



Province of Alberta

The 26th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

February 22, 2006 to August 31, 2006
and Index

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, February 22, 2006** 3:00 p.m.

Date: 06/02/22

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated January 17, 2006, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Order! Mr. Speaker.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Speaker, accompanied by the officers of the Assembly, entered the Chamber and took the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Almighty God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask Your blessings on all here present. We ask Your guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments for the benefit of all Albertans. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please join in in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members and Guests:

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

The Speaker: Thank you very much, Mr. Lorieau. I think Team Canada could have used you in Italy today.

Please be seated.

head: **Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor**

[The Premier, the Clerk, and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members, while it is not my usual custom to make mention of persons in the galleries, on this day I'm going to make an exception. Seated in the Speaker's gallery is Captain Manuel Panchana of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. If you would rise, sir. On the 15th day of December of 2005 Captain Panchana was leading his platoon on operations near Kandahar in Afghanistan when insurgents detonated an explosive device. He and two of his soldiers were seriously wounded. On the 15th day of January 2006 another incident near Kandahar claimed the life of a Canadian diplomat and seriously wounded three Canadian soldiers. Like Captain Panchana, all five of the wounded soldiers in these two incidents call this province of Alberta their home.

The challenges that they face in their recoveries are deserving of our heartfelt support and encouragement. We are ever mindful that the peace and freedoms we enjoy are borne by the sacrifices and risks made and taken by our men and women in uniform. For those in our Canadian Forces who have recently embarked to Afghanistan for challenging duty in the service of their sovereign and country and for their families we pray for a successful tour and for their safe return. [standing ovation]

Thank you, all. I'm sure that that message will be heard as far away as Kandahar.

The Royal Canadian Artillery Band will now play a brief musical interlude, the details of which are in your program. The RCA Band, Canada's oldest regular army band, was founded in Quebec City in 1879, and it was subsequently stationed in Montreal and Halifax. It has seen service in both world wars and in Korea, and it has travelled across Canada and beyond our borders. Reconstituted in Edmonton in 1997, the band is today under the direction of Captain Brian Greenwood, who will direct from the Speaker's gallery.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, and Mrs. Kwong, their party, the Premier, and the Clerk entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

head: **Speech from the Throne**

His Honour: Pray be seated.

Fellow Albertans, welcome to the Second Session of the 26th Alberta Legislature.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Legislature and 100 years of democracy in Alberta. As we celebrate this great occasion, may we all take a moment to reflect on the tremendous contributions of those who came before us and the great privilege we have been given as servants of this wonderful province and its people. It is therefore an honour to deliver the Speech from the Throne, as it is an honour to serve as this province's Lieutenant Governor.

During the past year I had the opportunity to travel throughout this wonderful province and meet thousands of warm, caring, hard-working people. I joined Albertans in welcoming Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh on a royal visit, and I attended countless events where communities were celebrated and great Albertans were honoured.

It was truly a special year for me and for all Albertans as we celebrated the province's centennial. The year was filled with special events large and small, legacies created in nearly every community, and birthday celebrations that spread across the entire province. These reflected the tremendous pride Albertans have in this province and their optimism for its future.

That optimism is well placed. Alberta is beginning its second

century from an enviable position. By nearly every economic measure Alberta leads the country. Last year Alberta's economy grew the fastest of all Canadian provinces. Alberta had the highest population growth, the lowest unemployment rate, the highest average incomes, and the lowest overall taxes in the country.

The year 2005 also marked a very significant milestone for Albertans. It was the first time in decades that Alberta rang in a debt-free new year. This milestone coincided with the arrival of record-high energy revenues for Alberta. While these create opportunities for our province, Albertans know we can't count on them lasting forever. That's why the government will use this opportunity wisely by setting priorities, creating long-term benefits for Albertans, and keeping an eye firmly on the future.

A Learning Society

Albertans know that building and educating tomorrow's workforce is one of the wisest investments we can make. The creation of a learning society begins with the youngest members of our province. Alberta already has an education system that is respected nationally and internationally with a strong curriculum, excellent teachers, and committed parents and students. This year government will work to further strengthen our education system and ensure that all of our students can take full advantage of the world-class education opportunities available to them.

A series of round-tables with youth from across the province will be held to help us better understand why students leave school early. A high school completion symposium, which will include teens, parents, business leaders, and educators, will help us develop a provincial strategy to increase high school completion rates.

The government took many steps to strengthen the postsecondary system during the province's centennial year. Over 7,000 new learning opportunities, including apprenticeships, have been created, a new endowment fund and new scholarship programs were established, and several capital projects were begun. This year the government will again cover the cost of tuition increases at public postsecondary institutions and will develop a new tuition policy.

We will also introduce measures that reflect all the expenses students face, including accommodation, textbooks, fees, and tuition, to ensure that cost isn't a barrier to students getting an education.

Alberta will take immediate steps to address labour shortages that threaten economic growth. It will increase education in areas of skill shortages by increasing grant support for specific programs. This includes partnering with aboriginal groups and industry on new training projects for aboriginal people. The government will develop a new strategy to increase awareness of Alberta as a destination of choice for skilled immigrants, and it will expand immigrant settlement services and language training and make it easier for foreign-trained professionals to work in Alberta.

Alberta will also plan for the future by developing a strategy to address skills shortages and enhance education levels in Alberta. People with advanced skills, creativity, and education will keep Alberta's economy strong.

A Prosperous Society

A strong economy sustains a high quality of life both now and for the future. The government will work to build a prosperous society by staying true to the fiscal principles that have served this province so well: balanced budgets, no debt, and low taxes. It will remain a leader in Canada for government accountability and transparency, with regular communication with and reporting to Albertans. This year the government will review its fiscal framework to ensure that it positions Alberta well for the future.

The government recognizes that the prosperity that comes from high resource revenues belongs to all Albertans, including future Albertans. That's why Alberta's plan for using budget surpluses includes increasing our savings. Later this month the government will make a substantial \$1 billion investment in the heritage fund. Further investment in the heritage fund will be announced in Budget 2006. These investments will ensure that some of today's prosperity is saved for future generations.

A portion of the surplus will also be dedicated to addressing our infrastructure needs. This is an area where government has demonstrated a strong commitment. In recent years Alberta has dedicated billions of dollars to meet the infrastructure needs of the growing economy, a level of support unmatched anywhere else in the country.

In 2006 construction in the province will go on at the fastest rate ever in Alberta's history. Work will begin or continue on about 60 new schools or major school modernizations, 47 major postsecondary capital projects, and 21 major health capital projects. The government will also invest in improving highways throughout the province. Major sections of the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads will open in the next two years, and twinning will begin this year on highway 63 south from Fort McMurray. Altogether we expect to pave 1,000 kilometres of provincial highways in 2006.

The government will create a northern development strategy in which northerners map out their own future. This will ensure that sustainable economic development in this region is supported with infrastructure and human services.

In addition to improving the province's infrastructure, Alberta will work to improve the regulatory environment. This year the government will embark on a comprehensive regulatory review to identify and remove unneeded red tape between Albertans and their government. This will help maintain a competitive edge for business and improve access to services for Albertans.

This year the government will take steps to ensure that forestry, agriculture, and energy, three pillars of the province's economy, are strong and sustainable into the future.

This government understands the challenges facing the forest industry. This is the province's third-largest sector, worth nearly \$13 billion to Alberta's economy. On January 1 government updated the province's stumpage system to make it more competitive. We continue to work with industry partners to build a common understanding of their cost and competitiveness issues and to resolve the softwood lumber trade dispute. The government is also working to add value to this renewable resource sector through its continuing \$1.8 million commitment to harness innovation as well as ongoing support to the Alberta Forestry Research Institute.

In the agriculture sector, after several difficult years, Alberta's farmers and ranchers are beginning to see new opportunities and revitalization. However, challenges still remain in parts of the agriculture industry, including the grains sector, which faces skyrocketing input costs and low market prices. Alberta will stand alongside its agricultural producers, who face the future with the competitive spirit that built this industry and this province. It will continue to support producers by providing responsive, timely, and straightforward tools to manage risk and add value to all agricultural commodities.

One area of particular promise is the biofuels industry, which offers the potential of sustainable growth and a new market for a primary commodity. At the same time, we will work toward helping the agrifood industry by continuing to press for a substantial agreement in the World Trade Organization that will reduce trade-distorting domestic subsidies and increase access to foreign markets.

This government has and will continue to focus its efforts on rural development to help rural communities become more prosperous and vibrant. Government has already taken many steps to support the rural development strategy, including increasing municipal policing grants, creating the rural affordable housing program, improving rural health facilities, and increasing support to agriculture service boards.

Budget 2006 will allocate new funding to provide stable, long-term support to local rural development projects. This will promote economic development, improve access to health care and learning, enhance environmental protection, and create more opportunities for youth in rural areas.

Alberta will also work with the energy industry to map a new frontier for the resource sector. Conventional crude oil and natural gas are still important to Alberta's economy, but the future belongs to nonconventional energy sources such as the oil sands and natural gas in coal and to value-added products created by refining, processing, and upgrading.

One resource whose enormous potential must be better utilized in Alberta is coal. We wouldn't conceive of burning a barrel of crude oil for heat, not when we know it can be upgraded to make fuels, plastics, and a range of other consumer products, yet that is what is being done today with Alberta's coal, a fuel more abundant than all the province's other hydrocarbons put together. Alberta has coal reserves to last upwards of 1,000 years, and they contain some of the cleanest burning coal in the world. We now know that we can produce from coal many of the things we produce from natural gas and oil.

Coal has the potential to provide plentiful, affordable electricity without the harmful emissions that were once associated with older coal combustion technologies. Coal can help meet long-term demand for feedstock for value-added energy products. The natural gas found within Alberta's coal seams also holds great promise to meet growing demand for natural gas.

The Alberta Energy Research Institute is the lead agency in developing an energy innovation strategy and has identified clean coal as a high priority. This year the government will work with the institute and other partners to explore ways to demonstrate the use of Alberta's coal in creating a number of value-added products, including petrochemical feedstocks. This will expand Alberta's already considerable energy advantage and make Alberta a clean energy leader in the world.

Managing natural resources wisely, including minimizing the environmental impacts of resource development, is a job this government takes seriously.

A Clean Environment

Albertans are blessed with beautiful landscapes that change from prairies to foothills to mountains and from rivers to forests to rangeland. The land, which has given Albertans all that they have, must continue to be the source of life and prosperity for future generations. This principle is at the heart of the land-use framework government is developing. It recognizes that the land supports many uses: resource development, recreation and tourism, agriculture and forestry, and residential. The framework is a multidisciplinary, multistakeholder effort to create a single mechanism for coordinated planning and decision-making.

This year Albertans will be consulted on their values and goals for the land through a series of workshops across the province and a provincial forum.

Another key focus of government in this area is the continuing implementation of the Water for Life strategy. In 2006 the govern-

ment will develop an inventory of groundwater in the province, and it will make a significant investment in regional drinking water and waste-water systems to ensure safe, sustainable, quality water supplies for all rural communities.

To address broader, long-term environmental issues, the government will hold an environmental youth summit. The summit will bring Alberta youth together to share concerns and ideas to enhance environmental protection in the province.

A Healthy Society

A clean environment is vital to a healthy society. So, too, is improving our health system, one of the government's top priorities this session. This session government will take steps to improve access, sustainability, choice, innovation, and efficiency in Alberta's health care system.

Government will work in collaboration with regional health authorities and stakeholders to improve wait times for medical services. Health care providers and administrators have demonstrated that they can come together to deliver innovative solutions that improve access to services. The Alberta hip and knee replacement project is one such example. It decreased wait times for first orthopaedic consultations from 35 weeks to six weeks and wait times between consultation and surgery from 47 weeks to less than five weeks. In 2006 this approach will be extended to other health areas such as breast cancer care, coronary artery bypass surgery, MRIs and CT scans, and prostate cancer care.

Government will continue to improve the quality of services Albertans receive by expanding the primary care network. In this model, a team of health professionals provides patient-centred support, advice, and care. This year 17 to 19 new primary care networks will begin operation.

This session we will set out clear principles to guide the health system, principles that reflect Albertans' values. They will provide a framework for a comprehensive public health system that fulfills government's commitment to provide high-quality health services to all Albertans and creates greater flexibility and choice. Albertans can be assured that a person's access to needed health care services will never be determined by their ability to pay.

Another key element of the government's health agenda this year is a major offensive in the fight against cancer. Alberta will become a leading centre for cancer expertise in North America. Cancer is a leading cause of death in Alberta. It will strike almost half of all Alberta men and two in five Alberta women during their lifetimes. Over 81,000 Albertans are living with cancer today. By 2025 that number will increase to over 200,000 if we do not take action now.

Research indicates that half of all cancers are preventable. Alberta's goals are to reduce the incidence of cancer by 35 per cent by 2025, reduce the mortality from cancer by 50 per cent by 2025, and ensure that Albertans diagnosed with cancer do not suffer. This will be achieved by making a significant, long-term, strategic investment in prevention, early screening, and research to make Alberta a leader in the fight against cancer and set the stage for a cancer-free future.

Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, will establish funding that the Alberta Cancer Board will use to move forward aggressively on cancer prevention, screening, and research initiatives.

A Safe and Caring Society

Albertans want to feel safe and cared for in their communities. This government will take action to ensure that Alberta's communities are strengthened. The government will establish a world-class

system for managing risks and responding to emergencies, including environmental disasters, to ensure that Albertans are protected. We will work with municipal partners to support municipal sustainability.

Last year saw the largest single-year increase in rural and organized crime policing in Alberta in 20 years. This year government will hire more Crown prosecutors and courtroom staff and appoint more judges to ensure that those who are charged with crimes are tried promptly.

The newly established Crystal Meth Task Force will build on the work of law enforcement officials and organizations such as AADAC to help reduce the supply and lessen demand for this dangerous drug.

We will improve our practices to ensure the privacy and security of all personal information held by government.

This government will take steps to ensure that Alberta's most vulnerable citizens are respected and cared for with dignity.

New legislation will be introduced to help protect children who are exposed to the harmful effects of drug manufacturing and trafficking in their homes. It will be the first legislation in Canada to specifically define a drug-endangered child and make it clear that such a child is the victim of abuse.

The government of Alberta remains committed to curbing family violence. We will strengthen legislation to protect people from family violence by broadening the definition of family violence to include stalking, widening the scope of who is protected under the act, and clarifying the conditions for granting emergency protection orders. We will also launch a multidisciplinary team of police officers, legal advisers, and other experts who will respond quickly and effectively to high-risk family violence and stalking cases. The team will assess threats and reduce risks with the goal of preventing serious injury and death.

We will increase financial assistance through Alberta Works to people who cannot work either due to multiple barriers or medical conditions that keep them from being able to find or keep employment.

New standards will be implemented to promote excellence and restore the confidence of seniors and their families in the province's lodges, supportive living and long-term care facilities.

Alberta remains committed to providing a superior quality of life that is inclusive, active, and culturally vibrant. This year detailed planning will begin on the renewed Royal Alberta Museum that will truly capture the Alberta story. The Alberta story will also be told abroad as Alberta becomes the first part of Canada to ever be featured in the Smithsonian Institution's Folklife Festival in Washington, DC.

The Alberta story, more than a hundred years in the making, is still unfolding. It's the story of how hard work, faith, and determination built a province. It's the story of the aboriginal people who first knew this land, the pioneers who took a gamble on a long shot on the western prairie, and the modern-day explorers who continue to break new ground in so many fields. It's the story of how caring people, committed volunteers, and community leaders created a place that is truly the best place in the world to live, work, and raise a family.

A new chapter of the Alberta story is beginning with the start of the province's second century. No doubt it will bring its share of struggles and challenges, and Albertans will meet them as they have always done, with courage and creativity. Together we will build a future that fulfills all the promise of Alberta's first 100 years.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and may God bless you all.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

The Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen and hon. members, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of *God Save The Queen*. Please remain standing at the conclusion.

Hon. Members and Guests:

God save our gracious Queen,
long live our noble Queen,
God save The Queen!
Send her victorious,
happy and glorious,
long to reign over us:
God save The Queen!

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours, their party, and the Premier left the Chamber as a fanfare of trumpets sounded]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Bill 1

Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, thank you so very, very much. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has just described the government's goal for Alberta to become a leading centre for cancer expertise in North America and to use that expertise so that Albertans can have a cancer-free future. It's most fitting that the signature bill of this session be legislation designed to achieve that goal, to create a cancer prevention legacy in this province. It will be a legacy like none other. It will be a legacy that will have a direct impact on the lives of our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren. It will mean lives saved and pain spared for thousands of people both here in Alberta and beyond.

With that goal in mind I am privileged to stand and request leave to introduce Bill 1, which is the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. Mr. Speaker, this being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 will help Alberta attack cancer aggressively at every level, from prevention to potential cures. The bill confirms Alberta's commitment to address the growing demand for cancer services both now and into the future. It supports a strategic investment in the collaborative work of cancer prevention, screening, and research. Cancer will be prevented because of expanded and new cancer screening programs to detect signs of cancer at an early stage. A virtual research institute will be created to co-ordinate all cancer research in Alberta. Alberta's reputation as a world leader in cancer research, prevention, and screening will grow because of the opportunities presented through this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I needn't tell you that cancer is a terrible illness that is a leading cause of death in Alberta and, indeed, in Canada and around the world. We must take action now to stop its growth.

It's my honour today, Mr. Speaker, to introduce Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

head: **Tablings**

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have the honour to table a copy of the speech graciously given by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

head: **Motions**

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I move that the speech of His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration on Thursday, February 23, 2006.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that pursuant to Standing Order 49(1) the select standing committees for the present session of the Legislative Assembly be appointed for the following purposes:

- (1) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund,
- (2) Legislative Offices,
- (3) Private Bills,
- (4) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, and
- (5) Public Accounts.

[Motion carried]

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would move that the following members be appointed to the Assembly's five standing committees:

- (1) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, nine members: Mr. Liepert, chair; Mr. Rogers, deputy chair; Mr. Cao; Mr.

Goudreau; Mr. MacDonald; Mrs. Mather; Mr. McFarland; Mr. Pham; and Mr. Snelgrove.

- (2) Legislative Offices, 11 members: Mrs. Tarchuk, chair; Mr. Ducharme, deputy chair; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Flaherty; Mr. Griffiths; Mr. Lougheed; Mr. Magnus; Mr. Marz; Dr. Pannu; Mr. Rodney; and Mr. Strang.
- (3) Private Bills, 21 members: Dr. Brown, chair; Mr. Liepert, deputy chair; Mr. Agnihotri; Ms DeLong; Mr. Eggen, Mr. Elsalhy; Mr. Groeneveld; Mr. Johnson; Mr. Johnston; Mr. Lindsay; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. Mitzel; Dr. Morton; Mr. Oberle; Mr. Pham; Mr. Prins; Mr. Rodney; Mr. Shariff; Dr. Swann; Mr. Tougas; and Mr. VanderBurg.
- (4) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, 21 members: Ms Haley, chair; Mr. Cao, deputy chair; Reverend Abbott; Mr. Amery; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Danyluk; Ms DeLong; Mr. Flaherty; Mr. Groeneveld; Mr. Herard; Mr. Johnson; Mr. Knight; Mr. Liepert; Mr. Lougheed; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Marz; Mr. Mitzel; Dr. Pannu; Ms Pastoor; and Mr. Zwozdesky.
- (5) Public Accounts, 17 members: Mr. MacDonald, chair; Mr. VanderBurg, deputy chair; Reverend Abbott; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Bonko; Mr. Chase; Mr. Danyluk; Mr. Eggen; Mr. Griffiths; Mr. Johnston; Mr. Lindsay; Dr. Morton; Mr. Oberle; Mr. Prins; Mr. Rodney; Mr. Rogers; and Mr. Webber.

[Motion carried]

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'd move that the Assembly stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 3:52 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, February 23, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/02/23

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

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

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it is a very great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a lady that is sitting in your gallery. Dianne Johnson is the wife of our esteemed colleague Mr. LeRoy Johnson, and she is seated, as I say, in your gallery. I'd ask her to rise and receive the very, very warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you a number of special student visitors from W.P. Wagner who are here or will be here very shortly. In any case, I'd like to introduce them and thank them for coming, along with their group leaders Stan Bissell and Stacey Mabey. Please give them the warm welcome.

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 49 guests from Rivière Qui Barre, the Camilla school. They are a great group of students who are energetic and eager to learn. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Mike Paustian and Ms Amanda Langford, teacher aides Mrs. Arlene Whitson and Mrs. Carol Brailey, and parent helpers Ms Anita Lischewski and Ms Brenda Hansen. I believe they are in our gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two groups of students today from the Duffield school who are seated in both the members' and the public galleries. The first group is a group of grade 9 students, 16 of them in total, accompanied by Sharon Smith and Marilee Godfrey.

The second group is 31 grade 6 students who are attending the School at the Legislature this week; their teacher, Mrs. Barb Daum; their assistant, Mrs. Charlotte Curtis; and their parent helper, Mrs. Shelley Charlet. These students will play a significant role in the future of our province, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House my

nephew, John Brown. He's seated in the public gallery. John is 13 years old. He's currently enrolled in grade 8 at Millarville community school. He's an excellent student, and he's involved in school sports. He's currently a member of the school's basketball team. I would ask John to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Pat Spady and Sylvia Krogh. Pat and Sylvia are both part of the keep medicare public vigil committee. This committee, organized by concerned citizens of all political stripes, will be holding vigils on the steps of the Legislature throughout the session. Pat is accompanied by her grandson Sam, and they are seated in the public gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly four guests seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they rise as I call out their names: Allan Dane, Jean McBean, Sylvia Galbraith, and Audrey Brooks. These four individuals are community activists and are concerned with the government's privatization plans for health care. They all attended the vigil held on the steps of the Legislature today, and I would now ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Government Policy Reforms

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a delight to rise in this new sitting and engage in another round of questions. A strong and informed leader is absolutely necessary to a well-functioning government. [some applause]

The Speaker: Hon. leader, sometimes it's difficult for the chair to determine who the applause is for.

Dr. Taft: I agree. I wasn't sure myself, Mr. Speaker.

Long-term policies must be set and implemented by a Premier who is fully accountable for his actions and decisions. Right now this does not exist with this government. [interjections] I can see this is going to be a fun spring.

My questions are to the Premier. Given that this government has made numerous threats to further privatize our province's health care system under a Premier who has admitted that he won't be running in the next election, will this government hold off on any policy reforms until they have a leader in place who will be accountable to the voters for the policies he sets?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm so happy the Leader of the Official Opposition asked the question. Here's the problem. I'm going to articulate the problem, and I hope everyone is listening. We have requests from regional health authorities ranging from 9 to 20 per cent. Even at the minimum, that is about three times the rate of inflation. That is the problem: 9 to 20 per cent. To put it into perspective, that's \$900 million if it's 9 per cent; that's \$2 billion if

it's 20 per cent. That's putting it into perspective. That is the problem.

Now, we have come up with some ideas that will resolve some of the problem – some of the problem – we think. If the opposition parties – and I will challenge the media to ask them this question – or the Friends of Medicare or the Raging Grannies or any other group have solutions to bring costs back in line with the rate of inflation and to increase access, please send them forward. They have offered no solutions whatsoever.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question was actually about accountability.

Again to the Premier: will the Premier once and for all inform this House when he will be retiring so that we know when to expect meaningful long-term policy decisions?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I can't give you the exact date, but it will be sometime in the late fall of 2007 or perhaps the early winter of 2008. But relative to the exact date I haven't figured that out yet.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that the unofficial race to become the next Premier is leading to policy gridlock in this government, what is this Premier doing to get this tired old government making decisions again?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, nothing has resulted in gridlock. As a matter of fact, we are proceeding and proceeding quite well as a government relative to policy decisions. There are all the ministers relative to the front bench – I've talked with most of them, not all of them – and the policy development taking place in their departments is absolutely outstanding. I wish the opposition would take some time – well, no, that would require too much work – to find out what is happening relative to policy development in each and every department. It's absolutely outstanding.

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

Registry System Security

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The shocking revelations uncovered today about the lack of action taken by this government in response to years of documented abuse of our registry system have an impact not only in Alberta but around the world. The threat of increased international terrorism has countries around the world tightening up security regulations from passports to drivers' licences to birth certificates. Unfortunately for Albertans, Alberta's private registry and the Ministry of Government Services have failed to follow suit. To the Minister of Government Services: following the events of September 11, 2001, can the minister explain to the House what increased security measures were imposed on Alberta's privately owned registries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good that the hon. member would ask that question because it does give me an opportunity to outline a whole number of issues that we have taken

over the last couple or three years. It's interesting to see that they haven't changed their tactics. They're still using the *Edmonton Journal* as their chief source of research. I have read the articles that are printed in there, and quite frankly this stuff that's printed in there is basically all two and three years old.

Since a number of issues have arisen, we've put in a number of things. Currently drivers' licences are not printed at the registry. That's what used to happen. We used to have break-ins; we had material go missing. So we've plugged that hole. We're the first province in Canada to come out with the facial recognition licence. That's not done in every other province, but we do it in Alberta. We have also stepped up all of our security within the registries themselves. For example, the people that have access to the private information all have a code number, and they have to abide by the codes.

We'll continue this later.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how much of that missing material, including blank licences, has actually been accounted for, the material that he indicated was stolen?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, these were break-ins that occurred back in 2003 and 2002. Some of that material, of course, was not recovered. However, it doesn't have any value currently. It has no value currently. The new drivers' licences have got identity things on them that we're not prepared to discuss in public because, of course, if we reveal what exactly is on there that's secure, then people trying to mimic them would have that information, so we're not doing that. They're encased in a certain material, and that's not just normal plastic. I can tell you that. So there's that issue, and of course they're produced by the Canadian Bank Note. Like I mentioned earlier, the facial recognition.

As far as the registries are concerned, we currently have on staff 15 inspectors. If we ever get a tip that there might be something going on in a registry, we can follow it. On top of that, we do very detailed, unannounced audits on at least 80 registries every year.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the number of falsely obtained drivers' licences remains so high and the credibility of Alberta's licences is so low that the province of B.C. has threatened to end an agreement under which Alberta's drivers' licences can be exchanged for one from B.C., what has the minister done to eliminate falsely obtained or fake licences from the streets of Alberta from circulating?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there should be some kind of rule against making those kinds of statements in this House because people should be honest when they come in here. The fact is that we work closely with the registries in B.C. and the B.C. government, and they have never indicated that there's any problem with our licences. None. There's a reciprocal agreement in place. There's never been any indication that any other province has a problem with our licence.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October 1993 the then Minister of Municipal Affairs stated that it was ludicrous to suggest

that privatizing Alberta's registries could lead to potential security breaches. In September '02 Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta noted that some of the private registry offices in this province "continue to be compromised by individuals operating on behalf of different groups." In February '06 it's reported that members of organized crime have infiltrated this province's registries, potentially gaining unfettered access to personal information on Albertans. The question to the Minister of Government Services: given that your government was warned about these security breaches more than three years ago, why has this government ignored this alarming problem?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just went through a whole number of things that we've implemented. There's even more that we've done, and I'll indicate another one. We require that every person that has access to personal information has to go through a security check. They have to then get a password number that they can use to gain access. What that does for us is it allows us to watch who's accessing from the registry. We've got two ways. We can tell which registry is accessing, but then we can tell which individual is accessing. If we ever suspect that there is something going on, we immediately have one of our investigators go in and make sure that the access that they're gaining is for the purpose for which they had their licence.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since this government surrendered its responsibility to the private sector, is it now helpless in its ability to punish or revoke the licences of registry owners with a history of security infractions? What can we do to them?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have forced the sale of registries. That has happened. We have cancelled the ability of individuals to have access to the registries. We take it extremely seriously any time that anyone breaches the security code. They all must have signed before they have that access. So if hon. members have any indication of any registry or any individual in a registry giving out information that they shouldn't have, please send it over because we really find this a very serious situation if somebody is breaching that contract.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This one is to the Solicitor General. Given that the RCMP has stated that they're willing to launch an investigation if properly funded, will you commit today to providing the funds necessary to conduct such a thorough investigation?

1:50

Mr. Cernaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, the RCMP are properly funded, and if there's an allegation of criminal misconduct or a criminal offence within one of the registry offices, they would be called in to do an investigation.

The hon. Minister of Government Services explained all of the things that have been done over the last three years, if not over the last 10 years, regarding improving the system, ensuring that the system is safe, ensuring that the system is secure. If there are individuals that are found to have committed a criminal offence or released private information illegally, obviously they'll be dealt with according to the law.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans who are puzzled by the strange omission of the so-called third way in health care from both Tuesday's taxpayer-funded PC infomercial and yesterday's throne speech should mark March 31 on their calendars. That's the day the Tory Party faithful vote on the Premier's leadership. In other words, Albertans are being kept in the dark about the government's secret plan to privatize health care because the Premier is worried about his leadership. My question is to the Premier. Why is this Premier keeping the government's plans for private, two-tier health care secret until after the upcoming vote on his leadership?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the details will come when the legislation is introduced. At that time, the hon. leader of the third party will have ample time to debate the legislative changes unless, of course, he can come up with a better solution.

Now, I'm open to ideas, but I'll tell you what the problem is. Here's the original ask: Chinook health region, 19.8 per cent, that's \$1.9 billion; Palliser, 18.6 per cent, that's \$1.8 billion; Calgary, 17.3, that's \$1.7 billion; East Central, 28.7, that's \$2.8 billion. Without going through the whole list, the total is \$100.6 billion – \$100.6 billion this year alone – and they have no solutions other than to spend, spend, and spend more.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, they vote down our ideas which would save money.

Now, if the third way is so controversial that you can't even share it with the Tory delegates to your leadership review, Mr. Premier, what do you think normal Albertans are going to think about it?

Mr. Klein: I'll tell you what normal Albertans will think about it. Normal Albertans will think that \$100.6 billion is . . . [interjections] Well, they don't think it's much; \$100.6 billion – \$100.6 billion – and the NDs don't think it's much. Well, their sense of money is a lot different than mine, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier is so desperate to hang on to power for a couple more years, why doesn't he do the right thing and back away from his plans for private, two-tier medicine in this province until he gets a mandate from the people?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would challenge the media to ask the Official Opposition if they have any solutions or if the opposition thinks that \$100.6 billion is acceptable annually. If the answer is that, yes, they feel it's acceptable, then their assessment of the value of money, as I said before, is a lot different than mine.

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

Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been hearing from some of my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne that the persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, program is facing a funding crisis. This has caused some significant concerns amongst individuals with these disabilities and their families. My questions today are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Is the government planning to reduce needed funding to persons with developmental disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be absolutely clear. There has not been and there will not be a reduction in funding for the persons with developmental disabilities program at all. In fact, over the past five years the funding for this important program has increased 70 per cent while the client base has increased 20 per cent. That means that this past year the budget has been nearly half a billion dollars, which is significant for 9,200 persons. I have to tell you this as well. The reason we're so committed to the program is that it's important that persons with developmental disabilities are able to participate effectively in our communities on an everyday basis. So it's significant funding, and it will not be reduced.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister, and this will be the first question when I go home this weekend: how can the minister ensure that these people with disabilities are taken care of and get the support that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question. I know that a number of MLAs like this hon. member have received letters in this regard. It's important that you realize that we're not talking about funding just for one program and for those supports. What we are talking about is a range of supports for persons with developmental disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, you'll recall that we had in place this year a review for the AISH program. That program provides a range of supports, as well, for 90 per cent of our clients that receive funding through our persons with developmental disabilities program. So that's in addition to the nearly half a billion dollars, as I explained earlier, for the 9,200 clients. That means that we have the living allowance, which is increasing here in April to a thousand dollars per month for 90 per cent of our persons with development disabilities. We also have a comprehensive health benefits program. We have a brand new personal income support program that we've legislated. That's approximately \$360 per month.

This range of supports is because we are, as I said earlier, really committed to ensuring that persons with developmental disabilities can live and participate in our communities on an everyday basis.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: how will the minister and her department ensure that this funding is actually meeting the needs of the people it's intended for and actually getting to those people directly?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, we all agree that it's important to ensure that this range of supports through these programs is available for persons with developmental disabilities. I can tell you, hon. member, that I as the minister responsible for this program will ensure that it's effective, that it's efficient, and that it's in place for persons with developmental disabilities on into the future. It is a significant amount of funding, but more importantly we have clients with great needs that need the budget.

Thank you.

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

Health Care Reform

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has been

promising details about health reforms for years but gave no details in Tuesday's infomercial or in the throne speech. The Premier's way of health care seems to have been halted or perhaps just delayed. My questions are to the Premier. Was it the health minister's meeting with your federal cousins that halted the Premier's reforms?

Mr. Klein: Well, thank God we have some federal cousins that are at least honest. Remember Adscam. Mr. Speaker, I have to say that if I was part of a Liberal government and was involved in a scandal like Adscam, like the Liberals were, I would have to find a place far enough away in the world to hide, and if they found me, they would lynch me for sure. These people got away with it. Well, they really didn't get away with it. They were unelected, thank God.

Mr. Speaker, I apologize: the figure is only \$10 billion, not a hundred billion. Only \$10 billion. But they still don't have any solutions.

Relative to the question I'll have the hon. minister reply.

2:00

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there was an opportunity to meet with the federal Minister of Health and to give a high-level overview of some of the plans in Alberta. It has not delayed anything or accelerated anything, merely given us an opportunity to have that exchange.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: is the delay because the Premier is being pressured by rural government members with concerns that these reforms will pull doctors away from their communities? Is that the delay?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, there is no delay. This takes time. We want to make sure that it's right. I'll be discussing later this afternoon with the minister a public consultation process. That has yet to take place, and we want to make sure that it is right. Once again I would ask – and I would ask sincerely – that if the Liberals or the NDs have any solutions to bring these costs under control, please send them over. The hon. leader chirps and chips, but he doesn't have any solutions. I have yet to see anything on paper. Yes, he's good to stand on the steps of the Legislature and lead the Raging Grannies and the Friends of Medicare and all the other supporters in chants and so on, but he has no solutions. He is mindless.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The Premier already has the Liberal document called *Toward a Healthy Future*, so he can look in there for suggestions.

My final question to the Premier: is the government delaying implementation of the Premier's way or just delaying the announcement until after March 31?

Mr. Klein: Neither, Mr. Speaker. And "the way": I'd like to see that. I don't recall ever receiving a copy. Maybe I have a copy. I want to see some specific solutions that are going to achieve two things: one, increase access, and number two, bring costs in line with the rate of inflation.

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

Summer Temporary Employment Program

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. The summer temporary employment program has been implemented for over 30 years and has provided Alberta's youth valuable hands-on experience and opportunities that can be directly applied to their future education and training. I would like to know if the program is still in place and if Albertans are benefiting from it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Of course, the summer temporary employment program, or the STEP program, is a very important program that helps workers and employers. This year more than 3,000 students and individual youth will be able to participate in the program, and they will learn skills from the program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister. As part of the STEP program the government offsets some of the costs associated with the workers' wages. Last year Alberta's minimum wage increased. Was this increase taken into account in this year's STEP program?

Mr. Cardinal: Yes, Mr. Speaker, definitely. What we pay under STEP is \$6.05 an hour, but we expect the employers, of course, to pay the minimum wage. In most cases you will find that they top up the wages considerably higher.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is also for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. I know that there will be businesses and community and nonprofit organizations like historical sites in my constituency that will be interested in taking part in the program. How do they apply, and what is the deadline for the STEP applications?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, any organization, including historical organizations, interested in STEP funding may apply. The deadline is February 28, and the phone number is 780-422-5082. The STEP program runs from April 24 to September 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Adoption Quotas

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January of this year it was reported that an internal government report produced by Children's Services detailed some very disturbing policies regarding financial penalties and adoption quotas. In a February 7, 2006, letter the hon. Minister of Children's Services states that she does not condone the use of a quota system; however, her department does set performance measures to achieve its business goals including increasing the number of adoptions in the province. My questions are for the Minister of Children's Services. Does your ministry now or has it in the past financially rewarded or penalized child welfare workers for either meeting or falling short of their performance measures?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me first say that we're deeply committed in this government to finding permanent homes for children that are in our care. I don't believe for a minute that having adoption quotas in our business plan is out of line. We want all our workers in the field to understand the importance that we put on adoptions in this province. We want to make sure that our children are taken care of and that they find a good, stable home.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: what steps has the minister taken in investigating the use of financial penalties for child welfare workers who do not meet a specific quota?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I think we have to put this in perspective. First of all, what the hon. member is talking about is a bonus system that is given to the CEOs within the region. That's to make sure that they match the goals that we set out for them. At no time under my ministry has anyone ever been penalized.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: will the minister reassure child welfare workers today that they will not face repercussions for speaking out publicly and reporting financial penalties imposed by Children's Services?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear here. First of all, no child care worker in this province is penalized for not meeting their quotas. What I will say is that the caseworkers in this province do a wonderful job. We appreciate everything that they do. I'm committed as the minister to continue to dialogue with them. Last summer I spent the entire summer travelling this province talking individually to child care workers. I met with them, listened to some of their concerns. They're committed to adoptions. They're committed to our aboriginal children in this province, to make sure that they find homes for these people. They do a wonderful job, and at no time are they ever penalized.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Edmonton Catholic School Board Deficit

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently it was discovered through an external audit that the Edmonton Catholic school board had accumulated a nearly \$10 million deficit and, to make matters worse, was not precisely aware how this deficit was generated. Subsequently the board voted against an independent forensic audit, leaving many questions unanswered. To the Minister of Education: how is it possible that a school board can generate a nearly \$10 million deficit without the trustees being aware of it?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, this is a very unfortunate circumstance. Obviously, \$10 million is a very large amount of money for any school board to try and handle. The issue, I think, is that the School Act requires an external auditor to be appointed to every school jurisdiction, and that particular auditor's responsibilities would include management letters at the end of an audit term. As soon as those deficiencies were spotted, I'm assuming that they were brought forward to the trustees, specifically to the board chair, who in turn called me about it as soon as she knew about it. We sat down, and we had a meeting about it. They've now sent me a letter outlining what they're going to do about it, and we'll take it from there. The fact is, though, that I remain concerned that we don't

have any impact on the classroom. We're just reviewing those numbers and statistics right now. In terms of the exact process of how they landed there, that will be I'm sure explained further as the days and months roll along.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My further supplemental to the same minister: how is it possible that the finance director was only reprimanded for this colossal loss and still remains in charge of the Edmonton Catholic school board's books?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, obviously staffing decisions are at the discretion of the local school board. We don't hire staff for these school jurisdictions. They do that themselves. I think they do it to the best of their abilities. In this particular case obviously there were some cost overruns. They have already indicated publicly and to me privately that there will be some reprimands. Perhaps they've already instituted some of those reprimands. In the end the situation needs to be corrected and it also needs to not repeat itself. I'm satisfied so far that they've taken some steps in that direction, and they will perhaps be taking even more stringent steps in the very near future.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Lastly, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how is it possible that the school board will recover \$10 million without really negatively affecting the students' learning?

Mr. Zwozdesky: That, indeed, is the central concern, I think, for the parents, obviously for the students, for the teachers, for the trustees, and for the administrators alike. The fact is that some cost overruns unfortunately occurred on the capital infrastructure side. Alberta Education is expected to inherit that aspect of the portfolio soon, and we'll be looking at tightening up some of the controls where possible. I think there were other cost overruns with respect to not having in place a proper project-based accounting system, and that, too, is being rectified. In fact, I understand that they have engaged or will soon be engaging a supplementary auditor to help to correct the difficulties they have and to ensure that others don't occur.

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

Learning Commission Recommendations

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Learning Commission was a major public review of the Alberta education system. It wrapped up in 2003, but Alberta's children are still waiting while this government and minister continue to consult and study the issues to death. Twenty-one accepted recommendations have involved nothing more than studying, and yesterday: more studies and more consultations. My question to the Minister of Education: how long will Albertans wait for action on key promises like fundraising, school fees, and access to diagnostic learning services for children?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm so grateful to have this question because the Alberta Commission on Learning actually put out 95 recommendations, a huge number of recommendations that covered tip to stern, so to speak, of the education system in this province. We have the best education system anywhere in Canada. Our goal is to make it one of the best in the entire world, and we're getting there very, very quickly.

I should just point out, Mr. Speaker, that yes, there are a few recommendations in the Learning Commission that still require some additional discussion and study. We have had a lot. It's been very open and public and transparent and all of that. In the interim let's not forget that we have added 551 million – half a billion – brand new dollars in support of the Learning Commission recommendations that were accepted. With your permission I'd like to read all 42 pages if I could. Maybe I could seek unanimous consent of the House to read all of them.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: as collective agreements expire this year, how long will the ATA and the school boards wait before knowing how to start negotiating their collective agreements?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the member is referring to recommendation 81 (a) and (c), wherein it was recommended that the School Boards Association have in place a bargaining model, a province-wide bargaining model akin to what we see with the Alberta Teachers' Association. Now, that is one of the most contentious issues that we have on the plate before us. As the hon. member would know, we allowed for the fullest amount of presentation possible, and the last group just came in in the middle of December. We've got their information now, and it's been rolled into the mix. We're studying that stuff as well. This is one where the school boards have voted 59 per cent in favour of a particular model. Quite clearly, 41 per cent were not in favour. It takes a little bit of fine figure skating to get through some of these issues, and this is one of them.

Mr. Flaherty: Don't trip.

Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: when will this government stop driving school boards into millions of dollars' difficulty and fund all-day kindergarten? Immediately, please?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, junior kindergarten or the possibility of it and the possibility of having full-day, mandatory kindergarten are two additional recommendations of the Learning Commission. I think what I'd like to do to answer the hon. member's question is simply say this: 95 per cent of young Albertans who are five years of age and therefore eligible for kindergarten enrolment are already enrolled in a kindergarten program.

We spend about \$100 million or \$110 million per year helping school boards provide those important programs, and you know what, Mr. Speaker? They're working, and they're so largely subscribed to because there is flexibility for the local school board to provide it in a manner at a time and a location that suits the local area. Quite frankly, many school boards like that. However, this issue, too, I'll be addressing further this year.

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

Registry System Security (continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For all this government knows, Tony Soprano, John Gotti, and Al Capone may be driving around North America with fake Alberta drivers' licences from privatized registries. Unnamed government and law enforcement officials are beyond frustrated and are beginning to make public

information about bribery, forgery, and gangland connections. It's a damning indictment of the government's privatization policy. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Given that there is evidence of security breaches and widespread fraud and abuse of Alberta drivers' licences by criminal gangs, why won't the minister admit that registries' privatization has been an abysmal failure?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would advise the hon. member to read *Hansard*, but as far as the people that he indicated that were using false drivers' licences, I hope they're not because I thought there were some of those folks that were looking at the grass from the wrong side now. But I imagine that our drivers' licences would be accepted in heaven. They are very superior.

Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member doesn't check a little more closely about what was printed because, in fact, what was printed was incidents that happened some time back, and as I outlined to the Liberal opposition, we have done many things to make sure that they are secure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the reports of security breaches are linked to organized crime, will the minister share with this House what he knows about gang involvement in compromising Albertans' private information held and collected by private registries?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, whenever we have any report or any reason to suspect that there may be information being let out or people seeking this information that is being given into hands that it shouldn't be, we do send in inspectors, and we're very, very careful to make sure that private information is not getting into the wrong hands. We take this very, very seriously, and that's why we have set up so many inspectors, eight of them in Calgary, seven of them in Edmonton, investigators that can go quickly, unannounced to these facilities. We have the mechanism now in place so that we can check who it is that's asking for that information and then be able to follow up to make sure that that information is used only for the purposes for which it was granted.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the minister: given that Albertans have every right to know how and to what extent organized crime has infiltrated privatized registries, why hasn't the minister turned the whole sorry mess over to the RCMP for a proper criminal investigation?

2:20

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is – and the Solicitor General clearly commented in his answer – that any time we suspect, even just suspect, that there is organized crime involvement, we turn it over to the police authorities. That's one of the things we do right away. Our investigators will have a primary look at it, and then if there's any thought that it might be connected with a gang, it's turned over to the local police authorities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of

West Yellowhead along with other Albertans continue to look forward to a resolution of the long-standing Canada/U.S. softwood lumber dispute. Recently some U.S. Senators have called for negotiations to resume between the United States and Canada to reach a settlement. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Are there any talks planned to resolve the softwood lumber dispute?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are meeting with federal counterparts, various ministers, and potentially structuring meetings with the Americans on the lumber dispute. We're just taking some time for the federal government to put people in place that will not only do the negotiating, but there's now, of course, a change in ambassadorship, so those things are going to take a few more weeks.

I'd just like to inform the House about two things. One is that Alberta will not favour any sort of a settlement at any cost, and secondly, we will have a thorough consultation with all industry before we sign any agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also to the same minister. Is there any reason for hope on this issue, especially with the new federal government and the new Canadian ambassador to the United States in place now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is. Although the previous ambassador, Ambassador McKenna, moved the file considerably – he was a great supporter of finding a quick resolution to this 20-year issue that's been lingering – we now have a new ambassador, Ambassador Wilson, who was part of the negotiating team on the original free trade agreement. That will bring hope to finding a resolution. Also, the Americans, of course, are moving legislation on the Byrd amendment. So things are lining up positively, and we do have great hope that this will finally resolve the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. Is trade retaliation against the United States the answer to solving this ongoing dispute?

Mr. Stelmach: Our position is that we don't support any trade retaliation. If we ever use energy, for instance, that'll be tremendously harmful to our economy, and as the Premier has said many times, 99 per cent of our trade occurs very quietly day in and day out without any problems. This is one issue that, if we start the trade war, potentially will hurt Alberta's interests in the long run. So, no, we don't support any trade retaliation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Education Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the fact that Calgary and its surrounding districts are responsible for educating almost a third of Alberta students, we continue to be abandoned by this government. The combined school infrastructure debt of Calgary public and separate has grown to a half billion dollars with no

concrete relief in sight for Calgary as of yesterday's throne speech. My questions are all to the Minister of Education, who last year was granted greater control of the school infrastructure budget. Given that your government accepted the reduced class size recommendations of the Learning Commission, why are Varsity Acres' kindergarten children being educated in a windowless copy room while the staff room was converted into another makeshift classroom?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of that particular circumstance, but if the member wishes to send me over some details, I wouldn't mind having a look at it. I'm assuming that he's already brought the case to the attention of the school board responsible.

I should just add this, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of very positive and good-news stories coming into and out of Calgary. For example, we know that Centennial high school in Calgary, that was recently opened, was one of seven – one of seven – new Calgary schools scheduled for '04-05, and another four are open or are scheduled to be opened in the current school year. These 11 new projects will provide enough space to accommodate 5,275 new students for the Calgary public board and 2,000 additional student spaces for the Calgary Catholic district. So as monies come available, we are addressing these circumstances.

Secondly, we're also providing where we can and on the basis of health and safety concerns additional brand new, state-of-the-art, steel-framed modulars to help accommodate those populations that are fluctuating in terms of students. So there's quite a bit of good news happening.

I'd like to comment on the \$207 million that I announced last September. I'd like to read that entire list at some point into *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, so the people in Alberta know how much we are investing as monies come available for new school infrastructure projects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question, of course, to the Minister of Education: if your government is not willing to repair older schools and build enough new ones to meet Calgary and district's growing population, why won't you at least provide suitable portable relief? The ones that you are personally sending now to the Calgary district don't fit.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're providing about \$4.7 billion this year alone through the Department of Education, and some of that, obviously, is also with Infrastructure. Now, once the infrastructure portfolio, all three parts, comes over into Education's domain, I will be able to respond in even greater detail.

However, let me just say, Mr. Speaker, that we spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year on one form of infrastructure or another to help improve our schools to make sure that they are safe, to make sure that they are affordable and accessible and that our students are being provided with the best educational opportunities possible. We do that consistently right throughout the province, including the wonderful city of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why does this government continue to undermine public education by subsidizing private schools to the tune of 60 per cent of their public counterparts' per pupil grants? Is this your third way for education?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the incredible success stories in Alberta is the fact that we allow choice. We allow and we encourage the most choice in kindergarten to grade 12 programming in the country. We have public schools, we have public Catholic schools, we have francophone schools, we have charter schools, we have virtual schools, and we even have private schools. They're all part of the mix that makes this the great province that it is, and the parents appreciate having that choice. The fact that we're able to provide only 60 per cent of the instructional component, none out of the infrastructure capital side, for helping out our private schools is yet another one of our major accolades, and the students in those schools are doing extremely well.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you're aware, in 2006 we will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. For the duration of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature at this point in the agenda I will be providing you on a daily basis a historical vignette in commemoration of this anniversary. These vignettes may provide historical data, quotations, or remarks made by a variety of members and brief descriptions about them.

Alberta's first election was held on November 9, 1905, and our 26th election was held on November 22, 2004. Throughout our 100-year history in our democracy in Alberta a total of only 769 different members have been elected in the 26 elections. In terms of service 286 members served one term, 187 members served two terms, 140 members served three terms, 78 members served four terms, 40 members served five terms, 19 members served six terms, eight members served seven terms, six members served eight terms, four members served nine terms, and one member served 10 terms. The average length of service in this Assembly has been 2.4 terms.

In terms of the longest serving MLAs in the history of the province of Alberta the longest serving member was Gordon E. Taylor, who served the 9th to the 18th Legislatures. He was elected for the first time in 1940 for the original constituency of Drumheller and served for 38 years and 10 months.

2:30

The second longest serving member was elected in the 1935 provincial election. Alfred J. Hooke, representing the constituency of Red Deer, served from the Eighth to the 16th Legislatures and served for 35 years and one month.

Ernest C. Manning was the third longest serving member. Elected in the 1935 election out of the city of Calgary, he served from the Eighth to the 16th Legislatures and served for 33 years and three months.

Floyd M. Baker, elected in 1935, representing the constituency of Clover Bar, served from the Eighth to the 15th Legislatures for a total of 31 years and seven months.

In 1971 Peter Trynchy was elected in the constituency of Whitecourt, served from the 17th to the 24th Legislatures. He served for 29 years and five months.

Those are the five longest serving members in the history of the province of Alberta.

The sixth longest serving member was William Tomy. Elected in 1935 in the constituency of Whitford, he served from the Eighth to the 11th Legislatures and then from the 14th to the 16th, for 28 years and 11 months.

The next longest serving member, elected in 1963, was Ray Speaker, who served from the 15th to the 22nd Legislatures for the constituency of Little Bow for 28 years and six months.

R.E. Ainsley was elected in 1935, served from the Eighth to the 14th Legislatures for the constituency of Leduc for 27 years and eight months.

In 1935 Peter Dawson was elected in the constituency of Little Bow, served from the Eighth to the 14th Legislatures, for 27 years and seven months. He served for 26 years as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta.

Still in the race but moving fast is the current MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, who was elected in 1979, from the 19th Legislature to the present, has now served 26 years and four months for the constituencies of Barrhead and others but at the conclusion of this term will just – whoa – go all the way up.

Thank you.

An Hon. Member: It'll be another 10 years before they paint your portrait.

The Speaker: Well, that's true.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Alberta Winter Games

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I stand before you this afternoon, Alberta's best young athletes are gathering in the communities of West Yellowhead for the 2006 Winter Games. Tonight our Premier will open the games at the Gordon Moore park in Hinton. Tomorrow the athletes take centre stage as the competition begins. Twenty-five hundred athletes and officials will take part, representing eight zones with pride and enthusiasm.

The Alberta Games are the essence of sports in our province. They bring together the passion of youth, the power of volunteerism, and the pride of the community for a special day every two years.

For some athletes the Alberta Games may be the starting point for their successful career in sport. For many others it will give them the skills and the experience that will help them throughout their lives.

Hosting the games speaks to the spirit and the pride of Alberta communities. This year it's the people of Edson, Hinton, Jasper, and Yellowhead county who are putting on the show. It takes almost as many volunteers as athletes to make this event successful. From the games' board of directors, committees, and office staff through to the volunteers driving the buses, preparing the special meals, and cleaning the venues – these are the people who deserve our thanks for their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the members of the House to join me in wishing everyone involved in the 2006 Winter Games all the best for a successful event.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Supreme Court Nomination Process

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to congratulate the new Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, on his historic victory in the January 23 federal election. For only the third time in the history of Canada we have a Prime Minister from Alberta, something that, I am sure, pleases everybody in this Chamber. Almost everybody.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to see that Prime Minister Harper is already fulfilling his campaign promises to bring much-needed

democratic reform and accountability to Ottawa. Today the Prime Minister announced his nomination of Justice Marshall Rothstein from Manitoba to fill the current vacancy on the Supreme Court of Canada. On Monday, for the first time in the history of our country, a nominee for the Supreme Court will appear before a public confirmation hearing and answer questions posed by an all-party committee of parliamentarians. This is a most welcome constitutional reform. It will bring more openness, more transparency, and more accountability to the process of government.

Mr. Speaker, since the adoption of the Charter of Rights in 1982 the justices of the Supreme Court of Canada have become some of the most politically influential decision-makers in our country. The people of Canada have a right to know something about these judges before they are appointed because once they are appointed, they wield this power until the age of 75 and mandatory retirement.

Monday's public confirmation hearings will create a historic precedent for democratic reform and strengthen our system of checks and balances. So I say congratulations, Prime Minister Harper.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Universal Health Care

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, although Premier Tommy Douglas of Saskatchewan is called the father of medicare, the true roots of medicare were planted and nurtured in the province of Alberta. It was the government of Alberta that designed the first health care plan in Canada to cover all citizens, and the government protected this plan in the 1935 and 1942 Alberta state health insurance acts.

The federal government proposals that started all of Canada on the road to universal health care in 1945 were the same proposals from the Alberta Hoadley commission of 1932-33 that had already been adopted by Alberta. Due to the absence of comprehensive, researched history of medicine in Alberta before 1947, credit for being the first to establish universal health care was not documented until just recently by Dr. Robert Lampard. An excerpt from his book *Profiles and Perspectives from Alberta's Medical History*, which documents the roots of medicare in Alberta, is published in the February 2006 volume of *The Alberta Doctors' Digest*.

Not only was the government of Alberta the first to establish medicare in Canada; it's also recognized in this history book as the greatest defender of medicare. Premier Manning helped save medicare when he led an appeal to reduce the costs of the 1967 Pearson plan by reducing its contemplated coverage. Alberta's present Premier helped save medicare by finding a way to stretch medicare dollars in 1993.

With health care costs rapidly escalating throughout the world, it is critically important that we find a way to save many of the health care benefits that we enjoy. It would be weak and foolish to pretend that we can save health care without making changes. It is prudent to prevent a collapse of a system by restructuring it. There needs to be a new way to ensure universal health care.

Alberta designed the first health care plan to cover all citizens. Alberta will design a plan that will protect our health care system and make it stronger for future generations.

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

Support for Olympic Athletes

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As the Olympic Games in Turin, Italy, continue, we as Canadians, more importantly Albertans, have

much to be proud of. These men and women have put their lives and careers on hold in the pursuit of excellence in the form of bronze, silver, and gold.

Rural areas such as Vermilion, Spruce Grove, Canmore, and Eckville and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary have new heroes. There have been a total of 19 medals to date, and a great number of these belong to Albertans. This speaks volumes to the quality of the people this province has within its boundaries. This speaks to the determination that lies deep within each athlete.

As a province we should be supporting these athletes through funding. This government has growing surpluses larger than before. Alberta once had a system that produced many great athletes and many great Canadians. It's time that we became that province once again. We have an opportunity before us in the 2008 Summer Games and the 2010 Winter Olympics in Canada to allow Alberta to really stand out, not for oil and gas revenues but for its people, the true Alberta wealth.

2:40

Currently athletes receive funding from the corporate community, the federal government, and nongovernment agencies and families. Now is the time for leadership from this government to support our athletes and show that Alberta remains committed to providing superior quality of life that is inclusive and active, further supporting a healthy Alberta leading by example.

Thank you.

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

Child Care Services

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to speak about our province's most valuable resource: our children. As we are all aware, the changing of the federal government has created a widespread sense of uncertainty within the child care sector not only in Alberta but across Canada.

Federal MP Olivia Chow has announced that she plans on bringing forward a bill that would reaffirm the national child care agreement enacted by the former federal government. The implications of cancelling this agreement are still uncertain in Alberta, leaving families and child care workers alike in a state of uncertainty. Alberta relied in large part upon the funding provided by the previous federal government to enact its five-point plan, a positive step in ensuring that our children receive quality care and that child care workers receive sufficient supports and respect.

I urge the members of this Assembly to join in recognition of the importance of maintaining and building upon a provincial child care program that is healthy, fully supported, and respected. Alberta families need to know that regardless of who is in Ottawa, their children will have access to quality care. Child care workers need to know that their work is highly valued and that the recent commitments of this provincial government will not be withdrawn or reduced in light of the federal election results.

I'm expressing my support for families in the child care sector in Alberta by asking this provincial government to immediately commit to following through on its responsibilities to the child care sector through whatever means necessary. In the wealthiest province in Canada we can all agree that our most valuable resource is our children. We cannot allow changes in Ottawa to undermine our commitments to provide respectable, quality care for the next generation of Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Public Health Care

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The results of the federal election have shown that Albertans will not tolerate dishonesty in government. This is bad news for the Premier. During the election the Premier refused to speak honestly to Albertans about health care. He openly declared that he had no plan for private health care, and he claimed that he was going to consult with Albertans prior to moving towards two-tier health care. Both claims have proven false. The result is that this government has no mandate for its plan for private, two-tier health care.

The deception continues, Mr. Speaker. Albertans won't know the details of the health privatization plan until after two important events: the PC Party leadership review on March 31 and a taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign to sell private health care to Albertans. If health care privatization is making Tory delegates so nervous and the government backbenchers so skittish, one can only imagine the reaction of normal Albertans once they finally see the plan. That's why the Premier is waiting for a taxpayer-funded, multimillion-dollar propaganda campaign to sell Albertans on the virtues of waiting longer, paying more, and padding profits for health care corporations.

The Premier is hiding his health privatization plans from Albertans because of his own personal, political interests. When politicians refuse to be honest, it's the people who lose. While the Premier clings to power and the government panders to the private health care lobby, Albertans are demanding that the government improve the public health care system, control costs by getting a handle on drug costs, and invest in prevention and promotion.

Real solutions for improving public health care, solutions championed by the NDP opposition, are being ignored in favour of deception and self-interest calculations. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will not stand for it.

head: Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party on a petition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the first of what I know will be many petitions in support of health care during this session. This one urges the government of Alberta to "eliminate private clinics and private delivery in the health care system, and develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen and extend Medicare." It contains 238 signatures.

head: Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on a Standing Order 30 notification.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to propose the following motion.

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance: namely, the ongoing reduction in funding and supports provided to individuals and families through the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Board.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party on a Standing Order 15 submission.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I'd propose the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Assembly consider the Premier's release of the 2006 Speech from the Throne to members of the media and the Leader of the Official Opposition prior to Members of the Legislative Assembly a contempt of the Assembly and a breach of the Assembly's privilege.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the conclusion the chair will deal with the privilege statement first, before we proceed to the Standing Order 30 application.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

**Bill 2
Drug-endangered Children Act**

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Drug-endangered Children Act.

This bill will make it clear that children exposed to serious drug activities such as manufacturing and trafficking are victims of abuse and need protection. Protecting children is becoming increasingly complex, and we need this legislation to help us keep ahead of this emerging social issue.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

**Bill 3
Protection Against Family Violence
Amendment Act, 2006**

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to thank the hon. Minister of Children's Services for asking me to lead this bill through the Legislature.

It's my pleasure to introduce and move first reading of the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act.

The proposed amendments to this important legislation will further protect victims of family violence by addressing abusive and threatening behaviours such as stalking. It will also offer protection to more family members to ensure that vulnerable people like seniors or those with disabilities don't fall prey to family violence.

Thank you.

The Speaker: For the record that is Bill 3, and added to the conclusion of the name of the bill was 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

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

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, the Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006.

In August 2005 the government of the United States passed a law extending daylight saving time by four weeks. Following that decision the Alberta government looked into the pros and cons of changing daylight saving time in our own province. The decision to introduce this legislation came after consultation with all of the ministries and the relevant stakeholders. The decision among the majority of stakeholders was to synchronize with our trading partners. This bill proposes to extend daylight saving time in Alberta, beginning with the second Sunday in March and ending the first Sunday in November, commencing in 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

2:50

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

**Bill 5
Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill deals with minor amendments in three pieces of justice legislation: the Civil Enforcement Act, the judicature amendment act, and the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act.

Amendments to the Civil Enforcement Act will further refine and clarify the process for seizing property that is already under seizure so that all types of creditors can use the same process under that act.

Amendments to the judicature amendment act, originally introduced in 2004, will refine and clarify original amendments that allow structured settlements in injury and death cases so that payments can be made in instalments rather than in a lump sum.

Amendments to the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act reflect developments resulting from the introduction of digital recording in courtrooms in the year 2000. The changes will update the definition of court reporter, allow more flexibility in how records of court proceedings are certified, and clarify how records of court proceedings are stored and maintained.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

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

**Bill 6
Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

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

Bill 7**Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006.

I'll have more to say on this later.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

Bill 8**Trustee Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006.

In 2001 we amended the Trustee Act to introduce the prudent investor rule, allowing trustees to diversify investments to control risk and improve financial returns. At that time, the old rules governing trustee investments, referred to as the legal list, were retained for transitional purposes in a schedule to the Trustee Act. The bill eliminates the legal list from the Trustee Act altogether.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Bill 9**Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, the carrier of Bill 9, I request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Bill 10**Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, this act will help clarify and strengthen the engineering profession by allowing registered professional technologists to sit on the council of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, APEGGA, and vote on new amendments, regulations, and bylaws.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 10, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 11**Architects Amendment Act, 2006**

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, this act will help to clarify and strengthen the architect profession by allowing the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for compulsory continuing competence in their profession.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006, as introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Bill 12**Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a bill being Bill 12, Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will implement many of the recommendations of the mortgage fraud committee and, hopefully, make it much more difficult for people who register titles under a mortgage fraud.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Bill 13**Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 13, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill will give tools to the Real Estate Association to help combat mortgage fraud.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 13, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006, as presented by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 14**Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat I request leave to introduce Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, these minor amendments will strengthen the act and respond to issues raised by individual callers and by the federation of regulated health professions.

I move first reading of Bill 14. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 15**International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act**

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act.

This act would implement provisions of agreements signed by Canada that create an international registry for aircraft engines and airframes. Because registry information is a provincial responsibility, provincial implementing legislation is needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

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

Bill 16**Peace Officer Act**

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act.

This bill will ensure better communication, co-operation, and collaboration between employers of peace officers and police services across the province, which will result in a higher level of law enforcement services in Alberta. It will also clarify the role, responsibility, and accountability of peace officers and strengthen provincial standards such as training, use of force, and qualifications.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act, as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Bill 17**Libraries Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, I beg leave to introduce Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, 2006.

This act will provide library boards and municipalities greater flexibility to ensure that Albertans receive efficient and consistent library service. The amendments also clarify financial reporting requirements and provide for a mechanism when a municipality dissolves or amalgamates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regarding Bill 201, which comes up next, and following discussions that I understand took place amongst members of all sides of the House, I would seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive the ordinary requirements of notice, that being pursuant to Standing Order 38(1)(d), which would allow for first reading of the human tissue gift act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 201**Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill is designed to increase the number of Albertans who consent to tissue and organ donation to help save or improve the lives of those requiring transplants.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Similarly, with respect to upcoming Bill 202 and following discussions that I believe did take place amongst all sides of the House, I would seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive the ordinary requirements of notice as required otherwise under Standing Order 38(1)(d) to allow for first reading of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: That being the case, I'll call on the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Bill 202**Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 202, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006.

Basically what this act is to do is to give some more tools in the

tool case for the hon. Minister of Environment to make sure that when crystal meth is made, the disposal of this is done in a proper way or that the persons that are doing this are paying penalties to clean up our environment so that we have the best environment in Canada.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Mason: Hi, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a package of documents prepared by the Friends of Medicare as part of their keep medicare public campaign. The documents were released in recent weeks and are a clear signal that Albertans are ready and willing to fight for their cherished public health care system.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a paper written by Herb Emery and Kevin Gerrits entitled The Demand for Private Health Care Insurance in Alberta. Herb Emery is a senior fellow at the Fraser Institute, and the paper argues that for private insurance to be profitable, there must be a superior private system and an inferior public one.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of an urgent call for action put out by the Alberta Association for Community Living. The call for action warns of cuts to funding and services for individuals and families served by the PDD Board.

I also have letters from Lorraine Bens, Kathleen Chalmers, Mary Markowski, and Vahini Govender, who are just a few of the many people who have written to express their serious concerns about these possible cuts.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the executive summary and key recommendations of the 1998 report of the Auditor General on Alberta registries made to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. This report identifies serious privacy and security concerns which clearly have not yet been addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to table five copies of the Liberal opposition paper Our Plan for Public Health Care: Creating a Healthy Future, Bold Innovation, Strong, Steady Management. This is in response to the Premier's request for information and suggestions on public health care.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and table the appropriate number of copies of a letter written by a constituent of Edmonton-Rutherford by the name of Shannon Critchley. She also includes a letter that she wrote to the Prime Minister. In both of these letters she expresses her grave concerns that the comments by Mr. Klein indicate that he may in fact be contemplating contravening the Canada Health Act, and she has very serious concerns about that.

Thank you.

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act I will table with the Assembly today the appropriate copies of the following Members' Services orders. First of all, Members' Services Committee Order 10/05, which came into force on August 31, 2005; Members' Services Committee Order 11/05, which will come into force on April 1, 2006; Members' Services Committee Order 12/05, which will come into force on April 1, 2006; and Members' Services Committee Order 13/05, which will come into force on April 1, 2006.

In addition, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 18th annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 2004. This report represents the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2004, and the eighth annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Coutts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, responses to Written Question 34 and Written Question 37, asked by Mr. Bonko on November 21, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs, response to Written Question 38 and return to order of the Assembly 44, both asked for by Mr. Taylor on behalf of Dr. Taft on November 21, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Fritz, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, return to order of the Assembly 46, asked for by Ms Pastoor on November 21, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mar, Minister of Community Development, return to order of the Assembly MR 36, asked for by Mr. Martin on behalf of Dr. Pannu on May 2, 2005.

head: **Projected Government Business**

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(5) I would like to ask the Deputy Government House Leader to share with us the projected government business for the week of February 27 to March 2.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, and thank you to the hon. Opposition House Leader for the question. I'm happy to indicate that starting on Monday, February 27, in the afternoon we will deal with private members' business, written questions and motions for returns will be addressed, and under Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders we hope to address bills 201 and 202. Monday evening we should be able to address Motion 501, and

then at 9 p.m. we will continue on with throne speech replies.

On Tuesday we hope to hear a message concerning a supplementary supply, following that, additional considerations for throne speech replies. Tuesday evening we anticipate that throne speech replies will continue.

On Wednesday we should be able to address Committee of Supply, supplementary supply, day 1 of 2, in fact. Wednesday evening we should be able to deal with day 2 of 2 for supplementary supply and, as time permits, consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech in the form of replies to the Speech from the Throne.

On Thursday we should see an introduction of a bill, the supplementary supply appropriation bill, from the previous two days of debate, followed by additional considerations of the throne speech, responses to it quite specifically, and wrapping up with second readings as per the Order Paper and following additional consultation with members opposite.

The Speaker: We will now proceed to the notification with respect to the breach of privilege or contempt of the Legislative Assembly. The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Having a chance to review the notes for this, I am not entirely satisfied with the question of privilege, and I would ask your leave and leave of the Assembly to withdraw the motion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

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

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Board

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will proceed. It has to do with the motion announced previously.

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the ongoing reduction in funding and supports provided to individuals and families through the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Board.

Mr. Speaker, there were questions raised in the Legislature about this from one of the hon. members opposite, but I think that all of us as MLAs certainly have been flooded with calls and letters about this issue. Leading into the Assembly, it's certainly the most amount of mail that I've got as the MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. It's a very organized group that feels that there is going to be a serious impact on some of the most vulnerable people in our society: those with developmental disabilities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, speaking to the urgency of this, there seems to be a debate about what is a cut and what is not. The Alberta Association for Community Living believes, in talking to the members in their groups, that there is going to be a severe cut. I know the minister says that it's not a cut because there is a 2 per cent increase in the PDD budget, but I think the point that they make – and it should be clear – is that inflation has been running much higher than that, and institutional inflation usually runs higher than personal inflation. So they believe that this is a serious matter, and the reason they're raising it now is because they know that the budget is coming up probably in the middle of March.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister, I believe, said in question period and in my conversations with her that there have been increases in the past. I don't doubt that there have been monies put in in the past,

but that does not help them this year. The point that they're making is that in the services that they're providing, there will be cuts. The urgency, again, is that I am told that the northwest and south regions have already begun to implement such reductions. They're already cutting back in those particular regions, and I'm told that most regions will begin to hold or will shortly be holding meetings with families, individuals, and service providers to discuss how to manage the required reduction in funding if additional funding is not coming.

Now, again, Mr. Speaker, I stress that this is a serious matter. These people are the most vulnerable people in society. They've got families that are under stress. Whether they've had increases in the last two or three years, that's great, but the point is that all they want is to maintain what they've had in the past. They're saying very clearly that they can't do this. Now, we can argue about figures here one way or the other, but the Alberta Association for Community Living and the people they serve are honourable people. They would not be saying this if there weren't cutbacks occurring.

The urgency again I stress, Mr. Speaker, because they know that the budget is coming down, we're told, in the middle of March at the earliest and perhaps the third week in March. If they don't do something about it now, these cuts will in fact occur, and it will have a very detrimental, serious effect on the most vulnerable people in society plus their families. So that's why this is the first chance that we've had to recognize this, hoping that there's still time in the budget to at least – it wouldn't be a lot of money – just bring things up to the inflation level. That's my understanding. That's all they're asking. They're not asking for big increases but just to be able to maintain the services that they've had in the past.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On this motion, the hon. minister.

3:20

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to respond to the motion pursuant to Standing Order 30 that's been raised.

The Speaker: We're dealing with urgency here now, everyone, okay?

Mrs. Fritz: I'll begin by saying that the premise, Mr. Speaker, of this member's motion is factually incorrect. Although it is an important issue, it's not a matter of urgent public importance that requires the adjournment of our ordinary Assembly business.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide the facts on this matter. As the member mentioned, yesterday I did meet with him to explain the funding for this important program, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought that the member would have taken that to the community and responded to the information that you had shared with me that you're receiving through letters, because you do know the facts from yesterday. We talked. We drew a diagram about that. We went through the budgets for the years, the numbers of people.

I've explained it today in the Assembly once again, as the member indicated to you, Mr. Speaker. Just to reconfirm that to you as well, there is not going to be a reduction. There has not been, and there won't be. There isn't a future reduction coming regarding this budget for persons with developmental disabilities.

In fact, when I spoke about the funding earlier, Mr. Speaker, PDD funding was \$287 million in 1999. It's now reached nearly a half a billion dollars each year. It services 9,200 people, and they receive supports from the program. Those supports or the services are not being cut in any way. As I said earlier, that's a 70 per cent increase. During that same time, caseloads have grown approximately 20 per

cent. It is a significant amount of funding. It averages about \$55,000 per individual so that people can actively participate in their communities.

It's also important to note that nearly all of the people receiving supports in the PDD program, as I mentioned earlier as well, receive assistance from the AISH program. During the past year we increased that living allowance, Mr. Speaker. I explained it to you during question period. It's an issue that is very clearly related to the supports that we do provide.

We did have the building bridges report. We implemented all of those recommendations. I am committing to reviewing this program once again, Mr. Speaker, because that was six years ago for that report. Also, by relooking at it, we can ensure that PDD is meeting the needs identified by families in the disability community, that it's being administered in an effective and efficient way, that it can continue providing supports to Albertans in the years to come.

Also, based on the significant and ongoing funding that's provided to this program and because there are no plans to reduce the provincial support to PDD, I'm looking forward to your ruling on this matter because I don't believe it's an urgent matter.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to participate in the debate surrounding this Standing Order 30 motion. If I consult *Beauchesne's* 387 to 398 regarding emergency debates, there are a number of tests that are set out there. When I look at this issue, which I believe is urgent – and I urge the Speaker to support the motion – I note that a number of tests have been met. This issue is not currently before the courts. It was not mentioned specifically in the throne speech. There is no bill on the Order Paper which is dealing with this issue, nor was any bill outlined in the government press release of February 15 in which their entire spring session agenda was outlined.

The resolution of funding might be met if we knew when the date of the '06-07 budget was going to be, but at this point we have no indication from the government when that would be, so there's nothing before us that would lead us to believe that we could get a resolution to this fairly quickly. There's no notice on the Order Paper for any supplementary supply budget, which might offer some relief to this situation. No bill on the Order Paper, nothing on the legislative agenda from the government, budget is unknown, no supplementary supply indicators that might tell us when this could be relieved. So I believe that there are a number of tests that have been met here regarding urgency, Mr. Speaker.

I also note that *Beauchesne* 389 talks about an issue that is “so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention” and 390 that “the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.” I think what's of the public interest here and the public concern is that the PDD community boards are currently planning reductions in supports and services because the funding projections in the provincial government, or the information they've been given thus far by the minister, is indicating to them that the budget will not be adequate to meet current and upcoming needs, so they can't even stay at the same place. That's why they're talking about cuts. They believe they will have to implement cuts in certain programs in order to deal with the amount of money that's being given to them.

I think that the government action has the following implications for families. This is what captures that public interest and public concern that's noted in *Beauchesne* 389 and 390. There are long waiting lists for the services and support. This places families at risk of receiving less-than-adequate care, and I'll hasten to say that that's

not because any caregiver wouldn't want to give it but that often there's just not enough funding to pay for enough hours, for example. We end up with increased segregation of individuals, placing those individuals in a situation of potential harm or, even worse, of abuse.

The Alberta Association of Community Living, who care for people in their own homes, has only received a 4 per cent raise in the last 16 years, Mr. Speaker, and they note that the wages for their care workers who take people into their homes to look after them are so low that they can't even organize respite care. I think this is part of the urgency debate, and given the leniency you showed others, I appreciate you directing the same towards me.

The Speaker: It has been provided.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

So in meeting that test that's set out in 389 and 390, I believe these arguments are part of it. It is not in the public interest, and I would argue that it's very much top of mind and of public concern that we do not leave vulnerable members of our society – and specifically I'm talking here about people receiving funding through PDD – in a position where they could be facing harm, facing abuse, or, more to the point in this one, having fewer services available and lowering their quality of life or the dignity that they have in living their lives. I think that's where it's important.

Another example is that the government has clawed back supports for two individuals living under the same care roof, rationalizing that the caregiver should be able to realize efficiencies. Well, that's giving two people in need of care under the same roof even less money to deal with, and that is causing very real stories of harm. I'm not going to go into those individual stories of harm, Mr. Speaker, because I'm cognizant of your concerns about urgency, but I think the larger point here is: how much longer is the government going to ignore problems which grow more critical with each passing and unresolved day?

We see no resolution for this in sight. There's no bill. There's no budget. There's no supplementary budget. There's nothing on the government agenda that indicated that this would be addressed. That's why I believe that there is urgency, and I'm asking the Speaker to recognize both the urgency of the PDD recipients and their situations and the need for an urgent debate to address that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's no coffee in the House or anything else until I declare Orders of the Day, so that is out, please.

On this point of urgency I call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner first.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just be brief. Two of the problems and why they cause urgency have been pointed out quite well. In the south region I've seen letterhead that has gone out to the various people that provide this service stating that there's a deficit of \$1 million, \$3 million, and \$5 million in the area and that therefore there isn't the funding to follow through with the programs. So they're implementing and having to look at shutting the program down in different areas. They're even having the problem where those that are leaving from child services and going into PDD are running a deficit. The funding isn't there, and there's nothing coming from the ministry to indicate to them that they can accept these new people. So I, too, would like to add my concern from the south region that it is an urgent issue and that there is nothing coming forward from the government that the people in the south are

aware of, and they are wondering how to deal with the shortage in the budget and the money that's being provided for them.

3:30

The Speaker: I'd just like to remind all hon. members that urgency doesn't mean that it's important in the sense – urgency refers to the fact that there's no other opportunity to deal with it.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is, in fact, exactly what I wanted to address. I think that, just by way of reminder, all members would know that Standing Order 30 and specifically (2) states that “the member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate,” which you've been kind enough to flag on various occasions for our attention.

In fact, it's urgency that we should be talking about. In just looking in the dictionary here quickly, urgent is defined as “requiring immediate action or attention,” something that is earnest and/or insistent. I don't think the speakers from the opposite side have proven that case of urgency. Urgent to most of us would likely mean a sudden or a very sharp loss of some kind of a special service, for example, or perhaps something of a detrimental nature by way of a displacement or a dislodging or something along that line or another occurrence wherein somebody might be deprived of a life and death service or something that is critically important.

As we know, PDD is extremely important. This is an area, Mr. Speaker, you'll recall, that I spent six years as minister looking after, and I'm delighted that the new minister responsible has taken up the torch and is moving the ball along in a very positive way, as she indicated in her comments. If PDD recipients were being put unnecessarily at risk or were being put directly in harm's way and there was proof of that or if there were very serious health or safety concerns or other things of that nature, you could in fact perhaps argue a case of urgency. But none of those kinds of examples were forthcoming, and there's no evidence of that whatsoever. In fact, quite to the contrary, I think you would find that our PDD program in terms of budget alone has grown from about \$283 million in 1998-99 up to about \$490 million or \$480 million or somewhere in there, and that would show you how seriously we as a government are looking after PDD recipients, their families, and the important programs.

So it's not in a manner of crisis. [interjections] You know, I offered you the courtesy, hon. yapping members from the ND. I'm just asking that you would shut up for a little while and allow us to make the case too. Okay? This is a very, very serious topic, and you ought not to take it so flippantly as you are right now.

We're not leaving persons without services, so there is no urgency here, Mr. Speaker, and that's the only point that I wanted to make.

The Speaker: Anybody else want to get involved? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster on the urgency.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, I want to speak to the urgency too. Every day, Mr. Speaker, in this Assembly we have the opportunity to question the government on matters of urgent importance or policy. Today not one member of the opposition took the opportunity to question the minister. Our member did. The opposition took the time in question period to talk about three- or four-year-old driver's licence fraud, to question the leadership of the longest serving Premier in Canada. They talked about hypothetical health care gloom and doom, and none of them had the urgency to stand up and

question the hon. minister about it. If it was urgent, that's when they could have addressed it.

The Speaker: Anyone else?

Hon. members, the chair continues to be bemused by what goes on in here some days. Normally on the first day after the Speech from the Throne there's a moving of the Speech from the Throne, and it's also customary to allow the Leader of the Official Opposition the maximum amount of time to speak to the Speech from the Throne. Whether or not that will happen today, I guess, will depend on how we deal with this particular matter.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30(2) and the rules

the member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

That's basically what it is. The chair is prepared to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion to proceed is in order under Standing Order 30(2) but first of all, I guess, will review some of the arguments.

First of all, the chair confirms that the ND opposition House leader has given proper notice of his intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. Notice of this application and the subject matter was received by the Speaker's office yesterday at 2 p.m. Therefore, the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met. There is a slight difference between the wording of the February 22 memo from the ND House leader to the chair and what is found in the proposed motion, but in the chair's view this does not invalidate the application. The chair also notes that the member was good enough to copy the Opposition House Leader, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, and a staff member from the Government House Leader's office, which is not necessary but is in the best traditions of the House.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether or not the motion fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion relates to “a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.” The member's proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on – and I underline – “the ongoing reduction in funding and supports provided to individuals and families through the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Board.”

The relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debate are *Beauchesne*, paragraphs 387 to 398, and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589. The chair has reviewed these references closely in considering this request for leave. I must emphasize to all members that to meet the requirements of urgency, there must not be – underline “not” – another opportunity for the members of this Assembly to discuss the matter. Members might want to reference *Beauchesne*'s paragraph 390 and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 589.

The chair has listened attentively to the submissions from several members in the House, and although the chair does not want to detract from the importance of this issue, he simply cannot find that this matter constitutes a genuine emergency within the meaning of Standing Order 30. Furthermore, it would seem premature for the chair to find on the first regular sitting day of the spring sitting that there would be no other opportunity to debate this matter. For instance, there will likely be supplementary estimates. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was of the contention that there was no indication of supplementary supply. Well, it was indicated by the Deputy Government House Leader in Projected Government Business, which is a part of the Routine – one member asks the

question; the other member gives the response – for Tuesday that there may be messages coming for supplementary supply. That will be before the House in the near future.

As well, there is the Speech from the Throne, the throne speech, where all hon. members can wax eloquent on any conceivable subject they want to, and that begins, conceivably, today.

To conclude, although this is a serious matter of concern and consideration for some, this chair, who also is a Member of this Legislative Assembly, has been contacted by some of the people referenced today and been told that there is no problem with funding. The chair cannot participate in the debate, but the chair should report factual information.

So the chair does not consider it of such urgency to warrant postponing the business of the Assembly this afternoon. Therefore, the request for leave is not in order, and the chair will not put the question.

head: 3:40

Orders of the Day

head:

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is not only a pleasure but also a great honour to rise and move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

In his remarks the Lieutenant Governor mentioned the opportunities he had to meet people during our centennial year. The Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency was pleased to welcome His Honour when he visited to participate in the presentation of centennial awards to outstanding Albertans of my constituency. I would like to thank His Honour for visiting so many of our communities to bring a spirit of celebration to all Albertans. The year 2005 was a very special year, and all members of this Assembly considered it a special honour to be serving the people of Alberta during our centennial.

For this legislative session we continue in the same spirit as we celebrate the 100th year of the opening of the first legislative session of our province. For over a century the governance of our province has been stable, effective, and all Albertans have been served very well. This is a special place for legislators to be, and I hope that we continue to govern with as much vision as did our predecessors in this Chamber.

In this special year I especially want to recognize the Premiers of this province: Haultain, Rutherford, Sifton, Stewart, Greenfield, Brownlee, Reid, Aberhart, Manning, Strom, Lougheed, Getty, and our current Premier, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. The leadership and accomplishments of these individuals and all elected members have brought us through the last century to where we are today, with a bright future for the century to come. Alberta today is strong, and the people are optimistic when realizing the potential of tomorrow. Our government has built a great foundation with a world-class education system, an innovative and responsive health care system, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and a quality of life

second to none. This foundation allows Alberta to grow and become stronger.

To continue to be successful, our government will continue to work in answering the needs of Albertans. Over the long term our government will address Albertans' needs through our 20-year plan. This plan outlines the importance of learning, innovation, high quality of life, and economic prosperity as the pillars of a strong Alberta. Yesterday's Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour, lays out the steps, guided by the vision contained in this 20-year plan, that will build upon a strong foundation so that Albertans can have an even more prosperous tomorrow.

A principal aspect of our prosperity is education. By emphasizing knowledge and an educated population, Alberta will remain a leader as we move into our second century. We have a great education system both at the K to 12 and postsecondary levels, but there are challenges. Among the challenges are high school completion rates. Yesterday the hon. Lieutenant Governor noted that the government will be addressing the issue of high school completion rates in the coming months, and this is an action which I as an educator of many years applaud. The high school completion symposium not only brings focus to the problem but should provide constructive solutions to improve high school completion rates. Educating our youth provides benefits for our entire province by preparing young Albertans to succeed in life.

However, our goals in education must go far beyond increasing high school completion rates. I am pleased that we have made great progress this past year in improving access to our many great institutions of higher learning through investments in the access to the future fund and the creation of new scholarship programs. This is a good start, and throughout this year our government will strive to make the postsecondary system more affordable and accessible to allow Albertans of all ages to advance their education.

Already new approaches are increasing access to higher education. Thanks to pilot projects such as the on-site apprenticeship training program at Fort McMurray, which brings the instructors to the apprentices rather than the other way around, and video conferencing via Supernet, which allows students to attend classes in their own communities, new educational opportunities have been created without having to wait for the construction of postsecondary facilities. Creative measures such as these will prove especially beneficial for Albertans who live a great distance away from postsecondary learning centres.

[Ms Haley in the chair]

Additionally, the Speech from the Throne outlines government plans to partner with aboriginal groups and industry on new training projects for aboriginal people. Having the opportunity to serve on the aboriginal education subcommittee, I'm aware of the challenges of aboriginal education, and I commend the government on new initiatives to partner with aboriginal groups and industry on new training prospects for our First Nations peoples.

A final point on education which I would like to raise deals with the shortage of skilled labour in this province. With the emphasis that the Speech from the Throne places on advanced education for Albertans as well as increasing opportunities for new Albertans to enter the workforce, our current skills shortage is on its way to being alleviated.

Our future prosperity is also found in a strong economy. Alberta's economy is largely based on the development of natural resources. The strength of resource development is very important in ensuring a strong rural Alberta and a strong agricultural sector. Representing a riding with both rural and urban components, I am very aware of

the challenges facing rural Alberta and agricultural producers today. I am pleased to see the measures suggested by His Honour yesterday with respect to helping rural Albertans and the agricultural industry.

Alberta's agricultural industry is largely dependent upon exports. It is a good initiative to work with the federal government in securing better markets for our producers and breaking down barriers to trade. Helping our agricultural producers remain competitive will be a great help to keeping Alberta rural communities strong and vibrant, as will the priorities of the rural development strategy. A key objective of the Alberta rural development strategy is to create the conditions whereby more people are enabled to live in rural centres. The emphasis on creating more opportunities for youth to stay in rural Alberta and to move to rural Alberta is indeed visionary.

My constituency is home to a prime example of how a rural development strategy can materialize. Recently Augustana University College and the University of Alberta merged to form the University of Alberta Augustana campus in Camrose. By offering the world-class programs of the University of Alberta in a rural setting, young Albertans have the opportunity to complete their postsecondary education in a more familiar environment where they will be equipped with the skills to establish careers and families in rural communities.

Madam Speaker, we all know very well the importance of resource development to the Alberta way of life. To ensure that the resource industries, whether it be agriculture, forestry, or energy, can succeed over time, our government is committed to supporting research and development. Research is critical to unleashing the innovation in resource industries to ensure continued economic growth. These innovations are taking place in research institutions such as the Alberta Research Council, an organization I am proud to chair. The Alberta Research Council is a key organization in helping the government of Alberta achieve its strategic innovation agenda. By delivering innovative science and technology solutions, ARC meets the priorities of industry and government in Alberta and beyond.

One example of ARC's work in finding solutions is found on a feedlot not far from Vegreville. This Alberta company is testing a revolutionary new system that takes feedlot manure and converts it into usable energy sources. The integrated manure utilization system, also known as IMUS, uses anaerobic digestion to produce biogas, mainly methane, to generate electricity. Recovered nutrients are used as fertilizer. This type of ingenuity has taken what is commonly thought of as a problem and created profitable solutions for agricultural producers.

In taking a look at the broader picture, energy is a key economic thrust for Alberta. The Alberta Energy Research Institute and the Alberta Research Council are at the forefront of developments to ensure that Albertans have access to secure energy sources while balancing economic prosperity and environmental needs. This represents a new frontier for the energy industry. This industry has demonstrated time and again that it has the will and tenacity to find new energy sources and see to their efficient and beneficial development. Challenges will include securing new supplies and better methods to obtain existing supplies of our conventional oil and gas, best methods to obtain energy from our oil sands, and a new look at the coal industry and new ways of obtaining biofuels.

3:50

Thinking of our vision today, I am reminded of Dr. Karl Clark, the so-called father of the oil sands. Dr. Clark while at the ARC and with the University of Alberta in the 1920s studied Alberta's tar sands as a road-paving material before focusing on developing the

hot water extraction process that energy giants like Syncrude and Suncor still use today. His work has allowed the development of an oil sands industry that is outputting close to 1 million barrels a day and is a rapidly growing energy source. Dr. Clark is a role model to the scientists and researchers of today as they unleash the potential of new energy sources and will undoubtedly continue our prosperity.

I have strongly emphasized the potential of research as it relates to energy, but more work continues through the Alberta Science and Research Authority and the other research institutes – the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, the Alberta life sciences institute – along with the Alberta Research Council and other universities and colleges to bring innovative ideas to maturity. These institutions house some of the best and brightest minds from Alberta and around the world. This is why it is so important to move forward in our postsecondary educational institutions to ensure that Alberta researchers will remain in the vanguard when it comes to developing new technology.

It is important to emphasize that investments in research have some very practical benefits to Albertans. An important component in moving the Water for Life strategy forward is using research to secure and manage clean water sources for the future. Research will also guide the development of the land-use framework mentioned by His Honour. Research will ensure that future land uses can balance personal and economic needs with the protection and security of our natural landscapes.

The hon. Lieutenant Governor's remarks yesterday also outlined the government's commitment to the health of Albertans. Everyone in this Assembly wants the best health care system possible for Albertans. We need not all agree on what form that should be, but we all want the best care for our loved ones and for all Albertans when they need care. I'm pleased that quality health care is a top priority for the government and that the objective is to increase access and reduce wait times, especially in areas of breast cancer care, coronary bypass, MRIs, CT scans, and prostate cancer.

In particular, I want to thank the government for bringing forward Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. We have all been affected by this dreaded disease, whether it is a loved one, family members, friends or neighbours or even personally, and I commend the hon. Premier for committing our government to the big-picture goal of setting the stage for a cancer-free future. The \$500 million outlined in Bill 1 will allow for continued advancements in cancer research, which will develop new treatments and better methods for dealing with this dreaded disease.

Recently I had the opportunity to tour the Cross Cancer Institute and observe their research programs. The Cross is a research hospital that very effectively integrates research and clinical activity. It provides care and research, which means that there is a much faster translation of research outcome to patient care. Beyond the labs and screening devices there is an excitement amongst the people at work there in the hope that someday – someday – we will be free of cancer. It was impressive to sense the teamwork toward the ultimate goal, and I admire their dedication. The Cross is one example of the innovation and forward thinking in our health care system, and I support our government's desire to develop a framework to permit continued innovation in other areas to allow Albertans to have better access and care within the health system.

Much of my speech today addresses the issue of using strengths to ensure continued prosperity. Another link to securing future prosperity in the province is the government's commitment to sound fiscal management by saving – saving – some of today's windfall revenues to protect against future shortfalls.

During the economic prosperity of the late '70s and early '80s the

government of the day under Premier Lougheed with great vision established the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. It was to address the basic principle that Alberta's resources belong to the people, including the children of today and the generations to come. Recognizing similar prosperity of current times, I congratulate and support the savings initiatives contained in the throne speech for further investing in the heritage savings trust fund and other visionary endowments such as the access to the future fund, the ingenuity fund, and the Alberta heritage fund for medical research.

Government endowments along with investments and infrastructure projects are a means of translating today's resource revenues into a lasting means of supporting the well-being of Albertans. We can do nothing less for ourselves and the future generations than to invest in the heritage fund and our own endowments to permanently support the building of a strong and resilient Alberta.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has come a long way in its first century. Our story is one of hard work and perseverance, a can-do attitude coupled with a willingness to help out those who need it. Our history tells us as much about our present as our future because as someone once said: it's hard to know where you are going unless you know where you have been.

I applaud the government for the Royal Alberta Museum initiative and encouraging that our story will be told and retold through our museums, including the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in my constituency. Our museums, big and small, throughout Alberta will transfer the wealth of knowledge to upcoming generations.

The Speech from the Throne is about building a new and better Alberta, rising on a foundation well established in the hard work of the past and based on the objectives of our government's 20-year plan. We have the privilege of living in a province of almost unlimited potential, and I look forward to working with all my colleagues in representing the best interests of Albertans in this Chamber.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour for me to have the opportunity to second the Speech from the Throne. I would like to thank our hon. Lieutenant Governor for delivering the speech yesterday and for setting an ambitious and exciting tone for this legislative session.

The government's upcoming plan contains many vital pieces that will affect the lives of Albertans in all parts of the province. Importantly, much of the government's agenda includes talking to Albertans to ensure that their needs and desires are known. Working together we will achieve what we desire.

I recently celebrated my first year as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and my experience has shown me just how much people contribute to make this great province better. Not only my colleagues here in the Assembly – and perhaps I'm biased – but it seems like so many of these thoughtful and helpful people live in my constituency of Calgary-Foothills. There have been so many times in the past when I've been inspired and motivated by the passion of my constituents. I am confident that we will find further success as we move forward in this exciting time in our province's history.

As the hon. Lieutenant Governor stated yesterday, this year we are celebrating 100 years of democracy in Alberta. A short century ago at McKay Avenue school the First Legislature assembled and began mapping the journey towards an exciting future. It was a time of incredible growth that stretched the boundaries of a new province's resources and experience, but the people met the challenge head-on and laid the foundation for a prosperous Alberta.

4:00

This year, the first year of our second century, we must once again face the perils of growth, but this time we will be tackling this problem as the economic powerhouse of Canada. Like they did a century ago, we will prevail. The government of Alberta's objective is very straightforward: to make Alberta the best place in the world to live, work, raise a family, and grow old. Achieving that goal requires carefully setting priorities, which were outlined by the Lieutenant Governor yesterday. These priorities are: creating a learning society, staying true to our fiscal principles to ensure a prosperous society, taking appropriate steps to have a clean environment, a healthy society, and finally a safe and caring population. These are the priorities that will define Alberta in its second century.

Madam Speaker, a safe and caring society is one where people have respect for one another. Our aboriginal population is one of the most important assets we have. We need to include and support them, and we need them to provide input into our future. Our children, which are the future, need to be protected from the negative effects of family violence as well as from the devastation of crystal meth and other drugs. I'm optimistic about our government's commitment and approach toward these problems.

Our seniors, who built this province, persons with disabilities, and adults who receive continuing care need to know that they will be cared for with the highest level of dignity and respect. Last year I had the opportunity to co-chair the MLA Task Force on Continuing Care Health Service and Accommodation Standards. During our consultations with Albertans I heard many stories which had a great personal effect on me. I'm certain that as we implement new standards for the province's lodges and supportive living and long-term care facilities, Albertans will once again feel confident that they will receive the level of care they expect and deserve.

I'm convinced that Albertans will receive the best quality health care possible. The current health care system is not sustainable, and it is not working as well as it can be. Madam Speaker, we have a population that is growing very fast. We also have a population that is aging. The health care system must evolve to meet these growing needs. Thankfully, this is the government's top priority this session. Wait times were reduced with the Alberta hip and knee replacement project and will now be reduced in the areas of breast cancer care, coronary bypass surgery, MRIs, CT scans, and prostate cancer care.

Albertans will also benefit from new primary care networks that will begin operating this year. The government is setting up to become a world leader in cancer research, screening, and prevention. We have the resources and the opportunity to make great gains in the fight against this disease. The Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act will help us make these gains. Being a leader in the fight against cancer is a vision that I proudly support.

The throne speech outlined our government's focus on a clean environment. The Water for Life strategy, the land-use framework, and the environmental youth summit are all vital components of an overall strategy that will ensure the sustainability of our resources and the beauty of our land. But when we look for ways to preserve and improve our environment, we must remember and understand our role as a global energy producer. As the Lieutenant Governor stated in his speech, Alberta enjoys a considerable energy advantage in the world. We have advanced our technology in the extraction of resources considerably but must continue to find better and more efficient methods.

We also need to invest our earnings into the development of cleaner sources of energy. I must admit that I'm excited about the potential of clean-burning coal. We have a unique opportunity to develop and utilize this resource and to establish it as an important energy resource of the future. The government of Alberta has

embraced this opportunity, and in doing so, we will certainly create a legacy for future generations.

Alberta's legacy has already begun. The world's attention is focusing on our province. It is with great pride that Alberta will be featured in the Smithsonian Institution's Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. There's so much that Albertans want to share with the rest of the world. I think I speak for most Albertans when I express how thankful we are for this opportunity to be displayed at the Smithsonian.

One thing that Albertans would like to show the world is our ability to survive through difficult situations as well as our ability to evolve. Alberta's agricultural sector has had a difficult time in the past few years. Yesterday the government pledged to stand by our agricultural producers, and we have also worked with producers to develop new markets. Already many producers have found new agricultural opportunities. Madam Speaker, I applaud their innovation.

Our forestry producers have also faced adversity. This industry is extremely important to our economy and our future. The government's commitment to the Alberta Forestry Research Institute will go a long way to guarantee the sustainability and competitiveness of this renewable industry.

With respect to ensuring a viable economy, I am most optimistic with this government's commitment to rural development. Although I represent the good urban people of Calgary-Foothills, I'm a strong believer that for Alberta to reach its full potential, we must ensure that citizens in every part of the province have the ability to contribute. I am confident of the comprehensiveness of the rural development strategy and the government's strong commitment to this cause. Rural Albertans need improved access to health care and learning as well as enhanced opportunities for youth. This is where the government will focus its efforts. I look forward to the day when no matter where in the province one lives, one can expect outstanding services and an abundance of economic opportunity.

I believe that creating the conditions for a strong and diverse economy is the most important responsibility of any government. Citizens need to contribute, and they need the opportunity to achieve what their hearts and minds desire. Creating such conditions has traditionally been this government's strength. We will never be satisfied with the status quo, and we will always work to make the economic situation better. This is why the government will work to remove red tape as part of the comprehensive regulatory review. Albertans have proven themselves as hard-working entrepreneurs, as innovators, and as achievers. The government cannot stand in the way of their progress. Our responsibility is to encourage growth, not stifle it.

Like the elimination of red tape for business, the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads are a great example of what government should be doing to assist people in their economic endeavours. The paving of 1,000 kilometres of highway is another. The government's funding to meet the infrastructure needs of our growing economy is impressive. It is no secret that we need people to move to Alberta, but they will only stay if we have enough hospital beds and school spaces for them and their families. Our investment in infrastructure this year is an investment in the viability of our future.

Yesterday the Lieutenant Governor told Albertans that the government will make a \$1 billion investment in the heritage savings trust fund. Albertans can rest assured that some of today's prosperity will be saved for the benefit of future generations.

Last year the Alberta government focused on education. This year we will continue this focus because Albertans know that building and educating tomorrow's workforce is one of the wisest investments we can make. I am very glad that Alberta's students will once

again get relief from the rising cost of tuition. More importantly, however, they will benefit from the new tuition policy that will be put forth by the government this year. The ability to pay simply cannot stand in the way of a postsecondary education.

In a high school completion symposium the government will ask our youth why high school completion rates are low. I am certain that our youths' input into the problem of low high school completion will give us many of the answers we need to improve these rates.

Finally, a new focus will be put on addressing Alberta's labour shortages. Like I said earlier, our aboriginal population is one of the most important assets. Aboriginals are younger and growing faster than any other segment of the population. Knowing this, the government will continue partnering with aboriginal groups and industry on new training projects for aboriginal people.

We have to do everything we can to make Alberta the destination of choice for skilled immigrants, but when they get here, we also have to make their transition into our economy as easy as possible. This will improve with the government's expansion of immigrant settlement services and language training.

Madam Speaker, the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne highlighted the Alberta government's vision for this province, this comprehensive and ambitious vision of a learning society that is prosperous, with a clean environment and a healthy, safe, and caring population. I can't tell you how proud it makes me to know that I, along with my fellow Albertans, will be a part of this vision. It truly does sound like the best place in the world to live, to work, to raise a family, and to grow old.

Thank you.

4:10

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of all Albertans and as Leader of the Official Opposition it's my duty and my privilege to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered in this Assembly yesterday. Just a few days ago I was asked to compose a letter for inclusion in Alberta's time capsule, which was sealed up on Family Day at the Royal Alberta Museum. I was only too happy to write the letter. I considered it an honour to offer my thoughts to the Albertans of tomorrow, just as I consider it an honour to address Albertans today.

In a democracy communication is vital, even communication that has to bridge the span of many, many years. Just as I left a note for the Albertans of the year 2105, Albertans of our past have left a lesson for us. But given their tendency to offer outdated solutions to new challenges, given the lack of substance or imagination in the throne speech or the Premier's television address, except perhaps the very imaginative statement that Alberta currently uses clean coal for half of our electricity needs, which is, of course, completely untrue, I have to wonder if the Conservative government has ever paid attention to the lessons of history or if they've ever really given thought to the message they're sending to tomorrow's Albertans.

The idea behind the time capsule is to give our descendants a glimpse of what life was like in early 21st century Alberta. It's a gesture of goodwill from one era to another, a sign that we care about what happens in the future. When you put something into a time capsule, you're preserving a bit of the past, even if it's just a few ideas or mementos, for the benefit, if only educational, of future Albertans. In other words, you're trying to leave some kind of legacy to the people who will follow in your footsteps. After listening to the government's throne speech, I have to ask: aside from a few token projects, where is Alberta's legacy?

In my letter to the Albertans of the future I wrote down a few of my hopes for them: that democracy in Alberta had been reformed to better reflect the wishes of the electorate, that the arts in Alberta were flourishing, that government was responsive and accountable, that the environment was pristine and pure, that Alberta had the best public school system in the world, that health care was publicly funded, world-class, and accessible to all. I also wrote that I felt a responsibility to help create the conditions that would make a better tomorrow possible, that we, the Albertans of today, would show the imagination and responsibility to invest Alberta's incredible wealth so that Alberta could at last escape the cycle of boom and bust and build a permanently sustainable economy.

I believe that Albertans have a responsibility to work towards the fulfillment of these goals, but I see little evidence in the throne speech that the current government has sufficient imagination and will to build a better future for our province, and that is a tragedy because right now Alberta stands on the threshold of true greatness.

We have all the elements in place to create sustainable prosperity for many decades to come. Our growing educated population and our immense resource wealth have given us a chance to invest in our future, to create a permanent prosperity, to fund world-class public health care and public schools in perpetuity, to build an artistic and cultural legacy that will stand the test of time.

A hundred years will pass before Albertans read the letters sealed in that time capsule, and I can't help but wonder if they'll look back on the century we have yet to build with gratitude or with disappointment. We have a duty to ourselves and to our children to make the most of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of our current circumstances. The Conservatives have had 35 years to get health care right, to get long-term care for seniors right, to get balancing a budget right. Our economy is booming like never before, and even that isn't helping this government get things right. For every surplus they seem to discover brand new ways to spend the money now instead of investing in the future.

After 35 years their creative well has run dry. Their most visionary idea is to reform the health system, but the reforms merely lay the groundwork for dismantling public health care piece by piece. Instead of truly reforming the health care system to help it meet the needs of the 21st century, they'd rather go back to the good old days, when families often had to sell their homes to pay for life-saving medical treatment. If those families were here in this Chamber now, they'd tell us: "We've been there. We've tried that. It doesn't work. Why? Why are you turning the clock back?" Conservatives are trying to turn back the clock because they don't have the imagination or the desire to search for better solutions. Yes, the public health care system needs help. Yes, it needs to be improved, but it doesn't need to be dismantled.

This government's time has come and gone. It simply doesn't have the energy and desire that are needed to take advantage of the incredible opportunities before us. By the Premier's own admission this government is running on autopilot, spending unearned surpluses like there is no tomorrow. The only problem is that there is a tomorrow, and we have to start building it now.

[The Speaker in the chair]

There are those who believe that Albertans have little to complain about given the strength of our economy and our high standard of living. I don't deny that times are pretty good for many but far from all Albertans. I think we have to look at our overall situation more closely and examine the many challenges and contradictions of life in Alberta today.

Take, for example, our democratic deficit. Alberta is one of the

wealthiest jurisdictions in the world, but prosperity without transparent, accountable, truly democratic government isn't really prosperity at all. When democracy is weak and secretive, when the primary purpose of government is merely to be re-elected, the province's wealth is far more likely to serve the ends of industry and government than of the public. If our prosperity is to serve the citizens, then we the citizens must take charge. Unfortunately, this government has no interest in doing anything to renew our democracy. It has shown little interest in electoral reform, for example, and such reform is absolutely necessary if we want a democracy that accurately reflects the desires of the electorate.

Just as importantly, Alberta desperately needs a government that is willing to embrace accountability and transparency. Alberta has no lobbyist registry, no fixed election dates, no all-party policy committees, almost no meaningful legislative review of public spending. We need the courage to give our Public Accounts Committee some teeth so that MLAs can do a more effective job of keeping track of government spending. We need to protect the public interest by creating a lobbyist registry, stronger conflict of interest rules, and legislation to protect whistle-blowers.

In order to meet the challenges of our booming economy, our swelling population, and our changing role in Confederation, we need a robust, full-blooded, vigorous democracy, one that can adapt to the rapidly changing needs of its citizens. More importantly, democratic renewal is worth pursuing for its own sake. Albertans value freedom, fairness, trust, honesty, and accountability, virtues that need to be in generous supply in a 21st century government but that are sorely lacking in the government we are under now.

4:20

Consider the strains our booming economy is putting on our environment. Albertans have always treasured this province's land, water, and wildlife, and they've always known that our future prosperity lies in the careful stewardship of natural resources. For the last century or so the demands of our modern economy have put an incredible strain on the environment. We need to rediscover the balance between protecting our environment and ensuring that Alberta's economy remains healthy. We need smart, sustainable, responsible economic growth, growth that preserves what some economists are calling our natural capital, while maintaining the high standard of living we all enjoy.

Instead, what do we get? We have policies such as this government's minable oil sands strategy, which claims to protect the environment but instead writes off vast parcels of Alberta's north as an industrial zone that threatens to become a wasteland. Similarly, when it comes to managing Alberta's watersheds, currently the only solution to addressing water shortages is to enable bulk water transfers from one basin to another. It's a band-aid solution that doesn't address the very real and pressing issue of wise water management.

As stewards of the land we have a responsibility to remember that our environment is the foundation of our prosperity and that it deserves respect for its own sake as well as its ability to fulfill human needs. If we take care of nature, nature will continue to take care of us. Alberta is one of the most bountiful pieces of real estate on the Earth, but our use of this land is haphazard at best. Prime agricultural land is being eaten up by suburban sprawl while golf courses, housing, and oil wells are being built within eyesight of one another. Our cities are growing without a plan, and our industries have to struggle to discover where they can and cannot build.

Coal-bed methane has turned out to be one of Alberta's most promising new resources, but we're extracting it without a plan and without sufficient regard for the environmental consequences.

Alberta's governments have promoted our diverse wildlife as a tourist attraction, but our expanding cities and towns are putting more and more pressure on wildlife habitats, including those of such tourist-attracting creatures as caribou and grizzly bear. Disregard for the natural world has caused other problems, from BSE threatening our cattle industry to chronic wasting disease affecting both wild and harvested deer.

Our saving grace is this: every challenge our environment faces is also an incredible opportunity for economic growth, for scientific discovery, and for improvements in our quality of life. If we can finally recognize that the environment is the source of all our wealth and, in fact, of life itself, we can redefine our role in nature. We can find a way to enjoy Alberta's bounty without destroying it and to share the most beautiful place on Earth with all the other life that has come and has as much right as we do to live here. That is the reason our caucus recently released a paper on land-use strategy for Alberta.

Here's another challenge, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's vast natural resources have brought immense wealth to our province, but 91 per cent of energy revenues in the last 25 years have been spent, meaning that less than 9 per cent have been saved.

Alberta's heritage fund, which was intended as Alberta's savings account for petroleum revenues, has lost nearly half of its value when adjusted for inflation. It's fine, it's great that the Conservative government has recently pledged to add a billion dollars to the heritage fund, thanks I think to pressure from the public, from the opposition, and even from former Premier Peter Lougheed, but we need a long-term plan for savings, not just a deposit every now and then.

Petroleum revenues are nonrenewable. We must use them to build truly lasting prosperity, not merely for paying today's bills. Our province's wealth should be used to address our very real and pressing social needs, to rebuild and repair our infrastructure, and most importantly, to ensure that our prosperity lasts and won't fade away when the last drop of petroleum is squeezed from the earth.

Alberta has one of the strongest economies in Canada, and people living in the Edmonton-Calgary corridor enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world. Yet, Mr. Speaker, children are going to school hungry in Alberta; use of food banks continues to rise; the gap between rich and poor keeps growing. According to the TD Bank – get this, all of you MLAs from Calgary – 42 per cent of Calgary residents are living on less than \$20,000 a year. The rising costs of housing have kept many Albertans from pursuing the dream of owning their own home. Government spending has been rising rapidly, but our social programs are failing to meet the needs of Albertans.

Agriculture has been the backbone of Alberta's economy from the beginning, but today's farmers are more vulnerable than ever to fluctuations in world markets, legislation by other governments, and Alberta's unpredictable weather. If we really care about our farmers, we need to develop systems that will help them manage these problems.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the economic challenges we need to face, and we can face them best by investing in ourselves as Albertans. Alberta citizens, the individual men and women who define our province, are the true source of our wealth. Fostering an atmosphere friendly to businesses, particularly small business and family business, is just as vital as investing in the health, education, and social welfare of Albertans, the very same Albertans who provide labour for private industry and who purchase its goods and services.

Perhaps the greatest challenge but the one with the greatest potential rewards is to build the world's first truly sustainable modern economy, the basis of something we must eventually

achieve on this planet: a zero-waste society. If we can make today's industry sustainable while at the same time developing the new sustainable industries of the future, Albertans have a very real chance of guaranteeing our prosperity for decades to come while at the same time preserving and protecting our environment. That, Mr. Speaker, is a dream worth fighting for.

Finally, consider the social challenges we still face. Too many Albertans face insurmountable barriers in their struggle to share in the prosperity that should be available to all Albertans. Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, despite or even because of the challenges they face, have made important contributions to our culture and economy. Let me ask, Mr. Speaker: shouldn't our guiding principles involve care and compassion for vulnerable persons? I'm glad to see that after years of Liberal urging the government is planning to look at fixing long-term care for Alberta's seniors. I hope they follow through because our seniors have suffered long enough. Nearly every Albertan knows someone who could benefit from a more compassionate, more ethical, more logical approach to the problems of homelessness, human rights, senior care, education, and accessibility. Isn't it time to reach out to our neighbours to help them enjoy the full range of opportunities our province offers?

4:30

Our education system alone is facing a wide range of challenges. Right now only about 69 per cent of Alberta's students graduate from high school within the normal three-year span, and only 75 per cent graduate within five years. Considering the demands and the opportunities of Alberta's growing economy, considering that within a decade Alberta could face a labour shortage of a hundred thousand people, it's incredible that we're wasting the talents of so many young people. We need students to stay in school, and we must provide the support they need to complete their education. For years our education system has had to struggle with rising demands and shrinking resources. Growing numbers of children with special needs aren't getting the attention and help they need because our schools don't have enough teachers or counsellors or specialized staff. Teachers are forced to teach to standardized tests despite their individual understanding of specific student needs.

What about our cities, Mr. Speaker? Our cities are growing faster than ever, but many new communities still have gaping holes in the landscape where new schools should be. Families in new suburbs are busing their children to older, established schools, but many of those schools are being closed down, and student populations in already crowded surviving schools continue to rise.

Alberta's modern, high-tech economy demands an educated workforce, a workforce with diverse education, including the fine arts, engineering, the sciences, and more, yet Alberta's tuition fees are rising faster than those in any other province, putting higher education out of reach for an alarming number of Albertans. The government's promise to cover this year's tuition increase is a good step, but what Alberta students really need is something more than just makeshift. What they really need is a policy to keep our colleges and universities accessible to any one who has the desire and drive to continue their education.

There's lots of rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, from this government about the value of the family, yet often both parents are working with no guarantees that daycare is available, safe, and a good environment for their kids.

Though not a crisis, Alberta's crime rate is cause for concern. Gang-related crime in our cities is putting a huge burden on police, and it's making our neighbourhoods unsafe. We need new strategies that will not merely punish criminals but eradicate the root causes of their behaviour. Though Alberta is seen as a land of plenty by many

Canadians, Albertans are turning to drugs and alcohol and gambling in troubling numbers, and drug addiction is a growing problem, particularly in rural communities.

We can meet these challenges. We can resolve these contradictions if we take a good hard look at our society and start investing in Alberta's greatest resource, its people. To overcome these challenges Alberta needs leadership that's not afraid to shake things up a little. Alberta needs a government with the imagination, the vision, and, yes, the intelligence to make the choices that will address the challenges we currently face while ensuring that future Albertans will benefit from those choices.

Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday night the Premier urged us to imagine Alberta. Ironically, his slickly produced vignette showed that more imagination was put into the spin than the substance, but I'll take the Premier at his word and imagine what Alberta could become if we have the courage and wisdom to invest in our future.

Imagine waking up on the morning after election day five or six years from now. You look up the election results on the Internet, and you discover that the number of seats received by each party accurately reflects their share of the popular vote. Imagine never having to vote strategically again because you head into the polling station with the ability to rank the candidates in order of preference. Imagine that voter participation in this province climbed from 45 per cent to 85 per cent because citizens felt committed to the political process, because they finally have the voice in the government they'd always hoped for, because government was truly representative.

But don't stop there. What if with just a few clicks of a mouse you could look up Alberta's new lobbyist registry, a website that keeps track of which special-interest groups are currently lobbying the government for action? What if you felt like you could trust your elected representatives to work for the greater good because there were systems in place to make sure government had to remain open and accountable to the electorate? What if we could rebuild the sense among elected officials that they serve the public, not the other way around? What if instead of smothering dissent, our democracy encouraged and embraced it? What if the government involved opposition parties in the decision-making process instead of shutting them out, effectively silencing the voices of hundreds of thousands of Albertans? What if Albertans could be excited about politics again instead of cynical? What if we could restore our faith in the democratic process? Imagine, Mr. Speaker, truly accountable government. Imagine a government that listens and responds to the voices of Albertans with honesty and sincerity. Imagine democracy with room for everyone.

What if 50 years from now you could once again drink straight from Alberta's lakes and rivers knowing that they were as pristine and pure as they were before Alberta was born, or if you could watch free-roaming herds of buffalo roaring across the prairies as they used to, protected in vast wildlife parks rivalling the Serengeti? What if Alberta created the most energy efficient economy in the world and eventually a zero-waste economy, one without emissions, one without landfills? What if 10 or 20 per cent of Albertans lived off the grid in homes that generated their own heat and power? What if office towers in Alberta were designed to put power back into our energy grid instead of draining it? Imagine if most Albertans drove only for occasional trips because smart urban planning and convenient, inexpensive public transit have made cars mostly unnecessary. Imagine if pollution were a thing of the past and that the clean air and water helped cut asthma and cancer rates in half.

We could transform. We could transform Alberta into a world-renowned, environmental paradise, a place where prosperity doesn't come at the expense of but, rather, because of a societal commitment

to environmental stewardship. Alberta could become the world's number one destination for ecotourism and the world leader in renewable energy technology.

Technology already exists that collects greenhouse gases and pipes them into depleted oil wells extracting the last of the oil, thus sequestering the gases safely within the earth. We can build on this technology to turn other pollutants into similarly valuable tools. We can protect Alberta's natural heritage as one of the most beautiful places on earth without sacrificing our prosperity. In fact, a whole new environmental protection industry could become an important – who knows, perhaps the most important – sector of Alberta's economy. Albertans could be the first people in history to finally strike a balance between high quality of life and responsible stewardship of the environment. We – we – could be the society that leads the way to a cleaner, greener, sustainable world.

4:40

Imagine your morning commute some years from now. Maybe you're enjoying the convenience of a well-designed, reasonably priced transit system. As you travel you see, amazingly, that the streets are in good repair, that the sky is free of smog, that the traffic is flowing smoothly. On the radio an announcer reports that Alberta's accumulated savings continue to grow and that the endowments for Alberta's schools, hospitals, and infrastructure have finally grown large enough to protect Albertans from any economic slowdowns.

At long last Alberta's economy has reached its full potential, and its wealth is being put to the best possible use for the benefit of all citizens. Good jobs are plentiful, and educational opportunities are varied and uniformly excellent whether you're seeking a degree, diploma, or technical training. In fact, Alberta has the best educated workforce in the world, and that has led to a vibrant arts scene, more efficient and innovative businesses, more effective government, and cutting-edge work in the sciences. Health care is not only fully publicly funded, but it's the best in the world, which it once was in Alberta.

Taxes are competitive, covering the province's needs without burdening families or businesses.

Homelessness: how do we accept homelessness in Alberta? Homelessness is virtually nonexistent as are food banks, which were unknown two decades ago, because Alberta's prosperity has finally reached out to touch everyone in Alberta.

The environment is recovering and even blossoming because Alberta's experience in cutting-edge research has created the world's first truly sustainable modern economy, an economy no longer vulnerable to the unpredictable highs and lows of resource revenues nor dependent on those nonrenewable resources.

Thanks to extensive investment in research and development Alberta has become a world leader in several economic sectors, including renewable energy, medicine, computer software, and nanotechnology.

Alberta's wise investments and dynamic economy have made it one of the world's leading lights, a source of inspiration for other jurisdictions, and a destination of choice for tourism, investment, and immigration. Alberta's burgeoning cities are centres of industry, commerce, and the arts, drawing the best and brightest talent from around the world. Creativity, education, and diversity are highly valued as engines of economic sustainability and social cohesion.

Imagine having the peace of mind that comes from knowing that not only is your own future secure, but so is that of your children and grandchildren. Imagine Alberta as a place of perpetual prosperity. Imagine if our seniors lived free from fear, if minorities were not merely tolerated but embraced, if no one went hungry or without a

decent place to live. Imagine the best health care system in the world, a universal system widely recognized as our best economic and social asset. Imagine if an end to poverty were finally in sight.

What if 100 per cent of Alberta students completed grade 9, and what if 95 per cent completed high school? What if 85 per cent went on to earn a degree, a diploma, a trade certificate and accomplished it without incurring years worth of crippling student debt? What if Alberta's arts scene grew both in economic impact and artistic reputation to rival those in Toronto or Montreal, in San Francisco and Edinburgh?

Imagine closing the doors on the last food bank in Alberta because its usefulness had finally come to an end. Imagine full employment for all Albertans with disabilities. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker. Imagine if Alberta's rate of mental illness dropped from the highest in the nation to the lowest. Imagine an end to gang violence in Alberta and the lowest crime rates in the country. Imagine if every single member of Alberta's First Nations finally had the means, the respect, and the support to find meaningful work, to live without thought of racism. Imagine if racism and sexism were no longer issues in Alberta because we finally learned to look beyond our differences and work together to build stronger, safer, happier communities. Imagine a society that values creativity just as highly as productivity, compassion just as much as competitiveness. Imagine if we fostered an attitude of dignity and respect towards people making use of social programs. Imagine a community spirit of shared responsibility. That's what our caucus imagines for this province. That is our dream for a better Alberta.

This government's dream by comparison is simply too small. This is not a time to be conservative, if you'll forgive the pun, about Alberta's future; this is a time to be bold, to be visionary, to be creative. The Conservatives don't have the vitality to imagine a grander future for Alberta. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's not even their fault. After 35 years of massive majorities any party would have grown as complacent, as tired, as bereft of new ideas as the Conservatives.

The Alberta Liberal opposition, on the other hand, looks ahead to an amazing future for Alberta, one with unparalleled opportunity and enduring prosperity, fairness, humanity, and generosity, citizens flourishing in a healthy environment, and, for the first time in far too many years, open, accountable government.

I hope that all MLAs will pay attention to this: in the last election more than half of Albertans rejected the Conservative vision, or should I say lack of vision, for this province. Those of us sitting in opposition represent the votes of more Albertans than those MLAs sitting on the government side. To me, Mr. Speaker, that says that Albertans are ready to move forward, to leave behind an old, tired Conservative government and move on to bigger and better things. They're ready for change. They're ready for innovation. They're ready for a new, young, energetic government that isn't afraid of dissent, that isn't bound by ideology, that is ready to be open, accountable, and responsive to the electorate. The Alberta Liberals are ready to bring the dreams of Albertans to life. We're ready to lead. We're ready to serve. We're ready to start building tomorrow's Alberta.

When Albertans celebrate the province's bicentennial in the year 2105, I think we want them to look back on the last 100 years, the future that we have the responsibility to build, with pride, not regret, and with appreciation for our wisdom, not disappointment at our lack of vision. If there is a time to dream, it is now. If there is a place to dream, it is Alberta. Let the Albertans of the future remember us as fondly as we remember Alberta's founding people, the men and women who made our prosperity and freedom possible.

Mr. Speaker, that is our response to the throne speech and our vision for the opportunities ahead. Thank you very much.

4:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to present the response of the NDP opposition to the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. I would like to begin by commending the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor for his excellent work on behalf of all Albertans. He has very large gardening boots to fill, and I think he's doing a very good job.

I would also like to begin by thanking the citizens of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who have shown their confidence in me once again. I will continue to do my very best to represent the interests of the hard-working people of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Speaker, if the government's televised address by the Premier could have been likened to a very good beer commercial, that has excellent visuals and about as much content as a beer commercial, then I think the Speech from the Throne could be likened to a testimonial for very, very flat beer indeed. The speech lacks sparkle. It lacks life. It lacks anything of interest. I think it would be better poured down the drain of history.

I want to begin by suggesting that the government's cancer initiative is a very good idea. I believe that with an aging population and with an excellent cancer infrastructure already in place in this province, it is a good place to build. I will give the government credit for that. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, the government can take steps and should have taken steps to reduce the incidence of cancer through prevention, and they have not done so. In particular, the government has failed to implement a comprehensive workplace ban on smoking, something that would not cost the taxpayers of this province any significant money and would have a great effect, in my view, on reducing the incidence of cancer. That's something that they could have done. It's fine to spend a great deal of public money on fighting cancer – and I think that needs to be done – but the government is talking out of both sides of its mouth on this issue and in not taking simple, logical steps in the area of prevention has stood up for the tobacco industry instead of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the third way, which is sort of a now you see it, now you don't kind of initiative on the part of the government. The government has been making various proposals for the privatization of health care for a number of years now. First of all, there was the Mazankowski report. Then there was the so-called Graydon report. The government has recently introduced a number of proposals, including looking at private insurance through a contract let to Aon insurance, one of the biggest insurers in North America. They don't see the conflict inherent in that. The government has also talked about allowing doctors to operate in both the public system and the private system. The government has also talked about particular types of procedures that one would have to pay for separately. Yet, it has disappeared. It is completely off the radar screen. It is now just completely invisible. The question is: why is that?

Just a few months ago the government was talking about the third way. Now it is not present in the Premier's televised address. It is not present in the throne speech. It apparently will represent a very significant part of the government's legislative agenda for this session once the budget has been passed, yet Albertans don't know what's there. There can't be a public debate over the government's proposals because the public is unaware of what the government's proposals specifically are. I think that that, Mr. Speaker, is deliberate.

The government would like us to believe that they have withdrawn or are not sure or haven't worked out the details. I think otherwise, Mr. Speaker. I think that the government is deliberately withholding the third way proposal from the public so that it can't be debated in public, there's not enough time to organize against it, and it cannot be used to challenge the Premier in the leadership review that he faces in about a month's time in Calgary. I think that once the Premier's leadership issue is dealt with, we may well see it again. In fact, I predict that we will.

The Premier today challenged the opposition parties to put forward ideas for improving our health care system that would save money or improve service. That was his response when he was challenged about why the government is keeping their plans secret from the public. What the Premier neglected to tell people, in fact, is that in this very House during the fall session I introduced a private member's bill, the pharmaceutical savings act, which would have seen the government follow the lead of New Zealand and bulk purchase pharmaceuticals at lower rates in order to pass those savings on to Albertans and to the health care system generally. That has the potential to save millions of dollars from the health care budget. Of course, even the government will admit that drug costs are one of the leading causes of increases in the health care system. So there are concrete and practical proposals, but once again the government, rather than taking a good, practical, tried-and-true suggestion, would rather protect the pharmaceutical corporations and the high prices that Albertans have to pay. The government is on the side of big pharma and not on the side of the sick in this province.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that since the last election it's been the NDP opposition that has led the fight on health care and led the fight against the government's third way. We have had public hearings and public meetings throughout the province. We've put out materials. We've had news conferences. We have done the heavy lifting on the fight against the government's third way.

I want to give a message to the government. It doesn't matter when they introduce their proposals for the third way. If those proposals include two-tier private health care, this party and a majority of Albertans will oppose them and will fight tooth and nail to prevent the government from bringing in two-tier private health care. The people of Alberta do not want this. If they did, the government would be of course proclaiming its plans from every rooftop in the province. They're not doing that, and the reason is: they know that Albertans do not want two-tier private health care.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about long-term care because that's another area where the NDP opposition has led the fight and was able to get the Auditor General to look at the issue. By working with members of the public who were concerned about this, we've been able to bring forward the issue. The Premier stood in this House and promised to implement every single recommendation of the Auditor General, but what's been happening – what's really been happening – is that the government has been allowing operators to convert long-term care beds to assisted living beds, where there is no regulation whatsoever. So while they're promising to enforce tougher regulations in nursing homes and other long-term care centres, what they've really been doing is allowing the operators to escape any regulation whatsoever through the back door.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it's been the NDP opposition that's led the fight on this issue and has done the heavy lifting to make this an issue and to force the government to promise. We will make sure that the government is held accountable and that it keeps its promises because there have been a disturbing number of broken promises by this government in just the past few years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the environment. I have to say that the throne speech is very strong on the

environment because most of the promises are recycled, and many of those have to do with the environment.

The NDP opposition proposes the establishment of a green fund. We believe that the wealth which is produced in this province through the oil and gas revenues belongs not just to this generation of Albertans but belongs to all Albertans, and that's something that the government doesn't seem to get. We believe that a good portion of that revenue needs to be put into a green fund to invest in energy alternatives. We believe that this province should remain the energy leader into the future but that that future does not necessarily mean that we will be leading in petrochemicals. We have the opportunity, if we want to take it, to establish Alberta as the green energy leader in the future. There are many investments that can be made. We can work with other provinces and with the federal government and even with the private sector in order to make sure that Alberta remains the energy leader.

5:00

I want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, that the government proclaims that education is a high priority, but it's interesting that the throne speech has very few actual references to educational policy. There are really no answers for postsecondary education. The tuition freeze sounds good, but again the government is simply saying that this increase in tuition is being held in abeyance instead of putting in place a long-term plan for tuition in this province. We've called for a learning commission for postsecondary education, and we believe that all of the stakeholders, including students and potential students, need to be involved in setting the goals for postsecondary education in this province.

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no urban agenda present in this speech. There is not a strong commitment to community policing. There's not a strong commitment to public transit. There's not a strong commitment to housing. Those are all priorities for Alberta's large cities, and it's almost like they've been forgotten.

If cities have been forgotten, then certainly low-income people in this province have been left completely out in the cold. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has said, we've been besieged by phone calls and letters from people who are concerned about the situation facing people with developmental disabilities. The government has once again failed to keep its promises to those people.

Mr. Speaker, as well, the government has forgotten about labour. Labour used to be considered one of the partners in building this province, and it has been many years since this government recognized the role of working people in building this province. During the strike down in Brooks the minister talked about the possibility of first-contract arbitration, but he set it for two years ahead. Clearly, that's not a sincere promise. That's just an attempt to deflect a lot of concern that had developed right across the province about how those workers were treated and their lack of ability to get a first contract. This has been a problem again and again. The government has set in place some of the worst labour legislation in the entire continent, and working people are falling behind as a result. The income gap in this province is widening notwithstanding the prosperity that generally prevails.

Farmers also receive nothing but recycled promises in this throne speech, the same old stuff almost verbatim from the speech before. The government is not dealing with the income gap for farmers, the gap between what they have to pay for their input costs and what they receive for their goods. Instead, they spend their time attacking the Wheat Board and other means by which farmers can receive a better share of the value which they create.

Mr. Speaker, just in conclusion, I want to say that this document

is remarkable for its lack of vision and its lack of answers for the people who produce the wealth in this province. Whether they work on the farm or in the factory or in the commercial sector, there is nothing here for those people. It's ironic that we have been asked to imagine a future by a Premier who leads perhaps the least imaginative government in this province's history. Albertans are known for their initiative and independence, and they deserve a government that gives the same.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Honourable members, I did not invoke Standing Order 29(2)(a) for the Leader of the Official Opposition, so I will not invoke it for the leader of the third party but will with the next successive number of speakers.

I will now call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to rise and to address the Legislature today, and I'm grateful for the time that I've been allotted to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I would also like to take this time to address the Legislature on what I have heard and learned from the people of Alberta this last year. They say that if you want to know, go, and if you don't, then send somebody. Indeed, great rulers and leaders are in touch with their people. However, their success brings a problem of silencing new ideas or progression and supports the status quo.

I sympathize with our Premier and cabinet. I know people who want to be counted as loyal and supportive and, therefore, often restrain themselves from telling it like it is. Because of this they often fail to bring forward good and innovative ideas. In this situation a leader needs to go to the people in disguise in order to hear and see what the people really are saying. We've heard of many stories in the past where a leader has disguised himself as a peasant and gone out to the people and was surprised at what he really heard when he was back amongst the people. We have listened to the rhetoric that only bigger governments care for and protect the vulnerable. We know that this is a fallacy. It means nothing; they are empty words.

I am surprised that there was no mention of tax relief in this speech. We must reduce taxes and our dependence on universal programs. We have listened for decades about a federal government that is going to eliminate poverty when, in fact, all they have done is make the poor more dependent than ever on them. We need to reduce the size of government, red tape, or the paper shuffling, and reduce our taxes. To simply eliminate the health care premiums would do all three.

We need to raise our basic tax exemption to \$20,000, closer to the low-income cut-off level. We need to urge the federal government to follow suit. It is sad and shameful to me and to many people that I have spoken with that they do not encourage or allow those who are the poorest among us to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

We have a major shortage of workers in the service sector of our economy. Why would we not allow a person on AISH, PDD, CPP, or Canada disability pension to go out, if they're able, and earn another thousand dollars a month without being punished with clawbacks or taxes? It is also very regressive for those people that are trying to pass on a small business or family farm that the government seems to be the biggest partner at this time and destroys the economy and those small businesses.

A strong and prosperous society is built from strong, debt-free families and small businesses. We should urge the federal government to reduce or remove capital gains and allow tax deductions, say 15 per cent, off people's income to go towards home ownership purchases, as we do with RRSPs. Our relationship with our new

government in Ottawa should be one which is constructive, not destructive. For the first time in a very long time we have an opportunity to work with the federal government. It is incumbent upon our government to set the example and not be the distraction.

We have a great opportunity to work with a federal government who is interested in property rights. They seem very interested in letting the province come up with provincial programs that will work for our province. We do not need nor do we want the federal government telling us how to care for our citizens with federal programs, universal programs from cradle to grave, from daycare programs to senior citizens.

Universal programs are a bottomless pit. They're a socialist ploy to break down society and to make people dependent on a government. Once people are dependent on a government, they continue voting for that government. They use jealousy, greed, and envy to excite the people to vote and take away the wealth from those that are motivated, dedicated, and innovative workers and give it to those who are not.

As a member of the opposition I have also heard that people want us to work together. We should work with this PC government, who did not receive the majority of votes, though they did receive the majority of seats.

5:10

We want to keep on track. We need to change our attitudes, and we need to recruit our superstars in academics and health care providers. We have lost a great deal of Canada's best, that have left to go to other places in the world because of our high taxes and social programs that are here. We need to encourage them to come back from the United States and Switzerland and other places where they have gone and enjoy this great country of ours.

It's imperative that we take a world view on what we are trying to do here. It's not good enough to say that we're the best in Canada or North America, that we have the lowest taxes because we're not just worrying about North America. We're dealing with the world. We have booming economies in Third World countries where we're going and taking out their best, trying to lure them here, to Canada, for a better life and a better living for them and their families. But we could be looking for those that have left to go to the States and other countries to come back by competing with those tax breaks.

We would never consider shortening the time of our star players on the ice or in other areas. We would never think of covering one eye of one of our best golfers and telling them to go out and compete in the world with only one eye. We would never consider putting weights on the ankles or on the wrists of our women's hockey team, saying that they're too good and they're destroying the competition in the rest of the world. We want to be and can be the very best in the world, and that should always be our goal.

By recognizing, praising, and rewarding excellence, we build a road to success that inspires others to put in the hard work and dedication to reach the top. Just as Sir Edmund Hillary, I'm sure, has inspired a member of this House to reach the highest point on Earth, we can do that in other aspects as well.

Our facilities in Canmore and the Olympic Park have paid off great dividends. We can and do compete with the rest of the world. It is time that we take off the economic shackles here in Alberta and in Canada as a whole and let the best rise to the top.

The government must reduce its social programs and economic engineering to allow taxpayers to direct a percentage of their taxes to a charitable or nonprofit organization of their choice, whether it's a women's shelter, a health region, food banks, or such organizations as the Salvation Army or the Mustard Seed.

We could further enhance our communities by implementing a

more equitable formula and return to communities a percentage of revenue generated from those communities through taxation, everything from fuel taxes to business to income taxes.

I have great faith in Albertans and Canadians giving of their time, talent, and money to build their communities, whether it's through their church organizations, their service clubs like the Rotarians, Lions, and Kinsmen amongst others. I have great faith in them, more faith than I do in the government, who claims to care but does not solve the problems at our community level.

We do not need nor can we offer bigger government, higher taxes, and more universal programs to build our future. Rural Alberta is becoming anemic from taxation. Indeed, municipal governments are suffering and are forced to cannibalize their local economies through ever-increasing property taxes, while the federal government and provincial governments get fat from income taxes, business taxes, user fees, GST, employment insurance fees, along with so many others, not to mention the pimping and proliferation of the vices of gambling, liquor, and pornography, just to name a few, and grabbing the accumulation of wealth, which they put into their fat accounts along with all the resource revenues, and then reducing the people as well as municipal governments to come begging on their knees for grants to sustain their communities.

I am very optimistic about what we have ahead of us. At this time we are going to go for another Olympic gold and be the best in the world. Are we happy to be the big fish in a very small bowl? We need to go out onto the world stage and do as we want to do with cancer research and be the best. The world is shrinking at a very fast pace. It is time for us to match it by growing to meet the challenge. There have been ideas already presented such as ethanol development and clean-coal technology. Much like our current potential we do not understand it or realize it, and we're not capitalizing on it properly.

There is nothing wrong with competition, especially when it is with those providing health services. We should not be dictating; we should be facilitating competition to help get greater health in our communities. There are different health regions that want to provide services, but they are being told that, no, they cannot. We're concerned about the safety or the dollar spent. We are suffering in the current health situation because of the monopolies that are produced and continue to be sustained through our health regions. We need to allow those health regions and their experts to decide how they can best serve the people in their community.

I'd also like to comment a little bit on our current democratic deficit. Right now perhaps one of the biggest and most problematic things that we're facing is openness and accountability. I feel that that could be dramatically changed if Alberta were to take the lead and be bold and bring forward legislation that would allow recall to the people. When the people have no force, they give up. They become apathetic. We have an opportunity to bring in recall. With recall people would be accountable. All people who are elected would be accountable to those who elected them. They could not be blue one day and red the next day without the people having the power to recall them.

It wouldn't have to be complicated. If one were to put a simple formula in place, whether it's 25 per cent or 35 per cent, for those eligible electors to bring forward a petition and to give it a certain amount of time, perhaps 90 days, and to notify the elected individual that this is going on, people would and could be accountable to those that have elected them. It's important that as elected people we are accountable to those that elect us and that we don't turn a blind eye and say: well, you can debate that four years from now, and we'll see what you think of it then. It's easy to postpone, and therefore things are forgotten too easily.

We have such an opportunity here as we go forward into the future. I'd like to address a little bit the agricultural problems. In the throne speech we talked about a prosperous society. We talked about low taxes, but nothing again, as I said, about reducing taxes.

One of the other things that people have brought up and that has amazed me is the fact that we are competing with some major economies elsewhere in the world. Those economies do not have the social benefits that we do, and they don't have the tax structure that we do. For us to think that it's only the United States that we're busy competing with, we're going to run into a brick wall. We have other economies that are going to scoop business and work from our country and take it elsewhere. We need to reduce taxes. We need to reduce red tape. We need to look and carefully scrutinize the regulations that we have in place.

It doesn't do us any good to say that we're not going to burn coal here when China has online 500 coal-generating plants to be built. We could and should lead that coal research and have clean coal because other places in the world are going to have to use that coal and will. Like with the Candu reactor we also could implement and share that technology that has been developed here in Alberta around the world, which truly would make for a better world to live in.

There are so many areas that we need to address. We need to be the ones that are forward-thinking. We need to be the ones that are thinking of the world and the global economy. We cannot turn a blind eye. We have a superheated economy here in the province. Now is not the time to pour more money and try and have an auction sale with only one tractor to purchase or one earthmover. We need to have the wisdom to realize the importance of putting away money and using it at the best time possible.

We're putting undue problems on local and municipal governments, telling them how and where and when they must spend the money and with too many conditions. We need to take a step back and remember that if we have the money in the bank, we can always spend it next year or the year after that. We have gone through a decade of saying that we don't have a deficit when, in fact, we've had a major infrastructure deficit. We can't cure it all in one year. I would urge the government to continue to relax the conditions which they are giving to those municipal governments to spend that money. It would be a great benefit to them.

We read in the throne speech that the province has updated the stumpage. One has to ask: what do they mean when they've done that? From the research that I've been given, they've reduced the stumpage fee and lowered the cost, therefore allowing the industry to compete better, but then it seems like that our U.S. counterparts put on countervailing duties that continue to destroy the economy. We need to back up. We need to remember what we did in the '80s when the boom was over and we couldn't balance the books. In order to get the economy going again in the oil and gas business, the government dropped the input costs and the tariffs and other things in order to allow that business to go forward.

We've done nothing but say that we're going to stand by the people in agriculture. I would urge this government . . . [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired.]

5:20

The Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available if anybody wishes to participate. The hon. minister.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the question-and-answer portion.

Mr. Stelmach: Oh. No.

The Speaker: The next speaker is the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

An Hon. Member: No. He's the next speaker.

The Speaker: There is no next one that I have. If the hon. minister wishes to proceed, that's fine.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege for me to respond to the Speech from the Throne during this the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Legislature. My grandparents came to this country from an autocratic empire in 1898 and along with so many other pioneers laid a foundation for 100 years of democracy in this province.

I, too, want to recognize the pride that Albertans have in their province. I witnessed their love of Alberta in hundreds of different ways across the province and, in particular, in my own constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and I agree with His Honour that Albertans' optimism is well placed. Alberta is beginning its second century from a very enviable position. Today Albertans are the pioneers of Alberta's second magnificent century.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to touch on only a few themes in the throne speech that are of particular interest to me as Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. As Albertans we have so much to be thankful for. We are debt and deficit free, have the best health care system in Canada, the best infrastructure in Canada, and really the best education system in Canada. Canadians by the thousands are awakening to the appeal of Alberta's quality of life and opportunity. This discovery is reflected in our high population growth, low unemployment rate, the highest average income, and the lowest overall taxes in the country.

We have so much to be thankful for due to the leadership of our Premier. He has led this province from red ink and pessimism to boundless opportunity and hope, hope for a prosperous future. On behalf of my constituents, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Premier for all he has done in setting new sights to challenge Albertans' innovative skills and entrepreneurial nature.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians have recently democratically opted to change the federal government, and we welcome this change. Albertans need not mistrust Ottawa or guard against the pillage of our constitutional rights to manage our natural resources. Albertans can feel unshackled from the nagging angst and mistrust over what Ottawa will do to us. We can use this opportunity to focus on a new positive relationship with the federal government. Alberta will work to build a relationship based on mutual respect for the Constitution, a clear understanding that governments are responsible for providing the most efficient public services possible.

Mr. Speaker, by focusing on Alberta's place in the world, we will influence the national agenda in a very positive way. We will continue to lead in environmental policy, with practical and measurable results. We will lead in sustainable economic growth and environmental stewardship. We will lead in all the quality-of-life indicators that make Alberta a magnet for entrepreneurial initiative in both the public and private sectors. I believe the new federal government will give credit where credit is due in terms of emission reductions and technological advancements and achievements proven out by Alberta companies.

In this century Albertans will witness several dramatic changes. Change is inevitable, and it's natural. Just think of the massive changes in society that Albertans born in 1905 were witness to: the remarkable growth of our cities, mechanized agriculture, two world

wars, a devastating economic depression, the rise of the automobile, the landing of man on the moon, the rise and thankfully the fall of communism, and the biotech and digital information revolution. In this century we will see the rise of China as the world's largest economy, with India and Brazil rivalling for the number 2 spot.

Future Albertans like my proposed grandchildren will have to contend with the transformation of hydrocarbon energy as the primary source of fuels for transportation and electricity to other less-emitting energy fuel sources. In fact, Pat Daniel, the CEO of Enbridge, has called petroleum and natural gas transitional fuels and is already planning for ways to become a leader in alternative energy. Clean coal will be a part of the answer and will keep Alberta in the energy-production game. So will the renewable fuel resources from bioproduction and other new technologies.

Mr. Speaker, it is the government's duty to prepare the next generation with the best tools to find their own way in their own time, and during this century Alberta's economy will need to change from one that derives most of our wealth from resources deep underground to one that relies on the ideas and entrepreneurial skills of Albertans. We can lay the groundwork for this new economy today by providing opportunities for the commercialization of new technologies right here, in Alberta, by making the investment in our physical infrastructure that makes Alberta the best place in North America to live and raise a family.

This is why I believe that the government's vision for a society that places a high emphasis on education and training is the responsible course to take. Albertans know that building and educating tomorrow's workforce is one of the wisest investments we can make, and I applaud my colleague of Advanced Education for his initiative to develop a new tuition policy for postsecondary education in Alberta. Tuition needs to be an affordable investment for all those who want to pursue their personal goals for education. Tuition needs to be affordable, but remember that what we get we pay for in life. We need to find a balance between affordability of tuition and quality of education. Quality instructors and institutions do not come cheap. I believe that Albertans understand that we will do better by focusing on the highest quality of education and training possible to position Alberta for success in a rapidly changing world marketplace.

The only barrier to our success over the next few years, Mr. Speaker, is the shortage of labour. Alberta's labour shortage will become more acute in the next number of years unless we take more steps to increase the employment rates for our aboriginal population and attract and retain more Canadians from other provinces and immigrants from other countries. Once again the government is taking the right steps to address labour shortages that threaten economic growth. This includes partnering with aboriginal groups and industry on new training projects for aboriginal people.

I am particularly pleased that my colleagues and I will get a chance to develop a new strategy to increase awareness of Alberta as a destination of choice for skilled immigrants. I look forward to working with the federal government on the immigration file and will seek their support to expand immigrant settlement services, language training, and make it easier for foreign-trained professionals to work in Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I apologize for interrupting, but the chair will invite the hon. minister to continue to debate as this item goes back on the agenda.

Hon. members, the House now stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30 o'clock. Have a great weekend.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, February 27, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/02/27

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I'm now going to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to be able to stand and introduce to you and to members of this Assembly 23 employees of Alberta Energy that are here touring through the public service orientation tour. I am delighted that they could be able to join us and see how we are preserving democracy and are hard at work here in the Legislature. They're in the members' gallery. If they'd stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two exceptional staff members from Solicitor General and Public Security. Laurie Hryciuk and Sue McCoy work in the human resources division of the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security and have been a tremendous asset to our department. They are here today to tour the Legislative Building and the ministerial office. I invite both Laurie and Sue to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a number of my constituents: first of all, the Rimbey elementary school grade 6 class. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Jim Moore, and parent helpers Jody Woodliffe, Rodney Clark, Margaret Tanasiuk, Kathy Davies, Rick Pankiw, Emily Breton, and Grace Allemand.

They are seated in the public gallery. I will ask them to rise in a minute.

In addition, I have my constituency assistant, Mrs. Cheryl Christie, and her two daughters, Lorena and Kathy. Cheryl worked for many years for Judy Gordon prior to working for me. She's a very valued person to our constituency in this province. They're also seated in the public gallery.

In addition to that, I would like to introduce Mr. Klaas Klooster. Mr. Klooster is a former constituent and is executive director of the Champion's Centre, an Alberta housing project for mentally ill, marginalized, homeless, or at-risk men and women in Alberta. The Champion's Centre operates in Ponoka and is currently expanding to Medicine Hat. They also are looking to expand to the Edmonton area. With Mr. Klooster is Dr. Austin Mardon, a noted Albertan working with people with schizophrenia. They are seated in the members' gallery.

I'd like to ask all these people to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a group that is visiting the Legislative Assembly today from the Native Counselling Services of Alberta. This group is led by an elder from the Cree-Sioux. Her name is Taz Johnson-McGillis, and she is accompanied today by Sheena McCart, Kevin Chille, Irleen Omeasoo, Wesley Haineault, and Carlene Weber. The Native Counselling Services of Alberta provides personal development skills to many people across the province. Their good work does not go unnoticed nor unappreciated. This delegation is in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you my guest, Mr. Rob Warden, sitting in the public gallery. Mr. Warden's mother, Jean, died in unfortunate circumstances while in continuing care, and he is championing all of those that remain in continuing care. I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Lynda and Ron Jonson. Lynda and Ron are tireless advocates for seniors' issues and improving conditions in Alberta's long-term care facilities. Lynda is a former registered nurse and Ron a former engineer living in Hinton. I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Winter Olympics

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every four years all Canadians get to feel part of a bigger team when we come together as a nation to stand behind our Olympic athletes. At this year's Olympic Winter

Games in Torino, Italy, the 196 members of Team Canada made all Canadians stand up and cheer. Our athletes competed with pride, talent, and guts, bringing home a record 24 medals. Many others achieved personal bests, and every effort was worthy of recognition.

The theme for the Olympics in Torino was Passion Lives Here. Well, Mr. Speaker, passion also lives here in Alberta because many of Team Canada's medalists are Alberta athletes, and I would like to recognize them today by name. The list of Alberta's medalists is long, and I ask for everyone's patience.

We start with, of course, Spruce Grove's Jennifer Heil. She started Team Canada off on the right foot on day one, winning gold in moguls.

Canmore's Chandra Crawford powered her way to an unexpected gold in cross-country skiing sprints.

Calgary firefighter Duff Gibson took home the gold in skeleton. He shared the podium with silver medalist and fellow Calgarian Jeff Pain. The pride and joy of Eckville, Mellisa Hollingsworth-Richards, cemented Canada's strength in skeleton by winning a bronze.

Can any victory be more dominating than what we saw in women's hockey? Calgary residents Carla MacLeod and Hayley Wickenheiser were big parts of the gold medal team.

Vermilion's Beckie Scott. Well, she shared a silver medal with Canmore teammate Sara Renner in the cross-country team sprint. Beckie was also voted by her peers around the world to represent athletes on the International Olympic Committee. She is the third Canadian ever to have this opportunity.

1:40

Arne Dankers of Calgary and Steven Elm of Red Deer collected silver in the speed skating pursuit event.

Now, Edmonton and Calgary came together for silver in the two-man bobsleigh thanks to Olympic veteran Pierre Lueders and our new Canadian, Lascelles Brown.

What would Olympics be without curling success? Okotoks' Shannon Kleibrink skipped her Calgary teammates Amy Nixon, Glenys Bakker, and Christine Keshen to bronze. Of course, Newfoundland won the men's curling.

I would also note, Mr. Speaker, that many Canadian athletes train out of Alberta at our world-class facilities at Canada Olympic Park, the Olympic Oval, and the Canmore Nordic Centre. These are all legacies of the 1988 Olympic Winter Games in Calgary, and they continue to inspire the next generation and had much to do with our athletes' success in 2006.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating all of Team Canada for their tremendous efforts at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy. [applause]

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to respond to the Premier's sentiments on the recent Olympic Games in Turin, Italy. These games were a great success for Canadian as well as Alberta athletes. I was especially pleased to see so many Canadian women athletes standing on the podiums. Each of these athletes just mentioned by the Premier deserves our thanks and our respect for their hard work and sacrifice, their commitment, their sense of fair play and service. Please give them a big round of applause. [applause]

We should also pause to thank the families, friends, coaches, and trainers of those athletes for their sacrifice and dedication. It was especially inspiring to see that so many family members made the trip to cheer on their loved ones. These values – hard work,

sacrifice, commitment, fair play, and service – are also the values that so many Albertans share. They are the values that we see every day in our teachers, in our doctors, nurses, our health care workers, in social workers, in religious and other community leaders, in businesspeople, coaches, parents, and so many others. It is so often these individuals that help pass these values on to the next generation. With their help I expect that Canadian and Alberta athletes may win even more medals at the Vancouver games in the year 2010.

However, 24 medals don't tell us the whole story. The Olympic Games, while celebrating the victors, also celebrate the human spirit and the human family. The Olympics provide us with an opportunity to celebrate diversity amidst our common humanity, to highlight their play. There's no better example of this than a coach from an opposing team providing a pole to a Canadian skier whose pole had broken during the race.

I sincerely hope that the performances by all of Canada's athletes at these games will inspire the next generation to participate more actively in sporting activities. This is an area where our province could play an even greater leadership role. There are wonderful opportunities to help families, especially needy families, with the resources required to enrol their children in sporting activities, to invest in the facilities needed, from rural ice rinks to world-class training centres, and to implement and fund a world-class Alberta sports plan. With this kind of commitment, sir, Albertans and Canadians will continue to excel.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I suspect that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is rising to seek unanimous consent so that his leader might be able to participate, so why don't I just ask the question.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. I would like to thank the House for this opportunity to add my congratulations to the Canadian team at this year's Olympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy. Our Canadian athletes competed with grit and determination and as a result came home with a record 24 medals, seven of them gold. Nowhere was the grit more evident than in Clara Hughes' final three laps in the gruelling 5,000 metre long-track speed skating race. Clara had literally nothing left in the tank at the end of the race, collapsing to the ice in pure joy and sheer exhaustion.

I wish to add the NDP opposition's congratulations to each and every one of these outstanding athletes. Whether it was the pure joy of Chandra Crawford's unexpected win in the 1.1 kilometre cross-country pursuit or Pierre Lueders' and Lascelles Brown's sheer determination in winning the silver in the two-person bobsleigh, our Alberta athletes did us all proud.

On Friday the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and I attended the northeast Rotary club lunch, and we sat with Jennifer Heil's extremely proud grandpa. It was really a nice opportunity to talk to him. He was on cloud nine, and I don't think he's come down yet.

Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, even greater success will be achieved at the Vancouver/Whistler Olympics in 2010.

In closing, I want to once again on behalf of all Alberta New Democrats thank the athletes, coaches, families, and all of those on

the Canadian team that did us so proud in Torino over the last 16 days.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

1:50

Long-term Care

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to fail the people in our province's long-term care system. Another tragic death of a senior at an Edmonton continuing care facility over the weekend is proof that the system is facing a crisis. Last week's announcement for seniors failed to address a range of problems, including the need for legislated standards of care. My questions are to the Premier. When will this government develop a solid plan that will ensure that all Albertans in continuing care can expect to live under province-wide standards?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we've put I think about \$36 million – is that correct? – into operations for long-term care. That's over and above the \$140 million we have committed for capital. We feel that we are tackling the most urgent recommendations right now. I can tell you that long-term standards are being developed and will be implemented this year. I'll have the hon. minister elaborate further.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier has mentioned, we did dedicate \$150 million through to the continuing care system over the past year. Actually, it's over the past 12 weeks. That's \$100 million for new spaces in the system, over 4,000 spaces that will be either built or enhanced in the rural areas, and also it's \$15 million to enhance lodges. The \$36 million are being used, as the Premier mentioned, to implement urgent needs immediately.

I'd be pleased to comment on the standards that the member had mentioned in the next question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-six million dollars aren't even what this government gives to the racehorses.

Again to the Premier. The money described in the announcement is less than half of what this government itself admitted is needed for seniors. When are you going to come through with province-wide standards and sufficient funding to meet the needs of people in long-term care facilities?

Mr. Klein: Just as a matter of clarification, we give absolutely nothing to horse racing. We give nothing to horse racing. This person is telling a big fib. He's not a liar, Mr. Speaker, but he's fibbing. That money is generated through slot machines at race-tracks, and it has nothing to do with the government or government funding or taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, the government has accepted the MLA task force's final report. We are committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of Albertans in continuing care. As I pointed out, we have given \$140 million plus \$36 million in operating over the past three months. That's just to cover the last three months and to look after emergency situations. I believe, notwithstanding what the opposition says, that this is a significant step forward on behalf of seniors

in continuing care. There's more to be done and more will be done, as the hon. minister elaborated.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the government listen to calls from stakeholders across the province and institute an independent continuing care commissioner to monitor and enforce standards?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we had a complete study by MLAs, including one from the opposition, and they came up with recommendations. The opposition does a credible job of monitoring the situation. I will give them credit. If we had a commissioner, then they would have even less reason for justifying their existence.

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

Budget Surplus

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By failing to properly plan for long-term care, this government is failing Alberta's seniors. By failing to plan for Alberta's future, this government is failing Alberta's children. If history has taught us anything, we need to put money aside in times of boom to prepare for the inevitable decline of nonrenewable resource revenues. Again to the Premier: will this government table legislation immediately that will bring an end to nonemergency, unbudgeted spending?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Finance and Provincial Treasurer respond in detail. But there are problems. You know, the opposition leader can talk about all the things that he wants to talk about, but he isn't accountable, thank God. For every good idea or what is perceived to be a good idea, there is a downside. For every action there is an equal and opposite and often negative reaction.

Now, as we generate huge surplus dollars, an emergency might occur outside of a natural disaster which can be accounted for in the sustainability fund. An emergency might occur, and all of a sudden people are saying to this Liberal opposition: "Well, my God, you proposed this. You're sitting on these billions of dollars, and you can't spend any to alleviate this emergency."

Mr. Taylor: Are you just making this up?

Mr. Klein: No, I'm not making it up. You know, yip, yip, yip. Why don't you stick to radio? Lips don't sweat.

Mr. Speaker, you know, an emergency can evolve or develop, and the Liberals would be left there hanging out if they ever, God forbid, became the government.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. A math question: when this government puts a billion dollars into the heritage fund and then subtracts a billion dollars from the fund for spending, how much is this government investing in the heritage fund?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I've heard repeatedly from the opposition that we should be putting money away and saving it. Today it seems to be an issue. The fact is that we are saving and we

are investing, and the heritage fund is one way. Yes, while we draw the investment income from the heritage savings trust fund, we have not increased until this budget year the actual amount in the fund. We inflation-proofed it this year. We'll be debating a billion dollars for the base of the fund, to grow the real value of that fund. Therefore, the investment income that is available for programs that are important to Albertans will grow. I think the opposition understands that. It's very difficult to make bad news out of a good-news story, and this is an attempt.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the Premier: why doesn't this government adopt our surplus policy that would put 35 per cent of surpluses into the heritage fund?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, the policy that we have adopted is a good policy. We had this discussion today about, well, 30 per cent, not 35 per cent. It grows and grows. You know, I can recall that back in the early '80s this province was in a depression, and 35 per cent of nothing is nothing. We weren't able to grow the heritage savings trust fund for years and years. When you commit 35 per cent, you commit it when you have surpluses. I would rather stick with the \$1 billion. At least it's growing.

As I said, for every upside there's a downside. You know, there are many, many people out there – and the Liberals hear from some of them; certainly the NDs do – who say: "Why are you sitting on this rainy day fund? Why not dissolve it? Why not spend it? You're sitting on something like \$14 billion. Why not do something with it?" So for every upside there's a downside. A billion dollars seems to be reasonable.

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

Electricity Deregulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last November Mr. Kellan Fluckiger, this government's hired hand from California on electricity matters, issued a policy paper proposing more refinements to electricity deregulation. This document is a clear indication of the failure of electricity deregulation after 10 years of trying to make it work to the benefit of the consumers. In fact, consumers have always been ignored in any consultations regarding electricity deregulation. Now we find out that the EUB has been cut out of the loop as well. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why was the EUB not given an opportunity to provide input to the Department of Energy on the matters dealt with in this very paper before it was circulated to stakeholders across Alberta?

2:00

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the document put out by the Department of Energy in December on roles and responsibilities, looking at the work of the various boards, the Energy and Utilities Board being one of those boards, was put out for consultation so that they could have it so that they could provide feedback. It was literally in that context that we've acted. We've provided no recommendations yet on it. It's been in discussion among all the boards, including the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this discussion paper that has been responded to by the EUB expresses

their deep disappointment that they have not been consulted, has the minister on behalf of the government instructed Mr. Fluckiger not to consult with the EUB in regard to these further deregulation refinements?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The whole process has been about consultation. It has been about: how do we actively engage people about improving what is already a very good system? We want to make sure that among the various boards they've have the opportunity to reflect upon their roles and if there are ways that we can improve it to avoid overlap, duplication, those kinds of things. So it has been very strong and open, and it has engaged some very good public comment back, so I compliment our department very much on being quite open on that consultation.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: this government is not open. Now, will the Alberta government fire Mr. Fluckiger for failing to consult with the EUB and other stakeholders in Alberta in this latest attempt to try to convince Albertans that electricity deregulation will and can work?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I will absolutely compliment and encourage our department and certainly the individuals that he has mentioned to continue the work that they've been doing in a very open, very transparent – that document has been circulated to all of the parties involved, and we've had quite a bit of comment from all of those parties, a good discussion ongoing. So it has been very much an open dialogue. We will continue to ensure that we have the best system for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Health Care Privatization

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier continues to hide his plans for private, two-tier health care from the Alberta people. Yesterday he falsely claimed that the NDP had not contributed any ideas to improve health care or control costs. This is all the more outrageous given that just last fall the Tory caucus voted down an NDP bill that would have cut drug costs by a minimum of \$75 million a year. My question is to the Premier. Why did the Premier tell the House that he was open to innovative ideas to save money in the public system when his government has already rejected a proposal based on a proven New Zealand plan that has dramatically cut the growth in prescription drug expenditures in their health system?

Mr. Klein: I'm going to give the hon. member a lesson in, well, geography and political jurisdiction.

Mr. Mason: We're all ears.

Mr. Klein: Right. He's all ears.

First of all, New Zealand is a country. It's a country, not a province. It's a country. Now, the national government in New Zealand can do things. Here we have to seek the consensus of all the Premiers and the territorial leaders, and we're trying to do that. It's not to say that the NDs' idea is a bad idea. As a matter of fact, we will pursue if we can do it provincially. But in order to do it nationally, you have to get the ND Premiers from Saskatchewan and Winnipeg onside. Or Manitoba.

Mr. Mason: Winnipeg is a city.

Mr. Klein: I stand corrected. Although Winnipeg represents the largest part of Manitoba, it is a city.

Mr. Speaker, if we could get all of the Premiers onside, including the ND Premiers, I would like to do that not only as it affects pharmaceuticals but as it affects uniforms. We've done a protocol on if there is something that Alberta is doing well in the hospitals, then rather than building another centre of excellence in, say, Winnipeg or Toronto, all the patients would come here.

So we are trying to come to grips with these kinds of things, and I would ask the hon. member to put pressure on his ND cousins in Manitoba and Saskatchewan to move on this particular issue.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why doesn't the Premier just admit that he's not so interested in controlling costs as he is in finding an excuse to privatize our public health care system?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'm going to make it clear what the proposed legislation accommodates, and it's only one part. The hon. leader of the third party brought up another part; that is, a national consensus that we should have common purchasing. That is one way to achieve savings. Another way is to look at all the administrative costs connected with health authorities. That is another way. The high cost of drugs generally, an aging population: all of these things are problems and need to be addressed.

We're looking at one solution to one component of the problem, and that component is: first of all, no one, absolutely no one, not even this individual will have to suffer. If he is sick or if he is in a car accident, he will be treated. He will be treated under the publicly funded system. Now, if he has a hernia, like Jack Layton had, then he might have the opportunity to move out of the line and pay for it like he would at the Shouldice clinic. But if the doctor says, "Lookit, it might be causing you some discomfort and pain, but I can't do anything for another year," if he wants to wait, he will get treated. So he will get treated under any circumstance.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I do have a pain, but it's sitting over there.

Why doesn't the Premier admit that any solution that improves the public health care system is of no interest to him because he's looking for excuses to privatize, privatize, privatize?

The Speaker: I'm not so sure that that's a question.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what I'm trying to do: bring costs down in line with the rate of inflation – that's one thing that I would seek the hon. leader of the third party's co-operation on – and improve access. Now, that is one component of the whole situation relative to bringing those costs in line, one component. Yes, it involves perhaps using the private system to move out of the line, but I repeat: anyone who needs treatment will get that treatment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Assistance for the Grains and Oilseeds Sector

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everyone in this Assembly would agree that our grains and oilseed producers have become among the best and most efficient in the world, yet they face a very, very bleak future. Whether it is the trade distorting subsidies, whether it's high input costs or low commodity prices, whether it's

the weather or a combination of everything, their industry is on the verge of collapse. Many producers feel that the CAIS program in its current form doesn't address their particular circumstance. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given these circumstances, what is the government doing to assist our grains and oilseeds producers for the 2006 crop year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very good question because this is an area that is of grave concern. Our Premier and our caucus are all very aware of the crisis that we see in the grains and oilseeds sector today: the high input costs, the low commodity prices.

What we've done is moved fairly quickly on production insurance changes that will help producers with their 2006 growing season. We reduced the cost of the premium on the spring price endorsement from 50 per cent to 30 per cent. We announced that just recently. As well, we moved early on the commodity price front too by boosting the floor price under the revenue insurance coverages, effectively setting a floor price for many of these cereals. When you add up all of the programs – and it's a package of programs that's available to all of our producers today – there's over half a billion dollars available to producers this spring between the federal government's programs and our programs. We encourage the producers to visit one of the 52 AFSC offices around the province so that they can get the information they need.

Can we do more, Mr. Speaker? Yes, I believe we can do more, but this is a Canadian problem, and all of the provinces are talking to our new federal minister. We hope to get some more information out to producers very soon.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: while every little bit helps, in the short term that addresses some of the problems. Can our grains and oilseed producers expect a future without the subsidies? What is our industry looking at in the future?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a good question. Really, what we're talking about is: is the grains and oilseed sector viable long term? Is it sustainable without government support? My answer to that is: yes, it is. But we need to deal with the WTO. We need to deal with new markets and new products for those cereals, which we are working on in co-operation with not only the other provinces but with our federal minister. We're talking to the industry. We just announced a three-point plan.

You know, when BSE hit this province, we came up with a BSE recovery strategy. We are working on a grains and oilseeds recovery strategy, and we'll be moving with that fairly quickly in March, Mr. Speaker, and hope to map out that future for the grains and oilseeds sector.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the minister know when the Alberta producers can expect payments from the federal government from the \$755 million program announced last year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that some of those payments are coming out right away. The federal government has tied these payments of the \$755 million, actually, to the CAIS program, and for those producers who have submitted their 2004 CAIS claim, those cheques are moving fairly quickly. They're based on 7 and a half per cent of a five-year average of net sales of eligible grains with the possibility of a top-up later this year although the federal minister assures me that the majority of funds are going to come out fairly quickly. If the producers have not filed their '04, I again encourage them to get to one of those 52 AFSC offices or get those applications in because it also enables them to apply for the 50 per cent advance on their '05 year, which again will put dollars into producers' hands this spring. Roughly \$200 million out of that \$750 million we believe will land in Alberta.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, last year this spring this government continued to deny that chronic wasting disease posed a threat to human health or wild deer populations. While this government is in denial, the problem is spreading. Fish and wildlife have no answers, yet the minister of agriculture has accused us of fearmongering, and this is the second cull in two years. To the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: is the government continuing to take the same stance as last year, that chronic wasting disease is not a problem?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I never said that chronic wasting disease was not a problem. What I said was that we have a surveillance system that works very well. What I said was that we support our elk industry and our deer industry because they, too, have a future. We've never said that CWD wasn't a problem.

Mr. Bonko: To the same minister: is this minister willing to give guarantees that chronic wasting disease will not enter the human food chain? It's a simple question: yes or no?

The Speaker: Nobody can give guarantees, hon. member. The next question.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you. Is the minister willing to apologize to Albertans for waiting so long to act on the threat of chronic wasting disease?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that's a ridiculous question. Really, the hon. member needs to do a little more research. This industry has been around for quite some time. The CWD surveillance has been around for quite some time and, in fact, is viewed around the world as a model which some other jurisdictions should be following. To follow his logic, when we were hit with BSE in the beef industry, we should have shut it down. We didn't do that. We're supporting our producers. We're doing what's right based on science, and we're doing what's right for our consumers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Environmental Initiatives

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has long placed a priority on finding sustainable ways to develop its natural resources to benefit all Albertans. One of these resources is coal, and the province's reserves are estimated to be twice the energy of Alberta's oil sands resources. In the Premier's address on Tuesday

night he emphasized this government's continued commitment to clean-coal research. He referred to the ingenuity it took to make oil sands resources a long-term prosperity and that Alberta's best minds and industry leaders have the knowledge and innovation needed to unlock coal's massive potential. My question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Can the minister tell the House about the research taking place to develop clean-coal technology?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the tremendous fiscal success that we are having in this province from energy resources, it is now time to continue to focus on the long-term problems that we have, and clean-coal technology is one of those opportunities. The goal, quite simply, of our clean-coal research is to find technologies that use our coal – and I'll call it Alberta coal – more efficiently, with a minimal impact on our environment. I say Alberta coal because Alberta coal is primarily subbituminous, which means it has a lower sulphur content and a lower mercury content, which has characteristics that have to be used in a different variety than other coal sources. Not only electricity generation but the importance of this research into other areas that can offset the use of natural gas are important.

Specifically to the member's question, together with industry the Alberta Energy Research Institute is currently working on 10 projects that are assessing clean-coal technologies for Alberta's needs. These include coal gasification with reduced emissions and the capture, storage, and usage of carbon dioxide.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What is the government doing to encourage development of renewable energy resources?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the importance of clean-coal technologies, we also recognize that there has to be a mix of energy technologies. The Alberta Energy Research Institute is really focused on six priority areas that we're working on: one of those I've talked about, of course, with clean coal, clean carbon; a second area is CO₂ management; bitumen upgrading; improved recovery of oil and gas; alternative and renewable energy; and water management.

Just one example that I will give to the members would be a project that we have on biomass through the Alberta Research Council at a feedlot in Vegreville. This project generates about 1 megawatt of power from agricultural waste. That's enough electricity to power their complete operation or a 2,000-person village.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that a mix is important and are working on a number of different fronts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister explain what actions are being taken to make sure Alberta continues to have clean air to breathe, free of emissions such as mercury and sulphur dioxide?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, if you can imagine this province as being the leader of environmental initiatives across North America, imagine this: this province sharing our technology with the rest of the world. Albertans can do it because we're investing in technology such as clean-burning coal.

What have we done in the last week, you ask? Well, let me tell

you what we've done. Our standing policy committee, our cabinet, our caucus all supported new regulations that, in fact, are reducing mercury by 2010 by 50 per cent. How much did you say? Fifty per cent. That's 1,200 kilograms to 600 kilograms. That's just the beginning of more to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

2:20 Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has actively encouraged coal-bed methane drilling, assuring Albertans that it's safe. Thousands of coal-bed methane wells have been drilled in the past few years. The farmers and municipalities in proximity to these wells are experiencing dramatic change in their drinking water. High levels of methane, caustic skin burns, loss of safe drinking water have been reported, and they're serious health and safety issues with no consistent process for investigation and management. To the Minister of Energy: how is it that CBM drilling is full speed ahead when we're still awaiting recommendations from the advisory committee and protective legislation is not in place?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, last fall there was a draft report, as you may be aware, from the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee on coal-bed methane, and that went through public feedback at that stage. That final report has now been prepared. We have just been in receipt of it. We are hopeful to have that report out in the not-too-distant future.

That said, I must re-emphasize, though, that the Energy and Utilities Board does still act on all of those issues that you've raised, very fact-, science-based information, to ensure that our water is protected. One of the recommendations coming out will be to ensure that we continue to gather and have the research on the protection of those aquifers so that we can continue to let all Albertans be reassured that their water will be protected as the coal-bed methane drilling continues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is precisely the question. You're continuing drilling before the regulations are in place. Why has there, for example, not been a regulation that all water in an area should be tested before the drilling?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there are regulations in place. This is another report, the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee, to help improve the regulatory framework that we have, a very good and one of the best, reputable standards throughout the world. The Energy and Utilities Board does act upon ensuring that when these issues come forward in any application, those things such as that water quality are preserved on every application, not just those going forward but those that have happened in the past.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: do you support coal-bed methane development without adequate legislative protection of groundwater?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, unequivocally I do not. In fact, as I was just sharing with the Minister of Energy, some industries have come forward, looking under the Water Act, legislation that was

passed in this Assembly. The answer to them at this point, until the report is complete, has been n-o. That's two letters. No.

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

Aboriginal Training and Employment

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're hearing more and more about the growing need for skilled labour in Alberta, and we know that aboriginal Albertans aren't nearly as represented in the labour force as other Albertans. Clearly, we need to provide more opportunities to aboriginal people so they can develop the skills they need for a career in the trades. This morning the Minister of Advanced Education announced that the province has now over 1,100 aboriginal apprentices, compared to just 238 in 2002. My first question to that minister: can he give us a reason for this increase?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, our government has made it a priority to increase the number of aboriginal people in the workforce and the number of aboriginal people who have access to postsecondary educational opportunities. To achieve that goal, in the last few years there have been a number of initiatives that have been launched to encourage young aboriginal people to consider a career in the trades. We've introduced promotional materials in all schools encouraging young aboriginal people to consider a career in the trades, we've sent youth ambassadors to speak to young aboriginal people around the province about career planning, we've worked to connect aboriginal apprentices with employers, and we've provided scholarships for aboriginal apprentices.

Reaching the 1,100 number, which is what we have now registered, is a significant milestone that all members of this Assembly and all Albertans should be pleased about. As a province we need to ensure that all Albertans, including those of aboriginal descent, have the learning opportunities available to them so that they can be part of Alberta's future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: has the minister set a target for further increasing the number of aboriginal apprentices and a method to achieve it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we'd like to achieve 1,500 aboriginal apprentices by 2008-2009. I think that's very achievable. In fact, it's probably a low target. My hope is that we'll surpass it quickly and achieve even higher numbers of aboriginal apprentices than that. We plan to continue the efforts under way to facilitate aboriginal people becoming involved as apprentices. We want to expand efforts to promote the trades as a good career choice not just to aboriginal people but to all Albertans.

We're working closely with the postsecondary institutions to strengthen the programs and services to ensure that aboriginal people, particularly, can be successful in preapprenticeship programs and can have that type of success. We're planning to do more to link industry with aboriginal organizations and First Nation groups to discuss training and employment opportunities not just in urban institutions, Mr. Speaker, but distributed learning opportunities in the community across the province. It's very exciting that NAIT had their first graduating class of their mobile classroom in Conklin in September of last year. Programs like that are very important to provide access.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Final supplemental to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: I'm wondering if the minister can inform us what her department is doing to increase the number of aboriginal Albertans participating in other sectors of the job market beyond trades.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, because my department is not a service provider, we actually rely upon partnerships, and those partnerships are indicative of what happened this morning with Advanced Education. That's just one example.

Within the various departments that we do have, we encourage them to ensure that there are training components and some employment opportunities as well as economic opportunities. As an example, under Human Resources and Employment we have the aboriginal labour strategy that's going on. Mr. Speaker, in the health area we have bursaries that will help ensure that careers do occur for aboriginal people in the health sector. With the federal government we have what we call the aboriginal workforce participation initiative, and that initiative is an agreement between us to be able to see how we can improve the employment opportunities for the First Nations and Métis people of this province.

We've done some really good things with the municipalities. As an example, the city of Grande Prairie signed an agreement with us under the AWPI to ensure that their departments within the city work with the city's industry to see what opportunities will be available beyond the trades. So, Mr. Speaker, partnerships are what we live on, and industry is certainly part of that.

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

Postsecondary Education Policy

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the Minister of Advanced Education and I both attended Public Interest Alberta's At the Crossroads summit on postsecondary education, and I want to commend the minister for not only being there but rolling up his sleeves and getting involved. Nevertheless, it seems that advanced education has gone from the penthouse to the doghouse on this government's priority list in the past year. Not one piece of legislation is scheduled from Advanced Education yet this session. To the minister: does this mean that the starvation diet is over and that there's money enough and space enough and professors enough and a fair tuition policy for all postsecondary students in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, legislation is not the only way to create a priority. In fact, if you don't need more laws, you ought not to make more laws.

Our Premier, in sponsoring Bill 1 last year, the Access to the Future Act, brought into this House, and this House passed, legislation which is very broad in scope which allows us and compels us to make postsecondary education a priority in this province. It sets out the access to the future fund, a \$3 billion fund which encourages investment not only from the government but from the community, from individuals, from good corporate citizens to make postsecondary learning a priority. It committed to putting a billion dollars into the heritage scholarship fund to make sure that finances are available for students to get an education.

It highlighted some areas like a common application process so that students can have access to all the public postsecondary institutions, easy access through one-stop shopping, so to speak. I

can report to the House that there's a committee consisting of the colleges and universities in the province, which are actively engaged in designing that system as we speak.

It set out the procedure for a searchable inventory for scholarships and bursaries, and that process is well under way. No more legislation is needed for that. It talked about plans to increase participation in the advanced education of individuals who are disadvantaged due to socioeconomic, geographic, or cultural barriers. This morning we announced that there are now 1,100 aboriginal apprentices in the province. We're being very successful on that. So it's not a matter of more legislation, Mr. Speaker; it's a matter of keeping doing the very successful things we're doing.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that tuition fees are governed by the Post-secondary Learning Act, section 61, does the absence of an amending bill in this session of the Legislature mean that students and their institutions will have to wait for a tuition policy until this time next year or beyond?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's been clear since the beginning of February of 2005 that we were going to bring in a new tuition policy. In fact, I've been calling it a new affordability policy because it's more than just tuition. It's not just the cost of paying tuition, but it's also the cost for rural Albertans of getting to school and the cost of living when they get to school or for urban Albertans who have to move to another place to go to school, so tuition and affordability.

The Premier indicated last February in his speech to the province that we would have that policy in place by the fall of 2006. We've reiterated that. We indicated this fall during the learning forum that we had that we would be bringing out a policy this spring so that people would be able to see it and that policy would be in place by the fall of 2006 so that students and institutions could plan on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister assure us that there will be the appropriate legislation that enables that new tuition policy in place in time for a new tuition policy to be in place for next fall so that students don't have to wait yet another year and we don't need another year of rebates? The Learning Alberta review seems to be dealing with just about every issue but tuition policy.

Mr. Hancock: Well, given that the hon. member and I both sat in the same session at the forum yesterday in talking about tuition policy and he heard some of the things that we were talking about, he knows that there's an incredible interest in how tuition policy and affordability is crafted and that there are many options available. It's prudent – and I'm sure he would agree that it's prudent – to explore those opportunities and come to a consensus of the best way forward for Alberta students.

We've promised that that policy will be in place. It will come out this spring. It'll be available for discussion. It'll be in place in the fall, and if there's need for legislation, we'll be bringing forward the legislation, and I'm sure the hon. member will help us expedite any legislation that's necessary to put that policy in place for students when they've had a thorough and complete opportunity.

This is not a short-term fix, Mr. Speaker. This is a long-term issue. Advancing education is important for all Albertans, and it's important for the future of Albertans in a knowledge economy.

Tuition is one element that's extremely important, and it's important that we do it right.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Coal-fired Power Production

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Old King Cole was a merry old soul, and when he called for his fiddlers three here in Alberta, I'm sure he was surprised to see the Premier, the Environment minister, and the Energy minister tripping over themselves to sing his praises. Expanding coal plants in Alberta is a huge step backwards. It's more about burning coal here in Alberta to sell electricity to the United States than it is to benefit Alberta consumers. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Given the huge untapped potential of cogeneration and renewables, why won't the minister admit that this great coal burning scheme is about expanding energy exports and not providing Albertans with affordable energy and a sustainable future?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we'd be delighted to bring him into the clean, environmental, economic solution of energy of the future, and that's why we're reintroducing him to that clean coal opportunity. He talks about coal plants, but he forgets about the technologies of gasification of coal to liquids, the capturing of emissions. A tremendous amount of opportunity can be under a more economic platform even for an environmental solution for coal of the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. My supplemental is to the Minister of Environment. When jurisdictions like Ontario are phasing out coal generation due to its harmful health effects and significant environmental damage, why is this government promoting a large-scale expansion of coal-fired generation here in Alberta?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, there is such an insatiable appetite for energy around the world, and as the world continues to grow from 6 billion to more, they're going to require more energy. What type of energy? Renewable energy, which is very important and which Alberta is leading the way on. I repeat: renewable energy is one. Fossil fuel energy is very important as well.

Mr. Speaker, let me reassure all Albertans. When Ontario will be in the dark because they will not have any electricity 10 or 15 years from now, they'll be calling to Alberta to look for help, and Alberta will tell them that we'll take your electricity and we'll send it to them, based on your ideas.

Mr. Eggen: Perhaps Alberta will look like Sudbury with the acid rain.

To the same minister: will the government, then, please guarantee that any new coal-fired generating units in Alberta will meet zero emission standards and will not be built using the weak-kneed standards that were just announced for existing coal-fired plants?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has just insulted all Albertans. How has he insulted them? This is how he's insulted them. CASA, the Clean Air Strategic Alliance – an alliance made up of NGOs, made up of environmentalists, made up of industry, made up of the public at large in Alberta – has received national awards, and this hon. member just came up and said that their recommendations sucked. Well, I want to say that nothing could be

further from the truth, in fact, with our technologies, with our initiatives to reduce the mercury emissions by half. I can only tell you that Albertans will never settle for that type of attitude as we go forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Trade Certification

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, many Albertans are concerned about the labour shortage in this booming economy. I have a constituent that tells me that there is an inequity in the way journeymen welders are treated if they want to come from another province to work in Alberta. I'm told, for example, that a welder from B.C. or Saskatchewan with a journeyman ticket that isn't red seal certified can't come to Alberta without first paying money and writing tests to have their trades credits recognized. However, an Alberta welder with a ticket that is not red seal certified can still travel to B.C. or Saskatchewan and work without having to get their credentials certified. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education. Can you explain what the red seal program is and why this inequitable treatment of journeymen welders exists?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the challenges that we have in the trades is that there is a different set of processes and standards in place in every province. Attaining a welding certificate in one province might not involve the same level of training as we have here in Alberta. In fact, Alberta is acknowledged as being a leader of training in the country, and our apprenticeship program is held up as a model in North America. In fact, even from outside of North America people come to look at our apprenticeship training model.

That differing set of standards is precisely why the red seal was created. That was an agreement across the country as to a set of standards so that people could apply in their own jurisdiction for a red seal, which would certify them for the ability to move, labour mobility, right across the country. By adhering to the red seal standard, Alberta isn't doing something unique. In fact, we're upholding the exact same standards that every province has agreed to. If an Albertan wants to hire a journeyperson from another province who doesn't have red seal certification, they can do so. That journeyperson can come here immediately, begin working, and then they can apply for the necessary certification once they're here. The cost is exactly \$60 for the necessary exam.

In terms of Alberta welders being able to work in other provinces without having to obtain a red seal, I can't speak to the standards for other provinces, but I can say that Alberta has led the way in making sure that there's a national certification process so that the labour mobility can happen without diluting the standards of care.

Mrs. Jablonski: My last question, Mr. Speaker: rather than putting up barriers for workers coming here from other provinces in the interests of maintaining high standards, can we not relax the red seal testing requirement to allow those experienced welders who have their tickets from other provinces to come to Alberta to work?

2:40

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we're not creating barriers. We're making sure that there's an appropriate standard so that credentials mean something and that employers know what they're getting. It doesn't pose a barrier to people moving across

jurisdictions. They can apply easily for a red seal in their own jurisdiction, or they can apply for a red seal here, or they can apply to take the test here.

Relaxing standards is not the way for us to move forward in making sure we have appropriate labour in the province. We make it possible for experienced workers to challenge exams. There's an easy process in place to make sure that workers are credentialled, and in fact workers who got their credentials in other jurisdictions prior to the advent of the red seal program – and I think that in welding that probably was 1979 – can come and work without a red seal, but if they got their credentials post the red seal program coming in, it's very easy for them to apply and to get the certification in this jurisdiction, and they can work while that process is under way.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a moment I will call upon the first of six hon. members to participate, but first of all I would like to draw to the attention of the members the presence of a former Member of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta in the members' gallery. Broyce Jacobs served the constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner in the 25th Legislature of Alberta.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members may wish to know that in the 1909 provincial election 82 candidates were nominated in Alberta's 41 constituencies. For the one and only time in the history of the province of Alberta a representative of the Socialist Party was elected. The constituency was Rocky Mountain, and the new MLA was Charles M.W. O'Brien, who was elected with 555 votes. I give you this quote which was found in a journal called the *Edmonton Capitol*, a statement made in this Assembly on March 2, 1910, by Mr. O'Brien: "I am proud to be the first political representative in this House, the embodiment of a new order of things. I am here to voice the interests of the slaves of society." Mr. O'Brien was defeated in the 1913 election, moved to the United States, and became a founding member of the American Communist Party.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Alberta Olympians

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to offer a few words in commemoration of the very special group of men and women who have once again shown Alberta to be at the forefront of athletic excellence. In recent weeks, as the eyes of the world focused on Torino, Italy, we watched our team put in its best winter Olympic performance to date, with Albertans making a significant contribution to this incredible success.

As a result of our world-class training facilities, whether the Olympic Oval, Calgary's Olympic Park, our alpine skiing resorts, or Canmore's Nordic Centre, Alberta has long been a destination of choice for athletes seeking a competitive edge. When combined with traditional Alberta dedication and drive, our athletes, both native and honorary, have a potential as great as any in the world.

As our Premier earlier mentioned, we are proud. We are all proud of their achievements, and I can tell you that the residents of Banff-Cochrane are especially proud of Chandra Crawford of Canmore, who won an astonishing gold medal in the women's cross-country sprint, and Canmore's Sara Renner and her teammate, Beckie Scott from Vermilion, who brought home silver medals in the women's team sprint event. In addition to these incredible results, Albertans

received, as we heard earlier, medals in men's bobsled, women's curling, women's moguls, women's hockey, and men's and women's skeleton.

Without a doubt we are developing and attracting some of the finest athletes the world has ever seen, athletes with unmatched determination and incredible sportsmanship. These extraordinary Albertans who ascended the medal podium and all those who honoured us by competing brought a great sense of pride to every citizen of this province. Please join me in once again extending congratulations to our Canadian athletes for representing this country so successfully and pay special tribute to those Albertans whose contributions were so vital in representing our nation to the rest of the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Black History Month

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure and pride that I rise today to acknowledge the celebration of Black History Month. February is celebrated in Canada and many parts of the world as a time to honour the many contributions of members of the black community.

Mr. Speaker, black Canadians can be found contributing at a very high level in many disciplines, including medicine; the arts; music; the trades; community, provincial, and national leadership; and have also served with great pride and ability in our military. I think of Corporal Ainsworth Dyer, who lost his life in the famous friendly fire incident in Afghanistan. On a brighter note we can't forget Lascelles Brown, our silver medallist bobsledder at Torino.

Mr. Speaker, my role as the first black to sit in this Assembly is one that I'm very proud to carry out with the knowledge that the road for me was paved with the determination of blood, sweat, and tears of many people who travelled long and difficult roads literally and figuratively.

Black farmers came to Alberta at the turn of the last century from many parts of the U.S.A., including Oklahoma, and settled in places like Breton, Amber Valley, Wildwood, and Campsie. While these were very thriving communities in their day, now only a few isolated farms remain as the new generation has migrated to our cities. Another wave arrived between the 1950s and '70s from the Caribbean. This group included my parents, who heeded Alberta's call for teachers. Worsley was nothing like they had ever experienced in Jamaica, but they persevered.

Mr. Speaker, Black History Month is not only a time to celebrate the contributions of black Canadians; it is an opportunity to remind us that we are all greater because of the sum of our parts. We are a multicultural nation, and we have so much to learn from each other and so much to share. I'm proud to be a member of Alberta's black community, proud to live in a country where we celebrate our diversity with such exuberance, proud to be Albertan, and a proud Canadian.

Thank you.

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

Freedom to Read Week

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to speak today in recognition of Freedom to Read Week. This important event takes place during the final week of February and is recognized by the Freedom of Expression Committee in Canada. Freedom to Read Week is intended to remind us all that freedom of

expression is an important liberty that we all enjoy in Canada. However, even in Alberta and across the country freedom of expression must not be taken for granted.

Although we as a nation are regarded internationally as a leader in protecting civil liberties, books continue to be removed from Canadian libraries, schools, and bookstores every day. Censorship represents an attack on our intellectual freedom, which is protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Freedom To Read Week encourages us all to defend our rights to read what we choose. It is an educational opportunity to teach others to respect and understand this right and to express ourselves openly.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge all Albertans to take part in Freedom to Read Week, ending March 4. There are numerous events taking place in the province during this period. Please visit the Freedom to Read website and show your support for this important event in any way that you can, and in doing so ensure that our freedom of expression continues to be defended with vigilance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Jennifer Heil

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure along with my colleague the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to acknowledge a very special Albertan and Canadian: Jennifer Heil from Spruce Grove, Alberta, the Winter Olympics' winner of the gold medal for freestyle skiing, women's moguls. On February 11, 2006, I am sure you could almost hear the cheering from Torino when 23-year-old Jennifer brought home the gold.

2:50

Skiing since age two with her sister Amie and father, Randy, Jennifer is no stranger to winning titles. At age 17 Jennifer Heil was named the World Cup rookie of the year for the 2000-2001 season. In 2004 she became the first Canadian woman to win a World Cup mogul title in the Canadian Freestyle Ski Association event. You could say that her family is very proud of how far she has come.

No stranger to achievement, Jennifer used to run cross country, where she set records in junior high school. She is currently pursuing her commerce degree at McGill University in Montreal.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to recognize an outstanding Albertan, one we are all very proud of, Jennifer Heil, gold medal winner for women's moguls at the 2006 Winter Olympics.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Aboriginal Apprenticeships

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of the announcement by Advanced Education that more than 1,100 aboriginal apprentices are working in Alberta in 54 trades. This is truly a milestone achievement and one that is worth celebrating because, as we all know, Alberta's economy is strong and the demand for skilled tradespeople is high. This figure represents a home-grown solution.

It's a fantastic start, but more needs to be done. We need to be aggressively promoting the trades and apprenticeship to all youth as a valuable and worthwhile career. As the chair of NADC and the Youth Secretariat I know only too well about the challenges facing young people, especially those who live in rural and remote parts of the country. The key to building on this apprenticeship success is

educating our talented youth about opportunities and options available to them.

We need to do a much better job at getting good information into their hands and inspiring them about how promising their future is and that they can make certain career and employment choices. One way to address the labour challenges we face is to engage young people in discussion to find out what their challenges are, what they think is working, and how we can do a better job. The Youth Advisory Panel does just that, and apprenticeship has been a hot topic at meetings and has resulted in some very forward-thinking ideas.

There have been many great suggestions like how employers can support youth and how guidance counsellors in high schools can be the students' first step towards a career in the trades. So when students walk into a counsellor's office and say that they want to be a welder or an electrician or, as a matter of fact, any trade, they will get the information and the support they need to proceed down the path. The whole idea is to be responsive to the students' initial inquiry.

I hope that this celebration of over 1,100 aboriginal apprentices will encourage even more young Albertans to see apprenticeship as a rewarding career pathway.

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

Labour Legislation

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last November I rose in this Assembly to congratulate the workers of UFCW 401 who had just won a first contract after years of struggle ending in a bitter strike. The Lakeside dispute should have made it clear even to this government and to the minister responsible that important changes were long overdue. The strike proved that Alberta's labour laws – frankly, the worst in the country – give employers every advantage in a dispute.

This government failed hard-working Albertans. It forced workers to take strike action when it should have forced the employer into arbitration. It allowed replacement workers into the plant when it should have respected the integrity of the union's picket line. But the real failure came earlier this month when the Minister of Human Resources and Employment revealed that he had no intention of pursuing first contract legislation. The president of the Alberta Federation of Labour called the news perplexing and disappointing. I have other words that I would use, but they would be unparliamentary.

Alberta is one of only three provinces that do not provide this basic protection for newly organized workers. First contract legislation could have prevented strikes at the Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton and at the *Calgary Herald*. Alberta's employers face serious problems of worker shortages across this province. Well, if you want to attract more workers to Alberta and promote healthy labour relations, the NDP would like to offer some suggestions: stop bringing in foreign temporary workers who take non-unionized jobs from unionized Albertans, stop supporting CLAC's efforts to undermine real unions in Fort McMurray, take measures to end the use of replacement workers during strikes and lockouts, and legislate first contract arbitration. In short, Mr. Speaker, show respect for the hard work Albertans do.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: In today's recognitions one hon. member referred to February as a certain designation month, and another hon. member referred to a week as a certain designation. Just so that the phones

in my office do not start ringing, I'm going to bring you up to date about all the other events that are celebrated in the month of February so that it can never be said that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta does not acknowledge all of them.

First of all, this year, 2006, is the International Year of Deserts and Desertification, meaning the certification of deserts. February is Black History Month. It's also Heart Month, Potato Month, Junior Achievement Month, Low Vision Month.

February 2 was Ground Hog Day. February 5 to 11 was International Development Week as it was also White Cane Week. It was also Burn Awareness Week. It was also Eating Disorder Awareness Week. February 7 to 14 was Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week. February 12 to 18 was National Children of Alcoholics Week. February 13 to 17 was National Antibiotic Awareness Week as it also was Random Acts of Kindness Week. February 14, as we all know, was Valentine's Day. It also was Read to Your Child Day. February 14 to 21 was Take It To Heart Week. It also was the Heart Fund Campaign week.

February 15 was National Flag of Canada Day. February 19 to 25 was Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week as it also was Scout-Guide Week. February 20 was Family Day in Alberta. It was also Heritage Day in some parts of the country. February 20 to 26 was Heritage Week. February 21 was International Mother Language Day. February 22 was World Thinking Day.

February 25 to March 5 is National Engineering Week. February 26 to March 4 is Freedom to Read Week, and February 27 to March 5 is Canadian Landmine Awareness Week. Tomorrow, February 28, is Shrove Tuesday.

Now, at the conclusion, before we begin Orders of the Day today, we're also going to have two points of order, one from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and the other from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I wish to make a tabling. The Minister of Finance provided the government's 2005-2006 quarterly budget report for the third quarter to all MLAs this morning. At the same time, she also made this report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act. On behalf of the minister I'm now tabling the quarterly budget report as the amended fiscal plan. I'm also tabling the third-quarter activity report describing the major achievements of our government during that period. Likewise, I am tabling the third-quarter update for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two documents. One is from Greenpeace, and the other one is from the David Suzuki Foundation. Both are outlining the health and environmental dangers of relying on coal for electricity and address some of the myths around so-called clean-coal technologies.

Thanks.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the leader of the NDP opposition I'd like to table copies of a release he issued today. The release shows that the NDP has accepted the Premier's challenge to propose solutions and improvements to our health care

system. As the release points out, we've been making proposals for some time, including legislation introduced last session to reduce the cost of pharmaceuticals.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three tablings today. The first is page 189 from the supply estimates from the spring sitting for the lottery fund, which clearly shows under vote 3.0.7, racing industry renewal, that an amount of some \$42 million is being allocated to the racing initiative, to the horses.

Secondly, a letter received by my office from a constituent, John Zyp, in which he outlines a number of recent experiences with the health system and comments on a rather chaotic runaround regarding trying to get some kind of assistance for a ministroke on the weekend.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, an e-mail received, again by my office, from Dennis Loughlin in which he was referred to a physical therapy centre and was told they had a waiting list unless he wanted to pay extra and get help immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter that was delivered to our constituency office in Edmonton-Gold Bar from Helen Vermeulen. This letter is addressed to myself and also to the hon. Premier, and it is regarding cuts to services and supports for adults with developmental disabilities. Both Helen and her husband, Henry Vermeulen, indicate that they would like to see an increase in PDD funding.

The second tabling that I have, Mr. Speaker, is documents regarding my question earlier in question period today. This is a letter dated November 28, 2005, to the Electric Utilities Act Advisory Committee members. It's in regard to the paper Role and Mandate Refinements for Alberta Electric Industry Implementing Agencies, and it's signed by the executive director of Alberta Energy, Kellan Fluckiger. I have the response to this nine-page document from Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, the AEUB, and that letter is dated January 13, 2006, and it is signed by R.D. Heggie, executive manager, utilities branch.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, return to order of the Assembly MR 35, asked for by Mr. Martin on behalf of Dr. Pannu on May 2, 2005.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Parliamentary Language**

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I raised a point of order in response to comments from the Premier in an exchange with the Leader of the Official Opposition in which he stated that the Leader of the Official Opposition was telling a fib. The citations that I'm quoting to support my point of order include 23(j), *Beauchesne's* 488 and 489, and *Beauchesne's* 492, the question being: is

it appropriate to use either that terminology of “fib” or to indicate that someone is fibbing?

I thought: well, fibbing is a colloquialism. I checked in the dictionary to see what that is, and in fact in the Random House Dictionary, concise edition, it notes that a fib and the derivatives, fibbed and fibbing, are a “trivial lie”. So it’s a lie. Saying that someone has told a fib is the same thing as saying that they told a lie, even if it’s a trivial one.

I would argue that there is a significant amount of documentation, including that which has been circulated to all members through the Speaker’s notes, that indicates that falsehoods and lies and not telling the truth and deliberately misleading are all indications of unparliamentary language and have been ruled and deemed to be unparliamentary.

Under Standing Order 23(j), which talks about using “abusive or insulting language,” that is certainly what was, I believe, the tone of what the Premier was delivering and was his intent, that he meant to be insulting, that he meant to indicate and to disparage the character of the Leader of the Opposition.

I have already referred to 488 and 489, which also includes a long list of prohibited language. Although I do note that “fib” is not specifically included in the language that I was able to review in the edition of *Beauchesne* that I have, I also note that the language is deemed to be parliamentary or not parliamentary as the Speaker sees fit. In this case, I’m asking the Speaker to rule that particular language as unacceptable in this House. I think it also conveys a tone that I’m seeing increasingly and particularly put forward by the Premier that brings all of the members of this Assembly into disrepute.

The second part of the issue here, the first being if it is appropriate to say that a member is telling a lie, is: is the information correct? In this case, I have already tabled page 189 of the supplementary supply estimates from the fall, which was the most recent update to our current budget. So when the Leader of the Opposition was saying that the government allocated or gave more money to horse racing than it did to seniors in its most recent announcement, that in fact is correct, and it’s backed up by the documentation here. If you note, on page 189 it says: reference/element, also called a vote, 3.0.7. It’s clearly listed in the budget documents under the lottery-funded programs.

Now, to try an argument that somehow the lottery-funded programs are not controlled by the government or not allocated by the program is purely specious. I mean, on this one page alone it’s allocating money to a number of different initiatives. Now, whether that money is collected directly in and run through general revenue and then issued by way of a cheque or a grant or some other means back out to a group or whether the government says, “We would normally take that money in, and we’re going to account for all of it, but you, in fact, can keep it at the source,” it’s still running through the government books, and the government is still allocating that amount of money for the group to use. So to try and pretend that somehow money is not being allocated to the racing renewal initiative by this government for the benefit of horse racing truly is a specious argument.

The point of order, I believe, is well founded against the Premier in attempting to use language that’s unparliamentary and also under 23(h) and (i), casting aspersions upon the character of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this point.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. At the outset I think it’s important to recognize that the Premier was responding to a preamble by the Leader of the Official Opposition. It was not necessarily a comment relative to the question that was being posed. What the hon. member said was that this government gives money to horse racing, and that was the point that the Premier was addressing in his comments. I think it’s fair to say that in the context of that comment it was a mischaracterization. Given the fact that that statement has been made numerous times in this House and has been responded to numerous times in this House, I would say that it was probably an intentional mischaracterization.

There’s absolutely no doubt that there are monies that are distributed to horse racing, but they are not given to horse racing. There’s a contract between this government and Horse Racing Alberta pursuant to which those monies are earned. If Horse Racing Alberta did not do anything pursuant to that contract, no monies would flow. No monies are given in the context of giving, and in the context of the statement, we are talking about monies that are provided by a particular department to the operations of that department in the true sense of the word “given.” So that is the context in which the Premier was making his statements.

I would agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre that the definition of fibbing or fib as outlined in the Oxford Dictionary, 10th edition, does say that it’s “a trivial lie.” I would point out, however, that the Premier was very, very clear that he was not calling the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition a liar. He made that clear on more than one occasion.

So what we are left with, Mr. Speaker, is a situation where we have a trivial mischaracterization by the hon. member, the Leader of the Official Opposition, but the Premier made it very clear that he in no way was calling the hon. member a liar.

3:10

The Speaker: Others?

Well, hon. members, we’ve just spent about 10 or 12 or 15 minutes talking about horse racing, and the subject of the question led off by the Leader of the Official Opposition today had to do with the subject of long-term care.

Now, the chair sends nice letters to hon. members, including one he sent to all Members of the Legislative Assembly on February 15, 2006. Actually, it’s very clearly written. Under section 6, Question Period, it says, and I quote from *Beauchesne* 409(2): “The question must be brief. A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence. A long preamble on a long question takes an unfair share of time and provokes the same sort of reply.” Then it says, “A supplementary question should need no preamble.”

We’re on the business of long-term care today, the second question, the Leader of the Official Opposition. Where this came from the chair doesn’t know, but I quote: “The \$36 million isn’t even what this government gives to the race horses.” Then “again to the Premier,” and then there’s a question. So then the Premier: “Just as a matter of clarification.” We’re not talking about the question here; we’re talking about the preamble, which shouldn’t have been issued.

Just as a matter of clarification, we give absolutely nothing to horse racing. We give nothing to horse racing. This person is telling a big fib. He’s not a liar, Mr. Speaker, but he’s fibbing. That money is generated through slot machines at racetracks, and it has nothing to do with the government or government funding or taxpayers’ dollars.

Then, “Mr. Speaker, the government has accepted the MLA task force’s final report,” and he goes on to answer the question.

Look, it’s only day 2. There’s absolutely no doubt in the chair’s mind that the usage of the term “fibbing” – although the Premier did

say, "He's not a liar . . . but he's fibbing." I don't like that language. I don't think that language is appropriate, and I think that even the use of the word "fibbing" in the context it is – it can be used according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It says, "Often used as a jocular euphemism for 'a lie' . . . one who tells 'fibs'; a fibber, a liar." They're interchangeable words. They're not the kinds of words that we need in our Assembly. If there's going to be an interjection of the chair, the chair is going to start interjecting with the first violation so that we never get to the second violation.

I'm going to ask the Deputy Government House Leader to withdraw the words on behalf of his leader, and then we'll move on with this one, please.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to follow your instruction. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, please proceed with your point of order.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This one shouldn't take very long, but again it comes back to the Premier's statements, to something he said in the House. I think that before he says things, he should be a little clearer that he's correct, especially when we're dealing with another parliamentarian. I'm talking about the Canadian Parliament, and I'm talking about Jack Layton. He was trying to justify – and again it had nothing to do with the questions. He insinuated that Jack Layton sort of jumped the queue and went to a private clinic to have a hernia operation. He did not. I will get the record straight right here that this is definitely not true. There's a grandfathered private hospital called the Shouldice Hospital. It does hernia surgeries as a contract to the public system in Ontario.

An Hon. Member: Good idea.

Mr. Martin: We're not arguing whether that's good or bad. It should be part of the public, but it was grandfathered, and Jack Layton had no choice but to go there [interjections] – Oh, aren't they sensitive; aren't they sensitive – for his publicly paid hernia operation as that is where he was referred by a physician. The point is that he did not jump the queue. It was part of the public system. The Premier should not be standing in this House talking about other parliamentarians when he doesn't know the facts, Mr. Speaker. It's not good policy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On the point of order the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Sorry. Go ahead, please, hon. member.

Mr. Martin: The point of order, Mr. Speaker, is that this was – I'm careful about how I say this – a mistruth about another parliamentarian, and it should not happen in this Assembly.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I was going to say just a couple of things. First of all, I missed the point of order completely, and I still miss it because I don't see where in our rules it would fit in. It also seems to me that what the Premier said relative to this matter, while I haven't followed it closely, pretty much accords with my understanding of it; that is, the individual that was the subject of the comment did in fact go to a private clinic which has been around for some time and which does wonderful work in the area of hernias as

a result of the expertise that they have been developing over a number of years. You know, I think it was a comment on simply the perhaps irony of the situation where a particular party rails against a particular public policy and at the same time takes advantage of it. I think that in our Legislature we have an opportunity for that type of fair comment. [interjection]

The Speaker: Well, just once, hon. member, okay? So we can have a ruling on it.

Mr. Martin: We might have a debate.

The Speaker: But then what would I do? I wouldn't be able to rule, would I?

Mr. Martin: Well, go ahead.

The Speaker: Well, thanks. I appreciate that.

One would have thought or at least the chair would have assumed that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview might have risen and given a citation from something. The conclusion of the chair would be that the member would have made the argument that it violated *Beauchesne* 493 for protected persons. Unfortunately, fellow parliamentarians in the current mode do not fall under that category of protected persons.

I'll quote what was said. This is the Premier of the province.

If he is sick, or if he is in a car accident, he will be treated. He will be treated under the publicly funded system. Now if he has a hernia, like Jack Layton had, then he might have the opportunity to move out of the line and pay for it like he would in the Shouldice clinic. But if he wants to wait, and if the doctor says, "Lookit, it might be causing you some discomfort and pain, but I can't do anything for another year," if he wants to wait, he will get treated.

There was a fair amount of jocular activity, as the chair recalls, in this exchange, going back and forth, and it was not, you know, that civilization was going to come to an end as a result of the answer to the question. So one would take it in the spirit of it all.

One also has to recognize that sometimes in question period members get involved in debating instead of asking, dealing with government policy, and every time we move into that thing, we sort of tend to fall into other kinds of responses. As an example, during this particular series of questions the leader of the third party used these kinds of statements, which certainly could have promoted a response from somebody else. The leader of the ND opposition basically referred to the Premier, and the reference was "hide," you know, you're hiding something, and used the phrase "falsely claimed" in the same sentence, and then said, "I do have a pain but it's sitting over there," at which point it didn't really bring responses other than to get us to the hernia situation.

At this point in time let's all use this and recognize this as only day 2. If we can smile and have a bit of humour, that might be helpful too.

Now we'll move on.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, February 23, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: 3:20

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, February 23, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 201 Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006

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

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006.

As I said on introduction, the bill is designed to increase the number of Albertans who consent to tissue and organ donation, which will help save and improve the lives of others. This bill will improve the co-ordination of organ and tissue donation throughout the province. While some excellent work is taking place currently in various health regions, we can always do better to ensure that the maximum number of organs and tissue is available for potential recipients.

This bill will require the designated health facility to notify the gift agencies when a person dies, when death is imminent, or when a dead body is received, and the gift agency will then use all reasonable efforts as outlined in the legislation to ensure that the appropriate steps are taken.

The human organ procurement and exchange program, which is more commonly known as HOPE, and the Comprehensive Tissue Centre operate in Edmonton and Calgary in co-operation, as I mentioned, with the local health regions. These agencies have trained staff to handle the delicate and emotional discussions that take place with family members at the time of this distress. Hon. members should be comfortable in the fact that no organ or tissue decisions currently, nor is it contemplated in the future, will be made without the consent of the family.

It goes without saying that the ability to receive a new organ or tissue can mean the difference between life or death. Over 400 Albertans are on waiting lists for various organ transplants, and 15 to 20 persons die every year in Alberta waiting for transplants. That is a number that none of us should be satisfied with until it reaches zero.

This bill incorporates a number of the provisions adopted several years ago in Manitoba. The difficulty that that province at the time was encountering is not unlike what is happening in Alberta today. While the number of deaths that were being reported in Winnipeg continued to increase, the same could not be said for outlying regions. Since similar legislation to this bill was introduced in Manitoba, in Brandon, as an example, the number of deaths January to November last year was 143, of which 124 were reported and 28 donors were attained. This compares to only five donors in 2004, three in 2003, and none in 2002.

The second part of the bill will compel the minister of health to table with this Assembly within one year of the legislation taking

effect a report which will include recommendations for a more co-ordinated government response to encourage donations. This review would examine how government forms and documents could be improved to include questions regarding a person's willingness to be a donor. As an example, there might be a provision on all drivers' licences or health care cards that are issued where a person is required to make a choice before receiving that new licence or card. The second example might be a simple question posed by a registry agent at the time of issuing a new driver's licence, and if agreed to, the donor card is signed at the time and then carried by that person.

This bill will also ask the minister to investigate the feasibility of establishing an online registry. This could be co-ordinated either with the human tissue gift agencies' websites or an enhanced Alberta Health website.

Statistically it has been proven that when someone has signed a donor card, family consent follows almost 100 per cent of the time. On the other hand, when a person does not make his or her wishes known, the consent rate by family is significantly lower. Therefore, we must simply do a better job of raising the awareness on this issue and not leave it to chance. I don't have the statistics, but I would guess that especially among young Albertans the number of signed donor cards is not very high. We must do whatever is possible to encourage family members to have that discussion and, hopefully, to take the next step of signing a donor card.

Now, our government could also do a much better job of leading that discussion. If one goes to the Alberta Health and Wellness website, there is no direct link to organ and tissue donation. Furthermore, when one types in the word "organ" and does a search under this website, the first thing that pops up is a survey form to fill out. The information that is being asked for will be compiled "for the Honourable Gary Mar" and must be completed by "October 31, 2000." Simply put, we as government must do a better job in this area.

One of the things that is not being asked for in this bill is the cost saving involved. When a person, for example, receives a new kidney, what is the cost saving versus the cost of dialysis? While that wasn't asked for, it would be valuable information to have because one can only assume that it would be significant.

There was a lot of good work done several years ago by the advisory committee on organ and tissue donation, that was chaired by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This report, A Framework for Action, was submitted in April 2000, and there are many good recommendations in this report. I'd strongly advise the minister and her department to re-review this document. My assessment is that little has changed or improved since that report was submitted more than five years ago.

Currently before the Ontario Legislature are two private members' bills seeking that the law in that province be changed to one of presumed consent. Under this model an individual is deemed to have given consent simply by doing nothing. This is a model to which a lot of consideration was given. However, I have not been convinced that Albertans are there yet. This model could face legal challenges. There are moral implications, and in general Albertans are opposed to a so-called negative option.

I want this bill to be successful. In order to do so, I feel that it's important to take several steps outlined in this legislation which could greatly increase the number of donors. It would be my hope that as a result of this legislation our donor rate continues to increase and a presumed consent model would not be required.

I ask all members of the House for support on this legislation and look forward to the comments. Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006. This is a very interesting bill, and as the sponsoring member laid out, it does raise a number of issues that I hope we are able to spend some significant debate time on and, more to that, take back into our communities and try to get the debate happening there.

I think the issue that we have is that we are now able to very successfully transplant organs. With the development of antirejection drugs this has now become a viable procedure for us. It does enhance the lives of people and also saves their lives literally. Where we have an option between, for example, dialysis and an organ transplant, you actually can save a significant amount of money. P. Keown from *Transplantation Proceedings* in 1999 noted that one year after transplantation the annual cost of supporting a person with a kidney transplant is 40 per cent less than dialysis. So it is a good idea for us. The problem is that we can't get enough people signed up to do it.

I think that there is a real willingness on behalf of Albertans and, beyond that, of Canadians to make a choice to assist people and to do that in a volunteer way. We have a different system in Canada than they do in the States. Here we volunteer. We make a choice to donate willingly to the organ transplant and also the blood systems. In the States you can get paid to donate your blood, and you would also get paid for donating various organs, and that leads you down a whole different road. I think my colleague from Edmonton-McClung is going to speak on that after me. But in Canada we have a long and, I think, noble history of donating because we believe it's a good thing to do.

[Mr. Webber in the chair]

3:30

The problem is that there are really two tests before you can harvest an organ from someone. One, they need to have signed a donor card, and the last time I thought about this I couldn't think of where it was I was supposed to sign. I kept looking at my driver's licence because somehow it was in my head that it was on the driver's licence. I finally located it on the back of my Alberta health care insurance card. So if anybody who's reading this *Hansard* wonders, please go to the back of your Alberta health care insurance card, and that's where you can note that you would like to donate and sign the card. So there's the active participation of signing the card.

We also take the additional precaution here of the consent of the family. That's where it starts to get a bit difficult because people can be reluctant in an initial time of grief. Perhaps there's a certain amount of – I'm searching for a word here, and this won't be the right one – abhorrence or squeamishness about discussing an issue like that when you have a loved one who is about to die or has just recently died. The result of that is that we're not able to harvest and to transplant as many organs as we need. So this bill is trying to find some ways to convince more people to donate.

I have a couple of questions off the bat. This is the second time that I've debated an organ donation bill in this Assembly, and I note that the previous one was never proclaimed. The 1998 Human Tissue Donation Procedures Statutes Amendment Act was in fact passed in this Assembly and is still awaiting proclamation, and my question is: why? We spent the time on it. What was so wrong, and is that being addressed in this bill and somehow being fixed? That's happened before, that something was overlooked or mistaken or whatever, and the subsequent bill addresses it all or even in one case takes the whole pre-existing bill inside of it, and the whole thing gets

passed. So I'm wondering why this 1998 bill is still not passed some eight years later.

Now, I note that the minister did follow up in 1999 and established the Alberta Advisory Committee on Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation, and that committee developed a series of recommendations for a framework for a provincial system of organ and tissue donation.

Then there's another one. In 2003 Alberta Health and Wellness established the Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation Interim Implementation Committee. You know, Mr. Speaker, sometimes I think the only thing different here is that the titles are getting longer. This one was to provide guidance on development, implementation, co-ordination, and evaluation of existing donation transplantation efforts, I guess. Again, the good recommendations that came out of this committee haven't been implemented, and I don't really see them in the legislation either.

So maybe if this passes second, we can hear from the sponsoring member as to what happened to the 1998 bill, the 1999 recommendations, and the follow-up committee in 2003. It seems we're getting an awful lot of attempts at this without a lot to show for it. So what is the real problem here? Let's get that out in the open and talk about it.

We in the Liberal caucus do support organ harvesting and transplantation. We're very interested in the debate around the idea of – how does it go? There are a couple of different ways of looking at it. One is the presumed consent, which is the sort of negative billing option that was referred to by the previous speaker, and then there's a sort of mandatory declaration bill that's also been brought forward by a backbencher in Ontario. Actually, I think they're both from Ontario. They're sort of competing Ontario MPPs with different ideas on this.

I would like to see a wider public debate on this because, in fact, we're assuming that Albertans wouldn't go for that presumed consent, but maybe they would. If that was the case, that would save us all a lot of time and grief because mostly what this bill is doing is tiptoeing around trying to get at people in time to bring up the subject and see if they can get their consent before the person actually dies or get to them fairly quickly within the reasonable window that's open for them.

So I'm interested in the rest of the debate around this bill. I'm speaking in favour of the principle of what has been proposed here. I note that between 15 and 20 per cent of all people on waiting lists die before a suitable organ is found for them. Two years ago, in 2004, there were 313 transplants performed in Alberta and 534 people waiting for transplants, so almost 200 people more waiting for a transplant than actually got one, and 42 people who died while waiting. That's in that 15 to 20 per cent range of people who die. They don't need to. We've got the organs there if we can just make arrangements to harvest them appropriately and do the transplants.

We do have 93 per cent of Albertans who indicated that they are in favour of organ donations, so maybe we need to push the envelope on this and try for something like a presumed consent effort. That's a bit more aggressive than what's being contemplated in this bill, but certainly I'm willing to support what is essentially in the bill.

A few questions that I might add on and ask if the sponsor can answer them. What are the goals and targets for increasing the number of organ and tissue donations? Is the government pursuing any other initiatives to increase the amount of organs and tissues that are available for transplantation?

I've already talked about the recommendations from the '99-2000 report. I'm wondering when those would be implemented. I'm also wondering about the government taking direction from its own 2003

consultation paper to implement a policy where the expressed wishes of a deceased individual take precedence over the wishes of the family, which is part of what we're struggling with here. The deceased individual may well say, "Yeah, I'm up for it; I've signed my donor card," but when they're actually on life support, the family that's on hand won't allow it to go forward.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak to this, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be speaking to this bill. When the Member for Calgary-West advised me that he would be drafting a bill on organ and tissue donation, I definitely took an interest in it. Let me tell you why.

About two years ago a dear friend and also a constituent of mine called me late in the evening to advise me that his son was dying in hospital and to come and visit within hours. A portion of the liver that the father had donated to his son had been rejected, and the child was in a dire state in one of our hospitals. After the family had the ability to say their goodbyes to the child, in the last minute, literally the last minute, a child's liver was located in a different part of Canada, flown in, and the child's life was saved. Recently that very same child, young Tyler, was recognized by our Lieutenant Governor as an outstanding community member for his scouting and other achievements in the community. A life, a great life, has been saved. To any parent any child's life is precious, to say the least.

Mr. Speaker, I wish that this bill could go further. I do agree with the Member for Calgary-West that perhaps the public would not be supportive if we instituted a presumed consent for donation of tissue and organs. That is too bad because perhaps sometimes we tend to dilute our legislation or our initiatives to satisfy a select few in our society who would perhaps become overly vocal on the issue of presumed consent with a clear outline allowing Albertans to opt out of this particular program if they chose to do so.

This idea wouldn't be novel because there are jurisdictions throughout the world that are not only considering, like Ontario is, presumed consent on organ and tissue donation but actually have instituted it and have shown it to work very well. One jurisdiction that I know of, Mr. Speaker, is Spain. In Spain they have presumed consent on organ and tissue donation, which is working very well and is satisfying that country's need for organs and tissues.

3:40

However, what makes me really happy about this bill is that this bill has adopted the best practices from other jurisdictions, including that of Spain, and it is proposing a central co-ordination of organs for our province and our country as a whole if it is adopted by other jurisdictions. That's very important, Mr. Speaker, because as young Tyler was suffering in the hospital, the organ was actually found, I believe, in another province. Now, this was a matter of co-ordination between doctors, but overall in this country we don't have a good network of sharing information on what organs are available, what organs are about to become available, and what lists of waiting patients there may be to draw from. It's a bit of a disjointed process that we have right now. If we could have a well co-ordinated process, I guess a greater number of lives would be saved.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre has indicated that a prior bill has not been instituted. I'm not familiar with the prior bill, so I can't speak to whether it should or shouldn't have been instituted. However, the benefit of the fact that we're discussing the issue here in the Legislature and the benefit of the fact that this debate,

hopefully, will be covered by the media throughout the province is that Albertans will start thinking about the importance of donating organs.

If this debate encourages one extra person to sign their card and, hopefully, donate their organs and allow another person to benefit and save a life, then I think a great mission has been accomplished already. I believe that more than one Albertan will be encouraged to do so, having heard the debate. Nonetheless, if we as government can show leadership and promote among Albertans a donation of organs, I think it is incumbent upon us to do that.

The bill also asks the minister to examine the feasibility of an online donor registry. I think that with our current technology, with the advent of high-speed Internet and its accessibility to every community in this province, again that would make organ donation even easier throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, I must support Bill 201 put forward by the Calgary-West MLA, and I hope that every member in this Assembly will support Bill 201 as it will definitely save lives. Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you. I must apologize for the way my voice sounds. I have laryngitis, and you can imagine what kind of apprehension I have about the third way and privatization. Anyway, it's good to see you in the chair, Mr. Speaker.

What we're discussing today is Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, and I am happy to be responding in second reading. I must say at the beginning that I'm generally in support of this bill as I realize the need to facilitate tissue and organ donations, and I can also appreciate the fact that 15 to 20 per cent of those people on waiting lists die before a suitable tissue or organ is located for them.

Now, I have some general comments and questions, and I'm really interested in hearing all the points of view being discussed from both sides of the floor. I'm also under the impression that similar pieces of legislation are currently being discussed in the Ontario Legislature, so I'll be paying attention to that as well. I heard the comment that was made about presumed or implied consent, and I know that this is something that they're, as I said, discussing in Ontario. I'm not sure where I stand on this issue because it really poses some questions for me.

Thinking about it, I tried to maybe reach my own decision, and I started thinking about something else. How about a mandatory declaration of intent? Instead of asking people to voluntarily tell us whether they agree with an organ or tissue donation, or if they leave it blank and then we have to ask later, I figure that maybe everyone over a certain age, let's just say 18 years of age or so, would be required to declare what their wishes are with respect to organ and tissue donation. Are they for it? Do they support it? Do they support certain organs but not others? Or are they totally against it? Maybe if they're undecided, then we can ask on-site basically, at the hospital. So presumed or implied consent is one issue. Mandatory declaration is another. That's something I can probably find easier to live with.

Now, reading through the bill, I'm interested in receiving some assurance, especially when no family members or next of kin are identified. For this person that we're approaching now and asking to agree to donating tissue or an organ, how can we guarantee that this person has full command of their faculties? How can we ascertain that this person has a sound mind and can make that decision?

Further to this, maybe it doesn't happen in Alberta, but you certainly hear stories about cases where that person who is on their

deathbed is or has been harassed. How can we ensure that utmost respect and consideration are afforded the dying patient or his or her family? We don't want them to be harassed; we don't want them to be pressured. They have to make that decision willingly. The family may be suffering or trying to come to terms with this tragic situation. The patient himself or herself might not be able to make that decision or might not actually like the pressure.

Also you hear some stories from other jurisdictions, certainly from south of the border or from other places in Europe, for example, that there sometimes are situations of deceit or misinformation, or the person is not told in accurate terms what his case is, or the extent of their illness or injury is exaggerated, or whether there exists a treatment or a cure for his case. This is definitely driven by certain situations where tissue and organ banks were sort of low on inventory, and then they figured that these are prime donors. It really alters the quality of care that these guys receive. We don't want to see cases where care is reduced or, you know, somebody is mistreated because he or she has a quality organ or two to donate.

Now, my next point would be on the issue of organ or tissue banks. It's a question of procedure. Are we going to scan everybody on their deathbeds, seeing who is available and who is willing to be identified as a donor, or are we going to do it just based on need? As an example, someone on a waiting list is in need of a compatible kidney. Are we going to examine those who are terminally ill looking for a compatible donor for this case at this time, or will we have the required kidney available as part of a ready-to-go stock or inventory? Are the banks accumulating inventory, or are they doing it just on the spot so the supply is fresh?

The banks, as I understand it – and I hope it continues to be like this – operate in Alberta as not-for-profit centres. Will there come a day when this government would allow for-profit tissue and organ banks to operate in this province? Again, you hear all these grumblings about the third way and privatization. Will this be yet another thing that this government privatizes?

Will people have to pay any fees at any stage? Will there be any charges for harvesting, storage, release, or disposal at any one point in the procedure?

Furthermore, how do we ensure that harvested tissues and organs are used first and foremost for Albertans who need them, then possibly allowing other Canadians to access our banks? I guess what I'm really trying to say here is that priority has to be given to Albertans and Canadians before we contemplate exporting to other jurisdictions.

3:50

Lastly, a technical question as to how the obtained consent will be recorded. As you may be aware, Mr. Speaker, I am the critic responsible for privacy and FOIP and all that stuff, and this raises a flag in my mind. Will there be a requirement, for example, to have witnesses present to ascertain that this consent was duly given? I think that would be fair because sometimes in certain situations a family member might contest the validity of a consent, and we're opening the floodgates to litigation and lawsuits. Maybe a witness or two would be a simple way to confirm that the person had command of their faculties and knew what they were doing and really did in fact intend to provide that consent.

As well, will there be an allowance for a donor or his or her family member to allow one form of donation but not another? As an example here, what if that person agrees to donate tissue or an organ to be used in medical research but doesn't want it to be transferred to a recipient or vice versa? Will there be an allowance for one form of donation versus another, or is it all or none?

With that, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your time, and I appreciate

the chance to speak in second reading, and I will follow the discussion.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to have the opportunity to join in the discussion of Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006. I sincerely thank the Member for Calgary-West for bringing this legislation forward.

Mr. Speaker, it's an important bill because it's an important issue. The reason why the issue is so important is that it is imperative that we increase the organ and tissue donation rates in Alberta. This can be most effectively accomplished through the creation of awareness, education, and a strong and efficient referral system. I believe that this bill, Bill 201, is the best start.

I believe that the meagre rates Alberta currently bodes in donations, Mr. Speaker, is symptomatic of the lack of knowledge and understanding that Albertans have about the importance of tissue and organ donation and the ability to do it. Albertans are giving and compassionate, yet for some reason our rates of organ and tissue donation are very low. As I said, this is not symptomatic of the quality of Albertans but symptomatic of the amount of knowledge and understanding they have.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Kidney Foundation of Canada, suitable organ donors represent only 5 per cent of all hospital deaths. Now, to put this into perspective, this means that 5 per cent of all hospital deaths allow for suitable organ and tissue donation. If 50 per cent of those hospital deaths, the people who died, had registered to donate their tissues, it's still plausible and possible that that 5 per cent of viable organs that could be donated would come from half the population that never registered, never considered the option, had no information or inappropriate information to become organ donors. So this means that maximizing donor rates is extremely important and can only be done by increasing awareness.

As a result, it's clear that our duty as legislators is to ensure that Alberta's citizens become informed on this issue. It's necessary for all Albertans to receive educational information on organ and tissue donation. It's important for all Albertans to see how easy it is to become an organ donor. It's important for all Albertans to see how important it is to become an organ donor. It's important for all Albertans to see how much good they can do to save another's life or improve their quality of life. It's important, Mr. Speaker, to caring and compassionate Albertans that they have the chance to make appropriate decisions.

There are always fallacies around organ and tissue donation, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I've heard some myself. One fallacy that needs to be addressed is the idea that doctors and physicians will not work as hard to save a person's life if they know that that person is a willing organ or tissue donor. When you give it appropriate consideration and appropriate information, it's easy to realize that that notion is absurd. It almost sounds like a skit out of *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life*, where they actually go and harvest a live person's liver because he signed a donor card. All doctors sign an oath to save lives. No doctor would ever make the choice that one life is worth more than another and that one person can die so another can live.

Not all tissues and organs either, Mr. Speaker, are donated just to save another's life. A lot of them are donated to improve quality of life. Oftentimes donating a kidney is not for the sake of life or death but to improve the quality of a person's life so that they don't have

to have constant medical attention. Cornea transplant donations that come from people who are deceased also improve quality of life. Now, people need to understand that it's only through the administration of the best possible health care as a person passes away that organs will be in the best condition and conducive to donation. So that's one fallacy that I hope will have been solved for Albertans right now.

Now, typically, Mr. Speaker, fear arises from the lack of knowledge. In fact, we fear what we don't understand and we don't have knowledge about. That's where all fear arises. With knowledge the fear of the unknown can dissipate, and with more knowledge, education, and information . . . [interjection] That's not a crock. Appropriate education, information, and knowledge would allow Albertans to fulfill their true giving nature and kind spirit, let their citizenship shine through, and help their fellow man.

Research has shown that a family's prior knowledge of donation and the donation process is one of the most important factors in determining a person's decision to donate. Another critical factor is how the family is asked or questioned about donation. In fact, imagine knowing the situation when a person is passing away: not only just asking the person or their family members if they're willing to donate but the method that the request is made is critical to determining whether or not a donation will be made.

Bill 201 has provisions to create an effective system for referral. Under this proposal the human organ procurement and exchange program, HOPE, and the Comprehensive Tissue Centre, CTC, existing agencies, would be notified by a physician or their hospital staff that a potential donor is available. The professional agencies would then use their existing resources, Mr. Speaker, to determine if the person had declared their wishes for organ and/or tissue donation. If so, there's no prolonged issue, but if not, the agency staff would use their expertise and training to assess whether the circumstances were appropriate to approach the person or their nearest relative and, if so, respectfully discuss their decision to make a donation.

Again I reiterate, Mr. Speaker, that though it's a sensitive situation and some people may consider it callous, only 5 per cent of hospital deaths lead to suitable organs and tissues for donation. So imagining that, again, half the population had registered for tissue and organ donation, that's another half of the population that may provide suitable organs for donation that had never considered it and need to be approached at the time when the issue is most critical. It is critical that suitable donors be approached even though it's a delicate situation in order to save lives and improve the quality of life of other Albertans.

The spreading of awareness among Albertans in our health care facilities is such a simple concept. What this concept needs, however, is direction. What this concept needs is leadership. What this concept needs is legislation in the form of Bill 201. The very fact that I've spoken to you about organ and tissue donation today and the fact that you are thinking about the issue now from all of the speeches that have gone on so far has led to an increased awareness and caused the message to go further for all Albertans. If one of us here today signs our donor form, which I did just today and which is found on the back of your Alberta Health card, if 10 of us express our wish to donate to our families, which I did this morning to my wife, if 20 of our friends and associates do so because we brought up the topic with them, if 100 Albertans because they hear about Bill 201 in the news tomorrow or read it in *Hansard* . . .

Mr. Martin: That's what a lot of people do.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. It might be a few more.

. . . then we can rest assured that we have been successful and spread the message to more. The steps may be small as we try to achieve our donation goals; however, any step forward is better than standing still. We can measure the success of this bill not simply by the statistics it creates but by the momentum of public opinion and degree of public knowledge it brings.

4:00

The methods behind Bill 201 are not rocket science, Mr. Speaker; they're quite simple. As we all know, simple ideas are often the most effective. Through the spreading of these ideas and explaining the opportunities of organ and tissue transplant, we can and will increase our levels of donation.

On that note, I call on all of you to help expand our provincial organ and tissue donation program. Let us show the rest of Canada and the entire world that we are leaders in this regard as well as many others. The first step, Mr. Speaker, personally I took today by signing my card, speaking to my wife and family about my intention to be a donor. I will be an organ donor if it works out to be such, hopefully not for a long time, but I will be eventually. The second step is in making this happen by passing Bill 201.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bill is generally a very good bill. It moves in the right direction. We can certainly support the principle that other speakers have talked about for deathbed consent, next of kin consent being given to human tissue gift agencies in absence of organ donor cards. Clearly, I think, as the mover of the bill brought forward, we have a problem in Alberta, and anything that we can do to save lives in the long run, I think in principle is very good.

I'm not going to go into the act specifically. I just want to wonder if there's been any thought given because of the privacy part of this particular act, and I'll be a little more specific. Under the act – it's in 8.4, I believe – it says,

a human tissue gift agency may share information it receives under this Act, including confidential personal information, with another human tissue gift agency if doing so is reasonably necessary to facilitate a transplant of human tissue.

Mr. Speaker, I can understand the need for this. I'm not sure if the member is aware of this, and I'll come to it, the implications that were drawn up in British Columbia. What if the agency in question is part of an American company that can then be obligated to submit Canadians' personal health records to American authorities under the USA PATRIOT Act? I don't know if the member is aware, but this was a major issue. It went to the law courts in British Columbia, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner in October 2004 talked about it. It had to do with health records, and this is an expansion of this particular part. Especially if we talk about privatization, there are going to be American companies more and more involved here if the government gets their way.

Regardless of that, this came up as a result of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union taking the British Columbia government to court. As a result of that, it went to the Privacy Commissioner. They asked the Privacy Commissioner there in British Columbia two questions.

1. Does the USA PATRIOT Act permit US authorities to access personal information of British Columbians that is, through the outsourcing of public services, in the custody or under the control of US-linked private sector service providers? If it does, under what conditions . . .

2. If it does, what are the implications for public body compliance with the personal privacy protections in FOIPPA?

I think this is a point that we have to make. I don't know how much discussion has gone into that.

Just as a general thing – and this is across Canada too – there is general consensus that U.S. authorities could at least under some circumstances use powers enacted by the USA PATRIOT Act to make orders for access to personal information located in Canada that is involved in the outsourcing of public body functions to a U.S. linked contractor.

Now, the point is: some people think that's more serious than others, but I think that there is a great deal of worry about privacy, and I think we have an act coming up in this session dealing with the PATRIOT Act in other ways. I think this is something that we should consider in terms of going through this particular bill.

Now, they came back with a number of recommendations. I won't go through all of them, but a couple of them, I think, are important in terms of our debate here. It says:

The government of British Columbia should amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act . . .

- (a) pending nation-to-nation agreement, as contemplated by Recommendation 16, prohibit personal information in the custody or under the control of a public body from being temporarily or permanently sent outside of Canada.

That was their number one recommendation there. Of course, they go on to say that it would be much better if we did this province by province and across the country and also work with other countries – the United States and Mexico they mention in it – down the way.

I just wanted to bring this to the attention of the mover of the motion, and I guess the question is at some point: has there been any thought that has gone into this? I think this could be a serious matter in terms of the privacy of an individual if American companies have access to our information. This is true of all health care records, but certainly this would be health care records.

As I say, generally we certainly support the principles of what the bill's trying to do, but I think there should be some thought about looking at the privacy. Perhaps we could take a look at what they did say in B.C. and see if there's any way that we can, if not eliminate, mitigate against the thought of some of these private records getting out where they shouldn't be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to also rise and join debate on Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006. I also want to acknowledge the hard work that the Member for Calgary-West has done to bring this forward today.

I think, Mr. Speaker, I can safely say that I'm not alone in my enthusiasm towards the measures proposed in this act. I'm sure it is painfully obvious that something needs to be done in order to increase the rates of organ and tissue donation in this province. It is something that is supported, no doubt, by the majority of the residents of my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace.

As Albertans I think we are among the most generous and caring people in the world. The current lacklustre status of organ and tissue donation doesn't result from a lack of generosity. I believe it is a direct result of a general lack of awareness. Realistically, how many of us have given serious thought to organ and tissue donation? By the time we are in a position to actually donate, we're well past the point of decision-making. The choice often falls to our family, a difficult choice, which becomes even more stressful if there has been

no thought given to the subject ahead of time. Imagine being in a hospital, where you've just been informed that a family member is breathing but might be brain-dead. There's no chance of recovery. Suddenly you're posed the question of organ and tissue donation. As I mentioned before, it has to be a tough choice. Will you be saving a life by allowing it? But will you also be going against the wishes of your loved one? Will you be allowing someone on a waiting list to die or continue suffering by refusing?

Things would be much easier if we all made our final wishes known. Unfortunately, this is a subject that many people are hesitant to bring up. It is, quite frankly, something that we don't normally like to think about. Without a catalyst of some sort, without prompting, it's highly unlikely that the subjects of death and donation will work themselves into everyday conversation. People like to think of themselves as immortal. It's a simple fact. Consideration of final affairs is often not open for discussion because we think it applies only to other people. Thousands of people who are currently suffering, even dying, while waiting for a transplant are paying for this attitude. We need to encourage discussion on this subject.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, I think that this will be the most beneficial aspect of Bill 201. It will serve to open a dialogue between Albertans. It will get them talking. It will plant the seed in their minds that a decision regarding organ and tissue donation is best made now rather than later. I especially like the way this issue is addressed by the bill in a nonforceful and informational fashion. We all know what happens when a topic is introduced too forcefully. There is normally a backlash. Whether from a telemarketer or a car salesman, it's quite basic human nature to reject anything that is shoved down our throats.

4:10

Bill 201 takes a more subtle approach to raising awareness, that I believe will be very effective in spreading the message to all Albertans. One measure proposed by the bill is to have the Minister of Health and Wellness investigate the inclusion of a letter that will be added every time an Albertan is issued an Alberta health care card or invoice. Such a letter would explain the organ and tissue donation process, urge Albertans to discuss organ and tissue donation with their families, and have a form attached that they could fill out if they decide to donate. This idea is a good means of broaching the subject of organ and tissue donation. Receiving a health care card or invoice would put the recipient in the proper frame of mind to consider important health choices. It might also serve as the much-needed catalyst to prompt a decision being made.

I think that most people, especially those with families, that see a request to consider organ and tissue donation included with their health information will no doubt consider the two in light of each other. The inclusion of a letter will illustrate the importance of making a decision regarding organ donation and put it in perspective. It will show that this decision is an important health care choice and make people realize that they have the potential to positively affect the lives of those in need.

Another method for increasing awareness that might be considered is an inquiry posed by the Alberta Registries agents when a driver's licence is renewed. Albertans could be asked to consider the question of organ and tissue donation when they renew their drivers' licences every five years. This is another unique and beneficial opportunity to increase awareness. It takes advantage of an appropriate time to bring up the subject of donation. Renewing an operator's licence, while it might seem to be a rather mundane activity on the surface, is actually a fairly significant procedure. A driver's licence shows that its holder is capable of operating a motor vehicle that is probably driven virtually daily.

Motor vehicle accidents take a terrible toll in Alberta. Every day, statistically speaking, one Albertan will die, over 70 will be injured, and over 300 will experience some sort of collision on our province's roads. These are sobering facts, and they are facts that might be a little closer to the front of someone's mind as they navigate the legal requirements for driving.

How does this relate to organ and tissue donation? As I said before, I believe one of the biggest obstacles to opening a dialogue, Mr. Speaker, on donation is the commonly held perception of immortality. The age-old "I'm not going to die any time soon, so this doesn't apply to me" belief is a huge barrier to discussion. In a climate of silence it is easier to hear a pin drop. Once we begin to overcome the initial reluctance to talk about these matters, I believe that there will be a groundswell of general discussion and a more open and frank atmosphere of discussion. The end result will be a dramatic increase in donation rates and an increase in the quality of life for those who are so desperately in need of organs and tissues.

This increased dialogue and level of social awareness would be enhanced by another idea proposed by the bill: asking the minister to consider the creation of an online donor registry. This idea would serve to add legitimacy to the concept of consenting as the wishes of an individual would be recorded in a concrete and permanent fashion. As people begin to give more serious consideration to donating their organs and tissues, they will want assurances to guarantee that their wishes are also known. A signed card carried in the wallet is an indication of consent, but I'm sure that many people worry about the very real possibility that this card may be separated from them in the event of an accident and that their wishes to become an organ donor would go unfulfilled. Measures like the consideration of an online registry that records the wishes of potential organ donors in much the same fashion as we record vital statistics and other such data would go a long way to answering these concerns. It could also be a vital tool in increasing the donation rate due to the assurance it would offer that wishes would be followed.

In general, the ideas suggested in the dialogue opened by Bill 201 will be vital in increasing awareness of organ donation amongst Albertans. Even discussing this bill as we are doing now is increasing awareness. Every small bit helps. For this reason alone, this bill has great potential to increase the donations to an acceptable level. As long as there is a need, as long as there are people suffering as they wait for a donor to become available, we have not met our objectives. This bill is a vital first step towards alleviating the pain of these people.

By opening a dialogue and making information available to Albertans, by breaking down social barriers that prevent discussion on the subject, we will increase the quality of life for countless people. By enabling a consideration of the establishment of an orderly system of recording the wishes of potential organ donors, we can increase that potential to eliminate doubt and provide peace of mind for individuals and families. Fewer Albertans would be forced to make agonizing choices on behalf of their loved ones. Fewer Albertans would be forced to live with the doubt that follows such a decision.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, this bill will go a long way towards injecting a measure of clarity into the present situation, which can be somewhat confusing and quite indistinct at times. Albertans on all sides of the donation issue will benefit from the general increase in awareness and improved record keeping. For these reasons, I'm very, very pleased to give this bill my enthusiastic support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to make a few comments on Bill 201, Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006. There's been, of course, long discussion amongst medical ethicists about this issue, so we are joining the discussion after some 30 years of looking at the whole issue of transplantation of organs and tissue gifts. Out of that discussion some have suggested, because of the huge need for tissue and for organs, that the removal of organs necessary to help people survive should be routine, and then people should be put in a position where if they don't want their bodies to be used for body parts harvesting for others, they should opt out in advance or veto in advance. Now, I'm totally against that kind of approach, and I'm glad that this bill focuses on the issue of consent. We're not in Siberia. Maybe I've seen a lot of science fiction movies, maybe too many, where we have the image of all kinds of bodies being kept alive for body parts in the future.

Actually, there is a real issue here about the definition of death. I think that over the years we've come to accept that the definition of death has to do with brain death, but you can keep a body alive hooked up to machines even after brain death has been determined. That puts that person in a very interesting status. I don't know what that status is.

An Hon. Member: Purgatory.

Dr. B. Miller: Purgatory. Right.

I think the issue of consent is really important, that a person be able to say in advance whether they want to donate their body for body parts or not.

One of the key moral questions is: to whom do body parts belong after you have died? To the state? Or do you still have some sort of connection to them? My definition of a human person is that a human person is an embodied person, so it's not the case that a person is a soul with a body that's attached; rather, the body is essential to one's identity. If a body is to be made available, it must be as a gift, so the person at some point in their life must be able to decide that they're going to donate their body. It must always be a question of giving, not the taking of body parts. Our language sometimes moves away from the notion of giving to the taking of body parts or the harvesting of body parts. Consent is really important, so I'm glad that this bill focuses on consent, asking people what they think.

4:20

I have real problems with the focus on going to a dying person for consent. I mean, the decision about donating your body should be made much, much earlier, and the suggestions about the use of drivers' licences or health cards is really important. When you come to the end of your life, it's enough that you have to be able to deal with your own pain and your own suffering and your own death, and that's extremely important.

There's a famous book – it's a classic – that was written by Leo Tolstoy called *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, which actually was published in the 19th century. It depicts the stages of death that people go through. Elisabeth Kübler Ross in recent years outlined those stages: rejection, anger, and finally acceptance. That book brings it out quite vividly. When you come to the end, you have to face all kinds of issues about your own pain and your own death. Most of the time that takes place in a hospital, and you're surrounded by professionals, and maybe you're hooked up to machines. In the midst of that somebody is going to come in and ask you for consent about your body after you've died. I mean, there are all kinds of problems with that.

I realize that there's a great need for more bodies, cadavers, being available, but to intrude at that point on a person's freedom to be able to deal with their own pain and their own suffering and their own death and ask them about – well, as one commentator puts it, it's a ghoulish request, and I think that it doesn't show a lot of sensitivity. So I have problems with that.

Also, the issue of relatives. If a person is not able to give consent as they are dying, then maybe relatives can give consent. I think there are some problems with that. I mean, surveys indicate – and this is an interesting one – that more people are willing to donate their relatives' organs than their own. That raises the issue of, well, the person having a kind of autonomy in giving their consent. I don't know if the relatives' consent is equal to the individual being able to give the consent themselves. So I have some problems with that. I think that the emphasis on asking the dying person for consent is, of course, way too late.

All of the emphasis should be on trying to strengthen the programs that raise awareness, as has been mentioned, and to also look at the use of health care cards and drivers' licences, to intervene when people actually have to get a particular licence and then be asked a question. Maybe we should have a required request of persons about whether they're willing to consent or not. For example, the question could be asked: are you willing to donate your organs after your death? The person could answer on the card yes or no or I don't know, and the I don't know should be respected.

One other point that I wanted to make which I thought was very good. I mean, we're dealing with a serious moral issue here about the nature of death. I like the proviso in terms of talking to people about their consent, that their religious beliefs would be acknowledged and recognized, because a lot of people have very definite religious beliefs about their death and about their bodies. I think that there is a kind of sacred aura that surrounds one's body. So that sacred aura has to be acknowledged, and that many people have specific religious beliefs that would lead them to refuse to sign a donor card has to be recognized. It means that it puts a lot of onus on those people who are going to go in and talk to dying people to seek their consent, that they have to have some sort of knowledge about the various religions and be sensitive about where a person is coming from in terms of their religious belief.

Those are the only comments I have, so in general I approve the principle and the direction of this bill, but I just have a few problems about how the issue of consent is handled. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and join the debate today on Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-West. I believe that this bill addresses some very important issues that we as a society are faced with. This bill promotes a model of organ and tissue donation that respects the rights of families dealing with the tragic loss of a loved one while acknowledging the gift of life that donated organs and tissues can provide.

The decision to donate organs and tissues is not a decision that should be made lightly. Research has shown us that one of the contributing factors as to the willingness of families to donate a loved one's organs and tissues is the manner in which they are approached. Mr. Speaker, if you can imagine a situation where a young woman has just been informed by a doctor that she is now a

widow and will have to raise the couple's children on her own, it's very difficult for that same doctor to then approach the young lady and discuss the possibility of organ donation. Immediately following the loss of a loved one your thoughts are about them and what you need to do to help them, not necessarily on helping others.

Mr. Speaker, despite the best intentions of the attending physician they're placed in a very tenuous position. It's very hard to express sympathy for a family's loss while at the same time mentioning that the recently deceased person's organs would be of great benefit to others. It's hard for some families to believe that everything possible has been done to save their loved one while being told that their loved one's organs are being greatly needed to save several other lives. I believe that doctors may be too attached to the grief or loss to be able to effectively encourage the gift side of the organ and tissue donation equation.

As I mentioned earlier, how a family is approached is very important. An important component of how you are approached is who's approaching you. There are many things that I would do if my wife asked me to but would not do if someone else asked me. That's why I feel that Bill 201 is very important. The mandatory referral process outlined in Bill 201 I believe will help to ensure that people are approached professionally and that doctors are freed from the double burden of talking to a family about the loss and the potential organ donation.

Mr. Speaker, under Bill 201 when a patient dies or when death is imminent, the hospital would be responsible for contacting the human tissue gift agency and providing them with all of the patient's relevant medical information. After receiving the necessary medical information, the agency is responsible for determining whether or not the dying or recently deceased individual is an eligible donor. If the patient is an eligible donor, then the professionals at the agency, who are specifically trained to approach families in a respectful and considerate manner, will contact the family members. Professionals from the agency have the advantage of being at arm's length from the process. They do not have an emotional attachment to the situation. They're not associated with the loss side of the organ donation equation. They're well-trained professionals who will approach people in a manner which will likely increase organ and tissue donation.

Mr. Speaker, some critics have argued that creating a mandatory referral process for organ donation creates ethical concerns. These critics are worried that by reporting imminent deaths, doctors will alter their treatment of patients in order to secure their organs for transplant. Potential critics are worried that patients with a poor but not hopeless prognosis will undergo invasive and potentially painful procedures for the sole purpose of prolonging the patient's life for the purpose of organ donation.

4:30

Although I understand the reasons behind this concern with Bill 201, I do not believe that the mandatory referral process will create an ethical dilemma. The mandatory referral process allows the doctors to remain neutral in the organ donation process. Mr. Speaker, under the current system doctors are first and foremost charged with the responsibility of looking after the best interests of their patients. The new system proposed in Bill 201 ensures that the doctors' role of protecting the best interests of their patients is protected and enhanced. No longer is it the doctor who is responsible for talking to the family about organ donation. In the mandatory referral process the doctor makes a call to the human tissue gift agency. After making the call, the doctor's role in the organ donation process is complete. The doctor can now return to treating the patient in a manner that best reflects the interests of the patient and the patient's family.

I do not accept the argument that the mandatory referral process will change the type of medical treatment that a doctor provides his patient. Under the proposed system doctors are not directly involved in the organ donation decision. They are responsible first and foremost for the patient currently in their care. The only responsibility they have to the system is a phone call to a 1-800 number. The new system clearly enhances a doctor's ability to help their patient by ensuring that they represent the patient and the patient's family and their desires during the end of life.

Mr. Speaker, another criticism that has been raised relates to rural Alberta. Concerns have been raised that rural Alberta lacks the facilities to handle donations. That may very well be the case currently, but we can't forget that one of the primary goals of Bill 201 is to increase organ and tissue donation in our province. As organ and tissue donations increase, I believe that the capacity to collect donations possessed by the human gift agencies will also expand. If this government is committed to rural development, as part of rural development it is important that necessary health services are available to Albertans in all regions of the province. It's important that we don't overlook rural Alberta in our attempt to increase organ and tissue donation. Approximately one-third of Albertans live outside of the Calgary and capital regions. In our efforts to increase organ and tissue donation levels, I believe we'd be in error by automatically excluding rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not naive enough to assume that the necessary facilities for major organ donation will be available in every community; however, tissue donations do not require the same level of sophistication and could therefore more easily be accomplished in smaller more rural centres. Additionally, I do not believe that rural Alberta would have that many referrals to a human gift agency. I'm under the impression that most current referrals come from Calgary and Edmonton. Most cases of brain death end up occurring in the province's two major health regions because the most critical patients are transferred there from rural areas. I believe that most often direct referrals that come from rural Alberta physicians would be in regard to tissue donations. Building the capacity for tissue donations is much easier than building capacity for organ donation.

Mr. Speaker, a final concern with Bill 201 that has been noted relates to privacy. This bill does not require the sharing of personal health information between the hospitals and the tissue agencies. Any time that we're talking about someone's personal health information, even in death, it is important to ensure that this information is not used inappropriately. I believe that the information that will be shared under Bill 201 is not excessive, nor is it unjustifiable. The only information that will be shared is information that is pertinent to the potential donation. Use of this information is severely restricted and subject to our province's excellent privacy laws.

At the same time, I believe that the use of the personal information is also justifiable. We permit medical practitioners to share health information about their patients when the sharing of the information is in the best interests of the general public. This process is followed with several venereal and communicable diseases. The sharing of the medical information pertinent to organ donation, I believe, will help to save the lives of many Albertans. It is for this reason that I believe that the sharing of personal health information as proposed in Bill 201 is appropriate.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that I believe this bill is one of the more important pieces of legislation that we will be asked to deal with this year. This legislation is necessary to help ensure the continuing health and well-being of Albertans. I believe that the mandatory referral system will increase organ donation and help to

ensure that Alberta's health care system remains among the best in the world.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006. I listened with interest to hon. members who spoke previously. Certainly, this is an issue that is sensitive to many people regardless of their religious views or their particular circumstances, and one has to be respectful of that. This bill, as I understand it, will certainly establish a systematic way of considering potential donors and approaching families of potential donors for consent, and how that consent is given or granted is very important.

Mr. Speaker, before I go any further, I think now would be an appropriate time to thank you and your office for providing to me and, I assume, to every other member information in regard to private members' public bills given royal assent between 1993 and 2005 as of December 1, 2005. I was looking at this one evening last week, and I was astonished to . . . [interjection] I'm sorry, hon. member? [interjection] Pardon me?

The Speaker: Hon. members, through the chair, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, yes. Certainly, there's not one of the bills that I proposed on this list, but interestingly enough, for the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, there's one from 1998, the Human Tissue Donation Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who is currently the hon. Minister of Children's Services. This bill, according to the document that I received from the Speaker's office, requires hospitals to establish policies and procedures governing the donation and transplant of human tissue, and this bill, according to what I received, is still awaiting proclamation.

During the course of the debate on Bill 201 I would appreciate an explanation from the hon. member who initially brought this bill before the House in 1998 as to why this never received proclamation. Certainly, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is absolutely correct when he indicates that this is an issue of importance, and it should be dealt with. So through the course of debate, Mr. Speaker, I would be very grateful for an explanation as to why this bill in 1998 was never proclaimed.

This bill, as I understand it, formalizes, again, a procedure requiring an agency to request consent for organ and tissue donation from an individual or family. We have to be very, very careful, Mr. Speaker, because we know that medical procedures and techniques are changing all the time while we debate this bill and, I'm certain, while this bill was being drafted. There is the case in France where a woman was mauled or disfigured by a dog, and she had part of her face removed and a transplant done. That certainly attracted a lot of media attention. We've seen in the last week a young man from Winnipeg, I believe, who was just days old and received a heart transplant. So the procedures are really becoming very advanced.

4:40

Hopefully, if we were to pass a bill like this, we wouldn't wait seven years for proclamation like the last time, but we would act on this. We always have to be very careful, Mr. Speaker, with these new, developing technologies that body parts or organs don't become a commodity. This, unfortunately, has happened in other parts of the world. There are certainly cases where there has been

exploitation of people with modest or no income who are looking at ways to support their family, where they sell a kidney. There are some areas of the world where this happens. There are some other areas of the world where people are kidnapped. They wake up, and there have been examples where a kidney, again, has been removed without anyone's consent. These individuals consider themselves lucky to still be alive.

So, certainly, we must ensure that those sorts of practices never, never occur here because, as previous speakers have indicated, it is a moral issue. We need to ensure, as we encourage people and families in very difficult times, that that is an option that they may wish to exercise; that is, to donate an organ or a body part to assist someone else.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, if it was to be passed and to become law, may help someone in the future. I'm not going to give a long list of the transplant procedures that are available or the waiting list that is occurring at this time in this province. Other speakers have certainly outlined that.

In conclusion, we have to be very, very careful about this. We do not want any human tissue to become a commodity. It should be up to the individual and the individual's family members whether or not they want to participate in any way in donation of a human tissue or an organ. We will wait, and we will see how all this develops, but I am anxious to hear why the previous bill from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek never was proclaimed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at approximately 5:15 I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-West to conclude the debate on this, but just to advise members, we have about 31 minutes, and there are six or seven members who have advised me they wish to participate. So I just provide that as a point of interest.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and join in the debate on Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006. I'd like to begin my remarks by congratulating the Member for Calgary-West on bringing forward such an intriguing piece of legislation. I say intriguing because Bill 201 opens debate on a topic which is not generally discussed. Organ and tissue donation is an issue which should be discussed openly in our province. Admittedly, the topic is somewhat morbid; however, ignoring the inevitability of one's death is a ludicrous idea. After all, there are only two certainties in life: death and taxes. While the government has been working at reducing the second, I don't believe there's much chance that we can reduce the first.

Mr. Speaker, the death of any individual is a sorrowful event, and this sorrow is heightened when the individual was healthy and in the prime of their life. However, from such tragic circumstances comes the opportunity for another person to live out a long and healthy life. Organ and tissue donation brings a new lease on life for individuals suffering from a myriad of ailments. From heart problems to liver failure to blindness the donation of tissues and organs can greatly help another person. Sadly, our rate of donation is extremely low. I believe this to be a direct product of a lack of discussion and planning surrounding this issue. I can't believe it's anything other than an oversight on the part of Albertans to make their wishes known because we in this Chamber have the privilege of living in one of the most philanthropic provinces in the country.

Albertans give their time, energy, and expertise to a variety of causes as volunteers. In fact, over 50 per cent of us donate our time in some way, more than any other province in the country. Alber-

tans have the third highest rate of charitable donations of any province in this country. Obviously, we are a province of people willing to help others. So why do we have such a low incidence of organ and tissue donation?

The only answer is a lack of awareness, and it is this lack of knowledge and awareness that Bill 201 addresses. It seeks to raise the awareness of Albertans of this issue and demonstrate the help that people can give. To be honest, I am one of the many Albertans who simply don't realize how much help they can give by addressing this issue with their family. Before this bill was brought to my attention, I wasn't aware of the difference between organ and tissue donation or the extent of the tissues which can be donated.

Bill 201 proposes simple measures which complement the programs currently in place to increase the rate of organ and tissue donation in our province. This is done by raising awareness in the public and by streamlining the process through which organ and tissue procurement and placement is achieved. Mr. Speaker, these are simple changes to our current system, but I believe that they have the opportunity to radically increase the level of donation in our province. The actions proposed would allow Alberta to catch up to the systems currently in place in other jurisdictions which helped them increase the rate of organ and tissue donation.

Now, in previous discussions there have been points raised that highlight obstacles which other jurisdictions have encountered when trying to implement new systems with respect to organ and tissue donation. In some instances these attempts in other jurisdictions have been held up as a reason to not implement change in our own system. I could not disagree more with this line of reasoning. Mr. Speaker, somebody somewhere has to be bold enough to be the first to attempt a new way of doing something, or systems and procedures become stagnant. This attempt may turn out to be a great success, and it may turn out to be a great disaster. However, the experiments of other jurisdictions provide us and others an opportunity to learn from the difficulties which they encountered and use that knowledge to ensure that we do not make the same mistakes.

Mr. Speaker, a few years ago a jurisdiction sought to make changes to their organ and tissue procurement and placement program. The implementation of a more streamlined and comprehensive system to allow more citizens to register themselves for organ and tissue donation had the potential to increase donor rates. Unfortunately, this was not the result, and donation rates remained at the same level as before.

The failure of these changes to increase organ and tissue donation rates provides us with the opportunity to examine why this happened. It is my understanding that the changes to the system were not accompanied by an aggressive public information campaign to increase awareness of the issue. By not raising awareness, the majority of the public would not know that any changes had even taken place, let alone what those changes were.

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue which plagues every government across the country. How to get a message out is something which communications personnel deal with every day. Governments can issue press releases on a subject, but there's not a large percentage of the population who read a government press release. If the release is not picked up by the media, then there are very few members of the public who will be aware of any changes. One way to ensure that the public is made aware of a government initiative is to put together an advertising campaign. Through radio, television, and print media a government could then convey changes which affect people. However, the drawback to this is that it is costly. The measure suggested in Bill 201 to raise public awareness strikes a balance between the two extremes described above.

One possibility aimed at increasing awareness about organ and

tissue donation is sending every Albertan an information letter. If Bill 201 is passed, the letter would potentially be sent to Albertans whenever they are issued an Alberta health care card or invoice. Additionally, this letter can be included in the Alberta driver's licence and Alberta vehicle registration renewal reminder notices.

4:50

If the sending of this letter comes to pass, it could explain the organ and tissue donation process, urge Albertans to discuss organ and tissue donation with their family, and have a form attached that Albertans could fill out if they decide to donate. The benefit of such a campaign is that there is time to have this program return results. It is not necessary that every Albertan instantly know about changes to the provincial organ and tissue procurement system. Also, by necessity, Alberta households would receive this letter several times on different dates if there is more than one person living in the household. This would provide more opportunities for discussion surrounding this issue and give families a greater number of opportunities to understand the wishes of their loved ones in this respect.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the public information section of Bill 201 will be the most beneficial in terms of raising the number of Albertans who choose to donate tissues and organs. I support the measures outlined in Bill 201 because it is necessary to raise awareness about organ and tissue donation in our province. Albertans are generous people, who are always more than willing to help out those in need. By raising awareness and understanding of the subject, I believe that we will see a marked increase in the number of Albertans who will take the time to fill out their organ donor cards and to make their wishes known to their families.

I would ask all members to stand with me in support of Bill 201, Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't realize I was up quite so quick, but I appreciate the time to stand up and to debate Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, as well. I've enjoyed the debate that has gone on so far and the many good points that have been brought forth. Because of the number of people that want to speak, I'll try and just speak to those issues that haven't been addressed yet.

I'd like to thank, though, the Member for Calgary-West for bringing this forward, and perhaps I'd like to start off by thanking the Member for Battle River-Wainwright for acting now and signing the back of his health care card. I've personally had two experiences in my own life back in the '70s and '80s concerning tissue and organ donation, so it's been near and dear to me for a long time and to many of those around me and my family. I hope that this awareness will go forward and that it will be a great benefit to Albertans.

I'd like to put a question, though, to the Member for Red Deer-North. I believe that not only taxes have been reduced in this province. Deaths have been reduced a great deal in the research that's been done through state-of-the-art facilities adopting new techniques and world-class research. Just today they're releasing some wonderful research from Calgary benefiting diabetics, being able to do tissue transplants into the liver in order for those with diabetes to be able to start producing insulin again. It's very encouraging.

One of the areas that I really would like to bring into the debate, though, is the question of the donor card, and there's been much

debate about that already. The province just recently put out \$400 cheques to every Albertan, and that was graciously received by almost every Albertan that I'm aware of. The problem is that we spent over \$10 million to distribute that, and there have been some sad cases, as we all know, of those who were wrongful recipients.

I would like to address the fact that perhaps with this Bill 201 and an ID card here in the province – and we know that they're talking about it in order to go through the States and to travel – we should maybe be putting some money towards a good ID program and that when people do receive their ID card, it is on there, and it is a question. One of the biggest problems that we have is awareness and the knowledge that this is wonderful and great and . . .

Rev. Abbott: Socialism.

Mr. Hinman: Socialism?

Well, if we have the ID cards, let's have it so that the question is on there. If my memory serves me, originally I signed my driver's licence and then a health care card. Now, what are we going to do in the future? Because of the problems in the health care system and the fact that we don't even know who has the health care cards, perhaps this is the time to look at changing and updating those and having an ID card that would serve the interests of all Albertans and help us to identify and reduce the fraud that's going on in the health care system at this current time.

Going back to reducing death or reducing taxes, it seems like the only excuse for reducing taxes is if this government is taking two steps forward and then half a step back. So I would, like I say, question the Member for Red Deer-North.

I am very much in favour of this bill and the intent of it. I appreciate the debate that assumed consent is not what we want, though it is being debated in other jurisdictions. I also agree with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in that we want to make sure that this does not get into the money side and the business side of it. This is giving, as we do with blood here in the province.

In closing, I just hope that this bill will not only pass here in the House but will also receive royal assent. Thank you.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be given the opportunity to join in the discussion on the human tissue gift amendment act. I support Bill 201 because I believe it will lead to greater numbers of organ and tissue donations by Albertans, therefore enhancing the quality of life for those waiting for organ or tissue transplants. This will be achieved mainly due to the bill's focus on enhancing people's awareness through debate and giving Albertans the opportunity to identify themselves as possible future donors.

Additionally, when a person passes away, Bill 201 proposes that all hospitals be required to notify the human gift tissue agencies, thus helping to enhance organ and tissue donation rates. This process would be referred to as the mandatory referral.

In the United States several states have already legislated such a process, known as the routine notification. In accordance with this act all hospital deaths or impending deaths must be reported to local organ procurement organizations, or OPOs, by hospital staff. Many hospitals in other states chose to participate in the system of routine notification even though it is not part of the states' laws. States where routine notification practices are in place, whether legislated or used voluntarily, have seen increases in donations. For example, in Pennsylvania they have seen great increases in the number of

tissue and organ donations since new donation laws were instituted in 1994. In the United States as a whole 50 states and the District of Columbia have chosen to legislate a process known as required request. This system requires hospitals to discuss donations with families once a doctor has diagnosed a patient as having brain death.

Many states have also looked at the idea of the mandated choice. This allows individuals to actually express their wishes regarding organ and tissue donation on paper while they're still living. Several states use the driver's licence renewal as the time to have people document their wishes. These programs have helped the United States increase the number of organ and tissue donations. Canadians have approximately 14 organ donors for every million people, whereas countries such as the United States, Spain, and Portugal have somewhere between 20 and 32 for every million people.

Here in Alberta in 2003, Mr. Speaker, there were approximately 12 organ donors per million people. These numbers indicate quite a significant difference in the number of donors in this province and the country as a whole compared to other countries with more successful programs for organ donation. Bill 201 hopes to improve Alberta's donation rates by implementing a system of mandatory referral. Mandatory referral would help to enhance donations within the province of tissues that one is able to donate, including eyes, cartilage, and tendons, just to name a few.

In the United States about 1 million tissue transplants are done annually. Here at home our rates are not nearly so good. In Alberta in 2003 there were approximately 19,000 deaths, resulting in only 91 tissue donors. This gives you some idea of how far behind we are in encouraging individuals to consider tissue donation and instituting effective programs to ensure that this occurs.

5:00

As Albertans we need to be concerned not only with how low tissue donation rates are, but also, as a result of these low rates, we are often required to buy tissues from the United States to address these shortages. This is quite costly, Mr. Speaker. Not only is it costly, but there have been many problems with these tissues in the past. For example, in January there were several reports of a New Jersey company who had not obtained the needed consent to remove tissues from those who had passed. These tissues were sold to Alberta facilities and given to Albertans who were waiting for tissue transplants. This case is quite frightening, and I believe that if we were able to get more tissue donors here at home, we would be more certain that these tissues were properly obtained and safe for recipients.

Transplants can also be cost-effective in certain cases, such as kidney transplants. Mr. Speaker, it costs approximately \$50,000 per year to have a person on dialysis. A kidney transplant costs around \$25,000 for the initial surgery and somewhere around \$6,000 per year following the transplant. Thus, kidney transplants are less expensive and generally improve the quality of life for the recipient.

Like the United States, Canadian provinces have also passed legislation to help improve donation rates and, although they are fairly new programs, are experiencing a good deal of success. In Ontario routine notification and requests have recently been legislated. All deaths in hospitals or inevitable deaths due to brain death must be reported to the Trillium Gift of Life Network, as legislated under the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act. The network is responsible for deciding whether or not to approach the family of a deceased individual to discuss donation. They are also responsible for co-ordinating donations in general. Although this program only began this year, it is based on a pilot concluded during the summer of 2005. This pilot program included seven hospitals, and the results of the trial were a 26 per cent increase in tissue and organ donation.

Manitoba has a similar system to ensure that those in need of donations receive them. Under the Human Tissue Gift Act hospitals are required to notify one of the human tissue gift agencies whenever the death of a patient is imminent, when a patient dies, or when the body of a deceased person is delivered to the facility. Once an agency has been notified, it is up to them to determine whether or not to approach the family regarding organ or tissue donation. This particular piece of legislation allows the agencies as a group to determine the amount of notification time to be given by hospitals to the agencies and which agency is to be given notice.

Therefore, although it is still early, Ontario and Manitoba are two Canadian jurisdictions where new legislation on organ and tissue donation appears to be working quite effectively.

Looking at these two examples and numerous states which have legislated either routine notification or require request, one can see that action of this type may be helpful in this province as well. Creating a dialogue to increase donation is a key aspect of this bill. If we can raise Albertans' awareness of the need for organ and tissue donations, we will hopefully be able to greatly improve the number of tissues and organs donated in this province and thus save and improve the lives of Albertans waiting for transplants.

I support Bill 201, Mr. Speaker, but I feel that the bill does not go quite far enough. This is a step in the right direction, but we need to do more to address the challenges of increasing organ and tissue donation.

Thank you very much for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have approximately 10 minutes left, and there are three speakers on the list. We'll go to the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006. The subject this bill deals with is a difficult one for most people. Death is a topic that most people find rather hard to think about, especially when it involves themselves or a loved one. Death is a natural and inevitable part of life. It is something that everyone will have to face at some point. We can't avoid it. We can only hope for a long, healthy, and productive life.

For some of us, Mr. Speaker, this wish is granted, but for others it unfortunately is not. There are far too many people that because of accident or disease pass away too soon. There are far too many more that suffer terribly and needlessly because of medical problems that can be cured with donated organs or tissues. As we speak, there are Albertans who face the same situation of uncertainty. They wait and wait, often in an increasing state of pain and discomfort, for a donor to become available. For some the wait is too long, and another family has to bear the pain of a preventable loss.

Some losses are not preventable. This is also a fact of life. Sometimes our loved ones are taken away from us suddenly and without warning in the prime of their lives, and there is nothing we can do to stop it. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are no guarantees for any of us. Sometimes there is nothing we can do to prevent death. Sometimes there is, however. Even in death there is the potential to give the gift of life, to ease the pain and suffering for someone on a transplant list and give hope back to their family. This is what Bill 201 is about: hope. For every Albertan who makes their wishes about organ donation known, there are a multitude who do not. This bill will be a vital tool in improving these figures. It will be an effective instrument to tap the natural generosity of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, one function of Bill 201 will be to open a dialogue amongst Alberta families. It will get them talking about organ and

tissue donation, and with any luck we will see a dramatic increase in the number of people who address the subject and provide their consent before it is too late. Perhaps more importantly, however, Bill 201 will simplify the donation procedure by establishing a clear and distinct process for a doctor to initiate when an individual becomes a candidate for organ or tissue donation. Speed and efficiency are key in the donation procedure. The more quickly the process occurs, the more likely it is to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, what Bill 201 proposes is a single-point initiation approach, meaning that a physician would only need to make one phone call to put the procedure in motion.

Mr. Speaker, doctors have an incredible wealth of knowledge about a staggering variety of issues, but their primary focus is on treatment of patients and diseases. There are organizations such as the human organ procurement and exchange, that specializes in organ and tissue donation. As it is their primary focus, they are the ones that are equipped to efficiently, respectfully, and effectively deal with the donation process.

Mr. Speaker, under the system proposed by Bill 201, a hospital would be required to notify a human tissue agency when a patient dies or when death is imminent or inevitable or when the hospital receives the body of a deceased person. By making this contact a requirement, fewer opportunities for donation will be missed. Once a human tissue gift agency is contacted, a detailed assessment of the suitability of a donor would commence. The wishes of the individual in question would be examined. If the donor had previously given consent, the agency would determine this fact. If the patient is deemed medically suitable to be an organ or tissue donor, the harvesting process would begin.

Consultation, Mr. Speaker, between the agency and physicians would ensure that all medical requirements were met. In short, a greater degree of efficiency and co-operation would result. The involvement of an agency in cases where consent had not previously been obtained would also be valuable in dealing with the family members of potential donors.

Mr. Speaker, asking a family to give consent to organ and tissue donation immediately after learning that their loved one is either deceased or about to die is a hard and horrible process. At the worst time in their lives they are being faced with a decision that may have received no prior thought or consultation. People from these agencies are trained professionals. They are trained and qualified to broach the subject of organ and tissue donation in a respectful yet encouraging manner. Furthermore, they are extremely knowledgeable and able to answer any questions the family might have. A general lack of awareness is one of the root causes of low donation rates, so it is only natural that a professional with a high degree of knowledge should be present to give the information.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that this lack of knowledge is a major factor in most decisions that are made against organ and tissue donation. People are inclined by nature to reject a process they don't understand. It is basic human nature. This is why it is vital to have these answers readily available when the situation presents itself. Families need to be aware of the importance of their decisions. They need to know exactly how their choice will affect the lives of those who are waiting on a transplant list. The choice will always be a difficult one, but the presence and guidance of a professional will ensure that making it becomes easier. If the guidance results in one new set of lungs for a person struggling to breathe or the gift of sight to one person who is waiting for a cornea, it will be well worth the effort.

Aside from providing information and counselling services to

families, the measures proposed by Bill 201 will increase organ and tissue donation rates by introducing an increased level of co-operation and efficiency into what can be at times a very confusing system. Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 will authorize and require hospitals to co-operate with agencies and share information about patient suitability. Furthermore, it would enable agencies to establish requirements to contact one another to maximize the potential amount of donations from a patient when appropriate. This level of communication and co-operation will greatly streamline the entire procedure. Bill 201 will not only enable the process to be started with a single contact; it will allow that contact to set in motion a process of highly co-ordinated interagency co-operation. The end result will be a maximized level of efficiency and a maximized increase in the quality of life for Albertans.

Everyone in the province is grateful for the prosperity we enjoy. Alberta is a place that presents its citizens with the best opportunities available anywhere. We have the best job market, the best economy, and the best record of leading the country in innovation. It is high time that our policies on organ and tissue donation caught up to this trend. Right now we are far from leading the country in donations, and Albertans are suffering, families are suffering, and children are suffering. Our current legislation, the Human Tissue Gift Act, dates back to 1973, 33 years ago. The world was a different place, technology was different, society was different, and medicine was different. It is high time we updated that legislation. It is time we join provinces like Manitoba and Ontario who have systems in place that are similar to those proposed by Bill 201. In short, Mr. Speaker, it's time we gave organ and tissue donation a shot in the arm.

When considering the benefits of this bill, I am thinking of every Albertan who is waiting and hoping for a donated organ or donated tissue. I am thinking of their families. I'm thinking of their children. I'm thinking that with this legislation we have a great opportunity to ease their pain because easing the pain and suffering that accompany a desperate situation should be the ultimate goal of organ and tissue donation.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I would like to offer a few words of caution. While I am in favour of the principles of this bill and I believe that it represents a tremendous step for those in life-threatening or grave situations, I believe we also must discuss measures that would ensure that donated tissues are not used for procedures that are cosmetic in nature.

With Bill 201, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we can encourage the generosity of Albertans and make it easier for them to give the gift of life. In supporting this bill we have much to gain, and I encourage all my colleagues to vote on this. Thank you.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many of the more than 500 Albertans awaiting a transplant in this province this is truly a matter of life and death. Citing statistics from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, in 2004 forty-two Albertans died waiting for a transplant. Even more discouraging is the fact that five of these individuals were young children. For others an organ transplant can mean a much improved quality of life, freeing many from long and stressful and costly ongoing treatments such as dialysis.

I note the remarks of the hon. Member for Calgary-West regarding the possibility of having some sort of notation on the driver's licence card. I believe this is a useful suggestion. With such a notation the family of the deceased person could see the wishes of the deceased person on the driver's licence and they're much more likely to understand the wishes of their loved ones.

The purpose of the bill is to create awareness about Alberta's

organ and tissue donation. I believe the act will increase organ and tissue donation rates within the province, and I ask all hon. members to support it.

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With the one minute that is left, I would quite simply say that I am in full support of this bill. This is a bill that I actually looked at in 1994, when I was a private member as well. At that particular point in time and that particular point in history, the whole idea of potential presumed consent was something that was a nonstarter.

I really commend the hon. member for bringing in presumed consent with a caveat, which, in essence, is a caveat that the next of kin can say yes or no, and I think that overall it's going to be wonderful.

I'd love to talk more on it, but quite simply, Mr. Speaker, what we have the potential for here, and to coin a couple of cliches, I know, is that we can give a gift of life out of the tragedy of death.

The Speaker: Well, I think, hon. members, that everyone on the list has had a chance to participate, so I'll invite the hon. Member for Calgary-West now to close the debate.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much. Thanks to all members who

participated in the debate today. I'm glad that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation had a chance to make a couple of comments because his experience as a medical doctor is important.

There were several questions raised during the debate. A couple are very easy to answer. One was: what are the goals of this legislation? Clearly, there's only one goal, and that would be that no one dies waiting for an organ donation.

There were other comments made relative to the privacy laws. We have checked with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and they find no problems with the particular legislation.

I guess the final comment, Mr. Speaker, would be that I can't comment on why previous initiatives weren't successful. However, if one looks at page 6 of the legislation, this act comes into effect on January 1, 2007, if passed.

With that, I would just like to again thank everyone. I'd move second reading of the bill, and that concludes my remarks.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:19 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, February 27, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/02/27

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

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

High-speed Rail System

501. Mr. Backs moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to develop an electric high-speed rail system by 2012 with a route that would include Edmonton city centre, Edmonton International Airport, Calgary International Airport, and Calgary city centre.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes it is time to dream, and other times it is necessary to act, to do something to create new beginnings. If we do not act soon on high-speed rail, many of Alberta's options will begin to disappear and potential costs will increase dramatically. This will be especially true as the land for right-of-way along possible routes is developed for other uses. It costs much more to buy when it is built up.

If we are to even adequately plan for a better Alberta, we must move on high-speed rail soon. So often this Conservative government of our province fails to look ahead, fails to plan, and fails to act when opportunities arise. Timidity and lack of vision should not be the words that are used to describe the government of the province of our Alberta.

High-speed rail has been killed many times. Big interests have opposed high-speed rail in the past. It does not fit the auto, oil, and highway ethos that dominated the second half of the 20th century in Alberta, but it isn't the 20th century anymore. High-speed rail has been around for many years and has proven very successful in many parts of the world, but government in Alberta has thrown all the public dollars into highways and airports. There has been little to no support for the passenger rail service that actually dominated our province here a century ago.

If you go to much of Europe and Asia and even the United States, you see modern rail service. You see high-speed rail service that is a key part of healthy economies and integral to economic development. We have reached the population levels in Alberta that can justify such a population link. It is vital for the economic health of our Alberta that we take our responsibility here seriously. This is not an exercise in picking winners like Alberta endured when an earlier Tory regime bungled diversification attempts in the 1980s. Rail development is an investment in transportation infrastructure. It is an investment in growth, and it is clearly an investment in economic development and the future.

It should be obvious that high-speed rail cannot be viewed as a stand-alone business that will be developed aside and apart from the public interest. Why do we continue to subsidize highways if this is the case? Why do we consider LRT to be a public good? There will be a need for government commitment and investment in the future public interest of all Albertans. High-speed rail will need a commitment of public dollars, but these investments will save government expenditures in other areas.

Clean air and reduced emissions are now worth something. Certainly, an electric high-speed rail system will be much cleaner

environmentally than the hundreds of thousands of cars belching out pollutants as they head between and in our cities. Wouldn't it be nice to remove that choking brown haze that so often envelopes Calgary and sometimes Edmonton? The lack of air pollution is a clear public good created by electric rail transportation.

We'll pave less of our prime Alberta farmland. High-speed rail will save a hyperwidening of the QE II highway and other roads. If we can save a good portion of the costs of increasing capacity on that highway alone, we could save billions that would have had to have been spent by the public purse. We'll save in maintenance. Highway expansion and upkeep is not cheap in a cold climate. Remember that steel rails don't grow potholes.

With high-speed rail Alberta will save in health care costs. In 2004 there were 24,289 injured and 387 people killed in traffic accidents in Alberta. A lot of people get injured and killed on our highways, but it's big news around the world when there are people hurt or killed in a train accident that doesn't involve cars. These accidents occur rarely. Modern train systems are safe.

We will also save in simply having less lost travel time. Just think of it: a downtown to downtown trip in 83 minutes. That's less time than you need for security at the airports. Such short, convenient trips will increase economic activity, will better integrate the Alberta economy on its north-south axis, and will unite Alberta more as a single economic unit. This in the end would create more traffic for both airports in the cities. The Edmonton International should not fear and perhaps could become a stronger, alternative air hub as Arctic and cross-polar flights increase.

One of the best reasons to build high-speed rail is the labour market. We will further integrate the Alberta labour market by making it much easier to make weekly commutes to the burgeoning petrochemical upgrader developments near Edmonton, which will need southern Alberta labour. Indeed, that could be the first spur expansion before we look to expanding to Fort McMurray and Lethbridge, and to look forward to the construction phase, which won't happen for a few years, we must anticipate a likely downturn in the labour market. The conventional oil patch will cool down after it is saturated with wells everywhere in a couple of years. There are hundreds of thousands of workers dependent on that conventional oil patch. That is driving 80 per cent of the activity right now. Most of these workers will not be taken up in the less labour-intensive oil sands. Most long-term Albertans like me remember that booms don't last forever. When the construction will start looks to be a great time to build high-speed rail.

I know that the government will be undertaking a ridership study, and I hope that study will not be hijacked by vested interests preferring the status quo. There will be plenty of increased activity for airlines and buses if this rail link is completed. Any study must factor in all the increased traffic that will be created, not just the division of the existing pie. If you build it, they will ride.

Alberta is the best place in the world to live. We don't have tsunamis, we don't have hurricanes, we don't have earthquakes, and we hardly have winter anymore, yet we still have some of the best skiing anywhere and other outdoor opportunities from the badlands to the Rockies to the northern boreal forest to the Cypress Hills to the prairies. We are quickly growing world class in unique cultural opportunities. We have so much.

We must build on our new economies of scale. We must take advantage of this clear opportunity that presents itself to us. Alberta is worth it. We must create the proper transportation links between our twin cities. We must not only prove Alberta's greatness but even improve upon it. There is a great future for our Alberta, and we must look to building it now. We have just seen the success of our Canadian and Alberta athletes in Italy. A Summer Olympics bid

would not be far behind the completion of a high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary.

I urge this Assembly and the government to move quickly on high-speed rail. Please make it so. Don't miss the opportunity. Please make sure it is built this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the next speaker, I would just like to point out that if we could show some respect for people who have the floor and keep the side conversations down, the Speaker would really appreciate that tonight.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise to speak to Motion 501 about the institution of an electric train between Edmonton and Calgary. I'm in kind of the uncomfortable position of agreeing with some of what the member actually said. I think the member has made a very good point when it comes to the labour market, when it comes to allowing people in either Red Deer, which, by the way, is not mentioned in this particular motion – allowing people to live outside of the city and still have the ability to commute in. I think that's very laudable, and I think it's certainly a good thing.

8:10

Just to give a little bit of history, if I may, Mr. Speaker, on what has been done. There has been a prefeasibility study done on the high-speed rail, which was performed by the Van Horne Institute. It determined that at roughly \$57 a one-way ticket, approximately 22 per cent of the people who travel on highway 2 would actually transfer over onto the high-speed rail train. One of the things that they did not conclusively get into is the amount of time it would take. For example, we know that there are some people that would ride the train if it took 83 minutes, as the hon. member has stated; however, they would not ride the train if it took 140 or 150 minutes. So we do need to take a very serious look at that and determine what the time point is as well as what the price point is. For example, how much will people pay to ride this?

I disagree with the hon. member when it comes to: the government must be the one who runs this. Interestingly enough – and the hon. member may or may not know this – one of the groups that was a proponent of the high-speed rail came in and basically stated that they could make a profit on running the train, and they could pay back the money over 15 or 20 years if there was no interest that was there. I tended to look upon that as simply a request for an interest-free loan. However, Mr. Speaker, it does indicate that there may well be some cost benefit, that there may well be a profit that can be made by a different group doing it on their own dollar. I think that all of these things deserve to be looked at.

The other issue – and this is probably where I take the greatest offence with this motion – is the whole idea of electric. I think there are a lot of other technologies that are out there. Potentially, if you can save \$2 billion by doing it with a very efficient diesel locomotive, I think that warrants a look at. If you can bring the speed up in a diesel locomotive, I think that warrants taking a look at. A maglev train is not precisely an electric train as we know it.

Although the motion is very well intentioned, from my point of view I think there are some basic flaws. However, I certainly do commend the hon. member for bringing this forward, and as we proceed with the market demand study, I look forward to the support of the opposition caucus as we tend to take the next step in taking a look as to whether or not the train will actually work.

As I mentioned, we just put out the RFQs for a market demand study. We received seven applications back, of which we have picked three that can subsequently go on to an RFP. Once the RFP is in, which we expect it to be by the end of March, we can start the

market demand study and actually determine realistically, scientifically if people are going to use it. Typically, what I see in talking to people between Edmonton and Calgary is that there's a huge amount of support for it in Calgary. There's a huge amount of support for it right up through to Edmonton. In Edmonton there is trepidation about support, and that trepidation has to do with the International Airport and the issues that will occur with the potential change in travel patterns from the International Airport.

I believe that we have to look exclusively as to whether or not people will use this, exclusively as to whether or not people will find the ability to do it. I agree with the hon. member that this has the potential to really put Alberta on the map. It really has the potential to change the labour dynamics. It has the potential to change the whole rural dynamics because all of a sudden, providing there is a stop in Red Deer, for someone living in Blackfalds, in Didsbury, in your particular constituency, Mr. Speaker, there is a potential for these people to work in either Edmonton or Calgary with just a short commute. I think that raises a huge amount of potential and possibilities. All of a sudden, you can have a manufacturing outlet in central Alberta where the people can commute from Edmonton or Calgary, and I think it just opens up a world of possibilities.

But the key element here – and I think this is where the hon. member is missing the discussion – is the cost. We're looking at a greenfield approach with a maglev train. You're probably looking at very close to \$5 billion. That's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. It's a huge amount of money. As you back down in the amount of dollars that potentially could be spent, you are saying that the amount of time will go down. Instead of being 83 minutes, it might be 93 minutes. It might be 100 minutes, 120 minutes. So we do have to take a very serious look at what that price point is, at what the time point is, when will people use it, how long of a trip between Edmonton and Calgary.

The hon. member does choose a good time to bring this up because the other point that we have to consider very strongly is protecting the right-of-way into downtown Calgary and into downtown Edmonton before it gets bought up. Interestingly, we do have the right-of-way into downtown Edmonton. The tracks over the High Level Bridge are owned by the provincial government, and all of the right-of-way right into downtown Edmonton is owned by us. We do not own the right-of-way into Calgary; therefore, we have to make some important decisions within the next year or two as to whether or not we're going to move in that direction and whether or not we're actually going to purchase some right-of-way there.

It is a very timely discussion, Mr. Speaker, on a very important issue, but I just don't agree with the parameters that the hon. member has put on it in his motion. If he would have said that he urges the provincial government to investigate the feasibility of a high-speed train, then I believe that everyone on this side and everyone in the Legislature certainly could support this motion, but by limiting it to electricity, by putting an exact timeline when they would want us to spend a huge amount of dollars, by not allowing the private sector to step to the plate and to spend those dollars, I believe that the motion should fail.

Mr. Speaker, I will commend the hon. member for bringing this up at this time. It's a very, very important issue that does need to be discussed, and this is a very good forum in which to discuss it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to address Motion 501. In prepara-

tion for tonight's debate I went back and looked at my maiden speech from just about a year ago. I mentioned in there that if this government was looking for a legacy, if this Premier was looking for a legacy, a high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary might be the perfect solution. I'm not so sure that I feel any differently a year later.

As well, in preparation for tonight's debate I thought I should do a little research. I figured that I'd find out how much it would cost me and how long it would take if I wanted to take a train from Edmonton to Calgary. Well, we all know that the Dayliner doesn't run anymore, so I thought I could go to Winnipeg or I could go to Vancouver and then hop a train to Calgary. I can do that, actually.

The first available train to Calgary would leave Edmonton with Via Rail this Thursday, March 2. I would arrive in Vancouver the next day, March 3. It would cost me \$223 plus applicable taxes. Now I have a problem: I'm in Vancouver, and the train to Calgary doesn't leave until April 17. I'm not kidding you. I did some research on the Internet, and the best I could find on average for a hotel in Vancouver is \$100 a night. Forty-five days times \$100 a night is \$4,500 not including taxes to put myself up in a hotel in Vancouver waiting for the train to go to Calgary. On April 17 the Rocky Mountaineer leaves Vancouver, travels to Calgary over two days: \$689 plus taxes. For a grand total of \$5,412 plus taxes I will find myself in Calgary 48 days after I leave Edmonton, meals not included.

I'm not in great shape, but I figure that I could walk 20 miles a day, and I could be in Calgary in 10 days. If I keep up my exercise program that I started a few months ago, I could probably ride my bike and be in Calgary in three days, or I could take my chances and hitchhike and maybe get there tomorrow or maybe not get there at all.

You know, it's funny, but I think it makes a point. I took a high-speed train in Europe this summer from the airport in Frankfurt to Cologne: 220 kilometers, 45 minutes, and it cost me 57 euros. I'm telling you, that is the only way to travel.

Everywhere I go I'm talking to Albertans who are strongly in favour of this initiative, including in Edmonton. I know the minister mentioned the fact that there doesn't seem to be as much buy-in in Edmonton as there is elsewhere, but even in Edmonton people in the business community are saying: what are we waiting for?

8:20

Now, I think it's important to look at the benefits of the greenfield option as opposed to the so-called brownfield option. For those who aren't familiar with it, greenfield means new tracks, new bed versus using the CPR right-of-way, which would be the brownfield option. If you go greenfield, obviously you get a straighter track because basically you can buy the land and go right to Calgary. In this case you don't have to go through Wetaskiwin, as an example. Not that there's anything wrong with Wetaskiwin, but it is a longer trip. It just doesn't make sense to me, and I'm sure most people will understand this: why would you build a 21st century train and put it on a 19th century railbed? That just doesn't make sense to me.

It's been mentioned and the minister agreed to do the land acquisition now. You know, given the current situation with the construction boom in this province, it might not be wise to build the train today. That's one of the reasons why the motion says the year 2012. I understand that it might not be prudent to do the construction today, but at the very least we should be doing the land acquisition today. Reserve that land now so that we don't have to stray. Right now the greenfield proposal calls for the track to run within a mile or two, generally, of the Queen Elizabeth II highway. If we do the land acquisition now, that will happen. If we don't do

the land acquisition now, we might find ourselves 20 or 30 miles west of the highway. Again, it's going to be a longer track, more turns, and slower. The Van Horne Institute says that it would cost \$47.8 million to do the land acquisition today. So we're not talking an awful lot of money to secure that land and make sure that it's there for when we are ready to build.

Now, there have been a number of benefits identified by using the greenfield route. Certainly, one of them is that for the most part it will bypass the smaller communities. A lot of the small communities that the CPR right-of-way runs through now have identified this as a major concern: having that train running right through or very near their communities. By going greenfield, you eliminate that problem. It gives you the option if you want to build a utility corridor as part of the land that's purchased. You could certainly do that.

With the greenfield option all of the track would be grade separated. There would be no level crossings, which, you know, when you have a train moving at 250 kilometres an hour or more, is probably a pretty darn important thing. As has already been pointed out, it does move Red Deer into a practical commuting distance between Edmonton and Calgary.

Another advantage for sure is the fact that there would be no freight service on the tracks. With the upgraded tracks on the CPR railbed we would be sharing a high-speed train with freight service, and the potential for disaster there is evident in everybody's mind, I'm sure.

The minister referred to the Edmonton International Airport as being one of the sort of holdups in terms of getting buy-in from Edmonton. Well, I've actually spoken to folks at the Airports Authority, and what they're telling me is that if this project were to go ahead, they would want to be included in those discussions. In fact, they would give serious consideration to having a station either near the terminal or as part of the terminal. So I'm not sure where the disconnect has come. Perhaps it was previous leadership with the Airports Authority. The current leadership has told me that this is a conversation they want to be part of, and they do not necessarily see it as a negative to the operation of their airport.

Electric versus diesel. The minister suggested that we should leave the door open for the discussion of diesel.

An Hon. Member: Clean burning coal.

Mr. R. Miller: I hear somebody on the other side mentioning clean burning coal. While I have to admit that I'm not enthralled at the idea of more coal, if in fact it can be shown that coal can be burned clean – and I don't just mean cleaner, but I mean clean – and we go with the electric alternative, there's going to be a need for more electricity, and that might be one possible solution. While I'm not a big proponent of going back to the idea of coal, it certainly would make more sense to use that coal to produce electricity than it would to burn the coal in the train, as some people on the other side might have been alluding to when they mentioned coal. Without any question, at the moment and I think well into the future an electric train would simply be cleaner and more energy efficient than the diesel alternative.

For the rolling stock itself there are lower maintenance costs associated with electric cars and electric engines. It's really not that much more. Every time I say something like this I shake my head, but it's only \$800 million more to go with the electric versus the diesel-electric alternative. I know that's an awful lot of money, but in today's economic reality, if there's a commitment and a willingness on the part of the government to do this, that really is not an awful lot of money. As an example, it's only two-thirds of the

money that was spent on the rebate cheques, or it's less than the Premier's commitment to cancer research, less than the money that was supposedly reinvested in the heritage savings trust fund, when in fact it was actually only not taken out of the heritage savings trust fund, but that's another story.

An Hon. Member: You don't understand the beauty of the concept.

Mr. R. Miller: The concept is questionable at best in terms of the heritage savings trust fund, and I hope to address that at a later point either this evening or in the next couple of days when I give my response to the Speech from the Throne.

Certainly, I believe that the time to start this project is now. As I've said, at least do the land acquisition. Light-rail transit in both Edmonton and Calgary has proven to be a huge success. Thirty years ago it was difficult to get people to buy in. We heard a lot of the same comments that we hear in the Assembly tonight, yet today you can't build either system fast enough. People are crying for it to be extended. I believe that there's a greater understanding in the public's mind as to the benefits of public transportation. Certainly, I believe now is the time to start. Access to the downtown cores and the Red Deer area is competing with other forms of development, as we've already talked about, and time is of the essence when it comes to doing this.

I can't believe my time is up, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly support this motion and urge all members to do the same.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm very pleased to see that there is discussion on train travel specifically between Edmonton and Calgary. The New Democrat opposition has some difficulty with the motion as it appears on paper, but certainly the more general concept of reintroducing train service between Edmonton and Calgary and, indeed, to other centres around the province of Alberta I think is something that deserves more attention.

One of my big reservations or concerns about what sort of train we would put between Edmonton and Calgary is the tendency for large projects to move towards the grandiose. You know, the key to a successful high-speed train service is a very high population and also a very high willingness for people to actually use that train. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford mentioned the train between Cologne and Frankfurt in Germany. I, too, rode that train and looked at it with some interest as I am a train enthusiast. There is a real difficulty to get a critical mass of people to ride that train between Cologne and Frankfurt even though you're looking at between 8 million and 10 million people within that metropolitan corridor. There are trains that run quite fast between Frankfurt and Cologne and certainly lots of highways, and people make those choices as well.

My suggestion, and this is open to discussion, is to perhaps look at expanding the CPR right-of-way and putting a number of different alternatives forward onto the CPR right-of-way. Certainly, there's room for at least two more rail lines to run along that right-of-way.

If my memory serves me correctly, in the peak time there was a passenger train running between Edmonton and Calgary, and it was a steam locomotive. They could get it under two hours running that steam locomotive at a very high speed. Certainly, it is possible to use conventional trains to have quite an efficient connection between Edmonton and Calgary and points in between as well, so the train can in fact feasibly and economically stop in other centres along the way and not just pass them by at 320 kilometres an hour.

8:30

I would suggest that opening and expanding the CPR right-of-way also would provide us perhaps with a model by which we could extend to train service between other centres in Alberta and look for an economical alternative for people to travel, let's say, to Fort McMurray or to Grande Prairie or to points south, Lethbridge or Medicine Hat, and, you know, provide that sort of infrastructure for the future as well. Let's not forget that although the economic tiger, as some people like to describe it, is the corridor between Edmonton and Calgary, certainly there are lots of other areas that deserve this sort of consideration in Alberta as well.

Finally, I believe that we do have to look to the future. We see other countries, including the United States, realizing that an extended train system is going to be part of the transportation future for western countries and, in fact, for people all over the world. So I do like the idea of this motion looking ahead not just to the immediate future but the long-term future, when we will need alternative transportation systems. Certainly, it's incumbent upon this Legislature and the provincial government to be involved in that transportation future, and perhaps there is some interim subsidization that has to take place in order to put the trains on the rails and to have people sit in the cars and actually use the system.

You know, Amtrak certainly is an example of that sort of forward-looking perspective in the United States. The train passengers are subsidized. The tickets are subsidized in the United States. But look to the future, you know, so that when that system is, in fact, more necessary, the system is in place and the psychology of using the train is in place in the citizenry as well.

Of course, we are very much tied to our automobiles, our individual automobiles here in this province, and it takes a long time to break or to change those driving habits. I know, for example, that many, many people wouldn't consider taking a train between Edmonton and Calgary right now because, of course, when you get to either metropolitan centre, what are you going to do? People find the public transport system in either city wanting, especially to go to different parts of the city in either Edmonton or Calgary. People say: well, I need my car anyway, so I might as well drive. So we have to be thinking about intercity travel in concert with an expansion of public transport in the urban centres so that people can make that psychological leap to take the train to Calgary, let's say, and then be able to take trains and buses and conveniently do their business in that centre and then come home again with public transportation.

There are a number of hurdles that we have to overcome, but certainly the possibility of re-establishing the rail link between Edmonton and Calgary I think is part of an integrated approach to our transportation future that we do have to take a serious look at and start spending money on feasibility studies and keeping those rights-of-way open. It breaks my heart every time I see someone building over a right-of-way here in this city. As you know, my own constituency is part of the CN rail link in Calder. There are so many rights-of-way and passages where we can put train systems, public transport systems through. Really, I think that it's incumbent, again, upon this government to protect those rights-of-way and make those purchases for the future and not have them built over because we'll be stuck with cars in the future that are unaffordable for a large sector of the population.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to seeing this motion perhaps becoming an act or something like it in the future.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak in support of this motion by my colleague for an ecological, efficient, and people-friendly mode of travel between our two major urban centres. I've chosen to look at the historical perspective rather than the mechanical or technical because when this proposal finally comes about – and you will note that I do not say “if” – it will not be the first time that the Calgary-Edmonton corridor has been a focus of rail innovation.

In 1936 the Canadian Pacific railway introduced the first light-weight, high-speed passenger train service in Canada. This innovation was intended not only to attract market and improve service and comfort; the downturn of the Depression made it imperative to save costs. Shortening travel time and reducing train wait were cost-saving measures. CPR's response to these needs was innovative, imaginative, and trend setting. Streamlined Jubilee locomotives, that still look classy on art deco posters, pulled smooth, curved-sided, air conditioned coaches with comfortable lounges and buffet service.

Four train sets were built by Canadian Car and Foundry, the company that built our first trolley coaches, and finished inside in CPR's own shops. Three of the sets were for the Windsor-Quebec corridor in eastern Canada. The fourth was for Calgary-Edmonton service. The Chinook Flyer left Edmonton every morning for Calgary and returned in the evening. It reached speeds of up to 105 miles per hour between stops at 19 communities along the way. This train is currently being restored at the Canadian Museum of Rail Travel in Cranbrook, B.C. When completed, it will be a display worth visiting.

After the Second World War the Chinook was downgraded to second-class status. The new corridor express trains were named after the cities' football teams, the Edmonton-bound train being called the Eskimo and the Calgary-bound one the Stampeder. These reduced the number of stops and shaved an hour off the Chinook's running time as a result. In addition to 200 regular coach seats, they offered swivel seats for business travelers in a buffet parlour car.

In the mid-1950s travel time was further reduced with the introduction of rail diesel cars, or Dayliners as the CPR called them, built by the Budd Corporation in the U.S. Unfortunately, the further time savings of the Dayliners was accompanied by a savings in passenger comforts. They did not have the number of washrooms, the passenger lounges, or the sit-down meal service provided by the earlier trains that CP designed for this route.

Because one or two Budd cars were shorter in length than a regular train, they were not as visible at crossings, and a number of accidents resulted. Rather than opt to reduce the number of level crossings, one every two miles between Edmonton and Calgary, the politicians added their voices to the call to phase out passenger train service between the cities, which happened 20 years ago this past November.

Now with congestion on our highways and waiting time increased in our airports with post 9/11 security measures, the rail mode offers us an opportunity again. I understand that some of the planners would like to see the rail route parallel the highway because being overtaken and passed by high-speed trains on winter roads would be its best way to persuade our car drivers to try the new service.

I am pleased to see that Canadian Pacific through the Van Horne Institute is contributing expertise to these studies regardless of whether its right-of-way is used or a brand new infrastructure is used.

I have two incidental suggestions to make, points which I hope have already been considered by the planners. Locating the maintenance shops midway between the two cities would have a number of advantages. It would bring new business to Red Deer,

and it would add Red Deer to the easy commute zone of both Calgary and Edmonton. People will generally start out earlier from a smaller city when visiting a larger one. Having the trains overnight and be serviced at Red Deer could also add traffic for an early 40-minute ride to the two larger centres before the travelers are ready to board for the longer intercity trek.

Second, space on a high-speed passenger train could be sold or consigned to courier and express operators, thus reducing the number of smaller vans on the road in exchange for a faster transfer.

Mr. Speaker, the Calgary-Edmonton rail corridor has an illustrious history and an exciting future. With the headquarters of Canada's first transcontinental railway now located in this province and the Calgary-Edmonton corridor leading the continent in economic growth, it is only a matter of time before we return to the rails.

Regardless of where the initiative comes from, let us give this the necessary thought and public discussion to make sure the new mode serves as well as its predecessors did with the CPR. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, might we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre it gives me a great deal of pleasure tonight to introduce a group of visitors in the public gallery that are with us from Toastmasters International. Toastmasters International is a nonprofit organization promoting communications and leadership skills within their numbers. They serve 250,000 toastmasters altogether in 10,500 clubs in 90 countries around the world. Edmonton apparently has the highest concentration of toastmasters on a per capita basis anywhere.

8:40

Tonight's visitors are from numerous clubs in the Edmonton area. They're led by their past district governor, Mr. Peter Kossowan. I'm thinking that I should perhaps join them, and then I would be able to figure out how to fit all that I have to say about high-speed rail into my 10-minute time slot. Would they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

High-speed Rail System

(continued)

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to change the opening of my speech. As a toastmaster previously, I know that one of the important aspects of learning to speak publicly is to remove the hesitations, the ahs and the ums, from your speech. Of course, as a member of one of the Lethbridge clubs I used to get fined fairly regularly on the numbers of ums. I don't know what their particular club uses by way of penalty for ums, but I hope it's within 10 cents. Otherwise, I'm going to owe a fair amount of dollars. [interjections] But who's counting, eh?

I want to count minutes, though, and my dream is 52 minutes. That is the magnetic levitation presentation that was made in my office by a German company with the idea of a high-speed – you can't really call it a train – vehicle that would connect, of course, downtown Calgary and downtown Edmonton with stops at the two

airports that are mentioned in the motion but also would recognize Red Deer. So 52 minutes. In the amount of time that we've been discussing this this evening, had we left on that vehicle at 8 o'clock, we'd be at the Calgary airport, I think, and perhaps almost into downtown. Now, that would be a meaningful amount of time. I think that if people had the choice between the number 2 highway – and a great highway it is – and 52 minutes, there you would have some transference, I guess, from one individual in a car over to the train.

By the way, I might add that in my experience in 12 years of driving from Lethbridge to Edmonton and most of that, of course, on the number 2 and all of it from the portion at least from Balzac to Edmonton, it's just unbelievable how many single occupants we have in the vehicles not only in the cities that we talk about but on our major highways. It's not for me to say whether it's a crime or not, but we should at some time figure out just how much all of this money that we put into infrastructure is actually costing us to continue to rely so heavily in terms of automobiles on our highways. Now, the market, of course is trying to make adjustments for that by the increase in the price of gasoline, but as far as I can tell, we've got even more vehicles on the road at 82.9 cents per litre than what we might have had at 39, so I'm not sure that the market is working very well for us in that particular area.

The minister of infrastructure gave a \$5 billion price tag, though, for that kind of a mode of transport. I want to say that the presentation that I was given had a \$7 billion tag on it at that point, so if somehow we've been able to knock off \$2 billion, then we're certainly heading in the right way.

That brings me to the question: where is the private sector in all of this? Certainly, the manufacturer of this vehicle wasn't pretending that they would in any way pay for this mode of transport or the kind of infrastructure that would be required to be used and, of course, to be paid for, expected the state or in this case the province to pick up, you know, the full cost. Typical of maybe a European mode of thinking. I'm not sure. I'm not European. I'm just, perhaps, giving an impression here. That might be fine, but when you think that we're looking at Calgary and we're looking at Edmonton with only 1 million people in each area, it seems to me, then, that probably we're asking a lot of taxpayers in this province to pony up whether it be \$5 billion or \$7 billion for a mag lev.

Now, I'm not current with the numbers in terms of electrification of a rail system or the diesel system except, you know, the numbers that have been used here tonight. Again, it would make me wonder whether or not we are being realistic as we look at the kind of population base that we're really trying to serve. If we now start talking about electric, we're talking about – what is it? – 83 minutes, or maybe it's 93 minutes. I forget. Perhaps with diesel we're now over 100 minutes. I think that minute by minute by minute we lose, then, that transference from the individual automobile over onto that highway. Again, I support the study that is going to take place. In fact, I'm not sure, but maybe we'll be asked to get involved with funding. If we do, we'll certainly look at it. In any case, while I support the funding, not to try to prophesize too much, I'd be very, very surprised that with the current population we would find a cost-effective way of being able to do that project.

I do agree with the minister and others that have spoken in terms of making sure that we have the rights-of-way protected. In some cases we'll have to go out and gain ownership of those rights-of-way, and I think that we should of course do that.

I will be voting against this motion because of it simply doing two things, really, confining it to electricity and also to the particular year, but I want to commend the member for bringing it forward. Again, to talk about the timeliness of it: now is the time to be having

the discussion. Now is the time to have all members' support in this Chamber when the minister of infrastructure goes and, you know, has the study done. I wouldn't want to hear now, from the support that this motion has been given, whether it passes or not, people then to quibble over the fact that we're going to spend some money on the studies. It would seem to me that everybody is supportive of that. I, like the rest of them, will look forward to the results of that particular study.

I think, though, where the timeliness is important also comes within the whole aspect of an integrated transportation policy, really, for this whole province. There is no question about the importance of northeast Alberta in terms of the economic future of this province. It would seem to me that we have to start recognizing where the golden eggs are laying and make sure, then, that we have provided a system in order to take full advantage of that tremendous resource that we find ourselves in ownership of.

8:50

I think I could stand and make the argument. Although I'm not going to do it tonight, at some point in time I might argue for a high-speed rail system between Edmonton and Fort McMurray ahead of Edmonton to Calgary because the situation there is that I think that you have to take a reasonable look at where your future lies and then make sure that the infrastructure is in place in order to do that. I know there's been some resistance to the rail situation from Edmonton to Fort McMurray because people were afraid that if they put a dollar into rail, it meant a dollar coming out of the road system. Well, our minister of infrastructure, I think, is already making it plain about what might and could happen to highway 63. Something has to be done with highway 63, with highway 881, and to me that is in combination with, not in opposition to, what we should do with a rail system.

I believe that it's unreasonable to expect that given the terrain, the territory of Fort McMurray, Alberta, we're going to be able to achieve 5 million barrels by the year 2030 as is now being predicted by some folks and expect that we will have all of the people that are required to reach that living in that particular area. I think it's just like bitumen, where there are upgraders that are going to be at Fort McMurray upgrading the bitumen, but there's also a huge opportunity, of course, in the industrial heartland for the bitumen to come to that particular area. It's quite simple. If you can't take the people to where the resource is, then you have to bring the resource to where the people are. That, I think, deserves some discussion as well.

In any event, I will be voting against this particular motion.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's actually my honour to follow up on everything but the last few seconds of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West's comments. It's particularly important that he brought up the example of Fort McMurray. When asked this summer what I thought of the idea of the high-speed rail, my comment was that it would be nice for a change to be ahead of the game or at least when the game began, to be fully operational within that game.

Fort McMurray is the best example of potential opportunities that are at this point being held back and to some extent being missed. Fort McMurray in the 1980s used to build their sewers and their roadways ahead of time, and then they would build the housing developments to follow. Right now Fort McMurray is having a great deal of difficulty with its waste treatment plant because of the increased population. I'm not opposed to what the hon. Member for

Lethbridge-West said about eventually increasing the rapid rail to Fort McMurray. As he mentioned before – and I will not go into great repetition here – the whole point of this rapid rail system, a large part of it besides the economic driver, is to eliminate the carnage that's currently happening on the road.

I wish the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation had been here last year when I introduced the notion of banning cellphones. I could have used the support that he's provided for rapid rail at that time, and I'm sure that discussion will come up later. The reason we put forward the electric was that it was kind of the middle-of-the-road – I hate to use the word – the more conservative approach to the rapid rail system. We don't want to go back in time. Back in time is the diesel. Even with the new developments diesels tend to have a noise factor associated with them, and it would be very hard to get rid of the sort of exhaust that is traditionally associated with diesels. The electric option is middle-of-the-road in terms of the expense. It's also the clean option, and if we can get to the point where coal is sufficiently clean, that the electricity can be produced without emissions, then this would certainly add to the value of an electric rail.

In terms of the electric style that I would like to see, I'm more in favour of the CPR's existing right-of-way. One of the main reasons I'm in favour of that is because the route has already established. The right-of-way is already there. The savings in expense would be greatly magnified because of the fact that the right-of-way currently exists. Yes, there would have to be developments bringing things up to grade and so on, and there's no thought that we'd be using the existing rail, but we would be using the existing right-of-way. By so doing, we would save a considerable amount of money. One of the sort of requirements, at least at this point, with that CPR right-of-way is that the CPR would expect a great deal of government financing as opposed to the completely private alternative. They've indicated that that is the methodology that they prefer.

Two weeks ago at the Glenbow Museum, when the CPR was donating a number of its records, including the first draft with John A. Macdonald, of the cross-Canada rail, I had a chance to talk to the CEO of CPR and also at the same time Peter Wallis, who was part of the authorship of this Van Horne Institute, who's associated out of the University of Calgary. I said I would be a rapid rail pompom, give me an R, give me an R, kind of person because I believe that this is a tremendous economic opportunity.

It has already been recognized that given our population the Edmonton-Calgary corridor is the hottest market in North America for its population and size. This rail would provide the options that many people have already indicated: taking people off the roads, putting them onto the rail, giving them a quality service, bringing Alberta sort of up to the level that is currently being experienced in eastern Canada between Toronto and Montreal and throughout the States via the Amtrak.

The one improvement that I would like to see Alberta making is that this rail would be passenger only and, of course, that this right-of-way would be divided. I wouldn't want to see the crossovers that currently are being proposed within the CPR model because that's where the accidents have occurred in the States, when freight and passenger trains shared the same rail. Obviously, it wasn't intentionally, but that's what occurred.

I like the idea of two parallel lines and particularly, as I say, going with the electric way of doing things. Peter Wallis came to my constituency office and explained the three alternatives. With regard to the magnetic rail I don't see us needing that rapidity at this point. I don't see us requiring that kind of cost. Some of the most frequent passengers, I think, on this particular system would be ourselves.

You heard my concerns about what I recalled as Ralph Air or Con Air, however you wish to look at it, Con being for Conservative, just

the short form. If we're looking for some financing for this project, I would be very glad to see at least two of our three planes done away with because most of the flights are between Calgary and Edmonton. If we could get people riding on this train doing the work as they go, not having to take that long taxi ride from the International Airport, to me this would be a step in the right direction showing responsibility.

With regard to this rail it's interesting that Peter Wallis is also associated with the Calgary International Airport. He's one of the directors. He does not see any concern about the competition putting various air commuters or, for that matter, bus commuters out of business. This would not create an unfair travelling advantage. He believes that connecting the two airports would be a great service to both in-Alberta travelling for Albertans but also for world travellers. It would offer them the type of opportunities, as I've noted, they experience on a regular basis whether they're coming from Japan, whether they're coming from Europe, or what they're used to in eastern Canada and in the States.

9:00

I'm pleased that the members opposite are not necessarily opposed to the idea. I am extremely pleased that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is pursuing the study to validate the economic feasibility of this particular proposal. It's very important that within our motion we've indicated 2012. We want the study to occur. We believe that based on the Van Horne Institute study, it is economically viable at this time, but we welcome that confirmation that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation will provide.

I would urge everyone to support Motion 501. This rapid rail I believe is going to happen sooner than later. The faster we get on board the better.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to close debate on Motion 501.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to see the general acceptance of this motion by the previous speakers here tonight. Just a few clarifications perhaps. In the motion it does not preclude stops in Red Deer, or it does not preclude stops that may prove to be working stops for a system.

I've been on a few of these high-speed links in other parts of the world. One, for example, is Seville to Madrid. You didn't even notice the stops, and I think it had four or five. It was just incredibly fast, much of it over almost empty olive groves. There are other examples where, in looking at types of ridership and potential ridership like we have in our type of economy here in Alberta, we would look very good. It's quick, clean, efficient transportation. It's starting with the Edmonton-Calgary route. The need to move with something, to start with, is the need to act. We have tremendous possibilities.

I don't know if I really agree with my colleague for Calgary-Varsity or the Member for Edmonton-Calder on the need for the CPR route. There are problems with that, and sometimes it can get more expensive to refurbish a roadbed than to naturally build a new one. It's an old freight route, and there are some great costs with that. The greenfield route, I think, has some tremendous arguments for it.

There's the possibility of great technological offsets to private companies in Alberta. As the Minister for Economic Development mentioned, there's quite a number of private companies that will be involved in the construction and the building of the actual units and

the various technologies that are involved. The route to Fort McMurray would be nice, but some of that would be very expensive for the first leg. Indeed, the maglev option, if that's to be put forward, is very expensive, and it's not really been proven over many long routes.

So we should narrow down our choices, and that's what we did. You have to be somewhat pragmatic and look at what would be the best option for Alberta. The motion deals with that. It looks to electric. It included the Calgary airport and the Edmonton airport because in some of the proposals that have been put forward by the consortiums or whatever you want to call those that are proposing them, the airports were not included, and we wanted to make sure that that was included in our motion. Please do not think that it does not include Red Deer or some other stops. This type of transportation backbone would be fed by buses and other types of transportation from other parts of Alberta.

There is tremendous opportunity with this. It is something that will drive economic development. It will save government expenditures in other areas, as I said: health care, the costs of paving half of Alberta for the Queen E II because that will see a tremendous amount of traffic reduction because of this alternative in transportation, and the sheer economic benefit from time saved and the effect on uniting our labour market and other markets in Alberta.

It has to be and should be, I believe, an independent route that is not used with freight. I'm very impressed by the greenfield options. But what is necessary in the near future is to tie down those rights-of-way, to decide on a route, and that needs some decision on the type of system we have to use. I submit that the electric system as put forward in this motion has been researched extensively. There are some major advantages to it for our province, and I think it would be the quickest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:07 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Eggen	Pastoor
Backs	Mather	Swann
Chase	Miller, R.	

Against the motion:

Abbott	Groeneveld	Ouellette
Amery	Hinman	Renner
Brown	Johnson	Rodney
Calahasen	Johnston	Rogers
Cenaiko	Knight	Stelmach
Danyluk	Liepert	Stevens
Doerksen	Lukaszuk	Strang
Dunford	Lund	VanderBurg
Fritz	Magnus	Webber
Goudreau	Oberg	Zwozdesky
Griffiths		

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 31
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

head:

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned February 24: Mr. Stelmach speaking]

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, just before adjourning on Thursday, we talked about the need of expediting the accreditation of professionals that have moved to Canada to help us with our labour situation. Another area that we're keen to work on is aboriginal employment programs. We want to take advantage of Alberta's hot economy to make real progress for our aboriginal people, and the newly minted Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Minister Prentice, is keen to work with us on this particular task.

Another important area, Mr. Speaker, is gaining control of the tools to manage immigration policy. It could be as fundamental to Alberta's future prosperity as the affirmation in 1929 of constitutional jurisdiction over natural resources has been to our present prosperity.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, this government believes in fairness. This includes regional balance between rural and urban Albertans. It also means intergenerational fairness, and using proceeds from nonrenewable resources to retire debt is an example of sharing the benefits of our natural resources with the next generation. Building infrastructure that has a long lifespan using innovative P3 financing is another way of sharing costs and benefits over time.

Investing and saving for the future are fiscally responsible actions that Albertans and their government know are right, and that is why I believe that setting aside a portion of the surplus in the heritage savings trust fund is the responsible thing to do.

I also know that you would agree, Mr. Speaker, that fairness also means balancing. It means balancing government investments across regions of the total province of Alberta. Our northern communities are the source of so much of the current wealth that benefits all Albertans, and we need to ensure that they have the tools to achieve their dreams and potential as the hub of the north. I look to participating in the northern development strategy announced in the throne speech, and this will ensure that there are appropriate resources allocated to ensure the continued sustainable economic development of this region.

Now, along with energy and agriculture, forestry is the major industry in the north. It's the third largest sector, contributing about \$13 billion to our economy. We understand the challenges that this sector is facing. We'll work closely with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, our office in Washington, my colleagues in the provinces in Canada, and the federal government on the softwood lumber file. I was encouraged that Congress is finally respecting international law and has repealed the Byrd amendment, paving the way for a return of duties paid by Alberta companies to the U.S. government.

Mr. Speaker, this government will continue to focus its efforts on rural development to help rural communities become more prosperous and vibrant, and I am so pleased that the speech has referred to the promise of the biofields industry, which offers the potential of sustainable growth and a new market for canola.

Managing natural resources wisely to create value-added products while minimizing the environmental impacts of resource development is a job this government takes seriously. This principle is the heart of the land-use framework this government is developing. It recognizes that the land supports many uses: resource development, recreation, tourism, agriculture, forestry, and residential.

To address broader, long-term environmental issues, the government will hold an environmental youth summit. It is critical, Mr. Speaker, to involve youth in an environmental policy development. After all of the oil and gas is gone, our future generations could still have a very valuable resource that is in short supply, and that resource is clean air, water, and land. A healthy environment could become more of an economic development attraction than even lower taxes in their lifetime, so we've got to give them that chance.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and, indeed, all Albertans can be proud of the vision and agenda of this government that has been presented in the throne speech. This government's vision respects and reflects Albertans' values of self-reliance, fiscal responsibility, and community spirit.

Albertans have confidence in our Premier; they have confidence in the government. They have confidence in the Premier because he has faith that Albertans can always find solutions to new challenges. The only way to look back is to honour our predecessors.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise at an important point in our session and in our tradition. The way of opening a new session of the House is a long-standing parliamentary practice that we have given a distinctly Canadian twist. In Britain today it's called the Queen's Speech because it's usually the Queen who reads it. In Canada we don't name it after the reader, the Lieutenant Governor or the Governor General, but after a more generic symbol. The throne is an enduring symbol of authority in the same way as the crown is far more than the individual who wears it.

When I speak of the authority the throne symbolizes, I'm speaking of more than power. Power can be naked force or coercion. Authority implies authorship. The throne is not only the seat of the head of state or, in his or her absence, of the Speaker but a symbol of what is most enduring in our system and what is most dear to us personally. It is a symbol of our shared values, and to the extent that we share them, we the people are the authors of that authority.

Our changing the name from the Queen's Speech to the Speech from the Throne is one way Canadians have taken a vintage system and built on it. Canadians have adopted these innovations largely by peaceful means. The Speaker's Mace was once a studded club that stunned or disabled while enforcing order. The aisle in our Legislature was designed to keep factions two swords' lengths from each other, and we who have opposed a party in power sit here as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition whereas earlier generations of those who opposed the rulers did so at the risk of their lives.

In England these rights were established after 20 years of civil war and dictatorship in which a king and many able ministers and other parliamentary leaders went to the block. An even more bloody price was paid in the French Revolution a century later. In Canada and in Alberta these benefits were given to us sometimes after struggles such as the uprising of 1837-38, that led to the granting of responsible government. Alberta and Saskatchewan struggled to win control of their natural resources. When we got it, our form of responsible government was a step more evolved than Britain's. Until a century

ago British governments were still being led from the hereditary House of Lords. Canadian governments from 1846 were responsible solely to the elected Assembly.

Canada was the first modern state to emerge without revolution or civil war. This is one of the gifts that we bring to the world. Our orderly transition of power was celebrated by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in his victory speech five weeks ago tonight. Every government to come to office in Canada since 1759 has been without bloodshed. If we regard 1759 as a battle in an international conflict, which it was, and recall the civil way in which the French and English dealt with each other in the transition, we have 400 years of essentially peaceful evolution.

This is our first and greatest shared value. It includes our freedoms – personal, economic, and political – because they were achieved through this tradition of peace, order, and good governance. It includes our other social values as well because the means of our achieving these had made for a potentially human society. Other states have achieved the democratic and social goals we have, but the more violent means by which they achieved them have been at a cost to the fabric of their societies.

A Speech from the Throne recapitulates these long-standing values by the simple fact and way it takes place. By its contents it shows us the values that are most important to a government's interpretation of its mandate at a specific moment. What does this speech then tell us about this government's values at this moment? First, I note that of the five headings in the speech the first three – A Learning Society, A Prosperous Society, and A Clean Environment – are all couched in economic terms. Education is justified because “people with advanced skills, creativity, and education will keep Alberta's economy strong.” Prosperity is by its nature economic. The environment section, less than a fifth the length of the prosperity one, is justified because the land “must continue to be the source of life and prosperity for future generations.”

It is not until we reach the fourth and fifth priority areas – A Healthy Society, with its focus on cancer research, which I applaud, and A Safe and Caring Society, which I also endorse – that we come to human values that stand independent of economic ones. The prosperity emphasis dominates the speech. Economic issues take up more than half the body of the speech, and the prosperity section is more than twice as long as any other. Some people see this as inevitable. They point out that income from resources and industry pays the cost of our programs, and to mention programs first will put the cart before the horse. I believe this outlook confuses ends with means, the how with the why of public service.

9:30

Mr. Speaker, I can't help but contrast this Speech from the Throne with the statement from our sister province of British Columbia the day before. The B.C. budget focused on spending on children, with an extra \$421 million to boost child protection services. With an emphasis on children this year and on seniors last B.C.'s government has shown a more human set of priorities than our own. It is almost 35 years that we have had a government in power with a primarily economic agenda, yet it is not fair to lay this imbalance at the feet of any one party or leader.

A good friend of mine had a walk in the snow with Ernest C. Manning after Christmas in 1967. Mr. Manning was already Canada's longest serving first minister, a record that has not been surpassed. He had recently won a sixth election by a landslide, yet he told my friend, “I can't be Premier of this province anymore. The new oil money doesn't care about the things we stand for.” A year later he retired. Three years later Social Credit was replaced by the Progressive Conservatives. Our new leaders had fewer misgivings about the new money than Premier Manning did. In getting along

with it so well and living through unparalleled prosperity, they and many Albertans have confused our priorities. We have forgotten that the citizen does not live to serve the economy and that the state is accountable to the whole electorate and not simply taxpayers and economic leaders. It is time to revisit these values.

In my first speech to this Assembly a year ago I said that children should not simply be one aspect of public policy but a central focus. We should be looking at every aspect of our collective life – environment, education, health, justice, culture, finance – in terms of how it impacts on children. I believe that even more today. I propose a sixth emphasis alongside the five in the Speech from the Throne, that of a child-friendly society. I believe children's well-being is a value we all share. Whatever our party or our economic point of view we agree that children deserve a high place on our scale of values.

Why do we love children? Biologists point out features such as their large eyes and other facial characteristics and parent/child bonding. They say that we are programmed to be attracted to children for their and our own collective survival. Psychologists talk about regression or projection, how children take us back to a time when we felt more loved or forward to an imagined future where our children live the hopes and dreams we did not achieve. Anthropologists tell us that children represent our biological immortality, the ongoing of life.

These may all be true, but I believe there is something more. I believe that children bring us close to the Divine, by whatever name we call it. Wordsworth says this powerfully in his *Recollections of Early Childhood*: streaming clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home; Heaven lies about us in our infancy. I experience this with my grandson, when looking into his eyes calls out the best in me. I find it significant that the only time it is ever recorded that Jesus of Nazareth advocated capital punishment was for those who damaged children. I believe that's because in damaging that which is most undamaged among us, we transgress the Divine. So for me respect for children, nurturing children, building a child-friendly society is not only good policy; it is fundamentally a matter of faith.

What, then, does it mean to translate this into present reality? It means to work and build a child-friendly society. A child-friendly society is a more human and humane society. Let us begin by recognizing some things it is not. A society that tolerates cruelty to animals in homes, on farms, in zoos, laboratories, slaughterhouses, or in the wilds is not child friendly for children identify with the suffering of animals. A society built on the principle of survival of the fittest or user-pay for basic services such as health and education is not child friendly. Children deserve our support and are not able to pay their way economically.

A society that permits blood and violence on our streets and on our television and computer screens is not child friendly. This is an assault on their senses and a violation of their innocence. A society that permits poverty and homelessness by people of any age or condition is not child friendly. A society that is run solely by the bottom line, that is materially rich and spiritually poor is not child friendly. It is in their spirituality that children must enrich us. A society devoid of this is like air deprived of oxygen.

A society that is time starved and always has a functional purpose for everything is not child friendly. It is in the spaces in the solid walls that the light comes through. It is in the gaps in business plans and behavioural objectives where new adventures, scientific, and artistic discoveries take place. A society without these, no matter how high tech, is like the dark mills and factories of Dickens time.

I have an educator friend who lived in London for a year and used to spend time in the National Portrait Gallery. He told me that the childlike, in-love-with-life faces he saw there belonged to the

scientists and artists. The kings and the bishops had hard faces. This tells me that building a child-friendly society must include a change in our politics and how we handle power. A society based on the adversarial principle in our politics is not child friendly. We've come a ways from the politics of bloody battles where the winners got the crown and the losers went to the block, but we still play battlefield politics in winner take all, bringing down or embarrassing the government, squeezing the losers out.

Building a child-friendly society means a new, more consensual approach to government, one where our common interests and values, such as children, do not become political footballs between parties or the objects of turf wars between levels of government. Such an approach can be a model to the children and youth who visit us here in this Assembly. Ninety years ago nurse Edith Cavell was executed in Belgium for helping prisoners to escape. She died for a patriotic offence, yet on the eve of her execution she said that patriotism is not enough.

Mr. Speaker, I appeal to my fellow members to recognize that many of the good things we have in this province and many of the values we uphold need to give way for something better. As patriotism is not enough where humanity is at stake, democracy is not enough where democratic decisions separate people into winners and losers and exclude some from the benefits of our society. Capitalism and the free market or social democracy are not enough when they rob people of opportunities and put them into pigeon-holes, and our God-given prosperity, with all the doors it can open, is not enough if it blinds us to other values, including the gifts our children bring and the time and energy we need to spend with them for our mutual benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have an economic or political model for how this can come about, but I do have a dream for the outcome we must share if we are going to bring it about. I see an Alberta where children grow in a wholesome environment, free from fear and protected in their vulnerability. I see an Alberta that unconditionally invests in children, meeting their needs while young and providing opportunities to learn self-support as they mature. I see an Alberta committed to children's health where their daily lives are life affirming and where medication and therapy are universal rights. I invite my colleagues in this House to join me in this vision.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I would take this opportunity to remind all of you that after each 15 minute speech there is a five-minute time period for questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a) if anyone wants to avail themselves of that.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

9:40

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure tonight to rise to reply to the speech from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on this our 100th anniversary of the Alberta Legislature. My congratulations to the Lieutenant Governor, who I'm proud to say is a constituent of Calgary-West; that is, on the rare occasions when he isn't on official duty elsewhere in the province.

One can't help but listen to this speech and feel a great sense of pride in the fact that we are living in what I believe is the best place in the world. Where else do citizens have a government that is debt free and still able to put a billion dollars away for future generations? I'll return to that in a moment. Where else would a government be able to embark on 60 new or modernization projects in its educational system? Where else would a government be able to undertake 47 major postsecondary capital projects or 21 major health capital projects?

What other jurisdiction with a population of 3 million people will pave a thousand kilometres of highway this year and commit millions more to ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary? Where else would you find a government that had the foresight to set aside half a billion dollars for a cancer prevention endowment fund with a goal of reducing the incidence of cancer by half in the next 20 years? Of course, the answer to all those questions is: right here in Alberta.

Soon we will be introducing a budget, one that is likely to increase spending to an all-time high. While that itself gives me some concern, commitments like those that I just mentioned don't come without some cost. But as government we must be careful not to overincrease expectations. There is an old saying: underpromise and overdeliver. Unfortunately, in Alberta today the expectation by many is: ask for it, and it shall be delivered.

I want to return for a moment to the heritage fund. One way of dampening those requests is to return to an automatic percentage contribution of nonrenewable resource revenue to the fund. In my view, one of the weaknesses of our current accounting method is that we keep announcing these huge surpluses. The public comes to a conclusion that we keep telling them how much money we have, and they just, in many cases, want to spend it. So if we change the law so that revenue from the fund stayed in the fund and a percentage of nonrenewable resource revenue was automatically dedicated to the fund, clearly our surpluses would be smaller, and hopefully the expectations would be less.

His Honour also spoke of a health system that was flexible and provided citizens with greater choice. I'm afraid this is not an option. It is a change which Albertans and Canadians must endure, or we won't have any kind of an affordable system left for us as we grow old and certainly not for our children and grandchildren. We must be prepared to be bold. We must not listen to the 20 per cent who make 80 per cent of the noise without taking into consideration what those other 80 per cent want. My constituents are telling me that when it comes to health care, please get on with it.

I do want to talk a little bit tonight about Calgary-West. My constituents are not a demanding bunch. For the most part they are busy earning a good living, driving their children to school and to recreation. Calgary-West is a constituency where 95 per cent of the residences did not exist 25 years ago. As a result, we are still trying to catch up on infrastructure needs like schools and roads. My constituency has a higher percentage of private school spaces per residence than anywhere in the province.

While I'm not opposed to private schools, in fact quite the opposite – the emergence of private schools in this province has forced our public education system to be better – the concern I have is that of choice. My constituents are choosing the private system over the public one because private schools are closer to home than public schools. School boards must re-examine priorities when it comes to keeping open underutilized facilities in older areas of the city at the expense of actually having schools constructed where the majority of the students live. I would encourage the Minister of Education to work with his counterparts in infrastructure and Municipal Affairs to help get this issue rectified.

Another issue I'd like to address tonight is that of seniors, who are

all getting older, living longer, and eventually will require more care. In many cases families are looking more and more to government for this care and its added expense. Government needs to examine immediately a system whereby working people are contributing to their end-of-life care during their working years. Like health care our children and grandchildren will not be able to afford the tax base that will be required to financially support us as we all live to be close to a hundred.

Finally, I'd like to congratulate all of the medal winners at the recent Winter Olympics in Torino. Several of those in Torino are constituents, and the world-class training facility, Canada Olympic Park, or COP, hovers over the north end of my constituency. In 1988, when the Olympics were held in Calgary, Canada won exactly zero gold, two silver, and three bronze. However, that total was the best ever achieved at a Winter Olympics. In the following Olympics in Lake Placid and Albertville Canada won seven medals at each. In 1994 in Lillehammer Canada's medal total soared to 13, then to 15 in Nagano, and to 17 in Salt Lake City. It's my contention that this didn't just happen. It occurred because as a legacy of the 1988 Winter Olympics Canadian athletes finally were on as level a playing field for training as the rest of the world.

During the lead-up to the '88 Olympics there was much made of cost overruns and environmental concerns. However, at the end of the day our government and a certain former mayor of Calgary were responsible for the '88 Winter Olympics. The results of staging those Olympics and the training legacy that was left are directly responsible for Canada's continued improvement showing at these games.

Much will be said over the next four years about the Winter Olympics in Vancouver/Whistler. There will be environmental protesters and media stories about cost overruns. In fact, I think it's already started. However, let's please keep our eye on the ball and remember what the games are all about, and that's the athletes. Remember what our athletes did in 2006 mostly as a result of having those facilities because we hosted the games in 1988.

For decades Americans have shown their pride in country by what was achieved on the international sports stage. Let's hope that this year's performance by Canadian athletes in Torino begins to build some of that same pride in our province and our country.

So I would conclude, as I began, by stating that we simply live in the best place I can think of. We need to keep working harder to make it better. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With that, I would move that we adjourn and resume sitting tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 9:48 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, February 28, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/02/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

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

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Privatization

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

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

Mr. Taylor: Fifteen seconds.

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1:40 Coal-bed Methane Drilling

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

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

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Health Care Reform

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

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

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

An Hon. Member: A month?

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

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

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

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

1:50

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

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

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

An Hon. Member: Tell the truth.

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

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

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

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

Health Care Insurance for the Disabled

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

Health Care Reform (continued)

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

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member is recognized.

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

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

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

Health Services for Rural Albertans

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

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

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

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

Child Care System

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Continuing Care Insurance

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

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Strategies for Responsible Gaming

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

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

2:10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Child Care System

(continued)

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

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

Health Services for Rural Albertans

(continued)

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

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

2:20

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

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

Professional Organization for School Principals

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Flexibility in Physicians' Scope of Practice

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. member.

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

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

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

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

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

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

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

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

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

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

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

2:30

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

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

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

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

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

Tori Holmes

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

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

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

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

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

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

School Utilization Formula

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gerald Côté

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

Hungária Gala Ball

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

2:40

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

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

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

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

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

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

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

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

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

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

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

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

Coal-bed Methane

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

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

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

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

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

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

2:50

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3:00

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

Please proceed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

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

Please be seated.

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

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

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

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

head: **Government Motions**

4. Mrs. McClellan moved:

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

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Mrs. McClellan moved:

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

[Government Motion 5 carried]

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

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 27: Mr. Liepert]

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

Mr. Liepert: I adjourned debate. Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, in this time of unparalleled opportunity Albertans

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

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

3:20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3:30

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

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

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

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

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

Seeing none, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3:40

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3:50

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Flaherty: Yes.

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

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

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

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

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

Thank you. I appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker: The answer, please, member.

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

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Other questions of the member?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4:00

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

4:10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4:20

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

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

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

[The Speaker in the chair]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is the last point in this document:

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

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

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

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

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

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

4:30

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Flaherty: I'm finished?

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

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

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

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

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

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

4:40

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

The other issue of democratic deficit and democratic revitalization

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4:50

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Speaker: Please proceed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

5:00

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

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

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

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

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5:10

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

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

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

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

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6

Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5:20

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

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7

Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 8

Trustee Amendment Act, 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

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

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 28, 2006**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/02/28

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

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

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Strang]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered so eloquently by the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor. I'd like to begin my speech, as others have, by commending His Honour on the work that he has done over the past year. His love for the province is evident, and his dedication to our home is beneficial to all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the speech delivered was one that laid the plans for our province for the next 12 months. I'm very excited about many aspects in the speech. Quite a few of the areas covered are directly related to the constituency of West Yellowhead. As I'm sure my constituents are aware, West Yellowhead is a growing and a vibrant area. There are challenges within the electoral boundaries, but the people are facing these challenges and meeting them with innovation and success.

One of the areas touched on by the Lieutenant Governor was that of education. One of the challenges that West Yellowhead is facing is education. The challenge is not enticing students to postsecondary as much as it is having students make it through and finish their high school. I appreciate the creation of the high school completion symposium to help all legislators understand some of the reasons why students decide not to complete their studies. The government not only needs to find out why our students leave high school early but has to show young people in Alberta the extremely successful postsecondary schools in the province. We all know about how good our universities are in the province, but I think we need to highlight how good our consortium and technical schools are.

The education system in Alberta is top-notch and cannot be overlooked. I do not think there is a province in Canada that can match the performance of our system. This excellent system extends from kindergarten to grade 12 as well as to university and to our consortiums and technical institutes. In my constituency the consortium and technical institutes are extremely important as a lot of our citizens of West Yellowhead attend these schools. I think the government needs to continue to entice young people into the consortium and tech schools around the province. By doing this, it will encourage the students to stay in school and finish their high school studies. The government must stress the importance of high school education because without it life can be very difficult in this day and age.

West Yellowhead is seeing a boom in the region through the coal,

forestry, oil and gas, and tourism industries. This boom has brought with it many positive changes as well as many challenges.

My constituents are also heavily tied to the forest industry, and I'm very pleased to hear His Honour mention that the government will ensure a strong and sustainable forest sector. We must ensure that there is long-term sustainability in our forest sector. The future of West Yellowhead depends on a very smart approach to forestry management. My constituents depend on the government continually looking for new ideas and ensuring that this vital industry continues to grow. This industry will grow. I'm extremely confident that it will remain strong not only through the commitment to harness innovation but also the support to the Alberta forestry institute. West Yellowhead will always be intrigued by changes done to the forest industry. As a government we need to ensure that there is balance in the industry so that we will see full utilization of all products and services that forestry offers.

Another important industry for West Yellowhead is the coal industry, and my constituents were pleased to hear that there will be a commitment to the coal industry. Now, while debate is looming about this resource, we cannot underestimate the usefulness of coal, nor can we underestimate the effectiveness and the environment-friendly aspect of clean burning coal technology.

Coal has a rich heritage in my constituency, with the Mitchell family running Luscar in the early 1900s. This area was called the Coal Branch. Many of the communities in my area were established, built, pretty nearly destroyed, and rebuilt again all because of coal. It is so vital to communities like Edson, Hinton, and Grande Cache, which need the government to continue its focus on this valuable resource.

Although many people believe there is no such thing as clean burning coal technology, I would like to tell them to come out into my constituency. See for yourselves the work that is done in the area on research of this new technology. As the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor mentioned, we have coal reserves to at least a thousand years. We must continually push forward to find the clean burning coal technology as fast as we can. Even though many think we are not environmentally sound individuals, the environment is one of the most important things to my constituents, and they are extremely supportive of clean burning technology as they realize the economic benefits that we have. My constituents are also depending on the technology to move forward, to become more and more viable. The opportunities for West Yellowhead are immense, and I cannot wait to see some of our coal technology.

The final thing I'd like to touch on is the mention by His Honour of the rural development strategy. As you know, the strategy is very important to West Yellowhead as it is a rural constituency. There is so much development in this region, and much of it can be attributed to the rural development strategy. I believe my constituency is going to benefit because the people of West Yellowhead are striving to work with regions surrounding it to make sure we are prosperous. The rural development strategy pushes this idea of teamwork. I'm very excited to see how this government is going to invest in our rural areas.

I feel this strategy is only going to be successful if all rural regions work together. This has already been seen through the many economic partnerships that exist around rural Alberta. West Yellowhead shares an economic alliance with communities in the Drayton Valley-Calmar and Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituencies, and this strategic partnership has proven extremely valuable to our economic growth. The Grande Alberta Economic Region is a very good example of how a rural development strategy will be successful. As the government promotes partnership and teamwork, it will become very significant to my constituents. The rural development

strategy will complement the already established economic partnerships and will only make my region stronger.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents are optimistic about the future of this province. They have no reason not to be. The government has put a multitude of effort and resources into helping this province succeed, and this is the same for my constituency. We are excited. I am excited. I look forward to the next 12 months.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

8:10

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

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and offer my response to the Speech from the Throne. It has been about 15 months since I joined this esteemed Assembly, and let me start by saying: wow, what an incredible journey. I have found my time and experience as an MLA both engaging and rewarding. A year ago 13 of our 16 caucus members were new. We had to learn quickly, and we hit the ground running. Looking back, I am pleased with our work and promise you, Mr. Speaker, and the people of this great province that we're going to work even harder to advocate on their behalf and continue to take their issues and concerns forward.

Like I said last year in my maiden speech, sir, I represent a wonderful constituency. One observation I made in my 15 months of service so far was that my constituents are paying a lot more attention, and this is probably true for most other constituencies in Alberta. People are starting to ask questions and investigate available options. They demand answers and are only convinced when presented with facts and clear evidence. This is a trend I like and encourage. Albertans no longer have blind faith in their leaders. This may yet need to be reflected at the polls, and I hope that one day voter turnout would increase from its currently low levels.

Talking about observations, Mr. Speaker, I have also reached the conclusion that there's definitely a democratic deficit in this province. Alberta is exhibiting clear signs of democratic sickness. Take the short legislative sessions. We're lucky if we sit for more than 50 days a year, and that's counting both the spring and fall sessions. Take the lack of opposition representation on standing policy committees. Talk about the Public Accounts Committee and how handicapped it is. Take our privacy legislation, which really exists to ensure secrecy and privacy of government actions and decisions, where, in fact, it should be people's privacy we're guarding. Access to information has been turned into denial or restriction of access.

This province desperately needs democratic renewal. Part of the problem, I think, is attitude. Most cabinet ministers and some government backbenchers – and I'm not saying all, but some – believe or want us to believe that everything is A-okay and nothing better could be achieved. Why is the opposition questioning their divine wisdom? How dare we suggest alternate solutions? Many of them think: if it comes from this side of the House, then it must be bad. Now, how would I characterize this attitude, Mr. Speaker? I'd probably call it childish. I view it as regressive, misguided, and arrogant.

This government has made a habit of introducing and passing a budget and then blowing it to pieces, sometimes in less than two months or so, by incurring budget overruns, which I call an overdraft or a deficit, but the government spin doctors so cleverly call them supplementary supply. In any sound business when your spending exceeds your budgetary allowance, it's called an overdraft or a deficit. Could it be that this government intentionally lowballs and

underestimates its revenues? Could it be that the ruling Tories are using annual surpluses to cushion their ad hoc, one-off, pet projects?

My friends across the floor should think about this point for a second.

An Hon. Member: What friends?

Mr. Elsalhy: Few. A few friends across should think about this for a second. I hear the hon. Member for Castle Downs laughing. I really enjoy entertaining him.

Why are we spending more than we're earning? Think about this: why are we spending more than we're bringing in from stable funding sources like taxation or non resource-based income? This government's reliance on surplus, nonrenewable energy, resource-based income is dangerous. Markets are volatile and unpredictable. Better budget planning and fiscal restraint are really warranted. I'm hoping for a day when the budget would more accurately reflect our financial situation and when budget surpluses would be more closely forecasted. When will Albertans demand that their government think to the next quarter century rather than just to the next fiscal quarter?

Moving on to my next observation, which is the practice of governing from one crisis to the next and the demonstrated shift from need to greed, after 35 years in power the ruling Conservatives' prime directive, Mr. Speaker, is to sustain their grip on power and get re-elected. They're tired and stale. An open-ended question: why is it that the government is so bent on things like deregulation and privatization that it appears to have become a goal and not a means? Why wasn't privatizing health care, for example, and the so-called third way discussed during the November 2004 election?

People were promised the opportunity to be fully consulted. The government said that they were going to consult with people, but here we are on the verge of dismantling our public health care system, and no consultation occurred. Some people argue the fact that there's going to be a website where people can send e-mails to the government or that some documents would be put on the Internet for people to access. I don't think that this is consultation. I was not consulted. I wasn't consulted as an elected official, nor was I consulted as a front-line health care worker and not even as a citizen. Now, what do Martha and Henry think?

The next issue, Mr. Speaker, which I would like to talk about is the rate of growth this province is experiencing. Just today we tried to debate the urgency of people's drinking and farm water being contaminated by methane and other gases and contaminants, to just cite one example. The government side didn't think that was urgent enough, and the discussion went nowhere.

I guess my message here is that people should really come before profit. People before profit: I'm not sure that this is a sentiment that is shared by all 83 members of the House, but I know that at least 21 of them in opposition share that sentiment. Most likely the government has other plans for this province.

Think with me, Mr. Speaker, to the early days. Think a First Nations' tribe which hunted buffalo. They hunted one every two to three days, and that was good. Then they were able to organize their hunt and capture two or three animals in one expedition, and that was great. Then they reached the idea that if we drive the entire herd off a cliff, we can harvest tens or even hundreds of buffalo in a single day. What they had was a lavish feast for a short period of time, followed by famine as they depleted the resource. Is our speed of development and rate of growth taking us in that direction? Are we not spending our children's and grandchildren's money today? What are the ecological and environmental implications of our actions?

This province needs structure and control as it forges ahead. No one hates money. We all want to get richer, but it's the nature of growth that's in question. What I am advocating is smart growth. I want a future that is sustainable. This province needs a solid plan, and the Conservatives, unfortunately, cannot muster one. It's really time to wake up and take stock. Albertans deserve the best open, transparent, democratic government; the best affordable education, K to 12 or postsecondary; the best public health care system; and the cleanest and most sustainable environment on the planet. All Albertans should share in the Alberta advantage, not just a select few.

Many Albertans, Mr. Speaker, including many constituents of Edmonton-McClung, are hoping for better leadership and a clearer vision for the future but are also convinced that this government is incapable of delivering that. They're hoping that the next provincial election will provide a leader who is inclusive, collaborative, and in touch. They want a government that is responsive, representative, and accountable. People also hope to be fully engaged in the decision-making process, and I'm all for that.

8:20

This year's Speech from the Throne and, similarly, the taxpayer-funded 30-minute infomercial on television featuring the Premier were nothing more than feel-good, pat-on-the-back media stunts, a patchwork of mini-announcements and policies on the fly, big on short-term promises from a Premier who is now a short-term leader. It's a boom-year speech with no sense of a concrete framework for the future of Alberta.

Take, for example, the heritage fund. I'm pleased that, finally, some money is going to the fund. But, really, think in terms of your own RRSP, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking in proportion here. If you contribute \$1,000 annually into your RRSP account over 20 years, you achieve significantly more than \$20,000 in your 20th year, a lot more. Why didn't this government follow good fiscal reasoning and a proven practice and contribute annually, even in smaller amounts – we're not asking for a billion every year – rather than wait for years and years to finally put a billion dollars into it? The math doesn't add up. Again, there is no plan.

We were also pleased to see a number of issues addressed that we as the Alberta Liberal Official Opposition and Albertans across this province have demanded action on for years. We have long advocated for the twinning of highway 63, the development of an inventory of groundwater in this province, and for developing a strong land-use framework. We were excited about the announcement that some assistance will flow through Alberta Works to Albertans who cannot work. No details were given though. So, yes, we're glad the government has made an initial commitment to tackle these issues. We just hope that they are as good as their word.

I'm also happy with some recent announcements showing that this government listened and favourably reacted to some of my own concerns with respect to the threat posed to the privacy of information of Albertans by the USA PATRIOT Act, for example.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on about the hits and misses, what was in the Speech from the Throne and what was ignored or omitted. However, in the interest of time I will just recap by saying that the Alberta Liberal opposition will continue to work with the government if its members are reasonable and willing to co-operate. We will also hold their feet to the fire whenever they lose sight of why they sought office. We will constantly remind them that people should come before profit and that there is no contradiction between guarding individual rights and interests on the one hand while advancing business and growing capital on the other. We can all be

winner and enjoy what Alberta has to offer. The Alberta Liberals have what it takes, and we're ready to serve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure and a privilege to be able to respond to His Honour's Speech from the Throne. Having just listened to the previous speaker, one would think that either I live in a very different part of Edmonton or in some very secluded part of Alberta where we're blessed with privileges and blessings that other parts of Edmonton wouldn't enjoy. As I look at my constituents and as I look at the situation in my riding, it differs significantly from the doom and gloom that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung is professing there to be.

Let's start, for example, with the Speech from the Throne. The first main issue raised by His Honour was a learning society, education. Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton public school board is renowned not only throughout the province, not only throughout the country, not only throughout North America but throughout the world as a leader in education. It's not that long ago that I had the privilege of spending some time with the Minister of Education for Bavaria, Germany. Guess what? She was aware of the Edmonton public school board. As a matter of fact, they're remodeling their system in Bavaria based on the Edmonton public school board because of the approaches and the results that they achieved with the Edmonton public schools. It's quite unusual that the Member for Edmonton-McClung would not be proud of the system. Having the Member for Edmonton-Decore sitting behind him, who was a member of the board of trustees for the Edmonton public school board, I imagine that there must be a little bit of dissent on the Liberal benches because it is indeed a system to be proud of.

It's not only Germany that's looking at us. Governor Schwarzenegger just last year sent a whole troop of educators from the state of California to examine the Edmonton public school board and to remodel now California's school system based on the Edmonton public school board. That's just one of many school boards in this province who are doing exemplary work.

Mr. Speaker, we're not resting on our laurels. The Minister of Education and His Honour in the speech have indicated that roundtables will be taking place throughout the province which will be looking at some of the weaknesses within the system because no matter how good we are, you can never assume to be perfect. One of the issues that we will be looking at, according to the Speech from the Throne, is high school completion rates. The economy is booming in this province. There are many competing interests, and obviously for some when you juxtapose the potential of making some money versus attending classes and writing tests, money seems to be a bigger draw than writing tests, and they withdraw from school. That's only on the three-year completion. If you look at the five-year completion for high school students, we actually fall within the national average and do quite well. But that's not good enough, and His Honour has clearly indicated in the Speech from the Throne that we will be addressing those issues.

Now, again, maybe the media doesn't reach the southwestern part of Edmonton, but if one was to watch the news within the last couple of days, one would see, as indicated by His Honour in the speech, that the Minister of Advanced Education is addressing the issue of the trades and, as a matter of fact, extending the opportunities to our native population and making sure that they equally share in Alberta's booming economy and have the ability and the opportunity

to work within the trades and avail themselves of not only a good income but the intrinsic reward of being a member of a profession and learning the skills that will be transferable later on, no matter how the economy may turn in this province. That's just, Mr. Speaker, in the area of learning.

The Speech from the Throne carries on, and it talks about a prosperous society. Now, we all know that Alberta happens to be in a position where we can refer to ourselves as a prosperous society. But as I always say, the Stone Age, Mr. Speaker, did not end simply because they ran out of stones; it ended because another material came about. Bronze I believe it was, those days. Well, the prosperity in Alberta will not end on the day when we hear that slurping sound coming from the ground and the oil runs out. The prosperity coming from this particular resource will end because other resources will come online, and this government, according to the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, is quite prepared to look at that.

If you look at the Speech from the Throne, you will find that such innovative ideas as biofuels are being looked at, and as I can hear to my right, there are some serious considerations taking place to redevelop coal in this province. Mr. Speaker, we're lucky again because we have coal that is actually, comparatively, relatively clean coal, low-sulphur coal. If you look at the coal that's being dug out in the province of Nova Scotia, for example, or if you look at the coal that's being dug out in Europe, our coal happens to be one of the cleanest coal that you will find on the face of the planet. But we can do better. We know that there are possibilities of gasifying coal, and there are possibilities of developing secondary industries, which can carry our economy into the future.

So are we stagnant? Are we just relying on gas and oil? No, we're not. We're looking at value-added. We're looking at other resources. We're looking at stripping gas. We're looking at developing secondary economies, and we are already seeing progress in those particular sectors.

Also, in order to be competitive in this world, we are looking at infrastructure. The province is only as good and the economy will be only as good as the infrastructure that's put in place to support it. Supernet was just one example of the infrastructure that's being put in place to carry our economy into the future. Actually, a solid infrastructure such as highways, such as schools, such as hospitals, such as bridges and overpasses: those require investment as well, and the Speech from the Throne clearly lays out a plan that's affordable, a plan that's rational, a plan that's staggered over time to put that infrastructure into place. It appears that this kind of information simply is not getting across because the doom and gloom would make one believe that Alberta is on the verge of collapse economically and the infrastructure as well.

8:30

Now, in order for this province to prosper, there has to be a big plan in place, and His Honour has laid out that this government will be undertaking a land-use strategy. Mr. Speaker, we are blessed with wonderful land, with wonderful landscape over here, but in order for us to enjoy it and in order for our children to enjoy it into the future, we have to manage this. We have to preserve our environment, but we also have to have a co-ordinated plan about how we are going to manage our land. To do so, just like we have done with water, with the Water for Life strategy, the government will be developing a land-use strategy, which means that we will develop a co-ordinated plan on how this precious land of ours in this province will be used for industry, for development, for recreation, and for other uses. According to the Speech from the Throne that plan is being put in place. Albertans will be consulted, and municipi-

palities and other orders of government will be consulted on developing this land-use strategy.

Another issue touched upon by His Honour in his Speech from the Throne and a very topical issue at this point is the issue of a healthy society. No doubt this government places a great deal of value on the publicly funded health care system, but we also realize that changes need to be made. I think that realization is acknowledged by all members of this House, that certain changes have to occur in order for this system to be permanent, to be sustainable, and to be available to our children and our grandchildren. One of the changes and one of the alternatives that has to be introduced is innovation, and we have shown clearly, Mr. Speaker, and His Honour has noted in his speech that innovation actually works in the health care system. A prime example, as pointed out by His Honour, is the fact that with just a little bit of innovation, just a little bit of outside-of-the-box thinking, the wait-list for hip and knee replacements could be shrunk from 47 weeks to five weeks.

Now, if that kind of innovation could be introduced to other sectors of health care, that kind of innovative thinking and the ability to think outside of the box, if that ability to be different and to try something different could be applied to the health care system overall, clearly we could achieve better results perhaps for less money and an increased accessibility for all members of our society so that they can enjoy a good quality health care system into the future.

Another example, Mr. Speaker, is our health networks. A partnership between physicians, between specialists that can operate in cities 24/7 and provide ongoing, high-quality care to our residents is something that's being introduced. The Member for Edmonton-McClung will notice that in Edmonton, in the near future, there will be some announcements allowing doctors to practise and provide better care with the resources that they have and provide more continuous care to our patients.

Perhaps most importantly, as noted by the Lieutenant Governor, is the initiative of this government on cancer. One of the biggest parasites in our health system is cancer, killing our children, killing our parents, our brothers and sisters, and costing the health care system at the same time an enormous amount of dollars. Now, what can we do about it? Can we just treat it, or can we research it? Can we look at alternative treatment? Can we look at perhaps even preventing it? Well, we can, and this government will be not only a leader in this country and on this continent, but this province can actually become an international leader on cancer research with this injection of \$1 billion, and I think we all should be proud of it. Now, that's a positive story that again didn't get to Edmonton-McClung.

Superimposed on that, Mr. Speaker, is the initiative on battling crystal meth, which again is another parasite within the health system that's costing us not only in health care but also in justice and in other social departments. One needs to not only look at the money; we have to look at the moral cost that it brings to our society. Again, we are leaders in combatting crystal meth.

Now, another issue that His Honour brings as a challenge to this government, which is being addressed, is the issue of law enforcement. If we are to have a healthy and prosperous society, we also have to have a safe society, and I think, again, quite a well laid out plan is being put forth by His Honour in his Speech from the Throne.

Just to give you one example, a program that's being instituted by the Edmonton Police Service here in Edmonton, which perhaps the Member for Edmonton-McClung would have heard about, is a program that deals with issues of multiculturalism. We are the only police force right now in North America that has members of all visible minority groups – be it racial, be it gender preference, or

other minorities – who get together with officers at Edmonton police headquarters once a month and discuss issues of hate crime and resolve those issues together in a very consultative manner and educate our society. The results that they achieve are phenomenal. The percentage of hate crime in this city has dropped significantly ever since that task force was put together.

Another one is NET, Mr. Speaker, the Neighbourhood Empowerment Team, put together with the assistance of the Solicitor General of this province, putting one police officer together with a whole bunch of civilians and allowing civilians to take control of their own neighbourhood and basically chase crime away from their neighbourhood by patrolling neighbourhoods, by providing neighbours with Clubs to protect against car thefts.

Those are positive things that somehow do not penetrate across this aisle, and perhaps we ought to communicate them louder. Maybe the media is not doing a good job.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the Speech from the Throne. I'm very proud of the plan that has been laid out. I think that it's a plan that is second to none. I think it's a plan that makes this province yet again, this year, a leader in all realms of government. Is it perfect? No. That's why government continues to be needed. If you look for perfection, you will never find it because there is always room for improvement, but if you want to focus only on the negativities, you will never bring anything positive about. So I think we should continue on the positives. We should proliferate the positives and just only improve them and ignore the negative comments from across the aisle.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask our hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs whether the NET program is a provincial initiative. It's certainly an Edmonton city police initiative and has had some success in various neighbourhoods. I like the program very much. It's presently working in the Britannia Youngstown area of my riding. In what way was the province involved in that program?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Good question, Mr. Speaker, and I'd love to meet with the member after and explain it to him. In the instance of setting up the NET program in Edmonton-Castle Downs, I approached the Solicitor General and said that we need this program. Even though, indeed, the program is managed through the Edmonton Police Service, the Solicitor General, with the assistance of the Minister of Gaming, extended a grant allowing the program to move into that particular neighbourhood. That's usually how it is co-funded. Even though the program is administered by the Edmonton Police Service, the co-funding that comes for this program comes from the minister of lotteries, which allows them to put this program in place. If the member would like more information so he can set one up in his riding, I'd love to share that.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on the Speech from the Throne.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and an honour to rise and honour both the Lieutenant Governor and his message, a message of hope and a message with wide-ranging ideas for all Albertans. After one year in this position my constituents continue to support me and also to challenge me and stimulate me to seek better ways to address the public interest. Many of the issues

that were raised by the Lieutenant Governor are dear to my heart, so I'll respond to some of these with some amplifications that I hope are appropriate and helpful in the House.

Let me talk about democratic response-ability in the sense of a hyphenated word with the emphasis on the ability of people to respond and to be responded to on issues affecting their lives. One of our greatest challenges is finding creative ways to engage citizens, especially young people, who must learn ways to participate and influence our future, indeed their future.

I have many young people in my constituency who are seeking hope, they're seeking trust in a system that doesn't seem to be responding to them in many ways in a society that doesn't seem to be responding to them in a constructive way, and they're looking for integrity in their representatives. They're remarkably aware of the difference between looking good and being good, of speaking and acting, of material success and true personal success. I'm very proud of our young people and their motivation for more humane and simple lifestyles, recognizing the frenetic pace that's killing so many of our fellow citizens.

8:40

My constituents are looking generally for more respectful, responsible leadership in the province, particularly in relation to cherished values, including fair social supports, particularly for those in disadvantaged positions; better environmental protection and enhancement of our environment; predictable educational investment that they can feel significantly supported in; and real health care reform.

A welcome sight to see in the message from the Lieutenant Governor was an emphasis on a land-use strategy. Indeed, this is the third time this decade that this process has been attempted, and clearly this must be the foundation for all else that happens in the province, yet it is so late in coming. It remains to be seen whether it will actually govern decisions rather than simply guide decisions to be easily overcome by vested interests in and out of government.

We must have three elements if this strategy is to be effective. First, it must have significant public involvement, including our municipalities. Any land-use planning without that is doomed to failure.

Second, it must have true integration in all the ministries. Five or six ministries are now involved in it, and that's appropriate. Any policies now need to be integrated well into those ministries such that they all understand the same rules, the same goals, and the same process.

Third, whatever we come to in terms of a land-use strategy must be enshrined in legislation, not guidelines. Without legislation it will continue to be undermined and manipulated.

Without these, Albertans will continue to be rightly cynical about the real intentions, especially after two previous attempts at a land-use strategy, in relation to taking control of our future and not leaving it to the industrial community and vested interests.

In relation to social supports my constituents are very concerned about the mismatch between the economic success of the province and the penury in which many of our disabled and disadvantaged people are living. They want to see more fairness, indeed generosity, from this government. How can we expect people with disabilities to live below the poverty line, to receive less than a 4 per cent increase over the past decade while we in privileged positions, indeed, set our own salaries? Now, if that isn't a conflict of interest, I don't know what is. We ourselves received 4.5 per cent just this year.

In relation to the democratic deficit I am struggling with many in the House to find ways to engage more people in discussion and

active involvement in our political process for healthier communities and for better public policy. How do we get more participation in our constituency work?

Well, there are a number of ways that have been discussed across the country and are being embraced in a number of different jurisdictions. They have to do with, in the first instance, a citizens' assembly, such as the one that was held in B.C., and it holds real promise for engaging people, thinking perhaps for the first time about what a responsible electoral process might look like and looking at the whole electoral process for ways in which it might be more responsive in the election of their representatives.

We've talked repeatedly in the House about all-party committees, and it's not clear to me what the fear of this might be. Most jurisdictions in democratic countries argue for an inclusive, participatory democratic process where all ideas are shared and debated openly. It can only benefit our democracy to have this.

Fixed election dates would also be progress in terms of moving us towards a more stable, less manipulated, important election time.

Whistle-blower legislation: clearly one that this government has resisted for years but would demonstrate a clear commitment to wanting dissent, seeking opportunities for honest dissent. Many are looking in both the academic community and in the public for signs that this government is willing and courageous enough to welcome whistle-blowers. The most recent events around the grizzly expert being demoted is just the most recent example of undermining the public confidence. The scientific community needs a voice in public policy, and it's not clear the extent to which they are receiving that. Obviously it's not the only contribution to public policy, but science and public values, constituent values, should be determining more effectively the public policy we embrace.

Fossil fuel use is obviously a big issue in the throne speech and is rightly highlighted. I think it's important to recognize the new thinking south of the border, where President Bush himself has indicated that we have to end our addiction to fossil fuels. How are we embracing that in Alberta? Or are we continuing to hide from the reality that fossil fuels are fossils, that they're a thing of the past, and that we need to move quickly away from fossil fuel use as a primary form of energy production in this province? Our young people know it. Even our old people know that it's time to make the break. Rich as we are, there is no reason why we can't extend our fossil fuel life well into the future and be leaders in renewables and energy efficiency in this province.

I know that the Environment minister has talked about this. I would like to see some investment, significant investment, incentives in these kinds of initiatives, and we have yet to see that in a significant way. This is a win-win-win for Albertans. It would give us an economic competitiveness, not paying the same prices for energy that others would be paying because we would be generating more of it with renewables. We would have reduced fossil fuel costs, we would have new technology and jobs, and we would contribute to the global climate change problem. We would be truly leaders on the planet.

Biofuels are an excellent addition, and these were identified in the throne speech. They will diversify our agriculture, and they will move us along toward some of the renewable energy sources we've talked about, but they need a fair, level playing field to compete with the fossil fuel industry, which has had ample, generous, some would say ignominious subsidies over the years. Especially now, we need to incent energy that is good for the environment. We do not need to give incentives for fossil fuels any longer.

Coal is not clean. There may be some experimental and scientific research that's showing how to burn it in a way that gasifies it and where some of the capturing of pollutants can be achieved. There is

still a tremendous amount of energy that goes into extracting coal and into transporting it, and it is not clear to me from the literature I've read that we are even within 10 years of having clean coal. So I have real concerns about this, as many Albertans do. It's another demonstration of addiction to a fuel that has to be partitioned closely and slowly as we phase out of it.

Ironically, in the face of tremendous commitment to fossil fuels, we are talking about a billion dollars in cancer prevention when fossil fuels are a major contributor to cancer in the country. How does one reconcile these two, except in an unhealthy way, to see that an emphasis on fossil fuels is going to definitely require much more investment in cancer treatment and cancer prevention? There's a mismatch there that I think is not lost on most Albertans.

I was very pleased to see a youth environment summit being discussed, and I look forward to that very much. I think our young people have a great interest and a great willingness to give ideas and get involved in a very substantive way in protecting our environment and developing new ways of approaching a more sustainable environmental practice.

8:50

How will we measure a clean environment? After 30 years it's still not clear that we even have the general progress indicators in mind, let alone significantly measuring these measures of sustainability. The Pembina Institute has given us a wonderful model from which we could examine a broad look at social, economic, environmental indicators that would give us a proper balance on whether or not we are developing a more sustainable society. I hope we can see some of those included in our annual reports in this Legislature before long.

The Water for Life strategy has been a great prototype, a great guide. It has been there for almost five years. What we need now is sufficient investment to establish commissions, to protect watersheds, to monitor industrial activity, to prosecute polluters, and to shift to best practice wherever we can. We continue to focus on the end, on water treatment, instead of on the prevention upstream, upslope and on the preservation and conservation of water. This clearly has to be a focus for this next decade, especially in southern Alberta.

Why do we not yet have all water wells registered in Alberta? With hundreds of thousands of oil and gas installations and hundreds of spills every year, when will we see a monitoring agency with teeth? Why aren't there prosecutions for all these spills? How many contaminated sites will go unreclaimed and, ultimately, be passed on to the public purse? These are concerns that many of my constituents raise because many of them are in the oil industry, and they also have concerns about their future.

I think it's important in thinking about prosperity for the long term to remember how many of our so-called investments are actually expenses, and they've been externalized costs as a result of environmental and human health costs. I'm thinking here again in terms of our extensive dependence on fossil fuels. If the energy industry was paying its share of health and environmental costs, we would see a much different playing field for renewables.

In relation to health care it's I think fair to say that the primary care networks have made a great contribution to health care in all of our jurisdictions. It's nice to see health practitioners working in teams. They can produce more efficient, more effective results than isolated practitioners who are not co-operating and working on the same agenda.

I need to remind this Assembly, perhaps not my colleagues but the Assembly, that economic competition does not improve the care of people. It never has. Money will not be an incentive for improving

the care of people. We need administrative efficiency. We need more investment in prevention. We need full investment in home care and physiotherapy to keep people as active and mobile as possible. We do not need private options that will reduce public quality and access.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hinman: I'd like to ask the hon. member: does he feel that we need more administration in health care then? He didn't quite get to finish his point there. I'm concerned that it seems like we're already heavy with bureaucracy and not enough front-line service. Is that what you were intending? What did you mean?

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an excellent question. It's not clear to me what has been the result of regionalization of our health system in Alberta. Has that meant less bureaucracy or more? Has that meant more efficient leadership? Has it meant more investment in the kinds of preventive and health promotion activities that would actually reduce the population demands on the health system? Already we're recognizing that over 70 per cent of what's coming into the health care system is preventable.

So, no, I don't think we need more bureaucracy. I don't think we need more administration. I'm asking: have we assessed the relative merits of the changes in regionalization and the present administrative relationships? Could we make them more efficient and more effective and streamlined?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his comments relative to the importance of youth and the role they play. It's often said that the greatest environmental victories of the future will be not what label we carry, be it as a Conservative or a Liberal or a Bloc or a Green or a New Democrat. It ultimately will be the victory we carry as people concerned about the health of ourselves. Taking care of the environment is also taking care of ourselves, and that carries no label because we're all involved.

But I pose a question. On numerous occasions you've made reference to Water for Life. You've made reference to the issue of investment. As much as this government in the past and the federal government of the past had a fiscal regime relative to attracting investment in this province for some of the fossil fuels you make reference to, I would ponder his thought relative to a fiscal regime for environmental initiatives of the future, speaking to that responsibility that companies and others might also have as we invest in these important points that he makes reference to.

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an important question, how we incent in the right ways citizenry that is used to consuming. I think that one of the key indicators of whether we're moving towards more sustainable energy policy will be the degree to which we give incentives for people to consume less, to consume

smarter with less in the way of pollution and throwaways, and to consume, particularly, appliances and material goods that are much more efficient and much more beneficial in their level of pollution. In that sense Climate Change Central has conveniently put on their website every province in the country and all the incentives that each province has created for some of these changes in lifestyle that all of us need to make and that industry needs to make.

Alberta needs to do more relative to what other provinces are doing in incentives for citizens to do the right thing, to take the one-tonne challenge, for example, and to live in a different way that will demonstrate not only to our own society but to our children that we take seriously our commitment to living lighter on the Earth.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: No others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort on the throne speech.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered last week by the hon. Lieutenant Governor. Before commenting on the Speech from the Throne, I would like to recognize the outstanding job that the hon. Lieutenant Governor has done in the busy, exciting centennial year of Alberta. I also want to congratulate the government, our Premier, and our Minister of Community Development for putting together a great centennial celebration across our province.

Talking about the centennial, 2006 is the centennial year of our Legislative Assembly, the seat of our Alberta democracy. I want to thank the founding members of the Alberta Legislature and all the members during the last 100 years for keeping this legislative institution strong to serve the people of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to celebrating with you and all members of this Legislature the 100th anniversary of our democracy. Our democratic parliamentary system has over 800 years of proven tradition and experience. As long as Alberta follows this proven parliamentary system, we have no democracy deficit.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly address the Assembly today on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-Fort. In the past year I have had the opportunity to work with so many of my constituents. I'm proud to say that working together, we have made life in Calgary-Fort and elsewhere in Alberta better and better each day. Making life better is our commitment. Making a better life in our community and in our province is the government's goal.

There are several aspects of the throne speech that I would like to speak on today because they are of particular interest to my constituents and to myself. I will start by saying to the government of Alberta: thank you for a job well done. Indeed, our leader and our government members have done an excellent job in making Alberta the leader and a model in Canada. Where else in the world can we find a jurisdiction that's free of public debt, living within our means, having windfall surpluses and, yes, public issues that other jurisdictions only wish and dream to have? As a matter of fact, Alberta has the highest economic growth rate, the highest employment rate, the highest average income. Alberta is only the lowest in overall tax burden on its citizens in the country.

9:00

Mr. Speaker, to anyone who cries that Alberta's sky is falling or shouts that the glass is a quarter empty instead of three-quarters full or complains about living in Alberta or criticizes Alberta, I advise this person just to go out of the province for a while and look back. I also want to ask that person the question: why has Alberta the highest population growth? Yes, more Albertans may be indoor

bound during the long winter months, and we love each other lots more, but that's not enough to account for the tremendous growth in population. The true answer for Alberta's growth can be found in the 2,500-year-old saying of the great sage, Confucius: good land; birds nest. To that this not-so-wise Cao-fucius adds: good governance; people come. These growth statistics are very impressive, and they point us to the belief that our government is on the right track, and this second century belongs to Alberta.

To be a leader in this country in the long run we must use extreme caution with our surpluses because, as history has shown, our future can slip from under us before we know it. I'm so pleased to know that we categorically disburse the windfall surplus in three areas: namely, saving for the future, spending on priority items, and returning to Albertans to meet their rising costs of living.

This is why I am so enthusiastically supporting the announcement of the \$1 billion investment in the heritage savings fund, and a further investment will be tabled in Budget 2006. Today's windfall revenue comes only once, but with substantial investments into the heritage savings fund we will guarantee the future generations the benefit of today's economic prosperity. As a member of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee I welcome this addition to the fund on top of the inflation-proof amount and also suggest more savings in any form in the coming years.

Mr. Speaker, our wealth is created by our people. To continue our road toward prosperity, we need to develop our people, our human resources. I'm very pleased to hear of the government's big investment in education, making its priority education and training to be accessible and affordable to Alberta's youth, who are our future. This requires investment to create space in our educational institutions and provide financial assistance to the learners. It also requires lots of innovative approaches in learning and teaching.

Our full-steam economy indicates that there's a shortage of workers, but I want to emphasize one point here, Mr. Speaker. My constituents want to ensure that our Alberta human resources development should first focus on the people who are already here before bringing in people from other places. I'm pleased to see that our government tackled this labour shortage by partnering with aboriginal groups and industry on our new training projects for aboriginal people. We need our aboriginal population to be of higher capacity and ability and to contribute as much as possible to our economy. I support any effort to encourage this participation.

Mr. Speaker, we also encourage people to move to this province, but we need to support them when they arrive here and to integrate them into our economy as quickly as possible. My point is that in order for our economy to continue to roll like it is, we need highly skilled and hardworking, ambitious people to move to our province, but when they get here, we also need to help these people to be productive with their ability and to work in their fields.

I also want to draw our government's attention to helping the people who have already emigrated here, our fellow Albertans. More encouraging is the government's expansion in immigrant settlement services and English as a Second Language training and a commitment to making it easier for foreign-trained professionals to work in Alberta because getting our skilled immigrants working in their field as quickly as possible is one of the fastest and most efficient ways to tackle our labour shortage.

Businesses in my constituency have expressed to me that not only do they need skilled workers, but they also need more unskilled or low-skilled workers in their operations as they cannot find these people in the local labour market. Our government should develop initiatives to bring in low-skilled workforces from outside Canada, working with the federal government to sustain our economic development. Mr. Speaker, making Albertans more productive,

more skilful and innovative will continue to ensure our leadership in the world's economic competition. It also raises our quality of life in Alberta.

I also support the upcoming comprehensive regulatory review our provincial government will undertake this year to identify and remove the unneeded red tape. To open successful small businesses takes an unbelievable amount of dedication and risk, and government red tape cannot stand in the way of these businesses' progress. It's as simple as that.

Now, the other important matter for my constituents is health care. Another aspect of the throne speech I would like to address is government's commitment toward improving our health care system. My constituents are pleased to hear that the government keeps on improving our public health care system through innovative ways. Our current spending on health care is huge, over 30 per cent of Alberta's total budget and rising. To me, this is solid proof that our publicly covered health care system is the highest priority in our government.

My constituents and other Albertans are assured of this publicly paid system and services available to them when they need it. But to be better, we need to do more with the same spending. Let's just say that we sustain our public health care spending at the level, say, of \$9 billion. If we cannot make this spending amount more effective – that is, get more results from the same amount – then any additional spending should be more effective and innovative. That's what I mean. It's more bang for the buck, so to speak.

Mr. Speaker, there's always room for improvement, and I'm very pleased to see the drive for continuous and evergreen improvement in our health care system. The government also intends to improve the quality of health care services to Albertans, and any successfully delivery model utilizes the teamwork spirit of professionals together to provide this excellent care. An example is the Alberta hip and knee replacement project, that has successfully reduced waiting time from 35 weeks to six weeks, and so on. This is a tremendous achievement.

On the preventive side prevention in health care is very, very important. I'm very pleased to know that our government shows vision in this area by investing in cancer prevention and treatment research. Cancer is a leading cause of death in Alberta. We know that. I have heard some experts say that Alberta has the ability and the capacity to lead the world in this field, and now we have the will and determination, and the government sets it in motion.

Mr. Speaker, on another, more personal level before I conclude, I would like to share with the Assembly and my colleagues what I call the four-E principle for government operation: that is, to be ethical, economical, efficient, and effective. Why do we need this four-E principle? Because Alberta is a wealthy province. Alberta has no problem in revenue, but the issues are in spending, the problems and issues that other jurisdictions wish to have. For a population of just over 3 million people last year's public operating budget was around \$25 billion, and our capital spending was in the tens of billions.

This is just like in a family. When we have ample money, if we're not careful, we can easily spend on things that we do not need, or we buy things, and we don't even look at the price tags. There are many stories of individuals who won a huge windfall of lottery, but in a short time all is gone, all is spent. So just imagine if Alberta could and should gain only 1 per cent in economical and effective spending of our \$25 billion, that would free up \$250 million to invest in other needs or to save for the future. I don't want to lose the big picture here, but, Mr. Speaker, I can buy a pen at \$2, \$5, or \$20, but the function is to write. So small things can add up very quickly.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, on the macro perspective my constituents are concerned with the fact that our public spending has been growing faster than our population growth rate, our economic growth rate, and our demographic changes, so I want to conclude by suggesting the government focus on the spending priority. As being ethical in spending is a must already, governments should also create a drive for being economical, efficient, effective in spending our valuable and huge public dollars.

With all of what I've said above, we should not forget that another purpose of public spending is to assist in or stimulate the quality of life in Alberta. In this area I would like the government to continue effective programs to help vulnerable fellow Albertans: seniors, children, people with disabilities. I also would like to see the government continuing investment in programs that develop our community spirit, our cultural and recreation activities because these are what make Alberta the best place to live, to attract people, to develop our economy further and higher.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to compliment the member on his excitement and the enthusiasm that he always shows to the House here. I have to ask the question. The members of the government continually bring up that we're the lowest taxed area in the country. I wonder if, in fact, he's one of those who felt that they needed to criticize our women's hockey team for excelling and reaching their full potential. My question is that after we've educated them we've lost many of our best that have left our country to places of lower taxation. Do we ever consider that maybe we need to lower our taxes to bring those that have gone to other jurisdictions back home? It's not about what we're doing here in Canada but on the world level and the fact that we have to compete with other countries. Does the member consider that in his thoughts?

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, for your compliment of my speech. I thank you for that.

Also, I want to agree with you that, yes, we need to compete with the whole global economy, and we need to have our taxes not just the lowest in Canada but over the world. To attract people to come to Alberta, sometimes we need to tell people not just to look at your income tax but your other taxes netted up, and you see your net income would be better if you stay in Alberta. I know it for a fact. My relatives live in California, earning much more, but their taxes on spending or other taxes gobble a lot of things there. The cost of living is higher too. So that's a very good point.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it is a pleasure to speak and reply to the Speech from the Throne. I missed the last time because of a curling accident, so I missed all the debate last time. This is the first time I've had to reply to the Speech from the Throne in probably – I can't even think back that far – 13 or 14 years, so I'll take my opportunity to do that.

An Hon. Member: We're keeping track.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, you're keeping track. The hon. member used to live to hear me all the time, and I don't want to disappoint him tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I would first of all like to talk just briefly about the riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. As do all city ridings, it ranges across a wide range of types of people. What I want to say is that in this particular riding, ranging from Beverly and Abbotsfield up over as far as Delwood, we have a lot of groups. You know, people get lost in the city. Both our major centres, Edmonton and Calgary, are growing larger, and without some focus and some groups that help in the city, the cities would be very hard to live in. We are fortunate in the riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to have a number of groups at work, the community groups that we all have. They do excellent work. Without community groups, I think, to make it almost like a small town, it would be very difficult for the city of Edmonton and, I would say, the city of Calgary to operate in a very efficient way. But we're fortunate in the northeastern part of the city and in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to have a number of groups that really provide some first-rate service for people. Again, I don't know what we would do without the work that these people do.

We all had the medallions that we could hand out; I believe 30 medallions for each of the MLAs. Rather than pick individuals, what I tried to do was pick groups because it's very hard to pick 30 individuals. We tried to pick groups and organizations that provide useful community service to people, and it was well received. I just want to list some of the places where the medallions were handed out because it's not only in my riding; they go into other areas of Edmonton: region 6 children's services, Candora Society, WeCan, Emmanuel Home, KARA, Belvedere Community League, Partners For Youth, ABC Head Start, Abbotsfield Seniors Stop In Centre, Bosco Homes, Delwood Community League, South Clareview Community League, Goodwill Industries, ACT Aquatic & Rec Centre, the Northeast Teen Centre, DECSA, Clareview Head Start, Active Claims, and then we had the people – and I won't mention the names necessarily – that deal with people with WCB, which is tough in itself, Planned Parenthood, Balwin Community League, Chrysalis, Boys' & Girls' Clubs.

All these provide a type of service, and if they didn't do it, a lot of these services would come back on government. I for one wanted to show some recognition. I'm sure all members would agree that it is important to recognize these people that do very difficult work. They don't often do it for the money – that's for sure – because they're vastly underpaid, generally, the people that work in these organizations. They provide a very important service, and I just want to take the opportunity here, Mr. Speaker, to recognize them again in the Assembly.

Now I will move to the Speech from the Throne. It may not surprise you, Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to be less complimentary than some of the previous speakers. I watched the Premier's TV address, and then the following day we got the Speech from the Throne, delivered very well and very ably by our new Lieutenant Governor. You know, if we were looking for sort of the direction we want to go and were looking for substance, we didn't see it. I watched the TV address, and it was so complimentary and self-congratulatory that I would have thought the Premier would have worn out his arm slapping himself on the back. The point is that the rhetoric becomes over the top.

You know, I used to tease people opposite because everything was always the best here. We're the best in everything. They'd say the best in Canada, and then it was the best in North America. And I'd have to yell: we're the best in the world, the best in the universe. It's all right to be proud. It's all right to be proud of our province, and

so we should be, Mr. Speaker, but to sort of have this self-congratulation over the top serves nobody well. In fact, it gets downright embarrassing after a point. We think everything is perfect here, that there are no problems, that it's the most perfect society that was ever brought on God's green Earth just because we happen to live here in Alberta and we have oil and gas.

Mr. Speaker, I think that adds to sort of the first general theme I want to talk about, and it's ethics and accountability. The last federal election was fought on ethics, and Stephen Harper did a very good job during that election campaign nailing the federal Liberals on ethics. I won't go into what he has done after, but during the election campaign it was a very effective campaign. He talked about the culture of entitlement, and he went after the public inquiry there with Gomery. Of course, we should be outraged about that. When I heard the Premier say in the House the other day that, oh, he would be hanged or he'd be kicked out, well, we'd never even come close to ever having an inquiry. We'd never do it in this province.

9:20

So that's the reality. It's not that things don't happen here. To say that this is such a perfect, ethical government is just absolutely ridiculous, and people know that. The only reason we know it with the federal government is because we had the Auditor General that dug it out. There are serious ethical problems here, and I just talk about ethics in a broad sense, just what we've seen dealing with health care. We did not debate this during the provincial election. In fact, the premier said: we will not talk about it, and if I ever was going to do anything in health care, I would consult the people. Well, we saw what consultation is: we put out a little book and a website to get beyond the leadership convention of the provincial Conservatives.

Now, I say that that has to do with ethics. It has to do with why there's so much cynicism in politics today, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier had run, laid out what he planned to do a year later and said that this is a mandate, then he would have the mandate. I may not agree with it, and probably we'd still fight it in the Legislature as an opposition, but at least he would have a legitimate reason for going ahead. We wonder why people are cynical. Here it is; I guess it's a legacy of one of the people that helped destroy a medicare system that we're very proud of in Canada. That's a legacy that we want?

What's so frustrating about it is that the Premier is not accountable to anybody. He's not running again, and clearly the provincial Conservatives aren't going to do anything about it. So we're going to be in this debate, Mr. Speaker, about health care and privatization and doctors operating in two systems and private health care and the rest of it. Where was that in the Speech from the Throne? Where was that in terms of the TV debate? I say to you that ethics in government: you tell people what you're going to do, and you try to follow through with it. Then we wonder why, as I say, people are cynical.

Mr. Harper talked about the culture of entitlement. Well, that was true, frankly, and I think that even some people out here would agree that with the federal Liberals, when people are in power too long, maybe that happens. But there certainly is this culture of entitlement here and this idea that if you disagree with the government, somehow you're un-Albertan. Mr. Speaker, I say to you that this is frightening to me as a parliamentarian. I want to say to you that I've sat in the House before with Conservative governments, and it's much worse now than it used to be with Premiers Lougheed and Getty. Sure, you'd have the debate, but it wasn't nearly the situation that it is now, and I speak from generations of having been in this House before.

The Conservatives here should take a look at what happened back

in those days. This culture of entitlement is there, this arrogance that somehow you're going to be here with absolute power forever. I would remind the government that last election the 21 of us over here had more votes than all of you over there. To think that you speak for all Albertans is insulting. It's not the case. I say to you that you may think that you're invulnerable, some of you people that have never lost or seen any other governments. Mr. Speaker, that's an attitude that will come back to haunt you. Just ask the federal Liberals.

I say to you that this whole idea of the democratic deficit – my God, what we elect here are four-year dictatorships. Our House doesn't work. We complained about what was happening federally, but at least they have a Public Accounts that meets outside the House. They have a Public Accounts that can bring people in and do the job. Even Member of Parliament Mr. Williams sort of laughs at the one we have here, a lapdog. In fairness to the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, I understand that he's going to bring in a bill to try and make this a better situation in terms of our budget. It's ridiculous. We spent \$7 billion in November, you know, just with two or three or four days' debate.

What really makes me angry about it is that we refuse to look, as other provinces are doing, at a different system rather than the first past the post. Other provinces are looking and, I expect, the federal government will look at perhaps automatic four-year dates for elections, proportional rep, and other things. But do you know why they don't want to look at it? Precisely because they'd have less votes. They have 61 seats. They don't care about democracy, Mr. Speaker. They don't care about democracy because the system works well for them, but I'll tell you that it doesn't work well for all Albertans, and you see more and more people complaining about it.

So I'd just suggest that there are a lot of areas. When you say that everything is perfect, Mr. Speaker, well, there are a whole bunch of vulnerable people out there that don't think everything is perfect. We talk about the people with developmental disabilities. We've had that debate. We talk about seniors and long-term care. The money that they gave out last time: most people know that that's not going to begin to solve the problems. We have a class action lawsuit that was brought against this government and won. We have AISH people still with no indexation. We can index our own salaries, but we don't index for them, the poorest people in society. Ask them what they think about Alberta right now and their opportunities. Not everybody lives in downtown Calgary, where there's a lot of money being made. There are still a lot of people falling behind in the Alberta advantage.

We have the worst labour laws in the country for working people, absolutely no doubt about that. We saw what happens in Brooks if we don't begin to deal with some fairness. We wonder why there's a labour shortage. Well, people want decent labour laws. They want to have some respect in the labour place.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on. I just want to go to education, public education. Now we're going to have a round-table. We can't make a decision about the remaining items on the Learning Commission. We know that certain things work in the high-needs area. We don't need to start throughout the province with junior kindergarten and kindergarten: it's absolutely crucial for high-needs kids. Absolutely crucial, and we're sitting there. Where is the Alberta advantage for them?

Now we're going to have a round-table. We're worried about high school completion rates. Rightfully so, Mr. Speaker. We're worried about that. What do we do? We set up a round-table. In Edmonton public, for example, we look at what's happened. We used to have 99 counsellors in 1991. That's down to 43.8. Learning resources, librarians, those sorts of people: from 81 to 12. That tells

you some of the reasons. If we don't deal with the kids, as I say, at the junior kindergarten/kindergarten level, those rates are going to stay high because those kids will not have a chance. We know that if they're behind one year in reading by the time they hit grade 9, they're not going to complete their final years. We know those things. We don't need a round-table. We should get on with it.

I realize that I'm running out of time. That's, I think, an appropriate place to end my thoughts. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and put some thoughts on the record about the throne speech and its anticipated effect on the people who live in Edmonton-Centre. One of the things that is an offshoot of this, I'm hoping, is that I represent the constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and I'd like to see the name Edmonton reclaimed. I remember being told by one of the government members who is no longer elected that the reason that everybody was calling it the capital region was that the governing party had not been successful in getting very many people elected in Edmonton, and they needed to have some kind of a showing and wanted to be at the table, so they just lumped everything around Edmonton and were able to call it the capital region. It brought in Sherwood Park and Spruce Grove and Stony Plain and a number of other ones, and in that way they were able to get a number of their MLAs at the table. But now the name has stuck, and as a native Edmontonian I'm seeing the name "Edmonton" disappear, and I'd like to see that reclaimed from the capital region. It's somewhat reminiscent to me of having Edmonton Tel and AGT, and then that morphed into Telus, and then Telus moved away. So there was a resource that we'd invested in and took a certain amount of local pride in, I think, and now it's totally distanced from us. Frankly, I think they broke a deal, but that's aside from what we're talking about with the throne speech today.

9:30

I still see a bias for Calgary in this government, and I hope that that's going to be addressed. You know, I noticed that this year the Great Kids awards are in Edmonton, but I'm struggling to remember the last time that it was. I was expecting it to sort of go back and forth, and it didn't seem to do that. The first couple of ones were in Calgary. I was waiting for it to move to Edmonton, and I noted they were in Calgary.

Something else I noticed was the Alberta centennial money that paid for the cowboys to descend upon the New York Stock Exchange, a big promotion for Calgary and paid for out of the Alberta centennial budget. Not one mention of the rest of Edmonton. Not one mention of the capital city of this province, which is Edmonton. Very interesting because that was supposed to be promoting the whole province, but it wasn't. It promoted Calgary, and that was Alberta centennial money that paid for that. I remember seeing the banner behind the shot that they had of them inside the New York Stock Exchange.

I always notice the government's announcements. The very good announcements and the very bad announcements all happen in Calgary. If they're going to announce that they paid off the cash debt, not the infrastructure debt, not the social debt but the cash debt, they do that in Calgary. Or if it's an announcement that they don't want people to pay very much attention to, then that happens in Calgary, but the rest of the time they can manage to do it in Edmonton.

I'm just hoping we'll see a bit more reclaiming of the name of Edmonton but also the important position I think this city holds in the province. It is the capital city. It is where the Legislature is. I'm proud to have the Legislature in my riding of Edmonton-Centre. I know I take a lot of teasing – and I deserve it – because every time I'm introduced in a committee or at some function of the government, I'm very proud to welcome everyone to my constituency of Edmonton-Centre when they're visiting the Legislative Assembly.

When I look at my riding, I am so blessed to have a constituency whose constituents are so very diverse. I truly treasure that, and I am so pleased to be able to continue to represent the people that live in this area. It is a very dynamic constituency. In between any given election 50 per cent of my constituents will have moved away, so when I go door-knocking, the chances are pretty good that I'm pretty much starting over every time. It's getting a bit more stable now as we have more people buying lofts and condominiums, and there's a bit of a shift to more of a sort of urban/metro mentality in downtown Edmonton, but it is very wide-ranging. This is, I've been told repeatedly, the most economically diverse riding in the province. We really go from the homeless guys that are living underneath the bridge behind my office to the million-dollar-plus apartments that are along the top of Victoria Golf Course there on Victoria drive and everything in between.

I have a lot of older housing stock, and with the older housing stock are lower rents, quite frankly. So we have a lot of people here that are really watching their pennies, a lot of students attending the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan, NorQuest, Alberta College, NAIT, just about any postsecondary institution you can think of in Edmonton, and they're likely to be living in the downtown area. Lots of seniors are living there, artists, new Canadians, and immigrants newly arrived to the country. We have a really diverse community. I'm looking through the throne speech and thinking: "Okay. How does this affect the people that live in my riding?" Let's start with the seniors.

Long-term care is a big issue. The government is certainly well aware of it, but I don't think any of the seniors that live in my constituency are going to be very happy with the glacial movement on long-term care and strengthening long-term care. If anything, what I'm seeing is a move for the government to divest itself of responsibility and funding in long-term care as they reclassify a number of long-term care facilities to assisted or supported living, which doesn't have a medical component to it, so it doesn't get the same kind of funding from the government, if at all, and not the same kind of legislative overlay or standards for it, and standards is one of the things that we were most aware was lacking from this government. It's certainly an area the government needs to continue to work hard on because it has not come up to the mark on that one at all.

One of the issues that's been raised by my constituents in a number of different sources, both from home-care providers, those that are representing organizations that hire home-care workers and contract with the government, and also from individuals who are under self-managed care programs who hire home-care workers on their own to organize that – the availability of home-care workers is at a crisis state. We just can't get them. We don't pay enough to home-care workers. People are not willing to do it.

The most recent thing that came across my desk was the price of gasoline to put in their cars to drive from place to place. Nobody is increasing a home-care worker's wages to cope with the increasing cost of the gasoline, and they're just looking for other jobs and moving to other sectors. When you've got a hot economy like we've got, they can find another job, and off they go.

So we're saying, "Don't worry; we're going to look after you" to

a number of the vulnerable in our society, but then we actually haven't made sure that we've got the systems in place to in fact look after people, and when we can't get workers who are willing to be home-care workers, I think our systems really start to fail the vulnerable.

We on the Liberal side do have Bill 205, which is coming forward later, sponsored by our critic for seniors, the Member for Lethbridge-East, which is in fact proposing standards for long-term care and additional framework to allow for an ombudsperson or someone to whom complaints could be directed and would be investigated. So I'm hoping that the government, if they're not able to follow through on their own promises for home care, can support the Liberal bill that's coming forward.

I have a large gay and lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual community that lives in Edmonton-Centre. I'm very proud of them. The feedback I've had from them on the throne speech is that they were pleased to see that the government did not go forward on any kind of action around changing the marriage commissioner requirements. They're pleased to be going on with their life and with their families and are glad to have the recognition that they now have federally for their marriages and are pleased to see that the province has stayed out of it.

The students that I talked about earlier are not getting any certainty around tuition increases, certainly not whether it's going to drop but how much it's going to increase, and I'm countering that against the Liberal idea of looking at providing 16 years of public education. I mean, it's very hard to get a good job now without a minimum of an undergraduate degree. So if that's the status, then why aren't we looking at supporting education to that level? I challenge the government to start looking at that.

I have a couple of organizations and agencies in my constituency which are experiencing some change, and I thank the government for their support of them, and that would be the new YMCA downtown. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has been a long-time supporter and I know was really pitching strikes for them in the cabinet, so I thank him for his support of that project. I think it's very important to the people that live in the downtown centre but also beyond that, and the YM has worked with the communities to try and address some of the concerns that have been raised about access and location and things like that.

9:40

Also, the Edmonton Art Gallery, now the Alberta Art Gallery. Once again we lost the name of Edmonton, but we'll give it up for the sake of Alberta. Again, I thank the government for finally coming through with some additional funding to help us get a wonderful new art gallery. It is an art gallery for all of Alberta, and it does house the Alberta collection of art, so thank you for that. I'm proud to have both of those in my constituency, and I thank the government for recognizing how important they are to their communities.

A number of people, a lot of people actually, in my constituency are on AISH, particularly with mental health issues. They tend to cluster downtown because of the cheaper housing stock but also the access to various social agencies that assist them. They have experienced a great deal of uncertainty and some very hard times. I know they're glad to see the increase that has been offered by the government, moving them up to I think it's \$1,000 now, but there still continues to be uncertainty about whether they will be subjected to asset testing, whether that level would be raised. They continue to point out how difficult it is to try and live with a disability. That's why they're on AISH, Mr. Speaker. You know, that's why they qualify for that program. They have certain needs and requirements and are not able to function in a Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 working environment.

They qualify for this money, but, boy, is it tough to be an able-bodied person out there living on a thousand bucks a month, never mind somebody that has some other disability that is a barrier to them. That's really hard. I think that keeping them in constant poverty is not the most positive thing we could be doing with the vulnerable in our society. I continue to urge the government to recognize the immense contribution that they make through their volunteer hours but also as members of our community and to try and support that.

I was very pleased to be appointed by the minister of infrastructure to the new design committee around the Legislature Grounds. I'm looking forward to working with that committee. I've got some great and exciting ideas on incorporating designs for winter cities, the importance of connecting to the surrounding community, including particularly Rosedale, looking at environmental design, safety through design, and public places as gathering spaces. I'd love to see a public art policy, with 1 per cent of the budget going to public art. Just think of all the sculpture and neat stuff we could have if we incorporated something like that and also to be able to maintain as many of our heritage buildings as possible.

The last thing that was mentioned to me about that was: could there please be some bike lock-ups worked into that? I thought: "Well, yes, that's true. We could, and that would certainly be working with an overall support for public transit." Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:45 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, March 1, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/01

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a distinguished constituent of Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Mr. Brian Storseth, the newly elected Conservative Member of Parliament for the federal riding of Westlock-St. Paul.

Mr. Speaker, Brian Storseth was raised in Barrhead and is a graduate of the University of Alberta. He owns the Co-operators in St. Paul. Brian is a former youth vice-president of the Barrhead-Westlock PC Association, a former councillor for the town of Barrhead. It is interesting to note that Brian also worked for the Speaker as a summer student. His experience allows him to recognize the diverse needs of rural Albertans. I know that Brian is committed to working hard to represent our joint constituents, and I look forward to continuing our association.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Brian Storseth is seated in your gallery this afternoon, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce the first-ever recipients of the Lois Hole humanities and social sciences scholarship. Now, as we all know, Alberta's former Lieutenant Governor, the late Hon. Dr. Lois Hole, was a rare and indeed a treasured individual. Never before has someone so deeply touched so many people with her openness, her warmth, and her empathy. She was someone who fostered hope in the future and faith in the goodness of humanity. She urged us to stand up for what is right, what is just, and what is meaningful, and she encouraged us all to be kinder to one another. To say that she was highly respected and much loved is an understatement.

Most of all, she reminded us of the value of education and its fundamental importance to the future strength and the vitality of our province. That's why it was so appropriate for our government to honour her memory by establishing the Lois Hole humanities and social sciences scholarship.

Earlier this afternoon it was my great pleasure to join Mrs. Hole's son Jim and the Minister of Advanced Education to present each of four students with a \$5,000 scholarship in memory of Mrs. Hole, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Advanced Education assist me later on. In the members' gallery are several guests from today's event, and I would ask the Assembly to hold its applause until they are all introduced.

Our guests include Mr. Jim Hole, of course, Sandra Kereliuk, who served as the former Lieutenant Governor's executive assistant, and with them are the most important people of all, the four inaugural recipients of the Lois Hole humanities and social sciences scholarship. I'd ask them to stand because they're very special people: Roman Sokolowski from Athabasca University, Barbara McLean from the University of Alberta, Karen Leung from the University of Calgary, and Jacqueline Quittenbaum from the University of Lethbridge. Congratulations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they are joined by a number of their friends and family members. As well, Stuart Dunn and Helene Lagace, staff members with the Alberta scholarships program, are with us today. So please join me in extending the warm welcome of the Legislature to all of these honoured guests.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. the Premier indicated, we had a scholarship ceremony awarding the scholarships, and we had obviously very proud members of families, friends, and professors join us. I'd like to introduce them and ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Karen Grove, who is the mother of Roman Sokolowski, Stefan Sokolowski, grandparents Mike and Lena Sokolowski, Don McLean, Gail McLean, Willy Petryk, Issy McLean, Selena Robinson, Sara Grove, Lise Gotell, Linda Trimble, Dallas Cull, Sean McLean, Matthew McLean, and Brenda Dietrich. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour for me today to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly people from the constituency of Airdrie-Chestermere, particularly one of my favourite schools in the world, the Airdrie Koinonia Christian school. They try very hard to come every year, and despite the bad roads last night and the snow they made it today anyway. I would like to introduce Mr. Dean Hughes, Mrs. Sylvia Irvine, Mrs. Terry Mammel, and Mrs. Judy Vellacott, the parents and teachers for this group of students. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to all members of the Assembly students from St. Martin Catholic school in my constituency. There are 21 of them altogether. They are accompanied by their teacher. They're in grade 6, and they've completed a tour of the Legislative Assembly building, enjoyed it thoroughly, and answered all my skill-testing questions perfectly, so they're a very bright group. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all MLAs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Dennis John Nowoselsky. He is a former pastor and public servant from

Saskatchewan hoping to move to St. Albert. I wish him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 73 students from St. Matthew elementary school in my constituency. They are accompanied by their grade 6 teachers Mrs. Sylvia Synenko, Mr. Roman Tarnawsky, Mrs. Crystal McNabb, and Ms Carrie Forster as well as Mrs. Bonnie Smith. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Tony Clark. Tony has joined our caucus team as our new communications officer. Tony was the northern Alberta organizer for the NDP in the recent federal election and previously served as research assistant to our caucus, where he substantially increased the popular vote, I might add. Tony is also an avid rugby player and graduated from the University of Alberta with a degree in theology and a degree in economics. He's seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature two very special guests, Kathryn and Stewart McLean. Kathryn and Stewart are both my cousins who are here today to watch the proceedings. Kathryn has been teaching in Taiwan for the last two years, and Stewart has been travelling the world and has just returned from Australia and Thailand. I would now ask if they could rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two very dedicated young ladies that are currently enrolled in the third-year nursing program at the University of Alberta. We all know the commitment the nurses make to their patients in care and caring, and I can assure you that if the rest of their class are as dedicated and committed as these two, that portion of our health care is in very good hands in years to come. Kaley Saumer is from Onoway or, as I'm told by my colleague, Whitecourt-St. Anne, and Lynette Stalwick is from Vermilion. I would ask them both to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Lois Hole Humanities and Social Sciences Scholarship

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I speak for everyone in this Assembly when I say that since the late the Honourable Lois E. Hole left us, Alberta has not been the same. We miss her warmth and compassion, we miss her grace and elegance,

we miss her practical yet poetic vision, and of course we miss her great humour.

Mrs. Hole was a champion of education who spoke often of its power not only for the individual but for our communities, our province, and our nation. She deeply believed that education was crucial not only for practical purposes but for creating a moral and compassionate society. Time and again Mrs. Hole spoke eloquently in inspiring words of support for education, the arts, and humanities, but her actions spoke even louder than her inspirational words for she lived a life that truly embodied a passion for learning and education, a passion for art, music, books, and creativity, and a passion for people, particularly children. She left us with a legacy spanning so many areas from libraries and literacy to music and theatre, from gardening to health care.

Last year the Alberta government in the throne speech established the Lois Hole humanities and social sciences scholarship to honour Mrs. Hole's memory and her commitment to education, and today the first recipients of the scholarship were honoured during a ceremony here at the Legislature. We're very proud that many more will receive the scholarship in the years ahead.

There is one recipient from each of the four universities in the province. Each receives \$5,000 towards his or her education. These recipients, Mr. Speaker, truly embody the future strength of our province. Yes, they are academically gifted, but they were selected by their institution to receive this scholarship primarily for their leadership and their contributions to their communities. In this they are true role models for our province. They are role models who are living out Mrs. Hole's legacy in their daily lives not only by pursuing excellence in learning but by giving back in whatever way they can to help improve the lives of those around them.

The four scholarship recipients are pursuing studies in the humanities and social sciences, a pursuit which is vital to the future of our province. Academic excellence in the humanities and social sciences builds on our province's knowledge base in countless ways. Research and innovation in these areas allow us to know more about societal trends, demographics, social issues as well as community and individual development. This knowledge feeds valuable research into issues that Mrs. Hole cared passionately about, issues such as learning disabilities among children, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and illiteracy. As a government we support the arts and humanities in many different ways and are working towards even stronger support for the years and decades ahead.

Mr. Speaker, today is a day to celebrate the future of four talented Alberta students, four individuals who stand ready to take hold of a bright and promising future. They've been introduced, and I'll say it again. They are Roman Sokolowski, Athabasca University, taking a bachelor of arts in political economy; Barbara McLean, University of Alberta, taking a bachelor of arts in political science and women's studies; Karen Leung, University of Calgary, taking a bachelor of arts in psychology and hoping to go on to a master's in clinical psychology; and Jacqueline Quittenbaum, University of Lethbridge, also taking a bachelor's in psychology and hoping to go on to a master's in speech language pathology.

Mr. Speaker, today is also a day to remember, to honour, and to celebrate the life of a truly great Albertan and Canadian, Lois Hole. We see here in the faces of these students the power and the inspiration that Mrs. Hole left for each one of us, a legacy that will last for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I regret that I never had the personal pleasure of meeting the late the Hon. Lois Hole, but like tens of thousands of other Albertans and, indeed, other Canadians from coast to coast I've been inspired by her commitment to public education. Mrs. Hole respected all the educational disciplines, but there was a special place in her heart for the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences. She understood the tremendous value and power of a well-rounded education, strong in the liberal arts. Mrs. Hole knew that a liberal arts education is the best tool for developing critical thinking and creativity, for creating stronger communities, and for building bridges between different cultures. She believed, quite correctly, that the arts and letters are absolutely indispensable to our progress and our prosperity.

Not long before her passing the late Lieutenant Governor, remarking on Alberta's good fortune, said: "It is a time of great opportunity for Alberta. We must not miss it." She was right. With the resources currently at our disposal we could create the best educated population in the world and, by doing so, enjoy the kind of Alberta that Lois Hole always dreamed of, a place where creativity, tolerance, compassion, respect, and imagination combine to create a new and better society. She might have called such a place a kind of paradise. To Lois Hole compassion and kindness were the ultimate virtues, so it is fitting that the scholarship that bears her name rewards students who use their talents in the expression of those virtues, providing leadership and service to their communities.

I would like to congratulate the first four recipients of this new scholarship. They should be very proud both of their individual accomplishments and that they have helped to carry Lois Hole's legacy forward. If Mrs. Hole were still with us, I'm sure she would have given Roman, Barbara, Karen, and Jacqueline each a warm hug and a few whispered words of advice or support, and then, in all likelihood, she would have told anyone within earshot about the importance of maintaining and improving our public education system. In her absence it falls to us, the people of Alberta, to carry on her work. Let's keep building great public education in this province. Let's bring Lois Hole's dream to life.

Thank you.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I'd request unanimous consent for the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to reply.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the distinct honour of knowing Her Honour the late Madam Lois Hole before I ever had the opportunity to sit in this Legislature. I learned a great deal from her life and drew lots of inspiration from her life's work. It is, therefore, a distinct pleasure for me to rise today and commend the government of Alberta for establishing the Lois Hole scholarships in humanities and social sciences to celebrate her work and to salute her. I'm particularly glad that Jim Hole could be present this afternoon, and on behalf of the NDP opposition I would like to extend warm greetings and best wishes to Mr. Hole and the entire Hole family.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Hole dedicated her life to hard work. She worked side by side with her husband, Ted, to build a successful farm business and then extended that success by becoming an author and a public speaker. Her true success, however, was in her generosity and sense of community. Mrs. Hole was a model of hard

work, leadership, and community service. It is fitting, therefore, that the scholarships bearing her name should be awarded based on those attributes.

Her Honour's dedication to education is beyond question. Before becoming the Lieutenant Governor, Mrs. Hole served as a trustee and chairperson for the Sturgeon and St. Albert school boards. She also served as a member of the Athabasca University governing council and honoured all Albertans in her position as the chancellor of the University of Alberta. Her Honour will be remembered as one of the best-loved Lieutenant Governors to ever serve in this province, and it is no wonder. Lois Hole was truly the queen of hugs, a tireless advocate for the arts and literacy, and a true champion of public education.

I extend my warmest congratulations to the first four recipients of the Lois Hole humanities and social sciences scholarships and their families. I'm confident that these scholars will follow the exceptional example set by Lois Hole, and I wish them all the best in their studies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Privatization

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is full of contradictions. Yesterday the Premier introduced a proposal that would see some Albertans receive far better access to health care than others if they just write a cheque for it, yet on the same day the Premier insisted that the ability of Albertans to pay will never determine their access to health care. Can't have it both ways. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier explain his claim that Albertans' ability to pay will not determine their access to health care when his own government has just proposed a plan that would allow certain Albertans to receive much quicker care if they're able to pay?

Mr. Klein: Wrong, wrong, wrong. You know, the Leader of the Official Opposition stands up and fibs not only to this Assembly but to the world.

The Speaker: Please. We've had discussions on the usage of certain words. I'm going to ask the Premier of the province of Alberta to withdraw the word "fib."

Mr. Klein: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I won't use the word "fib." I'll say that he doesn't tell the whole truth all the time – most of the time.

The Speaker: We have a point of order on that point. I think it's really important that we use proper decorum.

Please proceed.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, my point is taken and made, but I do apologize for calling the hon. member a liar.

Mr. Speaker, if this member or any person in this Assembly or any Albertan is sick or injured, they will be treated. They will be treated under the public system, and they will be treated immediately according to the triage procedures that are available in our health regions.

Mr. Martin: The rich first.

Mr. Klein: No, no. Not the rich first. It doesn't matter who you are. You could be Ray Martin. You could be . . . [interjections] Oh, no, I'm sorry. You can't use a name. You could be the hon. member. You could be anyone. You could be Mrs. Jones. You will get treated whether you have no money whatsoever if you have a heart attack, if you're banged up in a car accident. But if you have a hernia, like Jack Layton, the leader of the NDs, and if the doctor says that you will have to wait a year, and it's bothering you, then you can buy insurance, or you might be able to. That's the proposal. If there's a better idea, then send it over.

[Several members displayed a publication]

The Speaker: We've got a point of order on the utilization of exhibits, I gather.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. A straightforward math question: when two Albertans are waiting for a knee replacement, and the richer Albertan pays for treatment and waits two months and the poorer Albertan stays with the public system and waits 12 months, how much longer did the poorer Albertan wait? How is this equal?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. leader is saying is that the poorer Albertan should wait 12 months. That is unacceptable. We want to improve access for both those who can afford to pay and those who can't afford to pay. Now, aside from that red book, which, by the way, contains absolutely nothing in terms of bringing the costs of health care in line with the rate of inflation or improving access – it says nothing about that whatsoever. You know, they can hold it up all they want because it does absolutely nothing. The whole idea of this proposal – and it is a proposal because there is a public consultation process – is to improve access for those nonemergency situations.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, assuming that we all want to improve the public health care system, can the Premier explain how allowing doctors to practise in both the private and public systems will reduce costs for all Albertans?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is a matter for the public consultation process. As I indicated yesterday – and the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was at the media scrum – he can participate in the public consultation process and present those ideas. There will be plenty of time for debate in the Legislature if – and I underline the word “if” – legislation is introduced. If they have better ideas, if through the public consultation process they can present an alternative way to bring the costs of health care in line with the rate of inflation, if they can demonstrate very concrete ways to improve access, then fine, we'll consider those.

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

Private Health Care Insurance

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only is this government unable to provide evidence that supports the Premier's reforms to health care, but they're unable to answer the questions that are on the minds of most Albertans. These are basic questions that a govern-

ment pursuing massive reforms should be able to outline clearly. I will speak slowly. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what other health care services currently covered by public insurance plans does the minister intend to delist?

Mr. R. Miller: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Just a second.

A point of order on what? I'm sorry.

Mr. R. Miller: On the Premier's language and his behaviour in the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We'll deal with it later.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I heard him suggest that we were planning to delist services. That is not the case. It's neither in the consultation document nor is it contemplated as we go out and talk to Albertans about the policies here that, number one, talk about putting the patient first, talk about building a stronger public system, talk about doing things to improve the public system, talk about interregional co-operation, alternatives in paying and compensating health care professionals. Perhaps he could elucidate more clearly so that I could contemplate his question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take it that nothing will be delisted, and we'll keep her to her word.

To the Premier: given that half of Alberta households make less than \$50,000 per year, why does the Premier think that the average Albertan can afford private insurance? Is that what Aon said?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, again, all we're proposing at this point is a public consultation process. Now, if the hon. leader is opposed to us consulting the public, then stand up and say so. If he's not, then I would hope that he will participate in a meaningful way and provide positive input, not the red book because it contains nothing, positive input, input that will achieve two things: one, bring the costs in line with the rate of inflation, if we can do that, and improve access. If he has any ideas on how that can be done, any idea.

2:00

You know, as I said, there are a thousand pieces to this puzzle. What we're proposing is one piece contained in – I don't know how many recommendations in the framework. One piece. That represents about one or maybe two pieces to the puzzle. There are probably a thousand pieces to the puzzle. We'll consider any good advice from any of the people who submit thoughts and ideas to the public consultation process.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: for the record is there a plan to eliminate health care premiums and have Albertans pay for private insurance instead?

Mr. Klein: No. There is a plan to consult with Albertans. I'm going to say it very slowly. There is a plan to consult with Albertans, including members of the opposition Liberals and the opposition NDs and the opposition Alliance. There is an opportunity to

consult with Albertans and an opportunity for all of these members to provide their input.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As experts predicted, the Chaoulli case is being misinterpreted and misused for political purposes to justify reforms that the court never envisioned. Yesterday in the Assembly the minister of health began that process in Alberta. The Chaoulli decision lifted the ban on private insurance on the understanding that the rule against doctors working in both systems would remain in place. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why is the minister proposing to allow doctors to work in both systems? The Supreme Court decision provides no basis for that.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, as our Premier has said many times, this will be a part of public consultation. What I referenced yesterday were papers that were provided last November at a conference in Vancouver where Peter Hogg, a constitutional lawyer, and Marvin Storrow spoke about the very real question of Madam Justice Deschamps' ruling that cited the Constitution in Quebec and the Charter of Canada and suggested that if one is approved for one part of Canada with the Quebec Charter, it may very well apply for the rest of Canada. The great body of evidence that they were providing at that time suggested that all provinces should be looking at that.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, when I was at the meeting with Mr. Clement and the other health care ministers from across the country, I was told that at least six other provinces are reviewing their own legislation and regulation in light of the Chaoulli decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the majority decision was that allowing private insurance would not necessarily improve waiting lists, and some insisted that it would in fact weaken the public system, how can the minister say that private insurance will improve public wait times?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in the document, in fact, though suggestions were made that there may have been some deleterious reference, the vast majority of the opinion cited that the proponents of the Canada Health Act failed to show any illustrative point where private care had eroded the public system. They cited that very definitely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: since the court ruled that Quebec's restriction on private insurance was valid only if wait times in the public system were reasonable, why not simply fix the public system?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, and there is a great deal of work being done to fix the public system. The arthroplasty project, that sees hip and knee replacements done in this province in ways that reduce the wait times, is a primary example of something that leads the country in reducing the wait times. That's an outstanding event that takes place right here in Alberta. We intend to keep advancing in this direction, reducing the wait times in the public system.

Simply put, what concerns me a great deal is that we can do these things. We can make the public health care system more efficient, and we'll continue to work on that every day, putting the patient first, but we cannot guarantee that the system and the way that we're delivering it today with the rising costs of drugs and technology is sustainable for the long term. We are not looking at today and tomorrow; we're looking at the long-term horizon of delivering public health care responsibly.

Health Care Privatization

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I released a study that shows a direct link between the amount of private health care in a system and increased waiting lists. It found that even small increases in the percentage of private delivery cause wait times to jump dramatically. This is far from being an isolated study. It represents a consensus of health care experts around the world. My question is for the Premier. Why is the Premier misleading Albertans by telling them that two-tier, private health care will reduce wait times when the opposite is true?

The Speaker: A little while ago I interjected with the use of a certain word. Now the leader of the third party is saying to another member that it's a deliberate misleading, which violates our rules. Please find another word, okay? This is only the fifth day of this spring session. My hair is already starting to turn.

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has this information – I'm sure he does – then I would strongly suggest that he make it available to the public consultation process. That's what it's all about.

Mr. Mason: Can the Premier, who is attempting to turn our health care system upside down, stand in this place and cite one single study that shows that more private health care improves wait times?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that's not my place, either to show or not to show, but it is my place to consult the public. The hon. leader of the third party is a member of the public, and he is welcome to share his views with the public consultation process.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier admit that he is leading Albertans down the garden path where longer wait times and higher expenses are the only result?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, again, he can repeat those comments to the public consultation process.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, if I may. The study in question was provided by the hon. member opposite and the information provided cites data from a very different system. The system in Australia is quite different in the way they provide public/private partnerships.

We're pleased to take their comments, as the Premier said, but it does not constitute the full wealth of knowledge that we can have available to us in looking at the way that we can remarkably modify the system in Alberta to make sure that the public system stays strong and still explore an opportunity for selected services of a nonemergent nature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The release of the health policy framework is appreciated by all Albertans. However, the fear of the unknown now shifts to the devil in the details. The government seems confused between forgive and forget the repentant offender and promise and forget. The Premier promised to improve our health system by regionalizing and then promising elections of our health boards. This government also promised to have public consultation on this framework. This government controls the funding, procedures, and opportunities of the health regions as well as the health boards. What they are presenting is not the third way; it is their way or the highway. To the Premier: will you put the people of Alberta first and keep your promise and allow the people to elect health boards that have the power of requisition?

2:10

Mr. Klein: Well, the power of requisition: you know, an interesting question. It's one that I would invite the hon. member to put to the public consultation process. If you want to go back to requisitions, that's an interesting proposal. It might be interesting to have one board or maybe no boards since the government provides all the funding for health care. You know, these are questions that can be put to the public consultation process. As I say, there are a thousand pieces to the puzzle.

They want to concentrate – and by “they” I refer to the opposition – on the kinds of things that create controversy and conflict and confusion and chaos, the five Cs of journalism. As my hon. friend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek said, if it doesn't bleed, it won't read.

There are all kinds of things that are constructive that can be considered; i.e., the whole governance model and the cost of administration within our health systems, the common purchasing of not only pharmaceuticals, as the hon. leader of the third party pointed out, but uniforms and the numerous supplies that are used by the various hospitals and health authorities and doctors.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are all kinds of things that need to be considered, and I would ask the hon. member to submit his ideas to the process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: I would love the opportunity to meet with you and the minister of health.

Thank you. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: would you elaborate on what, according to the health policy framework, you consider to be small rural hospitals? The plan appears to be to downgrade these facilities. What are the details?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, on page 13 of the plan it deals quite extensively with rural hospitals. Some are larger; some were built in the '50s. Reconfiguration of them would be necessary because there are many different ways that we treat patients, new technologies and so on. So what the policy framework suggests is that we look at what is practically possible, look at the health authorities' use of the Capital health critical care line, look at the use of telehealth, look at the services that are needed in particular areas, that we partner between larger urban hospitals supporting smaller rural hospitals. When I talk in that report about multidimensional care in facilities, primary care, we talk about teams providing care. There's absolutely no intent to downgrade the hospitals but to in fact move them more into the century of rapid technology and treatment of patients.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister of Health and Wellness allow innovation and efficiencies to be developed by the health regions by allowing funding to follow the services which the regions feel they are able and wanting to provide to the people of their regions?

Ms Evans: Yes.

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

Opted-out Physicians

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Many Albertans are concerned with proposals for health care reform which would allow physicians and surgeons to opt out and to carry on practice in both the public system and the private system. Will the minister assure Albertans that allowing physicians and surgeons to opt out of the public health care system and work for private facilities will not result in a reduction of scarce human resources such as specialists which are now available in the public system?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, what we're proposing in the health policy framework is to make sure, in fact, that we launch this with a limited number of procedures, procedures of a nonemergent nature, where people want to get services more rapidly than they actually medically need those procedures. We will very carefully control that with business cases that have to be provided that show that there's no interference with the public system in delivery of those particular private opportunities.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise the Assembly how her department will ensure that waiting times for ordinary Albertans do not increase as a result of specialists such as orthopedic surgeons, anaesthetists, cardiologists, and so on allocating some or all of their time to private clinic settings?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to make this observation. One of the reasons why setting benchmarks and targets and wait times is so difficult on a national scale is because many things can interfere; for example, the health of the region, traumatic events, the kinds of resources that may be called away for something like a pandemic, and so on. So you have to be careful when you establish benchmarks for wait times that you do that in a way that steadily improves progress to access but doesn't necessarily mitigate against better clinical decisions.

Our intent is to make sure that any use of any professional in any part of the private system would in fact not compromise the public system. We're being very, very careful to define just a very small amount of opportunity here so that we can evaluate it, we can monitor it, and we can make sure, Mr. Speaker, what we are committing to; that is, that the public system be strong and ever stronger and improve wait times there, that we keep working on that, and that anything else that's done in any private clinic will not mitigate against the public system.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise whether any steps are contemplated to ensure that the best and most skilful physicians and surgeons do not flee the public system to work for higher financial rewards in the private system?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the question does is make an assumption that there will be higher rewards in the private system, and we cannot evaluate that. We cannot make that assumption at this time. What we have to say, simply, is that if there had been higher rewards in a private system in a nonpublic tract right now, you would have no doubt that there would be several of those opportunities available all over Canada. Quite frankly, what we are going to look at is how we control, how we evaluate and monitor the doctors that would make a case to go into that kind of private delivery opportunity and make sure at all times that the number one mandate of this government – namely, the strong public health care system – is maintained.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow. [Disturbance in the gallery]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Order in the gallery! You're not part of the proceedings.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the floor.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this House in relation to contaminated drinking water in rural Alberta the Minister of Energy indicated that coal-bed methane extraction, a new technology of the last few years, is just like drilling conventional gas. However, he apparently does not know that coal-bed methane recovery is very different, with many wells per section using shallow fracturing with toxic chemicals and explosives, some at levels up to 200 metres deep. EUB directive 027 of last month stated, "There may not always be a complete understanding of fracture propagation at shallow depths." My question to the Energy minister: will this minister finally admit that coal-bed methane drilling is proceeding without understanding the risks and placing Albertans and their water in danger?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, when we look at the safety of water, that's what the Energy and Utilities Board works on, that's what we work on, that's what Alberta Environment works on, that's what we all work toward: ensuring the safety and security of people, their water, their air, and all those quality issues. That said, you're always looking to improve a regulatory environment. Through the years we've had decades of experience in drilling in deep and in shallow zones, not just coal. This isn't the first time that shallow drilling has occurred for natural gas. There are plenty of shallow wells being drilled for natural gas in southeastern Alberta all the time. So when you're looking at the coal-bed methane zone, it's true that we want to make sure that we're up to speed and have the best regulatory environment to continue to facilitate and have the best structures in the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is not listening. Last month the same EUB directive said, "Oilfield and water well drilling and completions practices may not be adequate and should be reviewed." Does this minister disagree with the EUB?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I support that we have been very active, the Energy and Utilities Board, our own department, consultations

with industry, with the public at large. That's why we initiated the multistakeholder advisory committee to look at coal-bed methane in particular, acknowledging that there is going to be an increase of activity. It's started to happen; therefore, we want to be in front of it. The final report is with me now. The draft report was submitted last fall. The draft report was actually public information. We are going to be acting quickly to ensure that we continue to improve upon an already very solid regulatory environment.

2:20

Dr. Swann: Mr. Minister, these wells are being drilled as we speak. The EUB itself has said that they do not understand the risks. Will the minister stand up for public health and safety and consider halting all new coal-bed methane fracturing until we know what we're doing?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, it's convenient to take an extrapolation of one sentence from the Energy and Utilities Board. It's also true that the Energy and Utilities Board, who has a tremendous amount of engineering and geological expertise on their board to adjudicate, has approved already the drilling of wells because they have been able to assure the safety of Albertans in those very specific applications that have gone forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Opted-out Physicians

(continued)

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In today's society I'm really pleased that we have the technology that allows our constituents to phone you three hours ago with a question that they'd like asked on a very timely topic, which is health care. My questions are to the minister of health. Minister, one of the constituents that phoned this morning wanted to know if you or your department have established any guidelines on how much a doctor could make working in the private health care system that is being proposed, talked about, or otherwise discussed?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I've looked across the country. There are a variety of approaches that are undertaken. Some are capped; some are not capped. For the largest extent most surgical services in private facilities that are provided are not capped. We will have to very carefully consider what the case should be in Alberta. Again, it's a part of the consultation document, but we will take a look at how those doctors are paid, how the staffs are compensated. We have alternative relationship plans that pay health care teams in different ways, so we can look at how those fees are accomplished.

Currently at HRC in Calgary those physicians are paid on the public scale, but there are facility fees as well. So we would take a look at the business case and determine what seemed to be fair and reasonable. A criteria of fairness is important in this system in Alberta. I think that's appropriate. We would take a look at the service itself, what level of service was being provided. It may be individual and may be different dependent on which service was provided in that system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another very specific question that this lady from the county of Lethbridge asked is: will doctors operating in the private system collect the same fee for the

same procedure that doctors are compensated for in the public system?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's very clearly an important element. It is tied with whatever business case is made. We're not likely to amend the fees in the public system except through the trilateral agreement, which, as you know, is how we compensate our physicians. Quite frankly, we have yet to make a final determination on what would be done. We're looking at policies from a number of places, but most of all we're going to hear from Albertans first.

Again, on the principle of fairness, we don't want to make a predetermination on something that may or may not happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last question that I received this morning was: will doctors operating in the private health care system be able to use public health care facilities to perform some of their procedures?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, public health care facilities will always take precedence for public health care. Where we have extra or surplus space or community facilities that may be made available, there would have to be a business case develop so that the public tax dollars that had paid for that space were fairly recognized in whatever business plan would be available.

Mr. Speaker, I looked at a hospital in Bonnyville that had some space that was surplus, that had never been completely developed. It's possible that in a space like that, if a private clinic were to provide a business case, pay for the renovations, locate there, and provide some supports alternatively back to the public system, it would make sense for the public system in Bonnyville to look at that. We would have to deal with these on a case-by-case basis, what makes sense and is it fair to all concerned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Continuing Care Standards

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The continuing care system in this province is in crisis. This has been pointed out by the Auditor General, the MLA task force, and every brave Albertan who has come forward with their heartbreaking stories about the experience of their loved ones in continuing care. Last week's announcement was too little. To the minister of health: given that the safety of vulnerable Albertans should be this government's number one priority, will the minister act on the recommendation to regulate personal care attendants, who have the most direct and frequent contact with residents?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the question is a good one. Initially when we looked at this response, I feared that the member opposite might in fact suggest that it is too little, but it is what has been assumed could be spent to help us to complete this calendar year to the end of this fiscal year to provide ceiling lifts, support for reviewing medication administration, to provide another amount of money for administration of the long-term care facilities generally, and to provide another \$15 million towards the long-term care hours that are designated at 3.4.

Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that there is training of staff and other things that have to be done, and the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and I working together have yet

this spring to make sure that we are able to release a plan for addressing the standards issue, which was a part of the Auditor General's report and which has been cited by the hon. members that completed the study.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you to the minister for that, and I look forward to discussing this more in depth in the next thing that's coming up.

What is the minister doing to ensure that therapists are available and accessible to work closely with the residents to prevent disability and maintain health?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, various health regions have plans to do this type of activity. Some are more developed than others. Some are in fact contingent on the willingness and the partnerships already created by the various facilities that are administering continuing care. We have things that are different. In Calgary, for example, the chronic disease management strategy has a whole different methodology of navigating through the system. With compliments also to Chinook. I know that in the Chinook health region there have been a number of different approaches taken.

Mr. Speaker, one of the difficulties that we're trying to manage with the workforce requirements is the training of special therapists to make sure that we have an adequate supply, and where we can, we are trying to use therapists from other parts of the system, from the regional authorities, to provide supplementary supports to those facilities that require them on a needs and case-by-case basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. When will the minister legislate clear, measurable, province-wide, and resident-focused standards to protect the vulnerable Albertans that remain in our continuing care?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that in the very first instance we have to release the standards and get the feedback from the people that are resident in continuing care circumstances, their families, the providers of service, and make sure that the standards are appropriate. Whether those are carried further in terms of legislation I cannot commit to at this time, simply to say that the target that we have is to elevate the standards and make sure that patient safety is improved and that the work that we're doing to provide supports in the long-term care and continuing care facilities has measurable outcomes, that the things that we're undertaking there are evidence based, and that we're accountable for a higher and better quality of care. I know that that's the intent of every member of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Medical School Spaces

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to experience a shortage of doctors in this province as well as in this entire country. We recently heard a report in the city of Calgary that we're short 500 doctors today, with the average age of a doctor being 50. As we look at these shortages, we have hundreds of qualified students looking for seats in medical school, and when they're not successful, they'll often go to foreign medical schools for their training. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Are there plans to increase the number of residency spaces in our medical schools so that we can bring these new Alberta doctors back home?

2:30

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, an excellent question. We have been looking at that very closely with the minister of advanced learning. Clearly, we have had the greatest amount of success of any of the other provinces and territories in attracting physicians, in attracting applications. In terms of increasing the number of residency seats in medical schools, we are looking at that. We've had a 16 per cent increase between 2003 and 2005, and looking not only at international graduates but our own graduates returning home is a strategy that we hope to be able to improve on.

Mr. Speaker, I would just give the member some hope that we are going to make improvements on that. Hopefully in the new budgetary year there will be some evidence that we have made at least some additional steps.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. My first supplemental actually goes to the Minister of Advanced Education. Can the minister tell me if there are plans for future expansion of our undergraduate medical schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just about this time every year we do what we call enrolment growth or access growth fund allocations. In the late fall we asked every institution to come forward with their plans with respect to how they want to expand enrolment growth. I can tell you that over the past number of years there has been considerable growth in the health professions and health occupations areas and, as well, that we have a number of applications in to expand enrolment growth in health professions and health occupations now. Those allocations, those determinations will be made, actually, by the end of this week and subject to budget approval, but I anticipate that we will have, again, growth in health professions, health occupations, and particularly in the medical doctor field.

Mrs. Ady: Then my final supplemental to the same minister: can you tell me where Alberta ranks compared to other provinces in the number of seats that we have available?

Mr. Hancock: Well, in terms of the number of seats, we are third in the country. Of course, Ontario and Quebec, having larger populations, would be ahead of us in terms of the absolute numbers. In terms of percentage per population, we were actually second in the country, but we've dropped now to fourth. That's between the year 2000 and the year 2004. The reason for that drop to fourth is not because we've cut back, I want to assure people, but because our population has grown. A number of provinces have added medical graduate positions over those four years. Quebec, in particular, has added a significant number of positions. Alberta has added a number of positions, but we do need to add more.

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

Health Care Reform Consultation

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness announced the government's intention to move towards two-tiered health care. Today and yesterday they said: don't worry; be happy because we're going to consult with Albertans. Now the consulting is going on there for a

month. You can e-mail the Premier or the minister of health, or you can even telephone them. That's their idea of consultation. My question to the Premier is simply this: why doesn't the Premier admit the truth and tell Albertans that this so-called consultation is nothing but window dressing and that they've already decided to move towards a two-tiered system?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's not window dressing. It's something we committed to do, and we are doing it. We committed to do it as part of our overall program relative to achieving sustainability.

Relative to the consultation process I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, he cited a couple of things, but we also have stakeholder consultations. We have made slots available. We are already booking those slots. I'm pleased to say that there has been considerable interest in that. We will be working on weekends as well to make sure that wherever possible we hear from Albertans. The groups that want to come forward, the individuals that want to write and provide their feedback: we're doing our level best to reach as many as possible.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, given that it's probably just a coincidence that this month's consultation takes us beyond the Tory leadership convention, my question simply is this to the Premier: why is the government ignoring the evidence of its own health symposium – that was consultation – as well as views of Albertans in this headlong rush to privatize?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, there is no headlong rush to privatize or do anything else for that matter. There is a headlong rush to consult. Indeed, the international symposium was part of the consultation process, but it didn't involve the people of this province; it involved experts from around the world providing their views. It was part of the exercise that we spelled out loud and clear: we would convene a symposium to hear what works and what doesn't work around the world, and then we would have a public consultation process. Now we are in that phase of the program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, the results of the symposium were pretty clear. They said: don't go in the direction that the government's going. Why are we continuing with this after that evidence that came from Calgary?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, maybe the hon. member of the third party can recall for me, but I don't recall the symposium saying: don't have a public consultation process.

An Hon. Member: Don't have private health care.

Mr. Martin: That's what they said.

Mr. Klein: No. Well, I don't recall them ever saying, Mr. Speaker: don't have a public consultation process. That was all part of our plan.

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

Provincial Infrastructure Deficit

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions have to do with

this government's 3M approach to budgeting, ministers' magic math, which Albertans view as a song-and-dance routine. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given that the 2005 internal infrastructure documents indicate that Alberta's infrastructure deficit is \$7.2 billion and last fall the minister publicly mused that the deficit could be as high as \$10 billion to \$12 billion, would the minister please share with this Assembly the current infrastructure deficit in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The last work that we did, which was in the 2004-2005 budget year, showed that there was an infrastructure deficit of about \$7 billion. We are looking at how we can bring that down. When it comes to cost escalation, what we're seeing, quite simply, is that costs have escalated very much in the last year, so there could well be that component that is built in. What we saw this past year was an escalation of very close to 25 per cent. We have not gone out and updated those numbers, but it's my job as the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to ensure that that deficit goes down as opposed to going up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Finance. Given the multibillion dollar infrastructure deficit as well as the multibillion unfunded teachers' pension liability, can this minister continue to claim that Alberta is truly debt free?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an argument you might want to take up with the people who do financial statements and the Auditor General because there is an agreement on the pension fund that was reached, and it is not shown as a debt to the province. However, having said that, the Minister of Education is working very closely with the teachers in this province and their representatives to look at what can be done because we have a concern there.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know what's wrong with these people over here that find it difficult to celebrate the fact that Alberta enjoys the best fiscal regime in Canada. Each day that I come in here, I feel very sorry for them because it must be sad to try to find something wrong when everything is so good in this province today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:40

Mr. Chase: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given the volatility of natural resource revenue, will the minister consider taking a page out of the opposition playbook and endow capital dollars so that Alberta roads, schools, and hospitals can receive sustainable funding in the future?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, the short and dirty answer is no. We certainly do have to look at sustainable funding for capital, and that's exactly what we're doing at this point in time. We have something like a \$13 billion capital plan over the next three years. That's a huge amount of dollars. That's a huge amount of money. It's money that we're putting back into infrastructure. The infrastructure and transportation part: there still is some work that needs to be done, but it will always be work that needs to be done, and \$13 billion is a lot of money.

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

Hospital Bed Capacity

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are frustrated with the shortage of beds in the Calgary health region, yet we hear even today of excess hospital space in rural areas. Is the minister satisfied the region is doing all it can to address the bed shortage in Calgary?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, just yesterday the Calgary health region had a meeting on capacity issues, and they recognized the improvements that they would like to make in various management strategies. Some of the measures they looked at would be: a southern Alberta referral centre, increasing the number of program-based patient flow co-ordinators so that they actually help move the patients, expansion of home care with after-hours admissions. They looked further at opening extra continuing care beds, which they have, at least 14 in number, and increasing the use of urgent assessment clinics. At that meeting the Calgary health region made a commitment that directly related to the member's question. They will move patients, when appropriate, to rural acute care sites, and there is a plan to do just that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. What will the new framework do to address this disparity?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the new framework, talking about inter-regional collaboration and expanding the examination of the role of hospitals vis-à-vis community care facilities, will start to address that in various ways. Like I described earlier to one of the other hon. members, we will be looking at the use of rural hospitals, and we'll also look at ways that partnerships can improve the health care in both centres by partnering rural and urban hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, today as I speak, a great deal of work is done with the Capital health region in support of the Northern Lights region. It is one of the ways that we can expand on in other centres of the province to make sure that there is a very cost-effective and patient-centred safety-first method of admitting people and providing them space in hospitals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How will the third way approach capacity issues?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that goes right to the heart of reshaping the role of hospitals. We think that hospitals can be used in smarter ways. We have to improve access in regions. We recognize that. We also have to find ways that we use the technology of today – telehealth, Health Link, and ways of connecting people – so that hospitals can serve the role that they are most well-equipped for, and that is taking care of the very sick, and so that we can use the community facilities and the policies in the third way in ways that make sure that outpatients, where it makes sense to do so, can be cared for.

Today in Sturgeon within the existing hospital there was a reconfiguration and a renovation of the cardiac care centre. It will enable us to do more of those early intervention strategies in that hospital. This is the type of energized renewal I see for hospitals that may have been built in decades past, where the kinds of

activities that we can engage in now have not taken place. In St. Albert, for example, they've moved from taking care of four patients with pacemakers to 300 patients with pacemakers. This clinic will enable to do that, and that's right in the hospital. I see this kind of innovation taking place all across Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time for question period has now evaporated, but we're not going to leave this question period until we deal with a decorum issue.

The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your giving me this opportunity to apologize most sincerely for my actions. I ought not to have thrown the Liberal health policy at our page Jennifer. To Jennifer I apologize most sincerely. I also apologize for referring to the document as crap.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll begin today with an historical vignette, and I want to provide you with a quotation. This quotation comes from the Canadian House of Commons. The statement was made on May 13, 1946. "The most important responsibility we have [is to] the individual citizen of this country. He it is who should be considered; he is the man whose rights should be the fount and source of all the things we do." That statement was made by a Member of this Legislative Assembly outside, after he left this Assembly.

The person I'm referring to is a gentleman by the name of Solon Earl Low, who was born in Cardston in 1900. A farmer, teacher, and school principal, Mr. Low was elected the Social Credit member for the constituency of Warner in 1935. In the March 21, 1940, election he was defeated in Warner. Member-elect George Woytkiw then resigned his seat in Vegreville, and in a by-election held on June 20, 1940, Mr. Low was elected by acclamation. He returned to the constituency of Warner in 1944 and was re-elected. In 1945 he resigned and was elected to the Canadian House of Commons representing Peace River, which he did from 1945 to 1958. He served as Alberta's Provincial Treasurer, as a minister without portfolio, and as an Education minister. He sponsored the bill establishing Alberta Treasury Branches. He was the leader of the federal Social Credit Party from 1944 to 1961. In 1961 he was appointed a family and juvenile court judge in Lethbridge. Mr. Low died on December 22, 1962.

head:

Members' Statements

Be Smart, Be Safe Program

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, every day in Canada 6,000 people are injured, and another 40 die from injuries. Unintentional injuries are a serious health concern and cost Canadians \$14.7 billion a year. These injuries have one thing in common: they are predictable and preventable.

On February 25 Canada's home, car, and business insurers brought the Be Smart, Be Safe national injury prevention program to Lethbridge. Teaming up with the city of Lethbridge, Lethbridge fire and emergency services, Lethbridge regional police, and local injury prevention programs and groups, the Be Smart, Be Safe program increases community awareness of injury prevention through a week jam-packed with events, facts, and fun for the whole family, all designed to help prevent injuries in the home, on the road, and at play.

As well, financial and equipment donations were made to the

Alberta Farm Safety Centre, Safety City Society, and the Lethbridge fire department. Local insurance brokers also donated \$2,000 to the Gift of Safety, a group that provides car and child booster seats to families who cannot afford them.

Please join me in recognizing Canada's home, car, and business insurers for their commitment to injury prevention and for bringing the Be Smart, Be Safe program to Lethbridge.

Thank you.

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

Fraud Awareness Month

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today was the launch of Alberta Fraud Awareness Month, the first province-wide fraud awareness campaign in Canada. The campaign is a joint initiative between Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security, the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, and the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta.

2:50

Fraud is a crime that is growing across the country, but Alberta is a special target because of its growing economy and the high disposable income of its residents. Identity theft alone is the fastest growing commercial crime in North America. Statistics show that 1,079 Albertans reported being a victim of identity theft in 2003, and that's just identity theft. Thousands of Albertans fall victim to all types of fraud every year.

Educating the public is a key for both the enforcement and prevention of fraud in Alberta. Throughout the month fraud prevention forums and seminars will be held across the province, helping Albertans learn how to identify various types of fraud. Public service announcements will promote the slogan Fraud: Recognize It, Report It, Stop It. This slogan will be accompanied by information for Albertans on how they can protect themselves. In addition, Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security has distributed campaign brochures to all MLAs to share with their constituents.

This awareness campaign will go a long way to providing Albertans with valuable information so that they can protect themselves from becoming victims of fraud. I want to congratulate those involved for making this campaign a reality and making Alberta a leader in fraud awareness and prevention.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Team Kleibrink

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise in recognition of a team of athletes who brought one of the many Olympic medals back to our province. The Canadian women's curling team, headed by Skip Shannon Kleibrink, defeated the Norwegian team in a gripping match to seize the bronze medal almost one week ago.

Winning a medal in the Olympics is an incredible achievement under any circumstances. The path to the bronze medal for this rink is made even more remarkable because two of the members of the team battled fairly severe bouts of flu or perhaps even food poisoning while competing in Turin. The Olympic spirit displayed by Shannon Kleibrink, Glenys Bakker, Christine Keshen, Amy Nixon, and Sandra Jenkins to stand on the podium while overcoming obstacles off the sheet is inspiring.

The victory these ladies achieved is perhaps even a little more

special to me and the members of the Highwood constituency because the skip hails from Okotoks. I know the big city to the north likes to claim credit, but Shannon does indeed reside in the Highwood constituency, and we are very proud to claim her.

I would ask all members to join me in congratulating the bronze medalists in curling for the 20th Olympic Winter Games as well as all the Canadian athletes. Mr. Speaker, our athletes performed admirably in all sports, and they deserve our gratitude and our continued support.

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

Child Care Agreement

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What do democracy and child care have in common? First, they are values that unite most of us. Whatever type of democracy, whatever kind of child care we prefer – and there are many possibilities – we have more in common here than the points of difference that divide us.

Second, democracy is about choice. We don't have it if there is no alternative. Child care, too, involves choices. In the negotiations that led to the national child care agreement, this province through the insistence of the hon. Minister of Children's Services made sure that choice was enshrined in the Canadian program along with universality and the other three pillars of accessibility, quality, and a developmental approach. Democracy and child care were served in an agreement between levels of government, among regions and provinces, and across party lines. This was a significant achievement in co-operation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this achievement and this agreement may be in jeopardy. A new government in Ottawa may be unable to sustain this mix of choice and quality child care. Now we need to join together again to confirm the status quo of the national child care agreement signed by our government. Albertans may value well-thought-out tax cuts, but we're not prepared to let child care be the block on which the axe falls. Our willingness to stand together will send a message across Canada as the new government meets. The national agreement we negotiated and improved on needs to be honoured. It is a cause worth standing for. The way we make this point, in an affirmation across party lines, is as important as the point itself.

Thank you.

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

Viking Cup

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a unique event which happens every two years in my constituency. The Viking Cup is an international hockey tournament which celebrated its 25th anniversary this year. The Viking Cup has been setting the stage for world-class hockey and global cultural exchange for youth from countries like Russia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Finland, the U.S.A., Norway, Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden to come to Camrose since 1980. In addition, all-star junior teams from Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba and university and college teams have competed in this internationally known tournament.

Since its inception over 300 players who competed in the Viking Cup have been drafted into the NHL. Of these, over 100 have either played or are currently playing with an NHL club, and many play on various national teams, as we saw in the recent Olympics. What this points to is that there is an exceptional level of hockey played in the Viking Cup. This event encourages not only a high level of

competition in sport but also increases cultural understanding between the young people who participate.

In the past this tournament was owned exclusively by Augustana University College, and Camrose was the exclusive community involved in this tournament. Now the tournament is hosted in Camrose and Wetaskiwin and is jointly owned by the University of Alberta Augustana campus and Hockey Alberta. The Viking Cup will now be an annual event, with the host city alternating between Alberta Junior Hockey League cities in odd-numbered years and Camrose during even-numbered years. I look forward to seeing many of my colleagues at Fort McMurray when the Viking Cup takes to the ice next year.

Another change which was seen in the most recent tournament was competition in two divisions, junior hockey being one and a university division the other.

In closing, I would like to congratulate this year's Viking Cup winners: the University of Guelph, who won the gold medal in the university pool, and the Alberta Junior Hockey League North All-Stars, who won the gold medal in the junior pool.

Thank you.

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

Frank Atkinson

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Frank Atkinson, a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar who will be celebrating his 60th birthday on March 2. Mr. Atkinson was raised on a farm in the Fort Saskatchewan area and graduated from Fort Saskatchewan high school, after which he attended NAIT studying industrial instrumentation, graduating from there in 1968.

His lifelong passion for community service does not go unnoticed. He became the first mayor of the new summer village of Larkspur in 1985, a position he held for 16 years. From 1986 to 1991 he served as president of the summer villages of Alberta. From 1988 to 1991 he served on the board of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association as villages and summer villages member. His long list of community service includes membership on the Ottewell Community League council, where he has a lifetime membership, southeast Edmonton community planning coalition member, civic planning member from Ottewell, and chairman of the Capital Region Assessment Services Commission. He was also involved with the South East Truck Route Planning Group, the Edmonton southeast communities association, and the Municipal safety codes inspection commission.

Mr. Atkinson is married to Fay, and they have two children, Cynthia and Bryan.

As a young man he enjoyed swimming, motorcycling, waterskiing, and snow skiing. He is a very avid hunter, and he uses both a bow and arrow and a rifle to satisfy his hobby.

On behalf of all the residents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, particularly those in the Ottewell area, I would like to thank Mr. Atkinson for all his service to the community and wish him a very happy birthday. May he and his family have good health and prosperity for many, many years to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: As a further point in our recognitions, yesterday was the happy, happy birthday occasion for the hon. Minister of Environment, and today is the happy, happy birthday occasion for the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. Wish them both well.

head: 3:00 Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is correspondence from a constituent, Brock Skywalker, who writes to urge me to help stop the plans to reform health care. He strongly supports the Canada Health Act and feels the government should be upholding it and expresses a number of other concerns.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of the book *Prescription for Excellence: How Innovation is Saving Canada's Health Care System* by Michael Rachlis, MD. This is in response to the Premier's call for innovative ideas in health care.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table the requisite five copies of a bid conference document between the Horizon oil sands project north of Fort McMurray and Shanghai Construction of the People's Republic of China. In this document Horizon calls on Shanghai Construction to provide temporary foreign workers and that they become members of the government-sponsored union of convenience, CLAC, in order to avoid the use of Alberta building trades.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a little bit of business to deal with. Three points of order; maybe a little lecture. First of all, I'll deal with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm citing Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j) and *Beauchesne* 485 to 492 and the Speaker's memo of February 15, 2006. This is all around unparliamentary language and, I would say, the tone of what we are seeing in the Assembly.

I'm specifically referring to the first exchange between the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition. I will note, although I've been unable to get the Blues, that I believe I heard the Premier withdraw the word "fib" and then go on to make another statement about telling an untruth or lying. That is the particular issue that I am dealing with now.

He then I would say dishonourably withdrew the comment about fibbing. I'm sorry. He said, "I do apologize for calling the hon. member a liar," and managed to get it in the record one more time. I'm increasingly concerned with the tone that the Premier is setting for this House. It is very difficult for us as members to counter the public opinion, a very low public opinion, held of politicians when we have the Premier of the Legislature in Alberta setting such a tone. I'm concerned about the increasing abusiveness that I'm hearing, Mr. Speaker.

Now, citation 23(h) is referring to allegations that are being made against another member, in this case the lying; 23(i) on motive; and 23(j) on insulting language. I noted "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," and I think that's exactly what's happening in this House, Mr. Speaker. Every action is escalating to the point where we ended up with a second episode today for which the Premier has already apologized. I also note the unparliamentary language that was found in *Beauchesne* between 485 and 492 – there are obviously pages of it – and, again, the Speaker's memo that was issued to all members of the Assembly on February 15, 2006.

I'm asking for the Speaker to find a point of order against the Premier and to help us in curbing the increasing abusive tone of what is coming from that side of the Assembly towards members of the Official Opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, participation.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's clear both from your intervention and from the actions of the Premier in both withdrawing his remark and apologizing twice in the House this afternoon that your point was made with respect to both the language and decorum of the House. I note that you interjected as well when the leader of the third party opposition member used language. I think you made the point in the House for all members of the House to appreciate that we do have to be careful in our decorum and our language in the House and that we must do our utmost to make sure that this House is seen as a place of parliamentary discourse.

It would be useful in that process if members engaged in less hyperbole and more straightforward preambles to questions and those sorts of things. I think that as we go forward in this session, in terms particularly of question period, where these incidents most often arise, if all members of the House in framing questions could frame them in the context of true questions and less in the context of political rhetoric and hyperbole, we would have fewer opportunities to engage in this type of point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the outset the position that I take as chair of this Assembly is that I would like to see as few interjections and interventions of the chair as possible. That's been my tradition from day one, and it's been repeated periodically. I really believe that it's extremely important that when the chair recognizes one hon. member and gives that hon. member the right to ask a question and the chair then recognizes another hon. member and gives that hon. member the right to respond to a question, the least interventions by anyone allows for the greatest flow of the activity and provides for the best form of democracy, period. It's not my style to want to get up and interject. Today I did it three times, and that's really very much abnormal. I feel saddened about that because I don't think this was an exemplary day.

Can we just repeat again several little things? Usually there's a response that's given to something that provokes it, not necessarily all the time, but sometimes. So I would refer to oral questions in *Beauchesne* again, and 409 is the operative one. It has to do with, number one – let's start right at the source, the drafting of questions. Citation 409 says, "It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate." Virtually every question that we've had in this question period since the start of this session could have provoked a response and interjection from the chair. If I'd have done that, this wouldn't be called a question period; it would be called a Speaker's comment and interjection period.

Let's just go on to the next one in 409.

The question must be brief. A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence. A long preamble on a long question takes an unfair share of time and provokes the same sort of reply. A supplementary question should need no preamble.

Well, I've got a list of all the supplementaries on the preambles. I will give two examples. One, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View in his second question to the hon. Minister of Energy interjected in his preamble: "The minister is not listening." Well, if that doesn't provoke the first thing that we said, then the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East in her second question provided

a preamble saying how wonderful the Minister of Health and Wellness was. Well, that was unnecessary too. So you've got two extremes. Nevertheless, it basically pretty much summed up what it was. And I can go on on 409.

Listen, the responses that came from the leader of the government today were not exemplary. I say that again. There was an immediate interjection from the chair on the first one. There was a response with respect to "fib," and there was a withdrawal of that. Then there was a statement – and I'm not so sure it was, you know, a really enthusiastic apology – with respect to: "But I do apologize for calling the hon. member a liar." The chair has to take someone's word. The chair doesn't think that that was the best way that could have been phrased, hon. member.

The point of all of this: there was interjection, there were responses, there were apologies, some enthusiastic, some complete, and others not so much so. I don't think that was the best example of anything. We did get an apology. We got two apologies, I guess. One was sincere. One, well, we'll put some question on it, but, okay, it's done.

3:10

I appreciate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre raising the point of order because the chair does not want to interject. If hon. members want the chair to interject, he will interject on virtually every question and virtually every answer, and this will not be what you think it is. So there's a bit of give-and-take in this business, but we can do it in a positive way. Why don't we start doing it with wit, bring in some more irony, maybe even, you know, some nice, likeable sarcasm. Who is the guy who wrote the book *Gulliver's Travels*? Is it Thomas Swift?

An Hon. Member: Jonathan.

The Speaker: Jonathan Swift. Read *Gulliver's Travels* if you want to see the greatest form of wit to be found, and that would really help us all.

Okay. So that's number one, point number one. Not a good display. Thanks for being raised. We've had a little lecture, discourse. We've had some apologies.

Point number two, the hon. Government House Leader. I presume it has to do with exhibits.

Point of Order Exhibits

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Need I say more? *Beauchesne's* 501, 502, 503. It's always been the order to the House that one does not use exhibits. Members of the opposition in response – in a clearly flagrant violation of the rules because of a clearly orchestrated response – simultaneously waved some red paper. That was clearly a violation of the rules that I've just cited.

Again it goes to the order and decorum of the House. The rules are here for a reason, and order and decorum is appropriate in a parliamentary place. I find it strange when in arguing one point of order one member of the opposition raises the issue about how people perceive us as parliamentarians while clearly there was an orchestrated violation of the rules in displaying exhibits for exactly that purpose.

You've made your ruling. I'm not sure we need more, but that was the point of my point of order.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to

be able to rise and maintain that there is no point of order on this. If we actually look at *Beauchesne's* 501 under Exhibits, 501 is referring to props including "boxes of cereal, detergent and milk powder," 502 is referring to "samples of grain" and the possibility of "dead fish, herrings, or red herrings, damp grain or wild oats," 503 is with apologies talking about "potatoes."

I will note that what was held up by various members of the Official Opposition is a document that, in fact, is a sessional paper of this House. It was tabled in this House on February 23. It holds the sessional paper number of 8/2006. I'm sitting in the front row, Mr. Speaker. Nobody poked me in the back and said, "Raise this and wave it now," so from my point of view this was not orchestrated. If others felt the need to raise this, they may well have done that, but I didn't participate in that, and I'm certainly not aware of it happening.

Members of the Official Opposition have been working with the health policies a great deal. I, in fact, brought those documents today and handed them to every one of my colleagues to make sure that they had a copy of that document with them at all times. So, yes, everybody had them in this Assembly at this time.

This is not a dead herring. It is not a potato. It is not a box of cereal. We work with paper in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. Every MLA does. Every Assembly has paper. To be told that we can't hold up a piece of paper or move a piece of paper on our desk during question period – well, I'd be delighted to try and work in this Assembly with no paper at all, but in this case this was a duly tabled document, a sessional paper, part of a publication from the Official Opposition. It's not an exhibit. It's not a prop or a potato or any kind of food source.

The only other citation I can find is, in fact, a Speaker's ruling from May 6, 1999, page 1533, in which the Speaker ruled that the then member for Edmonton-Riverview's minibanners did not offend the rules of the Assembly under the definitions of exhibit, and that's the principle I'm guided on here, Mr. Speaker.

We're dealing with paper. We're dealing with paper that one would expect to find on the desks of these members. There was no orchestration that I am aware of. In fact, I would rule that it was not an exhibit but a document that we have on our desks.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, it's very clear that the document in question was not a red herring, it was not a dead fish, it was not wild oats or anything else. So that's *Beauchesne*. And the chair's interpretation of what the hon. member said about the chair's ruling in 1999 is not exactly the same as the hon. member's.

Let's get this book. It's called *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. Now, let's just listen very attentively to these words. I quote from page 520.

Speakers have consistently ruled out of order displays or demonstrations of any kind used by Members to illustrate their remarks or emphasize their positions. Similarly, props of any kind, used as a way of making a silent comment on issues, have always been found unacceptable in the Chamber. Members may hold notes in their hands, but they will be interrupted and reprimanded by the Speaker if they use papers, documents or other objects to illustrate their remarks.

So the point has been made: we do not use exhibits of any kind in this Assembly.

We had a great debate at one time when somebody mimicked something that happened in the Quebec National Assembly, when members of the Parti Québécois put up little fleurs-de-lys on their desks, and this got all kinds of coverage across the country of Canada. Then we had a former Provincial Treasurer stand up and put a Canadian flag in front of his desk when he was giving a

speech, and for consistency the Speaker interjected and made a comment not having anything to do with loyalty to the flag but having to do with what was considered to be an exhibit.

When you stand up in this House and throw up documents – well, I would never suggest for a moment that it was co-ordinated but in a way that a whole bunch of them came up: I think not. Look, this is not a hill to die on, and nobody's going to be quartered. We're just going to have a little lecture by the chair with respect to this.

The third point of order had to do with an interjection by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. Now, there was an exchange of notes, and the chair wanted to clear that one particular matter up. It arose when the chair had recognized the Leader of the Official Opposition. The chair's eyes were on the Leader of the Official Opposition. It's the courtesy provided to the speaker. On that side something happened. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford got up on a point of order. I said, "A point of order?" and he responded something about decorum in the House and language. As the question period evolved, it was brought to the attention of the perpetrator, which was the Premier of the province of Alberta, and at the conclusion of the question period the Premier of the province of Alberta got up and apologized to the page whom he had startled and apologized also for the use of a word in the Assembly. I presume that's what it was, so we're not going to deal with that. It's March 1, day 5.

Oh, yeah. We had a shot for the third party as well. Remember, the chair also had to interject when the leader of the third party used the word "misleading" in his question. There was an interjection. My Lord, I had more notes today than I normally have.

head: 3:20

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Motions

6. Mr. Hancock moved on behalf of Mrs. McClellan:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

7. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve itself into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Supplementary Estimates 2005-06
General Revenue Fund, No. 2**

Finance

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The supplementary estimate for Finance is found on page 18 of the supplementary estimates. I was just remarking that it's probably the shortest explanation for the most money, but that's because it's so straightforward. The request is to increase the investment in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund by \$1 billion. Of course, this is

possible because of higher than expected resource revenue. In this Assembly through this process now, members of the Assembly will have the opportunity to vote on whether, in fact, this money is placed in the heritage fund.

All members know that prior to this year our priority was paying off the debt. I don't think anybody disagreed with that priority, and our surplus revenues went for that purpose. With the accumulated debt eliminated and this year's higher energy revenue, we believe it's time now to look to increasing our savings. The \$1 billion will be in addition to the \$750 million that have been added for the Advanced Education endowment and the \$345 million that are forecast for inflation-proofing the fund. Of course, you understand that it's a forecast number because it is set on a formula. The allocation follows our plan, which has been clearly enunciated since this fiscal year's budget, which was presented in April of last year, and it is a combination of smart investment, savings, and giving back to Albertans.

We are building the value of the heritage fund. This is not a shell game, as was remarked by one member. Certainly, without this year's unanticipated high revenue we would not be able to increase the fund value to this extent. We may hear about our inability to forecast prices. Well, I suggest that maybe in the future everybody write it down on a piece of paper, like we do in some of the games we play, and then at a certain point in the year we'll pick it out and see who was the closest, or maybe we'll do it as gas prices were this year – every week – and see if any of us fall in the right spot. It has been volatile. It has been unpredictable this year, far more than any energy analyst ever predicted, but it is a good opportunity for us to add to our savings.

Now, I want to save some members a little bit of time on this in their speeches. I made the comment previously – and I want to make it one more time – when I was asked why we don't just leave the \$1 billion in the fund. Today we are asking the Assembly to approve adding \$1 billion to the heritage fund value, that would be deposited to the fund, but it is currently legislated that the government transfer the investment income from the fund to the general revenue fund for budgeting purposes. It is currently legislated. Section 8(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act says:

The net income of the Heritage Fund less the amount allocated to the Heritage Fund under section 11 . . .

Section 11, knowing that not everyone might have that act in front of them, refers to inflation-proofing.

. . . shall be transferred by the Provincial Treasurer from the Heritage Fund to the General Revenue Fund annually in a manner determined by the Provincial Treasurer.

End of section.

We have been using that investment instrument over the years to pay for program costs to our general revenue, and over the life of the fund about \$28 billion has been utilized and allocated for a variety of programs and projects. If we were to change that, we would amend the heritage fund act in order to do it. For the purposes today, for the ability to add \$1 billion from our unbudgeted surplus, we must move it as per the act, not leave the money in the fund. As I say, for the purposes today.

I want to make sure that everyone's clear on that. When we look at this over time, people may have some great ideas of how to change that. We've heard all manner of them. Should we take a percentage of resource revenue? Should we not take the revenue from the fund? Some of these things are quite easy, but in a year of average oil and gas prices I want to know where the billion dollars is going to come from if it's not available through surplus. When people give us good ideas, would you please tell me whether you want to take it from Health, whether you want to take it from

Advanced Education, from Education, from Children's Services, or from Seniors, because those actually are the only program budgets in this government that could supply those kinds of dollars. I don't think any of us want to do that. So while we want to invest money and we want to save, we want to make sure that we can sustain our program spending.

We'll all have more to say about this, I know, in Budget 2006, but for the purposes of the debate this afternoon I thought it might be helpful if I clarified for the Assembly the rules, the legislation around the heritage fund act and why we are adding these savings in this manner and why we're voting on those today.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll look forward to questions, and I'll look forward to answers that people provide on better ways to do this mousetrap, but I will challenge those easy answers that say "just do it" without any explanation of how you fill in the ditch, if you wish, if you do certain things.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As you can imagine, I'm looking forward with relish to having the opportunity to address this particular issue of the billion dollars that's being added to the heritage savings trust fund. I apologize for having had to step outside for a few minutes. I missed the minister's comments, and I had really hoped to have been here to hear them.

I do think it's relevant to share very briefly a little bit of the history of the fund. This fund was established in 1976 by a Premier who had a vision and a government that had a vision, something that I've argued for some 15 months now that this Premier and this government do not have. In 1976 the government of the day listed three objectives for the establishment of the fund: to save for the future, to strengthen and diversify the economy, and to improve the quality of life of Albertans. For a period of time we did in fact save for the future and met that particular goal.

To strengthen and diversify the economy, Mr. Chairman: I would submit to you that it is certainly my belief and that of many economists that we've fallen down in that regard. I believe – and there are many who concur – that today's Alberta economy is not necessarily any less dependent on nonrenewable resource revenue than we were in the late '70s and the early 1980s. That's not entirely for lack of effort, but it does cause a great deal of concern.

It once again brings to mind the bumper sticker that many of us had on our vehicles in 1983: "Please, Lord, let there be another oil boom. I promise not to piss it all away next time."

Mrs. McClellan: I don't think that's in *Beauchesne*.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Chairman, I think I'm quoting from a bumper sticker. In fact, I know I've quoted from that bumper sticker in this House previously, and I was not called to order that time, if precedence means anything.

The Chair: The hon. minister is rising on a point of order?

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Chairman, I just raised this issue. I don't think it matters where it's quoted. There is language that's acceptable in this House, and there is language that is not. I don't think that I can take any book that may have quotations with what is unacceptable language according to parliamentary procedure and use

it. There are other ways of expressing this. I find it offensive, and I just wish the hon. member would refrain from that in the House.

The Chair: Hon. member, you wish to respond?

Mr. R. Miller: Yes, Mr. Chairman. If I have offended the minister, I do apologize, and I will retract and insert another word: I promise not to waste it all away next time, squander it all away. There are many words that could be used.

Mr. Chairman, quoting from that bumper sticker I think is relevant because it expressed a sentiment that many, many Albertans held to be true at that time and that many are expressing to me today as I travel this province. I think it's relevant to remind the minister and the government that not only was it a concern of ours in 1983; it remains a concern of ours in the year 2006.

The Chair: Hon. member, if I could maybe comment on the point of order that the minister had called, my comment would be that the Speaker has just lectured the whole House on decorum and the use of language in this House. We haven't got 10 minutes past his comments, and we're dealing with them again. I would hope that in the future we would take to heart a little bit more the Speaker's comments on these things and that we would be less provocative.

If you'd like to carry on, I accept your apology.

Mr. R. Miller: I appreciate the chairman's comments. However, I will express my consternation at the fact that the rules do seem to change from sitting to sitting and, in this case, from day to day because I know for a fact that another member quoted the exact same bumper sticker the other day and was not called on it. So I'm a little confused, quite frankly, as to the ruling. Nevertheless, I have retracted and apologized for the comment, and I'd like to proceed with my debate if I could.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Chairman, from 1976 to 1983 this government had a policy of investing 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue into the heritage savings trust fund. I think it served us quite well. In 1983 there was a decision made to reduce the amount of investment of nonrenewable resource revenue to 15 per cent. Under the economic circumstances of the day that was probably a wise decision and continued to serve us well.

In 1987 the decision was made to not only cap the fund and stop making contributions to it but to withdraw all income from the fund. That carried on from 1987 through to last year, Mr. Chairman. That had a dramatic effect on the fund and on the goal to strengthen and diversify the economy. In 1987, when the fund was capped, it was at \$12.681 billion or thereabouts. Had it been inflation-proofed at the very least, which I really believe is a failing of this government which will have ramifications on generations in this province for years and years to come, it would be nearly \$20 billion today.

The Premier has spoken many times, although not recently – so I suspect that maybe the Premier is starting to understand. Many times over the last year or so the Premier has referred to the current surplus situation as a one-time event and not to expect this every year, that this is an anomaly, that this current boom that we're experiencing is not par for the course, an exception, my colleague from Edmonton-McClung cites the Premier as having said.

The simple fact of the matter is that for year after year after year we've been experiencing surpluses: in 1999-2000 a \$2.9 billion surplus, in 2000-2001 a \$6.6 billion surplus, in 2001-2002 \$1.1 billion. I'll remind everybody that that is the year of 9/11, a pretty

drastic year for businesses not only in Alberta but across the world. Certainly, my own personal business had a tough year that year reacting to the events of 9/11 and how that changed the business world. Nevertheless, we managed to show a \$1.1 billion surplus that year, \$2.2 billion in '02-03, \$4 billion in '03-04, \$5 billion in '04-05, for a total over that period of years of \$15.2 billion, Mr. Chairman.

This year the third-quarter update showed a \$7 billion surplus. In fact, I expect that by the time we get to the end of March 31, it will most likely be a \$10 billion surplus. Clearly, the situation of surpluses is not a one-time event. The situation of surpluses is what I call a chronic surplus problem. It's something that has happened year after year after year and I believe is an indication of either intentional lowballing by the government in terms of resource revenue or just plain bad fiscal management. I'm not sure which. I'm not sure that one is better than the other.

I do believe that when you look at those numbers, it's quite clear that we have every reason to expect a surplus again next year and the year after that and the year after that and perhaps for many years into the future. If that is the case, if we're fortunate enough to have surpluses next year and for many years into the future, then it begs the question: what are we waiting for in terms of having a plan, a solid, concrete road map as to how to best utilize those surpluses, how to make sure that not only today's Albertans but the Albertans of the future benefit from it?

3:40

When you look at these numbers that I just cited, the surpluses year after year after year, I cannot comprehend why somebody on the government side sitting around the cabinet table didn't sit down five years ago and say: look at these numbers. Look at the year '03-04, a \$4 billion surplus. Look at the year '04-05, a \$5 billion surplus. Are you telling me that the cabinet minister sitting across from me right now didn't look at those numbers and think: "Holy cow. If this keeps up, we're going to have that debt paid in a couple of years. What are we going to do with it?"

I sit around my kitchen table with my wife, and we look at our budget, and we say: "You know what? Things are going pretty well right now. Alberta is doing well. Rick has a stable job for a couple more years, I hope, and there's a very real possibility that we might have our mortgage paid off in a couple of years. What are we going to do when that mortgage is paid off? What is our plan, our vision for the future of this household? How are we going to set ourselves up so that when we retire, we can live comfortably, so that when we're no longer here, our children and their grandchildren will have some legacy left over from their parents?"

It's exactly, exactly the same thing that I and many, many other Albertans are asking this government to do, and that is some solid long-range planning so that next year when the Finance minister goes downstairs to give a third-quarter budget update and it's \$7 billion, everybody in this province will know exactly how that money is going to be allocated, not on the whim of the Premier, not on the whim of a couple of cabinet ministers sitting around a table in a bar scribbling on a napkin, but we will know. We will know exactly how that money is going to be allocated, how it will benefit today's Albertans, how it will benefit future Albertans. I think every Albertan in this province deserves to know that in advance, not after the fact but in advance.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm not the only person saying this. I've been saying it now for 15 months. It's becoming a chorus, and it's becoming louder and louder. We're hearing from people like the respected former Premier Lougheed, the man who had this vision initially, the man who had a vision for the future of the province, who wanted to save money for the future, wanted to strengthen and

diversify the economy, wanted to improve the quality of life for all Albertans. We're hearing it from groups like the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

An Hon. Member: Who elected them?

Mr. R. Miller: Their members. I'm not sure which member across asked, but their members represent them. In particular, I'm referring to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Their members represent thousands of small and medium-sized businesses, many of those located here in Alberta. A very, very respectable and reputable group they are.

I was referring to those that are lending their voices to this issue: the Canada West Foundation and, more recently, even the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, a relatively young fellow who clearly has his feet on the ground when it comes to matters of finance and who understands that there is a desperate need for a better way to deal with the surpluses in this province.

Mr. Chairman, under an Alberta Liberal plan there would be no question as to how this year's surplus would be dealt with. A \$10 billion surplus would have seen \$3.5 billion put into the heritage savings trust fund. I'm certainly not suggesting that a billion dollars isn't a good step forward. It's a wonderful step forward. I applaud the government for finally reacting to the pressure that I've brought on them, the pressure that some of these other groups have brought on them, the pressure that the former Premier has brought on them. I think it's a step in the right direction.

The only question is: why has it taken so long? Why weren't those decisions made five years ago? Why weren't those decisions communicated to Albertans five years ago so that everybody would have known and understood what would be happening to those surplus dollars? In fact, in a press conference the other day the Finance minister referred to the problems that she's having with all of the pressures that are being put on her to spend this money. I have the perfect solution for her, and that is a plan. If you had a concrete plan that said exactly how those dollars were going to be spent, there would be no pressures on you because everybody would know. The members of your caucus would know, the members of the opposition caucus would know, and all Albertans would know exactly how that money is going to be dealt with. In fact, as far as that goes, all Canadians would know how that money was going to be dealt with. The fear that the government seems to like to bring up all the time about somebody coming in and raiding Alberta's resource wealth wouldn't be a fear at all because the money would be allocated. It would be spoken for. It would be decided long in advance how it's going to be dealt with, and there would be no issue to fight over.

Mr. Chairman, as you can tell, I'm passionate about this. When I first entered the business world, my father told me to save for myself first. Put 10 per cent aside, he said. Boy, there are days when I wish I had listened to him right from the beginning, I tell you, days like today, when there is such concern about the future of our health care system in this province, and nobody knows exactly how much money they're going to need to afford that hip replacement or hernia operation when they need it, how much their insurance might cost every month.

I have and most of us have friends in the States that are paying anywhere from \$500 to \$600 to \$800 to a thousand dollars a month for health insurance. I hope that's not where we're going. I really do, but nobody on the other side has convinced me yet. I'm telling you that even on the wage of an MLA, which is a pretty good wage, I can't afford \$500 or \$600 or \$800 or a thousand dollars a month for

insurance, and if I can't, then I know that the majority of Albertans can't.

So I'm wishing that I had listened to my dad when he said: start saving for yourself now. I didn't initially. I learned from him though, and there's a powerful lesson there for all Albertans. It's time that we started saving not just for ourselves but for the future, and there's no better time than right now. In fact, it's never been more important than it is right now.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, I wasn't going to take too much time, but I've just got to refer to a couple of things. I think the hon. member was referring to the amount of surpluses over the last decade primarily. I find it interesting when the subject is there that we have wasted it – was that one of the words? – squandered it.

You know, this is something that really, entirely bothers me. It's not the truth or the lack of truth. It's the part of the story that you tell. It's the omission. It's the same thing happening in this health debate. You can say that all we have saved is \$2.1 billion in endowments and \$726 million in inflation-proofing and some \$6.9 billion that are in other funds if you neglect to say that you paid off a \$22.7 billion debt in that time and saved about 1 and a half billion dollars in interest payments.

Now, the argument could be made that you should never have got in debt in the first place. Well, most of us know how that happened, and we're not going to go back and rehash the disastrous national energy program that was put in that really brought this province to its heels. You don't have to do that. History is well documented in that area. It was a bad thing to do. It's over, done with, behind us, and we can't revisit that every time, but you do have to recognize that it did cause some very, very serious difficulties in this province.

So the surpluses that have been gained over the years have been well spent, I think. I think that most people would agree that saving 1 and a half billion dollars in interest payments that are now available for good programs in education and health and services to seniors is a good thing.

It's interesting. I talk to the very same people, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and I talk to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, believe me, quite often. What they really tell me is to cut taxes. Cut taxes, cut taxes, cut taxes, cut taxes. They've got a whole bunch of documents that give you every which way to do it, and I don't disagree with them one bit. I believe that one of the best ways to improve your economy, to make it work is to keep a competitive tax regime. People should have the money in their pockets. They will put it into the economy and make it work. You know, I can say another time that we have a plan – it's a concrete plan; it's spend smart; it's savings; it's give back – but it's better for many purposes to say that we don't have a plan. But you know what? Most people aren't buying that.

3:50

I was interested in something that I read in a *Sun* poll, and it surprised me a little bit, frankly. You know, polls are polls, and readership is readership. You don't know who responds, but we all tend to read these things and take some information from them. The highest percentage of what to do with surpluses was rebate cheques. That surprised me a lot because at the outset of this it didn't seem that that was the most popular thing. The second was cut taxes, the third was savings, and the fourth was spend more on programs. But the interesting thing is how big those first two were: like, 38 per cent and 32 per cent. That's the majority, and that quite surprised me.

My colleague's motion was referred to. I look forward to that debate. It's actually a Treasurer's dream. It really is. We would

have no further first-quarter, second-quarter, third-quarter reporting other than a revenue report. The only spending would be one time, in budget, so no matter how badly a school was needed or a hospital was needed or something came up in year, you wouldn't be able to do it because legislatively you would be prohibited from it because it clearly says that it would have to be at one point. So, like I say, it's a Treasurer's dream. I'm going to have to listen to the debate very carefully, and I'm going to probably have to try hard not to stand up and support it, even though I know that no government in Canada does this, because it simply doesn't work in its purest form. There may be ways you can do it.

But that's why we're here today. We're here to approve or not putting this billion dollars into the heritage fund. To say that it doesn't come to the Legislature, that the Legislature doesn't have a voice in it is wrong. We're here today. If this Legislature doesn't support putting a billion dollars in the heritage fund – you know what? – it's not going there. It will not be disbursed. So every dollar that has been allocated, recommended that's in this book has to be approved by this Legislature before it is disbursed. I want everyone to get that back in their minds, and please don't tell people that the Legislature doesn't have a voice in this. You do yourself a disservice because I just simply have to go and say, "Whoever said that doesn't know what they're talking about because the Legislature has the last word on this," and they will have it today.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I listened with interest to the explanation about the billion in and the billion out, and I accept what the minister is saying. But I want to go back in terms of history and put it in perspective and then talk about the way we budget and the way we budget in the future.

It is interesting to me – I'm sure it was just a coincidence – that these articles came out from former Premier Lougheed and I think the Canada West Foundation. I've seen their study. I'm sure it's just a coincidence, now, that that billion went in after the publicity.

Mrs. McClellan: I can assure you that this was done long before Premier Lougheed.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Right.

Anyhow, the point that the minister was making – and I understand what you're saying, that it's part of the legislation as the legislation now stands that you have to take so much out of the trust fund and put it into general revenues. That's probably true in terms of what we do right here. But remember that at one time – I think it was up to 1987; if I'm wrong, the minister will correct me – we did have to take part of it and put it in. Circumstances change, and I think that was the minister's point, that circumstances can change and she doesn't want to be sort of shackled in terms of what we can do if the circumstances change and we don't have as much money flowing into the treasury as we do now.

The point I would make is that we change the legislation before we could do it again. I think the point that people are making – with the amount of money that we do have coming through right now, perhaps for the time being we should rather than just the one time, again come back and change the legislation. We have time to do this and change the legislation. I don't know if it's 30 per cent – I think that's what it was before – or something.

The point about that is that if we do that, then we build up the trust fund for the rainy day down the way if we run into the problems that the minister is talking about. In fact, that's what Premier

Lougheed's point of view was, that we would save it. As I understand it, back in those days the whole purpose of the heritage trust fund was to save it for a rainy day, the types of things that the minister is talking about. Just as the legislation was changed in '87, if something happened – and we don't see that in the foreseeable future.

I admit, Mr. Chairman, that we can't always predict something that might happen, but surely we could change that legislation, just as we did before, and in the meantime build up that trust fund towards the sort of situation that the minister is talking about. I think that in terms of budgeting that would make a lot more sense, and I would hope that the minister would come back and take a look at changing the legislation so that we can do that in the future. I expect that it's probably not possible this session unless it's already on the books, but I think that should be a high priority fairly quickly, especially as the money is running in.

I just want to, Mr. Chairman, talk about how we are budgeting. It's not that we're not spending a lot of money. They may be one-time expenses and all the rest of it, but things have changed since I was first here. We have the supplementary estimates that we're dealing with here for a reason, and the minister alluded to it. There could be an emergency, you know, a huge forest fire or whatever. So there's always the potential to have that money there for those sorts of emergencies. It was never meant to be dealing with billions and billions of dollars, as we did just in November, and now we're back here. I don't know how much it'll be to now, but I would say with all due respect to the minister that we're defeating the purpose of supplementary estimates. Nobody is saying that the government shouldn't have the ability to move fairly quickly when there's an emergency, but our provincial budget right now is becoming sort of: what does it mean? We'll come here and have a budget, and it won't mean much because we'll spend \$7 billion or \$8 billion more if we give another prosperity bonus or whatever.

So our budgeting has become, I think, out of control, ad hocery, Mr. Chairman, and I think that's a problem that we're facing. The budget should mean something in the spring. Yes, there's a place, as I say, for supplemental estimates but not for the billions of dollars that we're doing now after the fact. The minister says: well, it's coming to the Legislature because the Legislature turns it down. Well, we all know the numbers there. Nobody on the opposite side is going to vote against it, and I'm certainly going to support, you know, the billion dollars going now into the estimates, but I think we really have to get a handle on how we're handling the budget. I think that over the years the budgeting process here is lacking much more than it was, as I said, 15 or 20 years ago.

Mr. Chairman, I don't want to take a lot of time, so I'll conclude by saying that I think we should look at, as the minister says, changing the legislation to make it possible to put money away on a year-by-year basis to build up the trust fund, to follow Premier Lougheed's original idea about it. That would be there for the rainy day fund that she's talking about if circumstances warrant it. I really think we're abusing supplementary estimates now with the amount of money coming through. It was never meant to be that. The minister goes back some ways. It was never meant to be passing billions and billions of dollars, as we are, and I would take that not as criticism, but we've got to tighten this up, I believe, because I think we're losing credibility on it here in the Legislature and elsewhere.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:00

Mrs. McClellan: I'll be very brief. I appreciate your comments. Yes, we could change the legislation. I think we should have a lot

of discussion on how. Thirty per cent of overall oil and gas revenues are nonrenewable resource revenues. Actually, that's what it was then. Should it still be that? Can we do our programming? Maybe it's a different percentage today with the demands. I think the health budget at that time was well under \$3 billion. Today it's \$9 billion and growing in a huge way. I think our education budget is probably more like double what it was.

We have to look at this, but for this purpose today I appreciate your support for the savings and the understanding that for the third quarter, for in year, this is the only way we could do it, in a supplementary estimate. Then when you look at the rest of them, I was expecting some recognition that this was considerably lower. The supplementary estimates in the third quarter, if you take the billion dollars that's going to the heritage fund out, are \$354 million, which is considerably lower than what we have seen. I know that on Seniors and Community Supports – I mean, what I heard is that this isn't enough. What a strange statement to make when you've got one month of the year left.

All I ask is that people think it through. Think it through. Don't make it sound like this is what we're doing for the next year. Most people out there understand that there's a budget coming soon and that this is in year, the last month of the year, and it's a way to get this thing going. I don't expect to hear from hon. members that any of these expenditures are bad. What I have heard over and over again in all my experience, not just as Finance minister: it's the process that we debate.

I thank you for your comments. I think they were positive and meant to improve the system.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity. I'm not going to repeat some of the arguments that were made before. I, too, think that had the province inflation-proofed the heritage fund in '86 or '87, we would have a fund that's almost twice as much now, but in real dollars it did really shrink.

However, I have two simple questions. Notwithstanding the ups and downs in economic circumstance from year to year, yesterday when some of us were delivering the responses to the Speech from the Throne, I made the argument about one's investment into his or her own RRSP account. Like my banker tells me and my financial advisers tell me, making an RRSP payment into your account every year, however small, with the compound interest is beneficial to you rather than waiting five or six years and making one and then waiting five or six and then making another and so on.

The way I understand it, this is the first payment into the heritage fund in 20 years, since 1986, and this is 2006. One billion over 20 years doesn't look like a lot. Anyway, I need an assurance that there is going to be a provision or a plan that we are going to commit annually, every fiscal year, some allocation of surplus money into the heritage fund. I am hoping for an assurance from the hon. minister that this is going to occur annually from now on.

The second question – and I appreciate her explanation that only the investment income is drawn out from the heritage fund to be deposited into the general revenue – will we ever have an assurance or a guarantee from her ministry that the principal of the fund is not going to be raided for whatever reason? It could be pet projects. It could be what's deemed to be an emergency or so on without coming back to the Legislature and debating it. I'm not sure if this mechanism is in place already or if it needs to be put in place. I urge the hon. minister to consider it. What I'm talking about is the principal, not the investment income.

I spent some time reading a report that was produced by a

government commission back in 2002, and it's called the Financial Management Commission. It had a whole bunch of MLAs and members on it. The report was called *Moving from Good to Great: Enhancing Alberta's Fiscal Framework*. The committee actually did some useful and very respectable work. They consulted with Albertans, and they received submissions. They asked questions and then made recommendations to the government at the end.

One of the recommendations was basically that the heritage fund should not be looked at as a static savings account and that it should be not only retained but strengthened and allowed to grow, so this is back to my point that the heritage fund did not really grow since 1986.

They also made note of the volatility of revenues because this government seems to be happy with or dependent on the nonrenewable resources that come, and we all know how volatile that market is. They instead urged the government to look at stable and predictable funding. They also urged the government to have a conservative plan to basically take out from the heritage fund. What these guys recommended is basically to take all the surplus money every year, even the general revenue that the government accrues or collects, put it into the heritage fund, then draw out from the fund based on a very conservative estimate. They said that this should in itself allow the fund to grow.

Now, whether we all agree that maybe every penny that comes in has to go into the fund first before it's drawn out, that's a different argument for a different day. But of the submissions that these guys received – and they received actually quite a few – most of the submissions as I'm reading here say: "a consistent call for some form of stabilization fund, better long term planning, and a more open budgeting process." They go on to say: "Views were mixed on the Heritage Fund. Of those who commented, most said the Heritage Fund should be kept for the longer term, inflation proofed and allowed to grow."

We did inflation-proof it, I understand, last year, in 2005, which is tremendous. It's a little late but good that we did this. Now we should really allow it to grow annually by contributing to it. Will we receive an assurance from the minister that this is a plan that she's willing to adopt from now on?

Also, the minister indicated that the survey on the *Edmonton Sun* website, I believe, indicated that most people wanted rebate cheques. I heard that same argument. The minister indicated that it's not how you tell the story or what's in the story; it's how you deliver it. I think we can interpret from this that people are not happy about certain things. For example, we received a \$400 rebate cheque, but we pay more than \$550 in health care premiums. We pay it every year. So, you know, maybe we should ask for a rebate cheque every year.

Another calculation that I did on my computer – you know, you can download all these financial tools from the Internet, and one of them is actually a calculator that gives you amortization and gives you mortgage simulations and so on. I ran a simple simulation, \$12.7 billion, what we started with in 1986, and I used a very conservative interest rate. I put 2 and a half or 3 per cent, and I said: what happens if every Albertan since 1986 was given a dividend from the heritage fund while allowing it to grow?

We received \$400, which was amazing – thank you very much – but with that simulation that I ran, we could have paid every Albertan a hundred dollars year in and year out from 1986 till today. A hundred dollars in 1986 was a lot more than a hundred dollars in 2006 if you're talking the strength of the dollar and the buying power. Nevertheless, at 20 years times a hundred dollars each, every Albertan would have made \$2,000, and the heritage trust fund would

not have shrunk. It would have actually maintained its value, and this is without infusing any money into it.

4:10

Interpreting that poll, you know, people wanted tax cuts, or they wanted rebate cheques. It's basically telling us as legislators that people think that they're paying too much, and maybe we should look at ways to reflect fairness in the taxation regime. Health care premiums are a tax because they're not used for disease prevention or health promotion. They're just put into general revenue. So that's another thing.

The Fraser Institute in February, I believe, of 2005 indicated that government spending in Alberta has deteriorated on something called the government spending subindex. They rank all the different provinces on an index based on sustainable spending. I argued yesterday in my response to the Speech from the Throne that this government spends more money in a fiscal year than it makes from non energy-based income. Energy is volatile. We should look at the other forms of income, like taxation, like forestry, like agriculture, all that stuff, not only resource based.

Nevertheless, the Fraser Institute indicated that Alberta dropped from second place to eighth place. I am quoting from their report. They say that spending increases in Alberta are cause for concern and could potentially jeopardize the fiscal advantage the province currently enjoys. So, yes, we have paid down the debt. It was a paper debt that the Conservative government incurred and then paid off, and we know whom to thank for this. We thank heavens or we thank the God in heaven because it's something that just came out of the ground.

Mr. R. Miller: They didn't put the oil in the ground.

Mr. Elsalhy: No. It was given to us by a higher power.

They paid off the debt on paper, but now we have an infrastructure deficit that is downloaded onto the municipalities most of the time. We have nonfunded liabilities for the teachers. We have shortages in the workforce. We have many things that could have been averted if there was a plan from the beginning.

To make my argument short, I am not really against the \$1 billion going in. I actually applaud that decision. I think it's late, but we take it the way it comes. What I need to know from the minister is that they will not raid the principal and that whatever the reason is, they have to come back to the Legislature to approve it, and second, that there is a commitment from the government to actually put money into the heritage fund annually from now on.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak very briefly on this particular issue. The Alberta heritage savings trust fund is something, I suppose, that grew up with me in many ways, being a lifetime Albertan myself pretty much. You know, the sentiments that created the Alberta trust fund in the first place I think were very highly regarded by most Albertans. Indeed, when I am speaking to my constituents in Edmonton-Calder, they still have a very high regard for it. Older people especially will ask me, "Well, what happened to the Alberta heritage trust fund?" Perhaps as much as anything we need to raise the profile of this particular fund and to in fact demonstrate to the citizens of Alberta, who otherwise are the owners of this fund, just what the long-term plan for it is.

Again, people who were around and cognizant of the intention of

the Alberta savings trust fund from the beginning are pretty much stuck on the original intention of the heritage trust fund for saving for the future, diversifying the economy, improving the quality of life for Albertans. You know, it's great to see that perhaps we're casting a more specific and critical eye on this now again in 2006 from the inception of this fund in 1976. In fact, to see this billion dollars being placed in there I think means a lot to Albertans, so I would like to compliment the government on choosing to do so at this juncture. It's certainly something where I can say to my constituents that it's a positive development in terms of putting money into the heritage trust fund.

However, I would like to see perhaps some focused legislation to determine how – I know that by law some money must come out as well. This is perhaps the nub of the confusion in these last couple of days. My suggestion and the suggestion of our caucus, then, is to perhaps change that legislation so that, you know, we are realizing a net increase in the principal of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund while we are enjoying these budget surpluses as we have been in these past few years.

This whole issue of saving for a rainy day and investing in diversification is perhaps a subject of a much larger debate that we desperately require here in this province. The funds that are constituting our surplus that we see today are finite, and the nonrenewable resources that are generating these surpluses will not be around in the infinite future. The urgency of making investments today, especially in regard to diversification, is perhaps the most wise financial choice that we can possibly make.

Banking money and investing in the market is one thing, but actually building tangible means by which we can diversify will realize this fund much larger returns than we could ever see from most financial markets. For example, the diversification of our industrial base into alternative energy would not only give us, in fact, less of a reliance on hydrocarbons and nonrenewable energy but, in fact, give us an industry and a technology to sell and to export to other parts of our country and other parts of North America and such. I believe that we deserve to focus on the heritage trust fund not just now with this one-term, \$1 billion investment but to integrate it into some much larger and more comprehensive legislation in the future.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, would just like to speak briefly to this. On behalf of the Albertans that I've spoken to, they're grateful that we're now going to put some money into the heritage trust fund.

The thing that most people have pointed out to me is that we all need to have a savings plan. We all need to have a budget. If we don't have one, it's much like the cartoon that we saw in the paper yesterday. As we're on our way to the bank to deposit that, we're busy reading all of the sales that are coming up and whatever, maybe holidays that we can take. It seems like the mode that we've been in is where can we spend it before we get it to the bank.

Albertans very much would like to see a plan where we're going to have a percentage go in, especially when we have the windfalls that we've taken in recently. Wise financial planners tell people who have won the lottery to put it in the bank and to think about it and come up with a plan on what they're going to do. I'd urge this government to continue putting the surplus into the bank and to have its goals being guided by Albertans.

Albertans are speaking very much that. Yes, we have low taxes here compared to other jurisdictions, but compared to the world they

want lower taxes. We can and are able to do this. Albertans are wanting the three levels of government to work together to become more efficient in providing the services of our area and by doing that again being able to lower taxes.

Another interesting point that was brought up to a group that I met with the other evening is that they would very much like to see the heritage trust fund being directed more to help Albertans. Then one asked the question: well, how can the heritage trust fund help Albertans in a more meaningful way? The idea that was being talked about that evening in one of my constituents' home is that first we could put it into the Alberta Treasury Branches or credit unions that are actually based here in the province. These facilities loan money out to Albertans, and it's a benefit to Albertans to have that there and low interest rates. We've seen the boom that these low interest rates have caused. If, in fact, the money was here in Alberta being deposited in the Alberta Treasury Branches, it would give great access to funding. The bank and the credit union, though, would be very much protecting that money and loaning it out on the same basis they do any money. So I'd urge the government to consider thinking about that.

4:20

The other idea that people were talking about is that perhaps the government should follow what China and India and some of these other European governments are doing and actually buying hard assets and keeping such things as gold and silver.

But in general what Albertans are asking is that when we have this surplus, please continue putting it in the bank. Don't just go on a spending spree. Have disciplined plans and a budget that's going to benefit Albertans in the long term. Albertans are asking for that. We would urge the government to continue putting as much into the heritage trust fund and using that trust fund for Albertans at the most appropriate time and places and not continuing to charge the economy right now with this enormous amount of money that's come in.

In my jurisdiction, the area there, they're saying that things are up 30 to 50 per cent. They can't even get bids. They need to put the money in the bank and wait two or three years, possibly, for some of this infrastructure when there's more equipment and firms are willing to bid again at a more competitive price.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question after considering the 2005-06 supplementary estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund for the Department of Finance for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,000,000,000
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The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Seniors and Community Supports

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the third-quarter supplementary estimates for

Alberta Seniors and Community Supports for the 2005-06 fiscal year. I believe that these supplementary estimates are important because this funding will provide housing services and will assist our seniors and our persons with disabilities. As you can see in the section beginning on page 45, the third-quarter supplementary estimates for Alberta Seniors and Community Supports total \$31,850,000. My ministry requests funding for three areas.

Mr. Chairman, the first estimate refers to an additional \$11.85 million required for the settlement of a class action lawsuit involving assured income for the severely handicapped, known as the AISH program. Our government decided that the best course of action was to settle the lawsuit and to simplify the process for people to be compensated. Specifically, this funding will be used to compensate those AISH clients who were overpaid or underpaid and are eligible for a payment now. These funds are based on a court-approved settlement which is fair and reasonable for claimants and for the government.

My second supplementary funding request has been identified to increase salaries paid to community-based staff contracted with the persons with developmental disabilities, or the PDD program. It is important to ensure that those with developmental disabilities are supported by a stable and well-trained workforce. Traditionally, agencies offering support to people with developmental disabilities have had difficulty recruiting and retaining employees because they cannot offer a competitive salary. With your approval an additional \$10 million will provide an increase to the salaries of up to 12,000 PDD contracted staff members through agencies retroactive to April 1, 2005. I have targeted this funding to ensure that it gets to those front-line workers. This will assist with creating fair and equitable wages for all staff providing important support services to Albertans with developmental disabilities throughout the province.

Mr. Chairman, the final estimate that I'd like to address today is regarding continuing care. An additional \$10 million is required in order to continue to provide the meaningful improvements that Albertans are expecting and to respond to the recommendations of the MLA task force on continuing care. Approximately \$5.3 million of this funding will bridge the current gaps in the benefits that we provide to our seniors and those with disabilities who require continuing care services. The changes to the Alberta seniors' benefit and the AISH program will allow us to better support low-income Albertans who cannot afford the full costs of accommodation. It will also ensure that those individuals have access to benefits that assist them with the cost of living in a facility that best meets their needs. Albertans moving into our seniors' lodges are older and more frail than they were in the past, and with \$4.7 million in additional funding we will address the increased demand for quality services in our seniors' lodges and ensure that the additional costs are not passed on to low- to moderate-income seniors.

In closing, I'd like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and would be pleased to answer any questions.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In reply to the hon. Minister of Finance, not for a second am I not grateful for this little bit of money that is coming to us, and I do realize that it is for the last quarter. I am looking forward to the budget discussion when I'm trusting that Treasury will look fondly and fairly on the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and get us the money that we really need.

I just have a couple of questions if I might. It overlaps a different department, but perhaps you can help me with it. On page 46, the \$11,850,000 that is to be paid out for the settlement of the income

supports. If I look on page 26, it looks like part of that money is coming from Human Resources and Employment based on lapses in the skills investment program, which is a totally different discussion. So is that part of these dollars? I'm not sure. Could I get a clarification on that?

Have any of these lawsuit dollars been paid out yet? Sorry. I'm assuming that answer isn't coming right now, which is fine.

My other question would be again back to page 46 in the Seniors and Community Supports section. What exactly are service needs? On the very first line, "\$4,700,000 . . . to cover residents' increased service needs." Would that be considered staffing, or is that considered housing? Is that care staffing or, you know, to top-up for housing?

I'm just going to make this comment because really I believe that this is for the further budget discussion, but there is a deficit in the south region for PDD of 8 per cent and in Edmonton of 3 per cent. Some of the money is going forward for staffing, which I'm sure is much appreciated, and is going, I'm hoping, to front-line staff. My questions are: how can we be sure that it really is going to front-line staff, and is that only for contracted staff, or is that actually for unionized staff as well?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to answer those questions. The answer to your first question, hon. member, is yes. That funding that you identified, that's on page 26 under Human Resources and Employment under the supplementary estimates that will be coming forward later, is the \$6.1 million toward the estimated \$11.85 million, and the \$5.750 million that you identified is a part of that for the class action lawsuit. It is shared between the ministries in that way.

Ms Pastoor: It is shared?

Mrs. Fritz: Yes.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

Mrs. Fritz: Then the next question that you had regarding services. The \$4.7 million is to increase grants for not all seniors' lodges but for the lodges that provide a higher level of support for our residents. As I said in my opening remarks, because residents are older and frailer in our lodges, many require additional support services such as a special diet or more than weekly housekeeping services and other personal kinds of assistance. The grant funding will rise from \$7.50 to \$9 per lodge resident per day for those lodges providing that additional service. It's not for the care; it's for the service provided through this ministry related to accommodation. So that's the answer to that.

4:30

Then the funding for ensuring that the funding that's here in the third quarter for wages for PDD staff gets to the front-line workers. I can see why you are asking that question because we do have government employees as well that work in the area of PDD. This funding is for the 12,000 workers that are employed through the contract agencies, and I've written to and mandated the provincial board to ensure that this money goes to the front-line workers and not into administration only. So I hope that helps.

Ms Pastoor: If I just might perhaps make a bit of a point. When

you were explaining the housing portion of it and the extras, perhaps the special diets, et cetera, I think that again it brings out one of the recommendations from the MLA task force. I think you were talking about enhanced lodge beds, and I'd like to just point out the absolute necessity that we have provincial definitions for what we're all talking about.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks again also to the hon. minister for bringing forward these supplementary estimates. I find that it's reasonably within order. Considering the overall size of this budget, these supplementary additions are not inordinate. However, I do have a couple of questions, perhaps, or clarifications that you can help me with, and I think that the members of the public are interested in these things too.

I have quite a number of continuing care facilities in Edmonton-Calder. One of the ongoing concerns that the administration and the families and the residents themselves, if they can express it properly, are continually telling me about is that there is a shortage of qualified staff to operate the continuing care facilities, especially for the residents who require intensive assistance. So for this \$10 million to be earmarked to increase the salaries of what I believe you said were 12,000 contract front-line workers, if you know – or perhaps you can forward the information to me later. First of all, what percentage increase in their salary are you expecting to be directed to each of the front-line workers? Second of all, what percentage of that total funding is obliged to go directly to those people?

One of the problems that I have is that there is an unevenness between different facilities in how they manage their funds. So I might expect that I would see some of these funds being spent in different ways at different continuing care facilities in my constituency. I know that there is some problem associated with that, the administration perhaps taking an inordinate amount of the funding in any given situation. So that's one concern that I do have, and if you could answer those questions for me, I would be most appreciative.

Second of all, in regard to the underpaid claimants' case by AISH workers – and I guess I could just look at this myself – I'm curious to know which ministries are in fact sharing this cost estimate together. I'm wondering as well, perhaps more importantly, if there has been any projection as to how much more this lawsuit is going to cost the Alberta government in view of how long it took to actually come to a settlement. It's my understanding that if we had dealt with this problem before, not only would the people who most need funds to survive in our society – that is, the people on assured disability – have received this money. In fact, I'm sure that many of the people who were underfunded don't exist anymore. The mortality rate for people that are living in such poor circumstances is very high, so not giving the money to those people in a timely manner I find to be morally reprehensible. Also, I find that there has to be a dollar figure on how much more we have to pay because of the truancy of the government in actually settling this issue.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to just refer to the first question. I think, hon. member, that we discuss continuing care in a different way. When I review the continuing care system, I refer to people that are in lodges or in self-contained apartments and on

through the system. You were inquiring about the qualified staff being paid through the funding that I've requested, but that's for the staff for PDD, and it's actually completely different. So I'll answer the second part of the question and just refer to the \$10 million for the staff for PDD.

That staff is the 12,000 people that are contracted through the agencies, and it will be dedicated funding. We are hoping that for most agency staff it will provide funding at about a 3 per cent increase. I hope that helps as well. It isn't continuing care; it's PDD.

The area that you addressed on the class action lawsuit, as the Member for Lethbridge-East referred to, that is on page 26. It is being cost-shared with the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment. That explains that too.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the minister for this opportunity to discuss the supplemental request. I, too, just want to go a little bit further, and I've spoken with the minister in private on these issues. One of the questions that I have is the concern on the facilities that I've gone and visited for PDD. One of those facilities has had a shortage of workers of 800 hours in a given month, and they had to have their own staff make up that shortage. I'm wondering. This money that you say is going to increase the wages: is it possible that they're going to actually be using it to increase the number of staff as there is that shortage? I'm concerned about: are we getting the right balance and addressing that problem?

At another enhanced facility that I went and visited, they're finding that in order to present their case and get the wages that they need, they're actually making the workers document every little thing they do because the health regions are saying: well, you know, you've got the 3.1 or the 3.4 hours. But they have high-needs people in there, and because they're not recording everything they're doing for those people, they're not assessed with the proper amount of hours. Perhaps one needs five hours. It's an ongoing problem to do the assessment in these long-term care facilities and then, therefore, get the workers that are needed.

The biggest dilemma, I guess, that the facilities are facing both in seniors' care and with the people with developmental disabilities is the turnover of staff and the shortage of staff and not being able to get them in there. I definitely commend you on the \$10 million to increase the wages because that's a major problem. People are drawn out and can take a much easier daytime job that isn't as labour intensive.

It also concerns me with the Michener that they've got guaranteed raises, I believe, of 3 per cent, 3 per cent, and 3.9 per cent. I think you referred to this yesterday, but I'm not clear. They know that this wage increase is going to be ongoing and that they'll be able to reach their budget. The letter that I've received from PDD south is that the facilities have shown that they need to have a reduction in their costs of \$1.7 million, \$3 million, and \$5 million in the next three years. They're very concerned about how they're going to do that with just a 2 per cent increase. So that reduction is causing a lot of grief to those facilities. Two of them in the area have been told by PDD south that they need to reduce their expenditures by 8 per cent.

One of the problems, they're saying, for the people they're moving from child services to PDD is that there isn't funding for them to go forward. Also, is there any money to help them in assessing the individuals for their needs? We have many that are high-needs, and they don't necessarily get the funding, so therefore the workload is increased on those other individuals.

4:40

The other area that I'd like to bring up again with you is that the per capita funding formula doesn't work for southern Alberta as there is a higher percentage of people with PDD in the south than in the central and northern regions, and I don't see anything in here to reallocate that funding to help them meet their shortages.

I appreciate the efforts that are being taken and, I trust, will continue to meet the needs in these two areas, and I thank the minister for her work.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. I appreciate your comments, hon. member. We did have that discussion yesterday, and you certainly brought forward some great ideas, like you did today as well, about the funding following the client, changing the formula, and looking at low-to-moderate needs for clients with PDD.

I'd like to go back to being clear as well that this funding is not for staff in continuing care, which you mentioned earlier in your remarks. This funding is for staff that are employed through the contract agencies that look after people that are persons with developmental disabilities.

The PDD south region for 2005-06 received a budget allocation of \$52.1 million, and that represents about 10 per cent of the total PDD budget. The funding for the PDD south region community board has increased 68.9 per cent since 1999. Now, PDD south has brought this issue forward to a number of MLAs. I am addressing that, and I will give you further information in that regard.

You say that there's a deficit with PDD south. Their funding has not been decreased. There will be spending reductions to the boards throughout the province that the provincial board has mandated to the boards as they allocate the funding, but there hasn't been a funding decrease overall, and there won't be one. I'll give you that information as I put it together in a comprehensive package.

Thank you.

Mr. Martin: To the minister: we understand that there has not been an overall cut. I think that in actual fact there's probably been a 2 per cent increase. But the point that the groups and PDD are making is that the reality is that with institutional inflation and inflation, it does mean a cutback in the services that they're providing. What they've been asking for is just to keep at the inflation level. As I said before in the House, yes, there has been more money put in – there are more clients – but that doesn't enable them to maintain their services right now.

The latest figures that I have from the Association for Community Living – it hasn't been announced in Edmonton, but there are regions that have already started some of the cutbacks, certainly the south and I forget which other region. They've told me that these figures are rough, but there'll probably be the equivalent of about \$18 million in cuts over the whole province. I'm told that even the Edmonton region will be \$4 million.

Now, it's good that the extra funding is coming, and I'm sure it'll be greatly appreciated for the people that work under very difficult circumstances there, but the reality is that when you cut across, no matter whether the minister says that there's a 2 per cent increase, out in the field some people are suffering a fair amount of stress. We're all getting the e-mails, the phone calls. That's the reality of what's happening, and that's why the very intense lobbying is going on. It doesn't necessarily matter, Mr. Chairman, who's right or wrong in this. The bottom line is that if there are the cuts that are occurring and that family is out there and it's a cut to one of their people, this is a very severe matter. They don't care who's right or

wrong about inflation and all the rest of it. The bottom line is that this is occurring with people right now, and there's a great deal of concern about it.

I would just say to the minister that certainly it's appreciated. We certainly support it. I think – and she can correct me if I'm wrong – it will probably mean about a 3 per cent increase in terms of their salaries. I think that's appreciated, but there's the other part of it that's creating the concern across the province. If the association and the groups representing the people with developmental disabilities are wrong, that there aren't these cuts going on, then I think that the minister should show us that this is not the case. But it's coming from them pretty clear that – and it's just an estimate at this point – there'll be the equivalent of \$18 million in cuts right across the province. That's pretty severe.

As I say, the minister is right in the sense that there's not an overall cut in terms of the amount of dollars. As we say, it's probably a 2 per cent increase. But we all know that we've looked at, through Members' Services, what it means in terms of MLAs' salaries. With inflation, the way we do it, it probably means about a 4 per cent increase just for that, for salaries here. We all know that institutional inflation runs higher. As I say, I don't think that they're asking for the sun and the moon. They're just asking to cover inflation so that they can continue doing what they were doing in the last number of years.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for those comments. I will take them under advisement, and, as I said, I will be putting together a comprehensive package to give back to you regarding PDD.

But you're right. It depends on, you know, what words people use and how they interpret the words. In this case, I'd like to just say once again, Mr. Chairman, just to have it on the record, that I really believe that the spending reductions that have been requested by the provincial board and in the allocation of the approximately \$500 million budget have been interpreted as funding reductions and that what people would like to see in addition to funding that has been put in place – they're coming forward with it as being deficits. So you're right. A lot of it is in the exchange of words.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: After considering the 2005-06 supplementary estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund for the Department of Seniors and Community Supports for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$31,850,000
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The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Innovation and Science

The Chair: The Minister of Innovation and Science.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Introducing the topic, I just want to refer the members of the House to page 328 of the published business plan where it talks about unleashing innovation. It says:

This business plan reflects strategies to strengthen Alberta's capacity for innovation, with an emphasis on: building the capability and capacity of Alberta's research system; building excellence in three priority areas (energy, ICT and life sciences); developing, attracting and retaining highly qualified professionals; encouraging technology commercialization; and fostering the growth of knowledge-based industries.

I focus on those last two comments, because this is what this supplementary estimate actually addresses, which talk about encouraging technology commercialization and fostering the growth of knowledge-based industries.

4:50

The supplementary estimate of \$30 million is requested to support the expansion of AVAC Ltd. to provide managerial and financial assistance to new businesses in information and communications technology, life sciences, and other industrial technology ventures. The goal is to increase the economic success of Alberta's high-technology industries and the rate of technology adoption within these sectors, similar to what AVAC Ltd. has accomplished within the agrivalues product sector. I would note that AVAC was established in 1997 with \$35 million, and the government invested an additional \$35 million in 2005. To date \$31.3 million has been invested in 154 agrivalue projects and companies, and these investments I believe raised an additional \$120 million from private sources.

Start-up and early-stage companies need mentoring and funding to grow and become successful. Alberta investors are very knowledgeable about energy and natural resource businesses but less familiar with high-tech operations and reluctant to invest in new and unproven science and technology ventures.

Desired outcomes of this expansion of AVAC include more successful start-up companies, more investment-ready companies that offer investors better quality deals, development and attraction of more capable technology and entrepreneurs and managers, and more sustainable growth in technology and value-added sectors. This initiative will help to provide managerial and financial assistance to new businesses in Alberta's targeted growth sectors: information and communications technologies, life sciences, and industrial technology. Support services offered will include business mentoring, financing assistance, marketing and operational guidance, professional assistance in company formation, and support for proof of concept and prototyping of new products and services.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

AVAC's membership and scope will be broadened to include representation from the advanced technology sectors. An investment advisory committee will be created to address the needs of the advanced technology sectors.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would ask for the support of the House in this request for a supplementary estimate of \$30 million.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We have a response from the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to see you in the chair. First, let me start by thanking the hon. minister for having agreed to meet with me yesterday, briefly, after responses to the Speech from the Throne. It offered us an opportunity to actually go over this supplementary supply, what it really means and why it was necessary.

Notwithstanding the discussion that we had yesterday, I still had a few points that I wanted to leave on the record. Let me start by saying that I fully support allocating money to research and development initiatives mainly for start-ups and early-stage, growing companies. I definitely want to see our economy diversified, and I hope for a day when we will see a Silicon Valley right here in Edmonton and another research cluster in Calgary and one in Red Deer and perhaps one in Lethbridge and one in any one of a number of cities throughout this great province.

Diversification, of course, and research and development will sustain us into the future, and I urge the hon. minister and his staff to really expand and focus on other things besides oil and gas – I know that they're doing this, and this is a trend that I would encourage and I hope to see expanded – things like clean energy, renewable energy, health research, IT, communications, et cetera.

Now, this is an expense of \$30 million, and as it shows, technology commercialization initiatives in the budget was \$3.175 million, and now we're infusing \$30 million, which will raise it to \$33.175 million. This is a tenfold increase, or really, if you think percentage, it's 1,044 per cent, so tenfold. My question is: why wasn't it in the regular or initial budget?

Now, I know that sometimes research or development or encouraging young start-ups, you know, people who need venture capital and so on, might not be a priority because we can make a lot more money a lot quicker from other sources. Perhaps it might be that this wasn't identified as a priority that was high enough on the priorities list for the government, so it wasn't in the initial budget.

Okay. If we accept this argument, it's not an emergency today, so why couldn't this wait till the next budget? Then perhaps the hon. minister would have made a stronger argument for his department competing with all those other departments by saying: I definitely need \$33 million for R and D and commercialization initiatives because this is the way of the future. He could have pitched hard for his ministry. So it's not an emergency today, and it could have waited for two to three more months, when the new budget comes down.

Now, I'm not arguing that this is money that is not needed, but I seek assurances with regard to, one, what guarantees or accountability mechanisms are in place now or are going to be put in place to ensure that this sum of money, \$30 million today, or future allocations are going to be divided and awarded appropriately to deserving, sound, and potentially successful ventures? We don't want the money to be allocated to ventures that are hopeless or are not going to succeed. So we need to have some guarantees here.

I also have some suggestions. I think that it should really go to Alberta companies first and foremost, and then maybe whatever is left should be allocated to other companies from other Canadian jurisdictions. So start with Alberta, invest it locally, and then expand if there is room for expansion.

I also think that we have to put in place some ceilings or maximums, so per recipient you're only allowed a certain amount from this pot, and if you exceed a certain amount or if you want to exceed a certain amount, there are other ways to approach the government for help.

Third, I would urge the hon. minister through IVAC or through AVAC to instruct them that there has to be maybe a small part that is treated as a grant, something that is a gift to that company to help

them get off and start their journey. The rest, however, the bulk of that money, should be recoverable in some way, recoverable in the sense that maybe it could be a low-interest or no-interest loan. So you give it to them with the promise or the contractual agreement that they would give it back in a certain number of years or once their costs have been recovered.

You could do it another way by maybe sharing in the copyright or the patent once they market their product or service, some way to ensure a return on investment, as really it is taxpayers' money that we're allocating here. We're dispensing taxpayers' money, so maybe we should look at a return on investment so that it's not all a grant. Some of it, maybe a small portion, should be, but the majority of it, the bulk, would be an interest-free loan or a low-interest loan or maybe sharing in the patent and in the copyright and definitely sharing in the revenues, then, once that product or service is marketed.

I'd also like to see a list of companies or projects which were successful in securing funding under this structure but also those who applied and were turned down or rejected. It would offer us a comparison of what went through and what was allowed or accepted but also what was blocked or rejected, to study it and scrutinize and say: okay; maybe one of those was deserving, and it was not allowed in error, or maybe one of the ones that was allowed shouldn't have been.

A question would be: what systems are in place to ensure that the money is allocated fairly? We don't want it to be left to the whims or the wishes of a board or a closed circuit of a few people who make decisions and play God with which contract gets \$1 million, which contract gets a hundred thousand, and which contract gets \$5,000. We want to have some criteria to make sure that the money is allocated fairly and equitably.

With the reporting, what kind of reporting will be in place at the end or regularly or periodically? We would definitely like to see a report on the measurable goals, targets, deliverables, evaluation methods, periodic evaluations, peer evaluations, and so on. Hopefully, that report would be tabled with the Legislature so all of us would see it and would determine what kind of return we're getting from that IVAC initiative.

5:00

The hon. minister also mentioned something about business mentoring, which I really commend him on because this is useful. I can take it a step further and maybe advise him to start an inventory of resources. There is help from the government. There is help from nonprofit organizations, help from nongovernmental organizations, and so on. Have a database of all these available resources. Put it in a kit or a tool kit. Give it to that aspiring business or young emerging company and say: "This is what we can do for you. Here is some money to get you started, and here are the resources that you can refer to." They could be federal. They could be municipal sometimes with the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation, for example. Whatever the source is, package it together and not say, you know: "We're the province. We'll give you anything that is provincially administered. You look for the other stuff." No. Maybe we should facilitate and offer him or her a tool kit, and we'll say: "Here. These are all the means and tools that are available for you. Good luck to you, and we'll see you in a year, and we'll report on your progress."

So not a lot of concern. I support having money put into research and development. Commercialization is one thing; pure science is another, but that's an argument I'm going to make in the regular budget debate. Overall, I'm in support with some assurances. I thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Doerksen: If I could just provide a couple of brief comments in response. I would agree with the hon. member that this not an emergency, but it is an opportunity. Frankly, we had the opportunity. There were some resources available. We presented our case, and we were successful in terms of the \$30 million, much the same as we were successful in getting another \$100 million for the ingenuity fund. So there was an opportunity presented because of our fiscal situation, and I think that it was incumbent upon us to actually try and move this agenda forward, which we have done.

I would point out to the member, though, that by moving the funds into AVAC, it doesn't mean it all has to be spent this year. The organization there will actually take this money over a period of time, so you can't really say that it's \$30 million just in this one year. It will be allocated over a period of time.

Some of your suggestions are very good suggestions. I think the intention, certainly, would be to invest in Alberta companies first. No argument from me on that one. Return on investment: the entire object of this exercise is in fact to have a return on investment. You're going to have some companies that are very successful that will provide a greater return based on, of course, how you structure the agreement and will pay back more than others who perhaps will not be so successful. In some cases I'm sure that some will in fact fail.

That leads me to your point on accountability. Here's the problem. If I as a minister keep too tight a hold and make the decisions about which companies are to get the money, then I'll be accused of picking winners and losers, and I'll be accused of supporting friends. Frankly, we have to get this money out into an arm's-length body that makes proper investment decisions and treats the money in that fashion without influence from the minister. That's a very clear reason why we put the money into AVAC.

The other reason we put the money into AVAC is that it's an established organization. I did not want to create another new organization and have to go through the whole learning situation again, so we're using the expertise that AVAC currently has because we think we can get on the ground and running a lot quicker by using that particular expertise.

As for accountability AVAC will continue to report just like they have now. You'll be able to see all of the companies that have been successful with respect to their application. I'm not convinced that we'll be able to show you the companies that are not successful. That's a different question. But certainly in terms of the companies that have received money, that is reported on an annual basis and will continue.

The rest of your comments we will review as we set up the details of how the money is allocated. So thank you for your comments.

Thank you for this opportunity.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, hon. minister, for your very informative and frank replies to questions thus far. I only have a couple of specific things to ask of you in regard to this supplementary estimate request. As I often am questioning each department for which I'm responsible, I'm seeing increases being, you know, about 20 per cent more than the original budget that we agreed to last year. I appreciate your explanations to the Member for Edmonton-McClung in regard to the process and how these things come to fruition and whatnot.

But, you know, I would like to see the accelerate innovation line increased substantially from the main budget this next time around because we are in a situation where we require diversification and specific technology investment, especially in the energy resource

sector in this province. I think that by us making an allocation beforehand, earlier and with some greater vigour, we would be sending a message to technology companies that we are, in fact, the place to do these things. So if we can telegraph our more firm commitment to accelerating innovation to the technology firms and to individuals who might have projects to bring forward, then I think that we would be serving our purposes much better.

My question is: are we increasing that line so substantially because of a new-found interest in that, or is it just an indication of things to come, I suppose? I would be curious for you to comment on that.

In terms of priorities for investment in science and technology I'm hoping that I could be given sort of a clearer picture in regard to the priorities that we have for science and technology investment in this province. I would like to see that as well. I think that would help me to understand the choices that are being made in regard to research investment.

I would like to know which specific projects or companies were the recipients of this rather large increase in innovation investment. You don't have to give that to me now, but if I could have that information at some point, I would be appreciating it. Why at this juncture was it so important for them to receive that money?

That's about it. I look forward to debating the budget for Innovation and Science in the upcoming session. I think that this is perhaps one of the most important places for which we will receive a dollar value for public dollars in this Legislature. I am a firm supporter of increasing your budget. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Doerksen: I would have absolutely no argument with the Member for Edmonton-Calder about increasing the support for my budget, so on that line he and I are both in agreement.

So just to cover a couple of points. Is this a new-found interest? No, it's not. One of the issues that we have been dealing with over a number of years is the whole – well, there are a couple of aspects. One, of course, is access to capital for particular emerging companies or start-up companies or whatever to be able to grow their business, also mentorship or the support you need at the management level for good ideas to make it into the marketplace. This has been one tool that has been proven to be effective in the agricultural sector and one that we thought we could use in a different sector. So quite clearly it's not new-found.

5:10

We've always been looking for opportunities on how you increase investment capital. We've tried through the Banff Venture Forum to introduce companies to venture capitalists. We take them through an entrepreneurial school, if you like, to teach them how to present their business plans, how to best target investors that have money. We've been working on a number of different fronts in the whole area of commercialization. Is it perfect yet? Absolutely not. We've got a lot of work to do. I think this is a good step.

I wanted to just clarify one thing. The \$30 million is not going tomorrow or the next day to specific companies. That decision is going to be made now that the money is put into AVAC, then I have to set up the process whereby companies will apply and present their business plan for that money. I actually anticipate that the investment in these companies will take place over the next one to five years. These companies will be identified over that period of time, then the money advanced. So it's not likely that the \$30 million program expands every year. A lot of this is going to depend on the take-up, how good the quality deals are, or if there are any quality deals in this space. That will take time.

The companies that are successful are reported on. I'm sure that AVAC has a website. I've seen their annual report. It actually lists the companies that have been successful. That reporting will absolutely continue and should continue. It has to be transparent.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

There was one other thing I was going to tell you, and it has slipped my mind. If it comes back to me, I'll pull you aside and tell you later about it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question after considering the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund for the Department of Innovation and Science for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006?

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$30,000,000
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The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Health and Wellness

The Chair: The Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The notes on Health and Wellness supplementary estimates to be voted start on page 21 and go right through to page 24. We are requesting \$141.2 million in supplementary estimates for 2005-06. The majority of the money is being used for the expansion of the electronic health record.

An additional \$28.1 million from higher than budgeted health care insurance premiums will be used to primarily address wait-time pressures. So that's over \$28 million coming from higher than expected health care premiums from the extra influx of people. Traditionally or frequently in the past these monies have been profiled for health for additional expenditure if the need arises.

A hundred and fourteen point nine million from supplementary funding and \$1.1 million from the additional health care premiums will go towards helping the regions update their point of care systems. Mr. Chairman, this includes tools to health care professionals so they can better collect and manage information at the point of care. It also in turn enables better clinical decision-making in inpatient and ambulatory care settings. For example, these systems will have decision support tools that flag potential adverse events and assist providers in tracking care needs. To date more than 17,000 health care providers are registered and users of Alberta Netcare. There are 570,000 Albertans who have health records in the system, and we're on track to achieve our goal of having a record for all Albertans by 2008.

Continuing care will receive \$26.3 million from supplementary funding. The government has accepted in principle the final report of the MLA task force. The money will address the most urgent recommendations. The money will go toward a number of things: increasing the number of nursing care hours in facilities from 3.1 hours per resident to 3.4 hours. It will go to buying and installing patient lift devices in all long-term care facilities, a very important thing, Mr. Speaker, that we anticipate will help residents as well as

assisting the providers of care so that residents are looked after in the proper fashion. It will go towards implementing an immediate review and upgrade of medication management practices and speeding up the implementation of residents' assessments and care planning tools.

New health and accommodation service standards will be implemented this year for all continuing care facilities and services. The standards will ensure that continuing care residents are cared for with the dignity and respect that they deserve. In 2005-06 \$25 million will also have been allocated solely to increasing staffing levels and care hours in continuing care. This funding concentrates improving the hands-on care for residents, and I believe it represents a good first step.

Each recommendation of the MLA task force on continuing care will be considered in detail by this Ministry of Health and Wellness and by Seniors and Community Supports for implementation through our 2006-2009 business plans and approved annual ministry budgets. So in the next three years we will be working at implementation. Twenty-seven million dollars from health care premium revenue will be spent on innovative projects to reduce wait times; \$12 million will be spent to sustain the hip and knee replacement project in three pilot regions: the Calgary, David Thompson, and Capital health regions. Pending the outcome of the final evaluation of the pilot later this spring, we expect that this project will be expanded over the next two to three years. So far it has had great success in reducing wait times. The remaining \$15 million from health care will go towards the development of projects to reduce wait times for other health services such as cancer care, mental health, and cardiac care.

This investment will help Alberta meet national wait time benchmarks that were announced in December and is evidence of our strong commitment to a public health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions for the minister. I understand that I may run out of time this afternoon; if so, I'll continue this evening. Maybe I'll start from the top of the reasons that the supplementary estimate has been requested.

The \$15,200,000 that's increasing the number of nursing hours in long-term care facilities from 3.1 hours per resident day to 3.4 hours: this is one of these figures that keeps getting announced over and over again. Could I get the minister to please supply exactly what the increments were? When we were here in the fall, we were at 1.9 hours, I believe, and I'd like to know exactly what the increments were and when they came into effect. If we're now at the point where we're funding 3.1 hours of care per day, when did we hit that time? Are there any plans to go beyond the increment of 3.4 hours, and when do we expect to reach that? The date is what I'm looking for here.

The reasoning is that the Long Term Care Association, supported by many others, was in fact advising that the number of hours of care that were required would be 3.6 hours. I've questioned the minister in the House previously on why she chose not to go to 3.6 hours but, in fact, to stop at 3.4. So I'm wondering about that.

There is money in here to support the purchase and installation of patient lift devices. That will help, but what that actually does result in is fewer staff in long-term care facilities. Where you have patients that require a two-person lift – in other words, they're often paralyzed or immobilized, or they cannot assist themselves at all – you have what is called a two-person lift, and with these devices you

can have one staff member operating the mechanism, the device, to move someone, for example, from a bed into a wheelchair, from a wheelchair back into the bed.

5:20

Interesting things start to arise from that. I've just gone through a sit clinic with someone who was really struggling, being terribly uncomfortable, in fact in pain, in their wheelchair. So with a great deal of assistance from the Glenrose and various physiotherapists, all very dedicated professionals, they worked along with this individual to fit them into a better wheelchair with more comfortable padding and more secure. But then they were saying: well, we have to make sure that when this individual is put in the wheelchair every morning, they are positioned at the back of the wheelchair. I said: "Hang on. Hang on. You're standing there with two people, one at their shoulders and one at their feet, and you're actually positioning that person in the wheelchair. Well, you don't get two people in a nursing home anymore, especially if you've now got somebody using the device." You've got one person with their finger on the button, and they're standing five feet away operating the device, which is basically like a big crane. It picks up the person, and you move it over, and then it drops them back into the chair. So there's no possible positioning in the chair at all.

I appreciate these devices, but they don't result in more actual staff on the ground. There's less staff on the ground because they now have the assistance of the device, and that's how it's allocated in these nursing homes. There is a downside to that: you've got less care, and you're also unable to work with things like positioning in wheelchairs. Seeing as most of the people we're dealing with in long-term care centres are in wheelchairs, this becomes a real consideration for people because it means that they're going to be uncomfortable and badly positioned in their wheelchair for four or five hours.

I can see that the chairman is moving to have us rise and report, and I look forward to continuing this debate this evening. Thank you.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(1), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration of estimates, I would invite the hon. Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report the estimates of Finance, Seniors and Community Supports, and Innovation and Science and report progress on the estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions relating to the 2005-06 supplementary estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund have been approved.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,000,000,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$31,850,000.

Innovation and Science: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$30,000,000.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply also reports progress on the Department of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a list of those resolutions voted upon by the Committee of Supply pursuant to Standing Orders.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 8 p.m., at which time we'll return in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:25 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 1, 2006** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 06/03/01
 head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, it's 8 o'clock. We shall call the committee to order.

Before we proceed with the estimates before us, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of Cubs. I used to be a member of the Cubs. I was a sixer back when. This is the 160th Latter Day Saints Cub group, and with them today are Christine McCaw and Marilyn Borely. I'd just ask all the members of the Assembly to give them the usual warm welcome.

Thank you very much.

head: **Supplementary Estimates 2005-06
 General Revenue Fund, No. 2**

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders the first hour is set between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

Health and Wellness

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: If I may. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre would like to proceed, but if I could just give a couple of responses to the questions that were posed in the afternoon session.

First of all, the hon. member is quite right that the regulations in our standards stated 1.9 hours. However, the position of 3.1 hours came into effect in the 2004-05 year, and over the past year we have been endeavoring to reach 3.4 hours per patient on average for staffing. By August the varied authorities and varied facilities in some authorities had achieved that level. By January it is my understanding that all of the authorities reported that all of their facilities had achieved a staffing mix equivalent to 3.4 hours. However, in doing so, some reported that their targets, though they may have been met, were met with some difficulty to the overall budgets of the regional health authorities. So when this supplementary estimate provided additional dollars for the long-term care hours, it did so knowing that we were topping up what was already spent by the health authorities in transfers to the long-term care centres.

Now, why not 3.6 hours? That might well be something that comes as part of our new budget year. It is not something that is part of this. We knew that we had to be realistic in how we reported and spent money towards the end of this fiscal year, and that's why the announcements that have come out in the third quarter cover simply that.

The other point I want to make is that the intent of the lifts that have been installed was not to reduce staff but, rather, to boost staff

morale because of the very grave difficulty – and I've been there and done that in long-term care facilities – where if you're one person and you're managing somebody who is not able to help themselves into a chair or into a bathtub or into a bed or in any other place, you can't manage that even with a lift as a one-person activity. We knew from what we'd heard from the staff in these facilities that the expenditure of these ceiling lifts would help us to at a minimum give them some assurance that we would make their lives easier in managing the patient, and in turn the patient would be able to relax better in a lift.

It was with no thought that they wouldn't still need the staffing complement at all. In fact, I think that that would give them some extra assurance. If it was possible for somebody who was fully lucid to manage with a staff member and one person operating the lift, presumably another staff member would still be managing other care and treatment for other patients on the ward or in the facility.

The lifts of their own accord were never installed with the thought that we were going to be reducing staff. It was strictly to make it safer for the patient and to make it a simpler procedure for people that are providing care to folks who need long-term and continuing care. Not once did anybody ever raise the point: well, then you can use fewer staff because you're having a lift. It might be a simpler situation, but for safety reasons for the largest part, if you have somebody who really needs to have a lift – and I know that in a couple of the long-term care facilities that I'm most familiar with, people are not able to be fully connected to their environment either because of their own state of dementia or because of their physical lack of well-being and so on. For many of the people it's still going to take two people even to manage that lift properly.

I don't know if there's another point I can respond to on that, but I look forward to the rest of the questions. I just thought I'd clarify what I'd heard up till now.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for the remarks that the minister made in response to the questions that I put on the record at the end of the afternoon session. I appreciate that the minister believes that the intent of funding the lifts was not to reduce the staff complement. I can tell you that I watch this every week, and there's one person there. There are not two people; there's one person there operating the lift. I've never seen two people there, actually, in all the time that I've been there. So that's the effect. That's the long-term outcome of what happens. If you've got just one person to operate it, that's what happens.

My illustration with the story about the woman trying to be positioned appropriately in the wheelchair: that's the result of it. When you've now got just one person operating the lift, you are unable to have a second person there that can help position the person appropriately. So you end up with someone who's not positioned properly, and they're slowly sliding down over the four or five hours that they're in the wheelchair during the morning or during the afternoon when they're back in the chair. There are outcomes as a result of choices that are made, and that's one of the places where I see it. I've already said that there are dedicated professionals there, and they're all working very hard, but that's what happens.

It was interesting to me that the physiotherapists that were working in the sit clinic were unaware that that would be the result. To give a very crude example, it's like going to the hairdresser's or barber's and getting a wonderful haircut which you are never ever able to repeat on your own. So it only happened in the sit clinic that they were able to position the person appropriately, and that's

unlikely to ever happen again because they don't have two people on in the actual facility to help them get in the position they're supposed to get in. That's the outcome of some of these things, whether they're intended or not.

The \$3 million to accelerate the implementation of the continuing care system, especially around availability of information used in decision-making: could we please get some details? I'm looking specifically for timelines, whether they're incremental or not. What are the points you're trying to hit with this, and what performance measurements are in place to allow you to look back on this and decide if it was in fact useful and an efficient project?

I'm looking for the same kind of information for the \$600,000 to support the implementation of the new standards for medication management, and if we could also get a layperson's description of exactly what's being anticipated there. Is this around a new charting system? Is it around computerization? Is it around some kind of robotic packaging, bubble packaging of pills in single dosages for individuals? What exactly does that mean?

There's an awful lot of money in here: \$114.8 million to accelerate the expansion of Alberta's electronic health records. Oh, boy. I think that we are all looking at the electronic health records with great anticipation and optimism that this will make the system better.

8:10

However, there are some huge pitfalls involved there, and the minister has been warned about these. There were several very good sessions at the minister's symposium in May 2005 in Calgary, in which they clearly said: you've got to know what you're doing here because there are a lot of examples out there of people rushing off and getting systems in place and then finding out that they don't interface well with other systems they need to interact with. Then I look in Alberta and go: "Great. We've got the Capital health authority developing one kind of electronic health record system and the Calgary health authority developing a completely different system."

Now, I've asked about this before, and I've been told: "Oh, yeah, they're going to interface well. They're going to communicate. This will be seamless. We're working on this." At that point I just have to pause and go: what were you thinking? Basically, each region could potentially develop their own electronic health records. How is that going to work, especially when we start bringing in all the other components that are involved there, the pharmacists and diagnostics and everything else? I'm noticing that more and more money is going off into this.

There were transfers of money in the third-quarter update around this. Now, this may well be the money that was in the third-quarter update, but I thought: wow, we're just pouring money into this system. Are we really watching? I'd like to know what the benchmarks are for checking that this stuff is working because we can pour literally hundreds of millions of dollars into this and end up with a system that doesn't work. We have examples elsewhere in the world of exactly that situation happening, so I'm not talking about the sky falling here. I'm talking about studies that the minister should be aware of.

I am interested in the explanation of why the regional health authorities were allowed to develop independent systems. Who is it that's supposed to knit these systems together and get them all to talk to one another electronically? I think there's a real issue there. I understand that we're in a hurry for this, but it strikes me that we were out front to begin with, and now we're behind. So what's the problem here? I'm getting reports that we're now behind on the electronic health records implementation.

The other issue around that is what we're seeing happening, and

we got a little taste of it with the debacle over the privatized registries. This has been the point I've maintained all the way along. You can have lots of different levels of security in these electronic databases, but it's always going to come down to a human being deciding that they're going to do it anyway. That's where we really need to be watching the system because, obviously, if we've got certain parts of our system like the drivers' licences and vehicle registrations privatized, through private companies, and they pay their staff minimum wage or slightly better and somebody rolls in and says, "I'm going to give you \$25,000," well, duh, yeah, they're going to take the bribe. No, they shouldn't, but how do we set up the system, aside from all the electronic blockers and alarm systems? There's a description of these levels of security that are in it. What systems are we looking at to deal with human nature and human behaviour? Because that is where our system is actually failing.

You know, we get the journalist shot in the parking lot in Quebec because the girlfriend of the Hells Angels biker gets his licence plate number out of the private registry there. That's exactly how they got it. They had his licence plate number. They walked around in the parking lot, found his car, waited for him. He walked out there, and bang, they shoot him. So that's where the problem is, and we don't seem to be looking for any kind of systems that are dealing with it.

When we've got electronic health records and we're shipping X-rays to India overnight and then shipping them back again and all kinds of information is being accumulated on someone, access to that information by sources that aren't supposed to get at it, frankly, I think, can have deathly consequences for people. I'm just not seeing anybody being alive to this and quick on the uptake.

Now, the minister had gone through the various transfers, how there was more revenue than expected and that that money was transferred inside the department to pay for other things. What I would like to do is get a breakdown of details – and you may wish to supplement this in written form after the fact and just send it over to me, Madam Minister – of the \$27 million for the access and wait time projects. There was an additional amount of money that was transferred internally for that. These access and wait time projects: exactly how does that break down? Who's getting cheques cut to them? What's the line-by-line breakdown on how those projects actually worked? We don't get very much information from the government financially. We tend to get sort of everything rolled up into one big vote line. I'm interested in: what is the detailed breakdown on this one?

I know that my colleague from Lethbridge-East is going to talk, I'm sure, about the progress that's not being made on establishing the standards of care, so I won't spend a lot of time on that. I will note, in fact, that that Member for Lethbridge-East is bringing forward Bill 205 with some excellent recommendations on standards and monitoring and enforcement through an ombudsperson, and I hope that the minister will give that very strong consideration. I'll leave the continuing care questions to her because she has a real passion for it.

Okay. I'm going back to the medication management. I asked for the details on the implementation of the standards. Could I also get information on what the standards are, please? In addition to that, are these going to be province-wide, and will they apply in both public and private facilities? The additional breakdown to that one is: how small a facility will the standards still apply to? You know, we've got some of these day homes now where people can take people into their homes and take three or four or five or six seniors into their home, but the standards are usually not applied to them, so we're getting somewhat concerned that there's an unlevel playing field out there with security.

I'm wondering overall why this money was not in the original

budget. I'm increasingly concerned about the amount of off-budget spending that this government is doing and the efficiency of this off-budget spending cycle that the government gets into. It is, in fact, inefficient. I wish we could see a budget that really was exactly what we needed to provide excellent health care to Albertans rather than this sort of A version and then the supplementary supply we get in the fall and then an additional supplementary supply that we get in the spring and, frankly, always after the fact. I'm sure this money has all been spent. It's not an efficient way to do things because people are not able to incorporate it in their planning from the beginning.

We talked about the breakdown on the electronic health records. What are the additional plans for these electronic health records? I've already noted that I'm seeing a lot of extra money being plowed in there. What are the plans going forward? Again, are there sort of incremental points, targets, or benchmarks that the ministry is trying to hit as they develop these? I know we're on an accelerated timeline. What is that timeline now, what points are they trying to hit, and how much money do they think it's going to require? I know that some of that will be in the budget, but I would like to hear what the overarching plan is here because I'm beginning to feel that it's a bit piecemeal. I would like to be reassured that there was, in fact, a through-line plan.

8:20

There's some interesting wording in here in the last bullet under the reasons the supplementary estimate is requested. This is around this additional money for "higher-than-budgeted health care insurance premium revenue on additional health services." Could I get an explanation of what the additional health services are? It's saying: "including \$27,000,000 for Access and Wait Times projects." What else is included in that? The \$27 million for the access and wait times projects: I don't think that's the full amount of money for that project. So when I asked for a detailed breakdown, a line-by-line breakdown of that before, I was meaning the full amount of money, including this particular injection of the \$27 million. But I'm interested in what the additional health services are for that.

When will we get the final results and evaluation of the access and wait times projects? I'm also interested in when we would hear the final evaluation of – I'm not going to get the name right now – what's essentially the hip and knee project, that just announced its results, its quite spectacular results actually, about a month ago.

So those are the specific questions that I have. I look forward to hearing from the minister. I understand that some of this is quite technical, and I've asked for a line-by-line. I'm happy to receive that in writing because I don't expect the minister to particularly have that off the top of her head.

I know I've got a couple of colleagues that would also very much like to ask questions of the minister in this department. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, would you like to respond, or would you like to listen to the others?

Ms Evans: Well, I will give a response. I will perhaps be more cursory on the matter of some of the continuing care hours and staffing hours just to enable further questions to come later.

Let me just go back for one minute to the safe lifting practices, that have been referenced once again by the hon. member. Injuries related to lifting and moving patients account for considerable lost-time claims and costs. For example, in 2004 the Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta accepted 3,493 lost-time claims from health service workers. Long-term care facilities had the highest lost-time

claim rate of all the health service areas, at a cost of \$2.9 million in 2004. Back, neck, and shoulder injuries, Mr. Chairman, resulting from the lifting and the lowering of patients, the holding, pushing, and pulling of patients while assisting them in their daily activities, and inappropriate patient lifting may have contributed to falls, strains, and safety issues for the residents.

Unsafe manual lifting of residents in long-term care facilities can be significantly reduced by the use of mechanical lifting devices such as the ceiling lifts. I will take under advisement the hon. member's comments that in her experience on a weekly basis there's only one person operating the lift. It has not been my experience, but under the circumstances I believe it's important for us to take a look at it. Clearly, the driver for this, in my view, was the safety of the workers as well as the patients, and I think that some of the statistics I've cited relate to that.

Now, about the continuing care system management project, I'm very pleased to report that it involved the implementation of standardized assessment and care planning tools for continuing care clients and residents. The totals include the interRAI MDS 2.0 for nursing home and auxiliary home residents, the interRAI MDS-HC for home care clients, including clients in supportive living residences, and the electronic submission of client, resident, and service information to Alberta Health and Wellness. These new tools and the data that results from the use of the tools will facilitate standardized comprehensive assessment and care planning for all residents and clients receiving continuing care services and will provide quality indicator and resource utilization information for use by health regions in the department.

Right from the time that we first heard from the Auditor General on the intake procedures and on the assessments when patients came in, I have been very concerned about that type of assessment and intake process as well as being able to have the proper tools in place for a plan that's easily understood not only by the resident and their loved ones or guardians but also by the staff that are using that plan.

Nine point five million had previously been allocated to the health regions for the project: \$3.3 million to each of Calgary and Capital and \$2.9 million to the nonmetro health regions. It's our belief that with the additional funds that are being provided, we will be able to complete the project and have the proper tools in place.

Now, the hon. members also asked about the plan for the \$600,000 for immediate action on medication management. Naturally, we were as a government highly concerned about the Auditor General and the MLA task force reports of overuse of psychotropic drugs to restrain long-term care residents and by the general problems of managing complex medication issues, especially for seniors in care. The funding will support the work of a multidisciplinary expert review panel. This panel will have to do not only the work of assessing the complaints that have been provided but make sure that we have accountability from those who are dispensing medication so that we know, for example, they're not simply left at the bedside or that there's not overuse or overprescription of certain psychotropic drugs and so that the charting and the use of these drugs is very clear in the purpose of them and how the patient has responded to those drugs.

The panel will conduct a comprehensive review of current medication management practices in all of our long-term care facilities and assisted living spaces receiving publicly funded health services; for example, nursing homes, the auxiliary homes, designated assisted living, et cetera. It will review the current practices here in Alberta and internationally and develop a medication management practice standard for implementation in our continuing care system during this coming year of 2006-07.

I want to talk for a few moments about the Alberta Netcare project

charter, and I swear that the hon. member in her speech has been collaborating with some of my colleagues who would pose some of the same questions because of the significant investment we've made both in information technology and in the electronic health record.

Let me back up to the starting point of the discussion, and that is: why is it that various regions have been enabled to develop their own processes and procedures? Well, I think, simply put, it's because they were quicker off the mark than we were. They were able to identify a need on the ground running, seeing the very disparate needs of some physicians, some who wanted to get involved and quickly embrace the notion of the physician office system management and get their own electronic health records in place plus the additional tools that were available. Some were receiving that information from various vendors who would approach them and give them that opportunity, and the health regions themselves of necessity found that in order to make proper links not only between their facilities and their providers of care but in terms of the accountability for the system, they developed systems that were put in place in a way that was generating information for those various regions.

What we are looking at now is a portal system that utilizes the advantages in these already-built systems. Some, yes, have been in place for a considerably long period of time, but I looked very carefully at what had been done, and if you eradicated everything and started fresh, we would not have been in any better position than we are today, in fact much worse. We are better now to look at the advantages of advanced technology and with the portal system build with the capacity that's already been generated and try to make those connection points.

Although it may have seemed like an impossible dream, it is advancing quite well because for the very first time the governance group of the providers – the Calgary health authority, the Capital health authority, and the rural regional health authorities – are working together with the Department of Health and Wellness in establishing protocols for how monies are spent, how initiatives are undertaken, and how we are advancing in the gathering of information and connecting with one another.

Alberta Netcare requires the ability to share information across disparate systems to achieve its objectives, and that has been accepted. It's not one system but a group of projects guided by the provincial IM/IT three-year plan, which will achieve the common goal of a provincial electronic health record.

8:30

Here I must thank my hon. colleague the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency because we have been working in close partnership with his ministry, knowing that we have the SuperNet in place in Alberta and knowing that we're trying very hard to be cost-effective in the systems that we deploy but being very conscious of other systems that are being built around us.

The major provincial projects and 2008 targets by the project charter include a P viewer, a provincial portal which will be ready for provincial rollout by May of this year and which will provide access to patient information through one common provincial tool, the PHIE, the health information exchange, which is integrator technology to connect more data sources such as the lab reports, which will be added with software selected and contracted this month, and phase 1 implementation will be ready by the fall of 2006.

The drug information or the pharmacy information network. Most drugs dispensed by retail pharmacies and by the Alberta Cancer Board can be viewed across the province, and I see that most of that is in place. By this coming year, 2006-07, 50 per cent of physicians

prescribing medications online will be able to check for possible drug allergy interactions. For 2007-08 our targets are for two-thirds of physicians frequently using the electronic medical records to document care, prescribe medications, and view lifetime health records of patients. It has been amazing to me over the last several months to listen to physicians tell me: I wasn't too enthusiastic, but our Premier said that we would be there by 2008, so we know that we must be there.

The laboratory test information. Eighty-five per cent of all lab test information is available province-wide for physicians and pharmacists who have access to laboratory results, and this coming year 95 per cent of all lab test results will be available for physicians. So we're closing the loop on that one, and we expect to have a hundred per cent available by 2007-08.

Our diagnostic images and tech report information. In 2005-06 they were available from Calgary and Capital for physicians, and in 2006-07 the filmless and shared electronically from Calgary and Capital regions for X-rays and MRIs for the diagnostic image and tech reports will be available from all regions and health boards. This will be an enormous cost saving. Most diagnostic images and tech reports will be completely available by 2007-08.

I want to comment briefly about registries and security. This past year every patient accessing the health system has at a minimum a record that includes their name, address, and personal health identifier. This coming year health care providers will have a secure single sign-on access to appropriate health care based on the principle of need to know. In 2007-08 health care providers, planners, and policy-makers will be able to track health services by provider, location, and type of event. Mr. Chairman, along with our wait-list registry and the use that we've made of that so that people all over Alberta can see the wait times across Alberta, I think there are maybe subtle but certainly clear signals that we're making some advancement on the use of information technology and our Netcare project. Our project charter now has tripartite sponsorship, as I've indicated, with the CEOs being involved. RSHIP has done a remarkable job.

If I may talk about the benefits of Netcare that we see, enhanced patient safety and more effective and efficient use of our health resources. We feel that we'll be better able to facilitate team-based care. Clearly, with the primary care networks we're able to track that in a much better way for multidisciplinary providers, and we believe that we will be able to improve access. This Assembly knows that the EHR will reduce medical errors dramatically; 18,000 Albertans requiring hospitalization due to improper medication use is just one frightening statistic of circumstances where Albertans have been either unintentionally overdosed but accessed medication from more than one provider and, as a result, have taken ill. Principally, this affects seniors because of medication-related problems. It's my belief that as soon as pharmacists and physicians alike can check that electronic health record of the patient, we will be able to curtail significant amounts of those circumstances, which will not only reduce costs but increase patient safety.

We've talked about reducing the duplication of data entry and the reduction in the lab tests and the paper production and, finally, the legacy system savings which will be achieved with discontinued use of expensive-to-maintain older legacy systems with the introduction of the new systems. The 10-year cost for the acquisition of an EHR in Alberta is estimated to be \$1 billion and can range from \$0.8 to \$1.6 billion. The 10-year cost of ownership, including both acquisition and recurring costs, for an EHR in Alberta is estimated to be \$2.3 billion. The total gross savings over a 20-year period are estimated to be \$8.7 billion and can range from \$6.6 to \$10.4 billion.

Now, these are incredibly huge numbers with a significant

magnitude, but let me break it down with one of my favourite examples. There was a forensic report done in Ontario just a few short years ago where 15 per cent of the physicians' records were examined in terms of determining the accuracy of their coding and billings to government. When that was reviewed by a team of professionals, forensic accountants, they determined that of the 15 per cent sample they were looking at, there had been some \$800 million worth of errors made, and that particular amount of errors were made in billings that went to the government that were billings over and above what those dollars should have been based on the procedures that were actually done to benefit the patient. It is not for me to suggest that any one of those billings was done with any malice or deliberate intent, but it shows that the lack of familiarity sometimes with the medical language, sometimes with the codings that should be used, sometimes with the business planners or practitioners that operate on behalf of physicians and manage the course of events in their office, perhaps even their reading of the procedures or the handwriting of the physician, resulted in some \$800 million that was spent that didn't need to be expended.

So when I look at an electronic health record, I look at it as not only a useful tool for patient safety but as an opportunity to create a much healthier and safer environment and a much more efficient system because we will be able to track the costs that have been billed to us and we will be able to check much more easily what we have done.

If you look at Canada Health Infoway's 10-year investment strategy in the Pan-Canadian electronic health record report prepared by Booz Allen, dated March of last year, our benefits in Alberta were assumed to be proportional to Canada's total public and private health expenditures; in other words, 10.5 per cent of Canada's total health expenditures. Canada Health Infoway's 10-year investment strategy estimated Canadian gross savings over a 20-year period to be \$82.4 billion; 10.5 per cent of this amount was assumed to be representing Alberta's savings. Over a 10-year period this amount is reduced by 50 per cent to \$4.35 billion of which two-thirds, or \$2.9 billion, is assumed to be savings realized by the public health care sector. In other words, the duplication that today clutters up our health care system is part of what we'll be able to achieve a savings in.

8:40

I can speak here of my own mother, who has had batteries of tests and never really realized the benefit of the results of those tests and who challenges me almost every week about why she has these tests when she's not feeling any better. I believe that ultimately an electronic health record and a patient care record that we would be able to access on behalf of our parents would tell us not only what the test was, what the benefit of the test should be, what the outcome should be, and what we could expect from the expenditure of those dollars, but more than that with the kind of suffering and discomfort they go through while they go back and forth to the doctor to get those tests. So, in my view, this is one of the best ways that we can make the health care system not only more accountable but more cost effective.

I think the hon. member also asked about the additional health care as written in the report where it states that "in addition to the Supplementary Estimate request, the Ministry will spend \$28,117,000 of higher-than-budgeted health care insurance premium revenue on additional health services." The additional health services were services that were acquired by additional individuals who came to Alberta and purchased the health insurance plan, or bought into the health insurance plan. There are more Albertans, so we had a total of \$28 million more collected in health care premiums. So that is what we're talking about.

Of that, we spent \$27 million for the access and wait-times project and then put the \$1.1 million into the other portion dealing with the – I believe it was the electronic health record. I'll just check back on that, and I'll have that answer prepared. But certainly the first part of it was put towards the access and wait-times project, and then the rest was moved into the amount of money that was spent on the electronic health record. That total expenditure is \$116 million. [Ms Evans' speaking time expired] I've talked to the limit for now.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

I have the following three individuals who've indicated that they want to speak on this subject: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the supplementary estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness. I would like to start with the \$26.3 million increase to long-term care, and I want to talk a little bit about some of the things that have been said in the past.

As we know, Mr. Chairman, the Auditor General did a report in this area that was quite scathing about the conditions that many of our seniors lived in. The Premier at that time stood in the House and committed to implement every single recommendation that the Auditor General had made, but subsequent to that an MLA committee was created to study the thing. This was a curious development because the Auditor General had done a fairly comprehensive job in his study. So the rationale behind creating an MLA committee to further study the issue was something that was questionable in our view. Sure enough, when the MLA committee completed its report, its recommendations were considerably less rigorous than the Auditor General's report. So it raised a question about which set of recommendations the government was going to implement and whether or not it meant that if they simply implemented those recommendations of the MLA committee, they would not fully implement the Auditor General's recommendations.

Now, the government had admitted at the time that the cost for carrying out these recommendations was much higher than the amount here. These are supplementary estimates, so I'd really like to know from the minister if she intends to bring forward in the actual budget the remainder of the money that's necessary to meet this. It was admitted by the government that between \$150 million and \$250 million would be needed to properly implement the changes proposed by the Auditor General and committed to by the Premier on behalf of the government. So my question is whether or not this expenditure is going to be forthcoming outside the supplementary estimates in the upcoming provincial budget.

Mr. Chairman, I want to talk a little bit about some of the government's claims about costs in our health care system. It's interesting that the document that has been released, highlights from Alberta's new health policy, indicates that today one-third of Alberta's budget goes towards health care, and it goes on to say that if current spending trends continue, health care will consume Alberta's entire budget in 25 years. Now, I'd like to know what the underlying assumptions are in making that statement because it's interesting if you go back to the Mazankowski report. Back in the year 2002 he makes a similar claim. Mazankowski says in his report on page 4, "If health spending trends don't change, by 2008 we could be spending half of the province's program budget on health." This is in 2002. Clearly, that's not acceptable.

Now, there was an attempt there, in our view, to do what's being done today, and that is to create artificially a sense of crisis in the

growth of spending. It's not to say that spending on health is not growing, and it's not to say that steps have to be taken to constrain cost increases in the health care system. This can be done through innovation in the public system.

It's interesting. I've got a report here, Mr. Chairman, that was prepared on behalf of the leader of the New Democrat opposition at that time, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and the report indicates that the assumptions in the Mazankowski report are incorrect. They use 1996 as the base year to begin tracking increases in health spending, and that's misleading. It conveniently overlooks that health spending was cut by over 17 per cent between '93 and '96, and some of the increases were simply making up for previous reckless cuts in health care spending. It also assumed that revenue growth would only be about 4 per cent a year. Of course, despite substantial tax cuts government revenue has increased by an average of 10 per cent annually since 1996, roughly matching increases in health spending. Vastly underestimating revenue growth as the Alberta government has done consistently might be seen as a virtue in other contexts, but it leads to erroneous conclusions in this context.

Mr. Chairman, not very much has changed in the last four years, when this response to the Mazankowski report was put forward. The government is still attempting to create a false sense of crisis about growth in health care expenditures and at the same time rejecting practical solutions that would in fact control costs within the context of a public health care system. The clearest example of that is the NDP bill that was defeated in the fall, calling for the creation of a pharmaceutical savings agency.

8:50

Now it's interesting, Mr. Chairman, that while it's true, as the Premier has said, that New Zealand is a country and that Alberta is a province, they both have the same population more or less. In New Zealand it's 3 million people not including sheep, and in Alberta it is 3 million people not including Tory backbenchers. Since 1993 New Zealand's pharmaceutical expenditures have only risen 3 per cent annually compared to the OECD average of 14 per cent and the Alberta average of 10 per cent. In fact, some observers argue that New Zealand saved \$624 million on its drug subsidies in the year 2002-03 alone, and that comes from the Conference Board of Canada. Clearly, the government has turned its back on the single most effective way to control health care costs. Why have they done that? Well, in our view they've done that because it falls entirely within the public system. It takes away the growth in health expenditures and therefore takes away the sense of crisis that the government needs to engender in order to create public support, they hope, for bringing in the third-way health care proposals that they have in mind.

I said at the point when I was concluding debate on the bill, Mr. Chairman, just before it was defeated, that we had two objectives in bringing forward the bill. The first objective was to show that substantial savings can be found by innovating within the public system, and the second objective of the bill was to show that the government is not interested in doing so. I think that's exactly what happened.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to conclude by saying that the suggestions that have been made both inside the House and outside the House by the Premier and the Minister of Health that we are now entering a consultation phase on these proposals is absurd in our view. These are clearly defined objectives that the government has had for some time that they are intent on carrying through, and the so-called consultation that is taking place in our view is a sham. There is no opportunity for broad public input. There has been no

public consultation since the provincial election, when the Premier promised that it would take place. All of the work has been done by the government in putting forward proposals to implement what they've long sought to do, and that is to create a second private tier of health care and to fund it through private insurance. It will allow queue-jumping, it will allow enhanced services, and it will inevitably increase waiting times, reduce the quality of care received in the public system, and according to Dr. Herb Emery, who is an economist at the University of Calgary and a senior fellow of the Fraser Institute, it will not save the government any significant amount of money and may in fact cost more.

I just want to say in conclusion that I don't believe that Albertans want to see private, two-tier health care. They have not asked for it, they have not been calling for it, nor have they been given an opportunity to provide any significant feedback to the government on this. The government does not intend over the next month to provide meaningful ways for them to do so, so I have to say that it is being driven from somewhere else than either the costs, which we've already dealt with, or public demand. It is not designed to control costs. Quite the contrary. It will increase them simply by adding additional middlemen. It is not being demanded by the people of this province.

The question then comes, Mr. Chairman: where is this idea coming from? Where is the pressure and the impetus to bring in private, two-tier health care in this province? Quite simply, it's coming from a number of corporations who provide private health care services, drug companies, and some physicians who stand to make very, very significant financial gains if the government system is put in place. That's where it's coming from.

It comes at the expense of people. As Dr. Emery has indicated in his paper, at most about 28 per cent of the people of Alberta will be able to afford the more expensive private tier. In order to get them to be willing to pay very substantial amounts of money in order to access that system, it must provide much higher levels of service than the public system, and it will inevitably result in a declining level of service in the public system and increased waiting times rather than shorter waiting times as the government has indicated.

On that note, Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to conclude my comments with respect to the Department of Health and Wellness supplementary estimates. I call upon the minister to provide clear rationale for the cost increases in the health budget that they are projecting and give us their assumptions. As one of my math teachers was fond of saying, "Show your work."

Thank you.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Chairman, one of the things that all the members of this Assembly will be pleased to note is that the comments from my learned colleague across the way very eloquently addressed the view of the advancement of the health policy framework which we have just delivered. Not one cent of this supplementary estimate is carved in any way towards any part of the private care that he has so eloquently decried. He attributed motives to this government and to the corporations, I know not of whom, that have advanced the case that they may benefit from it. I've never heard this. What I've heard, in fact, is people wanting choice. What I've seen in the expenditures of the supplementary estimates is an opportunity to advance efficiencies, to improve the nursing hours in long-term care, to provide patient lifts and supports for medication and assessment tools.

Mr. Chairman, in answer to the colleague from Edmonton-Centre's previous request about where the \$1.1 million extra was going to, it is in fact on point 2, as I suggested, the electronic health record, for work done on the systems management there.

I would just simply state that in due course, pending the outcomes of the consultation with Albertans, we will be providing more detailed estimates of costs. I think that we've been quite clear that on that subject, we haven't defined so much cost savings on the policy number 8 or 9, but several of the other policies, in fact, will lead to cost savings with a more efficient system.

With that, I'll conclude and wait for others to comment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the minister of health being here this evening and taking these responses. I guess there are a few things that I'll just run over quickly. First of all, the people in the long-term care facility are very grateful for the money that is being added to these different areas. One of the problems, though, with the people that I've been talking to down there is that it seems like all of a sudden we're just doing a political pressure thing here, attending to long-term care when, in fact, home care and DAL and enhanced care are facing these same shortages and problems. I wonder if the minister is aware of that and if there's something possibly coming in for those.

The extra home care really does help seniors stay in there a longer time. I've had two or three seniors that have called and talked to me about the problems of their home-care people not coming in the morning. They're sitting there saying: well, I guess I'd better get back and get into a different system and get out of my home here. I had a 90-year-old senior who fell a month ago because her home-care person didn't come in the morning. She tried to shower on her own, and then the complications went on. I'd like to bring that to the attention. I think home care has been an excellent program, and perhaps we need some additional looking in that area there.

With the \$15.2 million that we're spending on increasing it from 3.1 to 3.4 hours, I'm just wondering if you could give an actual number of additional workers that we're talking about. When my constituents and people come and ask me, these numbers don't mean a lot to them. To be able to say that 5,000 more are going forward or what the numbers are would possibly be helpful.

I have some concerns with the lift devices. In the one facility that I went into, the power went down. All of these lift devices that they're putting in now are electronic. There are a few of them. If the thing burns out or something else – it seems like the old hand pumps worked. They were functional, worked well. The \$7.5 million just seems like an incredible price to pay. I'm wondering how many extra lifts that is putting in or whether we're buying Cadillac lifts. I agree with all of the points that the minister put out on helping our seniors as well as the workers and not hurting them by two people struggling and pulling and trying to lift them, but I have to wonder about it.

9:00

The question that I have on that is that I'm going to go to an electronic wheelchair that I was helping a senior with that reclines so that she can rest. She's got MS, and she's stuck in this wheelchair, so in order to take the pressure off, it reclines. Anyway, it's got an electronic actuator on there – a screw jack is what it is – and it allows her to tilt her machine back, but it was not functioning well. Myself being a jack of all trades, I took it apart to look at it to fix it for her, and the cotter pin was coming out. I was able to fix it.

I went into the local farm dealer – it was a Timken activator – and I said, "Can you get me one of these?" They're the Timken dealer. They looked at it. "Oh, absolutely." I said, "Well, can you give me a rough estimate as to what this is going to cost?" He looked at it and said, "Well, it shouldn't be more than \$150, but I'd say \$125."

I said: "Please order me one in. This came off a wheelchair, and the senior told me it cost \$1,500 to get this." Being a jack of all trades I thought, "Well, I'll get it, and I'll adapt it for this senior." Anyway, two weeks later the farm dealership calls me back and says: "I can't believe it, but we're not allowed to bring those in. It's a medical device, and therefore we can't get it." The point that I want to bring up on this, with the health records and some other areas: it seems like as soon as medical is attached to something, we take a fleecing on the price.

I had another senior whose wheelchair axle – it was a rubber-tire device with actual plastic rims instead of steel, and the plastic had broken. She took that in to get it fixed, and the facility said: "Oh, that is outdated. You can't use it anymore. You've got to get a new wheelchair. We don't have those." There was a half-inch axle bolt that went through it. They wanted her to spend \$750. I told that senior: "Look, we'll find one. Those wheels have got to be around." I found her two steel axles for \$50 apiece and put it on, but the facility said: "Oh, no. That's outdated, and we can't get the parts for it."

It just seems like we've got a major problem in the medical system where we take an incredible fleecing on these services because they can and will take advantage of it. I wonder if the province has done any looking at where we're getting our sources from and if we can get a more reasonable rate and change the attitude of: this is government funded, and it's okay to charge \$600. So I have concerns in those areas.

When it comes to the different drugs now, I believe that we announced awhile back \$10 million to cover some drugs for cancer patients. We're picking areas again. Different physicians that I've talked to say, "You know, Paul, we've got seniors, whether they've got degenerative disease or other areas, and too often we're playing politics again." We're saying, "Well, here's \$10 million for these drugs." But other people, whether they've got MS, Lou Gehrig's, or something else, aren't entitled to those drugs. They're feeling that we need more global programs, that if these drugs are going to be accepted, it doesn't matter what the tragedy is or the health problems, they need those drugs. Why we would say that a cancer person needs the drug and we'll pay for it, but for someone with Lou Gehrig's we won't. It seems like we're playing politics here and going for the bigger groups, and some of those smaller groups are feeling left out and very much concerned about the decisions that are being made and how it's coming forward.

The \$114 million to accelerate the expansion of the Alberta electronic health records: another area that there's some question on and whether we're getting value for our money. But the biggest question, I guess, that some people outside health care are wondering, you know, is: are these totally going just to enhance the records and to enhance our evaluation and our treatment of people, or is this going so it's transfers of costs and other analyses? How much of that money is really being targeted to help with the evaluation and client care, like you were mentioning, with allergies and those types of things that come up?

I guess the other two things that I want to talk about are our lineups and our backups that we're dealing with. Quite often it seems like the shortage that we have is beds. We're saying that we've got these doctors, and you're talking about allowing them to go into private practice because they don't have the ability to do all the surgery they want in the public system. The question has to be asked: are the beds available there, and how could they possibly be working part-time in our public system, yet somehow be able to go to the outside and work and utilize their time there when, in fact, if we had the beds available, they'd stay in our public system and continue operating and putting people through? So I have questions on that line of thinking and where we're going.

The last area I'd like to cover is actually when, you know, this whole supplementary budget said it's under expense and equipment and inventory purchases. There are many things that the different health regions want to provide. I've talked to you before about angioplasty down in the Chinook health region, the MRI equipment down there. They had to raise the money. Currently there's a doctor that is trying to come back and is interested. He does colonoscopies, but the hospital is going to have to raise \$150,000 to get the equipment to allow him to come back and work here if, in fact, he gets accredited to work here in Alberta again.

It seems like if we were to put some of this enormous amount of money into some actual equipment like for colonoscopies and into an angioplasty room and some of those things – we've got an enormous amount of money, and I guess I wonder how much is actually being spent on equipment and beds so that we can actually get people through and shorten the list down and do the best we can with the dollars that we're spending.

I'll look forward to the minister's response in writing or however. Thank you very much for the time.

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to say that I am quite enchanted with the hon. member's observations across the way. It occurs to me as I listen to him that I've heard some of the same remarks and frustrations from people like yourself, hon. member, and several others in this audience that would probably wonder if there are ways that we could find an orchestrated response to making sure that we get those professionals in appropriate places at appropriate times.

Maybe what we need to establish – and I'll take a very sincere look at it – is some kind of central appeal mechanism for MLAs of all sides of the House to go through and say: this is your contact person if you've got somebody you believe should be working at a greater involvement in the health care delivery system and these are the barriers. Perhaps if I kept a registry of that, I would see some clearer way of unraveling and untangling these issues with members of the public.

I want to just give an answer to your first question on the number of staff. We will provide an analysis of how many staff were added, but I want to make clear that I will define it in two ways: the number of staff that we believe were added not so much as a result of the move to 3.4 hours of care per patient but equivalents so that we're comparing apples with apples and not just looking at the numbers that have been inflated because people have moved into long-term or continuing care residence. The other part, though, I should tell you is that in some cases dollars that were provided for long-term care were provided to increase the salary levels of people who were advanced either by merit or by some other agreement with their institution, so it not only provided more dollars for increasing the number of hours of staff care on that patient ratio but increased the number of dollars that individual providers received for the work they did interfacing on the front lines.

9:10

In terms of medical devices and alternative supports I think this is one of the areas that intrigues me most, Mr. Chairman, probably because as a woman living alone, I have suffered with not knowing what prices should be for repairing the simplest of implements and finding myself quite vulnerable because of my lack of mechanical capacity to evaluate that. Your comments about whether or not some of these substitutions would be acceptable, whether we should be entitled to importing other devices, or in fact are we being exclusive because they are, quote, unquote, medical? Are we being exclusive because someone has a lock on the market? I'm not sure, but I'm going to undertake to do some analysis of that.

If we could hire handymen or get people to do some kinds of replacements or repairs to equipment rather than replacement of equipment or just completely cancelling one chair that might have some use – we ship literally hundreds of pieces of equipment that we deem unfit to use any further for our own purposes to Third World countries. Perhaps some economies could be achieved if we would undertake to do the kind of repairs you have.

Mr. Chairman, I'm delighted. I'll sit down. I find now that if I've got something that needs help, I know exactly who to call.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do realize that the time is running out and we have other departments that want to be discussed, so I'll try to be very brief. A lot of things that I'd like to say have already been said. I'm not sure that I actually need a reply from the minister. I think if you would just consider what I'm saying, it'll probably suffice for tonight.

One of the things that you mentioned – and I'm not sure if it was a misspeak or not on your part. You referred to the lifts as ceiling lifts. I'm wondering if, in fact, that was correct: they're ceiling lifts. It comes out of capital accounts. Now, ceiling lifts, in my mind, are totally useless. We need mobiles that will move around the rooms and down the halls and into other rooms, so it may just have been a misspeak.

Certainly, speaking about the injuries, in my mind it's partly because of inappropriate training, but I would venture to say that it's probably because people are working short. They can't wait for their partner to come, and they just do the job because they've got to get in and do it. I would suspect that a lot of those injuries lead toward that. Certainly these lifts will help, but I'm not going to bother going into it. I think it was pretty well described this afternoon what can happen.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner sounds exactly like the maintenance person that we had at our nursing home. We were so, so fortunate. He could feed his mother. He could do anything. He could repair them, but once we started getting into a more sophisticated way of having wheelchairs, he was told that he couldn't repair them because then the insurance companies wouldn't accept what he had done. So we often had things just sitting for no reason because of insurance. Perhaps that's something to look at.

The interRAI tool. I think that you explained it in a fairly comprehensive manner. Part of my problem with that, though – and I was given some education on the use of the interRAI when I was fortunate enough to sit on the MLA task force with my other two colleagues. It's my understanding that it's to establish a care plan, and that care plan has been made: three assessments with multidisciplinary people on that thing. The most important people that are often missing are the families, and they should be a crucial part of it, and I do know that they aren't in some areas.

The other thing is that that tool in my mind is supposed to be a care plan. It is not supposed to be used as a placement tool for where people will live. In essence what is happening is that they say: this is the care you get; therefore, this is where you're going to live. They're using it as an excuse not to put people into long-term care because they're trying to downsize long-term care. I'm really opposed to that because I have horrific stories that, of course, I'm not going to go into about people being very inappropriately placed for housing.

Another thing with the interRAI tool. It has to be used – again I'm back to my mantra of provincial standards – absolutely the same across the province. People have to understand the use of it and also the definitions. I would like to see at the bottom of that interRAI

tool the care plan. The care plan, then, equals the hours required to deliver that care plan and the number of staff that would be required for it. It would average out, I'm sure, but I think it's a better way of figuring out what actual staff hours should be, based on the actual care plan that the interRAI had come up with.

The medication. There are some excellent studies, as you know, that have been done and have identified a huge problem. Part of what I see as a problem is the downgrading of our professionals. I'll go into a little nurse talk here that I'm sure both you and I will understand, and it's just a very short story. I have a file on my desk where a woman came to me and said that she had actually been paying somebody to make sure that her mother got her medication. The mother suffers from Parkinson's. She came to me and said that sometimes she comes in and the medications are on the floor because, of course, the mother is shaking. I said, "Did you check the chart?" She said yes. The chart had said: medications given. Now, had it have been a nurse, like you and I, you would have assumed, because as a nurse and as a professional it is assumed, that when you say "medications given," they're also taken. However, if you're the cleaning lady for 50 bucks a month and you say "given," what you have done is given them and left them at the bedside. That is a huge problem, in my mind.

The electronic records. My fear for that is that I think that I as a patient would like the choice of what goes onto that electronic record. For one thing, I fear insurance companies getting it. I honestly don't believe that anything is secure in this day and age. There are just too many clever hackers out there. My fear is that insurance companies would get it and hold it against you in terms of pre-existing conditions for jobs or whatever. As I said, I really think it's important that patients have the right to say: "No. You will not put these in the electronic records. I want that between you and I." I'm thinking perhaps of some kinds of psychiatric records that may hit that because it comes in under a medication. It's a medication that starts the record, and then the rest of it would hit it.

You also had mentioned the report that I had also heard about with these huge mistakes in terms of the codings and dollars not being spent. It went both ways; the mistakes were made on both sides. You were talking about the dollars, and I'm talking about the mistakes that can be made in terms of the privacy. In computer-speak, not that I'm computer literate, the one thing that I did learn was garbage in and garbage out. If people can make mistakes in the filing of the billing, they also can make mistakes in the filing of the privacy or in actual fact of what they're supposed to be putting in in terms of: it was the left leg and not the right leg and whatever. Those sorts of little mistakes could be made. So I question that as well.

I think that if you would just consider all that, that would be fine. I don't need a reply tonight. Thank you.

Ms Evans: Well, I stand corrected on the – I've always called them ceiling lifts – safety lifting devices. I agree, and I would be very pleased to look into the kinds of things, and I'll get the Blues later to check.

I just want to make one point. I'm not sure that we can ever agree to the patient agreeing to what is placed on the electronic record for the simple fact that some patients, although I recognize that there is a risk always with information – one of our grave problems today is the management of those with psychiatric problems that choose not to take their medications, community treatment orders, et cetera. We have to have some kind of way of keeping that kind of record for the medical professionals and making sure that the patient record that they may be able to have access to isn't fettered with so many descriptors that could be in the hands of somebody else in the home,

perhaps, given to the patient in a way that somewhat compromises their dignity.

I think there are a couple of things we can look at here, but I will make sure that I look at the Blues, and I'll give you a response later. I do look forward at another time to the opportunity to talk to you about the continuing care standards. I agree with you that interRAI should not be used as a placement device, but we should be careful to use it as an assessment tool. I always – always – believe that a patient should have a guardian or a family member as part of their care plan.

9:20

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. It's just really a personal comment, I guess. The fact that I recognized that you used "ceiling lifts" I think probably dates us both, so thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. One of the concerns, an ongoing concern that was brought to me over a year ago from a constituent, is gastroparesis. I talked with the hon. member very early on last year about this concern, and it has to do with information accuracy. At the very beginning the mother of the two children who were suffering from gastroparesis had had a great deal of difficulty with receiving misinformation or the province was misinformed that a device was available. It had been approved federally, and the cost was, I think, relatively small. It was the equivalent of the cost of a pacemaker, basically, under about \$5,000, but the technology and the medical expertise did not exist in Alberta at that time. Hopefully, the minister can update me as to whether she's found out whether Alberta has finally recognized that the device has been approved and if there are any steps towards being able to implant that device within the province.

In this particular case, the family was forced to mortgage their home and go down to the States, where fortunately the teenage children had the devices implanted. It made a significant difference to their daily lives – they were able to return to school – but at a great cost to the family, approximately \$60,000.

There are a number of patients, both older and younger, who are so debilitated by gastroparesis that they have to be fed through a tube, and the minister is very aware that one of the greatest ways to increase the cost of care is to institutionalize a person. If this person who is being fed in the Foothills hospital through a tube and requiring this kind of care had had this device implanted, based on the percentages of success there's a good chance they would have been able to return home, return to work, and contribute.

This is just an example where we need to have updated information, and we need to have the specialists on hand in Alberta. Failing that, I gather that since this family had to travel down to the States, there is the capability in Quebec at this point, and hopefully the minister will consider that the travel costs associated with going down to Quebec, until we can deal with the problem here in Alberta, would be considered covered by the department of health.

Another concern I have has to do with cancer drugs. The province refuses to recognize federally approved cancer drugs, and by this failure cancer sufferers are suffering the financial costs of drugs that in some cases, I gather, are up to \$15,000 a month. With these drugs having been proved effective in arresting the development of cancer, I would like to see that money being spent right now to improve the patients' treatment because without it they're not necessarily going to be around in the future for the research to have kicked in.

A second concern I have. I met recently with directors of the Calgary health region, and I was asking about the Children's hospital, which is going to be opening later this year in the Calgary-Varsity constituency. I asked: would the hospital be fully operational? I was told: no, it wouldn't. In fact, while we're going to have state-of-the-art, wonderful operating facilities within the Children's hospital itself, they're basically going to be kept in cold storage because we don't have the individuals to perform the operations within these rooms.

When we're talking about achieving efficiencies and having to contract out operations – granted, they're hip and knee, and there are not very many children that are going to require that type of surgery early on in their lives that would be attending this hospital – it seems to me a terrible waste when we have operating facilities within our public system that are being mothballed or at least underutilized.

Likewise, in terms of achieving savings, in talking to a radiologist with the Calgary health region, the individual indicated to me that there was absolutely no need for contracting out such things as MRIs and a whole variety of ultrasounds, scans, and so on. They could be done within the public system because this is one area where we're doing well in terms of having the equipment available. But because we only have a single shift, this work gets contracted out at a much higher expense. Yes, it's paid for under the public system, but if we were performing these scans, et cetera, within our own public system, which we have the capability of – we also have the trained individuals to do the testing. This is just an example of a greater efficiency that would be considerably less costly.

Another concern I have is with regard to the security of health records. This didn't happen under the current minister's watch, but we can remember that at one point we had a population of 3.2 million, but there were 5 million health cards out there. Based on the fact that it's not nearly as secure a form of identity as the driver's licence, which the minister of government affairs pointed out, we're still talking about a piece of paper. Yet that piece of paper can be used to apply for a passport. It's got the equivalent significance of a social insurance card. If you have to show ID at a police station because you had the misfortune of getting a ticket or you're looking for a police clearance, you can use this card as a statement of your identity. I would like to think that at some point in the not distant future we would have a more secure card system and that that would be part of the entire record system.

An ongoing concern of mine that comes up on a very frequent basis at the constituency office is patients falling through the gaps, whether they're supposed to be funded by seniors' care, whether they're supposed to be funded by health care, whether it's a community living concern. It seems that no one necessarily takes the responsibility, so a question I would have for the minister is: would you like to see anything to do with health, whether it's persons with disabilities, whether it's seniors, under the health care umbrella? When I've talked to people, for example, at the Bethany care homes, they would like to see anything to do with seniors – health, recreational programs, et cetera – under Seniors because they felt that they wouldn't have to go to three ministries, necessarily, to get support. It would be one-stop shopping through seniors' care. I'm just looking for a reflection if you think this is potentially a good way to focus on seniors' care.

9:30

With regard to the lifts, I'm glad that the difficulty was cleared up as to whether they were stationary or mobile. One of my constituents had the misfortune of basically going through nine years of frustrating denial from the Workers' Compensation Board because while working, again at a Bethany care centre, the lift that she was

using to take a senior out of her bed broke. So this very dedicated registered nurse intervened and, in so doing, ripped the muscles out of both her shoulders and failed to receive appropriate compensation and was put through a series of very demeaning, frustrating reviews of her circumstance. She went to see an endless stream of different doctors, who didn't seem to have records from the previous visit. So she basically was unable to work, being put through a series of "Lift this box; lift that box," which she wasn't able to do. So I'm so glad to hear from the minister that more lifts are being put in place.

I do believe, as the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner pointed out, that there are possibilities of greater efficiency within the system. Sometimes the types of devices that we're giving to patients are of such a complex, built-in computerized nature that the ability to repair them no longer exists. So while I want the best for people, maybe we have to look at what is also very practical in terms of wheelchairs and power chairs and so on.

Thank you very much.

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, there have been a couple of points relative to follow-up on certain correspondence and discussion that the hon. member provided me with last year. I will have to examine the Blues and follow up on them, and that goes for some of the other points as well.

I think that overall what I hear here is genuine concern that we get it right in dealing with both the electronic health record and the hours of support for particular patients, and I appreciated his interest in some of those particular cases. I'll follow up and correspond directly, and I have my staff member Mr. DeBolt here that will make sure that we follow up on his questions.

The Deputy Chair: You're ready for the vote, I presume, after considering the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund for the Department of Health and Wellness for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases: \$141,183,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Solicitor General and Public Security

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed an honour to be here this evening to discuss the supplementary estimates for the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security in the amount of \$4,982,000, which is requested. The spending pressures are due primarily to policing costs and salary settlements. The three significant incidents that have resulted in spending pressures that must be addressed as part of the third-quarter update: \$2.1 million for the Lakeside Packers strike in Brooks earlier this year, \$2.3 million for the RCMP settlement, and \$582,000 to provide policing services to the municipality of Crowsnest Pass.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to comment briefly on each of these spending pressures. With regard to the Lakeside Packers strike the cost from the strike at Brooks was \$2.1 million, representing 70 per cent of our costs as part of the provincial policing service agreement. This labour dispute was unexpected, but additional manpower was

required to diffuse any possible conflicts that might have occurred. In fact, there were some incidents that had the potential to escalate had it not been for the additional officers that were on scene. The strike lasted approximately three weeks and required support from the Edmonton and Calgary police services, the RCMP K Division municipal police service, the RCMP K Division provincial police service, and the RCMP F Division tactical team from Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the RCMP salary settlement, funding is required to address \$2.3 million in RCMP manpower costs resulting from the salary settlement impacts this fiscal year. The 2005-2006 provincial policing service agreement estimates included a salary settlement forecast of \$2.1 million, which is consistent with historical increases. However, the total settlement amounted to \$4.4 million, based on a federally negotiated increase for the RCMP.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Crowsnest Pass policing issue. An additional \$582,000 is required to assume responsibility for policing the municipality of Crowsnest Pass. This is a result of the government's decision that the population of Crowsnest Pass be calculated as if it were five separate communities under section 604 of the Municipal Government Act.

Mr. Chairman, that's a brief look at our budget pressures and program review. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to the supplementary estimates on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Looking at these some-millions of dollars and all of the millions of dollars that are debated here under supplementary estimates, I just have to put in the point that I think it is shocking that we spend so little time and have so little time left to deal with many, many millions of dollars for each department. There should be more time allocated to debate these matters.

Just a couple of questions on these particular matters. On the Lakeside Packers strike and the cost of RCMP for that were any of these offset costs to communities that lost police personnel for short periods of time because of that strike? Were they compensated in other ways, or were they asked to be short of police for that period? I see that you've broken it down in your comments, Mr. Minister, through the chair, but why were they lumped together in the supplementary estimates document?

A minor question. Can the minister explain what he means by the costs of the RCMP salary settlement? Are these funds going to be used to adjust the salaries of police officers in Fort McMurray? If so, are the funds provided enough to allow these RCMP stationed in Fort McMurray an adequate standard of living given the extremely high cost of housing there? You might also look at Fort McMurray. If we're looking at urgency, the need to help those communities and, indeed, those personnel in those centres is very pressing. You know, if not, why aren't more funds being diverted to assist these officers?

9:40

As to the Crowsnest Pass: is this a reverse of the position that the minister took in the spring of 2005, when he actually denied the extra funding to the municipality of Crowsnest Pass? Is he now honouring the provisions of the Crowsnest Pass regulation, which stipulates that the government provide for funding for policing based upon whatever way that delivers more money? Why is there now a reverse in that position, and are these monies going to continue?

Another matter is in terms of the RCMP salary settlement again. Are there any training costs or extra training costs involved in that or any extra monies involved in the preparation for the training

facilities that will be coming up, in the police academy or whatever we want to call that facility that's coming up? Just to speak to the potential siting of Edmonton: it is again, I think, in the primary position for that because of the siting of the Edmonton maximum institution there. Of course, we've also heard that another primary site might be the city of Drumheller because of the site of the institution there.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Some very interesting questions, and I'll respond to each of them as briefly as I can.

Were municipalities short of policing resources when the strike at Lakeside Packers in Brooks was taking place? What the RCMP do throughout our province: they use a concept called a post system, where the officers in a community – for example, let's use the community of Brooks. They have a number of officers that work in this municipality, in the city of Brooks, that are paid for by the municipality. The provincial government provides the RCMP officers that work in the surrounding community or in the rural communities around Brooks. In a post system officers can work, actually, in the municipality or can work in the rural area. So they can actually cover each other, and that's the "post" term that's used by the RCMP.

Because of the issue that this was 24/7 coverage for the strike, some RCMP officers had to be transferred in from various parts of the province to ensure that sufficient resources were there to ensure the safety of not only the employees of the plant but the safety of those that were on strike at the plant as well as ensuring the safety of the community of Brooks. Officers were brought in from various parts of the province to ensure that the number of resources that were required were there. That's why resources from Edmonton and Calgary police services were brought in, to ensure that, again, the right number of resources were in place, just to ensure that the police were there to provide a safe and secure environment for both those that were on strike and those that were not on strike.

In the supplementary estimates the hon. member asked a question about why both amounts were lumped together. The reason both amounts were lumped together, the \$2.3 million and the \$2.1 million as \$4.4 million, is that they both fall in line with the provincial policing programs within the ministry. It's separated out for information purposes, but it's still in the same line item in the business plan and in our budget totalling \$157 million. It's a small portion of the larger picture. It all ties in with our provincial policing service agreement that we have with the RCMP as well as some of the other smaller programs for the provincial policing programs that are provided.

The RCMP salary settlement, Mr. Chairman, is determined by the federal government. The RCMP are in a unique position where they do not have an association or a union that negotiates for them. Normally what occurs is that the finance department looks at the policing contracts throughout Canada, and it tries to keep the RCMP in line in the middle of, I believe, the top six police services throughout Canada. So they'll usually be in that number three position.

We don't have any say regarding what type of salary increase they get at all. Historically over the past number of years it's been roughly about 2.1. A 3 per cent increase would be roughly around that \$2.1 million which we budgeted for. This past year they received substantially more, nearer the 5 per cent mark, and that, of course, created some issues for us, obviously, coming back to this

Assembly asking for additional funding to ensure that the RCMP officers got the raise that was given to them by those in Ottawa.

The member also asked, though, regarding the issues in Fort McMurray, which is a very good question: are those funds there to assist those officers at Fort McMurray? These funds are not. These funds are strictly for the salary. He raises a very good point, a very interesting point, in fact. We've been working with Commissioner Zaccardelli in Ottawa, the commander of the RCMP. There are some real issues regarding the fact that we have recruits coming out of Regina that are going to Fort McMurray. Their starting earnings are in the \$40,000 range or close to that. Obviously, the cost to live and to provide for a family in that community can be very expensive, so we are working with the RCMP to look at being able to supplement their salary for the provincial positions. I know that the city of Fort McMurray is looking at working with the RCMP from that aspect as well. We're hopefully going to come to an agreement very soon.

I met with Commissioner Zaccardelli about three weeks ago, and he reassured me that it's on the table in Ottawa and that it's moving forward. There is a real concern for us with those officers because, obviously, we want to ensure that they have a quality of life in Fort McMurray that provides them with a salary that can provide the necessities for themselves as well as for their families.

The hon. member, Mr. Chairman, as well asked regarding the Crowsnest Pass legislation. Have we changed our position regarding the Crowsnest Pass legislation under the Crowsnest Pass amendment act? No, we haven't changed that because the Crowsnest Pass amendment act wouldn't allow us to split those communities up. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and I met with the MLA from that area and discussed this at length with the mayor. It was an agreement that under section 604 of the Municipal Government Act the five separate communities in the Crowsnest Pass area could then be continued five separate, thus allowing them to be funded provincially under the provincial police service agreement, being that they were each a municipality of less than 5,000 population versus the town of Crowsnest Pass having a population of 6,700 individuals.

Training costs for Lakeside Packers, I believe, was one of the last issues the hon. member spoke of. Training costs are always an issue that we want to deal with year-round. Training costs of any type are not included in these estimates. This is strictly for salary, overtime, and the costs of the strike: food, lodging, which was done, I believe, at the armed forces to the south and west of Brooks on highway 3. Training costs, though, are provided in their normal budgets that we provide to the RCMP throughout the year in the lump-sum negotiated budget that we have with them, which is near the \$135 million, \$140 million a year. So training costs are included in there.

9:50

Did we learn from issues at the Lakeside Packers strike? Yes, we did. There are opportunities that we have to learn from. Obviously, one of them was very simple and very clear regarding communications at the site between the Calgary Police Service or the Edmonton Police Service and the RCMP. Our radios are not compatible. So we have to work on issues such as that as well as some of the techniques. The techniques in training for the RCMP are different than the techniques that the Edmonton Police Service and the Calgary Police Service use, for example.

There are some differences between municipal policing in this province and federal policing provided by the RCMP. Those are things that we've been reassured by the RCMP and the Alberta Chiefs of Police Association that they are going to continue working together on in the future to ensure that those training practices are

going to come together. As we move towards integration in the province, as we move towards collaboration with our policing services, as we look at sharing services and sharing responsibilities, along with that will come, obviously, the training capabilities to in fact train together as one.

I'm not saying that one service has a higher standard of training than the other, but they do have different techniques, whether this service uses riot control techniques and this service on occasion uses bikes at a strike or a lockout. So there are a number of different techniques that are used. In our province we've been fortunate to have more training than other provinces. From the fact that with the WTO here about six years ago, with the G-8 here a few years ago, there were opportunities for us to work together in collaboration in a larger picture but, as well, bringing officers from throughout Alberta from all of our police services to one location and actually working together. So it's actually very interesting to watch because it is an opportunity to see a seamless police service work together with officers in different uniforms.

I think I've answered all the questions, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to address the supplementary estimates for the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security.

The large majority of the funds that are being requested were included in the Lakeside Packers dispute, which the minister has talked about. The difficulty I have with this is that I think these expenditures were unnecessary and would have been avoided if the Minister of Human Resources and Employment would have worked towards bringing the parties to a resolution prior to the strike.

I attended at the picket line on several occasions, Mr. Chairman, and I found that the police presence generally was very positive. They were even-handed, by and large, and worked I think fairly effectively to defuse tense situations that developed from time to time. So I think it was a positive use of the police in that case, but the potential for violence was clearly there. It certainly wasn't violence restricted to one side. In fact, some of the tactics used by the employer were, in my view, deplorable.

But the question is why we have to pay this. This is a great deal of public money for a policing presence that might not have been necessary. The cost to the workers, the cost to the plant, the cost to the town's local community, and the cost to our agricultural producers were tremendous as a result of this strike. I believe that that strike could have been avoided, and we needed to see more action from the Department of Human Resources and Employment. Opportunities to head off the strike, in my view, were not taken.

So I guess I'd just ask the question. Before we make a decision that might involve extra expenditures in another department, in this case the Solicitor General and Public Security, is there some consultation when another department takes certain decisions that may in fact result in a dramatic increase in costs for that department? It might be in the agricultural department, or it might be Economic Development. I don't know. Clearly, the extra costs in Solicitor General and Public Security were caused not by that department but by another department, and I'd just like to know whether or not these things are discussed or worked out in advance and whether or not the Solicitor General has an opportunity to express his view with respect to decisions of another department that might substantially affect his budget.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member makes some interesting comments, and I'll try to answer them as best I can. The police presence. I think they were very kind remarks. I think they were very professional comments made, and I know that the police service members and RCMP members that read *Hansard* will appreciate the comments that you made regarding their presence being positive in that community and their presence being there to diffuse serious situations. Obviously, the potential was there, and the hon. member was at the site.

The question that the member raises was: could the strike have been avoided? That's a tough question to answer. I think we in this province have had very little unrest with our labour unions and associations. The labour atmosphere and environment is very good. When this strike did take place in Brooks, it was one that was unusual in the fact that we had not seen a strike of that magnitude in a long period of time. But from a policing point of view we did have the resources that we wanted to ensure that the residents of the community of Brooks as well as those that were striking and those employees that were not striking were all protected in that community.

The hon. member also suggests that costs related to our Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security may have increased due to the Ministry of HR and E possibly creating the problem. That's another good question. First of all, I'd like to thank the hon. member for supporting this budget request. That's what I thought he was inferring, but on the other hand it's always something that we have to deal with when we work in cross-ministry initiatives. Obviously, legislation is in place regarding strikes and lockouts. I had the fortunate ability in my previous career to be the strike lockout co-ordinator for the Calgary Police Service, and I know that going to the front line on a daily basis at various strikes in our industrial areas was very tense, but it was very interesting to talk to both sides because both came from different points of view. It was a matter of getting down to the table and being able to negotiate a contract fairly and in a reasonable frame of mind.

The last question: did the Ministry of HR and E create an increase for my ministry? No, I can't say that it did. The Ministry of HR and E is there to assist with employment standards throughout the province, to ensure that unions have rights out in the workforce but as well to ensure that management has the right to manage. Therefore, the strike itself was something that we have to live with and did, and I'm just thankful that no incidents of major occurrence occurred other than one incident where an assault took place, but nothing of a more serious nature occurred.

So thank you for those questions.

10:00

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we have two minutes left.

Mr. Hinman: Wow. That's a good time constraint. Well, I guess I'll have to be really brief and efficient. For the strike: \$2.1 million. I guess I'd be interested in the breakdown on that on whether that was for the number of officers, the salary, or the resources that you had to bring in for that.

I wish that this supplement would have had recognition of the inequity for small towns throughout the province that have over 5,000 and are not receiving any funding as causing a major strain on those mid-size communities. Mr. Chairman, I was hoping that that would have come in there. On behalf of Mayor Irwin from Crowsnest Pass, he's grateful for the money that's come in for the policing there. But, as I say, the province really needs to take a look and realize that those small towns over 5,000 need a stepped approach where they're funded. It puts a tremendous strain on those small communities.

The other quick thing to mention is the training costs. These small towns that have had their officers come in, they often lose them to larger towns because of the salary inequities that they can't pay. Perhaps we should be looking at some sort of compensation when a small town loses a trained officer.

I also want to talk briefly about the police training facilities and to remind the Solicitor General again about LCC in the south and the facility that they have there and that we don't need to be necessarily looking at a whole new facility in the province but perhaps funding those that we already have and getting the best tax dollars for the number of officers that we can train and put out there.

Because of the shortness of time I guess that that's where I'll leave it.

head: **Vote on Supplementary Estimates 2005-06 General Revenue Fund, No. 2**

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, I would have liked to recognize you, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(1) and Government Motion 5, agreed to February 28, 2006, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon relating to the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, please say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Chair: The motion is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the estimates of Community Development, Education, Health and Wellness, Human Resources and Employment, Infrastructure and Transportation, Justice, Municipal Affairs, Solicitor General and Public Security, and Sustainable Resource Development.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, have been approved.

Community Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$30,200,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$11,000,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$141,183,000.

Human Resources and Employment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$6,100,000.

Infrastructure and Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$39,900,000.

Justice and Attorney General: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,720,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$39,850,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,982,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$15,700,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a list of those resolutions voted upon by the Committee of Supply pursuant to Standing Orders.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:06 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, March 2, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

On this day I would ask that all Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly, all others present here, and those observing these proceedings in their homes join together in a minute of silent and personal prayer as we reflect upon the lives of Canadian police officers and military personnel lost in service to their countrymen.

May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may a nation be eternally grateful. God bless.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is again my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of students from Bluffton school. There are 29 students accompanied by teacher/principal Mr. Mark McWhinnie and by Nolan Krauss, Deneen Evans, Karen Bevans, Judy Lamb. They're seated above me in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three very hard-working members of Alberta Justice: Trina Sharp, Gisele Wright, and Dana Purves. These individuals are staff in the department of human resources and are here today to tour the Legislature and to see the political process in action. I would ask them to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping my visitors – they are in the public gallery – have arrived safely because I understand they had a bit of a harrowing trip on the highways. I understand they were dealing with some snowy conditions today on their trip up from Calgary. They're a group of students from a school in my constituency of Calgary-Elbow. Visiting us today are 67 students from l'école Sainte-Marguerite Bourgeoys along with their teacher, Chantal Piché, and nine parents and helpers. They're here to learn about government and the work we do in the Legislature. I'll ask members of the Assembly to join me in offering them the traditional warm welcome, or bienvenue, of the Legislature.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Elmer Jules Half, a First Nations member from Goodfish Lake in the Lac La Biche-St. Paul area. Mr. Half is a correctional services worker with the Solicitor General's department, and he is here to take in the

pageantry and warm good feelings of question period. I'd ask that he please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this House.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Jason Rockwell. Jason is the communications director and organizer for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, local lodge 99, district 14. Jason recently oversaw the successful resolution of a six-week strike with Finning International. Most recently he was a candidate for the NDP in this past federal election in Edmonton-Spruce Grove. He's seated in the public gallery. I would ask that he rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

First Anniversary of Mayerthorpe Tragedy

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to honour the memory of four heroes, four brave young men who gave their lives in service to our province. Tomorrow marks the anniversary of one of the darkest days in the history of policing in Alberta and in Canada. It was on March 3, 2005, that RCMP constables Anthony Gordon, Leo Johnston, Brock Myrol, and Peter Schiemann were murdered. The four officers were gunned down while guarding a crime scene near Mayerthorpe. They died upholding the oath they took to protect each and every one of us.

On that tragic day a year ago both myself and the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne met with the families of these brave officers to offer our government's heartfelt condolences and support. A full year has nearly passed, but the pain and the grief felt by the families and friends of the slain officers and by all Albertans still remain. As Alberta's Solicitor General and as a former police officer I will remember March 3, 2005, as one of the most difficult and trying days of my life.

Time will eventually ease our pain, Mr. Speaker, but we must ensure that it does not erase the memories of these courageous young men who made the ultimate sacrifice. They are heroes, as are those police and peace officers before them who laid down their lives to protect our freedom, our values, and our way of life. We honour them now. We honour them forever.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the House for the moment of silence to honour the Fallen Four.

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to pay tribute to the lives of four very brave, very dedicated young men. As the minister said, they are heroes, and as an Albertan I am both grateful and proud that such men lived and worked in this province. March 3, 2005, was indeed a black day for this province and this nation, a day that will be forever remembered as the greatest tragedy in the history of policing in Alberta.

Though we rightly mourn the deaths of these officers, I believe that we should also celebrate their lives and accomplishments. Without question these men had the respect of their peers, the admiration of their communities, and the love of their families and

friends. During their all too brief time on this Earth they inspired their fellow Canadians with their courage, their decency, and their desire to do the right thing.

In life and in death constables Schiemann, Gordon, Johnston, and Myrol upheld their oath to serve Albertans, to defend and protect us whatever the threat. By choosing to wear the uniform, they knew that they were taking a risk, yet they accepted that risk knowing that to do so was necessary and right. These brave young men were not just police officers. They were members of the community of Mayerthorpe. They were sons, husbands, and fathers. They were friends and role models. Let us never forget the people whose lives they touched, the families and friends who have bravely carried on and who have worked to provide a lasting legacy for the Fallen Four through music, memorials, and through their sharing of love and memories.

We are truly touched and inspired by the response of Canadians. Perhaps the best way to honour the memories of these four constables is to do our utmost to make Alberta a safer, more secure province and, furthermore, to always remember and respect all the men and women who wear the uniform, who put their lives on the line every day on our behalf.

1:40

Tomorrow let us gain strength and solace by remembering the heroes of Mayerthorpe and by offering our thoughts and prayers for all the police officers who have given their lives to protect our way of life, and let us do the same for those officers who every day dedicate their lives to our protection.

In closing, I offer my condolences to the families, the friends, and colleagues of the four fallen officers. I know that you will always carry the pain of this terrible loss in your hearts, but I hope you can take some comfort in the knowledge that Canadians and especially Albertans will never forget their sacrifice or their courage.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I'm assuming that you're asking for the support of the House to allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to participate.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Unanimous consent for the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in respectful memory of the four fallen law enforcement officers to express our sorrow and regret for the tragic event in Mayerthorpe, Alberta, one year ago. The memory of the tragic killing of the four RCMP officers and the sense of pain and loss will forever live in the hearts and minds of the members of this Assembly, the people of Alberta, and especially the families of Leo Johnston, Anthony Gordon, Peter Schiemann, and Brock Myrol.

On behalf of the New Democrats I offer our sincerest condolences to all those who have been affected by this loss. Our hearts and thoughts are especially with the families and friends of the fallen officers, whose lives have been devastated by the loss of their loved ones. I also express my sympathy for the residents of the Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt areas, who have witnessed up close this terribly tragic event.

Every day, Mr. Speaker, we ask our law enforcement officers to put their lives on the line for our safety. We ask them to put

themselves in harm's way in order to protect us and to uphold the laws of our democracy, and they do so with courage, honour, and integrity. Whenever a police officer loses her or his life in the line of duty, it stands as a reminder of the personal sacrifice that law enforcement officers make in protecting us and our democratic values. The memorial park in Mayerthorpe will be a fitting tribute to the fallen officers and the sacrifice and dedication shown by the men and women who enforce our laws and who by doing so uphold our democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and the House for this opportunity.

The Speaker: Would the Assembly also permit the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to participate?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we mark the anniversary of a tragedy, one that has caused us to reflect on our lives and our communities, it is painful to see the loss of life and more so to see the lives of constables Peter Schiemann, Brock Myrol, Anthony Gordon, and Leo Johnston cut short in the line of duty protecting and serving our communities.

It is important that we recognize and remember the great sacrifice of the lives of those who serve us. Peter, Brock, Anthony, and Leo were dedicated to their duty to preserve the peace and keep our communities safe. They were much more than RCMP officers. They were our friends, neighbours, sons, fathers, husbands, and, most important, members of our community in every sense.

If there is one thing we should take away from these times of remembrance, it is that remembering is not enough. The RCMP is one of the most respected police forces in the world. That respect starts with the citizens they serve. The greatest tribute we can show to our fallen officers is to continue to work with and stand by those whose job it is to protect us. Just as these officers gave their lives in fighting crime, we as citizens must not turn a blind eye but aid in every way possible. We can only keep our communities safe by working with and showing respect for our police officers. We enjoy such peace and prosperity today because we respect other people and their property. We respect common law or equality before the law.

We need to cherish our freedoms. Other places in the world live in turmoil because they do not have a just society, where people are equally protected under the law. We need to continue to show our respect for our police officers and the law to our next generation so that we can continue to enjoy a safe community.

May God bless and comfort all the families affected by this tragedy. Thank you.

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Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Reform Consultation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A legitimate public consultation process includes open dialogue and the commitment that differing opinions are heard and respected. An ad hoc, 30-day consultation is not sufficient for an issue as fundamental as health care. This discussion cannot be reduced to one-page memos and 15-second sound bites. My questions are to the Premier. Given that this government has replaced town hall meetings by putting the health care framework in Alberta libraries, that won't even receive the

document for at least another week, will this government extend the consultation until next fall?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the purpose of health care reform is twofold. One is to improve the accessibility and choice in health care for Albertans, and the second, of course, is to bring health care costs in line with the rate of inflation. I challenged both the Leader of the Official Opposition and the leader of the third party to offer me solutions that would lead to those objectives. [interjection] Well, they can do it on two pages or three. One page would do.

We have introduced a framework that includes ten principles that will act as a guide for government in making positive, innovative changes to health care for the benefit of all Albertans. We said that there will be public consultation. There is. The minister informs us this morning that she has already received over 400 phone calls, e-mails, and letters since Tuesday but none from the opposition. She also informs me that she has received numerous requests from stakeholder groups wanting to meet with her, and she will meet with them. So I'm thrilled to hear that the consultation is taking place, and the government looks forward, of course, to hearing what these individuals have to say. We are moving forward, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. We are also receiving many phone calls and letters. Will this government commit to tabling all of the feedback they receive from Albertans on this issue, such as these cards and letters and phone messages and e-mails sent to the Premier's office and the minister's office, and produce a comprehensive report on the results of the consultation process? Will they do that before they act?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the minister in charge of the process is the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I'll have her respond.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that has been overlooked in the comments of the Leader of the Opposition is that at such time as we have a legislative piece, if we have a legislative piece and, certainly, whatever that constitutes, when it comes forward to this House, there is if you have legislation a process for consulting on regulation. That's another important part of it. This is a policy framework that started way last year. Well, it's been ongoing for some period of time but in earnest on the third way last year, and in July on the web page we put up a 13-point document that identified various ways that people could make a contribution to it. We've been consulting, and we'll continue to consult. I'd be pleased to take any suggestion of groups I should meet with. We've already booked in other parts of the province to make sure that I get an opportunity.

One more thing, Mr. Speaker, when groups . . .

The Speaker: I'm sure you'll have greater opportunity for clarification.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: does the Premier genuinely believe that the solutions to the challenges facing Alberta's health care system can be presented on one page?

Mr. Klein: I believe that they can if there is a concrete solution to accomplish two things: that is, to improve quality and access and to bring costs in line with the rate of inflation.

Now, there are all kinds of things that can be done. Some of them were suggested in the three-year-old Liberal book that was presented with a new cover the other day. [interjection] No. I think it's a different cover – right? – but it's red.

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

1:50 Health Care Privatization

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has produced a health policy framework that raises some genuinely alarming questions. Taken as a whole, this framework will lead to health care becoming a consumer product with a citizen's right to health care being replaced by a corporation's right to market it. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that this framework repeatedly refers to consumer choice for health care, does this government take the position that making a profit should be a factor in clinical decisions concerning patients? Yes or no?

Ms Evans: No.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Second question to the same minister: does the minister take the position that the relationship between a doctor and a patient is essentially the same as between a buyer and a seller? Yes or no?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we could debate the merits of that as a statement for many days and nights. It's an oversimplification of the trust and confidence between a doctor, the Hippocratic oath, and the patient, and I would never suggest such a thing. So, quite frankly, I'm surprised that the suggestion has come on the floor of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister refers to the Hippocratic oath. Has she reviewed the Hippocratic oath or, in fact, the oath that the Canadian Medical Association actually requires of doctors? Does she know what she's talking about?

Ms Evans: Yes.

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

Federal Transfer Payments for Health

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canada Health Act's accessibility principle says that all insured persons must get access "on uniform terms and conditions" without financial barriers, and the consultation document from the government says on page 2 that Albertans support the principles of the Canada Health Act, but the Premier's proposed reforms clearly violate this principle. My questions are to the Premier. Given that you were quoted as saying, and I quote, the last thing we want to do is contravene the Canada Health Act, close quote, will you commit today to abiding by it?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we have stated, in fact, that we don't want to violate the Canada Health Act, but nothing is carved in stone at this particular time as we move through the public consultation process. I've said time and time again that if the Liberal opposition

have any good ideas to improve accessibility and choice and bring health care costs in line with the rate of inflation, then send them over.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

An Hon. Member: We did yesterday, and it got thrown away.

The Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has only provided \$36 million of the \$250 million to fix long-term care because, and I quote, you can't snap your fingers and expect dollars to fall from the air, how can the Premier justify risking nearly \$2 billion in federal health transfer payments if you violate the Canada Health Act?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the \$2 billion to which the hon. member alludes is for Canada. It's not for Alberta.

Ms Evans: We get about \$1.6 billion.

Mr. Klein: Oh, no. I'm thinking – it's about \$40 million. Yes, \$1.6 billion. That represents about 10 per cent of our total budget, Mr. Speaker. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have a portion of the money that's part of the federal transfer. We have received about another \$52 million for the wait times project and about \$52 million for diagnostics, which ends this year. So we have roughly 1 and a half billion dollars that comes in terms of federal transfers.

Mr. Speaker, in the past when provinces had been illustrated to in any way contradict certain evaluation by the federal government of certain procedures that went in contradiction to their interpretation of the Health Act, the charges that were levelled back to those social union transfers were an equivalent of what was actually deemed to have been spent. We don't have any precedent to identify exactly what, if anything, would be done if there was an evaluation by the federal government that this was out of order.

Mr. Speaker, may I remind you that we have not yet . . .

The Speaker: You don't have to remind me of anything. I'll just remind the hon. member of the time factor.

The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: why is the Premier so willing to risk losing federal health funding for violations that are neither wanted nor needed?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that remains to be seen. Right now we're going through the public consultation process. I would remind the hon. member that there is in place now a disputes resolution process that would have to be used before any consideration was made relative to whether or not the proposal – underline proposal – violates the Canada Health Act. The proposal.

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

Health Care Reform

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier plans to spend the next month hiding behind a fig leaf of a phony consulta-

tion process to avoid answering questions about his government's radical plans to privatize health care. On the one hand, the Premier asks us to send over our better ideas to him, and when we do, he throws them back in our face. Clearly, consultation is not the real agenda here. It's avoiding answering questions and avoiding debate. To the Premier: why does the Premier refuse to answer legitimate questions from the opposition and Albertans about his government's plans for a private, two-tier health care system?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we're not avoiding any questions. We have a proposal – a proposal – that could be tabled sometime in April or perhaps May, and it is a proposal, unless the NDs have a better idea to improve accessibility, provide choice, and bring costs in line with the rate of inflation. I have received absolutely nothing. I did receive from the Liberals – and we have had the document for some time. The minister will respond in detail I believe on Monday to their document; that is, the Liberals' document. I would remind Albertans and the NDs, in particular, that we have received absolutely nothing from them.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Then I would ask the Premier if he is aware that the NDP opposition conducted public hearings on health care reform around the province last winter and that we forwarded a copy of our report to his health minister, and she has done nothing about it.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, no, I wasn't aware. I'm aware of what our caucus does and what the government does in terms of public consultation. I do recall seeing a signboard – now, I don't know whether it was sponsored by the Liberal Party or the NDs – one of those portable signboards calling for a town hall meeting on health care last year, or maybe it was the year before. But, no, I'm not familiar with the details.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell the House why it is that he's prepared to head down the road of very radical reforms to our health care system if he doesn't know what's going on?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what's going on with the NDs. There are four of them, and they were fewer – well, maybe they weren't. [interjection] Last year, was it? Well, okay, there were four of them.

You know, we give them money. They can do what they want, I guess, with the money.

2:00

Mr. Mason: You don't give us money.

Mr. Klein: Oh, I'm sorry. We don't give you money? Well, then they did it on their own. You know, I commend them for that.

Mr. Chase: It's all your money, is it?

Mr. Klein: No, no. It's taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker. But if they did it on their own hook, good on them.

Mr. Speaker, I don't involve myself with their politics. I'm sorry, but I've got so many things on my plate that I can't involve them with my politics.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Education Property Tax

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the mayor of Calgary issued a glossy annual report in which he says that the province should get out of the education property tax to allow the city to have access to more money. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Is the province shortchanging the city of Calgary with respect to provincial funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, it's quite the contrary. As a matter of fact, I think the brochure that the member referred to does a very good job of outlining the support that the province has provided to the city of Calgary. I'd like to just point out to the member and to all members that Budget 2005 actually provides for about \$4.14 billion to Calgary and area, which would include \$1.1 billion for basic education, \$1.9 billion in health, and about half a billion dollars in infrastructure. That's in addition to the \$95 million in fuel tax that flows through to the city of Calgary, and of course Calgary, like all municipalities, shares in the \$3 billion in the municipal infrastructure program that the government put in place, which was the first opportunity that the government had to share with municipalities the fiscal situation the government found itself in when the debt began to be paid off. So the first program we instituted was of significant financial support for municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: has the minister given any thought to taking up the mayor's request that the province get out of the education property tax so that the city can access those tax dollars?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, not only have I given it some thought; I've been quite vocal as a proponent that we should begin to put the groundwork in place for such an event to occur. At the same time, I've also said that it is absolutely essential that we define the roles and responsibilities of both the municipal governments and the provincial government. To that effect, I have recently instituted a minister's council on municipal sustainability, that will do just that. That council consists of the mayors of both Calgary and Edmonton as well as representatives from AUMA and AAMD and C. That council is working very well and is moving that process along quite nicely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question: if the situation is as rosy as what the minister would like us to believe, why is the mayor constantly sending out these types of brochures?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the mayor has his job to do; this minister has his job to do. We choose, perhaps, different ways of getting the job done, but at the end of the day we're both heading in the same direction, and that direction is recognizing that there are financial pressures on municipalities and identifying and securing long-term, secure, sustainable sources of revenue for municipalities, not only just the city of Calgary but all municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fifty thousand coal-bed methane wells are planned for the next decade in Alberta, including fracturing of coal seams. Growing numbers of Alberta landowners and farmers are expressing fear and anger at the inadequacy of protection for their drinking water. Not only are they concerned for family and animal health; they're also concerned about losing their livelihoods and property values. To the minister of health: given that toxic chemicals are used in these drilling and fracturing episodes and that some individuals have been adversely affected, what is Alberta Health doing to investigate and ensure safe drinking water?

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the Public Health Act and the Regional Health Authorities Act make provision for RHAs to respond to incidents of this nature to protect human health. We have been working with Alberta Environment on issues that have been raised frequently on the floor recently about methane. I think methane alone isn't the problem. It becomes a problem when it's restricted to confined places. The immediate health hazard is in the possibility of explosion and burns. Drinking-water wells can have inexpensive vents added to their well caps to allow this gas to escape. I think it's incumbent upon us to work as regional health authorities with the legislation we have available to pursue the issues that have been identified.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the health minister: will the minister, under the precautionary principle, support the stopping of all new coal-bed methane developments until she is assured, in the Horseshoe Canyon particularly, that water is not being adversely affected?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have our public health officials that are working on this with the officials of the David Thompson region, and I believe that when they are prepared to provide me with such report and recommend such action, then that would be in my prerogative to do so. However, having said that, we have had no indication yet that this action is necessary. Our officials continue to pursue and identify what issues should be considered and are doing their due diligence in this matter.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of agriculture: given your responsibility to protect and support the viability of farmers and landowners, what is the minister doing about the growing complaints of tainted water and its potential to affect the health of animals and agriculture?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a good question. Dissolved gases in well water in this province are not an uncommon occurrence. It has been around for some time. We've been dealing with it as a natural occurrence. In a number of wells around the province natural gas has been there. Having said that, if you go to our website, Ropin' the Web, there's a lot of information there on what farmers should be doing about testing their water on a regular

basis. Certainly, if they feel that their water has been tampered with or contaminated based on energy exploration, whatever kind of energy exploration that is, the first recourse for them is to deal with the energy company. If that fails, through the Farmers' Advocate office there are other avenues of recourse to either bring the well back to where it was in terms of safety or, in fact, in some cases to explore other alternate sources of water for either their livestock or for personal use. There are a number of areas where Agriculture does follow this up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Labour Supply

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The strength of the Alberta economy has always been with its workers. Without the skills and the expertise of Albertans our economy and prosperity would not be what it is today. Given that the economy grows and evolves, employment rates are highest in our province, and businesses are clamouring for needed workers, my first question to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment is: what is the government doing to develop Alberta's workforce?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as I've mentioned before in this House, we are blessed to be in Alberta. We are expecting over 400,000 new jobs in the next 10 years. Through our 56 employment centres we are of course providing skills upgrading, job search services, career counselling, language training, and other services to our clientele. Human Resources alone will be spending over \$205 million this year to address some of those issues. The government, of course, has committed within the next 10 years to provide at least 60,000 additional training spaces in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. I know that the government is working on a labour force development strategy. How does this fit in with what this government is doing right now for the Alberta workforce?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, that's a very important question. This 10-year strategy, of course, is a broad and long-range strategy designed to meet Alberta's labour needs now and in the future. It involves working with representatives, of course, from industry, labour groups, education, aboriginal groups, just to name a few. We need to work together to address this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Given that the labour strategy highlights a need for better ways of recognizing the credentials of immigrants, what are you doing to ensure that skilled immigrants can quickly get their credentials recognized so that they can contribute fully to Alberta with their skills, experience, and expertise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an area that does have significant challenges, but of course we want newcomers to Alberta, people that we can attract to Alberta to help build our communities and develop our economy, to be able to very quickly use the skills they bring with them.

We have in the Department of Advanced Education a branch we call IQAS, international qualifications assessment service. Historically we've been prepared to go abroad to help prequalify people who want to come to Alberta, or we'll qualify them when they do come. In other words, what they do is take the credentials that the newcomer brings with them, do an assessment to determine what the equivalent credentials would be in this province, and then give them a certificate so that they can present that certificate to an employer to show that they're qualified to do work.

We're working with our IQAS and with persons in both the professions and occupations and in the immigrant community to make an easier access to that type of process so that we can also look to help them find bridging mechanisms. When people come to the province, many times they might need the language of work, for example. They may need some programs through NorQuest or Bow Valley College or another postsecondary institution to help them get the language of work, and many other ways in which we're helping newcomers to this province participate in our community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Education Achievement Testing

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues its focus on testing, not teaching, by spending \$4 million on testing last year. Elementary students and teachers are stressed with standardized testing that does nothing to improve learning. The addition of the grade level assessments and computer-assisted assessments leaves us wondering how far this government will go in sacrificing learning for the sake of meaningless rankings. To the Minister of Education: why won't this minister abolish grade level assessments and computer-assisted assessments and replace this effort with meaningful remedial support for children?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think we should remind the hon. questioner and all members here that we spend about \$4.7 billion per year doing exactly that: helping our children in the kindergarten to grade 12 system to succeed and helping them become better educated and good, contributing citizens. Now, one of the reasons that we have the very best education system in Canada and one of the best in the world is because of things like standardized testing, is because of standardized curriculum that runs province-wide, is because of outstanding teachers and dedicated parents and hard-working school trustees and a government that really cares about the education of these children, and we're going to continue doing that.

Mr. Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, there are many, many children falling through the cracks. How come this government won't replace standardized testing with diagnostic testing, which will improve kids' learning in school, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of projects under way that are helping to improve learning for children. In fact, I would point to a number of AISI projects. Perhaps I could bring them in and read them all to the House one day. We spend tens of

millions of dollars on AISI projects that are designed in large part to do exactly part of what the hon. member is asking about, and that is those children who need some additional help. That's over and above the per capita monies that we provide through the instructional component. In an effort to help them even more, we do have a flexible funding framework review going on right as we speak, and if there are some improvements that are imminent, we will look at making those. In the interim I'm quite satisfied that the diagnostic testing that we have been looking at – and the hon. member will know this – which in fact is replacing the PATs at the grade 4 level, is proceeding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the individual program plans are important for high school retention and for the completion of high school, why is the government focusing on standards and not teaching children?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think 30,000 teachers would appreciate reading that in *Hansard*. I think there's outstanding teaching going on in this province because of outstanding teachers. We recognize that, and it's unfortunate that the critic from the Liberal opposition doesn't recognize it and won't give them credit to that effect.

We do a lot to help our children. We do a lot to help with professional development. We do a lot to help with standards, which have been referred to, and we also are very helpful in terms of outcomes that are expected, in terms of the new accountability pillars that are there, which are all focused on improving education. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to do that to the very, very best of our abilities.

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

Employment Opportunities for Foreign Students

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. International students make important economic, social, and cultural contributions to Alberta. When they come here to study, they pay higher tuition than domestic students because it's one way to ensure that international students pay a reasonable share of the actual costs of their education. Recently some of my constituents in Calgary-East were asking if there is some way to make it easier for these international students to work off-campus to help pay for their bills. Current rules prevent or restrict foreign students from working off-campus while they are studying. [interjections] Can you listen, please? And the rules make it difficult to join the workforce here in Alberta after they have graduated. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education. Can the minister tell this Assembly what the government is doing to make it easier for foreign students to work in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. An important question because there are more than 6,000 international students studying in Alberta's postsecondary institutions, or at least there were in 2004. As the hon. member has indicated, international students are very, very important to our postsecondary system. One of the four pillars of our strategic plan is competing in the global marketplace, and if we're going to do that well, we need to build

those international relationships, and we need to build the understanding that we get from studying with people from around the world. So it's important that those students can come here and can study and work to finance those studies.

We've been working with the federal government. The federal government had a pilot project in a number of jurisdictions in the past year to allow foreign students to work. We've been working with them to sign an agreement with respect to that process so that foreign students would be able to work for approximately 20 hours a week while they're going to school. They could work during the breaks between their terms, and they could work for a period of time after graduation or after their term ends. We're hoping that that agreement will be in place shortly and that it will be available to foreign students in Alberta within the near term.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How does this initiative support Alberta's proposed 10-year labour force supply strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. It is very important that we attract and retain new immigrants to build our workforce in Alberta both short term and long term. Of course, international students are excellent candidates to fill some of these jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall in this Legislature the Minister of Education said that the unfunded teachers' pension liability wasn't even on the government's radar. Today and tomorrow thousands of teachers are meeting down the street at the Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention, and I can assure the minister that this issue is on their radar. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Why is this minister so slow to sit down with Alberta teachers to work out a better pension deal?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, obviously the member is not in the loop at all. I have sat down with members of the Alberta Teachers' Association. In fact, I've sat down with them a number of times and talked about this very issue. I also addressed that particular assembly of schoolteachers this morning at the Citadel Theatre. We talked about this, and we talked about it at some great length. If the member had read *Hansard* from yesterday, when the hon. Minister of Finance addressed this particular question, she said that the Minister of Education is working on this issue, and I am.

2:20

I think we need to be reminded of two things. Number one, there are a number of unfunded pension liabilities out there, not only the teachers'. So we have to look at that. Secondly, we have to respect the fact that in 1992 a specific agreement had been made during which the government of Alberta said that it would undertake two-thirds of the responsibility and the teachers would undertake one-third.

Now, for a variety of reasons that unfunded liability arose, and we've been doing our best to address that. There was an offer, in fact, that had been put verbally on the table by my predecessor to eliminate this. Unfortunately, it wasn't able to be taken up by the ATA.

Mr. R. Miller: It's going to cost Alberta taxpayers \$32 billion.

To the same minister: will the minister commit to attending the unfunded pension plan liability session tomorrow afternoon at the Shaw Conference Centre?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I don't know about that particular session, and I haven't been invited to it. Had I been invited, I might have been able to accommodate it.

I have met with numbers of teachers on this, and I have met with numbers of school boards, and I will continue to have those meetings because I do understand that the unfunded pension liability has the potential to negatively impact teacher retention as well as future teacher recruitment, and I don't want to see that happen. But we're talking about \$6 billion here, Mr. Speaker, \$4 billion of which the government is responsible for, \$2 billion of which teachers are responsible for.

I should end by just reminding the hon. member that a couple of years ago this government, in fact, bought out one entire year of the unfunded pension liability at a cost of \$63 million. So there are optional ways to look at this, and optional considerations that will be part of the mix as we continue talking about it.

Mr. R. Miller: Once again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why doesn't the minister just admit that the only reason – the only reason – this government isn't sitting down with the teachers to find innovative ways to reform this pension is because the idea tank of this government has run dry?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again. We have had a number of meetings. In fact, very recently I just met with their executive council. I've been to their ARA, and I've met with their executive officers, and I've had a number of meetings with them. I've met with principals. I've met with teachers. We have all kinds of ideas that are floating around this issue, and I've just indicated a couple of ideas that I think need to be considered. So the tank on this side is very, very full. It's just one of those issues that takes some time to negotiate our way around.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Health Care Privatization (continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's pretty obvious that there are some nervous Nellies in the ranks of the Tory rural caucus, and they have every right to be nervous because they're being sold a bill of goods by the Premier and the health minister. More private, for-profit health care means an even wider gap between big cities like Calgary and sparsely populated rural areas. Just follow the money. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why is the minister championing a privatized, two-tier health care system that will lead to a further drain of medical specialists from rural areas to the big cities?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, when I look at the benches in this House, this wonderful Legislative Assembly, I see anything but nervous

Nellies. I see very dedicated men and women who want to develop policies that will help us build a better future in Alberta. I see people who want to build a strong public health system, and putting patients first is the first policy in the document of putting health care in proper perspective. We want to build not only for today's generation but for tomorrow's.

Mr. Speaker, in the document on page 13 it identifies strategies for rural Alberta hospitals. I provided those yesterday in this House, and I'll be pleased to reiterate them should the member wish.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the minister avoided the question. I'll ask it a different way. Given that private health care is all about profit, isn't it inevitable that many medical specialists will move to the cities, where they can make more money through the private clinics?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in the context of . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the context of access proposals that could be developed by people, physicians coming forward to take advantage of an opportunity to provide private care, the first principle is to make sure that the capacity of the public health system is not damaged. That would go the same way for Lloydminster; Carbon, Alberta; Barrhead, Alberta; Lethbridge, Alberta; or High Level.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the point is: how can you stop the damage? If people can make more money in the cities, that's where many of these specialists are going to go.

The Speaker: That's very debatable.

An Hon. Member: Is that your question?

Mr. Martin: That's the question to the minister.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is purely conjecture at this point. It's a hypothetical case at this point.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Support for Olympic Athletes

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Team Canada recently achieved its best ever results at an Olympic Games. Our athletes finished third, with 24 medals and many personal bests, and Albertans were a large part of the success, bringing home numerous medals. With the Olympics returning to Canada in 2010, expectations are high to be even more successful. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. With the high expectations placed on Canadian athletes for 2010 and beyond, how much provincial funding is directed towards our Olympic training program?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, those athletes who compete for Canada at the international level, for example at the Olympics, most recently in Torino, are supported through Sport Canada, which is a federal funding agency. Here in Alberta this province supports the development of provincial level athletes, but we also, of course, do work with partners to provide exceptional training and competition

facilities in our province for international level athletes. So we don't fund international level athletes directly, but we do so indirectly through the provision of support for facilities.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister: then if we don't provide funding directly to athletes, how does the province support their development?

Mr. Mar: Well, we know that Olympians certainly aren't born overnight. They're built through a great deal of developmental sport. What we do, Mr. Speaker, is have strong provincial sport programs that allow athletes to compete at regional, provincial, and national levels. We spent in this province \$12.8 million in the last fiscal year on these programs. That includes the sponsorship of programs like the Alberta Winter Games, which commenced last week in Hinton, Alberta; the Arctic Winter Games, where our Arctic winter athletes will be participating in the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska starting this weekend. It also includes the Alberta Summer Games. It would include the Canada Summer Games, last year held in Regina, Saskatchewan.

I should say, Mr. Speaker, for the Alberta Games that some 73,000 young Alberta athletes have taken part since those games were commenced in 1976, and some of the athletes that come out of that program, of course, go on to things like the Western Canada Games or the Canada Games. The result is that athletes like Haley Wickenheiser, like Chandra Crawford, like Jenn Heil all have participated in these provincial level games and have also represented Alberta at places like the Canada Winter Games, but once it comes to international competition, that's where support from Sport Canada comes in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. To the same minister: are there any plans to establish satellite Olympic training centres in other parts of the province; that is, other than Calgary?

Mr. Mar: None at this time, Mr. Speaker, but I should say that it's been over 20 years since the Olympics took place in Calgary. We have been proud to support the facilities that are there. For example, most recently we did put in \$23 million worth of infrastructure at the Canmore Nordic Centre. The result was that we were able to host a World Cup of cross-country skiing last December. It was the first time in 16 years that such a competition took place in Alberta, and the result is that some 70 million people in 54 countries saw the televised event in Canmore. We've also contributed some \$600,000 to the refurbishing of the Olympic ski jump, and there has been some suggestion that we should look at some of the other Olympic facilities, such as the speed skating oval where, of course, our national team trains. As business cases come forward for the renewal and upgrading of those facilities, we'll certainly be happy to entertain them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

2:30

Adoption Quotas

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 23 in this House the hon. Minister of Children's Services stated that she does not believe for a minute that having adoption quotas is out of line, yet in a letter dated February 7, 2006, the minister states: I do not condone the use of a quota system. My questions are for the

Minister of Children's Services. Given that the minister contradicted herself about her own policies, will the minister clarify today whether she does in fact support a quota system for the adoption of Alberta children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'd be pleased to do that. When we had the question in the House, the hon. member asked me about a quota system, and I did talk about a quota system. I think there needs to be some clarification in regard to what I was trying to say. All of our senior managers across this province and many of the ministries have what they call performance measures, and I think that's a good indicator of how they're doing their job, what they're doing right in their job, and what is being done wrong.

What I will say is that in my business plan we have goals that we would like our workers in this province to make. One of the goals in the business plan is about getting higher adoption rates, and I don't think there's anything wrong with this. I have hundreds and hundreds of children in my care who are looking for homes, who want to be adopted. We put that as a priority in government. We encourage our caseworkers, who do a wonderful job in this province, Mr. Speaker, to find these children a loving home and get them adopted.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: can the minister please explain how a policy that financially rewards regional CEOs for the number of adoptions they perform relates to the best interests of the child?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I think I have to again clarify something. There are no financial rewards, for one thing, when we're looking at performance bonuses. Overall they could have 10, 15, 20 things that they have to make on their performance bonus. If they don't reach the quota that we have given them on the adoptions, they're not penalized for that individually. We want to make sure that the children in our province go to loving, caring homes, and if, for example, a senior manager doesn't happen to make that individual personal performance, for example on an adoption, he's not penalized for that.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: given that the draft report A New Casework Practice Model has been hidden from the public, will the minister summarize for this House what this report states regarding this quota system and the impact that it has on adoption processes in Alberta?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, the report the hon. member is speaking about is a draft report that we have put out to our stakeholders, all of the people that work so hard in this province for Children's Services. We brought forward an act I believe it was a year ago in November called the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. We wanted to find out from that innovative piece of legislation, that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo took on, what we were doing right, what we were doing wrong. We asked for input in regard to that particular draft. Once we get the final copy of that – and it is a draft, Mr. Speaker, and I want to repeat that. We have asked people in the field to respond to this particular draft, and once that is finalized, I'd be pleased to table it. But we're not hiding it. We've asked people within the field, that do good work, to give us their input and respond to the draft report.

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

School Infrastructure in Calgary

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The southwest quadrant of Calgary is one of the fastest growing parts of the province. Now, hundreds of new families are moving there every year, and our existing school infrastructure is simply not keeping pace with the demand for more and improved spaces. The needs are becoming intense, so I would like to ask the Minister of Education: what can I tell my constituents about the latest developments in the plan to address the very pressing needs for more educational facilities in Calgary-Lougheed and other rapidly expanding areas of the province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have about 60 different types of school infrastructure projects that are under way or will go under way this year, totalling about \$580 million province-wide. Now, a lot of that activity is in Calgary, and quite specifically a lot of it is in south Calgary. Recent numbers would probably add up to about \$50 million worth of school construction of one type or another going on in south Calgary. There are projects, I think about five or six schools, that are under way there right now, and perhaps more will come. We'll wait for the next meeting that I'm going to be having with the board there, and we'll wait for available dollars to fund as many of those pressing needs as we can, not only in south Calgary but wherever we are able to across the province.

Mr. Rodney: My only supplemental is to the same minister. I understand that the Calgary public school board is asking for dozens of schools, and the Calgary Catholic school board suggests that they desperately need at least four more schools. I'd like to have the minister, if he would, clarify his department's policy on prioritizing these requests to ensure that the areas that need the schools the more are indeed getting the schools first.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the process is really quite straightforward. For the benefit of all members, who I know are interested in this because we are all affected one way or another, let's just be reminded that school boards develop a capital plan, submit it to us every year. We review that. We look at the priority needs. We look at things like the health of the students attending the schools, the safety of the students, the issues that might pertain to capacity or crowding or aging infrastructure or whatever. So there's a very thorough review process, which our good friends in Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation have been doing.

Now, as the Department of Education works more closely with infrastructure issues and as that particular part of the portfolio comes over our way, perhaps in the next short while, we will be doing a lot more of our detailed planning with them. But a lot of that, Mr. Speaker, is also an issue of taking a look at where your populations are going to be versus perhaps busing them to where the schools exist, so we're looking at a variety of factors in that way. I'll be meeting with the two board chairs here very shortly. I'm sure we'll be hearing more of their needs, and we'll be doing the best we can to address them along with all the others we have before us.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, from the throne speech debate held on March 8, 1968, in this Assembly we find these words:

Northern Alberta is the new frontier – the land of tomorrow. I am glad that I had the wonderful privilege and experience to see the virgin lands and forests, streams and parklands, before we commenced to push the frontiers back. The pioneers were young men and women with a spirit of adventure and the will to conquer the

new land, and with a hope to build a future for themselves and their families . . . Their needs were simple, their lives were full, their contributions great.

These words were given by Adolph Fimrite, born on February 15, 1913, in Kingman, Alberta. He was the owner of Fimrite's department store in Wanham, Alberta. Mr. Fimrite served as a Social Credit member for the constituencies of Spirit River and Spirit River-Fairview from 1952 to 1971. He was appointed deputy chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council on April 23, 1963, and oversaw the creation and the building of the Alberta Resources Railway as well as the highway 34 bridge and the highway 2 suspension bridge. He was appointed a minister without portfolio in 1966.

Mr. Fimrite is only one of several MLAs in Alberta's history who received more votes in each of four successive elections, as he did in 1952, 1955, 1959, and 1963. His vote count went down in 1967, and he was defeated in the election of 1971. He died on July 18, 1990, in Kelowna, British Columbia.

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

head: 2:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Red Deer Memorial to Fallen RCMP Officers

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 16, 2005, eight months after the murders of four young and brave RCMP officers, the owners and tenants of the Bower mall in Red Deer unveiled a life-size bronze statue of an RCMP officer and his horse in a beautiful ceremony that included the families of the four fallen officers: Peter Schiemann, Brock Myrol, Anthony Gordon, and Leo Johnston.

A limited edition of 50 bronze medallions depicting the statue of the RCMP officer and his horse were created and presented to the families and official representatives from the RCMP and government. Our Premier received a bronze medallion, and I have the honour of presenting one of those very special medallions to the Lieutenant Governor next Thursday. Brock Myrol and Tony Gordon were both from Red Deer, and this tribute to all members who serve and protect is a memorial that their families and friends as well as members of the community will always cherish.

Mr. Speaker, as you enter the south door of the Bower mall in Red Deer, you are confronted by this life-size memorial and reminded of the sacrifices that RCMP and all police officers make every day to protect and serve the people of Alberta and all of Canada. Tomorrow we will commemorate the first anniversary of the four brave young men who gave their lives in the line of duty, and we will remember them. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation to the owners of Bower mall, Sterling Vanreal and Centrecorp, to the tenants of the mall, and to the artist, Cameron Watt, for their generosity and vision in creating this magnificent memorial.

I would also like to thank John Van Haastrecht, representative of the owners, and Gary Seher, manager of the Bower mall, for a beautiful unveiling ceremony, that expressed our deepest appreciation to the officers and their families for the supreme sacrifice that was made for us.

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

Mayerthorpe Memorial to Fallen RCMP Officers

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow will mark the one-year anniversary of the tragedy at Mayerthorpe in which four

young RCMP constables lost their lives. This senseless act of violence shocked the communities of Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt, our province, and our country. A year ago the RCMP lost four respected brothers, their families lost four loved ones, and the towns of Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt lost four active and well-liked members of these communities. A year has passed, and the time of mourning for these young men continues.

In order to mark this occasion, the Mayerthorpe Fallen Four Memorial Society is holding a dinner and a charity sports auction to coincide with the annual Wranglers old-timers versus RCMP hockey game today and this evening. The funds raised through the various events will be used to support the activities of the Fallen Four Society in commemorating the sacrifice which was made by these four young men. These events will give members of the community the opportunity to come together and share their memories of March 3, 2005. This function is being held this evening as it was agreed that there would be no large events held in Mayerthorpe on March 3 as the members of this community would prefer to spend that day privately with family and friends.

In the face of a great tragedy people near and far have shown compassion and understanding. I'd like to thank my colleagues in this Assembly, Albertans across the province, Canadians, and members of the international community for their expressions of grief and support over the past year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mountain of Heroes Foundation

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report that I was privileged to bring greetings on behalf of the province to the second annual Mountain of Heroes gala last night. Five people were honoured, and they include Randy Fowler, whose life took a drastic turn 24 years ago. Randy was literally on his way to a career in professional football when he was involved in an accident that left him in a coma, and doctors feared the worst, but today Randy gives inspiring speeches on behalf of the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured, which he serves as a board member. He also speaks on the dangers of drinking and driving for the PARTY program, the United Way, and the Cops for Kids program.

Dale Taylor has initiated the sandwich club and the Warm Feet for the Street projects at the Mustard Seed street ministry. She also supports Inn from the Cold, the Sheriff King Home, and the Calgary Foundation through the Taylor legacy fund as well as projects in the West Indies and Central America.

Dr. Morton Doran has taught anatomy courses to medical students at the U of C for the past 15 years and received no fewer than three gold-star awards in each of those years. Dr. Doran has also volunteered with medical missions in Central and South America and has become a hero to those with Tourette's syndrome.

Marie Nicholson has donated countless hours to a plethora of causes as a member of the Stampede City Kinettes, holding every executive position at the club and zone levels for the last two decades and serving at the district level as well.

On November 4, 2002, Karen Venables' 18-year-old son, Devin, took one punch to the temple and died 16 hours later. Since then, Karen has been working on the DEVIN Foundation: Diligently Ending Violence in Neighbourhoods

My wife, Jennifer, and I as cofounders of the Mountain of Heroes Foundation would like to thank the board of directors, the volunteers, and the corporate partners of the event for raising research funds for cystic fibrosis and at the same time recognizing these

Albertan heroes who have truly turned tragedy into triumph.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Building Alberta's Labour Force

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the hottest economy in the country and there are no signs of this slowing down. Help-wanted signs are everywhere, and forecasts show that in 10 years Alberta will face a shortfall of workers that may be as high as 100,000. Now, I know the media and others often comment on the doom and gloom aspect of this challenge, but what's not reported or widely known is all of the government actions under way to address skill and labour shortages. I think this is important to share with Albertans.

For example, the number of apprentices in our province has grown by 103 per cent in the past 10 years.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Rev. Abbott: A hundred and three per cent, which is a phenomenal number. We are training more apprentices in Alberta than at any other time in our history, and this year government is boosting funding for apprenticeship by \$5.7 million, which will add many new spaces for apprentices.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to getting even more certified tradespeople and apprentices working in Alberta. This commitment can be seen in the province's action to increase the number of registered apprenticeship program scholarships from 50 to 500. This will encourage more high school students to continue their apprenticeship programs after graduation. The total funding for RAP is half a million dollars.

Our government also initiated the youth apprenticeship program, a pilot project that helps students in grades 7 through 12 explore career options through integrated learning activities. There are approximately 163 students enrolled in this program in Alberta.

Connecting job seekers with employers is also an important role government plays. In Drayton Valley Alberta Human Resources and Employment is working with our local employment agency, Cardium Employment Services, to connect people looking for employment directly with employers looking for workers. A number of people new to Drayton Valley have come into these offices and walked out a short time later with a list of employers looking for people. These agencies are also working to develop a survey of employers to find who is looking for workers and what kinds of jobs are available.

Mr. Speaker, this government is also working closely with industry and businesses to partner on activities such as career fairs and others.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Municipal Franchise Tax

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to talk about more financial hardships that Alberta energy consumers continue to face because of deregulation. Specifically, I would like to speak about the municipal franchise tax. It's not a fee; it's a tax that consumers pay on their monthly electricity and heating bills. A recent thorough, province-wide study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business shows that there is no link between the charges that some consumers pay in this province and the intended

purpose of the tax. This, in my view, is a consumption tax, not a fee like the Progressive Conservative government would like to have consumers believe.

Consumers in some municipalities continue to see their municipal franchise tax fluctuate with the price of natural gas and electricity. Despite the stated purpose of this tax a resident of Calgary may see their charge double, even triple from month to month depending on what the costs of natural gas and electricity are.

In 2004 this tax accounted for nearly 10 per cent of the city of Calgary's total revenues. Calgarians may expect to pay 300 per cent more than the residents of Red Deer in a given year for this arbitrary tax. A small-business owner in Leduc will pay about 425 per cent more than a small-business owner in Hinton. Clearly, there is no logic to the formula that is used by Leduc, Calgary, Beaverlodge, Fort McMurray, Wetaskiwin, and others when calculating the municipal franchise tax.

We need to have a good, close look at what research the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has done and be mindful of some of their recommendations. They recommend among many things that the government of Alberta take the initiative to put in place a common fee calculation that ensures that electricity and natural gas consumers are treated similarly across the province and local governments do not profit from high electricity and natural gas prices. They also say that local governments, especially those that impose high rates, should find ways to lower the fees.

At this time I would like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly for this opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

2:50 Government Reform

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are at an opportune time, a crossroads, and together we can soar into the future. We can raise our society to new heights. Peace, prosperity, and protection are universally held by people around the world. However, few have attained all three at the levels we have. We have achieved such peace and prosperity because of all the people and the choices they have made. We have respect for one another and the law, which protects people's lives and property, which in turn has enabled us to enjoy peace and prosperity.

Prosperity is a two-edged sword. It can destroy the individual as easily as it can the country. Is prosperity going to destroy us or make us stronger? To paraphrase Alexander Tytler: democracy is doomed to fail when the people choose to vote for the government that promises to give the most. The result is a tax-and-spend government that destroys the economy.

We need our three levels of government to work as a team. Each level must accept and recognize where its responsibilities are and how the people will be best served. We have gone through a long period of centralization and the notion that bigger is better. What we need is a government that is smaller, more efficient, and effective. For years the federal government has promised more and more federal programs, everything from early childhood care to seniors' care, cradle to grave. This seemingly free gift is too good to be true. We are tearing apart our families with social engineering, everything from our tax structure to our caring for our loved ones. There is a vicious circle of taxing more for more programs, which in turn creates the need for more taxes. We need to create tax credits for families who choose to care for their loved ones. Why do we think it is better to pay an institution \$3,000 a month instead of a thousand dollars a month tax credit for a family?

With a new government in Ottawa, led by a Prime Minister who understands the need for governments to be responsible for their own areas, we have a golden opportunity to change the tide. We must work with him to reform Canada. Canadians are overtaxed and overgoverned. We must act now to work with the new federal government to reduce the duplication of services, the size of government, the universal programs, and most important: their taxes.

Thank you.

head: Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Bill 18 Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, 2006.

Thank you, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

Bill 19 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

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

Bill 203 Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 203, Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill is designed to create another type of railway under the existing act which recognizes the importance of restored and re-created vintage railways operating in our province. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

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

Bill 204
Parental Consent to Medical
Treatment for Minors Act

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act.

Bill 204 will make it necessary for minors age 15 and under to obtain the informed, written consent of at least one parent prior to medical treatment being obtained.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

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

Bill 205
Continuing Care Standards Act

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your indulgence just for a moment, if I might. I rise with humility and not without luck and the goodwill of a caucus colleague to introduce my very first bill in this House. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Continuing Care Standards Act.

This act is intended to create a continuing care commissioner's office responsible to this House to ensure that the provincial standards of care for all of those in continuing care, regardless of who delivers the service or where they live, will be monitored for equality, adherence, and the authority to enforce the same.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter that is similar in tone and content to phone calls and e-mails that I am sure are flooding all of our offices. This one is from Alice Williamson, who's concerned that instead of listening to Albertans and fellow MLAs, he chooses to insult them and bully them. Ms Williamson points out that this behaviour increases voter apathy.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. Because working families are going to be the hardest hit by the proposed two-tier health reforms, I'd like to table a release from the Alberta Federation of Labour dated February 28 and entitled Government's Third Way Plan: A Love Letter to For-profit Health Care and a release from the Health Sciences Association of Alberta from the same date entitled Government's Third Way Plan Undermines Public System.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got one document to table. It's a news release from Public Interest Alberta entitled Alberta Must Defend . . . Childcare System. PIA, Public Interest Alberta, is urging the Minister of Children's Services to defend the agreement with the federal government that she signed just last year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I would ask that the Government House Leader please share with the Assembly the projected government business for next week.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, March 6, at 9 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 19, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006, and thereafter consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech.

On Tuesday, March 7, in the afternoon we anticipate messages from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor with respect to interim supply, thereafter to deal with government motions 8 and 9 with respect to the referral of interim supply to committee of supply and the number of days of interim supply, thereafter consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech and, time permitting, second readings of Bill 9, Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006, and Bill 10, Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech, Committee of the Whole on Bill 19, and second reading of Bill 14, Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, Bill 16, Peace Officer Act, and Bill 17, Libraries Amendment Act, 2006, and as per the Order Paper.

3:00

On Wednesday, March 8, in the afternoon we would anticipate, presuming that the interim supply has been entered, committee day 1 of interim supply and at 8 p.m. day 2 of interim supply, and, time permitting, third reading of Bill 19, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006.

On Thursday, March 9, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 11, Architects Amendment Act, 2006, Bill 12, Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006, Bill 13, Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006, and Bill 15, International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act, and Committee of the Whole with respect to any bills that might be available.

head: **Orders of the Day**

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

Bill 3
Protection Against Family Violence
Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006.

Family violence has devastating consequences for children and families, and it plagues communities throughout our province. It means constant fear and despair to many. No one should have to live like this. That's why one of this government's top priorities is to end family violence.

As the MLA for Red Deer-North, where the hon. Premier first

announced the provincial round-table on family violence, I'm extremely pleased to see this process coming full circle. The amendments proposed in this act respond to the issues and concerns Albertans shared with us at the round-table.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

One of the most significant changes is the expansion of the definition of family violence to include stalking. Too often after an individual leaves a violent relationship, they become a victim of stalking, and too often this results in serious injury or even murder. This civil protection legislation will ensure that those who have gathered the courage to leave violent relationships are protected from further family violence. Alberta is only the second jurisdiction in Canada to make this provision.

Bill 3 also includes the addition of a preamble. This will clarify the legislation's objectives and allow for a more consistent interpretation of the act. The preamble confirms the commitment of the people and the Legislature of Alberta to preventing family violence. The proposed amendments also expand the definition of family members to include relatives who don't live together. This means that vulnerable family members, including seniors and people with disabilities, can be protected.

Bill 3 also provides a more comprehensive explanation of family violence and removes the word "intentional" from the definition. This will provide caseworkers, police, and judges with an increased understanding of the dynamics of family violence and help them determine when an emergency protection order should be granted. It also means that emergency protection orders can be granted even if abusers say that they did not mean to hurt the victim. The proposed amendments also extend the review time for these orders by two days to ensure that the court has the best information possible when reviewing an order.

Bill 3 removes the requirement to impose counselling on victims because best practices suggest that positive outcomes for victims of family violence are best achieved through personal choices and voluntary participation. Counselling may still be ordered by the court for the abusers. Research also indicates that the effects of family violence on children need to be addressed in order to prevent long-term social and economic impact. That's why the proposed amendments will remove barriers so that children may receive counselling with the consent of only one parent or guardian.

These proposed amendments will make us more responsive to this issue and will protect even more people affected by family violence. I ask for the support of all members of the Assembly for Bill 3 to help ensure that Albertans are protected from the threat of family violence.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Assembly giving me time to introduce. It's at an appropriate time too. I have some very hard-working staff who are in the gallery observing the

debate on the bill, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, and I would like to acknowledge them if I can, please.

I have Sheryl Fricke, who is the executive director of the prevention of family violence and bullying; Laura Alcock, who is the director of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, child and family services; Susan Taylor, senior manager from the office of the prevention of family violence and bullying; Sonja Ford, executive assistant, prevention of family violence and bullying; Debbie Malloy, who is my special adviser in the minister's office; and Jeri Romaniuk, who is my special project co-ordinator in my office. I'll ask everybody to give them a warm round. If they could rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 3
Protection Against Family Violence
Amendment Act, 2006
(*continued*)

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we consider Bill 3, Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006, I would like to share some thoughts on violence. We talk of violence as a thing, a noun, a subject, or object, but it comes from "violate," a verb, a set of actions and attitudes. That's where I want to start.

What are the actions, the attitudes, the words and thoughts behind them by which we violate another living thing? We violate when we invade another's space or property, when we snoop or eavesdrop on words or sights not intended for us, read private letters or journals. We violate when we intrude on personal space, when we stand too close, talk in someone's face, make intimidating gestures or personal remarks. These can assault as much as a body blow. We can violate by impersonating someone or mimicking them unkindly, grabbing a purse or other personal object, even as a joke. We violate by slander, what we say about them, and by remarks about their relationships, families, friends, and the groups they belong to. All these things stop short of mugging, beating, sexual and other violent assaults.

These more serious offences grow out of an attitude of violation that does not hold sacred one's person and space. A culture that condones brutality in movies, video games, and some professional sports signals that violence may be okay. When we tolerate these assaults in our minds and on our screens on a regular basis, we place the onus on the individual to decide why certain kinds of violence are unacceptable when others are not. We violate not only when we commit acts towards specific people; we are implicated in policies that target groups, another race or gender, or another species.

This Bill 3 intends to protect against family violence, and we must support that effort. Violence against women continues to grow to epidemic proportions through acts of harassment, spousal assault, sexual violence, and the ultimate price to pay, death. In fact, we heard at the World Conference on Prevention of Family Violence, recently held in Banff, that there was a global agreement that domestic violence is a pandemic, and domestic violence should be addressed with the same attention as is given to the avian flu or HIV/AIDS. Abuse must end. When we hear statistics about violence, remember too that each number is more than a statistic. It is someone's life.

I would like to quote from *Standing Together* from the story *Measures*, by Leslie Wraithen, about violence against women:

Imagine cutting yourself off from your family and friends and everything you love. Imagine trying to contain the danger to just yourself.

Picture yourself moving your children in the middle of the night to another shelter because he has found you again.

Try to imagine making life beautiful for your children while you heal from three broken ribs.

Picture yourself thinking you would rather be dead than be hunted. Imagine being more afraid of life than death.

That is what violence does.

3:10

Last year Alberta shelters provided a safe haven for nearly 7,000 women and 7,000 children, assisted nearly 56,000 callers on crisis lines, yet they were unable to accommodate nearly 4,400 abused women and 4,000 children because they were full. Know that Alberta leads in many of the sorry statistics, whether it be the number of women who report being stalked, the number of women who report experiencing abuse, or the number of murder suicides. We also have one of the highest rates of women killed by their intimate partners.

Most of us are repelled by the violence that increasingly characterizes our society, but what are we doing about it? Women in Canada make up the vast majority of victims of crimes against the person, including sexual assault and spousal violence: four out of five victims of spousal homicide are female. Criminal harassment or stalking: female victims are overwhelmingly stalked by men. Kidnapping or abduction: violence against women is not random but an act of power and control.

We cannot forget the women who are afraid to ask for help, the child who won't speak, or a death that goes unsolved. So many voices have yet to be heard. We must work for change. This was driven home to us all during the Fekete inquiry last spring into the murder of Betty Fekete and her son Alex by Josif Fekete. The judge, after hearing five days of testimony, still has to recommend in 2005 that police officers should not treat chronic complaints made by a recipient of domestic violence, such as those made by Betty Fekete regarding death threats, as a nuisance and, therefore, unworthy of belief.

We must support the efforts of the shelters and family violence prevention programs here in our own community. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing this amendment forward to clarify the Protection Against Family Violence Act. The purpose of this bill is to widen the scope of family violence to include stalking as a form of family violence. Furthermore, this bill will make enforcement against family violence easier for law enforcement officials by providing some clear definitions of what constitutes family violence. The bill looks at improving the emergency protection order process by making it easier to apply for such an order.

This bill is a positive step in protecting victims of family violence; however, I find some points requiring more clarity. If this bill is accepted as it is currently drafted, we're going to see a sharp increase in the number of people charged for committing family violence. In particular, this will be the case due to the broad terminology used to define conduct considered to be stalking. Also, removing the previously required intent of a respondent will mean more people being found guilty of family violence.

As I look at the rationale behind this, I realize that according to the 2005 study by Statistics Canada, Alberta does have the highest family violence in Canada. Alberta women are more likely to be physically abused by a family member than other women in Canada. Furthermore, aboriginal people report twice as many cases of stalking as nonaboriginals. One point that should be made regarding

this bill is that it does not mention or address the higher rates of family violence and stalking that are experienced by aboriginal people.

I'm pleased that 4(b)(ii)(C) adds stalking as a form of family violence, that 4(b)(iii) adds a clause that defines stalking, and 4(c) adds a clause that defines conduct considered to be stalking. However, section 1(2)(c) may be problematic. Specifically, the clause is very general and includes terms such as "being present at . . . any place where a family member, or anyone known to the family member, resides, works, carries on business or is . . . likely to be present." This clause seems to be far too wide reaching. Referring to this clause, there are endless innocent situations that may be deemed stalking, especially in a small community, so I am concerned about that.

I notice that 5(b)(iii) adds two clauses which include two new factors to be considered by a judge when issuing an EPO: "whether the respondent is or has been controlling" and "whether the family violence has been repetitive or escalating." The portion of this clause that includes "controlling" may be problematic. How exactly do we define controlling behaviour? At what point does a judge decide that a respondent's behaviour should be classified as controlling?

Section 5(b)(iv) adds two new factors to be considered by a judge when deciding whether to grant an EPO: the vulnerability of elderly claimants and the effects of family violence on a child who is in custody or care of the claimant. In my opinion, this is the most valuable amendment in this bill.

Looking at section 8, there's a new clause, 8(1.1), which states that a claimant's location may be disclosed by the court if an order is made that the respondent be restrained from attending that location. The previous clause stated that the location of the claimant must be kept confidential. From my understanding this clause is intended to allow a judge to order the respondent to stay away from the claimant, but if the location was required to be kept confidential, this would be difficult as the respondent would not know where they could not go. Perhaps we can get some clarity on that point.

Overall, this bill is a positive step in protecting victims of family violence, and I support it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for leading this important bill through the legislative process for me. I want to also acknowledge the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who has spoken very passionately about the issue of family violence. On the questions that she is asking, we will certainly get back to her.

Mr. Speaker, family violence has devastating consequences on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. It can leave scars that last a lifetime. Thousands of Albertans are affected by family violence every year. Helping Albertans understand what family violence is and what can be done to prevent it has been a strong agenda for this government. Making improvements to the Protection Against Family Violence Act will help us meet those goals.

I'd like to remind everyone what this act is about. The act was created because there's no time to cut through red tape, like getting a peace bond or a restraining order, when violence is happening. It's all about immediate, emergency protection for victims. This act helps in situations where one family member is violent against another: punching, slapping, knocking down, or causing physical harm in some way. It is also used when a family member has threatened death or severe violence.

This act is not used to intervene in ordinary family tensions and

disagreements, but it does protect all family members, Mr. Speaker – seniors, women, men, and children – and it helps anyone who has been a victim. The Protection Against Family Violence Act enables police, child intervention workers, and judges to act quickly in order to stop the violence, provide protection from future violence, and provide a breathing space so that family members can put longer term safety measures in place.

The amendments which the hon. Member for Red Deer-North just outlined will make this a more user-friendly piece of legislation, legislation that builds on what we heard at the World Conference on Prevention of Family Violence. During the conference we heard from 1,100 participants from 31 countries, and it served as an excellent reminder that no matter where we are in the world, we all have something in common: we are all touched by family violence, and we all want to do something about it. At the conference the United Arab Emirates made a commitment to establish the first women's shelter in their country, a huge step forward.

The world conference also helped to reinforce the fact that family violence isn't an issue exclusive to spouses and that we need to broaden our thinking and offer protection to other family members who could be vulnerable, such as seniors and the disabled, which is why we're expanding the definition of family members in the Protection Against Family Violence Act to include individuals who do not live together.

3:20

One of the most significant changes to the Protection Against Family Violence Act that I am particularly pleased with is the inclusion of stalking. Mr. Speaker, research indicates that 57 per cent of stalkers are partners or former partners of their victims, and you see it all too often. Someone tries to leave a violent relationship, their abuser attempts to retain their control by stalking, and that person ends up either completely traumatized for life, seriously injured, or dead.

I'd like my colleagues to imagine for a moment what it's like to live in constant fear for your safety and for the safety of your children, afraid to answer the phone or listen to the messages on your answering machine, always looking over your shoulder when you go out, afraid to answer the door, afraid of what that person might be doing to your children.

This change will help protect those who have left violent relationships and their family members. I want to be clear, though, that adding stalking to the definition of family violence under this act is for the sole purpose of protecting victims, not for investigating or laying charges against a stalker. That's what the Criminal Code is for. However, the definition of stalking in Bill 3 is similar to the one used in the Criminal Code, allowing for both pieces of legislation to work hand in hand. With this amendment we will become only the second province in Canada to protect victims from stalking.

Stalking victims are numerous, but they're afraid to speak up because what protection did they have before? With these amendments we're giving victims of stalking, victims of family violence a voice, and, Mr. Speaker, we're shattering the silence of family violence. Adding stalking to the Protection Against Family Violence Act as well as extending protection to seniors and the disabled, granting emergency protection orders more quickly, and helping children who bear witness to family violence receive the counselling they need will make this very good piece of legislation even better.

Before I finish, though, I'd like to share with my colleagues a powerful poem that was shared with me. I think it really puts things into perspective as to why our government is taking such a strong hand against family violence.

I got flowers today.
It wasn't my birthday or any other special day.
Last night we had a fight and he hit me.
But I know he is sorry . . .
Because I got flowers today.

I got flowers today.
It wasn't our anniversary or any other special day.
Last night . . . he threw me against the wall and started to choke me.
But I know he must be sorry . . .
Because I got flowers today.

I got flowers today . . .
and it wasn't Mother's Day or any other special day.
I was so swollen and bruised
I was ashamed to answer the door.
But I know he's sorry . . .
Because I got flowers today.

If I leave him . . .
Where will I go?
What about money?
What about my kids?
It's getting worse every time . . .
But I'm afraid to leave.
But I know he's sorry.
Because I got flowers today.

My friends and family filed by to see me . . .
Asking why I never left him.
If only I had the strength and courage to . . .
But I didn't.
So . . . I got flowers today.

Mr. Speaker, I think this poem says it all, and I ask all members of the Assembly to support Bill 3.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate both the Member for Red Deer-North and the Minister of Children's Services bringing forward Bill 3, strengthening and diversifying the Protection Against Family Violence Act. It certainly is a necessary thing to do. Here in the province of Alberta we have a very unacceptably high rate of family violence, and this can only be stemmed somehow by a combination of changing the laws that can penalize offenders but also combined with a means by which we can educate our population and perhaps the next generation to understand just how destructive the various elements of family violence are to individuals and to our society as a whole.

I, too, was struck by the statistic of the fact that over half of stalkers are, in fact, former partners of individuals, mostly women having this violence perpetrated on them by men. You know, this is indicative of a way by which the pattern of violence is enacted in our society. I just wanted to, if I could, reflect on some of the reasons why, in fact, men are abusive towards their partners or former partners. You know, most of it centres around this issue of control. It's not anything to do with creating a loving family situation. Rather, it's an extension of control turned to violence. A lot of this sort of behaviour stems from a very rigid definition in the perpetrator's mind of what male and female roles are and where the power does lie. Therefore, I do certainly support initiatives such as Bill 3, but the importance of educating our own children, particularly male children, to understand the importance of equality in a family relationship I think is equally as important to stemming the tide of violence.

Also, of course, a very large emerging reason why, in fact, people do perpetrate violence against their spouses or ex-spouses or partners

is that they are continuing a pattern of violence that they themselves were victim of in their earlier life or as children. Once again, we know that if we can break that cycle at any point in time between the generations, then we're likely not to be just benefiting the women and families that are amongst us now but for generations to come.

Certainly, I do, as I said, have mostly positive things to say about this particular bill. As I've been reading it here, I suppose that extending stalking into the act is a good idea, but, you know, the reason that perhaps it was slow to become part of this act previously is that it's a little bit more difficult to define. As a previous speaker, I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, pointed out, there are several places here where I think we need to look at the language more specifically, and perhaps we can do that in the committee stage. Just looking at when a person is defined as being dangerous perhaps to the person, then just how we control a person's movements can be problematic. Certainly, it's not something that's insurmountable for the fine minds that sit and stand around this Chamber to come up with some way to make it work.

Specifically, I would like to just draw your attention very briefly to section 5(b) on page 4. It's adding the need to take into consideration when issuing an emergency protection order "the claimant's need for a safe environment to arrange for longer-term protection from family violence." You know, our own WIN House here in Edmonton, just one of the shelters available to people in difficulties, had to turn away more than a thousand women seeking assistance last year because of lack of funding and space to care for endangered women and children. You know, if we have a lack of proper community and public support for many women and children who choose to remove themselves from difficult situations, then I think this is an important piece of the puzzle that is in fact missing. Not to take away from the importance of this bill, but we have to have other services in concert that can work to reinforce the good intentions of this bill.

3:30

Also, I would suggest that one of the problems that law enforcement officers have with, say, restraining orders and the whole mechanism by which stalking is dealt with now in the law enforcement service is that it's simply very difficult to monitor and to carry forward. I know from the work that we do in my own constituency of Edmonton-Calder that when people do come forward with difficulties associated with family violence, of course the police can advise very admirably and competently what people should do, but in regard to enforcement they're often simply short of staff to be able to follow through and perhaps come when a call is made for someone who is violating a restraining order or something of that nature. So, once again, for us to make sure that we have adequate law enforcement in place at a community level I think is an important part of making this bill effective.

Finally, I just would like to certainly suggest our tentative support of Bill 3. We are interested, however, just to perhaps clarify some of the language contained therein and again reinforce the importance of other elements in our own society that need to be strengthened, including education and police enforcement and shelters, so that we can have an integrated approach to attack this problem of family violence in our province.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 3 on behalf of my constituents of Edmonton-Decore. I do think this is a good bill, and I do support this. It's a growing concern. It's

been growing for years, and it's finally being addressed here today with this introduction of the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006.

It doesn't surprise me that we lead the country in violence, as quoted from Statistics Canada by my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods. We also lead the country with privatization of liquor stores. We also have gambling, which leads to addictions. We have these people gambling, which is available all the time. A person can come home after spending their paycheque and become violent after that and take it out on their family. We recognize that that does happen.

There's also the fact that after having the liquor stores being privatized, they're available everywhere, making it more accessible. We need to address that. With the drinking that goes on out there, more counselling is needed. Its availability is becoming alarming. We have increased family violence due just, I think, to the privatization that we've allowed with our liquor stores. There's one on a convenient corner near you, which does concern me as well.

If this bill is accepted in its current form, I think you could see a sharp increase in the number of people charged with family violence. I'm pleased that it includes seniors as well as family members. We know that as we're an aging population and kids now are living at home longer and longer, they may in fact come to their aging parents and want money. We've seen commercials advertising it and how subtle family violence in some cases is. Unfortunately, it's some of the seniors, the aging parents, that are recipients of that.

Family members – some people may not be willing to come forward. I know that in my constituency I don't have that many people coming forward. I think maybe they don't recognize it perhaps because it's subtle in some cases, or in some cases they, in fact, are embarrassed that it's even happening to them and how they allowed themselves to get into this position for this long without leaving. Some fear for what's going to happen to the kids, and that's a big thing as well. The kids are an important fact here that needs to be addressed, and I do believe that this bill will protect the children as well as the spouse, whichever one is in fact under the abuse piece here.

The other portion that I'm concerned about. Mr. Speaker, it is a positive aspect in respecting family violence. I said before that I do believe it's a good bill, but I'm disappointed it doesn't in fact address more cases for aboriginal people living out in the rural areas as well as in the urban areas, too, because it is becoming an alarming rate among the growing population. That is a population that is in fact – you read time and time again in the paper – on the receiving end of violence or murders. It's a growing population that we need to address, and I'm glad again that this does bring it in here as well.

School is an excellent source. If we're going to nip this in the bud, it's got to start with education. I'll give that to the education system. They have that Safe and Caring Schools initiative. Then they have the conflict teams to recognize and tell them already at a young age that this behaviour is not acceptable, that this language is not acceptable. But it's going to take a lot of time to go through this.

I've got a couple of questions with regard to what would be considered stalking. I know that the police sometimes are at a hard point because it's not within the bill. A person has now taken up residence across the street from their spouse, looking across the street from their window, perhaps with binoculars. Is that considered stalking, and can they do anything with regard to that? They said that sometimes, as the member said, as it is, they can't do anything about it. I don't know. Hopefully, this bill can address something like that as well.

What about internal conflicts? This came to my attention during an open house town hall meeting with Chief Boyd taking on crime. He was doing his tour of all the communities. A constituent had

come up with repeated violence that she was in fact the recipient of by her husband, her spouse, but that spouse was a member of the Edmonton Police Service.

Now, they'd like to keep a lid on something like this because they don't want to taint the members or the force with something like this because it doesn't happen in the force. But this lady, in fact, was a recipient of this, but she's being muzzled: can't talk about it, cannot call the police, cannot call the mayor. Does this preclude being investigated by their own? Will it be able to take on services such as the police force when they have investigations on one of their own, or does it allow just the police force to investigate their own? That would be one of the concerns that I would have.

Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not prolong the discussion. The point I want to make is that certainly the intent of the bill is good. Adding stalking I think is important, and I especially like the idea of the disabled and the elderly claimants because we're hearing more about elder abuse all the time. As I say, I think the bill is a good bill. But I think, as my colleague was talking about, it comes down to how you begin to enforce it.

I think we know pretty clearly what stalking is. If you look at the family violence in Canada from Statistics Canada – I'm sure the minister has seen the stalking, criminal harassment. They talk about obscene phone calls most frequently, but they say that "more than one-half of female stalking victims reported that their stalker phoned them repeatedly or made silent or obscene . . . calls" – that was 52 per cent of them – "while one third reported being spied on . . . and/or being intimidated or threatened." That was 34 per cent. "In contrast, more than half of male stalking victims . . . reported being intimidated or threatened." So, generally, I think that when we get into stalking, it shouldn't be just an isolated thing. I think it's a number of repeated phone calls and these sorts of things.

What I'm coming to is that in the same report it's been alluded to that Alberta has the highest rate of stalking for women in the country, 13 per cent; for men, not quite the highest but 7 per cent. My point, to come back to a good part of the bill, 5(b)(iv), is that if we're going to add stalking, as we should, and when we do have the numbers – now, I'm sure that with adding to this bill, there's going to be much more pressure on the courts. There's going to be much more pressure in terms of people needing the help, safe places, shelters, and that sort of thing. That's my concern, not the bill but what happens after in terms of the situation.

I know that the minister is well aware of this. There are shelters that my colleague talked about in Edmonton – but I'm pretty sure it's true throughout Alberta, that the shelters that we have now, with the laws we have now, we're being turned away. Even though we have the laws, if we can't do something about it if it gets clogged, then a good piece of legislation, if we don't have the enforcement, might not be particularly helpful. So I lay that out as a concern, not about the bill, but what happens after is my concern.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) kicks in. My apologies. I was remiss after the previous speaker. Any questions or comments for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you still want to ask your question to the Member for Edmonton-Decore or speak on the bill?

Ms Blakeman: I think I'll just go ahead and speak on the bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead. Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. I guess with some regret I thank the Speaker for the opportunity to speak to this bill again today. I really would like to be able to not get up in this House and speak about violence against women, and I would really like to not have to deal with another bill that's trying to protect women because I would really like to see the resolution of this issue. I've now been working on this for probably 30 years. In many ways it seems to be escalating, and none of us that work in this area are able to identify whether, in fact, there are more women and family members that are victims of abuse or whether we're just getting better at getting them to come forward and identify themselves so that we can make note of their numbers and compile the statistics.

I look back to the genesis of this bill with pride. This bill was originally proposed by the Liberal member for then Edmonton-Highlands, Alice Hanson. It was the first time, I think, that an opposition member's sponsored bill ever passed second reading in this Assembly and had support of the Assembly. It was a fairly historic document at that point. It did go through an additional consultation process over the summer and was brought back in Committee of the Whole, at which point there was a parliamentary procedure that was used to have the chairman leave the chair, actually, in Committee of the Whole, and the bill basically disappeared into thin air. I sponsored it the next year, and then it reappeared as a government bill. It was sponsored by the then Member for Calgary-Currie and passed at that time.

I believe this is the first amendment act that we've had to that bill, and that original bill must have passed in about 2000, if I'm remembering things right. So I would say that this is a tribute to Alice Hanson. This bill has stood the test of time. We're really not having to go back and correct it for any mistakes that were made in the original drafting of it; rather, we're dealing with the refinements that we feel we need to be making to the bill to make sure that we are protecting everyone that needs to be able to take advantage of what's being offered in this bill.

It's interesting. I at one time was the executive director of the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, and because of that I was stalked by a member of the public for a period of time. I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I had the full resources of the Edmonton Police Service behind me to help me out, and I got to carry around the phone number of a detective, and they checked on me I don't know how often. I was aware that I was being helped and protected and that people were watching out for me, and I was able to continue to move about my city and through my life with a degree of confidence. At the same time, I knew that the very women that I was working for on behalf of Albertans and on behalf of the advisory council – those women that were being stalked by domestic partners did not have the same protection that I did because I was being stalked by a member of the public. Yes, it was political, but I never understood, and to me it was a great irony that in my position I got that protection and the women that I was working for didn't. That's 15 years ago. So it's taken us 15 years to come to this point.

I understand that the sponsoring member and the minister are saying that we're one of the first two in Canada to recognize that and to offer legislation to protect victims of stalking. What a sad comment. All we seem to have been able to do with the issue of violence against women is to find the layers. I don't think it's gotten more complicated. I think it always was complicated. We slowly

peel back the layers, and now we've reached the layer and the understanding of what stalking does to people's lives.

I always approach this issue from a point of fear, in the same way that one of the tests that we look at in law is harm. Is harm being caused? Who is being harmed by a particular action? I always approach this issue about fear because to me it wasn't enough that you had to appear bloody and beaten. I think that women's lives were and are changed forever by the fear that they could not move about in their city and through their lives as I was able to because they were having to deal with that element of fear and to bring caution into their lives on all parts. This is doubled, tripled, quadrupled with every child that that woman is likely to be responsible for. My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was quoting from a book in which a mother was talking about: how do you teach your children that there are beautiful things in life when you are paralyzed and locked inside of your own home for fear that if you go outside, you will be discovered and stalked and worse to follow that?

So I am pleased to see the addition of the stalking amendments. As always, I want this to be Charter proof. I want this to work. So I am wondering: what was the feedback? I'm assuming that this bill was run through the Legal Resource Centre or the Law Reform Institute, which is usually the avenue that the government takes to sort of test new law. I'd like to hear back some assurance that this, in fact, is going to stand the test.

Three other issues I'd like to raise. One is the health connection, and it's something that I talk about a lot now as the opposition critic for health. There are a couple of ways that we can reduce the cost in health care: by reducing some of the demands on the acute care systems and particularly the emergency system that are completely preventable. One of those is motor vehicle accidents, and the other one is domestic violence. This is completely preventable, and if we continue to work hard on it, I'm hoping that the numbers are going to go down. This is a consumer of acute care, high-cost health care dollars, and there's no reason for it. This is not accidental. This is not some act of God that we have no control over. This is a societal problem, and we all have to continue to work on it.

It does cost our society in many ways. It costs us through police services, through hospitals and health care, lost production time, incarceration, penitentiary time. It costs society a great deal to have violence perpetrated, particularly when it's systematic, it's systemic, and it's family-based. The family is the basis of our society, and when we allow people to be in fear in their own homes, it's a challenge to us to try and address that.

I'd also like to talk about the need for cultural education and support for cultural education. There's been a great deal of discussion in Alberta recently about the need for workers and skilled workers and looking at whether we could bring in short-term temporary workers or whether we need to increase immigration. Mr. Speaker, in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre it's both a blessing and a challenge to be able to welcome a significant number of the immigrants and new Canadians that arrive in Edmonton, who tend to come into Edmonton-Centre mostly because of the cheaper housing stock, I think, and because of the availability of some of the social service helping agencies' settlement services that are clustered downtown. But we see a lot of people that are coming here from other countries. They stabilize and then they move off to other neighbourhoods.

3:50

In Edmonton I'm aware that Mill Woods, of course, is also a large cultural centre for people that have come from other places. That's a challenge for us, to continue to work with those communities in a

way to be supportive but to also be firm that in Canada and in Alberta that's not acceptable behaviour, that it does cost all of us, and that we expect society to work together and to help each other to break through that cycle of violence.

That's not done in isolation, and I think that it's important that the ministry recognize and that the government recognize and fund settlement and cultural agencies that are working with distinct groups to try and get programs in place to combat family violence, to educate women and family members that this is a crime and that it is not acceptable behaviour. We just have too many people that don't get out and circulate, and they don't have an opportunity to find out that there is help there for them, that this is not behaviour that we accept. We have to reach out into those communities, and there are some innovative ways to do it.

In Edmonton, and I think now beyond that, we have the multicultural health brokers, which is a coalition of people in the health professions and social service professions who come from various backgrounds and speak various languages. It's very high. It's 30-some languages that I think the group in Edmonton speaks. They're able to get out into those communities. They're approaching people to give them advice about prenatal care and that kind of thing, and as they do that, they're watching for those signs. They're educating women in those communities and helping to draw them out and to give them tools to work with. But they're doing something there that's not specifically paid for under what we would call traditional medicine. That's preventive medicine, and it needs to be funded and supported.

The Mennonite Centre for Newcomers is also in my constituency along with an organization called Changing Together. Both of these organizations work almost exclusively with immigrants and new Canadians who have come from other places, and those are exactly the kinds of programs we are trying to offer.

So we have to remember that as we invite new immigrants to come to our province to augment our labour base, they need a good start here. That includes things like assistance with language training but also assistance with what the Mennonites call settlement services. It's about housing. It's about how you get around the city: how to use a bus, how the shopping and grocery stores work, and all of that kind of thing. It's also what society expects from you and how you get help if things start to go wrong.

I continue to advocate for funding for those groups: reliable, predictable, long-term funding and not piecemeal, where you're getting one grant from this Department of Health and another grant from that Department of Children's Services and a third grant from Human Resources and Employment. It just means that their administrators spend all their time writing grant proposals and not any time actually doing the work that they're supposed to be doing. We need to get out of the silo on that one.

Lastly, I think we need to have the conversation – and maybe we can have it as part of this debate – around incarceration. If we're going to follow through from this bill, which is offering protection, and if someone contravenes that and crosses the legal barriers, then what are we comfortable with as a society? Do we want people locked up, or are people comfortable with some sort of house arrest or electronic bracelets or community service? We haven't really had that conversation, and I think it's a conversation that we need to have.

What value do we place on this? What are we looking for? There's a common phrase about correctional institutions: are you looking to punish, or are you looking to rehabilitate? We need to have that discussion here. I think we're trying to protect people and members of our society. We don't have enough jail space, literally. We've got huge problems in the remand centre. We have to start

having that discussion about what our expectations are, about whether people would be locked up or not. I hope that that's a conversation that flows from this because it's part of this discussion.

So I am pleased to support this bill. I think the government has done a good job in following through on this one. I've been very critical in the past, and I was right to have been very critical in the past. This, I think, is a positive step forward. My colleagues have shared some of the concerns that they have coming from their areas of expertise, and I'm glad I got the opportunity to speak to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I notice that the member was cut off just short of finishing a sentence. I would have liked to hear what she was going to finish with. Would the member be able to continue on with her conversation, what she was giving?

The Acting Speaker: It's a session for questions or comments.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. I was talking about the continuum of violence from the identification of the services in the community, the support services that are offered by those agencies in the community, the existence of legislation like this that gives us that framework to work from, and the end point, where I feel the discussion hasn't happened. The one piece that I didn't get into that continuum is the whole court system. In Alberta we have been very good at developing some innovative programs, particularly – and I'm not going to get the right name; I'm sorry – a special department working through Justice that is specially trained Crown prosecutors who deal specifically with family violence caseloads.

My one concern around that is that there seems to be a desire on the behalf of somebody in the Justice department to move the Crown prosecutors around every six months. But for that particular area the whole point was that you developed a specialization, and when you're moving one Crown prosecutor out of there every six months – and it's a fairly small team to begin with – you actually are creating huge upheaval in that department because somebody's on their way, like, every couple of months. So I'm asking as part of the context of this bill for the Minister of Justice to have a look at that.

Thank you for the opportunity for me to get that in there when I wasn't able to get it in earlier.

The Acting Speaker: Any other questions?

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Bill 1

Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Premier.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to rise this afternoon on behalf of our hon. Premier and in tandem with the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness as well to request leave to move at second reading Bill 1, which is the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act.

The legislation before us today is extremely important for the health and wellness of Albertans now and in the future. Bill 1 will leave a legacy for our children, our grandchildren, and our great-

grandchildren. Most importantly, it will save lives. Cancer, as we all know, is a leading cause of death in Alberta. Today 81,000 Albertans are living with cancer. Without this particular legislation the numbers would otherwise grow to about 200,000 by the year 2025.

Currently almost half of all Alberta men and two out of every five Alberta women are likely to be diagnosed with cancer at some point during their lifetimes. The number of Albertans living with cancer is increasing rapidly due to population growth, an aging population, and patients living longer. The economic burden of cancer is also growing at an astonishing rate, rapidly consuming resources, increasing costs, and eroding economic activity.

4:00

There is good news, however. Research does show that half of all cancers are preventable. As our Premier said when he introduced Bill 1 last week, Alberta is very well positioned to attack cancer at every level, from prevention right through to potential cures. This bill, Bill 1, is very consistent with our priorities for health renewal in Alberta: to take action on wait times and improve both quality of care and regional service integration. The strategic investment that will be facilitated by this legislation will also allow greater collaborative work in the areas of cancer prevention, screening, and research. Increased cancer prevention strategies will involve a combination of research, education, public policy development, and social marketing initiatives. There will be expanded and new cancer screening programs to detect the signs of cancer at an early age. A virtual Alberta cancer research institute will be created to co-ordinate all cancer research in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, the target is to reduce the incidence of cancer by 35 per cent by the year 2025 and to reduce the mortality from cancer by 50 per cent by the same year, 2025.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 will help ensure that Alberta is positioned as a leading centre for cancer expertise in North America. It will help Alberta prepare now for the growing demand for cancer services in our province. The work that is done and the expertise that will be achieved through this legislation will create a cancer-free future for Albertans.

I ask on behalf of our Premier for the support of the House at this important second stage of Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, and I'm delighted to move it at second.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in my role as opposition critic for Health and Wellness and speak in support of this bill in second reading, that being Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I think that Alberta is at such a point of opportunity, and this bill is maybe able to take advantage of that position of opportunity. Certainly, Alberta Liberals have looked a lot at how well positioned we are right now and the immense possibilities that are open in front of us.

Seeking a cure for cancer is one of those things that I think we all dream about when we look at things that we would like to accomplish. It's admirable that the Premier wanted to take a first step in achieving this dream. It's a part of a larger dream. I think that if we are successful in implementing what is envisioned in this bill, it moves beyond Alberta to information technologies, methods of treatment, research, and hopefully prevention that can be shared with other parts of Canada.

We're under intense scrutiny in this province right now from others because they see the amount of money we have and encounter

often an attitude from the government – you know, “It’s mine; you can’t have any” – which is difficult for others in Canada to understand when we seem to have so much. Here’s an opportunity for us to invest in something that, in fact, has a much wider ripple effect, that all may benefit from. I hope that this bill, this idea is looked at by the government as part of a continuum. I’d be very disappointed if the government dusts off its hands and goes: “Well, there, we’ve done it. That was it. This bill is all we needed. Let’s go home. Done.” I really believe that we need to look at this as part of a larger context.

I, too, have met with the Alberta Cancer Board. I was very impressed with them and understand what they were seeking. In fact, I see what they were seeking exactly reflected in this bill. So we have the infrastructure side of things, and really what we’re talking about there are the cancer centres in Edmonton and Calgary.

The cancer centre in Edmonton. We’ve identified what needs to happen. We’ve moved on to the stage of design. We know where it’s going to be situated. It’s well on its way, and we have a pretty good idea of how much money it’s going to cost. It’s a little bit more difficult in Calgary. Haven’t looked at exactly what we need the building to do and what would be in it and who would be working there. I think they have identified where it’s going to be. But the design of the building to support the functions that they identify: they’re not at that stage. So we’re less aware of how much money, but I think there’s a ballpark figure that people are working with. So the money that is identified and set aside in this bill is going to get us most of the way there but not quite all of the way there.

The larger part and the more optimistic part and the more exciting part of the bill is the funding that should play out to research, the testing and screening component, and prevention. What I’m trying to urge the government to do is to stop siloing cancer, to stop looking at cancer as something neatly put in a box because I think increasingly what we’re learning is that that is simply not true. If we’re actually going to tackle this one, we have to come at it with a much more holistic approach. That can sound rather tired and a little crunchy granola to some members here, I’m sure, but it’s said with the best intentions. We can research cancer till the cows come home, but if we don’t combine it with the other components that are outlined here, we are not going to move this forward. Again, we can test and screen forever, and we will identify all kinds of cancers, but if we don’t combine it with the research and the prevention modules, it won’t move us forward. We have to combine all three and take those seriously.

I’m always interested in the juxtapositions that I witness in this House, and there are two of them that I’m seeing come with this bill. On the one hand, we have this bill being tabled in the House on one of the same days that we have people here who have come from elsewhere in Alberta because coal-bed methane exploration is resulting in contamination of their well water to the point where they can set it on fire. You juxtapose that kind of toxicity in someone’s life with this grand bill to deal with ending cancer. You’ve got to put those two things together, folks. You’ve got to understand that they’re both existing in Alberta at the same time and start to understand that those two things have to be dealt with at the same time. They’re part of the same thing.

The other juxtaposition, the one that the media and a number of other people picked up on very quickly, is: well, how come we didn’t get a stronger nonsmoking bill out of the government if they really meant this? Why did they allow it to be watered down? Why is it okay to protect people in most workplaces in the province but not to protect people if they’re working or playing, I suppose, in a casino or a bar, where a minor wouldn’t be allowed? Indeed, that’s

an interesting juxtaposition, and I can’t explain that, so I’ll leave it to the government members to explain it.

What we have to look at is that we have to understand and integrate the social determinants of health, and that especially comes into play when we look at the prevention module of what’s being proposed here. Certainly, the Alberta Cancer Board and its affiliates and agencies and supporters and academic institutions are more than capable of dealing with the research side of what’s being proposed here and dealing with the testing and screening side of it. That’s what they do. They’re experts in that. That’s where their capacity is, and it’s not particularly the capacity of government. I mean, we fund those agencies, but they’re the experts at it. We turn to them to do that work. But they do not have the capacity for prevention. They can put out some good brochures or PowerPoints or web pages with some information, but if we’re really going to get at prevention and we’re really going to deal with social determinants of health, the capacity lies with the government.

4:10

I’m asking the government to recognize that and to pick up that piece of what we’re looking at here because that’s where the ball falls. To pretend that it’s nothing to do with them, this bill is not going to be successful. This idea will not live long enough to become a legacy to anyone and certainly not create any kind of legacy for Albertans.

We need to create healthier populations so that they can cope with what either genetics or the environment throws at them. We really are starting to get a pretty good idea of what causes cancer. If we can get well on the road to getting healthier populations so that they can better withstand this, whether it’s coming at them from a genetic basis or whether it’s coming at them from an environmental basis, we need to work towards that. Let me give you a couple of example of things that we could be doing.

Hot lunch programs for kids. We know that if we can set kids up to be successful by age six, their chance becomes equal with any other child in this province to be as successful as they want to be. If we don’t help them get to that point, then we know that they are much more likely to turn up using the resources of the police system, the criminal system, the corrections system, also the health system, social services, and a whole range of other costs that we share as taxpayers. But, frankly, we don’t need to be paying that money out if we could have prevented it in the first place. So it’s programs for kids. It’s things like hot lunch programs.

It’s things like safe, affordable housing. For that, I think the government could be taking more of a leadership role in working with its municipalities to make sure that we have safe, affordable housing, and that we’re also looking to the consumer protection side of things. This government was embroiled – and I think it was just settled recently – in the pine shakes debacle, which started just about the time that I got elected. The government is the only agency that really is capable of gathering the information and doing the unbiased testing and then being able to give that kind of consumer protection advice, and the pine shakes episode is a classic case on how not to do it. But I think we should learn the lessons from that.

When we talk about safe, affordable housing, I’m not only talking about the availability of it and that we try and help cities design neighbourhoods that work well together but also that we’re not recommending or promoting any particular kind of material being used. One of the things that we need to look at is the building materials that are used in houses. We know that many of them contain materials that are known to be carcinogens, but we still continue to promote them because they’re cheaper. But are they really cheaper? If we’re building houses that, when people live in

them, contribute to the likelihood – this is the environmental part of what I was talking about – of their getting cancer at some point, have we really saved ourselves money? I don't think so. I think we've cost ourselves money. This is part of what I'm talking about. You've got to really start to look at this in a holistic way, approach it with that kind of attitude.

Some of the other social determinants of health that we know are really important are access to education, things like wages. The city of Edmonton has committed with the assistance and inspiration, actually, of the Edmonton Community Foundation to a program working with low-income families – it's a study actually, a long-term study – to give families access to different levels of support and, particularly, access to recreation. Again, that's something else that I'm sure some of the colleagues in here would say: "Oh, that's a frill. You should be on your own for that. You should be paying for that yourself." But when we look at it in context, we know that if people start to build up that stress and they have no way of getting rid of it and they have no education that helps them understand that they need to work that out of their system, we do start to see it turn up as a contributing factor.

I think that we also want to look at curriculums in schools. You know, if we're going to be serious about this, let's approach the whole thing. If I may just give a very quick example. I was really impressed when I was in Austin a couple of years ago because they set out as a city to brand themselves as the music capital of North America. You'd go: "Oh, yeah. Ho hum. Big deal. It's a tourism tag line." But they took it seriously. They really went through everything in their city and said: what can we do to promote music and promote ourselves as the music capital of North America in this department, in that department, in the way we do this, that, or the next thing?

Here's some of the stuff they came up with. The music in their airport is not muzak. It is the CDs of local bands that are played through that system. So when you get off the plane and walk through that airport in Austin and you're hearing that music and you're going, "Oh, that's kind of cool" – you know what? – you're listening to local music. So right from the minute you walk into that city, you start to be a part of that atmosphere that they created, that they are a music capital.

In the city hall they have a stage set up and they have a band that comes in once a week – one of the local bands, new band, touring band, whatever – and plays for one set for the city council. It's a free concert, and anybody else can wander into city hall and hear it at the same time.

So they took that kind of integration seriously, and they looked at the traffic patterns and bussing people into the festival sites and how they could move people around to hear more music. They took that seriously and looked at everything. That's why it works, and that's why they were successful. They didn't just limit themselves to tourism brochures. They really took it seriously.

The last part I want to talk about is minimizing the health hazards. I've talked about prevention. I've talked about making people healthier, making you stronger so that as a population you get healthier. If we're going to make those changes, we're not being very successful with us. We're really having a hard time convincing people that are 40 and 50 and 60 that, you know, you've got to change your whole lifestyle; you've got to lose that weight; you've got to change the way you've been eating your whole life. We're not very successful at that.

What do we know works? We know that it works if you start with kids. So really we need to start with the kids now in order to have a change in our population 20 years from now. The curriculum is important, but it's also a range of other things that become really

important. If we want people to be healthy and, you know, think nothing about walking for 20 or 25 minutes to get to an event or something, you've got to start that stuff when they're kids. That's why I'm talking about the recreation part of stuff.

You've got to talk about nutrition and accessibility to good food. Frankly, if you've got a kid growing up in a neighbourhood where Safeway has locked down the only grocery store for 15 years and they can't get another grocery store there – all they get is the gas quick stop stores, you know, which only sell milk and pastries – how are the people that live there supposed to get access to good food? So there are a lot more parts to this than just saying: we're going to throw money into this, and they're going to screen and research, and it'll all be solved.

Back to minimizing the health hazards. I think we need to look at aggressive environmental standards and evidence-based environmental standards. If this government doesn't want to listen to me, then listen to your own friends, listen to the Canada West Foundation, listen to Preston Manning, listen to the TD Bank, who are all telling you that we have to be green. We've got to be conscious of what's in our environment and how we're handling environmental – I'm just going to call them toxins for want of a better word. My apologies if that offends anybody. I'm just trying to get a word that encapsulates that I'm talking about.

Let's look at some of the things that have already become issues in our province that we know put things into the atmosphere, the water, the food, the ground, that we eat, that we consume, that our animals consume, that get into our bodies, that cause us trouble and have links to cancer, things like sour gas flaring, things like coal-bed methane exploration and development, things like intensive livestock operations.

4:20

Thus far, what this government has done is to facilitate business improving all of that, and we've got to take another look at that and go: what are we really enabling here? Is there really a balance from the decisions that the government has made? Are we really going to come out ahead on this one? Not just a couple of smart entrepreneurs that have done a good job in lobbying the government and in running their business efficiently that come out on top, I mean all Albertans coming out on top. I would argue that if you've got a couple of successful entrepreneurs balanced against a high rate of a particular kind of cancer in a given neighbourhood, we haven't done this very well. We've allowed that set of scales to tip in favour, and all Albertans pay that price.

I think we need to look very carefully at really strengthening the citizens' ability to get at and present anecdotal material and support them with research when we're talking about things like applications to the EUB and the other environmental boards that make decisions about exploration that's being allowed in various sectors versus what can get into our water, our air, our ground, our animals, that kind of thing.

So just to close, Mr. Speaker, I think we have a huge opportunity here in Alberta. I encourage the government to proceed with this investment. I'd like to see this benefit Albertans and, further, benefit all Canadians and beyond to the world. I don't want to waste opportunities or to underutilize here. The government has a tendency, in my opinion, to start well and then not follow through, and I think it would be a real shame if we didn't follow through on this one.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to rise to speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I want to indicate how important I view the fight against cancer. It needs to be a priority for not just the government but for all aspects of society in Alberta, and I believe that the act is a good start towards doing that.

Alberta has a strong history in dealing with cancer, and the Alberta Cancer Board, in my view, is an outstanding organization that over a period of many years has made a real contribution to people who are living with cancer and towards eventually eliminating the scourge of cancer. As our population ages and increases in this province, Mr. Speaker, we're going to be faced with a dramatic increase in the number of persons living with cancer and, ultimately, the number of deaths that occur as a result of this terrible disease.

My wife worked for many years at the Cross Cancer Institute, Mr. Speaker, and during that time I had the opportunity to become somewhat familiar with some of the issues and some of the operations of the Cancer Board and of the Cross. I can't say how many people came to me and talked about the wonderful compassion and professionalism of the people that work at the Cross Cancer Institute, and I heard similar things about the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary. Those people have done a great deal to save lives, to do research, and to comfort and care for people in their last weeks of life. I can't say enough about the wonderful care and compassion that is provided by those people.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at a very substantial amount of money going into cancer facilities. As the population ages and as cancer rates rise, there's a need to care for those people, and that means major investments, including major investments in capital. But unless we take very clear and bold and forward-looking steps to deal with prevention and early detection of cancer, we may become overwhelmed by the financial costs of duplicating that investment not just once but many times. So the focus on prevention, in my view, is essential. It's obviously more than a money-saving exercise; it's an exercise in preventing people from getting sick and preventing people from dying premature deaths and all of the things that means for those people and their families.

So I think it's very much a good overall direction. I want to say, though, that I think that there are other things that need to be done, and the government is not being consistent in its stated aim of doing all it can to prevent cancer and to bring down the rates of cancer and ultimately even find a cure for some types of cancer in this province. The most obvious example, Mr. Speaker, is the lack of resolute action on smoking. I heard the Premier say today in his news availability that it's just a matter of some old guys that still smoke and they wouldn't be around forever and eventually we could move toward a totally smoke-free environment.

The fact remains, Mr. Speaker, that 30 per cent of cancers in Alberta are caused by smoking. If you allow smoking in bars, it doesn't matter if the people doing the smoking are old codgers or whatever it is that the Premier said about them; the fact is that the people who have to work in those places, often young people, are exposed to second-hand smoke and thereby exposed to the risk of contracting lung cancer or other serious diseases. The objective is not just focusing on getting smokers to quit, but it's to protect nonsmokers from exposure to second-hand smoke. I think that the government has not done all that it could in that respect, and it needs to have the political courage to go a step farther than it has so far.

The other area where I think we need to look very carefully at what we're doing is with respect to environmental risks for cancer. Particularly because Alberta is the centre of the petrochemical industry in Canada, it has a higher rate of exposure to many cancer-causing chemicals than you might find in other parts of the country.

One of the most common chemicals that arises out of the petrochemical industry is benzene. It's one of the most carcinogenic chemicals that is commonly found in the environment.

I don't think that we are doing enough to protect people from exposure to these kinds of chemicals in the environment. We have, in my view, an EUB that doesn't do enough, that doesn't take into account the legitimate concerns of people around exposure to the petrochemical industry. I would like to see Alberta have the most stringent regulations and the most rigorous enforcement of those standards of any province in the country when it comes to the petrochemical industry and its impact on the environment. We have far from that, Mr. Speaker. We know too well about the exposure to sour gas and to other pollutants in the environment that takes place as a result, and I think that the government needs to put its money where its mouth is with respect to regulation of dangerous chemicals that arise out of our petrochemical industry.

4:30

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about coal because that also represents environmental risks. The Premier is talking about building the economy on the basis of the development of coal. Whenever we raise the question of burning more coal, he says, well, that's old-fashioned thinking, that we're going to be getting into things like the gasification of coal and the using of coal as a primary source of chemicals that are needed to maintain and extend the chemical industry in this province.

That's fine, Mr. Speaker. Coal gas is a very old concept. It's basically a process of destructively distilling coal to produce carbon monoxide, and that's basically what coal gas is. That's fine if you want to replace the natural gas, which we are pumping out almost as fast as we can find it to the United States, with coal gas. That would be one thing, but the burning of coal in order to provide electricity exports to the United States is, in our view, unacceptable because there is no current use of real clean coal in this province.

Even if new coal plants were built with absolutely the latest technology, there would still be a risk to the environment and pollution that would be faced by Albertans and would certainly have a contribution to rates of illness in this province and death rates, as well, in order to provide energy exports to the United States, something that Albertans as a whole would not benefit from. People that own those coal plants would benefit a great deal, but it wouldn't be something that would be anything but harmful for most Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I think that if the government really wishes to follow through systematically on its stated goal of reducing cancer rates, it's going to have to do a whole lot more than just pass Bill 1. Bill 1 puts some significant money towards the issue on an ongoing basis. That's positive. But the goals that the government has stated for itself are, in our view, completely unachievable with the present regulatory regime in this province with respect to smoking, with respect to the petrochemical industry, and with respect to plans for future coal development. Unless those things are addressed by the government, the goals here remain just nothing but window dressing.

While we will be supporting Bill 1 and strongly supporting the stated goals of Bill 1, we remain very skeptical about the government's actual intention of meeting those goals. I would urge all members, including those opposite, to ask some pretty tough questions about the government as we go through this session and following it and through the budget. I think there are a great number of unanswered questions with respect to the government's capacity to meet the fine goals set out in this legislation.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak on the first bill, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I do think this bill is a very good piece that's come from this government, and I would wholeheartedly support that along with my opposition colleagues as well. It establishes, as it says, a \$500 million initial investment in the fund.

One of my first questions is: this is a great investment to start with, but how much further will it go? Where is the rest of the money going to be coming from later on to continue with this? We realize that cancer is not going to be a quick fix. It's been around for many, many years. It's just suddenly being recognized with our technology and our ability to diagnose it better. We've got to make sure that we're in this for the long run. This is something that's going to benefit generations to come, children born today as well as generations later on. If we're serious, we've got to make sure that we've got the leadership in place willing to stick with this for the long run.

We realize that cancer in some way, shape, or form has touched everyone, and I can say that for myself, that it's touched my family as well. My father-in-law passed away just a couple of years ago with pancreatic cancer, a terrible disease. You know, one day you go in for a routine biopsy, and all of a sudden you discover there's a shadow or something. It's unfortunate. Well, I would call it an autopsy, unfortunately, because it was just like a death wish there. Unfortunately, no cure for that one. He managed to survive another year, but you could see a man go down slowly, slowly from 200 pounds to maybe a hundred pounds. It was a terrible thing to have to go through. He hadn't even retired. This is a story that a lot of people have to talk about, unfortunately. You know what? People wait for their golden years to be able to start living, and they don't even make it there.

If we're serious about this, as some other members have stated, then I think we have to try and look for the root cause of this. Again, it's going to take millions. It's going to be into the billions of dollars, but this is a long-term investment that this province is committing to to ensure that we have a healthy, prosperous province for the next hundred years. It means slowly figuring out exactly what we are consuming. Is it through the agricultural products that we're eating? Is it in our food? Is it how we cook our food, with our Teflon, or is it with the aluminum? Is it the products that we spray, the pesticides, to keep our fields resistant? I don't know. Is it even in the water? This is something that I think needs to be thoroughly investigated. Again, this is going to be a long-term investment.

I'm not sure, in fact, if we're even going to have the infrastructure. As our population continues to grow, are we going to have the availability to be able to accommodate? It looks like it's an increasing population that have cancer. Are we going to be able to accommodate the need? Are we going to accommodate the workers? Are we going to have enough people in the professions? What are the specific prevention initiatives that they're planning to initiate? These are a number of questions. It's \$500 million, but I'm not sure specifically what the plans are. I'm giving my support to it, hoping that there will be specific plans that will be rolled out in the coming months and coming year. Other than the money, what other specific steps, as I said, is the government taking to bring in training and recruitment and retention of the health care specialists?

Somebody mentioned the fact that the people that work with the patients at the Cross Cancer Institute have a very, very tough job.

They go there knowing that they're working with people in palliative care and the terminally ill. I have to commend the people that are in those particular fields. They, in fact, have taken a calling that a lot of people I don't think could handle because you know that you're going to deal with people who are on their deathbed. Whether it be young or old, you've got to work with these people. Some of these workers get to know them on a personal basis, get to know their stories, knowing that they aren't going to be around for a whole long time. We do have success stories, though, that are coming out of that, but it's an awful treatment that a lot of these people have to go through, with the chemotherapy as well.

It was mentioned that if this government was serious about this, they would toughen up on smoking. We all know that smoking is a leading cause of cancer. The opportunity was before the Legislature just last year, and unfortunately this government took the easy way out and took the softer approach instead of showing true leadership and standing up to one of the root causes. We all talk about the burden on the health care system. Well, that is one specific burden. If they're serious about it, they would bring in tougher rules and regulations governing smoking.

I think I'll just conclude my remarks because I know that maybe the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark would like to speak as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

4:40

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, I want to rise and offer support to Bill 1 and to thank my government for this particular initiative. One of the things that I have noticed during my treatment is that cancer is a very democratic disease. Cancer can strike old and young, rich and poor. When I take my chemo treatments at the Cross Cancer clinic, it's absolutely amazing to me the vast spread of humanity that is there receiving treatments of different kinds, but of course the ones that I particularly see are the ones that are currently involved in chemotherapy. I see some getting better; I see some getting worse. Of course, our hearts go out to all cancer victims that are out there at the present time. I refuse to see myself as a cancer victim. I like to see myself as a cancer survivor, but I'm not there yet.

In many ways the writing of the bill and the providing of the dollars is enabling for the Alberta Cancer Board, and I think that is appropriate. When we look at the record that the Cancer Board has in terms of offering services to residents of Alberta and far beyond our borders, then I think that by any measure they have done a tremendous job and would deserve the support not only of members here in this House but right across Alberta. I realize that I'm getting fairly anecdotal in this particular speech, but it's current in my particular case.

Just to add another little bit of flavour to it, I happen to be part of a clinical study that is examining a new, aggressive treatment for the type of cancer that I happen to have. I want to say that when I was first diagnosed, it was really frightening to hear your name and cancer in the same sentence. I hope that no one else in this room is ever going to have to hear that, but I can't guarantee it. We know what the odds are. Probably over the intervening years, unfortunately, I won't be standing alone.

In any event, when I got home, like most people, I would think, I went onto the Internet as quickly as I could to try to understand what these terms were. Believe me, fellow colleagues, I'm learning more about this stuff than I ever, ever wanted to know and want to know. But I discovered on the Internet that for this particular myeloma Alberta kept popping up: Alberta, Alberta, Alberta. I found then that

there are doctors here in Alberta who are leading the way in the research on my particular cancer.

So I took the time to write a note of thank you to former Premier Lougheed because the funding for the particular clinical study – at least some of it and perhaps all of it, I'm not sure – is from the Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. Here was foresight, you know, 20, 21 years ago. I think it was set up in 1985, if I'm not mistaken, but that would be something that anybody could quickly look up. But I just sent a note of thank you for the foresight that people had in setting up this fund. There's no question that this fund has attracted top-notch researchers, top-notch practitioners to this province.

To remain in the anecdotal stage, I've actually had it said to me that I was lucky. I looked at him: yeah, lucky. He said: "No, no. Actually, you are. The odds were that you were going to get cancer anyway, and the fact that you have cancer, you've got a good cancer to get. It's incurable, but it's treatable." So that's what they're finding.

When I first started into this particular protocol, just to show you how quickly things can happen, at the time they said that we would be able to provide one stem cell transplant. The whole idea is to put it into remission and try to keep it there as long as you can, but it'll come back, and when it does, then we'd probably have to start looking for matches in terms of blood types to have the kind of transplant that is fairly normal and a proven protocol.

Well, that was October, and now the treatment seems to be changing to the point where when they harvest stem cells from me to provide, then, for the stem cell transplant that I'll go through, they're actually going to take enough because they believe now they can do it twice. This is more than just a doubling of the ability to provide treatment because, obviously, in the second transplant one would be older and, perhaps, maybe not as strong as one might be at the first time. The fact that you can get your own blood again and not have to fight off the body as it tries to reject something different that's coming into your body I think is a huge move, and it's happened just this quickly.

I hope that doctors that are involved in the current situation not only will read this act but will maybe read the *Hansard*, read the speeches, read the concern that other members have offered up, and read my little testimony. You know, if I'm wrong in any of the facts, then we need to get them straightened out. But what I'm revealing here today is my understanding of the situation. The reason for doing that above anything else, Mr. Speaker, is that I want to try to remove the fear that we might have in the diagnosis. There are tremendous – tremendous – changes that have happened. There are tremendous changes to come.

This kind of foresight on the part of this government and hopefully the support of all of the colleagues from all of the parties in the House is the kind of thing that people will want to remember Alberta for. Twenty years from now, 30 years from now, whenever it is, they'll look back. They won't remember who were the people particularly sitting in this House. They'll just remember that it was the Alberta government – and everyone in this room is part of that; we're part of the Alberta government – and that they had some foresight. They had some faith in the future to go ahead with this program.

Now, I look at the words of the purpose, and it's primarily in the prevention. Under section 2(b), which is, "support and encourage any other initiatives set out in the regulations," I hope there will be an opportunity to have a look at how the current set-up is organized throughout the province. There are small things that could be done in rural regions that would take tremendous pressure off some people that are suffering cancer like I am.

I happen to be lucky in the sense that I have a second residence here in Edmonton, so I can go to the Cross cancer clinic. I agree with everything that the hon. leader of the third party said about the Cross cancer clinic. I can't say enough about how well we are treated in that institution.

There are people in my part of the province that need radiation, and they have to drive to Calgary for radiation. Now, radiation is going to last five, 10 minutes. It's very quick, but they have to drive and find accommodation or drive every day, I guess, depending on the distance. For very little effort, very little resources, I think, in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, places like that, these little satellite operations could be set up with the help of this money. It would save the inconvenience, and I can tell you that when you are frightened, inconvenience is a major, major hurdle. I'm now starting to understand just how big the little things can be when you're in the kinds of situations that I find myself in.

I believe that I have an opportunity given my position in this House, given my experience now with this disease – I need to stand up, I need to talk frankly and honestly about this situation and encourage everyone to get behind these kinds of initiatives. [applause]

I forgot a duty. I've been asked – and I'm pleased to respond – to adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:50

Bill 2 Drug-endangered Children Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act.

Mr. Speaker, I've got two of my staff up in the gallery, who are watching eagerly, who have done an incredible amount of work on this piece of legislation. They are Lisa and Justin. I just want to acknowledge them.

Drug activity is increasing throughout our province, and this is frightening. Even more frightening is that innocent children are being caught in the middle. This is an emerging issue in Alberta, but unfortunately the United States has been dealing with this problem for many years. While I was researching this legislation, I visited the United States with Staff Sergeant Ian Sanderson of the RCMP K Division drug awareness service. We heard so many heart-wrenching stories about drug-endangered children, and I'd like to share one with you.

In Denver two days before Halloween the police were staking out a meth lab and preparing for a drug bust. While they were watching the house, they noticed a small boy dressed in a Halloween costume. He kept looking out the front window as if he was waiting for something. The police later learned that he was worried he would miss his bus to take him to a school Halloween party. He said that he wanted to be ready because his mom was already sleeping and she didn't remember things. Who knows how long he had been waiting. After he had been removed from the house, he had to be decontaminated and examined by a doctor. They even had to burn his Halloween costume because it became toxic.

This kind of life is all too common for too many kids. Research has found that 30 to 35 per cent of meth labs are located in places that children call home, and children were present in 21 per cent of indoor marijuana grow operations. Children who are exposed to such damaging physical and social environments face many dangers.

Their strollers are used as drug couriers. Their bedrooms are hiding places for drugs and chemicals. Their basements are filled with mould and carbon dioxide, and the air they breathe is loaded with toxic fumes. They are at high risk for chronic respiratory problems, neurological damage, and, Mr. Speaker, even cancer.

Putting a child at risk in this way is abuse and requires immediate intervention just like any other kind of abuse. Sadly enough, more than once a week we remove a child from an environment where drugs are being produced or being sold. But this isn't a straightforward or easy process. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act does a lot of great things in this province for children and families. It focuses on much-needed rehabilitation and on keeping families together. Unfortunately, some cases are so horrific, like children who are drug-endangered, that a different response is necessary. In addition, the enhancement act doesn't specifically identify who is a drug-endangered child or that such children are at an extreme risk and need intervention.

This means, Mr. Speaker, that if a child is found in a drug house, we can't automatically remove them from that home. This on its own is enough to warrant immediate intervention under the enhancement act. That's where Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act comes in. Bill 2 will allow us to take immediate action to effectively protect children exposed to serious drug-related activities.

This proposed legislation is a first in Canada. Bill 2 specifically defines who is a drug-endangered child and makes it clear that these children are victims of abuse and must be removed from that environment to ensure their safety. When passed, it will allow the police or a caseworker to apprehend a child if the child's life, health, or safety is in danger due to exposure to serious drug activity. If the child can't be returned home within two days, an application for future care and longer term services would be made under the enhancement act. It's another tool to help caseworkers and police rescue these children. Bill 2 clarifies and focuses the action that can be taken to protect children exposed to serious illegal drug activity such as manufacturing and trafficking. As a stand-alone piece of legislation it will be clear, concise, and not buried within a much larger piece of legislation. This means, Mr. Speaker, that it's more likely to be understood and used than an amendment to the enhancement act. It also ensures that Albertans know that any child exposed to drug manufacturing and trafficking is a victim of abuse.

We need this legislation to keep ahead of this emerging social issue. We can't stand by and watch these kids be abused. We have a responsibility to take action, and that is what this proposed legislation will do. I ask all members to support this very important piece of legislation. Your support will mean a safe and promising future for some of Alberta's most vulnerable children.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak today to Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act. When we look at a child, what do we see? It doesn't matter whether hers was a planned or accidental birth, whether he was born naturally or by Caesarean. It doesn't matter whether she is a fourth-generation Canadian or born to newcomers just off the plane. Blood type; skin, hair, and eye colour; and performance on an IQ test don't matter. Obviously, it doesn't matter if his parents are Liberal or Conservative, socialist or fascist because to a child these labels have no significance whatsoever. What does matter is that the child be loved, nurtured, protected whether in sickness or in health – the unconditional words of the traditional wedding service apply here – that she be encouraged, supported, and given every opportunity to face life confidently and to develop and share the unique gifts and strengths he or she brings.

It doesn't matter if these supports are provided by one full-time parent or by two who share the responsibility, by a sympathetic grandparent or by a caring nanny in a publicly funded or privately run daycare centre. What does matter is that there be standards and safeguards to ensure that children receive the love and care to which all are entitled. It may matter if a child is born on the wrong side of the tracks, as we used to say, to a parent on the street or in dire poverty or addiction or with a condition that requires special treatment. In these situations a just and caring society accepts that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, that we need to be there with the necessary supports for child and parents or to intervene if the parent is unaware of the condition or unable or unwilling to take the necessary measures for the child to receive the special help needed.

Abuse is like the definition of a verb that most of us learned in school: an action or a state of being. Abuse doesn't have to be something that's done to someone. It can be a condition in which they live. It can be something we leave undone. We who stand by without intervening or doing anything share the responsibility with those who commit the acts.

In this bill we are looking at this type of state of being: ongoing abusive situations. What makes a situation abusive is not simply that an illegal substance is being produced where children live. If we were to decriminalize crystal meth or replace it with another noncriminal substance being produced on the premises, it would still be harmful to children and, therefore, still be an abusive situation. What makes the situation abusive is not simply that the substance may be illegal or even that it may be toxic. Unfortunately, we have found over the past half-century that we have raised children in the presence of asbestos and other substances we didn't realize were toxic or carcinogenic at the time. We are still paying the price for our ignorance, including First Nation children without pure drinking water, yet we call this neglect and not abuse.

No, Mr. Speaker, the factor that makes these houses abusive is to be found when we look at the word itself: a-b-u-s-e, "ab" as in abrupt and abnormal in combination with "use." It is the using of children for something less than their own good that constitutes abuse. Using this criterion, we can see that there are many other situations that are abusive to children. There are, of course, the classic stories of children working in mines, mills and factories, and their modern equivalents, in sweat shops and Third World construction sites. These are the children who are sacrificed to violence in war-torn regions and, less dramatically, in other types of conflict.

5:00

Whenever children are pawns in a marital or political dispute, whenever they are used as bait in advertising or sales, whenever they are simply statistics to win capital funding for grand programs or paraded for a cause, however well-intentioned, it is an abusive situation.

Drug addiction represents a complex and troubling challenge in our society. There is no easy road to travel in seeking a solution to drug addiction. Still, we must continue to explore methods for deterring our youth from abusing drugs, thus reducing the harms.

Given the traumatic nature of any apprehension, I believe that it would be most beneficial to put these children in an environment that they are familiar with, so I reviewed the matters to be considered in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. It states:

If a child is in need of intervention, a Court, an Appeal Panel and all persons who exercise any authority or make any decision under this Act relating to the child must do so in the best interests of the child and must consider the following as well as any other relevant matter:

- (a) the family is the basic unit of society and its well-being should be supported and preserved;

- (b) the importance of stable, permanent and nurturing relationships for the child;
- (c) the intervention services needed by the child should be provided in a manner that ensures the least disruption to the child;
- (d) a child who is capable of forming an opinion is entitled to an opportunity to express that opinion on matters affecting the child, and the child's opinion should be considered by those making decisions that affect the child;
- (e) the family is responsible for the care, supervision and maintenance of its children and every child should have an opportunity to be a wanted and valued member of a family, and to that end
 - (i) if intervention services are necessary to assist the child's family in providing for the care of a child, those services should be provided to the family, insofar as it is reasonably practicable, in a manner that supports the family unit and prevents the need to remove the child from the family.

As I look at this bill and after my discussions with the hon. minister, I believe that the intention is that every effort will be made to work with the family unit. With that understanding I support the intent of this bill to be protective rather than punitive but at the same time strengthen the legal framework to hold parents responsible when they have put their child at risk through involvement in drug activities. This is another action to support the ongoing battle against addictions and illegal drug activity.

I thank the hon. Minister of Children's Services for bringing this forward, and I give my support.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to tell you from a personal standpoint that it really, really warms my heart to know that we have people inside this Chamber bringing forth bills like this one, Bill 2, and the one previous, Bill 1. I want to commend and thank our hon. colleague from Lethbridge-West for sharing something so dear to his heart, and now on Bill 2, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the fine Minister of Children's Services, for bringing forward something that I think is crucial if we are to continue to protect our children.

I know that the minister developed Bill 2 with great sincerity and dedication to helping drug-endangered children. The hon. member's commitment has helped to further a wider public debate on how to best meet the needs of young Albertans who suffer physical or physiological harm or neglect. These children may benefit from more intensive intervention such as Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act.

Mr. Speaker, I know that I'm not alone when I say that I share the public's and our colleagues' concerns about the harm and neglect our children are suffering because of exposure to illegal drugs, because of persons under the influence of illegal drugs, and because of exposure to dangerous environments where drugs are being manufactured or where chemicals used to make drugs are accessible. These children are indeed victims of abuse, and they need our protection.

Serving the needs of children in our province is certainly amongst the most important of our callings as government members, and responding to these problems involves more than just dealing with presenting medical and behavioural symptoms. It also requires attention to issues like housing, employment, child rearing, and the development of social supports. A comprehensive and collaborative approach focusing on preventing use, minimizing harm, treating dependency, and reducing the drug supply is required.

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission in collaboration with government partners and community groups has responded to the call from Albertans for government leadership in directing these efforts through the Alberta drug strategy.

This strategy lays the groundwork for a co-ordinated and community-based approach to alcohol and other drug issues in this province. The intent of the Alberta drug strategy is to complement efforts such as the Drug-endangered Children Act and guide further collaborative action in this province.

Bill 2 supports a commitment in the strategy to protect children exposed to illegal drugs and remove them from dangerous environments. The Alberta drug strategy increases opportunities for co-ordination and support at all levels and across all sectors. It enables better planning and use of resources and establishes a common frame of reference for action on alcohol and other drug issues.

Although these problems have a pervasive effect on health and well-being, they are amenable to intervention. Early intervention can break the cycle of drug abuse in the home, protecting children, and minimizing the risk of predisposition to drug use and criminal activity in the future.

Use of intervention protocols is one option. However, Albertans require access to the continuum of information, prevention, treatment, and harm reduction services that address critical stages in development and important life transitions and also provide a range of options for dealing with current problems.

With more than 50 years of experience in helping Albertans, AADAC plays a key role in supporting the objectives of health in this province. It provides leadership for the Alberta drug strategy in sustaining an effective response to alcohol and other drug issues, and in this capacity AADAC will continue to work with partners to address alcohol and other drug problems.

Maintaining a comprehensive service system in Alberta is a wise investment. Preventing and treating alcohol and other drug problems benefits individuals and their families, the province's health, education, and social service sectors, and the business community. Albertans will benefit from legal and regulatory responses to these problems that reduce exposure and access to substances by minors, reduce drug-related crime and violence, and reduce substance-related mortality and morbidity.

Mr. Speaker, a number of states have implemented the drug-endangered children protocol. This is meant to be an early intervention tool based on the principles of crime prevention. Police, social services, pediatric health practitioners, and dangerous goods responders all work together as a team to investigate when children are found in clandestine drug labs, marijuana grow ops, or other situations where children are victims of abuse, neglect, or contamination caused by drug activity. Use of this protocol and other options for intervening with drug-endangered children are currently being investigated.

In order to move forward and effectively address alcohol and other drug problems in Alberta, key stakeholders must commit to a collaborative approach. Reducing demand, reducing supply, and reducing harms associated with alcohol and other drug abuse are equally important. Actions must demonstrate shared ownership of problems and solutions, building on lessons learned from the work already under way in the province and across the country.

As chair of AADAC I support legislation and regulations that promote health and well-being and discourage illicit substance use. These measures should be sensitive to changing community needs and values and should not result in more harm to the individual or society than would occur from the actual use of illicit substances. The Drug-endangered Children Act provides us with an opportunity

to consider an additional avenue open to us to help children who are in harm's way. I am very pleased to support Bill 2 because its intent is to act in the best interest of young Albertans, and it's clearly evident.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, effectively responding to the protective needs of drug-endangered children is a priority for the province and is part of the government's commitment and approach to a healthy Alberta. It requires comprehensive, effective action, including the availability and a range of information, prevention, and treatment services. I urge all members to support Bill 2, and I would like to advise them that AADAC will continue to work with key stakeholders such as the Minister of Children's Services, the Solicitor General, and others in meeting the needs of children with respect to this bill.

Thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, are you rising to ask a question?

Dr. Pannu: Correct.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

Dr. Pannu: Perhaps I should have taken the opportunity to ask a question of the minister, but hopefully the member who just spoke can address some of these questions that I have, one or two.

We know that the incidence of exposure to these drugs that endanger children is increasing, perhaps, but is there any estimate of the number of children in Alberta who might come into this category of children endangered by drug exposure? That's one. AADAC might have some information on it and maybe not, but it would be I think significant for us to know how big the problem is and whether or not we have these numbers over a period of years so that we can know the trend of this problem that's there before us.

The bill clearly is intended to address this serious problem and protect children from this kind of danger. I think that in the House there would be many colleagues interested in knowing what the scope of the problem is.

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

Mr. Rodney: A very good question. Sadly, the answers are difficult to find, and when we find certain answers, they are difficult to trust, I might say, because of the clandestine nature of this situation. I'm happy to offer to the member the information that has been gathered after we close here today but in consultation with the ministers of Health, Children's Services, the Solicitor General, and Environment. Perhaps we can find out more when the minister closes debate as well.

The Acting Speaker: Unfortunately, Madam Minister, I cannot recognize you because recognizing you would close debate. However, the question has been put on the floor, and there's nothing stopping you from providing a written response.

Any other questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, if I could go back to the previous debate, I'd just like to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for sharing his experiences with cancer. I think it's important to put a human face on these debates from time to time, and I appreciate what he had to say. On behalf of everyone on our side of the House I wish you all the best, and I hope you'll be here for a nice long time.

On to Bill 2. We're very supportive of this legislation. Sometimes you have to take extraordinary measures to protect children, particularly when the parents aren't doing it. Predominantly, this is a very good piece of legislation. I have a few problems with some of the wording in it, particularly when we're talking about the definition of children who are endangered. A child whose guardian possesses a chemical with the intent of manufacturing an illegal drug: I think what we need here is perhaps a definition of what these chemicals are. I don't know that much about the production of drugs, never having done it. I assume that it's probably straightforward as to what they are, but I think we really do need to lay out in the rules exactly what we're looking at here so that there's no confusion about, you know, what constitutes the chemicals used for illegal drugs.

We also have a child whose guardian exposes him to a cannabis grow operation. Again, we have the question of what actually is a cannabis grow operation. Is that five plants in the basement of a house? Does that constitute a grow operation? Now, obviously, if the house is filled with plants, that's a grow operation. But we could get to the point where we're wondering, you know, if somebody maybe has a vendetta and says: "Oh, they've got five plants in their house. You've got to remove the child from that house." This is an important question here because we really have to narrow down these things. Everyone seems to know what a grow op is in their head, but we really need specifics on it, I believe.

We also have the provision for a child who has been or is likely to be physically, emotionally, or sexually abused due to its guardian's illegal drug activity. I don't know how you're going to prove that. This is another question. Perhaps, again, it may be obvious, but on the other hand, you know, I think we really have to sort of narrow these things down a little bit before we take the drastic step of removing a child from their home.

So for the most part I think this is a fine piece of legislation, and we support it. I commend the minister for bringing this forward. I think you'll find a lot of support on this side of the House, but I really would like these I think quite important matters to be addressed.

At this point I'd like to adjourn debate on this issue.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it has been yet another very fast-paced week of debate. That having been noted, I would move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until Monday at 1:30.

[Motion carried; at 5:16 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, March 6, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/06

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Hon. members and to our guests here today, would you please join in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Would you kindly participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Dr. Musaed Al-Haroun, the ambassador of Kuwait to Canada. His Excellency is accompanied by the Kuwaiti ambassador's third secretary, Mr. Al-Kulaib. The ambassador is on his first official visit to Alberta. His Excellency has had a very busy schedule with courtesy calls on the hon. Premier and my cabinet colleagues and the MLA for Calgary-East.

Alberta's exports to Kuwait reached over \$40 million in 2005, consisting mostly of oil and gas machinery and agricultural products. There has been increasing contact between Alberta and Kuwait. This summer Kuwaiti oil companies will meet with their Alberta counterparts at energy conferences in Houston and Calgary. In the meantime, I'd ask our honoured visitors, who are seated in your gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce Shanly Donahue. Shanly and her husband, Jack Donahue, are close friends to Colleen and me and, of course, are close to many members of the government caucus. Shanly is a proud Albertan and active in her community, and I'm honoured to have her join us today. She's seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that the Assembly please join me in giving her the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 26 enthusiastic grade 6 students along with their teachers Ms Nancy Ellestad and assistant Maria Flammia and parent helpers Donna McLean and Colleen Smith. They are from the Archbishop Joseph MacNeil school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today to observe and learn with keen interest about our government, although I understood from the question time I had with them earlier day that they've learned about government very thoroughly both from their teachers and through the tour that they had today at the Legislature. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled two residents of Strathcona constituency who are seated in your gallery. They are Frank and Adele Peters, who are the proud parents of page Robyn Peters, who is a student at Ardrossan junior/senior high school. I'd ask Mr. and Mrs. Peters to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Carter Snethun, who is seven years old and just yesterday received the Great Kids award. Carter is accompanied today by his parents, his grandparents, and his sister. When Carter heard about a family in need, he decided to do something about it. The family was staying in Edmonton to be by their baby, who had just received life-saving open-heart surgery. The family needed \$1,000 to make a trip home for Christmas. Carter sold his and his sister's artwork to raise the funds and in three weeks raised over \$3,500. Carter isn't big in stature, but he's big in the hearts of all Albertans. They are seated today in the members' gallery. I would ask that Carter and his family stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce some incredibly talented and hard-working individuals who are here in recognition of National Social Work Week, from March 5 to 11. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature social workers from the Ministry of Children's Services. My guests are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and it's my honour to introduce Brenda Mazurek, Edward Garrick, Denine Kalita, Judy Pearce, Morris Chaban, Fran Champagne, Janice Adamson, Debbie Osbaldeston, Clay Golden, Cathie Aquirre, Dinah Weeks, Rod Adachi, and Guy Quenneville. Also supporting Social Worker Week is Gord Johnston, the CEO for the Edmonton and area child and family services authority. I'll ask my guests to stand and receive the warm welcome.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 26 of the best and brightest grade 6 students in Alberta. They're from Meadowlark elementary school. They are

accompanied by their teacher, Ms Moreau, and two parent helpers, Mrs. Kaliel and Ms Mack. They're here for a week in the School at the Legislature program, which, I must say, is an outstanding program. They're in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm reception of all MLAs.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a friend and assistant, Marj Carroll. Marj is an assistant in the Edmonton-Mill Woods constituency office. I'd like to ask her to stand, and I'd like to ask all members of the Assembly to give her our warm traditional welcome.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a huge group, 70 students from Meyonohk elementary school in my riding accompanied by their teachers Mr. David Fairfield and Mr. Victor Wang and parents Mrs. Chan, Mrs. Hai, and Mr. Chan. This is a Chinese/English bilingual school program established over 20 years ago. They are all sitting in both the public and members' galleries. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I request them to please rise and receive a warm and traditional welcome.

1:40

Now it's my second group introduction. Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise again to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Aman Khanna, visiting from England, U.K. He is here to check out the Alberta health care system. I want to thank him for coming to the Legislature. He is sitting in the public gallery with my son, Ricky Agnihotri. He has a master's in public health. I request both of them to please rise and receive a warm and traditional welcome.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Sharla Ozeroff, my constituency assistant in St. Albert, who is well known in northern Alberta as one of the best hockey referees we have. Would you please rise? Welcome to the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a young lady who is the newest member of the Official Opposition staff. Her name is Kelly FitzGibbon. She is seated in the public gallery. She is joining us to perform admin support duties. I would ask Kelly to please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce someone who is well known to members of this Assembly, but I want to introduce him today in his capacity

as vice-chair of the board of governors of the University of Alberta and head of their strategic planning. Mr. Brian Heidecker is with us in the members' gallery. I can say to the House that we've relied on Brian to head up a committee for us in terms of the access to the future fund and help us design a report around how we put the regulations in place. He has done strategic planning with the University of Alberta and, generally, has helped to advance education in Alberta. I'd like members to give him a warm welcome.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Reform

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last 13 years at least 10 different deputy ministers have presided over a health department so dysfunctional that after commissioning over 20 different reports, symposiums, summits, frameworks, plans, and initiatives, they still appear to be stopped at step 1. These reports include in 2006 the health policy framework; in 2005 the health reform implementation; in 2000 We Are Listening, Here's What We've Heard; and on and on and on. My questions are to the Premier. How many tens of millions of dollars has your government spent producing these numerous reports, symposiums, summits, frameworks, plans, and initiatives going all the way back to 1993?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: after spending 13 years and millions, probably tens of millions of dollars on these reports and plans and initiatives, why does the most recent one have as action 1, "Put an overall health policy in place"? Surely, after 20 reports there's a health policy for this province.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, much of the health policy has been implemented. Some has yet to be implemented. What we see in the policy is a proposal that is now under public consultation, and we will take the public's feedback into account, as we will the Liberal opposition's feedback and the NDs' feedback and the Alliance's.

I'm glad to see that our proposed reforms have sparked what I think is a needed debate about health care in Canada. I see that the federal Minister of Health was speaking about our proposed reforms on CTV and agrees that this kind of debate is good. I also see that the Montreal Economic Institute has waded into the debate and has said that there is absolutely nothing illegal about opting in and opting out. That remains to be seen. But the federal Liberal candidate for the leadership, Mr. Martin Cauchon, was quoted last week as saying: "The nature of democracy is to allow discussion and debate. To reject the simple idea of exploring alternatives is unhealthy for the future of health care in this country." That comes from a Liberal.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If open debate is a healthy thing, why did the Premier dismiss our policy last week as "crap"?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I won't use that word again. I apologized. If he is not man enough to accept an apology, then he doesn't deserve to be sitting there.

The Speaker: There is a tradition in the House that once a matter is dealt with, it is dealt with, so it's probably not good language to repeat.

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

Cost of Health Care Reform

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Electricity deregulation, one of the most expensive and unpopular public policies in Alberta's history, was forced through by this government on the misguided claims of lower cost, more choice, and better service. I was at an REA meeting recently where delegates spoke about electricity deregulation costing Alberta a staggering \$15 billion. Now this government is preparing to force through health reforms with the same phony arguments of lower cost, more choice, and better service. It amounts to health care deregulation. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the Premier has already admitted that the proposed health care reforms will cost patients more, how much is he planning to shift onto the backs of individual Albertans?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I haven't made that admission. I've said that we will consult with the public, and if the Liberals or the NDs have a better idea, send them over. I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness speak to the proposals in the red book because many of those, as the minister will elaborate, have been carried out already, and they are a key to achieving sustainable health care.

Relative to electricity, Mr. Speaker – it was included in the preamble, so I think I can speak to it – first of all, the retail side of electricity has not been regulated. People have the choice of staying on the regulated rate. As a matter of fact, if the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition listens to the Enmax commercial, the Enmax commercial clearly says: we will offer a rate competitive with or under – I'm paraphrasing now, and I don't know exactly what it says – the government regulated rate. The only thing that has been deregulated is the production of energy.

Dr. Taft: Again to the Premier: given that even basic service from a private clinic in Calgary was going to cost \$300 per month out of pocket per patient, is the Premier happy to support a policy that could easily cost Albertans another car payment a month?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, this is all part of the healthy debate that ought to take place, and certainly inside or outside the Legislature the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has ample opportunity to provide his insights.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that electricity deregulation led to soaring costs, worse service, and dismal choice, why should Albertans have any confidence in this government's health policies, which amount to health care deregulation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as I explained before relative to the deregulation of electricity, the only thing that was deregulated was the production of electricity, not the retail of electricity. People can still secure electricity through the regulated rate and can for some time, as I understand it. Indeed, the hon. member should listen to the Enmax ad, but if he hasn't, I'll send it to him.

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

Hospital Capacity

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 8 a.m. on March 1, 2006, there were 81 people in the Capital region emergency rooms waiting for a bed, but none were available. We've heard from the ER physicians that the situation is in crisis and not just, and I quote, horrible, as is normal, end quote. Currently hospitals are often forced to cancel elective surgeries because there are no beds to put the patients in afterwards. My questions are to the minister of health. Why don't these hospitals have the staff and resources to function properly?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, traditionally this season, the flu season, always sees an extra burden on health care delivery systems. The work that's being done by the Capital health authority and Calgary health authority is very aggressive in trying to find alternative strategies: moving day surgeries to other locations, finding ways to work with the people that are delivering patients by ambulance in this city, working on a different protocol so that we efficiently use staffing, both from the city ambulance delivery as well as providing some other options. It is regrettable when we need extra space for patients, but I can assure this Assembly that everything possible is being done to accommodate those patients.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Again to the same minister: what concrete steps has this minister taken since December to improve this situation? Flu season happens every year; you should have been expecting it. This has been a day-to-day crisis.

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that Albertans want us to find solutions in a collaborative way. Each health region is working to do just that, not only with partners in other health regions.

If one is going to talk about how we have provided for health care in Alberta, let's look at the success rates in health care. In Canada there's probably no other place that people would be able to get such quick and responsive service. The \$1.4 billion in capital planning that was added this past year for new spaces will help address a lot of the problems. The bed reclamation project and other new projects have been announced.

Mr. Speaker, over and above that, the primary care networks, which are a community-based response facility, in this region have increased. In total now we have 11 primary care networks to help take off some of the pressures of the burden of the people that arrive sick.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My last question, again to the same minister: will the minister assure Albertans that the new hospitals that are being built or expanded will have the resources to function?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, with the best that we know today, they will have the resources to function. Today we are looking at an expansion of the role of hospitals, looking at the expanded use of community-based facilities for health care. If you look, for example, at some of the facilities we're building – and I'll address one right now, the Calgary Children's hospital, which some have apparently criticized as not being big enough. The expansion of the outpatient there is going to increase the capacity by 60 per cent at that facility. Three other spaces in three other hospitals look after other children's issues.

Mr. Speaker, children don't want to be in hospital, and the acuity level for those that will be in hospital will be higher than ever before. We're working very hard to allow children to heal and recuperate in their own homes, where they're likely to heal better in a loving atmosphere.

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

Health Care Reform Consultation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, today I sent the Premier a letter calling for real, meaningful, and transparent public hearings on the government's proposal for two-tier, private medicine in Alberta. The government has hurriedly announced that previously closed-door SPC meetings dealing with health care would be opened up in an attempt to show that the government was actually listening. It shows, on the contrary, that the government's public-input process is ad hoc and excludes the public from being heard. My first question is for the Premier. Will the Premier support the NDP opposition's proposal to establish an all-party Legislature committee, which will hold public hearings around the province on the government's proposals, before introducing legislation that will inevitably lead to two-tier, private health care in this province?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's an assumption to say that legislation will be introduced that will lead to two-tier health care. I would remind the hon. leader of the third party opposition that the so-called third way is a way to achieve sustainability in health care without resorting to what the hon. member describes as that awful, evil, two-tiered, American-style system or the Canadian way, which is not sustainable. ND Premiers, Liberal Premiers, Conservative Premiers, and the federal minister all agree that health care as we know it today in Canada is not sustainable.

Relative to the consultation process and the way it's being carried out, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

The Speaker: Perhaps the next question.
The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is the Artful Dodger when it comes to answering real questions.

My question to him is: will this government commit to full public hearings around the province with a legislative committee made up of all parties in this House before he introduces two-tier health care?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. leader of the third party is the Artful Dodger when it comes to asking a question because he always ties in what he alludes to as that evil, American-style, two-tiered health care system. We're talking about a third way. That's what the international symposium was all about, to find out what is happening in other countries.

You know, I had a visit today with the ambassador to Canada from Kuwait, one of the richest countries in the world, where they have a parallel system of delivering health care.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the public consultation process, again, I'll have the hon. minister reply.

The Speaker: We may get to it.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has found a new way to avoid answering questions.

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

The Speaker: Now, just a second, please. I try and administer a basic time factor in here, about 35, 40 seconds. That has now been evaporated. Then I with a great deal of politeness recognized the leader of the third party. The leader of the third party needs to be reminded that he cannot have a preamble. He can't have it both ways.

Proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that most excellent admonishment, Mr. Speaker.

Health Care Reform Consultation (continued)

Mr. Mason: I'm going to ask the minister the question. Will she agree to hold public hearings with an all-party committee around the province so that the people can speak directly to their representatives and they don't have to come up to Edmonton and go to an SPC meeting?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think it's quite evident that they don't have to come up to Edmonton and speak to their minister or their MLA. I'm going this . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Saturday I'm in St. Paul and in Bonnyville. I'm listening to the groups that are coming there. I have been doing my best to register the groups that want to come forward, individuals as well.

Mr. Speaker, it is worthy of note that although the Alliance Party has asked for an opportunity to provide their comments, I have heard from none of the other opposition parties.

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

2:00 Health Policy Framework

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents want assurance that the government and the Minister of Health and Wellness are considering all new ideas from all sources. Now, we understand that the Liberal opposition has their red book with some ideas for health care reform. Have the minister and her department evaluated those red book ideas?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has been recognized.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very hard to speak over the noise here, and I don't want to speak over the noise. If that would diminish, I would speak.

The Speaker: That's better.
The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the ideas contained in the Liberal paper have been reviewed. They were reviewed in 2003 and in 2004. A communication from my predecessor to the hon. Leader of the Opposition took place talking about the Creating a

Healthy Future document. At that time there were 24 health care ideas in the paper. It appears that eliminating premiums has been dropped from this latest version, but we will accept all ideas and evaluate them accordingly. We'll provide response to them, and I will be prepared to table that later today.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, if there are no new ideas in the Liberal red book and constituents are asking for new ideas, will the Minister of Health and Wellness describe the new ideas in the health policy framework released by the government last week?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, many of the ideas that we have been tabling, both in the document Getting on with Better Health Care last summer, in July, plus the policy handbook, talk about putting patients first and work towards keying in on accessibility and sustainability in a nutshell. There are many ideas in the opposition document that have been provided that have been also works in progress, including the wellness funds that we have given to regional health authorities, the extra work that we have been providing along with dollars for children's mental health services, and the pharmacare program that we have been working on extensively.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, would the minister explain to members assembled and all Albertans who are watching question period in their living rooms this afternoon where they can get copies of the health care policies and how they can have input in the most effective way?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, they can go to the library, they can get it from their MLA, they can go to www.yourhealth.gov.ab.ca, and they can also call 310-4455. We have produced some 6,000 reports over this weekend, and we are distributing them as rapidly as we possibly can.

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

Health Care Funding

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, no matter how you cut it and leaving aside the fact that eliminating health care premiums is now in our fiscal policy, you can't get away from the fact that the hospital system needs more beds, more doctors, and more nurses. The government has committed to funding the Calgary health region's capital expansion plans through to 2010 so that the region has enough beds eventually, but to actually open those beds to patients will take approximately 25 per cent more operating funds over the next four years. To the minister of health: how much operating funding is the minister prepared to provide to address Calgary's acute need for acute care expansion?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that is a question of budget. I believe that at the appropriate time the Minister of Finance will table the budget, and we will speak to that accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain this government's reluctance to commit to sustainable funding certainty for this or any other organization that relies on it for the money to keep our citizens healthy?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, when I start thinking about

what's going to be available for my children and my children's children, it keeps me awake at night. Today we are spending almost a billion dollars more every year in health care. We've doubled in the last five years the amount of money we're spending. We have spent a considerable amount of money both on capital and operating, and it's simply not sustainable. Why are we worried about this spending? Well, Water for Life, supports for moms that are single with children and don't have work, all the kinds of things that affect the social determinants of health. If we had the money that we're putting in to treat people, looking after people who are most vulnerable, we would do a lot better. I think that we are doing our very best to spend our resources wisely.

One other item I'll mention: there's no place else in Canada that spends so much money on health care as we do in Alberta.

Mr. Taylor: To the same minister in an effort to bring some focus back to the issue at hand: should the people of Alberta take this government's refusal to commit to sustainable long-term funding as a sign that the government has concluded that it's not going to be the government after the next election?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think there's no real response to that question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development announced the management decision to suspend the grizzly bear hunt while a DNA census of the involved grizzly bear population is completed through the province. Why didn't the minister just name the grizzly bear a threatened species?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The preservation of the grizzly bear is more than just coming up with a single number, it's more than just an annual hunt decision, and it's more than just looking at any single aspect of grizzly bear management. We're committed to having proactive management of a sustainable grizzly bear population. We do that whether the species is designated as threatened or not. It's important, for sure, that we have good, solid information when we make those kinds of determinations, but we don't need that designation to do the proper management when species are threatened.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, we should be talking about sustainability, proper management, and monitoring to make sure that the species is sustainable for the future. Even though I did suspend the hunt for a few years, I'm planning on keeping grizzlies on the landscape and definitely on people's minds. We're increasing our education as well as increasing the information that goes to our BearSmart program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. How is it possible to manage a wildlife species if you don't have the complete information about the grizzly bear population?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. In Alberta we manage a wide range of species, and where we don't have estimates, we have very good systems to make sure that we monitor the trends that are on the landscape. How do we manage grizzlies without the numbers? Well, we've already established a recovery team. We've changed our management regime over the years. We use DNA work to make sure that those estimated populations are within range. We dedicate extensive manpower and resources in planning and research for the species. We've put 1.3 million additional dollars into management and into research, and there's more on-the-ground work than there's ever been in grizzly bear management.

What amazes me, Mr. Speaker, is to hear people say that suspending the hunt is the first step in conserving bears. Well, the regulated hunt is only one part – one part – and it's only one of the tools that we've ever used in the extensive management of grizzly bears.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. What is the government doing to address the concerns of ranchers, farmers, and communities about grizzly bear safety?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very important question. I don't underestimate the concerns of the ranchers or the people that live on the eastern slopes when their livestock, which is their livelihood, has been threatened, and I don't underestimate the public safety component of grizzly bear management.

2:10

I'm increasing the public safety efforts through our BearSmart program, as I had mentioned, and that will include an educational component for all of rural Alberta. We will be stepping up our bear aversion programs with farmers and ranchers, who need to know that monitoring of all sightings of grizzly bears is the responsible thing to do in risky situations. At the same time we'll continue with the spring program to fly food sources into the backcountry so that grizzly bears do not come down to eat the livestock that is so important to our farming and ranching community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ministerial briefing documents from October of 2004 advise the human resources minister that the division 8 declaration for the Horizon project could be seen as, I quote: a misuse of an otherwise legitimate labour code provision in order to avoid unions affiliated with the building trades and that "critics will try to politicize issue during the expected election campaign." My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why did this government approve a division 8 application for the CNRL Horizon project before the 2004 provincial election and delay the announcement until days after that election was over?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. It gives me an opportunity to clear up the issue. A legal challenge, which will be heard in May, has been filed with the courts, as the member knows. You know, it is related to the major

project status that was granted to CNRL for the Horizon oil sands project.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware and as the member should know, because the matter is going to be heard in court, it would be inappropriate for me to in fact make a comment on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

Mr. Backs: Yes.

The Speaker: I've recognized you for a question.

Mr. Backs: Point of order on the answer. It wasn't answered because of sub judice. He didn't answer the question.

The Speaker: You've been recognized for the question, sir.

Mr. Backs: The point of order, Mr. Speaker, is . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. It is at the conclusion of the Routine that we deal with points of order. I will recognize you at the conclusion of the Routine for the point of order, but right now I've recognized you for your second question.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the minister of human resources: is the Department of Human Resources and Employment considering at this time any other division 8 applications, and if so, to what sites do they apply?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of any applications.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister: why did this government choose to so quickly and quietly approve the division 8 declaration when it clearly favoured the use of the CLAC convenience union and also favours the use of temporary foreign workers in that document?

Mr. Cardinal: Again, Mr. Speaker, the same answer. Because the issue is before the courts already and will be heard in the very near future, I can't make any comments on it.

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

Agricultural Assistance

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both the federal government and the provincial government have provided short-term relief to the grain and oilseed sectors of the ag industry. I know that it's encouraging news, but I really haven't talked to too many producers who have received many federal cheques recently. But they have indicated that they really would like to see some substantive changes to crop insurance programs. My question is to our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Would the minister pursue with our new federal ag minister the possibility of developing a farm income insurance program, one that would vastly simplify our current crop insurance program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have already begun working very closely with our new federal minister of agriculture, and I can say that my impression is that he's very committed to working to improve our business risk management programs as a package. We want to make them more bankable. We want to make them more responsive and predictable and simple. Indeed, we also perhaps want to add some regional flexibility into the package overall, and we're talking to him about that.

Really, production insurance has been one of the most stable tools producers have had to use over the last 40 years and has been a program that has stayed with us over those 40 years, where many other programs that we've tried to dabble in have kind of come and gone. What producers do need is stability, and we are committed to working to achieve that stability and improving those programs. Should that mean a change to the crop insurance programs as we know them today, we are open to those discussions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first supplementary to the same minister: is it possible, in your mind, to establish a revised program based on a selected income level by the producer that's still shared in cost by all the present or current participants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the CAIS program as we know it now is more or less a margin insurance program. When you couple that with our production insurance, it does allow for that flexibility. Coverage under both programs is related to the productive capabilities of the farming operation. Indeed, CAIS is related to the economic operation of that business.

The real question that I think we need to explore is: can we make these programs better? Can we make them bankable? Can we make them more of a program tool for producers? I think the answer to that questions is yes. In the short term and in the meantime we need to recognize that our producers, especially in the grains and oilseeds sector, are hurting. To that end, today we'll be announcing that we will be reducing the cost of production insurance by some 20 per cent for producers. That is good news to producers in the grains and oilseeds sector. That will be coming out today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Minister. It is good news.

I would ask if any financial lending institutions have indicated to you that they would prefer to have a client who has a relevant income program or return on investment type of income program available as opposed to crop insurance?

Mr. Horner: Well, that's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. To that end, in addition to the grains and oilseeds recovery strategy, which we announced some weeks ago, we're working on, as I mentioned earlier, the bankability of these programs. We will be meeting with financial institutions over the course of the next weeks and months to talk about the changes that we're making to both crop insurance and CAIS, to the ag policy framework discussions that we're having with the federal government and our other colleagues around the country, and we are committed to working as a group to ensure that the financial sector understands our programs and can use them as bankable programs of business risk management for our producers. Whether that means that it would be an investment vehicle or an income vehicle we'll leave to those discussions.

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

Water Quality at Ellerslie Elementary School

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last November the Education minister assured this House that he would investigate the drinking water situation at Ellerslie school in my riding. In fact, he stated that he would investigate the situation and get some action moving. Well, four months have already passed, and students are still relying on a water truck for drinking water, as they have for decades. My questions are for the Minister of Education. Why is the minister continuing to allow some Alberta children to have to wait for water in their schools?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, I did act on that issue. I had my officials contact the school board, and I talked to some of the school board officials myself, and I understood that the situation was being looked at or at least looked after. However, I also understand that in some subsequent follow-up to that intervention that I made, which I think the member for bringing to my attention incidentally, there was an issue to do with something about the boundary, exactly where the school is located. I can't recall offhand, Mr. Speaker, if it was an issue of a municipal boundary or a school boundary or something else, but there was some issue like that that came into play and, unfortunately, prevented the speedy resolution of it. But if it hasn't yet been resolved or looked after, then we can certainly have it revisited, hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Agnihotri: It isn't the boundary.

A question to the Minister of Education: does the minister believe that students should rely on trucked water in what he calls the best school system in the world?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have the best school system in Canada and one of the best in the world; that's true. However, we have a number of partners who help in the delivery of that, and municipalities are one of them, so we'll have a look at this again, hon. member, just to make sure that it is being tracked and followed. Perhaps within a few days I would hope that we can get an update. But what surprises me is that the hon. member hasn't called the school board directly to find out because that's where I'm going to call, and he'd certainly be welcome to do the same.

Mr. Agnihotri: When will the students at Ellerslie school have reliable hot and cold running tap water like the homes in the new development across the road from that school? Are the property developers in that area a higher priority than our schoolchildren?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, you know, if in fact four months have gone by since this issue was first raised, I'm surprised that the hon. member has waited this long to actually do something about it. It's in his constituency, and he'd be welcome to do something about it. However, given that he's chosen not to do anything about it, then I'll direct my officials to follow it up yet again, and we'll do whatever we can to help ameliorate the situation.

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

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, fools rush in, and unfortunately Albertans must learn to duck for cover. In the mad rush to develop the coal-bed methane industry here in this province, the

Alberta government has approved thousands of wells before a proper regulatory framework to safeguard public safety and the environment is in place. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Considering all the trouble that's gone on in these past weeks and months, could the minister please commit now to a moratorium on coal-bed methane drilling until after a proper inventory of groundwater has been completed in the affected areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I'd like to mention that there is a tremendous, strong, rigorous regulatory environment in place to ensure that Albertans are protected, that their water is protected. We're continuing to improve upon that platform. In fact, I'd like to have the Minister of Environment supplement some of the work that they do on Water for Life.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, on the important question, the Water for Life strategy is a long-term strategy that talks geologically about mapping, that talks about inventory. It talks about a long-term strategy of getting a baseline of information. To all Albertans: I want to assure them that that is exactly what this government is doing.

Mr. Eggen: To the same minister: would the minister not admit that the bargain basement royalty reductions that he has offered energy companies have in fact contributed to the headlong rush to drill CBM wells without proper consideration for the environment and for the rights of residences?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we have a very good regulatory environment in place. We also have a very good and fair royalty structure in place. It has to balance the risk. It also comes in as part of the royalty. As for fair share, I'd like to compliment the industry on the \$3.4 billion that they've reinvested back into the lands and for the future development of that resource. The coal-bed methane is a huge opportunity for Albertans. Albertans have benefited substantially in the royalties of that. Almost 14 and a half billion dollars of revenue have come to Albertans directly. In addition, we could go into the income tax. But Albertans have benefited tremendously by this resource. It is being done responsibly and safely.

Mr. Eggen: To the same minister, please: to what degree is this so-called urgent need to exploit CBM in fact a direct result of the mismanagement of our conventional natural gas supplies here in Alberta?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, this industry actually is one of the most responsible of any of the industries. They take the environmental issues as well as the landowner issues. Clearly, with the volume of activity there are always some challenges to be met, but they are trying to be proactive, ensuring that they do address everything from the surface issues to the landowners to the environmental to the water to the air quality. Substantive improvements in technology likewise continue to ensure that we have the safe air, the safe water, that those things are protected, that we can also receive the tremendous benefit from those minerals that are there.

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

Access to Education by Nonresident Students

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was amazed to hear that a 17-year-old student who recently moved from Lethbridge to Calgary is being prevented from enrolling in the Calgary public school system because her parents live in Lethbridge. It seems rather strange that at a time when our province is increasing its emphasis on students completing high school, we see examples of the reverse occurring in the system and access, in fact, being denied. My first question to the Minister of Education: does the fact that parents pay property and education taxes in one city preclude their child from enrolling in a school jurisdiction outside their own community?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, obviously high school completion is extremely important, but I don't recall there being anything specifically in the School Act that would prevent or preclude the situation that the hon. member is asking. In fact, I don't think there's anything in the School Act that specifically ties the issue of accessing an education directly to the payment of school or property taxes. Now, that having been said, the simple fact is that the funding doesn't follow the student in the way that the situation might otherwise dictate it should in this particular case.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister is: what options do exist for a student who is caught in exactly this kind of situation?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the options if the child or if the young adult is over 16 but under 18 would be to see if that person can be qualified as an independent student. Automatically when a student turns 18, according to the School Act, they can be deemed to be independent. There could be circumstances that one could construe as options in the 16- and 17-year-old age range, which I believe is what the member said describes the student in question.

Now, the locally elected school board – and in this case I think he's cited the Calgary public board of education – would have some locally developed policies that would further flesh out what constitutes being an independent student at age 16 or 17. It could include factors such as whether the student is married or is cohabiting or is paying rent or has some other means of private dwelling, so it'll depend on the individual circumstances as to what the options might be.

Mr. Magnus: Given that this student has been denied access, Mr. Minister, what exactly are you going to do to get this student back into school?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I did immediately after being called by the press yesterday on this issue was that I directed one of my Education officials to get in touch with the particular school board and try to find out a little bit more about what the circumstances are. Quite frequently when we're dealing with issues like this, there is sometimes sensitive or delicate information. Sometimes there's private information. Sometimes there are other hardships or difficulties that perhaps aren't ever going to be made known publicly, but they might exist. I'm not saying that that's exactly the case here, but each one of these circumstances has to be looked into for its full value.

Secondly, I also indicated, which, as you know, was also indicated in the throne speech, that we were going through the process of organizing a high school completion symposium, and as part of that, Mr. Speaker, we will certainly look at removing any roadblocks that exist that might otherwise prevent a student from completing high school, or we'll fix or clarify any other difficulties that may exist, be they in policy, in law, or in rules.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Consultant Contracts

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General writes, "... contracts are a cost-effective means of delivering services, it is important that contracting policies and practices are appropriate and adhered to." Albertans work hard for their money and expect this government to be accountable and responsible when spending that same hard-earned tax dollar. My accountability and transparency questions are to the Minister of Finance. Would this minister agree that consultants should provide sufficient documentation to justify their consulting expenses?

2:30

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding, certainly of contracts that I'm aware of, that the terms of the contract do outline exactly what you expect for the contract. Each contract is put out singly, generally, and all of the obligations in the contract are expected to be met.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does this Finance minister pay consultants to provide verbal advice without supporting documentation?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking me if I have paid out money to consultants to give me verbal advice without any supporting documentation, if I heard the question right. My answer to that would be: not to my recollection.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Finance ministry pay consultants to provide verbal advice without supporting documentation?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I will discuss this with my deputy and provide an answer to the hon. member. It is certainly not my knowledge.

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

Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A strong electrical transmission system interconnected with neighbouring jurisdictions can provide a stable source of electrical energy to all Albertans. I'm concerned that the ever-increasing demand on our system caused by industrial and residential growth will cause some parts of Alberta to experience outages in the coming years. My question is to the Minister of Energy. A new 500 kV line that will service the Calgary area is being planned for, but no construction is happening. What's the delay?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's critical that this line that's just recently been approved by the Energy and Utilities Board – at least, the needs application was approved – go forward as expeditiously as we possibly can. We know of the growth in Alberta, and the demand for electricity is growing. The transmission lines are one of the next key components to make sure that we get into place to ensure the reliability of electricity delivered to our homes. It is paramount that this line go ahead as expeditiously as possible.

That said, also at this stage in the process it's making sure that appropriate consultation with the public has gone forward. Alberta Electric System Operator has done a 10-year analysis of the need for transmission. Some of that, this specific 500 kV line, has been approved by the Energy and Utilities Board for need. Now it's down into the needs of and the issues with landowners.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that part of the answer talked about consultation but that rural MLAs are getting many calls from constituents about the lack of information on how this line will impact their farms and their residences, what are this minister and his staff doing to inform these folks in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know of the need for the transmission line though it's a very difficult issue to know where to locate those transmission lines. No one really wants to have them on their property, but it's very important that they go somewhere, so right now there is extensive consultation going forward.

The transmission facility operator in this case is AltaLink. They have begun consultations with the United Power Transmission Area Group. That's a group representing landowners along the Genesee to Langdon corridor. They've also had a number of consultations – November through December was their first stage open house – talking to landowners. Over 500 landowners attended AltaLink's open house information sessions that have been held throughout 2005. They continue to be working through them in the first half of this year and want to ensure that those landowners that are particularly affected have been listened to and that their issues have been addressed appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. I understand that southern municipal leaders are calling for buried lines on this project. These lines will just drive up the cost for all Albertans. What's your response to this?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, in some ways it would be wonderful if all of our transmission lines could be put underground. We'd certainly get rid of the sightline issues and the disturbance on the surface, yet that would likely add 15 times the amount of cost to bury those lines. When you put in a 500 kV line, it's not just a matter of burying it, but that wire also has to have special materials to be encased. Then, if there were a power outage or something, you've got to dig those lines up. If there is a disturbance or a problem with those lines, it is a tremendously more expensive option. Though it might appear attractive just to get rid of the sight, it is really a cost and servicing issue that is the problem.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, very shortly I'll call upon the first of six but first of all our historical vignette. Let me quote.

The greatness of Canada will not depend upon the number of her people, upon the quality of No. 1 Hard Wheat, or the fine Shorthorn cattle she raises – her greatness in the future will consist in the character of her people

This quotation was found in the *Edmonton Journal*, March 5 edition of 1918, and these words were given by James Robert Lowery, who was born in Campbellford, Ontario, in 1884. He studied at Queen's University and at the University of Alberta, and he was among the first to have received a bachelor of arts degree from this new university in the province of Alberta. He was elected to this Assembly in 1913 in the Alexandra constituency as a Conservative and served until 1921. Notably, as a sitting member serving in the armed forces, in the 1917 Alberta general election he was among 12 others who were automatically returned by acclamation. Mr. Lowery also served overseas in the First World War as a major of the 1st Canadian Mounted regiment. He was wounded at Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917. Mr. Lowery died December 12, 1956.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon, first of all, the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Health Care Reform

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week certain hon. members on my left made alarmist allegations that the government's health care initiative is going to reduce the number of doctors caring for Albertans. These nervous Nellies seem to assume that the number of doctors working in our health system is static and that it never changes. Nothing could be less accurate. Doctors and nurses enter and leave our health care system all the time. During the decade of the '90s 1,000 doctors a year left Canada. The challenge to Alberta is to design a health care system with incentives that will keep and attract our health care workers.

Mr. Speaker, the good news is that the government of Alberta is meeting this challenge. [interjection] The opportunities created by our health care reforms will attract more doctors into our health care system. The balance between the parallel public and private systems is not a zero-sum game. It is not a question of dividing a fixed-size pie between the public and the private sector. [interjection] It is a question of growing the pie so that there are more doctors, more nurses, and more technicians.

The government's third way reforms will grow Alberta's health care sector. Allowing doctors to work in both the public and the private health care systems will give doctors more opportunities and greater flexibility to structure their practices. This option will help to retain the doctors already in Alberta and attract new doctors to our great province. These reforms will mean more health care to more Albertans more quickly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is not good to have interjections when hon. members have Members' Statements. This is a very unique thing that we did in this Assembly, and one of the key discussions among all members was that members when giving a member's statement could discuss any particular kind of item they

wanted to discuss. There would be no points of order, no points of privilege considered by the chair, and there should be no interjections. None.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:40

National Social Work Week

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and recognize that March 5 to 11 is National Social Work Week. National Social Work Week celebrates this proud and dedicated profession and its long history of commitment to improving the well-being of people in society. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to advise Albertans that I am a social worker and proud of the profession.

Throughout their long history social workers have made a difference in the lives of others. We should all be very proud of them and the work they do. Across Alberta social workers provide a variety of services. They work in hospitals, mental health clinics, public and not-for-profit agencies, and in private human service agencies. As independent practitioners they counsel families, work as researchers, educators, and as policy consultants.

Social workers are skilled and ethical practitioners who give help to society's most vulnerable members. They work for positive outcomes for individuals, families, and groups within each community. Ministries within the Alberta government are lucky to have these dedicated professionals deliver social programs to Alberta's children, youth, families, seniors, and people with disabilities, among others. With integrity, dedication, and commitment to helping society's most vulnerable, they provide services as diverse as the many people they serve.

I commend the women and men who take on this rewarding and challenging line of work. I hope that this week we all take time to celebrate the contribution social workers make to the lives of Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Liberal Opposition Vision for Health Care

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal opposition health plan, *Creating a Healthy Future*, addresses the present concerns the Conservative government is attempting to tackle through two-tiered private health care. The solutions our public health care system needs are in this plan. The problem is this government's inability to take off the privatization blinders and focus on improving our public system. Just as they did with electrical deregulation, they're trying to convince Albertans that privatizing health care will be in their best interests, but I can assure you that it will not.

Today during a technical briefing the Alberta Liberals outlined a number of concrete solutions to create a high-quality, affordable, and sustainable health care system. The government has thrown the challenge at us to prove our system will effectively reduce waiting times and keep health spending affordable, and today we responded. Our plan will work to meet the government's goals and will uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Kevin Taft, the leader of the official Liberal . . . [interjections] The Leader of the Official Opposition and myself as health critic outlined six major initiatives contained in *Creating a Healthy Future* which would improve the public system by increasing access and affordability and ensure that all Albertans receive the same quality of care: one, the integration of specialized surgical centres into the public system to reduce wait times, reduce costs, and improve quality; two, the expansion of community health centres to improve

access to primary care; three, the introduction of a pharmacare program to reduce costs and ensure equal access to prescription drugs; four, the creation of comprehensive continuing-care legislation, including minimum hours of patient care and staffing ratios; five, the re-examination of the roles of medical professionals and the systems of payment to allow a more collaborative approach to delivering health care; and, six, the use of health impact statements and assessments and a wellness fund to focus on prevention.

A good health care system has a cohesive approach based on the principles of affordability, accessibility, equity, and quality. When you take these elements apart, the system is left in chaos. I fear the government's current plans will do just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: There was no interjection from the chair during that participation by the hon. member, but the hon. member knows . . .

Ms Blakeman: Yes. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: But then the chair did not intervene either when the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness did it today. Let's all try to remember.

Should I give you the reason again why we don't use names? [interjections]

I'll come back to that a little later. Right now we're going to deal with the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Great Kids Awards

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today and recognize Alberta's great kids. Yesterday the hon. Premier and the Minister of Children's Services presented awards to 16 outstanding Alberta children and youth for making a difference in their homes, schools, and communities. I had the honour of attending the seventh annual Great Kids award ceremony to recognize one of my constituents, Great Kid Browne Courtorielle from Cold Lake.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity acknowledge all the other Alberta 2006 Great Kids. They are Colton Meronyk from St. Albert, Carter Snethun from Spruce Grove, Dennis Brown from Calgary, Chance Szott from Daysland, Britny Martens from Alix, Colin David Price from Sangudo, Savannah Symmonds from Medicine Hat, Taralyn Chapman from Edmonton, Stephanie Armstrong from Calgary, Beau Brietzke from Airdrie, Danielle Hilsabeck from Lacombe, Tanessa Lynn Andres from Bassano, Karleen Beaverbones from Rocky Mountain House, Clayton Muff from Blairmore, and April Roan from Wetaskiwin.

Mr. Speaker, these Great Kids were selected from among 236 province-wide nominations, and yesterday I saw first-hand what an amazing bunch of children and youth we have in Alberta. As the Premier said, we are very fortunate to have a generation of young Albertans moving towards adulthood who are in a position to take this province to even greater heights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Brokeback Mountain Oscars

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate nearly 600 Albertans. They are the cast and crew behind the *Brokeback Mountain* movie, which last night was awarded three Oscars at the Academy awards. The Blackfoot hotel in Calgary was home last night to a local Oscar ceremony hosted by IATSE, the union representing the crew. Complete with red carpet and a big-screen TV showing the ceremony, hundreds of people gathered to celebrate the highlights of the entertainment industry this past year. The

celebrants included the set builders, costumers, wranglers, and makeup artists: the people behind the camera. When Ang Lee, the director of *Brokeback Mountain*, was named the winner of the best director award, I bet the crowd's cheers were heard all the way to California. When he went on stage, standing behind him in spirit was a crowd of happy and proud Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the real winners were Albertans. The movie highlights the beautiful countryside of Alberta and, I am proud to say, the Highwood constituency, home of the best western backdrops that nature has to offer. The movie shows everyone what we offer tourists: big skies, beautiful landscapes, horse trails, ranch experiences, and more.

Congratulations to all the hard-working Albertans in the film sector who made these Oscars possible.

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

Education Achievement Testing

Mr. Chase: Early in June this government forces grade 3, grade 6, grade 9, and grade 12 students to participate in a questionable exercise called standardized testing. Not satisfied with the unnecessary stress it has caused students, their parents, and teachers in June, the Alberta government cranks up the level of abuse in March. It shares the results with its ideological partner in crime, the Fraser Institute, which broadcasts the results across the province in local papers. By so doing, it rubs salt into the open wounds of disadvantaged schoolchildren, whom this government pushes further down rather than providing the means to pull them up. Is it any wonder that Alberta has the highest high school dropout rate of almost a third, including a 75 per cent dropout rate for English as a Second Language students in Canada?

This government in its false show of veneer accountability spends three times as much on creating, administering, and marking these tests as it does on developing the curriculum that these tests supposedly measure. What these tests accurately and predictably reflect is the socioeconomic level of the student writing the test. With very few exceptions private schools, subsidized to the tune of 60 per cent of public per-pupil grants, with restrictive, selective enrolment policies, not to mention high tuition fees, are compared to their underfunded public counterparts, which, not only as a result of their mandate but out of a genuine desire to improve the human condition, accept all children regardless of their socioeconomic or learning luggage.

If this provincial government truly wanted to improve its educational outcomes, it would increase its curriculum support for the schools at the lower end of the achievement results. There is no educational purpose served by publishing the results of these highly questionable tests.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I hereby submit five copies of the report of the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts dated March 1, 2006, which outlines the committee's recommendation for changes to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I also submit five copies of the report of the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts covering the committee's activities for the First Session of the 26th Legislature.

Thank you.

head: 2:50

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of over 4,500 residents of Grande Prairie I would like to present the following petition to the Legislature: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation to build a skywalk across the Highway 43 bypass in Grande Prairie."

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a petition that's signed by 185 constituents of mine in Whitecourt-St. Anne. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to do what is necessary to complete the plans to widen highway 32 in my constituency as soon as possible.

Thank you.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling an e-mail from Elaine Hyshka, a constituent of mine. She is deeply concerned about our Premier's latest attempt to privatize health care. She disagrees with queue-jumping and forecasts great detriment if doctors are allowed to practise in both the public and private settings. She urges me as her MLA to oppose two-tiered health care and reaffirms her belief in the five guiding principles of the Canada Health Act.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table two of the many letters that I've been receiving about the government's plans to privatize the health care system. One is from David Finch, and he warns about the return to the days when people's lives were often in danger because they didn't have the money to buy health care.

The second one is from Reny Miklos from Edmonton, and he's concerned about the changes to violate the Canada Health Act and to create a two-tier system.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I believe that a constituent of his, Craig Colvin, writes expressing his outrage at the government's proposed third way, great concern and objection to having doctors working in both systems, and a question about how private insurance companies will not allow us to get the most bang out of our health care dollar when most of the money goes to paying the shareholders.

The second tabling that I have today is from one of my constituents, again very opposed to the health care. She's a health care professional herself, opposed to what the government is proposing, is particularly concerned about the shortage of health care professionals, and believes that the third way would create a situation very similar to the American system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings. First of all, I'd like to table a copy of a letter sent by the leader of the NDP to the Premier. The letter calls for thorough and sincere public consultation on health care reforms, including transparent, all-party public hearings. He notes that the current consultation period "is a sham."

I would also like to table two documents from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Their news releases are dated February 19 and March 4 of this year. The first raises concerns about the so-called third way in health care. The second also calls for proper public consultation on health care.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail from a constituent, Frank Jenkins, who copied me his responses to the government's website asking for consultation on the third-way changes. The comment he particularly wanted me to highlight is where he says:

Please spend our money and your time on getting more doctors and nurses into the health care system. Stealing doctors from the public sector for the private sector . . . does not change access (the number of doctors is the same).

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to provide the proper five copies of documents of advice to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment on the Horizon oil sands project and their use of temporary foreign workers and the Christian Labour Association union.

Mr. Tougas: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Dialogue document, the Your City, Your Voice report, which was released today at Edmonton city hall.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, pursuant to the Architects Act the Alberta Association of Architects 2005 annual report. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Zwozdesky, Minister of Education, return to order of the Assembly MR 27, asked for by Mr. Flaherty on May 2, 2005.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on a point of order.

Point of Order Sub Judice Rule

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this point of order to speak on the question of sub judice regarding the question that was brought by me during question period. I'll cite 509 in *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*.

The Special Committee on the Rights and Immunities of Members recommended that the responsibility of the Speaker during the question period should be minimal as regards the *sub judice* convention, and that the responsibility should principally rest upon

the Member who asks the question and Minister to whom it is addressed. However, the Speaker should remain the final arbiter in the matter but should exercise discretion only in exceptional cases. In doubtful cases the Speaker should rule in favour of debate and against the convention.

Also, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, edition 2000, on page 428 in the second paragraph it says:

The Committee clarified further that while all Members share in the responsibility of exercising this restraint, the Speaker is the final arbiter in determining whether a subject matter raised during the consideration of oral questions is sub judice.

In reality, I was not ruled out of order by the Speaker under our rules of order, the Standing Orders of our Legislative Assembly, under 23(g), “where there is [any] probability of prejudice” to any individual because of speaking to a court case, because I did not speak to a court case. I spoke to a decision which was essentially a political decision as to the timing of a declaration of an announcement.

Basically, in arguing that the question cannot be answered because it is before the courts – the question should be that it is before the courts. This question is not, in fact, as I argued, before the courts. The question before the courts is whether this declaration after the fact prejudiced the interests of tradesmen in this province. My question did not cite the criminal case in any way. The question did not in any way prejudice the rights or interests of the individuals and organizations involved in that civil case, and in no way does the question affect the interests of the government in this case. What this question speaks to is the clearly political decision of the government to delay the announcement till after the election, and this decision was made before the election. The case before the courts is not a criminal case. Again, it does not speak to the timing of the announcement.

I ask that the Speaker rule that this question be answered. Indeed, if we are to limit questions under division 8 in this manner, any question regarding this huge project, important to our Alberta economy, could be avoided by saying that the division 8 application is before the courts and may be for some time with appeals. I ask that the Speaker exercise his discretion and that this question be answered.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m not sure quite how to approach this. First of all, I’ll say thank you for attempting to clarify where you’re coming from, hon. member, on this. Issues pertaining to what a Speaker’s role is or should be or whatever are enunciated, too, in the various documents, which the hon. member obviously indicated.

I think that the current Speaker and previous Speakers, who have had the privilege of sitting in that chair, have made it abundantly clear to all members what their role is as Speaker and what the rules of question period are. The rules of question period simply are for private members to hold the government accountable for its policies, its actions, its directions, and that sort of thing. While there is, I guess, an incumbency upon ministers to provide answers, it is totally up to the ministers or the Premier to provide whatever answer they feel is fit in the appropriate part of the response. But I have yet to hear a Speaker that would compel a minister to provide some type of an answer such as the hon. member opposite is looking for. I’d like to see that one somewhere if it exists. I don’t think it does.

3:00

Now, it’s true that sometimes, Mr. Speaker, members may not like the answer they get, or they may feel that the answer isn’t as pointed

to the question. That happens in all parliaments where we have this particular system. But whether something is before the courts or not is another matter, and I think the minister was attempting to answer that particular part of the question if that’s in fact what was said.

I’ll just end by saying, Mr. Speaker, that frequently there are causes for misinterpretation or misunderstandings when it comes to the ebb and flow, the to and fro of question period. That may or may not be the case here. We’ll await your ruling in that respect. But we don’t have the Blues or the ability, unfortunately, on this side of the House to have looked up exactly what the exchange was and whether or not there is any validity to the point being raised. Nonetheless, we’ll leave it up to the Speaker to make some insights into this and see if, in fact, there is some resolution to this curious matter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in terms of the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, first of all, while it is useful and it is convenient to reference sub judice in *Beauchesne*, all hon. members must note that this Assembly in the past has gone beyond the conventions that were used in *Beauchesne* in dealing with sub judice and views sub judice and the whole question of sub judice to be of extreme importance. That’s why we are one of the few Assemblies found anywhere that follows this model of government to actually have a sub judice section in our Standing Orders. That goes way beyond anything that can be found in terms of these other documents that we would use from time to time. Under Standing Order 23(g) this Assembly debated the whole question of sub judice and dealt with it, and it’s dealt with in a pretty dramatic way.

Secondly, it must be very, very clear: the chair certainly did not hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning saying that the chair ruled the question out of order because that certainly was not the case whatsoever. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning was raising a question to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment, and the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment basically came back and said: look; this matter is before the courts, and as a result of that I am prohibited from dealing with the question. I believe he even gave a date; he said in May.

But all of that is totally moot because there are some good paragraphs to read in *Beauchesne*. The chair would refer hon. members to *Beauchesne* 416, which has the subtitle Replies to Oral Questions. This is what it is:

416. (1) A Minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for refusing, and insistence on an answer is out of order, with no debate being allowed. A refusal to answer cannot be raised as a question of privilege, nor is it regular to comment upon such a refusal. A Member may put a question but has no right to insist upon an answer.

(2) An answer to a question cannot be insisted upon if the answer be refused by the Minister on the ground of the public interest; nor can the question be replaced on the Notice Paper. The refusal of a Minister to answer on this ground cannot be raised as a matter of privilege.

This goes back, actually, in the Canadian House of Commons as far as 1942, and there’s another citation dealing with it again in 1974. So the whole question of sub judice basically, as I repeat, is quite moot.

The fact of the matter is that this is called question period, and hon. members have the right to ask questions, and the chair will recognize some person of the government to respond to it. The government can choose on its own merit as to who should be the answerer to the question, and then it becomes totally subjective and subject to interpretation what the answer may or may not be.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 2, I would like to now move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 2, I would now move that motions for returns that appear on today's Order Paper also stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 202
Environmental Protection and Enhancement
(Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 202, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006.

As most members are probably aware, I have been looking for ways to stop the damage that this horrible drug, crystal methamphetamine, has brought to our province. While some members choose to address the problems produced by the effect of the drug, avenues which I wholeheartedly support, I feel that it is better for me to go after the cause of this drug problem. I want to take down the manufacturers and distributors because if we eliminate this aspect, we will eliminate some of the problems that we are seeing in our province. If we can get rid of the people who make or distribute the drug, we are a lot better off.

Methamphetamine is a challenge within my constituency. Many of the communities around West Yellowhead are battling the effects of this drug. This drug has the power to overtake communities and lead them to disaster. My constituents call me on this to do something about it.

In the past within this House we have discussed how addictive this drug is. We have discussed how devastating this drug can be. The province must and is taking action against this devastating drug. But one of the things that I've noticed in my research on this topic and in speaking to my constituents is that there is a part of Alberta that is being hurt by the drug, and it's been overlooked, not necessarily on purpose, because I don't believe it has been considered when we are dealing with the adverse nature of this drug. That part is our environment.

Now, many of you may not understand why I've linked meth with environment, so to grasp this, you will have to look at how this drug is made. A quick search on the Internet gives you a litany of ingredients, none of which are safe, which are put into making the

drug. Here is a short list of some of the chemicals used to make crystal meth: hydrochloric acid, sulphuric acid, starting fluid, and Freon. They are four of the chemicals that are going into making this drug. This is what goes into your body if you take this drug. Now, this is bad. But after you make the drug, there is waste generated which is extremely dangerous.

The waste produced from manufacturing crystal meth is very toxic. First, there is a toxic sludge that is produced. This sludge is a thick, black, tarry mess, that should be classified as hazardous. In fact, there are many toxic warning labels that can be attached to this filth.

Secondly, outside of this sludge there is a lot of ether that is left behind. Ether is normally used in the producing process of crystal meth, but there is always a lot of substance left behind after the initial process is completed. Not too long ago there was a meth lab bust in Edmonton, west side, and so much ether was discovered that had it been ignited, it would have levelled six city blocks. Now, some may shrug their shoulders and say: well, how easy is it to light? How easy? Considering that the making of crystal meth requires the use of open flame, you can rest assured that the chances of ether exploding are very real. So not only is it toxic; it is explosive.

3:10

Leftover toxic chemicals can get absorbed into the walls and furniture and cause immense damage to the place that houses this operation. The outcome is devastating, and you have to realize that this damage is only from the absorption of the chemical, not from the chemical being spilled or dumped. Now, think of the damage that is caused when this toxic, hazardous sludge is dumped in a field or down a toilet or down a storm sewer. The damage to the environment is immense. It is beyond compare the damage that has been done through the irresponsibility of crystal meth producers.

Some detractors may say: how do I know this toxic waste is being dumped into our environment? Well, you need to think about this with some common sense. When crystal meth is made, there is about six times the amount of toxic waste produced as a by-product. To put this in perspective, if a producer makes a pound of meth, they will produce six pounds of toxic waste. But these manufacturers do not make one pound of meth; they make five, 10, 15 pounds of meth at a time, from which at least 30 pounds of sludge is produced. Do you really think meth producers keep this sludge in their labs? Of course not. They get rid of it, and I can assure you that they do not move it down by travelling up to the Swan Hills facility. They take this mess and dump it. They dump it in waste ditches, in farmers' fields, or down household and storm sewers.

With all this in mind I have produced Bill 202 in hopes that it will allow officials to charge individuals who operate a meth lab with crimes against the environment. This is not hinged on a conviction. My hope is that when officials arrive on the scene of a busted lab, they can charge those responsible with not only the federal narcotic crime but also provincial environment crime. By having another charge brought under EPA, we can cut off the drugs at the source, and we just may be able to scare the makers to disband the making of this drug. It's my hope.

Now, I know that there will be those out there that say that EPA has many different areas that can already be used against polluters, and while I realize that this is the case, I don't think there's a section specific enough to go after what we need. There's no specific meth production section within the act, and without that I feel that we are not going to be able to be successfully charging and convicting operators of environmental crimes. To be brutally honest, I have no knowledge of the EPA ever being used against meth producers.

How can we strike fear in these people if we do not even use the tools that are available? How can we show that we are serious about these repercussions if we don't have the specifics available?

Bill 202 specifically states: "A person who releases substances into the environment in the course of producing methamphetamine is deemed to cause or to have caused a significant adverse effect." By having it specifically say what I just read, we have in my opinion opened the door to getting these manufacturers without having to worry about whether the current rules could really apply. I believe that Bill 202 gives our officials an easier avenue to get these manufacturers, put them behind bars, charge them for the cleanup, ensure that they will never be able to hurt our province again.

Mr. Speaker, methamphetamine is a problem in my constituency, as it is around the province, and my constituents have asked me to do something about it. I realize that this government has done a lot to combat this problem by adding more money for treatment centres, supporting AADAC, and creating a task force to investigate this problem. However, I feel that we are dealing with the effect of this problem and not specifically dealing with the cause. With all due respect, my constituents cannot choke off the supply with treatment centres or through task force committees. My constituents are demanding action from me. My constituents need to see proper tools in place. They need to see officials use tools to ensure that their communities, their children, their livelihoods are protected.

I realize that this is a tough battle for all of us here in the Legislature. Drugs are systematically destroying our future in many cases. We need to come up with a new and out-of-box way to meet this challenge. I think Bill 202 is a start in that direction.

I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate on this bill, and I hope that all will be convinced to support Bill 202. Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and speak in favour of Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. This bill amends the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to add meth specifically to the section on a prohibited release where no approval or regulation is given. The amendment makes the production of meth prohibited under this act and makes a person deemed responsible for such a release into the environment liable for penalties that include a \$100,000 fine and imprisonment for a term of not more than two years.

This bill is another tool that can be used in the fight against crystal meth. Specifically, this amendment addresses the production of meth by making it illegal to produce meth by any method or process. A person who is found to have released substances into the environment in the course of producing meth is deemed to have caused a significant adverse effect and thus is liable for penalties.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is important in the fight against crystal meth. From an environmental standpoint it addresses the adverse environmental effects caused by producing meth in clandestine labs, or, as we call them, clan labs. It makes it illegal to use any method or process of altering a chemical or physical properties of a substance to produce meth. It allows for additional charges to be brought to bear on those deemed responsible for producing meth as well as causing the release into the environment of any materials that cause an adverse effect.

The spread of crystal meth use in Alberta and across the country has become almost an epidemic. It is a highly addictive and potentially lethal drug that can be bought for a very cheap price. Due to this and the devastating impact on those who use it, their families, and society as a whole, it is very necessary for governments

to move quickly with legislation that makes it more difficult to access the ingredients for the production of crystal meth as well as enact any law that gives enforcement officers more tools to lay charges for the production or possession of ingredients that are used to produce crystal meth. Amending the EPEA to provide another mechanism to lay charges relating to the production of crystal meth as well as making it a crime to release those substances into the environment is a necessary step to deter the production of crystal meth in labs.

3:20

Clandestine labs, or what we call clan labs, can cause serious harm to the environment. Illegal operations are extremely dangerous. Whether they are large or small operations, these clan labs can cause significant damage to the environment. For every kilogram of meth produced, there are five to seven kilograms of waste. This discarded waste that is produced is toxic and can remain viable and present in the environment for years. Due to the massive environmental risk inherent in the production of meth, producers must be held accountable, and there must be a mechanism to lay charges against those deemed responsible for a discharge into the environment. This bill allows for such charges to be laid.

Mr. Speaker, meth production is extremely dangerous. The chemicals used to cook the meth are very hazardous. Solvents and fumes from meth labs are flammable and explosive, and gases formed in the meth manufacturing process can cause very serious health problems or death from inhalation. Meth operations also produce highly toxic wastes, which can pollute dwellings, water supplies, and soil. The wastes include liquids, acid vapours, heavy metals, solvents, and other harmful materials.

Mr. Speaker, the operators of these labs almost always illegally dump the waste in ways that severely damage the environment. The federal government has already moved to list meth in schedule 1 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which provides the maximum penalty for production and distribution of meth. The move increases the maximum penalty from 10 years to life in prison. There is a growing trend across Canada and also in the United States to take legislative steps to combat crystal meth production. The move to include production of meth under the EPEA is another tool to use in the fight against crystal meth.

This is a drug that is destroying families, that is destroying the lives of Alberta youths and Alberta families. We need to use every tool we have to fight this scourge, from harsher penalties to protecting our children from established drug houses. This bill provides another tool in this fight and allows for additional charges under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. It is necessary to use every means we have to punish those who produce meth and pollute our environment with toxic by-products. This bill is a good move and a good tool to fight crystal meth.

I personally support this bill and urge all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: I would advise all members of the House that this so far is the order which members have indicated, if they need to take a telephone call or something else: the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then the hon. Member for Highwood, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview or Edmonton-Calder, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. members for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Calgary-Fort, Drayton Valley-Calmar, Calgary-Hays, the Minister of Environment, Calgary-North Hill, and Calgary-Lougheed. So that gives you an indication.

Now we'll go to the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to make this quick. I'm happy for the opportunity to join in the debate on Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. I would like to commend the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for his sustained effort in the fight against crystal meth, which is plaguing our society.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In a few short years crystal meth has done a lot of damage in our province, our country, and much of our continent. This drug has the most devastating effect on the users but may hurt all of us in ways that we are not even aware of.

Mr. Speaker, every single Albertan has a stake in the fight against crystal meth because its production is so incredibly dangerous. This drug is so dangerous because of the chemicals used to make it and the fact that the people who make it have little or no experience with these chemicals.

An article in *Newsweek*, which was published in August, tells a story about a crystal meth producer. This story is becoming far too common. I would like to quote a few sections of that article because it highlights the need to get tough on this drug. The article reads:

As the concoction simmered, Houchens, [the cook] . . . noticed it was getting too hot. When he picked up the pitcher, the bottom gave way and the combustible mixture splashed onto a burner. The resulting blast engulfed Houchens in a ball of fire. "I felt my face just melting," he recalls. "The skin was running down my arm . . . like lard."

Mr. Speaker, chemicals that can produce such damage are extremely dangerous and are almost always regulated by the highest environmental standards. However, most of the chemicals that are used in the production of crystal meth can be found under the kitchen sink. These chemicals are dangerous on their own but extremely deadly when mixed together.

According to authorities in the United States meth labs have been discovered in houses, apartments, motel rooms, sheds, and even vehicles. As the meth problem grows and agencies seek to restrict the products needed to make methamphetamine, the methods and the locations of the production are changing. This adds to the difficulty health and environmental agencies face in assessing meth-related health risks.

Mr. Speaker, meth is produced using a variety of methods, and the pollutants that are produced as a result also vary, but there are some common chemicals that have been found in meth labs across North America.

In Alberta the police say that crystal meth producers are polluting groundwater with toxic by-products. According to a report that was released by the Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, toxic chemicals used in cooking the drug are often dumped with no regard to their negative impact on the environment.

I am disturbed by the fact that each pound of meth produced leaves behind five or six pounds of toxic chemicals, which are usually poured down plumbing pipes, storm drains, or directly into the ground. The chlorinated solvents and other toxic by-products used to make meth create long-term hazards because they can persist in soil and groundwater for years, and the cleanup costs related to meth labs are very high because the solvent-contaminated soil usually has to be burned away, which can be a difficult process. According to statistics the average cleanup cost is about \$5,000, but it can cost up to about \$150,000.

But the cost of meth to society is much higher than the cost of cleaning up the environment. Car accidents, explosions and fires that are triggered by the manufacture of meth, increased criminal activity including domestic violence, emergency room and other medical costs, the spread of infectious diseases, and of course the addiction problems: all are very concerning. This is why we need to ensure that those people who are caught manufacturing meth are punished to the highest extent possible.

Mr. Speaker, although I support what this bill attempts to do, I don't know if it takes the best approach. This bill, as well as every other private member's bill that has been debated in this House about meth, is the result of frustration by private members, who are continually hearing meth-related stories. Much of what this bill tries to do can be accomplished by strengthening our government's regulations. This would give the government the advantage of flexibility since regulations can be changed easily in comparison to legislation. I think flexibility is very important in the fight against meth because, like I said earlier, meth producers are doing all they can to stay one step ahead of law enforcement, and we must be able to adapt quickly.

Although I said that private members are frustrated by the meth problem, I must backtrack and applaud this government for responding quickly and aggressively to it. The government's new Crystal Meth Task Force is a welcome announcement. Also, the democratic first that occurred in this Assembly last year to ensure that Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, was passed is another example of how government members, ministers, and opposition members came together to fight against this and all drugs.

The larger problem in this fight has been the past federal governments' weak laws. Punishing criminals is the responsibility of the federal government, and the laws are, quite frankly, a joke. People who make meth are simply not afraid of or deterred by the law. In their minds punishment from getting caught is well worth the risk. They know that they will serve their short time in jail, and they will be out making meth again within a couple of years.

3:30

Earlier the Member for West Yellowhead mentioned some toxic chemicals that are used to make meth. Mr. Speaker, those chemicals are poison. Poisoning somebody intentionally is called murder or attempted murder. This is the approach the federal government should take towards meth makers and meth dealers especially because these meth makers and dealers target our children and try to get them addicted as young as possible. If federal laws were stronger, we would likely not be facing the problems we have with meth today. Luckily, now that the federal government is being run by a responsible party, we should see some of our laws strengthened.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I would like to reiterate just how harmful meth production is to the environment and how costly it is to our society. I'd like to let the Member for West Yellowhead know that I support what he is attempting to do with this bill. I support this idea, and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate on this issue.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to support the Member for West Yellowhead in his attempt to limit the effects of crystal meth, and I do appreciate his explanation as it related to putting this legislation under the environmental protection act. My colleague the Environment critic from Calgary-Mountain View would like to be participating in this debate, but he has a

meeting at this time with the Environment minister with regard to coal-bed methane and the water pollution. He's hoping that he'll be able to join in support of this member's statements a little later.

I would like to think that the arms of this bill would also be applied to marijuana grow ops. Although it's not the same type of chemicals involved in the grow op, nevertheless there's danger to the environment. There is danger through the mould, through the miswiring and stealing of power. There is the possibility of similar damage occurring in the neighbourhood as is the case with the crystal meth. I would also like to see the teeth that are being proposed in this legislation being applied to such things as abandoned well sites, former refineries such as what the people in Turner Valley are experiencing, and creosote locations as is the case with what the city of Calgary is dealing with. Our environment is being challenged in a wide variety of ways.

Crystal meth is a very serious addictive drug, and I am pleased that the member is addressing not only the effects of the drug itself but the manufacturing of the drug and the lingering damage to not only people directly but the environment itself. I support whatever measures this government can take to clean up our environment and ensure its safety and sustainability in the future.

Therefore, I very much support the Member for West Yellowhead's attempt to listen to his constituents and carry out their desires. Well done, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join the debate surrounding Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. This bill brings to the fore an aspect of the situation which – I'll be honest – had never really crossed my mind before. The scourge of drugs and various societies' efforts to stop them are well known. The focus of the debate centres on the damaging effects of drugs on those who are addicted. These effects are ones which we are all too familiar with. However, because this is such an important issue, other related factors can be overlooked, and this is what I feel has happened in this situation.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard on the news, from our constituents, from experts, from our colleagues in this Chamber about crystal meth. There is no doubt that this drug is one of the most dangerous substances that a person can encounter. It is relatively new in Alberta, and this awareness adds to the havoc it can wreak. As far as being a recipe for disaster, it doesn't really get much worse than meth. It is relatively easily produced using substances which can be found in almost any small town. The drug is highly, highly addictive, it is cheap to purchase, and the damage it does to addicts' bodies is incredible. From rotting teeth to damaging the nervous system, crystal meth attacks the mind and the body of those who use it.

As if this wasn't bad enough, the residue from cooking meth is even worse than the drug. With ingredients including sulphuric acid, naphtha, benzene, and chloroform it is no surprise that the wastes from meth production are harmful. Also, given the fact that producing crystal meth is not exactly a legitimate business, those responsible are not very responsible about the disposing of their waste. The toxic residue from meth labs ends up in storm drains, dugouts, sewers, and ditches. The environmental damage which these types of substances can cause is immense.

Mr. Speaker, I have been farming all my life. One of the most important lessons that can be taught in farming families is that we have a responsibility to work with the land, not just take from it. As farming has changed over the years, we have seen a rise in the

number of chemicals which are used in the industry. As we have learned more about how these chemicals affect our environmental attitudes, regulations surrounding the use and disposal of chemicals in farming communities have changed. There now exist regulations and standards of practice which dictate how chemicals involved with herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers are used. Time and research have proven that the incorrect use of these substances can have wide and far-reaching effects on our environment. As agriculture producers have learned more, they have become more and more careful with these substances as they have a genuine concern for the land and understand that proper management will ensure that this land will be healthy and fertile for our children and our grandchildren to farm.

I would hazard to say that individuals who are producing crystal meth are not quite as concerned with the health of the environment as am I. Mr. Speaker, from 2002 there were 30 incidents with respect to the production of meth. This means that police have found the evidence of production, equipment being in place for production, or the dumping of lab waste. In the most recent year, 2005, two labs and one dump site were found. One of the labs was quite large, and police discovered 21 kilograms of meth in it. This lab was capable of producing an additional 165 kilograms of the drug.

While the number of busts are low, police services believe that the meth is being produced in larger amounts in our province. Part of the reason for the low number of labs being discovered is due to just how portable they are and the relatively short amount of time it takes to produce the drugs. In other jurisdictions labs have been discovered in automobiles, apartments, abandoned warehouses, and even in sheds in the woods. The production of meth does not require large amounts of electricity or water, such as a hydroponic grow operation for marijuana, so it is easier to hide these operations.

Another indication that large quantities of meth are being manufactured is the street-level activity with respect to the drug. Police organizations are reporting that the methamphetamine on the streets is being sold at lower prices yet is of greater purity and of higher quality. Mr. Speaker, the laws of supply and demand are as applicable to this illicit substance as they are to the legitimate businesses. If you are getting a better quality product at a lower price, there probably is some competition for the business.

Finally, evidence provided by undercover officers in other jurisdictions tells a tale of meth being produced in Alberta and being shipped to other provinces. This indicates that the scale of methamphetamine production in Alberta is most likely higher than the number of labs and dump sites which are discovered by the police.

There is no doubt that meth production is a growing issue in our province, and this means that more and more toxic chemicals are ending up in our environment. The measures proposed in Bill 202 would give officials a specific charge to lay against those who are operating meth labs. Having a specific charge would eliminate the ambiguity of whether or not an individual can be charged with an environmental offence. Also, putting a specific reference to drug labs in our legislation would raise awareness of this topic for peace officers and prosecutors.

3:40

This province has long been committed to good environmental stewardship. Our current hon. Premier, while serving as minister of the environment, oversaw the development of the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, acknowledged as one of the most progressive environmental laws in Canada. In his Speech from the Throne the hon. Lieutenant Governor outlined the government's priorities for the coming months, and those contained

advances in both water and land management. The provincial Water for Life strategy is a comprehensive plan designed to ensure that Alberta's water resources are well kept for future generations. The groundwater inventory plan for the new future will give the province more information which can be used to make the best decisions possible with respect to Alberta's water. The land-use framework being developed by the province will institute a single process for making decisions on how Alberta lands are utilized. The importance of all of the facets of land use were taken into consideration in developing this mechanism.

Instituting measures against crystal meth labs in the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act fits well with other environmental measures that the government is currently undertaking. The proposal contained in Bill 202 is forward thinking and, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, draws attention to an aspect of the drug trade which is often overlooked. In one way it is saddening to have this realization thrust upon us. Not only are individuals and families falling victim to this horrible drug; so, too, is our environment.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Member for West Yellowhead for introducing the bill to the House. I have enjoyed the debate surrounding the bill thus far, and I am looking forward to hearing what others among my colleagues have to say about it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you as well for the introduction of this bill, hon. Member for West Yellowhead. Certainly, we have been hearing a tremendous amount of information from all quarters, including this Legislature and around North America, with the emerging problem of methamphetamine and its use and now the problem of the toxic leftovers from drug labs around our province.

The main problem, as I see it, with methamphetamine is that it's very simple to make, and people can have clandestine drug labs in almost any sort of situation. They've been found in apartments, inside of the trunks of cars, in campers, in hotels, out in the back of a field. It doesn't take a tremendous knowledge of chemistry to put these things together, but it does take, I suppose, a lack of care and attention to one's own health and the health of others to consider selling such a noxious substance but also a lack of care and attention to the people in the surrounding area where a methamphetamine lab might be and the larger environment where the chemicals are disposed of.

So I can say with some certainty that the NDP caucus is in support of this bill with some reservation, I suppose, because the first thing that came to my mind, Mr. Speaker, when I was reading about this is: why are we, in fact, just mentioning the drug methamphetamine specifically when we're dealing with toxic substances in the environment and the drug culture that does exist, unfortunately, in our province? There are many other chemical problems that we have in this province besides this one specific one. Indeed, there are many other drug problems that we have in our province besides this one specific one. So, you know, my first impression and something that I would like to continue to bring up as we speak on Bill 202 is: why are we not including other illegal drug operations and perhaps other illegal chemical industrial sites in this legislation?

You know, we do have, unfortunately, a situation where if people can hide toxic substances that they might be using in different clandestine processes or even industrial processes and somehow circumvent the proper disposal of those chemicals, then there are people that will take advantage of that. So I would like to perhaps

see something taking in a wider range of illicit activities here specific to the disposal of drugs.

Unfortunately, I think that methamphetamine is a problem that is emergent and something that we need to deal with in a more pressing way, but certainly there are lots of other criminal activities going on around illicit narcotics labs. My question might be: why are we being so specific to crystal meth? You know, I can think of quite a number of other possible chemical sort of processes that we might be able to include in this same thing. I know that grow operations don't have the same toxicity with marijuana as crystal meth does, but certainly it leaves similar environmental damage and problems with people with a lack of attention to the real estate in the area that they are building these illicit labs in. So that's one of my concerns in regard to this bill.

The second one. This is a funny situation, perhaps, to be in, but one of the things that I was finding myself being increasingly concerned about is building new laws or increasing very specific bills and stacking them one on top of the other instead of dealing with larger issues in a wider sort of way. You know, when we keep making small laws very specific to one specific thing, I'm wondering if we perhaps aren't sort of building a body of law that is great to deal with the small problems as they come up but are not dealing with the larger laws and initiatives that we could generate here in the Legislature that could deal with whole wider issues.

Of course, every time we talk about illegal drug activity, I hasten to bring up the importance of dealing with the root causes of these activities. A lot of it's to do with a lack of education and vision or perceived opportunity for young people, from lack of attention to the social service needs of young people at a very young age where they are through, certainly, some choices of their own but not entirely a fault of their own, led through poverty and through broken homes to a life of using such terrible substances such as crystal meth. I always like to just remind ourselves and the persons in this Legislature and the province of Alberta about the importance of dealing with these drug issues in a wider context. So I do feel obliged to mention that as well.

Another issue, of course, is the question of enforcement. You know, it's becoming increasingly clear that the responsibilities that are put upon our law enforcement officers have grown geometrically over the last 20 or 30 years in regard to the types of responsibilities that we expect them to undertake. Considering that plus the vast, fast growth of our province's population would lead me to believe that none of these small bills or laws are particularly effective if we don't have the enforcement capacity to carry them out. So without, say, Bill 202 being in concert with a real increase in our law enforcement capability in this province, specific to community policing and being able to have the eyes and the ears of law enforcement on a very neighbourhood sort of level, then I question the value of a bill that becomes law that otherwise is not particularly enforceable. That is an issue that I do want to bring forward in regard to Bill 202 as well.

3:50

Also, as I said before, the whole issue of the disposal of toxic substances is a huge concern as Alberta becomes more industrialized and, you know, particularly as the manufacture of methamphetamine involves such noxious substances as toluene and phosphorus, ephedrine, methanol, alcohol, sodium hydroxide, paint thinners, ammonia. But each of these individual substances also exists individually, and people are using them in processes either industrially or around their home. So my concern – and I think it's a very serious concern borne out by the increase in the overall level of toxicity in our environment – is that we must be sure to capture these

substances in a more systematic way before they build up in our environment and create a carcinogenic atmosphere that we all have to live in.

It's becoming evident that the cumulative effects of various toxins that individually, perhaps, do not cause ill health to us but cumulatively build up over time and deposit themselves in our fatty tissues, in our livers, and in other tissues in our body, in fact create a toxic point where we are more susceptible to cancer and other debilitating illnesses. You know, as we push headlong into the industrial process, the industrialization of our fair province, I think we must be very much more conscious of that. So if we could use Bill 202, perhaps, as a harbinger of further attention to this pressing and growing need in our province and industrial society in general in North America, then I think that I would support it more wholeheartedly, but certainly this is an interesting step in the right direction.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join in on the debate on this bill. The aim of this bill is to protect our environment and the health of Albertans by punishing those who recklessly disregard existing laws and add dangerous pollutants or toxins to our ecosystem through the production of meth. Moreover, the bill will hold accountable those who harm the environment through crystal meth production by making them and not the taxpayers of Alberta responsible for the often staggering costs of cleaning up a meth lab. Specifically, this will be done by amending section 9 of the current Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act so that meth producers may be convicted under provincial law for the degradation of the environment without the charge hinging on the conviction of the federal Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

We're all familiar, Mr. Speaker, with the devastating impacts of crystal meth on the bodies of those who use it. This drug causes insomnia, heart palpitations, hypertension, irritability, paranoia, and strokes, just to name a few. Furthermore, we have all seen the devastating impact that crystal meth has on our communities and particularly on our youth. Throughout Whitecourt-Ste. Anne methamphetamine has been used directly, and it's been associated with levels of violence and crime that threaten the very fabric of our communities as well as an increased incidence of HIV, AIDS, hepatitis, and other communicable diseases.

Mr. Speaker, this issue really hits home to me. As you know, the sponsor of this bill has been having a very difficult time trying to get a rein on meth problems that have arisen in his area. My constituency neighbours West Yellowhead, and I've noticed that meth is beginning to become more and more prevalent throughout my area as well. I've noticed that the meth use has been harming the youth of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. It's a problem that's throughout our schools, and we can see it on our streets. This is why I think we need to ensure that the government begins to take some steps to go after the people responsible for making this horrible drug.

There are too many instances where drug dealers and drug makers are getting off seemingly with a slap on the wrist, and I think the law needs to be tougher. The government has taken action, but I think that more definitely needs to be done. I like the idea that the hon. Member for West Yellowhead is proposing in amending the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act so that our law officials can throw the book at perpetrators.

The environmental impacts of crystal meth production often lurk beneath the surface and are often overlooked but are equally as devastating as the social and psychological costs. Production of crystal meth produces many dangerous toxins, including hydrochloric

acid, iodine, benzene, ether, and chloroform, to name a few. The production process typically produces the chemicals in very large amounts. A recent lab bust in Edmonton yielded 12 pounds of crystal meth and 72 pounds of toxic waste. Meth producers often dispose of these toxins by dumping them down the sink or the toilet or into drainage ditches and canals, causing tremendous environmental damage and compromising the long-term health of Albertans. Being a rural constituency, the members can appreciate how much room there is for waste to be disposed of in a large constituency with such a great MLA as Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, and we need to guard against it.

Exposure to the by-products of meth production has been linked to health complications such as kidney disease, lung disease, and brain damage, just to name a few. What's more, the production of meth is inherently dangerous because many of the chemicals used are highly explosive and flammable. A large meth lab can produce enough explosive material to level many city blocks in some Calgary areas. Indeed, there are countless cases where meth labs have exploded, causing severe injury and fatalities.

An American study reports that explosions and releases of toxic chemicals that are related to meth production are far more likely to cause personal injuries than other explosions and releases of toxic materials that are not related to meth production. Additionally, those most likely to be injured were police officers and innocent bystanders. Mr. Speaker, we as legislators have the duty to do all we can to stop these incidents from occurring.

Why all this concerns me is because I fear a lot of the environmental waste that is produced will affect my constituency and those in rural Alberta. It's a growing problem, and none of us are immune from it. Other jurisdictions have realized that harming the environment through the production of crystal meth is extremely harmful.

In 1999 a West Virginia man was successfully prosecuted on environmental charges relating to the production of crystal meth. The court imposed a sentence of 12 years and seven months in jail. Here in Alberta we need to empower our law enforcement and judicial systems to take similar action to protect the environment and the welfare of the citizens of this province.

Alberta has been an innovator in finding solutions to the problems posed by meth production and distribution before. A recent regulation change by the minister of health has made the main ingredient used in the production of crystal meth much more difficult to access, Mr. Speaker. Furthermore, Alberta and other provinces have taken on a new and comprehensive interprovincial approach in dealing with the problems posed by crystal meth use. It's time we applied the same innovative approach to protecting our environment from the destruction caused by the production of meth.

Bill 202 fits well into a comprehensive approach to eliminating meth use because it recognizes that meth production is dangerous on numerous levels. Under the amendments proposed by Bill 202, law enforcement would have the tools to prosecute those who produce meth on a number of different fronts. Bill 202 proposes that a specific section be added to the act to give law enforcement officials a tool to target meth lab operators for crimes against the environment. You see, I would like to make punishment for meth lab operators more severe, but that is federal jurisdiction, so we have to go about it differently. Protecting the environment is a provincial jurisdiction, so it's good to start here, Mr. Speaker.

The future of all Albertans is linked to our environment: the air that we breathe, the quality of the water that we drink, the purity of our land, which will sustain us for many generations to come. We simply cannot allow producers of meth to jeopardize our future through the dangerous and illegal release of pollutants into the environment.

I urge this Assembly to pass Bill 202 and send a message to all Albertans that we are serious about protecting our future. We must also send a message to the operators of these meth labs that their actions will be taken seriously and that they will be punished for the full extent of their crimes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few quick comments, I guess. First of all, I'm always concerned as we pass more and more legislation that sometimes it's too limiting and not covering all of the bases, and when it comes to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, it just seems to me that when we start making lists, we start excluding a lot of things. To want to put crystal meth and the chemicals being used in it on there I think is a commendable thing. We want to limit them. On the other hand, I just find that as we make a list, we're leaving things off.

I just wonder if under the Environmental Protection Enhancement Amendment Act it shouldn't be any substances that are deemed harmful to the environment. To be much more open and not have a specific list – you know, what's going to come up next year? What are they going to be making and manufacturing? If we have substances that are on a list that are moved and found harmful to the environment, we should be able to act on them. It seems that we're always trying to solve it one problem at a time rather than with a comprehensive act that just says things that we've deemed environmentally dangerous, that we should be able to go after all environmental hazards and not just the ones on a specific list. I would hope that we'll go forward and be able to make, I guess, less amendments and less bills and to get wordings that are more inclusive and cover all the problems with the environment.

I definitely must say that we do want to remove and have a way of getting after these crystal meth labs, and I approve it on that side of it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and join the debate on Bill 202. I am very concerned about the rising use of crystal meth amongst the youth in our society. This drug is one of the biggest challenges facing our society today.

Methamphetamine use is becoming more prevalent in all areas of the province, both urban and rural. Crystal meth has affected both rich and poor. This drug knows no boundaries and is spreading rapidly throughout our province. Part of the reason for the rapid spread of this deadly drug is the fact that it is so addictive that many people are hooked after first-time use. Another reason for the rapid spread of meth is the ease with which it can be produced. Anyone with access to a pharmacy, a hardware store, and the Internet is able to get all the necessary ingredients and materials required to make crystal meth. Practically any space could be converted into a chemical laboratory with the potential to addict and ruin the lives of hundreds of Albertans.

I would like to commend the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for all of the hard work that he has done in attempting to prevent the rapid spread of this drug. Through the efforts of this courageous member many of the necessary precursors to crystal methamphetamine have been moved behind the pharmacists' counters, restricting their availability. Bill 202 is a fitting next step for the hon. member's crusade against methamphetamine use.

The police, in conjunction with the government of Alberta, have worked hard to shut off the tap that has been allowing crystal meth to flow through our province. We have been taking a very proactive approach to trying to remove the drug from our streets. The government and this Assembly have also taken important steps to repair the damage that has been done to Albertans by crystal meth. Thanks to special co-operation between all parties last spring, we were able to pass legislation that would ensure that parents have the ability to get their children into treatment programs.

Mr. Speaker, the important work that is left to be done focuses on cleaning up the mess that meth has created. When police successfully shut down a crystal meth lab, the potential damage to the community has not completely been eliminated. As with any chemical reaction the production of crystal meth also results in the production of several by-products. The by-products of crystal meth production include many noxious, toxic, potentially explosive, and deadly gases and chemicals. Potentially, phosphine gas, hydriodic acid, hydrogen chloride gas, and phosphoric acid are amongst the by-products that are produced in the production of crystal meth. I do not think that I have to elaborate on the potential dangers associated with each of these chemicals. Each chemical has the potential to be quite lethal and needs to be disposed of in the proper fashion.

Mr. Speaker, as a province we have the ability to properly process and dispose of these hazardous chemicals. However, I doubt that the people who are trying to make money by destroying the lives of children are as concerned about the environment as normal Albertans are. Albertans would never tolerate a legitimate chemical waste dump in a residential neighbourhood. It is imperative that we take steps to ensure that meth producers are not able to further ruin our communities. The people we are trying to deal with are less than honourable and, therefore, deserve special treatment.

Alberta's environmental protection laws currently operate under the philosophy that the polluter must pay. Those responsible for making the mess are held responsible for cleaning up the mess. This is the way it should be. If you decide to destroy the lives of young children, risk the well-being of a community, and cause immeasurable harm to our pristine environment, then you deserve to pay. Bill 202 proposes that we do just that. By amending section 109 of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act so that meth labs are specifically referenced, a provincial charge can be laid without the need for a conviction under federal law.

Mr. Speaker, you might be asking yourself: why do we need this special provision as I have already indicated that Alberta's laws are already based on the polluter-pays system? While this is true, Alberta's legislation and subsequent regulations were not designed to deal with specific situations created by meth labs. Under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act a regulation exists which deals with the storing and disposing of toxic waste. This regulation has rarely been used to go after the operators of meth labs as the regulation has been designed to deal with waste stemming from legal activity, not illegal activity.

The major problem that we run into when applying current environmental protection laws to meth labs is that often the operator of the lab does not own the property. Current legislation allows an environmental protection order to be issued if a meth lab has caused damage to the environment. If the criminal who was running the operation is in jail, the EPO is served to the owner of the property, who may or may not have any knowledge of the meth lab. The main problem with the current situation is that the rules appear to allow the responsible party to avoid having to pay for the damage that is being done.

I believe that the changes are needed so that the blame can be properly attached to the guilty party. Our current laws and regula-

tions have been set up to stop large industrial polluters from cutting corners in order to improve the bottom at the expense of the environment. The laws and regulations have been not been designed to deal with an operation whose entire foundation is illegal. The approach that has been taken in Bill 202 is to simply ensure that the current approach to environmental protection prevails. I feel that it is important to give the lawmakers every available tool in attempting to eliminate both the supply and the effects of crystal meth.

4:10

I have outlined why rules like the ones proposed in Bill 202 are absolutely necessary. I am supportive of the idea and in the absence of an alternative method to advance the goals proposed in Bill 202, I am inclined to support it.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

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

Mr. Cao: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon to join the debate. There have been a lot of good points raised, and I hope that my comments will add some thoughts to the proceedings this afternoon.

Methamphetamine is a very serious problem in our cities and towns, Mr. Speaker. In a very short time it has risen from the most obscure to one of the most dangerous, notorious drugs in our communities. We are fighting a bit of a war on crystal meth in this province, and there have been many different ways that we have gone after this drug. From the work done by the Solicitor General and the health ministers to the work done by the private members, this is an issue that we must all co-operate on.

Mr. Speaker, what I find interesting about Bill 202 is the method it uses to go after those that make crystal meth. Most of the provinces and the U.S. states that have been dealing with this kind of drug use increased drug penalties or try to limit ingredients people can purchase. During the debate on the Member for West Yellowhead's bill in the last session, Bill 204, we heard about many different ways the U.S. states are limiting the purchase and tracking the sales of the drug pseudoephedrine. Pseudoephedrine is found in many common cold medications, and Oklahoma state decided to track sales of this drug by using a registry style of system. This system seems to work, and the state reported that instances of meth labs seemingly dropped as the rate and control of this ingredient tightened.

This is a step that this province took in December, 2005, and I commend the Member for West Yellowhead on this initiative. After our hon. Member for West Yellowhead brought forward his bill to limit the sales of cold medications containing pseudoephedrine, the Minister of Health and Wellness changed the regulations and put those medications behind the counter, limiting their sale. However, there are not many jurisdictions, to the best of my knowledge, that have tackled the issue of the environmental damage that is done while making this drug. This is truly an innovative and creative way of tackling a problem that has begun to grow since its inception in our society.

The government is also very committed to addressing this problem, as was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. The commitment to fighting all drug abuse in Alberta is extremely important. One of the main things that we as legislators should focus on is how this particular drug harms us, not only as citizens of the province but in our environment as well.

It has been mentioned that the waste that is produced from manufacturing of this meth drug is quite substantial. I know that many today have talked about the mess that is left behind after the

extraction of ephedrine in the final stages of meth production. The waste is very damaging and in many cases has the potential to do irreparable damage to the facility that it is housed in and the surrounding environment.

Before us we have a bill that addresses this problem, and we have to look at this bill in an outside-of-the-box context. This amendment to the existing act is another attempt at snatching those who make the meth. The bill gives provincial authorities the opportunity and some power to go after meth makers without meddling with the federal crime jurisdiction, and this is something that I think the province needs. Those who make meth are not concerned about anything that surrounds them. Meth production itself does incredible harm to the person who makes it, and if the producers neither care enough about themselves nor care about the damage to the human lives of drug users, what makes us think they would have concerns for others or even the environment?

Now, I realize that some critics of this bill will go on about how we need to help those who are in the business of addicting our children. They talk about how we need to ensure that there are enough community supports and social programs to ensure that a person making the meth can be made into a good person and made a productive member of society. Now, while this might be the case, we need to also punish those who hurt our children. My question to the critics who would rather have the social programs instead of punishment is: if you had a daughter who came home one night and was having a mental breakdown because of an addiction to this meth, would you be calling your government and asking for more social programs to help the meth makers? I don't think so. I think you would be calling your local police station and trying to do everything you could to ensure that those who produced and sold this drug to your little girl were put away where they could not hurt anybody else. I believe this is what the bill does. Currently there are many ways to go after the makers of this drug, and now there could be one more.

There is one thing about this bill that I find very interesting. I do have a concern that we are allowing meth makers a small window to get around the law by figuring out the different ways of making a drug similar to meth but not specifically defined by the amendment we are debating. Are we limiting ourselves to one name of a drug, or do we need to make it more general so we can roll with the punches as we adapt it to the drug makers? We all know that this is not the last drug we will wage battle against. Every time the grip of the law comes down on one substance, a new one shows its face and becomes a new target. This has been the case throughout the last 50 years when it comes to the war on drugs. Take out one, and they make another one. I think we should look at this and figure out a way to adapt more readily.

Mr. Speaker, I'm in total support of the idea behind this bill. What I find extremely rare is the fact that the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, sponsoring this bill, came up with a very interesting idea, an innovative way to fight this drug without getting into the federal jurisdiction. I commend the member on this initiative.

I think that by supporting this idea, we will be showing our province that we will bring the fight to the meth makers or any other drug makers. We are not going to stand idle while a very few destroy the many. We will fight this battle, and we will get more ideas like this one. We will surely come out on top.

Again, I commend the Member for West Yellowhead on attacking this drug's social ills. I appreciate the time to speak, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. I want to sincerely thank the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, segments of our society are gravely ill. The individuals who encourage and feed the culture of drug abuse are like a cancer that eats away at everything we hold dear. It attacks our families, it threatens our children, it consumes the lives of thousands of Albertans, and it is a disease that we must fight with every tool at our disposal. We have a long and hard road ahead in this fight. The criminals who make and distribute these poisons to our friends, our relatives, and our kids are crafty and manipulative. They feel that they can trick law enforcers. We must in every way possible show them that they cannot. We must hit them hard, hit them repeatedly, and hit them where it hurts the most with everything we've got. Above all else, we must send a clear and distinct message to those who would profit from human misery that we will not in any way tolerate their behaviour.

In the fight against meth we've recently added several weapons to the arsenal. Bill 202 may be the most significant of them all as it will introduce another method of inflicting justice on these purveyors of poison. Cicero once said, "Let the punishment match the offence." Taking away a meth producer's freedom by incarceration is just and proper. Fining them to the tune of up to \$100,000 is just and proper and fitting. These individuals poison not only the residents of Drayton Valley and area, not only the citizens of the rest of Alberta, but they poison our environment as well. They make thousands upon thousands of dollars producing meth and leave a wasteland of shattered lives and toxic chemicals in their wake. They profit from this misery and destruction, so it is only fitting that they should be held financially accountable for their actions. Just as they profit, Mr. Speaker, so, too, should they pay.

Bill 202 would amend existing environmental legislation by making specific reference to the toxic by-products of methamphetamine. The law already provides heavy fines for those who violate it. This bill would make it easier and more practical to bring the full force of our environmental law and its fines against those who make meth. In short, this bill would be not only a powerful weapon of justice but a powerful deterrent as well. Criminals will be made aware that crime truly does not pay in Alberta. They will come to know that making meth will in fact be a very expensive undertaking. When the potential financial loss outweighs the potential financial gain, I believe we will see a dramatic drop in meth production.

We will also see Alberta emerging once again as a leader. No other province currently has specific provisions in their environmental legislation to make reference to meth and its by-products. No other province is actively pursuing this environmental approach even though they technically could with their existing legislation. Essentially, each province has in place prohibitions against releasing toxic or noxious substances into the environment, but the by-products of meth and the chemicals used to make it all fit the category. Things like phosphorus, acetone, ether, and benzene are present in large quantities in any meth lab, big or small. Any amount of meth manufacturing can cause a significant environmental impact, but as of yet there has been no action in this area. Why not? I honestly don't know. Perhaps there's a perception that criminal law is the only way to deal with meth producers. Since we've always dealt with drug offences in the same way, perhaps

we've been blinded by tradition. If so, it's time to take off the blinders.

Mr. Speaker, meth is unlike any drug we have dealt with before. Old-line, hard drugs like cocaine and heroin are bad – make no mistake – but meth is worse. It's worse. It's worse because it's cheap, it's easy to make, it's highly addictive, and its by-products are nightmarishly toxic. Meth can be cooked by anyone anywhere. As you heard, we're seeing it in houses, apartment buildings. We're even seeing mobile labs in the back of vans. Lured by the promise of easy money and low overhead, criminals are cooking it at every opportunity in record numbers. They produce as much as they can with the sole objective of addicting Albertans so they can turn a fast buck. Using environmental legislation to go after these criminals is not only innovative; it is logical and necessary. These people poison the environment, so it's only fitting that they be punished accordingly. The punishment is not only appropriate to the crime; it is an effective and potent weapon to drive into the heart of drug production.

Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker. We are at war. It's a war of attrition, and the decency and values that we as Albertans cherish are being eroded. The innocence of our society is drowning in a tide of methamphetamine, and traditional methods and strategies can't hope to hold it back. To fight meth, we must take the fight to the enemy. We have made a commitment, and we must commit totally with every resource at our disposal. Not only will this bill work in Alberta; it has the potential to inspire other provinces to follow our lead. As I mentioned before, they already have in place environmental legislation that can be used against meth producers, and a small, simple amendment such as the one we're discussing now would bring the full force of that legislation into play easily and effectively.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, meth is not just an Alberta problem. It's not just a Drayton Valley problem. It knows no borders. Right across the country there exist thousands of covert labs and operations that are pumping out this poison as we speak. Every minute new people are being sucked into a private hell as they become addicted, and the problem gets worse by the day. If left unchecked, there is no limit to how far it will go. A unified approach is vital. With meth it is a case of hanging together or hanging separately, and we have a unique opportunity with Bill 202 to help not only ourselves but to help our friends and our neighbours across Canada as well. We can be a source of inspiration for the nation. We have in our hands an idea that has the potential to benefit every Canadian, so why would we not support it?

I suppose the argument could be made that this amendment and the approach of environmental prosecution of meth producers in general isn't desirable. It may be seen by some as too harsh or restrictive. Some may call it excessive in light of the criminal penalties that already exist for producing and trafficking in drugs. Well, I don't agree with this argument. The people that this bill will target are not worthy of our sympathy, Mr. Speaker. These are not the people who in a moment of weakness and bad judgment tried meth and became addicted. They're the people who have made conscious and deliberate choices to poison and destroy the lives of others for money. They cause untold pain and suffering, and they don't care. They pollute our water and our land with toxic chemicals, and they don't care.

Mr. Speaker, we have the opportunity with Bill 202 to make them care. We can with this simple change make it easier to force these individuals to pay for the harm they have caused. We can more effectively deal with the toxic messes left by meth labs, and we can make the guilty parties pay for the cleanup. With environmental charges added to criminal charges, the potential jail time for these offenders could increase. In addition to facing huge fines, they

could also be made to pay back any profits that they might have made from their illegal activity. In short, this bill will make it easier for the good people of Alberta to take back what these criminals have stolen from them.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 will help Albertans to get back the things that we cherish. It will help us get back our clean air and our water. It will help us get back our neighbourhoods and our peace of mind. Most importantly, it will help us get back the safety of our children.

I think that Bill 202 represents an innovative and necessary next step on the war on meth, a step which I feel must be taken for the good of the province and for the good of humanity as a whole. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by endorsing this idea, and I urge my colleagues from all sides of the House to join me in offering it full and enthusiastic support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to speak to Bill 202. This bill proposes an interesting solution to reduce the harms caused by methamphetamine production. As other members of this Assembly have mentioned, meth labs cause considerable damage to individuals as well as the public health at large and the environment. The manufacture of methamphetamine is a dangerous and volatile process that generates a significant amount of waste, the volume of which is about five times greater than the mass of the product produced. This waste is rarely, if ever, disposed of properly and can cause substantial damage. It is often dumped down sinks, toilets, or drains or dumped into rivers, streams, or lakes or even just dumped on the ground. The disposal of the toxins may lead to the poisoning of water supplies or soil. In addition, the cooking process itself severely contaminates the surrounding areas and can thoroughly taint the structure in which it takes place.

4:30

I will not delve into the personal or public health effects of exposure to the chemical by-products of meth labs, but they are devastating.

Currently no other Canadian jurisdiction makes specific reference to the by-products of illicit methamphetamine production in their environmental legislation. However, a few jurisdictions in the United States have taken specific measures to deal with the environmental contamination caused by meth labs. Several states, including Colorado, Kansas, and Washington state, have taken legislative or regulatory action regarding the cleanup of meth labs. These states and several others have been forced to deal with the devastating environmental and public health consequences of methamphetamine production and have taken steps to deal with these effects. While these states may offer interesting insights as far as dealing with the effects of meth labs, their legislation does not go as far as Bill 202 would. Bill 202 is a more proactive legislation and seeks to get to the heart of the problem and limit production itself.

Minnesota is one jurisdiction that offers a comprehensive methamphetamine strategy that seeks to limit and address the negative effects and limit meth production. Its legislation makes specific reference to restitution for meth crimes by persons convicted of manufacturing or attempting to manufacture methamphetamine, to pay restitution to all public entities that participated in any needed emergency response and also to property owners who may have incurred removal or remediation costs. The legislation also contains provision regarding limiting the over-the-counter drugs used to produce meth, harsh penalties for the manufacture and possession of

chemical reagents with the intent of manufacturing meth, and meth lab cleanup procedures.

One proactive and innovative measure which I find interesting is provisions dealing with the purchase and possession of anhydrous ammonia and associated container crimes. For example, the legislation makes it illegal to put that ammonia in a container that is not designed, maintained, or authorized for it. This, like the provisions in Bill 202, offers one more enforcement tool for officials to aggressively pursue meth producers. Minnesota's legislation offers an innovative approach to dealing with both the cause and effect of meth production.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to see that Alberta is heading down the same path. Bill 202 would offer one more instrument to fight against methamphetamine production and penalize meth producers. This bill also brings more attention to the environmental harms and the public health risks that accompany meth production. It is important to recognize these effects, which are not discussed as prominently as the individual or social consequences of meth use and production.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forward another original solution to the meth problem facing our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be here before you in the Legislative Assembly to speak to Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. I'd like to extend my thanks to the Member for West Yellowhead, who has brought this bill forward. The insightfulness of this proposed legislation truly impresses me, and I say this because it brings attention to an issue of which I suspect some Albertans have little knowledge. This is the true mark of excellence for legislators. Creating solutions ahead of the curve is always a difficult task, but it is certainly a welcome approach.

When I think about the devastation of drugs such as crystal methamphetamine, I think about elements like addiction. I conjure up images of producers, distributors, and users caught up in a deadly game of dependence. I think about all the lives that are impacted by this carousel of destruction, especially the children who will be raised in these situations with little support or direction towards a healthy and positive lifestyle. I also try to think of new methods that we can utilize to battle against those supporting the drug trade, the goal of such efforts being the creation of secure homes for all Alberta families.

Mr. Speaker, we don't think of the environment often enough. However, this is of great concern because of the negative impact of methamphetamine production on the environment, and the impact of that is extreme. Thankfully, we have the opportunity to develop legislation in the form of Bill 202 to address this issue.

In Alberta and most of western and central North America crystal methamphetamine is created through two different chemical means. Though different in some regards they share a common thread: the use of harmful chemicals and the creation of hazardous by-products. The list of substances used in the process includes hydrochloric acid, sulphuric acid, toluene, benzene, and charcoal lighter fluid. This is a potent mix, and it gives a clear indication of the severity of the problem. However, the starting elements also create an obscene combination of wastes as end products. Included in the effluent is a toxic brew containing a variety of potentially flammable sludges which spew harmful gases, such as hydrogen chloride.

One must realize that the wastes and by-products associated with

meth labs will not be disposed of properly. For obvious reasons, it would be unlikely for any of these operations to spend their free time hauling empty containers to the local eco station for disposal. It is unlikely that profits are spent on equipment to ensure that gases are filtered or scrubbed before they are released through a vent. Excess chemicals will not be transported in a certified vehicle to an appropriate provincially regulated facility for storage, destruction, or reuse. Effluent will not be treated to any standards set by anybody, including Alberta Environment, before it's flushed down the toilet, washed down the gutter, or thrown into the closest field. Illicit drug production and the illegal handling and disposal of hazardous chemicals go hand in hand in this case. Both are threats to society, and both require actions by us, the legislators of Alberta.

Meth labs have been known to exist in homes, hotels, vehicles, and warehouses. Dumping grounds around these sites could include everywhere from the local ravine, park, or even schoolyard. Liquids poured down drains collect in plumbing systems and often lead to the release of noxious gases. This means that all of us could breathe in fumes from meth labs, and our children could be playing in the toxic waste that these drug producers have dumped illegally within our neighbourhoods.

When these operations are found and busted by our trustworthy city police or RCMP detachments, who do you think currently pays for the cleanup costs of the pollution which is uncovered? You guessed it, Mr. Speaker: the taxpayers of Alberta. The very people who suffer from the effects of the pollution and the effects of the drug trade have their hard-earned tax dollars spent on cleaning up the aftermath too. The funds spent on the cleanup of these facilities are then unavailable for use in programs dealing with future prevention. No progress is made in the fight against drugs, and no people involved in the production, sale, or use of meth are assisted in getting their lives back on track. The money is simply used to clean up one site while another sets up across town. We can change all that by giving our continued support to Bill 202.

Bill 202 recognizes the dangers of methamphetamine production on the environment and acts to ensure that the proper people, those who cause the mess, are actually responsible for cleaning it up. This legislation seeks to ensure that those operating a methamphetamine laboratory will be held accountable for the reclamation of the facility and its associated waste. We'll also rightly penalize such groups with appropriate fines for damaging the environment. Such measures will not only help to preserve and revitalize the air, water, and land we all enjoy but also decrease meth production because this legislation will also provide another deterrent in the fight against drugs within our province. With our strong law enforcement presence in the province it's only a matter of time before meth labs are brought to justice, and if the fiscal costs through environmental cleanups and fines are substantial and binding, then this will be a definite deterrent against starting one in the first place. Therefore, we're killing two proverbial birds with a single stone.

By supporting Bill 202 we can protect our environment and decrease the availability of methamphetamine for trade. With less methamphetamine production comes less methamphetamine on the street, fewer methamphetamine users, and decreased social and environmental impacts. The overarching result is the protection of Albertans, the safeguarding of our children from the dangers of meth use and the drug lifestyle, and, of course, the elimination of exposure to the pollution associated with its production. We don't want to live in a place where methamphetamines are commonplace in our schools. We don't want them in our homes, and we don't want them on our playgrounds. We don't want the damage that the production of methamphetamines has on our environment because we must realize that our environment includes our schools, includes our parks, and includes our homes.

4:40

The environment, Mr. Speaker, is a shared responsibility for all of us. We all have to work to uphold the integrity of Mother Nature and all it includes. After all, it is one of the few things that all of us share and enjoy. We're in many ways connected to it and through it. The threats from methamphetamine labs show that now more than ever we must be concerned about our environment, which is why it's so appropriate for us to be discussing Bill 202 here today. Although it's not one of the first aspects that most of us think of when discussing the obscene dangers of drugs, it certainly should be. Just as the playgrounds of our children must not be a haven for the evils of methamphetamine, our environment must not be the dumping ground for the toxic waste of crystal meth labs. Just as it would be absurd for the Alberta government to pay for the production of methamphetamine, it's unacceptable for us to pay for the cleanup and disposal of the by-products from these facilities. Just as it's our duty to protect our children and the environment, it's our duty to stand together in support of Bill 202.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to first of all compliment the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forward Bill 202. As Minister of Environment I want to say that crystal meth presents a serious and challenging issue that this government is committed to addressing. The waste products of crystal meth production can cause significant environmental damage, as has been mentioned by others here this afternoon. Legislative tools will ensure that those convicted of operating crystal meth labs are held responsible for any environmental cleanup costs caused by their illegal activities. While effective provisions already exist within the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, Bill 202 gives prominence to an issue affecting so many communities and so many Albertans.

I am working closely with the hon. Member for West Yellowhead to realize in regulation the full spirit and intent of this important initiative. I applaud him and applaud those that are so active in this important initiative, such as the first lady of Alberta, Dr. Westbury as well, in creating this awareness, in righting something that is so wrong. I want to congratulate the hon. Member for West Yellowhead and all those who are working so hard to make a difference in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 202. Since I was named the chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, in December 2004, I've learned more about methamphetamine than I ever imagined I would. I've heard countless stories, disturbing and heartbreaking stories from Albertans whose lives have been severely affected by meth abuse. I've heard tales about lives and families torn apart by meth addiction. Methamphetamine is a highly potent, highly addictive illicit drug that has become a growing concern as its production and abuse increases. Communities across the province are seeing first-hand the horrible effects of this drug, and they're forced to deal with the serious health, social, and economic consequences that accompany methamphetamine use and production.

Mr. Speaker, you've heard the long, long list of health effects of meth abuse. It's a very, very ugly list. But the harmful effects of methamphetamine use and drug abuse in general, I may say, extend

far beyond personal health issues. Drug abuse often leads to deterioration of personal and family and professional relationships. It leads to reduced effectiveness at work and school. Drug abuse often leads to criminal activity to pay for the addiction. There are also broad social, economic, and public health costs resulting from the use of illicit drugs, and productivity is diminished. The public health system is further strained by the costs resulting from drug use. Illegal drug use, production, and distribution bring increases in property crime and violent crime, and resources must be expended to repair this damage. As you can tell by the list of effects, we're talking about a very nasty drug. Crystal meth is an exceptionally addictive drug as well, so easily accessible and relatively inexpensive for users to purchase.

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission has worked hard to assist Albertans struggling with addiction, including addiction to meth. AADAC offers counselling and treatment services to individuals and their families who are seeking help. These services may be accessed through AADAC's confidential 24-hour help line, visiting any AADAC office, and via aadac.com. AADAC also provides further treatment options for individuals with addiction problems. This past November AADAC began two new treatment programs designed to help youth aged 12 to 17 recover from substance abuse. This treatment initiative includes residential and detoxification programs located in Edmonton and in the Calgary area that assist with recovery from abuse of a range of substances and includes a special treatment protocol for meth users.

Detoxification gives youth support during withdrawal and prepares them for residential treatment or other treatment options. The voluntary adolescent detox program is usually a six- to 10-day program, or longer if required, in a safe and supervised environment. The program provides stabilization, assessment, referral, information sessions, introduction to self-help groups, and addiction treatment planning facilitated by an AADAC counsellor.

Residential treatment is intended for adolescents with severe, chronic substance abuse problems. The voluntary, no charge, 12-week AADAC residential programs include an urban-based model here in Edmonton and a wilderness adventure program based outside of northwest Calgary. The treatment includes on-site schooling, group and individual counselling, a family program, and recreational activities. Having seen these two programs with my own eyes, Mr. Speaker, I am very, very impressed with the work that goes on with these individuals every day. These two programs, I might add, are linked to family aftercare counselling provided by AADAC.

Mr. Speaker, with all that being said, they're just one part of the government's overall drug strategy. AADAC has actively been working with other government departments, regional authorities, community agencies, drug coalitions, families, and individuals. Why? To develop an overarching strategy that will effectively address the problems associated with drug abuse. AADAC focuses on four key elements – prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and policing and enforcement – to ensure a balanced, comprehensive approach in responding to the issues associated with drugs, which brings us right back to Bill 202.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead should be commended for his tireless work in finding ways to reduce the production of methamphetamine. Bill 202 offers another opportunity to address the source of the problem, methamphetamine production, while protecting the environment and public health at the same time. We need to consider more innovative solutions like this to slow and eventually eliminate the production of methamphetamine and other illegal drugs.

Now, many of the initiatives mentioned earlier, such as counselling and support, treatment and detox, deal with the harmful effects

of methamphetamine use. Bill 202 also deals with the detrimental effects on the environment and public health. We need to do all that we can to stop the production of methamphetamine. Bill 202 offers another avenue to go after the producers. The additional punishments that could be levied provide more mechanisms to deter meth lab operators and reduce production and distribution of this deadly drug.

In addition to increasing the supply of meth on the streets, meth labs themselves also pose a significant danger to the population at large. The cooking process is highly dangerous. The chemicals involved are extremely volatile, explosive, and toxic. The significant volume of waste generated when meth is cooked is not safely disposed of, and it pollutes our environment. Yes, Bill 202 addresses these concerns and offers innovative enforcement avenues to combat the problem.

However, Mr. Speaker, we do have another problem. While I'm very pleased with the thought behind Bill 202 and I agree wholeheartedly with its intentions, I have one apprehension in a technical aspect of it. Specifically, I'm concerned that this bill's exclusive focus on methamphetamine may be too limiting. There are a lot of illicit drugs out there, and we must be certain to not focus our priorities on just one aspect of the overall drug problem. I am concerned that the phrasing of this legislation may be too narrow and exclude other drugs – past, present, and future – that could have similar public health or environmental consequences.

It's also important to consider that the Minister of Environment has stated that the changes proposed in this bill could also be implemented just as effectively through regulatory change. Now, in light of the concerns of the hon. minister and other members of this Assembly, I propose hoisting Bill 202. If the minister does not implement regulatory changes, then we should revisit this bill when the time is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: I'll wait a moment for the amendment to be circulated to you all. Does anyone wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Chase: Speaking to the amendment, I very much appreciate the intent of the member who proposed Bill 202. He proposed it because his constituents asked him to do it, and he believed that it was the best vehicle to accomplish the end, which was to limit not only the production but the sale and problems associated with the cleanup of crystal meth. There is no doubt that in the future we're going to be faced with other types of drugs and other circumstances that pose threats, but I think that the member has focused on crystal meth, which at this moment is an extreme problem, and in so focusing on this, has created a bill to address the situation.

I speak against the amendment, which would put it back six months. I believe that the discussion should take place throughout the process of Committee of the Whole and third reading. To further amend the bill if we need to sharpen its focus, fine, but simply pulling it at this moment to me dishonours the member's intent.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. Minister of Environment stated that he is going to modify the EPE Act to make sure that we look after this dreadful drug production. I'm in favour of that, and I'd at this time call for the question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to address this shortly as well. I said earlier that I was in favour of Bill 202 but was very concerned, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed is, that it was too inclusive and that we need to go after all areas with this drug.

I don't understand. Last spring we came together as a House and moved the crystal meth bill in short order, and I feel that we should be able to get an amendment and bring it forward here with the unanimous consent, I believe, of all parties. We need to be able to move on this quickly, and six months seems like a tremendously long time to me. I would like to see an amendment come forward to move to make this a more inclusive bill but in a much shorter term than six months from now.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

Bill 203
Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway)
Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to move second reading of Bill 203, Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006, on behalf of the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

The hon. member regrets that he cannot be here today but has expressed to me how important he considers this bill to be.

As the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka I am familiar with the Alberta Central Railway Museum, which is located near my riding. This fine organization provides the citizens of the area and the entire province with something truly special, a glimpse into the past. The name Alberta Central Railway Museum recognizes the historic railway which served central Alberta from 1913 to 1981. It originally ran from a location near Red Deer to a point beyond Rocky Mountain House. The museum site represents the 1907 Wetaskiwin Canadian Pacific Railway depot in a scaled-down form. It is a public venue that prides itself on its wealth of knowledge of pre-1965 CPR artifacts and history.

In conjunction with the museum's 10th anniversary celebration in 2002, the final spike was hammered to complete a full-gauge rail line on the museum grounds. This mile-long loop of track is utilized by visitors who board a restored 1926 passenger car. This vintage, first-class equipment gives passengers a first-hand look into Alberta's history. Having a track of this nature allows for something more than a site. It offers an experience. To feel the cool steel of a passenger car as you climb aboard while the unmistakable beat of the engine begins to fill the air is truly remarkable. I know that for me personally, being able to visit these heritage sites and relive a part of the past is something I cherish and enjoy very much.

Through its active rail yard and exhibits the Alberta Central Railway Museum is able to tell the story of train travel in Canada. This includes a vivid portrayal of the work involved with the railroads and the incredible importance of railways to western Canada. The railway is something more than our highways, and a train is something greater than our cars. The railway built our country and gave birth to the province of Alberta. The railway was the only means of transportation other than walking or riding a horse or a cart. Really, it was the only fast transport available in the entire western part of the country.

The laying of each new length of track gave rise to great opportunity for many of the first Albertans. It is still apparent from glancing at a map of our province that towns grew on the routes of railways. This is because the railways brought not only settlers but a steady source of supplies and a reliable means of transportation to export markets.

The once countless wooden elevators are wonderful examples of this aspect of railway transportation. These elevators symbolize farming and the location of communities themselves. Railways and elevators were synonymous symbols of service for farmers and the west for many years. Though the role of these structures has diminished in the new era of agriculture, their importance in terms of our heritage is still evident. Thankfully, organizations such as the Alberta Central Railway Museum are working to preserve them. In 2002 the museum was able to acquire a 1906 Alberta Grain Company elevator. According to Alberta Central, it is the second oldest standing grain elevator in the province.

Despite the success of the Alberta Central Railway Museum they have approached the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, in whose riding this museum sits, with an issue that is troubling them. While their passionate spirit for their cause bodes well for their operation, in the case of their active track this is simply not enough. This is because the legislation and regulations that currently apply to the track at this museum are making it difficult for them to operate.

A great example of this is the fact that the folks at the Alberta Central Railway Museum have to complete an inspection of their track just as often as major rail companies. This means that heritage railways are checking their line just as many times as CN and CP. It is my understanding that under the current regulations an inspection must be done twice per week. It is easy to identify that this is difficult for the small organizations that run heritage lines. It is also easy to see that two sets of regulations would be more appropriate.

It is clear that there is a huge difference between national carriers and heritage operations. Under the proposed legislation heritage railways would operate at speeds below 30 kilometres per hour and travel less than 240 kilometres per day and would not operate for the purpose of transporting commodities. National carriers travel much faster, cover much more ground, and carry many dangerous goods. In fact, a typical train that would run through my constituency, down the track between Edmonton and Calgary, would have as many as 100 cars, each car weighing more than 100 tonnes, which is over 10,000 tonnes at high speed many times per day. Alberta Central runs about 20 weeks per year, two trips per day, about a mile per trip, which is 10 trips per week, with one engine and one or two other cars at very low speeds, mostly below 10 miles per hour. So just as we cannot compare apples and oranges, we cannot judge national carriers and heritage railways with the same degree of scrutiny.

5:00

The difficulty the Alberta Central Railway Museum is facing is not an isolated case. There are three other active sites in Alberta that utilize vintage equipment on full-gauge tracks. These include the

lines at Fort Edmonton Park, Calgary Heritage Park, and the Alberta Railway Museum. All three of these organizations are dealing with the same challenges as the Alberta Central Railway Museum. These difficulties can be erased with a simple amendment which is proposed in Bill 203. By creating a heritage railway designation under the Railway (Alberta) Act, we will build a platform to free them from the unnecessary burdens they currently face. By following this legislation with more appropriate regulations, we will be giving them a chance to operate under more fitting guidelines.

However, it is important to note that we will not be giving them free rein that will endanger visitors. Unique regulations will be established that will take into consideration the risks involved in running these heritage railways. A major risk involved in railways is the wear on track switches and other such devices. This is a valid concern for major carriers whose repeated trips over these tracks include a large number of cars carrying huge loads. The vintage railways dealt with under Bill 203 have a handful of cars with minimum tonnage. I'm not claiming to be an expert, but it would make sense that less weight and fewer trips would mean a lot less damage or wear and tear per day.

With these sorts of differences between the demands on the track used by national carriers compared to those in heritage sites, an amendment to the Railway (Alberta) Act is a much better approach than making exemptions through regulatory reform. Bill 203 achieves the desired end in a simple way and at the same time gives these historic sites a designation of heritage railway which is accurate, fitting, and honourable. It is worth noting that this designation could not be created with regulation changes alone.

The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose has been assured through the process of stakeholder consultation that safety will not only be maintained but will be the number one, first priority in the creation of the new operating standards for heritage railways. At the same time, these rules will be more appropriate to the capability of the organizations and the vintage equipment they run.

Now is the perfect time to be addressing this issue. The Alberta centennial has made all of us reflect upon the great history of our province. It has made us realize that we have all been a part of making it the success story that it is today. This connection is important because it is a part of who we are.

Because of the vintage qualities of the equipment used on these lines and the regulations that currently govern them, these railways are being unnecessarily burdened. Grouping historical railways in the same category or the same regulatory sphere as major carriers such as CN and CP makes no sense. Creating a separate classification for them as heritage railways is a logical and reasonable solution. Please join me in supporting this legislation in Bill 203.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I rise to speak in favour of this motion.

An Hon. Member: It's a bill.

Mr. Chase: A bill. Thank you very much. I appreciate that clarification.

I speak in favour of this bill for a series of the same reasons that have been put forward before, so I'll not go into great detail. But it's important to connect the number of kilometres travelled with the safety of the line to ensure that the line is properly maintained. Given the small percentage of kilometres that are annually expended in the Fort Edmonton, Heritage Park, and the heritage railways, it makes absolute sense to not require the same strenuous rules. The

vintage railways are a part of our celebration that we just experienced with our 100-year, centennial birthday, and encouraging history in this province, which this bill promotes, is of utmost importance.

Just a very little sidetrack comment. For the three years that I worked as a campground host in Cataract Creek wilderness park, I would travel from Longview along the highway past Eden Valley. Along the Highwood River there was an historic railway car being used as a cabin. The people in the area objected to the use of this stationary rail car as a cabin. They felt it was an eyesore. The cabin owner decided that since stationary was the problem, he would simply mount this rail car on a set of rails that basically extended about 10 feet on either side of his car. So that he was within the Alberta regulations of a vintage rail car, he would make sure that he moved the rail car a few centimetres to the left, a few centimetres to the right to make sure that he came under the legislation associated with vintage rails. I'm sure he will enjoy, as will all other heritage railway buffs, Bill 203, which differentiates historical railways from the regular freight on a day-to-day basis.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be very brief. The hon. member has talked very much about this bill and has basically said the majority of what I was going to say.

I would give a little background to this bill. Many people are familiar that there is a railway in Heritage Park. Mr. Speaker, over the past three to four years there have been some significant issues with the Heritage Park railway about the cost of upgrading that, in essence, to the level that would occur on all other railways around the country. You and I both know that in Heritage Park, quite simply, it goes around in a circle. It makes absolutely no sense to have the same regulations for CN/CP as well as the other short lines in Alberta as it does on these closed-circuit railways.

In talking to the railway associations, they in no way want to endanger people. On the other hand, they are spending an inordinate amount of money to go through all of the qualifications, go through all of the track checks twice a week, as was mentioned, and it's causing them severe hardship.

The central Alberta railway, for example, is looking at costs of around \$50,000 a year, which quite simply could be used for other things. It could be used for other things for their museum. To let the Assembly know why we are talking about railways, CN and CP, being national carriers, are governed by federal legislation. The short-line railways, of which there is now just one, as well as the heritage railways are actually under the jurisdiction of the Railway (Alberta) Act and therefore come under our jurisdiction.

This is a case, Mr. Speaker, of quite simply doing what is right. It's a case of some common sense. It's a case that a railway going 10 kilometres per hour or 10 miles an hour, under 30 kilometres per hour, is not going to pose the same amount of threat to people's safety as a railway that is travelling 50 or 60 or a hundred kilometres per hour carrying freight over large distances, yet, as it is today, the regulations are exactly the same. So I really commend the hon. member for bringing this bill forward. It is something that I and my department are completely in favour of, and it is something that I certainly will support.

The regulations will come after this. It will come with some consultation with the actual railways. In no way – in no way – Mr. Speaker, are we going to diminish the safety of these railways. In no way are we going to allow the railways to diminish to such an extent

that they become a safety hazard. What we're going to do, quite simply, is put a level of common sense into this. I feel that that is incredibly important.

Again, I really commend the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for bringing this forward and for paying such attention to his constituency. Although it may be seen by some as being an issue that is very simplistic, it is a very important issue. In places such as the central Alberta railway, Heritage Park, Fort Edmonton this is a very large issue, so I absolutely commend the member and look forward to the speedy passage of this bill through the Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, take some great interest in seeing the speedy passage of Bill 203. I had the opportunity to speak to the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose last week, and he informed me of the details of this bill. I can with very little hesitancy say that I certainly agree with the spirit if not the details of Bill 203. We have quite a number of vintage railways operating throughout the province of Alberta. Certainly, encouraging this sort of development as a way for people to learn about the history of our province as well as to promote tourism in the province of Alberta – I think it's incumbent upon us to encourage that as much as possible by allowing these vintage railways to operate in the most economical way possible.

You know, for more than 80 years we've had different companies operating branch lines all over the province, through the mountains and up to the north country and down south to the States. We see a lot of our history directly linked to the development of these rail lines, and some of our most beautiful architecture is associated with rail lines as well. Now, in 2006, we see some of our, I guess, most interesting tourist attractions somehow being linked to these vintage railways. I myself and my family worked for a number of years at Fort Edmonton as costumed animators, as volunteers. We greatly appreciated the vintage rail lines that do exist there, and certainly it was a big draw for tourism in Edmonton, as it is in Calgary and central Alberta, where the member who introduced this bill is from.

I do have a couple of specific questions that perhaps we can work through during the speedy passage of this bill. First of all, we have here in Edmonton a very well-organized and industrious group called the Edmonton Radial Railway Society. These are the people who operate the streetcars at Fort Edmonton, and they operate streetcars of different vintages there. As well, they operate the streetcar that goes over the top of the High Level Bridge. They have been very proactive in developing that as a way to transport people to the south side, back to the north side, and as a tourist attraction too. I know for a fact that the Edmonton Radial Railway Society as well has very ambitious plans and, in fact, has built up the rail capacity in storage to run a streetcar from Fort Edmonton up to the University farm area, where there will be a new LRT station in the not-too-distant future.

I'm curious to know if perhaps this legislation would be pertinent to the Edmonton Radial Railway's plans as well. I know that they are fully deserving of our full support in what they do. While perhaps it's problematic to apply this particular legislation to the route that they operate over the High Level Bridge since those are also, I believe, commercial railway lines, certainly I would like to entertain the possibility of the line that they have proposed from Fort Edmonton up to the university farm. They will put in their own line. They have bridges stored away already. They have rail lines stored

away. If we could perhaps accommodate for their plans for that route under this legislation.

The area, specifically, that I would focus on in regard to perhaps some minor changes is the 240 kilometres a day stipulation which is in this Bill 203. Perhaps we could look at that. I will take it upon myself to contact the Edmonton Radial Railway Society to see if that works for them with their plans because I would like to certainly see them accommodated within the structure of this Bill 203.

As I said before, I think that railways have a very strong connection to our past and teach us a lot about the history of how our province was developed, but they also teach us about the future and how railways will in fact come back to serve us again here in Alberta. They're fun, they're interesting, they attract people from all over the world, people who are dedicated to vintage railway as a hobby and as a field of study, and I certainly hope that Bill 203 will help to facilitate that here in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to join in debate on Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006. I support the bill and support the intent of improving the existing legislation in terms of how it addresses certain railways.

Mr. Speaker, the original act, the Railway (Alberta) Act, was debated in this House in 1998, and it had really three purposes. First, it eliminated administrative barriers to individuals or groups in the private sector who were contemplating starting up a public railway. Now, under the old system it was necessary for each railway operator to obtain a special act in the Legislature, as you would recall, in order to formalize their railway. The Railway (Alberta) Act eliminated the need for a special act.

Secondly, the purview of the act was expanded to encompass all full-size railways which operate in Alberta. Now, prior to this, only public railways were identified under railway legislation in our province. Railways operating on industrial sites as well as other railways, such as the one located in the Alberta Railway Museum, as we heard about today, were not included in the railway legislation in the province.

Finally, this act empowers the minister responsible to create and enforce regulations with regard to rail safety under legislation which falls under provincial jurisdiction.

This act is a great improvement on the original act, and I do support it. We do have to allow the Alberta Railway Museum and others to operate in this province, albeit in a very safe environment, and remove some of the administrative barriers.

With that, I support Bill 203, and I wish to adjourn debate on Bill 203. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a good afternoon of debate, and in view of the hour I would move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:19 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 6, 2006**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/03/06

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Boards of Directors Guidelines

502. Mr. MacDonald moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to eliminate patronage appointments and increase openness and accountability of government institutions and agencies by establishing new principles and procedures for recruiting, training, and evaluating boards of directors as outlined by recommendations 1 and 2 of the annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta, 2004-2005.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure at this time to lead off the discussion on Motion 502. Patronage appointments to public boards is this motion. I think it's about time this Legislative Assembly had a debate on this issue, and this certainly follows from the Auditor General's report from last year where there were recommendations made to improve recruiting, evaluating, and training of public boards.

This motion provides the opportunity to point out, number one, the patronage in the appointment process. Do we have a democratic deficit here? Is there sufficient openness? Is there sufficient public oversight? Given the poor system for evaluating and reporting on performance and the potential or real negative impact on the performance of important public boards and agencies, many of which are responsible for significant decisions and considerable amounts of tax dollars, I think that this is an important time to have this debate.

Now, certainly, when we look at the Auditor General's report and we look at how the report ranks or gives priority to its recommendations – there are three categories, of course: key recommendations, other numbered recommendations, and unnumbered recommendations. Both the recommendations we're talking about in this motion are about key recommendations. I have no idea what caught the Auditor General's eye in this matter or, as a matter of fact, the other auditors' that work in the office. The Auditor General's report includes both cross-ministry and ministry-specific recommendations, and since most ministries have established boards or agencies with delegated powers, these recommendations were cross-ministry.

Now, there are a lot of agencies and boards and commissions that have been created by this government. Research indicates, starting with A, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: there's the Northern Alberta Development Council and the Métis Settlement Appeal Tribunal. In Advanced Education, of course, we have a significant number of boards of governors of institutions all over the province that are set up. Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: many different organizations. Children's Services certainly; Community Development; Economic Development. In Finance we've got ATB Financial, the Alberta Insurance Council, the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, the Alberta Securities Commission. In Gaming we have the Alberta Gaming Research Council and the liquor commission. There are lots of boards, Mr. Speaker.

We can look at the necessity or the need to improve public

confidence in the political process, and I would urge all hon. members to consider supporting this Motion 502 if for no other reason than to restore public confidence in the political process. There are many examples of what the federal government has done right and what the federal government has done wrong. One of the things that they have certainly done right is that they have for public circulation a book on appointments. It's a public document. Now, I researched this, and I couldn't find a similar book for this government. I can't find, if it does exist, a comprehensive list of all these agencies, boards, and commissions: who was on them, what they are making, and who appointed them.

Now, perhaps we could even go further than have a book. We could have a website linked directly to the front page of the Alberta government's website, and we could have a list on here so that the public could be confident that they don't need a Progressive Conservative membership to apply for one of these agencies, boards, or commissions. This website could let everyone know what positions are available, how long is the term, the compensation and/or benefits, and also we could find out the vacancies, the listing of those vacancies and if there is to be a competition to fill these vacancies and for how long the competition is open to the public. I think that would be a good first step.

Was there an open competition when we appointed the former Minister of Energy to his patronage job in Washington, DC? I don't think there was an open competition. I don't think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was aware if there was an open competition. Who knows? With her background in the arts maybe she would have been interested in applying. You never know. It's hard to say. I for one didn't see an open competition when Murray Smith got this job. There was certainly no indication of the salary that would be paid.

Mr. Ouellette: You have to admit that he's doing a hell of a job, though, isn't he?

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry, Minister of RAGE; I didn't catch that.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, Mr. Smith's compensation package, his accommodation, his expense account: none of this was made public prior to that patronage appointment. The hon. member can roll his eyes if he wishes, but it is a patronage appointment pure and simple. That's all it is. This is a government that a little over a decade ago eliminated all these patronage positions in these sort of foreign capitals.

Ms Blakeman: The offices.

Mr. MacDonald: They closed those offices as a cost-cutting measure.

Now, when we see some hon. members retire from this Assembly, they're not satisfied with their payout. Oh, no. Mr. Smith goes to Washington at the taxpayers' expense, and there's no rhyme or reason as to why that is happening. The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency may think that there are valid reasons for this patronage appointment, but I can't see any. Sorry. The federal government has a series of embassies and ambassadors and staff in various places around the world, and I would encourage this government to work with that group. In fact, we have the former Minister of Finance in the Progressive Conservative government, Mr. Michael Wilson, going down to Washington to work as our ambassador.

So maybe we could work with him, save a few dollars, and eliminate that patronage position because we still don't know all the details of the selection process. This is where, if we had a website, there could be a lot of people seeing that position open up, understand that the government is going to create that position . . . [Mr. Macdonald's speaking time expired] Boy, I wish I had more time.

8:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am also pleased to join in this debate on Motion 502 dealing with patronage tonight. You know, there is a lot that can be said about the staffing of agencies, boards, and committees, but I will keep my comments brief and fairly narrowly focused to enable others to cover the issues as well.

Across Canada there is an astounding number of positions on federal agencies, boards, and commissions that are appointed by the Prime Minister and his cabinet. There are some 2,800 of these positions, and that number does not include Crown corporation appointments, judicial nominations, or appointments to Ottawa's unelected and ineffective Senate. The Official Opposition's Liberal cousins in Ottawa displayed naked cronyism and unadulterated patronage in doling out literally thousands of these positions over the years. A large number of these appointments by ministers and the Prime Minister's office are made without consultation or the advice of the affected agency, board, or commission. Can you believe it? Without consultation with the affected agencies, boards, or commissions.

Many of these appointments are unvetted and completely arbitrary. Far too often plum appointments were used to simply reward loyal Liberal acolytes. These appointments were indicative of the obscene culture of Liberal corruption and entitlement in our nation's capital. In the two weeks leading up to the dissolution of Parliament and the onset of the federal election campaign last fall, during the frantic last days of this disastrous and corrupt Liberal government's prolonged death rattle, Paul Martin handed out a staggering 212 appointments. Let me repeat that: 212 appointments in a mere two weeks. That's not all.

An Hon. Member: That's not all?

Mr. Prins: That's not all. This cornucopia of appointments that were handed out during this two-week span like bite-sized chocolate bars and boxes of Smarties on a Halloween night included lucrative goodies such as a dozen ambassador positions, directorships of large Crown corporations, executive positions in important federal agencies, immigration adjudicators, high-ranking judges to the federal judiciary, high-level promotions within the RCMP, and trustees of national museums.

The sad thing is, Mr. Speaker, that this two-week patronage bender looks almost reasonable compared to the patronage spree that Martin went on between April 14 and May 19 of 2005 when 448 orders in council were hurriedly approved, including more than 300 public-sector appointments. That Trudeau-esque flurry of patronage and pork-barrelling just happened to coincide with the period last spring when Martin's government precariously teetered on the brink of losing the confidence of the House of Commons – 448 orders in council. The Martin Liberals decided not to take any chances and made very sure that they could take care of as many Liberal friends and followers as possible in their potential final days as the ruling party in Ottawa.

Unfortunately, the federal government did not fall on May 19, and

Canadians were forced to endure several more months of Liberal governance, which included more patronage and a very transparent ploy to spend their way to try and buy votes and attempt another election win using an obscene amount of taxpayer dollars, including pre-election spending announcements in excess of \$20 billion in the month of November. Can you imagine \$20 billion of new spending in one month?

Just to add some credibility to what I'm saying and some incredulity to what you are hearing, I'll share a few examples of these appointments. Here are a few of the noteworthy beneficiaries of former Prime Minister Martin's plentiful patronage appointments. I'll just name a few of these, just for the benefit of the Assembly.

Glen Murray, former mayor of Winnipeg and defeated Liberal candidate in the 2004 federal election, appointed as chairman of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy despite the rejection of his appointment by MPs in the House of Commons environment committee. John Harvard, former Liberal MP, appointed Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba. Ironically, he was appointed Manitoba's LG to make way for Glen Murray, who would eventually go on to lose his seat in the 2004 election.

Allan Rock, a former Liberal cabinet minister, appointed Canadian ambassador to the United Nations. Frank McKenna, former Liberal Premier of New Brunswick, appointed ambassador to the United States. Jim Walsh, a former Newfoundland and Labrador Member of the House of Assembly and cabinet minister who headed Martin's leadership campaign in Newfoundland, appointed to the Federal Transportation Safety Board. Yvon Charbonneau, former Liberal MP, appointed ambassador and permanent delegate of Canada to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris. Stan Keyes, former Liberal cabinet minister and one-time chair of the National Liberal Party of Canada caucus, appointed Canadian consul general to New England and Boston. Howard Sapers, former Alberta Liberal MLA, appointed as correctional investigator of Canada.

Karen Kraft Sloan, former Liberal MP, appointed Canadian ambassador for the environment. David Haggard, defeated federal Liberal candidate, appointed chair of the newly created advisory committee on apprenticeship. Robert Fung, prominent long-time Liberal financial supporter, who also happens to be Martin's former college roommate, has been the beneficiary of a plethora of patronage perks over the years.

I'm not even going to touch on the ridiculous partisan patronage appointments that the Martin Liberals have made to the federal judiciary or the undemocratic lifetime appointments to the Senate to reward personal friends, financial contributors, and good soldiers within the Liberal ranks, Mr. Speaker.

The sheer volume and opportunistic timing of Martin's patronage appointments may be sickening but hardly surprising. It was just business as usual for the Liberal Party of Canada. Mr. Martin was just following the well-treaded path of his Liberal brethren Chretien, Turner, and Trudeau, who in the grand Liberal tradition opened the federal appointment troughs for the rest of the partisan Liberal hogs to feed at on their way out of the Prime Minister's office. The level of taint involved in Ottawa's appointment process is stunning. Unfortunately, it even gives a bad name to hogs.

Here are a few of the more infamous patronage appointments made by former Prime Minister Jean Chretien: Roger Simmons, former Liberal Trudeau-era cabinet minister convicted of tax evasion, appointed as consul general in Seattle. David Dingwall, former Liberal cabinet minister, the man who claims he was entitled to his entitlements, appointed president and CEO of the Royal Canadian Mint. We all know how that one turned out. Jim Munson, Prime Minister Chretien's former press secretary, Chretien's last

Senate appointment. Munson joined Percy Downe, Chretien's former Liberal chief of staff in the senate. Alfonso Gagliano, a Chretien cabinet minister of federal sponsorship scandal fame, appointed Canadian ambassador to Denmark.

I could continue for hours, Mr. Speaker, about the long Liberal lineage of questionable patronage appointments. I didn't even get to Trudeau. I said at the outset that I would be brief, so I'll exercise restraint and cede the floor to the next speaker.

Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we seem to have an urge tonight to enthusiastically coach and help out the person that's recognized to do the speaking. It's really not necessary. If anyone wants to speak, I can certainly put you on my list. Just raise your hand to be recognized, and hopefully we'll get to you.

The next speaker will be the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Debate Continued

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, if that wasn't the most amazing case of the pot calling the kettle black, I don't know when I last saw it. This is so typical of what's wrong with Alberta. Here we have a motion that's attempting to make things better in Alberta, and what we have is a government backbencher who gets up and whines on for 10 minutes about a defeated federal government. Hello? We're not talking about the feds; we're talking about right here. Did that member contribute to what was happening here in Alberta? Did he have anything positive to say about moving us forward? No. He's going to whine on about the defeated federal government. Well, let's look at what his own people have to say. [interjection] If it's good for the goose, it's good for the gander, honey. Sit tight.

8:20

Here we have a favourite member of this particular Alberta government. That would be Rod Love. In a press release with the *Edmonton Sun* we've got Mr. Rod Love explaining "Alberta's process of holding open competitions with panels of bureaucrats and outside experts vetting the candidates," and he's promoting this to who? That would be the Gomery inquiry, that went across the land. What is Mr. Love quoted as saying? I'm sorry. There's a brief word in here that's an expletive deleted, but bear with me, Mr. Speaker. In quotes, Mr. Love says, "There was too much goddamn cronyism in our own government." Please forgive me. It's a direct quote, and I'm happy to table it.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we just had a discussion earlier, last week, about quoting using unparliamentary language or language that's not fitting to be used in this Assembly.

Ms Blakeman: I understand that. I just wanted to be accurate with the quote, and it's in the quote. I'm happy to table it. I'll get you the copies and table it later this evening.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. member withdrawing that comment? Would you like to withdraw that comment?

Ms Blakeman: It's a quote, but I can withdraw the word in the middle of the quote, and I'm happy to table it so that you can see I was quoting, Mr. Speaker. Thanks very much.

We have this representative of this government not talking about

anything in Alberta but talking about something happening outside of Alberta. You know what, Mr. Speaker? Almost every word that he spoke is absolutely applicable to Alberta today. We've got somebody whining and talking about how there was a government in place for so long, that it was so totally corrupt, that everything was permeated throughout their culture with corruption, and they've been in power how long? Oh, my goodness, this was such an immense amount of time. We should have all been ashamed of how long they sat in power in the federal government. How long was that? Was it 12 years? Oh, my. How long do we have the Conservatives in power here in Alberta? Well, that would be 35 years. That's almost three times as much. Three times as much and, I could venture, three times as corrupt perhaps, Mr. Speaker.

Let's have a little look-see at what our possibilities here are: patronage appointments to government boards and agencies. Mr. Speaker, this was already brought forward by our very own Auditor General not once, not just the most recent Auditor General but a previous one as well, talking about the need for this government to clean up the way it appointed people and to get people in place because they actually knew something about the issues. This is important because these people are supposed to be representing the citizens, and they should be representing the citizens. Frankly, more people in this province did not vote for this government than did vote for this government.

Therefore, to have citizen representation, there surely should be people appointed to these government boards and agencies who are not card-carrying members of the Conservative Party. More of them should not be card-carrying members than are card-carrying members, I would argue. They're also dealing with distribution of money, particularly government grants, so it's very important that this is seen to be open and transparent and accountable, and it is not, Mr. Speaker.

Let's have a look at some of the names. We have our very own gallery of rogues here, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to be able to go on for as much time as I have here. We've got Mr. Smith, who was a former provincial minister who did not seek re-election in the November 2004 election. What happens to him? No competition. Gosh, gee, he is appointed as the counsellor for the Alberta office in Washington, DC. My colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar had already commented that this was not an open and tendered job and that, in fact, that very minister had been responsible for cost-cutting measures earlier in which he closed all of these very same trade offices. Now they're reopened, and he's given the plum job in Washington, DC.

How about former Auditor General Peter Valentine? In the spring of 2005 he was appointed as interim head of the Alberta Securities Commission. He currently serves as senior adviser to the CEO and leader of internal audit projects at the Calgary health region authority. Well, my goodness, Mr. Speaker, what goes around comes around, doesn't it? Okay. Let's look at the Calgary regional health authority. In the late 1990s the Calgary regional health authority was run by a number of confidantes of the Premier, including former treasurer Jim Dinning as chairman, former chief of staff Rod Love as communications adviser, and former Executive Council deputy minister Jack Davis as CEO. Very interesting. The pot calling the kettle black again we have here.

How about Mr. Hartley, former VP, communications, for the PC Party association of Alberta, who also served on the regional health authority board there in Calgary? How about Norman "Skip" MacDonald, president of the Premier's constituency association, who was also appointed to the Calgary regional health authority, or perhaps Mr. Libin, who is a lawyer and, I understand, is responsible for some assistance in fundraising, who also served on the Calgary

regional health authority? How about Jack Davis, former Deputy Minister of Executive Council under this current Premier, appointed as president and CEO to the Calgary health region? They've also appointed this same Mr. Davis to a variety of things: president of the Alberta Social Housing Corporation, director of Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation, now known as the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, member of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board advisory committee, member of the Mount Royal College board of governors. My goodness, Mr. Speaker, this is a very long list indeed.

How about Mr. Gary Campbell, a long-time associate of the Premier who currently serves as the vice-president of finance, north, for the governing party's political association, serving on the Ralph Klein foundation and government appointments including the internal audit committee, the board of governors of the Alberta Treasury Branch Financial, and the Alberta Economic Development Authority. He was co-chair for the government's Alberta Tax Review Committee in 1998, also chairman of the government's Business Tax Review Committee in 2000. I bet you're starting to regret doing that, aren't you?

Let's look at Wendy Kinsella, who was the former assistant deputy minister of Alberta labour. She is now appointed or has been to the Capital health authority board. How about chair of NorQuest College board of directors? She's also been a member of the University of Alberta board of governors and a former executive director of the Alberta Human Rights Commission.

We have the previous Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who was appointed as a provincial judge. I'm sure she was very well qualified for it, but I do note she was, immediately upon not running in the last election, appointed as a provincial judge. How about Bob Maskell, the former Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, appointed to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts?

Well, my goodness, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine all these names, all these close associates, all of them appointed to various influential positions handling money, developing policy? They're supposed to represent the citizens. The distance between them and this governing party is nothing; it's about as wide as a piece of paper.

How about Audrey Luft, a member of the Alberta Economic Development Authority, also a former chair and member of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts? Additionally, Doug Goss, who turns up as a board member of NAIT, turns up as a board member of the Capital health authority, turns up as a member of the Environmental Protection Commission. How about Julian Nowicki, a former Deputy Minister of Executive Council: turns up as chair of Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission? Oh, yes, my friends. We even have a lovely woman named Paula Tyler, a former Deputy Minister for Children's Services, I think, and she turns up as a senior official for mental health services for children, Capital health authority.

There are a number of members, people that are closely associated with the political party from which this governing party comes. So when we talk about whether there's a bias, whether there is a process in place that's open and accountable, there isn't. [interjections] I'm loving this, Mr. Speaker, because every time we get people whining and moaning, and there's the Minister of RAGE yapping away on the other side again. I'm hoping he's going to get up immediately upon my finishing and actually put something on the record instead of just yapping off from the other side. Thank you very much for allowing me to get that out, Mr. Speaker.

Oh, I'm so sorry. How could I have possibly forgotten Bob Westbury, a favourite of this government, who is appointed on the government's behalf to a very long list of boards and different positions?

The Deputy Speaker: I'm not sure. Was the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency the next one wanting to speak on this? Oh, I was mistaken.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and to speak to Motion 502. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for bringing forward this motion as I believe it presents a unique opportunity to prove the old analogy about stones and glass houses.

8:30

I'm sure we all remember the final days of the Liberal Martin government, Mr. Speaker, that tired, decrepit old beast that still managed to shove its snout into the pork barrel for one last apocalyptic feeding frenzy. Let me say that again: that tired, decrepit old beast that still managed to shove its snout into the pork barrel for one last apocalyptic feeding frenzy. What didn't disappear down the throats of departing Liberal MPs was tossed about randomly in every conceivable direction to friends and party contributors.

I was pleased to see my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka refreshing the collective memory of the opposition with a few examples of what their federal cousins find to be ethical and appropriate behaviour. The cronyism and wastefulness of the federal Liberal juggernaut as it gasped its last was a lasting and eternal testament to the celebration of mediocrity.

I actually wish I had more time at my disposal, Mr. Speaker, but regrettably I'm bound by the orders of this House. If this weren't the case, I might actually have a chance to completely catalogue and recount the extent of corruption and patronage present in every federal Liberal government since the time of Trudeau. Since this amount of time isn't a possibility, I'd like nonetheless to at least scratch the surface in the time I have remaining and mention a few more friends of the federal Liberals that achieved fame, fortune, and power with the mantra: it's who you know at the PMO. Those who kissed the Grits, so to speak, were handsomely rewarded, and ordinary Canadians footed the bill for this unprecedented financial philandering.

Mr. Speaker, as long as there was a Liberal government in power, Canadians could count on an overwhelming majority of Liberal friends filling the upper echelons and cushy cubbyholes of every government organization in sight. Whether they were talking heads or figureheads, they ascended to notoriety mostly on the back of association, not always by virtue of merit or ability.

Last April former Heritage minister Liza Frulla announced the appointment of three individuals to the board of the CBC, for example. One of these was Rai Sahi, a chief executive of Morguard Corp. He had a direct association with Paul Martin in the 1980s for his involvement in a deal to buy a Martin-owned company, Kingsway Transport Group. Let us also look at a couple of appointments made during the same period of time by the former minister of transportation, Jean Lapierre. B.C. businesswoman Kazuko Komatsu, who had donated thousands of dollars to the Liberal Party of Canada, was appointed to the board of directors of the Vancouver Port Authority. Former minister Lapierre also appointed one Michel Crête, a consultant to the Liberal government, to the board of Via Rail. Former Labour and Housing minister Joe Fontana appointed a renowned residential and commercial builder, Alexander Werzberger, who incidentally was a staunch Liberal supporter, to the board of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

What is really amusing, Mr. Speaker, are the comments made at this time about these and other appointments by Mr. Lapierre's spokeswoman, Irene Marcheterre. Ms Marcheterre made a statement

to the effect that those who were appointed were giving a valuable service no matter that they had been giving money to the Liberal Party as well. She also commented that all individuals were qualified. Now, why should this even have to be said? I would think as a taxpayer that those who were appointed to these posts by the federal Liberals would have been considered on the basis of merit. That a staffer would feel the need to justify the appointment with a statement of qualification speaks, in my opinion, directly to the pervasive perception of corruption that surrounded the Liberal Martin government. Ms Marcheterre herself, after making these comments, was implicated in the Gomery investigation for allegedly receiving under-the-table payments along with other Liberals: simply unbelievable but not isolated.

The great statesman Benjamin Franklin once said, "He that lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas." Now, I'm not saying that the federal Liberal Party was infested with fleas in a literal sense, Mr. Speaker, but I will say that they left pieces of their legacy of patronage scattered far and wide across the country. These individuals caused and, regrettably, continue to cause an itch in the nation's collective sense of decorum.

One must also wonder at the issue of association, Mr. Speaker. The opposition seems to have a rather warm and cozy relationship with their federal cousins. I certainly think that this relationship makes the proposals in Motion 502 . . .

An Hon. Member: Prove it.

Rev. Abbott: Grant Mitchell.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Rev. Abbott: I certainly think that this relationship makes the proposals in Motion 502 rather amusing but also sadly ironic given the track record of the Martin Liberals.

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order?

Point of Order

False Allegations

Ms Blakeman: Yes, please; 23(h), (i), and (j). The speaker is saying that there's a cozy relationship between the provincial Liberals and the federal Liberals, and there is absolutely no proof to that. I would quote 23(h): "makes allegations against another member"; 23(i), imputing false . . . [interjections]

Hey, you know? [interjections] Order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I can't hear what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is saying with all the background noise.

Hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Continuing on, 23(i) is imputing "false or unavowed motives to another member" and 23(j): using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." In that one comment he has managed to do all three of those things, and I would ask that he be brought to order on this, please. He's making an assumption here that is simply not true.

Rev. Abbott: If I may respond, Mr. Speaker, 23(h), (i), and (j) – and I would think that the member would know this after the many years she has sat in this House – are referring to situations about another member. I was not referring to any member specifically, but rather I was referring to the Liberal Party as a whole. Of course they're

associated with their federal cousins. They share the same name, and they share many of the same values and beliefs.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone else who wishes to comment on this point of order?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, it seems that there has been a bit of a misunderstanding here because what I understood to be said was with respect to some former members of the Liberal Party in Alberta such as Grant Mitchell and Howard Sapers. Obviously, there is a relationship between some former members and the now extant Liberal government in Ottawa, and I think that's all the hon. member was trying to point out. In that respect, there was some coziness. We're all aware of it. So if we could just move on, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with the hon. member. It is a terrible insult to be accused of being in any relationship with the federal Liberals.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I've allowed a lot of leeway in all of the speeches so far tonight as far as relevance goes. Let me read the motion to you. We're debating:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to eliminate patronage appointments and increase openness and accountability of government institutions and agencies by establishing new principles and procedures for recruiting, training, and evaluating boards of directors as outlined by recommendations 1 and 2 of the annual report . . .

I've heard no mention of the annual report in any of the speeches. I've heard no mention of establishing new principles. All I'm hearing is examples of patronage at the provincial and federal levels of government.

If we're going to debate the motion, let's stick to the motion and the principles of it or else we'll be in points of order all night. May we move on, or I will be calling a point of order on relevance on all the speeches from this point on.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for clearing that up. That will bring us back to the parable about glass houses and stones that shouldn't be thrown. In true Liberal fashion the walls of the former federal House weren't glass. In fact, they were taxpayer-funded Waterford crystal, and the House staff were the homeowner's friends on permanent paid leave. In the end the people of Canada were given sufficient illumination to see through these walls and express their horror at the goings on within, thank goodness.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that these glass house building plans were distributed far and wide within the Liberal family, including the provincial Liberals, and that's the relevance.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hinman: Relevance. You just made the point of talking about it, and he got up, and he hasn't said a single thing with relevance to Motion 502. I'd ask that you would keep your word and print them to point every time that they speak and they're not relevant. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Are you challenging the chair? I want to read to everyone *Beauchesne's* 459: "Relevance is not easy to define." In this case I would have to argue with this particular clause because tonight it seems to be quite easy to define. "In borderline cases the Member should be given the benefit of the doubt, although the Speaker has frequently admonished Members who have strayed in debate." I will be admonishing them when I feel it's necessary to do so or unless someone calls a point of order.

Mr. Hinman: We'll be standing up lots.

The Deputy Speaker: What was that?

Mr. Hinman: I said: I guess we'll be standing up lots unless they change their ways.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on the motion.

8:40 Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the motion I think what I'm trying to get at here is that the provincial Liberals are also representative of the culture of entitlement that David Dingwall made famous. You see, the opposition has not placed a lot of distance . . .

Mr. Hinman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on a point of order. What's your citation?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hinman: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). There is no relevance on new principles or procedures, and that's what this motion is about. It's about new principles and procedures for recruiting, training, evaluating of directors as outlined by the recommendations of the Auditor General's report. I don't hear any of that, and I question the relevance of his speech.

Rev. Abbott: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member would simply let me finish the speech, then he would see the relevance as it will all tie in at the end and become a very eloquent piece of literature. But he won't let me finish.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, your citation of (h), (i), and (j) doesn't refer to relevance at all.

Mr. Hinman: How about *Beauchesne's* 469 then? Does that one work any better?

The Deputy Speaker: It's *Beauchesne's* 459, so you quoted the wrong points. As I said before, it's not easy to define, and it's up to the discretion of the Speaker to do that, and I will do that.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar again on the motion.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm trying to get my speech finished here, and I can tell you that if this was the opposition trying to finish a speech, they would be allowed to do so. Now let me get back to the speech.

Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: The opposition hasn't placed a lot of distance between themselves and their disgraced federal cousins, so it would also seem reasonable to assume that by not vigorously denouncing the behaviour of the Martin regime, they aren't in the best position to comment on the appointment practices of other governments. It would appear that with this motion, they've gone beyond handing out stones. In fact, they're handing out slingshots as well, Mr. Speaker.

I honestly fail to see how any institution or individual could sink to the depths of depravity, greed, and corruption that we as Canadians came to expect from the last federal Liberal government. I also don't see the point in encouraging provincial reforms when they're already being investigated and acted upon. Furthermore, I think the achievements and accomplishments of this government speak for themselves. We have members of all political stripes and members of no political stripes sitting on our various boards and committees, Mr. Speaker. In fact, up to 80 per cent of Albertans are conservative, so it wouldn't surprise me if 80 per cent of our boards' members or makeup were conservative people because that's Alberta.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank once again the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and all the colleagues that have helped me with this speech for bringing forth Motion 502 and giving this Assembly an opportunity to reiterate the litany of shameless Liberal patronage that used to echo down the halls of federal power. As informative an experience as this has been, I'm afraid that I will have to join my colleagues and withhold my support for Motion 502.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the website dictionary.com patronage is explained, and one of the definitions given is

- The power to distribute or appoint people to governmental or political positions.
- The act of distributing or appointing people to such positions.
- The positions so distributed or filled.

Synonyms given on that same website for patronage include pork-barrelling and cronyism. Cronyism itself is defined as favouritism to friends "without regard for their qualifications."

Mr. Speaker, in the early '90s a Premier appointing his barber to head the gaming commission was considered a bad move. It caused his popularity to slip further and accelerated his departure from provincial politics. Fifteen years later this government still makes the same mistakes and doesn't seem to have learned anything. Granted, they may apparently not be receiving the same level of attention or criticism as before or as they should, but that's not an excuse for corruption. Maybe they're not troubled by it much because this government is more secretive, hiding more and more behind FOIP, or the public and/or the media have become desensitized to news of patronage appointments. Unfortunately, this government acts mostly after being exposed or shamed into taking action. This is a sign of fatigue and stagnation. Of course, 35 years of monolithic rule and a tight grip on and addiction to power leads to such outcomes.

What we're suggesting here is for the government to be proactive this one time and clean its house on its own accord before it's forced to. The direction I am taking, Mr. Speaker, is one of appearance. The visual is really bad now, and it needs to change dramatically. The public doesn't trust politicians and has lost faith in this government. This distrust was only magnified or compounded when they

found out what this government is doing: appointing its friends and loyalists to comfortable, nice paying jobs on various boards and commissions. We have a chance today to significantly improve this government's image by alleviating some of the concerns that the public, we in the opposition, and even the Auditor General have with respect to cronyism or patronage appointments.

Motion 502, as presented by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, offers the hon. members across the floor a chance to try to begin to appear to be a little more transparent and forthcoming. If they have nothing to lose or hide, they would all support it. What we are proposing here, to bring it into focus, is to establish principles and procedures for recruiting, training, and evaluating people who are appointed to serve on boards, agencies, commissions, and committees. This is in tandem with the recommendations of the Auditor General in his annual report, 2004-05. We need the best people for these jobs: people with iron-clad, irrefutable qualifications and sound, relevant experience. Someone whose sole value is his or her friendship with or backing of a Tory MLA may not necessarily be the best candidate to fill this vacancy.

Of particular concern and cause for great irritation to me is when a position is created or invented, when it's custom-made to fit a certain applicant. This is unacceptable in our province's second century. If Mr. Harper is trying to clean up government in Ottawa, we should too, right here in Alberta. If the ruling provincial Tories don't do it, Mr. Speaker, we Alberta Liberals will.

Now, I know that people will say that the Auditor General didn't use the word patronage, per se, in his report, but we all know how diplomatic our Auditor General is and that those around him helping edit his releases are ones who pay great attention to their choice of words. The examples are there, and listing them off one by one today will extend this discussion for hours. We've just gone through it, and I think it's not necessary to go further into it.

This government has a chance to start to come clean and avoid embarrassment and scandal. This is the visual or appearance that I'm urging them to take into consideration. The greater benefit, however, is going to be that the citizens of this province will be served by individuals who are competent, trustworthy, and hard-working. These agencies or boards dispense hundreds of millions of public taxpayer dollars and oversee essential and critical services, from health and education to finance, to energy, and environmental protection. You have everything from the Treasury Branches and the Securities Commission to college and university boards of governors, from AADAC and the health regions to persons with developmental disabilities and the Workers' Compensation Board appeals commission, et cetera.

Accountability and trust are missing from the equation, Mr. Speaker, but really can be easily restored if this government chooses to act. I urge everyone to accept our Motion 502 today. Participation on public boards, agencies, and commissions is an important and integral part of our democratic process. Every Albertan with the proper experience and education should be able to apply to fill such a position. The decision should be based on merit and qualification; that is to say, on what you know not who you know in the government caucus or the PC party aristocracy. Thank you, and good luck to you all as you vote on this proposal.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a little bit of a different angle on this. Quite frankly, I don't have any problem with people in this Assembly naming Mr. Smith or Mr. Westbury or

other people that have taken appointments in Alberta, but when you do the drive-by smear in a motion like this, that's inferring that all of these people on these boards are Tories, are patronage appointments, that's very unfair to literally thousands of Albertans who go to work once a month, once a week, twice a year on the hundreds of boards that make this province the great place that it is.

8:50

We have a motion that says that we're going to do in with this patronage – and the hon. members brought up the connection to Gomery, but there is an absolutely huge difference between that level and the appointments that are in Alberta because hundreds of millions of dollars haven't left with the appointments that these boards and these people look after in Alberta. They spend this money on behalf of Albertans, and the money is accounted for by an officer of this Legislature, the Auditor General, who has also been accused of being a patronage appointment by the opposition in this motion. Mr. Speaker, that's astounding, to a certain degree, that an officer of the Legislature would be included in a motion about patronage appointments.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is a . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against Nonmembers

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Certainly, I would allow the hon. member time to withdraw that comment. We had never on this side of the House said that the Auditor General was involved in any sort of patronage appointment or patronage process. Clearly, if the hon. member had been listening to the debate previous, he would have realized that we were following up on a recommendation from the Auditor General's 2004-2005 report. I would ask now that the hon. member withdraw that statement.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I will not withdraw it. They also used the former Auditor General, Mr. Valentine, as another appointment. So they can check their *Hansard*. I am saying that including all Albertans, including these people, when you're discussing a motion like this, wipes them all with the same brush. They brought these names up, not me. I am more concerned with Mr. and Mrs. Jones who serve on these boards and who serve diligently and faithfully. Yes, some of them are Tories – that's just a fact of life – but lots of them are Liberals, are NDs, are nonpolitical, and the motion and the conversation has been around the fact that: well, this is all bad; it's all dirty.

Mr. Speaker, by and large, rather than name names of people who have been appointed to these boards, give examples of where the boards have done something wrong with taxpayers' money, where these people have improved their way of life or their bank accounts. Like other patronage appointments across the country we can all be compared to other provinces or the federal government, if you'd like. It doesn't serve a lot of good, but the fact is that these people shouldn't be afraid to come forward and volunteer to serve on boards, except to be slashed by the opposition that it's somehow a patronage appointment.

I want to just read the appeal board appointments: candidates will be screened and interviewed based on their qualifications the

applications received; successful candidates will be added to the appeal board roster maintained by the department that provides a list of impartial, qualified individuals willing to serve on appeal boards as required. You know, it doesn't say: good Tories only apply. It says: qualified applicants. I would hate to think that because you do belong to a party at some time that you're ineligible to do extra work for your province and for your community. That just makes no sense.

I have no question that the hon. members' intentions were good, but the way that they approached this is that all boards are patronage, all boards must need more accountability and openness. That is simply not the case, Mr. Speaker.

You're looking nervous.

The Deputy Speaker: You're on a point of order.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, I'm not going to withdraw my statements.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order?

Well, I don't have the information before me at this particular point based on the alleged point of order, on what these allegations specifically were, but I can tell you from the gist of all the speeches from both sides of the House tonight, names were brought up from federal people and provincial people. I'm sure that all the federal people's names that were brought up that allegedly received a patronage appointment didn't use that position in a negative way or a way that would benefit themselves either. If I'm to rule this on a point of order, I'm going to have to rule everyone that spoke to it so far out of order as well.

Now, I've asked this Assembly several times tonight to stick to the motion that's before us and the merits of the motion rather than resort to making allegations against another member or saying things that would impute false or unavowed motives to another member or as 23(j) says in our Standing Orders, "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Now, based on the fact that it was likely to create disorder, I could pretty much call every speaker on 23(j) because every speaker created disorder so far tonight in my estimation. I could rule the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster out of order, but to do so, I would have to go back and rule every other speaker out of order because they've all done the same thing.

I'm going to ask one more time if we can move on from here and stick to debating the motion even if that means taking the notes in front of you, those who are left to speak here, and covering them up and picking the motion up out of our Order Paper and looking at it to see what's in there and making up your speech as you go. That is my ruling, that we're going to carry on, and from this point on I'll be calling everything on a point of order.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, as you can see, my speech is not very elaborately written, but it comes from my experience of being on boards.

One of the boards I was on was the Health Facilities Review Committee. That was probably one of the most dedicated groups of people I ever had the privilege to listen to and work with, and I haven't been too terribly involved in politics except for the last five or six years. Most of these people I didn't know. We certainly never approached it from a political point of view. We approached it from a point of view of people that cared very deeply about the health facilities they were in, and I can assure you that they never,

ever felt that it was a patronage appointment. After several months of work there I think they probably felt that they'd been tricked into a very difficult position. They contribute tremendous time to this.

So to suggest that somehow our system doesn't work now or that we need to change it because there's something wrong, Mr. Speaker, I think is unfair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, are you debating the motion, or are you debating what was previously said?

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm debating the motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I'm confused about that because it sounds like you're debating what was previously said, so please proceed on the motion.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, Mr. Speaker, I shall end the confusion immediately. I would just hope the hon. members of this Assembly choose to deal with the motion in the appropriate way.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to stand and speak to this Motion 502. I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for bringing this motion forward. I think it's a very appropriate one to start this Second Session of the 26th Legislature.

I did not prepare any notes calling kettles black or throwing rocks at glass houses. It didn't even enter my mind. I'm very disappointed that we fell into that, and I was disappointed with the jubilation and the laughter shown by some members when it was brought up.

What I want to speak on tonight is the motion on openness, on accountability, on new principles and procedures. I, too, though, would like to thank the thousands of Albertans who have accepted positions on these boards for the enormous amount of work that they do. To me they're the ones that really are the backbone of our communities and really what make them work. For us to think that someone else does it, I think that we should consider it a little bit more. I've been associated and worked with many of those people that have spent many extra hours dedicated to serving on those boards.

What I wanted to talk on tonight is cleaning up the perception of patronage appointment. I very much know and realize that in the real world if I had to hire someone or was looking for someone to deal with rules and regulations concerning automobiles, I would go to those people who I know and understand.

9:00

The point that I want to talk about is that perhaps we should step back and look at some of those boards that we put in, especially provincial boards, and consider elections again, the ones like the health boards. They served us very well in the past, those that were elected, and it's a great benefit because there was no question who they were loyal to and who they were working for: those people they were elected by. Each member in the House here understands who they're elected by, and what should be first and foremost on our agenda at all times is representing those people.

Some of the other things to look at when we consider the fact of openness and accountability. Accountability is: where are we spending our tax dollars, and what are we doing for the size of

government? It seems like we're often having more boards, more appointments, and that's not serving the best interests of Albertans. So I think that on this part of openness and accountability it would be of value to discuss whether or not we should be electing more boards and whether we need as many boards as we have.

The other part is the new principles and procedures. It's the principles and procedures that govern us and our values and our way of thinking. Certainly, the optics for those people that are watching, it's been very eloquently pointed out tonight, do not look good from a provincial or federal position, and I think that we owe the people that have accepted these things the responsibility of cleaning that up. The Auditor General has said in his reports that we should maybe be doing more due diligence when we bring these people onto the boards. What would help there immensely – at the municipal level when they want to do something, they have to advertise it in the papers, and there's an application and a procedure that they go through. It's been pointed out tonight many times that there are not procedures, and it seems that it's bad optics. That's why people become disjointed from government, saying: "Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm not going to become involved. It's going to happen, and there's nothing we can do about it."

So to bring that back, I say that we should change the procedures, that we should be advertising. We should make those positions known to the public. I like very much the idea of putting it on the web and letting people understand that it's there and that they can and should apply for that job feeling that it is a nonpartisan job and that they are serving the community as a whole. It's not about the individual. It's about the process. We've pointed out many times tonight about the different individuals that have been there, but it's the process of how the individuals got there that has tainted it. So I would hope that what we would be doing – and I would certainly support Motion 502 – is saying: how can we make Alberta better? It's not about who they are or what they know; it's about how we make it better.

To close on accountability, I think that one of the major problems that we suffer in this democracy of Canada and Alberta is that accountability in the private world means that you're held accountable and you'll be removed when you've been shown to not follow what you represented or said you were going to do. That is recall. We could really change things here in the province of Alberta if we were to bring in recall. Then we would be accountable. We could have the elections, and we could be recalled if, in fact, we changed our policies, our thinking, or our procedure.

With that, I'll sit down. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion, and I hope everyone will vote in favour of it.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion before us, Motion 502, I'm pleased to rise and speak to. The motion in essence is simply asking this House to take the two recommendations made by the Auditor General in his report of 2004-2005, recommendations 1 and 2, and implement those recommendations. That's the essence of Motion 502. I want to put on record what these recommendations are before I proceed to comment further in the debate.

Recommendation 1 says:

We recommend that the Deputy Minister of Executive Council update Alberta public sector governance principles and guidance so that they are consistent with current good practices for recruiting, evaluating and training directors.

Now, clearly this recommendation suggests that the guidelines and the principles in place now are out of date, to put it mildly, and that they need to be updated.

Recommendation 2, Mr. Speaker:

We recommend that the guidance include a statement that governing

boards evaluate and report publicly their own performance against both Alberta public sector principles and their own board governance policies.

These recommendations to me are self-evidently attractive propositions, recommendations for action on the part of this Assembly and this government. If there's a disagreement with the substance of the recommendations, that's what I think we should focus our debate on. I'd like to hear hon. members on all sides of the House focus on the substance of these two recommendations and say what they see wrong with them.

There are over 100 corporations, such organizations, in the public sector. After examining the governance of these bodies and boards, the Auditor General, the principal officer of this Assembly, has made these recommendations. I haven't heard a word about whether we have reservations. I don't. I think that these are eminently sensible recommendations and that they must be implemented immediately.

I also believe that these are recommendations made in the context of the Auditor General coming to the conclusion that we do not have in place in this province good governance guidelines. All he can do as an officer of this House is make recommendations, draw our attention to where we are not doing our job well, and then hope that, rather than accusing each other of doing this or doing that, we pay attention to what this gentleman, that we have appointed and who reports to us and is obliged to report to us on an annual basis, tells us needs to be done, where we are falling short of the most current, democratic, accountable, transparent, ethical governance practices.

Now, if members of this House take issue with these recommendations, that should be what we should be spending our time on in this House, not on accusing each other of this. I think it's in the public interest. We are here to serve the public good, and the public good is served if we have ethical governance practices, if there's transparency about the way we make appointments, if those we appoint are accountable to us, accountable to the people of Alberta by reporting on their own decisions and functions on a yearly basis and making those evaluations public. That's what these recommendations are saying.

Now, surely we can point our fingers at Ottawa, at the Liberal government that was, and say: well, it was afflicted by all these unethical practices, a rotten government. But what has that finger pointing to do with us here making a statement that we do take, in fact, the recommendations of the Auditor General of this province seriously? That finger pointing, it seems to me, whether we intend it or not, is taking attention away from the task before us, which is to make the governance of these over 100 public agencies and bodies better than it has been, and in doing that, he suggests what we need to do.

9:10

I implore members of this House to take seriously the work that the Auditor General has done on our behalf and to take action on those. There are interesting parallels, Mr. Speaker, between what these recommendations contain – and I have looked quickly through the Auditor General's report – and what in response to the problems many of the speakers tonight have drawn attention to with respect to the way things have been done in Ottawa in the past and the lack of ethical standards there.

Ed Broadbent, a member of the last Parliament, prepared a report called *Cleaning Up Politics: Demanding Changes in Ethics and Accountability*. Now, if we don't hold ourselves to the highest standards of accountability, if we don't demand of ourselves ethical standards, that are crying for attention, who will? I think it's up to

the electors, then, to make those decisions if we don't pay attention. The Auditor General has done his work, and I think it's an obligation that we pay attention to what he is suggesting we do.

The Broadbent report on ethics and accountability makes seven recommendations, Mr. Speaker. The first one is democratic accountability for MPs, the second is fixed election dates, the third is transparent leadership contests, the fourth is electoral reform, the fifth is about ending unregulated lobbying, and the sixth is about ethical appointments, and that's the one that I want to just read into the record, what he's recommending needs to be done. If we look at what he's recommending and then go back to the recommendation that the Auditor General of the province of Alberta, the officer of the Assembly, has made, we'll see great parallels, overlap. So if we pay attention to the substance, I think we might agree that certain things need to be done, and to be honest to our electors, we ought to act on those recommendations because they make sense.

This is what these recommendations are, Mr. Speaker, as proposed by Mr. Broadbent: that the government of Canada – and here you could substitute the government of our province because, after all, our primary concern at this moment with reference to the special debate on this motion is with the province of Alberta. This is what he was saying about the government of Canada:

That the government of Canada develop skills and competence-related criteria for all government appointments, (including Board Members and senior Officers of Crown Corporations and other government agencies) . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close debate on Motion 502.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will just draw the attention of the House to number 6 of the recommendations in the Broadbent report.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that bell is not someone ringing this Legislative Assembly looking for a government appointment.

Now, we heard a lot about this motion. It was certainly interesting to listen to the debate as it was, but the Auditor General made this recommendation, not the Official Opposition, and I would encourage all hon. government members to think about that. This is a recommendation – in fact, it's two recommendations, and they're key recommendations from the Auditor General.

There seems to be a problem here, and this motion would go a long way towards fixing that. Now, we can't ignore this. A top Tory, Mr. Rod Love, has said – and it was discussed earlier, Mr. Speaker. This was in the *Edmonton Sun* in February 2006.

Rev. Abbott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Nonmember

Rev. Abbott: I thought you'd admonished us several times this evening to avoid naming names to try to stop what you'd call a rabble-rousing, that's mentioned in the Standing Orders.

The Deputy Speaker: I admonished everybody for making accusatory remarks and allegations against another member, imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, or using abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder. That's the gist of it. Hon. member and for all hon. members, with the exception of two speeches tonight you're getting back into that area of infringing upon the Standing Orders. If you would like to continue, please complete your summation and stick to the motion.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, there was no point of order there because there was simply no citation.

Mr. Speaker, top government organizers admit that there is too much cronyism in this government. If we vote for this motion tonight, that will hopefully satisfy that individual, for one.

We heard a lot earlier about the previous federal Liberal government. Well, now, Mr. Speaker, this newly elected Conservative government in Ottawa, what is one of the first things that they want to do? It's to establish a public appointments commission to set merit-based requirements for appointments to government boards, commissions, and agencies to ensure that competitions for posts are widely publicized and fairly conducted. Now, that's what this motion is all about, and that was my idea earlier about having a website with all this information on it. That is the purpose of that website. If it's good enough for the Conservatives in Ottawa, I don't know why this government here would be so uncomfortable with that, particularly after the wording from the Auditor General.

The establishment of this public appointments commission certainly would prevent ministerial aides and other political appointees from receiving favoured treatment when applying for public service positions. That's something that I would encourage this government to look at. It's not long ago that one member from one department was chastised for getting money from the taxpayers for not doing any work. That wasn't a federal Liberal appointment. That, Mr. Speaker, was a Progressive Conservative appointment.

Ms Blakeman: No.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, it certainly was.

The only reason why I can say, Mr. Speaker, that government members are upset with Motion 502 is that this government is obsessed with control. This government talks about democracy, but if any independent commission or board or agency actually operates independently enough to criticize the government, it's dissolved or it's changed or it's filled with Tory cronies. Whatever happened to the Alberta community lottery boards? These were a genuine grassroots community organization, but because Tory members, MLAs, weren't getting enough photo ops, they shut the whole program down. They cancelled the board.

Participating on public boards, agencies, and commissions is a really significant part of our democratic process. It should be something that every qualified citizen has an equal chance to be able to do, with appointments being based on merit, not on who you know over in the PC Party office.

This government has directives with impressive sounding principles, but the problem is that these are just window dressing. That's why the Auditor General made these recommendations in 2004-2005. Too often partisanship overrides performance, and the public and the taxpayers suffer. These bodies that we're talking about control hundreds of millions of dollars and deliver or oversee

the most significant public services in our province, from health and education to finance, energy, and environmental management.

9:20

The government bragged about the publicity gained from the mention in the Gomery report about the process used to hire deputy ministers – that was recommendation 12 – but it stops there. These processes don't appear to have carried on into other agencies or commissions or public boards. I would like to see that happen. If we vote to support Motion 502, I think we will have a better province. Certainly, we will have a better government.

In conclusion, I urge all hon. members to support Motion 502. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 502 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:21 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Hinman	Pannu
Elsalhy	MacDonald	Swann
Flaherty	Miller, R.	

Against the motion:

Abbott	Johnston	Rodney
Ady	Knight	Rogers
Amery	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Brown	Lund	Stelmach
Calahasen	Magnus	Stevens
Cenaiko	Melchin	Strang
Doerksen	Oberg	VanderBurg
Goudreau	Oberle	Webber
Griffiths	Ouellette	Zwozdesky
Jablonski	Prins	

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 29
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 lost]

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

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 28: Ms Blakeman]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by stating that I am extremely honoured to have this opportunity to rise today and speak in response to the Speech from the Throne, given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I would like to thank and

congratulate His Honour on a fine speech and a very fitting speech given the historical significance of the upcoming session.

Mr. Speaker, as Albertans we were all extremely proud to celebrate the centennial of our province in 2005. A century of achievement and success is behind us now. The Speech from the Throne marked the beginning of a renewed commitment to excellence as we enter the first sitting of our second hundred years. The second century will prove to be one of promise and innovation. Recent resource discoveries, a booming economy, and sound fiscal management will assure Alberta's prominence well into the future. Innovation and prudent spending are contributing to a dramatic increase in the quality of life enjoyed by Albertans in the present.

Mr. Speaker, this prosperity has not been without its challenges. There are always obstacles and adversity that threaten to overcome even the best-laid plans. Alberta is a place of extreme diversity. We are a land of vast expanse and vastly different cultures, but despite this diversity we are united in the common goal of a better province for all.

Mr. Speaker, I am both honoured and fortunate to represent the good people of Calgary-East. This constituency is unique in both its location and its diversity. People of all backgrounds are proud to call it home. They face the challenges and adversity with typical Alberta spirit, and typically this government has once again risen to the occasion by addressing many of these important and pressing issues. In the Speech from the Throne we heard of a commitment to new innovations that will continue the momentum of our prosperity, innovations in technology and value-added products, but especially close to my heart was a proposed series of initiatives aimed at increasing the number of skilled immigrants coming to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned previously, Calgary-East is a constituency of great diversity. People from all over the world who came in search of a better life have found just that. Through their perseverance and hard work they have added a valuable piece to the economic fabric of Alberta. Through their varying cultures and ethnicities they have added a giant contribution to the cultural fabric as well.

Alberta is a place of opportunity. We are a place where a person's ultimate potential is limitless. In light of the government's fiscal policies, the economic climate that makes this potential a reality will continue for a long time to come. Calgary especially is facing a boom of unprecedented proportions, Mr. Speaker, and a proportionate lack of skilled labour. Our city is expanding at an astronomical rate. Our population is expanding by over 2 per cent each year. By 2008 we will have a population of 1 million people.

Mr. Speaker, infrastructure is springing up, and jobs are being created faster than they can be filled. There is insufficient domestic skilled labour to meet the demand. In Calgary we desperately need carpenters, plumbers, machinists, and all sorts of tradespeople to accommodate our growth. By making a further commitment to increasing the influx of skilled labour into our province, the government is not only showing great responsibility; it is also providing great opportunity while adding even more to the diversity that has come to make Alberta distinct.

Mr. Speaker, as an immigrant myself I know the challenges and opportunities that are associated with leaving everything you know to start a new life in a strange land. It is a scary and daunting proposition, full of equal parts of hope and uncertainty. Easing this transition and bridging cultural barriers is a vital first step in increasing our workforce. In the speech delivered by His Honour, we heard of a new strategy to streamline the immigration process and make Alberta a prime destination for skilled immigrants.

Many of my constituents found opportunities in Calgary that would have been unattainable in their home countries. My hope is

that with new and innovative strategies they will be joined by countless others. This is more than a creative vision for the present. This is a long-term diversification strategy that will sustain and even increase our economic momentum far into the foreseeable future. Removing barriers to immigration is a key component, a necessary component of a sustainable Alberta, and I am extremely pleased to see the government's proactive stance on this pressing issue.

Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents will also be pleased that more hard-working people will have the same opportunities they had to make a new life in a foreign land. This policy is so natural for this province. We have come back to our roots. As a fledgling province we advertised far and wide for settlers willing to carve a society from a harsh wilderness with basically nothing but determination and hard work. We made it easy for them and offered incentives, and the rest, as they say, is history.

9:40

Mr. Speaker, when we look at what we have today, we do it with the recognition of the immigrants that made it possible. Their achievements were nothing short of amazing. In the span of a few short years they showed the world that hard work and co-operation could make a society that the world would envy, a society where all the prejudices and enmities were set aside for the common good and a good life could be attained by those willing to work hard for it.

Mr. Speaker, we have now come full circle in our thinking. The entire world contributed to the first century of our province. We took in the most adventurous. We attracted the best, the brightest, and the hardest working from every corner of the world, and they built for us a province of which we should all be extremely proud.

We no longer have wilderness to tame or farmland to homestead, but we face challenges in our second century nonetheless. Once again, Mr. Speaker, we need skilled labour, and once again the world has shown its eagerness to lend the minds and the hands of its many different peoples. We have once again made a commitment to invite them in, a policy which will be to the benefit of everyone in this province. Alberta has been blessed with an abundance of natural resources, but left untapped, these resources are worth nothing. Oil is a commodity. It can't build a house, fix a car, or perform surgery; skilled immigrants can. As our prosperity continues to grow, so will the demand for their unique abilities.

In conclusion, as we enter the first session of Alberta's second century, I am extremely pleased at the foresight and commitment of the people of this province shown by this government in His Honour's speech. Just as was the case a hundred years ago, Mr. Speaker, great things are in store for the next hundred years. The people of Calgary-East, like every other Albertan, are extremely enthusiastic about the potential this future holds. They are eager to add their input into the future and pleased that the issues so important to them in the present are being addressed in a clear, concise, and visionary fashion.

Mr. Speaker, by increasing the prevalence of those who would help to build our province with their skills while at the same time fighting those who would try to destroy it with drugs and criminal activities, this government has addressed issues important not only to myself and my constituents but to every citizen in this province. With sound policies such as these I have no doubt that Alberta's prominence will last into the next century. Just as I have held the ideas of those who preceded us as an example, it is my firm belief that the statements presented by His Honour will likewise stand as a long-lasting testament to wisdom and sound policy to our descendants. While the future is not absolute, I have great faith that Alberta is on the right track to sustainable and continuous growth.

It is and will always be a place of unlimited opportunities for everyone, just as it has proved to be for me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to table a quote related to her speech on Motion 502. You can do that at this time.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the previous motion, Motion 502, I did quote from a particular document. I had promised I would table that document, and I'm happy to do so at this time.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise for the second time to give my response to the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne.

Before I get into that too far, I would like to apologize to the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf of all members of this Assembly for what I believe was a new low in debate that we sunk to tonight. I would particularly point to the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, who, I believe, Mr. Speaker . . .

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Zwozdesky: I would simply remind the member of citations 23(h), (i), and (j) as well as 459 from *Beauchesne*, which the Speaker admonished members about earlier today. I'm not sure if the hon. member who just spoke was in earshot distance to have heard exactly what it is that you said, but perhaps you could remind everybody at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: On the point of order?

Mr. R. Miller: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was simply responding to an interjection from the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker. Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j) have been quoted extensively tonight. I think in all cases it was probably quite fuzzy as to whether or not there were any motives imputed to an individual member, but clearly what we have just heard are motives imputed to an individual member. He has mentioned my constituency, and he is trying to speak on behalf of me. I would ask him not to do that. I would ask him to withdraw those comments. If he would like to apologize on behalf of himself and speak for himself, then he can certainly do that, but he cannot speak for this entire Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order?

Well, obviously, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, your comments did create disorder in this House. During the division I spoke to both House leaders and said that I would be enforcing the rules on the strictest basis to maintain decorum in this House. So I would rule that your comments were out of order because they did cause disruption. Would you wish to withdraw them?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be happy to withdraw the comment, and I look forward to your continuing to

enforce decorum in the House. That might mean that I would get through my speech without any interjections from the members opposite.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I apologize to the people of Edmonton-Rutherford because I really do believe that the level of debate reached a low in this House tonight. I would like to thank, in particular, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for bringing it back up to the level at which I believe it belongs and which I believe Albertans have a right to expect.

Mr. Speaker, one year ago I congratulated then Prime Minister Martin for having made an absolutely excellent choice in choosing the new Lieutenant Governor. During the previous year, my first year as an MLA, those comments proved to be extremely profound, I think, because I can't imagine another Albertan who would have made a better choice. I was honoured to have had the opportunity to be present at several events where the Lieutenant Governor was involved and particularly honoured to have had him attend an event in my consistency of Edmonton-Rutherford when we honoured 39 wonderful citizens for their contributions to Alberta with the centennial medals. That was certainly a highlight of my first year as an MLA and a highlight of my first year representing the people of Edmonton-Rutherford – amongst many, I must say.

Having had the opportunity to be involved with the royal visit was certainly a highlight. Presenting centennial medallions to centenarians was a highlight. I had 13 centenarians living in Edmonton-Rutherford in the year 2005 and had the extreme pleasure to be able to present each of those with a gold medallion. I think I may have mentioned this previously in the House, but the only consternation I had was the fact that 12 of them were female. I suggested to them that perhaps they were holding out on us and had a secret that they weren't willing to share.

All of the celebrations around September 1 were special. It's unfortunate that the children didn't have the day off school. That's the one reservation that I had. I really think that, you know, given a once in a century opportunity, it's too bad that we didn't give the kids a day off school. Nevertheless, I know I took my children out of school to join in the celebration, and I know many other parents did as well.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the highlight for me, the number one memory that I take from my first year as an MLA, was having had the honour to represent the people of Edmonton-Rutherford at the RCMP memorial held at the ButteDome in recognition of the Fallen Four. Never have I been so proud to be a Canadian as I was that day, to see row after row, literally sea after sea of men and women in uniform there to honour the four fallen RCMP officers. It was a sight and an experience that I will never forget and, as I say, without question the apex of my year as an MLA.

9:50

In particular, to the speech delivered by the Lieutenant Governor, I found myself one evening last week – and sometimes I wonder if maybe I should get a real life. The Premier referred the other day to the people that reside in this Assembly as not real people. At the time I took some offence, but maybe he's right because I have to say that the other evening I found myself at home, while doing some research for an upcoming bill, listening to the proceedings of this Assembly. With thanks to the Speaker and the Legislative Assembly Office it's available online on the Internet, so I was able to listen to debate while I was doing my research.

I heard a speech given by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and another one, a very eloquent speech, I must say, by the

Member for Calgary-Fort. If you were to just listen to those two speeches and not have heard anything else, you would have thought that Alberta was literally Utopia, that everything was as good as it could possibly be right here in Alberta, and that there was absolutely nothing that could be improved upon; it was the very best imaginable. There was another speech given by a colleague to the left, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and in his speech you would have thought that there was nothing good with what's happening in Alberta right now, that everything was in utter chaos, and that we were all doomed to destitution, that it was just as bad as could be imagined. Then, thankfully, somewhere in the middle there was a speech by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung which pointed out that things are very good in Alberta right now but, boy, there are a lot of things that cause us to be concerned. I must say that these are the sorts of things that I hear from the people of Edmonton-Rutherford as I'm travelling through the constituency or knocking on their doors.

There's no question that we live in a time of plenty in this province right now. There is more money than any of us can possibly imagine. There is tremendous opportunity for so many people, and yet, somehow, there's a total disconnect between the wealth and the opportunity and a large segment of our society who are suffering, can't find a job, can't seem to pick themselves up from the situation they find themselves in and share in the wealth and prosperity. I'm not sure why that is, but I think every member of this Assembly should be concerned about it because it sort of defies logic, yet it's a very real situation. We have more food banks in the province right now than we've ever had in communities that have never had a food bank before. I have constituents, even in the relatively well-off constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, who are desperately awaiting the arrival of their rebate cheques so that they can buy groceries to feed their kids.

Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that these two things, health care and the entire issue surrounding the wealth of the province, are going to be the focus of this sitting of the Legislature, and I'm going to spend a little bit of time talking about both of those. In my comments almost a year ago to the day in my maiden speech I compared the maiden speech of my predecessor, Percy Wickman, a former MLA from 1989 through to 2001, to the situation as it was a year ago in Edmonton-Rutherford. I was surprised, quite frankly, and somewhat taken aback at how similar things were from 1989 to 2004, how little things had changed, and in fact how similar the concerns that were being expressed to me as I had campaigned were to the concerns that Percy Wickman had raised in 1989 in his maiden speech. So you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, a year later not much has changed. If it didn't change much in 15 years, it hasn't likely changed in a year, and certainly my experience talking to the people of Rutherford is that it hasn't changed that much.

The two big issues, as I say, that have been identified to me really are health care and issues surrounding the surplus and all of the money that we find in the province right now, and I just want to go back to something that I said in my maiden speech last year because it's so relevant today. It's not an exact quote, but what I touched on was the fact that people were telling me on the campaign trail that what they really want is an ambulance when they need it. They need to know that there's a bed, not a gurney, waiting for them in hospital. They want the elimination of the health care premium tax. They don't want to pay \$500 or \$600 a month for health insurance. They'd like to see the establishment of a wellness fund. They believe in creating a public drug plan and desperately wanted to see improvement in long-term and seniors' care centres. Those words, when I look at them now, a year hence, are certainly prophetic because all of those things are things that we're hearing again today.

Now, the Premier has asked and the health minister has asked for ideas, Mr. Speaker, and I think we've been quite forthcoming with ideas. Unfortunately, they haven't always been received in the spirit in which they were delivered, but I do believe that a number of very good ideas are to be found in the Liberal health care document. In fact, the minister indicated in the House today that several of those are ideas that have been adopted and are currently in the process of being worked on. It would appear that perhaps there were some good ideas in that document after all, despite what the Premier said, so I'd like to congratulate the Liberal opposition caucus and those that worked on the document for having had some foresight when they drafted that document because, in fact, there were some good ideas in there, and there's now finally some acknowledgement from the government that that was the case.

The whole idea of consultation really, I think, needs to have some work on it. The minister has given a month for Albertans to respond to what could conceivably be some major changes – major changes – to the health care system as we know it. People are saying that a month isn't enough, and I would tend to agree. In fact, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the minister said was that people could find a copy of the government's framework policy in their MLA's office, and to this date that is not the case. I've had several people come into my constituency office looking for a copy of this document, and we don't have one. I feel terrible having to tell them that I don't have one. We can certainly print one off the internet and have done so, but that's not the point. If the minister says, "There are copies in your MLA's office; we're sending copies to all MLAs' offices," and people arrive and it's not there, that's . . .

Ms Blakeman: The government looks bad.

Mr. R. Miller: The government does look bad, and in fact, unfortunately, sometimes the local MLA looks bad. It's important. People need to see that document if they're going to be providing . . .

Mr. Magnus: Respond to the Speech from the Throne.

Some Hon. Members: Relevance.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the throne speech allows quite a bit of leeway in what a member can speak on. I'd like to cite for the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill Standing Order 13(4)(b). Were you rising on a point of order, or were you just interrupting?

Mr. Magnus: Just interrupting.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, 13(4)(b) states that no member shall interrupt a member that's speaking unless he's rising on a point of order.

Hon. member, please continue.

10:00

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important, if we're going to tell Albertans that we want their input and then we tell Albertans that a document is going to be available at their MLA's office, that in fact we make sure that that is the case. Now, I understand that today the minister made some representation that it will happen soon, and certainly those constituents of mine that have come looking for more information on exactly what the government's plans might be will be pleased to see that when it takes place.

Now, I know that I'm fast running out of time. I do want to talk

a little bit about the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, in particular, Mr. Speaker. I know that I had a fair amount to say about this earlier, so I won't spend a lot of time on it. I think it's important to note that while we have made a commitment finally to invest a billion dollars into the heritage savings trust fund, there's been some discussion about the fact that we are still taking a billion dollars out before we put the billion dollars back in, so really all we're doing is maintaining the status quo. The fund in 1987 was worth \$12.7 billion and as of the second-quarter update was down to \$12.4 billion. So we can see that in 19 years, really, we've lost the value of that fund. In fact, had it at least been inflation-proofed, it would be nearly \$20 billion today.

Under an Alberta Liberal plan, with the current surplus situation \$3.5 billion would have gone into that plan this year alone. So I think it's important that people see that while it's a good first step, certainly this is a fund that in my mind has been misused and perhaps even abused over the years. It's good that we're finally giving it some recognition.

Now, Mr. Speaker . . . [Mr. Miller's speaking time expired] Mr. Speaker, could you please check the time?

The Deputy Speaker: Your time has elapsed. I checked with the Clerk. Your time has elapsed.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great honour and privilege to rise tonight in response to the Speech from the Throne. Two weeks ago His Honour the Lieutenant Governor opened a new chapter in Alberta's history as one century of achievement was left behind and another was ushered in. Last year was a banner year for our province. It was both a year of closure and a year of new hope. As Albertans wrapped up centennial celebrations across the province, they had many things to be thankful for: a booming energy market, an unprecedented expansion in prosperity and virtually all things, and a sense of the truly unlimited potential held by the future.

I am personally extremely thankful to have been given the chance to represent the constituents of Drayton Valley-Calmar. Our constituency, like any other in the province, faces unique challenges and situations. Alberta is a place of great diversity, and the government must accordingly take great care in its plans and initiatives to ensure that no individual or region is left behind.

One of the biggest issues facing Drayton Valley-Calmar is that of crystal methamphetamine. This is not an issue specific to our constituency, but it is an especially relevant one. The criminals who make these poisons and distribute them to our friends and our children are not only operating in urban centres any more, Mr. Speaker. Drugs have become a rural problem as well, and new strategies must take into account the ever-changing nature of this threat. While meth is a problem that affects all Albertans, Drayton Valley has been hit especially hard as it has become a mecca for meth producers.

In conversations with government personnel in Saskatchewan I have recently learned to my dismay that up to 80 per cent of the meth distributed in that province is being produced in the Drayton Valley area. Now, my constituents are good, decent people, Mr. Speaker. They only want to live their lives and raise their families in peace. They did not ask for this cancer to invade their communities, and they are extremely pleased at the government's announcement of a renewed commitment to continuing and expanding the fight against meth.

In the throne speech we heard of the great steps being taken in the fight against meth and, by extension, the fight against crime in general. The newly established Crystal Meth Task Force, of which

Drayton Valley's mayor, Her Worship Diana McQueen is a member, is up and running, and new initiatives will continue to emerge to find, prosecute, and punish those who manufacture and distribute drugs.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents and every citizen of this province need to be given the tools to fight the proliferation of drugs. They need help in the war on meth and the war on crime in general. They need to be empowered to take back their communities and their homes, and the messages by His Honour inspired great confidence that these goals are well on their way to becoming reality.

A further focus on rural policing was also seen as refreshing news. Crime is not an urban problem; it is an Alberta problem. Given the recent proliferation of drugs and the isolated nature of many rural areas, criminals are now moving their operations to the countryside, that we once considered a safe haven. The tragedy in Mayerthorpe is but one clear example, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased at the awareness and foresight shown by this government in recognizing and addressing this growing problem. My constituents are extremely pleased as well as extremely hopeful that they will once again know the peace and security that they deserve.

By working with police and organizations such as AADAC in augmenting this co-operation with the streamlining of the justice system, criminals will no longer find profit in the manufacture and sale of illicit drugs. They will be made to pay for the pain they inflict on our communities and our loved ones. Mr. Speaker, crime contributes nothing to the betterment of this great province, and I am most pleased to see the exceptional efforts that are being made to exclude it in every way possible from the lives of Albertans.

Another matter of great significance to the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar and every rural constituency is the issue of access to health care. Albertans, rural and urban alike, enjoy one of the best health care systems in the world at the present time. The proposed changes we heard outlined in the throne speech by His Honour will only serve to reinforce and make better what is already an exemplary system. We have all heard that this government is dedicated to reducing wait times and increasing service. I in turn have heard many of my constituents agree wholeheartedly with these proposals. The system we enjoy today is good. Proposed reforms will serve to make it better and more accessible to each and every Albertan regardless of their standing or location.

I was especially pleased with the announcements regarding considered improvements to rural health care, Mr. Speaker. Rural residents often face challenges that are different from those of their urban counterparts. Perhaps the most challenging and difficult to overcome and the most dangerous to health and well-being is the remote nature of many rural constituencies. If a resident of Edmonton were to be involved in a car accident, he or she is never more than a few minutes or blocks away from a hospital. In a rural area an accident or emergency may occur a great distance away from the nearest hospital, meaning that emergency response is of key importance.

Over 200,000 ground ambulance trips occur each year in Alberta, supplied by 450 ambulances and 3,000 ambulance attendants. Many of these life-saving trips occur in remote and rural areas, and while their continued efficient operation is of great importance to the health and well-being of all Albertans, it is especially vital to the safety and continued prosperity of rural residents. I am encouraged with the announcements concerning collaboration between regional health authorities, stakeholders, and government to improve medical delivery. I am also enthusiastic about the principles of the health system being structured to reflect the values held by all Albertans. It is my sincere hope that these discussions will include in their scope ways of streamlining and improving ambulance service as an extension of general health care reform.

The people of my constituency not only rely on ambulance service for their emergent medical needs; they also share with other Albertans the belief that it is in the best interests of everyone to assist the efficient and effective delivery of this service in any way possible. Just recently, Mr. Speaker, I had a meeting with the chief of staff from the Drayton Valley hospital. We had the ambulance service there, and municipal councillors were all there. We talked about ways that we could collaborate and intersperse the ambulance with maybe manning our special care unit and possibly being involved in helping each other with our health care system.

I'm eagerly anticipating the proposed improvements to our health care system that our government has recently put out for consultation. Myself, my colleagues, and the people of Alberta will not only benefit from these changes, but we will also feel secure in the knowledge that their introduction follows careful consideration, long planning, and extensive stakeholder consultation.

This government has long had a reputation for prudence and responsibility in matters concerning the welfare of Albertans, policies which have resulted in the financial and societal prosperity we all enjoy today. Regardless of whether they are applied to reinvestment of resource revenue, environmental protection, or health care improvement, these qualities are manifest in every measure that this government has taken to improve the lives of Albertans.

10:10

This was never more evident as 2005 turned into 2006. As His Honour mentioned in the throne speech, it was the first year in a very long, long time rung in by Albertans that was free from the burden of provincial debt. Mr. Speaker, this party has always believed in balanced budgets, but back in the recession times of the early '80s and due to the Liberals' national energy program we could not keep out of the red. We accumulated debt, as did all governments of all political stripes, but unlike other governments, we dealt with it. Through stakeholder consultation, sound policy, and deliberate action Alberta eliminated the provincial debt, a monumental achievement which gave the citizens of this province an unprecedented climate of financial freedom, one that is not enjoyed by any other jurisdiction in North America.

Mr. Speaker, this is but one example of the way this government approaches every problem. His Honour's speech reaffirmed that this attitude of accountability and desire to improve Alberta will remain at the forefront of every issue considered or decided in this Chamber. Albertans were once again reminded that they not only live in the best place in the world. They were assured that they have working for them a government that is always striving to make it better in every way possible.

I am proud to be a part of this great, progressive momentum, Mr. Speaker, and I can say with enthusiasm that my constituents share wholeheartedly in my excitement. It is truly a great time to be an Albertan.

I thank you, and with that, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Bill 19 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure on behalf of the Minister of Finance, our Deputy Premier, to move second reading of Bill 19, the Appropriation (Supplemen-

tary Supply) Act, 2006, which provides some very necessary and important funds, as explained in the bill itself.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to respond to Bill 19, the supplementary estimates, in second reading. Again, I could probably go back to last year's debate because the arguments are similar. I'm not sure why it is that year after year we see supplementary estimates that are more and more and for more and more departments. In just November of last year we passed \$1.77 billion in supplementary estimates, and here we are, not much more than three months later, with almost that much again, \$1.354 billion. So in a period of only a few months well over \$3 billion in supplementary estimates have been passed.

The Premier himself has acknowledged that most if not all of this year's incredibly big surplus has already been allocated. The whole idea of supplementary estimates of the size that we see and covering the number of departments that we see really does once again draw into question the entire budgeting process and the way that this government treats a budget with such disdain. I acknowledged last year the fact that, literally, within days of the budget being passed, we had ministers openly referring to off-budget spending. Sure enough, that is exactly what happened.

So here we are once again, within three months of having passed supplementary estimates, passing another \$1.35 billion in further money for the government. In a lot of these cases when you look through the supplementary estimates and the money that's being allocated, you really have to wonder (a) why, if it was so important, it wasn't included in the original budget or (b) why it couldn't have waited just a few more weeks for a proper budget. What was the emergency that demanded that this money be expended between November and the end of March, when we would presumably have a new budget to be debated in this House? You know, I'm not going to list every single example, but there are many examples of that in these supplementary estimates, and I think it's a relevant question.

The other thing that certainly comes into play here is the very limited amount of time that the appropriation bill gets when we deal with it in committee. We have what is known as two days of debate, but unfortunately in this House that means an afternoon and an evening, both of which have time restrictions and neither of which allows for proper, detailed inspection of the supplementary estimates department by department. Again last week, when we were dealing with the appropriation supply in committee, probably the vast majority of departments that are requesting extra funds received no time at all, no debate at all, no detailed inspection line by line at all of the request that's being. I think that it is a real flaw in the way that this House does business, that we don't allow more time for the committee to look at these supplementary estimates line by line.

Mr. Elsalhy: No scrutiny.

Mr. R. Miller: My colleague from Edmonton-McClung says, "No scrutiny." I'm not going to say no scrutiny. Certainly we scrutinize, but we don't have the opportunity necessarily to ask the questions, and what that means is that the government doesn't have the opportunity to show openness and accountability, which Albertans deserve. Again, that really is the question when we're talking about only one taxpayer.

Specifically, there is one thing that I would like to point to. I gave a fairly detailed talk on the billion dollars for the heritage fund last week. One of the things that came out of that whole thing – I called it a shell game, and there was some defensive reaction to that on the

part of the government. We've talked a number of times about the fact that we're putting a billion dollars in and taking a billion dollars out or taking out and putting in; I'm not even sure which happens first. But the minister defended that by saying that the legislation requires that return on investment be removed from the heritage savings trust fund and put into general revenue. Mr. Speaker, I checked the legislation, and the minister is absolutely right: that's what it says. Short of what's required as of last year's change in legislation to finally inflation-proof the fund, every penny outside of that and administration costs, every penny that's earned has to be transferred into general revenue.

So the very first question I have is: why haven't we brought forward legislation this spring that would mandate that the return on investment stay in the fund? Why do we have a law that not only allows us to rake the earnings out of the fund but actually tells us that we have to? There may have been a time when Alberta had a large debt when there was an argument for doing that, but certainly in today's fiscal reality I can't see any reason whatsoever why we still have on the books legislation that says that we must take the revenue that's earned by that fund and put it into general revenue. I think that that's a real disservice to the fund and ultimately a disservice to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to draw particular attention to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. Once again – and I hope I don't sound too much like a broken record, but I know I said the same thing last year – this is one ministry where I really don't have an awful lot of problem with the supplementary supply. This is what supplementary supply is supposed to be used for: \$1.25 million for the east-central Alberta disaster recovery program resulting from overland flooding during the month of August last year. That's exactly what supplementary supply is for: an unforeseen expense. Nobody could have seen it coming when we did the original budget in March and April last year. It happens. We have a sustainability fund that's to deal with that sort of thing. That's where the money went. I have absolutely no problem with that, and I commend the minister for, by and large, sticking to his budget.

Another \$6.5 million for the southern Alberta disaster recovery resulting from flooding in September and \$25 million for the floods that happened in southern Alberta in June of last year. Again, if this is the sort of thing that we saw regularly in supplementary supply, Mr. Speaker, the debate would be an awful lot shorter because I wouldn't be able to stand here and complain about that. But when we see other program changes and additions that either (a) don't seem to me to have the urgency that they couldn't have waited for the new budget or (b) came so shortly after last year's budget was passed – in fact, that would indicate that there was some urgency to them in the first place – then why the heck wasn't that in the budget? Let's have some planning and some budgeting that means something to Albertans.

10:20

Now, I just want to talk for a minute about the surplus situation and the fact that right now this government has a law which mandates that it's not allowed to run a deficit. We've seen the government do a very good job of sticking to that even in what I've referred to previously as a difficult year, the year 2001-2002, following 9/11, when the government was required to make some rather drastic adjustments to its budget procedure, sticking to the budget to make sure that they didn't break their own law, and I commend them for that.

What I would like to see is something that would do the same on the other side of the ledger sheet; that is, something that would compel this government to stick to their budget, to not go and

announce billions of dollars here and hundreds of millions of dollars over here after a budget has been passed but live with the document that has been passed by this Legislature until such time as we can deal with another budget document. You know what? Maybe it would be a minibudget, as has been done several times on the federal level. This idea of just ad hoc spending: again, I sincerely believe that that does a disservice to all Albertans.

Now, I know that the Member for Battle River-Wainwright has a motion coming up. Unfortunately, it's far enough down the list that I'm not sure that it'll get debated in this session. I'm hopeful that it does because I would love to hear the debate on that. This motion would call on the government to hold surplus funds in a reserve until such time as the Legislature could deal with them, and I think that's an excellent idea. I really believe that Albertans deserve to have decisions of that magnitude – we're talking billions and billions of dollars – not just debated in the Legislature but those ideas brought forward in the Legislature as opposed to being announced in mid-summer at a government retreat somewhere. That's not the way that Albertans expect their government to operate, and that's not the government that they deserve. I applaud the Member for Battle River-Wainwright for his initiative in bringing that motion forward. I know I'll be supporting it, and I'm quite hopeful that all of the members of this Assembly will because the idea has great merit.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will cede the floor and allow some other members to take part in this debate. Certainly, as I say, the fact that we're dealing again with supplementary estimates only a short period after it was last done – and, you know, even the billion dollars. Okay. I'm going to back up and reiterate. With even the billion dollars for the heritage savings trust fund, which I'm certainly in favour of, once again I don't understand where the emergency was that that had to be done now and not as part of the budget process that we're going to be dealing with in a couple of weeks. I think that that's just the most glaring example of it.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I will take my seat and allow others to participate in the debate. Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Education supplementary supply debate we're looking here at an \$11 million grant to separate and opted-out school boards. I'm not sure exactly how this works. This could be referring to the fact that the province is placing a soft cap on the education property tax rate, and this supplementary supply is to top this off. It would be helpful if I could find out what opted-out school boards means. I'm not clear on that. Maybe the good minister would spend a few minutes educating me on that.

Could he explain what the money is for, in clarification, giving us specifics, and by what process or policy the separate boards receive supplementary supply when the public boards do not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: They do too.

Mr. Flaherty: They do too? Thank you, sir.

What assurance can you give us that these funds were distributed to the boards based on need and not on other matters? That's a question I'd like maybe explained. Why was it not included in the regular budget that was presented last spring?

Mr. Zwozdesky: It was. It was just a transfer.

Mr. Flaherty: It was just a transfer of dollars? Thank you for that.

I'd like to just maybe suggest that the minister could comment or

maybe make a point on: if I could dream, if I had a crystal ball and was able to look ahead, I really would like some approach, in supplementary or brought in through the regular budget process, on the question of hot lunch programs in high-needs areas across the province. I think this would be a feather in the minister's cap. He's a good soul, so maybe he'll look at that. Dreaming again: full-day and junior kindergarten seem to be a concern for many people across the province, especially in Calgary.

Resolve the unfunded liability in teachers' pensions: that seems to be an issue that could be addressed, Mr. Minister, if we had some kind of plan. Even at the teachers' convention this week in Edmonton it was amazing how many teachers seemed to have this on their mind and are concerned about it. Also, I think that at the university on Friday night one of the people in the Faculty of Education was mentioning that, as you well pointed out to us, sir, it's now starting to be a mental thing. People are not looking at education because they don't want this extra burden of paying for a mortgage, that kind of thing, in dealing with their livelihood.

Those are just some very quick comments, and because of the hour and day I'll sit down. Maybe the minister will send me a note or give me some insight into some of the points I raised.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 19, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006. A lot has been said about the ineptness and incompetence that the government has shown year after year in preparing its budgets. Billions of dollars are asked for, sometimes once a year, sometimes more than once a year, to add to the budget approved by this Assembly during its spring session every year. It raises questions about the real value of debating a budget in April and May and then learning six months down the road that the debate we did have during the spring session really was meaningless and that the government didn't find itself bound by the vote that this Assembly itself conducted to approve the budgeted amounts.

With this huge amount – billions of dollars are involved here – we are simply asked to rubber-stamp unbudgeted expenditures. Unbudgeted expenditures are estimates that result from poor projections about what money is needed to deliver programs, to put money into infrastructure projects, or whatever. On the one hand, there is a clear record of incompetence in coming even close to what monies are needed on an annual basis to run the operations and programs that the government is responsible for. On the other hand, we find a very different picture. The revenues are always underestimated by billions of dollars. I guess that because revenues are underestimated, the government presents a budget which also looks sort of the result of disciplined thinking, tight budgeting procedures, saying that every dollar that's budgeted must be accounted for properly, yet within six months that accounting is simply forgotten.

10:30

The supplementary estimates, Bill 19, that we are debating now, is the second bill since November of last year that we are discussing in this House in order to address the failure of the government in the first place to present budget estimates that are close to what in fact is needed to run government programs and finance projects that it proposes to undertake. So the ability of this House, really, to hold government accountable in terms of both its revenue projections and budget estimates is frustrated year after year, as is indicated by the requests that come to us for supplementary estimates.

It's disappointing that a government that has been around for so

many years hasn't learned to prepare budget estimates which would be at least more or less accurate, that would reflect the real needs of the government and the real capacity of the government to fund those needs. One wonders whether it's a question of incompetence or whether it's a matter of a deliberate decision to lowball revenues and then proceed from there, from lowballing of the revenues to presenting budget estimates in April and May that the government knows will be insufficient to meet the government's own obligations. Either way it shows a lack of integrity, a lack of willingness to be honest and transparent with the citizens of Alberta, the taxpayers of Alberta with respect to both the revenue picture and the budgetary estimates that are needed to meet the government's commitments.

The problem with this, in addition to the government's inability to be honest and transparent, is the ad hocery of it all. There can be huge mistakes made when the money is spent in an ad hoc way. Wastage of money often results from ad hoc decisions because ad hoc decisions are made without due deliberation. Not only are they made without due deliberation by the minister; they are made without due deliberation by this House. It is the right of this House to engage in appropriate deliberations with respect to the government's expenditure programs and then engage the government in debate, ask tough questions before voting for or against those estimates. That's why I say that when you have these supplementary estimates, related bills, coming before the House once or twice a year during the same fiscal year, you ask the question: what was the point of spending weeks and weeks and weeks during the budget debate on debating and approving estimates for each department if those approved estimates, those budgetary figures are not to be respected and not to be adhered to?

The question that I have in my mind as the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona is: what role do I have in holding the government to account on this? How do I go back to my constituents and say: "Well, look, I've done my job. The government has responded to it. Next time I've seen improvement, so my work has paid off. I was critical. I did spend some time looking closely at the budgets. The government got some direction from the debate, and the following year there was an improvement." There is no improvement, Mr. Speaker, in the way the government presents its estimates and then comes back for supplementaries.

For the last nine years, that I've been in this House, I've seen the same conduct, the same procedure, the same behaviour of the government: falling short of being able to appropriately estimate its own needs and therefore assign dollars to meet those needs and deliver the goods to Albertans. Very disappointing. It raises concerns about whether or not this government really has the discipline that it takes both to come up with an accurate estimate of the revenue picture and the expenditure picture and then to stick to the decisions made by this Assembly.

This Assembly's decisions ought to have some role in the way government behaves. The government finds that it can take liberties with the decisions made by this House any time it wants to because it can come back and come up with these ad hoc estimates and get them rubber-stamped in this House. I think that's not good enough. That's not, I think, in the best interests of the people of this province who are, after all, responsible for paying the bills and are the owners of the assets from which we draw the revenues to pay these bills.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would close my remarks on Bill 19. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the short

amount of time we have left to debate Bill 19, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006. I'd like to add my comment also, I guess, that it's very disappointing to see the lack of discipline in budgeting shown by this government. It seems like there's more interest in: "Well, we'll not worry about getting things down to the nitty-gritty. Later on we'll just run a little supply, and the revenue that we need will come in to our different departments."

It seems like we need legislation not so much prohibiting us from running a deficit but perhaps prohibiting us from spending all of the surplus that comes in. We are in a unique situation once again. In the '80s we had that applicable bumper sticker on what we'd do if we had a second chance, yet it seems like we're going to repeat it.

I'd very much encourage this government in this coming budget to I guess sit down each of the ministers and say: look, let's have our budget come forward, and let's stick to it. In matters of emergency, such as the flooding, we understand, and those are the ones that are coming forward or, for example, the situation with the Solicitor General, realizing that they didn't understand the agreement they had with the Crowsnest Pass area and needing to make amends within a different area in the province.

The most important thing is that we take this opportunity to realize that we have a surplus coming in, that perhaps we need to put in some legislation because of a lack of discipline, that we'll be putting this into the heritage trust fund and, as the other member mentioned earlier, that perhaps we should be passing legislation that we can't take anything out of the heritage trust fund unless it is an emergency. We should be building that. It should be inflation-proof, and we should be looking to the future.

I personally agree with the C.D. Howe report, that we're past sustainability already, that we're in a precarious situation. Everybody can say, "oh, it's not going to happen this time," but if things were to turn around, how would we continue with the budget that we currently have and expanding at such a rapid rate when, in fact, the services are not keeping up with the needs of the people? Yet the bureaucracy and the paperwork seems to be expanding at a very out of control rate.

Basically, I would very much like to see the government – and I'll speak to it again – take a serious look at the upcoming budget and have the discipline to tell the ministers: "Look, this is it for the year. We don't want to be going back to supply." We need to take a closer look. We've been doing it for years. We understand the situations and don't have to wait for an Auditor General's report to say: "Gosh, the seniors are suffering. We need more workers there. We're not running a good ship, and we can do a lot better." I would encourage the ministers, as they're preparing their budgets, to do a good job here in the future.

Thank you.

10:40

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education on behalf of the hon. minister to close?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. Thank you. I will take a quick moment.

First of all, in response to a couple of comments made by Edmonton-Rutherford: no, this is not some sort of a soft cap. There are a number of points, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, which could answer some of the questions that you asked, that were debated last Wednesday afternoon and last Tuesday evening, so I would encourage you to look there.

It was kind of you to reference the kudos that you did for the Municipal Affairs ministry with respect to disasters, but there are also other good, positive things there that could have been referenced that weren't. I don't think anybody would argue that \$20 million to libraries was important or that the transfer of \$11 million from the opted-out portion to be shared equally amongst public and separate school boards was a bad thing either. There are a number of other needs areas expressed there.

For the sake of time right now I will respond to the questions that the Member for St. Albert asked because all that happened there, Mr. Speaker, is simply that back when we were doing the budgeting a year ago for the '05-06 government year, we targeted so many dollars for the opted-out school boards, which are typically your separate, your Catholic boards, and in fact the number of declared voters for that portion did not match. It was overestimated by \$11 million. All that happens, hon. member, is that that \$11 million goes back into the Alberta school foundation fund. Then it gets redistributed back out to all the supports to share. That's simply what that was.

The other points that you indicated about the unfunded pension liability we've debated here, and I'm sure we'll debate them again.

That basically answers all of that, Mr. Speaker. With that, I would again encourage a positive outcome to the vote on second reading for Bill 19 because these monies are important, they're available now, and we'd like to get them out to the places of need.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been an interesting evening, with a few bumps and grinds along the way. Nonetheless, that is what democracy is all about. On that note, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:43 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, March 7, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a proud Albertan. He's been a proud Albertan since 1988. He did not arrive here for the Olympics, but if riding motorcycles and scuba diving were Olympic sports, he'd be right in there. I'm speaking, of course, of Dave Ryzebol. He is the VP of public affairs and government relations for Canada Safeway, a fine corporate citizen; one of the board of directors of the Canada Safeway Foundation; a huge fundraiser for tsunami relief, over a million dollars there, for Boys and Girls clubs, and for food banks, the biggest in western Canada; also, as I mentioned in last week's member's statement, a Mountain of Heroes foundation sponsor. His wife, Dorothy, his son Christopher, who's working here in high tech in Edmonton at Bioware, are very, very proud of him. I know he's proud to live in Calgary-West, and I know that Calgary-West is so well represented. I would like all members to join me in the traditional welcome for Dave Ryzebol. He's in the members' gallery. Please stand and be recognized, Dave.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a visiting grade 6 class from Fulton Place elementary school. There are 16 visitors this afternoon, 14 students. They are accompanied by teachers Dr. Wade Pike and Miss Quinn Sloan. This group is visiting the Assembly today, and they are in the members' gallery. If they could now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly, I would appreciate it.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly some 28 bright and eager students from the Edmonton Christian school in the northeast part of the city. There are 28 students. With them is their teacher Mr. Greg Gurnett. I might point out that he's the brother of a former MLA from this Legislative Assembly and a colleague of mine. The parents here with them are Mrs. Carol Boonstra, Mrs. Donna Nyland, and Mrs. Annette Visser. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Tina Faiz. Tina has joined the NDP caucus staff as our communications director and as executive assistant to the leader. She has worked in several federal government departments and earned a woman of distinction award in 2003. Since then, Tina has run a very successful communications company with her partner and has been a freelance contributor to CBC radio and television. We're delighted to have her with us, and I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature a very young, great Alberta leader, Trevor Gladue. He holds many positions. First of all, as a VP of the Métis Nation of Alberta provincial council, Trevor was first elected in 1996 and is serving his second term. Of course, the next one that he does is as chair of Northern Lakes College. He's seated in the members' gallery. He resides in the minister of health's riding. Lucky woman. I'd ask that he stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all colleagues here in the Legislature a good friend of mine and a former mayor of the town of Whitecourt. Brady Whittaker, would you please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Aon Consulting Inc.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier admitted that he's getting his information on electricity deregulation from Enmax commercials. We also know that he's getting his information on private health insurance from Aon, a consulting arm of a private insurance company. No wonder this government will only conduct a superficial consultation process on their health care proposal when they clearly value the advice of insurance companies before the opinion of ordinary Albertans. My questions are to the Premier. Given that this government has paid Aon 1 and a half million dollars in taxpayer money to tell the government how to implement private insurance, will the Premier release the results of that study immediately so that its findings can be part of the consultation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I find the Leader of the Official Opposition's assertions to be somewhat confounding in that Aon has not yet submitted its report.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that a comprehensive study by the World Health Organization has said

that supplementary private insurance actually increases inequalities in service and access, why is this government paying Aon for advice when we already know what the outcomes of this policy will be?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we don't know. Certainly, I'm sure the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness will take into account the findings of the world health association as we assess the overall public consultation phase of this exercise.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that Aon is designing the private health insurance system, will Aon be allowed to then participate in the very market that it's designing?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I can't really comment on what Aon is doing or not doing because they haven't submitted their report yet.

Relative to their ongoing involvement I'll have the hon. minister respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have not seen the report yet. The report is actually building actuarial models and studies to look at the impact. It has nothing to do with the current consultations on public health. It has everything to do with finding out if we were to change – if we were to change – any of the mix in funding, how it would impact Albertans, vulnerable Albertans, those people that are currently insured, those people that have pre-existing conditions, and to look at the full scope of it. We don't expect this report back until sometime later in the spring.

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

Health Care Reform

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday when I referred to the government's third way as health care deregulation, the Premier told me to listen to an Enmax commercial which would advise on the benefits of electricity deregulation. Well, today I'm asking the Premier to listen to the words of Enmax CEO Gary Holden. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the CEO of Enmax stated just last month that "problems . . . with deregulation have discouraged innovation and the costs of regulation have actually increased since 1999," why is the Premier continuing down the same deregulation path with our health care system?

1:40

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I've said before that if the Liberals have any better ideas other than those that have already been assessed, send them over.

Mr. Speaker, relative to Mr. Holden, the CEO of Enmax, I had the opportunity of meeting with him along with I believe it was the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, and he illustrated to me their very simple form to accommodate the regulated rate under so-called deregulation that offers consumers what he considers to be a better way. At no time did he indicate to me that deregulation of the generation portion of electricity undermined anything that they wanted to do.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Holden actually explained at length his concerns publicly with deregulation. Again to the Premier: given that electricity deregulation led to soaring costs, worse service, and dismal choice, why should Albertans have any confidence in this government's health care policies, which amount to health care deregulation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I fail to see where service is bad. Certainly, there were some problems that we ironed out through Government Services and through various departments relative to the retailing of electricity, but for the most part those matters have been sorted out. Enmax is doing a good job. ATCO is doing a good job, as I understand. TransAlta, although they're on the generation side, are doing a good job. So I really don't see what the problem is.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: does the Premier see a future in this province in which surgeries for knees and hips and eyes are advertised on TV like electricity products are advertised today? Is that where we're heading?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is entirely up to the physicians and the rules relative to advertising. I don't know what those rules are. I know that we're exposed to a lot of American advertising, and that's the system that we don't want. All we're trying to do is bring health care costs, which total nearly \$9 billion right now, in line with the rate of inflation and to improve access. That is not sinful.

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

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 21, 2005, a standing policy committee reviewed a draft copy of the Department of Energy's business plan for the years 2006 through 2009. This plan indicated that the percentage of total royalties collected by this government on behalf of the citizens, who own the resources, is going down significantly. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is the total percentage of royalties going down when the value of the resource in this province is going up?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, our royalties are based upon a number of factors. Production and price are the two predominant issues that form how the percentage is calculated. As prices go up, our rates go up. If prices went down, our rates would go down also. As production volumes go up, so would our rate go up. If a well's production volume goes down, so would our rate go down. What it's trying to do is ensure that we get all of the extraction of the resource possible. In any one year the average rate might be up or down, but the fact is that it's worked very effectively to ensure that we extract all the resource that we possibly can, the most of that resource we can, to get the best value for Albertans.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that the Crown revenue share, the portion of the industry's annual net operating revenue that is paid to the Crown as royalty, has decreased by 4 per cent since 2001, how many billions of dollars have Albertans lost because the royalties have not been collected? And don't tell me that we can't afford public health care.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, like I said, we could go back through the mechanics of our structure, which has been very efficient and has provided tremendous value. Some years it will be a higher percentage because of price and production volumes. We have mature fields that you need to replace, and some of them are getting lower in production volumes, so they'll have lower associated rates. That said, we forget that what we're trying to do is receive fair value for Albertans, and that's done through royalties and also through bonus payments. If they would refer to the third quarter that just came out, 14 and a half billion dollars were collected through this industry; \$3.4 billion came through land sales. That's a reflection of how we also receive the economic rent. It's not just the royalty percentage. It's the land sales: \$3.4 billion reinvested to ensure that we do receive that in a substantial way.

Mr. MacDonald: To the same minister: we're not talking about land sales. We're talking about royalties.

Now, to the same minister: given that the Department of Energy has recently completed two studies, the first on a major oil and natural gas royalty rate review and the second a study of how Alberta royalties compare to the lower 48 states, will the minister release these studies and show Albertans how they've been ripped off by the current royalty structure?

Mr. Melchin: Actually, the facts don't show that at all. They show the converse. The various studies, Van Meurs being one of them, show that we have one of the more tough regimes around the world. That said, we have been comparing the specific information. Our royalty and fair-share questions are a combination of two facts, not just royalties, and that's why I brought in land sales. The economic rent, as it's built, that we're trying to receive so that Albertans get their fair share of the revenue, is based upon two factors: royalty and land sales. You can't separate the two because the structure is built to collect both, and in that sense Albertans have received a tremendous value this year from both.

Health Care Reform Consultation

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the health consultation of the government is a sham. At yesterday's meeting of the Tory policy committee the SPC heard from pro-privatization individuals who have been appointed to public bodies by the government. These presentations were often made behind closed doors. To the Premier: how does the government intend to hear the views of ordinary Albertans with this closed-door, under-the-dome process that they have put in place?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond in detail, but I can tell you that it's not a closed-door, under-the-dome process.

Ms Evans: First of all, it was not a standing policy committee. It was registration from individuals and groups that came forward to speak with me. We asked them whether or not they would like to have it open to the public and open to the media. One out of the four selected that. Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat disappointed that they didn't want to have it as open consultation.

We are posting on the web page the ones that will be registered for subsequent consultations. We are asking them if they will be prepared to speak in front of the media, to provide their statements for the media and, if possible, an advance notice of their statements. Currently we have 30 registered in places like Bonnyville and up in St. Paul later on Saturday. I know that there will be a slightly different process.

So it's not only under the dome; it will be in other centres. It's with people in a variety of ways. We are meeting with groups, Mr. Speaker, listening to what they have asked us to share with them.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, if this minister is disappointed that people don't want to speak publicly, why is she accepting secret testimony behind closed doors from pro-privatization proponents? You set the rules.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I would have to speculate about is that some of them had presentations, in one case, where their president was out of town, and they made the presentation themselves. They felt that it was more appropriate for the media to speak to their president than themselves. So they didn't want to publicly make that comment. That was the statement from one. Another group indicated that they had some issues that perhaps weren't as close to the third way but related to the education of the workforce, and they talked about that. They were not prepared to make a public statement.

Mr. Speaker, rather than belittle people that come forward and try and provide this government advice, I think we should celebrate that they have come forward to give us their very best response to the health policy framework.

1:50

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier, if we may: why doesn't the Premier get out from under the dome and go out and talk to Albertans and take some MLAs with him and have public hearings around the province on the government's proposals to gut our public health care system?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I try to get out from under the dome as much as I possibly can. As a matter of fact, I missed cabinet this morning, unfortunately, because I was down in southern Alberta.

I think it's important for people to get out from under the dome, and that's exactly what the minister is doing as she consults with Albertans. There are numerous ways of consulting and receiving input: e-mails, telephone calls, town hall meetings, as the opposition suggests, although they want to do it via an all-party committee. So, Mr. Speaker, we're getting out from under the dome. We're consulting with Albertans, and we're receiving their input.

International Medical Graduate Program

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, being an MLA who represents a very diverse constituency, I meet several foreign-trained doctors, also referred to as international medical graduates. They often access my office to have their documents notarized for residency application purposes. Many of them come to my office year after year applying for residency positions, which, I might add, are few to begin with. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What role does Alberta's international medical graduate program play in improving Albertans' access to health care?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the most important areas where we can improve is to advance the case of the internationally medically trained graduate who comes to Canada and hopes to engage in practice. The ways that we can help them take their qualified licensed approaches from other universities and accredited institutions elsewhere is to provide them an opportunity to work in a residency program under the supervision of qualified and trained teachers in the academic halls of learning, particularly in the universities.

Mr. Speaker, it's a very strong program, and we have increased since 2003 from some 855 to over 900 foreign-trained physicians that have come forward. The announcement we've made today will further increase the number of foreign-trained physicians that are receiving extra support to get their licensure in Alberta in our universities.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, my first supplement is also to the same minister. What will be the overall impact of the \$3 million announced today?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, depending upon the number and the type of residency program chosen, there should be about 14 that will be trained. They will be able to engage in various specialties with the residents. We have had very willing comments back from regional health authorities and from the academics, who have said that this is certainly welcome. We will move up from 28 physicians that are currently taking training to 42, and they will be in a variety of disciplines and will help build our workforce. It's one of the many measures that we are undertaking this year to improve the overall workforce and to make sure that internationally trained graduates have a place to practise here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement is also to the same minister. What other approaches is the minister taking to allow more foreign-trained physicians to work in Alberta's health care industry?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we're also funding 20 new flex-residency seats. These allow foreign-trained and other physicians to take partial residency training when they do not need the full residency program. We're working with mentorship programs and looking at and exploring other options available.

I want to give credit to the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall and other MLAs who have come forward over the past year and a half encouraging us to become more aggressive to engage foreign-trained physicians. Certainly, the Member for Calgary-McCall is an outstanding example of someone who has listened and heard and passed on that message.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta government representatives and even a cabinet minister have been in contact or visited with leaders of communist governments in Asia about sending temporary foreign workers to work in our Alberta oil sands. The communist bosses like Alberta's idea of binding these workers to work for only one employer. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, and this question is not before a court of law. Is the preferred length of time that this government is recommending to indenture foreign workers to sponsoring employers in Alberta two years, three years, five years, or some other length of time?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, the opposition would find this a problem. We have the hottest economy in Alberta. There are thousands of jobs. It's nice that Alberta is so attractive to everyone in the world to come and work here.

Specifically to this question, of course, our first priority in Alberta is, number one, to sustain the strong economy that we have: thousands of jobs. Our priority is, again, to employ Albertans first, Canadians, aboriginal people, persons with development disabilities, and youth. That is our number one priority in Alberta.

We do have an immigration policy in Alberta jointly done by four ministries, Mr. Speaker. Maybe one of the ministers would like to expand on that. The process: if an employer, for an example, in Fort McMurray wants to bring in temporary foreign workers, the member knows that that process is under the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's actually under an Alberta government program.

Another question to the minister of human resources. Will these tens of thousands of foreign workers be offered membership in traditional Alberta trades organizations and other unions, or will the larger sponsoring employers have that choice?

Mr. Cardinal: Again, Mr. Speaker, of course it's nice that Alberta is so attractive to the world that everybody wants to move to Alberta. We must have a darn good government to be able to do that.

Ms Calahasen: We've got the best. The best. The greatest leader.

Mr. Cardinal: We've got the best. We are the best, yeah.

Mr. Speaker, in relation to the other issue, of course, again I stress to the person that if an employer wants to bring in temporary foreign workers, first of all they have to meet our conditions in Alberta. I mentioned those in my first question. Second, they have to apply to the federal government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are in the process of setting up a meeting with the new federal immigration minister to determine what direction their policies are going to go in relation to immigration and temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Backs: I haven't seen that with Fort McMurray, Mr. Speaker.

A supplementary question to the minister of health. With potentially tens of thousands of indentured temporary foreign labour flooding into Alberta, will they receive their health care through our public system, a new private system, or some other third way?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, they'll receive their health care, if qualified, after the appropriate waiting period, like anybody else. We would look at the basis of their qualifications. There's nothing further to say, I don't think.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Advanced Education Opportunities

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the government committed to adding 60,000 new spaces to Alberta's postsecondary system by the year 2020, with 15,000 of those spaces created by '07-08. Reports say that so far only enough funding has been put in place to reach about 16 per cent of that target. While new university spaces are important, Albertans in rural areas and smaller centres also need better access to postsecondary education at rural colleges. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. How many new spaces have been created so far, and specifically how many of those are in rural Alberta?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I first would like to point out that as Minister of Advanced Education it's my job to ensure that we not only think of advancing education in the context of universities and colleges but also understand that it deals with all adult learning. So we're dealing with literacy issues; we're dealing with community learning opportunities as well as apprentices, ESL, and other forms of education. As someone who grew up in rural Alberta, I know that Albertans in rural and smaller centres need to have the same access to advancing their education as people in urban Alberta do.

In the recent Speech from the Throne we indicated that we'd reached 7,000 new learning opportunities, that those have been created in the province this year. Because of the nature of our economy today about 6,000 of them are new apprentice spaces, new learning opportunities for apprentices; 1,100 are new spaces at universities, colleges, and technical institutes. These opportunities have been created across the province. If we look at the rural areas, 271 of those specific spaces at colleges and technical institutes have been created in rural Alberta.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, very quickly, that the colleges that we have around this province have been working with universities to make sure that it's not just the traditional college opportunities that are available in rural Alberta but baccalaureate programs as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess on that note my first supplemental is to the same minister. Given the importance of graduate students and research to the future of our province, how many of these new spaces created so far have been on the graduate program side?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question.

Just to finish the thought on the last one, I'd like to indicate, in case people missed it, an example of how distributed learning opportunities are being created in this province. People might have noticed last week that Keyano College, for example, entered into an agreement with SAIT and with the University of Calgary that will involve the three institutions working together to offer environmental, energy, and social work programs to students in Fort McMurray at Keyano College.

Now, with respect to graduate students, under the access growth fund we've responded to the proposals that have been put forward by universities, colleges, and technical institutes, responded to their priorities for growth. Last year \$10 million dollars was put in for nearly 1,100 spaces, as I indicated. We created very few graduate spaces last year, but in the upcoming year institutions have put forward a range of proposals. Those new graduate spaces will be part of Budget 2006, but I might say that over 1,000 new graduate spaces have been created since 1999. Increasing those graduate spaces is very important. It ties into our whole research and development proposal, and other initiatives such as those through the heritage medical research foundation and the ingenuity fund will help to deal with that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you. I guess on the research side, Mr. Speaker, my final question is going to go to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Given that innovation is a key pillar of the government's 20-year strategy, what is his department doing to support research and graduate students?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education referenced a couple of entities already that provide support for research. Through additional research institutes and program expenditures targeted at life sciences, information and communication technology, and energy we've been able to actually increase the amount of sponsored research at universities from less than \$200 million in '94-95 to well over \$600 million last year. This money goes not only to help our researchers but also to support graduate students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Policing Services

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's cities are experiencing such a dramatic growth in population that providing services to communities is becoming a challenge. Perhaps the most serious problem we are facing is the disturbing trend of violence in our neighbourhoods. The tragic and senseless death of a man on an Edmonton Transit bus travelling through Mill Woods has left communities in fear and concern for their safety, and they are looking to government for answers. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Given that police services desperately need to increase their numbers in response to population growth and to have more presence directly in our communities, will this minister commit to increase the level of police funding to major cities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The senseless and tragic murder that took place on Edmonton Transit over the weekend was horrific, obviously, an issue that the family has to deal with now, and our thoughts and prayers go with the family of the deceased.

Again, Mr. Speaker, as we go through these issues, we talk about that issue; we talk about the issue that has just happened in Hobbema as well. These are obviously issues that we have to look at in policing. It's not just about funding. It's about ensuring that the community is there to assist the police. In order to build a strong, safe community, the community has to be involved as well. So it's not all about funding.

But, yes, we have. This past year we've provided funding for not only rural Alberta but, as well, for our municipalities: \$65 million of funding went out to municipalities. Our spring budget, that will be announced in a few weeks, will provide municipalities and, again, our rural municipalities with funding for our RCMP partners as well.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: will the minister along with the Minister of Education consider funding and implementing programs in our schools such as a provincial complement to the dare to resist drugs program, that also engage parents to help our children move away from violent lifestyles to healthy choices?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, a very good question. What we have to look at – I'll give you one example, that of the Crystal Meth Task Force, that is being co-chaired by Mrs. Klein and Dr. Bob Westbury. Our ministry made a presentation to them. We have a responsibility in Solicitor General and Public Security regarding, obviously, education and prevention as well as intelligence and enforcement but, as well, healing on the corrections side. So we have a number of areas within our ministry that we have to look at regarding education programs.

I've met with the Minister of Education regarding the CALM program that's in our high schools, which is, again – and the minister may want to speak on this – a compulsory course that every grade 10, 11, and 12 student has to take and has to successfully complete before they can move on towards their high school diploma.

We do have programs in place. Obviously, we want to build on those to ensure that the issues related to conflict resolution can be taught to younger kids so that they have an opportunity to look at ways out of a situation versus using a gun or a knife.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. To the same minister: given that community-based initiatives such as outreach programs and Neighbourhood Watch provide many opportunities for our youth to engage in positive activities, will this minister make the commitment to properly fund these grassroots organizations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, another very good question. We do fund a number of community groups and community organizations, and I'll just give you one example. Two and a half months ago in Hobbema the community cadet program started with less than 40 kids. It's a program run by the RCMP in the community. As of last Wednesday they have almost 400 kids in Hobbema from the four reserves in this program. It's a tremendous program.

So we've seen results. We know that some education and prevention programs that can be in place will take these kids out of gangs, will take them out of being pressured into criminal activity by their peers by providing them with some structure. Now, the program we have in Hobbema we know can work in other areas, not just reserves but in other municipalities as well. In this next year when our budget comes out, we're going to be moving forward to try to get that program moved to other areas in the province.

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

Economic Benefits of Movies Filmed in Alberta

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Economic Development, and it is about the movie *Brokeback Mountain*. I would like to know how Alberta's scenery replicating other places helps Alberta's tourism industry.

Mr. Dunford: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is the challenge, because we know that many people make their holiday plans based on films that they've watched. In fact, one isolated study that we have access to indicates that for as many as 8 out of 10 people that watch a movie, that will impact on their vacation plans and that 1 out of 5 will then actually visit the location. So *Brokeback Mountain* being filmed

west of Calgary, we need to get that information out. It helps when the leading actor, Heath Ledger, for example, goes on Oprah Winfrey and talks openly about filming near Calgary. It's something like 9 million viewers.

In a spirit of keeping the tone nice here today, I just want to ignore the opposition for one moment and say that the fact that *Brokeback Mountain* won three Oscars is going to help. Certainly it raises awareness, and when you have awareness, we must make sure the information is there for the people.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. There is no doubt that a few big films have generated attention, but I would like to know how attention in entertainment magazines brings tourism to West Yellowhead.

Mr. Dunford: Well, it will be quite important for the West Yellowhead area, as indeed any other area in Alberta, to make sure that your regional economic development alliances and other consortia get in on the film business because, one, it's big and, of course, it has a tremendous attraction.

One of the objectives that we have here in this department is to increase the film industry even further. It's important that we provide information to travel magazines. You know, people read the information; they want to get more information. Our travel call centre, by the way, since *Brokeback Mountain*, to get back to that movie, has received a tremendous number of calls. We have presentation location packages covering all of Alberta that we send out to interested producers. I can tell you that the request for this information has actually doubled over this past year. It's a really good story for all Albertans, including members in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is for the same minister. Now that the Oscars have come and gone, what are you and your department going to do to keep up the momentum in increasing tourism in Alberta?

Mr. Dunford: Well, the film industry is going to help us. Something like 53 movies have been made in the past three years, but we've got three particularly big ones that are going to be released this year: Robert Duvall – everybody knows Robert Duvall, I think – and his movie *Daughters of Joy*; Robin Williams with *RV*. Sometime I'd like to tell you my little anecdote of my meeting with Robin Williams down in the Milk River area. Actually, you can't have a conversation with Robin Williams. All you do is hand him a line, and you get a skit. In any event, Brad Pitt's *Assassination of Jesse James* will be out. By the way, when Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie were here in Alberta, one visit to the Tyrrell centre created something like 153 international media press articles about the Tyrrell museum. So this is tremendous. It's big business, it can be big business, and we plan to make it a bigger business.

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

Water Quality at Ellerslie Elementary School

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I asked about the water situation at Ellerslie school yesterday, the Minister of Education stated that he was surprised that I had waited so long to

actually do something about it. Furthermore, the minister stated that the school was in my constituency and that I would be welcome to do something about it. My questions are for the Minister of Education. Given that I personally took that advice, spoke to the board, and continued to work with the affected parents, can the minister inform this House what the Minister of Education has done to fix this problem?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it's not my problem, and it's not necessarily his problem either, but I would like the hon. member to know that when he asked this question back on November 17, we acted within 24 hours. We were immediately in contact with the school board to try and find out what the situation there was: was there a problem, and why was this particular member inflaming an issue? Now, the fact is that there was a boundary issue . . . [interjections] I wonder if we could just ask the Liberals to shut up for a minute. Just for a minute because this is important. Okay. I'll ask them not to.

I will just conclude this way, Mr. Speaker. We acted within 24 hours at the member's request. We contacted the public school board. The public school board provided a briefing and indicated that as part of their infrastructure maintenance renewal planning this was on the radar screen.

The water system being provided to Ellerslie is not part of the city water system at the moment, so the water is trucked in there. It's safe water. It's certified by the Capital health authority. There's no reason to inflame the situation. Now, if he knows something other than that, then please tell us.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: given that you stated yesterday that you were under the impression the problem had been dealt with, can the minister please explain how exactly the situation has been dealt with so far?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, let me try this again with perhaps a different wording. Here's how the system works. We have people who run for elected office. They are called public trustees of the school system. They get elected. They have a certain responsibility. One of their responsibilities is – guess what? – schools. They get a capital list together of infrastructure needs for schools and all of the other needs that are pertinent to education in their area. Then they prioritize them. Then they do their best to address them with the funds that we provide to them. We work with them on many of these occasions.

But the bottom line here is that that particular school's water supply is safe. It's trucked in. It's fresh every day. It's certified by the Capital health authority for drinking. So the situation is on another list to be dealt with by the city and by the school board, and I understand it'll happen in either '06 or '07, and the member knows that.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: given your invitation yesterday for me to do something about this problem, is it the position of the minister that the opposition should be giving direction to the school boards? Isn't it the job of the Education minister? It's your job, Minister, not mine.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I'll be happy to do your job as well.

Now, here's the thing. Mr. Speaker, what I was simply saying is that if the member hadn't heard anything or hadn't been apprised or he hadn't followed up and it took him four months to do that, I was just surprised by that. That's all that was said. I know that when an issue is important to me in my constituency, I follow up with it, and

I track it very carefully, and I try and ensure that the matter gets tended to. I'm sure that the member will learn how to do that in good time, and this is a good start for him.

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

Environmental Royalty Tax

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday morning the Minister of Environment came up with the sensible idea of levying an environmental royalty tax of some sort to help fund research into new technologies and monitoring. However, all it seemed to take was a phone call from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and within hours the Environment minister was back-tracking on this proposal. My questions are, of course, to the Minister of Environment. Why was the minister so quick to cave in to the pressure from the oil and gas industry and abandon his sensible proposal to levy an environmental royalty to fund research and develop new energy technologies?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, let me reframe the facts of the situation. First of all, Albertans care deeply, as the hon. member does, about the environment. In terms of as we go forward, do we want science and research to be used in improving environmental standards? Unequivocally yes.

2:20

Let me give you an example. In 25 years through science and research, through AOSTRA, in actual fact oil sands development has reduced emissions by 50 per cent because of science and technology. Do I support as the Minister of Environment for the Crown environmental incentives in order to encourage this type of activity? Unequivocally yes, today, tomorrow, next year as well, and in many years to come because it's a long-term solution.

Dr. Pannu: To the same minister. He hasn't explained why he caved in, so I'll ask him another question. Given that the polluter-pays principle should apply to all industry in this province, why is the minister, then, caving in to the pressure from the energy industry by allowing them to dictate environmental policy on research in this province?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, when I became Minister of Environment, I said that I would like to be somewhat like a marriage counsellor because, you know, an actual CEO of an oil company who has children and grandchildren wants to make sure that their children and grandchildren breathe the same clean air, drink the same clean water that I do. In fact, the CBC referred to me, as Minister of Environment coming from Fort McMurray, as the fox in the henhouse. I said: you think my family doesn't want to breathe clean air and drink clean water?

So do I support scientific initiative? Yes, I do. Do we want to incent to attract even more activity in this regard for long-term, sustainable results? Unequivocally yes.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I won't repeat the CBC's description of the minister, but here is the third question: why should the taxpayer continue to be on the hook for negative impacts of oil and gas development rather than having the industry pay through an environmental royalty that he proposes?

Mr. Boutilier: My vision and the gleam in my eye is that I would like to eventually have a long-term sustainability fund, which we do have today, for environmental purposes, for scientific research that will produce results and outcomes that provide long-term solutions for our children and for the hon. member's grandchildren now and well into the many centuries to come.

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

Access to Education by Nonresident Students

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked some questions about a 17-year-old from Lethbridge who recently moved to Calgary, where she very much wants to finish her high school. I remain concerned that this young student may not yet be registered at a Calgary high school. My question is again to the Minister of Education. Has this young student been welcomed into a Calgary high school or not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, the 17-year-old in question has chosen to move away from her home, and as such she is a minor child not living with either parent at the moment. There are some extenuating circumstances here, and if I provide as much information as I think I know about this case, I may be violating some privacy issues. On the other hand, if I don't provide an answer, then of course other accusations will come. So let me just say that the Calgary board of education, I know and I am relieved to hear, have made every effort for the past several days to contact this student, and the student has unfortunately not yet responded to them. [interjections]

Mr. Magnus: Given that some of the opposition don't seem to think this is an important question, my second question: are there any barriers that still exist and are preventing this student from furthering her education?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, it certainly is a very serious issue, and we will do everything that we can from our end to help any of these students or school boards when issues like this come forward. However, we do have locally elected trustees, and they have in turn administrators, who do their best to address awkward and sometimes difficult circumstances such as we're discussing.

To my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, there are no barriers here other than communication. We need the two parties to be able to first of all get in touch with each other. Efforts are being made in that regard, and after that, they'll simply need to assess the student's situation with respect to what courses she has taken, what courses she wishes to take, what sort of a program she wishes to be on: will she be on a legal guardianship type of agreement or classified as an independent student? So there are circumstances like that that aren't necessarily barriers, but they are issues that need to be addressed.

Mr. Magnus: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: who will provide the funding for this young person to attend a high school in Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, when students are in the K to 9 program, we fund on a per capita or a per student basis, as most people here would know. Once they arrive in high school, we fund on a credit enrolment unit basis specifically those particular courses where credits have been awarded because the course taken has been completed. There's a special formula that works in that respect.

Now, with regard to one particular student who has chosen to live

away from her own domicile and has picked a school of choice elsewhere, quite obviously if that student is able to get in touch with the school board – I know the school board is trying to get in touch with her – then something might, I'm sure, be arranged.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that if an arrangement can be made between the family, the minor child, and the Calgary board of education, which I think is the board in this particular case, then she will be obviously taking some high school credit enrolment courses. [interjections] Once she completes those, we will do our very best to fund them. That's how the system of funding works, and we will certainly look at it. We're not immune to these problems, and we do try our best to alleviate them.

The Speaker: There were several interjections there about time. That whole exchange with the three questions and three answers took 3.5 minutes, which is considerably shorter than many others earlier today.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, by way of an historical vignette today this may be of interest, considering that this is also International Women's Week, March 5 to March 11 of this year. In 1916 Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba granted women the right to vote in provincial elections. On June 17, 1917, in that particular provincial election, Mrs. Louise McKinney won election as an independent in the contested constituency of Claresholm.

In August of 1917 under the province at large category Miss Roberta McAdams was elected as a nonpartisan MLA from this province at large designation for soldiers and nurses.

Louise McKinney was the first woman elected to a Legislature in the British Empire. She earned this designation as Roberta McAdams was not elected until August 17, although both were sworn into the Alberta Legislative Assembly on the same day. These two women were the first women elected to any parliament, again, in the British Empire.

Mrs. McKinney ran under the United Farmers of Alberta banner in 1921 and failed to be re-elected. A number of newspaper articles of the day credited her defeat with her opposition to the use of alcohol and the use of tobacco. In 1925 she was the only woman to sign the Basis of Union, which created the United Church of Canada. In 1928 she was one of five women who petitioned Ottawa for a ruling on the question of women being qualified to sit in the Canadian Senate. She died in Claresholm on July 10, 1931.

On February 8, 1918, Roberta McAdams became the first woman in the British Empire to introduce a piece of legislation, the War Veterans' Next-of-Kin Association. She did not seek re-election in 1921, moved to the Peace River area with her husband and then to Calgary, where she lived until her death on December 16, 1959.

head:

Members' Statements

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

National Social Work Week

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every March social workers throughout Canada celebrate National Social Work Week in recognition of the contributions social workers make to our society. We celebrate in recognition of the valuable role that social workers play in our society. Social workers are a valuable asset to our society in many ways and deserve our sincere appreciation. National Social Work Week celebrates a proud profession with a long history of commitment to improving the well-being of people

in our society. Social workers provide professional assistance to people seeking to overcome personal and social problems in order to lead satisfying, full, and productive lives. They offer services to individuals, families, groups, and communities throughout Alberta.

2:30

I commend all social workers in Alberta for their selfless dedication. I would like to send a thank you to all social workers in Alberta. They don't hear it often enough, but the average Albertan, like myself, does realize the value of their work, and people do appreciate it. This year it's hoped that people will take a few moments to thank someone they might know and express a positive thought about the profession and its impact on the community. I hope all Albertans will join me during this week to recognize the important contributions that social workers make.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Alberta Youth Advisory Panel

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to thank a great group of Alberta's youth for the work that they do with the Youth Secretariat, Children's Services, and this government as a whole. These are the youth that sit on the Youth Advisory Panel. These individuals help to give ongoing youth perspective on all work done by the Youth Secretariat and this government. This dedicated group works hard to see that positive changes are made for youth in this province.

There are 17 young Albertans from throughout the province that sit on the Youth Advisory Panel. For example, at the last meeting these individuals discussed topics such as the youth justice system, employment opportunities, secondary education, and the barriers to and opportunities for postsecondary education. Previous meetings have covered topics such as community involvement, housing, community opportunities, and addictions. The panel has had the opportunity to meet with the Premier, the Chief Justice for Alberta, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, presidents of colleges, and many other individuals to discuss issues and challenges related to addictions, justice, and postsecondary education and to offer solutions from the youth perspective.

Not only are these youth working towards providing our government with input on various issues; they are also helping with several other youth-related functions. This past Sunday, March 5, the Great Kids awards took place at Fantasyland Hotel here in Edmonton. Members of the Youth Advisory Panel were on hand all weekend helping with the activities, and I would like to thank them for their involvement. Many of the youth on the panel are, in fact, former winners of the Great Kids awards and are, indeed, outstanding individuals. Their input is very valuable, and I would like to thank these youths for their work.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Pharmacist Awareness Week

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Pharmacist Awareness Week, so today I rise to speak about pharmacists in Alberta. First of all, I want to thank all the professionals working in the pharmaceutical field in Alberta, be they researchers, technicians, or pharmacists.

I want to congratulate the Pharmacists Association of Alberta and their members on a job well done. They serve Albertans to the

extent beyond the normal calls of professional duty. Alberta pharmacists have been internationally recognized with awards for their work to improve patient care. They continue to lead the way internationally to benefit patients through the expanded role of the multidisciplinary health care team.

Alberta pharmacists have pioneered in their professional scope of practice. With their training, qualifications, and knowledge of pharmaceutical science and chemistry, I have more confidence in their profession for drug and medication programs. I am pleased to know that pharmacists expand from the role of mere drug dispensers to the role of drug and medication prescribers. Indeed, our health care system relies on the medication system. Without this pharmaceutical system we have no health care.

I want to bring out an important point, Mr. Speaker, a hidden point really. Our health care system relies on the pharmaceutical system, which is entirely in the realm of private business and for-profit. It starts out with researchers and developers of drugs to cure our illnesses. We rely on manufacturers to produce the drugs for our use, and we rely on the distribution network of pharmacies for the medicine to reach us. Just imagine how this system would be if it were publicly run by the government.

Mr. Speaker, whenever we talk about our health care system, we tend to narrow our thinking only to the work of doctors, nurses, and the space in hospitals, but we need to realize that the manufacturing and supplying of drugs, equipment, and consumable items are a critical part of the health care, and all of these are in the realm of private businesses.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Sporting Events in Grande Prairie

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you are no doubt aware, northwestern Albertans, particularly the ones in the Grande Prairie region, are no strangers to hosting international visitors for a variety of reasons. This past weekend was no exception.

The Natural Luge World Cup had two event stops at the Night-hawk ski area near Grande Prairie. In just 18 months Alberta volunteers, guided by track designers, built a world-class natural luge track that has met and surpassed all requirements for international competition. One European racer commented: it's like Formula One. The Grande Prairie region will now move up to host the 2007 natural luge world championships, which will draw competitors and spectators from 16 countries.

It doesn't end there, Mr. Speaker. The 2006 Ford World Women's Curling Championship is being held in Grande Prairie March 18 to 26. A showcase of the world's premier women curlers from Asia, Europe, and North America will compete in this event.

These successes, Mr. Speaker, are directly linked to Alberta's can-do attitude and our unbeatable spirit of volunteerism.

Thank you.

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

National Child Care Program

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Five months ago the Minister of Children's Services announced a five-point early childhood development and child care plan made possible by an agreement reached with her federal counterpart. The plan provided for significant increases to child care subsidies, assistance for parents wishing to enrol their children in day programs, and improved

professional development opportunities and increased wages for child care workers. Those modest gains are now under threat. The minister recently warned Albertans that if the agreement is cancelled, then the improvements that were made possible would also be in jeopardy. This could prove disastrous for many families.

The federal Conservative plan will not directly create new child care spaces. Their plan will not promote public, not-for-profit care, which we know is the best way to deliver quality child care and early learning services. The families who need it most will likely never see their full \$100 monthly allowance. Families receiving income support through Alberta Works will likely see the \$100 clawed back. The money will also be a taxable benefit, disqualifying many families from income-tested programs.

If this government is sincere about providing choices for women and families, then it should provide real choices, including the ability to choose high-quality, affordable child care. Sadly, at an average cost of over \$500 per month such options are simply not available for many families. I'm urging the minister to do the right thing when she meets tomorrow, I understand, with her federal counterpart and defend and save the agreement reached last year. Alberta families deserve no less.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(4) provides for a fourth member's statement today allocated to the government side. Is there any member who wants to do it for two minutes on an ad lib basis?

head: 2:40

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm submitting a petition on behalf of concerned Albertans from Okotoks, High River, Sunset House, and a few other communities petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to

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

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Bill 20

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006.

The proposed amendments in this bill will protect Albertans' personal information from improper access by foreign governments and create fines of up to \$500,000 for violating our laws governing disclosure of records. It will allow newly created government boards and committees to be brought under the FOIP Act more quickly and add circumstances where the act won't apply to public bodies. It will address how the act applies to specific categories of records, including library books and certain records of the internal

auditor and ministers, and build in more time for the Information and Privacy Commissioner to consult with an applicant during the processing of a FOIP request.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 20 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling an e-mail from Karen Ockerman, an Edmonton-McClung constituent. She's against privatization of health care and feels that the third way is both short-sighted and poorly advised. She ties this into how the government treats our seniors and the way government looks at environmental issues.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a document that I'm tabling on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Official Opposition. This is an article in regard to the Enmax CEO stating: initial introduction of power deregulation a disaster.

The second tabling that I have is also from question period today. This is in regard to a question that I directed to the Minister of Energy. This is a copy of the draft confidential report for the standing policy committee review on October 21, 2005, indicating that in the year 2004 as a percentage the Crown revenue share for royalties was 19 per cent.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon with three tablings, the first of which is a copy of an e-mail from a constituent by the name of Leslie Hall, who is writing about her concerns with the health policy framework. She says that she's "strongly opposed to creating a multi-tiered system that will only serve to augment the already large disparity in quality of life and access to social services in our province."

The second is another letter from a constituent, Janette Pole, again writing to indicate that she's unhappy with the proposal to allow more privatization of health care in Alberta. She says that she feels that as the Premier is "rushing through this before he leaves government, we should wait until the new Premier is in place and take a good hard look at this."

The third, on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, is from a constituent of his by the name of Martha Dobbin. It's another letter about health care. She's expressing grief based on the fact that "no Conservative MLA appears to be presenting the wishes of her/his constituency in speaking against the Third Way but is rather falling in line with a plan that is obviously against the wishes of most Albertans."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three tablings, the first from Reny Miklos on health care: retaining a publicly funded, accessible health care system, not violating the Canada Health Act, and concerns over the absence of a lobbyist registry, with private health interests lobbying the government.

The second tabling is from Roseline Bouchie with concerns about insurance companies' qualifications to decide how distribution of what is priority health and not priority health care and double-dipping for doctors.

The third tabling is from Paul Armstrong, director of Alberta Coalition of Concerned Citizens, again on health care, asking that someone explain the logic of taking doctors from the already overtaxed public system and making a couple of suggestions about foreign-qualification doctors and getting them into our system.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. The first is a letter from D.W. Irons, who is upset that the government is moving ahead with health care reforms that were not supported at the health summit and that they have contracted with Aon, whose parent company was forced to pay \$190 million in fines for unethical behaviour.

I also have a brochure produced by the Seniors' Action and Liaison Team, which is strongly opposed to the privatization and two-tier health care being proposed with the so-called third way in health care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two documents to table today. The first is an excerpt from the Alberta NDP platform calling for the creation of a green fund to support green transportation initiatives and cleanup of toxic sites.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is an op-ed piece written by my colleague from Edmonton-Calder. The piece calls for adjusting royalty rates to increase the resources we have available to fund important cleanup and sustainability initiatives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness: a letter dated March 6, 2006, from the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, to Dr. Taft, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, providing preliminary observations concerning the Alberta Liberal opposition report entitled *Creating a Healthy Future*.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2006-07 interim supply estimates. These interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the government until May 31, 2006. It is anticipated that by that date spending authorization will have been provided for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$5.8 billion for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$222 million for capital investment, \$28 million for nonbudgetary disbursements, and \$328 million for lottery fund payments.

Interim supply estimate amounts are based on departments' needs to fund government programs and services until May 31, 2006. While many payments are monthly, other payments are due at the beginning of each quarter and at the beginning of the fiscal year. Some payments are seasonal.

head: 2:50 **Government Motions**

8. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2006-07 interim estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Government Motion 8. I'd just like to get on the record the fact that I'm a little disappointed that we are once again seeing an interim supply estimate. In my comments a year ago I had indicated that I was more than willing to come back to this Legislative Assembly in early February, and I had indicated then that I would hope that the government would be as willing to do so. If we were here in early February, there would be ample time to deal with the Speech from the Throne and those various responses, and we could be beginning budget deliberations by the end of February. That would allow us ample opportunity to debate a budget in full before the fiscal year-end and thereby eliminate the need for this document and further interim supply.

I indicated last year that the government of Saskatchewan last year for the very first time in the 100-year history of the government of Saskatchewan was asking for interim supply. I cited that because the Finance minister here said that this is normal procedure and, indeed, it is normal procedure. All I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that it wouldn't necessarily have to be normal procedure.

I have a great deal of problem approving \$6 billion in funding to the government without anything more than a single line item for each department. I know that eventually we will see a budget and have an opportunity to debate it, but it causes me a great deal of concern to approve \$6 billion in such a very short period of time without any real understanding of where that money is going or what it's going to be used for.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to anybody else who may wish to comment as well.

The Speaker: Shall I call on the hon. Minister of Finance to close the debate?

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I think you'd have to come back to the Legislature in January, and I guess that's something we can discuss. It does require a certain number of days for budget debate, but this interim supply estimate, as I indicated, is two months of supply for the government. To suggest that a budget this size for the province would not be utilized over that time period would be kind of an interesting thought.

As I indicated in my opening comments – and I understand fully that the hon. member wants to put his concern on the record, and I appreciate that – we do have departments who have services and programs that are funded at the beginning of the fiscal year. I would anticipate a supply motion even if you anticipated that you might get your budget through because I don't think anyone in this Assembly wants to interrupt that good work that's done in our health facilities, in our schools, through Children's Services, and many other programs.

Many of our obligations are on the first of the year, some of them are quarterly, but it is important that that work continue and that the thousands of people who work in this province to provide educational opportunities, health care, and certainly all of the services that we enjoy in this province receive a paycheque at the end of the month. I think they deserve that. Mr. Speaker, this is only until the main government estimates are approved.

I look forward to all of the debate and discussion over the period of the budget debate. I think the hon. member knows that the interim supply estimates cannot reveal the government's spending plans until all budget documents are tabled. I know that he understands that and understands why we debate it in this way. There will be very comprehensive budget information in our fiscal and business plans, and I would be pleased to inform the hon. member that budget day will be March 22.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

9. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2006-07 interim estimates shall be two days.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

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

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 6: Rev. Abbott]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to be able to rise today and give my response to the Speech from the Throne. Eight days ago in question period – I want to set a little context for my remarks, first of all – the Premier indicated that he wished I had stayed in radio. Of course, the Premier mentioned a great many things of questionable validity that day, including his comment that the opposition, “would have even less reason for justifying their existence.” Now, I'm sure the Premier wishes that I had stayed in

radio because for all of the media's influence, some of it real, much of it alleged, one thing journalists and talk show hosts cannot do is compel elected officials to appear on their programs to be held accountable. The Premier was able to avoid me for as long as I was just on the radio, and now that I sit nearly across from him in this House, he no longer can.

I don't know whether the Premier privately thinks that I'm a great guy or not, but that's not the point because this isn't about me. Although I submit that the Premier and his many fellow government members have forgotten this after all these years of being corrupted by power, it's not about them either. It's about the citizens of Alberta. It is about democracy. It is about accountability. That's why I was sent here by voters who know that this government is old and tired and out of ideas yet still as undemocratic as ever, unwilling to tolerate dissension, genetically incapable of accepting ideas and advice from outside.

So this government drifts, a victim of its own culture of entitlement: entitlement to make all the rules, entitlement to remain in power, entitlement not to be questioned or held to account, entitlement to do the autopilot thing because, well, they think they're entitled. Well, that drift, that culture of entitlement, that arrogance and complacency and squandered opportunity is not good enough for the people of Alberta. This is about the people. It is about what they want and what they need and what they treasure and what they hope for, and that is not in this Speech from the Throne.

Oh, the same old platitudes are there: warm, fuzzy, mom and apple pie, baseball, hotdogs, and Chevrolet-style bromides that read like they were crafted by some Toronto ad agency copywriter who's trying to sell RSPs or some other product or service that will, gentle reader or viewer, bring you a sense of security and peace of mind as soon as you hand over your money. I don't know. Maybe the guy who penned this masterpiece also does those commercials for life insurance designed to cover the cost of your funeral, you know, the ones where the earnest-looking pitchman reminds us how it only costs pennies a day, and everyone qualifies regardless of age, and you won't need a medical, which is undoubtedly reassuring news in the context of the third way.

Perhaps the guy used to – I don't know – write advertising for the federal Liberals back in the day when the feds spent quadrillions of our tax dollars every year attempting to convince us how good their ideas were. I know the Premier's throne speech eve infomercial only cost 170,000 of our tax dollars. But, yeah, there's been a changing of the guard in Ottawa, and hey, a guy's got to feed the family one way or another.

My point, Mr. Speaker, is that this Speech from the Throne stretches credibility to the breaking point. There's a promise in every paragraph. If the Premier had stayed, well, not in radio but television, he'd remember that the stories you do for broadcast have to have more than a passing acquaintance with the facts. As the *Globe and Mail* said of itself in a recent editorial eviscerating a certain federal election ad, and I quote: we're not making this up; we're not allowed to make stuff up. As a reporter he'd know or should know that the more promises a government makes, the less likely it is to keep any of them. That's not because government is inherently dishonest – well, not just because, in any event – but because the more promises you make, the harder it is to figure out what your priorities are.

Although as someone who just fairly recently left the radio business and finds himself often still viewing this whole process through the jaundiced eye of an old newsy, I note the chicken-and-egg nature of the promise-them-everything school of politics, and I wonder which came first. Did the old federal government and does the current Alberta government lack a vision and a plan and a clear

set of priorities because they both promised everyone everything under the sun? Or do they make all these promises in hopes that they won't notice that they have utterly lost their way?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the constellation of Albertans' hopes and dreams and concerns is undoubtedly contained in that Speech from the Throne, but although you can look up into the sky on a clear night in the country and see those constellations up there, they remain out of reach. However, we can get to the moon. We got there when we made it a priority and developed a plan. The people of Alberta know that the future is very bright indeed, but while the possibilities may be limitless, there are limits on the number of possibilities we can pursue at any one time. We have to set some priorities.

So let's talk about that, and while we're at it, let's talk about a couple of glaring contradictions in the throne speech too. For instance, the throne speech talks about a learning society and a prosperous society and promises that "work will begin or continue on about 60 new schools or major school modernizations, 47 major postsecondary capital projects, and 21 major health capital projects," yet Calgary alone has 40 communities packed with young children without a public elementary school. Less than a dozen schools are under construction. The Calgary Catholic board has been allocated only a fraction of the number of portable classrooms it requested. The Calgary board of education spends \$27 million a year on school busing. Now, \$27 million would pay for, oh, half a dozen elementary schools. Come to think of it, the prosperity bonus cheques would have paid for over 300 schools.

As for the 47 major postsecondary and 21 major health capital projects, well, anyone who would argue their need today in this province is just plain cheap. The Calgary health region, for example, will need something in the neighbourhood of 25 per cent more money in terms of operating funds over the next four years so that they'll be able to staff and run their new facilities. So far there's no operating cash to go with the capital fund for hospital construction and expansion. I know. I know: wait for the budget. That's the standard line.

Glaring contradiction number two: the government's Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I quote again from the throne speech: "Research indicates that half of all cancers are preventable," and "Bill 1 . . . will establish funding that the Alberta Cancer Board will use to move forward aggressively on cancer prevention." Well, the contradiction is that this is the very same government that last year at this time cut the legs out from under a private member's bill to uniformly ban smoking in all public places right across the province. Why? Did the government succumb to the tobacco lobby? Was it the lobbying from bar owners? Or did they succumb to the same cabal within government? They tried, until they could no longer stand the howls from an outraged public, to exempt the Legislature Building and cabinet ministers' offices from a smoking ban. Whichever, it doesn't matter to whom they caved. They caved – that's the point – on smoking. We know that 45,000 Canadians a year die from smoking-related illnesses, in many cases cancer.

About priorities: the issue here is the need to choose a few, which this throne speech clearly indicates this government has failed to do. I've had a lot of conversations with constituents lately about their priorities, and I'm going to use one conversation that I had a couple weeks ago. It's reasonably representative. I was talking with a guy who volunteers to maintain the outdoor ice rink at one of the community halls in Calgary-Currie. This is one of those salt-of-the-earth people that communities all over this province rely and depend

on to do the basic stuff like provide the ice rink for the community kids – the outdoor rink, that is, in the face of an almost endless chinook this winter, and the ice surface, by the way, was gorgeous.

He told me: "You know, I grew up in this community. When I was a kid, my dad worked; mom stayed home. We were able to buy a bungalow here, close to downtown. We had one car. I walked to school, and I walked to the rink to play hockey, and I walked to the ball diamond in the summertime." He said, "You know, none of these new communities have any of these public facilities that help make communities work." Aha. There's a clue to a priority and, I think, an interesting comment. It spoke to one ordinary Albertan's understanding that this government is no longer delivering value for money, no longer delivering value for the tax dollars he sends from Calgary up here to Edmonton.

He's not asking for the sun or the moon or even a cure for cancer. He's asking why his government has neglected the basics: schools in the communities where kids live; parks and recreational facilities; by extension, enough hospital space to accommodate the sick; quality care for our aging parents and grandparents; space to educate and train the tens of thousands of young people who are turned away by our postsecondary institutions every year; enough money to create some opportunity for our disabled and our disadvantaged rather than barely enough to subsist on; our air; our water; and our nature. Mr. Speaker, those are the basics for which government has a responsibility.

Government's job, government's priority is to create the context in which every Albertan can aspire to his or her full potential: economic, social, and human potential. Good governments do this by providing excellent public services, public goods, and public works, which enable the private sector to be highly productive and globally competitive and enable citizens to be all that they can be. There is great power in communities. There is great power in people, and wise governments recognize this and nurture, encourage, and invest in this. But this government – oh, this government – has neglected too many people and too many communities for too long. Promising them everything under the sun at this juncture isn't going to fool them anymore. The people of Alberta look at our unprecedented wealth and opportunity. They see a government unprepared to lead, and they rightly conclude that we deserve better.

I will be delighted some day to go back to radio, once Alberta has a government that makes its citizens its priority. It's clear, though, Mr. Speaker, that that's going to take a change of government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by our hon. Lieutenant Governor. I would like to congratulate His Honour for an impressive first year of service as our province's 16th Lieutenant Governor, and I would like to extend my warmest wishes for his continued success.

I also want to recognize the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Legislature and the 100 years of democracy in Alberta. As my article in the winter edition of the *Canadian Parliamentary Review* explains, we enjoy a very healthy democracy in this province, thanks to the work and dedication of many people who are in this Chamber today, including the Premier, the Speaker of the House, and many other parliamentarians throughout our province's history. We should be proud of our democratic traditions.

We should also take pride in the position our province has taken in this federation. Alberta has become the leader in Canada by such a wide variety of measures. Governments from across the country

look to us for leadership and innovation in how we govern. It took a lot of hard work to get there. I feel confident that this hard work will pay dividends for Albertans for many years to come.

As I think of the many Albertans who have worked hard to get us here, I think of our brave soldiers in Afghanistan and their courageous families, and I realize that they are making sacrifices so that others may have the same kind of democracy that we have. I think of the families in Afghanistan that want all of their children, girls and boys, to go to school to get a good education. I think of the health care in Afghanistan and the little boy who had a cancerous tumour on his face and his grandfather who took him to a Canadian base and to Canadian doctors for help. I think of the people from Edmonton who quickly raised \$10,000 through their church when asked by a soldier to help the little boy die a more comfortable death. I think of how comfortable our lives are, and I say a prayer of thanks for our soldiers, their families, our Canadian values, and our great democratic governments.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne highlighted many initiatives like health, education, infrastructure, and safe communities that benefit Albertans, and I would like to spend the next few minutes talking about how some of these will benefit my constituents in Red Deer-North. All Albertans, including my constituents, will benefit from major investments in infrastructure this year. Red Deer enjoys its geographic position in the middle of the Edmonton-Calgary corridor, which is one of the most productive geographic regions on the planet. To sustain this level of activity, we need more roads, more hospitals, and more schools. I enthusiastically encourage the government's commitment towards ensuring that the province's infrastructure keeps up to its impressive economic performance.

3:10

To continue with this economic performance, we also need a highly-educated and skilled workforce. One way the government plans to achieve a highly-educated workforce is by speaking to youth, parents, business leaders, and educators from across the province through a high school completion symposium to better understand why students leave school early. This is a very important initiative because we need our students to finish high school and to move on to a postsecondary education or into the workforce as soon as possible. Fifteen dollars to \$20 an hour might look inviting to a student for a full-time job. However, this will not satisfy them for long, and returning to school will be difficult. I can still see my daughter's frustration when she realized that she had to upgrade and complete her grade 11 and grade 12 chemistry. As a young adult it was expensive in time and money for her to go back to college to complete courses that she could have completed while she was in high school.

Our workforce needs to grow substantially if Alberta is to keep its competitive advantage. Mr. Speaker, as indicated in the Speech from the Throne, the government will respond this year by developing "a new strategy to increase awareness of Alberta as the [place] . . . for skilled immigrants." The development of this strategy along with the government's added focus on settlement services and language training will go a long way towards attracting the best people to our province to work in their specialized fields.

We have to remember that we also need to have homes for the immigrants who come to live and work in Alberta. The mayor of Red Deer has established the Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness. I've been told that there are up to 12 people living in a two-bedroom apartment because they cannot find affordable housing. I congratulate our government and the minister of seniors and housing for working to support affordable housing in Alberta.

Thanks to affordable housing grants and Potter's Hands construction, we will add another 95 beautiful, affordable housing units this year to the 225 that have been completed over the last three years in Red Deer.

The Edmonton-Calgary corridor is also home to a substantial segment of Alberta's aboriginal population. These important Albertans need to be included in discussions on solving our labour shortages. We need to find ways for aboriginal populations to take a greater role in shaping this province's future. I am thankful to Olymel, one of our major corporations in Red Deer, for taking the initiative to train aboriginals and to bus them back and forth from Hobbema to their meat processing plant each day. I know that there are other organizations in Red Deer that are committed to good oil field training programs for all Albertans. I am encouraged by new partnerships that are being formed between aboriginal groups, industry, and government.

With increased training for aboriginals will come increased opportunities on Alberta's reserves, and more opportunities on reserves will help aboriginal populations to overcome problems like drug addiction and gang violence. I feel the horror of the mother who ran to her three children who just barely missed being hit by a bullet and had debris sprayed all over them when they were in the bathtub. It is suspected that this frightening incident with three small children was the result of an aboriginal gang shooting.

These problems are not exclusive to reserves. Mr. Speaker, we need to stimulate our youth through education and provide them with opportunities. Such an approach will help to curb the spread and use of crystal meth, which is a problem across this entire province. This is a topic that is very dear to my heart, as I have spoken to many parents in the past year whose children are addicted to this terrible substance. Crystal meth affects every Albertan, whether it's knowing somebody who suffers from addiction, being a victim of a meth-related crime, or paying higher insurance premiums due to sharp increases in property theft.

This is why I so passionately applaud the government for establishing the Crystal Meth Task Force, which will work with AADAC and with law enforcement to reduce the supply and decrease demand for this drug. Along with many parents whose children are abusing drugs, I anxiously await the proclamation of my private member's bill, Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act. This will give parents the tools to help their addicted children through detox and treatment.

I am also very supportive of the government's decision to increase the number of rural and organized crime police in the province last year. In order to seriously tackle the difficult issues related to the spread of drugs, we need more police on our streets.

This year the government has committed to hiring more Crown prosecutors and courtroom staff as well as to appoint more judges. Mr. Speaker, this announcement will be very welcome in Red Deer, where our overcrowded and overworked courthouse is in need of expansion and a new judge.

Albertans will be relieved to see the effect of stronger legislation to protect people from family violence. Albertans deserve to live without fear, and the upcoming amendments to this legislation should make many Albertans feel safer. I am pleased to sponsor Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006, which clarifies the definition of family violence and the definition of victims, which includes seniors and people with disabilities who don't live under the same roof.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans also deserve to have a health care system that they can count on. In the throne speech the Lieutenant Governor indicated that the government will take steps to improve access, sustainability, choice, innovation, and efficiency in Alberta's

health care system. We know that unless we make changes, health care will consume Alberta's entire budget in less than 25 years. This is the same in every province across Canada. I know that I want to leave a health care system that my five children and my five grandchildren will be able to count on too. Improving access, choice, and efficiency is welcome news to the people of Red Deer-North and to every other constituency in this province.

Primary care is an example of an innovative and efficient model of health care delivery that will be expanded this year. Recently the government was able to decrease wait times through the Alberta hip and knee replacement project. This was an innovation that worked and will therefore be expanded to other areas where wait times are just too long.

Mr. Speaker, the expansion of these various programs is an indicator that this government is serious about strengthening the public health care system. In fact, the government has been taking steps to strengthen the public system for several years. I believe they deserve more credit than they receive. It's very easy for the opposition to scare Albertans into thinking that this government intends to completely dissolve the public system in favour of a private system. It's easy for them to tell Albertans that their access to health care services will be based on their ability to pay. But this is extremely irresponsible. The opposition is simply misinforming the public, and they know that they can do so because they are playing on the public's fear.

I ask the public to overcome their fear and embrace some facts. Mr. Speaker, here in Edmonton hospitals are being expanded, at the Royal Alexandra and the University of Alberta. The Stollery children's hospital was built. The Mazankowski Heart Institute is currently under construction. Huge sums of money are being invested in prevention, early screening, and research of cancer. According to the throne speech there are 21 major capital health projects taking place around the entire province. Does it make any sense for a government that is accused of trying to eliminate public health care to be investing so heavily in the public system? It simply doesn't add up. I ask Albertans to consider this before they allow anyone or any group to play on their fears and scare them into thinking otherwise. Our public system is not perfect, but the government has clearly shown a commitment to improving it.

The environment is also a very important part of the government's agenda. We know that if we take care of the environment, the environment will take care of us.

Mr. Speaker, through the Speech from the Throne the government has shown that it is ready to start its second century with an ambitious and exciting agenda. I'm excited about the future that we are preparing for our people. I look forward to working with Albertans to ensure that this century is as successful as the last and that the comforts and values we share as Albertans will be there for another century.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to the Speech from the Throne, which His Honour Mr. Norman Kwong delivered on February 22. Throne speeches, of course, as well as budgets are moral documents because they outline priorities which affect people's lives, their everyday lives. As usual, this throne speech reflects a traditional economic approach, favouring economic growth but overlooking especially the most vulnerable people in our society.

One of this government's favourite words is choice, regardless of the fact that so many low-income people in our communities are

quite limited in the choices that they can make. We hear that mantra over and over again: it's all a question of choice.

3:20

Let's look for a moment at the word "choice." Classical economics has always assumed that human beings are logical, rational, and self-interested, weighing carefully costs against benefits in order to make smart choices which accrue as much profit as possible to themselves. This is the standard model of economic man. However, there's one fatal flaw with this view: this economic man does not exist.

When we look at actual, real human beings, we find all sorts of behaviour. Some behaviour is not in the interest of people. It's quite irrational, undermining their own self-interest. How else can you explain why people continue to vote Conservative year after year when it is clearly against their own self-interest? In real human beings we see everything from quite selfish behaviour, on the one hand, to self-sacrificial, altruistic behaviour, as demonstrated in the outpouring of help for victims of a tsunami or a hurricane.

Ordinary human beings are quite unpredictable, and there is emerging now a new subfield of economics called behavioural economics. I was helped in these remarks by a recent article in *Harvard Magazine*. This new field of behavioural economics, which seems to be getting more and more important in university economics departments across North America, studies how real people make choices. It's very important to understand what they're saying about this whole issue of choice because choice, as I mentioned, is the new mantra of Conservative ideology: choices in respect to daycare, choices in respect to health care.

Behavioural economists tell us that on this matter of choices there is a fundamental tension between the present and the future, between seizing available rewards in the present and being patient for rewards that come in the future. It is obvious that the temptation of the moment is strong. It is called instant gratification. If you ask someone, "Which do you want right now, doughnuts or fruit?" they will say: doughnuts. But if you ask which one a week from now, they will say: fruit. It is common for us to postpone decisions for the future on things that are really important, like quitting smoking or beginning an exercise program or saving money in RSPs. It's also quite common for people, when they get a lot of money, a huge gift, a huge boon of money, to spend it right away. There are so many stories of people who have won lotteries and then a few years later they are bankrupt.

This temptation to spend now, instant gratification, is what this government is leading us into. In Alberta we are blessed by a huge gift from Mother Earth in the form of fossil fuel resources. But what do we do? We spend it. Professor Roger Smith, a respected professor at the University of Alberta, commented in a letter recently published in the *Edmonton Journal* that from 1986 to 2005 Alberta's oil and gas revenues totalled \$86 billion, but of this huge amount the province has saved only \$6.4 billion and spent the rest, a billion here and a billion there, prompting the Canadian Taxpayers Federation in their newsletter to state that the Alberta government has increased spending by 113% not in the last 10 years but in the last couple of years, and "Premier Klein's spending binge makes even the most spendthrift Liberal government in Ottawa look fiscally responsible by comparison."

This government should learn from Odysseus. Odysseus was warned by the goddess Circe that his ship would pass the island of the sirens, whose irresistible singing can lure sailors and their ship onto the rocks. The sirens are a metaphor for the temptation of the moment. Odysseus made wax stoppers and placed them in the ears of his crew. He asked his crew to lash him to the mast, and even

when he pleaded to be released, they were to lash him tighter until they passed beyond the danger. This government needs to lash itself to the mast and develop a long-term savings plan and invest in the welfare of our children and our grandchildren. Without a plan the Alberta ship is being steered by this government onto the rocks. Even in classical economics it has been the belief that during bad times governments should spend money on public works projects to increase employment, but in good times governments should save and save and save.

Last summer I read the fine biography of John Kenneth Galbraith written by Richard Parker. Actually, this book is in our library now. I saw it yesterday. It's a new book, a very fine biography of a great Canadian. John Kenneth Galbraith's career began at the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph and has spanned most of the 20th century, from the depression era to his being an adviser to John F. Kennedy. Galbraith was a great fan of FDR's New Deal, and throughout his career as an economist he never wavered from arguing that during tough times when unemployment is high, public deficit spending on public projects is necessary. But when the economy is racing ahead, as it is now, when you have an overheated economy, what we need is more fiscal restraint.

It is a question of good stewardship. In my career of more than 40 years in the ministry I used that word repeatedly in my sermons: stewardship. It's an important value, that we should be good stewards of the gifts of creation. I noticed that the newsletter of the environmental research centre at the University of Alberta is titled *Partners in Stewardship*. This word has moved out of its religious background into the secular sphere, as it should. It's an extremely important value.

As we look at the huge, wonderful resources we have in this province, which we didn't put there, that are there and we are exploiting, we should remember that we have to be good stewards of that tremendous wealth. I take very seriously the challenge of the Canada West Foundation, which has reminded us of our intergenerational responsibility. The term they use is intergenerational equity. The revenue that flows from oil and gas and coal lying beneath the surface of Alberta is a trust, a gift which should benefit not just people today – that's the instant gratification I was talking about – but it should benefit future generations also, our children and our grandchildren. Again, this government has to lash itself to the mast and exercise wise and prudent stewardship of our nonrenewable resources.

Most people I think were quite surprised by all the attention to coal in both the throne speech and the Premier's infomercial. It may be the case that there are enough coal reserves to last a thousand years, about 33 billion tons, but talk about clean coal is misleading since clean-coal technologies are still in the developmental stage, and many of the most promising developments, such as the converting of coal to gas and liquid fuels . . .

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language Referring to a Member by Name

The Deputy Speaker: I'd just like to remind the hon. member of two things. We don't use the word "misleading"; it's been judged as unparliamentary. The other thing I'd like to remind the member is that we don't refer to members of this Assembly by their proper name, so it would be the Premier of the province of Alberta. Please carry on.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't recall making those points at all, but anyway. I didn't mention the Premier at all.

The Deputy Speaker: You referred to the Premier as Premier Klein in your speech earlier on. If you check your script, you'll probably see that. And we have decided long ago that we don't use the term "misleading." It's in the Speaker's handout that was given to all members at the beginning of the session, that that's an unparliamentary usage of language. So if you'd care to carry on without comment.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll check *Hansard* for those mistakes, and I apologize for those mistakes. I wasn't aware.

Debate Continued

Dr. B. Miller: What I was saying about coal is that I think there are many research organizations, such as the Alberta Energy Research Institute and the Alberta Research Council, and also organizations of industry that are working on improving the technologies, so I'm not about to suggest that we shouldn't be moving ahead on that front. In fact, we should be putting more investment of our money into these technologies so that we can have a symbiosis of both respect for the environment and moving ahead in the use of our fossil fuel revenues. It's all a question of our responsibility in being good stewards. I'm afraid that with the government initiatives we're moving ahead too fast and we're moving ahead in such a way that we're showing a great deal of irresponsibility in respect to our environmental responsibility as stewards, and I think that needs to be attended to.

What I find missing in the throne speech also is investment in people. The throne speech has an optimism which is based only on one way of measuring economic growth. The throne speech boasts that Alberta has the highest average incomes in Canada, but it fails to mention that the gap between the rich and the poor is the widest gap in the country. If other measurements were used, such as the genuine progress indicators which you can find on the website of the Pembina Institute, you will see a very different picture of Alberta. Alberta leads the country in gambling addictions, alcoholism, substance abuse, use of food banks, and not surprisingly we have one of the highest divorce rates in the country.

3:30

Mr. Backs: A liquor store on every corner.

Dr. B. Miller: That's right.

The gap between the incomes of the richest 20 per cent and the poorest 20 per cent of Albertans has increased since 1994 by 62 per cent. In 1999 the top 20 per cent earned 14.5 times more than the lowest 20 per cent.

In respect to the way we use up our resources in terms of being consumers, there is something called the ecological footprint: the amount of land we use to meet our basic needs. Albertans have the fourth largest footprint on earth. Albertans on average consume 10.7 hectares of land to meet our needs, and the top 20 per cent of income earners have a footprint of 15.8 hectares.

In light of all those kinds of statistics about our human life and all of the problems that we face in human life in Alberta, it seems to me that this government is creating an immoral society with its out-of-control spending focused on the moment and irresponsible stewardship of our resources neglecting our responsibility for future generations. The throne speech is evidence once again that the Alberta ship is being steered onto the rocks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Caldor.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today in response to the Speech from the Throne on behalf of the people from my constituency of Stony Plain. I would like to begin my speech by thanking His Honour for the work he has done over the past year. His dedication to Alberta has helped to make our province the best place in the world to live, work, and play.

As His Honour mentioned in his speech, last year our province celebrated its 100th birthday. Throughout that special year there were many highlights, including Her Majesty's visit and the amazing fireworks display, which was a perfect ending to the province-wide party on September 1.

Mr. Speaker, the speech delivered last week by the Lieutenant Governor contained the highlights of the government's intentions for the next year. I am very excited about many of the aspects in the speech, including the removal of unnecessary red tape from government processes, the development of a new land-use framework, and the commitment to funding cancer research. In addition to those exciting initiatives for myself and the people in my riding there was another very exciting announcement. The government's initiative to promote and fund clean-coal technology research through the Alberta Energy Research Institute and other agencies is great news for the constituency of Stony Plain.

In the Wabamun area in my constituency there are at least 400 million tons of low sulphur coal lying under the ground. Over the years 150 million tons of this coal have been removed from the Whitewood and Highvale mines to fuel electrical generation. This is the largest coal-producing region in the province, with over 13 million tons of coal being mined annually.

Presently the three coal-fired power plants in the area, Wabamun, Sundance, and Keephills, generate approximately 35 per cent of the power needs of this province. They do so by meeting and exceeding some of the highest environmental standards in North America. These plants have been a big part of the Alberta advantage in regard to providing Albertans with low-cost electricity in an environmentally friendly manner. These operations have also provided employment for approximately 1,000 residents in the area.

The development of clean-coal technology will further reduce any environmental impacts and allow for further development of this valuable resource and provide additional benefits for all Albertans. The development of clean-coal technology is exciting for Alberta and for the residents of the Stony Plain constituency. This new, developing technology will allow Albertans to continue to benefit from our tremendous, abundant coal reserves while protecting our environment for future generations. With the Wabamun plant scheduled for retirement in 2010, that site may offer an excellent location for a demonstration plant to further develop this exciting new technology.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Speech from the Throne delivered a vision of Alberta's future that all Albertans can be proud of. We're living in a time of untold prosperity, and it's important that this prosperity is passed onto future generations of Albertans. That is why I was very pleased to see the government commit to a \$1 billion investment in the heritage fund, the first such investment since 1987. Along with many endowments that the government has funded, the heritage fund will ensure that Alberta will remain strong for many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close by thanking His Honour for his Speech from the Throne. All Albertans are truly blessed to know that we have such a great individual leading our province forward. Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with great pleasure to respond to the throne speech here this afternoon. It's my observation that the Speech from the Throne should set a tone for the Legislative session. It's a speech that should seek to inspire, as it might introduce concepts that will be later fleshed out into bills during the course of the session. A throne speech speaks more directly to the public than most other speeches and documents that are disseminated from this House; thus it must be equally inspiring and substantive so that the public might know that their interests in the pressing issues of the day are in fact being dealt with in an even-handed and judicious manner.

I'd like to thank His Honour Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong for his even-handed delivery of the speech and for the manner in which he addressed several areas of concern that all Albertans have a very vested interest in.

I'd like to reply to the throne speech on two fronts, both on what subject matter the speech did include and then what areas of concern the throne speech, in fact, did not address. It's my opinion that the subject material of what this throne speech did not address speaks much louder than the other words which it contains. For this I am deeply concerned and more than a little bit suspicious. So I'd like first to cast a critical eye onto the speech and then discuss what was not there.

In the first section, entitled A Learning Society, this government proposes a series of round-tables to help to understand why students are leaving school early. It is well known that early intervention in the earliest formative years of a student is critical to lifelong learning, so if it is the Learning Commission's recommendation to institute full-day kindergarten, and if we could pass that into law, we would be sure that the next generation of student graduates will be much more likely to in fact graduate. Each dollar that is spent in early education will multiply by six by the time a student reaches high school. This is not even accounting for the enriched and healthier lives that our citizens are more likely to have if they are educated to a high school level and beyond. I am glad the government is facing the embarrassing failure rates for high school students in this province. It is unacceptable, and we have to be honest and brave enough to look at what the reasons for our high failure rates here in this province are.

I was pleased to learn that several infrastructure projects are being fast-tracked for implementation during this next budget year. Twinning highway 63 is a long overdue project, and I'm very pleased to hear that this project will come to fruition soon. Highway 63, as it stands now, is indicative of the lack of planning that went into the development of the oil sands resource here in Alberta.

It's been obvious for at least a decade now that the oil sands were going to develop into one of the world's greatest strategic sources of hydrocarbons. So why didn't this government plan and build the infrastructure to help to nurture this golden egg for then, for now, and for 30 years into the future? Where are the roads, the housing, the infrastructure for the city of Fort McMurray? You have in your caucus a former mayor of this city. Surely he could tell you what is needed up there.

Let's look into the future and see that the oil sands development will carry on and expand into the Peace Country too. Let's be sure to build an infrastructure that will benefit the long-term needs of the north and not just sort of a boom town mentality that's only focused on short-term gain.

A mention of agriculture using biofuel is very laudable but only if there is an integrated plan to encourage this and other alternative fuels to be used by consumers. Our agriculture industry needs plenty of assistance, but as long as the planning for assistance is only of a short-term and of a reactive nature, we will be forever caught in this

cycle of crisis in our agriculture sector. The root of this crisis in agriculture, in my mind, is that there is not enough support and value being placed on the family farm. If biofuel and other value-added enterprises can be directly made to benefit the family farm first and foremost, then perhaps we will see some long-term gain in this regard.

3:40

I'm very concerned about the focus on coal to become the next great energy source in this province. There are way more questions than answers in regard to this enterprise, and you can be sure that I will be casting a very critical eye on the government's intentions in this regard. We know that we have a very significant coal supply here in the province of Alberta, and certainly it supplied us with electricity for a long time. However, my concern is that in order for us to move beyond a hydrocarbon-based economy, we have to start moving in other directions. Certainly, coal is going to be with us for a long time, but do we need to make the lion's share of our investments in our energy future in that particular technology? I would suggest not.

If we're serious about diversification, then we have to make a serious stab at alternative fuel development. That is why I believe that with the riches we have now, which are not going to be around forever, it's imperative that we invest in a significant way into alternative fuels that do not include hydrocarbons. We are in the best and probably only position to do this. Other companies and private enterprise will certainly follow but only if we make our intentions known.

We can see and learn lessons from the United States, that if we're not serious about investing in alternative fuels, then the investment community will not follow suit. If we're going to mimic the national energy policy of the United States, then I think that we're all doomed to failure. Certainly, we know that in the United States there is a strong movement amongst municipalities and states to move past hydrocarbon fuels as the main driver for our energy economy, but there is just this resistance amongst the current federal government in the United States.

Why should we be sticking ourselves with something that is going to be left to the past? We know that we're making tremendous amounts of money off hydrocarbons, and we're all grateful for that, but let's try to invest more pointedly into the future.

When I speak to my constituents in Edmonton-Calder, most often their concerns rest on what the future of our health care system is going to be, the bills that they open each month and find difficult to pay, especially their utility bills, and issues of crime and of safety for their family, security, property crime, and violent crime.

We owe it to our municipalities and, indeed, everyone in this province to have a police force that is commensurate with the huge growth in our population that we've seen over the last 20 years. Our per capita police force presence is not keeping up with the rest of the country. I think it's incumbent upon us at this juncture to look at how we police our province and how we fund it as well. It is a proposal that I put forward – and I will continue to do so in this session – that we need at least 500 new FTE positions across this province to meet the needs of this growing province in terms of policing.

Particularly, I believe that we should be focusing on a community police model to achieve those policing goals. Community policing has had a stamp of confidence, I suppose, from our new municipal police chief here in Edmonton, and certainly it's recognized as a model that works not only in urban areas but also in rural areas. I would urge the government, please, if they could, to consider in this next budget an increase in actual FTEs, not just for replacement but

for actual FTEs, to bring our police force up to the level that our population deserves.

Also, as I said before, when I'm speaking to people in Edmonton-Calder, this health care issue is first and foremost on their minds. You know, I really have to question the sincerity of this government in not being forthcoming as to what their intentions are. I know that there is a baseline of what is being planned for, and I know that it includes some sort of privatization of health care. But, you know, this consultation process that we're in now does not seem valid. I've been speaking to other people: physicians at the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Alberta Medical Association and the nurses. All of them are saying that now they're just being sort of in what feels to be a flippant fashion asked to consult on something that is going to come down in the next 20-some days.

So I think that we do need to reform our health care system; there's no two ways about it. [some applause] I was hoping for a little applause there. But it has to be in a context of a strong public system. There's just too much compelling evidence to suggest that a privatization of our system, even if it runs parallel to a public system, will only result in the reduced capacity of the public system to meet the needs of the public. I think that if we have the very best system possible, then everyone must have access to that in an equal way. It is the strength of the fabric of our society to be able to do so, to give the very best that we have to offer to people when they're in a time of need, and anything less than that I would consider to be not only illogical but, in fact, immoral.

We are in a unique position amongst western developed countries and really any country around the world, where we have a reasonably intact public system. There are many reforms that we can do to make it better, but I refuse to believe that putting a parallel private system or any form of that in place is going to strengthen anybody's access to health care, be you rich, moderately rich, poor, or whatever in between. Even people who are well off can easily be fooled and tricked out of their money by having private options to health care. People think that they, perhaps, can purchase their way into health and are easily a target of nefarious sort of plans when certain people who might lack scruples know that they can take advantage of people when they're ill or when they're sick.

How we look after people who are in need is a measure of what sort of society we are, and I believe that this Legislature has beyond all else a duty to set the tone for our society, that we are indeed a caring society and that we look after each other in an equal and reasonable sort of way.

So thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the upcoming debates.

I would like to please adjourn the debate on this now.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Bill 9

Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006

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

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 9, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill intends to bring about the following two changes. The first and most important change in the amendment act will update the province's Alberta Works legislation to provide more flexibility in decision-making for grant-funded students. Alberta Works pays

the costs of a person's postsecondary training if they cannot afford to pay for their own training and they are not eligible for student loans. Currently all students applying for grant-funded training have to be out of high school for one year before they are eligible for full-time training grants. The amendment act would make a change to the one year out of school rule so that more exceptions can be made for people applying in certain circumstances.

This rule is there to make an important distinction about who can apply for grant-funded training. Training grants are not intended for every student graduating from grade 12 and looking to begin a postsecondary education. The majority of graduates leaving high school apply to advanced education for loan assistance if they need it, but requiring everyone to be out of high school at least one year before they can get funding help through Alberta Works is not always reasonable for those who would otherwise qualify for assistance.

3:50

The proposed change would benefit, for example, a 20-year-old youth from a developing country who has not completed high school and cannot make any more progress due to his lack of English. As well, he cannot continue in the regular school system due to his age. Under the current rules this person would not get any funding for ESL training or upgrading through Alberta Works because he has not been out of high school for one year. The proposed change would also benefit, for example, a 17-year-old single parent who gets support through Alberta Works to stay in school and finish high school. Under the current rules this student cannot get support for training as a licensed practical nurse because the student has not been out of high school for one year. These are many of the people who may not have the skills to get a job immediately or the options to pursue other avenues while waiting a year to qualify for grant-funded training.

Under the proposed change the one year out of school requirement would be moved to regulation so that government has more flexibility to make exceptions in certain cases. It will help people such as single parents, immigrants, or refugees who need to get on with some training immediately to keep moving forward.

Under Alberta Works government is committed to helping people get the skills they need so that they can increase their income through working and fill the job vacancies in the province's workforce. To do this, we need the flexibility to take individual circumstances into account when deciding who qualifies for grant-funded training. Alberta Works also provides services that help single parents get child support in addition to the financial assistance they receive.

The only other change being proposed through the amendment act is a housekeeping amendment to clarify the minister's authority to establish forms pertaining to child support agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to reply to Bill 9 and, you know, thank the mover for bringing forward this bill, which speaks in some way to some problems with the legislation. While these amendments may not seem to be contentious, the problem with the Income and Employment Supports Act remains. There is much too much reliance on regulations, and there is no way to measure exactly how much people living in poverty truly need. Without indexing rates to inflation and tying them to an accepted measure, such as the market-basket measure, there is no accurate determination of what people need to survive

and to prosper and to do well in our Alberta. Apparently, the government believes it can determine this through regulations.

I think it's imperative that these amendments should have clearly addressed the issue of those who dropped out of school when they were under 18. These teenagers cannot wait for a year or two to get back on track. The purpose of this bill should be to ensure that these kids get the help they need to complete their education and find meaningful employment. However, this amendment is unclear as to whether this will be accomplished. It leaves this determination up to the minister's discretion through regulations. This leaves many questions unanswered and leaves those kids who need support wondering if they can qualify for help to get their lives back on track. Surely, we can do better than just leaving it to regulations.

Again, this amendment is a housekeeping change in some ways to make the regulation-making ability of the minister specific and not implied. However, while there is no problem with some specific changes in this bill in this area, the more global problem here is that almost everything in the Income and Employment Supports Act is subject to regulation and not detailed in the legislation. The main problem with the entire act is that it allows for the content and form of almost everything to be determined in the regulations. While this specific amendment is largely housekeeping, the overriding problem is that this entire act is subject to the minister's or the Lieutenant Governor in Council's ability to make regulations.

The Income and Employment Supports Act allows the minister to make regulations for virtually all areas that this act encompasses. This gives the minister far too much power behind closed doors to alter things like the content and form of support agreements as he likes, and this may not always be in the best interests of the recipients affected. Also, leaving the legislation open to this widespread regulation-making authority makes the legislation itself more like a general framework without forcing the government to comply with real requirements. Regulations allow the government the ability and flexibility to make changes without scrutiny. This is not always in the best interest of Albertans affected by the legislation.

In addition, there is a need for additional amendments to the Income and Employment Supports Act in order to address some of the problems with that act. Most importantly, increasing social assistance rates is a vital step in supporting independence. These rates must be indexed to inflation and tied to this accepted measurement tool, like I mentioned earlier: the market-basket measure. Only by incorporating this MBM, market-basket measure, can the government determine what income support and benefits are needed for individuals and households and what basic necessities actually are. The Income and Employment Supports Act does not define what basic necessities are, and this ambiguity can lead to inaccurate assessments of benefits.

While this specific act, Bill 9, does not address these issues, perhaps it is time that this government takes action that ensures that low-income Albertans have a decent standard of living. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened intently to the mover of the motion, and he gave some logical reasons why we're moving in this direction, but I don't think it answers all the questions. At first glance the proposed amendments appear to increase the number of people who are eligible for income support and acceptance into training programs, and it seems to increase the likelihood that people facing financial crisis may find more

immediate relief for their unemployment issues. Now, I expect that the mover of the motion and the minister would say that that's the purpose, the reason for bringing this bill forward, and that certainly is an important reason.

But, again, it becomes vague when it moves into regulations. It's hard to know how many people would be impacted in this regard. The mover of the motion talked about certain people that it could benefit, and that would be desirable. I guess I worry about the flip side of this, Mr. Speaker. I think that it's possible that we've had this move towards labour shortages and bringing 12-year-old kids into the workforce, and I worry about this potential that, oh, well, if you get out there, if you move away, if you're 16 or 17 and for whatever reason you're out of school and perhaps not with your parents and the rest of it, it would be encouragement to get these sorts of low-entry jobs rather than trying to finish their education. You see, that's a problem when you deal with regulations. We don't know where it's going to take us.

The desirable things that the mover of the motion talked about, certainly, I could support. I think that we all could. It makes sense. But where does it go? Behind closed doors, then, how do we know that it's not being used in this particular regard? We'd say: well, the minister wouldn't do that. Maybe the minister wouldn't, but why do have that in regulations?

So I would say to the mover of the motion: it would be nice to be a little clearer because we do get conflicting things coming from the government. I point out the move towards more child labour out in the workforce. It's hard enough to keep kids in school, but let's say that you've got a 17-year-old that's out of school, and instead of them pushing to finish formal education, we get them into some sort of training for low-entry jobs. It seems that that could be possible here. In the long run are we doing the right thing for that student or not? Probably not in that case. Now, I would hope that that wouldn't be used in that regard, but how do we know? But how do we know? How do we know when we put it behind sort of closed doors on regulations? I wish that the mover of the motion or the minister could at least give us some clarity about what this does mean other than showing the broad strokes that the member talked about, which we all agree with.

4:00

Now, the other problem – and the Member for Edmonton-Manning alluded to it – is this, Mr. Speaker: in this rich province, remember, a lot of young people on Alberta Works, the bulk of them, are probably children of single parents and the rest of it. Income support: I didn't hear anything about this. I thought the minister had alluded that sometime there was going to be at least some increases. Maybe it's coming in the budget; we don't know.

Mr. Cardinal: Stay tuned.

Mr. Martin: Well, I've stayed tuned for a long time watching this government, and I'm getting tired of the tune.

Let's take a look at it. The income support that is currently offered through the program is a pittance, frankly. Here it is, Mr. Speaker: a family of five is expected to survive off \$1,450 a month – \$1,450 a month. Now, to be eligible for child support services, a two-person family cannot make more than \$14,600 a year. That works out to \$608 a month per person. The minister in a government press release related to this bill stated his commitment to "helping people develop their skills so they can increase their income through working . . . To do this, we need the flexibility to take individual circumstances into account." Well, we don't need flexibility to raise those rates. You can't expect anybody to live on that sort of money in this province at this time.

It's hard to know what to do, frankly, with a bill like this. When the mover so eloquently laid it out that we're talking about immigrants and refugees to continue with ESL, all those things are good. All those things, as I say, are good. I would have liked to have seen that there was a commitment, first of all, to increase the rates. Secondly, with all these things happening behind closed doors, there could be a downside to this bill. At some point, perhaps through the second reading or committee stage or the rest of it, if they can clarify that a little more because I think the potential for abuse is certainly there, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes flexibility is good, but sometimes it can go too far.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers on the bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to close debate.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to note that both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in principle agree to the amendments that are being proposed. I do understand that both of them have issues with the global employment and training matters. However, those are outside the scope of the proposed amendments that I'm bringing forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we would like to request from the Government House Leader to return to the Speech from the Throne for two more speakers, so we will do that at this time.

head:

**Consideration of His Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**
(continued)

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to give my reply to the Speech from the Throne. First, I must congratulate His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on his fine delivery of the Speech from the Throne and, indeed, the many things he does daily for the people of our great province.

In representing the good people from Edmonton-Manning – and they are all good people, I daresay, for it is truly the best area of the best city of the best province of the best country in the world . . .

Mr. R. Miller: You missed the best universe.

Mr. Backs: The best universe.

Here in Alberta we have no earthquakes. We have no tsunamis. Our floods pale in comparison to other parts of the world, as do our droughts. Indeed, most of our problems would be considered small compared to the difficulties encountered by many others on our small planet.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

An Hon. Member: Thanks to the government.

Mr. Backs: We hardly have any winter anymore, and that's not thanks to the government. Well, maybe it is. We have, though, tremendous resource revenues. We are so lucky.

Here in Alberta we're not beset by religious strife. We do not have suicide bombers blowing themselves up next to peacemakers to make a point. We have not had war on our lands in living memory. We can congratulate and support our soldiers and all of our service members here and afar who are doing so much in the world for Canada and for Alberta.

We have people here who come from more cultural origins than almost any other place in the world has, yet we live in great harmony. We all have a convenient scapegoat in the form of populist eastern Canada, that will become even more fun for this side of the House now that this government's federal Conservative cousins are in power in evil Ottawa. We can yell at all the bad things they do to our Alberta, and I'm sure they will. But Alberta will survive and get better because Albertans will make it so.

This government should have worked harder on ideas for this throne speech. That lackadaisical, lacklustre, and almost lazy throne speech will ensure that we must continue to rely on the people of Alberta to do well despite their government. That throne speech might have been all right for the 20th century, but we're far past that now. The speech talks of a debt-free new year. Well, I remember that just a little over a year ago it was election time, and the government wailed on about how it had defeated a \$23 billion debt. Mind you, this took over 11 years, and this government was a little silent on the fact that it did so with \$63 billion in energy revenues, that no other province had.

During that same time this government managed to savage seniors and health benefits, scare away or anger a lot of our health care personnel, increase tuitions at a higher rate than anywhere else in Canada, not even come close to other provinces in training First Nations people or youth in any numbers, and get a reputation of not doing much of anything for anybody except for the friends of the government. Somebody should put lyrics to a new song: where has all the money gone? By the way, where did that original \$23 billion debt go? Alberta is the place that should have a Gomery inquiry.

I'm glad that the government has decided that it had better start thinking about things. It says that it will start thinking about red tape and do a review. Good to think about it. The proper thing. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business made it clear that Alberta's small business suffers from some of the worst red tape in Canada. We have some of the largest paper burdens, some of the most disorganized regulations, and some of the worst gobbledygook in dealing with government that anyone might hope not to have in trying to start up or grow a business in our Alberta. Where is the money for the red-tape review, and when will we see it? Will we see it this year?

This government says that it is thinking about doing something for our agricultural industry. About time. Agriculture is in its worst price crisis in a generation or more. This government is going to press for something "substantial" at the World Trade Organization. It doesn't know what, doesn't say that it holds much hope, and doesn't know how it's going to get there, but it's thinking about it. "Yeah, we'll give them more farm welfare, or whatever we call that program, and hope they keep quiet," I guess is what the government is saying. And "Keep on voting for the government."

This Conservative government says that it is thinking about the environment. It will hold an environmental youth conference to see what they think. Thinking about it. Sounds good. Good politics. It shows that the government is thinking about the environment: yeah, that's a good one; put that in the throne speech.

This Conservative government wants to show that it's on top of the high school dropout program. It will think about it. It will hold a symposium and ask everyone, even kids: "Why is that? We can't really figure that out." Yeah, our government is on top of that one.

This Conservative government is even going to ask Albertans what we should do about skills shortages. That's a tough one. I hear some government folks say that they thought the market was supposed to take care of that. "Yeah, well, we'll ask around and see if someone knows what's going on." They're thinking about it.

4:10

I see that the government is going to tighten its secrecy law. Whoops. That's supposed to be called the freedom of information laws. The government will even think – think – about a tuition policy while it pays for tuition increases again this year while still letting them rise again. Thinking hard, though, thinking about it. I actually am happy that the government has responded to the Alberta Liberals' and the Auditor General's, for that matter, moves and calls for bringing improvement to long-term care.

I am pleased to see that there will finally be some response to our calls on this side of the House for increases in social support for those who cannot work. The present levels of support should be an acute embarrassment for anyone in a position of power in our Alberta. Maybe it will take minds off the lawsuit settlement a bit.

I am glad to see a land-use framework in development. I guess that the government has been looking at the land-use policy put forward by the Leader of the Alberta Liberal Official Opposition last fall and has realized that it is time to do something. I don't think the Premier will be throwing that red book at anybody and calling it crap.

I am truly happy that there will be help for cancer research. I am very encouraged that the concepts behind the Alberta hip and knee replacement project have finally been accepted by this Conservative government and will be extended to breast cancer care, coronary artery bypass surgery, MRIs, and CT scans, and prostate cancer care. We on this side of the House will be watching that promise closely. Don't be too slow at speeding those things up, or you will hear about it quickly.

I'm actually sort of happy, kind of wondering about what might happen but about something that will go on and that we will see highway 63 happen with other projects. Many of these have been mismanaged so many times that the jury will be out. We're actually waiting to see what is going to be there and how it is done. Albertans and this side of the House will be watching closely.

I'm displeased that your labour and training policy is still not much, still unacceptable. This government seems to want to do everything to steer kids away from the trades while it talks about attracting them. There is no vocational high school in this city, in Edmonton, anymore. Educational funding policy discourages administrators from funding vocational courses in schools and gives them no incentive to invest in up-to-date equipment or to help to attract fully qualified teacher tradesmen. There is no work in developing true evaluations of proper credit for different types of learning to allow greater mobility and use of learned skills as one moves into other fields.

If we could have a seamless web from a trade ticket to a PhD in terms of credit, as I heard President Sam Shaw of NAIT state at a recent conference, I think many of our skills problems would begin to evaporate. It would be great if parents would get the wise message and pass it on to their kids that to get both a trade and a degree would provide the best life experience and skills they could hope for. It would also pay for the degree.

The fact that we have an incredibly high dropout rate speaks to the lack of relevancy in our schools for many of our youth. The fact that our apprenticeship advancement rate is abysmal, especially in the first two years, speaks to a system in disarray. Why is nothing being done about that? Why do just a few over 5,000 a year graduate with

a journeyman's ticket when we have 45,000 or more in apprenticeships? What's going on? Why does this government allow the practice of multi-skilling, which is actually deskilling, to continue when the real concept should be pursuing greater skills, full journeymanship, and the most important concept of the trades that has been in place for centuries, namely mobility: the high level of skills that allow one to move from job to job in constantly changing workplaces yet still be able to do a job with skill and authority. Why do you continue to kill the building trades? This Conservative government's support of CLAC is scandalous. I've heard people term this CLAC organization the new state union for Alberta, as if we were living in some sort of a Stalinist state, a Stalinist government. Certainly, this government and its compliant labour board have made CLAC happen, but it's really just an easy union of convenience.

Keeping wages and benefits down this way does not attract people to Alberta, and that's bad for business. Why not work with the trades to train people, get apprentices trained through their halls, use the interprovincial mobility programs that are already in place, and maybe cut the interprovincial red seal exam cost from \$460 to \$60, a figure that was mentioned in the House just the other day? Make it easier. Work with the trades. They'll respect the government for it. Discourage them further, and they'll fight you like you wouldn't believe. Any tradesman who has lasted a few of the winter nights in the Oil Can in Fort McMurray won't be much afraid of taking on a Tory government.

If this government persists in trying to load up the oil sands with indentured labour, with temporary foreign labour, it is certainly looking for trouble. Tens of thousands of temporary, indentured, cheap labourers from communist countries sending their money home will not make people happy in Alberta. Let them move here, let immigrants move here with their families, and you will get to one of the actual things that the government's policy looked for, which is retention, to retain them here and to grow our Alberta.

The actual immigration program that should be concentrated on is the provincial nominee program, and the sector that should be worked on is small and medium-sized businesses, especially in the restaurant and retail sectors. It is the conventional oil patch which is providing 80 per cent of the present growth, not the oil sands. That conventional oil patch is sucking workers from other occupations and small businesses and small towns like some huge vacuum truck.

Assistance in this area for small businesses in both our cities and towns has not come, and the need is for unskilled and semiskilled labour. Some of the members on the government side have spoken to this in their replies to the Speech from the Throne. The need is for unskilled and semiskilled labour as much or more than it is for skilled tradesmen, technologists, and engineers. Why not try to increase mobility with more programs, as has been successful with the engineers in APEGGA in creating its Pacific Northwest mobility program? Again, that word "mobility" comes to the fore. Learn transferrable skills: that should be the key.

In closing, there are more questions asked by this throne speech than I have time to get to and more questions asked than were actually answered. There is no real, imaginative sense of the future, no real framework for a better tomorrow. There are a few good programs, some spending that was long overdue but no real financial framework, little sense of the long term, lots of questions. I think we should enter the 21st century.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne, like the others before me. On the surface the speech is a promise in every paragraph and on every page. All Albertans put their trust into a government to live up to these promises, to be accountable, and to be transparent. These words are right out of the Speech from the Throne.

The first promise is to address labour shortage. Why do we have such a backlog in apprenticeships? Because they can't get to school because of the limited number of spaces. Perhaps this can be addressed by the Minister of Advanced Education. Or, as well, a solution lies within our own labour force: Alberta unions. Why not allow unions to indenture the apprentices on-site, offer training and knowledge right there and now? They have the facilities, and they have the money and the capability. Why not allow this opportunity? Apprentices want assurances that the jobs that they train for today will be there for them tomorrow. Security is what they want, Mr. Speaker, not temporary foreign workers.

A prosperous society was also raised during the speech. This is something everyone can agree on. The promise of a future investment was encouraging news, a billion dollars for the heritage fund, only to find out that the government is taking a billion dollars out. They're putting it in the front door, removing it through the back door. So the question is: where is the investment? Where is the accountability to Albertans?

A promise of better roads came as welcome news to those in the oil patch, those who make the drive to Fort McMurray on a weekly basis. This is about time. There have been far too many accidents, and too many deaths have occurred. The main question is: why did this take so long in coming when the provincial debt has been paid off?

4:20

The throne speech touched on the need to focus on rural development. The government has almost half of its members from rural Alberta. They should already have plans in place. Rural areas this past year have seen food banks, unaffordable housing, coal-bed methane development that has ruined the landscape and rendered the land useless for agricultural development and in some cases the water useless for drinking. The list goes on. Given these events, don't you think it's a bit late for a rural strategy?

Moving down the list of promises, the new catchphrase for alternative energy is coal. I don't know what plans are in place, and I suspect that the government doesn't either. It's one of these on-the-fly policies that we make up as we go along or hope that something comes out of the blue or that technology comes along. How do we get to this coal? Most of it does lie beneath the soil, rich, prime soil on agricultural land. It spreads right through to the Rocky Mountains.

What about the landscape? Reclamation and return to natural state: these are two different concepts. When the coal is extracted, how useful will this land be later? This is the thinking of a tired government that after 35 years is clearly out of ideas. It's evident when the Premier asks the opposition for our ideas. We have to ask: is he serious, and will he listen? This government is of the opinion that if it does come from opposition, it has no merit, but some of the members that sit on the other side have to remember that they did come from opposition.

Constituents from Edmonton-Decore want guarantees that crime, both rural and urban, will be tackled. It appears that this government is soft on crime. It's grown as fast as the economy. Perhaps it's time that judges are given some direction in handing down sentences on drinking and driving, hit-and-runs, assaults, drug offences. Minimum sentences could be in place to protect the public. Perhaps

it would speed up our judicial system and the backlogs that it has already.

Seniors are also on the list of those that need protection from the high price of gas and electricity that was in the form of deregulation. This was promised and would lead to competition and give lower rates. So far we have not seen this competition that deregulation has promised. It has led to higher profits and higher rates, that all Albertans are paying. Where are the lower rates that we expect from the benefits here? When will Albertans see the difference that was promised?

This leads also to deregulation or privatization of our health care system, that we are talking about. The Speech from the Throne talked about choice, a word my constituents have told me that they do not support as yet. Back off is the word. Full public consultation well in advance, not a month in advance, is what was promised. Privatization by this government would be irresponsible and reckless.

I'm reminded from this House that most of the popular vote did not lie with this government but was cast for opposition, an opposition that does have a land-use policy, one that the government says that it's willing to ask for input from the public on. This is a government that already should have one. After 35 years they're still looking for answers because they don't have any. You would think they would have some of the answers and that they would be in place because of the ongoing work with Martha and Henry, the average Albertans, those that were interviewed during the Premier's very expensive commercial on his views about prosperous Alberta.

People travel from around the world to see the vast open rangeland, the majestic mountains, and the lakes, but for how much longer can we boast about the natural riches? The environment, the boreal forest in the north are threatened by the energy, the oil and gas, and the need for expansion. How much longer can we boast about this? Who is going to be the real winner after this boom is gone? The balance needs to be in place for long-term benefits for the next generation, for my children and the grandchildren of this province, for the next hundred years.

The promise that will benefit the next generation and one that was a welcome sight was the fight against cancer. It looks like a promise. If it's properly and carefully administered, it can be a leader world-wide and a leader in Canada. Something like this I can support. It's a disease that, I have said before, has touched us all in some way, shape, or form. We need to get to the root cause of this disease. We need to look at the basics of where it starts. The government had an opportunity when the smoking bylaw was before it and didn't do it. Are they certain that with this \$500 million investment they are going to be putting their money where their mouth is?

I will conclude, Mr. Speaker. I do look forward to the changes that lie before us with the innovation and prosperity that the next hundred years can achieve and that opposition can deliver and will deliver when given an opportunity and a chance. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 19

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise this afternoon in committee and ask a number of questions regarding the supplementary supply estimates for Community Development. The minister is asking for a total of \$30,200,000, and I have some questions that I would like to ask relative to that.

The first question is regarding the \$200,000 that is referenced for arts development. What I would be curious to know and I'm sure many Albertans would be curious to know – apparently this money is going to be used by the department to act as a liaison for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, Mr. Chairman. I'm wondering how long the department has known that they would be featured at this festival and if, in fact, we couldn't have included this in last year's budget or, if it did for some reason come up on relatively short notice, why this allocation wasn't included in the November supplementary supply estimates, that were passed in this House in November. I'd be curious to know exactly, specifically how the department will be spending that money in Washington, and I do question whether or not it's even appropriate that that money be in the Community Development budget as opposed to International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Now, moving on, there is \$20 million being allocated for a one-time grant to assist with cost pressures for libraries. Mr. Chairman, you will know that the Official Opposition Liberals are big fans of libraries. In fact, last year one of our members, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, introduced a motion that would have seen every Albertan eligible to receive a free library card to provide free access for all Albertans to all libraries. Unfortunately, the government chose not to support that motion, and I really do believe that that's too bad because the value of libraries and, in fact, the value of reading in particular cannot be underestimated. I know that at least one gentleman, who's a superintendent with the Edmonton Police Service, told me that he can walk into any house and tell you within seconds whether or not the children in that household are going to be in trouble with the law as they grow. When I asked him how he would be able to make that determination, he said that he looks for books. I thought that was quite profound.

Certainly, I'm not about to bemoan the fact that libraries are receiving \$20 million. I think that's probably a very good initiative. But, again, the question is to be asked because this is actually more money than was allocated for libraries in the original budget. So why was the amount that would be required by libraries underestimated by such a vast amount that in a supplementary estimate we actually have to give them more than they were originally being given? Another question that I would have is whether or not the \$20 million is going to be distributed evenly amongst all libraries in the province on some sort of a pro rata basis, or are there some particular libraries that need special attention and are going to be receiving the majority of that funding? Those would be questions that I would be interested in hearing the answers to.

4:30

As well, Mr. Chairman, the minister has asked for \$1 million to be granted to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts again, related to the Smithsonian Institution this time and the festival that's going on there, and I'd be curious to know exactly how that money is going to be utilized at the Smithsonian festival. What benefit will Albertans realize from being involved with a festival in Washington,

and how will that benefit be measured? What sort of performance measurements are there going to be so that Albertans can see that, in fact, \$1 million being spent in Washington is returning some value on their hard-earned tax dollars? I need not remind this House that we have an agent in Washington right now, and a lot of people question whether or not we're actually getting value for the money that's spent there, and here we have an example of another million dollars that's being spent in Washington. I think that Albertans have a right to know that there is, in fact, good value being returned to them for that money that's being spent there.

Lastly, in reference to the supplementary supply estimates for Community Development, Mr. Chairman, I note that there's \$9 million that has been granted to the Heritage Park in Calgary. I'm not sure why Fort Edmonton Park in Edmonton isn't getting \$9 million as well. I have a great fondness in my heart for Fort Edmonton Park. It's on my A-list of attractions to point visitors to the city of Edmonton immediately after I send them to the Alberta Legislature, of course, which is at the top of my list. I find the Fort Edmonton attraction to be one of world class, and I'd like to see them receive a little more money too. I'm not sure why that's not happened here.

Again the question is: what is so urgent that we have to apply \$9 million in supplementary estimates to the Calgary Heritage Park as opposed to waiting just only a matter of days now? The minister told us this afternoon that March 22 is the magic day, at which time Albertans will have their first glimpse at the budget for the coming fiscal year. So we're only days away from that, and I'm curious to know what is so urgent that we have to get \$9 million to Calgary's Heritage Park now as opposed to waiting for the budget, which is soon to arrive.

Last year Community Development made 5 and a half million dollars available – 5 and a half million dollars – to one single individual who had a private meeting with the Premier and within minutes walked out with a cheque for 5 and a half million dollars. Here we are now: \$9 million, as I say, may be going to a worthy cause, but I'm not sure whether or not it was made available after a 15-minute meeting.

Those are the questions that I have, Mr. Chairman, relative to Community Development in specific. I know that I have some colleagues with questions on other departments, so I'm going to allow them to ask those questions, and I may well be back in a few minutes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to ask a few questions about the supplementary supply with respect to the Department of Justice. I note that the supplementary estimate of \$3,720,000 is divided into two parts: \$2,720,000 for additional operating costs resulting from staff salary settlements in 2005-06 and then \$1 million for the Public Trustee to assess and bring forward legal actions on behalf of children in care. In terms of the first amount, the staff salary settlements, I'm not sure how this works and why suddenly this is not covered by the usual budgeting of the department. Why suddenly is there a necessity for additional funds to cover salary increases?

It appears, when you look down through the lines on the supplementary supply budget, that all departments in the Ministry of Justice received a pay increase. Is it all people working in the department, or is it just senior members who received an increase and it's not spread over the whole department? It's not clear, of course, from what we have here.

I was wondering if the minister could explain. There's \$39,000 allocated to the minister's office, line 1.0.1, and \$51,000 allocated to the deputy minister's office. Is that a raise in salary for the minister and the deputy minister? I mean, we'd all like to have those kinds of raises in salary. I don't know what it is.

It's interesting, when we look down through the list, that there is a supplementary increase for every department except for legal aid. It seems to me that legal aid is one of the most important parts of the justice system. It constantly needs more funding because it's the responsibility of the province to ensure that low-income people who cannot afford a lawyer have access to the justice system. It's a very important principle. I know, in talking to clients and to lawyers, that the legal aid system constantly needs attention and needs more support, so it looks bad that there are increases everywhere except for legal aid.

The million dollars for the office of the Public Trustee: that's to bring forward legal actions on behalf of children in care. It'd be interesting to know what these legal actions are and what kind of lawsuits are being brought forward. I'm totally in the dark about that, and it would be nice if the minister would explain that.

Those are the questions I have, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't have a lot of questions. One big one. Again, the way we do supplementary estimates and the amount of money that we have pouring through here: in November billions of dollars, and here we are back in March with more supplementary estimates. I could say that we could call these people across the way the tax-and-spend Conservatives because our budgets don't mean anything.

Sure, we're going to debate a budget in March, but probably as soon as we go through the estimates, all of the various department heads will be spending more money on all sorts of things, Mr. Chairman. I think we really have to get a handle on this. Supplementary estimates, I mean, to me were meant, to begin with, to deal with what we'd call emergencies. It could be a flood or a forest fire, things that we can't predict in our budget. That's what it was set up for. Now we pass the budget, and the budget doesn't mean anything. We can do whatever we want. We'll just come back with more supplementary estimates.

As I say, we went through huge expenses in November, and here we are, Mr. Chairman, coming back with expenses again. Now, I thought it used to be that Conservatives were supposed to be very concerned about the fiscal bottom line, and they were supposed to really care about the budget, the bottom line. Well, that doesn't happen with this Conservative government in this province of Alberta.

I'd guess that some of these things that come through supplementary estimates are probably desirable. You know, I mentioned one about the libraries. Well, of course that's desirable, but wasn't that desirable back in March of last year? Shouldn't that have been part of the budget? It seems to me that when we go through all of the departments' budgets, they should have laid out their plan for the year. That's hardly an emergency that just popped up.

4:40

I guess I'm questioning, Mr. Chairman, how we're using these supplementary estimates. Surely, with billions coming through – this is a huge company – there has to be a better way to do things. I say to the members of the front bench over there: if you ran your own business this way, you'd be out of business; you wouldn't have the tar sands pouring the money in.

Well, I think there are all sorts of things that we have to do. We could make this Legislature more effective by having committees deal with the budget on a budget-by-budget basis, like they do in some other areas. I won't hold my breath waiting for it, but that's probably a way we could do it. The major question I would have of this government, to the front bench, is: when are we going to use supplementary estimates the way they were meant to be used and the way they were back when I was a Member of the Legislative Assembly during the Peter Lougheed days? They were meant for emergencies. We weren't passing billions of dollars and things that clearly are not emergencies at this particular time.

Mr. Chairman, it really irks me that the budget that we passed and the estimates that we're going to go through next month, at some point in April – it's going to probably be a waste of time because we'll come back in November and we'll be dealing with supplementary estimates. I hope that it's not billions of dollars, like it was last time. Here we are again, hundreds of millions of dollars a month or so before.

I want to really stress that this government has to get a handle on how they do the public business. I'd stress again that the question is: when are we going to treat supplementary estimates not as a slush fund for each department to spend whatever they want and come back and report after? When are we going to do it the proper way, and supplementary estimates again will be what they're meant to be? They are for emergencies and unexpected things that you could not predict. Surely, you could predict all of the things that we're talking about here in each one of these departments.

As a Legislative Assembly we should be embarrassed by the way we handle the public money in this regard, and certainly that government should be embarrassed, a Conservative government that says that they understand the bottom line. Well, Mr. Chairman, again, they don't understand the bottom line. This has become a slush fund, and as I said, I think that we can do much better for the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to pick up on what the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview had to say because it's interesting and instructive to have the odd conversation with the member and get a little sense of a history lesson of what this place used to be like. He touched on that just a moment ago, of course, when he talked about how supplementary estimates were used for real emergencies back in the Lougheed era.

I'm going to go off on a bit of a personal tangent here for a second, if I can. It sort of reminds me of back in the day when the Taylor family was what we used to refer to as a sitcom family: single income, two children, outrageous mortgage. We had to watch every penny that came through the door because my wife was staying home with the kids, who were very small at the time, and we were trying to get by on one media person's salary. Despite the popular misconception, you know, those of us in the media make absolutely boring middle-class salaries, most of us. So those were a bit lean times, but they were good times, too, because one of the things that it does is bring some discipline to bear on what you do.

In the Taylor family budget we used to record virtually everything. We basically said that if it's a spending item that amounts to less than \$2, like a pack of gum or an ice cream cone – well, actually we exempted ice cream cones. It isn't exactly a slush fund; it's a little harder than slush. That's the one exemption to the rule. We said basically that if it's less than \$2, if it's a pack of gum, we're not

going to track that, but if it's \$2.01, yeah, we will, and anything above that. You know, we still try to do that in the Taylor family budget.

I can see how the members opposite collectively got to the state that we're at today. I can see it just by benefit of having been here as an elected MLA for 15 months. I can see it because in some ways, and still speaking personally here, it's a very different way of being compensated and rebated for your expenses and that sort of thing than out there in the real world, where, you know, you don't get a mileage allowance for your car plus a credit card from the government so that the taxpayers can pay your gas as well.

The one thing that I've noticed over the last 15 months is the incredible river of money, at least compared to that old lifestyle of having a boring, middle-class, media guy's salary, that flows through our lives as MLAs now. In addition to our own salaries, one-third of which is tax free, we get temporary residence allowances, we get mileage allowances, and we get various other opportunities to have our expenses reimbursed. It's a constant money-out, money-in thing. After a while you just start going, "Well, you know, I'm kind of busy; I don't really want to go to all the trouble of tracking all this," and the temptation is there to get sloppy. From the way you didn't used to record anything that cost less than \$2, well, now it's sort of: you know, I could probably get away with not recording anything less than \$40 or \$50. Well, we don't do that in the Taylor family, but I think they do that on the other side of the House. Only they add millions and tens of millions and hundreds of millions and billions of dollars to the figures that they don't do a proper job of tracking.

I think the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is absolutely spot-on when he says that there is virtually nothing in supplementary estimates, in interim supply estimates, which we will debate later in the days to come, I think tomorrow as a matter of fact, that couldn't be predicted, that couldn't have been budgeted for.

I guess my first question would be to the Minister of Finance. Does she really believe that she cannot do a better job and that her ministry officials cannot do a better job of preparing the budget sooner than they do, in advance of when they start, of tracking the money, perhaps tying the hands of some of the big spenders? Or let them spend big. It's not so much the issue of how much they spend; it's how disciplined they are at spending it.

If they say at the beginning of the fiscal year that they're going to spend \$9 billion or \$6 billion or \$1 billion or whatever the department's budget estimate is, then the Minister of Finance can say: "All right. There's your budget. Come see me as we get close to the end of the fiscal year and tell me whether \$9 billion is going to be enough or \$6 billion or whatever." I don't want to just pick on Health, but \$9 billion is the number that we talked about earlier, obviously. Tell me whether that's going to be enough for the next fiscal year or whether you're going to need some more, and then we'll get it into the budget. But don't come to me partway through, whether it's almost at the end of the fiscal year or whether it's, you know, in the fall, and say: "Oh, my gosh. I need another billion dollars. I'm a billion short this week."

I guess I would ask the Minister of Finance: when you're confronted with something like that, when one of the kids comes to you and says, "I'm a billion short, Mom; can you give me a little extra to tide me through until the next time I ask you for more?" why doesn't she just say no? Why does she feel that she can say yes and then come back to this Legislature and say: by the way, I already gave the kids that extra billion dollars, and now I need you to approve it. Talk about a case of closing the barn door after the horse has bolted. Only this is an issue of, you know, willingly and with premeditation letting the horse out first and then coming to the

Legislature and saying: "I let the horse out. The horse ran away. I hope that's okay with you. I can't get the horse back, and now I need you to pay the bill for the search party." I just don't get it.

That's the sort of general area that I wanted to talk about. Specifically, I want to look at Education, and I would like an explanation from the Minister of Education.

4:50

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the noise level is starting to rise. Could you please cool off? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has the floor.

Proceed.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like some answers from the Minister of Education, please, about the supplementary estimate of \$11 million "requested to provide increased operating grants from the General Revenue Fund to offset a reduction in the opted-out separate school boards' share of school property tax revenue." Now, I consulted with a couple of my colleagues who have experience at the school board level and indirect experience dealing with school boards. I'm well aware that separate school boards have been allowed for a number of years now, in fact have the constitutional right, to collect their own school property taxes, something that the public boards, the public public as opposed to separate public, do not have the right to do.

I'm a little bit confused here, and I hope the minister will clear this up for me. I'm a little bit confused by: "to offset a reduction in the opted-out separate school boards' share of school property tax revenue." That sounds to me like – well, I'm not sure what it sounds like. It almost sounds like, you know, the boards opted out, but they're now not opting out to the same extent that they were, so we need more money because they're not taking as much. I'm sure it isn't meant to read like that. I would like an explanation of two things: first of all, what this means, and secondly, after all the years that separate school boards have been collecting their own school property taxes, why this kind of snuck up and surprised the Education minister and he went: oh, Mom, I need an extra \$11 million; I'm a little short this week. I'd like an explanation for that.

I'd also like to know if this deals with all separate school boards across the province or whether this is one specific school board. Is this perhaps the Edmonton Catholic school board, which I believe has a deficit of \$10 million? Since that leaves over a million dollars, is the Education minister going to spend that last million dollars hooking Ellerslie elementary school up to a reliable water supply?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That concludes my remarks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm sort of pleased to rise to speak to the emergency spending that has been brought forward by the government in the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates. I have some questions to the minister regarding the Human Resources and Employment department. I look at the reason the supplementary estimate was requested.

This Supplementary Estimate is requested to provide \$6,100,000 towards the estimated \$11,850,000 cost to the department of the settlement of the Income Supports Class Action. The department will reallocate the remaining \$5,750,000 from lapses in the Skills Investments program.

Seeing that it is in our emergency estimates, I hope that the minister, because this matter was before the courts and now is settled, can speak to it.

One question: is the government expecting to make any payments on this claim before the fiscal year-end, and if not, why does this

have to be in supplementary supply? Where is the emergency nature of this particular item? Indeed, why do we have to even have it here if it is not an emergency? Why do we continue to have so-called emergency funding put forward from time to time to deal with things that are not really pressing? The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview put out some very good arguments on why we should be looking at how our budgetary process is breaking down. He was commended on that by the Member for Calgary-Currie, and I commend him as well for some very cogent arguments in that area.

In terms of where the money came from, part of the monies came from the department for the payment of the income supports class action, some was from the department of seniors, and the remaining \$5,750,000 comes from the skills investments program. Now, these lapses in the skills investments continue to concern me. The same thing happened last year for many millions of dollars. Was this budget too high again this year, or is the government still falling down in skills investments administration? Is it really trying to expand the skill sets for individual Albertans and, indeed, for the economy in general? You know, these questions I think are important. Why are these monies being spent? Why are they being expended? Why is it that skills investments again does not use its budget, does not have its program developed in order to ensure that we're looking to have a properly trained and qualified workforce in Alberta when this seems to be an issue which is at the forefront of government action so often?

Those are some of the questions I have, Mr. Chair. I thank you for the opportunity to speak before this Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've had opportunity a couple of times now to address supplementary supply at various stages. There is one thing that I thought I should mention, and that is the question of the unfunded liability for the teachers' pension, which doesn't appear anywhere in the supplementary supply estimates. I'm going to have to assume that that means that it's not considered an emergency by this government although many things in this document wouldn't necessarily be considered an emergency. I think it could be successfully argued that this is, if not an emergency, certainly an emergent issue for Albertans. That unfunded liability today sits at approximately \$6.9 billion, of which two-thirds is the direct responsibility of the Alberta government and, hence, the Alberta taxpayer, so about \$4.6 billion that the Alberta taxpayer is on the hook for today. It doesn't show as a debt on the government's books. It shows as an unfunded liability. Nevertheless, it really is a debt, and I think it should be treated as such.

I think you could also argue that the remaining one-third, the share that the teachers currently hold, is also the government's and the taxpayers' responsibility because ultimately it is the taxpayers of the province that pay the teachers. So really you could say that Alberta taxpayers are today on the hook for \$6.9 billion.

The reason why I'm concerned about this and the fact that it doesn't appear anywhere in the supplementary estimates, Mr. Chairman, is that under the current agreement, that was structured in 1992 and that both government and teachers agreed to, this plan will be paid out over the next 54 years at a total cost to Alberta taxpayers of about \$45 billion. Mr. Chairman, under the current economic reality that we have, with literally billions and billions of dollars of surplus, perhaps as much as \$10 billion or even more this year alone, the fact that we could be sitting down and negotiating with teachers and addressing this \$7 billion debt today as opposed to leaving it sit on the books and eventually costing as much as \$45 billion I think makes it an emergent enough issue that we should be discussing it today.

5:00

So not only, Mr. Chairman, is it relevant what's in the supplementary estimates that we are debating today, but I think it's also relevant to discuss some of what's not in the supplementary estimates. Certainly, I do believe that the magnitude of that unfunded liability and the fact that it will ultimately cost Alberta taxpayers \$45 billion if we don't deal with it sooner rather than later is an omission that is worthy of note. I'm wondering why it was omitted. Last week, when the Finance minister gave the third quarter update for the province, one of the little red flags that jumped out at me is the fact that the total liabilities for the province of Alberta have not fallen to the levels that were forecast in the budget that was passed in this House last May, in spite of the fact that we paid \$1.2 billion down on the remaining debt.

This is a fallacy that the people of Alberta need to know as well. The province of Alberta is not exactly debt free. We do still carry a debt load. We have set aside the money to pay that debt load as those instruments become due, but the fact of the matter is that the financial penalties for paying them off early were more than the savings that would have been recognized. So we do still carry debt, and as I say, this past year we paid off \$1.2 billion in that debt. Having said that, our total liabilities have not come down as much as were forecast. So we're in this period of unprecedented economic wealth, more money coming in from the sale of oil and natural gas, particularly land sales, more money coming in than anybody probably ever dreamt, yet our liabilities are climbing versus the budget.

I'm wondering if maybe that's why the government wasn't able to find some money in the supplementary supply to address the teachers' unfunded liability. I don't know if that's the reason or not, but again I think it bears questioning because of the fact that, you know, we can literally either pay now or pay later. We can pay now, deal with the unfunded liability at \$7 billion, or we can pay it out over the period of the agreement at \$45 billion. I'm not a rocket scientist, Mr. Chairman, but I think it's pretty clear that if we have the money now, we should be addressing this issue now as opposed to living with the agreement as it currently sits and costing Alberta taxpayers an awful lot of money that we probably don't really have to be costing them.

So I'll look forward to some response from the Finance minister, hopefully before we vote the supplementary supply, in relation to those questions that I have about the unfunded liability. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make a few comments regarding questions posed by Edmonton-Glenora. I'd like to start at the outset by congratulating him for having very good eyesight. I note that the Ministry of Justice has a total of \$3.7 million in this supplemental estimate of \$1.354 billion, so for him to pick up that relatively modest amount of money is certainly an indication that he's paying attention to the numbers.

The \$3.7 million falls into two categories. The majority of it, \$2.72 million, is required to pay for costs of staff salary settlements. Those are legal obligations of this government, and I'll provide a bit more detail with respect to that. The second is a \$1 million transfer from Children's Services to the Public Trustee. There has been a change in the responsibility with respect to lawsuits involving actions on behalf of children in care. That has been transferred to the Public Trustee from Children's Services, and there is a million dollars that goes along with that. Basically, it's one of those things

where mid-course a policy decision with respect to responsibility has been made. There has been a change in the ministry responsible. As I understand it, the way we do our books in government requires this particular change as part of supplementary estimates.

The specifics with respect to cost of staff settlements are as follows. There's \$1.5 million for increases to management pension plan contribution rates. There's \$910,000 for salary settlements for bargaining unit, management, and opted out and excluded staff at 3.9 per cent, .9 per cent above the originally funded 3 per cent. In other words, there was a settlement in the course of the year for .9 per cent higher than we had budgeted. There was this obligation that must be met. There was \$220,000 for August 2005 increases to salaries of nonlegal managers, once again a mid-term settlement increase. Lastly, there was \$90,000 for salary provision increases to aboriginal organizations providing court worker service.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora rightly noted that as you go down the line items within the ministry, many of the lines do in fact have an increase, but those are in relation for the most part to these salary adjustments. People who receive those are located in the various departments. I can assure the hon. member that the minister is not one of those who is benefiting as a result of this. It may well be that my deputy minister is, but certainly this minister is not. They relate to people within the ministry or who are employed by the Ministry of Justice. They are entitled to salary increases. We are obligated to pay those, and that is why it is there.

The hon. member referenced legal aid. I certainly agree that legal aid is a valuable component of Alberta Justice. The reason that they are not included in this is that we fund legal aid pursuant to a five-year contract, a certain amount of money per year. That money is in the budget. There is no salary increase associated with legal aid because it is operated as a result of the Legal Aid Society. They enter into contracts with people who are employees. We are in the last year of that five-year contract, and we will be entering into a new contract with the Legal Aid Society and the Law Society of Alberta, who is the other party to the contract.

Those are the explanations I have with respect to the Ministry of Justice supplementary estimate numbers.

Mr. Chairman, at this time I would move that we rise and report the progress on Bill 19.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 19.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, do you concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We made some good progress this afternoon, and as such I would move that we call it 5:30 and reconvene this evening at 8 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:10 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 7, 2006** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 06/03/07
 [The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, before we start, could we revert immediately to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, obviously the story of the fun we have here at night has gotten out quite quickly. To that effect, my brother Eric is here from Vermilion. I know that you're probably asking: "Will it never quit? Will they quit sending Snelgroves to Edmonton?" It's a great privilege to ask my brother to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very hard-working and dedicated individuals that work in the Solicitor General and Public Security office. Bill Meade and Sandra Klashinsky are here. They travelled the province and did a large amount of work on Bill 16, which we'll be hearing in second reading tonight. I'd like to ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Bill 14 **Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce second reading of Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Health and Wellness is proposing minor amendments to the Health Professions Act. The proposed changes will strengthen the act and respond to issues raised by individual colleges and by the federation of regulated health professions. The Health Professions Act was proclaimed in force in part in December of 1999. There will be 28 regulatory colleges established under the act and governed by regulation when it is fully implemented. There are currently 16 regulations implemented under the act. Twelve are under development and moving forward quickly.

As regulations are developed and professions gain experience operating under the act, required amendments are being identified. These key amendments include clarification respecting complaints, the application of continuing competence programs, adding flexibility for the minister when considering applications from professions to be governed under the act, enabling councils to regulate the title of specialist with respect to their profession, the addition of several protected titles, and an amendment to the practice statement for opticians.

The practice statement for opticians under the Health Professions Act would be amended to ensure that it accurately describes the services currently being provided by opticians, including sight testing, known as refractions, and eye health assessment. Including sight testing in their practice statement will enable the Alberta Opticians Association to ensure that its members adhere to specific standards.

Mr. Speaker, current practices will be maintained and will be performed under the oversight of the college. Performing sight testing and assessing eye health are not restricted activities. Opticians currently perform sight testing under the remote supervision of health professionals authorized to prescribe corrective lenses. The refracting information is provided to the health professional to prescribe the lenses, and that professional is usually in another location.

Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 108 opticians throughout the province providing sight testing for another health professional. Opticians also currently perform sight testing when dispensing corrective lenses. The regulatory body should be given authority to regulate the health services provided by its members. Providing eye testing and eye health assessments are not restricted activities, so without the proposed change the Alberta Opticians Association will not have the jurisdiction to regulate members that are performing these activities, and they will go unregulated.

An amendment is also proposed for schedule 7.1 of the Government Organization Act with respect to restricted activities. Mr. Speaker, while this schedule has an offence provision, there is no specific time limit stated for prosecution, which means that by default the period is six months as per the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. Amending the schedule by adding an appropriate time limit of two years will avoid this default mechanism.

The ministry's target for full implementation of the Health Professions Act is this year. The department is working with a legislative subcommittee established by the federation of regulated health professions and with individual health professions to address policy issues. As a result, further amendments will be brought forward following full implementation of the act.

I move second reading of Bill 14.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, in second reading.

There are a number of issues that I would like to bring up as part of second reading. Second reading is essentially a debate on the principle of a bill, and we're always asked whether we support it in second reading. We're answering, then, that we support something in principle or don't support it in principle. I have to admit up front, Mr. Speaker, that I am going to have to withhold my decision because I have some uneasiness about some of the proposals that are being made in this act, and on the other hand I'm very supportive of some of the other sections.

Just a few notations that I'd like to make. The first is under the Government Organization Act, schedule 7.1, that the sponsoring member mentioned. I do note that this is actually increasing the timeline for reporting an offence from six months, which is the default position, to two years. I can also say that a number of people have contacted me – not a large number – with a concern about that two-year cut-off, that two years is often not enough time to be able to come to a realization or to reach the point where you have enough information or decide you want to go forward.

The other side of that, of course, is: how long are you supposed to have a defender of something hang on, waiting to see whether the shoe is going to drop, whether someone is going to try and bring forward a suit against them or some sort of a criminal charge? There has to be some point at which they know that that's not going to proceed. So I just wanted to mention it, that there was some concern raised about that two years. I certainly do not support that in some other cases, particularly around reporting of sexual assaults, for example, but I think that in this particular instance it's probably merited.

The next section, and the one that has been one of the most controversial for me, is the section in the bill which is amending section 25 of the originating act. Essentially what that's doing is changing the way the minister can choose which organization gets to be recognized as representing that particular profession. It used to be that the minister had to abide by the organization that represented the majority of persons that were carrying on that profession in Alberta. That section is being struck down, and now with different wording it's basically saying, you know, that if the minister is satisfied that this is the reasonable group to be chosen, so be it.

There are two sides to this. I've had a number of groups approach me. I'm sure that they're the same groups that have approached the minister and may well have approached the sponsoring member of the bill, all with their arguments about why they should be the one. In balance, I think this is probably an appropriate mechanism for the minister to have at their disposal to deal with these kinds of disputes.

8:10

Let me expand for those in the Assembly that may not have a close association with this. You may have two different organizations that are basically representing people that perform more or less the same function, and each organization is saying: "I'm the one. I'm the one, and the other group is not legitimate or should not be representing." I think politicians are always very reluctant to step in the middle of somebody else's internal dispute and pick because it's just not appropriate. We're not the experts in that area. We're not the ones to say: you're the ones.

An Hon. Member: Speak for yourself.

Ms Blakeman: Well, if the backbencher wants to get in the middle of this and be choosing which profession is more merited, fine. I'm not going to get into that, and I don't think we should be in those kinds of disputes. I think what's been worked out here is probably the most reasonable way to deal with things.

There's a choice, it seems, being made specific to the massage therapists and the group that has a higher qualification or a higher standard. I think they require – now, here we go. There are a number of organizations: the Alberta Registered Massage Therapists Society, the Massage Therapist Association of Alberta, the Alberta Remedial Massage Therapist Association. They are all getting regulated somehow.

The one that's getting left out is the Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners. They do not meet the standard that's been set by others, and admittedly this is a very, very high standard. There are 2,200 hours of training required by some of these other massage therapist organizations, and that's very high. I mean, if you look throughout the States and the other provinces, you're dealing more in the range of 250 hours, 500 hours, 800 hours of training required. Twenty-two hundred hours is the standard here, so very very high. This one group, the Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners, is going to get left out because they don't come anywhere near that, but they also perform

services that are more related to stress reduction and relaxation massage: maybe that's a good way to put it.

I'm wondering why the minister doesn't consider in this case recognizing a lower level, a less trained level that doesn't presume to have higher aspirations. They will admit that they're trained at a lesser level, but they still want to be regulated and included. The repercussions from this are that if they are not included in this process, they lose the ability to take referrals from physicians, from other health professionals. I think that in some cases they'll lose their ability to literally charge for their services as a professional. So it has a large impact on them.

I would have said that if you regulated a sort of secondary level or a novice level, you're more likely to have those people continue on with their training and try to hit the higher level, as an inspiration to move up and get paid more per hour and all of those things. If we just say that we're not going to regulate them at all, that you're not a profession and we don't recognize you, then those people just leave completely and go onto something entirely different, having basically wasted their hours of training. So I think there's an argument here, that in this particular case a secondary level or different categories could be worked out to be accepted, or the minister could be asking one of the other groups to recognize the group with lesser time, to accept them as a different category. I will admit that this has caused me more meeting times than any other section that was in this proposed bill.

Another section that came out for me is around the complaints. There's an adjustment that's being made here, that essentially someone who makes a complaint to a complaint director regarding a regulated member of a profession has to do so in writing, and they have to sign it. That makes sense to most of us. We're familiar with it from a court of law. You know, if you're going to accuse somebody, then you've got to be willing to stand up in public and put your name to it. Of course, for everybody's reliability and documentation, it should be in a written form, perfectly acceptable.

That clarification is fine, but I find it very odd that it's juxtaposed against the next section, in which the ability to take a complaint orally is now being added. On the one hand, somebody complaining about a regulated member has to do it in writing and sign it. Then in the very next section the complaints director, who has reasonable grounds to believe that the conduct is unprofessional, can receive a referral or be given notice and can be given this information orally and will commence the whole process. I'm finding that very strange, and I'm looking for an explanation of it because I would say that if it's serious enough to start an investigation, as is clearly anticipated by this section, then it should be done in the same manner as all the other ones are, that is in writing and signed so that there's a clear person making a complaint.

Now, you may not want to publicize the complainant's name, but that documentation still needs to be there. It can't be done sort of in an anonymous way and orally. I think it just leaves far too much open for misinterpretation. It doesn't give the person who's been accused much opportunity to come back and say: "How did they write this? Where can I read this and see exactly what they said?" It was an oral statement. I have concerns around that.

There are a couple of sections that the sponsoring member mentioned where the scope of practice is either that they're registering a new scope or they're expanding the scope. We've got the provisional dental assistant, a provisional optician, and then the widening of the scope of the opticians to allow refractions, which are essentially eye tests. We did consult a fairly wide range of stakeholders as we looked at this bill: the Alberta Association of Optometrists, the Alberta College of Pharmacists, the Alberta Opticians Association, the Alberta Podiatry Association, Association of

Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners, College of Alberta Dental Assistants, and – I’m sorry; I didn’t write this one down, and I may not get the title exactly right – the acupuncturists. We’ve talked to all of them, and most of them are okay. I’m bringing up the points where they had some concerns. We were not able to find out what the optometrists didn’t like about the expanded scope. They didn’t respond to us.

The other issue I have and part of what’s causing me some hesitation here is that this bill is specifically mentioned in the Health Policy Framework that was recently released by the minister, known more colloquially as the third way. There is a great deal of uncertainty about this, and as I looked through the document, the framework that was actually handed out, it sounds innocuous enough. But there’s a lack of detail and certainty in a number of areas which starts to make me worry that there’s something in this bill that I’m not recognizing that could have a huge impact on the health professions that are regulated under this act. I don’t want to look back two years from now and go: oh, my goodness; that was the tiny golden key that opened the door that led to private health care that nobody wants. I’m having to be more cautious than I would have been debating this bill a couple of months ago because Bill 14 is specifically mentioned in a couple of places.

When I look at the section 2 in the Health Policy Framework, Promoting Flexibility in Scope of Practice of Health Professionals, I get some interesting phrases and descriptions happening. Under the Policy Intent section, which appears on page 10 of the document, they’re talking about the issue of overlapping roles, responsibilities, and scopes of practice, and that the government wants to look at taking away some of the restrictions that prevent “pharmacists, nurses and other professionals from making clinical care and treatment decisions appropriate to their training and knowledge.” As far as I can tell, none of that’s actually being discussed in Bill 14, but I’m not sure because we don’t get a lot of detail here.

8:20

There’s an attempt to focus on collaborative and team approaches. These are a part of the initiatives that have been very successful, called the primary care initiatives, where you’re bringing in a number of health professionals that work in one location and will have a team approach to working with patients. There’s an acknowledgement here that “physicians would continue to play a key role, but would be able to spend more time on complex cases where their knowledge and skills are essential.” Then it talks about some of these other professionals assuming “a greater role in the delivery of primary, preventive and chronic care.”

Now, this is something that the Liberal opposition has been very keen on, that team approach, but again we get no details about exactly how the minister anticipates this happening. What scope? How are the scopes going to be changed? The only scopes of practice we’re talking about in this bill are the opticians to do eye exams and adding the category of clinical pharmacist, also the new ones of provisional dental assistant and provisional optician. There’s something being anticipated here. There’s clearly some sort of list of jobs or scope of practice or credentials or expectations, but they’re not being spelled out, so very hard to react to.

Again, under the Direction and Implementation section here it talks about Alberta’s new legislation governing the health professions provides greater flexibility in terms of the scope of practice of the various professions as a means of promoting a greater innovation.” Which legislation is being talked about here? Is this some yet untabled legislation, or is it referring back again to Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act?

It’s talking about working with health professionals, taking full

advantage of the opportunities that this legislation has made possible. There’s an anticipation that something’s happening here. It’s clearly talked about in the document. I don’t see it reflected in here. If it’s not in here, where is it? If it is in here, where is it? The other place that this shows up is in the response from the minister to the Liberal health policies. It appears on page 3 of that summary, position 10. The Liberal policy is:

Reshape the way we manage our health care workforce. This includes re-examining the roles of all of our medical professionals, evaluating alternative systems of payment for doctors, and gathering better data to plan for future needs.

We get the minister responding to this, saying: we’re currently doing this; the government is preparing provincial comprehensive health workforce planning. They have worked with a number of different areas. Then, “We are working to bring all health professionals together under the Health Professions Act (Bill 14 – Spring Session 2006).” Again, it’s referred to without any level of detail that allows us to actually understand what the government is intending. We have the government saying: oh, please come and consult with us; give us your ideas. But it’s like trying to talk to a cloud. There’s no substance to it. There’s no list of specificity. There are no details that we can react to. It’s just sort of this amorphous thing. I have concerns that things are not as they appear.

The one other thing that was of note to me in the member’s opening remarks was that he stated that 12 professions are under development to be added to the list. I think it’s a total of 28 that will be the final list. Right now there are 16 of them under there; 12 are under development. My question is: exactly which ones will be ready for April 1? That’s one of the drop-dead deadlines for some of the professions. They have to be in place by then, or they cannot continue to charge for their services. I would like to know how we’re doing. I’ve been in contact with the minister a couple of times over unexplained, inexplicable delays. For some professions they’ve been working away, and all of a sudden the ministry stops talking to them for four or five or six months. They don’t understand why. They are continuing to try and move forward, and then there seems to be this big sort of log-jam or blockage. I’m concerned that there are some groups that need to be through by the 1st of April that won’t be. So I’m looking for that.

Thanks very much for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 14 in second reading. My first impression of this bill is that, certainly, it seems to be mostly just housekeeping, but there are certain issues in regard to changing titles of professionals that I think deserve our more careful attention and, indeed, some constructive criticism as well.

When speaking with a number of the professionals that are directly affected by this Bill 14, specifically opticians and podiatrists, there is some mixed reaction to some of the specific language that is being employed in Bill 14. I would just like to point out some of our reservations in a general sense, and perhaps when we debate this bill further with my colleagues in the committee, in third reading we can look specifically at where some small changes could take place.

Specifically, if you have the bill in front of you, on the first page, section (2), the Government Organization Act is being amended to include a statute of limitations for prosecution for the illegal performance of a restricted activity, like setting bones and invasive surgical treatments and things like that. You know, I find it a little bit interesting that there is a statute of limitations here of two years.

We were looking at other provinces around the country, and they do in fact tackle this in different ways. Some legislation in different provinces, such as the Manitoba Limitation of Actions Act or the Saskatchewan Limitation Act, both fine NDP provinces, might I add, have the limitation period beginning once the claimant first becomes aware of the offence. This gives us some latitude for people to be able to seek justice if there are cases of fraud or impropriety or things like that. I know everyone has their magic markers out. They can just tab that section, and we'll come back to it perhaps later.

On the third page, section (4), again we're amending the Health Professions Act. You want to repeal the provision that the organization seeking to be a regulated profession must represent "the majority of persons carrying on that profession in Alberta." I think I need further clarification on that section because my initial reading of that is perhaps that in fact it seems to open the door for more ministerial discretion as to who's going to be considered as the profession. Indeed, you know, if we have private health service providers entering the market here with our brave new world that some people are suggesting – God help us. Then we might have an expansion of the recognition of a regulated profession, which I would find problematic, certainly.

8:30

As I had mentioned previously this afternoon in my reaction to the throne speech, when you privatize medical services, you open the door to all manner of quackery and flim-flammery. It's very difficult to regulate these things anyway, but when people are in desperate circumstances and they're looking for some relief and the door is open for privatization, then you just create a whole new set of regulatory problems, some of which, I would suggest, Bill 14 has built into it.

Moving down to page 4, section 10, this amendment proposes to give councils and colleges greater freedom to confer the title of specialist through bylaw rather than going through the amendments to this act. I find this to be definitely a problem because you're raising the concern of this proliferation of new specialities, let's say, without proper consideration. Again, in the sort of retail market of private health care you create these whole new specialities, that you can perhaps charge extra money or what have you. This is a problem because, of course, we're meant to be regulating these things for the best practices and benefits of the public, so if we're not using the term "specialist" in a judicious manner, then I would suggest that we're courting trouble.

Down on page 5, section 11: this amendment seems to want to give colleges and councils the power to enact bylaws respecting the disclosure of information about their members and some groups releasing information about their members. This, I would suggest, provides some problems in regard to privacy, so I would just like to highlight that.

The nut of the issue, I suppose, in regard to Bill 14 is to make these changes on an administrative level, but as I suggest here with these few examples – I'll actually leave some of the others to the other members to point out because, in fact, we do have these problems with it.

Again, I would have to reserve our support of Bill 14 as it stands, but it's young in the session, and we can certainly be convinced of its merits.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and comment on Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes

Amendment Act, 2006. In general the principle of amalgamating the professions under one act makes a lot of sense to me. In the public interest it's clear that we want to have a regime that governs all professions in a similar way, that provides consistency in terms of the practice of those professions and consistency in applying problems with those professions, whether they arise out of complaints or out of recognized problems within the profession itself. In that context the principle of accountability, then, is very much present in the professions act, and it's progress, indeed, to include under a consistent framework all the professions that we believe are serving people and helping them to achieve greater levels of health and healing. So in general I support this.

It obviously identifies some other key areas which have to do with scope of practice, and that needs to be well discussed and debated. I think we on this side have recognized that part of making the health system more efficient is to examine scope of practice and look at the ways in which some practices could be delegated to other professions. Indeed, some things that physicians are doing could be delegated to other practitioners and reduce the load on medical practice. The other issue has to do with standards, a clear ability to measure a standard and to ensure that that minimum standard is always achieved and that an ongoing education program is available for those practitioners to reach that level of competence.

If we are again in this bill trying to acknowledge the primacy of the public interest and the safe provision of services, I would be interested to know what level of consultation these amendments had. It's not clear to me whether or not this had input from all professions commenting on each other's practice as well as the consultation within a particular discipline itself. I think it would be very useful, if it hasn't been done, because clearly the public interest is served when we have measures of effectiveness in that particular profession and we have measures of maintenance of competence.

So given those provisos and those general principles I just have a couple of questions about a couple of sections. There was a repeal in section 4: requiring a majority support. This has been raised by a member opposite in the third party.

Ms Blakeman: And by me.

Dr. Swann: And by my colleague from Edmonton-Centre.

Why is that? Under what conditions does the minister seek other decision-making advice through the advisory board? That's not clear under section 5.

Again I refer to the principle of continuing competence. That was amended. It's not clear to me why you would amend the requirement for assessment of competence of all members of a particular discipline. This is one criteria for a profession. It is the issue that most of the public are concerned with, that there be a maintenance of competence and an ability to assess that in every case.

The extension of the complaint process to two years is progress. I mean, obviously, half a year is insufficient. I don't know that the two years is sufficient, but it's certainly progress in the principle of justice and fairness.

I was very pleased to see podiatry moved under the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta. Clearly, podiatry is doing surgical procedures. They should be adjudicated. They should be monitored. They should be evaluated under the College of Physicians and Surgeons, where a lot of the enforcement of standards is legitimately placed, in my view, where they have the highest level of training and competence.

Under sections 7 and 8 there appears to be a contradiction. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to go to 7 and 8 to just refresh my memory. Yes, it has to do with the complaint process. Section 7

says that the complaint must be in writing, and section 8 says that it could be verbal. So it's not clear to me why that would be two separate sections. There may well be a good explanation for it, but it's not clear to me.

I guess the only other recommendation that I see missing here in terms of accountability is the need for every profession to have a separation between their licensing body and their professional interest body. In a number of cases that does not exist, and it would be one thing that I would think I might make an amendment to in the upcoming section on the nature of accountability.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments if there are any.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to second reading of Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act. The main object of this bill is that Alberta Health and Wellness is currently working with the health professionals to develop specific regulations and bring them under the jurisdiction of the Health Professions Act: the changes to the application procedure to become a regulated profession, clarification of complaint procedures, changes to the requirements for continuing competence programs, adding new protected titles for some professions, and amending the scope of practice for opticians.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, the amendment to the Health Professions Act, which was passed in 1999, will bring all self-regulated health professions under a single act to ensure that rules that govern professions are consistent. It will oversee 28 regulated colleges, but only 16 are currently under the act. The government has requested that currently unregulated health professions submit applications for regulation. These applications must propose a structure under which the profession could be reregulated.

Each of the 28 professions have been drafting specific regulations under the act. The drafting is taking . . . Mr. Speaker, can you ask everybody to please be silent?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon members, the noise level is increasing. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the floor.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you. The drafting is taking years, with numerous consultations with the members of other professions. Each regulation will list the restricted activities that a profession's members are trained to do.

There are two controversial sections in this act that are explored further in the sectional analysis. The first one is that the Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners opposes the amendment that removed the requirement that an applicant wanting to become a regulated profession must represent a majority of people carrying on that profession. The second one is that the Alberta Association of Optometrists objects to the amendment that includes refractions under the scope of the practice of opticians.

Mr. Speaker, many of the changes are based on recommendations by health professions or are housekeeping changes required to ensure that the language used in drafting regulations for each regulated college is consistent with the Health Professions Act. It may be a necessity to voice concern or caution about the future implications of some of these changes, especially since this bill was identified as part of the government's third-way reforms.

Other potential implications of this amendment for the massage

therapy profession include an immediate spike in fees charged by regulated massage therapists, based on increased demand. Many massage therapists with less training may migrate away from rural areas, reducing access for rural Albertans. Massage therapists may lose income since they would no longer be able to accept referrals from physicians or chiropractors. Does this minister have any plans to regulate massage therapists with varied levels of training?

For the last 22 years the province has required that an application for regulation by health professions "must be made by an organization that represents the majority of persons carrying on that profession." How does the minister justify such a significant policy change? Is the minister satisfied that all relevant organizations and stakeholders were consulted in the development of these changes? That's a big question. How did the minister go about identifying all potential stakeholders? It appears that the decision to regulate is being made in a closed environment. Where is the transparency in this process? How will the minister prevent the views of a minority of professionals being imposed on a majority?

These amendments may cause conflict among professional organizations since there may be strong divergent views on the most desirable form of regulation. What other requirements will the minister be using to determine whether to send an application to the Health Professions Advisory Board? What sort of data or statistical information identifying the number of members belonging to an organization are applicants required to provide?

Mr. Speaker, the long-term implications of this amendment, of these changes need to be carefully examined to ensure that they don't have a negative impact on both consumers and health professionals in the future. There is some uncertainty that the entire range of stakeholders was consulted in the development of revisions to the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act. It is essential that each interested group receive the opportunity to provide input into changes being made that may impact their profession. The Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners was not consulted about changes that have significant impact on their members.

I want to hear more argument and more details about this amendment act before I make up my mind to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, now I would like to adjourn second reading debate on Bill 14. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Peace Officer Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand this evening to move second reading of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act.

As I stated during the introduction of this legislation, this act will ensure better communication, co-operation, and collaboration between employers of peace officers and police services across the province, which will result in a strengthening of law enforcement services. It will also clarify the role, responsibility, and accountability of peace officers and strengthen provincial standards such as training, use of force, and qualifications.

Mr. Speaker, this proposed legislation is the result of Albertans contributing their ideas to improve law enforcement. It has also been developed following a review of best practices on a national and international scale. Bill 16 further enhances the important work peace officers do across Alberta and accurately reflects the wide range of roles they carry out.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments provide for increased

accountability to ensure that both employers and peace officers are complying with the standards. Under this draft legislation the director of law enforcement within Solicitor General and Public Security would receive additional authority to complete inspections and investigations to make sure the rules are being followed.

8:50

The proposed act also establishes a process to manage complaints made against a peace officer. Employers will continue to deal with complaints against the peace officers they hire, but, Mr. Speaker, the director of law enforcement would have the power to review, oversee, or investigate a situation that may be more serious in nature or if the complainant isn't pleased with the outcome of a review at the local level. The director would also have the authority to appoint a third party, such as a police service, to investigate the concern.

These measures will strengthen the integrity of the program and reassure the public that peace officers are doing their job and following the letter of the law. If the peace officer is found not to be abiding by the rules, the current provision allows for the employer's authorization or the peace officer's appointment to be suspended or cancelled. Bill 16 expands these provisions so that it's very clear where a suspension or cancellation of an appointment would be appropriate.

Proposed amendments would also allow for terms and conditions to be imposed on the employer's authorization or a peace officer's designation to ensure that they are complying with the standards. This will help employers and peace officers alike to clearly understand what is expected of them within the program and the ramifications for not following the legislation.

The proposed Peace Officer Act will ensure a more effective delivery of law enforcement services that will help make Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and respond in second reading to Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act. Of course, policing in Canada involves two levels of government. The Constitution Act of 1867 confers authority on the federal government to legislate on matters of criminal law and to create the country's national police service, the RCMP. Provincial Legislatures are empowered by the same act to make laws in relation to the administration of justice, and policing, of course, is understood to be a part of the criminal justice responsibility of provinces, so provinces can create a police force through legislation or require municipalities to provide adequate policing or negotiate with the federal government for the RCMP to provide policing.

Well, Bill 16 is rather unique, I think, in that it recognizes and authorizes something new, something kind of in-between; namely, special constables or, as they're now going to be called, peace officers. This bill reflects a growing trend in policing today, which is increasingly multidimensional and pluralistic given the tremendous demands that the public wants in terms of peace and security and safety. Since 9/11 there's so much demand for security, so that has meant a proliferation of all kinds of different types of policing, from the traditional role of public police to security guards protecting private property. Bill 16 is legislation which provides a framework for the authorization of special constables as peace officers, an identification that's somewhere between a public police officer and a private security guard.

But this in-between character of peace officers creates a set of problems, and there is the potential for a great deal of public confusion about what we are talking about. At a symbolic level the

police and peace officers and private security guards all wear uniforms and in many cases will carry weapons. For example, a mall security guard engages in surveillance, makes arrests, conducts searches, all traditional functions of the public police, but they are private agents. In some places in Canada municipal police are hired by private business to restrict access, check IDs, remove troublemakers from private property, and they are public agents. So, in fact, there's a great deal of confusion about what is public and what is private. Historically the public police were authorized to protect public places, and private spaces were the responsibility of their owners, who could hire guards.

The problem is that now we have, as one commentator puts it, mass private property. In other words, we have huge shopping centres, and we have hospitals. We have many privately owned spaces to which the public is invited, so questions arise about who should police such spaces. Is that the role of the public police, or is it the role of special constables or peace officers or private guards? There's an obvious overlapping of the responsibility of the public police and special constables and private guards, so there's a great need for Legislatures to bring some clarity to this confusing situation.

The use of private security and special constables is of course increasing across Canada while at the same time the number of police personnel is decreasing. I think this is important to point out. Recent statistics provided by the Centre for Justice Statistics indicate that there are 56,000 police in Canada and 82,000 private security guards and special constables. Given this trend, it would not be surprising that there are different opinions, even conflicts caused by this trend. Of course, at the two extremes, the investigation of serious crimes by police on the one hand and private security guards just protecting property on behalf of the owners on the other hand, there is not much conflict, but in between there are so many functions of special constables and peace officers that carry out traditional police work such as traffic safety. So there's a potential for conflict and confusion. Roles overlap, and distinctions are blurred.

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the variety of work performed by special constables in this province, it is quite impressive. There are about 3,000 special constables in Alberta, and they do a tremendous job. I made a comment that was quoted in the paper as being critical of the work of special constables, and I wasn't at all. I was only referring to the special project concerning highway 63.

Special constables have done a really good job and in a variety of ways. There is a tremendous mix of the kind of roles that they perform, from compliance officers who do fraud investigations for many different departments. There are special constables working in hospitals. There are liquor and gaming officers who inspect bars and casinos. There are conservation officers, provincial protection officers who provide courtroom security, campus security, Calgary transit security, and I guess Edmonton is considering the same kind of transit security as Calgary. There is municipal bylaw enforcement. All of these special constables, now peace officers, carry out the duty of enforcing provincial statutes, not the Criminal Code, although here is again a fuzzy area in terms of distinctions which needs to be dealt with.

The feedback from stakeholders, including the public police service, seems to be mixed about this new trend to include so many special constables and peace officers. The trend of an increase in private security and a decrease in traditional policing would of course be of concern for police associations. Some would argue that special constables can free police from routine and mundane tasks, enabling the police to focus on the more complex functions of dealing with serious crimes. I've heard that. In fact, I have a

brother-in-law who's a member of the police force in Ottawa, and he reminds me that that's the case, that many peace officers are able to take a lot of the routine tasks from police officers, and that's a plus for them.

But many are concerned that special constables don't have the same level of accountability and training as the police, and this may cause problems. So my question concerning this bill and the preparation for this bill is: has there been adequate consultation with the police departments, including the RCMP? For example, will the RCMP be involved in the evaluation of the pilot project on highway 63? I'm wondering about that kind of dialogue and debate, whether that has taken place.

There are many questions about this bill, and in second reading I'm not going to look at specifics. I want to concentrate, as I have been, on general issues, not the particular wording of the bill. One of the most important issues is accountability or governance or oversight of peace officers, and there are two different aspects here. There's accountability in the field and accountability in terms of appointment and standards of training and the complaint process. The bill doesn't deal with the first point, accountability in the field, but surely that question is huge. I mean, who is in charge?

9:00

I talked with a special constable who does traffic work in the province, and he told me that on two occasions in the last year he was the first to arrive on a murder scene, before an RCMP officer arrived. Now, what is his role in that situation? How does he relate in terms of accountability to the police officer? What are his powers of arrest? If a special constable stops a car on highway 63 and discovers that there are drugs in the car, what can he do other than call in an RCMP officer who may be hundreds of kilometres away? Will this just mean, in effect, a lot more work for the RCMP in trying to keep track of these special constables since the special constables or peace officers are dependent on the RCMP to do their work? That is the issue of accountability in the field, and I think it's a serious question that has to be addressed.

The bill deals mainly with the lines of accountability between the peace officer and the public, on the one hand, and the police officer and the Solicitor General's department. There are lines of accountability for police officers in terms of their relationship to police commissions and the chief of police and the Solicitor General. We dealt with that when we were discussing the Police Act, when it was being amended, and we had all kinds of discussion about civilian oversight of the police. We expressed a lot of our dissatisfaction that we didn't have an adequate civilian oversight process in this province, and much of that discussion is relevant here. It appears from this bill that the only line of accountability is between a peace officer and the director, defined as "the Director of Law Enforcement appointed under the Police Act."

Well, there are a lot of unanswered questions about this. I mean, what is the relationship between the authorized employers and the peace officers? Is this line of accountability between just the peace officer and the director of law enforcement adequate? What kind of control over peace officers do municipalities have? There doesn't seem to be the equivalent of a police commission for peace officers.

I think there are lots of questions about that. In fact, I guess it comes down to the whole issue. I mean, many people argue that special constables and private security officers are much less accountable for their actions than the police because legislation does not establish independent oversight mechanisms. But they do much the same work as the police, so the argument is that there should be a greater integration of governance and accountability, and perhaps the same mechanisms, the same kinds of governance and account-

ability, should be present, whether you're talking about the police or whether we're talking about peace officers. I see a lot of potential for difficulty and conflict in the future because we haven't figured out a more integrative model.

Well, one of the most controversial aspects of the work of special constables is traffic safety work. I have received phone calls and e-mails about not just the issue of public safety but also the personal safety of special constables. A special constable who had called me told me that in stopping a vehicle, he does not know what he will encounter, whether it's a soccer mom or a drug dealer. Police admit that stopping vehicles is one of the most dangerous things that they do, so we have to really go slow here and consider what we're doing when we put young men and women with less training and less experience out there on dangerous highways like highway 63.

In fact, this is the key issue, I think, to debate with this bill: the issue of training. Unfortunately, issues like training are left to the regulations. Recently I had an introduction to some aspects of training by the RCMP when they discussed with me their model – it's called IMIM – incident management intervention model, where they take recruits through the whole process, beginning with verbal intervention, through the use of weapons, depending on the situation. It was very instructive to me to see how elaborate and how complex that training is. I would hope that the same kind of thorough training would be available for peace officers, especially because they need to have tremendous ability to converse and even to use nonviolent tactics to deal with people in the first stage, before they get into the use, of course, of weapons.

I think there's a difficulty here because the government MLA review of the special constable program, which released its recommendations on December 7, 2005, I thought made a good attempt to organize the whole area of special constables, peace officers into different categories and levels of authority and also levels of training in each of the categories, but unfortunately that is not in the legislation. That's left to the regulations, so the clarity we need on this very important issue of training and the status of peace officers is not in this bill.

Bill 16 is an overall framework, so this is similar, I suppose, to what may be coming with the third way, which is being put forward as an overall framework, and everything that's really important is left for regulations. I think minimum standards for training, what actions special constables can and cannot perform, accountability issues in the field are all left for the regulations, so it's very difficult for us to even talk about this topic when all we have before us is a framework, and the substantive issues are left for others to decide. I don't find that very adequate.

Well, Mr. Speaker, these are the issues I wanted to raise, and I look forward to hearing other speakers on this very important topic. Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again in debate on Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act. The object of this bill is to bring all peace officers, previously known as special constables, under one piece of legislation that will clarify their roles and their responsibilities, increase accountability, and strengthen provincial standards for training, use of force, and qualifications.

The immediate result of this bill will be to increase the role of peace officers in the province of Alberta. It is the stated goal of the Solicitor General to find ways to deliver strategic and seamless law enforcement services across the province. It appears that the primary way to enhance delivery of law enforcement across the province will be through the utilization of peace officers to comple-

ment existing police services in Alberta. Bill 16 is the framework that the Solicitor General will use to deliver the enhanced role of peace officers.

Mr. Speaker, some of the key changes to the old special constable programs are changing the name of the special constable program to the public security peace officer program – this is designed to raise the profile of this specific area of law enforcement – establishing different levels of authority based on the peace officer's role and responsibilities. There will now be four different levels of peace officers, with varying levels of authority. It ranges from the ability to carry firearms for traffic enforcement and the transfer of prisoners to working in administrative roles, such as exhibit custodians for police services and animal control specialists, ensuring that peace officers have access to the best system of communications to ensure their safety and to better co-ordinate their activities with the other law enforcement agencies.

Mr. Speaker, what is obvious in this bill and in these new rules is that the new standard of peace officers is designed to increase their presence in law enforcement, and this Bill 16 is the vehicle through which this second level of law enforcement will increase in prominence and use in Alberta communities.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, the outcome of this bill is that the peace officers will assume a new level of authority not previously held under the old provision in the Police Act. There are many areas of concern around this new use of peace officers. Primary amongst these is: how will these officers be utilized? It is important to remember that they are not trained police officers but peace officers who have some training in specific areas and specific authority to enforce certain provincial statutes. They do not have the full range of police training and thus cannot and should not be put into roles that require the full set of skills that police officers have.

For instance, if they are utilized to do traffic stops on primary highways, as the recent pilot projects on highway 63 and highway 21 have them doing, do they have sufficient training to effectively enforce this? Traffic stops are one of the most dangerous aspects of policing and require a full range of abilities, including knowledge of tactical communications, the ability to defuse hostile situations through verbal techniques, knowledge of the legal aspects of moving violations, sound judgment, and finally and of utmost importance, the judgment to responsibly deploy weapons if the situation escalates.

Police officers are subject to an incredibly rigorous process before they get hired – interviews, polygraph, psychological examination, extensive background checks, et cetera – to ensure that those are the right people to be able to use weapons. Will peace officers go through a similar process before they are hired as a level 1 Alberta police officer to ensure that they have the ability and judgment required to carry a side arm? Will these level 1 peace officers endure the hours of scenario training for traffic stops that police go through? These are the questions that must be answered before support for this bill can be given.

Mr. Speaker, the peace officers will have weapons at their disposal. These range from collapsible ASP weapons to pepper spray to carrying side arms. The Solicitor General has stated that they will receive the best training in the use of these weapons, but they develop the training protocol for all peace officers in the use of weapons and the use-of-force model. What type of training will they receive, and how long will it take? Special constables under the old model received two weeks of training at the Alberta Justice college in Edmonton: one week of legal training and one week of human relations training. Then it was up to the employer to provide self-

defence training, known as PPCT, or pressure point control tactics. PPCT training and training in the use of weapons for most special constables, such as those in hospitals, would last for 32 hours, or four days.

The problem with this new model is that we have no idea what level of training these officers will receive and for how long. Who will administer the training? Will they be trained by the police training section members, or will it be through private security agencies? What is the duration and the content of the training? How much time will be spent on tactical communications? The most important weapon an officer has is his or her verbal skills. Unfortunately, the Solicitor General cannot tell us the detail of any of this because they have not developed these training models yet. This will be done through regulations.

We cannot support this new, expanded role for peace officers until we know absolutely that these officers have received the appropriate amount of training to ensure the public's safety and the safety of the officers. Some of these officers will carry 9 mm handguns and shotguns. We absolutely need to know that they had the full training needed to be able to responsibly and safely deploy these weapons.

Another factor is: who is ultimately accountable for these officers? The municipality or institution that employs them or the Solicitor General through the director of law enforcement? There is a distinct level of accountability for police officers: the chief of police and internal affairs investigations, the Solicitor General. But who will these peace officers be accountable to? Will it be the employers who have authority to discipline the police service that they are working with, the municipality that employs them, or will the Solicitor General through the director of law enforcement be accountable?

The issue of accountability is crucial in this bill. Before I support this bill I need some more details, more information because I'm still not sure. I will listen to some other speakers; then I will decide. At this stage it's very hard for me to support this bill.

Thank you very much, sir.

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

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I enjoy the opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act. I appreciate this being brought forward to our attention at this point in time because, you know, we have an interesting situation with our law enforcement direction in this province. It's something that I think a lot of people find troubling, and this is a tendency to use more private security and people with less training to execute the police needs of our province. So while, actually, we do find Bill 16 mostly favourable, I guess it speaks to a larger direction that we are seeing that is a problem in this province, and that is, as I said, the use of officers with less training or private security firms, in fact, carrying out law enforcement in the province.

So this proposed act seems to bring all peace officers under one piece of legislation to presumably ensure better communication and co-operation and collaboration between employers of peace officers and the police services across the province. I would like to perhaps plumb the depths of how, specifically, it does do that. I can see it in some ways, but there are some specific concerns I have to see if the proper lines of communication are, in fact, there. As far as I can tell as well, it seems to want to clarify the role, the responsibility, and the accountability of peace officers and to strengthen provincial standards such as training, the use of force, and the qualifications of the officers, which we can all, I guess, appreciate if Bill 16 comes to do that for these peace officers.

9:20

There are almost 3,000 peace officers in the province, and they're working for any number of different groups from the RCMP to colleges and whatnot across the province. They're meant to be enforcing provincial and municipal bylaws. Of course, we all know that these amendments seem to be stemming mostly from the Alberta special constable review from the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. I commend him for that work, certainly.

We applaud the effort to improve efficiency of peace officers as that will ease some of the police officers' workload undoubtedly. However, I have expressed on a number of occasions, and I think it's becoming glaringly apparent, that we need more police officers in our community, so I'm wondering how the police community, in fact, views this extension of the use of peace officers in their line of work.

You know, it's a very sensitive issue, Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about police enforcement of the law in any society. What's most important is the integrity of either the peace officers or the police officers to uphold the law but also to be able to manage situations in the most circumstantial sort of way. Certainly, I don't propose to suggest that peace officers might be any less able to manage circumstances as they come forward to their attention than police officers, but you do get what you pay for. If we are in fact placing people out to enforce the law with less training and less attention and paying them less money, which is a large part of this whole movement from police to peace officers, then you can expect that perhaps you won't get the same level of coverage that you might with a fully trained police officer.

I mentioned it this afternoon, and I will just briefly again, that our per capita police coverage in this province has been slipping considerably. I think that it's incumbent upon us to of course strengthen the laws around peace officers and private security firms, but also let's not forget our responsibility to have adequate police coverage in our province too.

There are a number of areas that I would like to discuss specifically in each section of Bill 16. I'm loath to do that at this time save to say that in general we intend to try to support this bill as it moves through, Mr. Speaker, perhaps with some amendments, particularly in the areas of being able to watch over these groups and be able to make judgment against officers if they are sort of having some problems with the public.

One of the issues that I would like to just telegraph here a bit is this whole idea of how we might supervise and discipline individuals who might be in contravention of any number of police officer rules and regulations. It's difficult to know because this is sort of a general framework, but it's the individual regulations that actually determine, I would suggest, the quality of policing. So I would hope that we would be able to look at those details as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to just get a few brief moments to speak to this Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act, in second reading. I remember the genesis of this because I believe that I was the Official Opposition critic for Justice and the Solicitor General when there were a couple of different reviews done but, specifically, an MLA review of the Police Act that was actually done in two parts. Both times there was consideration of this deputy constable, a sort of second level, a tiered level of police officer. I have the same concerns today that I had then, and

a number of them have been reiterated. They are around training and whether we let someone out there with a gun that doesn't have the same kind of training that police officers have.

You know, what's really at the heart of this for me, Mr. Speaker, is a philosophical idea about: why can't we just pay the people that we have to do the job? Why does this government constantly push to find a cheaper way to do it, to find somebody else that will come in and do basically the same job for a lot less money and less protection and less benefits and maybe a bit more danger because they don't get the same kind of training? It's a Wal-Mart economy. Every time or every year there's got to be less cost.

I don't understand this philosophy. I don't understand why this government keeps doing this. I don't understand why we can't just say: "We've got good Albertans here that have worked hard. They've trained hard. They've reached a level of expertise. They deserve to be paid a certain salary to do what they do. Let's pay them to do it." But we don't do that. We say: "Okay. We've got this one level of people, and now we deem they're too expensive. We want a cheaper version so that we can make them do basically the same things but without the same amount of money." I don't understand that, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't make sense to me why you would constantly look to downgrade it, basically, and try and find someone to do basically the same job for less money. But they keep doing it.

I'm sure there have been other arguments made that, you know, this is unfair to those individuals. If they are qualified to be the top tier and to get into the police academies and be chosen, good, then they should be, and they should be paid as such. If they're not, then maybe it's not appropriate that they serve the public in that capacity. Maybe there's a good reason for that, and they shouldn't be given a gun and sent out there. I think those questions need to be asked. I know that's not a popular thing to say with this particular government, but I have to ask those questions. We've seen it happen in so many professions, and I continue to hear that kind of attitude and this government seeking other opportunities like that. In what other profession can we get people to do the same thing for less money and pay them less money with less benefits and all that goes with that?

I'm going on longer than I thought. Sorry. The second thing that's bugging me about this is the name of it because we do have a struggle here between whether we're talking about someone who is here for peace, order, and good government or someone who is here on sort of the military side. There are two sort of strains of police officers. Just let me give you a few definitions. I mean, on the military side you get people called law enforcement, and on more of the community-based you would talk about a police service, not a police force but a police service. At some point in there you get that peace officer. That's what I was raised with. I mean, police officers were peace officers. They were to uphold the peace. Over time we've seen that movement to more of a military style. It's about law enforcement. It's about police forces. Even the uniforms have changed towards a more military style where you're getting the belts. They start to look like commandos and the stuff that goes with them, the accoutrement I think it's called in here.

9:30

I find it really interesting, the choice to call this secondary level of officer. I don't want to be insulting, but I don't know how else to call this. The second tier, the entry level: what do you call it? It's not what we started out to look at, which is fully trained police officers. It's some other kind of level here. I find it very interesting that they've chosen to call it a peace officer. It's Orwellian because that's not what these people are doing. The essence of what is being

set out in this act, the services, the tasks they will perform are not about keeping the peace. They're about security and ticketing. It's almost exactly the opposite of being a peace officer. So it's interesting choices that have been made on this one. I'm looking forward to the rest of the debate on it.

I know that there are other issues that we want to debate tonight, so at this point, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 16.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 19
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006**

The Chair: Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, you had adjourned debate.

Mr. Stevens: I'm good. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Are there any other comments, questions, or amendments offered in respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I look at Bill 19, the supplementary estimates, I feel that it's time for us to wake up to the revolving credit through which the government is going yet again and on which it is taking us as citizens yet again. Revolving credit is like the revolving doors in department stores. They're intended to keep the building inside warm, keep the cold outside, and make it easy for people to pass through the doors when they're carrying a load of parcels. That's how the system is supposed to work: for consumer credit, to keep the bills under control, food on the table, and get on with the business of people's lives.

That's how it works with grown-up people until some kids come along without anything better to do. They're not there to shop or buy or even look. They're just along for the ride. They go round and round through the doors, tying up traffic, forcing serious visitors to take the side doors, letting the warm air out and the cold air in in the process. Some people may think these kids are cute. Most serious shoppers just think they're a nuisance as they go round and round and round and round, like the Wanderer, the guy in the 1960s hit who admits that he can never settle down.

Mr. Chairman, this is the roundabout that's going on regularly with the financial resources of this province. Budgets are meaningless because we don't really need to work within limits. Thanks to the oil bonanza, we can always make another round through the revolving door, letting more of the heat out. Every few years we go through a round of D and D: debt and deficit reduction. We say that we're being mature because we have to live within our means and cut spending, but we're not being mature. We use manufactured crises to cut back on our responsibilities to the homeless, those on assistance, children, hospitals, and communities, all in the name of self-reliance, fiscal management, getting our house in order. The moment we've off-loaded these, we're back at it again, another round through the revolving doors, running up unbudgeted expenses.

We say that it's not really overspending because the carelessness

is covered by resource revenues rather than from taxes. Would we use that reasoning as homemakers if we were selling off the trees, the pavement in the driveway and garden, the groundwater, and the topsoil to fund a spending spree? Would we say: I'm not really being irresponsible as I'm still living off my monthly paycheque? Would that justify stripping our houses down outside, selling off the siding, shingles, and eavestroughing to cover a trip to the casino?

I would like to consider the heritage savings trust fund. Of the \$122.9 billion in natural resource revenue collected in Alberta from 1977-78 to 2004-05, 91.4 per cent went into a combination of current consumption and debt repayment while 8.6 per cent was saved in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. In 1987-88 the Alberta heritage savings trust fund was valued at \$12.7 billion. In the 2005-06 second-quarter update the fund was valued at \$12.5 billion. If the heritage trust fund was inflation-proofed in 1987-88, it would be worth over \$19 billion today.

Mr. Chairman, the essence of parliamentary government is financial control by the Legislature. This oversight is not limited to direct or indirect or any particular kind of taxation. It includes the management of our entire portfolio, all the assets with which we've been blessed. The injection of \$1 billion is a good step toward better management. It is long overdue.

[Mr. Rodney in the chair]

I would also like to look at continuing care, AISH, and PDD as I consider Bill 19. As I think about different kinds of care, I do not believe that people believe in care for its own sake. They may support care if it's good business or go along with it if there's a profit to be made. But if it's the simple matter of putting public dollars into care for the homeless, the unemployed, the aged, or the children of working parents, then we hear a different story. We hear about the need for self-reliance, for getting a job, for families standing together. In other words, they're saying: we don't care. There are public dollars available for new projects. There's far more interest in putting them into incentives for industry, exploration, development, research, and tourism. Care, like religion, is becoming a purely private affair. If the state or its supporters are to be involved, they want to be able to charge private fees for services or offer corresponding tax cuts to the private sector for it to take up the slack.

9:40

I'm going to step into the realm of religion for two quotes. Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto me and the statement that the whole law can be summed up in this: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. It is not in our separation of people into taxpayers and consumers, into contributors and beneficiaries, into categories of age, health, gender, and specific competencies but in the recognition of our connectedness that society and communities hold together and individuals, families, and other groups become strong. The divide and rule, survival of the fittest approach has spawned many inhuman experiments, including the one last century that gave rise to this quotation.

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a communist. Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.

Martin Niemoeller's words remind us that this state did not come about all at once. It took about a decade from the first steps to separate people until the conclusion, where some people came to be

seen not as people but as a problem that required a final solution.

Mr. Chairman, it's been a little more than a decade since this government introduced a leaner, meaner approach to public support for those in need. Now it has been joined by a new federal government that says: caring for the unviable is not our concern; let them fend for themselves, or let them depend on private charity.

I'm going to paraphrase Niemoeller's words to show what is happening to care among us. The abandonment of the national child care agreement is simply another step on a slippery slope to a less human society. First they cut back welfare payments, and I said nothing because I was not on welfare. Then they cut seniors' benefits, and I did not complain because I was not a senior. Then they cancelled the child care agreement, and I let it pass because I did not support public child care. Then they began to privatize health care, and I did not object because I could pay my own way. Then I found myself homeless, unemployed, and ill, and I could do nothing as they had cut off me.

Let us resolve that we will go down this path no farther. It's time for government with a heart.

As I look at the continuing care \$10 million injection, I'm wondering how this money will be allocated and monitored to ensure that it goes towards improving the quality of life of seniors. The current system is not meeting the public need and expectation for ensuring the safety and well-being of residents in continuing care. The Health Facilities Review Committee and protection for persons in care office do not have the power to inspect facilities or the enforcement mechanisms to ensure that facilities rectify any problem identified. When will the minister take action to solve the problems with enforcement and accountability?

The biggest dilemma that the facilities seem to be facing, both in seniors care and for people with developmental disabilities, is a huge turnover of staff and a shortage of staff and not being able to get them in there or entice them to that work. I commend you on the \$10 million to increase the wages because that's certainly a major problem, but I'm wondering what we are doing to attract people into this profession and to make sure that they feel recognized and worthy.

When I look at the PDD funding, it seems that they're having to make a reduction in their costs, and there isn't enough funding for them to go forward. With PDD funding there's not been an overall cut, I understand that, but there's been only a 2 per cent increase. The point that the groups and the PDD are making when they talk to us is the reality that institutional inflation does mean a cutback in the services they're providing.

Those are the major concerns that I have in those two areas. Also, with AISH, we looked at that class-action lawsuit. I don't know how much money has been allocated so far or how many claims have been made, but I'm wondering what action has been taken to prevent future problems with Alberta's social programs.

I have questions about the PDD funding formula. I am concerned about the lack of staff to take care of our people in continuing care centres. I also am concerned that we have lost the vision of taking care of our people, of supporting our people, of taking care of the vulnerable because that really is the mark of a civil society.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Seeing no members from the government side, I'd now call upon the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to stand and discuss supplementary estimates for 2005-06. It has been well expressed before that we have limited opportunity to discuss financial issues. This is a case in point, where it's after-the-

fact spending, outside of budget, a reminder, I guess, that credibility and accountability have to do with the ability to discuss and hold to account the government of the day on the basis of budgetary planning.

Just to itemize some of my specific comments, I'll begin with the Finance department and talk about the need to better balance the social spending, the environmental protection investment, and the economic focus that this government takes and the lack of balance between those, that we still look for and call for as the Official Opposition.

I note in relation to the Human Resources and Employment sector that a \$6 million allocation was provided for the partial settlement of the class-action lawsuit, an unfortunate reflection of something that I hope the department is looking at very seriously and is going to prevent in the future. It relates, again, to what my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods has been talking about, and that is the caring gap, as we see it, in relation to those disadvantaged and those who are most in need of public support.

In this context the AISH increase has been small and inadequate for people who have to live in a society where the cost of living is increasing and where, indeed, we have the highest standard of living in the world. It's unconscionable that we are still keeping our most vulnerable people so far below the poverty line. They have not yet seen fit to index their increases on an annual basis on the basis of the cost of living and inflation. How is it, Mr. Chairman, that we can give ourselves a 4 and a half per cent increase and somehow not find it legitimate to give those on AISH and some of the most vulnerable in our society at least equal and, indeed, index these income supports?

In relation to people with developmental disabilities – and I'm now shifting to the Seniors and Community Supports side – clearly there is a call, again, for fairness in our society, for balancing the economic interests with the social development and the illness prevention and health promotion issues that an adequate income entails for these people in the most vulnerable situations. How is it, again, that we can give a 2 per cent increase to persons with developmental disabilities and give ourselves a 4 and a half per cent increase in this Legislature? It's a serious legitimacy problem – illegitimacy problem, I would say – and I hope that the Legislature will come to grips with this. PDD should also be indexed to inflation and cost of living. There's no basis for being so stingy with the people who are the most vulnerable in our society and being so generous with ourselves, Mr. Chairman.

In relation to Municipal Affairs, the \$39 million increase listed in the supplementary estimates, this had to do with the \$7 million for the targeted investment program to assist urban and rural communities with weak assessment bases, and the rest, 32 and a half million or so dollars, for disaster assistance.

9:50

I wanted to raise the issue that has increasingly plagued our constituency; that is, market value assessment. How are we going to address this without increasing the wrath and the profound despair of some in our constituency who can no longer afford to stay in their homes because the market value assessment has increased their tax share to the point where many of these seniors and people on fixed incomes simply can't continue in their homes. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, it may surprise you that some couples have talked of – actually, I've heard of one instance where they formally separated as a couple in order to claim income less than the cut-off point at which they would receive health benefits and other benefits because of the increase in their tax on their housing.

We need to find another way to assess particularly inner city

housing besides the market value assessment. There needs to be a ceiling beyond which we don't go or a percentage of the lowest tax rate in that area. We cannot continue to see the skyrocketing market value assessments and the taxation that goes along with that. Particularly irate are some young families who have a relatively modest house but whose land values reached the point where they, too, are being squeezed seriously.

In relation to Sustainable Resource Development, a \$15 million supplementary for firefighting, primarily, and for the pine beetle, these are not items that can obviously be avoided in the real sense, but forward-thinking and prevention in terms of what we understand to be determinants of forest fires and getting early attention to the pine beetle issue is what all of us expect in this province.

I want to focus also on the lack of any investment that I can see in a serious commitment to integrated land-use planning. The committee has been struck, but I'm very much hoping that we will not be seeing a repeat of the last two attempts to have an integrated land-use framework and a land-use plan in this province that will simply not function and not be seriously . . .

An Hon. Member: What happened?

Dr. Swann: It was not seriously integrated into the various departments that need to be integrating it: Agriculture, Sustainable Resource Development, Environment, forestry. All of these sectors need to see the legislation. They need to operate under the auspices of the legislation in a very consistent manner. We cannot have regulatory bodies overriding them. The land-use planning framework has to be in stone. The minister should not be able to make these kinds of decisions, so everyone can operate, including the business community, in a framework under which they can have confidence. It can be clear, and everybody knows how it's going to work. So I'm really calling for some investment in both time and money to ensure that these plans for land use in the province are clear, they're integrated in all the various departments, they have good public involvement, and they are legislated.

Those are my comments around . . .

The Acting Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but speaking of ministers, I would invite the newly social Minister of Innovation and Science to take his seat as we allow the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to continue with his comments and give him the respect that is due. I appreciate your co-operation.

Dr. Swann: Those are my comments. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: Seeing no members from the government side standing, we have the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to report.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure again to rise and speak to Bill 19, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006. Community Development has requested an additional \$30.2 million. It's a huge amount, \$21.2 million for community services: \$20 million for a one-time grant to assist with cost pressures associated with the operations and maintenance of libraries and \$1.2 million for featuring Alberta at the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC, in July 2006. Wow. I like it. I'm not against that, but I want to ask the Minister of Community Development: how much do we pay to our local festivals like the Heritage Festival, Klondike, and the Stampede in Calgary?

I have some other questions. I'll start with this \$200,000 that will be used by the department to act as liaison for the Smithsonian

Folklife Festival in Washington. How long has your department known that they would be featured at this festival? Why was this cost not foreseen? How specifically will the department be spending this money in Washington? Is it appropriate to have this cost within your department? Is this not an International and Intergovernmental Relations cost? These are a few questions.

Given that the additional money is more than was originally budgeted for, why did your department underestimate this cost so grossly? Obviously, library maintenance and operations are not costs that suddenly appear without warning. Why did you not account for this money in your budget? How will this money be distributed to the numerous libraries throughout the province? Are there a few libraries that need substantial funding, or is this money to be split amongst all the provincial libraries?

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

This one is very interesting, Mr. Chairman; \$1 million will be granted by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to the Smithsonian Institution to assist with the management of the festival. Why is your department helping to fund a festival that is taking place in the U.S.A.? How will this money be utilized by the Smithsonian festival? What benefit will Alberta see from helping to fund a festival in Washington? Again, is this not a cost that should fall under International and Intergovernmental Relations? Will this money that went to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts be considered arts funding? If so, why? Considering the fact that AFA has been grossly underfunded in the past, I hope that this is not considered arts funding as it appears to have no impact on Alberta artists. What input did the Alberta Foundation for the Arts have in deciding to grant this money to the Smithsonian Institution?

Mr. Chairman, \$9 million is being used to redevelop Calgary's Heritage Park. Given that many requests for centennial grants as small as \$1,000 were denied because there was no grant money left over, where did this additional \$9 million come from? I just want to remind the minister, that the one grant that I . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, the noise level is rising again, making it very difficult to hear the hon. member that's speaking.

Please continue.

10:00

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm talking about that Mill Woods Presidents' Council grant. They were asking only for a few thousand dollars, and the grant was denied. They celebrated Canada Day and centennial day last year, and the money was short because HRDC denied a \$5,000 grant. I requested of the Minister of Community Development only a few thousand dollars, and if you remember, you said that you don't have money. Now I don't know where the money is coming from, \$10 million, \$20 million, \$30 million. My God, there's no limit.

Actually, that was a real celebration; 60,000 people on the south side celebrated Canada Day as well as the centennial day. They couldn't get even a couple of thousand dollars, and now we are giving the Smithsonian, I think – how much is it? – \$1.2 million. We don't have money for our own people here in Edmonton and Calgary and \$1.2 million? I'm not saying anything against the Smithsonian folk festival in the U.S.A., but it should be fair. The preference should be given to our own cities, especially to Albertans, who sacrificed a lot in the last 10, 12 years. Given that many requests, as I said, even small grants like the Mill Woods Presidents' Council's, were denied, I want to know why and what's happening. How do they assess the applications?

I remind you of another grant. Five million dollars was given to a film director, and that grant was decided, I think, within a day or two. How the deal was brokered nobody knows. I don't know what's happening. I mean, there are lots of questions, a huge amount of money. It's the taxpayers' money, and we're all sitting here. We're elected by the people, and we are answerable to our constituents. Think about it. When we give a huge amount of money to someone – you know, I don't want to say under somebody's pressure – how do you guys decide? How do you assess the system of this grant? Given that your department handed \$5.5 million to a single Albertan after a private meeting with the Premier – this is the one I'm talking about – and now you are asking for an additional \$9 million, why has your department mismanaged this grant money so badly?

This is another question for the Minister for Community Development: how specifically will this \$9 million be spent? Why could this redevelopment not wait until the next fiscal budget? What is the urgency in redeveloping this park? Mr. Minister, you always answer my questions. I request you again to provide me with details in writing as soon as possible. You always do, and I commend you for that in advance.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to the supply changes here just in as most general a way possible and quickly. You know, the biggest issue that I have – and I've spoken about this several times over the past year and a half – is this fundamental problem with underestimating and lowballing the original budget that we pass in the spring and then adding such large amounts to each department and ministry later on down the road. This stems from a number of, I would say, categorical problems with the way that this government is being run.

The first, that I would like to just speak on briefly, is the issue of revenues. Now, we knew where the royalty rates for oil and gas were going, and it was nowhere but up in this past 12 months. For this government to set the projected revenues from royalties at such a low number I think does a disservice to any ability of these various ministries to engage in long-term planning for the future. The royalty rates and the commodity prices of gas and oil are difficult to plumb. Certainly, if we knew for a fact that they would stay high or stay at any particular level, then we would all be able to plan better, but the deliberate lowballing of revenues can only harm the ability of the government to be responsible for the various departments they are in terms of being able to make long-term plans.

Just on that level alone, here we are looking at very large unbudgeted additions to each of the departments, and I find that to be irresponsible at best. You know, the people of Alberta deserve better than that. They deserve to have an honest projection of what their budgets are going to be. Each of these ministries represents a fundamental part of the social fabric in people's lives. When we're talking about education here in Edmonton, we're talking about the ability to retrofit and build schools or not build them. The shortage in the budget for infrastructure in terms of schools has resulted in Edmonton being shortchanged in regard to retrofitting buildings and building new schools, and that's a direct result of deliberately lowballing revenues from oil and gas. This is just one example, Mr. Chairman, that we could use.

Of each of these ministries I would suggest that health care is perhaps the mother of all lowball casualties. With that plus a deliberate underfunding of our public health care system we are in this perceived or otherwise manufactured crisis that the government

now wants to somehow act on through privatization. Each action has an equal and opposite reaction, we learn in physics and perhaps in a larger sense in terms of karma. The basic mistake or deliberate misleading mistake of building a budget based on very low figures results in these supplementary pieces having to come in. Now, fortunately, we can do that because there's such a tremendous amount of revenue out there, but that's not something that lasts forever, Mr. Chairman. It's a problem that will only become worse if, in fact, we were dealing with tighter numbers.

You know, you get this illusion of conservatism by bringing in prudent and streamlined budgets in the spring, and then you get this great pitchforking of money around afterwards, sometimes approaching and even exceeding the original budget that we debated in the spring. I think that Albertans have caught on to this, Mr. Chairman. I'm hoping that we can make some resolution to that in the spring budget that's coming up that we will be debating here, a more sort of honest and reasonable estimate of how much money we're actually going to spend in 2006 and 2007.

Making long-term plans for the future. As I said, Mr. Chairman, one place where we can go but we can't go unless we are making some honest projections about our revenues is building a green fund for the future. You know, I was so happy to hear the Minister of Environment speaking about building a billion-dollar endowment. At least it's something, a hundred million dollars for 10 years or something like that. I'm not sure what the Minister of Environment was detailing, but this is the sort of long-term step in the right direction that we could get our heads around. It's a very small amount, and perhaps we'd do it in a different way, but these things cannot be talked about if we continue to lowball our royalties.

10:10

The Minister of Environment specifically said that we could have a very modest increase in our royalty rates to accommodate for this, and this is becoming a buzz around in the public. You know, we used to talk about royalty rates, and maybe people's eyes would glaze over, but it's starting to become a public issue. I'm the last person that would ever give electoral advice to the hon. Conservative Party across the way there, but in terms of electoral politics the royalty rates issue is getting on the radar screen of people because people know that if there are billions of dollars of extra revenue coming in, there are billions of dollars being lost by having an inadequate royalty regime that pays the people of Alberta properly for the oil and gas revenues that are being extracted from this province each and every day.

So, again, we lowball the overall estimates during the year plus we have a royalty regime which gives away a lot of our energy at bargain-basement prices, and I think we have together, Mr. Chairman, a recipe for disaster down the road. Now, the only thing that keeps it afloat is the fact that there's lots of money floating around there to stop the gaps in between, but it's no way to run a railroad or a ministry or a government, and I think that the people of Alberta would like to see some resolution to this.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report Bill 19.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 19.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 17
Libraries Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to move Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, 2006.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again to speak in support of Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act. The bill makes four major changes to library administration. It allows for the creation of intermunicipal library boards. Number two, it defines a financial reporting process that clarifies financial accountability. Number three, it provides for the dissolution or amalgamation of the library board in the event of municipal dissolution, amalgamation, or annexation. Number four, it removes the right of municipalities to levy a public library rate or local property tax to fund the library.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 should improve library services by making it easier for municipalities to co-operatively provide library services. There is the risk that more municipalities will choose to provide one large intermunicipal library rather than smaller libraries in each community if the stakeholders in the affected regions feel that the option is an intermunicipal library or no library at all.

This bill will not help the significant problem with libraries in Alberta: underfunding. Libraries were funded at the same per capita rate funding for the last 14 years. Although \$20 million was just announced, Alberta's libraries will continue to be one of two jurisdictions that charge fees to access library resources. Why won't this government take action in any of these areas?

Mr. Speaker, the groups I consulted are in favour of the changes and believe they are long-awaited improvements. We support local democracy, that is local library boards. We support literacy. Learning begins with reading; therefore, we encourage the library system to improve their services and make more books available. We believe in access to libraries in rural areas, and these changes will make that easier. We would like to see greater funding for the libraries and the removal of library user fees.

Mr. Speaker, the libraries are the basic services of all walks of life. It's an investment in the building of intellectual resources and also

a cornerstone of democratic society. In Alberta's very first Public Libraries Act in the year 1907 the act stated very clearly that "all libraries and reading rooms established under this Act shall be open to the public free of all charges." Public libraries started out in the early years of this province's existence as open-door institutions, free to all Albertans. But in recent years, starting in the late '80s, public library after public library across this province has introduced annual membership fees in order to generate funds. As a consequence, today in Alberta every major public library with only two exceptions charges an annual membership fee that Albertans must pay if they want to borrow books. In this practice of charging residents a fee to belong to their local public library, Alberta is alone in North America with the sole exception of Quebec. Everywhere else in North America public libraries are free to the local residents, whose taxes support the libraries' existence.

10:20

Mr. Speaker, over the last two decades provincial funding for public libraries has been far from generous. From 1986 to 2002 the library operating grant funding formula was \$4.04 per capita, and today it's only \$4.29 per capita to determine the grants. This province should increase its share of the funding formula to increase the funding available to public libraries and compensate municipalities for the lost revenue. Recently the Alberta government announced \$20 million, as I said, for public libraries' one-time infusion to purchase new materials or develop community-based programs that support literacy for all Albertans.

Under this amendment act the ability for municipalities to levy a special public library rate is being repealed. This change was not included in the government press release. Why was this change to the act not included in the press release? That's a big question. Did they complete a comprehensive survey of all municipalities to see if any were using the public library rate? What consultations were done with the municipalities? This omission is cause for concern. The municipalities I contacted don't use it, but one of the 300 municipalities with libraries could. So we should be concerned that this may impact the municipalities' ability to collect money for libraries and therefore to deliver services. Our position will depend on the answers to questions in this area. If no one is using the public library rate, then you could make the argument to remove it for housekeeping sake.

When I visit elementary schools, I tell students that if they want to be successful, they must read absolutely everything and everything they can. I support any policy that improves learning, literacy, and our future. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I consider Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, I have some thoughts about libraries, books, and literacy. In her latest book, *Dark Days Ahead*, Canadian author Jane Jacob warns of cultural amnesia, where we not only forget but forget what we've forgotten and what makes us what we are. Books and reading are a prescription to keep us from that kind of forgetting. In the movie *Fahrenheit 451*, long before Michael Moore's 9/11, there's a scene where a crew of firefighters torches a pile of books in the street. A small boy asks, "Daddy, is it true that firemen once used to put out fires?" That's the type of amnesia Jacob is warning against and that books, libraries, and literacy help to keep at bay. It's not accidental that totalitarian regimes censor books so their simplistic views can become total for their followers.

Here in the western so-called democracies we face a different

challenge. We're so used to throwaway images and ideas that are on the screen, current at one moment and then passé, that we forget how to hold more than one idea at a time, how to juggle, wrestle, rework our thoughts: qualities that make for an informed and educated human being. It is possible to imagine a gigantic crash of the Internet that would force us back to earlier forms of communication. It would take longer to get information, and some live sources wouldn't be available, but it wouldn't cost us our long-term memory, our knowledge of who we are, where we've been, and a sense of where we're going.

It's possible to envisage a breakdown of the movie industry, bankruptcy in Hollywood, and even a shutdown of video stores with their DVDs. That would force us to do something else on Friday nights, perhaps to rediscover earlier forms of entertainment. We'd miss the visual memories and classic performances and would have to learn to make our own mental pictures again, but it wouldn't leave us without ideas.

I cannot imagine how we could lose our libraries, the books in them, and our ability to read them without a fundamental collapse of our civilization. Our capacity to talk to ourselves, time travel, nourish an inner love life, and ride the shoulders of the greats: all this depends on having the words and ideas in a form we can hold and carry. Someday we may perfect telepathy and be able to transmit pictures and movies to others. Until that happens and as long as we use language, we'll need books to encode, enlarge, and interpret our experience. They are the fundamental building blocks of the good life.

As I look at this Bill 17, I am in favour of the changes and believe that they are long-awaited improvements. I support local democracy; that is, local library boards. I support literacy. Learning begins with reading. Therefore, we must encourage the library systems to improve their services and make more books available. Finally, I believe in access to libraries in rural areas, and these changes will make that easier. And I would like to ask for greater funding for libraries. Why do we still have library user fees?

I do support Bill 17 as a positive step, but there is much work to do to really support libraries, books, and literacy. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) there is a five-minute comment and question period. Anyone wish to participate?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will make some very brief comments in regard to Bill 17. We don't see a great deal of difficulty with the wording of this bill or its intention. I think it does in fact clarify reporting requirements and provide a mechanism for dissolution if a municipality somehow changes.

It seems straightforward, but my concern – and we will work with this in greater detail as the bill passes through, with my other members as well – is: is this a way by which municipalities, with the regionalization of municipalities in rural areas, can in fact dissolve and leave behind a library easier than they could before? We see with the regionalization that has been occurring that, potentially,

libraries in smaller centres could be at risk. I just hope that this is not part of the way by which Bill 17 is designed for the closing of libraries around the province.

You know, we've seen some encouraging signs of commitment towards libraries. We've got the – what was it? – one-time \$20 million investment in libraries around the province, but I think that the state of these institutions is such that we need sustained investment over time. I realize that municipal libraries and school libraries are under different funding mechanisms, but, you know, we saw over the last 10 or 15 years school libraries being in decline in regard to their funding and their staffing. This is indicative of a lack of commitment towards libraries and building that habit and interest in students while they're in school. Right? So what I'm hoping to see is an integrated approach towards the support of libraries through building and strengthening library services within the public schools, thus creating a population that values libraries in a broader way when they are, in fact, adult citizens and taxpayers and using the library.

It's a question of proximity and quality, and libraries have to change over time in order to meet the changing tastes of the population. That takes money. The benefits are probably not commensurate but, I should say, multiplied from the original investment to help to educate our society, for people to access new technologies, just a place to meet and to improve the quality of a community, Mr. Speaker.

10:30

The library system that we are fortunate to have here in Edmonton is just part of the way by which the quality of life of the city is enhanced. I know that my family has built a lifelong habit of using these facilities. In smaller centres I think that we should be looking at the public library as being a focal point to build community and to build a sense of belonging and education and all of the good things that we want for the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak on the bill?

Does the hon. Minister of Community Development wish to close debate?

Mr. Mar: Nothing further to add, sir, except that I will take into account the comments made by members opposite.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:32 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 8, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our people. Let us be guided by our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly four individuals who are contributing in a very significant way to municipalities in Alberta. These individuals are members of the newly established Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability. The sustainability of municipalities is a major priority for this government. To that end I look forward to continuing our work together.

I want to thank these representatives for coming to the Legislature today. Accompanying the individuals that I will be introducing are several of their key staff members who also are contributing in a significant way to the minister's council. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I will ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly after I've introduced them. From the city of Edmonton Mayor Stephen Mandel; former Member of the Legislative Assembly and president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, AUMA, Mr. Bob Hawkesworth; the president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, Mr. Don Johnson. And please recognize the mayor of Calgary, Mr. Dave Bronconnier. I don't see him there, although he might be hiding around the podium. I know he's joining us for meetings later on this afternoon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure for me to introduce a person who is very familiar to most members of this Assembly. I'm sure you hold him in memory as well, Mr. Speaker. He has made many of our debates in this Chamber very colourful. He was my seatmate and officemate and sat in this Chamber from 2001 to 2004. That's Mr. Brent Rathgeber, former MLA for Edmonton-Caldor. I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Education it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some of the very best and brightest students in all of Edmonton, 64 grade 6 students from Blessed Kateri elementary school, located in Edmonton-Mill Creek, who are accompanied by their teachers Ray Brooks, Robert Burghardt, and Darlene Payne. I'd ask them to please now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, do you have another one?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. On behalf of our Minister of Advanced Education and MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 26 enthusiastic grade 6 students along with their teacher, Ms Colette Coumont, and parent helper Ms Renée Brown from Archbishop Joseph MacNeil school in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today to observe and learn with interest about our government. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them all to rise and accept our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to everyone here in the Assembly today 20 special guests from my constituency. The ECHO Society, which stands for Empowering Citizens for Health and Opportunity, is a wonderful organization that provides rehabilitation services to Albertans in the communities of Whitecourt, Mayerthorpe, and Fox Creek that have developmental and physical disabilities as well as those caused by brain injury. Along with the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency I had the pleasure of joining this very vibrant group of Albertans for a photo earlier this afternoon. I'd ask my guests to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's a distinct pleasure and honour today to introduce some dignitaries from the Aga Khan University Hospital in Nairobi, a nondenominational institution. The education provided at this university hospital is second to none in recognizing men, women, and people of all different ethnic groups and persuasions. They are meeting today with three of our public organizations – Capital Health, the Alberta Cancer Board, the University of Alberta – to create a partnership and relationship to deliver health services in Nairobi, Kenya.

In the gallery are Dr. Mushtaq Ahmed, the chief physician at Aga Khan University Hospital and the associate dean of Aga Khan University; Galeb Gulam, a senior executive and the chief financial officer at Aga Khan University Hospital in Nairobi; Dr. Farrok Karsan, who is based at the Aga Khan University Hospital in Karachi, Pakistan, and is also assisting the Nairobi hospital. It's wonderful to go on the web and see what they are doing in Pakistan as well. From Capital Health in Edmonton very familiar faces: Allaudin Merali, the executive vice-president and chief financial officer; and one of my personal favourites, vice-president Brian Hlus. Would our guests please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce my guest, and I have to assume that he might be sitting behind me because I can't see him, so I'll go ahead. I'd like to introduce to you and through you an Albertan who has cared very deeply and has spent inordinate amounts of his personal time working on the plight of those in continuing care, and I'd ask for the traditional warm welcome of this home – House. I've been here too long. My guest is Robert Warden.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a group of concerned daycare owners. They are with us today in the gallery to show their support for the national daycare program. I would like to ask them to please rise as I introduce them: Suzanne Vokurka, Gillian Jobs, Edda Hunter, Connie Nye, Zsolt Maraitar, Tammy Adams, Ellie McEvoy, and Liz Barker. Please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a group of concerned daycare owners. They are with us today in the gallery to show their support for the national daycare program. I would like to ask them to rise as I introduce them: Janet Albury from Wee Care Family Day Homes in Fort Saskatchewan, Lovena Satdeo from Edmonton Family Day Homes, Debbie Pageé of the North Edmonton Family Day Home Agency, Natasha McCartney from the town of Beaumont, Natalie Wezler, also from the town of Beaumont, Charlene Ellison of Northalta Family Day Homes out of Edmonton, and another person from the family day homes, Barbara Raliszur. Please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Kelly Sloan. Kelly is the executive director of the YWCA. Along with other important work, the YWCA Edmonton supports the YWCA of Guyana with resources and expertise. Locally the YWCA Edmonton runs the nonpartisan one woman, one vote program, that encourages women to run for office, to vote, and to work on political campaigns. We are pleased to have Kelly join us today, on International Women's Day, and I commend the work that she and her organization do to empower and aid women in all facets of their lives. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as a footnote today with the presence of the mayor of the city of Edmonton, this canopy that surrounds the Speaker's podium was a gift from the people of Edmonton to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and the province of Alberta on the 75th anniversary of the province of Alberta in 1980. We're now arriving at the 100th anniversary of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and I'm pleased to advise all members that His Worship is working with us on another project that will enhance the quality of this room and this Chamber as we go through 2006.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

International Women's Day

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past 28 years Canada has joined the world on March 8 to commemorate International Women's Day. As we all in this Assembly consider the impact that women have had on our lives, we should come to understand the

immense significance of today. Expressing this importance is a quote often attributed to a great Chinese leader, who said, "Women hold up half the sky." It is a call for us to respect and value women here and around the globe.

In Alberta a number of events will honour this special occasion: a candle-lighting ceremony in Banff, a documentary film presentation in Calgary, an International Women's Day round-table at the University of Alberta women's centre, a celebration dinner hosted by the Edson and District Community Learning Society, and a discussion on international perspectives on women and leadership in Lethbridge. Mr. Speaker, there are many more events around the province and more going on than simple celebrations.

Canadians will mark the 25th anniversary of the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. This international treaty pledges equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities for men and women. Alberta will join other Canadian governments in New Brunswick this September for a national meeting to discuss women's issues, including the United Nations treaty. This will be the 25th anniversary of our national collaboration.

Mr. Speaker, on this International Women's Day I ask members of this House to join me and communities around the province in celebrating, acknowledging, and supporting the achievements of women in Alberta and around the world.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to respond to the ministerial statement on International Women's Day. I've reviewed some of the statements I've made in this House about March 8. I've talked about the status of aboriginal women, violence against women, child care, women in poverty, funding for women's shelters, operational funding for sexual assault centres. Today in the paper I read about the Two Steps Forward, One Step Back movement, in which women seem perennially locked. All that seems a bit grim.

I notice that in a newsletter from the peer program at the Women's Centre of Calgary in Bridgeland in their most recent article they talk about International Women's Day: people recognize the day to demonstrate their intention to keep fighting. And, I would add, to celebrate, which the minister did so nicely.

As the minister noted, the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was ratified by Canada 25 years ago. From this flowed legal and human rights foundations like the Canada Human Rights Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Both have been integral to improving the status of women in Canada and in Alberta. As we have learned, a gain in status for one group like a rising tide lifts all boats. So, for example, maternity provisions protecting job security for women evolve into parental leave, which benefits all of us. I believe these far-sighted legal tools have protected and empowered women. I'm delighted when a young woman looks blankly at me when I talk about a time before the maintenance enforcement program or having no protection from harassment in the workplace or losing one's job because a woman got married or was pregnant.

The Official Opposition continues to work on issues of economic equality and opportunity. I note that the recent StatsCan report talks about women continuing to be clustered in lower paying, pink ghetto jobs, making 71 per cent of what their male counterparts do even though – and this is a success story – women are exceeding men in literary skills and continuing to increase in achieving university degrees.

I look around this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and I note that the numbers of women here are going down, not up. What a comment that Rwanda, Mozambique, and Lesotho have a better percentage of elected women than we do.

Much to celebrate. Much to do. Happy International Women's Day.

The Speaker: Will hon. members allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to participate on behalf of the third party?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, thank you, and I want to thank my colleagues for this opportunity for me to respond on behalf of my caucus and our leader to the minister's excellent statement today. For over 30 years we have been observing and celebrating International Women's Day. Over that time women have taken important steps forward. Yesterday Statistics Canada released a report showing that women are closing the gap in postsecondary education and workplace participation. Unfortunately, the report also points to a continuing pattern of women earning lower wages than men and having a high risk of living in poverty. This discrepancy is particularly clear for visible minority women. Yesterday the report found that minority women, although they have on the average better education, are earning somewhat less than their nonvisible counterparts.

Women face more immediate threats to their well-being, Mr. Speaker. Last year women's shelters in Alberta accommodated close to 6,000 women and close to 5,500 children who were escaping violent home lives. Sadly, shelters were unable to accommodate another 5,150 woman and their 3,710 children because they were full.

Like for too many Albertans, domestic violence is a particularly personal issue for me. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the murder of my youngest sister at the hands of her husband here in Edmonton. How many of us are trying to help loved ones, friends, families to escape abusive and terrifying family relationships? How many more women and children suffer violence anonymously? We would be remiss if we didn't also pause on this day to remember the Edmonton women who were murdered because their work in prostitution made them easy targets.

I'm also deeply troubled by the growing problem of early sexualization of young girls in our province and in our country. A culture that equates youth with beauty and pressures girls to act as women exposes those girls to serious psychological problems down the road. I applaud the courage and contribution of Léa Clermont Dion, a high school student in Quebec, for initiating a public debate on this issue.

I began my statement by praising the accomplishments women have made, and I want to emphasize the importance of these gains. But major challenges still lie ahead. Lower wages and violence against women and girls are symptoms of a larger problem, Mr. Speaker. As long as women are not full and equal participants in the workplace, in boardrooms, and in Legislative Assemblies, we will only be able to bandage over serious problems. Let's pledge to work together as members of this Assembly to remove the barriers that still exist to women's full and equal participation in social, economic, and political lives.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I invite all Albertans to join us in celebrating International Women's Day, celebrating past advances, and committing to fighting for justice and equality for all women.

Thank you very much.

1:50

The Speaker: For the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to participate, we'll need unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year citizens around the world commemorate International Women's Day. It is one day a year that we recognize the contribution of our women to our society as a whole.

As an Albertan I am proud that our province was one of the first in the British Commonwealth to give suffrage to women. But even before that women led the fight that men seemed to shy away from. Our women in the 1800s and early 1900s were leaders in the fight to clean up society across Canada. Their moral character and social conscience helped to define a generation.

During both World War I and II women went into the workforce to help contribute to the war effort in Canada. Without these great individuals sacrificing their time and talent, we would not have been able to rise up and continue the fight. After World War II their strength continued to grow in the face of societal changes. As women across the world began to evaluate their place in society, they once again made great changes to how our world works. Let me give you some examples of some amazing Alberta women.

Annie Gale first got politically active when she realized that people were forced to buy inferior vegetables from grocers who had contracted with B.C. and did not sell Alberta products. Her annoyance over this single issue grew into a life of service in public. Her activism in Calgary society would eventually lead to her running and winning a spot on the Calgary city council. Elected in 1917, Annie would be the first woman elected as a municipal councillor in the British Empire and the first woman to serve as an acting mayor.

Ethel Knight Wilson was one who changed Alberta. Ethel was the second woman named to the provincial cabinet. As a Social Credit MLA and minister of labour she did a great deal to help workers in our province. Ethel also brought forward the legislation which created the Women's Bureau of Culture and Information. She was certainly a great woman in Alberta.

Beyond the more public roles are women as the keystones to our families. Their contribution to creating and maintaining families is just as important as any other contribution they gave. In my own life women, especially my mother, have played a strong role in shaping and forming my life. My mother is one of my biggest fans, and her contribution to my success in politics and life is immeasurable.

In closing, I would like to thank our women. I know they'll continue to lead, shape, and help our society grow into one that brings respect and tolerance through their unique caring and loving nature.

Thank you.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Reform Public Consultation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the 1990s this government pushed through electricity deregulation without proper consultation, and we all know the results of that. We know how the public feels. Now this same government is pushing through a policy on health

care with only a 30-day consultation process, in which there are now just 23 days remaining. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier agree to an all-party televised debate focusing on his health care reforms? [some applause]

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I didn't know they were applauding for me. [interjections]

An Hon. Member: We will if you agree.

The Speaker: If everybody would speak through the chair, it would really work.

Mr. Klein: Well, I do agree. In fact, not only are we debating the situation before the television cameras during question period, if – if – the proposals are brought forward, there will be ample time to debate this situation in front of all the television cameras. I don't know if they'll be on or not. I think that they were for the Bill 11 debate. I stand to be corrected. I think I'm right, because it was of such public interest. I would hope that the Speaker would indulge the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and keep the television cameras on during debate, if it in fact takes place, of the appropriate legislation that will be brought forward. But right now we're debating in front of the television cameras.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier attend a town hall meeting organized by the Liberal opposition to fit his schedule – any time, any place – to hear what Albertans are saying about health care? Will he come out and meet the public?

Mr. Klein: As much as I wouldn't like to attend, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has laid out a public consultation process. It is a government process. We're responsible for fulfilling our duties in the best way we see fit. The process that has been tabled and outlined by the hon. minister is the process that we are going to follow. Now, there are a lot of suggestions relative to the process for public consultation. I'm sorry, and I apologize to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, but I'm going to stick with the process laid out by my minister.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then to the minister: will the minister herself or will she urge her colleagues to attend health care town hall meetings organized by the Liberal opposition – we'll organize just a few for you – and report back to her caucus what she or they hear? Will you attend a town hall meeting?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly report back to our caucus what we hear. We have actually booked a fairly full schedule right now. I know some MLAs have individually booked meetings in their particular constituencies. I have meetings this Saturday in St. Paul and in Bonnyville. I am arranging a meeting in Hinton. There are other centres that we're planning to go to in all corners of the province. So I could not make a definite commitment, looking at my own schedule and meetings we're arranging.

So, Mr. Speaker, although it's a kind and generous offer, I would urge the opposition to bring those views from those meetings forward, and they will constitute part of the material we're gathering from the public.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday at town hall meetings in Camrose and Pigeon Lake several hundred rural Albertans spoke out about the impact on their lives of coal-bed methane, and the Official Opposition listened. These hardworking Albertans are experiencing water contamination and water shortage, and many are forced to choose between safe water and income from oil companies. Without adequate regulations oil companies and landowners are increasingly being pitted against each other. To the Premier: with some reputable hydrogeologists and industry expressing uncertainty about the impacts of shallow coal-bed methane fracturing on groundwater, is it not prudent to pause to consult with scientists, companies, and citizens until we know the extent of the damage to our vital groundwater?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it – and I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy elaborate – we just announced two initiatives critical to protecting the precious resource of water. The first is mandatory baseline testing of well water before drilling for coal-bed methane. This will help us monitor water quality accurately. The second is the mapping of Alberta's groundwater so that we know exactly where our groundwater is located. Thirdly – I would add a third – is that there is a complete review of any coal-bed methane extraction process or application by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. The hon. member and any other citizen, of course, is invited to intervene if he or she feels that their water is being compromised.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have the letter, but I'd be glad to table it at some future date, from one of the companies, MGCV, I believe, very active in coal-bed methane extraction, saying that one of the individuals to whom the hon. member alluded has been spoken to by the company and seems to be satisfied. The letter also indicates that the situation relative to contamination of his water supply occurred a long time before coal-bed methane was extracted.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the coal-bed methane has been going on for five years, Mr. Premier, will you acknowledge the rural concerns and honour your commitment to halt new coal-bed methane development in the Horseshoe Canyon formation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have never given a commitment to halt coal-bed methane. I have given a commitment that if the Minister of Environment discovers that coal-bed methane is indeed contributing to contamination of water supplies, then that activity will be suspended pending a complete resolution of the problem.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lacking any scientific investigation, it's going to be impossible to prove that now after five years.

To the Minister of Energy. Until now the EUB has been relying on industry to do baseline water testing before drilling. How can Albertans be satisfied that the EUB is protecting the public interest?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the Energy and Utilities Board is the

one that's been setting a very rigorous standard for the industry for decades. I've got to still clarify that we try and typify coal-bed methane as if it's a new activity when it's not. This drilling activity in shallow wells occurs in thousands of wells if not hundreds of thousands of wells across the province, with decades of experience in managing water – saline, aquifers, fresh, potable water – fracturing techniques, all of those issues. The industry has a substantive amount of evidence, information, baseline information, and the like. It's not in the absence of a very solid foundation with which this activity is going forward. That is the first misrepresentation of what's happening with this coal-bed methane.

Secondly, each of these individual applications – and he mentions Horseshoe Canyon. That's in a seam where there's virtually no water. So even in that it isn't a matter that there is even a water extraction issue. As to whether it's affecting other zones or aquifers, the evidence thus far does not suggest anything of the like.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Continuing Care Standards

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been tirelessly advocating for improvements in the long-term care system. Jean Warden died last year of malnutrition, dehydration, and infection in a for-profit facility. This highlights the current crisis in long-term care and the desperate need to legislate standards of care and ensure that enforcement mechanisms are in place. My questions would be to the Premier. Mr. Premier, why isn't this government legislating clear, enforceable provincial standards of care since the Auditor General and the MLA task force have submitted their reports?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is under review. I'll have the hon. minister responsible for seniors respond. I don't know if it's the minister of health or the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I think it's Seniors and Community Supports.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to respond to this question. You know that over the past year we have worked very hard on this issue of long-term care following the Auditor's report, and especially the member asking this question knows that because she was a part of the continuing care report along with two of my colleagues that reported just recently with 45 recommendations. The Minister of Health and Wellness and I responded very quickly through the third quarter, which we had here in the Assembly just this past week. In the third quarter there was an allocation of \$36 million to meet the urgent needs that were identified in these 45 recommendations: \$26 million to Health and Wellness, \$10 million within my ministry.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you this. With the budget coming up in the next few weeks, we can look forward to a continuation in long-term care in meeting the needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate that answer, but I would also like to suggest that this government take this issue so seriously that they would commit to establishing an independent office, like in my Bill 205, which is calling for a continuing care commissioner to solve the problems with enforcement and accountability. My question would be . . .

The Speaker: Well, I think you've had a question, hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: . . . when will that be considered?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had this discussion, the hon. member across the way and myself, as recently as two weeks ago. I was looking forward to the bill being here in the Assembly. I apologize; I've been very busy. I haven't had an opportunity to read the bill yet, but I am looking forward to that as well.

In our discussions the member knows that what she has put forward in regard to having a commissioner in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, reporting through you for long-term care is one approach. We've had other approaches in that regard, and I'm going to evaluate all of them, and I would involve that member at that time even in making that type of decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I think that my point is: could we look at this as being actually legislated? Would that be looked at or just as a regulation?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to that debate when the member's bill comes forward.

Health Care Reform Public Consultation

(continued)

Mr. Mason: The Alberta Liberal leader thinks the Premier is a great man, a colossus even. We in the NDP opposition have a different view, Mr. Speaker. We see a Premier who wants to ram through the most far-reaching changes to our medicare system in 40 years without a mandate to do so and without properly consulting Albertans. My question is to the Premier. Why is the government acting in such a high-handed and undemocratic manner by denying Albertans the opportunity to present their views at a set of public hearings around the province, not just milk and cookies with the minister?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to first of all thank the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for his very kind words.

Mr. Speaker, there is a public consultation process laid out, as I mentioned. In fact, I understand that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness went out on the steps of the Legislature today when one of the ND members was about to speak and invited members in for a consultation, then went back out and invited another 15 back in. Now, that to me shows that the minister is willing to listen to all sides, even sides orchestrated by the NDs and the Liberals.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier believe that the minister inviting some protesters in for milk and cookies is a substitute for a real consultation process that actually goes out to where people live in this province – in Mayerthorpe, in Medicine Hat, in St. Paul, and in Wainwright – and hold public, open, and transparent hearings? That's the point: no more closed-door meetings.

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, I don't know specifically if the hon. minister is going to go to the locations indicated by the hon. member, but certainly she plans to go on the road and meet with constituencies throughout Alberta.

I'll have the hon. member respond.

The Speaker: Perhaps we'll get it in the third one.
The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that many Albertans, including a number of contenders for the Tory leadership, have told this government that they need to take the time to properly consult Albertans in open public hearings, why has the Premier decided to short-circuit the democratic process instead?

2:10

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the suggestion that we're short-circuiting the situation and the public hearing process. We promised that there would be public consultations. Those consultations are taking place. We don't want this, please forbid, to become a circus. We want the hearings and the public consultation process to be as impartial and nonpolitical as possible, notwithstanding the attempt by the Liberals and the NDs to make it very political, and we want to hear from Albertans as to what their ideas might be to, one, improve accessibility and choice in health care for Albertans, and two, bring health care costs in line with the rate of inflation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Energy and Utilities Board

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two of the most important things in our life are our health and our environment. Through recklessness both are easily compromised, and it is often difficult if not impossible to repair the damage. The fastest way to progress is through learning from the mistakes we and others make. Over the past years we have allowed the separation of mineral and surface rights to the detriment of landowners. To the Premier: in order to protect and treat landowners fairly, will you allow elected representation on the EUB board to make them more accountable to the citizens of this province?

Mr. Klein: On the AEUB that is a very interesting suggestion. I've often said publicly to the media: for every good suggestion there is a bad suggestion. In other words, for every action there is an equal and opposite and often negative reaction. If the hon. member will send over his suggestion, we'll consider it, but also we'll consider the cons. I don't know what they might be at this particular time, but I'm sure that as we discuss a policy change around the caucus table, there will be plenty of concerns raised.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: would you consider equal representation before the EUB board and review the compensation that landowners are entitled to when they go before the EUB board and who they can hire and pay to represent their interest?

Mr. Klein: I really don't know. I understand that the Minister of Human Resources and Employment is working on that particular situation, and maybe I'll have him respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did attend a number of meetings with that particular concern, and it's under discussion right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. To the Minister of Energy: will you protect Alberta groundwater and aquifers by extending the no-drilling or fracking zone to one mile within water aquifers until the baseline hydrogeological investigations and reports are in?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, you know, the Energy and Utilities Board has already looked at this issue. They came out with a directive to ensure the protection of the aquifers, as so mentioned. Yes, there is a great interest by industry, by the regulator, and by everybody to ensure that that happens. They have already put out directives that there are certain procedures that must occur if it's within the shallow – so it's 200 meters that is suggested. Those are the ones that have the right degree of expertise to measure and quantify those kinds of questions, and they've appropriately said.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Police and Peace Officer College

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In October Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security issued a request for proposal to build a centralized training centre for police and peace officers. I understand that 30 communities, including two from my constituency, submitted proposals to the department in December and now are anxiously awaiting word on the successful bid. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the minister provide us with an update on the status of this project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member mentioned, our department is looking to develop a single-site facility in the province of Alberta as Alberta is one of the only provinces left in Canada without a facility of this nature. We're looking at a facility to try to improve the quality of training, ensuring that the standards are superior and, of course, that it would provide training for the roughly 8,000 police and peace officers in the province.

Our department did receive an overwhelming response to the RFP that was due in the middle of this past December. We received 30 tremendous proposals with 42 different land parcel considerations within them. Due to the high number of submissions, Mr. Speaker, we need the opportunity to analyze each one in great detail, and we'll not be able to shortlist in the time period that was specified in the RFP. We did send out a letter to those 30 municipalities requesting an extension on the proposal till May 15, and we're hoping that we should have the decision made before the middle of May.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can the minister please tell us what the communities can expect to happen between this time and May 15?

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, I want to thank those communities for their interest and their support in this project as we move forward. The review committee will continue to analyze and review all of the proposals to evaluate them against the

criteria that were identified in the RFP. The short list will then be developed, and the review committee will begin interviewing and going out and actually doing physical site assessments in the communities. Again, as I mentioned, the expected deadline for the site to be selected is May 15, and obviously we hope to have that done prior to then. There still is a lot of work to be done. Each one has to be measured on its own merits, yet using the same measurement criteria to be fair to all of those 30 communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Health Care Reform

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are just 23 days left in this government's proposed consultation period on the health policy framework, yet they are asking Albertans to react to a proposal with very little substance and around which the minister has admitted, and I quote: the detailed discussion is not there. End quote. The public needs solid information, and the government is not providing any detail or evidence. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the minister ever releasing the detailed discussion of the health plan so Albertans can react to something of substance?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, last July we put on the Alberta Health web page 13 initiatives that were health policy directives that we've been following through on, everything from looking at how we spend money on drugs to health policies and looking at enhancement of goods and services: a variety of strategies. We indicated and have received Albertans' responses to that. We also visited last summer all the health regions and gathered information about things that would constitute worthy policy directions to advance new health strategies. Putting patients first: there are several ways that that can be done. In the context of this framework we hope regional health authorities respond, and we're looking for Albertans' responses so that we know what their thoughts are about the broad principles that we've provided.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: can the minister explain how keeping public costs to the rate of inflation without taking into consideration the growth in population will result in anything other than reduced services?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member opposite has hit upon one of the very difficult problems that governments, I would say not only nationally but internationally, are wrestling with. We have been very fortunate in Alberta to have sufficient funds to advance our health policies and our health strategies beyond what we've seen in any other part of Canada, but we recognize that to keep health care sustainable, we have to look at other ways of controlling the costs that we have in place for health care, whether that is the kind of initiatives that we're looking at in consolidating drug purchases or whether we make choices that are different in terms of new technologies that come on board. These policies talk about a variety of principles where people could look at whether choice and access could be delivered in other ways and get Albertans' responses before we go into further work on some of them that just may not be acceptable. We're hoping, however, that they will be.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the minister of health: can the minister explain how introducing private insurance for some surgical procedures will increase access for the average Albertan when those who have been on waiting lists of hip and knee surgeries for months or years will not even be able to purchase insurance for their procedure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:20

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we first talked about this health policy framework, we didn't talk about Alberta introducing private insurance. We talked, rather, about reducing or removing the prohibition on private insurance that exists here in Alberta and in four other provinces. We note that our neighbours to the east, Saskatchewan, do not have a prohibition against private insurance. Simply put, in this document we are not talking about instituting or changing the mix of any insurance program or any other kind of funding mechanism. We are talking about policies for delivery of care and looking at some options.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Highway 43

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 43 runs through my constituency, and traffic volumes, especially truck traffic, continue to increase. Some sections of highway 43 are yet to be twinned and are in a poor state of repair, and some sections are very dangerous. My questions are all for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. When will these sections of this highway through my constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne be finally completed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The very quick, short answer is that we are looking at the fall of 2007. There have been 376 kilometres of this road twinned. We're moving ahead with this. Over the past five to six years there has been a huge amount twinned. We currently are expecting to have 19 kilometres more twinned this upcoming year, leaving 37 kilometres yet to be twinned in the year 2007, and we truly hope that it will be done in the fall of 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. Again to the same minister. The year 2007 is two construction periods away, two complete seasons. Is there anything that could be done to speed up this process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a very interesting issue that we have here. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on how you look at it, part of highway 43 goes through a First Nations reserve. We are having a very difficult time negotiating that particular amount of land so that we can have the twinned road through that part of the reserve. Normally what would

occur in any other place in Alberta is that we would have the ability to use the Expropriation Act, but because it is on reserve lands, we do not have the ability to expropriate that land, and therefore we have to negotiate.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, what we're left with is the ability to either (a) come up with a negotiation or (b) plan a whole new route around the reserve. We would much sooner go with the existing route, which is through the reserve. It makes much more sense, would be much more beneficial for the people living on the reserve as well as for everyone else.

But through to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, it is a critically important issue, and we will do what is needed to ensure that highway 43 is completely twinned.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that soaring construction costs and lack of labour for contractors are causing many disruptions in projects throughout northern Alberta, what impact does this have on the completion of this route?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year we saw an unprecedented 25 per cent increase in the costs of our projects. That obviously has been taken into great consideration in what projects we do, what we're able to do.

In specific respect to highway 43 the biggest single issue we have is quite simply enabling us to receive the land from the negotiations. The price certainly is an issue, but that's not the biggest issue here. As I alluded to, it's obtaining the land that we need to build that road, and we will do it. There's a preferential way to do it, but there is another way that we could do it as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Workers' Compensation

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Workers' Compensation Board contracts for private health care services outside of medicare. This is a costly system, and it does not give injured workers choice of treatment or doctors. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. With planned health care reforms will the WCB maintain its expensive private contracts or will it return to the public health care system or will there be some new WCB third way allowing choice?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, there are about three questions in that question. To start with, I think we need some clarification because one of the things with workers' compensation is that we do have legislation that there is to be workers' compensation in Alberta, and that's good. The other part we need to know is that the workers' compensation program is funded 100 per cent by the employers and also administered 100 per cent by the employers. We do participate in one area of the appeals process, and even that particular process is funded by the workers' compensation with their private dollars. The workers' compensation legislation has been in place since 1918, way, way before the Canada Health Act was introduced; therefore, that process was always exempt for a number of reasons. One of them is to ensure that when an employee is injured, access to doctors' facilities is as quick as possible so they can go back to work.

Mr. Backs: The WCB does report to the minister.

A second question to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. When will the minister direct the WCB to settle the tens of thousands of long-standing, contentious claims so that these injured workers do not continue to be a huge drain on our public health care?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, that particular area, of course, has been dealt with in this House for a long, long period of time. Working with the workers' compensation, of course, we've tried to improve the existing appeals process that is in place and being used. The process that's in place will allow that for any applicant or any file that's in existence, any time you have new information, you can bring that file forward, and we'll deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the minister of health. Has the ministry of health estimated the cost to public health care caused by WCB not dealing with unsolved, unfunded, long-standing claims by these tens of thousands of injured workers, all of whom access the public system?

Ms Evans: No.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, did you want to respond?

Ms Evans: I did. I said no.

The Speaker: Oh, you did. Sorry. That was very quick. Brevity is good.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Land Expropriation

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine brought to my attention the following facts. The government of Alberta expropriated good farmland north of Calgary. The landowner was given \$45,000 per acre, which included a sizable home, a dive pool, three garages, and a western wear business and barn. In comparison, the Calgary regional health authority purchased empty, raw land for the new hospital for \$85,000 per acre. My question is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How does he explain the difference in price of those two parcels?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Quite simply, what we do is do the fair market appraised value any time land expropriation is undertaken. There is a difference in what occurred for the south Calgary hospital. That land was not expropriated. It was involved in a deal with the old Bow Valley site. The city took over the Bow Valley site, and they subsequently turned over some of the land in south Calgary to us for the site of the hospital.

So, Mr. Speaker, quite simply, the land was not expropriated. We have a policy in my department that it is always fair market value that is what is being paid to the particular person when land is expropriated.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question goes to the same minister. Why, my constituent asks, was the land for the hospital not expropriated based on the expropriated price of the land in the north?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, in whatever community we have in Alberta, there is a significant difference between where the land is situated. Land that is situated on the west of the city is not necessarily worth the same as what is located on the east of the city. Therefore, we undertake fair market value, which is an assessment through the estimators, through the real estate agents of what the value of that land actually is. We subsequently, then, expropriate it according to the value of the land.

Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, through to the hon. member, the value of the two parcels of land, where they sat and physical location, was significantly different, which accounted for the difference in price.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the same minister. What factual assurance can the minister provide that the owner of the land parcel in the north of Calgary was fairly treated and our public money was not overspent for the land in the south of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a very interesting tale that occurred in the land in north Calgary. We were trying to negotiate with the particular owner of the land for two years, and we could not come to a negotiated price. Subsequently, we went and expropriated the land, and a price was established. That price was roughly \$45,000 an acre. What then occurred is that this particular case was taken to court. In the court case the judge actually stated that the value was a fair market value, but he then ordered us to pay above the fair market value for the movement of the houses and some of the inconvenience. In general, what that person actually received was very close to right around a million dollars for the land that was in northern Calgary. This was determined to be the fair actual price by a judge when it came to the expropriation.

I really must stress, Mr. Speaker, that we try to give fair market value. I think that when it comes to the beneficiary of that price, it's important that we have a transparent process to ensure that they get the proper price for their land. In this particular case I have no hesitation in saying that that is exactly what happened with your constituent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Northeast Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservative government recently announced that the northeast leg of Calgary's ring road would be built as a so-called P3. This government never learns. The southeast Edmonton ring road was first announced as a \$300 million project; 16 months later the cost of building the road as a P3 had ballooned to almost half a billion dollars, the triumph of ideology over common sense. My question is, of course, to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How are Albertans

supposed to know whether it makes good budgetary sense to build the northeast Calgary ring road as a P3 when the minister is refusing to disclose the comparative cost of using conventional public financing to build this section of the road?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really feel that I must address the hon. member's preamble. The difference between the \$300 million and the \$478 million public-sector comparator on the Anthony Henday was a change in scope. The public-sector comparator was \$478 million, with the bid coming in at \$493 million. I will also draw the Assembly's attention to my previous answer, when I stated that the cost of construction went up 25 per cent last year. By us doing the Anthony Henday as a P3, we saved the taxpayers of Alberta 25 per cent, or roughly \$125 million.

In direct response to the hon. member's question, the reason that the public comparator is not being brought forward until one month before the bids are opened is so that no one can say that we have been gerrymandering the bids, that no one can say that we were gerrymandering the price. That bid on the public-sector comparator will be given to the Department of Justice, and they will all be opened at the same time. The three bids that will be from the private sector as well as our public-sector comparator will be opened at exactly the same time.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, to come back: won't the minister admit that the real reason for keeping secret – it is very unusual to do this – the comparative costs of public financing to build the northeast Calgary road is because the minister knows full well that this will be more expensive, just as the Henday was? That's why he's keeping quiet. He got burned last time.

Dr. Oberg: Actually, Mr. Speaker, that's absolutely false. That is not true. Quite simply, everyone in this Assembly knows that if we went out and said that a project is going to be worth \$500 million, I will guarantee to you that we will not get a bid under \$500 million. We are going to bring out that public-sector comparator, which is going to be our comparator on the work that is being done, a month before. We will have it sealed, and it will be opened at the same time. The other key component here is that if the private-sector bids are not competitive with the public-sector comparator, then they will not be accepted.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the minister, as we know from the Henday, was totally off base on his estimates on Anthony Henday. Won't he admit to this Assembly that that's the real reason we're not looking at the public-sector comparator right now? That's the real reason.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I'll reiterate. We were off base. If we would have done it by conventional financing, it would have been \$125 million higher.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans demand a fair share for their resources through proper royalty rates. The Crown revenue share, the portion of industry's annual net operating revenue that is paid to the Crown as royalty, has decreased 4 per cent since

2001, meaning that millions of dollars have not been collected that should have been collected for the Alberta treasury. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. When oil and gas companies are posting millions of dollars in record profits, why is it necessary for this government to continue to provide more than \$100 million annually in financial assistance through tax credits? Even the Auditor General reports this in his latest report.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, on the first issue, with respect to the percentage rate of return, that's a general, overall averaged rate given all the different royalty structures we have for oil sands, for conventional, and the like. That has been impacted by the substantive increase in the oil sands activity. As you know, our generic royalty regime is 1 per cent until payout, so because those projects are coming on in greater quantity and production, it's lowering the overall average rate today, but it's going to substantively help increase the royalties in the future. That rate was all designed to help us attract the investment so that we could have that long-term viability.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister – and this has got nothing to do with the oil sands royalty program – why is it necessary to continue to reduce royalties by over a half a billion dollars annually through 10 different oil and gas royalty reduction programs when these resources are being sold at record prices?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I might speak to one in particular; for example, the deep gas royalty holiday that was put in place to help us ensure that we get at the hard-to-find, difficult areas, very marginal, substantially high-cost exploration wells that haven't been found. Our royalty structures are put in place to help ensure that we get value and find and recover any and all of those resources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Finance. How can this government continue to underfund long-term care when millions of dollars in royalty revenue are being left uncollected by this government?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I would unequivocally disagree with this hon. member that we are leaving royalty revenue uncollected. The energy industry has a long and important history of contributing to the economic well-being of this province, and everybody in this Assembly knows that. However, there have been a number of programs that have been put in place over the years for a particular situation, one of which the minister just explained now. There are many different royalty structures. There are challenges in securing some pools of gas or oil, and some of these structures were put in place at that time. These are negotiated over a period of time in good faith to serve a purpose.

I would say to the hon. member that the amount of revenue that we collect from the oil and gas industry in this province speaks to the success of the programs that we have, unlike some provinces that have the same energy source that we do but have not contributed to it by reducing taxes, improving royalty programs, and encouraging economic activity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:40 Urban Aboriginal Strategy

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary has the

fourth largest aboriginal population in Canada, and my constituency of Calgary-McCall has the second largest aboriginal population in Calgary. As I discuss quality-of-life matters with my constituents, I am appalled at a number of issues affecting the well-being of aboriginal people in Calgary. Furthermore, I'm surprised there isn't a clear understanding of the Calgary urban aboriginal strategy. My first question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. What is the Calgary urban aboriginal strategy, and how is the policy impacting aboriginal people of Calgary?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the urban aboriginal strategy is actually a federal government strategy. Alberta signed on just so that we can make sure that we would implement it with the municipalities as well as with aboriginal communities. There are a number of reasons to do that. We wanted to make sure we establish the process to effectively address the needs of the aboriginal people of Calgary, in this case, and other cities but also to make sure that we built on what was already there, what was needed, and why some of those programs were not working.

On the second issue, Mr. Speaker, there have been some real projects that have come out as a result of the urban aboriginal strategy. Just to give you an idea, I'll just list off some of the litany of programs that I do have, and I think it's really important to see this. First of all, I would say the Centre for Suicide Prevention, and that's to make sure the development and implementation of the aboriginal suicide prevention workshops in Calgary occurred; secondly, the Alexandra health centre, where lunch and learn, the aboriginal cultural awareness training for health professionals and other professionals in Calgary, is occurring; and of course the Awo Taan Native Women's Shelter, where we have the pediatric health initiative to support the shelter, of course, and their clinic in providing community liaison health services to residents of the shelter.

Mr. Shariff: My first supplemental is also to the same minister. Given that the urban aboriginal population is young, mobile, and growing in numbers in cities, what initiative is the minister working on to help these young people transition into city life?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this is really important when we're talking about the aboriginal community. I just want to give a plug for the AUMA and the AAMD and C in wanting to build better relationships with the aboriginal community. They've done an excellent job, of course, through the AWPI, which we're now working on with the various municipalities. Thirdly, we have a number of programs that we've been working with, and I want to be able to talk about those.

First of all, the NAPI ambassador program connects aboriginal youth currently in junior and senior high school with aboriginal ambassadors to provide accurate information in accessing higher education. Of course, the Boys and Girls Club of Calgary also focuses on creating cultural development programs for aboriginal youth in the Bowness and Forest Lawn areas.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, not wanting to make this the puffball question, I would ask the minister if she wants to add any additional information to what she has already answered.

The Speaker: Go ahead. Thirty seconds.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this is really important. First of all, we also have what we call the business etiquette and job finding skills. The Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth will conduct

workshops on business etiquette, job finding, and of course résumé writing for aboriginal youth. The Chinook Lodge, through SAIT, provides academic learner services to aboriginal students. There are a whole litany of areas that we've been working on, and I'll file those at some point in time if you would like.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, in the election of 1921 Irene Parlyb was elected as a member of the United Farmers of Alberta in the constituency of Lacombe. She was to be re-elected in the elections of 1926 and 1930 and served to 1935. In 1921 Irene Parlyb was appointed minister without portfolio and served in that capacity until 1935. She was the first woman to be appointed to an Alberta cabinet position.

It was not until 1973 that the first woman cabinet minister was appointed with a full portfolio. Helen Hunley was elected as a Progressive Conservative in 1971 in the constituency of Rocky Mountain House and in 1973 was appointed Solicitor General. She won re-election in 1975 and served to 1979.

Irene Parlyb was to play a leading role in the Persons Case. Helen Hunley was appointed Alberta's 12th Lieutenant Governor in 1985, the first woman appointed to that position in Alberta, and served until 1991. Irene Parlyb died on July 12, 1965. Helen Hunley lives in semiretirement in Alberta.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of several members.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it's a little bit unfortunate; I think my guests did have to leave, but for the record they're still in the building somewhere. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from my constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Visiting the Leg. today from Sylvan Lake was a bright group of 58 students in grade 6 from Fox Run school along with their teachers John Fielder and Karen Adair and teacher assistant Renee Deacon. Within that group I would also like to give a special welcome to parent helpers Lorie Johanson, Frank McLean, Tina Thiel, Karen McCartney, Deb Schultz, and Lynne Breton. Lynne is the daughter of Louise Kamuchik, Clerk Assistant here in the Legislature. Her grandson Dillon was here also. Well, I think they've left, Mr. Speaker, so thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Similarly, my visitors have already left, but I did recognize up in the gallery someone who I met quite a while back at Climate Change Central. It was Scott Fleming from Teletrips, and he was accompanied by Gord Olsen. It was just good to see them here. Thank you.

head: **Members' Statements**
Canadian Agricultural Safety Week

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, today until March 14 is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. The theme this year, Farm Safety is My Business, reflects the attitude that farm safety is a personal responsibility and starts with each and every one of us on the farm.

Mr. Speaker, from 1985 to 2004 there was an average of 18 farm-

related deaths on the farm in Alberta. On average four of those yearly deaths involved children under 18 years old, 87 per cent were male, and 70 per cent of the incidents involved farm machinery.

One of the most powerful teaching tools that exists is leading by example, Mr. Speaker, and that applies to ag and farm safety too. Management, not labour, shapes everyone's attitude towards safety. Proper training, identifying hazards, and managing risk are vital to today's agriculture industry. Remaining vigilant is an ongoing process and an important element in workplace and agricultural safety.

I'd like to congratulate the organizers, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Farm Credit Corporation, for choosing Alberta for their western launch, held on March 6 in Olds at Olds College farm shop. I also want to congratulate the organizers and sponsors on their focus this year on 15- to 25-year-old individuals. Youth makes up a significant portion of new farm workers, and with the least experience they are most at risk, Mr. Speaker. It is farm safety for the sake of the future.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, March 8 to 14: I hope everyone is aware and safe. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

First-aid Assistance at St. Benedict School

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to recognize a group of heroes in my constituency. On February 24 of this year during a dance and silent auction at St. Benedict elementary school in the city of Leduc a parent attending the event suddenly collapsed. His breathing was laboured, and it was apparent that he was in need of medical attention.

2:50

Four people present – Audrey Hochhausen, Amanda Garneau, Susan Yacyna, and Karen Bibaud – came to his aid. All four are proud members of the nursing profession, and they immediately recognized the serious nature of his condition. Without hesitation they put their skills to use, providing first aid until emergency response staff arrived to transport this gentleman to the hospital. During this critical time the teaching staff at St. Ben's also performed admirably, maintaining control of the youth and parents present, keeping everyone calm, and giving these ladies the room they needed to work.

Mr. Speaker, without the intervention of everyone involved, this gentleman would not have survived. He remains in hospital but is expected to be discharged fairly soon. I would ask the members of the House to join me in recognizing and congratulating not only these four women for their quick action that saved the life of a stranger but also the staff of St. Benedict school who helped to control the situation and provide support. Together they averted what could have been a tragedy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Amanda Ammar

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a young lady from Onoway, Amanda Ammar, who represented our country at the 2006 Olympics in Italy. Amanda was born on February 6, 1986, in St. Albert and soon moved to Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. She was only three years old when she first took up cross-country skiing and was the youngest member ever to train with the Onoway Jackrabbits. Skiing distances of 15 and 55

kilometers as an 11-year-old, this “racing rabbit” showed great promise and joined the Edmonton nordic club.

Amanda made herself well known as a rising star with outstanding abilities during her next years, becoming an Alberta provincial champion and earning the honour of representing the Canadian junior national team. When Amanda’s positive attitude, hard work, and outstanding skills led to a magical call telling her she would be representing Canada on the cross-country Olympic ski team in Torino, Italy, a dream had truly been realized.

Back in grade 1 Amanda drew a picture of herself beside a mountain embedded with the five Olympic rings, and now, as a 20-year-old, she is the youngest person ever to represent the Canadian cross-country Olympic ski team. Of course, Amanda’s family has supported her every step of the way, and we can only imagine the pride they all felt when they watched her dream come true in Italy.

Amanda now trains at the world-class facilities of Canmore Nordic Centre, where she also receives world-class coaching and is aiming for the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver and beyond. This dedicated Albertan truly has a remarkable future ahead of her, and the town of Onoway, the constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne, the province of Alberta, and all of Canada should be very proud of her. On behalf of all my colleagues congratulations and best of luck, Amanda. We’ll be watching in four years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

National Child Care Program

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to once again speak to this House about the importance of a strong, well-supported child care sector in Alberta. Today child care workers and concerned parents have organized a rally in Calgary and one that will take place outside the House this evening. Some of them are our visitors here today.

Albertans recognize the threat that Prime Minister Harper’s new program represents to our own child care program in Alberta. That plan would have several negative impacts on these workers. Most obviously, it would result in an end to the provincial funding that helped raise child care workers’ wages to more respectable levels. Many families will no longer be able to afford child care. This will result in closure of some child care facilities and in some parents leaving the workforce. I, for one, am willing to voice my support for the child care sector in Alberta in demanding that this provincial government remain committed to the principles that guided the five-point plan.

The Premier has already stated that he is in support of Mr. Harper, in support of ending provincial supports to the child care sector. The hon. Minister of Children’s Services has not yet stated her position. I’m asking the hon. minister to respect the commitments that this government made to the child care sector in Alberta. There are thousands of Albertans, thousands of families in this province, that will be negatively impacted by the federal Conservative plan.

In closing, I encourage all of the members of this House to voice support for the child care sector in Alberta and in doing so show Ottawa that we value the wonderful work that they do in our province. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Youth Networks

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to discuss Alberta’s youth networks. As I have

mentioned many times, youth are the future of this province, and their input is very valuable.

Mr. Speaker, a youth network is a committee of youth who have met often to identify social, health, community, and economic issues affecting youth. These networks provide our youth with a chance to work with local and provincial authorities in finding solutions to address different issues and challenges that youth face. They also allow Alberta’s young people to give feedback on the services provided to youth in their own communities.

These youth networks have been very successful to date. In region 1 the southern youth network advisory panel hosted a youth forum to aid their children and family services authority in its business planning process. This gave the authority a chance to hear directly from the youth in the region and to use their comments in any upcoming regional initiatives.

In region 6 the coalition of street youth have been working to come up with a magazine targeted at high-risk youth.

Another group, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta prevention of bullying youth committee, is working hard to address the challenging issue of bullying. They have taken action by working on an antibullying awareness campaign for youth.

These are just examples of the great work that these individuals in our youth network do for our communities. Through these youth networks our youth are becoming involved in their communities and are able to support their future growth and success.

Thank you so much for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Health Care Reform Public Consultation

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government confuses the term “communication” with ‘con-munication.’ For a number of years this government has dabbled and doublespoken about the importance of preserving the Canada Health Act while undermining the public system. It has spoken about delisting services, reconsidering what is medically necessary for coverage, and, most recently, to what extent it can offload its public responsibility onto private insurance companies. To aid in its public health betrayal, it hired the private insurance company Aon at a cost of over 1 million taxpayer dollars to help the government disassemble their public system.

Six years ago this government, after two previous attempts, used closure to finally ram through Bill 11 legislation. On the Legislature grounds thousands of Albertans protested the government’s refusal to listen. Approximately 10,000 protestors gathered at the AgriCom in Edmonton while between 4,000 to 5,000 gathered at the Corral in Calgary.

This people’s parliament, the Legislature, was turned into a lock-down mode reminiscent of the storming of the Bastille. Perhaps this is why the Conservative king, who barely escaped with his life, confuses public consultation with confrontation. Three times this week he has crowed his reluctance to attend public forums as meetings with peasants and plebeians, Marthas and Henrys can be rather raucous affairs. If this government truly wanted to hear from Albertans on its proposed third-way plans, it would leave the security of its legislative castle and mix with the masses.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on a Standing Order 40 application.

Mr. Martin: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move Standing Order 40 on the Order Paper for debate later on.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of six of the many letters we have received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens. These letters voice serious concerns surrounding the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I am tabling today are from M. Golberg, George Bruseker, Christa Gilroy, Bill Gilroy, Lonnie Varze, Ella McEvoy.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of seven of the many letters I have received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens. These letters voice serious concerns surrounding the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I am tabling today are from Amanda Rintisch, Bozena Kurzatkowski, Michele Yankowski, C.P. Whyayazski,* Donna Alexander, Lana Sinclair, and Evelyn Blain.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods to table the appropriate number of copies of seven of the many letters that she received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens. These letters voice serious concerns surrounding Prime Minister Harper's rash decision to cancel the national daycare agreement. The letters are from Jody Matwichuk, Lori Engman, James Grant, Connie Bowie, Candace Diker,* Fiona McLellan, and Dr. Isabelle Chapados.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three tablings today. The first is on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Official Opposition, which is a copy of the letter sent to the Premier requesting a public, televised, all-party debate on the government's third-way plans.

The second tabling is from Marc Brisbourne, who is a constituent in my riding, with concerns around particularly item 9 in the government's health policy framework: paying for choice and access. He feels that this will lead to better care for higher incomes and that the ability to pay for treatment should not be a criteria, how much you can pay.

The final one is from Denis Arrowchaser, who believes that the "private section medical care will produce longer waits in the public section We should just continue to fix the current system."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, during question period on Monday, March 4, I undertook to provide a further response to the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Rutherford regarding consultant contracts. I am pleased to table today five copies of that additional information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of six of the many letters I've received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens. These letters voice serious concerns surrounding the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I am tabling today are from Aliya Ashraf, Stacie Nikoloyuk,* Gina Del Brocco, Cindy Stork, Monique Allen, and Terry Yahnke.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters we received concerning the cancellation of the national daycare program. They are from Rae-Anne Richard, Kayla Herman, Arash Riahi, Laura Fulmer, Gracy Cysouvic,* and Laurie Ethier.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from the Warden family, a very disappointed response to the protection for persons in care report. I have the requisite five copies for the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Pastoor: I have another one. Sorry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. My second one is a letter to the Premier from the Alberta Association of Rehabilitation Centres, in which their contention is that "community services to people with developmental disabilities are in crisis." I have the five requisite copies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another tabling, from my constituent Mr. Jim Sexsmith, who is a veteran and retired, living on a very low income. He is concerned about affordable, low-income housing for veterans. He's urging the government to take action and help find an affordable place for retired veterans like himself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a document called The Daily, published every day by Stats Canada. This one is dated March 7. It's a summary of the findings of a report called Women in Canada, which finds that while women are closing the education gap with men, they still tend to earn less and be at higher risk of living in poverty. These disparities are especially predominant for women who come from visible minority groups.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you gave notice of a motion that I gather wants to be introduced by the leader of the third party. Is that correct?

Mr. Martin: That's correct.

The Speaker: Okay. This is a Standing Order 40 application, so I would ask the hon. leader of the third party to read the motion into the record and explain briefly the condition. Then I intend on calling the question.

Health Reform Public Consultation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The motion is:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately establish a committee for the purposes of holding public hearings in all regions of the province on the government's health policy framework, February 2006, and, further, that the committee should

- (a) include committee members from each of the parties represented in the Legislature,
 - (b) have the authority to hold public meetings and establish other parameters for an open and transparent public hearing process, and
 - (c) report on its findings at the fall 2006 session of the Legislative Assembly
- and, further, that no legislation implementing the government's so-called third way in health reform is introduced to the Legislative Assembly until the committee's work is completed.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the motion is extremely urgent. Albertans have consistently told us that health care is the issue that they care most about. It is the largest expenditure item in the annual budgets of the province, and people's lives depend on it. There is obviously a great deal at stake. Public opinion polls have shown repeatedly that the public wishes to retain the single-payer public health care system that we have in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the government's health care agenda seems to have a timeline of its own. There are very dramatic reforms, so-called reforms, being proposed which will undermine, in our view, the public health care system in this country that has served us very well for 40 years. Yet Albertans are entirely shut out of the process.

I'm asking that the Assembly debate this motion immediately because the consultation process introduced by the government will not provide opportunities for public input prior to the legislation being introduced. The government has indicated that they wish to introduce the legislation sometime early in April, Mr. Speaker. They've indicated that there is a four-week window for what they call consultation, of which three weeks are left, yet most Albertans are as yet unfamiliar with the government's proposals. So the timelines are very short before this legislation is going to be introduced.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is critical that before the government introduces this legislation for what they've indicated is going to be essentially a two-tier health care system, that the public has an opportunity, as the government has promised, to find out about the details of the government's proposals and to provide comment to the government. The process that has been set in place by the government does not allow this. In fact, it has been largely used as an opportunity or as an excuse to avoid answering detailed questions from Albertans and from the opposition on the question.

Given that the government had been unwilling to debate health care during the last election, promised consultations, those consultations have not occurred, the legislation is being drafted as we speak, and there is no meaningful public consultation process that allows

Albertans in their own communities to provide input with respect to this, I consider it a most urgent matter, that the Assembly should deal with this motion and establish an all-party committee of the Legislature to hold public hearings around the province and submit its report to this Assembly and to the government prior to legislation being introduced which will dramatically and radically transform our public health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: **3:10 Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Interim Supply Estimates 2006-07
General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund**

The Deputy Chair: We shall begin with the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to the interim supply estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. What we are asking for today is \$832,400,000 for operating expenses as well as another \$207 million, which end up being for capital expenses.

I won't take a lot of time today. Quite simply, the first number, the \$835 million, is broken down as follows. There are \$400 million for the municipal partnership grants. These are grants that will be going out in the first two months, prior to the budget being passed. There are \$25 million more for capital and accommodation projects. These are for rent. These are for upgrading. The capital amount, in short, is for doing what the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation does each and every day. The rest of the \$835 million is simply two-twelfths of my operating budget, which allows me to actually pay my staff and, again, to do the things that we need to do in Infrastructure and Transportation.

There are also \$207.8 million in capital investment. This is for road projects that are presently being done. As the hon. member knows, under conventional financing we do have to pay for these as they are being done, and we do not want to nor wish to delay any road projects for two months in our very short construction season while the budget is being passed.

Mr. Chair, that's what the dollars are being used for. If there are any questions, I'd be more than happy to take them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to participate in debate this afternoon on the interim supply estimates for 2006-07. Certainly, when we look at this and the hon. minister innocently states that this is one-sixth, or two-twelfths, of the annual budget, well, then you would think that there shouldn't be any problems.

However, one looks at the spending habits of this particular government now and what they used to be, what they were at one time. When the current Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was first a representative in this Legislative Assembly, this government had a very, very bad spending habit. Then they had a curious habit of reducing significant expenditures in core areas, which today we are still facing the consequences of. Because of this overspend-

ing and this notion that we could have special warrants and the fact that perhaps money did grow on trees – everyone but the government seemed to know that this wasn't true – we had to have dramatic cuts in government expenditure. No one denied that that should occur, but how it should occur was a significant topic for debate.

Now, I said before that we've cut the health care budget. We cut the budget towards public education. Certainly, the infrastructure budget was reduced. We're still playing catch-up on that. How much catch-up? Well, even the hon. minister was just in the last fiscal year talking about borrowing money. Yes, borrowing money. I don't know if he had your permission or not, Minister of Finance, but he was talking about it. I don't know if the hon. Minister of Finance had been consulted on this borrowing that was anticipated or thought about by the minister, but the infrastructure deficit was first reported to be \$3 billion, then it went to \$4 billion, and then it went up past \$7 billion. So that is yet another example of some of the previous planning that has occurred with this Progressive Conservative government.

Now, how concerned should we be about that, and how concerned should we be about this whenever we're discussing the interim supply amounts to be voted, Mr. Chairman? Well, we only have to have a look at the Order Paper from last week. This is the Order Paper from day 3, Monday, February 27. We can just review some of the motions here, but certainly Motion 514 has caught my eye and caught the eye of a lot of different Albertans. The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright has obviously some concerns about government spending and government spending habits. This motion reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Government to introduce legislation to ensure that all budget surpluses or unbudgeted revenue from a given fiscal year be held in a holding account until its allocation is debated by the Legislative Assembly the following fiscal year.

Motion 514 indicates to me that there is concern on the government side of the House as to how this whole process of budgeting is working.

Now, when we discuss interim supply for Infrastructure and Transportation, how confident can we be that next fall, for instance, we're not going to be looking for more money for this department? Infrastructure repairs and infrastructure construction are certainly necessary. It is a vital, vital department. In light of the poor planning that's gone on, how much extra we are paying now for infrastructure is the question.

The hon. minister talked earlier about the allocations and also talked earlier in question period about the 25 per cent increase in construction costs. Well, I haven't got, in my view, an adequate answer yet from the minister in regard to the \$40 million-plus cost overruns on the flyway intersecting the Queen Elizabeth II highway, the old highway 2, and the Anthony Henday Drive project. The hon. minister was certainly forthwith – and I appreciate this – with the information in regard to the inappropriate rumble strips that appeared below the overpass on highway 2, where it was considered by myself and many other motorists to be unsafe and unacceptable on a relatively new road. I appreciate the minister's clarification on that matter, but I'm still after the details on why that cost overrun was so significant. It could not all be attributed to the increases in the cost of cement.

3:20

Now, earlier today the minister talked in question period, as I said, about the 25 per cent increase in construction costs. I had an urge to go down – and I just haven't had an opportunity – to the library and get the *Alberta Gazette* and see what percentage increase there is in the private-sector contracts that have been approved by the Treasury

Board, some of the increases that would have occurred there and for what reasons, because the *Alberta Gazette* is really a snapshot into how this government operates and how this government spends money. I would not be surprised to see in the *Alberta Gazette* where some of the contract budget increases and extensions have been for less than that 25 per cent figure, and many would be over that 25 per cent figure.

Dr. Oberg: That's why 25 is an average.

Mr. MacDonald: A 25 per cent increase is now an average, Mr. Chairman.

The high cost of steel is used as an excuse. I was astonished when I was doing some research on this outfit called Shanghai Construction, that is being used to import temporary foreign workers to this province. This outfit, Shanghai Construction: not only are they busy doing construction projects, but they're also a manufacturer of steel and steel products. I was astonished to read on the Internet that their profit margin had changed because the price of steel had decreased. I keep hearing from many different sectors in this hot economy in Alberta that the price of steel is going very high, and I found that contradictory, that this outfit was complaining that their profit margins had to be readjusted because the price of steel was going down. So if there are any buyers out there of steel and steel products, I would urge them to perhaps contact this outfit and see what their prices are.

Now, that shouldn't be used as an excuse. Steel prices should not be used as an excuse for increased construction costs. I find it astonishing that it would be. Even if it's an average of 25 per cent, I think our construction companies and our construction managers are much more able and capable of making decisions on and off the site, and I don't think that is necessary.

Mr. Chairman, when we look at the interim supply budget under Infrastructure and Transportation, we think of the bridges. We think of the roads that need repair. Certainly, this hon. member is quite satisfied with the explanation from the hon. minister in regard to looking after his staff. That's one place where I think we need to ensure that people are well compensated.

Government employees: there are certainly significant pressures to attract them to the private sector. If we have design engineers and we have planners working in the department, I think we should make sure that they are well looked after financially, or the minister will be working there past midnight by himself. They'd all be gone to the oil and gas sector. These are competent, able people, and we have to make sure that their compensation is adequate. I have some questions about some of the deputy ministers and people like that, Mr. Chairman – don't get me wrong – about some of their bonuses and whatnot, but we have to make sure that Alberta government employees are well looked after financially and that they are satisfied with their workload and their employment conditions.

We talked earlier about the budget process and the fact that we are now looking at this interim supply, of course, until the budget is introduced. I assumed, like everyone else, that the whole budget process started in November, but much to my surprise when I received a leak – and I was grateful for receiving the leak – on the Department of Energy's budget, I saw that the budget documents were going before private, government-members-only standing policy committees in October. I thought this whole process started after Remembrance Day, but certainly I was wrong.

Dr. Oberg: We'll make sure you get your leaks.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate that.

If this process is starting in October, it's much sooner than I thought. There shouldn't be any reason at all why the budget could not come much sooner. It would not be necessary to have this debate this afternoon on interim supply.

That goes back, Mr. Chairman, to the concern that I had earlier about the long-term planning of this government and the worry that's reflected in Motion 514, the worry that government spending is out of control. I know that the size of the government has increased – and we've talked about this before – but we need to make sure that we're satisfying all interested parties: taxpayers, the Taxpayers Federation, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the opposition parties, everyone. If we had better long-term planning by this government, I think we would have better confidence in the entire process, and we would see that confidence expressed by the citizens.

Now, this money is simply to carry the government through until its budget. It's an allowance, if we could call it that. Whenever your children, Mr. Chairman, are quite free with their allowance, one has a tendency to watch it more closely. This is the same with this government. It has to be watched very, very closely to ensure that this money is being spent when and where it is needed.

We're having this debate on the sustainability of health care. Public health care, according to government cabinet ministers, is no longer sustainable. I would beg to differ. Certainly, we're going to see in this budget for this respective ministry some money being spent on public health care facilities for the public good. But when we look back at how some of this money has been spent in the past, one has to wonder.

I would like to have my copy of the public accounts before me to see if, for instance, IBM has been getting any money for supplies and services from the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. I certainly know they're getting money from the department of health. In fact, we looked at the third-quarter update, and there was a significant increase in the third-quarter update on the amount of money we're spending on the electronic health records. I wonder what part of that budget, if any, is going to be directed toward IBM. Maybe I will get the answer to that question through the course of debate. I would appreciate it.

3:30

Certainly, Mr. Chairman, this interim supply budget is an example of a government that needs to spend a little bit more time on long-term planning. Now, last week I believe I compared this government to what I considered a hockey team where everybody wants to be the captain. The current captain is slowing down a bit, not on the power play as often as he used to be. He certainly still scores, but the 50-goal seasons are past. There are a couple of people, some of them playing on the same line, some of them I would consider good right-wingers, some of them more to the centre, and some of them to the left with their spending habits, you know, but they all have their eye on the C, on the captaincy. I think that may be one of the reasons, Mr. Chairman, why we are seeing this obvious lack of attention to detail in budget planning. This is why we are having this discussion, this debate, this afternoon on the interim supply estimates for fiscal year 2006-07.

The team needs an allowance. They certainly do. But how much? The minister's reasons earlier in debate certainly were valid. I think it is good that the overall department is essentially going to be looked after. Now, whether one-sixth of the budget is enough for the year for the department itself, that's hard to say, but certainly we can't say no when we look at the infrastructure deficit that has occurred in this province because of long-term planning.

I said in the Assembly here before, Mr. Chairman, that we only

have to go 400 metres east of here to see the rusting rebar poking through the concrete from the bridge over the North Saskatchewan River. There is significant pressure to have not only that bridge but other bridges repaired. We need to get on with a lot of things. Other parts of the country may look with envy at the budget surplus, but we need to continue to build this province through the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would just like to address a couple of the points that were brought up by the hon. member. First of all, I thank the hon. member for alluding to the amount that we pay our civil servants. I, too, concur that we are in a very hot economy. My deputy minister, for example, is a structural bridge engineer, and structural bridge engineers are very highly sought after in the private sector. Therefore, we do have to ensure that they are compensated well enough so that we can take their full attributes within the government system.

A couple of other comments I would make though. I know that it's probably for no reason other than that the hon. member has never been in the government, but we actually start our process in about June or July of the year prior to the budget. I start my business planning process in June where we go through complete discussions with the department about the business plan. That starts in June and moves through to July and August. We do not necessarily receive our final dollar amounts until later on in October, November.

The whole budget process is a lot more than simply receiving a dollar amount from Treasury Board. It does take a lot of planning; it takes a lot of time. Quite simply, it's usually around an eight- or nine-month process. Then ultimately what has to happen – and I'm sure the Finance minister can speak for herself – is that it has to be printed. It has to be made sure that there are no mistakes.

The hon. member was talking about the interim supply. Quite simply, Mr. Chair, if the budget were announced – and it's my understanding that the budget has been announced for the end of March – and if the opposition were to simply say, "We agree with the budget, and we don't need to debate it," so that we can get it in by April 1 and get it done, then the hon. member is absolutely correct: we wouldn't have to do interim supply. We could simply say: yes, thank you very much, and thank you for recognizing our very comprehensive budgeting process. It would simply be passed, and we would be able to get on with business. But this side believes in full democracy, and we're going to debate the bill. We're going to take a look at each specific department, which is going to take around 24 or 25 days, a day for each department or a session for each department. That is the reason, quite simply, why we need the interim supply. As the hon. member correctly stated, we have to keep on building the infrastructure. We have to keep on with what is happening in Alberta.

The only other comment that I would make is about the issue of the 25 per cent cost increase. Over the past nine or 10 years the construction costs have been averaging around 3 or 4 per cent. All of a sudden last year it went up 25 per cent, and that was for a combination of reasons. What you saw – and I apologize for the allusion – was a perfect storm coming together. You had a shortage of labour, and the labour prices were going up significantly. You had a shortage of steel, and the steel prices were going up as well. The third thing which happened is that we actually ran out of cement in this province, and the shortage of cement actually also led to the increase in costs. So you had this whole vortex of three or four different things that all hit at once, which led to this inflationary

pressure of 25 per cent. That is something that was in both the public sector as well as the private sector, and those numbers are certainly recognized.

The hon. member made another interesting comment about the price of steel. I, too, have seen that the price of steel may well be coming down. This was not expected by our industry; it was not expected by us. There are so many factors that deal with what is happening in China and what is happening with the steel manufacturers of the world that it was very difficult to perceive. It's difficult to perceive that this is going to be a long-term trend and we'll actually get back down to the prices that we were paying four or five years ago. Or is it simply a downturn because economies around the world have become so overheated that they have bought the steel, and simply they are not buying more right now? So it's very difficult to establish what exactly the reason and rationale are.

I have heard rumours that the country of China last year utilized roughly 200,000 metric tonnes of steel and that, in fact, that may rise to 400,000 metric tonnes. I don't know if that is true or not. The issue is that it's a supply-and-demand market, and my understanding is that the supply of steel in the world has actually increased to the point where we are seeing a bit of a decline in price. As I stated earlier, Mr. Chair, I don't know if this is going to continue. I don't know if we're going to continue to see this.

What I will suggest, though, and what our industry counterparts are telling us is that the 25 per cent is not going to be the norm. We're not going to be seeing 25 per cent inflationary pressures over the next year. As a matter of fact, we're in the process of budgeting around 6 per cent, so we hope that we are over. We hope that it will be under that, but we are budgeting for a 6 per cent inflationary trend.

Mr. Chair, the hon. member has hit exactly what the issues are. We're asking for this money simply to keep our department running for the next two months as well as for the grants to other organizations such as municipalities. That's why we're asking for the dollars. For us to lose two months in April and May would be absolutely catastrophic for the road building industry as well as the infrastructure construction industry in Alberta. Therefore, we do have to continue. We do need the interim supply. I thank the member for his comments.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we all admit that we have in this province right now an infrastructure deficit, but I think the blame, frankly, has to go back to when we got preoccupied. To me there are three sorts of deficits you always have to balance off in government: the social deficit, and we're talking about the human services; the bottom-line deficit, which we got preoccupied with in the '93, '94, '95 period; and of course the infrastructure deficit. There has to be a balance there. I would suggest that we lost that balance and concentrated only on one area at that time.

The problem that that created – and I think the minister would agree – is that now we are facing a massive infrastructure deficit, so we're playing catch-up. Unfortunately, when you do that, the catch-up becomes more expensive because now we're into the boom economy. The minister alluded to it. We're into the boom – shortages of labour, steel, and cement, I think, are things that he talked about – but certainly when you're in a boom, the costs go up. We know that.

3:40

It would have been much better to have at least balanced that off during the times early on in the '90s. Some of these needed infrastructure projects would have come in much lower at that time.

There's no doubt about that. So now we're playing catch-up, and it's a matter of how much you can do in any given year. That's where we're at. I would hope that in the future we would recognize that we can't put all the eggs in the one basket.

It's had an impact on health care and education, and I'd think that a previous Minister of Education would recognize that. So, hopefully, we've learned from that situation that there has to be a balance.

I want to just follow up with P3s though. The minister is an ardent advocate of P3s, even though I think that even he would admit that the history has not been very promising. In Nova Scotia a Conservative government got rid of them after a Liberal government brought them in. In Britain they've been a disaster. We've even had some experiences here with the Calgary courthouse and so forth.

I want to go to what I was trying to get at in question period about Anthony Henday. The figures that we have now come to the 25 per cent. Admittedly, when the P3 was announced on the 22nd – the reason I'm reviewing this is because I think it has implications for the Calgary ring road and any other P3s we may look at – it was \$300 million for the 11-kilometre stretch of road connecting highways 2 and 14. Now, 16 months later the cost is \$493 million, a 60 per cent increase. I know that the minister said – and it's correct – that there were changes that occurred in there. As I understand it: two additional bridges, additional kilometres, six lanes instead of four lanes, maintenance, and so forth.

I guess the only question I would have there is that if the people in his department thought that \$300 million was the cost, are we getting the Cadillac version or not? I think that's an important point, but I'm more interested in the later figures. On January 27, 2005, you'll recall, the government news release said that it would have cost up to – up to; that was an interesting way to put it: up to – \$497 million to build the southeast ring road using conventional public financing. They said that the P3 was only \$4 million less costly compared to the original government claim of a \$30 million savings. So \$493 million. As I recollect it, the drift of that particular release was: boy, we're going to save \$4 million because it could have cost us up to \$497 million.

Then we had that internal report around here – the public-sector comparator was an internal government document, and the minister is aware of it – that showed that the southeast ring road would have cost between \$452 million and \$497 million using conventional financing. In other words, instead of costing \$4 million less as a P3, the project was just as likely to cost \$41 million more. Now, that was not on the original release. So you see the skepticism starting here, Mr. Minister.

Then on May 19, as I recollect, the day after the Legislature closed down, we got the actual public-sector comparator done by PricewaterhouseCoopers. They told the government that building the road using public financing could cost as little as \$422.3 million or as much as \$487.3 million. So you see the scepticism. That's very different than the conventional spin that it would cost \$497 million. All that's lower when we get the results of the public-sector comparator.

I know that the minister says – and I'll come to some of the questions on the Calgary ring road – that it's not a debt if you're paying \$32 million a year. Well, I understand the old saying: when it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck. It's still money coming out of funding for the government in the 30 years hence. We'd be paying \$32 million on that Henday project over that period of time. So in actual result that's about a billion dollars that we're going to be paying over a 30-year period. Now, I know that it's convenient because it's not going to be put on the government

books as a debt, but the fact is that we'll have to pay that every year for 30 years.

You know, I don't tend to be a structural engineer, but it does seem like a lot to build 11 kilometres and maintain 25 kilometres of road. I contrast that, Mr. Chair, with the 14-kilometre southwest portion of the ring road which will open in 2006, and that cost \$245 million using public financing. Now, admittedly, the southwest portion won't be built to the same level as this portion, but I think there's some comparison there. It doesn't include crossing of the North Saskatchewan River and three major ravine crossings, and that was done for the \$245 million. Then, of course, we know that on December 5 there was a report in the *Edmonton Journal* about some problem with the bridges, some changes to the bridges. I know that the minister will say that that's going to be covered, but that is worrisome when that starts to happen right at the beginning of the project.

That's my point, Mr. Chair: it's hard to get a handle in terms of these P3s. I've learned, having worked in the private sector, to respect their expertise. I don't think they're going to P3s because they want to do a favour for the taxpayers of Alberta, that they're going to do it for less somehow. The profit motive is there.

I'd just like to go, then, very quickly, Mr. Chair, into the more recent announcement flowing from that about the Calgary ring road. I have here the news release, and it has questions and answers. One question is: "Why is a P3 being considered for this project?" Partly it says: "The project's scope and lack of environmental and geotechnical issues are other factors that favour the P3 process." Now, nobody knows what that means particularly. It probably means that it's easier to build. That's what I would think.

Dr. Oberg: It means that it's flat land.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Easier to build. Right. We wouldn't want the private sector to have to do anything that's more difficult.

"What are the advantages of using a P3?" "One is the project could be built and in service two years earlier." Second, it "would be completely free-flow" and so forth. What I don't understand about that is: if we put out a bid and said that this is what we want and this is the time frame that we want, as we do in most other areas, why couldn't you bid that and then build the conventional way? Just put that as part of the bid system. It's been done before. I don't see why a P3 necessarily – if you put the same criteria there, why can't you do it in the conventional way? – somehow you can do earlier. If the companies want to bid on it and you have a certain time frame, that's the way it should be.

The other – and I know I got the answer in question period today about the project cost – is: "Government will not release cost estimates until proposals are submitted to ensure a fair, competitive bidding." Well, this is a new way of doing it.

3:50

I'd sure like to know what sort of cost we're looking at ahead of time rather than a month before. We may have, then, three hand-picked groups bidding on it, but that's very different than even the previous P3s that were advocated. I think one of the reasons we could see for the Calgary courthouse and the rest of it is because we had some idea ahead of time. I really question that process. I think that to be more transparent is always important, that we should see that public-sector comparator ahead of time.

Then, I'll come back to just this last. I've said it before. "Isn't a P3 just another term for debt? No. The government is simply paying for the project over a 30-year period rather than all at once. The Alberta government would not start making annual payments

until after construction is completed. These would be budgeted as operating expenses over the 30 year period." The point is that we're still paying out of the taxpayers' pockets there, Mr. Chairman. Just to call that not a debt – maybe it's not a debt on your books, and that's probably what looks good, especially when you're going for the leadership, you know, but it is a debt that we'll have to pay over that period of time.

We have to look at those projects. The Henday is a billion-dollar project because it's a 30-year project. I really stress that I think the private-sector people that get into these P3s know what they're doing and they're going to make a lot of money on it. I still have never seen the advantage yet. I say, with all due respect to the minister, that with the figures we got from Henday and the differences that I've talked about, it leads to some skepticism. I think we have to do better to lay it out so we can begin to understand the Calgary ring road. Certainly, it needs to be done, but I've never seen a case yet where P3s are the best way.

Let me just conclude there. I just have one other question. We're getting a lot of ache about it from all over – and I know he is – about roads and because of the infrastructure deficit. The one is highways 63 and 28. I mean, this is a road that I think has special circumstances because of the tar sands, and that seems to be our main thrust of our economic development. I think we should be speeding it up. Now, I know we've announced some. I guess I'm trying to get a handle for people on how soon we could see the twinning between those two roads. What's the time frame now, the latest time frame? I've heard various estimates. Certainly, it's being pushed by people in Fort McMurray for sure, that they would like this moved as quickly as possible because there's going to be a lot of traffic on there.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I assume that you will give me the same leeway to talk about things that are not in my interim supply that you just gave the hon. member to talk about when it comes to P3s.

Mr. Martin: It's in the department.

Dr. Oberg: Actually, in all fairness it is not part of the interim supply because the P3 has not been finalized in Calgary; therefore, it is not included in this budgetary item, but I will still talk about it.

Mr. Chair, a couple of things. The hon. member had talked about the potential of the boom and the paying off of the deficit and debt. Absolutely, paying off the deficit and debt was the thing that we were elected for as government in this province. It was the thing that people wanted us to do in this province. It did result in, though, some capital projects being put on the back burner. Subsequently, with the paying off of the deficit and the debt, we were able to start doing a lot of the projects that were out there. I think every hon. member in the Legislature has seen what projects are being done out there right now.

One of the things that we did not anticipate, though – and I challenge anyone in this Assembly to say that they anticipated it – was the huge amount of growth in the oil sands that took place over the last four to five years. The number of projects that have been announced, up to \$130 billion, realistically was beyond the grasp of anyone within the last 10 years. This is something that came out of the blue. It's a great news story. It's wonderful. It's a very positive thing for the province of Alberta, but it's not something that was anticipated five or six years ago, Mr. Chair. We are working hard to

recover. We are working hard to get the infrastructure and the transportation projects that are desperately needed in this province.

The other issue, and one of the things that you really have to remember, is that construction on infrastructure is about 7 to 8 per cent of what is happening in the province as a whole. As a government we do not control the prices. It is the private sector and the huge private-sector projects that are out there that actually control the prices. Unfortunately, we have to follow along because we have to compete with these prices as well.

The hon. member went on about the cost of the Anthony Henday, and I will give him an example. He was wondering about the massive cost of \$493 million. The city of Edmonton is looking at doing an interchange on highway 2 and 23rd Avenue. As the hon. member may or may not know, the price of that interchange is now up very close to \$140 million for one interchange on highway 2 and 23rd Avenue. It's absolutely massive what has happened to the amounts of these projects. It's \$120 million to \$140 million, so it's very huge. It's very significant. When you take into consideration that on the 20 or so kilometres of lane on the Anthony Henday we have 24 bridges that are in place on that road at \$493 million, it puts it into context, Mr. Chair. Obviously, it's a lot of money; \$493 million is a lot of money.

The other issue that occurred when it came to the P3 and the Anthony Henday – and this ties into the P3 in the Calgary project – is quite simply that the public-sector comparator, the \$300 million, was put out before the scope of the project was actually finalized. It was put out about a year to two years before, and it was purely an estimation at that time of what the costs would be to build that road. It was an estimation. What then occurred over the next 14 to 16 months, in which case the private companies went out and actually put in the bids, is that we upgraded the scope of the project. We upgraded the potential for appreciation in the project, and we built that in. The public-sector comparator states that we typically build in a 10 per cent contingency, and that 10 per cent contingency would be on top of the roughly \$478 million, \$475 million public-sector comparator.

We're not going to make that mistake this time, Mr. Chair. We're going to come forward at exactly the same time in exactly the same market conditions as what the private sector is going to do, and we're going to compare the bids. When you enter into a P3 – and I don't want to leave the impression here that we are philosophically or ideologically driven by a P3. Quite simply, if it is a good deal, we will do it; if it is not a good deal, we won't do it. We don't have blinders on that say that a P3 is the only way we're going to do it. We are conventionally financing many more projects than we are doing as the P3s. So I think that is a significant issue.

There's one other response that I think people really have to think about, and that is: when we conventionally finance, it is the private sector that builds the roads. It is the private sector that builds in profit into that particular contract as well. There is profit in the private sector when they build our roads, when we get the tenders in for our roads. On a P3 one of the advantages that we have quite simply is that the risk assumption is all on the private sector. For example, if a bridge collapses – hopefully, it would never collapse, but if there is something wrong with the bridge, in the next 30 years it is the responsibility of that consortium to ensure that it's fixed. They have the liability if something happens to that road over the next 30 years.

In a conventional financing method we typically get a guarantee of one to two years. The hon. member prior to this talked about the roughness in the road on highway 2 under the interchange. Well, because we conventionally financed it, we have a year to two years of a guarantee. If this was on a P3 project, for 30 years they would

have to take that accordion type of road out of there and they would have to fix it properly.

There's also the reference made to the girders. Yeah, the girders were not to our specifications. What they actually were was higher. They had actually put in higher specification girders. Our people picked it up and subsequently looked at it and gave them the opportunity to prove that they were higher, and yes, indeed, they actually were a higher specification. The rationale for that was because the contractors felt that it would lead to less maintenance down the road if they built it to a higher quality than what our specifications and standards actually were. We tend to see that on P3s as well.

4:00

The other issue: highway 63. Again, this is a very good example because with highway 63 I am having to take money out of my budget. I'm potentially having to reprofile it. Hopefully, I won't. Hopefully, the Finance minister will have mercy on me and not make me reprofile it. Ultimately, I may have to reprofile it. The key is that I have to do all of these things because I have to come up with the money in the three or four years. I have to come up with the cash dollars in three or four years to ensure that that road gets done. It is a very high priority for the citizens of Alberta, not just the citizens of Fort McMurray, so I am attempting to do it in whatever fashion I can. If it was a P3 – and it's not a P3 for some specific reasons – then I would be paying for that over 30 years, and I would not have to come up with all of that money. I would not have to reprofile it all at once.

The other issue – and I'll use the Anthony Henday as an example – is that because we're paying for that over 30 years, because the \$500 million is spaced out over the 30 years, it gives me the ability to deal with the rest of the infrastructure deficit that is occurring in Alberta. Quite simply, if I had to take \$500 million and pay that cash up front, which is a conventional form of financing, we would not be able to do it. We have felt, and I certainly feel and I certainly agree, that the P3 proposal, the risk assumption, the maintenance, the higher standards: all of this is a very positive way to do it. But I do not have blinders on. That's why we're doing a public-sector comparator. That's why we're looking at the process. That's why we're looking at the bids. We will determine if it is indeed a good deal for the taxpayers of Alberta.

Just for your information as well, this is exactly what the Auditor General stated when he looked at our budget. He said that P3s have to be considered, that they should be considered, that the process should be so that it's a real public-sector comparator so that the public-sector comparator comes out at the same time that the bids are open. So we are quite simply following the process and the recommendations of the Auditor General.

The hon. member makes an excellent point when it comes to what happened in Nova Scotia, and one of the things that I am attempting to ensure is that that absolutely will not happen here. We have seen what occurred in Nova Scotia. We have seen what befell some of the P3s before, and we're attempting to go around that. But, again, if it is not in line with our public-sector comparator, quite simply, we will conventionally finance it. It will take longer because I will not be able to take X number of dollars out of my budget and simply build that road. It's going to take a longer time. It may not be a road that is completely finished, with all the interchanges, because we will be scrimping and saving and potentially using that interchange money somewhere else.

I don't think anyone here, especially those members who are from Calgary, wants another road such as the Stoney Trail NW, where there are going to be some lights. We want it free-flowing; we want

to keep the traffic moving. For anyone who has been in Calgary in the last while, you know what it's like not to have free-flowing traffic on the Deerfoot Trail, where in essence, in many ways you're sitting there for a period of time, 15 minutes to half an hour to three-quarters of an hour, in absolute gridlock.

An Hon. Member: A slow-moving parking lot.

Dr. Oberg: Yeah, a slow-moving parking lot. Absolutely.

So it's imperative for the citizens of Calgary that we get that road done as quickly, as quickly as possible, and that's what we're endeavouring to do with this.

Just in my final comment I would ask the hon. members, when they're driving to and fro on highway 2, to take a look at the huge amount of progress that has been done on the Anthony Henday because of the winter. We may well be significantly ahead of schedule when it comes to opening that road because of this winter. The roadway, the overpasses are looking absolutely excellent, and I think it's going to be a great deal.

Lastly, the other key component to this is that I can tell you and I can tell this Assembly when that road is going to be done. That road will be done in October of 2007 because, quite simply, if it is not, on November 1, 2007, there will be a million dollar penalty. On December 1, 2007, there will be a million dollar penalty. And so on and so on.

So I believe it is a good deal, and I believe it's something that we need to continue on, but we will take a very close look and ensure that it is in the range with the public-sector comparator, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to combine a couple of different departments here, if I could, and direct my questions to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation because I know that he has also today graciously agreed to answer questions as he can on the interim estimates for Advanced Education. So if I can kill two birds with one stone and ask a couple of questions in both of those areas.

I see that we're looking at \$1,040,000,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation to get us through the next two months and somewhere less, \$362 million, for Advanced Education to get us through from the beginning of April to the end of May. As always, because the document that we're provided with, of course, the 2006-2007 Interim Supply Estimates, is just a series of line items in a budget, I'm always curious as to what we're actually spending the money on, cognizant of the fact that as the Finance minister said in the House the other day, this is not a straightforward one-sixth of the budget for each department, that there are certain expenditures that have to be undertaken at this time that cover you off for year-end and so on and so forth. How much of this in both departments really constitutes this sort of once-per-year expenditures, and how much is ongoing funding to keep the lights on and the employees paid and so on and so forth for the next two months?

The numbers, of course, are huge, and they do cover one-sixth of the operating fiscal year for both departments. Infrastructure and Transportation, obviously, is a special case these days because we are trying to address the considerable infrastructure deficit that has been built up in this province over the last 13 years, an infrastructure deficit caused in part by the government's decision to make paying off the debt the priority. I know that the government feels that that was the direction it was given from the people of Alberta. Nevertheless, we ended up with the mortgage paid off on a house with a leaky roof.

Of course, part of the infrastructure deficit has been exasperated, or exacerbated – exasperated if you're stuck in traffic on the Deerfoot – by the fact that we've had so much economic growth and so much population growth in this province over the last dozen years. I wonder if the minister on behalf of both departments could give me an indication with each budget here, with each interim estimate: how much is for the kinds of once-per-year expenditures that the Finance minister was talking about in the house earlier this week, and how much is for ongoing expenses?

Then I'd like a sense of why it is that we can't bring those numbers more in line with the fiscal year. I mean, budget day is going to be, as the Finance minister announced I think yesterday, Wednesday, March 22. Yes, there is a set period of time to debate the budget. Nevertheless, we're not far off the beginning of the next fiscal year, I would think, before we've completed debate on the budget. The question that always nags at my mind – and maybe I should be directing this to the Finance minister as well – is why it is that her department can't get an earlier start on the budget and have it ready in time for us to debate and vote on, carry through the process, and have it in place with or without amendments in time for the beginning of the new fiscal year.

Back to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation for a moment, if I can, I wonder if within the context of the \$362 million in interim supply estimates for Advanced Education he can tell me if any of that money and, if so, how much of it is going towards actual infrastructure issues within the Ministry of Advanced Education. According to the throne speech I think that there were 47 capital projects in Advanced Education planned or under way. I'd like some sense of what those are and how those are proceeding.

4:10

I think I'll leave it at that because I know that the minister wants to respond; perhaps the Finance minister does too. I know that we have other speakers, and time is always of the essence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Very briefly, I'll reiterate. The hon. member may not have heard what I initially said about Infrastructure and Transportation and the initial breakdown. In essence, there is \$400 million which is for the municipal partnership grants. So \$400 million out of this slightly over \$1 billion is grants that go out at the beginning of the year. These are not grants that are prorated on a monthly basis. They're grants that go out specifically at the beginning of the year. There's another \$25 million there for capital and accommodation projects. These are, in essence, leases and lease upgrades that we are on the hook for, that we have to follow through with. There's no way around that.

Mr. Chair, the other \$400 million on the operating side is for the running of the department. It's for wages. It's for salaries. It's for equipment. It's for all the things that it takes to keep my department running.

You have to recognize that for my particular department these are probably the busiest two months of the year. April and May are probably the busiest two months purely because it's the start of the construction season, and we are working very hard on that. There's \$207.4 million, Mr. Chair, that is there for capital projects. This is quite simply paying for the work that is being done.

So that is what is included in my departmental estimates.

On the Advanced Education side there is roughly \$344 million in operating expenses. If I may, I'll just break it down for you here. The ministry support services is around \$3.4 million; the program

delivery support is about \$6.6 million. These first two are actually staffing. Program delivery and ministry support are staffing, so in essence these are salaries paid to people for those two months.

There's assistance to the postsecondary institutions. These are the grants that go to the institutions so that they can pay their staff and so that they can do the things that they do, and that's \$266 million. In direct response to the hon. member's question, there's 45 and a half million dollars for the infrastructure capital for postsecondary institutions.

There's also another \$17.7 million for support to postsecondary learners. What that is is student loans as well as scholarships and bursaries. There are scholarships and bursaries that are determined and paid out during that time frame. There's also another \$17.4 million that is nonbudgetary disbursements, and this has to do with the student loan component of it. These are nonbudgetary disbursements that must go out to students. These are for people that are receiving their student loan payments. The apprenticeship delivery: 4 and a half million dollars.

Again, as I say, that is simply paying the wages of the people that are there and paying the wages of the department.

So, Mr. Chair, I feel that although I am reading what the hon. Minister of Advanced Education – I do have a slight bit of knowledge of what occurs in Advanced Education, and I really have absolutely no problems with this. We have to keep our advanced education institutions running. We have to keep the learning system running. Quite simply, if we went for two months before we received the budget and shut down, it would be catastrophic indeed. I know that it is not the intent of the hon. opposition to shut down the postsecondary system.

So that's the breakdown. I'd be more than happy to answer any other questions on it, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. A series of questions. I asked earlier in the House as to where our infrastructure debt or deficit stood, and the minister responded, I believe, that it was somewhere around \$7.2 billion or \$7.4 billion. So it's an extremely large deficit. At one point the minister suggested what I was a little bit concerned about, trading one sort of debt for another, and that was the possibility of borrowing to eliminate this current deficit. Like the minister I very much wanted to see this deficit removed, but since that initial thought I'm just wondering if he could share other solutions in terms of a year-by-year payoff, a percentage of the surplus or whatever, that may have come up.

The minister is well aware that I see P3s as a gamble, and I think he does in a sense as well. We're basically gambling with P3s that our short-term gain, the money we save up front in cost overruns, will not be cancelled by the long-term pain of 30 years of fluctuating interest rates that we have no control over. My feeling is that we should be paying for things with the money we currently have and not putting our future, our children and grandchildren, further into debt.

I would like to get an update, if it's possible, on how we're coming along with the Tsuu T'ina land acquisitions. I'm wondering specifically: will we ever know – or when will we know, not will we ever. I hope we'll know at a defined time. When will we know how much we're paying provincially for land acquisition for the Tsuu T'ina land to run the ring road through?

There's been a lot of discussion held at the city of Calgary, which is where it should happen because this is going to be impacting the city, as to whether we should have two entrances to the reserve via Southland Drive and 90th Avenue. My understanding is that the last

time this was discussed, there was going to be, at least at this point, the possibility of a single access via 90th. The people of the communities were concerned about a double access. I know Alderman Erskine did his best in terms of sending out a series of surveys and holding a number of public meetings about these concerns. I hope that that gets resolved.

I agree very much with planners from both the province and the city that in order to be able to decide on future routes, we have to acquire the land now. There's no doubt about that. The city would completely be frozen if we didn't have the land for those alternatives. Again, this sort of relates because a little further down that road to the north is the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and they have a large say.

I'm very concerned as the critic not only for Infrastructure and Transportation but in my role as the critic for parks and protected areas. I'm hoping that the details for the crossing of the Elbow River will be forthcoming. I've talked about the wonderful bridge we have across the Bow on that particular stretch of the ring road. I've indicated that from a passage of animals, birds, people, et cetera, and from a noise level, I'd rather have the noise sort of above and beyond than concentrated. I've also indicated that for movements I don't want a low bridge which impedes the transition of animals and humans within the Weaselhead park wildlife conservation area. So if you have any details, Mr. Minister, with regard to the bridge and its construction, that would be very much appreciated. I know that there are a number of people in Calgary who are concerned about the preserving of that wildlife area.

The other part. Possibly the minister will discuss this. It seems that the Premier does not want the surplus dollars to be debated in this House. In his belief the surplus, for whatever reason, is solely the responsibility of the government to decide how it should be expended. The government has talked about a three-part plan. Please, Minister of Finance or minister of infrastructure, correct me if I'm wrong, but it seemed to me that the gist of that plan was that one-third of it was supposed to go into savings. What has happened is that we put \$1 billion in, and then we took \$2 billion out, so I'm not clear about how the surplus can go to resolving the infrastructure problem.

4:20

Again, possibly I misinterpreted, but I thought the second third of the whole would be to pay down infrastructure. My understanding is that approximately \$2.2 billion or thereabouts would be put into paying down the infrastructure debt or financing future infrastructure projects. Then the third, that I have the most degree of difficulty with – and I'm sure there are members opposite who have difficulty as well – is that there seems to be the third which the Premier has granted to himself as whatever he sees fit. Last year, in his wisdom, he saw fit to go with \$1.4 billion in terms of \$400 one-time rebates.

An area that I praise him for seeing fit – I just would like to have been a part of the discussion – is the \$1 billion in terms of supporting cancer. The last I heard was that that \$1 billion is now a half billion, and I'm not sure how that billion translates directly into infrastructure support; for example, the Tom Baker cancer institute and whether it's going to be relocated, added to, or just what the possibilities are.

The Liberals have put out and stuck to recommending a plan for the surplus which would see 35 per cent of all future surpluses put into a postsecondary endowment fund so that we would have steady funding in addition to general revenue. We also recommended the idea of 25 per cent into infrastructure projects, and ideally there is the balance between paying down our current infrastructure debt and allowing for future growth. I tend to be, in this case, somewhat fiscally conservative because I would like to see that infrastructure

debt dealt with, but I'm very aware of the demand for a whole variety of areas: the 60,000 new spaces at the postsecondary by 2020; the 15,000 by 2008. Obviously, if we're going to create those spaces, which are great investments, we have to balance the paying off of the infrastructure debt and the creating of the new spaces. This is extremely important.

Calgary is without 40 schools in its suburban areas, and the flawed formula is causing inner-city schools and programs to be closed, but there's no payoff in the sense that very few new schools are sprouting up in suburban areas. So I have concern about paying for those schools and, again, balancing the debt and the need for the new growth.

We have recommended that 35 per cent of all future surpluses be saved, and that's a pretty clear statement. Basically, whatever our surplus is from here on into the future, one-third of it would be saved. It wouldn't be an in-out process. It would stay in. Endowment funds would be created.

Lastly, because we have a concern and, unfortunately, we have no ministry for arts and culture, we would see 5 per cent of all future surpluses expended for arts and culture. Our idea is to build up a \$500 million endowment fund, which would support a variety of activities: dance, theatre, enticing individuals to expend their money on filming in this province. What it would do is provide a set amount of money that people could depend upon. All they would have to do is look at their portions of general revenue and then top it up by the amount in the endowment funds that would be set. As soon as we had a surplus figure, you'd know that these groups were able to participate in this endowment fund.

I look forward to whatever answers the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation can provide. A lot of this money is hopefully going to be expended in the Calgary area. As well, we're having the problems with the water treatment plants. I know it's a balance act, and I very much appreciate that you and your caucus are making hard decisions. How do you pay down the deficit? How do you maintain the growth?

Thank you. I look forward to your answers.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Minister of Finance, did you want to supplement answers?

Mrs. McClellan: Can I just clarify – the hon. member may not have heard my comments at supplementary estimates – on two points only? On the unbudgeted surplus, hon. members, please do not say that these are not debated by the Legislature. They are. No money is expended until it is passed through this Legislature. This is, in fact, a fact. In fact, a fact. I have been quite quiet about correcting this, but I won't be in the future. The fact is that while you may say that we are going to put out \$1.3 billion in health projects in a quarter, which nobody, I think, would deny were needed, particularly the MLAs in Calgary as I think four hospitals were affected by that announcement, and they know they need the space, and they want them done. But, in fact, until that supplementary estimate came into this House and was approved by this House, those dollars did not flow. Frankly, if the House turned it down, the project would not go. I want to make that clear.

So please understand that while we may make a decision on a project's recommendation . . .

Mr. MacDonald: What about the prosperity bonus?

Mrs. McClellan: That was in the House. In fact, I had to amend the act. The member is asking about the prosperity bonus, as he called it. If you were in the House, you were part of the debate where I

amended the act so that it could be tax free. That's the other one that needs to be corrected.

So all I ask is that we get the facts right and that we use them in the right manner. I try to be straightforward. I try to give you the answers. When I go out and about, which I do, and I'm told that these things are being said, I say: well, they must have misunderstood. You know what? I'm not going to say that anymore because we're having the conversation. These are the facts.

You can criticize the fact that we may make a decision to recommend that the Foothills hospital, the Rockyview hospital, the Peter Lougheed hospital, and the Children's hospital or whatever other institution gets X number of dollars of funding between budget cycles, but until that supplementary estimate is debated in this Legislature and passed, that, in fact, does not happen. As I say – let me make it clear – if this House decided not to approve that estimate, that project would not proceed. So I want to make that clear.

The other one that I wanted to just clarify for the hon. member is on the heritage fund and the \$1 billion investment and why we just take the money out. I did explain at the time that it was necessary because it would require a change in the legislation, and we wanted to put those dollars in the fund. We have the option of making an amendment to that legislation and not flowing the funds. The difficulty that I have with doing that at this point is that we count on that some 1 billion dollars of revenue from the fund for programming spending. If you didn't have that money in a year, if your surpluses were not there, I would have to find \$1.2 billion or \$1.1 billion or \$950 million, whatever it was in that particular year of the investment, out of program. Well, Health, Education, and Advanced Education take well over 60 per cent of our budget. You know where you'd have to go because the small departments simply don't have it.

So until we can be sure that we have a reliable revenue stream to satisfy our program expenditures that have to occur for needed services, I would be somewhat reluctant to make that change yet. I am not reluctant to put the billion dollars of monies that are surplus to our needs into that heritage fund. That stays as a permanent part of the fund, and we will realize the investment off that fund. Those dollars, again, can be used for well-needed projects.

I'm open to the idea, but it's a little like health premiums and education property taxes. You have to replace the money. You know, you just simply do. And that's a tough question to answer. We want sustainability. I've been here when we had to reduce budgets. It is not a pleasant experience. It is not easy to ask our public service, as we did, to take a 5 per cent reduction, to have to lay off valued employees in all of those services. So we want to make sure that we can sustain those needed expenditures. I look forward to that debate in the budget as to how we could spend those dollars better. I'm always looking for ways to do that. But I did want to make that comment.

4:30

We did not make a definitive decision on surpluses as to a percentage. I've said that while there's a fair amount of value in looking at a third/a third/a third – maybe that's the right number. Maybe it's 20-40-40. Maybe it's 25-50-25. I don't know. We can debate that. But for the past year, because of the infrastructure needs that we had with the capital requirements with the heavy growth we're experiencing, we did not want to tie ourselves to that, understanding that there were some very high capital needs out there that had to be looked at. But we did make the commitment that the unbudgeted surplus, or the monies that are surplus to our ongoing operating needs, would be spent in three ways: smart spending –

that's what we consider capital investment, as an example; giving back – that can be a rebate cheque, it could be a tax reduction, it could be a number of ways that you give back to the citizens; and, of course, endowments and savings.

I'm very proud of the fact that this year we've been able to put \$750 million into our access to the future endowment – that's great; I'll be even more thrilled when that's fully funded – that we were able to add funding to our tremendously successful Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research to raise that, to add dollars to our scholarship fund and, of course, to the ingenuity fund or the science and engineering fund. So those are great investments. I look forward to our being able to add to those and fully fund them in the future.

I just wanted to clarify those two points for the hon. member because I think he asked the questions with an actual interest in knowing the answers. So thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First, just to very quickly deal with some of the questions that were just raised. The land for the Tsuu T'ina, the cost of land: our appraiser will be in somewhere between April 15 and May 15, somewhere in that time frame. The advantage that we've had in dealing with the Tsuu T'ina is that we were able to agree actually on one appraiser, which has shortened up the time frame quite considerably because typically what occurred in the past is that we would pick an appraiser, the Tsuu T'ina would pick an appraiser, and then there would be a third appraiser who would take those two appraisals and decide which one is actually correct. We were able to agree on the same appraiser, so we hope to have that between April 15 and May 15. There were some delays in doing that, in getting the actual assessed value and the assessed amount, but I met with the chief last week and I understand that everything is under control on that now.

We are working as fast as we can on the Tsuu T'ina. We're attempting to get all of the details in place. There still are some details that are outstanding, but we're fully confident that everything is moving forward as opposed to moving back. One of the big kickers in all of this, though, is that whatever we do, whatever we decide on does have to be taken to the federal government because any time you get a change in the reserve land, it has to be taken to the federal government. It does have to have their approval. It has to have full environmental impacts as well. So all of these things have to occur prior to this project moving ahead.

But I can stand here today and say that I'm very confident that we will get this done. I'm very confident that this will be seen through to its conclusion, and I have nothing but praise for what the members of the Tsuu T'ina band have done. They have been excellent to deal with, and I have absolutely no issues with how things are being done. We're working together as fast as we can to get this in place, and we hope to have it done very, very soon.

However, as I stated, it still is very much in the federal government's hands as to what does or does not occur, but I'm very confident that if Tsuu T'ina and if myself and the government of Alberta go forward to the federal government, they won't say no. Failing that, I've just heard that the Prime Minister is actually from Calgary, and I don't really think that he would want all the people from Calgary writing him a letter stating that they did not want this ring road. So it certainly, I believe, is going to go full tilt and should be there.

[Mrs. Ady in the chair]

The hon. member also asked about the bridge. I don't have the exact structural details of the bridge, but we are very cognizant of the Weaselhead, and we're doing everything we can to ensure that the Weaselhead is protected. We will be having full environmental impact studies over that area to ensure that there is no or at least very, very minimal environmental impact. Any time you have a freeway going through an area, realistically there is going to be some environmental impact. We wanted to keep to a managed environmental impact, and we want to ensure that it is done for the betterment of the citizens of Calgary.

The other comments that the hon. member made were about P3s, and I really believe that much of the comments – you can probably read in *Hansard* – were to deal with my comments prior to this.

So with that, I would sit down. Madam Chair, I understand that I am also doing the estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness, so with your concurrence, I would start there, if that's okay with the opposition.

The Acting Chair: I'm sorry, but I also still have Edmonton-Gold Bar on my list. Would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar like to speak on this before we move on?

Mr. MacDonald: Madam Chairperson, no. If the hon. member, in light of the time, would like to get started, that's fine.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Okay. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'll be very quick. I just wanted to have a small conversation. We've all heard how you're juggling the money, but I happen to come from outside of the magic corridor of Calgary-Edmonton and the other magic city of Fort McMurray, and I'm worried about highway 3. I'm not sure that putting passing lanes is the answer, and I'm just hoping that you haven't juggled money out of that project, which probably isn't good to begin with – it really needs to be twinned – to help the other part of the province. Yeah, we seem to be out of that loop, and I want to make sure that we stay in it.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. Madam Chair, I just want to assure the hon. member that Lethbridge is always in our hearts in this government, especially considering that the newest city in Alberta, Brooks, is very close to Lethbridge as well. So it's always in our thoughts, it's always on our minds, and it's always in our hearts.

In saying that, though, Madam Chair, there are a couple of things that are very interesting on highway 3. The hon. member is absolutely right: we're going to be putting in roughly 24 kilometres of passing lanes, which is going to alleviate the problem. It is not going to solve the problem.

There are several issues when it comes to highway 3. First and foremost, when it comes to the actual transportation down highway 3, the biggest bottleneck is in the Crowsnest Pass. That's why we're concentrating on doing that first and foremost in Crowsnest Pass, to get a satisfactory route through the Crowsnest Pass. There have been a lot of representations made to us about the south side of the valley and how that is not – I stress: is not – a route that we should be undertaking because of the watershed and all sorts of other issues. So we're currently doing the engineering on going through widening the existing road, making it four lanes, trying to get the speed limit up to around 80 kilometres. Because of the location of the road I don't believe that we can get it up to 100, 110, 130 kilometres. I think, quite simply, that it would take too many houses if we were

to do that, and there is not a wide enough valley; there's not room enough to do that with the road.

4:40

The second area that needs to be addressed on highway 3 is actually the bypass around Fort Macleod. I think that for the people who live in Fort Macleod, this is a critical issue because Fort Macleod is one of the few communities in Alberta that has actually seen a decline in its population. Subsequently, one of the issues that has been brought to my attention is that people are not planning businesses there because they are afraid that the traffic is all going to route around, and they want to see ultimately where that routing will take place and when that routing will take place. So I feel that this is certainly a priority as well.

Travelling east, there are significant other priorities on highway 3 also. Probably the next biggest one is right around Medicine Hat. What we have around Medicine Hat is highway 3 that kind of weaves around the airport, which limits the length of runway of the airport in Medicine Hat. It also causes a great deal of consternation because all the traffic that goes through highway 3, which, by the way, is our number one route for transportation to the west coast, now goes right through Medicine Hat as opposed to a bypass. So we're currently looking at how we can bypass Medicine Hat. This is with the direct concurrence of the mayor and the MLAs with respect to Medicine Hat, and everyone is in favour of this.

So those tend to be our priorities on highway 3. As the hon. member, I'm hoping, can tell, we have actually spent a fair amount of time on designing highway 3, and it is not out of our thoughts. It is a very important, critical transportation corridor and part of the supply chain. The route out to Vancouver is an essential component for businesses in Alberta.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. If I might have a supplemental. You didn't give me a time frame on that. I realize that a lot of work has been done on it.

The other thing: is not the land already gazetted for the Canamex highway? How does that affect around Fort Macleod? I believe that land is already gazetted.

The Acting Chair: Time.

Dr. Oberg: If I may, Madam Chair. The land is gazetted. We know where it is. But what is happening in Fort Macleod is: quite simply, they want to know when it is going to occur. What I'm attempting to do is move up these projects. I gave you the priorities of how I see the projects unfolding on highway 3, and I think there's a fair amount of rationale for that. There's no point in making a good trade corridor and then have it bottleneck in the Crowsnest Pass.

So that tends to be the direction we're going. It is contingent on budgetary constraints. The budget will be occurring within the next couple of weeks, and we'll be able to talk more about it at that time. But these are certainly our high priorities in the government of Alberta and, I'm sure, with all citizens of Alberta, especially those citizens in the southern part of the province, although because of the incredible importance of the supply chain, it should be of incredible importance to everyone in Alberta.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Seeing no other speakers, does the committee wish to vote on the estimates for Infrastructure and Transportation before we proceed to the estimates on Health and Wellness? Seeing no one standing, I will go ahead then.

Infrastructure and Transportation

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$832,400,000
Capital Investment	\$207,800,000

The Acting Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

So we'll now turn it over to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation on Health and Wellness estimates.

Dr. Oberg: If I may just add a point of clarification: it was my understanding that we had also done the Advanced Education estimates.

The Acting Chair: So we need to vote on those? Okay.

Advanced Education

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$344,700,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$17,400,000

The Acting Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Health and Wellness

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's my pleasure on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness to present the estimates for interim supply.

Madam Chairman, what you have before you is just a huge amount of dollars. It's \$2.2917 billion – and I said billion – that we're dealing with today. This is roughly 39 per cent of all the total interim supply estimates that are before us today. This is very similar to my department, the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. It's quite simply to keep the departments going, to keep the physicians being paid, to keep the regional health authorities being paid, to keep the health authorities as well as the Health and Wellness staff being paid, to keep the drug supplies being given out to patients.

Madam Chair, I would be more than happy to take any questions from the hon. members. Any questions that I cannot answer, I will certainly pass on to the Minister of Health and Wellness. But this is a very critical issue. I don't think anyone – anyone – in this Assembly would want to see the Department of Health and Wellness not have any money for two months, and therefore I would urge all of us to pass this in a very expeditious fashion.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise on interim supply estimates for 2006-07 in relation to Health. I appreciate that this is the number one concern of Albertans and that it's important that there be no glitch, no holdup in the ongoing functioning of a very complex system, for which we are accountable.

I would like to ask a few questions around where we are spending the dollars and how well we are spending the dollars, again with specific focus on new technology, on how well we're assessing the importance of new technology, and whether it's appropriately used.

I've heard stories among my colleagues where, for example, full body MRI scans are being given at office parties as a gift or at an auction sale. It's clear to me that in some areas our technology is not being used appropriately, and while there may be relatively few risks associated with the use of MRIs, there are certainly those that are constrained in their appropriate use by not being able to access the private MRI system. If we have that kind of promotion of an MRI scan, and indeed some of the inappropriate private use of MRIs just because people can afford to pay it, it suggests to me, then, that we are not serving Albertans in terms of setting standards and ensuring that the technology, first of all, is needed and then, secondly, is used only in appropriate settings. I know that we have the technology assessment program, and I just wonder whether there is sufficient medical evidence and oversight to allow us to make good, long-term decisions about the new technology.

We're also concerned on this side about the continued lack of investment of our health budget in prevention. We continue to spend over 95 per cent of our dollars in health care in identifying and treating disease and injury. I was gratified to see some of the new investment in mental health, and hopefully this can be directed at some of the determinants of mental health, at the preventive side of mental health, especially our disadvantaged population, and the increased risk of addictions, of mental health problems, and how much we could by early intervention in childhood and family issues reduce the demands on the health care system. That continues to be an issue that will plague the ongoing increases in health care budgets if we fail to invest appropriately in prevention and keep it under 5 per cent of most health authorities' budgets, as it is today.

4:50

It's also clear that the public are expressing a commitment to publicly funded health care. We are deluged by phone calls and letters on this side about the proposed privatization option that will suck resources and staffing, suck physicians out of rural areas, potentially, into more lucrative practices in the cities. People are very concerned about this, and if government members are not hearing these same messages, I hope they're actively soliciting feedback from constituents who are concerned about the importance of uniform access and the clear direction for medically necessary services that we're all looking for.

Those are the essence of my concerns, Madam Chairman, and I'll wait to see if there are some offered answers.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's not very often that I actually get to answer these questions, so I will take some delight in answering these today.

Madam Chair, the hon. member has a very good point when he talks about assessing new technologies. One of the huge costs in health care right now and right today is new technology. Much of it, in all fairness to the people who have brought forward technology, is of dubious benefit. It may well have some benefit, but it is not necessarily the be-all and end-all, and I will use MRIs as an example.

What we have to keep remembering and have to keep focusing on is that the MRI is a diagnostic tool. It is simply a diagnostic tool. Those of us who actually used to diagnose things by putting hands

on patients and listening to them are aghast when there are so many MRIs that are ordered today. However, medicine must move on, and technology must move on, but I certainly hope that the art of medicine also continues to move on and also continues to be a viable focus.

The key point here, though, when we talk about new technologies and when we talk about – and I believe the hon. member used the term – medical evidence and oversight, is that that is the college of physicians' role and responsibility. It is not for anyone in this Legislative Assembly, it is not for anyone in the bureaucracy of health care to determine whether or not a medical procedure is a viable procedure. It is up to the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the medical fraternity to determine if, indeed, it is a viable procedure.

Subsequently the college – for example, on total body MRI scans, as was brought up – certainly has the ability to say that that is not a medically safe procedure and to cause charges to be brought against a particular physician who advocates for that. They have chosen not to. I am not specifically up on the research on total body MRIs, but there is a body of evidence that is showing that the risk of a total body MRI and the potential of finding something that is wrong, such as a cancer, may or may not weigh each other out, may or may not count each other out. I think that in the next five to 10 to 15 to 20 years you may well see a complete change in philosophy when it comes to things like total body MRIs, but I'm only speaking today with respect to that.

Lack of investment in prevention: what we do have to remember is that 5 to 10 per cent of the budget is being spent on prevention today, and it's a huge amount of dollars. Mental health work: a lot of that work is in prevention. A lot of the community health services are in prevention. Wouldn't it be a wonderful world if we didn't have any disease at all, if it was all preventable? Absolutely. There's no question about that, but we do have to treat acute cases. When someone comes in with a broken arm, we can't simply say: well, sorry; you should have prevented it. It has to be fixed. It has to be set. It has to have the procedures done on it. So we do have to be realistic when it comes to health care. We can't simply say that all diseases could have been prevented because, in all fairness and honesty, many of them could not have been prevented, could not have been identified, and subsequently their course changed.

The other comment that I will make is very simply with respect to the physicians in rural areas. I am probably the most qualified person in this Assembly to talk about physicians in rural areas, for reasons that shall remain anonymous. I will simply say that when it comes to the potential for privatization, the potential for a different payment system, those physicians that are in rural Alberta make significantly more money than those physicians in urban Alberta. I think that that is something that you have to remember and recognize and the difference is very, very significant.

The issue when it comes down to physicians in the rural areas is not a monetary issue; it is a lifestyle issue. Because you're on call a significant amount of time, because you're on call for large amounts of time, that tends to be what the issue is. It is not a remuneration issue.

Madam Chair, with that, I believe I've answered the majority of questions that have been put forward by the hon. member, and I'd be pleased to answer more.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and make a few observations on the interim supply estimates for the Depart-

ment of Health and Wellness. I have a few questions that I would like to ask the minister of infrastructure, who happens to be, luckily for us today, also a physician.

Madam Chair, the comments made here on the use and abuse of technology: it's an important issue. Technology, new technologies – you know, that just because they're there, therefore they should be used – I think is an important issue when we are talking about controlling costs and preventing harm from the excessive use, unnecessary use of some of the diagnostic technologies. I think both seem to suggest that we need to pay more attention than we may have to this point to the very question of the appropriate use of medical technologies both in diagnostic practices that prevail across the province and in some other ways.

So I think it's a very good point. I think we need to pay more attention. My sense is – and I heard the minister of infrastructure also suggesting that – that there is money to be saved without causing any inconvenience or damage to the health of our patients that come to our medical institutions that provide service. I want to add my voice to that concern that's expressed across the foyer here on that issue, and I think we need to pay attention to it.

I notice here, Madam Chair, that this year's supplementary estimates for expense and equipment/inventory purchases are \$2,291,700,000. Last year the amount was \$2,044,200,000. There's a difference of about \$250 million here; \$250 million more is being asked this year. I wonder if the minister will have something to say on that to explain what this difference reflects, what the increase is about, where these particular \$250 million may be expected to go or are projected to go.

On the other hand, I also notice that under capital investment there's a slight decrease of \$2 million in what's being asked for this year – that is, the coming fiscal year, 2007 – compared to the fiscal year 2005-2006. So there are some variations here from last year. I think that they simply tickle my curiosity, and I'm sure Albertans would like to perhaps know why are there variations between last year and the coming year.

I understand that these supplementary estimates are meant to tide us over the next two months, the month of April and the month of May. We have been debating interim supply estimates for the current year.

5:00

Dr. Oberg: Those were supplementary estimates.

Dr. Pannu: Yes, supplementary estimates. You'll notice that there has been quite a bit of discrepancy between the budgeted estimates and then the supplementaries that are asked for. I'm curious to know how close these interim estimates are to what we'll actually need to spend over the next two months. Are they wildly off base or likely to be off base, or have we learned something from previous years, doing the same work, and has the government developed a more precise way of estimating what it's asking for?

Once I've heard answers to my questions and I'm satisfied that we are targeting to become more precise in how we budget, what we ask for as part of interim estimates – and supplementary estimates, I'd suggest – then I'll be happy to make up my mind to vote for them or not.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. First of all, I would just like to agree with the hon. member when it comes to technology. Technology is one of the highest cost items that we

have in medicine today, and there really does need to be an adequate evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of some of these procedures. It's very difficult to do, but there does need to be a push in that direction. I had already reminisced about the art of medicine. It's probably long gone from my body at this particular point in time, but I have reminisced about that. Technology is something that we have to be constantly aware of, and we have to be constantly vigilant to ensure that the technology is actually an improvement and is improving the health of Albertans as opposed to just technology for technology's sake. I think the hon. member is absolutely correct in that.

When it comes to the \$250 million increase over this time last year, that represents a roughly 8 to 10 per cent increase in the cost, which is what we're seeing in health care today, an 8 to 10 per cent increase in both utilization and the cost of such items as drugs, technology, procedures. That's why the \$250 million is there over last year. It's the natural growth in the amount that we're paying. There are a little bit of dollars built in there just on the outside chance that something did not go through properly by the end of May, in case there is some needed and it isn't getting there right away. This is not the type of system that we can simply stop for a day and say: okay, we're not going to have any health care in Alberta for one day. There is a little bit of leeway built into that, but in general what it is is the inflationary pressures, the access pressures, the amount of pressures from the increased utilization of the health care system that has occurred over the past year.

Capital investment, that \$5.4 million, simply means that in this next two months there are fewer capital dollars that have been utilized, that have needed to be utilized. My assumption on this is that this has to do with a lot of the planning procedures that are taking place. There are a lot of hospitals that are under construction, that are starting, and this \$5.4 million is, quite simply, the amount of planning dollars that are going forward on that. The smaller amounts, the equipment purchases, would be included in the \$2.2 billion.

I hope that has answered the hon. member's questions and that that satisfies him.

Dr. Pannu: Madam Chair, may I follow up with a question?

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I apologize for forgetting to ask a question. I thought I'd better ask it while we still have it.

You had mentioned drugs, and we know that drugs are the most worrisome driver of costs within the health care system. You talked about a 10 per cent increase anticipated. Drugs are a very, very important part of the increase in costs, a really serious driver. Is there anything reflected here which would suggest that drug costs are being targeted as an item where we need to seek ways to reduce those costs?

I went to a pharmacist to get a prescription filled a couple of weeks ago, and I was pleasantly surprised. This wasn't covered by Blue Cross, you know, that we all have. I was told last year when I was getting this prescription filled that it was a standard drug, you know, under patent. Now, this time I went there, and automatically the pharmacist told me that I will get the generic form of it. I said: I'm delighted; we've been trying to tell the government to do the same.

Is there anything built in here to suggest that the government, in fact, is now asking hospitals, for example, or health authorities to look at the use of generic drugs where the health outcomes are similar, if not identical, as compared with the more expensive

patented drugs? That certainly is, I think, an issue on which Albertans would like to hear from us, hear from the government as to what action they're proposing to take. I wonder if some of those considerations are built in in these interim estimates. If not, why not?

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Madam Chairman. First of all, in the interim supply estimates it's almost impossible to build in a decrease in costs for drugs. In a two-month time frame you are not going to see that decrease in the medications. To decrease the amount of expenditures on drugs is going to have to be a longer term process.

What the hon. member was talking about, quite simply, is that when a patent protection comes off a drug, it subsequently goes to generic. We do have mandatory generic substitution in Alberta. The drug that you're talking about – and I don't know which drug it is – typically has I believe a 20-year patent. Recognizing that it takes an average of 13 years for a drug to get into the actual pharmacies, before it is brought to market, there's an average of seven years. What I think happened with the hon. member and why his drug was changed is that a generic did come on the market because the patent had expired, so that's why. But there is generic substitution. The hospitals look very much at the generics, and they utilize generics where they are applicable.

I will take it one step further at my own risk and peril and say that I think it's something that has to be looked at. There are a huge number of very similar drugs that are coming on the market, and when they are put on the formulary, there's not necessarily another drug taken off. It is an issue that we do have to look at. The price of drugs is something that we have to be very cognizant of and vigilant in.

The unfortunate part or fortunate, depending on where you're at, is that a lot of the new drugs that come on are very, very expensive, but a lot of the new drugs that come on are very, very good as well, and they do have a very beneficial effect on the health outcomes of Albertans, so we have to be careful. I think the bottom line in what I'm saying is that we have to be extremely cognizant, we have to be extremely vigilant, and we have to make sure that the drugs are performing to what they are said to perform and that they do have a place in our formulary.

That's the long answer. The short answer is: no, there is no specific indication in these two months. I know that the hon. minister is doing her utmost to keep drug costs down, but that is not something that can be done in a two-month time period. It has to be done in a full-year budget or even more than a one-year budget.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. When we look at this interim supply budget for Health and Wellness, we see that there is in excess of \$2 billion requested. We see expense and equipment/inventory purchases, a much smaller amount for capital investment. When the hon. minister indicates that this is necessary to keep our public health care system operating, everyone is certainly cognizant of that and supports that. But this is an opportunity to discuss not only this portion of the Health and Wellness budget but what is yet to be allocated. We know the budget process that has been dealt with in the past. We know that sometimes the regional health authorities' individual budgets, specifically Calgary and Edmonton, those huge urban health authorities, are much larger

than some of the government departments' total budgets, for instance.

5:10

There is a lot of money spent on providing public health care. I would certainly urge this government to stick to delivering health care to the citizens of this province through the public model, the single-payer user system. I can't imagine how much of this budget is going to be spent on public relations. We know some of the elaborate public relations plans that this government has implemented at taxpayers' expense, of course, in convincing citizens that they need the choice of where to go to acquire needed health services.

Now, it was put to me the other day that these choices will be dependent upon the size of your wallet. I would agree with that. There is no need to go this way. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Opposition, advised and tried to convince this government of the folly of more private health care delivery. The hon. member was right in advising this government of their folly with electricity deregulation and reminded the Premier about when Albertans were told that, oh, they need choice when they purchase electricity. Choice is what they wanted. Well, the choice that Albertans have been left with as a result of that government policy is: "Which bill should I pay first? My high electricity bill or my high natural gas bill?" That was the choice they were left with. The same will apply if this government goes through with implementing their private health care scheme. The people will certainly have choice all right, but it will be: which medical bill do we pay first?

Now, if we're to proceed with this, we're going to have some doctors who in the forenoon will be working in their private clinic, and in the afternoon they'll be going to the public system. We heard earlier about the scarcity of qualified doctors, the difficulty in recruiting them. This idea that you can work in the forenoon in a private clinic and in the afternoon in the public hospital is not to the benefit of the public health care system nor the people who rely on it.

The people who also rely on our public health care system are members of the business community. I can't understand why the Calgary Chamber of Commerce is so anxious to see privatization of our health care system. The single-payer user system is an economic advantage for all economic sectors, whether it's manufacturing, whether it's the service industry, or whether it's people who are involved in heavy industrial . . .

The Acting Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(1), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration of estimates, I would invite the Deputy Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report progress.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the interim supply votes that were taken this afternoon and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Ady in the chair]

Mr. Shariff: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows. The following resolutions relating to the 2006-2007 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund have been approved.

Infrastructure and Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$832,400,000; capital investment, \$207,800,000.

Advanced Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$344,700,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$17,400,000.

Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply also reports progress on Health and Wellness and requests leave to sit again.

Madam Speaker, I wish to table a list of those resolutions voted upon by the Committee of Supply pursuant to Standing Orders.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening, at which time I would ask that we reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, March 8, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/03/08

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Mr. Taylor: I wonder if we might revert to introductions, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am delighted today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of committed daycare owners and managers and parents who are here because they are concerned about the word that we're hearing that Prime Minister Harper is going to cancel the national daycare agreement. These people are here to be recognized, to tell us that we need to support them in doing probably one of the most important job there is. So if I could have them all stand to receive the warm traditional welcome, that would be wonderful.

The Deputy Chair: For the information of those people seated in the galleries, this is committee stage. It is a little more informal compared to the regular proceedings during Assembly. So you will see people taking off their jackets and moving around. It only happens during committee stage.

head: **Interim Supply Estimates 2006-07
General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund**

Health and Wellness

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else wish to speak on the Health estimates? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise with some interest to speak on the interim estimates for Health. I think that we all are aware of the high numbers that we're dealing with in terms of our health care budget, but I have to say that I find it difficult to talk about the detailing regarding these huge sums that we're expected to approve. I think the detail is insufficient, particularly in light of government's proposed third-way amendments to the health care act, and I would suggest to all members of this House and to all assembled here: how can we responsibly debate the spending of such huge sums in light of the lack of detailing regarding the actual allocation of these sums, their place in the overall budget, and how this third-way legislation will play into all of the spending?

The government has their Healthy U program, and they boast of children's health as being a top priority. How can that be the case when there is, I and my own party and others as well would say, a consistent disregard for the care of children in this province? The issue of child care is not resolved. Our weak labour laws target children rather than protect them. What good are the healthy eating

programs when children are at risk in other areas of their lives? So I find it difficult, Mr. Chairman, to look at these interim budget numbers without having some specific information as to where the direction of our public health care system is going here in the province of Alberta.

It seems clear to me that there is some nefarious activity going on in regard to the future of health care, and my feeling and many others' across the province is that we're out to sell health care to the highest bidder in this province, Mr. Chairman. I find that difficult to stomach, quite frankly, and I think that most Albertans will come to believe the same thing. So I am rising to speak in protest of speaking on the detail of this budget given the otherwise devious activities that seem to be undermining it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Chairman, I want to just simply remind the hon. member that we are in interim supply. What we are asking for in a number of these departments are dollars to carry these departments for two months, 60 days, maybe 61 days, until the main budget is passed. This is normal procedure. In fact, even if we had hoped that the budget would be passed by March 31, we would probably ask for supply in the event that it was delayed.

Now, the health budget has been in the neighbourhood of \$9 billion, and we are asking for \$2.2917 billion, which is a fraction of that budget. I know the hon. member, and I know that he wants the people who are working in this field to be paid. I think he understands that many of our payments to the regional health authorities are made at the beginning of the month so that they can ensure that they can carry out their expenditures at the end of the month. I will also remind the hon. member, because I believe he was here when I made mention yesterday, that the budget will be introduced in the House on March 22. That is the time when we will have the opportunity to get into the detail on all of the questions that he might have.

So I just wanted to remind members again that this is interim supply. It is a short period of supply. Sometimes we have found it necessary to ask for 90 days of supply. We are confident with our timing that 60 days will manage this and that we can carry on the important business of health, of educating children, of looking after children through our Children's Services budgets, and caring for the environment, making sure that our infrastructure projects that are so important, many of them in the health area, can proceed. Therefore, we ask the House to pass an interim supply budget to make sure that the business of this province isn't interrupted.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise to speak on the interim supply estimates as we look forward to again speaking on supply estimates that are needed to kind of supply what I think is almost a paycheque-to-paycheque style of government. It is not normal in many other provinces, in many other jurisdictions, in many other countries to not have a budget that we deal with on a year-to-year basis. Most of the budget is in fact put in the budget so that we're not actually looking at bringing things forward from time to time that weren't debated. We would be looking at what we would be doing over a year. Many families work that way. Many businesses work that way, and it is a good way. Why do we have a budget if we're not going to stick with it and we're not going to be dealing with these matters?

I think that some of the things that were brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Calder were very well put on the need to have in the health care budget. I look at one line here and I look at billions, and it doesn't tell us much. How do we debate this? How do we speak to this? I would ask the minister who is standing in for the Health and Wellness minister to tell us how much is actually being put forward in this particular supplementary estimate for the social determinants of health.

The social determinants of health were raised by the health minister last year and were very clearly brought forward as something that would bring down the costs of our health care system and make it more efficient and make it something that would better deal with the health of our people here in Alberta and essentially and especially the health of our children. If we're not looking to providing the best sort of pay and to attract the best people by keeping them well paid and giving them the best of benefits, many of them that have worked for many years dealing with our greatest resource, our children – I think that that is so important to look for: how we develop and move forward in our society.

A few specific questions, I suppose, on Health and Wellness. I'm just asking if we can have some sense of what new major equipment in terms of MRIs and other similar equipment have been put in the Fort McMurray area and what type of equipment we might expect in some of the burgeoning communities that are so busy from our very, very strong energy sector right now. We see, of course, that the community of Stettler is very busy. We see that Edson and Hinton are just going crazy. We see Grande Prairie. Many, many of our communities right now have incredible problems in attracting proper health care personnel.

8:10

What are we doing to put in place training for new health care personnel that will be dealing with the problems of the greying population, the baby boomers, moving quickly through our population. Health care personnel have been a problem for many, many years, ever since the cuts of the 1990s scared off so many people in the health care sector from Alberta.

Those are just a few of the things that I think are important to look at in this global figure. I hope that when we look at the budget that the hon. Minister of Finance mentioned is coming very soon, on March 22, we will see a budget that will deal with matters that will cover us and give us a sense of how the government is going to be moving forward for the entire year.

Just a point on the Minister of Finance's riding. The city of Drumheller would be a fine site for the police academy, second only, of course, to the fine riding of Edmonton-Manning. Both of them have correctional facilities, which would provide a good mix and match for the police academy.

In any case, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just to respond very briefly to the hon. member, unfortunately a lot of these questions were actually answered this afternoon. However, I will reiterate what was stated this afternoon. First of all, there is an interim supply for \$2.2917 billion, which will account for the two months of April and May, when it comes to the department of health. Quite simply, what these dollars do is ensure that physicians get paid, that nurses get paid, that all the health care practitioners get paid, that the RHAs get paid, that the department of health gets paid.

Mr. Chairman, to vote against this bill would in essence shut down the department of health. It would be shutting down the health care industry as we know it for those two months, and everyone in this Assembly fully recognizes and realizes that if those dollars were not there, if the health care system was shut down for one day, it would be quite a travesty to the people of Alberta.

I recognize that there are issues when it comes to health care in general. Those issues will be debated on the floor of the Legislature during question period. They will be debated on the floor of the Legislature during the upcoming budget. Quite simply, interim supply is a way to continue the running of government past the April 1 deadline, which is the end of the fiscal year. A question that I was asked earlier today as well was: "Well, why didn't you plan for it? Why didn't you plan for the upcoming budget?" I reiterated to the people that in my particular department – and I'm sure it's the same in the department of health – we actually start planning for the budget in June and July of the previous year in order to make sure that the business plan and the budget are in place.

I'm quite confident that the Minister of Health and Wellness is going to be bringing forward a budget that will do all of the things that are needed for health care in Alberta. Unfortunately, this is not that budget. This is a budget that, quite simply, bridges the gap between April 1, when we run out of legislated money in the government of Alberta, and the end of May. Hopefully, the budget will be passed before that time. I reiterate what I said this afternoon: if the opposition is concerned about that, the budget is being introduced on March 22, and they can quite simply say that we will vote on the whole budget, on the whole estimates before April 1. Fortunately, this side of the House does not agree with that and feels that it should be debated, so that is what is going to be occurring. This is, quite simply, a way that we can continue to fund the Department of Health and Wellness for the next two months.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just two months but, I mean, if we estimated that over the course of a year, that would be up to \$24 billion. So obviously this is just a shortfall of the funding that they didn't anticipate, if I could just use that in terms of the whole-year base. Maybe that's a stretch, so I'll give the minister a base that one.

We talk about \$2 billion – I believe it's \$2,291,700,000 – and the terms of reference here are expenses, equipment, and inventory purchases. I do believe that the minister has included in that expenses including "salaries, supplies, grants, amortization of capital assets" while also included under those are "appliances; display cases; furnishings; . . . office equipment; shelving; and storage containers." Would that be right to assume, that some of those purchases are being made under that as well?

Going down, consumable inventories for the departments of Transportation and Sustainable Resource Development are also under (ii) as well as vehicles. I'm not sure about that. It also includes part of the capital assets as part of its inventory that "consists of immovable capital assets, equipment required for their construction," equipment for installation. You know, these are all very needed, I'm assuming, with regard to being able to do the day-to-day operations for Capital health and its region, the one it serves, but it just kind of begs the question: how much of this is actually necessary to operate over the next two months? I mean, we're talking about \$2 billion, almost \$3 billion. That's not chump change, as the Premier would say; that's a lot of money. We talk about being able to balance and project our spending from year to

year in a fiscal year, and we're just two months, 60 days, shy of that, but we're asking for \$2 billion.

You wonder why we're spiralling out of control with health care spending. We don't have a budget that we stick to with regard to the House here. I think that if we actually stuck to the budget, adhered to it, we wouldn't be out of control. When we talk about some of the terms of reference that I've mentioned, I mean, it begs the question: are absolutely all these necessary? We talk about the inventory or some of the purchases. I'm not regarding the salaries and the cost to keep the physicians and the front-line people there in line and doing their day-to-day operations. That there's no question about. But when we talk about the vehicles and the other things there, it does ask the question: is that absolutely necessary on top of the already erroneous amount that health care costs, which is upwards of \$9 billion? An additional \$2 billion to talk about furnishings and that: it does ask a question there. How much is health care out of spending because of some of these things, and are we actually able to rein in control, or are we just letting it get out of control further to allow for the debate for the third way?

I'll just sit down and perhaps the minister for infrastructure can enlighten me on some of this.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I must correct the hon. member. There are only 12 months in the year, and this is two months of the 12 months. The two months are worth \$2 billion, so one year is not \$24 billion.

The other comment that I'll make is that \$2.291 billion is not almost \$3 billion; \$2.291 billion is considerably closer to \$2 billion than it is to \$3 billion. I would suggest that the hon. member does not take poetic liberties with \$750 million as that is a lot of money, and it's a lot of taxpayers' money that is to be concerned about.

The other issue is that the hon. member has to recognize that at the front page of the estimates it deals with all of the departments. When they are talking about furniture, when they are talking about everything in the departments, it is all of the departments. Included in this estimate is \$5.4 million for capital investiture, which are things like computers. It's necessary equipment. It's also planning for new hospitals which is included in this. So \$5.4 million in capital funding is what is included in these two months' estimates. There is \$2.291 billion that is included for the two months' running of the health care system.

What the hon. member also has to realize is that many of these grants are actually front ended, so they are paid out in the first two months, which is the reason why it is not extrapolated: six times \$2.291 billion, Mr. Chair. The \$5.4 million, though, I will reiterate and I'll emphasize that that is very important money that is needed for such issues as planning for the hospitals that are going to treat the sick and injured in Alberta.

8:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to respond to something that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation brought up a couple of times ago in his response, I think, to the Member for Edmonton-Manning. His suggestion that there is some kind of will in this House or in any part of this House, I think most specifically on the opposition benches, to vote against this and deprive thousands of people of their livelihoods, their salaries, and tens of thousands of patients in this province of medical care is perhaps the most ridiculous thing that I have ever heard.

Talk about trying to play the sympathy card in this whole routine. This is not what the point is about. Of course we are going to vote, and even if we all on the opposition side of the Legislature voted against the interim supply bill, we are more than outnumbered by the government members. Of course this bill is going to pass, and of course people are going to be paid, and of course people who are in hospital who are sick are going to be looked after. Of course people are going to be able to continue their university and college education and their K to 12 education and everything else that goes on. That is not in question, Mr. Chairman.

The point of the matter and the point that we are arguing on this side of the House – and I refer to the minister's own comments about his own department that planning for the budget starts in June for next April – is simply this: if you can't deliver a budget in time to give it the full debate that the minister himself believes it should have and vote it, with or without amendments, in time for the start of a fiscal year, which happens April 1, year in and year out – it's not like this thing comes up and gets you by surprise – then maybe you should start the process at the end of May or mid-May or whatever it takes. We're talking here about nearly \$6 billion in interim supply to keep the government of the province of Alberta and all the people who depend in any way on that going for up to 60 days because you guys can't get your act together. Now, come on. You've been the government for 35 years. You ought to know how to do a budget by now.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for that provocation that was brought forward. If the hon. member would care to read the Blues, and I would quote: I would suggest that the opposition would not be voting against this bill as it would mean that physicians would not be paid, that nurses would not be paid. I would suggest that they would not be voting against this bill, I believe is the exact wording.

The other issue. I've sat in this House now for going on 13, 14 years, and in each case they question the ability that we have of budgeting. They question the amount of time that we take for budgeting. What we do is a very thorough budgeting process that does take time, Mr. Chair. It sounds like a commercial, but we are not going to put a budget in before its time. It's extremely important. This is taxpayers' money we are dealing with. We have to be sure this money is put to the best use, that it's put to the absolute best use for Albertans. Quite simply, I'm offended by what the hon. member just said.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, have to indicate that receiving the bill without first tabling the budget and the lack of details within the bill creates some difficulty for me in understanding what is happening.

I would like to ask some questions or point out some things with Children's Services. I can see an amount there, and it's huge, and it says expense and equipment/inventory purchases. What I'm wondering about: what is happening with the youth shelter review committee? We had that in place for the fall, I believe, and there are definitely needs indicated across this province for youth shelters. I'm talking specifically about Grande Prairie. There's a housing crunch there, and it's creating huge issues for youth looking for room and board and/or transitional housing. We talk about the need

to get more students to complete high school, and yet we've got these youth without a place to live, without a place to stay. They're not getting their basic needs met. I need to ask: what is happening with that youth shelter review committee? What are the plans for it? Are there any actions planned, and when are they going to start?

It's interesting how the children's advocate office annual reports and the CFSA annual reports echo each other in that they both say that they're not doing a good enough job of looking after kids in terms of advocacy and mentorship. That's another concern I have. What are we doing to help fund programs to give the advocacy and mentoring that youth need to help them make good decisions?

The funding crunch still exists with shelters. There's no sustainable, predictable core funding. A tremendous amount of energy has to go into fundraising rather than the programs to benefit the youth. We need to look at giving them core, predictable funding that they can count on year after year so that they're not worrying about not being able to pay their staff.

The other question, of course, on the minds of many these days related to Children's Services is daycare. It's a huge concern at this time. This government approved a five-point plan in the agreement with the federal government. It was a positive step, and it's now in jeopardy. There is a staffing crisis.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I just want to kind of interject here. We are dealing with the health estimates, so I presume that you are leading to some health summary.

Mrs. Mather: I'm getting there.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. So it's a positive step, that plan. As we look at daycares, one of the most important things in terms of health is wellness and prevention, and daycares, the qualified staff, the accreditation process that's going to assure us that we have qualified staff, will help that.

Again, looking at the health situation, I'm saying that health is more than just hospitals. The best way to build an effective and affordable health system is to build a healthier society. One of the things that I'm talking about is that we need to look at youth. We need to provide the basic needs for those teenagers. We also need to look at our young children, the preschool kids and the after school kids, in terms of their health and their well-being, the social skills as well as the health.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise again. I was taken aback a little bit by the response of the minister on some of the health questions earlier in terms of budgeting and especially in his response to the Member for Calgary-Currie, you know, the question of the time of budgeting and the 13 years that he's been in here and the 13 years he's been with this government. Still this government hasn't got it right and hasn't been able to get it together to be able to have one budget for the year. Why is it that we should be in a position to have to vote money for paycheques right now, with two months left in the year? Why is it that we should be in a position to have to vote for keeping our hospitals going, for keeping our schools going, for having paycheques for people? I mean, it really gets to me to be hearing that from our government in this time.

What is it that we have one line – one line – here? The detail here is not amazing. I mean, we have one line with \$2,291,700,000, and

in the next line we have \$5,400,000 in Health and Wellness. That is the extent of the detail that's given to the people of Alberta to debate this. That is almost beyond reason and is almost beyond responsibility. In fact, it is, I believe, irresponsible to just give us this type of information and to be able to be dealing with this to try and to argue on this in any way that would be democratic, would be dealing with responsibility to the people of Alberta, the children of Alberta, and the future.

I thank you for that, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

8:30

The Deputy Chair: After considering the 2006-2007 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the Department of Health and Wellness for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$2,291,700,000
Capital Investment	\$5,400,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Next we have the Department of Justice. [interjection]

Mr. Stevens: What would you like?

Mr. Flaherty: Go ahead with Education.

Mr. Stevens: You want Education? I can do that.

Education

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Education.

Mr. Stevens: Let it not be said that the opposition don't have influence. They asked for Education, and they're going to get it. Just so we're clear, I am rising on behalf of the Minister of Education to provide some comment with respect to that aspect of the interim estimate.

Alberta Education has requested interim supply vote funding of \$637.4 million and interim supply from lottery initiatives of \$21.5 million to ensure that education service providers continue to receive monthly grant payments to pay their teachers and other operating costs.

The interim funding equals approximately two months of operations for our schools and programs. The \$637.4 million can be broken down as follows: interim supply by vote of \$636,800,000 in operating expense, interim supply by vote of \$590,000 in equipment and inventory purchases. The \$21.5 million in the interim supply for lottery initiatives can be broken down as follows: learning television, \$384,000; transportation subsidy, \$10,134,000; high-speed network, \$1,334,000; school facilities, \$9,667,000.

Mr. Chairman, to ensure that our schools and programs remain

open, I request that the interim supply by vote for the Alberta Education ministry of \$637.4 million and interim supply for lottery initiatives of \$21.5 million be approved.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for St. Albert, did you want to speak?

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is it a problem if I ask the good minister if I could get a copy of the document he used? I wish I'd have had that this afternoon.

The Deputy Chair: You certainly can ask him if he wants to send one to you or to the House. He may do so, but he's not obliged.

Mr. Flaherty: It would be wonderful. Thank you. I appreciate that. It's a pleasure to do this, Mr. Chair, because when I was the regional director of Edmonton, we did a lot of training about how to do budgets. If Dr. Gerry Laing was watching tonight, he'd say that I'm breaking every rule that he taught me by talking about something that's not broken down and being able to defend and rationalize.

Anyway, let me try and go through this. I've taken a look at this particular amount of money that was suggested. I think the amount of money here is \$637,400,000 for expenses and equipment/inventory. I hope there are some salaries in there for daycare workers as well that work in schools, but I'm not sure about that. Maybe the minister could help me with that.

Let me just talk a little bit about dreaming about education and what I think should be in the budget. I know it's not here, but I'll dream a little bit and talk about that tonight. One of the things that I guess I've been highly critical of the Minister of Education about is that I think he seems to have trouble making decisions. I believe that we've got to start looking at education with what I call a ready, aim, fire approach. If I may look at the Alberta Commission on Learning as an example. We've reviewed it to death, and the minister has toured around the province, talked to parents, talked to school boards and teachers.

I noticed today that Mr. Ray Speaker is coming to talk to us here next week. He used to be my former boss. One thing about Ray Speaker that I admired was that he did tour, he did talk, but he acted. I guess that's the one problem I'm having with this whole business with the commission: it's taking so long to get things done. For example, we were talking about salaries. I can't believe – and I'm hoping the teachers of this province will rebel soon – that they aren't yelling and screaming, although I'm trying to get out to them with a package to talk to them about provincial bargaining. If I was a teacher teaching today, I would literally be trying to burn the doors down to get in to see the Minister of Education. He might tell them to shut up, but I don't think they'd listen to him.

The other thing that really, really bothers me a lot is the whole business of the role of the principal. My goodness, the role of the principal has been so important – we have an example of a fine principal sitting down to my left here – to making this school system work well. We still haven't got this document from this government, the Clarke report. We cannot get it to find out what they want to do with the role of the principal. Well, let me tell you this: you're playing with fire if you don't deal with that very, very soon because it's a critical issue.

Now, I had the honour of also mentioning – and I was criticized by some of my colleagues about this. They said: "You're too hard on the minister, you know. We want consultation. We want

consultation about health. We want consultation about education." Well, I hope I'm not being too hard on the minister because I've tried to say to the Minister of Education: why is he going out touring around and consulting when he's probably not going to act on what he hears? Why is he doing this when all he has to do is look at the report given to him by the school trustees, about eight criteria to stop and help kids that are dropping out of school? He doesn't have to tour around. He's got all the solutions right there. All he has to do is get busy and find out how we can take that and plant it through all schools in Alberta. Save the airline; it could be used for other purposes. So I think that's very significant. I hope you people tell him about that because he's going to hear a lot more about that in the coming weeks.

Anyway, let me just tell you about this dream of this budget that I hope we're going to have, Mr. Chair. First of all, I had the honour and pleasure of going to see about hungry kids in Alberta. I was invited by my MLA colleague Mr. Hugh MacDonald to visit this thing in Edmonton-Gold Bar and tour the city-centre schools, and I found out something that shocked me. I saw children that were sleeping on the floor. Their parents are lost. They don't know where they are. Some of them come home in the evening; some don't. They are suffering from a multitude of indicators of poor health. This is happening just down the street from the Legislature here.

I'd also like to talk about the excellent staff and volunteers that are working hard in this whole business of the hot lunch program. I think Alberta is one of the two provinces that provided no funding for the school lunch program. Now, I'm hoping that the new budget talks about that – and I'm sure it will – because there's no funding for school nutrition programs in this province. All provinces other than Manitoba and Alberta provide support to Breakfast for Learning to provide nutritional programs.

Once again, we have a government. I believe they're trying hard, but they're not innovative, and they don't see how this is important for children. I think it's very significant that the chairman of the Protestant school board was asked a question by I think it was Dr. Taft. He asked the chairman, who is, by the way, an expert in nutrition: "What about kids not having proper meals in schools? Can they learn?" She said: no; there's a great deal of difficulty. Not only the poor kids. There are a lot of well-to-do kids, even in St. Albert, going to school without eating properly. That's why I think we should look at this junk food thing more carefully.

Anyway, I'm suggesting to this government – and I hope it's brought out in the budget – that there are a hundred thousand hungry kids that go to school every day in this province, and we have to do something about it. To do absolutely nothing really, really bothered me. Do you know that it would cost \$2 a kid to go and put this program in place?

Now, let me just talk a little bit about – Dr. Oberg was up. Maybe he'll want to comment and take a slap at me on this one.

Chair's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we have an age-old tradition here to refer to our fellow colleagues by their constituency. This is I think the third time that I'm hearing a member's name. Now, once it may have been a physician whose name may just be the same as the Leader of the Official Opposition. I just want to caution you that that's a tradition. That's something we respect in this Assembly. So if you are referring to a fellow colleague, refer to them by name of constituency.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your help. If I've offended anybody, I apologize, but it's close to March 17, and I'm getting excited.

8:40

Debate Continued

Mr. Flaherty: Now, we got away from my wonderful talk here, Mr. Chair, but I'll try and get back to it.

The next thing I want to talk about in this potentially good budget that's coming up is the whole business of infrastructure; for example, Calgary Catholic board. What a wonderful board that is. A wonderful board. I hope some of you will go down there and meet them. They're really terrific. They received 12 new portables this year, and they needed 108, Mike. The one thing that's very poorly planned is the fact that many of these portables don't fit. They don't work in the system they have. They believe in portables, but your new ones don't work. So God help us. We need help down there. Let's hope that they get some help from the new budget.

So the whole question here, Mr. Chair, is schools. Schools need funding for everything inside the school. While some districts have received funding for buildings and portables, they haven't received funding for all the materials inside the classroom such as class wares, labs, books, tables, chairs, pens, and pencils. Let me tell you, Mr. Chair and your colleagues, if I can, that one of the wonderful things that you should see at Vital Grandin in St. Albert is that a child, because of a Vanguard 2 computer, is able to speak to her aide because of the need for that. Now, the problem with the funding for special ed is that it wasn't there for her to get this machine. Thank goodness that a large grocery chain supplied that. I had the honour of meeting this girl about two weeks ago, and she's now speaking to us through the computer. I'd like to bring her in the House some day to let you people see it. It's marvellous.

Mrs. McClellan: I have one in Cessford school.

Mr. Flaherty: Wonderful. Well I think it's to be commended that you did. That child has opened up her whole personality because of that.

So we're talking about infrastructure. Let me just talk about transportation. Transportation, as you know, in the Calgary Catholic school board is a very difficult one. In fact, I think we had a statistic here that 20,000 students in the city of Calgary – I believe that's correct – travel by bus. The size of the population of Airdrie every day, so it's quite the thing. But funding is required in Calgary for community schools. They want community schools where kids can walk to and from school and feel safe. There's a massive transportation issue in the city of Calgary. While there have been some wonderful one-off arrangements with the department, the permanent source of funding for transportation has not been reviewed in 15 years. I think it's important that districts are now having to make up extra funds for transportation because there isn't such a concept as community schools.

Well, I've got a couple of little things here, Mr. Chair, and I'll sit down. Full-day kindergarten. You know, I just don't get it; I'm sorry. As an educator I don't get it. You know why? I'm talking about the situation out at Mayerthorpe with the man that carried out the particular thing that happened out there, which was tragic. Let me tell you that what I believe we need in our schools from K to 3 are good diagnostic tools to help us pick out kids that are going to have problems.

I want to thank you, hon. member from the Okotoks area, for the wonderful ability for my grandson to have screening because he had an eye/hand co-ordination problem. I'm happy to say that he's in

grade 1 at one of your wonderful schools there, and he has actually overcome his problem because they did his screening. They implemented a program to help him, and that kid is going to be successful in school. I can bring an expert – right at the U of A is one of the best educators in all of Canada; I can't tell you his name because I'll get fired here tonight – and he will tell you that we need to change what we're doing in the elementary schools because many of our kids are falling through the cracks. We need to start doing remedial programming and get a career education stream and revamp our system. That's what he's saying, and he's very knowledgeable. I wish I could bring him. If you'd let me bring him, I will. I constantly wonder why the government doesn't get that whole business on screening and diagnostic testing. I don't get it. I really don't get it. I hope to bring that up to the minister again.

Now, you have been good with your funding framework. I think it was excellent what you did five years ago, but you've got to relook at that whole thing, quite frankly, because many of the boards in this province, rural and urban, are saying that they don't have enough money to operate. So make no mistake: I am going to continue to talk about better funding for schools as long as I am still sitting in this seat. I intend to be here for a few years yet, so be ready because I think we're going to have to have some money for that. We need to have a look at the whole question of the framework of funding and make sure that we also look at the whole business of plant operation and maintenance to make sure it's keeping up with inflation. I was pleased that you did that with the busing last year in transportation, but I think that whole area needs to be looked at.

I'll stop, Mr. Chair. I want to thank you for your help tonight in getting through this. I want you also to know, all you Calgarians and southern Alberta people, that the Oilers got a new goalie today. He's not as old as me, but he's good. Calgary, beware because you're going to be in trouble when we play you next Thursday. I hope I'm not on duty.

God bless. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, you know, I thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for giving us some detail on the Education numbers.

Some Hon. Members: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Backs: Thanks to the member to my right here for saying that it's the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Thank you.

It's good to see that some of this is broken down. But I wonder, in seeing that it is broken down, why we see \$10,400,000 coming out of the lottery fund for transportation and why that could not be coming out of the general budget.

I ask, you know, for maybe a little bit more detail on a matter that came up in the House here just some days ago. It must be an ongoing cost, and that's the trucking of water to the Ellerslie school, which has not had water put into it for 20 years and is a matter of great concern to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Some of these areas in terms of, you know, \$636 million for operating expenses: again, that's a lot of money with not a lot of detail.

To build on some of the things that my colleague for St. Albert spoke to on education streaming and how that is being funded, I would hope that there is something of that in this, but I doubt it very much. The reality of much of our education system and how we are streaming many of our kids is clear in how we are ending up with so,

so many high school dropouts. As I said in my response to the Speech from the Throne just yesterday, why is it that the government is just now thinking about asking kids why so many are dropping out? Why is it that we have so high a rate of high school dropouts? Why is there not some sense of dealing with relevance, some sense of dealing with providing things that are providing interest to the kids, and indeed providing them with meaningful employment in terms of things that they can get into?

We don't have a vocational high school in Edmonton any more. We have taken away the name composite from many of our high schools because they don't really have the equipment to justify realistic levels of vocational training, yet we hear demands and demands and demands to bring in temporary foreign workers because we're not training vocational labour; we're not training trades; we're not training technicians; we're not training people to do the jobs that are so necessary in a modern economy.

8:50

The problems in our education system are clear that way. Even coming out of our high schools with all the dropouts, even with the graduates the average age of entry for an apprentice is 25 years old. Why is that? Why is it that when they even get into their apprenticeships in the first two years most of them are gone? There are 45,000 people in apprenticeships right now in our province, and that's a good thing. It's a good thing that more are being encouraged, and we're seeing some movement in that area. But, on the other hand, why are most of them dropping out in the first two years and most of them finding that they're being used as cheap labour and not getting the proper supervision from a journeyman, not getting the proper training, not even getting the proper training that they'd had before in school to get into doing this? A lot of them are just being used as labourers, laid off shortly thereafter because they were cheap labour, and then they're gone.

We've seen some moves to establish new trades, which is good: establishing things for the traditional oil patch, the traditional oil industry. New trades of things we used to call toolpush and such are now out there. That has even jumped those numbers up somewhat in terms of the graduates, which skews the figure, really, because those people are being given that because they have experience. It skews the numbers of graduates, which are actually smaller.

Why do we have no sense of trying to bring some training forward for so many children in our system? They are, indeed, our future. Why are we bringing in, you know, potentially thousands and thousands of temporary foreign workers when we have still one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the country, when even in Canada we have, I think, 1,800,000 kids in the 18 to 25 year age group that are out of work? There's something wrong there. There's something very wrong there.

We need to somehow stream better in our high school system, need to make things relevant, to make things important for those that want to get into a trade. An emphasis on academics is good. The Fraser Institute has really pushed this idea that we should have, you know, these high marks in academics and focus just on these few areas. They rate the schools this way, and we have ratings of the schools in that way in order to do that. But I think it's worked against the realistic sense of how we will educate our children properly in terms of what they can do to have a successful career.

I'd recommend to any parent that they ask their child to take a career in a trade first and then move into a university degree. Anyone that I know that has done that has been very successful, and they will do well. Indeed, many of the leaders of business in our province started as tradespeople, and they became very successful through the work patterns that they learned, through the things that

they learned. Many of them went on to get a degree later on. Some of them didn't. Some of them just were very successful in being a tradesperson and going into business.

Many of our aboriginal business leaders have actually been very successful in their endeavours. I could name a couple. Golosky Trucking: the person that started that was actually an ironworker, and he got his trade, and he's built up a business which has hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of employees and does very well in training aboriginals and bringing them through the system.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Another in Fort McMurray is Neegan Developments. Dave Tuccaro is a crane operator, an operating engineer, and very successful and has been the recipient of many Canada-wide awards and done that through learning, initially, his trade. Yet we have very little, almost nothing, in our education system.

One question is: is there anything in these monies to try and change that emphasis? Is there any change in the emphasis on trying to get some monies for teachers who also have a trades ticket in order to train kids in these areas? You know, they may be more costly. We may need to bring something in. I've talked to award winning schools that would like to get more things, but there doesn't seem to be enough money for equipment or not enough money for expenses to actually train people in the many areas.

We hear that the registered apprenticeship system is just not working in almost all the trades because of the fact that there's not enough equipment. It just works in a few, some mechanical, a few of the others, but in most of them there is not anything that we can actually bring people through for most of the trades. Many of the businesses that I've talked to will not use that system because they get castoffs from the teachers who don't want those kids in their system, in their school because they bring down their marks and make it look bad for them when they're trying to get higher in their ratings, so to speak.

I think there are major issues in spending here that really aren't shown in these numbers, but I sure would like to have a few answers on some of the questions that I've asked.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to talk to education funding also. I have a few concerns, some that I share with my colleagues that have spoken before me.

One, though, that I haven't heard mentioned is joint use agreements. This is a great concern in my constituency, and I think it is across the province. There are community teams, groups, and clubs that need space, and often the schools have the space, but the schools can't afford the extra custodial time or maintenance that would be required for the extra hours of use, and neither can the clubs or the teams or the groups. I know that there is some effort apparently going on to resolve this, but I really feel strongly that schools can be the heart of the community, and they need to be supported. They help involve students in positive activities and help them make healthy, wise decisions in terms of their lifestyles. So this is an area where I certainly would like to see an injection of funds. Of course, there's no detail here, so I don't know if that's included, but I would like it to be considered.

When I'm talking about schools being the heart of the community, I think that one of the things that we can do that would solidify the support for many of our young people is to bring in social workers

and other services into the school so that there's a seamless integrating of services between school and outside agencies. I think that should be a primary focus. We need to be working together. We need to know what each agency is capable of. There are wonderful programs out there, but often schools aren't aware of what the resources are. If we could have someone in the school to kind of coordinate and solidify and create that seamless movement, that would be a real plus.

The other thing that is a huge problem is that we do not have trained counsellors the way we had at one time. At this point most schools do not have counselling. If they do, they might have .1. That is just not adequate. We need to have counselling at all levels. This is something that can contribute to diagnosis, to screening, as my colleague from St. Albert mentioned, but it's also a vehicle to help keep students from falling through the cracks. So I really would like to see more money put into counselling services for schools of all levels.

9:00

As my colleague from Edmonton-Manning indicated, we have a real concern about the fact that the vocational aspects of schools have disappeared. We know that technology means we're moving towards fewer workers in the area of manual labour. What we need for the information age are well-trained people. We have a drastic shortage of skilled blue-collar workers: mechanics who work with computer chips in vehicles, electricians, plumbers, chefs, beauty culture workers. The list goes on and on. We seem to be catering to the top 10 per cent of the schools' population, believing that academics is the way to go, but we need to be looking at the differences that students bring. We have the whole continuum. We need to be helping students at every point on that continuum be successful.

Our workforce in the next 10 years will need to be skilled in all areas, particularly technology, and I think that this is another area where we need to be injecting money. The RAP program is a wonderful program. I certainly support it. I saw students who were successful with that in the high school where I was.

Another concern that I have is that we still do have class sizes of 34. There are a number of them here in Edmonton. We need to look at why that is happening.

Another thing is that teachers are frustrated because there are curriculum changes. New textbooks are required – for example, in social and French now in the elementary schools – but the province is not providing the money for those changes. The 30 minutes of phys ed daily is a good idea, but schools don't have the resources to do this. Then, of course, mandating second language learning: there isn't the staff to do that. We have to have trained teachers in order to implement this.

As we look at our high school completion rates, there are so many factors involved. As I say, we need to go back to early childhood education. We need to invest dollars there, into child care, to help support these children in getting the very best and getting their basic needs at that level, where they will learn many things, including social skills.

I think that's all I need to say tonight. Thank you.

The Chair: After considering the 2006-07 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund for the Department of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$637,400,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Justice and Attorney General

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to make a few brief remarks regarding the interim supply requirements for Alberta Justice for 2006-2007. I think it's fair to say that, as in other ministries, what we're looking for is two months' expenditures to carry on business as has been approved as a result of debate in this House on the budget of 2005-2006.

I'd ask members to refer to the section beginning on page 7 of the interim supply schedule, where some information with respect to this matter is found. The requirements for Alberta Justice total approximately \$81.5 million. That is, of course, required to support the ongoing commitments of Alberta Justice until the budget 2006-2007 is tabled and passed in this Legislature. Of that, \$77.1 million is for Alberta Justice operating expenditures and \$4.4 million is for equipment/inventory and expenditures. The interim supply, of course, will allow Alberta Justice to continue to meet its mission to protect the rights of citizens and advance the goals of society.

Alberta Justice is a core ministry. It provides essential services to ensure safe communities, access to justice, respect for law, understanding of and confidence in the justice system, and of course it also provides a legal foundation for social cohesion and economic prosperity. I know, Mr. Chairman, that the members opposite are very supportive of a well-running and a good-functioning justice system and will be more than supportive of what we are asking for this evening.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few brief comments and questions in regard to the interim financing for Justice. I'm just curious to know if these interim expenditures are indicative of an overall increase in Justice spending for the upcoming budget year. Given the recent discharge of a firearm by a provincial protection officer, how urgent does this Peace Officer Act become? Given the need to establish consistent training for peace officers, can we expect to see the recommendations that came out of the special constable review come into force, such as those calling for co-ordination of services and training between peace and police officers? Is there interim funding that's being allocated for this specific initiative?

If the estimates that we're hearing here today are indicative of increased spending in Justice, we're certainly supportive as the New Democrat caucus of such an increase for police and peace officer supports in conjunction with the Solicitor General, for more Crown attorneys and other Justice personnel. However, I was wondering if we can expect more funding to be made available to address the root causes of the activities that go on involving the Justice department – for example, domestic violence – and to work in more close association in providing adequate child care, equal access to education, and things like that. I suppose we address violence in the courts, which is very much necessary, but we would like to see

specific funding perhaps targeting how we can reduce the visits to the courts by individuals in our society.

We certainly are supportive of the Justice estimates, and we look forward to some clarification and some interesting initiatives in the new budget year. Thank you.

Mr. Stevens: Just a brief reply to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I appreciate the support from the hon. member and from the ND opposition party. The throne speech obviously indicated that there will be in this upcoming budget some new initiatives with respect to Justice in terms of more prosecutors, more judges, more staff in the justice system to address the challenges that we have there, and that's all going to be good news. The throne speech also referenced an initiative which we have jointly with the Solicitor General, called ARTAMI, which will be addressing a problem that we have in Alberta and which is throughout Canada, but certainly we have it here in the province; that is, domestic violence and stalking. So we have some very, very exciting initiatives.

9:10

However, the matter that is before us tonight is an interim supply matter. The interim supply matter deals with business as usual, if you will. In other words, we have an approved budget for the Ministry of Justice. We will be carrying on, expending money over the course of the months of April and May based on this interim supply, as we are today. There will be no new expenditures associated with this approval this evening, hon. member. What it will be is business as usual, as previously approved and debated on in this Assembly.

The Chair: After considering the 2006-07 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund for the Department of Justice for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$81,600,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Gaming

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My request this evening comes in two parts. The first part is \$38,400,000 for the Gaming budget itself, primarily required to continue to support the community-based programs of CFEP, the community facility enhancement program, and CIP, the community initiatives program. That amount will allow us to continue providing grants under those two programs to eligible not-for-profits, who make application throughout the province, and the programs will continue uninterrupted into the next year.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The other amount, which is a larger amount, is \$328,200,000, and that is for disbursement of funds from the Alberta lottery fund. The lottery fund provides money to other departments and other programs. For example, one that you'd be familiar with is AADAC. We want to make sure that we have the money in that budget so that they can continue to do their good work on treatment and education, helping people with problems with alcohol, drugs, and gambling. So we certainly want to continue the funding to AADAC. Other funding that we want to continue would be funding which is provided from the lottery fund to Community Development for such good programs as the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation, the Wild Rose Foundation, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission.

We in this Assembly are all familiar with the good programs that are funded through the Alberta lottery fund, and this interim supply estimate is to allow us to continue funding those programs so that they continue uninterrupted until our budget is approved. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have some very brief comments in regards to the interim budget for Gaming. Regarding the AGLC's recent announcement that new resources will be made available for problem gamblers in regard to their treatment and focusing on their problem, I'd like to note that we applaud the government's initiative to provide easier access to information on responsible gambling. However, we do also want to note that we question the sincerity of such efforts given that these information centres will be placed inside the casinos and in the very casinos that fund basic programming for our province. The argument may be made that problem gamblers are to be found in casinos; therefore, it makes the most sense to have the information there. But I guess it would not be indicative of a greater concern; for example, perhaps if video lottery machines were banned as well, if regulations banned bank machines within a certain distance of VLTs, or if casinos were issued severely restricted liquor licences. These are all things that we would like to see considered in the next budget year, Mr. Chairman.

The dependence of our budget in so many areas on gambling is of grave concern to many people in our province and to myself personally very much so. The dependence, as well, of many charities and groups on the profits made from gambling, which hurts so many people here in this province, I find difficult to balance in my mind. If we were to stop underestimating other sources of revenues and budget accordingly, I believe that we would not have to be so dependent on various gambling institutions and machines like VLTs in particular. I think that we would serve the public interest better to look to restrict our dependence on such earnings in the future.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Graydon: I never want to miss the opportunity to give the member some good news. He mentioned a couple of things in here. I want to use every opportunity I have to spread good news. He talked about the distance between an ATM, a cash machine if you will, and VLTs and slot machines. We have recently implemented a distance requirement in there. No longer can you be sitting at your VLT and reach over and take some cash out of the ATM machine. There is now a distance requirement, and outlets are complying with

that requirement. So it will take a concentrated effort to get up from your machine and go and access funds. It will break your pattern of thought, hopefully, and not make it quite so easy to get cash to continue gambling.

The second initiative that was recently announced, which I think is another good-news initiative that should be mentioned, is that we have a program called the Alberta server intervention program. It's mandatory training for people who are involved in the alcohol business as a waiter, waitress, management, or even working in a retail liquor store. It's mandatory training that staff must take for the responsible handling of liquor products. It is a requirement also that volunteers and members of not-for-profit groups take that training over the next few years. We've recently waived the fee so that not-for-profit groups, your neighbourhood Legion or Kinsmen club, that want to get their members trained in the responsible serving and sale of alcoholic beverages can now take that training free of charge on the Internet. It's about a five-hour course. You can break it up over many, many days if you want, but the total time required is five hours, and it is free of charge to nonprofits.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: After considering the 2006-2007 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the Department of Gaming, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

Agreed to:	
Expense	\$38,400,000
Lottery Fund Payments	\$328,200,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Which department would you want to take next?

A general question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't have any specific questions on anything specific that is left in the interim supply, but I'm going to try one more time with a general question directed at the Finance minister.

Mrs. McClellan: I'm ready.

9:20

Mr. Taylor: She says she's ready, Mr. Chair.

An Hon. Member: She was born that way.

Mr. Taylor: She was born that way.

It covers the process. It's a question about process, quite simply. It refers back to some comments that I made earlier this evening and some comments that I made this afternoon about the fact that budget day is two weeks from today, March 22. We do need and want and treasure a set amount of time to debate the budget. In fact, I'm sure that everybody on the opposition benches would like it if we could debate the budget longer than we do. So we're certainly not talking about shortening the period of debate on the budget. But this is an annual process, and as the minister of infrastructure said earlier on, people in his department start working on next year's budget in about June of this year.

If the budget can be brought in on March 22, when the fiscal year starts April 1 every year, as complex as the process may be, as much care as your fellow ministers and their most excellent public servants in each one of their departments take to craft good budgets, in fact they do, why can't the process, then, be started two weeks, four weeks earlier every year so that the budget is ready to be presented to this House in a timely fashion so that we can debate it in a full and proper manner, vote on it, and have it in place ready to take effect by or before April 1? It seems to me, Mr. Chairman, that that's a reasonable request to make of the Finance minister and the government. So I wonder if I could get a response to that, please.

Thank you.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Chairman, I'd be pleased to respond. It is about timing. I can tell you that nothing would make me happier than to be able to bring in the budget in a time frame that would have it concluded well before the end of the year. It really is about process, and it's a little bit, I think, about tradition as well: you bring in the throne speech, you have a reasonable time to debate that, and the budget follows. There is no advantage to me as Finance minister or to any minister here in delaying the budget. It doesn't change the numbers. It doesn't change the amount of money you have to spend. It doesn't really even shorten up the time you have to debate it.

So I take this as advice rather than calling it an admonition. We've talked about it before. I had certainly hoped that we would have this budget in somewhat earlier than we did this year. I'm not going to make excuses. I will remind everyone that we have a very complex system of reporting because at the time we bring our budget, we bring a fiscal update, an economic update, a complete set of government business plans, and all of the good accompanying information. I have a wonderful staff at Finance that prepare this. I think that we can safely say that we've not had an error in our budget, and that's diligence and so on. I think that with our House leaders we can talk about earlier. [interjection] Yeah, as the Government House Leader was saying, really it's the development of the policy that takes the time.

Even with that, the minister of infrastructure is entirely right. We will begin the next budget process in June, as we did this year. Can we tighten up the timeline? Should the House go in earlier? Those are things that we all have to have a discussion on. Frankly, I don't find January an exciting month, and I've never been able to take a holiday since I joined this group, so I haven't found any advantage there.

I just want you to know that from a Finance minister's perspective the ideal would be exactly that. The other ideal would be that you never had any in-year spending. It's a Treasurer's dream.

I heard somebody say that their families, you know, wouldn't operate this way. Well, good on you because I can tell that I've never been able to plan for 12 months that my washing machine wasn't going to break down or that the transmission wasn't going to go out of the car or that one of my kids wouldn't need some equipment for something I didn't know they were going to get into that wasn't in my budget. I've always tried to have some money that I didn't have allocated that would cover some of those things, so I admire the person who said that their family would never operate needing unanticipated in-year spending.

As I say, I don't take issue with the member's question. It would be the ideal. Can we work towards that? I'll make a commitment to the House that we try. We've got a lot of work to do, a lot of policy to make sure that we have right. As I say, we take a great deal of pride in this province in putting forward budget documents that are accurate, that don't have errors, and that give a complete picture, sometimes I think so complete that they're so big that

nobody will read them, a very complete picture of what our intention is for the year.

So I thank you for your comments. I understand entirely where you're coming from. You know, Mr. Chairman, it would be refreshing to have a debate that didn't centre around: I don't have any detail for these numbers.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: After considering the 2006-2007 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for support to the Legislative Assembly, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly

Agreed to:	
Support to the Legislative Assembly	
Expense	\$12,000,000
Office of the Auditor General	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$4,500,000
Office of the Ombudsman	
Expense	\$600,000
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer	
Expense	\$700,000
Office of the Ethics Commissioner	
Expense	\$100,000
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner	
Expense	\$1,100,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the votes be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$9,200,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$177,100,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Children's Services

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$224,500,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Community Development

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$93,600,000
Capital Investment	\$2,800,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the votes be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Economic Development

Agreed to:	
Expense	\$17,200,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Energy

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$74,600,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Environment

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$23,700,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

9:30

Executive Council

Agreed to:	
Expense	\$4,300,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Finance

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$21,600,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$11,000,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the votes be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Opposed? Carried.

Government Services

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$18,300,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.**Human Resources and Employment**

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$137,100,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.**Innovation and Science**

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$36,100,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.**International and Intergovernmental Relations**

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$2,800,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.**Municipal Affairs**

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$34,300,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.**Restructuring and Government Efficiency**

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$63,900,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.**Seniors and Community Supports**

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$488,300,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.**Solicitor General and Public Security**

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$110,100,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.**Sustainable Resource Development**

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$43,800,000

Capital Investment \$5,600,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the votes be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. That was indeed a fine performance. You're to be congratulated. I move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the interim supply votes.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2006-07 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, expense, \$12,000,000; office of the Auditor General, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,500,000; office of the Ombudsman, expense, \$600,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, expense, \$700,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, expense, \$100,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, expense, \$1,100,000.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$9,200,000.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$177,100,000.

Children's Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$224,500,000.

Community Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$93,600,000; capital investment, \$2,800,000.

Economic Development: expense, \$17,200,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$637,400,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$74,600,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$23,700,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$4,300,000.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$21,600,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$11,000,000.

Gaming: expense, \$38,400,000; lottery fund payments, \$328,200,000.

Government Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$18,300,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,291,700,000; capital investment, \$5,400,000.

Human Resources and Employment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$137,100,000.

Innovation and Science: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$36,100,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,800,000.

Justice and Attorney General: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,600,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$34,300,000.

Restructuring and Government Efficiency: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$63,900,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$488,300,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$110,100,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$43,800,000; capital investment, \$5,600,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a list of those resolutions voted upon by the Committee of Supply pursuant to Standing Orders.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 19
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I would move Bill 19 for third reading.

I would just say that I appreciated hearing many of the thoughtful comments, and insightful comments in many cases, in the discussion of this bill. I certainly felt that the comments that were made were meant to be helpful and constructive, and I've made notes. I hope that the members who have made those comments see their thoughts reflected in the future.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance to close debate?

Mrs. McClellan: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure we'll get support for the motion that I'm about to make, and that is that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 9:40 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, March 9, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have two groups of guests that I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly. They're all outstanding representatives of Alberta's public service, and of course they're all working in Alberta Municipal Affairs. I would like to first of all introduce a group of employees from Alberta Municipal Affairs that are touring the Legislature, having an opportunity to see the political side of life as they deal with the practical side of life in their day-to-day operations. I would like to introduce to you 11 individuals. They are Kristine Jonah, Brenda Putz, Jay Merchant, Sarah Severyn, Mandi Carroll, Mike Haugen, Dave Wheeler, Jeff Bazinet, Michelle Austin, Nicolle Germain, and Brad Kopp. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Speaker, Municipal Affairs has a program that I'm very proud of and works extremely well. It's a mentorship program where new employees have an opportunity to get a lay of the land from some of the more experienced folks that are within our department. Today I would like to introduce to you two representatives of that mentorship program. They are Elysia Johnson, who is an administrative assistant with the planning and co-ordination union, and her mentor, Kari-Ann Kuperis, who is a public affairs officer in our communications branch. I would ask that they rise and receive the recognition of the House as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to do today. It is my pleasure to rise on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Stony Plain to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two of his constituents who are visiting with us today. The first is Karen Snethun. She is the mother of Carter Snethun, who recently won a Great Kids award in the Stony Plain region. With her is Deanna Sanche, who is visiting the Assembly to observe the process of our Assembly. Deanna is very interested in the work that our pages do and has expressed a desire to try that one day. I would ask our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction to you and through you to all members of the House is to introduce to you Christine Barker and Sam Ludmer, who are residents of St. Albert. Christine and Sam are visiting the Legislature Building today and are joined by three of their guests, Hy Ludmer and Brad Stowell, visiting from the United States, and Aaron Ludmer, visiting from Ottawa. I'd also like to add

that Christine and Sam are getting married this weekend. Congratulations to them. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. David Benoit, his wife, Sylvie, and children Joseph, Catherine, and Patrick. The Benois are here today to learn about Alberta's legislative process. I'm certain that they are very familiar with the federal system as their uncle is the recently re-elected Member of Parliament for Vegreville-Wainwright, Mr. Leon Benoit. The Benois are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce a school group that I have in the members' gallery. It's not very often that I get a school group up. In fact, this group comes up every year. They're the Trinity Christian school, and they had a tough time getting here today. They slipped and slid over those roads and made it anyway to better show their kids how government works. The parents with them are too numerous to mention, so I'll just mention the teachers. It's Mr. George Graffunder, Miss Kim Schellenberg, and Mr. Clement McLachlan. If I could ask them to rise, we can give them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of children from the Edison school north of Okotoks. The grade 6 class is accompanied by their teachers Mr. Joseph Smith and Mr. Blair Maciura along with parent helpers Mrs. Lynn Perkins, Mr. Rick Festa, Mrs. Lana Smith, Mrs. Shelley Rizzo, Mrs. Baby Hornaday, and Mrs. Sabrina Birrell. I'm sure these people, along with Cindy's people, slithered their way up here in less than ideal conditions, and I'm certainly happy to have them here. I suspect that they're back in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often I get guests up here, but I was pleasantly surprised twice today. Over the lunch hour a former constituent approached me and is visiting today. She will be introduced later on. It was great to see her.

I also have two friends from Olds that work for accredited supports, an organization that provides excellent services to persons with disabilities in my community. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask Linda Maxwell and Verlie Weiss to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 14 members of the board of the Family and Community Support Services

Association of Alberta. They are in Edmonton-Meadowlark tomorrow attending a board meeting. I would like to welcome them. They're here to watch question period today, led by president Joe Ceci. They asked not to be identified because they're all very modest civil servants. If they could just rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to welcome a group to our Legislature and to introduce to you and through you to the members and the officers of this Assembly a group from one of the best and greatest multicultural schools in our province, the John Barnett school in Edmonton-Manning, accompanied by teachers Mr. Barry French, and Mrs. Pat Robinson and parents Mrs. Denise Hugman and Mrs. Carol Lycan. Please rise and have the warm welcome of the members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Karla Kincade. Karla is here visiting her brother David, who is a valued member of the Liberal caucus staff, and of course she's visiting my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. After spending five years in New Zealand, she's just moved back to Canada and will be residing in Kelowna, B.C. She is finishing her masters in medical physics at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. I would ask her to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: 1:40 **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Income Support Class Action Settlement

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years this government ignored its own laws by denying the most vulnerable Albertans what they were entitled to: fair treatment according to the law with respect to their payments under AISH, social assistance, and widows' pensions. Now this government is trying to sweep the issue under the rug by claiming they didn't know, quietly agreeing to huge out-of-court settlements, and by blaming the so-called errors on staff. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister admit that this lawsuit was not the result of 20 years of bureaucratic errors but resulted from a policy directive carried on with the minister's knowledge and support?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before in this House, it is very unfortunate that people with so many needs were caught in this particular situation. As you're aware, this issue goes back to 1979. That involved two other premiers and no doubt a number of cabinet ministers and no doubt a number of staff in those various departments. I believe that the staff at the time followed the policies that were in place at least as close as possible depending again, of course, on the type of information they received from the clients, and sometimes that's where there are some differences.

Again, I'd just like to say that it's unfortunate this happened. I believe the agreement has been settled now to the satisfaction of the clients, and the process is to proceed with the payments that are owed to certain people.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Well, we'll all agree that it was unfortunate. Again to the same minister: did the minister take this multimillion dollar class-action settlement to members of the provincial cabinet, Treasury Board, or Premier's office before it was made public?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker. Any issue as sensitive as this always goes through the whole process to ensure that it is dealt with appropriately. Maybe the Justice minister may want to also supplement my answer on this.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is actually to the minister of seniors. Did this minister take this multimillion dollar class-action settlement to members of the provincial cabinet, Treasury Board, or Premier's office before it was made public?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to respond to this issue because it is a serious one. We have acted upon it as you know. As my colleague here mentioned to you as well, it did go through the appropriate processes. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition would like to hear further about that, I'd refer that question to the Minister of Justice.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The process behind this class-action lawsuit remains something of a mystery. The fact is that this government appeared to try to hide this lawsuit before the last election. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister deny that instructions have been given to staff in his department to destroy documentation relating to the lawsuit and its settlement?

Mr. Cardinal: I don't believe, Mr. Speaker, that such an action would have been taken. We do have valuable staff, well-qualified staff, and they're very sincere. They try to deal with the clientele as effectively as possible. No, I don't believe a directive of that nature would ever be given to anyone.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. My next question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Premier. Given that the Premier has denied any knowledge of the settlement of the class-action lawsuit before it was in the newspapers, can the Premier deny he had any knowledge of the lawsuit when it was launched in the fall of 2004 prior to the last election? Did he know about it then?

Mr. Klein: No, I don't believe so. The only knowledge I had of a lawsuit as it pertained to AISH, or maybe it was seniors – I don't know. There was a class-action lawsuit launched some time ago relative to one of those issues. Relative to that specific lawsuit, maybe I had some knowledge; maybe I didn't. I don't know. To answer the question – and I don't know if it was asked – it did go to cabinet, and it did go to Treasury Board.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Then my final question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that this issue went to cabinet and the Treasury Board, will the minister table the list of meetings and attendance records for Treasury Board meetings in which the class-action lawsuit was discussed?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, if I could see any benefit to the clients who are being dealt with in this situation, it would be one consideration, but I see absolutely no benefit in providing what are dealt with as confidential meeting minutes. The Premier has clearly stated that this matter was before Treasury Board. I will confirm that. I see absolutely no benefit to the clients, if that's what the hon. member is trying to deal with, in having that information.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Reform Consultation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the section on allowing doctors to work in both systems, the government's Alberta's New Health Policy Framework: Questions and Answers document indicates that "we're looking at many scenarios." It also says: "Private insurance is one, but only one, of the options we're looking at. We're also looking at what other ways there are to publicly insure Albertans." My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Exactly what other scenarios is the government considering for doctors working in both systems?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the most important scenario is to make sure that if doctors work in both systems, they must ensure and we must ensure that we do not impair the capacity of the public system to provide a strong public system of care. That's one of the most important things that we would look at.

We would look, Mr. Speaker, obviously, at the situation in the community, the kinds of capacity that the community had, and what sorts of criteria would be developed in consultation. We spoke last night with the AMA and with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the other colleges that would be charged with providing health care for the professionals that would be a part of any type of private establishment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the meeting that was held with various representatives, the AMA, et cetera, last night was behind closed doors and you're not providing any information here, how is the public supposed to be able to judge your framework when you won't give them any details at all?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was really only one group of the four last night that requested to have a private conversation. The Health Sciences Association of Alberta, Bow Valley College, and Mount Royal College had open conversations. The conversations that are private are always at the request of the group that is coming to present. We recognize that they may reserve comments until later. We have committed to get them additional information and continue the dialogue.

It's my intention throughout this process to continue to consult, to continue to listen to people, and when we have more benchmarks or more established guidelines based on our interaction with the consultations, we will provide them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: well, Madam Minister, will any of these other options or other scenarios or whatever else is discussed behind these closed doors – will any of these details be presented to the Alberta public before the legislation comes before this Assembly?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, although I cannot provide exact timing of what we would do in release of the consultation issues that came forward or some of our options, it's my full intent to provide as much as possible to the public, to be absolutely transparent about why we would make any decision, why we would table legislation with any provision to do anything. I think almost every member of this House would agree that when this government does table legislation, it provides rationale for all of those particular approaches. Right now our job is to listen, and that's what I intend to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

1:50

Health Care Spending

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since day one of the spring sitting the Premier has been doing his best Chicken Little imitation, saying that the sky is falling and raising the spectre of health spending soon consuming the entire provincial budget. But when you look at the government's actual books right through to this year's third-quarter update, you'll find that health care spending is at the same 34 per cent of total program spending as it was five years ago. Health spending is going up at exactly the same rate as other areas of government spending, and there is no evidence that other priorities are being crowded out. My question is to the Premier. Why doesn't the Premier stop distorting the facts about health spending and, instead, adopt innovative ideas like a pharmaceutical savings agency that would keep a lid on the biggest health care cost driver, prescription drugs?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, first of all, that is a good suggestion, and we're going to work on that. As I mentioned in the Legislature earlier, we would like to do it on a national scale, but it involves the co-operation of the federal government and all the ministers of health and all the Premiers. That's not to say that we can't do it provincially, and we're going to work on that. That's not to say that we can't do it in conjunction with, say, British Columbia because they've proven to be very co-operative with Alberta, and they're interested in those kinds of things. So we can do that.

It goes beyond that, Mr. Speaker. They concentrate on pharmaceuticals. They don't want to mention bedpans, swabs, uniforms, gowns, bedding, you know, just a multitude of supplies that could be co-ordinated and purchased on a provincial basis. But for every upside there is a downside, and one of the downsides is that it may offend some of the unions that are active in some of the regional health authorities, and it may offend the NDs. Those are the kinds of things we can look at in terms of bringing down costs.

Relative to "the sky is falling," I would suggest that the NDs are the ones who are spurring on the notion that the sky is falling.

Mr. Martin: I don't remember asking about bedpans and gowns and bedding.

Mr. Speaker, given that government spending in all sorts of areas is running ahead of inflation due to unbudgeted billions being added

every year, why does the Premier want only health spending growth to be kept at the rate of inflation when all other costs are running above?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry that I didn't answer this question, but it's a question that more appropriately is put to the Minister of Finance, and I'll ask her to respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the facts really do show that in the last five years health spending has increased at a rate that we don't believe can be sustained over the long term. We note that other provinces are making the effort to contain their health spending in about the same manner with inflation, growth. We're striving for those numbers because we know that Alberta has the best health delivery system in Canada, the best programs in Canada, and centres of excellence that are not matched anywhere in Canada. In fact, we provide many very important programs to citizens across Canada, such as pediatric heart transplants. So this government is determined that our health system will not be put in jeopardy because we don't look at the fiscal reality that's facing us.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, one could only hope that they would look at the fiscal reality of all the other government spending that's out of control rather than just scaring.

My question to the Premier is: why doesn't the Premier admit that the real agenda behind his Chicken Little routine is to frighten Albertans into accepting what they have consistently said that they oppose; namely, the Conservatives' privatized, two-tier health scheme? That's what it's all about.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the controversial and the confrontational nature of the comments – i.e., the Chicken Little attitude and the sky is falling kind of situation – I would remind the hon. member that it's not this government and it's not the Minister of Health and Wellness that's organizing and orchestrating protests on the steps of the Legislature. It is the NDs.

I would like to commend our hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. As one MLA put it, she came across as a queen on television, whereas the person sponsored by the NDs came across not so well because he was incoherent and he was yelling and he was screaming. It might be good for television. I don't know. But I'll tell you that the Minister of Health and Wellness was calm, cool, and collected.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Education Property Tax

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Manitoba government announced recently that it is eliminating its portion of their education property tax. The president of the AUMA, Bob Hawkesworth, is again renewing his call for Alberta to do the same. My question to the minister: will the minister follow Manitoba's lead and eliminate the province's portion of the education property tax?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, things are not always as they appear to be. While it's true that Manitoba has recently eliminated the province's portion of the education property tax, what is not clear at first blush when looking at this is the fact that the system in Manitoba is significantly different than here in Alberta. I'm sure you remember when several years ago in Alberta the

province changed the way that education was funded and began to collect education property tax in all municipalities throughout the province and then to distribute those funds equitably to school boards.

Manitoba has historically had three sources of funding for their education: general revenue, like Alberta; education property tax, like Alberta; but a significant portion, in fact 42 per cent, of all costs of financing education in Manitoba still comes through the local school boards requisitioning locally for those education property taxes. Those remain in place, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can the minister tell the House why Alberta can't simply get out of the education property tax once and for all?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's something that I've been quite vocal in advocating ever since I became Minister of Municipal Affairs. Someday I would like to have the opportunity for that to in fact take place in this province, but we've got a long way to go before we get there. It's about a 1 and a half billion dollar problem to deal with, and that's not just a one-time problem. That's 1 and a half billion dollars this year and every year thereafter. It's not as simple as in the case of Manitoba, where it was a relatively small amount, less than 10 per cent of the problem that we would be dealing with here.

So we're working with municipalities. We're trying to find alternatives so that someday we may be able to make some reasonable choices and begin to eliminate that education property tax and allow municipalities to have some access to at least part of it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: have there been any discussions with our municipal partners to examine the province getting out of the education property tax, to eventually free up some of the tax room for municipalities?

2:00

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I introduced members of the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability. That council, in fact, spent the afternoon meeting upstairs, talking about these very issues. We're talking about exploring alternative sources of revenue for municipalities, but more importantly we're talking about clearly establishing the roles and responsibilities that municipalities have.

I have consistently made it clear to municipalities that the province is not going to discuss new and alternative sources of funding for municipalities until we have a consensus on what the role and the responsibilities of municipalities are and how much it should cost. Once we know how much it should cost, then we can begin to discuss where the money is going to come from, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the concerns that the Auditor General addressed in his 2004-2005 annual report, the Minister of Energy continues to insist lamely that the current royalty structure is efficient, effective, and fair. The minister sees

no need to improve a system that has seen the citizens' share of the royalty wealth decline significantly since 2001. In fact, the minister has a copy of a study which states: we should be charging more for our royalties. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. How much of an increase in royalty rates does that study recommend?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'm not certain which study supposedly I have a copy of. There are so many studies that I do have copies of lots of studies. I'm not certain which one he is specifically referring to; therefore, I don't know.

What I do want to say is that we do act and continue to work to improve the structures we have. All of our regulations, our standards, our royalty structures, those suggestions by the Auditor General: we do act upon them to ensure that Albertans do receive their fair share and that things are appropriately managed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that your department handed out more than \$100 million of Albertans' money in 2005 to, quote, financially assist the oil and gas industry, end of quote, will the minister now tell the House how that money was spent and why?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I suspect he's referring to the Alberta royalty tax credits in particular on this one; that one was put in. It's an adjustment of royalties already paid. We've collected close to \$12 billion in royalties alone this year. It was a hundred million dollars. So we still have collected a tremendous amount of royalties from all those companies.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of health: how many health care professionals could your department hire with a hundred million dollars? Isn't it true that you could hire up to a thousand needed health care professionals?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are many different types of health care professionals, and I would just defer to the Premier if he wishes to provide a response.

Mr. Klein: No.

I wish to just ask for a point of clarification. Could I maybe have the hon. member advise the House who he's quoting? He said "quote, unquote" relative to the hundred million dollars. I don't know who he's quoting.

The Speaker: We can deal with this as a point of order.

Mr. Klein: No. I don't want to raise a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

School Lunchtime Supervision Fees

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many students in my constituency need to be bused to neighbouring communities in order to attend school. At noon hour they cannot walk home, nor is there enough time for them to be bused home to have their lunch. At the same time, these students are not allowed to stay on school property and eat their own lunches unless they pay \$20 per month per student

for a supervision fee. These fees add up in a hurry in a multichild family. To the Minister of Education: why do these parents have to pay a special fee just to have their children eat their own lunch at school?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, each locally elected school board has the right and the responsibility to make whatever policies they are willing to make. The short answer is that the School Act allows that to be done. But I suspect that school fees that are charged for things like lunchtime supervision are charged to pay those people who are qualified or in some cases perhaps certified to look after the students who will be eating those lunches. There have been a number of situations over the past several years where some children, for example with special needs, have required special types of supervision, and the school board is sensitive to that. I think the local school principals would be as well. So they're trying to ensure that there is proper supervision there.

So the short answer is that the School Act allows it. Not every school board does it, and not every school within a school board charges the fees either. But they go to offset a variety of things, not just personnel. There are clean-up fees, Mr. Speaker. There are games that they buy and provide for students. So those monies get used in a variety of ways.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, since these fees pose a financial hardship for many families and many school boards and principals don't care to deal with this issue, where should these parents turn to to resolve this problem?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, obviously, one of the best and most effective things to do is for the parents to talk to their locally elected school trustee. That's a good place to start. They could certainly talk with their school principal even ahead of that. There are parent school councils that deal with these kinds of issues. They can examine all of the different policies. [interjections] Shall I continue?

The Speaker: Please. You have the floor.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm sorry. There are interjections from the other side. This is a very serious and important issue.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, they could talk with the superintendents in their area. So there are a variety of ways that they can go about doing this because the policy does vary from board to board, and it also varies from school to school. So those would be some ideas that they might wish to undertake.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, would the minister's department consider exempting from this fee students who don't have schools in their neighbourhoods and have no other options?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know that we would jump to the quick and do that. I think that we have very capable school trustees, who have obviously been entrusted by the public's vote to look after these kinds of issues. I think it should first be dealt with there. I think that the school boards, during the meetings that I've had with them and based on the information that I've received from others, are doing a very good job of that at the moment. So if we leave it at the local level, perhaps they can sort this out. The important thing here, I think, is to ensure that we're not necessarily denying any access to some of those privileges.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Calgary Children's Hospital

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The famous line from the movie *Cool Hand Luke* summarizes this sad government's attitude towards Albertans: "What we have here is a failure to communicate." This fearful government attempts to insulate itself from its perceived affliction of public accountability by hiding behind closed caucus castle doors, surrounded by an impenetrable FOIP-filled moat. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Would the minister please clarify whether the Children's hospital in the Calgary-Varsity constituency will be operating at full capacity or in a series of phased-in stages when it opens this fall?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted in one sense that the hon. member has given me the opportunity to respond because initially when I spoke to the media about this issue, I was under the impression that it was going to be at capacity, that it was going to be fully open. My understanding is that there will be additional capacity released at a later time, later than the initial opening date, and I haven't yet received the detailed plans from Calgary health region relative to exactly what they intend to do.

But, Mr. Speaker, if the inference of the question is that somehow this government is at fault because there haven't been resources provided – and that was an acknowledgement that was relayed to me the other day – I don't think it's even fair to adjudicate that before the budget comes out and before the amounts of money are disbursed to the regional health authorities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the dollars currently committed to hospital bricks and mortar be quickly followed by predictable, ongoing, base operational funding?

2:10

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, clearly in our capital plan we have dollars allocated for a variety of projects in Calgary. We approved over \$665 million for new projects in Calgary just last summer. I think the hon. member would be fully recognizing that. During the release of the dollars – those are done in accordance with the plans provided by the health authority, planning for staff allocation and resources, the functional planning that goes into it, and through the phases of study completion those dollars are released.

Now, obviously, there is staff training and other plans to execute and, Mr. Speaker, I'm very confident that in due course we'll receive those from the authority.

An Hon. Member: It's a beautiful hospital.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. And, yes, it is a beautiful hospital.

Given that the bed-per-patient ratio for Calgary and Edmonton is the lowest of all North American cities, when will Alberta's cities' ratio rise to at least the 1.9 North American average?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that when we review the bed ratio lists, we also have to look at the other service elements and capacity provided in communities. We have a tremendous number of outpatient clinics. The primary care networks that have been instituted by my predecessor are growing by leaps and bounds. We

intend to have 18 more on stream this year, and the kind of capacity we are building into services in neighbourhoods is a good part of how we are addressing outpatient needs, mental health needs. The work that's being done on chronic disease management, for example, in the questioner's city I think will satisfy residents there that they are getting very good care.

Alternative Energy Project in Okotoks

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, last year the government's innovation program approved funding for a leading-edge alternative energy project in the town of Okotoks, that will use solar energy collection and storage for heating in a new 52-home neighbourhood. This project was accepted to the innovation program because it was sponsored by Climate Change Central and Alberta Environment. There was a lot of excitement when it was announced, but the project has experienced delays due to the flooding last year and other cost overruns. My constituents are concerned that the project will be in jeopardy without additional funding. The federal government has committed to provide additional funds if there is matching funding from Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Can the minister tell the House whether the innovation program will provide the necessary additional funding to ensure that this program can be accepted?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, as the member has indicated, this project came to us from Climate Change Central. In addition to their involvement, Natural Resources Canada was a partner, ATCO Gas, as well as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. As he has indicated, this is one of the unique projects that we have funded through our innovation program to look at some alternative energy uses.

The member has brought to our attention the fact that there were some severe weather events that have affected the infrastructure building of this particular closed-loop system that we have to look at. Mr. Speaker, I would let the member know that as we have our discussion with the other partners, I would be prepared to reconvene the review panel to see if further participation is warranted.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. As the minister responsible for disaster relief, will you follow up on the flood claim and expedite that claim payment as quickly as you can?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the severe weather events of this past summer were devastating in many parts of Alberta. We have in place, in fact, a disaster recovery program to assist individuals and small businesses and municipalities in dealing with recovering the uninsurable portion of losses for essential items. I understand that an application from this project has recently been submitted to my department. We're in the process of reviewing that application, and I can assure the member that should the losses qualify for compensation out of our program, I would certainly be supportive of paying appropriate levels of compensation up to the limits of the program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try them all. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Environment. As this is a leading-edge technology not only in Alberta but all of Canada, as the sponsor of this project will the minister commit that

his ministry will provide the funding to ensure that this project proceeds?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, Climate Change Central, for all Albertans to know, is the only kind of private/public partnership in all of Canada. There's no other province in Canada that has such a program. Its sole intent is to leverage dollars, and that's what we've done in this particular case, and it is quite a remarkable environmental initiative. We're, I understand, meeting again tomorrow with Science and Technology. Certainly, we will continue to leverage dollars in terms of securing to make sure that this project is a success. I want to say that I know that the Member for Calgary-Montrose, who sits on Climate Change Central with me, is committed to also working towards making this become a reality.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Trial within a Reasonable Time

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 11(b), guarantees to any person charged with an offence that they have the right to be tried "within a reasonable time." This is a fundamental right upon which our justice system operates. However, judges have commented that they are reluctant to revoke bail because of the undue wait times spent languishing in correctional facilities like the remand centre, forcing defendants to live with the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads for months if not years. My questions are for the Minister of Justice. What will the minister do to shorten unreasonable wait times for trial, or is it government policy to do nothing and, in effect, sentence the accused before they have a trial?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a very important point. He is quite right that a speedy trial is an important part of the justice system in Canada, and it's an important part of the justice system in Alberta. The criminal courts for the most part are found in provincial court, and I can tell the hon. member that we've been doing a lot in that regard. I can use Calgary for an example. The time to trial has gone down each of the last three years and at this particular point in time is the lowest it's been for some considerable time. We have put additional resources into that court, for example, in terms of two additional portable courtrooms, additional judges, additional staff to go along with that. In fact, the lead time will likely be reduced again when the Calgary Courts Centre will be completed next year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I'm glad he raised the issue of resources. Will the minister immediately take steps to add more Crown prosecutors and especially more provincial judges to ensure that justice is administered fairly in Alberta?

Mr. Stevens: I think, Mr. Speaker, it's important to understand that the issue of resources is an issue across Canada, and it's certainly an issue here. Alberta is doing very well on a comparative basis – that is, compared to other jurisdictions – in wait time. Having said all of that, the throne speech indicated that we, in fact, would be looking at putting additional judges, additional prosecutors, and additional staff into our courts, and I can tell you that that's our intention. Of course, we'll be debating that later. The hon. Solicitor General last

year put additional police officers into the field to do their job, and part of the result of that, of course, is that there will be additional charges that need to be dealt with in our courts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that other jurisdictions in Canada and internationally have set timelines for the completion of cases from arrest to preliminary inquiry to trial, will the minister commit to implementing timelines for the determination of cases in Alberta?

Mr. Stevens: Effectively, we have timelines that are followed. Some 10 years ago the Supreme Court of Canada in a case ruled that if an accused did not have a timely trial, then the charges would be stayed or dismissed. In fact, as a result of that case, in one other jurisdiction there were a number of dismissals. I believe that that case had a timeline of something in the order of six months. The timelines in Calgary, for example, at this point in time are somewhere in the vicinity of 20, 21 weeks, so we're well within that. We monitor that on a regular basis. We have no intention of doing anything other than addressing that in a positive way. Effectively, as a result of the Supreme Court case, for the past 10 years we've paid very, very close attention to it. As I've indicated previously, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is doing very well relative to other jurisdictions in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

2:20

Rural Physician Recruitment

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of a charm offensive from the Health and Wellness minister, the time has come for the truth offensive to begin. Two days ago Dr. Brent Piepgrass, vice-president of medical services for the Peace Country health region, spoke the truth about the negative impact that the Conservatives' privatized, two-tier health scheme will have on rural physician recruitment. Dr. Piepgrass called the third-way proposals frightening and morally questionable. I will table the relevant document at the appropriate time this afternoon. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister provide her personal assurance that courageous physicians like Dr. Brent Piepgrass will not only not face any kind of disciplinary action but will in fact have her full support to continue to speak out about the impact of third-way proposals on residents of their health regions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections] The hon. minister has the floor.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have invited every Albertan to come forward and provide us their views either by accessing the Internet, by getting the material from their library or their MLA, and we will give them all due consideration.

In the case of health care professionals that contradict the government or have alternative points of view, there has never been any intent to have anything but the most open and transparent process. Mr. Speaker, I suppose that the question is in order, but I would just challenge the member opposite to define any time when this member, either as a minister of the Crown or in any other position, has taken an offensive position to someone who's spoken in criticism of government policy or the member herself.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll hold the minister to her word on that one.

What does it say about the government's third-way proposals when outstanding physicians responsible for recruiting rural doctors are calling them frightening and morally questionable?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, initially there are comments that have been made by people – and they may hold to those views throughout the process – that have been in opposition, but there are also comments, equivalently warm and enthusiastic, about trying some new approaches to make sure that we do things in different ways to improve health care. We're trying to improve access, we're working towards sustainability, we're going to gather in all of these opinions and impressions, and then we're going to deal with them accordingly. I would remind the hon. member that in an effort to make sure that we attract doctors and international medical graduates to Alberta, this week we released \$3 million to assist in residency placements for almost 14 positions, with the very strong view that many of them will ultimately practise in rural Alberta and support the needs of rural Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the minister choosing to side with the Premier, who wants his rich golfing buddies to be able to queue-jump ahead of the rest of us, rather than siding with physicians like Dr. Piegras who believe it's morally questionable for those with money to get better or faster access to medically necessary services?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the health policy framework that this government has provided to Albertans gives all Albertans an opportunity to comment. It gives us a chance to reflect on those comments, to define legislation that will be in accordance with what we believe is the appropriate strategy to undertake for accessibility and sustainability. Until such time as we table those responses, I think the remarks are purely conjecture.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Gun Registration

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recently elected federal Conservatives have promised to scrap the Liberals' billion dollar boondoggle gun registry. The majority of Albertans and the Conservative government of this province have long opposed this wasteful and unfair harassment of law-abiding firearm owners. My question is to the Minister of Justice. In light of the anticipated repeal of the federal gun registry, would you consider instructing Crown attorneys in Alberta to cease enforcing those sections of the Criminal Code that deal with the gun registry?

Mr. Stevens: That, Mr. Speaker, is a very good question. In fact, Alberta's position with respect to prosecution under the Firearms Act has been very clear since the get-go. The provincial Crown prosecutors have very clear instructions, and perhaps it's worth while just to outline what those are so that everybody knows. Alberta Justice will not prosecute any charges under the federal Firearms Act. If police services need assistance in reviewing the charges, then they are to seek those services from Justice Canada.

Alberta Justice will not prosecute firearms owners under the Criminal Code if possessing an unregistered firearm is their only offence. Alberta Justice will prosecute registry charges that are laid along with other Criminal Code offences, such as the accused being unlicensed or the firearm being used in the commission of a crime. Lastly, Alberta Justice will prosecute, as we always have, firearms offences under the Criminal Code that negatively impact community safety.

Dr. Morton: I must say, Mr. Speaker, that that's a very enlightened policy.

The repeal of the federal firearm registry is anticipated but has not yet occurred, so my question is: would the minister consider communicating to his new federal counterpart in Ottawa that as far as Alberta is concerned, the sooner the better?

Mr. Stevens: Well, that is indeed a very good observation, and I say that because I've already done it, but I do thank the hon. member for the suggestion.

Just briefly, the background with respect to this, Mr. Speaker, is this. Alberta Justice is responsible for ensuring that we contribute to the largest extent toward safe communities. We believe that our resources must be used wisely in that regard, and candidly we believe that the registration of long guns does not contribute in any sense whatsoever to safe communities. The federal government is spending large numbers of dollars on this particular program, and they can be diverted to better purposes.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

New Home Construction

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All my questions are to the Minister of Government Services. Given the current housing boom and the rush to produce a quick product, what is this government doing to ensure that new homeowners have a quality product?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there is a bit of a problem out in the industry currently where some people are having difficulty with contractors. There are a number of things that people can do to help the situation themselves, things like having an agreement before construction begins. There's the ability to have a holdback until the deficiencies are addressed, and of course there's the ability to take out home insurance that would cover some of these situations. Certainly, it's not a desirable thing that is happening in some cases, but I would urge people to investigate how they can protect themselves prior to getting into the agreement.

Mr. Bonko: Given that in the past the government approved pine shakes, how can new homeowners be assured that contractors aren't cutting corners in order to boost their bottom line?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, of course, when you're entering into the agreement, you can specify certain things that have to be done and certain materials that have to be used. You can do that before the project ever begins.

Mr. Bonko: What is this government doing to ensure that home inspectors are actually qualified to do home inspections?

2:30

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, and I thank the member for asking it because there is a very great need for these types of people.

There is a national organization with people in Alberta that are members. What we are currently doing is that we have asked those people to come together and present to us a mechanism where we could certify them and license them so that, in fact, when someone hires a home inspector, they know that they are getting an individual that is qualified because, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the qualifications that are necessary for a home inspector, it's very substantial. They've got to understand all of the codes: the building code, the electrical, the plumbing, the whole issue. They've got to be able to understand cement work; they've got to be able to understand structures; they've got to be able to look at and test the roof and tell you whether it's in good shape; then, on top of that, many of them are even qualified to look at appliances. I've seen the check sheet that they use, and there are some 400 items on there. You can imagine that a person that would be qualified to do that inspection is going to have to be well-trained, and they're going to have to have been in the business for a fair length of time.

Thanks for your question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today in the question period there were 77 questions and answers in a 50-minute time frame. That's pretty good.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Our reflection on the history of Alberta today deals with elections and election periods. Since the 1979 election in Alberta the election period in our province has been 28 days. Fourteen days after that issue of the writ have been nomination days, and 14 days after nomination day has been polling day. This has not always been the case.

The shortest election period, 23 to 27 days, was in effect for the elections of 1909, 1913, 1917, and 1921. For elections held between 1924 and 1955 the election period was between 30 and 40 days. For elections starting in 1959 and ending in 1975 the election period was between 39 and 49 days. For these latter elections: 1959, 1963, 1967, 1971, and 1975, nomination day was 25 to 35 days after the date of the writ, and polling day was 14 days after nomination day. Currently it's 28 days.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first member to participate.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Colin David Price

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to thank the sponsors of the Great Kids award ceremony that took place on March 5 and recognize a great young man from Whitecourt-St. Anne.

West Edmonton Mall, Fantasyland Hotel, IBM Canada, TransCanada, and the government of Alberta all deserve high praise for their part in honouring 16 special Albertans that have displayed leadership, generosity, and the strong spirit that makes our province so great.

Premier and Mrs. Klein and the Minister of Children's Services joined members at a ceremony that recognized Great Kids from our constituencies. We listened to biographies of these young Albertans

that revealed how great they really are, and I want to share with you all a brief glimpse of my great kid, Colin Price from Sangudo.

When Colin's brother was diagnosed with cancer, the life of his family was immediately turned upside down, but this quiet, brave 12-year-old was generous with his love and support while completely putting his needs on hold to stand by his brother's side. Colin never complained when the family made numerous trips between their home and Edmonton and spent many days and nights in the hospital. He helped keep the routine as normal as possible but, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, could always be trusted to improve his brother's mood.

Colin became an incredible source of strength and stability to his family during this extremely difficult time in which there were, obviously, many bad days. Colin has continued to develop a remarkable maturity since his brother lost his battle with cancer. Faced with such hardship, Colin's courage, strength, and love continue to shine. Many, many people in my constituency and throughout the province for that matter, Mr. Speaker, have shared happiness and heartbreak with the Price family. I'm sure that they join me now in congratulating Colin Price on his so strongly deserved recognition as someone who makes our province so great.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Initiative

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday I had the pleasure of attending the formal public release of the latest stage of the Edmonton urban aboriginal initiative. This report, which I tabled in the Legislature on Monday, paints a timely portrait of urban aboriginal life in Edmonton. From July to December 2005 the first part of the process included a wide-ranging community dialogue with a cross-section of the aboriginal community, engaging more than 1,800 people. They held talking circles, open house information sessions, and a major gathering of community leaders, who provided input on issues, concerns, and opportunities facing the Edmonton urban aboriginal community.

Most significant, perhaps, was the use of the Your City, Your Voice workbook and survey. More than 500 of these workbooks were returned, and the comments contained in the workbooks can be found in the appendices of the report. I would recommend that anyone interested in gaining an understanding of the urban aboriginal experience in Edmonton should obtain a copy of this report.

Statistically, the report reveals that Edmonton has the second largest aboriginal community in Canada as of 2001, with 30,365 aboriginal residents and double that number within a two-hour travel radius of the city. It is a fast-growing population as well, growing at a rate of two and a half times the city's population growth. Aboriginals represent 4.6 per cent of the city's population, but there are only a few Edmonton neighbourhoods where the aboriginal population exceeds 10 per cent, including some in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Unfortunately, this young and fast-growing population is troubled. In many neighbourhoods more than 50 per cent of the population lives in poverty. The poverty rate is one and a quarter times higher than Alberta's aboriginal average and two and a half times higher than that of all Edmontonians. Sadly, the majority of those surveys did not find Edmonton to be a welcoming city.

This report is not the end of the process. As elder Vic Letendre said in the report, "The City has welcomed the Native people in. Now it is going to be up to them to pick up the torch and go." This is the most ambitious and wide-ranging urban aboriginal initiative

ever undertaken in Canada. I commend all of the partners, the Edmonton urban aboriginal initiative, the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund, the Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee, Western Economic Diversification, the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development department, and particularly the city of Edmonton, for moving forward with this much-needed initiative. The future of urban aboriginals looks a little brighter today thanks to their efforts.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

**Giselle Kutrowski
Elyse Merriman**

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday as we commemorated International Women's Day, our hon. Minister of Community Development quoted a great Chinese leader who said, "Women hold up half the sky." I would suggest that sometimes women hold up more than half the sky.

Yesterday in Red Deer the Soroptimist International of Central Alberta, a volunteer organization for business and professional women whose mission is to improve the lives of women and children, presented two cash awards to two young women who do more than their share of holding up the sky. These young women, who juggle full-time school with family duties and part-time jobs and still contribute to their community, are an inspiration to all women.

The 2006 women's opportunity cash award was presented to Giselle Kutrowski, a single mother who is taking her social work diploma at Red Deer College. As she cares for her small children, works hard to meet their needs, and studies for long hours in order to improve her economic situation, Giselle makes herself available for those who seek her help.

The Violet Richardson award was given to Elyse Merriman for her dedication and hard work in her volunteer job at the Red Deer regional hospital. While attending high school full-time, Elyse has clocked in over 290 hours of volunteer work at the hospital since 2003. Her dedication as a volunteer is also an inspiration to others.

Mr. Speaker, the Soroptimist International of Central Alberta join with 95,000 Soroptimists around the world to contribute time and financial support to community-based projects benefiting women and girls. I ask members of this House to join me in congratulating Giselle Kutrowski and Elyse Merriman on receiving their awards and to thank the members of the Soroptimist International of Central Alberta for their work in improving the lives of women and girls in local communities and around the world.

2:40

The Speaker: Should the Assembly also congratulate the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for receiving a woman of the year award this week? [applause]

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Israeli Water Treatment Technology

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and acknowledge the beginning of a new era of innovation and co-operation in the field of waste water treatment. Recently four prominent scientists from Israel, Hileel Lerman, Yohanan Montagne, Yosef Ron, and Erez Abou paid a visit to Drayton Valley. The town of Drayton Valley, MP Rob Merrifield, and myself had the pleasure of meeting with this distinguished group to discuss an issue important to all Albertans.

These four scientists, who are with the Mofet B'Yehuda Technol-

ogy and Business Incubator research centre in Israel, toured the town's water treatment plant and made a presentation to town council. The focus of this presentation was a new water treatment system that has been developed in Israel, a system that uses innovative new technology and has the potential to be more cost effective and environmentally sound than current processes – clean water before and after its use.

Mr. Speaker, following this first step, enthusiasm toward and interest in this new technology is high in Drayton Valley. Should it be considered feasible to apply these new Israeli concepts, Alberta could once again be in a position to lead the country in innovation. This sort of forward thinking is the reason our province continues to remain at the forefront of technological and social development. New technology and ideas aimed at making our world a better place shouldn't be confined by international borders, and these recent events in Drayton Valley have affirmed the spirit of co-operation and vision that continues to make Alberta the best place in the world to live.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to encourage my colleagues to join me in extending my most sincere thanks to our new friends from Israel, who were instrumental in developing this technology, as well as to town councillor Gary Carter and to all those whose hard work facilitated this fresh and exciting exchange of ideas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Enron Activities in Alberta

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to commend the authorities in the United States of America who are willing to stand up and speak up and defend their citizens against corporate fraud and greed. Today, as we speak, U.S. courts are prosecuting former Enron executives for ripping off energy consumers for millions upon millions of dollars.

Some of the accused were involved in the deregulation of Alberta's electricity market. The relationship that existed between this provincial government and Enron and its affiliates is very troubling. In August 2001 the Minister of Energy stated that he looked forward to: working with Enron on the continued development of a competitive electric industry in Alberta. End of quote. In fact, the minister allowed Enron's lawyers to write amendments to provincial regulations in a manner that best suited Enron's needs.

Even though Enron has been exposed as a corporate fraud that manipulated the electricity market to steal millions of dollars, this provincial government still remains silent. After being in power for so long this Progressive Conservative government has forgotten the difference between right and wrong. It is wrong not to investigate Enron's market manipulations in Alberta. It would be right to stand up for this province's energy consumers and seek justice. It was wrong to allow Enron to design Alberta's electricity market to suit their needs. It would have been right to design a market that benefited Alberta consumers.

Enron and its affiliates donated thousands of dollars to this Progressive Conservative government while deregulation was imposed on Albertans. Years later, with Enron executives facing justice in American courts, this government still remains silent. A political donation should never – never – serve as a down payment for government inaction. Albertans deserve better. It's now; it's time for a full, independent public inquiry into Enron's activities in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Energy minister bends to oil patch pressure and lets royalty revenues slide, it's just the same as if he spent that money. Millions of dollars in lost royalty revenue leave this province every month, and it's high time that this government stepped in and stopped the bleeding. In the 2004-05 report the Auditor General once again was critical of how the Department of Energy and the EUB monitor production levels for oil and gas and natural gas. We're not even meeting the very modest benchmarks that this government has set for royalty collection, and the method of accounting for royalties is faulty at best. Albertans will be stuck with the cleanup of this government's gold rush mentality towards resource development. The companies are making billions of dollars off the extraction of our resources, and we'll end up paying for the environmental cleanup.

The Environment minister had a good idea earlier this week. It's actually an idea the New Democrats have been promoting for some time, which is to add an environmental levy to the existing royalty structure. Such a levy could be used for research initiatives and for the efforts to expand green transportation and other measures to counter the harsh impact of the oil and gas industry. All it took was one phone call from – guess who? – the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers for the minister then to back down. We hope we can see more of that later, perhaps.

Lost energy royalty revenue is the problem from which so many other troubles flow. Health care, education, and infrastructure struggle to keep pace with the growth because our royalty structure bleeds money. Consumer utility bills are too high because the energy companies don't pay their fair share. Whose province is this anyway? These resources are not meant to be consumed all at once and at fire-sale prices to boot.

A modest adjustment in royalty rates makes good business sense, and it's the right thing to do.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with 150 signatures on it. The petition urges the government Alberta to “eliminate private clinics and private delivery in the health care system, and develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen and extend Medicare.” This brings the total number of signatures on this one to 538.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday a motion will be made that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 2.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday a motion will be made that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Bill 21

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to request leave to introduce Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act.

This act replaces and updates current legislation and, along with its forthcoming regulations, will provide the AISH program with increased flexibility to better respond to the needs of Albertans with disabilities. The new legislation continues our efforts to renew the program by updating the language, streamlining processes, and improving income recording procedures for clients.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 21 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 22

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

2:50

Bill 210

Election (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Riverview, Leader of the Official Opposition, I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 210, the Election (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2006.

The purpose of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is self-explanatory, and I hope it receives its due attention.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table in the Assembly today five copies of the 2004-2005 annual report for the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research, otherwise known as the Alberta ingenuity fund. Just a couple of the things that are highlighted are the prion research centre, the centre for water research, as well as how it uses industry associates to assist industry in applied research. A copy of this report has been forwarded to all MLAs directly from Alberta Ingenuity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I referred to a document during my questions earlier today, and I would like to

table that document and the requisite number of copies of it. It's titled Alberta's New Health Policy Framework: Questions and Answers, February 28, 2006.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of five of the many letters that I have received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing concern about the cancellation of the national daycare program. Letters I am tabling today are from Sarah Bulfone, Kamla Singh, Cheryl Dixon, Shandale Walker, and Danette and Lee Gordon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a news release issued by the leader of the NDP and a graph which illustrates a point I was making in question period today. It shows that despite a dire projection by the Mazankowski report of health care spending eating up half our budget, actual spending has stayed essentially the same.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to table five copies of the many letters received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I'm tabling today are from Sandra Phelan, Lesley Truman, Melanie Toth, Tina Peeters, and Christina Pegoraro.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to table a number of copies of five of the many letters we've received expressing concern about the cancellation of the national daycare program. These letters are from Tammy Porsnuk, Tammy Kynock, Yvonne Oshanyk, Doug Birch, and Vicky Arlidge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from a constituent of mine, Ms Heather Gordon, who questions the Premier's hurry to implement his third-way changes. She states her objection to a two-tier health care system and her concern about the lack of real consultation with Albertans.

The second, Mr. Speaker, is on behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods: five of the many letters that she received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. Today I'm tabling them from Peggy Rehaume, Trudy Dickerson, Margaret Riordon, Kate Lowther, Lauren Crane.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of the document which contains Dr. Brent Piegrass's observations. Dr.

Piegrass is the vice-president of medical services with the Peace Country health region.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a number of letters voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. They are from Jessica McKinlay, Juanita Roy, Jan Stewart,* Sammi Huber, Barbara Ritson, and Susan Iwaskow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of five letters received from concerned parents, daycare owners, staff, and other citizens voicing concerns over the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters are from Heather Hollands, Tiffany Phelan, Rosemarie Brown, Bobby-Lee Wingo, and Russell Greenhalgh.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I have the appropriate number of copies of five of the many letters I have received from concerned parents, daycare owners, staff, and other concerned citizens voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I'm tabling today are from Gail Hadfield, Connie Johnson, P. Littlejohn, C. Callihoo, Donna P.

The second tabling is from my constituent Mr. James Sexsmith, who is a veteran and retired, living on a very low income. He's concerned about free parking at hospitals for veterans and seniors like himself. He wants to know where the monies collected from the hospitals go, where it is spent. He's asking for a complete investigation on this matter and a report to the public through the media.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today, the first being an e-mail letter from a constituent of mine, Evelyn Abbott, who is writing with her concerns about health care. She admonishes that "once you get mixed up with Insurance companies and NAFTA – well you know the rest."

The second letter is also from a family in my constituency: Dave Haynes, Dianne Harke, and Nicolas Haynes. They indicate, again, grave concern about the proposed changes to health care. They say, "While we strongly support innovation in health care, we are unconditionally opposed to anything that undermines the principals of the Canada Health Act."

Mr. Speaker, a further five letters regarding the cancellation of the national daycare program, and these letters are from Alison Ortwein, Rhonda Arlidge, Jennifer Kelley, Debbie Callihoo, and Rosanne Callihoo.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Public Health Act: the Public Health Appeal Board annual report 2005.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(5) could I ask the Government House Leader to share with us projected government business for the week commencing Monday, the 13th of March.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to outline the projected government business for the week of March 13 to 16, 2006. Starting with Monday, March 13, 2006, of course, is private members' business in the afternoon and in the first hour of the evening, between 8 and 9. Government business begins at 9 with the second reading on bills 22, 1, and 2, and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, March 14, in the afternoon we have Government Motion 11, dealing with Ray Speaker and his address to the Assembly on March 15, 2006, and second readings on bills 18, 20, and 21. That evening, commencing at 8, we have Committee of the Whole on bills 22, 1, 2, 3, 9, and 17, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, March 15, in the afternoon commencing at 1:30 it's worth noting that prior to calling Routine and Orders of the Day there will be the 100th anniversary Alberta Legislative Assembly commemorative celebrations, with the daily Routine commencing at 2. Government business will start around 3:15 in the afternoon with third reading on bills 22, 1, 2, 3, 9, and 17. The Government House Leader, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) and the Speaker's memo dated March 8, 2006, will at 4:30 p.m. move that the House adjourn until 1:30 p.m. March 16, 2006, to accommodate the dinner for the 100th anniversary of the Assembly that evening. As such, with the anticipated success of the motion that evening there will be no evening sitting to accommodate the dinner for the 100th anniversary of the first sitting of the Legislature.

On Thursday, March 16, 2006, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders there will be second and third readings as per consultation with the opposition and as per the Order Paper.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, just an information update. I appreciate the co-operation of the members of the Assembly with respect to the events next Wednesday. All hon. members will receive a memo from me – it was signed earlier today – which includes all of the people who are registered for the 100th anniversary dinner next Wednesday as well. There are some 400-plus people, including nearly 130 former members and, in addition to those, some 16 or 17 widows or widowers of former members who are coming as well. The information will be there for all members to basically feel comfortable with recognizing people from the past if names are forgotten and the like. I very much appreciate that co-operation as well. So everything will go very, very well.

3:00

You will also get a copy of the agenda for the evening. There will be a refreshment period from 5:30 to 6:30, and then we'll begin at 6:30. Actually, there will be very, very few speeches, but there will be some very interesting little mementos that all members will receive for their contribution to the history of Alberta.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 11

Architects Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006.

I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of the Alberta Association of Architects. This organization ensures that its membership is competent to practise architecture in Alberta and thus serves the public interest.

The Architects Act was just amended in March of 2004 to provide an up-to-date definition for the restricted architectural practice of interior design and allow licensed interior designers to formally become members of the Alberta Association of Architects.

The Architects Amendment Act is needed to enable the Alberta Association of Architects to require its member architects and licensed interior designers to demonstrate continuing competence in their professions. By so doing, they will maintain their membership with the association. These amendments would include licensed interior designers within the definition of an authorized entity, allowing these individuals to be governed by all of the pertinent provisions of the act, clarify that licensed interior designers and their employees can engage in the practice of interior design, and allow licensed interior designers full voting rights to elect architects and interior designers to the association's council. These amendments would also ensure that up-to-date regulations and bylaws can be developed for licensed interior designers and that licensed interior designers are registered in the same manner as architects.

Mr. Speaker, this act will help to clarify and strengthen the architect profession by allowing the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for mandatory continuing competence in their profession.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, proposes changes that would allow the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for compulsory continuing competency in their profession. This bill clarifies that licensed interior designers and their employees can engage in the practice of interior design, and it allows them full voting rights to elect architects and interior designers to the association's council. If passed, the changes will also ensure that up-to-date regulations and bylaws can be developed for licensed interior designers and that they are registered in the same manner as architects. It will professionalize more so the practice of interior design. Licensed interior designers are practising within the realm of architecture when dealing with interiors of buildings over 5,000 square feet.

The stakeholders that we from the Official Opposition have consulted on this issue, Mr. Speaker, support the change. The changes help improve the practice of professional interior design, and this profession improves the quality of life for all Albertans.

The work that licensed interior designers are doing does fall within the scope of the practice of architects. The Alberta Association of Architects is the regulatory body responsible for registering

and licensing all architects and licensed interior designers legally entitled to practise the scope of architecture or licensed interior design in the province of Alberta. The AAA, Alberta Association of Architects, or the association, is a self-governing professional association charged under the Architects Act with the registration of architects and the licensing of licensed interior designers and with the regulation of the practice of architecture in the province of Alberta. The association regulates the practice of architecture in the protection of the public and the administration of the profession.

An interior designer can give advice on preparing designs, plans, detailed drawings, specifications, or graphic representations respecting the interior finishes in a building, either fixed or loose furnishings, equipment, fixtures for use in a building, or partitioning in a building that is used to subdivide a floor area. They can administer construction contracts, inspect work, assess the performance of work and the quality of materials related to the work described above.

We have consulted the very capable Naomi Minja, the executive director of the Alberta Association of Architects. They've been fully involved in the consultations and, I understand, support the changes to the act. As well, the Interior Designers of Alberta were consulted and do support this act.

Licensed interior designers are the people that help make many of our major buildings beautiful and also functional. All of these public spaces that we enjoy are helped along in our enjoyment of them by professional interior designers. They select the appropriate materials that have the right flammability rating, are durable enough to stand the test of time, and are also pleasing to the eye. How high should a handrail be? What type of flooring should be installed? The drapes and all the many other types of facility furnishings and whatever that will be used are recommended to us and supplied to our buildings and structures by professional interior designers.

Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition supports this piece of legislation. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to indicate our support for Bill 11, and we thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward. It has sort of an awkward name, though: Bill 11. I hope that doesn't give us some ominous precursor to things later this spring.

The bill, as we see it, certainly helps to clarify and structure things in regard to allowing the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of interior designers and to enforce the requirement for compulsory competency, which always has to be good. We know that it's very important for us to allow the professional associations to govern themselves. This certainly extends the responsibility that we have here through the Legislature, so that's a good thing. The Alberta Association of Architects certainly is in favour of these amendments, and from my understanding they said that it would help them to enforce their requirements for licensing and membership and things such as that.

3:10

The amendments clarify roles and responsibilities, which has to be a good thing too, and seem to bring things into sort of a sense of order in the Architects Act, which otherwise heretofore seemed to have, to quote from someone in the AAA, a rather haphazard past. These newly spelled out requirements and regulations are analogous to those defined in the act for architects, and the amendments appear to be neither discriminatory nor cosmetic, which is good.

Licensed interior designers find themselves for the first time fully

included in this act instead of tacked on as an afterthought. I'm sure that they are looking forward to functioning under this act as equal partners and on the level of architects across the province. Given that the Alberta Association of Architects supports this substantive inclusion, I think that the rest of Bill 11, then, is sort of housekeeping, to have all of that fall into place.

We're happy to be in support of this Bill 11 without any amendments, and we look forward to seeing what comes next. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow to close debate.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seeing the support that we're receiving from the opposition parties, I would like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Bill 12

Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, one of the fast-growing crimes in the province is mortgage fraud, and to that end we set up a committee that had representation from the Solicitor General's department, the Attorney General, Finance, of course from my department, the Edmonton city police, the RCMP, financial institutions, and the Law Society. They made a number of recommendations, and we believe this amendment to the Land Titles Act will in fact help accomplish some of the things that they've talked about.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The first and most important thing that this act does is allow the registrar to question when someone comes to the counter or someone brings forward a land title. The current situation is that if all the i's are dotted and all the t's are crossed, the registrar doesn't have a choice but to register it. Under these amendments the registrar will have the ability to actually question, even to the point of the identity of the individuals that have signed the documents. We believe that that way there will be the ability to probably find out if, in fact, there's something wrong with the document. Of course, there are probably still going to be some cases that will get by because even though the registrar will have the ability to do this, we have to be careful that we don't hold up the process unduly. Under this act we will also be making sure that if the registrar doesn't register immediately and does more investigations, the assurance fund isn't going to be liable under every situation. So that's really the most important part of it.

Also, we are defining the purpose of the land titles registry. This is a request from the FOIP office because they're having some difficulty at times determining whether, in fact, release of information that's on the title is in keeping with the purpose of government collecting that information and filing it. There are, as well, a number of other, minor amendments that really could be called housekeeping, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will be moving second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to rise as the Official Opposition critic for Government Services to participate in the debate during second reading of Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006. It's also noteworthy to mention that I'm really considering this bill in conjunction with its sister bill, Bill 13, which is the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006, as they're both attempting to deal with the same problem, mortgage fraud, each within its own sphere.

Before I go any further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. minister for having agreed to meet with me ahead of time, before the legislative session started. I appreciated his time and his admin staff's time when they met with me and my researcher to go through the changes that were being proposed. I sincerely appreciate this. It allows us to conduct a dialogue professionally and intelligently.

Now, mortgage fraud, Mr. Speaker, is real and scary. It is a lucrative crime. We all know that crime doesn't pay. That's the way we were brought up, and that's the way we were taught. But until these criminals are caught, they're really making a ton of money fairly painlessly and quite quickly. Their return on investment, if we can call it an investment, is really quite high and quick. It appears to be the in crime, definitely one of the crimes of today. Crooks are getting craftier and more sophisticated, more creative and high tech. With that, the damage and loss are magnified manyfold. They lure unsuspecting victims and prey on people's basic dream and, one would argue, their right to own a home.

We're not talking about petty theft or a little kid stealing a chocolate bar. We're examining crimes which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and have the potential to ruin lives and destroy families. Mortgage fraud can also drive up the cost of home ownership for genuine, honest, and hard-working people hoping to either own their first home or move from one home to the next. Insurance rates or registration fees or things like that may actually soar and may become another hurdle that homeowners have to overcome.

Now, we all know how active our economy is. This booming and bullish economy has led to a correspondingly scorching hot housing market with significant increases in sales, a widespread building frenzy, and an increase in the average sale price for sold properties. Land titles staff apparently processed more than 1 million land title registrations in the year 2004-2005. One million transactions.

Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006, tries to deal with this issue. I'm willing to support this bill as it doesn't really appear to be contentious at all. It's quite useful and timely. In fact, its main aim is really simple: to clean up and update some of the language which is used in the old act to make it consistent with the current situation and the current practices. For example, I noticed that all references to inspectors and assistant inspectors have been removed under this amendment as those positions are now obsolete and no longer used. So we're making it conform to the current practice, which is good.

It allows the deputy registrar to function just like the registrar himself or herself and not only when the registrar is ill, away, or absent or when the position is vacant. So, really, we're empowering the deputy registrar to undertake more responsibility and to evolve in his role and his mandate to become equal to and a replacement for the actual registrar. It allows the registrar, in essence, to delegate to his or her deputy, and they can both do the same work together. Nothing bad there.

The second goal of this amendment is to bring the registrar of land titles into the battle against mortgage fraud and to afford him or her more power to help combat this growing problem. This bill also allows the registrar to refuse to register an instrument when fraud or

an improper transaction is suspected. I think that this is good, of course, but the question here will be: is this going to be subjective? What kind of training and special skills are we going to offer to our land titles staff to be able to detect if something appears fishy or something is not kosher or appropriate?

3:20

Will they have a certain protocol to follow, a manual to refer to, or a list of things to watch for? We don't want it to be left to their judgment entirely, and then one genuine transaction is denied while one criminal transaction goes through and is not stopped. Will they have the required training and continuing education as the crimes evolve and as the criminals, as I mentioned, get craftier and change their ways? Will these officers receive additional training as time goes?

Also, will they be required to report questionable transactions to police or law enforcement, or will they just refuse to register that instrument right there and then, and that's the end of the story? I would hope that if they intervene and if they intercept something or stop it, they would have good record keeping and maybe save a log with all the pertinent information and offer this to law enforcement for them to be able to track the magnitude of this growing problem, for them to be able to maybe look for similarities in how the crime is committed, or for them to be able to thwart additional crimes in the future because now they have trends or patterns that they can refer to in their investigations.

Mortgage fraud, as I mentioned, is a growing problem. I can actually spend 10 minutes, at least, talking about examples of mortgage fraud, but I'll leave this for a later date. It's noteworthy to mention that the Real Estate Council of Alberta, or RECA, has put out a bulletin on mortgage fraud. I would refer all the hon. colleagues in this House and people who might be listening on the Internet or reviewing *Hansard* later to visit their website and try to go through these recommendations and pieces of information because it really allows them to understand how these crooks commit these crimes. I would refer everybody to their website: www.reca.ab.ca. Their bulletin was actually produced in April of 2004. It talks about things like straw buyers, flipping property, low down payments, and so on, and it alerts people to the red flags that they should be watching for.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this is relatively useful. It doesn't appear to be contentious, and again I thank the minister for having given me the opportunity to discuss it ahead of time. I welcome further comments. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie has further to say.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and debate Bill 12, Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006. It's a very interesting debate for me because my background is as a real estate agent. I've been doing this job for a long time, especially the land title experience. Some problems facing the land title sometimes cause difficulties for buyers as well as sellers.

According to the data in this bill, the first objective of this bill is to clean up and update some of the language within the act that is no longer used or no longer up to date. The impact is very clear. The bill wants to give additional responsibilities or more duties to the registrar. This is a noncontentious bill with no apparent negative impacts. Further, the bill incorporates the registrar into the battle against mortgage fraud in Alberta, which is a positive thing.

We need some caution on this particular bill. It needs some

amendments, I think, because when you pay \$7 or \$10 for one particular land title, sometimes you get very little information. People expect a full property archive report in the land title. Suppose you buy a car. You are entitled to know the last four or five owners of the car: who bought it, when they bought it, the sale price, and condition. I used to live in England. We used to get the full history of some products, especially cars. When you are buying property or land, maybe a house, it's a huge amount involved, and I think it's very important that we get the full property archive report when we get the land title.

The land title history is operated and maintained by Alberta Government Services, and it is the responsibility of the government. We should look at it very carefully. I know that RECA is doing a good job, but still, as I said before, we should have a commissioner who would look into this matter very carefully. In other states some laws are different. The assumption of a mortgage: in other states it's not possible, but in Alberta the people assume somebody else's mortgage. Then they flip the property, and they make lots of money. We don't see those changes in the land title report.

Another complaint I hear from some people on the land titles is that sometimes it takes more time. In rush time sometimes the people get the land title report in 10, 15 days. Maybe sometimes it takes more than two weeks. When some buyers and maybe some sellers write an offer for the property, the possession date takes three months. After three months it takes two weeks for the land title, so it's close to four months. The market value sometimes goes up, and the buyers and the sellers sometimes make settlements under the table. That's happening in Alberta. This, in other words, is fraud, and it shouldn't happen. If we have a vigilance department who can look into this, this will not be beneficial for the buyer but good for sellers and good for the citizens in Alberta.

Another thing I want to mention here is that when we pay some amount of money to the registrar for a land title, they don't highlight some properties bought and sold by the government. In some states it's compulsory if government is involved in the property. I mean, maybe it's discriminatory, but it's up to you. If the transaction is done by the government, it should be highlighted. It should be highlighted. People should know that this property is bought or sold by the government, as with other properties. Property archives should be there, even five, six times flip-flopped, especially if it's government involvement. It should be highlighted, the mortgage information especially.

3:30

Suppose the mortgage is refinanced a few times. I mean, it happens in Alberta. Some lenders are playing foul games. They buy one property. If one lender turned down the mortgage, then they go to the other lenders and get the mortgage. After financing from one place, they go to the other place. There are lots of problems in this one as well. I think we must consider some grey areas in this particular issue before we pass this legislation.

We need to educate buyers and sellers both. I mean, some people are innocent, and they buy the property. They don't go to a licensed realtor. They just find a for-sale property, and if they're asking even 20 per cent more in price and the seller says, "Okay, I'll take \$10,000 less than the asking price," they think: oh, my God, it's cheaper. But they don't realize because they don't ask the people who are experts in the field, and they pay more for that. Afterwards, when they find out that they bought the property for 25 or 20 per cent more than the actual value of the property, then they repent that.

That's why I'm suggesting that we should suggest to RECA or maybe make the legislation so that there should be some sort of awareness. I mean, we should educate the people, especially on

buying a property. Some people don't even inspect the property. I don't know. Some inspectors have the licences, but they charge \$200, \$300, \$400 for a small house. When they write reports, it could be in five years, could be in four years, and some innocent people don't understand those things. It's very important to educate the new buyer, the first-time buyer. First-time buyers always suffer because they don't have the full knowledge about the whole thing. If they are leasing the property or they are buying a house or buying land, the problem is there. They don't understand sometimes.

So we need somebody to guide them. I know that they don't contact the licensed realtor because they think: oh, they have to charge some commission. Just to save some commission, they contact some person who doesn't have the knowledge. In a case like this, the only way, I think, is to educate the people on how they can, you know, save some money. I think that saving money is more important than anything else.

The provincial committee, with representation from the government, is also important. I think the minister already indicated that they are concerned. RECA is involved. They are doing a good job.

Other than that, I don't think there's any problem with this bill. I believe this is a good bill. I'm willing to voice my support for this bill as it appears to be primarily aimed at cleaning up or updating the language. I'm very happy with this bill. It's good to see that we are making the needed changes in the land titles in response to the problems we are facing associated with mortgage fraud in Alberta.

That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak this afternoon on Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006. I'd like to thank the hon. minister and representative from Rocky Mountain House for bringing this forward. I believe that there are a number of issues here within the bill that were wanting attention. As far as I know, we as the New Democrats will give it tentative support. I guess I just wanted to go through a couple of the places where we don't necessarily find contention, but perhaps we can look for future clarification just to make sure that we know what you are trying to do here.

These amendments, I believe – correct me if I'm wrong – are sort of required in response to a recommendation made by the Advisory Committee on Mortgage Fraud in its final report, issued last year in November. The language in this proposed bill seems to be changing to reflect existing positions. There are no longer any inspectors or assistant inspectors. Rather, there's only the registrar and deputy registrars.

Therefore, most of the changes are of that sort of nature, which is fine: adding some regulations here, I see, to permit the registrar to refuse a registry when fraud is suspected, which certainly has to be welcomed by most of the real estate community, I believe, and by the public as well, and adding regulations permitting investigation of the registrar for suspicious dealings and to access personal information, which again is perhaps necessary considering the magnitude of purchasing a home for most everyone. It's the biggest purchase that they make, so we want to make sure that there's adequate protection in place to reduce the incidence of fraud.

Alberta is the mortgage fraud capital of Canada, unfortunately. We have more fraudulent incidents in Alberta than in any other place. Certainly, it's a reflection of the hot market and movement of property throughout the province, which I guess is a good thing in some ways, but we have to be here to stand on guard, to regulate on the other hand, I suppose.

3:40

The amendment as proposed here raises several additional questions, and I believe, in my mind, that it raises more questions than perhaps are addressed in the bill. Just a couple of places to watch for, and we can continue the debate when we meet in the other level of debate here.

Section 13, for example, of the proposed amendment is stipulating that proof of identification may be required in order to register rather than leaving it up to the discretion of the registrar. As to who or what group may need to produce identity, in the interest of transparency we would suggest that perhaps that could read that proof of identification must be required, period. I mean, who's to say why someone would have to be excluded from that? I think that it's just easier to use a one-size-fits-all for that particular section.

Another example of a section that might require some adjustment or at least clarification is in section 14 on page 4, which gives the registrar the right to refuse registration if fraud is suspected. While of course we can support the right to do so – in fact, we support that to reduce the incidence of fraud – as far as I can see, there's no provision made for appeals by the individual to be refused. Perhaps I'm missing something. Nor are there provisions for the registrar to report suspected fraud. Perhaps if I could get some clarification on that so that we can just have that out in the open: perhaps referring it to another level of inspection or the police, I guess, if necessary.

Also, if the stated purpose of the amendments is to give the government another tool to prevent and detect fraud in its registries, how does the hon. minister, then, perceive these proposed amendments given that fraud is still ongoing in our privatized registries in general? I would suggest that a tightening up of the privatized registries and the problems we see associated with that might be working in concert with this bill to protect citizens because, of course, we always have to be vigilant. We have seen individual cases of privatized registries not following the rules, so perhaps that would be a nice one-two punch to reduce real estate fraud in the province and to better serve and protect the public, which is our job otherwise.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wish to speak under 29(2)(a)? Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to ask a few more questions. Why couldn't RECA or the provincial government stop assumption of the mortgage in Alberta when some other provinces don't have this? There was a rumour last year that they are going to stop assumptions of the mortgage because of a few frauds in Alberta. Why did we let it go that far? Can you answer this particular question: why are we still waiting?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is to ask a question of the previous speaker or to make a comment. Anyone else?

Mr. Eggen: I can respond, certainly. That's a great question. As a real estate owner, not a real estate dealer, I would be curious to know about that actually. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie brings a wealth of experience in the real estate trade to the House, to the Legislature, and I appreciate his comments. It's refreshing.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services to close debate.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just be brief. I'm going to address some of the concerns even though normally we just deal with the principle of the bill at this point, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the Liberals and the NDP for their support on this bill.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung talked about the training of staff. Yes, that is a very important component. As a matter of fact, currently we spend a considerable amount of time when someone comes in and becomes an employee in the land titles office. As they move up, in order to have the final sign-off, it takes them a considerable amount of time to get there. Of course, any time that we find or the registrar would suspect something and is pretty sure that there's something suspicious, the police would be called in. That's all part of the investigation the way we would work it.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about releasing a lot of information. Mr. Speaker, one of the amendments in here is to add the purpose of the land titles: why you have land titles and the registrar, the registry of them. The purpose, then, will help the commissioner dictate what kind of information can be released off those titles. It's not totally in our hands, but certainly we're hoping that with these amendments it'll clarify it somewhat.

He also mentioned the number of sales and mortgages rolled over and those sorts of things. That's exactly the kinds of things that the staff will be trained to look at and will be able to start asking questions because they get really suspicious if a property has been rolled over, say, four times in a year. There could be – not necessarily, but there could be – something going on. That's the type of thing that they would identify and would start asking a lot of questions and would start backing it up to see if the people that signed the documents are who they say they are. They would be getting all that identity.

The mortgages as they are rolled is another area that the registrar will be looking at. It's quite amazing, these people that are in the business of defrauding the public in the mortgage area and in land, the various schemes that they have. Now, when we talk about the training of staff, we have to also remember that the people that are committing these crimes – their techniques are changing. So we have to keep up with that. We have to keep recognizing that, you know, there's something different here today than there was yesterday. Those are the kinds of things that they'll be dealing with.

The Member for Edmonton-Calder was wondering about the appeals. No, there isn't an appeal. What will happen, of course: if a registrar is holding up an instrument, then in fact the opportunity will be there for the individual that's trying to register it to clarify and justify everything that's before the registrar. If it turns out that, in fact, the registrar refuses, then of course it'll go over to court. That would be the appeal.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would call the question on second reading of this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

3:50

Bill 10

**Engineering, Geological and Geophysical
Professions Amendment Act, 2006**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 10, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta,

more commonly known as APEGGA, has made to the development of this legislation. The association has worked closely with the staff of Human Resources and Employment. The membership of APEGGA strongly supports the provisions contained in this bill. Also in support are other professional regulatory organizations, including the Alberta Association of Architects, the Alberta Institute of Agrologists, the College of Alberta Professional Foresters, and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists.

Mr. Speaker, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act governs the practices of engineering, geology, and geophysicists in Alberta and requires that people who wish to practise as engineers, geologists, and geophysicists belong to APEGGA. The legislation also grants these individuals the right to vote for and become members of APEGGA's governing council and to vote on all proposed bylaws and regulations put forward by APEGGA.

In 2002 the legislation was amended to include the registered professional technologists, or RPTs, in engineering as APEGGA members. In 2003 RPTs in geology and geophysics also became members of APEGGA through the creation of a new regulation. None of the RPTs, however, were granted full voting rights or council membership rights in the association. Bill 10 would allow RPTs in engineering to have the same rights as APEGGA's current professional members, the right to vote on and to be elected to the governing council and to vote on bylaws and regulations.

Similar changes to the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act regulations are also proposed to give RPTs in geology and geophysics the same rights. As it stands, Bill 10 makes it mandatory for at least one RPT to be a member on APEGGA's council. However, mandatory council membership was not part of the amendment submission presented by APEGGA to the Alberta government. To rectify this matter, a House amendment will be introduced during Committee of the Whole reading of Bill 10 to delete the reference to mandatory council membership for RPTs. In other words, RPTs may, as opposed to shall, sit on APEGGA's council. The House amendment will in no way hinder RPTs' ability to vote or be a candidate for APEGGA's council.

Mr. Speaker, this act will help clarify and strengthen the engineering profession by allowing RPTs to vote on and become members of APEGGA's council and also vote on new and amended APEGGA regulations and bylaws. Bill 10 guarantees that all views of all APEGGA members will be heard. This will ensure that the association continues to serve the public interest and maintain the high standards of safety and excellence Albertans have come to expect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 15
International Interests in
Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the second reading of Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act. Bill 15 is implementing legislation that will help move Canada toward becoming part of an international registry for large, mobile equipment such as passenger aircraft.

Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the Canadian federal government signed two

international agreements: the first, the convention on international interests and mobile equipment, also known as the Cape Town convention, and then the protocol on aircraft equipment. Eight countries, including the United States and Ireland, have ratified the convention and protocol. Canada and 24 other countries have signed the convention and protocol but haven't yet ratified them.

Mr. Speaker, these two international agreements touch on an area of provincial jurisdiction: interests in personal property. We've been assured that Canada will not ratify them until a critical mass of provinces – Ontario, Quebec, B.C., and Alberta – have indicated their support. Ontario and Nova Scotia have already passed but not yet proclaimed legislation. Quebec and B.C. haven't yet indicated their plans for implementing legislation. However, it is likely that Canadian ratification of the convention and protocol will take place 12 to 18 months from now.

In general, Mr. Speaker, these two international agreements establish a system for the registration of international interests in aircraft equipment. It'll be much like the way the registry keeps track of information on your truck or car. The registry for aircraft equipment, such as engines and airframes, will be based in Ireland. As we all know, when you buy a car through a bank, the bank searches the registry to find out if there are any liens on the car or if it has been used as security for another loan. Airlines also use banks and other financial institutions to finance the purchase of large passenger aircraft. Those institutions need access to the same kind of up-to-date, reliable information about the aircraft to protect their financial interests.

Currently an international registry does not exist to keep track of such important information. With an international registry in place banks will have more confidence about the security of their loans, and as a result they've already indicated that they'd be able to lower their lending rates and save the airlines some money. Now, aircraft are expensive, and even a small reduction could mean savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars on a purchase. Our hope, of course, Mr. Speaker, is that some of these savings would be passed on to consumers. Without Alberta implementing legislation to help establish this registry, firms located in our province, such as WestJet, would be left out, wouldn't be able to participate, and they would not be able to take advantage of the anticipated lower lending rate.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that Bill 15 does not amend Alberta's Personal Property Security Act. The international agreements are flexible. They allow jurisdictions to make choices regarding their implementation to take into account existing domestic laws and procedures. The new registry on aircraft equipment will have no effect on how provincial registries currently operate and collect information on Alberta's cars, trucks, and homes. The legislation allows Alberta to exercise its jurisdiction in an area where the federal government has reached an international agreement, and it will give Alberta businesses access to lower financing costs when purchasing new equipment.

For these reasons I encourage all members to support second reading of Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act.

I also move to adjourn debate on this bill. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1
Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act

[Adjourned debate March 2: Mr. Dunford]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in support of this bill. The Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act I think is a very important bill and deals with something that has touched on every member of this Assembly in some way and on many of our families. To establish this fund, to establish some of these matters addresses each of the three pillars of many of the things that the Alberta Cancer Board has been looking for and wants to have in its strategy, and those three are prevention, early detection, and research.

4:00

Some of the many problems we see in cancer are shown in the statistics for Alberta and the Northwest Territories. In Alberta an estimated 13,200 new cases of cancer will be expected in 2005, 6,800 for men and 6,400 for women, and 5,500 deaths from cancer. For prostate cancer among men it remains the most frequently occurring cancer in Alberta, and in 2005 an estimated 2,200 men will be diagnosed with this and 400 will die. Breast cancer is incredibly difficult for many women, and it's the most frequently occurring cancer for them. An estimated 1,950 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and 430 will die from it. Lung cancer, the most preventable of all human cancers, continues to be the leading cause of cancer death in Alberta for both men and women. In 2005 an estimated 1,660 people, 850 men and 810 women, will be diagnosed with lung cancer, and 1,410 people will die from it. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in Alberta for both men and women, although both incidence and mortality rates have declined steadily over the last decade and a half. In 2005 an estimated 1,560 people will be diagnosed with it, and 600 people will die.

The above findings were drawn by the Canadian Cancer Society from the Canadian Cancer Statistics 2005 booklet. These are shocking numbers. I hope and pray that the numbers will be decreased through this important initiative and that what we see through a co-ordinated approach and an increased amount of funding and an increased amount of focus on this issue will be important in reducing these tragic deaths.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to participate in second reading in the discussion on Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, as sponsored by the hon. Premier. Of course, you know that when an opposition member rises, you get people from across the way with their ears perking up and they circle their wagons and they think that we're going to attack them and criticize them. They expect the worst most of the time, but today I am pleased to disappoint them because I am standing in support of this bill. Actually, one would argue that it's really long overdue.

This bill is useful. It has positive outcomes or favourable impacts. It establishes the new cancer legacy fund, which is about half a billion dollars, \$500 million, which I think would yield about \$25 million annually. It's good because this way you have a steady stream of something that is forecastable, something that is relatively guaranteed, relatively secure, that keeps coming every year. I think this is better than ad hoc decisions or grants or, you know, one-off prosperity dividends or payouts. This is good because now people in the field can rely on \$25 million, or more if revenues increase, coming their way every year. I think that's positive.

It also intends to encourage national, international partnerships with the private sector in screening and research, and this is useful of course. I'm going to talk about the issue of screening in about a minute here.

The third clear impact or positive outcome would be funding and establishing a virtual institute, a cancer research institute, which will increase capacity for researchers in this province to collaborate on research and development projects. It offers additional leverage for attracting outside grants because sometimes you go to the federal government or you go to venture capital people or whatever the source is, and they say: "Okay. We will match whatever you can muster, whatever you can come up with." So we're opening doors now to places like the Canadian Institutes of Health Research or other agencies that would match whatever funds we can come up with here provincially.

In terms of a background, the Alberta Cancer Board has been pressing for a significant commitment by this province and by this government to expand its capacity and resources to deal with cancer in terms of not only treatment but also detection and prevention. In addition to the legacy fund, the board has submitted some capital requests to the government, to the treasury, of some \$350 million for expansion to the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton and is in the early stages of preparing a proposal for a similar one for Calgary to expand cancer-related capacity, which is going to be worth \$500 million to \$600 million in that city alone. This is a good first step, but the government should be expecting that more demands are going to follow.

Now, I said in the beginning that I wholeheartedly support investing in cancer research in all disciplines, be it early diagnosis and detection, like I mentioned, or be it medication and pharmaceutical care protocols or surgery or restorative surgery. In fact, on the issue of early detection and diagnosis you know, Mr. Speaker, of my experience in the health care field. As a pharmacist I not only see patients afflicted with the various forms of cancer – and we all know how devastating and destructive and terrible a disease it is – but I also see and talk to their family members and their spouses. People are usually very comfortable with their pharmacist, and they share things with you that sometimes they don't share with their physician even. One of the themes that I can detect now is that people are concerned about misdiagnosis, or not having a correct diagnosis made at the beginning. Sometimes they blame it on how busy the specialists are or maybe because there aren't enough specialists and so on.

If you don't detect it early enough or if you detect it but you diagnose it the wrong way, then it adds to the negative impact of that disease. If you catch it early enough and if you detect it the right way and you prescribe the right medication or the right surgical procedure, then your chances of survival are really higher. Scanning techniques have improved. I really have to emphasize that I'm not criticizing the advances that were made over the past 10 years or so. We definitely came a long way, and we have a lot more to offer. We have a lot more to improve upon. The population is aging, and the rate of morbidity or multiple diseases is increasing, and the challenge is still here. So I hope that one of the things that this fund is trying to address is in the area of early and accurate diagnosis and detection.

Also, Mr. Speaker, what about the underlying causes of cancer? It is good to be able to finally attack or tackle the problem of cancer. It's definitely a growing concern. But what about the causes that might actually cause people to come down with cancer? One of the risk factors is going to be family history. Maybe there is nothing much we can do if somebody has a gene that predisposes them to coming down with a certain form of cancer, be it colorectal or prostate or breast cancer or whatever.

My grandmother herself came down with a very rare form of cancer, oral cancer, which basically affected her jaw and her tongue and her teeth. She actually had to undergo surgery, and they

removed about two-thirds of her lower jaw and about one-third of her upper jaw. She was really devastated by it because from that point on she actually had to eat all her food preblended, almost like Gerber for kids. It was really, really awful. They couldn't tell her where she got it from. She did not have a family history. She did not have all the other determinants of cancer. They said that maybe, possibly, because she was a headmistress or a principal of a school, she drank too much coffee. They couldn't tell. That was about 26 years ago, and I think that today they should be able to do a better job with all the scanning routines and all the techniques that they use in our health centres.

4:10

Back to the underlying causes. I always quote the saying about an ounce of prevention versus the pound of treatment. This is where I'm going, Mr. Speaker: to try to alleviate or to prevent the causes that contribute to cancer. Certain things are not stoppable, but certain things are. Questions come to mind. What specific prevention initiatives is this money going to support? What are we going to do to educate our public? What things should we ask them to avoid? What things should we ask them to look for?

Also, if we're going to invest hundreds of millions of dollars – and I'm saying that this is a first step; we might have it next year or the year after – what are we going to do for environmental risk factors? Two examples in very recent history: within this last year we had the Wabamun train derailment and a spill. I know that they did contain it. Maybe they didn't contain it fast enough. At least is there going to be an agency or a board that's going to look at these risk factors and re-evaluate, test the water, do environmental impact assessments over a period of time to make sure that the water really did go back to its former quality? We also heard about the water being contaminated by coal-bed methane fracturing. People are claiming that they can actually, literally, ignite their tap water. They can't bathe in it; they're getting some terrible skin rashes from it. They can't make their farm animals drink it, and they can't drink it themselves, so now they're relying on water being trucked in. These are just examples of natural or artificially occurring toxins that could be averted, that could be avoided.

The issue that is on everybody's mind: are the province and the government going to strengthen our smoking legislation? Smoking is definitely one of the main causes of lung cancer. It has been proven. It's in the scientific wisdom. People know that smoking, with all the tar and all the garbage that is in cigarettes, causes lung cancer. So are we going to strengthen smoking legislation?

I'll go back to my experience as a pharmacist, Mr. Speaker, and I'll tell you about something that I was personally involved in. I ran for the College of Pharmacists board six or seven years ago, and I hoped to become one of the councillors because I had an idea. I wanted to remove tobacco products from pharmacies. Some pharmacies are relying on tobacco sales not as a revenue-generating stream but as a traffic maker. If all the independent or small stores stop selling tobacco, the bigger stores like Safeway and Shoppers and Superstore are still selling them. Because of their huge size the government and its bylaws tell you that you don't need to separate that section of your store from the rest of it.

I ran on the idea that I would present a motion to ban tobacco sales from all drugstores regardless of size. I came in fourth. We were five people running, and I came fourth, 27 votes away from the first-place winner. It's noteworthy to mention that the first three were hospital pharmacists. People in the hospital pharmacy industry voted for their own because they didn't know me, but they liked the idea. I'm hoping that one of these days, now that I'm a member of

this esteemed House, we can actually discuss the feasibility of removing tobacco products from all drugstores regardless of size.

Evidence shows that cancer in a majority of cases is also caused by social reasons or causes such as poverty or malnutrition or things like that. This is a growing concern for myself and my caucus colleagues because regardless of the wealth and all this money that the government is bringing in and that people are relatively better off than before, the gap between the really rich and the really poor is widening. So I think our middle class to some extent is being pulled, polarized. The rich are getting richer, which is not necessarily bad, but the poor are getting poorer, and this is something I take issue with.

Also, treating cancer involves palliative care, or terminal care. It's an important issue because these people are in the last period of their lives. What are we doing? What are we hoping to accomplish with this bill to try to afford them the dignity and the pain-free status to ease them in their last days in this world? Palliative care is important; 27 to 45 per cent of all cancer-related costs pertain to palliative care. So it's a growing expenditure, but it's also something that we have to be aware of. As people get older and as medical treatment gets better, more and more people would require palliative care because we're diagnosing them right – or so one hopes – and we're going to look after them.

You know, people are living into their 80s and 90s now with comorbidities, which means they have multiple diseases, and we are definitely going to spend more on looking after them in their last days. So palliative care: it opens up the discussion on things like long-term care as well and continuing care. It all fits together. We shouldn't really look at these policies as piecemeal or, you know: I'm today talking about cancer; I can't talk about long-term care. They all fit together.

An Hon. Member: It's silos.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Leave the silos away and look at the bigger picture because, you know, it's one person and it's one taxpayer that we're looking after. You can't really split them and say: oh, I'll look after his health and I'll look after his education and I'll look after his social needs and I'll look after his legal rights and so on. It's one person. You look at it from a holistic approach.

Also, other than just pouring money or investing into this fund, what is the government going to do to increase training, graduation, and retention of qualified health professionals? You would hope that people that are graduating – and you've heard the statistic that the admission quota is going way up and that people are finding it extremely difficult to go into medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, physical rehab, and so on. What are we doing to promote more open . . . [Mr. Elsalhy's speaking time expired]

Ah, well. Okay. There are more chances, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I know that the member was sort of cut off mid-thought on the issues that he was pursuing, and I'm wondering if he can just complete the last section that he was talking about.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, hon. member, Standing Order 29(2)(a) has been used for that reason before, so the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I promise to be brief. I was just talking about training and recruitment. We all know that admission quotas have become restrictive. People are not seeking those professional programs because of the length or the amount of money that they have to fork out to be in them. It's costly and it's long. Medicine, for example: seven, eight, nine years to become a physician. The more specialized you want to be, the longer it takes. People are shying away from becoming specialists and only graduating as family physicians because there's a quick buck to be made, and that's it.

The other thing, too, is – and I can tell you this from my experience as well – that half of every graduating class from the University of Alberta's pharmacy department goes to the U.S. Why do they go to the U.S.? They get offered better wages. Sometimes you hear stories about them hiring their spouses and offering them relocation bonuses. They give them a house and so on. What are we doing here to be competitive in that job market? We all know that we have a job shortage.

You know, you talk about importation of temporary foreign workers: what are we doing for our international medical graduates? People are coming from overseas, and they're really qualified. I know that the Minister of Health yesterday or the day before issued a press release talking about some 14 residency spots for international medical graduates, which means that if they share them, we can possibly get 28 of those international graduates through per year, and basically we're getting 28 more physicians every year, which is great.

But what are we doing to maybe encourage people to go in now, and what are we doing to encourage our government to retain them within this province? Maybe we should pardon some of their student debt. If people are graduating with heavy student debts, we can pardon some of it.

An Hon. Member: Time.

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, I still have three minutes, I think. I'll come back to it in committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, five minutes is allowed under Standing Order 29(2)(a), so you still have three minutes.

Mr. Elsalhy: I appreciate it. Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else in the remaining time under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'd like to rise and discuss Bill 1 briefly. It's kind of hard to argue against an all-out attack on cancer. There are not going to be too many people in this room right now or hardly anyone in Alberta who hasn't been touched by cancer in some way.

I remember that last week when we were here, I heard from the Minister of Economic Development about his current battle with cancer, and it was a very interesting and inspiring story. I recall a few years ago in my own family I had a call from my dad telling us that one of my nephews had leukemia. His name is Ryan. When you hear something like that, there's a feeling in the pit of your stomach that just makes you sick to think that someone this young – he was probably 13 at the time – would have a disease as poten-

tially horrific as this. He and his family went through just a hellish time fighting this disease – a lot of hospital stays, medication, all sorts of terrible stuff – but it worked, I'm happy to say.

Thanks to the cancer research funds over the years and the people in the cancer community in Edmonton he's a big, strong 18-year-old today, and that's a real success story. I think that with this bill there may be a lot more of these success stories in the future. It certainly would be wonderful if sometime – you know, right now there's something called, I think, the Edmonton protocol for diabetes. Maybe some day in the future there will be an Alberta protocol that will solve some sort of horrendous cancer, maybe prostate cancer or something along those lines, and maybe it will all start right here with this commitment of \$500 million to start a real solid battle against cancer.

In that regard, yes, I certainly have to give credit to the government for reaching for the stars. I mean, we've been kind of waiting for this government to do something big with all the petrodollars that have been coming in. Battling the deficit is not exactly something that's going to gladden the heart. It's a good thing; congratulations, it's done. This is a better thing. This is something that could make a difference in the lives of people for years to come and around the world, and I certainly hope that it can succeed. I have to give credit to the government for finally showing some vision.

It's an ambitious goal; that's for sure. We're looking at reducing the incidence of cancer by 35 per cent by 2025 and reducing the mortality from cancer by 50 per cent by 2025. Big goals. I don't know exactly how they found these goals, and how they're going to measure them is another question altogether, but I assume that they've got some sort of plan in place to keep an eye on this.

Mr. Speaker, we have all sort of done our part for cancer research, some in big ways. This is the biggest way, and we've all had our small ways. I know there are a bunch of opposition MLAs who went on a little Cops for Cancer Battle in the Saddle a few weeks ago. We raised over a thousand dollars. I think the members for Edmonton-McClung and Edmonton-Manning – I was sick that day, but I organized it – and Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-Decore were all there. We did our part and raised about a thousand dollars.

Mrs. McClellan: They were sick after they did it.

Mr. Tougas: I'm being heckled; I can't believe this. I'm saying nice things; I'm being heckled.

An Hon. Member: In a good way.

Mr. Tougas: Okay. I'll accept that. I'll accept the applause.

I do have to say, though, that there's a little bit of irony in this government launching a battle against cancer in that they have – well, a little over a year ago we had a stronger tobacco law, that was watered down. Tobacco, as we all know, is one of the leading causes of cancer. We had a chance right there to really do something about it, but the government held back. We really should have fought harder for that thing. It just doesn't make a lot of sense that today we'll be launching a big offensive against cancer, yet we have ways that we could be stopping it earlier.

We're talking about things like coal-bed methane. We don't know the impact of this. We have water that's potentially tainted – we don't know – yet we're still going full speed ahead with this. So there is more than just a little bit of irony in this sort of thing, Mr. Speaker.

But, as I said, I'll be brief. I would just like to put in a plug,

though, for the city of Edmonton. I know they're talking about – what was that called again? – a virtual cancer research centre. If it's going to go anywhere, I'd just like to say that it belongs here in the city of Edmonton at the University of Alberta. Just before other cities start making moves on it, this is where it belongs because the real seat of higher education is right here in the city of Edmonton. [interjections] I can hear some complaining from some Calgarians here. Let's be fair here.

An Hon. Member: What about the rural folks?

Mr. Tougas: Rural people are staying strangely quiet right now.

So I would like to just mention that Edmonton is probably where this sort of thing belongs. I hope the government doesn't worry too much about trying to spread this out between Edmonton and Calgary. The real goal is cancer prevention and a cure for cancer, and we shouldn't worry quite so much about making sure that Calgary gets a bit of it and Edmonton gets a bit of it. If that's going to cost us administrative dollars, I hope this isn't the type of thing that we have to really worry about.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I said that I'd be brief, and I'm a man of my word. Again, I'm supportive of this legislation. It'll be interesting to see, when it finally comes to pass, what it looks like, and we'll be keeping a close eye on it. Again I commend the government for committing this kind of money to it. I hope that some day in the future we'll look back on this day and say that we've done a great thing here.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, 29(2)(a) is available. Anyone on the bill?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a very few comments, and I certainly want to add my appreciation to the opposition members that have supported this bill. As has been said by a number of the speakers, there are very few of us that can say that we haven't been touched by this at some point in our lives, whether it was a family, friend, or acquaintances. Too often it's a very difficult disease to manage, and families and friends are affected as deeply as the person fighting the disease, and sometimes it's harder for them.

I want to add one other commendation, and that's to the Cancer Board members. They're a dedicated group of individuals that have really dedicated their time and their efforts, really, on a volunteer basis to fight this disease. There have been a number of people serve on that board over the years. But it's really their plan, working with the minister of health, and their belief that if we make these types of investments, if we concentrate in the areas that this bill outlines, we actually can reduce the numbers of incidences of cancer. Obviously, that will be wonderful for all of us.

I want to also just mention that I'm not sure that we're all aware of the tremendous research that does occur in this province today in the area of cancer. I'm very proud that we have dedicated cancer research funds over the years to ensure that we could attract those very great researchers, those fine people who work in that area.

I want to mention the dedication and hard work of Dr. Turc. He has been a stalwart with that organization. He's an amazing man. I would venture to say that he could have gone anywhere and has been approached, I am sure and in fact know, many times to leave the province and go somewhere else. But his dedication to the people of this province, to what he believes we can do here – I'm as pleased for him and people like Dr. Tony Fields, again one of the

leading people in this area, recognized world-wide, that have chosen to stay in Alberta and fight the fight here. So I think we're very fortunate in this province to have those types of people, and you could add many to that list. That type of dedication and that kind of support and that kind of interest make it tremendously easy for all of us in this Legislature to support this bill and the goals that are set out in it.

4:30

I want to thank all members for their support for this. I want to wish the researchers and the physicians and the caregivers that work in this area well in their goals of bringing down the incidence of cancer in a very, very significant way. I think this formalizes what we all believe in and, most of all, shows the dedicated people in the field that we're behind them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the bill.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not go on long on Bill 1. It's a bill that would be hard to oppose, to say the least. Certainly, we in the NDP will support the thrust of the bill, but I do have some questions and some concerns as we go along. I'm glad that the Minister of Finance is here for at least one of the questions that I will be putting out at some point.

I guess that the point about the bill is that \$500 million, we hope, over the long run will have some impact. I know that the figures that the Premier quoted were pretty ambitious in terms of cutbacks. Certainly, this is one time when we all hope that the Premier is right, that we can do this with this endowment fund. We don't need to go into all of this. I think everyone in this House has known people that have died of cancer. I would point out that one of my colleagues, that many of you would remember, Gordon Wright, the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona, went through a painful time when he was here in the Legislature, and many of you would remember that. We've all had somebody close to us, I think, taken by this awful, awful disease.

The point that I would want to make, then: if we're going to take this disease on seriously, we have to come back to the smoking bylaw. I would suggest that the government at least knew that they made a mistake when we were going to have special smoking areas here and not for the rest of the public. Within a day they at least solved that problem, but it sent out not a very good message to the people. Of course, we know that smoking is one of the major causes certainly of lung cancer. There are many others, but certainly smoking is one of them. I think that if we're doing a fund like this and doing it for research to try to deal with cancer, perhaps we should come back to the Member for Calgary-West, I believe it is, and look for a province-wide ban.

Maybe we can see that as part of the legacy in the next Legislature. It seems to me that it would be quite appropriate, as we're putting in \$500 million here, to begin to look at that. It certainly creates some problems for people, but if we're serious about cancer, I think that's the first step that we should take, and perhaps we can look forward to that in the very near future. Of course, then we can get into a debate – I won't bother here because I think it's been said – about the problems with methane and, coal related, whether there is such a thing as clean coal. Those are all potentially cancerous too, and that's another debate to be held.

A message becomes important. This is the question I have for the Minister of Finance. It's my understanding that the Cancer Board

prepares yearly budgets for the administration of monies, but this particular investment would be controlled by the Minister of Finance, if I'm understanding it correctly. I think there's a key point here. I believe that the Cancer Board has what they call ethical investments. Certainly, an obvious one that they would not invest in would be tobacco, for example. Ethical funds are in all sorts of areas: liquor, people with bad environmental records, but certainly tobacco. I would hope, then, that with this particular fund, at least, the minister would follow the guidelines of the Cancer Board in any investments that they might make. I think that that's an important message. If all of a sudden we're setting up a board here and we're allowed to invest in tobacco companies or other companies that actually could cause cancer, Mr. Speaker, it would not be sending a good message for the endowment fund. I'm not sure that she can answer it here, but I would hope that they would take a look at that and that this particular fund at least would follow the guidelines set out by the Cancer Board. I think that's a very important part of it.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that this money is going in to try to deal with this disease. From our perspective in the NDP opposition we'll certainly wholeheartedly support the bill as it stands.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available again.

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on second reading?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Bill 2 Drug-endangered Children Act

[Adjourned debate March 2: Mr. Tougas]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark still has 13 minutes left.

Mr. Tougas: No. I think I'm done with this matter, Mr. Speaker. I'm fine.

The Deputy Speaker: Then I'd recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that I have the opportunity to put some of my concerns about this bill on the record, and I'll go through these. I have to say that the previous members of my caucus have spoken in favour of this bill, and some people are very supportive. I understand that and I respect it, but I have some cautions around this bill, and I see some similarities to other things that have happened in the past that I want to put on the record because I think that it's important to do that.

Let me distinguish where my concerns lie, especially in light of the last bill that we just passed through second reading, which was the cancer legacy bill. One of the points that I was raising around that is that we have to be much more alive to the environmental triggers or catalysts or causes of cancer than we have been. Aside from making healthier societies overall so that we're just healthier people with better habits and better nutrition and all of those things, we also have to be alive to what's in the environment around us that can also be problematic and likely does contribute to a higher rate of cancer through our lives.

I want to be clear here that when we're talking about meth labs, I don't have a problem with what's being proposed here. I think that it's perfectly appropriate to link an environmental concern for children and their long-term health to the waste that is generated when you have a meth lab. I'm sorry; there's nothing that I can say that's positive about a meth lab.

4:40

I'm noting that for every kilogram of methamphetamine product that's produced, there are 5 to 7 kilograms of waste produced, and that just lies around. It is toxic. There is no legal or legitimate means of getting rid of it, and someone that is running a meth lab is making no attempt to do that. It's not as though they're hauling it out to a compost in the back and containing it in one place. So I have great concerns about children that are in the area of this kind of waste, and I view it as toxic waste. Meth labs are also producing particularly inflammable gas, which of course presents a huge fire and burn danger to children. Also things like air contamination, chemical burns, and chemicals being absorbed into teddy bears and clothing and crib bedding and all kinds of things – that's just a really bad idea.

When I first looked at this bill, I really struggled with it, and I'm still struggling with it. I honestly don't know whether or not I'm going to support this as it moves through. Here's where my concerns lie. This is another state intervention into the home, and I note with interest that this government is particularly reluctant to have intervention into a number of other areas – they shy away from it; it's part of their philosophy – and those are things like environmental protection or laws about restricting business, for example. There are certain areas where this government just will not go, yet I've noticed over the years that there's a willingness, almost an eagerness for the state, in this case the provincial government, to intervene into people's homes. This causes me great concern. We need to be very, very cautious when we start to do this, particularly when we start to take families apart.

Now, I know that there are good social workers out there that work very hard on behalf of the government, and there are agencies that contract with the government to do much of the same work, and they have the children's best interests at heart. I know that they are trying to make sure that they are protecting children, but we've also come to an understanding that in removing kids from the home, you really need to try and work in the best interest of that kid and try and keep that family intact. My concern here is that I don't see a real commitment to try to remove a kid from a dangerous situation but leave them with some kind of family.

Here's the scenario that I'm not comfortable with. Intervention into a home: a kid is yanked out of their room. However terrible that room might be, it's still their space. It's still their bed. It's still their blankie. They're removed from that, from their toys, from the dish they use, from their sippy cup, from everything that is familiar to them, and they are placed not with another family member but with a completely unknown family. I really struggle with that. I don't know how that's really to the benefit of the child.

Remember, I'm not talking about removing them from a dangerous, toxic situation like a meth lab. But the other situations that are anticipated in this bill are things like grow ops, and I'm not seeing a really clear definition of that. So this could be a situation where there are a certain number of marijuana plants in the basement, for example, which people could argue and probably do that it's being grown for their own consumption. There's a more lenient societal attitude towards that right now.

It's also covering trafficking. Trafficking is a difficult one to deal

with and has been a bit of a moving target over the years as well because how much product you have in your home for your own personal use, especially if you're speaking about various marijuana-derived products, has moved quite a bit over the years. There's quite a bit of open talk now about decriminalizing it entirely.

You may well have a family that in all other respects contributes to their community, participate on the parent advisory council at school, coach the soccer team, are involved in their community. They may well attend a faith community on a regular basis and be involved with a certain kind of marijuana product, and their kids could be yanked out of their homes. I'm struggling with how that is going to be of benefit to that kid. I see the intention of this bill, but I question the government's eagerness to intervene into the family with such an aggressive tactic. What we're getting from this is more administration. We're getting more legal rigamarole, for want of a better word, a whole other legal process that we get involved with here that the courts now have to deal with and possibly process, plus the Children's Services administration and placement and the foster family administration. We add in a whole other layer here.

I'm thinking: well, where have I seen this before? You know where it was? It was the PCHIP bill, or what's commonly called the PCHIP bill. At the time I argued that we didn't need that bill, that we had the legal resources through the Police Act and through the then acts that covered child welfare to do what that act did. I still maintain that that act was window dressing. We could do everything we needed to do with the existing law, so why did we need another law that, again, was fairly interventionist into someone's life? I saw that bill go through with no resources attached to it, and in fact there was a real struggle for the first couple of years because girls were picked up and there really wasn't anyplace to go that was actually immediately accessible and ready for them.

I'm seeing this same sort of thing being anticipated here. There's definitely a concern about exposing children to illegal activity, particularly where it's involving toxic substances and illegal substances. Let's face it; this is illegal, right? But I don't see why we can't work with the existing laws that we have in place and the existing processes that we have in place. This to me has that same veneer of window dressing, of grandstanding, if anything.

If the point of this bill, as someone said when they introduced it, was to make sure that the definition of abuse of children included having them in an environment like that, where it's toxic and illegal, then why don't we add that definition into the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, which is where all the other definitions of abuse of children are? We've already got an act that does that. Why are we establishing a whole other act to do something when you already have one that does that? So I still question: why? What are we gaining that's of benefit with this additional act? It's interventionist in a very aggressive way. We could do this by adding to the definition of abuse in the existing legislation.

This bill doesn't come with resources. Now, we've got a budget coming on March 22, but I haven't heard any indication in the discussion so far. This did not come forward as a money bill. There are no resources attached to this. Once again we could have basically a whole administrative level that is now added onto the burden of everything else that these various groups I've described are trying to carry with no resources added to it. What's that about? What's the point of that, Mr. Speaker, when we have the laws already there?

You see why I'm starting to think that this is a little bit of grandstanding, a little bit too much, a little bit extra so that the government's name is on it and they appear to be doing something. But they have all the other vehicles available to them to do that

already. My point is: just do it. If this is really important, then just do it and put the resources behind it so that they're there. Put the resources so that we don't have child welfare workers that are working with caseloads of 400 children, you know, where they've got enough time to be detecting this and working with it specifically.

4:50

One of the statistics that was used when the bill was introduced was that about 30 per cent of meth labs have kids living in the vicinity, in that environment. My question is: what does that translate into? How many Alberta children are in that situation? The government must have the numbers. I'd be interested in knowing how many Alberta children were in that. That 30 per cent: is that 30 per cent of all the meth labs in Canada, of all the meth labs that are known about in North America, or of all the meth labs in Alberta? How many is that? How many children are we talking about here? Are we creating a law to intervene in the lives of 30 children, 300 children, 3,000 children? What's the magnitude of this problem? Again, this relates back to: are we putting extra legislation in here when we could use means that are already at our disposal?

My other concern is that there's nothing in this bill that does anything to stop the root causes. Yes, children will be removed from their homes. Yes, families will be reprimanded or subjected to the full course of the law that's anticipated in the bill. Does it do anything to stop it from happening tomorrow other than the threat of punishment, other than that stick of corrections, that big stick that the government can wield? I don't see that. We're here tomorrow; now we can hit people with a stick. But there's nothing to stop people. There's no disincentive or incentive for them to not be in the same situation.

It's a way of reacting after the fact that I see this government continually doing. I have to say again and again and again: you know, if you don't deal with the social determinants of health, you are going to be standing here five years, 10 years, and 20 years from now with exactly the same problems only more of them. All you did was have a big stick to hit the people that you caught. It doesn't do anything to help all the rest of the families that you never catch up with or you don't locate or who don't come up through the system somehow. It does nothing to address all of those people.

Those are the concerns that I have over this bill. It does look like window dressing to me. I think it's a good intention, but if that's what we wanted to do, then let's open up the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the existing legislation, and add that definition of abuse in there and go through the existing act. I don't see why we are creating a whole other act to do this. Again, it's like a trophy. You know, you can show it around to people and say: "Look, aren't we doing something important here? Aren't we really concerned?" But I go: did we do anything to really give people an incentive or an opportunity to move out of a criminal lifestyle? Is there assistance for employment? Have we done something? If we're going to talk about the kids, then have we done something specific for the kids? Have we looked at hot lunch programs wherever they're needed in the province? No. So it does nothing to really help those kids but a big stick.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to reiterate much of what the Member for Edmonton-Centre has said. I've talked to some child welfare lawyers, and a number of them have said that we

can already do this. We can already do this. These are the people dealing with the situation. Social workers have told me that we can already do this. You know, the House leader often says that we don't need to just be passing laws for the sake of passing laws, that there has to be a purpose, because we could be overly governed. I would hope that at some point the minister will tell us why she really feels that this need is there. Certainly, many in her department that I've talked to do not believe that. They believe that it was there before.

I mean, I'm like the Member for Edmonton-Centre: I'm not sure whether I should support it or not. The goal is good, the goal of getting children out of abusive situations if there are grow ops and all sorts of bad things happening. But that's the point: they already can do that.

I do worry about it being a little intrusive too – and I think the Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about it – in the sense that an indoor cannabis grow operation is not adequately defined. There may be some members in this House that at some point could have been in trouble, you know, if this bill had been there. I'm not mentioning any names, of course, but they're probably all sitting over on the other side. The point I'm making is that when you get laws like this, that are undefined, it could lead to the possibility of abuse.

Now, again, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre says – and she's absolutely correct – nobody wants kids around abusive situations. The abuse that this bill is trying to prevent is often there. If you're in a grow op and there are druggies around and/or crystal meth and the rest of it, of course that's a serious situation, and we should get those children out of there immediately. The point that I'm trying to make, though, is that I'm told that we can do that already, that it happens all the time. The House leader often says: well, we don't just pass laws for the sake of having laws. I'm wondering, then, why we're doing this.

Of course, there's also the fact – and I'm reiterating the good speech from the Member for Edmonton-Centre – that we've got to deal with the root causes of some of these situations too. This is not going to solve all the problems of those kids overnight.

I worry about two things: one, I don't believe that there's an adequate definition of what this means; and secondly, if we already have a law where they're doing this – and they're doing it every day, that I'm aware of, in these situations – are we passing a law because now it's exciting to say that we're dealing with crystal meth and we're dealing with grow ops and the rest of it? Is this because it looks good in terms of what we're attempting to do here in the Legislature? I think we should ask this question because the Conservative government House leader says that we don't pass laws for the sake of passing laws. I'm wondering if we are in fact doing this.

Again: how do you oppose a bill where kids are in danger? That's the dilemma that you have with these bills even though this bill may not add anything at all to what's already happening, Mr. Speaker. So I hope the minister at some point will give us a better rationale as to why she thinks this bill is necessary.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, Hon. Minister of Children's Services, do you wish to close debate?

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be pleased to address the concerns of some of the opposition questions in Committee of the Whole.

I'd like to move second reading of the Drug-endangered Children Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Bill 6

Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General still has 12 minutes.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to talk about one of my – I can't say that it's my favourite area, but it's certainly an area that I've developed a lot of expertise in over the years. It's the maintenance enforcement program. For all the criticism that I've directed towards the government over the nine years that I've been here, I have to say that there has been continued movement forward in improving this program. To me, that's a very good sign.

This is an area that is of absolute, integral importance to children in this province. For whatever reason, we have a lot of families that don't stay together. I don't know why, and I don't want to get into that. What my concern is directed towards is that we have a deal that if you are the parent of a child and you are not living in that family unit, there is a responsibility to contribute towards the child. It's not about the other parent. It's not about the parents. This is about the children. This is about making sure that the money that's necessary for those kids gets to them. We've got a pretty good program, and we continue to improve it, as I said. I think this is another step forward.

5:00

You know, it's one of those situations where every time you think you've figured out how to plug all the loopholes that people manage to find, then there are a few more that pop open, and you've got to figure out a way to plug those as well. People that don't want to pay for the maintenance of their children are pretty creative and pretty stubborn and pretty chronic in not following the law. It's important that we keep the program alive, kind of a living program that continues to adjust as it needs to.

There are a couple of things that are being anticipated here. I think the main one that the minister spoke of was what are called LIRA, which is the locked-in retirement account. There are probably a lot of them because for the most part they're accounts where if you had a government pension and you left, you were able to take that pension part with you, but it goes into this locked-in account, and you can't withdraw from it until you reach, I think, over 50 years of age. You can't draw from it at all. It's locked in there. What we had was, you know, a need for that money to be accessed on behalf of some children, and the way the law was written, we couldn't get at it until the individual, the parent, the debtor in this case, turned 50. Our own laws were working against our ability to access money for children, so part of this act is to address that particular issue.

I saw a statistic the other day that I thought: oh, that's a flow-through from some good legislation that was put in place. You know what it was? It was the number of older women who were in dire poverty, and I think it might have been specific to divorce, from years ago, decades ago, compared to now. I said: "Okay. What that's about is the change that was achieved where spouses were able

to access pensions as part of divorce proceedings and share pensions, you know, for the time that was accrued when the couple was together." The other spouse would be able to access that. I thought: "There it is. There is what we were trying to achieve with that." We have fewer women that are now seniors that are in absolute, bone-numbing poverty. I thought: "That's why you do this stuff. That's why you try and set that in motion." So I'm hoping that this is the same kind of thing.

A couple of other small things are being addressed: the money that is achieved through flexibility in dealing with debtors who are evading the maintenance enforcement program. As I said: boy, they can be creative. I will never understand that. I will never understand why a parent would go to such lengths to avoid paying maintenance for their child. I just won't get it. I mean, people quit their jobs. They move away. They hide their assets under friends' names. It's appalling behaviour, and I just can't understand why you would do that to your own offspring, but people do it a lot, and they're creative about it.

So there are a couple of very positive movements that have been made here. Better flexibility. That's around setting times for financial examinations to a later date so that the debtors don't have to worry about reprisals because of scheduling conflicts. You know, once you get somebody that is actually willing to work along with this, even if they have deliberately withheld payments in the past, if you've actually got them to the point where they're willing to recognize their debt and try and resolve the problem, you don't want to place additional barriers in their way. You've got to kind of coax them along once you've got them on your side. This is making that a bit more possible. It's to make the process less confrontational for the debtors and for the debtors to avoid possible jail time because they've missed a default hearing process.

There's also a section that's dealing with creditors getting all the current money owing to them before maintenance enforcement applies the funds to outstanding penalties and fines owed to maintenance enforcement because of delinquent payments. Now for a long time we actually didn't. There were no interest and fines charged. Those are more recent developments, but I'm glad to see that it's now being organized so that the creditor who needs the money, the custodial parent, is going to get their chunk of money for the kids before MEP takes their fine and penalty money. I think that's perfectly appropriate because, again, the point of this is to direct that money towards the children.

Some people, lots of people, actually most people can manage to go into a family break-apart situation and with a bit of help figure it out for themselves for the most part. It doesn't have to be that acrimonious. You don't have to get that confrontational about it. Lots of folks do get an arrangement between themselves about how it's all going to work, and how much money it is. If the families are satisfied with that, and it's supporting the children, good on them. But there has been a need to be able to have that kind of registered somewhere.

What we had before was that if it was your own arrangement, then it was outside of the MEP program, and we won't get involved with it. Lots of times there are a few little bumps along the way, but it's outside the program, so nobody can help. Ultimately, what we were trying to do here was actually help the kids. So what's being proposed here is that it's going to bring these maintenance agreements, these sort of ad hoc ones developed by the families, into line with provisions in the Family Law Act, and it encourages the families to use these agreements as an alternative before going to court. It's providing MEP staff to take care of things like assisting in the filing of the agreements in the Court of Queen's Bench and

servicing notice of the filings. They don't need to have representation to make their own agreements enforceable, and they can be assisted by the MEP staff in all the processes of filing. I'm thinking that this is going to allow for more settlements to be done outside of the court system. Again, a good thing.

The more we can get people to figure out how to manage their own lives and resolve conflict without getting confrontational, the better. We live in a society where confrontation is not polite, and we don't like to do it, but when we're in a conflict with someone, we want to turn it all over to the courts and have a judge make the decision for us. Hopefully, we believe we're right and they're wrong, and the judge is going to make them pay. That just clogs up our courts. It also absolves us from the responsibility of trying to work stuff out ourselves. So we have increasing numbers of mediators trained now and available through non-profits: Catholic Social Services. Some of them are available through the justice system in certain instances. There's a mediation and arbitration society that you can get in touch with. It's a very reasonably priced way of working your way through this, and I strongly encourage people to do that.

The last thing that's being dealt with in the act is financial examinations. Oh, I think I talked about that. It's allowing the director of MEP to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an order of alternate arrangements for the examination of a debtor. That was the one where they don't have to worry that they're going to have the full weight of the court come down on them if they miss their default hearing. I've already talked about that one.

5:10

I congratulate the program and all the staff that work in it and the minister for continuing to improve this program and move it along. It's darn hard to do because, really, it's a collection agency. Maintenance enforcement is a very specialized collection agency, which is not what you would usually expect to find inside government. So you're looking for highly specialized people that can do this job, get the money, extract the money, and at the same time they are representatives of the government, and they need to work with people in a way that is sensitive and respectful. Anybody that has ever dealt with a collection agency knows that usually collection agents are not respectful. So it's a tough line to walk. We all get complaints about maintenance enforcement from people that think that they should have gotten more or that it should have been done in a different way.

For a while I think we got into a place where once we found a noncustodial parent who owed money, it was like: "Yay, we got a live one. Let's turn him upside down and shake him until all the change falls out of their pocket." I mean, we just whaled on the live ones that we actually got in our clutches, and that caused some very bad feelings out there. I think that there have been adjustments made, and the program is trying very hard to be respectful to both sides of this. We just all need to be grown-ups about this and move on and deal with what's being proposed.

Back from my very earliest days in this Chamber when I challenged the then Justice minister and Attorney General to do something to move the maintenance enforcement program of the day on to a new level, he took that challenge and established a maintenance enforcement review, which was chaired by the then Member for Calgary-Lougheed. There was an amending act that came in, and I think we've amended that twice more since then, so my congratulations.

The other thing that the program has done is learn to keep the numbers better because the numbers quite disguised what was

actually happening and how successful we were at collecting files that were outstanding. At one point it basically just recorded any activity in accounts. You could have paid a buck, and it would have showed you as active, but the fact that you owed \$80,000 wasn't showing up. That's \$80,000 that belonged to a child, that should have been there to send a child to camp or to pay for their hockey school or their school fees or a bathing suit or food. That's what we have to remember about this program.

I'm proud of my involvement with this program. I intend on remaining vigilant that we continue to move it forward. I'm pleased to see the changes that have been instituted with this amending act, and I'm very willing to support it. I'm not the critic of the act; I just jumped in here because I have such a long and passionate involvement with the program.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in second reading. I urge everyone to support this bill and pass it on. Thank you.

At this point, I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 6.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn the House until 1:30 next Monday.

[Motion carried; at 5:14 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 13, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as Members of the Legislative Assembly. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members, today we'll be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all hon. members and all participants in the galleries to join in in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom à vous et à l'Assemblée des invités spéciaux venus de la communauté francophone. Ils sont assis dans votre galerie et étaient ici ce matin lors de la cérémonie en reconnaissance des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, une célébration annuelle de l'histoire et de la culture françaises et la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, qui aura lieu le 20 mars.

Je suis heureux de vous présenter en premier lieu les membres de l'exécutif de l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta. L'association, connue sous l'acronyme ACFA, a son secrétariat provincial à Edmonton, chapeaute plusieurs autres organisations, don't douze bureaux régionaux à travers la province. L'année 2006 est une année marquante pour l'ACFA alors qu'elle célèbre son 80e anniversaire.

Parmi nous aujourd'hui sont M. Jean Johnson, président, M. Jean-Louis Dentinger, conseiller, et les accompagnants pour cette journée spéciale à la Législature sont les membres de mon équipe au Secrétariat francophone, M. Denis Tardif, directeur général, et Mlle Cindie LeBlanc, directrice adjointe. J'aimerais qu'ils se lèvent et soient reconnus. Je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour leur souhaiter une bienvenue chaleureuse.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to the Assembly a number of guests from the francophone community. They are seated in your gallery and are special guests who attended the morning celebrations in the rotunda to mark the beginning of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a two-week celebration of French culture and history, and International Francophonie Day, coming up on the 20th of March.

I am pleased to first introduce executive members of the French Canadian Association of Alberta. The association, commonly known as the ACFA, is the provincial umbrella organization representing all francophones, with a provincial secretariat in Edmonton and 12 regional chapters across the province. The year 2006 represents an important milestone for the association as it celebrates its 80th anniversary.

Present today are its president, Mr. Jean Johnson, and councillor Mr. Jean-Louis Dentinger. I would ask them to stand up and be recognized by the Assembly.

Joining them on this special day at the Legislature are members of my staff at the Francophone Secretariat, Mr. Denis Tardif, executive director, and Ms Cindie LeBlanc, assistant director. I would like them to stand and be recognized.

I would invite the members of the Assembly to join me in extending them a warm welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, today is Commonwealth Day. We celebrate the ties that bind us with over one-quarter of the world's population that live in Commonwealth countries. In the Speaker's gallery are three of the founding members of the Royal Commonwealth Society's Edmonton branch, which was founded in 2004. I'm happy to report as well that the Edmonton branch has undertaken to cosponsor and assist in the promotion of our annual Alberta Commonwealth Parliamentary Association student essay competition. An information sheet on the good work that the Royal Commonwealth Society does is on each member's desk. I now invite Colin Reichle, the branch's chair; Dr. Dugan, vice-chair; and Charles Hunt, the treasurer, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Hon. members, my vignette of the day will be about the two chairs on the dais. In the Speaker's gallery are craftsmen who built the chair on the right. They're Chad Hoflin, a former Infrastructure and Transportation employee; Dennis McDonald, a former Infrastructure and Transportation employee; Patricia Souliere, an apprentice carpenter with the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation; and Amie Scott, an apprentice painter with the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. Robert van Essen, a former Infrastructure and Transportation employee who also worked on the project that I will describe later, could not be with us today. I'd invite all hon. members to extend to them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in the members' gallery are two of Alberta's outstanding postsecondary leaders. Sharon Carry, president and CEO of Bow Valley College in Calgary, is a true visionary and a passionate advocate for the role of learning in securing the future of our province. Sharon has been president of Bow Valley College since 1997 and has successfully led the transformation of the college into one of Alberta's leading postsecondary institutions. Value for money, there is no better source of education.

Séamus O'Shea, vice-president academic at the University of Lethbridge, is also in the gallery. Séamus has been with the University of Lethbridge since 1977 and is a professor in the department of chemistry and biochemistry. He has served as vice-president academic since 1991 and has been active in the implementation of information technology for academic and administrative

purposes. You may recall that Séamus O'Shea is also the chair of Alberta's iCORE, informatics circle of research excellence.

Mr. Speaker, I met with both Sharon and Séamus today to discuss the creation of a common student application system. These are the two leaders of the process, and it's exciting to see where the initiative is going. It's very complex. It will take a little while to get up and running, but the talent and enthusiasm and leadership behind that project could be in no better hands. I'd ask the two to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 24 grade 6 students from Boyle school, and they are accompanied by their parents and teachers. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm fortunate to have a guest here today. This young fellow is a student at the University of Alberta studying political science, and then he hopes to go on to a law degree. Kurtis Streeper worked in my constituency office last summer, and I'm hoping to welcome him back to the same position again this year, where he can do his excellent job of serving the constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti. I'd ask Kurtis Streeper to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 31 students and teachers from Meadowlark elementary school, led by their teacher Lu Zhang. The parents are Jessica Tang, Liz Leung, Angela Kwan, and Sylvia Lo. Would they please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 76 grade 6 students from Albert Lacombe school. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Joe Esposito, Mrs. Elaine Whittaker, Mrs. Paddi Brown, and Mrs. Donna Ernst, who is a teacher assistant, and parents Mrs. Laura Kabat and Mr. Nick Tassone. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

1:40

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 42 students from Prince Charles elementary school. Along with them are two teachers, Ms Alicia Cardinal and Mrs. Clementine Spence; two student teachers, Ms Sylvia Hui and Mr. Nick Larkin; two teachers' assistants, Ms Sinclair and Mrs. Gelasco; and a parent, Mrs. Laurie Callihoo. They'll actually be here at 2:00 this afternoon, but can we give them a round of applause anyway.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and to the House Zoe Todd. Zoe is a graduate of the University of Alberta and plans on pursuing a degree in medical anthropology as an extra. Zoe is currently a volunteer with the Seminar on the United Nations and International Affairs. Zoe has been a wonderful addition to my constituency office staff and is assisting us with community outreach. I trust that she is sitting in the public gallery. I will now ask her to please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and the members of the Assembly two active women in the Edmonton community. Docia Lysne is an active NDP volunteer over a number of years and also serves on the board of directors for Planned Parenthood. She serves as a mentor for the Edmonton institute for women. Marion DeShield is a former leader of the national black women's coalition and is a senior citizen volunteer with the seniors' centre here in Edmonton. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Calgary Funding Needs

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mayor of Calgary has been trying since before Christmas to get in to see the Finance minister to discuss her upcoming Alberta budget. Now, I don't know how the minister expects to learn Calgary's needs otherwise since there are few people alive who can remember the last time the Calgary Conservative caucus went to bat for their hometown. To the minister: why is she refusing to consult with the mayor of Calgary until two days after she brings down the budget?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have not refused to meet with the mayor of Calgary at all, and I am disappointed that this hon. member chooses to continue this discussion, which is really without a great deal of foundation. Let me just set the record straight. I received a letter from the mayor of Calgary on December 15 wanting to talk about some municipal taxation issues. I responded to the mayor immediately and asked because of the budget meetings we were encountering then, remember, the 15th of December, if he would meet with 23 MLAs from Calgary, or thereabouts, and share their concerns – they could meet in a group – and, most appropriately, could he meet with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I did not receive a response to that letter.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the Premier: could the Premier at least meet with the mayor between now and budget day if the Minister of Finance continues to refuse to do so?

Mr. Klein: I can tell you, Mr. Speaker and this hon. member, that I have met with the mayor of Calgary on numerous occasions, and depending on what he wants to speak to me about, I'd be very happy

to meet with him, but I can't go into details of the budget with the mayor or with members of the opposition or members of the media or anyone else for that matter.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier can listen to the other party.

Given the refusal of the Finance minister to meet with the mayor and the failure of the Education minister to meet with the Calgary school board chair in advance of the budget about the budget, why is the Premier allowing his ministers to take the citizens of Calgary for granted?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Provincial Treasurer respond in detail, but both the Calgary mayor and the chair of the Calgary school board are criticizing the province for what they claim is a lack of funding to the city. Both claim the government is ignoring the needs of Alberta's largest city, a unicity. I would like to remind both individuals and the hon. member that over the past year this government has invested more than \$4.14 billion – billion – for roads, schools, hospitals, and many other priorities in the city of Calgary.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Corporate Donation to Olds College

Mr. Taylor: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The moral of the story of the Pied Piper is that he who pays the piper calls the tune. EnCana Corporation has given Olds College over a million dollars to fund, among other things, an expanded land sciences program with a curriculum developed by the oil industry. To the Minister of Advanced Education: sure, we want our sons and daughters to be employable when they graduate, but what steps is he taking to protect the academic autonomy of Olds College here?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that that's a very nasty slur on a very fine institution. Olds College has served Alberta and Albertans, particularly in the agriculture and home economics area and now in land sciences and horticulture, for many, many years and does a fine job of doing that. It provides an excellent educational opportunity for students.

The hon. member knows, or at least should know, that every new program that comes forward has to go through the quality Alberta council, which ensures that it's of the highest quality standards and that it's an appropriate program for students. Any new program offered by Olds College will go through that process. The hon. member knows that, and he should actually withdraw that kind of a slur against one of Alberta's fine public education institutions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: given the comments last Tuesday in Camrose by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat regarding the Land Agents Licensing Act that, quote, industry is in control of the act, is the minister at all concerned that this new arrangement inappropriately places this program at the beck and call of the industry?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can't comment on what another member might have said when I wasn't there, but I can assure the House of this: Olds College offers land management programs and

is expanding those programs. They're of excellent quality, and it's very important that they do so. As this government embarks on a land-use strategy to mirror the air-quality strategy that we have, the clean-air strategy, and the Water for Life strategy, a land-use strategy that is being developed by this province as part of our 20-year strategic plan, having knowledgeable people and knowledgeable programs in that area is of very, very high importance. Olds College is actually leading the way in that area with quality programs which are not industry controlled but are controlled through the college itself through a community-governed organization, a board-governed organization with independence and the requirement that all programs be approved through the quality Alberta council. It couldn't be a higher standard than that.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to urging the college to consult with landowners, with the Alberta Surface Rights Federation, the Alberta grazing lease association, and other such organizations on this new curriculum, or does that only come with million dollar donations?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, good corporate citizenship and good individual citizenship are the backbone of this province. Individuals and members of the community and corporate citizens in this province should be encouraged to contribute to advancing the education in this province. They should not be slurred. They should not be run down. They should not be denigrated for being good corporate citizens. Donating money does not give control, not in this province for public education, not in this province for political purposes. Giving money is good corporate citizenship. It helps enhance the learning opportunities for students. The quality of the program is strictly in the hands of the institution itself, its board governance, and subject to the quality Alberta control council. This member knows that and should understand that and should not be besmirching the reputation of a fine public institution and good corporate citizens.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

1:50

Health Care Reform

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An article by the Minister of Health and Wellness appeared in a Calgary newspaper over the weekend in a weak attempt to explain the third way. This article did not provide any of the details that Albertans have been demanding. It was vague, uninformative, and now there are only 17 days left in the consultation. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the Alberta Medical Association, which represents 97 per cent of Alberta's physicians, wants more details about the proposed reforms, will the minister clearly define which hospitals and medical services would be privately insured?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, first of all, just on the subject of private insurance, that is not the subject of the consultation on the health policy framework. I met last week with the membership, the executive of the Alberta Medical Association. They did raise a number of issues. They indicated to me that they would be raising these points at their meeting this weekend. My understanding is that this weekend they dealt with care guarantees and a request for having more detailed information. They were positive about many of the points in the health policy framework. Relative to certain particular points relative to workforce and the role of doctors in any other altered system, they asked for more detail, and in due course we will provide that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister: given that the AMA is only now being consulted, can the minister explain why Alberta's doctors weren't involved in the drafting of such significant policy changes?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the College of Physicians and Surgeons and members of the Alberta Medical Association have talked and had an ongoing dialogue with Health and Wellness as we normally would. I know that's happened with my predecessors; it's happened with myself. Relative to many of the proposals that are in that particular policy framework, we have talked to them. There has been dialogue about the specifics that they're asking for now. There's obviously more dialogue to occur. But prior to even tabling the health policy framework, in general terms we had a discussion with members of the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and several other providers. We provided some early indication of the types of things we were looking at.

Ms Blakeman: Well, they're still looking for detail.

Again to the same minister: given that Alberta's doctors weren't consulted on this, evidence from the Health Symposium was ignored, and Albertans have had very little opportunity for input, can the minister explain who is driving these health reforms?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think if you're a person on the waiting list for a hip, if you're a person on the waiting list for knees, if you are persons waiting for cataract surgery, if you are people that have waited a long time for surgery, you're asking us to make some changes and look at options.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker: I would say that Canadians are recognizing that we have to change. We may not all agree on what the changes are, but it's very clear that in order to provide timely care and the proper access for individuals as well as something that continues to make it possible not only in the foreseeable future but years beyond to sustain the health care service delivery system, it's up to all of us to look. Universally across this nation, I believe, at least across Canada we are looking at other ways of doing things.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Rural health care has been on life support in Alberta for years now. Now the government plans to pull the plug completely. Dr. Brent Piepgrass, the vice-president of medical services with the Peace Country health region, describes the impact of the third way as frightening. To the Premier: why is the government threatening rural Alberta health care by pursuing policies that Dr. Piepgrass says will only lead to a further drain of doctors from rural areas to large cities?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I haven't spoken to the doctor in question. This is the opinion of one individual. I'm sure that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness will speak to him if he wants to speak to her and provide his opinions and, hopefully, his options and his suggestions to make the system better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: why is this government failing small towns like Manning in

Alberta by proposing for-profit medicine that will make it almost impossible for those towns to retain their local doctors?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond in detail, but the challenge of attracting doctors to rural areas is a constant problem notwithstanding the fact that we have a rural MD strategy. This isn't an issue just here in Alberta. It's an issue in ND Saskatchewan and ND Manitoba as well because doctors across North America are moving to urban centres. Despite that, Alberta's rural physician action plan has helped, I think very significantly, maintain the ratio of doctors to patients in rural Alberta over the last five years. In fact, I'm told that since 2004 the number of doctors in rural Alberta has actually increased by about 3 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: why is his government refusing to have open, public, and transparent hearings if not just to hide the disastrous consequences of its third-way privatization scheme on rural health care?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, not only can the minister speak about the challenge of attracting doctors to rural areas; she can speak in detail about the public consultation process. I'll have her respond.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we are working extensively and exhaustively, the colleagues and myself, on speaking with people in rural Alberta and in urban Alberta. I've had consultations this morning. I had consultations Saturday. We will be providing the list of people that we've consulted with. We're getting a lot of letters and e-mails, and we're responding to those. People have had meetings, and frequently they request a private audience. They want to talk in private about health care, but we are very willing to meet in open settings with them as well. I'd have to say that the response to those meetings has been very positive. We've had, obviously, several here in Edmonton, and in the latter part of the month we'll be in Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. We'll be in Hinton this Saturday and in Calgary on Saturday as well to divide our time between two places, to hit the very specific concerns from very specific communities.

Mr. Speaker, we're very willing and open to listening. I want to just say thank you to the MLAs who've undertaken private and public discussions with their residents about health care. They are also adding to the information that we're bringing forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Gangs and Organized Crime

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week my constituents were confronted with the latest carnage that has resulted from a gang war in Calgary. This latest homicide and retaliation unfortunately both occurred in my constituency and seemed to be directly related to two gang-related homicides last summer. My question is to the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Could the minister inform the House and my constituents as to the actions that our government and his department are taking to combat organized crime in Calgary and across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These incidents once again highlight the nature of the violence among gangs and

organized crime within our province and, coming with this, obviously, the tragedy that follows these incidents for the families whose sons are deceased. The police are doing their job in looking at the investigations and the resources that they have. These are highly intensive investigations that take more resources than most other investigations due to the seriousness, due to the danger that surrounds them. But intelligence-led investigations – for example, the situation in Calgary – are really based on the intelligence information they get from the policing community as well as from the public. Chief Jack Beaton and myself on Friday appealed to the public for members to provide that information to the police service, to phone Crime Stoppers if they have any information regarding gang activity in their communities or in their neighbourhoods.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, our department utilizes Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta; IROC, the integrated response to organized crime; as well as the new ICE team that was deployed this year, the integrated child exploitation unit; regarding organized crime throughout the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: could the minister inform the House as to what the performance measures are that his ministry is using to ensure that the money targeted against organized crime through IROC is being effectively spent?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, IROC has a mandate to use a variety of enforcement strategies and partnerships to dismantle and disrupt organized crime throughout the province through their police services, being the RCMP in Edmonton and Calgary. As well, we provide funding for officers in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, as well as Camrose. I can't release specific performance results regarding their investigations, obviously, due to the fact that they have ongoing investigations at this very time. I can assure the hon. member that the outcome of IROC investigations is made public through the media releases upon the effective arrests.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: could the minister inform the House as to what successes IROC has had in ensuring that law-abiding Albertans are being kept safe from these violent crimes?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, these are very highly intensive, resourced investigative bodies, or IROC is. Obviously, it takes a large number of officers to work on these investigations due to the seriousness, whether it's surveillance, whether it's intelligence probes, or whether it's the investigative capabilities themselves, of each of these investigations.

I'll give you three very quick examples, Mr. Speaker, that occurred this past year, just within the last seven months. Project Intrigue was an IROC investigation with the RCMP and the integrated proceeds of crime where they, in fact, seized \$4.25 million worth of ecstasy, drugs, body armour, and semi-automatic weapons. Project Ikon was another example. In September four men and one woman were arrested with \$450,000 worth of drugs and weapons. Project Infiltrate: in December of this past year, a \$30 million mortgage fraud in and around the Edmonton area, including Camrose; 118 properties; six properties in Camrose as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Treasury Board Meeting Attendance Records

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's shameful that this government refuses to be accountable, hiding behind some of the worst FOIP legislation in the country. Alberta's Privacy Commissioner recently said that the government needs to adopt a culture of openness. Last week one example of this culture of secrecy was when the Official Opposition was asked to pay \$174,000 for documents related to the income support and AISH class-action lawsuit, and don't tell me this is for photocopying costs. To the Minister of Government Services: if the minister believes in the importance of open, accountable government, why does he support changes to the FOIP policy which will increase government secrecy and limit access to information?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has for a number of years had a very open and accountable system. The member refers to some charges. Well, let the facts be known that, in fact, since this legislation was passed, it has cost the Alberta government some \$56 million. How much have we collected in fees? Five hundred and thirty thousand dollars.

Mr. Elsalhy: This question is to the Deputy Premier. Given the outrageous cost of FOIP requests, will the minister save taxpayers' money by tabling attendance records for the Treasury Board meetings at which the lawsuit and the settlement were discussed? Nothing confidential, just the attendance records.

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't normally know who is asking for the FOIP information, but the hon. member has admitted it. The opposition has requested, obviously, information regarding the collection of overpayment and compensation for underpayments to individuals on AISH. Right?

Now, Mr. Speaker, our officials, good-thinking public service employees with no crosses to bear, no political allegiances, estimate that it will cost \$326,000 to comply with the opposition's request. So the request that was received by the FOIP commissioner was very broad and would require a significant \$326,000 worth of staff time and office resources to search for the records, prepare, and copy them all for the Liberal opposition.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier then. Okay. Don't give us the entire FOIP request. Just tell us who was at those meetings.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm told that a total of 200,000 pages would have to be prepared, so we feel that the estimate relative to the fee being charged is fair given the immense scope of this project. I'll have the hon. Provincial Treasurer respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, just briefly. No, I will not give the attendance records of a Treasury Board meeting. I am the chairman of Treasury Board, and it's well documented. There is also a list of people who belong to Treasury Board, and those are the people that are present at Treasury Board meetings.

Common Student Application Process

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, with the high standards required for access to postsecondary institutions in Alberta, students often have to apply

a number of times to several institutions in order to gain admission. This leads to inefficiencies and wastes of time and money both for the students and the institutions. It's been almost a year since the common application process was proposed in the Access to the Future Act. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Why is it taking so long for a common application process to be instituted in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is complicated, but it's important. It's important work that is being done. As the hon. member indicated, the Access to the Future Act did provide for the development of a common application system, but we have in this province publicly governed, board-governed institutions. They're independent institutions, so it takes a great deal of work and collaboration to bring them together to work on a system of this nature.

Now, we're very fortunate, of course, in having good leadership in that system, and I introduced earlier today Sharon Carry of Bow Valley College and Séamus O'Shea of the University of Lethbridge. I was able to meet with them about the work that they're doing. They've brought together a committee of all the universities and public colleges in this province. The representatives of those colleges meet on a weekly basis. As I understand it, they have an independent consultant working with them looking at what the potential barriers to success are, what the issues that need to be addressed are. They've made a huge commitment to meet this goal.

The common application system will be in place, hopefully, on a pilot basis by next year and fully implemented by 2008 if all goes well. I must say that it's one thing for me as Minister of Advanced Education or for this House through the Access to the Future Act to say that this is a very important project. It's quite another thing to get the colleges and institutions working together, as they have been collaboratively over the past year, to develop a very strong system for the benefit of learners in Alberta.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister assure Alberta students that the single point of entry will be available to benefit all Alberta students, including those applying from rural areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, that is one of the huge benefits of having a common application system. All of us who've had children know how difficult it is to not only get the information you need but to send the applications to various numbers of institutions, pay the fees, and do that. The common application system will allow any student from anywhere in the province and, for that matter, students outside the province to access all of our public education system through one point of access, hopefully through one application fee. That system will be able to draw from other elements of our system in terms of getting, for example, transcripts attached to the student finance system, so it will be a very robust and complex system but will give every Albertan, regardless of where they live, access to all of our public postsecondary institutions.

2:10

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise whether any money has been allocated to move this process forward? How much is it going to cost to get it up and running?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed. The postsecondary application system is an important building block in creating an innovative and seamless process. It has been done elsewhere but not together, as we're proposing here. Ontario has a college application system. What we're talking about is putting all of the public postsecondary institutions on the same system. We've invested a million dollars in it this year. We're looking forward to a proposal from the group that's putting it forward in terms of how much it will take to complete the process and to ensure that the process is built so that we can add functions to it on an ongoing basis. So we've invested a million dollars this year, and the budget over next year will come forward at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Home Building Contractors

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When buying a home in Alberta, it's buyer beware. All my questions are to the Minister of Government Services. Last week the minister admitted that there are people having difficulty with home contractors. Can he elaborate on what these problems are?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, if that was asked on our side of the House, it would be called a puffball. But the fact is that some of the problems – for example, finding a contractor is a big problem. The issue, as well, is that we've seen reports where there's a disagreement between the contractor and the individual who is having the work done.

One of the things I would highly recommend before someone starts a renovation or the building of a new home is to be very specific in a contract as to what exactly is covered, what kinds of materials you are using. Any time you ask for any change in the contract, make sure that it's documented, whether it be the contractor that's asking for a change or the individual that is having the renovation or the new structure built.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister suggesting that people contract with lawyers to read over the fine print because they're first-time homeowners? Is that what he's suggesting?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, no, I'm not suggesting that. Having gone through this personally – and I'm not a builder – the fact is that if you sit down and talk with the contractor, you can work these things out. There is some legislation in place that deals with the signing of contracts and what a contract means. For example, you have up to 10 days after a contract is signed to exit the contract at no charge. The fact is that during that time frame if a person wants to talk to some other folks that are familiar with contracts, they're able to do it. It doesn't necessarily have to be a lawyer.

Mr. Bonko: Given that the Alberta Home Builders' Association states that "not all contractors play by the same rules," why is this ministry passing on the problems to the consumers instead of solving them?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not a case of not doing anything. We have through the licensing process, for example, many of the

trades having to be licensed. They have to have gone through apprenticeship. There are those kinds of things that we put in place. But government cannot hold the hand of everyone all the time, under all circumstances. That just can't be done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Health Care Reform (continued)

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday the Minister of Health and Wellness and myself met with Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituents to discuss health reforms. All of the groups we met with identified abuses of the health system by unwarranted visits to family physicians. Most requested the implementation of user fees in order to reduce this abuse even if it contravenes one of the principles of the Canada Health Act. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the implementing of user fees being requested elsewhere in the province as you go through the consultation process?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have had a number of people petition that we should be looking at something like this in order to avoid the potential for abuse. We are not looking at user fees at this time. We are not contemplating that, nor am I aware of any place in Canada where that takes place. But I will cite that some people are very frustrated by long waiting times in emergency, for example, or by people that they feel go repeatedly to doctors' offices, perhaps without cause, their neighbours. Those are the kinds of things that people bring forward because they do want us to have an efficient system, and they want us to as much as possible reduce the opportunity to have to wait in the system by responsible attitudes. I think the part of our policy that talks about putting patients first, discussing the self-empowerment rather than self-entitlement is a good watchword for this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the fee-for-service agreement with our family physicians only allows for the diagnosis and/or treatment of one ailment per visit, therefore requiring subsequent appointments for extra ailments, will the new health proposals address this very expensive form of health delivery service?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in our health policy framework document, policy 3, talking about new compensation models, we look at the compensation by team rather than a fee-for-service model that could lead itself to that. It is not dictated or it's not required that a physician would only look at one particular service to a patient, but many choose to do so relative to their appointment schedules, which we are not responsible for. We are going to as much as possible encourage a way of compensation so that these kinds of things, this needless cost and inconvenience to patients, can be avoided, and we are working with that in mind.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Alberta teens can access health services at no cost without the knowledge of their caregivers and in whatever health facility, be it a doctor's office or an emergency room, will the minister commit to commencing a program to educate Alberta youth on the costs

associated with accessing health care services for minor ailments such as colds?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are several things that we have to deal with with all Albertans. For example, the use of advanced nurse practitioners in greater numbers could actually deal with some of the colds and flu-like symptoms that people face. At one point there were nurses in school systems, which actually were visiting nurses, that undertook that kind of service. What we are looking at are programs built on the same kind of theory as our Do Bugs Need Drugs?, where we teach elementary children that you don't always need to have a drug in order to solve a problem. We will expand that both through teaching and sensitivity to what actually takes place in doctors' offices and the very real opportunity to get that kind of treatment from another source.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Schoolchildren with Anaphylaxis

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a safety threat in our schools that threatens the lives of about 1 in every 60 schoolchildren. This threat comes to school in brown bags in the form of peanut butter sandwiches and other allergens such as seafood. This was such a threat that the province of Ontario recently developed Sabrina's law, ensuring that children are safe from these hidden risks in school. My question to the Minister of Education: has the minister considered the risk of anaphylactic shock to children in Alberta schools?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have. We've been gathering data on this for the past little while. The background to this in a nutshell is that a couple of parents did come and talk to me about this – it's a very serious issue – before Christmas, and I undertook in follow-up to that meeting to consult the school boards, who actually develop local policies in this respect, to find out what preventative measures they already have in place. There are a number of things that the school boards do already to try and prevent the circumstance from impacting a child in a negative way, and I'll be working even further with those same school boards and other ones who perhaps don't yet have as sophisticated a policy in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll go right to my third question. The minister has answered the second question. Will the minister commit today to conduct a province-wide consultation with many parents, especially rural parents, of children with these life-threatening allergies, to meet with them and see the problem that they have and do something directly about it?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I will be putting in motion very soon a process through the Alberta School Boards Association to do a consultation piece, and I can ask them to roll that in as well. It's a sensible suggestion, and I'll certainly take it under advisement.

Mr. Flaherty: Then am I understanding that the minister is telling me that we have policies right now across the province? Is that what you're saying, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are policies in place right now amongst all the school boards. To what extent those policies have been fully fleshed out or not I don't have at my fingertips, but I did pursue this issue with a few just to do a dry run, if you will, on what those policies look like.

The policies in some cases include notification at the entrance to the school where they know that they have a child that suffers from anaphylaxis of whatever nature it might be. In other cases I know that parents have taken the responsibility quite directly, and they have consulted with school principals to make sure that the principals are there. In other cases they have a special injection where they can provide a shot of adrenalin to a child who maybe has come down with an allergy symptom or is reacting to something. I just forget the exact name of that particular injection. Nonetheless, those schools that know in advance that children who have this anaphylaxis condition are attending do have those kinds of policies and procedures already in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Physician Input on Health Care Reform

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Medical Association to its credit has, despite considerable political pressure no doubt, declined to support the government's privatized, two-tier health care proposals at its policy meeting last weekend. The AMA president said that it's unfortunate that neither the AMA nor the public has detailed information needed to make informed choices about the proposals. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why does the government continue to keep hidden not only from the general public but even from the province's doctors detailed information on its so-called health care reforms that would allow informed choices to be made?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I suppose it's always a risk, if you release a policy, that you will be confronted with allegations that you are not providing details. The policy framework, all 10 policies, is a broad framework for addressing concerns that have been raised over the last several years in terms of how we structure our system: putting patients first, the discussion about implementing new fee models, the discussion about the role of hospitals, expanding system capacity. All of those other things that we're doing in the context of the health policy framework are but one step of the 13 strategies we announced last July.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear, having talked to the Alberta Medical Association representatives last week, that they do want to have some more detail, but it is certainly no attempt to reduce their opportunity to receive it. It's another stage of the process. We will continue to speak to them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Given that the factually challenged minister persists in making incorrect claims about health care spending rising faster than government revenues, how can the province's doctors put any stock in the information they're getting from the government?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I really hope that by the time we come forward with a response to both the AMA and Albertans relative to our consultation process the hon. member will see that I'm not factually challenged.

Mr. Eggen: The information in the paper was not correct.

Why won't the minister admit that her don't worry, be happy routine that she's spreading around the province is actually spreading confusion and is no substitute for open, public hearings on her government's radical, two-tier health care proposals?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will take his comments under advisement. I know that many of his comments were less of a question and more of an editorialship on the kinds of consultations we've had. I've been privileged to listen to the views of Albertans. I'll continue to do that to the best of my ability, as will all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Agricultural Research Spending

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As many members of this Assembly have pointed out recently, Alberta's grains and oilseed producers and farmers are facing one of their most challenging years ever with input costs rising and commodity prices being kind of low. While this government has been hard at work improving already existing programs like crop insurance and CAIS, there are some groups that insist more immediate help is needed. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. While I was encouraged to see an announcement of nearly \$30 million for additional research and development funding, why are we spending this money on research instead of continuing to help primary producers directly?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a good question given that a lot of producers are looking for help immediately, and it's a question that's been addressed in this House several times about the close to half a billion dollars that is available to producers this spring. But coupled with that, when you talk about the hardships that we've had in our entire ag industry over the last three or four years, we came out with a BSE recovery strategy, and we're working on a grains and oilseed recovery strategy. All of those consultations with industry pointed to the fact that we need to also look to the future. When we look to the future, we need to have research and development as a primary focus of that, so we view this \$30 million not so much to help our producers out this spring but to help our producers to that next level of generating revenue out of the marketplace as opposed to programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what sorts of projects will be funded through this additional research money?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, primarily the research dollars are going to be going into the grains and oilseed sector through the Alberta crop industry development fund as well as additional funds into the livestock industry development fund as well as some funds that are going to the Agriculture Research and Extension Council of Alberta. It's very important that when we take lab science in agriculture, we have to be able to apply it to the field in an efficient and economical manner. We have a number of applied research groups around the province that are very good at doing that, but they need some help with regard to the capital for the equipment, and they need some help with regard to some of the research projects that are ongoing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: how soon will we see results from this program?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that in terms of the capital allocation that we are putting out to the extension groups, we should see some results of that fairly soon because those are the types of projects where we can put some equipment out on the ground over the course of the next year. But, again, it's extremely important that we are looking to the future. Today producers are enjoying the benefit of some research that was done five, 10, 15 years ago. We anticipate that the research that we're now embarking on will be of benefit to producers five, 10, 15 years from now in addition to the biofuel-type research that we're doing, which may even be sooner than that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

First Nations Input on Health Care Reform

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the assembly of treaty chiefs of Alberta came out in opposition to the third way because they believe further privatization will hurt aboriginal people. My first question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Does the minister agree with the chiefs that further privatization of our health care system is bad for Alberta's aboriginal people?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there was actually an all-chiefs meeting last week, and the all-chiefs came forward with some recommendations which the Minister of Health and Wellness will receive and be able to take into consideration with all the recommendations that they're bringing forward. We have requested that the chiefs – and I've written to all the chiefs in Alberta – make sure that we get their views as to what needs to be done, what the impact will be on any other treaties, and once we receive that information, that information will go straight to the Minister of Health and Wellness so that we can take into consideration their concerns.

Mr. Tougas: To the same minister: is the minister concerned that the privatization proposals will lure doctors away from northern communities, worsening an already serious shortage?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, in northern Alberta we have an issue relative to retaining and attracting doctors, and the RHAs within our northern regions have been exemplary in terms of making sure that we retain those doctors that we do have. We have the rural physician action plan, which has been working very well, to ensure that the doctors that we have will stay, and I know that the Minister of Health and Wellness has certainly ensured that that rural physician action plan will continue and address the shortages that we do experience in northern Alberta. We have a number of plans in place to be able to help those areas, the municipalities that have been looking at doctors, and make sure that we continue to do that.

On the issue of the First Nations, Mr. Speaker, the First Nations certainly do have a concern when it comes to retaining and attracting doctors. As you know, on the federal level we have agreements with the ministry of health and wellness, and those federal agreements address the concern of doctors on reserves.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. To the minister of health: can the minister tell Alberta's First Nations people why their specific health concerns have not been addressed by the third-way proposal?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad for that question. The third-way proposal, or the policy framework for the third way, is somewhat unique in that it looks at the system in a broad context for health policy delivery, but if you look at the 13 strategies released last July for getting on with better health care, one of the strategies there is a whole strategy featuring support for aboriginal health and for the aboriginal people. There are many initiatives that we're undertaking, not the least of which are advocating on behalf of aboriginal people and the aboriginal policy framework dealing with health and more health and more collaborative approaches between the federal government, who are responsible for ensuring that health is provided, to the local providers and other partnerships we can arrange.

Mr. Speaker, this morning I met with a member of the aboriginal community who asked quite specifically about some of the supports for infectious diseases.

Pediatric Services in Calgary

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, in the midst of all the confusing information floating over the third way, the residents of northeast Calgary for a second time are hearing that the 15-bed pediatric unit at the Peter Lougheed Centre may be closed down. This has caused a great deal of stress and grief among residents of northeast Calgary. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell my constituents and the residents of northeast Calgary if there is any truth to the allegations that the Calgary health region is contemplating closing pediatric beds at the Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one can assure the residents of northeast Calgary that the Peter Lougheed Centre and the 15 beds there play an important role in delivering pediatric care. There is absolutely no truth to the rumour that those beds will be closed, nor are we contemplating that.

Mr. Shariff: Well, I hope that this is an ironclad guarantee that those beds will not be closed. What assurances can the minister give to residents of Calgary as a whole that they will be able to continue to access pediatric services city-wide despite the opening of the new Children's hospital?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that it's clear that Calgary, in its delivery plans, has tried to cite the region's various service deliveries; in fact, not consolidating all of the service delivery for any one particular group demographically or any one particular disease but making sure that various neighbourhoods have access. Referrals come from the Alberta Children's hospital. They come from the emergency department. They are in the case of the Peter Lougheed receiving children from a variety of places, but there are absolutely no plans to change the structure to reduce the opportunity in community centres. In fact, I see quite the opposite: a prevalence and attitude and philosophy of management of the Calgary system that can assure that in regions quite specifically children's services and pediatric services will be delivered throughout the city as the planning and new facilities come on board.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, shortly I'll call upon the first of six hon. members to participate today, but before we get to that, our historical vignette of the day.

From Tony Blair to Winston Churchill to Benjamin Disraeli to Lord Palmerston, parliamentarians of the British House of Commons have always had the need to sit while in committee and in the Commons. The chair to my left is an original chair from Westminster. The chair design, done by Augustus Welby Pugin, dates from about 1845 and has remained unaltered to this day. If this chair could talk, it could tell us about all the wars the British people have been in since Crimea, the creation of the British Empire, and developments in the United Kingdom and the world over the past 161 years.

This chair will soon be returned to the British House of Commons. To my right is an identical copy of the original Westminster chair. As an Alberta Legislative Assembly centennial project three dozen Westminster chairs were expertly built by skilled and dedicated craftsmen in the province's Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation. These new chairs are intended to last well over a hundred years, perhaps 161 years. Individually numbered, the chairs will be placed in the three lobbies of this parliament. They will serve as a visible and very practical reminder of our valued connection with the Mother of Parliaments at the Palace of Westminster.

I would like to thank the minister and the outstanding craftsmen for their support of this project. [applause]

In 30 seconds the first of six.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie 2006

Mr. Ducharme: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui c'est un plaisir pour moi de présenter à la Chambre une explication d'un événement canadien qui s'appelle Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. Neuf millions de francophones se rassemblent à la grandeur du Canada sur une base annuelle pour célébrer Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. Cette année Les Rendez-vous ont lieu du 10e au 26e mars. Durant cette période de temps on célèbre les communautés francophones afin de promouvoir la langue et la culture françaises tant par ses activités sociales et ses célébrations que par sa dimension humaine et communautaire.

Les Rendez-vous contribuent à renforcer les liens entre les anglophones et les francophones du Canada et favorisent un plus grand respect entre ces deux communautés. De plus en plus nos municipalités albertaines se joignent aux Rendez-vous en tenant des cérémonies pour reconnaître leur communauté francophone; parmi ces municipalités cette année on compte Red Deer, Lethbridge, Edmonton, et Fort McMurray. Félicitations à ces municipalités.

Comme je le mentionnais lors de la présentation de mes invités spéciaux ce matin à la rotonde de la Législature, le Président de la Chambre était hôte d'une belle célébration dédiée à la reconnaissance de la contribution des francophones à notre province. C'est un geste que la communauté apprécie beaucoup si on en juge par la participation importante de la communauté. Je tiens aussi à remercier mes collègues de l'Assemblée qui ont participé à la célébration.

Cette huitième édition des Rendez-vous revêt une signification spéciale parce que le thème de cette année porte sur les échanges, le dialogue, et le rapprochement entre les communautés francophones et francophiles du pays entier. Alors que l'Alberta recrute de la main-d'œuvre qualifiée de partout à travers le Canada et à travers le monde, ce thème est particulièrement pertinent pour nos communautés francophones, qui accueillent parmi eux un nombre croissant de nouveaux arrivants qui parlent français. Cette diversité vient renforcer notre communauté francophone et nous rend plus dynamique.

Vibrante comme elle l'est, la communauté francophone célèbre sa langue et sa culture tout au cours de l'année par l'entremise de festivals de la chanson, festivals de film, carnivals d'hiver, et j'en passe. J'aimerais profiter de l'occasion pour inviter tous mes collègues à apprendre à connaître la communauté francophone en participant aux événements qui ont lieu dans leur circonscription pendant l'année.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure to provide the Assembly with information on a wonderful Canadian event called Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. Nine million francophones will get together for the annual Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, which runs this year from March 10 to March 26. During that period of time attention is focused on francophone communities with the idea of promoting French language and culture as much through community and human relations as through social activities and celebrations.

Les Rendez-vous contribute to the reinforcement of links between francophones and anglophones in Canada by fostering greater respect between the two communities. More and more of our municipalities are joining in Les Rendez-vous by holding ceremonies to recognize their francophone communities. Red Deer, Lethbridge, Edmonton, Fort McMurray are some of the municipalities that held flag-raising ceremonies to mark the launch of these celebrations. Congratulations to all of them.

As I alluded to earlier while introducing my special guests, this morning the Speaker of the House hosted a wonderful ceremony in the rotunda to recognize the contributions of the francophone community to our province. Judging by the large attendance, it was very much appreciated by the francophone community. I also want to thank my fellow MLAs who took time off from their busy schedules to stop by.

The eighth edition of these Rendez-vous takes on a special meaning because the theme of this year's event is centred on interaction, dialogue, and connections among francophone and francophile communities across Canada. As Alberta recruits skilled labour from all over Canada and across the world, this is especially relevant for Alberta's francophone communities, who are welcoming among them an increasing number of new Albertans who speak French. This diversity is making our francophone communities stronger and truly dynamic.

Vibrant as they are, francophone communities celebrate their language and culture throughout the year through music and film festivals, winter carnivals, and other celebrations. I would like to take this opportunity to invite all my colleagues to get to know the francophone community and to take in some of these events in their own ridings throughout the year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie 2006

Mr. Chase: Merci, M. le Président. Les francophones ont contribué au développement et à la culture de notre pays pour plus de 400 ans. Les explorateurs, les marchands, et les habitants ont influencé l'histoire de cette région de l'Alberta.

L'été passé ma femme et moi nous nous souvenions de la contribution culturelle des francophones en Alberta. Pendant que nous visitons le Fort d'Edmonton, nous nous sommes arrêtés au marché. J'aimerais les ceintures de plusieurs couleurs que les coureurs des bois ont porté. Ces ceintures avaient une intention utile. Ils ont protégé et supporté le dos des coureurs pendant qu'ils

ont porté des ballots lourds de fourrures et leurs grands canots de voyageur à travers les portages. Maintenant ils servent comme un rappel historique décoratif.

2:40

La longueur de la ceinture symbolise la longue histoire française dans l'ouest. Les couleurs brillantes représentent les cadeaux riches des arts, de la musique, de la danse, de la langue, et de la culture, qui continuent d'éclairer les environs de l'Alberta. Les filets entrelacés, qui ajoutent la force à la ceinture entière, représentent les contributions des francophones qui ont partagé pour rendre forte cette province.

Aujourd'hui je voudrais reconnaître et remercier les francophones, qui améliorent la qualité de la vie en Alberta en partageant leur culture. Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] French-speaking people have contributed to the development and culture of this country for over 400 years. French explorers, traders, and settlers have influenced the history of the Alberta region.

This past summer my wife and I were again reminded of the cultural contribution of francophones in Alberta. While visiting Fort Edmonton, we stopped at a market where I was admiring the colourful sashes worn by the coureurs de bois. These devices served the very utilitarian purpose of protecting the backs of men as they carried the heavy fur bales and their voyageur canoes across the portages. Now they serve as a decorative historic reminder.

The length of the belt represents the long history of the francophones in the west. The bright colours represent the rich gifts of art, music, language, and culture, which continue to brighten the Alberta landscape. The interwoven threads, which add to the strength of the whole belt/sash, represent the contribution that francophones have shared to make this province strong.

Today I wish to recognize and thank francophones for improving the quality of life in Alberta by sharing their culture. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Common Student Application Process

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in support of the minister's bold new initiative approach in using technology to make it easier for students to apply for postsecondary studies in Alberta. Although still in its developmental phase, the common application process will be designed to help a more user-friendly method of applying for various postsecondary institutions in one easy step.

Once it's fully operational, the advantages to students will be numerous. No matter where they live in the province, it will be extremely beneficial in serving rural and other underrepresented populations who may have social, cultural, and geographical challenges to deal with. This new, easier to use system will create a level playing field for students who have a harder time with the current, more complex processes. It will also help those learners by providing information on a timely basis and act as an electronic clearing house on available program opportunities.

Under the current application system a student who makes an application to, for example, four postsecondary institutions must fill out four separate applications, submit four separate nonrefundable fees. Under the new process that will all change. The Alberta postsecondary application system will eliminate the necessity for students to pay multiple application fees for multiple applications. It will be one point of entry and result in significant potential time and cost savings for students. While students benefit from a more user-friendly method of applying, there are significant benefits on the institutional and government side as well in terms of creating a standardized process that is more efficient and effective.

The development of this one-stop shopping approach for students is a true collaborative partnership between all the key players in the public postsecondary system. It just makes good sense that people responsible for delivering the programs and services and those enrolled at these institutions have their voices heard in the development of the framework. Working side by side with officials from Advanced Ed to identify and address potential issues or concerns that may arise, it ensures that this new application process will be tailor-made to meet the specific needs of learners, institutions, and government.

I think it's a wonderful system, and I compliment the minister on this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mary Anne Jablonski

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women award honours women who, through their professional and personal efforts, are making extraordinary differences in the lives of women or girls. This year's recipient is inspiration and encouragement personified, and she joins past honourees around the world such as the late Princess Diana and former Philippines President Corazon Aquino as well as local winners, including Gail Surkan.

Our honouree received a scholarship to attend Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, where she studied psychology and political science. She's been married to her husband, Bob Jablonski, for 35 years, and they have three grown children and five grandchildren. Prior to entering politics, she and her husband owned and operated a very successful fibreglass manufacturing company.

Her activism began in 1982, when she along with four other women successfully lobbied the federal government for medical and dental plans for the families of Canadian armed forces and RCMP as well as for the rights of spouses of military members. She's currently serving her third term as MLA for the Red Deer-North constituency and has worked tirelessly to enact changes for the current Protection Against Family Violence Act. This bill has gone to second reading. The hon. member has other bills that have been passed in the Legislature: the Victims of Crime Amendment Act and the Criminal Notoriety Act.

She's perhaps best known for Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act. The bill was passed last year, and through the court system it allows parents to force children into a five-day stay in a drug detox facility so they can get treatment. The legislation has been adopted in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and it's modelled after Bill 202.

In her capacity as MLA she's chaired the Justice and Government Services Standing Policy Committee and the Youth Secretariat and also served as a member of Public Accounts, Members' Services, Health and Community Living, and the Crystal Meth Task Force.

The hon. member is an enthusiastic member of her community, with involvement in various community groups, sporting associations, church boards, the Catholic Women's League, Girl Guides for 20 years, and the chamber of commerce.

Mr. Speaker, I invite hon. colleagues to join me in congratulating central Alberta's newest winner of the Making a Difference for Women award, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Health Care Reform Consultation in Lac La Biche

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Numerous meetings were held in Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency this past

weekend between representatives from many municipalities and communities and the Minister of Health and Wellness.

My constituents raised a number of issues and attributes of our health care system. Overall, they talked about issues relating to doctor recruitment and concerns about waiting times. They asked about having specialty services, like a diabetic clinic. Many talked about the opportunities for doctors to engage in rural communities, to increase their financial incentives. My constituents were concerned about the number of physicians in rural Alberta and felt that many spaces in medical schools should be given to rural Albertans. They felt that students will return to their home communities, and this will help increase the number of doctors in rural Alberta.

Some individuals felt that the improvement of the electronic health record helps rural physicians access information and helps curb misuse or abuse. There was considerable discussion about streamlining referrals and how this can be a better system. Some raised the fact that the increases in private MRIs can speed up waiting lists. They believed that this was a very positive direction.

Other comments raised related to regional psychiatric services and how the announcement of the mental health fund this year helps local support programs. They talked about future directions of our ambulance services and were very happy to hear that the government continued funding this year.

Many concluded that improvements on province-wide drug programs and consolidation of drug expenditures are a good idea. Many felt that local communities were working well together in determining which health services they would provide and serve in a partnership. Constituents further identified many cases where the private system could be good.

The Speaker: On that note, thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Tax Reforms

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With about a week to go before the budget day, there are some tax ideas I would like to address here today. One Alberta advantage could be lower tax rates. During our 100 years sitting in the legislative sessions, we have often debated where to spend money and how to best use public funds. Rarely has this Legislature thought about meaningful tax cuts. It sometimes seems like we forget that the public purse is made from the wallets of the workers.

My point today, Mr. Speaker, is that we should remember that people want us to spend responsibly, and most importantly we need to remember to return this money to help those who are struggling during Alberta's boom. Rather than talking about more programs, I think we can help the people of Alberta by offering tax cuts. Our people are overtaxed. It is time for us to make another step toward offering a global competitive advantage. The time has come to raise our personal exemption and eliminate health care premiums.

By raising the personal exemption to \$20,000, we return the money to the pockets of the people. This would give a typical family over \$1,000 and a single individual more than \$500 back in their pockets. For those on a lower income it would allow them to invest in themselves. Let us allow Albertans to decide how to spend their money. Let us acknowledge that bigger government is not better government. It would be a real prosperity bonus that people can bank on every year.

By raising the exemption and eliminating health care premiums, it would allow families to have over \$40,000 which they could protect from the vultures of government. We should be fiscal hawks who defend the taxpayers against a rising tide of taxes and fees, not

vultures who feed off the backs of Albertans. We could continue to lead Canada by example in helping people to help themselves.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we go on to the next order of business, yesterday was the five-year anniversary of the election to this Assembly of a number of members, on March 12, 2001. Let's congratulate them.

head: 2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the many letters I have received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I am tabling today are from Arthur Schultz, Victoria Morisbak, Sidney Chan, Randy Allarie, Raquel Lara, and Katie Gamble.

My second set of tablings, Mr. Speaker, comes from Calgary-Varsity constituents expressing their concerns regarding the potential closures of Jerry Potts elementary school and the English program at Varsity Acres elementary. These closures are the direct result of the government's failure to adjust the space utilization formula to reflect its reduced class size initiative. The e-mails are from Janice Bauer, Mike Bateman, Joanne Morin, Rita David Shailah, Anne-Marie Polay, and B.D. Aggarwala.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member and to others, remember that this is tablings; this is not Members' Statements.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a copy of a letter that I received on February 16, 2006. It is from the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. This letter is in regard to the CAIS program and the overpayments.

Thank you.

Mr. Flaherty: This is five letters, Mr. Speaker, from daycare owners and staff and concerned citizens, specifically Connie Kubinowsky*, R. Padmore*, Greg Gamba*, Tammy Stromberg, and Laura Chutny. I will table these.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More letters voicing concern with the cancellation of the national daycare program. They are from Heather Munholland, Cheryl Millar, Pam Lasuita, Tami Masterson, Leeann Turnbull, and Diane Clark.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is 52 names from the Calgary area petitioning the Alberta Legislature to urge the government of Alberta to "consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

The second tabling is six more names from citizens requesting the protection of the national daycare program, including Tawa

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Montessori Day Care, J. Waldo, Elzbieta Buszka, Jean Keenan, Kelly Hanrahan, and Pat Sharun.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table six letters, with the appropriate copies, from citizens expressing concern about the cancellation of the national daycare program. They are Mrs. Emily and Dr. Christopher Herd, Susan Pointe, A. Graci, Keltie Ferguson, the Polish Bilingual Daycare, and Lorraine Smith.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise also to table six copies of letters that I have received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters are from Vivian Smith, Tanis F. Eaker, Sherry Meyers, Ann Basualdo, Hollie Muskego, and M. Trottier.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is a letter by Nella Callihoo on behalf of eight others in my constituency concerned about the future of health care in Alberta and concerned about the protection of the Canada Health Act.

Also, a letter from Ted Bishop, who is also concerned about the future of health care, especially towards a two-tier system. He lived in New Zealand and has experience to share.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon, the first being a letter from a constituent of Edmonton-Rutherford, Hugh Critchley, who is expressing concerns about the planned third-way changes. He says, "Please stop your 3rd way and improve on the way we now have."

I also have a further six letters regarding the cancellation of the national daycare program. They are from Jeanne Pesklewis, Ishrat Qureshi, Angela McIsaac, Al Ng, Sally Pham, and Mary Badu-Acheampong.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You're okay, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity?

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. Those were all my tablings.

The Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is an e-mail from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Ms Emily Brodeur, who states her concerns with and disapproval of the so-called third way. She believes those who are poor will receive inferior care and argues that our effort should be focused on improving the public health care system rather than privatizing it.

The second one is, again, six of the many letters that the Official Opposition received from citizens concerned about Mr. Harper's cancellation of the national daycare program. They are from Kelly Peloquin, Susan Suh, Pete Hurd, Megan McDougald and Erwin Hunke, Rob Reay, and Nahid Higgins.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two documents to table for myself, and, with your permission, if I may table two documents for my colleague from Edmonton-Calder. My first document is the March 2006 edition of Martha's Monthly. In it this magazine gives several pieces of advice regarding health reform, including that consultation requires actually consulting people and that rich people can get better meals in restaurants but shouldn't get better health care.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is a piece from Sarah Boseley dated March 10, 2006. In the piece Boseley describes a growing trend where public hospitals in the U.K. are having to repair damage done during botched hip and knee replacements performed in private clinics.

Now the two documents on behalf of my colleague for Edmonton-Calder. The first one is a letter from Heather Mackay with the Edmonton Prochoice Coalition. She is very concerned about Bill 204 and warns that if this bill is passed and becomes law, there will be more deaths related to botched abortion and suicide and more suffocated newborns.

The second document is a letter from Canadian Youth for Choice, Mr. Speaker, which is associated with the Canadian Federation for Sexual Health. They are also very concerned about Bill 204. They envision a Canada where sexual reproductive rights are respected for everyone. They also note that young people under 15 years old who partake in high-risk sexual behaviours have a fundamental need for accurate, confidential, and nonprejudicial sexual health information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More letters of concern about the cancellation of the national daycare program: from Barb McCrea, Mellin Ong, Shanthi Thiagarajah, Madelene Collins, and Wendy Gaunt.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some more letters from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing their serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters are from Tracy Franks, Amanda Miranda, Mary Asafo-Akowuah, Grace, Lisa Cottrell, and Vera Bluecloud.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll be tabling with the Assembly today a message from Her Majesty the Queen, head of the Commonwealth, entitled Health and Vitality: The Commonwealth Challenge, dated March 13, 2006.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 9, I will now move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head:

Written Questions

Provincial Protection Officers

Q2. Dr. B. Miller moved that the following question be accepted. What consultations, studies, research, or other information-gathering exercises pertaining to the use of provincial protection officers for traffic safety enforcement on primary highways under the direction of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were conducted by the Ministry of the Solicitor General and Public Security prior to the implementation of the pilot project?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very timely request because the pilot project for highway 63 has already been announced. I believe that this is a change in respect to the traditional roles of policing. The RCMP have had the function of policing our highways, and now to turn a portion of that over to special constables represents a change. This question simply is inquiring about the preparation, the kinds of studies that were made that led to the proposal of this project.

3:00

My main concern all along has been the issue of safety of the public, because highway 63 is a very busy highway, and also the safety of special constables, who don't have the same training. Their training may be adequate; I don't know. That's, I suppose, what the pilot project is supposed to inquire into.

The question is really what kinds of consultations have been made with the RCMP. It has been their traditional role to police a highway like highway 63. Is this change, this pilot project, something that they really want? How have they been involved in the deliberations?

Also, it would be helpful just for the sake of the public to understand what is happening, what kind of research and what kinds of studies there have been in terms of what other provinces and other states south of the border are doing. Policing is evolving, and in terms of its evolution how is this particular change to have special constables doing highway traffic safety work warranted?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for the comments made. Policing is evolving, and with that we're looking at new methods of service delivery. So on behalf of government I'd be more than happy and prepared to accept Written Question 2 and will respond in writing to the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close the debate.

Dr. B. Miller: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security for his response. I look forward to the results.

[Written Question 2 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. minister, the response will become the property of the House, so the best way would be to table it in the House when the hon. minister has it.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I'd like to do is simply now move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper beyond the one just discussed do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 201

Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman,

be it resolved that when the committee rises and reports, it recommends to the Assembly that consideration of Bill 201, Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006, be deferred until April 3, 2006, or until the first day for consideration of private members' business after that day.

This will allow for due consultation with stakeholders.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before calling the question on the motion by the hon. Member for Calgary-West, the chair would like to provide a brief explanation to all members given that it has been a number of years since this type of motion has come before committee.

This motion if passed will postpone further Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 201 until April 3, 2006, or until the first day for consideration of private members' business after that date. The chair wants to be clear that this motion is not a hoist, which can only occur at second or third reading and which has the effect of defeating a bill.

There are precedents for this type of motion. Some members may recall that a similar motion was moved by the Member for Calgary-Egmont in 1998 in connection with his private member's bill, Bill 204, Worker's Compensation Amendment Act, 1998, to allow time for further consultation in the preparation of an amendment for Committee of the Whole. This also occurred in 1996 in connection with the member at the time for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont, who requested that Committee of the Whole consideration of his Bill 203, Family Dispute Resolution Act, be postponed.

This type of motion has emerged as a result of the 1993 changes to the Standing Orders with respect to private members' bills. Given that these bills must proceed on a strict timetable, there is no mechanism by which the bill can get off the treadmill to await the results of a consultative process. This process was clarified in Speaker Schumacher's ruling of February 11, 1997, where he confirmed that only the sponsor of the bill at issue could make this type of motion to accord with the principles of private members' business.

Finally, before putting the question, the chair confirms that this motion falls under Standing Order 18(2) and therefore is not debatable.

[Motion carried]

Mr. Zwozdesky: I would move that the committee rise and report progress at this time.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 201.

The Committee of the Whole has also agreed to the following motion.

Be it resolved that when the committee rises and reports, it recommends to the Assembly that consideration of Bill 201, Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006, be deferred until April 3, 2006, or until the first day for consideration of private members' business after that date.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table a copy of this resolution for the records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: 3:10 **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 203
Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway)
Amendment Act, 2006**

[Adjourned debate March 6: Mr. Stelmach]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to rise and make a few remarks in support of Bill 203, Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Speaker, last year we had an opportunity to celebrate this province's centennial and at that time, of course, reflect on the history of our province and why it is that Alberta has become the great place that it is today. There's no doubt that the railroad and those associated with it played a significant impact on the development of our province, especially during the last 100 years. The railroad allowed settlers to come to this province across the land. It also joined our country from coast to coast, creating a truly united Canada. It allowed the shipping of products outside the province and importation of materials and people to support the thriving economy. As such, it's most important that we preserve this important part of our heritage so that future generations of Albertans and visitors to our province are able to appreciate the impact that the steam locomotive has had on our history.

We're fortunate in Alberta that we have a number of organizations that dedicate themselves in whole or in part to preserving this aspect of our proud history. One such organization is Calgary's Heritage Park, where annually over 400,000 visitors come to see the early days of Alberta brought alive. I know something of Heritage Park, Mr. Speaker, because formerly it was located in Calgary-Glenmore. As of the last election it became part of Calgary-Elbow.

Canada's largest living historical village showcases an impressive collection of over 150 exhibits, thousands of artifacts, and lively interpretive activities. The dedicated staff and volunteers of Heritage Park work very hard to give visitors a realistic look at what life was like in our province's early days. One of the central attractions of the park is its full-size, fully functional steam-powered railroad, which operates three steam locomotives on a one-mile loop of standard gauge track. The engines pull some very interesting pieces of history: a collection of rolling stock and 10 passenger cars, including two fully restored 1885 coach cars, a 1912 CN car, the Bowness summer car, and the famous car 76, which was an executive car that was used on the occasion of the last spike ceremony. Visitors to the park have the opportunity to experience the excitement of riding the rails just as Alberta's pioneers did. History truly comes alive, principally because of Heritage Park's attention to portraying historically accurate exhibits. That's why Bill 203 is a necessary piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned earlier, the railway employs three steam locomotives from the 1940s that stop at three historical stations located throughout the park. At one of these stops visitors have the ability to take the ride-the-rail tour. This exhibit allows the visitor to experience first-hand the development of the railroad in Canada. Mr. Speaker, given the importance of historical accuracy in exhibits such as this one, it's important that we ensure that those who have taken the initiative to preserve Alberta's railway heritage are supported.

The goal of Bill 203 is to make sure that our legislation and regulation are appropriate to the intended target. At present, regulations which were designed for main line railroad track are being applied to our heritage railways. Main line railroad track handles a very high volume of traffic and carries trains with all types of cargo. Main line rail track crosses over highways and other public roads, goes over high bridges, and carries trains with a high tonnage at higher velocity.

Heritage railways, as proposed in Bill 203, Mr. Speaker, handle a very different type of train. Heritage railways operate in a historical manner, are travelled less frequently and at lower rates of speed. Additionally, heritage railways travel only on a defined loop of track that sits entirely within the confined space of a historical park.

Mr. Speaker, after looking at public railways and heritage railways it's easy to see that although there are similarities, they are clearly different in application and should therefore be treated accordingly. A historical railroad need not and should not require modern crossing arms and light fixtures, nor should the locomotives be required to have functioning speedometers and modern brakes when functionality dictates that the historical technology works. Speeds are easily judged by elapsed time markings, and old brakes can still be perfectly good brakes. We aren't talking about bullet trains here, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about steam engines puffing away. Requiring needless upgrades imposes unnecessary costs that swallow precious resources, and the overkill seriously impairs the historical accuracy of the exhibit. It's only a matter of common sense that we should be testing against proper objectives and not lumping all examples into the same category. What Bill 203 ultimately will achieve is a recognition that history should not be replaced by modern elements for the sake of needless update.

Public safety is clearly always a primary concern, but this debate is not about public safety. It's about cutting needless red tape by correcting an area of overregulation as it relates to heritage train operations. The facts show that in 42 years Heritage Park has operated its railroad without incident, so applying the same set of standards to both main line public railways and heritage railways

does nothing for public safety and needlessly burdens historical societies.

Bill 203 affords us the opportunity to take the time to study and properly develop sensible rules and regulations that fit the unique realities of heritage railways. Mr. Speaker, it's important that we apply fair and appropriate rules that respect these exceptions while maintaining an appropriate standard to ensure public safety.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the members of the Assembly to support Bill 203 as it is truly a very good piece of legislation. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006. As has been mentioned by some of my colleagues, this bill is about creating a framework which will allow for a separate designation of railway under the act. The end goal of this is to allow the railways which would be affected by Bill 203 to work with the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation to develop a set of regulations which are more appropriate for the day-to-day activities which the new heritage railways undertake.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I realize that this has been mentioned before, but I feel that it cannot be stressed enough. A more appropriate level of regulation does not mean a lower standard of safety. It means maintaining the highest standard of safety while ensuring that the inspection and maintenance requirements are fitting to the operation.

Mr. Speaker, by affording specific railways in our province the designation of heritage, we will be recognizing the role which they play in giving Albertans the experience of riding on a vintage piece of railway equipment. However, a concern has been raised with respect to the use of heritage as a designation. While I think that it is a fitting title for the affected railways, the concern raised is that this designation under the Railway (Alberta) Act could be misconstrued in that it is a formal designation as a provincial historic resource under the Historical Resources Act, which is completely, as we know, a separate process and refers to buildings typically.

Mr. Speaker, the Historical Resources Act, which is administered by the Minister of Community Development, empowers the minister to designate an historical resource as a provincial historic resource or a registered historic resource if the minister feels that such a designation would be in the best interests of Albertans. A site or structure which is a registered historic resource generally has three of the following characteristics. It is most significant to a region or community, it is a good example of an aspect of Alberta's natural or human prehistory or history, and/or it has significant paleontological or archaeological or architectural merit.

An Hon. Member: That's a mouthful.

Mr. Rogers: Yes, that is a mouthful, Mr. Speaker.

The appointment as a provincial historic resource is a more significant designation under the designation program. Provincial historic resources are subject to protection under the act. No person may destroy, disturb, alter, restore, repair, or remove any historic objects from such a resource without written approval from the minister.

3:20

In order to be considered for such a designation, structures or sites must be of an outstanding provincial significance, associated with an

important aspect of Alberta's natural or human history, or of outstanding paleontological or archaeological or architectural merit, Mr. Speaker. In both circumstances, to be eligible for designation under this program, the resource must be situated on its original location. If it has been moved or if it has been a re-creation of a historic building, it is not eligible to be designated as either a provincial or a registered historic resource under the act.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most interesting parts of this program, in my opinion, is the provision for the fact that an historical resource may be owned privately and would remain private property after the designation. As these sites remain private property, they can be sold or inherited as any other property would be. The only restriction placed upon such a designated site is that the order giving recognition to the site is registered against the certificate of title. This makes prospective buyers aware of the designation and informs them of the requirements under the Historical Resources Act. By making provisions for private ownership, pieces of Alberta history can be maintained and preserved without the provincial government needing to purchase the resource or the site of this building. This type of flexibility would in my opinion give more incentive to private owners to apply to have a property of theirs receive official recognition.

The aforementioned guidelines are just that, Mr. Speaker: guidelines to be used by a person or an organization to make an application to the Ministry of Community Development in order for a structure or site to be given official recognition.

Following this, there is a five-step application procedure, which involves the applicants giving background information on the site and stating the historical significance of the site. This application is then evaluated by the appropriate staff, and a recommendation is made regarding whether or not official recognition should be granted to the site or building in question.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, there exist a number of requirements, specifications, and procedures which need to be followed before official recognition can be granted to a site. By amending the Railway (Alberta) Act to include a new type of train called heritage, none of these steps have to be undertaken. I do not believe that this is the intent, nor will it be the outcome of this legislation to have the affected railways considered as a provincial or registered historic resource. The power to grant this designation falls exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Community Development through the power granted to him under the Historical Resources Act.

The concern which was raised surrounding this issue was and is valid. When implementing legislation, we want to avoid ambiguity and eliminate the potential for misunderstanding. Bill 203 seeks to recognize the role played by the affected railways, but it does not presume to supersede or in any way affect the authority held by the Minister of Community Development to administer and regulate Alberta's historical resources.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 has two objectives. First, the title of heritage more accurately reflects the nature of the railways it impacts than the current designation of amusement. Secondly, by creating another designation which new regulations can be attached to, altering regulations governing these railways will simplify the inspection and regulatory process in the future. It will eliminate the need for each individual railway to apply for exemptions from each regulation which does not necessarily apply to their operation.

In the future, if another two or three railways are characterized as heritage, Mr. Speaker, under the act there will already be a set of tailored regulations in place for this operation to adhere to. This will reduce the possibility of any confusion surrounding the safety and operational regulations which need to be adhered to and will eliminate the need to apply for exemptions from regulations which

were not designed for the operations in question. This clarity will serve in good stead both the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation and the operations involved in the years to come.

This legislation is well thought out in its simplicity, ensuring that the department with expertise will be able to work with stakeholders in the development of regulations in the future. Mr. Speaker, I support Bill 203, and I would ask my colleagues on both sides of the Chamber to support this initiative. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to voice my support for Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I have in mind a special constituent who has special interests, and I know that others in my constituency and our province have special considerations as well for our treasured railways of Alberta.

Historically, the railways that line the coarse prairie terrain are symbols of resourcefulness and resolve of our forebears, who were dedicated to the advancement of our society. For them and for us today the direction of the future points west. Alberta's pioneers carved the path into the unknown with the ever present dream of a bright, vibrant, prosperous Alberta, and it was this vision, Mr. Speaker, which established the rock-solid foundation that our great province stands proudly atop today.

Vision has consistently proven to be a vital ingredient in providing the distinction between triumph and failure. The vision of our province has always been a marvel, a panoramic view that stretches with immeasurable ambition from the Great Plains right to the Rocky Mountains. However, that vision is of little consequence without the will and perseverance of a people that possessed that vision: optimistic, dedicated men and women who selflessly stamped those steel lines through our province to make that vision of Alberta a reality. The ideals that Albertans hold dear today – strength, persistence, resilience, just to name a few – were forged many years ago by those same individuals. They devoted their lives and personal safety to plant the seed that would enable our province to become Canada's industrial and economic leader.

Mr. Speaker, there's always been debate regarding the necessity of implementing the legislation proposed in Bill 203. It's been suggested that the proposed amendment toward heritage designation seems redundant, clouding for some the intent of what is to be accomplished from the modifications to the bill. I for one believe that Bill 203 will not only broaden the distinction between the assortment of Alberta's railways, but it will also enhance the effectiveness of their regulation and maintenance. Furthermore, it will serve to ensure that the railways that have become such an essential ingredient to our identity as Albertans will be given due recognition to exist as valued memorials to our heritage.

Under current legislation there are three types of railways: industrial, public, and amusement. Now, focusing on the latter, a railway that operates for the singular purpose of providing recreational rides to individuals is generally considered an amusement railway, and as such these particular railways are subject to many of the same requirements and safety regulations of other railway classifications. However, the ways in which these various railways operate are fundamentally different, and it's due to these differences that the management and enforcement of a great deal of regulatory principles have proven to be logistically unsuitable in regard to the historically significant railways involved in Bill 203.

Currently railways identified for amusement purposes, which include railways operating on historic sites, generally receive far less

traffic over a given period of time when compared to other types of railway. Even so, they're still subject to the same frequency of inspections and maintenance checks as the main line operators. At this point I'd like to quote a fine constituent of mine, Mr. Don Totten, who is an expert in the field. He says: right now inspectors are using old legislation that does not apply to these machines; heritage equipment in this province is well maintained. And he knows that from a personal and professional standpoint. He says: new legislation is needed if we're going to continue to maintain equipment. An interesting note for members of the Assembly and people in the province: Alberta has the vast majority of steam locomotives in Canada, that is 70 per cent, something that's very important and definitely worth knowing.

Mr. Speaker, to better serve the public in our province, I believe that the resources of time, energy, and funds which are required to sustain such a practice would be more appropriately utilized at the discretion of the operator, and I know that Mr. Totten agrees. This could be accomplished through heritage designation regulations, while continuing to maintain sound and effective safety procedures. Bill 203 would do exactly that. It would ensure that these valuable machines would remain operational through a standardized regulatory process, enhancing the effectiveness of said process in relation to Alberta's railways. This act would help a great deal in enabling the streamlining of regulations for these specific types of railways and save a considerable amount of time and energy that could be devoted to other more suitable causes.

3:30

It's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 203 does not aim to sever the connection between stringent regulation and responsible safe practice. The well-being of passengers on these rail cars along with those who operate them is of paramount importance and most not be underestimated. Bill 203 will ensure that the security measures followed to protect all parties involved is in direct relation to each railway's usage rate. This act will allow operators to focus their attention on exactly what's required to keep each railway as safe as possible.

The educational value of these railways must also closely be considered. They can help our children take a glimpse into the 19th century of Canadian culture, offering insights about our history, demonstrating the raw majestic beauty of our province as well as the physical nature of working-class life on the prairies. This wisdom is projected even further, Mr. Speaker, by way of helping Albertans to truly understand our industrial background, the labour and toil painstakingly devoted over so many decades, elevating our province on the way to becoming the economic superpower that it is today. These steel giants are the figurative reflection of a people who in their day possessed an unwavering desire to improve their quality of life, allowing all who were to follow in their footsteps to proclaim the most beautiful and accomplished province in Canada as their home.

It's been argued, Mr. Speaker, that the aforementioned amendment and the issue of requirements could be placed in the hands of the railway administrator and could be dealt with through administration and policy rather than through legislative change. Although in some cases legislation is critical to ignite the process of change, doing so with purpose and conviction with the intent of administration can become caught in the web of formula and procedure. In addition, under the current situation the operators of heritage-themed railways who wish to become exempt from certain forms of regulation must proceed with an application process that requires the operator to clear a series of hurdles along the way, making the progression towards change slow and tedious. It's our duty as

members of this House to provide all Albertans with the most efficient, responsible governance possible. It's in situations where administration becomes delayed or stagnant where legislation must lead the way in providing adequate change in policies.

Mr. Speaker, the case of our provincial railways provides this House with an excellent opportunity to expedite this transformation in management of these invaluable icons of our heritage. It's clear that the four provincial railways in question operate in a very unique manner relative to the public and industrial modes of transport. In order to facilitate a process that will continue in an equitable and proficient fashion, we must be diligent in supporting the legislation brought forth in Bill 203.

I urge all hon. members as leaders and citizens to support this bill, and I urge them to join me in ensuring that these instruments that have stood the test of time will remain operationally sound in the face of overregulation. I urge they join me in pledging that the education of each and every individual who chooses to support these sites, paying homage to Alberta's ideals and traditions, will never cease. Let's respectfully enshrine our treasured railways through the legislation brought forward by this act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

Bill 204
Parental Consent to Medical
Treatment for Minors Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to move second reading of Bill 204, the Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 will help parents in the increasingly difficult job of protecting and nurturing their children. I'm a parent myself. I have three wonderful children, that mean the world to me. Everything I do as a parent is done with the aim of keeping them safe, happy, and free from the consequences of bad decisions. Parenting is without a doubt the best job in the world, but it's also the most difficult. I try as every parent does to give my kids a positive foundation of wisdom and values that will hopefully shield them from harm and help them make good decisions. I give them my guidance, my support, my prayers, and my input because these things are essential to their development and safety.

Mr. Speaker, as a loving parent I also set limits and boundaries on what is acceptable and what is not. When it is necessary, I enforce these rules. Why do I do these things for my children? Why do I protect them and nurture them? The answer is very simple: because children are often not capable of making important decisions on their own. As a parent, to guarantee the well-being of my children, I must often make decisions for them to protect their best interests. When I am allowed to, that is.

Generally, I feel that the law does a wonderful job in aiding parents. We have in place countless statutes that dictate a minimum age of responsibility for various activities. These allow society as a whole to place and enforce restrictions on the actions of children. For the most part these are reasonable and proper, and I am glad to have them. For example, Mr. Speaker, I don't have to worry about my children buying cigarettes. Of course, I've taught them about the

dangers of smoking, but I sleep easier knowing that this extra barrier exists. I can say the same thing about alcohol. The fact that they are not allowed to buy it not only reinforces what I've taught them about drinking; it also provides an extra level of security. Once again I'm glad to have it. Thirteen-year-olds aren't allowed to drive. Is it reasonable that we don't allow a child to pilot a two-tonne vehicle in traffic? I think so. I'm glad that that law sets an age of capacity in this case.

I could elaborate at length about the other things that our children are not allowed to do, like voting or entering into marriage without their parents' permission and, of course, several other things, but I won't. Instead, I'd like to address what they are allowed to do, Mr. Speaker, and why it should shock every parent and why I am addressing this issue with this bill.

There exists in this province and in this country, Mr. Speaker, a system that allows children to make important, life-altering decisions without any involvement from their parents whatsoever. I find it alarming that a child can seek medical treatment of any kind without his or her parents' knowledge. I find it downright frightening that the same child can obtain medical treatment in the same way. How is this possible?

Well, for anyone to obtain medical treatment, they must first give consent. This consent can only be given after all the aspects and consequences of the intended procedure are explained and understood fully by the patient. In short, the consent must be informed. The patient must also have the ability and capacity to understand the consequences of getting or not getting the treatment. Now, these are good principles, and I don't have any problem with them whatsoever when they are applied to adults. What I do have a serious issue with is the notion that a child can be seen to have the same capacity as an adult.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, if a doctor determines that a minor of any age understands the intended procedure or treatment and its consequences, they can consent to it independently. Is this reasonable? Well, I find it strange that the same young person who has to take a taxi to the doctor because they're not old enough to drive there potentially has the ability to make major health care decisions on their own. Should they really be considered mature enough to do so, especially when they're already considered immature in so many other areas by our society?

A minor that is deemed able to consent to treatment does so under what the common law calls the mature minor doctrine. The maturity, meaning the ability to consent of each child, is assessed on an individual, case-by-case basis by a medical professional, not by a definite and legislated minimum age. This bill seeks to enhance this doctrine by establishing such a minimum age under which a minor cannot make independent medical decisions without the consent of a parent. The concept is not radical. It's not extreme. It's simply an attempt to give parents a measure of involvement in the lives of their children when important decisions are being made.

How will this happen? Well, Bill 204 proposes that any minor aged 15 and under obtain the written permission of at least one parent before they can obtain medical treatment. Now, this is not unreasonable. This bill is not presented with the intention of restricting the rights of anyone or dramatically changing the entire system of medical consent. It's a small change, a simple change, but it is a change that will have a positive effect on children and on parents and families alike.

3:40

Now, I realize that 16- and 17-year-olds, especially in today's society, are usually considered to be mature in most cases. They are

not included in the scope of the bill because I think the vast majority of people in this age group are mature enough to make health care decisions on their own if they so choose. I also realize that some children are independent due to a variety of reasons. Any child who isn't subject to guardianship under the Family Law Act is also exempt from the provisions of this bill. I'm aware of the unfortunate fact that some children have a bad or unworkable relationship with their parents. This is often not the fault of the children, and I don't think they should be penalized for it. This is why there's also a provision in the bill that allows a minor or a third party on behalf of the minor to appeal a parent's decision. This allows an independent review by the courts of a controversial parental decision and protects the children whose parents aren't acting in their best interests.

Finally, the bill does not apply to any situation that requires immediate medical attention or a medical emergency. The restrictions in the bill are presented with reason, Mr. Speaker, and requiring consent for a child whose life or safety was in immediate danger is the last thing that any reasonable individual would ever want. What the bill does do is provide a measure of clarity to a confusing situation while at the same time protecting a specific vulnerable group of children who desperately need guidance and help in making major life-altering decisions.

In essence, the bill would remove the burden of determining a child's capacity to consent from our medical professionals, and it reassigns this to the child's parents. This is an appropriate change, Mr. Speaker, and an appropriate responsibility for parents to have. Now, some may view this move as a challenge to the capability of our doctors and nurses. It isn't. These people are among the most capable, dedicated, and intelligent members of our society. We trust them with our health and with our lives and justifiably so. This bill simply seeks to recognize that the parents of a child are more intimately aware of their child's abilities and level of understanding.

Parents deal with every aspect of a child's life on a constant basis. They know their child at a level that nobody else can even begin to approach. As such, I believe that they are the best equipped to possess the power to determine a child's capacity. As the people who have raised, nurtured, and been responsible for their children from day one, it's only natural that parents be assigned the ability to make capacity judgments about their children as well. I think it's reasonable to assume that parents will make these decisions with the best interest of their children at heart. If a child wants to obtain a beneficial medical treatment, there will be no problem in obtaining consent from their parents. If they're seeking a treatment that has serious and negative consequences, this bill will give parents the opportunity to voice their concerns and to intervene if necessary. I think it is vital that we extend this right to parents, Mr. Speaker.

If any of the members here today are unsure about the merits of this bill, I guess that I simply ask them to place themselves in the shoes of a parent whose child makes a vital, life-altering medical decision of any kind without their knowledge or permission, a parent that must live with the aftermath of that decision and the knowledge that they were powerless to stop it.

Our children are our future, and as legislators I believe we have a duty to protect them. Those who need this legislation need it desperately. I urge all of the members of this Assembly to join me in offering this bill your support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this Bill 204, Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act. While there are many issues concerning this bill which we need to raise questions about, right at the outset I think there's a lot of ambiguity around the term "medical treatment." This is a very ambiguous

term, medical treatment. It's left undefined. When we consult something like the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, there are many definitions concerning the whole area of health care, and specifically the term "medical services" is used in respect to the services offered by a physician. But what this bill is referring to seems to be not just medical services but a very, very broad, undefined term, medical treatment.

There's a curious reference to, quote, other health care providers. It's physicians, nurses, and other health care providers. Presumably the other health care providers can provide medical treatment, but all this remains undefined. Now, I suppose that is left to the regulations to make those kinds of definitions, but I think the Legislature should not approve a bill blindly without knowing what the scope will be of something that is called "medical treatment."

The most important issue here in respect to medical treatment is that this bill demonstrates, clearly, a disrespect to physicians and undermines the authority of physicians. This bill makes a doctor or a nurse guilty of an offence and subject to a fine of up to \$10,000 if they provide medical treatment without getting the consent of a parent. It doesn't matter what the service is, whether it is good or bad, needed or not needed, if the consent is not given, the physician is in the wrong.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I find this to be an insult to our physicians and our nurses in this province. Does the mover of this bill have any evidence to show that physicians and nurses are giving inappropriate medical treatment to minors? I think we need to have that kind of evidence. Otherwise, why would we make this decision to undermine the relationship of minor children and their physicians? Why would we as legislators make doctors and nurses into lawbreakers when they are just exercising their calling to heal a young person? We should not legislate unless we have studies to demonstrate that such a bill would be in the interest of the good of our society; otherwise, such a bill is quite irresponsible.

The second major problem with this bill is the issue of consent. I appreciate the hon. member mentioning the importance of parental involvement. I, too, am a parent, and my two sons are now adults, but to go with them through all the difficult decisions that they make in their lives is, indeed, a challenge. In an ideal world, of course, parents ought to be involved in the welfare of their children. I have no problems with that. But is legislation insisting on parental consent warranted? In insisting that a parent give consent, it restricts the ability of a minor to give consent, and here's where we come up against the tradition of common law.

A minor in this bill is defined as "a person who is 15 years old or younger." That in itself seems to be quite arbitrary. Why 15? I think Quebec fixes the age at 14. Why 15 and not 14, or why not 16 or 17? There is already precedent on this issue, however. For example, the Alberta Court of Appeal in the case *C.U. versus McGonigle* in 2003 stated that

the parental right to determine whether or not a minor child will receive medical treatment terminates when the child achieves a sufficient understanding and intelligence to provide an informed consent.

So that is the law as it is now. A mature minor can give consent to health care. In fact, there's a booklet produced by the Canadian Medical Protective Association which also concurs in this point, saying that

as a result of consideration and recommendations by law reform groups as well as the evolution of tort law on consent, the legal concept of the "mature minor" has become widely accepted and firmly entrenched.

So I think that we have real problems with this bill. It wants to change the common law and move it in a completely different

direction. Of course, one recognizes that when we're talking about mature minors, as the age of the child lowers and the difficulties of choice increase, it becomes more difficult to show the necessary understanding and intelligence. But surely the right decisions can be made within the relationship of the mature minor and his or her doctor, and we don't need any legislation to kind of impose itself on that relationship.

Now, this bill doesn't actually mention the minor child's capacity to give consent except in the preamble, but the effect of the bill is to deprive the minor child of his or her right to give consent. Is this not to deprive a 15-year-old of a Charter right? I would make the claim, Mr. Speaker, that section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees to every Canadian, irrespective of age, the right to life, liberty, and the protection of the person.

Can we conceive of situations where this right might be compromised? I think we can. For example, what might happen if a young person is brought into a hospital emergency department? The doctor would have to decide if the situation is a medical emergency or not. If it is a medical emergency, then of course he proceeds, but if it is not, then he would have to find the parent or be subject to a fine. I find this really quite awkward.

3:50

The line between medical treatment and medical emergency is not defined in this bill. What if a young person is brought to a school nurse or a summer camp counsellor, and they say, "Well, we cannot bandage your cuts and bruises until we contact one of your parents." In fact, there's nothing in this bill to indicate that maybe parents can give someone else the authorization to give consent on their behalf.

Of course, there are many, many more complex situations, and the hon. member didn't mention the most complex situation, and that is the abortion issue. I'm surprised the hon. member didn't bring that up because that seems to be the main issue behind this bill. Well, of course, abortion is extremely complex. I think that in terms of this bill there are complications on both sides. Whether parents consent to an abortion or whether they're against an abortion, there's still a problem, and it's still an intrusion into the relationship between the young person and the doctor who gives advice.

Anyway, if it is the intent of the mover of this bill to limit the number of abortions, if that is what is behind this bill, then depriving a child of his or her rights is simply, from my point of view, bad social policy. I think we must make a distinction between the morality of the act of abortion on the one hand and the construction of social policy on the other hand.

It is not necessary, I think, to argue about the right or the wrong of abortion. That would get us into a huge debate, and probably none of us want to go to in that direction. But even if one accepts that abortion is the destruction of life and is a great and terrible tragedy, as I would, the question that is all important is: what kind of social policy is needed to limit the number of abortions in our society?

For me, it is a societal good that we both enhance women's well-being and minimize the necessity of abortions. I have no interest in promoting an abortion culture. What is important for me is a good social policy, and I don't think this bill is a good social policy. It will actually endanger the lives of many young women who are desperate to have an abortion. It will limit young women from obtaining safe abortions and will have dire consequences for women who do not have parental consent but who are desperate and will seek abortions whether legal or not, with all of the risks of injury and death and also suicide and the suffocation of newborns. I'm talking about minors: 15-year-olds, 14-year-olds.

A good social policy in reducing the number of abortions would place greater emphasis on medical research in the area of contracep-

tives, would emphasize, of course, education, the need for a good, solid sex education, teaching both boys and girls that they share in the moral responsibility for preventing pregnancy. One could go on and on and outline what would be the ingredients of a powerful social policy.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, this bill has way too many problems. It's too vague and ill defined. It's simply bad social policy, and I recommend its withdrawal or its defeat. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The purpose of Bill 204 is to protect the well-being of children and the rights of parents by requiring parental involvement in a young minor's decision to obtain nonemergency medical treatment. Any child aged 15 or under wishing to receive nonemergency treatment would require the written consent of at least one parent or guardian before treatment could take place.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly feel that parents need to be involved in the lives of their children and that they have the right to nurture and protect their children from anything that may cause physical, emotional, or psychological trauma. If, for whatever reason, a child 15 years old or younger must undergo any medical procedure, I believe that it is important for parents or guardians to be there to support children through difficult moments.

You see, Mr. Speaker, I believe that there are more good parents than bad. I believe that children 15 years and younger still need the love, understanding, and support of their parents to thrive and succeed. I believe that all medical procedures for children are traumatic and require the love and support of their parents. I believe that good parents will guide and direct their child in the best interests of the child.

I remember holding my daughter's hand just before and after she had eye surgery and reassuring her that everything would be fine and that the pain was just temporary, and she was 23 years old. I remember holding my son and helping him to cope with a rollerblade accident that damaged his spleen. He was 15 years old. I remember looking for my 12-year-old child in the outpatients' ward at the hospital when he kind of disappeared just before he had to have day surgery, because he was afraid of the unknown.

I remember helping all my children to take their antibiotics on time and to be sure to finish all the pills and to take their daily vitamins. I cannot imagine that any child would be encouraged to go through any medical procedure without the support of a parent. I cannot imagine that after dedicating our lives to protecting and nurturing our children, after teaching them to use bike helmets and kneepads, after taking them out of a room filled with second-hand smoke, after taking them to hockey and swimming and baseball and dance and music lessons, and after showing them that we would always be there for them, they would be encouraged to go through any medical procedure without our support.

Mr. Speaker, it is essential to the physical, mental, and emotional health of any child to have the support of their parents to help them to cope with the aftermath of any crisis, medical or otherwise, and especially for any serious procedure that can have lifelong implications. Bill 204 addresses children 15 years old and younger. The majority of children this age are still under the care of their parents and are the responsibility of their parents or guardians. There are age limits on drinking, smoking, driving, voting, joining the armed forces, and getting married. Doctors and nurses recognize the importance of parental consent because they require written consent now in most procedures before they begin. I even required written consent for senior Girl Guides in order for them to be able to have a Tylenol during camping trips.

The laws that enforce these age limits are not considered to be a denial of a child's rights. The 20th century began with children having virtually no rights and ended with children having a very powerful legal instrument that not only recognizes but protects the rights of the child. This powerful legal instrument is the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. The United Nations convention on the rights of the child is ratified by 191 nations from around the world, including Canada.

Article 5 states that the child has the right to be protected by parents. Article 7 states that it is the right of the child to "be cared for by his or her parents." Article 14 states that a child has the right to have parents or legal guardians "provide direction to the child." The United Nations convention on the rights of the child also states that every child has the right to develop to the fullest; the right to protection from harmful influences, abuse, and exploitation; and the right to participate fully in family, cultural, and social life.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are children who do not have the benefit of parents capable of making a good decision for them for whatever reasons and are in the care of the government. In these cases I believe and expect that the guardians of a child 15 years and younger will make decisions in the best interest of the child and be there to support them and encourage them in whatever is needed.

I know that there will be much debate about the rights of the child who may not receive good parenting and that a child who is loved will have the support of their parents anyway. It is wrong, however, to think that parents and guardians have no business in the health and welfare of their children, especially those just 15 years old and younger. I know this for sure: good parenting is a lifelong commitment, and there are more good parents than bad or mankind would not have survived this long.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out one more time that this bill does not speak to youth older than 15 but only to children 15 years old and younger. A child 15 years old and under still needs the love and support of his or her parents and guardian, and to require them to make mature decisions that will affect them physically, emotionally, or psychologically for the rest of their lives is unconscionable.

Mr. Speaker, I will support this bill, and I ask others to support this bill simply because it is in the best interests of all young children.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak on Bill 204 this afternoon. It's an interesting bill because of its scope and what it tries, I guess, to cover. My difficulty lies in a number of different areas, not the least of which includes just, somehow, in a basic way excluding or prohibiting certain individuals in our society from receiving medical treatment without a certain caveat placed on that treatment. This is a fundamental difficulty that I have in regard to freedom that would preclude most of these other arguments that I will bring forward here this afternoon.

4:00

I can tell you that we've had quite a number of constituents from all across Alberta phoning us and sending messages in regard to this bill, both from individuals and community health organizations. Everyone that I have received information from is testifying to the fact that somehow legislating medical treatment – right? – which goes undefined in this proposed bill and, therefore, could be everything from anything to do with sexuality to abortions and sexually transmitted infection treatment, counselling, et cetera – restricting all of these things and more, really anything as far as it

seems to be described in the bill, would definitely do more harm than good.

If teen sexual behaviour, specifically abortion, is the target of this bill, there are other much better and less dangerous ways to go about addressing this issue instead of presenting a blanket coverage and really and essentially an exclusion of certain people that might be seeking medical treatment. We do know that we have a very sad and long history of medical treatment laws in regard to, let's say, abortion. Right?

History has shown us how desperate a female can become when she is set on terminating a pregnancy; there are more deaths related to botched abortion and suicide as well as suffocated newborns: that's a quote that I received from the Edmonton Pro-Choice Coalition. The American Medical Association confirms this, in fact stating in a 1992 report that parental consent laws result in an increase in pregnant teen runaways, back alley abortions, and self-induced abortions as well. A host of other reputable medical associations have reached the same conclusions, including the American Association of Pediatric Surgeons and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

If infanticide, suicide, late-term abortions, botched homemade abortions are a result of such legislation, I must say that I would rather see children receiving some professional medical care when terminating a pregnancy than reading about things in perhaps an uninformed way or receiving treatment that otherwise can put risk to their lives.

Currently abortion is available to young women after a thorough assessment by a professional social worker; it is the social worker's professional duty to ensure that the young woman has not been coerced into having an abortion and that she is competent enough to consent to the procedure; she is given a chance to explore her feelings and receive information about fetal development and the details of the procedure itself: that's again from the Edmonton Pro-Choice Coalition.

Under the proposed legislation it appears that the social worker who counsels the young woman and makes an appointment for her would be otherwise guilty of an offence and fined \$10,000 just for making available health information that each individual in our society has a right to have.

For making the argument that abortions are used as birth control, statistics show differently, showing a steady decline in abortion rates over the last 30 years. Even if this was not the case, such an argument assumes that all teenage pregnancies are in fact terminated on a whim by irresponsible young women who failed to take proper precautions. Social workers can testify to the number of teens who then find themselves unexpectedly pregnant after engaging in what they thought was safe sex. This also does a disservice to young women who, upon careful consideration, may terminate pregnancies after concluding that they're not responsible to raise children at that point in time.

Incidentally, less than 1 per cent of all abortions are in fact had by young women under the age of 15. Such numbers beg the question why legislation is needed to make the lives of maybe, assuming we have 3.2 million people in this province, 30 individuals more difficult, especially when we consider that teens are 24 times more likely to die from childbirth than from an abortion performed in the first trimester.

If abortion is the issue, then let's take other steps to provide our youth, whether at risk or not, with information about risk reduction where sexuality is concerned. At stake here is not simply informed access to abortions but treatment for sexually transmitted infections, birth control, other abuse, and prostitution related health problems. The solution is information, education, care, and options, not restrictions and regulations.

Let's not forget that there is an unfortunate culture of abuse in our society that also contributes to sexual problems amongst children. There is a consensus in North America that single teens who find themselves in an unwanted pregnancy should seek support of empathetic, caring, and knowledgeable adults. Ideally, this should be their parents. Absolutely. Parental involvement laws make such notification and/or consent of one or both parents mandatory. Unfortunately, not all teens live in such a supportive home environment. Some are in dysfunctional families where the news of their pregnancy could precipitate emotional abuse, physical abuse, or ejection from the home. This is information that we received from the women's issues group from the United States.

According to the recent figures from Planned Parenthood, close to 85 per cent of teens coming in for services of any sort come accompanied by a parent. It is the reason of the remaining 15 per cent for not bringing a parent that we should focus our attention on rather than forcing them to. The Alan Guttmacher Institute found that the vast majority of young women in fact involved their parents in an abortion decision. A group that successfully overturned a consent law stated that

the statute operates only on young women who do not consult their parents with the news of pregnancy because the family is unsupportive, in crisis, dysfunctional, or abusive . . . For these young women, the statute tests the already difficult relationship between parent and child, undermining the very goals it purports to promote.

We certainly do not contest that parents have a legitimate interest in and responsibility for the well-being of the children, be that mental, spiritual, and physical; however, the sad facts are that while in most cases parents are caring individuals who take their responsibilities very seriously, many are not as well. One in four females, one in six males have been the victim of sexual exploitation as a child, and now statistics show that 85 per cent of abuse victims are of a family member or a close family friend. Additionally, 20 per cent of the substantiated sexual child abuse is consummated sex, unfortunately. As uncomfortable as we are facing this horrifying fact, pregnancies and STDs do result from incestuous and abusive relationships.

Therefore, the issue remains that in too many cases parents are involved in child abuse. In such a case to whom is the child meant to turn? We cannot force children in these situations to legally confront their abusers, but we can provide them with medical services that do not require the consent from those same abusers. On average children tell 10 adults of an abuse before someone believes them. Let's help them to get that 10th person by allowing access to a medical professional who may be a nonjudgmental authority figure that they will feel comfortable telling and getting assistance from as well.

It's interesting that we have discussions of children's rights and, specifically, the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, which I don't know if this Legislature recognizes or not. I think maybe they don't for some reason. Anyway, there are some articles that are very important from that document that I think need to be brought up in regards to this particular bill, and I will do . . . [Mr. Eggen's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 204, Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act. I believe the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar has brought forth a piece of legislation which, if passed, would positively affect

Albertans in many ways. This bill will ensure that any minor aged 15 and under wishing to procure nonemergency medical treatment is required to obtain written consent of at least one parent before the treatment could take place.

4:10

It's clear that the reason for the bill and the thought behind Bill 204 is the protection of children. Protecting our children is a concept that is not foreign to any of us. It's a natural and constant force that drives us to safeguard the vulnerable future generations of our society. This concept of ensuring the safety of our youth is also not foreign to the legislation that is in place today in Alberta and throughout the country.

For example, I believe this bill can be compared to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, which was enacted in February 1999. This Alberta legislation, which is commonly known by its acronym PCHIP, was the first of its kind in Canada. The purpose of this legislation is to protect children involved in prostitution by enabling social services and/or police to apprehend and secure them in a safe environment.

Part of that PCHIP act is the establishment of programs which are designed to assist children in ending their association with prostitution. These community support programs are an important provision of this legislation, but in order for the child to become involved in them, a voluntary services agreement must be reached. Under the definitions of the act a child is a person under the age of 18 years, and if the child is 16 or 17 years old, they can access support services without parental or guardian permission. If, on the other hand, the child is under the age of 16 years, a voluntary service agreement can only be entered into with the child if a guardian also consents. Through this measure parents and caregivers are also encouraged to be involved in the programs.

Upon reflection, many pertinent examples where age is a stipulation for participation exist. Perhaps you yourself are thinking of some of the other things right now, and the reason you are able to do so is because such legislation is quite commonplace. Principles such as these have been passed to protect our children from activities which have the potential to pose them harm, many of which they are often unable to see or manage themselves.

I've yet to hear any weighted arguments in favour of abolishing such laws, and I do not foresee any arising in the future. These ideas are not controversial, they are not criticized, they are not protested, and they are instead widely accepted and even praised. That's because such legislation is in the best interest of our children and, essentially, all of society. These concepts are helpful to us, they are a necessity in society, and they are important to all of us. Bill 204 is simply an addition to the list promoting these same values and concerns that we hold so dear.

It's logical to have medical procedures in the same class as community support programs administered under PCHIP because they, too, pose a threat to the well-being of children. Personal medical procedures, including cosmetic alterations, which are often viewed by minors as they watch some of the television shows, are very popular to get involved in themselves to make themselves more popular amongst their peers. They're often very difficult and sometimes impossible to reverse if they have them done without parental opportunity to consult with them and let them know about the long-term and even the short-term implications of those types of procedures.

The complications in both the long and the short term involved with some of these undertakings are often quite serious. There can also be damage done that goes far beyond the surface. The emotional scarring that can result from these physical procedures is

extreme as well. Traumatization of this nature can lead to a lifetime of negative thoughts, feelings, and acts. Our children may not fully consider all the long-term ramifications of the physical, emotional, or even spiritual impacts that these nonemergency medical procedures may have on them.

For those in the adolescent years such consequences are sometimes ignored, dismissed, or minimized. Often the appropriate weight is not given because such things seem to be part of the distant future when the reason for the treatment may be impacting them right now. Having all gone through the trials and tribulations of adolescence, I think we can all relate to the feelings of our children as they experience the same things at this age. However, we also know with the wisdom of age that this stage is not permanent. Braces will come off, skin blemishes will clear up, the right girl or guy will find you, and none of these dilemmas require surgery to solve. As some of you may have experienced, logic of this nature is not understood by some of our children. Comments from us in this regard are often countered by replies such as, "You don't understand," or my personal favourite: "How would you know what it's like? You're too old to remember."

When our children have the option of deciding matters such as the need for nonemergency medical treatment without our knowledge, there is a chance, no matter how hard we try as parents, that the concerns of today will dominate their decision, and the realities of their entire lifetime will be trumped by their perceived immediate needs. It is essential that there is a guaranteed and appropriate check in this scheme of short-term thinking. We can take a step towards creating one here today for the parents of Alberta by supporting Bill 204. It's important to note that through the passing of this legislation and the creation of such a check, we will not be unduly limiting the rights of anyone involved. If this was the purpose of 204, I personally wouldn't support it myself as I believe strongly in human dignity and liberties. I would certainly not be supporting it if that was the case.

Human rights are, of course, one of the fundamental institutions upon which this country was built. They are important in more ways than I can express at this point in time. However, it is also important for us to recognize that Bill 204 is not unduly infringing upon these rights. This bill is not trying to prevent treatment, just add awareness, something every parent cherishes and every family needs. By having parents more fully involved in the lives of children, we will help create stronger family ties.

Bill 204 promotes active parenting by increasing the degree to which parents are involved in the personal medical decision their child is making. Once this dialogue is opened in these instances, it creates an atmosphere of trust that is conducive to discussion and consultation in other areas. If through the passage of the legislation we can open up the lines of communication between parents and their children, should we not all feel obliged to do so? Such action could produce a multitude of positive effects in the families of our province and, consequently, the whole of society.

The health of the family goes well beyond the home. It creates a cascading effect in the lives of our children, wielding positive forces in terms of self-esteem, education, and friendships. A positive family environment today goes well beyond tomorrow. Momentum of this kind is carried not for months or days but for generations as the cycle of well-being is passed on.

For the safety of our children, for the strength of our families, and for the well-being of our society I would ask all members to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 204, Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act, gives us the opportunity to consider what we mean by independence, self-direction, informed choice, life competencies, and other aspects that are foundational to a free and democratic society. We need to look at the quantitative limits such as age, IQ, and performance standards we use to determine these competencies, measures that are themselves limited yet that we cannot escape in a changing and imperfect society.

In traditional Jewish and Islamic thought a child became an adult legally at the age of 12 years, but this was not an overnight leap from infancy to adulthood. Those societies provided many supports: apprenticeship, religious tutoring, mentoring, and monitoring of growth to maturity. In western societies we set a later age, 21, when one could vote, leave home, get married, and enter other contracts without parental consent. Under Protestant influence in the North American west the right of passage was not a bar mitzvah but often became the first legal trip to a bar.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There were some anomalies to this age of adulthood. One could be drafted into military service at a younger age, years before he could vote on national issues such as conscription, and he could be sentenced as an adult in criminal court for crimes such as murder when we still had capital punishment. Then there was the age of sexual consent. It was realized that there was a discrepancy between biology and the law and that it was unrealistic even in the most puritan times to prohibit sexual activity before age 21. So the law acknowledged that one could engage in sexual activity but could not commit to another in marriage without parental consent until the legal age of adulthood. Recognition of these anomalies led to a gradual lowering of age: first to 19 for voting in Alberta, which was accompanied by the government setting up of a ministry of youth, then to age 18 and, in some cases and jurisdictions, to 16.

4:20

There was another factor contributing to this down-pull of the time that one came of legal age. This was the 1950s and the discovery of adolescence as a market. The word "teenager" became big then, and fashions, movies, and music were crafted to capture youth as a separate culture. With money to spend, whether parental allowance or their own earnings, and marketers ready to part them from that money, another parting took place: the opportunities for interaction with elders and adult mentors. This happened not mainly because youth wished to cut these ties but because marketers wished to be free of other influences that might interfere with their sales pitch to the new target audience.

In the 1960s the gulf between the generations became deeper, and scientific and medical developments provided youth with contraception, abortion, and other options that had not been available to their parents. In the last decade there's been a retreat to the mentality of: everyone for himself or herself. Generations and generations are talking, sometimes indirectly, and trying to understand each other. Perhaps this comes out of the ecological crisis as we realize that we must hang together and support each other on Earth. It is not surprising that this trend first became apparent among our First Nations, who have a greater sense of connection to the earth. In that culture the word "elder" carried respect and did not have the negative connotation of old fogey or outdated, that it had acquired in the mainstream.

About this time the words "mentor" and "mentoring" came to prominence in our own culture. It is from this perspective of mentoring that I speak against Bill 204. I would prefer to see the

opportunity for youth to consult with others of experience and complementary perspectives so that they can make wise and informed choices that they can live with even though that process for decision-making may not include a parent. Sometimes, as in this bill, the advisory person will be the parent or legal guardian. Other times it may have to be a teacher, counsellor, coach, aunt, uncle, wise grandparent, or family friend. Ultimately, I'd like to see the range of mentors expanded to allow for alternate or surrogate advisers when parents are unavailable, unable, or unwilling to provide this kind of presence and support. I understand that this situation is more common than many of us realize. I've certainly experienced it in my work as a high school administrator.

We all need such advisers we can turn to whatever our age. We are not providing this for seniors in the form of surrogate or substitute decision-makers to help them in dealing with changes in their lives. It is not simply in dealing with those who have an apparent limitation of age or youth or medical or mental need that require such back-up. To see others only in this light puts us in a position of unspeakable arrogance. We all need each other. For every position of strength or skill there is a corresponding downside. For every vision or viewpoint there is a blind spot.

I do not support Bill 204 because, first, we need a clear definition of medical treatment. Are we including headaches with broken bones, allergic reactions, abortions? What is the scope?

Some children do not have a healthy relationship with parents. Some parents have abdicated that responsibility either because they are unwilling or unable to fulfill the role. These children need advice and assistance from someone else, someone they can trust. Perhaps it is a doctor. Legislation must recognize all children, even those without the protection of parents or other guardians.

I have concern about the erosion of the trust relationship that can exist between patient and physician. Children may not go to a doctor when they need to if parents have to be involved. That is, they may not get the help they need. I'm concerned also that this bill will make doctors and nurses lawbreakers for assisting a child.

The bill, which appears reasonable at first, will have dire effect on the health of young women seeking abortion. This will affect young women from every single community in Alberta. No matter what we think about abortions, they do happen. About 30 to 50 women aged 15 years and younger each year seek abortions in Edmonton. These are women from all over northern Alberta. Indeed, many women come with a parent to have an abortion, but for those who do not have parental support, there will be horrible consequences if they feel that they cannot go to a doctor.

Currently abortion is available to young women after a thorough assessment by a professional social worker. It is a social worker's professional duty to ensure that the young woman has not been coerced into having an abortion and that she's competent enough to consent to the procedure. She's given a chance to explore her feelings and receive information about fetal development, the details of the procedure itself, and the aftercare. This legislation can erode the rights of Alberta women to safe and fully funded abortion. It's a wolf in sheep's clothing and will have terrible consequences for some young Alberta women. History has shown us how desperate a woman can become when she's set on terminating a pregnancy. There will be more deaths related to botched abortions and suicide as well as suffocated newborns. This is a reality. It's unfortunate.

Although as a parent I support this bill because I am a responsible parent and I believe that its intent is to protect children and promote good parenting, the bill suggests something that is complex and needs further consideration and amendment in order to be good social policy. It is not comprehensive, and I cannot support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this interesting discussion on Bill 204, the Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act. This is an important bill. It will allow parents to have more involvement in their children's lives and in their decisions to obtain nonemergency medical treatment. As such, parents will be in a better position to assure the overall safety and well-being of their children.

Mr. Speaker, I would not prefer to live in a world in which a child can enter a plastic surgeon's office and request breast augmentation surgery or liposuction or rhinoplasty or any number of other cosmetic surgeries without their parents' knowledge. I believe that children are not mature enough to make life-altering and body-altering decisions solely on their own. In order to better protect their children, parents need to have the right to be consulted when their child has decided to obtain nonemergency medical treatment. Bill 204 will help to achieve this goal. By involving parents in their children's medical treatment, we're giving back to parents the right to monitor and safeguard the well-being of their children.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Today, Mr. Speaker, there's a very serious societal set of pressures that encourage people to look a certain way. Young singers and actors regularly alter their physical appearance through surgery, and our children, obviously, are commonly influenced by these stars. This can sometimes be seen simply in the clothing that they wear. Is it unreasonable, then, to think that these children may also be influenced by the actions of these celebrities to take more serious measures? Well, I don't think so. Our children may be tempted to take these measures to alter their physical appearance just as their favourite star has. How can parents be asked to simply stand back and watch their children as they become chameleons based on what they see in the media and in the popular culture, which changes flavours every day of the week?

In the majority of cases children under the age of 16 are still growing physically and mentally, and as such they may not always possess the necessary maturity to consider the very real future consequences of their actions or appreciate that their bodies may change considerably between the present and when they themselves fully become adults. Now, having witnessed fads come and go over the years, parents are in a better position to consider the long-range benefits and drawbacks of certain treatments as well as what's in their child's best interests. Therefore, they should be the primary individuals consulted when their child is considering nonemergency medical treatment.

What Bill 204 is advocating is the collaboration of determination of capacity to consent with the attending medical professional and the child's parent. Parents are mandated by law to provide the necessity of life for their kids, yet they do not have to be consulted as to whether or not their children obtain these or any other types of treatments. Personally, Mr. Speaker, I don't feel that this makes any sense at all. In order to take care of our children as best we possibly can, as parents we must be made aware of our children's decisions and offer our input to assist in managing their overall health. I can't stress that enough. If parents don't know about something, they can't be of assistance. It's as simple as that.

4:30

The system that we currently follow does not allow parents to become involved in their children's treatment to the extent that I feel that they should be. If they were, the criteria for consent for medical

treatments would be considered valid, and it would include three distinct steps. The first requirement is that patients must be properly informed by their attending medical professional. Their condition is properly explained, and the recommended treatment is offered, and the effects of having or not having the treatment are delineated. The second requirement for consent to be deemed valid is that the consent must be given voluntarily by the patient. The third requirement is that the patient must have the capacity to consent to that treatment. By capacity I mean that the individual must be able to understand the character and anticipated effects of the treatment.

Any minor meeting these requirements for capacity consent is regarded in the same manner as an adult, as has been referred to in the mature minor doctrine of people who have spoken prior. This is the doctrine that established that children of any age can make rational, informed decisions about their health if they have the capacity to give said consent. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that parents are in a better position to judge what's best for their child's overall health. I would argue that our children need the guidance of their parents when considering medical treatment, and I would go further. After having taught thousands of students over the years in various countries at all levels, I know that our children actually want that guidance from their parents.

Now, in the past when the system of allowing children under the age of 16 to consent to treatment came into practice, it could be argued that it was functional and it was practical at that time. I don't feel, however, that this is the best practice for us in our present day and age, nor do I believe that it will serve us any better in the future. Yes, this may be common law and practice, but I believe that our legislation by its nature simply must evolve to match our evolving society. Legislation should also reflect public interest, and I feel that Bill 204 would do exactly that.

At the present moment our children are dealing with a great number of issues that did not seem so prevalent when we as adults were growing up. From the proliferation of drugs such as methamphetamine, which is showing up in our communities and schools at an alarming rate, to the media's bombardment of their viewers with images of the so-called perfect body and face, things are quite different today. Another thing that's quite different today is the amount of disposable income that our youth possess. Many of our young people have jobs, and since they have minimal expenses, they can presumably use this money for whatever they choose, including cosmetic procedures. Parents should have the ability to participate in the activities of their children. They should also have some measure of input into these activities as such involvement is vital to the role of what it means to be a parent.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204, the Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act, would allow parents to regain some control over their children's health and well-being. Given current societal changes, it is more important now than it ever was before that parents help guide the decisions of their children. Any time an individual is considering medical treatment, the utmost thought and care must be given to that decision, and I simply do not feel that children should have to make these decisions all by themselves. In my opinion, parents are in the best position to advise their children and assist them in considering the long-range benefits and drawbacks of any medical procedure. After that, perhaps the procedure would continue. It would simply continue in a better informed fashion.

Therefore, because of the bill's ability to improve parental involvement in Alberta, I am very happy and honoured and feel obligated to support this bill, and I encourage all members of the Legislature to do the same. Once again I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege that I'm able to rise at this time and speak to Bill 204, and I thank the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for his thought and the desire to bring this bill forward early in this sitting. There's no question that the most important unit in our society is the family. There's also no question that it's the parents who have the greatest interest of the child at heart and would look after them better than anyone else. There have been many excellent points brought out about the importance of parents, about consent, and I'd just like to bring out a few other ideas that we haven't maybe discussed.

What is the purpose of having minors if, in fact, we want to talk about free rights and privileges and not needing parents? Why is it that we have put in regulations that prohibit minors from buying cigarettes, pornographic magazines, alcohol, and entering drinking establishments let alone gambling casinos? Those are minor details compared to that of having surgical procedures and free access to do as they so desire.

There's a reason why they're minors, and that's because under the family unit they're raised and protected and taught by their families. Points have been brought up of the desperate situation that many pregnant teens find themselves in, that they are not able to go and discuss things with their parents and therefore need to bypass them and supposedly go to people that have their best interest at heart when that is the furthest thing from the truth. We know that there are cases of abuse, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't put in legislation to protect minors in our society. There are some abusive parents out there. We need to deal with them on that level and to be vigilant in going after abusive parents.

There have been many points brought up on the negative side about the desperate situation of pregnant women needing to be able to go and have access to a doctor. I would like to just refer everyone to a book called *Forbidden Grief* by Dr. Theresa Burke. It's a very eye-opening book. It talks about after an abortion: what happens and the struggles that women go through. I think every woman should be counselled and see both sides before they make such a dramatic decision, especially without the consent of a parent. It just isn't a good emotional or physical situation for them to be in.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In counselling groups of women, she found that there's a very high percentage of those women that participated in an abortion that, when she went back, had gone on to have eating disorders, to be suicidal, have drug addictions and various other abusive situations, all going back and rooted in the fact that these young women had participated in an abortion and weren't informed to realize the long-term effects of it. So it's very important that parents are, in fact, the guardians of our minors in our society. If we want to throw away parental rights, surely our society would fall apart. It would become decadent, and we wouldn't have the social organizations and the laws that we do have and the peace that is here. It would become chaotic and not a great place to live and be a part of a community.

I appreciate the opportunity to stand up and give my full support behind Bill 204. It's something that we need here in the province. We want to protect our children, and the parents are definitely the best situation to protect them. Despite the fact that we have some parents that fail to do that, that isn't the reason to give minors full rights to do as they please.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While I appreciate the intent of the mover of the bill, I don't believe this bill can accomplish it. This bill can't roll back time. We can't return to a *Leave It to Beaver* or a *Father Knows Best* time period. There is, unfortunately, an ugly reality in Alberta. We have among the highest divorce rates in Canada, almost a 50 per cent rate, and we have definitely among the highest, if not the highest, suicide rates. So the idea that, you know, Father comes home with his lunch pail to Mother, who has been making brownies all day, and the kids all were able to go home for lunch, and Suzy is going to Brownies and Johnny is going to Cubs: that world does not exist for many children.

Having taught for 34 years and having coached for a large amount of that time both within the schools and within the communities, I know that age 15 for some children is a lifetime. I'm not talking about child soldiers in Sudan or children working in Third World sweatshops; I'm talking about the reality that exists within this province.

4:40

The government seems to be sending mixed messages. Last year this government approved allowing 12-year-olds to go to work, but it's saying that those same 12-, 13-, 14-, and 15-year-olds aren't old enough to make some key decisions. This government does not take into account the reality that we face on a daily basis that more and more children are seeking a sad sanctuary on the streets because their dysfunctional families have driven them there, not by their choice. This bill does not deal with the dysfunction. It deals with parents as one whole, and therefore it fails to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

As a teacher I would receive phone calls at my home at night from children whose parents were abusing them, and the slow process of getting that abuse from the reporting period to the actual trial was a terribly painful process. A child had to be physically beaten so that you could see the exterior wounds or a parent practically had to be caught in the act of sexual abuse before the law had sufficient cause to pursue the parent. So this bill just does not address the children who are living on the street, and there is a growing number of them both in Calgary and in Edmonton and, I would assume, in Red Deer and our other cities as well, our new city of Brooks. We can't deny that these street children exist, and forcing them to have the parents' approval before they receive medically necessary intervention just adds to the abuse.

We have people who come from different countries and different religions where young brides are killed because potentially they have dishonoured their family. We have people from countries where it's still the practice for sexual mutilation. In our society we would consider cutting a girl's vagina a form of mutilation, but in other countries that's part of an accepted religious practice.

We need to protect children. Within our province we have a variety of different religions. We've had very controversial cases with the Jehovah's Witness faith about blood transfusions. We had the situation where a father wanted his daughter to have a blood transfusion. Neither she nor the mother wanted that blood transfusion to take place. In the end, basically, it was too late for that blood transfusion, if it would've worked, to have done any good because the young lady, unfortunately, died. We cannot change the reality, so what we have to do as a Legislature is protect children to the best of our abilities.

We have voted in this Parliament, in this Legislature to pass such bills as the crystal meth bill. That bill, unfortunately, went from 90 days of in-house treatment and counselling to basically five days.

Part of the reason that bill failed is that we don't currently have the facilities. We don't pay for the base operational funding for programs like those intervention programs to take place. We've recently gone through a series of stages for the environmental cleanup of crystal meth lab areas, and particularly with the environmental cleanup these are more on the punishment end of things rather than on the preventative end of things.

In Calgary – and I'm sure there are examples here in Edmonton. I believe the girl was 15. She was so afraid of what her parents' reaction would be to the fact that she'd delivered a baby that she put this baby in a green plastic bag. Fortunately for the baby, obviously, and for the young mother who made a mistake, the baby was found, but for every baby that is found and rescued, there are a number of babies who aren't, who end up in trash bins because the children are so afraid to tell their parents. Isn't it sad that embarrassment, a lack of relationship or a lack of understanding or a desire to please the parent takes precedence over life?

This bill with all its intentions cannot turn back the clock. If we're going to help children, then we need beds for them in a variety of programs in all our cities and in our rural areas, which will take them out of these abusive homes, provide them with counselling, provide them with support. We've heard about the bond between physician and patient. How much less is that bond between the role of a parent who is not fulfilling their paternal or maternal obligations and the role of the doctor-patient confidence?

I have seen junior high school students, in my experience over 34 years, going to junior high dances dressed up as pimps, as prostitutes, a variety of costumes. Obviously, they left their parents' door wearing these costumes. In some cases the mothers came up with this combined sort of cute cheerleader aspect or the French maid costume, highly inappropriate for junior high.

But that's the reality: 15 There are a number of 15-year-olds at the junior high level. There are a number of 15-year-olds who have been out on the street already for two years. This bill does not address those needs. This bill cannot turn back the clock. What we need is legislation that addresses the reality of today's Alberta world. This bill does not do it. I speak against it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bearing in mind that we are in second reading of this bill and speaking to the principle of the bill, I'd just like to actually read into the record the preamble to the bill and then speak to a couple of the issues. The bill says:

Whereas the health, safety and well-being of children and families is of paramount importance to the people of Alberta;
Whereas parents have a legitimate interest in and responsibility for medical treatment provided to their minor children; and
Whereas decisions about a child's capacity to consent to non-emergent medical treatment are more appropriately made by the child's parents,

and then the bill goes on to describe what it does. I think that is the essence of the debate of the principle of the bill, and I want to speak to two of the issues there.

One would be the second one where "parents have a legitimate interest in and responsibility for medical treatment . . . to their minor children." That particular clause speaks to the paramountcy of parental rights and responsibility. In one sense, Mr. Speaker, we dealt with that issue during last session with Bill 202, when we discussed the mechanism whereby a parent could forcibly take their minor child into treatment for drug issues. That paramountcy was supported and, in fact, loudly endorsed throughout our country as an

appropriate mechanism. So I think that is a very important issue that we are dealing with.

4:50

A number of people have made some comments – and they're accurate – that not all parents are good parents, and that does present challenges to this bill. I do want to question one of the arguments that says that this is an intrusion into the relationship between a youth and its doctors, nurses, and social workers. In fact, Mr. Speaker, allowing young people to make decisions without the involvement of their parents is actually an intrusion into the relationship between a parent and their youth.

That leads me to the second issue to deal with, and that's capacity. In Alberta there are a number of criteria that must be met for consent to be valid. One is that the consent must be voluntary, so that implies that consent is given without coercion, without compulsion, and that it's based on factual information. The second element – and I just alluded to it – is that the patient must be properly informed. In other words, medical consent is by definition informed consent. Before medical treatment can be consented to, the attending physician has a duty to disclose any and all possible ramifications that may result from the treatment or lack thereof. Treatment undertaken without informed consent can constitute battery and/or negligence. Mr. Speaker, that is important, but I would also argue that not only is information about the medical system important; there are also a number of other factors whereby a parent can bring to bear things of importance to their own belief system, their own family situation, any number. So informed consent has to be larger than just medical consent, and I think that's really where parental involvement is necessary.

Thirdly, the patient must have the capacity to consent. In other words, we make a determination whether an individual is able to understand the nature and anticipated effects of the proposed treatment and the alternatives to said treatment and is deemed to be competent to give valid consent.

Now, obviously, the bill is somewhat arbitrary in that as soon as you pick an age, it does become an arbitrary decision. Given that some teens at 15 are much more capable than other teens or have the capacity, the truth is that in many of our laws we do pick an arbitrary age because that's the only really effective way you can do it. Clearly, I don't think anybody in this Assembly would argue that a five-year-old has the capacity to make decisions about their medical treatment. So age is arbitrary, but I think it's a reasonable age considering all the circumstances.

The point has been raised that minors may not have confidence in their parents, and that is true. I think that's an issue that all of us as parents have dealt with. There's a certain age with our children. I recall quite distinctly that one of our children in particular insisted at the junior high age that we should not come and watch her play her sports activities. I mean, she might be embarrassed by the fact that we showed up. Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that I did not take her advice. I showed up for all of her games, and now that she is well into adulthood and has three of my grandchildren, I think she's quite happy, in fact, that we insisted that we would show up and show her support. She was actually, I think, glad that we showed up.

There is the issue of coercion, and certainly this is a valid argument for those on the opposite side of the position I'm taking, that you can't coerce co-operation from your teens. It's a challenge that all parents face. In fact, I'm reminded of a well-known story where a young man took half of the inheritance and left his father to go live in a different country and squander all of his money. The story goes on to say that when he came to his senses, he came back,

and his father received him with open arms. I think that's a true picture of the feeling and passion that parents, in this case a father, have that really desperately want the best for their children.

Mr. Speaker, despite reasonable arguments to the contrary – and there are valid reasons to the contrary – on balance for me the paramountcy of parental rights and responsibility trumps those arguments, and I certainly am in support of the principle of this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to rise today to speak to Bill 204, and I compliment the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for bringing it forward. As we've been discussing this afternoon, this bill is to protect the well-being of children and the rights of parents by making parental involvement mandatory in young minors' decisions to obtain nonemergency medical treatments.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm reminded of when I was a teenager. There were six kids in our family, and we were all about a year apart in age, so we were quite a herd. My father had a wonderful way of controlling our behaviour. He had four vehicles, none of which was very nice. In fact, I think we could see the ground through the floorboards on the old family station wagon, but he held the keys.

An Hon. Member: It was a motorcycle.

Mrs. Ady: Oh, it was a motorcycle?

He held the keys to these four vehicles, and every Saturday morning he would get us up early, and depending on how pleased he was with us or not, he would distribute the four sets of keys amongst the six children. You always knew when you were out of favour because you did not get a key. You were digging in your purse for bus fare. I bring that up as a point that keys sometimes are important things, and they were certainly important in our lives at that moment.

When I look at this bill, I look at the keys that we give parents to help them raise their children. We certainly give them the responsibility. In fact, I mentioned earlier that while I was in Australia, an hon. member was bringing forward a bill to make parents have to sign contracts to say that they were in charge of their children and responsible for them. I thought it was a fairly different looking bill but still being brought forward. So we want parents to be responsible. In fact, when things go wrong with kids, we always ask the question: where are the parents? Why aren't the parents involved? Haven't they trained their children? Aren't they checking? Aren't they observing? You know, we give them all those responsibilities, but sometimes we don't give them the keys that they need in order to assist and aid their children when they're trying to raise them and help them turn into responsible adults.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have a wonderful family doctor. She's been involved in my life and my children's lives for some 20 – well, my oldest son is 26 now. I would say that we have a high degree of trust in each other. She's been involved in all the different adolescent ailments that my children have had, and I would say that they have a lot of trust in her as well. But does that mean that it's primarily her responsibility to raise my children, or is it mine? I think about that. She's a mother. She has children, and I think she probably would want to have that responsibility not taken from her to be involved in those really important decisions that kids make.

Earlier I heard people talking about cosmetic surgery. I am very concerned today with the way young women are starting to mutilate their bodies in order to try and capture some ideal. We're seeing a huge escalation in those kinds of surgeries. As a parent I think it's

important that we be involved with our young people in those decisions. I've heard certain members talk about the fact that there are some ugly realities. There are kids out there who do not have involved parents. I heard the word "divorce" mentioned, which we know is at epidemic proportions in some ways. I would say to you, Mr. Speaker, that I know of a lot of divorced families where even though divorce has occurred, those parents are still very involved in their children's lives and really doing good things as parents in their lives.

5:00

I used to always say to my sons, "You know, if you need a rule, I'll make you a rule. I don't know that your brothers all need to have the same rule because they're not having problems. Just you are, so I'll make you a special rule if you need a rule." They hated that, but it's kind of how I felt about parenting. Most of us are trying really hard to be good parents, albeit imperfect. We make mistakes, and sometimes, like the former hon. member mentioned, our kids go through phases where they don't communicate well with us. I, too, had children that would not walk with me in the mall. They wanted to be, like, five stores behind or five stores ahead. They wanted to be dropped off a block from school. They went through those phases, and fortunately they didn't last overly long.

I would say to you that most parents that I know truly want to be good parents. They're trying their very best, and they need as many keys as possible in order to assist and aid their children as they develop. That's one of the reasons that I am attracted to the principles of this bill. I think it does give those keys to parents.

When I look at a 15-year-old, and I look at what that means in grade 9 – I think we're about at grade 9 at the very most. I have young adult sons right now, and I can tell you that even though they're 26 years old, they are still calling me, and we're still solving problems together, and they're a lot more mature than 15. At 15 on the range of where their intellect stood or their capacity to make great decisions, I don't know if I had great confidence then that they should be making life-altering decisions or even minor ones at that point in their lives. I mean, I just felt like it was a good thing to be involved in.

I recognize that all kids do not have the ability to communicate with their parents and that sometimes only a doctor is there, only a social worker, only a teacher, but I would say to you that most kids still do have parents that do care, and we should give them every key that we can in order for them to carry out that responsibility. You know, we celebrate with our kids, we suffer with our kids, we support our kids, but mostly we love our kids. I think we should protect children and let parents do their job.

So I'd like to support this bill and thank the hon. member for bringing it forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to discuss this bill. Quite simply, I don't want to reiterate a lot of the things that have been said. I don't believe that anyone can go against parents being involved in their young children's lives. I think that for people under 15 it's quite legitimate for parents to be involved, for parents to be concerned with what is happening to their child, and I agree, quite frankly, with the majority of things that have been said.

The only comment that I would suggest – and this is a comment that I made to the sponsor of this bill as the bill was coming forward – is that they really should give a much narrower definition of medical treatment. Medical treatment should be defined as a

specific thing. I'll give you an example. If a 14-year-old comes to see a physician for an ear infection, there's no problem with the mother simply dropping them off, the child sitting in the doctor's office waiting to see the physician, and subsequently having treatment rendered to him.

So I do agree with the principles of this bill, and this is something that I have stated to the sponsor of the bill. I believe in the principles. I believe in parental responsibility. I believe in parental advice. I believe in parental knowledge for those children that are under the care and auspices of the parent. However, I do believe as well that the terminology of medical treatment must be clearly defined and must be clearly laid out. I believe the intentions of the hon. sponsor of this bill are extremely good. Therefore, I will be supporting it, but I would hope that in committee there would be a definition given to medical treatment in this bill and that it would be altered as such, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I read the bill very carefully and listened to the comments made on both sides of the aisle very carefully. In the bill the whereas clauses of the bill appear very innocuous, and I don't imagine that anyone in this Chamber could agree on what those particular sections of the bill mean.

When one actually reads the bill and realizes what the bill aims at accomplishing, I think it would be very difficult to argue that this is not about any and all medical procedures. I hear mention of plastic surgeries, for example, being touted as one of the procedures that could be prevented from being done without the consent of a parent. Well, perhaps in some cases, although the cost of those plastic procedures usually in themselves cause them to be prohibitive to young people to be done without the consent of a parent. We're not also talking here about eye surgery.

I may be going out on a limb, but I think we're talking about abortion over here, that the intention of the bill is to regulate children's ability to obtain abortion without the consent of the parent. Now, if that is the case, that may be right or it may be wrong depending on one's personal convictions and the convictions of his or her constituents. However, if that is what we are to debate here in this Chamber, then let's draft a bill that speaks directly to abortions, and then we can debate this bill in a coherent way and know what we're all talking about.

Mr. Speaker, there are several problems with this particular bill. If those, quote, medical procedures, unquote, are not available to the children, what options will the children have if they choose not to disclose the need for such a procedure to their parent? What alternative options will the children have, and how will they self-administer alternate medical procedures to achieve the same goal if, indeed, they are not in a position or choose not to or cannot – because in many cases they cannot – share the need for that medical procedure with their parents? Are we willing to accept the alternatives and accept the repercussions of legislating this bill into being and then accepting the repercussions of kids self-medicating and providing themselves with alternative medical procedures?

Mr. Speaker, the essence of the bill really lies in the relationship between a parent and a child. I imagine that in this Chamber most, if not all, parents have good relationships with their children. As a matter of fact, probably most of our families, if not most of our constituents, have good relationships with our children where our child would come to us and disclose a need for a medical procedure. For us, then, we don't need this bill. Our children will come to us anyhow; they will disclose the need for a medical procedure anyhow. Indeed, if it's a procedure that they need, by virtue of the

fact that they're coming to us and asking for it, we'll either grant it or not, and the problem issue is resolved.

Now, this bill will only be addressed for those children who choose not to or who cannot go to their parent or a guardian to obtain permission. If they cannot or will not go to their parent to obtain permission, it doesn't matter how many laws we pass in this House. They still won't do it. Now, by compelling them to do it, what you really are doing is depriving them of their ability to go to their doctor, seek sound medical advice, and obtain whatever treatment or surgical procedure they may require, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the question lies in: do we trust our doctors? Do we trust our doctors in the absence of a parent's consent to provide a child with sound medical treatment or sound medical surgery? Well, I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that in this Chamber at least all of us ought to because we are the ones who legislate doctors into place. We are the ones who legislate the body that governs doctors' procedures in place, and we are the ones where the buck stops if doctors do something wrong. Now, if we don't trust our doctors to provide our children with sound medical treatment, then I think we should re-examine the whole process by which we put doctors in place and whether they are governed by proper ethics and codes of conduct.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that we do trust our doctors. We trust them in our absence to provide our children with the treatment that they do require and that will not render them seeking alternative medical treatments outside of the medical community and putting their lives in hazard.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, lawyer I am not, but again I would venture to say that Charter arguments could very easily be formulated against this bill. I heard the United Nations proclamation of children's rights being quoted. One of the main aspects of the proclamation is to provide children with medical treatment. Well, this bill deprives children of obtaining medical treatment where they are not willing or able to obtain consent from a parent.

5:10

As a teacher, as an educator, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you – and I believe I heard the Member from Calgary-Varsity mention that it is not uncommon to have a student come to a teacher and say: "Teacher, I want to talk to you one-on-one. I have something embarrassing I want to tell you, something that I cannot share with anybody else." You'd be surprised how often teachers in our classrooms learn of personal situations that children go through at home or with their family or just personally that parents never are privileged to find out because of the fact that there is that sense of anonymity in their ability to obtain advice.

As such, Mr. Speaker, I am moving that the motion for second reading of Bill 204 be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 204, Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'd ask that copies of that amendment be circulated to all, and we'll just wait for a fraction of a second until it is.

Hon. members, we have an amendment on this particular bill before the House generally referred to as a hoist amendment. Those who would like to may participate in this debate. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to have it registered in *Hansard* that the reality of hoisting this bill and suggesting that it be discussed six months hence basically kills the bill because six months hence the Legislature is not likely to be open.

I would like to think that when we debate within this House, our debate has meaning, that we speak from the heart, that we lay out our personal beliefs, and to the greatest extent possible we attempt to lay out the realities and the feelings and sentiments of our constituents. If this just simply becomes a platform for marketing our religious or moral beliefs to our constituents, then a large part of the purpose of this Legislature is lost. So I'm hoping that this was not an exercise in discussion and debate but that it was based on the member opposite's belief that this bill did not meet the requirements and, therefore, was basically taken out.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor, interestingly enough, we have a Standing Order 25(2), which states: "Except as otherwise provided in this Standing Order, no reply is allowed the mover of an amendment or a superseding motion" with respect to this matter. The hon. member brought to my attention an event that occurred in this House on March 6, 2006, when, in fact, the chair at that time did recognize the mover of the superseding motion. So I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor and permit him to participate with respect to this hoist amendment, and we'll spend some time redoing this in the future.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that, and perhaps we're making a little bit of history this afternoon. Maybe we'll have to change our Standing Orders in the future to reflect what's happening.

On the hoist amendment I want to say that I do sincerely appreciate the debate that has happened in this House this afternoon. This, I feel, is what the Legislature is all about. I'll be honest with you: I learned a lot this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I've seen the contents of this bill, what I'm trying to do, from different sides that I had not heard even amongst discussions within our own caucus. I heard some new viewpoints today, and I would have to say that I was very enlightened about some of the different difficulties with this bill as well as some of the positives, obviously. When you put a bill forward in the House, you tend to see only the positives. You tend to think that it is a bit of a cure-all. When it hits the floor of the Legislature, then there is an opportunity to see what other people think, perhaps to get some outside views through various interest groups and through various cards and letters, et cetera. Certainly, I think the debate has been extremely valuable.

I was a little scared to introduce this bill, Mr. Speaker, because it is a socially conservative bill. It is a pro-life bill. I'm not trying to spread my religion to anybody. I'm trying to do the right thing, I believe, for all Albertans. Many of our laws in this land are based on moral traditions. They're based on the Bible, quite frankly. "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not kill." A lot of the laws that we have today are based on tradition from the Holy Scripture. Although this bill certainly doesn't go that far, there's no doubt that because of my Christian and religious convictions I felt that this bill was very, very important.

I will also say that there are a lot of social conservatives in Alberta. There are a lot of pro-lifers in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. I have received a lot of cards and letters and e-mails, et cetera, asking for this kind of thing to be done. This bill is not a bill that would end abortion. It's certainly not a bill that would defund abortion. It's simply a bill that would try to get parents involved in a major decision, such as an abortion, but it could also be obtaining contraceptives through a doctor's prescription, or it could be cosmetic surgery, as was mentioned in several speeches here. Quite frankly, it's simply a bill that is trying to get more parents and children communicating with each other.

As I said, there a lot to think about with regard to the hoist motion. Perhaps six months from now there will be some more information that would come to light that would help us to make a better decision on this bill. I know that some of the points that were brought up about the mature minor doctrine – well, that's a doctrine that was established for a 20-year-old back in the early '70s, when the age of majority was 21. A 20-year-old was trying to get some medical treatment without their parents' consent, and they were able to get that. So that's when the mature minor doctrine was established. To say that it should apply to 15-year-olds I think is ludicrous, and that's why I brought this bill forward.

Bill 204 is not a slam on doctors or health professionals. It's simply a strong endorsement of parental rights and responsibilities. As I said, we do this kind of thing: we set age limits with smoking, with cigarette purchasing, with the consumption of alcohol, and with other things. I felt that it was reasonable to try to do it with regard to medical treatment.

There were some speeches that talked about a situation of desperation. That's why I tried to put in a judicial bypass here, that you could go to a social worker or a teacher or a counsellor. You could go to a third party, and you could try to have them advocate on your behalf as an adult in order to receive whatever medical treatment you felt you needed.

I think it's pretty sad that in some of the speeches that were against this bill, you know, some of the points that were brought out were maybe not fair to the bill. But, again, that's the whole value and beauty of debate. There were many people asking for this through e-mails, petitions, letters, and calls.

With regards to the Charter issue, well, the Charter is there to protect individual rights, so all bills are subject to the Charter. I mean, if you feel that the bill isn't coinciding with the Charter, then let it be tested in the courts. That's what the courts are there for. That's what the Charter is there for. We don't assume that something is going to go against the Charter before we know the full implications of it.

5:20

Lastly, I guess, just defining medical treatment, Mr. Speaker: that seemed to come up in a few speeches. Sections 3 and 4 clearly

define medical treatment as any nonemergency procedure or service that involves medical personnel, not a teacher or a school secretary administering a band-aid. That's just ridiculous to bring up examples like that. It's talking about a medical person doing a medical procedure. That's what the definition is. Again, it's very, very clear in the bill.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'll just tell a little story about my own son. I have a son who is 14 years old, and when he reached a certain age, he was allowed by his school to go uptown and go to 7-Eleven. A note came home, and it said that they have to have the parents' consent in order to allow the child to leave the school grounds and go to 7-Eleven. So we took the note, and we sat down with my son. We had a good chat with him about all the pros and cons of going to 7-Eleven. We talked to him about some of the things that he would face at 7-Eleven, some of the temptations, such as stealing, such as maybe being offered drugs or such other things, maybe the temptation to skip out of school once you got off the school grounds. Anyhow, we had a good, long chat with my son, who is 14, and, lo and behold, we decided to give him permission to leave the school grounds. I thought that was really reasonable.

I think it's unfortunate that in Alberta we don't have to have permission for our 15-year-old or our 14-year-old daughters to go and get an abortion so that we can have the same opportunity to discuss the pros and the cons and the good and the bad of such a decision. That's what this bill was trying to do, but I understand that we need to give it more thought. I understand, Mr. Speaker, that maybe we need to have more debate on this issue.

So, in closing, I do support the hoist motion. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 204 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I would move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 13, 2006**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/03/13

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Youth Consultation

503. Mr. Danyluk moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government, municipal governments, and community organizations to develop mechanisms to formally consult the youth of Alberta on issues that affect their future.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to discuss Motion 503. It is often said that youth are our future, and I do not believe anybody would disagree with this comment, including myself. Therefore, if youth are our future, we need to listen to their voice so that they may help to shape this future which we talk about. This is what Motion 503 proposes.

I feel that it is important to have ongoing and consistent input from youth in order to have an impact on the true needs and challenges of Alberta youth. We must have a structural change to hear the voice of our youth. This must be ever clear, Mr. Speaker. Youth must be involved at the community level, the municipal level, right up to the provincial level.

Presently what we have is youth forums – and they are held throughout the province – that give input for youth. We also have some networking that takes place between those groups to the Youth Advisory Panel. I sit on the Youth Secretariat for the province of Alberta, and there is the Youth Advisory Panel, which consists of 16 youths from throughout the province, yet we do not have any formal connection between the forums, the networking, the Youth Advisory Panel, and the government.

In this province there are approximately 840,000 children and youth. The voices of these individuals must be heard by us as adults and, more importantly, as legislators. Youth should be viewed as a resource. They have the solutions that we are often searching for. They know better than anyone the issues that affect them, but they also have valuable and insightful opinions on all issues that affect this province. It is time that we listen to their voices on a constant and consistent basis. They have the ability to enhance our province as a whole with their input.

As of yet we really do not have a co-ordinated and constant mechanism for consultation with youth at every level. Some may argue that youth simply lose interest in the process. I believe that in order to keep youth engaged, they must be provided with a system with meaningful input. In giving them such an opportunity, our youth are quite likely to be interested in formal consultation.

One of the best features of this motion is that it in fact does not set how the government, municipal governments, and communities should go about consulting with the youth of Alberta. This allows groups in the community, municipalities, and at a provincial level the space and flexibility to decide on a mechanism that works best for their community. My concern is that the youth of this province be consulted; the method for this consultation is up to the government and community organizations in which they are involved.

Mr. Speaker, we need to consult with the youth of today. The

youth of today are the ones who will be running our province. We must have Alberta's youth voice their opinions, concerns, and thoughts on the future direction for this province. As the chair of the Youth Secretariat I have worked with and worked for young Albertans a great deal. It has been my experience that the youth are very bright and very enthusiastic as a whole. They have good ideas, and given the opportunity, they can give valuable inputs on issues that affect their future.

Part of the role of the Youth Secretariat is to identify and work to address the needs of adolescents. The key part in reaching this goal is the Youth Advisory Panel. The advisory panel youths work with the Youth Secretariat to come up with solutions to issues that impact the youth of our province. They come up with new ideas and suggestions that enhance our secretariat as a whole.

Our group is made up of a wide variety of individuals, ones of different experiences and different settings in their community. Therefore, I suggest to you that this group represents a great mixture of youth from our province, and their input is priceless to the government of Alberta and to myself as chair of the Youth Secretariat. With their help we can work to address the challenges of the use and abuse of illegal drugs, such as methamphetamines, by young Albertans. We can work to enhance services for youth and fill the gaps in such services. We can do a lot of great things when youth are involved. The answers they have, Mr. Speaker, are often the solutions we are looking for.

Mr. Speaker, the Youth Secretariat is only one form of youth consultation. There are others within the province that are also listening to the voice of youth. We have the Alberta youth forums, as I stated earlier, the Alberta children's and youth initiative under our youth networks, as I previously mentioned as well. These are only some of the programs at the provincial level.

We also have programs at the municipal level. For instance, there is the City of Edmonton Youth Council, which acts as a voice for those youth in the city. The city of Calgary also has input from city youth. They have the opportunity to voice their opinions on such things as Calgary Transit and to be part of groups such as the mayor's youth council.

Mr. Speaker, we do have some youth input in this province. I believe an enhanced mechanism for consultation would be a good thing for all Albertans. Youth change a great deal from the time they are children until they become adults. They know how to work with new technologies before the majority of adults do, and the technology is changing so rapidly. They seem to be able to keep up with these changes. Youth are adaptable, and they can help us a great deal in many ways, only one of which is the technology.

The reality of the youth of Alberta can be used as a resource to help us realize and attempt to address the challenges that face them as a group and all Albertans in general. We have to make sure we are consulting the youth of this province from a community position up to and including a provincial position. We need to transpose the voice of our youth into a positive direction for youth, which, as a result, would be successful for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the importance of the youth in Alberta having a voice.

8:10

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tonight we're discussing Motion 503, which wants us, the Members of the Legislative Assembly, to urge the provincial and municipal governments and community organizations to develop mechanisms to formally consult

the youth of Alberta on issues that affect their future. Well, let's see here. This motion is from an hon. government backbencher, right? Why didn't the hon. member just discuss this within his own caucus or meet with the Premier one-on-one or talk to the minister or ministers involved?

Actually, let me try to determine who the ministers involved are. I know we have a Minister of Children's Services, so is she the one responsible for provincial policy pertaining to youth? Ontario, for example, has a Minister of Children and Youth Services; Saskatchewan has a Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation; British Columbia runs youth programs under its Children and Family Development ministry: different names but the same emphasis on young people and their needs.

It doesn't matter what you call the ministry or how big the minister's title is. The issue in question is: what attention is being offered to youth programs, and what effort is devoted to engaging young Albertans? Do we need a law to tell this government it needs to do more? Can we force this government to consult with young people on everything, particularly things and decisions which primarily affect them?

You know, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't help but think about how age plays a role in how things move forward and how various decisions are arrived at. Take, for example, myself as the youngest opposition member in this House and the second youngest overall. I look around this esteemed place and compare myself to some of the older members across the way. I come with energy and ideas, and I'm really interested in dialogue and co-operation, whereas most of the members across are jaded and exhausted.

I take this to a bigger sphere and compare the Liberal Official Opposition caucus to the other caucuses in the House.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Zwozdesky: Under 23(h), (i), and (j) I think there's an attempt to impute some false motives there along to several of our members. I'm sure the member didn't mean it the way it came out, but perhaps he should just revisit that comment about members opposite because he has some members sitting beside him on both sides that are just opposite him, and I don't think they would appreciate that either.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on the point of order.

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. On the point of order, Mr. Speaker, I would just appreciate some clarification from the member opposite who raised it: what motive was I trying to impute?

An Hon. Member: Lack of respect.

The Acting Speaker: Well, this is not a kind of question/answer back and forth. A point of order has been raised. He had an opportunity to respond, and I have the task of providing a ruling.

Hon. member, the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order, citing 23(h), (i), and (j). Let's see what 23(h), (i), and (j) say.

A member shall be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member:

- (h) makes allegation against another member;

- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

That one I can see possibly being within the realm of the argument being presented.

Hon. member, I'd just caution you in terms of – you know, the language that you use will incite reaction, and maybe you want to get to your point and continue arguing on the debate that's before us.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this clarification. I in no way intended to offend anyone across the way.

Okay. I can move on, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. Elsalhy: I'll say, for example, that I can communicate with some members from the other caucus more than I do with others. For example, I can communicate and work with the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who is, by the way, the youngest member in this House and the youngest member of his caucus. He presents, from time to time, useful and attention-worthy suggestions like his soon-to-be-debated idea around allocating our huge provincial surpluses.

Back to my point though. I was saying that the Alberta Liberals are the youngest caucus in this House, and as such we would definitely hope that any discussions, dialogue, or consultations would definitely involve us too. I would be interested in seeing the stats on the average age per caucus. One would even extend this survey to how old and what the average age of candidates was in the last provincial election, in 2004.

Now, should we be expanding this to discuss things like the percentage of female representation as well in each caucus? The Alliance and the NDP have none. The Tories have 14 per cent, and we the Alberta Liberals have 19 per cent. We can all do a lot better.

Some member across argues that this motion is only for youth and that we shouldn't be talking about the age of the members. Fine. How do we define youth, and what age group is captured under this definition? Teachers, health professionals, the legal system all have varying definitions for who's considered a youth.

The intent of the motion is good, of course, and I agree that we should look at ways to engage more young Albertans, but couldn't this have been accomplished by a simple letter or face-to-face dialogue with cabinet, like I mentioned earlier, instead of eating up a spot on this valuable and precious private members' time?

I'm also thinking about the recent stories and news commentaries about how the Progressive Conservative Association is having difficulty attracting young people to their party and how, in particular, those young people are not interested in attending the convention and the leadership review this March 31. It is my observation and belief that fewer and fewer young people still or would find the PC Party appealing and attractive. Quite a few Albertans, many of them young, told me that they can no longer align themselves with the provincial Tories. They are more comfortable aligning themselves and believing in the federal Tory party policies, but they cannot do the same thing here provincially.

We can probably look outside to only a few months ago. We celebrated our provincial centennial, and each of the 83 constituencies had a centennial ambassador. Most of them were retired, and the majority of them were either former candidates in provincial elections or friends of current MLAs or even constituency presidents. We didn't treat the centennial as a look to the future. Why didn't we find 83 outstanding young Albertans to act as centennial ambassadors? Is this province 100 years old, or is it 100 years young?

Another wrinkle is that everybody in this House is apprehensive and uneasy about the proposed two-tier health care changes, or the so-called third way. Shouldn't the consultation process, which is very short, one month only and by invitation only, be extended to include our provincial youth? Is it not their future or an important part of it that we're shaping here? Does the government believe that these young people are not entitled to register their opinion whether or not they want a health care system which is publicly administered, fair, and affordable. It is their future we're deciding here. What happens if the government insists on privatizing health care delivery? Some changes are going to be irrevocable, or they would be very hard to undo. What voice or recourse will these young people have when they graduate and join the workforce and plan to have little families of their own? Would it not be too late then?

On a small scale myself I started a group called the Young McClung, which is a nonpartisan youth group where young constituents between the ages of 15 and 30 gather at a local coffee place once a month and discuss issues. We go to a different coffee place each time, all within my constituency. I serve as their host. I buy them their coffee and donuts. What they do is sit around the table and discuss issues that are either current or pressing or whatever is on their mind. The kids came up with the name Mocha with Mo for that group.

The group is led by a young person who is in her fourth year of university, and I must say that everybody around that table is bright, articulate, opinionated, and enthusiastic. Like me, Mr. Speaker, they still have faith in some politicians and they have hope for a better Alberta. These young men and women meet and talk amongst themselves, sometimes asking me to explain things, or they give me their positions on the various issues, and I enjoy being a listener and taking notes. Like I mentioned, they're very bright and they're very opinionated. They're current, and they're aware of the issues.

Now, there's an example of one MLA going to the young people directly, not through an entry on an Order Paper receiving just under an hour of debate.

8:20

Another thing I have done, Mr. Speaker, with my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore was go to the students at Queen E school back when we were discussing Bill 202, dealing with the treatment and protection of children abusing drugs, in the First Session of the 26th Legislature. We went to the kids – there was a gym full of high school students, grades 10, 11, and 12 – and we asked them what they thought. They even had fill-in ballots that we gave them and they gave back to us. We listened to the for and the against arguments, and then they filled out a ballot that they deposited anonymously in a box. We tallied the votes. We told them what the result was, and everybody was so pleased and so interested in the process. The principal thanked us, and they said, you know, to do it again.

My colleagues and I are also hoping to do the same this year, this time around when we discuss Bill 204, Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act, which received its second reading today. We're hoping to engage students again in at least four high schools in Edmonton and ask them for their opinions. We not only invite them to talk and debate the issue; like I mentioned, we get them to vote and we tally their votes and tell them how it went.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that through our own initiative and because we do mean what we say, members of the Liberal opposition do in fact engage young Albertans regularly and effectively. Young people are our future leaders, as the hon. sponsor of the motion indicated, and they are the ones who will continue to move this province forward.

You notice, Mr. Speaker, that I did not even begin to touch the issue of voter apathy and how young people distance themselves from politics and elections, et cetera. I know that some of my hon. colleagues are going to speak about this in more detail. Like I stated before, the youths of this province should be encouraged to participate also in the democratic process.

Many young people, Mr. Speaker, worked on my campaign. The youngest one was 12. This guy came with his mom, and he offered to do pamphleting. I said, "Well, you know, you're probably not old enough." He goes, "No; give me the map and let me do it."

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the 10 minutes allocated have elapsed.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 503. I have my honours degree in philosophy from the university, and when I took that course, the one thing that I learned was that you always have to define your terms when you're debating any issue. So I have two issues with this motion that I hope we can clarify as the debate goes on, and hopefully at the end the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul can clarify his definition of those terms.

The first is a definition of "youth" in this motion. When most people talk about youth, they conceptualize it as sort of that age of 10 years old – yeah, just knee high to a grasshopper – to 18 years old. But to be honest, though youth fits in that definition, the youth that I think is very important to be discussed in this motion is the age group of 18 to 35. Under 18, formative years and still developing – and I've noticed because I don't go to a community in my constituency without going to see the grade 6 class and discussing with them the politics, the legislative process, municipal, federal, and provincial politics because they take it in the grade 6 curriculum. To be honest, Mr. Speaker, they get excited. They get passionate. They talk about voting, and they really discuss issues.

But, Mr. Speaker, the youth age group that typically is disenfranchised and turned off and doesn't get engaged and doesn't talk about issues is the 18 to 35 age group, the group that is just starting to get out into the real world. They might be dating. They might be married. They might start to have kids. It's not until they get to be 35 that they really get engaged because then they start to pay taxes. It's critically important to get that age group of 18 to 35 engaged, so I hope that the hon. member can clarify if that's the group he's referring to.

I have to disagree with the previous two members who both spoke. Both times they used the phrase that youth are the leaders of tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that's fundamentally wrong because tomorrow never comes. We are always at today, and these youth, 18 to 35, are the leaders of today and need to be engaged as such.

Now, the second issue that I hope the hon. member who brought forward this motion can clarify is the word "consult," consult on issues that affect them, Mr. Speaker, because that's very vague. I'm not sure what that exactly means. What issues particularly affect youth besides maybe young issues? Quite frankly, every single issue that we debate in this Legislature, every single decision that's made at the municipal, provincial, or federal level affects youth because they have to live with the decisions that we make today for the next 20 years. They need to be consulted on the best ways, the greatest ideas on how to deal with seniors' housing issues. If it costs one level of government something, it's going to be paid for by youth.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's always been my experience – and I'm talking about people younger than me – that younger people

have the most creative, innovative, flexible ideas that I've ever heard because they don't have so much history and so much past that they repeat themselves, that they do things over and over the same way.

So those are the two issues that I hope the hon. member can clarify.

Now, when it comes to consulting youth, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to emphasize that there are three levels of consulting youth that most everybody goes through. They always start at the first level of consultation, and that's when you invite a group of youth in, whether they're 10 years old or 35 years old, and you ask them what their problems are. Then you say, "Thank you very much," and they leave. You've consulted them, you've heard all their issues, and that's where it stops.

Some groups, some people move on to the second level of engagement of consultation where you invite the youth in. You ask them what their issues are, and you ask them: what are some things we can do to solve them? They tell you, and then you ask them to leave. Then you actually try and implement some of them. You actually try and work on them. That's the second level of engagement.

Very few people reach the third level of engagement, which is so critical, and that's when you invite the youth in, you ask them what their problems are, their challenges are, you ask them what the solutions are, and then you ask them if you can fix it together, Mr. Speaker. When youth are being consulted, they have to be consulted in a meaningful way where they have to come up with the solutions and help implement them as well.

Now, as I mentioned before, I try and do everything in my power to engage youth. I visit every grade 6 class in every community I'm in. I don't leave without offering to come in and talk to the grade 6 class or the grade 10 class, to engage them in the curriculum and try to get them excited about politics. I have also, in partnership with a few other members, some of which are in this Assembly this evening, started to work on a group that for lack of an official name or title now is future leaders. I know that I'm succumbing to my own. They're future leaders or they're present leaders. We haven't picked a name. It's to engage young people from 18 to 35 to become leaders, to get involved in their community, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, looking on the Internet – anybody can do this. If you look up information on young leaders, there's an organization in the United States called 18 to 35, which focuses specifically on educating young people about being future leaders. Just information on how to run a meeting, *Robert's Rules of Orders*, and how you organize volunteers is critical to forming young leaders. We're hoping to accomplish a lot with this organization when we get up and running.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is an important motion for the mere fact that it talks about community-level engagement, municipal-level engagement, provincial engagement. It doesn't specifically refer to federal engagement, but it carries on. In every municipality that I've been to in the province, I have almost always been the youngest person in the room at every single meeting. I'm not just the youngest politician or legislator in the province of Alberta. It appeared for the longest time that I was the youngest politician in the entire province at any level of government. Since the last municipal election it seems like a lot more young people have gotten engaged.

Now, I'm not criticizing anyone in this House, but just to point out, Mr. Speaker, that I was first elected when I was 29. I was the sixth youngest politician elected in the history of this Legislature. I also would like to point out, though, being the youngest, that I am 20 years, almost to the day, younger than the average age of the MLAs in this House. I am 40 years younger than the two oldest MLAs in this House, and I have to point out that the two oldest

MLAs are from other parties, not from our party. This House right now is experiencing one of the highest average ages it has ever had in its history, yet this province has the youngest population on average of any province in Canada.

Mr. Strang: Because they're all making money.

Mr. Griffiths: Well, maybe some of them are making a lot of money. This being in politics isn't exactly a highly profitable business.

Now, it's more critical than ever to engage youth – I'm talking about the 18- to 35-year-old group – to get them involved in the decisions we make today that we're going to have to live with for the next 20 years, Mr. Speaker.

8:30

Now, the last item I want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to youth is rural development. I've worked for the last four years as an MLA on rural development. We identified that health care, education, community infrastructure, economic development, growth, small business development, not just agriculture but both, youth, seniors, aboriginals, the environment, arts, and culture are all critical elements to successful rural development, but not one of them was more critical than engaging youth. For every four youth that are born in rural Alberta, three of them leave rural Alberta to go to the city and only one comes back. That causes incredible depopulation of rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the most creative, innovative ideas come from young people. Our volunteer base comes from young people. Our energy comes from young people. When those communities lose their young people, they lose their energy, they lost their creativity, and to some extent they could be doomed to die. So when most communities in this province are looking at rural development, they're trying to engage and activate themselves to find solutions to some of their problems, the first thing they are doing is engaging youth in their community. They're trying to get them involved at the municipal level, at the provincial level, on community volunteer organizations. Whether it's getting involved with the Elks or the Legion or on an economic development group, they're trying to get them involved.

Mr. Speaker, we have succession planning for agriculture across this province. That's where people who are 60, 65 years old who are thinking about retiring find ways to help transition the farm to the next generation. There are actually a couple of communities in this province now – and they're leaders in this – that have started to engage young people to find out what sort of businesses they would like to take over or start in town so that they don't have to leave to find something to do, and hopefully they'll come back. They try and get them involved in the community, involved in businesses right away.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say – and I know it's probably going to sound partisan because I'm 33 – I still classify myself as a youth because I've put it up to 35, and when I actually hit 35, I'll keep moving the bar up a bit.

An Hon. Member: You're a baby.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah, I know. I'm a baby.

Mr. Speaker, this is a critical issue, and I hope everyone supports it.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the youngest youth of the Assembly, but the 10 minutes allocated has run out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As one who has had the privilege of working with youth for many years, I realize that youth have changed a lot over the decades, and I identify with the former speaker in asking: what do we mean by youth? There are lots of different definitions, but I need to point out that youth today have roles that aren't normally attributed to them: workers, parents, and taxpayers. Youth are also increasingly independent consumers specifically targeted by corporate marketing.

Youth, I believe, can enrich our political system and our communities, but the fact is that for a variety of reasons they are less active in the formal politics of their communities than older residents. We find that approximately 1 in 4 – that is, 25 per cent – youth voters 18 to 24 voted in the 2000 federal election, whereas approximately 4 in 5 – that is, 80 per cent – of voters over 48 years old voted in the 2000 federal election. Age seems to be a primary determinant of whether one is going to vote. Only 3 per cent of Canadian party members are under age 25. The average is 59 years. So the concern is that the growing trend is that youth will not outgrow their disengagement, driving electoral participation down further.

When we talk about engagement – we use that word a lot, I think – I, too, want to say that I have worked with the youth in my community. I had them helping in my campaign, and we have some good things that are happening. While it may be true that young people are less cynical about politics than our older citizens, research shows that they do feel a profound sense of disconnect from political institutions. Elections Canada research shows that the young people who are active in volunteering in community organizations are to a considerable degree the same ones who will turn out to vote. In other words, civic engagement and voting tend to go together.

In Mill Woods we have a couple of youth groups that are doing quite well. One is called a youth federation; the other one is a youth council. They have different mandates, but the overriding thing that they have in common is the meaningful and sustained involvement of themselves in an activity focusing outside themselves.

Engagement has cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components, that is, the head, heart, and feet. When you're working with youth, you need to engage them. You need to have them participate by being active, by going out and helping people in seniors' homes, or helping in hospitals, or anything that you can find that is meaningful, that they agree is meaningful. You give them the opportunity to actually see the results of their actions then they are more likely to become engaged.

In this bill we're talking about the need for that engagement and participation. If what is taking place in our political institutions is real and offers an opportunity to make a difference, youth will participate. I think the idea of consulting with youth is well and good, but it must be more than tokenism, must be more than the public consultations that ask for opinions and then ignore them, and it must be more than staging the questions to come out with a predetermined conclusion. If political leaders really want to consult with youth, they have to be prepared to be called on the carpet without excuses or evasions and be able to admit when they blew it: the same direct kind of language that youth will use when they talk to each other. Then we have a hope of meaningful consultation. If that type of consultation is the intention of this bill, then it is an act of courage, and I will support it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words on this motion. I find this motion to

be rather important, even though it's only a motion. It's not a piece of legislation. I think the very fact that we're having this dialogue over here and becoming more conscious of the fact that there is a need out there for engaging our youth in the political process is important within itself. But with one caution: as I listened to some of the previous speakers, I noticed that there was a tendency to politicize this conversation. All of a sudden this has become a Liberal versus Conservative or perhaps NDP versus Liberal conversation. I think that in itself misses the very essence of why the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul has put the motion forward because in my opinion that kind of dialogue is the very reason why youth don't engage in the political process.

I think the youth of today are much more open minded and much less affiliated to very well-defined doctrines and regimes and political parties and are much more likely to be shifting based on personal convictions and on the topic being debated. To try to polarize our youth now between political lines is self-defeatist because that's the way to detract as opposed to attract the youth.

It's not a secret that all political parties within this country are seeking greater input from youth and are seeking larger enrolment and membership of youth, maybe not necessarily in the formal process of purchasing a membership but just sheer engagement in the process and in development of policy. I think every party not only provincially but even federally. We had all major parties federally having drives to get the vote out during the last election on the federal scale, recognizing the fact that we're losing youth's attention. How are we losing it? Because of the politicized debate and the very derogatory and, perhaps, overzealous arguing of topics, and that loses their attention.

Mr. Speaker, we need to engage the youth. If we are to get fresh ideas, if we are to be in touch with a large segment of our voting population, we need to know what their thoughts are; we need to know what their dreams are; we need to know what they like and what they dislike about what we do. And they are a large percentage. If you use the 30 per cent bracket or 35 per cent bracket, we're looking at a large percentage of voters. Imagine if we chose not to engage males in the political process or chose not to engage females in the political process. That would be unthinkable. Yet somehow perhaps not on purpose, perhaps not by design, simply by our conduct we choose not to engage the youth, and I think it's incumbent upon us to engage our youth in the political process. Not in the traditional political process. They don't need to buy memberships, but they need to be involved. They need to read newspapers.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that we're in a very troublesome situation. If you combine the sales of the *Edmonton Sun* and the *Edmonton Journal* and compare them to the population of the readership, less than one-quarter of individuals – and that's allowing for shelf life of a newspaper – read daily news. That means they're disinterested. They, frankly, are not interested in what's going on in the House. They're not interested in the political process. Why? Because, frankly, they don't think it engages them. They don't think it has anything to do with them, and it's almost a fatalistic approach. They feel that they can't influence the process at all.

So I commend the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul for thinking of this motion, for bringing it forward, and for at least getting us to reflect on it. If it's only for an hour, perhaps some of this residual conversation will carry on outside of this Chamber and motivate some of us to get the youth involved in the process.

As such, Mr. Speaker, I will support that motion. I think it's a noble one, and it carries a lot of potential. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleasure to rise and speak to this interesting motion from a relatively young member of this Assembly, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul. It was, indeed, very interesting to hear the youngest member of the Assembly speak on the motion and about issues of youth and age and these demographics that we seem to take as unproblematic, as if once you turn 25 or 30, you all of a sudden overnight change.

The motion similarly has the intention of focusing on engaging younger members of our communities, of our province. I presume engaging them in matters of public interest, public policy because this Assembly's responsibility primarily is not with the private lives of individuals, whether they're young or old, but more with their public status as citizens, as members of communities, and the issues that are relevant in terms of public policy to them.

So I think the motion lacks some sort of focus on what exactly it calls on this Assembly to do by way of consultation and exactly whom. It's easy to slice populations in terms of age, but does age really matter all that much when it comes to, for example, issues of war and peace, issues of environmental pollution or environmental health, or the future of our health care system? I think there are many issues, public policy issues, over which distinctions of age blur relative to other variables or other identities that people might have. Whether people are poor or rich might matter more whether they're young or old on a certain issue. Whether people live in rural areas or in urban areas may be yet another matter. Consumption of culture is another issue, you know, what kinds of tastes, lifestyles, people adopt. Age may be more significant, for example, in that regard.

So simply referring to youth without exactly indicating what we are talking about, does raise some of these issues which must be addressed. Questions that are begged by this are, you know: is youth an identity, or is youth just a matter of numerical, sort of, configuration? You're over 25 or 30. I know that in the youth wing of the New Democratic Party, you know, the top age is 25. CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency, has a cut-off age of 30. There are various measures, various positions on when youth ends and the sort of postyouth period starts. So it's not clear exactly what youth is going to be consulted and for what reasons.

The identity of being young is another matter because once people begin to define themselves as belonging to a certain group, in this case being youth, then that matters socially; that matters politically; that matters in terms of policy. So I think these are questions that are germane to the debate on this motion before we proceed to the consultation issue.

A second one on the issue of consultation that worries me a bit: consultation over the last little while has got itself a black eye, if I may use that term. People ask: what does it really mean? Is it getting a few people together behind closed doors and talking with them about matters that you have on your agenda, or is it really public participation in a public forum where youth argue with each other, youth exchange ideas with each other and with others who are not so youthful or young? The whole question of consultation sounds very nice but raises questions about what exactly, if this Legislature voted on this motion and endorsed it, consultation would mean. What form will it take? Will it be open? Will it be transparent? Will it be engaging? Will it ensue into healthy debates about issues of the day, or will it be exercised again in selectively picking people and then sitting with them to interest them in issues that may be on the top of the mind of those who want consultation. For me to enthusiastically support the motion, I would like to have some answers to these questions. What is this group that we are talking about?

There were references to the oldest members of the House being on this side of the House or that side of the House, and I just want to

assure those young members of the House that age may not in fact separate us as much as ideas might. It's not so much a matter of years; it's a question of what ideals move you, what ideas you espouse and embrace, what kind of dreams you have about not only your own future and about your own cohort of aging people but about the world in which you hope we'll all walk into in the next few years or the next decades.

To me it is that kind of engagement that we need to invite people to talk about: what kind of world they want, what kind of future they envision, and how they think that they can challenge us all – young and old, poor and rich, rural and urban, highly educated and those who drop out of school – how we can all engage each other in asking those important questions, the questions about our future. Youth is our future, but all of us have a future, and all of us have a stake in that future. Surely, if we can get more young people, men and women, participating in our political system, turning up at election time and at least voting, that would be great.

I think we have to really get everyone to ask the question: how can we get all of those people who at the moment sit outside of the political process engaged, be they young, be they old? Why is it that people don't participate? People don't see their stakes in important issues of the day, whether they're talked about in this Assembly or outside by volunteer organizations, nongovernmental organizations, community groups, or church organizations, whoever they may be. There are important issues, there are important questions to be addressed, and there is a concern that the public sphere seems to be of declining interest to a growing percentage of people, particularly young. If we lose people and their interest in the public sphere, I think the whole future of democracy is at risk. If we inspire each other to engage each other in these core issues and core concerns, I'm sure we'll be able to get the youth involved in it too.

8:50

I certainly applaud the member for bringing forward this idea, this opportunity for us to debate, but these are issues that require serious questions about what we are talking about. Are the distinctions and these divisions really as clear cut as sometimes motions such as these assume? I'm afraid my view is that they aren't; therefore, the motion lacks clarity, lacks focus. I hope this kind of discussion will help the member to move forward with a clearer view of what he wants to accomplish with this motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Motion 503, youth consultation. I do feel somewhat qualified to speak on the topic. It's, believe it or not, not too long ago that I was actually fitting into that category although, like many members, it's slipping very quickly away.

Motion 503 is an idea whose time has definitely come, and I'm very pleased that we're discussing it here today. Now, that is not to say that this government has not already encouraged the involvement of youth. There are several government initiatives and programs that are aimed specifically at youth and with good reason. As the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul has suggested, the most precious resource in Alberta is not our oil or our wheat; it is our children.

At this point I wonder if it is the will of the fine Members of this Legislative Assembly for me to break into a rousing rendition of Whitney Houston's "I believe that children are our future."

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Rodney: No? No song? Okay. Well, I'll just give you a cliché then, the cliché being: the leaders of tomorrow. Of course, the Member for Battle River-Wainwright has dealt with this already. I'll just say this: the future success and failure of this province will be their responsibility sooner than we think. The ideas they develop in the next 20 or 30 months, the next 20 or 30 years will be directly tied to the perceptions that they form today. So it's vital that they be involved in every way possible.

When I say involved, Mr. Speaker, I speak in the broadest sense. The possibilities, obviously, are limitless. There aren't too many young things Albertans don't have an interest in or won't have an interest in at some point in the future. Many issues we discuss in the present will have great significance for the citizens of tomorrow, so it makes great sense to get them engaged as soon as possible.

Sometimes when we think of a process of engaging youth, we tend to think of only those who are disadvantaged or those who are in need of help. In other cases, we as adults think that youth should be consulted only about so-called youth issues. Sometimes we feel that youth face specific challenges that are different from those we face as adults. In some cases this may be true; however, many of the decisions that adults make are made with the future interests of children in mind – we talked about it earlier today – so it isn't unreasonable that we make every effort to engage them in a wider range of issues.

There are a lot of perceptions about young people – there always have been – that may prevent them from becoming involved. Sometimes younger folks are seen as apathetic, but after having worked for quite some time now, over a couple of decades, I can tell you that what I've seen is the exact opposite. I know that the great majority of our young people are overflowing with ideas, and what I really like about this motion is that it is not restrictive. This is an important gesture which reinforces the point that we want the input of our young people. Sometimes certain adults can get caught up in the belief that experience is the only prerequisite for wisdom. When that happens, we lose sight of the fact that cynicism can then develop, which may prevent new ideas and perspectives.

Young people often look at things from a different viewpoint. We know that. Sometimes a different viewpoint is exactly what's needed to bring clarity to an issue. If there were never any new ideas, no progress would ever be made. Right now, right across the province young people possess great ideas that are well worth investigation. Motion 503 seeks to strengthen input of youth and increase their involvement in decisions that affect their future. We have a duty to make these decisions in their best interest. To do that, we need their help, not only to brainstorm but to create the action plan and then implement it. Some of us may not be around for that implementation, so indeed it is directly related to them.

Therefore, it stands to reason, Mr. Speaker, that we should facilitate in every way possible the involvement of our youth as we continue to improve our province and give consideration to the ideas of tomorrow today. This motion is a vital step towards that goal, and I'm proud to offer it my support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Youth are obviously critically important to us, and youth issues are equally important to them and to parents and to all of us as a society. I have to tell you that as Minister of Education I have the pleasure of being in touch with youth every single day, and I take that responsibility very seriously. It's for that very reason that in my ministry we are going to be hosting a series of round-tables around the province starting

very soon, culminating with a symposium on high school completion rates later this fall; at least that is the plan and that's the target. We want to consult very specifically with youth and for youth about issues that are affecting them.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, we hope to come out with a very thoughtful and thorough game plan that will help us to increase the high school completion rates in the three-year window, which members here would know is where we need the improvements made. We're not doing too badly in the four-year window or the five-year window. We're certainly doing very well when we talk about youth in the 25-year-old range, if we can still refer to those as youth, and the numbers in that age who have completed high school, but that's quite a few years after the normal expected completion date.

I also want to mention quickly that there will be considerable consultation going on with respect to the Premier's Crystal Meth Task Force. This is another serious way that we are consulting with and for youth. It's not restricted to them, obviously, but we will be talking with them a lot. Last year I had engaged my officials in a crystal meth study to find out what the issues were out in the community. In fact, I talked with every single school board when I met with them about this issue, and they, too, are speaking with their youth more actively perhaps now than before.

Finally, in my role as Minister of Community Development over the past few years, before I took on Minister of Education, I can recall our annual Vitalize conference. Vitalize, as people here would know, is a conference for volunteers essentially. This is a conference well past its 20th year, as I recall. There was a specific component every year within that particular conference for youth to meet and to speak, to gather, to chat, share ideas, and typically, if memory serves, we had about 150 to 200, perhaps more, representatives in the youth category. In 2009, of course, we're hosting the international skills competition, which is all about youth as well, and I don't have time to get into that.

However, I do want to applaud the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul for having brought this particular issue forward because he's trying to share through his motion that municipal governments and community organizations and all of us have a stake in the future of our youth and in listening to what their issues are and responding accordingly. Therefore, I will be pleased to support this particular motion, which has at its heart a formal consultation mechanism or series of mechanisms at all levels of government to advance the issues that are on the minds of the youth today and how those issues will impact their future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge other members to seriously consider supporting this. Let's give it a chance to work its way through and see what we can do to make things a little better for the youth of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to close debate.

9:00

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all hon. members of this Legislature for their comments and, I guess I'd have to say, for their song.

I do want to make a couple comments. The first one is to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who basically brought forward the concept that age is very relative. From that aspect, saying that age is relative, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona looked at me and suggested that I have some youth, and of course I look at the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, and I suggest that he has youth. But I want to say that who I am trying to address in this

motion specifically, or maybe I want to say isolating, are individuals who do not have a legislated opportunity to have input because presently if you have legislated opportunity, you do have some ability to have input. I'm not saying that it should be constrained to that age group, but that's mainly where the focus is.

I would also like to compliment the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, when he talked about the leaders of today. I very much agree that it is not the leaders of the future; it is the leaders of today. But we very much need to give them that opportunity to hear their voices and be the leaders of today.

I want to also stress that I feel it is very necessary to get youth involved. The question that came up is: what type of consultation? As everybody here knows, this is a motion. I believe that consultation, as was stated by one of the hon. members, is possibly the first step. There needs to be an avenue in order to have meaningful and, if I can say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, transparent and open discussion. I think it's very, very important.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close by saying that in order for us to be successful as a province, we need to have input from youth at all levels. I stress again: at all levels. They need to be able to give meaningful input to community organizations, municipal governments, and also to us at the provincial level.

Mr. Speaker, our future is today. We must work harder to hear the voice of Alberta's youth. For this reason, I ask all members to support Motion 503.

Thank you very much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

head: **Consideration of His Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Johnson moved that a humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 7: Mr. Bonko]

The Acting Speaker: Any other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried]

head: **Government Motions
Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne**

10. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Klein:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

Address to the Assembly by Mr. Ray Speaker

11. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on March 15, 2006, welcome to the floor of the House a former

member, Mr. Ray Speaker, to address this Assembly to mark the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the convening of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on March 15, 1906.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 13
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 13, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, the Real Estate Council of Alberta is responsible for administering the Real Estate Act. These amendments will strengthen the Real Estate Council of Alberta's authority to combat mortgage fraud by adding this statement to their purposes: "to protect against, investigate, detect and suppress mortgage fraud as it relates to the [real estate] industry."

[Mrs. Ady in the chair]

This amendment may appear to be small, but it will do two important things. First, it will clarify that the Real Estate Council of Alberta has the appropriate investigation powers to carry out activities related to combatting mortgage fraud. Second, it will enhance the Real Estate Council of Alberta's ability to share personal information about mortgage fraud perpetrators while respecting the privacy rights of individuals. These amendments are a direct result of the recommendations of the advisory council on mortgage fraud.

In summary, the proposed amendments will go a long way toward ensuring that the government of Alberta tackles mortgage fraud as effectively as possible and that the Real Estate Council of Alberta can play a fuller role in combatting it.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 13.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 4
Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006**

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a modest amount of pleasure to rise and speak about Bill 4, the Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006, in second reading.

I chuckle a little bit at that because, of course, we've just come through an hour of debate on Motion 503, which was all about consulting youth. There was some discussion – I won't call it an argument – back and forth on the floor of this House as to what constitutes youth, who are youth, and when we are no longer youthful. As the Member for Battle River-Wainwright will discover in the fullness of time a few decades hence, middle age doesn't really begin until somewhere between 65 and 75.

9:10

In any event, because we were discussing youth and youthfulness

and things like that, I was taken back a year or so to my misspent youth, growing up in southern Ontario in the small city of Sarnia in the late '60s, early '70s, when the band Chicago had a hit called *Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is*. That song had a certain resonance for those of us who grew up in southwestern Ontario because at that time from I believe the last Sunday in April until the last Sunday in October nobody in Sarnia ever really did know what time it was or could tell by turning on the television because, of course, this was before cable, before satellite, before any of that. We had five channels: one from London, three from Detroit, and one from Windsor.

Now, I guess the rest of the province of Ontario went on daylight time, as did most of Canada with the exception of Saskatchewan. But Windsor and Essex county in Ontario would stay on standard time because at the time the great state of Michigan, in its collective wisdom, elected not to join most of the other states in the United States by going on daylight time. So Michigan state was on standard time. Mr. Speaker, because historically there have been so many Windsorites who have worked in Detroit and so many Detroiters who came across the border every morning to work in Windsor, it seemed to make sense for the people of Windsor and Essex county to stay on the same time as Michigan. There are many people in many other parts of Ontario who have often wondered whether Windsor is really part of Ontario, but perhaps that's beside the case.

Anyway, all our television programs were on – I can't remember now. Were they on an hour earlier or an hour later? They'd be an hour later, I guess, than what it said in the *TV Guide*. So it was a several-months-long exercise in mathematical gymnastics to figure out, you know, whether the *Tonight Show* was on tonight or tomorrow. In any event, we all survived except for those chronological purists in the state of Michigan, who were eventually forced by the times, the tides, and other Michiganders to join most of the rest of North America and go on daylight time.

I bring this up for no particular reason other than it's just a bit ironic that we get into these sorts of discussions. I mean, there's no question but that this bill is going to pass, and there's no question but that this bill probably should pass. We're not even first off the mark here in Canada. Ontario, Manitoba, and Quebec have already adopted very similar legislation to move daylight time back, to have it start the second Sunday in March rather than the first Sunday in April, and to extend it to the first Sunday in November from the last Sunday in October. Many reasons are given for this: how happy the kids will be at Halloween because now they'll be able to go out in the daylight. I don't think the kids will be happy about that at all. I think the parents will. I think it takes away a certain amount of the boo factor from Halloween if you actually go out trick or treating, you know, in daylight.

One of my colleagues was going on today in a meeting that we had about how wonderful it will be, you know, for all us sun worshippers because we love the daylight. There was even some reference to the ancient Egyptian sun god Ra. I can only assume Ra was named in ancient Egyptian because, of course, in these days of thinning ozone layer and all the rest of that, if you stay out in the sun, worshipping it too long, you're not so much raw as you are cooked or burned. [interjection] Thank you. Well, you know, it's better than singing. What can I say, Mr. Speaker?

Some are saying that it's absolutely vital that we make this move so that we synchronize Alberta's time with that of our largest trading partner, the United States. Now, I made reference to Michigan a few minutes ago and how for a number of years they withstood the peer pressure from the other 49 states to go on daylight time and ultimately succumbed to that. Our next-door neighbour to the east, Saskatchewan, still doesn't go on daylight time. I don't know if it

ever has, but it certainly hasn't in my lifetime. It seems to survive. It perhaps doesn't prosper to the extent that we do here in Alberta, but it does okay. I think that that's a bit of a spurious argument, that we have to change the clocks at precisely the same moment that our American neighbours change the clocks or else the wheels of commerce will grind to a screeching halt here in the province of Alberta.

I mean, we now deal with our largest trading partner across at least four time zones, and we seem to manage that okay. We seem to have worked out the time difference between Calgary and New York, the time difference between Edmonton and Los Angeles, the time difference between Red Deer and Houston. You know, we manage okay, so I don't really think we need to do that. Nevertheless, we will because this is just one of those things that happens.

If you're someone whose children go off to a school where the day starts early, you will have some concerns about this because your children will be walking to school in the dark for part of the year, no question about it. If I could give any kind of advice solicited or otherwise around that, it might be to school boards to take a look in light of what we're proposing to do here, to extend daylight time, at changing the hours of operation of some of the schools so that our small children do not have to walk to school in the dark. That is a very real concern for parents. Otherwise, I can't really see too much problem one way or the other with this. I guess the sun worshippers will be happy.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that I can be talked into supporting this right along with the rest of the House. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to briefly speak to Bill 4, Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006. The member who just concluded his remarks before I rose I think touched on some of the issues that I had in mind, too, the argument that is made in favour of changing daylight saving time. The minister's own comments the other day suddenly focused a great deal on harmonizing daylight timing arrangements with the U.S. in light of the fact that more than 80 per cent of our trade is with that partner and that if these changes are taking place there, they must here as well and that if they don't, then that would somehow affect the efficiency of the flow of goods and services across that very, very long border.

When I start thinking about it, Saskatchewan hasn't really changed its time. It's next door to us to the east. They haven't changed the time during the NDP regimes, during the Liberal regimes, and during the Conservative regimes. So it's obviously not a political issue. It's not an ideological one, so it does remain a question in my mind how Saskatchewan has dealt with the rationale they have for not changing while we are using our rationale to change. I'm not opposed to change, and I support the bill, but certainly it's a question that arose in my mind.

The second question that arose is: if we turn the clocks forward the second Sunday in March – if we'd had this legislation in place for this year, we would have done that yesterday, I think. Given the times of school openings, the other question that did come to mind was: would it add inconvenience, if not add some risk, you know, for children walking to school?

There is an argument made that making this change in daylight saving time would in fact increase safety on the road or on the street for people crossing the street because those of us who are driving in the late afternoon would still be driving in daylight. We'll be able to see people crossing the streets and whatever have you, so it increases safety.

At the other end, early in the day, the issue of the safety of young children going to school certainly did cross my mind. Perhaps that's where the Minister of Education would take note and maybe ask school boards to raise this question at least for discussion and see if there's any merit in adjusting school opening times in view of the change that this bill will bring about with respect to daylight saving time.

9:20

There are other good reasons, persuasive reasons, to make this change. Conservation of energy certainly is increasingly on the minds of all of us, certainly most people in the House and outside of the House. Moving the clock, making this four-week adjustment to daylight saving time, increasing that period during which we use daylight saving time I think will certainly help conserve energy, reduce the costs as well as save on the environmental side of the equation, help there. So there are good reasons, economic reasons certainly, environmental conservation reasons, and perhaps safety reasons to move forward with this change.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to express the support of this member, of the caucus he represents here tonight for Bill 4. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 5 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 5, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. The bill deals with minor amendments to three pieces of legislation: Civil Enforcement Act, Judicature Act, Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act. These amendments came mainly from practical recommendations from legal institutions, the first having to do largely with allowing an enforcement creditor to give notice of his or her claim to the civil enforcement agency that has seized property on behalf of a distressed creditor. The second deals with clarification of the court's discretion to order periodic payments of damages and is presumed to be in the interests of the plaintiff. The third appears to have to do with more modernized recording devices in relation to oral testimony.

On behalf of the party I think it all seems very cogent and valid, and I don't think there'll be any resistance from this side. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, did you want to speak?

Dr. Pannu: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak on Bill 5, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. Most of the amendments that this bill is bringing forward make sense. I was looking through the minister's comments that he made while introducing the bill for second reading on February 28, I think, when he spoke on this, and they are very helpful in providing

the reasons why these various changes in the existing statutes are needed. I think that some of the changes are required by changes taking place in other pieces of legislation and for some other interesting reasons.

If I'm not mistaken, one of the four amendments dealing with the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act, for example, reflects really the changes that have taken place in technology, the information technology and the storage and retrieval processes, more or less, I guess, the obsolescence of the position of stenographer, which, I think, according to the existing legislation that's being amended, was an appointee of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Given that the recording technology has changed and practices have changed, the legislation must be changed to bring up to date the statutory definitions of various roles and the manner in which the data dealing with evidence, court proceedings can be best handled. It makes good sense both at the intuitive level but certainly in terms of daily practice and the technical aspects of it, and the arguments related to the technical changes that have taken place I think give a good reason for making the changes that the minister in this act is proposing.

Similarly, the Judicature Act changes. Again, the amendments are minor, as the minister says, and I agree. They have to do with the monetary awards to be paid in installments. I think that to make this provision and make this clarification in the existing legislation would help, certainly, the people who are awarded these monetary awards. It safeguards their interests. One of the amendments provides clarification of the court's discretion to order structured settlements, and I was quite intrigued by what that means and how the modification that's being made will change that process. The guidelines that the new amendments will provide the court to make these structured judgments I think are a very helpful clarification. Since these structured settlements are supposed to be tax free, I think that it does provide the court with some guidance as to how to deal with these structured judgments in the interest of the recipient, or the beneficiary, of these judgments in a way that it certainly saves the monetary value of these assessments.

Mr. Speaker, I read through the minister's own observations carefully and found disagreement with very little there. In light of that, I would say that we are in support of the changes being proposed, and I happily support the bill.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

9:30 Bill 6 Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate March 9: Ms Blakeman]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important act. It's not about parents; it's about children. It's about making sure that money that's necessary for the children gets to them. The Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006, is intended to make the situation better for many families.

Maintenance enforcement is a very effective program and helps out a lot of families in Mill Woods that would otherwise go without because their dads choose not to pay their share. Maintenance enforcement works quickly and effectively to ensure that both moms

and kids get the maintenance due them. In some cases the penalties maintenance enforcement have in place act as a deterrent to the dads that might think they can get away with not paying. For example, they cannot renew a driver's licence, cannot renew a passport, cannot receive an income tax cheque or a GST cheque or any monies that come from a government level. All levels of government work together on this issue.

We've had a number of successful cases in Mill Woods, and I want to congratulate the program and all the staff that work on it and the minister for continuing to improve this program.

As I look at this bill, the first amendment deals with how payments are applied and helps to ensure that money reaches creditors before maintenance enforcement keeps any funds for penalties and fees. As we consider the Income Tax Act, we know that the first thing you can deduct is related to dependants as dependants are a tax credit. Therefore, if it comes off first from net income, then it should be the first responsibility for real income.

The second amendment addresses financial examinations by maintenance enforcement. This is an amendment to allow the director of the maintenance enforcement program to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an order of alternative arrangements for the examination of a debtor. The purpose here is to allow for alternative payment arrangements to be made relating to the debtor's ability to pay. This amendment can also result in reduced court times. Some say that accounting is not a science; it's an art. What do we want included in the picture? We must make sure we are not giving artistic licence for those who should be responsible to avoid their responsibilities in the name of bona fide accounting. This amendment is intended to give public accountants on behalf of clients the opportunity to penetrate a bleak picture which is really a smokescreen for apparent losses in obligations, which become an excuse for evading maintenance enforcement payments.

The third amendment deals with maintenance agreements between parties. It allows for the maintenance enforcement program to administer these arrangements and is consistent with similar arrangements in the Family Law Act. This province has created considerable incentives to business. This bill is an opportunity to balance that. The government has given exemptions to encourage people to go ahead with business plans because of the benefits they create for the community. We need equivalent incentives to invest in families. The well-being of families, either together or separated, needs to hold an even greater place in our values. The encouragement to invest in families should be as great as to sink one's assets in a business venture or economic activity. Investment in families is investment in our humanity.

The fourth amendment deals with current rules relating to access to locked-in retirement accounts. The new rules allow for more support for children and address deficiencies in the existing act that do not allow for access to these funds until the debtor is of the age of 50 and chooses to withdraw the funds. The new rules address the problems from the 2004 act to allow for access to these types of locked-in funds. This is a measure to counter the Bermuda or Bahamas syndrome: putting one's investments offshore, where they cannot be touched. In the Bermuda syndrome the party who is trying to evade responsibility uses distance and miles and political boundaries. In the support evasion system the evader used distance and years and regulations to put assets out of reach.

I'd like to congratulate the minister and the individuals who have worked on this Bill 6, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006. I support it as a wonderful step in looking at things that are really important for families.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 6, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006. Let me at the very outset thank the minister – I forgot to do it when I rose the last time and before – for briefing us early on, three or four weeks ago, I think, quite extensively on the amendments to the existing legislation by way of these bills that he is bringing forward. We had a good meeting, where we had the opportunity to be briefed on the nature of the amendments and the reasons for those. The minister was very, very helpful, and the meeting was most productive from our point of view.

Again, I think the amendments that Bill 6 is seeking to make will make the existing arrangements much better. These amendments are intended, as the minister has indicated, to clarify and refine existing sections of the Maintenance Enforcement Act to allow for better client service and access to justice. The four amendments relate to the application of payments, financial examinations, maintenance agreements, and access to certain locked-in retirement savings. These amendments will certainly benefit children and families by getting more money into their hands, the creditors that is. The amendments give families and children access to more money sooner, and these locked-in retirement funds are one good example, that those will be accessible now. Lump-sum payments for medical or child care purposes before arrears or fees are paid is another good element, I think, that these amendments embody. The amendments give the director of the maintenance enforcement program more powers to address default payments and debtors who are in arrears.

It's a very good set of amendments, which improve the already very good maintenance enforcement program, MEP, as the minister uses that acronym in his remarks. This maintenance enforcement program provides a vitally important service to parents around the province, helping to enforce support orders and thus ensure that our children are having their basic needs met. The program offers parents a neutral third party through which to work, which can be so important in the strains of separation or divorce.

Contrary to popular belief many, if not most, of the agreements registered with the program are carried out without any major problems. It's good to know that not all dads are deadbeat dads, and certainly not all late payments are indicative of ill will. However, experience has shown that there are cases where, for whatever reason, support payments are not forthcoming, and it is children who suffer the most. Study after study has shown that a happy childhood consists of much more than having basic needs met. But in the absence of the state being able to guarantee happy memories, the least it can do is ensure that children and their parents, be they single moms or single dads, have recourse to a program that guarantees the money owed them for their needs. This program, MEP, the maintenance enforcement program, does this for over 60,000 children and nearly 100,000 clients. A very large number of Alberta families and children are impacted by this program, most of them in a very positive way.

The program has been around since 1986, and its collection rates are getting better every year. Every year we find better ways to ensure fairness and justice for all parties involved. As the minister said when introducing this bill for second reading, financial examinations alone have led to an additional \$900,000 being collected for creditors, and overall collection levels have risen 10 per cent in the past three years alone. These amendments, therefore, are in keeping with these ongoing efforts, which deliver the necessary means and benefits to families and children affected by family breakdowns.

9:40

There is perhaps just a small issue of clarification here with two of the amendments. I think the first one has to do with the amendment contained in section 4(11), which was described a few weeks ago by the minister in his introductory remarks. This concerned the director's powers to obtain substitutional service orders allowing for alternate arrangements regarding financial examinations. The minister had described this as allowing "the program to bring debtors who are constantly evading service in for financial examinations." Now, I'm just curious how these substitutional service orders would allow for this to happen. What exactly is the process? What's the substance of this process? The minister, I'm sure, would help clarify this.

Alternate arrangements for examination. You know, I'm reading through what the minister had to say on this issue when he was introducing this bill, that the court can adjourn, I guess, the examination, and then this amendment will dispense with the need to serve notice for the parties examined to return to the court again, so the serving will not have to be done again. The persons can be asked to be in the court more than one day after adjournment. That's probably what it means, but it just needs a little bit more information for me to fully understand what it means and what's involved in this.

Also, I think there's some sort of a reference to how this will improve collection from debtors who consistently avoid meeting with the director. Would the change, in fact, make meeting with the director mandatory, or would it compel the party to meet with the director? How does that work?

In the interests of fairness and assuming that the director will use his discretionary power in the best interests of all involved, this appears to be a well-intentioned amendment, and the program may find it to be of considerable use, but I'm curious to see a review of this in a year or two just to make sure we know how effective this change is in resolving cases of arrears and how stakeholders, creditors and debtors alike, feel about the director's discretionary powers.

One other point perhaps, Mr. Speaker, and then I'll sit down. It again deals with asking for more clarification. I think it would be helpful, certainly for me, to have an explanation of how the registering of agreements both with the MEP and with the courts will proceed if the third amendment proposed here is passed. This concerns section 2 of the amendment, which gives the director of MEP the power to file maintenance order payment agreements with the court on either party's behalf. Again, as the minister argued, it's intended, I presume, to reduce delays and to facilitate or make it easier for both parties to get the agreements filed with the court until someone else on their behalf can do it. Is it not presently the case, and are there any legal implications here in terms of either or both parties finding it not so much inconvenient but unacceptable for some reasons for a third party to be doing this work on their behalf? It's a question of control, really. Would parties involved, parents in particular, feel that they're losing control completely by this amendment if we put this thing out of their hands?

Mr. Speaker, I think I have made a few observations. I was reading through the bill, the minister's comments, and some research that our own staff has done and was quite impressed with the enormity of the activity on this front: how many families are involved, how much money changes hands, and how many times the MEP steps in to resolve matters to the benefit of all parties involved in the matter of maintenance payments when families break down and separate or proceed to seek divorce. With those remarks, I would take my seat.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister for Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking the members for Edmonton-Mill Woods and Edmonton-Strathcona for their words of support tonight and the Member for Edmonton-Centre for her words of support last week relative to the Alberta maintenance enforcement program.

As was noted, the program itself celebrated its 20th anniversary last month. Over that 20 years some \$1.8 billion has been collected and distributed to the creditors, largely children, of this province, which is a very good thing. The program itself today is seen as a leader in the area of maintenance enforcement in Canada. This bill will make it a better program.

I very much do appreciate the support and kind words for the people who do yeoman service in this department on a daily basis. It is a highly emotional area, needless to say, for people who are having difficulty collecting the money that is due to them. The volume of communication with the department on a monthly basis is truly enormous, and they do an incredible job addressing that communication. Some people are not happy; that is just the nature of the business. But when you consider the magnitude of their job, it's quite fantastic.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona outlined some questions. I'm happy to respond to those. I will do that in committee. I'll go back to the people who work in this area on a daily basis and perhaps get some more detail so that I can be more thorough in responding to the hon. member at that time.

I would now call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

9:50

Bill 7

Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again tonight to speak this time to Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006, in second reading. In the way of a background I think this amendment was sort of inevitable given certain changes which occurred back in 2002, as the hon. Minister of Justice indicated when he introduced the bill. In 2002 the then Justice minister approved the raising of the limit for small claims in small claims court from \$7,500 to \$25,000. This, in turn, encouraged or allowed people to pursue legal action in Provincial Court instead of the Court of Queen's Bench, where the process may be more onerous and complicated.

Provincial courts don't require a claimant to have legal representation; that is to say, one does not need a lawyer. One can represent him or herself if they so desire. Also, filing fees or the cost of litigation may be less this way. What this did was allow greater access to the courts and, as such, was really a positive move.

Similarly here for situations involving motor vehicle accidents we are allowing victims to sue in Provincial Court, not just the Court of Queen's Bench. This takes a big load off the Court of Queen's Bench, and it frees up some of its valuable time to deal with more serious cases. We are improving access to justice, and for that I find myself in support of this bill.

Almost all drivers in this province carry liability insurance, but a very few don't. If one of these rogue drivers gets into an accident, and some of them actually get into an accident and then flee the

accident scene or are involved in a hit and run, for example, they will not be able to afford the resulting damages. The Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act protects the victims of uninsured and unknown drivers, where they can take their claim against the administrator of the motor vehicle accident claim fund, who would then be the nominal defendant. If the claim is successful, funds are distributed from the general revenue fund.

So again I emphasize my support for this bill, but I actually have one simple question. I was reviewing the motor vehicle accident claims program website under the Ministry of Justice, and it really currently states that the person may begin his or her own action without a lawyer. So I was just trying to clarify: does this exist now as it is, or is this happening only after we pass this amendment?

As such, I look forward to seeing it come back in committee and receiving more debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Pannu: I'll be very brief, Mr. Speaker, speaking on Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006. At this point in second reading I would like to simply indicate that in principle we agree with the changes that the minister is bringing forward to the existing legislation by way of this bill. In part it's a response to changes that took place in 2002 with respect to the amount of the claims for which one could go to Provincial Court, under the small claims court that is.

I think the minister is perhaps right in focusing on the fact that the changes that they are suggesting, opening the possibility that people could go either to the Provincial Court or to the Queen's court if they so choose, will perhaps lead to reduction in the costs of litigation related to matters related to motor vehicle accident claims in the province. I think the accessibility to the court system and to the system of justice in the province has emerged as a major issue because the costs of going to court have been growing very, very fast. We've been hearing from an increasing number of Albertans about their concerns about how costly it is to pursue redress to matters that concern them when they go to the courts.

So anything that can be done to curtail and contain costs to people who have to go to the court system I think is something that needs to be supported. In fact, we need to redouble our efforts to find ways of reducing costs of litigation and costs of going to court in this province. The transcripts and access to them alone are extremely expensive, and I've heard through my constituency office people complaining about how expensive it is for them to have access to the transcripts of the courts. That's just one small aspect of the overall picture of the costs of going to the courts.

The bill, certainly, is in part intended to reduce the costs or limit those costs by increasing access and encouraging, I suppose, people with claims related to personal injury sustained through motor vehicle accidents to be able to go to provincial courts and represent in that court themselves, their own cases, thereby reducing costs related to legal representation.

As I said, we are in principle in agreement with the intent of the bill, the principle underlying it, and as we move through the debate in the committee, I assume that we will have an opportunity to take a closer look at some of the clauses of the bill. If there's a need for change, there'll be an opportunity then to speak to those.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Once again I appreciate the supportive comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

There was a question with respect to what is currently permitted by way of self-represented litigants in our courts today. The fact is that one may represent themselves in front of every court in this province, whether it be Provincial Court, Queen's Bench, or the Court of Appeal. The point that is made in general is that the Provincial Court is the one that has a more streamlined, less costly, less rule-bound process and, therefore, is the one that is most accessible to self-represented litigants, or people who represent themselves. Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal really have been designed, in terms of process and rules, for people who are represented by people trained in the law, namely lawyers, and really the matter that we have before us is to ensure that this piece of legislation reflects the fact that self-represented parties may bring their action. They do today, but we'd like the law to read so that it reflects the reality, and that's really in large measure what we're talking about here.

I'd call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 8

Trustee Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening on behalf of the Official Opposition and speak to Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006. This bill, I believe, can be appropriately described as a housekeeping bill. It addresses some of the flaws that have been discovered since Bill 26, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2001, was passed by this House. In doing my research today, I was able to discover that that amendment act actually had the support of the Official Opposition, as will this act today.

It would appear to me that the Trustee Amendment Act, 2001, pretty much accomplished what it set out to do in terms of allowing trustees a little more flexibility by removing restrictions that they were facing in terms of how they could invest and allowing the prudent investor rule to take place. Unfortunately, the trustees in many cases were still constrained by the limitations that were not noticed at that time and are now being addressed by the proposed amendment that we're dealing with tonight. So, as I say, it will certainly have the support of the Official Opposition caucus, or at least that's what I'm recommending to my colleagues.

10:00

I'm pleased to see that the hon. minister has consulted with the Alberta Law Reform Institute. My understanding is that back in 2001 they were not only supportive of the amending act at that time but actually had been calling for that change for some time. In our consultation with the Alberta Law Reform Institute they're certainly not expressing any concern whatsoever about this amending act and, in fact, are pleased to see it coming forward. So I applaud the minister for having made those efforts in consultation because, unfortunately, that does not always happen. We've had several instances that I'm aware of in the last year and a half since I've been a member of this Assembly where that sort of consultation did not take place, and it's always good to see when it does.

I would briefly like to point out my frustration at times with the cross-ministry co-operation, or lack thereof, that sometimes seems to take place. I'm not sure why that is. It's been described sometimes as turf protecting or empire building or whatever. I'm not sure

what happens exactly, but clearly in this case the minister has made an effort to consult with every other ministry where the Trustee Act is mentioned and involved, and for the most part it looks to me as if we're going to make some progress in terms of addressing the inadequacies of Bill 26 from the year 2001.

However, having said that, there are still a number of ministries that are not necessarily coming onside fully, and it leads me to another frustration which I've expressed many times in this House, and that is where we move things from legislation into regulation. There are a number of examples of that, in particular the Cemeteries Act, the Condominium Property Act, and the Funeral Services Act, all falling under the Ministry of Government Services, where they've chosen, at this time at least, not to adopt these changes but rather to consult. That's a good thing: consult with stakeholders before they move away from the legal list.

But then when they do make the changes, the plan is to allow the rules for trustees to be governed in accordance with regulations as opposed to this piece of legislation or another piece of legislation. That always causes concern for me because, as you've heard me express in the past, Mr. Speaker, often regulations are dealt with behind closed doors and out of the eye of the public in terms of debate in this Legislature, and I don't believe that that is a good thing.

Another example of where that's happening is the Dependent Adults Act, again where the decision is being made to stay with the legal list for the time being. We're not sure at this time, once they've decided which way to go with that, whether or not those changes will be enacted in regulation or perhaps brought back to the House in legislation. So that's certainly a concern that I have, and I'm sure we'll have an opportunity to address it a little further when we get to the committee stage.

Overall though, as I said, I do believe that it's a good move to incorporate the prudent investor rule universally across all legislation. This does move us towards that, so I'm pleased to see that.

I'm a little surprised that we've waited five years to address some of the inadequacies that were discovered as a result of the amendments that were made in 2001. Perhaps the minister may address that tonight or at some further stage of debate, but I would have expected that maybe we would have dealt with some of those questions sooner than now. However, as I say, in general I think the idea to adopt these changes across most provincial legislation will give the trustee more options for investment, Mr. Speaker, and allowing that I think is a good thing. The legal list approach was very restrictive and perhaps too conservative, if I can say that without being called on a point of order. I think I just did.

I think ultimately that with these changes that are being proposed in this amendment, all individuals and societies that are affected by the Trustee Act will be better served. With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to offer my support and recommend that of my colleagues to Bill 8 in second reading.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very brief comments on Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006. The changes made in 2001 to give more flexibility to trustees led to, I guess, introducing the notion of the prudent investor rule to replace restriction on the trustee to invest only in the securities listed in the legal list. My question is about the prudent investor rule and how it works. It certainly provides more flexibility, but how is the practice associated with the investor act? How is it monitored? What happens when prudence is not, in fact, demonstrated by a decision made by the trustee? Is there any monitoring? Are there any penalties? Is there any control when the trustees fail to act prudently?

Reference was made by the minister to "in keeping with modern theories of investment." Yes, I guess that the notion of the prudent investor rule is part of those modern theories of investment, but the legal implementation of those I think are questions that come to mind which need addressing. The minister either today or perhaps in the debate in the committee can return to these questions and address them for my clarification. I just want to know how it works and what happens when it fails to work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate?

Mr. Stevens: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Bill 22

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance to move second reading of Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006.

Just to again indicate that interim supply acts, the appropriation act such as we see here, are not an uncommon practice in the parliamentary system. Today we're celebrating Commonwealth Day, I believe, so I thought I would just reference that. I'm hoping that members here will see the wisdom in supporting this so that government can in fact continue providing necessary funds to hospitals, schools, seniors, and so on come the end of March.

Thank you.

10:10

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will try to make my comments brief as well.

The hon. minister has referenced that this is not an uncommon procedure in the parliamentary system, and he's correct. It's certainly not an uncommon occurrence in Alberta although I would certainly argue that it's not a necessary occurrence either. I've indicated in the past that I'm more than willing to come down here in late January or early February, and were we to do that as a House, we could have a budget passed in advance of the end of the business year, so it's not that it's necessary or required that we do things in this manner. Nevertheless, this is the way that the government chooses to proceed, and so it goes.

I would like to reiterate my concerns as well that as an opposition, when we're charged with providing constructive criticism to the government, it is difficult to approve what is essentially a blank cheque. I understand and empathize with the various ministers who spoke to this bill when we were in Committee of Supply that the government has to continue to run and that there is a lot of good work that needs to be done and employees that need to be paid and programs that need to be funded, and often they're funded in a front-end-loaded sort of way. I would have no intention of interfering with that funding.

It is difficult to approve a blank cheque which in this case totals nearly 6 and a half billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, with only a one-line or perhaps two-line explanation as to how much money is going to the department and no real explanation whatsoever as to how that money is going to be spent. It requires a bit of a leap of faith not

only on the part of opposition parties but on the part of all Albertans that that money is going to be used wisely because we really have no way of knowing until a budget is introduced how that money may be used.

Certainly, I'm hopeful and I know that many Albertans are hopeful that, for example, there would be further funding for long-term care. We know that that's an issue that is close to the hearts of many Albertans. It's been in the media a lot over the last year, and the government took small steps towards funding the recommendations of the long-term care review committee, but clearly there is a lot more funding required and a lot left to be done to make that right. We're hopeful that some of the money that has been requested in interim supply is going to go to those issues early and not make them wait.

I'm hopeful, as an example, that there will be some money in the budget of the Education minister or perhaps the budget of the infrastructure minister to provide running water at Ellerslie school, which is an issue that the Official Opposition has been bringing forward with some fervour, Mr. Speaker. I have no way of knowing whether or not there's going to be a little bit of the \$637 million from the interim supply for Education that might address that dire situation, but I'm hopeful that that would be the case.

I'm hopeful that the Finance minister or the Education minister would find it in their hearts and in their minds to take some of the money that has been appropriated in interim supply and begin to address the unfunded teachers' liability, which is a debt that is already at billions of dollars and will cost Alberta taxpayers, all of us in this Assembly and all of us across the province, tens of billions of dollars over the course of the current agreement if we don't choose to address it during a time of unprecedented wealth, when it would be argued that it would be fiscally prudent to do so.

Again, I'm hopeful that some of these things are going to be addressed by the approval of the interim supply, but we have no way of knowing that, and that does cause me concern in that we're asked continually, year after year, to supply 60 days' worth of funding in the order of \$6 billion without any real information being provided as to exactly how that money is going to be spent. I suppose we have to put an awful lot of faith, as I said, in the government and the ministers involved that this money is going to be used in a prudent fashion, that Albertans will receive value for the dollars that they entrust to us.

I look forward to the budget next Wednesday, Mr. Speaker, when we'll have some of those questions answered. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my opportunity to speak briefly to interim supply. I would echo some of the comments of my colleague but really need to take a different tack on interim supply in relation specifically to the ministry that I'm most concerned about, that of Environment. I argue that given that this ministry has around 0.5 per cent of the provincial budget yet is dealing with the third most important issue to Albertans, we need to take a serious look at what this means for the future of Alberta and for true planning and implementation of some kind of sustainability in relation to this province.

It's only after 13 years that we are now beginning to get a reasonable approach to a land-use plan. This is the third attempt, and we're all extremely hopeful that this will be an effective framework from which a plan can be made which would guide development, especially resource extraction in this province, in balance with other values that Albertans hold. The present budget

and the interim supply identify an extremely limited capacity to do this, Mr. Speaker, so I'm actually arguing the reverse of what in some cases people will be arguing today, that government in this case needs to make a huge injection of funding and make the environment a priority in this province.

We have not the capacity as yet to monitor our groundwater, to do the adequate baseline testing, to even have a database of all the water wells in this province. We're still waiting for groundwater inventory and testing. The recent experiences in the south and east of the province, where landowners are increasingly concerned about dramatic changes in their wells in volume and in quality, suggest that we are catching up, to say the least, with an inadequate staff and inadequate technology to do the job of actually assessing where we are, looking at the possibility of new technologies that could be used both by industry and by Alberta Environment to help us to get a handle on what it is we're doing both on the surface and under the surface and how we're going to ensure a high quality of life for our children.

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of contaminated sites; if one includes all of the potential oil and gas installations, several hundred thousand now in the province. Each of these poses its own liability: the downstream oil and gas sector, the mom-and-pop gas stations that have become defunct and need to be cleaned up, the refinery sites. There is no existing orphan fund for these. If they're defaulted, they will fall to the public purse. Clearly, Alberta Environment with more resources – and indeed some of this could well come from industry – for a kind of an orphan fund for downstream oil and gas and refinery sites is a really urgent priority in this province.

In relation to climate change, again, we're looking for leadership. A department with such limited funding can do a very limited amount in terms of incentives for energy efficiency, incentives for renewables, and an attempt to create a more level playing field with the dominant fossil fuel dependency that we've developed in this province for our economy. It's very clear that we need leadership on this. In the context of climate change we need a government that would set clear limits for industry and also help them to know clearly what it is that they're expected to achieve in terms of their emissions, now standing first in the country in terms of air emissions.

Those are the main comments I wanted to make in relation to interim supply, Mr. Speaker, and I'll take my seat.

10:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will indeed take pleasure in closing debate and thank the members for their comments. I look forward to the House's support.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A good amount of progress tonight and a lot of good comments were made and so on. On that note, I will move that we adjourn for the evening and reconvene tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; at 10:21 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 14, 2006** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 06/03/14
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am simply delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature a very special guest seated in your gallery. Our new Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Hon. Michael Chong, president of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister for Sport, representing a constituency in the province of Ontario, paid a very special visit to our province today. We had a very productive meeting with our department and also Community Development. I am pleased to introduce him to our House. He's accompanied today by Anne Scotton and Mary Jane Armstrong. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly Mr. Issam Al Halabi, mayor of the city of Yanta in Lebanon. Mr. Al Halabi has a bachelor of arts degree and has been a teacher for 25 years in Lebanon in a high school, and he has served as mayor in Yanta since 1996, which equals two terms. He has some very special recognitions in his career achievement. He was a special adviser to the Druze leader Mr. Walid Jumblat from 1985 to 2000 and sits on many political and municipal boards in Lebanon. With him today are two of my favourite constituents, Mr. Ziad Aboultaif and Mr. Henry Shtay, who are hosting the mayor in Edmonton. I would like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly two individuals, Mr. Michael Cloutier, who is the president and CEO of AstraZeneca of Canada limited, one of Canada's leading pharmaceutical companies, along with Mr. George Samoil, who is the manager of government relations. They are here to celebrate their investment, a \$10 million investment, in Edmonton's NAEJA Pharmaceutical limited in a bid for the next breakthrough in pain medication. I would invite the gentlemen to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 24 grade 6 students from the Neerlandia public Christian

school, which is located in the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Jim Bosma, program assistants Mrs. Shirley Rauscher and Mrs. Laura Kamminga, parent chaperones Mr. Krikke and also Mrs. Mast. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and members of the Assembly 22 keen and bright students from Sifton school. They are accompanied by their teacher Mrs. Wnuk and parent/staff Mrs. McCullum; Mrs. Parenteau, a parent; and Mrs. Narsing, a parent. They're in, I believe, the public gallery. I'd like them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure today that I introduce to you and to all members of the House a group of very special guests who are seated in the public gallery. They are from the Ashbourne assisted living facility in my constituency, and their names are Mrs. Joyce Bergquist, Mrs. Karin Welch, Mrs. Kathleen MacLean, Mrs. Alfreda Dober, Mrs. Isobel Rutzebeck, and Mr. Herb Philpott. They are led by Ms Sarah Reynolds. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the cordial welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 16 members of the Yellowhead Tribal College together with their teachers, Linda Anderson and Bill Brady. They are studying aboriginal studies, and they're hoping for a good dose of social studies here this afternoon. I'd ask them to rise please and receive a warm welcome from the members.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a privilege today to introduce two esteemed members of the Janssen-Ortho group who are with us. Dr. Penny Albright is the vice-president of government and health economics. She's here from Toronto because last evening at our Alberta Institute of Health Economics she, along with the Rt. Hon. Don Mazankowski, presented the first ever Mazankowski fellowship award to Dr. Jeffrey Johnson for his research. She's accompanied today by Mr. Brent Korte of local government relations of Janssen-Ortho. He's a resident of Spruce Grove. Many of us know him. He's been very active in our community and on behalf of his company for the last 13 years. I would ask if they would please rise and all of our members would please acknowledge their presence with us today.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Social Determinants of Health

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under this government the gap between rich and poor in Alberta has grown wider than in any other

province. For example, both Statistics Canada and the TD Bank report that an astonishing 42 per cent of Calgarians over age 15 now live on less than \$20,000 a year. Evidence clearly shows that poverty and income disparity play a huge role in poor health. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does this government acknowledge that poverty and income disparity are important factors in contributing to poor health?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there are many social determinants of health, and among them are, obviously, poverty and income disparity. There are a number of other things that relate to literacy and a whole number of things that we could cite. They are part of it but not necessarily exclusively the predeterminants. Many people with poorer incomes in fact do exceptionally well and are not necessarily unhealthy. So it is one of the things that can affect the person but not necessarily a sole determinant of health.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why is this government pursuing health reforms that include having patients pay out of pocket for better services when those reforms will clearly – clearly – work against the interests of middle and lower income Albertans?

1:40

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to point out that our Premier has said many times that a person's ability to access health care in Alberta will never be based on their ability to pay. The link that the hon. member is suggesting is that there would not be a capacity for people who need health services to access it when they need it. What we have proposed as policy, which is out there for consultation – I'm listening to Albertans as we speak. We are getting feedback on one of the 10 proposals that talk about choice, talk about access, and talk about that in those circumstances where nonemergent services are necessary for cataracts, for hips, or for knee replacements, there may be an opportunity for people to access those services through private facilities, provided that the public capacity of providing services is not detrimentally affected. That is the premise of that particular policy.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister of health acknowledged that literacy as well as poverty and income disparity are factors in health determinants, why hasn't this government done any research into the long-term health benefits of ensuring that impoverished children in Alberta get enough food to eat? Why haven't they studied that?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to research on behalf of the hon. member what kinds of studies have been done. But I would suggest from my time in my previous ministry – and many of the other ministers represented here today are no doubt aware of some of the studies that may have been done either regionally or as local initiatives perhaps. We will look into that bibliography and see what is available to provide the hon. member that data.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Economic Benefits of Health Services

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that this government views the health system as a business opportunity, where the pursuit of profit should drive the provision of health care, and it appears that this government is prepared to use health care as an economic development tool by marketing medical centres as sleek and state of the art in order to attract wealthy foreign patients. It's easy to imagine these wealthy medical tourists stepping over homeless Albertans on their way to a procedure. My questions are to the minister of health. How can the minister justify putting public money into training health professionals and building facilities that will be used to treat millionaires flying in from another country?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, on page 16 in our framework for health policy we talk about deriving economic benefits from health services and research – it's true – because we recognize that "health care occupies a prominent place in the economic life of Alberta and accounts for roughly one-third of the provincial budget." It goes on further to say that "national and international trade in health technology, drugs and equipment is significant and presents an important opportunity for Alberta industry."

Mr. Speaker, it defines intent and direction, but nowhere does it say anything about sleek buildings and the kinds of references that were made by the hon. member that would appear to in any way undermine what we will provide in health care, the strong public system for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My next question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Is the minister creating specialty tour packages to Alberta that include medical treatment?

Mr. Dunford: Actually, I hadn't thought about that. I'll take that under advisement, absolutely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What steps is the minister going to take to ensure that medical tourists don't push ordinary Albertans to the back of the line?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that when we look at medical tourists, we're quite a way down the line, but let me cite something for you that I think is of significance. Our Cancer Board and Dr. Jean-Michel Turc at the Cancer Board anticipate a number of researchers coming from other countries to learn about some of the wise and very innovative approaches we're taking here on cancer research. Ultimately, we have an opportunity not only in Alberta but in other parts of the world, and certainly if the federal government proceeds with the national cancer strategy, to develop some strategies that can make the globe a smaller place for research and development of technology and better treatments. So the primary purpose would be to develop and expand on our capacity in the health care system to do more in the treatment of patients. If there is a byproduct of that in the number of visitors that we attract, as my hon. colleague has referenced, then we'll take a look at it. But the primary goal of research and development will be to ensure that our patients, patients that are suffering from disease, will be taken care of.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Health Benefit Cost to Employers

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Universal public health care is clearly part of the Alberta advantage, but even now supplemental health benefits for employees have grown to \$2,000 to \$4,000 per year. Private health care will quadruple that or more. Labour will demand coverage. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What estimates has the government made of payroll costs to employers of its third-way health reforms?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a reasonable question. Under my department, under Alberta Works we have programs that do support people to get back into the workforce. At one time there were no health benefits for any of our caseload, and this good government made changes in the policy, and now we do have coverage. I think we have over 140,000 individuals . . .

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Cardinal: Over 140,000 individuals are being subsidized. The good part about that is that these people are not on social assistance. These people are all working and getting the subsidy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That question wasn't about people on assistance.

A second question to the same minister: what estimates has the government made of costs to the public payroll in Alberta of its third-way reforms to public health care?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information here today with me, but I'd be willing to provide it to you, hon. member.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the Minister of Economic Development. Other than for private health providers has the Economic Development department investigated the effect on external investment in Alberta as a result of the increased privatization of health care?

Mr. Dunford: Well, this is one thing that we actually have been looking at. One should think of health as a holistic system. Of course, we've had questions earlier today about the impact of income and that sort of thing on health, but why would there be any reason, when we have such a dynamic health system as we have in Alberta – and as a matter of fact, admitted by the opposition today, it's one of Alberta's advantages. – why wouldn't we try to investigate the possible advantages of all of that?

We've put a SuperNet into place by the way, and while our pharmaceutical companies are here in the audience, I'd ask them to take a look at Alberta. Now, we might not be as advantageous from a manufacturing standpoint, but when you have three million people that have access to a SuperNet, why could we not have clinical studies here in Alberta with its tremendous range, then, of environments, tremendous range of people? Why can't we do that?

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I attended a session of the Health Boards Conference and listened to the minister's speech to the delegates there. I spoke with a number of them afterwards, and I have to say that there was widespread concern about the government's proposals and confusion about what the government is actually proposing. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: if the government's own health board members, which they appointed, are concerned and confused, what steps is the government going to take to clarify its proposals and provide clear information to the Marthas and Henrys of this province?

1:50

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to be among the health boards and to see almost 26 of the colleagues from all sides of the House visiting and discussing various topics with the health board members. I had the opportunity to address a couple of the policies in our health policy framework and explain the rationale of why we would, in fact, try to embark on other ways to provide access and sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I think that the document speaks for itself in the policy context of what we want to provide Albertans. We're looking forward to gathering the input from Albertans. At such time that we would be prepared to table a proposal, we will provide the rationale and address more of the comments. In response to different groups like the Alberta Medical Association and others that are raising those questions, we will provide them comments as they come in as well.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister yesterday challenged the board members to think outside the box. I want to ask the minister if she's prepared to think outside the box and commit here that if the government can find a way to meet its objectives through improving and innovating strictly within the public system that we now have, she will do that before she heads down the road of more private delivery?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think the minister of health at any time in our government should always be prepared to think outside the box and bring forward creative solutions to renew and improve health. Regardless of what we look at in the changes that might be implicit in new policy, we should keep trying to do the things we've done with the hip and knee replacement and many of the other kinds of innovative approaches that Alberta has become leaders and famous for. We will always work on that context.

What we're also attempting to do is look even further beyond the horizon to see what we can advance that might in fact allow more flexibility and options for Albertans as we proceed along the way and not just be stuck with the status quo without trying to push the envelope on other access proposals that could be available for our consideration.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to trying to improve the health care system within the public context that now exists before proceeding with privatization? Yes or no.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I will always try to proceed with improving the public health care system, but that does not close the door or, in my view, provide a barrier to looking beyond that and looking, like

other provinces across this country are doing, to try and find other ways to expand our capacity to deliver strong health to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mandatory Testing for Senior Drivers

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that there is a proposal being considered by government to have mandatory testing for drivers when they reach the age of 75. A number of my constituents are upset that government seems to be singling out seniors by requiring them to redo their driving test just because of their age. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Why do you seem to be targeting seniors when there are other drivers out there that are causing more traffic collisions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just say at the outset that these recommendations were brought forward from the McDermid report, which was a report on traffic safety in Alberta. I really must clarify some of the misunderstanding that is out there. We are not talking about a driver's test. We are talking about a medical test. Currently every person who is 75 does need to have a medical test when they hit 75 and then again at 80 and then every two years after that.

Mr. Speaker, what the McDermid report actually suggested is that, starting with 75, the seniors have a medical examination every two years following that. That is one of the recommendations that is going to be debated in this particular report.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Why are you only looking at seniors rather than drivers with known medical conditions?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we're not. Quite simply, when a medical doctor relays information that a person has a specific medical condition, each particular condition is subsequently analyzed and determined to have specific medical examinations at certain periods of time. For example, a diabetic has to have a medical examination at a certain period of time. All of these are very consistent with what is occurring now. What I really must stress and stress again, is that we're talking about drivers' examinations, about driver tests. We're simply talking about the medical examinations that are there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Will the minister assure this Assembly that there will be some form of consultation before any changes are made?

Dr. Oberg: Yeah, Mr. Speaker, absolutely. One of the things that I've stated about the McDermid report is that there are several recommendations from there that are quite controversial. Quite simply, this is one of the controversial recommendations; there are several others that are in the report. We are planning a full set of consultations in the next couple of months to determine what

Albertans think about these particular recommendations, such as photo radar at traffic lights. All of these things were in the actual recommendations. I feel that we should not simply get a report and put it on a shelf, so we must ask Albertans what they feel about these recommendations. Consequently, that's what will be occurring over the next couple months.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Alberta/Montana Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Electricity deregulation continues to cost Alberta consumers more and more, and now we find out that there is confusion, more and more confusion, in the Department of Energy over their transmission policy. Now, this department has failed to provide to consumers of this province a cost-benefit analysis detailing the benefit to consumers in this province of increased electricity exports through the Alberta/Montana tie-line. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. How much, if anything, will Alberta consumers save on their monthly power bills if the Alberta/Montana tie-line is completed?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the one reason we keep talking about why transmission is so vital is that it is the highway to how we get electricity from any two points. We all want electricity. We need those highways built. The greater interconnectivity we have, the greater reliability we have. If any one line goes down, if any one generator goes down, you have more options, both for import, export and otherwise. So it's too artificial to say that it's a simple calculation. We could save substantial money by having greater reliability.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. That's an expensive highway. Why is this Alberta government allowing increased electricity exports through the Alberta/Montana tie-line when your own department – your own department – states that Alberta will need anywhere between 6,000 and 13,000 megawatts of new electricity coming online in the next 20 years? Where is the benefit to consumers?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, first off, the transmission line for the Alberta/Montana tie-line is a private sector merchant line that's not being borne by or added to the cost to Albertans. It was actually a private sector initiative of their own accord. So it won't be on the backs of Albertans even for that line. However, it is in Albertans' interests to ensure that we have transmission built for our own needs and for our own purposes. We have a tie-line between Alberta/B.C. That has helped us substantively over the years. Having that greater interconnectivity will benefit Albertans to provide a more stable, reliable outcome for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: talking about the interests of Albertans, why is this government putting the interests of electricity exporters before the interests of Alberta consumers?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, it is about and we are developing that policy in the primary and sole interests of Albertans. It is for us to

ensure that we have – we already have lower nonhydro electricity costs than anywhere else. We have an excess of generation today. Find other jurisdictions in the country that don't have a tightness of supply. The other jurisdictions do. Even their rates are higher than what we're facing, in particular if you mention Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Digital Library Projects

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the throne speech of 2005 our government stated: to create 15,000 new student spaces in the following three years and support the development of the Alberta digital library as a responsive public institution in the fastest growing area in Calgary. The University of Calgary worked hard in this government direction with four major projects, one of them is the digital library. So these are world-leading initiatives to increase enrolment for about 7,000 students in the next few years. My question today is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Can the minister update the Assembly on the progress of the digital library project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The throne speech last year used as one of the examples of the types of projects which could be supported by the access to the future fund the Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library. The Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library is a project which came out of, as the member rightly says, a project at the University of Calgary, a Campus Calgary project, where they were creating a digital library for the Calgary area. Of course, once it's digitized, it's available online and can be available to students right across the province. We took that as an opportunity to expand across the province with a digital library, which will give access to academic resources to students right across this province.

The Alberta Library Board has taken on that project, and Dr. Frits Pannekoek, who's now the president of the University of Athabasca but at that time was at the University of Calgary as their chief librarian, is very actively involved in it. We have business plans coming, and the project is coming along very well.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: given that the digital library in Calgary is a partnership with many institutions, such as Mount Royal College, Bow Valley College, Alberta College of Art and Design, SAIT, and also the Red Crow College on the Blood reserve, with over a hundred thousand learners, what action does the minister take to help to facilitate such excellent collaboration among our institutions in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two projects that we should be clear on. One is the Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library, which was announced in the Speech from the Throne as being supported out of the access to the future fund. Then, building on, the second project is the University of Calgary's digital library project, which they initiated in collaboration with the colleges and the institutions which the hon. member mentioned. We're working on both of those projects. We're working with the Lois Hole

Campus Alberta digital library project to make sure that those digitized resources, both print and three-dimensional resources, are available to students across the province.

One of the interesting things about the Campus Calgary one is the tie-in to Red Crow College. It shows the power of being able to add other institutions, some of which are not even within our jurisdiction, to the process and provide those academic resources more broadly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when do you expect this digital library to start and complete helping modernize our education into the modern age?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the digital library project is well under way. Many of the institutions are already digitizing resources. Many of the institutions have library licensing. The project board has put together a business plan. So that project is well under way.

The hon. member should also be aware that the University of Calgary has as one of their priorities a digital library, and what that is, as distinct from the Campus Alberta digital library, is a building which will house their digital library centre: their digitizing resources, their computer resources as well as their library resources. That project would actually bring in library resources from across the campus and free up space for them. I know that the University of Calgary is eager to proceed with that specific building project as well as participating in the cross-Alberta Campus Alberta digital library project.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I first asked this government to deal with the unfunded teachers' pension liability on May 11, 2005. It's almost a year later and still no action. My question is for the Minister of Education. When will this minister get off the fence and finally make a decision about the teachers' unfunded pension liability?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to an agreement from 1992-93 the unfunded pension liability is contributed to with a responsibility by government to the tune of two-thirds and teachers to the tune of one-third. So there is an agreement already in place that addresses the unfunded pension liability. From the '92-93 period going forward, the contributions are roughly 50-50. It is a serious issue. I have acknowledged that here, and I've acknowledged it out there. It's a very complicated scenario, and it's not an easy one to work our way through.

Secondly, there are a number of other unfunded pension liabilities that we also have to consider, and it's difficult to do one and not look at the others. So we're trying to look at a variety of issues here.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that I'm concerned, as I'm sure the hon. questioner is, with the impact of the unfunded pension liability on teacher retention and on teacher recruitment, and that's why we've undertaken to try and address this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how much has the unfunded liability grown while Alberta taxpayers have waited nearly a year for this minister to do something?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the current unfunded pension liability for teachers stands at just over \$6 billion, if my memory serves correctly. Government assumes responsibility for about \$4 billion of it; teachers are responsible for about \$2 billion of it. Our contribution, which is built into my budget in Education, at the moment stands at around \$140 million or \$145 million per year for the unfunded pension portion only. Our total contribution to the teachers' pension, both unfunded and current, is more in the line of over \$300 million per year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A curriculum question for the Education minister: at what grade level do Alberta students learn about the effects of compound interest?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, let me see. I learned about it in grade 8. I'd have to look it up and see if that's in the pure math curriculum or the applied math curriculum. Sure enough, it's addressed somewhere, as I recall, in the junior high school years. I'll verify that for the hon. member.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Funding for the University of Calgary

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Advanced Education: is it the Advanced Education department's policy to encourage only one world-class university in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, our government and all Albertans can be proud of the fact that we have four very fine universities in this province. Each one is world class in specific areas. Athabasca University is well renowned around the world as a leading open university. It has international accreditation. It's known in all parts of the world for being one of the world-class open universities. The University of Lethbridge has top-notch water research and will soon be, if it's not now, leading edge in the world. The University of Alberta is a leader in medical research, dentistry, pharmacy, and many other areas. It has a nanotechnology facility. The University of Calgary is a leader in social work, architecture, and many other areas and will soon be a world leader in the new ways of teaching veterinary medicine.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have four great universities. The University of Alberta's new president has said that it should be in the top 20 in the world by 2020. I think that's something that we should aspire to. I think all four universities, in fact all of our public education institutions, should aspire to be world class. Indeed, we want to have a world-class system, and we do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is the per-student grant approximately a thousand

dollars less for U of C students in spite of there being a more expensive mix of programs at the U of C?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's premise is not correct in that there's a more expensive mix of programs at the U of C. In fact, if you take the grant and divide it by the number of students, you will get the wrong answer. That's what's happened here. If you did that, you would show \$1,000 per student more at the U of A than the U of C.

However, what's important is that we don't fund based strictly on the number of students. We fund on a base level funding based on the buildings, based on the number of students in specific programs. In fact, there are a number of different programs with different levels of expenses, and those account for the majority of the difference in the funding levels.

Now, on a periodic basis we do readjust the funding levels to ensure that there's continuing equity. That's done every five years, and we're in the process of doing that now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. Again to the Minister of Advanced Education: would the minister be willing to meet with the Calgary caucus together with representatives of the University of Calgary to resolve this issue?

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member is aware, I think, that we have a meeting on Thursday to talk about the discrepancy that she's talking about, that I meet on a regular basis with the presidents of all the institutions, both singly and together, and that I'm always interested in talking about it. She also should be aware that the president of the University of Calgary is on what we call the systems transformation subcommittee that came out of the Learning Alberta forum, so he's ideally positioned at the centre of the discussion about how we deal with the funding formula not just for the universities and colleges but also the funding formula process with respect to affordability for students and the roles and mandates for institutions in the province. The president of the University of Calgary is at the centre of the discussions. I have ongoing discussions with him individually. I'm meeting with the presidents of all the institutions in Calgary later on this month on Campus Calgary, and I'm meeting with Calgary caucus on the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:10 New School Construction in Calgary

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The contradiction which exists between the ministry of learning's space utilization formula and its implementation of the Learning Commission's reduced class size initiative is causing older schools to be unnecessarily closed and the very few new schools opened to be built much smaller than their community's student population requires. My questions are to the minister of learning. If class sizes for divisions 1 and 2 are mandated to be under 23 students, why does the current space utilization formula still measure classroom space as being able to accommodate 30-plus students?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I don't recall if that's the exact case or not, just off the top of my head, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell you that the

Commission on Learning made some recommendations with respect to class size and indicated that the K to 3 level on a jurisdiction-wide basis should strive for 17 students per classroom. Grades 4, 5, and 6 would be 23; grades 7, 8, and 9 would be 25; and the high school would be, of course, 27. They said that we should try and get to that rate within about five years. Now, we've accelerated that. In fact, for all of the grades from, I think, grade 4 to grade 12 the majority of our school boards by far are already at the recommended guidelines within a two and a half year window of time or they've bettered themselves than what was recommended. So regardless of which formula the hon. member might want to look at, we are making tremendously positive progress toward meeting those expectations.

Mr. Chase: Well, I'm sure Mr. Dirks would be pleased to hear that.

My second question for the Minister of Education: how much longer will the Calgary public and separate school boards, tens of thousands of parents, and their students have to wait for the combined 62 missing community schools, 40 public and 22 separate, to be built?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we've opened or are scheduled to open a number of brand new schools in Calgary even in this year. I can tell you that in Calgary-Foothills we have a new K to 4 school under construction for \$6.6 million that will open in October of '06. We have a K to 4 core school, Chaparral elementary in Calgary-Shaw. That will open in October '06. That's \$6.1 million. There's a new school called Douglasdale/Glen elementary in Calgary-Hays. That will open in the spring, very shortly, \$5.2 million. The list goes on, and that's just on the public side. I have a list on the Catholic side that I could read off as well. So the infrastructure issues are getting addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My last question to the Minister of Education: why should a third of Calgary public students and an even larger proportion of Calgary Catholic students have to ride the bus when for the same amount of money wasted on bus fees several new schools could be built each year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the issue of transportation ride times is obviously a local issue. Transportation funding is obviously a joint issue between the province and the local school board. When I met with all of these school boards in the fall, in fact, I had put this issue on the agenda. There is a review of our renewed funding framework going on right now. I'll expect those results very soon, and then we'll try and make whatever improvements are necessary there. But the fundamental thing here going forward is to take a closer look at building schools where the population exists, quite obviously, and that will cut down on some of the ride times and on some of the busing costs. On the other hand, we do have a number of good, old schools that are still quite functional.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Social Assistance

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time I will table a report from the Winspear fund that makes for sobering and sad reading. In the past year the Winspear fund in Edmonton

has assisted 148 individuals and families whose basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing are going unmet due to the inadequacy of government income support programs. Over 60 per cent of this emergency funding went to families with children. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How does the minister justify that in a rich province like Alberta the most vulnerable citizens are having to turn to agencies like the Winspear fund to help them overcome desperate situations?

Mr. Cardinal: Yes, Mr. Speaker, no one should be in that situation in Alberta. I agree with you fully. Our government, of course, is definitely working on programs to provide additional services for those people who are caught in that unfortunate situation. We do help also with daycare assistance and other school supports.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the Winspear fund, along with other agencies, is having to do the government's work. My question is again to the minister. When is the minister going to do something about it so that these people don't continue to fall through the cracks?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, I ask the member to provide the information he has, and I'm willing to sit down and go through the package.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I said that I would table this information.

My final question, then, is to the minister. He does have control. When can the people in Alberta Works expect to receive a long-overdue and substantial – and I stress substantial – increase in their monthly benefit levels?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, this is an area I've been working on for the last six, eight months or so. Of course, it's a matter of time. Soon things will change.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Traffic Safety Pilot Project

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security recently announced a six-month pilot project that puts sheriffs on highways 21 and 63 to perform traffic safety patrols with RCMP officers. This project has raised a number of questions about enforcement and safety on Alberta's highways. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Why is there a need for a traffic safety pilot project on these highways?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation mentioned earlier, the McDermid report had nine recommendations regarding traffic safety in the province, the vision 2010, that we want to look at, reducing somewhat the 25,000 injuries and the 400 deaths per year on Alberta's highways.

Our department is looking at all options, Mr. Speaker, whether the new policing service delivery model regarding how we can enhance our services on these highways as well as ensuring that the police officers who are multiskilled in criminal investigations can remain

doing just that: investigating criminal activity and responding to emergencies.

Mr. Speaker, this pilot project allowed us to train 10 sheriffs that have extensive training in both traffic investigation and traffic enforcement. During this pilot project we are stressing these two highways, 21 and 63, regarding the high number of fatalities and collisions that are on those highways. Obviously, there's a need for other highways as well, most recently highway 19 between highways 2 and 21. There were two recent fatalities on that stretch of road, that the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon was speaking to me about.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. You said that these officers are trained in traffic safety. What happens if they come across crimes such as impaired driving or drug infractions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This pilot project is in conjunction with the RCMP. It's an opportunity for both the sheriffs' office and the RCMP to work together and complement each other from that enforcement aspect of the traffic investigation. If, for example, a traffic officer, or sheriff, came upon an impaired driver, he has the authority under the Criminal Code to arrest that individual, but he would then turn that individual over to the RCMP for the criminal investigation regarding that offence.

2:20

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister again: how and when will we know if this pilot is an effective way to address traffic safety?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, the ultimate goal of the pilot project is obviously to see a reduction in the number of injuries and a reduction in the number of fatalities that we have in the province. If we can save one or two lives even, that's going to show that we can have an impact through education, through enforcement, and through personal contact between an officer and a violator. Obviously, with an increase in enforcement comes a heightened level of awareness and education for drivers, who ultimately have the responsibility to drive safely.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Collective Bargaining for Teachers

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School boards, teachers, and parents continue to wait while children pay the price for the policy gridlock in the Education minister's office. He is keeping important information under wraps and is blaming teachers, boards, and parents, in fact almost anybody, for the inability to get the job done. My question to the Minister of Education: how will boards negotiate contracts with the ATA in May of this year? Is an e-mail your only solution to the problem, sir?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no one on this side of the House in the government caucus has been blaming anyone. There has been a

little bit of blame from the opposition toward some of the teaching profession unfortunately, but I can tell you that as shameful as that is, we on this side value the parents and the teachers and the children who are in our education system. The issue of negotiating is being done at the local level right now. There is a recommendation in the Learning Commission to try and change that and move to a new model, and we have been looking at that and trying to see what the impact of it might be, but there's not exactly unanimity amongst school boards on that proposal either. It's a difficult issue, but it is one that we are continuing to look at and review.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the minister blaming his inability to make a decision on a bargaining model for Alberta on disagreements between school boards? Does he feel it is not his job to resolve this very, very important issue?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize this again: nobody is blaming anyone, and no one is blaming anything, other than perhaps the Education critic on the other side. What we have here is a long-standing tradition of local bargaining, which some school boards are willing to part with, some are not willing to part with. But I will be meeting with all the school board chairs on March 24, and this is one of many issues on our agenda at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Principals continue to wonder: are they in or are they out of the ATA? How long will we wait, or does he not feel it is his job to resolve this very important issue? Is it indecisiveness? Can he make a decision?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, if the question is, "Are principals in or are they out?" clearly at the moment they're in. That's a no-brainer. They're in the ATA. The recommendation that the hon. member is referring to was pursued with a study last year. That report came to me a few months ago. We've been looking at it. We've been looking at the impact of it, and it's not quite as simple as I think some people in the opposition try to make this issue sound.

For example, there are a number of principals who also teach. Now, if there were a consideration given to removing principals from the ATA, that would de facto mean that they could no longer teach. So a teacher would have to be hired to come in and take over where that principal left off. There is a financial implication there. There is a teacher supply issue as well that exists there. Of course, there would be some issues pertaining to infrastructure. Yes, it does have some complications to it, but that, too, remains one of those issues that has required some additional review, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Alberta at the Smithsonian

Mrs. Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, in March 2005 the government of Alberta and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington signed an historical agreement for our province to take part in the internationally renowned Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. Not only does this appear to be a great venue to showcase our province, but I understand that the festival is proven to stimulate economic opportunity, boost marketing, tourism, trade, government relations, and public relations. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the minister

please provide an update and advise the Legislative Assembly on where we are in planning for Alberta's participation in this festival?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour that the Smithsonian has honoured this province, Alberta, to take part in the Folklife Festival that will be held in Washington between the dates of June 30 and July 11. What is so exciting is that we are the first ever Canadian jurisdiction to be represented at the Smithsonian. This will give us an opportunity to showcase our culture, our folklife before over a million visitors in Washington mall, another 12 million that will take part looking at various websites and periodicals and tourism journals. The plan is going ahead. We will be making a formal announcement at the end of April in terms of the Smithsonian Institute and Alberta at the Smithsonian, and we're very pleased that we were given this opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the Minister of Community Development. Given that Alberta has 3.3 million people from all different backgrounds, cultures, and workplaces, can the minister tell us how he selected 150 representatives to fully demonstrate our diversity, economy, and way of life to our American neighbours in Washington, DC?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I don't need to remind you or members of this House that this province has an incredibly wide and diverse cultural, occupational, and living history, and no doubt it is a great challenge to find 150 people to represent this. But this is exactly the goal and the goal of the Smithsonian Institution, to present a cross-section of Alberta life on the Washington mall.

There has been a curator from the Smithsonian, Dr. Nancy Groce, who has travelled tens of thousands of kilometres, spent a great deal of time here in Alberta with staff from Alberta Community Development to come to have an understanding about the history and the contemporary identity of Alberta. Through this curatorial process the Smithsonian has actually decided, of course in consultation with officials from Community Development, as to which aspects of Alberta life to include. So, as referred to by my hon. colleague, the minister of intergovernmental affairs, at the end of April we will have an announcement to make with respect to the specific displays, the exhibits, and the artists that will be representing and making up Alberta at the Smithsonian.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can you advise us whether there are other activities planned in Washington to go along with the Folklife Festival to focus additional attention on Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to cover a couple of plans for the Smithsonian. One, of course, is the unveiling of the website, Alberta at the Smithsonian, which will be very important. But most important will be Alberta week at the Smithsonian. This will be some social events and a number of economic forums. We're also pleased that the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton and a number of private-sector companies will be participating the week before. Why it's so important is that the House will rise that

particular last week of June, and we'll have all of the decision-makers, the elected representatives, and very senior policy decision-makers visiting Alberta at the Smithsonian that particular week, and we will be able to convey to them how important our Alberta/U.S. relations are.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was a very significant 84 questions and answers in a 50-minute question period.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Our historical vignette today begins with a quote, and I refer you to *Alberta Hansard*, March 8, 1976. The following words were spoken.

We of the commonwealth of nations are justifiably proud of the system we've inherited: a symbolic head of state in the Crown which continues on forever and is not subject to the whims of parties in power, elected parliaments, appointed judges who then become unassailable by the politicians, courts of appeal, civic rights, and a vast body of law.

2:30

These words were given by Roy Alexander Farran, who was born January 2, 1921, in England and spent his youth in India. A major in the British army he retired in 1948. He is probably the most decorated man to have served in the Alberta Legislature. Military honours bestowed upon Mr. Farran include the Croix d'Officier de la Légion d'Honneur, the British Distinguished Service Order, the Military Cross, the French Croix de Guerre, the U.S. Legion of Merit, the Italian gold medal, and the Greek War medal.

Mr. Farran arrived in Alberta post World War II, already an accomplished fiction and nonfiction writer. He arrived here to work with the *Calgary Herald* and to establish the *North Hill News* as owner and publisher. He was an alderman for the city of Calgary from 1961 to 1971. He was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in 1971 for Calgary-North Hill as a Progressive Conservative and was re-elected in 1975. Mr. Farran was the Minister of Telephones and Utilities from 1973 to 1975 and Solicitor General from 1975 to 1979. He is the author of seven books, including the classic *Winged Dagger: Adventures on Special Service*, published by Collins in London in 1948. Roy Farran currently lives in retirement in Calgary, Alberta.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have never had the privilege before of introducing members of my family. This afternoon, quite unexpectedly, my youngest grandson, Ryan, who was the winner, number 1, at his school in a science fair project, and his father, Darren, an enthusiastic golf pro and parent, are present. Darren Evans and Ryan are from Barrie, Ontario. If they would both please rise.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special class that's attending NorQuest College in my constituency. This is an employment program, including job opportunities for building success, and also a transitional vocational

program. We have 16 students joining us along with their instructor, Ms Judy Dobbs. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and Deputy Speaker.

New Acme Community Centre

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend marked the second anniversary of a devastating fire in the village of Acme, a fire that consumed their community centre, the Acme Memorial Hall, which was built in 1959 and had just undergone numerous renovations. Needless to say, this was quite a shock and a loss to the community.

However, this past weekend also marked the grand opening of a new, modern Acme community centre built on the exact same site as the old one for a cost of \$1,850,000. Due to the hard work and determination and perseverance of everyone involved, only \$20,000 of that \$1,850,000 remains unpaid. Insurance coverage made up just over \$1 million, with the remaining \$824,000 of the cost being raised through fundraisers, private and corporate donations, and grants, all in two short years. This facility will serve Acme and district as well as central Alberta very well for many years to come.

The people of Acme and district are a shining example of the determination and hard work that's required to overcome adversity and challenges in building a great community and a great province. I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating Acme and the residents of the district on a great job well done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Red Deer College Kings Volleyball Team

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to stand in the Legislature of Alberta once again to recognize the continuing dynasty of the Red Deer College Kings volleyball team. For the seventh consecutive year the Red Deer College Kings men's team have been crowned national champions at the Canadian men's volleyball championship in Quebec City. This winning streak gives the College Kings the record for the most consecutive victories in Canada, moving them past their closest competitors, the Limoilou college Titans of Quebec City, who previously held these bragging rights with six consecutive victories.

This was not an easy championship. Coming within a whisker of losing the biggest game of all, the Canadian colleges' men's volleyball final, the Kings battled their worthy opponents from Quebec City, who were outstanding before a hometown crowd that had the house rocking with the beat of drums and noisemakers that never stopped. Using their experience and skill along with the exceptional direction of their dynastic coach, Keith Hansen, the team stepped up at the most critical time to win the championship. The King's captain, Joey Martins, and Graham Hetherington, a third-year player, were both named to the second all-star team.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the Members of this Legislative Assembly to join me in congratulating players Pierre Rocque, Aaron Yasinski, Kris Inglis, Gilles Plouffe, Andrew Reed, Peter (Andy) Shaw, Chaim Schalk, Andrew Tallas, Jason Waddell, Cody Lockhart, Doug Gilbertson, Tim Gourlay, and Joey Martins along with head coach Keith Hansen, assistant coaches Bob Rutz and Adam Roth, athletic

therapist Heather Fletcher, student trainer Cole Dziatkewich, and video champ Lee Tipman.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Commonwealth Day

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we recognized Commonwealth Day. The Commonwealth is home to more than 1.8 billion people in 53 countries, rich and poor, small and large, spread across every continent and ocean in the world. The dynamic and vibrant network of partnerships that exists among its people gives the Commonwealth its unique stand in promoting peace, democracy, development, and co-operation.

Development is about people, their quality of life, the choices available to them as they strive to reach their full potential. It's about finding new ways to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, education, health care, jobs, transport, safe living conditions, good government, and a stable economy. We see many parts of our world in need of critical care and observe that as a partner we share a special responsibility to alleviate poverty and disease and provide access to education and essential health care services in need.

Working in partnership is essential between the nations of this earth, whether they are developed or developing. This is how we build a better, more secure, more sustainable world. Only together can we achieve an open and democratic society. Together we will be able to recognize that we all share a common humanity regardless of who we are and where we come from.

I congratulate all 53 Commonwealth nations on this very special day. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Team Thomas World Junior Curlers

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again it's a pleasure for me to rise and recognize the fact that although my colleague from Red Deer-North has indicated that central Alberta has some good athletes, Alberta's northwest has great athletes. I want to speak about some of them, particularly some of the athletes from the Grande Prairie region, on behalf of myself and my colleague from Grande Prairie-Wapiti and all of our constituents.

Last week I mentioned two world-class events that came to our region, attracting world-class competitors. This time, Mr. Speaker, we applaud four young men from the Grande Prairie Curling Club who are provincial and national junior curling champions. The foursome – skip Charley Thomas, third Geoff Walker, second Rollie Robinson, and lead Kyle Reynolds – is representing Canada at the world junior curling championships in Jeonju, South Korea. I understand that at this point Team Canada has a 4 and 0 record. We not only welcome the world to Alberta's beautiful Peace Country, but we also send world-class athletes to represent Canada around the world. Again, that can-do attitude.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

2:40 U of A Pandas Women's Hockey Team

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The University of Alberta Pandas hockey team claimed its fifth Canadian Interuniversity Sport

women's championship title in seven years with a 2-1 win over the top-seeded Laurier Golden Hawks in Nova Scotia on Sunday evening. The defensive-minded Pandas, the number 2 tournament seed, fell behind early, just as they did in Saturday's semifinal against St. FX, but this time they rebounded quickly and played an almost flawless system after taking the lead midway through the second period.

Goaltender Aaron Sorochan was named the Canada West Freshman of the Year. She finished the conference playoffs with a perfect 4-0-0, Mr. Speaker.

Nineteen-year-old physical education student Tarin Podloski led all scorers at the nationals with five points to pick up the tournament MVP honours after being named a second team all-Canadian last week. Mr. Speaker, Podloski was named a first team conference all-star in the Canada West during the 2005-06 season after finishing second in the league in scoring with 28 points.

Of note, Rachel Sanders picked up her second team sport gold medal of 2005-06 after helping the field hockey Pandas and Coach Carla Somerville to their first national title in team history last fall. The last CIS player to accomplish the feat was Alberta's Nicole Chapdelaine, who won both women's soccer and hockey in 2001-2002.

Congratulations to the Pandas for continuing the University of Alberta winning tradition.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Child Care Program

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children's Services recently met with her federal counterpart. I suspect that the federal minister recently heard two very different messages on this issue.

On the one hand, the Premier of Quebec has been strongly advocating for maintaining the agreement reached last year between the federal government and several of the provinces, and no wonder. Quebec's \$7-a-day child care system is the envy of parents across the country. That government understands that investing in early childhood development programs and quality public child care gives children an important head start while providing parents more choices when returning to work.

On the other hand, our own minister likely delivered a more ambiguous message. I say this because she has told Albertans that she is philosophically supportive of the Prime Minister's plan to give parents \$100 per month as a buy-off for cancelling last year's \$5 billion agreement, and that has got Alberta families and child care providers very concerned. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. As a taxable benefit \$100 would leave fewer dollars in parents' pockets than promised. The current \$500 per month subsidy for child care spaces, wage increases for child care workers, subsidies for early childhood programs, and programs for kids with disabilities may also be on the chopping block.

The minister must tell Albertans in clear terms what her vision is for child care. She must fight for the dollars won in last year's agreement, must make a categorical public commitment to Alberta parents that they will have affordable access to high-quality, public, nonprofit child care and that she will stand by her five-point plan come hell or high water.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on a petition.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with 177 signatures on it. The petition urges the government of Alberta to "eliminate private clinics and private delivery in the health care system, and develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen and extend Medicare." This brings the total number of these signatures to 715.

Thank you very much.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter from Donald Moreau regarding drivers' licensing for seniors with medical problems.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first that I am pleased to table with the appropriate number of copies is a letter from a constituent, Mr. Fouad Ammar. It states his belief that we should focus on public health care and that private health care is not needed.

The second tabling I have with the appropriate number of copies: six letters that I have received from parents and daycare owners and other citizens voicing concerns about the cancellation of the national daycare program. They are from Liliane Chahmini,* Min Du, N. Cato, Kim Gravel, Paul Broda, and Chris Kubica.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of letters received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. I'm tabling today from J. St. Onge, Mandy Palmer, Lisa Brandingen, Jim Crook, Alicia Drake, Roberta Keichinger.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the proper number of copies of a report of the 2005 disbursements from the Winspear fund. The fund was designed to be one-time emergency funding for people who are working hard to help themselves but whose social circumstances create a need for financial assistance. Between November 2004 and December 2005 this fund helped out 148 people who otherwise wouldn't have received assistance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of letters received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing the concerns about the cancellation of the national daycare program. There are four letters from Janet Algar, Teresa Frost, Sharron Glimm, Roxanne Campbell and two letters that are signed by someone that writes like a doctor.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table six further letters regarding the cancellation of the

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

national daycare program. The writers today include Jen Smith, Anu Heuser, Ken and Patricia Skawronik, Jannele Martin, Angela Webb, and another doctor.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise again to table the appropriate number of copies of many letters I've received from concerned parents, daycare owners, citizens with regard to the termination of the national daycare program. These letters came from Nicole Zebinski, April Wellington, Laurie Brandle, T. Pickunyk, Natalie Bragg,* and K. Wack.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling e-mails from a Mr. John Hartley, which were sent to many members of the Assembly. Mr. Hartley wonders why Conservative MLAs are so intent on destroying medicare and notes that opposition parties have supplied solid alternatives. [interjections] He's my kind of guy. There should be open consultation on health reform as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: And that, hon. member, is why this Assembly must deal with this whole question of tabling of e-mails one of these days.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some more letters about the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters are from Steve Allan, Vanessa Botuk,* Melodie Pearson, Rhonda Wendland,* Joanna Cornisson,* Julie Pinney-Reeves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I know this question because I now get lots more notes from hon. members about this whole question of tablings. A national daycare program falls under federal jurisdiction, not provincial jurisdiction, and unless some of these things are worded to have an impact in Alberta, I think they should be filed in Ottawa rather than here.

head: 2:50

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Bill 18

Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to move on behalf of the hon. Mr. Mar Bill 18, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, 2006.

The Speaker: Is the hon. minister proceeding with additional comments?

Mr. Hancock: Not at this time.

The Speaker: Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm speaking against Bill 18. This bill isn't about protection; it's about reduction and destruction. It's a feeble attempt to legitimize this government's current laissez-faire attitude through legislation.

To begin with, I'd like to speak about communication, or lack thereof. Last week my researcher, on my behalf, approached the Minister of Community Development requesting a three-column document. The purpose of this request was to get an outline of the intention of the bill. That was not provided. So in an act of desperation and an attempt to follow through with parliamentary procedure, I approached the minister's office at noon today. I was confronted by an individual who obviously went through the Charlebois school of communication in that no documentation was supplied. Of course, the Charlebois school would suggest \$800,000 worth of taxpayer money for no written evidence. This seems to be the way communication is received within this ministry.

An Hon. Member: You didn't even get the facts straight. Truly.

The Speaker: Okay, okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor. We're currently in second reading of a bill. Please proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past summer, in an attempt to do my job as critic, I sent out requests to all the parks and protected areas. We had quite a degree of difficulty finding the addresses, the e-mails due to, again, insufficient communication. But through much research on behalf of my researcher we accomplished the task, and in good faith we sent out letters to each and every park, wilderness area, protected, and so on. We asked a very simple question. It was: could you give us, please, your three most important wishes? If you could have these three wishes granted – infrastructure, whatever it might be – what would they be?

Well, these hard-working individuals in the field were effectively silenced by this ministry. They were not allowed to comment. In fact, they were instructed not to comment. I was told that as the lowly critic I would receive this information through the Department of Community Development. That communication has not been forthcoming. When I am about talking to individuals in the field, some of them almost have the need, it appears, to cover over their badges for fear that the information or the questions I might ask might somehow find its way back to the department, and punishment would occur later.

This lack of whistle-blower legislation, the lack of communication applies directly to Bill 18. One of the proposals in this bill is to terminate the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves. By so doing, we get to silence another group, and we get to say that everything we do within our own department of community relations is fine. We don't need to seek advice from anyone else because we know it all. The bill removes the advisory committee and, as such, reduces democratic participation. This group of six public members and six government members provided advice to ministers on establishment and withdrawal of wilderness areas, ecological reserves, and the making of regulations. Any advisory committee recommendations were to be placed before the Assembly within 15 days. That was a refreshing form of not only consultation but sharing of the information.

This government will say that the advisory committee is obsolete as it's not currently sitting. This is not an acceptable reason to dismantle the advisory committee. The advisory committee has become obsolete only because this government has chosen not to appoint members, not to appoint a chair, or not to call a meeting. In fact, the last document that we have in the library goes back to 1980.

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

I guess there's no interest in communication. There's no interest in seeking advice. So to legitimize our lack of communication, we'll just shut down the committee. It hasn't met since 1980. I would like to think that rather than eliminating it, we would renew it.

Now, in terms of parks and protected areas this is a reasonably small expectation in that only slightly over 4 per cent of our land is under provincial protection designation. This ministry can't even manage that amount. In total we have slightly over 500 different forms of parks, wilderness areas, ecological reserves, and so on. Of that approximate 500, only 43 of them have management plans. Of that 43, the majority are very incomplete. How can you protect something that you don't manage?

In addition to the management there is a concern about the ability to manage in the field. Again, when I and other members of our caucus have gone throughout the province and have talked first-hand to conservation officers and park managers, the answer we get is: there aren't enough of us to do the job that we're expected to do. Since 1990 over half of the conservation officers have been removed. There are very few seasonal conservation officers, and there seems to be no career opportunity in the conservation areas for the seasonals to move to full-time employment.

One of the areas that I actually agree with is the idea of increasing the fines. The only problem is: how are you going to catch the crooks when you have very few so-called policemen in the form of conservation officers patrolling large expanses of land to do their job?

Another concern I have has to do with the elimination of buffer zones. To me this is just a matter of legitimizing current practice. Last year I went into great detail, probably painstaking, painful detail, about a specific experience of my own, and that was the Cataract Creek wildlife wilderness area. The buffer zone was effectively mowed down courtesy of Spray Lakes logging, that clear-cut right to the borders of the park. Then, not content to clear-cut, having basically destroyed the perimeter, they passed it on to Bell Pole. Bell Pole was given the permission to drive through the campground, take out the most pristine campsite so that they could build a road up to Mount Burke and to the second set of falls so that they could take whatever other lodgepole pines remained. This is this government's idea of a buffer zone.

In terms of multi-use and multi-abuse, the protected designation at this point is not worth the paper it is printed upon. Industry gets first crack within the majority of parks. They build the first roads. Then the next group to get a crack is forestry. Instead of using the same road to access the area, they have to build their own road. By the time we're through, we've got criss-crossed roads through the park areas. Then we blame wolves for getting after woodland caribou. So we get into our planes, get out the 30-30s, and wipe out the wolves. They're not the problem. It's the access, the cutting up of our wilderness areas that is truly the problem.

3:00

Until people and wildlife have a larger say in the presentation of the parks, we're going to have considerable confrontation and conflict. People with ATVs have legitimate requirements, people with snowmobiles have legitimate requirements, but you cannot coexist with hikers, climbers, fishermen. The answer is not simply just to close down the whole area to all the groups affected but to come up with a plan whereby off-road vehicles would have a place to have their fun, which is legitimate for them to do. Snowmobilers would be able to access areas, which hopefully wouldn't be so clear-cut as to not have any esthetic appeal for travelling. The group that I don't have much sympathy for – but I suppose they deserve a space of their own; I wouldn't like to think that it was a government-

funded space – is the mud buggies. These are the ones that cut up our creeks and our riverbeds. I don't see them as having any legitimacy within a park and protected wilderness area.

This bill does not protect. This bill does not improve the access for people with disabilities. It does not promote access for people of reduced financial means. The rates for camping in our various parks continue to go up, but the private companies who are doing their best to provide the services are not being supported by this government. This government has its special little areas. The Canmore Nordic Centre: this is our poster to the world. This is our version of what we do in Alberta. As soon as you get off the pavement and you venture into the wilderness parks, you see all around the destruction. Within the parks themselves you see the rotting infrastructure.

Back to the concern about multi-use. I don't have a whole lot of trouble with free-range cattle, but I'd like to see them outside the park for my campers and other Albertans to enjoy, not wandering through because of the fact that this ministry has not maintained the fencelines.

I also have concerns about the sale of public land. This government is very big on selling off its leases. I'd like to see some of this public land turned into park space and protected under a legitimate regulatory body with sufficient numbers of people to see that the regulations were actually carried out.

Alberta is a beautiful province. We've had a series of wonderful movies. But if the helicopter that filmed part of *Brokeback Mountain* had flown a little to the right or a little to the left or over to the other side, you would have seen the clear-cuts. This past week when we were attending concerns over coal-bed methane throughout the Horseshoe Canyon, we saw a picture of what had happened in New Mexico. We saw blotches, which were the well sites. Well, for Alberta those blotches are the clear-cuts. They should not be allowed to happen, and using pine beetles as an excuse for unrestricted forestry management is not acceptable.

Our wilderness should be what we promote. Unfortunately, that is not the case. I cannot support this bill as it takes away from regulation and legislation rather than strengthening it.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest this afternoon to speak on Bill 18, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, 2006. I think that the title of this bill is indicative of the breadth that it attempts to cover, so I find, perhaps, speaking to the spirit of the overall bill a little more difficult with this one since it seeks to cover just a wide range of issues in regard to parks, natural areas, and various regulations and statutes that govern those areas.

I can say that I have more questions, perhaps, than answers in general with the entirety of Bill 18; however, certainly, there are a number of specific areas that I have concerns with that I will seek clarity from the minister. Hopefully, we can come up with some amicable agreement to some specific areas in this bill. I guess that most of it appears to be reflecting actual policy and just trying to clarify some sections and update them for changes that have taken place either through policy or through the evolution of use of these ecological areas and heritage areas and whatnot.

However, there are some specific sections that I have circled that I would like to bring up here this afternoon. First of all, section 9 of this amendment. My reading of it is that this section deals with programs or measures allowed in areas of ecological importance. Particularly, subsection (b) is somewhat disconcerting, I think, Mr. Speaker, as it states that the minister may allow programs or

measures to be carried out with respect to “environmental research and reclamation” whereas the original section said, “for environmental research that does not involve any physical disturbance of a wilderness area, ecological reserve or heritage rangeland.”

I find this to be quite a significant change in the language, and I’m wondering if this is an attempt to somehow change our environmental duty to these protected areas and actually allow developments, perhaps oil and gas, perhaps forestry or others, inside of ecological reserves. Of course, the word “reclamation” intimates that you have made some significant disruption in the first place that requires reclamation. So this would be a section that I have particular difficulty with if it is in fact changing the nature by which we have drawn the special places in the first place to protect them from those various sorts of industrial activities that this could imply.

Another amendment that I saw straightaway refers to the Crown not being obligated to ensure “as far as practicable that the interest” in areas of ecological importance is “withdrawn, cancelled or otherwise terminated as soon as possible.” If the interest, in my mind, is “privately owned minerals in an ecological reserve,” as described in section 10, when this might occur, what environmental impact does this amendment have as well? It sort of implies that you in fact are allowing more intensive incursions into a protected area and giving primacy to the privately owned minerals of that said region as opposed to, perhaps, the importance of the integrity of the ecological areas.

So those are two areas that I see specifically that have jumped out at me that are causing trouble. Once again I say that I can’t speak specifically to the spirit of the bill because, certainly, there are individual sections in here that seem eminently reasonable and logical to me, which, I guess, they should be.

3:10

But, say, another couple of pieces here – I do have an overriding feel to this bill. It’s talking about amending heritage rangeland trails, changing it from not allowing motorized vehicles to what in my mind is allowing all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles. So I’m just wondering if this is a specific intention just for one area or if this is a policy that’s ongoing to allow protected areas and ecological reserves, heritage rangelands to have more motorized vehicle traffic in them. We know that this is a problem in general. I hope that there’s not a policy just to sort of throw up one’s collective hands and let it go just for the sake of the fact that we can’t govern or protect these places due to the insufficient numbers of officers in the field.

I also have a problem with, you know, not protecting buffer zones around protected areas. Without being able to somehow connect special ecological zones together to create wilderness corridors, Mr. Speaker, for wildlife to have a sustained area to operate in, you have this patchwork effect that becomes very evident when you fly at lowish levels across the eastern slopes and all through northern Alberta, where the intact, sort of continuous wilderness has been cut into literally thousands and thousands of pieces due to very intensive seismic and oil and gas and forestry activity over the past 30 years. I think all of us can speak to the dramatic change which has taken place in the continuous wilderness that is inside the borders of Alberta.

It’s very important at this juncture for us to look critically at how much of the overall space in the province of Alberta we are willing to protect and what sort of corridors and spaces there are between these protected areas to allow for the continuous movement of animals and plants and bird life to continue with the sort of intact ecology, evolution, and development of this place that has been the case for thousands of years.

With the speed of development one would expect that our responsibility here in the Legislature is to protect as much as we can while we still can. There’s a point that we’ve, I think, already passed, where we must stand in the way of unchecked development. We certainly have experienced the economic benefits of such development over the past 30 years. But I would say that for the sake of future sustainability, which is a word that we toss around, I think, too lightly in this Chamber sometimes – true sustainability in regard to retaining natural areas will be lost to us forever if we don’t do something now.

There are jurisdictions all around the world which have missed this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to protect intact wilderness areas and the connections between them, and we’ve lost throughout the world great ecological and diverse and unique places. The boreal forest is sort of the next in line to suffer that end, I would say. It’s unfortunate, but certainly we don’t have to have it happen that way. We have it within our ability here in the province of Alberta to protect our natural areas without compromising our economic growth and prosperity that we have enjoyed. I believe that it’s very much within the responsibility of the Minister of Community Development and all of us here in this Legislature to ensure that we leave something intact and substantial for the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes of question and comment and answer.

Mr. Chase: I just wanted to clarify. I believe you were talking about the pathways, Y to Y animal corridors, that would allow animals their free movement. Could you just clarify potentially what accesses have been cut up by the current industry developments?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Well, we’ve seen in the news and over the last few weeks the controversy over the grizzly bear. The reason that we’re losing the grizzly bears so quickly is, first and foremost, habitat loss. The animal itself is reason enough to act on, but the grizzly bear is also an indicator species of the overall ecological health of a larger ecosystem. Where we see the greatest sort of cutting up of intact wilderness areas is along the eastern slopes. Let’s say that the area they studied or tried to study for the grizzlies, between highway 1 and highway 16, where there was a devastating loss of grizzly bear, was also where you have the greatest loss of habitat that has taken place over the last 20 years, in that same area. That is just an indication of where we need to focus this, as you say, Y to Y corridor, a continuous corridor of habitat along the eastern slopes.

Other jurisdictions and the Americans, with their much greater population and different laws, have been much more successful, ironically and unfortunately, in actually developing that continuous corridor of ecological protective zones to the south of us. I think that we need to step up to the plate in that regard.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Others?

Then I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my great pleasure to rise and debate against Bill 18, Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, 2006. The bill makes a number of changes to the administration of

specific types of provincial parks, wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands.

It terminates the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves and adds a requirement for public consultation before designating wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands. It details specific rules about what activities are allowed in the wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands and removes buffer zones from the act. It increases fines for noncompliance by a factor of 10, and in the case of industrial violations, it links the value of the fine to the financial gain through the contravention.

The impact of this bill is less protection. The general trend is to reduce levels of ecological protection in wilderness areas, ecological reserves, heritage rangelands.

There is less public participation in this bill, Mr. Speaker. The bill also removes the advisory committee and as such reduces democratic participation. This group of six public members and six government members provided advice to the minister on the establishment or withdrawal of wilderness areas, ecological reserves, and the making of regulations. Any advisory committee recommendations were to be placed before the Assembly within 15 days.

Removal of buffer zones: as my colleague mentioned, buffer zones are any area of public land adjoining a wilderness area or an ecological reserve as a controlled buffer zone. Less significant and detailed impacts and outcome changes are detailed in sectional analysis areas.

3:20

This bill I am against. I would say this is a good, bad, and ugly bill.

I'll start with the good one. We do support the requirement for public consultation before creating new wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands; however, the advisory committee could work in concert with broader public consultation. We do support higher fines and fines that relate to the amount of revenue gained through the contravention.

The bad part of this bill. I would say that the reason I don't support this is because of buffer zones. Their inclusion in the act has not ensured their use. Buffer zones are more suited to management/planning exercises and could be done through regulation.

The worst part and the reason I don't support this bill is that this bill reduces democratic and legislative participation in regulation and the establishment or withdrawal of wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands.

Our vision for park reform: restart the special places campaign and start the process of designating new areas as parks in underrepresented areas and in unique places. We need to seek balance and ensure that there are proper offsets and protected areas to compensate for industrial areas, such as the oil sands in northeast Alberta. CPAWS has a good plan, and we should consider that one.

We need tougher park legislation. Parks need protection from industrial activities that are still allowed to progress in too many categories. The density of oil wells is higher in parks than in nonpark landscapes.

Planningwise, enshrine the requirement to maintain current park master plans. Too many park master plans are out of date and have no plan at all. We need to introduce a requirement that transactive park master plans are completed every seven years. These are to be approved by the minister and tabled in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Infrastructurewise, embark on a meaningful infrastructure renewal program for all of Alberta's parks. This means renewing basic infrastructure in the regular, run-of-the-mill park across Alberta. This includes picnic tables, fire rings, toilets, hiking trails, et cetera.

Wilderness areas continue to lack any formal legislative purpose or direction. When will they have a formal debate on a vision for wilderness areas? That's a question. How come this bill does not contain a legislated vision for wilderness areas? Do they feel that the allowances for dispositions, the ability to allow other tenures and land uses in ecological reserves, heritage rangelands, and natural areas provides adequate protection to meet each of their legislated mandates? How does the minister believe he can ensure that wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands can be protected for future generations when what happens outside of the park will affect what happens in the park? How will this be addressed without the use of buffer zones? Do they feel that buffer zones are obsolete provisions? It's easy to make a provision obsolete by not following your own policy then justify its removal by saying it's obsolete. It was this government's inattention that made it obsolete.

Mr. Speaker, we are concerned that the government is raising the fines but not increasing patrols or the number of staff. How do you intend to enforce these new fines? Do they feel that this bill will on balance increase protection of parks or will reduce protection? When it comes to the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves, this committee requires six park staff to sit on the committee. I doubt that there are six park staff to sit on the committee. I doubt that there are six full-time, nonseasonal employees available to sit at a committee.

Buffer zones are a vital component of managing any protected landscape. We need to think about the greater park because what happens outside the park affects what happens inside the park. Removing buffer zones will reduce the effective size of all wilderness areas and ecological reserves in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Shall I call on the hon. minister to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development to close the debate.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, Bill 18 amends the legislation that governs wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands. Some of the provisions in this act date back to 1971. Over the years we've added new categories of protected areas to the act, and Bill 18 clarifies a number of provisions for the different categories. Bill 18 also updates enforcement, offence, and penalty provisions. It updates definitions, improves wording and clarity to make the act easier to understand and administer. For example, Mr. Speaker, prohibitions against litter and dumping and provisions for dispositions like grazing leases now will be addressed for all protected areas under this act. Overnight camping in an ecological reserve will be prohibited by statute instead of just by practice.

Bill 18 will also repeal the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves. This committee has not been active for over 10 years. We now involve, instead, local communities and stakeholders in management planning and development of any policies for these areas.

Bill 18 also repeals the provision for controlled buffer zones. No buffer zones were ever formally proposed or established.

These changes include a substantial increase in the maximum fines for serious violations like those that may cause significant damage or destruction. Instead of a maximum fine of \$5,000, individuals can now face fines of up to \$100,000. Instead of a maximum fine of \$50,000, corporations can be fined up to one-half of a million dollars. Under Bill 18 if a person makes money from an offence, such as cutting trees in a park and selling the timber, the Crown may recover costs for damages and the courts may levy additional penalties for damages.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to the thoughtful comments of the hon. members for Edmonton-Ellerslie and Edmonton-Calder, and I will take into account their good questions and thoughts on this bill.

At this time I call the question on second reading for the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

3:30

Bill 20
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The Hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006.

Bill 20 proposes eight amendments to the FOIP Act, each of which I would like to briefly highlight over the next few minutes. The first amendment clarifies that the FOIP Act does not apply to the published works in a library collection. The FOIP Act was not intended to apply to library books on the shelves of our schools and public libraries. Recently the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner pointed out that this is not clear in the act. This amendment responds to that concern.

The second amendment limits access to ministerial briefing material for five years. Specifically, it provides an exception to the right of access for government records created for briefing a minister who is assuming a new responsibility for a ministry or briefing a minister for a sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Amendment 3 limits access to records relating to an audit of the chief internal auditor of Alberta for 15 years. This amendment adds a mandatory exception from disclosure for records held by a public body that relate to an internal audit and applies to the records of all audits conducted by the chief internal auditor when those records are in the custody of the auditor and a public body.

Amendment 4 is to further enhance the security of Albertans' personal information. Currently the act allows a public body to disclose personal information to comply with a subpoena, warrant, order of a court, or a rule of court; however, it is not clear which courts this provision refers to. The proposed amendment clarifies that a public body or its service provider may disclose personal information only if ordered to do so by a court with jurisdiction in Alberta or in accordance with a rule of court finding in Alberta. This will make Albertans' personal information less vulnerable to collection by foreign agencies.

The fifth amendment suspends the processing of an access request while the Information and Privacy Commissioner consults with an applicant on whether to allow a public body to disregard a FOIP request. Before a public body can disregard a repetitive, systematic, frivolous, or vexatious FOIP request, it must seek permission from the Privacy Commissioner. The commissioner determines whether the request fits any of these criteria. As the decision to take away an individual's right to make a request is a serious one, the commissioner consults with the FOIP applicant. If approved, the amendment will allow the 30-day processing timeline for a FOIP request to stop while the commissioner makes his decision.

Amendment 6 sets higher penalties for disclosing personal information to a foreign court. Should an individual or corporation disclose personal information pursuant to a subpoena, warrant, or court order when that court does not have jurisdiction in Alberta or pursuant to a court order not binding in Alberta, that person would be guilty of an offence and would be subject to a fine. The proposed fine for corporations could be up to \$500,000 to deter such disclosures, and prosecution would have to commence within two years of the offence.

Amendment 7 allows for the deletion of a body from schedule 1 of the FOIP regulation if the body would be subject to the FOIP Act under another part of the definition of a public body or if the body would more appropriately be subject to another act of Alberta or Canada that provides for access to information or protection of privacy or both.

Finally, our last amendment allows a newly created government agency, board, commission, or committee to be subject to the FOIP Act more quickly. This new regulation-making authority gives the minister the ability to bring a public body under the FOIP Act prior to the next amendment of the schedule of public bodies in the FOIP regulation. Without this temporary designation the new body would be subject to the Personal Information Protection Act.

All these amendments will provide more information and access protection and greater information security for Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to respond to Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, in my capacity as the Official Opposition critic for Government Services, under which the access to information and protection of privacy legislation sits. I have to thank the hon. minister for having agreed to meet with me and for sharing the three-column document with me, which was really useful and helpful. I think I would also thank the hon. sponsor of the bill, the MLA for Red Deer-North. Although she wasn't at the meeting, she's really one of the most active government backbenchers in this House, and I commend her on all her hard work.

We went through the introduction of the hon. sponsor of the bill, and she mentioned the eight amendments, and I wanted to just go through them myself to get my thought process in order here. Talking about the Minister of Government Services having the authority to make regulations, that he or she can move a body onto the schedule, we've talked about regulations being made behind closed doors or, you know, privately, with no review and no scrutiny from the Legislature. This is the discussion that we seem to be having to go through time and time again.

The issue about the subpoenas or court orders and making the Alberta courts paramount: I think this is useful because if the information is housed or collected or stored in this province, then it has to be an Alberta court that actually allows access. So I will

touch on this, which is a favourable development. I also liked the idea of increasing penalties for breaches or contraventions of the act. The other thing that I liked was the introduction of minimum penalties and so on. So I guess what I'm saying is that this bill is sort of half good, half bad, in my opinion. I would have much rather seen this bill split into two.

The way I take it is that private members traditionally would introduce a bill that is really pertinent to either their constituents or something that they personally have interest in. So I would have actually liked the hon. sponsor of the bill to sponsor half of it, which is the one dealing with the USA PATRIOT Act and, you know, foreign authorities trying to access information on Albertans and so on, because that is something we all agree with. This is something that I personally asked for in the First Session of the 26th Legislature.

The other half, which is the one that I find myself in disagreement with, should have been perhaps sponsored by the minister. That's the one that I would be inclined to debate more. Instead, they were packaged together, and they were sponsored as one package, which really forces me to either take it all or leave it all. I have mentioned before that there is this approach of poison in honey: you give somebody something to eat, and it tastes good, but what's inside is really bad for you. Sugar-coating rat poison, for example, doesn't change its nature; it's still rat poison. I don't like this one bit.

I mentioned that half of it is good. I agree with it, and I'm going to actually go through the ones that I agree with. I definitely approve of and wholeheartedly support placing restrictions on foreign authorities or companies co-operating with or taking direction from foreign authorities. We are all aware of the provisions of laws like the USA PATRIOT Act, for example. If any agency from the U.S. or from any other jurisdiction needs information on a certain Albertan or wants to gain access to information that pertains to an Albertan or is housed in Alberta, they have to go through the proper channels, and by that I mean an Alberta court. Orders from foreign courts will now mean nothing. This act clarifies this aspect, and I totally support this.

3:40

The second part, which I mentioned briefly, is the issue with penalties and maximum fines. Raising maximum fines for individuals and also raising maximum fines for corporations for breaches of the act is definitely a good thing. Everyone has to know that breaking this law or any other law, for that matter, in this province will be dealt with in a corresponding manner with zeal, force, and with timeliness. We take the privacy and the protection of information of Albertans really seriously, and any individual or corporation who is even thinking about contravening the FOIP Act will now think twice.

Tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, less than 24 hours from now, we're going to be celebrating 100 years of democracy. But doesn't a true democracy entail some degree of transparency and accountability? What I'm referring to are the bad things in this bill now. I keep saying in this House and outside that if this government has nothing to hide, why is it adding more layers of secrecy to its already thick cloak?

Federally Justice Gomery insisted that more openness and transparency were warranted. Is this province any different? Why are we not adopting his recommendations here as well? Could it be the old attitude that everything is fine and nobody needs to worry and that the government business is none of the opposition's business, that we should not be reviewing it, that there's nothing wrong and, you know, everybody should be happy?

Some definite examples of these questionable amendments, like the hon. member across briefly alluded to, is exempting ministerial

briefing notes from access under FOIP. Now, how long are we doing this for? We're doing it for five years. I know that the minister tried to explain this in our meeting by saying that they're documents that are sometimes used to prepare for an upcoming legislative session or for bill ideas or things like that. But, really, why five years? Why not only six months or maybe a year? Why at all? What could anybody tell any minister that this minister may be uncomfortable revealing or sharing with Albertans? This amendment also allows background facts to be severed. Who is this government working for that it doesn't want to share its research on the various issues? Again, why all this secrecy?

The second one, Mr. Speaker, is an observation I made in my short period here over the last 16 months. I have made the observation that staff and employees in certain ministries or perhaps all of them – I am not sure – are becoming increasingly careful about what they say and what they put on paper or in an e-mail in fear that if it were to be FOIPed later, they would be in hot water. So they're really careful about what they say and what they write.

Moving on, this bill has something that is really questionable in the way of exempting the investigations, findings, and reports generated by, given to, or obtained by the chief internal auditor for a period of 15 years – 15 years. Mr. Speaker, this is a terribly long time to be hiding things. Again, the argument here is that the chief internal auditor's role is only advisory or consultative. My rebuttal is that, again, if there's nothing to hide, then this government would look a lot more honest and forthcoming if it did not restrict access to this information. The visual, you know, the public perception of government that everything is bad and all politicians are corrupt and government is up to no good: we have to fix this. We actually have an opportunity to fix this right here, but we choose not to.

Also, the issue around who is the chief internal auditor accountable to. I've made this argument before, and many of my colleagues have as well. It's the classic definition of employer or boss. As an MLA my bosses are the people who elected me and entrusted me to ask questions on their behalf. The chief internal auditor and, for that matter, the entire internal audit committee work for the people of this province, not for the government and not for the minister. Their work is performed to make sure that the interests of the public and the tax dollars in the public purse are protected and dispensed according to best practices and with the utmost accountability. So hiding any type of information, however benign or useless or trivial in the opinion of the minister, really looks bad, especially now when we're trying to convince people that what happened federally is not going to happen here provincially and that we're taking measures to ensure that accountability, transparency, and openness are not only protected but promoted and encouraged by all government departments.

Lastly, before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, is the issue surrounding permission to disregard FOIP requests. I'm starting to envision FOIP administrators at the different public bodies looking for reasons to dismiss an application. So an application is not looked upon as to: how can I help this applicant; how can I release this information? They're now looking at ways to stop it and ways to refuse to release it.

This amendment will now pause or stop the clock as the commissioner studies the request for dismissal and arrives at his or her ruling. Currently the application clock continues to tick along for its 30 days' duration while the commissioner is conducting his or her review or evaluation. This amendment now stops the clock indefinitely, until a decision is made. That could be 30 days, like it is now, or it could be two months, or it could be a year, or it could be longer, maybe two years. Who knows? This is definitely unacceptable, and I would have found it a little easier to swallow,

Mr. Speaker, if they could have recommended that maybe the 30-day period would have been made into six weeks or 45 days or something that is reasonable. But the way it's worded here is really ridiculous.

So the cap. I would have much rather seen this bill split into two. One bill that I would have actually wholeheartedly supported right away, the part about protecting the privacy of Albertans. This is paramount. This is really, utmostly important for myself and for everyone in this House. It would not have received a lot of debate because everybody agrees on the merit and the usefulness and the benefit. The other half, which is the one adding more layers of secrecy, would have been the one that we would have argued against. So if I'm going to vote and it's all or none, I'm going to definitely urge everyone to reject this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Like my hon. member who previously spoke, I appreciate the government's attempt to keep foreign fingers from our privacy documents; however, the majority of this bill, as far as I'm concerned, is basically providing a sufficient length of time to bury the evidence, long enough for the minister to escape public accountability.

George Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-four* made the observation that "he who controls the past controls the future." By hiding, burying, FOIPing, what I referred to in last week's question period as an impenetrable FOIP-filled moat, the day-to-day business of this Legislature is prevented from occurring in a smooth, transitory manner. The government uses FOIP as a blunt instrument to basically bash opposition requests. Imagine if we were to actually share and work on information, if we had a level playing field, if our constituents could see us all on policy committees, working together for the common good of the province as a whole instead of this confrontational approach of us and them that Legislatures symbolically have maintained.

FOIP prevents the opposition from carrying out its job. I am not the least bit interested in the number of bottles of either red or white wine that were served at a Wednesday night lobbying function. What I am interested in is such details as flight logs. What I am interested in is detailed expenses of road transportation, number of conservation officers in a particular park, et cetera. This is all information that would be useful in terms of planning and, in a lot of cases, supporting government intentions.

3:50

Unfortunately, walls of FOIP are thrown at us on a regular basis. Yesterday, when we were talking about freedom of information, I think the figure came up to something like \$300,000 or \$174,000 for requests of who attended certain Treasury Board meetings. This type of hiding is the equivalent of: this group of new swimmers gets to wear the life jackets, but the other guys have to wear weights around their ankles. There's no sense of communication, transparency, accountability. It's: we will do our darndest because we're the government to prevent you from carrying out the role that the people have elected you to do, and that's basically requiring the government to be accountable and transparent.

Also, the government tends to pick winners and losers, and they don't seem to pick them in a particularly understandable way. For example, Impark. This outfit has a notorious, thuglike collection agency policy. It called people up at 2 in the morning with its demon dialing system, and it was misinformed; it called the wrong people. Yet outfits that are legitimately trying to improve the quality

of life for Albertans, especially amputees – War Amps was initially denied the information that it needed to send out its appeals. I don't know whether key rings were considered potential foreign infiltration concerns, but the War Amps had to go through quite a process to get permission. Likewise, veterans had to go through quite a process to achieve the veterans' licence plates that we all celebrate now.

If the government wants to be not only perceived but valued for their transparency and accountability, all the FOIP costs could be avoided. As I said, I don't need to know the internal workings. I don't need to know what the minister ate when they sat on the jumbo jet heading to Ottawa because our own jet was in the hangar or what they ate in Hinton when they hopped on the government plane, but I do need to know the day-to-day workings to do my job. For example, we put forward a FOIP request to find out the details happening with the young offender who found his way to the bottom of an elevator shaft. All this information the taxpayers have paid for, and it isn't the exclusive right of the government to hide this information in its archive as opposed to sharing it.

What we need is a government that values accountability, transparency, that doesn't get involved in either petty or grand expenses. The simple way to get over the cost of FOIP would be to table the documents. By simply tabling them and providing them, there is no cost associated. Every day no extra cost is associated. Every day we table documents as part of our process. We have called upon the government on numerous occasions to table their information. We've basically been receiving the approach: "It's mine. It's all mine. How dare you ask for this type of information?"

Protect us from our foreign invaders? Secure us from our internal Vichy regime. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with interest to have an opportunity to speak on the bill as brought forward by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. I think that Bill 20 has a number of things that I would find meritorious yet some other things that are quite troublesome and really the opposite of the intention of the other part of the bill, so you've got to wonder sometimes how these things might come to fruition.

I think that I would like to speak in general on the bill on these proposed amendments. It seems to be aimed at protecting personal records from being improperly obtained by foreign governments, for which I am very grateful. I think it's a great idea, and it's long overdue. They also seem to speed the process for bringing new government boards and committees under the FOIP Act, which I think is somewhat troublesome. Some other amendments clarify how the act applies to specific categories of records like ministerial binder exemptions – what's that all about? – and addressing a request processing issue identified by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. They propose to allow somehow suspending a request until the Privacy Commissioner determines if the public body can disregard the request.

You know, there are many elements to this bill that would slow the process and the job we're meant to be doing here on both sides of the government, which is to work with the clarity of fact and with the objectivity of the best interests of the people of Alberta in mind. So I do have some serious reservations about this bill, Bill 20, and I would like to perhaps suggest some changes.

In this century more than in any other, Mr. Speaker, information is a very valuable commodity. Following the events in September

of 2001 in the United States the American government concluded that the best tool it had at its disposal to fight the so-called war on terror was seemingly innocuous bits of information on everyday things and patterns of behaviour of human beings. When collected and analyzed, it's assumed that these data streams of everyday life will establish clear distinctions and patterns relating to crime. In its attempt to maximize the data and analyze this, the USA PATRIOT Act has given American courts and law enforcement officials greater access to all kinds of data about individuals, including, potentially, Canadian citizens.

The B.C. Privacy Commissioner concluded after some very serious reflection that more stringent measures are needed to be put in place to ensure that a Canadian citizen's personal information remains just that: personal and Canadian. Alberta's own office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has concurred and just recently released a report about security risks associated with foreign access to Albertans' personal information. The findings stated that "it is important that the Government make a strong and unequivocal assertion of the value it places on the privacy and security of the personal information of Albertans." That's from page 33 of the Privacy Commissioner's report *Public-sector Outsourcing and Risks to Privacy*.

Mr. Speaker, these proposed amendments may in part seem to address those concerns, which is good, by specifying that only courts or bodies having jurisdiction in Alberta may have access to FOIPable documents, thereby seeming to exclude American courts or companies. While we applaud that apparent commitment to protecting our citizens' personal and private information, there are several what we consider to be quite objectionable sections to these amendments that deserve serious criticism and consideration.

The NDP has had a lot of experience with delayed and stymied quests for information over the years, where it's taken upwards of five months to get access to requested documents rather than the 30-day requirement stated previously. Considering the already great difficulty with which FOIP requests can be successfully made, we wonder how these amendments propose to address access issues in favour of the public because, after all, when we do request information through FOIP, we are doing it in the name of clarifying issues and considerations for the public's best interest. Not serving that, I think, undermines the basic means by which we can cast a constructively critical eye on what the government is doing.

First of all, if we could ask for clarification regarding the proposed inclusion of non-FOIPable material of published works available online, say in public libraries, then why is this an issue? Often this material is already available in the public domain. Self-published works, if they're available at libraries, are catalogued and may be taken out. If they are already available in the public domain, why should they be excluded from a FOIP access if someone should choose to obtain them in that manner? This, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, casts a light on the overall intention of this government to withhold information, and the spirit of not being able to access that information goes against the better judgment of running a good, transparent government.

4:00

Secondly, and more importantly, the five-year FOIP exclusion of ministerial briefing materials proposed here is based on the argument that public access to such documents may impair the government's ability to prepare for session, which, Mr. Speaker, I really must say is quite outrageous. The legislative debates based on notes like this are public, and to bar access to them is to invite accusations of secrecy. For a government already plagued by a lack of accountability and transparency, we're rather shocked that such amendments are proposed.

The very spirit of democracy rests on the fact that the government is formed by and for the citizens of Alberta, and therefore the documents, preparatory notes, and discussions must be made public and available to the public, particularly considering that such ministerial briefings do not and should not be considered as revealing the substance of deliberations of Executive Council any more than ministerial comments and debates do in the Legislature. These are two different things, Mr. Speaker. Along these lines, the other part of this, the 15-year exclusion of documents belonging to the chief internal auditor of Alberta is equally unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, we have some serious problems with the second part of this bill, and I think we have to call into question why the two pieces are attached together. In fact, it is important for us to protect the information of our citizens from foreign incursion, but at the same time we're somehow withholding information that our own citizens are entitled to look at and use as part of the deliberation of good government. So I do want to express these reservations that we have at this point in time, and hopefully during the course of this legislative session we can make some corrections.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak in second reading to Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006. This is always an interesting experience because, in fact, the intention of FOIP legislation, freedom of information and protection of privacy, was supposed to be about openness and transparency. It was supposed to be about access to government documentation. That's where the idea of it came from, but in the hands of this government and some other governments, I must admit, it's turned into denial of access to information and in some cases has reached a very fine art of denial.

There are a number of things being anticipated here. I went back and asked for a copy of the Select Special Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Review Committee final report from November of 2002. I haven't been able to read through all of it, so I'll be looking forward to participating in the Committee of the Whole discussion here. In my cursory reading of this it looks like what this legislation is doing is absolutely dead opposite from what the committee recommended, but I will take more time to look through that and participate in Committee of the Whole on that specifically.

The idea that this government is open and transparent is, indeed, laughable. I don't do many FOIP requests, Mr. Speaker, mostly because I do regard it as a very long and tedious exercise in futility, but the few times I have done it, I'm struggling to remember if I ever got any information. I know that some of my colleagues have been much more prolific in their applications, and I think the success rate is about 10 per cent, but I'll let them speak to that.

A couple of things are being anticipated here. One of the ones that's really interesting to me is the shutdown of information, making the documents from the chief internal auditor exempt from FOIP requests for a period of 15 years. This gets really interesting. Does this set the stage for the Public Accounts Committee to be refused information from the chief internal auditor as well? What about motions for returns or written questions? Do they end up following that lead, or is the FOIP legislation, in fact, used as a reason for not releasing the same kind of information?

I would've thought that a committee like Public Accounts, which is formed of members of this Assembly, is not restrained, as far as I know, from asking for anything, and they have an expectation that they should receive it. The chief internal auditor is an integral part now of the way that the government manages its own finances, and therefore it comes under the scrutiny of Public Accounts as well.

It's a relatively new creation, and I would have to say that it appears to have hit a stumble. I would venture to say that it's not working well right now and seems to actually be stalled. I'm thinking that they haven't even managed to replace the last chief internal auditor, who was the first internal auditor. I think they haven't even replaced him, so one presumes that whole office is sort of on hiatus.

What we've got here is that the office that was created to really look at how the government was managing its financial documents and audit more closely how the government was handling all of that is now going to set itself apart and not be open to any kind of scrutiny, which really shuts down any kind of scrutiny of the government's finances. That's why I'm asking the question about access to the Public Accounts Committee. Will that be shut down as well, as a corollary or an effect of what's being anticipated in this legislation?

One of the other sections is contemplating allowing a timeline on a FOIP request to be halted. The clock is to stop ticking when the commissioner makes a decision as to whether the request should be rejected or disregarded, so it's on an appeal process in front of the commissioner. This I find amusing because it's already in effect, Mr. Speaker. I'm dealing with that very thing right now.

Back in September we applied to get information that would tell us what evidence the government was using to move forward on its third-way health framework, what they were basing this on, what the cost-benefit analysis was, what studies, what exactly they were basing this whole idea on. We did a FOIP request in September, and you get the usual: okay, you'll get a response within 30 days. I don't have all the exact dates in front of me, but I think it was shy of the first 30 days that they came back to us and said: well, this is a huge request. We said: okay, fine. We narrowed the request right then, so within the first 30 days we presented a narrower request of what we were looking for.

Then they came back with some huge amount of money, which is standard practice now. They don't actually want to be seen saying no to you, but they're going to come back to the opposition and demand, you know, tens and into the hundreds of thousands of dollars to pay for the staff time and the photocopying to actually get the documents, which is the same as saying that you can't have the stuff because that's a huge part of the caucus budget for the opposition and in some cases actually probably exceeds the caucus budget for some of the other opposition parties. In effect, it's another way of refusing a FOIP request without doing it.

4:10

This saga continues. We're asked for a huge amount of money. We appeal it, saying that it's in the public interest, and in fact that's granted. The amount of money is reduced by I think 80 per cent. So we come up with a purchase order to pay for the reduced amount. We submit it. Time goes by. Nothing happens. We go back and say, "Where is it?" "Oh, well, we didn't get anything from you." "Well, we submitted a PO to you. This should be progressing." They look around, and they've lost the PO. They can't find it. They insist that we never sent it to them. Well, we can prove that we sent it to them. We recorded it all. We kept copies of faxes and remittal sheets and that sort of thing, so we can prove it. But, no, they can't find it.

We get another PO issued, a second PO. They lose that one too. Then there's a third PO issued. Time has moved on. We've appealed again to try and get the entire amount dismissed on the argument that if you've recognized that it's essentially in the public good and reduced the amount the first time, that argument holds for the whole amount.

We're now several months past this. Remember, we started in September, Mr. Speaker. We're now into the new year, so we're four, five months into this process. We still have nothing, and we've been delayed.

The next trick is that you just keep changing the officers in the department who are responsible for FOIP. We'd go back to them and say: "You're overdue. You're late. You've lost another PO. What's going on?" "Oh, I'm sorry. That person is gone. The new person will have to familiarize themselves with the file." That seems to take, again, another period of time. They lose it. I think some of these different people were responsible for losing some of the POs. I'm not exactly clear on that timeline. But that's what has happened to us. We've been assessed amounts of money. We've paid it. They've lost POs. They've changed FOIP officers. I think we're on the fourth or fifth FOIP officer on this file in six months.

Now we're told that if we want to appeal this again, well, then there would be a halt. The clock would stop ticking, and they would stop accumulating the files that we now have a FOIP order to produce. Do we appeal what's happening to us? If we do, then the clock stops ticking and they stop collecting the documents. Well, we still want to see the documents, so at this point we're having to hold off on that in the hopes that they will continue to collect these documents and finally hand them over. We're now being told June. We started this in September. You're supposed to be getting these documents within 30 days. You're supposed to get a letter within 30 days that tells you whether it's going to be followed through on immediately or if there's some other issue.

I mean, we're not talking 90 days' delay here, Mr. Speaker. If we don't get it in June, it's quite likely we're looking at September, which is a whole year to get something that is perfectly legitimate for us to be asking for. It's already been recognized that it's in the public interest. So this FOIP legislation is not being used to enhance access to government documents. It's being used to restrict and deflect access to public documents, to deny the opposition and the public access to public documents.

I notice the – I think we should name it the Gold Bar and Strathcona memorial section, which recognizes the work that both of those individuals did in raising the issue of the USA PATRIOT Act and the effect that it could have on personal information that was collected by our government and the ability of private U.S. companies that had anything to do with us to have their files looked through by the U.S. government. That's how that whole thing was set up. Indeed, I was here and was able to hear both the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona raise that issue repeatedly. Thank goodness that they did because we are seeing the government take some action on that. Congratulations for figuring out that one. [interjection] Yes. I'm being reminded that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung did as well. Timingwise, the members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Gold Bar were raising this in 2003 and 2004, I think.

So a good thing there. When the government does something right, I try and encourage them by saying: you did something right there; keep doing it.

I'm interested in how this is all going to play out, in effect, what is possibly before us in the government's new policy framework on health. What's being anticipated there is moving to private insurance. Well, the private insurance providers that have indicated

an interest are all coming out of the U.S. Insurance companies are very adept at collecting vast amounts of information on individuals and using it back and forth with other insurance agencies. What's interesting about that is that we're always asked to release access to that information when we apply for a bank loan, a credit card, any kind of a mortgage.

My own insurance company tried to get me to waive and to release information of all kinds of aspects of my life that they had no business knowing. They gave me a nice sort of little threatening clause in there saying that if I didn't do this, I might perhaps have my insurance cancelled. I said: "Well, fine. Cancel it. I'm not giving you the information." But I suspect that a lot of other people went, "Oh, dear," and ticked off the box and said, "Yes, you can have access to that."

So how is FOIP going to work, then, if we have U.S. health providers and U.S. private insurance companies dealing with our personal health information and that information is now being held by them in the U.S.? How is FOIP going to protect us then? I'll be interested to hear from the sponsor of the bill whether that's been anticipated and what specifically has been put in place to protect us. I don't think this clause, as nice as it is, is going to do it. But let's hear from the sponsor of the bill. I think we're all aware that once we open it up to U.S. health providers and U.S. insurance companies, then we have opened it up according to NAFTA and all bets are off. I think that's more of a concern.

One of the other issues . . .

Oh, Mr. Speaker, I'm so disappointed. This is such an interesting bill.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you anticipated the question.

You were so rudely cut off by the bell. Did you wish to conclude your statements?

The Acting Speaker: Brief remarks.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. What I had wanted to talk about was the assessments that were being levied for people who went through the FOIP process and the discouragement that that's given to not only the public but also to the opposition members.

Finally, I think the members opposite need to be careful what they wish for. I know that they anticipate that they will be in power forever, but they won't be. Do they wish to live under the FOIP restrictions that they are putting in place? I would venture to you, Mr. Speaker, that we will hear very different sounds coming from members on that side if they are subject to these FOIP restrictions that they, in fact, are trying to put into place. It may well serve the purpose of the government members now, but they will not be government forever and possibly not even government for much longer. I think they need to carefully consider whether they wish to work under those same restrictions that they're now putting in place, if I may offer that as a conclusion.

Thank you.

4:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise again and debate against Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006. This bill aims at achieving eight objectives. Four of the amendments are aimed at

further restricting the information that may be available through a FOIP request. Of those four, two may be viewed as positive steps because they will restrict the ability of foreign authorities from accessing private information through warrants. The other two may be viewed as an attempt by the government to keep potentially sensitive material secret. We oppose those two objectives strongly, particularly the one dealing with the ministerial briefings.

One of the objectives is to increase the power of the Minister of Government Services by allowing him or her to make regulations regarding the FOIP Act. The stated purpose of this objective is so that the minister may designate new public bodies, making them accessible through FOIP requests in the interim while the schedule of public bodies is updated, which is complex and time consuming. We support this particular amendment.

One of the objectives is to put in half of the 30-day timeline when a public body requests that the commissioner allows the body to disregard the request. My recommendation is to oppose this objective as the FOIP process is already very time consuming.

One of the objectives is to increase the penalties for unauthorized disclosure of private information by individuals and corporations. We support this objective as there must be real consequences for these offences.

One of the objectives is to allow a public body to be deleted from the schedule of public bodies even if that body receives substantial funding from the government. We strongly oppose this objective.

Mr. Speaker, although there are some positive changes that are being proposed here, overall the impact of this bill would be overwhelmingly negative. Let me talk about the positive impact of this bill. The proposed changes regarding library information and foreign court orders ensure that Albertans' information is not susceptible to foreign authorities. These changes are in response to concerns first raised by the province of British Columbia regarding the impact of the USA PATRIOT Act. The proposed changes regarding more severe penalties are also positive. Having these changes will ensure that individuals and corporations that hold personal information know that violating Alberta's law regarding disclosing personal information will have serious consequences.

The negative impact side of this bill: proposed changes regarding information held by the chief internal auditor and ministerial briefings will have a negative impact. This government is well known to be among the most secretive in Canada.

Mr. Chase: Two awards.

Mr. Agnihotri: Two in a row.

This is another attempt by the Tories to restrict public access to information that the government wants to be secret but that Albertans should be able to access. The proposed changes regarding the deletion of public bodies from the schedule of public bodies also have a very negative impact. For example, if the government provides significant funding for a research institute, that institute should be considered a public body because it will be under the influence of the government. The government would have studies conducted, reports produced, et cetera, through this institute, yet its work would be exempt from FOIP access. Mr. Speaker, this is an attempt by the Tories to further limit the public access to information.

This bill does propose some positive changes. However, the negative outcomes far outweigh the positive; therefore, it is recommended that we oppose this bill. We would want to amend this bill by removing the sections which deal with the chief internal auditor, ministerial briefings, timeline extension, and the deletion of a public body from the schedule of public bodies.

I see no need for the changes there to section 6 of this act. For one thing, the act already limits to a great degree information that is prepared by all four ministers in sections 22 and 24. If the purpose of the changes to section 6 is merely to allow the government to effectively prepare for a sitting of the Legislative Assembly, why the five-year timeline? That's a big question.

The minister has commented that ministerial briefings should be exempt from FOIP access to allow the government to properly prepare for a sitting of the Legislative Assembly. Does the minister not realize that the opposition too must prepare? As the opposition our rule requires that we will be able to hold the government accountable. This bill would seriously limit that ability for us.

The new restrictions relating to the chief internal auditor are very troubling, very troubling. The reality is that the office of the CIA is staffed primarily by deputy ministers and the Tory faithful. Now you want to make it so that CIA investigations into the government activities are hidden from the public for 15 years. How will this result in an accountable government? Another question.

Now I would like to talk about the FOIP fees that are restrictive. My question is: is it revenue or a hurdle to deter or prevent the access? When a FOIP request is processed, sometimes up to half or 60 per cent of the documents returned are blanked out or blacked over or withheld. Are we interested in protecting the privacy of citizens, or is it the prime directive to prevent access to government information? Which is the priority of this government? That's a big question.

Mr. Speaker, now I would like to adjourn this debate. Thank you very much.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 21

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and move second reading of Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, or the AISH Act.

As the chair of the MLA AISH Review Committee and chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I'm pleased to see this bill come before the House. I'd like to remind the members that in April of 2005 the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow and the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill and I released the report on a comprehensive review of this important program. The AISH program provides support for over 34,000 Albertans with a severe disability that impairs their ability to earn a living. This program provides vital income support and health benefits for Albertans in need.

4:30

We had an overwhelming response to the program review, Mr. Speaker. We received responses from over 18,000 Albertans, including Albertans with disabilities, their family and friends, and disability organizations. We are very grateful for this input. It helped us to make 11 recommendations, which I'm pleased to say the government moved quickly to implement and which have led to the introduction of this Bill 21.

In April of 2005 we introduced significant improvements to the AISH program. Among these changes was an increase to the maximum living allowance, from \$850 to \$950 per month, which will increase again to a thousand dollars on April 1. In addition, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports introduced personal

income support benefits last October to help clients with extra monthly and one-time expenses like, for example, paying for children's school supplies or travel to medical appointments. Another significant improvement we made was to renew the program, including increasing employment earnings exemptions.

All of these enhancements have been very well received by clients and their families as well as stakeholders in the disability community. Bill 21 promises to continue to improve this program. AISH clients told us that the program wasn't flexible or responsive to their unique needs. While the enhancements made over the last year were very important, legislative changes are necessary to fully move the program forward in the way Albertans have asked for, and that's why I'm pleased to see this bill before this Assembly.

One of the biggest changes Bill 21 offers is flexibility in the reporting of income. Right now clients report their income on a monthly basis, which makes sense for those clients whose income changes regularly through their work or through some kind of investments. However, Mr. Speaker, approximately 85 per cent of AISH clients either have no other source of income than their monthly living allowance or their income does not change more than about 10 per cent from one year to the next. Bill 21 will allow those clients whose income is quite static to report less frequently, possibly as little as one time per year.

Basing reporting frequency on individual client situations will improve program efficiency by making it easier for clients to report changes in their income and reduce the occurrence of overpayments and underpayments. More than ever before, the new legislation will respond to the unique situation faced by AISH clients while at the same time ensure that AISH clients who work or whose income fluctuates during the year can continue to report their income monthly.

As you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, with over 34,000 files occasionally errors in reporting income can result in a client being overpaid or underpaid their AISH benefit. The rewritten act is more flexible in terms of how these errors are corrected. By passing this legislation, we'll be able to make sure that AISH clients first have the opportunity to appeal the overpayment and exhaust that process before a debt is assessed and collection action taken. In the past collection began as soon as an overpayment was identified. With the proposed change, after an appeal panel decision, any client who feels that they have not received due process will still have the opportunity to go to court. The bill also allows for government to consider special circumstances and, if appropriate, exempt the client from repaying the amount that they were overpaid.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, these changes will first of all allow us to respond better to individual situations; secondly, ensure that clients have access to appeals in overpayment situations; and thirdly, bring the legislation up to date and in line with all the positive changes made throughout the past year.

As chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities part of my role is to bring forward issues that are important to the disability community. We achieved that, I believe, during the MLA review process, and I'm pleased to continue that today by speaking to this renewed bill.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak to Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. I encourage all members of the Legislature to support this important legislation as it continues our commitment to improve AISH. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've reviewed the changes and the work that the MLA review committee did, and there

is some really good work here. I want to be able to support this bill; however, I do have some reservations. The numbers that you have quoted of the people that are involved is actually a very, very small percentage of Albertans; however, that number is our most vulnerable. Probably the other group that would be most vulnerable would be the homeless. I believe that these people are so very vulnerable, and therefore our responsibility to look after them I think is very, very great. They exist and they survive. We are lucky because we live and we have many, many choices with how we live our lives and what we can do with our daily living. They don't have many of those choices.

One of the things that I do have reservations about is that with the review guide it said that almost every respondent identified the need to increase the AISH financial benefit. What I would like to have seen there is a serious consideration of having those dollars, the base dollars that people on AISH get, actually be indexed so that when they see that toothpaste, toilet paper, and their utility bills have gone up, they at least have a hope that next year they will get that increase, that will help relieve that fear of what they are going to eat if they have to pay for the utilities.

One of the other comments that was made is that the government has changed the policy to make the practice of not having to go to court legal in terms of people who were having difficulties in either underpayments or overpayments. I believe that it may be legal, but is this really the way that we expect to be governed? I would question the moral and ethical aspects of this practice. The Citizen's Appeal Panel I think is a good first step towards addressing this dilemma, provided that the staff deal with our citizens in a very respectful way.

I believe that sensitivity training could well be applied to some of the people that are in these departments that often deal with these people who have mental problems. Their medication may not be on that day, and many of them do have limited education and sometimes can be very difficult to deal with. In particular, when you have to repeat the same kinds of information over and over again, it does take a certain sensitivity to be able to handle that. I also think that it's not particularly accountable. I think that we have to be very accountable not only with our dollars and with the process but with our behaviours.

One of the other big concerns for me is that many of the significant provisions have been moved to regulation as opposed to actually being legislated. I believe there are many things in here that should be legislated so that there's a comeback. Despite the fact that it may all get lost in FOIP, I believe that there must be that opportunity.

Future changes must be made in an open and accountable manner. I believe that the accountable manner is better easily handled through legislation as opposed to regulations that are often done behind closed doors.

4:40

I know that the Premier is always asking for ideas, so I would like to throw out an idea particularly for people that receive AISH payments on a very regular basis. On my utility bill it is very, very clear what I have paid for, how much I owe. I'm on a budget plan. If I'm over or under, it's very clear on every single statement that I get exactly where I stand. The utility companies have a very excellent tracking system to be able to do that. I'm wondering if we couldn't implement some sort of a statement where if a mistake was made, there would be a much better chance of catching that mistake over, say, even a six-month period than letting it drag out, where these people just take the money and may not actually think their way through or have a statement to compare it to to see if they're

over or under. If they have the statement from last month and they got a hundred dollars and this month they're getting \$200, would that not trigger, perhaps, the question: why is this over? Or if they got a hundred dollars and this month they only got \$50, I'm sure it would trigger that question, and they would realize quickly that there is a problem at some point with the money they're receiving.

I've mentioned that I think sensitivity training is essential, particularly for the staff that deal on the telephone or the staff that might help people fill out the actual forms.

Ms Blakeman: The front lines.

Ms Pastoor: Front lines, yes.

I feel that removing the court ability is a common legal defence open to other Albertans in fighting debts or in fighting anything. I believe that by removing that from the AISH recipients, we have now segregated them again into a separate body that doesn't have that fairness of being able to use the court systems.

I'm not clear on the details of what the regulations relating to the following sections of 12(1)(b), (f), (g), (h), (i), and 12(2)(b) actually are. So perhaps I could obtain those before we go into Committee of the Whole.

Some of the sections are not going to be included in the AISH Act but then go into regulations. One in particular is the review. Now, the fact that this was reviewed was because it was legislated. It had to happen in 2004. I feel that at least a time frame should be legislated. I certainly think that it should be done at least every five years, and it should be legislated.

I also feel that the financial administrators should be legislated. I think that there should be behaviours put on the persons, either the administration or perhaps the financial administrators, that would be working to help people who can't do it on their own. It could well be the public guardian that has to look after these people, but I think that it should be legislated. There has to be some way that we can look at it without having to try to fight with FOIP all the time to get exactly, very clearly – so the people actually have something to hang their hats on when they try to fight a system that isn't always as kind as it should be.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister for seniors.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased as well to speak to Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped, AISH, Act, 2006, because it is a very important piece of legislation. I'd like to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Strathcona for sponsoring this bill. As you know, through his responsibility as chairman of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities he has become well known and respected for his interest, his knowledge, and his insight on the needs of Albertans with disabilities, and I appreciate that very much.

As minister responsible for the programs that serve adults with disabilities in our province, I believe that Bill 21 and the forthcoming regulations will continue our government's work to renew the AISH program and make it more responsive to the unique needs of persons with disabilities. When our hon. colleagues from Strathcona, Calgary-Nose Hill, and Calgary-Bow reviewed the AISH program, one of the things they found was that the language, as was mentioned earlier, within the AISH Act and regulations was in great need of being updated. The original AISH Act was written in 1979, when the program first began, and back then it was based on welfare legislation, which was very prescriptive and limiting. As a result, the language and the tone of the existing act do not reflect our

renewed direction for the program as we move from an income support focus to a disability support focus.

Bill 21 addresses this renewed direction by modernizing the AISH legislation that was written 27 years ago. This renewed act will also make the AISH program more responsive to the unique needs of persons with disabilities by focusing on their abilities and assisting them in becoming as independent as they possibly can. Mr. Speaker, that is what all of the changes in Bill 21 are about: making the AISH program more responsive and flexible to meet the unique needs of persons with disabilities.

That goal is one of the reasons why in November 2004 the Premier created the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports. For the first time many of the government programs for persons with disabilities were placed under one ministry, and this new ministry structure has given us the opportunity to co-ordinate our programs to support individuals in the best way possible. I know that it is important to persons with disabilities, their friends, and their loved ones. Bill 21 allows us to continue to improve the co-ordination of these programs and services by consolidating legislative provisions related to the AISH program under one ministry.

Mr. Speaker, the updated language and improved program co-ordination outlined in Bill 21 are mirrored by our government's investment in the renewed AISH program. That renewal includes a significant investment in the program to implement the many positive changes we have made over the past year, and that investment was unprecedented in the program's 27-year history. This program is about people, not finances. Government investment has proven to have had a direct impact on the quality of life for individuals. I think it is important to note that AISH clients themselves see this as a true renewal of the program.

As my colleague from Strathcona has noted, Bill 21 will also change the reporting and appeal structure for the AISH program. Making the reporting process for clients more flexible will also cut down on administrative paperwork, which will reduce the number of errors and, in turn, will reduce overpayments and underpayments to AISH clients. That is something that I think everyone here would like to support, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation will reflect our government's commitment to people with disabilities, as I said earlier, by updating the language. It will allow for more flexible reporting and appeals processes and reduce the number of errors that result in overpayments, allow for health benefits to support the high medical costs to people with severe disabilities who are not eligible for AISH because of their income level, and enable third-party payments if it benefits the client and they have consented.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 21 will enable our ministry to carry on with this important work to make real and significant changes to the AISH program. This bill represents the future of the AISH program, and I'm confident it will make a difference in the lives of persons with disabilities in our province.

4:50

Before closing, I'd like to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for your thoughtful comments. I want you to know that I was listening very carefully. I will read *Hansard*. I will try, through the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, to have those answers that you are looking for in Committee of the Whole. You had some good ideas. There were two there that I liked that you had presented, so thank you.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'm respectfully going to request the support of all members for this very important bill as I believe it will enrich the lives of our AISH clients. So thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

There being none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I see this bill as kind of a baby-step solution for a giant problem. I'm pleased that we're heading in a positive direction, but the reality is that when we're finished . . .

An Hon. Member: One-term wonder.

Mr. Chase: We'll see about that.

What's happening here is that we've defined dignity as \$12,000 a year plus \$400 if the person is sufficiently able to do some work outside their home, and to me that's a pretty limiting definition. I'm concerned that it took so long for this government to recognize how far in the hole these individuals were, and my concern is that this proposed Bill 21 doesn't have an automatic market-basket measure cost-of-living allowance increase. How many more years will it take either until we have a new government or we have a realistic add-on on a yearly basis? These small amounts of increase from \$850 to \$950 and now up to the whopping sum of \$1,000 per month are very quickly eaten, as was previously mentioned, by costs such as rent increases, utility increases.

Basically, it appears that we're giving, but other people surrounding them are taking away. If the government as part of this bill could have some sort of rent control expectation or took into account the selection of where the person was housed to keep landlords from preying upon these most vulnerable of citizens, I would be much more pleased.

I believe that a lot of the action the government took was the direct result of the class-action suit. I know that there are members, including the minister responsible for this area, who have big hearts, and I do appreciate that. It's not a question of, you know, white knights and dark knights. We all have our various sides. But more needs to be done.

The Alberta Association for Community Living, which works with a number of people on AISH, has only received a 4 per cent raise in the last 16 years. People working with PDD, persons with disabilities, had a limited raise last time, I believe in 2002. So it's not only the people who are on AISH that are struggling to make it financially; it's the people who are attempting to support them.

There are little things that we could do that would help in the process. In some cases instead of requiring the PDD clients or the AISH clients with sometimes very major physical disabilities to go downtown to pick up their cheques, we could make it easier. If we're worried about the tracking of the funding, we all have constituency offices, so here's the thought: have the cheques sent to the constituency offices for more convenient pickup by our clientele. [interjections] Well, I'm very concerned about how far AISH recipients have to travel and the impediments. There has to be a better system, a community outreach for getting the money to the people in need.

Something else that would help – and it would be rather inexpensive but, again, it would require some government support and funding – would be to make the AISH recipients' bus pass at the same cost as the seniors' bus pass, which in Calgary was \$35 a year as opposed to \$35 a month. This would be a small break, but it would definitely help.

The other obvious note in terms of if we want to talk about just strictly monetary efficiency is that it's considerably cheaper to keep people in their community, and AISH recipients would much rather be in as normalized an environment as possible as opposed to

institutionalizing them. So I wish within this bill that we would recognize that we are investing a very small amount overall to look after these most vulnerable individuals.

One of the things that bothers me is the way the system works in terms of how people end up on AISH. Basically, if they apply for AISH, my understanding in the past – and the minister can correct me – is that they lost their long-term disability coverage. It just was lost to them. They may have worked for a number of years and then, due to some unfortunate accident or illness, were forced onto AISH. The insurance companies to which they had paid premiums for years and years and years cut them off as soon as they go onto AISH.

Another sort of, you know, “You’ve been kicked once and now you’re stepped on,” is that AISH recipients are prematurely forced, basically, to go on Canada pension. This is particularly hard for people who end up on AISH after having worked for 30 years or more and are forced to go prematurely into drawing funds from their Canada pension. So I wish we could co-ordinate the various levels of benefits. AISH should be a sort of topping up rather than a minimal amount of funding.

I am concerned that this bill in its current format may not make it through this House because it was presented as a private member’s bill.

Some Hon. Members: No, it’s not.

Mr. Chase: Oh, sorry. I stand corrected. I am so glad that it’s a government member’s bill. I was mistaken. By giving it the authority of a government member’s bill . . .

Some Hon. Members: It’s a government bill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. And again I praise you for taking the most vulnerable people on AISH and recognizing this.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, it would really help if you could direct your comments to the Speaker.

Mr. Chase: Oh, yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I need an Annie Oakley mirror so that I can see the people I’m talking to, but I understand the process.

I am very pleased that this is a government member’s bill. I gladly accept the embarrassment of my confusion over this government bill because it recognizes the vulnerability of AISH recipients. It just doesn’t go far enough. I will be supportive of this bill and its baby steps. I would like to see yearly updated market-value, cost-of-living allowance cheques built into this bill, and will probably be suggesting such things in the form of amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

There being none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with great interest to make some comments in second reading on Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. To my understanding this act is replacing some old legislation, providing some new flexibility to better respond to the needs of Albertans with disabilities, who are amongst our most vulnerable citizens here in the province.

5:00

The new legislation says that it’s updating the language, improving reporting. Now, I’m not entirely sure how the reporting

procedures are in fact improved with this new bill, but we perhaps can look to the regulations – I don’t know – to see if that is where we might see the improvement in regard to reporting. This AISH Act hasn’t been seriously updated for more than 25 years, so we’re glad to see some changes. We certainly do applaud this long overdue increase to AISH payments that was announced last year, and we look forward in the new budget to see more such increases that would meet the rise in inflation, the cost of living, the realities of individuals living on this very, very limited monthly budget.

We do have some questions regarding this bill that we see here before us this afternoon. When the hon. Member for Strathcona introduced this bill, he stated that “this act replaces and updates the current legislation and, along with its forthcoming regulations, will provide the AISH program with increased flexibility.” As no less than many dozens of sections and subsections of this bill refer to regulations, I would ask if it was possible for this Assembly to see some of these regulations so that we might better understand just exactly what he means by this and how we can support this legislation, in fact, by seeing what the regulations have to say.

I guess you see my point, Mr. Speaker. I do find it a bit odd, to say the least, that in light of the class-action suit against the government for overpayment recovery and underpayment issues, the current proposed bill should allow these same important issues to remain under directorial control in the regulation part of this act. Again, what processes and guidelines would be in place to ensure that the government doesn’t misstep again, as they did with this very large class-action suit that we find pending against the government right now?

You know, the original act made a distinction between facilities and institutions and denied benefits or payments to persons living in institutions. The proposed act doesn’t mention institutions at all, and we’d like to know if that distinction has now faded into regulation or obscurity or what exactly that distinction is. So that is a worthwhile thing for us to be watching for.

Lastly, if the MLA AISH Review could send a questionnaire to every AISH client and make available that same questionnaire online, accept other written submissions, consult with 4,000 disability organizations and individuals, hold two public meetings, speak to over 18,000 people apparently, and in the end make public their findings before beginning the legislative review, all to begin a much-needed review affecting many tens of thousands of people in this province, then my question, obviously, Mr. Speaker, is: why can’t Albertans expect the same level of commitment or consultation to review a much larger program, our public health care system that affects well over 3 million people?

So, Mr. Speaker, certainly it’s welcome to see some activity in regard to our AISH recipients here in this province. I know that we have underrepresented the needs of these people for far too long, and I would just like to close by reminding everyone that but for the grace of God or whatever you happen to believe in, we all can be in that same position of need and of requiring assistance, and it’s our duty to remind ourselves that these people who are requiring special assistance are everyday individuals who have run into a series of circumstances or medical problems or whatever it is that have put them into this position. We as a caring society must make sure that we look after their needs and their wants, and that is a measure of what sort of society we are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and debate on Bill 21, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. This act will replace the existing AISH Act and consolidate AISH-related legislation under the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports.

It is expected that changes in this act will increase flexibility in reporting income and result in fewer incidents of overpayments and underpayments, likely in response to the \$100 million settlement reached in December 2005. This act outlines the appeal process for individuals required to repay benefits because of accidental overpayments. Clients will have access to the Citizens' Appeal Panel to review an overpayment before a debt is assessed and a collection action is taken. This act will allow health benefits to be provided to disabled individuals who do not meet the income eligibility requirements but face financial hardship because of their high health costs.

It is very important to discuss a little bit of background of the AISH program in detail. Mr. Speaker, about 6.4 per cent of Alberta's population between the ages of 18 and 64, totalling 205,000 people, have a disability; about 2.4 per cent, 75,000 people, have a severe disability; 1 per cent of Alberta's population, which is 32,000, currently receive the AISH benefit; 32 per cent receive AISH because of mental illness, 23 per cent because of developmental disabilities, and 45 per cent because of physical disabilities. The caseload has increased from 16,368 cases in 1994-95 to 31,450 in the year 2004-05. In the year 2005-06 AISH program funding was \$488 million. It is projected that in 2007-08 program funding will reach approximately \$606 million. Albertans on AISH receive a monthly allowance of up to \$950, \$1,000 as of April 1, 2006, and the personal support benefit for raising children, health benefits like premium-free Alberta health care insurance, AADL copayment fees, prescription drugs, eye care, dental care, emergency ambulance services, and essential diabetic supplies.

In the year 2004 an AISH review committee was established to review the AISH program because clients and stakeholders indicated that the benefits were too low and the program was not meeting clients' needs. There was also a legislative requirement to review the AISH Act in 2004 to identify ways to make the program more responsible to clients' needs.

5:10

A review guide was sent out to AISH clients and disability organizations and was made available to the public. The results indicated that almost every respondent identified the need to increase the AISH financial benefit. Ninety-six per cent wanted to see additional benefits for clients with unique needs beyond the cash benefit and health care coverage. Eighty-four per cent supported having medical benefits separate from income support. Eighty-three per cent supported increases to the employment earnings exemption rate.

Mr. Speaker, many of the recommendations have been adopted by this government since the review was completed. Most notably, there has been an increase in the monthly benefit from \$850 to \$1,000 effective April 2006.

My debate would be incomplete if I didn't talk about the background of the lawsuit details. In December 2005 the government of Alberta settled a class-action lawsuit allocating \$100 million for the victims of decades of illegal debt collection processes. The government was accused of arbitrarily interpreting its own policies and legislation in order to recover overpayment as far back as possible. Legislation dictated that when collecting an amount over \$500 up until 1983 and over \$1,000 after that, the government needed a signed repayment agreement or had to go

through the court to recover the money. The government instead went against its own policy and began arbitrarily docking clients for overpayments caused by administration errors.

The new policy allowed the government to avoid court in cases where there was no signed agreement and simply start repayments of future benefit cheques. For years deductions were made without any judicial oversight. In a May 1999 court case the government acknowledged that it could not make these deductions, but the practice still continued until the year 2004, when the government changed its policy to make this practice legal. It allowed for debt to be recovered without going through a court process or securing an agreement with the client. They also denied clients full compensation when they were underpaid, limiting them to six months of payments. The recipients who received less money than they should have were allowed to recover six months' worth of their losses even if the underpayment had been going on for years and was the result of administrative mistakes.

Mr. Speaker, many of the changes in this act will increase flexibility in the AISH program, especially the health benefit provision; however, we should be cautious and suspicious that so many significant provisions are being moved to regulation. Transparency and accountability should be this government's number one priority, especially considering their track record on this issue. We want to voice our commitment to providing client-friendly, flexible programs that meet the needs of disabled Albertans, but we also need to be aware that in order to restore public confidence in the provision of the AISH program, changes must be made in an open and accountable manner. It is essential that any changes to the AISH program make the process more client friendly, minimize costs to clients, and demonstrate flexibility and simplicity. We are opposed to details being made by regulation, especially since this government has a history of betraying the most vulnerable members of our society through decades of illegal debt collections. We hope that changes to the AISH Act were made with the needs of the clients in mind and reflect a change in attitude towards disabled people by this government. I welcome the move by this government. I commend the sponsor, the Member for Strathcona, for introducing this bill. I support this bill in principle.

Before I conclude, I want to say a little bit. I met a constituent yesterday, and he was complaining about the money. I mean, although the total amount of money they've received since April is about \$1,000, he's not happy with that. He believes that the government should review the case every year and that they should get the benefit like other disabled people in Alberta. The review was due for a long, long time, and the Alberta government should consider this case very seriously. They have sacrificed a lot in the past. The Premier admitted this many times, and it is about time to consider them very seriously.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of points I'd like to get on the record during second reading of Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. There have been a number of speakers that have spoken prior to me about the good work that has been done in this act and in recognizing how onerous some of the old legislation was towards our vulnerable people.

A couple of points I'd like to make. What I'm not seeing in this act is any attempt to index AISH. Considering that we as MLAs in

this House are the beneficiaries of an indexing which attaches any increase we receive, or decrease, I suppose, in the Alberta weekly wage, I would really like to see the same kind of indexing happen for the AISH benefit amount. What tends to happen here is that it's not indexed. It doesn't come up year after year after year, and all of a sudden it's a huge amount of money that's being considered, and the government balks at it. Really, if we looked at an incremental increase all the way along tied to something, inflation, the Alberta weekly wage – there are a number of things that it could be tied to – then it's a smaller incremental amount and keeps everybody up to speed and benefits people very immediately. It helps them deal with the increase in their utilities and other inflationary costs.

The second thing I'd like to see that I don't see in here is a legislated review. I think that once a year is too often, probably even every two years. I'm thinking three years might be appropriate, but I'll leave it up to the government. I think there should be a legislated review of the entire program. Things do shift and change in this province, and to just leave it out there until somebody manages to drag this back up again out of the depths of the swamp to have a look at it is really putting an expectation on a vulnerable group of people to be able to cope with all kinds of things which, frankly, we don't really expect out of anybody else. I mean, unions renegotiate their contracts every year or every several years. As I said, we as MLAs are indexed. So I think it's important that we do look at all the aspects of the program on a regular basis, whatever is appropriate there. I'm suggesting three years.

5:20

I'd also like to outline my concerns about the amount that is being moved into regulation. The old AISH Act is essentially being reinvented, and there are a number of sections that have been moved straight across from the old act into this one. Here are the sections that have not been moved across and are now being included under regulations, not in the legislation: employment training programs and services, asset testing, exempt assets, deemed assets and income from assets, changes in circumstances, disentitlement to benefit, application of Income and Employment Supports Act, financial administrator, confidentiality of information, and as I mentioned a review process. All of those were under the legislation in the old act. Now they are coming under some kind of regulation.

The problem with a regulation is that it does not come before this Assembly. There is very little opportunity for the public or for our constituents who are AISH recipients to have an opportunity to comment on it, and by not having it come in legislation, it makes it really difficult. Regulation changes can be made. They're published in *Alberta Gazette*, which comes out I think twice a year. It's very difficult for citizens to be able to find. Frankly, it's not incredibly easy for members of the Assembly to track down. So it makes it very obscure and difficult to find out what changes have been made that affect their lives and gives them almost no opportunity to respond to what is probably presented to them as a *fait accompli*.

I'm looking in the enlarged section that appears in this bill outlining what the cabinet can make regulations on. In particular, I would like details from the minister on what the regulations will

look like. I'd like to get those before we actually pass this legislation, not sometime a year or something down the road when it comes out in *Alberta Gazette*. I'd like to know what the ministry is considering now – they must know, and if they don't know now, we've got a much bigger problem on our hands – in particular, “respecting the circumstances in which a director may provide, refuse, suspend, vary, or discontinue a benefit”; “respecting the appointment and duties of a financial administrator”; “respecting requirements to repay under section 7, including the circumstances in which a director does not have to require repayment”; “respecting underpayments”; “respecting the collection of debts due under section 9(2)(b).” This is specific to the minister. So we've now got two sets of regulations that can be made. One set of regulations can come through the cabinet, and the second set of regulations can simply be done by the minister, which is even harder to track.

There are three regulations that are now being empowered under the minister: “respecting applications for benefits”; “respecting appeal panels, appeals, and the decisions of a director that are exempt from appeal”; and finally, “respecting the transition of any matter from the previous legislation.” That's a huge field to play in, Mr. Speaker.

So I would like some detail from the minister responsible on what is being anticipated here. I would encourage her to table the draft regulations in the House so that we can look at those at the same time as we are considering support for this particular bill because this causes me great concern. This government has a real habit of creating these shell bills. To a great extent when you look at what's being moved out of the legislation into regulations, this becomes a huge shell bill. For all the other good things that have been done here, when I weigh that in balance with the potential for, frankly, abuse and a lack of transparency and openness and accountability from the government, it gives me great concern about what's being anticipated and planned here.

Those were the points that I just wanted to get on the record as part of second reading. I will look forward to hearing back from the minister with the specifics of the requests that I've made here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

The hon. Member for Strathcona to close debate.

Mr. Lougheed: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 8 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, March 14, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/03/14

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: We'll call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 9

Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 9, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006. During second reading of Bill 9 some important questions were raised that I would like to address. The most important change in the amendment act will update the province's Alberta Works legislation to provide more flexibility in decision-making for grant-funded students. This will be achieved primarily by outlining the one year out of school rule in regulations so that more exceptions can be made for people applying in certain circumstances. The change will benefit the immigrant with limited English skills or the single parent who needs more skills to earn sufficient wages to support her family.

I would like to clarify that this change will not prevent any student from completing a high school diploma. Current regulations already ensure that at-risk youth under 18 years can get the supports they need to remain in the school system.

For those who pursue occupational training, I want to clarify that the government is not interested in forcing anyone into low-paying work. Rather, the government is committed to helping people increase their income through working so that all Albertans can obtain the self-reliance and independence they deserve. That's why so much is done to help people enter training programs for occupations like machinist, licensed practical nurse, drywall installer, and pharmacy technicians. All of these occupations are in high demand with good salaries.

Alberta Works also provides services that help single parents to get child support in addition to the financial assistance they receive.

The second change being proposed here is strictly housekeeping. One of the references to the minister's authority to establish forms pertaining to child support agreements is missing. Now it will be added. Parents have a legal obligation to support their children. The government is not interested in depriving single parents of the child support they deserve. That's why free services are provided to Alberta Works' clients to ensure that this is obtained.

Before I close, I would also like to acknowledge the observation that none of these changes speak to an increase in rates. As announced in the throne speech, the government is raising rates for Alberta Works' clients who cannot work. This government believes that more assistance is needed for this group, and I'm given to understand that more details will be announced at budget.

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I look forward to answering any other questions that may be raised at the Committee of the Whole stage.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 9, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006. I thank the mover for some of the clarifications that were brought up in second reading. They were very helpful. The opposition certainly is interested in seeing that people can learn, can get an opportunity to be self-reliant, can have the training and the ability to partake of training with proper child support, with help in their English skills, with help for some of the peculiar problems that they run into as single parents.

While these amendments in themselves are not contentious, the problem with the Income and Employment Supports Act remains. There is too much reliance on regulations, and there is no way to measure exactly how much people living in poverty truly need. Without indexing rates to inflation and tying it to an accepted measure such as the market-basket measure, there is no accurate determination of what people need to survive. Apparently, the government believes it can determine this through regulations.

We've been speaking quite a bit in this House on health care in the last couple of weeks. You know, there's been some discussion of the social determinants of health, and they continue to be a major cause for concern in terms of the health care costs, the actual health of the people in our population. The need to address especially those who cannot work and their income levels is apparent, and it has been apparent for a long time. The health costs for those populations are often very much higher and very much more complicated than those for the population in general.

On the impacts and outcomes of Bill 9, removing the provision that made eligibility for income support and benefits tied to not attending school for the previous year and amending it to just include meeting the age allows people who attended school in the past year to apply for and receive benefits if they meet the requirements. Previously those eligible for benefits and income support were precluded from applying for and retaining income supports if they attended an educational institution in the previous year.

The amendment that addresses those under the age of 18 is questionable as to whether it serves its purpose. The effect of this amendment is to allow the minister through regulations to determine eligibility for part-time training benefits for high school dropouts. The sample form on the Human Resources and Employment website states that an eligible person "must be out of public high school for 24 months" in order to receive training support for part-time study. It appears that this requirement placed an undue burden on high school dropouts who wanted to re-enter an educational institution the next year but could not afford it or who were perhaps faced with other obstacles that required exiting from high school.

The question here is whether the suggested amendment serves the purpose of allowing those who dropped out of a training facility while under the age of 18 to access benefits even if they left the educational facility within the past year or two. If it does, then it will have a significant impact on those under 18 who require assistance, such as unmarried mothers who left school due to pregnancy or those whose family circumstances or financial circumstances forced them to discontinue their education.

The other main impact of this act is to give the minister more authority to make regulations prescribing the form and contents of support agreements, specifically related to the director assisting a person who is in receipt of assistance under another act or who is qualified for assistance but has not received it from the person obligated to pay support and arrears. The amendment makes a change to allow the minister to make regulations to determine the form and contents of a support agreement between parties. Previously the ability by the minister to make regulations was not mentioned specifically but, rather, was implied.

8:10

This amendment is rather a housekeeping change to make the regulation-making ability of the minister specific and not implied. However, while there is no problem with the specific change in Bill 9 in this area, the more global problem here is that almost everything in the Income and Employment Supports Act is subject to the regulations. I spoke to that in second reading. It's not detailed in the legislation. The main problem with the entire act is that it allows for the content and form of almost everything to be determined in the regulations. While this specific amendment is merely housekeeping, the overriding problem is that this entire act is subject to the minister's or the Lieutenant Governor in Council's ability to make regulations.

Another criticism not only of this amendment act but the Income and Employment Supports Act in general is that it does not address some critical problems already associated with the government's social assistance programs. The amendments in this act are not troublesome taken in context with the act that it amends, but the original act attempted to expand an already flawed system without addressing those problems.

There is an overriding problem with the act that amends the Income and Employment Supports Act. The act took a system that was already flawed. When that one came in, it did not adequately meet people's needs and, really, expanded that flawed system. Bill 9 at least attempts to address some of the problems by taking out the requirement that an eligible recipient of income support and benefits could not have attended school in the previous year. It's a good step, but more people need to apply for assistance to get the training that they need to obtain employment.

There is a need, perhaps, for additional amendments to the Income and Employment Supports Act in order to address some of the problems with it. Increasing the social assistance rates is a vital step in supporting independence. These rates, as I've already mentioned, must be indexed to inflation and tied to an accepted measurement tool like the market-basket measure. Only by incorporating the market-basket measure can the government determine what income support and benefits are needed for individuals and households and what basic necessities actually are. The Income and Employment Supports Act does not define what basic necessities are, and this ambiguity can lead to an inaccurate assessment of benefits. While this specific act, Bill 9, does not address these issues, perhaps it is time that this government takes action to ensure that low-income Albertans have a decent standard of living.

Some of the training programs that we so often see supported by Human Resources and Employment are of little value. Sometimes they are put forward as a money-making device for some of the companies that are involved. I think there has to be sufficient and adequate supervision of some of these types of schools, types of contracts, types of endeavours to ensure that they're not just a way for someone to take the government's largesse and interest in getting people off the welfare roll, so to speak, to ensure that they are in fact getting proper training, that they are in fact getting a good basis in language. I've talked to a number of students in these schools. There's no attendance taken. There's no sense of any need for achievement. The main thing is that they're getting their forms done, their money paid from the government, and that's all that the schools, if we want to call them schools, have an interest in. There are some huge difficulties that have been related to us by many of these students. Sometimes it's very difficult to prove that because they meet some rather lax requirements under HRE in skills development and some of these other areas. You know, there is such a tremendous push to satisfy the need in small business and in our

smaller centres, our smaller communities, for workers. Throwing money at this item and thereafter reducing so-called welfare statistics seems and looks good. In reality we're not doing anything for our economy. We're not doing anything to properly train the required skills that many employers need to put people into the workforce.

Why is it that we still have such a high, high level of youth unemployment? Across Canada it's well over a million people in the 18 to 24 age group, yet we're looking for temporary foreign workers. Why is it that we have so many aboriginals that remain without access to real programs to properly train them? There have been, certainly, some improvements. There have been some great increases, I guess you might say, percentage-wise, but the actual numbers in comparison to the population are still not very large. Yet we look at the city of Edmonton, for example, an urban centre that's going to be the largest centre of aboriginal population in Canada of any major city.

The opposition, in looking at this particular bill, gives qualified support. There are some good improvements in it, but it does not go far enough. With that, Mr. Chair, I'll end my words.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next member to speak, may we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I grew up in a family of girls, an older sister and a younger sister, and I'm very pleased to have here up in the gallery my younger sister, Isabella Bishop. I would hope that she would stand up, and everyone give her a good welcome.

The Chair: Members in the gallery, you may notice that some of the members don't have their jackets on. We're in the committee stage of a bill, when members can remove their jackets and sit in a seat other than their own and perhaps carry on quiet conversations. I would like to encourage all members to make sure that your conversations are quiet as I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Bill 9 **Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006** *(continued)*

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not sure whether this change will accomplish its goal in allowing high school dropouts, which was mentioned in section 2, to go back into training programs without having to wait the year or two or 24 months. It's questionable because under section 2 it says: that the individual "is at least 18 years of age and did not attend school in the immediately preceding year, or meets the age or other requirements provided in the regulations." So, again, my question is whether it will accomplish that specific task or not.

I've got some specific questions with regard to it. How does this affect the person who is essentially single but because of income or lack of income thus shares with a roommate or parent? How does this affect them in their ability to access this particular program? As to the bill's extent, the purpose, I guess, is to provide programs for persons in need . . . for food, shelter, [clothing,] personal items and medical and other benefits as are essential

to their health and well-being and, in particular, to provide training and other measures to facilitate their movement toward more independent living, outside of a dependent, such as, you know, those that are living still within the households with their parents or having to rely on someone as joint income, preventing them from being out on their own.

Does this open a door for people who were previously turned down for assistance if they can't take the training because they live in remote areas or they're without a vehicle or a computer or the Internet courses? I know that we talk about the Internet being wide ranging and spread from one end of the province to the other, but in some areas it's just not feasible, or they just can't afford it.

You know, section 3 talks about directors as well: in accordance with the Public Service Act, one or more directors may be appointed to administer the act under the minister's direction. If more than one director is appointed, the responsibilities are to be determined by the minister for each individual. Will these directors be in addition to the people that are currently holding administrative positions and presiding over the programs? Or will the current administrators be laid off with benefits or with parachute packages? This sometimes happens to those in government service that are being let go.

Where is the accountability? When any organization or employee is asked to do any duty or function, does that include handing out training contracts and money? There's got to be some specific kind of criteria or checks and balances when we're talking about public money trying to benefit the public in general.

8:20

Those would be just a couple of specifics that I would have. Overall, it doesn't look like a bad program, but there are some specifics that we have raised on a number of issues that we're hoping would be clarified or at least would be tightened to ensure that the effectiveness of the bill is able to be met then.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This would be the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 9, Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006. This is a very important bill for two groups of people that both reside in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre but also have their primary training and support organizations located there. Specifically, they're the participants in the Terra program and also a number of immigrants and new Canadians who tend to cluster in Edmonton-Centre and are attending programs like NorQuest. They're looking for educational upgrading and in many cases ESL training to be able to move into a productive life here in Edmonton and Alberta and Canada.

With the changes that came through with the new act in 2004, we ended up with this bizarre and very wrong situation. I'll use the example of Terra because I actually wrote a letter to the minister on this. The whole point of the Terra program is dealing with young women who have chosen to carry pregnancies to term. There they are, usually in high school, sometimes in junior high school, now with a baby. This program is to support them to go back and complete their education. That's the entire point of the program. It has enlarged its services, and now it goes as far as to offer sort of support and counselling for the fathers of these children if they wish to participate in such a program.

Here we had Terra, whose very purpose was to be helping these girls finish their education, and many of them were reliant upon funding through what was then called SFI and then, more recently, the Income and Employment Supports Act. With the change in the

legislation they got cut off, and they couldn't get funding anymore. So a number of these girls had to literally leave Terra, the very program that's there to help them, and go out and get a job because they could no longer get funding to help them stay in Terra and complete their education. So just a total mess, a really bad scene. I don't think that it was what the government intended to do, but nonetheless it did it.

It's taken us a good year to straighten this out, which is unfortunate because there will have been some young women who were not able to recover from the setback that they experienced because of the changes in the program. But credit where credit is due: even though the government were the ones that originally messed this up, they did recognize their mess and cleaned it. So good on you for doing that.

The second group that I referred to is the ESL and upgrading students who attend NorQuest. I get invited to come out and speak to them two or three times a year, and I'm happy to go because I think it's important for people who are new and are integrating into our country. Let's face it; some people have been here four or five years or may have even come when they were youths. The more that we can acculturate them to our society and have them come to see their political representatives as someone that they work with is a good thing, in my opinion, so I'm willing to spend my time there.

I can't tell you how many people have said to me as I visit their classes: "Please, please, can't you do something about the level of support that we get? You know, we're expected to work hard and be successful at our studies here, and we're also expected to earn something on our own. We do that, and we do it happily, but we can't work too much or we're neglecting our class time or we're neglecting our study time, and the amount of money that we're receiving is just not enough. We're suffering here. We can't eat properly. We can't find ourselves accommodation that is safe for us," for many of them who are women, for men, even for people with families. On their behalf I want to put those concerns on the record.

I understand that this bill is not in fact giving them an increase in their support payments, but it will be allowing some of them that got caught in this thing of where you had to have been out of school for two years before you were eligible to receive support payments again to go back to school. There can be all kinds of reasons why these particular individuals have had an intermittent educational career, if I can put it that way. We are seeing more and more people coming from Africa where some of them have been involved in some terrible episodes that we in this very safe, protected environment cannot even believe. We can't possibly imagine what they've been through. Some of them are victims of torture. Some have lived for long periods of time in refugee camps in other countries and have made their way here sort of bunny-hopping across a number of other countries to settle here. So they may have episodes of flashbacks where they're having to cope with the aftermaths of torture or from having viewed that sort of activity, and it can affect their ability to stay in school and to be successful. Then to put further barriers in their way just was not helping.

One of my colleagues has already talked about the need for workers and why aren't we looking at helping our own workers to be successful and able to participate fully in the job market first, before we start bringing in boatloads of people on a temporary worker permit from another country? And I agree. People of aboriginal societies, people that are coming here from other countries, immigrants and new Canadians, are certainly two of the groups that we could be looking at and working with very closely, and those are the people who primarily are filling the classes at NorQuest. As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, I introduced one of

those classes in the Assembly this afternoon, and I read out a little description of the program that they were in, which was job opportunities and vocational upgrading. That's exactly the people who are qualifying for this income support and who really need it. It's a good investment on our part, and it really pays off for us in the long run. By assisting these people, we certainly get our investment back many times over.

On behalf of those people who are participating in the Terra program and those who are attending the NorQuest classes and some others, I thank the government for recognizing that they had made an error earlier and for being able to correct it.

Just a few other things that I want to note with this legislation. I know that a number of other people have spoken about the increasing move of the government to push the decision-making and detail work into the regulations. I note that this bill is rife with it, and what a mistake I think that is for Albertans and for our future. We need to have some of that detail brought into this Legislative Assembly and the ability of our constituents to view it, to download it, and to talk to us about it and we can bring their comments into this Assembly. None of that happens when you are dealing with regulations. It's not available to people widely. It's not available on the Internet or through Our House or on www.assembly.ab.ca, so it's very difficult for people to get hold of.

8:30

One of my colleagues was talking about instituting a market-basket measurement for deciding what levels of income and benefit are appropriate, and I certainly support that. We have a fairly wide disparity in Alberta between appropriate levels of benefits, between rural areas, for example, and cities, even smaller centres. This is important. We're probably spending too much in some places and not enough in others, and there are simple ways to deal with that.

The last two things are the need to index the support and benefit payments to something. I don't particularly advocate one indexing scheme over another, but I think it should be indexed on a yearly basis. Whether you're going to index that to the rate of inflation or you want to index it to the Alberta weekly wage or any other reasonable annual measurement, fine. Work that out. But it should happen so that we have an incremental increase that happens. I mean, people receiving these support benefits are having to deal with inflationary costs in groceries, in transportation, in housing, in utilities just like all the rest of us, but we, especially we here in this Assembly, are privileged enough to have our salaries tied to annual indexing with the Alberta weekly wage.

Why do we take the most vulnerable, the poorest in our society, and send them out there in a leaky boat, push them off from the pier and just send them out there in the middle of the ocean, never being able to come back and dock anywhere and have any kind of annual review? Then when five or ten years go past and all of a sudden they are so far behind that it's a huge amount of money to bring them back even with everybody else, there's this huge hue and cry about how expensive it is. Well, you know, get a grip. Do this on a reasonable basis and quit making this such a grand patriarchal handout. It's just inappropriate, and frankly it's grandstanding. So get on it: index it to something.

Tied with that is the need for a review on some sort of reasonable basis. I said this afternoon, when we were talking about the AISH benefits, that I didn't feel an annual review was necessary, that it's probably onerous to look at the whole program on an annual basis. Maybe even two years still might be too soon, but probably at three years you should definitely be looking at all aspects of the program to see if they're still relevant, if you should tweak the program here or there. Maybe you should be dropping a program.

Maybe there's something new that really needs to be addressed. If you made no changes at all, no one would have telephones installed in their homes, and now we're at the point where we've got Internet. You've got to continue to review these programs in light of what's going on in the world around them. The government's insistence on refusing to do this is quite tiresome, frankly, and I think very old-fashioned and, as I said, patriarchal, and they've just got to move away from that. It's not a reasonable way to deal with people in our society.

Those are the comments I wanted to make. Thank you for the opportunity. I appreciate it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be relatively brief. I spoke before on this particular bill, and I said at the time that I certainly see the intent of it as being reasonable. I understand that it's giving more flexibility to people that are falling between the cracks. I think a couple of those 148 people that I raised in question period today that had to deal with the Winspear Foundation might have been helped with this bill. So I think it's a step in the right direction.

I won't go on about the rates as I did in question period because I know that's coming on another day. I mentioned today that the rates are appallingly low. We've virtually had no increases at all since 1993, and I think that's causing more people to fall between the cracks. But we'll save that debate for another day after the budget.

I will support the bill because I think that for the groups that the member bringing it forward talked about, we do need that flexibility to deal with those sorts of groups.

I know what the member said, and I take him at his word, and I'm sure he'll be reminding the minister, but I think that when you have this sort of flexibility when people are trying to learn the language – they may be very good academically, and they may have a lot of potential, but because they're struggling with the various issues that the member referred to earlier on, there can be a tendency for: well, let's get them into some training right away, or let's move them into some lower paid jobs. I think we have to be somewhat careful of that.

I'm not sure how you do that when you move it into regulations. I think we shortchange people when we say – just from my own experience as an MLA in the inner city, it used to be that we said of these kids in the inner city coming from very tough backgrounds: well, the best we could hope for is to socialize them. Thankfully, I trust that we've gone away from that. We're demanding that they learn to read and write and have those literary skills. So the only caution I have about this is that it can be fairly easy, then, especially when people are clamouring for workers, that we shortchange these people and say: well, you'd be better off here rather than continuing with your formal education in some way. When it's not out in the legislation, we don't know what's going on behind closed doors, if that's happening or not.

I guess that I would ask the person bringing the bill forward just what precautions we might have for that. As I say, that concern is not enough for me not to support the good intentions of this bill. I think the intentions are good, but I think there is that potential for abuse, Mr. Chairman. So I'm asking for some clarification on how we can recognize how this program is going to work, if we're ever going to know how it's going to work if it's behind closed doors in terms of regulations.

As I said, Mr. Chairman, we'll save the debate about the adequacy of the supports programs that people are facing. I'll be

looking forward very much to seeing what's in that budget. As I said, it better be substantial, or there are going to be some serious questions because all the bills in the world won't solve that problem unless we raise those rates for people. The majority of these people are trying. It's not that they're lazy and not trying – I think the member would agree; you know, this is why we're bringing this bill forward – but they do need adequate help to help themselves.

So I'd be interested in how the member sees the problem that I'm laying out. Again, it's certainly not enough for me not to support the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by first thanking all the four speakers before me for accepting in principle the amendments that I'm bringing forward. I do understand that they do have a number of different issues that they have raised, and with some of them I do agree. I think it's very important that our services that are provided stream our young people into training that will be meaningful for them and not just send them to low-paying training because they do not have the English skills. I agree with you a hundred per cent.

There were also concerns raised about the level of social benefits to people on social assistance or AISH or other such programs, and I agree that the amounts that we do give out are not sufficient, particularly if you're living in a big urban centre where housing cost is phenomenally high. To live on \$600, \$700, \$800, or a thousand dollars is just difficult. None of us in this room would be able to live on that. I agree, but that's beyond the scope of the amendments that I'm bringing forward.

8:40

One of the beauties about committee stage is that members are able to stretch the concept to bring in arguments and debates on various subjects, and we've heard quite a few today. I do understand the experience of the Terra program or AISH or the Winspear centre, but again I think those are all arguments for a debate at a later stage with a different matter. For now, as far as the two amendments that have been brought forward, I do understand that there is an agreement in principle. As far as the other issues are concerned, I think every member in this House should be concerned about it, should be raising it, and certainly I agree with some of the arguments that have been brought forward.

With that, Mr. Chairman, if there are no further questions, I'd call the question.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 9, Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 22

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to briefly comment on what has now become an institution in this Assembly. This is my 10th spring session, and I've seen an interim supply bill every single time, so I'm having to admit that this is part of the government's agenda.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Unfortunately, I don't see any meaningful movement towards changing this, what is now an institution. I think there's something wrong with that.

For the people reading this at home, what the situation is is our budget year runs from the first of April to the end of March. It takes us about five weeks to work our way through all of the debates on the various budget departments and then the appropriation bill that follows that. So, really, in order to have a budget completely debated and passed prior to its implementation on the first of April, we would have to start debating this back in sort of mid to late February.

This government has increasingly moved our start date for the spring session to about that time and has been moving back the introduction of the budget to very late. At this point we're now expecting that the budget will not in fact be introduced until barely a week before the end of the fiscal year. So in order to have permission to cut the cheques to pay the people who work so hard in the government bureaucracy and to, you know, purchase those supplies that are necessary and keep various programs up and running, the government has to give itself a little bit of operating money to tide it over, so to speak. That's what the interim supply budget is: it gets you through the interim.

We now have this government habit of pushing the budget later and later and later, and it has to grant itself interim funding. We end up, as the opposition, with a document booklet that basically sort of takes 60 days worth of operational money from each department, figures it out as a percentage, and says: this is what we need for this department. We get no information that goes along with it. It doesn't say how many people are going to be paid for how many days of work or which projects are going to be commenced or whether there's full funding given to certain programs to get them started or no money at all to various other programs that don't commence until the fall. We don't get any information. We just get a line item that says: this department is asking for X million or billion dollars to get them through the 60 days.

So it's very, very bad planning. From a government that prides itself on its fiscal responsibility, in quotes, this is appalling behaviour. The members of the opposition regularly get up about this time every year and flog the government with its poor behaviour around this interim supply, and it seems to have not the slightest bit of effect upon the government, so I'm taking it that they really don't care that they're appallingly bad fiscal managers and that they can't seem to understand when the 1st of April is and be able to back the budget up enough to do that. It's not going to stop me from trying to influence the government.

I think that what really bothers me about this is that I don't see any movement forward. I don't see the government learning anything, and I'm really concerned with the lack of information, that decreasing information that is provided around budget documents overall. All I can do for that is go to other observers of the govern-

ment's fiscal behaviour for some assistance in holding the government to account. So I go back to the Auditor General's report, and I look at the recommendations and key recommendations that he and his staff have made and say: "Okay. Well, has the government learned anything here? Is anything being done about this?" If I'm now being asked to just blanket give you 60 days' worth of operational money in all these departments, do we have any sense of whether lessons have been learned and changes are being made to implement some things that are fiscally responsible?

I'll also point out, Mr. Chairman, as you are well aware having been a previous member of the Public Accounts Committee, that the Public Accounts Committee in Alberta has only permitted itself to sit while the session is in, so this committee doesn't meet outside of sitting. We're also aware that this Alberta Legislature sits fewer days than any other Legislature in the country. The argument that I'm immediately met with from the other side is: yes, but we sit at night too, so that actually makes more days. Well, it doesn't when you're only meeting on Wednesday mornings while we're in session.

What's happened is that we meet for so few weeks that we are now examining about a third of the ministries every year. Some ministries, obviously, come up more often. The big ones like Health are going to get viewed every year. You can have a ministry like Infrastructure or Science or Gaming or Aboriginal Affairs that does not come under scrutiny before the Public Accounts Committee for four or even five years. The committee has not permitted itself to look at anything outside of the year under question, so even though you're only seeing this department once every four or five years, you're not allowed to question at that point for the four and five years that's gone on between the last time you saw them. You can only question them for the year that's under examination at the time. So we're missing a lot of scrutiny here, and a lot of fiscal lessons are not being learned.

I will just bring to the government's attention once again the number of key recommendations that have been made that aren't likely to be dealt with in Public Accounts this year, just given, you know, how many ministries are likely to be scrutinized. We have a couple of cross-ministry recommendations that have been made, and interestingly two of the five in the cross-ministry were recommendations that were in fact brought forward in Motion 502, proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, around appointments: recruiting, evaluation, and training of boards of directors. The first recommendation was that "the Deputy Minister of Executive Council update Alberta public sector governance principles and guidance so that they are consistent with . . . good practices for recruiting, evaluating and training directors" who would be appointed to these various agencies, boards, and commissions.

The second recommendation was that "the guidance include a statement that governing boards evaluate and report publicly their own performance against both Alberta public sector principles and their own board governance policies." The intent of that was included under the motion from my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, and surprisingly and shockingly, Mr. Chairman, that motion was voted down by the Assembly. It was a great disappointment. Another key recommendation in the cross-ministry. Again this doesn't get to be talked about in Public Accounts because it's meaning to be dealt with by a number of ministries or possibly all ministries, which is why I'm bringing it up in the context of interim supply because we're supposed to be granting money to operate in a fiscally responsible manner for 60 days.

8:50

So I'd like to know if these are being incorporated and, in fact, if they are being accepted and integrated.

We also have a recommendation – it is a key recommendation – that "the Deputy Minister of Executive Council provide audit committees with guidance for overseeing internal audit departments, including identifying related training."

There are two other, one unnumbered and one numbered, additional ones under cross-ministry: one for linking government and ministry business plans, just a recommendation that they, in fact, be links, and that "the Department of Finance identify and describe core businesses in the government business plan," and a numbered recommendation, number 4, that "the Department of Finance develop guidance related to the purpose, definition and use of societal [norms]."

Now, there are a number of recommendations on seniors' care and programs. I'm hoping that we are going to get that minister in front of Public Accounts.

Then we have Sustainable Resource and Environmental Management, and I think that minister might be coming.

Advanced Education. I don't think we will see that minister, so we have recommendation 15, designating programs as eligible; 16, departmental compliance tests; 17, public postsecondary institution purchasing; 18, research roles and responsibilities – this is at the University of Calgary; an unnumbered recommendation on research policies, again specific to the University of Calgary. Oh, my Lord, there are actually 11 more recommendations from the Auditor General specific to the Advanced Education department, so I recommend people have themselves a read of the Auditor General's annual report, 2004-2005, on page 20, to get the rest of those recommendations.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has five recommendations. Three of them are numbered. Recommendation 20 again recommending that the department "evaluate the performance of its grant programs in meeting Ministry goals." Recommendation 21 recommending that the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation "clearly define eligibility criteria," "document its evaluation of the loan applicant," "analyze the borrower's financial condition," and a number of other suggestions that they're making on that. Recommendation 22 is around managing the beginning farm loans program. Recommendation 23 recommending that "the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation improve controls over the administration of the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program," and a number of recommendations they make there. Finally, an unnumbered recommendation on the testing of advance payment methodology.

Children's Services. There are two recommendations there.

Community Development. Ah, yes, Wild Rose grants to Applewood. Recommendation 26 recommending that "the Wild Rose Foundation review the results of [their] audit into the grants to Applewood . . . Community Association and take appropriate action." Now, I'm pretty sure that Community Development will not be coming before Public Accounts this year, and I'd be very interested in hearing from the minister as part of the interim supply debate during Committee of the Whole what, in fact, has happened with that. There's also an unnumbered recommendation that the Wild Rose Foundation systems for the international development program improve its grant systems and again three different specific recommendations on how they should do that.

One numbered recommendation for Education.

Three recommendations, all of them numbered, two of them key recommendations, for Energy.

One on Environment.

Finance has three of them. Two of them are numbered recommendations, and one is a numbered and a key recommendation.

Gaming. There are three recommendations.

Government Services, one.

Infrastructure and Transportation, three.

Restructuring and Government Efficiency performance measures. In numbered recommendation 37 they again recommend that the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency:

- clearly define its performance measures and targets, and
- develop systems to monitor and report results.

Now, when they say “again recommend,” they’re very subtly and quite elegantly pointing out that they have made this recommendation before and there’s been no satisfactory response from the government. In fact, this was made in the 2001-02 year and again in ’02-03, and now we’ve got it coming up again in ’04-05. Really, I think that’s telling us that the Restructuring and Government Efficiency department doesn’t know what it’s doing since it can’t even clearly define its own performance measurements and targets. Dear Lord, Mr. Chairman. I mean, sometimes you really do have to question what the heck is going on when you’ve got a whole government department that doesn’t know what its own performance measurements are supposed to be and that the Auditor General has to tell it not once, not twice but three times to try and figure that out for itself. “Develop systems to monitor and report results.” Oh, please.

I think that’s all I need to say about this government and interim financial reports and its ability to be fiscally responsible, open, accountable, and transparent. There’s a lot of work to be done here.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’m pleased to rise and debate on Bill 22, the interim supply estimates, 2006-07, general revenue fund and lottery fund. The focus of the interim supply is to make sure that the government has operating grants when they have not yet completed the budgeting process. Even when this government has a budget, they end up overspending. This is not a new thing for us. I saw the same thing last year. They keep on repeating the same thing again and again. I think the main reason is because they have 62 members in this House and the opposition has 21. They don’t care. If we have differences, they can ask for a vote, and they can do whatever they like. But they are forgetting one thing: they have to answer to their constituents, who elected them. So I just warn them: if not this time, next time be careful. They should make the budget process properly.

Even when this government has a budget, they end up overspending like they did last year. How foolish can that be for a government that cannot organize its time? It’s in their hands. They are in power, and they have the staff, and they can do it. Once again they want us to write a blank cheque without giving us any details. It tells us that there is progress in place to start planning, and that’s what is critical. If we are going to be fiscally responsible, as they always proclaim, they should do the job right. If it’s fiscally proven in this province, we have got to signal them – that’s all we can do – so that the proper budget planning can be undertaken so that we can have a reflection of the needs of the agencies that are going to be doing the expenditure planning on our behalf.

Mr. Chairman, we need to have the detail that’s associated with being able to say that these are the types of expenditures. We don’t know why they don’t give us the full details. We don’t know what they are spending, so how can we comment on them appropriately?

This is the booklet they gave us, a few pages, all the portfolios. Community Development is just two lines: Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases, \$93,600,000. I’m not sure about this. The same with the other portfolios: no details at all. They don’t give us any detail before they give us this booklet, and they expect us to

debate on this. This is not fair. Next time they should do the job right. If I show this booklet to my accountant and tell him, you know, “This is the way my government is doing it,” I think that any good accountant would laugh at the government. I don’t know why they are repeating again and again.

9:00

It’s really a huge amount in this booklet, a huge amount with no details. I want to ask the Minister of Community Development because I’m the critic for Community Development, and the figure I see in this booklet is a huge amount but no full details. I can’t see the breakdown of some \$93 million, which the government mentions in this supply list, \$93 million or whatever they are spending on expenses and equipment/inventory purchases. I mean, I don’t know what they call it. How much money will be spent on the programs or the services? We don’t know. When we ask them, well, nobody gives us the proper answer. Is it possible to receive full details in the future, a full breakdown of the whole amount found under each line, under each item where they are spending it?

These are just a few questions that I raise, but there are definitely many, many more questions to ask. Maybe I will ask in detail when the question period comes.

Mr. Chairman, as in the last year, this year once again they are asking us to sign a blank cheque. They can’t bring a financial budget before us in a timely fashion. They have only had three months. I mean, I think we had a budget in November. How long does it take when they start preparing for these budgets way back in November?

I guess one of the things that’s really difficult as we go about talking with Albertans is focusing on the kind of debate around what the expenditures are. I know that the normal answer to that is: well, wait till the budget comes. But if we are supposed to vote on this judiciously and in the spirit of appropriate government recognition of expenditure, we need to have full details, which we don’t.

I notice that during question period, when we ask them questions, sometimes they expect us to direct them to the departments. Last week I asked a question of the Minister of Education about one of the problems in my riding. It was a water problem, and I contacted the people concerned a few times. When I asked him, he said: well, you are welcome to do it. When I asked him again, he said: it’s your problem. I mean, this is the attitude. We all are here for the people. They elect us. We are answerable to them. So I can only request each and everybody sitting in this hall: if they choose us, we should respect their judgment. They have so many expectations of us.

My next question is from this booklet. I don’t know. Where is this funding going? Where are they going to spend the money? We don’t have details. They don’t give us the answer. How would we find out? What are we doing here?

I know some people are saying: oh, we are wasting time here. No, we are not wasting time here. Somebody here is not doing the job right. If I were the CA, chartered accountant, and the budget is something like this, I would just throw that paper out and say, “You’re fired,” right away. I said the same thing last year. Nobody listened. Now I think most of the MLAs sitting here are not listening, Mr. Chairman. They are talking. They’re not listening.

Some Hon. Members: We’re listening.

Mr. Agnihotri: Are you? Okay. Thank you.

Being the critic of Community Development in my portfolio my priorities are, like I asked the minister many times, to increase the funding for the arts. I heard from the stakeholders that they want us to double the funding. We are getting approximately \$20 million for

arts funding, and they said that the reasonable amount they want is \$40 million. But every budget they say: well, just wait for the budget. I listened to the same thing last year, and I'm going to listen, I think, to the same thing this year. Nobody listened. I mean, we are here for the people who elected us.

Another thing in my portfolio is the Human Rights Commission, and I asked questions a few times. I mean, people are waiting. Some people made complaints to the Human Rights Commission, and the cases are there for two, three years.

We are fortunate. We have sufficient money, and this is a very important department as the Minister for Community Development agreed. I mean, he said: "Yes, it's very important. We should look into it." Still, when I talk to my stakeholders, they are not happy. When I listen to the ministers here, they always say: education, we are number 1; number 3 on this; health care, yeah, yeah, we have done this or that.

I went to the Grey Nuns hospital. I'm the witness. I took my wife there, and we had to wait nine hours. Nine hours. She was crying like a baby. It's serious. When we put the question to the ministers, I remember the wording from the health minister: I talked to somebody in Europe. They say: "Oh, you guys are really lucky. You are ten times ahead of us." I mean, I don't want to know the position in Europe. I'm talking about here in Alberta, especially in my riding. The people are suffering, and nobody's listening. Every time everything is okay, okay.

9:10

We are fortunate. We have money. But we don't plan properly; we don't have long-term sustainable policies here. That's what we need.

One of the stakeholders in Calgary – I don't want to mention his name. He's very important. [interjections] It's very interesting. Please listen. He said that he talked to 20 MLAs from Calgary, and nobody listened to him. What they want is a proper sports policy. I even wrote a letter to the Minister of Community Development, and he replied: yes, in the next session we will introduce sports policy. I'm still waiting for that. Cultural policies; sports policies; resource policies. What do you have? Every time we ask you the question: where is your policy? Then we show you the policy, and you throw that policy out. Are you guys listening? [interjections] I'm not finished yet.

If the government is serious about making Alberta number one in health, make Alberta active and healthy and save dollars from Alberta health care. Where's that plan?

An Hon. Member: It's the fourth way.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yeah. Fourth way, fifth way, seventh way, maybe no way. No way.

You will see. If there is pressure from the public, you guys will change your opinion just like that. So think about it. The reason I'm saying this is because I heard so many times from the minister of health: "The priority is to make Albertans active. If we make them active, we can save tons of money in the health care system. Alberta helps society by accepting and implementing all the recommendations in the Alberta sports plan." This or that I've heard so many times but no answers. I want the government to begin to develop a strategy that will promote and support Alberta's sports plan. I'm going to ask that question to the Community Development minister when he's here maybe next time during question period. This is very, very important.

Okay. Now I want to talk a little bit about the economic priorities, long-term sustainable funding. So many times we discuss the

policies. Where are your policies? You guys always ask the opposition, always blame the opposition parties. I've never seen your policies on resources.

Ms Blakeman: Or land use policies.

Mr. Agnihotri: Did you see one?

Ms Blakeman: No.

Mr. Agnihotri: You, Mr. Chairman? Anybody? [interjections] Well, why don't you admit that you don't have any policies?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, it would really help if you would direct your statements through the chair rather than going across the floor.

Mr. Agnihotri: What I am trying to say, Mr. Chairman, is very simple. It's taxpayers' hard-earned money, and this government should spend money very wisely, very wisely. And do you know what? The Tories are always blaming Alberta Liberals: oh, Alberta Liberals, party of spending; they spend money like crazy. Now you see your record. I think that if you see your record, you are the biggest spenders in the history of Alberta – the biggest spenders in the history of Alberta. [interjections]

Chair's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, please. I know that a lot of members wish to speak. We are at committee stage. There's ample opportunity for everyone to participate in this debate, and the chair would be happy to recognize each and every one of you. So rather than interjecting, let me know, and I will recognize you, and you can speak next.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the floor.

Debate Continued

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you. I simply want to make sure that taxpayers' hard-earned money improves the lives of Albertans. This is where the money should go, not \$45 million on horse racing. The gap between rich and poor is increasing, widening. What are we doing? You go somewhere – I don't want to mention the place . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I regret that the time allocated has run out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I will try to be brief. I want to take a different attack. For one, back in the days when I was here before, we always had interim supply. I think the one thing that we could do, that we used to do, is have the budget sooner after the Speech from the Throne. As I and maybe some people here recollect, it used to come about a week after the Speech from the Throne.

An Hon. Member: And elections right after.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, there were elections right after that the odd time too.

But I see no reason why we couldn't do that. The interim supplies then would probably be a month rather than two months.

In saying that, it's not the interim supply that I'm as worried

about; it's the overall, what the budget means when we do see it next week. The budgets that I've been seeing in the last couple years: we pass them, we have a debate in estimates, we go through the procedure, and then the budget is basically outdated as soon as we pass it. We have to come back in the fall with supplementary estimates. This year, as I recollect, was \$3 billion or \$4 billion – \$3 billion or \$4 billion – in supplementary estimates. Then we come back a few weeks later, and we're dealing again with supplementary estimates in January.

The point, Mr. Chairman, that I make is that it seems that the budget doesn't mean much. I can live with an interim budget. I think it could be a month if we did it the proper way. But I want the budget and the estimates that we're debating come next week to mean something. I don't want to have to come back in November and be dealing with \$3 billion or \$4 billion again in supplementary estimates. That makes no sense at all.

Clearly, Mr. Chairman – and it's been alluded to – we have to tighten up the way we do things. I mean, money's rolling in here. It's not because of the brilliance of the government; we happen to be sitting on resources. The money's rolling in. But we do not have the ability on both sides of the House to deal with the budget in a tough-minded priority way. We just spend it. If we don't like what's going on, we'll spend and bring in supplementary estimates.

Our Public Accounts, we know, is a joke compared to other places. We should be having smaller committees. To the House leader: smaller committees looking at the budget in more detail; perhaps not every department all the time, but some of that should go on. It happens in other places, and I would think the leadership candidates that are coming hopefully will take a look at tightening up the budget process.

Mr. Chairman, as I say, it bothers me that next Wednesday we'll have a budget, then we will debate the estimates for 30-some days, and then that budget won't mean anything because the spending will go on after. If the Premier decides some other important thing has come up in his mind, on a paper napkin, there'll be more money spent there, Mr. Chairman.

9:20

So the point that I think this government should get – there's another for leadership; there are a few of them around here – is that they used to call themselves fiscal conservatives. [interjection]

I didn't know that the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was running, but it's good to know.

The point that I make is that we should be tightening up this whole process. So an interim supply bill? Yeah. Let's begin to move the budget process closer to the Speech from the Throne so it doesn't have to go as long. A month it used to be. That makes sense. Then let's make the budget mean something. Sure, we still have supplementary estimates. There are emergencies that sometimes you just can't predict, like the floods in southern Alberta or forest fires in northern Alberta. That was always there, but that should be limited to emergencies.

It shouldn't be, you know, a spending thing where you can spend \$3 billion or \$4 billion dollars in the fall and another, I think, \$245 million again in November, and we're back here. I would think that for people that call themselves fiscal conservatives, that should make sense to them, that we should be tightening up this whole process.

I guess that I will hope and see that this budget that's coming down next week, Mr. Chairman, is actually a budget that does list the government's priorities, and they intend to live with that budget for 12 months and not go on a spending spree as they did last year and spend whenever they feel like it. It's undemocratic, and it's just not a good way to fiscally run the province.

We will see – we will see – Mr. Chairman, if they've learned

anything. We won't know probably till – well, we'll know all along. There'll be announcements all the way along in the press, you know, as we go along the budget. But I really suggest to the people and the leadership candidates out there that this is one process that we can all agree has to be tightened up. Let's have a budget that actually means something when we pass it in March and April.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to the interim supply estimates for 2006-2007. You know, I've only been in this Legislature for a year and some months, and I've seen in that time a supplementary supply, an interim supply, a budget, a supplementary supply 1, a supplementary supply 2, now an interim supply, and a budget next week. Clearly, we seem to be doing supply after supply after supply, budget after budget. We're voting again and again and again on money, and we're not really dealing with any real budgetary process, which I would think would deal with these things on an annual basis and maybe on some occasions only for emergency monies.

You know, what are we going to be dealing with next in terms of these supply bills? An extra supply bill, an additional supply bill, something that says the more supply bill or the simply supply bill or the pie in the sky supply bill or the gone awry supply bill? I mean, what are we getting into here? The dealings that we're having here and the lack of budgetary discipline on the part of this government are clear.

I look at this document for interim supply estimates, and it's seven pages long, seven pages and a lot of blank space. I look at line items: Health and Wellness, \$2,291,700,000; I look at Advanced Education, \$344,700,000; \$224,500,000 for – that's all of the information that we get, Mr. Chair. I mean, I'm just amazed. We're arguing mainly on process here because we're getting no information. Is that responsible to the voter? Is that responsible to Albertans? Is that responsible to the people that elect us? The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie asked time and again in his remarks that were just finished: are you listening? We heard, "yes, we are; we are; we are" from the government's side, but I don't hear any active listening. I don't see these processes ending. I look at time and time again a whole list of these supply things.

Mr. Chair, I think it's time to look at a real budget process. I think that any small business, any corporation, gosh, a meeting of shareholders would dump the executive if they saw this sort of process in place. A union meeting would dump their executive if they saw this sort of process in place, and yet we seem to see it continue time and again with massive amounts of money on the part of the government.

With that, I conclude my remarks and hope that we might see in the future some sort of budgetary process. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 22 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Carried.

Bill 1**Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, did you want to speak on this?

Mr. Martin: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: You have been recognized.

Mr. Martin: Thank you.

I thought you waited with bated breath for me to stand up there, hon. member.

Mr. Chairman, certainly we all spoke on this bill before. It would be hard – it would be like kicking a puppy – to vote against it, but we mentioned that there are things that should go with it, smoking and the rest of it.

I thought that the Minister of Finance might look at this because our concern with Bill 1 is that it's going under the minister's purview rather than the Cancer Board's. One of the things that's very clear when you deal with the Cancer Board: you have to deal with ethical funds, and the obvious ethical fund that you should not be investing in is tobacco companies. That's not true if you take it to Finance necessarily. Now they may well do it, and I hope they do, but it seems to me that it would be quite hypocritical if we did not do that, if we had an endowment fund and there were no ethical standards put on those particular investments.

I think this makes sense, and I'd like to bring in an amendment. Certainly, we support the intent of the bill. The only amendment that I have, if I could send this up, is to move that Bill 1, Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, be amended in section 3(2) by adding "subject to subsection (2.1)" before "the Minister of Finance shall hold and administer" and by adding the following after subsection (2): "(2.1) the Minister of Finance shall not invest the Fund or any portion of the Fund in securities of companies in the tobacco industry."

Now, surely this is an amendment that makes common sense. If we're going to have an endowment fund of \$500 million and we want to cut down cancer and all the things that the Premier talked about that they want to do with the endowment fund, this just makes good housekeeping sense. How embarrassing would it be for the government if the opposition checked the endowment fund down the way and found out that there were investments in securities of companies in the tobacco industry? So I would hope that this would be a friendly amendment to make the bill even better.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9:30

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I just want to check with you. Do you have the original copy with your initials?

Mr. Martin: Yes, I do.

The Deputy Chair: I will require that.

Hon. members, the amendment is being circulated. We shall refer to this amendment as A1. We'll give a minute for distribution, if you don't mind.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment that's been tabled by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is one that I think provokes some interest. I know that there were a number of members tonight who were hoping to speak to the main bill in committee. I'm not sure those members were necessarily prepared to speak to the amendment. Because there wasn't any previous notice of the amendment coming forward, I would propose that we adjourn debate at this point on Bill 1 so that members can reflect on the amendment and come back to deal with it at a later date.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3**Protection Against Family Violence
Amendment Act, 2006**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to take this opportunity to address some of the questions raised during second reading. I was asked if the addition of stalking to the definition of family violence would result in an increase in the number of people charged with this offence. I must emphasize that the sole purpose of this proposed legislation is to protect victims. The Criminal Code is the mechanism responsible for laying charges. As such, the addition of stalking to the definition of family violence is not for the purpose of increasing charges against stalkers. Its intent is to increase the number of people who can be protected from this type of behaviour. I'd like to note that the definition of stalking in Bill 3 is similar to the definition in the Criminal Code; therefore, these pieces of legislation will complement each other.

There was also concern that the definition of stalking is too broad and does not specify that it is a repetitive behaviour. Mr. Chairman, the definition specifies repeated conduct and recognizes stalking as a series of events, not an isolated incident. Furthermore, the definition is based on Manitoba's domestic violence legislation, which has successfully withstood a constitutional challenge.

There was also a question regarding how a judge or justice of the peace determines if controlling behaviour exists and if an emergency protection order should be granted. Controlling behaviour is only one of the factors being considered when determining if an order should be granted. The proposed amendments provide a more comprehensive explanation of family violence based on research and best practices. This means that judges and justices of the peace will have a better understanding of the dynamics of family violence, and this will allow them to make more informed decisions about family violence situations.

Concern was also raised that aboriginal and immigrant families were not identified in the proposed amendments. Although Bill 3 does not specifically identify these populations, it does ensure protection for all vulnerable populations. The dynamics of family violence and the unique needs of specific populations will be addressed in more appropriate ways such as training, public awareness, and education initiatives.

My colleagues also asked if the appropriate resources and supports are in place at the community level to respond to stalking and family violence. Family violence is a crime, and police are involved in investigation and enforcement activities. Furthermore, women's shelters exist throughout the province to assist those fleeing family violence. Support for these important services will continue. Mr. Chair, as a point of clarification let me just say that no one is ever sent away without help.

During second reading concern was raised that the proposed amendment would result in a need for more shelter beds. In fact, we hope that the opposite will occur. By keeping victims and their children in their own homes and requiring the abuser to leave the residence, victims won't need to leave their homes and seek shelter elsewhere. In circumstances where a victim must flee to a shelter, an emergency protection order may still be granted to allow time for the family to put measures in place to support a safe return home.

I also received a question about the proposed amendment to section 8 regarding the confidentiality of a victim's address. This is a common-sense amendment, Mr. Chair. It's intended to clarify the duties of a clerk respecting the requirement to keep the location of a claimant confidential. It simply clarifies that where a judge orders that a respondent stay away from a particular address, the clerk can disclose this, and they won't be in contravention of their duty.

The Protection Against Family Violence Act has been very effective since it first came into effect in 1999. The proposed amendments are based on several evaluations and reviews that have taken place since then. I believe Bill 3 will better protect victims of family violence and will help make an already good piece of legislation even more effective.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 3, Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006. I did raise a number of issues when I spoke in second reading and talked about stalking.

I hope that members of the government caucus are aware of the excellent and, I think, unique work that's being done by a special unit of the Crown prosecutors here in Alberta and in particular by a woman named Val Campbell. The previous Minister of Justice is well aware of the good work that she's doing. I've heard her speak a couple of times, and she really makes an impression not only for her passion and commitment to the issues but also because she's just loaded with statistics, facts, figures, connections and has really started to bore down on this issue through the many layers that I talked about when I was addressing this in second reading.

There's a fundraising breakfast that the legal community, particularly the women in the legal community, have held for many years approximately around the date of International Women's Day. Sometimes it's shifted a bit so that it's around the anniversary of women getting the vote in Alberta, which would have been April 17, I think it was.

The breakfast happened to be last Friday, and Val Campbell was the guest speaker there. I got to hear her presentation again, and it drove home particularly the stalking component. I know that there's government support for this. I hope that all my colleagues in the opposition and in the other opposition parties in the Assembly are going to support this bill. We really are starting to see the connection of behaviours that are around violence against women and their children. These should not be viewed as separate activities and separate aggressions. These are about control. This is about somebody trying to control their intimate partner or their family members every living, breathing moment. It is about having someone completely under your control and mostly using fear to do that.

9:40

One of the ways that they do that is by stalking. As mentioned by the sponsoring member, the definition of stalking that appears in this bill is indeed very similar to the stalking definition that appears in section 231(6) of the Criminal Code. Essentially, it's about

following from place to place either the individual or a family member or someone precious or known to the family member, communicating directly or indirectly with that individual or someone known to them. It can be just as effective to control a mom by threatening or controlling her kid or even her sister or her parents. So this is not necessarily about, you know, directly pounding on somebody. A lot of these control issues are about other means of making that person bend to your will.

We've also got another section that talks about being present or watching the home or the place of business or a place where they're likely to be present; for example, the store where they buy all their groceries, the gas station where they always stop to gas up their car, or some place where it's likely that person is going to be. To have somebody standing there, watching them, signalling to them, staring at them, that's stalking, and we need to be clear about that behaviour and what the purpose of that behaviour is.

In Alberta we have the highest stalking rates in Canada. We now know that stalking is connected to homicide rates. It's one of the factors that we find turns up consistently. When we look at all the factors that were in place when we actually have a spousal homicide, there are some consistent ones, and stalking is one. So if we can start to get on top of stalking activities, we may be able to prevent another woman dying at the hands of her intimate partner. I know that I'm going to get cards and letters saying that there are women that kill men. Yes, that's true, but we're dealing with a percentage here in Alberta of 85 per cent.

Alberta has, I'm not happy to report, the highest rate of spousal abuse in Canada – I've already talked about the highest stalking numbers – and the highest domestic murder/suicide rates in the country. What on earth are we doing in this province that we cannot get on top of this? We're not getting better. This is not improving year to year. We are not leaders here, unless you want to be leading in a trend for murdering women. Why can we not get on top of this? I watch initiatives like this one, which is a good initiative, and of course I'll support it, but I go: "Okay. What else is needed?"

We get some special units like this Crown prosecutors' team approach – excellent idea – where we've got Crown prosecutors that are highly trained and experienced in dealing with these kinds of cases. They know what to look for. We've got Val Campbell out there doing I don't know how many public appearances and lectures every year to try and get the police to understand how to investigate these episodes, what to look for, how not to be hoodwinked, to understand what the situation is that they're walking into, and to be alive to the possibilities of it. We're trying to do some things here, and we still can't get on top of this. Somehow we're allowing a culture to exist in this province that still says that it's okay to do this despite the attempts that we're making through a pretty enlightened Department of Justice, I have to say, both the previous minister and the current minister for keeping this up, but obviously there's a lot of work we need to be doing in other places because we're not succeeding.

One of the things that I'd like to remind people about is what the cost to society is of violence. When we look at the other departments, the social service agencies that have to be pulled in on this, here's a fairly short list: law enforcement; the Crown; emergency shelters; child protection services; a civil or a family lawyer; victim services through the police; social services through the government; Edmonton community services, the municipal ones that are offered; Capital health; housing; mental health. We're looking at prevention programs, parenting counselling, sexual assault services, aboriginal services, multicultural addiction, off-site treatment for offenders, treatment for victims, treatment for children. All of that costs money.

I talk about how we can reduce the need for acute-care services

and emergency services and those costs to our health care system, which is an entirely preventable activity that we could be doing. We could cut those costs right out of the health care system and move that money over and spend it on something else. This is one of the areas that I like to talk about. If we could reduce and completely eradicate domestic violence, we could take a huge chunk of health care spending and move it over to spend it on something else, but we haven't been successful at doing that, and we continue to treat women and their children in emergency services and in clinics and doctors' offices for the myriad of things that manifests itself as a result of family violence.

The other issue that I want to talk about in connection to this is how important it is to keep the separation of concepts between access to children and the maintenance payments. Again, this government has been good about understanding that concept. They haven't fallen in that hole where they start to attach the two things. You can see why it becomes a natural connection for people because they think: "I'm paying for something. I'm paying you money, so I'm paying for access. It is connected." It cannot be connected particularly because this is what you end up with.

We've had a couple of terrible murder/suicides here in Alberta. In particular, one in Red Deer was directly connected to access to a child, and that child was being used as a way of controlling the mother and keeping the mother within the reach of the father. Always they want to put together the access and the maintenance, and it absolutely cannot be. This is a good example of why we need to keep those two concepts separated. We need to keep them separated through the programming, separated through the legislation. Every time we approach this in the courts, we have to understand that they are separate concepts and not let them get linked together because when they do, we end up with terrible, terrible tragedies.

I wanted to use this opportunity to congratulate Val and her team for the work that they're doing. I think it's worthwhile. I think it's paying off. I know it's tough for her and the other people working on this concept. I've met some people that are working through the city of Edmonton services in the same sort of small teams. A very tough thing to do day after day after day. My thanks to them; my congratulations to them. I believe what you're doing is working. Don't lose hope. You are having an effect. We have to look in some of the other areas of our lives and the other areas of our influence in this Assembly as to how to help you in the work that you're doing.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise a couple of additional points while we're in Committee of the Whole on Bill 3, and I look forward to hearing the debate from my colleagues in this Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

9:50

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. A pleasure to speak on Bill 3, Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006. We have to remember that this isn't associated with just those of low economic income or inner-city residents. This is widespread. It's something that affects each and every one of us in some way, shape, or form. The problem is, like I said, that it's not associated just with those with low income. It might be associated with those with high incomes; they are strapped to the very end, and they resort to violence.

Some specifics that were raised about the stalking – and I'm glad the member from Red Deer gave a little bit of clarification that it would not increase or lead to increasing charges with regard to stalking. That was one of the concerns that I had when I originally looked at this. I don't know if this is going to do much good if we don't have the bodies in place to enforce it and to in fact give some

education as to what is and what is not acceptable as far as family violence goes.

We have an increased amount of immigrants coming into the country, and what may be acceptable to one culture as to how they do control their family in their motherland certainly is going to be different and less acceptable when they are here. In fact, some could be of the Muslim faith, who have strict dress codes for their women: how they can act in public, how they can dress in public. This can in fact lead to violence. When they come to a different country, they may want to experience something a little bit different. In fact, they may want to meet new people, but because where they came from doesn't allow for that, this could be the exact reason why there is family violence: they are trying to experience and maybe acculturate themselves as new immigrants with some other people, say at the Mennonite centre. There's obviously resentment as to their losing their dependence on the spouse. Maybe some violence occurs from that. So I think some of it has to come with education to be able to back up or at least add a little bit more of a topping up to this particular bill as to what is and what is not acceptable for immigrants coming into the country.

Not to just list aboriginal people, but there are a great deal of aboriginal people especially on the reserves or in the northern areas where there is a lot of violence, and it's a lot because of their isolation. They might just find that this is the only way to come to terms with one another because they are not used to speaking civilly to one another.

I've just highlighted a couple of specifics here with regard to the bill with new immigrants and with the distance and the lack of actual mediation or supports to be able to help the people with regard to their problems. Perhaps if there were more inner agencies, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned, to be able to catch these people before they continue to go down the cycle of violence, that would certainly go a long way. If we did have the people in place, such as the Edmonton Police Service or in the rural areas the RCMP, to be able to do this – but that's not their main focus: to be able to prevent family violence. Their main focus is to protect and to serve the citizens. They need separate departments to be able to reach out and to give a little bit of support to families who are experiencing this.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I won't take much time. As I said before, this is a very good bill. I think that the member has realized that we do have a serious problem. It's been mentioned before that we have the highest stalking rate in the country. The member said and I say that this is a very important step, but I don't think that we can be sure that this isn't going to add to extra work by the police and other people. I don't think we know at this point. I guess that's the only point I would make: if the members can use their influence to deal with the whole problem. I think we were told last week that 40 per cent of the homicides – you know, one step will lead to another – are domestic disputes. So this stalking can lead to some very serious matters down the way.

We do need more resources. I think it's clear in a boom economy – I was told that in places like Fort McMurray and others there are some serious problems. So we do need more resources. It's nice to have the legislation – we need that – but I think it's clear we need more resources. I mentioned earlier on that Edmonton WIN House alone had to turn away more than a thousand women seeking assistance because of lack of funding, and I'm sure that's true right throughout the province. We need, as mentioned, more education

for front-line workers: the social workers, police officers. We need more police officers. I mean, this is just a part of the boom economy.

Certainly, it's a good bill, but I don't think that we recognize that by passing legislation here, we'd solve all the problems. We do need to have the backup services. So I would say to the hon. Member for Red Deer-North that any influence she can have in the budget that's coming up and in talking to the minister – as we put these bills through, let's provide the backup services.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just be brief. I'm pleased to rise in support of this bill, and I echo the Member for Edmonton-Centre in commending the work of Val Campbell and others in this area in trying to bring this terrible societal problem into the public sphere to try to limit it somewhat. It is much more pervasive than we would like to think: the ability to intimidate, the ability to instill fear, the desire of some to have power over another human being just through stalking. I believe the use of emergency protection orders, the greater power they'll give for police to use them, will be a positive thing and reduce the potential for increased violence.

I'm very pleased to support this bill, and I'll just say that, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise in debate on Bill 3, Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006. I'll be very brief.

An Hon. Member: We're listening.

Mr. Agnihotri: You're listening. Okay.

Just one point that should be made regarding this bill, Mr. Chairman, is that it does not mention or address the high rates of family violence and stalking that are experienced by aboriginal people. I think my colleague already mentioned violence against ethnic people. Violence against women is a very important issue. I support this bill because principally this is a good bill. We need to be seen as advocates for women and all victims of family violence. By showing our support for this particular bill, we will demonstrate our commitment to reducing our occurrence rate of family violence. I don't want to go into details. Maybe I will speak at the next stage. Mr. Chairman, I want to adjourn this debate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, did I hear you that you wanted to have it adjourned? [interjections] Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

10:00

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report bills 3, 9, and 22 and report progress on Bill 1.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 9, Bill 22, Bill 3, Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I presume you meant to say: report progress on Bill 1. Is that correct?

Mr. Agnihotri: Yeah. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie just proposed that we report three bills and report progress on Bill 1. Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for the record the motion, then, was that bills 22, 3, and 9 were reported. That's what we just concurred in.

The Acting Speaker: That's correct. I meant three bills, not only Bill 3. Three bills, yes.

Mr. Hancock: And those three bills were reported out of the committee.

The Acting Speaker: That's correct.

Mr. Hancock: I then would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 15, 2006** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/15

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Order! Mr. Speaker.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms bearing Alberta's original Mace, the Speaker, accompanied by the officers of the Assembly and Mr. Ray Speaker, entered the Chamber and took the chair]

[Mr. Ray Speaker took his place behind the Bar]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. On this special occasion we give thanks as legislators for the rich diversity of our 100 years of history. We ask for guidance in our deliberations and debate of the future that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. We welcome the many challenges before us and dedicate ourselves to both the present and the future as we join in the continuing service to Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor**

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, as we await the arrival of Their Honours, let me welcome all who are here today. The galleries today host many former members, spouses, relatives of deceased members, and guests of former members. Those of us who currently serve are honoured by your presence, and we welcome you. One hundred and twenty-eight former members and 16 spouses of former members will join with current members as we celebrate the 100 years of democracy in Alberta today.

We currently serve in the 26th Legislature. In the general election of August 5, 1952, three former members with us today were elected to serve in Alberta's 12th Legislature. As Alberta's senior parliamentarians let me introduce them and ask them to stand. Arthur Dixon was elected as a Social Credit member as one of six Calgary MLAs in 1952. Nick Dushenski was elected as a member of the CCF in the Willingdon constituency in 1952. Raymond Reiersen was elected as a Social Credit member in the constituency of St. Paul in 1952. [applause]

By coincidence, 1952 was 54 years ago. That was the average age of current members elected to this Legislature in the election of 2004.

I'm also pleased today to acknowledge the presence of a message that we have received from Buckingham Palace, a message delivered to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

I was pleased to receive your kind message of loyal greetings sent on behalf of the Members of the Legislative Assembly on the occasion of the Centenary of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta which is being marked during a Special Ceremony in the Chamber today.

I remember with pleasure my visit to Alberta last year and send my warm good wishes to you all for an enjoyable event during this most special anniversary year.

Signed Elizabeth R.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor and Mrs. Kwong.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Mrs. Kwong, and their party entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

His Honour: Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated.

The Speaker: Your Honours and hon. members, 100 years ago today at the hour of 3 p.m. the 25 members of the First Legislative Assembly of Alberta came to order in a makeshift Chamber in the Thistle Roller and Ice Rink, located only a short distance from this site. They heard the province's first Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. George Hedley Vicars Bulyea, outline the first steps to be taken in the evolution of the fledgling province.

Today we sit in the Chamber of a magnificent Legislature Building, where we celebrate the centennial of our Legislative Assembly and, in doing so, give recognition and our profound thanks to the contributions of the 769 men and women who built and developed this institution beginning in 1905. Their vision, dedication, and sound judgment in serving the interests of Alberta have led us to where we stand today, a province with a high standard of living, productive and healthy citizens, and unparalleled potential for the future.

In celebrating 100 years of democracy in Alberta, we are thankful for the wisdom shown by our forebears in choosing the Westminster model of democratic governance that, despite its occasional foibles and frustrations, has demonstrated its staying power and effectiveness over 700 years of history.

It's now my great honour to call on Alberta's 16th Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman Kwong, to address the Assembly on this most auspicious of all occasions.

Your Honour.

1:40

His Honour: Thank you. It's not very often that I'm the best dressed guy in the room.

Good afternoon, Premier Klein, Mr. Speaker, hon. ministers, hon. members, distinguished guests. I am honoured to join you all today in paying tribute to the 100th anniversary of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. This is a proud day for we who are gathered in this Chamber. Indeed, it is a proud day for all Albertans.

Since 1906 the Legislative Assembly and those who served through it have been one of our most powerful and enduring symbols of democracy. While it is true that democratic ideals thrived in this land long before Alberta was a province, it is the Legislative Assembly and its special partnership of Crown and Assembly members that gives us the means to govern in a truly democratic fashion. Since 1906 nearly 800 Albertans have responded to the call of public office. They have given their hearts and minds to serve as Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Throughout our history hon. members have represented a variety of viewpoints and political affiliations. They have debated issues both great and small. Regardless of which side of the House they sat

on or sit in, each has shown the highest degree of personal sacrifice, dedication, and commitment. Each person who has served in this Assembly has an intense desire to leave their communities and this province a better place than they found it.

As Her Majesty the Queen's representative in Alberta I congratulate all of you on 100 years of service to the citizens of Alberta.

Thank you very much. [applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Your Honour.

It's now the pleasure of this Assembly to invite former member Mr. Ray Speaker to give remarks on behalf of all former members.

Legislative Assembly of Alberta 100th Anniversary Addresses to the Assembly

Mr. R. Speaker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Your Honour, Mr. Premier, Leader of the Official Opposition, ministers, members, former members, and spouses of former members, I want to say that it is a great opportunity to be able to say thank you for letting us as former members be part of this ceremony today. Mr. Speaker, you have done a superb job. Thank you. My colleagues in the gallery are having a great time today. We want to thank you for that, and they want to thank you for this great time. [applause]

Your Honour, I should say, first of all, that it's the first time I've appeared before the Bar. I'm off subject – and Mr. Speaker has only allowed me a limited amount of time – but I was threatened the first time I arrived at the Legislature that if I didn't behave and if I didn't quit swearing, I might end up here. But I will behave.

Spending nearly 30 years in this place has allowed me a very special friendship with MLAs dating back to 1935, some 70 years. I want to say something about those people. Every one of them was very strong in purpose. They came here because they wanted to represent their constituents, they wanted to do it in a democratic process, and they wanted to make sure that the individual needs of Albertans were well met. I can only say again that our gallery here has a group of people that have made an excellent contribution to this Assembly and the government and the democratic process of our province.

A few remarks on the lighter side. My first visit to this Legislature was 42 years ago on February 13 for the opening of the 1964 session of the Legislature. I walked from the hotel with a member that was elected in 1935. He said: I will show you what to do and when to do it. So I followed and went along with him. We entered the rotunda, and as I saw this new building and looked up, I said to myself: man, there's nothing like this in Little Bow. After that, we proceeded up the marble steps and turned to the left. Now, that's the only time that I've done that. The two of us proceeded to a room just outside this door over here, and we walked into the room. It was larger than it is today. It was a bare room, and all that was on the wall was a series of coat hooks. My colleague said to me, "That's your hook right over there; hang up your hat and coat," which I did. Then as I turned, he said: "Over on the right here, through that open door, is the urinal. If you have to use it, go ahead." That was my introduction to this Legislature.

The session of 1964 was also special in that it was the first session to have a sound system. Prior to 1964 the Premier and the government had difficulty hearing the opposition, and that was for two reasons. It's not quite the same today, I understand. Democracy in Alberta had the habit of electing small oppositions. That was the first reason. The second reason was that at that time the members of the government brought a local paper back into the Assembly, and they read the paper during question period, so you couldn't hear anything. I had a Scandinavian friend that was part of the Legislature at that time. That was prior to my time. I said: what was the

name of that paper? He said: well, gee whiz, I think it was the Edmonton Urinal. Anyway, at that point in our history the opposition was finally heard. Also, we had *Hansard* introduced in the same session, and you could read what the opposition had to say to the government at that point in time.

Well, the 1964 session ended with a volley of paper from the press gallery, and that signalled two things. Certainly, first of all, the session was over, and secondly, as members – and you don't go through this practice – we all came out this door. We lined up at the Clerk's office over here, and there was the Clerk's counter. As your turn came to approach the counter, you were given two things: first of all, your annual paycheque, and it was one cheque, no deductions. Secondly, you were given your annual supplies. Mr. Speaker, as a note I want to say that it wasn't a briefcase with a million dollars in it. It was a cardboard box, and in that cardboard box were the following: one pack of legislative paper, one pack of envelopes, four steel loose-leaf rings, one eraser, and one box of paper clips. Now, I tried to understand that, but I understood it better and respected it, this kind of frugality, when I was reminded by some of the members at that time that in 1935 the public servants couldn't be paid by the government. So it was part of that era.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier, and certainly members here, things have changed, but I think the constant that we have in this Legislative Assembly is the democratic process that keeps us free and able to speak our minds and give our opinions. If we could look back and witness 100 years of our democratic system, that has been in partnership with the private sector of our province, the way to observe it, the most obvious way, is in our success as Alberta. Today I just happened to read the third-quarter report of the Finance minister: \$24 billion in the budget, \$7 billion as a surplus, no deficit, no debt. We have the heritage savings trust fund that is active and viable, specifically in research. We have an infrastructure in this province of roads, schools, public buildings, hospitals, and telecommunications. We have a program of health care and social services. Along with that, in our private sector we have a broadened diversity, which is most important. We can all agree that it's most exciting that in 100 years we have moved from a frontier province of homesteaders to a diversity and combination of public and private opportunities in this province that are second to none.

1:50

From my recent travels to Ottawa and other places in Canada I can report to all of you that Alberta is the envy of all Canada. Congratulations. Mr. Premier, you know what I think? It's time we throw a party.

In our 100 years former governments have set the stage, though, for this progress. With the former members that are here, I think that historically, as to what has happened, we should recognize that. For example, the government of Premier Brownlee in 1930 secured for Alberta provincial rights to our public lands and natural resources, and that was a promise made by the Laurier government in 1905. Premiers Aberhart and Manning in the 1940s legislated a checkerboard system of resource development and a resource reserve program to manage Alberta's provincial oil and gas resources.

Premier Strom in the 1970s supported resource development and balanced the first billion dollar surplus budget for the province of Alberta. Premier Lougheed in the 1970s and the 1980s, in battling constitutional and national energy program challenges, ensured the protection of Alberta's natural resource ownership, specifically oil and gas, by insisting on the notwithstanding clause being in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982. Premier Getty took courageous steps to diversify our Alberta economy to protect our public revenue in times of unexpected shifts. Premier Klein, you heard the call of

Albertans in the 1990s to eliminate the deficit and the debt. Your government listened at that time, and you are to be congratulated.

That brings me back to today. This government and this opposition face a fantastic opportunity at the beginning of the next hundred years. Democracy holds the answer to what unfolds in this province of Alberta. With this privilege, on behalf of my colleagues here assembled I wish you the best on the 100th anniversary of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Thank you. [standing ovation]

The Speaker: Mr. Speaker served in the Assembly for 28 years and six months. Thank you very much, sir.

It's now my honour and my pleasure to introduce to all here the dean of current Canadian first ministers, the hon. the Premier of the province of Alberta.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your Honours, current and former Members of the Legislative Assembly, distinguished guests, families, and friends. Mr. Speaker, the other Mr. Speaker, Ray Speaker, noted that when he was first elected to the Legislative Assembly, one of the first things he was shown was his way to the washroom. I can tell you that across the hall from me existed Ray Speaker when I was in room 137 as Minister of Environment, and one of the first things he did was show me the bathroom.

On behalf of my fellow MLAs I am pleased to welcome our special guests here today. This is a very, very special day, the 100th year of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. It's been a challenging and rewarding 100 years, and I am privileged to be part of that history and to call myself an Albertan because certainly we have changed a lot since that first day in 1906, when the very first Legislative Assembly began its work in I believe McKay school.

Today Alberta is a prosperous and vibrant province with some of the most innovative and compassionate people in Canada, and it has an exceptionally bright future ahead. The hard work, passion, and energy that the members of this Assembly have dedicated to serving the people of Alberta have played an important role in making sure that future is bright. One hundred years of discussion, deliberation, and progress have taken place under this dome and have led to many remarkable achievements. Every MLA that has served in this Legislature has a right to feel proud. No matter what side of the House he or she sat on, all MLAs have shared in Alberta's democratic traditions and in the work of building this province.

One thing in particular should make us all proud, and that is the teamwork and the dedication of our families and our staff and our colleagues, who, although not elected officials, have made large sacrifices and have supported us and worked hard to make this province great. The work and success of each MLA is a team effort with a network of individuals standing behind them, supporting them, and helping them to succeed.

Of course, all of these people include researchers and ministry staff, program experts, and many other dedicated professionals who share their knowledge and passion for the province to help us do our jobs to the best of our ability; administrative staff and pages to help keep us all organized; Legislature caretakers, who keep this beautiful building going and ticking; Legislature security, who keep us all safe; our spouses and our children and friends, who offer support and understanding even when our duties require many hours away from home. Each person over the past 100 years has played an extremely important role in making Alberta's future bright, and together we can make our province's next 100 years an even greater success.

Some of the special people I've mentioned are seated in our galleries and on the floor today, and I would ask them all now to stand and receive the warm and very special acknowledgement of

the Legislative Assembly for their commitment to Alberta. Please all stand. [applause]

The Speaker: The Premier was elected to this Assembly in 1989 as the Member for Calgary-Elbow. Thank you, sir.

Many people, including me, believe that democracy functions best with an effective opposition. It's now my pleasure to introduce the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

2:00

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With two Mr. Speakers in the Assembly we may be in twice as much trouble as normal.

It's a great pleasure to rise here. To all of you who are gathered here, all the special guests, I'm sure we listened carefully to Mr. Speaker's comments about the importance of democracy and to the Premier's comments about how behind every elected representative there's a whole team of people. How true that is. I'm pleased and honoured to join with them in this Assembly and with people across the province in celebrating our first century of legislative democracy in Alberta.

One of the great strengths of democracy is that it adapts. It adapts to changing social values, to new technologies, to changes in demographics. Democracy's flexibility and its responsiveness to the needs of the people it serves is what allows democratic ideals and the economic, cultural, and social benefits derived from those ideals to endure. The flexibility of democracy was demonstrated early in the history of this Legislature when the government of Premier A.L. Sifton in April 1916 recognized the right of women to vote. Far too many years later, in the 1960s, peoples of Alberta's First Nations secured the same right. Changes such as these have benefited us all, bringing fresh perspectives to the Legislature, empowering Albertans, and raising the legitimacy and effectiveness of our democracy.

Now we believe it is time to start thinking about further changes. Alberta's Legislature has served its citizens reliably for 100 years, offering stable, responsible, and at times even visionary government. As we enter our second century of democratic governance, I think Albertans should take this opportunity to consider ways in which to continue to renew our democracy, to make our Legislature more representative and accountable and our elections more fair. Ideas like fixed election dates, electoral reform, better rules on political financing, and other changes could inject new life into our democracy, encouraging more citizens to vote and increasing citizen engagement in the democratic process.

While people of different political viewpoints often disagree on questions of policy and ideology, disagree here every day that we sit, I think we can all agree that as legislators we have a responsibility to make sure that the people we serve remain committed to and engaged in the political process.

The ultimate aim of democracy is to ensure that government serves the public good, that citizens' interests are protected, and that peace, prosperity, and freedom are nurtured. While far from perfect – it is, after all, a human institution – our Legislature has done an excellent job of serving its people, and I look forward to witnessing the changes the people of Alberta will forge in the years to come.

Thank you very much. [applause]

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition was elected in 2001 to this Assembly in the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. Thank you, sir.

It is now my pleasure to call on the hon. leader of the third party in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Sir.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking you for your efforts and the efforts of your staff in

organizing today's celebration. I think it's much appreciated by members both current and past, and I'd like to express my welcome to all of our former colleagues, friends, and their families today. Welcome.

Mr. Speaker, today we celebrate 100 years of representative democracy in Alberta. The importance of this fact cannot be overestimated. It has protected the rights of individuals and provided for their collective needs. It is the wellspring of social progress and even of economic progress. But democracy is not a static thing; it is a living thing. It needs to be nurtured and supported.

Democracy in Canada was not something that was handed to us by the British or by the Crown. The history of democracy in Canada and Alberta is a history of the struggle by those who were ignored and disenfranchised to extend their rights and to strive for greater measures of equality. It had to be wrested step by step from the elite of this country. When this Legislature first met, the elected representatives were all men. Because of the work of the Famous Five and thousands of women and men who believed in the equality of women, the franchise was extended to women in 1916, and by 1917 the first female MLAs in Alberta joined this Assembly.

Now we enjoy broad democratic rights and freedoms. That is certainly worth celebrating. It is an enormous accomplishment and has improved and enriched people's lives in countless ways. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to those who have worked over the last 100 years to build our democracy in Alberta and in Canada. To the workers and the farmers, the small business owners, and community-minded people from all backgrounds who worked so hard for a voice at the table and for the right to be treated with the same dignity as their fellow citizens a hearty thank you.

The very name of the New Democratic Party's political philosophy is social democracy, and it proclaims our goal of extending formal democracy into the social and economic fields. We see real democracy as far more than just elections and Legislatures. The extension of human rights to all, the right to free and unfettered collective bargaining, the right to quality education and medical care regardless of ability to pay, the reduction in poverty, and the elimination of homelessness are all parts of our vision of democracy. The extension of democracy is vital to the people's interests. Things like the Alberta Bill of Rights, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Human Rights Commission, and freedom of information legislation are all important parts of our democracy.

As we enter the second century of democracy in Alberta, parliamentary reform, electoral reform, limits on executive power, transparency and accountability in government are keys to extending social and economic progress in our province. They are vital to defending the gains of the past 100 years and extending them into the future.

Let us dedicate ourselves to renewing our vision of democracy in Alberta. Let's do our part to ensure that we hand to our descendants 100 years from now as much progress in building real democracy as we have received from our forebears.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [applause]

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to get unanimous consent of the House to allow the leader of the Alliance Party to speak today.

The Speaker: The request is that the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner be given an opportunity to participate today. We will need unanimous consent. Any dissenters?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your Honour, Mr. Premier, and all the special guests that are here today, it truly is an honour to be here. As mentioned, 100 years ago today 25 MLAs from across Alberta came to the Edmonton Thistle Roller and Ice Rink to meet for the first time. Their challenge was much like ours: to provide good government and to serve the people.

Perhaps the most important principle that we need to ensure good government as we enter the second century of democracy is that of accountability. I know of no better way than to have a democratic process for recall.

Albertans have a long history of independence and self-sufficiency. As stewards of the land we need to foster that independence and continue to foster an appreciation of our democratic rights. It is a sad situation for a government to be considered out of touch and not putting the interests of the people first and foremost. People must be engaged and part of the process when they believe that they will make a difference. We should never underestimate the capacity of Albertans to make a difference and to rise to the challenges. So let us challenge ourselves to protect our freedoms by protecting the rights of our fellow citizens. The best government is the one that governs the least, one that helps the people to help themselves.

Mr. Speaker, democracy is exciting and challenging. It's truly an honour to be here half a century after my grandfather and to see his passion and the passion of the MLAs here in this House to provide that democracy. May we be strong and free and continue to enjoy peace and prosperity for another century. [applause]

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Your Honour, Mr. Premier, the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the hon. leader of the third party, all members, I would like to thank all of you for your contributions today in marking the 100th anniversary of the first sitting of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The citizens of Alberta place a profound trust in the members elected to this institution, and it's certainly my hope that we and our successors will continue the legacy of excellence demonstrated by our predecessors.

To conclude our ceremony today, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau, who is in the Speaker's gallery, to lead us in the singing of our national anthem and *God Save The Queen*.

Hon. Members and Guests:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

God save our gracious Queen,
long live our noble Queen,
God save The Queen!
Send Her victorious,
happy and glorious,
long to reign over us:
God save The Queen!

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours, their party, and Mr. Ray Speaker left the Chamber]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will now follow through the normal Routine. It's back to work.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly my father, Mr. Mel Dunford, who is here from Calgary to celebrate with us the hundred years of democracy in Alberta. So I'd ask you to share the warm and traditional welcome with him.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Parliamentary Reform

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's of course an honour to rise in this Assembly on the 100th anniversary of its first sitting, under, I might add, a Liberal government, in 1906. It would be far too easy, however, to revel in the celebrations and overlook the fact that Alberta's democracy is in need of serious repair. Where once Alberta led in democratic innovation, this government is now viewed as a democratic dinosaur. My question is to the Premier. Given that in the last election voter turnout was just 45 per cent and this government received only a minority of those votes, will the Premier finally give his support to the Alberta Liberal proposal for a citizens' assembly on electoral reform?

Mr. Klein: Well, notwithstanding how many people or what percentage of people turned out, we managed to elect 63 members. That is the democratic process, Mr. Speaker. That is the democratic process. If the hon. member can count, there are 63 of us. There are only – how many? – 16 of them, give or take, four, and one. Everything is on the table. Send me a proposal.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that over 50 per cent of voters in the last election supported opposition parties, why doesn't this government have all-party policy committees, which are common practice elsewhere?

Mr. Klein: I have explained time and time again. First of all, this is a Legislature. It is not the House of Commons. Other ND Legislatures and other Liberal Legislatures don't have any form of committee system whatsoever. In other words, they do things from the top down, including Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, these are standing policy committees. They are not standing committees of the Parliament or the Legislature. They are standing policy committees of government. I would like to make that clear: of government. Standing policy committees of government.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the Premier has said that he could, quote, care less about fixed

election dates because he, quote, won't be running, won't be around anyways, will the Premier level the playing field for everyone who will be running and commit to fixed election dates in Alberta?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, in keeping with telling only part of the story . . .

An Hon. Member: That's tactful.

Mr. Klein: Oh, it is tactful. That's what he does.

The other part of the story, Mr. Speaker, is that for every upside there is a downside. What he forgot to say is that I also said, "For every action there is an equal and opposite and often negative reaction." So send me a proposal. We'll consider it, but we'll consider both the pros and the cons.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public Opinion Survey on Health Care

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today this government released the results of a survey which concludes that changes are needed to our health care system, a point that I believe all of us would agree on. What this survey does not do is justify the government's plan for its so-called third way. Instead, it shows that Albertans want changes within the public system. My questions are to the Premier. Given that this survey shows that half of these respondents didn't know what the third way was and those who did had five different ideas of its definition, will the Premier commit now to releasing more details of the government's plans?

2:20

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the Minister of Health and Wellness speak to the specifics of the survey results. But what I find very interesting – and the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition alluded to it – is that changes are needed. Substantial changes are needed to achieve sustainability; in other words, to bring the cost of health care down in line with the rate of inflation and to improve access. Another thing the survey pointed out was that Albertans want to make their own choices and manage their own health care, and that speaks to many of the initiatives that have already been undertaken. I've said from the very beginning that debate is healthy, and Albertans are making sure their voices are heard. The survey is just one more way.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the top two suggested changes were to improve wait times and to increase staff levels, why is this government pursuing reforms that will see increased doctor shortages and even longer wait times in the public system?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, all we have put forward are proposals contained in the health policy framework, but I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the colleagues in the House would know, when we talked about our supplementary estimates, we talked about additional dollars to improve the access times, to build on the great success of the hip and joint project, which has made a considerable difference throughout, putting the patient first, building a strong public system. The heavy emphasis of eight of the 10

policies is on building a strong public system, sustaining it, and advancing innovatively.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that within those surveyed, of those who wanted a change to the health care system, only 3 per cent – 3 per cent – wanted a two-tiered system and 7 per cent wanted partial privatization, will the Premier now rule out private payment for preferential access? Will he rule it out?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would rule in anything that achieves the two things that we want to achieve, and I'm sure the opposition wants to achieve them. Those are improvement in access and bringing the costs of health care, which now exceed \$10 billion annually and will eat up our total budget by the year 2025 – already in New Democrat Manitoba, where they have no cares whatsoever about spending money, it eats up 43 per cent of their budget. It's no wonder that their roads are falling to pieces and their education system is lacking and there's no money for the protection of people and property and privacy. That's the ND way.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Government Accountability

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Democracies can be distinguished by whether the people and their representatives can examine what the government does and whether the government is accountable. Yet in this province secrecy and spin, not openness and transparency, seem to be the norm. To the Premier: why is the government proposing a new FOIP policy which will increase government secrecy when there is such compelling evidence that democratic openness and transparency are much needed?

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Hon. member, as the chair recalls, yesterday there was second reading on a bill dealing with this matter. This matter is currently before the House. All members have opinions on this and may participate; this is not a position of one person. The bill is before the House, hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: I see, Mr. Speaker. Okay. I'll move on.

Government Accountability (continued)

Mr. Elsalhy: To the Premier again: when will the public-sector whistle-blowers in Alberta receive legislated protection instead of a witch hunt every time they open their mouths to expose corruption?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I take strong exception to that assertion that a witch hunt is conducted against those who wish to report legitimately on the misdoings and the misconduct of others. I can tell you that if anyone wants to report anything, they are not punished in any way, shape, or form.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. One more time to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: given the vital role in ensuring accountability played by the federal Auditor General, when will this government empower Alberta's Auditor General with the necessary resources, the necessary autonomy, and the investigative powers for him to do a better job?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member – and I understand that he is new and maybe doesn't understand the rules – that the Auditor General reports to the Legislature. He is not under the control or the direction of the government whatsoever. He is under the control and the direction of the Legislature, including the opposition.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Automobile Insurance

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans who want to see what our health care system will look like in a few years under the Conservative third way need look no further than the profits being made today by the private auto insurance industry. The insurance industry made an obscene profit of \$6.5 billion on the backs of the country's drivers in 2005, which was almost 50 per cent higher than the record \$4.2 billion profit they made the year before. My questions are for the Premier. Will the government take action to protect Alberta drivers from being gouged and order an immediate rollback in auto insurance rates?

Mr. Klein: I'm going to have the Minister of Finance expand on my answer, but I want to provide a preamble, and that is to remind the New Democrat opposition that the Alberta Automobile Insurance Rate Board sets rates annually to ensure fairness to consumers.

I'll have the hon. Finance minister respond further.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the report that I think the hon. member is referring to does not confine itself to automobile insurance. It is all property insurance. So you really have to take that information and look at the area of auto alone. What I would inform the House is that it is our estimate and I think the insurance industry's estimate that Alberta drivers have saved \$300 million in premiums under our reforms.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there's a Santa Claus too.

This is to the Premier. If the Saskatchewan automobile insurance corporation can offer an 8 per cent reduction in rates to its drivers because it's making a good profit, why can't the private insurance industry do it, and why doesn't this government direct them to do it?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Finance expand on that, but I would remind the leader of the New Democratic Party that the insurance agency in Saskatchewan, the socialist agency, can compete here if they want to.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I think that rather than charging the money and giving it back, the system that we've put in place will work much better. We have had two rollbacks in insurance rates here. We have an opportunity again this summer for the Automobile Insurance Rate Board to examine the premiums and profits, and at that time if it is determined that there should be a further lowering of premiums, it will happen then.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the government promised Alberta drivers that the rates that they pay would be the same or even lower than those enjoyed by people who live in provinces with public automobile insurance, isn't it true and will the Premier not admit that he has just broken another promise to Albertans?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, no, I won't admit anything. The only thing I will admit is that we achieved what we wanted to do. The hon.

leader of the ND, the socialist opposition, would have us think that we were trying to punish all drivers. What we were trying to do was eliminate penalties for younger good drivers and eliminate financial penalties for older good drivers. If the ND opposition, the socialist opposition, thinks that was wrong, stand up and say so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

2:30 Government Spending

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been hearing a lot from this government recently about sustainability and the cost of health care. While health spending is increasing, the rate of overall government spending, excluding health, is also rising at an unsustainable rate. We should learn our lessons from the past and avoid boom/bust spending. Wise fiscal prudence would have us cap spending and increase savings now to avoid drastic cuts later. My questions are for the Premier. Will this government limit the budget to current levels with an index for inflation and population growth to avoid drastic cuts later?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, details of our spending plans will be contained in the budget when it's tabled in a short period of time.

I'll have the hon. Finance minister respond to the extent that she can respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I always find it interesting when they get up and say: "You should reduce spending. You're spending too much." When I ask the question of the hon. members who say this, "Do you want me to reduce spending in Health?" it's "Well, actually, we've been asking for more spending in that area." "Do you want to reduce spending in Education?" "Well, actually, we're not funding our schools enough." "Do we want to reduce funding in Advanced Education?" "Well, actually, we don't have enough spaces for all of our students, so we can't do that either." "Should we reduce spending in Children's Services?" "Well, no. We want more money for Children's Services so that we can provide more lunches, more services every day." It is irresponsible to stand in this House and complain about government spending with absolutely no solution at hand.

Mr. Hinman: Well, more ministers and more bureaucrats wasn't where we were asking for spending.

My question again is to the Premier. Will this government protect Alberta's long-term interests by depositing 30 per cent of resource revenues into the heritage savings trust fund, as was originally intended?

Mr. Klein: I don't know if it was originally intended. I can't find the policy written anywhere that that, indeed, should happen. I would remind the hon. member that when I came into government in 1989, as you so rightfully pointed out, Mr. Speaker, the size of the public service was in excess of 30,000. It is now 22,960.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It won't take long and we'll be back to where we were.

My last question to the Premier: will this government alleviate the pressure on property tax by distributing 2 per cent of the provincial revenues on a per capita basis unconditionally to municipal governments?

Mr. Klein: I'll have the hon. Finance minister expand on that question through her answer. I can tell the hon. member, through you, Mr. Speaker, that we give 5 cents per litre of gasoline to major municipalities. We have taken over total financing for all secondary roads, total financing for all major highways through municipalities. In addition to that, we have distributed amongst the municipalities \$3 billion in unsolicited funds. Three billion dollars. That is a lot of money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Marlborough Elementary School

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning 400 students went to Marlborough school expecting that they would have a normal day filled with classroom activities. Instead, they were confronted with locked doors because the roof on their school is structurally unsound. These students have been dispersed to other schools, such as Bob Edwards and Greenview in northwest Calgary, which is at least 45 minutes on the bus for K to grade 4 students. My question is to the hon. Minister of Education. What is his department doing to work with the Calgary board of education to ensure that not a single instructional hour is lost for the students at Marlborough elementary school?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think we should thank the Calgary public board for acting very quickly and doing the precautionary measure of ensuring that the structural nature of the roof is thoroughly investigated and assessed. The second thing is that the Calgary board has already made arrangements for these students to be transferred for the next several days, I would assume, to neighbouring schools to make sure that no instructional time is being lost. My department has been working with them in that respect, and I feel pretty comfortable that the temporary plan, at least, will not result in any lost educational time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister inform my constituents as to how long his department has been aware of concerns with the structural integrity of the roof at the Marlborough elementary school?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, my Department of Education doesn't yet have full technical responsibility for infrastructure. That is the plan, and that is going to be transferred over very soon. We have consulted with the ministry of infrastructure, and I can tell you that an assessment was performed by the ministry of infrastructure in co-operation with the Calgary board of education. Our government, in fact, provided some \$25,000 some time ago for that to be done. I don't have an exact date. I will get that for the hon. member.

I think it's important to stress here that there have been no casualties. There hasn't been any harm done. This is a precautionary measure taken by locally elected trustees, and I think they've acted in very good faith.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: could the minister inform my constituents as to what steps he is taking to ensure that repairs to the school will be expedited to permit students to return to school in their community as soon as possible?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a lot is being done. In fact, I just got an envelope here of the news release from the Calgary board. I think it's important, first of all, to address the fact that the Calgary board of education will hold a meeting for parents on Thursday, March 16 – that's tomorrow – at the Bob Edwards school, and they will provide some more detailed information to parents and guardians regarding the situation at Marlborough school.

The other thing is to stress, of course, that the Calgary board of education and our government take the health and safety of our children very, very seriously. I'm very pleased that we're going to be ensuring that health and safety for students is not compromised. We are going to be working with them as soon as that engineering report is completed, and we will ensure that whatever funds are necessary there will be provided. We provide about \$9 million to the Calgary board of education for major infrastructure renewal as part of the \$730 million overall that we provide annually.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

School Infrastructure

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Member for Calgary-East pointed out, Marlborough elementary school in Calgary had to be evacuated this morning because of structural concerns. The school has problems with the roof. After engineers examined it, school board officials decided it was unsafe for the students. The majority of schools in Calgary are of a similar age, 1968 or older. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity does have the floor.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are all to the Minister of Education. Given that the Calgary board of education has an infrastructure debt of over \$400 million, how many more structural concerns will be allowed to reach the critical point before this government takes action? [interjections]

2:40

The Speaker: There's a synergy that exists between the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and the Minister of Education. Now it's the Minister of Education's turn.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my turn, but I'm not going to start yelling and shouting, not on the democratic day that we're celebrating.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that there are a number of new schools that have opened or have been approved for the Calgary board of education just in the last couple of years. Let me just read 15 of them quickly. [interjections] No? All right.

Well, then, let me simply say this. Mr. Speaker, the Calgary board of education in its news release today clearly said that it is "temporarily relocating students from Marlborough School in Northeast Calgary as a precautionary measure while it conducts a comprehensive assessment of potential structural problems at the building." They are doing a precautionary thing. We should be thanking them. We shouldn't be yelling at them. We shouldn't be accusing them of anything untoward. They've not done anything wrong here. They've acknowledged that there might be a problem, and they're erring on the side of caution and doing this preliminary assessment. So that's a good move.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the backdrop of a \$7.4 billion surplus how can the Education ministry justify its inaction on maintenance and new school construction?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think we've done a pretty good job so far. That doesn't mean that a better job can't be done in the future. I'm going to be addressing this with school board chairs when I meet with them on Friday, March 24, which I've alluded to here earlier. I've already provided them with a temporary agenda, and infrastructure is one of those issues that we're going to look at. Suffice it to say that in the range of about \$800 million is being spent in this area, and Calgary is getting a reasonable share of that. I'm not immune to Calgary's growth pressures. I know that they need more schools in that area. As soon as monies become available, I can guarantee you that they're going to get some.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When is this government going to take kids off the buses, out of decaying school structures, and provide a healthy school environment?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that there's no inference that buses are an unsafe environment. We have very capable bus drivers out there who are absolutely pledged to ensuring a safe and caring environment on the school buses. Now, there is an issue of bus ride times. That's a separate matter. But the health and safety of our students is protected on buses and in the classroom. We're pretty proud of that record so far, and we're going to ensure that that proud record continues as a legacy into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Keephills Electricity Generation Plant

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's announcement by TransAlta and EPCOR to construct a new 450 megawatt, \$750 million coal-fired generating unit at TransAlta's Keehills site is great news for the economic development of my constituency of Stony Plain and great news for all Albertans. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister assure my constituents and all Albertans that this new project will utilize the newest proven technology to ensure that the coal required for this project will be used in the most efficient manner and that the environmental impact of the generating process will be further reduced to protect our environment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I can assure Albertans that they're going to have continued progress on the cleanest coal, the best technologies that are available to be used. This is still early in the process. They've just signed a development agreement. There's much work to be done. It'll have to have all of the clearances by the Energy and Utilities Board, by Alberta Environment to ensure that those environmental standards are met.

In fact, Genesee 3 was one of the latest coal-fired plants brought on, and that set the benchmark. It's going to have to meet that or even a superior benchmark. Just for some illustration of the standards that that's meeting, most of the sulphur dioxide is eliminated in those processes. There's about a 50 per cent reduction in NO_x; particulates, virtually nil. Carbon dioxide emission is even down 15 per cent in those coal-fired plants.

New legislation is coming for mercury. Alberta Environment has brought in a 50 per cent reduction in mercury emissions. That's going to be in place by 2010.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the minister's department project that the electricity will be needed by Albertans in 2011, when this project is scheduled to be commissioned?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate that we have one of the fastest growing, best places in the world to invest, to live, and to work, and we continue to see the growth and the need for generation of electricity. We are going to need this plant and others to come forward, so clearly there is a great demand. The marketplace has acknowledged the tremendous benefits of our electricity deregulation. They have brought on generation faster than in any other jurisdiction in North America. About 4,000 megawatts have been brought on in the last few years, and this will add to the continuing growth of the long-term availability and supply of generation.

Mr. Lindsay: To the same minister: will the province's electrical transmission network be strengthened in time to ensure that this much-needed new generation will be deliverable to Albertans and possibly others?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, transmission continues to be one of the more urgent needs. The Energy and Utilities Board along with the Alberta Electric System Operator have been doing a long 10-year, 20-year plan on the transmission needs. They've approved a line between Calgary and Edmonton that's to be constructed. It's urgent that that be put in place. The anticipated completion of that is 2009-2010, in that time period. That will be in advance of this new generation that comes from that area. The transmission lines will be available to carry that load.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Calgary Health Trust

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Health Trust, a fundraising arm of the Calgary health region, has resorted to soliciting donations for medical equipment like heart monitors and stretchers. Requests for charitable donations have been posted throughout Calgary hospitals in an effort to make up for funding shortfalls. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. As the richest province in the country why are we collecting donations for basic medical equipment?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, today in Public Accounts this question was raised relative to the collection of funds by Calgary Health Trust. I had the opportunity to speak with the chair of the Calgary Health Trust, Mrs. Pat Nelson, who used to be a sitting member. She talked to me about the times that people in memory of their loved ones wished to make donations, and predominantly many of the bequests that come to the Calgary Health Trust take advantage of just that opportunity.

For many decades in Alberta people have chosen either to fund raise on behalf of local priorities or because local people want to prompt other kinds of amenities in hospitals or, in fact, have been in appreciation of the kinds of care they've received in public health

care facilities. Particularly when people are in the terminal stages, they often feel a great attachment to those facilities. This trust fund takes an opportunity to take advantage of consolidating those resources in order to supply hospitals and health care facilities with the right types of facilities.

Ms Blakeman: Openly soliciting, advertising for donations.

Again to the same minister: where does this government draw the line on what new medical equipment is deemed essential and what is a luxury and open for donations?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that in some of the private, nonprofit, and other institutions one might well categorize some of the replacement equipment provided by auxiliaries or other fundraisers as essential. Again, it is their choice. Our government with the federal government has through the last several years, in the recent past, done a great deal to co-operate on diagnostic equipment. The many millions of dollars that are spent on new MRIs and CT scans come from the resources of the province. To the largest extent we try to provide the essential ingredients. I would suggest that although some of these pieces of equipment from time to time in certain institutions might also be categorized as essential, it has not been so much solicited as it has been the preferred offering of generous donors who want to improve our health care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: well, is it the minister's position, then, that these health regions should have to rely on these so-called generous donations in order to provide basic medical services to Albertans?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, basic medical services for Albertans is certainly the mandate and mission of the government of Alberta. I might also add that if people wish to provide more amenities – many people fund raise for ambulances, for example, in rural communities – it becomes a large part of a community endeavour that they're not only proud to do, but they enjoy doing. Many of these kinds of amenities have built communities by pioneers who have taken great pride in adding to their community with local dollars over and above what has been provided by government. Rather than worry about this, I think we should congratulate the members of the Calgary trust fund for a job well done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West-Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

2:50

Forest Industry

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Recently the government of Ontario announced a multimillion dollar aid package for its forest industry. Is Alberta considering similar relief for this province's forest sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as you and this Assembly and all Albertans know, we are not in the business of being in business. We recognize first and foremost that the forest industry is facing many economic challenges that have been brought on by a number of things, including a strong Canadian dollar and a weak U.S. dollar, rising costs, and certainly global competitiveness works its way into

there too. These economic pressures are not just being faced by Alberta industry; this is across Canada as well. Ontario recently updated their stumpage system, which we did January 1, 2006, in Alberta. So all provinces across this country are grappling with this issue. Our industry, to their credit, has not asked for a bailout. What they have asked is that the Alberta Forest Products Association and the government, my ministry, look at competitiveness, costs, and at future markets and come up with an Alberta-made solution.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Is your department working on a strategy to develop other market opportunities for Alberta's forest industry?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that is yes. We are actually committing to seeing the forest industry grow and prosper. To support our industry, we have to take a look at participating in cross-ministry initiatives with Economic Development and other ministries to look at exploring emerging markets that may be out there for our fibre, fibre that we can adapt to the marketplace for our own forest products, and looking at new and innovative ways in terms of synthetic fibres that come from agricultural products as well. We would be working through our partnerships but, more importantly, looking at science, research, and technology to help us build those new markets for our products.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. How is this approach going to help Albertans in rural communities that look to forest industries for their livelihood?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very important question, and I want to thank the hon. member for it because it actually speaks to the heart of the issue. This is not just about industry; this is about Alberta and it's about Albertans. The long-term sustainability of our rural communities is impacted by the long-term health and sustainability of our forests and the forest industry in Alberta. In addition to those initiatives that I talked about, we're working with our MLAs; we are working with our industry and our communities to help industry remain competitive in a global market. More importantly, these efforts I believe will address the viability of our existing communities to help them remain competitive and supportive of Alberta communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Coal-fired Electricity Generation Plants

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I attended a news conference with citizens fighting a massive new set of transmission lines designed to facilitate exports of coal-fired electricity to the California market. This follows on the heels of yesterday's EPCOR and TransAlta announcement that they plan to build a new 450-megawatt generating unit near Lake Wabamun using the same old dirty-coal technology that the Premier told Albertans in his televised address was no longer being used. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Will the minister stand in his place and assure Albertans that under no circumstances will his government allow the proposed Keephills 3 generating plant

to be built using the same old dirty-coal burning technology that is being used in the Genesee 3 generating units?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much for the question. To the hon. member I also want to say that I think it's really wise for all of us in this 21st century that rather than dealing with labels, such as calling things dirty coal, maybe we should save labels for planets and not for people and the kinds of initiatives that are taken forward. That actually came from David Suzuki. He said that rather than trying to pigeonhole and disenfranchise and really exclude in terms of new technologies, new regulation that's going to reduce mercury as we go forward, Alberta will continue to lead this country with environmental practices.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask why the minister is stubbornly refusing to require zero-emission coal gasification technologies to be used for these future coal-generating units, including the proposed Keephills 3 plant.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the ultimate goal of all Albertans – and I know that all Albertans and members of this House and, certainly, the Member for West Yellowhead would agree – is: first and foremost, how do we use technology? How do we reduce emissions? What is the government doing? I'll tell you what the government is doing. We are reducing, in terms of our emissions, by 50 per cent by the year 2010. Can we do better? Our attitude is – Albertans have an attitude – we can always do better, and we will continue to do better through technologies.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, why is the minister putting the profits of power companies who want to use and have been using outdated coal-burning technology to export Alberta power to the United States ahead of public health and this province's environment?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, public health in this province is number one. The environment is very important to us all. Again, rather than using labels, let us embrace our positive energy and positive things in what we're doing to harness that energy in positive initiatives. As a former not NDP but Liberal cabinet minister from Ottawa said: it's clear that Alberta is leading the way in environmental initiatives.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Alberta/Montana Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Electricity deregulation has been a very bad deal for Alberta consumers from the very start: higher costs, lower service . . .

An Hon. Member: It's the same as yesterday.

Mr. MacDonald: It is the same as yesterday, but the power bills have not gone down, hon. member.

Now, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor, and I hear interjections from all corners of the House. So, hon. member, let's start over.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Electricity deregulation has been a bad deal for Alberta consumers from the very start: higher costs, lower customer service, and now we have problems with the

development of the transmission system. Citizens from across this province and even in the state of Montana gathered in the south end of Edmonton before noon today to express their concerns about increased electricity exports from this province. They spoke specifically about the Alberta/Montana tie-line. My first question, Mr. Speaker, is to the hon. Minister of Energy. Will the Alberta government intervene before the National Energy Board on behalf of this alliance of landowners, farmers, and ranchers that are opposed to the proposed construction of the Alberta/Montana tie-line?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to point out a couple of things. First off, this line that's proposed is actually being built and developed to promote wind energy, for one. We're trying to still promote the renewables, trying to promote clean alternatives. I guess that we could cut off an ability to transport it anywhere, but transmission is a fundamental piece of our integration and reliable delivery of electricity. Better ties will only allow more generation capacity to also be imported into Alberta. It's not just a one-way flow outside, going export. It allows us reliability of bringing more in. We are one of the few jurisdictions in North America that are very limited by the amount of inter-ties between the provinces and the United States.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can this government guarantee electricity consumers in Alberta that their bills will not increase even more if we export large volumes of electricity to the United States through this proposed Alberta/Montana tie-line?

The Speaker: On previous occasions the chair has said that nobody can give guarantees.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Okay. I cannot guarantee that.

Mr. MacDonald: I knew the answer to the question, Mr. Speaker.

Now this question to the same minister: given that we now have a link to the North American market for natural gas and everyone knows what that has done for the gas bills here in Alberta – they have gone up; we pay the same price in Edmonton as we do in Chicago – will the same effect happen for electricity prices when we have this direct link to the American market? Will our bills go even higher?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, that's pure speculation again. We have benefited substantially by having greater capacity to export natural gas. This year alone something like 14 and a half billion dollars in royalties and revenues have been brought in that we wouldn't have been able to have. We were stranding our gas in the past right here in Alberta. There's a very major difference, though, between natural gas and electricity. Natural gas is really quite a scarce commodity. It is becoming very difficult to find, so supply and demand have made for a higher North American price on natural gas, clearly. We have substantial, many ways, numerous opportunities to perpetually generate electricity in many formats, not having ever the concern of being short of supply.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Assistance for Grains and Oilseeds Sector

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly enough, 100 years ago our grains and oilseeds producers were earning almost the same dollar for a bushel of wheat as they are today. Yet today, in the past 30 years they've seen a 1,200 per cent increase in the cost of fuel, an over 1,500 per cent increase in the cost of fertilizer. Most of our producers in the grains and oilseeds sector are cash strapped going into the spring season. They hope they can afford crop insurance. My questions are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. One of the primary questions that the producers have been asking of late, those that couldn't afford to get into CAIS before, is: will they be eligible to receive some of the federal payment under the grains and oilseeds program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member made some very interesting and accurate comments about the crisis facing our grains and oilseeds sectors this year. While our production breaker has obviously gone up a tremendous amount, it is indeed true that the input costs have gone up a tremendous amount as well. The federal government, as many in this House will know, did announce a program payment last fall that the new federal government has accelerated this spring. How they've accelerated that payment is by utilization of the CAIS program and the '04 information that producers had applied with in the CAIS program.

What's important to note for Alberta, Mr. Speaker, is that all producers have the ability to retroactively participate in the CAIS program all the way back to 2003 if they get their information in prior to the end of March this year. What's also important, as it relates to the payments from the federal government, is that if they had their '04 information in, then automatically those federal payments will flow to those producers. My concern is that close to 9,000 producers who participated in '03 have not put their information in for '04 as yet, and the deadline at the end of March is fast approaching.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second question that seems to come up a lot, Mr. Minister: if producers who might receive payment under the spring price endorsement or the revenue insurance coverage component of crop insurance receive that payment, is it going to impact their production index? Will it have a long-term effect on their yield coverage for their premium?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The great thing about these two options is that they do not have an impact on the yield coverage in the premiums nor do they reduce payments under the CAIS program, which we were just talking about. There are two beneficial features of these programs, and they are that they are independent from the producers' marketing strategies – therefore, they'll have no impact on the producers' future premiums – and secondly, the programs actually encourage producers to manage their farm and not the program.

I might point out, Mr. Speaker, that we did raise the revenue insurance coverage floor prices by 7 per cent this year to help offset

some of the impact of this higher cost of production. For example, some of these floor prices for 2006 and some of our major commodities are: red spring wheat, \$4.22 a bushel; barley, \$2.57 a bushel; canola, \$7.17 per bushel. Those are the target prices that were set under the RIC program. Again, we would like the producers to actively get involved in participating in these programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. For those that are contemplating enrolling this year but might not be able to afford it, are there any options available in terms of affordability, Mr. Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm encouraging all of the producers to participate in some of the meetings that are being held across the province right now. The Ag Financial Services Corporation is exploring those options with all producers in about 32 meetings that are happening across the province. It's important that these workshops are attended by producers who are interested in participating in CAIS or by those producers who may not understand the programs that are out there or the package of benefits that we have for producers. So I would encourage them to get in touch with their local AFSC office to explore those options.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 78 questions and answers in the 50-minute time frame today.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of several hon. members to participate in Members' Statements.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you to you for your indulgence and, certainly, to the House. Mr. Speaker, what I consider one of the perks of this job is that I can introduce to you and through you to this House my granddaughter Kerstin Williams. In the end this is what it's really all about: our grandchildren. She's a grade 11 student at Bev Facey high school in Sherwood Park. She's an accomplished dancer. I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Just so you know, your grandmother does behave here.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Britny Martens
Danielle Hilsabeck

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have known for quite some time that my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka is blessed with a strong, talented, and active youth population. The 2006 Great Kids awards that were presented on March 5 proved this yet again. Out

of the 236 province-wide nominations 16 kids were honoured, including two young ladies from my riding: Britny Martens and Danielle Hilsabeck.

Britny was recognized in part because of her efforts in organizing a seven-kilometre walk in her hometown of Alix to raise funds and awareness for the Kidney Foundation of Canada. What's more is that the event, which was named the Give the Gift of Life Walk for Awareness, was done in response to her father's kidney disease. For an 11-year-old to show this kind of perseverance, compassion, and courage is a true inspiration. Through Britny's leadership the event was extremely successful, having raised \$7,000 and an invaluable increase in public knowledge.

The list of Danielle Hilsabeck's accomplishments is long and impressive, especially considering her age of only 14 years. Through her duties as the Clive junior high school students' union president she portrays natural leadership qualities, kindness, and respect to all students. On top of Danielle's other responsibilities she also took on the lead role in the production of the school yearbook last year, acting as a replacement for a teacher who fell ill. Her management skills allowed her to guide 15 student volunteers to a successful result. She is now the official editor of the entire yearbook.

I am proud to recognize the efforts and determination of these young ladies here today, and it is an honour to represent them in this Assembly. With great kids like Britny and Danielle calling the riding of Lacombe-Ponoka their home, I know that our constituency and our province have a bright future. Mr. Speaker, once again I congratulate them both on their outstanding accomplishments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

3:10 **New Brigden School Fundraising**

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. In life and in sports it's often said that it's not how tall or how strong you are that counts; it's your dedication and the size of your heart. So is the case with Alberta's small rural schools.

New Brigden school is one fine example. It's the most northerly school in the Prairie Rose school division, located in a small farming community in the Drumheller-Stettler constituency. This small school of just 49 students in grades 1 to 9 was involved in three projects which are making a big difference in many ways.

Mrs. Machell and the grades 1, 2, and 3 class learned their lessons about conservation and over three years collected pennies for the planet. The students then presented \$180 to Ducks Unlimited in October 2005 towards preserving wetlands.

The students together with their parents and community members tackled recycling. They filled recycling bins with beverage containers and helped the students' union win \$500 from Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation's school recycling program as the top collector in the small school category. These funds along with the money from the containers themselves will be used for students' union activities.

The school has also undertaken a project to fund the building of a well in India. By raising \$750, the students will provide a safe source of drinking water to a village of over 200 people. Through the sale of calendars created by the grades 1, 2, and 3 class, a silver collection at the Christmas concert, and a number of donations from within the community, they have raised \$608.64 as of March 9, leaving them just shy of their goal.

Mr. Speaker, the efforts of the students of this rural school should be an inspiration to all of us and demonstrate the importance of

small rural schools as important members of the community and helping to develop strong character and good citizenship as part of a well-rounded education. These are just a couple of the reasons why Alberta students are amongst the best in the world and benefit from an outstanding and caring education system in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Democratic Reform

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To remember democracy is especially important as many of our sons and daughters are in harm's way in Afghanistan as we meet here today. They are tasked to battle a terrorism that is directly aimed at our way of life and our democracy.

I speak often of democracy to children. I visit all the school classes in Edmonton-Manning that have visited these halls. We talk of this room as our great hall of democracy. We talk of its importance to our way of life. I tell them of some of the 46 countries I've been in and how so many of the places are where people are fighting and dying to have the right to vote. Much of the world would love to have our democracy. I tell them that it is so important what we have, but when I leave the kids, I sometimes wonder: what is happening here in Alberta?

Last night we debated yet another emergency supply bill, over \$6 billion outlined in a small booklet with no details, some line items in the billions, emergency supply gone awry. This should not be normal for a democracy. The huge amounts do not constitute emergencies. What is happening? Our American neighbours started their revolution with the cry: no taxation without representation. What is happening?

We also debated last night a bill which put more into regulation, to be decided in secret behind closed doors. Secret decision-making is out of control, and there are no opposition members on standing policy committees, more secrets. What is happening?

There is hope, Mr. Speaker. There is hope for democracy. We heard questions today about citizens' assemblies and about electoral reform. We must enter this 21st century. We must renew our democracy. It is rapidly approaching a time for change. Let us embrace it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

U of C Human Performance Laboratory

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People who live at the foot of a mountain seldom realize how high the mountain is, so today I rise to speak about something outstanding that is close to us. I'm talking about the human performance lab at the University of Calgary, that I had the opportunity to visit. The lab's international reputation is well established with its partnership with many athletic companies. Name any international, well-known sport company; my bet is that they are working with the U of C's human performance lab. Name any high-tech shoes worn by top world athletes and players; my bet is that they can be traced to the research and design from this lab. I'm talking about high-tech shoes for athletes in soccer, basketball, track and field sports, even golf clubs as well.

The work on sports equipment is only a small part. The greater research discoveries and achievements are in human physical and mental performance and endurance. In the recent Winter Olympics the outstanding achievements of Canadian athletes can be traced to the work of dedicated people at the U of C's human performance lab. They are now working harder and smarter for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

Building the ultimate athletic and sports equipment is only about 20 per cent of the researchers' work. The other 80 per cent of the work is on health and wellness and improvement of the quality of life for Albertans, Canadians, and humanity. The researchers also examine aging and mobility of people, how to prevent injuries and diseases such as osteoporosis, arthritis, and cardiovascular problems.

I would like to ask all members of this House to join me in commending the great work of the researchers at the U of C's human performance lab and commending the University of Calgary for their vision in establishing such a world-leading study centre. Alberta's educational institutions are outstanding, Alberta researchers are world class, and Alberta students are eager to learn and discover. So investment in education is the best investment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

One Hundred Years of Democracy

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is also my great honour to rise today in recognition of Alberta's milestone, the 100th anniversary of democracy in our province. Last year was a banner year for all Albertans. We celebrated the centennial of our province in grand fashion. We took time to recognize how far we have come together and recognize how much further we have the potential to go. Today we celebrate something even more important. The prosperity, good governance, and democratic freedoms that Albertans enjoy today saw their genesis not in this Chamber but rather in the Thistle rink and then the McKay Avenue school with the first sitting of the Alberta Legislature. From these humble beginnings 100 years ago our predecessors have developed a grand and noble tradition. They sat, as we sit now, with the goal of making Alberta a better place for all who are fortunate to call it home.

A full century has passed since that beginning, and while the location of the Legislature may have changed, the principles that guide it have not. The concepts of freedom, democracy, and justice introduced to our province so long ago have only grown stronger with the passage of time. Albertans are fortunate to enjoy a level of democracy that many in the world do not. As we pass this anniversary, let us look back with pride at what was and forward with hope to what will be.

Tomorrow this anniversary will be behind us, but what it represents will remain everlasting. We as representatives of the democratic process will continue to play our part. Eventually we will move on, but democracy will remain and grow stronger. The principles established a century ago have survived war, disease, depression, and hardship. They have survived and emerged healthier and more vibrant than ever. They will continue to flourish well into their second century and beyond.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, it has been my honour today as a member of this Assembly to recognize this anniversary, and it continues to be my privilege as a citizen of this province to participate every day in the freedoms that it commemorates.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Assistance for Alberta's Farm Families

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Alberta's farm families. Farmers and their families were some of the first settlers in our province, but times have changed on the family farm.

An Hon. Member: You don't even know one.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry. I grew up on one.

Now fertilizer and fuel costs are some of the biggest regular expenses for farmers, not to mention the costs of equipment and even university tuition for their children. Commodity prices continue to fall despite increases in all the expenses for supplies purchased off the farm. Everyone else, it seems, gets their share before the farmer. This is not the result of a one-time disaster or just a bad year. These trends are an economic reality for many farmers.

3:20

This government, in co-operation with the federal government, responded to this farm crisis with the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, or the CAIS program, as it is called. The goal of this program was to integrate stabilization and disaster protection into one program. It has however fallen far short of its goal. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business described the ills of the CAIS program in its recently released report *The Case Against CAIS*.

The pages of this report tell a tale familiar to all those that call farming a way of life. A full 58 per cent of CAIS participants are dissatisfied with the program. They feel that it is far too complex, and they know that it is riddled with time-consuming and expensive paperwork. Farmers continue to jump this endless series of hurdles in their need for some income support only to find that the program that is there for them provides too little money and often is too late. The result is that the CAIS program has added accountant fees to the long list of farm input costs. Almost 10 per cent of farmers are paying over \$5,000 just to participate in the program. It is clear that the CAIS program is not providing a long-term solution to the farm income crisis. Farmers need to be treated fairly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on to the next item of business on the Routine, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasant task that I have this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all our colleagues here in the Legislature a lady that's here on her first-time visit. She would be one of the stalwarts behind legislators in the province of Alberta. She is associated with my colleague from West Yellowhead, and I would ask Tammy to please rise and receive the warm welcome of my colleagues in the Legislature.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm submitting a petition on behalf of many concerned Albertans from the communities of Hill Spring, Magrath, and Glenwood petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to

eliminate all [school] fees for instructional supplies and materials . . . textbooks, musical instruments, physical education programs, locker rentals, lunch hour supervision and required field trips, and to ensure that schools are not deprived of the resources necessary to offer these programs and services without additional charges to parents or guardians.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly on behalf of 20 Albertans. This petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to call a public inquiry into Enron's role in the development of electricity deregulation in Alberta and their market conduct in the Power Pool of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first tabling is from two of my constituents from Edmonton-McClung, Lorene Gervais and Bryn Berezanski, addressed to the hon. Premier and CCed to me as their MLA, requesting that the hon. Premier instruct the Treasury Board to immediately increase funding to programs helping persons with developmental disabilities.

My second tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is a letter written by a really bright young woman from Edmonton-McClung, Miss Christel Hyshka, addressed to the Premier, again, where she goes into great detail informing the Premier why the proposed third way is wrong and complains about the lack of consultation with the citizens of this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a total of seven sets of tablings expressing concerns about the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. For the sake of speed, Mr. Speaker, I will only share the names of those who sent the concerns. To begin with: Maureen Broda, Dan Rupert, Jeanie Blanchette, Dave Miller, and Louise Vos.

The second set was sent by Sarah Webber, Marwa Bondak, Pam Thind, Mary Ann Rabie, Rushmi.

The third set was sent by Binda Pokhareil,* Sandeep Thind, Marianne Skibova, Sharon Kumar, Maryann Javed,* and Sadia Javed.

The next set was sent by Irene Nand, Theresa Baron, Jessie Ramsomair, Bev MacDonald, Sunojnie Gunraj,* Jasvinder Thind.

The next set was by Emma P. Baragona, Surinder Kaur Dhillon, Kathy Justason, Sheryl Semmler, Carolyn Epp, Genna Cabinas.

My second-last set was sent from Don Horne, Lisa McLean, Martin Lafaille, Pritpal Kooner, Burton Baskerville.

The last set was sent by S. Kala, Kanwaljit Thind, Sukhinder Thind, Jashir Bhamber, Avril Magara, and Jolene Chamberlain.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seven more letters regarding the provincial government's involvement in the national daycare program: Tracy and Dave Ludwick, Michele Parker, Tammy Adams, Kimina Sloan,* Vanessa Rotuk,* Joanna Carnium,* and Denise Cote.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table on behalf of the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar a public notice to

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

a town hall meeting on public health care, a public consultation which is to occur Wednesday, March 22, at The King's University College, 7125 – 50th Street. The time of this public consultation is between 7 and 9 p.m. Look forward to seeing everyone there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table six letters and the appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. These letters are from Jean-Marie Ndahiro, Suzanne Poirier, Rene Robitu, Tamara S. Miners, Joyce Lawrence, and Fatima Bellahmer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table six letters and appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters I'm tabling today are from Carmen Magana, Mavis Cardinal, Myria Lewis, Pamela Gogowich, J. Perrin, and Matthew Milloy.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great pleasure today to table with the Assembly a message from Her Majesty the Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, March 15, 2006.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 22

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance it's my pleasure to move for third reading Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006.

There's been some discussion in second reading and at committee of the provisions of the bill. I would just briefly say what I've said every time I've heard the same arguments from the opposition relative to the timing and relative to the process, that interim supply is a time-honoured tradition not just in this House but across the Commonwealth. It's an appropriate methodology to ensure that the business of government continues while the intimate details of budgetary process and normal supply are provided for. This House has the opportunity to debate every bit of spending in detail, not only the budget estimates when they're brought forward and through Committee of Supply but also, of course, supplementary supply.

I was just astounded by the member's statement today from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning when he was talking about emergency. This is not a bill about emergency supply at all. This is part of the normal process of governance. It's part of making sure that governance continues while the opposition and the House, every member of the House, has an opportunity to fully and completely debate the full set of estimates when they're brought forward. It allows government to do budget and estimates on an appropriate basis so that they're not rushed in and fully debated before the end of March in every year but that they have the fullness of debate. Obviously, the interim supply bill only provides for a modest amount of the year coverage to give the time for that full debate.

I would commend it to the House and move Bill 22 for third reading.

3:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to comment on the Education expenditures. I'm just looking for it here. I believe we're addressing the question of \$637,400,000. As my good colleague from the constituency of Edmonton-Manning suggested, democracy is not being given the benefit of the process by having to deal with this in a lump sum.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But be that aside, Mr. Speaker, I think I'm able to dream a little bit here and talk a bit about the things that should be in the budget, and maybe I'll score some points. The Education minister is not here, but I know that his good colleague is there. [interjections] Pardon me, Mr. Speaker. I will just comment further on this. Excuse me for that. Anyway, let me say something positive to follow that remark that I carelessly made.

First of all, I think the government deserves some accolades for the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I think I support that. I hope that in the purpose – I've added a number (iv) point under Purpose – they would take a look at the act to support and encourage research into the nutrition aspect of people, the spirits they take in, and look at that in terms of healthy bodies and lifestyles. So I hope they would maybe add another purpose to the act, but I think that generally I'm very much supportive of it.

Let me, then, just turn to a claim the government continually makes. It continually says that we have the best education system in the world, and there's a lot of money here. I would just challenge that, and I would go along by saying that we have the best, excellent teaching force in the world in Alberta.

I was at a wonderful ceremony the other night with 16 teachers in St. Albert receiving excellent teaching awards. The interesting thing about these teaching people and meeting the elementary principals at the end of the evening was asking them: what thing would you change in terms of the elementary school? It was interesting that they suggested that the whole question of diagnostic testing should be looked at. It was interesting to hear what they said about that. So I think we're on the right track over here by asking the government to take a look again at the K to 3 area, laying the foundation for kids, and have a look at the whole question of diagnostic testing.

As the Minister of Education was saying the other day, he's meeting, I believe, with special education parents even today. I think that it's today he's meeting them. One of the things that comes out in their literature, their brief to the Minister of Education, is the fact that one in five children – one in five children – has reading problems in starting school. One of the pieces of research that's very clear now is that if we don't do remediation in the elementary school, we are losing these kids. I haven't got a crystal ball, but I hope some of that \$637 million that we're talking about there has some dollars for that particular thrust. I think it's very, very much needed.

On the whole question of special needs for children, the government has the postulates laid out about what special education parents can receive from the government. One of the things that seems to be lacking, according to these parents that I talked to, is the resource base for children with special needs. That's an area I think the government needs to look at as well.

A third area along with this is the whole question of career education. I don't read the *Edmonton Journal* very often. In fact, I

went swimming this morning; that's why my face is so red and my eyes are kind of blurry.

An Hon. Member: I thought they were Liberal.

Mr. Flaherty: No. I do read the *Edmonton Journal* once in a while, and I noticed that in the *Edmonton Journal* they talked about the good apprenticeship program. I'd like to commend the minister on that. But if you think you're doing well now, Mr. Minister, I would suggest that if you could get good support from career counselling in our secondary schools and develop a career education diploma and give it some prestige – with all those good communication officers you have, I'm sure they could spin you up something nice – we would attract students that need to be encouraged to go in that area. I think that's one thing I really would urge the government to look at.

Now, one of the other areas that I have to say I was kind of impressed with the government on is this half hour of physical activity. Unfortunately, I ran into a phys ed specialist from an elementary school at this function the other night in St. Albert, and he said: this is not a bad idea, but the problem with it is we have no way of measuring to see if kids' endurance or cardiovascular is improving. You know, I think that's a very significant point.

An Hon. Member: Put them on a scale.

Mr. Flaherty: We could do that, but I think we have to look at this whole thing.

In terms of the educational process I'd just like again to talk about the Crystal Meth Task Force. I think this is a good move, but I really would like to know how the government is going to report to this Legislature on what this task force is doing. Is it making a difference? What are its deliberations all about? I think it would be very, very important to get that information.

Continuing on my dream for kids and talking about this particular interim budget, about how we're looking to help kids in our schools, I think we should have a look – hopefully there's some money in there; maybe we're going to be surprised on the 22nd and hear that there's money in there for a hot lunch program. We are blessed in St. Albert in that the chairman of the Protestant school board in St. Albert is a specialist in nutrition at the University of Alberta, one of our fine institutions. She's saying that children need good nutrition to do well in school. I think it would be very wonderful if this government could come out with some real insightful and really good thinking and look at this as an area that they would consider in the budget on the 22nd.

Now, the sad thing to talk about here in terms of infrastructure – and we had a look at this this afternoon in terms of the school that had the problem in Calgary; thank goodness no one was hurt, and that's wonderful. We have to look at this whole business of portables. I believe the Calgary Catholic school board received 12 new portables, that, by the way, don't work in the system that they have. These new portables don't fit into the Calgary Catholic school board system, so I'm hoping that we can give them the kind of support that they need. They need 180 of these over the next three years. I hope this budget that we're waiting for will address that issue if it's not in this interim statement here.

Of course, the question of transportation is a big issue as my colleague from Calgary talked about this afternoon. I had a meeting with one of the officials from the ASBA the other day, and he was telling me that we have to look at the funding framework in education in the rural and the urban areas because it's not doing the job.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down and thank you, and I'll turn it over to you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief with my remarks at this time on Bill 22. I would have to caution Alberta taxpayers in regard to this government's attitude towards interim supply. Certainly, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education is correct that it is a tried and true parliamentary tradition, but we have to be very, very careful. Taxpayers are quite aware of this government's spending habits in the past and how those spending habits got us into deep, deep economic trouble. The consequences of those excessive spending habits were cuts to public health care, cuts to public education, cuts to the public service, an infrastructure debt that we're just now beginning to realize how extensive it is.

3:40

So we have to be careful here whenever you consider that the provincial budget literally, Mr. Speaker, under this Progressive Conservative government in the last 10 years has almost doubled. Yet we still have problems like what the hon. Member for St. Albert was talking about. This large amount in this bill, Bill 22, indicates that this government has some planning and priority problems.

Now, I don't know – and I've said this before – whether all the hon. members are so focused on the upcoming leadership review and leadership campaign that they're not focusing on these respective departments, but I sure would urge the hon. members across the way to focus on their departments and, certainly, focus on some of the problems that are currently being brought to the attention of this hon. member.

Specifically, adults with developmental disabilities and their families are very, very concerned this winter about the money that is going to be provided through Seniors and Community Supports for Albertans with developmental disabilities. Now, much has been said about this issue already, and certainly there's a significant amount of money in this bill. Hopefully, that issue will be addressed, and this government won't ignore the advocates, who are standing up and speaking out on behalf of Albertans with developmental disabilities and their families.

It's very important. It is our duty, our obligation, to provide for these citizens. Through no fault of their own they can't participate in our rosy economic activity, but they have every right to live their lives with dignity and with respect, and we must never, never forget that. We shouldn't have to force their families into action every budget year by contacting their respective Member of the Legislative Assembly. They shouldn't have to do that to know that their loved ones with developmental disabilities will be cared for. Now, that's just one issue, Mr. Speaker, but certainly I hope that will be addressed.

Now, the hon. Member for St. Albert was talking about education a little earlier. When we look at this budget and we see the amount of over \$600 million that's going to be allocated for public education, we have to still be concerned about the leadership that's been shown by this government towards the Learning Commission. Certainly, in the neighbourhood that I represent, we've seen the school closure process, that some unfortunate neighbourhoods in Calgary are now experiencing: good public schools being closed, some of them being sold after parents, taxpayers, were told that there was no money to keep these schools open. Now we have millions of dollars in extra money to turn them over to another group. Is that fair? Is this how this government is operating these days?

Parents, Mr. Speaker, have suggested that this government has lost touch; they've lost direction. Parents are very concerned that whenever one school closes and the other schools in the neighbourhood become overcrowded, the fact that the gymnasium can't be used by all students at one time because of the crowding, that's not what I would certainly describe as an Alberta advantage. We have schools that have been designated as receiving schools as a result of these closures, with overcrowding to such an extent that the library is now being used as a classroom. Children routinely eat their lunch in the corridors. They sit on the floor and eat their lunch. Again, I don't think this is good public policy. This was initiated by this government: by the Minister of Infrastructure, by the Minister of Education. Parents, the people who pay the taxes, are not happy. They don't think that their resources are being used wisely. When they're told to send their child to a school and they abide by that, they find out when they get there that the school is in poor repair, that it is overcrowded, and that class sizes have not been reduced like they had been promised. So there's certainly a lot of work to do.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education is correct when he talks about the historical use of the interim supply bill, but we have to be very, very careful. I know we're spending a lot of money in this province. I'm going to continue to ask this government if it's being spent wisely and in the right places.

We were at Public Accounts this morning, and one of the officials from the department of health, Mr. Speaker, said that we've got bucketfuls of money. I'm going to have to review *Hansard* from that meeting to get the exact quote. I was surprised that the financial situation was referred to as bucketfuls of money. We have to be very, very careful.

An Hon. Member: Who was it?

Mr. MacDonald: Hon. minister, the ministry of health was in Public Accounts today.

I listened with great interest to that description. I hope that is not the attitude in all ministries: that we have bucketfuls of money. If we do have bucketfuls of money, let's save it in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and spend wisely. Spend smartly, spend wisely. Let's not spend our finances unnecessarily.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and cede the floor to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, who seems very interested in speaking on this matter.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments. The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm intrigued by the hon. member making the statement that a minister of this government made comments about buckets of money. I would just like to get some clarification: was it the minister that made this comment and of which department?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: as I said earlier, I'm going to check the record in *Hansard*, but it was the department of health that was appearing before Public Accounts this morning, and it was one of the department officials.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006. I've been looking through the bill to see for what period, for what particular number of days or weeks or months into the next fiscal year this 6 and a half billion dollars or so is being asked for approval by this House. I don't find those numbers here. Is it to tide us over the next two months, three months, four months? I think it would be useful to have the information here. It's not there. I'm just trying to look for it. I presume that it's for two months. It would be important to have that kind of information included in the text of the bill so that we don't spend more time asking questions with respect to this kind of issue. It's a lot of money. I think the government has to go on while we debate the budget, so I understand that there's a reason for asking for approval of interim supply funds.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, we are now only about seven, eight days away from when the budget comes down, when we'll have more information, but to speak to this request with some focus, I think it would be good to have a little more information from each ministry with respect to what the money is being asked for and how that money is going to be spent, on what program, and what have you. Without that information here it becomes a sort of pro forma kind of discussion: you either vote for it or you don't. You don't want the government to stop. You want people who work for the government to be paid, programs to be funded. But as a member of the Assembly I find it very difficult to intelligently ask questions on the amounts being asked for or on the bill as such unless I have more information on this. So I regret that that information isn't there.

The practice that the Minister of Advanced Education as House leader for the government side suggested, that all governments do this, doesn't justify not having the information here that's essential for the deliberations of this House before the House votes on it. Otherwise, as I said, it becomes simply an exercise in tradition, and the appeal is made to past practice rather than to the reasons and the information needed for us to make up our minds on which way to vote on this. So I find that a little bit frustrating.

I would move on now to talk a bit about two or three departments that are asking for money. Advanced Education is the one I'll start with, where \$344,700,000 is being asked for in terms of interim supply for this department.

Mr. Speaker, this morning I was listening to CBC Radio, to a program called *The Current*, which runs, I guess, between 8:30 and 10 o'clock in the morning. One of the persons being interviewed by Anna Maria Tremonti, who is the host of this program, was none other than the president of the University of Alberta, Dr. Indira Samarasekera.

In the dialogue between the host and the president one point that President Samarasekera made very much was the challenge that we have before us in this province. Certainly, we have the opportunity in this province more than other places. She also talked about the country in general. One of the most important natural resources, she said, is that stuff between our two ears, our brains, our development, our human capacities and skills and abilities. She emphasized the importance of postsecondary education and in particular, of course, spoke about universities and the University of Alberta, which she is now the president of.

The point that she made was this. She said that class size, to improve the quality of education, is the key challenge that we face, that the quality of education is contingent on the size of classes that our students have to be in. She gave a sort of average figure. She said that about 15, 20 years ago at this university the average class

size used to be around 16. There's a great deal of variation between the smallest graduate classes and the undergraduate classes, but on the whole the average was around 16, 17. Today, she said, the average is 24 or 25. Huge increase. Absolutely huge increase. She said that we tap into this enormously important resource called human capital through providing the best quality of postsecondary education that we can to Albertans who return to university.

Another point she made there was that only about 50 per cent of the students at the university now are between the ages of, say, 18 and 35. The remainder are people who return to university or come to university in their mid-careers to learn new things and to upgrade and to update what they already learned perhaps 10, 15, 20 years ago. She said that the class size is the critical factor here. We must try and roll back the class size, the University of Alberta being one case in point, but I'm sure that the situation is the same at the University of Calgary and other institutions. The class size must be reduced, she said, to between 14 and 16. That's our challenge.

Now, questions that come to mind here are: is the minister planning to respond to this kind of advice from one of the most respected leaders in the area of postsecondary education in this province? If so, in the request that he is making, is he providing for such reductions? If so, how? I'm just putting this question for the minister's consideration, and I hope that he will certainly address that because the development of human resources is the key to increasing productivity, to improving our quality of life, to increasing our competitiveness, and to ensuring prosperity into the future. That's the message from people like Dr. Indira Samarasekera, the president of the University of Alberta. I think it's important that we address those questions here, as to how we invest our resources to address those very fundamental challenges that our postsecondary institutions such as the University of Alberta and other institutions in this province face.

Moving on, Mr. Speaker, to another minister's request here. Children's Services: \$224,500,000 is being requested for the period, which, as I say, I'm assuming is the next two months, April and May, but that information is not contained at least in this document, Bill 22, for me to be surely able to say that these monies are there to tide us over into the new fiscal year during the first 60 or 61 or 62 days. But this is a fair bit of money here.

The minister made some very, I think, important commitments to the families of Alberta not long ago – a couple of months ago perhaps, maybe a bit longer – with respect to bringing forward a five-point plan for the provision of child care services and early childhood learning services and opportunities for preschool-age children, in particular those whose parents work, are in the labour force and have employment and are not home for at least part of the day or most of the day. Seventy to 75 per cent of parents of children under six years of age, Mr. Speaker, are in that situation in this province. What the minister had to offer by way of a five-point plan that she made public and released some months ago – there was a great promise in that plan for those families and for the children in those families who need and use child care and daycare services.

4:00

I want the minister to perhaps address the question of where she stands now in the context of a new government in Ottawa, which has very different plans than the five-point plan that the minister had not only endorsed but, in fact, with some great deal of pride and joy offered to the families of Alberta three or four months ago. Is that plan going to be pursued regardless of what the federal government does or doesn't do for our children, for our families on that score?

I think it's important that we invest in these very young children and families who are in that situation in order for us to tap into the

human resources that are available in this province. But in order for us to help them grow to the maximum possible extent and capacity, investment must be made not only at the postsecondary sector, but we should start making those investments in the very critical first few years of every child's life.

That's why child care these days is more than just babysitting. It is, in fact, to instill in our very young children the capacities and skills that serve as the starting points for their formal education. Stimulating environments in which to spend their early years lead to their ability to succeed and do very well indeed as they start formal schooling from kindergarten onwards.

At this point I think I could probably also refer to whether or not the monies being asked for under Education by the Minister of Education also include a commitment to bringing in full-day kindergarten, that's been recommended by the Learning Commission, a recommendation that has been accepted by this government.

No answers to these questions here because there are no details. There's no information here on how this government is planning to spend the money that it's asking for on fundamentally important programs, programs that will certainly make sure that as we move into the future years, the investments begin to pay back.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, the House has before it Bill 2, Drug-endangered Children Act. If passed, its implementation will require a huge injection of new resources for social workers, for caseworkers, for police officers, for others.

So these are questions that are germane to this discussion but can't really be addressed very well unless we have more information. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 22, interim supply, in third reading. Since it is third reading, we're supposed to speak to the effect of the bill. We've had, I think, some opportunity – some might argue ample; some might say not enough; I'm not going to get into that argument right now – to question specific ministers about specific departments, specific line items in the interim supply estimates in Committee of Supply. We've gotten some answers back to some of our questions. Some of those answers we like; some of those answers we weren't so impressed with. But we're beyond that point now, and we're talking about interim supply in third reading. So what's the effect of this bill? Well, the effect of this bill is to keep the government of Alberta going for the next two months or so, if that's what it takes to get the actual budget fully debated and passed. I'm sure it won't take two months to do that.

The hon. Government House Leader and Minister of Advanced Education referred to interim supply as being, I believe the words were, a time-honoured tradition or a tried and true tradition, something like that. Of course, on the face of it he's right. Just because something has been done a certain way for a long enough period of time to refer to it, though, as a time-honoured or tried and true tradition doesn't mean that we can't improve upon the process. The minister is looking at me now going: oh, here we go again; another opposition member is going to talk about the process of interim supply and why we need to rush through \$6 billion plus in government spending to keep the lights on and the wolves from the door.

Yeah, I've got to mention it once again – I really do – and, in fact, refer the minister and hon. Government House Leader back to an exchange, perhaps, that I had with the hon. Minister of Finance last Wednesday evening, as a matter of fact. It's in *Hansard*, and I'm

certainly not going to quote from it, but I asked a general question about the process: especially since planning for next year's budget will begin scant weeks after this year's budget is debated, why is it that there's such a thorough process that we go through, that we can't simply start the process earlier so that the budget is ready to be delivered in time to be debated and passed before we run out of the fiscal year?

Mr. Speaker, here we are today celebrating the 100th anniversary of the first sitting of the Alberta Legislature. It's not like we change the dates of the fiscal year year in and year out. That's pretty predictable. That's a heck of a lot more predictable than the weather in this province has been for the last 100 years, for instance. She undertook, Mr. Speaker, to actually try and see if some changes could be made in the great, creaky, old government ship of state to effect a more efficient moving forward of the shuffling of the paper so that we could actually get to that point next year. She said:

As I say, I don't take issue with the member's question. It would be the ideal. Can we work towards that? I'll make a commitment to the House that we try. We've got a lot of work to do, a lot of policy to make sure that we have right.

Then she went on to say that she takes "a great deal of pride" in the way that the budget process does come together.

She finished off by saying, "I thank you for your comments. I understand entirely where you're coming from," and she said – and I'm sure that the Minister of Advanced Education will agree with this point – "You know, Mr. Chairman, it would be refreshing to have a debate that didn't centre around: I don't have any detail for these numbers." Mr. Speaker, would it ever be. Would it ever be refreshing to have a budget debate about the budget so that we didn't need to have a debate about interim supply, which is kind of like an episode of *Seinfeld*, in a way, a show about nothing – well, a show about nothing in terms of the information that's supplied to justify figures. On the other hand, it's a show about over \$6 billion.

So we're supposed to talk about the effect of this bill if it passes third reading today. I think that in the course of talking about that, I will refer back to a remark made by my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar a little while ago. Of course, I haven't had the opportunity to review *Hansard* from this morning's Public Accounts either, so I don't know that this is absolutely, 100 per cent, word for word accurate. He referred to the official from the ministry of health who referred to the notion that we have buckets of money.

Mr. MacDonald: Bucketsful.

Mr. Taylor: Bucketsful, or bucketfuls, of money. I never know where to put the "s" in that. Bucketfuls of money.

I mean, that not only speaks to the effect of this bill and the effect of the budgeting process that goes on over the course of an entire fiscal year, an entire calendar year, goes on on a daily basis, but that's really the challenge that we face here in the province of Alberta over the next fiscal year, over the course of the budget debate that we will have starting in a few days, over the course of the fiscal year beyond that.

Perhaps at that point we'll have gone through a leadership replacement process on the other side, an election, and a change of government so that we can set about doing this right.

4:10

Mr. MacDonald: That's a time-honoured parliamentary tradition as well.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. That's a time-honoured parliamentary tradition, exactly: changing governments when they lose their way.

You know, here we have on the one hand the bucketfuls of money, whether we're referring to the particular buckets that the official from the health department was referencing in Public Accounts today or whether we are referring to the general state of things these days in the province of Alberta. Bucketfuls of money: we have bucketfuls of money. We have bucketfuls coming through the door. We have bucketfuls going out that door as we spend it, and this government, Mr. Speaker, is spending it so rapidly that we could actually find ourselves in this province back in a deficit position in 2008 if we stay the course.

You know, projecting what will happen if we stay the course is always a dangerous game because, of course, courses seldom stay the way they are, and thank goodness for that. If they did, for instance, by now every man, woman, and child in the United States of America would be an Elvis impersonator. You know, that prediction was made a couple of years after Elvis died. There was a rash of people rushing to become Elvis impersonators. I know we have an occasional one in this House.

Mr. MacDonald: And a fairly good one too.

Mr. Taylor: A very good one; better than most, in fact.

If we stay the course, health care will consume 100 per cent of our budget by 2025, quoth the Premier. Well, you know, we're not going to stay that course, regardless of whether he gets his way in the debate over whether health care should be commercialized in this province or not.

If we stay the course, we're going to be back in a deficit position by 2008. There are many aspects of policy with which government members and members on this side of the House disagree, but I don't really think that members of the government opposite are quite that profligate in their spending and quite that crazed with going through the bucketfuls of cash that they'll actually allow that to happen. But if we stay the course, that could happen. So we've got the bucketfuls of money. The challenge here is not to spend it; the challenge is to spend it well, to spend it wisely, to spend it effectively.

I'm not going to go over all the ground that has been covered this afternoon because it's on the public record already, and it's there for anybody to look up, but there have been some excellent points raised already by my colleagues who have spoken to Bill 22 in third reading so far. There are areas and there are people in this province that we should be spending on that we're not. There are schools in this province where the roofs are threatening to fall in. I just don't understand how you can get to that point in the richest province in the land unless, of course, you're spending stupidly. We certainly know that the spending is going on.

So that's one example. There are many, many others. I mean, you can look all around this province and see examples of money, bucketfuls of money, being thrown at things without any logical think-through of the process, of the need, of the consequences, of the effect of doing that, without any logical thought being given to an investment strategy first, followed by the spending that needs to be done. There's a kind of – oh, it's almost a panicked approach, the realization when you wake up one day that you've neglected all sorts of things and you can't possibly fix it all, but let's try and fix as much of it as fast as we possibly can. Well, you end up overpaying the contractor whom you hired to renovate your house and fix the leak in your roof when you take that sort of attitude. Although I think we could work the process better and more efficiently and more effectively, I don't have a fundamental problem with what's being asked of the members of the Legislature here today, which is

to give final, third reading approval to \$6 billion and change in interim supply.

The number is a lot higher than I'd like to see because of the process, but I'm okay with interim supply in principle. I've got less of a problem with that than I do with supplementary supply, where partway through the budget year this government comes back to the House and asks us to retroactively approve the spending of billions of dollars more that wasn't in the original budget, because that just says that they spend without any discipline, without any plan, without any vision. Whoever yells the loudest gets the last piece of candy in the jar. I have a huge problem with that. I have a huge problem with the overall approach to spending by this government. I don't see a plan. I don't see a vision. I don't see a logical process there.

So, yeah, we need to approve Bill 22 to keep the lights on and the wolves from the door and to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that your cheque doesn't bounce and mine doesn't and, far more importantly than that, the 22,959 public servants – was that the number that the Premier gave today? Oh, no: 22,960, minus the one who perhaps talked about bucketfuls of money at Public Accounts today; I don't know – that everybody gets their paycheque or severance or whatever.

So we need to pass Bill 22, and I'm going to vote for it; of course I am. But I hope I've raised some questions here that get some serious debate, some serious consideration not only during the budget debate that starts in a few days' time but by the tall foreheads who start to work on preparing next year's budget in a few weeks time, because the process needs changing. The overall process needs changing.

This government, Mr. Speaker, spends an incredible amount of time taking relatively simple, straightforward concepts and adding layers of complexity to those concepts until they've spent entire days chasing their tails so that at the end of the day they're too tired to make a decision or too caught up in the complexity of what should have been common sense. We need some common sense back in this province. This government isn't delivering.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to speak?

Does the hon. Government House Leader wish to close on behalf of the Minister of Finance?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps it would be appropriate just to say a few words given the amount of discussion

this afternoon on Advanced Education. I appreciate the words that were given by various members opposite about the value of education to Alberta and about the need for us to invest in education and to treat education as a very important way of ensuring that our human potential is maximized in this province so that we can achieve the future that this province has. That is an extremely important investment.

The issue of interim supply gives us the time to move forward to talk about full supply. I hope that those same interests will be expressed as we go into Committee of Supply in each of the departments and talk in detail about the uses that we have from our nonrenewable resource revenue and from our citizens and the ways in which we apply it most effectively to maximize the human potential and maximize the opportunity for the province and that we take that time and we do that appropriately, recognizing that in most jurisdictions the question of interim supply is not about providing that full amount of information and debate that we've heard talked about before, but it's about getting the resources so that we can continue to do the job that needs to be done for Albertans while we have that full debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been a very momentous day as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of our Legislature and of leadership in this province. We've had many guests in the Legislature, former members who've come back to help celebrate with us, and the Speaker has made a conscious effort, indeed a stellar effort, to make sure that we mark the anniversary appropriately.

Members will be retiring to a dinner with former members to help celebrate this event, and so we've agreed, I think, earlier that it would be appropriate to adjourn the House early today so that we could enjoy the company and the camaraderie of members and former members and share stories about the various ages that we've represented in this House.

Therefore, I would move under Standing Order 4(3) that the House do now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 4:21 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, March 16, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, in commemoration and celebration of 100 years of democracy in Alberta the Legislative Assembly of Alberta undertook a province-wide essay competition in two categories, one for senior citizens and one for students. The question they were to respond to was: what democracy means to me. I am delighted to announce that we have the two winners of our contest here with us today, and they are in the Speaker's gallery.

First of all, the seniors' competition. Mr. Louis Warring of Edmonton submitted the winning essay from Alberta senior citizens. Mr. Warring, as I said, lives in Edmonton with his wife, Molly Anne. During the Second World War he served in the air force as an instrument mechanic with a bomber group in northern England, and until his retirement he owned a glass business in Edmonton. Mr. Warring presented his essay this morning to a special gathering that was held in commemoration of the centennial event, and I am pleased now to ask Mr. Warring to stand and receive the recognition of the House.

Master Jan (Yash) Mitsosz Lisiecki submitted the winning essay from Alberta's students. Master Lisiecki lives in Calgary with his family, where he attends Earl Grey elementary school. He is in grade 6, and he's already achieved world-class status as a pianist. Yash was the youngest pianist to play at the National Centre for the Arts in Ottawa. Please, Yash, rise with your parents, Anita and Zbigniew.

Hon. members, in the story of Alberta going back to 1905, in the first Speech from the Throne in this province the Lieutenant Governor of the day gave his Speech from the Throne and spent three paragraphs on the subject of immigrants. This is in 1905. This family watched the Olympics in Calgary in 1988 from their homeland of Poland. They fell in love with the visuals of the Rocky Mountains. They fell in love with the Canadian flag. They moved to Alberta. They had this child called Yash.

His mother said to me this morning: he's so advanced in mathematics that we had to give him a diversion. Now, the kid's in grade 6, okay? He's so advanced that he's taking high school mathematics now, but he has to have a diversion, so she gets him into piano. So I say to him this morning, "Who's your favourite rock music group?" He looks at me and says, "Chopin," as if it was to be mine.

So here is a young man. In his essay he said today that one of the great things about democracy in this province is that everyone can aspire to be the Prime Minister of this country. Well, stay tuned 30 some-odd years in the future. I had to tell him this morning that with the group that we had of former MLAs and current MLAs, it's a good thing he said Prime Minister because I understand that there were a few members in the room who are aspiring to another position here in Alberta. Jan and family, please rise.

I'm also pleased today to advise all members that we have in the Speaker's gallery as well a very talented and creative group of people who worked together to produce a new book called *100 Years at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta: A Centennial Celebration*. These are people who are all in-house employees of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta who undertook a challenge several years ago to do something in commemoration of this year.

I'm going to ask them to stand, and I'll say something further about them as I give my vignette of the day. First of all: Wolfgang Maul, a communications consultant with our communications services, provided both the design and exceptional writing for the project; Tracey Sales, with our communications services, assisted with the production for the project; Rhonda Sorensen, communications co-ordinator for us, oversaw the project and provided editing expertise; Kathy Hnatiuk, editorial assistant with House services, provided editing expertise for the project; and we got editorial assistance as well from Philip Massolin with the Legislature Library. I'll say more about them: exceptional in-house people. Congratulations and thank you.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce today to you and through you to members of the Assembly grade 6 students from Mountain View school, which is in our Premier's constituency of Calgary-Elbow. They're here along with their teacher, Elo Olalekan, and helpers Mrs. Spencer and Mrs. Christakis. They're here to learn about government and the work that we do in the Legislature, and they're also here to participate in our mock Legislature program, to learn how a bill is passed. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and that our members give them the customary warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a privilege today to meet the students from Father Kenneth Kearns school from Sherwood Park, seated in the members' gallery. This vibrant group of students is from a school that has learning excellence, and they're accompanied today by their teachers, Jim Schiebelbein, Clint Moroziuk, and Marina Colbert, along with parent helpers Kathy Farquhar, Kara Clark, Yvonne Groat, and Jim Martin. I wonder if the students could please rise and we would welcome them with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through to the members of the House a number of Lethbridge constituents. Now, they are all community minded, but one of the organizations that they represent is called Family Voices. I would like to introduce Anne Kish, Barbara Nish, and then the Fowler family – father, Dean; mother, Khristina; and children Payton and Brooklyn – and ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of the loveliest ladies in the city of Edmonton. They are the

Hattitude Sisters in Red. Yes, all of these sisters wear a red hat – well, almost all, but I'll get to that. There are a number of societies within the city; however, this particular society has members primarily from south Edmonton, with a number of them living in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Speaker, I have met with these delightful ladies. In fact, they allowed me to have my picture taken with them today, and I can truly say that they have a wonderful sense of humour and certainly have the most positive outlook on life. They do not complain, and they are always smiling. They have a tremendous amount of fun, and, as was mentioned to me, they have things to do and places to go.

With us today we have 13 members, one being a queen and one being a hostess. We have Queen Joyce Reid and Hostess Jeanne Jones, whose favourite saying, I'm told, is: behind every successful man is an even more successful woman. By the way, Jeannie's husband, Edgar, is a recipient of the Order of Canada, and Edgar and Jeannie recently received the Order of the Bighorn, an award which recognizes their outstanding contributions made to fish and wildlife conservation.

Joining Joyce and Jeannie today are Joyce Anderson, Irene Barr, much to my surprise my mother's cousin Eileen Dobie, Wendy Fithen, Jennie Jones, Ina McDonald, Mavis McKay, Donna McQuade, Ivy Stevens, Trudy Smith, and one lady in a purple hat. The purple hat, Mr. Speaker, evidences the fact that it's her birthday month. I wasn't given a year, nor did I ask. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Allie Wojtaszek. Allie Wojtaszek is a student in Edmonton, and she and her husband, Duncan, are very active in student politics and activities. Duncan Wojtaszek is the executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students. I understood that he might be here, but I didn't see him. If Allie would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to the Assembly somebody who has worked very closely with me for the last 18 months and regrettably is moving on to other opportunities. She's been my executive assistant and, as such, has had to put up with several of my foibles, shall we say, but she's done it wonderfully. I'd ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the entire Assembly. If I didn't mention it, her name is Susie Sykes.

With Susie is someone who is also assisting me and is staying on. She's a glutton for all kinds of things. Her name is Carmen Remenda, and she's also a terrific worker. Please give her a warm reception.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a visiting delegation from the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. This delegation is part of the Harmony Senior Citizens Agency, and they're from the St. Nicholas Seniors' Home. This delegation is led by Bill Orfino, and the group today consists of Clara Hamal, Elsie Dunbar, Winnifred Zyla, Victoria Ruzycki, George Danilak, Shirley Cherwak, Liz Orfino, John and

Pearl Kaminsky, and Lawrence and Betty Kachman. I would encourage them to return any time to their Legislative Assembly and listen to the proceedings here. They are in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome to you and through you to members of the Assembly two members of the Greater St. Albert Catholic regional division No. 29. Mr. Dave Caron, chair, and his trustee colleague Jacquie Hansen are in the public gallery. Would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House close to a dozen members of the students' union of the University of Alberta. They are all seated, I believe, in the public gallery. We've got a pretty crowded House today, so they might be spread around. They are Don Iveson, Duncan Wojtaszek, Jason Tobias, Jeannine Saunders, Colin Robertson, Matt Schneider, Samantha Power, Graham Lettner, Justin Kehoe, Tim Schneider, Catrin Berghoff, and David Cournoyer. If you would please all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House individuals who are here to express concern about education funding for students with developmental disabilities: Kathryn Burke, the co-chair of the parent advisory council for the Academy at King Edward, a specialized school in Edmonton for children with learning disabilities, and three students, Kyle Noruschat, Brad Jones, Gavin Reilly. I'd like to ask these individuals to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 11 people who are working with the Canadian Mental Health Association Mindworks program. That's a very cool program located in downtown Edmonton. If I'm remembering the correct program, they really grilled me on a number of policies when I went to visit them. It was a great exchange. They're seated in the public gallery, I believe. With them today is their group leader, Elizabeth Kunzle. I'm sorry about the pronunciation. I'd ask you to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Tammy Winder. Tammy has joined us all the way from Lethbridge. She has a beautiful daughter who was born deaf and with developmental disabilities and at the age of 15 was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. Tammy is here today to remind us all of our commitment to persons living with disabilities; namely, to value and respect persons with disabilities and implement comprehensive support and services for these

citizens. She's seated in the public gallery. I would ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really thrilled today to introduce to you 22 seniors from my constituency. They have lived through most of the years of the century of the province that we've been celebrating, and they've made substantial contributions to what Alberta is today. They are from the Harmony senior citizens agency and from Father Hannas and St. Basil's seniors' homes. With your permission I would like to read their names: Terry Spence, Mabel Wynnyk, Betty Pitchko, Pauline Chmilar, Aleida Peredery, Barb Stolz, Lill Westcott, Irene Colburne, Dorothy Archibald, Ann Melnyk, Steva Markowsky, Kay Kutt, Victoria Zignash, Stella Huculak, Walter Brown, Mary Lazaruk, Julie Mitchell, Stella Wasylycia, Sharon Terry, Maria Bilynska, Kay Ostafichuk, and Georgia Liakopoulos. I was hoping they would be seated in the public gallery, but they may not be. I had the pleasure of getting a picture taken with them and chatting with them. One of them is over 90 years old, and they're still active and engaged. I will now ask them to rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three wonderful people. They are Mrs. Kanak Chamarty, Mrs. Smriti Patnaik, and Dr. Suman Kollipara. Dr. Kollipara and Mrs. Patnaik are in software engineering, and Mrs. Chamarty is a financial consultant and entrepreneur. They are here this afternoon to tour the Legislature. They are seated in the public gallery. I request them to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Renata Romanek and Annamaria Edwards. Renata and Annamaria both work at Chrysalis: An Alberta Society for Citizens with Disabilities. Renata is a client marketing co-ordinator, and she graduated from the university in Cracow, Poland, with a master's degree in philosophy. Annamaria is a front-line worker for Chrysalis and was born here in Edmonton. She has a bachelor's degree in sociology. They are both seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: 1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

School Infrastructure in Calgary

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bowcroft, Montgomery, Sir William Van Horne, Terrace Road, and Western Canada are just five of the 185 schools listed in the Calgary board of education's rankings of schools in worse overall condition than Marlborough school. Marlborough school itself was evacuated yesterday because of serious roof problems. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Given that the Calgary board of education's documents state that most Calgary schools are in worse condition than

Marlborough, can the minister assure the parents of students attending the schools ranked in worse condition than Marlborough that their children are safe?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in tandem with our locally elected school boards we do have a responsibility to ensure that a safe and caring environment is provided for children that attend our schools. We are doing that to the best of our abilities. I do acknowledge that there are some schools that need attention. That's why we have a fairly aggressive maintenance and repair program in place. In fact, tens of millions of dollars go into this area every year. In acknowledgement of the hon. opposition leader's question he should know that I am meeting with all the school board chairs on March 24, and we will be talking exactly about infrastructure needs.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the head of the union responsible for maintenance services for Calgary schools stated today that Marlborough elementary school isn't the only public school with significant roof problems, will this minister commit here and now to reinvesting in infrastructure for Calgary schools?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, once I get the technical and full responsibility for the infrastructure piece, I'll be able to answer that question, perhaps, more specifically. That should happen in a few weeks.

However, I think it's important to note that in the case of Marlborough school the Calgary public board of education took a very proactive, a very precautionary approach here. We provided them with tens of thousands of dollars – I forget the exact amount, somewhere between \$25,000 and \$40,000, as I recall – and they did a structural assessment. In doing that, they determined that that particular roof needed some attention, so they did the proactive thing: closed the school. They're dealing with it. Nobody is in any harm's way there in that respect.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the minister speaking of an aggressive maintenance program, there is over \$425 million in deferred maintenance to Calgary schools. How does the minister justify this backlog?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, every school board submits on an annual basis their three-year capital plans. Included in those plans are issues pertaining to new school construction needs, to modernizations, to upgrades, to rightsizing, to expansions, to other similar-type needs. We review them, they provide them on a prioritized basis, and then we do our best to fund them on that basis.

The Speaker: The second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we all know and the minister knows that the state of disrepair in Calgary schools is well documented. Teachers, students, trustees, parents, and maintenance staff have all raised concerns, serious concerns, over the state of Calgary schools for years and have not had adequate attention. This puts the health of students, teachers at risk and puts at risk as well the value of our public assets. To the Minister of Education: given that toxic mould is a direct result of leaky roofs, will the minister

order independent air quality assessments in this and other at-risk Calgary schools?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would think that if the local school board had that specific concern, with those specific connotations, they probably would have already done that. I'm not aware that that is the exact case there. If there are concerns of that nature, then certainly the Calgary public board or the Calgary Catholic board – I'm not sure which one he's referring to – either one of them I'm sure would be happy to follow up.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Exactly what is this minister's responsibility for the safety of schoolchildren in this province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, section 45(8) has a wonderful explanation of this. I would direct the hon. member to have a look at that section. It is the section that says that there is "a safe and caring" learning environment requirement. What that means is that we work with locally elected school trustees to ensure that that is met. If he knows, if he has examples where some students are indeed in danger, then I would ask him to please provide me with that specific case.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: given that deferring maintenance drives up costs over the long run, how does this minister justify allowing public assets like these public schools to deteriorate to the level where they need this kind of work?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we have a very large infrastructure budget. It covers new. It covers enhancing hospitals, schools, public buildings. We've been criticized for not saving enough money. We've made over a 40 per cent increase in our infrastructure budget since the last budget. We have a budget that will be presented in this Legislature on Wednesday, March 22, at 3 p.m., I believe, and we can have a full discussion of all of these issues in that budget debate.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Affordability of Postsecondary Education

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is spinning its two-tier user-pay commercialization of health by saying that paying for health care must become more of a shared responsibility. Now, back in the day, back in the early '90s the government said that the cost of advanced education had to be, and I quote: a responsibility shared by the learner and the government. The results? The fastest tuition increases in the nation. Thanks for sharing. To the Minister of Advanced Education: with the minister's spring deadline for a new affordability policy fast approaching, why are stakeholders still waiting for a draft policy that contains some actual specific details?

Mr. Hancock: Because it's not done yet, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was my suspicion. Will the minister commit to rolling back tuition fees for students?

Mr. Hancock: As the hon. member well knows, Mr. Speaker, because it has been well publicized, last fall our Premier promised students in this province that tuition fees would be held constant at the 2004-2005 levels into the new year and that we will be bringing forward a new affordability policy which will include the tuition policy element. That policy will be available this spring for implementation in the fall for institutions and students planning their budgets for the following school year. That's what the Premier promised. That's what I've promised. That's what will happen, and the students are part of that process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the Premier's ultimatum yesterday to Conservative leadership contenders, will this minister be around long enough to make sure that the new policy actually gets implemented?

Mr. Hancock: Stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: I'm sure we're all waiting with bated breath, Mr. Speaker.

Public Opinion Survey on Health Care

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government released a poll which they purported claims support for reform of the health system along the lines envisaged by the government. However, this was not a public opinion survey designed to solicit the views of Albertans on health care or on the third way. It was, in fact, a market research survey done by Margaret Kool Marketing, which is developing the multimillion dollar PR strategy to sell private health care to Albertans. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why are the minister and her staff attempting to pass off the Leger Marketing survey as a serious attempt to gauge the views of Albertans on health care when it was in reality nothing more than message testing done for the company hired to sell Albertans on the supposed merits of the Conservatives' two-tier health plan?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the cost of some \$11,000 nine hundred people in Alberta were surveyed about their beliefs and what the health system looked like in the times of January and February. There was no attempt whatsoever either from myself or the news release to sell this or market this as a way of advancing the third way. In fact, it starts talking about: the survey of 900 people conducted during the months of January and February found that Albertans generally perceive the state of the current health care system as not sufficient for future generations. It goes on to answer a number of questions.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister is continuing to purport that this survey in some way represents the accurate views of Albertans, why has she chosen to selectively release only the market research component rather than

the entire communication strategy done by the Margaret Kool Marketing company, and will she in fact make that entire marketing plan public?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that is a different study that's being referenced now. The \$141,000 spent for Margaret Kool Marketing company, MKM, is a number of things that may or may not, some of them, see the light of day. We were looking at a number of focus tests, a thorough examination of how people responded to sustainability of health in their region, how people responded to the various terminology used, the third way, to talk to them about access times, to talk to them about private pay, what their thoughts were on it. Although a summary has, I believe, been made available, we can make more of that available, both through posting it on the web and making more detail available.

Mr. Speaker, the Leger Marketing polling was released in its entire form yesterday.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that 78 per cent of the respondents to that market survey agreed that all health care services covered by the Canada Health Act should be delivered through publicly owned facilities and paid for by Alberta Health and only 3 per cent of the respondents supported two-tier health care in this province, will the government now commit to abandon its proposals for two-tier private health care in this province?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, you cannot simply isolate and select certain data in order to just justify anything. You could look at the data saying that 66 per cent believe that if people pulled out of the queue and had services elsewhere, it would shorten waiting lists and make it better for them. I'm not either subscribing to or judging that data. I'm saying that there are a number of different questions that were asked with different answers.

I think it very significant, Mr. Speaker, that when you look at it, 5 per cent said that they were completely satisfied with the health care system in Alberta, but 95 per cent, by the obvious, not completely satisfied answer, were representing concerns about the length of waiting times, about the access they get to the system. While generally they thought it was a good system, they want us to do exactly what we're doing today, and that's working at making a public system that's strong even stronger.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by hon. Member for St. Albert.

Surface Rights Compensation

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are being asked to sign surface rights agreements due to the increased coal-bed methane drilling in my constituency. They're quite surprised to learn that compensation rates have not changed in the past 20 years or more, yet in that same time frame property values have risen three to four times and energy prices have soared much higher. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. When is the minister going to adjust the surface rights compensation so that farmers are more fairly compensated for the footprint the energy industry places on their land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Surface Rights Board has authority under the Surface Rights Act, and under the Surface Rights Act it's very explicit and very complicated. I'd like to be very clear here that if a landowner and a company can't agree on entry or compensation related to the resource activity, the board may grant right of entry and determine compensation. The board may do that.

In determining compensation, the board has clear guidelines. They take into account the value of the land, the loss of use as well as adverse effects such as noise, nuisance, inconvenience, and that type of thing, and more importantly damage to the land. Mr. Speaker, as you know, the value of resources, such as oil and gas, is important, but it's very volatile, and that's not the only factor in determining compensation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the same minister: given that these compensation rates haven't been keeping abreast of the increase in costs of taxes and land values, will the minister consider annual mandatory compensation fees for transmission lines, such as pipelines and power lines, in addition to increased compensation for the footprint?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, again it's very complicated, but under the Surface Rights Act pipeline and utility companies can apply for right of entry to construct pipelines, power lines, and telephone lines. A pipeline does not normally result in above ground structures and generally creates a short-term disturbance, so in addition to land values the board assesses a compensation payment for the crop season following installation. Major transmission lines are covered by long-term agreements under easements or right of entry orders. To determine if a transmission line is considered major, as the hon. member asked in the question, the Surface Rights Board uses the Energy and Utilities Board's definition of a 69 kV transmission line or larger.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplementary to the same minister: will the minister commit to a regular review of surface rights compensation rates, say every five or 10 years or adjusted to some benchmark, such as increasing assessment rates?

Mr. Coutts: Currently under the Surface Rights Act, Mr. Speaker, the annual compensation for right of entry or surface lease may be reviewed every five years until the site is reclaimed or terminated. At the same time, we keep abreast of the trends, and the Surface Rights Board definitely considers aspects of determining compensation of payment. We're constantly reviewing that and will continue to review that in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Special-needs Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seventy-eight per cent of Alberta's classrooms have at least one child with special needs. Early intervention is essential for children with special needs to become healthy, happy adults. The standards for special education introduced in 2004 do not come close to meeting children's classroom needs. To the Minister of Education: what will this minister

do to assure parents and teachers that our special-needs kids will be properly educated?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're providing an envelope of over \$4 billion in number and general terms to achieve exactly that. I would take exception to his comment that the standards for special education are insufficient or inadequate. These are more than sufficient and adequate. There may be an issue of funding connected to that. That's what the parents have been telling me, but they're quite happy with the standards themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. How long will these parents here today have to wait until they find some relief from the minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the area of special-needs funding has in fact gone up by 99 per cent. It's almost doubled from \$170 million five years ago to \$340 million today. That's a significant commitment on the part of our government towards special-needs children.

Now, we not only provide that, but also in the area of early identification I know that in co-operation with the lead Ministry of Children's Services there have been now 36 parent link centres established across the province. That's an additional 15 or 20 this year alone, and that will help a great deal, Mr. Speaker, with the earlier identification through developmental screening, which I'm assuming the hon. member is aware of.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the parents' point of view, given that early intervention is vital for a child's success, Mr. Minister, has the minister evaluated how the shortage of funding at the kindergarten to grade 3 level will impact children completing their schooling?

2:10

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't have a specific evaluation on that exact question, but I can tell you that we've made tremendous improvements, tremendous strides in providing education at all levels, not just at the K to 3 level. Through initiatives such as our student health initiative program, working with Health and Wellness and with Children's Services, we provide an additional \$34 million for that kind of early identification. That strategy coupled with our early identification strategy through the parent link centres and a number of other initiatives, PUF and so on, are all helping to make sure that parents out there know that we care very much about their children and about the circumstances of those parents in helping provide for those children.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Class Size Reduction

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta announced funding in July 2004 to reduce average class sizes across Alberta. It is now almost two years later, and some parents in my constituency are expressing concern that student numbers in some classrooms are still too high. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Why is it that some of our class sizes are

still much higher than what was recommended by the Alberta Commission on Learning?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that is indeed a very good question. Just by way of brief history, the Learning Commission had said: here are some guidelines that we would expect the school system to achieve over a period of five years. Government has tried very hard to achieve those targets within three years. We're about to finish our second year. We've provided about \$200 million in new monies so far to hire 1,600 additional teachers. I think what's important to keep in mind here is that we're talking about jurisdiction-wide averages, not specific school classroom averages. I will acknowledge that we have a little bit more work to do in that area.

Ms Haley: Well, to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. What are you doing to address the challenges that school boards have regarding insufficient student space as it relates to that recommendation?

Mr. Zwozdesky: That, too, is a good question, Mr. Speaker. The thing about it is that we know that when we were very aggressively pursuing meeting the Commission on Learning guidelines for average jurisdiction-wide class size, we automatically put pressure on the infrastructure side, on student school spaces, and how many are needed. So I addressed this issue with the school boards last November. We're going to pursue it and follow up on it a little bit further at my meeting on March 24.

Let me just conclude by saying that I'm very pleased that as a result of the 215 million new dollars that we've put in in the last 18 months for our class size reduction initiative target, we are right on track if not ahead of schedule in some areas, and that's very positive news.

Ms Haley: My last question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker, is this. Given that growth in my constituency ranges between 10 per cent and 20 per cent a year and inside my constituency we're short about five schools, which has got to be putting more pressure on your classroom initiative, will you be announcing five new schools for my constituency?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, nothing would give me more pleasure than to be able to stand in this House and say yes to a question like that, but I just don't have the money at this time. However, I will commit to the hon. member that next time I am there, we will meet again, and we'll pursue this issue even further. On March 24, however, I expect that I'll be addressing it with the school board chairs from that area.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Special-needs Education Funding

(continued)

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Teachers and parents in my constituency are very concerned about addressing the needs of children with special needs. They would like to know how school districts who receive less than half of what they need for children with severe disabilities are able to provide the mandated level of service. There is no room in the general grant to make up this government shortfall. My questions are to the Minister of Education. If the minister is aware of the shortfall for each and every case of a child with severe special needs, why isn't this problem being addressed?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware that each and every child has a shortfall in funding. What I am aware of is that when it comes to severe special-needs children, for example, that budget increased in this last year alone by something like 11.4 per cent. So we are adding more money into the system to help alleviate those problems, but we work in conjunction with our locally elected school boards whose job it is to ensure that appropriate programming is provided for children with special needs, be that children with mild, moderate, or severe special needs or be it with gifted and talented special-needs children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. How does the minister respond to teachers and other staff who take the mandate to provide adequate services for children with learning disabilities seriously and are distressed with funding constraints?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what funding constraints she might be referring to. I think I indicated earlier this afternoon that our funding in this area has doubled from \$170 million to \$340 million, and I expect that there might be a price increase and perhaps even a volume increase in the forthcoming budget. We'll just have to wait and see, as the hon. Treasurer has indicated, until March 22, and then we'll have some additional answers to that very question, I would suspect.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. How does the minister respond to angry and tired parents who are spending enormous time and effort fund raising for basics that should be provided by core funding?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, school parent councils or parents or others should not be doing fundraising for so-called basics or essentials in the school system. If there is an example that the hon. member knows of where parents are fund raising specifically for something that is forbidden, I can tell that you I'd be very interested to see that, and I'll bet you the school board would be as well because that should not in fact be happening. We're providing about \$21 million per school day into our school system, and our school boards are doing a pretty good job in implementing and using those dollars to make sure that the basics are provided for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Little Smoky Caribou Herd

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Many animal advocacy groups are critical of the program being carried out to cull wolves in the area of the Little Smoky herd. They emphasize that industrial development has much to do with the decline of the caribou population. Why has Alberta taken this drastic step of removing wolves?

Mr. Coutts: Well, first and foremost, Mr. Speaker, this step is being taken because the Alberta government is serious about protecting the threatened caribou. It isn't an action that is taken lightly. It's very, very serious. Secondly, we've done this because predation is the primary cause of caribou mortality, and the Little Smoky caribou will disappear without this type of action. It's important that we

follow the recovery plan as it was put forward, and that's what we're doing. That recovery plan was prepared by stakeholders and NGOs and industry as well, and that has been recommended as a predator control. This is a short-term action, and it's also important to note that we're only reducing the local wolf numbers and not the total number of wolves in the province.

Mr. Goudreau: My next question is also for the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Why single out wolves instead of putting a moratorium on certain developments, as some groups are recommending?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, that is also consistent with the recovery plan, and we're looking at ways to minimize activity on the land as well. We're working with industry to make sure that that's one of their major efforts as well. A moratorium is not the solution to better management on the ground. There are strict operation restrictions on all industrial activity where there are caribou. We use best practices from other jurisdictions, and companies are required to do annual management plans on protection areas with strict deadlines and compliance reviews as well. Industry itself is a major funding partner in research and monitoring the caribou as well. We like to have those partners do our integrated management plans with us, and as a result there are many good pilot projects out there on caribou protection.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, my final question is also for the same minister. He talks about a plan. When is Alberta going to implement the full plan?

2:20

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. There are good plans in place at this particular time. We have had a strong history of being good managers of caribou and other wildlife in this province. We were the first in Canada to recognize caribou as threatened, and we conduct more research on woodland caribou than any other jurisdiction in Canada. I spoke about our recovery plan in the previous answer, and that includes a number of short-term and long-term solutions to making sure that caribou still remain on the land not only with the help of good management practices from the department but also our industry and stakeholders.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Policing Services

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's population continues to grow, and that means, unfortunately, an increase in crime, particularly violent crime and gang violence. In response to this reality, the government is not increasing its funding for police services in our big cities of Edmonton and Calgary. This government is counting its pennies when it comes to public safety while giving a billion here and a billion there. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Given the billions of dollars of surplus money, why is this government, a grinch in respect of public safety, making an insulting offer to the city of Calgary of \$16 per capita for police funding, the same as last year and the year before?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cernaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The numbers that the hon. member mentions are correct. They have \$16

per capita in the city of Calgary and in the city of Edmonton. In the previous year we tried to look at our overall budget and stress smaller communities throughout Alberta, assisting them in their policing grants to give them an automatic base: if they were under 20,000, a thousand dollar lump sum plus \$8 per capita. The hon. member should remember, though, that the program that we have in Alberta is by far the best policing grant system in all of Canada. One example: the city of Vancouver shares their fine revenue with the province of British Columbia, and that's all the funding they get.

Dr. B. Miller: To the same minister: given that this government's share of policing services for our cities is a measly 6 per cent, why in a province with so much are we leaving our cities on their own? Why are we being so soft on crime?

Mr. Cernaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, the 6 per cent that the hon. member mentioned may not be accurate. In fact, \$15 million is the per capita allotment that the city of Calgary received. They also received over \$6 million from the organized crime strategy, which includes officers in the IROC and ICE units, that the province provides funding for. As well, if you look at the roughly \$30 million of fine revenue that the municipality gets to keep, we're talking \$50 million.

Dr. B. Miller: Can the minister explain if the use of sheriffs – and it sounds like a western movie – is the new plan to deal with gang violence and violence on the streets? Is this the best the government can do?

Mr. Cernaiko: Well, the use of sheriffs and that western theme is because we're in western Canada as well, Mr. Speaker.

Sheriffs are there for a particular purpose. Their main function is court security and prisoner transport. They're in a pilot project with the RCMP right now regarding traffic investigation and traffic enforcement. We're looking as well to the future. There may be other areas where we expand their role to provincial officers throughout Alberta to assist and complement our policing services, not to replace them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Learning Commission Recommendations

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Education minister continues to hone his well-deserved reputation as a ditherer who couldn't make a decision to save his life. Whether it's implementing two-and-a-half-year-old recommendations of the Learning Commission, implementing a strategy to improve low high school completion rates, or coming up with a revamped school closure process, there seems to be no decision that the minister isn't prepared to run away from. This indecision is creating havoc. My question is to the Minister of Education. Given that the minister promised that he would make a decision about the outstanding recommendations of the Learning Commission by the end of 2005, when is he finally going to get around to making these decisions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, when I met with the school boards in November for the second time last year – and I appreciate that this hon. member wasn't there and wouldn't know this – I told them that I would do my best to have either an answer, a yes or a no, on the outstanding recommendations, or I would have

an alternative to the proposals, or I would at least make government's position on each of them clearer, and I would try to do that by the end of December. That's what I said to them, and they will all back that up.

Now, unfortunately, we got a little behind in the schedule with that particular target deadline, and it's only because some other groups wanted to come in and present to one of our standing policy committees. In the guise of openness and transparency we allowed them to come in. The last one of them, Mr. Speaker, came to us on December 12, and something called Christmas got in there. It was a wonderful occasion, but unfortunately we couldn't get all the meetings that we had wanted. So we're a few months behind with that, but if the hon. member would stay tuned, there will be some decisions on this fairly soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My point remains: Mr. Dithers. Christmas is now an excuse.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. Let's be nice. Okay?

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I'm always nice to this minister.

My question. Specifically, one of the recommendations has to do with full-day kindergarten for high-needs students, and that's a very important decision, Mr. Speaker. When is that decision going to be made?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Soon.

Mr. Martin: Soon to this minister could be another two and a half years.

My question to the minister is simply this. Is the minister aware that 18 high-needs schools in Edmonton public could lose their full-day kindergarten because of a lack of funding from his department? That could be coming down the pike.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we provide millions of dollars for school boards across the province, and these are locally elected officials. Kindergarten is not a mandatory program. If they wish to provide it, they provide it to the best of their abilities. They presumably use our envelope of broader funding to do that.

Now, every school board has a slightly different approach to this because it's based on local needs as determined by locally elected officials. That's how the system should work, and you would think that this hon. member, who used to be a trustee, would know that by now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Alexis Reserve Land-use Study

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this Assembly we're hearing lots about health care and education issues, but when I go home to my constituency in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, land issues and land-use issues far outnumber these concerns. This weekend I'll be meeting with leaders from my First Nations communities. It's my understanding that traditional land-use studies are being conducted across the province. My questions are to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Why has there not been noticeable progress with regard to land-use issues in my constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there has been some progress. The Alexis First Nation was first involved in 2004 to do traditional land-use studies, and it takes approximately three years to be able to do a land-use study mostly because it entails a lot of things. One is that the First Nations have to map their traditional, spiritual, and cultural use of the land, and also they have to be able to bring in the elders to be able to work with the information as well as the regular kind of information on GPS studies. So on the issue of the First Nation they have been working very hard. They are only at the two-year time of the three-year program.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I understand the process, but given the answer, Mr. Speaker, I have to report back to my chief this weekend, and he wants to know: what's the progress with the status of the Alexis Indian reserve with land-use studies that are happening?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the question because I know that the First Nations have been wanting to know whether or not they can continue and complete the traditional land-use study. They will be getting some information from my department shortly to let them know that they can complete the study. So, as a result, the member can tell his First Nations to continue to work with my department to ensure that they get the dollars that they require to complete the study.

The other component, Mr. Speaker, is to be able to ensure that they do the protocols that we've requested them to do. They are now working on those protocols with government. I would like to commend the First Nations for making sure that they do that. For your information, I'd appreciate that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

2:30 Private Health Insurance for Artists

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the economic contributions of the arts sector in this province artists generally earn less money than the provincial average. Most artists cannot afford private insurance. Many are self-employed – you know that – and do not have employer health benefits. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the minister plans on limiting public health coverage to only emergency services, what plans does this minister have for the artists who cannot afford private health care insurance?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, if you look at our new health policy framework, eight of the 10 policies deal with strengthening the public system. The value statements talk about looking after individuals, families, communities, and working in co-operation and collaboration with health care providers to do just that. Today we provide supports and coverage for people who are vulnerable because of income, who are senior. That will continue regardless of any changes that would come in the future. I'm very confident of that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you. My next question is to the Minister of Community Development. Has the minister consulted with the arts

community to hear their concerns regarding health services and access?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. We provide health support, as the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has said, based on the fact that they're Albertans, not based on their occupation.

Mr. Agnihotri: My next question is to the Minister of Economic Development. How does the minister hope to grow the film industry in Alberta when our actors leave the province because they cannot afford private health insurance? We don't want to lose them.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we will take that question under advisement and provide an answer to the hon. member as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Trade Certification

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The red seal certification program for trades workers is an excellent program that ensures that trades workers coming into Alberta have the necessary skills to carry out their work functions in a knowledgeable and safe manner while possessing the required skill set to work at the same level of skill as other qualified Alberta trades workers. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. With the influx of out-of-province workers to alleviate skill shortages, is this program meeting its objectives?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's a very important question because the interprovincial standards, or red seal program, as many in the industry know it, is a very valuable program and is really referred to as the passport for mobility for tradespeople across the country. The objectives of the red seal program are to assess the skills and knowledge of workers against national standards agreed to by industry in each province or territory, and that then provides the mobility. In other words, once they have that red seal, they can work anywhere in Canada. They can work in Alberta. The real value of the red seal is knowing that those people who come to this province have met the standard and are capable to go right to work. It's available to skilled workers in all jurisdictions. We know that workers with the red seal that come to Alberta are qualified. They know that they can immediately start working.

Mr. Speaker, it's a well-taken-up program. We know that we have 110,000 Alberta tradespeople who have attained that designation since it was created, more than in any other jurisdiction in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can trades workers who are presently working and trained in Alberta challenge these exams in trades that they are not currently qualified under but have work experience in to provide them with the opportunity to become more employable by being certified in more than one trade?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. People who have skills and knowledge can challenge the red seal exam. The red seal is

recognized in the industry. People who have that designation in one trade may have skills in a different trade. The pipefitter trade, for example, fits into the steam fitter/pipe fitter process. Maybe a welder could fit into the pipefitting area. So there are cross-skills, and a person who has a red seal certificate in one area can seek to challenge the exam in another area and get tickets in a second or even a third trade.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you. To the same minister: what is the process for trades workers in Alberta to challenge these exams to enable them to be red seal certified in multiple trades?

Mr. Hancock: Well, the process is fairly straightforward, Mr. Speaker. The individuals involved get their documentation together showing that they're qualified in their occupation. They need evidence of training and related work experience and any related certifications. They make an application through one of our field offices. We have regional apprenticeship offices in a number of places across the province. Our department will verify the authenticity of the documentation against the standards set for that trade. Once approved, usually within two weeks, the individual can schedule a time to write the exam. They may also be required to perform a practical test to demonstrate skill, depending on the trade in which they're seeking recognition.

In some trades, Mr. Speaker, the industry has recommended that credit given for skills in one trade be applied to another trade. If there is a common set of skills, they can actually have the recognized skill set applied to the new trade.

So the process works. The process is available for people coming to the province to get their tickets in a number of areas.

One thing is very important. While we have a shortage of skilled workers in the province and we're recruiting people both to take their training as apprentices in the province and to come to the province with their skills, we want to make sure that we have qualified workers. We do not want to water down in any way the qualifications necessary because we want to have the highest quality work in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Health Care Reform Consultation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sixteen days down and 15 days left to go in the government's health care consultation, and it's not looking good for the government. The government's own survey results reveal that only half of Albertans are even aware of what the third way might be, and many stakeholder groups, like the Alberta Medical Association and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, say that they need more information in order to provide constructive feedback. My questions today are all to the minister of health. Will the minister commit to providing Albertans and stakeholder groups like the AMA and the college with the detailed information they have requested?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of talking earlier this morning with the president of the AMA about the consultations and about a number of other issues. I think we are proceeding very well. They asked some specific questions. We've agreed to provide them the answers. At such time that we're prepared to either introduce legislation or introduce new policies, obviously, we will continue to inform Albertans.

Speaking of the consultations, Mr. Speaker, we are doing very well with the consultations in covering Alberta. I will be in both Hinton and Calgary this weekend having meetings and have arranged other meetings in other parts of Alberta to make sure that we get as much information from Albertans as possible. We will continue to work with the college and other providers as they come forward and in due course respond to their questions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Madam Minister, when will the rest of us get to know what these details are, or is it just the AMA that gets to get the details from you? Have you now got two tiers of information?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, obviously, anything that is asked for from some of the groups will be available to all. Some of them don't ask for definite, specific information. They ask for things that may be private in their view. They have sometimes asked for meetings that are not held in the public consultation by their own request. We will be quite prepared to share our concerns. The documents that come forward as a result of our consultation process will disclose everything that we possibly can. Some people, for example, ask questions about the scope of practice. Quite specifically, the role of pharmacists in prescribing was an issue that was raised. They're asking how we will advance the Health Professions Act. All of these things will be available and in due course will be raised either on the Legislature floor or in the ways that we configure our policy. Many of the things that people bring forward, especially about the electronic health record, relate to the use of the record and how we will advance it in the future.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister: will the minister listen to Albertans and extend the timeline and widen the public consultation to include town halls where individuals, not just special groups, get to question the minister and include translation services, a televised debate to make this truly an open, public debate for all Albertans?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, at this rate we've had a number of individuals. We have two days' worth of consultations with individuals who have registered and have asked for meetings. We're doing our best to speak with the health care providers and the stakeholders. At the end of the period designed for consultation, if there's a need to do more, we would certainly advance it. The important part is that Albertans through their MLAs, through consultations that they're having with MLAs in their own communities can advance their papers if they so choose. They're responding in many cases to the discussion guides. They're phoning us. They're sending letters to us. We've received about 2,800 thus far.

In terms of the quality of representation from the various communities, from the various providers, and from the various people that have a role in supporting the health care system, I'm quite satisfied that the representative views that have come forward are very high quality and will enable us to make good, sound policy decisions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we had 89 questions and answers in the 50-minute question period. That's the best we've had in a long time.

In 30 seconds I'll provide you with an historical vignette and call upon the first of six members to participate.

***100 Years at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta:
A Centennial Celebration***

The Speaker: Hon members, in keeping with the theme of the anniversary this year, 100 years of democracy in the province of Alberta, last evening at a special and unique event for former members and current members we unveiled a new book, a book titled *100 Years at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta: A Centennial Celebration*.

This project was begun three years ago. We concluded that we would hire an architectural photographer and ask that person to show the building, to take a series of visuals of the building in a way that many of us may have never seen it before. The photographer in question, a gentleman by the name of Jason Statler, accepted the challenge and excelled at the task. Then came the difficult part, the choosing of only about 100 photos from the thousands taken by both the architectural photographer as well as other photographers associated with the Legislative Assembly in the province of Alberta.

Earlier today I introduced a number of people who did work on the book. They were team leader, Rhonda Sorensen; writing and book design, Wolfgang Maul; colour photographs of the building by the architectural photographer, Jason Statler, and Wolfgang Maul as well; editing and production by Rhonda Sorensen, Philip Massolin of the library, Tracey Sales, and Kathy Hnatiuk of House services. We selected 100 photographs from over 1,000 digital photos that were taken with respect to it.

All current and former Members of the Legislative Assembly will receive a copy of this publication. We had 1,000 volumes of the book published for our centennial event. We're in the process of publishing an additional 9,000, so all Albertans and Canadians can view and appreciate this book. The books will be available within six weeks at our gift shop.

I will also be providing to all Members of the Legislative Assembly sufficient copies so that they may distribute them to all of the libraries in their constituencies if they wish to participate. If a member chooses not to participate in the delivery of such at the libraries within their constituencies, then, of course, we will arrange for the distribution. We hope to have this process in place by early May of this year.

The books were published in the province of Alberta, and you will see in the back page of the book the whole production team, the team that worked on it. This is the first time in 26 years that we've had a book done on the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. The people who worked on it, I repeat, volunteered evenings, weekends, and holidays because they believed in the project here in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I'm really proud of them.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Louis Warring
Jan Mitsosiz Lisiecki**

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On that very same note of our celebration of the Alberta Legislature's 100-year anniversary, I must tell you that you have created a wonderful opportunity by allowing our seniors and our youth to compete by way of writing essays on their explanation of what democracy in this province and in this country means to them. Rightfully, Mr. Louis Warring, a gentleman who fought in World War II with the Royal

Canadian Air Force in bomber airplanes, put his life on the line so we could be here to celebrate democracy, which otherwise may not have come about without the efforts of such individuals like him. That effort, as you know, continues throughout the world with our armed forces in combat.

Benefiting from that effort is a young man whose parents, as you mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, saw Alberta during the 1988 Olympics.

Mr. Cao: In Calgary.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Yes, the Olympics were in Calgary.

They fell in love with the scenery, and I'm sure did some research on the province and decided that this was going to be their new, adopted home.

This is a transition from a senior who fought for this province, who fought for democracy, to a young man who now gets to live in Alberta and flourish. Mr. Speaker, I know that Jan Mitsosiz Lisiecki aspires to be a Canadian Prime Minister, and I can tell you that I think he passed the first test because when you put him to the test and asked him to play a little piano concerto without any notes, I think he performed perfectly.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think we owe a note of gratitude to Mr. Louis Warring, who allowed us to be here, allowed young Mr. Jan Mitsosiz Lisiecki to benefit from it, and I think that we should be proud as Albertans to have such individuals among us to celebrate 100 years of the Alberta Legislature with us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Legislative Assembly Centennial Celebration

Mr. McFarland: Thank you. Yesterday, March 15, this Legislative Assembly was the site of a very special, event-filled day to commemorate its 100th anniversary in Alberta. Without knowing all the details, planning, and events that many talented individuals had masterminded over many months, we in this Assembly were treated to a wonderful trip down memory lane. Starting with the well-organized noon registration of 128 former and 83 current members and spouses, this special ceremony heard addresses from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor; one of the longest-serving former MLAs, Mr. Ray Speaker; our Premier; leaders of the opposition parties; and the recognition of four former Speakers.

The day concluded with a first-class time to reminisce, have dinner, hear our current Premier and a former Premier, hear our current Speaker recognize the members and their families who supported them as well as the many staff in this building from years ago to the present day. It was truly a superbly planned, well-timed event. From bagpipers to table officers, the Sergeant-at-Arms, pages and our current security staff, each one contributed to this very special night. As more than one former MLA told me: this really is an historic event, an occasion I'm glad I could come to.

Everyone involved in the production of this once-in-a-century celebration needs to be commended. Mr. Speaker, you demonstrated the attribute for which you are so well known: detail. Although there were only a few unable to be in attendance, I know that they along with all former and current members in this Assembly today along with our families would like to express our sincere gratitude and say thank you to Mr. Speaker. You and your dedicated team of volunteers did a first-class job. [standing ovation]

2:50

The Speaker: Thank you very much. The thanks will be conveyed to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Dr. McNeil, and the

literally dozens of volunteers who worked. I'll be identifying them to you as we go through the remainder of the session this year. Thank you very, very much.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Alberta/Montana Transmission Line

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first sentence, on a topic that is not what I was going to talk about, is to say: yes, thank you, sir; it was a party.

Today there are plans in the works to develop a Montana/Alberta tie-line that will link our electricity distribution system with our neighbours' to the south. The government has refused to provide a cost-benefit analysis detailing the benefit to consumers, us, of the Montana/Alberta tie-line. Why export more electricity from Alberta when the government's own report states that the province is going to require 6,150 more megawatts over the next 20 years?

Southern Albertans who have contacted me have repeatedly posed questions to both the companies involved with this project and the EUB but received unsatisfactory answers. These are legitimate questions from Albertans whose lives will be significantly impacted by this project and still no answers. Now is the time for our provincial government to intervene on behalf of citizens before the National Energy Board.

What impact will these high-powered lines have on Albertans whose property falls only feet from the proposed locations? Many of our concerned constituents have small children and are fearful of the health effects that these lines may have. How will these lines impact the environment surrounding them? Southern Albertans have voiced their concern that the environmental impact of these high-powered lines could have great significance, in particular, on the native grasslands, the birds, the wildlife, and certainly on wetlands.

Albertans value their property and, understandably, do not want to see their property damaged or altered. Southern Albertans have even voiced their concerns regarding the effects that these high-powered lines will have on their communication devices. Working on a farm with small children requires these devices.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Role of Grandparents

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We say a lot about a word by the way we say it. Said in the usual way, "grandparents" is like "half-brother," "mother-in-law," "stepson." These are package phrases. They carry a load of associations, insinuations, stereotypes that we usually take in without thinking. Let's shift the emphasis. If we say "grand parents" in the way First Nations say "grand chief," we get a different take for grandparents are parents of a larger family with a larger field of vision. Regular parents are often preoccupied, focused on paying bills, putting food on the table, reading the report cards, not to mention the challenges of their own careers. They're anxious with the sense that how they do all these things and how the kids turn out is a reflection on them.

Grandparents are able to take in the big picture. Most have nothing to prove. They're able to give children something closer to unconditional love because they're at arm's length, not implicated in a situation, not responsible for the results. Being in that place is a wonderful asset, one that those who are concerned with families need to recognize and treasure.

Grandparents can provide a stabilizing force in the lives of children. In times of family crisis they can be negotiators between parent and child, helping one to understand the other. In a society

with high divorce rates, economic hardship, and drug and alcohol abuse grandparents may be the only source of stability a child can rely on. Grandparents can be a major influence in child development, and they can help families to cope with the challenges of everyday life.

Grandparent/grandchild access is a gift to our society, one to be encouraged unless there is a strong reason to the contrary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Keephills 3 Electricity Generation Plant

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, March 14, TransAlta and EPCOR announced an exciting project, the expansion of the Keephills power plant. They are planning to construct a 450-megawatt, \$750 million addition to this coal-fired generating site. Keephills 3 should be in commercial operation by 2011 and will supply Albertans with additional environmentally friendly coal-fired generation while ensuring that Albertans continue to receive low-cost, coal-fuelled electrical energy, energy that is part of the Alberta advantage.

The coal in the Keephills area is classified as subbituminous class C and is specially suited for power generation. As a fuel it is at least 10 times more economical to use for generation than natural gas. I believe our recent marginal electrical cost increases can be attributed to the fact that in the last five years the majority of generation built in Alberta has been gas fired. The land that this coal is extracted from is reclaimed to a state that is at least as or more productive than it was prior to mining.

Present technology removes over 99 per cent of particulate matter from stack emissions, and this new technology will greatly reduce NO_x, SO_x, and CO₂ emissions. This new unit will meet the new mercury reduction guidelines and will be the most environmentally efficient plant operating in our province and probably in North America.

Mr. Speaker, this planned addition is great news for the economic growth in my constituency, and when built, it will be great news for power consumers in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Collective Bargaining in Alberta

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we observed the 100th anniversary of democracy in this province, yet every day glaring problems with our democratic institutions become increasingly obvious. One of the most important rights that working people have in a functioning democracy is the right to come together and bargain collectively for fair wages and working conditions.

For this government it isn't enough to maintain the worst labour laws in the country; this government also likes to take sides. When UFCW workers went on strike for fair wages in Brooks, this government did everything they could to support the rabidly antiunion Tyson Foods.

Last May this government took sides again by granting CNRL's Horizon project a special designation under division 8 of the labour code. This designation allowed CNRL to negotiate a weak agreement with a company-friendly union, CLAC, and bypass democratically determined agreements with legitimate building trade unions. The division 8 designation is part of what the labour movement calls a dangerous one-two punch aimed at Alberta workers.

Recently the Conservatives got into bed with the Liberal federal government to allow big oil interests like CNRL to fast-track foreign workers into the oil sands. Here's the bottom line: CNRL works out

a low-wage deal with CLAC under division 8; if Alberta workers won't work under this bogus contract, they'll import workers who will. All this has been perpetrated in the name of labour peace. CNRL and CLAC brag about getting work done, negotiating deals, and building the province. They don't talk about the real agenda to let big oil keep raking in the money, sending sizable amounts to the Conservative election accounts, while wages to the labour rights are rolled back.

Mr. Speaker, that is not my vision of democracy.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition on behalf of 20 Albertans. This petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to establish public auto insurance as proposed in 'People Before Profits' from the Alberta Liberal Caucus."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 1,193 residents of Alberta petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to "recognize the financial burden borne by postsecondary students in this province, and to take action by implementing a significant rollback of tuition fees."

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview I would like to present a petition signed by him and sent to him from a number of people, 1,175 to be exact, who are asking that the government "recognize the financial burden borne by postsecondary students" and "take action by implementing a significant rollback of tuition fees."

Thank you.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 1 through 19.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Bill 23

Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, I beg leave to introduce Bill 23, the Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006.

The proposed amendments will make the Provincial Parks Act easier to administer and provide more effective ways to preserve the province's natural heritage. They are largely administrative in nature.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Bill 206

Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and beg leave to introduce Bill 206, the Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act, for first reading.

I believe that there is a need to encourage parents and guardians who are separated or divorced to have access to their children, and this bill promotes access exchange in a positive environment by designating child-centred facilities in Alberta for this purpose.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the Teaching Profession Act I am pleased to table in this Assembly five copies of the annual report received from the Alberta Teachers' Association for the year 2004.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table six letters and the appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for future daycare. The letters are signed by Paulette Calvert,* Juana Rodriguez, Vesna Peric, Teresa Czapiga, Helene Milloy, and another doctor's signature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to table six letters and appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. These letters are from Ruby Rosales, Lori Ann Sheplaw, Heather Evans, Lori Dickson, Patricia Haynes, and Andrea Mercredi.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today, the first of which is from a constituent of mine, Gordon Inglis, who has copied me on a letter he sent to the health minister. He asked her: "Please keep the Public Health Care System. Do not create a two tier system. Do not violate the Canada Health Act."

The second, also a letter regarding the health care system, is from Martha Dobbin. She says that her "experiences with American two-tiered health care system are in sharp contrast" to the positive experiences she's had with the Canadian system.

The third letter, copied to myself, was sent to the Premier. The writer, Tonya Malo, urges the Premier to abandon the "current plans to reform health care."

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Mr. Speaker, I also have six subsequent letters regarding the provincial government's involvement in a national daycare program, and these letters are from Lisa Whelan, Brenda McNeil, Jan MacGregor, Annaleta Kikins,* Gloria Rurka, and R. Bernard.*

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and to table six letters and the appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters I am tabling today are from Kerri Desnoyers, Judy Payou, Norm Desnoyers, Lori Engman, James Grant,* and Connie Bowie. These letters all are expressing concern over the cancellation of the national child care agreement.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a final report, Summary of Proceedings, January 28, 2006, for the Community Workshop Special Education Review from the parent advisory council, Academy at King Edward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. The first is from Cheryl Senger, who is concerned that if people who are single parents lose their subsidy programs for daycare and after school care, they won't be able to afford to work because most of them make so little money.

I also have tablings from Ted Woynillowicz around health care. His point is that the doctors will "cherry-pick for their private practice." Britain tried this, and it didn't work.

Also from Chris O'Brien, making the point that there's "no justifiable logic" to the Premier's "persistent and perplexing efforts to reform our public health care system."

From James Johnson, noting that the health framework is "coy when it comes to defining what is and what isn't 'medically necessary but not an emergency', although rhetoric and history have hinted this may include hip and knee replacement," et cetera.

From Colleen Mead, noting that "Britain and Australia are now re-investing in public health care and reducing the role" of private health care.

Finally, from Virginia Stephen, who sees "nothing in the 'values' expressed that could not be addressed" within a fully funded public health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table six letters and appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters I am tabling today are from Carmen Patterson, Jamie Mayes, Shannon Mitchell, Sherman Louis, Angelina Daniel, and Sasha Kebuson.*

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table this afternoon. The first one is a backgrounder on the Horizon project, produced by the Alberta Federation of Labour. It argues that

government is giving CNRL special privileges that undermine negotiations with legitimate trade unions.

I also have a letter from Tammy Winder, who is visiting us today. Mrs. Winder's daughter is a vibrant young woman with a developmental disability and juvenile diabetes. She has not received proper support to manage her diabetes. When Mrs. Winder looked into moving her daughter, she was told that cuts to PDD meant funding would not follow.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table a number of letters from constituents from across Alberta who are concerned parents of children with special needs. They're concerned about the level of funding in Alberta. The letters are from Marilyn Cramer, Wendy King, Domenic Cusanelli and Angela Iavasile, Traci Dunlop, Lori Fankhanel, Kim and Dave Kinders, Garnet Boutette, Shirley and Dave Williams, Terry Appleton, Holly and Rob Brown, Gwynne Holder, Nicola Quilliam, Sarah Gilroyed, Deborah Paquette, Sandra Pollard, Shelley Broadhurst, Cathie Sarafinchan, Carol Quilliam, and Carol Chabot.

Thank you.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. According to Standing Order 7(5), I would request that the Government House Leader share with us the business for the week commencing March 20.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'll be happy to provide that information. On Monday, March 20, in the afternoon we will of course deal with private members' business and written questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Then we will deal with motions for returns numbered 1 through 19. Depending on how time goes here, I expect we will deal with second reading of Bill 205, the Continuing Care Standards Act. On Monday evening we'll deal with some government motions, which will include the spring and Easter recesses and also the spring sitting adjournment. Later that evening we hope, at least, to deal with third reading on Bill 1 and Bill 3. Also, we would hope to deal with bills 10, 13, and 16 at second reading.

3:10

On Tuesday afternoon we should be able to be in Committee of the Whole and deal with bills 18, 17, and 10. On the Tuesday evening we hope to be in Committee of the Whole, dealing with bills 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11.

On Wednesday, March 22, in the afternoon I think it's important to note that immediately following question period, at whatever time it ends, the House will recess so that we can get ready for the Budget Address at 3:30 p.m. In the evening I expect we will deal with the government motion that pertains to Standing Orders of the House.

On Thursday afternoon I anticipate that we will be able to receive Royal Assent, Mr. Speaker, for Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, and perhaps other bills as available. At the same time under Government Motions we would be pleased to hear the opposition leader's responses to the budget.

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 1

Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act

The Chair: Anyone wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak to the amendment. Just to refresh members' memories, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview moved an amendment to Bill 1, that the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act be amended in section 3. Basically, the key point is 2.1, that "The Minister of Finance shall not invest the Fund or any portion of the Fund in securities of companies in the tobacco industry."

This, in our view, is very fitting given a couple of facts. First of all, this is a bill that deals with cancer prevention, and one of the leading causes of cancer, the cause that is probably best researched and best documented as a direct cause of lung and other cancers, is the use of tobacco. So I think that it would be not only fitting if this amendment were passed but extraordinarily ironic if it were not because the government does have a history of allowing these investments in tobacco companies.

For example, if you look at the heritage savings trust fund 2005 annual report in schedule 12, there's a schedule of the 10 largest issues based on fair value. Japan Tobacco is the eighth largest investment in that schedule, and the fair value of the stock held in the heritage trust fund in Japan Tobacco Inc. is \$4,785,000. So it's clear that the government has not taken steps, at least with respect to the heritage trust fund, to ensure that this money is not invested in tobacco companies.

Mr. Chairman, we have a bill, which I think is a fine bill, called the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, which is attempting to make investments in order to conduct research with respect to preventing cancer. I think it would be a shame – in fact, I think it would be completely unacceptable if money that the government put into this fund for that purpose was actually invested in corporations which produce products that are directly linked to the causing of cancer, so I am ever hopeful that the government will accept this amendment by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. We need to put our mouth where our money is in this case. That means making sure that the public money that's invested in a fund for cancer research in fact be money that will work in a way that will not be contradicting the intentions for which it was invested in the first place.

It's very important that all members of the House support this amendment. I think it signals that not only are we prepared to put some money in, not only are we prepared to put our voice in the fight against cancer, but we're also willing to make decisions, hard decisions, in a practical way that lead towards the prevention of cancer and which further the fight and further the principles that are enunciated in Bill 1, which is, as I said, an excellent bill and something we'd like to support. Certainly, this amendment will make the bill much more consistent with its stated purpose, and we believe that it should be supported.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Before we recognize the next speaker, might we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests
(reversion)**

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very, very special group of individuals who have been working with me and, in fact, advising me regarding the debate on this particular Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. They are from a school in my constituency, Oliver school, and all enrolled in a special program called the Nellie McClung school for girls. I would like them to please rise as I call their names. The two instructors that are with them today are Mrs. Heather Jubenvill and Mrs. Elizabeth Fraser. Also with them are the students also known as the BLAST girls: Taylor Pinch, Kelsey Roehler, Haylee Fortin, Emily Dutton, Katherine Shimazaki, Tsue Anderson, and Allisha Rivera. With them is my constituency manager, Keltie Watson. Please give them a warm welcome to the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Bill 1

Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act

(continued)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you. I'd like to start off by saying that I support the concept of this amendment. I am concerned at the broadness of it, though, that if a fund manager were to purchase an index stock, they would be in violation of something here. I would be much more comfortable if this amendment could be altered just slightly to say direct investment. It's just my view on it, but I concur with what the hon. member is trying to accomplish. I think that if we could look at it from the point of view of it being a direct investment, I would have absolutely no problem supporting it on that basis.

3:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I'd just like to rise briefly in support of this amendment from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. You know, ethical investing should be a matter of course for any government, and I was hoping that that was the case with the current government. From what I heard just a few moments ago from the leader of the third party, that may not entirely be the case, so I think it's important that we do have an amendment in this bill ensuring that no money at all is put into the tobacco industry. It certainly would be hypocritical, to put it mildly, for a cancer prevention legacy to be connected in any way, shape, or form to one of the leading causes of preventable cancer in the world.

I don't know what the government's stand is on this amendment right now, but I certainly hope they support it. It's straightforward. I understand some of the points you made, but very clearly some companies are tobacco companies. It says: do not invest in them. I think it's very clear. I don't know if we really need another amendment to it. Perhaps he may want to yet, but in the meantime, until it is amended, I think this is certainly a worthwhile amendment, and I support it wholeheartedly.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to be on the record. My comments are very similar to those that have been articulated by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and as one of the individuals in this Assembly that sits on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, I think it is a good start towards perhaps developing a comprehensive policy towards ethical investing in that fund. I certainly hope that that fund grows significantly larger. When we look at this bill and this amendment that is proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I would urge all members of this Assembly to support this amendment, and the reasons were articulated, I thought, very well by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Please support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Listening to the debate and following on the heels of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar with regard to the support of this amendment, I too would like to support this amendment. However, I also have concerns, as were expressed by my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere, about potentially having the phraseology changed so that it was direct investment in those types of companies. The investment world as we know it today sometimes has groups of investments, blocks of investments. Sometimes it's a fund of sorts. Sometimes it could be a very large investment. We're talking about a very large fund here, which I think we can separate out, and we can make some strategic changes to the way that we do our investments. Certainly, when you're setting up something that is related to cancer and tobacco, you want to have that separation because it just makes sense to do so.

So I would also like to indicate my support if we could get the changes to the wording so that it really did narrow it down and thereby not hinder any earning potential, which would have the benefit of earning more dollars for cancer research and for the cancer issues. I don't want to limit it so much so that we limit the earning potential of the fund. Although I do agree with the amendment and the intention of the amendment, I just want to make sure that we're not going to do something that would jeopardize the long-term viability of the fund.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to speak in support of this amendment. I know that there's been some concern expressed by a number of members this afternoon about perhaps being a little more specific as to identifying direct investment, and I understand, in fact, that there may be some work being done as I speak towards a subamendment. I'm hopeful that that will be coming forward, and perhaps we can have the support of the House on the amended amendment because this is really important.

I'd like to remind the House that last year during question period I asked a question of the Minister of Finance on this particular issue, that being the investment of funds from the heritage savings trust fund in tobacco companies. I was very disappointed, unfortunately, in the answer that I received from the Finance minister. What I was told at that time was that the primary, overriding concern when it

came to investing funds from the heritage savings trust fund was return on investment. That is a concern for me, and I think it should be a concern for all Albertans, not simply when it comes to the funds invested from this act but, in fact, as my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned, in general the funds that are invested from the heritage savings trust fund.

If return on investment is the overarching criterion that we look at when we decide how to invest those funds, we could be investing in all sorts of things, whether it be tobacco companies – it might be legalized brothels. It could be weapons of mass destruction. Let your mind wander. It could go on and on. [interjections] We could be investing in casinos, as my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark said, and Edmonton-Gold Bar suggests perhaps even oil companies.

To get back to the particular amendment, Mr. Chairman, I think that given the prevalence of cancer, given the overarching support from all sides of the House for Bill 1, and given the recognition, I think, in general in society today of the negative effects of tobacco, it simply would be wrong to take money from this fund and invest it in tobacco companies. So I wholeheartedly support the amendment, and I'm hopeful that we'll see a subamendment that will make the amendment a little more palatable to all members of the House so that we can make this very important change to Bill 1 and thereby ensure that it gets the full support of all the members of this House.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise with anticipation on the amendment to Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. We certainly have been very pleased to see the construction and development of this bill over these past weeks and months. I think that the bill's best quality, certainly, is that it provides some sense of hope for people not just who have been afflicted by cancer and looking for treatment but otherwise looking to prevention and lifestyle and societal changes that would reduce the incidence of cancer in our society in general.

It's an unfortunate side effect of the industrialization of North America and specifically here in Alberta that our cancer rates are rising. One of the most interesting aspects of that is, of course, the accumulated effects of carcinogens in our atmosphere and in our water and in our land. As we move along from 1930 to 1940 and so on and so on, each layer of increased industrialization adds another layer of long-term carcinogenic components to our environment. So we have to be aware of that. Certainly, mortality is a fact for all of us, but there is a way to reduce our cancer rates considerably by looking at the prevention side as opposed to the treatment side.

Our amendment specifically is looking at one obvious carcinogenic element that is in our society and identifying it as such and not investing in the promotion of the use of that carcinogenic material in the future so that we might reduce the cancer rate. It would be removing an obvious irony in this bill that has been pointed out by a number of people around this House and in the media as well that, of course, if we are investing in preventing cancer in our society, then certainly we must steer away from those parts of our behaviour and processes in our economy that, in fact, do promote cancer. To not be investing in the tobacco industry I recognize is a little bit delicate. An hon. member from across the way mentioned about the enormity of funds and how mutual funds are lumped and grouped together, but I think that we might be able to find a way around that.

3:30

Certainly, the history of ethical investment portfolios is quite advanced in our society. They've been around for more than 30

years in the investment community. It's becoming a very sophisticated way to avoid certain harmful investments. You know, tobacco has been identified as one of the very first places for ethical investment to not go. So I'm sure that there would be some sophisticated advice around that we could access so that the provincial government in fact is not investing in tobacco products.

It's interesting because, of course, we are assisting the provincial Cancer Board here, which already has a set of ethical investment precepts. By subsuming that somehow or stepping in the way of their ethical investment guidelines by the absence of ethical guidelines in our larger Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, it's again an irony that we would be best to avoid here in building this bill.

I'm certainly glad to see the spirit of co-operation and, perhaps, compromise abuzz around the room as I speak, and I hope that all members might consider some compromise here that will be delivered to you shortly.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to my hon. colleague across the way for agreeing to accept a minor amendment to this. It would be a subamendment that would read this way: "The Minister of Finance shall not make any direct investment of the Fund or any portion of the Fund in securities of companies in the tobacco industry." On that basis I am confident that my caucus will also support this change.

The Chair: So you're moving a subamendment?

Ms Haley: Yes, I am.

The Chair: We'll call this subamendment SA1. Does everyone have it circulated to them? Anyone wish to speak on the subamendment? The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that this compromise really shows how this House can work. In celebrating the hundred years of democracy of Alberta, seeing the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere work together so closely to get this done, I'm really proud. I'm sure that the Speaker a hundred years from today will say that on this date, this is what happened. Congratulations.

Mr. Martin: Maybe we can get a lot of bills changed here in the future, Mr. Chairman.

I certainly support the subamendment. Having been in the business at one time of selling mutual funds, I understand some of the concerns. At least this is clear. I would hope it will still send the message to the fund managers that even if they can find out down the way about some of these funds, they shouldn't be doing it. So it sends a precaution. It makes it clear that Japan Tobacco, for instance, should not be part of this particular fund. We will certainly support it on this side of the House.

Thank you.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, I want to thank all the hon. members for consideration of our subamendment. Certainly, our investment management group do their very best to manage our funds in the way that can bring the best return to support the good work that our endowments and other funds that they manage can carry out.

This will certainly be of great assistance. As the hon. members know, quite often you buy a composite of a particular fund. This, I

think, suggests that we do not want to invest in tobacco funds, but a composite may carry a very small portion. I think that would be quite – "unavoidable" is a good word – inadvertent. You would not want to take away from the value of this great legacy endowment by an inadvertent investment. So I appreciate all hon. members' input into this and support for this.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on subamendment SA1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 carried]

The Chair: On amendment A1 as amended, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 as amended carried]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. We have now voted on the amendment and are continuing in Committee of the Whole?

An Hon. Member: Right.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I really welcome this opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I had introduced a group of students from the Nellie McClung school, which is housed in the Oliver school in my constituency. The material I'm about to present has been researched and brought forward by these young women, and I wanted them in the gallery to see what happens when you become an advocate for positive change and work the process through to bring it to the floor of this Assembly. So I really welcome the opportunity to do this, and thank you for co-operating with me.

In Bill 1 we are attempting to set up three purposes with the bill around a cancer legacy. That is to be able to fund research, testing and screening is the second portion, and the third portion is prevention. I think that we could all agree that a major part of prevention is getting people to quit smoking or, better yet, getting them to never start in the first place. I'll tell that you as someone who started smoking in grade 6 and smoked for 32 years, it is a very, very difficult thing to withstand the marketing that constantly comes at you. Once you're addicted, you're addicted. This is a stronger addiction than heroin, and it's very difficult to quit once you start. You need a lot of support.

I would say that the group that is most vulnerable to targeted marketing is teens. Although tobacco companies say that they don't target teens, yes, they do. We've been quite successful through a number of initiatives, some of them government generated, some of them generated by various agencies in the community, in getting smoking rates to decrease; in other words, getting people to quit and, as part of that, not having people start, except that just recently the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey showed us that, in fact, for current smokers aged 15 to 19 – and these are Alberta statistics – that number started to go up in the 2005 survey. It was decreasing, and it has started to increase. That increase represents 12,400 new teen smokers – new teen smokers – people we didn't have smoking before.

There is a prevention method available that we think is quite successful. Last Friday I was invited to attend Oliver school for a

presentation. As I said before, Oliver is home to the Nellie McClung school for girls grades 7 to 9, and that is a girls-only school. They had a presentation that was put together by a group that I think is self-titled the BLAST group. I introduced them earlier. That includes their instructor, Mrs. Jubenvill. Taylor, Kelsey, Haylee, Emily, Katherine, Tsue, Jessica, and Allisha were the members of the group.

3:40

What they would like to do is get power walls banned. Now, for those of you who are not familiar with power walls, in fact you are familiar with power walls. You may just not know that that's what they're called. Especially in convenience stores, when you go to the checkout, you look behind the cashier and what you see is a wall of little cigarette packages. It's a whole wall. It usually goes from about waist level right up over the six-foot level. So when you look at the clerk, as you're talking to them and paying, all you can see are these cigarette packages. It usually fills up the whole space. That's the power wall that I'm talking about. They're point of sale tobacco displays that are placed at or near the checkout counter in many retail stores and particularly in convenience stores, like Mac's or 7-Elevens. When you look at who is frequenting those convenience stores, by far and away the most frequent visitors are people in that teen smoking group that I was talking about, the 15 to 19.

These power walls are paid advertisements for the tobacco industry. They spend a lot of money doing this. They're serious about it. In 2004 the industry paid retailers across Canada \$95 million for these power walls.

What's really insidious about this is that the power walls are deliberately displaying tobacco products in close proximity to products that you would expect teenagers to buy, like gum and chocolate bars, candy. They're entirely entitled to buy that, and you would expect most teenagers to be in a store at the counter buying gum and chocolate bars. What goes just knitted with that are these power walls. So it's saying over and over and over again: candy, gum, okay; tobacco . . . okay. So it's a very effective tobacco marketing tool. That's the description of what the power walls are.

What the Nellie girls did, if I may call them that, this BLAST group, is a project on smoking and nicotine, and it had a number of components. They did the research on what was out there, they did site visits to test some things out and see whether they could get retailers to sell them tobacco products, they created a video, they organized the presentation that happened on March 10, and they did a postcard campaign.

When they did the research, they found that a number of other provinces have passed legislation specifically banning power walls. That includes Saskatchewan, who was I think the first jurisdiction to specifically prohibit the display of tobacco products in retail outlets. In fact, one of the students, Katherine, provided me with a copy of the Saskatchewan legislation, and I will table that at the conclusion of my debate. So we've got Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nunavut, Quebec, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island. All passed legislation that in one way or another is talking about prohibiting these power walls. The newest one was in fact the Northwest Territories. On March 2, two weeks ago today actually, I think, the Northwest Territories passed the Tobacco Control Act through final reading and Royal Assent. It includes prohibiting the visible display of tobacco products at the point of purchase, the very power walls we're talking about.

They did the research on what was already out there and who was already involved in this kind of thing. They did a really cool video in which they had, like, a little spy camera in a bag, and they went into a number of stores and did a couple of things. They tried to purchase cigarettes and were refused outright from buying the

cigarettes. But in a couple of places – yeah, I'm quoting here: "Though not part of the final documentary at one point we asked to buy a package of cigarettes for our 'Mom' and were told if we were to come back with our Mother's ID we could purchase a package." So, gee, that'd be hard. Just to have to nip that driver's licence out of mum's purse, down to the convenience store, and you've got a pack of cigarettes, which is a little alarming. I mean, highly illegal, but very alarming that they managed to do that. And they didn't even try hard. They had their little spy camera, and they just walked in there and did this stuff. Right?

The purpose of the video was around buying other substances that were for sale in these locations that contained the same product or similar products. Nicotine is what I'm talking about. Their point is that there are no age restrictions on the patch. There are age restrictions on purchasing cigarettes but no age restrictions on purchasing the patch. One of them had heard about inmates in prisons taking the patch and soaking it and getting the nicotine out of it and then rolling up, I think, tissue paper and smoking that. That's how they were getting the nicotine into their systems in the correction facilities. They thought: "Well, if that's a way to get nicotine, maybe we could get that as teenagers. Let's try it." So they went into the store.

They note that, depending on which type you buy, the levels of nicotine in the patches is still very high. That makes sense. You get somebody like me that smoked for 30 years, you're going to have to get some serious drugs at work to help me move off and break that addiction. So very high levels of nicotine. I mean, I smoked more than a pack of cigarettes a day. If you're going to try and wean me off that drug, you're going to have to start with a fairly high level of nicotine. That's what they were trying to make the point about, that they were able to purchase these nicotine patches and walk out. They could access the actual drug that we're all trying to stay away from and that really has an addictive component.

I believe, if I'm remembering this right, they actually were able to get clerks to agree to sell them the patches, of course, again for their mom. But it was quite alarming to them and, I think, really opened their eyes to both how loose the monitoring is in these stores but also that the commitment is not really strong from everybody out there to be very careful about the marketing of these products and the availability of the products.

The other thing the BLAST team did was that they organized the presentation. They had a really hot young man that came in, which didn't hurt, and talk to the assembled classes.

Mr. MacDonald: Tell us more about this man. How young was he?

Ms Blakeman: I don't know how young he was. But, yeah, he was very nice looking, and that didn't hurt. He was a young guy, so he was speaking directly to them and talking about the power walls.

Mr. MacDonald: Not to you. To them.

Ms Blakeman: No, not to me. Oh, man. Some days.

He was talking about having worked on the legislation for the power walls in Saskatchewan, a very effective presentation. It was very clever of the BLAST girls to work with ASH, actually, to bring this fellow in because I think he was quite effective in getting the message across with that particular group. So talk about marketing.

One of the things that they showed was a video that came out of Ontario. This is what really grabbed me because this video interviewed 160 teenagers in Ontario, none of whom smoked. They did things like ask them, you know: what colour is a pack of Du Maurier cigarettes? What colour is Player's?

An Hon. Member: Red.

Ms Blakeman: Exactly. I'm getting answers from across the floor.

What's alarming about this is that they were able to answer all the questions correctly, and how did they know that? None of these teenagers smoked. How did they know that Du Maurier was a red package? Well, because every time they went to buy a pack of gum, every time they went to buy a Kit Kat chocolate bar or an Oh Henry, they were looking at them because they were part of the power wall behind the clerk at the point of purchase when you went to pay for your gum. So they knew what all the names of the major cigarette brands were. They knew the colour and what the package looked like.

The young fellow was saying that one of the reasons that he started smoking a particular brand was because his favourite was red, so he chose the red brand of cigarette. I mean, there are no marketing mistakes here, Mr. Chairman. This is quite deliberate on the part of tobacco companies. They pay a lot of money to figure this stuff out, and it's very effective. It works.

3:50

Here we have a whole group of teenagers who know a lot about brand names and colours of cigarettes. They were asked: what would you suggest? What do you think would make a difference here? They were the ones that said: "Take the power walls away. We don't want and need to see those cigarettes when we go to buy gum or a chocolate bar or a soda pop or whatever. We don't need to see that stuff." Really, for the people that smoke, they know it already, and they don't need to see it. The whole purpose of it being there is to get people who don't smoke to start smoking. Right?

They were suggesting that these power walls either be covered up or entirely moved away, and I think they're right. That's exactly what the BLAST girls are trying to do. They are trying to get this Assembly here, this government to understand that there is no reason except pure marketing to have those power walls in place, and they are asking that those power walls either be covered up or the merchandise be moved under the counter.

In following through on that, they did a postcard campaign, which they either have or they will be sending to the minister of health. It says: Powerwalls Target Youth – Ban Tobacco Retail Displays. It's a great picture of a little tiny head of a kid. His head is just barely clearing the checkout counter at a convenience store, and his whole view is filled with the power wall of cigarette packs. It's an excellent visual. This is the postcard that they have organized. They got it printed up and everything, and they've organized to send it to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Everybody who was at that presentation on Friday signed up for it, so they really did a lot of work on this campaign.

That's a wonderful example of a follow-through of public advocacy. These young women were really caught by something. They felt it was wrong. They felt it should be changed. They went out, and they did the research to make sure that they knew what they were talking about. They advocated amongst their friends and colleagues. They've taken it a further step with the postcards to the minister. They have briefed me as their elected representative to come before you in the Assembly while we're in Committee of the Whole and ask you to consider this.

Mr. Backs: They should be thanked for that.

Ms Blakeman: They should be thanked for their work.

I'm asking on behalf of the BLAST girls from the Oliver Nellie McClung school and in recognition of that prevention component of

Bill 1, the cancer legacy bill: we want to ask the government to bring forward legislation to ban power walls.

I think it's important that we do thank Taylor, Kelsey, Haylee, Emily, Katherine, Tsue, Jessica, and Allisha. They did all the work that you need to do to change public policy, and I think we should reward them for their effort by taking what they did seriously. They've done a good thing here. I know that the BLAST girls are very happy to meet with the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I'm sure we can organize that if she's got time. The truth is that they've done all the work they need to do to make this happen.

At this point I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of an ad that's been created by Action on Smoking and Health, Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta, and Unite against Tobacco: The Place We're Most Exposed to Smoking Is Indoors. It shows the kid in front of the power wall. I'll table that, and, as promised, I would like to table the Tobacco Control Act, which is the Saskatchewan legislation. It's in section 2 that they get quite specific. So here is a sample for the government to look to and learn by. I'll pass that on as well in my tablings.

So thank you very much for the opportunity to get involved with a little citizens' action here today and work with students from my constituency, bring it forward to the Assembly. I know that many of you in here were paying attention, and I appreciate that. We're certainly supportive here on the opposition side to this legislation. It would be lovely to see the government be able to carry through on it. I look forward to seeing one of the government members before the end of the spring session bring forward some legislation to ban power walls.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today in Committee of the Whole. I really appreciate it, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the bill as amended.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 1 as amended. It makes it a lot easier for all of us now to enthusiastically support Bill 1 with this very important amendment which the House has just voted on and voted unanimously, for a change. This is a very good omen. Without sounding Pollyannish about it, I hope that this spirit of co-operation flourishes in this House as we step into the second century of the history of this Legislature.

It is important that pieces of legislation that are vital to the health of us as Albertans and as individuals, vital to the health of our communities and of the province, health being used in the broadest sense of the meaning of the term, receive careful debate, intense debate, engaging debate across all sides of the House and that we, in the spirit of compromise and trying to seek to vote on the best possible legislation that we can agree on, will continue to negotiate on important pieces of legislation into this session and beyond as Albertans expect it.

With respect to what's happened here with respect to the acceptance of this amendment by this House, I'm heartened, and I know that my constituents of Edmonton-Strathcona would be very heartened, to notice that it is possible once in a while in this House for us to talk across this very wide space that separates us, the two sides of the House, and listen to each other and come to agreements that make sense, that appeal to the common objectives that Albertans expect this House to pursue, that serve the public interest, and that are to the benefit of all Albertans. So I'm very pleased about the passage of this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to make a quick note of an important word in the title of the bill, "prevention." I think we need to move

in a determined way towards prevention of disease across the spectrum, and let's start with cancer. This bill is titled Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. It is designed to prevent the spread of cancer, to reduce the incidence of cancer through research, through education, through public policy development, and through what's called social marketing initiatives. This bill will establish a fund called the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund, from which monies can be allocated to support these activities of policy development or research, education, et cetera. That's all very good.

I notice that in section 6 of the bill under the payments from the fund, section 6(4) says, "The Minister may impose terms and conditions on the making of grants, including conditions that the money be granted only to match funds provided by others." It doesn't say that that's the only concern that the minister will have. The minister can impose conditions for other reasons as well.

4:00

I want to make sure that I'm on record speaking on behalf of the NDP caucus here. Research on tobacco use and diseases associated with tobacco use is sometimes funded by the very companies that produce the product to sell. Certainly, the tobacco companies are very strong and powerful corporate players, and they often want to promote research at the same time that the consumption of the product that they produce promotes the spread of cancer. So I hope that the minister would impose conditions, including that research the minister comes to know is funded by tobacco companies themselves will not qualify for drawing on the fund, for matching funds from this fund. I think it would be totally contradictory to the spirit and the purpose of the fund for such decisions to happen, where tobacco company funded research is also funded from this research.

I'm hoping that this can be either dealt with in the regulations or, at least, the minister will agree with what I'm saying, that the spirit of this bill now and the consensus around this House with respect to what this bill is about demand that there be a clear separation, that the research, education, and other projects that this fund will be used to fund will be stand alone, independent at least of the kind of research that tobacco companies may also be interested in funding.

We know that drug companies, tobacco companies have their own set of conditionalities for the recipients of their research funds. The case of Professor Dr. Nancy Olivieri at the University of Toronto is the most recent case in Canada that comes to mind, where she was asked to suppress the findings of drug trial results because the company felt that publishing those results in a publicly accessible outlet would jeopardize the commercial interests of the company. The results of the research happened to be negative with respect to the use of the drug and the side effects of the drug. Dr. Olivieri came under enormous pressure both from the university administration and from the companies because as a scientist she thought that her first obligation was to the public interest and to maintaining the integrity of the research enterprise that she was so proud to have been undertaking for a very long time.

There are conflicts between the interests of companies that fund certain kinds of research and the kinds of interests that this bill, hopefully, will promote. I'm very, very supportive of the bill. I just want to make sure that the Minister of Finance takes into account these conflicts of interest and contradictions and says very clearly and firmly that this fund will be available to those research projects and those other education projects which don't receive funding from corporate interests which have an interest in promoting the use of drugs.

Mr. Chairman, this weed called tobacco is really a highly carcinogenic weed. We know this, and its use should be discouraged

as much as it can be discouraged through public policy, through education, through community-based initiatives. We need to proceed with legislation such as exists in our neighbouring province to the east: the Tobacco Control Act. I know that the government of B.C. tried several times to make illegal the advertising of tobacco use by tobacco companies, and it ran into some difficulties at the Supreme Court level. Perhaps the Saskatchewan province's act on controlling tobacco use would serve as a better model to proceed with legislation in this province. I hope that in the wake of the passage of this bill in this House the government will take the initiative to bring forward another piece of legislation which will reinforce both the purposes, the goals, and the spirit of this act so that this huge amount of money, money Albertans are putting into this act, is not indirectly lost because we have failed to act on bringing forward legislation that will discourage both the marketing of tobacco and its use.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 1 in committee. When we look at cancer rates across this province and across this country, this legislation is certainly needed. We have to listen to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona when he reminds us that this bill is the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, and prevention is certainly, I would agree, the key word here.

When we look at some of the past actions of this government, we see that this legislation is certainly refreshing. What I mean by past actions, Mr. Chairman, is that it's not that long ago, in the last six years, that there was a lack of radiation therapists in this province, and the few that we were training were leaving the province, being recruited to work elsewhere. It got to the point where there were a significant number of these skilled professionals recruited from Australia. These individuals settled in Calgary, and they were coming up here on a daily basis. They were flown up to Edmonton to work here at the Cross Cancer Institute to reduce the significant backlog that was going on there.

I read in here, Mr. Chairman, that the purpose of this act is "to support and encourage cancer prevention initiatives, including research, education, public policy development and social marketing initiatives and, without restricting the generality of the foregoing . . ." I'm certainly pleased to read that, and I encourage the government to be mindful of what happened when we had some significant lists, some lengthy lists of individuals waiting for cancer treatment. To be diagnosed with that disease is dreadful, is horrifying, and then to know that you have to wait for some time to receive treatment: I can't imagine what that's like. That's why I would expect everyone here to support this initiative.

Mr. Chairman, we look at our society and the 10 most common environmental toxins. We have PCBs. We have pesticides. We have mould and other fungal toxins. We have asbestos. We have dioxins. We have volatile organic compounds, or VOCs. We have chloroform. We have chlorine. We have heavy metals like arsenic, mercury, lead, aluminum, cadmium. In question period earlier the hon. Member for Stony Plain was talking about another coal-fired generator going in around Lake Wabamun. We look at the effect, for instance, that that coal-fired plant will have on the local environment.

4:10

I think that we should go one step further with this bill and have a look at some of the policy positions that were developed in this

book, Mr. Chairman: *Creating a Healthy Future*. This is the very book that was tossed. This is the very one that was tossed by the Premier on March 1, 2006, in this Legislative Assembly. This is the one. I think it is an historical document. Many people in the province have already signed this because they agree with me that this is a piece of Alberta history. I would like to toss around some of the ideas that are presented in this book. Certainly, on that day I was surprised to see the page startled, and I was surprised to see the government whip was startled. It was amazing to see the reaction on the face of the government whip. But I'm getting off topic here, and I'm being encouraged by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

I would like to say this. We look at the environmental consequences at a site such as the one that was described by the hon. Member for Stony Plain, where we're going to burn coal, we're going to produce electricity, and hopefully we're going to capture and compress the flue gas stream from that facility and use that for enhanced oil recovery, Mr. Chairman. But when we develop these facilities and we look at the production of heavy metals through this flue gas stream, perhaps it's time – and it's not specifically in this legislation. One could look at the regulations and say: well, it could be developed in the regulations, or it could be interpreted through the purpose of this act, Bill 1. Policy position 1 from this document, this famous document, *Creating a Healthy Future*, requires major policies and funding decisions to undergo health impact assessments. The whole idea of an HIA, or health impact assessment, I think, should be incorporated into this bill.

Most of the important factors in determining our health have nothing to do with the health care system, lifestyle choices, or injury prevention, Mr. Chairman. Despite this, most government departments fail to consider the effects that their policies may have on health. Not only government does this; industry does this as well. I've worked in industry all my life, and some of my contemporaries have passed on or are fighting this very disease that we are trying to reduce and eliminate in this bill. Cancer rates are high, and unfortunately with some kinds of cancer they're going even higher. So we have a lot of work to do. If we want to reduce the rate of cancer and reduce expenditures for public health care, health impact assessments are something that I hope we can work into this legislation. A health impact assessment would examine a policy's potential effect on a wide range of factors that influence the health of our society, including, as I said, the environment.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

What effect would a specific proposed policy have on the health of Albertans or, Mr. Chairman, in this case the rate of cancer in the general population? This idea of studying the potential health impacts of various projects would be a step that certainly would be in line with the whole idea of the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I said earlier that this health impact assessment could certainly control health care spending by building a healthier society. I think we all must work together towards this goal, Mr. Chairman. With a health impact assessment this bill, I think, would be improved.

There are other parts of this document that certainly have caught the eye of health care planners, and I would encourage all members of this Assembly and all people, whether they're involved with the Cancer Board or the Minister of Health and Wellness or other departments within government, that are hopefully doing some long-term planning, to take a look at this whole idea of health impact assessments and how they could help us reduce the rates of this dreadful, horrible disease. This disease is certainly affecting many

families, and when we set up this fund, I think we have to remember where we were six years ago and what I talked about when we had a shortage of radiation therapists in this province and what it meant to those who were diagnosed with the disease, with cancer.

So, hopefully, that will not happen again. Hopefully, this money will not have to be used to pay overtime because there is a shortage of these skilled professionals, and hopefully through this bill we will recognize that we always have to be training staff. We have to recognize that some are going to go to British Columbia; some are going to go to Saskatchewan; some may even go to California. I don't think we can point fingers when we're so aggressively recruiting these individuals from places as far away as Australia, but we have to make sure that we have the professionals in place.

After I conclude my remarks, I'm going to have a look at the annual report from the Alberta Cancer Board and just see the staff that are currently there and also, if I can through the financial statements, find out the rate of overtime. Hopefully, it will not be the same as it was three years ago, Mr. Chairman, because that statistic indicates that we still have a problem with recruiting and retaining these professionals.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude my remarks, but hopefully in the future another good, sound idea from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview will be considered by this government, and that is the idea of incorporating into their long-term planning having a health impact assessment. Let's see if we can reduce some of these cancer-causing agents that are, unfortunately, too common in our environment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just some brief comments on Bill 1, the amended Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I, too, would like to add my name to those members who have congratulated the Assembly this afternoon for the tremendous co-operation involved in amending this act. I believe that all Albertans will be better served by that change.

I also want to make a brief comment about the girls from Nellie McClung school that were here this afternoon. In light of the celebration yesterday, Mr. Chairman, of the 100 years of democracy, to see young leaders in our community involved to the extent that these young ladies were for an issue and a cause which they are obviously very passionate about I think is just a wonderful thing, and it speaks very well for the future of this province.

4:20

I'd like to congratulate as well my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre, again, in the spirit of democracy for, I think, setting a tremendous example for all members, showing that, in fact, democracy is a bottom-up process, a two-way street. So it's not just us getting up in this Assembly and talking about our views, but it's actually listening to our constituents and encouraging them to bring their ideas forward and then showing them, literally step-by-step, how the process can work, to the point where these young ladies as part of their CEEDs – CEEDs stands for curriculum enrichment and extension days – actually used one of those days to come to our Assembly today, Mr. Chairman, and see the next evolution of the process that they had worked on. So I just think that's a wonderful initiative by my colleague from Edmonton-Centre.

The other evening, Mr. Chairman, I heard the hon. Minister of Economic Development speak on Bill 1. He spoke very openly and

frankly and passionately about cancer and Bill 1 and the efforts contained in this bill to work towards eventually preventing and eliminating so many different kinds of cancer. I just wanted to thank the minister for the manner in which he addressed that situation. I think we've all heard that when you're dealing with cancer, attitude is everything. Clearly the minister has a great attitude as it relates to his particular struggle and journey with the demon cancer, and it was quite heartwarming to hear his address the other evening.

Mr. Chairman, I'm sure that every MLA who has spoken to Bill 1 has commented on the fact that they have in some way been touched by cancer, and certainly this MLA is no different. I lost grandparents to cancer, I lost a father-in-law to cancer, and I have a wife who is a cancer survivor. So it certainly touches close to all of us.

I support this bill totally, especially now with the amendment that was passed this afternoon. I look forward to seeing, hopefully, the positive impacts that it will have in the future for the citizens of this province.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and look forward to further debate in committee or perhaps in third. I felt it important to get those comments on the record because I think there has been some very good work done in this Assembly today. In the spirit of the 100 years of democracy that we've been celebrating yesterday and today, I think it's especially important to acknowledge that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 1, Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, as amended?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 1 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 2 Drug-endangered Children Act

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Firstly, I'd like to take the opportunity to briefly mention and acknowledge the hard work of one member of my staff, who is seated in the gallery this afternoon. Laura Alcock, the director of our Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, has worked extremely hard on this particular piece of legislation.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to take the opportunity to address some of the questions asked during second reading. I was asked: why don't we just amend the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act? We've heard from stakeholders all over this province that a smaller, stand-alone piece of legislation would be more effective. It will be clear, it will be concise, and it will not be buried within a much larger piece of legislation. This will ensure that drug-endangered children receive the attention and protection they need. This means that it's more likely to be understood and used than an amendment. We need to make sure that this legislation won't be misinterpreted.

Some members also asked: how many drug-endangered children live in our province? Mr. Chair, because drug-endangered children aren't clearly defined under the enhancement act, we don't currently track the number of children who fall into this category. Furthermore, because Albertans aren't aware of the dangers children face when exposed to drug manufacturing and trafficking, we believe a number of incidences go unreported. But the fact of the matter is that more than once a week we're forced to remove a child from an environment where drugs are being made or sold. This is an emerging social issue in our province, and we need to be able to respond.

One of my colleagues also asked if this bill will help 30, 300, or 3,000 children. As far as I'm concerned, Mr. Chair, one child that has to grow up in such a damaging physical and social environment is one too many, but from what the police and our caseworkers are telling us, the problem affects far more than one child in our province.

There was also a concern during second reading that a child would be apprehended and left without family. Mr. Chair, these children are being abused, and their health and safety are in jeopardy. Apprehending a child is a serious matter and one my ministry does not take lightly. If the child can't be returned home within two days, an application for future care and longer term services would be made under the enhancement act. Under the enhancement act we make every effort to place children with their extended family and within their community.

I was also asked to specify which chemicals were referred to in Bill 2. Mr. Chair, it's very important that we don't limit the effectiveness of this legislation. The recipe for crystal meth is easily available on the Internet, and the ingredients are easy to come by. If there is any doubt, all members need to do is go online to see a number of recipes using a variety of ingredients. Cold medicine, iodine, paint thinner, drain cleaners are just some of the ingredients that can be used in meth. Because these ingredients are common and innocuous on their own, we were very careful to ensure that a guardian must not only possess the chemicals but must also have the intent of using them to manufacture illicit drugs.

A few years ago ecstasy was the drug of choice and the use of crystal meth was just beginning. Who knows what new or reinvented drug will present a risk down the road. Bill 2 will help us to respond to the emerging social issue, not only now but in the future as well.

A question was raised: what constitutes a cannabis grow op? Mr. Chair, the decision to remove a child from a cannabis grow operation would not be based on the number of plants presented. Instead, we look at the likelihood a child would be harmed if the child was to remain in that environment. Bill 2 is designed to protect children from serious illegal drug activity that poses a significant threat to the well-being and the safety of the child.

There were also some concerns that Bill 2 would allow the state to intervene in people's homes. Mr. Chair, the purpose of this legislation is to protect children exposed to serious drug-related activities such as manufacturing and trafficking. It will allow caseworkers to better protect children.

4:30

I've also been asked about one part of the bill that states that a child can be apprehended without an order if a child's life, health, or safety is in jeopardy. There is some concern that this may be abused. Mr. Chair, staff will be well trained so they understand when this is an appropriate response. Furthermore, the same provision currently exists under the enhancement act, and it is not abused.

One of my colleagues also asked how we prove a child has been or is likely to be physically, emotionally, or sexually abused. Mr. Chair, that definition is clearly set out in the enhancement act.

I was also asked whether this bill comes with any resources. This bill clarifies and focuses that attention on actions that can be taken to protect children exposed to serious illegal drug activity such as manufacturing and trafficking. As such, we don't expect a lot of additional costs. We must keep in mind that if a child cannot be returned to their home after the initial two days, we'll turn to the enhancement act to provide support.

Finally, Mr. Chair, I was asked: what are we doing to address the root causes of this problem? The issues surrounding drug-endangered children are complex, urgent, and ongoing. Drug use is a problem, and it's up to government as a whole to work together to effectively address this issue. A number of cross-government ministries are under way to do that.

In July 2003 government formed a cross-ministry working group on crystal meth involving nine ministries. AADAC has a variety of programs that deal with drug use and addiction. A variety of crime prevention programs are also now in place, and most recently Mrs. Colleen Klein headed up the Crystal Meth Task Force. At Children's Services we have the advancing futures bursary program. This program provides bursaries to kids who are or have been in government care so that they have the opportunity to continue their education. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul has been doing some outstanding work with the Youth Secretariat. This secretariat works with youth to identify and address key issues facing our young people. We're also piloting projects in Edmonton and Calgary to develop new ways to work with high-risk youth. This includes special steering committees and programs targeted specifically at our high-risk youth.

Bill 2, Mr. Chair, is about protecting children. It will help us ensure that all Alberta children have the safe, healthy, supportive home they deserve, a home free from abuse. I ask all members to support this important piece of legislation and ensure a promising future for some of Alberta's most vulnerable children.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It gives me pleasure to speak to Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act, in Committee of the Whole. I will be supporting this bill. I think it is a good step forward in terms of addressing some of the serious issues, particularly as it relates to crystal meth and the growing problem of crystal meth but also the issue of marijuana grow operations and the dangers that they pose to Alberta's children.

I consulted rather extensively over the last few days with a number of members of various police forces that I know but particularly a member of the Edmonton Police Service, Doug Green, whom I have mentioned in this Assembly before. He is a school resource officer at Harry Ainlay high school and does a tremendous job educating children about the risks of crystal meth and other illicit drugs with the assistance of his black Lab, Ebony. Just a great program that he operates, and I would strongly encourage all members of this Assembly to seek out a presentation of Doug Green's. I'm more than willing to facilitate that at any time. It's just amazing to see the reaction of the children as they learn with the help of a passively trained drug dog not only what the dog is capable of doing but, of course, as part of the learning exercise the dangers of crystal meth and the other drugs that they're constantly faced with in their lives.

I also spoke at length with a superintendent of the RCMP, and both of these police officers that I've spoken with at length are supportive of this bill, and I think that shows that we're on the right track if both local Edmonton police and RCMP – actually, the RCMP officer I spoke with is in Richmond, B.C., so it's not just Alberta that we're talking about now but recognizing, of course, that this is a problem that extends beyond our borders.

A couple of things that they pointed out and that I'm glad to see are addressed in here. There's always a danger right now with crystal meth sort of being the drug that has caught the attention of the media, I suppose, as well as legislators and many parents for sure. I mean, there's just a general growing awareness of the dangers of this drug. There's always a danger, then, that we may pay a little too much attention to that drug at the expense of others, so both of the gentlemen in question were pleased to see that we've addressed the situation of marijuana grow ops because they, too, pose a serious danger to children, especially when it comes to issues of mould and toxicity. One of the comments from the RCMP officer was that any time you mix water and electricity, you're asking for trouble. The pesticides that are used in these operations – and let's extend it to other things, mushrooms as an example. I think the minister mentioned a few minutes ago that we never know what the next drug of choice might be. So certainly it appears that this bill is all encompassing, and that's good.

Some interesting things came out of the conversations with these officers as well. It's funny how these things work. I was able to consult with another RCMP drug officer this week who spoke to my Rotary club, giving a presentation on meth labs. One of the things that came out of that is that only three meth labs were busted in Edmonton last year. That is by large reason due to the fact that these operations have become smaller and more portable. They're not what we envision in terms of, you know, great big – I shouldn't say that they are not because there are still big operations, but they can be in a box and moved literally from location to location. The officer that spoke to the Rotary club on Wednesday indicated that, in fact, you can carry a box into a hotel room and manufacture a pound of crystal meth within four hours.

Interestingly enough, at my particular Rotary club the manager of the hotel where we have our club meetings is also a member of the club, so I asked the hotel manager whether or not he had had that experience. Indeed, they have had in that particular hotel two or three occasions where they have discovered meth labs. The staff has discovered meth labs right in the hotel. So it's a very real danger not just to children but to anybody that might be staying in that hotel. For all you know, there's a meth lab right next door on the other side of the wall in your hotel room. In fact, a number of hotels have now undertaken initiatives where they're training their staff what to look for in terms of whether or not there may be a meth lab in the hotel or may have been one operating.

This is interesting to me in that there are so few labs being found now as a result of the fact that they're becoming smaller and more portable, but I think it also illustrates, Mr. Chairman, the fact that children may be in even greater danger if, in fact, these things can be moved around as readily as they can.

The other fact that came forward from one of the gentlemen I spoke to was that in his experience – and he has spent a number of years on the drug squad – somewhere between 10 and 20 per cent of meth labs and marijuana grow operations will have children in the vicinity, actually in that particular structure. That as well causes us to support this bill. In particular, he mentioned hotels, as I've already outlined, but also daycare centres and schools and so forth that might be in the area of the meth labs. So while this bill

addresses particularly children that might be housed in that structure, in that house or apartment or hotel room, there's certainly a concern as well for other children that might be in the vicinity.

4:40

So with those opening comments, then, I would like to just sort of go over some of the concerns that we have section by section in the committee stage, and perhaps with the minister's assistance we may be able to address some of these this afternoon.

Section 1. The minister did mention that not only are we talking about the possession of chemicals – and I do appreciate how difficult it is to define the chemicals – but the fact that the bill talks about the intent of manufacturing an illegal drug. The only question I would have there is: does the minister have any idea as to how we would actually define intent? Is it based on quantity, for instance? Again, most of us are aware or can easily find out which chemicals are involved in the manufacture of crystal meth, but are we talking about 45-gallon drums? Clearly, there's intent. Are we talking – and I would hope not. You know, a package of Sudafed probably wouldn't be included. So I'm wondering if the minister might just be able to identify for us how we're going to define the word "intent."

Certainly, I can share with this House that when I was speaking to the various police officers, they said that they're glad to see that we're talking about intent to manufacture because if you wait until the manufacturing is under way, that just doesn't make any sense. If these chemicals are present in any quantity or if there are some other criteria that show that, in fact, intent was there to manufacture, clearly the children are in danger and action would be required.

In section 2(9) we talk about "reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the child's life, health or safety is seriously and imminently endangered." The minister mentioned a few minutes ago that all of the police officers and directors would have training to help to identify both of those – that is, which would be reasonable and probable grounds – and also whether or not the children's health and safety is seriously and imminently endangered. The question I would have there would be: how much training? What would the training look like? Are we talking about a half-day course or a one-day course, or is it, perhaps, something more extensive that would help these various officials to know exactly when a child might be in imminent danger or their health jeopardized?

Section 2(10) again talks about a police officer or director may enter a premise and if necessary search for a child again using reasonable and probable grounds. Again, the same question is: just how much training is going to be in place to ensure that those officers do in fact use reasonable and probable grounds? Is the minister going to be able to ensure either through this legislation or perhaps in regulation that we won't have unauthorized or unwarranted searches of homes?

Section 3 under the heading Notice of Apprehension. There's discussion of notification to the guardian "by any method." This question may have been asked before. I didn't hear the minister answer it this afternoon, so if I can beg her forgiveness if it has been asked and answered before, I apologize. But it does raise some concerns as to just what "any method" might be and whether or not that is sufficient. Perhaps we should define a little more specifically how notification might be given.

I'm just using as an example, Mr. Chairman, a message left on an answering machine. We all know – certainly I know. I have teenage children, and I'm often left messages that disappear by the time I get home, and I would normally have received them. You know, I like to think that my home is relatively stable. If we're talking about some of these homes where the situation might not be as rosy, there are any number of scenarios that one could envision where notice

might not arrive to the guardian. So I'm wondering if we could have, perhaps, some clarification on that. In B.C., as an example – and I'm sure that the minister probably is aware of this – their family and community service act requires that notice must, if practical, be in writing and must include a statement of the reasons for removing the child. So I would suggest that that might be a good idea for us to consider as well. Section 3(4), again under Notice of Apprehension, talks about "reasonable effort" having been used "to give notice in accordance with this section." I'm just wondering if the minister might be able to identify for us how we would define reasonable effort.

Again, Mr. Chairman, under item 4 of the notice of apprehension it talks about when a child is apprehended under the act, the director would have exclusive custody of the child and is responsible for the child's well-being. Perhaps the minister was addressing this when she talked about every effort being made to keep the child with family members because that was my question. Would we look first at perhaps an aunt or an uncle or a grandparent or some other stable situation where we might be able to place the child rather than putting them in an unfamiliar setting? I believe she did address that, and I do appreciate that.

Those are the questions that I would have in the committee stage, Mr. Chairman. As I said, despite the relatively minor concerns I have, certainly the members of law enforcement that I have spoken to are in favour of this bill. They think it's a step in the right direction. They do believe that we've covered our bases in terms of addressing not only crystal meth and the marijuana grow ops but also some of the other drugs, current and perhaps future, that might put children in danger. They support it, and I will be supporting the bill as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to rise and voice my support of Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act. I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the Minister of Children's Services, for bringing this legislation forward.

Mr. Chairman, Albertans reside in a province of great prosperity. We look after our children, communities, and in this respect, again, this is a great piece of legislation. Our children represent the future of our province, and we focus on protecting them from the harmful environment, even uncaring parents or parents who are into illegal activities. I think we cannot and must not fail those children.

When I look at this piece of legislation, there is a perspective, a common understanding that drug abuse only happens in what I call high-needs areas, or I could say a low-class neighbourhood, but actually it is not. It is prevalent in all areas of society. This law will help us to protect our children across the province, across all communities, across all cultural and ethnic groups.

I think that the most effective element of Bill 2 is that it suggests that a child that is exposed to an environment of illegal drug trade is endangered and, therefore, the victim of abuse. Intervention is then deemed necessary, and in my thought, Mr. Chairman, this will prove to be a very successful deterrent to any individual, those involved and those who may be considering becoming involved with drugs.

The fact that any child is living within this kind of unstable and dangerous environment is in itself a proof of abuse. The children can be harmed in many ways. The most obvious one is physical abuse, but in the long-term they suffer negative health effects, exposure to toxins and chemicals, and even more troubling, Mr.

Chairman, are the psychological consequences that children may face due to exposure to drug activity.

4:50

It is possible that affected children who live in an environment where illegal activity is normal may not understand that it is wrong. They may believe that the activity is morally acceptable, and they may even become prone to experimenting with such activity themselves in a later part of their lives. This would ultimately compound the problem even more. Bill 2 aims at preventing exactly that, and it will strike a hard blow to drug activity in Alberta while preserving the innocence of our children. I believe that the act will allow for children who are considered to be abused to be placed in an environment where they will be protected, loved, and nurtured. It will give them a home that fosters kindness and gives mutual respect. It will help to reinforce the solidity of the family dynamic.

Even further, this act will encourage communities to become more actively involved in detecting and reporting illegal drug activity. Communities must be seen as large families, as support networks where everyone is looking out for each other. As people become more vigilant in the defence of our youth, neighbourhoods from all over the province will have the opportunity to rid themselves of this kind of negative activity.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 2, as I read it in detail, is the first of its kind in Canada and will show the rest of the country that Albertans are prepared to take a stand in defence of the rights and welfare of our children and to stand up against illegal drug activities. This proposed legislation may also lead the way for others for improved and innovative ways for fighting drug crime.

I suggest that, following the lead of Bill 2, Albertans should look at legislation or city bylaws to create a tracking system designed to record and monitor hydroponic greenhouse equipment sales. It would aid in the fight against illegal marijuana grow operations. Hydroponic systems are commonly found in marijuana grow operations as they allow the plants to grow faster in a small area with no soil involved. These systems will grow a large number of plants in a relatively small area.

For equipment like this, commonly known as garden or greenhouse equipment, that the illegal grower relies upon to keep the operation concealed and running, the creation of a registry would allow all hydroponic greenhouse equipment sales from across the province to be traced to the individuals who purchased it. It could be argued that this would be seen as invasion of privacy, but I feel that it would simply serve to increase the transparency of the purchase. It would also provide valuable information for authorities should any illegal activity arise.

A current city of Edmonton business licence bylaw with regard to municipal pawnshops offers insight into how this could be accomplished. This bylaw requires that the licensee of a pawnshop obtain from the person pawning the goods detailed personal information: two pieces of identification; a description of the goods in question, including details such as make, model, serial number; and other information about the transaction. Now, in case of any illegal activity the authorities are able to trace the originals of the goods sold with the help of the information obtained at the time of the sale.

Another means of fighting crime in illegal drugs is looking at the money, tracing the money. Drug activity creates some benefits for drug-dealing people. The question should be asked why some people have no proven source of high income, no profession, and are of young age, and they own big homes, acquire expensive cars, keep expensive assets and large amounts of cash.

Now, I believe that a system of such monitoring of hydroponic greenhouse equipment and going after the money would be excellent

mechanisms to help the province fight drug crime as well, so those are things that I suggest for further on.

As far as Bill 2 is concerned, I think this is an excellent piece of legislation, and I conclude that we should all support this bill and have it passed wholeheartedly as this is a great cause in fighting for the children. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act, in this debate in the committee. I want to make it very clear at the very beginning that I agree with the purposes of the act, the spirit of the act, the objectives of the act. Children must be protected from abuse, even when that abuse is practised or inflicted by their own parents, guardians, or caregivers.

In the same vein, Mr. Chairman, I also want to reiterate my belief that children must be protected from abuse from actions taken by governments, by the state, or its agencies, be they child care agencies, social work agencies, or law enforcement agencies. In principle our concern is protecting children from abuse regardless of which quarter that abuse comes from. So, as I said, we are in agreement with the fact that children must be protected from abuse, and this particular piece of legislation speaks to a particular kind of abuse which results from drugs produced inside family dwellings, I presume.

Mr. Chairman, our research staff contacted and I personally spoke with some law enforcement representatives. I spoke with Sergeant Sanderson from the RCMP K Division just a few days ago, and he sent me, as he promised during the conversation, this document called Drug Endangered Children: Equating Drug Activity to Child Abuse. An interesting document.

One thing that struck me here was a bar graph on page 5 of this, which I found quite revealing. Distinctions were made in the incidents of crystal meth trafficking – that's all the information there is in this graph – between what is called northern Alberta and southern Alberta. It's quite striking that the rate of increase in the files on trafficking in this particular drug is very high. It's grown over the years in northern Alberta dramatically, I should say, whereas in southern Alberta there is continuous growth but at a very, very low rate. So I really would like to get the minister's attention to this issue. It seems to me that if this graph tells us something about the evidence of drugs being produced – in this case it's not about production, it's only about trafficking in drugs. In order for drugs to be trafficked, they have to be made available. You know, they have to come from somewhere. Some of these may be produced in homes in Alberta itself.

5:00

The impact of this piece of legislation – in the name of protecting children, we'll have to remove children from parents or caregivers – the uneven effect of impact given the demographic differences between northern Alberta and southern Alberta is something that we must address. Northern Alberta, I submit, Mr. Chairman, has a much higher proportion of First Nations Albertans dwelling in the region as compared to southern Alberta. We already know that the problem of child abuse, of child neglect, or other reasons for which children get removed from families is much more serious within these communities, the First Nations communities. It's a fact that's undeniable. It's a fact that must be recognized when we develop public policy, social policy as well as legislation that reflects that social policy. So I have a concern that the children that will get removed will overwhelmingly, perhaps, come from northern Alberta,

using this relevant indicator, and that in northern Alberta the families from which the children will be removed will predominantly be First Nations families. I invite the minister and the department staff to really look closely at these possibilities and then ask themselves: are the actions that we are taking appropriate?

The second point I want to make, Mr. Chairman, is the question of abuse in the family and what happens to children once they get removed from the family and become wards of the Crown. In that respect I want to share with the House and with the minister a revealing documentary that I just happened to come upon by accident. I happened to be home on the evening of March 7, about a week or so ago. I turned the TV on – and this was between 8 and 9 o'clock – and on the Newsworld channel there was a documentary called *Wards of the Crown*. That was a recently produced documentary under the program called *The Lens*. It's a new program on Newsworld.

This talked about the experience of children who get removed from families and what happens to them through the words and the experiences of the children narrated by themselves, using their own words. Of the four that were interviewed, two of them – I noted their names: a girl, Leah, and a young adolescent fellow, Andrew – had been shuffled through the system, moved from one foster family to the next foster family to group homes and, ultimately, onto the street. It was very painful to listen to their story. Children that are removed from the family don't necessarily get the protection that they need. In fact, they get exposed in many cases to continued abuses of who they are. They have a sense of instability, a lack of belonging, a lack of sense of place. Therefore, the problems that they develop in their psychological development and in their ability to develop social relationships are huge, absolutely huge.

So I would urge the minister to perhaps get hold of this video and look at it as we deliberate on this bill and how effective the measures proposed in it will be, notwithstanding the very noble goals that we have in mind that we want this legislation to accomplish. It's not a partisan issue. I say without any reservation that I'm with the minister on this. We must protect our children from harm. We must try to reduce the possibility of harm, but we must also weigh the effectiveness of the measures that we propose to take in order to do so. This particular documentary draws attention to it.

Mr. Chairman, the third point I want to make has to do with the conventions of the rule of law in a democratic society. All of us are engaged in celebrating 100 years of democracy in our province. We have a proud record. We also know that we made mistakes in the past when we took rights away from people who were disabled or whom we saw as imbeciles, or whatever, and we corrected ourselves. But as we move forward into the next century, I think we must ask the question of whether or not we respect on a continuing basis, on a systematic basis the strictures of the rule of law that this principle imposes on the state and on the legislators when making their laws. What do I mean by it? I want to very quickly go through this.

The rule of law entails, of course, preventing the state from unauthorized and unchecked use of power in the enforcement of laws, in the apprehension of children or other people, some of whom may in fact be criminals. The rule of law, Mr. Chairman, requires that we reserve the use of coercion, detention, punishment, the use of force to remove children. There are actually words used in this legislation to say that if necessary to use force to remove children from families, the use of force is for those who have been shown, on the basis of sound evidence and fair procedure – two things here: sound evidence and fair procedure – to have committed some wrongful act.

The police can invade privacy by tapping the phones or searching houses but only after getting a warrant based on probable cause that evidence of crime is likely to be found – probable cause that evidence of crime is to be found; in this case, that evidence of abuse is to be found. Individuals can be arrested or children apprehended or removed from their families and put under Crown custody only after government shows probable cause that they have committed a crime or have been abused. They can be preventively detained but only after evidence is submitted of the past wrongdoing as well as of danger to the community or to children at the hands of their parents or risk of flight, whatever. They can be punished only upon proof of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Now, in my judgment, Mr. Chairman, section 2(9) and (10) seem to offend this fundamental principle of the rule of law and respect for the rule of law by all parties, particularly by the state. In this case I want to draw section 2(9) and (10) to the attention of the House for a serious look at those two provisions in the act. To me they seem to run against the grain of the rule of law doctrine, on which all of our democratic decisions and practices in law should be based.

So I have an amendment that I would like to introduce. It doesn't have to be voted on today. I would urge the minister to look at this. If she doesn't want to, that's her decision. All I'm saying is that by tabling this amendment today, I'm providing the opportunity to the House and to the minister to at least consider it before we move forward on this bill. So, Mr. Chairman, I have this amendment, and I want to circulate it.

5:10

The Chair: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Everyone has a copy. Please proceed.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to draw the attention of the House to the first eight subsections of section 2, (1) to (8) inclusive. These eight subsections of section 2 are entirely consistent with the doctrine of the rule of law. So I would be very happy to vote for those eight subsections of section 2 because they, as I said, are totally consistent with the principle of the rule of law and respect for the rule of law.

However, as we move to subsections (9) and (10), Mr. Chairman, subsection (9) says:

Notwithstanding subsection (1), a director or police officer may apprehend a child without an order if the director or police officer has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the child's life, health or safety is seriously and imminently endangered because the child is a drug-endangered child.

This subsection relieves the law enforcement authorities or the director of the strictures that the rule of law imposes on the state and its agencies when acting to enforce a law. That is why I think that this subsection (9) is a matter for concern and should not be part of the final piece of legislation.

Similarly, Mr. Chairman, subsection (10) of section 2 says that:

A person who is authorized to apprehend a child under subsection (9) and who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the child may be found in a place or premises may, without an order and by force if necessary, enter that place or those premises and search for the child.

Mr. Chairman, in my view, again, this subsection (10) is in violation of the principle of the rule of law.

So what I'm proposing, then, by way of the amendment before the House is that these two subsections, which offend the very fundamental principle of the rule of law on which our parliamentary

system is based, on which our laws are based, on which our law enforcement activities are based, be removed from the bill. That is the purpose of this amendment. The amendment moves that “Bill 2, Drug-endangered Children Act, be amended in section 2 by striking out subsections (9) and (10).”

I would, in concluding, Mr. Chairman, urge the minister to at least give it some consideration. I’ll be happy to receive her advice and sit down with her and go over it. If after that we don’t agree on this, then surely, you know, she has all the powers and opportunity to move forward. But I would urge the minister not to proceed with haste on this bill until she has had the opportunity to consult with her officials and with other members of this House and, hopefully, to give me an opportunity to talk with her about it, if she so chooses, before proceeding.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children’s Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. I was actually holding myself in my chair so that I wasn’t jumping up immediately when I heard the hon. member talking about striking out sections 2(9) and (10). Mr. Chair, this isn’t about the rule of law. This is simply about protecting children. That’s what it’s about. The act authorizes either the director or the police to apprehend a drug-endangered child. The application for an apprehension order must be made to a court in person or by telephone. When there’s imminent danger, then a child can be apprehended.

What I’d like to say to my colleague across the way is that when we were in the process of drafting up this legislation, we consulted with stakeholders. We talked to the police. We talked to caseworkers. We had it go through Justice in regard to all of the sections within this piece of legislation. As Minister of Children’s Services I would encourage the hon. member to see some of the things that cross my desk on a daily basis when we’re talking about some of the poor children in this province that we have to apprehend. For example, the police are called to a family violence situation, and it ends up that all of a sudden they’ve come across a meth lab or something. It could be a huge grow op. It could be a number of things. We just read in the paper recently about a child pornography case. There are times in this province when we have to apprehend children immediately.

I would encourage all members in the House not to support this amendment.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Mrs. McClellan: I’d like to speak on this just very briefly. I think that when you read this whole section in its entirety and you come to subsections (9) and (10), it’s very clear that the reason you would apprehend a child without an order is because of the child’s life, health, or safety. That, to me, is the answer. It’s only under those circumstances where an officer believes that a child’s “life, health or safety is seriously and imminently endangered.” That would be the only exception.

I can’t imagine that any one of us – any one of us – in this room would agree that you should not step in to save a child’s life. I don’t think the hon. member believes that either. I think he may be right in some of his comments on the rule of law. This is the rule of law for a child. I couldn’t support that amendment after reading the whole section and understanding all of the opportunities that there are to go through the process properly. When I read the section and it says that a child’s life, health or safety is seriously endangered, to me this section has to stay.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

5:20

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I take seriously what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona says about how we look at the rule of law in our province and in our country. We should take those comments very, very seriously in how we deal with this bill. It is an important bill, and we must deal with this very, very serious problem, somehow bring to bear the force of the government on the problems of crystal meth and, really, other drugs. I think the mover of this amendment has got some very clear arguments, that this should be looked at a little bit further, some good arguments for delaying and thinking and pondering this a little bit further.

With that, Mr. Chair, I’d move adjournment on this amendment.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Children’s Services to speak on the amendment.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Chair, I have to get up just one more time because I think there’s some confusion within the House. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act that we have in place at this particular time and the Child Welfare Act before that all had this same piece, sections (9) and (10), in the legislation. It’s not about the rule of law. It’s that the child’s “life, health or safety is seriously and imminently endangered because the child is a drug-endangered child.”

I urge all members of the House not to support this amendment brought forward by the hon. member from across the way. It’s something that on occasion we have to do in this province to protect our children who are very, very vulnerable.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Chairman, I’m very, very sensitive to what I’m hearing here. The issue is not whether or not children when in danger must receive immediate protection or relief from that danger. That’s not the issue. The bill is about endangering children through their exposure to the manufacturing or cooking of drugs. The whole notion of immediate danger that creeps into the argument here seems to be really out of place. The danger that the bill speaks to, what it’s talking about, is the danger that results from an activity called drug manufacturing, illegal drugs being produced in the family residence, in the basement or wherever.

I ask: what is the probability of immediate danger to the lives of the children here? I don’t see that. The argument that these two provisions are already there in another act doesn’t justify continuing to make the mistake, what I would think would be a mistake if it’s already in another piece of legislation. The issue should be debated on the grounds of whether the ability to enter a premise to apprehend a child because the child’s parents or family or caregivers are cooking some sort of drug should be appropriately authorized. I say that the practice of the rule of law, on which all democracies are based, and respect for the rule of law require that an order be issued by an independent authority, not the authority that is going to enter the house.

I think it’s a fundamental right to have protections on that kind of entry and intervention. That’s the issue. The provisions in the act between subsections (1) and (8) allow the director or police enforcement authority to use the phone to seek such authorization to enter a family dwelling, to call by phone or through other technical means. So provisions are there. They do allow the ability of the law enforcement authorities to seek that kind of legal order before they enter, and that, Mr. Chairman, is the kind of guarantee that I am

seeking, that this bill and other bills that we have that deal with the violation of our rights to privacy be addressed properly and be addressed seriously in this House.

I'm not at all at loggerheads with the minister or with the argument that children must be protected, but so should be our liberties. That's the issue. The minister says that there's no evidence; she has no numbers. So how serious is the incidence of this problem in this province? If there's no emergency, why is it necessary, then, to suspend our fundamental liberties? That's the question I'm asking. Subsections (9) and (10) in my view do in fact amount to the suspension of our fundamental civil liberties by way of allowing law enforcement authorities to enter a place and remove a child without proper and prior legal authorization by a court or by a justice of the peace. That's the issue.

We ought not to take these matters so lightly simply because we get carried away with an argument. If the minister had given me some evidence – and many other members have asked her to do the same. Tell us: how serious is the problem? What's the scale of the problem here? Have you got some numbers to convince me or anyone else in the House that it's such a serious problem that you want to go ahead and suspend our liberties in such cases?

The argument that children are endangered doesn't make sense to me. The danger that's being addressed in this bill is the danger that results from an activity to produce drugs in the house, not an immediate danger to the safety and the life of the child. It is the long-term harmful effects. Abuse is the word that you use. Abuse isn't some sort of a death sentence, you know, that right away the child is going to be dying because someone is producing crystal meth. That could happen if the drug is consumed, but that's not the issue here.

It's a legislation that has serious intentions, good intentions. It's also a legislation that, in my view, must raise some serious concerns on the part of all of us as lawmakers. I'm simply doing my duty as a member of a democratically elected House of Assembly to draw attention to the fact that we must always respect and subscribe to the values of freedom, of liberty that are enshrined in our Constitution, that are enshrined in our laws and do what we can to make laws that will do the thing that we want them to do while at the same time respecting those fundamental freedoms and liberties.

I rest my case, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 1 as amended and Bill 2.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 2. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 1.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly. I'd also like to table copies of documents tabled during Committee of the Whole this day for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

The Assembly stands adjourned.

[At 5:30 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 20, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Hon. members, would you now please remain standing as I invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to sing our national anthem, and to all here, please join in in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce today Dan Lidgett. He's a resident of Edmonton, formerly of Wetaskiwin. He's a volunteer with the Canadian Paraplegic Association and the PARTY program, prevent alcohol- and risk-related trauma in youth. Dan is in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to wave and acknowledge the Assembly as we give him the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of students from Woodhaven junior high. There are 90 students here today. They're accompanied by Jayme Foster, Ray Shapko, Deb Schellenberger and parents Kelli Holden, Darren Stumbur, Sherry Mitchell, Mrs. Tina Gibson, Marilyn Freund, Karen Headrick and educational assistant Dana Stewart. I would ask that the House give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly and that they would please stand.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 26 enthusiastic grade 6 students from Earl Buxton elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're accompanied today by their teacher, Val Ritter, and by parent helpers Mrs. Kalra and Mrs. Rawat. They're here to observe and learn with keen interest about government and the Legislature. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, do you have guests today?

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 24 bright and energetic grade 6 students from Patricia Heights elementary school who are attending our School at the Leg. program for a week. Today they decided to come and watch us during part of question period and observe their MLA and everyone here working hard on their behalf. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Beverly Oldford. I would like to ask them all now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this esteemed Assembly.

The Speaker: The students should also know that it's the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung's birthday today.

This is also the 17th anniversary of the election to this House of four distinguished members of this House. On March 20, 1989, these four individuals were elected to this parliament for the first time: the hon. the Premier, the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment, and the hon. Minister of Government Services.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two of my constituents: Gail Ells and Florence Ingham. Florence works with the Alberta Dental Association, and Gail is a copyright assistant for Athabasca University. I'd ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly six citizens from a group focused on the industrial heartland expansion in Sturgeon and Strathcona counties. They are Mike Sudayko, Joan Sudayko, Maureen Chichak, Laura Martin, and Diane Gorgichuk. Please stand, and we'll give you the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, although I don't see the group of wonderful professionals that joined me this afternoon, they may in fact be in a different part of the Legislature. They will be here today at some point. They are resident physicians, the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta, known as PARA.

There are some 1,200 residents in Alberta. They perform a valued service in all of our hospitals and care institutions for health. They recently concluded a collective agreement with the government of Alberta. They are here today to meet MLAs, to ask questions, to represent issues of the student body both as it applies to their education and to the work that they're doing. Today at lunchtime they gave me excellent ideas on the subject of physician recruitment. If any members are in the audience on either side of the House, I wish they would please stand, and we could acknowledge their presence with pleasure.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Services for Rural Albertans

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as electricity deregulation

hurt people across rural Alberta, this government's health care deregulation is about to do the same. Even the government's hand-picked chairman of the Peace Country health authority has gone public with his concerns that the third way will draw health care professionals away from rural Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How does the minister possibly respond to the chairman of the Peace Country health authority when he says, and I quote, there's a shortage of orthopaedic surgeons, and if 10 of them are operating in the private sector, that's 10 less for the public system across Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, throughout the policy framework we have a number of initiatives designed to improve and strengthen the public health care system. Under the policy that relates to choice and access we have identified very clearly that any effort to accept an access proposal must only be done when there's an assurance that the public health care capacity will be maintained and will be strengthened. Although the hon. member has referenced a chair that is valued and has raised concerns about rural Alberta, we fully intend, if any access proposal is accepted, to make sure that it does so only in the context of making sure that there's adequate provision of services throughout Alberta and that the public system stays strong.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the minister has said that if all else fails, she could order doctors to go to rural communities for, quote, brief periods, how are rural Albertans supposed to receive consistent, high-quality care if doctors are only in the community for brief periods?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have never at any time stated that I would order doctors to do anything. We indicated in the context of accepting an access proposal that we could require doctors to provide services in other places, but it would be a proposal where there would have to be mutual agreement from the physicians in question, the health authority, and it would have to be evaluated by Health and Wellness no doubt in the context of a process that included specific issues as raised by the nurses, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the AMA, and others. So looking at what might conclude a successful access proposal, we would evaluate on the basis of all these things and ask them to provide us with some type of proposal that would be innovative and make sure that in rural Alberta we were filling those spaces that had to be filled.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will this minister finally admit the obvious, that the third way is going to make it harder to attract doctors to rural Alberta?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that makes a number of assumptions about a policy that is one of 10 in our book that talks about choice and access. The intention of our policy framework is to increase access. Increasing access is fundamental to the success of the policy – it's done through a number of measures – and ensuring that we move towards as much sustainability as possible not only in the larger urban authorities but in rural Alberta as well. You should be pleased to know that when we visited parts of rural Alberta, many of them are embracing with some enthusiasm some of the options that

they believe will ultimately increase the number of physicians that will work in our system.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Reform Consultation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are now just 11 days left in this government's rush-job consultations on the third way. Earlier this month the Minister of Health and Wellness made much of her consultations in Bonnyville and St. Paul. The fact is that these so-called consultations were little more than closed door, private meetings. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how many members of the public in total were involved in the consultations in Bonnyville and St. Paul?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to table that information. In Calgary we met with several on Saturday that were much expanded groups and various numbers, but we can table that exact information. The media were present at the conclusion and were able to talk to a number of the presenters. But as I've told this House before, in these consultations many people want private meetings, want to share private information. That does not prevent them in any way from sharing any of their information with the public. We've invited them all to have a proposal available for the media. Should they not wish to share it during the consultation with me, they can share it following. I believe that in Calgary we had about eight people from the media.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: does this minister believe that this kind of consultation, that left out the general public and much of the medical community in St. Paul, can really be considered complete?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this government has had a very strong track record of consulting with Albertans. If you looked at the consultations on health from the Mazankowski report, A Framework for Reform, to the type of information we've been making available in various forms through policies, our Getting on with Better Health Care, that was released last summer, a document that various individuals have followed up on and given us response to, several types of information that have gone either through the public arena or through MLAs for consulting, we have got a lot of information out there. This particular policy framework is available in all the libraries. We've had responses to it. We've had about 2,800 written and phone responses. We've had numerous consultations. I can table those results to date. Probably tomorrow would be the best time for those results to date, and I'll continue to provide them.

I'd like to just make one comment, Mr. Speaker, to conclude. Can I just say that the people that have consulted with me have been anything but cynical about the process. They very much appreciated that we have had a dialogue.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why didn't this minister just do the right thing and host a public town hall meeting in St. Paul and Bonnyville? Why didn't you do it?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have been providing those stakeholders,

first and foremost, the opportunity. We wanted to make sure that the various municipal leaders who are responsible for preventive social services through family and community supports, that the seniors groups that might not otherwise have a chance get their voices heard, that the health care providers have an opportunity, the regional health boards. The community health councils have an invitation to come and bring forward their information. First and foremost, we were dealing with stakeholders who are part of the provision of health care services and those people that support health care systems in all of the regions. Those were the ones that we were targeting in each of the regions that we have met with thus far.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Lottery Grant to Alpha Gamma Delta Fraternity

Mr. Tougas: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, \$18,760 can buy you a lot of luxury furniture, as the members of the Alpha Gamma Delta fraternity house have found out. That's how much they received from the community initiatives program, a lottery-funded initiative which was intended for projects that, quote, are of benefit to the general public, unquote. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister tell us how \$1,400 sofas, \$1,500 worth of leather bar stools, and a \$600 ottoman for a frat house could be considered of benefit to the general public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alpha Gamma Delta is a registered not-for-profit association. The application that they made was fully in order. They met all the criteria for that application and for that grant.

Mr. Tougas: To the same minister: since CIP guidelines allow a maximum of \$10,000 in nonmatching funds and initially that's all Alpha Gamma Delta asked for, why did they receive more than \$18,000?

Mr. Graydon: There are provisions that on some occasions the matching component can be waived, and that was done in this case. This is not the first and only case where the matching component has been waived. They had raised funds during the year, but they had already committed those funds to I believe juvenile diabetes. Instead of taking money back from that program, that was allowed.

Mr. Tougas: Will the minister investigate this grant to find out why it went through so quickly and why so many rules were violated?

Mr. Graydon: No.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Private Health Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A private health insurance scheme is already promoting faster service for heart bypass, prostate, cataract, and joint replacement surgeries. Acure Health Insurance website states that "medical access insurance will take you out of the line and arrange to expedite your diagnosis and treatment in the [U.S.], or in Canada when services are available." Acure and dozens of other private investors are already drooling over the third way. They can hardly wait. My first question is to the

Premier. Will the Premier tell all Albertans what Acure already knows, that the third way will allow wealthy people to get lifesaving surgery before low- and middle-income Albertans?

1:50

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, this company offers insurance for people that wish to avail themselves of medical services that exist elsewhere, out of the province. Right now, as the hon. member knows, it is prohibited under the Canada Health Act to offer a similar service in Canada. That's what we're wrestling with right now, and that's what the public consultation process is all about. But it's been happening for years and years that people who can't get access to medical services to alleviate pain and suffering here will go to the United States or to the United Kingdom or to India or to other jurisdictions that offer the alternative to obtain medical relief.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the public of Alberta wants to know what the government has in mind and they're tired of the smoke and mirrors of this government, will the Premier now tell the people of Alberta whether or not under the third way people will be able to jump the queue for lifesaving surgeries such as a heart bypass?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond in detail. I don't know, because I'm not a physician, of the urgency and the urgent nature of the bypass operations to which the hon. member refers, but I can tell you that if he has a heart attack right now, an ambulance will be called, he will be taken to the hospital, and he will be treated under the publicly funded system.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier continuing to refuse a direct question; that is, whether or not under the third way, his government's proposed policy, people will be able to get ahead of the line by paying more for surgeries like bypass surgery, cataract surgery, prostate surgery, and a long list of other surgeries?

Mr. Klein: I don't know about cataracts, Mr. Speaker, because cataract surgeries – and I don't know if the hon. member has had a cataract surgery by a private clinic.

Mr. Mason: No. I can see you clearly.

Mr. Klein: He wears glasses, Mr. Speaker, so I don't know how clearly he can see.

Mr. Speaker, this is hard to define because the urgency of a particular procedure has to be defined by a physician, who's in the best position to know.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Marlborough Elementary School

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents in my constituency were shocked to learn that their community school needs were again being shuffled aside and ignored. These honest and hard-working Alberta families are being confronted . . . [interjections] This is a very important issue, hon. member.

Mr. Speaker, these honest and hard-working Alberta families are being confronted with the ongoing reality of five to 10-year-old students being bused 40 minutes away, sometimes to different

schools than other siblings, just to go to school. My question is to the hon. Minister of Education. Since the school was closed to students last Wednesday, what has the minister or his department done to ensure that renovations or repairs to the Marlborough elementary school are being done immediately?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I did contact officials with the Calgary public board. They apprised me of what occurred on Thursday night when 400 parents met, and they told me that they had a very good meeting. They presented what the facts of the case were, and the facts simply are that about seven or eight years ago, I think it was, a major renovation was done to 30 per cent of the roof there. They brought in some steel reinforcements, some steel cladding, as they call it. That alleviated part of the problem, and things seemed to be okay. Then very recently they found out that there might be other concerns, so they did the preventative thing: they closed the school down. They've made arrangements for all the children to be bused to neighbouring schools while they sort out what the problems exactly are and engage a contractor to look more deeply into this. We need to respect their decision for having done this very, very efficiently.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Minister of Education: will the minister undertake to have a meaningful discussion with parents at Marlborough school and discuss the future of the school as soon as possible?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to comment on the future of the school per se. That would be up to the Calgary public board to comment on. I think that a very meaningful consultation occurred last Thursday between locally elected officials and other administrators with Calgary public and the 400 parents. I might just add that, as a result of all of that, the Calgary public board worked very, very hard with their officials to move all of the furniture, to move all of the desks, to move all of the school books, the computers, and everything else over this past weekend so that the two receiving schools, Mayland and Greenview, as I recall, were ready to receive the first busload of students from Marlborough as early as I think this morning. That's the truth of the matter. So they've done a pretty good job of looking after that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given that the department of infrastructure was aware of this issue of the structural integrity of this building since September, why hasn't his department done anything to ensure a safe working and learning environment for the staff and the students at Marlborough elementary school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What occurred back in actually late October, early November is that we received a notification from the Calgary public school board that there was a leak in the roof. Subsequently what happened is that we gave the Calgary public school district a \$25,000 grant to do an engineering study to determine, quite simply, if the school was safe or not. To this point in time we have not seen the study despite repeated attempts to gain the contents of that study back to us.

An interesting point on this as well, Mr. Speaker, is that the roof

is actually made of a thing called Stramit board, which is a different type of roof, and it subsequently has not turned out that well. This is the only school in Calgary that has that type of roof. Therefore, we're anticipating a speedy, speedy cure to this particular issue once we get the engineering report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Major Projects in the Industrial Heartland

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today many concerned residents of the industrial heartland in Sturgeon and Strathcona counties have come forth with serious concerns about the unbalanced development in their area. They're concerned about the air they breathe, the water they drink, their rural way of life, and agriculture. Hundreds of people in the region believe that this government has failed to do its job in planning and consulting on heavy oil upgraders added to massive industrial sites already present, and now they're demanding answers. My first question to the Premier: can the Premier explain why this government continues to approve major developments without a provincial land-use plan to guide the process and balance the interests of industry with those of landowners, agriculture, and the environment?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the Liberals held a news conference this morning to reflect the concerns of Sturgeon county residents about a proposed – I underline "proposed" – plan for an oil upgrader in their region. It's my understanding that the companies or company involved has yet to seek regulatory approval for construction of the oil upgrader. Further, this is a matter that has to be adjudicated by the county as well as by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. I understand as well that the project will have to undergo an environmental impact assessment. I'll have the hon. minister respond in more detail to that.

The Speaker: Perhaps we can get to that as a supplementary.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: given the large number of Albertans who claim that they have not been fairly and appropriately consulted, can the minister inform the Legislature as to what evidence he has that a meaningful public consultation has occurred?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I too will have the Minister of Environment respond because both of our departments are involved in this.

With all of these projects that have come forward, first off, the counties involved have done quite extensive work on zoning those lands for heavy industrial use. That was some of the first long-term planning kind of work done by those counties, specifically identifying that area for large, heavy industrial use. The last project to come through went through a very extensive environmental impact assessment. It's gone through the Energy and Utilities Board. It goes through all of those kinds of requirements to ensure that the impacts of land, air, and water are preserved so that the safety and security of the people in the area are secured.

2:00

The Speaker: I suspect that the next one is to the Minister of Environment, but that's guessing. The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry that I'm so predictable.

To the Minister of Environment: given the serious cumulative

environmental impact already in the industrial heartland area and three more heavy oil upgraders proposed, will he commit in the interests of public and environmental health to a cumulative environmental impact assessment before development decisions?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to all Albertans that, first of all, we have a very, very public consultation process when it comes to perhaps the strictest of EIAs that we do in this province. I might also say that for the approval that was carried out in 2003 by BA Energy, in fact there were five steps that were taken for public consultation in terms of preconsultation, during the process, during the approval, as well as the terms of reference. In all of those situations, such as the important things that the member has talked about in terms of balance of the air, water, and integrated land management, the public had an opportunity to present. Not only that, but I could give you the example of the Fort Air Partnership, that Alberta Environment works closely with, which is in part 5 of the five-step process. Something we continue to commit to is working with all of the stakeholders because there is nothing more important than the air and the water and the integrated land that you speak of. Getting that balance right and the cumulative impact of getting that balance right is exactly what Alberta Environment is committing to and is doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Highway 19

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 19 is located between Nisku on highway 2 and the town of Devon in my constituency. It is approximately 10 kilometres long and serves as an extremely busy truck bypass around Edmonton to western and northern Alberta. It is also a commuter route for thousands of residents of the town of Devon and surrounding area who work in Edmonton, Nisku, or the international airport. This roadway is overdue for twinning. Unfortunately, two residents of Devon were killed in separate accidents in the last two weeks. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. In order to improve the safety and efficiency of this roadway, when can we expect it to be twinned?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I certainly take great condolences with the hon. member on the passing of two of his constituents.

We are presently in the process of finishing off the functional plan for that particular twinning of the road. We're in the process of acquiring the right-of-way, which has not fully been done yet, to ensure that that road is twinned.

I will say one thing to the hon. member, and that is that the Anthony Henday is going to be finished this fall, and that will allow a straight access from highway 2 right through to highway 16. So one of the things that we're hoping will occur is that truck traffic will utilize the Anthony Henday to go from highway 2 to highway 16 as opposed to highway 19. Unfortunately, that doesn't completely answer the question, but the functional plan is being done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. How can we get this moved up in priority?

Dr. Oberg: Well, one of the big issues, Mr. Speaker, has nothing to do with money. It has nothing to do with time. It has nothing to do

with the priority list. Quite simply, what it has to deal with is how to accumulate the land that is needed for this, and there are numerous, numerous landholders along highway 19. There are roughly, as the hon. member mentioned, 10 kilometres of road that have various different landholders. We're currently in the process of negotiating this land and attempting to get the right-of-way so that we can twin it, but that at times can be quite an arduous process.

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: due to the urgency will he consider expropriation if necessary to acquire these rights-of-way?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, expropriation is actually very much a final step. It's a last attempt in order to get the land. We would much sooner attempt to deal with the landowners through good negotiation, through coming to an agreement, so that everyone walks away with a win-win scenario. There are some very difficult lands, as the hon. member knows, along that route – for example, part of a church – and the whole idea of expropriating some of these things is going to be very, very difficult. We would much sooner have an amicable settlement to this. We would much sooner have an amicable settlement when it comes to the negotiation, so we are going to negotiate. The expropriation process is certainly, certainly a last step, a last-ditch effort.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Medical Residents' Debt Load

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall I asked the Minister of Advanced Education why medical residents, who are still students, are required to begin paying back their student loans, and he, describing it as a very good question, admitted, "That is an issue that we do need to work on." Well, like the tuition policy, there is something else from the minister's department that isn't ready yet. To the minister: with the average student debt load of residents at \$112,000 and rising with differential tuition, will he at least accredit the residency program for interest relief, like Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, and Quebec have done?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I think that's a very good suggestion. We're working through a number of good suggestions with respect to student loans, student finance, student affordability policy. We will continue to work until we get the best answer, not the most immediate answer. That's what we're trying to do: deal with the issue of student finance and affordability of education in a comprehensive way. I believe that not only the individuals who the hon. member just raised but all students will look forward to a good and comprehensive result.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister aware that servicing that debt with interest that no other postgraduate student is required to pay takes up to half a medical resident's take-home pay?

Mr. Mason: Their average debt is more than you've raised for your leadership race.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: I'm not sure quite how the leader of the third party

would know how much. Perhaps this is evidence of the quality of his research.

Mr. Speaker, it's a very important issue, and it's not one that we deal with lightly. In fact, I've got a lot of sympathy. We're putting a lot of effort into how we deal appropriately with the financing of students, with the affordability policy, and how we ensure that students do get an interest break when they're not earning at a level necessary to pay back their loans. Hopefully, by the time we get through this process and come out with an affordability policy, we'll have a whole new structure which will make sure that every student knows that finances will not be a barrier to getting an education, that they'll be able to graduate with an appropriate level of debt, and they will have an appropriate way to pay it back out of the income that they can expect to receive from employment in their area or their profession.

I know that it's frustrating for people to wait for processes to happen. I know that this particular organization has been very, very patient and very, very helpful in the process, and there will be a new affordability policy in place soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the health minister: is it just a coincidence, or did the minister plan to make differential tuition and crippling debt add up to a powerful incentive for doctors to want to moonlight in private, commercialized medicine?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member attributes motives to me which are not worthy.

I would like to say that we have had a very thorough review today, an opportunity that was unparalleled, with the student residents who came in and spoke to me for over an hour, talking about a number of their issues, including tuition, including the kinds of aspirations they have to serve Albertans, to provide the best care possible. I have been impressed by their due diligence. Though I've already introduced them, Mr. Speaker, at some point I'd beg your indulgence to do that again to be able to highlight that this government values their students, values the residents. Some of the initiatives that I think will be evident in this year's budget will support that contention.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Child Pornography Investigation

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the actions of a brave woman in Edmonton who overheard a disturbing conversation between two children and reported it to the authorities and thanks to the authorities in Edmonton, the Attorney General of the United States was able to announce the takedown of a large, highly organized international child porn ring. This child porn ring swapped pictures and live video of children being sexually abused and raped. The U.S. Attorney General stated that these images that were sent around the world are the worst imaginable form of child pornography. My first two questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What involvement did police in Alberta have in this investigation?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to publicly acknowledge the outstanding work that the Edmonton

Police Service did in this investigation as well as the outstanding investigative work of Detective Randy Wickens.

The origins of this particular case actually came to light last May, in 2005, when an arrest was made here in the city of Edmonton. Upon investigation the investigators realized the tentacles of this investigation and the far-reaching effects it had throughout the world. These investigators are on the front line. They are trained and highly skilled in investigations regarding this type of technical experience that they need. So last week's announcement in Chicago was really a benefit to all of us throughout the law enforcement community, across Canada as well as around the world, and the fact that there are no boundaries to this type of technical advance.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: what is this government doing to stop those who would use the Internet to attack one of the most vulnerable segments of our society, our children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to ensuring the safety of all Albertans, whether they're on our highways, in our homes, or online. Last year we announced that \$1.7 million would be provided to an ICE unit, an integrated child exploitation unit: an integrated team of officers from the RCMP, from the Edmonton Police Service, Calgary Police Service, the Medicine Hat and Lethbridge police services as well working together with 21 officers throughout the province as one team in different locations, with two hubs, Calgary and Edmonton. Information is being shared from our police services, amongst each other, with each other, again focusing on the safety of our children in the province and focusing on the future effects of these types of investigations. This province is committed and will continue to be committed to fighting this type of crime in the future.

Mrs. Jablonski: My last question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister tell me what his department is doing to ensure that the people who commit these heinous crimes are being prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is quite right. Child exploitation is a sickening crime, and here in Alberta we recognized that something special needed to be done. In February of 2003 we assigned a special prosecutor to deal with this form of crime. His name is Steve Bilodeau, and he was front and centre in Chicago last week. Mr. Bilodeau was able to work with the police in this case to arrange for search warrants, precharge legal advice, undercover police investigation techniques, and the like in order to ensure that there was this successful bust throughout North America and the world.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, at this point in time we have 91 outstanding child pornography cases before the courts here in Alberta. The good news is that Mr. Bilodeau and his team have over a 90 per cent success rate in prosecution of those crimes. I'm also pleased to say that, like the Solicitor General, we intend to enhance our service in this area, and later this year we hope to be able to announce that additional prosecutorial resources will be applied.

Thank you.

Sustainability of Caribou Population

Mr. Bonko: If the Alberta government is serious about protecting

caribou and talked about keeping caribou on the landscape, what we really need is a landscape that can keep the caribou, period. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. After three failed attempts for a land-use framework, when will the government develop a land-use strategy?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has worked very, very hard on putting down the criteria for a land-use framework. It was announced in the Speech from the Throne 2005 and was further added onto this Speech from the Throne in 2006. In between that year what we have done is we've set up a sustainable resource environmental management office under Sustainable Resource Development that includes the co-operation of seven departments across this government that are concerned about a provincial land-use framework and that deal with land use on a day-to-day basis. We will continue to go out and consult with Albertans this spring, and this fall we'll have a round-table that will deal with discussions from the valued discussions that we have this spring that will come up with recommendations on a provincial land-use strategy for the next 50 years in this province.

Mr. Bonko: How can this government justify a wolf cull, which is really a last-ditch effort that kills one species to save another, all because of a lack of government policy?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, that is quite the opposite. We do have a policy for dealing with threatened species in this province, and the caribou has been designated as a threatened species in this province. It's about management. When you have a natural predator that is going out and eating the young caribou that will be born this spring, you have to manage that. Sustainable Resource Development has had a very, very good history in balancing and making sure that proper management of the resource is taking place so that the wildlife that are threatened can definitely be preserved for the future. It's part of our recovery plan, and we're staying with that recovery plan. For him to say that there is absolutely no plan is absolutely wrong.

Mr. Bonko: My last question, to the Minister of Community Development then: what collaboration is this ministry undergoing with other government ministries to ensure that the caribou do have a permanent home on Alberta's landscape?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, that I'm aware of, there are no caribou within our provincial parks. To the extent that there are, we do cooperate with the minister responsible for Environment and the minister responsible for sustainable resources.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Tuition Fees for Postsecondary Education

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province has the lowest percentage of students from our high schools going on to postsecondary education, and this province also has some of the highest tuition fees. The government claims that it wants to make postsecondary education both affordable and accessible to more young Albertans. At the same time, Alberta's postsecondary institutions do need a funding formula that encourages significant enrolment growth and improvements in teaching and learning conditions. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education. Will the minister categorically rule out the inflation plus 3.5

per cent formula for tuition increase policy recommended by the Alberta university presidents, because doing so will further worsen affordability of public postsecondary education in this province?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, in a Legislature which has been consumed by the discussion of how you appropriately consult, the suggestion that one should rule out ideas that are brought forward in a consultation process before the process has been finished would seem to be out of bounds. What we have is A Learning Alberta process, which started last year. We now have a subcommittee in which both universities and students as well as all sorts of other players within the postsecondary system are participating to talk about an affordability policy and in that context to talk about how tuition fits into it. In that context, I hope they're discussing a wide range of alternatives. So, no, I can't rule out one alternative that someone has put forward as part of that process, but I can say this. It is a proposal that the four presidents put on the table for discussion purposes, and it appears to have had the effect of enlivening the discussion. That's a wonderful thing.

Dr. Pannu: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if the minister actually believes in improving not impeding affordability, why doesn't he adopt the tuition fee policy recommended by the coalition of Alberta university students that would set tuition at 1999-2000 levels and thereafter increase tuition at the CPI minus 1 per cent rate?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I guess, Mr. Speaker, that just shows how fortunate it is that we do not have a government that deals with things on a one-off basis. If you implemented piece by piece a policy like that, what would happen is you would then deal with the whole question that was in the preamble to this member's question, and that is: how do you make sure that there's access for every Albertan who wants to get an education? How do you make sure that there are spaces? How do you allocate the resources to make sure that you have access, quality, and affordability?

It's not about one piece, about rolling tuition back. It's not about rolling tuition back to 1999 levels or 1995 levels or anything else. It's about the whole package. So that suggestion along with the suggestion from the university presidents need to be on the table and need to be discussed in the whole context of the complete affordability policy and a tuition policy and in the context of how we make sure that there's access for every Albertan who wants to learn.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has been at it for almost a year now. Given that the minister has failed either to endorse the CAUS proposal or to categorically reject the university presidents' proposal, what exactly is his position on developing a tuition fee policy to achieve affordability and a funding formula to achieve accessibility?

Mr. Hancock: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, that hon. member would be the first one to cry foul if I hired a whole group of people or invited a whole group of people in to discuss a policy and then put my preferences on the table before their preferences had been fully discussed. I'm not going to do it now. He wouldn't agree with it in any other context of consultation. What we have is a large committee of people right across the postsecondary system looking at broad issues of tuition and affordability, how finances can be removed as a barrier to any student getting an education, and we're going to look

at the broad context of that. Certainly, I have some viewpoints as to what I think ought to be done, but I'm interested in informing myself and government with the full breadth of knowledge and interest from not only students . . .

Dr. Pannu: Talk is cheap.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member is saying, "Talk is cheap," so he should quit talking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday the North American free trade agreement panel ruled that the United States improperly assessed countervailing duties on softwood lumber imports from Canada. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Does this ruling end the softwood lumber dispute?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the NAFTA panel ruled that Canadian lumber is not subsidized, and it's something that we knew right along. Now, will the ruling end the dispute? No. The United States government has till April to decide whether they're going to appeal. They have more or less indicated that they will appeal, and the appeal process will take at least another several months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first and only supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Does this decision mean relief for Alberta's softwood lumber producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The hon. minister that answered the first question noted that the NAFTA decision is good news for Canada, and of course in Alberta it would be good news for us, hoping that the panel and the government accepts that decision. Our government and the industry have worked very, very hard to make sure that the trade panel based its decisions on accurate information about forestry practices in Alberta, and we will continue to work hard, as we have in the previous years, including consultation with Alberta's forestry industry, to make sure that we move this dispute forward so that it will provide the kind of relief that the Alberta industry wants and the Alberta industry thinks that they expect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Fort McMurray Infrastructure Needs

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is starving our golden goose, Fort McMurray. The mayor and councillors are doing their best to accommodate the increased demand on services by borrowing to their limit and going as far as humanely possible, to the point of permitting a work camp to be set up in the heart of the city. Fort McMurray is caught in the vice of an economic boom and a government-forced infrastructure depression. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. Given that Fort McMurray is the economic

driver of this province, why has your government abandoned the citizens of Fort Mac?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing – nothing – could be further from the truth. I've got to tell you that Fort McMurray, the Wood Buffalo area, has a very aggressive MLA, who brings all of their concerns to this building and to our caucus and, differently than some, looks to working on a solution for the long term.

Mr. Speaker, although I will be the first to say the great amount of economic activity that Fort McMurray brings to this province, there is also a very significant commitment from this government to that region as recent as an announcement of the beginning of the twinning of the highway to Fort McMurray, the work that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is doing with that municipality on achieving their concerns around water and water treatment.

Mr. Speaker, the Fort McMurray story is a wonderful Alberta story. We are proud of what's happening there, and we're going to do everything that we can to work with that community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that Fort Mac's waste treatment plant, hospital, schools, and recreation complex can't keep up with the rapid growth, will this minister provide financial relief in the form of grants rather than forcing the municipality further into debt through having to pay back interest-free loans?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are processes to deal with all of the things that the hon. member has brought forward. As I indicated in my earlier answer, the Minister of Municipal Affairs is working very closely with that municipality, the minister of infrastructure is working very closely with that municipality, the Minister of Energy is working very closely with all of the players in that municipality, and again – I will repeat one more time – they have a very capable, very competent MLA, that brings those concerns to us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My third and final question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Will the minister push her government to release not only the land but provide subsidized funding for the sewers and roads necessary to support affordable housing in Fort McMurray?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak to this issue because we do have land, as you know, that's available to the community of Fort McMurray. Right now we have a request for proposal, a second one going out to the community. It will be complete here within about the next 20 to 30 days, and a part of that is deep infrastructure needs. But I have found that with the first proposal that we did with parcel D, it is the developer that's coming forward as part of the initiative when they do put in a number of alternatives that they have available, and one of those is for the deep infrastructure needs. So that is something that is coming from the proponents for the lands.

Having said that, I know that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation may want to comment on the infrastructure needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ethics and Accuracy in Research

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It can be argued that our high standard of living is due to the scientific and emerging research of the past. For us to continue to advance as a society, it's imperative that research results be reliable and trustworthy. I understand that two federal agencies, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, have uncovered problems associated with the accuracy of research and use of funding dollars that they receive in Canada. My question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What steps are being taken in Alberta to ensure that research in Alberta is protected from unethical or inaccurate research?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, let me say from the first part that it is unfortunate when the activities of a few can do so much damage to the reputation of so many great minds and great researchers not only in Alberta but across Canada. With this story we did a review of all of the research activities that have been happening in this province, and we have not found any evidence of any research funding from the province or our related entities, such as the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, that have been involved in any of these particular transactions.

Mr. Speaker, the one researcher from the U of A that was publicly mentioned in this particular article was dealt with actually in 2003. The University of Alberta dealt very quickly and appropriately with that particular individual.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My one and only supplemental to the same minister: in cases where unethical behaviour has been found, what recourse is available?

2:30

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, there are really two elements of accountability that are in place when you look at a research grant in particular. The first would be, of course, the scientific process whereby applications have to go through a peer review process to make sure that they meet the standards and the objectives that are necessary before proceeding with research, and that's all vetted through people that understand the directions of the research, to make sure that that all makes sense.

The second element, of course, would have to do with the expenditure of money. To that degree, we sign grant agreements with the universities, which put into place the accountability mechanisms for monitoring the funds that are expended. In the event there would be any indiscretion, the matter there would be between the university and the researcher, and we would immediately ask the university for our funds to be returned to us, and they would then be expected to deal with the matter of the indiscretion at their level, which they have in the past always shown the willingness to do.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we had 80 questions and answers in a 50-minute question period.

In a few seconds from now I'm going to ask if the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness can revert to Introduction of Guests, but prior to that our historical vignette of the day.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Three major plebiscites, one on electrification and two concerning daylight savings time, were voted on province-wide

in conjunction with provincial general elections in 1948, 1967, and 1971. On August 17, 1948, the plebiscite subject was electrification, and 139,991 Albertans, or 50.017 per cent, voted yes to, "Are you in favour of the generation and distribution of electricity being continued by the power companies?" and 139,840, or 49.973 per cent, of the people of Alberta voted yes to the question, "Are you in favour of the generation and distribution of electricity being made a publicly owned utility administered by the Alberta Government Power Commission?"

On May 27, 1967, 236,555 Albertans, or 48.75 per cent of the citizens, voted for the question, "Do you favour province-wide daylight savings time?" and 248,680, or 51.25 per cent, voted against the question. The question, "Do you favour province-wide daylight savings time?" was again asked on August 31, 1971, and 386,846, or 61.4 per cent, of Albertans voted yes, and 242,431, or 38.53 per cent, voted against.

As a separate vote a province-wide liquor plebiscite was conducted on October 30, 1957, on the question, "Do you approve additional types of outlets for the sale of beer, wine, and spiritous liquor subject to a local vote?" and 171,786, or 63.9 per cent, voted in favour, and 96,961, or 36.1 per cent, voted against. The same plebiscite also asked the question, "Should mixed drinking be allowed in beer parlours in Edmonton and Calgary and the surrounding areas?" and 99,150, or 78.5 per cent, voted in favour of mixed drinking, while 27,203, or 21.5 per cent, voted against.

Since 1971 no province-wide plebiscites have been held in Alberta.

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What an honour today to introduce the people you're most likely to meet first if you attend a clinical or teaching hospital, and those are the attending resident physicians, who are completing between two and seven years of their practicum in order to become fully qualified as professional doctors. Members of PARA, the Professional Association of Residents, are with us today in the Legislature. They are spending time today meeting with a variety of MLAs and planning with MLAs and staff to host a reception later. They are remarkably bright, and thank God they're the ones that are coming up to look after us as we age. They were very astute in raising issues today about their tuition and also the kinds of things that we should be considerate of in hoping to attract more residents and physicians to Alberta. I would invite them to please rise and all Members of this Legislative Assembly to celebrate such remarkable potential in these individuals.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Youth Forums

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Young Albertans are a vital part of our province and a human resource that we must protect and listen to as a government. Recently I discussed the Youth Secretariat, the youth networks, the Youth Advisory Panel, and the work that these groups do for our province. This afternoon I would like to share a little bit about Alberta youth forums.

Youth forums supported by Children's Services are geared towards empowerment and engagement of youth and are youth driven and organized. Through these forums youth are brought

together for a day or for a weekend and through these gatherings are able to discuss issues that affect all youth of Alberta.

During these youth events many topics are discussed. The usage and prevention of drugs and alcohol and tobacco addictions are also commonly debated. Some forums have discussed the issues of sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, as well as tattoos and piercing, racism, drinking and driving, violence in the family, and the homeless. The individuals who participate in these gatherings, through sharing their concerns and ideas for solutions, are helping to improve youth policies not just for the youth of their communities but for all of this province.

Mr. Speaker, 33 youth forums have been scheduled for 2005 to June 2006, ranging from large communities to small towns like Slave Lake and settlements like Buffalo Lake Métis settlement. These youth forums are a great way to identify key challenges facing youth and allow us to work with our youth to build on existing initiatives that affect them.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Association for Community Living

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I attended the 50th anniversary of the Alberta Association for Community Living, and I will later table five copies of their just released book *Hear My Voice*.

Mr. Speaker, I challenge everyone in this House and those watching this telecast to read that book and not shed one tear. It is a story in their own words of people with developmental disabilities who were in institutionalized care; in other words, they were in the system. They tell of their survival and how the spirit can triumph with a little help. They were the vulnerable, they were the neglected, and they were the forgotten. It tells of how they regained their dignity, self-worth, and became contributing members of society by the very fact of their existence. Good legislation and hard-working families helped turn that around.

I draw the parallel to the vulnerable in our continuing care system. We know of the loss of dignity, self-worth, and lack of respectful treatment, the lack of accountability, and outdated standards, and even those standards have no mechanism for enforcement.

We fear human beings being perceived as without value in our overly commercial world. We hear Romeo Dallaire, Stephen Lewis, Jean Vanier, Bill Clinton, and Jimmy Carter speak from the global perspective of the need to overlay commercialism with humanity, so we are not alone on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Skating Championships in Calgary

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary is home to the world's greatest hockey team. The stars that the ice in the city of Calgary has become accustomed to are those of the Calgary Flames of the National Hockey League. However, recently in Calgary sports fans have been and will be exposed to stars of a much different nature. The likes of Flames like Iginla and Kiprusoff have been replaced with other skating stars, such as Cindy Klassen and Jeffrey Buttle.

2:40

At this time I'd like to formally recognize the city of Calgary for hosting this past weekend's World Allround Speed Skating Championships as it also prepares to host the 2006 World Figure Skating Championships. The attendance at the Allround Speed Skating Championships at the Olympic Oval was outstanding last weekend as the skating stars showcased their fast-paced sport at its best to sold-out crowds.

Canadian star Cindy Klassen picked up right where she left off after the recent Olympic Games in Torino. Klassen swept all four of her races this weekend, completely blowing out the competition. Her performance was highlighted by posting near record times in the women's 1,500-metre and 5,000-metre races. In dramatic style she saved the best for last, though, as she posted a personal best in the women's 500 metre to win the event.

Up-and-coming male star Denny Morrison decided to make a name for himself as well. At only 20 years old Morrison set a Canadian men's record and nearly missed the world record in the 1,500-metre event, surpassing all expectations.

The past championships are definite indications that the future of Canadian sport is extremely bright. The upcoming week will be no different. There is no doubt that it will be an amazing figure skating competition as well, as all the top figure skaters from around the world have gathered in Calgary this week to take a shot at the world skating title.

The province should be proud of the city of Calgary for earning the right to host these events. Calgary has always done a tremendous job of displaying all that it has to offer to those who travel to our province for occasions such as these.

I'd like to wish all the competitors the best of luck throughout this week's championships.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Alberta Formed, Alberta Transformed Team Thomas World Junior Curling Champions

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and thank the members of the Alberta 2005 Centennial History Society and 34 authors who collaborated to produce a two-volume book titled *Alberta Formed, Alberta Transformed*. The book, a project supported by the centennial legacies program, was initiated in 1989 and had its launch at Grande Prairie Regional College on Friday, March 17. Society president and co-author Dr. Jaroslav Petryshyn was joined at the launch by three other authors, editor-in-chief Dr. Michael Payne, Brian Calliou, and Patricia Myers, all contributors, to unveil this remarkable history covering 12,000 years in Alberta. The book will be presented to all libraries, schools, and postsecondary institutions in the province. Truly, a lasting legacy of our centennial celebrations.

I would be remiss if I stood here and had an opportunity and did not tell you and all of my colleagues that Grande Prairie is now the home of the world junior curling champions. The Charley Thomas rink, Mr. Speaker, from Grande Prairie, brought home the gold. Again, the city of Grande Prairie, the province of Alberta, and Canada are proud of their accomplishments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: With the World Figure Skating Championships going on in Calgary and the world curling championships, the chair has to ask the question: why are we here today?

Multiple Sclerosis Society

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to attend a Multiple Sclerosis of Alberta information evening, and for that I would like to thank my old high school friend Joan Ozirny for the invitation. At this information session one of the problems was the problem of raising awareness of MS. I want to take this moment to do my little part in raising awareness amongst my colleagues here today of the MS Society and the work they do on behalf of the people who suffer through this illness.

The Alberta division is located in Edmonton and was founded in 1981. The division is made up of 17 chapters, which provide services to people affected with MS and living within the boundaries. One of these chapters is in Lloydminster, Mr. Speaker.

Multiple sclerosis, or MS, is a disease of the central nervous system that affects 1 in 300 people. In Alberta approximately 10,000 are living with MS. MS is the most common neurological disease in Canada affecting young adults. It is usually diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 40 but can occur in children or adults. Women are twice as likely to develop MS as men. Alberta has one of the highest rates of occurrence of MS anywhere in the world.

Symptoms may include vision problems, numbness or tingling sensation, loss of balance, extreme fatigue, short-term memory or cognitive difficulties, even paralysis. As yet there is no cure for MS, but drug therapy can reduce the frequency and severity of the MS attacks, allowing many people with MS to live normal or near normal lives.

Fundraising is another issue facing this society. The Alberta division and chapters organize and sponsor a number of fundraising events. However, four stand out as attracting the largest number of participants: the Super Cities Walk for MS, the Rona MS Bike Tour, the readathon program, and the carnation campaign. Together these annual events raise over 3 and a half million dollars for MS research and client services in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, their motto is: don't talk about us without us. I want to commend all the volunteers and members of the MS Society as they work to find a cure, raise awareness, and work to enable people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Public Health Care

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two-tiered medicine will not work as promised here in Alberta. The government are creating more problems than they are solving with the introduction of the third way. There is another way to the third way: a bold new government that believes in one health care system for everyone, not the two-tiered, Americanized system proposed by this tired old government. Public health care is sustainable; the Progressive Conservative government is not.

Canadians spend less than 10 per cent of their GDP on health care while Americans spend 15 per cent. Private health care is more expensive than public health care. We will not save money, and in fact costs to individual Albertans and employers will increase significantly through the purchase of private health insurance. We need to remind those who demand a private, parallel system that Canada's publicly funded, single-payer health care system provides businesses here with a competitive advantage over American companies who must pay the high costs of private health insurance for their employees.

How many times have we heard this government claim that health care spending is out of control? Instead of the 10 per cent annual increase in spending that's claimed by this government, health care spending increases in real dollars since 1992 have been very modest, averaging only 1.6 per cent a year between 1992 and 2004. The government uses misleading numbers, not controlled for population growth or inflation, from a few high-growth years that followed deep cuts to make its spending figures artificially high.

This government is out of control, not health care spending. We used to have faith in our public health care system. Now we feel insecurity because the government continues to distort the truth.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we should never forget that universal access to comparable levels of publicly funded health care services,

regardless of the ability to pay, is a fundamental element of Alberta's health care system. Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 93(2):

- (1) the petition of Royal Trust Corporation of Canada for the Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006,
- (2) the petition of Thomas Wispinski on behalf of the Alberta Catholic Health Corporation for the Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act,
- (3) the petition of Edmonton Community Foundation for the Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006, and
- (4) the petition of Calgary Olympic Development Association for the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2006.

head: 2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two documents on behalf of the leader of the NDP opposition. The first is a letter from Dr. John Wodak, of Sherwood Park. He calls the government's third-way experiment ill-defined and suggests that the venture be postponed for several years.

I'm also tabling an ad by Acure Health Corporation that was faxed to my constituency. It is promoting private health insurance for insured services. The insurance is underwritten by Western Financial Group, of which Mr. Jim Dinning is chairman of the board.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, did you have a tabling? Go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling six copies of letters from Karen Caine, Shauna Vanderheide, T. Beyer, Roberta Wells, M. Beyer, and Kristine Hagen regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycares.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings on health care. The first is from Richard Clarke, asking for sustainable universal medical insurance for all Albertans; then from Michele Brown, commenting on her concerns with having doctors work in both systems; from Susan Williams, against having the government's third way; from Pat Anderson, with concerns about using a private insurance company, Aon, to design our health system; from P. Stein, again commenting on the capacity shortage of specialists and family doctors practising in Alberta, particularly rural.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, and I have the appropriate copies. The first is from a constituent. The constituent is saying that he wishes to express his feelings about the incident in the Legislative Assembly involving the page earlier this month: "We expect our leaders to set an example. We have a right to demand that they respect their political opponents and respect ideas with which they do not agree."

My second tabling, with the appropriate number of copies, is letters regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters are from Robbin Bowman, Kelly Ireland, Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative Limited, Gail Clarke, Mellissa Kraft, and Denise Fenton.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of six of the many letters we have received from concerned parents voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I am tabling today are from Tina Yanitski, Nicole Kerfont, Pamela Hollander, Jane Potenher-Neal, Carol Hanson, and Pam Kerrigan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I would like to table five copies of the book *Hear My Voice*, which I referred to earlier. It's personal stories of persons with developmental disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise here today and table six letters from concerned Albertans regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare in our province. The letters I am tabling today are from Lori Folk, Pearl Frederick, Wendy, Christine Roguski, Andrea Hylak, and Maria Esperanza.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today with a number of tablings, the first being a letter from a constituent of Edmonton-Rutherford, Sterling Rideout. He indicates that he read the government's health policy framework with interest but, unfortunately, found it full of "ambiguity, vagueness, platitudes and repetition." Having read the Alberta Liberal vision for the health of Albertans, he found the proposals "to the point, specific, informative, easy to understand."

Also, the requisite number of copies from Reg Roberts, who e-mailed the Alberta Connects website, had a response from the Minister of Health and Wellness. This is his response to that response, indicating that it doesn't match up with his experiences with the private health care system.

The Speaker: Do you have them all?

Mr. R. Miller: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. R. Miller: I have more tablings, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, let's hurry up. We're two minutes now into this.

Mr. R. Miller: I'm trying to hurry, Mr. Speaker.

I also have six further letters regarding the provincial government's participation in the national daycare program. These are

from Earl Naddin,* Coreen Rieland, Denise Cote, Ms Iwaskow, Irene Jackson, and Kim Ganne.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Mr. Stuart Palace, who believes that the four teenagers alleged to have murdered a passenger on an ETS bus should have been denied bail.

The second tabling is from Marlene and Don Schwartz, also constituents of mine. This is a copy of their letter to the Premier, asking him to advise the Treasury Board to increase funding to persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, programs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got one document to table. It's a letter from Mary and Ed Gamble. The Gambles are strongly opposed to the Premier's third-way agenda in health care. Among many reasons that they give here for their opposition is that third-way health care in Alberta is about to make many Albertans second-class citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table six letters and appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters I'm tabling today are from the Terra Association, Megan Shandro, N. Keith, Angie Wiebe, Kim Pender, Janelle Schultz.

Thank you.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment: pursuant to the Veterinary Profession Act the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 2005 annual report.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Written Questions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given last week on Thursday, March 16, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

[Motion carried]

Opted-out Physicians

Q1. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

What is the total number of physicians who have opted out of the Alberta health care insurance plan for each of the 2001 to 2005 fiscal years and from April 1, 2005, to February 22, 2006?

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close debate.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll look forward to getting the answers to that question.
Thank you.

[Written Question 1 carried]

Wild Rose Foundation Grants

Q3. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Agnihotri that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 how many grants awarded by the Wild Rose Foundation were subsequently investigated due to inadequate assurance that grant funds were used as intended?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Community Development I'm pleased to respond and indicate that he, on behalf of government, is prepared to accept Written Question 3.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate or call the question.

[Written Question 3 carried]

3:00 Acheson Acclaim Sour Gas Blowout

Q4. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.
What was the total cost incurred by the government for its response to the Acheson Acclaim sour gas blowout that occurred on December 12, 2004, broken down by department?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're quite able and willing to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 4.

Mr. Taylor: Call the question.

[Written Question 4 carried]

Royalty Payments

Q5. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.
What is the exact dollar amount paid to each group or individual by the Ministry of Energy pertaining to its latest royalty review?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Written

Question 5, we're not prepared to accept this question on the basis that the department is continuously reviewing royalties. In respect to individuals or groups it's primarily an internal review that we do, so it's just employees and staff. We also accumulate all kinds of reports that are done by various groups, both industry and other associations throughout the world, but those aren't individual amounts that we pay.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would think that with all those many, many, many reports and calculations gathering dust in the basement of the Ministry of Energy, the minister could lay his hands on, you know, a few exact amounts and share them with the House. So I'm rising to express my disappointment but not my surprise.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 5 lost]

Medical School Spaces

Q6. Mr. Taylor moved that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2009-2010 how many additional spaces will be created in Alberta's medical schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is one of those questions which is very difficult to determine whether you should accept it or reject it because it asks for information which is not necessarily readily available. However, I'm going to recommend that the House accept the question, but I want to put a bit of a context around that.

Since the fall of 2000 there have been substantial increases in funded first-year physician seats in each of the two Alberta medical schools, 26 at the University of Alberta and 31 at the University of Calgary. The first graduates of those programs are now in residency training. That brings the spaces currently to 100 at the University of Calgary and 127 at the University of Alberta.

Now, the hon. member and the House will probably know that what we do each year with respect to growth in access places at postsecondary institutions is request each of the institutions to put forward their proposals for access growth. We then fund new spaces through the access growth fund, which we hope to rename the enrolment planning envelope so as to reduce any confusion between that and the access to the future fund. We also then talk with other departments. For example, with respect to health professions we would be sitting down and have been sitting down with the ministry of health to talk about where the greatest area of need is and how we can allocate resources appropriately. So the probable answer to the question, not to jump ahead of the game, is that that growth will be worked out in consultation with the postsecondary institutions involved and with the ministry of health and other stakeholders. The exact numbers will not be available until final budget dollars in each of those years are allocated.

I didn't want anyone to be under any illusions that by accepting this question or by rejecting the question, if that's what we recommend, we were trying to get around the information. It's really one of those situations where, while you have growth plans and you have growth aspirations, the question asks how many places will be in

place, and that answer is never certain until the funding dollars are actually appropriated to it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I have the hon. minister on my side on this one. I'll press my luck and call the question.

[Written Question 6 carried]

Nursing Program Spaces

Q7. Mr. Taylor moved that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2009-2010 how many additional spaces will be created in Alberta's nursing programs, broken down by institution and type of program?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to suggest that the House accept this question on the same basis as they did the last one, on the understanding that there has been considerable growth in the capacity. Between 1999 and 2005, for example, increased enrolment capacity in nursing programs across Alberta is anticipated to result in 3,177 student seats across all years of programming in registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, and registered psychiatric nurse education programs in 2009-2010. It will translate into approximately 525 new RN bachelor graduates, 188 new RN diploma graduates, 67 new RN masters and PhD graduates, 285 new LPN graduates.

However, as I indicated before, while we plan growth, while we anticipate growth, while we work with the department of health in terms of where we need new health care professionals and we work with each of the institutions in terms of how they can expand capacity, we're working in a number of areas to ensure that access to enrolment growth is available not just in urban centres but distributed across the province and distributed into rural areas where appropriate. New programs are being proposed. For example, Grande Prairie college is hoping to offer an RN program in co-operation with the University of Alberta. Both Grande Prairie and Northern Lakes colleges have proposals with respect to, for example, cohorts of education for RNs and LPNs in High Level. So there are many things happening and many proposals in place, some of which will actually be the subject of funding in the budget, I hope, in a couple of days.

With respect to exact places that are going to happen down the road, all I can actually report are the ones that we've got funded and put in place, and then we'll have to speculate on the others, knowing that as enrolment growth funds become available, both health profession and occupation programs and other programs are allocated to institutions across the province.

[Written Question 7 carried]

Physician Recruitment

Q8. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted. How many physicians have been recruited to work in Alberta municipalities with populations equal to or less than 15,000 residents for the fiscal years 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, and April 1, 2005, to February 23, 2006?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government will accept this written question with an amendment. The hon. member was notified before 10 this morning of such an amendment. We would propose that the question be amended by striking out "How many physicians have been recruited to work in" and substituting "What was the percentage increase in the number of physicians working in."

The Speaker: On the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not keen on this amendment because it disguises the information that I was looking for. I wanted to see what the numbers were that had actually been recruited because it makes a difference to us if there was one, or 10, or 50, and a percentage increase doesn't give us that kind of specificity. You could say that it increased by 100 per cent over the previous year because you had zero and now you have one. It really doesn't give us any kind of an indication of what's going on in those areas. I would have preferred to have had the information that I had requested originally, but it appears that I'm not going to get it.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Shall I now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate, or just call the question?

Ms Blakeman: Question.

[Written Question 8 as amended carried]

3:10 Health Resource Centre Joint Replacements

Q9. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted. How many of the patients who had qualified to be put on the list for surgery in the Alberta hip and knee replacement project were unable to have their surgery completed at the Health Resource Centre in Calgary due to other health issues that these patients had that could not be treated by this particular private clinic during the fiscal year 2004-2005?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept Written Question 9.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate?

[Written Question 9 carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given last Thursday, March 16, it is my pleasure to now move

that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 1 through 19.

[Motion carried]

Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee

M1. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all submissions received by the Alberta Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee between May 26, 2005, and February 22, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 1 I will respond on behalf of the hon. Premier by saying that this particular motion will need to be rejected, and I'd like to basically provide a little bit of insight as to why. Number one, the information about the review that is requested here is in fact subject to our internal review process, and as such it's not able to be released. Secondly, I should probably mention that the interviews that were conducted were verbal, and they were as such conducted either in person or by telephone. Thirdly, the parties who were interviewed in this particular internal review did so with the expectation that their comments would not be publicly disseminated. So on that basis we are unable to respond in the affirmative, and we'll have to reject MR 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this is sort of the idea of consultation behind closed doors again. I would remind the minister that this is taxpayers' money. I know that they see the Public Affairs Bureau as basically their little institution to run and put their spin on things, but I would remind them that it's not the Conservative Party, that this is actually taxpayers' money. These people are supposedly public servants paid for by the taxpayers of Alberta, and they have a lot of power. We've learned this over the years.

If there was to be a review, I would think we'd want an open public review. I see the member back there – I hope he gets into the debate. An open public review: obviously, they don't want to do this. Again, the reputation that this group has is just basically an arm of government, the spin doctors. That's totally inappropriate in a society where the taxpayers are picking up the bill. It now is basically a propaganda arm run directly out of the Premier's office. I was hoping that this review would say that that's what's happening because that's what all of us believe.

I can't understand, when we're dealing with something that's paid for by taxpayers' money in the public regime, that we can't have this information. Mr. Speaker, this makes absolutely no sense to me at all. I could understand it if it was the Conservative Party paying for this, even though they treat it as sort of their propaganda wing. We really would like to know who's saying what behind closed doors. Are we just going to continue in the same way? I hope the member from Calgary – I forget the name of the last debate – I'd certainly like to hear from that member in this particular debate. Maybe we'll get time in the second question that he can stand up and do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee

M2. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all minutes of the Alberta Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee meetings from May 26, 2005, to February 22, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 2, which effectively requests the provision of certain minutes from certain meetings, I need to inform all members present that there were no minutes kept at those particular meetings, so it would be impossible to provide something that does not exist. On that basis, I would indicate that we will have to reject this Motion for a Return 2.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I find it, to say the least, unusual, unbelievable that we'd have these meetings, and there would not be minutes of what was going on in the meetings. I mean, what kind of way to run the ship is that? Again, it's this whole idea of closed meetings, taxpayers' money, and the public not consulted, the public not supposed to know, not even people in the Legislature supposed to know what's going on.

Doesn't this talk about 100 years of democracy, the way this Public Affairs Bureau works, Mr. Speaker? I think that the government should be totally ashamed about this, totally ashamed that a Public Affairs Bureau is working out of the Premier's office as a propaganda spin for the government, and you say to the people in the Legislative Assembly here today and through us to the people of Alberta that we have no rights – we have no rights – to know what's going on. This is the government's take on it.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't surprise me. I can't say that I'm shocked. I'm appalled but not shocked because I expected this.

Mr. Hancock: Not shocked and appalled?

Mr. Martin: Well, the hon. House leader should be shocked and appalled that this is happening, Mr. Speaker.

I can't believe that this Public Affairs Bureau – while I may not have liked the Public Affairs Bureau before, I think it's just under this government, under this Premier, since it came under the Premier's purview, under his direction. Surely the government must see something wrong with this. If they don't, then maybe we do have a four-year dictatorship here in the province. Hopefully, the next time we celebrate 100 years of democracy, we can at least have a Legislature that has purview over some of this information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

Health Resource Centre and Network Health Inc.

M3. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence, including e-mails, contracts, proposals, briefing notes, or memoranda, prepared for or by the government and/or the Calgary health region pertaining to the Health Resource Centre or Network Health Inc. between January 1, 2002, and February 22, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is rejecting Motion for a Return 3. When the public body is considering giving access to a record that may contain third-party business information, the public body must provide written notice to the third party prior to disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Therefore, request for this information must be made under provision of the FOIP Act.

The Speaker: The hon. member to close the debate.

3:20

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, here we have a government and a minister that says that they want to consult with Albertans. They're moving ahead with the so-called third way, and the minister says, "We can consult, and we want everybody to know what's going on." One of the advocates for privatization is this particular group in Calgary moving ahead, pushing ahead, yet the minister says, "Well, it's their business review." Well, this is a very important part of the information that we should have and the people of Alberta should have because this is a group that's pushing ahead with privatization. What influence do they have with government?

Again, if the minister talks about the consultation process, that they're open, transparent. Well, we're not. This is information that the people of Alberta should have. I'm not naive enough to think that they're going to do this but, again, it's just typical, Mr. Speaker, absolutely typical of the way this government operates, behind closed doors.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee

M4. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the report of the Alberta Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee announced on May 26, 2005.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion 4 I will indicate on behalf of government that we are going to be rejecting this particular motion, and I'd like to briefly explain the rationale for that conclusion. Within government management periodically reviews the structure and resourcing of departments to ensure that they are organized in a manner that would allow them to carry out their mandates as effectively as possible. These, in fact, are internal, management-type responsibilities, and they are not therefore deemed appropriate for public review. They are internal.

Now, the Public Affairs Bureau review process was no different than many other processes. In fact, the particular recommendations of an advisory committee that does get obtained for consideration by management in its review of the Public Affairs Bureau organizations were provided for internal purposes only. On that basis, Mr. Speaker, we will be rejecting Motion for a Return 4.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hate repeating myself, but here we go again. Here's a government agency, paid for by the taxpayers. The minister is right about one thing. He says that it's no

different from other reviews; it's an internal review. It seems like they think that the taxpayers' money is just for their use. Here we have a very powerful part of the government, the Public Affairs Bureau. Here we are in the Legislature of Alberta, the elected representatives, asking for information about a government department and being refused by the government, saying, "It's just for internal review, and it's no different from other reviews."

That's the problem, Mr. Speaker, to the deputy House leader. That's the problem. That's the way this government operates: behind closed doors. We're well aware of that, but this is something that should change. Surely this government should see the irony of this. Here is a Public Affairs Bureau that's probably the most important – directly out of the Premier's office, paid for by the taxpayers – and they think that it's their own internal right to control this information. We as legislators here have no rights. I mean, democracy. Yeah, real democracy in Alberta, Alberta style.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

CO₂ Injection

M5. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies, briefing notes, backgrounders, feasibility studies, or environmental assessments prepared by or for the Ministry of Environment from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze the injection of CO₂ for storage purposes.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Environment I'd like to state that we would like to move an amendment to this motion. We certainly accept the intent of this motion. Copies have been distributed to everybody. We would accept an amendment saying, "copies of all studies, feasibility studies, or environmental assessments prepared by or for the Ministry of Environment from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze the injection of CO₂ for storage purposes." That does amend it by striking out "briefing notes" and "backgrounders."

Both briefing notes and backgrounders for the most part are provided very much on a confidential basis, internal for discussion for the minister's purposes. They also would potentially contain information that would be very proprietary to any individual company that would be involved, and that would be subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

So we'd move to accept it on an amended basis.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to look at some of the information in regard to the decisions being made in regard to CO₂ injection. However, I do take exception to the amendment in some very important ways, not the least of which being the fact that backgrounders and briefing notes are, in fact, very useful in understanding the direction of the policy being undertaken in this particular issue and then all other issues as well. There are lots of statistical analyses and data sets out there, but what I think Albertans would like to know and need to know about this major undertaking of CO₂ injection and storage is which ones are actually being considered by the minister, what recommendations are being made, and how those recommendations are actually deliberated or considered.

I feel a dark shadow passing over the Legislature here in regard to this motion because it reminds me of Bill 20. Bill 20 looks to categorically exempt briefing notes and ministerial backgrounders from any FOIP requests, and conceivably any information could be CCed to the minister and then become exempt from FOIP. So by putting that stamp of being a briefing note or something that is confidential to ministerial jurisdiction only will, as I say, put a censor across, perhaps, vast tracts of information that are relevant to the proceedings of good government here in this Legislature. I have a serious problem with that. For the minister to indicate that such information will also not be provided to the Assembly directly is completely counter to the rhetoric and talk around here about transparency, openness, and accountability. So I have difficulty. In fact, I will not support the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder do you want to close the debate or should we call the question?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I don't preclude the anticipation with which I'm looking for this information that I've asked for. You know, on this whole CO₂ injection process we need to have further clarification, and I've had some very illuminating discussions with members here in the House. I guess my biggest concern is to make sure we are differentiating between injection of CO₂ for the extraction of oil and CO₂ for storage so that it does not contribute to the greenhouse effect in the atmosphere. I would like to see clarification between those two things because they are, in fact, two very different things. I hope that we all are edified and educated on this subject so that we don't spread confusion on this matter and think that we're perhaps helping the atmosphere by injecting just for the sake of extracting oil.

So I close the debate.

[Motion for a Return 5 as amended carried]

3:30 CO₂ Injection

M6. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies, briefing notes, backgrounders, feasibility studies, or environmental assessments prepared by or for the Ministry of Energy and/or the Ministry of Environment from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze the injection of CO₂ for the extraction of oil.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This one is very much like Motion for a Return 5. It does take a very significant difference, though, as the hon. member mentioned. This is more for the extraction of oil rather than for storage purposes, and they are different purposes.

We'd like to move an amendment to this one as well, Motion for a Return 6, by striking out "briefing notes, backgrounders." Therefore, the amended motion would read

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies, feasibility studies, or environmental assessments prepared by or for the Ministry of Energy and/or the Ministry of Environment from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze the injection of CO₂ for the extraction of oil.

For the same reasons previously said, we are happy to give the information. You get lots of material that comes to the minister.

Much of it is for your own internal purpose and need for when you're examining various possibilities. Some of it's very proprietary. Much of it's proprietary to individual companies as they're coming forward and making some recommendations. So it's for that reason that we're striking out "briefing notes, backgrounders," but we're happy to comply with the basic request of this motion as amended.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has an amendment. That's what we're on now if people want to participate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister's openness in presenting at least some of the information relevant to this. Once again my very same argument applies to this amendment, and I just want to reiterate, I guess, the crossroads that we could be at here in regard to excluding information from public purview.

I do realize that there is some sensitivity in briefing notes. You know, I do have my own briefing notes that I use every day here, but when it comes down to making an actual policy and the direction of that policy, I believe that at least sometimes we do need to have that direction. There's a vast galaxy of information out there on any given subject, but if we know where the minister is drawing his or her conclusions from, it makes a very large difference as to what sorts of plans and information we can have to work with.

Again, it's this whole issue of Bill 20. I'm very concerned about Bill 20 in regard to being able to just put that ministerial briefing note stamp on any pile of information, and suddenly it disappears from public view. So I do with all due respect speak in rejection of this amendment.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, do you want to conclude the debate, or should I call the question?

Mr. Eggen: I'll just very briefly, yes. I'm looking forward to seeing this information. As you can see, I'm looking both from the Energy and the Environment side in regard to CO₂ injection, and I hope that each of us here in the House doesn't mix up storage with injection for taking the oil out. In fact, the New Democrats support very much using CO₂ as opposed to water for injection to extract more oil from the ground, but we just don't want it to be framed in the illusion that this is somehow long-term storage of CO₂ that would protect us from the effects of greenhouse gases.

I will close the debate on this one and thank you very much.

[Motion for a Return 6 as amended carried]

Third-way Health Initiative

M7. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including legal opinions, briefing notes, backgrounders, or memoranda, prepared by or for the Ministry of Health from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze whether the government's third-way initiative violates either existing provincial legislation or the Canada Health Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon.

Minister of Health and Wellness I need to indicate to all members that government's response to this particular request will be to reject it, and I'd like to briefly explain why on behalf of that same minister. The reason, really, is because the records that are being requested here are likely to fall within the exception that is outlined in section 27 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, otherwise known as FOIP. The department's practice is not to disclose records that are protected by solicitor-client privilege, or legal privilege. So, on that basis, we find it necessary to reject this particular MR.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: I'm absolutely shocked that this got rejected, Mr. Speaker. This I think goes to the heart of it. Now the minister is doing the Privacy Commissioner's job for him before it even goes there. This is absolutely key because this has to do with the so-called third-way initiative. We're trying to figure out here, because of the vagueness of what the government is talking about, whether this initiative, the so-called third way, violates either existing provincial legislation or the Canada Health Act. This is absolutely crucial for us to know what we're dealing with here. If it does violate the Canada Health Act – and we believe on this side that it does to some degree – that could end up costing the taxpayers millions of dollars if this government bullheadedly moves ahead in this particular way with the health care privatization.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, we'd want to know this information that could end up, as I say, costing the taxpayers millions of dollars. Again, typical of this government: if we can find a loophole, we don't want to give the information; behind closed doors. It's just typical of what we've learned to expect, and we'll keep asking the questions. Maybe someday there'll be a miracle, and they'll actually answer something that was worth while.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

Health and Wellness Consultations

M8. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the results, data, and analysis of all public opinion polls, focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires undertaken by or on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Wellness from January 1, 2004, to February 22, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness I will indicate that government is not able to support this motion, and as such we will have to reject it. I'd like to briefly offer an explanation as to why that is the case. Mr. Speaker, as you and all members here would know, when the public body is considering giving access to a record that may contain third-party business or personal information, the public body must provide written notice to the third party and/or to individuals prior to disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Therefore, a request for this information must be made under provisions of that act, and as such we find ourselves in a position of having to reject this particular request.

3:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What patent nonsense. This has nothing to do with getting written permission from third parties. We're talking about public opinion polls, focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires paid for by the taxpayers of Alberta. That's what we're asking about. Where's the third party in that?

This is money, again, paid by the taxpayers of Alberta. They're doing these focus groups. They told us that. They're doing opinion polls. We're bringing in what is supposed to be a major initiative sometime later on in the session, and here again this government is saying that we as legislators don't have the right to know this business. To say that this is third party, that they can't do this without, you know, getting permission from the third party – from what? The opinion poll? I'm sure that the government could release opinion polls that they paid for. They can talk about the focus groups and all the rest of it. Again, it's the taxpayers paying for this, Mr. Speaker.

You know, to me it's just unbelievable that this government can sit there, and for the most important initiative that we're going to be dealing with in the next number of years, we can't get this information. Yet they're going to come, they say, with legislation later on.

Again, tie the two together. I'm sure the Public Affairs Bureau is behind this. I'm sure that this group that we can't get information on is also tied into this particular polling and all the rest of it. But, again, we'll keep trying. Closed-door government, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 8 lost]

Grizzly Bear Population Data

M9. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports, briefing notes, backgrounders, or memoranda regarding grizzly bear populations in Alberta prepared by or for the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development from January 1, 2004, to February 22, 2006.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I would like to indicate that we will be rejecting this motion for a return, but on March 3 of this year the Department of SRD released the information regarding the grizzly bear recovery program and other information regarding the provincial grizzly bear population. This information is publicly available on the Sustainable Resource Development website. With respect to the other materials, the briefing notes and memoranda, we've had a number of discussions already on that issue, and we don't need to further that debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to close the debate.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, this particular motion, which I drafted before that information was released, is somewhat less urgent save for the fact that it's curious to see how poorly the decision was executed to in fact suspend the hunt for the next three years. It wasn't a smooth process by any means, and it took several individuals and the press to quite frankly stick their necks out to actually have this move forward. What we would like to know and I'm sure the public would like to know is: what was wrong with the study that was being withheld for so long in regard to the grizzly bear population, and why were there so many differing opinions there?

I think that there was, Mr. Speaker, a great deal of spin and misinformation being put forward by the SRD department in regard

to the actual number of grizzly bears. It was clear that they knew that their estimates were seriously less than the actual population out there. I had heard that between highway 16 and highway 1, in fact, there could be as few as a hundred bears as opposed to the 500 or 600 or 700 bears being put forward by SRD for several seasons. You know, there's a whole mix here that gets in the way of true ecological decision-making in terms of sustaining this population, and the politics of the hunt got involved there. Certainly, a very, very powerful lobby of the Energy and forestry departments was getting involved and interfering with this.

So, finally, I do applaud the minister for making the decision to suspend the hunt for three years. I'm just hoping that we will realize that the numbers are in a crisis state, that the grizzly bear is a threatened species, that the grizzly bear, in fact, is an indicator of a larger problem of unsustainable development of the eastern slopes and that we look to preserving meaningful tracts of land for future generations, which would be for the benefit of not just the grizzly bears but for the whole ecosystem and for our children and grandchildren.

I do want to say once again, though, that I do appreciate the hon. minister suspending the hunt for the next three years. I know that the grizzly bears are currently still hibernating, but I would like to suggest and nominate that the hon. minister is the first one out there to break the good news to the grizzly bear population when they do wake up and be there to tell them that they won't be at the short end of a gun coming this fall.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 9 lost]

Land Sales Systems

M10. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the agenda and minutes of the February 20, 2004, meeting involving the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo referenced on page 30 of the October 2005 Report of the Auditor General on Alberta Social Housing Corporation – Land Sales Systems.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion 10 I'm recommending that it be rejected. That is because, as referenced in the Auditor General's report, the February 20, 2004, meeting between the minister of seniors and the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was an informal meeting that did not have a written agenda or minutes, so these documents simply do not exist. I'd also like to add that on July 15, 2005, my department released almost 500 pages of land appraisals, land sales agreements, correspondence, and other records to the opposition under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This clearly shows that we do release information when it's appropriate under this act, but in this case the release of these documents under FOIP is inappropriate. Those same reasons apply to this motion because the documents simply do not exist.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to conclude the debate.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. That may well be the case, but something happened, Mr. Speaker. I would just remind the minister that the Auditor General found very serious failings in the way we dealt with

the Fort McMurray land deal. In the 2000 Confederation Heights deal, 73 free acres, the price was lower than the appraised value. I mean, that cost the taxpayers a lot of money. It caused housing prices to certainly skyrocket in Fort McMurray. Then we found with Timberlea all the untendered parts of the bids going, you know, for much less than the tendered parts right by each other. We found financing terms.

All these things the Auditor General talked about. We've been trying to find out: why did that happen, Mr. Speaker? Why did that happen? We have not got an answer yet. The Auditor General doesn't have the answer. All we know is that there are problems, big problems again, that cost the taxpayers a lot of extra money and certainly didn't help the land prices in Fort McMurray. We know what has happened there.

Again it's transparency. We're told by this government that they always look into things. They would never have any problems at all in this government, never any things that were wrong. They would never have a Gomery. They would never have anything like this because I think the Premier said that he would be hung. Well, I mean, something went desperately wrong here, Mr. Speaker, and we still don't have the answers. We know the answers that the taxpayers got and we know what some of the people in Fort McMurray got. Why did it happen? We still don't know. We'll wait, then, for the next question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 10 lost]

3:50 Land Sales Systems

M11. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the memo from the deputy minister to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports referenced on page 30 of the October 2005 Report of the Auditor General on Alberta Social Housing Corporation – Land Sales Systems.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this particular case the same answers can't come back from the minister because there was a copy of the memo, and it is alluded to by the Auditor General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 11 I am recommending that it be rejected, and that's because the memo identified in the motion has already been requested under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. After a thorough review it was determined that it would be inappropriate to provide this memo to the opposition because the request would breach sections 17, 21, and 24 of the FOIP Act. Specifically, releasing this information would be an unreasonable invasion of a third party's personal privacy. The same reasons why this request was denied apply here as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's interesting. This is not an informal conversation, that the minister used last time. This was a memo, and she's talking about a third party. Well, it was

a memo from the deputy minister – the last time I looked, they were paid by the taxpayers of Alberta – to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Who's the third party here? I mean, this is the top deputy minister to the minister.

Again I would remind members of the Assembly that this is a very serious situation in terms of how this went awry, and surely it's part of the job of the opposition but, more than that, of the people in the Legislative Assembly to try to find out when taxpayers' money is wasted – in this case it was – why it was wasted, why certain people that were close to the government seem to have an inside track. This information could be very valuable so it never happens again. I know that it didn't happen in this minister's time, but if we don't learn from the past, we're doomed to repeat the same mistakes again.

So again I'm not surprised but disappointed that we'll probably never get to the thing. We'll never have a public inquiry in this province ever to get to the bottom of this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 11 lost]

Audit of Securities Commission

M12. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. R. Miller that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the final report submitted by the accounting firm KPMG to the Alberta Securities Commission, ASC, auditing ASC employee computer systems.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I need to indicate that this particular Motion for a Return 12 will need to be rejected. The reason for that is as follows. First of all, the Alberta Securities Commission Board did in fact retain the KPMG firm to perform an audit on the ASC's e-mail system, that being the Alberta Securities Commission. I'm advised that the KPMG report in question is, in fact, an internal and confidential document of the Alberta Securities Commission. As such, it is necessary for government to reject this Motion for a Return 12.

I should just conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that the hon. Minister of Finance actually addressed this matter here in question period over a year ago – as I recall, it was April 21 – and perhaps on other occasions as well. So there is some previous record with respect to this particular issue.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we thought that the hon. Minister of Finance had addressed the issue in question period in a manner that we found a satisfactory answering to our questions, I'm sure we wouldn't have gone ahead with this motion for a return. What can I say except that I'm disappointed and once again not surprised? Although I do note the note of regret in the Deputy Government House Leader's voice every time he says that he's going to have to reject one of these things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 12 lost]

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

M13. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. R. Miller that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund ethical investment policy.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, again on behalf of the hon. Minister

of Finance, who oversees this particular area, I need to indicate that government will be rejecting this particular motion. The motion for a return, as we can all read, refers to an ethical investment policy, inferring that there is, in fact, some stand-alone ethical policy in existence. In fact, there is no separate ethical investment policy that I'm aware of. Investments are made on the basis of what their risk and return components are. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I need to indicate that that's the answer, and we'll have to reject this particular motion for those reasons.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to conclude the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am of course absolutely unsurprised by the response, and with that in mind I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document called Ethical Guidelines for the Government Pension Fund – Global, put out by the Finance department, the Ministry of Finance, of the government of Norway.

The Speaker: Perhaps you could do that tomorrow during the Routine.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will.

[Motion for a Return 13 lost]

Student Loan Relief Program

M14. Mr. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including but not limited to studies, budgetary analyses, submissions, proposals, memos, and other correspondence, related to the decision to increase the minimum debt level required for eligibility for the Alberta student loan relief program from \$5,000 to \$7,140 per annum.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to indicate that I'm prepared to accept this motion. I recommend acceptance of the motion, although before the hon. member opposite gets too excited, I would want to make sure that people were aware that it's not likely to end up in a whole truckload of documents coming over. The hon. member will know or should know that the rationale for moving to \$7,140 is that the federal government finally, after 10 years, increased their lending limits to \$7,140. Provincial lending kicks in after the federal lending, so that's essentially where the increase in the lending limit comes from and the increase in the debt load comes from.

So it's not rocket science. It's not as a result of a huge amount of analysis. It's really as a result of the collaborative process of the loan system across the country. In fact, one of the reasons why the debt load increased as well is that we don't forgive federal debt. We encourage the federal government to get involved in a program where they could forgive some of the debt that they put out.

We essentially have two ways of dealing with student debt. The first is for a first-time student borrowing money to have a student loan relief program so that the first amount of money that we would give a first-time student borrowing would be a grant rather than a loan. Then the second is a student relief benefit, which pays down their debt on their behalf after they graduate and consolidate their debt.

The problem we have, of course, is that we only give relief on

provincially advanced debt, not federally advanced debt, and the new level, the \$7,140, is a federal amount. Under the student loan program across the country we advance federal monies first and then advance provincial monies on top of that.

4:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to acknowledge the comments of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and thank him on a couple of levels: number one, for agreeing to support this motion for a return and, number two, for promising that there won't be a truckload of documents forthcoming. Any time that we can get the answers we're seeking, that give us a fuller and more complete understanding of issues around student debt load and student assistance program matters and affordability, you know, without having to clear-cut another chunk of Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia to fell the trees to produce the paper to do that I think is a good day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 14 carried]

Campus Alberta Quality Council

M15. Mr. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including but not limited to studies, reports, proposals, presentations, and correspondence, related to the design, mandate, and implementation of the Campus Alberta Quality Council, including any correspondence between the Ministry of Advanced Education, formerly Learning, and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, AUCC, or other accreditation organizations.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with the hon. member's desire not to clear-cut Clayoquot or any other place in order to get documents, I have to recommend that this particular motion be rejected.

Mr. Speaker, the Campus Alberta Quality Council is a very important agency, a quality assurance agency that makes recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education on applications from postsecondary institutions seeking to offer new degree programs in Alberta. Other than degrees in divinity all degree programs offered in Alberta, including degrees offered by nonresident institutions, must be approved by the minister after such a recommendation.

This motion for a return is very similar to Motion for a Return 50 in the last session of this Legislature. It was also moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Again, the concern is similar, that the motion is very broad, asks for a wide range of documents, most of which are available to the member by going to the Campus Alberta Quality Council's website. Any information that is not available on the website he could certainly ask for. There are no secrets here. I'd be happy to provide him with appropriate information.

Some of the information that's being requested simply just does not exist. On the question of correspondence between the department and AUCC about the design, mandate, and implementation of the council, there's no such official correspondence of which I am aware after questioning. This was also already indicated to the hon. member in the response to Motion for a Return 50 in the last session.

In short, Mr. Speaker, most of the information the hon. member

wants is available on the website at www.caqc.gov.ab.ca. Most of the rest of the information he's seeking doesn't exist. But if there's some specific information he wants about the set-up, operation, investigation, analysis with respect to the Alberta quality council, I'd be happy to deal with his questions and invite him to either send me the request for the information or arrange to sit down with myself and, if I can, invite the members of the quality council.

There's nothing secret about the quality council. They're doing great work for Albertans. They were set up to achieve a quality standard. They're working with us to achieve standards of assessment, standards of quality across the country so that education in Alberta can be seen for its value to any institution around the world. It's appropriate for every Albertan to take a look at the quality council and the good work that it's doing. I'd be happy to zero in on whatever information might be applicable, but this question is too broad to be answered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll close the debate very quickly simply by making a point, and I will take the minister up on his offer. The Campus Alberta Quality Council is set up and does seek to set high standards for excellence in postsecondary education within the province of Alberta. Of course, the problem with the Campus Alberta Quality Council, as we speak today, is that it confines its activities to the province of Alberta. The last time I looked, although we may be a distinct society, we are still a member of Confederation. We cannot operate in isolation. That's why it is instructive to know what work has been undertaken or, furthermore, what work is being undertaken or will be undertaken in the future. I realize that I'm going a little off the scope of the motion, as broad as the minister thinks it already is at this point, to determine any kind of communication that is or should be going on between the Campus Alberta Quality Council and the AUCC, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that right now, because we do not have a national accreditation facility for postsecondary institutions and the programs that they offer in this country, the AUCC falls almost by default into a role very similar to that. In order to get easy transition and transference from a baccalaureate degree in this province to a graduate studies program at an institution in another province, it helps a whole lot to have AUCC recognition because that tells the graduate school at the other university in whatever province that, in fact, the baccalaureate degree that the student has meets certain standards and is recognized by the AUCC.

I see that the minister is shaking his head. We've had this discussion before. We'll have this discussion again. Until such time as the Campus Alberta Quality Council, perhaps, is the campus Canada quality council, I think there's benefit in communicating with the AUCC and making sure that the quality council's mandate and standards line up with the AUCC.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 15 lost]

Health and Wellness Travel Expenses

M16. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a detailed breakdown of all expenses incurred by the Minister of Health and Wellness, her staff, and/or designate on trips during the 2004-2005 fiscal year, including but not limited to travel, accommodation, meals,

receptions, and hosting as well as incidental and miscellaneous expenses.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to just quickly reference Motion for a Return 16. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness I would like to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Motion for a Return 16.

Ms Blakeman: Excellent.
Question.

[Motion for a Return 16 carried]

Private Nonemergency Health Insurance

M17. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all cost-benefit analyses for the implementation of private insurance for nonemergency health services.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again on behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness I need to indicate that the government will be rejecting this Motion for a Return 17. Briefly, here is why. The information may contain pending policy and/or budgetary information – perhaps forthcoming budgetary information; we'll see – that could interfere with the decision-making process at Alberta Health and Wellness. As such, that ministry may need to consider these records prior to any such broad dissemination. Finally, Alberta Health and Wellness has in fact received a similar FOIP request on these records. For those particular reasons the government will indicate that it is unable to support this motion for a return and will be rejecting it.

4:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm disappointed to hear that because the information that has been requested here is of keen interest to Albertans to help understand why the government is making certain decisions. If the issue for the government is the timing of the particular request, I invite the minister to provide that information following the budget debate if, in fact, that is what is causing her concern at this time. I'm certainly willing to honour the confidentiality of the budget until it's released. If that is what her primary holdback concern is, please release it after that time.

This is another example, Mr. Speaker, of the frustration that we in the opposition experience in trying to get information. As you've pointed out on a number of occasions, it's question period, not answer period. We don't get answers during that opportunity. We send letters. We don't get information that way. We ask in written questions and motions for returns. We often are turned down there. We do FOIP requests and are met with enormous expenses that are in the tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars to try and meet some of these requests. So, yes, we are going to continue to try every possible avenue that is available to us to pry information out of this government because they certainly don't provide it without having every legal means brought upon them to provide that information. I'm not surprised. This is typical of the government, particularly around their plans for privatizing health care, that they will not tell us from whence this is coming and who's talking to

them and what the studies are that they've done. Disappointed, but on we go.

[Motion for a Return 17 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Meetings with Private Health Care Representatives

M18. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing for each of the fiscal years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 a list of all groups and individuals representing either specific private health care related companies or any association, group, or organization representing the interests of the private health care industry who have met with the Premier, the Minister of Health and Wellness, the assistant deputy ministers of Health and Wellness, or any Alberta standing policy committee.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The purpose of this is obvious, Mr. Speaker. Since we don't have a lobbyist registry, we are unable to find out who has had the ear of the Premier and of the Minister of Health and Wellness to be able to influence them in the decisions that they make. This is an attempt on our part to elicit exactly who has had access to them so that the rest of the public can find out who's been able to influence them when members of the public have not.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion for a Return 18 falls within the purview of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, and I will respond on her behalf by indicating that the government will need to reject this motion for a return. Here, briefly, are some of the reasons why. First of all, the information requested may in fact contain personal and very private information. When the public body is considering giving access to a record that may contain third-party business information, the public body must provide written notice to the third party prior to such disclosure, which is in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, FOIP. This information is not readily available and would require an inordinate amount of departmental resources to research and compile. Accessing this information under FOIP would allow government to consider an appropriate fee for this request if applicable.

So for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, a request for this particular information would be better made and, I would submit, must be made under the provisions of the FOIP Act. As such, the government will need to reject this particular MR.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to conclude the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why we need a lobbyist registry in this province. We had an all-party committee that looked at it and certainly recommended that that happen because this is the process that's met. We've had a group of people who've been able to meet with the Premier, with the Minister of Health and Wellness, influence them, and the rest of the people, the citizens of the province of Alberta, have no idea who those people are. Using the excuse that this is somehow private does not cut it in this province when there's been access to be able to influence government policy. All we asked for was a listing of those people. We

didn't ask for what was in the meeting or what the policies were that were recommended.

Mr. Taylor: Or how much the orange juice cost.

Ms Blakeman: Or, indeed, how much the orange juice cost.

But this is why there's such a problem here. It's antidemocratic. This is part of what is going to bring this government down, if I may be allowed to say so, Mr. Speaker. It's that absolute disregard for openness and transparency. What is the need to have secrecy here? If those individuals are meeting to influence this government on government policy, then their names should be public. Maybe what they're actually discussing behind closed doors may not be, but who is getting access to the government is of utmost importance, and it should be made public. That's why this kind of arrogance is going to contribute to bringing this government down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 18 lost]

Alberta Securities Commission

M19. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. R. Miller that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the report completed by BearingPoint Canada regarding employee complaints at the Alberta Securities Commission that allege senior management engaged in favouritism and fostered an oppressive work environment.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance with respect to Motion for a Return 19 and to indicate on her behalf and on behalf of government that there are reasons to reject this particular motion for a return.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Securities Commission Board retained BearingPoint Canada as their management consultant in order to conduct an organizational assessment of the Alberta Securities Commission management. The BearingPoint Canada report is an internal and confidential report of the Alberta Securities Commission.

Furthermore, I believe that the Minister of Finance did speak to the issues at hand with respect to the Alberta Securities Commission on May 9, 2005, on April 26, 2005, on April 7, 2005, on April 5, 2005, on April 4, 2005, on March 23, 2005, and perhaps on other occasions as well and has advised me that her advice is that government will have to reject this particular motion for a return.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wow. That was quite a list you put together, quite a list, in fact, of all the times that the Minister of Finance has spoken to this issue. It must have taken some research dollars and resources and time. Needless to say – but I'll say it anyway – if the Official Opposition had been satisfied with those answers, this motion for a return would not be appearing on the Order Paper today.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 19 lost]

The Speaker: Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: 4:20

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you two people who have been following the progress of the MLA task force with great interest: Robert Warden and Laura Gibos. I would ask them to rise and be recognized by this House.

**head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 205 Continuing Care Standards Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would firstly like to thank my caucus colleague from Edmonton-Manning for so generously giving me his bill draw number, 205. The issue of protection for those in care has been of great interest to him for many years.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I delivered my maiden speech on May 8, '05. I had no idea at that time how prophetic it would be, and I am paraphrasing. I spoke of the need for provincial, standardized care for the vulnerable in long-term care. I spoke of staff shortages or, in the case of assisted living or designated living, having to pay extra costs for those services because what they were entitled to was so minimal. I said that I prayed that none of us or more so our parents would experience the indignity of only being a commodity on a bottom line. I said that we can as a collective Assembly do better, and we must. We owe it to this House and to the people to govern fairly, openly, honestly, and to be accountable. I've finished at this point paraphrasing.

We must do better than to have class-action lawsuits as a form of accountability. The Auditor General's report of May 2005 into long-term care in Alberta was scathing in its findings. The standards were outdated, and even those were not being adhered to. However, there were new standards being contemplated but only in draft form. In response to the Auditor General's report a task force was established by the ministries of Seniors and Community Supports and Health and Wellness. The task force's mandate was to discuss these draft standards with the stakeholders. I thank the Premier for hearing me when I suggested that because of my experience as a front-line caregiver in long-term care I would be of benefit to that task force. My appointment did set a precedent for opposition members to be involved.

Mr. Speaker, believe me, everyone connected with that task force, MLAs and staff, worked flat out, but the hardest part was the emotional stories, that could leave you mentally and emotionally exhausted. Early into the process it became very clear that in addition to discussion on the draft standards, it was going to take on a different dimension and a life of its own, and as a result the process was opened to more of the general public. People started to share their pain and frustrations of having no one to talk to about complaints on the care of their family members. Complaints were shuffled around until often the person died and the family understandably gave up.

There was talk of perceived neglect and abuse. There were investigations, but only recommendations were forthcoming, and that did nothing to relieve the frustrations of the families. There

appeared to be no one ultimately responsible. It became clear to me – and the task force’s document *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care* echoes that – there is a need for provincial standards for all of those in care regardless of where they live or who delivers the care. They must be clear, measurable, resident-focused standards with strict guidelines for enforcement.

This bill is intended to create a position for a thoroughly independent officer, legislated and responsible to this House. The officer would monitor Alberta’s continuing care facilities to ensure that they all comply with provincial standards; receive, review, and investigate complaints while protecting the confidentiality of whistleblowers; conduct inquiries and investigations where appropriate; report annually to the Legislature. They would have the power to enter continuing care premises, collect information, and order action on the licences, grants, and contracts of continuing care facilities. It would be the final stop for accountability, for protection for all of those in continuing care.

This should not be another big bureaucracy, nor should it have the chance to turn into a growth industry. Small is good, accountable, and as a rule it is more efficient. With the increasing privatization of housing and care delivery in continuing care, this commissioner’s office, in my opinion, is imperative. Regulations will not cut it. I believe the key is the independent aspect of this commissioner. This office must do more than just review the processes. These investigations have been happening for a long time, and clearly they have failed.

The most important mandate, the main point, is that this office would have the authority of enforcement in the case of noncompliance with the standards. This office would keep the standards current and make them available to the public. There are presently the Health Facilities Review Committee and the Protection for Persons in Care Act, both of which do a credible job in investigating, but they do not have the power, the teeth if you will, to enforce these recommendations. Enforcement and accountability is what was asked for. Accountability and enforcement of the standards: the Auditor General identified this, as did the task force and the public.

More staff with increased training was identified as the greatest need, and I believe that without exception families, residences, staff, administration, and private owners spoke up for extra staff. What we heard was that the staff did the best they could, but neglect was happening and even premature deaths. The neglect was not intentional, but does that make it okay? I think not.

Housing and health care are each under a separate ministry. They truly are interconnected and depend on each other, which is another reason, in my mind, to have an overall commissioner who understands and is involved with the standards for both.

I believe this is a very important bill and will make very important rules that will protect those we are responsible for. I know that the public and anyone who had been, has been, or is presently involved in continuing care is watching this very closely.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to think that history will record that something was done under my watch. As a member of this House I was fortunate to be a part of the task force. The co-chairs and I wrote reports, and they have been incorporated into the *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care* document. The work will not be finished until we can be assured that there are legislated provincial standards with accountability and enforcement.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 205, the Continuing Care Standards Act. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the hon. Member for

Lethbridge-East for introducing this bill. I’d like to thank her for her tireless work on behalf of our seniors, her genuine compassion for our seniors. Her efforts to improve on the quality of continuing care in our province should be commended.

I agree with this bill’s general premise that we should have some mechanism in place to ensure that standards are adhered to and that there is accountability for the care our seniors receive in continuing care facilities across the province. Bill 205 includes four short sections, about half a page on continuing care standards, and 10 pages of descriptions of duties, powers, and responsibilities of the commissioner or advocate for seniors.

Last year the MLA Task Force on Continuing Care Health Service and Accommodation Standards was established in response to the Auditor General’s report on the government of Alberta’s seniors core services and programs. The task force was made up of the hon. members for Calgary-Foothills, Lethbridge-East, and myself. In light of the topic of this legislation I’d like to take a few minutes here to discuss some of the experiences that we had serving as co-chairs of the task force, the task force recommendations, and the government’s subsequent response.

During the public consultation stage of the process the three of us along with a couple of very helpful and dedicated individuals from the departments of Health and Wellness and Seniors and Community Supports – and I’ll name them: Gayle Almond and Carmen Grabusic; they were very helpful – travelled across the province to meet with stakeholders and members of the public to examine ways to improve upon health service and accommodation standards in Alberta’s continuing care facilities.

Albertans from communities spanning the entire province shared their insights, experiences, and knowledge with the task force. These meetings along with hundreds of phone calls, letters, e-mails, and written briefs and completed discussion guides covered a great deal of ground. We heard numerous personal stories that reinforced that this is a very sensitive and emotional topic for many Albertans. We gained a greater understanding of how Albertans and many stakeholders perceive the current system. We were told time and time again that overall the system is quite sound. Albertans are generally pleased with the facilities and the level of care received by individuals in continuing care. However, we were told that the current system is not always perfect, and we were provided with a great deal of constructive advice on how best to enhance and improve upon it.

4:30

After the initial consultation process the task force compiled the comments and advice it received and incorporated it into a list of draft recommendations. The task force released the draft report to the public and provided Albertans with the opportunity to respond to the recommendations. This first draft going to the public happened in September of last year. Following this second stage of consultation the task force issued its final report, *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care*. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East did not participate in this part of the process, opting instead to write a complementary report of her own. Mr. Speaker, our *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care* report made several recommendations pertaining to the standards in continuing care facilities.

So to put this whole discussion into perspective, I’ll outline some of the recommendations. There are 12 main themes in the report and a total of 45 recommendations. I won’t go through all of them, but I’ll just mention a few of them. These recommendations included establishing provincial standards pertaining to meal services in supportive living facilities; establishing “a clear concerns resolution process”; reviewing

the roles, responsibilities and effectiveness of the Health Facilities Review Committee, Protection of Persons in Care [Act], and the Provincial Ombudsman in receiving and resolving concerns or complaints from within the continuing care system.

This would actually completely cover the hon. member's request for a commissioner to look after these issues.

We recommended to "undertake a review and update of all continuing care health service and accommodation related legislation." We recommended to "assess options for monitoring compliance" and review "existing mechanisms, such as the Health Facilities Review Committee." The report specifically recommended that the inspection of facilities be carried out "by one organization" and that "enforcement should remain with the Ministry responsible for the funding." So there would be no need for an additional level of bureaucracy to deal with these issues.

The report also included recommendations pertaining to the enforcement of training, education, and support standards and offered examples of potential enforcement measures – such as levying fines, revoking licences, or appointing an administrator – to be used only as a last resort if operators fail to meet standards and the issue is not resolved.

Recommendations were also made regarding the licensing of nursing homes and auxiliary hospitals as well as licensing all supportive living facilities. The task force also recommended in its final report that the government "enable supportive living and long-term care facilities that provide publicly funded health care services to access and complete an accreditation process."

In addition, the report recommended that Alberta Seniors and Community Supports and Alberta Health and Wellness pursue a process in conjunction with stakeholders "to rate supportive living and long-term care facilities and make these ratings publicly available." This should be another way to expose any facilities that do not meet standards or are not accountable.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see from my brief recap of but a few highlights, the report covered a lot of ground. Some of the recommendations to improve standards in continuing care facilities can be employed now, while others will have to be phased in over some time.

Last month the government formally responded to the report, accepting it in principle and announcing the initial strategies to respond and to implement its recommendations. The government has committed to implementing the standards recommended in the report this year and has also pledged to act on recommendations concerning new monitoring, reporting, enforcement, and concerns resolution processes. Once these new standards are implemented, there should be little or no need for the suggested commissioner's position. I would like to give the new standards a chance to work before we add another layer of enforcement for something that may not even be needed.

Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the intent behind this legislation and agree that additional steps must be taken to review and implement continuing care standards, I have a few concerns with Bill 205. There are two basic themes in this bill. One is establishing a commissioner to enforce standards, and the other is the setting up of the standards for the care and accommodations. First of all, as I've already mentioned, the government of Alberta is already committed and began acting on the second purpose of this bill, which is reviewing and implementing these standards. As far as the establishment of a commissioner on continuing care, proposed in this legislation, I believe that this may not necessarily be the best course of action at this point in time. The government will be reviewing the compliance and enforcement processes governing continuing care facilities this year, and this legislation would be premature or may

not be necessary at all when the current process is fully implemented.

While I support the intent of this bill, I believe that the specifics in the bill are not necessarily the right solution that we need. So I'll not be supporting this bill, but I am pleased that this issue is being debated, and I look forward to hearing what other members have to say on this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to make a few comments about the particular bill in front of us and say that, clearly, we agree with the spirit of the bill. We've called for something similar, as I'm sure the member is well aware. Certainly, we need – we call it a seniors' advocate; you can call it whatever you want. One of the things that we suggested is that it should be an officer of the Legislature, the same as some of our other officers. I think that the hon. member would probably agree with that. I believe that unless we have this person that has some clout and some authority, we're going to continue to have problems in long-term care.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, we can certainly support the spirit of this bill, but I want to say in respect that there are some problems with the text itself. I guess the most important thing is that the bill will not help seniors this year. It may not help seniors next year or the next. We know that some seniors – it's still coming forward – are in crisis situations, so time is of the essence, somewhat, with the people that we're dealing with.

What bothers me a bit about this bill is that it will establish another set of reviews and committees. Mr. Speaker, surely the creation of the office of independent commissioner or, as we call it, seniors' advocate, whose sole task is to guard the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable citizens, is overdue. However – and this is the catch – we must ensure that establishing this office does not result in more delays and red tape when addressing real and pressing issues. For example, section 3(1) of the proposed bill establishes that "within 6 months of the coming into force of this Act, the Government must review, in conjunction with the Commissioner, the standards of care prescribed for long-term care facilities and supportive living settings." Another review.

With all due respect, I think we do not need another review. We've had the Auditor General's. We've had the MLA task force on continuing care. We in the New Democratic Party had public hearings and have released reports. This is all just in the last year. So we've had a number of reviews. We believe that we do not need another review. We need new standards and actual implementation of them.

Of course, this means more money for updating facilities and equipment, but more than that it means more health care professionals and a commitment for sustained funding to support them. Mr. Speaker, I think we have the evidence, and I'll come to that. There are things we need to do. Certainly, we will support a commissioner, seniors' advocate, whatever name they want. Contrary to the previous speaker I do believe that we need this person to have this power to deal with some of these situations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, regarding this review, section 3(4) stipulates that

prior to implementation, standards of care developed under this section must be

- (a) approved . . . by the Commissioner, and
- (b) made available to the public.

Well, again we question whether we need another review. We think

that there are things that could be done right away. It seems to at least address the problems of lack of accountability and transparency that have plagued this government, and this is a good step in that it appears to seek the input and approval of the public, especially the people who stand to be affected by new care standards.

I think that we have to lay it out, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member might clarify how the new standards of care will be made public and to what end. Will feedback be invited? If so, will it in fact be considered before implementation proceeds? What mechanism will be in place to ensure that the public is indeed consulted? Does it have the intent of making findings or determinations public?

4:40

Yet another worry that I have in terms of the bill's delay is that the proposed bill requires serious consideration. Section 20 provides for a process of appeals and delays in compliance. According to Parliamentary Counsel, whose expertise was sought in trying to make heads or tails of this section, these provisions mirror those set forth in section 74(1) of the FOIP Act, allowing for such appeals. Now, we just had a discussion about FOIP and some of the problems that we're facing, so our objection rests on the fact that if you have additional delays while waiting to access information, while this is inconvenient, it may have serious repercussions. In this case, you're dealing with cases of abuse, neglect, or death, needing immediate attention, so I think we have to relook at that particular part of the bill, Mr. Speaker. Again I would stress that certainly I'm glad that the member has brought forward this idea that we do need a commissioner, senior's advocate, whatever name that we want.

I think there are some things, though, that I would like to see done right away rather than having a six-month consultation period. Let's get the seniors' advocate, the commissioner that the member is talking about. I think she and I could agree that we need to change the legislation. We suggest in our report that that should have been done this spring because the legislation, according to many advocates that I've talked to, Mr. Speaker, does not lay out what it should in terms of standards and all the rest of it. So we need to go right back here and change the legislation, but that can be done while we have a seniors' advocate.

We need to set up a patient's bill of rights. That could be done right away, and that would certainly help the commissioner, as the member is talking about.

Something we need to do right away because it's happening is put an immediate stop to redesignating auxiliary hospitals and nursing homes as assistive living facilities. It's interesting to me that we can have the same people there one day in long-term care, and the next day it's assistive living. Well, right now there are no standards. They say that they're coming.

Another thing that I would suggest we do right away as we set up the commissioner's office that the member is talking about is require all new long-term care beds to be delivered either through the public or the voluntary, nonprofit sector. If there are some good private ones, we can grandfather them. In the meantime, some of them shouldn't be grandfathered. They should be thrown out, as we know. We require all new long-term beds to be in private rooms in order to respect personal privacy and, where feasible, upgrade existing facilities to private rooms only. Mr. Speaker, we could do this right away, I believe, without a study.

Whistle-blowing protection for front-line staff. We see a lot of the problems going on.

The other part of it, very quickly, Mr. Speaker, because I know a number of people want to speak on this, is the 2003 hikes in long-term care fees. They were unconscionable at that time, and it's still a hardship for many families. We should certainly reverse these

fees. I think we can do that in this rich province for the people that have contributed all the years to the future of this province. Also, we could set up an open, transparent process to clearly identify the types of services provided in long-term care settings to which extra charges can be applied. You know, let's get a handle on the money that people are having to fork out from their pockets.

So, Mr. Speaker, the point that I want to make – and we certainly are not going to vote against it because we think the bill is important to bring forward. An officer of the Legislature: I hope we're agreeing on that. As I say, we call it a seniors' advocate, the people do. We need that immediately. Let's get on with some of these other serious matters now rather than waiting for another study because I think we've had enough studies. We believe that we know what we have to do, and I think that the member on the opposite side would probably agree with most of the things I'm saying. That's the only question I have, you know, if we have another commission six months back and forward.

Let's just get on with this. Let's get on with changing the legislation. Let's bring the standards in. Let's reverse some of the fees. Let's do all of these things and do them immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My thanks to the previous speaker for his excellent suggestions, I think many of which we share here in the Liberal opposition. I am very glad to see this bill actually get to the floor because I think I've been associated with an idea, this idea or one very similar to it, since prior to the 2001 election.

It was initially prepared by my colleague who was then MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Then a version of it was brought forward by my colleague who was then the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I prepared a version of it and had a bill draw that was stratospheric, so the bill didn't even make it to first reading. I know that last year, in 2005, the same member did have a bill forward, but the number was too high, and it didn't make it to the floor. I'm delighted that it's made it to the floor now.

What I would like to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is just to detail some of the expectations and the reasons why we were looking for a bill that would actually establish standards. What's important about standards is that you know what they are and everybody knows what they are and that you all operate by them – that's the point – but also that the standards are monitored and, finally, that they are enforced. We have had some variations on this theme, but unfortunately when it came right down to it, very few of them actually had standards in place that were shared by all. Two, it wasn't monitored in any kind of a systemic way. Three, it certainly wasn't enforced by anything that had teeth. So those are underlying the work that we are attempting to do here.

I think, in fact, that was reflected by the work that was done by the travelling MLA committee but also by the Auditor General. As members in the Assembly are aware, I've sat on the Public Accounts Committee for many years and had in fact raised a number of these same issues during my time as the Official Opposition critic for seniors. I was very relieved to see the Auditor General's report because it did in fact validate what residents, their families, their friends, advocacy groups in the community like the Elder Advocates association, and what opposition critics from both of the parties had been saying for many years. It had fallen on very deaf ears on the government side, but it seemed that once the Auditor General came out with his report, then the government was willing to listen. It did

validate everything that all the rest of us had been saying for many, many, many years.

I talked earlier about the standards being effective only if we have the compliance monitored and enforced. I think that what we have in Bill 205 as proposed by the Member for Lethbridge-East does address exactly that. It does address the problems that were identified by the Auditor General's report from May of 2005 and by the MLA task force, that released its report in September of 2005. Both of these did identify that current systems to monitor compliance with standards were absolutely inadequate and ineffective.

Key findings that the Continuing Care Standards Act addresses are that standards for the provision of nursing and personal care and housing services in long-term care facilities are not current at all. For example, 30 per cent of the facilities that the Auditor General investigated did not meet basic standards of care, and that appears on page 15 of the special report that he issued. On that same page he notes that standards are needed for services delivered in assisted living and other supported living facilities.

4:50

Here the opposition differs very much with the direction that the government is going around redesignating people, and this was touched on very briefly by my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. We're basically, with a swish of a pen and a wave of a hand, reclassifying people from one day being recipients of care – and part of that is assumed to be medical care – in a long-term care facility, and the next day they are individuals who do not qualify for medical care and are now someone living in an assisted-care facility. And do you know what? They never even got out of bed. That's what this government is able to accomplish. So that's part of what we're trying to address with this bill.

We've got their systems to monitor compliance with standards for both long-term care facilities and the lodges that are not adequate. I had spoken about that earlier, and again that's mirrored in the Auditor General's report on page 15. Just continuing with that, the Department does not have an adequate system to monitor long-term care facilities' compliance with Basic Standards. The Department relies on the Authorities, the Health Facilities Review Committee (HFRC) and the Protection for Persons in Care Office (PPIC) to monitor whether the facilities comply with Basic Standards . . . Further, HFRC and PPIC do not inspect facilities for compliance with the Basic Standards and do not have enforcement mechanisms to ensure that facilities rectify non-compliance.

Absolutely toothless. During a number of the Auditor General's facility visits he noted that "31% of the Basic Standards relating to care were not met."

I cannot underline enough my frustration with the Protection for Persons in Care Act. Every time we have to refer someone to that process, what we get is some very well-meaning but incredibly apologetic staff member who very sadly reports back to us that, basically, the Protection for Persons in Care Act is an educational tool, which is very cold comfort when that is all that is available to you as a resident or as an advocate for a resident or a guardian or a trustee for a resident who is trying to get some action taken. They're trying to get some recognition that standards have not been met, that it has not been monitored, and that it has most definitively not been enforced. Very frustrating.

So the mechanisms that the government has had in place and keeps touting as the solution to all of this have absolutely failed us. It's important to note here that it didn't just fail all of us here in this Assembly: well fed, well paid, and completely able to move about through our lives. This failed vulnerable people. That is what is most unforgivable about what has happened to this point in time.

The Health Facilities Review Committee has no authority to enforce the compliance. Equally toothless. I know there are good people involved with that, but it's equally useless, frankly. I'm sorry for such harsh words, but I think they have to be used when we're talking about vulnerable people.

The protection of persons in care, as I said, does not conduct compliance or regulatory reviews in long-term care facilities for basic standards, for policies, for procedures, or for legislation. Where they investigate reports of abuse involving adults receiving publicly funded care from whatever kind of facility they're in, the protection of persons in care

investigates approximately 90% of abuse complaints [and they use] contracted investigators who have backgrounds in health professions and law enforcement. In some cases, referrals are made directly to police authorities or professional associations or colleges.

That has been a very frustrating process indeed and certainly needs help.

My colleague the Member for Lethbridge-East was a member of the MLA Task Force on Continuing Care Health Service and Accommodation Standards and has given me some notes about what the task force heard and what she tried to incorporate into her bill as a result: that standards should be measurable, that they should provide for consistent reporting and define a minimal acceptable quality of care and quality of life.

It's really important what we do with that minimal level of care because, of course, what ends up being what everybody shoots for is the minimum but not anything above that. The lessons we've learned from the AG and other places and, again, reflected in what the committee heard: that the standards will only be effective if compliance is monitored and enforced and that these standards need to be updated and reviewed routinely. They do get out of fashion and out of effectiveness, and they do need to be reviewed. That also holds for legislation and policies around these standards that also need to be reviewed and updated.

I know there are others that wish to speak. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Bill 205.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to be able to rise to speak to Bill 205, Continuing Care Standards Act. I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this act forward, and I think she should be commended for her concern and for her passion for seniors.

With this in mind I must say, though, that there are presently mechanisms in place to monitor care and treatment for everyone, including seniors, and I believe it would be best to continue with current mechanisms which monitor the quality of health care for all citizens of Alberta and not just one group. There really are a number of mechanisms in place to hold health authorities, health professionals, and other care providers, such as nursing home operators, accountable for the quality of care they provide. These mechanisms include not only the review and monitoring of the facility but also measures such as requiring the preparation of regional business plans and annual reports, having contracts in place with service providers so that expectations are clear, monitoring performance through approved performance measures, establishing standards which are currently being updated, encouraging best practices, and licensing and accrediting of individuals and organizations by expert organizations.

There are currently other bodies in place in addition to the aforementioned who help monitor quality of care and treatment, such as the Health Facilities Review Committee and the protection

of persons in care office. It's been said that these groups have no teeth, but this is not necessarily the case. Recommendations during routine reviews are met and followed through with. With regard to complaints these are investigated thoroughly, and recommendations must be met. I might add that if there is any opposition or reluctance to positively or satisfactorily adhere to recommendations, the minister of health has the authority to force the facility to upgrade or to rectify the particular situation.

The Health Facilities Review Committee and the protection of persons in care office work for all groups and all demographics, not just the needs of one particular group. Perhaps the needs of one group should not supersede the needs of the whole, and for this reason I will not be supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 205, Continuing Care Standards Act. Seniors have worked so hard all their lives to build this province, and we owe them a lot. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The long-term care centre system is facing a crisis. We've seen casualties. We've seen deaths. Albertans put their lives and the lives of their loved ones in the hands of providers of long-term care. The government by law is charged with providing direction and sufficient funding to these facilities, yet there are no minimum standards of care in this province. Do we have to fall on the deaf ears of this present government or of present government officials who earn tons of money? I heard that one of the big guns in the department is earning \$638,000.

We expect a little bit more for our vulnerable people. The ugly truth about government neglect: the Auditor General's report, which we have all seen, has clearly indicated that 30 per cent of facilities under review did not meet basic care standards. It came through loud and very clear. We need province-wide standards, and we need solid plans. Our loved ones or maybe – maybe – we will have to go there one day. We should not forget this.

5:00

I receive numerous complaints from my constituents, and we definitely need a proper commissioner's office to listen to those complaints and enforce them. We need a commissioner's office that could report to this House and take further action. We must create a continuing care commissioner's office that is responsible to this House to ensure that provincial standards of care are monitored. If we read the Auditor General's report, he clearly mentioned that if we don't monitor something, we can't get a good result.

People from ethnic groups are invisible in these facilities. I want to know from the government: why is that? Why do not many people from the ethnic community go in there? If they want something special, I think that we should consider that very seriously. I want to know from the government if any of the task force or any of the government officials have ever thought of talking to or listening to the ethnic community. I mean, they are part of this province. They pay the same tax as everybody, including myself.

Now I would like to talk about the accountability in this Bill 205. Our goal is to put a continuing care commissioner in place to ensure that facilities provide residents with high-quality care. Facilities, both public and private, must be accountable for the care and service they provide. This Bill 205 grants a continuing care commissioner a unique power: to monitor compliance with standards and issue orders to ensure compliance.

Mr. Speaker, the families and residents across the province have voiced frustration about the lack of accountability that exists in the continuing care system. There is a lack of transparency and accountability in this system. Even when recommendations are issued to a facility, they are not obligated to carry them out. Often this leaves families with the burden of fighting it out with the facility.

Now I want to talk about the Allen Gray facility, which is in my riding. We have seen cases at the Allen Gray where the family members have been banned from visiting relatives for voicing concerns. I know of one woman, whose father was a resident of the Allen Gray, who was denied access to him by this facility even though she had power of attorney and should have full access to him. Why was she denied visitation rights to her own father? Is it because she had criticized the care her father was receiving? We live in a free country, and people should feel free to question this system. For the people in that facility, Mr. Speaker, some people who complain about the system get punishment, and some people who praise the officials sometimes get rewards. There are 16 suites, and some people pay a little bit more, and the people who are yes-men get those suites.

I have received a report from the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. According to this report, it shows that this Allen Gray long-term care centre is a paradise. I mean, I don't know who I should believe. Should I believe those about 20 people who wrote me letters, phoned me regularly? They have lots of concerns. I don't know. I think the hon. member should know whom I should blame.

Anyway, the report is here, and I haven't gone through it yet. I just want to remind the hon. member that the facility no doubt – I mean, building-wise it's fantastic, overlooking a lake. But when the complaints were coming, nobody complained about the building of the facility. They were complaining about the care standards inside. I know he talked to 40 people, but I talked to many people. I mean, I disagree with that. But the decision is up to the government, up to the task force, so they should look at it again. I'm still receiving numerous calls and complaints about that facility.

Another thing. The office that we are talking about that this bill establishes would be a safe place for the staff and families to bring complaints without having to fear repercussions. I just mentioned the Allen Gray facility in my riding. Some people are so worried that they don't speak out. They are worried that if they speak out, maybe an official inside there will give them punishment, so they are not in a position to speak out. Maybe when delegates or the task force visit the facilities, if they visit there with the authorities, they will talk totally differently. So just to make a note of that.

Just about two or three months ago, Mr. Speaker, I asked the authorities through FOIP to give me a copy of the contract between the Capital health authority versus Allen Gray, which is now called Gray House Guild. They sent me this copy. It's about 130, 140 pages. I was asking for the latest financial statement of Allen Gray, and they sent me the financial statement from 1998 to 2000. I'm asking the member: is that fair? I want to know how much they are earning and what powers they have. Why is the minister not taking action against those facilities? They know that. I wrote the letters to the minister. I talked to the CEO, and I talked to the people there, and the people talked to the minister. They keep on contacting the minister. From this document I found out that the minister doesn't have the power to take action against those facilities.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister of seniors.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 205, the Continuing Care Standards Act. I'd like to commend the Member for Lethbridge-East for her commitment to Albertans living in continuing care. We all know of her passion, especially during session in the Legislature, when we've heard that many times as she speaks to continuing care. That compassion and commitment we all share, though, as well. It's to improve the quality of life for our seniors and other vulnerable Albertans living in our continuing care facilities.

I know that I let the House know previously, Mr. Speaker, that I would be reviewing the legislation in detail. I want to assure you that I have done that on several occasions and had an opportunity to speak to the member briefly about my thoughts in regard to Bill 205. I've been in the same situation as the member opposite: I've brought forward several private members' bills previously. I am aware of the importance of second reading because second reading focuses totally on the principle of the bill. I am supportive of some of the principles of Bill 205 but not all of them. I do support that updated standards be implemented, but the dilemma that I find I am in, Mr. Speaker, is that I'm not supportive of all the steps that have been put forward in the process, you know, to the whole situation of the standards and with continuing care.

5:10

I also recognize that the bill cannot be amended in second reading. It can only be amended at Committee of the Whole, which is the next step. Mr. Speaker – and I've learned this through putting through private members' bills – in order for it to get to Committee of the Whole, we must be supportive of second reading and, as you would say, not just the principle at second reading but every word, actually, that's in the bill at second reading before you get to Committee of the Whole. Having said that, I regret that I do not support all of the principles that are here in this bill. It's helped me recognize as a new minister, as well, for the past year that we need to communicate far better when these types of bills come forward because we're looking for the collective good at the end of the day with the right intent in the spirit of the bill and that we didn't have the opportunity to do that in the way that we could have.

Mr. Speaker, there is, as I've said, definitely value in enhancing the standards that are currently in place, and we are working hard to do that. If someone is at risk of neglect or abuse, that should be fully investigated, and you know that we do that now. The act is called the Continuing Care Standards Act, and really I view it as actually being more about a continuing care commissioner. Especially because the accommodation side of the standards, as we had discussed before, hon. member, fits in this ministry and the care standards with the Minister of Health and Wellness and for the reason, as I said, about it being mainly about the commissioner more than the actual accommodation/standards area, I'm unable to support Bill 205 because I know this to be reality: that creating a position such as this will duplicate many of the efforts that are already in place.

Creating a commissioner would also overlap planned changes that we heard in earlier debate are to come this year in response to the MLA task force on continuing care report. You know, Mr. Speaker, the idea of an independent advocate to address seniors' issues is a good idea. It's an idea that's been discussed before. It's an idea that has a lot of merit. In fact, we've recently had a formal presentation by a number of seniors' groups to the majority of our colleagues about establishing such a position. The desire of these seniors' groups was to have a seniors' advocate to address all issues related to seniors aged 55 and over.

I regret that Bill 205 identifies a commissioner that would not be

inclusive of all seniors' issues, as was put forward to me, but has a very narrow scope of only examining concerns in continuing care. I do remain open to the concept and the idea of moving forward with a seniors' advocate, but if such a position were created, my view is that the role would look at seniors' issues more broadly than the position that's described in Bill 205 and not be confined strictly to continuing care. Having said that, the greater concern I have with Bill 205 is that I believe that, in effect, it confuses not only roles and responsibilities but lines of communication and accountability on a very important issue which we all care about, which is the safety and well-being of seniors and others living in continuing care.

Clearly, in light of the Auditor General's report and the findings of the MLA task force there is much improvement needed in this area, Mr. Speaker. However, my colleague the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and I are working to address these concerns, and we have worked quickly. As the minister responsible for seniors' issues I support a more holistic approach to monitoring standards in our continuing care facilities. Rather than dealing with complaints or concerns one at a time, my ministry is developing a comprehensive strategy to address a number of processes that will respond directly to the concerns that the member has outlined in her bill. I have heard those concerns and am looking to address those. The strategy will include how to handle facility licensing, reporting, monitoring, enforcement of standards, the introduction of a new concerns resolution process.

The bill notes that the commissioner's duties would include monitoring compliance with continuing care standards. What is unclear is whether that means the commissioner would be responsible for all of the routine monitoring and enforcement across the province. I did try to bring clarity to that as I was reviewing the bill. As I said, I've read it several times. If that is the bill's intent, then this would be a significant administrative function, especially when you consider that there are more than 14,400 long-term care beds in the province, nearly 2,000 designated living spaces, not to mention the 9,000 lodge units across the province.

This would also be a challenge when you consider the other duties identified in the bill for the commissioner, especially the one that states, "To receive, review and investigate complaints regarding the health, safety or well-being of persons receiving continuing care in long-term care facilities or supportive living settings." My concern with this provision, hon. member, is that we already have both legislation and a process in place to address this function right now. I'm referring to the Protection for Persons in Care Act, which you know provides safeguards against the abuse of adults in government-funded care facilities. Protection for persons in care helps to ensure that abuse is reported, all complaints are investigated fully, and recommendations can be made to help prevent abuse from occurring in the future. If criminal activity is suspected, then protection for persons in care notifies the police immediately, which our guests here today would be fully aware of. If a continuing care commissioner were introduced as outlined in Bill 205, there would appear to be significant overlap, I believe, between the commissioner's duties and those of protection for persons in care.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, a legislative review of the Protection for Persons in Care Act has been completed, and my colleague from Calgary-Nose Hill is reviewing options for legislative amendments to be introduced during a future sitting of the Assembly.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, much of this legislation, although I know it to be really well intended, will duplicate other established legislative processes and other work already under way in regard to continuing care standards. For that reason, I cannot support Bill 205 here at second reading.

As you know, the Minister of Health and Wellness is responsible for health care standards, as I said earlier. Well, I am responsible for the accommodation standards. Together we are working to improve our continuing care system, and we're doing that not only with an investment of new funding but with the compassion and care that I know the member is looking for here today as well because we know that that's needed, too, to make the necessary changes to improve the system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 205, and I must very much commend the Member for Lethbridge-East for the fine work done on this bill, which is the priority bill for a private member's bill for the Alberta Liberal Official Opposition. I had that draw, and I was very pleased to see that the Member for Lethbridge-East could take this forward because this has been an issue of primary importance for me as the Member for Edmonton-Manning, primary importance for many, many Albertans, to see that the situation would somehow get fixed.

I was very displeased just a minute ago to hear the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports seem to indicate that she would not support this going through to the next level of debate and begin to talk about not dealing with this issue. This is something that came up very, very much during the last election. That was almost a year and a half ago now. It came up after to us. Many members have raised this in the House. The Auditor General's report put an exclamation mark behind the problems that we have in this area and the very real need that there has to be some sort of ability to enforce compliance, to ensure that standards are properly in place and properly enforced.

5:20

I find it very, very difficult that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka would say over and over again that the system is quite sound is what he heard in the committee that travelled around this province. Well, I attended one of those meetings in Calgary, and almost every person that reported in that meeting was appalled. Some of the stories were so horrific, almost, that I couldn't believe how bad the government has bungled its administration in this area and its responsibilities in this area. There's a huge need to achieve excellence in continuing care, especially as our demographic moves forward, especially as greater proportions of the population are part of this.

There are real inadequacies in the current system. The Auditor General was clear in his report that "standards will only be effective if compliance is monitored and enforced." One of the other names that we proposed earlier was inspector general to give force to the name of this position. The commissioner for continuing care is more comprehensive, I suppose, but we need something here that would in reality begin to ensure that there is somebody there that is independent, that could enforce compliance, that could pull a licence – pull a licence – to ensure that some of the abuses that we've seen, some of the abuses just through negligence that we've seen that have hurt so many families and have hurt the reputation of Alberta in this area, that that sort of independent power that would report to the Legislature, not report to the department, would be in place.

A continuing care commissioner addresses the exact problems that were identified by the Auditor General in May 2005 and the MLA task force in September of 2005. The Auditor General inspected long-term care facilities to obtain evidence about the quality of care and services provided throughout Alberta. Both the Auditor General

and the MLA task force identified that systems to monitor compliance and standards are inadequate and ineffective.

For example, page 15: standards for the provision of nursing and personal care in housing services and long-term care facilities are not current. Thirty per cent of facilities don't meet basic standards of care. The Member for Edmonton-Centre already emphasized that particular point. Standards are needed for services delivered in assisted living and other supportive living facilities. Page 15 of the Auditor General's report: systems to monitor compliance with standards for both long-term care facilities and lodges are not adequate. It goes on and on.

The Department does not have an adequate system to monitor long-term care facilities' compliance with Basic Standards. The Department relies on the Authorities, the Health Facilities Review Committee . . . and the Protection for Persons in Care Office . . . to monitor whether the facilities comply with Basic Standards.

In reality, these are all toothless. The HFRC and PPIC, the Health Facilities Review Committee and the protection for persons in care office, "do not inspect facilities for compliance with the Basic Standards and do not have enforcement mechanisms to ensure that facilities rectify non-compliance." As they said, "During our facility visits, we found that 31% of the Basic Standards relating to care were not met."

The HFRC has no authority to enforce compliance. There are no sanctions specified in the Health Facilities Review Committee Act. Facilities or regional health authorities have failed to implement recommendations following an investigation by the committee.

The protection for persons in care was established to prevent abuse of adults living in publicly funded facilities by requiring that abuse be reported and investigated . . . PPIC investigates reports of abuse involving adults receiving publicly funded care services from hospitals, long-term care facilities, seniors lodges, shelters and group homes. PPIC investigates approximately 90% of abuse complaints using contracted investigators who have backgrounds in health professions and law enforcement. In some cases, referrals are made directly to police authorities or professional associations or colleges.

Page 33:

PPIC completes investigations based on complaints of abuse from residents, family, facility staff or others in a number of settings, including long-term care facilities. PPIC provides only limited assurance of compliance . . . PPIC does not conduct compliance or regulatory reviews in long-term care facilities for the Basic Standards, policies, procedures or legislation.

The task force did a lot of work last summer. I think it was good to see an opposition member on that task force and a very qualified one at that, the Member for Lethbridge-East. You know, that committee said that "standards will only be effective if compliance is monitored and enforced." Again we come to the need for being monitored and for being enforced, the need for an office that has some independent authority. The standards need to be updated and reviewed routinely. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview mentioned that we have to move quickly. I think, actually, that the legislation that the Member for Lethbridge-East has put forward here does provide something that would probably get this going much quicker than anything else we have seen to date.

The committee went on that "legislation and policies around standards need to be reviewed and updated." Well, it seems to be obvious.

"The public would like inspections to be carried out by an organization that is at arms-length from government, RHAs and operators," and that seems to be a key recommendation that the government looks to be going back on.

“It is the role of government to monitor and enforce standards and that the RHAs need to be held accountable for the quality of care, including contracted health services,” and the only way to do that would be through some independent authority. One that reports to this Legislature, as I’ve said before, is what we really need in this, and this bill addresses that clearly.

“The public is not confident that providers are being held accountable, and are especially concerned with private providers. As a result, the public would like detailed operational standards that are easily measurable.”

Recommendation 26 of the MLA task force:

Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Seniors and Community Supports should collaboratively assess options for monitoring compliance with the health service and accommodation standards, including reviewing the roles, responsibilities and effectiveness of

existing mechanisms, such as the Health Facilities Review Committee.

Well, I mean, how we’re going to be relying on that as the way out here is almost beyond me. It is just almost impossible.

Well, I’ll move to adjourn, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I would move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:29 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, March 20, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/03/20

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Request for Unanimous Consent

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before proceeding to the debate on Motion 504, the chair wants to comment about Motion Other than Government Motion 505, which in the ordinary course of events would be considered by the Assembly on the evening of Monday, April 3, 2006. The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, who is proposing the motion, asked late last week that he be allowed to amend it. The request arrived in the Speaker's office last Thursday but did not make it in today's Order Paper. Under Standing Order 39.2(2) notice of the amendment "must appear on the Order Paper not less than 4 sitting days before the motion is moved."

All members should have the proposed amended Motion 505 on their desks. As the motion will not be debated until two weeks from today, the chair would ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 39.2(2).

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Although motions other than government motions appear only in Monday's Order Paper, the chair will arrange to have the amended motion appear in tomorrow's Order Paper.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Emergency Services

504. Rev. Abbott moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage municipalities to provide minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to open the debate on Motion 504. One of the key functions of government is to ensure that public safety is enhanced and protected in every way possible. This is by no means a simple task. As society evolves and changes, our protective institutions must also change.

Fire departments serve many functions in today's world, only one of which is putting out fires. Firefighters serve as first-line responders in all sorts of emergencies, from car accidents to water rescues. It is a challenging and dangerous job. Albertans depend on these brave men and women to act decisively and competently in emergencies that are often matters of life and death. In most cases, in the vast majority of cases, Mr. Speaker, firefighters are well prepared and well equipped to deal decisively with these emergencies. Like anything else, however, there is always room for improvement, thus the impetus for Motion 504.

Currently the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the Alberta fire commissioner's office, and the Fire Services Advisory Committee work closely with municipalities in respect to fire and rescue services. As the operation, financing, and practices of fire departments are municipal responsibilities, these organizations are not generally concerned with micromanaging departments but, rather, providing guidance to them. Through the development and promo-

tion of guidelines and a series of field mentoring staff, these organizations encourage municipal fire departments to operate efficiently and in a way that best reflects the protective needs of the population they protect. Motion 504 seeks to build on the good work already accomplished under this system by further urging municipalities to adopt minimum standards for fire, rescue, and recovery services.

One purpose of the motion is to open a dialogue on potential deficiencies in the current system. Currently there is a host of confusing regulations, which, while they are relatively comprehensive, have the potential to allow situations where public safety may be at undue risk. There are provisions in labour law, for example, that make some degree of training necessary for firefighters. Perhaps we could build on this by aggressively encouraging training to a certified standard. This would enable more volunteer firefighters to enhance both their safety and the safety of those they protect in areas such as rural Alberta.

There's also the matter of equipment, Mr. Speaker. Right now vehicles used for fire, rescue, and recovery services must meet transportation standards, which is a great start. Right now departments are encouraged to have equipment appropriate to their situational needs. Now, that's good. It's okay, but we can always do better. For example, a 30-year-old fire truck might be road-worthy. It might meet existing codes and guidelines. But in today's world it may not be enough. How do we know? There are no minimum standards. Whether it is or isn't, I think there's always room to live up discussion on the subject and to push for something better.

There is no requirement for a department to possess up-to-date life-saving equipment either, like the jaws of life, for example. I think the name of this equipment speaks for itself. Maybe we should look at more actively encouraging every department to adopt as a minimum standard the possession of this and other vital equipment, like diving gear, for example. If a child were to fall through the ice of a dugout, Mr. Speaker, can he or she really wait the extra time it would take for that equipment to come from a larger centre? In an emergency time is critical. Every minute counts. So does every little bit of motivation that we can provide to improve the current situation.

Another area that might be discussed is the distribution of fire, rescue, and recovery services in a municipality. Population distributions change. Let's face it. Alberta is enormous. Some of the rural municipalities have to cover a huge area. Maybe we should be more vocal in encouraging them to aggressively study how best to locate their equipment and personnel. Should they have two trucks or three? How big should those trucks be? How many firefighters should be trained and ready to go in a given situation or in a given area?

Mr. Speaker, I've only scratched the surface with these few examples, but I think I've made my point. There are literally thousands of things we can do to facilitate improvement. With this motion I believe we hold in our hands a powerful tool to do just that.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 504 is urging the government to "encourage municipalities to provide minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services." Now, that might sound a bit vague, but there's a reason for that. I've worded the motion in this way so as not to limit its possibilities. Words like "encourage" and "minimum standards" are fairly open-ended words, and that's exactly why they were chosen. Fire services have evolved over the years. Some areas have rural fire co-ops; others don't. In studying this issue, I have learned that municipalities are responsible for funding and operating their own fire, rescue, and recovery departments. We've given them that power, and we don't want to intrude on it unnecessarily. This

is why we encourage instead of demand. It's more productive. Minimum standards were chosen because these words will serve to open a dialogue on potential deficiencies in the current system. It is not specific on purpose. I want to inspire as much discussion as possible on areas of concern so that we can work toward fixing them by any means necessary, so that we can work together in this area.

I want to urge this government to add to the encouragement already being given to municipalities. We have a framework. We have tools in place. What I am proposing is a further filling in of that framework with increased co-operation between municipalities, fire departments, and the government. I want us, in short, to add to the toolbox we already have and help our front-line fire and rescue workers build a better Alberta, a safer Alberta.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, in the quest for public safety we can always do better. I believe that by supporting Motion 504, we can not only encourage further discussions on means of improving current practices; we can also build on the steps we've already taken. We need to. Together we can raise the bar of public safety with all the means at our disposal. I believe this motion is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, my sincere hope is that we will see co-operation, camaraderie, and improved service throughout Alberta as a result of passing this motion tonight. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.
8:10

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of the Official Opposition this evening and give a response to Motion 504. First of all, I would like to thank the mover of the motion, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, for bringing forward an idea that, I think, is certainly in the best interest of the public in Alberta and must be supported in principle. However, as one might expect, I do have some comments and concerns about the motion, particularly the way it's worded, but in principle I support the concept of what this motion is trying to accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities in this province are already stretched to the maximum when it comes to providing services. We know that as MLAs. We all hear that in our offices. I'm sure that I'm not the only one, and I'm quite sure that opposition MLAs are not the only MLAs that hear that. It's a steady refrain from across the province. Whenever we attend meetings with the AUMA or the AAMD and C, this is a common concern that's expressed to all MLAs. If years of downloading by the provincial government and the federal government – in all fairness, the federal government has downloaded as well – and decreased financial support have put such an extra tremendous burden on the municipalities, the first question that jumps out at you, of course, with this motion and some of the things that the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar spoke about in terms of equipment, you know, newer and better fire trucks and a standard of having a jaws of life in every municipality and so forth: those are all good things, but obviously somebody has to pay for them. That hasn't been addressed at all either in the motion or in the comments that the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar made.

He gave a little bit of an explanation toward the end of his speech this evening about the vagueness of the motion and why it is that way. I'll just point out one glaring problem with the vagueness of the motion, Mr. Speaker. It talks about minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services, but there's no explanation at all as to what those minimum standards might be. In fact, it's so vague that one could interpret it to be either minimum standards across the province or allowing each municipality to set their own minimum

standards. I think the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar would agree that those two scenarios are entirely different: if we have one set of standards that is the minimum for every municipality and every individual that lives in this province or if we allow each single municipality to set their own minimum level of standards. I'm going to trust and assume that the member meant province-wide standards. That would make sense to me. If we're allowing each individual municipality to set their own minimum, I'm not so sure that I could support this motion.

Of course, if we establish, in fact, that these are province-wide minimum standards, then the next question is: how would we establish those, how would they be met, and, as I said, most importantly really, who is going to pay for the implementation of those standards? We know that municipalities at this point are already desperately seeking alternative sources of reliable and sustainable funding. To add more financial responsibility to the burden that they're already facing would, without question, just exacerbate what is already a very grave problem for many, if not all, municipalities.

A question in my mind is where this idea is coming from. I was hoping that the member might address it in his comments, and he didn't. I'm not sure if we'll have an opportunity at some point to hear from him further, but I'm wondering if he consulted, in fact, with the AUMA or the AAMD and C, or maybe it was with his local council. I'm not sure. In the conversations I've had with members of the AUMA, they weren't aware of this at all. Not to pick on the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar in particular, but I think, rather, I'd prefer to pick on the government as a whole.

An Hon. Member: Go ahead. Pick on him.

Mr. R. Miller: It's much more fun to pick on the government as a whole.

There seems to be a pattern, a fairly noticeable pattern in the year and a bit that I've been in this Assembly of the government not consulting with primary stakeholders on issues of relatively great importance. The most obvious example we have of that right now is, you know, an issue that we discuss daily in this Legislature, and that is the proposed changes to health care, the so-called third way. What I believe and certainly the correspondence I get into my office would indicate many Albertans believe is that there's either a lack of consultation or a very poorly disguised process that really is no substitute for public consultation. I'm not sure whether or not the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar had an opportunity to consult with any of these groups that I've mentioned or perhaps others, but I would hope so because, as I say, there does seem to be a pattern here, and I would hope that we're not continuing to go down that road.

Mr. Speaker, there's no mention in the motion of police or ambulance service, and it would make me wonder, if we're going to establish minimum standards province-wide – and, again, I hope that that's what the intention is here – for fire and rescue and recovery services, that we would also have the same for police and ambulance service.

If I could just take a minute and talk about those two examples; most recently, of course, the almost takeover of the ambulance service by the province. What a disaster that whole thing was a year ago, and of course we're still waiting and probably will have to wait for some time to find out how that's all eventually going to be worked out. Clearly, there was an effort there to ensure province-wide standards and province-wide delivery of ambulance service, and it just hasn't happened. In fact, it's left many municipalities in disarray. I think it's perhaps a little better this year, but certainly a

year ago they were in total disarray in terms of their planning, not knowing exactly which way the province was going to go on that issue. I would hate to see the same thing happen as it relates to fire and rescue services.

Policing. We look at the RCMP as an example. There was no substantial increase in manpower for the RCMP for over 20 years until last year.

Mr. Bonko: How many years?

Mr. R. Miller: Twenty years without any substantial increase in manpower in the RCMP.

Of course, last year, following the tragedy out in Mayerthorpe, it sort of became the issue du jour, if I can call it that, and suddenly we saw an increase. It shouldn't take the death of four young men to raise our awareness and our sensitivity to the fact that our province is growing. As we grow, the level of crime and the type of crime that we see changes as well, and we have to keep up with that in terms of the resources we give our communities to police themselves.

Edmonton and Calgary still this year – maybe it'll change in the budget on Wednesday – as of right now are still being offered \$16 per capita for policing. No increase over the last five years. As I said, Mr. Speaker, certainly not only the number of crimes but the type of crime, the level of crime, and the severity of crime that we see, change as these two major cities grow. They've both reached that relatively critical mass of a million people, and when that happens, the comfortable little city that you grew up in doesn't feel like a little city anymore. We're now big, major league metropolises with major league problems, and not having an increase in the per capita funding over the last five years clearly doesn't address those problems that we're facing.

The next question I would have is whether or not, in fact, the standardization of resources for fire and rescue and recovery might perhaps be a veiled way of addressing issues like the Wabamun disaster and the fact that there didn't seem to be any co-ordinated response from the provincial government in that case, and maybe this is what's trying to be accomplished here.

It looks like I'm running out of time, Mr. Speaker, so I'll just say that while I will offer qualified support for this motion, I really wish it had said something like this: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to implement province-wide minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services for municipalities in full consultation with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and ensure that all municipalities have the resources necessary to implement such minimum standards.

Had we been a little more specific in terms of who we were consulting with to get there and how we were going to fund it, it would undoubtedly have received my unqualified support, Mr. Speaker. As it is, as I say, I can lend it qualified support, but I really wish that it was a little more specific, and I'm particularly concerned about the vagueness in the wording of the motion as it now sits.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to this motion from a little bit of a different point of view, and that's focusing on the recovery part of it. Right now in Alberta we've probably got one of the world-class facilities to train firefighters.

Thankfully, it's located in Vermilion, but it's trained just about all of the firefighters in Alberta. It does a very good job, and Albertans can go to bed at night knowing that there are a very dedicated group of professionals out there to look after that aspect of safety. We also have an incredibly dedicated group of police officers, RCMP, in Alberta that also give people a great deal of comfort and do a very good job. Although many of the different fire departments are made up of volunteers, I think it's safe to say that they could probably go against most professional firefighters anywhere in the world.

So it's not that we don't have very good people in all corners of Alberta, but what we're missing, Mr. Speaker, in my personal experience, is a co-ordinated effort to invoke a recovery or in some cases a rescue. I think it wouldn't take very much for the province to activate some training or to encourage some people to learn what's involved in a recovery and co-ordinate these two bodies.

Mr. Speaker, last August at Muriel Lake in Bonnyville we had a friend of ours drown. I can tell you that as hurtful as it is to go through it, and I wish no one else ever has to, I was as disappointed in the government of Alberta's response to that as anything I've ever been disappointed in in my life. It was virtually nonexistent.

Now, the people that showed up, the volunteer firefighters from Bonnyville, were there as fast as they could be there. They didn't have a boat. They had a small drag hook in a lake that covers 50 square miles, and they were willing, but they didn't know how to contribute to that recovery. The RCMP showed up quickly. They, too, had a boat but really no idea how to put in place any kind of a recovery grid or method or organize the volunteers. The fish and wildlife conservation officer showed up the next day. I can say nothing bad about anyone who was there. Their intentions were great. They didn't have the machines or the technology or the ability to co-ordinate, and I think that it says to me that we need to move our fire and rescue people under the Solicitor General so that one department co-ordinates these activities. The name has been changed to Solicitor General and Ministry of Public Security.

I think that we do ourselves a disservice to think that it just takes more money all the time to do better things. That's not true. Sometimes we need to take an inventory of what we've got in people, in products, and available boats, whatever would be needed in a particular recovery, and have someone there who can explain to the families and the people involved: this is what you can expect; this is what you can't expect. It's not very prudent, Mr. Speaker, to send out a heat-seeking helicopter the day after they've drowned and then have them say: well, quite frankly, we can't locate them two hours after they're in there. You give them hope; you take it away.

Many people become experts on this kind of thing as they work. I mean, I don't believe that it's not well-intentioned, but information about: how long does it take for a body to surface? What should you do? What could you do? How do you develop a grid so that people with cameras – I mean, if you have GPS and you have a boat that's equipped and you can do it, that's great. At one time I think we had around 16 boats out there trying to do this, but there was no one from the Alberta government in any capacity that was suggesting or telling us how to do this. People shouldn't be trying on their own to invent flotation devices that might mirror what a human body does. Surely we can do that and then give that information out to the different fire departments or whatever recovery group is there.

Granted, cost is a real, real driver. Mr. Speaker, if the Bonnyville fire department were in charge of the 10-day rescue, it would probably take all of their budget to look for someone who is not part of their community at a lake outside of their town. It would be very unfair to suggest that fire departments could be put in a huge deficit because of trying to do the right thing. I think the Alberta government needs to look at that and determine if there are circumstances

where we need to fund these searches or to have people there to help co-ordinate them. It certainly shouldn't put the municipality in a detrimental position.

Albertans rise to the top in times of crisis, and I'll guarantee you that every community is like that. We have unbelievable people that show up. Many days there, Mr. Speaker, we had over a hundred people, at times up to 150 people there trying to offer their services: what can we do? Quads and boats and spotting scopes and people bringing food. It happens everywhere in Alberta. It's not exclusive to me, but at that point it makes you very, very proud to be a part of that community.

Here are the people and the co-ordinating people – it's really unfair to single out some, but I have to say that a fellow named Bert Samuelson who works at Lakeland College in Vermilion just dropped his life for 10 days and worked with the people. Unfortunately, Bert's dad passed away today. Also, Milt Anderson, who worked at Webb's of Vermilion: 10 days. Their wives and their other families. People dropped their lives and sat there helping the family. And what did we do? Nothing. It just isn't right.

It's not a knock on our fire department and our municipalities not meeting standards. We have it. We've got a lot of it. Maybe if you're not on a highway, you don't need the fancy jaws of life, and maybe if there are no lakes in your constituency or your area, sir, you don't need a recovery boat or someone to do that, but it wouldn't be a big stretch to train half a dozen or twelve of these people that are probably in our fire departments now or in our police departments and have them available to move to an area where tragedies have happened and help co-ordinate and at least explain to the families what they can expect: this is what happens.

Let's not waste the resources. If there is no point in divers, don't do it. The divers that came there from the volunteer group here in Edmonton were unbelievable. They worked so hard trying to locate it. They often came back on our boat and collapsed, utterly exhausted. This is not a criticism, but they had very little help from us, I guess. We didn't know what to do. Finally, we get more divers. You finally start to develop grid patterns. You develop ways to pull them through the lake so you can cover more ground and save oxygen. But you shouldn't be reinventing the wheel.

We need one of the departments to bring this together under one block and say: here's what we do; here are the best practices when you're involved, unfortunately, in one of these circumstances, and that isn't there now. I would say that if this happened in Edmonton or Calgary or virtually any other town and you were told, "Well, you just have to wait; in 10 days they'll come up," I don't think that would be good enough.

Now, sometimes it's impossible. There are people who go through the lakes in the winter. There are people who fall into rivers. You know what? You can't die if you don't live. It's unfortunate. But when you're in a lake that's 10 feet deep, 17 at its deepest – and I want to talk to the minister that's got water about that – you'd think that there would be someone that could show up and say: "Here would be the best practices to set out a grid. Here are the people that are going to go around the lake and talk to the people, ask if they saw anything, and they're going to put that information through the co-ordinator right here, and he's going to keep the family in touch. He's going to make sure that they understand what's going on, and he'll make sure that we're not wasting our time, wasting our resources." So someone who understands it.

I don't think that every motion or every sentence in it needs to be taken to: what can go wrong? I think we need to look at some motions as: what can we do right? If co-ordinating the fire, the rescue, and the recovery under one department would make it better,

it will probably save a little money. Mr. Speaker, until you go through this, you don't realize how many people you'll run into that will say: well, the same thing happened to us, and here's what we had to do.

There are lakes where your loved ones will be taken to a certain area. Well, if the family knows that, that's great. But if the widow and the family that were at our campground didn't have to stay there and didn't have the huge support that her family was, what would she have done? I guess she would have sat at the end of the pier and waited. It just isn't what you want to put a dollar figure on. You want to be able to say: we showed up, and we did the very best we could because we were trained in co-ordinating the volunteers and the professionals that we had to do it.

Mr. Speaker, there's no magic bullet, but I would just say that I would hope the Assembly would support the intent of this motion.

8:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to this motion this evening. You know, like the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I must support this in principle. The need to ensure that there are "standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services" in all municipalities is a laudable objective for our province. I look at this motion, and I wonder how it will achieve that. I think it is essentially pretty weak and ineffectual in terms of trying to achieve that. Minimum standards for delivery of fire, rescue, and recovery services are a good idea, but the questions are: what will these minimum standards be, and who will develop them?

If the province and the provincial government want minimum standards, then it is the responsibility of the provincial government to establish what these standards are, and then they must ensure that the municipalities have the necessary capabilities, both in terms of finances and personnel, to meet these standards. If the responsibility for this is downloaded to municipalities, then they have to have the ability to meet these standards.

Municipalities should not be left with the responsibility to implement the standards because there will then be differing minimum standards across the province based upon the existing capabilities of that particular municipality. St. Albert might be able to do something which would require a fair amount of resources; other communities, counties, municipalities may not be able to. The reality is that if the province wants all municipalities to adopt and meet a minimum standard for fire, rescue, and recovery services, then it is the province that needs to establish such a standard, and they should do so in full consultation with the AUMA and the AAMD and C and then provide the funding necessary for those municipalities that cannot meet these standards.

You know, there was talk earlier that some municipalities may not need certain capabilities in terms, perhaps, of divers or whatever, even the jaws of life, but I think all of them have accidents that would require that. All of the municipalities and counties, indeed all of the municipal governments in our province have lakes and sloughs and dugouts and rivers and could benefit from having a true standard set up that would cover all the local governments in our great province.

You know, I believe the wording that was put out by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford would be a far stronger wording and a far more effective wording in trying to ensure that the actual intent of this motion actually comes into play. Sometimes it does take a bit more money, and sometimes it takes some specifics in order to get some real advances made in terms of public safety and in terms of providing a better standard for all Albertans.

Indeed, there will always be the great volunteer added to the great ability of Albertans to jump into things and try and make things better to save those who are in need and to help them when we have natural disasters and tragic circumstance. I think it is one of the characteristics of Albertans that we will always jump in and do that sort of thing no matter what or where we are in this province.

I'm encouraged by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar talking about the importance of perhaps bringing all the firefighters across the province to the union standard. It is encouraging to hear him say that. You know, we do need some minimum standards all across the board.

With that, Mr. Speaker, although the intent of the motion is good, and we must support it for its basic principle, I think that it will be ineffectual in reaching its end if it stays with that particular wording. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak in support of Motion 504. I would like to take this opportunity, at first, to congratulate the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for introducing this outstanding proposal.

An Hon. Member: Well said; very well said.

Mr. Prins: Thank you.

There are some great examples across this province that illustrate the potential benefits of this motion. I would like to highlight one of them: the Lacombe Regional Fire Service. This organization that serves within my riding of Lacombe-Ponoka, is a true success story that I believe can be used as a model for many other regions across the province.

The goal of the Lacombe Regional Fire Service is to continually strive to reduce the frequency and severity of emergency incidents within their service area in order to shield their communities from the damaging effects of these events. For this organization their mission statement is more than just a slick phrase; it's part of their planning process and the reality of their action.

The Lacombe Regional Fire Service was the result of a thorough investigative review by Lacombe county, the town of Lacombe, and the Lacombe fire department. These three partners joined to become the founding members of the fire service which they envisioned. However, they did not limit their success by restricting membership. Instead, they welcomed expansion and created a fire and rescue network that serves surrounding communities and the rural areas between these communities. As such, the Lacombe Regional Fire Service has grown to include the village of Clive, the village of Alix, the town of Eckville, and most recently the town of Bentley. The village of Mirror was a member before dissolution – now they're part of the county – and the Lacombe Regional Fire Service is looking to bring Blackfalds into the organization in the near future, so then it will encompass all the urban municipalities within the county.

Lacombe acts as the main hub for the administrative services, allowing all of the communities within the organization to be well connected and well served. This means that the entire area covered by the Lacombe Regional Fire Service has capabilities that far outreach those which would be achieved by individual communities. However, the small towns in the region are not seen as peripheral or satellites; they are seen as partners, with each community fire department playing an important role in serving the designated area.

Despite its size the organization still relies totally on the support of volunteers, with the regional fire chief being the only serving

employee. In part he is responsible for providing technical advice to the organization's board of directors, which is comprised of elected representatives from major member groups.

I can personally attest to the fact that the Lacombe Regional Fire Service is a first-class operation from top to bottom. The success story of the Lacombe Regional Fire Service was built under the current governing system we have in place for fire and rescue services in Alberta. This does not mean that the treatment of these organizations and the standards they operate under are flawless. I believe we need to be constantly searching for ways to improve.

Being content with the status quo eliminates the opportunity for progress. That's the premise behind Motion 504. While there are great fire and rescue services in this province, some are falling behind. These organizations need new ideas and encouragement. Communities need to focus more attention on their fire and rescue services, making them the priority they need to be. Ignoring this issue would be a big mistake.

I'm not saying that every municipality should necessarily adopt the exact system of the Lacombe region because the situation is not that simple. Alberta is a diverse province, and to some extent unique solutions need to be found for each region. However, the overlying concepts of the regional fire service can be applied to nearly all areas. In my discussions with the Lacombe county officials they expressed their beliefs that the structure and dealings of their fire service are applicable to most regions. For example, the Member for Peace River has areas within his constituency in which travel time between communities is measured in hours instead of minutes. In these types of areas populations are smaller, limiting human resources and decreasing the tax base. Nonetheless, the concepts of sharing information, training facilities, business plans, communication plans, income and economic plans, and performance measures are still extremely valid. In fact, in these relatively remote areas co-operation and sharing these types of resources is even more important.

8:40

I just would like to add that in my work with the Lacombe Regional Fire Service – I was a member of it at one time – one of the main things that we did was get together in practice sessions. We would bring all of the firefighters from the different villages and towns together, and they would plan the co-ordination of their equipment, the co-ordination of their radios, their communications. They would build a comradery that would strengthen them for the times when they would have to deal with emergencies in joint force.

They would set policies as to who would be in control of situations if there was a multidepartment response, and they had policies in place that would determine who would pay for a multforce response because there's always the problem of who pays for these things. This is because small communities have huge volunteer demands, and as a result fire and rescue crews are difficult to attain. The training these brave citizens require is typically only available from the Alberta Fire Training School in Vermilion, making time and cost an issue for small municipalities. The Lacombe Regional Fire Service would bring in training to its fire departments, directly to the villages or towns, making the lives of everyone involved much easier and saving time and money for these municipalities.

Motion 504 can help facilitate this sort of progress. With the carrying of this motion, we will open the doors for all municipalities to establish first-class fire and rescue networks. I don't think we need to spend a lot of money to accomplish this. We just have to start working together to train and plan and co-ordinate and find efficiencies in any way possible. In fact, when we do this, we might even save money. Instead of costing more, it might cost us less to do this.

Working together is part of Alberta's history. It's an age-old way of making the most of what we each have individually to create the greatest good for all. Co-operation is an important concept to consider in every activity, especially for something that impacts all of our lives like fire and rescue systems do. Although some of our members here would like to see the wording stronger in this motion and would like to see it more prescriptive, I believe that the actual decisions that have to be made are political decisions that have to be made at local levels, in local municipalities. They will have to decide how far they want to go, how much money they want to spend, and how much equipment they want to invest in, so I want to leave that up to the local municipalities.

For these reasons I've outlined, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting Motion 504. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand and speak to Motion 504 this evening, and I appreciate the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor and his intent and his desire in this motion. There have been many good discussions brought forward. I guess the one that excites me the most in all of this is the fact that we realize that we live in a diverse province. Too often we're in remote areas, and accidents happen, and we wonder: how do we resolve these problems?

My biggest concern with this is that we just went through the ambulance fiasco saying that we need to have standards across the province, and as soon as we brought that up, we realized all of a sudden that it's not a \$55 million program, it's \$110 million, and even at that they weren't sure. It really worries me when they say, "Provide minimum standards." I could support this wholly if we were to make an amendment for municipalities to provide recommended standards, realizing that in rural Alberta in many areas they're not able to meet those minimum standards.

There are small communities with just 50, 100 people living there. They have a fire truck, they have a boat, and they've bought these other pieces of equipment. They've raised the money because of disasters in their communities, and they have them there, yet the minimum standard might say: well, it has to be a 16-foot boat. So all of a sudden they're not allowed to go out because of these minimum standards.

I have great fear for the smaller communities in rural Alberta that if, in fact, you place minimum standards, they'll be eliminated. We've gone through the Walkerton episode with the water treatment plant. New standards have been put in place, and it's very onerous on some of the smaller hamlets and small communities to try to meet those new standards when, in fact, their water is okay.

It just doesn't work to have a blanket program saying, "These are the new minimum standards" when it's easy for Edmonton and Calgary or perhaps Lethbridge to meet those, but the smaller areas cannot have it anymore. I'm very concerned when we say, "minimum standards." I see that that often turns into maximum amount of money, and therefore we can't operate or have some of these firemen or ambulances in our communities because we no longer meet the minimum standards. I think that it's sad when we do that to communities and tell them, "Your way of life is outdated, and you can't live that way anymore," because what it is is it's shutting down those small communities, and people have to leave because of the new minimum standards.

So the intent and the desire to provide safety to Albertans and to have rescue and fire and recovery services is excellent. I like the idea from the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster that perhaps

what we need is to have emergency response teams in different areas of the province that can go out and help these small communities and have experts available.

To put in those minimum standards: I'm very apprehensive about that. I think that it'll do more harm than good in the small rural areas. So I would encourage us to reconsider that and to change it to have recommended standards, to have facilities and places where people can go and receive the training.

Another huge help would be to give tax credits or other areas to these volunteer people who put an immense amount of time and effort and money into keeping their areas alive. We need to help them in that way, not necessarily saying that you're no longer qualified and we're going to shut down your rescue or fire department because you no longer meet the minimum standards.

So with that slight change to provide recommended standards and to have easier access to training, I'd be happy to support this motion, and I look forward to more debate on this one. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very glad to be able to stand and take part in the debate on Motion 504. I'd like to also assure the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor that fire prevention and fire support in rural areas is a passion with volunteers. I want to say that it is probably one of the most important issues for individuals in rural Alberta, and I know that it may sound as if I'm speaking against motherhood when I make a couple of comments that question some of the directions of this motion.

Urging municipalities to provide a minimum standard for fire and rescue services is an important issue, and I very much appreciate the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor bringing up this issue. I also understand the intentions of the member in bringing forward this motion. I have some questions about some of the practicality in rural Alberta but especially in remote areas of Alberta.

We talk about regular standards. I was the chairman of the fire department in our area for approximately six or seven years. What happened: under that fire department we had communities that partnered with aboriginal communities in order that we could provide a service. If you had standards and regulations that asked each and every one of those communities to have a certain standard, then I don't think there would be fire departments in some of those areas, and they would have to be left up to larger communities. The time that it would take for those individual fire departments to get there would be way too long for any sort of feasible control.

Mr. Speaker, today in our province we have 431 fire departments.

Mr. Lukaszuk: How many?

Mr. Danyluk: Four hundred and thirty-one. Approximately 85 per cent – and I stress to you 85 per cent – of these organizations are staffed by volunteers. These community fire departments pride themselves on the services that they provide and just do not have the means to be able to meet any further standards. As we know, if it's possible, they will do it. Right now I have fire departments in my area that are running bingos and casinos, fund raising to upgrade their equipment. Should there be a standard? Maybe yes, if the government is willing to provide some support, but if they're not willing to provide the support, those individuals can't afford to do it.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, training is an integral part of any firefighter's career. In our area we have collaborated with the regional fire communities or municipalities and provided services and training in co-operation

with the excellent school out of Vermilion. They have done a tremendous job of training and have provided some very needed equity in regard to knowledge. I don't want to correct the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, but part of that training very much involves the co-ordination of fire departments and their involvement in search and rescue and firefighting and some co-ordination with the community.

I want to say that if we did have standards – and I say the standards that seem to be brought forward – I just don't see how it would at all be possible to . . . [interjections] Sorry, Mr. Speaker. It's just a little distraction.

Certain equipment is also regulated under these pieces of legislation, and vehicles used in firefighting and rescue services are also regulated in a number of ways. For example, under the transportation act, as mentioned by the hon. member that presented this motion, vehicles must be noteworthy – and I think that is very important – and remain so throughout the course of their use or firefighting practices. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is not as if the rural firefighter departments or any fire department for that matter go completely unregulated and without standards for staff and equipment.

Under the Department of Municipal Affairs Alberta has an Alberta fire commissions office that oversees the Alberta Fire Services Advisory Committee. Mr. Speaker, this committee helps to ensure that our municipal fire departments provide an appropriate level of fire service within their regions. They provide a great deal of information and assistance to those in the field. For example, they develop and publish information packages on how to establish and operate a fire department and on how they have individuals that go through the fire departments to ensure that they are operating in a manner that meets the accepted practices. Therefore, these municipal fire departments have support, and most do the best job they possibly can.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the problems municipalities have with their firefighting and rescue services or lack thereof are actually few and far between. While there are, no doubt, some situations where municipal fire departments could improve the level of service they provide as a whole, I feel that these groups provide a very excellent service both in firefighting and rescue services. In turn, as a province we provide them with ample tools to do so. Without providing provincial funding for municipal firefighting departments, especially in rural areas, I do not see how it will be possible for the majority of these groups to meet increased standards if such standards were encouraged.

Mr. Speaker, we heard today discussions about Lacombe, Edmonton, Calgary, Drayton Valley, Bonnyville, Peace River. Now, these communities are large communities and have the ability to support firefighting services and equipment. I am mostly speaking on behalf of the small communities that do not have the abilities, that rely on other communities to help them out, and they are there as support. They are there as suboffices or subdepartments. We cannot put too many standards or restrictions on those individuals. To ask a hardworking, dedicated crew of firefighters, the majority of whom are working in a voluntary capacity, to give even more of their time in additional training is really hardly fair. As I said, in our area we do not have anyone that is in a paid position except the chief, who was just hired to overlook and help with the training. So, you know, some of the comments the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar had talked about, that we need to train more – that is happening already, and if there are places where it isn't happening, maybe there should be some support in that direction.

As well, to ask municipalities to come up with more money to finance these small fire departments may be pushing them just a

little bit far. I know that most of the municipalities support firefighting to the best of their abilities. If you go throughout the communities and I know that if you go throughout my constituency, there are so many that have provided great effort in the support of their fire departments.

Mr. Speaker, I guess it is good to talk about equity, it is good to talk about consistency in firefighting, and it's good to talk about standards. I could support this motion if there was some latitude in the acceptability of standards from different communities because I think that if we equalize standards, then the communities in remote areas, especially my communities, will not be able to afford to have any sort of firefighting. So I want to support the individuals that are there, that are trying to protect the homes of the community, that are trying to protect the community.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this motion put forward by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. I find, as I listen to the debate on both sides from the one side of the House, that the issue is becoming a little bit clarified in my mind.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that people of Alberta, regardless of where they live, whether they live in a rural area or in an urban area, deserve a reasonable level of fire and rescue service. They deserve, whether or not they live in an area with a volunteer firefighting system or a trained professional system, at least a minimum standard. That's not to say that the standard can be the same across the province. Obviously, in a highly dense urban area there's going to be faster response than otherwise. I don't believe that this is a question of putting a greater burden on local municipalities or on volunteer firefighters. I don't think that that is what the hon. member intends by his motion. In fact, I would say that I believe that volunteer firefighters would welcome assistance that could be provided to them that would allow them to do their job better. They are involved in that because they care about the people in their community and they want to save lives, and anything that this government can do, it should do in order to assist them and to ensure that all people in rural Alberta have a decent and minimum standard of emergency care.

The problem is – and I think that's why this motion has been somewhat modified by the mover – that there is an implied requirement that if the government chooses to do this, it has a financial obligation. I think it's high time that the government recognize that it has that obligation.

Mr. Speaker, just in conclusion – I know that the time is running out – I want to say that while I think that the motion does not address the resource issue and the responsibility of the government, it should be passed. It's a good first step.

9:00

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I've just been advised that because of the first vote that we had, there are still another three minutes if you wanted to conclude your thoughts.

Mr. Mason: I'll allow if there's another member.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for bringing this motion

forward. It's creating some good discussion, so I appreciate what he's done.

Reading it, it says, "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage municipalities to provide minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services." A very fine motherhood statement, and of course I would never ever think of arguing against motherhood.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it's important to recognize that I would hope what the hon. member is talking about is allowing each municipality to set the standards that they think they can attain. If we start setting standards across the province and/or a number of municipalities like the AUMA or the AAMDs and Cs are figuring out the standards, we're going to have great difficulty in a lot of areas because most of these people are volunteers. In fact, to impose on them standards that would require a lot of training, you end up with almost having to have full-time people on staff. Quite frankly, the municipalities simply cannot afford to do that, so I think it's really important that the municipalities have that ability.

Some have mentioned the training. I think it is really important, and I think it's really the role of the provincial government to assist in the training. Of course, there's a lot of that happening today, but probably there could be more done.

I know that in the county that I'm in, they have a regional director for services, and that person looks after all of the fire departments, does the co-ordinating.

There's one area that has been mentioned a couple of times: rescue. Well, Mr. Speaker, in the Rocky constituency we have that vast area in the west country. There is a search and rescue group that are volunteers, and they have taken a lot of training. Through donations – and I have helped them in some of the government programs to get various equipment. Quite frankly, if we were going to offer a real high standard there, that would require a lot of dollars, a lot of training.

Sometimes I have a little difficulty understanding why taxpayers should have to pay for, in a lot of cases, some dumb decisions by the public. For example, why on earth do people riding skidoos go up on the high elevations and trigger snowslides and then expect taxpayers to pay to recover them? I think that there is a responsibility on the part of the individual to recognize some of those dangers so that, in fact, if they get in trouble, they pay to have themselves rescued. Often it requires a helicopter, and of course we end up paying for that.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Government Services, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar to close debate on Motion 504.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really would sincerely like to thank all of those who participated in the debate tonight. I thought it was an excellent debate. I would really like to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for his excellent and very supportive comments as well as the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. I thought he made some great, great points. The Member for Rocky Mountain House was just outstanding. Even the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was very supportive, and I appreciate him.

With regard to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, well, he and I need to do some more talking, I think, Mr. Speaker. I think he needs to see that this motion really is aimed in the right direction. I have one question. The question is this: what if your best is not good enough? What if your best is not good enough? You see, I

really believe that minimum standards are our job. As a government that is certainly our job. We're the ones who have to set that province-wide standard. Minimum standards need to be set. There needs to be a benchmark.

We've heard about areas such as Lacombe-Ponoka that have found ways to work together. They've found ways to make it work with the existing dollars, not with any outside dollars but with the existing dollars that they have within their budget. They spend the money that they have, and they make a system that works, a system that is able to meet the needs of the community. I do recognize that the standards will vary from municipality to municipality. For some places it takes minutes to get across their rescue area. For other places it takes hours to get across their rescue area. So of course we need to be understanding that there will be a somewhat different standard depending on where you are, but there still have to be some minimums provided.

The whole thing where this bill came from, Mr. Speaker, is that we had a little situation in my constituency where we found that there were two competing forces trying to provide for fire and rescue services in a portion of my constituency. One was sort of trying to take over from the other one, and one had kind of a higher standard than the other one. So they came to their MLA, and they said: "You know, who is right? What are the minimum standards for fire and rescue?" I guess that I was shocked to find out we didn't really have any.

Then I started to look into it, and I found out that there is a committee that's out there currently working on guidelines, working on recommendations, working on sort of provincial standards or provincial minimums that municipalities are going to be encouraged to meet. Again, it's not always an issue of money. Sometimes you can spend the money that you're currently spending in a more focused and in a wiser fashion.

I'm really thankful for the way we got to talk about this tonight, and I hope it's only a springboard. You know, motions generally are fairly vague, and motions are generally just encouraging in nature, but I really hope that this is just a springboard, that maybe we could talk more about this at the AUMA, at the AAMD and C. Maybe we can talk more about it in our own meetings as a government and even here on the floor of the Legislature. My hope is that we can work together with Municipal Affairs and with the Solicitor General to come to an amicable agreement on how we can put this forward and how we can make this work.

I guess, in closing, Mr. Speaker, that I believe that as legislators we must remain vigilant in regard to public safety by constantly aiming to improve the safety and well-being of the citizens of Alberta. We must ensure that all Albertans feel safe within their communities. It's extremely important for our citizens to have the peace of mind to function openly and freely, having the confidence of knowing that someone will be there to help in the case of an emergency or a crisis. Province-wide standards are our job as a government and as a Legislature, but municipalities are our partners. They are our friends. We have to work with them to see this come about.

I do encourage all members, even the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, to support Motion 504. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

head: **Government Motions**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move

three government motions. I'll do them one at a time. As all members here would know, these are effectively adjournment-type motions, so they're not debatable.

Spring Recess

12. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, March 23, 2006, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 3, 2006, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried]

9:10 Easter Recess

13. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, April 13, 2006, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 24, 2006, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried]

Adjournment of Session

14. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the spring sitting of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

[Motion carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1 Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Premier to move Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, at this stage, third reading.

I've already indicated to the House earlier, Mr. Speaker, what the potential impact of this act is and why I think it's incumbent upon all of us to support it. That having been said, I'll look forward to any other positive comments or observations that other members of the House might have and seek their concurrence at the end to have this proceed through third reading.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak about Bill 1 in third reading. Actually, it's the first time I've had the opportunity to speak about this bill. The effect of this bill will be to direct a considerable amount of money into a fund focused on cancer prevention initiatives, including, as the bill states, education, public policy development, and social marketing initiatives and the support of screening programs and a virtual research institute.

Everyone is in agreement that we have received tremendous benefits from medical research as it has developed, especially in the last few decades. In fact, demographers, those who trace the trends in population growth, have referred to the great health transition, the shift from short lives marked by early death caused by infectious

diseases like typhoid and smallpox to long lives marked by death from chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer. Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a huge trade-off. We, on the one hand, deem ourselves fortunate to be able to live long lives, but the downside is having to deal with chronic diseases like cancer. On the one hand, fighting infectious diseases like smallpox did not take long. If you lost the fight, it was over rather quickly, and if you won, there were no lasting effects. But with chronic diseases, which we encounter so much now in old age, the struggle is often slow and drawn out, lasting many weeks, months, or even years. This is the trade-off: a longer, healthier life followed by many more years of serious decline and often disability.

The reality that we face today is that the greater prevalence of chronic disease like cancer means rising costs in health care, so of course there has to be a greater investment of our money. Part of this is the high cost of medical technology. A common estimate is that 40 to 50 per cent of expenditure growth can be traced to increased costs in technology. Few of us would criticize this because it is obviously a societal good that we can keep finding new ways to help people fight disease.

For example – and I want to make a personal reference here – my mother, who passed away a number of years ago, had breast cancer twice in her lifetime. The first time, about 60 years ago, the treatment was successful given medical technology at the time, but it left her with many lingering effects of radiation sickness. The second time she had breast cancer, 40 years later, the treatment was also successful, and because medical technology had advanced and improved so much, there were few side effects. No one would disagree and oppose the fact that medical technology is improving the opportunities for people to deal with diseases like cancer.

However, the statistics on the rising costs of technology coupled with another statistic raise serious questions. Beginning in the 1970s, patients in the last year of their life consumed over 25 per cent of medical costs, and that seems to be an increasing trend. What is desperately needed in our society, I believe, is a frank, open, wide-ranging discussion of dying and death. Given all of the money that we put into the last year of our lives, it appears that the great enemy is death. We put more money by far into prolonging our life in the face of death than into the quality of life during our last days.

As Daniel Callahan, the outstanding medical ethicist, puts it, there is a great schism in our approach to chronic disease and death. On the one side is the research drive, and on the other side is palliative care. The research drive aims to find a cure for a lethal disease like cancer. Death is the enemy, not to be accepted. The research drive seems to treat death itself as a curable disease, as if it is merely a biological accident and can be controlled, prolonging life.

Of course, people die for a variety of reasons. One reason is that for the moment we do not have the cure, and research must go on and do its work. Another reason people die is because of bad health behaviours, bad lifestyle choices such as smoking. Many have mentioned in the debate on Bill 1 the importance of environmental factors influencing our health and contributing to disease. Of course, there are also genetic factors, which research is dealing with.

Bill 1, with its emphasis on cancer prevention and research, is one answer to the research drive. The bill's focus on prevention through education and increased screening for early detection is most important. No one, I think, in good conscience could oppose this bill. It's one answer to the research drive. But this is only one side of the challenge. I mentioned that there's a great schism in our approach to chronic disease and death. On the one side is the research drive. We want to invest in research and have the best medical technology, the best science available. On the other side is the palliative care movement. Mr. Speaker, I want to say just a few

words about that because this bill doesn't deal with that, and I think there should be an equal amount of investment in the palliative care side of the whole issue.

Palliative care as a movement became quite important in the 1990s. It's an attempt to work to pull the care of the dying back to its ancient roots of giving comfort and relieving suffering. In this movement death is not perceived as the great enemy; rather, death is seen as a part of life. The goal is to help the terminally ill to die more peacefully by taking them out of the cure-driven apparatus of modern medicine and allowing them to live in peace during their final days.

Mr. Speaker, another personal note. My father passed away a couple of years ago from pancreatic cancer. Fortunately, he was able to live in his apartment almost right to the very end with home care, with palliative care. I see that as a tremendous plus that the palliative care movement has given us.

Bill 1 only deals with one side of this schism. Governments must also invest in palliative care, not just on the research side, the drive to have the best research available. We must invest in palliative care. Granted, a lot of progress has been made with palliative care like hospices, pain management, and living wills. Mr. Speaker, much, much more needs to be done. Reasoned debate about the conditions of our long-term care and assisted living institutions is an important part of the overall approach to end-of-life care, and that debate has to continue to take place. Most research money goes toward combatting lethal diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and strokes, but what is also needed is the funding of research on mental health, arthritis, and osteoporosis, all of which actually affect more people and directly affect our quality of life.

If we focused more on the quality of life and less on the length of life, we would probably save billions in health care costs. The war against death has actually put many, many people at risk of dying horrible, agonizing deaths, deaths so miserable that in the last 20 years a whole debate has emerged in our society about euthanasia and about assisted suicide. So to be able to live long lives and to face lethal diseases like cancer also poses a huge issue for us in terms of how we deal with dying and death.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 is a step in the right direction because it shifts the attention from a narrow focus on finding a cure and combatting death to preventions and screening, where quality of life and lifestyle issues can be raised. That's why I would support this bill. But it does not go far enough. We need another bill, the Alberta palliative care act, in which we set aside \$500 million for end-of-life care because that is surely a direction that we need for the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1 this evening. There's no doubt that Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, demonstrates the vision of the government, and I commend the hon. Premier for sponsoring it. This piece of legislation embodies the dream of all Albertans, that one day we will live in a society that is free from the pain and suffering of cancer.

I would also commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for his amendment and the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for her clarifying subamendment. The amendment seeks to eliminate the investment of the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund into ventures that are involved in the tobacco industry. As we're all aware, tobacco use is the largest preventable cause of

cancer. It would be inconsistent with the objects of the act, one of the most important of which is to reduce the incidence of cancer, to have the fund provide capital to corporations which produce known addictive, carcinogenic products.

The Alberta cancer legacy fund established by Bill 1 will support new cancer screening programs as early detection is one of the keys to winning the battle against the disease. Co-operation is another key to success in the treatment and prevention of cancer. The fund will assist in the co-ordination and collaboration between research programs, between the public and the private sector, and between Alberta and other provincial, national, and international researchers. It will help us to get the best value for every dollar invested in cancer research.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the best place in Canada to live, and with our efforts to create legislation such as Bill 1, there is no doubt that it will continue as such for generations to come.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) kicks in. Any questions or comments?

There being none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I, too, want to commend the promoters of this innovative investment. Not common that we see this kind of investment in prevention, and indeed very welcome. Screening, early detection, education, research: all of these are critical to moving forward on this devastating disease for which in many cases we have no cure and we don't have a prevention yet because we don't know the cause. But in those cases where we do know the cause – for example, air pollution and tobacco smoke – we should be doing everything possible.

Many of us are concerned that, indeed, the rates of cancer are increasing, and it's not purely a function of age. It seems to be increasing environmental exposures. Increasingly the wrong foods, alcohol itself, in high doses are associated with cancer. Certainly, we could do more in the area of tobacco and air quality in buildings, especially for employees and workers, as we debated in this House with the last bill on smoke-free places. It's our hope that we will take the next step and ban smoking in all public places, not just those where children are, because lungs are lungs whether they're children's lungs or adults' lungs.

It's also clear in the literature that we know something about dietary carcinogens. Preservatives in some cases seem to be associated with an increased rate of cancer. Hormones seem to be related to cancer, and their use in animal production needs to be looked at very carefully because we know something about how that's translated not only into an increased risk of cancer but also feminization of animal species and, perhaps, some precocious puberty in young people. Obesity itself seems to be a risk factor for cancer. Active living and a healthy diet would not only reduce cancer, but it would reduce some of the chronic diseases that we're seeing add significantly to the health care costs. So there's a spectrum of actions that we could be taking and that this fund, I think, could help to promote and educate about that would not only reduce cancer but would reduce a lot of chronic diseases; for example, heart disease and arthritis and obesity.

There are a few contradictions, though, in spending \$500 million in prevention and not addressing some of the thousands of synthetic chemicals that we introduce into our diets, into our air, into our land every day. We do need to look at how we can pull ourselves off the chemical society that we've become and recognize, I think, that some of the increase, especially in hormone-related cancers like breast and prostate, may well be related to what we are doing to

animals in food production and what we are strewing on the land and putting out of our smokestacks, especially our internal combustion engines, and the increasing focus of this government on fossil fuel development over the next few years. We have to do it better. We have to do it more cleanly. We have to make the shift towards renewable fuels and away from fossil fuels in order to reduce in another way the incidence of cancer.

Some of the synthetic chemicals – and I'm thinking here of both fertilizers and pesticides – from the fossil fuel industry are also adding to the potential carcinogens in our environment. We have to find some other ways, some more natural ways of producing food and minimizing the risks of cancer.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. A very positive direction with investing in prevention, early intervention, research, and education but a contradiction in terms of our heavy emphasis on fossil fuels in this province. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Bill 3 Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and move Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006, for third reading.

I've been encouraged by the support of my colleagues for this bill, and I appreciate the lively discussions we've had about these important amendments. They will give us an improved means of protecting vulnerable people like seniors or those with disabilities and those at risk of family violence through stalking.

I would ask the entire Assembly to lend their support to these amendments and help keep our communities safe from family violence. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 3 in third reading and to make some comments on the effect of this bill, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006. Of course, we all agree that the topic of family violence is one of the most important issues in our ongoing struggle to prevent violence in our society. It is really shocking and unacceptable that Alberta, one of the wealthiest provinces in Canada, should also have the highest rate of spousal abuse in Canada. In 2004 a total of 5,520 spousal abuse incidents were reported to the police in Alberta and 3,865 charges were laid. According to Statistics Canada, Alberta women experience the highest rates of domestic violence in the country. Granted, there are many strains on families these days, with being uprooted because of working away from the family, and there are high amounts of gambling problems and alcoholism and a very high divorce rate in this province. Still, there's no excuse. We must encourage and enforce in Alberta a zero tolerance policy for family violence.

I support fully the well-written statements of the preamble of this

bill outlining different aspects of the commitment to oppose family violence and protect especially its victims. The effect of this bill will be, I believe, to strengthen our society's ability to respond to family violence.

9:30

I want to make a few comments: first, about the definition of family violence and, second, about the process of apprehension of offenders. I want to commend the government, especially the Department of Justice, for the publication of a very fine handbook called the Domestic Violence Handbook. Many speakers have already congratulated Valerie Campbell for her work in educating prosecutors and police officers with respect to family violence, and I, too, wish to add my congratulations. She's just doing a splendid job throughout Alberta.

This handbook, Domestic Violence Handbook, is a splendid, clearly written, helpful handbook which raises awareness and outlines the processes of dealing with offenders. As noted in the introduction of this handbook, we've come a long way since July 8, 1982, when the House of Commons introduced a motion on police charging those accused of wife-beating, a motion which was greeted initially with laughter and jeers. We've come a long way since 1982.

Valerie Campbell writes in the handbook that in the first few months of prosecuting cases of domestic violence here in Edmonton, she watched "in helpless disbelief as most victims, often with children in tow, left the courtroom only to return to abusive . . . situations." She also mentioned seeing frustrated and angry police officers leaving the courtroom because a "domestic violence charge was either stayed or dismissed for lack of evidence." So much progress has been made, and three years after the domestic violence unit began in Edmonton, there are now six designated prosecutors and three specialized courtrooms. Victims receive more support, and fewer cases are falling through the cracks.

It is important for the public to be aware of the nature of family violence, and this bill contributes to a wider understanding of such violence. As many reports and studies have indicated, typical abusive relationships occur when one partner exerts control over and exploits the other partner. Such behaviour may involve physical violence or threats of violence or constant denigration of the other partner; in other words, emotional and psychological abuse. It may involve economic means whereby a partner is isolated and made to depend completely on an abusive partner.

Now, this bill adds stalking to the definition of domestic violence. Stalking, or criminal harassment as it has been called, has been a crime in Canada since 1993. Stalking is simply an extension of control as the abuser tries to dominate, follow the victim, watching and threatening the victim, causing tremendous fear. The Domestic Violence Handbook states that

despite its purpose and the best intentions of police and prosecutors, criminal harassment or stalking continues to be overlooked in many domestic violence cases. This oversight can have tragic consequences, particularly for victims who have left abusive relationships.

Hopefully, the inclusion of stalking in this bill will contribute to correcting such an oversight.

Mr. Speaker, that was my first main comment about this bill, about the definition of family violence. Now, the second main comment I want to make is about the process of apprehension. The October 31, 2003, report, A Coherent and Principled Response to Family Violence in Alberta: Recommendations for Action and Change, submitted to the Minister of Children's Services, recommended changes concerning the emergency protection orders, or EPOs. Up until now a justice of the peace or a judge would only

grant an EPO when two requirements were fulfilled: family violence has occurred, and by reason of the seriousness or urgency the order should be granted to protect the claimant. The report recommended broadening these requirements.

For an example, an abuser may be in custody or just released and is on the way to where the victim resides. So the addition in this bill after the words “that family violence has occurred” of the statement “that the claimant has reason to believe that the respondent will continue or resume carrying out family violence” is a good addition. Abusers may not like this, but society needs to protect victims of family violence, and this should outweigh any inconvenience to respondents. So I think that’s an improvement in this bill.

The 2003 report, which I referred to, also raises the issue of sanctions for breaches of an emergency protection order. Bill 3 is fine, but if there are problems in the processing and the enforcement of EPOs, then we still have work to do. Under section 127 of the Criminal Code a police officer can arrest a person for breaching an order by the court, which is of course important for serious cases, and the police act on that, but in many cases involving domestic violence breaches of emergency protection orders are often considered not serious enough for arrest, and there’s a problem there. This is a very serious problem.

Even under section 495 of the Criminal Code a police officer has the power of arrest without warrant for an indictable offence if the officer has reasonable and probable grounds for believing that an offence has occurred. But Bill 3 underlines the importance of dealing with a person who is thought to be about to resume a practice of family violence, not that such an abuse has happened. If such a person is moving toward the home of a victim and is found to be in a place he should not be, he should be charged with a breach of an EPO.

The Protection Against Family Violence Act does not prescribe any penalty for the breach of an EPO. That’s my understanding. The 2003 report recommends that a breach of an EPO should be made a provincial offence so that lesser punishments can be imposed for lesser breaches, and this is especially important now that we’re using special constables and peace officers instead of police officers. Will the special constables – and we don’t know this because we haven’t dealt with Bill 16 yet – be able to deal with offenders who breach EPOs? Bill 3 does not deal with these issues, but, Mr. Speaker, this is addressing its effect. I think this bill will be limited in its effect if we do not also go on to deal with the effectiveness of enforcement.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006. I think I join most of the other members on this side with positive comments about the amendments being made: section 4, incorporating stalking into the current legislation and defining stalking; section 5, changing the processes used in issuing emergency protection orders, including the vulnerability of elderly people and children, again an important addition; and section 6, requiring only one parent to consent to a child receiving counselling due to family violence.

On a more general basis, I think it’s important to begin to discuss and look at why Alberta has a higher rate of family violence and look at some of the unique features of our culture that contribute to it. Indeed, as has already been alluded to, we need to consider some of the extra strains and stresses on First Nations people and on new

Canadians, some of the living conditions that they are faced with, and how we could reduce some of the primary causes that lead to family violence and despair. Some people are living close to the edge and need the support of a living income, and I include many of our people on welfare and on AISH supports as living well below the poverty line and experiencing on some levels extreme stress that contributes to relationship problems and contributes to violence. I think we need to look at areas in which we could be more conscientious about early intervention in situations that are potentially at risk and with children who are potentially at risk in poverty situations and deprived emotional climates.

Finally, we need to look at areas where we’re not providing the kind of opportunities for growth and development, educational opportunities and training that would also help people of both genders and all races and all walks of life and all ages to maximize their human potential, another area where frustration and anger and bitterness can arise and contribute to an Alberta disadvantage, Mr. Speaker, that I know we would all want to try to address.

9:40

I also want to just talk briefly about the recognition in my own profession, in medicine and nursing, that we need, I think, better training to identify and respond to signs of domestic abuse and violence. I don’t think we’re doing as good a job as we could in our hospitals, clinics and in nursing assessments, medical assessments. I think there’s a real reluctance in some quarters to identify and report and act on domestic violence, and there’s too commonly a willingness to blame the victim in domestic violence – and that needs to be addressed – in terms of attitudes, whether it’s in the health sector, the legal sector, or the policing sector. It may be associated with racism. It may be associated with lack of professional experience. It may be associated with just fear of getting involved in a situation that’s often uncomfortable and leads to a lot of time and counselling, in courtrooms, in interventions of various kinds. So training and preparation of all of our society for dealing straightforwardly with signs of domestic violence is an important contribution that we would like to see in this province to reduce the incidence that has become singularly high in Alberta.

I could allude also to the gun registry and the gun licensing system in Canada, that I believe has made a contribution to reducing some of the injuries, accidents, and violence associated with guns and firearms, long arms particularly. There’s been a significant reduction over the last decade in both injuries and homicides in conjunction with the new national legislation. It’s impossible to say that it’s cause and effect, of course, but there is an association with this legislation and the dropping in gun-related deaths and injuries.

So, on balance, looking at prevention, looking at early intervention, and, finally, at the level of salvage operations in families where the violence has gone beyond it, I think this goes some distance in helping us address this very important issue in creating a healthier society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

Any other speakers?

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close debate.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all the speakers for their comments on Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006. It’s obvious that we all recognize the need to reduce the incidence of family violence and that we believe that family violence is the root of many societal

dysfunctions. Together I think we can make a difference, and I just want to thank everybody in advance for supporting this important legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 10
Engineering, Geological and Geophysical
Professions Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate March 9: Mr. Danyluk]

Mr. Danyluk: If there are no other members wishing to talk, I would like to ask for the question.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you have to move second reading.

Mr. Danyluk: No. What happened is that I am sure that I moved second reading when I did my introduction before, Mr. Speaker, so I'm not sure if I have to do it again.

The Acting Speaker: No, you don't.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise on Bill 10, which on the face of it may seem like something innocuous and not a very detailed bill, but sometimes when the government looks to try and deal with some things that are dealing with some very important groups in our society – I think that in this particular situation, they maybe tried to exercise the wisdom of Solomon and, in doing so, cut the baby in half. You know, it's kind of hard to deal with this particular bill in second reading because I understand from first reading that we're going to get an amendment, which will actually give us the meat of part of what is actually happening here. That will come in Committee of the Whole, which makes it kind of bizarre trying to debate.

On the face of it this bill has some great concerns, to be truthful, for members of ASET, which is the association of science and engineering technology professionals. It's also a matter of some concern to many members of APEGGA, which is the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta. Any legislation that affects the operation of the engineering and engineering technologist professions is of major concern to many industrial concerns in our province: many construction companies and owners and, indeed, many major interests in Alberta. The people who work in these professional capacities have a huge and significant effect on the economy of Alberta. APEGGA has 43,000 members in Alberta, and ASET has many thousands as well, over 16,000 members.

Now, the context of this legislation is rather important. Engineers and engineering technologists work to design, build, organize, indeed, to engineer many of the projects undertaken in Alberta. We have a huge number, actually, on the books right now in Alberta. We've had a huge number on the books for the last 30 years. We've always had tens of billions of dollars in projects, but actually some of them are being acted on right now. It is important to all Albertans that any work performed in the engineering field is done professionally and with the greatest competence possible. We don't want any more roofs of schools falling down, and we certainly don't want our plants and petrochemical facilities blowing up. Engineers and

engineering technologists are very important. Both the representatives and the executive of members of APEGGA and ASET take their professional duties very seriously. They also understand clearly the importance of legislation governing how their work is performed.

To clarify their concerns regarding professional practices and the regulation of their work, ASET has established standards and has long asked for legislation to govern their work. APEGGA has for many years represented the professional and other interests for professional engineers, and the engineering profession has long been regulated by the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act. Many engineers are strong in their feeling that their profession of engineering should be protected even more.

There are many issues surrounding the growth of the engineering profession in our very busy economy. It's extremely busy in the oilfield and construction sectors. It will continue to be so. There are issues like outsourcing engineering services, and that has raised questions of how much engineers tasked with approving work done overseas and sent here online can do and, you know, how far they should go in approving such work and how quickly they should approve such work. What proportion and what degree of vetting of this work should be the responsibility of P.Engs as a sign-off and okay? How much more should we be looking to have the work done here by Alberta engineers and, perhaps, technologists?

Also, there's the integration of the labour market for engineers in the Pacific Northwest, that has allowed for much greater movement of engineers between Alberta and the northwestern United States. Actually, I think the government's Human Resources and Employment department has done some very good work in this area to integrate this labour market for professional engineers, but here again when we deal with legislation, we get into some complicated areas on how this does affect our professions.

9:50

Significantly, in this bill there's always going to be a certain difficulty in finding out where the dividing line is, and this has been the true significance of what's been going on for quite some time between ASET and APEGGA. Where is the dividing line, or should we be looking at something else, between engineering technologists and professional engineers, who have the iron ring and the designation of P.Eng? Where is the demarcation, and how do you determine it? ASET has asked for some time for its own legislation, for its own regulations. APEGGA has been reserved about this because it may affect their professional status. APEGGA has offered to essentially absorb ASET in the past, and the membership of ASET totally rejected that. It creates difficulties.

The government in this bill has the official agreement of both organizations, the executives of both ASET and APEGGA. On the face of it this may look like it reflects unanimity and agreement by the membership of the affected organizations, but in reality this is far from the truth. APEGGA counsels reluctantly agreed with parts of the bill, but they did not actually see the final bill before it happened. It would have been nice to have seen some of the government MLAs at the APEGGA MLA day, but there were none there. To be truthful, some of them were quite surprised at seeing some parts of the bill that were there that will now be taken out by amendment. Now, I understand, we will see these amendments coming forward. To my understanding from talking to a number of the actual ASET membership, even though the executive is supporting the legislation, many of the members have hope for much different legislation. They are prepared to support the changes because they at least see it as a step forward.

I think the government has not dealt itself proudly in how it has

pulled this together, and as this situation in the development of the engineering profession and the P.Engs and technologists develops, I think that we are going to have to look at spending a bit more time in trying to come up with some better ways to have the legislation developed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, now it's your time to close debate.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to close debate. As the hon. member suggested, yes, there is an amendment that is coming, and we can discuss that at

length when we go into Committee of the Whole. Yes, I would very much like to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a very productive day and a very productive evening. On that basis, I would move that we now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 21, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/21

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are indeed lucky and fortunate to have with us today Canada's very first gold medallist in the 2006 Winter Olympics, Jennifer Heil. Jennifer is here today with her mother, Heather McSporrnan-Heil; her agent, J.D. Miller; her coach, Dominick Gauthier; and Ken Scott, the mayor of Spruce Grove.

Jennifer is a true-blue Albertan. She was born and raised in Spruce Grove. She began skiing at the age of two and took up the sport of freestyle skiing when she was 9.

You know, I have to tell Jennifer of my experience skiing. I took lessons at what was then the old Paskapoo, and a friend took me up to Lake Louise. I'm stumbling around, and he said: just follow the trail. I saw a sign that said ladies downhill so I took it. I gave up skiing after that.

But I can tell you that Jennifer's years of hard work and training paid off in spades at the recent Olympic Games in Torino, Italy. She made her fellow Albertans exceptionally proud, taking home the gold in the Olympic freestyle moguls event. Jennifer's win was not only Canada's first medal of the games but was also the first gold ever won by a Canadian woman in a moguls event. Needless to say, it was also a win that marked the beginning of a great medal run for Alberta athletes.

Jennifer is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I'll ask all members of the Assembly to join me in offering her and her delegation the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature. [applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but this introduction will be made by our whip, who hosted our very special guest, the ambassador from France.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Merci, M. le Président. Je suis très fier d'introduire à vous et à tous les membres de l'Assemblée M. Luc Serot Almeras, le consul général de la France.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Mr. Luc Serot Almeras, the consul general of France. The consul general, who is based in Vancouver, is on his first official visit to Alberta. France is the world's fifth largest economic power and is Canada's third largest source of foreign investment. Indeed, French investments were in the spotlight last year when the energy group Total increased its investments in Alberta's oil sands. Accompanying the consul

general is M. Gérard Carlier, honorary consul of France in Calgary, and Corinne Arabeyre, présidente de l'Alliance Française d'Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask our honoured guests, who are seated in your gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: Well, we'll call on the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations again.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 75 very, very special guests from the A.L. Horton elementary school. They are seated in both galleries. Today they are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Bev McCarty, Mrs. Colleen Welsh, and Mrs. Larissa Moroziuk and parent helpers Mrs. Kim Giesbrecht, Mrs. Ann Waters, Ms. Karen Schmitke, Mr. Darcy Humeniuk, Mr. Eugene Rudyk, Mrs. Svitlana Fedorouk, Mrs. Helen Litwin, Mrs. Cheryl Elkow, and Mrs. Nancy Makowecki. Please all rise in both galleries and really give them a warm welcome to this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last evening in Spruce Grove we had a tribute to Jennifer Heil in the TransAlta leisure centre, and I was honoured to be able to listen to Jenn speak to the kids that were assembled in the TLC and talk about all of the things that helped her accomplish her goals and the choices she made. One of those things is the people that have helped her to achieve those goals by being, in some cases, her eastern family, and we have some of those members in our gallery today. They are Andrea Miller, Jason Miller, and Julia Miller, who are seated in the members' gallery. This is Jennifer's eastern family who help her do what we're so proud of her doing. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce a young constituent of mine. Kate Bolsten-Hoder is a second-year student at Athabasca University, one of our great long-distance learning universities, and she is studying political science and anthropology. I suggested to her that upon graduation she will be well qualified to study dead politicians. I would ask her to rise and receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions this afternoon. The first is a very special group from D.S. MacKenzie junior high school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. We have with us today four exchange students from Fushimi school in Sapporo city, Hokkaido province, our sister province in Japan, and I'm going to introduce them. They are Hikari Ezaki, Yoshifumi Sawada, Yuki Shipagaki, and Momoko Shindo. They're up in the public gallery. As well, they are accompanied by two young ladies who will be returning to Japan this summer as part of the exchange, Heather Johnston and my daughter Kim Miller. I'll ask them to stand. Accompanying them are several other family members and students from D.S. MacKenzie as well as

the principal of D.S. MacKenzie school, Mr. Phillip Grehan, teacher leader Miss Christine Cao, and parent helpers Mrs. Joyce Aulenback and Mr. Randy Johnston. Could they please all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre I also have a group that I would like to introduce from the Metro Community College. There are 15 students today, and they're led by their group leader, Betty Woloszyn. I would ask them to rise as well and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Sherry McKibben. Sherry was an Edmonton city councillor between 1994 and 1995 and served as president of the Alberta NDP between 1995 and 1997. Prior to her term at city hall Sherry worked with the Boyle-McCauley Health Centre on a number of projects, including Alberta's first harm reduction and needle exchange program. She served as the executive director for the Norwood child and family service centre and most recently as the executive director of HIV Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to announce that Sherry has agreed to join our caucus as the chief of staff. We're excited to have Sherry join us and would like her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Liesel Hack. Liesel is a social work student who is doing her field placement in my constituency office. She's a first-year student at Grant MacEwan College and is interested in areas of social policy and international development. Liesel has been an invaluable member of our team in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and we are happy to have her with us. She is seated in the public gallery, and I would ask now that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mark Ramsankar. Mark has been a special education teacher with the Edmonton public school board for the past 19 years. In his 20th year Mark was elected to the Edmonton public school board local as the president. He's working very hard to represent teachers in a strong public education system. He's seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 23 grades 5 and 6 students from Namao school. They are accompanied by their parents and teachers, and they are seated in the members' gallery. I would like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Unbudgeted Surpluses

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province needs a government with a plan and the guts to stick to it. While the hard-working people of this province certainly deserve to get something back from their government, there is a right time for rebates. The right time for rebates is when the roofs of our schools are not in danger of collapsing, when our province's seniors are able to live in dignity, and when children are not going to school in Alberta hungry. My question is to the Premier. Given that the government has an obligation to ensure that our province's resource revenues will benefit us for generations to come, why doesn't this government make the Alberta advantage permanent by investing 35 per cent of surpluses in the heritage fund?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I could anticipate the question. I have to in all honesty express my frustration because the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was at the media scrum yesterday, and I was asked: what is planned for the unbudgeted surplus? My reply was that the policy now, established by caucus, was to spend some on needed infrastructure, save some through the heritage savings trust fund and various endowments, and give some back. That is the policy now. Relative to the policy in the future, that will be decided by the government caucus, not by the Liberals.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The day will come when the Liberal caucus is the government caucus.

Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: given that the Premier has indicated that there will not be significant new funds for long-term care facilities, can the Premier explain the Alberta advantage to the many Albertans in long-term care facilities who live every day facing staff shortages and inadequate care?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that the budget will be tabled tomorrow, and I would ask that he be patient.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: can the Premier explain the Alberta advantage to the hundreds of children across this province who sit in schools hungry because this province refuses to support school nutrition programs?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we don't abandon our responsibility to children. I would remind the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that this is probably the first government and maybe the only government in Canada to have a Minister of Children's Services. I'm advised that about three-quarters of our school boards are involved in meal programs, and of course we fully fund the school boards outside of the money that is collected through the education portion of property taxes.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Industrial Development in Natural Areas

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We in the Liberal opposition recently released our paper calling for a land-use strategy in Alberta. I'll send the Premier a copy. We understand that Albertans expect their governments to be stewards of their land, especially protected areas, to ensure both ecological integrity and economic prosperity. This government's decision to allow petroleum drilling in the Rumsey natural area is clearly a fundamental contradiction in government policy. Either special areas are protected or they aren't. My question is to the Premier. Why does this government allow overruling of the Minister of Community Development in allowing the Minister of Energy to open the possibility of drilling in the Rumsey natural area, an area your government supposedly designated as protected?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, my recollection of that particular case involving the Rumsey area is that it allowed for a certain amount of drilling, but I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think one of the first things we need to clarify is that the Rumsey area is an area that has been valued. There's a portion of it, the Rumsey ecological reserve, that has been designated under Special Places 2000, and absolutely no oil and gas activity is allowed in that reserve area. But there is a current management plan that does accept petroleum and natural gas postings in the natural area. However, in the natural area, which is not the reserve, even those are issued under very strict restrictions and constraints.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: given that over 20,000 wells will be drilled in Alberta this year, why can't this minister just draw the line and say that we've got a duty to preserve some areas of Alberta in its natural state?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, years ago when they went into the special places that were designated, there was a management plan put under for all of those areas. In these cases, in the reserves specifically, there is no drilling activity allowed. Under the other areas, the broader area, the natural area, it's under strict guidelines. That was the plan that is being followed, that was approved from day one.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier inform this Assembly as to when we will see and when the people of Alberta will see a comprehensive land-use policy that will finally set out clear guidelines on what forms of development are appropriate in what areas?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I regret to inform you that the minister who can speak to this is unavoidably absent today, but I can tell you that I have discussed this matter with him. He is working very diligently on a land-use study for the province, and it will be tabled in due course. I can't give the hon. member the exact time.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling in Horseshoe Canyon

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Coal-bed methane is an important resource to our province, but it must be developed properly. Thousands of coal-bed methane wells in the Horseshoe Canyon formation have brought to light a stark reminder, that our groundwater is more precious. We don't know what we need to know before proceeding on to the target of 50,000 coal-bed methane wells in this decade. Only this month the government has put in place a process of baseline testing of groundwater to establish that when changes occur to people's water, what is causing the change. To the Minister of Environment: what is your plan to do baseline testing in the areas of coal-bed methane development in the Horseshoe Canyon?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I think the announcement last week regarding what the hon. member has mentioned is an important first step to many steps. Baseline testing will be based on evidence, on scientific fact. It will not be based on simply emotion even though we're emotional people. People have even accused me of being emotional on occasion. [interjections] It's true. But with that emotion, based on scientific fact and evidence is how this government is proceeding to protect the most important resource we have, the blue gold called our water.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will you commit to an independent review of the testing protocol for this baseline water testing?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member, first of all, that he brought to my attention members of the public who had some concerns relative to the issue. I might add that I thank him for the hour-and-a-half or almost two-hour meeting that we had with them because I think all of us, including the residents and the hon. member, want to ensure that this resource that we call blue gold is protected today, tomorrow, and well into the future. We're going to use it based on fact and the baseline testing that this government announced in my ministry last week.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, given that we can no longer get baseline data in the areas that were drilled, will you consider holding off on new drilling in new areas of the Horseshoe Canyon until we have the baseline information?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, baseline testing is proceeding so that we can in fact go forward in a comprehensive way and also in an integrated management way, that the Minister of SRD and the Minister of Energy collectively, the three ministries, are working on. I can say that our culture, as the hon. member has said in the past, may be fuelled by petroleum and lubricated by oil, but it runs on water.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Mason: Oh, that's tough to match, Mr. Speaker.

Unbudgeted Surpluses (continued)

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, tomorrow afternoon the Finance minister will rise in the House to deliver her latest work of fiction, otherwise known as the provincial budget. True to form, the government will no doubt underestimate its projected revenues by billions of dollars, resulting once more in billions of dollars in unplanned surpluses. Next year's surplus will then be added to the \$33.4 billion in unplanned surpluses since 1993. I want to ask the Provincial Treasurer: does she believe that \$41 billion of unbudgeted revenue over the same period – \$34 billion of unbudgeted surpluses and \$7 billion of unbudgeted spending – is fiscally responsible?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we're going to have a great opportunity over the next several days to discuss this. However, there isn't a government in Canada, indeed I doubt in the world that wouldn't like to have our problem. I will only say this on the forecast of resource revenue, which is primarily where, if there is a wide fluctuation either up or down, it occurs. If the hon. member believes that he can forecast better than the private sector – we used eight, at least eight outside energy specialists, analysts to give us that information. I would invite the hon. member to look at our record of projections based on that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in previous years the NDP opposition has actually gone to energy analysts that are respected in their field and come up with projections that were far more accurate than what the government came up with with its Oujja board, will the minister admit that she in fact could do a much better job?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're going to have days and days to discuss this issue. I would rather err on the side of having a surplus than spending more than we have, which is what I hear from the opposition benches: "Spend, spend, spend. Spend on this, spend on that, spend on this." On the other hand, we don't save enough. There is a history of contradiction over there that you could write a best-selling novel on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Well, hey, big spender, spend a little time with us because we can tell you that, in fact, this government has failed to project accurately its income by a wide margin. To the Provincial Treasurer: will she admit that the government has been out by billions of dollars in almost every year, and why can't she do better than that?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I will admit that we have had a higher surplus than we anticipated in the majority of years, but I will also be happy to admit that we deliver consecutively balanced budgets. Because of good, prudent management, when the farmers and ranchers and livestock industry in this province were under the siege of BSE and a potential crippling of their industry, we were ready to respond, and we didn't need to borrow money to do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

School Infrastructure in Calgary

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the president of

CUPE local 40 issued an invitation to the Minister of Education to take a tour of Calgary schools that are suffering from significant maintenance problems. My question is to the Minister of Education. Will the minister undertake to join me and the local CUPE president in a tour of some of the affected schools in east Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Such a friendly invitation, Mr. Speaker. You know, as a matter of course in my role as the Minister of Education I routinely visit schools throughout the province. Just recently we visited a school in Caslan, a school in Onoway, in Whitecourt, in Cessford, of course Edmonton, of course Calgary. The next time I'm down in Calgary-East, I'd be very happy to visit some of the schools in the hon. member's constituency, and I thank him for that invitation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the minister visited a lot of these schools, can the minister indicate which other schools in Calgary are facing closure because of deferred maintenance problems?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the one school that was closed this week by the Calgary board of education, I'm told that that particular issue was somewhat unique. I think Calgary public did the smart and precautionary thing. Rather than allowing any potential risk or harm to come to some 400 children, they said: why don't we just close this school for a while and look at this issue a little more closely and then send those students off to another school?

With respect to the general issue of closure there is a process that is very clearly outlined in our school regulations that boards must follow. It's entirely up to the local school boards to follow that process, and I have no knowledge of what they may or may not be contemplating by way of closures for whatever reasons.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since reports and spreadsheets will not adequately illuminate the dire conditions in some of our schools, will the minister form a committee to get first-hand knowledge of this situation and report back to him immediately?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will be encouraged to know that the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation has some officials, and the Department of Education has some officials, and they are working together on a review and an assessment of some of the schools that have been put forward on priority lists by school boards right across the province, not just in Calgary. We have 62 school jurisdictions, and all of them have varying degrees of concerns about capacity, on the one hand perhaps, about issues of aging infrastructure in others. That is an internal committee that is doing that work as we speak, and they do it every year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member of Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Lottery Grant to Alpha Gamma Delta Fraternity

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Gaming minister declined to investigate a nearly \$19,000 lottery grant awarded to the Alpha Gamma Delta sorority. Now, while I in no

way question the motives of the fraternity – in fact, I would like to congratulate them for their fundraising efforts for juvenile diabetes and other organizations – I do question the process surrounding the grant approval. My questions are for the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister explain why a project that clearly had no urgency to it was pushed through his department in about three weeks when community groups can wait six months or more for an answer?

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, I'm not entirely confident that that's true information, the timing. I do know that they are certainly a qualified applicant. I do know that I have a copy of their original application here. Despite some rumoured numbers in today's paper, in quotes from someone who I'm not sure was there two years ago when this original request went in, the original grant application was for \$18,760.

Mr. Tougas: I don't believe that's accurate Mr. Speaker.

Second question. Can the minister give the rationale why his ministry chose to nearly double the original grant request to the surprise of the sorority?

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, I believe I just answered that. The original grant application says \$18,760, and that's what the grant was all about.

Mr. Tougas: Not true.

How can the minister justify turning down any organization for a grant when he allows nearly \$19,000 to be spent on luxury furniture for one house?

Mr. Graydon: The application was for upgrades to the main floor, to the common areas. It's not unlike requests for furniture, if you will, for daycares, for maybe a seniors' recreation complex. It's not unlike a lot of the requests we get. It was an applicable use of funds. We do not do a microscopic examination of what it was spent on. In the two-year period from the application there will be by this fall an examination to make sure that the money was spent on what they said they would spend it for. For example, if a band asked for a grant for band instruments, we would make sure that they spent that money on band instruments. We wouldn't determine exactly what instruments they bought.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Freedom of Choice in Supporting School Systems

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the hon. Minister of Education. The current School Act contains provisions which make it illegal for a member of the minority faith where a separate school jurisdiction exists to choose to be a supporter of the public school system. These provisions predate the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and they predate an agreement among the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, and the Public School Boards' Association that individual members of the minority faith should have the right to choose to be supporters of the public school system. Given this agreement, would the minister be prepared to recommend an amendment to the School Act to allow an individual member of the minority faith to be a supporter of the public school system in his or her community?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, if I understood the question cor-

rectly, I think that perhaps indirectly the hon. member is seeking information that pertains to a complaint that has been submitted by one particular school board to our Alberta Human Rights Commission, according to the press release that was issued about two weeks ago. Members of the House would certainly know that the nature and effect of the Human Rights Commission and anything before it would be therefore a matter of sub judice, and I don't think it would be appropriate for me to comment on something that might be headed in that direction at this time.

Rev. Abbott: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister could circumvent this given that in 2001 the ACSTA agreed that individual members of the Catholic faith, where a Catholic separate school jurisdiction exists, should have the right to choose to be supporters of the public school jurisdiction in the community. So has the minister consulted with them so that we could put this issue to bed and end the dispute?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have met with a number of school boards on a variety of issues, and I can't comment on a specific case such as is being sort of pursued here. However, we'll just have to wait and see what the exact nature of the complaint is that I understand by press release only has been submitted to the Human Rights Commission, and perhaps some of the answers will flow from whatever their deliberations might be. I think that's all that I'm at liberty to say on this particular issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister has the power to open the School Act, would the minister be prepared to arrange a meeting with the ACSTA and the PSBA for the purpose of discussing an appropriate amendment to the School Act to resolve this issue?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, again, I won't comment on a specific case. But in a general sense any time an act of any sort that belongs to this Legislature is opened up for whatever purposes, it goes through a normal, natural process of consultation. I think that same style would be followed should any act be opened up, and I'm not going to comment any further on that particular issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Medical Personnel in Edmonton Remand Centre

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person." However, these fundamental freedoms apparently do not apply to those housed in the Edmonton Remand Centre. Jody Umpherville died on August 9, 2003, in the Edmonton Remand Centre because this government did not provide adequate medical care, a violation of her Charter rights. My first question is to the Minister of Justice. Given that the minister has received the 10 recommendations from the fatality inquiry into the death of Jody Umpherville, can the minister tell us if he will implement any of these recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a fatality inquiry process that we have in the province, for which I am responsible. When recommendations come forward, we publish the report and

pass it on to the ministry that is principally responsible for the recommendations. I must admit that in this particular case I do not recall the specifics of the recommendations. However, typically, matters of the remand centre are matters for the Solicitor General.

Dr. B. Miller: My second question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Given that there are 2.1 physicians per 1,000 people in Canada and the Remand Centre houses over 700 residents, will the minister appoint a chief medical officer for the Edmonton Remand Centre, at least one physician, as recommended by the fatality inquiry?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, at present the process is that any time there is an arrest made, whether in one of our municipalities or out in rural Alberta, they're taken to the remand centre, or they're taken to an arrest processing unit where they are seen by a paramedic or a nurse that is on staff 24 hours a day. If it's deemed that that individual needs hospitalization, then the police are responsible for taking that individual to a hospital, waiting there while the individual gets that attention from medical staff, and then transporting back to that facility. In the future are we looking at medical personnel being permanent staff? That's something that we're going to have to review.

Dr. B. Miller: To the same minister: now that there is no money for a new remand centre, is it the policy of this government that those housed in the remand centre who have not been found guilty or innocent of any crimes should endure conditions in which their fundamental rights are placed in serious jeopardy?

2:10

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the hon. member. I've been to the remand centre. I've eaten the food, and it's very good. I'll tell you that although the cells are built for one and then double bunked for two, at this point in time we do have four-inch mats that can be placed on the floor when there is some overcrowding at the Edmonton Remand Centre. But I can say that we're looking at other options. We're utilizing the facility at Fort Saskatchewan, which is close to the city of Edmonton. We're also ensuring that our facilities in Red Deer as well as Calgary are being used. On our corrections side for our sentenced offenders those facilities in Peace River, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge are being fully utilized as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Assistance for the Grains and Oilseeds Sector

Mr. McFarland: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, many of the members of this Assembly are aware that the federal ag minister and provincial ag ministers met this past weekend to discuss a number of key agricultural issues. I would be most happy to hear that you came back with some resolve to some of the current issues outstanding that many of our Alberta producers are experiencing. To say that their expectations are high would be an understatement. Mr. Minister, have you come back with any information that will currently help the situation that our grain and oilseed producers are experiencing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member:

it is indeed a very important question across the country in terms of the grains and oilseeds sector. All of us at the meeting of provincial ministers were unanimous in our support of the federal minister to do whatever it is that he can do to help us negate some of the negative impacts to the grains and oilseeds sector and other sectors in agriculture across the country.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government is still proceeding with the \$755 million payments to the grains and oilseeds sector based on net sales. Of that amount, Alberta producers stand to share in about \$200 million. It's important that those producers have their '04 information into the CAIS program for speedier payment. If they don't do that, there will be an application process down the road.

The other thing that I'm very pleased about: the federal government is going to continue with their commitment for \$500 million added to the federal budget for agriculture each year over the next five years, so a 2 and a half billion dollar commitment. That commitment, as we discussed at the meeting, is for long-term development and long-term sustainability.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you. I've heard of four different cheques coming out from the federal program in our area, so I guess our guys are more concerned with knowing if there are any upcoming CAIS changes that will actually help put money in their pocket before spring.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to note that as far as the CAIS program goes, Alberta being one of the lucky ones to manage the program ourselves is probably quite a bit ahead of some of the other jurisdictions in terms of some of the administrative changes that we're making. Most of the criticism that has been directed at the CAIS program has been administrative in nature: it's too slow, it's too cumbersome, it's too complicated. We are taking a lot of steps to make it simpler, to make it faster, to make it online.

The consensus at our meetings over the weekend, Mr. Speaker, was that the unanimity amongst the provincial ministers was: don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. We have a CAIS program that is not working for the producers. Let's fix it. Let's make it work. We have several initiatives that are coming forward to all ministers, because we all have to sign on this thing, for future decisions to be made at our next federal/provincial/territorial meeting.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For those that can survive through this spring and the crop seeding that continues on, Mr. Minister, what is the long-term initiative that they might look forward to?

Mr. Horner: Well, coming out of the meetings with the federal minister and other provincial ministers, we have obviously told them about our three-point strategy and the grains and oilseeds recovery strategy that we're embarking on in this province very, very soon.

In terms of consultations with the industry it's a \$1.7 billion industry in this province, Mr. Speaker, so it is very, very important to us. We are going to be going out into the country to talk to the industry leaders, to talk to our federal government as well about what we can do to make this a long-term, viable business into the future, talk to people like the Grain Commission, the Wild Roses of the world, the AGCATs of the world to make sure that we're on the

right path as well as our position on the WTO, which will also be critical to the grains and oilseeds sector.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Youth Homelessness

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The August 2005 report entitled *Seeking Sanctuary: An Exploration of the Realities of Youth Homelessness in Calgary* provides valuable insight into the challenges that thousands of homeless children face in our province every day. According to the report most of the youth surveyed were not aware of or had limited knowledge about the programs and services that are available to them. My questions are for the Minister of Children's Services. What specifically has your ministry done to reach out to homeless children in Alberta to provide them with information and support?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the hon. member. If I recall, it was a conversation that the hon. member and I had when she came to a meeting in my office to talk about some of the issues. I explained to her that I had met with the Homeless Foundation, listened to what they had to say about homeless youth in Alberta. I explained to them some of the innovative things that we're doing in our office in regard to our high-risk youth project. I talked to her about our Youth Secretariat, that the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul is working so hard on, our youth forums. In fact, we have expanded our bursary program which is dealing with high-needs youth. I think we can be very proud in this province of how we're dealing with our high-risk youth.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: given that many of the children who were surveyed reported being on the street for longer than two years with no support or basic needs being met, why are these children falling through the cracks?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, children can fall through cracks for various reasons. We're trying to reach out to the youth in this province. We're doing a review of our youth emergency shelters right now. We're talking to youth across this province under the leadership of the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Speaker, I think what's innovative about this government is that we're listening to youth and we're trying to deal with what the youth are telling us are their problems. They want some things dealt with in this province in regard to their education because we realize that we've got some, you know, round holes and are trying to put square pegs in them. We're doing a lot of innovative things in this province. We've talked, again, to the Homeless Foundation about getting our messages out to the various agencies on what this province is doing to address the needs of the high-risk youth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: given that aboriginal youth are overrepresented among the homeless population in Alberta, what is your ministry doing about this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms. Calahasen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud to be able to answer that question. First of all, we've been working with a number of different aboriginal groups to be able to identify some of the struggles that the people are going through. What we've done is we've worked with the minister of seniors to look at some of the possibilities for homeless people. We also have what we call a transitional program where we've been working with the various municipalities to be able to identify those challenges and to be able to address the concerns that are coming through. As you know, when people migrate from either the reserves or from the isolated communities, we have problems when it comes to some of the areas of concern, and definitely homelessness is one of the areas.

As a result, we've been working not only with the people from the various reservations and the First Nations but also with the communities, with the northern communities to identify some of those areas and to be able to see what can be done. I want to give praise to the minister of seniors, who is responsible for housing, for being able to identify some of those areas. So we've been working on some of those programs just to ensure that we can begin to address those terrible gaps.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Major Projects in the Industrial Heartland

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents of Sturgeon and Strathcona counties feel as though they are caught in the headlights of this government's headlong rush to put profit ahead of people and the environment. Without a proper consultation process and especially without proper standards to report and monitor leaks and emissions, this whole thing just stinks. To the Minister of Environment, please: since the massive industrial heartland complex will generate billions of dollars in profits for decades to come, why does the minister refuse to develop a proper special compensation package that better reflects the losses of nearby residents, something that goes beyond the government's very stingy concept of fair market value?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member just said simply does not reflect the truth of what is happening.

2:20

Mr. Eggen: To the same minister: since not everyone is able to pack up and leave, is this government willing to provide for the loss of land values and quality-of-life issues that arise when some of the world's biggest oil refineries and bitumen upgraders begin to arrive at their back door?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member that when you talk about the Q word, I agree with the hon. member that the quality of life we enjoy as Albertans is unmatched anywhere else, and the standard of living we enjoy is unmatched anywhere else in this country.

In terms of protecting what you're suggesting, absolutely so. We intend to do that and are doing that and will continue to do that.

Mr. Eggen: To the same minister: is the minister willing to commit to requiring the very best standards of emission control that the world has to offer for these new bitumen upgraders, refineries, and chemical plants in the industrial complex, or is he going down the road again of letting the polluters call the shots, like he's done with the proposed Keephills 3 coal-fired plant?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the last statement was simply not true. Yes, Alberta will continue to lead this country and this continent when it comes to tough environmental standards. In fact, two weeks ago it was announced in terms of our new regulation regarding mercury and regarding the issue that as we go forward, we will continue to use our science and innovation to lead the world. So I agree with the hon. member: we'll continue to lead the world. To the members on the front bench, they may want to pay attention to what I'm saying because it is about leading the world.

Alternative Energy Project in Okotoks

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday I brought up the issue of Drake Landing in Okotoks. Drake Landing, as the members will recall, is a 52-unit solar-heated and -cooled housing complex which is a complete boon to the environmental emissions. However, material cost overruns and flooding have caused a monetary crisis. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Has your department come to any consensus to salvage this leading-edge environmental technology?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, last week the hon. member asked on behalf of his residents relative to what we can do to help such an environmental initiative as this green project. Actually it's another example of Alberta leading the world, as I mentioned earlier. I'm pleased to announce to the House today that working very closely with Climate Change Central, in fact the government is committing a half million dollars towards ensuring that the investment that Climate Change Central has put into this program will continue based on the extraordinary circumstances that took place with some of the work from last summer.

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, that is a great answer indeed for me. In fact, that has absolutely blown my supplemental questions right out of the water, or the blue gold, as he might say.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

School Infrastructure in Calgary

(continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fairy tale of the Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf is being played out in real life in Calgary and Edmonton. Instead of houses, however, we have schools constructed with saturated straw, rotting sticks, and crumbling bricks. We have two tap-dancing ministers, infrastructure and education, wolfishly huffing, puffing, and disclaiming the responsibilities for infrastructure maintenance while a justifiably frustrated Drake Hammill, the head of the Canadian Union of Public Employees local 40, is offering school devastation tours. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Given that the minister's reply to the hon. Member for Calgary-East's invitation was evasive, when you are in Calgary this Friday, March 24, attempting to justify the disconnect between reduced class size and your decaying space utilization formula, will you make time for Drake's tour? Yes or no?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where this hon. member got the information that I would be in Calgary this Friday. I'm hosting 62 school board chairs here in Edmonton, and they all know that, so I won't be there on the 24th. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll send your regrets to Drake. Another time possibly.

Can you offer Calgary students, parents, caretakers, teachers, and trustees any indication that the plight of their older schools and yet-to-be-built new schools is at the top of your priority list?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to assure this member and all members in this House that the safety and security of our children is always at the top of mind of any Minister of Education. That's a number one concern, and that's why I personally phoned and thanked, I even congratulated the Calgary public board on taking a preventative step such as they did. It's never easy to take a step to close a school temporarily, but in this particular case they did a very prudent and logical thing to ensure that nobody would come in harm's way. We should be reiterating that thanks to them, but we should also be reminding people that that decision is made by locally elected trustees – that's what they're there for – and they have acted prudently in this particular case. So I will continue to support them in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that a healthy school environment is absolutely essential for learning to occur, what steps are you taking personally to ensure student safety?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I phoned officials in the Calgary public to get a little more rounding on this particular issue. I'm aware that virtually the minute it came across our desks, a supplementary amount of some 25,000 dollars was given to conduct an immediate assessment when it was flagged and brought to our attention. We'll just wait for and see the ongoing report, that is being done right now, to come our way to see what future steps the Calgary public board wishes to undertake. But let's keep in mind that there are school boards right throughout the province who are doing their best to address these issues. It's not just one isolated case that has to be dealt with here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Senior Public-sector Salaries

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Recent salary increases for some public-sector employees as high as 17 per cent have raised concerns that people in senior public-sector positions are paid way too high wages. Could the minister explain how the salaries of senior officials in Alberta compare to what other provinces pay employees in those same types of positions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. When we're talking about the broader public sector, that includes organizations and employees that are not employees of the Alberta public service, such as health authorities and school boards. As minister responsible for the personnel administration office for Alberta, I am only able to speak to salaries of employees who are members of the Alberta public service. The government reviews the salaries and benefits that it provides to its employees to ensure that we are comparable with other employers offering the same type of work for similar situations. This is important so that

the government can find and keep the talent it needs to continue running the services.

Mr. Marz: My next and last question to the same minister: can the minister advise how senior public service salaries or tax-funded employees, including these boards, compare to what private-sector employees make in those similar positions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This is a very good question because it has to do with the challenge our government faces in retaining and attracting employees. Our government faces the same challenges as the private sector in finding and keeping employees in the tight and competitive labour market out there. We review the competition levels for employees to ensure that we are able to attract and retain qualified people to run our senior government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Nutrition Programs in Schools

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to put ideology before the health of young Albertans by not only ignoring the obesity crisis in children today but also contributing to it. The causes are a lack of knowledge and poor food choices. It is further soured by a funding formula that makes schools rely on junk food sales to fund basic school operations like physical education. My question is to the Minister of Education. Does the minister evaluate the health-related costs of new and existing policies, such as allowing the promotion and sale of junk food in schools?

2:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously the health and welfare of our students, and the member would know that we started an even more aggressive campaign in that regard last year when we brought in the daily physical activity program. We are providing somewhere over a million dollars to help bring that initiative along, and that's just the first part. Our next part of that same plan is to deal with the overall health and wellness perspective, and that will include things to do with nutrition and proper eating habits and proper food habits. We have a fairly aggressive plan in mind for that. So if you'll just stay tuned, we plan to move that issue along very soon.

Mr. Flaherty: My second question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Has the minister conducted any analysis of the costs of relying on the sale of junk food to students to fund Alberta schools? How much is the lack of action costing Albertans?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the type of analysis that the hon. member is referencing is something I am unfamiliar with. However, I would tell you that our Choose Well Challenge, our community challenges have been very successful in not only engaging adult and senior populations but engaging several youth. We launched the Choose Well Challenge for this year focusing on nutrition in schools, on regular exercise programs, on students looking after themselves by going to bed and getting plenty of rest and enjoying a balanced lifestyle. When we launched that this year, there were a number of schools present. They were already engaged in physical activity and nutrition programs within their schools. The teachers were very

knowledgeable, had been trained to that effect. So I'm very satisfied that there are strides being taken.

As to studies about the losses or costs referenced, I would endeavour to follow up and in due course inform the hon. member of what data we do have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister of Education remove junk food from schools in an effort to alleviate the obesity crisis in Alberta's children and reduce future health care costs?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, locally elected trustees have in fact taken some of those initiatives already. Some so-called junk food machines have been removed. Others have been removed and replaced with milk machines. So there are a variety of different approaches. My experience has been that locally elected officials are in the best position to make common-sense, local decisions, and that's what's going on right now.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, by way of a historical vignette today I'm going to do a several parts series on leaders of the Official Opposition, so today is part one.

From 1906 until an amendment to the Legislative Assembly Act came into effect in 1972, the tenures of leaders of the Official Opposition were based on actual session dates. In other words, one was the Leader of the Official Opposition when the Legislature sat and not when it did not. Between 1906 and 1971 Alberta had 18 different leaders of the Official Opposition.

Albert J. Robertson, a Conservative representing High River, served from 1906 to 1909. Richard B. Bennett, a Conservative representing Calgary, served in 1910. Edward Michener, an independent, then Conservative representing Red Deer, served from 1910 to 1917. George Hoadley, a Conservative representing Okotoks, served in 1918-1919.

James Ramsey, a Conservative representing Edmonton-East, served in 1920. John R. Boyle, a Liberal representing Edmonton, served from 1922 to 1924. Charles R. Mitchell, a Liberal representing Bow Valley, served in 1925 and 1926. John C. Bowen, a Liberal representing Edmonton, served in 1926. From 1926 to 1940 there was no recognized Leader of the Official Opposition.

In 1941 and 1944 James H. Walker, an independent from Warner, served as the leader. Alfred Speakman, an independent from Red Deer, served in 1942, and James C. Mahaffy, an independent from Calgary, served in 1943. From 1945 to 1948 J. Percy Page, an independent from Edmonton, served. The Legislative Assembly had no recognized Leader of the Official Opposition from 1949 to 1951.

J. Harper Prowse, an Edmonton Liberal, served from 1952 to 1958, and in 1959 J.W. Grant MacEwan, a Calgary Liberal, served as the leader. From 1960 to 1963 the Legislative Assembly had no recognized Leader of the Official Opposition.

From 1964 to 1967 Michael Maccagno, a Liberal representing Lac La Biche, served as the leader. In 1968 a Conservative, Peter Lougheed, representing Calgary-West, became the Leader of the Official Opposition and served in that capacity to 1971.

Tomorrow I will take you from 1971 to the current situation.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Torino Paralympic Winter Games

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to acknowledge the efforts and achievements of an exceptional group of athletes. Two weeks after the conclusion of the Winter Olympics Torino, Italy, was once again host to an Olympic competition, this time the Paralympic Winter Games. Once again Canadian athletes proved to the world that their spirit and dedication remains second to none. Team Canada's athletes won five gold, three silver, and five bronze medals for a total of 13, surpassing the expectations of most. Albertans played a significant role in this total victory, and I would like to take a moment to acknowledge them individually.

Skier Brian McKeever of Canmore was responsible for almost a quarter of Canada's medals, winning gold medals in both the five- and 10-K visually impaired cross-country races. He also won a silver medal in the 20-K cross country and a bronze in the 7.5-kilometre visually impaired biathlon. His older brother, Robin McKeever, also of Canmore, assisted in these victories by acting as his guide.

Lauren Woolstencroft, a native Calgarian, brought home a gold medal in the women's standing giant slalom and a silver in the women's standing super-giant slalom.

Kimberly Joines of Edmonton won a bronze in alpine sit-skiing, and Shauna Maria Whyte of Hinton, the final Alberta member of the team, was in second place in the biathlon when an equipment failure removed her from further competition. While she didn't bring home a medal, her sportsmanship and dedication were truly world class.

The five Alberta members of the 33-member Canadian team accounted for over half of Canada's total medal count, a fact of which we can all be extremely proud. I would encourage every member of this Assembly to join me in offering best wishes to the Canadian paralympic team and especially to the Alberta athletes, whose contributions meant so much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, March 21 is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This international day was established in 1966 through Resolution 2142 of the 21st Assembly of the United Nations General Assembly. This was done in part to commemorate the tragic events in South Africa known as the Sharpeville massacre. The terrible tragedy, which occurred in 1960, saw police open fire on a group of young students who were peacefully protesting the apartheid's passbook laws. At the end of the dreadful ordeal 67 protesters were left dead and 186 more were injured.

With the resolution the United Nations General Assembly called for the international community to increase its efforts to stop racial discrimination. Since the proclamation of this international day Canada and other nations have joined the March 21 campaign that has now become a pillar on which the movement against racism stands.

2:40

It is important that all of us gathered here and all citizens of Alberta not be satisfied with the status quo in our province. While we can be proud of the fact that we do not have extreme laws such as those administering the policy of apartheid, we can always improve our situation. We will not be free from the evils of racial discrimination until we eliminate it from all aspects of our society, including elements as mundane as our everyday discourse. Only

when this is fully addressed will we have rid our society of racial oppression.

On this the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination let this Assembly recognize the strengths of our multicultural society and recognize the need to continually work towards making Alberta free of racial injustice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forty-six years ago on March 21, 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people in the township of Sharpeville, South Africa, people who were peacefully demonstrating against apartheid. As the hon. member mentioned, the United Nations General Assembly later declared that day, the 21st of March, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The UN called on all nations and communities to not only remember that tragedy but to work together to eliminate racism wherever it exists. In response many organizations throughout the world and also here in Alberta have worked hard to educate the public about racism, organizations such as NAARR, the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, and the Alberta human rights and multicultural education fund. Last Sunday some of us attended the ninth annual Harmony Brunch here in Edmonton sponsored by these organizations, and I commend them for their work.

The theme this year for the international day is Fighting Everyday Racism. It is an important emphasis because despite all the declarations and conventions and special days the evidence of racism continues to undermine the foundations of our society. No country and no province is free from racism and racial discrimination. We must address the racial slurs and jokes which occur in everyday speech, racial innuendo on the Internet and in magazines, especially racist epithets hurled at our First Nations people.

Mr. Speaker, many years before Sharpeville, in 1893, a young lawyer was travelling in the first-class section of a train on his way to Pretoria when a white male passenger insisted that because he was a coloured man, he would have to sit back in third class. He refused to move, and a conductor threw him off the train. Mahatma Gandhi sat in the cold outside the train station all night reflecting on the deep and painful disease of prejudice. That incident was the turning point in his life. Soon after his experience on the train Gandhi created the theory of Satyagraha, or the force of love, and he determined to root out the disease of prejudice but never to yield to violence and never to use violence against others.

Now more than 100 years later there's no excuse for us. We have the right kind of charters and laws and declarations and examples like Gandhi. The struggle to combat racism must shift to the streets and schools and parks and our own families and communities, where we must commit ourselves to zero tolerance of racist behaviour and fight against everyday racism.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week hon. members of this House rose and recognized Commonwealth Day, which is celebrated the second Monday of March each year. Today I rise to

recognize the practical benefits of being a part of the Commonwealth of Nations. Recently I had the opportunity to travel to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 55th parliamentary seminar at Westminster, England, where I had the honour to celebrate Commonwealth Day at Westminster Abbey.

The mission of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, or CPA, is to “promote the advancement of parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance.” The programs administered by the CPA provide the sole means of regular consultation among Commonwealth members. This provides the opportunity to increase understanding of different parliamentary procedures around the globe.

I was one of two Canadian delegates and was honoured to represent this Legislature and lend a Canadian provincial perspective to the debate as the other representative was a Member of Parliament. This seminar gives participants the opportunity to share their ideas and debate processes from different parliamentary perspectives. Through the sharing of ideas we had the opportunity to learn what has worked for other nations and what hasn't as well as share our own experiences as legislators and parliamentarians. The debate and ideas were as diverse and interesting as the member countries of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth includes 53 countries which represent over a quarter of the world's population, living in vastly different nations, ranging from Fiji to Zimbabwe. This diversity has lent itself to a wide range of parliamentary practices and procedures all stemming from the original Parliament at Westminster. The contribution of the CPA to the betterment of parliaments around the globe is immeasurable, and I would like to recognize their contribution to good parliamentary practices.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Youth Science Month

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year thousands of young Albertans participate in local and regional science events all across our province. These young scientists work hard and usually have a lot of fun developing projects that demonstrate their innovation, knowledge, and imagination. Many of us in this Assembly have had the good fortune of meeting with many of these brilliant young people in the last few years, and I'm sure I can speak for all members in saying that they leave us feeling a tremendous sense of optimism in Alberta's future.

Unleashing innovation is a key pillar of this government's 20-year strategy, and it is essential that we continue encouraging our young people to gain knowledge and skills in science and technology. This knowledge will help them to better understand the world and also to excel in their education and broaden their career options.

It's in the best interests of our society and our economy to develop and support a culture of innovation. We must nurture new generations of scientifically literate young people who will push the boundaries of our knowledge and improve the quality of our lives in the future. That's why I'm happy to join the Minister of Innovation and Science in supporting Canada's Youth Science Foundation in recognition of March 2006 as Youth Science Month in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Long-term Care

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nearly a year has passed since the Auditor General released a scathing report on the shameful

conditions of many long-term care facilities in Alberta. A year ago we were calling the neglect and abuse seniors experience Alberta's dirty little secret. The fact that a year has been allowed to pass without any significant improvements is an outright scandal.

Far from making improvements over the past year, the Minister of Health and Wellness and the minister of seniors have allowed numerous long-term care facilities to be downgraded to assisted living facilities. In many cases residents remain in place while their services are downgraded. With the government now raising the spectre of medical savings accounts and further privatization, it is no wonder Albertans are worried about the quality of care they can expect as they age.

The NDP has put forward some very practical, very workable solutions to this crisis. We have called for a new comprehensive long-term care act to replace the hodgepodge of legislation that now governs various types of supportive housing. We also are calling for the implementation of high standards of care followed up with unannounced inspections to ensure that those standards are being met.

We also need to invest in hiring and training staff in these facilities. In our consultations with seniors across the province we heard about the hard work and dedication of the staff in supportive living facilities, but we also heard that they were overworked and that there simply weren't enough of them to ensure that residents were safe and comfortable. The NDP is calling for staffing standards that require a minimum of four hours per day per resident of nursing and personal attendant care as well as at least one registered nurse on duty 24 hours a day at every long-term care facility.

Mr. Speaker, these measures won't break the bank. They're reasonable. In fact, they are the least we can do for the people who spent their lives building this province.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 94 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that I presented Monday, March 20, 2006, and I can advise the House that all but one of the petitions comply with Standing Orders 85 to 89.

The committee has considered the remaining petition and recommends to the Assembly that Standing Order 89(1)(b) be waived for the petition for the Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006, subject to the petitioner completing the necessary advertising in accordance with the Standing Orders before the committee hears the petitioner.

Mr. Speaker, that is my report.

The Speaker: I'll call the question then. Would all hon. members in the Assembly supportive of the report please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those opposed, please say no. It's carried.

head: 2:50

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am submitting a petition on behalf of 106 concerned Albertans urging the government to, one, abandon its plans to implement the third-way reforms; two, defeat

legislation allowing expansion of private, for-profit hospitals and permitting doctors to work in both public and private systems; three, oppose any action by this government to contravene the Canada Health Act; and four, vote against forcing Albertans to pay for private health insurance for services that should be covered under medicare.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here stating, "We, the undersigned residents . . . petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased." Fifty-one signatures.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have here a petition with 53 signatures from Calgarians on it, petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to "consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table a petition containing the names of 92 Albertans from the communities of Edmonton, Calgary, Leduc, and Sherwood Park urging the government not to proceed with their third-way health care reforms.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Bill 26

Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce and move first reading of Bill 26, the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act of 2006.

This bill will replace the Blood Samples Act of 2004 and offer protection to police officers, firefighters, paramedics, and good Samaritans who provide emergency assistance and have come into contact with a bodily substance of a source individual.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 26 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in response to a question from the hon. opposition leader in question period yesterday I will table five copies

of the list of groups that I met with in Bonnyville and St. Paul on March 11, 2006, and would like to remind all hon. members that the list of stakeholder groups that I have met with is listed on our website, www.health.ab.ca.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today. The first letter is from Don Veldhoen, and he is saying that the government has a widening credibility gap when it comes to health care.

The second is from two of my constituents, Merv and Jean Rogers, and they accuse the government of releasing a very vague health policy and not telling the truth about wait times in countries with parallel health systems.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four sets of tablings, all having to do with the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The participants, the signatories are Ron Barnhart, Kathy Barnhart, Darlene Senio, Dan Chalifoux, Dale Côté, Ann Boylan, Eugene Rienks, Donna Lynn Smith, Carol Carbol, Judith Axelson, L. Fjerwold, Don Massey, Barbara Massey, Gene Leblanc, Jean and R.K. Taylor, Glenda Roberts, Judy Wilson, John Tanasichuk, Karen Glauser, Agnes Fisher, Doug McEwen, and F.J. Fjerwold.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table six letters and appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters I am tabling today are from Kathy Briner, Marie MacDonald, Heather McEwen, Arnette Anderson, V.C. Pich, and Judi Cook.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table five letters and appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare from Pam Buckler, Phuong Chau, Tara Malo, Monica Jok Mach, and Julie Henkelman.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table four letters, the appropriate copies thereof, regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. These letters are from Natalia Petrossie, Tina Valjak, E. Heimannsberg, and S. Heimannsberg.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, letters from constituents with appropriate copies, all expressing concern about the third way and the future of health care in Alberta. The first letter is from Brenda Knight and the second one is from Eileen Carpenter and the third is from Ken Baden.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the government's answer to my Motion for a Return 12 yesterday, I am pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a document entitled Ethical Guidelines for the Government Pension Fund – Global produced by the Finance department of the government of Norway. It's an ethical investment policy, which I believe the Alberta government sorely needs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a letter from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Ms Marilyn Caskey, who strongly objects to further privatizing health care and allowing people to queue jump. She talks about how insurance companies try to make money for their shareholders and avoid covering services or paying claims. She also opposes allowing physicians to work in both public and private spheres, wants actual, serious consultation before anything is decided, and supports the idea of a leaders' debate on the future of health care. It's actually good reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: It's my pleasure today to table the appropriate copies of a book titled *100 Years at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta: A Centennial Celebration*, which was produced by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Mar, Minister of Community Development: response to Written Question 3, asked for by Ms Blakeman on behalf of Mr. Agnihotri on March 20, 2006.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 13 Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate March 13: Mr. Strang]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Question.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, are you participating in the debate on Bill 13?

Mr. Agnihotri: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Then I will recognize you.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 13, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006. The purpose of this bill is to delegate new responsibilities to the Real Estate Council of Alberta, which we call RECA, in an attempt to combat mortgage fraud in this province. The members of the Real Estate Council of Alberta will now act as a first line of defence against mortgage fraud in Alberta. If this bill passes, members will

likely require some level of training to help them identify potential mortgage fraud and, more importantly, to respond effectively and safely when they identify potential mortgage fraud.

This is a good bill. I support this with some cautions, Mr. Speaker. Mortgage fraud was an issue that got significant media coverage in the past few months as cases became publicized in the newspapers. This is really a problem that does exist in Alberta, and this bill is a positive step in combatting mortgage fraud.

There are questions that need to be asked regarding this bill. Specifically, by delegating this new responsibility to the Real Estate Council of Alberta, there will be a need for training, potentially increased funding, et cetera. Because this bill is so brief, there is no elaboration as to how these issues may be dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, mortgage fraud is booming in Alberta. Mortgage fraud has emerged as a real issue here in this province. Let me mention a few of them, some very popular frauds, which are illegal.

3:00

First of all, it's the straw buyers. The straw buyer is a phony loan application. Some people get a mortgage from someone who is not a serious buyer, but they use their name. They use their phony names and get the mortgage in their name. Sometimes the person who is getting the mortgage doesn't even see the property. I mean, without seeing the property, buying is illegal, but this practice has been going on in Alberta for a long, long time. I am surprised that this government or RECA haven't taken any serious action against this fraud. But I'm happy that at least RECA is considering this as a fraud, which is a good step.

The second one I want to mention is flipping properties. Flipping a property is when you buy a property, assume somebody else's mortgage, and then, you know, when the market is good, you transfer, flip this property to somebody else. Some people think it's legal, but it's not legal. It's only in Alberta, I think, where we get this assumable mortgage. An assumable mortgage in other states is not acceptable. There was a rumour that Alberta, not the Alberta government but RECA, was considering stopping assuming mortgages. It's a big fraud.

I'll give you an example. Some people come from B.C. or Toronto or some other part of the world, and they come with \$100,000. [interjections] Just a minute. Just a minute. With \$100,000 they can buy 50 properties. Sometimes with a \$1,000 down payment they buy a house, and after some time they flip the property when the market rate is high. Some people think it's legal, but it's not legal. It's a fraud, a big fraud, and especially when they give some money to a third party to get the mortgage. Suppose you are A and I buy a mortgage in your name, and you haven't even seen the property. This is a fraud. It's a good thing RECA is taking action on this one.

The third one, as I said, is the low down payment. Most of us have seen in the newspaper zero down payment or for a \$1,000 down payment you buy a house, you buy a condominium, right? You know, there are lots of people who are first-time buyers, and they don't understand this legality. Sometimes the seller or the broker says: you move into the property, you live there for six months, and then we will transfer that mortgage into your name, and the title is still in somebody else's name.

I mean, it's sometimes a gang. They appraise the property, and sometimes the appraiser is involved. The bankers are involved. They get the mortgage. They buy lots of properties only when the time is bad. Before 1980, when the market was really low, millionaires came with a small amount of money, they bought 200 properties, and when the market went up, they made lots of money. Business is business, and if the business is legal, then it's okay. But

I think RECA has known of this problem for a long, long time. I'm surprised they haven't stopped the assuming of somebody else's mortgage. They should have stopped assumable mortgages because they know that this thing was going on for a long, long time. I think it was two years ago that there was a rumour that they were stopping the assumption of mortgages, but it's still going on. Then they started taking action against the banks. Some bank officials were involved with some people who made frauds, with the big gangs. It was in the newspaper for a long, long time. So those are two or three types of popular frauds I have mentioned.

Some people buy property in bad shape. I'll give you an example. In the downtown area the structure of a building is rotten, totally gone, and they buy those properties, and somehow they get the inspection done. We don't have the mechanism or we don't have some sort of strict policies. I mean, how can they buy those properties where the structure is so poor? Then some innocent third person who doesn't even live in Alberta buys those properties. The people living here make money. They depend on that after buying these properties. The first-time buyers, the people who can't afford or don't have a big amount of money always, you know, buy those types of properties because they're always advertised: you will be better off buying this property than renting the property. Some people take the mortgage and rent the property first. Then they sell after six months when the property rate has gone up. This is also illegal, and it's a big fraud.

I mean, going through the data in this bill I found lots of things that are really good. I think RECA is taking the right step. The government of Alberta participated in a mortgage fraud prevention committee to encourage communication, develop best practices, and improve training for workers in the mortgage and real estate industries, which is good. What we need is to educate people, especially the first-time buyer who doesn't know how to buy property. Sometimes they think they'll just save some real estate commission, and they don't consult with an expert in the industry who has the experience. Those innocent people take a wrong step, and they repent afterwards.

Another thing I want to ask the proposer of this bill: in Alberta why don't both buyer and seller pay commission? I have seen some other countries where buyer and seller both pay the commission. In Alberta only the seller pays the commission. I don't understand. Both parties are involved. Why does only the seller pay the commission to the real estate person or any broker?

3:10

Another question I want to ask is about mortgage refinancing. In some cases some investors buy the properties and keep on refinancing the property again and again, and then they flip the properties and make lots of money. The whole gang, as I said before – surveyors, inspectors, and sometimes the builders – is involved in this. This is totally illegal, and it should also be considered.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Another thing. I lived in England for 14 years, and there were different laws than here. In England there was gazumping. Maybe this is something new for most of the people sitting here. Gazumping means that the seller can change their mind, even signing at the last moment. He should have the right to refuse to sell the property, but it's not happening in Alberta. Gazumping is like, I suppose, where you buy a property and you write in the contract that the possession date is in six months, and when the market is really hot sometimes, the seller loses a huge amount of money. As the buyer has some rights, sellers should have some rights. They should have

the right to say no. I'm not saying once the agreement is made, but there should be two agreements: the initial agreement and the last agreement should be close to the closing time. It's not happening in Alberta. This is very important. I want to know why it's not happening in Alberta.

Another thing I want to mention is the builder. We have seen so much construction, especially in the urban areas, in new developments, and the builders are cutting corners. I'm surprised. I've been a real estate agent myself, and sometimes I'm surprised how they pass that cheap material. The people don't know, especially the first-time buyers. When they build a house, it goes through the departments, but finally at the time of the inspection they don't find those things which they see in the contract, and it's very difficult to fight against. I mean, some big builders always guarantee that it's under warranty for such and such years, but it's my personal experience that it's hard to fight against those big companies. We should have some strict laws against the builders.

Another thing I find is in the land titles, especially when the property is bought and sold by the government; I mean, the government of Alberta, the provincial level. It could be the federal level, or it could be civic government. If the property is bought and sold by the government, normally it should be highlighted. It should be highlighted, and it should be accessible to the people for transparency, what the government is doing. I mean, I've seen so many land titles. I've never seen property where the government was involved and it was not highlighted in the property archive report on the land title. In my eyes, this is not right, and the Minister of Justice should know. He should make a note. He's the expert in this field. I'm not. Please note this point: if we could do something to make it a little bit more strict on this one.

As I said before, this bill is a really, really good step in combating mortgage fraud in Alberta, and I'm happy to see that this government is taking this issue very seriously. As I said, I support this bill but with some precautions. I would however like to hear about the training and the other supports that the Real Estate Council of Alberta will be receiving for this added responsibility.

This is a good bill, and my only question is regarding the other recommendations that were made by the Advisory Committee on Mortgage Fraud. Is the government planning on following through on all of those recommendations or what I talked about? If we look into some questions I raised, you know, this bill will be even better. Other than that, I didn't see anything wrong with this bill. I will definitely listen to the other speakers if we have any, and then I will make up my mind whether I support this bill or not.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Based on my colleague's pretty much unreserved support of this bill, I stand in support of it as well. Under the title of mortgage fraud I would like to see somewhere within this bill some kind of requirement that when a person goes to sell their home, they are responsible for informing the buyer of the materials that were used in the construction of the home. I know that a major concern that cost a number of people in Calgary, Edgemont and some of the newer districts, was pine shakes, this fiasco where the government approved the shakes, and then later a number of companies went bankrupt, and the owners of these homes were stuck with a replacement bill of between \$9,000 and \$15,000, dependent upon the size of their roof. Sellers, as far as I'm concerned, should be required under law to indicate the types of materials and the faults that have been found with them, whether they're government-sponsored faults or not.

Another concern I have is when realtors are selling property and point to a vacant space and say: well, that's for the new school. Well, for the last number of years in Calgary 40 districts have been waiting for that new school to magically appear, and unfortunately that has not happened. I believe real estate agents need to provide a history and some kind of however accurate information that they can provide about where at least on the priority list for the government and for the school board that school might be. Otherwise, it's just an interesting space of land.

3:20

I think that something else that realtors and sellers should be required to do is inform people of potential land-use changes. Quite often somebody buys in a particular area with a so-called green space in the back, and it turns out later that that has now been rezoned for commercial. Instead of a park-like atmosphere, they're finding that they've got another strip mall or 7-Eleven popping up.

These are areas that I would like included. They border on fraud by not informing the purchaser of the problems associated with either the property itself or the changing designations or the sort of false proposition that a school will be coming sometime soon to a neighbourhood near you.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Bill 16 Peace Officer Act

[Adjourned debate March 7: Ms Blakeman]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today in second reading debate of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act, a bill that's the result of a consultation process, that I would congratulate the government for undertaking, a series of consultations with police, municipal officials, provincial officials, and special constables over an eight-month period. It's good to see that that consultation took place before this bill was crafted.

Having said that, though, it strikes me that this bill leaves out a great deal. Some it purposely leaves out because it intends to deal with those issues under regulations, and I have a problem with that, both philosophically and in terms of the details as well. Some it just seems to leave out because it didn't really consider those issues or the ramifications of some of the issues that this bill does seek to deal with.

In short, the bill seeks to bring all peace officers under one piece of legislation that will clarify their roles and responsibilities, increase accountability, and at least allegedly strengthen provincial standards for training, the use of force, and qualifications. There's no question that there is a place for peace officers, or special constables as they used to be known, to function as a level of law enforcement, but they should not function in the place of fully trained, fully accredited police officers. Mr. Speaker, I believe that that's what this bill seeks to do: to get some bargain-priced pseudo-cops into the system to do the work of police officers at a lower rate of pay, at a lower level of training. I think that the consequences of that will not be good.

You know, we're fortunate, Mr. Speaker. We do live in a very peaceful society. I know that sometimes it doesn't seem like that when we get up in the morning and turn on the radio or grab the morning paper and look at the headlines and some horrible, heinous crime has been committed here in Edmonton or in Calgary.

Dr. Morton: Listen to talk radio.

Mr. Taylor: Oh. And talk radio, of course. No question about it. It makes mountains out of molehills on a regular basis. That's pretty much the purpose for its existence.

There's a very good example. The hon. member mentioned talk radio. An hour of talk radio can in fact leave the listener with the distinct impression that this is a perilous, dangerous society in which we live. But it's not, really, not in Alberta. If you want a perilous, dangerous society, I mean, there are plenty of big cities in the United States that you can look at with crime rates hugely out of proportion to our own. We are fortunate to live, the media notwithstanding and the media's creations of impressions notwithstanding, in a safe and peaceable province. That will probably get us through most of the flaws and faults in this legislation most of the time, but most of the flaws most of the time is not good enough.

What we're suggesting that we should be doing with this legislation is put peace officers in the place of police officers doing specific tasks, specific duties that traditionally have been the responsibility in the province of a fully trained police officer for a very good reason; that is, the police officer is really the only person in our society who is appropriately trained to anticipate, judge, and react to the level of threat involved in that particular incident.

A very good example is the proposal to use peace officers in traffic stops. Traffic stops, as any police officer will tell you, can be – can be – one of the most dangerous aspects of policing. You never really know, when you pull over a motorist, what you're going to find when you walk up to the driver's side door of that car and ask for the licence and registration. You may have cause as the police officer or the peace officer to pull that car over. Maybe the driver was speeding. Maybe the driver was weaving, and you suspect that he's impaired. Maybe the driver has a burnt-out tail light, and you just want to advise him of that. There can be all kinds of things, but you don't actually know until you approach the driver and he rolls down the window of the car what exactly you're going to be facing.

In order to safely and successfully conduct a traffic stop, you need someone with a full range of abilities, including a knowledge of tactical communications, the ability to defuse a hostile situation through verbal techniques. It can be nothing other than an otherwise law-abiding citizen who's had a bad day and made an illegal left turn or ran a red light or did something that, yes, you know, is potentially dangerous but didn't cause any problem at the time. So the otherwise law-abiding citizen is going to the police officer: what are you picking on me for? Then the attitude starts. Well, the police officer has to be able to quickly and peacefully defuse the situation because situations like that, even with law-abiding citizens, can get out of hand pretty quickly. The officer needs knowledge of the legal aspects of moving violations, needs sound judgment, needs the judgment to responsibly deploy weapons if the situation escalates. In short, that officer needs one heck of a lot of training.

I don't see in this bill clear evidence that the training is going to be sufficient, and I think that's a real problem, Mr. Speaker. We don't know who is going to be responsible for the training. We don't know who these peace officers will be accountable to. We don't know whether it will be, as in the traditional case with special constables, the employers who have the authority to discipline or the police service that they'll be working with or on behalf of or in place

of. Is it the municipality or jurisdiction that employs them? Will it be the Solicitor General through the director of law enforcement who is accountable? We need to know that before we can possibly vote in favour of this bill.

We need to know precisely what process will be involved in the hiring of police officers, especially – especially – if they're going to be hired as a level 1 APO, level 1 Alberta police officer, the top level of the four levels of authority to be adopted for peace officers: Alberta peace officers levels 1 and 2 and community peace officers levels 1 and 2. It's the level 1 APO who will have and be the highest level of authority that can be obtained for a peace officer. These are the peace officers who will receive the authority to enforce the provisions of provincial statutes and the Criminal Code that are specific to their mandate. This will probably mean enforcing traffic violations on Alberta's highways. This will probably mean providing prisoner transport and court security, protection services for high levels of government and other individuals as deemed necessary. It's expected as well that this level of peace officer will further complement the role of policing through the provision of specialized services. These officers will be trained in the use-of-force model, so they'll have the authority to carry some kind of weapon, whether it's a baton or pepper spray or, you know, a combination of these weapons or perhaps even a firearm.

3:30

Now, we're not breaking entirely new ground here, admittedly. We have special constables who have the authority to carry some limited, shall I say, low-grade – I don't know that that's the best phrase that I could use, but it's the one that comes most readily to mind – weapon as it is now, and they're functioning rather successfully at their job, although you do run into problems from time to time with special constables in the transit service, for instance, where they really do not have the force of police officers, the full impact and effect of police officers, nor should they for the level of training that they have right now. But by the same token, absent a full-fledged police officer, you have a dangerous situation that cannot be necessarily completely defused.

There is certainly a role for special constables. They're on our transit systems. They're on our college and university campuses. They're in our hospitals alongside doctors and nurses. They enforce city bylaws in municipalities. They work as conservation officers in our parks, also as fish and wildlife officers, and they do play a very significant law enforcement role in those aspects of our society.

Now we're talking about expanding this to place peace officers in the place of police officers doing such things as traffic stops. You know, I mentioned training before, and the problem with this new model, Mr. Speaker, is that we really have no idea what level of training these officers will receive and for how long. Nor do we know who will administer the training. Will it be police training section members? Will it be private security agencies? How long will the training go on? What's the content of the training? How much time will be spent on tactical communications? I've referred to that before. The Solicitor General thus far has not been able to tell us the details of any of this because the training models haven't been developed yet. Training models will be developed through regulations.

Well, I can't support that. I can't support this expanded role for peace officers in which they take the place of police without knowing absolutely that they have received the appropriate amount of training to ensure the public's safety and the safety of the officers themselves. I can't take a verbal assurance from government. You know: "Trust us. When have we ever let you down before?" A big old group hug isn't going to do it here.

These officers, some of them, will be carrying nine-millimetre

handguns and shotguns, and, you know, we all absolutely need to know that they have the full training needed to be able to safely and responsibly deploy these weapons. As the Solicitor General himself would know, as at least one other member of the government benches opposite would know from their past lives as police officers, police officers have this training. We have in this province, in this country as a rule, with occasional exceptions, tremendous confidence in our police officers because we know that they have a long history and heritage of excellent training and excellent recruitment practices as well.

You know, police officers are subject to, depending upon the police service that's doing the hiring, polygraph examinations, psychological tests, very extensive background checks, references from other members of family, from friends, from neighbours, all kinds of people who've known this individual in the past. The police service wants to know when they recruit somebody to join their force that they're recruiting a very stable, level-headed individual who shares the values of his or her fellow officers, who's committed to serving and protecting the civilian population, who's committed to defusing difficult situations, not making them worse, committed to solving and investigating crimes and keeping our streets safe, as corny as that phrase might sound from time to time, and committed to right, not to might but right.

So we trust our police officers. We trust our police officers, Mr. Speaker, with our lives sometimes, and we have every good reason to do so based on the heritage of policing in this province and this country. We pay our police officers reasonably well. As we talked about in this House I think just last week, we don't have what in my opinion is sufficient funding to hire enough police officers for our biggest cities. We need more police. This seems to be a backdoor way to get more police resources, more people acting as police without actually really going to the trouble of hiring police, and I think they're going about it the wrong way.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, respect the role of any officer attempting to carry out the mandate that they have been given, but I don't believe that Bill 16 offers sufficient clarification or support for the differentiated roles.

I have similar concerns with regard to training and education. A concern that I have is: are we trying to reduce policing to its lowest level and therefore pay someone a smaller salary to carry out that role? The medical equivalent would be a person who has received a limited amount of training, such as a licensed practical nurse, taking on duties of a registered nurse. They simply have not received the amount of training to make what in both cases can be a life-and-death decision. So I'm concerned about the training.

I'm also concerned about the various levels and the identifications and even the vocabulary that is connected. This new sort of Americanization of bringing the term "sheriff" into our Alberta context to me is a concern in itself. You know, do they have five-star badges? Are they wearing western paraphernalia as they go out in their cruisers? Are we having sort of a Dukes of Hazzard kind of mentality?

I'm concerned that we're potentially setting up special constables in various levels for failure because we're sending them out not sort of in a ride-along circumstance where you've got either a city police member in the same vehicle or you've got an RCMP member in the same vehicle. Quite often we'll be sending these people out to a large degree on their own with limited backup. Yes, they'll have a radio, which depending on where they are may or may not transmit. I've experienced this first-hand myself when working in the parks in

the mountains in the southeast part of the Kananaskis. The RCMP have the advantage of the satellite phones and special communications. I'm not sure that with the average car radio or cellular technology, given some of the effects of the Canadian Shield and the distance between towers – these people may find themselves in circumstances where backup that they require is not readily available. Putting people out on the roads or into the streets without sufficient authority and support concerns me. It also concerns me about the number of different uniforms, the number of different insignias, the different car markings.

3:40

Albertans will, I would like to believe, respect the role that each officer is trying to carry out, but I'm afraid that they may not get any more respect than some bouncers, who have been badly wounded in bar fights and so on. I'm hoping that every constable, special or otherwise, every law enforcement individual will be equipped with a vest. That, to me, would be a minimum expectation. I do praise this government because my understanding is that these vests are going to be available for people working in the penitentiary and jail systems provincially much sooner than they'll be available federally, so I salute members of this government for seeing this through. I'm hoping that these individuals will receive that as minimal equipment. Another piece of what I would consider to be minimal equipment is the gloves that are basically knife and razor blade and sort of puncture proof so that they have an opportunity to defend themselves.

I have difficulty, again, with the level of training. It seems to me almost contradictory when a special constable, basically a civilian volunteer who has been put through a limited amount of training, is not allowed a side arm but has the much more dangerous equipment of a shotgun. This may not be the regular circumstance, but quite often these special constables are sent alone in a fully marked RCMP vehicle to do routine tasks, possibly issue a summons or patrol the local park.

From a friend who had experience doing this, the number of times when surprises occurred – I suppose it shouldn't come as much of a surprise on a long weekend that people are going to consume more alcohol than they might normally do. This individual was surrounded and put in a position of risk. Whether or not there had been another fully trained RCMP individual with him at that time, the result was that they would both have been outnumbered. I have concern about: how do you take on this kind of role when you find yourself in an emergent circumstance when you haven't had the variety of experience that a fully trained either city police or RCMP individual will have had?

To me, regardless of what level of policing you're doing, the most important aspect is strength of character. Strength of character, being able to be calm in a situation which is extremely frightening and being able to talk calmly and encourage an individual not to take the particular action that they're about to take, is to me tantamount. Strength of character can't be taught. It's something that you possess.

In my experience in the parks and protected areas and the wilderness area, I was responsible along with my wife for 101 campsites. I personally dreaded long weekends because I knew that the closest RCMP detachment was over 70 kilometres away in High River and that if I ran into any trouble, the conservation officers were usually very involved closer to the city, in campgrounds like Bluerock, which because of their close proximity people got to faster, started drinking sooner, and the difficulties arose. I was very grateful for the supporting role of the conservation officers because, basically, all that stood between me and some difficulty was the golf pencil with which I used to register campers. Quite often those

campers, after they've had a number of beers, were less than supportive when I asked why they hadn't registered.

Fortunately, my background in teaching and negotiating served me well, but I didn't have a shotgun, I didn't have a pistol, nor was I trained in the use of those particular weapons. If you take a person, especially a young person who has had very limited training, and you put them out into a dangerous circumstance like a highway 63 or a remote campground and you just say to do your best and there isn't backup support, then I have great concerns about that.

Bill 16 appears to water down law enforcement as opposed to clearly defining what can be and can't be done. I don't want anyone in a position of risk. I don't want there to be risk to the general public. I don't want there to be risk to any officers attempting to do their best, to carry out their mandate in good faith. I am hoping that with these special constables there will be a lengthy period of ride-alongs with more experienced individuals, that they will not be sent out by themselves to either endanger their lives or those of the people they serve.

Bill 16 is basically an appetite whetter. If the fine details are going to be put through legislation that doesn't go through this House for debate, then Bill 16 just does not provide the sense of organization, the sense of planning, the sense of peace of mind that a peace officer act should contain.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The use of peace officers in law enforcement is not a new concept. The act that we're bringing forward in Bill 16 is new. The actions of the officers that we're talking about in this new legislation really come from a number of different acts. They come from the Police Act, and they come from various acts throughout our provincial government's legislation. So they come from a number of different pieces of legislation. We want to take from a number of different areas, put it into one act for them, a peace officer act, removing the term "constable" or "special constable" just to infer that they are not police officers, that they are peace officers.

As I mentioned, the use of peace officers in law enforcement is not a new concept. In fact, peace officers have had a presence in Alberta since 1953. Their role has evolved over time to meet the changing needs of the communities that they work in and the organizations that they work for. Bill 16 is designed to further clarify the roles and responsibilities for these peace officers, but we also want to clearly distinguish one level of peace officer, that authority, from another. There is a need to develop specific levels of authority that properly reflect the variety of duties peace officers have acquired over the years.

3:50

It's our goal with Bill 16 to enhance and complement police services. This is not about replacing police officers. This government has shown a strong commitment to policing in this province. Budget 2005 was the largest single increase of police officers in 20 years in Alberta. We announced \$23 million in new funding to increase provincial policing programs and expand courtroom security and prisoner transfer programs. That enabled us, Mr. Speaker, to add nearly 200 police officers to Alberta communities; 100 of these new positions went to rural communities. An additional \$3 million was allocated to hire sheriffs to handle courtroom security and prisoner transport in smaller centres. This allowed the redeployment of 30 RCMP officers from those various duties in courtrooms and court security, which they didn't want to be in, to be able to

manage and be back on front-line duties responding to the calls required from the community, investigating criminal activity, and responding to emergencies.

There's an urgent need to develop new ways to deal with the shortage of police officers not just in Alberta but throughout Canada. Looking at new models of service delivery, Mr. Speaker, is exactly what we're doing, and we're taking a lead in Canada regarding that. Peace officers who have the authority to perform specific enforcement duties can help reduce the pressure on police while delivering high-quality service to the public. Police officers can then focus their attention on the more serious crimes in our communities. Achieving this will help keep the citizens of this great province safe and secure for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just respond to some of the questions that the hon. members across the way raised regarding some of the issues that they have or some of the concerns that they have. When we talk about the various levels, the four levels that are in Bill 16 refer to two levels for a community peace officer and two levels for our government peace officers. It really clarifies who is at what level and which government they work for, the provincial government or a municipal government. So that is really an explanation to ensure that there is stand-alone legislation to ensure that that's fully explained.

When we talk about training and the question regarding training, in the Police Act or, I believe, in any other act the training requirements aren't in an act per se. They may be in the regulations, but they're normally in policy. For example, for policing the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police meets regularly. They have a not-for-profit organization, obviously, that is there to ensure that they have great communication amongst all police services in Alberta. They are the ones that determine the training of their policing services throughout Alberta. The RCMP, on the other hand, have a national picture, a national scope of what type of training they provide, but they do all fall in line.

For the training standards that we have in place for the special constable program, we train the officers that come from Calgary, Edmonton, Rocky Mountain House, Grande Prairie and are going to continue to train them. The municipalities have been advised that that level of training is going to be increased. There will be higher standards for them to ensure that the program that we want to provide in the community is really needed in the community as well as the designation provided to them. They have had the training to meet that designation. So training standards are going to be increased. They have been increased, in fact, in this past year.

The legislation in Bill 16 doesn't have the hiring process. It doesn't talk about the training because that's going to be done, some of that, either in regulations or in the policy that we have, but I do want to advise the members that these officers have been out there and have been enforcing traffic for years and years and years. This isn't something that happened two weeks ago, Mr. Speaker. They've even had the authority to write traffic summonses throughout Alberta for I'm sure at least the last 20 years, if not longer. So these officers have been out there. They have been trained. They have been trained by our department, who utilizes the RCMP. We utilize RCMP officers, Edmonton police officers, and Calgary police officers regarding the training and where we're moving in the future.

The training that took place for the sheriffs that were mentioned was an additional six weeks of training, which totalled 12 weeks. Again, these officers are trained. The main function, the main role of the sheriffs is that of prisoner transport, prisoner security, courtroom security, and judicial security. That included, as of January 6 of this year, doing interprovincial transport of prisoners throughout Canada. So the 350 officers that we have in our ministry

are doing that now. They have the training for that now. We're adding an additional number of weeks of training for them to be taught how to investigate traffic collisions as well as the ability to write summonses and/or enforce highway traffic act legislation. But they also have the ability to arrest on warrants, Canada-wide warrants or criminal warrants or provincial legislative warrants. They have the ability to do that now, as do special constables; for example, from Rocky Mountain House. They have the authority to do that now as well.

This act shouldn't be new to the members from the opposition, but in fact they should be looking at it saying, "Wow, this makes sense" in the fact that we're pulling all the pieces together and bringing one act forward.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just mention as well that they talked about the peace officers that carry side arms. Again, the officers that we have have been carrying side arms for 20 years. They've been trained in it. They've been carrying side arms for 20 years in their role as sheriffs for court security and prisoner transport. So they have the training, and they'll continue to have that training as we move forward with looking at other opportunities for them in the future.

We have confidence in our police, and we'll continue to as they are our emergency responders and our criminal investigators. The special constable program or the Peace Officer Act don't say anything about these officers investigating criminal activity or having authority under the Criminal Code to investigate a homicide or a sexual assault. That's not their role. That's not what they're trained for. It's job specific, and it will be job specific in the future.

So peace officers have and will continue to supplement and complement the police through training to respond to non-urgent services like traffic enforcement, traffic investigation. As I mentioned earlier, the RCMP used to provide transport of prisoners. They used to provide courtroom security, judicial security in this province. They were the ones as well that did not want to provide that function any longer because they felt that there was a better need for front-line police officers to be out on the front line and not sitting in a courtroom. I agreed with them, Mr. Speaker, and we developed this plan over the last year.

I want to just bring to light that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity said that these are *Dukes of Hazzard*-type officers. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora mentioned that they were dumbed-down policing. I take great offence with both of those comments, Mr. Speaker. These are young – well, some of them are older. They're educated. They're young, professional men and women who have chosen a career with the province of Alberta. They've chosen a career with the Solicitor General and Ministry of Public Security to take on those roles of court security and prisoner transport. They've taken on that role. They want to look at new opportunities to provide out in the community, to serve their community in a law enforcement capacity as a peace officer, not a police officer. So I take great offence to the hon. members from the Liberals making statements such as those, which are degrading, which are improper.

I want to just finally mention, Mr. Speaker, a few other things regarding the sheriffs. As I mentioned – and I won't belabour the point – they have additional training that's provided above and beyond what was provided in the past. The investigative training that they have is second to none. It's with the RCMP and the Edmonton Police Service. The pilot project that we have is going very well. From the information I received today at lunchtime, it's going very well. The partnership between the sheriffs and the RCMP is tremendous. They are having a marked effect on highway 21, and they're seeing a decline in speeders on highway 63. In the

two months that they've been there, they've seen a decline in speeding from the fact that obviously the media and, as well, ourselves are getting the message out to communities and to drivers that they are going to be monitored in their driving habits on those two highways. So that's good news.

4:00

We're going to deliver more good news at budget tomorrow afternoon. I'm looking forward to tomorrow afternoon's budget, as I believe all members in this Assembly are. We're here representing 3.2 million Albertans in a number of various different ministries, Mr. Speaker, and I'm honoured and proud to be the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

As well, I'm honoured and proud to bring forward Bill 16, which is really going to provide the legislative backbone for peace officers in Alberta, for peace officers that want to share in a law enforcement career, that want to work and provide Albertans with a safer and a more secure community, ensuring that, yes, there are programs and, yes, there are functions that they can handle that police officers don't need to handle, that will allow and free up the time of police officers to respond to those emergency calls and respond to the needs of the community, whether it's the investigation of a theft or the investigation of a fraud at a business. So it allows them the opportunity to concentrate on criminal investigation, and it provides an opportunity for peace officers, who are focused and skilled and trained in these areas, to provide that service to Albertans.

As you look through the act, Mr. Speaker, really we have six parts, which fully explain the employers' authorizations and the peace officers' appointments. It talks about the complaints and discipline procedure, inspections, offences and penalties, regulations, and transitional provisions, which I mentioned earlier.

Again, I want to thank the members opposite for the debate on this bill. As well, I thank the MLA for Calgary-Hays for the tremendous amount of work he's done in the last 10 or 11 months on this act as well as staff from our ministry. I see that Sandra Klashinsky, who has played a tremendous role as well, is here from our ministry.

Mr. Speaker, I'll leave as my parting comments that this act has been a long time coming in the fact that this provides, as I mentioned, a backbone for peace officers in this province, whether they are government employees, whether they are corrections officers, some of the 1,100 corrections officers and 400 probation officers and caseworkers that we have, whether it's the 350 provincial sheriffs that we have, the 180 officers that work in SRD, the I believe over a hundred that work in Community Development, the 180 or so that work in the ministry of transportation for inspection services, and as well the 150 or 160 officers that are in uniform working for various municipalities throughout Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if it's appropriate to ask a few questions of the hon. minister, but anyway I'll try.

Is it just opening the door for other professions? Like, now we are talking about these special constables with some training. How about in the future if the health minister starts saying that they need some health professionals? They can get some special training, and they can work in place of doctors or some other professionals in the medical profession. The next time it could be the Minister of Education saying that they can give a little bit of training to teachers for special purposes. Is that what this government is planning to do in the future?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister and Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This legislation provides, again, for the opportunity for special constables to move forward under the new act, and once proclaimed, of course, they'll be peace officers, not special constables. Again, we want to ensure that the public isn't confused with the terms "constable" or "special constable." They are not police officers. We want to ensure that the public is well aware that they are not police officers. They can be attached to an enforcement unit, but they are peace officers. They have authority as peace officers in the province of Alberta. Dependent on the training and dependent on the municipality, on what the municipality's request may be regarding enforcement in their own community, that's the designation that will be provided to them by the director of law enforcement.

Again to the hon. member, training has been an issue in the past. When we talk about the use of force and we talk about standards, the Auditor General is very clear in ensuring that we have audited standards throughout Alberta regarding policing, and obviously we're going to ensure that we have those standards in the peace officer program that we're going to have throughout this province. This is a complementary or a supplementary level of service to the community. It is a law enforcement occupation. It is in the field of law enforcement, but there are a number of fields of law enforcement, not just policing.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. First, does the minister have a long-term plan on how many more of these specially trained officers we're going to have, and is this possibly a first level of training so that in the future we can have an Alberta police force and have people that are partially trained to move up and expand on that?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, absolutely not, to the latter remark regarding an Alberta police service. No, absolutely not. The RCMP are our provincially contracted police service for Alberta. We are entering into negotiations with Canada regarding their contract, which is due in 2012. We have a tremendous working relationship with the RCMP, a tremendous amount of history regarding the RCMP in our province. I think that if we were going to look at a provincial police service, we wouldn't have added 200 officers last year, and as well we wouldn't add the number of officers to the RCMP that we're going to announce tomorrow. Obviously, they are the police service of choice for us in Alberta for our provincial police service. Therefore, no.

On the number of officers that we're going to be looking at for sheriffs in the future, obviously our program is expanding because the services have expanded into rural areas to look after the courts. There are 70 courthouses in the province of Alberta. That means that we have to provide court security, judicial security in some cases, as well as prisoner transport back and forth from those courts to the various holding facilities. Are we going to be looking at additional officers? You'll have to wait for tomorrow's budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: A couple of questions. Are the peace officer positions ranked in order of authority? Will Bill 16 clarify the various levels of authority? The second question is: what opportunity is there for moving up or across the existing ranks? For example, if you're a security officer or a prison guard, does that put you three steps up

from, say, a court security person? Will there be opportunities within the existing ranks, sort of levels of training where you could potentially move within the forces themselves with a little extra education to receive that upgrading in your position?

The Deputy Speaker: The time has elapsed for Standing Order 29(2)(a).

The next member to be recognized is the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had actually risen at the same time as the Solicitor General. I had meant to rise under 29(2)(a). There was a comment that the Member for Calgary-Varsity made which to me is a very important concept and which an awful lot of people don't understand. A lot of people have misconceptions about strength of character. He said that you're born with strength of character. You're not born with strength of character. Strength of character is something that one learns by doing difficult things.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we're not under Standing Order 29(2)(a), where you can question the previous speaker. We're speaking on the bill in second reading of the bill. If you wish to keep your comments on the bill, please proceed.

4:10

Ms DeLong: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Police officers not only have strength of character, but they also learn strength of character by doing difficult things, when it's a difficult personal thing for them. And yes, strength of character is something that is learned.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, are you rising under Standing Order 29(2)(a), or are you rising to speak on the bill?

Ms Pastoor: To speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to make a few comments. Many that I would have wished to make have already been made, so I will certainly save the time. There are a number of things that give me pause for concern with this. I guess that I'm coming with an overlay from my experience in long-term care and, of course, the bill that I have on the floor at the moment.

One of my concerns – and perhaps the minister could address these later – is that I see what the qualification standards are. One of them is grade 12 or the equivalent. Then further down it says that stronger qualifications would be for a more stringent – if I was a kid getting out of grade 12 and my dream from early childhood was to be a police officer, I would think that that would be enough because that's what it says, and I'm going to be really disappointed when I find out that that's not enough. I'm not sure that that's not sending the wrong message. I think we need highly qualified people.

Also, somebody out of grade 12 will not have taken the psychology courses that deal with human behaviour, certainly with deviant human behaviour. I'm assuming that when these people are hired and trained, they may well end up going through your police academy – that may well end up in southern Alberta, Lethbridge in particular. But I would assume that they are going to go at that level of training because these are young people.

Yes, I agree with the hon. member across the way who said that character can be learned. But young 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds,

when they consistently have people in their face – really, it takes more than two or three years to learn the skill of disassociation, where you can actually learn to deal with that and disassociate yourself from the situation and become professional. It takes many, many years of training for that, and I'm just not sure that young people out of grade 12 would have that.

One of the other things is – and I'm going to perhaps use a personal example. Trying not to be totally disrespectful, but I have gone through customs, and I'm hoping that these young people that are trained in Alberta are going to be trained to perhaps treat people with respect. I've really had some very unpleasant situations that appeared sometimes to just be, "Because I've got the uniform and you don't," a very bad attitude when you're alone on a highway trying to stop someone for a speeding ticket.

One of my other concerns is that once we have these people trained, I'm not sure what their pay scale will be, but I'm hoping that they would not be allowed to moonlight and perhaps end up being rent-a-cops. The reason I'm saying that is because I'm used to, as I'm sure the other police officer is – and I'm really not sure who it is. We've all done nights, and we know what it is to work shift work. You come off those, and you're bagged. You're really, really tired. But if your pay scale is such that you have to work two jobs, I don't want that person trying to stop me for a speeding ticket or anything else when they're so spun out from having to work two jobs because the pay scale isn't going to be high enough. It could well happen. I look at it in terms of LPNs. I look at it in the downgrading of the professional staff. Yes, there are people, certainly, within the health industry that work two jobs and do shift work. It's exhausting.

The other question that I might have is: would there ever be the possibility that a particular contract would go to a private firm that now can supply trained officers? I'm thinking of, perhaps, well, bars would be good, but security on different pieces of property particularly at night.

The other questions that I had were about the curriculum. Would it be a provincially applied curriculum? Would they all learn the same thing so that no matter where they go in the province, their behaviour has an expectation and their training has an expectation? Is there any possibility that at any time this curriculum or education would be delivered by a private contractor?

Another concern that I had was something that comes out of my experience of wanting legislated responsibility. I see that on page 17 the accountability is going to be between the Auditor General, the Solicitor General, and Minister of Public Security. In my mind, that's far too many people. The complaints can go round and around and around in a circle, not unlike what they do in continuing care. There is never one person that can take the responsibility of saying yes or no. It just goes around in circles, and it never ends.

I can see that there will be some complaints. I don't think that people are perfect, and there will be complaints. There will be young people that will overstep their boundaries. I can also see that this could well end up in frustrations, and if the complaints go around in circles and are not handled, I can see lawsuits coming.

The other thing on the monitoring of conduct is: would there be drug testing and would it be random?

I think those were some of my concerns that other people, perhaps, have not addressed.

At this point, I would like to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not prolong this very long. I've listened to the debate and the minister's answers earlier on, and I appreciate what he's saying. There have been peace officers involved in Alberta for many, many years. I think these questions are more in terms of when it comes to Committee of the Whole, in case we're not here. I'd be interested to know, though, if there is a different direction, not clarifying what's in the bill. The minister has indicated that that's what they're trying to do, clarify the role and actually to codify what's already happening, as I understood what the minister was saying.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think what we're somewhat concerned about is: are we going in a direction where there's going to be a significant number more peace officers? I think therein lies the worry to some degree, that we may be attempting to do policing on the cheap. Now, I don't think that necessarily flows from the bill, but I guess that what I'm trying to do is figure out the numbers that we have now. Are we looking at significant new numbers in terms of peace officers? What is the direction that we are going?

I know that the minister has already spoken. I'm more interested in seeing what he says in Committee of the Whole. I'm not particularly worried about the bill as such. I think that to codify what these people do – and this minister is correct: we've had peace officers for many years. To repeat, I guess the concern is: are we changing the direction to where we're going to have more of these people? Is that the goal of the government? If that's the case, then I think we should have a serious look at our policing because, as some other members alluded to on the opposition side, some routine things can become not routine very quickly when people are dealing with it.

4:20

So I'm not sure. The bill is not necessarily what worries me because I think the minister is right that it makes some sense to codify, as I call it. But I guess what I'm trying to find out is the direction that we're going in the long run. What are the numbers of peace officers that we have now in Alberta? Is there some estimate about how many more we might want and what their role may be? As I said, I would hope that the minister could come back in Committee of the Whole and give us some idea of the government's direction in this whole matter.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Others?
Ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays wish to close?

Mr. Johnston: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I was prepared to answer questions from the members opposite, but I felt that that has been done very eloquently by our Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. I would therefore like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17 Libraries Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise again to speak in support of Bill 17.

The Chair: Hon. member, I should have recognized the hon. minister first to have introductory comments.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to make a few comments on behalf of the Minister of Community Development just to cover off some of the points that were raised during second reading. One member inquired about the municipalities' usage of the public library rate. At the moment only two municipalities that we know of have a public library rate. Municipalities continue to have the power to establish a public library rate; however, it comes from the Municipal Government Act, not from the Libraries Act.

Another issue raised during second reading was about the municipalities' ability to collect funds for libraries and service delivery. Bill 17 has no impact on a municipality's ability to collect money for libraries and to deliver services. Municipalities now provide funding for library service from the general tax base if they do not have a public library rate. In fact, in most cases the public library funding is minimal, so they do not even think it's worthwhile identifying as a separate rate.

Another member commented that the bill may provide a mechanism to allow municipalities to dissolve and leave the library behind. In fact, at the moment there is no process, and there have been libraries left behind when the municipality dissolved. In those cases, there was no legal board and no one responsible for paying salaries, for paying bills, or for providing service. Bill 17 provides a process to dissolve a library when the municipality dissolves. Bill 17 can allow the work of the board to wind down in an orderly manner when the municipality has dissolved, so that the service can be either transferred to a new municipality or be terminated if that council will not provide the service.

At this point, Mr. Chairman, I would ask that Bill 17 be moved through Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise again to speak to Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, 2006. I know that this bill makes four very important changes in the library administration. I want to discuss that very briefly.

The first one is the creation of intermunicipal library boards. This is an updating of the Libraries Act to incorporate current practice. It allows up to three municipalities or municipal districts to join together to form a board to go on the local library. There are currently at least two examples of this in this province. For example, the towns of Black Diamond and Turner Valley have one library. The towns are proximate to each other, and sharing the cost allows the communities to provide a higher level of service.

The next one is financial supporting. The act adds intermunicipal library boards to the act and states that the intermunicipal board shall prepare an annual budget and submit it to the municipalities. The act also requires intermunicipal boards to keep financial records, audit these records, prepare a financial report, and submit it to each municipal council.

The third one is dissolution or amalgamation. This is a new section that allows for the dissolution or amalgamation of the library board in the event of municipal dissolution or amalgamation or annexation. There is currently no process to transfer public library services if a municipality is dissolved, amalgamated, or annexed. This amendment allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to dissolve board services, assets, and liabilities or terminate services if public library service is not provided by the new municipality.

The fourth one is the special public library rate. The ability for municipalities to levy a special public library rate is being repealed by this act. This change was not included in the government press release. I want to know why this change to the act was not included in the press release. Did they complete a comprehensive survey of all the municipalities to see if any were using the public library rate? What consultation was done with the municipalities? This omission is cause for concern. The municipalities I contacted don't use it, but one of the 300 municipalities with libraries could. So we should be concerned that this may impact the municipalities' ability to collect money for libraries and, therefore, to deliver services.

Our position will depend on the answers to questions in this area. If no one is using the public library and if no one is using the public library rate, then you could make the argument to remove it for housekeeping sake.

The next one, section 11:

- (1) A council may, in addition to all other rates and assessments levied and assessed for municipal purposes, levy and assess from year to year a special annual rate on the assessed value of all property liable to taxation for municipal purposes, which rate is to be called the "Public Library Rate".
- (2) The money collected under the Public Library Rate must be used by the municipality
 - (a) to provide the municipal board with money with respect to the amount approved under section 8(3),
 - (b) if it is a party to an agreement described in section 13, to provide an annual grant to the library system board with respect to its budget under section 18, or
 - (c) to provide money to both the municipal board and the library system board with respect to budgets under sections 8 and 18.

4:30

This Bill 17 I think definitely would improve library services by making it easier for municipalities to co-operatively provide library services. There is a risk that more municipalities will choose to provide one large intermunicipal library rather than smaller libraries in each community if the stakeholders in the affected regions feel that the option is an intermunicipal library or no library at all. The bill will not help the significant problem with the libraries in Alberta, underfunding. Libraries have been funded at the same per capita rate funding for the last 14 years. I got the answer from the hon. member.

The next one is that Alberta's libraries will continue to have one or two jurisdictions that charge fees to access library resources. Why won't the government take action in any of these areas?

Mr. Chairman, the groups I consulted all are in favour of the changes. I believe that these improvements are long awaited. We always support local democracy – that is, local library boards – and support literacy. Learning begins with reading. Therefore, we encourage the library system to improve their services and make more books available. We believe in access to libraries in rural areas, and these changes definitely will make that easier. We would like to see greater funding for the libraries and the removal of library user fees.

Mr. Chairman, libraries are very essential, basic services for every citizen in this province. Alberta's first public libraries act – I'm not

sure, but I read it on the Internet – stated very clearly that the libraries should be free to the public. Even the website from Community Development says very clearly that the libraries should be accessible, accountable, with quality service and the proper funding. They're talking about the proper funding. The stakeholders that I've talked to so far in the library field are complaining that the funding is not properly given to them. Recently the \$20 million, whatever, lump-sum amount that the government announced – I don't have the full details of how they are going to utilize that money.

My point is that this act which I'm talking about, the first libraries act, which was made in 1907, did not say anything like that, that money should be taken from the people as user fees, so we should respect the first libraries act, and we should not charge user fees. According to the Community Development website, I found this very clearly saying that in Alberta public libraries may charge for the following. Please allow me to read five words. Number one is a penalty for overdue materials. I agree. If somebody is late in returning the books, definitely we should charge, but there should be some flexibility. If the weather is bad or somebody is ill, at least they should be allowed to extend the date through the telephone or through e-mail or something, which is not happening. It used to be like this in the '80s. If somebody is really not returning those books for a long, long time and not replying to their letter or something, yes, we can ask them to pay the penalty.

The next user fee at this moment is the library cards. I know that I introduced the motion urging the government to remove that fee. Some libraries charge \$12, some even \$30, and some people cannot afford that. Some people, yes, definitely can afford it. My point is that we all pay the tax, and once we pay the tax – this is a basic necessity. We should not charge money, especially the user fee, whether it's in the library or in the hospital or in the schools. Necessities are necessities, especially if we still charge for the library card. I know where the government is spending money in other departments. Why do they not spend wisely on literacy so that we can make the base of our children? This is very important, and the government should consider it very seriously. I know my motion was shot down; I think it was last year sometime.

Another user fee at this moment: we are charging for meeting rooms. I mean, some libraries may have meeting rooms. If a community or some students want to discuss something inside the library, I don't think anything is wrong. I mean, we should encourage them to sit and discuss the future. If they are planning, certainly, about something educational, we should encourage them to sit there, but we should not charge them money. If a group of businesspeople want to have the room, definitely we can charge money for that meeting room inside the library. If we charge money for the meeting rooms to some individuals who want to talk about something beneficial to the schools and colleges, definitely we should not charge for that.

The photocopying and other user fees that we are charging. Suppose I go to the library and see some things, very special material. I can't borrow that book, and I need to just photocopy one copy or two copies, so there should be some flexibility. The libraries should not charge to make two or three photocopies. To me, it's a library, and it's very important. If somebody makes some photocopies, why do we pay 20 cents or 25 cents per copy? Sometimes you don't have the change. There should be flexibility, and I think they should be allowed to make a few copies. If a group of people are making tons of photocopies, 100 or 200, from the library, then, yes, we can ask them to pay some money.

4:40

Another user fee we are still charging is for downloading onto

disk or paper in the library. This is ridiculous. I mean, kids normally use this. They don't always load onto disk. I don't know how much it will cost the library. We are the richest province and should encourage our children to learn more and more things.

The last user fee mentioned on this Community Development website is contracted services. If a group of people belongs to a private business and they want to research certain things, well, they can charge them money, but if a group of people like a community group wants to do some research on certain topics, sometimes it takes more time, and I don't think it's reasonable to charge them money. The library is there to help people, to encourage them to find out some more. I notice, you know, that sometimes the scholars, the very learned people, go to the library, and after reading good books, they enlighten some other people.

I'm trying to say that user fees – it's not according to the act, the first act I mentioned. It should be free, but if it's necessary, we should be flexible, especially for the six things I mentioned. I want the minister to make a note because the government has already spent too much money. If they can spend \$45 million on horse racing, why not spend money on the libraries, which are essential, basic necessities? The government is ignoring that.

Once again, I'm not against this bill. This bill makes really good changes, but if they consider those user fees, then it would make it even better. Thank you very much once again.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would just like to briefly speak on this bill, Bill 17, Libraries Amendment Act, 2006. In the constituency of St. Albert and the city of St. Albert libraries are very, very important. I'm very pleased with this bill because I think it supports libraries.

Certainly, there are some suggestions I'd like to make. Maybe you could look at these things; the government could look at some changes. I think Lois Hole said it very well when she said: "A world without libraries is a world without education . . . without progress, without justice. Without libraries we can neither explore and learn from our past, nor build a better future." Our Rotary associations in northwest Alberta have taken a major stand on literacy, and in fact there was a national conference on the importance of literacy and libraries to help us alleviate this problem internationally, across the world.

I am very much in support of this amendment, and the only thing I would suggest is the question of regular grants. It would be important, I think, in the city of St. Albert if we could receive money, dollars, on an annual basis, every fiscal year, because it would help us with the operation of our library in St. Albert.

I'm in support of the amendments, and I look forward to supporting this.

Thank you very much.

[Mr. Danyluk in the chair]

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This particular bill is straightforward, and certainly on this end we're not going to have any problem supporting it. You like that, right?

I do want to draw some cautions, though, on this. As I said, the bill is straightforward. The municipalities are themselves responsible for voting on amalgamating boards. Of course, they have to get the minister's approval. I would hope – and I don't think this is the

intent of the bill – that it's not a choice way to cut funding to smaller municipalities with smaller libraries, because I see that as a problem.

I just want to allude to what I'm talking about, Mr. Chairman. Back in the early '80s, when I was in this Legislature, in my riding in the inner city there was a library that had the possibility of being shut down. Of course, we got involved in it in the community. This was in the inner city. The argument was that there wasn't enough usage in that particular library. There in the inner city – it was in Norwood – is precisely where they need libraries because the inner city often is where some of the higher illiteracy rates are. We fought hard to keep that particular library. It went through a possible chopping block just a while ago again, when I was a public trustee. What we found in that particular library, if I can use it as an example, is that now it's overfilled. It's busy all the time because they went out and marketed it and encouraged the community to become involved in it. It became friendly for the users. The computers are there, the books, the rest of it.

The point I make, drawing it to this bill, Mr. Chairman, is that whether it's in the rural areas or the inner cities, in some cases a small library in a small town or a small village, just like a school, might be very important to that village, and maybe there is a need for there to be a small board there. I don't think that's the intent of the bill, Mr. Chairman, but I do believe that that could possibly move in that direction.

I would remind people that we have some work to do. We do need more libraries not less libraries in light of the fact that 30 per cent of Albertan adults aged 60 and older do not have the literacy skills required to properly read the back of a bottle of Tylenol. Given that only 69 per cent of our teens are graduating high school on schedule, we need to seriously reinvest in literacy and education.

Now, I won't go on long about this, Mr. Chairman. The \$20 million is gratefully accepted that was announced March 2, to tie in with this particular bill, but what we need to do is look at more sustained funding because we have some serious literacy problems in this area.

I know it's not part of this bill, but another shame is what's been happening in our schools. If the school libraries are going down, usually that has an impact in terms of our other libraries. I noticed in Edmonton – and I'm sure it's pretty well true throughout the province – that the number of librarians has dropped dramatically. In Edmonton in the schools – in the Edmonton public, I'm talking about – the number of learning resource people, mainly librarians, dropped from 81.7 FTE to 12.1. Now, that's a pretty serious matter. We have to deal with literacy. We wonder about the high school dropout rates. I think that may be one of the reasons. We can talk about school counsellors too.

The bill makes sense. The \$20 million that was announced makes sense, but I would hope that we'd do it in a more sustained way. Again, Mr. Chairman, just a caution. It's true in the rural areas too, that where they need the libraries may be the first place that they are cut away under this amalgamation. I know that's not the purpose, but that's what can happen. That may be precisely, as it was in my case in the inner city, where they need the libraries the most. So that's a caution in terms of the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:50

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to rise and echo what my colleagues from Edmonton-Ellerslie, St. Albert, and

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview have pointed out in terms of support for Bill 17. I'd like to make three brief observations, and I have one question, which will hopefully be answered.

In my 34 years as a schoolteacher I have noted what was previously pointed out by the MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, that school librarians have become an endangered species. The number has been greatly reduced. There are very few schools – elementary, junior high, high school – that even have part-time librarians, and in some cases they're the first to go. Librarians are intellectual guides, from preschool story corners to advanced postsecondary research. Librarians play a key role, and this bill recognizes that role to a degree.

As the Liberal opposition we would like to see greater funding for libraries and the removal of library user fees. We're not fans of either health care user fees or library user fees. The only concern I have with regard to Bill 17 is the fourth requirement, where it says that it removes the right of municipalities to levy a local property tax to fund the libraries. What I'd like to know is: what is the government's role in financially supporting libraries and assuring that libraries will be available in sparsely populated rural areas? I know at one point the bookmobile was the way that sparsely populated rural areas and reserves were reached. I would hope that this government, in recognizing the importance of literacy and investing in our youth, would consider support for such outreach concerns as bookmobiles.

As I say, I support the intent of Bill 17. I would appreciate an answer as to what role the government sees in financially underwriting the costs of libraries. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

The Minister of Innovation and Science.

Mr. Doerksen: Just on behalf of the minister, in response to the last speaker, I would certainly refer that matter to the Minister of Community Development. He can probably address that in third reading.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 10
Engineering, Geological and Geophysical
Professions Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 10. During

second reading of Bill 10 I outlined several reasons why this legislation is important to Alberta's registered professional technologists. I believe that the comments were fairly self-explanatory. It is my pleasure to ask that the government make amendment to this bill, which I will table now and which I believe is being distributed at this time.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that all the members have now received this amendment. It is my pleasure to move the amendment. To give all the chance to review the amendment before we sit in the Committee of the Whole next time and discuss it, it is my pleasure to adjourn debate on Bill 10 with the amendment on the floor.

The Chair: We'll refer to that amendment as amendment A1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 12
Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I mentioned in second reading, the purpose of the bill was to try to deal with the issue of fraud primarily. There are a number of housekeeping clauses in there, and then, also, to define the purpose of the land titles office and the registration. Of course, the purpose of collecting that information is so that it can identify individuals and corporations with real interest in property.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm primarily in support of the bill. I'm just looking for a couple of clarifications.

Section 17 of the act reads:

On receiving a request for a search and the payment of the prescribed fee and on the fulfillment of any conditions, criteria or qualifications prescribed by regulation, the Registrar shall furnish a search of the information contained in the register.

With regard to section 43.1(2) in the bill there may be some privacy issues to be raised here. There have been concerns raised in the past regarding businesses asking for personal information only when it is required for the purpose of the business transaction. This clause seems to imply that the registrar may arbitrarily scribble down an individual's social insurance number, driver's licence number and simply put it in a file. My question is: will this information be tracked? At what point would the information then be destroyed?

The other concern I have has to do with Section 50.1(1). Are registrars trained in identifying potential fraud? Is this completely subjective, or are there guidelines in place for identifying potential fraud? What happens after the registrar identifies the potential of fraud, and to what extent is the registrar obligated to report the incident to the authorities?

As I say, in general I support the bill. Just those two clarifications which I would appreciate a response on. Thank you.

Mr. Lund: If you don't mind, I'll just deal with them as they come up. That's a very observant point, dealing with 43.1 and how long the information will be stored. I will try to get you a more definitive answer, but it's my understanding that it would be kept on file long enough so that if there was an issue about the title, then it would be on file how the registrar actually, in fact, was convinced that the individuals that were signing the documents were actually those

persons. But I'll try to find out exactly, and I'll give you that information.

5:00

The identification of fraud. We are training our people to look for a number of areas that would trigger some suspicion. There are a lot of times that, actually, the titles are brought to the registrar; they tried to file them right at the office. That's one place that they will be looking very carefully at. The bulk of the titles are actually registered through a lawyer, but some of them are walked right into the office. The registrar then, of course, is going to be asking for the identification as in 43(1). If they see something there that they're a little bit concerned about, then we will start to investigate it further.

We have on staff special investigators. There's a whole unit that is trained. They're primarily ex-policemen, and they're trained in looking at this stuff. If, in fact, they do find that there is fraud, then, of course, there could be charges laid. The police would be involved and then take it to court.

There are a number of things that I mentioned in second reading. If a title is changing hands very frequently, and each time the price, the value goes up, that's worth checking out. That's one of the problems we're having today with the hot market, particularly in Calgary. Goodness. I read that people are buying homes that have been grow ops and paying a huge price for them. That's why it's even getting more difficult for us to find this stuff.

They will be watching for three or four transactions in a short period of time. Each time the price is up \$20,000 or \$30,000 on a \$250,000 home, that kind of thing. That's when they'll get suspicious that there is something going on, and that's when they would start checking it back to see whether, in fact, there is some fraud. That's another definition of fraud. One might think, "Well, as long as the individual can get that price, why are we worried?" Well, the problem is that often, too, you'll have a numbered company. Then when you start checking it out, you find out that it's the same individuals. They're selling it among a group.

The Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have more questions that perhaps the minister can reply to. I think all of us want to reduce the number of fraudulent incidents in Alberta. We heard in the previous bill that we're the mortgage fraud capital of Canada, something that I don't think we're particularly proud of. I understand that the minister is trying to deal with this.

I have some questions dealing with the bill. For example, section 13 of the proposed amendment stipulates that proof of identification may be required in order to register. Just a simple suggestion: rather than leaving up to the discretion of the registrars who and what group may need to produce said proof of identity, it seems to me that it would be tougher if we said that the amendment should read that proof of identification must be required, the same as we often do when we're on a plane or whatever. You would have no choice about it, and that would take away some of the loophole. I'd like the minister to comment if that might be a possibility, to take away that discrepancy.

Another example, from a different perspective, is section 14, which gives the registrar the right to refuse registration if fraud is suspected. Of course, we support the registrar's right to do so, but I'm thinking of people that are in the inner city or whatever. Sometimes they don't have the proper identification, but maybe with some help they can get the proper identification. So I'm wondering why there were no provisions made for appeals by individuals refused, nor are there provisions for the registrar to report suspected

fraud. I hope to hear some elaboration on this, and maybe there's something the minister might want to take a look at.

I think I heard the minister talk about that in his department they have investigative officers, ex-policemen and that, that work in this area. Tying into that, white-collar crimes are getting more complicated, and often the criminals are ahead of us in technology and the rest of it. I think that's true in a lot of areas. So I'm wondering if the minister has addressed the question of training staff at land titles to recognize incidents of fraud. For instance, a question I'd ask: is land titles pairing with the police services of Edmonton and Calgary to help establish such training, perhaps with the investigative officers that he talked about before in a previous question? I mean, as criminal manipulations of the legal system continue to evolve, it becomes harder and harder to catch these people. We know that.

I guess the other thing is getting tough on crime. In terms of dollars and cents white-collar crime often costs society more than violent crime. We hear a lot about that. In terms of money lost or spent pursuing these criminals, I wondered if – and I know it's not just in his department; the Minister of Justice is here – we're looking at legislating penalties in addition to those handed down through court proceedings; for example, large fines for those who profit from mortgage fraud in addition to criminal proceedings. This is a growing problem.

Mr. Chairman, I'm more interested in where we're going with this. Obviously, we'll support the bill. Maybe we can cut down fraud, and we'll try to do it. But I'd like to ask the minister those questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: The Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for those comments. The reason that we're not saying that they must ask for identity. Often these are filed in a lawyer's office, and it's up to the lawyer to check and see that all of the people have signed it. The ones they'll really be watching are where individuals come in to the counter and file. That's when in some cases they will probably be going right back to the people that signed the affidavit, that they knew the person that signed it is that person. So it would be rather onerous to say that you had to ask for this identification.

No appeals from the registrar's decision. That was brought up in second reading as well. The fact is that if the registrar makes the decision to hold, they will do some checking themselves. If they feel that there needs to be more investigation, they'll call in the special investigation unit that looks at these things. Then, of course, from there if, in fact, they find out that, yes, there is something here, that it's not proper, they would involve the police. The penalties? It's theft. Fraud is theft, so immediately it will be turned over to the Solicitor General's department, and the appropriate charges would be laid.

The training of staff: that's an ongoing process. Of course, the advantage we got with the special investigators part of the unit: they're training our people on what to look for, what looks suspicious, and are part of it. There is a long training process. That's one of the difficulties we've got today when we try to hire more people. You can't just take somebody in off the street and train them in a couple weeks to do this type of work. It takes a lot of training and a lot of work.

I hope that covers your questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few more

questions on land titles. The first one is that when you pull out a land title, sometimes we don't see the full description. I suppose there's the property, the background, the ownership. How many owners were there, and how much money did they pay? A few years back when we used to pull out the land title, the full description was there. Now I don't see the full details in there. I want to know why we don't get the full information in the land title. I think this is one of the reasons that fraud is booming in Alberta.

5:10

My second question. You know, when you refinance something, maybe we should ask the registrar to accommodate some sort of help. There should be some collaboration between the banks and the registrar so that they can get all the information, especially about the refinancing. It's very important.

The third question. You know the registries where you get the land title? One of my friends was asking me: who gets it? What's the procedure for that?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A good question about the number of owners. Quite frankly, the changes that we're making in the purpose of the land titles may address some of this problem. But under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act there are instances where it's very important that a lot of the information not be disclosed.

Like I say, the reason we put in the purpose clause is so that if you have a good reason to be wanting to know the history of who owned this property, then you could get it. But the difficulty we have is that if people just willy-nilly develop themselves a data bank for whatever reason – maybe they're going to start soliciting from those individuals – that's not the purpose of land titles. Land titles is simply to show who has interest in this property. So while I can understand where you might want to know who the owners have been – for example, if you're concerned about a contamination of the site, you need to know what happened on that site – there are ways of getting it, but hopefully it will be more distinct now that we have that new purpose clause.

The refinancing: these amendments are really not about financing. That's another area altogether. This has really got nothing to do with that area. We do allow rollovers as far as land titles are concerned. We do allow that in Alberta, and that's a very valuable tool. But, really, what you were talking about, as I get it, is for the whole financing. That's not part of what we're doing here.

The history: I think I covered that in the answer to my first one. There are ways that you can get it through application.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Minister, would you buy a car without knowing, you know, the whole details, like a couple of buyers in the past? This property archive, the full description in the land title, was always there. This stopped just a year or two years ago. Why did they suddenly stop giving us information? My point is that especially when the property is bought and sold by the government, it must be highlighted. People should know about property dealings, especially from the government side.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Chairman, I'll try to get you a more definitive answer before third reading. It's my understanding that if you're an individual looking for the history of the property that you're wanting

to buy, you can apply and get it. But you can't put in for a batch or identify an individual and ask for all the properties that they own. You can't get that. That's private. But we'll review *Hansard* and try to get a more definitive answer for you because I totally understand what you're talking about. I totally understand it.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

Bill 13

Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate March 13: Mr. Strang]

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to stand and move out of committee Bill 13. Some of the questions that were asked related to the legislation's purpose. The Real Estate Council of Alberta's mandate as described in the Real Estate Act is "to set and enforce standards of conduct" of regulated members "in order to promote the integrity of the industry and to protect consumers," to provide services to "enhance and improve the industry," and also to administer the Real Estate Act and its regulations, bylaws, and rules.

We had talked sometimes, you know, about how these amendments are going to assist agents and look at combating the aspect of mortgage fraud. While these amendments make it easier for investigative agents, such as municipal police forces and lenders, to share information with the Real Estate Council of Alberta where feasible to do so, many of these agents are bound by information-sharing policies and privacy legislation wherein they are only able to share these with other bona fide investigative and enforcement agencies. Strengthening the Real Estate Council of Alberta's mandate to clearly an investigation and enforcement role in terms of mortgage fraud will go a long ways to ensuring that the Real Estate Council of Alberta is empowered to receive such information.

One of the other aspects that I heard some of the members talking about is: what else can we do to combat mortgage fraud? Well, amendments are being submitted from other acts which are also impacted by mortgage fraud issues. Government Services and the Real Estate Council of Alberta have also developed a tipsheet to help consumers, lenders, and real estate professionals protect themselves from mortgage fraud. The Real Estate Act was amended in 2004 for licensing of appraisers by the Real Estate Council of Alberta, and all industry members were also required to take mandatory mortgage fraud awareness courses offered by the Real Estate Council of Alberta.

5:20

Some of the other aspects that were sort of discussed earlier were on the Advisory Committee on Mortgage Fraud and who the members were. Well, because mortgage fraud impacts a variety of

sectors, it was important to work with partners to outline what the next steps should be. To review these issues and develop potential solutions, the Minister of Government Services struck the Advisory Committee on Mortgage Fraud. This committee brought together representatives from a cross-section of society, including the financial sector, the real estate sector, the legal community, law enforcement agencies, and representatives from four Alberta ministries: Government Services, Justice and Attorney General, Finance, Solicitor General and Public Security.

So these are some of the items that I thought I'd bring up, and if there are any more that I have missed from the members opposite, I'll bring them up and clarify them in third reading. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I attended that course about mortgage fraud a couple of years ago, and even two years ago they were talking about stopping the assumption of a mortgage. I think it is only this province which allows assumption of a mortgage. This rumour was going on for a long, long time. Why so far have we failed to enforce this law? Another thing: RECA I don't think has the power to enforce this type of fraud or illegal activities in the real estate market. Could you please clarify that?

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think the main thing we're talking about here is the co-operation and co-ordination that we're working on with all sectors and sharing the information so that we can combat the aspect of mortgage fraud so that we can work with it so that we don't move forward and have people suffer a lot on these aspects. Like I mentioned before, the sharing of knowledge with the financial sector, the real estate sector, and the legal community as well as law enforcement agencies – at least they work in a cohesive group so that they don't allow this aspect of mortgage fraud in our province to continue, as we've seen in the earlier days when we had people possibly just paying a dollar to take over the mortgage of a home. So this way, they're working together to combat that.

Thank you.

Mr. Agnihotri: The problem has been there for a long, long time. Why are they not taking action?

Mr. Strang: Well, they are taking action, Mr. Chairman. They're moving forward on this and working together. I mean, we're just bringing this together now, bringing these amendments in so that they can work together co-operatively to make sure that this mortgage fraud is going to be under control. We've got to pass this first before they'll be able to work together.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very quick here. [some applause] I love it when I get applause. It doesn't happen often.

The amendment is fine: "to protect against, investigate, detect and suppress." I mean, anything that we can do. We've already talked about Alberta being the mortgage fraud capital of Canada. I want to say that we can pass a lot of bills here, but we have some other serious problems because in an overheated economy, this is going to

go up. The police say that this is automatic. I think the member would agree with me that just by adding this as an amendment – it's a good one – we're not going to solve the problem. I don't know what else can be done. I'm not sure about the licensing, how people get into the business, whether that should be toughened up or not, but this is going to continue, I think, to be a major problem even with this amendment. I think the member would agree. I'm just asking the question – perhaps the member can't answer – if there is something else we can do in terms of licensing to try to deal with it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. What we're looking at right now is that these changes will involve considerable consultation with industry and investigation agencies on what practical steps will work best to combat mortgage fraud and help consumers. They reflect the ongoing and collaborative efforts on the part of government to ensure that it is taking the mortgage fraud issue seriously and that it deals with these areas in a proactive manner. So I think that's what we're looking at, and as the member stated, we've got to pass this to move forward. Sure, we've got a booming economy, but I think that with this amendment we'll make sure that we help curtail this.

So I'd move out of committee at this time.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 13, Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 4

Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to make a few comments with respect to this matter in committee. The first point I'd like to mention is that it really doesn't matter if we have the same time changes as other parts of the world. This is something that some of the members raised in their comments in second. Specifically, other jurisdictions have managed to exist without following the path of their neighbours. There has been one major difference with the decision made by these jurisdictions. They have simply not followed daylight saving time at all. We're not eliminating the time change, only discussing when we change. Changing the clocks at the same time as most of our immediate neighbours is the easiest way to make this happen. It's one change two times a year, and that's all. Simply, there is no confusion.

I'd also like to take a moment to discuss the safety of schoolchildren because that, again, came up in some of the comments in second reading. I certainly don't want anyone to be left with the impression that we're not concerned with the safety of our children. In fact, I think the evidence would indicate that the safety of our

children will be enhanced as a result of this initiative. Obviously, changing the clock earlier will affect how dark it is when the children leave for school, and I trust that parents, educators, and drivers will continue to be aware of the need for vigilance in the morning.

On the other side of that issue is the effect it will have in the afternoon. Transport Canada has advised that there will likely be a reduction in the number of pedestrian and motor vehicle occupant fatalities and injuries. They told us that most pedestrian injuries occur between the hours of 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. The extra daylight

during that period will make pedestrians more visible.

As one hon. member pointed out, we are not the first off the mark on this, and the only question remaining is: what will be made most easy for Albertans . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but under Standing Order 4(4) the committee stands adjourned until 8 o'clock tonight, at which time we'll reconvene in committee.

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 21, 2006** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 06/03/21
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: We'll call the committee to order.

Bill 4 Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: I recognize the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just wish to conclude my remarks from this afternoon by saying that Bill 4 is a bill that we consulted on. We're proceeding with the recommendation of the people that we consulted with, that we should be making this change by adding four weeks throughout the year to daylight saving. It is a good bill for industry; it is a good bill for Albertans. I would encourage all members to support this.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 4, Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006. Actually, it's the first time that I've been able to speak about this bill. Bill 4 ensures that our yearly love affair with daylight saving will take place earlier and last longer. So the spring ahead will take place a few weeks earlier, on the second Sunday of March, and the fall back will occur on the first Sunday of November.

I thank the hon. minister for his history lesson about daylight saving in Alberta. I have a very personal interest in this topic because my astronomer father worked in the time service with the dominion observatory in Ottawa. My oldest son actually just moved a few weeks ago to Greenwich, England. As is well known, Greenwich Mean Time is the basis for the world's time zones, which begin on the Greenwich meridian, longitude zero.

Daylight saving time was first implemented by Germany and Austria at 11 p.m. on April 30, 1916, and many other European countries, including Britain, followed suit. Nova Scotia and Manitoba adopted daylight saving at the same time as Britain, and the United States adopted it in 1918. Recently the United States has proposed an extension of daylight saving to begin in 2007, and Ontario, Manitoba, and Quebec have already chosen to follow the lead of the U.S.

As the minister has pointed out, the rationale for following the lead of the United States includes many factors. The importance of remaining in line with our most important trade partner is supported by our financial and business sector. In the realm of agriculture with the transportation of live animals and perishable food across the border it is important that we be on the same page in respect to time. Of course, it's convenient to travelers if flight schedules are on the same time schedule. The argument about energy savings has some merit, I suppose, since more daylight at the evening rush hour reduces energy consumption.

As the minister said this afternoon, Transport Canada advises that the extra hours of daylight in the evening would reduce pedestrian and motor vehicle occupant fatalities and injuries, although this argument has to be balanced by the fact that the morning rush hour

will see more darkness. That is not a problem if you live in the U.S., but it's quite wearisome to have to get up in the morning in the midst of darkness for so long during the winter months. Of course, the many hearty Canadians living in the far north would not be impressed by such whining.

I could go on and give an extensive lecture on sun worship, which goes back to paleolithic times when you'd find that the dead were buried facing the direction of the rising sun. Ancient temples, especially in Egypt, were built with their entrances facing the rising sun. But I won't go on with that lecture.

I will conclude by referring to Plato's famous allegory of the cave. He saw the liberation of people from the darkness of the cave moving out into the sunlight as a movement from ignorance into the light of truth. In conclusion, let me say that if this move to daylight saving is also accompanied by a commitment of this government to greater transparency and truth, then so let it happen. Amen and amen.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, after that inspiring speech and in light of the savings that may occur as a result of this bill, I would like to ask the hon. minister if any effort has been made to study the electricity grid to see if there will be at least any modest reduction in electricity consumption in this province as a result of this bill.

Certainly, whenever we look at Bill 4, it is necessary for Albertans, as the hon. minister stated earlier, to remain in sync with our largest trading partner. Our financial interests, our agricultural interests, our transportation interests: all of these sectors need this change to maintain our competitive advantage. If there's a chance again, as I said, to reduce our energy consumption due to this change, even a small saving to the power grid, then certainly I would urge all hon. members to vote for this bill.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to remind all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly of the importance of our north-south ties. Some people talk about our east-west ties, but our north-south ties are so important, and the integration is much too valuable to be jeopardized by not implementing this bill. This is not just a case of following the Americans. It is vitally important to our economy to remain synchronized with our largest trading partner. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has talked about the Canadian provinces, and he is absolutely correct, but we also have to be cognizant of our trading partner south of the border.

With that, I will conclude my remarks on Bill 4. I can't imagine any people who would be opposed to this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In looking at the object of this bill, the proposed legislation will mean an extension of daylight saving time by having daylight saving time come into effect three weeks earlier than before, the second Sunday in March, and also falling back by one week, the first Sunday in November. I'm speaking in support of this bill, but I'd like to make some observations.

I think this is about bringing Alberta practice in line with other jurisdictions around us. The alternative is what we see on a current FedEx commercial: offices adding or subtracting from the calendar to deal with the outside world. The United States Congress has made a start here, increasing the number of weeks per year that the clock is advanced to save energy consumption. If this motion

passes, Alberta will be the fourth Canadian jurisdiction to follow suit. Alberta was one of the last provinces to adopt daylight saving time in Canada. Daylight saving time was first invented in 1921. It did not come to Alberta until the end of the 1960s and the Social Credit era due to rural opposition. So now it's about 40 years old.

If Alberta was behind the country in first adopting daylight saving time, we need to remember that Canada led the world in the adoption of standard time. Many Canadians are becoming aware of the legacy of Sandford Fleming, the engineer who surveyed passes through the mountains for two railways, designed the first original Canadian postage stamp, and put together the proposal for standard time that was eventually adopted by the rest of the world. Fleming's contribution is well documented in Clark Blaise's book, *Time Lord*.

There's a philosophical side to this issue also. The Greeks had two words for time: khronos, or measured time, with its sequence of minutes, hours, days, and weeks; and kairos, or appropriate time, the right time to be born, plant, harvest, marry, leave home, as in the 1960s song *Turn, Turn, Turn*. In our world khronos is the only time we know. We try to fit our lives, our children's development, our body rhythms, and our choices into it, but it doesn't always work that way. The time sense of our First Nations, of young children, of the aged, and of artists, a time sense that we call primitive and underdeveloped, has something to teach us here. It is in the nowness of their needs that our children call us more fully into life and rescue us from the tyranny of the clock time.

If we adopt this bill – and I believe we will – let's see that time becomes a tool, not continue as a tyrant. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on Bill 4 in committee. I spoke on this bill during second reading and spoke in support of it, so I won't repeat the reasons for support. I think they are the reasons that were well articulated by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General in introducing the bill, and we agree with those reasons for bringing forward the changes.

8:10

There were some concerns expressed by several members when speaking on this bill with respect to how changing daylight saving time in the spring, in particular, would cause young children to walk to school when there is not enough daylight, perhaps, for them to walk to school safely. So some concerns expressed that this might expose our children on their way to school in the morning to some increased risk of being involved in a traffic accident, if not entirely run over. I think that's something that needs to be considered.

We make all kinds of assumptions when we either propose legislation or speak to it. Often we hope that those assumptions are sound, but sometimes only experience tells whether or not every one of those assumptions is indeed sound and things turn out as they're supposed to. So I would suggest that we monitor for the next year or two, as we make this change, the incidents of young children involved in accidents in the morning rather than pedestrians at the closing end of the day, if I may use that term, as has been the case in the past, and see if there's a change needed then. If we need to revisit, we'll do it then.

Certainly there is more than daylight hours that affects the safety of our roads. If we are intent on protecting our children walking to school in the morning, especially as a result of these changes that we are making – and we should be – we must obviously teach our children better road safety rules as well as address other outside factors such as the behaviour of motorists. For example, according to Stats Canada, young pedestrian victims under 14 years of age are

most often at fault for their injuries. Clearly, there is some room there, therefore, to educate our young children with respect to traffic rules and their own safety. As for motorists' behaviour, aside from increasing penalties for drunk drivers and speeding, we must also address the issue of cellphone use while driving, which has been banned in other places, including the United Kingdom, for example.

These issues may sound peripheral to the daylight saving debate, a change in the daylight saving hours, but these come from questions raised during the second reading of this bill, so we feel that they ought to be addressed as clearly as other issues.

In general I think that I am in support of the bill. Let's move on with the passage of the bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Briefly. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona makes a good point, that we should monitor the early morning hours of this extension. In that regard, I know that the information we have regarding the potential effect of this from a safety perspective has been provided to us by Transport Canada, and I'll ask my department to follow up with that organization to ask them, when they next consider this matter, if they could take into account the point of additional dark time in this four-week extension of daylight saving. I think that's an excellent point, and I do appreciate your comment in that regard.

For Edmonton-Gold Bar there's no doubt that in the information that's available on this, the Americans used energy saving as their number one reason for bringing in the bill. I can also tell you that independent of that I've seen anecdotal evidence that there will be some modest saving simply because there will be more daylight in the latter part of the day when more of us are up. Hence, the idea is that less lights will be turned on during that time, and as a result there will be some modest saving. Time will tell.

In any event, I appreciate the members' comments and would call the question.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 4, Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 5

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have some brief comments I'd like to make with respect to Bill 5, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, in committee. I do appreciate the input and comments of the hon. members in second reading. This bill, once again, deals with minor amendments to three pieces of justice legislation: the Civil Enforcement Act, the judicature amendment act, and the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act.

Briefly, Mr. Chairman, the Civil Enforcement Act amendments will further refine and clarify the process for seizing property that is already under seizure so that all types of creditors can use the same process under the act.

The amendments to the judicature amendment act, which had been originally introduced in 2004, will refine and clarify original amendments that allow structured settlements in injury and death cases so that payments can be made in instalments rather than in a lump sum.

The last amendments relate to the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is correct. The reason for these amendments is in large measure as a result of going digital in about the year 2000, so much of what is involved in these minor amendments is to bring us up to date in the 21st century. I can tell the hon. member that we continue to have court reporters even though we are digital because there are certain cases, for example, that require daily transcripts, and where daily transcripts are required, it's my understanding that court reporters do continue to attend in the courtroom.

In any event, I appreciate the comments of the members to date. These are practical amendments to three pieces of justice legislation which will improve justice in Alberta, and I look forward to receiving the support of the members for this particular bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the Minister of Justice for his explanation of the recommended amendments in his addressing this bill in second reading. This bill deals with minor amendments, I think, to three different pieces of legislation.

First, the amendments to the Civil Enforcement Act. These amendments simply refine the process for creditors who seize properties. At first I had difficulty understanding the language, which is the case for most of these bills, but the minister's explanation is very helpful. We are dealing here with two different kinds of creditors: the distressed creditor, someone like a landlord who is owed rent by a tenant and who has the right to seize property, and an enforcement creditor, who can seize property under a court order. So with the changes being suggested, if the distressed creditor has a recognized interest in a property, the enforcement creditor may also give notice of his interest and vice versa.

There's no point in my summarizing the points already made by the minister. My understanding is that these changes are rooted in recommendations of the Uniform Law Conference. Frankly, I did not know about the existence of such a body. The Uniform Law Conference was founded in 1918 and charged with the task of harmonizing the laws of the provinces and territories of Canada. It meets every year bringing government policy lawyers together to consider where harmonization of laws would be of benefit. It sounds about as exciting as a group of bishops getting together to decide cannon law or the creeds of the church, but I assume that someone has to do this kind of work and make the right kinds of recommendations. The legal advice that I have received is that this is just fine-tuning of procedures and that I do not need to ask any questions or comment further.

8:20

The second part of this Bill 5 is an amendment that has to do with awards by courts in respect to injuries or death. My understanding is that traditionally the courts have awarded lump-sum damages for personal injuries, and there has been pressure over the years to allow

for structured settlements which can provide for the plaintiff a steady stream of money.

One of the important issues here is the tax situation. If the lump-sum award is invested in order to produce money as needed for years to come, the income earned by the investment will be taxed while in the plaintiff's hands. What needs to happen is that the whole sum of the award must take this into consideration so that the income generated by the award and the investment will pay the tax and provide what the plaintiff needs.

The changes recommended here in this bill provide guidelines for courts to order structured settlements in such a way that the plaintiff doesn't have to worry about the tax issues. The positive value of this is that the plaintiff doesn't have to worry about investing the money, money he might be tempted to spend right away, and he doesn't have to worry about the taxes. So this is a good thing, and I have no issues about the wording of this amendment.

The third part, the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act, proposes to update the definition of a reporter as defined in the *Alberta Rules of Court*. It repeals Section 1(b)(f) and updates the language of "reporter" to refer to "a person who is appointed by the Minister as a court reporter for the purposes of this Act or an agent or employee of that person." Given the evolution of recording of court actions from typing to digital recordings by machine, the amendment allows for the certification of such records by the court official in charge of the sound-recording machine. There are other additions in this amendment in respect to the storage of records and the keeping of records for 10 years, after which they may be erased.

My only question – and I think the minister has already alluded to it – is about the traditional role of official court reporters, which has been quite important. They have been, it appears, independent officers of the court charged with the task of making a record of the proceedings, then transcribing the record, and under oath certifying the accuracy of the transcription. This is extremely important because in the case of an appeal to a higher court, there must be an accurate account of court proceedings. It's very important to recognize the independence of the court reporter, who does not work directly for the judge or the lawyers but is the "official court reporter."

Now that the government has installed digital recording devices, does this mean that such official court reporters are unnecessary? Section 4(b) is amended, and it is no longer necessary for a transcript to be certified by a court reporter. Who is it that certifies digital recordings? The substitution of 3(1) states that a record must be certified "by the judge or the court official in charge of the sound-recording machine." Who is this court official? Presumably, the reporter as referred to above in this amendment, a person appointed by the minister or an agent or employee of that person. I don't know. Is something lost here in terms of the independence of court reporters? I think one could see that independence and the role of court reporters as a kind of check or a safeguard on court proceedings, and I'm just wondering if that independence, that safeguard is somehow compromised here. So that's my only question.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I spoke to this bill in its second reading and dwelt on the importance of the maintenance enforcement program and how it has helped children and families who find themselves in a situation where maintenance support is necessary, so I won't repeat that. I indicated our support for the bill in general. I asked some very general questions. Those questions are on record, but they're not questions of the sort that would either

lead me to propose any amendments or express any serious reservations while supporting the bill. So that said, I simply conclude my remarks by reiterating our general support for the legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Just briefly to the point raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. There are less reporters today as a result of the conversion to digital. Prior to digital the reporters took the record and when necessary converted it into transcript. Today the digital equipment takes the record, and where necessary the reporter converts it into transcript. So the role of the reporter in terms of ensuring that the record is correct for either use in court in the first instance or on appeal remains identical to that before. They're just using the digital recording device rather than the mechanical recording devices that they had previously. So I think I can safely say to the hon. member that the role of the reporter in that regard is the same. It hasn't altered whatsoever.

I would call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 6

Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to make some remarks with respect to Bill 6 in committee. There were a number of points raised by hon. members in second reading, and I would like to try and address some of those points at this time. I certainly appreciate the feedback that I received from members and their genuine interest in this very important program, the maintenance enforcement program.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona asked a number of questions. His questions centred on the bill's provisions regarding financial examinations and maintenance enforcement support agreements. First, I'll speak to the financial examinations. Perhaps it will clarify some things for all members if I take the time to explain in more detail exactly what a financial examination is.

Simply put, the act allows the director to require a debtor to appear at MEP's office to be examined on their finances. Mr. Chairman, these are seriously defaulting debtors that are examined. During these examinations staff reviews debtors' financial particulars so they can negotiate a repayment schedule with the debtor. Financial examinations give MEP and debtors another avenue to resolve matters before using the courts.

This is still a very formal and serious process; however, the financial examination gives the debtor the opportunity to talk to a MEP representative and to come clean with a fresh start. The debtor is able to obtain referrals to organizations such as creditor counselling or addictions counselling and begin feeling responsible again by making payment arrangements. MEP is also able to update its files with relevant information on the debtor and children to ensure that correct amounts are being collected.

Mr. Chairman, in almost all cases the financial examination process involves MEP and the debtor only. The court is not usually involved whatsoever. Currently the courts only become involved in the financial examination process at the request of MEP's legal counsel. This request would be made when the debtor fails to appear for the financial examination or where a debtor appears but still refuses to provide full financial disclosure to the director. MEP may then apply to a court for an order compelling the debtor to attend at MEP or provide disclosure to MEP. Should the debtor still fail to comply with financial disclosure, MEP may then apply for a further order finding the debtor in contempt of court, and should the debtor still fail to appear before the director, MEP may apply for a warrant for the debtor's arrest.

8:30

Mr. Chairman, Bill 6 seeks court assistance with financial examination in a couple of other key areas. First, the bill would allow the court to grant substitutional service orders for summoning debtors to appear at MEP's office. This means that a summons can be served to someone who knows the debtor in substitution for serving the debtor personally. I can tell you that this is a standard procedure under the rules of court in ordinary civil litigation proceedings. Currently MEP is required by its act to personally serve someone with a summons to appear for a financial examination. That means having a process server hand the documents directly to the debtor. However, there are debtors who are difficult to serve. In fact, some people go to great lengths to evade service. For example, they may refuse to come to the door when a process server arrives or tell people at work to say that that person is not there if someone comes calling.

In these cases, Mr. Chairman, Bill 6 will enable MEP to go to the courts, explain the past problems in service, and ask for an order allowing for service of the summons in a different way. This might mean allowing MEP to substitutionally serve through the debtor's relative, friend, or employer or allowing the documents to be posted on the door of the debtor's home. With substitutional service MEP will be able to call more debtors to attend at financial examination, and since financial examinations have been very successful, it will provide MEP with the tools that will almost assuredly have more dollars collected for the creditors.

A second area where the member asked questions for clarification was regarding alternative arrangements for examination. Bill 6 seeks to provide MEP with the court's assistance by allowing the court to order alternative arrangements for financial examination of the debtor. This will give MEP the ability to conduct financial examinations in locations other than MEP's office. Examples of when this would be useful would be if a debtor were incarcerated or unable to travel. Again, the intention here is to give MEP more ability to conduct the examinations and to be flexible in where the examination takes place.

The member also had a question about adjournment of financial examination. The purpose of this amendment is to provide MEP and the debtor with greater flexibility and less paperwork. The amendment will allow MEP rather than the courts to grant the adjournment. For example, if the debtor has not brought all the necessary documents or if the debtor or MEP staff cannot complete the examination in the scheduled time, they will be able to adjourn the examination to a time that is agreeable to all without the requirement to re-serve the debtor. Also, if the debtor calls MEP after first being served and requests the examination to be rescheduled to avoid the debtor's missing another important obligation, the amendment will facilitate this. Mr. Chairman, the provision for adjournments will allow MEP to accommodate debtors' schedules, and this will likely result in greater attendance.

In short, the changes in the Maintenance Enforcement Act to support financial examinations will result in more efficiency and client satisfaction. The changes will also result in higher collections and greater resolution of arrears because more financial examination will occur.

Before I leave this particular topic, I'd like to address a comment made by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. She was concerned that alternative arrangements for financial exams might allow debtors to get accountants in and paint a bleak picture of their finances so that they can get out of paying support. This certainly is not the intention of Bill 6, nor will it likely be the result. As mentioned earlier, the intention of allowing the court to order alternative arrangements for financial examinations is to grant the ability to conduct examinations at places that are more convenient for MEP and the debtor.

As for debtors trying to get out of paying support, MEP's experience with financial examinations so far shows that the collection rate is very high. Staff is well trained to identify when a debtor may be exaggerating hardship. In these cases if MEP feels that a reasonable payment arrangement cannot be negotiated, a default hearing may still be scheduled in court. This is a separate process, that MEP has had in its legislation for many years, requiring a debtor to appear in court to explain why they have not been paying maintenance. In other words, where MEP feels that debtors are not being truthful, those debtors may be asked to convince a court of their position. Bill 6 does not in any way change that default hearing process.

Referring back to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's comments, I'd like to address his question regarding the registration of maintenance enforcement support agreements. As I understand it, the member is concerned that parties may feel that there is a loss of control by allowing MEP to file their agreement. Mr. Chairman, it's important to underscore the fact that the ability of the parties to file their maintenance enforcement support agreements themselves is not compromised whatsoever by this amendment, and there are no legal implications resulting from this change. If the amendment is passed, the parties will still be able to file and serve their own agreements. The benefit is that they will also have the option of having MEP do the filing and serving for them. For many people courts are intimidating. Even filing a document is a burden for some. The amendments here will allow MEP staff to take on, if requested, those responsibilities of those people who wish to register with the program, and in my perspective, access to justice, which is one of the primary objects of Alberta Justice, will be advanced.

Those are the comments I have, Mr. Chairman, with respect to the questions raised by hon. members in second reading, and I would encourage all to support this very good bill, which amends an important part of the work we do in Alberta Justice under the maintenance enforcement program.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are a number of amendments to the Maintenance Enforcement Act here, and the purpose of these amendments is to facilitate better access to justice for families dealing with MEP. I thank the hon. minister for his explanations although when he gave his speech in second reading, the first amendment he discussed is actually the last amendment. He discussed them in reverse order, causing me considerable confusion for about 30 seconds, but then I realized what he was talking about.

I don't have many comments. In the first amendment, which is number 2 in the bill, section 10.1 is amended by adding a clause that allows for the director to file documents on behalf of either party

with the Court of Queen's Bench and to give notice of the filing to either party. This seems to facilitate the process on behalf of the parties involved since they do not have to serve notice of the filing to the other party. MEP will do this and inform all involved, and there seems to be no problems with that. That facilitates things.

Amendment 3. Section 17.1 of the act is amended by adding (2.1), which allows the MEP to access funds that a debtor has in locked-in retirement funds, or LIRAs. Previously such funds were not accessible, and this was changed in 2004. This is obviously in the best interests of children, who need the financial support right away instead of waiting for years and years. But as the minister has pointed out, in practice financial institutions have insisted that such funds cannot be accessed until the debtor is at least 50 years old. This amendment makes it possible for families to access these retirement funds right away, and this amendment makes it clear that when a financial institution is given notice to pay out from a retirement fund, it is not entitled to deduct anything for charges or for any tax withheld. So there are no problems with that.

Amendment 4. Section 24 is amended and allows for the director to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench "for alternative arrangements for the examination of a debtor" and his financial circumstances. The hon. minister has explained in great detail the importance of these meetings with the debtor concerning his employment and his financial circumstances. I have a greater appreciation of the complexities involved and what MEP has to confront in dealing with people who owe money for the support of children, and I recognize the success that MEP has had in dealing with debtors, bringing in about \$900,000 a month.

8:40

The changes proposed under subsection (5) assume that there is a problem with the debtor appearing before the director because many debtors try to evade their responsibility, so this addition allows for more flexibility. I don't know whether it was intended to make the process less confrontational so that debtors would be encouraged to come in and discuss their special circumstances. Such a change would allow debtors to come in and deal with their circumstances and responsibilities before they risk arrest. This would obviously save the court's time.

I guess that in general the only question I have – I mean, I appreciate all the complexities. I don't know whether this question even makes sense. I think we have to ask in relationship to the children who are affected: what are the gains and losses with this change? Is the attempt to facilitate the process to speed it up so that the debtor is dealt with in a quicker way before you have to go to the court? Will more people respond when they have that opportunity before the courts get involved? I guess that's the question. You know, there's a problem here. I guess it's necessary because debtors keep trying to evade their responsibilities, even moving their residence and fleeing to other provinces, so there have to be some steps to facilitate this process. It is very complex. That's all I have to say.

Amendment 5. Section 36 is amended by striking out "periodic payment" and substituting just the words "payment or payments." This will ensure that families will get the current funds owing to them under a maintenance order before any arrears or any fees and charges are collected. So families owed by the debtor will receive the money currently owed to them before the issue of arrears is addressed or the issue of penalties for late payments is addressed. This change is clearly a good thing because the families need the money right away.

So those are my comments. Other than the one question, that is all I have, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate this opportunity to stand up and respond to Bill 6, Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006, in this stage of debate.

Undoubtedly this is one of the main or major concerns that each of us here in this House receives in his or her constituency office. Family maintenance is probably one of the main topics, you know, for walk-in traffic in the constituency office or people phoning asking for help or clarification: where to go, who to talk to, and things like this. It's apparently a growing problem. It's not an urban-only issue or a rural-only issue. It's evenly spread out across the province and across Canada, for that matter. The issues surrounding family maintenance and the issues surrounding child care and custody and all these things are really a growing concern not only for us as elected officials but for the parents that have to go through them or for the government agencies like the maintenance enforcement program, that looks after the collection component of that formula.

I'm looking at some statistics here. I realize that in Committee of the Whole we are supposed to mainly focus on the provisions one by one or the line-by-line stipulations in the bill, and I'm going to do that in about a minute. But I'm noticing here that, for example, in the year 2004-05 the maintenance enforcement program had a collection rate of 84 per cent, which amounts to about \$167 million. I'm getting this from the government backgrounder that accompanied their press release on February 24. In 2005-06, which is this current year, the MEP was projected to have a collection rate of 88 per cent, which amounts to about \$182 million.

Now, I look at these statistics in two ways. One, that, yes, we are scoring more success in our collection efforts, which is great. We still have a bit more to do, or some more road to travel, which is acceptable because things seem to be improving overall. But it also shows that \$182 million was pending or in transition between the debtors and the creditors, or between one parent and the other. So we have to look at other ways to further address this concern.

I keep thinking that there has to be more education for parents. There has to be more sort of a heavy-handed approach, like you get one strike and the second strike you're out type of thing. We have to be extra vigilant in our collection efforts. We have to be extra forceful in those collection efforts because some people get away with things. They think that the system is too relaxed or too easy on them.

I have been exposed to many situations where the children are used as leverage. They're used as a bargaining chip from one parent to the other. Mostly the parent that has custody would use the children to arm twist or blackmail the other parent. They deny them visitation. They prevent them from seeing the kids, and there is a lot of emotional and psychological trauma to those children. We all know that children typically and normally require care and love and attention from both parents, and now they're being used as leverage, or a bargaining chip, and it's really traumatic for them.

You also hear cases about, you know, some settlements or payments that are being done outside of the MEP. Sometimes one parent would tell the other that it's an emergency or that it's needed for this or that. They both either agree or by negligence fail to report it to the MEP, and then these payments or settlements are never registered. I'm telling every person that walks into the constituency office in Edmonton-McClung: "No, don't do things outside of the program. Register every payment on the program because that's proof that you've actually done your part and you're abiding by the collection notice."

Another angle that caught my eye is that based on surveys, the

client – and I don't typically like that word, but anyway, being the debtor or the creditor – satisfaction with the MEP has also steadily climbed from 54 per cent in 1999 to 68 per cent in 2005. Again, you can read numbers either way. You can look at the percentage approval, or you can also think about the percentage disapproval. I think that dissatisfaction would either stem from deadbeat parents who are forced to comply, and they don't like it and they're complaining about it, or from the other parent who is going through difficult times and the program doesn't seem to be delivering. There is a failure to collect, which places a bigger burden on the creditor. So, again, I refer back to the issue of education and enforceability because no deadbeat parent should get away with it, and we should be looking at ways, like we are today in this Bill 6, to streamline and improve the process.

Now, I'll talk about the section-by-section analysis, the different provisions in this bill, and I promise to do it briefly. Section 2, which amends section 10.1 of the Maintenance Enforcement Act, adds a clause which allows the director on behalf of either party to file documents contained in a maintenance agreement – that is to be done with the Court of Queen's Bench – and to give notice to either party. This is good. It allows the MEP staff to take care of certain processes on behalf of the parties. So really what we're doing here is facilitating and intervening on their behalf, which is a positive direction to take.

8:50

Adding the new subsection (2.1) in section 17.1 allows the MEP to access funds that the debtor has in a locked-in retirement vehicle, which is great. These debtors, if they're sneaky or if they're trying to cheat the system by locking some of their money into RRSPs or some long-term GICs or stuff like that, would now face the same exposure because the MEP can actually go in and take some of that. So I also support this.

Adding section 24, allowing the director to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for alternative arrangements for the financial examination of a debtor, makes the process less confrontational. I agree with that too because, you know, emotions are running high as it is. There is usually confrontation. There is animosity between the two parents or the two partners. It's really difficult for the kids and difficult for them, too, as it is. So it alleviates some of that.

In section 5 the amendment ensures that families get the current funds owing under the maintenance order before any penalties are collected for late payments or failure to pay and so on. In other words, families owed by the debtor will receive the money currently owed to them before looking at any outstanding debt or penalties for late payments. Once the current balance owing is paid out, 90 per cent of any remaining money will be allocated to the arrears and the remaining 10 per cent will be allocated to the fees and charges payable to the MEP. So that's good.

I really support this bill. I think it's a step in the right direction. I would just add before I conclude that one area that I think should be addressed by the government from now on is cross-jurisdictional or interprovincial co-operation because some parents might leave Alberta and go to B.C., for example, and it takes longer to talk to the equivalent of the MEP in B.C. and try to get the money from there. Maybe talk to the federal government, that they can possibly take over the MEP program and administer it federally, and we could be the Alberta branch, and British Columbia would be the B.C. branch, and so on and so forth and have cross-jurisdictional co-operation. Having one database where all the payments are registered, where all the outstanding debts are catalogued and listed, and then having one agency federally looking at it would definitely alleviate a lot of

pain and suffering. People change addresses. They move from one jurisdiction to the next. It makes it really difficult to track the money and to track the debtor to extract that money from him or her.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity, and I invite further comment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 6, Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006. I want to thank the minister for addressing in some considerable detail several of the questions that were raised in the debate on this bill in second reading. Certainly, for me many of those questions have been addressed to my satisfaction. I had questions about substitutional service orders, allowing for alternate arrangements, financial examinations. Those have been answered. The director of MEP's power to file maintenance orders with the court on either party's behalf was another set of questions that I had. They've been answered.

Mr. Chairman, having heard the minister address those questions in detail, I really don't have much more to add to what I've already stated with respect to my support for this bill. With those questions addressed and clarification provided, I'm happy to support the bill because I think it will make life easier for everyone and certainly make the MEP program much more effective.

I have one question here, and it just occurred to me as I was going through what the minister had said. The discretionary powers of the director of the MEP are quite considerable. Perhaps they have been further enhanced. There's always a question of how good the director's judgments are when they allow that kind of discretionary power to one office or to one person holding that office. That's the only question that came to mind. Are there any ways in which a director's use of discretionary powers can be either challenged or examined by a third party or can be appealed? Those sorts of things come to mind. You know, to have a fair procedure, which is very important in matters of dispensing justice, is an important one, I think, and I just raise it as a question that I'm curious about. It's an enormous amount of discretionary power to the director, and I hope that it works well. It will address, I think, many of the problems that the minister and his staff have identified and then have proposed legislation to address.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A few brief comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora asked in general why we are making some of these changes. I think it's to facilitate the process so that it is going to be easier for those who are part of this process. I must say that the debtors who become part of the financial examination process, I would think, in many cases would be some of our more difficult cases because people who are paying and who are complying clearly don't get into that particular process.

That being said, I rely upon the information that is provided by the experts; that is, the director of the maintenance enforcement program. I am told that there is incredible success when people actually get into the financial examination process. There is great confidence by the director and other people from the program that these changes, while on the surface appearing to be of a conflict nature, the fact that they're in the same room and they'll be able to discuss these matters, gives the director and his staff a belief that

they will be more successful in accomplishing the goal of collecting the money and entering into meaningful and successful repayment programs. That is what I am told. That is why we are bringing it forward, and we will monitor it like we monitor all of our changes to see whether or not our belief is in fact ultimately reflected in the product.

To the Member for Edmonton-McClung and to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I would say this about the future and future potential changes. The last examination of this bill was a number of years ago. In fact, it was just a few months ago that we brought in the last of the recommendations from that particular review. I would anticipate that in a couple of years or so we will probably be considering reviewing the program again in light of the fact that we brought in a number of amendments over the years to examine how they are working, to see how other jurisdictions are operating. This is clearly a program that will continue to be under review. We want it to be as efficient and effective as possible. We are all in agreement as to the appropriateness of the goal of the program.

I certainly appreciate the support and the comments of the members who have spoken to it and look forward to your continuing support as we move this through. Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 6, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

9:00

Bill 7

Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to make a few comments with respect to Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, in committee. I'd like to thank the hon. members for Edmonton-McClung and Edmonton-Strathcona for their comments in support of the bill at second reading.

The Assembly heard from me in second that the amendments are designed to adjust wording to clearly indicate that a personal injury lawsuit involving the motor vehicle accident claims program can be commenced in either the Court of Queen's Bench or Provincial Court, and accordingly terminology in the act will be changed to reflect that.

I'd like to provide some additional explanation to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, who had some important comments to make. The question was asked whether a person could begin his or her own action without a lawyer as the system works today. In fact, Mr. Chairman, the ability does currently exist, but in this particular piece of legislation it's not as clear as it could be, and it's that lack of clarity that gives rise to the amendments here although it's certainly clear that whether you're in Provincial Court

or whether you're in Queen's Bench, you can go there and proceed on your own as a self-represented litigant.

The concern is that the act here uses language that is particular to the Court of Queen's Bench. Therefore, a citizen wishing to commence a lawsuit for personal injuries in Provincial Court may read the act and be left with the mistaken impression that they cannot do so. That clearly is not the practice today, but we're trying to ensure that our legislation reflects the practice.

They may read the terms of the act that are different from what they may be reading from other sources. For instance, a person reading an Alberta Justice publication or viewing the Alberta Justice website on how to commence a claim in Provincial Court will notice certain key words such as "civil claim," "dispute note," and "notice of application." All of these terms are associated with the Provincial Court. In the current legislation, however, these terms are referred to as "statement of claim," "statement of defence," and "notice of motion," and all of those terms are associated primarily with the Court of Queen's Bench. Once again, we want to ensure that there is no confusion or misunderstanding as to a person's legal right to sue under the act in Provincial Court or to act without legal counsel.

One amendment, Mr. Chairman, deals directly with wording that is more inviting to a self-represented litigant. In the current version of the act section 25(2)(h) states that a barrister and solicitor but not a self-represented litigant may be paid for costs of services performed subsequent to the judgment being obtained. The amendment is removing the words "barristers and solicitors" so that self-represented litigants can be reimbursed for any costs they incur as well. As you can see by this example, these changes are important to our overall goal of improving speedy and efficient access to justice for Albertans.

Further changes to the act, Mr. Chairman, include the following: wherever the act says "statement of claim," it will also now say "or civil claim." Wherever the act says "statement of defence," it will also now say "or dispute note." Wherever the act says "notice of motion" or "originating notice," it will also now say "or notice of application."

Section 4 of the act is being amended to reflect that an agent other than a barrister and solicitor in Provincial Court may represent the Administrator. In section 4 the act is being amended to specify what the Administrator may do on behalf of the defendant in Provincial Court or the Court of Queen's Bench, since procedurally there are certain differences between the two levels of court and they are governed by different legislation.

Section 18 is likewise being amended to state that legislation governs how to proceed with an action, depending on the level of court the action is commenced in.

Also, for housekeeping purposes some other changes are being made. Wherever the act says "solicitor," it will now say "barrister and solicitor" instead because these terms are not differentiated under Alberta law.

For consistency with the rest of the act section 11 is being amended to say "defendant" instead of "person."

Section 17 is being amended to reflect that the plaintiff may receive payment by either a judgment or a settlement, as the case may be. Current wording uses only the term "judgment."

Mr. Chairman, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act protects victims of uninsured and unknown drivers by ensuring that they have someone from whom to recover. This is a very important program for Albertans. It's important that these changes proceed so that the act reads clearly and that there is no confusion or complication for people who access Provincial Court relative to this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few words about Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006, now in Committee of the Whole. I appreciate the reference to the importance of the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act and its ability to protect victims of uninsured drivers by facilitating the process of appealing for damages for personal injury. Very important.

I guess it's important to smooth things out, to make sure that it's clear that there's a reference both to the Court of Queen's Bench and to Provincial Court. My understanding was that most people would go to Provincial Court because that's an issue of small claims. Right? For anything below \$25,000 you go to Provincial Court; if it's over \$25,000, you go to Queen's Bench. Is that the distinction?

Mr. Stevens: Right.

Dr. B. Miller: This simply facilitates this so that a person knows what direction to go, I guess, in order to recover damages for personal injury.

This amending act allows for the provision that litigants can choose to pursue a case without legal counsel and represent themselves, as was mentioned. I assume that that would speed up the process for some people. The hon. minister mentioned the words "barrister and solicitor," and I wasn't sure why that was added. In the world I come from, there are cardinals and bishops and priests and so on. I guess that in every profession there have to be lots of categories, and this is an attempt to be more inclusive.

I went through this very carefully line by line, but I have nothing to add in terms of questions, so there's no doubt that we'll support it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I looked at Bill 7, I realized that the current wording of the act presumes that all actions are resolved in Court of Queen's Bench and that all litigants must be represented by legal counsel. This amendment changes these provisions to allow an action to be commenced in either Court of Queen's Bench or Provincial Court. It also allows for the new provision that litigants can choose to pursue a case without representation. An effect of this is also that litigants will not have to have representation by a lawyer to commence action.

The move to allow actions in Provincial Court means that the litigants are bound by the Provincial Court Act, which has a less complex process and does not require a lawyer. This act will improve access to justice for Albertans involved in these types of claims by giving a choice of whether to have representation or not. As well, it will free up time in Court of Queen's Bench to hear cases of a more serious nature. I support the intent of this bill, and I'd like to thank the minister for the explanations.

As a victim of a motor vehicle accident I find this bill one that I can identify with in many ways. My accident was in June 1972, a few months after the province deemed to no longer have the unsatisfied judgment fund, I think it was called. I was hit by someone who was an assigned risk driver who had no insurance or driver's licence. The anguish my family experienced with my injuries was exacerbated by the anxiety about a possible settlement or going to court and experiencing costs with no likelihood of a reasonable outcome. So we chose not to proceed but to release that energy and that concern and focus on moving forward.

9:10

I notice that the limit for small claims was changed in 2002 to \$25,000 from \$7,500. This is positive, but it is pitifully little when injuries result in lifelong pain and need for accommodation. I believe now – and I'm asking: is this correct? – that victims still would have to sue and hope that compensation will actually happen if the \$25,000 is deemed not to be appropriate for meeting their needs. If that's the case, this is unfortunate, and it's unfair when the victim does not get the settlement even though the court system rules such an award. I do know of many cases where that has been ruled, but the victim does not get the money. Every effort is made to get it, but it just doesn't come.

That's my only concern, and that's sort of an aside because this bill serves to increase access to justice for Albertans, and that's a positive step. It's a good move for those who are attempting to obtain damages for injuries suffered from a motor vehicle accident. It is a positive step as long as those injuries aren't so severe that they should have, I think, more compensation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to take part in debate in committee on Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act. Thanks again to the minister for providing some additional clarification information on the various subsections of the bill. Since we're dealing with two different courts, and there are two different procedures for the courts, some changes are simply clarifying which rules apply to which court.

One thing that caught my attention was when the minister said that given that the small claims amount has been increased to \$25,000 – I think it's about three years ago or four years ago that it happened. Since then, according to the minister's comments during second reading, more Albertans are now opting to go the route of the Provincial Court, the small claims court, and they're doing so because it's often faster, less expensive, and legally less complex and complicated. It all sounds very plausible, but this would have then led, I think, to an increase in the caseload for Provincial Court. I wonder if the capacity of the Provincial Court to deal with an increased caseload has been enhanced. If not, then the assumption that going to the Provincial Court will expedite, you know, the matters I think would be frustrated if the number of judges is the same, if the number of court hours is the same, and more people are going there to seek settlement. So that's the main question that comes to mind.

The second one. I heard, at least read somewhere, I suppose in the press some day, that the courts are becoming a little bit frustrated with people who represent themselves as they go to the court. Certainly, the Provincial Court allows people to appear before it without any legal advice or without any person representing them, without legal representation. If that is also the case for the Court of Queen's Bench, I think it's with the Court of Queen's Bench that some frustration has been expressed by judges with respect to those people who choose to represent themselves. Given the complexity in the way the Court of Queen's Bench proceedings happen, that may make matters even worse, you know, when you allow people to go there on their own. Any changes by way of these amendments that might cause more frustration at the level of the judges in the Court of Queen's Bench? If not, that's fine, but the other questions certainly remain. You know, what happens to the caseload in the provincial courts as a result of this?

Other than that, I think the changes are helpful. They'll certainly

allow settlements to happen without too much cost, without too complex a legal route to be followed by the people who go to these courts. So I support the bill in general.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and participate briefly in the debate this evening on Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006. Earlier I was reviewing this act with our critic on this side of the House, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. At first glance I thought this legislation was a result of changes that had been made to the Insurance Act, specifically the cap on pain and suffering. I'm cautious in my support of this bill and certainly do not think that is the reason why there has been a need for this bill.

When we review this bill, we see that the small claims court limit was raised to \$25,000 going back three and a half years, Mr. Chairman. When that happened, making that at the time the highest ceiling in Canada – the increase then had been from \$7,500 – it was thought that it would take some of the judicial load out of the Queen's Bench and into the Provincial Court, but I'm not so sure that this bill is a consequence of those changes.

Now, I understand that this change was made necessary by an increase in actions in the Court of Queen's Bench. I don't know why we have waited three and a half years, but so be it. We certainly have to ensure that there is timely access to justice. If there have been problems in the past three and a half years, hopefully these changes will address those problems.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to any other hon. member that may wish to speak on this matter. Certainly, as I have a look at this, it seems to be in step with what occurred in 2002.

Thank you.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to start out by thanking the hon. members for their most excellent observations. There are a few points I'd like to make. The purpose of this legislation, really, is to ensure that the wording reflects the practices in both Provincial Court and Queen's Bench. That's the essence of what we're doing here. It was drafted with a Queen's Bench lens, and it is necessary to have a Provincial Court lens also. That is what we are doing, so it reads for both.

9:20

I'm sure that it should have been drafted with both perspectives in the first instance; however, the increase in the limit of Provincial Court from \$7,500 to \$25,000 enhanced the likelihood of personal injury actions being brought at Provincial Court and, hence, the likelihood of actions where there are uninsured or unknown drivers giving rise to personal injury being advanced in Provincial Court. It's just simply a combination of things that could have been drafted this way initially, but we're doing it now to bring it up to date. That's the thrust of it.

Just a few observations. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona asked some questions. The self-represented litigant issue is an issue that we have in all of our courts, whether it's a Provincial Court, Queen's Bench, or Court of Appeal. In fact, last year when I met with the representatives of the three courts and I said to them "Let's see if we can identify one issue that is common to all of us, whether it be the courts or Alberta Justice, that we can work on together in a unified fashion to see if we can enhance the issue," it was the self-represented litigant issue that was identified.

I can tell the hon. member and all members that at this point in time we are devoting energy and resources, including representatives from Provincial Court, Queen's Bench, and Court of Appeal together with Alberta Justice representatives, to develop strategies to enhance information to self-represented litigants appearing in all courts. That is going to be an ongoing effort for some time. You don't solve and don't deal with that issue in a year or two. I can tell you that all of the courts and Alberta Justice are working on it. So you're right: it is not simply a Provincial Court.

The court capacity did expand in Provincial Court in a modest way, and I think tomorrow, perhaps, if you pay keen attention to the budget, there may be some good news relative to Alberta Justice in that regard. I can't tell you any particulars. I just want you to pay keen attention tomorrow afternoon when the hon. Minister of Finance provides us some very good detail on what may be occurring there. Of course, you will have an opportunity to grill me later, perhaps in April or May, and I'll be happy to provide the detail at that time.

You can bring an action in Queen's Bench for any amount. There is no threshold amount. Practically speaking, I think it's fair to say that you're not going to be commencing too many actions in Queen's Bench for a modest amount of money because the cost associated with the process is relatively high compared to a provincial court. I'm talking about filing fees and things of that nature. Of course, if you use legal counsel, it becomes very difficult to justify for modest amounts. That's why people are self-represented litigants at Provincial Court, for those two reasons. But you don't have a minimum amount in practice.

We use barrister and solicitor because in Canada, in Alberta, you are upon becoming a member of the Law Society of Alberta a barrister and solicitor. The English practice is to be a barrister or a solicitor, and the reason that we're changing it here is so that there's consistent wording. There's no magic to it. It's just that barrister and solicitor is what they are called. Albeit that they probably practise as a barrister or as a solicitor, they are called both.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods made a couple of points. I believe that the limit under this motor vehicle accident claims fund legislation may be a hundred thousand dollars. I don't have the material in front of me. If you have a claim for greater than \$25,000, you have two choices: you can bring it in Provincial Court and waive the amount above \$25,000 and seek a judgment for \$25,000 or less, should it be that that's all you can establish, but you can sue for more in Queen's Bench, and there's a maximum amount that you can claim under the act.

One of the other things that's changed since 1972 – and I don't know whether it was offered then – certainly is the prevalence as an option in insurance coverage of the SEF 44 coverage, which is the uninsured motorist coverage. Effectively, the way it works is that you can buy coverage that says that the amount of your insurance policy that you have for third-party liability will apply for your benefit in the event that you are involved with an uninsured or unknown motorist who causes injury to you. You buy basically third-party liability for your own benefit and the benefit of people who are insured under your policy and who are riding with you in your vehicle. I don't know if that was available in 1972, but certainly it is pretty prevalent today, and it is something that I think is wise for people to take because it provides probably more than \$100,000 in terms of coverage for the type of situation that you were involved in, unfortunately.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 8

Trustee Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to start by clarifying a few points raised by members in second reading of this Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006. First, Mr. Chairman, it's important to note that this bill is not a correction of past errors but is part of a planned process leading to the modernization of the investment rules in the Trustee Act. The amendments introduced in 2001 were intended as a first step to better investment rules. The passage of time was necessary in order to give trustees of pre-existing trusts time to become familiar with the 2001 changes.

The second point, Mr. Chairman, relates to the other acts that are amended by this bill. Some of the other ministries impacted have chosen to establish investment rules by regulation. This does not mean that these departments were not willing to co-operate. Consequential amendments were made to legislation of other departments. It's up to those other departments to decide how to set up their own investment rules. Each of those departments will be consulting with their appropriate stakeholders in the development of their regulations, and we encourage this due diligence. Putting investment rules into a regulation makes it possible for those rules to be updated more regularly. This ensures that the regulation remains consistent with the existing investment options.

In terms of regulations to the Dependent Adults Act, at this time we are not making any substantive changes to the investment rules because that act, along with the Personal Directives Act, is currently part of a comprehensive review. The ministries of Seniors and Community Supports and Justice initiated the review in the summer of 2005 and have conducted extensive public consultations regarding possible changes to the two acts. The review, which is being chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, is looking at many issues, including the rules that should govern investment by trustees under the Dependent Adults Act.

Mr. Chairman, I'd also like to address specific questions regarding the prudent investor rule and how the trustee is monitored. These amendments do not change the rules regarding monitoring of investors and penalizing of improper or inappropriate investment. The act does not provide for the government to monitor trustees. The person who set up the trust, the beneficiary, or other interested party monitors the trusts. Under the act trustees can seek from the court an opinion, advice, or direction on any question affecting the management or administration of the trust property.

If a trustee is believed to have improperly handled or invested trust funds, the court can be asked to determine liability and assess the damages payable by the trustee. It should be noted, though, that less than optimal returns are not sufficient grounds for the court to find the trustee liable. If someone believes that the trustee has acted improperly, the potential plaintiff would have to do more than show

that the trustee could have adopted a different investment strategy that would have produced better returns. The plaintiff would have to show that no trustee exercising reasonable skill and prudence would have invested in the way that the defendant trustee invested.

Those are some responses to the questions that were raised in second, and I seek the support of the hon. members. Thank you.

9:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The purpose of the bill is to replace the legal list and all references to it in other legislation. Given the acceptance of the prudent investor rule, I turned to something provided by Alberta Justice – namely, Amendments to the Trustee Act Change Investment Guidelines for Appointed Trustees – to try to make some sense of this.

Proclaimed on February 1, 2002, the Trustee Amendment Act 2001 legislated the “prudent investor rule”, which specifies that a trustee must make investment decisions based on reasonable returns while avoiding undue risk.

Then the guidelines go on to explain some of the highlights of this legislation, referring to, “Unlike the ‘legal list approach’, the prudent investor approach expressly instructs the trustee to consider [other] matters” in terms of investments.

As the hon. minister has said, there’s a kind of staged-in process where the legal list now needs to be taken out of the legislation and set aside. Given what was there before, it was necessary. If a trustee wanted to go beyond that list, the trustee was bound to go to the Court of Queen’s Bench for an order permitting the trustee to invest funds in accordance with prudent investment standards. So this facilitates things considerably by removing the legal list. That’s my understanding, and I don’t think the bill really goes any further than that. Most jurisdictions and other places have replaced the legal list approach with the prudent investor approach, and this is something that seems quite in order.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: I’ll be very brief, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act. I indicated our support for the bill in its second reading.

I had raised a question about: if the prudent trustee rule doesn’t work and imprudent decisions are made, who does the monitoring? I understand that this bill surely does not deal with that issue, but I wonder if the Trustee Act itself does. This is the amendment to the existing one. You had mentioned how it works, but there must be some statute that gives people on whose behalf the trust is administered by the trustee that if they’re not satisfied with the way the trust is being administered or the investment is being made, they have some legal recourse. Which particular statute defines that procedure and opportunity for the plaintiffs, I guess, to go ahead is something I was sort of curious about. I know that the existing piece that we’re discussing here is not about that. It’s only about dealing with the transitional arrangements which no longer are needed, so we’re simply saying that they’re not there, that they won’t be there. I understand that.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to what this particular Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, seeks to accomplish, we are happy about that and in agreement. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 11

Architects Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’m pleased to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006. The Architects Act was amended in March 2004 to provide an up-to-date definition for the restricted architectural practice of interior design. The Architects Amendment Act is needed to enable the Alberta Association of Architects to require its member architects and licensed interior designers to demonstrate continuing competence in their professions. By doing so, they will maintain their membership with the association.

These amendments would include licensed interior designers within the definition of authorized entity and would allow these individuals to be governed by all the pertinent provisions of the act. It would clarify that licensed interior designers and their employees can engage in the practice of interior design. It would allow licensed interior designers full voting rights to elect architects and interior designers to the association’s council. These amendments would also ensure that up-to-date regulations and bylaws can be developed for licensed interior designers and ensure that they are registered in the same manner as the architects.

Mr. Chairman, this act will help to clarify and strengthen the architect profession by allowing the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for mandatory continuing competence in their profession.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity. This time I rise to participate in the debate on Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006, in committee, and I thank the hon. member for sponsoring this bill. Bill 11 proposes changes that would allow the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify their governance, licensing interior designers and enforcing the requirement for compulsory continuing competency, which is great. I come from a profession myself that has strict regulations and guidelines as to the scope of practice and for continuing education that are strictly enforced every year. Professionals who fail to accumulate enough continuing education credits are sometimes suspended, and within a certain period of time if they continue to fail to meet the requirements, they’re permanently struck off the register and have to go through many, many hoops and hurdles to requalify. So this is good because now it shows that interior designers are moving towards a better governance structure and more competency in their field, which is tremendous.

The bill also clarifies that licensed interior designers and/or their employees, because sometimes they're big companies, can engage in the practice of interior design and allows them full voting rights when it's time for them and their colleagues, the architects, to vote on people who they want to elect to their association's council. Basically, it's a good bill to ensure that up-to-date regulations reflect the current practice and to make this organization comparable to other similar professional bodies, which is good too.

We all know that Canada and particularly this province, Alberta, are going through a very hot housing market. There is a building boom in this province, and there is more need for the services of architects and interior designers. Parallel to this, there is also a lot of need from owners of older homes who want to either renovate or upgrade. Sometimes they are increasing space or adding things like secondary suites, for example, or just doing renovations and upkeep to continue to live in their quarters.

9:40

Interior designers are hard-working men and women, a huge majority of whom are professional and trustworthy. They make our living spaces more beautiful, more inviting, and more enjoyable. I commend them on wanting to take this direction and going down this path that would regulate their industry and their profession more. I have a lot of respect for organizations that want to adopt such a governance model.

I know that committee stage is definitely for sectional analysis, studying the various provisions one by one, line by line, or clause by clause, but this time I'm not going to do that because overall it is a positive bill. I know that there were stakeholders that were consulted. The Alberta Association of Architects – they use the acronym AAA – were consulted and are supportive. Also, the Interior Designers of Alberta, who really this act affects the most, voiced their support when we in the Official Opposition asked them what they thought. For these two reasons, I would definitely voice my support and encourage all hon. members to do the same.

I will now take my seat and encourage further discussion. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very, very brief on this Bill 11. It simply seeks to include under this act licensed interior designers, so the changes are being made in every section or subsection of the bill to represent that addition of licensed interior designers.

I notice that there are some requirements with respect to the kind of training, skills, and abilities that they need to have and how they're going to be certified. It's certain that licensed interior designers meet those educational and training and professional requirements. I don't see anything else that really is of a great deal of significance that should require extended debate.

Interior design is an important occupation. It's growing in significance. They certainly inject life and colour and design to all kinds of spaces, small and big, and make workplaces and places where we spend time, either for living or for working, pleasant places.

Mr. Chairman, I don't have much more to say on it. I think it's a fairly simple matter. It's an extension of the Architects Act to include the licensed interior designers, and that's all for the good, I think. Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 11, Architects Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report bills 17, 12, 13, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 and report progress on Bill 10.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 17, Bill 12, Bill 13, Bill 4, Bill 5, Bill 6, Bill 7, Bill 8, and Bill 11. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 10. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 4
Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move for third reading Bill 4, Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006.

I believe that we've had a full discussion with respect to this matter in second and in committee, and I would ask for support again from the hon. members in third.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to just say in third reading on Bill 4 that I want to express my thanks. I'm not going to repeat this for all the bills that are coming, but I want to express my thanks to the hon. minister for his openness and his willingness to share the contents of these bills beforehand, which was very helpful, and also his explanations, a little bit of history on these bills, which are very complex. A lot of the issues come out of the courts, not this one in particular but most of them. I found it very helpful to have the explanations offered.

Now, with Bill 4 there's no question that we would support this, and the debate has been good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister to close?

Mr. Stevens: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

**Bill 5
Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to at this time move for third reading Bill 5, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

I'd like to thank the members who participated in debate for their thoughtful comments, and I would ask for continued support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

**Bill 6
Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure at this time to move for third reading Bill 6, Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006.

From the comments of the hon. members it's very clear that the purpose of this bill is well understood and very much supported, and the amendments are supported because they will enhance recovery for this important program, which at the end of the day supports the children of this province who are receiving support. So, Mr. Speaker, I would at this time ask for the continued support of the hon. members.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister – the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

9:50

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you. I was a minister actually. I still am a minister. Not a government minister, but I am a minister, a reverend. You know, that kind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak on third reading of Bill 6. Now, this Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act has given many hon. members a chance to talk about MEP because in our constituencies we all receive many people coming to complain about the process and so on. Many of the people that come, their complaints are not necessarily justified because the whole point of the MEP is to protect families and take care of children in this province. There are a lot of difficulties, and most of the people who come to complain to me are men, actually, who feel that they haven't been treated fairly. So the provisions in this bill to allow a chance for people to go in and meet with the director and discuss their financial situations before they have to deal with court orders and threats of arrest is very important.

The effect of this bill, Mr. Speaker, I think would be to really facilitate the whole process of MEP, and anything we can do to facilitate the process is good. So I fully support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this chance to rise on third reading of Bill 6, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006. I promise to be brief, you know, seconding the opinion of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora that the reason we're supporting these amendments is that they are geared towards providing funds to creditors more quickly. As indicated by my hon. colleague, again, children seem to be the group that is most affected by problems with custody and with financial support from one parent or one partner to the other. Any change that allows for those children to obtain the funds owed to them by debtors is a positive change, and it should be supported.

The amendments address some of the problems with application in practice, specifically allowing for the MEP to access locked-in retirement funds, as was previously discussed and as was the intent in 2004, the review that the hon. minister alluded to. These changes ensure that the debtors cannot hide a chunk of their income owed to the creditors.

This bill also brings maintenance agreements into line with provisions in the Family Law Act and encourages families to use these agreements as an alternative to going to court. This is a tremendous development, and it should be encouraged. Maybe it should be looked at for similar or other quarrels or disputes as a means of settling such disputes. The idea of using MEP staff as facilitators instead of always resorting to going to the Court of Queen's Bench is also a positive development.

This is just a brief summary of why myself and most of my hon. colleagues in the opposition felt that it was a worthy bill to support, and I voice my support in third reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

**Bill 7
Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure at this time to move for third reading Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

**Bill 8
Trustee Amendment Act, 2006**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 8 for third reading. Bill 8 is the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the fact that the

Minister of Justice and Attorney General has succeeded, I think, in having a record number of bills passed through two stages this evening, I think we ought to reward ourselves by taking the rest of the evening off. I therefore move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 22, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a few guests joining us today from Red Deer county: Reeve Earl Kinsella, councillors Reimar Poth and Jim Wood, and County Manager Rob Coon. They are here today to meet with both hon. members from Red Deer and myself to discuss very important municipal issues. I'm so pleased that these hard-working members of Red Deer county are able to be here to enjoy question period and to take an interest in the budget speech. They work very hard for all constituents of Red Deer county. They are joining us today in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them to rise and get the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly three very good friends. First off, Louise Kidney, who's lived in our area for some time, Calgary-North West, has been a very good friend and supporter over all the years that I've certainly been in public office, has lived in Mirror, Alberta, as well. The second individual is Jeff Gaulin, who likewise lives in our area of Calgary-North West, attended parent meetings last night with Royal Oak and Rocky Ridge, looking for schools in the area. He's a very good person, friend, and supporter. Jeff actually works with Molson Canada. I should mention also that Louise has done a lot of work with SuperNet on behalf of the province over the years. The third individual is Ravinder Minhas, the owner and CEO of Mountain Crest breweries. His slogan is Damn Good Beer. I have to take that on the recommendation of others. He and Molson's can sort that out. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 64 enthusiastic grade 6 students along with their teachers, Mrs. Michelle Armstrong, Mrs. Krista MacGregor, and David Mireau, along with parent helpers Julie DeRose, Leah Steiner, and Jo-Anne Balla. They're all from the St. Mary elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you've read *Parent* magazine and you'll know that St. Mary's was the cool school last year. These students are here today to observe and learn with keen interest about our

government. They're seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great opportunity today to introduce to you a resident of Rocky Mountain House and a great golfer but also, more importantly, the superintendent of the Wild Rose school division, Greg Thomas. I'd ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, what a pleasure it is for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a young lady who hails from High Prairie, Alberta. She is a member of the PDD board in the northwest region, a small business owner, and, of course, an active member of the family farm. Recently she was elected as president of the Lesser Slave Lake PC Association. She is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the other members of this Assembly a group of very bright and able grade 6 students from Lacombe upper elementary school. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Derek Rankin and Mrs. Carrie Lisafeld, some parent helpers as well: Mrs. Miriam Kunz; Charlene Drozd; Margaret Church, a very close neighbour and friend of ours; Mr. Alvin Peck; and Mr. Phil Boston, the bus driver. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of friends with me from Lacombe. They are Mr. Lennard Vanderschee, the chairman of the board of the Lacombe Christian School Society, and former board member Mr. Dennis MacLeod. They are also seated. I'd ask them to rise and receive our welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre it gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of active and inquisitive students from NorQuest College in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre. There are 11 students joining us today. They're in the public gallery, and they're joined by their teacher-leader, Mr. Allan Carlson. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two members of the St. Albert community, Ireen Slater and Bill Alton. Ireen Slater has a wonderful background in associations, the national one parent association and the RCMP Community Advisory Committee, and is also now president of the SUN organization, Seniors United Now. Mr. Alton is the St. Albert director of policy development for the St. Albert constituency, and he's also involved with the organization Alberta and Northwest Territories Regional Council of Carpenters

and Allied Workers. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the Candora Society staff of Edmonton. The Candora Society of Edmonton is a not-for-profit organization with a mandate to address the needs of low-income residents of northeast Edmonton. The Candora Society promotes positive growth in the lives of women, children, and families in our community. The society connects people to increase understanding of each other, to reduce isolation, build self-worth, and enrich the community. I would now ask that the staff members of Candora rise as I call out their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: the executive director, Debbie Clark, Kristi Beckett, Shelley Westwood, Jackie L'Hirondelle, Michelle Ackland, Melanie Aloisio, Susan Skaret, Ana Monzo, and Jane Awawias.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Art Macklin. Art, his wife, Donna, and youngest son, Nathan, operate a family farm in the Peace River country of northwestern Alberta, where he has homesteaded the land from the original forest since the mid-1960s. He is past-president of the Canadian National Farmers Union and is currently serving his second term on the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. Art is also the chairman of the Canadian International Grains Institute. He is seated in the public gallery. I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

1:40

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a young man who exemplifies the promise of Alberta's youth. Visiting today is Erik Saude, the co-chair of the Alberta Graduate Council. He was involved in the postsecondary review with the Department of Advanced Education and is in the final year of his PhD in the faculty of medicine at the University of Alberta. Erik's research is focused on the development of nuclear magnetic resonance as a diagnostic and prognostic tool for pulmonary disorders. He is a varsity athlete. He received the Jimmy Condon award. He is ranked nationally in track and field and is an academic all-Canadian.

I have had the great privilege of spending time with Erik since he happens to be a constant companion of my daughter, Robyn, and I know first-hand that he is not only a fine academic, but he rustles cows with the best of them. Mr. Speaker, Erik Saude is seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Did you leave out anything?
Others? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my long-time friend and past colleague Wendy

Crawford. Wendy and I had the opportunity to serve on the Alberta association of adult and continuing education for a number of years. Wendy has stayed with that role, and of course I came here. Wendy is accompanied by a visitor from Texas, her friend Shirlie Childers. Shirlie hails from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, finds the snow a bit much, but we're delighted to have you here, Shirlie. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two Calgary entrepreneurs, Mr. Glen Gurr, who is an insurance broker in my constituency and a long-time community volunteer, and Mr. Trevor Tomanik, who is in the food and beverage and property development business. I assume that they're in the members' gallery, and I'd like everyone to provide them with a warm welcome.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Progressive Conservative Leadership Campaign

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we had one cabinet minister resign to pursue the Conservative leadership, and no doubt we will see others departing soon. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier please explain to the Assembly the concerns that prompted him to require cabinet ministers to resign if they are pursuing the Conservative leadership?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, you know, I hate to say it, but really it is none of the Leader of the Official Opposition's business. The appointment of cabinet is the prerogative of the Premier, and I think that the question is entirely inappropriate.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, my second question is also to the Premier. For the record is it the position of this government that anyone seeking the leadership of the Conservative Party must not under any circumstances use government resources such as aircraft, automobiles, staff, or office supplies to support their leadership campaign?

Mr. Klein: To support their leadership campaign, no. That is forbidden. To conduct their ministerial duties, yes. They can use the resources that are available through the government.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that flight logs for government aircraft were freely accessible without FOIP until about two years ago, when the public became very interested in them, will the Premier return to a policy of full accessibility to complete flight logs so everyone can monitor the use of government aircraft by leadership contenders?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the use of aircraft by leadership contenders if they're using it for leadership purposes will be suspended.

Mr. Speaker, relative to access to the files it's my understanding that the last time there was a FOIP request, it involved boxes and boxes and boxes and just an extraordinary amount of administrative

time. If the request is reasonable, I don't see a problem. Very often the request might be reasonable, but it involves a tremendous amount of time on the part of the aircraft staff and all of the public service employees. You know, we will try to accommodate the Leader of the Official Opposition and any other member of the public as best we possibly can if the request is reasonable.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to supplement.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will say to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that those aircraft logs will be available fully to everyone probably next week in the library.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Gambling Self-exclusion Program

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I spoke to a woman who had a serious gambling problem who told me how she finally convinced herself to sign up for the government's voluntary self-exclusion program, whereby a person with a gambling problem agrees to ban themselves from casinos. She was surprised to find out that the applicant has to wait two days, then bring the form back to the casino. In that two-day period her resolve failed, and she proceeded to go on a six-month gambling binge that cost her at least \$75,000 and nearly destroyed her marriage. My questions are for the Minister of Gaming. Why does this government turn away gambling addicts who are pleading for help and tell them to come back two days later?

Mr. Graydon: One of the new initiatives that we just started is information centres in the casinos. There are full-time staff there. You can go up, discuss your issue with them if you wish, pick up printed material on problem gambling, and get information, actually, on the program that he's talking about. It's a program that has been very successful.

Mr. Tougas: Well, I'm going to ask the question again. Why is there a two-day wait period? Is it a cooling-off period? Do you want them to keep gambling?

Mr. Graydon: This has never been raised as an issue before, but I'll be happy to follow up on that.

Mr. Tougas: Well, will the minister commit to changing the rules here and now so that voluntary self-exclusion can occur immediately rather than after a two-day cooling-off period?

Mr. Graydon: No. I suggest that if that is the rule, it was put in after some research and due diligence, so I would expect that to happen before there was any change in policy.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Small Business Labour Supply

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good restaurants in my constituency are shutting down their lunch trade because there is no help. Small business cries for help, yet more than a million young Canadians between 18 and 25 are unemployed, close to \$6 million

budgeted for skills investment last year was transferred to pay for the AISH lawsuit, and 9 and a half million dollars the year before for skills investment lapsed, wasn't even used. For all the talk, skills investment has not been a priority for this government. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How will this government ensure that resources for skills development are actually used to alleviate skills shortages for small business?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, as we move forward with our long- and short-term labour force strategy in Alberta, issues like that, of course, will be dealt with. First of all, we want to deal with the short-term issue of ensuring that as the economy grows – and only the Liberal opposition would find anything negative about such a strong economy and so many jobs out there. In fact, in the time they spend criticizing that we have too many jobs, they could be helping us participate in the development of the long-term strategy. We spent close to \$300 million alone through my department to assist in the transition of people getting off social assistance, for an example, and into the workforce.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: will this government continue to let the oil price driven, distorted labour market suck the life out of small business, or can it and will it energetically seek to train the unemployed?

Mr. Cardinal: Number one, Mr. Speaker, we should be thankful that we are blessed with a strong economy in Alberta. Only a good government will do that, and this is a government that did do it. In this area, of course, we are trying our darndest to train as many people as possible to fill these jobs that are out there. It was only 10 years ago, when you drove around the province, that there were people looking for jobs. Today when you drive around the province, all you see is job openings.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another question to the minister of human resources: how will the minister direct his department's immigration and skills development efforts to deal with the area of greatest need, the labour crisis in small business?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question because our first priority in Alberta is to hire Albertans first. Then there is also the aboriginal population, with very, very high unemployment. We're concentrating on that. We have the youth. We have persons with developmental disabilities. We also have elderly people that are wanting to get back into the workforce. In addition to that, we want the mobility of Canadians, to be able to move across the provinces to take jobs in Alberta.

In the area of immigration, Mr. Speaker, of course, as you are aware and as the member knows also, some of those policies fall under the federal government. There is a new immigration minister. I am in the process of setting up a meeting with that particular minister to determine how we may improve the situation of immigrants wanting to come to Alberta to live and work. As you're aware, in the past the feds have targeted to have at least 250,000 people per year immigrate to Canada. Now, Alberta in the past only received I believe 6 per cent of that, or about 16,000, and 3,000 of those 16,000 moved back to the larger centres across Canada. Therefore, we definitely need to improve the services, and we have

to work with the federal government to do that. It's not in our mandate to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Long-term Care Standards

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier promised to implement every single recommendation of the Auditor General regarding the deplorable state of long-term care in Alberta. The government's failure to implement this promise has meant that tragic deaths and severe injuries to vulnerable seniors continue. The \$36 million committed by the government so far is a fraction of what the government's own MLA committee said was needed. My questions are to the minister of seniors. When is this government going to replace the toothless Tory MLA led Health Facilities Review Committee on the management of long-term care facilities with unannounced visits and inspections done by an independent and competent authority set up for that purpose?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important committee that the member has addressed here today, the Health Facilities Review Committee. It's an excellent committee that I know has attended to any concerns that are related to long-term care and related to the care side of the standards. As you know, my area is the accommodation standards, but the Health Facilities Review Committee is under the purview of the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I'll ask that she respond to that question.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the minister can provide the answer in writing.

Instead of downgrading seniors' care, when is the government going to require a registered nurse to be on-site 24 hours a day, seven days a week at every licensed long-term care facility in the province?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, care is not being downgraded, and you know that, hon. member, but I will refer this issue to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the questions about care in facilities quite properly belong with this minister. Standards and the new identified standards, which we've been in consultation on with not only providers but health authorities, are pretty well imminently ready to come forward to this Assembly, but I am not yet satisfied that they're in the proper form. We've done extensive consultation on them. We want to make sure they are achievable, and we want to make sure the plans are in place to effect them. So in due course we will be providing those standards.

Suffice it to say that the addition of the \$36 million, the \$25 million that allowed us to add more supports for lifting patients as well as supports for staffing in the third quarter have been embraced, and we've had many different accolades from groups that say that we are seeing improvements in long-term care as a result of it.

Mr. Mason: Accolades there may be, Mr. Speaker, but people are still dying.

This is to the minister of seniors. When is the government going to put a stop to the redesignations of existing long-term care facilities to unregulated assisted living facilities that either have lower or nonexistent standards of care?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, as I explained to you earlier, the responsibility for this service regarding seniors in long-term care is a shared responsibility between the Minister of Health and Wellness and myself, and I will direct this question once again as it's under the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I will take under advisement the question from the hon. member, and we will collaborate and provide an answer.

Mr. Speaker, the inference at the start of this question that there is not adequate address of the Auditor General's remarks is totally in error. We accepted and put in place systems to try and work on every front, including support for medication delivery in the proper way and for reconfiguring the mix of administrative support so that long-term care facilities had that kind of capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Democratic Reform

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have just celebrated 100 years of democracy. In a recent editorial in the *Lethbridge Herald* they wrote about the democratic decline. There is no democracy where there is no accountability of elected representatives and the protection of what should be constitutional rights. Dar Heatherington and David Emerson, just to name two who have escaped accountability for their actions in the face of public outrage. Since 1994 B.C. has legislated recall, citizens' initiative, and fixed election dates. My question for the Premier: will he protect the future of Alberta and our property by entrenching property rights into an Alberta Constitution?

Mr. Klein: I don't know what the hon. member means by entrenching property rights in the Constitution. Mr. Speaker, I think that it goes without saying that people have a right to own and ensure the privacy of their property. I think that that is enshrined in law, but I would have to check.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It isn't as far as I'm aware.

Will the Premier level the playing field for the next provincial election – and I don't mean the PC leadership election – by setting fixed election dates?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have no problems. It's a matter that hasn't been discussed by my caucus, but I've often said that for every upside there's a downside, that for every action there's an equal and opposite and mostly negative reaction, and that applies to many of the suggestions that come from the Liberals and the NDs. They all say: "Why don't you do this, and why don't you do that? Why don't you do the other thing?" But what we like to do in our caucus is do a reasonable assessment of any proposal and find out what the downsides are. You know, they don't recognize the downside. All they do is say, "Oh, this is an idea; accept it," without doing an assessment of the downside. I'm a firm believer in the law

that prescribes that for every action there is an equal and opposite and mostly negative reaction.

2:00

Mr. Hinman: I'm looking forward to hearing the downside.

Mr. Speaker, my final question to the Premier: will he empower the people with the ability to say no way to the third way by putting people first and passing legislation for recall before passing third-way health legislation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the other way is about achieving sustainability in health care; in other words, about bringing the costs of health care in line with the rate of inflation. But if the hon. member considers it appropriate that there will be no money to spend on anything else by the year 2025 if health care costs continue to climb the way they are, if he thinks that that is okay, let him stand up and say so, and let the NDs stand up and say so, too, if they think it's okay. All we want to do is bring it back in line with the rate of inflation and improve accessibility.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

West Fraser Timber Co. Ltd.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday West Fraser Timber announced that it's closing down one of the two of its pulp lines at Hinton Pulp. With the loss of 100 jobs, my question is to the Acting Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is this a sign of trouble for the pulp industry in Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that the North American pulp industry faces uncertain times due to certain global pressures, and Alberta, of course, is not immune to this. However, West Fraser is not in fact shutting down its entire operation as pulp mills in other parts of the country are. In fact, West Fraser is investing, investing \$20 million to upgrade the mill to be more competitive in the long term in that particular industry. That is an investment in the future for the forest industry in Hinton and, of course, other parts of Alberta also.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first and only supplementary question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What resources are being made available to the 100 Hinton employees whose jobs will be lost as a result of this pulp line closure?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, as in my earlier answers to questions from the opposition we already spend around \$288 million or so specifically to deal with situations of this nature. In fact, my staff has already contacted West Fraser officials to look at where we may provide additional services for the employees that may need some transitional support, including job and career counselling, resumé writing, job search assistance, and other transitional supports for people who need to move to new locations either in Alberta or in Canada or in within their community. Also, it just happens that there is a job fair in Hinton and Edson tomorrow that the employers have requested and will participate in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Telemarketing Investigation

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are by nature very generous people who are willing to offer their support for noble causes. Unfortunately, recent reports suggest that an Alberta-based private, for-profit fundraising company, Xentel, may be preying upon the generosity of Albertans, using unethical business practices. Government Services is currently conducting an investigation into these alleged abuses. My questions are all to the Minister of Government Services. Will the minister publicly release or table the findings of the investigation into Xentel's telemarketing practices?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it is true that we are investigating the whole incident. What we know so far, of course, is that there was a charity donation made to two organizations from this fundraising activity, but we are making sure that there's not misrepresentation to people that may have contributed. So, yes, we will release all of the information from our investigation once it's complete.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Xentel records all of its telephone solicitations, will this government order these recordings to be made public to those Albertans who believe they were ripped off?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that we have the authority to require those taped recordings to be made public. It's a private company that talked to individuals. Whether we can force them to make those public I'm not sure, but of course our investigators have the ability to listen to the tapes and make sure that there wasn't any misrepresentation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that after receiving much criticism Xentel has promised to make its complete solicitation script available and has thus far failed to do so, will the minister commit to tabling the script once he gets it?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, in our role in the investigation we will make public our findings. Whether we can actually go beyond that and require that is speculative. I'm not sure that we have the legal authority to do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Avian Influenza

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Experts have recently predicted that a deadly strain of avian influenza virus may be coming to North America via the conduit of wild birds which are migrating between Asia and this continent. They say that it's not a question of if but when the pandemic will hit here in Alberta. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister advise the House whether Alberta is fully prepared to deal with the risk of a pandemic influenza striking Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, along with Health and the Department of Municipal Affairs, that minister, and the Solicitor General and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development many ministries are involved. I am satisfied that every day we become more fully prepared. Let me start by saying that avian flu is not

necessarily pandemic influenza. If the avian flu migrates from birds to human beings and it then becomes an influenza and could certainly become a pandemic influenza, that is one of our major concerns.

Mr. Speaker, government officials, people, scientists working in laboratories have been readying themselves by looking at how the more recent strains of avian flu might transmit. Our medical officers of health are liaising with government officials, municipal officials. We have doses of Tamiflu for some 260,000 of the most seriously ill Albertans and front-line care workers.

Mr. Speaker, I think that at such time when it comes – and hopefully it won't come to Canada or to Alberta – then we are as prepared today as we can be given the nature of this particular flu, where we're not quite sure whether this virus is the one that either Tamiflu would protect us from or some of the other, more recent developments that we're working on.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: has the government formulated a plan to educate Martha and Henry on how to prepare for the possible influenza outbreak?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a lot of that work is going on now not only with the chambers of commerce but by, for example, medical officers of health in the regions, who are educating local businesses, making sure in schools of the programs that encourage people on how they should behave if they've got the flu or to stay home when they're sick, to cover their mouths, and so on. Also, recently a wonderful session held by Capital health, the second of which I know we've had in the last several months, invited many of the scientists – Dr. Louis Francescutti, Dr. Mark Joffe – and talked about a plan to cope with a pandemic, reminding people how staff should be treated, how they should be talked to about if they stay home the day they're sick, reminding people about the various things they should do to keep their workforce healthy and sustainable.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm satisfied that as far as we have gone, the planning is in place, but we're doing more due diligence. I know that other ministries are looking, with me, at tabletop exercises to be sure that the plans are active and working.

2:10

Dr. Brown: My final supplementary is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Has the government instituted any programs to specifically educate and protect individuals who may be exposed to the avian flu virus through exposure to domestic poultry or wild birds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The key to biosecurity and protecting the poultry from avian influenza, or bird flu, is education and preparedness. We've been working with the industry for a number of years, actually, on biosecurity measures and a plan to deal with an outbreak of a disease like AI. We've actually been taking the lead in Canada in terms of preparedness and developing the plan to minimize the risk and spread of any kind of disease; in this case, it would be AI. We have an upcoming campaign to educate owners of backyard bird flocks because we view that as an area which may have some risk to it. We want to reduce the risk of domestic birds coming into contact with wild birds as much as we possibly can. To that end, in answer to the member's question we are definitely on an education track right now.

Water Quality of Lesser Slave Lake

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, Lesser Slave Lake is the region's most prominent natural asset. It's now suffering from the combined stress of forestry, agriculture, and recreation. The government has the ability to ensure that the lake remains in its pristine condition; however, they have failed to take action to steward this prestigious area. To the Minister of Environment: can the minister assure local residents that runoff from confined feedlot operations and local septic fields will not enter the lake?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and all members of this House and all Albertans that we will do everything in our power to ensure the protection of this lake that the hon. member has mentioned and that I know the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has recognized. We will do that. Yes, we will.

Mr. Bonko: Given a lack of trust in provincial government, will the minister empower local communities to engage in community-based water quality monitoring?

Mr. Boutilier: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but with all the boos I didn't hear the question. So I'm sorry; I'd have to ask the hon. member to repeat the question.

The Speaker: That's not exactly how it works, hon. minister.

Mr. Bonko: To the minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: given that residents told us that they have no faith in the NRCB's ability to address environmental impacts of expanding confined feedlot operations on the lakeshore, will they review the AOPA legislation and ensure that no raw sewage ends up in the lake?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we've been doing an ongoing review of the procedures involved in the NRCB's application of AOPA. Agriculture has been working on extension programs with producers. We believe that we have the best legislation in the country as it relates to intensive livestock operations. In fact, other provinces are looking to us to develop their own legislation because urban and rural communities need to coexist, and intensive livestock operations are a fact in agriculture. It's part of our value chain. It's part of how agriculture will grow in the future. We're very good at what we do, and we're very good stewards of the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution-related Offences

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year our Legislature passed Bill 39, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2005, including an amendment to Bill 206, Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2003, which allowed law enforcement to seize vehicles in prostitution-related activity. On behalf of my constituents I thank the minister and all the members who voted for it. My main question today is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. My constituents are impatient after three years. Can the minister give the Assembly and constituents of mine an update on how long they have to wait before the law comes into effect?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows and I'm sure the Assembly knows, the law was originally passed in the spring of 2003. At that particular point in time we felt that there had to be some amendments, and those amendments were subsequently brought forward in May of 2005. Since that time, we've been dealing with the regulations, and the regulations have been around issues of essentially what to do with the car once it is seized. We have worked all of those out, Mr. Speaker, and we will be in a position within the next month or so, later on this spring, to make the announcement that this law will be taking effect, and this law will allow the cars of johns to be seized in the hon. member's neighbourhood.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the Solicitor General, who is responsible for law enforcement. Given that three years ago as the private Member for Calgary-Buffalo he brought in the bill – and I commend him for that and support him on that – can the Solicitor General tell us when law enforcement can start seizing those vehicles?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We anticipate this law to become an important tool for the law enforcement community once it does come into being. We will continue to work with Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation regarding this. As soon as the regulations are complete, police will have this additional tool, as I mentioned, and the authority to seize vehicles. We always have to support the public, whether regarding the efforts to stop those people who have disregard for residential communities or regarding the safety within these communities, whether it's drugs and alcohol or whether it's physical assaults or needles and condoms.

We also have to remember, Mr. Speaker, that enforcement is just one side of this issue. We need to ensure that there are also adequate programs in place to allow these young women to safely be removed from the streets to transition themselves away from being involved in the sex trade industry and, as well, so that they can get the help and support they need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that my constituents complain to me about the lack of city bylaws in Calgary that can be developed to control prostitution, such as prohibiting the sex trade near schools and residential areas, what can the minister do to encourage the city of Calgary to develop such municipal bylaws?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the outset let me say that Municipal Affairs certainly is supportive of any municipality's initiatives to establish bylaws that will result in creating safer and more viable communities. At the same time I need to point out that while the Municipal Government Act is enabling in nature and will allow for bylaws respecting the safety, health, and welfare of people and the protection of people and property and respecting people, activities, and things in, on, or near a public place or place that is open to the public, the municipal powers do not extend to areas of

jurisdiction that include the control of activities that fall under the federal Criminal Code.

So creating bylaws that will accomplish what the member is seeking is a little bit tricky and does require some creativity on the part of the municipality. To that extent, Mr. Speaker, I understand that initiatives such as this are being discussed and sponsored by an organization by the name of the Community Life Improvement Council as well as the Canada West Foundation. In fact, a workshop is being held in Calgary on April 4, 5, and 6, and they will be dealing at that workshop with issues such as safe streets, safe cities, and seeking solutions. I hope that they're able to come up with those creative concepts that bylaws can work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

First Contract Labour Arbitration

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the worst labour laws in the country as far as workers are concerned. The province, frankly, is a haven for unscrupulous employers, who often treat their workers as second-class citizens. Tyson Foods is a case in point. After the ugly labour dispute in Brooks last fall the government indicated that they were prepared to look at first contract arbitration. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: can the minister tell us when he's going to do the right thing and bring in first contract arbitration?

2:20

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, like the Liberals, only the NDs would find something negative about too many jobs in Alberta and such a strong economy, but we'll have to live with that. That's why they're the opposition.

I just want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the labour laws in Alberta are probably the best in North America.

An Hon. Member: Probably in the universe.

Mr. Cardinal: Maybe the universe even, Mr. Speaker. They are the best.

Presently in Alberta with such a strong economy, so many jobs out there, many industries are moving to Alberta to set up purposely because Alberta's environment as far as the labour situation is really good. In fact, over 99 per cent of all collective agreements – that's 1,200 collective agreements – are in place and approved without any disruption at all.

Mr. Martin: No doubt the best labour laws in the country for people like Tyson. No doubt about it.

My question. The minister avoided it, so I'm going to ask again: what is it going to take for the government to move on first contract arbitration? Another dispute? Violence? Somebody getting killed? Is that what it's going to take?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, this particular issue is under discussion right now, and of course the member knows that any issue that is under discussion in caucus is not discussed in the House until a final decision is made.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's absolute nonsense. The minister said before that he was looking at first contract arbitration. It's not for discussion behind closed doors by this government. My question again: when is the minister going to do the right thing and move on

first contract arbitration? This year, next year, or in a hundred years?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course this member knows that anything that's under discussion by our government is not shared in public until a final decision is made. Stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Shared Responsibility for Seniors' Programs

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Continuing care health services have been separated from housing. This leaves the public uncertain of where to go for help and unable to identify who is ultimately responsible. It is confusing, inefficient, and an ineffective approach. We need to establish a system with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. To the minister of seniors: given that the minister indicated on Monday that she has a new concerns resolution process for continuing care in mind, would the minister describe this new process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to comment that the responsibility for continuing care is shared between the Minister of Health and Wellness and myself, but that responsibility is actually working very, very well. The area for accommodation and for housing that was mentioned here, the concerns resolution process as far as the standards related to accommodation in my ministry, what that would relate to is this: as we updated the standards through the MLA task force, one of the areas that we thought would bring immediacy to change and to help people in care if they did have a complaint was that that would be reported, it would be monitored, and it would be enforced. That would occur through a concerns resolution process. The concerns resolution process, for example, under accommodation would mean that if somebody had a concern about food, which many of the complaints in care to my ministry are about, then the staff would record that. They would report on it. That's what it's about, to actually resolve that for the individual and for the family, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier said last fall that consolidating seniors' programs and services is under active consideration, can the minister explain how this plan has gone forward or is being implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the shared responsibility, especially in the area that's related to standards, which I know the member is very familiar with, where this is coming together for supportive living and for long-term care is that areas such as designated assisted living and the long-term care are under the regional health authorities, whereas lodges and assisted living are within my ministry. But where it comes together is with the funding that we allocate to both.

I don't know if that assists you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. My next question would be to the Minister of RAGE. Has the minister assessed the efficiency or not of having seniors' care, housing, and programs divided between multiple ministries?

Mr. Ouellette: No, Mr. Speaker, I haven't. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Railway Transportation in Northern Alberta

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Canadian National Railway recently announced the acquisition of the Mackenzie Northern rail line, running from Smith, Alberta, to Hay River, Northwest Territories. CN's \$40 million investment will see upgrades of the line, increasing train velocities, expediting train shipments. The development of the container handling facility in Prince Rupert is also becoming a reality, with potential long-term benefits for northern Alberta. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what are the implications of this new project on northern Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to this question is that this project obviously is going to have wonderful implications for northern Alberta. The port of Prince Rupert is looking at having roughly 500,000 containers per year once phase 1 of the project is done. Again, this is probably the third or fourth time this session that I'm in a little bit of an uncomfortable position, and that is that I'm actually going to congratulate the previous federal government for the Pacific gateway strategy. This is a strategy that yesterday I reconfirmed with the new minister of infrastructure and transportation in Ottawa. This is a very important strategy both for northern Alberta as well as Alberta in general as well as the Pacific gateway to expand our export markets, to expand our export capability. Quite simply, this is wonderful news for northern Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is also to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. The north still lacks a connection to the west coast because of the removal of the Watino rail line. Does the minister see a role for the provincial government in supporting rail infrastructure and development?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question. Prior to CN taking over the short-line railroads, which were under provincial jurisdiction, there was an element of potentially helping the short-line railroads. I find it very difficult to attempt to help an organization or a company that is making 31 per cent profit, which is what CN is presently making. I believe the figures are very close to that. So this is very much an enigma. We don't necessarily want to enter into the market to be helping one particular company versus the other company. On the other hand, we do want to ensure that there is mobility, that there is a rail transportation in northern Alberta. Obviously, we are looking very closely at this decision. We are looking very closely at whether or not we do become involved in this, but we have to be careful because we simply don't want to be seen as subsidizing one company over another.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand the dilemma that the minister has. Still, looking at it from the northern Alberta perspective, can he please tell me how we can take advantage of an infrastructure without having part of it there?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we've done, obviously, is the northern road strategy, which the hon. member has been intimately involved in, and another thing that we've done is provide land for the intermodal port that the county of Grande Prairie is presently doing. So we're there to do whatever we can from an infrastructure and transportation point of view to ensure that the goods and services move and that the supply chain is very effective from northern Alberta right out to the port. We will do whatever it takes. We have to get over this issue about subsidizing one company versus the other. That's a very large philosophical dilemma that we're in in this particular situation. It was actually much easier when the short-line railroads were under provincial jurisdiction as opposed to the large railroads, which are under federal jurisdiction.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Sports and Fitness Strategy

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An active lifestyle is an important and effective way to maintain good health. By promoting sports and recreation, this government can contribute to a healthier population and decrease the cost of public health care. My first question is to the Minister of Community Development. Does the minister agree that fully implementing the Alberta sports plan would help to reduce the cost of public health care by promoting a healthier population?

2:30

Mr. Mar: The short answer is yes, Mr. Speaker. I think the longer answer, though, is that the Alberta government through Community Development has had a long history of promoting sports at both the recreational and competitive levels. One can see the results of the recent winter Olympics, that were held in Torino, Italy. One can see the number of athletes that train right here in the province of Alberta that are members of Canada's Olympic team. One looks at success that we've had in World Cup events in skiing, cross-country, and downhill.

I would invite the hon. member to also see the level of participation at games like the Alberta Winter Games, that were recently hosted up in the Hinton area, where it was an extraordinary result, where some 2,200 athletes from throughout the province descended upon Hinton and the surrounding area and participated greatly.

So, Mr. Speaker, we do recognize this. The sports plan would certainly be an excellent adjunct to supporting what we already do, but we already do a great job, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: has the minister taken part in the third-way consultation to advocate for a fully implemented Alberta sports plan?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, certainly I have advocated for the implementation of the Alberta sport plan, but again I want to emphasize that participation of young people in athletic endeavours is very, very important. This is something that the Minister of Education certainly is aware of. Anybody who's been a Minister of Commu-

nity Development in the past knows that kids that are part of a team are not part of a gang. Kids that are slinging around a tennis racket are not slinging around a firearm. Kids that are high on their achievement are not high on drugs. We recognize intuitively and statistically the value of participation in the arts, in culture, in sport, in recreation, and this has been a very important part of the emphasis of the Department of Community Development.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the Minister of Health and Wellness: has your department conducted any studies to determine the financial impact an Alberta sports plan would have on health care costs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak with any knowledge about studies in the past, but I would tell you that a very effective program started by my predecessor, the Choose Well Challenge and the Healthy U program, seems to be having a tremendous amount of benefit in communities. A number of communities participated last year. We had 62 communities. We expect to have even more communities involved this year. If there are studies or data that I can provide for the hon. member, I will search that out and see if we can provide them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds I will call on the first of a number to participate but first of all our historical vignette of the day.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: As of June 1, 1972, the Legislative Assembly Act addressed the actual tenure of the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Since that time the leader was the leader on a full-time basis, unlike the practice which existed from 1906 to 1971.

Former Premier Harry Strom, Social Credit representing the constituency of Cypress, served in 1972. In 1973 James D. Henderson, Social Credit representing Wetaskiwin-Leduc, served for a brief period before Robert C. Clark, Social Credit representing Olds-Didsbury was elected leader. Mr. Clark served as Leader of the Official Opposition from 1973 to 1980. In 1980 Raymond A. Speaker, Social Credit representing Little Bow, became the leader and served to 1982.

Grant Notley, New Democratic Party representing the constituency of Spirit River-Fairview, served as the opposition leader in 1983 and 1984. Following Mr. Notley's untimely death, the current member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, a member of the New Democratic Party representing the constituency of Edmonton-Norwood, assumed the position and served from 1984 to 1993.

Laurence Decore, a Liberal representing Edmonton-Glengarry, served in 1993 and 1994, when D. Grant Mitchell became the new Liberal leader. Mr. Mitchell served as Leader of the Official Opposition from 1994 to 1998. From July 7, 1998, to March 12, 2001, Nancy J. MacBeth, a Liberal representing the constituency of Edmonton-McClung, served as the leader. In 2001 Dr. Ken Nicol, a Liberal representing Lethbridge-East, became the leader and served in that capacity to March 27, 2004, when the current member for Edmonton-Riverview, a Liberal, assumed the position.

Alberta has had 28 different leaders of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, 16 Lieutenant Governors, and 12 Premiers. While one, E. Peter Lougheed, was to be elected Premier of the province of Alberta in Alberta's first 100 years, four were to become Lieutenant Governors of Alberta, and that will be a subject of another vignette.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Alberta Association for Community Living

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend I had the opportunity to attend the Alberta Association for Community Living's 50th anniversary celebration and annual family conference here in Edmonton. AACL is a family-based, not-for-profit organization that represents the interests of children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families. This organization believes in the importance of supportive, loving families and fully inclusive communities.

It strives to assist children and adults with developmental disabilities and to provide opportunity for them to grow up in supportive and understanding families, have a home in the community, and develop and strengthen the family relationships and friendships in their lives. The AACL provides supports to increase the opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities to be educated in inclusive classrooms, find and maintain meaningful employment, and develop other life skills that will help them be valued members of their communities.

As chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I would like to recognize the work of the AACL and the positive impact it has made in the lives of Albertans with developmental disabilities and their families. Congratulations to the Alberta Association for Community Living for 50 successful years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Challenge North 2006 Conference

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today to draw attention to northern Alberta. Northern Alberta makes a significant contribution to Alberta's economy and the quality of life all Albertans enjoy, but it is only beginning to capture its full potential.

Much of the northern economy is based on resource extraction; however, the long-term sustainability of northern Alberta communities depends on adding value to our resources and achieving a high quality of life for northern residents. While many communities in the north are experiencing unprecedented growth, others are experiencing difficulties adapting to changes taking place in northern and rural economies.

Next month the Northern Alberta Development Council is hosting Challenge North 2006: Today's Promise, Tomorrow's Reality, a conference that brings together northern leaders to identify strategies to guide the development of their own communities and the region as a whole. Infrastructure, human resources, education, and housing are just some of the northern priorities to be discussed at this conference.

As a government we must make a commitment to provide the opportunity for these Albertans to build vibrant communities and economies through co-operation, innovation, and diversification.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all members to attend this important conference in High Level and to take a tour of the area. I look forward to being part of the process as we move forward as a whole province to ensure that northern Alberta is not overlooked and receives the investment and support it needs to grow in the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:40

Catherine Druhall

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise in sorrow

this afternoon to pay homage to a constituent of mine whose funeral I recently attended. Mrs. Catherine Druhall first contacted my constituency office almost exactly one year ago. She came to seek help because she was fearful for the health and safety of her husband, John, who is a resident of a long-term care facility in Calgary. When she met with my assistant, she had books, binders, and boxes of documentation she had made documenting the poor level of care her husband was receiving and the times he needed acute care as a result.

Catherine spent time with her husband nearly every day until she could no longer walk, just one month ago. She spent time with him so often not only because she was a loving, dedicated woman but also because she was terrified of what might happen to him when she was not there. Catherine used every government process to try and get help. She received at best lip service and at worst outright intimidation. Catherine said one day: "We have always worked hard. We never cheated. We lived our lives with dignity, and my husband deserves to live out his last years in dignity and to die with dignity."

Catherine did live her last years with dignity, and she did die with dignity, because and perhaps only because she did not have to depend on long-term care in this province. Catherine prayed that after the Auditor General's report of last spring and the MLA commission report of last fall she might see positive change. Instead, this honest, hardworking, and caring senior died in fear of what would happen to John now.

Thank you, Catherine Druhall. Women like you created the opportunities that we enjoy today. In return, you and other seniors have been treated with disregard and disdain by this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Telus University Cup

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize some of the best hockey being played in our province, indeed our country. Now, to be clear, I'm not referring to the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames. The University of Alberta is hosting the Telus University Cup. This tournament features the top six university men's teams from across Canada. Over 200 athletes, coaches, and staff will compete for the national title from March 23 to 26 in Edmonton. The defending champion U of A Golden Bears will host Lakehead University of Thunder Bay, Acadia University of Wolfville, Nova Scotia, the University of Saskatchewan, McGill University of Montreal, and Wilfrid Laurier of Waterloo, Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to encourage everyone to take in some of this competition and experience exceptional hockey and possibly discover some future NHL talent. I would encourage all members of the House to join me in congratulating the organizers, sponsors, and athletes and in wishing them well over the next three days.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

World Water Day

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is World Water Day. Water is so fundamental to life that it is often taken for granted, yet lack of water and unsafe water is a threat to life in many countries of the world. Rural Albertans close to their source of water and intimately involved with its uses are most conscious of how vital to life, livelihood, and the precious ecosystems it is. They, among others, are increasingly anxious about the present administration of this resource and are concerned about this when most of the water is

invisible. Weak systems of monitoring and enforcement continue to take their toll and affect 20 per cent of our Alberta population.

The Alberta government has stated in its Water for Life strategy of three years ago that groundwater and surface water must be preserved in pursuing community and economic development, but evidence of this is wanting. Our water is declining in quantity and quality. Industrial expansion is predicted to consume more water than agriculture this decade. In the case of oil and gas, activity has the potential to both contaminate underground aquifers and contribute to loss in deeper zones, where higher mineral content can make it unpotable. This is of particular concern in recent unconventional CBM activity burgeoning across the province.

What is the volume and quality of our groundwater? We don't know, yet government refuses to slow the pace of industrial development until we know. We must manage surface activities to protect this vital resource and move to full-cost accounting to ensure that industry and the public treat water conservatively and sustainably.

The Water for Life strategy remains largely a vision without major new investments and baseline measures and new regulations. Albertans have identified the environment as a close third in priority, yet it receives only 0.5 per cent of the provincial budget. Alberta is caught in a frenzy of industrial activity, population growth, and climate change that could leave future generations with a starkly different environment and an economy hampered by a shortage of water. We cannot be complacent about our lifeblood. We need leadership for smart growth. Government must take control of the profound industrial pressures on surface and subsurface water and balance them with ecological and human needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and present a petition representing a hundred residents of Alberta from the communities of Sherwood Park, Edmonton, St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, Red Deer, Delburne, and Calgary expressing their concern about the proposed changes to the health care system.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to submit a petition with 51 names: "We, the undersigned . . . petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings with regard to the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The e-mailers and letter writers are as follows: Christine Dober-Miller, David Langdon, Kim Tufford, Billy-Jo Schmidt, Dena Gillies, Katya Pekh, Sergei Pekh, Dawn Laprise, Barbara Brochu, Arlene Thompson, Sandra Krasowski, Peggy Flesher, C. Moorey, Eugenia Alcasabas, J. Oliver, Rakesh Kapoor, and Kaya Frayn.*

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have copies of six letters regarding the provincial government's involvement with the national daycare program. These letters are from Linda Bourassa, Sandy Bowhay, Peter Adams,* Stacey Wickman, William Fedorak, and Ron Wickman.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to table six letters and the appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. These letters are signed by Gladys Wrynn, Ed Wrynn, R.J. Grant, Peggy Ziebarth, Samantha Pekh, and Maxine Howard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter requesting support for adequate funding for the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Edmonton Region Community Board to support individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. This is from Jan Ardis.

My second tabling is five letters with appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters I am tabling today are from Dawn Schroeder, Kim Tufford, Teena Wilks, Ronald Pasnak, and Joyce Assen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Carolyn Pogue calling on the government to reject the privatization of the health care system.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of the Assembly my special guests from the outstanding Ernest Morrow junior high school, located in the hard-working community of Forest Lawn in my excellent Calgary-Fort constituency. I must point out that the better half of the Member for Foothills-Rocky View is a dedicated teacher at this school. There are 35 hard-working students here today accompanied by five dedicated group leaders and teachers: Shannon Donnelly, Marilyn Russel, Verna Oystriick, Darren Kiziak, and Diane Pham. I would like to ask all of them to stand and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

2:50

The Speaker: With a great deal of trepidation, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is again indeed a pleasure and an honour to introduce to you and through you

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

to members of this Assembly two young Albertans from the constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul. Joining us for the budget are Graham Beaulieu and my youngest son, George Danyluk. Graham and George are both in their third year of mechanical engineering at the University of Alberta. Both of them will be working with Nexum this summer, Graham in Lloydminster and George in Fort McMurray. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in order to adequately prepare for the Budget Address by the Minister of Finance, the House is recessed until 3:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:51 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.]

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

15. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2006-07 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, the 2006-07 government estimates, fiscal and business plans, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 16, I now wish to table the 2006-07 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2006-07 government estimates.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I am tabling the government's consolidated fiscal, capital, and business plans for Budget 2006 as required under sections 4, 7, and 7(1) of the Government Accountability Act.

Also provided for the information of the Legislative Assembly are business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of the same act.

head: **Budget Address**

16. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Mrs. McClellan: As a proud Albertan it is my honour and privilege to rise today and present Alberta's budget for 2006, the first year of our second century. Mr. Speaker, 2005 was a special year for Alberta. We celebrated 100 years as a member of Canada's Confederation. Just last week we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Legislature. Alberta has come a long way from that first legislative session, held in the Thistle Roller and Ice Rink, just a few blocks from where we sit today. Together Albertans have built a province that's gone from a remote wilderness with great promise to an economic powerhouse with tremendous achievements and boundless opportunities.

Alberta has always been a place for optimists. People like Karl Clark, who pioneered Alberta's oil sands discoveries back in the 1920s and refused to give up on his dreams. Karl Clark would be amazed at what's happening today. People like Dr. James Shapiro and his team at the University of Alberta, whose Edmonton protocol is giving new hope to millions of people with diabetes. People like our former Lieutenant Governor Lois Hole, whose passion for education and for life inspired us all. People like Arno, Steve, Glenn, Terry, Darcy, Rick, Tony, and, oh, so many others, who refused to give up when BSE turned their lives and their livestock businesses upside down. And people like our Premier, who has always believed in Alberta and Albertans, who believed that we could be the first and only province in Canada to be debt free and kept us firmly on track till that goal was achieved.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's history is defined by optimists, and if there was ever a time for optimism about Alberta and about our future, this is it. We enter our second century in a truly remarkable position. Our economy is leading the country. More people are working and earning more than ever before. Our education system is among the best in the world. Our colleges, universities, and technical schools are producing outstanding graduates, leading researchers, and thoughtful young people who will lead our province in years to come.

Leading businesses and entrepreneurs see Alberta as the place to achieve their dreams. Across the province there's a feeling that this is Alberta; the sky is the limit. Our challenge, Mr. Speaker, is to channel Albertans' optimism, their energy, and their ideas to take the best advantage of today's prosperity and secure an even better future for our province.

In a nutshell, that's what Alberta's budget for 2006 is designed to achieve. It's about strengthening today and securing tomorrow. It's about seizing today's opportunities and investing wisely to meet today's challenges. But most of all it's about keeping our eyes firmly on Alberta's future and making sure that everything we do today, every investment that we make helps build a better future for our children and their children.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2006 is Alberta's 13th consecutive balanced budget. It positions Alberta for continued growth and prosperity. It strengthens our position today, ensuring businesses can compete, communities can thrive, and Albertans can succeed. It invests in priority areas, saves for the future, and gives back to Albertans, keeping our taxes the lowest in Canada and helping people who need our support. Before I get into some of the details, Mr. Speaker, let me begin with the big picture.

For 2006-07 our budget projects a surplus of just over \$4 billion. That surplus is largely due to continuing high prices for oil and gas. I'll tell you right now that the surplus could be more if prices are higher than we anticipate, and it could be less if prices drop. That's the reality that we live with in Alberta, and like every Finance minister under our Premier's leadership I would rather be pleasantly surprised with higher-than-expected prices than be forced to cut back if prices drop.

This year's surplus will be earmarked to three key priorities: saving for Alberta's future, responding to capital and infrastructure needs, and increasing the sustainability fund to provide added protection against any sudden declines in revenues and to respond to emergencies throughout the year.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce today that an additional \$1 billion will be invested in the heritage fund in 2006. That's in addition to the \$1 billion we invested earlier this year and our ongoing commitment to inflation-proof the fund. It's a direct reflection of our government's commitment to use Alberta's abundance of resource revenues not only to meet the challenges of today but to share that legacy with future generations of Albertans.

This year our government's base operating spending will increase by 8.3 per cent. As Alberta's Finance minister my focus never strays far from the bottom line. I'll be honest and say that I wish spending was lower, but I believe this is responsible spending for this year, and I am confident that we're making the right investments today to secure a better future for our province.

At the same time, I will also give fair warning to Albertans and to those who think that there's no end to how much we can spend. Do not expect this rate of spending to continue in years to come. We have learned the lessons from Alberta's past. We will not squander Alberta's future security by spending more than we can afford, and we will not spend money today, then pass on the bills to future generations of Albertans. Not on our government's watch. This year, Mr. Speaker, we will also review our fiscal framework to make sure that it continues to serve Alberta's needs now and into the future.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me talk about some of the details in our budget for 2006-07. This budget invests in five key areas: in infrastructure; in people; in communities, both rural and urban; in Alberta's environment; and in sustaining economic prosperity.

Over the next three years our government will support \$13.3 billion in infrastructure and important capital projects. That's a 45 per cent increase over our previous capital plan. It's a level of spending that is unmatched in Canada. In fact, on a per capita basis we'll spend three times the average of other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, \$13 billion is a lot of money, but it's also a very critical investment in Alberta's future. It will continue our investments in new and revitalized schools across the province. It will open up new spaces at colleges, universities, and technical institutes and make sure that Alberta has the highly skilled workforce we need. It will improve Alberta's access to leading health care treatments, and it will make sure that we have safe and efficient roads and highways all across the province.

3:40

Let me give Albertans just a quick list of some of the projects that this \$13 billion investment will support: a new centennial centre for interdisciplinary science at the University of Alberta, the Campus Calgary digital library at the University of Calgary, the second phase of redevelopment of Bow Valley College, expansion of trades facilities at Red Deer College, the new Robbins health learning centre at Grant MacEwan College, expansion of Lakeland College in Lloydminster, a new water and environmental science building at the University of Lethbridge, and a new centre for apprenticeship training at NAIT.

In education, Mr. Speaker, 21 school capital projects will be completed this school year, opening up more than 7,300 spaces for kindergarten to grade 12 students across the province; 109 new modular classrooms will open up an additional 2,725 new spaces. Work will begin or continue on 51 previously announced school projects.

In health care, Mr. Speaker, our capital budget will support new

health facilities in Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan; the new Sheldon M. Chumir health centre and the bone and joint institute in Calgary; expansion of the Rockyview, Foothills, and Peter Lougheed hospitals in Calgary; redevelopment of the Royal Alexandra hospital in Edmonton and hospitals in Lethbridge, Edson, Barrhead, Viking, and High Prairie. It will replace the Eastwood primary health centre in Edmonton. It will continue building the new south Calgary hospital and the health sciences ambulatory learning centre in Edmonton. It will complete the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute in Edmonton and move ahead with health information systems, including electronic health records.

On top of these projects, over \$3 billion will go to Alberta's municipalities over the next three years to support roads, bridges, public transit, water and waste water and other infrastructure initiatives in towns, cities, and villages across the province. We'll invest \$3.6 billion in Alberta's highway network, including critical work to begin twinning highway 63 to Fort McMurray, build ring roads around Edmonton and Calgary, and pave our high-volume gravel roads.

Mr. Speaker, this is a clear case of investing now, when we have the money, and putting our resource revenue to work for future generations of Albertans.

The second area I want to highlight today is our investment in people. Ask Albertans what they expect their government's priorities to be, and the answers are pretty clear: make sure our children get a good education, that there's a place for my son or daughter at Alberta's universities, colleges, or technical institutes; make sure I can get health care when I need it; and take care of Albertans who need our help, especially children and seniors. That's exactly what Budget 2006 is designed to do.

Total health spending will reach over \$10 billion this year. That includes a 7.5 per cent increase in operating spending and nearly \$700 million for health capital grants. Nearly two-thirds of operating spending will go to health regions to support everything from promoting good health to providing home care to running hospitals and transplanting hearts even in the tiniest babies. This year and for the next two years grants to health regions will increase by 6 per cent per year, giving them the certainty they need to plan and deliver health services to Albertans.

We'll follow through on Alberta's commitment to lead the rest of the country in cancer prevention through a combination of screening, research, and prevention. If Albertans like Dr. Tony Fields have their way, we'll prevent thousands of new cases of cancer, save lives, and maybe, Mr. Speaker, just maybe find a cure for cancer right here in Alberta.

We'll also take very important steps this year to build on our experience with the highly successful hip and knee replacement project and reduce waiting times for breast and prostate cancer care, coronary artery bypass surgery, MRIs, and CT scans.

By 2008-09 our annual operating spending on continuing care initiatives will have increased by \$127 million. That additional funding will result in more hours of nursing and personal care in long-term care facilities, better access to therapy, expanded staff training, and implementation of new health care standards. This is in addition to capital funding last year and this year which is being used to support 1,500 new rural supportive living units and upgrade close to 4,000 units in 77 seniors' lodges across the province.

Mr. Speaker, these are substantial investments in the future of Alberta's health care system. Over the past 10 years spending on health has grown by about an average of 10 per cent per year. This trend cannot continue, or we will have a health care system that we can only afford with \$60 oil and \$7 gas. If we keep spending like we have been over the last 10 years, we're betting the future of

Alberta's health care system on the price of oil and gas. That worries me, and it worries Albertans. Our government has launched a comprehensive discussion on what needs to be done to make sure that our health system is there when people need it and at a price Alberta taxpayers can afford. It's a debate that Albertans need to have, and it's a debate that will shape the future sustainability of health care in Alberta.

This budget also makes very significant investments in the education of our children and young people across the province. In 2006-07 our government will increase operating spending on basic education by over 5 per cent. Funding to school boards will also increase, including another \$16.6 million to reduce class sizes in Alberta schools, especially in the earlier grades. Increased funding will also support technology, transportation, student health, children with special needs, and students whose first language isn't English.

This year the Minister of Education will also launch a series of round-table discussions talking to students, parents, educators, business and community leaders to find the best ways to increase the number of young Albertans who complete high school. A high school completion symposium will also be convened to address these issues.

In 2005, Mr. Speaker, postsecondary education was our government's number one priority, and that was just the beginning. Our commitment to postsecondary education will be even stronger in 2006-07. Operating spending will increase by 16 per cent, and over \$270 million will be invested in capital projects at Alberta's universities, colleges, and technical institutes. By 2008-09 our government will have increased operating spending on postsecondary education by nearly 29 per cent and will have opened up 20,000 new learning opportunities for students across the province.

The first allocations will be made this year from the access to the future fund, providing support for up to \$45 million in projects at Alberta's postsecondary institutions, and as announced already, Alberta's postsecondary students will not pay \$1 more in tuition this year thanks to our government's promise to pick up the costs of tuition increases again this year. On top of that direct support for Alberta students, we will also increase funding for scholarships, bursaries, and grants by 21.5 per cent and increase the yearly loan limits to recognize rising costs for students.

Here are some of the other investments that we will make in Albertans, young and old, as part of Budget 2006. Support for the Alberta seniors' benefit will increase by over 8 per cent. Funding for AISH will increase by nearly 18 per cent. Money will be invested in affordable housing, and funding for children's programs will increase by over 12 per cent, providing additional funding for child care, for child intervention services, to support families of children with disabilities, and to step up our actions in preventing family violence and bullying.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are fiercely proud of the communities where they live. They want their communities to be good places to raise their families and build their futures. There's no doubt that many rural communities have been under an enormous strain. While Alberta's cities have struggled to keep pace with a booming economy, rural communities faced the devastation of BSE. Albertans stood by farmers and ranchers when BSE and bad weather took their toll, but it's really the rural communities that face the hard repercussions right in their own backyards. They see the impact today whenever commodity prices rise or fall, and they watch their youth and young families leave for the cities in search of further education and better jobs.

3:50

In spite of that, Mr. Speaker, rural Alberta is a place for optimists,

for people who believe there's a future for rural Alberta and rural communities all across the province. I'm fiercely proud of my rural heritage. It's where I live. It's where my heart and soul will always be. I'm enormously proud of our government's commitment to rural communities, to their futures, and to the families who call rural Alberta home.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to announce today that our government is committing \$100 million for a new rural development initiative. This initiative will support a number of projects and help us move forward with implementing our government's comprehensive rural development strategy. We're going to work with rural communities, expand and diversify the rural economy, improve services, and enhance the quality of life in small-town Alberta. Details of this new initiative are still being developed, so I can only say to people in rural Alberta: "Stay tuned. There's more good news to come."

Mr. Speaker, this budget will also provide ongoing support to communities all across the province, large and small, rural and urban. This year we'll increase our funding for provincial and municipal policing, step up our efforts to combat organized crime, take steps to address the serious problem of crystal meth, improve access to the justice system, and establish a new initiative to handle high-risk family violence cases.

We will also spend an additional \$7 million on provincial foundations: foundations for the arts, sports and recreation, parks and wildlife, human rights and multiculturalism, volunteerism, and historical resources.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are proud of their communities and rightly so, but they're also fiercely proud and protective of our environment. They value Alberta's land and water, and they want to make sure that it's preserved for future generations. With this budget our government will add to its investment in the Water for Life strategy. Over the next three years \$172 million will be spent on municipal water and waste-water treatment facilities, on reducing the risk of flooding, and on testing and protecting Alberta's water supply. We'll invest \$15 million in a new initiative to develop a comprehensive land-use framework for Alberta, a framework that will guide future decisions on how Alberta's land is used, whether that's to preserve sensitive grasslands, to open up recreation areas, manage growth around our major cities, or preserve our valuable farmland.

Twelve million dollars will be spent this year on initiatives related to climate change, including major research initiatives through the Alberta Energy Research Institute.

Our Premier has joined with others in the industry to champion a new future for Alberta's vast supplies of coal. We've all heard his passion when he talks about clean coal, and he's working hard to turn the skeptics into believers. Just like with the skeptics who said that the oil sands would never be viable, we're going to prove that the naysayers are wrong.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has coal reserves to last upwards of 1,000 years, and they contain some of the cleanest burning coal in the world. Alberta's coal contains twice the energy of Alberta's conventional crude, natural gas, and bitumen combined. Our challenge is this: to combine new technology with the ingenuity of Albertans to transform those vast reserves of coal into an affordable, reliable, and clean source of energy for the future.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier has said that a new day is dawning for coal, and it's dawning right here in Alberta. With our government's support the Alberta Energy Research Institute will partner with leading Alberta-based industries to develop clean-coal technology, technology designed to eliminate emissions and open the door to new, clean-burning alternatives to meet our growing energy demands. This is another area where Alberta optimists will lead the

way, and the result will be a cleaner environment, a long-term source of energy in Alberta, and a wealth of new opportunity to expand Alberta's economy and build for the future.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is stronger than ever, and all signs point to a continued strong growth in the near future. As one author put it, for the first time in our history Alberta is being widely emulated rather than casually dismissed. There is no doubt Alberta is the place to be, and there's no longer a chance that we can be dismissed. People are flocking here to get jobs and pursue their dreams. Businesses look to Alberta as the place to invest, pursue new opportunities, and build their futures.

Mr. Speaker, make no mistake. Alberta has to be able to compete not only with the rest of Canada but the rest of the world. To do that, it's not enough just to sell Alberta as a great place to be. We need to be competitive on taxes.

Our government will reduce the general corporate tax rate from 11.5 per cent to 10 per cent effective April 1, 2006. Mr. Speaker, I know that some will criticize us for this decision and say that we should give the break to small business instead or pass on any tax reductions to individual Albertans first, so let me put this in perspective. Alberta's tax rates for small business are already very competitive, and in comparison to the rates for bigger businesses small business today pays only 3 per cent. That was the target we set five years ago, and that target has been reached. We've seen no indication that our rates for small business are not competitive or fair. On the other hand, larger corporations face growing pressures to compete not only here in Canada but on a global basis. Alberta must be able to compete and attract business investment from around the world.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of tax reductions for individuals and families I also have some good news to report. Our priority again this year is low- and middle-income Albertans, lightening the load they pay and leaving more of their hard-earned tax dollars in their pockets, not ours.

As many will remember, Mr. Speaker, our first priority when Alberta's financial picture improved in the late 1990s was to reduce personal income taxes. As a result, from 1999 to 2001 our government phased in over \$1.5 billion in personal income tax cuts, including the single tax rate and the highest income exemptions in Canada.

This year the basic spousal and eligible dependant tax credits will be increased to \$14,899, compared to an average in other provinces of \$7,800 for the basic credit – that's for the basic credit in other provinces – and \$6,850 for spousal amounts. All tax credits in this province will be indexed, including the Alberta family employment tax credit. Together these changes will save Albertans about \$77 million in personal income taxes.

Mr. Speaker, effective April 1 we'll also increase the threshold for health care premiums by \$5,000. That means that a family with children will pay no health care premiums if their taxable income is less than \$32,210. This is a direct benefit to 140,000 people, and it will save them \$30 million in 2006-07 alone.

On top of these very important steps, Mr. Speaker, our government will also reduce school property tax rates by over 7 per cent and continue to protect Alberta seniors from paying increases in school property taxes.

We'll invest in research and innovation and continue to attract leading researchers to our province. We'll expand our research endowment funds, encourage innovation and faster commercialization of new energy technologies, invest over \$50 million in life

sciences research, and continue to support start-up business ventures.

4:00

We'll also continue to assist Alberta's agricultural producers in their ongoing recovery from the effects of drought, low commodity prices, and BSE. For the 2006 crop year we are extending the previously announced enhancements to the spring price endorsement and revenue insurance coverage programs. We are reducing the producers' share of production insurance premiums. These changes will provide some relief from rising input costs and sagging commodity prices while encouraging producers to protect themselves in an uncertain sector of our economy. In addition, we'll continue our efforts to promote value-added agriculture and secure a brighter future for Alberta's agriculture industry.

Taken together, these investments will make Alberta a fierce competitor for national and international business. It will maintain our commitment to small business, provide more certainty for agriculture producers, leave more money in Albertans' pockets, and support research, innovation, and leading-edge ideas.

Mr. Speaker, these are the highlights of Budget 2006. As I said at the outset, if there was ever a time for optimism about Alberta's future, this is it. With Budget 2006 we're determined to capture Alberta's optimism and hopes for the future, to address the challenges of today but, most important, to secure an even better future for our province and for generations of Albertans to come. We're also determined to play a strong leadership role on the national stage, contributing our ideas and experience and showing everyone that a strong Alberta makes for an even stronger Canada.

Mr. Speaker, in the Premier's television address a few weeks ago I listened to the voices of so many Albertans. I heard them talk about their hopes and their dreams for the future, and I listened as they talked and our Premier talked about Alberta and the kind of things that are possible here if we just set our minds to it.

The comments from one young man struck me in particular. He talked of his experience as a youth and how he works with youth today, and he said: "I've always been told opportunity knocks once. Not in Alberta. It knocks several times on your door. You just have to capitalize on the opportunity when it's there."

Mr. Speaker, opportunity is definitely knocking on Alberta's door. We can hear it. It's all around us. With this budget, with the right investments, and with our eyes on Alberta's future we're ready, and we will capitalize on every opportunity that comes our way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Premier. Thank you, Albertans. To quote our Premier, welcome to Alberta's second century. With Albertans' unique blend of optimism, ingenuity, and sheer hard work, I have no doubt it will be even better than the first.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:05 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, March 22, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/03/22

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading
Bill 2
Drug-endangered Children Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't tell you how pleased I am to rise today and move Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act, for third reading.

We've had many good discussions about this legislation and what it will do for some of Alberta's most vulnerable children, and I'd like to take the opportunity to address one issue which was brought up during committee. There is some concern that the part of Bill 2 which provides for an emergency apprehension of a child without a court order violates fundamental civil liberties. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to reassure all members of this Assembly that this is not the case.

Apprehending a child is a serious matter and one that my ministry does not take lightly. These provisions are used in situations where clearly a child is at risk. Unfortunately, police and caseworkers aren't always aware of all the circumstances of a case until they go to investigate. They need to be able to respond to what they find, and this may include immediately removing a child from a dangerous situation.

I'd like to thank my hon. colleague for his concern and assure him that the aforementioned subsections are necessary to protect the children in our province who most need our help. These provisions have consistently been upheld by the courts as being constitutional.

Again, I'd like to ask the entire Assembly to support this important piece of legislation and help address this emergent social issue. Your support will put an end to the abuse that these children face. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had spoken actually against this bill I think in second reading. I have the same concerns now that I did then. There's been nothing coming from the government side that alleviates my concerns, and those are specifically that all the powers that are needed to apprehend children if they are in danger, in fact, exist now. So the purpose of this bill is unclear.

My concern about it is that it becomes a window dressing. It becomes something that can be waved around that we're protecting children, but in fact the actual resources that need to be in place for this – I don't see them being in place, and I'm a little concerned that we'll see a parallel to what we saw with the PCHIP bill, in which young prostitutes were apprehended and were supposed to go to a safe house when, in fact, there were no resources for the safe house. For the first period of time after the bill was in effect, there was no place to put these young women. I think that program has not been as successful as the government had hoped, but it's much flashed around as proof that somehow the government is doing something, and that's my concern with this bill that I see before me.

Everything that the government claims it wants to do with this bill

it, in fact, can do now, and if it was really concerned about expanding the definition of abuse to include being in a house where toxic drugs are being manufactured or grown, then I question why the current definitions of abuse under the existing child and family act – and I never get that name right; sorry – aren't just expanded to include this additional definition of abuse.

So I, too, have some real concerns about how the effect of this bill ends up getting played out. I don't see the resources in place to make it operational. I question why we're not using the existing legislation, that we're piling on yet another layer here, which, to my mind, is inefficient government, not efficient government.

I share my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona's concerns about extraordinary powers that are being granted here. I think we have to always strive for that balance, and I know that that's difficult for child welfare workers and for the police that are dealing with these cases. This is not easy stuff. I just have real concerns that this is a bill that's all about grandstanding and window dressing and not about actually doing what the government professes that it wants to do because if it did use the laws that are there, resource them so that they're effective and get on with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments very brief this evening. It's not often in this Assembly that I find myself changing my mind on a piece of legislation. The other day when I spoke to Bill 2, I gave it my wholehearted support, and I would like to be able to do that still. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that particular day gave what I believe to be some very, very compelling arguments about the rule of law, particularly as it relates to sections (9) and (10) regarding the apprehension of a child.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that upon reflection over the last few days, I share as well the concerns of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and that doesn't mean that I don't believe there's an awful lot of good that is being attempted to be accomplished by this bill. But when we're talking about basic civil rights and civil liberties and in this case perhaps an unnecessary infringement on those civil liberties, I do in fact share the concerns of a number of my colleagues in this Legislature, and I'm not so sure that I'm going to be able to continue to be able to offer my full support of this bill unless we can address those two clauses that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona addressed in his comments the other day.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. My concern with this bill is that once the children are apprehended, do we have the facilities and do we have the operational budget to support them? Whatever hell we've taken them out of, I want them to have an opportunity to recuperate, to be placed in the care of loving foster families, possibly the opportunity for the parents who went down this wrong road to have an opportunity to receive counselling with the hope that maybe these damaged families can be brought back together.

This reminds me a little bit of what we were trying to accomplish with the children that were addicted to crystal meth. Initially we were talking about a 90-day treatment plan, but over the course of amendments and discussions that was greatly reduced. I guess I'm asking the minister: can you outline some of the support programs – for example, the number of beds, the potential for foster families – that would address my concerns? While we're apprehending the

children, are we putting them in an environment of care and protection where their educational goals, their health goals, their basic needs can be fulfilled?

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 2 in third reading. I want to start by bringing to the attention of the House a bill that was passed in this Assembly some 75 years or so ago, to be exact, in 1928. It was called the Sexual Sterilization Act. I just want to remind all members of the House about that bill and the injury that bill did to over 3,000 innocent Albertans who were sterilized because that law was passed in this House. That law was wrong. It was morally wrong. It's a legal abomination. The Supreme Court said so. This government then compensated those innocent victims of that carelessly passed law. I bring this to the attention of the House because it's sobering to think about how Assemblies such as ours get carried away by the argument of the moment or the concern of the moment, not a sound argument but a concern of the moment, and enact laws that are wrongful, that do irreparable injury and damage to innocent citizens.

8:10

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I want to draw attention to the pseudoscience that drove that particular decision by this Assembly in 1928 as yesterday was the anniversary of the passage of this bill in this Assembly under this roof. That bill was driven by the science of genetics and the eugenics movement based on a pseudoscience of theories of genetic inheritance, that somehow imbecility, mental illness, or a deficiency in intelligence were the result of defective genes, and therefore mothers who were alleged to have those genes had to be deprived of their right to have children, hence sterilization.

One of the key figures in the early part of last century, a scientist, a psychologist, and a celebrated psychometrician of the time, was Cyril Burt, who was later on knighted for his scholarship and became Sir Cyril Burt. He was a professor at the University of London in England. Seventy years later Sir Cyril Burt's research was shown to be based on forged and falsified data. The psychological association of Great Britain took away his membership posthumously. His peers 70 years later saw the offence that he committed was so serious that they found it necessary to take away from the already passed away Sir Cyril Burt the honour of being a member of that association.

Now turning to Bill 2, Mr. Speaker, I have had time to reflect after last Thursday's debate in which we argued back and forth about the legal status of this bill, whether or not it's respectful of the conventions of the rule of law on which all democracies are based, and I have been unable to change my mind about my concern that the bill, in fact, does not respect this fundamental principle of the rule of law to which all democratically elected governments must submit their legislation, must use it as a test, as a proof whether or not the legislation is worthy of the support of Houses or Assemblies such as this one.

Mr. Speaker, we either have to accept the first eight subsections of section 2 and say that those are sufficient in themselves to permit the apprehending of children who are defined by this act as being endangered through drug production in the home – they're drug-endangered children. These are not children whose lives are in immediate and imminent and present danger. These are children whose well-being is endangered because they inhale the fumes, the chemicals that are cooked and produced in a residence. The first eight subsections of section 2 allow enough leeway to law enforce-

ment agencies or the child protection agencies to seek legal permission and authority to enter the premises to apprehend those children. Subs (9) and (10) are the exact opposite of the first eight, and if this bill is to allow (9) and (10) to stand, then we don't need the first eight. If we are going to allow child protection authorities or other agencies of the state to go in at will without being authorized to go into a residence, then why do we need the first eight?

So either we have (9) and (10) – and then it's clear that this Assembly is saying to child protection authorities that they don't need to follow the rule of law and to go in and do whatever they want because that's in the best judgment of the Assembly – or we say that the first eight are the ones that we stand by and that these are the only ones that we give approval to. We can't have it both ways.

Mr. Speaker, the state, in my view, without due cause has no place in the living quarters and in the family rooms of this province and of this nation. That is why I find it ironic that the minister is supposed to protect children. When you protect children, you protect them not only in terms of their physical well-being but you also protect them with all the civil liberties and the freedoms that they enjoy now and that they will enjoy when they become adults. You can't pass a law, violate a fundamental principle or rule of law, and then say that you are protecting children. You are not protecting them from anything. You are simply in fact creating conditions in which the legitimacy of the laws that we enact will be undermined, and therefore the laws themselves will be weakened.

There are 516,700 children between the ages of birth to 12 years and 315,300 mothers with such children in that age group. Of these, 60 per cent of the mothers of children in a family where the youngest child is less than three years old work. Mr. Speaker, 71.4 per cent of mothers with the youngest child being between years three to five work. Then 83.6 per cent of mothers with the youngest child being between the ages of six and 12 years work. These are the children who need the protection of and the services of this minister. The minister has been to Ottawa last week to seek such protection, to seek such assurance from the federal government, and these families, hundreds of thousands of children and their parents, are still waiting to hear from the minister. I think she has an appropriate role, a major role as a matter of fact, in improving the lives of our children. This bill doesn't do that. If anything, it undermines the conditions under which our children can grow up as healthy children and become healthy and enabled adults.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce an amendment, usually called a hoist amendment, to the act. I have the copies of the amendment with me. I would like it to be circulated before I speak to the amendment any further.

Thank you.

8:20

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you may now proceed.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion for third reading of Bill 2, Drug-endangered Children Act, presented to the House by the minister just a few minutes ago, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 2, Drug-endangered Children Act, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence."

Briefly, Mr. Speaker, to speak to the amendment, I argued with some passion Thursday afternoon for the minister to give this Assembly and, more than anything else, give herself some time to reflect on what some of us have expressed as serious concerns with respect to this bill. I was unable to persuade the minister to do so on Thursday afternoon.

This motion gives me another chance to make yet one more

attempt to ask the minister to allow a cooling-off period of six months – and this motion will do precisely that – in which she and her department officials will have the time to weigh the arguments made in this House against subs (9) and (10) of section 2 of this bill. Perhaps it would be possible, then, for the minister on reflection to say: yes, there is some merit to the arguments made in this House tonight and on Thursday afternoon. If she is not convinced, then six months from now she will have opportunity, a full opportunity, to proceed with this bill in its third reading.

All it does is allow the minister six months of time to engage in some further consultation, and she's welcome to consult with us. I'll be happy to walk into her office and spend some time with her and share my concerns again and explain. Perhaps if I haven't explained myself successfully enough now, I'd be willing to work harder on it and see if I can convince her, and if at that moment she still thinks that she wants to proceed with it, she will have the opportunity to do so then.

So I ask the House to support this amendment in order to allow, certainly, the minister and other members of the House to have the necessary time to reflect on the arguments because the arguments are serious. They deal with the essential aspects of the rule of law and whether or not the legislation before us does meet the test of the principles of the rule of law.

As I said in my introductory remarks earlier, Mr. Speaker, legislation passed in haste or in partisan zeal does not necessarily serve the interests of Albertans in the best way possible. The sterilization act of 1928 is one significant example of a law that was passed in that kind of zeal, under those conditions of the limits of our knowledge that prevailed at the time. We didn't ask questions about how limited that science was, how flawed those arguments based on that science were, how unreliable the data that justified that science turned out to be, so unreliable that it turned out to be in fact false, and the author and the principal investigator was in fact dishonoured by his own peers 70 years later.

All of this, I think, draws our attention to be cautious when we move forward with laws which have the possibility of offending and infringing on our fundamental rights. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, spoke in support of this bill originally, and I'm having some second thoughts based on what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and also the Member for Edmonton-Centre said. They brought up some very good points about the rule of law, about civil liberties. A lot of my concerns about this Bill 2, regarding marijuana grow ops for instance, have not been fully addressed. I know that earlier today the Minister of Children's Services said that this law does not violate civil liberties, but just saying that it doesn't violate them doesn't mean it's so. With all due respect, I'm not questioning your judgment.

I think that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has made some excellent points, and a little sober second thought on a bill of this magnitude is certainly something to think about. Removing a child from a home is a last-ditch, draconian measure, and it's not something that can be done lightly. I'm sure it never is. But if we're talking about a bill that can take children out of their homes, it would be worth while to give this more thought. So I'm saying this in favour of the member's amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to spend just a few moments to discuss Bill 2 because Bill 2 is very important legislation. When we talk about the children of this province, we know that around the province, unfortunately, there are unscrupulous adults who will do anything, essentially, without morals or ethics and put their children in danger while they're in the pursuit of making a dollar by cooking methamphetamines in their homes. When they're prepared to do that type of work, it's absolutely amazing to me that somebody would stand up and say that you're putting their civil rights in danger when what you're talking about is protecting the rights of the children, making sure that the children have an opportunity to grow up, making sure that the children have an opportunity to overcome the barriers to success. Quite frankly, children that are in that type of situation obviously have far too many barriers to their success already.

There are appropriate times and appropriate places when one has to go into a home and apprehend a child – there are appropriate times and appropriate places – where a child is being abused, and this is a type of abuse. You need to be able to protect children. I heard one of the hon. members opposite indicate that just by saying that it doesn't violate human rights doesn't make it so. Well, just by saying that it does violate human rights doesn't make it so either. Obviously, what happens when you put together legislation of this nature is that you have to do a very careful consideration and weighing of the relative merits of each case and determine what's appropriate in the circumstances. You need to have legal opinions and legal views of it. Obviously, you need to look at what the respective rights are, but no rights are absolute. Absolutely no rights are absolute. Every right is subject to . . . [interjections] If you want to get into the debate, feel free to get into the debate.

Every right, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Acting Speaker: It would really help if the person who is recognized speaks through the chair. If there are other members who wish to participate in the debate, there is an opportunity for the chair to recognize them. Currently the floor is with the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the long and short of it is: when children are in danger, it's in the community's interest and the child's interest to protect that child. Obviously, the question of danger can be a subjective question at times, but when you're talking about people who are cooking drugs in their homes, when you're talking about people who are violating the law and abandoning their duty and responsibility to provide a safe and caring environment for their children, then it is in the interest of society, in fact it's the obligation of society to provide that caring and that protection. That's what this bill is about. The bill is child protection legislation. The provision that concerns us, section 2(9), mirrors the provision of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. The apprehension of children in urgent situations where their life, health, or safety is in imminent danger is valid child protection legislation. It's not only the right thing to do; it's our responsibility to do it.

8:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important for us to recognize and differentiate the intention of my hon. colleague's amendment. An idea of putting some sober second thought into this I believe originates at least twofold, the first being that we have provisions within the Child Welfare Act already to remove children if they are in a situation that is dangerous to their welfare, either

their physical or mental state. So we are just trying to point out that by layering on other more specific things in regard to the apprehension of children doesn't necessarily make it a better way to actually look after the welfare of children. I mean, we're not debating the nefarious activity of people and all of the terrible things that they do while being parents and their responsibility in that regard. I'd think that you would recognize, Mr. Speaker and all members across, the differentiation that we're making.

Important, I think, as well, is the second point that I want to make, that it's so easy to cloak oneself in self-righteousness by pointing out something that happens to be the newsworthy crime of the day. So making crystal meth in people's homes seems to be the thing that everybody wants to talk about, and we seem to be spending an inordinate amount of time here in this House on that one specific place where children can be endangered. I certainly am not showing any disrespect to the intention of looking after children and the welfare of children, but to just to focus on that and to put another layer of law on there when we already have the law in place to look after children if they're in danger I would say has an element of grandstanding.

So I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, that we are simply looking at a sober second thought, and any time we build on layers of apprehension of children or rights in general, we have to be very, very careful. You know, we're speaking across different political ideologies here, from both the left and the right, and we will not look after the protection of children by also putting on extra laws just for the sake of them when we probably have them in place already.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We all care about kids. There is no partisan nature to caring about kids, and to attribute accusations that we care less or that because we're Liberal or NDP or Conservative or Alliance, somehow we have a different value for children. I hope we don't go there. To various degrees fathers, mothers, parents, grandparents all have a concern for children. I would think that that's a large part of the motivation of why we're here: we're trying to establish and protect the generation to come.

I was not here in earlier debate, but I did ask the minister – and this was for clarification purposes – are we going to improve the lot of these children? Do we have a place to take them to after we've apprehended them? This would very much help me in my decision-making if laws exist already that make such apprehension possible. If they don't exist, I'd like to hear that discussion as well. What I'm looking for, Mr. Speaker, is further information so that I can make an accurate judgment on the hoisting of this bill.

We dealt with crystal meth in terms of the environment. It was felt that there wasn't sufficient information at that time. We spoke at length, the better part of two hours, on that particular crystal meth-related bill. In the end it was hoisted because it was felt that we could craft a better bill. We also hoisted the bill with regard to, again, protecting children and requiring children who are under 15 to have their parents' permission for any kind of medical services that might be provided. Again, with that particular bill we addressed it; we spoke to it. We did our best, but we found that it was short. It didn't have the strength of recommendation, the strength of legislation to go through it.

This is where I'm at. I need more information so that when it comes to the vote on the hoisting process, I have all the information I need to make a good decision. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to speak to this

bill at the last stage of the bill, and I'm not going to take a lot of the House's time tonight to speak again. As I understand the issue with the hon. member who has put forward the amendment, it really was sections (9) and (10). We discussed that at some length in the last stage of this bill.

When I read section (9), to me it is very explanatory as to why you would do that. It would be in exceptional circumstances. The prior sections of this bill go through all of the procedures that an officer must follow. But in section (9), without reading it all, they say:

may apprehend a child without an order if the director or police officer has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the child's life, health or safety is seriously and imminently endangered because the child is a drug-endangered child.

Mr. Speaker, the minister has answered that question prior to this amendment being put forward. She has had legal opinions. I have seen the legal opinion; it does not suggest that in this circumstance the rule of law would be jeopardized or somehow gone around. It's the "reasonable and probable" belief that the child is in danger. Now, there isn't any one of us in this Chamber that would sleep very well if we had put this off for six months, which means a year, and a child was lost because there wasn't an ability to apprehend that child.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know all of the circumstances, but I can assure you that the Minister of Children's Services has far more information on this matter than I or any one of us in this House has and, I would suggest, more information than any of us would want to have on this matter.

This is a very, very serious issue. We are concerned in this province about the disposition of the by-products of cooking crystal meth. We're worried about endangering our environment. We are condemning houses that have had drug activities occurring in them because they're not fit to live in. And we are suggesting that we can put off for a year taking a child out of one of those places? I think not.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to briefly comment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder perhaps explained his colleague's intention to forward this amendment to provide us with an opportunity for sober second thought. I happen to think that's an excellent idea. However, what's requiring sober second thought here is the unbelievable stretch one would make to compare the intent of a bill, which is to save children's very lives, with a bill that was passed in this House 70 years ago that was meant to sterilize mentally handicapped people. That stretch is an absolute insult.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Finance minister has just pointed out, our Minister of Children's Services didn't just pluck this one out of the air. It's the product of a lot of thought, a lot of sober thought, I might point out, and a lot of consultation, including legal consultation. We're not talking about children who are the victims of bad parenting here. We're talking about children who are in imminent danger, and we're talking about the ability of someone to go and save their lives.

The argument is absolutely lost on me. I just don't understand why we're having this argument. It seems absolutely logical. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that the hon. member that made this motion – and I'm going to try and stick to the motion – is probably quite aware that there is no legitimate way for a hoisted bill to come back six months hence. There is no legitimate way to bring a bill back six months from now. It was done once in error in our Parliament in Ottawa. I think the hon. member knows that, so he knows full well what he's doing, which is essentially killing the bill. It doesn't give anybody any time to improve on things. It essentially buries it. So if the hon. member didn't know that, I hope he does now.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, a hoist amendment doesn't come before the Assembly very frequently, so I just want to let you know that there will be potentially two votes. The first will be on the hoist amendment. If the vote on the hoist amendment passes, then the bill drops off the Order Paper and technically dies. If the hoist amendment fails, then I have to put forward a question for the third reading right away. Okay?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:42 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Acting Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Eggen	Pannu
Chase	Miller, R.	Tougas

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Hinman	Mitzel
Cao	Horner	Morton
Cardinal	Jablonski	Oberle
Evans	Knight	Pham
Forsyth	Liepert	Prins
Graydon	Lindsay	Renner
Groeneveld	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Haley	Mar	Swann
Hancock	McClellan	Tarchuk
Herard	McFarland	

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment lost]

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 14
Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate March 7: Mr. Agnihotri]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, with, I think, much the same feelings as I expressed under the

first iteration, with changes to the application procedures to become a regulated profession, clarification of complaint procedures, changes to the requirements for continuing competence, adding new protected titles for some professions, and amending the scope of practice for opticians. All of these, to my mind, have added strength to the professions act and added to the confidence that the public can have in these professions. I think that while some of it is housekeeping, there are significant parts to this that will give us all a greater confidence that these are going to be professions that will have publicly designated recruitment procedures, standard evaluations, public oversight.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, the chair needs to clarify something. I am looking at the information that's before me, and it appears that the hon. member has already spoken at this stage before, on second reading.

Dr. Swann: I thought it was first.

The Acting Speaker: No. This is second reading, and I believe you've already spoken.

Dr. Swann: Yes. That's right.

The Acting Speaker: I should have interjected earlier on.

Dr. Swann: That's fine.

The Acting Speaker: Does anybody else wish to speak?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I do have a number of speaking notes to clarify some of the points that the hon. member raised previously, and perhaps that would illuminate it. I will just be very brief and then forward a copy of some of those points so that that could be perused later.

Relative to scope of practice in the issues that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View raised previously, he identified very important issues in the regulation of health professions on which we certainly concur. The Health Professions Act, which is being amended here, sets out the framework within which health professions are regulated. Issues related to scope of practice, the development and enforcement of standards, and the development and evaluation of training programs are addressed in professional regulations and through the ongoing activities of regulatory colleges.

With regard to the complaints section and the reason why there is a reference in one clause to registering complaints in writing with a signature, and then there's a reference to having the ability to take a complaint orally, there are contradictions regarding the complaints process, especially in sections (7) and (8). When a complaint is made under section 54 of the Health Professions Act, the complaints director is obligated to take action as set out in section 55. Thus, if a complainant makes a formal complaint that is a written, signed complaint, the complaints director must proceed with that complaint. But what if the person does not make a formal complaint? They do not want to get involved. They are afraid or whatever. If an individual simply brings an issue to the attention of the complaints director and chooses not to make a formal complaint, the amendment to section 56 allows the complaints director to treat that information like any other information in that section and take action if the complaints director has reasonable grounds to believe the conduct of a regulated member or former member constitutes unprofessional conduct.

9:00

Relative to the consultation for the amendments all of the health professions with schedules under the Health Professions Act were consulted during the development of these amendments. The minister seeks advice from the advisory board on any issue relative to the Health Professions Act but usually seeks advice when there are issues that require extensive investigation and consultation with a variety of stakeholders or a with a variety of concerns. The kinds of issues that the minister normally refers include recognition of new professions, expansions of a profession's scope of practice, and the development of new restricted activities.

Just briefly on why an amendment on assessment of competence. Section 50(2)(a) and (b) is amended by adding "or categories of regulated members" after "regulated members". So it's "or categories of regulated members." The amendment to section 50 allows a college to limit its continuing competence program to certain categories of practitioners. For example, many colleges provide for short-term courtesy registration of practitioners from other jurisdictions in order that they may practise for a short period of time in Alberta, to provide a seminar, for example. To require such individuals to participate in a college continuing competence program may be unrealistic.

On the question of massage therapists, relative to regulating their training, no decision has been made about this. The amendment to the act will allow the minister to initiate the process to determine if regulation is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other points relative to massage therapists, but I'll just conclude with the fact that the Health Professions Act was passed in 1999, came into force in 2001. These amendments have arisen from issues experienced by the professions and government in administering the act since it came into force.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

Anybody else?

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate.

Mr. Mittel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened to all the debate on this, and certainly the minister of health has answered a lot of the questions. If there are any other questions that do arise, certainly we can look at those during Committee of the Whole.

With that, I call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

Bill 23

Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 23 is intended to make the Provincial Parks Act easier to administer by providing more clarity, closing legal gaps, and deleting outdated provisions. Bill 23 clearly defines administrative authority; for example, ministerial authority to issue parkland use dispositions like leases or permits according to the regulations. Where authority to conduct certain practices was implied, they are now instead clearly stated.

Heritage preservation is now stated as a fundamental purpose for Alberta's parks. This authorizes established practices that protect the land. A separate reference to education and experience of the province's natural heritage provides legislative authority for parks education programs.

Bill 23 updates and clarifies the powers of conservation officers. They will now have the authority, similar to wildlife officers, to stop and search vehicles or boats within parks and in an emergency take steps to protect the public or prevent damage to the environment or to property.

Bill 23 also substantially increases the maximum fines for serious violations like those that cause significant damage or destruction. Instead of a maximum \$2,000 fine individuals can now face fines of up to \$100,000. Corporations can be fined up to one-half a million dollars. Under Bill 23 if a person makes money from an offence, like cutting trees in a park and selling the timber, the Crown may recover the costs for damages and the courts may levy an additional penalty for damages.

Mr. Speaker, I seek second reading and move the Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006, Bill 23.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Hon. minister, I am more supportive of Bill 23 than I was of Bill 18. I would like to go through some definitions, points of clarification, and then suggestions on the potential of strengthening this bill even further.

Bill 23 conducts a number of housekeeping changes to the Provincial Parks Act. The Provincial Parks Act along with the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act is the main legislation governing the establishment and management of Alberta's provincial parks and protected areas. The highlights of this particular act include updated enforcement, offence and penalty provisions; cleaning up the obsolete provisions; defining the purpose of parks; attempts to provide clarity and remove deficiencies or conflicts; and updates the wording. These are all very positive aspects of it, and of course the minister is very aware of my concern that I brought up with regard to Bill 18; that is, in order to enforce the tougher fines, we have to have more enforcement officers on the ground.

Bill 23 proposes a substantial increase in maximum fines for serious violations. That's extremely positive. We need to be protecting our parks. I've referred to how little of Alberta's land is designated under the protected areas, so anything we can do to strengthen that protection I'm all for.

Under park management the act proposes to move the minister's authority to issue park land-use dispositions like leases or permits from regulations into the act. These include provisions on what you can and can't do in the park, and I'm very pleased to see these moved into the act and out of regulations because it's a more publicly accountable methodology.

With regard to the background part of the problem with some of the legislation associated with parks is that, you know, there are three main acts but eight different categories of parks, and that tends to cause some confusion. I realize this bill is trying to clarify that, but the categories that provide some level of protection in this act are wildland provincial parks, provincial parks, and recreation areas.

Without going into definitions of the various parks, I would like to move ahead with what I see as good about this bill and then indicate my reservations and suggestions.

What is good about this bill is that it makes much-needed improvements to the park legislation. It adds legislative authority rather than regulatory protection for parks. It provides for more ecological protection, and we're all in favour of that beyond a doubt. It makes improvements to the work conservation officers can do in enforcing peace and order in the parks, and again I throw out my usual statement that in order for conservation officers to have a workload that is manageable, we need to have more of them in the field.

The area that I'm hoping that the minister can work towards improving is that this act, from my understanding, still provides no protection for recreation areas. It falls short of making protection the highest priority for the park system, as most other provincial and federal park systems have done. This act sort of equates recreation and preservation.

9:10

The act does not give clear legislation direction on off-highway vehicle use in parks. The bill still allows ministerial oversight in allowing some extraction activities, and of course that became very controversial in Monday's story about the Rumsey areas. The lack of protection and the ministerial oversight also apply to areas like Suffield, the Whaleback, and the reserve land bordering Waterton national park. Obviously, we would like to see these as protected as they possibly could be and in legislation not subject to ministerial approval.

What we'd like to see happen – and this is a direction that I would ask the minister to consider – is complete the system. Restart the special places campaign and start the process of designating new areas as parks in underrepresented areas and in unique places. We need to seek a balance and ensure that there are proper offsets or protected areas to compensate for industrial areas, such as the oil sands in northeast Alberta. I understand that later on, either this month or early next month, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness will be presenting a plan, so I don't want to take away from their limelight. I know that CPAWS has talked to the minister and also to the Minister of Environment and sought input.

Under protection there's no doubt that we need tougher park legislation. Parks need protection from industrial activities that are still allowed to progress in too many categories. The density of oil wells is higher in parks than in nonpark landscapes, and that seems kind of an oxymoron circumstance. Drilling in the Rumsey natural area continues, and it is allowed in all natural areas. We need protectors. We need to restore the number of conservation officers. I would like to see at some point – and I spoke briefly with the minister about returning the number of conservation officers to their precut 1992 level so that these penalties that have been suggested in this bill can actually be taken into account.

Under the planning with regard to Bill 18 I talked about the need for management plans. In Bill 23 I believe we need stronger planning as well. I believe we should enshrine the requirement to maintain current park master plans. Too many park master plans are out of date, and some parks, unfortunately a large number of them, have no plan at all. We need to introduce a requirement that transactive includes public involvement. Park master plans are completed every seven years. These are to be approved by the minister and tabled in the Legislature. In other words, we would like this planning to happen on an ongoing basis.

With regard to infrastructure I've talked numerous times about the need to restore and renew. This means renewing basic infrastructure in the regular run-of-the-mill parks across Alberta, whether it be picnic tables, fire rings, toilets, hiking trails, et cetera. I would love to see the fencing around the parks be maintained so that the parks themselves do not become multi-use – that was not what they were intended for – in terms of grazing cattle.

Four other suggestions I would like to have considered. Why not include in the act a specific requirement to prepare transactive park master plans and submit these? Given that recreation areas are for outdoor recreation, why not include some level of protection to ensure that natural areas remain in a natural state? In other words, the recreation that takes place within these parks isn't detrimental to the natural capital, the value of the park itself.

I would like to see detailed direction on the use of off-highway vehicles in the act. I know that there are a number of quad drivers and four-by-fours and so on who would like to see clarification too. They would appreciate knowing where they're allowed to recreate, and that way we could avoid conflict in these recreational areas.

Lastly, I would like to see an advisory committee for provincial parks and recreation areas established. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just very happy to speak on second reading of Bill 23. Again, as with Bill 18, I believe, there's just a myriad of changes and amendments to the parks and natural areas legislation in this Bill 23, although this is specific to provincial parks, of course. Generally, I am on first glance happy with most of the amendments that are in Bill 23.

It's important for us to recognize that provincial parks legislation needs to be updated considering the changes of the population and land use in the province of Alberta over the past years and decades and, certainly, to recognize just how important these recreational lands are, provincial parks specifically, to the integrity, I suppose, of the future recreation opportunities for the population, future generations, and for the natural areas that they cover and seek to protect as well.

I think that in second reading it's appropriate to speak in general terms of what we would intend to see, and for each of the points that I have for us this evening, I certainly have places where I can see the potential for these ambitions to be realized. There are some specific areas that I have outlined, but we will look at those in third reading or Committee of the Whole in terms of specific sections that I think that I would seek clarification for.

Certainly, the focus that we would like to see as a caucus, I think, reflects the interest that Albertans have in their natural environments. You know, we like to identify with the natural world here in Canada in general and Alberta specifically. As we develop and seek energy and forestry and farmland from our natural areas in Alberta, we have to be very conscious of protection while we still can indeed protect the wilderness areas.

I think I saw a map this morning that was showing continuous forestation in the province of Alberta, and it was quite shocking, Mr. Speaker, just to see how much the map has changed since I have been following these things with some interest for most of my adult life. We know that these are the economic realities and the population pressure and the increased economic activity, which is good for the economy and good for everyone. We can see what a robust economic situation we're in from this afternoon, but then we have to remember what our duty and responsibility is, to protect natural areas while we can.

I would like to see provincial park legislation continue to be on the table and to be supported by financial contribution from the province to ensure that more parks are in fact built in each of the ecosystems that are distinct to the province of Alberta. I'm looking as well to hope to see at least 10 per cent of the province under some form of protection in regard to each of these individual ecosystems, together totalling perhaps 10 per cent of the total area of the province under provincial protection.

What we need to do – and we can see some degree of evolution with Bill 23 – is to be very much more specific about land use in protected areas and not to fall into the tendency to sort of either/or with protected areas. I think what we're seeing now are some battleground areas where people want to use motorized vehicles or people want to have a place protected in its pristine state, with minimal human activity. I think it's important for us to consider

both because the first way by which we can protect our natural areas in a real way is to ingrain and educate an appreciation of the natural world in our population.

9:20

The first step is to get people out. We're increasingly urbanized as a population, so just to get people, especially from urban areas, out into any park situation is an important first step. Certainly, I do not preclude the possibility of having special designated areas where people can engage in a wide variety of outdoor activities that, you know, are perhaps going beyond camping and hiking and skiing and whatnot but also bringing some of their other hobbies and interests into the areas.

I guess it's important to differentiate – and this is where I have some specific areas that I've highlighted in this Bill 23 – where we need to make some very clear distinctions so that we don't immediately presume that any given provincial park area, just by designating it a park, is protected in its pristine ecological state. Many of these places are completely fenced in by developed areas, agriculture or otherwise, and that's the first step to saying that it's not a continuous ecological zone. Of course, it's more like a fenced-in area. Then people with varying degrees of intensive land use also sort of undermine, perhaps, the protected aspects of it being a provincial park.

We have provincial parks, of course, as we know, adjacent to urban areas or even in urban areas. My own constituency, Edmonton-Calder, I think has one of the very latest provincial parks in it, of which I am very proud and would like to see. It's adjacent to many hundreds of thousands of people, Mr. Speaker, so of course this would be one of the areas that requires regulation and legislation. Ultimately and first and foremost we want people to get there and to enjoy it and to enrich their lives and to educate them about the natural world because that's, in fact, what the provincial park legislation is all about in the most general way possible.

I would like to put forward just very quickly as well our hope that the level of conservation officers in the province would be considered to be increased. We have just simply too few people to enforce a lot of regulation and legislation in our provincial park areas. There are just simply too few of them, and the area is just so large.

Also, over the last number of years it's become clear that the infrastructure in many of our provincial parks is found wanting, and I think now is the time to make an investment in building up that infrastructure, be it from picnic tables to washrooms and roads, so that people feel as though the province is caring about that place, and, thus, they must care about it as well. Remember that, just as in our society, we don't have a policeperson looking over our shoulder to make sure that we look after and follow the rule of law. Rather, we have it internalized in our own minds through education and training. The same with people's relationship with a provincial park: if it's in a derelict state, it just somehow sends a message that perhaps this is a place where anything goes, with further sort of destructive behaviour. So I believe that as in urban areas, where if we make a point of cleaning off graffiti and fixing that broken window straightaway, it somehow increases the overall level of crime prevention in an urban area, if we fix up and maintain our provincial parks to a proper level, then people are getting the message that this is a valuable place that we invest in, and it's important to take care of that place too.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to pointing out some specific areas for Bill 23 with the hon. minister, and I'm very glad to see some activity in regard to our provincial parks. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the remarks of the minister as he introduced this Bill 23, the Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006, in second reading. I won't spend a lot of time reiterating the very worthwhile comments from both my colleagues from Calgary-Varsity and Edmonton-Calder, but there are two points in particular that I would like to get on the record this evening.

For those members of this Assembly who hang intently on every word that I speak – and really, folks, who doesn't? – you will know that I am not a fan of moving legislation into regulation. In this particular instance, as has already been pointed out, we have the minister actually moving regulation into legislation. So I would like to congratulate you for that, Mr. Minister, because any time we see that, I will speak in support of that move. Mr. Speaker, I think it's a breath of fresh air in this Assembly to see regulations being moved into legislation whereby we all know that in order to change them, public debate is required. That leads to openness and accountability, and for that I am thankful. Again, I applaud the minister for that.

The other comment that I do want to make, Mr. Speaker, is on section 16, which deals with the operation, particularly the takeoff and landing, of aircraft in a park or recreation area. My peers in the foot-launched, free-flight community, particularly hang-gliding and paragliding, would be rather upset with me if I didn't acknowledge the fact that in this proposed legislation the minister is including an exemption for those of us who fly hang-gliders and paragliders as well as parasails and other nonpowered aircraft.

Ms Blakeman: What makes you so special?

Mr. R. Miller: What makes us so special? Well, I think it is our appreciation for the solitude and the reflection that the two sports in particular that I've described tonight provide us.

I appreciate the fact that the minister is recognizing how special that activity in which I and many thousands of others across this country partake is, so just for the record I'd like to read into *Hansard* that particular clause which says that

a person shall not take off or land an aircraft in a park or recreation area except . . . in the case of a hang-glider, parasail or other non-powered aircraft, in a specific location that is designated, and in accordance with any conditions established, by order of the Minister for that purpose.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can think of one very obvious example right here in the city of Edmonton, actually, and that would be at – I was going to say Rundle park, but it's across the river from Rundle park – Gold Bar park. No, it's not even Gold Bar park. I'll have to check, Mr. Minister, and get the name, or perhaps the minister might be able to help me out.

There is a west-facing ridge along the banks of the North Saskatchewan River. There's a ski hill there, and there is a provincial park that encompasses this area. Special permission has been granted in the past for hang-gliding activities to take place there. Currently there is a remote-controlled airplane club that also operates out of that particular area in recognition of the special geological features that the ridge along the riverbank provides there. That's one example of where, in fact, this sort of thing currently takes place.

There are also, Mr. Speaker, a number of areas in the province where hang-gliders do not necessarily intend to land in a provincial park, but just by the nature of the geography those activities may be

taking place in proximity to a provincial park. That in itself would add to the possibility that a landing may take place in a provincial park. Again, having the opportunity to negotiate with the ministry to have permission to utilize certain areas of a park or a recreation area where it might fit well with the activities of foot-launched free flight certainly is something that I know my colleagues and my peers involved in those activities would appreciate.

When we speak to Bill 18 later on, I will address similar comments because, unfortunately, unless I'm missing something, I'm not sure that Bill 18 allows the same latitude. As I said, I will be addressing similar issues at that point. Certainly, it appears that section 16 in this particular amendment act does accomplish what I know my colleagues involved in those activities would want it to, and for that I thank the minister, and it will have my support.

Thank you.

9:30

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Any other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 23, the Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006. I, too, am very encouraged by this, and being a frequent user of the parks and other protected areas, I think it's progress. With the provincial debt out of the way it certainly is something that we can begin to look at again. As a province that attracts a lot of people, in which we take a lot of pride, there's a tremendous economic benefit associated with these wonderful areas that are continuing to attract the world population. I think we could start to think about and move toward some new areas.

While this particular amendment deals in a fairly specific way with updating and strengthening some of the regulations and powers of conservation officers, I just wanted to put in a plug for looking seriously at the importance, especially with the heavy industrial pressures on our province, of looking at the possibility of the Bighorn area and the Andy Russell park being proposed in the southwest of the province as being some important additions to our wonderful province.

I also echo the need for the tougher park legislation. With the recreational and the increased load of citizens on these parks, clearly we need to send a strong message to people, and I hope we can move in a constructive way, especially to deal with some of the off-highway vehicles that are a concern for many of us who use the parks. We have to find a good balance. Obviously, people have to have access to many of these places, but some of the environmental damage and some of the obvious noise pollution associated with motorized vehicles are a significant detractor from these pristine places or places that we want to keep pristine.

So there's a lot of work that we need to do there, and I would hope that we could find a balanced way of setting up committees and interest groups and finding some constructive ways to work through some of what appears to be a growing phenomenon that has impacts not only on those of us in the local communities that are recreating but also on our international visitors and, of course, on our wildlife. I guess that would fall into the area of planning. The more we can get stakeholder involvement in that, the more constructive our policies and plans will be.

I think we have a tremendous amount to be proud of in Alberta. We've got some tremendous special places, parks, and wildlands, and I would like to see, as many would, an extension of the protection and an extension of the areas covered under this important ministry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll certainly be supporting the changes here and encouraging more in the future.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

Any other speakers?

The hon. Minister of Community Development to close debate.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been a tremendous opportunity to get feedback from a number of members of this Assembly on the bill. I appreciate their positive comments as well as their constructive criticisms. I should comment that all four members who spoke were members of the opposition, and they spoke in such glowing terms that I was fearing that there might be an amendment for a hoist coming from my own side.

However, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure now to move second reading of Bill 23, the Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

head:

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 17
Libraries Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I would like at the outset to make a couple of comments on points raised in debate on Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, 2006, that were made in Committee of the Whole. Library boards are established by municipal councils, and the Libraries Act clearly states that a library board is established by the council of a municipality, and municipalities provide the majority of funding for libraries.

Ninety-eight per cent of Albertans have access to public library service. Many can access their libraries through the Internet, making 5 million virtual visits per year. More than one-half of Alberta's 309 libraries serve communities of fewer than 1,200 people, and municipal library boards are working very hard to meet the needs of all their residents. As an example, the municipal district of Opportunity has just set up library service points in Red Earth Creek and Calling Lake in addition to their existing library in Wabasca.

The role of the Alberta government is to administer the Libraries Act, that governs Alberta's libraries, and to support public libraries with operating grants. About 16 per cent of public library funding comes from the province of Alberta. The government of Alberta provides operational funds to Alberta's libraries: \$16.9 million in operational grants on a per capita basis, \$3 million allocated for SuperNet expenditures and other library-related projects. We also recently announced \$20 million in one-time funding for libraries out of the recent budget surpluses of the province of Alberta.

With those closing remarks, I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 17.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, my comments will be relatively brief. I would just like to share an anecdotal story about libraries and the importance of libraries. I think I've mentioned in the past that I am a member of a Rotary club, a proud member of the Rotary Club of Edmonton Gateway. One of the great things about Rotary, of course, is that we bring in guest speakers every week that serve to educate and enlighten us about the going-ons in our community.

About a year ago we had a superintendent from the Edmonton Police Service speak to the Rotary club, and we were talking about children and raising children, and that's maybe an appropriate anecdote tonight given the earlier conversation. Mr. Speaker, the comment that the superintendent made was that he can walk into any house in Edmonton and tell you within seconds whether or not those children are going to be in trouble as they grow. Of course, that piqued the interest of the members of the club, and when asked to elaborate, he said that the methodology he uses is to look for books. He said that if there is clear evidence of books upon his entry into the household, that always reassures him that these children are likely to turn out well. I think that's very telling in today's society given the prevalence of the Internet, and I think there are a number of people who sense that perhaps books are losing their importance and that thereby perhaps libraries are losing their importance. Clearly, this was not the feeling of this superintendent.

In fact, I think most members of this Assembly recognize the value of books and libraries. I know that libraries are a lot more than just books, but without question that is still sort of the primary focus and the primary service that libraries provide. I think that anything we can do that will aid in the preservation and enhancement of libraries, Mr. Speaker, is good, so for that reason the Official Opposition has been supporting Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, 2006, throughout, and I appreciate the minister's comments about what we like to think has been constructive criticism regarding the bill.

9:40

I guess that the other thing, because I haven't had an opportunity to speak to it yet, is the whole issue around library fees, Mr. Speaker. That is the one disappointment that I have. I know that the comment has been made by a number of members in this House this spring sitting that when an act is opened, it's opened not just for one purpose but usually to allow for several changes at once. There's one change that perhaps could have been included in this bill, and that would have been the elimination of library fees altogether. That's not here, and it is a disappointment for me because that is an impediment, unfortunately, for some individuals and some families to access libraries. We are one of only a very few jurisdictions that even allow library fees to be charged, and I think that given the current prosperity of Alberta, it would have been a really positive step forward to eliminate the possibility for library fees to be charged, to fund libraries so that that change could have been made. I think all Albertans would be better off for that.

But despite that omission, as I said, I think that overall this is a bill that will improve libraries and access to libraries and perhaps ensure their viability for some time, and for that reason I will be supporting the bill in third reading.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I concur with my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, and as I had mentioned in second reading, I'm certainly in support of this. The \$20 million that the government recently announced is very welcome, and certainly it's needed as well, but I think what I would like to see is more than just the one-time funding initiative and a sustained commitment on the part of the province to encourage, provide, and fund lifelong literacy.

I find some statistics very disturbing about the illiteracy rate in Alberta. You know, I don't see a clear way by which we are tackling this problem. The completion rate has not improved

substantially since I've been following it in the province. We have many external pressures that interfere with literacy. People are less likely to be reading, young people especially, with other recreation pursuits taking precedence perhaps. Certainly, for high school students who are struggling, there is the temptation of a very positive job market out there to lure them away, so they don't finish high school.

So I see the libraries as a very important component of improving our literacy rates and the capacity of students at a young age to pick up the habit of reading and going with their family to the library on weekends or for a family activity. It's very important. I think that we have an unfair advantage in some of the larger municipalities, where our libraries are just much more accessible and much larger, and I would like to see that wonderful opportunity extended to smaller municipalities across the province and encouraged over a much longer period. I'm wondering how we can do that over time.

I'm looking specifically now at this bill, and perhaps I can just seek clarification from the hon. minister. I'm looking on page 3 at section 8 of this bill, and this section seems to repeal section 11 of the Libraries Act, which allowed for municipalities to levy taxes for their libraries. I'm just wondering why this was decided to be the way that it is and what we might be able to do to replace this option for funding. Mr. Speaker, as I said, smaller municipalities, I really believe, deserve to have libraries that are comparable to what we have access to in our neighbourhood here in the larger cities. We need a way to sustain the funding. If that's a local tax that can be levied for the library, I think that's a first step to perhaps engaging some people to the fact that, "We're paying for it; we might as well use it" in terms of a local library.

I'm just curious about that one section. Otherwise, I'm certainly in support of this bill in general. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

The hon. Minister of Community Development to close the debate.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have anything further to add other than to say thank you for the comments made by hon. members and to move third reading of Bill 17.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 18

Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Chairman, I'm hitting for the cycle tonight.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to remind members of the House that Bill 18 amends the legislation that governs wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands. Bill 18 clarifies a number of provisions for the different categories of protected areas

that have been added since 1971. It updates enforcement, offence, and penalty provisions. It updates definitions, improves wording and clarity. It deletes obsolete provisions.

Bill 18 repeals the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves. For the past 10 years we have been using a completely different and, in my view, improved process that involves local communities and stakeholders in management planning and development of any policies in these protected areas.

Other changes include a substantial increase in the maximum fines for serious violations, up to \$100,000 for individuals and up to one-half a million dollars for corporations, with additional penalties if a profit is being made in the commission of an offence.

In addition, there are four House amendments to improve the wording in Bill 18. The first makes it clear that any reference to the act also makes a reference to the regulations. The second focuses on damage to the land, which would include pollution at a level that causes damage. The third and fourth House amendments simply make a change from plural to singular and substitute the accepted term "individual" for the term "a natural person."

Mr. Chairman, I ask support for the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act.

Mr. Chase: Just for the sake of speed I see that the purpose of your amendment is strictly clarification. I support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Chase: On the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: You have moved the amendment?

Mr. Chase: No. I'm just suggesting that at this point I believe we're talking about approval of the amendment that was just made as opposed to the whole Bill 18 process.

The Deputy Chair: The committee has before it the bill.

9:50

Mr. R. Miller: Did he not just move the amendment?

The Deputy Chair: That's right. We have the government amendments to Bill 18 before us, so we are voting on the amendment as moved by the hon. minister, and the amendment shall be referred to as A1. Are you ready for the vote on that?

Hon. Members: Yes.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the amendments that are before us as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity were distributed and should be on your desks. We shall refer to this amendment as amendment A2.

The hon. member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to begin by apologizing both to the minister and to this House. This is the first time I've brought forth an amendment, and if I'd done things in a proper fashion, I would have approached the minister and discussed the nature of the amendment with him beforehand and sought his input. I didn't do that. I apologize.

What I'm trying to accomplish in the A2 amendment is to reinvigorate, reinstate the advisory committee, and I'll just go through what I'm hoping to accomplish in the amendment. Also, I put forward the amendment as an entire package instead of a series of sectional debate circumstances because I believe that we're either in favour of establishing greater advisory committees or we're not, so I'm dealing with it as a whole matter.

This amendment to Bill 18 reintroduces the advisory committee and makes it more active and more effective at improving the management of all protected areas described in this act. The proposal updates the scope of the advisory committees to make recommendations on the creation, expansion, withdrawal, and management of wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands. The composition of the committee has been changed to allow greater public involvement by reducing the number of government members to three and continuing with six members who are representative of the public at large. So I'm looking for balance on the committee. The chair would ideally be one of the public members.

By requiring that the committee meet not less than twice a year, we've taken steps to ensure that this committee is recognized and valued by the government. The advisory committee will be held accountable to the Legislature as any and all recommendations must be placed before the House immediately when in session or within 15 days of the next sitting of the House.

I propose these amendments because Alberta's parks belong to Albertans, and as such they should have a say in their creation and management. Just in summary, I am trying to empower average Albertans. I want to involve them in the planning and preservation of parks. I want to increase their voice and by so doing increase their involvement and interest in the parks and preserve landscapes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just had an opportunity to read this now. One of the parts of Bill 18 that I found problematic was the elimination of these advisory committees. I think it was part of the housekeeping that was going on with Bill 18. The advisory committees were basically not functional and hadn't been sitting for a long time, but, you know, that doesn't preclude the value of having those there. In fact, this was one of the areas that was pointed out to me by interested groups that were reading Bill 18. They suggested that it would be nice to have these advisory committees functioning or resurrected, so to speak. I would commend the diligence of the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to pursue this and to place it into an amendment. I certainly support the spirit of resurrecting the advisory committees and strengthening them too.

I think that whatever we do in a democratic setting, we seek to engage the public through representation, and the best way to do so is to give people the opportunity to actually speak and to act on issues that affect them. Some of the most innovative and interesting new parks that have been created around the world I know employ advisory committees, people who actually live in or around natural areas, and they ask them what they want. Again, it goes back to what we were speaking on previously with Bill 23, this level of engagement and democracy to in fact find out what people want out of their parks. If they're living in proximity to a park, really, I think it will encourage the success and the viability of the park.

I know that there's one provincial park, which name escapes me right now, close to Valleyview which is almost entirely encircled by First Nations. Part of the problem with the park in the past is that

this park was not entirely accepted by the First Nations. Having an advisory committee in that specific circumstance I think would go a long way to creating a line of communication to find out what local people want out of the park and how it might interact with their lives.

I am speaking in favour of the amendment. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else? The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Mar: Yes, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity did extend me the courtesy of providing me with a copy of this earlier this evening, and I've had the opportunity to read it. I cannot express my support for the amendment because, as I indicated in my opening comments on the bill, we have not used advisory committees for some number of years. But we do agree with what the hon. member said with respect to seeking input from members of the public with respect to these lands. It is our intention to do so, and we have done so successfully over a number of years without using advisory committees but, instead, by bringing about local communities and stakeholders in creating the management, planning, and development of policies in these protected areas.

It is with regret that I cannot extend my support for the amendment, sir.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Any other speakers on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I had indicated earlier that I would be asking some questions of the minister in committee on Bill 18, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, 2006, specifically as they relate to the operation of aircraft and, in this particular instance, of foot-launched, powerless aircraft in respect of my peers and colleagues involved in the sports of hang-gliding and paragliding.

In the amended act as proposed, item 8.2 under section 15 refers to a person not being allowed to take off or land an aircraft "in a wilderness area or an ecological reserve" or "in a natural area or a heritage rangeland without the Minister's permission." Now, when we were discussing Bill 23 earlier this evening, there was a specific exemption provided for hang-gliders and paragliders, being foot-launched, powerless aircraft. I do not see that exemption in Bill 18.

10:00

Of particular concern for myself is what would be described as an emergency landing. I think most members might be able to appreciate the fact that when you're in a powerless aircraft, that depends on natural lift to maintain flight, if that lift evaporates for whatever reason, a landing is imminent. With all due respect, at that point, Mr. Chairman, a landing is an emergency landing. There is no opportunity to go around and take another try at it. There's no opportunity to fly some distance to make sure that you're outside of an ecological reserve or a recreation area. In fact, quite often a pilot of such an aircraft would find themselves in a situation where they weren't even aware of the fact that they might be overflying one of these areas. So it causes me concern, and it would certainly cause people involved in those activities concern. I think that what I was about to mention was that as I read the new act, section 8.1 actually repeals subsections (4) and (5), which allow for those emergency landings as authorized by the minister.

I'm hopeful that the minister might be willing to address those concerns that I've raised this evening, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief. The increase in fines and penalties with Bill 23 and Bill 18 is very positive and a much-needed step for Alberta parks and protected areas, yet this is only a small step in the legal strengthening that needs to be done to ensure that our parks and protected areas are safeguarded for future generations.

With regard to Bill 18 specifically it does clarify that off-highway vehicles are prohibited in three out of the four protected areas under this act. This amendment would be an ideal time to clear up inconsistencies such as the need to prohibit off-highway vehicles in all of the areas in this act.

Bill 18 removes the legislation that would allow for a designated buffer zone around a park. Although this legislation has not been used before, the removal of this section would not allow any new ones to be formed. The whole meaning of the buffer zone is a transition between what is going on outside the park boundaries and within the park itself. Without that transition there is the potential of encroachment. Also, the repeal of this section means that there is no tool for Alberta parks to use to mitigate or restrict activities occurring on adjacent lands that are affecting the ecological integrity of these parks.

The minister recognized that the removal of the advisory committee from the act is going to be addressed with increased public consultation in other venues. I would love to see the word "consultation" become "collaboration" so that it's not just a listening process but actually working with citizens and coming up with the best achievements possible.

It would be good to see a commitment to addressing the lack of conservation initiatives on land adjacent to the parks in response to the repeal of the buffer zones as well. In order for the government to successfully preserve our natural landscapes, steps must be taken to ensure that environmental degradation beside our parks is managed and monitored properly. I'm hoping that the minister in his summation can help me to understand why buffer zones aren't receiving the strength and the support that I feel is necessary.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 18 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 18.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour and in light of the wonderful budget that was delivered this afternoon by the hon. Minister of Finance, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:07 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 23, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/23

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. First of all, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 25 employees of the personnel administration office who are here on a public service orientation tour. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 65 grade 6 students from the Gibbons school. They are accompanied by parents and teachers. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I'd like them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Eric Oddleifson, his wife, Collette, and son Evan. Collette is Evan's homeroom teacher. He says that he's a 90 per cent student. They also wrote a letter to the Premier, and I'll just read the last sentence. It says, "I urge you [Mr. Premier] to do your job and keep our water clean and keep us safe." Would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I am pleased to introduce to you and members of the Assembly three guests seated in the public gallery. They are Reg Basken and his two grandchildren, Reg and Kimberley Barry. Reg, of course, is a long-time labour leader in this country. He was the president of the national Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, a former president of the AFL. He's active in many charitable organizations, such as the United Way and the Edmonton Community Foundation. Most importantly, he's president of the Alberta NDP. His grandchildren, Kimberley and Reg Barry, are visiting Edmonton on their school break from Prince George. I see they're standing. I'd ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

I'm also delighted today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Grant McLean. Grant has served as a senior manager with the government of Alberta in the Department of the Solicitor

General and Public Security and was also a former aide-de-camp to the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. He is an officer in the Order of Military Merit and is a recent recipient of an Alberta centennial medal for his extensive work in our community. Grant is also the former mayor of Airdrie. He is seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that you give him the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Endowment Funds

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Conservative government has borrowed heavily against Alberta's future by spending virtually all of the natural resource revenue it takes in each year. The Official Opposition has been leading the charge for a greater emphasis on savings. Even the Premier spoke last September of new endowment funds within a matter of months. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Why has an environmental endowment fund, critically needed to address water and other issues, simply evaporated into thin air?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, quite to the contrary. One thing about this government is that any new idea, such as the hon. member has mentioned, the environmental endowment – I want to say to members here: do we support the environment, ladies and gentlemen? It is very obvious to me that an environmental endowment is a new idea, a new idea that needs to be fed, that needs to be nurtured so that we will make it a reality, and that's exactly what this government is doing.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to see the line in the budget that addresses that one.

My next question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Why has this government chosen to completely neglect last year's flagship legislation by not committing one single penny to the access to the future fund?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. This government last year indicated in a stellar way through Bill 1 and through the throne speech that we were going to put \$5 billion into endowments for the future: half a billion dollars into the Alberta heritage medical research fund, half a billion dollars into the Alberta ingenuity fund, a billion dollars into the heritage scholarship fund, and \$3 billion into the access to the future fund. That access to the future fund has already generated significant interest in Albertans and others, contributing back to postsecondary education and advanced education in this province. Mr. Speaker, \$750 million has been put into that fund, which will contribute \$45 million this year to match those contributions; \$250 million has been put into the heritage scholarship fund; \$200 million has been put into the ingenuity fund. So we've made a huge step forward on that. Yes, of course, I'm pressing for more and pressing for more earlier. Our Premier has indicated that within three years that access to the future fund would be fully funded. One year has gone past. We've got two more years to get that done, and I think we're on track to do it.

Dr. Taft: My third question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of

Finance. What has happened to a social sciences endowment fund, crucial to addressing children's needs?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we've made a commitment of some \$5 billion to endowments, and we do intend to fully fund those. It would be perhaps imprudent to discuss another endowment, as important as that endowment is. We have made a commitment to do that, but at this point we're making our commitment to the funds we have. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education mentioned a number of them: the medical research endowment, another \$200 million to that plus more coming.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition very conveniently ignores the fact that we have done a debt repayment of \$22.7 billion over this time period, saving \$1.5 billion in debt servicing. That's where part of the funds have gone. He conveniently forgets all of the initiatives that we've made in health, education, advanced education to move this province forward. Why don't we just tell the whole story?

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Unbudgeted Surplus

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spending of oil and gas revenues in this province continues to rise dramatically as this government becomes increasingly reliant on nonrenewable resource revenues. Since 2004 we've seen an increase in this spending from \$3.5 billion a year to \$5.3 billion a year. It's an addiction, and it's a trend that is clearly unsustainable. My question is to the Minister of Finance. In this time of unprecedented boom why is this government increasing nonrenewable resource revenue spending instead of investing the funds so that they become permanent?

1:40

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again, I think the hon. member discounts and ignores completely the fact that we put \$1 billion in the heritage fund in the third quarter. We have another \$1 billion going in in this budget. That is a permanent increase to that fund. He also conveniently forgets that we just gave a 16 per cent increase to Advanced Education: I'm sure he would rather not have had that. A 7.7 per cent increase to Health: maybe we shouldn't have done that. A 5.1 per cent increase to Education: maybe we shouldn't have done that. And \$13.5 billion for capital projects: maybe we didn't need any of those. It's easy to sit on the other side of the House and come up with these types of questions but absolutely no solutions, no answers. Spend more, quit spending: the contradiction is quite amazing.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, we do have an answer, and it's our own surplus policy.

My question to the Treasurer: given that this government clearly lacks direction for the future of this province, why doesn't it do the right thing and adopt a sustainable policy, the Alberta Liberal policy for surplus investments?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I suppose that we could have done that this year. We'd have had no increase for health. We'd have had no increase for advanced education. We'd have had no increase for education. We'd have had no increase for children. We'd have had no increase for safer communities, for a better court system. We could have done that. What we've said instead is that we will save.

We will spend wisely. We no longer have a debt, the only province in Canada that can boast that, probably the only place in North America that can boast that. That's all conveniently forgotten in this discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. My final question, to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: given that this government is not endowing capital spending, how does the minister expect to fund repairs of potholes and roads and public buildings when the oil and gas run out?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we have a capital account of \$13.5 billion. That's dedicated to new postsecondary education facilities here, new health facilities across the province, new postsecondary, in fact, across the province. It's to better roads, including beginning of the twinning of highway 63. I want to point out to the hon. member that our capital plan is three times the size of any capital plan in any province in Canada today.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Income Support

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AISH and PDD in the Seniors and Community Supports department were increased in yesterday's budget. [interjections] Good thing. Good thing. But in Alberta Works, under the human resources department, funds for people in transition and people not expected to work were cut. These are Albertans who will not benefit from health care premium changes. These are the poorest of the poor and those trying to break free of the welfare cycle. A question to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: with earnings supplements for the working poor cut 19 per cent and health benefit funding cut 16 per cent, is the minister telling our working poor to expect less?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, it is unfortunate that anyone in Alberta, with such a hot economy and so many services, would go through some challenging times to meet basic needs, but the hon. member is not right to say that there was no increase. There was an increase in the budget for that specific area. We try our best to ensure that the best services that are available can be provided to our clientele.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when you go back a number of years, most of the dollars that were spent through the support programs were for single people and couples without children that were employable. In fact, the welfare caseload at one time was 97,000, with 5,400 staff working and a \$1.7 billion budget. At one time 80 per cent of those people on welfare were people that were employable and trainable and couples without children. Today, Mr. Speaker, the welfare caseload is down to 25,000, and half of those are expected to work, but half are not expected to work for various reasons.

We do not have a welfare office, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta anymore. We have 56 employment centres that assist people to make the transition from welfare to full employment eventually.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with

your business plan saying train them to get off welfare, why is this ministry cutting funds to get welfare recipients off supports?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, that is not true, Mr. Speaker. In fact, at one time the workers in the department, the 5,400 staff spending \$1.7 billion, spent 80 per cent of their time providing support for young people, couples without children, single people that should be working. We do not have that in Alberta. At the 56 employments centres now when a person walks in for social assistance, they'll get career counselling, resumé writing, job placement, and the transitional supports that are necessary to get them back on their feet.

Mr. Backs: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: with less supports, fewer welfare recipients, are you bringing back the idea of free one-way bus tickets to send welfare recipients out of Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, only the welfare recipients that don't want to work do that. The others all want jobs and training.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Corporate Taxes

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's provincial budget delivered a massive tax cut, that's going cost taxpayers of Alberta \$370 million, for highly profitable corporations in an already overheated economy. This is just dumb economics. The CEOs of the major corporations' investment in the PC party is paying dividends in spades. Meanwhile, the budget figures show that average Alberta families will actually see their personal income taxes go up \$102 million next year. My question is to the Minister of Finance. How can the minister justify the completely unjustified and unnecessary 15 per cent cuts in taxes for the corporate sponsors of the PC party while taking more money out of the pockets of ordinary Albertans?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again, you know, it's a bit distressing. We're all in this House. We all have access to budget documents. Many of us have been here for some time, and every hon. member in this House should know that the first tax reductions were made on the personal side. I produced a budget book, which was tabled and given to every member of this Assembly yesterday. If the hon. member would go to a section on tax in this, he would quickly understand that we have already saved average Albertans \$1.5 billion in taxes. In addition to that we increased the basic exemption and spousal or dependent exemption. Again, in addition we index that increase every year so it's not clawed back by inflation.

Mr. Speaker, no other province in Canada matches a spousal exemption – no other. The federal government doesn't do it. Have a look at the graph, and see what the NDP government in Saskatchewan's exemption is on basic and spousal, and come back and tell me that we've ignored the average Albertan.

Mr. Martin: You notice, Mr. Speaker, that she didn't talk about the question.

The question is this: why would you give the most profitable corporations in an overheated economy a gift of \$370 million? Explain that to the taxpayers of Alberta.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's any secret that the opposition member who is speaking now is not interested in business of any kind.

I've had the opportunity today to meet with some of the business leaders in this province, and they do understand what drives this economy. They do understand that the Alberta businesses here today have to compete not only in Canada but in a global economy. They do understand that while we are competitive in Alberta, Canada is not competitive in the world, and we have to work hard to make sure that our federal government follows our lead and make sure that our businesses can continue to operate, continue to work in a global economy, continue to generate jobs so that the average Albertan has a place to work.

1:50

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, my question is simply this: how can the Minister of Finance justify having a corporate tax rate 20 per cent lower than the next lowest province while saddling an Alberta family of four making \$60,000 with an income tax bill 28 per cent higher than in the province of Ontario?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is: hon. member, I would be happy to sit down with you and go over your figures because they are not exactly accurate.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, chronic wasting disease is an issue in my constituency as that's where the first cull of CWD-infected deer was made a year ago. I understand that five more cases were discovered through the chronic wasting disease control program. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister tell us if these further cases mean we are getting ahead of the disease or it's becoming an epidemic?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta considers chronic wasting disease a serious environmental as well as economic threat. We have 400,000 wild deer in this province. We must continue to be very, very aggressive in making sure that our approach is to prevent chronic wasting disease from coming across the Saskatchewan/Alberta border and infecting those 400,000 deer. The program that the hon. member is talking about started in January, and it is part of our long-term effort. Seven thousand deer have been tested since 1996. Actually, contrary to the claims that were made in the House this week about whether we're doing the right things or not, I'd like to point out that by doing nothing, as was suggested, this local deer population would be decimated within 50 years – that's the local deer population – and it would go to the entire province. Our actions help to make sure that Alberta's deer are being protected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister: how did your department select these control measures?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, we use the best science available both in Canada and internationally, and our actions are based on recommendations of an expert international panel. That's a scientific panel, and it's guided by a national strategy of Canada. Reducing deer density is the key, and it is the recommended response for all future recommendations on the spread of chronic wasting disease. We need to do everything we can to keep more animals from becoming infected and to protect both the environmental and economic viability of rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Given that the deer population is so critical and important to the constituents in my area, what is your department doing to ensure that these residents are informed, consulted, and engaged in these actions?

Mr. Coutts: Local consultation is very, very important, consultation not only with the residents, Mr. Speaker, but also with hunters and guides and outfitters. Two public meetings were held in Empress and Chauvin to present our action plans and to answer technical questions about the science of chronic wasting disease. We work closely with other government departments, like Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Health and Wellness, and Community Development as well as our partner in Saskatchewan, where the threat really comes from.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Automobile Insurance

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A true or false question for the Minister of Finance: is your ministry seeking a one-year delay in your own self-imposed review of automobile insurance reforms due to take place this fall?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there is a discussion ongoing now as to whether we should have a little more experience before that complete review is taking place. So while I don't think it's definitive yet, certainly that discussion is occurring, and it will occur with the stakeholders. We will determine together whether it's prudent to move ahead if we have enough information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: how will Alberta drivers benefit by waiting one more year for the AIRB to confirm what they already know, that is that the government's bungled reforms have greatly benefited private insurance companies at their expense?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not what we're finding at all. In fact, there are a number of things we're finding that are very positive. One, the number of uninsured drivers has dropped dramatically – uninsured drivers. There is more fairness in the system today because people are not discriminated against by gender or age. The Automobile Insurance Rate Board – and the member full well knows this – has the authority to review rates throughout the year and make decisions as to whether to recommend a rate decrease. So they will not be waiting for any change. But I think it's prudent to have the right information when you make decisions to change. We've had a little over a year's experience with automobile insurance reform, and it is a very, very positive outcome to this point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the Alberta insurance rate board will not discuss the circumstances surrounding the recent hasty and completely unex-

pected departure of their executive director, will the minister please inform this House why he left?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I couldn't possibly do that because that is certainly in the purview of the Automobile Insurance Rate Board. I would suggest that the hon. member talk to them. I have not asked the question, didn't know the circumstances, and I'm not sure that it is really my affair.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Forest Sustainability

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Global Forest Watch Canada released a report about the amount of intact versus fragmented forest in Canada, with particular attention paid to Alberta. Can the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development explain what it means by "fragmented forest"?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an important question because the report indicates and shows and acknowledges that Canada has a vast forest, and it is probably the most intact in the world. Alberta has 60 per cent of its land base as part of that forest. The report that the hon. member is talking about defines an intact forest as 10,000 hectares with no sign of human activity whatsoever. So what that means is a tract of land the size of the city of, say, Lethbridge or Red Deer, where there would be no roads, no human activity, no farms, no ranches, absolutely nothing happening and everything being sterile. That's their definition in the report, not ours.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, please. The purpose of question period is not to ask for definitions of words; it's to deal with government policy. Perhaps you could move on to the second question.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. How is he, as a minister, dealing with this challenge in Alberta?

Mr. Coutts: Actually, that's exactly where I was heading, Mr. Speaker, because in order to understand our policy of sustainability, it was important to show what the report was standing up and talking about. Sustainable Resource Development manages the landscape from a different perspective than the report. Ours is that of balance. We balance the needs of forestry, oil and gas; we balance the needs of recreation; and we balance the needs that the wildlife need to survive in the forest. We do that over a very long period of time. So we recognize that the forest is a living thing and, in doing so, that the renewable resource that we see is a living thing. That's how and why we manage it sustainably for the future.

2:00

The Speaker: That was helpful.

The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. How do we address the needs of wildlife?

Mr. Coutts: Sure. We manage the landscape based on balance, as I said, for a variety of users, Mr. Speaker. We have official protected areas in the province, we have wildlife habitat, plus we have management plans that help us take the steps to account for the needs of wildlife. We also have a critical habitat review that takes place before applications go into sensitive areas, and forest management plans are required before companies can go in and do any forestry. We have set-asides. We have regulations in place to protect streams and other sensitive areas that will help our wildlife flourish in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Ambulance Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emergency room overcrowding has been a constant problem that has been brought to the minister's attention time after time, and the government has offered no solutions. In fact, insufficient funding by this government will prevent the Capital health region from increasing the number of acute-care beds to ease backlogs in the emergency room. On top of that, this government decided not to increase funding for the municipal ambulance program. My questions are to the minister of health. Given that there were no ambulances in Edmonton to respond to emergencies 93 times in February 2006, up from only eight times in all of 2004, can the minister explain the decision not to increase funding for ambulances?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, from a number of points of view the hon. member has cited some issues that I believe have been topical in the media but may not reflect the capacity that we're trying to build in regional health authorities. The regional health authorities have been gifted with an average across the province of about 6 per cent; in the case of the Edmonton capital region a 5.7 per cent increase, over \$100 million. In terms of the capacity that they wish to establish in terms of beds, it will not only be between the hospitals in downtown Edmonton but between the subacute region.

There's a lot of work being done, Mr. Speaker, in your own constituency. I believe some of the day surgeries and other procedures are being transferred to Barrhead, are being transferred to other areas. It's quite exciting to see the co-operation that hospitals are building in order to accommodate capacity when beds are short.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that much of the system's ability to take new patients into the ER or for surgeries depends on the ability to discharge people into long-term care, why has the minister only committed \$78 million to long-term care when even she admits that it needs \$250 million?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the long-term care plan we recognized that both in the third quarter and in the monies that are in this budget there are dollars to move from a staffing ratio in 2004-05 that was at 3.1 to 3.6 hours of care per person per day. I think that under these circumstances you see us accelerating the type of care that's provided to people. You see a much stronger capacity that we've built with lifts, with medication supports, with administrative supports.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we still have work to do, and we continue to do that. We're preparing standards so that long-term care patients and people that are working with the care plans for long-term care

patients will be stronger. We're working on more information and better training. If you look at the budget this year of my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education, you will see many more people that are coming into training for positions that will someday help and support this.

Mr. Speaker, on every front we're trying to tackle the problems to make sure that we have adequate staffing and long-term care placements.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the same minister: how can Albertans believe that this government can reform the entire health system when they've proved they can't even manage the ambulance service?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not even making any pretense of managing the ambulance service. It is not our job. We have provided . . .

Ms Blakeman: You're not funding it. You're not managing it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in over 25 years of local and provincial politics, to my best recollection the province of Alberta has never managed the ambulance system. What we have done in the last two years is provide at least \$55 million to all but two authorities that are receiving \$10 million for pilot projects to support health care management within the ambulance system. We have had members of municipal ambulance systems working on an advisory committee – and note that I say municipal employees, not provincial government employees – trying to define what, if any, should be the future of managing ambulance in a proper way. I think that over the last few months they've done a lot of consultation. They're looking at patient safety. They're looking at the impact on municipal authorities. I'm sincerely hopeful that at the conclusion of this you'll see a plan for ambulance delivery that will be both safe and that will accommodate the regions in the best way possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Income Support

(continued)

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. The announcement to raise income support rates for Albertans who cannot work is very good news, but why is there no increase for the 15,000 people who also get assistance through Alberta Works but are expected to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question. At least the member mentioned that those people that are not expected to work did get an increase in the budget. Talking about the 15,000 or so that are expected to work, our top priority – and I said this earlier in question period – through the 56 employment centres is to put these people back into the workforce as quickly as possible because that is where the clientele want to be. Through that, we provide employment exemptions, daycare support, school support, and other expenses, health care support, even relocation to a new community if they choose to do so. So that is

our plan. Anyone that's able to work, that's living in Alberta will eventually have to work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To get a little more clarity, why aren't any of the rates tied to standard measures like the market-based measure to ensure that rates are at least in line with the cost of living?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, the market-basket measure and others like it are good research tools, as we all know, basically to explore low-income issues that trace Albertans. Of course, we use them for that purpose only. We don't use them to determine what assistance is required because we provide so many other valuable services like thousands of jobs in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary: is the 5 per cent increase going to be enough for those clients who cannot work or get enough money through other employment?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, we'll continue monitoring that situation very closely as we move forward. I mentioned earlier that there are other supports provided for those people, and we'll continue doing that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Continuing Care Assistance

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Almost a year after the Auditor General's scathing report and recommendations by the MLA task force this government has committed less than 30 per cent of the \$250 million estimated by the minister of health to improve continuing care. I'll steal a motion from my fellow member, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and say: do we not all in this House support our vulnerable seniors? My question is to the Minister of Finance. Can the minister explain how she failed to budget the resources necessary to fix continuing care when racehorses got a 40 per cent increase?

2:10

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I am really struggling to understand which budget documents my hon. colleagues across the way are using. I thought they were in the House when we presented the budget and the numbers yesterday. Now, I want the hon. member to just think again of the amount of increase to long-term care and the \$250 million that she quoted and the 30 per cent. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Actually, the next question is to the minister of health. I'll come back with that math answer. Given that \$63 million was granted to horse racing and only \$42 million put toward improving seniors' care, can the minister explain how many full-time personal care aides could have been hired with that money?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm not clear about whether it's the money that was relative to the horse racing, so I would have to say that I need more clarification in order to answer the question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. That would have been the difference between 42 and 63.

The Speaker: The question, please.

Ms Pastoor: To the Minister of Gaming: how many task forces were required to determine that horse racing should receive a 40 per cent increase?

Mr. Graydon: Actually, if no one shows up at the racetrack and doesn't put any money in the slot machines, there will be a zero per cent increase.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Corporate Taxes

(continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's budget showed once again that in Alberta friends of the government get richer, and everyone else gets scraps from the master's table. The \$370 million gift to corporate friends of this government is beyond comprehension for most Albertans especially because it's not a one-time gift; it's a gift in perpetuity, year after year after year. That these megaprofitable corporations will be laughing even harder to the bank while Albertans are stuck with health premiums and user fees is unconscionable. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Why is this government willing to give billionaire corporations six times the amount this government is willing to invest in early learning and child care?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I want to take the hon. members to page 134 in the fiscal outlook book. I'm sure that you have them in front of you. We'll have an opportunity to debate this because this is part of my department. If you go to the bottom of that page, it clearly says: "Effective April 1, 2006, we will reduce the general corporate income tax rate to 10 per cent, lowering taxes for Alberta businesses" [interjections] – can we listen once more? – "by \$265 million." That's not the \$400 million that I heard yesterday from the ND, and it's not the \$300 million or whatever it was that I heard earlier today. It's on page 134 in my book.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? If Alberta businesses continue to grow and thrive as they have been under our tax policy, creating more jobs and more jobs for Albertans, that number could change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That \$370 million comes from the minister's own projection of revenues.

Why does this minister think that corporations like EnCana should be given \$8.5 million in giveaways while a low-income family of four deserves a meagre \$65 a month more? It doesn't even compensate for the erosion in the real value due to inflation of what they have been receiving since the last increase.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the hon. member again that all on the personal side, the basic exemption, both basic and spousal or adult dependant, is indexed every year so that there is no loss year to year. That was a decision that was made.

On the earlier part of his question I can only assume that the hon.

member is talking about a royalty situation. The oil and gas industry undisputably contributes in a huge way to this province both in revenue derived from royalties, from land sales, and maybe most importantly from economic activity. I don't understand at all a philosophy that has absolutely no use for, no respect for, and no understanding of business.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, my final question to the same minister: why does she think that paying back corporate donations to the PC Party through corporate tax cuts is more important than investing the \$250 million needed to immediately improve quality of life for seniors in long-term care?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, the first thing I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that I think members of other parties in this House are probably offended because the member infers that only our party receives any donations from the corporate community. Oh, would that be true, it would be wonderful, but in fact it's not.

Mr. Speaker, I like to have questions on this budget. I want to have questions on: did we provide enough dollars in health care? I think that's appropriate. Did we provide enough dollars in continuing care? That's appropriate. Did we provide enough dollars in education? That's appropriate. To make these rather specious comparisons is not productive, not helpful, and it completely clouds all of the discussions we're having here.

Home Building Contracts

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as evidenced by yesterday's budget, Alberta's economy is firing on all cylinders. While this is a good thing, I have some 50 constituents who seem to be the victim of this hot economy. Despite signing a contract with a home builder, in some cases as long as a year ago, to build their dream home at a specific cost, these constituents are now being told that the builder will not honour the contract and is offering to refund their deposit. In the meantime, the costs of building a home have increased substantially. My questions are to the Minister of Government Services. What safeguards are in place to protect consumers in situations like this?

Mr. Lund: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good point because certainly in Calgary right now there is a great demand for homes and, of course, a shortage of labour. As a matter of fact, a couple of weeks ago I met with two large home-building companies, and they're putting a cap on the number of homes that they will even contract because they don't want to run into this problem. I know it must be really traumatic for the 30-plus purchasers that signed contracts and now are not going to get their homes.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned that these were contracts that they signed, and really I think we can't overemphasize how important it is that people know what's in the contract, that they make sure that they're comfortable with the contract and make sure that it's all legal because there are issues peripheral to maybe what people are thinking about at the time you're signing the contract. So it's really important that people talk with people that have experience in that field.

Mr. Liepert: My first supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Can he tell the Assembly why the builder would not be required to at least pay interest on those refunded deposits?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, currently we don't have any legislation except for the Residential Tenancies Act that requires interest to be

paid on a deposit. Incidentally, that interest rate now is zero, so it's not a big help. It certainly is an area that we need to look at. But once again I've got to come back to the fact that that's just one of the items that should have been covered in the contract. As I say, it's peripheral to what people might be thinking about, but people that have had experience in contracts would identify that kind of a scenario that could happen.

Mr. Liepert: My final supplementary question to the same minister is: would he consider having his department intervene and at least have the developer sell the lots to the purchaser at the same price as what was agreed to in the contract?

2:20

Mr. Lund: That's an interesting situation, Mr. Speaker. I haven't seen the contract, but it's my understanding that the contractor never did purchase the land, that in fact the land is still registered under the name of the developer. So I'm not sure that there's any way that we can deal with that issue but, I guess, to emphasize again how important it is to have a good understanding of the contract and to have a good contract.

Just yesterday we had an awards program for the best champions in consumer affairs. One of the awards that we granted was to Alberta New Home Warranty, and it was for a book that they have put together on tips when buying a new condominium or buying a new single-dwelling home. I would urge people to get a copy of that in order to have a look at it.

Also, under the Real Estate Council they have a lot of good tips for people that are getting into contracts to purchase homes. Actually, of course, often in cases the home is the biggest purchase that a family will make.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Municipal Sustainability

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two-thirds of Albertans, those 2 million plus citizens living in and around the boom-town cities of Edmonton and Calgary, were ignored in yesterday's announcement with the exception of partial ring roads that will circumnavigate the line of ambulances parked in front of overcrowded hospitals, the decaying inner- and absent outer-city schools, the seniors crying out in understaffed, underregulated long-term care homes, and the hundreds of thousands of low-income individuals dependent on FCSS support. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. How much more do the citizens of Edmonton and Calgary pay out through a variety of taxes – provincial income, property, gas, and health care – than they receive back from the province for service funding?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, you probably won't like the answer, but I want to remind the hon. member – and I'll stick to Calgary because that's where he's from; we can bring the others into it as well – that the city of Calgary does receive \$95 million from its share of the provincial fuel tax. It does receive \$177 million a year from the Alberta municipal infrastructure program. But in total, sir, the contribution to the city of Calgary in all of those categories that you named is \$4 billion from the province, so I will not put in the amount that they contribute because it's considerably less.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. My second question is to the

Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that about this time last year you speculated about providing municipalities tax relief through the return of the education portion of property tax, when will your speculation turn into government action?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the member brings that question forward because it gives me an opportunity to discuss what I've been in fact discussing with the mayor of Calgary, the mayor of Edmonton – I introduced them in the House just recently – the president of the AUMA, and the president of the AAMD and C, who are working together on the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability to deal with that very issue.

I have repeatedly said in this House – and I repeat it with the members of my council – that the responsibility of that council is to have a look at the roles and responsibilities of cities, of the province, and to determine what are the reasonable costs associated with those roles. Once we've done that, once we've established what those roles are, then it makes sense to begin to look at the revenue side and determine whether the revenue, in fact, matches the roles and responsibilities. I expect that we should have that complete within the next six to eight months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the definitive timeline. That is appreciated.

My third question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that despite our multibillion dollar annual surpluses Albertans are currently – currently – paying out of pocket billions of dollars in health care premiums and insurance fees to receive delayed basic care, how much more will we have to pay out when your government's third-way private delivery costs are downloaded onto hard-working Albertans?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no intent to download costs on hard-working Albertans in the third way. In fact, the whole premise of the policy framework is to build a strong publicly funded system, a system where you can get public health care at the time you need it, as much as possible, without any identification or contradiction as to your ability to pay because you will always have that capacity to access a strong public health system in Alberta without paying for it.

Mr. Speaker, the question does not relate to the health care policy framework. It does not relate to what Albertans have been looking for in policies. It does not relate to any kind of identification this government has made for any future costs in health care. Yes, the health care premiums are still part of a portion of public funding towards health care, but the larger bulk of health care funding still comes from the general revenue fund of the province of Alberta. The vast majority of \$735 million comes from the province of Alberta's revenues, and what we're struggling with is trying to make sure that it's sustainable and that people have access where and when they need it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six to participate.

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan 100th Anniversary

The Speaker: Today I would like to advise you that I have conveyed on your behalf and on behalf of the staff of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta sincere congratulations to Speaker P. Myron

Kowalsky and the members and staff of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan on the 100th anniversary of the opening of the First Session of their first Legislature.

Our celebrations began on March 15; Saskatchewan's will begin on March 29. We, of course, share with Saskatchewan more than just a common border. In fact, we share the same humble beginnings. With the establishment of the Legislative Assembly of the North-West Territories in 1888, together we began the quest for responsible government and autonomy within the dominion of Canada. Attaining such provincial status was a struggle, but successfully we built two strong and independent provinces.

So as we look back over the last 100 years, on your behalf we convey best wishes to the people of Saskatchewan and their institution of democracy.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's once again my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of high school students from Ponoka, Alberta. They are from St. Augustine school. They're a group of 29 grade 10 students studying government in their social studies class. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Darren Josephson and Mrs. Elaine Ernst. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Crystal Meth Strategies

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the last couple of weeks I've shared with the Legislature several youth groups that we as a province have consulted with on many different issues. One challenge that these groups of youth have identified and tried to address is the problem of illegal drugs and methamphetamine in particular. As chair of the Youth Secretariat I think it's important that we work together to solve this problem.

In order that we do this, the government has taken a number of steps to protect the children and the youth of this province. For example, Mr. Speaker, Bill 2, the Drug-endangered Children Act, will help to protect children exposed to drug manufacturing and the trafficking of illegal drugs. Recent health regulation changes have helped to ensure that some of the medications used in making meth are now listed as schedule 2 drugs and, therefore, are sold from behind the pharmacist's counter.

In addressing the challenge of meth, the province has also developed an Alberta drug strategy under AADAC together with the Crystal Meth Task Force and other government departments and partners in our communities. AADAC will develop a co-ordinated response to meth within our province. Again, youth are being consulted on this issue and are helping to develop solutions to the problem. Further, as we speak, youth are working with aboriginal youth in four different areas of our province to obtain their perspectives with the growing problem.

AADAC also opened a number of retreat beds for those youth

aged 12 to 17. New services provided also include a special treatment procedure to help address methamphetamine use.

Through these initiatives I hope we can curb the use of meth by our children and young people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:30 X-Treme Women's Hockey Challenge

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today in recognition of the 2006 Battle of the Border X-Treme Women's Hockey Challenge. Last night the four-game challenge between the Calgary Oval X-Treme and the U.S. Selects team kicked off in front of a sold-out crowd in the Three Hills Centennial Arena. The game was very hard fought and exciting, and the U.S. Selects, sad to say, scored a goal in the dying seconds of the final minute of play to defeat the Oval X-Tremes 3 to 2.

EnCana, the event sponsor, generously matched the proceeds of the game and donated them to the big winners of the evening, the Three Hills Arena Completion Society and Kneehill minor hockey.

The Battle of the Border was more than just another hockey game to our community. The young women from the two teams in the tournament as well as Olympic gold medalist Hayley Wickenheiser participated in school visits and a local mentorship lunch and signed countless autographs for young women in our community. One lucky young lady, 12-year-old Dominique Lambert, won the local X-Treme Queen contest and had an opportunity to join the Oval X-Treme team in their dressing room prior to the game and sit next to Hayley Wickenheiser during the game.

The teams involved in the Battle of the Border and Hayley's Olympic gold medal winning Canadian women's hockey team have done a wonderful job of raising the profile of women's hockey and women's sports in general. Sports and physical activity are very important to the well-being of young women. They contribute to higher levels of confidence and self-esteem. Sport is where one can learn about teamwork, goal setting, and the pursuit of excellence. Sport prepares you for life.

The ladies of the Oval X-Treme team and the U.S. Selects team as well as Hayley Wickenheiser and her Team Canada teammates are an inspiration to young women and set a wonderful example. These women's hockey heroes truly are worthy role models.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Tribute to Fort McMurray

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fort McMurray is a good place to live. Too often our media portrays Fort McMurray as a place that is out of control. It's not. From what you read and hear, it is darkened with environmental degradation and is a wild west town, beset by violence and drugs. It's not. I'm not saying that there are not problems that should be addressed in infrastructure funding and in improving the quality of life in Fort McMurray, but it is a good place to live.

Most people in the world would love to have many of the problems Fort McMurray has. The northern lights actually shine on Fort McMurray. The majestic Clearwater and Athabasca rivers meet at Fort McMurray. The city enjoys some of the most historic and scenic river valleys in Alberta.

Where else in Alberta can you land a float plane downtown? I twice lived in the old Syncrude Towers, and float planes flew past my window. It was cool. Where else can you walk out your back door in many subdivisions and into virgin pine and aspen forest?

Snowmobile enthusiasts can leave their yard and go on trails that will stretch for hundreds of miles. Some of the best trophy fishing lakes in the world are a hop, skip, and jump away. Hunting opportunities are some of the best on the continent. And it's pretty neat to drive up the ice road to Fort Chipewyan and to see the museum and church in the oldest community, arguably, in Alberta, to say nothing of driving through the wonders of nearby Wood Buffalo national park and crossing Alberta and Saskatchewan's largest lake, Lake Athabasca.

There is a multicultural and multi-Canadian base to Fort McMurray that is cosmopolitan and gives it also an international flair. If you want to learn about Newfoundland, go to Fort McMurray. There's more: the theatre at Keyano College and the Fort McMurray Oil Barons for great hockey.

There's lots of work and business. There's much to work on in growing Fort McMurray, Mr. Speaker, but a family can do very well financially and grow a great life in our beautiful Alberta city of Fort McMurray.

In the future I would like to see in our media a much more balanced view of what McMurray has to offer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 21 we recognized the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This is a day to remember and reflect on the fact that racism is still part of our society. On March 21, 1960, police opened fire and killed 60 people at a peaceful demonstration in South Africa. This serves as a reminder of the destructive nature of racism, and we must raise awareness and involve all Canadians in the movement against racism.

Yesterday I was pleased to see grade 6 students from St. Clement Catholic school in my riding doing an excellent exhibition and conference about the elimination of racial discrimination. It was a very inspiring moment for me. We can learn a lesson from our children as individuals and make the same effort to support acceptance and diversity. First of all, speak out against racism. In this case, silence is not golden. Silence too can lead to greater discrimination, so you have the right as well as the duty to speak out. When you have the chance, stand up and protect our society's great diversity and respect for differences.

Mr. Speaker, racism is the belief that one ethnic group, race, or religion is superior to others and that they are not worthy of respect or recognition. As a result, individuals become the target of racist acts based on the colour of their skin and their cultural background. Your support should not stop at home. Even at work you can explore ways to promote positive race relations by vocally objecting to racist jokes and insults. Racism must be stopped. Together we can accomplish this goal.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Advanced Education Tuition Fees

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we heard the government's budget for the upcoming year. Great care was taken to continue giving gifts to friends in big oil and tax cuts to those who need them the least. For postsecondary students there was very little real good news. In particular, there was no sign of permanent relief

from ever-increasing tuition fees. Despite the minister's talk about increasing the affordability and accessibility for our postsecondary students, yesterday's budget illustrated the difference between how much this government values investing in our students and, therefore, in our future versus squandering public revenues in perpetuity and giveaways for their corporate friends.

For yet another year students face a tuition increase. The government will pay for the increase in the next fiscal year, which amounts to nothing more than a stay of execution. Students need a real solution to ever-growing tuition costs. I think it behooves us to ask: who needs relief more? Last year, for example, EnCana had net earnings of \$3.4 billion. Meanwhile, a recent survey of undergraduates found that in their prime, summertime earning months nearly two-thirds of students earned less than \$2,500 per month. Yet this government hikes tuition for students and cuts taxes for the already wealthy.

Last week a letter from the university presidents to the minister was made public. They were calling for the status quo in tuition increases. I urge the minister to ignore those demands and to make students a priority. I urge him to listen to the recommendation made by student groups, those most familiar with the burden of escalating tuition, and implement an immediate freeze and deliver a long-term plan which includes a significant rollback to ensure that all of Alberta's bright, young minds can afford to fully participate in postsecondary education. Now, Mr. Speaker, that would be a real investment in our future.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 142 Albertans who are asking the government of Alberta to abandon plans to implement the third way, to defeat legislation allowing expansion of private, for-profit hospitals, not to contravene the Canada Health Act, et cetera.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition from 56 Albertans who are urging the government of Alberta to "consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that I would like to present to the Legislative Assembly, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to call a public inquiry into Enron's role in the development of electricity deregulation in Alberta and their market conduct in the Power Pool of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday, April 3, I

will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 10, 11, 12, and 13.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday, April 3, I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 20, 21, and 22.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 24

Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill 24, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006.

As announced in yesterday's release of Budget 2006, Bill 24 amends the existing act to raise the limit on the use of nonrenewable resource revenue for budget purposes to \$5.3 billion from \$4.75 billion. As per the legislation any amount over the \$5.3 billion will continue to be allocated to the sustainability fund.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Bill 25

Securities Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 25, being the Securities Amendment Act, 2006.

Bill 25 is a bill that will include among other things the protection for secondary market investors in the province of Alberta, including people with RRSPs, pensions, and other personal investments. Under this legislation they would have a legal right to sue public companies that issue false or misleading information. Ontario has enacted similar legislation. The legislation is important because nearly 90 per cent of all equity trading in Alberta takes place in the secondary market. The bill also identifies a number of provisions within the existing act that need to be amended.

I move first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I move that Bill 25 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Bill 27

Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 27, the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act.

Before we get too many calls from excited children, this act isn't repealing the sales of vegetables in Alberta. They will still be on your dinner plates, I assure you. I'm sure that this bill will bring about some very fiery and passionate debate, and I look forward to that.

This bill will repeal the unnecessary and unused Vegetables Sales (Alberta) Act and the two associated regulations: the vegetable sales regulation and the grades, packages, and fees regulation. Growers

and packers are no longer using Alberta grades. They're using the federal grades or more subjective qualities such as appearance, size, and product consistency, allowing them to market produce more easily outside the province. That's why we've introduced this bill: to continue our commitment to eliminating unnecessary and unused acts and regulations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Bill 28

Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill will result in a more secure and transparent election process, which in turn promotes integrity and public confidence in Alberta's municipal electoral system and gives local jurisdictions the flexibility to tailor election procedures to address their citizens' requirements.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move that Bill 28 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Stony Plain, am I calling on you today?

Bill 211

Traffic Safety (Mandatory Motorcycle Training) Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and request leave to introduce Bill 211, the Traffic Safety (Mandatory Motorcycle Training) Amendment Act, 2006, for first reading.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to reduce the occurrences of collisions and fatalities involving motorcycles on Alberta's roads. This bill will hopefully cut down the number of collisions involving motorcycles by requiring that anybody wishing to obtain their class 6 licence, the motorcycle endorsement, present proof of having taken part in a certified motorcycle training course.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 211 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings. The first is from Martha Cheney, who questions: if it's a private system, what quality control processes will be in place, and also what recourse is available to deter receiving poor service?

The second tabling is from Marlene Lecky Perron, who makes a

point that she doesn't believe Albertans want a system where ability to pay would determine the rate at which you're served.

The next one is from John Stasiuk and family, making the point that it is possible to make good improvements in the current system; from Shawna Welz, who makes the point that she wrote to the Premier and the minister and just received condescending letters saying that she didn't understand; from Bob and Kathy Borreson, making the point that they've had first-hand experience with a family being denied private health insurance in the 1950s prior to medicare; from Don Mayne, making the point about the foolishness of hiring a company which has been convicted of wrongdoing to provide guidance to the Alberta government; from Bill Lundquist, making a point feeling that the Premier really doesn't care about the poor, the hard-working, or the seniors; from David Flower, making a point about a \$1.5 million contract on whether private health insurance should be an option in our province going to a subcompany of a private U.S. company; and from Jean Andrews and Rene Thibault, making a point asking to please stop destroying the medical system, which has provided universal and accessible health care.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the requisite number of copies of six of the letters that the Official Opposition received from concerned citizens regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The ones I am tabling today are from Shannon O'Neill, Kasimo A. Kalyegira,* Meerag Swamy, Larry – and I couldn't read the last name; it's illegible – Anupa Ashav,* and Heather Harsch.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table six letters and appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters I am tabling today are from Thy Nguyen, Rae-Lynn Wiltshire, Jeff Crawford, Tong Zheng, Tara Paterok, and Shana Dion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table six letters and appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare from Douglas McLachlan, Stephanie Wolfe, Laurie Moulton, Mark Hall, Antsar Mustfa, Patricia McEwen.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twelve further letters regarding the provincial government's involvement with the national daycare program, and these letters are from Heather Horn, Idabell Parcasio, Lisa Komaransky, C. Elliott, Heather Eliasson, Kerry Powell, Bernard Fraser,* Jason McCallum,* Angela Bourne,* Chris Evans,* Suzanne Evans,* and Veshaya Shayans.*

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table two documents on behalf of the leader of the NDP opposition. The first is a letter from Alvin Finkel. Mr. Finkel objects to the dismissive and robotic response received from the minister of health when he raised serious concerns about health privatization. He provides evidence of how the public system will suffer if a parallel private system is put into place.

I'm also tabling a synopsis of a legal dispute between Grant McLean and the government of Alberta. Mr. McLean was a senior manager with the government of Alberta, a former mayor of the city of Airdrie, and in 2005 was awarded the Alberta centennial medal. Mr. McLean is taking his former employer, the government of Alberta, to court for alleged negligent misrepresentation in a matter relating to his pension.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the requisite number of copies of the 2004-2005 Alberta Economic Development Authority activity report entitled Sustaining Economic Performance and Prosperity.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, I want to raise a point this afternoon with respect to tablings. There's a difficult situation that has developed and is starting to develop, and I use by example sessional paper 197/2006, which was tabled in the House by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Invariably members stand up and say: "I'm tabling here a letter with respect to the provincial government plan for the future of daycare," or something of the like, and a document is tabled which references the national child care program. In looking at some of these tablings, as the chair does from time to time, there's absolutely nothing in the letter that has to do with respect to the province of Alberta. But more importantly – more importantly – than that there is no signature on the letter, there is no identification who the letter might be from, and the letter that's tabled is absolutely unreadable. You can see it as well as I can.

Now, if this is what we're doing in tablings, then I'm going to ask that the House leaders have a discussion and deal with this subject once and for all because if it's simply a matter of a member going out and xeroxing 150 blank pieces of paper and then standing up and tabling them, our *Hansard* people are invariably spending a waste of time trying to identify who it is.

When we come back on April 3, I'm going to give you some other examples where, in fact, the names mentioned in the House do not correspond with the documents tabled. This is not the honourable way to do things.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask under Standing Order 7(5) whether the Government House Leader could share with us the projected government business for the week of April 3 to 6, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to

provide the projected government business for the week of April 3 to 6, 2006. On Monday, April 3, 2006, most of the day is spent on private members' business with Government Bills and Orders starting at 9 p.m. in Committee of the Whole, Bill 16; second reading, bills 15, 20, 23, 26; and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, April 4, 2006, in the afternoon there will be Committee of Supply, estimates of the Legislative Assembly, day 1 of 24, Seniors and Community Supports, and as per the Order Paper. That evening commencing at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders Committee of Supply, day 2 of 24, Energy, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, April 5, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders Committee of Supply, day 3 of 24, with Infrastructure and Transportation, and as per the Order Paper. That evening at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders Committee of Supply, day 4 of 24, Executive Council, and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, April 6, 2006, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders Committee of Supply, day 5 of 24, Human Resources and Employment, and as per the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before moving to the next item in the Routine, might I just draw to every member's attention that on Monday next the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster will reach his half-century point in life.

head: **Orders of the Day**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

head: 3:00 **Royal Assent**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[Mrs. McClellan and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, and Mrs. McClellan entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

His Honour: Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated.

The Speaker: May it please His Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sittings passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

The Clerk: Your Honour, the following are the titles to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- Bill 1 Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act
- Bill 2 Drug-endangered Children Act
- Bill 3 Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006
- Bill 4 Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006
- Bill 5 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006
- Bill 6 Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006
- Bill 7 Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006
- Bill 8 Trustee Amendment Act, 2006
- Bill 17 Libraries Amendment Act, 2006

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated his assent]

The Clerk: In Her Majesty's name His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and Mrs. McClellan left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**
 Provincial Fiscal Policies

16. Mrs. McClellan moved:
 Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 22: Dr. Taft]

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of all Albertans and as Leader of the Official Opposition it's my duty and, indeed, my privilege to respond to the budget delivered in this Assembly yesterday. There are a few things to like in the budget. How could there not be, given the wealth of Alberta? Tuition relief for students, more funding for projects to reduce wait times in the public health care system, more support for Albertans using the AISH program, an increase in spending on primary care, the planned twinning of highway 63: those are all steps in the right direction, Mr. Speaker. But, after all, when you take a shotgun approach to budgeting, you're bound to hit the target once in a while. [interjections] I can tell it's going to be a fun afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

Overall, this budget shows that we have a directionless, fractured government drowning in cash yet, despite unprecedented opportunity, completely unable or perhaps unwilling to develop a long-term plan to ensure Alberta's prosperity.

Ordinary Albertans don't depend upon windfalls to balance their household budgets, Mr. Speaker, yet the government's addiction to nonrenewable resource revenue grows stronger every year, rising from 3 and a half billion dollars in 2004, already a very significant amount, to a projected \$5.3 billion by 2007. The problem with this is: if the price of oil and gas drops – and history shows that it will – or, perhaps more ominously, if new technologies render petroleum resources less valuable, how are we going to support the kind of spending that we have? Where is the money going to come from?

Mr. Speaker, I often reflect on the fate of the Red Deer River Valley downstream from Drumheller. In 1950 there were well over a hundred coal mines between Drumheller and what is now Dinosaur park. In 1960 there were about a dozen. In 1970 there was one. The coal was still there, but the resource had been rendered without value because of advances in technology. My concern for the future of this province is that that same kind of scenario will play out again.

A truly responsible, forward-thinking government would set aside as much of this nonrenewable revenue as possible to pay for future expenses, but instead we get tax cuts for corporations and subsidies for horse racing. Mr. Speaker, if we can't find the discipline, the discipline that this government once had to start saving for the future now, in the middle of this incredible boom, when is it ever going to happen?

In 10 or 15 years will Albertans once again be forced to tighten their belts not through any fault of their own but because the politicians of today – all of us – failed to insulate our economy from the whims of resource prices? As elected representatives of the people every member of this Assembly on both sides of the House has a responsibility to act as a steward of our province's collective wealth. We've been entrusted by our fellow citizens to manage that wealth in ways that serve the public good. Therefore, we in the Official Opposition are duty-bound to offer our criticisms of this budget.

This budget predicts a \$4.1 billion surplus. That's wonderful, no doubt. But the lion's share of that expected surplus will come from the estimated \$11 billion in nonrenewable natural resource revenues. Simply put, we are living beyond our means, yet the government's planned changes to the Fiscal Responsibility Act will increase, actually increase the limit on the use of nonrenewable resource revenue for budget purposes from \$4.75 billion to \$5.3 billion. We in the Alberta Liberal opposition strongly oppose this initiative.

3:10

The smartest people in this province, from economic think tanks to business leaders to savvy working Albertans, are all saying that we need to save much more of our natural resource revenues for the future. But, instead, this government is spending the money almost as fast as the resource is sucked out of the ground. Mr. Speaker, the Canada West Foundation published a study recently indicating that this government had spent 91 per cent of all natural resource revenues in the period from 1979 to 2004. Ninety-one per cent. We are spending it as fast as it comes in. That's no way to build a future.

Sure, this year the heritage fund gets another billion dollars, but that's less than the government spent – handed out, I might say – in rebate cheques last year. In any case this government continues to draw money from the heritage fund for general revenues. What's the sense in that? There's no real commitment from this government to growing that fund, a fund that has lost 50 per cent of its real value in the last 17 years.

In other areas the budget didn't address the \$6.9 billion in teachers' pension unfunded liability. The government is responsible for two-thirds of this liability, which clearly represents an unpaid debt.

On infrastructure and transportation, Mr. Speaker, once again this government has failed to provide adequate, sustainable, and predictable funding.

When it comes to Alberta's cities and towns, they need a wider array of fiscal tools to meet the needs of their communities, and they're not getting it. This government needs at the very least to live up to its commitment of two years ago to put a hard cap on the education portion of property tax at \$1.2 billion. That would mean this year, in fact, a rollback of over \$200 million.

When it comes to schools, the infrastructure situation, the condition of our school buildings is too often almost in a crisis mode. Just last week, every member of this Assembly knows, a school in Calgary had to be evacuated because of structural problems with the roof stemming from roof leaks that had not been attended to for years. Calgary has 40 neighbourhoods with no schools and over \$400 million in deferred maintenance, and there are up to 76 neighbourhoods needing schools in Edmonton.

One of the symbols to me of the failure of this government, Mr. Speaker, is that you can walk through neighbourhoods of Alberta from 1910 and 1920, through the dirty '30s, the war years of the '40s, through the '50s, through the baby boom of the '60s, and through the '70s and '80s, and every neighbourhood had a school. Our society could afford schools in the 1920s. They could afford them in the '50s. They could afford them in the '70s. Under this government you walk through neighbourhoods that have empty fields, and children even in cities are spending up to an hour each way on a bus, going to school. [interjections] I hear moaning, a phony sort of moaning from backbenchers of this government. I dare them to do that at a parent council meeting in any number of schools in this province.

How is it that at a time of such prosperity, when we have a booming population and so many children, this budget makes no mention of new school construction? The Minister of Education knows how many schools are needed. He has a three-year capital plan for every school board. Why won't this government provide stable, sufficient, and predictable funding for proper schools for our children? The budget line for infrastructure renewal for schools, \$81 million, isn't enough to take care of the Calgary board of education's capital needs of almost \$400 million never mind Calgary Catholic schools or Edmonton public or Edmonton separate or all the rest of the province.

The increases in operating grants for education will barely cover inflation, and to my great dismay, in a province as wealthy as Alberta and a government swimming in cash, there's not one cent to fund hot lunch programs. This government simply seems unprepared to admit that kids in Alberta are going to school hungry, and that is a great moral failure of this Conservative government.

I also can't help pointing out, Mr. Speaker, that there's no money for junior kindergarten or full-day kindergarten, investments in early education that pay off over the long term, pay off over and over in lower justice costs, lower health costs, higher productivity, and higher tax revenues.

As far as postsecondary education goes, Mr. Speaker, the tuition rebate is continued for 2006-07, as previously announced, which comes after years of rapid increases, the fastest in the country from 1990 to the present. While the respite in tuition increases is welcomed – I support that – we're still awaiting and students across this province are still awaiting the tuition fee policy that was promised in the 2005 Speech from the Throne over a year ago, a policy that Alberta families desperately need to determine whether or not they can send their kids to college or university and a policy that many young adults themselves need to know if they can plan their lives around an education or not.

There is also no additional investment in the access to the future fund, one of the real surprises of this budget, with just \$750 million total after two years of a three-year commitment to a fund that is supposed to reach \$3 billion. As a result, there will only be \$45 million annually generated from that fund to spend on system improvements, not nearly enough. When fully funded, whenever that will actually be, it will provide \$135 million, a step in the right direction but not the kind of planning we need. Frankly, this policy pales in comparison to the Alberta Liberal plan, which, assuming a

\$10 billion surplus, would already have produced a 3 and a half billion dollar postsecondary endowment fund, which would continue to grow and support Alberta's postsecondary institutions until they became truly world class.

While the operating grants to postsecondary education appear substantial, they're not as great as this government is claiming. The grants to postsecondary education are appearing to be higher because the government is temporarily paying \$87 million to offset the costs of tuition increases. I welcome the savings to students, of course. But let's not kid ourselves about the actual funding our colleges and universities are receiving, just enough to cover inflation.

The health budget has increased to \$10.3 billion, a great amount of money by anyone's measure and a 7.7 per cent increase over last year. But, Mr. Speaker, I put a warning out to this government: if they want to keep any kind of control on this, do not proceed with the provisions in the third way that open up our health system to market forces. If we think we have trouble controlling health costs now, you wait until the marketplace is driving demand and prices.

Giving the Alberta Cancer Board \$25 million from the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund to expand cancer screening programs is a welcome move. Cancer screening can help reduce further costs and, of course, can be an important factor in saving lives.

We are disappointed in the increases for long-term care, only \$42 million, significantly less than the \$250 million that was recommended by the long-term care review committee and by the health minister herself at one point.

Spending on primary health care is up, which is a step in the right direction. We support a team-based approach to providing care in the community because we have seen, as have so many Albertans, that such an approach can create substantial savings in the public system. Let these innovations continue to work.

3:20

The one tax cut that we would have enthusiastically supported was not in this budget, and that is eliminating health care premiums. Eliminating health care premiums would be a tax benefit to every single person in Alberta. It would benefit the working poor. It would benefit small businesses, who so often have to now cover that cost in order to hold onto employees. It would benefit big public-sector employers like colleges and universities and, indeed, many provincial agencies because they pay those benefits. It would benefit everybody, and yet it's not here in this budget. It should be, Mr. Speaker.

We were also surprised – and I think it's worth noting – that funding for aboriginal health strategies appears to have been cut from \$2.2 million to \$1.7 million, in the overall scheme of things not a huge percentage of money, but Alberta's aboriginal population is substantially more reliant upon health services and experiences higher rates of health problems across a whole range of diseases. By cutting the budget for aboriginal health strategies, I'm concerned – we're all concerned – that this government is setting itself up for higher costs and more difficulties and, frankly, more human suffering in the aboriginal community of the future.

Another area, Mr. Speaker, where in the overall scheme of things a relatively small amount of money could have made a revolutionary difference is in the arts. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts did receive a 16 per cent increase in funding, which sounds terrific until you realize that it's only the second increase in funding in more than 15 years. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts receives funding through Community Development and then distributes those funds to Alberta arts groups and individuals. While any increase is nice, funding for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts has been insufficient for years, and it results in a lack of support for all kinds of important

groups, groups that add to our quality of life, groups that employ inordinate numbers of Albertans, and groups, in fact, that if they were fully supported would turn this province into a genuine magnet for business, for economic activity, for filmmaking, for tourism, and, indeed, for all kinds of creative industries.

This province has consistently neglected the arts sector and ignored its incredible potential to diversify Alberta's economy. Alberta's cultural and artistic community has once again been let down. The people of Alberta are missing an opportunity to invest in a vibrant, sustainable, revenue-generating sector of the economy that adds so much to our quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, this may be a surplus budget, but it shows a huge deficit of imagination. There's no comprehensive plan for the future here, no sense of direction, no vision of a better tomorrow. It is, indeed, a budget to nowhere. Blessed with unprecedented windfalls, all this government can do is throw a few dollars here, cut a few dollars there, count on unbudgeted surpluses to put out any political fires that happen to break out, and hope that's good enough. Well, it is not good enough. It's not good enough for the Alberta Liberal opposition, and it's not good enough for the people of this province. This is no way to manage Alberta, especially not an Alberta with such incredible potential.

If we had a government with the discipline and imagination to spend where it's needed and save the rest, we could guarantee our prosperity for decades to come. We could build a province of permanent prosperity. Instead, we have a government thrown into disarray by its own good fortune. As one minister has already admitted, it's a lot easier to just say no than it is to manage massive surpluses. The austerity budgets of the 1990s proved that this government is pretty good at saying no, at least was, but faced with the far greater challenge of shepherding Alberta's good fortune to build enduring prosperity, this government has failed utterly. This is a budget that sees numbers but not people, that sees a balance sheet and not the larger meaning behind all the facts and figures.

Albertans deserve better. Albertans need better. Albertans need a government that understands the meaning of windfalls and the importance of long-term planning. We cannot afford government short-sightedness any longer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Thank you. Thank you. I hope you're still doing that at the end.

This is a budget that puts profitable corporations, thoroughbreds, and spin doctors ahead of people. Mr. Speaker, let's start with the taxes first. The numbers don't lie. According to the revenue projections in the fiscal plan, page 44, the government will take an extra \$102 million out of the pockets of average Alberta families in the form of personal income taxes next year. Meanwhile, the government's corporate income tax is going down by about \$370 million thanks to a 15 per cent reduction in the general corporate tax rate. Reducing the corporate tax rate from 11.5 per cent to 10 per cent, a 15 per cent cut at a time of record high corporate profits, is frankly just a giveaway, a giveaway pure and simple.

Now, let's just look at a few examples of record corporate profits: EnCana Corporation, \$7 billion in profits over the past two years; Husky's yearly profit, double that of the year before; Talisman's profit, up 340 per cent in the most recent quarter. The profit parade goes on and on and on.

Meanwhile, this government seems to be allergic to giving a break to hard-working, average Alberta families. The best the Conservative government could come up with was a hundred dollar increase

in the basic personal exemption. At the 10 per cent flat tax rate that's a savings of 10 whole bucks next year. Mr. Speaker, these days that's barely enough to buy yourself a good cup of coffee. I think the budget should have come up with a warning label telling Albertans not to spend their 10 buck tax saving all in one place.

About five years ago, Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government brought in a flat income tax of 10 per cent. As the years roll by, the unfairness of the flat tax to middle-income earners grows. The government's own budget figures show that a two-income Alberta family with two children making \$60,000 per year will pay 28 per cent more in personal income tax than a family with the same income in Ontario. The Alberta family would also pay three times as much in health care premiums as the same family in Ontario. The government's figures show that a two-income family making a hundred thousand dollars per year will pay 14 per cent more in personal income tax than a family with the same income in Ontario. That's on page 142 of the fiscal plan.

Don't give me the bunk about needing to be competitive with other jurisdictions in terms of corporate taxes. With this completely unjustified and unnecessary corporate tax cut a large profitable corporation in Alberta will pay corporate income tax at a rate 40 per cent lower than the same corporation in Ontario and 20 per cent lower than the same corporation in B.C. The funny thing is, Mr. Speaker, that the B.C. Liberal government just cut its corporate tax rate by 1.5 points in its recent budget to try to compete with Alberta, and now they once again find themselves with a rate 20 per cent higher than Alberta's. Boy, trickle-down economics is really prevalent among these governments.

Meanwhile, the best the government could do on health care premiums was to raise the income threshold for premium subsidies by a few thousand dollars. Premium subsidies only benefit those with very low incomes living below the poverty line. Now, that's assuming, Mr. Speaker, that you can figure out the confusing array of paperwork needed to apply for a premium subsidy. It doesn't come automatically. You have to apply. Meanwhile, middle-income and even lower middle-income families keep getting soaked with \$1,056 in regressive health care premiums year after year after year.

3:30

While average Albertans do not get a break on health care premiums, Budget 2006 keeps wasting over \$100 million a year on the Alberta royalty tax credit. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, giving refundable tax credits to energy companies during a time that oil and gas prices reach ever higher and higher levels? The policy rationale for continuing the royalty tax credit, which is a corporate welfare leftover from the Don Getty era, is such a state secret that for years the government refused to provide the rationale to our current and past Auditors General, who have been asking for it since 1993. In its most recent annual report the government finally cracked under the pressure and told the Auditor General – and I wonder if they had a straight face when they said this – quote, the object of the Alberta royalty tax credit is simply to provide financial assistance to the oil and gas industry, unquote. Well, isn't that nice? A \$100 million gift: wouldn't we all like that? Forget about the grain farmers or the welfare moms. Those hard-pressed oil tycoons definitely need much help so that they can keep buying their yachts and fuelling their Hummers.

Mr. Speaker, this year's budget contains no new environmental initiatives of any kind to help us meet climate change targets. This budget contains no new measures to address the huge impacts on land, air, and water of oil sands, coal-bed methane, or other energy development projects. The budget contains no new measures to

transition the province to create a greener, cleaner future. The NDP opposition has proposed modest royalty adjustments to generate revenues for green funds that would assist municipalities, small businesses, and homeowners to undertake a range of green initiatives, everything from improving public transit and LRT to doing home retrofits, to fight climate change as well as to reduce utility bills.

Mr. Speaker, on health care, this is a government that claims to be concerned about rising costs, yet other than empty rhetoric the budget itself contains no specific measures for innovation within the public health care system nor any attempt to make it more sustainable. The budget does acknowledge that the most rapidly rising costs are prescription drug costs, which are going up at a rate of about 15 per cent a year, almost double the rate of increase in overall health spending.

While the government claims to be concerned about rising health costs, it rejects practical solutions for slowing down the growth in drug costs, such as the NDP opposition's proposed pharmaceutical savings agency. The NDP opposition's proposal is based on a successful New Zealand model that has slowed down the growth in drug costs to 3 per cent per year for the past 12 years. If the New Zealand model were to be implemented in Alberta, the health system could save \$75 million in one year, with a further saving of about \$50 million every year after compared to the status quo. But this is a government, frankly, Mr. Speaker, that wants to off-load health care costs, not control them. This is a government that wants to make health care more affordable only for itself and less affordable for citizens by shifting more costs onto patients.

Also, Mr. Speaker, a big loser in this budget is K to 12 education. The Minister of Education is showing that in addition to often dithering, he also seems to lack clout at the cabinet table. How else do you explain a budget containing no provision for expanding kindergarten and junior kindergarten for children at risk, as recommended by the Learning Commission over two and a half years ago? Since then three provincial budgets have been delivered, and there is still no such commitment. The Learning Commission estimated the cost of expanding kindergarten and junior kindergarten programs at \$63 million yearly, which sounds like a lot, but I would remind people that it's only one-sixth of the \$370 million being given away in the corporate tax cut.

The postsecondary sector fared only marginally better. Postsecondary students should be grateful, I suppose, that due to some crossing of wires between the Premier and his Advanced Education minister last fall the government's picking up the tab for tuition increases for a second year. But nobody, Mr. Speaker, should be fooled by this. This is a stay of execution, not a real tuition freeze. Tuition is still going up 6 to 8 per cent each year, with the government just paying the increase for a couple of academic years. The worst-case scenario is that the students could face a triple whammy tuition increase in the fall of 2007. Postsecondary education is the best investment a government can make in its own future well-being. The NDP opposition therefore urges the government to take a serious look at rolling back tuition, as requested by student groups such as the coalition of Alberta university students. I'm not expecting it, but hope springs eternal.

Nor is there much in this budget for this province's financially strapped municipalities. Instead of fulfilling its promise to relieve municipalities of the burden of providing ambulance service, funding is being frozen again at \$55 million for the third straight year, meaning the burden for providing this life-saving service will increase for more and more municipalities in the coming year.

Far from reducing its school property tax by 20 per cent in the coming year, as requested by the Alberta Urban Municipalities

Association, and leaving the tax room to municipalities, school property taxes are going up again next year by almost 2 per cent. That's the reality that's in the budget documents. The province's school property tax will be a full 22 per cent from the freeze promised in the 2001 budget, a promise broken every year since, including this year.

This budget contains only an extra \$42 million for improving continuing care standards for vulnerable seniors. That's about 11 per cent of the reduction in corporate taxes next year. The NDP opposition believes that seniors deserve better, Mr. Speaker, but it's pretty clear that this Conservative government does not. The Minister of Health and Wellness herself has said that in order to implement the recommendations of the Auditor General and her own government MLA task force, a \$250 million investment is required. Why invest only 8 cents on the dollar in this year's budget when there seems to be lots of money to throw around, especially on corporate tax cuts? I would remind people that these people are in very difficult situations. The horror stories keep coming, as I found out today of one in my own riding.

In short, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2006, I repeat, is a budget for spin doctors, thoroughbreds, and fat cats. Why is almost a 20 per cent increase in funding for the government's official propaganda arm, namely the Public Affairs Bureau, deemed more important than funding for developmentally disabled adults, which is going up only 2 per cent, only one-tenth as much. As the PDD Edmonton community board has pointed out, this budget will mean substantial service reductions for developmentally disabled adults. Again, the irony of it. This budget contains a 38 per cent increase in the horse-racing subsidy, from \$45 million this year to \$62 million next year. I was surprised that they would even have the gall to do this after all the publicity. The money going to the horse-racing industry could go a long way to avoiding cutbacks for the developmentally disabled or for improving seniors care or for the misery of carrying a 5 per cent decrease in monthly benefit levels for social assistance recipients not expected to work.

Mr. Speaker, the government is also going to step up its efforts to fleece Albertans with more casinos, more slots, and more ponies. Meanwhile, user fees go up and services are cut. I would remind about gambling. The government has become as addicted as anybody: \$1.3 billion. I can remember when it was \$50 million. Now the government is addicted on gambling the same as some other unfortunate people.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, this is a budget out of sync with the needs and priorities of Albertans. Budget 2006 is notable not only for its lack of compassion but for its lack of vision for the Alberta future. Surely, in this rich province we could have done better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there are questions.

There being none, I will call on the next speaker, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Lougheed years spending was running at higher and higher levels, just like it is now. Year after year the government coffers grew, and year after year the spending went higher and higher. Everyone demanded and received something. We lived through those good times, and we thought they would never end. But the vacant houses, bad economy, and increasing fiscal costs across Alberta in the Getty years proved that the boom times will be followed by bust times. We know of seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of drought. The lesson of

those years was that spending led to deficits, and deficits led to drastic cuts. From looking at this budget, I am left to wonder if we have learned anything from the past. Our fiscal house is one that needs to be in order, and we need to wonder how far the spending can continue before we've gone too far and can't return.

It is a good thing that this government is putting funds back into the heritage savings trust fund. It would be even better if we actually planned for the savings and made sure that the fund was matured properly. I question the need in boom times for this government to count on the trust fund's dividends as part of the general revenue.

It is good to see that more Albertans will be saved from having to pay the health care premiums, but, even more, the government should eliminate them. If we will not eliminate them now in a time of plenty, when will we?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

While this budget offers some consideration for the future, it is obviously a stay-the-spending-course budget, which does little to set a course to guide the province. I am very convinced, as we begin our second century, that we have not learned the lessons of the past. We have not come to grips with the needs of future Albertans and the struggles of current ones.

Help for families and individuals should be our highest priority. Albertans have seen a great deal of benefit from our booming economy, but they also pay the price in more expensive housing, fees, and taxes as their earnings go up. The government has failed in this budget to adequately address this. If they were simply to increase the basic tax exemption to \$20,000 in Alberta, it would return approximately \$500 back to the average Albertan, giving people a few dollars in their pockets, change at the end of the year. It would really make a difference to hard-working Albertans. Those who work to earn their money earn the right to spend it. Let's leave more money in the pockets of those who have earned it.

We have given funding to postsecondary education, yet we did not give any additional funding to secondary and elementary schools. How do we teach our youth and meet our commitments to the generations to come if there is no infrastructure in place? This is what happens when we fail to plan: we've planned to fail.

Market value assessment is inflationary and adds to the problems. This government was in power to see the real estate bubbles of the past burst. We need to have a program where production value and purchase price enter into the formula and have a higher weighting on the assessment to the economy. We've currently given I believe a 7.9 per cent reduction in the mill rate, but because of inflation and the market assessment we have an overall increase of 1.7 per cent in taxes being collected. We could have done better.

A long time ago businesses were promised a cut from 11.5 per cent to get down to 8 per cent. The steps that have been made in this budget are good ones, but now we have to start to fulfill the promise. The government needs to continue to draw investment into this province.

This government boasts about being debt free while many municipal governments are still laden with debt. In Budget 2006 dollars are dedicated to municipalities for new spending but not for alleviating their debt load. Enabling municipalities to become debt free would reduce the pressure on property taxes. It would allow them to give their citizens a tax break.

We've also got the unfunded teachers' liability that we still haven't addressed. Perhaps an even greater concern for Albertans is the Canada pension plan, which is dismally underfunded, and we should be looking at that.

Rural Alberta needs continued support. In a time when urban centres are growing, our rural areas are being left to die on the vine. Why are we giving almost the same amount to horse racing as we are to rural development? When did horse racing become a needed business for this province? I would suggest that the province has no business being involved in business.

Rural Albertans are no different than the people in Calgary and Edmonton in their need for better schools, better facilities, and better access. The increasing pressure on the cities is being exacerbated by rural area people that are going to the cities for their needs because of the diminishing services of many rural centres. There are many students that are also moving to the cities and parents actually busing them there because of the lack of curriculum in rural schools.

Farmers and ranchers know that weather can be their greatest enemy or ally in providing for their livelihood. The 20 per cent decrease in agricultural insurance premiums is a move in the right direction, but it does not do enough to sustain agriculture, which is the backbone of our rural economy. We need to remove the taxes from agriproducts that they use to produce their crops and raise their livestock.

This government has grown at an unprecedented rate. We started at 17 ministries in 1992, and we have since grown to 24. This government should begin the process of downsizing and controlling their cabinet size. I hope that they will continue to amalgamate ministries as we observe the resignation of leaders in their candidate run.

As I have said in the past, efficiency would truly be increased if we were to eliminate the new Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. We've been told that the ministers are efficient and that they can restructure. The bureaucratic bloating continues to rise to an alarming level in this province. There are 27,500 people in provincial employment, not the 22,500 mentioned last week. We have just added 800 more this year. In the feedlot we call this chronic bloating, and we know that they'll eventually die.

Alexander Tyler talks about the death of democracy, and he says that it's from tax-and-spend governments. I hope we can learn the lesson before we're in that dilemma. We need to review and cut the size of government. Otherwise, we'll once again be needing to make drastic cuts later on the backs of the citizens. This government should serve Alberta with a lean, more productive, and efficient government.

We would encourage the government to replace its legislation that required that all surplus must go to pay down the debt to legislation that would require all surplus to be split between the heritage trust fund and a tax refund to Albertans.

The government should now, after the biggest budget ever, seriously examine the cap on spending, preferably taking spending back down \$3 billion or \$4 billion and leveling off this massive growth. It is important if not critical to have a formula or a plan in place. Sound financial managers advise a savings plan, a disciplined plan where one saves 10 per cent. We have not saved in the last 20 years, and we don't have the discipline, but if we would install it now, we have a great opportunity when we're at the peak of our earning years.

Health care reform is big on the agenda of this government. If this third-way policy is to be successful, then more should be done to assure Albertans that politics will play less of a role in the delivery of their health care. The first reform should be to level the playing field for funding to all regions and allow funding to follow the services, services which their appointed boards want to provide for their regions. The government's third-way initiatives may control rising health care costs, but it will be a minimum savings if it is simply tied to inflation and population. Our rising population needs

more long-term thinking. We need to look at being innovative, as they are down in Taber, where they're actually rewarded for reducing the number of patient visits to their doctors' offices and not on a fee per visit only. The doctors want to make Alberta healthy, and there are programs out there that are exciting and innovative if we'll just grab onto them.

If we look at the infrastructure spending, there seems to be no idea of the consequence of increasing the spending so dramatically. The government is setting prices that are escalating for themselves and everyone else who needs homes, schools, hospitals, and roads built. Inflation comes from demand outstripping supply. We are creating a building problem which may just implode. In Calgary today the effect of these rising costs has inflated the average home to \$400,000, pricing some out of the market. We need to project what our infrastructure demands are. The government alone can fix this by slowing down the building parade until someone can come up with a plan rather than accelerating production beyond supply.

3:50

In conclusion, I guess I would like to compare us to winning the lottery. We've been very blessed, but the winning can be the beginning of our downfall. Too much money has often led to corruption, mismanagement, and flamboyant lifestyles. Can we sustain the huge influx of money without redistributing it and not cause inflation and possibly run into a brick wall in a few years?

The gap between our potential and our achievement grows with our added revenue. We are the envy of other provinces and even the world. It is my hope that we can strive to reach our ever-growing potential and not rest on our past achievements. We have seen both good examples and excellent ones here in the province. We need to take two steps back and remember that tax cuts and refunds are progressive and great for the economy. Working Albertans deserve a refund on their tax from the surplus income.

It is not good enough to say that we are the best in the world. We need to rise to our full potential. We need to recognize hard-working, innovative, and efficient Albertans. We need a formula that will restrain government growth, invest in our future and infrastructure and the endowment funds, and truly put Alberta ahead of the race by reducing taxes and leaving as many dollars as possible in the pockets of the people, to be used at their discretion.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone.

Mr. VanderBurg: The member opposite talked about the horse-racing industry and made an inference that we support this industry more than we support other industries. I wondered if the member opposite knows about the arrangement that the horse-racing industry has so many slots tied to a race track and then gets a percentage of the take of those slots to fund horse racing. If nobody played the machines at the facilities, at the horse-racing tracks, the subsidy would be zero. I wondered if the member knew that.

Mr. Hinman: I understand that the subsidy would be zero, but the fact of the matter is that people do go there, and we're encouraging that betting. I don't believe that it's in our best interest, just as smoking is not in our best interest in the province, and we could focus the money in better areas. If, in fact, we were to put in incentives where farmers would be able to recoup as people came and bought Alberta-made products or other areas, we could do incentives to enhance that industry, but I don't see the need to enhance the business of horse racing.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to follow up on my colleague's question as it related to horse racing and, really, the gambling industry. I'm wondering if the hon. member's inference is that under his party they would remove all gambling in the province and add tax to food as opposed to using gambling dollars to do some of the good work that we do in the province.

Mr. Hinman: I thank the minister of agriculture for asking that question. I believe in free enterprise, and it's interesting to me that, going back to the '90s, the government took the idea that because our dollars were leaving the province, we needed to bring this vice in here in order to keep it here. I don't believe it's to the benefit of society to have it here, and it's been very sad to me to see the heritage trust fund get turned into the gaming and revenue ministry. Rural Albertans and most Albertans are left now to make application to lottery funds instead of the heritage trust fund. I don't see the reference in trying to promote gambling and thinking that it's a wonderful opportunity and that the government should be backing it and expanding it in all areas. It just isn't beneficial.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, and it is certainly around the increase, the substantial increase, the 40 per cent increase in the subsidy to the horse-racing industry. In light of the fact that it is now \$63 million, if one looks at this subsidy since it was first initiated, it's growing in leaps and bounds every fiscal year, and it's well in excess of \$250 million at this point. I notice that there is a significant demand for irrigation infrastructure assistance. Would the hon. member feel that the money would be much more appropriately used if it was used to improve our irrigation systems rather than just as a direct subsidy to some of the elite people in this province through the horse-racing industry?

Mr. Hinman: I thank the hon. member for the excellent question. I'll quote the Premier: "For every upside there's a downside." For every dollar spent, there can be a negative side. What they're wanting to do is focus this money on the horse races. I understand that that's their desire and that they think that's beneficial, but I think there are many areas in the province where we could truly reach our full potential rather than just the achievements we have. Irrigation is an excellent one. We see the increase in production there has been in southern Alberta, which is now our breadbasket, where the government has subsidized and put in dams, realizing and wanting to capitalize on our blue gold. It's an excellent opportunity, and we need to continue doing that. Then we should be spending money on more studies, and it would be of far better use to put that money into increased water storage capacity and perhaps buried lines instead of open lines, where we lose our valuable water to evaporation.

There are many areas where if we were to have a great and extended debate, that would be of much better benefit to Albertans and taxpayers as a whole and make us more independent. If we focus that money, whether it's on education, whether it's on farming and agriculture, whether it's on health care, there are a lot of priorities that I think would take precedence.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 26
Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure at this time to move Bill 26, Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act, for second reading, and I would ask that we at this time adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 18
Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves,
Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands
Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Stevens: I have more to say on this matter, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand on behalf of the hon. Minister of Community Development to move for third reading Bill 18, Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, 2006.

I wish to provide some summary of what this bill will do, Mr. Speaker. Bill 18 clarifies a number of provisions in the existing act. It updates enforcement, offence, and penalty provisions. It updates definitions, improves wording and clarity. It deletes obsolete provisions. It substantially increases the maximum fines for serious violations. It also repeals the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves, whose work now is performed in a process that involves local communities and stakeholders. Bill 18 also repeals the provision for controlled buffer zones. No buffer zones were ever formally proposed or established. As long as an activity does not encroach on the protected area, we maintain the integrity of its protection.

Bill 18 redefines aircraft to include powerless flight. Restrictions that apply to aircraft also apply to hang-gliders and paragliders. No one would be prosecuted for landing in one of these protected areas in a genuine emergency, Mr. Speaker.

While Bill 18 aims for more consistency among all protected areas covered by this legislation, it also recognizes the unique needs of each type of protected area: that grazing is essential to maintaining the ecological integrity of our heritage rangelands, for management purposes off-highway vehicles are used only by the province or disposition holders, for recreational purposes two trails provide access to areas where off-highway vehicles are permitted.

That, Mr. Speaker, is a summary of what this bill is all about, and I would ask for support from the hon. members.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have read some of Bill 18, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Amendment Act, and I'll tell you that there are some

positives within the bill itself, but the other part that's disappointing is some of the specifics that they peeled out of it. Unfortunately, the bill makes a number of changes to the administration of specific types of parks, wilderness areas, and the reserves, but it gives less protection. The general trend is to reduce the level of protection in wilderness areas. It really never had any protection to begin with, it seems.

It allows in some of these areas – parks, reserve lands – that oil and gas exploration does take precedence because of mineral rights. So then where is the actual protection for these lands? This is just paying lip service for the general interest groups that are wanting to seek some more protected rangeland areas, some natural areas, and, on the other hand, to allow off-road drilling or exploration. It doesn't work.

The other part of the bill terminates the advisory committee on wilderness areas. Well, now we have less public participation. I'm not sure why we specifically had that as I thought that we would at least encourage a more democratic process, more participation from stakeholder groups and nongovernment agencies. In this group we had six public members and we had six government members who were providing advice to the minister to establish some of the specific areas and some of the boundaries and some of the legislation. But now we've said in this particular amendment that we're going to strike them from the act itself. So we're going to have less people to monitor this, and that's unfortunate.

We removed the buffer zones. The minister just talked about the specifics on that. I mean, I think that buffer zones are needed because you do have those who continue to push the boundaries, and if you don't have the buffer zones there, then you're going to continue to have the encroachment.

We do however support the requirement that it talked about for public consultation, and we do support the fact that in this bill we're talking about higher fines for violations. Those are some good pieces in the bill, but again I'd have a hard time supporting this particular bill based on the other specifics that I mentioned: the reduction of the public participation and the removal of the buffer zones and less protection.

South of the border they've actually had some specific areas designated as roadless areas. I think that that's a unique concept. Perhaps this government could follow suit before it's too late, before every available square inch of this province has in some way, shape, or form had a hole or been desecrated. It's no longer going to be pristine or, at least, protected. The roadless concept designates specific areas of the particular state where they're removing all footprints of man. They are not allowing any, as it says, vehicles. Period. So it's a roadless area, not for exploration, not for seismic. Nothing. They're going to allow nothing. It doesn't say that the public can't access it. It's saying that there will be roadless areas. I think that that would be a novel idea. It would be a great start here if we decided to at least put some land aside. Even Wood Buffalo now is no longer sacred. They're having roads going into that area. I mean, at what point are we going to allow the footprints to not be so dominant here?

This particular piece, like I said about the roadless areas, would allow for some hiking, perhaps some trails for horses, but that would be about it. There would be no actual ability for a vehicle to go in. I'm not saying that the public is not allowed. They could certainly get in by hiking, have access for tenting or for just recreational use.

The other concern is that people are always concerned about off-road vehicles. We have a lot of destroyed land within the province, as far as I'm concerned, that isn't much good for anything after you've had, you know, the oil and gas or coal-bed methane, taking

some of the specifics. It's not good for rangeland. You can't use it for agriculture.

Why not designate some specifics and call them natural areas for off-road vehicles, or ATVs, whatever you want to call them, allow them to have, you know, their 30 square miles? That would give them more than enough land to be able to use their ATVs or their snowmobiles, their off-road vehicles, on land that's already basically been destroyed in some way, shape, or form. It would allow them to continue to have their fun, their recreational use. I'm not saying that they shouldn't be able to have it. Designate some areas, but don't go into the mountains, the streams, and some of the protected park areas. Set some roads and some lands aside for them to have specific use. You could have it in the middle of the province, the lower part of the province, the upper range of the province, but set some roads aside. I talked to the Alberta Fish and Game Association during the last conference down in Red Deer, and that would be something that the members would support and could support with regard to these areas.

Those are some specifics, Mr. Speaker, that I have raised on this one with regard to the wilderness, ecological, heritage, and natural areas. But as the bill reads, with pulling out the advisory and with removing the specifics for the protectiveness, I can't support it at this point in time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when we're talking about Bill 18 here, there are still in my mind unanswered questions in regard to this legislation even at third reading. However, I awaited this bill. When it was introduced in the Legislative Assembly, I delivered some copies to a few constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They had originally contacted our office regarding this legislation. They, too, are the owners of all-terrain vehicles, and they enjoy getting out and operating these vehicles in uninhabited areas. I certainly would endorse the idea suggested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, where there are designated places across the province for individuals who enjoy this sort of activity, designated areas where they can go and cruise around. They can go up and down hills. They can cross creeks and rivers. They can even take their camping gear and go five or 10 kilometres off the beaten path, so to speak, with their ATVs and camp. I see absolutely nothing the matter with that in designated areas.

I certainly hope that whenever this bill, Bill 18, was drafted, individuals who enjoy this activity were not left out. I certainly hope that they were consulted by the government. I see the hon. Member for West Yellowhead over there. We only have to look at the town of Edson, which, I'm told, has the largest ATV store in North America. Now, that's what I've been told; I stand to be corrected. There are a large number of citizens out there who buy such vehicles for many reasons. I just wonder what they think of this legislation and if they have been consulted, either the people that ride these machines or the people that sell them and maintain them.

Now, there are four categories of park and protected lands described in this act, Mr. Speaker. Wilderness areas preserve and protect natural heritage, where visitors are provided with opportunities for outdoor recreation. Two of Alberta's three wilderness areas are White Goat and Ghost River, and no developments of any kind are permitted. Travel is by foot in these areas. Wilderness areas provide limited opportunities for nature-based recreation, such as backcountry hiking, wildlife viewing, and mountain climbing. Hunting, fishing, and the use of horses are not permitted in the wilderness areas.

4:10

In the ecological reserves – and I'm looking specifically at the legislation here. This is where section 8 is to be amended. These reserves preserve and protect natural heritage in an undisturbed state for scientific research and education. Ecological reserves contain representative rare and fragile landscapes, plants, animals, and other geological features. The primary intent of this class of reserves is strict preservation of natural ecosystems, habitats and features, and associated biodiversity. Public access to these ecological reserves is, again, by foot only. Public roads and other facilities do not normally exist and, as I understand it, will not be developed. Most ecological reserves are open to the public for low-impact activities such as photography and wildlife viewing.

Now, this legislation is going to prohibit – one is not allowed to take into or use in an ecological reserve

- (i) a motor boat or off-highway vehicle,
- (ii) a motor vehicle designed primarily for travel on highways other than on a road (excluding, however, its right of way or undeveloped road allowance),
- (iii) a cycle except on a road or prescribed route, or
- (iv) without the Minister's permission or except as prescribed, a horse or pack animal.

When this decision was made, were individuals who enjoy getting out on their all-terrain vehicles consulted? Was there any consideration made for improving their access to outdoor Alberta so that they, too, in their way can enjoy their hobby? We have to consider, Mr. Speaker, all Albertans whenever we are debating this legislation and before we debate it, when the legislation is drafted. Now, there's a time and a place for everything, and I don't think that we can forget or exclude the owners of all-terrain vehicles, and we can't in this Legislative Assembly not support their enjoyment of our outdoor areas. Certainly, I hope that they have been consulted and they're in agreement with this bill because it's going to be now or never, as far as I'm concerned, with this.

With those remarks I will cede the floor to another hon. colleague. However, with a great deal of sympathy for this bill, I have to reject it in its present form. My questions have not been answered, in my view and my opinion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the premise of the bill is basically that it's housekeeping. Certainly, some of it is amendments to remove obsolete provisions and to try to improve the clarity of the legislation and update regulation powers. I mean, some of the bill is that.

You know, there's an old saying that the devil is in the details. Often when we deal with bills in this House, the devil is in the lack of details. That's a problem that we face often, Mr. Speaker. I look at section 9, subsection 5(b), which concerns me. It repeats the original section detailing what may be done to or for an ecological reserve and rewrites the section. It's particularly disconcerting as it states that the minister may allow – may allow – programs or measures to be carried out with respect to “environmental research and reclamation,” whereas the original section states “for environmental research that does not involve any physical disturbance of the wilderness area, ecological reserve or heritage rangeland.” I think the sticking word here is “reclamation,” Mr. Speaker. Of course, one comes and asks the question: is this an attempt to sidestep our environmental duty and allow development of oil and gas in ecological reserves? If not, why mention the word “reclamation”?

That is, as we know, an activity usually associated with either mining or oil and gas drilling. If that's not the intent, I wish that they would at least make that clear in the bill. So again I'd come back to the point that the devil is in the lack of details.

The only other section that I have some concerns about, Mr. Speaker, is 10(2)(c). Again, it states that this specifies that a person is not guilty of an offence if they are destroying or damaging plant life or animal life in a wilderness area, ecological reserve, natural area, or heritage rangeland "in the course of carrying out any activity allowed by a disposition or permission in a natural area or heritage rangeland." What does this mean? Maybe it's not the case, but we don't know when we're dealing with these bills: does this give permission to the oil and gas industry to tear apart our wildlife preserves so they can conduct reclamation efforts in them?

I mean, most of the bill makes sense because of the housekeeping, but when they throw in these broad terms and use the word "reclamation," we just don't know what direction the bill is going in. As I said, then it becomes difficult to know whether you should support it or not. On the surface it looks like they're protecting wilderness areas, and then they throw in terms like "reclamation" and make it unclear. Mr. Speaker, I wish that we had clearer intentions. I don't think the minister is here to give us those clear intentions about what this means.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one interested, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

head:

**Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 26
Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act
(continued)**

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Stevens]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-North Hill I'd like to put some of the principles of Bill 26 on the Order Paper today. Bill 26 is an updated version of the Blood Samples Act that was introduced as a private member's bill by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. The Blood Samples Act received royal assent in May 2004 but has not been proclaimed. The act provides a means for certain people, such as police and firefighters, to apply for court orders to compel someone to be tested for communicable diseases when the police officer or the firefighter has been exposed to a bodily substance from a person if there has been reasonable and probable grounds for suspecting that the person has a communicable disease. The information from testing may be disclosed to the applicant's physician to help determine what treatment, if any, the police officer or the firefighter should have.

At the time that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was leading the charge on this law, the only similar legislation in Canada was in Ontario. Feedback on Ontario's experience has warned us that a modified approach is required. Its legislation is not proving to be effective and concerns have been raised in relation to

the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since the Blood Samples Act was introduced, the Uniform Law Conference of Canada has developed models, mandatory testing, and disclosing legislation that address Charter rights concerns.

4:20

Health and Wellness has consulted a wide range of stakeholders in Alberta who have also raised questions about the scope of the act. Stakeholder groups were created that included representatives of police, firefighters, and paramedic professions, the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the regional health authorities, medical officers of health, the Alberta Advisory Committee on AIDS, and the Alberta Community Council on HIV.

The proposed amendments fall into four broad categories. The first category of the amendments will expand the scope of the act. Current provisions identify police, fire, and peace officers as professions that may make an application under the act. Health and Wellness is recommending expansion to include paramedics and individuals who voluntarily provide emergency services and to provide authority for additional professions or groups to be added by the regulations if the need arises. Currently the only type of sample that may be required by an order is a blood sample. The recommendation is to expand this to bodily substances in recognition of advances being made in new types of diagnostic tests. Changing the name of the act from Blood Samples Act to Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act will reflect the expanding scope of the act.

The second category of the amendments will change authority to order testing from medical officers of health to the court. This is an important amendment because it serves the interest of the applicant and provides protection for the individual who is providing the sample, referred to in the legislation as the "source individual." It is generally recognized among stakeholders that the experience of court proceedings was required. Medical officers of health did not view themselves as well positioned to apply the reasonable and probable grounds test that must be met before a testing order can be issued. Under the proposed amendments a court issues the order, and the medical officer of health will have the responsibility for carrying out the testing order. Provisions are made for the medical officer of health to request assistance from a peace officer in carrying out the order as required. Contents and requirements of the test order have also been clarified in the amendments.

The third category of the recommended amendments deals with procurement safeguards. Key procurement safeguards have been introduced to ensure that the source individuals giving the samples have been notified of the application, of the right to respond to the application, and of the right to appeal an order. The current act did not fully address the source individual's rights. These amendments are required to address the issue relating to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Procurement that is required from a minor or a dependent adult are clarified in the amendments.

The fourth and final group of recommended amendments deals with information disclosure and privacy protection. In order to protect privacy and provide the least intrusive way to acquire information on the source individual's health status, provisions are made for the chief medical officer to check the communicable diseases database for test results. The amendment provides clarification regarding information disclosure for the purpose of the act. Certain disclosures will be allowed, still keeping the privacy interest of the source individual in mind. An example would be between health professions in the case of professional consultants and in the case of minors, the parents or guardians.

In conclusion, these recommendations will strengthen and broaden the scope of the legislation, will clarify and define roles and

responsibilities, and will also reduce the risk of Charter challenges. The amendments are the result of a strong consultative process that the minister believes has improved the legislation. I ask for the support of the House and move second reading of Bill 26.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 20
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate March 14: Mr. Agnihotri]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to take this opportunity to say a few words about Bill 20. Overall there are some very good parts of Bill 20, and there is some stuff that we are quite concerned about. I'll get to the good parts first.

There's increased protection for information regarding individuals. I think that in this day and age when we're under a lot of pressure to give out information to foreign powers, particularly the United States, it is a real positive step that we will allow judges to make that decision and not civil servants. Now, we're all sympathetic, of course, to the United States and all the problems they've been through in the post 9/11 era, but I think that, first, we really have to safeguard our privacy from foreign eyes, whether it's the United States or any other country. So we're very supportive of the first part of this bill.

There's another part where we'll be increasing fines for violation of the FOIP Act. This, too, is another positive. There's not much point in having a law that doesn't have any teeth. I think that the size of the fines will tell Albertans and anyone who wants to violate the FOIP Act that we mean business when it comes to protecting personal privacy. So, again, the first two parts of this bill we're quite supportive of, and we would be happy to support the bill if it ended right there.

Unfortunately, there are other parts of the bill that increase the level of secrecy surrounding government documents. I wish the rest of this bill was as positive as the first part. A lot of it solidifies this government's reputation as the most secretive government in Canada. It appears that the government wants to defend its 2005 code of silence award from the Canadian Association of Journalists.

Now, we have in this bill a provision to exempt ministerial briefing notes for five years. I expect that in Committee of the Whole we'll hear some rationale behind this, but right now I really don't know what it would be. There's some talk that it would protect internal documents that are sometimes used to prepare for upcoming legislation. I don't know why we need five years to protect this information. So I look forward to hearing more about the rationale for this part of the bill, but right now I think it's very, very weak.

We also have a 15-year protection for the findings and reports of the chief financial auditor. That will be kept under wraps for 15 years. Fifteen years is the kind of gap we expect for state secrets and stuff that we want to keep hidden from public eyes for a very long time. Again, I'm not quite sure why we need a 15-year provision here as well.

I understand that in Committee of the Whole the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung will be introducing some amendments to change this bill. I certainly hope that the government members will give them a good, hard listen.

A large part of this, again, we're supportive of. It's a good bill on that part, but I don't know if we really need any increase in the level of secrecy that surrounds this government at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

4:30

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I will go on the same tack as the previous speaker. The first part of it is good. I think it's necessary. In the 21st century, frankly, information is treated like a commodity and a precious one at that. Mr. Speaker, following 9/11, the U.S. government concluded that the best tool it had at its disposal to fight terror was seemingly innocuous bits of information on everyday things. Of course, when collected and analyzed, it is assumed that these data streams of everyday life will establish clear distinctions and patterns related to crime. In its attempts to maximize the data collected and analyzed, the USA PATRIOT Act has given to American courts and law enforcement officials greater access to all sorts of data about individuals, including, potentially, Canadian citizens.

Now, the B.C. Privacy Commissioner concluded after serious study that more stringent measures need to be put in place to ensure that Canadian citizens' personal information remains just that, personal and Canadian. Alberta's own office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has concurred and just recently released a report about security risks associated with foreign access to Albertans' personal information. The finding stated that "it is important that the Government make a strong and unequivocal assertion of the value it places on the privacy and security of the personal information of Albertans." That, Mr. Speaker, is on page 33 of that report.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments may in part be seen to address these concerns by specifying that only courts or bodies having jurisdiction in Alberta may have access to FOIPable documents, thereby seeming to exclude American courts or companies. While we applaud the apparent commitment to protecting our citizens' personal and private information, there are, however, as mentioned by the previous speaker, several objectionable sections of these amendments that deserve serious consideration. The NDP, I think, and perhaps others have had much experience with delayed and stymied requests for information, where it has taken upwards of five months to get access to requested documents rather than the 30-day requirement.

Considering the already great difficulty with which FOIP requests can be successfully made, Mr. Speaker, we wonder how these amendments propose to address access issues in favour of the public. That's supposed to be what it's for: in favour of the public.

First of all, if we could ask for clarification regarding the proposed inclusion under non-FOIPable material of published works available in public libraries. Frankly, why is this an issue? This material is already available in the public domain, and self-published works if available to libraries are catalogued and may be taken out. If they are readily available in the public domain, why should they be excluded from FOIP access if someone should choose to pay and collect them in that manner?

Mr. Speaker, secondly and importantly, the five-year FOIP exclusion of ministerial briefing materials is proposed based on the argument that public access to such documents may impair the government's ability to prepare for a session. Frankly, it's outrageous. Legislative debates based on such notes are public, and to bar access to them is to invite accusations of secrecy. I mean, maybe it's because we have had one-party rule for so long that we think we

have to be more secretive. For a government, whether they recognize it or not, already plagued by a lack of accountability and transparency, we are shocked that such amendments are proposed. Very shocked . . .

Mr. MacDonald: And appalled?

Mr. Martin: . . . and appalled too. Yes. Thank you, hon. member.

The very spirit of democracy rests on the fact that the government is formed by and for its citizens. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, its documents, preparatory notes, and discussions must be made public and available to the public, particularly considering that such ministerial briefings are not and should not be considered as revealing the substance of deliberations of the Executive Council. That exemption is already there under section 22 of the original act.

I mean, this is the same as any ministerial comments and debates in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. To say that somehow this is part of the Executive Council debate is nonsense. This government is going further than anybody in this. Again, it's just the nature of being more secretive. We don't want anything out to the public. Lord knows, we wouldn't want the public to know what's going on, you know, in a democracy. No, we wouldn't want that to happen.

Then – and a previous speaker talked about it – along these offensive lines, the 15-year exclusion of documents belonging to the chief internal auditor of Alberta is equally offensive, Mr. Speaker. Fifteen years: I almost think that sometimes we could bring the Kremlin back in terms of what we do here in this province.

Furthermore, section 7 of the proposed amendments allows for the unlimited suspension – the unlimited suspension – of a FOIP request while the Information and Privacy Commissioner considers whether it should be filed or not. Now, there may be a reason to stop the clock, so to speak, Mr. Speaker, on a 30-day limit for processing FOIP requests while such consideration takes place, but that the proposed amendment does not limit the time that such consideration can take is unacceptable.

A blanket, in other words unlimited, suspension of FOIP requests is not the way to solve consideration and deliberation issues. A FOIP request: six months? A year? Two years? Three years? It gives this government the right to do that, so it's just a way to get around freedom of information and privacy. They run roadblocks all the time. When we have FOIP requests, there are roadblocks all the way along, Mr. Speaker, and to give a blanket suspension is, frankly, offensive and ridiculous.

Mr. Speaker, the last item to mention today in this second reading is, again, the seeming protection. A citizen's basic right to protection of privacy is admirable on this front. Too often this has been neglected, compromised, or outright denied. I'm thinking here, for example, of the security of our privatized registries being compromised and this being known about for years before it was revealed to the public in the papers. Now, I would remind this government that in Alberta we celebrated 100 years of democracy. We've got to reinvent democracy. To close up these loopholes so that people can't get the information is, frankly, wrong. I would think that all hon. members, that are elected to serve the people of Alberta, would understand this. I would hope that – we don't have a Senate; there was never serious, sober thought there anyhow – before we pass this bill, we deal with the FOIP requests. We can all agree. Before we pass this bill, let's put some thought to this because this is offensive in a democratic society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to consider Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, because it is very important. I believe this bill aims at achieving eight objectives.

Four of the amendments are aimed at further restricting the information that may be available through a FOIP request. Of those four, two may be viewed as positive steps because they will restrict the ability of foreign authorities to access private information through warrants or subpoenas. The other two, though, numbers 4 and 5, may be viewed as an attempt by the government to further increase its secretive nature. Of course, this is something I cannot support.

One of the objectives is to increase the power of the Minister of Government Services by allowing him or her to make regulations regarding the FOIP Act. This is number 9(b). The stated purpose of this objective is so that the minister may designate new public bodies, making them accessible through FOIP requests in the interim while the schedule of public bodies is updated. I see this as a positive one.

One of the objectives is also to put a halt on the 30-day timeline when a public body requests that the commissioner allow that body to disregard a freedom of information and protection of privacy request. This is number 7. This to me is totally unacceptable. This would result in a blanket suspension of FOIP requests and a disregard of people's desire to learn more, perhaps very important information that they require.

4:40

One of the objectives is to increase the penalties for unauthorized disclosure of private information by individuals and corporations. This is number 8. I really support this objective because there must be real consequences for these offences.

Another objective is to allow a public body to be deleted from the schedule of public bodies by the minister as well as the Lieutenant Governor in Council. This is number 9(a). I don't really understand this. I don't see a need for it, and without further clarity I have to oppose it.

Although there are some positive changes that are being proposed here, overall the impact of the bill, I think, would be overwhelmingly negative. The positives are the proposed changes regarding library information and foreign court orders to ensure that Albertans' information is not susceptible to foreign authorities. These changes are in response to concerns first raised by the province of British Columbia regarding the impact of the USA PATRIOT Act. The proposed changes regarding more severe penalties for offences related to the act are also positive. Having these changes will ensure that individuals and corporations that hold personal information know that violating Alberta's laws regarding disclosing personal information will have serious consequences, and I strongly support this.

However, on the negative, the proposed changes regarding information held by the chief internal auditor and ministerial briefings, obviously, are going to have a negative impact. This government is well known to be among the most secretive in Canada. I see this as another attempt to restrict public access to information that the government wants to be secret but that Albertans should be able to access. These changes will seriously demonstrate, I think, a detrimental impact on the entire political process, Mr. Speaker, severing an important tool for maintaining government accountability.

As I considered the background of FOIP, I noted that reviews of the FOIP Act took place in 1999 and also in 2002. The 2002 review resulted in a report including the recommendations of an all-party

Legislative Assembly committee. In that report there were a total of 62 recommendations. None of the proposed changes in Bill 20 are supported by that 2002 review. Another report was issued by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in February 2006. This report only deals with the threat of foreign authorities accessing Albertans' private information and, therefore, only relates to the positive changes proposed in this bill. Specifically, this 2006 report relates to the amendments in this bill that deal with library information and foreign court orders.

If the purpose, again, of the changes to section 6 is merely to allow the government to effectively prepare for a sitting of Legislative Assembly, I have to ask: why the five-year timeline? I really do not understand that. The minister has commented that ministerial briefings should be exempt from FOIP access to allow the government to properly prepare for a sitting of the Legislative Assembly. Does the minister not realize that the opposition, too, must prepare? As the opposition our role requires that we be able to hold the government accountable. This bill would seriously limit that ability for us.

The new restrictions relating to the chief internal auditor are also very troubling. Now it seems that these CIA investigations into government activities would be hidden from the public for 15 years. How will this possibly result in accountable government?

I believe that there are some serious negative impacts that this bill could have. Some of these changes would diminish the entire political process by removing government accountability. Parts of this bill really trouble me. We live in an open, democratic society where the government is accountable to the people. Many of the proposed amendments in this bill amount to government censorship. This government serves the people of Alberta and is accountable to Albertans. Sections of this bill attempt to sever any accountability that exists. Therefore, I must oppose this bill because it will further limit access to information under Alberta's already restrictive FOIP.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) does anyone wish to rise?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to just make a few comments on this very important bill after having listened to some of the comments made by the hon. members. Of course, this is second reading, so it's just the principle of the bill. Certainly, we'll be in a position to answer all of their questions when we get into committee.

Just very briefly, some of the comments I heard: taking a public body off the list. Currently, we don't have the ability to do that, Mr. Speaker. All we're doing here is allowing a mechanism so that we can do it. Otherwise, it sits there. You could be amalgamating two. Now you've got three instead of just one. That's a very simple way of explaining that particular one.

Other things, Mr. Speaker, like stopping the clock. What's happening today is that the clock keeps running, the commissioner makes a decision, and if the decision is that the information that is in question needs to be released, then it can be a problem for the departments to get it out. So then we ask for a 30-day extension. Hopefully, when this is passed, we won't have that problem of having to ask for that extension. Quite frankly, there are times when the department simply cannot get all the information, especially if they have to go to a third party. That's the whole idea there, and I don't see any way that that could be construed as a mechanism to delay the release of information. That's not the intent, that's not the way it would work, and I think that that would be wrong.

As far as the briefing books, Mr. Speaker, there is some information in those briefing books that members can get. They just have to know what it is that they want and ask for it, but in just asking for the book as it is, that's what we're saying no to. So that's what that one is all about.

I'm sure that there'll be more detail when we get into committee, so I would adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 21

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are some comments I'd like to make about Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, the AISH Act, in committee. This bill is a continuation of the renewal of the AISH program. I'm proud to say that it will assist the program to better meet the unique needs of Albertans. As was mentioned during the second reading, this new legislation will make the AISH program more flexible and responsible to the needs of the 34,000 clients.

I'd like to remind the members of the Assembly about some of the major improvements this legislation will introduce. The income reporting process will be much more flexible, allowing clients to report according to their individual situations. This will reduce paperwork, administrative errors, and the occurrence of overpayments or underpayments. In addition, the act will help ensure that clients have the opportunity to appeal an overpayment before a debt is assessed and collection action is taken, and if they feel that it is necessary because they haven't received due process, they'll continue to be able to take the matter to court. This legislation will also allow the program to take into account special or exceptional circumstances and, if appropriate, exempt the client from repaying the amount that they were overpaid.

4:50

Bill 21 will also improve the co-ordination of programs and services for Albertans with disabilities by consolidating legislative provisions related to the AISH program under one ministry and updating the language in a 27-year-old act that was originally based on welfare legislation.

Mr. Chairman, this legislation also improves the quality of life for people with disabilities who are ineligible for the AISH program. Occasionally there are cases where individuals with severe disabilities are ineligible for AISH because of their income, which is above the cut-off, but they are unable to meet their basic living needs because of the high medical costs associated with their disability. Bill 21 will allow us to provide health benefits on a limited basis to those people with disabilities who because of their income do not receive an AISH living allowance. This change will make the AISH program more responsive to the needs of Albertans with severe disabilities and ensure that they are receiving the health benefits they need, tailored to their individual situations.

Another way that this legislation enables the AISH program to be responsive is that it allows the program to pay a third party directly for goods or services if that is for the benefit of the client and the client also gives consent. At the request of the client this would allow AISH to directly pay for things like rent or for continuing care accommodation charges.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to take a moment to address a few of the concerns that were raised during second reading of the bill. As mentioned earlier, this legislation is focused on ensuring that the renewed AISH program is flexible and responsive to the needs of the clients, and that's exactly what moving provisions of the legislation to regulation is going to help us achieve. These amendments will allow the program to adapt and ensure that the services AISH provides are in tune with client needs now and in the future.

Mr. Chairman, details about the duties of a financial administrator will also be in the regulations while the authority of the administrator resides within the legislation. Speaking of financial administrators, also new in this act is the provision that the financial administrators will now be appointed with consent of the client, ensuring that they have access to this service when they need it.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to address another concern I've heard during second reading, about the training of the AISH program staff. Now, staff training is not legislated or specifically referenced in Bill 21. The AISH program is currently working with disability groups and the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities to develop disability awareness training for staff. A joint stakeholder and AISH program advisory committee is being established to oversee the development of a training plan, a plan that I understand will be implemented later on this calendar year. This, of course, is in response to a recommendation of the MLA AISH Review Committee which suggested that the program partner with organizations knowledgeable in disability issues to provide that ongoing training for AISH staff.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to also take a minute to address concerns raised about the monthly living allowance. Last year the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports announced that the AISH living allowance would increase from \$850 to \$950 per month, and of course, as we know, next month the allowance will increase to \$1,000 per month. [interjections] Yes, it is positive news. This increase is in addition to the personal income support benefits and health benefits that the AISH clients receive.

In closing, I'd like to clarify some information raised during second reading as well. First, there is concern that clients need to cancel other benefit programs to be considered for AISH. Mr. Chairman, AISH tops up other income and ensures that clients will have at least \$950 or, in a couple of weeks, \$1,000 to live on each month. In addition, the issue raised by the Member for Calgary-Varsity about Canada pension plan benefits was changed several months ago. I think it was last May.

Another point. Secondly, 96 per cent of AISH clients receive their living allowance through direct deposit, and only about 4 per cent receive theirs through the mail. They don't have to go pick up their living allowance from some central location, as somebody had suggested.

With respect to transportation, many cities across the province are moving to assist AISH clients with either free or reduced bus passes. Edmonton and Calgary are moving to half-price monthly passes, and Grande Prairie is leading the way with public transportation at no cost to AISH clients, a good move for Grande Prairie. They are to be commended for that move. This reduced cost of bus passes is not a formal benefit of the AISH program. It's not part of the legislation.

Finally, I'd like to address the concern about the absence of a definition of institution in the act. Now, that term is not referenced in the act. The definition isn't included. If the term does appear, it would be defined in regulation as it might pertain to eligibility criteria.

Mr. Chair, in conclusion, thanks for the opportunity to speak again to Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. I encourage all members to support this act. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to rise and participate in debate on Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, which basically repeals or replaces the old act, takes its place. I would say that concerns around AISH or recipients of AISH are probably the second most frequent issue that is discussed in my constituency office in Edmonton-McClung. A few days ago I mentioned that family maintenance enforcement was my number one issue, based on traffic and based on volume and the amount of work that my constituency staff spends time on, and this is probably a close second.

AISH programs or support for people on AISH is almost to 34,000 people or more in this province. I know that the hon. sponsor of the bill, from Strathcona, mentioned that 34,000-plus people receive AISH supports, and I feel that this may be actually even bigger, that this number may be a little higher. I would be interested in receiving information on, you know, what stats the province keeps and the latest figures and how we update those figures and so on and how periodically we do this.

In April of 2005, which is almost a year ago, we approved in this Legislature the increase from \$850 per month to \$950 per month. While we agreed that this was useful and beneficial and timely, it was also agreed that this is only a first step and that we needed to do more. I know that on April 1 this year, 2006, it's increasing again, from \$950 to \$1,000, but it begs the question: is this fair? Is it adequate? Is it enough?

"Approximately 85 per cent of AISH clients" – and I am quoting the hon. sponsor – "either have no other source of income than their monthly living allowance or their income does not change more than about 10 per cent." For that reason, I don't oppose this bill trying to offer flexibility for their reporting. Instead of requiring them to report once a month, reducing the frequency may be useful, especially for people who have limited mobility or who cannot really go to their AISH worker or to the government office to file their income.

I would maybe take it a step further and in the future look at ways to allow people to file online. If there's a way for them to go on a website, a secure website, possibly with a pass code that is issued to them, they can file their monthly or quarterly or semiannual reports, do it online. It's cheaper for them because they don't have to take a cab or hop on a bus and visit a social worker or an AISH worker. If they don't have to, then fine. They can do it from the comfort of their homes, and it would probably be a step forward. I think it's worth considering.

5:00

There is a section in this bill that talks about making sure that the AISH clients have the opportunity to appeal if there's an overpayment that's assessed. I have to first say that overpayments for the most part are not caused by the claimant or by the recipient. They're usually a clerical error, or something happens at AISH headquarters and people receive more money than they should have. Then when it's discovered, and there's a decision to reclaim this money, it's

usually not due to the fault of the recipient. So I would urge consideration, and I would urge empathy and leniency in the way that we handle these files because these guys are suffering as it is, and to add another layer of burden on their shoulders would not be warranted.

There is talk about the appeal panel, and I'm interested in receiving information on the composition of the appeal panels and who serves on those. I understand that the act is worded in such a way that it allows flexibility for the government and for the minister in charge to decide these things in regulation. I know that we've mentioned time and time again that we don't like this direction because regulations are done behind closed doors and are not debated. We would much rather see it debated here in this House, on this floor, and all members participating. If it has to be done every 18 months or two years, fine. Let it be done every two years.

Regardless, I would like to get some assurances on the composition of these appeal panels and what seems to be restricting the ability of those recipients, if they need to contest a decision by that appeal panel, to resort to legal action and reducing access to the courts, which would otherwise right a wrong.

Another thing that was mentioned by my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East is the issue of indexing those benefits to some sort of a measurable line. You know, every year MLAs, cabinet ministers, civil servants receive increases in their salaries and their compensation based on a variety of things. Sometimes it's tied to inflation, sometimes it's tied to the market-basket measures, or sometimes there is something called the average weekly earnings index. Maybe they, too, should be linked to some sort of a review or an evaluation that is done annually to be able to ascertain that their \$1,000 a month or their \$1,050 or \$1,100 a month or whatever it is is reflecting the increases in the cost of living.

We all know that recipients of AISH are struggling with general expenses, usually rent, food and medicine, utilities, and so on. We have to reflect that things get costly, that prices go up, and that their benefits are not tied into anything that reflects that increase, so as a matter of fact their money is probably shrinking in that definition.

My hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East also talked about sensitivity training for some AISH workers, and I support this because you have two sides. Sometimes you have clients who are difficult to deal with. Again, it's not due to their attitudes, or they don't really intend to be difficult. It's because of the hardship that they're facing and because of their circumstances. Sometimes they feel left out, and they feel that society has abandoned them. Maybe they feel that there's an injustice in the way they're dealing with their circumstances. So sensitivity training might be useful.

On the other side, you get the AISH worker himself or herself who is suffering from a bit of stress. They're overworked. There's a lot of demand on their time. They may have fatigue. You know, they burn out dealing with difficult files. Some of them actually start their day feeling energetic and empathetic for the clients that they're seeing, and by the end of the day they're really dragging their feet. So we have to empower them, too, and offer them the tools for them to be able to cope with the demands on them.

We've heard stories, invariably, in all our constituency offices that there is this AISH worker who doesn't seem to care. He or she might be less empathetic, and they don't sincerely look at the file and evaluate all the circumstances. So it's a question of accountability as well. Maybe there should be peer reviews. Maybe there should be an appeals mechanism or a complaint structure for people to bring issues up to the supervisor level or the director level. Some of those instances are easily addressed when the person changes his or her AISH worker. It's as simple as that. You start fresh, you go

to a different worker, and you take it from there. Sometimes it's not as simple as that.

I mentioned the regulations, you know, and how it's done in the minister's office or within a small circle of people and it's not debated. If I'm going to narrow it down to the two issues that I don't want to see in regulations, they would be surrounding the collection or retrieval of overpayments, which is one. You don't want to be extrapunitive or extra heavy-handed in your collection effort. The other angle, which is quite the opposite, is in the underpayments. If a client is underpaid – and we all remember that the class-action lawsuit was basically complaining about the six months. The government was telling the clients: okay; if we underpaid you, you're only allowed to claim it back within six months. I totally and heartily disagree with this.

Are we making it nine months in regulations? Are we making it a year? In my opinion all money that was owed or underpaid to that particular recipient must be paid in full. Whether we do it in a lump sum and give them a huge chunk of money or whether we phase it over a period of time, let's say a year or 18 months, and we pay it back, it has to be paid back. It was money that was owed to them, and they're entitled to it.

I would also add an observation that usually AISH recipients should not be looked at alone, or separate from their general circumstances. You have to evaluate families and the family situation as a whole. You should look at issues around disability. You should look at issues around malnutrition, family violence, addictions to drugs, addictions to gambling, and so on. Look at the whole picture, and in my opinion it might warrant more support to a certain individual or a certain claimant because for him or her it might need more attention. So for them, \$1,000 a month may not be the answer. I definitely think we can do more.

Also, in this bill the definition of what is fair for these people. What's the definition of the poverty line? Are we saying that \$12,000 a year is adequate for a person who might be looking at, as I mentioned, rent, utilities, food and medicine, transportation like bus passes or cab rides, all that stuff?

One recommendation I was also hoping to make to the hon. sponsor of the bill is the issue around how the AISH recipients cash their cheques. One idea that I debated with some of the AISH recipients who come into the office is that they say: we would like the government to be able to allow us to tell all the banks and all the different places like the Money Marts, for example, and so on to not charge us fees. They would like to present their cheque to a Money Mart or to a bank and say: here it is; it's a government-issue cheque. Then the government would pick up the 50-cent or \$1 transaction fee.

Some AISH recipients also like the idea of a debit card – and I know that the government is studying this proposal – with a secret PIN number. They would take it to a teller or an automatic teller machine, an ATM, and cash parts of their cheque at a time. They don't have to cash the entire thing. Some people can't manage their finances as adequately or as efficiently, so for them to be able to maybe take \$50 or \$100 at a time and leave the rest would be very useful. Cashing the cheques or issuing them a debit card – or maybe a choice of either. They could be presented with a choice and they pick.

I will also urge that we look at AISH as a top-up or as a minimum. We should use it as a top-up or a minimum, not as a ceiling or as a maximum. I'm referencing clawbacks because, really, for people who are able to work and whose circumstances change from one month to the next, clawbacks are a big hurdle. Sometimes it's a disincentive for them to go out and work because they get \$400 sitting at home, or \$200 of it is clawed back if they go out and work.

5:10

These are ideas that I'm hoping will receive some attention from the government. The idea that maybe we should cover a percentage of their utilities regardless of where they live and possibly with consideration for, you know, the place where they live, an apartment versus a bungalow versus a condo: all these things. Especially now that everybody is complaining about deregulation and how utility rates are going through the roof, these guys are having difficulty making ends meet. Possibly covering a portion of the rent from a separate fund because by far rent, to have a roof over their head, is going to be, you know, 45, 50, 60 per cent of their monthly expense.

In committee I know that we should try to address the sort of clause by clause structure of the bill. I noticed that section 1 is talking about definitions again being left to the regulations, and I covered that.

Section 3 is talking about the benefits and which benefits would be available to those AISH recipients and the eligibility requirements for benefits. I don't think it's a lot of change or totally different from what we had before, so I'm not going to dwell much on it.

Section 6 is talking about third parties and financial administrators. My question is: is it acceptable to have a director pay a third party for goods and services provided to a client? Two faces to this coin. The first one is that when we help a client who cannot really manage their finances adequately on their own or has difficulty budgeting, it would be useful if a provider agrees to, you know, divide up or take care of their expenses such as food expenses; for example, if there's an agreement with a local grocery store that might help them budget or agreements with places like ATCO or EPCOR or companies like this who would, you know, split up the payments so that it's more manageable for these guys.

There's also the possibility that the client might enter into this agreement. He or she agrees to being serviced in such a way, but then they want to back out. They want to cancel that agreement. Will there be a provision in the regulations or wherever that would actually allow them to change their mind, basically? It's probably useful in situations where, you know, the person is living on his or her own and doesn't have somebody to look after them, and they might be afflicted with some degree of mental illness. It's probably useful. But we have to allow them the flexibility to change their mind later.

Section 7, as I mentioned, is talking about the requirement to repay. I know that I urged consideration and empathy when, you know, we're asking these guys to pay back, again most of the time through no fault of their own. They didn't ask for more money, and they probably spent it all. So if we're limiting underpayments to six months, why are we not limiting overpayments to a certain level? Why are we not maybe instituting a statute of limitations like we do with criminals, saying that anything older than two years is forgiven? Maybe this is something to be considered.

Section 10, dealing with appeals. I mentioned that, you know, removing the courts from it is something that I might not find palatable. Here it's talking about having to make the appeal within 30 days from when the person was notified of the decision.

Complaints are heard by the citizens' appeal panel. Again, I'm emphasizing that I need to receive assurances on the composition of that. An appeal panel may confirm, reverse, or change a director's decision. This is a right that we're taking away from these guys, and I think it's not fair to them because they're still citizens like everybody else. If other citizens under other circumstances are entitled to seek legal action, so should these guys be.

I keep mentioning in this House that this government not only adds layers of secrecy and customarily hides the truth; it's becoming increasingly uncomfortable with criticism and is now hiding from the courts or legal action by legislating itself above the law and denying access to the courts for AISH recipients.

Section 11, dealing with offences, outlines the consequences for an individual, a financial administrator, and a third party who knowingly provide false information or omit information. I have mixed feelings on this, but I think I'm leaning towards supporting it because privacy is paramount, and it's the privacy of individuals that I care about. If somebody is making a misrepresentation or bending the truth or, you know, hiding something from a file or removing something, it warrants intervention, and we should not be lenient in situations like this.

With that, I appreciate your patience, Mr. Chair, and your indulgence, and I would encourage further discussion. Thank you, sir.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that we rise and report progress on Bill 21.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 21.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? It's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn the Assembly pursuant to the spring recess adjournment motion, which passed this last Monday. That was Government Motion 12.

[Motion carried; pursuant to Government Motion 12 the Assembly adjourned at 5:18 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 3, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we begin our deliberations in this sitting of the Legislature, we ask for the insight we need to do our work to the benefit of our province and its people and to the benefit of our country. Amen.

Hon. members and the people in the gallery, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite everyone to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly today two special guests that are with us. First, Deb Young, who works in my office, is recovering from a severe accident she had at Christmas. She's barely got out of the hospital, is still recovering, and will be back, we anticipate, in June. We're delighted to see that her health has recovered from the severe injuries that she endured. Accompanying her today is Fred Dancey, her father, who worked for Alberta Treasury for 10 years back in Premier Peter Lougheed's term. We'd like to ask the two if they'd stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some very special children from the School of Hope, which is centred in Vermilion. It truly is a huge school in that they teach students all across Alberta. They are accompanied today by teachers Kelly Collver and Shirley and Eugene Kramps and parent helpers Gerri Davidson, David Thompson, Christine Johnson, and Janice Johnson. I would ask all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of grandparents who have come here today in support of Motion 505, grandparents' access to grandchildren, which will be debated in the Assembly this evening. Grandparents' access and

custodial rights is an issue that is not going to go away. There are some very human faces of people who care passionately for the love of their grandchildren. I ask that these individuals stand when I introduce their names. In the members' gallery we have Annette and Gordon Bruce of Legal, Alberta. Annette is the president of the Orphaned Grandparents Association. For some grandchildren the relationship between themselves and their grandparents is on a full-time basis because there are no parents present. Annette and Gordon and the Orphaned Grandparents Association are there for those children.

Mr. Speaker, we also have Marilyn and Barry Marks, who drove up here this morning from Calgary. Marilyn is the president of the Alberta Grandparents Association, an association not only committed to the rights of grandparents but also committed to the rights of grandchildren having access to their grandparents. Marilyn is also a recent recipient of the 2005 Alberta centennial medal for her outstanding work in the community, presented to her by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we have Florence Knight, the national director of the Canadian Grandparents Rights Association. She has been involved with grandparent issues as a volunteer and stakeholder for over 16 years. I don't know if she's here today, due to an illness.

I do ask that these committed grandparents stand proud and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a really engaged, lively, vital, dynamic, interesting group of seniors that live in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. They live in the Churchill Retirement Community. They are here with Ms Brenda Edmonds, who is their leader and gets them into the most trouble, I think. She does a wonderful weekly program of current events. I would ask Brenda and all members of the Churchill Retirement Community to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and members of the Assembly 12 members from the Abbottsfield Stop-In Centre, the seniors centre. The leader of the NDP and myself have spent some very enjoyable time over there with these active seniors, and we look forward to going back. There are 12 of them. I'd ask them to stand as I read their names: Mrs. Dumont, Jean Kisilevich, Tina Stifora, Peggy Baker, Martha Ehnes, John McFadyen, Nick Karpinski, Mrs. Joyce McFadyen, Mrs. Jo Elkow, and Mrs. Elizabeth Elkow. I'd like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Greg McAteer. Greg is an amazing Alberta citizen who has endured a number of illnesses and disabilities. He has been handicapped for eight years. He was diagnosed with peripheral vascular disease. He's very grateful to the many charitable organizations like Easter Seals that provided him with the tools for living, including his scooter, wheelchair, and lifting device. Greg is seated in the public gallery, and I would now like to ask that he receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through you to members of the Assembly it is my pleasure to introduce a constituent of mine, a youth and also a leader in our community from the oil sands capital of the world, Fort McMurray, Blake Robert. I'd ask Blake to rise. With him – he's not aware of this – we have 24 guests from the ministry of the mother ship, the Ministry of Environment. I'd like them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the members of the Assembly.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today and introduce a guest that we have visiting us all the way from Stockholm, Sweden. Jonas Tornblom just arrived in Edmonton last night from Vancouver, where he was attending the Globe Conference and Trade Fair, that hosted more than 2,000 environmental leaders from more than 75 countries. I'd ask Jonas to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Progressive Conservative Leadership

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a time when this province desperately needs strong, steady management to deal with challenges such as infrastructure and housing in Fort McMurray, severe hospital bed shortages in Calgary and Edmonton, and a school building crisis across the province, this government is now more than ever without such leadership. This government is no longer just on autopilot; it is adrift without a captain. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Who is in charge of this government?

1:40

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no question that this government is in charge of running the affairs of the province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the last time this House met, the Premier was so distracted by infighting within his caucus that he was unable to answer my questions, will the Deputy Premier clarify how this government plans to ensure that the Progressive Conservative caucus infighting will not interfere with the business of running this province effectively?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I don't think that the caucus affairs of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta are really any of his affair in this Legislature. This Legislature is about governing. It is about a mandate that was given by the people of this province to this government, to our leader, and that has not changed.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: given that as of 1 p.m. today the Alberta government's website indicates that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks is a sitting member for Treasury Board and for the Standing Policy Committee on

Agriculture and Municipal Affairs, will the government consider adding other nongovernment members to sit on Treasury Board and SPCs?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I think that talent, abilities, availabilities are probably part of the determination.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Unbudgeted Spending

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are blessed in Alberta to have tremendous resource revenue and wealth. Unfortunately, we have a government that is incapable of managing it. It is just the second day of session since Budget 2006 was tabled by the Progressive Conservative government, and we have the Minister of Education already talking about spending outside of the budget. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that Albertans had a budget for the week of March 22, 2006, when can Albertans expect a new budget for the week of April 3, 2006? Where is the fiscal plan for this week?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I thought that on the day of the budget speech all members were in the House. Actually, I thought they were mostly attentive. However, I would be quite pleased to go through the speech again if you give me that latitude. It was very clear in the speech and in speeches I've given since in answering questions that there will be opportunities for spending in capital areas. We outlined very carefully that the Minister of Education has met with 62 school boards, that as of April 1 the responsibility for all areas of education funding go to that minister, and that he would be bringing forth a plan.

The last thing, if I might, is that I heard a lot about in-year spending, and then I heard a lot about no spending for schools in the budget. Well, you could have taken the \$207 million that we allocated to new school and school spending in-year last year, held it until the budget day, and would have satisfied him more, but children would have been the losers.

Dr. Taft: My question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Education. Given that the minister has publicly stated that, quote, I think there is some urgency with respect to certain health and safety concerns at some schools, end quote, why didn't the minister commit to addressing these concerns in his budget and this government's budget instead of relying on unbudgeted surpluses?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, the health and safety of students across this province are obviously of great concern not just to the Minister of Education but to all the government caucus members, and that's one reason why we are spending \$5.3 billion this year to augment, in many cases, our budget. Now, as of Saturday I've inherited formally the infrastructure components relative to schools. We have about \$258 million now that will be coming through Education and going out there for school construction projects, including modernizations, upgrades, and portables. We have about \$81 million that will be going out by way of infrastructure maintenance renewal funding. That alone represents a 68 per cent increase. Finally, we have about \$395 million going out in plant operations and maintenance. So there are considerable monies going out there already.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's no reassurance to the 40 neighbourhoods in Calgary without schools.

My final question is to the Minister of Finance. Were there cabinet or Treasury Board discussions about off-budget spending before the budget was introduced?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to refer again to the budget speech, and I'll just quote. It's very short.

This year's surplus will be earmarked to three key priorities: saving for Alberta's future, responding to capital and infrastructure needs, and increasing the Sustainability Fund to provide added protection against any sudden declines

and so on.

I want to make a couple of things very clear. Under the parliamentary system that we operate and under the fiscal framework that is approved in this government, in-year spending is allowed in certain areas. But I do not want to hear people go out and say that this government is spending money without the authority of the Legislature because, Mr. Speaker, you know and I know that that is not possible. In fact, if we make a recommendation on schools, it will come to this Legislative Assembly floor before any money will flow. All I ask is honesty with people on such an important subject.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Reform

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just last week the Minister of Health showed a blatant disregard for the values and opinions of Albertans by indicating that nothing heard during the brief consultation period would stop legislation from being forced through this spring. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is it the minister's position that none of the 100 groups she met with provided any ideas that could be used to improve Alberta's health system?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we met with many groups, individuals, received a tremendous amount of feedback through e-mail and letters, and at no time did I state that nothing that had been said or written or done would influence or would not influence this government. This government has a track record of listening. I said that I was hopeful that we would be able to introduce legislation this session, but I was very clear in all conversations in every group that I met with that it was our hope that we would bring it back, show caucus what we'd heard, and then from that point onward make a determination about how the government would respond. I clearly stressed that it was imperative that we listen to Albertans first. The very last day I was actually asked by somebody if we had already made a predetermination about what we were going to do. I said that we had not.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that a former cabinet minister who's also a medical doctor admitted that most government members don't understand the third way, will the minister clearly outline for this Assembly exactly how allowing doctors to work in both the public and the private systems will reduce spending and cut waiting times?

1:50

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we know that the American system is unacceptable. We know that the Canadian system is unsustainable.

In our attempts to find a better way for your health, a new way in Alberta, we looked at having doctors work in that middle ground of both a public and private situation. Our view – and it is shared, fortunately, by a Liberal Senator, Michael Kirby – is that in fact the Alberta way of allowing doctors to work in both under a private, regulated, and controlled system of delivery might well be the very best way of assuring that we don't contradict the Canada Health Act. I should clarify if I misspoke. I mean, in allowing them to work in both the private and the public, we would protect the public health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister: given that the Premier, the architect of the third way, may not be around to push these reforms, will the minister continue to go against the wishes of Albertans and force through the third way?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this government has been gathering information. It has not been shared with the public, or even the total cumulation of it with me yet, all of the things that we have heard, that we have . . . [interjections] If the other side would just listen for a moment, I could identify that throughout that consultation we said that we would gather information and then provide feedback to people about what we had heard. I am at a loss to understand how the hon. member opposite would be privy to that information and would know that people were in opposition to the health policy framework. Much of what was said was in direct support of that. This caucus has taken a position that this is an important initiative for sustainability and access, and we will continue to look at it through that lens.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Opposition to the third way keeps growing and growing. This past weekend Tory delegates sent this government a message about its arrogance and failure to listen to Albertans. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the misguided attempt to foist two-tier, private health care on an unsuspecting public. My question is to the minister. Given that the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks, who is a medical doctor and was in the cabinet and in the Tory caucus for nine years, says that he and other members of the Tory caucus don't understand the third way, will the minister now withdraw the so-called third way until someone in that government other than herself understands it?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would invite the hon. member of the third party to ask each member of the government caucus what they understand about the third way and then make his evaluation. But it is interesting that the third party has now listened to a newly independent Conservative.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, only an independent Conservative can be relied on to be able to speak freely in this House.

I want to ask the minister whether or not she is prepared to tell the people of Alberta right now what the third way is and when they're going to go forward with the proposals once we even know what they are.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think the people that we consulted with challenged us to take a look at a number of those policies and come back with a revision that would reflect some of their opinions and points of view. What the third way is, as obviously I've expressed

earlier: a better way to be innovative, to look at new ways of doing things, and to find ways to increase access. We have a wonderful opportunity to look at the successes of the hip and knee replacement project and to model things that are part of it.

Mr. Speaker, the other policies that we defined, many of which have been totally acceptable to many of the people that have come forward, are things that I think would be very advantageous to bring forward. So I would invite the hon. member opposite to stay tuned. As we bring this information forward, I'm sure it will become abundantly clear that we've listened to Albertans and that we're proceeding in a way to make our system just that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. How can the minister ignore the expressed wishes of not only Albertans in general, including the large majority of people who made presentations to her, according to her own staff, but even those of PC Party convention delegates through her stubborn refusal and keep going ahead with the third way, the solution to a problem that doesn't exist, the solution to a problem that the government in fact . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, last week at the AAMD and C I spoke to an audience that appreciated an explanation on the third way and later came forward and made a comment that we had to work to make sure that health was sustainable. Then I spoke in Calgary on Thursday afternoon to the Chamber of Commerce and received a standing ovation for the points that I made about health care sustainability. Finally, on Saturday, in front of hundreds of delegates at our convention – and I would guesstimate that there were at least 200 delegates in the room – I identified some of the critical points of the third way in response to many of the questions.

In short, Mr. Speaker, there was not a word of declamation or refusal to accept that we have to find ways to change, that we have to find ways to make the health care system more sustainable, that we have to work to improve access. Overall, from those particular groups I take heart that Albertans are paying attention to the fact that at the rate of \$735 million more this year, or almost 8 per cent more this year, if we keep going in this direction, we will simply not be able to provide health care in the future.

So, Mr. Speaker, the accusations of not doing the right thing are misguided at best.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Forestry Industry Sustainability

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ninety per cent of Alberta's forests are in the Northern Alberta Development Council region. Alberta's forests are well supported by the valuable work being done by the sustainable resources department. There have been many concerns raised, however, not about the sustainability of Alberta forests but regarding the sustainability of the industry according to Alberta's 20-year strategic business plan. Forestry is an economic cornerstone. My question is to the minister of sustainable resources. What is being done to ensure that the forestry industry will continue to be one of the pillars of Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government, including our department and the minister responsible for northern development and the chair of northern development, certainly is aware of the important role that forestry plays in our economy here in Alberta. We are aware also of the many challenges that that industry sector faces in a world marketplace. I've discussed in this Legislature many times our partnership with the Alberta Forest Products Association and the things that we're doing to address competitiveness in the province and trying to involve them with our industry as well.

In addition to that part of cross-ministry, we're going on a fibre roadmap that will take a look at getting more economic value out of the fibre that is available not only from the forest but also from agriculture and also synthetic fibre that may be out there. We work with Forintek and we work with the Alberta Forestry Research Institute to make sure that we can head off the challenges in the forest industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: what is being done to ensure that value-added facilities have reliable access to the high-quality fibre they need?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, for manufacturers to remain viable, they must form business alliances with primary operators to ensure that they have a wood supply with which to operate. Those alliances are business-to-business opportunities, and we do not enter into those business-to-business arrangements. What we have done is tried to provide some incentives for those alliances as we go through in renewing forest management practices and agreements that are in place. The value-added component is also key for wood in the northwest part of Alberta.

So, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that we get the proper wood to the proper mill in the proper time and the proper access to the marketplace as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:00

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Increasing amounts of wood are coming from private woodlots. Are there any incentives being looked at to encourage reforestation on private land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question, but we really need to be clear. Alberta Agriculture doesn't have any programs for encouraging reforestation on private land. Our focus is to encourage producers to invest in agroforestry on private land by building that value chain that would focus on growing specific trees for specific wood products. For example, growing spruce or aspen to make custom furniture would be one of the programs that we would focus on. Our involvement is really through a public/private partnership, the Alberta woodlot extension program. That program provides awareness for forested land retention and for the sustainable management of woodlands. Awareness activities in this group are targeted at farmers, ranchers, and other landowners to improve their use and their land practices and to invest in that agro industry that we talked about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Hospital Bed Capacity in Calgary

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary health region has issued 29 code burgundies in the first three months of this year, compared to 33 in all of 2005. These bed shortages have even resulted in a 10-year-old cancer patient being temporarily denied chemotherapy. The health system in Calgary is hurting, people are hurting, and it's time that this government stopped hiding behind vague, misguided reforms and started taking action to improve the situation. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that new hospital beds won't be ready for at least two years and physicians are only expecting the situation to get worse, when will this minister have a plan in place to resolve this crisis?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, clearly, it was a very regrettable situation where a young boy with cancer had to wait. In fact, he was due to be in the hospital on Thursday, and it wasn't until Saturday that there was a treatment bed found. There's an unusual and unprecedented pressure of oncology patients, children that need supports in Calgary. By this fall, in September, when the new Alberta Children's hospital opens up, we will be able to relieve this pressure with an additional 10 beds. So this year we will have more beds in place. In the meantime it is our hope that Calgary will continue to accommodate these pressures by alternative arrangements.

Unfortunately, because of the pediatric capacity the only place this child could be was in that particular facility. So that was why, Mr. Speaker, we couldn't transfer him elsewhere or do anything else as a temporary measure. I know that the staff worked very hard to make sure that we could accommodate him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has blown up and sold off hospitals in Calgary and hasn't yet built a new one to replace them, will the minister apologize for allowing this situation to reach such a critical point that small children suffering from cancer are having essential chemo treatments postponed?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I recall, in my television comment last Friday evening I did just that. I said how very sorry I was that a child and his family had to wait and that we had certainly put every effort into trying to resolve the situation. No minister wants children to have to wait, particularly if there are other options available. On this occasion, regrettably, what was planned was not workable for at least 24 hours, but I'm very pleased that there was an adjustment that was able to be made, that there was a bed available for Saturday. I know that the hon. member opposite joins me in the hope that we don't have that pressure again before the beds open this fall.

Mr. Taylor: You know, Mr. Speaker, how long does the minister expect Calgarians to put up with this unacceptable state of affairs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the \$1.4 billion worth of funding last fall will go a long way to making sure that we have increased bed capacity. There will be at least 2,000 beds built in the next three years, 700 of which will go in Calgary. So if we had not made those kinds of moves, I could be more understanding of the questions from the hon. member opposite.

I think we're particularly advantaged right now in our history to

be able to move forward to build more capacity, and in the meantime as an alternative approach to some of the pressure of day surgeries the Calgary health region is looking at the subacute region, the other hospitals in the region to absorb some of the brunt of the pressures that are being faced in Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Protection of Children Abusing Drugs and Alcohol

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Concerned parents in Red Deer and throughout Alberta have contacted me to ask me about treatment and healing programs for their drug and alcohol addicted children. By July 1, 2006, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act will be in force. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister explain how this new legislation will help children and families who are struggling with drug addiction?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I cannot resist congratulating the hon. member for the work that she has done on this legislation and the work she continues to do on the Crystal Meth Task Force. Many times youth will not voluntarily admit themselves to a treatment program, and this particular legislation enables the parents to go to the court and obtain an order for a nonvoluntary admission, enabling that child to have at least five days of treatment and of assessment and enabling the AADAC workers and the workers that are in touch with the child to develop a care plan and a proposal for ensuring that they get further treatment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: how will the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission be assisting children who urgently need treatment for drug abuse?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, last fall we introduced another 24 voluntary youth detoxification and residential treatment beds with a considerable addition of staff and supports in AADAC. Any child who urgently requires help can either contact AADAC through the 24-hour help line or, in fact, voluntarily stop in at any one of the facilities and look to AADAC in any one of its locations for access to treatment.

We believe the new legislation is an important tool in the province because it recognizes that there's an extensive continuum of services required for children who are addicted to either alcohol or drugs. This legislation, which is in support of the child, is not for everyone, but obviously it's a particular avenue of accessing these services, Mr. Speaker, when other relevant treatment options have failed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't resist asking this question. Are there plans to provide residential treatment beds outside the two major urban centres, possibly in Red Deer?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we're examining right now the locations. A decision, a final determination hasn't been made, but there's a very good case for a northern and a southern facility. Obviously, Red Deer has done a considerable amount of planning for this. We will be adding 24 voluntary detoxification beds, and it's certainly very high on the list of priorities that we're addressing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Kindergarten Programs

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The value of teaching during the first eight years of life has been well documented in educational, psychological, and medical research, yet the Education minister announced last week that early childhood learning through full-day and junior kindergarten will not be supported by this government. How can the minister justify ignoring what the chair of Alberta's Commission on Learning describes as the two highest priority recommendations: full-day and junior kindergarten? How can the minister justify his decision?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Learning Commission made 95 recommendations. We acted as quickly as we could and accepted 87 or 88 of them, and we have allocated well over half a billion dollars to see them through. That's going very well. There were three recommendations that weren't yet responded to, and we did respond to them a week or a week and a half ago. The fact is that the majority of people who contacted this minister and, I'm sure, perhaps other colleagues simply said that they did not want junior kindergarten forced onto four-year-olds. But they did say: try and do something, however, to help with earlier identification. They did say: try and do something with respect to earlier developmental screening. That is exactly what we plan to look at doing.

With kindergarten, Mr. Speaker, it's almost the same thing. But let's remember that 95 per cent of eligible kids are already in a kindergarten program of one type or another.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the minister talks about empowering school boards to be responsible for education, how does he expect school boards to pay for the kindergarten programs they are already offering? They're already doing it. Why don't you help them?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the member opposite isn't as well informed as I'd hoped he would be. I'd be happy to sit down and explain this a little more to him because he may not realize that we provide \$241 million a year to help school boards make local decisions. Some of them offer full-day kindergarten programs, some offer three days a week kindergarten programming, others offer a half day, and so on. We provide as much money as we possibly can right now to ensure that those decisions at the local level are made. My final sentence, quickly, is just this: almost 50 per cent of the school boards surveyed also supported our position.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, Mr. Minister, given that 95 per cent of the parents send their children to optional kindergarten programs, it is clear that parents want these programs. Why does the minister continue to claim that parents are divided when the real issue here is a lack of funding?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let me just say this again. We do have 95 per cent of the children going into optional kindergarten programs that suit the local area and that suit the local parents. I won't argue that it's important for children to have early start programs, and that's why we're augmenting the funding every year and giving school boards that additional capacity and that additional

flexibility to address those needs. The simple difference here is that we are not going to be forcing it on the system. We have locally elected school boards. We're going to support them making locally elected decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Hazardous Material Spill at Wabamun Lake

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that spring is upon us, my constituents and those across the province are making plans for their well-deserved cottage vacations. A large number of Albertans are asking the same question, and that question is to the Minister of Environment. What is the Environment ministry doing to ensure a proper cleanup at Lake Wabamun after last summer's devastating oil spill?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say as a cottage owner that this is very important as Albertans as a whole begin to enjoy the beautiful weather that Alberta Environment delivered today and the many days in the future. I would like to say that I'm very proud of the fact that Alberta Environment in the first 24 to 48 hours issued strong enforcement orders to Canadian National, and further to that our environmental commission formed a SWAT team relative to the approach we are taking and the expectation by Albertans. Finally, I can assure the hon. member and the residents in the Wabamun area that over the entire winter we have been doing sampling of water. We continue to do that, working with Alberta Health. I also might say that, as well, remaining with us are two specialists that we hired in the first 24 hours, Dr. David Schindler from the U of A – some members might have recognized his name – and Dr. Ron Goodman, who, of course, was in charge of the *Exxon Valdez* spill.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what is being done to help residents cope with this spill?

Mr. Boutillier: Well, first and foremost, Mr. Speaker, we have come forward with recommendations by the Environmental Protection Commission, chaired by Eric Newell, the chancellor of the University of Alberta. We are being not only out and down the road but around the corner in getting out in front of this issue. We remain committed in terms of how we're approaching this, and I can assure the hon. member that relative to the SWAT team that I spoke of, advertisements are in the newspaper today relative to searching together with this specialized environmental team that can travel to any lake anywhere in this province to protect.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What is his ministry doing to support the commission's recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Environment has already pointed out, the environmental commission made a number of recommendations, some of which fall under the responsi-

bility of the Minister of Environment, and he's outlined where his department is going in that direction.

The balance of the recommendations dealt with the Emergency Management Alberta agency. My ministry is at this point leading a cross-ministry initiative to implement and create the independent agency that the commission had recommended based upon what they recognized as an outstanding emergency management organization that already exists in this province. Our ultimate aim is to make that a world-class agency, that will be directly accountable to Executive Council as per the recommendations of the commission.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1987 on behalf of Alberta taxpayers the Progressive Conservative public works minister, Ernie Isley, paid \$10.2 million for several parcels of land totalling 503 acres from Edmonton developer Joseph Shekter. This land inside the Edmonton restricted development area was to be used for a ring road freeway and a utility corridor. In 2001 the same government transferred all ring road land, worth millions upon millions of dollars, to the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Why did this Progressive Conservative government sell two parcels of ring road lands, amounting to about 160 acres, for \$2 to the Galfour Development Corporation, which was controlled by the late Joseph Shekter?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, as the member has indicated, these are transactions that happened some time ago, the original back in '88 and the most recent in '01. I would have to go back and investigate the whole situation. There's no way that I've got that before me at this point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again to the same minister: were these two parcels of land, which were sold for \$1 each, part of the lands purchased by taxpayers for \$10.2 million the previous year?

Mr. Lund: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I don't have that kind of information before me.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did send him in advance the documents related to this matter.

Again to the same minister: given that one of these parcels was valued at \$800,000 and the other valued at \$1.5 million, why were these lands sold by this Progressive Conservative government for \$2?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, in his entire grandstand, of course, it is true that he gave me the document three minutes ago, so I am supposed to somehow have the answers in that length of time. Thanks for sending it over. It'll make it easier for me to find. We will be looking into it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Health Care Reform

(continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While most Albertans oppose this government's privatized, two-tier health care scheme, opposition is strongest in the Tory rural heartland, and no wonder. The government's decision to return to the old way, to introduce two-tier, for-profit health care, will certainly mean a further drain of health professionals from rural areas to the big cities. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why does the minister continue to champion a privileged, two-tier health care system that officials in the rural health regions and our own staff claim will suck doctors out of the smaller centres into Edmonton and Calgary?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, many times in this House and other places I've enunciated that the only way that we would enable private care to be provided in concert with any geographic region was to first of all ascertain that the public health care system was protected. In fact, building a strong public health care system is what we're endeavouring to do. Rural physicians and providers have spoken to me about this issue. It's part of a larger workforce issue and many of the things that we're doing, including developing primary care networks, the dollars that we provided for educating more international medical graduates, the other position we're looking at for a second intake at the university, all of these things we're doing to ensure that there is a strong workforce and that the worst fears of the opposition are not realized.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given her refusal to cancel the third-way scheme, Albertans are asking why the minister is listening to the health care privatizers while ignoring those, including many within her own caucus, who know that this ill-advised scheme will widen the health care gap between the rural communities and large urban centres.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there's an implication there that this government and this minister are only listening to private providers. Yes, I've listened to many doctors, and many of them are members of private corporations, but the bulk of the people that have come forward as stakeholders have been providers that include community associations, include seniors' groups, include people with nonprofit associations, include disease advocacy groups. We are not listening to any one group in any exclusive fashion; we're listening to people that have brought forward their best ideas. The inference is that we're trying to provide certain Albertans an advantage. It's simply not true.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if the minister's so-called public consultation wasn't just window dressing, why is the minister pushing ahead with a for-profit, two-tier health care system in defiance of public opposition, especially when the strongest opposition is coming from the rural communities?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite presumes to read my mind, and he is in fact in error. I am providing this caucus the opportunity to review all of the consultation documents, everything that we've received. We are posting them on the web as they come forward, and if the hon. members were listening, they're being posted on a regular basis as the notes have been provided. We're

asking people to still clarify if they had further questions about it. I am not ready to entertain either with this caucus or this House what the results are because it's too soon to have things that were done as recently as Friday tabulated. In due course, when we're ready, we will be sharing that not only with this House but with all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

University of Calgary Capital Plans

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the government announced a forward-looking plan to add 30,000 postsecondary spaces in the province by 2011. The University of Calgary has a plan to help meet this goal and to deal with the serious shortfall of university spaces in the city of Calgary and has launched four major capital projects to add 7,000 spaces by 2010. My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education. Can the minister advise whether his ministry will address the critical access problems facing the U of C by fast-tracking these four major capital projects so that it can move forward with the projects and address the critical access problems?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I've been really pleased with the amount of collaboration and co-operation we've had with all aspects of the postsecondary system, bringing forward long-term strategic plans with respect to capital needs right across this province but resulting, of course, in a very significant issue, and that is that there are a number of places where we could expand the capacity of the system and, of course, the number of dollars needed to do that. Now, I've been working very closely with the University of Calgary on its long-term capital plans. It has very ambitious plans but very good plans with respect to how it would like to expand, what areas it sees a need to provide student spaces in, and what type of physical infrastructure they need in order to do that. Last Friday, for example, we announced the new Campus Calgary digital library, a \$113 million project which will launch them well on that way. The facility will expand existing library spaces but will also free up other space, so it's a great project.

Dr. Brown: Another question to the same minister: will the minister tell us when the U of C can expect to receive capital funding for the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That project is part of a capital plan which the University of Calgary has, which is about a \$700 million program. As I just indicated, we've approved \$113 million for the digital library. That's part of about \$151 million which is in the capital budget this year for the University of Calgary for things like the Craigie Hall renovations, bachelor of science renovation and expansion, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, and the digital library. So what I can say is that they have three additional projects – the ISEEE program, the urban campus, and the experiential learning centre – which are very high on their priority list, very high on our priority list, but we have to work through the process of allocating capital. I'm working with them on both the traditional mechanism for doing that and any new mechanisms we might have.

Dr. Brown: A further supplementary question to the same minister:

will the minister consider allowing the U of C to explore innovative ways to fund those badly needed capital projects as its board of governors has proposed?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of long-term capital projects for postsecondary institutions needs to be looked at both in terms of financing and planning. Institutions are struggling with cost escalations in completing existing projects, and delaying plans for new projects obviously means that they could become more expensive. Borrowing is one approach that the U of C has suggested, and they make a fairly compelling argument that the cost of borrowing, in particular if they use it through the Municipal Financing Corporation and borrow at the government rates, is perhaps lower than the increasing cost of construction. So we have to look at that very compelling argument. I have to go to my caucus colleagues, my cabinet colleagues, and Treasury Board colleagues and say: are there ways in which we can allow institutions like the University of Calgary, which has a strong financial base and a strong future, to move ahead with some of their programs outside the normal funding process?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. member for Calgary-Hays.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today concerned citizens in central Alberta are meeting with the chair of the Energy and Utilities Board to express their concerns about the lack of planning for resource development in the province, the lack of cumulative impact assessment before development, and risks to groundwater in relation to CBM drilling in the Horseshoe Canyon play. This is another example of landowners, rural Albertans, who are gravely concerned that we don't know the full impacts of Horseshoe Canyon drilling and fracturing. The Minister of Environment has come out last month requiring baseline water testing, one and a half years after the concerns were raised. To the Minister of Environment: what has been done in the investigations of claims of rural families who have lost water or had their water contaminated in the last two years from the CBM activity in their area?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I can assure all Albertans that you can marry together environment and the economy. You can marry together conservatism and conservation in terms of what we are doing. What we are doing is acting. We are acting in terms of baseline testing. We are acting in terms of our team of biologists and people that are water experts that are out there studying the situation. Within the next seven days we will be giving the more detailed approach to what we are doing on the baseline testing, that I thank the hon. member for mentioning.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister demonstrate leadership for health and safety and call for a pause in drilling until we have the mandatory water testing in place?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, what the member is suggesting – and I know that in his heart he is very sincere in what he is suggesting – is taking a broad brush and just sweeping across the province of Alberta. I don't think that is really the ultimate solution to the very good questions that he's asking. As I mentioned earlier, the baseline testing, the biologists we have, the water experts we have – we will

do everything in our power to protect so that the environment is protected and our water is protected and the economy can continue to grow.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final supplementary to the Minister of Environment: given that the coal-bed methane wells in the Horseshoe Canyon continue to be drilled as we speak, when will we see the protocols for water testing for independent review?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my second supplemental response, within the next five days our hydrologists as well as our experts are meeting to finalize the protocol. That's my commitment to the hon. member and the members of this Assembly: within the next five days. I want to also reassure the member and everyone that I will continue to be a marriage counsellor on those two important points.

Compensation for Crown Prosecutors

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, last week in Ontario it was announced that Crown prosecutors would receive a 40 per cent increase in pay and benefits. My question is to the Attorney General. Are there any negotiations under way in Alberta to increase the pay and benefits for Alberta crown prosecutors? Are there any negotiations under way in Alberta to increase the pay and benefits for Alberta Crown prosecutors?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It is true that last week there was an announcement that in Ontario there is a proposal to increase the amount of pay for prosecutors. However, at this point in time I think that the detail is not available. It's apparently going to be over a three-year period, and my information is that it has not yet been ratified.

The fact is that we, as a matter of practice in the Justice department, review on an annual basis the compensation of our Crown prosecutors and other lawyers. We do a comparative with Ontario, B.C., Manitoba, and the federal government, and we will be doing that again this year.

Mr. Johnston: My first supplemental is to the same minister. Where are we ranked nationally in terms of pay and benefits for Alberta Crown prosecutors?

Mr. Stevens: Well, as I indicated in my previous answer, Mr. Speaker, what we do is a comparative with certain jurisdictions which we think are the appropriate jurisdictions to do comparatives with. I can tell the hon. member and other members that when we last compared this, which of course was within the last year, we are within the range. So we feel that at this particular point we are competitive. I must say that if there is an increase in other jurisdictions, we have to look at that, and, as I have indicated, we will be doing that.

Mr. Johnston: My last supplemental to the same minister: will increasing the pay and compensation for Alberta Crown prosecutors assist in slowing down the flow of prosecutors leaving office to enter the more lucrative private practice?

Mr. Stevens: At this particular point in time, Mr. Speaker, we have

something in the order of 225 prosecutors in the province. While historically, going back a few years, there was a problem with respect to retention, that certainly has not been the case in the last three to four years, and at this point in time it's my understanding that we don't have that problem. In fact, the budget that will be debated in the weeks ahead has provision for about an additional 25 prosecutors. We do not anticipate that there will be a problem attracting new prosecutors with the exception of some particular areas like Fort McMurray, for example. It's difficult to attract people because of the unique circumstances there. Admittedly, the city of Calgary also poses some problems, but generally speaking, we do not see this as a major issue.

head:

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on to the next point in the Routine, changes in the composition of one caucus within the Assembly has required some changes to the rotation for question period and for Members' Statements.

The rotation for question period and the rationale for that rotation is found in the chair's ruling of March 8, 2005, which can be found at pages 90 and 91 of *Hansard* for that day. The chair does not plan to repeat that whole ruling and will now indicate how that rotation is going to be altered.

As members know, the independent Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner is entitled to the fifth question every fourth day in the Assembly. The chair can see no reason why the Member for Strathmore-Brooks should not be entitled to the same place in the rotation. On our schedule of House activities today, Monday, April 3, 2006, is day 2 in the rotation. The fourth day from today will be Thursday, April 6, at which time the Member for Strathmore-Brooks will be entitled to ask the fifth question of the day. So that no one is confused, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner is entitled to a question on Wednesday, April 5.

To be clear, on day 1 of the rotation the Official Opposition will be entitled to the first three questions, and the members of the third party will be entitled to the fourth question. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks will have the fifth question, the Official Opposition the sixth, eighth, 10th, 13th, 15th, and 17th questions. Members from the government caucus will be entitled to the seventh, ninth, 12th, 14th, and 16th questions. The third-party caucus will continue to be entitled to the 11th and 18th questions.

Members should be alerted that day 1 of the rotation will not be the same as day 4. On day 4 the sixth question goes to a member of the government caucus while on day 1, which will be this coming Thursday, the sixth question goes to a member of the Official Opposition.

The chair will be tabling charts to demonstrate the operation through the rotation and will be providing the charts to members along with the new projected sitting days calendar.

With respect to members' statements there was an arrangement that was agreed to by House leaders on March 16, 2005, concerning the operation and rotation of members' statements. In keeping with this rotation, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks will be entitled to two members' statements over the next five weeks. His first member's statement would be Thursday, April 13, 2006.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we recognize the first of six for Members' Statements, I have to tell you that this is a very

significant day in the history of the province of Alberta. In the spring of 1930 a bill was placed before this Legislative Assembly to ratify an agreement which John Edward Brownlee, Alberta's fifth Premier, called, and I quote: probably the most important piece of legislation that would ever come within the experience of members now sitting in the House.

On this day, April 3, 1930, the Alberta Natural Resources Act received royal assent, the corresponding federal statute being enacted on May 30 of the same year. One part of the text reads in part:

In order that the Province may be in the same position as the original Provinces of Confederation are . . . the interest of the Crown in all Crown lands, mines, minerals . . . and royalties derived therefrom within the Province . . . and all sums due or payable for such lands, mines, minerals or royalties, . . . shall . . . belong to the Province.

For many Albertans the settlement also constituted a moral victory insofar as, and I quote again from comments of the day: the inferior constitutional status of Alberta had been an important factor in a continuing feeling of alienation amongst our population. End quote.

In practical terms the agreement provided for the transfer of about 40.5 million hectares of land, 1.21 million hectares of tar sands, 202,300 hectares of petroleum rights, and several million hectares of coal leases. Financially the arrangement stipulated that the dominion government would pay to the province an annual sum of \$562,500 until its population reached 800,000, after which it was to pay an annual sum of \$750,000 until its population reached 1.2 million. Finally, it was to remit an additional sum of \$1,125,000 in perpetuity. In addition, legislation was passed in the Alberta Legislative Assembly that session to provide for the administration of the natural resources that were now under provincial auspices.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Team Scheidegger Junior Curling Champions

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to congratulate the winners of the 2006 Optimist juvenile girls provincial curling championship, the Casey Scheidegger rink. The team definitely had one up on their competition throughout their round robin play this past month, winning all of their games to finish with a perfect 5 and 0 record.

The foursome, which includes Katie Wilson, Jessie Scheidegger, Jayme Coutts, and of course Casey, is coached by Don Scheidegger. While I'm sure that the team took the time to celebrate this accomplishment, they had very little time to prepare for their next challenge.

With their Optimist juvenile provincial title this talented curling team earned a spot in the 2006 under 18 international championship, which was held in Calgary from March 30 until April 2. I'm sure that the girls were proud to represent our province as Team Alberta in this great tournament, that included rinks from across Canada, the United States, and a single entry from Japan.

The Scheidegger foursome was a formidable force in the event, going unbeaten yet again in round robin play. Their 5 and 0 record there gave them top spot in pool A and sent them into the semifinals against Saskatchewan, the second place team from pool B, where they won, Mr. Speaker, 5-4.

Advancing to the final, the Scheidegger rink faced Ontario, winner of their pool. It truly was a battle of the best. The team from Ontario went on to win the game by a final score of 6-3, leaving the Scheidegger rink with the silver. It was the first loss for Team Alberta, who did themselves proud in the championship. Three of

these talented young athletes – Casey, Jessie, and Katie – live in Little Bow, and Jayme lives in Livingstone-Macleod.

I along with Jayme's uncle, our Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, would ask that all members of this Assembly join us in recognizing the outstanding accomplishments of the Casey Scheidegger rink. Congratulations.

2:40 Electoral Reform

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the British parliamentary system has endured for almost 800 years. It has been a guiding beacon of light for freedom and democracy in many jurisdictions, including Canada and Alberta, yet recently there has been some talk of abandoning the single-member plurality system, which is a key feature of our parliamentary democracy. Some favour an alternate electoral system, such as proportional representation, and trumpet the need for change under the alluring phrase "democratic reform." Many of these proponents of change disparage our system by comparing it to a horse race under the rubric of the phrase "first past the post."

The single-member plurality system has many advantages. It allows electors the benefit of being able to directly choose which candidate will represent their party through local nomination meetings. There remains a strong geographical tie between the elected member and the riding that they represent, so representatives are attuned to the needs of their constituents. On the other hand, under proportional representation candidates are generally chosen by the party itself, creating a detachment between the electors and their representatives.

Proponents of proportional representation say that single-member plurality is undemocratic and that the birth of new political movements is inhibited. This is patently untrue, Mr. Speaker. Examples of new parties emerging abound in our province, parties like the CCF, the United Farmers of Alberta, Social Credit, the Western Canada Concept, and even the Alberta Alliance Party, all of which have been represented in this House. Even today four parties are represented here in this Chamber. Elected members are able to represent a diversity of views not only among but also within their parties. We should be cautious about abandoning a tried and true electoral system which has served our province and our country so well and for so long.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Chester Ronning Centre

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to recognize the exciting educational and research developments which are taking place in our rural institutions of higher learning. Last week I had the pleasure of attending the opening of the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life at the University of Alberta's Augustana campus in Camrose. The director of this new centre is David Goa, whose experience includes religious studies in both Augustana and the main campus of the University of Alberta. Additionally, he was previously curator of folk life at the Royal Alberta Museum and curated exhibits such as Anno Domini in 2000.

The late Dr. Chester Ronning was a stalwart of the Camrose community. This man was an academic, a teacher, an MLA, a foreign diplomat, and I was privileged to know him as a friend. Chester Ronning was a remarkable individual whose passion consumed a variety of subjects, and seeking out and sharing knowledge was one of the most important. This was very clear during the time that he was principal of Camrose Lutheran College. He was perhaps best known on the world stage for his diplomatic

work and his efforts to foster discussion between diverse groups of people. He served as ambassador or high commissioner to a number of countries. He was a companion of the Order of Canada as well as a member of the Order of Excellence of Alberta.

The centre which will bear his name will focus on studying the intersect between religion and public life in our global society. Perhaps a greater understanding of religion in public life will further the diplomatic relations between nations which Dr. Ronning strived so diligently to foster during his lifetime. I look forward to the work which will be produced from this new, unique centre of study in my constituency.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Did the hon. member also mention that Dr. Chester Ronning was a former member of this Assembly?

Mr. Johnson: He was an MLA. Yes, he was a member.

Stephen Ames

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to recognize a constituent of mine who has attained international recognition as a professional golfer. As his closest competitors faltered under pressure, Stephen Ames displayed nerves of steel to shoot a five under par 67 last Sunday to win the Players tournament at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Verde, Florida. Stephen finished six strokes ahead of his nearest competitor to take home first place money of almost \$1.5 million.

Like 12 of my colleagues in this Assembly, Stephen Ames was born in a country outside of Canada. A native of Trinidad, and like those 12 members, he has chosen to become a Canadian citizen and raise his family in Calgary. Rising to the challenge of being the Players champion, Ames has had to overcome a difficult last two years as his Calgarian wife, Jodi, has battled lung cancer. On the tour last year Stephen found himself not only competing with others to make the cut every week but also had to play mum and dad to his two sons, Justin and Ryan, who accompany him on the road on a regular basis.

After winning the championship last Sunday, Stephen was joined by his family, and they spent the week in nearby Disney World. It was the family plan to travel to his homeland, but the winner of the Players championship automatically qualifies to play in the Masters, beginning this Thursday. This opportunity was just too good to pass up, so the visit to Trinidad will have to wait. I would ask all hon. members to join me in wishing Calgarian Stephen Ames nothing but success this week in Augusta, Georgia.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1987 then public works minister, Ernie Isley, paid Edmonton developer Joseph Shekter \$10.2 million for 503 acres of land in the city of Edmonton. The Provincial Treasurer of the time, Dick Johnston, noted with some criticism that \$10.2 million was about \$6 million more than the land was worth, not a great deal for taxpayers.

I now have questions that I would like to ask on behalf of taxpayers. Given that the Provincial Treasurer assessed the value of this land to be \$4 million, why was similar land sold one year later by the Progressive Conservative government for a mere \$2? Yes, Mr. Speaker, \$2. Strangely enough, details of the sale are missing from the public record. Why, I wonder, was this land sold back to Mr. Shekter's company before plans for the Edmonton ring road were finalized? Why was this land deemed surplus to the needs of

the ring road given that this land is located in one of the fastest growing areas in Edmonton? How much did the completion of the portion of the Anthony Henday Drive crossing the North Saskatchewan River increase the value of this property? What other lands in the restricted development area did this government sell for \$1 or \$2? Who ordered this land to be sold? Is this one of the skeletons the former minister of infrastructure was referring to two weeks ago?

The government must provide answers to these questions immediately. Surely there must be a good reason for selling 160 acres of prime residential land in southwest Edmonton for pocket change, and I'm sure there's an equally good reason why details of the sale are missing from the public record. It was only a short time after this sale that the budgets for public health care, public education, and the public service were cut by this Progressive Conservative government. Seniors were told to do with less. Albertans deserve answers. Can this government please provide them immediately.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Celebration of Alberta Theatre

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Monday, March 27, was World Theatre Day, an event celebrated in over 90 countries, so today I'd like to recognize and celebrate Alberta's theatres. From Alberta Theatre Projects to Workshop West Theatre we have a wealth of theatre excellence in our province. From the flagship companies with multimillion dollar budgets to the companies working with under a thousand dollars, they tell our stories and lead us into other worlds. So to ATP, Azimuth, Catalyst, the Citadel, CAT in Red Deer, Concrete, Free Will Players, Fringe Theatre Adventures, Great West Theatre in Fort Macleod, Horizon, Keyano in Fort McMurray, Leave It To Jane, Loose Moose, Lunchbox, L'UniThéâtre, Northern Light, One Yellow Rabbit, Pleiades, Prime Stock, Pumphouse, Quest, Rapid Fire, Rosebud, Shadow, Stage Polaris, Studio Theatre, Teatro la Quindicina, Theatre Calgary, Theatre Network, Trickster, Vertigo, Workshop West, and all the others who create, develop, entertain, and bring us that shared experience, thank you for your inspiration, value, and the vitality you bring to our communities. Please join me in cherishing Alberta's theatre community, and get out and see a play.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table more pages of a petition urging the government to "increase infrastructure development funding for Highway 63." Today I'm tabling 1,330 signatures, for a total of 8,991.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling a petition to the Legislative Assembly from residents of Alberta petitioning the Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

head: 2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In regard to

my questions earlier in question period I have three documents that I would like to table for reference to all hon. members. The first is an article from the *Edmonton Journal* dated October 3, 1987, stating that the land price of \$6 million is too high. The second document I have is from the Alberta Government Services land titles office, and it indicates here that 123 acres of land in the city was sold for \$1 and the estimated value at the time of sale was \$1.5 million. The other document I have is another Alberta Government Services land titles office document, and it indicates that a much smaller parcel of land, this one around 36 acres of residential development property, again valued at around \$800,000, is sold or transferred for \$1.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some health tablings: the first from L.E. Wagner wondering why we don't have a provincial plan on pharmaceuticals.

A letter from Sarah Wall notes that absolutely no objective research evidence supports privately funded health systems.

A letter from Miki Wharton-Meijer insists that "the government have meetings where the majority of stakeholders . . . can ask questions and air their concerns. That would be the democratic way."

A letter from Tena Wiebe notes: "it is more cost effective and efficient to improve and streamline the public system."

From Marlene Williams with a concern that "a parallel private system will draw off resources from the public system."

From Kellogg and Katherine Wilson noting that they are both seniors and expressing extreme displeasure at a third way for medicare.

From Warren Woodcox noting that insurance has to be "bought and paid for before an illness is diagnosed."

From Geraldine Young with a number of suggestions on increasing health care providers, broadening the use of information technology, and using home care.

That's it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a single letter from a resident of my constituency, who is expressing concern and rejection of the third way concept in health care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table this afternoon. The first is a letter from Rick Gilson of Grande Prairie. Mr. Gilson is a high school principal and a head coach who would like to see considerable investment in athletic and recreational facilities. He notes that every dollar spent on sport and recreation "saves \$7 from being spent in healthcare."

I also have a letter from Dorian Despina of Grande Prairie, who is opposed to allowing doctors to operate in both public and private health systems and argues that the best way to reform health care is to innovate within the public system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling correspondence from several people, all of whom are opposed to the third way plans for health care. Each of the seven correspondents disagrees with plans to provide private insurance and to allow doctors to straddle

the private and public systems. The letters are signed by Madeline Nguyen, John Ternan, Madeleine Chartrand, Erin Rose, Gail Wallace, Susan Thi Xuan Thu Huynh, and Nathan Krywiak.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First tabling today is a letter from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Ms Lorna Berlinguette, who is urging us to adopt a comprehensive plan that would address the whole problem of violence against women. She wants us to provide sustainable funding for front-line organizations helping females at risk and supports having independent, trained advocates for those females seeking justice after having been victimized.

The second one is also a letter from two Edmonton-McClung constituents, Evan and Marian Addy, who recount the health care story in this province and how things were fine until about the 1990s and how ill-advised policies and decisions back then can more than explain the current difficulties we face today. As for the third way, they think that it "should be decided by a referendum" and say that like most Albertans, they too need more information on this proposal.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 13 sets of correspondence from Calgary constituents expressing concern, anger, and an underlying sense of betrayal over this government's third-way proposals. The correspondents are as follows: Martin Cowman, Bonnie Nahornick, Kathleen O'Donoghue, Diane Field, Dr. Jonathan Lytton, Rob Lerouge, Dr. Bruce and Marilyn Harrison, Peter Esposito, Linda Holzman, Mary Esposito, Louise French, David French, and Kelly and Margaret Price.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of tablings today, the first of which is the appropriate number of copies of the program from the Magic Moments Children's Benefit held on Friday, March 24, at West Edmonton Mall presented by the Birth To Three Society in support of Edmonton early intervention program and Early Head Start. It was noted by a number of speakers that evening that only members of the Official Opposition were in attendance.

I also have a number of health letters. One is from a J. Thompson, a constituent of mine, who says that "there has been no genuine, full-scale attempt to streamline and reorganize the existing public system" in health care.

One from a constituent, Pat Seale, indicates that she's concerned "who and how people will be affected adversely" by the new policy changes in health care, and she goes on in her letter to outline each of the various policy changes and how they will affect Albertans.

I have another one from a constituent, Daniel Langdon, whose parents actually have experience in a mixed public and private system. He outlines those, and asks us to "please follow the will of Albertans and abandon the third way."

Also, Mr. Speaker, I have a total of three letters related to persons with developmental disabilities and the funding or lack thereof that is announced in the recent budget, and these letters are from Linda Whitlock, Lonnie Tanner, and Tobias Jeserich.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: I've got one. I think we've now circulated to all members the copies of the new question period rotation along with the new projected sitting days calendar. Graphs are good.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 23, I'm going to move that written questions 10, 11, 12, and 13 be dealt with today. There being no additional written questions, there are, therefore, none to stand and retain their places either.

[Motion carried]

Public Funding for Assisted Living

Q10. Mr. Martin moved that the following question be accepted. What was the average portion of the total cost for a resident in an assisted living facility that was publicly paid for, and what portion was privately paid for in the fiscal years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be rejecting Written Question 10. It is unclear what "the average portion of the total cost" means. The department does not track the average cost of health care services in long-term care, assisted living, or designated assisted living. No tracking of average care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find that rather unbelievable, especially in view of the circumstances, that we've been having debates about the recent increases back a few years ago on the residents and the fact that there is public money flowing in while these are private facilities. I guess that I'm sort of amazed that we don't have any record of where this money's going or any idea of what's happening out there. Why wouldn't we be tracking it? I think that's the simple question that most Albertans would ask. Obviously, if the minister doesn't have the figures, she can't give it to us, but I would think her department, then, would want to do something about this. This seems to me to be a no-brainer, that we'd want to know where government money is flowing.

[Written Question 10 lost]

3:00 Public Funding for Long-term Care

Q11. Mr. Martin moved that the following question be accepted. What was the average portion of the total cost for a resident in a long-term care facility that was publicly paid for, and what portion was privately paid for in the fiscal years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005?

Mr. Martin: I have to ask the question, but I think I know the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be rejecting Written

Question 11. It is unclear what the term "average portion of the total cost" means. That is precisely the reason that the department has recommended a response that says that because we do not track the average cost of health care services in long-term care, assisted, or designated assisted living, we are unable to provide this. The hon. member makes a sterling point on the business of tracking costs. While I will endeavour to look into that, at this stage we are not able to give those average numbers on either this question or the predecessor.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I said, I knew the answer to this question from the previous one. I would take the minister at her word, then, that they would begin to look into this. I think this is a very serious matter. I don't know if the Auditor General has referred to this or not, but probably he should. I would take her word on that, that they would be looking into doing some tracking.

Thank you.

[Written Question 11 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Designated Assisted Living Facility Costs

Q12. Mr. Martin moved that the following question be accepted. For the fiscal years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 what was the average cost per resident per month at a designated assisted living facility?

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think I know the answer to the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As before, we will be rejecting Written Question 12. The department does not track the average cost of health care services in long-term care, assisted living, or designated assisted living. I'm appreciative that the hon. member opposite has acknowledged that I will be doing some follow-up work on this to see whether or not we can do what is most important; that is, to be accountable to Albertans for the dollars that are spent in these situations and to see whether there is a value in attaching a valuation to those kinds of care facilities for that particular cost.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I would like to weigh in on this question. Actually, it basically covers all four. I am sorry that the word "average" is being used because I think it gives the other side a convenient out. I will take the minister at her word, that she will look into this. If not, I can assure that these questions will be coming back in perhaps a more specified way. Also, I'm trusting that by that time we will have clear, clear definitions of assisted living, designated assisted living, lodge, enhanced lodge, and on and on and on, which will then help to clarify these questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: With all due respect to the hon. member, if they're not

tracking it, it doesn't matter how you put it in the question. Again, we'll just make the case fairly straightforward, that we will be watching to see if we can make the government accountable for both public money and the amount that people are spending privately because there were big increases three or four years ago. I think it's important that we understand this, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 12 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Designated Long-term Care Facility Costs

Q13. Mr. Martin moved that the following question be accepted. For the fiscal years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 what was the average cost per resident per month at a designated long-term care facility?

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, knowing the answer to the question, we'll get it on the record.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be rejecting Written Question 13. The department does not track the average cost of health care services in long-term care, assisted living, or designated assisted living. I think the point has been well made by the questioner. We will follow up and see what we can illuminate in terms of cost accountability in the future. I will take this under advisement, but presently we will be rejecting this question.

[Written Question 13 lost]

head: Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 23, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions 20, 21, and 22.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Payments to Redesignated Long-term Care Facilities

M20. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of payments made by a regional health authority or the Ministry of Health and Wellness to all facilities in Alberta whose designation changed from long-term care facility to assisted living facility between April 1, 2001, and February 22, 2006.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll keep trying.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we will be rejecting Motion for a Return 20. Alberta Health and Wellness does not have this level of data because Health and Wellness provides global funding to regional health authorities and does not receive assisted living funding information from the regions on a facility by facility basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I've got another motion in between here. It seems to me that there have been a number of cases recently, at least that we're aware of, where a facility changed from long-term care to assisted living. Surely they can't do that on their own. There must be permission from the government, from the minister's department, to do that. As you know, we've raised this in the Legislature. It was the same group of people there, and then all of a sudden they're moved to assisted living, which has even less standards. We're trying to get some handle. We're not asking for the tracking of the money here. We're asking how many institutions have done that. Surely the minister has that information. It's not tracking the money; it's just what facilities have changed. We're trying to get an idea of the numbers here.

[Motion for a Return 20 lost]

3:10 Redesignation of Long-term Care Facilities

M21. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of facilities in Alberta whose designation changed from long-term care facility to assisted living facility between April 1, 2001, and February 22, 2006.

An Hon. Member: Good luck.

Mr. Martin: Thanks. I need good luck here to get information, no doubt, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be rejecting Motion for a Return 21. Motion for a Return 21 is quite unclear with respect to the specific intent of the phrase "list of facilities . . . whose designation changed." In the context of long-term care services only approved auxiliary hospital services are deemed to be designated by the minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I remember that I requested a contract between Allen Gray and Capital health some time ago. They gave me the papers, but they sent me the statements from 1998 to 2000, the latest one, not even '01, '02, '03, '04, '05. I want to know why the government is hiding so much. Albertans have the right to know the full accounts, where their money is going and how much they are paying. I don't know why the government keeps on rejecting all those written questions that are raised.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Debate on Written Questions

The Speaker: Hon. members, the debate here is with respect to the acceptance or the rejection of a motion. There is no provision whatsoever in here for questions to be asked of an individual member. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie may make a statement in support of or against the motion but is not in a position to ask a question of the minister. The chair will not permit the minister to respond during this part of the Routine. There are other opportunities for questions and answers.

If I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview now, I'm recognizing him to close the debate.

Debate Continued

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I understood that with the written questions about the tracking, whether I agree or not, if you don't have the figures, you don't have the figures. But when the minister says, "a list of facilities," I think we're playing a bit of a semantics game here because, clearly, there were a number of places where they went to assisted living from formerly a different title and different standards and all the rest of it. Off the top of my head I can think of one in Camrose, where they had a different level of staffing.

This is pretty important information, Mr. Speaker, for us to know. The government seems to have a policy of moving towards assisted living with the same people in the same institution. Again, we weren't asking for the dollars. I accepted what the minister said, that they don't do that, and I take her word that they will be working on that. But this is pretty basic information. For the life of me, I can't understand why we wouldn't have access to this information.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but surely an institution, private or nonprofit or whatever, can't just say, "Oh, today we're long-term care, and tomorrow we're assisted living for the same group of people" without the government's hand in there, saying okay or no. Why would that information not be made available to us in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker? Whatever institution we mean, we'll try to reword this again, but surely it should be the right of the Assembly and, through the Assembly, the right of the people of Alberta to know what's going on. Long-term care has been a very major issue here since we've been back, you know, since the election, as the minister is well aware. This is part of what we're trying to get to. I just don't understand why we couldn't at least have this information.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, I accept that if they don't track, they can't give you the information. I accept that, and I accept the minister's word. But this is not tracking. This is simply telling us the number of facilities where this is happening so that we get a little better handle on what's happening in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 21 lost]

Health Impacts of Industrial Activities

M22. **Dr. B. Miller** moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing for each of the fiscal years 1997-98 through 2004-05 and April 1, 2005, to March 9, 2006, all reports, studies, papers, or analyses prepared or received by the ministries of Health and Wellness or Environment related to the health impacts of industrial activities in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be rejecting Motion for a Return 22. When the public body is considering giving access to a record that may contain third-party business information, the public body must provide written notice to the third party prior to disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This information is not readily available and would require an inordinate amount of department resources to research and compile. Accessing this information under FOIP would allow us to consider an appropriate fee for this request if applicable. For these reasons, the request for this information must be made under the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

The Speaker: Shall I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close the debate?

Dr. B. Miller: No.

[Motion for a Return 22 lost]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 201 Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure today to rise in committee and make a few remarks regarding Bill 201, the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006. As I said on introduction, the purpose of this bill was to create a dialogue around organ and tissue donation and thereby attempt to increase the number of Albertans who consent.

First, I'd like to provide a little background as to why I felt that introduction of this bill was required. In Alberta the Human Tissue Gift Act governs the donation and transplantation of organs and tissues. There have been no major revisions to the act since its implementation in October 1973, which is more than 30 years ago.

In 1989 the Uniform Law Conference of Canada adopted the uniform Human Tissue Donation Act. This conference prepares model acts on selected subjects in the interests of uniformity throughout Canada, and it contained recommendations intended to make more organs available for transplant. It would also provide better protection for donors, recipients, and their families. Provincial governments are under no obligation to accept the recommendations in the model acts, and the government of Alberta did not accept the act following its release in 1989.

In 1998, in response to public advocacy, private member's Bill 206, the Human Tissue Donation Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, passed through the Alberta Legislature and received royal assent. The Member for Edmonton-Centre referred to this act on several occasions during her remarks in second reading. Although passed in this Legislature, Bill 206 was not proclaimed.

In 1999 the then Minister of Health and Wellness established the Alberta Advisory Committee on Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation and appointed the current Minister of Children's Services as the chair. The purpose of this committee was to find ways to increase organ and tissue donation in Alberta. This committee submitted its final report on April 19, 2000, and as I said in my remarks on second reading, little has been done since then. The advisory committee recommended that new legislation was required to ensure that Alberta had a sound legal framework to guide donation and transplantation.

3:20

So that brings us to today. Since introduction of this bill I've received many calls, e-mails, and letters, and it's fair to say that the medical community is concerned with the provisions around imminent death. Physicians are concerned about being placed in an ethical position of deciding when death is imminent, and I under-

stand that professional dilemma. The medical community is proud of our accomplishments in donor consent, and they should be. But I also said on introduction that people continue to die waiting for organ donations, so until that number is reduced to zero, no one should stop looking at ways to make things better. I also believe there are many opportunities for tissue donation that we may not be exploring under our current procedures.

Equally concerned are a number of organ recipients who say that the bill doesn't go far enough and should include presumed consent. Of note is the fact that a private member's bill calling for a presumed consent model is currently before the Ontario Legislature. I also noted recently an article in the media from Ontario which states that since new rules came into effect requiring mandatory reporting in that province, the number of donations has actually tripled.

As members are aware, when this bill came up for committee discussion several weeks ago, I asked that it be put over until today. I wanted to enter into a consultation process with the medical community, and I have done that. I also wanted to provide the Department of Health and Wellness with time to assess what this bill would do. I wanted to have the department examine this bill and see if initiatives being contemplated could be accelerated, and I believe that good progress is being made in this regard.

With those remarks, I'll take my seat, and I'll listen to members who want to participate in committee. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise and give my first comments on Bill 201, Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, intended to make donation easier by establishing a more systematic way of considering potential donors and approaching families of potential donors for consent and also formalizing a procedure that requires an agency to request consent for organ and tissue donation from an individual or a family. It's clear that we've come a long way in this province in relation to human organ procurement.

I want to commend the existing system, but some significant tweaking, which this amendment will entail, is going to assist that, moving us beyond the HOPE program and pushing us to do two fundamental things, I think: one, to enhance the capacity of professionals to be prepared to deal with families and talk frankly about the need to make commitments to making these donations and, secondly, to facilitate that decision beyond the conflict that sometimes occurs between family members after the death and the initial commitment by the individual. So some clarification, surely, is welcome on those two fronts. As the hon. member recently indicated, nearly 1 in 5 people waiting for organ donations are dying before they get the organs, and in many cases this surgery can be cost-saving and actually economically very favourable as well.

I'm hoping that some very practical results from this will be a team that would assist professionals even before the registration in moving forward and getting comfort with and establishing as part of a routine with their patients the discussions that are needed. At the present time it's hit and miss. Many professionals are uncomfortable with the process and simply ignore it until it's too late.

A few questions arise that I haven't seen answered and that I would appreciate some further comment on if it's available. Will this government and this amendment take direction from its own 2003 consultation paper recommending that where the wishes of a deceased individual have been expressed, they take precedence over the wishes of the family? Will this deal specifically with the notification procedures and address consent procedures, and can we expect the government to engage Albertans in further discussion if

we are moving towards a presumed consent versus a mandatory direction?

Finally, Mr. Chairman, will there be an evaluation in terms of the economics of implementing this new framework, and will there be some evaluation of the impact on the health care professionals and how this is being embraced or working, as the case may be?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that in general we support this important amendment and would just like to see some clarifications of those questions.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to begin by commending the hon. Member for Calgary-West for his vision, for his tenacity, for his dedication in bringing Bill 201 to the floor, and for his commitment, finally, to the improvement in our organ and tissue donation in Alberta.

As the member stated in his speech this afternoon, my department has been looking at this issue for some time, and the Department of Health and Wellness will bring forward legislation very soon that will address the member's concerns about organ and tissue donation. The government's legislation, called the human tissue and organ donation act, will repeal and replace the current Human Tissue Gift Act. The proposed legislation is stronger thanks to the efforts of the hon. member and to the feedback that we've received on Bill 201. I am very pleased that the member has indicated a willingness to bring the proposed human tissue and organ donation act forward. This is appropriate given that the legislation will address some of Bill 201's objectives. Many, in fact, of its objectives are contained in the bill.

Mr. Chairman, while it would be premature for me to discuss what will be in the government's legislation, I would like to inform the House about what we heard from interested parties with respect to Bill 201 as passed in second reading. One of the objectives of Bill 201 is to create a procedure that will ensure that Alberta's medical professionals consider organ and especially tissue donation whenever a potential donor becomes available. Another is to add a layer of accountability to this process by requiring that a phone call regarding potential donors be made to a donation agency after such a consideration has been made. A third objective of Bill 201 is to provide these donation agencies with the opportunity to jointly establish the requirements for this notification procedure. This objective is based on the fact that these agencies have expertise which should be utilized when creating these requirements.

The final objective of Bill 201 is to initiate interdepartmental discussion, co-operation, and action to increase the public's awareness of organ and tissue donation. The hope is that a greater awareness of this in the public will improve organ and tissue donation rates across the province. Mr. Chairman, with respect to this last objective, I have committed to initiating a discussion and action between the Department of Health and Wellness and the departments of Infrastructure and Transportation and Government Services to look at ways that we can increase awareness of this issue with the public. As an example, the Member for Calgary-West has suggested that information pamphlets be inserted into driver's licence and vehicle registration renewal notices. The member has also suggested that during the driver's licence renewal process Albertans could be asked to indicate whether they would consider becoming an organ and tissue donor.

Mr. Chairman, I've committed to looking at the pros and cons of all these possibilities as well as any other ideas that may help to increase awareness among Albertans. These are the objectives the member is attempting to achieve with Bill 201, and while it has

created some apprehension in the medical community, it is merely because the bill requires physicians to take action with respect to organ and tissue donation when the death of a patient is imminent. Like the sponsoring member, I agree that requiring action from physicians when the death of a patient is imminent creates a difficult professional dilemma for physicians. I feel confident that the government's bill will address the concerns of the medical community.

They have also acknowledged that Bill 201 would remove the attending physician from the organ and donation process and would require a third party, someone from a donation agency, to approach the family of the deceased person and request consent. Mr. Chairman, although closer reading of Bill 201 reveals that this is not necessarily the case, I can understand how this could be a concern for the medical community. The Alberta Advisory Committee on Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation report suggests that the attending physician be involved in this process, and Health and Wellness agrees. Currently staff members from donation agencies teach physicians and medical professionals how to effectively approach families of potential donors to successfully obtain consent. By providing physicians with this knowledge, we can avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.

3:30

Mr. Chairman, a great deal of work has been done by the Member for Calgary-West and between the member, the medical community, and the Department of Health and Wellness. All of this work has gone toward the development of a human tissue and organ donation act, which the hon. Member for Calgary-West has agreed to bring forward on behalf of Albertans, and I commend him for it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Relative to Bill 201, in the interest of simplifying this matter between a private member, his initiative, and a government bill, a decision has been made to drop Bill 201 and to include significant aspects of that bill inside government legislation. I know that the member and the government share the same goals, which are to raise both professional and public awareness and ultimately to increase donation rates in the province, and I applaud the member for this. In addition to the strategies proposed in the health minister's department bill, we will work together with other government departments to determine the best ways to achieve these goals advanced by the member and government. For this reason, pursuant to Standing Order 64(1) I move the motion that the chairman do now leave the chair.

Thank you.

Chair's Ruling

Motion to Leave the Chair

The Chair: Hon. members, before calling the vote on the motion, the chair would like to provide some clarification to all members regarding the rules governing this type of motion and its effect on the bill before the committee if the motion is passed. First, the motion is allowed under Standing Order 64(1), which states that

a motion that the Chairman leave the Chair

- (a) is always in order,
- (b) takes precedence over any other motion, and
- (c) is not debatable.

The parliamentary authorities are very clear regarding the implications of this motion. If it is approved by the committee, the chairman will at once leave the chair, resulting in the proceedings in the Committee of the Whole coming to an end with no committee report being made to the House. The bill that is before the commit-

tee at the time that the motion is moved becomes a dropped order and disappears from the Order Paper. Members may wish to refer to *Beauchesne's* at paragraph 905, *Erskine May* at page 617, and on August 26, 1996, the Deputy Speaker's ruling at page 2369 of *Hansard*.

The chair wants to ensure that members are aware of the effect of this motion given that this is a rare occurrence. A motion of this type has only been moved in Committee of the Whole on two occasions in the last decade, once on August 21, 1996, in connection with private member's Bill 214, Victims of Domestic Violence Act, and a second time on May 9, 2001, with respect to private member's Bill 203, Residential Care Housing Committee Act.

Debate Continued

The Chair: The chair would now call the question on the motion that the chairman do now leave the chair.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Clerk Assistant: Under Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders, Committee of the Whole.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**
(continued)

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 203 Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to open debate in the committee stage on Bill 203, Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006. I'd like to begin my remarks by thanking the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for moving debate on second reading my behalf. During that debate, which I read in *Hansard*, my colleagues eloquently supported the bill and the reasoning behind it. As we enter committee stage, I would like to address the questions which came up during second reading and discuss the wording of the bill.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder raised the question of the applicability of Bill 203 to the efforts of the Edmonton Radial Railway Society. By way of refresher, these individuals are responsible for the maintenance and operation of the streetcars in Fort Edmonton as well as the streetcar which passes over the High Level Bridge between downtown and Whyte Avenue. Mr. Chair, to my knowledge the High Level Bridge streetcar is considered part of the urban transit system and therefore does not operate under the Alberta railroad act that is hereby being amended. The amendment does not change that status.

Further, as we look at the definition of a heritage railroad as outlined in section 2 of the bill, we can see why this legislation will not apply to the streetcar running from Whyte Avenue to downtown Edmonton. Let me quote from the act.

- (d.1) "heritage railway" means a railway that

- (i) is operated wholly or in part within the confines of an historical park or similar park or site,
- (ii) is comprised of rolling stock and structural facilities, any of which was manufactured in 1965 or earlier,
- (iii) operates at a speed not exceeding a maximum of 30 kilometres per hour,
- (iv) travels no further than 240 kilometres in a day, and is operated for the sole purpose of providing rides to individuals and is not operated for the purposes of transporting goods or commodities for a toll or a fee or of being a common carrier.

This last section is pertinent in this situation because people can use the trolley across the High Level Bridge as a means of transportation, another reason for exclusion under this act.

Mr. Chairman, this bill will not be applicable to all organizations who operate vintage equipment. This held true under the old designation of amusement, and it will hold true under the new designation of heritage.

While all attempts have been made to make Bill 203 as widely applicable as possible, considerations of safety and the nature of rail operations need to be taken into consideration to ensure that all rail operators in the province are treated fairly. For example, the Alberta Prairie Steam Tours is currently identified as a public railway under the Railway (Alberta) Act. Now, this operation runs a steam engine locomotive from Stettler to Big Valley and back. The reason why they did not fall under the amusement category is because the nature of their operation is quite different from what is carried out in the Alberta Railway Museum or Heritage Park or Fort Edmonton Park. Alberta Prairie Steam Tours cross onto a public track for a short distance and then run on tracks through public lands, where they cross roads and in general come into more contact with everyday life outside a park. Additionally, there exists the possibility that a person could purchase a ticket in Stettler, then exit the train at Big Valley, effectively using the train as a means of transport.

This is in contrast to the operation of railways within parks. In parks there is a controlled setting with far fewer public variables to consider. Train engineers do not have to be alert for a pickup truck speeding to beat the train or the possibility of encountering another locomotive along a public section of rail. It is not the intent of this bill to exclude an operation which utilizes vintage equipment but, rather, to create a balance among the needs of rail operators in the province. This balance is to be achieved through Bill 203.

First, it is important to recognize the contribution which certain organizations make to preserving and creating Alberta's history. As other members mentioned previously, the railway played a vital role in the development of our province. Towns and settlements sprang up along projected rail lines, and if the anticipated railway did not appear, they quickly disappeared again. The coming of the railroad into a town or city caused an immediate spike in land prices in the area and made many Albertans quite wealthy. There were many developers in multiple rail companies which laid track across our province, tying the north and the south of Alberta into the major transnational lines of the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific carriers.

3:40

The present designation of amusement does not call attention to or recognize the effort that is expended by these rail operators in preserving our rail history. By adding the definition of a heritage railway into the Railway (Alberta) Act, the contributions of these operators will be recognized. I would like to point out that the heritage category is being added to the existing types of railways instead of replacing the amusement designation. The reason for this is that it was thought prudent to plan for possible developments in the future which might better fall into the category of amusement.

So by adding the new type of railway to the Railway (Alberta) Act, the contributions of the affected organizations will be recognized, and the legislation will be more responsive to developments affecting railways in Alberta.

The second goal behind the introduction of Bill 203, as some of my colleagues alluded to during second reading, is to create a mechanism through which a new set of regulations will be drafted and then applied to heritage railways. The needs of operators of these railways and the requirements necessary for safe operations are not necessarily being met through having these railways meet regulations designed for another purpose. Regulations which are more appropriate to the operations to which they apply will better suit all needs. Safety will remain the number one concern of all involved, and ensuring a high level of safety will be paramount when drafting the new regulations.

Mr. Chairman, we have opportunity to recognize the importance of historic railways in Alberta and the role which they have played in shaping our province by creating the designation of historic in the Railway (Alberta) Act. At the same time, we have the opportunity to reduce overregulation in the province. So I would urge all members of this Chamber to stand with me and voice their support for Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006. This bill creates heritage railways under the railway act, which allows heritage railways to operate under their own regulations. Currently heritage railways operate under the same legal specification as major rail lines, causing unnecessary regulations and burdens, high insurance on vintage lines. The new regulations will definitely develop safety inspection policies specifically for heritage railways. There are two reasons for supporting this particular Bill 203: heritage and regulation.

Presently the railway act's definition section does not specifically recognize heritage railways. The act defines amusement railways and industrial railways. Alberta railways played an important role in building Alberta. This bill attempts to preserve this history. Stakeholders at the heritage railways museum argue that the current act is cumbersome for vintage rail museums. They say that they are faced with unnecessary regulations, causing high insurance and other regulatory burdens. At the Alberta Railway Museum in Edmonton the railway operates on their own private property. The line does not cross public streets, yet it is still subject to the same regulatory standards as major rail line operators.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta has three significant historic railway museums. One is the Alberta Railway Museum in Edmonton, which provides school tours, Alberta Central Railway Museum in Wetaskiwin, Rocky Mountain Rail Society in Stettler, headquartered in Calgary, and the other Alberta rail heritage sites include Fort Edmonton Park, Heritage Park in Calgary, and so on.

Did you know that "railway" is British/Canadian, but "railroad" is American? Stakeholders expressed concern with section 2(a)(ii). The bill states: structural facilities, station buildings, et cetera, "any of which was manufactured in 1965 or earlier." Number one, while rolling stock equipment such as locomotives, et cetera, are built prior to 1965, some of the facilities have been built more recently. The implications are unknown.

Stakeholders also expressed concern with section 2(a)(iv). The

bill states that the train “is operated for the sole purpose of providing rides to individuals and is not operated for the purposes of transporting goods or commodities for a toll or a fee.” However, the Alberta Central Railway Museum, charges fees for rides. The implications are unknown.

I have a few other questions. According to section 1 of the railway act, what is going to be significantly different between an amusement railway and a heritage railway?

Another question is: will the label heritage railway have any funding implications? For instance, will heritage railways be able to apply for new grant opportunities beyond current sources such as the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation and community initiative programs?

What about rail safety, rail inspections? How will this legal change impact inspections on rail lines? What role does insurance play in this change? Will insurance costs be reduced and why? Could you please provide some examples that demonstrate that the current act is not working for heritage railways?

Mr. Chairman, this is a good bill. I wish we had some better bills than this one for discussion because there are some other priorities for Albertans. I wish we had some bills, if it's the railways, LRTs, or CP railways, security for the transportation, prevention of crime: you know, the bills which Albertans want to see. I'm not criticizing this particular one. This is a good bill, and I support this, but bills in regard to resource policies: those are the bills that Albertans want to see, the priority bills. We are receiving royalties, and we should discuss here again and again what we should do with the resource. Bills which give us the opportunity to discuss the resources in Alberta and savings, infrastructure, and safety in the transport department, housing for low-income people: those are the priorities for Albertans.

This bill is good. I mean, it is good to see. But I still meet people that criticize the deregulation of electricity in Alberta, and we don't see any bills in regard to that to discuss whether it's working or not working for Albertans. Most of the people I meet say that deregulation is a total failure. Not only me. People are talking in the streets. They want to see bills in regard to health care, long-term care policies, and the education/arts sector.

3:50

I was in Fort McMurray last week, and I met a few stakeholders there. They are frustrated. They say: “Yeah, I heard that these are the bills introduced in the last few weeks. What are you guys doing for Alberta's sector?” Fort McMurray is giving us so much money, and we all know that, but what are they getting in return? That's the question. Those are the priorities for Fort McMurray: infrastructure. I don't see anything like that.

We here talk about railway heritage; railways do this and do that. Yes, that's fine. But we should concentrate on the priorities of Albertans. We should listen to what they want, not what members sitting here in this Chamber want. We should listen to them first.

So far I haven't heard anything about land use policies, no bills. There are so many lands, especially, that the people want – I'm coming back, Mr. Chairman. I know that I'm going a little bit out of the . . .

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on Bill 203.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very glad that the bell rang there. I was just about to stand on a point of order.

I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me a great deal of

pleasure to rise today and address the Committee of the Whole on Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006. If ingenuity and determination are the lifeblood of this province, railroads and trains are the veins and arteries. They are an integral part of Alberta, integral to our understanding of the past and vital to the development of our future.

The steel rails that criss-cross our province have been many things to many people. To the brave workers who authored the anvil chorus that laid track westward and made our country whole the railroad represented a new and brighter future. To the immigrants who came westward to carve a life from the wilderness it represented a gateway to unlimited opportunity and a new beginning. To our parents and grandparents it was the primary and often the only feasible means of transportation. I've heard many stories from long ago from my father-in-law, who himself rode the rails looking for work as he travelled from province to province in western Canada. In short, Mr. Chairman, the railroad in its golden age fuelled and facilitated the ambitions of our young province. It was more than mere transportation. It was the hopes and dreams of our ancestors given in the form of steel and steam.

This golden age is behind us now. The steam locomotive and telegraph and the coal-stoking firemen are gone, shunted aside by the inevitable march of progress. Romance has been replaced by function, and the functionaries of the past have been relegated to rust away in silence. In most cases we see this glorious past not as it was but dimly through the fog of history in the form of faded photographs and half-forgotten memories. It is a situation that borders on tragedy, Mr. Chairman. Most of the thousands of steam locomotives and their rolling stock are gone, broken up for scrap or left to crumble into nothingness in forgotten corners of rail yards – most, but not all. A fortunate handful of these warriors escaped the scrapyards and the ravages of time. Their working days are over. They still run in limited capacity, but instead of building the future of Alberta, they now serve to bring life to its past.

One of the most important and most often overlooked social responsibilities is that of remembrance. We all have a duty to act as guardians of the past for without an understanding of the past the future can hold out no hope. We have a responsibility to our children to remind them of the individuals and the tools that made Alberta the best place in the world.

Bill 203 and specifically section 2 of the bill will be a vital and necessary step to ensure that this happens, Mr. Chairman. The present system has not recognized the unique situation posed by the five operating historical railroads in Alberta, and as a consequence these railroads are often faced with difficult or next-to-impossible regulations to meet standards that don't account for the uniqueness of their situation.

The provisions contained within section 2 of the bill specifically illustrate the unique situations faced by heritage railroads. These provisions seek to make day-to-day operations much easier for the dedicated individuals who operate these historical resources. We, as Albertans, invariably recognize the unique role these railroads play in understanding the past. Bill 203 simply recognizes this fact with legislation.

Pigeonholing historical railways into the same class as public and amusement railways doesn't make sense to me, and it makes even less sense to impede in any way these valuable and vibrant examples of living history. Classifying an historical train as a public railway puts it in the same class as a modern train, with all of the attendant restrictions and regulations. While this may apply in some cases where historical trains operate outside of a park setting, I don't believe it to be appropriate in the majority of cases. It simply doesn't seem reasonable to me that a Via train hauling passengers at

breakneck speed, a freight train hauling grain and petroleum, and an 80-year-old steamer rolling sedately around a circular track at the speed of a slow jog must all meet the same requirements.

Mr. Chairman, section 2 of Bill 203, as I mentioned previously, amends the Railway (Alberta) Act by adding specific details regarding the conditions under which a heritage railway operates. A good example of this is found under section 2(a)(d.1)(i), which states that a heritage railway “is operated wholly or in part within the confines of an historical park or similar park or site.” Now, this is a vital distinction to make. It illustrates the point that a heritage railroad as defined by Bill 203 does not face the same operating conditions as a public railroad. Another important distinction is made in section 2(a)(d.1)(iii), which discusses the operating speeds of a heritage railway. It states that a heritage railway “operates at a speed not exceeding a maximum of 30 kilometres per hour.” These two examples illustrate the need for the creation of a separate classification for heritage railways by specifying the unique conditions under which they operate.

Obviously, these are not appropriately classed as public railways, and likewise it is not appropriate to classify them as amusement railways. This latter classification under the current situation is similarly unsatisfactory, Mr. Chairman. Amusement is not a term which is particularly appropriate for something that brings the past to life in such a meaningful fashion. While they are certainly entertaining, these railroads provide more than amusement. They provide education, and they provide a means of connecting to the past. This is the real benefit of an historical railroad, not to amuse but to give life to the experiences known by our ancestors.

A child looking at a picture of a locomotive from 90 years ago might express a mild interest, but seeing that locomotive in person and in operation might inspire that child to begin a lifelong journey of knowledge and ignite a passion for history within them. Imagine a child condemned to look at a picture of history when history itself is still alive. Imagine further the tragedy if that history is not sustained, if it's not nurtured and aided through appropriate legislative means.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 203 presents us with a unique opportunity to promote and assist this heritage. It will give us a chance to add clarity and change to a climate of regulations that are often overly restrictive. It will give us a chance to address with the proper degree of dignity those artifacts which mean so much to our understanding of the past.

The specific sections of the bill I have referenced are fine examples of this clarity. By introducing a specific category for heritage railroads, we will be helping to guarantee that they will continue to operate well into the future. We will be helping to ensure that our great-great-grandchildren will have the opportunity to stand beside and even ride upon the same sort of train that Alberta's pioneers like my father-in-law depended on, the same sort of train that helped to carve Alberta from a rugged and unforgiving wilderness and started us on the path to the level of prosperity we enjoy today.

4:00

Bill 203 proposes relatively minor changes to the current legislation but ones that may prove vital to the survival of our heritage. I believe that it is our duty to preserve for our children in any way possible those pieces of our past that still remain. As such, Mr. Chairman, I am proud and honoured to give my full and enthusiastic support to Bill 203, and I wholeheartedly encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests
(*reversion*)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a great honour for me today to introduce a young man that is currently attending the University of Alberta in the accounting program. I was very fortunate to go to school with his parents. They had great potential, and it's showing through in this young gentleman. Cameron Ferbey is in the members' gallery today. He was here looking for some work with our Department of Finance, and I know that if they're lucky enough to get him, with his enthusiasm and background he'll do a very good job for the people of Alberta. I would like Cameron to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 203
Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway)
Amendment Act, 2006
(*continued*)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the opportunity to speak in committee on Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for his clarification this afternoon on a number of issues that I had brought up in his absence during previous readings of this bill.

I had communication with the Edmonton Radial Railway Society again today just to run specific elements of this bill past them to see if it meets their needs. I guess that the first clarification I'd like to make is that while the Edmonton Radial Railway Society does in fact run the train across the High Level Bridge, they also run quite an extensive streetcar operation in Fort Edmonton Park. This society is a very ambitious group, let me tell you. It is their intention to run more track out of Fort Edmonton Park, perhaps along Fox Drive, and even as far as where the new LRT line is going to be with the University agriculture grounds. While other municipalities have been slow to build public transit in this form, this group has taken it upon themselves, and I would just like to encourage them to continue to do so and to make sure that we're not putting things in the way that would impede their expansion plans.

The members of the society that I spoke to today asked me to forward a couple of questions, that I would like to put forward here this afternoon, the first being that this proposed amendment to the act is discussing the operation of railways that operate no more than 240 kilometres per day. They wanted clarification on whether that was the total amount of kilometres that were being travelled on the tracks or whether that was per vehicle because they in fact run several streetcars in Fort Edmonton Park, and they average between 40 and 70 kilometres on each machine per day, depending on how busy they are. So is that an accumulated amount of kilometres? Are we looking at the amount of wear and tear on the tracks to the point of 240 kilometres per day, or are we talking about per vehicle? They would like to have that clarified because it would directly impact their operations in Fort Edmonton Park.

The second issue that I wanted to bring forward is that this group, as I said, have ambitions to cross Whitemud Creek with the same

streetcars that they have at Fort Edmonton Park and perhaps run their streetcar out to where the ETS bus transit system meets Fort Edmonton Park. It's, I guess, about a half-mile walk from the transit centre back to the park, so to facilitate ease of transport of people from the buses to the park, they would like to run an extension. They're hoping that this bill would not interfere with that. So I just wanted to put that forward. It's a very good idea that they have. They were not concerned about the speed – they don't travel any faster than 30 kilometres an hour, certainly – and they are not concerned about the High Level Bridge issue as it pertains to this specific amendment.

They do have some concerns where they need some assistance to perhaps continue that operation in a cost-effective manner. They recognize that it is under the Railway Act, the maintenance and operation of that High Level Bridge crossing. So it does fall under a different jurisdiction somewhat. I guess their concern about running that in a cost-effective manner is that they have to follow certain procedures that are quite expensive in terms of gauging the track and doing some minor maintenance. So they would perhaps appreciate our assistance as a legislative body here to make that easier for them to do.

So those are my main issues that I wanted to bring forward. Of course, I'm certainly supportive of this bill in all ways. I just wanted to make sure that the interests of perhaps the single largest heritage railway society in the province are met with this particular bill. They certainly are enthusiastic that people are paying attention to the good work that they do. I think it's a reflection of the many different places that have heritage railway, either museums or short circular tracks around the province. It's a great local tourist incentive for smaller centres to build, and people enjoy riding trains. In fact, there are train aficionados that will travel around the world looking for specific types of rolling stock that might be preserved.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to some clarification, please, from this bill's sponsor.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm grateful for the opportunity to address the Legislature with respect to Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006. I think that I can speak for all of our colleagues here when I say that it has been an absolute honour and privilege to represent Albertans during the provincial centennial.

The centennial celebration gave us the opportunity to reflect on the hard work and accomplishments of generations past. The celebration also allowed us to pass those memories on to the generations of the future. As for my own experience, the centennial celebration strengthened my belief that it's up to every Albertan to ensure that difficult lessons from our past are remembered and that pleasant memories are cherished. I also realize, however, that as legislators in this province much of this responsibility should fall on us.

That is why I'm so ardently supportive of Bill 203. Mr. Chairman, if passed, Bill 203 would provide the mechanism to define a qualified railway as heritage. Specifically, according to the bill,

“heritage railway” means a railway that

- (i) is operated wholly or in part within the confines of an historical park or similar park or site,
- (ii) is comprised of rolling stock and structural facilities, any of which was manufactured in 1965 or earlier,
- (iii) operates at a speed not exceeding a maximum of 30 kilometres per hour,
- (iv) travels no further than 240 kilometres in a day.

Now, the final stipulation of this bill is that it would operate for

the “purpose of providing rides to individuals.”

4:10

Bill 203 is a simple bill with such important implications. It is important because it will reduce the overregulation of railways which meet certain specifications. It makes no sense to me that a railway which is operated wholly or partially within the confines of an amusement or historical park or site and is used for the sole purpose of providing rides to individuals on rolling stock should be subject to the same regulations as railway operators on a commercial level. These trains are not transporting goods or commodities, and they are not crossing our province or our country. They are usually taking people on short, low-speed rides in a park. More importantly, they are bringing to life the history of an industry which impacted the lives of so many pioneers who called Alberta home.

Looking back in history, it is quite remarkable how much impact the railways had. In fact, before Alberta was the province we know, the railway ripped through the countryside. According to historians, first came the Mounties, then the ranchers, and then the Canadian Pacific railway. It was at that time that Calgary's 4,000 citizens figured that they had it made. In 1883, when the Canadian Pacific railway arrived, the picture in Calgary changed substantially. An immediate tent town sprang into existence, providing under canvas both housing and for a time offices for a newspaper and dentist. It took hordes of men to accomplish the seemingly impossible task of completing the railway track. Lieutenant-Governor Joseph Royal in 1889 said: the opening of the railway to the northern districts, which is now in the course of construction, will effect an astonishing revolution; the energetic pioneers of Saskatchewan will, before many months elapse, find themselves as if by magic within a few hours' ride of the markets of the world. Now, many people arrived by train to Calgary, but not all of them intended to stay. The railway spread west and into the foothills.

Edmonton's history is similar to that of Calgary's in that the railway brought the hope of prosperity. Edmonton proclaimed itself the railway centre of the north because it had two railway systems running through it. So today some of the buildings on Whyte Avenue in Edmonton's Strathcona neighbourhood have been preserved as a way of remembering those great days. In fact, the name Strathcona honours Donald A. Smith, Lord Strathcona, one of the founders of the Canadian Pacific railway. The railway system is also to thank for keeping our neighbours to the west a part of this country. The railway had made its way into and spread throughout Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, a century from now people will look back to today and will talk about the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. This corridor may some day be linked by another more highly technologically advanced railway system.

Mr. Chairman, the purpose of my speech was to outline the importance of the railway system in this province, in this country. The railway meant everything. This is why we now have to step up and do whatever we can to preserve the memory of those times. This is the essence of Bill 203. If passed, Bill 203 will help the railway museums in the province survive and continue educating Albertans about their great historical value. As legislators creating legislation in the centennial year of the Legislature, this is a great gift to give to future generations.

Mr. Chairman, we are living in an interesting time in this province at the moment, a time filled with prosperity and hope, a time of mass migration to the province, and a time when we can really make a significant mark on this world. It sure does resemble what was happening 100 years ago. So as we move forward on this ambitious agenda of wealth creation and growth, let us make certain that we do

not forget all the hard work it took to get here. So many people put their sweat and blood into creating the railway system in this province that we should do everything in their honour.

This is why I support Bill 203, and I urge all of my colleagues to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wasn't going to speak on this, but because I have and feel such a personal connection with railroads, I really felt that I had to. I think it's a good bill, and I think it's something that we have to pass for our heritage.

My grandfather was a CN man. That meant a great deal in Winnipeg, so growing up as a little kid I was really quite proud to say, "My grandpa's a CN man." He had three fingers missing, which was almost a sign of pride because it meant that they weren't quick enough, and they lost their fingers in the couplings when they were putting the trains together. Another thing I can recall is putting pennies on the tracks and waiting for the trains to flatten them out. Now, that may sound dangerous, but because I had listened to *The Lone Ranger* on the radio so much, I actually learned how to listen on the track with my ear, and I could tell how far away the trains were. We would test each other within five and six and seven minutes to the trains coming in.

The other thing I did was ride the caboose from Winnipeg to Winnipeg Beach, and I waved at all the farmers in the fields, and I waved at all the kids on the train crossings. It was such a sense of community. It was so wonderful to be a part of what I knew was our heritage because I knew that we in western Canada wouldn't have been there had we not had railroads come through and bring all of the supplies that we needed to grow western Canada.

In Manitoba they have something called the prairie dog, which is similar to what we have here in Alberta. My kids rode that train and were privileged to be up in the steam engine and all of those sorts of things. They have wonderful memories as well.

Now we're speaking of high-speed rail. We're speaking of bringing back the railroad. I think it's wonderful. I don't know if it's going to happen. Certainly this is a different era. We speak about dollars; I'm speaking about heritage. I'm hoping that that rail will return because I've travelled up down this province in the air, and it's really a horrible way to travel. You're herded through airports, and you sit in little, itchy-bitsy, cramped seats, that you can barely move out of once your plane has arrived at its destination. So, yeah, let's bring on the railroads.

The other thing is that the bill will help reduce the insurance costs and regulatory burdens for the railroads offering these services and this sense of heritage. I would hate to think that my heritage is being determined by an insurance company, that probably isn't even Canadian, so I really support being able to get around those.

I think it's very important, as has been mentioned by everyone previous to me, that we protect our heritage. After all, we're only a hundred years old, and that is so very, very young. Two hundred years from now I'm hoping that my great-great-grandchildren might say, "You know what? My great-great-great-grandfather was a CN man."

I think of Pompeii – I'm not sure: 500 or 600 years – and how wonderfully they have preserved Pompeii. It is a sense of history. So it's with joy that I stand up and actually talk about railroads and would certainly ask for support for this to go through so that we can maintain our railroad heritage.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to close debate.

4:20

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. It's a pleasure to close debate. I'd just like to respond to a few of the questions. First of all, the question from the Member for Edmonton-Calder. It was certainly the intent of the society that first approached us about this that the 240 kilometres per day would be per train. Now, I suppose if you broke that train up, I would think that it would mean that each train would probably be allowed to go up to 240 kilometres per day. However, this is something that can be addressed in the regulations, and I would certainly recommend that The Edmonton Radial Railway Society be involved and have input when it comes to developing the regulations.

Regarding the streetcars that might actually go outside of the park, point 2(a)(iv) indicates that the bill refers to trains within a park or partially in a park, so I would think that that might be taken into consideration if this particular society is talking about streetcars that might operate in Fort Edmonton Park and actually go out of the park. Again, something that could be addressed or clarified, I think, in the regulations. Very good questions.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie asked about railway safety and inspection. Again, that's the intent of having the regulations, and all of that can be addressed in the regulations.

He was also concerned about input from the public and that this may have been something that simply came from within this Legislature. I'd like to assure him that the reason this came forward in the first place was that I was approached by the Alberta Railway Museum operators under the Canadian heritage railroad association to actually introduce this bill in the first place. So I assure him that this really did come from the stakeholders and from outside.

I appreciate the enthusiasm with which everyone has spoken. To my knowledge everyone was in favour, and I would think that this should be unanimous. So I'd like to thank all the members for their support, and I would suggest that we get on with the vote.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 203 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, a flood of memories came back with that very beautiful discussion on the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, otherwise known as Bill 203, one that I, too, am pleased to support for many of the reasons mentioned today. With that I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 203.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 203.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 205
Continuing Care Standards Act**

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. Backs]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and discuss briefly Bill 205. First, I would like to commend the Member for Lethbridge-East for putting forward this private member's bill. I've worked with the hon. member for about the last 16 months or whatever it is, and I can certainly attest to her dedication to the protection and care of the elderly in Alberta. I think that this bill goes a long way toward ensuring that the lives of Alberta's elderly will be a lot better than they have been in recent years.

The Auditor General's report of May 2005 focused attention on the living conditions of Alberta's elderly, who are often some of our most vulnerable citizens. The MLA task force that was formed after the Auditor General's report came out heard dozens of stories from people who have suffered greatly due to lax standards and a pitiful lack of funding. It became abundantly clear that there is a need for provincial standards for all those in care regardless of where they live or who delivers the care. They must be clear, measurable, resident-focused standards with strict guidelines for enforcement.

The intent of the bill from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is clear. Since the current system is not meeting public expectations for ensuring the safety and well-being of residents, the government must create an office that has the power to inspect facilities for compliance with standards. The continuing care commissioner would be independent of the ministries of health or seniors, which I think is a very important element of this new position. The care of our seniors is too important an issue to be susceptible to political whims of the day. A continuing care commissioner addresses the exact problems that were identified by the Auditor General in May 2005 and by the MLA task force in September. Bill 205 is based on a single, simple, and unassailable premise that each and every continuing care setting is home to its residents and that they deserve the highest quality of care in their homes. Bill 205 grants the continuing care commissioner the unique power to monitor compliance with the standards and issue orders to ensure compliance.

Mr. Speaker, I've read over the comments from various members in second reading on March 20, and I believe that there were a number of valid points raised about how the bill was written and some provisions in the bill. The bottom line, however, is this: the Auditor General said in his report that standards will only be effective if compliance is monitored and enforced. This is the crux of the bill. Both the Auditor General and the MLA task force identified that systems to monitor compliance and standards are inadequate and ineffective.

It's very important for all members to realize that Bill 205 does not involve the creation of a seniors' advocate. This is not designed to create some sort of super office that will make all the problems of the elderly disappear. The intent is to create a commissioner who will have the power to monitor compliance with standards, review and investigate complaints, review and investigate the decisions of other bodies, and impose fines for noncompliance.

What I read from many members who spoke on this bill was that they supported the intent of the legislation, but they had some problems with the wording of the bill. Well, that's fine, Mr. Speaker. That's what Committee of the Whole is all about. The Member for Lethbridge-East would be delighted to consider any amendments that would make this bill better, but the only way we can get to that stage is if we allow Bill 205 to pass into committee. So that is what I'm asking all hon. members to think about today. The bill may have its flaws. You may have legitimate concerns about the wording of the bill, but the intent of Bill 205 to create a commissioner who will ensure that standards are met is too good an idea to throw out at second reading.

I ask all members to allow this bill to pass into committee, where we can debate the fine points at some length. I believe it is simply too valuable an idea to allow it to die in second reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join in the discussion on Bill 205, the Continuing Care Standards Act. The members who have spoken on this bill in the past are obviously passionate about the subject of Bill 205, and I, too, care about this subject very dearly. I want to share my views on the proposed legislation because it deals with a vital issue for the entire province. That is because in one way or another we are all impacted by the systems that care for our seniors. Whether we have grandparents or parents currently involved in continuing care or not, it is safe to say we all know someone who is. God willing, we too will reach the age where we will experience seniors' programs and facilities first-hand. Once we realize the necessity and inevitability of continuing care, it is natural for us to look to work toward ensuring that the system that governs it is as effective as possible.

The Member for Lethbridge-East should be commended for her efforts in this regard. She is truly a respected individual in the field and has been a true advocate of Alberta seniors for quite some time. In the time that I spent working with her on the MLA Task Force on Continuing Care Health Service and Accommodation Standards, I was able to realize her passion toward these standards. We were lucky to have her participation on that committee. She contributed so much.

Her passion for this issue goes well beyond her time as a member of the Assembly. As many of you know, before she was elected as the representative of Lethbridge-East, she attended Lethbridge Community College and graduated as a registered nurse. She later became a certificated geriatric specialist and worked at the Edith Cavell care centre from 1990 to 2004.

4:30

The Auditor General of Alberta investigated the continuing care system in the province because, according to a frequently asked questions document released by his office early in 2004, there was encouragement to do so by the general public, various organizations, and even some MLAs. Fortunately, the audit framework was already being prepared because it was well known that Alberta's population is aging and, as such, creating a large number of vulnerable seniors. Logically, this means that the costs of care are

likely going to rise in accordance with this increased demand. Ultimately, everyone is impacted fiscally because the complex service delivery systems are funded by taxpayers.

The Auditor General, having recognized the scope of continuing care, set out to complete a comprehensive investigation. This was done by looking at 12 public, eight private or for-profit, and five voluntary or not-for-profit long-term care sites across the province. It's worth mentioning that these facilities were located in both rural and urban communities. With this well-represented cross-section the Auditor General expects that the findings are more than a mere report on selected facilities. Instead, the audit can be extrapolated to the entire system.

The Auditor General's May 2005 report entitled Report of the Auditor General on Seniors Care and Programs did find room for improvement, but it is important to note that the government did not turn a blind eye to the problems. Instead, they were confronted head on. I am confident in saying that progress has been made, and the thoroughness of the recommendations was matched by the scope of the responses.

Recommendation 1 in the Report of the Auditor General on Seniors Care and Programs urges the Department of Health and Wellness to work in conjunction with the Department of Seniors and Community Supports and the regional health authorities to bring the basic service standards of continuing care facilities in line with the current needs. Part of this recommendation was to create a system by which these standards are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are updated consistently.

The response of the government in regard to recommendation 1 was comprehensive. First of all, it should be clearly stated that Alberta Health and Wellness has – and I repeat: has – come up with new continuing care health standards. Included in these new standards is a review process that will be enacted regularly and will involve regional health authorities and other stakeholders. Similarly, Alberta Seniors and Community Supports is refreshing the accommodation standards they set for long-term care facilities. They have also stated that a system designed to regularly review and update this set of standards will be brought forth later this year.

I could continue for quite some time reiterating the responses this government has made to the recommendations of the Auditor General of Alberta. Instead, I would summarize by saying that the concerns expressed in the Report of the Auditor General on Seniors Care and Programs are certainly being addressed. I believe that it is important for all the members of this Assembly to recognize the steps that have been taken and the efforts that we will continue to make in this regard. This government respects the rights of all Albertans, including, of course, our senior population. I will continue to work to ensure that this happens. It is no secret that the continuing care system of this province needed some adjustments, but it is also apparent that steps have been taken to remedy the situation.

Just as in all the other dealings of the current government, criticism is welcome, suggestions are investigated, and the proper action is taken to ensure that Alberta remains the best province in this country. I am proud to say that the government has improved the continuing care system in many ways through numerous responses to the recommendations found in the Report of the Auditor General on Seniors Care and Programs and also in the MLA task force, 45 recommendations that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and myself put together at the end of our consultation period. This shows that the processes set up to govern Alberta are working and, as a result, Albertans are being well served.

The issue of continuing care is extremely important, but I do not feel as if this piece of legislation is the answer to the problems that

remain. For instance, I feel that tackling the issue through the tool of regulations offers far more flexibility. I would also like to add that some aspects of the bill, such as the review of standards, have already been addressed.

I welcome debate on matters concerning seniors, and I feel that efforts such as the proposed legislation from the Member for Lethbridge-East brings much-needed attention to these issues. The time we have spent in this Assembly dealing with Bill 205 has certainly been worthwhile. The time allotted for debate allows us to collectively brainstorm ideas and look at the situation from all angles. Having an open mind and listening to alternative points of view are attributes of good governance. These efforts will allow us to continually find the right solution for Alberta seniors.

At the end of the day I believe that we can all agree on one thing: the treatment of seniors is a priority in Alberta. Because of the importance of seniors to the government I have no doubt that we will always strive to come up with the proper answers to their concerns, and we will do so in a timely matter. Unfortunately, I do not believe that Bill 205 is the correct way to deal with the issues of continuing care, but I believe that it is beneficial to discuss new ideas like this one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to commend my hon. colleague the Member for Lethbridge-East for all of the work that she put into this particular bill, Bill 205, Continuing Care Standards Act. I really appreciate her conviction and the experience that she brings to this whole issue, as other members have mentioned.

There is a line of a well-known Christian hymn, "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying," and I think that summarizes quite well the two sides of our health care system. "Rescue the perishing" describes the aggressive medical interventions which are necessary to cure diseases and keep people alive and well. So we have a public health care system which is excellent, in which physicians and surgeons and so on work, emphasizing medical interventions. But the other phrase in that line from that hymn is "Care for the dying." "Care for the dying" describes palliative care, which is the act of positive promotion of the health and quality of life of those who are dying.

You know, medical ethics is a burgeoning field that really took off a number of years ago in response to the progress of medical technology, which is raising all kinds of issues, especially around end-of-life issues, such as whether certain methods of intervention should be used to prolong a person's life, what kind of quality of life the person would have, and so on. So medical ethics tended to focus on those kinds of heroic issues of interventions, about extraordinary means to keep a patient alive.

Medical ethics, unfortunately, didn't pay much attention to long-term care. Perhaps it was because long-term care has to do with routine matters, and that's part of the problem. Unfortunately, seeing long-term care as mere routine matters, mere caretaking, providing warehouses for those who are ill and those who are dying has led us as a society to wink at the existence of long-term care institutions, facilities, and to allow them to fall into substandard care.

Medical ethics needs to shift its focus. I'm saying this out of my own experience because I did teach medical ethics for a number of years at St. Joseph's College here in the city, at the University of Alberta, and I don't recall us ever paying any attention to the issues of long-term care. Medical ethics should then focus on long-term care because it is in that context that we deal with the very important

human values of quality of life and human dignity. Long-term care should embody everyday ethics, placing a high moral value on the routines which provide comfort, relief from suffering, and an enhanced quality of life. Those are three important phrases. That's the goal, I think, of our long-term care facilities and of nursing homes in Alberta: provide comfort, relief from suffering, and an enhanced quality of life.

4:40

Well, the Auditor General's report was a wake-up call, alerting us to the realities that the taken for granted routines in long-term care facilities were in fact not complying with basic standards. One of the goals of care in such facilities is the relief of suffering, yet one of the Auditor General's concerns was about providing medication to residents and maintaining medical records. The report identifies problems such as

- inconsistent documentation of the effectiveness and the adverse effects of medication therapies, particularly relative to pain control and chemical restraint
- inadequate security and storage . . .
- inconsistent control over phone orders signed off by physicians
- insufficient or untimely notification of physicians or pharmacists following medication errors.

Mr. Speaker, we constantly read stories about the poor condition of continuing care facilities and nursing homes in the United States, and I think that most of us assumed that our situation is better, that there is more attention to nursing homes and long-term care facilities in Canada. Maybe not. The Auditor General's report was certainly a wake-up call. Now we have the Auditor General's report and the report of the MLA task group and the report of my colleague from Lethbridge-East, Blueprint for Action, that really provoke us to move in the direction of this bill, to propose an independent commissioner to conduct investigations in long-term care facilities. This is an idea that has finally arrived.

Now, baby boomers have always had their way of making changes in our society, and I think they are all beginning to experience what is involved in caring for aging parents. They will soon be thinking about their own retirement years. I think the oldest baby boomer is about 58, 59. Of course, those of us who were born during the Second World War, 1939 to '45, are a special cohort because we've always been out ahead of the boomers, leading the way, showing them how they can move in the direction of better quality of life. So it's appropriate that the Member for Lethbridge-East brings this bill and that I, for one, support it as a member of that Second World War cohort.

Now, I think that the idea of an independent commissioner has arrived, and if it's not accepted now, it will be soon because baby boomers will insist on it. They will insist that there be attention to monitoring quality and standards in long-term care institutions. The mechanisms that we have in place now are limited in their effectiveness. The Health Facilities Review Committee, established in 1973, may investigate complaints and report to the minister, but the committee does not check for compliance with all basic standards, such as the frequency of physician assessments and maintenance of health records, and the committee has no authority to enforce compliance.

The Protection for Persons in Care Act is legislation that requires health care providers and members of the public to report incidents of abuse against our seniors in long-term care facilities. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports in her speech in the House last week commented that the duties of the proposed commissioner in Bill 205 duplicates the PPIC, but I don't find that that's the case because the idea of a proposed commissioner adds a level of

enforcement that is missing in the PPIC. I think that a problem with most of our acts, acts like the Protection for Persons in Care Act, is that they don't go far enough in enabling there to be an investigation of long-term care facilities to maintain the right kind of standards.

The way this bill puts it is the right way, I think. Right up front in terms of the duties of the commissioner is the first one: "to monitor compliance with continuing care standards." That's the most important aspect of this bill and, then, on that basis, to go on and "to receive, review and investigate complaints regarding the health, safety or well-being of persons . . . in long-term care facilities."

Mr. Speaker, I think that the Auditor General's report was calling for this kind of response that we brought here in this bill. It's not enough just to investigate abuse complaints; it's important also to be able to have a commissioner who can initiate reviews and make investigations himself or herself into what these institutions are about and insist that there be compliance with basic standards.

The proposal of an independent commissioner is not something new. In fact, Alberta was the first province to appoint a public-sector ombudsman. Applying the concept of an ombudsman or a commissioner to long-term care is also not new. There are such ombudsmen for patients in hospitals in many other countries. There are also specialized long-term care ombudsmen and commissioners in the U.S. We should look at some of these examples.

There is a very fine article written in *Health Law in Canada* by Mary Marshall: Seniors Need Resources to Pursue Complaints. In this article she compares models from New Zealand and England and the U.S., and the consistent features of these models, of these special commissioners to oversee long-term care facilities, are that they're impartial, they're comprehensive, and they're independent. That's precisely the thrust of this bill: to set up a commissioner who is independent, accountable to the Legislature.

Seniors are a vulnerable group in our society, Mr. Speaker, and we need to take responsibility to put in place the kind of system we need to handle complaints effectively and especially to enforce adequate standards. This is a bill and a concept, an idea, that has arrived. I'm asking my colleagues to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 205, Continuing Care Standards Act, my first opportunity to speak to it. I think it represents an important contribution to seniors' care in the province and perhaps, in general principle, to the question of the public trust that we're addressing in this bill. Let me say that with the recent changes in the health care proposals there is a crisis of confidence in the province and a need to be clearly onside with citizens of the province and the concerns expressed by the Auditor General's report. We not only have to do what's right; we have to be seen to be doing what's right and make sure that whatever is happening is open to the public, especially the seniors, who are in a most vulnerable and dependent position when they enter these long-term care facilities or assisted living facilities.

The minister of health has emphasized in some of her new recommendations for the third way that there be choice and that there be somehow a justification for a two-tiered system which, in some unknown way, is supposed to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and improve quality when all evidence, Mr. Speaker, is to the contrary. So it's rightfully a concern for all Albertans, especially with the most vulnerable people, that this creeping privatization be met with a clear indication from government that we have an

accountable framework, that we have an independent person who is knowledgeable, experienced, and empowered to address some of the questions about what is actually going on in some of the long-term and assisted living facilities.

A second point I would like to make about this is that changes are being made and have already been made quite dramatically in our seniors' care system. There are dramatic increases in the number of private services and the shifting of the burden of the responsibility for paying for the medical costs – paying for the medications and for some of what many consider to be essential care – onto the private individual and family. I think that many people are obviously concerned about that. How is this transition going to be, and what kind of impact is it going to make on families? Is there somebody that is going to speak on behalf of these individuals and their families?

A result already of some of these dramatic changes is that I've heard increasing complaints from seniors themselves who are having trouble making their payments each month, especially if they're on a fixed income. In some cases individuals are extremely disadvantaged and very dissatisfied with the quality of everything from food to attending to their basic needs, and they feel that they have no recourse, that no one is really listening. Some of the changes may be improving conditions, but we need an accountability, that isn't present. The Auditor General's report added a real urgency to this. Again, Alberta could be a leader by demonstrating increased accountability and transparency around what is actually happening out there with so much dramatic change and privatization going on in our seniors' care, some of which is indeed showing inadequate, inconsistent, and unsafe conditions for people.

4:50

We must rebuild the trust of our seniors, and we must rebuild the trust of our families that what we are doing here is in the best interests of the public and especially those most vulnerable in our population. We have to have a clear staffing requirement and increase the number of hours per resident. That was strongly indicated. There have to be standards and then enforcement of the standards by regular or not so regular, indeed some unannounced, visits that will be able to assess whether they're actually being carried out in both the public and the private settings. That is essential. There can't be a two-tiered system going on here in terms of quality. Monitoring has to be there and a periodic public review so that people can be assured that what we say we're doing we're doing in the best interests of these people. Then policies have to emerge from that continuing review that say: we've learned this much, and now we have to make more changes as a result of this independent and authentic review of what's happening and, with that, an examination of whether the dollars are being well spent and whether they're actually resulting in the kind of changes that we say we want and that our seniors deserve.

A commissioner would be empowered to gather some of this data and analyze the data so that real actions and real recommendations could arise without bias and without vested interests influencing them. I think it would be a real demonstration of courage and leadership from this government if we were to see this come about, with the commissioner having free opportunity to inspect, investigate, and act, including imposing fines or penalties at least in some cases where the standards were not being met. This has to have teeth, or no one really responds to it.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the province must do the right thing and be seen to be doing the right thing in terms of a transparent, open, accountable process for the people. There's a profound dependency and powerlessness that many feel, including the families of some of

these dependent seniors and dependent adults, and there must be a really clear demonstration of a commitment to address some of these in an objective way through an empowered individual who acts on behalf of citizens in all respects. Staff and family must have input into this process as well. That may be a feature that we might emphasize in this particular role. When the vested interests in the institutions are not feeling free to speak for whatever reason – and whistle-blower legislation comes to mind in the context of the Legislature – when staff in these institutions do not feel empowered to speak, there must be the capacity for the commissioner to listen to affected families and the individuals themselves.

I hope that the Legislature will indeed support this important innovation, that is forward looking and inspired by a life of commitment to seniors' care by our member. It would demonstrate not only the willingness to do the right thing but the willingness to be seen to be doing the right thing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, do you wish to close the debate?

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am certainly grateful for all the kind words from my colleagues in this House, certainly from both sides of the House. I feel that my views are respected. That, I think, is what this House is all about, that we all stand up and be respected for our views.

This bill is asking for a person with legislated authority to enforce provincial standards with consequences, to protect all those in care regardless of where they live or who delivers the service. It becomes very complicated because basically what happens to someone in a facility is that they are one person but fall under two ministries. I think that's even more reason for one person independent from both ministries to be able to oversee the standards and to be able to have enforcement. Standards must be enforceable, or the paper that they're written on is useless.

The two committees, the Health Facilities Review Committee and the Protection for Persons in Care Act, have done some very good investigations, but they can only make recommendations. They have not had the teeth that people have been asking for. Had this been an effective way to deal with the problems previous to this, we wouldn't have heard that it isn't working. In fact, the Protection for Persons in Care Act cannot conduct complaint or regulatory reviews in long-term care facilities for basic standards, policies, procedures, or legislation. The Auditor General called for such a person to be able to review and also have powers of enforcement. The MLA task force heard time and time again for some accountability, particularly from families who felt that they were on a treadmill. Not unlike a gerbil in a wheel, they would go around and around and around and never ever come to a satisfactory conclusion. I also believe that we cannot have accountability delivered by class-action lawsuits.

This is a seniors' issue because the greatest number of people in continuing care are seniors. But let's be clear: it can be anybody in group homes, designated assisted living, assisted living, lodges, enhanced lodges, or even private, for-profit homes. It can be any permutation of any of these. We are still awaiting the provincial standards that will give us clear definitions as to what these actually are because they tend to be different across the different regions.

That's why I'm asking for support for Bill 205 to move forward to Committee of the Whole. I believe that we need a chance for further discussion and certainly the opportunity for perhaps amendments. I believe that we have two different concepts here, which have been spoken to with what I thought was a bit of a misunderstanding. I'm speaking of a commissioner to deal with continuing

care, which is different from the seniors' advocate that has been asked for and actually has been presented to a government standing policy committee. That is why I believe that we need further clarification at this point on the difference between these two concepts. The advantages would be that we could discuss how the bill could be implemented and the advantages that it would provide.

We must fight for our vulnerable citizens, knowing full well that as a rule they don't vote and, therefore, don't have as strong a voice. We have to protect them from neglect and abuse because it is the right thing to do. The government members have shown that they can vote as they see fit, so I ask for a vote from the heart and the head for the vulnerable in this province.

The Auditor General and the MLA task force have spent hundreds of hours working with stakeholders all over this province: with staff, families, and administration. I feel that to not go forward at this time to at least have further discussions and conversations in Committee of the Whole would be a disservice to this process. Therefore, that is why I am asking you to support Bill 205 to pass to Committee of the Whole.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:59 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Flaherty	Miller, R.
Backs	MacDonald	Pastoor
Blakeman	Martin	Swann
Bonko	Mather	Taylor
Elsalhy	Miller, B.	Tougas

5:10

Against the motion:

Abbott	Johnson	Ouellette
Ady	Knight	Prins
Amery	Liepert	Rodney
Brown	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Cenaiko	Lougheed	Stevens
Forsyth	McFarland	Strang
Fritz	Melchin	Tarchuk
Graydon	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Haley	Morton	Webber
Herard	Oberle	Zwozdesky
Horner		

Totals: For – 15 Against – 31

[Motion for second reading of Bill 205 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we now call it 5:30 and reassemble at 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:12 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 3, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/04/03

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Access to Grandchildren by Grandparents

505. Mr. Webber moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the positive and critical role that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren and to encourage access when it is in the best interest of the child.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In today's society where violence is prevalent on television, where dangerous drugs are hurting our children, and where life is becoming more complex and is changing at an ever-growing pace, the positive role that grandparents can play in the lives of their grandchildren cannot be overstated. This is why I brought forth Motion 505.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as a society I believe that we must encourage grandparents in this role and that we must ensure that grandparents have the opportunity to take part in the lives of their grandchildren when it is in their grandchildren's best interest. However, as a society we are also obligated to follow the law, which is largely based on historical precedents and the balancing of rights. This balance is often a very delicate one that has to be re-examined and reconsidered routinely. The examination of this balance is what compelled me to bring forth this motion. This balance is very delicate, and any changes to it must be made only after very carefully exploring the options.

Unfortunately, I don't have the answers. Instead I will put forward the issues and hope that we can have a productive discussion on the matter. Now, apparently, Mr. Speaker, we have a very long list of members who wish to speak on this motion, so I will attempt to keep my remarks brief so that others do have an opportunity to share their thoughts on the role grandparents should play in the lives of their grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, legal precedent tells us that in the absence of evidence that demonstrates a parent's inability to act in the best interests of his or her child, a parent's right to make decisions on his or her children's behalf should be respected. Alberta's Family Law Act seems to agree with this notion. The legislation includes provisions that allow for grandparents to apply to the courts to obtain a contact order to see their grandchildren.

It is more difficult for grandparents who want to gain access to their grandchildren when the family is intact. To clarify, an intact family is one where the parents are not separated or divorced but rather are together but don't allow their children to see their grandparent or grandparents. In these cases grandparents must go through an additional hoop: they must first obtain leave from the court, which means that they must obtain the court's permission to apply for access to their grandchildren. The reason for this provision is that allowing grandparents to apply for access to grandchildren in cases of intact families may be disruptive to those families.

Mr. Speaker, according to Marilyn Marks of the Alberta Grandparents Association this provision is unfair to grandparents in intact families. This organization believes that parents should be charged

with the responsibility of proving that grandparents are unfit to have access to their grandchildren. Currently the onus is on the grandparents to prove that they are worthy. This group also believes that the right of access and visitation is the right of the child, not the parents. Finally, the group complains that Alberta's intact family children are discriminated against and that nonintact family children are seen as needing their grandparents more.

Mr. Speaker, these are clearly two very different positions, and finding a resolution is no simple task. However, the Alberta Grandparents Association has some suggestions. One of these suggestions is to include mandatory mediation as a means of bringing all parties to the table to find some kind of resolution for everyone involved. This may be a valid solution; however, we cannot simply make mediation mandatory and call that the end of it. There may be many considerations to discuss. We may be limited in the number of mediators that we have in the province. It may take a substantial amount of time and money to make mandatory mediation a possibility.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the issues surrounding grandparents' rights to see their grandchildren, and mandatory mediation may be one of the possible solutions. As our Premier often says, "For every action there is an opposite and often negative reaction," and with this issue there is a very careful balance to strike between the rights of parents, grandparents, and, most importantly, children.

In the meantime, however, I would like to stress that I believe that in most situations grandparents do play a very positive and critical role in the lives of their grandchildren and that they should be encouraged to play a role when it is in the best interests of the child. This is why I brought this motion forward and why I want it discussed here tonight. As for the more difficult question of whether our laws find the appropriate balance or whether mandatory mediation may be a reasonable solution, I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In speaking to Motion 505, I am a grandparent. It's a role I cherish, which brings me great joy, fulfillment, and pride. Accessing grandchildren, fortunately, is not a problem for many families. There are definitely unfortunate situations where it may not be in the best interest of the child to spend time with their grandparents, and parents have legitimate concerns about gaining access. There are, however, times in which the situation is not clear-cut, and grandparents have unfairly been denied access.

Once they have to use it, the Family Law Act is difficult for grandparents to understand and navigate. The onus is placed on grandparents to bring an application before the courts in order to be granted the right of access in single-parent families. The process is even more restrictive in intact families, as the member opposite mentioned, for grandparents are required to obtain the leave of the court prior to bringing application for access before the court.

Grandparents face extra hurdles that are not in their best interests and certainly not in the best interests of the child. This onus on grandparents is counter to what we know intuitively and what research supports in terms of the benefits of a grandparent's access to the child, the parents, the grandparents, and society as a whole.

In the past two throne speeches the government recognized that it doesn't take a single parent to raise a child; it takes a community, and grandparents are an important part of that community. The Family Law Act doesn't appear to include the assumption that the child has the right to have a relationship with grandparents. An

application must be made in order for the child to obtain contact with a grandparent. When parents or guardians deny access to grandchildren, they should be required to provide valid reasons for denying access. Legal fees are financially prohibitive, especially as many grandparents are retired and on fixed incomes. At this point grandparents are assumed guilty and then have to prove themselves innocent. That is the reverse of the process of law.

In Alberta the family law system is fragmented, sometimes resulting in two to three different levels of courts, which can be confusing and exhausting. An alternative which has been put forward is the notion of mandatory mediation as an amendment to existing legislation, thereby facilitating a conflict resolution process where all parties involved could come out winners. This is a suggested alternative. I'm not suggesting that the government take this particular approach, but it would be one of the tools in potential resolution of the problem.

In 2000 the unified family court system was suggested to help facilitate resolution of family disputes, but this concept, unfortunately, was dropped. We need this type of unified family court system in which to deal with grandparent/grandchild access denial issues. This unified family court concept makes sense, with specialized judges and services that will enable Albertans to resolve their disputes with the least possible damage for those involved.

Access decisions must be in the best interests of the child. This important concept can and should be processed in a more simplified manner with less financial and emotional burden. Burden of proof that the grandparents' access to grandchildren would be detrimental should fall on the court, a mediator, or the Children's Aid Society or its equivalent. Decisions must be evidence based, not hearsay based.

8:10

I support the arguments of organizations such as the Alberta Grandparents Association, which the hon. member noted, who are calling on this province to make family law more child friendly as it pertains to grandchild/grandparent access. It is with this in mind that I have put forward a notice of amendment. I have gone over my intentions and the amendment's intentions with the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

The intent of the amendment – it's being circulated as we speak. My intent in the amendment is to restore the original wording of the motion as it was first conceived. It was conceived in partnership with Marilyn Marks of, I believe, the Grandparents Association.

I want to provide a very brief history of this. I doubt very much that there's a member in this Assembly who has not had some form of correspondence from Marilyn over the last number of years. Marilyn has presented to a number of individuals and to the rural caucus as recently as last week. She was very appreciative of that offer and felt that she was heard out. I'm very pleased that people took the time to listen to Marilyn's concerns.

Marilyn approached me about a year and a half ago. I had just fairly recently become a grandparent, so I was extremely receptive to what Marilyn was saying. I worked with Marilyn over the past year and a half. This past summer I spoke to a number of grandparents who were in a similar position as Marilyn found herself, who did not have access to their grandchildren. I believe that just about everybody has received the amendment. My intention is to move this amendment and if I could seek explanation from the Speaker as to how he would like to number the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you moving the amendment now?

Mr. Chase: Yes. That is my intent.

Mr. Chase moved that Motion Other Than Government Motion 505 be amended by striking out "recognize the positive and critical role that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren and to encourage access when it is in the best interest of the child" and substituting "protect the rights of grandparents by introducing legislation to make it less onerous and burdensome for them to gain access to their grandchildren."

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. We will circulate the amendment. I believe it's circulated now. We will refer to it as amendment A1.

When you're finished, we'll proceed with debate on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Speaking to the amendment, continuing the background history, there are hundreds of grandparents who, unfortunately, find themselves denied access for a variety of reasons, many of which are unjustified. When Marilyn approached me and asked for my advice – as I say, I worked with her – I consulted a number of grandparents over the summer and heard their very sad stories. I advised Marilyn based on the reality that private member's bills or motions that are put forward do not succeed very well, especially, unfortunately, if they're brought forward by opposition members. Marilyn asked me, "Can you think of an individual who was elected as a representative of the government who might take on such a task?" and I will indicate that the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills came very quickly to mind.

He's a member of the Calgary-Varsity constituency. We share concerns about a wide variety of things, including not wanting to see Nose Hill park paved over. We worked together and supported Brentwood mural initiatives. So it seemed to me that this would be the individual to approach. I believe he's sincere. I believe he's passionate. I believe he's compassionate. I don't give you permission to use that in your next election brochure, but recognizing the wisdom.

What has happened is that I believe the member has been persuaded to change the original wording which was, as noted in this amendment which recalls and calls for the original wording to be reinstated, to "protect the rights of grandparents by introducing legislation to make it less onerous and burdensome for them to gain access to their grandchildren." Now, in both his original motion and the somewhat watered-down motion, well, tremendously watered-down motion, the word "urge" is there. There is still no compulsion on the government's part to undertake any of the suggestions that have been provided. Both motions urge the government; however, in the original motion it was much stronger. It said, "protect the rights." It recognized that grandparents had rights, and that's extremely important.

By introducing legislation to make it less onerous, the introduction, the type of legislation is completely up to the government. I'm not trying to suggest how that legislation should occur. I recognize the government's role in creating that legislation. In order to protect grandparents and recognize their rights and improve their accessibility to their grandchildren, just talking in terms of recognizing the positive and critical role, you know, do we send them a card: "Dear Grandparent, I recognize that you have a positive and critical role to fulfill"? I believe we need to go further and not just recognize but protect. That is the key point of my amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General on the amendment.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and make some comments with respect to Motion 505 and the

proposed amendment A1. The motion as originally drafted recognizes “the positive and critical role that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren and [encourages] access when it is in the best interest of the child.” I think it’s fair to say that when you hear those words, you almost assuredly would say: of course. Alberta Justice recognizes the positive role that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren. Fortunately, in the vast number of cases grandparents are able to access their grandchildren without any difficulty whatsoever.

However, in those situations where there is conflict between the parents and the grandparents on the issue of access, the new Family Law Act applies. So the remarks that I’m going to make this evening are to enlighten those who are listening and the members of the Assembly who might not have been here before the last election as to how we got to where we are today. There is a history to that, and I think it’s important that we revisit it.

The Family Law Act applies where there is a conflict with respect to access for grandparents to their grandchildren. The Family Law Act changed grandparents’ access provisions to strike a balance between the rights of grandparents and the rights of parents. It did this by establishing conditions that must be met by grandparents before an access application can be made to the courts. The nature of the conditions that must be met differs depending on the reason for the interruption of the grandparents’ access.

To explain that, I’d like to outline how these cases were addressed before the Family Law Act. Before the Family Law Act the Provincial Court Act allowed a grandparent to apply for an access order any time access to their grandchild was refused. Although this appears to be a broad provision, the courts were reluctant to grant access orders where there was an intact family and both parents were opposed to the access. The courts generally found that it was not in the best interests of the grandchildren to order access in an intact family when it would continue the conflict between parents and grandparents.

Additionally, parents often incurred significant cost to defend these applications, leaving the family impoverished after the court process. This also was not in the best interests of the grandchildren. Because of this practice, under the Family Law Act grandparents now need to seek leave or permission from the court to apply for contact. The addition of this first step gives the court a chance to assess the merits of the grandparents’ case and decide if it should proceed to the next phase, the actual application for access per se. This helps prevent unnecessary litigation, hardship, and cost.

8:20

As I noted earlier, the courts are very reluctant to interfere with parental decisions in an intact family, and the legislation now reflects that fact. Grandparents do not require leave from the court when one of the parents is deceased or where the parents are living separate and apart and as a result the grandparents’ contact with the child has been interrupted. This reflects the fact that denial of access in a nonintact family may be a reflection of a changed family circumstance that may be unfair to both grandparents and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, before the court makes a contact order, it must be satisfied of the following: the contact is in the best interests of the child; the child’s physical, psychological, or emotional health may be jeopardized if the contact is denied; and the denial of contact between the child and the grandparent is unreasonable. They consider these things because sometimes there are valid reasons for parents to deny access to grandparents. So we can see that the Family Law Act has provided a good balance between the rights of parents and the rights of grandparents, depending on the individual family situation.

Before it was passed, the Family Law Act went through a rigorous public consultation process, where this very issue was debated extensively. I believe we reached a reasonable solution at that time, especially for children who stand in the middle of the debate. Throughout the consultation the interests of children were of paramount concern for everyone involved, and it is those interests that the Family Law Act protects first and foremost.

Given that the new act was just passed into law last spring and came into force only last October, it would be premature to look at amending the legislation just yet. We need to take some time to determine if the policy objectives of the legislation are being met. This will not only give the legislation time to work in practice, but it also recognizes the efforts of the many Albertans who took part in the stakeholder consultation process.

I can also tell the members of the Assembly that the Alberta Grandparents Association participated in the Family Law Act public consultation process in 2002. They’ve also corresponded on many occasions with Alberta Justice, met with the previous minister, met with myself, and made a presentation on grandparents’ access to the Justice standing policy committee prior to the passage of the Family Law Act. Mr. Speaker, we’ve heard their concerns, and as a result the previous minister identified grandparents’ access as an issue requiring special attention in the legislative process. All sides of the grandparents’ access issue were heard from during discussion of the Family Law Act when it was before the Legislature, and the Legislature made an informed decision to proceed with some restrictions on grandparents’ access.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, the government does not propose to reopen grandparents’ access provisions until we have had some significant experience with the existing provisions of the act and have determined if the policy objectives of the legislation are being met.

As to the amendment A1 put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, that would call for change to legislation which, quite frankly, is premature and for which there is no basis, this matter having been gone through extensively in the very recent past, just before he came to this Assembly.

I want to emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that the Alberta government recognizes that grandparents often have a special relationship with their grandchildren, and wherever possible we want to see those relationships remain intact. However, the interests of grandparents sometimes conflict with the interests of parents, who may find that grandparents interfere with their ability to raise their children or to manage their family life. We are certainly aware of the concerns raised by grandparents who want access, but our first consideration must be what is in the best interests of the children. Quite frankly, we believe that the Family Law Act at this point is structured in such a fashion and allows the courts to balance the rights of grandparents and parents, considering that contact will be in the best interests of the child if, in fact, it is awarded to the grandparents.

It is always a tragic situation when access is denied to someone who loves the child in question. But the fact is that whether you’re talking about grandparent access or whether you’re talking about access of separated parents, these kinds of conflicts almost assuredly become intractable. I can assure you that it would be much better if we did not have the parties going before the courts and bringing forward experts to give evidence and having incredible sums of money spent on the process, but that is unfortunately an aspect of our society. This particular process that we have here is in large measure similar to the type of process that is available for parents. It would be better to not need any of it, but it is necessary to have some method of this nature.

As I’ve indicated, it is early days. We need more time to assess

it. We will assess it in the future, and it may be that the system will require some change at that time. At that time we can consider some of the proposals that will be discussed here this evening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills for bringing the motion forward and special thanks to my colleague from Calgary-Varsity for introducing amendment A1 to make the motion more aligned with the original intent of the motion, I believe; that is, to recognize the critical roles that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren. I, too, have communicated with the Grandparents Association, and as a new grandparent myself I empathize with the concerns of this group and of grandparents who do not share the joy of raising a grandchild.

It is unfortunate that this bill, the Family Law Act, has the effect of placing such a unique burden on grandparents wanting to have access to their grandchildren. This has the effect of robbing children of the positive influences that grandparents can have on the development of children. Does the new Motion 505 really recognize the positive and critical role that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren? According to the Family Law Act as it pertains to grandchild/grandparent access where the parents are together, grandparents are required to jump two additional hurdles and must obtain the leave of the court on notice to the parents or guardian prior to perhaps being permitted to bring an application for access before the courts.

This legislation makes the process for grandparents in this position so burdensome that it becomes extremely difficult for them to be successful in the process. This is systemic discrimination by virtue of being a grandparent involved in this legislation. This discriminatory treatment contravenes grandparents' constitutional right of equality before and under law and equal protection and benefit of law.

The Family Law Act as it pertains to grandchild/grandparent access makes it extremely difficult for grandparents to play a positive and critical role in the lives of the grandchildren. This is not in the best interests of the child. When I look at division 3, Contact Orders, section 35(4) of the Family Law Act, this section does not inherently support the child developing a relationship with grandparents. Instead, this section places obstacles in the way of such a relationship developing. This is not in the best interests of the child as research suggests that children will benefit emotionally, physically, relationally, and socially from a healthy relationship with grandparents.

There are many benefits that I think we can talk about. Certainly, grandparents provide a stabilizing force in times of family crisis. Sometimes a grandparent may be the only stable element in a chaotic family situation. This suggests less reliance on public resources, such as social services, children's hospitals, and community counselling centres. Research also indicates that grandparents contribute to child development by socializing with grandchildren, giving financial and emotional support, passing history, values, and traditions to the grandchildren. Relationships with grandparents add qualitative and quantitative dimensions to the pool of adult role models available to children, and children's relationships with their own grandparents affect their relationships with their own grandchildren down the road.

In terms of developmental issues researchers have found that the unconditional love that grandparents bestow upon grandchildren aids

in their self-esteem and in their confidence. It gives them a belief that they are important and that they matter and that they can be successful. During adolescence grandchildren find it beneficial sometimes to tap the wisdom and ancestry of grandparents as they're trying to figure out their own identity. This positive psychosocial role that grandparents play suggests that the family unit as a whole may rely less on public social resources to aid with developmental tasks. From a long-term developmental perspective, continuity in relationships is helpful. In our current society, with high divorce rates, economic hardship, and drug/alcohol abuse, grandparents may be a long-term stabilizing force in a young person's life. Again, this suggests less reliance on public resources to assist with filling emotional needs.

8:30

The overriding principle of the Family Law Act in terms of access to children by grandparents if the parents do not want to provide access is the philosophy that the parental rights come first. Therefore, the test that has been placed in the act is against the grandparents. They have to prove that they have valid reasons to have access to their grandchildren or contact with their grandchildren rather than the parent having to prove that the contact should be denied. This test is too onerous on grandparents. It is too hard. It should be the goal of the Family Law Act to promote positive relationships in a young person's life, to have positive role models and loving individuals to look out for children as much as possible. However, this act has placed a barrier to grandparents wanting to provide that unconditional love and support. The test is too harsh and, in fact, presumes that grandparents are guilty of being incapable of providing a positive influence.

This reverse onus is contrary to the fundamental principles of justice that state that an individual is innocent until proven guilty. The onus should be on the parent who wants to deny access to prove that the grandparent is unfit, not for the grandparent to prove their worth to have contact with the grandchild. In essence, when parents want to deny access to grandchildren, the onus should be on them to provide valid reasons for denial of access.

I support this amended bill because it is the right thing to do, I believe, for Alberta's children and grandparents. I realize that the bill is new, that it needs time, and that we may be looking at revisions down the road, but I believe that this bill right now does not do anything close to what should be done for the grandparents of this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in order to speak to the amendment on Motion 505. I believe that this is an important issue, that grandchildren are very near and dear to the hearts of those of us who are fortunate enough to have grandkids. Grandparents are often an important part of the children's lives. Many grandparents look after their grandkids on a regular basis and have a positive influence on them.

When I was very young and growing up as a farm boy, I lived with my mom and dad two miles from my grandparents. Two miles where I'm from is like two blocks in the city. They not only babysat my sisters and me; they were also teachers of the things my mom and dad didn't have time for. They taught me the basics of the German language, the appreciation of history both in Alberta as homesteaders and of the way of life in the old country. They also taught me the appreciation of our environment and of our way of life in southern Alberta. From the age of about seven or eight I rode my

bicycle two miles to my grandparents' house to visit, to enjoy my grandmother's cookies, to help them with the yard work, and just to be around them. These are times that I will cherish forever.

I myself, Mr. Speaker, have 10 wonderful grandchildren. Spending time with them is something I enjoy and I look forward to. I can't imagine how badly I would feel were I unable to see all 10 of them on a regular basis or at all.

Mr. Speaker, if grandparents are not abusive or violent toward the children or their parents, I believe they should be allowed access to their grandchildren. Children can benefit from grandparents in their lives. Therefore, such relationships should be encouraged whenever possible. If grandparents do not pose a threat to their children or grandchildren, I see no reason why they should not have access to their grandkids.

When parents deny access to the grandchild because they're upset with their own parents, whatever the reason may be, it's not fair to the child. Children should not be used by parents as bargaining chips. It's the children who lose out when their parents or guardians deny access between them and their grandparents.

I believe the problem of access, Mr. Speaker, is especially worrisome in a case where two parents separate or divorce. These are difficult times for all parties involved. However, I believe that the grandparents' access to the children is often left as an afterthought. This is very unfortunate. These are difficult times, no doubt, but a child's relationship with their grandparents is a special one and one that should not be ignored regardless of what is occurring between the child's parents.

I do recognize that we have in Alberta an established process to address grandparents' access to their grandchildren under the Family Law Act. The Family Law Act includes a process by which grandparents can apply to the court for a contact order with their grandchild. In granting a contact order or in refusing one, the court must consider what is in the best interests of the child. I think this concept of the best interests of the child is vitally important. Therefore, if the court feels that contact with the grandparent is in the best interests of the child, then the contact order will be granted.

I also recognize that there's a different process for families that are still intact versus families that have broken up. In cases where families are still whole, grandparents are required to ask leave from the court first before they can apply to the court for a hearing regarding a contact order with the grandchild. I understand the reason for this procedure is that going to court is seen as disruptive to the family, and it may not be in line with the desires of the parents or guardians of the children. However, as Motion 505 indicates, the fact that the Family Law Act places the burden on grandparents to essentially prove that they have a legitimate right to see their grandchildren may sometimes be requiring a bit too much.

Mr. Speaker, I can understand the basis for the process as established in the Family Law Act regarding grandparents trying to obtain an access order to their grandchildren. However, I also believe that we should try to ensure that the relationships between grandparents and their grandkids are not inhibited unnecessarily. As I previously mentioned, grandparents can be a very positive role model for their grandchildren, and their involvement in the lives of their grandkids can have a very positive influence as children grow and develop.

As a grandparent I can't imagine what it must be like to have your own child deny you access to your grandchildren. Sincerely, Mr. Speaker, I hope that I never have to experience that situation. Yes, parents are by far the most influential people in the lives of their children, but grandparents often play an integral role as well. In this day and age I think it's important that all children have as many good role models surrounding them as they possibly can.

Mr. Speaker, because I'm a grandparent and feel that this role is an important one and one that should be taken very seriously, I stand today to offer my support for Motion 505 as originally written. I cannot support the amendment. I look forward to hearing from the other hon. members on this subject.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to see this go back to the original intent. I understand that the law is new and perhaps should be given a chance for evaluation, but I'm not sure that this is something we should be waiting on. The divorce rate is almost 2 to 1, and that certainly doesn't constitute the intact family. How many of our children are falling through the cracks because grandparents can't step into that void and help?

The power and the influence that grandparents have has been alluded to, and certainly in many cultures grandparents actually do raise that second generation while the parents go out and work. I'm thinking that the native community and certainly many of the Asian communities have that skip, where the grandparents are actually doing the raising. Yes, it does take a community, but more importantly it often takes that community that is drawn together and connected by blood.

I heard the expression "babysitting," and I probably would take exception to that because I like the term "grandparenting." I don't babysit; I grandparent. I think it's very important that if we start using that kind of language, people will start thinking and recognizing that importance.

It has been mentioned that children should never be used in a situation where adults are acting more like the children that they're supposedly looking after. I just think that at this point in time it's very important to go back to the original intent and the original motion as it was presented. This amendment A1 would then take us back to the beginning. I think it's very important that this be done at this point in time. We can actually work very hard for those kids that are falling through the cracks as we speak.

Thank you.

8:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak against amendment A1. Most of the members of this Assembly who are present this evening can likely recall fond memories of the times spent with their grandparents. They may recall the anticipation that they felt on those family car trips to visit their grandparents, trips that felt so long, or the special candy their grandmother would keep in a bowl on the coffee table in her living room. They may remember the special fishing trip with their grandfather or the summer they spent an entire week at their grandparents' all by themselves.

Many of the members here now have grandchildren of their own and are making new memories. They now realize that their grandparents enjoyed the time spent together just as much as they did. Grandparents play a virtual role in the lives of their grandchildren. The interaction between children and their grandparents is extremely valuable. The time spent with the grandparents is an important way for children to learn how to interact with older people. Often the first significant contact that children have with seniors or older individuals in general is with their grandparents. Children learn how to better relate to people of different age groups. They learn from

the visits with their grandparents that they should interact differently with older people than they would with playmates of their own age or even with their parents or teachers.

Grandchildren are forever learning from their grandparents. This may sound like a cliché, but grandparents are a link to the past. Through their grandparents children have learned more about their family's history, their heritage, and their communities. Grandparents teach their grandchildren about different times. Times pass so quickly now, and change is greater from generation to generation. We've become so caught up in the present that it's easy to forget about the past, even the recent past. It is important to maintain and celebrate those links and remember where we came from.

Mr. Speaker, I do realize that the issues of access to children by grandparents can be a touchy subject at times. It is important to strike the right balance in this matter. It is necessary to be fair to the grandparents who wish to visit the grandchildren. The process of visitation should not become too onerous. Grandparents often play a critical and positive role in the lives of grandchildren, and access should be encouraged when it is in the best interests of their grandchildren. Children can never have too many loving, supportive family members in their lives.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to recognize that at the end of the day parents are parents, and parents must have the right to raise their children as they see fit. It is also imperative to acknowledge the rights and well-being of the children. It is sometimes easy to get caught up in the debate of the rights of the parents versus the grandparents and lose sight of the children. Decisions regarding access should always be made with the best interests of the child in mind.

Mr. Speaker, this is why I can't support amendment A1. I strongly support Motion 505. I'm pleased to recognize the positive influence of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren, and I feel it's important to encourage access where it is in the best interests of the child.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the amendment to Motion 505 regarding grandparents' access to grandchildren. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Foothills for bringing this motion forward for this discussion. It's a very sensitive and complex issue.

In a perfect world legislation would not be required to allow grandparents to visit their grandchildren. I believe that children, parents, grandparents, and all of society benefit from having access to those who love them most. We all have memories of our grandparents and the joy we felt in our hearts whenever we went to visit them, or perhaps we might remember the fear as well. I remember the love and consideration that my grandmother bestowed on all her grandchildren, and I also remember the fear I felt when my grandfather discovered us in the peach orchards eating his profits.

I did not, however, realize the impact and the sacredness of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren until after I had become a parent and was visiting my parents in their snowbird home in Florida. They lived in a retirement park along with many other seniors. While visiting with my parents and their neighbours and listening to their conversations, I began to realize the importance of grandchildren in their lives. They talked about each other's families. The greatest news in the park was that Jane and Leo's two grandchildren were coming to visit and that Nick and Bernice's grandchildren were staying for another three days and that Bea and Harry's daughter was having her first baby. Their greatest joy was sharing

stories of their children and grandchildren, looking forward to visits with their grandchildren, and sharing their time with these little shining stars.

It was an incredible revelation to me because as a parent of three small children at the time, I had no idea why snotty noses, dirty faces, and stinky diapers could bring such joy. Now as a grandparent of five of those wonders of the world I understand. It's those tiny arms wrapped around your neck or your leg, whichever they can reach at the time, and those butterfly kisses that say without words that you are the most important person in the world and the most loved that make every moment together with them a piece of paradise.

Sadly, however, this is not a perfect world, and legislation is required to assist some grandparents in gaining access to grandchildren, and we need to ask ourselves: does the current Family Law Act protect the rights of all parties involved? This is a straightforward question that may have a much more complicated answer. This is especially true because every situation is different. For example, there is no doubt that the involvement of another positive personal influence aside from a parent can have a profound impact on a child. Grandparents are often seen as role models for children, acting as a means of support in good and difficult times, able to share advice, or simply willing to share their time.

In most situations, Mr. Speaker, it can certainly be argued that it is in the best interests of children to have grandparents involved in their lives. It is for these reasons that grandparents should have access to their grandchildren. They have the ability to make such an enormous contribution to their upbringing, but this is not always the case.

Even though the grandparents' relationship with the child can be strong, their relations can still become strained with the parents. Sometimes disputes between parents and grandparents can lead to the parents blocking the grandparents from contacting the child. It is subjective situations like this that make it difficult to determine if such an obstruction is justified.

To the contrary, there are situations where grandparents can have a negative influence on a child. Physical abuse at the hand of a grandparent can be just as damaging or more damaging to the spirit of a child than abuse from a parent. Similarly, mental abuse or neglect can have an equally damaging effect on a child. Ultimately, it is up to parents or legal guardians to use their judgment in who they decide to expose their children to. Even so, it is important that laws are in place to formally protect the child from this sort of abuse and to minimize the potential for people to have a negative influence on their lives while at the same time assisting those who have a positive influence.

However, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that this is a question of governance alone. The Family Law Act exists for this very reason. It is a mechanism that aims to protect the best interests of everyone involved but most importantly those of children. Under this legislation parents have the right to deny grandparents access to their children. I believe this debate to be more about efficient governance. More specifically, does the law go too far in making it difficult for grandparents to see their grandchildren with no substantiated reason? The difficulty lies in determining whether grandparents should have to prove that they are fit to have access to the grandchildren or whether parents should have to prove that they are not.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that seems to have no easy answers. There appears to be a dichotomy between how far the law should go to protect children and the risk of alienating important people from

their lives in the process. One thing is for certain: whether it is determined that current legislation should be modified or not, the best interests of the child must remain the first priority.

As the debate goes on, I look forward to hearing from my other colleagues on the subject. I would not support this amendment as I believe that it fails to recognize that it is a natural law that two parents intact should make decisions that are in the best interests of their children.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join the debate on the amendment to Motion 505 as sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills. In contemporary society it is vital to recognize the importance of strong and supportive families. It is crucial to the well-being of all Albertans to create and foster a social environment that encourages such families. We cannot stress enough the value of the family as the family is the cornerstone of our democratic society, the human and social link between the past, the present, and the future. We should recall the adage that civilization may be a thousand years old, but it's only a generation deep.

It is the experience of the family that socializes children into a contemporary society and that transforms the "me" into the "we." Today we see the corruption and erosion of the traditional family. Deterioration of the family experience is becoming all too common a reality in our society as divorce rates continue to rise. The decline of the family has resulted in the weakening of civil society and brought about negative social and economic consequences. According to the philosopher Rousseau it is the experience of the family that attaches children first to their relatives and then to their fellow citizens. If family ties are weakened, the larger social ties are also weakened.

While the core of the family, the mother/father/child triad, must be protected, it is important to recognize the positive influence of members of the extended family in the lives of children and particularly the role of grandparents. Children need the love and support of family members, and grandparents often play a substantial and positive role in the lives of their grandchildren. Grandparents contribute to the well-being of a child. The positive interaction between a child and her grandparents is an important method of social development.

Grandparents are important sources of knowledge. Their infinite reserves of patience make them excellent teachers. Grandchildren have an opportunity to learn about respect, tradition, and history from their grandparents. They can learn more about their families and their heritage. They can also learn more about what life was like during their grandparents' generation. Let's be frank: grandparents are a lot more fun than parents.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to promote the well-being of our children and ensure that families are provided with tools to that end. If it's in the child's best interest for her grandparents to be granted regular access, then such access should be encouraged. Access should be fair and not overly burdensome to the grandparents. However, the right of the grandparents to visit the grandchildren must be balanced with the rights of parents to raise their children in the manner they think best and make decisions on behalf of their children. I strongly believe that as a society we must do all we can to promote strong, nurturing families. We must protect the societal values that are based on the family.

By recognizing the social importance of family relationships and encouraging family relationships that are in the best interests of the children, Motion 505 speaks to that end. I oppose the amendment to 505 for the reasons given by previous speakers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak against amendment A1. Children are our precious resource, but for children to reach their full potential, they must have positive influences in their lives. We were all children once, and we can all remember the degree to which our opinions and values were shaped by those around us.

Those children who are fortunate enough to have known their grandparents benefit from a truly unique opportunity. The relationship between a child and a grandparent is a truly special one, a relationship that is built on a lifetime of caring and giving. When we speak of giving, Mr. Speaker, I think we should all consider the magnitude of what grandparents have to give. They have an unbelievable amount of experience and wisdom to share. These are things that can instill in children a sense of historical connection and understanding that can't be found anywhere else.

Many adults today – and I'm sure there are many of my colleagues among them – look back with great fondness on the time with their grandparents. They were a link to a different time, a simpler time when the values of community and family were paramount, a time when people helped each other without question and worked together to overcome adversity.

To approach the future, it is necessary to have an understanding of the past. Grandparents have a lifetime of knowledge and experience. They have a living connection to a past that would otherwise exist only in history books and television documentaries. Experience and wisdom aside, Mr. Speaker, I also think that each inclusion of a loving and caring individual into the life of a child is in that child's best interest. Every positive influence, every happy experience: these things will all become part of that child's foundation as he or she grows older.

This relationship works the other way as well. I don't think that there's anything that brings more joy to the heart of a grandparent than time spent with a grandchild, unless it's the opportunity to spoil grandchildren rotten and send them home again. That is something which I'm sure some of us have enjoyed and the rest of us look forward to.

Unfortunately and increasingly so, the lives of children are not always happy. It is a sad fact but a fact nonetheless that more and more couples are getting divorced. Often children become caught in the middle, especially in cases where parents are involved in a dispute with each other. This process can be terribly hard on children, but sometimes the pain is compounded when grandparents are denied access to their grandchildren because of a dispute between parents. This is awful and tragic, but it does happen. On other occasions a dispute may occur between a child's grandparents and parents with the same result of access being denied. This is also tragic. It is another example of conflict affecting an innocent third party.

Now, I realize, Mr. Speaker, that there are certain cases where grandparents shouldn't have access to their grandchildren just as there are cases where parents shouldn't either. As much as we would like it to be otherwise, there are bad people who do bad things. These people, whether they are abusive, violent, or otherwise potentially harmful to a child, have no business being around children. We have laws in place to deal with these situations, laws which I believe provide a good degree of protection for those who need it.

Current family law legislation is centred around the premise of the best interests of the child. This is an admirable goal, but it is perhaps a test that is more suited to resolving conflict between parents and between a parent and a third party, such as a grandpar-

ent. My main concern is that children are sometimes used as pawns in a war between adults. The specifics of family law are a discussion topic for another day, Mr. Speaker, but I think the debate here tonight has brought forth a very important and worthwhile point that may resurface if and when the time comes to re-examine those laws.

The point that I and many of my colleagues have made here tonight is that the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is special, special enough that, in my opinion, we should recognize it and encourage it not only on a personal level but with our affirmation of Motion 505 as it stands without the amendment. Grandparents are special people with a great deal of love to give to their grandchildren, who in turn have a great deal to give back. From such a relationship we all benefit.

So I would urge my colleagues to join me in not supporting the amendment A1 as I believe that Motion 505 in its current form addresses the concerns raised. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, I was actually hoping to speak to the motion rather than the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time under Standing Order 8(4), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate – I would invite the hon. member to do so at this time.

Did you want to speak on the amendment in your time allotted?

Mr. Rodney: I'll speak on the motion, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

9:00

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to close?

Mr. Webber: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. In my opening remarks I spoke about the Family Law Act, legal precedents, and the need to find an appropriate balance between the right of a parent, a grandparent, and a child. These are very important issues that are difficult to balance. On the one hand, parents have a right to raise their children in the manner they see fit. On the other hand, grandparents can play a very important role in the lives of their grandchildren, and as a society we should be encouraging positive and nurturing relationships.

Alberta's Family Law Act is based on the concept of best interests of a child, and all decisions made by the courts must be made according to this concept. However, according to the Alberta Grandparents Association, the right of access and visitation is the right of the child, not the parents. To resolve these differences, the association suggests creating a unified family court system where prosecutors and judges are specially trained in family law matters.

Another possible solution that is supported by the association is mandatory mediation as a means of bringing all parties to the table to find a resolution that is good for everyone involved. Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that most people in this Assembly place a great deal of value on the positive role that grandparents can play in the lives of their grandchildren, and as the population ages, this issue is likely to become more prevalent. As I stated in my opening comments, a possible solution to this may be mandatory mediation. However, making mediation mandatory may take some time. They

may need to train more mediators, and to set up such a system takes time and money. The courts are currently very busy. The population is growing. All of these factors are causing strains on the system, which complicates things even more.

These are some of the issues that need to be resolved. For now I will agree with many of my colleagues and would therefore like to recognize the importance of the relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren. I believe that such relationships should be encouraged when they are in the best interests of the child.

I'd like to conclude by thanking everybody for participating in this important discussion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 16 Peace Officer Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to Bill 16, Peace Officer Act. I compliment the hon. member who is bringing this bill for all the work that has gone into this particular bill. It brings a lot of clarity to the whole structuring of the peace officer program.

I think that we have already said in second reading that much of the substance of this bill is left for the regulations, so when it comes to trying to anticipate what we're looking at when we would look at the peace officers in terms of the categories, appropriate training, and ability to bear arms and so on, it's really difficult to pinpoint where we're going. It seems that a lot is left for the regulations in the future.

Well, there are different sections of this bill, and hopefully my colleagues will address some of these sections. I'm going to focus on part 2. Part 1 deals with the employer's authorizations and peace officer's appointments. Part 2 deals with complaints and discipline, and in this section, the beginning of section 14, it says that any person may "make a complaint in writing regarding a peace officer to the peace officer's authorized employer," and then in section 15 about the investigation it focuses on the authorized employer. If the authorized employer receives a complaint and if "the complaint is frivolous, vexatious or made in bad faith," then the authorized employer can set it aside.

Now, I think that there are some problems with that in terms of discerning what is frivolous and vexatious. Who is making that decision? The act seems to imply that it's the authorized employer who is making the decision, but there's no independent examination, no independent witnessing or investigation or decision about what is frivolous or vexatious. So this again raises the issue, which we've discussed before in this House, namely with Bill 36, the Police Amendment Act, the whole issue concerning the necessity of independent investigation by some public body. Unless there is that independence in examining complaints, then the public won't necessarily have the kind of confidence that it needs to have in policing. I mean, what would apply to police should also apply, I think, to peace officers. There should be some kind of parallelism

between the complaint process here and the complaint process outlined in Bill 36.

Continuing on, I could make the same comments about 15(4), (5), and (6), which focus on the director. When the director receives a complaint through the authorized employer, then the director must review the complaint and make a report, a decision. Again, all the authority is focused on, first, the authorized employer and then on the director without any kind of independent investigation. I think that that is not in the interest of public confidence.

You know, I could refer to the same issues that we raised with Bill 36. For example, when we talked about the need for independence and impartiality and presented a proposal for a public oversight mechanism to look at complaints against the police, we made all kinds of points; like, we need an independent and impartial judge. Also, the need is to preserve the appearance of impartiality and objectivity so that members of the public maintain confidence in the system.

I think that the government is underestimating the whole element of public confidence. Even in cases coming before the courts, whether bail is to be accepted or revoked, there's a primary ground: will the person flee? There's a secondary ground: will the person be a danger to the community? Then there's a tertiary ground, namely public confidence. What is the public confidence in the criminal justice system? I think that there's a big issue here with public confidence if we don't have some sort of public oversight mechanism present in this act.

9:10

Continuing on, Mr. Chairman, to section 19, that's the section that I'd like to focus on and bring an amendment. Again, the issue here is some sort of public oversight mechanism. In section 19(1) "an authorized employer must provide a report to the Director, as soon as the authorized employer becomes aware" of the following incidents: for example, if a peace officer "used excessive force" or "used a weapon" contrary to the regulations; "an incident involving a weapon used by another person"; "an incident involving serious injury to or the death of any person"; or "any matter of a serious or sensitive nature related to the actions of a peace officer." If any of these incidents occur, then the director must investigate the matter. That's section 19(2).

Then subsection (3): "The Director may request a police service or other person to conduct an investigation into an incident or matter, or to take over an investigation." I don't know who this "other person" is. I think it is commendable – and this is consistent with Bill 36 – that there's a request for a police service to be involved in an investigation. That's taking it outside of the circle of peace officers and the relationship between the authorized employer and the director and so on. The RCMP would be a good example of a police service that could bring some sort of objectivity. I don't know what the reference to the "other person" is, but I think that the problem here is the lack of a public oversight mechanism.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to make an amendment to 19(3) to make sure that there is some reference to a public oversight mechanism in here, so here is my signed copy and all the other copies.

The Chair: We will call this amendment A1.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill 16 be amended in section 19 by adding the following after subsection (3):

- (3.1) If an investigation is conducted under this section, the Director shall appoint one or more members of the public as overseers to observe, monitor or review an investigation to ensure the integrity of the process of the investigation.

I think that with an expanded role for peace officers, including traffic enforcement and other duties that sort of move into the traditional role of policing, it is really important that there be some form of public oversight of peace officers. This is in the public's interest and would ensure public confidence in any investigations against peace officers that are really serious. Now, this is the same public oversight mechanism that the Solicitor General used in Bill 36, the Police Amendment Act, 2005.

Now, it's a puzzle to me. It's not clear why a similar oversight mechanism is not included in this bill, given the expanded roles and responsibilities of peace officers. They must have confidence that all investigations of a serious nature have a public oversight component. That is why we're bringing forth this amendment. This is not particularly an onerous amendment, Mr. Chairman. This is the exact language that was used in Bill 36 to provide public oversight for serious incidents and complaints involving police officers. It seems logical to use the same language so that we can have this same element present. I can't emphasize enough the importance of some kind of public oversight mechanism, which is in place in other police acts. Why can't we also apply it here to special constables if we're going to really be serious about the proper accounting of the work of special constables and peace officers?

That is my amendment, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Anyone wish to speak on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I look at this amendment A1, it brings me to think about the actual bill, where I think a great deal of the concern, from the constituents I have spoken with, is a lack of confidence. There are many questions that they have about how these peace officers will be utilized, what training they will have, how long that will be, and there are just not enough answers in the bill as it's being proposed. Another question that comes up often is: who are these peace officers going to be accountable to?

As I look at amendment A1, the rationale is to address that lack of public confidence with an expanded role for peace officers including traffic enforcement and other duties that may encroach into traditional police roles. It is imperative that there be some form of public oversight for peace officers. This is in the public's interest and would ensure public confidence in any investigation of a serious nature against peace officers.

One of the questions that has been brought up to me, probably because of my background in high schools, is the concern that peace officers may take over the role of school resource officers. Again, these questions aren't answered in this bill. If that role is given to peace officers, I'm concerned because, with my high school experience, I believe that those students would see these new officers as much the same as shopping mall security guards, and there would be little respect or credibility for them. Again going back to the amendment, we need to ensure public confidence.

This is the same public oversight mechanism that the Solicitor General used in Bill 36, the Police Amendment Act, 2005, and to me it's not clear why this was not included in Bill 16. I don't think it should be onerous. The exact language was used in Bill 36 to provide a public oversight for serious incidents and complaints involving police officers. It seems logical that the same rules should apply to this level of law enforcement that may be performing the same duties in some cases.

So I'm saying that we need a truly public, transparent process so that the public can be sure of being free from undue political influence. The rationale here is to ensure the integrity of the process

and to ensure that there is no appearance of police investigating their own. Let's be realistic. Peace officers will work closely with police officers, and there will be a common bond between them. We must have a public monitor of these investigations. This was the rationale the government used in Bill 36, and it is the same rationale that we are using now.

I support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

9:20

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the amendment. Much reference has been made to the Solicitor General and Bill 36 and the independent investigation citizen oversight committee. Last year especially residents of Edmonton can remember all the controversy with regard to the former chief of police, the basic entrapment, the use of police computers to get private information on individuals. There was a great deal of kerfuffle, confusion.

Fortunately for the city of Edmonton the new police chief is a wonderful individual. This gentleman has done a lot of the repertory work in establishing himself as a very credible officer. His training in Toronto has stood him very well in terms of understanding big city concerns, difficulties with ethnic violence that Edmonton, unfortunately, is now experiencing. But even with his wonderful abilities and his openness and transparency and his very quick off the mark comments with regard to disappointment with the police reaction to the beating death of the individual on the Mill Woods bus and the response time, even with these admissions and recognitions, we need an external oversight citizen component in order for citizens to have faith in the larger process. Again, with reference to Bill 36, this component was a part of the bill.

When we're talking about law enforcement, and particularly at a level where there has not been the degree of training provided for the individuals, I would suggest that more oversight rather than less is needed in terms of establishing both professional and ethical conduct. Without this citizen oversight committee the public gets a sense that it's a closed shop, the report cards are being prepared by the individuals evaluating themselves, and the public would lose faith in their ability to self-regulate.

There is also concern with regard to how well they integrate with existing police forces and to what extent their process will be evaluated, by whom, and over what period of time, and what the standards are by which this evaluation process will take place. It appears that we're getting somewhat more of a definition of what a peace officer does, clarification of roles, the equipment they can carry, and so on, but in terms of their evaluation and supervision, that is missing from Bill 16. That is why I support this amendment, which calls for greater citizen oversight, input, and clarification of role as well as evaluation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to join debate on Bill 16, the amendment to section 19(3). We all know that the job of peace officers is a very demanding one and that the peace officers, in fact, have to use force, sometimes lethal force, and that the incidents in which force is used lead people who feel that they are victims of excessive use of force to lay complaints. It is, in my view, very much in the interests of all of us, including police officers, to see that we have procedures and processes in place which increase public support for the work that peace officers do. The measures that we give authority to in this Legislature to increase that public confidence and support should be clearly designed to enhance public trust in the legislation that governs this.

I think that the amendment and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who has proposed this amendment, are right in drawing attention to the fact that there is a flaw here in the legislation in that it doesn't provide for effective public oversight with respect to the process proposed here for the manner in which the director may request a police service or other person to conduct an investigation. First of all, I think it's important that the investigations be independent and not only be independent but be seen by the public to be independent of the peace officers and police services themselves. But even when a police officer and service is involved in the investigation, if that has to be the case, it's even more important that there be public presence in the form of legislated ability to oversee the investigation so that there's a transparency and the public knows that the investigation has taken place in a manner that meets the standards of transparency and independence and impartiality.

So I think the amendment proposed here, as (3.1) to section 19(3), is a very appropriate one, and I certainly indicate my support for the amendment. I hope the House will find doing so a reasonable thing to do as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Anyone else wish to speak on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wish to speak to this. I could not support this. In response to the comments from the members opposite the information given and the example given by the Member for Calgary-Varsity is relating to police in Edmonton. I wish to reiterate that this is a peace officer act. This is not police. This, once again, is a peace officer.

The various sections in the complaint process: while there are stops, the first stop is the employer. That is the first level. The second level is the director of law enforcement for the more serious complaints. So that's a level. The amendment for an independent body as in Bill 36 – and I have to admit I haven't seen Bill 36, that part of it – is not required as, again, this is not the police.

I cannot support this amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: On the bill, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A couple other points, and perhaps my colleagues can direct their attention to other parts of this bill. In terms of the same section, part 2, towards the end, when we get into the issues around the Law Enforcement Review Board. It just is curious that the language used in reference to the Law Enforcement Review Board is the language of recommending "to the Minister that the decision that was the subject of the appeal be confirmed, reversed or varied." That's section 21(4). The same in subsection (5)(a) in terms of the recommendations that are put in writing. So I guess the ultimate authority is the minister.

I don't know whether this is an undermining of the authority of the Law Enforcement Review Board, but does the minister consider that he is more informed than the members of the LERB? Surely, the LERB are capable and can decide on this issue without the reference to the minister.

9:30

This section I think is problematic. It allows the minister to vary or overturn the decisions of the LERB without really stating why. I think that that should be reviewed, and I wondered if the minister can explain why he wants to have this authority to reverse or vary the decisions of the LERB and kind of undermine their authority.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Regarding the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora regarding the Law Enforcement Review Board in this Peace Officer Act the Law Enforcement Review Board conducts an appeal, as it states, in the case of the cancellation of an employer's authorization. This would be, for example, the town of Rocky Mountain House or the city of Camrose. That's the employer. It's not a police service. The employer is the municipality. So if there's an investigation regarding an individual, a peace officer that is employed by the municipality, it's the municipality that actually has the authorization to receive the peace officer classification. It's the officer himself who gets the designation, but the authorization actually goes to the municipality.

Therefore, the Law Enforcement Review Board has that ability to make recommendations to the minister whether the authorization for that municipality should be gone or upheld. As it says in section 5(b), "in the case of the cancellation of a peace officer's appointment, the Law Enforcement Review Board must provide its recommendation in writing to the appellant, the peace officer's authorized employer and the Minister." So all three are provided with their written recommendation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. We ran out of time when we were talking about special constables, and some of the confusion still remains with me that I would like to apply to peace officers in Bill 16, and that has to do with the titles and the ranking and the various levels of authority. I'm talking specifically about section 11, use of titles, under Bill 16. The negative aspect of this is that the public may find the different designations of peace officers confusing, and they may not understand the difference between a level 1 APO and a level 1 CPO. Everyone knows what a police officer is in terms of RCMP or city police and what authority that title carries, but the different levels of peace officers will cause confusion.

Does the Solicitor General have a plan to deal with this confusion? Is there a public awareness component to the implementation of this act so that Albertans are aware of the different levels of peace officers? If so, how much is that public information, which is absolutely necessary, potentially going to cost, and if that's not going to take place, why has the department not considered the public's perception of the peace officers and the inevitable confusion surrounding the different levels?

The comments I made with regard to the hierarchy of police officers and how they relate to the other levels of policing come to mind as well. I talked earlier with regard to special constables about uniforms, equipment, insignia. The minister must ensure that the difference between the various levels and their roles is made clear to the public so that they can understand the different levels of law enforcement.

I'd also like to reference section 23, inspection and investigation. This entire section gives the director of law enforcement the ability to enter an authorized employer's premises, at will it appears, and inspect anything he wants to, including records, vehicles, weapons, equipment, to ensure compliance with the act. I'm just wondering about that degree of authority. To what extent is it justified, and how can it be substantiated?

In section 29 of Bill 16 it says that information must be provided and conditions must be met by a person to be appointed as a peace officer or a person applying for the employer's authorization. Where are the prerequisites, the education, the expectations? Shouldn't

this information already be determined? There must already be criteria that define this process, but where are these criteria? Why is this left to regulations? We should know what type of information needs to be obtained in order to become a peace officer or an authorized employer. Can the minister explain what these requirements are? What are the physical requirements for all levels of peace officers? What are the necessary academic requirements and experience necessary to be a level 1 APO? What are the conditions that must be met? Is there a psychiatric evaluation for these officers that will be required to carry side arms or shotguns? I can't imagine that there isn't, but if there isn't, why wouldn't there be given the level of armament?

There are many questions to be asked here. Clarification of what these requirements are is needed. I can't imagine that the minister is just going to make them up as he goes along, but it doesn't appear that within Bill 16, at least within section 29, these clarifications are provided.

With regard to training regulations, what type of training are these officers going to receive? Can the minister provide these levels of training so that we can understand what types of individuals will be carrying weapons, conducting traffic, enforcement, and so on? How will we know that they have had sufficient training that they're qualified to be out there in the public protecting the public interest?

With regard to standards of conduct, practices, procedures, protocol, once again, a lot of the regulation-making authority does not seem to have substance. What information sharing will police officers have? What is the intercommunication process? Will they have access to CPIC, the Canadian police intelligence centre? Will they be connected with MOVES, the registered car owner database, and OSCAR, Edmonton's Police Service database? If so, what controls will be placed upon these to ensure that the access is not abused, as I referred to earlier with the Edmonton police force?

Respecting the time within which an authorized employer must provide to the director the information required under section 18, notification to the director of complaints of investigation of police officers, why is this in regulations? Why is the time frame not spelled out in the act itself? For instance, why isn't there a clause that stipulates that when a peace officer is being investigated, the director must be notified within 30 days? Why is the time left for regulations? We have debated the difference between legislation and regulation and the manoeuvrability and the room that does not clearly spell out what the intent is. This information should be up front so that the public understands what's going on.

With regard to more of the time frame and the colour of the uniforms, the insignia and so on, which I brought up earlier, how is the peace officer badge going to be distinguished from a police badge? It should be clear in the act that upon termination of employment as a peace officer the badge obviously has to be returned forthwith to the Solicitor General, and failure to do so should result in penalties. The last thing we want to be doing is going into Value Village and being able to purchase peace officer uniforms. There's a difference between justice and a Halloween costume, and the opportunity for abuse is out there.

If the minister could address many of these concerns and questions, it would be much appreciated. Thank you.

9:40

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me begin by going back to section 11, use of titles. Again, really, this allows the minister to "authorize the use of titles for peace officers or classes of peace officers in accordance with the regulations."

Obviously, the regulations will be coming forward, but it does provide the governing for titles of peace officers. The community of Rocky Mountain House may want to call their officers enforcement officers. The community of Wetaskiwin may want to call theirs community peace officers. Those titles are up to the municipality but as well have to be approved by the minister.

When it goes to the next section, 12(1), we talk about the uniform and the restriction regarding uniforms, what the uniform will look like. The problem that we have right now is that special constables and police officers run around with a red stripe on their pants, and no one knows who they are. The issue is that by removing the special constable title, by moving the red stripe from peace officers to blue for provincial and to grey or another colour for peace officers, that will provide a clear distinction right across the province that we have four levels of peace officers: one being yellow for federal police officers, those being the RCMP; red for municipal officers, being police officers; blue for our provincial peace officers; and grey for municipal peace officers. That will provide an obvious clarification to the public when they do see that versus the assortment of striping that we have out there today.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity also mentioned articles regarding 23(1), inspection and investigation, and the ability of the director to enter an authorized employer's premises. We're not talking about some employer in a shopping mall somewhere; we're talking about the city of Camrose or the town of Hinton, where we're going to be going into the city to look and inspect the practices, the training procedures for any internal training, again, their records management, their vehicle signage. These are requests from the Auditor General. If the hon. member would like a copy of the original review that we did to consult with Albertans, I have additional copies I can provide to him that show the consultation that we had out in all of Alberta with peace officers, with municipalities, with the Alberta associations of both police officers and peace officers. So we have that information for him if he'd like to do some additional reading on that. I can get copies for all of you. Actually, you can get one on the Internet. I believe it's still up on our website.

The prerequisite in the regulations, Mr. Chairman: we don't go to adding prerequisites for police officers, nor do I believe that in any other profession we put those requirements in an act because those can change. Those can change any time throughout the year. If an organization wanted to change the level of training that they want to do, then you would have to make a complete change to an act, which is deemed to be a little redundant. Therefore, the regulations will be in place regarding the prerequisites, the prerequisites of physical fitness testing. Again, this is covered in the document, the review that was done, and those issues will be addressed further in the regulations as they come forward.

Lastly, the hon. member spoke about the relationship between the peace officers and the police officers that they're working with in a community. Whether those are RCMP or whether those are municipal police services, obviously, there will be an memorandum of understanding developed between the two. We have some tremendous models in the province right now in a number of municipalities. I don't want to say one municipality is better than another. We saw two of the models, one in Grande Prairie and one in Strathcona, two tremendous models where the memorandum of understanding clearly describes the role and responsibility of the officers that work in that community, how they're tied into the RCMP, how the supervision is provided between the two, and the relationship that is formed between them as well. So that's going to be done in the MOU, again, covered in the regulations to detail how they're going to work together, what level of service the municipality may want them to do. That changes from municipality to

municipality, Mr. Chairman, as one municipality may want them to enforce various different acts versus all provincial acts. That's up to a municipality to make that decision. They are given the authority to respond to any provincial act or write summonses under any provincial act if they have the qualifications, if they have the training, if they have that ability, and if the municipality has deemed that that's what they want them to do within their municipality.

So I think I have outlined a number of the responses to the hon. member, but if he'd like a copy of the review, we'd be more than happy to get one to him tomorrow.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very, very much. Within Bill 16 is there a clarification of the supervisory roles of the higher levels of the police service? In other words, what I'm saying is: if you look at the RCMP or the city police forces as being at the highest levels of training, is there a clearly spelled-out evaluatory chain of command? From an education point of view what I would compare it to is a student teacher and their practicum adviser or an established teacher. If you have a good student teacher, the benefits to both yourself and to your class are tremendous. If you have a weak student teacher, then the extra evaluatory roles and the extra responsibilities that are placed upon you are increased. I'm wondering if there is any kind of recognition of the extra workload that training these individuals has with the regular police forces, whether it be municipal or through the RCMP.

Another example would be in terms of the, sort of, chain of command. You've got registered nurses. You've got licensed practical nurses. The registered nurses are given a supervisory role over the licensed practical nurses. Then you have the orderlies. Again, if these people are working together in sync, you have a wonderful system, but if they're not, it places a strain rather than a support for the people in charge at the highest levels, in the case of RCMP, city police; teacher, student teacher; registered nurse, LPN, orderly; and so on. I would like to ask the minister: are these roles clearly defined? Who evaluates the roles? Who evaluates the interconnectedness? How do we know that the existing forces are going to be supported and not spend a lot of time on the job trying to correct mistakes or bringing the people up to the level that they've received given their limited training?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to remind the hon. member that this isn't new. This function has been in place for 30 years. The relationship with the RCMP and throughout rural Alberta has been in place for about 30 years. The functions that are taking place right now in our communities throughout Alberta have been in place, but what we're doing here is we took out the various sections from various acts regarding peace officers and built it into Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act.

There's no hidden agenda here. There's nothing of subsequence other than this new act is going to provide them the foundation of what we need to move forward in the future regarding peace officers. They didn't have that in the past. So now when we talk about the memorandum of understanding, that's already in place. That's done. They've done that already. All we want to do is cement it into the regulations and ensure that that relationship is there so that we can build stronger relationships because there are municipalities, there are areas in the province where they don't have a good working relationship. Those are the areas that we want to

concentrate on and work on to ensure that the county, special constables right now, and the RCMP can form that relationship, can work together in a better relationship such as we've seen in some tremendous locations throughout the province.

So this really is there to build on what's in place right now. The function of what's in Bill 16 isn't new. This has been going on for some 30 years already. So I think the regulations obviously will clarify that. This, again, will provide a stronger sense of security for the public but as well have those checks and balances in there, working with the Auditor General because he's the one that told us we have to have standards out there. Whether it's standards for policing or whether it's standards for peace officers, those standards will be in place. We need them. We need those checks and balances, and I'm sure that's what the hon. members want as well. So this will provide us with that foundation to move into the future.

9:50

Mr. Chase: At this point I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: Shall progress on Bill 16, Peace Officer Act, be reported when the committee rises? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

Bill 23

Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wish to make a few comments on Bill 23 in committee on behalf of the hon. Minister of Community Development. There were a couple of points which were raised during second reading that I have answers to.

There are 70 permanent conservation officers, and an additional 88 will be added in May for the summer season. This is the same number of permanent officers as last year, and the seasonal number is slightly higher.

While the Provincial Parks Act does not contain provisions to address vehicle use, including off-highway, it does allow for specific regulations to be used to govern vehicles, which continues to be addressed in general regulations. I feel that these regulations are sufficient to deal with all types of vehicle use in the parks.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. As I noted earlier, I was much in support of the intent of Bill 23. Can the minister provide me some type of assurance that the part-time seasonal officers, who are so frequently discouraged by their lack of opportunity to achieve permanent status – is there any recognition that these seasonals based on previous years' evaluations will be added to the regular staff and have some degree of job security?

What happens is that a number of these very qualified individuals who work season after season fail to receive part-time, and as a result they're forced to look for work in other areas. These people have gone through the process, a number of them at the wonderful University of Lethbridge, and receive tremendous training. But instead of being out in the wilderness, which ideally is their first choice, they end up being recruited by a variety of other police

forces, and their training allows them to make these switches, but their heart is truly in the wilderness.

The other concern I have is that in order for the regulations to be in place, we don't just need a few extra full-time employed conservation officers; we need to go back to the full allotment that we had prior to the cutbacks in the early 1990s. Currently we have almost half as many officers trying to patrol a vast area, and they're handicapped in trying to provide that kind of coverage. They can't provide the regulation that is absolutely necessary, which is a large part of Bill 23, if they don't have sufficient manpower, womanpower, human resources to carry out their job. So back to the original question: is there any hope in sight that more full-time officers will be hired and that part-time officers who have demonstrated their previous abilities will be first considered for those full-time jobs? If the minister could respond, please.

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak on Bill 23?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 23, the Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006?

[The clauses of Bill 23 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It would be appropriate at this time to rise and report progress with respect to Bill 16 and to report Bill 23.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 23. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 15 International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act

[Adjourned debate March 9: Mr. Stelmach]

Mr. Stelmach: I believe we extended all the information on the bill. It's a very worthy bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have spent a little bit of time with the past minister, and he was kind enough to keep me informed of exactly what is going on. I'm really not that familiar with airplane parts. I didn't think that I would hear myself saying this, but basically this is housekeeping, and it is to keep the province in line with, actually, what would appear to be global conventions that need to be signed. Canada has signed but not ratified the convention on international interests in mobile equipment, and because a convention affects an area of provincial constituent jurisdictions, it's necessary for us to pass this through the House.

One of the things that is expected when this convention is ratified, not only by Canada but all the other signing partners, is it would lower the cost of financing high-value mobile equipment such as aircraft, which is mainly what this is geared toward. I guess at that point I'm wondering if I'm going to be lucky enough to have my airline tickets lowered. Certainly, WestJet airline, which is Alberta-based, would be supporting this.

10:00

One thing in the three-column document is an exceedingly interesting way of using the word "accountable." What they say is that the act will establish remedies in the event of a default. I must remember to use that language when I try to get accountability again in this House.

The actual international registry will be in Ireland. The operational registry will no longer be required by multiple countries and, in turn, multiple provinces. It will be pretty straightforward once it gets going. I think that everybody could recognize that if you need a part for an aircraft and it's not flying, you need it now. You need to be able to get it through all the different customs.

I just would have one question that I'm sure the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville could answer. It says that a legal review will be undertaken to determine whether these elements from the convention protocol need to be included in the Alberta legislation. Obviously, that's what we're trying to do, but I'm just wondering what the time frame on that was and if, in fact, this legal review has been done prior to this discussion.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 15, International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act. I want to indicate our support for this bill at the very outset. The minister's introductory remarks on it make it very clear what the purpose of the bill is. It really is a bill that is prompted by two international agreements signed by the federal government, the first one being the convention on international interests in mobile equipment, also known as the Cape Town convention, and the second is a protocol on aircraft equipment. I think eight countries have already ratified the convention as well as the protocol. The U.S., of course, and Ireland are included in these eight. Canada and 24 other countries have signed the convention and protocol but haven't yet ratified them. Ratification requires, where necessary, the provincial assemblies to pass legislation that will then enable the federal government to ratify the agreements that are already signed.

Both of these agreements, Mr. Speaker, I understand from the minister's comments and from reading quickly through the bill – lots of words there – touch on an area of provincial jurisdiction having to do with the registering of interests in personal property. The minister also tells us that the government of Canada has assured us that it will not proceed with ratification unless it's got a substantial

number of provincial jurisdictions that have passed the necessary legislation. Of course, Quebec, Ontario, B.C., Alberta have all indicated their support. Ontario and Nova Scotia have already passed but not yet proclaimed the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, it's a bill that deserves the support of the House. It certainly has the support of our caucus. My question to the minister is: are there any costs involved in passing this legislation, and if so, what's the scale of the costs that the province will incur having passed this piece of legislation? That's my main question. I'm sure that the minister will respond to it either now or perhaps later.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to close the debate?

Ms Calahasen: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Bill 20

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate March 23: Mr. Lund]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. A former Prime Minister, who was fond of using middle digits and some questionable language, when confronted about the language he used, said: oh, I just said fuddle duddle. I've heard members of the media basically spell out the meaning of FOIP. I'll substitute fuddle duddle, and IP stands for: it's personal. That is the feeling that members of the media have expressed and, for that reason, awarded the government the title of most secret all across Canada based on their lack of willingness to share information.

Without going into great depth, we are hampered from carrying out our roles as equally elected Members of the Legislative Assembly by the government's use of FOIP to withhold information. It causes the taxpayer unnecessary draining of resources for us to put forward a FOIP request. Maybe it's just a peculiarity, but when we finally get that information, it usually arrives on the day when the House is about to adjourn, so opportunities to discuss the information that has finally been retrieved are extremely limited.

In order for us to carry out our job in what I would like to think would be a more collaborative fashion, we have to have equal access to information. The information has been paid for out of the public purse. In order to carry on the joint responsibility that we have, regardless of whether we're government or opposition, we cannot be hindered and hampered by the inability to access the information that is required.

My first FOIP request last year was to determine what had happened prior to the young gentleman finding himself down at the base of the elevator chute. I had asked for very simple things such as when the elevator was last inspected, when the door was last inspected, what the physical circumstances were that led to this door being so faulty that this young individual was unfortunately killed by a fall to the bottom of the shaft. That was a clarification question.

We also put out FOIP requests for flight logs. Fortunately, we received the answer prior to the recess that those flight logs would be tabled, but given the change of affairs that's happened in the last couple of weeks, I have no sense that we'll finally get that information, that we requested some time ago.

This should not be a game of hide-and-seek. It should not be:

“We’ve got the information; tough on you. It’s our right because we’re the government, and you have no rights as the opposition.” Imagine the Alberta that could be, where we were hon. members of policy committees.

10:10

Mr. Snelgrove: Oh, I can only imagine.

Mr. Chase: Well, given the recent state of affairs and the lack of confidence within the party itself, you won’t have to imagine much longer because Albertans are demanding greater transparency. They’re demanding greater accountability. They’re not accepting, basically, a funeral procession in the form of a leadership race that is going to take over two years. They want accountability. They want transparency now. [interjections]

Well, these are all very clever comments, but they don’t address the need for sharing information. Until this government can demonstrate to the people of Alberta that it is transparent and accountable, why should the people of Alberta want to prolong 35 years of hide and seek?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d just like to make a couple of comments. Four of the amendments are aimed at further restricting the information that can be made available. I think part of my big problem with a lot of this is probably based on my personality. I’m not afraid to stand up and be counted, I’m not afraid to be responsible for what I say, and I sure as hell – I’m not afraid to be responsible for my behaviour. Whoops. I’m responsible for that.

I really have a problem with people who do a whole pile of hiding. I absolutely admit that there have to be some areas where people must make decisions. But once those decisions are made, I think there has to be an accountability of how that was arrived at. I don’t think you need to go through all the nitty-gritty of every piece of information that was discussed, but I think that if you are responsible for making the decision, then you should be responsible for standing up and saying why you made that decision. I think that’s part of the integrity of the people that are making these decisions.

Also, there are pretty powerful timelines: 15 years, I believe I read, for one of them. That’s actually a long time and will certainly make for excellent bedtime reading 20 years from now, when all of this stuff definitely will be coming out. Certainly, there will be some young, bright masters student that’ll just be salivating, waiting for all of this to come out. So why not just get it up front, say what you’re doing, stand up for what you believe in, stand up for the decisions that you’ve made, and quit trying to hide behind FOIP so much?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, in its second reading. The bill is a sort of mixed bag. It has some, I think, promising initiatives in it. For example, it includes a response to the recommendation made to the government by the Information and Privacy Commissioner of the province; specifically, legislative measures that need to be taken in order to protect information pertaining to the personal and private records of Albertans.

In view of the requirements of some foreign pieces of legislation

– for example, the USA PATRIOT Act, which requires all companies or persons in possession of information that the law enforcement or investigation agencies of the U.S. state may require to be made available to them as a legal requirement. All records in possession of or collected by or handled by any agency and organizations that may have any connection with U.S. parent firms or businesses are under the PATRIOT Act obliged to surrender that information to U.S. authorities. Since lots of government data, information is handled through contracting out to either U.S. agencies and corporations or their subsidiaries in Canada, the information that’s provided to the government and held by government agencies in confidence, in trust, provided by Albertans, then becomes subject to access by the agencies of a foreign government. So the Information and Privacy Commissioner recommended some changes. This bill responds to the recommendations made by the Information and Privacy Commissioner that will protect the information related to Albertans’ health records or financial records or private records under the U.S. PATRIOT Act to American courts. That’s well and good, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, that part of the bill is something that I support.

The question with regard to the penalties, whether or not the penalties proposed if the provisions of the proposed act related to the protection of privacy are violated, is another issue. We can certainly deal with that in the debate during the committee, but in principle I think I am supportive of the attempt made in this bill to respond to the Information and Privacy Commissioner’s recommendations.

However, there are other parts of the bill, Mr. Speaker, which are highly objectionable; for example, that the ministerial briefing notes now will become inaccessible through FOIP requests. I think there’s absolutely no justification to remove ability to access those briefing notes because they are of substantive significance to the debates that happen here, to the ability of this House and certainly of this side of the House to be able to scrutinize government policy and the background information on which that policy is based. That background information is contained in those very notes that the bill will put beyond the reach of members of the Assembly. We certainly take a very serious view of the provision that will in fact make access to information related to public policy impossible to get. How do you get public debate and public scrutiny and public examination of vital issues associated with the public policy if you don’t have access to those background materials the briefing notes contain? So that’s something that we will not be able to support, Mr. Speaker.

Also, some questions about some information that may be now deemed in this act as non-FOIPable and some published works, you know, that may be available in libraries and other places. I’m curious about it. Why is this proposed legislation specifically attempting to include under what is called non-FOIPable materials published works that may be available in other places? Maybe the minister can respond to that. If the materials are already available in the public domain – and self-published works as such are available in libraries; they are all catalogued and may be taken out – why should they be excluded from FOIP access? Just because they’re available, there’s no need for them? I don’t understand exactly what the concern is here and how that concern is being addressed by that particular provision in this bill.

10:20

Secondly and again importantly, Mr. Speaker, the five-year FOIP exclusion on ministerial briefing material is something that is very, in my view, undemocratic in nature. Why this is being done is beyond my understanding at least. Maybe the minister will respond to that. For a government that really is already plagued by lack of

accountability and transparency, it's striking to note that such amendments are being in fact proposed. The very spirit of a sort of democratic debate and discussion on public policy rests on the fact that the government is obliged by law to make available to the general public and certainly to the members of this House the information that the ministers and the executive use to make their policy.

The argument that allowing access to briefing notes will be considered as revealing the substance of deliberations of Executive Council is a kind of novel argument. That's an interesting invention, but I don't think it justifies making access to information of public interest more difficult than is already the case any more acceptable.

The 15-year exclusion of documents belonging to the chief internal auditor of Alberta is another provision of the bill that makes no sense and is equally unacceptable. Again, the question is: why the 15-year provision to exclude documents belonging to the chief internal auditor? The chief internal auditor deals with the expenditures of budgeted public money and how departments and different branches of the department spend those public dollars. Why such documents should be put beyond the reach of the members of the Assembly and the public at large for at least 15 years requires some explanation and serious addressing by the minister responsible for bringing forward this legislation.

Another provision of Bill 20, section 7, allows for the unlimited suspension of a FOIP request while the Information and Privacy Commissioner considers whether it should be FOIPed or not. While there may perhaps be a reason to stop the clock, so to speak, on the 30-day limit for processing FOIP requests while such consideration takes place, the specific amendment proposed in fact makes the 30-day time limit simply useless, meaningless. There's no assurance in the bill that a request will be handled expeditiously and that the 30-day limit, if not exactly to the letter, at least in spirit would be respected. When FOIP requests are made, I think the justified expectation is that such requests must be responded to within an appropriate time, and a 30-day limit seems to be fine, but now with

the suspension of the 30-day limit the government could take perhaps as long as it wishes and thereby frustrate the very purpose of seeking the information through a FOIP request that may be before it. So that's another part of the bill that's highly objectionable. I think it's a serious flaw in the bill and will need to be addressed.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I only want to just conclude by saying that the manner in which FOIP requests are presently handled – and I speak on the basis of the experience certainly of my own caucus. When we have put in these requests for information, there is an undue delay, and there are various ways available to the government to postpone and to prolong the duration for which the government can find ways to deny access to the information. That shouldn't be the case, and the amendments as proposed in this bill will simply make that bad situation far worse. Therefore, the bill in whole is one that I'm afraid will not receive our support unless we can amend it to address the flawed parts of the bill that I've just drawn briefly some attention to as we move to the next stage of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to call the question, please.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:28 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 4, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/04

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Curry.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce five people from CAUS, the Council of Alberta University Students, who I had the honour of meeting with earlier this morning. In the public gallery today are Jen Smith, Samantha Power, Jason Blades, Duncan Wojtaszek, and Gaurav Singh. If you would please stand and accept the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two classrooms to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly. This group is visiting the Legislative Assembly today from St. Gabriel school, and the group consists of 40 individuals with two teachers, Mrs. Svetlana Sech and Miss Kandise Perry. Also in attendance today are three teacher assistants, Mrs. Louise Depuis, Mrs. Anu Khurana, and Mrs. Tammy Toronchuk. They're in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 38 brilliant students from Holy Family Catholic school from my riding accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Beth Devlin, Mr. Karol Wawrykiewicz, Mrs. Marlene Norsworthy, and the parents are Renée Laporte and Mrs. Theresa Gibeau. They're all seated in the gallery behind me, and I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you today a group from Rosemary, Alberta. Before I introduce them, I'll just draw to your attention that this is the 14th year that Mr. David Blumell has brought his school students to the Legislative Assembly, and it's the 14th time that I have introduced them. The teachers are David Blumell and Laurel Nickel with parent helpers Scott Simpson, who also happens to be the mayor of Rosemary, as well as Harold Unruh, Marina Petker, Mary Laforest, Chris Dyck, Pam Byers, and Chad Fika. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Water for Life Strategy

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta a combination of economic growth, population increase, years of drought conditions, and climate change has raised dire warnings about the sustainability of our water supply. Today a renowned water expert is voicing his concern that if we don't put a water conservation plan in place immediately, critical water shortages will occur in the near future. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Will the minister commit to full implementation of the Water for Life strategy now, backed by legislation and full funding rather than the piecemeal approach that's occurring?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. As Dr. Schindler from the University of Alberta pointed out yesterday, the Alberta government's Water for Life strategy is perhaps the most progressive water strategy in all of Canada. I want to commit to all Albertans that with this blue gold that the hon. member talks about, we will endeavour to continue to carry out the good work on our Water for Life strategy with the water councils and watershed councils that we have across Alberta because that is so important. Information is power when it comes to protecting such a valuable resource that the hon. member has mentioned.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when will he lift this progressive plan off the paper and put it into action with full funding?

Mr. Boutilier: I want to thank the Minister of Finance for the last budget, where she committed \$52 million for infrastructure. Fifty-two million dollars. As the hon. member has mentioned – and I still have that gleam in my eye – about a hundred million dollars a year for an environmental endowment and such important initiatives as Water for Life. I do know this. This government is committed to the strategy, we are acting on this strategy, and we will continue to act on this strategy in terms of protecting and sustaining the water that we enjoy in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A gleam in his eye isn't enough to protect the water of this province. When is the Water for Life strategy going to be fully funded?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as we speak it is being funded. It will continue to be funded today, tomorrow, and the next day because it's so important to us.

[Standing ovation as Premier Klein entered the Chamber]

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Fee-for-service Contracts

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Another day, another skeleton. Public accounts documents from 2004 show that the Premier's former chief of staff, Rod Love, received \$46,000 from Alberta Finance. Access to information requests regarding this contract failed to show adequate documentation for the services received. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. Can the Finance minister tell us what reports Rod Love Consulting completed for the Department of Finance in order to receive 46,000 taxpayer dollars?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't tell him off the top of my head exactly what they all were, but I can tell you that there was a significant amount of advice that was provided verbally, some probably in written form. But I would remind the hon. member that when we contract for consulting services, much of the advice you receive might be strategic, might be in written form but quite often will be in verbal form as well. I will undertake to review this for the hon. member and respond.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that access to information documents failed to show any reports, studies, or significant frameworks for services provided by Rod Love, how can Albertans know that they got value for their hard-earned taxpayer dollars?

1:40

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans can know they got value for their hard-earned dollars when they look at the success of this province and what we have achieved. So advice that we've received from this consultant and others that help us formulate our policy and, more importantly, carry it out is invaluable to the people of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister have us believe that it is just a coincidence that Alberta Finance toughened up its contract policy just months after these access to information requests were filed?

Mrs. McClellan: What I would say to the hon. member and to all members is that I think you should be very, very encouraged by the fact that we review all of our contracting policies on a regular basis, and if there are ways that we can make those contracting policies better, we do. We did do a review of our contracting policies and others. We've made some changes in those, and I think the policies are very good. But I can say this, Mr. Speaker. That won't be the last review of the contracting policies. We will continue to do that as the province grows and evolves.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton Gold Bar.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After purchasing 503 acres of land in the Edmonton restricted development area for \$10.2 million in 1987 from the late Joseph Shekter, Ernie Isley, the Progressive Conservative public works minister at the time, stated: if you were to talk to some of the affected property owners in those

RDA's, I don't think you'd get too many of them who would use the word "generous" with respect to my dealings. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Does this Progressive Conservative government now consider the sale of 160 acres of prime real estate in southwest Edmonton by Ernie Isley for \$2 in 1988 to the late Joseph Shekter to be generous or very generous?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as we all know, this transaction happened back in 1987-88. We are continuing to research it. In due course, as we get all of the information, we will be able to share it with the House. I suspect that there is another side to the story as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can the minister explain why this government sold an additional 100 acres of prime residential land at the same time in southwest Edmonton for \$1, bringing the total now to 260 acres for \$3. Did Mr. Shekter hit the jackpot?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member is bringing up another sale that happened back in the '80s. If he would be kind enough to give me the information as to the location, we would then be able to expedite the finding of all the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It will be tabled at the appropriate time.

Again to the same minister: were any of these parcels of land sold to the late Joseph Shekter for \$3 pledged as security to refinance the West Edmonton Mall in 1994?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I have to repeat that this is virtually 20 years ago that these transactions occurred. Certainly, we don't have at our fingertips the information that the hon. member is asking for, but we are looking for it.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Wellness is pushing for private, two-tier health care with no regard for the impact on Albertans. The greatest harm of all will fall on those Albertans who live in small towns and rural areas, yet the minister has failed to answer concerns that this will leave rural areas with fewer doctors as they leave to make more money in the big cities. To the minister: other than vague personal guarantees and other trust me types of lines what, specifically, is going to keep doctors in small towns and rural communities if the third way proposals are adopted?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, fundamentally the one important thing to remember is that we indicated clearly in the policy document that we would not be moving on any access proposal if, in fact, it would in any way imperil a strong public health system. We indicated that whatever access proposal came forward would have to make sure that it did not damage the public health system, so that doesn't matter if it's in Lloydminster, in Grande Prairie, in Lethbridge, or in Calgary.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, what research has the minister or her department conducted to show the impact of the third way on rural health care?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the policy framework and our discussions of it have gone out to a number of people, and we've had considerable response from rural Alberta. I think the most important thing that we can do is follow up on the initiatives in the rural physician action plan to look at some of the other things like the medical bursary program, the endeavors that we've got under way with the minister of advanced learning to make sure that we are doing a recruitment in a proper way. We have been looking recently at funding for international medical graduates so that we can train more specialists and place them in other parts of Alberta. The alternative relationship plans with physicians enable us to draft business plans and agreements with physicians that support them being located in places where there are vacancies.

Mr. Speaker, we are making every effort on the side of the workforce initiative to make sure that we have the appropriate number of staff. In Calgary recently in discussions about the third-way policy Calgary, for example, identified that until at least 2010 they're quite optimistic that they can fill their spots. That's a good-news story because then we're less likely to lose physicians from rural or outposts to fill up the urban spaces.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a plan in place. We are working on workforce on a number of fronts. Stay tuned. We'll continue to do that.

Mr. Mason: Sounds like a plan to move doctors to Calgary, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the minister has failed to do her homework and cannot tell us the impact of the third way on rural and small-town health care, will she now do the right thing and withdraw the third-way proposals altogether?

Ms Evans: No.

Physician Supply in Rural Alberta

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, in my constituency the Palliser health region is experiencing among other specialist shortages a shortage of anaesthetists. The regional hospital in Medicine Hat requires up to six of these specialists, and it's had to cancel over 200 surgeries over the past four weeks until more anaesthetists are recruited. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could this minister explain how this problem is being resolved?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this was a very unfortunate situation in Medicine Hat where we had illness, a personal leave, and a sudden resignation. When this occurred, at least half of the residents that were anaesthetists were not available to perform their duties. We've been working with the Palliser region, the health region in Medicine Hat, to resolve these issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister outline what is being done to deal with the shortage of medical specialists, including anaesthetists, especially in meeting the health needs of rural Alberta?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the idea of a pool for physicians,

both for rural family practitioners and specialists, is in place in Alberta, and that's one of the things that we've been evaluating. The Alberta Medical Association specialist locum program makes it easier for specialists to locate into regions when something like this occurs: when anaesthetists leave suddenly, for a placement, then, for five days up to a number of weeks. We are looking at this very favourable evaluation of this locum program to be able to assist in circumstances like we have found ourselves in in Medicine Hat.

Mr. Speaker, I've given a number of other answers on the previous question that might accommodate some of the responses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

1:50

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is Alberta and Alberta Health and Wellness doing to train, recruit, and retain more medical students?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think it was evident in the budget this year that there were more physicians being educated at the University of Calgary. In the provincial nominee program since April 2002 280 foreign-trained physicians have been put in place. Eleven of these have been anaesthetists, and I understand that Palliser health region has availed themselves of some of these specialists.

Mr. Speaker, beyond getting the active plan for workforce in place, we're working with health regions to see if we can level the playing field a bit, especially in rural Alberta, so that access to physicians or attracting physicians from out of country, trained professionals to come in and fill spots, is something that will be more smoothly undertaken without the pullback from other urban areas to conflict with their progress.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Métis Hunting Rights

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 10 Provincial Court Judge D.C. Norheim found a Hinton area Métis man guilty of hunting without a licence. Judge Norheim found that the man could not claim the right to hunt without a licence under the interim Métis harvesting agreement. In his ruling the judge said, "I recognize that this defendant and others may have been misled by the actions of the province in stipulating in the Interim Métis Harvesting Agreements that any Métis would be able to harvest wildlife anywhere in the province." My question is for the minister of aboriginal affairs. With the harvesting accord now in shambles, what does the minister tell Alberta's Métis population now? What are they supposed to do?

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware of the decision that was rendered. At this point we can't discuss it because the appeal period has not elapsed.

Mr. Tougas: This dates back to March 10.

How does the minister respond to the judge's ruling that "the IMHA purports to extend to all Métis in the province, for all areas of the province, the rights defined by the Supreme Court in *Powley* . . . It cannot do so." How do you respond to that?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again I cannot respond to what's going to happen or could happen, and as a matter of fact, if the time frame hasn't elapsed, I cannot discuss anything relative to that.

But on that note, let me just talk about the Métis. First of all, they come at me saying that they did not support anything to do with Métis, and now all of a sudden here they are. They can't suck and blow at the same time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Tougas: That's not true at all. Never said any such thing.

Now, since the minister has clearly botched the writing of this accord, will the minister now hand this important negotiation to another of the signatories of the agreement, Sustainable Resource Development or Community Development, who might actually get it right?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the Justice minister speak on this issue if he wishes, but let me just talk about process. He is taking the lead on this issue. [interjections] Well, either you want to listen or you don't.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Ms Calahasen: Just so that you know, Mr. Speaker, let me first of all talk about what has been going on in terms of the issue. We are working with the Métis, and it will be decided in terms of when the information comes forward from the MLA committee.

On the IMHAs, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't only the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development that was involved in the negotiation. There was also Sustainable Resource Development. There was also the Minister of Justice's department who was involved. It was not only the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and I want to make sure that every Albertan understands that because the misinformation that has been given by a lot of people is really wrong. I think that, first of all, it's important for Albertans to really understand what has been going on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Internet Luring Related to Children

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Justice. It's been reported that adult men are using the Internet to lure young girls into sexual conversation and invitation. Recently our hard-working police forces have found some of these men and charged them, but it seems that the charges are not holding up in court. Will the minister strengthen Alberta's laws so that we can put these child molesters in jail?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm aware of the specific case that the hon. member is referring to. It has just recently been decided, and the Crown prosecutor is currently reviewing a potential appeal of the matter. So stay tuned. We'll be able to tell you more about that particular case as we go forward.

The provisions under which these charges are laid are Criminal Code, which is a federal jurisdiction, and therefore ultimately we have to work with the federal government, as we do, to make changes to the Criminal Code or suggest changes, and that's an ongoing process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for that answer. Given that we have a new, common-sense Conservative

federal government, will the minister now lobby the feds to raise the age of consent to 16 so as to help curb the Internet child luring?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would be happy to hear that even when we had a Liberal government, this government lobbied for an increase in the age of consent to 16, and we will continue to work towards that goal, hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to hear that, but what else can the Department of Justice do to assure the parents of Alberta that their kids are safe when using the Internet?

Mr. Stevens: Your question raises a very important matter because the Internet has given rise to a new breed of crime. Alberta was the first jurisdiction in Canada to have a special prosecutor. We did that in I believe February of 2003, and since that point in time our prosecutors work closely with the police to very good success. I believe it was two weeks ago that there was a press conference in Chicago indicating that a national and international ring of child pornographers was busted. I can tell you that this particular budget that we have has provision for additional Crown prosecutors, some of whom will be put into this particular area of specialty.

Lastly, I can tell the hon. member that while there are an increasing number of cases, the success ratio of our prosecuting team is at present in excess of 90 per cent, which is an incredible success ratio in the area of prosecution of crime.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Affordability of Postsecondary Education

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike their predecessors, the elected student leaders I met with again today are determined to convince this government that enough is enough. Tuition and debt loads are too high, and the cost of postsecondary education is a genuine barrier for too many students. I along with these students want to make sure that the government delivers on the Premier's promise that the new tuition fee policy will be the most affordable in the nation. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given that the draft tuition policy has apparently been delayed again until May and that he may not be the Minister of Advanced Education after June 1, could he please tell us what becomes of the draft policy and his promised consultation process?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, a bit hypothetical: presumably, maybe, who knows?

Mr. Hancock: I was just going to say, Mr. Speaker, that the presumptions are invalid.

Mr. Taylor: Can the minister perhaps guarantee that under the new policy tuition fees in Alberta will be lower than they are today? A simple yes or no will suffice.

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. It would be impossible to make that guarantee.

Mr. Taylor: Is the minister prepared today to say no to the flawed income contingent loan repayment schemes that may ease repayment but which actually increase total costs for students?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I've always found it prudent that when you ask knowledgeable people to form a committee and to examine all the possible options that might be available and to make recommendations about which ones are most appropriate for students in our province, to make sure that affordability is key, that every Albertan has the opportunity to access an education and can afford that education, one ought not to make presumptions about the conclusions until they've actually got the recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are heartened to see the glimmer of hope that the long-standing Canada/United States softwood lumber dispute may be on its final legs. Last week President Bush and Prime Minister Harper discussed the softwood lumber dispute at the summit meeting in Cancún, Mexico. Over the weekend the U.S. ambassador, David Wilkins, predicted that the dispute would be resolved before the year-end. My question is to the Acting Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Does the Alberta government see these developments as an indication that an end to this dispute is finally in sight?

2:00

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this is really a long-standing dispute. I wish I could give an easy answer, but that's not basically what's happening. We welcome, however, President Bush's intervention in this respect. I know that Albertans and the Alberta government will continue to work with the Canadian government, with other provinces and, of course, industry to prepare for the resumption of negotiations, and I know that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development is also involved to find a solution.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's bottom line is this, and it's unchanged. Industry must be guaranteed access to the U.S. markets, and number two, duties collected by the U.S. must be returned to Canadian industry. In the end any resolution of the dispute depends largely on the U.S. industry's willingness to settle this dispute.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Yesterday the World Trade Organization issued a softwood ruling against Canada. What significance does this ruling hold for the Alberta forest products producers?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, the World Trade Organization ruling does not weaken our resolve to work with industry for a fair and just settlement. It does not stop us from continuing to insist on Alberta getting the \$500 million in duties back to Alberta and into the economy. Yesterday's decision did not rule on the validity of the duties. It focused on the formula alone. That's all it did. The NAFTA panel has already agreed and determined that the duties are not justified. When I speak with my federal and provincial counterparts on forestry in the upcoming weeks, I will ensure that the concerns of the Alberta forest industry are brought forward to help solve this dispute.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Fort McMurray Infrastructure Needs

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The citizens of Fort McMurray are being sacrificed by this government's insatiable appetite for unsustainable, without infrastructure support, oil sands extraction. While billions of dollars in royalties flow south, scarce dollars remain or return. This message was echoed by residents at their doorsteps and in a series of our Liberal caucus outreach meetings last week in Fort Mac. My first question is to the Acting Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How much has the much-needed upgrading of highway 881 been shelved completely or put on hold while the twinning of head-on highway 63 takes place?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there is good progress being made on highway 881, and none of it has been put on the shelf. There are sectors, the overlay, that are going to be completed this year and sections that are going to be completely restructured this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Fort McMurray people will be pleased to hear that.

My second question is again to the acting minister. What is your ministry doing to address Fort McMurray residents' concerns about the ever-increasing volume of industrial traffic going through the centre of the city, with the potential for toxic spills?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, certainly, this is a big issue for Fort McMurray. There are a number of things that we're doing. We're looking at how more traffic could go around. We're also looking at the possibility of some rail service that would go across the river and up into some of those areas. That, of course, would alleviate a lot of the heavy traffic that is currently in the centre of the city.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given that the sons and daughters of long-time Fort McMurray residents as well as teachers, nurses, RCMP, and municipal employees cannot afford to buy or rent a home in Fort McMurray, what is your ministry doing to make affordable housing available?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've addressed in the Assembly before, we have worked hard in Fort McMurray to ensure that we have a thousand acres of land come available on the market in 90-day increments. We have one parcel that has been completely through the request for proposals, which we anticipate will provide over 2,000 housing units, possibly more, as we work with planning with the municipality of Fort McMurray because of the increase in the density of that area. We are currently in the process of a second RFP, and I will speak more to that in my estimates today.

The Speaker: That's correct. The hon. minister's estimates are up today, and it's usually not normal to raise a question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Health Care Reform

(continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After meeting with skepticism and outright opposition from average Albertans, the Minister

of Health and Wellness finally found a receptive audience last week at a Calgary Chamber of Commerce luncheon cosponsored by Radiology Consultants, which runs a for-profit MRI and CT scan clinic. The minister finally found a group who agreed with her ideas. My question is to the minister. Why did the minister go through a sham consultation process, in which she claimed that no good ideas for fixing public health care were brought forward, if she intended to only listen to groups, like the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, which agreed with her preconceived notions?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, at some point in this Legislature I hope to table the list of people that I've met with across Alberta. They include seniors, community leagues. They include several people that gathered one day in Forest Lawn from various parts of the community: Millican, Ogden, a number of other points. They include people who represent municipalities as mayors and reeves. They include people who represent the professions – the physicians, the optometrists – people who came in and discussed glyconutrients with me. There is a broad range of people that have made representation.

In the case of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Speaker, they provided a release in February that talked about the third-way initiatives. They invited me to their health committee. They are the only chamber of commerce that has a health committee, I believe, across Alberta for sure, but it seems to me that it goes much broader than that. They had focused on the third way from a number of initiatives. So I met with them, and I was invited to speak about the third way at their luncheon.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the point that I was making to the minister: given that she indicated to them that there were no good ideas previously from all her consultation, will she admit that the whole consultation process was just political window dressing and that she's only listening to people like the Calgary Chamber of Commerce privatizers who happen to agree with her?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, what I said – and I should clarify. I didn't say that there were no good ideas. I said that in terms of sustainability, in terms of the kinds of things that would ensure that our health care system would go on for decades to come, in terms of innovative things that would look over the hill and challenge us to a higher level of thinking, in terms of things that would improve accessibility and be a departure from what we've provided in the provincial health policy framework, there were very few. Some of them that did come forward that were good ideas reflected on different ways to train, different ways to progress on prevention and wellness strategies, and different ways to build upon something that we're already doing, which is building upon the access proposals to expand to cardio, cancer, cataracts, et cetera.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the minister just talked about the consultation. If she's truly – truly – listening to Albertans, will she now agree to pull the proposals on private, two-tier insurance and doctors working in both systems and concentrate instead on proposals to make the public system more sustainable, like a pharmaceutical savings agency and primary care reform?

Ms Evans: As part of Getting on with Better Health Care, that was published last July, the pharma strategy and a number of other strategies are already in place and are working. They are not as complete as they will be, but we're making significant progress in the numbers of ministries that are cosponsoring support for pharma purchases. We're doing a number of things already, Mr. Speaker,

that we've launched that are part of the health policy framework on areas that people have agreed on.

In terms of why we would still look at doctors opting in and opting out and working in part and what we define as the middle ground, I think it's clear that what we want to do is protect the public system, reinforce the importance of people serving the public system in terms of on call and extra supports. We don't want to lose those physicians, Mr. Speaker, to the private system.

I would be very pleased to sit and explain this to people and the detail of how we intend to advance that if, in fact, we move forward on this particular initiative.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

2:10 Criminal Justice System

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following some high-profile criminal cases in Alberta, Albertans are starting to be concerned with bail being issued to the accused. Would the Minister of Justice and Attorney General outline the judicial guidelines under which our judges and justices are now allowed to issue bail?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. Briefly, please.

Mr. Stevens: Yes, briefly, Mr. Speaker, but it is a good question because people read about this in the paper on a daily basis, and they'd like to know how the administration of justice occurs.

The Criminal Code deals with the circumstances surrounding bail, and the Crown, which is prosecuting the case, must prove to the judge on the evidence that's available at the time of the application that it's necessary for a particular accused to be detained, one, to ensure his attendance in court; two, to protect the safety of the public – in other words, to establish that there's a substantial risk that another crime will be committed if the accused is out – and lastly, to maintain the confidence of the public in the administration of justice, having regard to the circumstances of the case.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in view of these concerns some Albertans have taken the initiative to file petitions with the minister, MLAs, and the Crown prosecutors' office. Can the minister advise what result such petitions have on the actual dispensation of bail?

Mr. Stevens: I appreciate that the hon. member has had petitions raised in his area, that matters have occurred there that have, you know, engendered a lot of interest from the public. The matter of a petition I think is quite appropriate for the public to engage in. It's part of the expression of interest that we recognize here in the House. It is something that members can receive from their constituents and is quite appropriate to file here. I would encourage, given the nature of what we're talking about, that the petitions also be filed with the federal government because it is a Criminal Code matter.

However, as it relates to the administration of justice, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for all members, all Albertans to understand that the judiciary is independent, that the Crown prosecutors' office, indeed, is independent of political considerations, and that a petition per se will have no influence whatsoever in a particular case that is before the courts relative to the issue of bail or any other matter.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, without interfering with the independence of the judiciary, how can Albertans constructively express their potential dissatisfaction with sentences or bail?

Mr. Stevens: I think that a petition, letter writing, and so on are appropriate, but what we have as politicians is an opportunity to dialogue with other AGs across the country, to dialogue with the federal Minister of Justice on the rules of criminal law, whether it be bail or conditional sentencing or the like, and to the extent that we determine that the rules we currently have fall short of what public expectation is – in other words, they aren't working the way we think they ought to – we can lobby through federal/provincial/territorial meetings, that are held on a regular basis, to try and effect change. That is a long-term prospect, but it all starts with the public indicating that they think there is need for a change, and then people will review it and determine whether or not there is some basis for that concern.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities in Alberta are struggling to provide services due to limited financial resources. In areas like infrastructure and police funding Alberta's municipalities are being left on their own to foot the bill while the provincial government, awash in resource revenue, still cannot come up with a long-term, predictable funding solution. One-time unconditional grants are not the answer. My questions are all to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister explain how one-time grants through the targeted investment initiative will provide long-term financial stability and security for Alberta's municipalities? There is no guarantee from one year to the next.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I have explained to this member and to all members of the House a number of times the process that the government is engaged in right now. That is a process of working with members of the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability to put together the long-term plans and long-term, reliable sources of funding that the member makes reference to. In the meantime, I think it's appropriate, and the government has already indicated their strong support for municipalities through a couple of programs. One the member makes reference to, which deals with our smaller municipalities, but the big one, obviously, is \$3 billion in funding that flows through to municipalities to deal with their municipal infrastructure needs on an interim basis until we can put that long-term plan in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the next question would be: how long would those municipalities have to wait before that long-term plan is in effect?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister's council has been advised by me that I expect them to have at least the basis of their recommendations in place by late this summer, early in the fall so that necessary changes, if possible, can be made during the spring session of next year's Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain why this government will not sign a memorandum of understanding with Alberta's municipalities granting them full budget participation in those critical decisions and those areas that really affect them directly, involve them as partners?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the member might accompany me to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities convention this year in June because at that meeting last year Alberta was being shown as the example of excellence and participation and co-operation between the province and municipalities. We have a commitment to our municipalities to work with them, and we take that commitment very seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Provincial Water Supply

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. An earlier question today referred to Dr. David Schindler's report. I would like to further expand on Dr. Schindler's concerns. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Given that southern Alberta has had a long history of drought, which significantly impacts industry and farmers, what is the government doing to prepare for water shortages due to drought?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During a drought as part of our Water for Life strategy we bring together our farmers, communities, and industry to ensure that we have an adequate water supply. The natural steps, I want to say, will be this: as we collect that information from over 200 weather stations that we have, we need to be examining what are the other options for storage, such as off-stream storage. Also, part of our Water for Life strategy is on-stream storage. Now, for those members that's just a fancy way of saying the potential construction of another dam.

To be quite direct, as we go forward, we will be working with our watershed councils, such as in the Bow River and the Battle River and all over Alberta, to ensure that we have the best information possible to deal with the very serious question that Dr. Schindler has raised.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the minister of agriculture. Given that Dr. Schindler's report also points to agriculture as one of the biggest users of water in southern Alberta, what is the government doing to limit agriculture's impact on this precious resource?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do know that agriculture has an impact on the water supplies in the province, but we also know how important water is to the livelihood of agriculture in this province and to thousands of farm families in the province. Irrigation is certainly a major user of water in the province. It does so, though, in a very efficient fashion. In fact, in the last 30 years the irrigation sector has made huge efficiency gains in the order of 50 to 70 per cent, and it is continuing to make further gains in terms

of the expertise that we use in irrigation and, really, the science of conservation of water in the agricultural sector. No one in the province would depend on water more than those trying to grow crops using it. We're very good stewards of the land, and we'll continue to be so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

2:20 Retention of Provincial Government Employees

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MLAs received a 5.23 per cent salary increase on April Fool's Day. Most provincial employees will receive a 3 per cent increase this year. The private sector and especially the conventional oil and gas industry is offering far more and with lots of extras. They're grabbing workers. Employee retention is an issue everywhere in Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What measures does the government have in place to retain Alberta government employees in the face of greener pastures and better offers in the private sector?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, that is a very, very good question. It is a very important question because without those employees this government would probably not be able to operate. When it comes to representation by their unions, we have what are called collective agreements – this person is aware of that – and 99.4 per cent of the collective agreements, of the 12,000 or so collective agreements, are settled without interruption. Therefore, I feel that what we have in place – to do appraisals, recommend increases, et cetera, et cetera, are all in place already.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A second question to the same minister: what will this government do to maintain proper government services such as water safety and environmental regulation if it cannot replace employees lured to the private sector?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, just in the last couple of months we had 25,000 more people move to Alberta, and this member thinks that we can't operate the province. We have over a \$27 billion budget a year in ministries in our government to operate the province of Alberta, and we have the best – the best – civil servants anywhere across the country.

Mr. Backs: They are great civil servants, Mr. Speaker.

The third question to the same minister: will the minister finally catch up the 5 per cent rollbacks for all employees in the public sector who have never had that returned?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, I'll monitor that situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Water for Life Strategy (continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's become clear in recent years that there is a water crisis across not only Alberta but the prairie provinces and into the Northwest Territories. We are seeing a summertime flow reduction in our major river systems, between

30, 60, or even 70 per cent of the water that we depend on for our urban and rural areas. The questions are to the Minister of Environment. When will the minister bring out his Water for Life strategy and ensure that, in fact, we're going to have water for the future for our agriculture sector, our industrial sector, and for our urban areas? When are we going to see the Water for Life strategy unveiled?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question, but perhaps I can speak in this way. First and foremost, I want to thank the Minister of Finance because in her most recent budget it was announced that \$175 million will be used for our Water for Life strategy. That \$175 million is clearly an important signal in terms of the money we are spending relative to protecting this valuable resource.

Mr. Eggen: To the same minister: considering that using dams and water diversion projects has been disproven as a means by which we can in fact retain water, will this minister please tell me whether or not he's willing to use dams as a way to preserve the water systems here in the future, or will he look for a conservation system by which to ensure water for the future in this province?

Mr. Boutilier: I think it's a very important point, and in fact there are three points to it. Number one, the Water for Life strategy indicates that by the year 2015 the usage of water in our province will be improved by 30 per cent. Albertans, though, have an attitude that we can even do better than that. I'm certain, in terms of their daily practices that the minister of agriculture talked about earlier, that will be and continues to be a key component of Water for Life. Also, though, step two is that of off-stream storage. How do we build reservoirs to be able to capture yet at the same time meet the obligations to our neighbouring provinces? I believe that we can do both. Also, point three, a dam would be a last resort after exploring, of course, these first two important steps that I've indicated this afternoon.

Mr. Eggen: Well, considering that the main increase in water usage in this province is for large industrial projects such as the oil sands, will the minister, then, commit to a conservation system that will reduce the water consumption of large industrial projects such as the oil sands, where most of that water, in fact, is being lost?

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say this. In actual fact the water consumption that is being done by development in the oil sands is significant, but I also might add that their recycling, their conservation, and their off-stream storage that they have today are also excellent examples of how they have been working with our Water for Life strategy. I am imploring them and others: with the development that's taking place, we will protect so that nothing – absolutely nothing – will damage the Athabasca basin, where the water is drawn from. We will ensure that 25 and 50 years from now I will answer to my grandson and granddaughter that we have done our job by protecting the basin and this important resource we call blue gold.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today in the question period there were 92 questions and answers. That's very remarkable.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: I do have some comments that I do want to make with respect to a number of questions.

First of all, the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-

Gold Bar. I would refer all hon. members to *Beauchesne* 410(6), that basically indicates that the chair should give “the greatest possible freedom . . . to Members consistent with the other rules and practices” in their questions. Having said that, I then want to take the member to *Beauchesne* 409(6), which says: “A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.” *Beauchesne* 409(7), “A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it,” and 410(16), which says that “Ministers may be questioned only in relation to current portfolios.” The chair has listened attentively now on two occasions, yesterday and today, with respect to the questions. Unless there’s a connection to the current environment of 2006, I don’t know how we can proceed with a third question of something happening 20 years ago.

Now, to both the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I’ll expect that because both of you used quotations today, you will be tabling the source of those quotations in the House at the appropriate time for tablings.

As a result of the discretion given to the earlier two members that I’ve just mentioned, some discretion then was given to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs with respect to his question because *Beauchesne* 408(1)(c) says that questions should “not require an answer involving a legal opinion.” I think we were right on the edge with respect to a legal opinion, but that was given because of discretion given earlier in the give-and-take of what we deal with on a daily basis.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker’s Ruling

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 13(2) I’m wondering if I could ask the Speaker to explain his ruling on 409(6). My understanding is that the question is to be within the administrative competence of the minister to whom the question is directed, is responsible for the present ministry. The question was directed towards the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, for which that individual is minister. Your ruling seemed to indicate that one could not ask a question about something in the past. Could you clarify, please?

The Speaker: Well, 409(6) basically talks about “for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.” There has to be some flexibility given, as there was by the chair yesterday when he listened very attentively, and he listened very attentively today as well. But this is the year 2006. The current minister has only been the minister in this portfolio for some period of time, and if we’re talking about events that happened 20 years ago and they’re being asked of a current minister today, then what is the purpose of the Public Accounts Committee, which meets on a weekly basis and is supposed to review the events of the previous fiscal year with respect to the Auditor General’s reports and the like? I mean, if we’re going to stand up in this question period and a minister has to account for something that happened in 1923, then where’s the relevancy and the currency and the urgency that we find in all of these?

Citation 408 (1) says that such questions should

- (a) be asked only in respect of matters of sufficient urgency and importance as to require an immediate answer.

If we’re going to go back 20 years or 40 years or 60 years, hon. member, I don’t know how that works, quite frankly.

So the explanation has been given. I said that there would be some flexibility. Tie it together. We move forward.

2:30 Vignettes from the Assembly’s History

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I introduce the first of a number to participate today, let me fulfill you with some more knowledge about the previous history of the province of Alberta. The first provincial election held in Alberta on November 9, 1905, was governed by the regulations in the Ordinances of the North-West Territories. It was not until 1909 that the province enacted its own election legislation with An Act respecting Elections of Members of the Legislative Assembly. This act, like its predecessor, indicated that the Clerk of the Executive Council was responsible for overseeing the administration of general elections in the province.

The responsibility for administering general elections in Alberta remained with the Clerk of the Executive Council until The Election Statutes Amendment Act, 1972. Under this new legislation the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, a nonpartisan officer of the Assembly, took on administrative responsibilities associated with elections. This legislative change coincided with an administrative change which saw the appointment of two different individuals to the position of the Clerk of the Executive Council and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. Although the two roles themselves were always distinct, it was the practice in Alberta from 1935 to 1973 to have the same individual serve in both offices concurrently.

It was not until 1977 that legislation came into effect to create an officer of the Legislature, the Chief Electoral Officer. Appointed by a special committee of Members of the Legislative Assembly, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer continues to administer all by-elections and general elections for the province of Alberta.

Since 1977 four individuals have occupied the role of Chief Electoral Officer: Kenneth Wark from 1977 to 1985, Patrick Ledgerwood from 1985 to 1994, Dermot Whelan from 1994 to 1998, and O. Brian Fjeldheim from 1998 to 2005. The Legislative Assembly will soon deal with the appointment of Alberta’s fifth Chief Electoral Officer.

In 30 seconds I’ll call upon the first.

In the interim might we proceed with Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly my son Mr. Wayne Prins. He’s seated in the visitors’ gallery. He’s down from Fort McMurray, where he works very hard recruiting and training workers for the oil sands business. I’d like him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Members’ Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m particularly proud to celebrate the 300th graduation from the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre in my constituency. Matt and his family graduated from a life of addiction, pain, and desperation to a life full of hope and new opportunities. Congratulations to Matt and family.

Mr. Speaker, in 2005 an evaluation of the AARC program was conducted by a noted addiction program evaluation authority, Dr. Michael Patton, PhD. He studied and interviewed 100 consecutive cases and found that 85 per cent of the graduates were still clean and sober after five years. Those are enviable results, and Dr. Dean Vause and his staff are to be congratulated. The dedication and caring of the parent support group is also commendable and a major factor in the success of the AARC program.

I'm excited to say, Mr. Speaker, that AARC is currently in the ground on an expansion project that will see their facilities double to about 70 spaces. The project, estimated to cost around \$8 million, is more than fully funded through fundraising efforts of the board, chaired by Mrs. Ann McCaig. Congratulations to Ann, her board, and all volunteers and supporters.

AARC has rebuilt 300-plus addicted lives and that of their families. Well over a thousand souls have been touched. But, unfortunately, waiting lists are growing, and demand is accelerating. Addicted teens take drugs to feel good, Mr. Speaker. AARC rebuilds self-esteem and teaches addicts to feel good about themselves by harnessing the power within and sometimes external higher powers.

Hon. members, please help me thank and honour this marvellous miracle in Calgary-Egmont.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Family Law Legislation

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night in the Legislature there was a debate about grandparents' rights with respect to having contact with their grandchildren. Listening to the debate, one can see that this is a very difficult and sensitive issue that has no simple answer. In response to this and many other difficult family law issues the government developed the new Family Law Act, that came into effect on October 1, 2005. The idea behind this new legislation was to simplify legal procedures for families in distress. It is part of the Alberta Justice family law strategy aimed at creating a simple, integrated, and effective family law system that promotes the well-being of children and families.

This new Family Law Act updates family law and makes it easier and simpler for Albertans to understand. It protects the best interests of the child when families break down. It encourages parents to work together to reduce the effect of conflict on children and to reduce the emotional and financial costs to families during these troubled times. It supports, where appropriate, ways of resolving conflicts outside the courtroom.

The Family Law Act is supported by services to assist families as well as streamlined court procedures. Section 35 of the Family Law Act has attempted to make the process easier for grandparents whose access or contact with their grandchild has been interrupted as a result of the separation of their guardians.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good law, that intends to help families in distress. As with all new laws there may be some sections that require a little tweaking. However, I believe this bill is succeeding with the goal of making life a little easier for families during difficult times.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Fort McMurray Infrastructure Needs

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fort McMurray is caught between the push and pull of two titans whose policies and practices directly determine the quality of daily life of its residents. The Alberta government plays the dual role of slum landlord and

carpetbagger. It keeps raising the rent without maintaining the tenement's infrastructure. When the building along with its tenants collapses, the landlord moves on.

The huge oil sands companies can quite legitimately claim that they have paid their dues to the government. They have lived up to the conditions, economic and environmental, that the government has required of them. Are they a good neighbour? To what extent do they share their growing good fortune with the citizens of Fort McMurray? Is their presence contributing to or taking away from the community?

City councillors accurately reflect the mood of their constituents. They are frustrated by the imbalance between the government's new oil sands project approvals and its failure to maintain and expand the most basic of infrastructure requirements: roads, hospitals, schools, waste and water treatment plants.

Every individual and group we spoke to last Monday and Tuesday, whether on their doorstep or in a series of outreach community meetings, despaired of the lack of affordable housing. The constant stress that temporary and permanent residents of Fort McMurray are feeling is showing up in the classrooms, in the divorce courts, in the hospitals, in the shelters, and at the food bank. Both government and industry have a responsibility to restore balance by promoting smart, sustainable, infrastructure-supported growth in the Fort Mac region.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Democratic Reform

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a day when political change is in the air in Ottawa and Alberta, I want to speak to the question of political parties in the democratic process. I am a member of the Alberta Liberal Party, but I do not speak primarily as a Liberal. I speak as a concerned citizen, an Albertan, and a Canadian in a world where partisan differences, like ethnic and religious ones, are secondary to our shared humanity.

Political parties began in an attempt to win control of the Crown, to make it accountable to parliament, but in Britain much of parliament's power was held by a hereditary upper house. Responsible government began in Canada in the 1840s, when the elected assembly won control of the Executive Council from the appointed governor. Strong party discipline was the only way to do this; otherwise, the government could play on factions to control the agenda.

Today the situation is different. Parties often hold power at the expense of citizens. It is time to recognize this, to focus on MLAs' responsibilities to their constituents, to increase the role of legislative committees, to make greater use of private members' bills, to permit debate that genuinely makes a difference.

I belong to a party that has no wish to be a 40-year dynasty. We want to change the system so no party can do that. Alberta needs to open government as we have opened the marketplace to citizen initiative. Let us look to a better way so that Alberta can lead in democracy as well as economy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

2:40 Canadian Senior Broomball Championships

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate the organizers, volunteers, and more than 500 athletes who were involved in the 30th Canadian Senior Broomball Championships, held in the great city of Leduc within my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont-Devon from March 27 to April 1.

These athletes came from across the country: from Quebec,

Newfoundland and Labrador, B.C., the Northwest Territories, and across the prairies. They came to work and they came to play, for this annual gathering was not just an athletic tournament but also a convention for delegates of the Canadian Broomball Federation. Over a period of four days approximately 66 games of broomball were played at Leduc's Black Gold Centre to determine the best in the land. The host teams from Alberta came from across the province: the Lethbridge Panthers, Leduc Fire, Edmonton Express on the men's side and two ladies teams, Edmonton Wasabi and the Calgary Bullets.

Mr. Speaker, like all good hosts, our athletes allowed their guests to enjoy the glory. This year the men's championship was won by the Bruno Axemen from Saskatchewan, and the women's championship was claimed by the defending champions, the QC Huskies from Quebec.

I would ask the members to join me in congratulating the organizing committee from Leduc broomball for staging a successful tournament and convention – Nathan Pountney, Jason Walters, Patrick Gillis, David Ramsey, Sharon Fenske, and Patrick Kesler – as well as a host of volunteers and all who made this championship possible.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to inform the hon. members that AADAC has answered the call from Albertans to offer more addiction services for youth and their families.

Here's some of the good news. AADAC has received \$19 million in new funding this year, and that's going to go a long way in allowing the enhancement of services and continuing operation of 25 area offices, three urban clinics, three adult residential treatment centres, two adult detox facilities, two youth service centres, and two youth residential and detox facilities. This increase brings AADAC's annual operating budget to \$95 million, Mr. Speaker, and I can assure you that the dollars are being utilized wisely.

In addition to sustaining AADAC's ability to meet demands through regular operations, of which two new AADAC offices will be opening this summer, it will also provide funding support for 37 different nonprofit organizations across the province and add two new agencies to the network. These new services will build on considerable work already under way as AADAC follows through on commitments for the Alberta drug strategy.

In terms of youth focus, a total of \$14 million will be invested across the province to expand services. It will ensure that treatment is available to families who are experiencing problems associated with alcohol and other drugs, including crystal meth.

Key priorities for the upcoming year include, number one, doubling the number of voluntary treatment beds for youth by expanding programs to locations in southern and northern Alberta; number two, expanding AADAC's continuum in youth services in implementing detox and assessment services in support of the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, or PCHAD, which comes into force July 1, and that will mean additional beds in five sites across Alberta; and, number three, continuing to build relationships with regional health authorities and other provincial partners to deliver addiction services in innovative ways, including continued work on concurrent disorders. Other projects include an aboriginal youth treatment pilot in Edmonton, working with national partners, and an expanded public awareness campaign on crystal meth and with schools.

Thank you and thank you to all hon. members for support of AADAC.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a petition signed by 16 students and staff of Glendale middle school in Red Deer. This petition urges the government of Alberta to "introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the . . . increase in teenage smoking in Alberta as reported by Health Canada."

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Bill 207

Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling today is a letter from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Mrs. Shauna Warrilow, LPN, in which she states her opposition to the third way. She highlights the issue of staff shortages and the growing demand on nurses to work longer shifts and put in overtime. She questions the rationale for wanting to go private and doesn't want the government to add to people's pain and suffering by requiring them to pay more for health care.

The second tabling is also with regard to the third way: a copy of a letter to the Premier from Ms Cheryl Touchings, in which she states her support for the Canada Health Act and her objection to any measure which could undermine Alberta's public health care system. She opposes allowing physicians to work in both public and private spheres and forcing Albertans to acquire private health insurance. Lastly, she comments that personal income should not determine the level of care one gets in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Arising out of my questions in question period today to the Finance Minister, I'm pleased to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of documents obtained through the access to information for services provided by Rod Love Consulting. As I had indicated during question period, these documents are full of expense accounts and invoices from Rod Love Consulting; however, contain no reports, studies, or significant frameworks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have letters from constituents. The first letter is from Sherry Ewing, in which she is expressing her extreme disappointment at the extreme short-sightedness of the government in not funding full-day kindergarten in our province.

My second letter is from Rod McConnell, stating that now that Alberta has dramatically increased the amount of money in its coffers, how much of this money is actually going to be in research, development, and deployment of alternative energy sources for this province?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, do you have a tabling?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, I do. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Several tablings. The first is from Ileene Breton: a letter to both the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Premier with her fears that the third way will lead to excellent private care for some and a poor public system for the rest.

A letter from Joan Buhr, appreciating the Official Opposition's attempts to fight the third-way proposal.

A letter from Brian Burke, sharing his disgust with the Alberta government's desire to privatize out the health care system.

A letter from Dave Burkhart, noting that the health policy framework is simply a play for profits by American insurance and health care corporations.

A letter from S. Burrows, expressing an opinion that the major reason for long wait times is a serious shortage of health care professionals.

From Elizabeth Carmichael, feeling that seniors, the disabled, and anyone with a pre-existing condition will be the victims of private health insurance.

From Catherine Carson, noting that the competitive advantage not just for Alberta but Canada in attracting transnational and global corporations to set up shop is our publicly funded system.

From Aaron Chubb, noting that the government is keeping taxes low for oil companies while claiming that we don't have enough money for health care.

And, finally, Darrell Clarkson, noting that he's a senior, a father, a grandfather, and someone who's taken time to research and study health care with a very long and thorough report on health care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:50

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a historical land title certificate from Alberta Registries for the short legal on 4;25;52;9;SE. In 1988 the registered owner of this property was the Galfour Development Corporation in Edmonton.

The second document I have today is from the Alberta Government Services land titles office. It is a document indicating that the value of a parcel of a land, a hundred acres of which is developable, is \$800,000, and it was sold by the public works minister at the time, Mr. Ernie Isley, for \$1. Again, this transaction occurred in 1988.

My third tabling is an article from the *Edmonton Journal* titled New Documents Show Middleman Assisted in 1994 WEM Refinancing, and this was part of my question today.

For the record, the quote that I used in my question earlier in question period today, Mr. Speaker, was from a tabling that I provided to all members of this House yesterday.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, do you have a tabling?

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the

appropriate number of copies of the judgment of the Hon. Judge D.C. Norheim, which I discussed earlier today in question period.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter from Sandra Stadnek of Wetaskiwin. Ms Stadnek is very concerned about the lack of details forthcoming about the government's so-called third-way reforms. In particular, she doesn't want to see physicians fast-tracking patients who are paying privately while allowing patients in the public system to wait.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Rashpal Sehmy. Mr. Sehmy spent 12 hours on March 22 protesting in front of the Legislature to show his support for public health care. He strongly believes that a person's wealth should not determine the quality of care that they receive.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before going to the next step in the Routine, I'd just like to draw your attention to the Order Paper. There's a slight change in today's Order Paper. Bill 15, International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act, now in Committee of the Whole and introduced by the former minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, now appears under the name of the Acting Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Offices of the Legislative Assembly

The Deputy Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 58(8), which requires that the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly be the first item called in the Committee of Supply's consideration of the main estimates, I must now put the question without debate or amendment on all matters relating to the business plan and proposed estimates for offices of the Legislative Assembly for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:

Support to the Legislative Assembly Expense	\$45,936,000
Office of the Auditor General Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$19,166,000
Office of the Ombudsman Expense	\$2,327,000
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Expense	\$2,515,000
Office of the Ethics Commissioner Expense	\$410,000
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner Expense	\$4,510,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Seniors and Community Supports

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to be here to present the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports business plan and budget. It really is hard to believe that this is already the second budget for this ministry, and I think that the results we've achieved during the last 16 months speak for themselves. Together with our community partners we've accomplished a great deal on behalf of the people that this ministry serves: our seniors, Albertans with disabilities, and low-income Albertans who require housing services. I'll spend most of my time this afternoon outlining the key programs that assist these Albertans and how we are supporting those programs through Budget 2006.

This is certainly a good-news budget for this ministry. As I'll discuss shortly, the funding that we've been allocated will go a long way in making a difference for the people that we serve. As minister it is my responsibility to present the ministry's budget, but as I highlight our programs through this afternoon, you'll see that the ministry is more about the people we serve, the way we have developed comprehensive programs that are flexible and responsive to their unique needs.

Once again, I believe that our business plan for Seniors and Community Supports was the very best that it could be. It was a challenge bringing it together last year, and this year we were able to enhance it even further. Our ministry's vision is for "a vibrant province where all Albertans live with dignity as full participants in society and experience the best possible well-being and independence." Our mission, Mr. Chairman, is to "provide and co-ordinate support, services, programs, information, and strategic planning that contribute to the inclusion, well-being, and independence of seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons in need of housing supports."

Before I discuss our program areas in detail, I'd like to briefly mention to you our core businesses. The first is to "provide targeted financial and health-related benefits," which reflects the work we do on behalf of low-income seniors and persons with disabilities. Our second core business is to "provide a range of housing options and supports for lower-income Albertans," which speaks for itself, Mr. Chairman. Our third core business is to "provide and co-ordinate a range of supports for living in the community."

Our ministry's program expense budget for the coming 2006-07 fiscal year is \$1.8 billion, which is an increase of nearly \$190 million, or almost 12 per cent over last year. That's a significant increase in support of our programs, Mr. Chairman, and I'm very thankful for that.

3:00

Prior to being appointed to this portfolio, I remember the words of our former minister responsible for seniors, our Deputy Premier, and the ones that stand out for me are how she'd say that Alberta has one of the most comprehensive packages of seniors' benefits in the entire country. That was quite a statement 10 years ago, and it certainly remains true today.

The first program I'd mention is the Alberta seniors' benefit program, which has a budget of nearly \$274 million this year, and that's an increase of \$25 million over last year. This program

provides low-income seniors with monthly cash payments to supplement income from other federal income-support programs and/or their personal pensions or savings. This program continues to have the most generous monthly cash payments and eligibility thresholds of any provincial financial support program for seniors. That's something that we in this Assembly can all be very proud of, Mr. Chairman.

Some of the new funding will be used to address caseloads, which we expect to increase slightly this year. However, the vast majority of the increase will allow us to provide increased benefits to low-income seniors living in continuing care facilities. Specifically, this funding will allow us to increase the level of support being provided to Alberta seniors' benefit clients living in long-term care and provide the same level of assistance to low-income seniors residing in designated assisted living facilities. That is new, and it's important, and I'm so pleased that it's occurring this year. These changes are good, Mr. Chairman, as we administer our Alberta seniors' benefit program, and they respond directly to recommendations made by the MLA task force on continuing care.

When talking with seniors, many of them will often tell you of the impact that their dental and optical health have on their overall quality of life. Our dental and optical programs have made such a difference in our province, so much so that more than 14,000 seniors have received support from these two programs each month. That's 14,000 a month, Mr. Chairman, since it was introduced last April, which I think is just outstanding. Because it was so successful and well received, we did reallocate some funding last year from other programs to help meet the demand.

The program is available to seniors with incomes of up to \$30,310 and couples with incomes up to \$60,620, and it provides a range of dental and optical coverage depending on a senior's or senior couple's income level. Recognizing the demand we expect to see once again, we have increased the budget for the dental and optical assistance program by \$8 million, bringing total spending to \$60 million this year.

Before these programs were introduced, some assistance with dental and optical costs were provided under the special-needs assistance for seniors program, which provides financial coverage with one-time, emergent expenses that seniors simply cannot afford. The introduction of the dental and optical programs has reduced some pressure on the special-needs assistance program, and that is why the budget number for this year has stayed the same.

One of the programs that we reallocated funding from last year, Mr. Chairman, to assist with the demand for dental and optical assistance was the education property tax program. This program provides senior homeowners with a rebate for any increase in their household's education property taxes over the amount that they paid in 2004. Because education property taxes went up only slightly overall last year, the average benefit paid out to about 60,000 households was relatively low, around \$40, but because the base year of the program will remain at 2004, we expect to see an increase in the number of households receiving benefits and the average benefit paid to each household this year. That is why we've budgeted \$9 million for this program this year.

Before I move on to our housing programs, Mr. Chairman, I wanted to mention to you and to the Assembly our work to move forward with the new continuing care standards in the coming year. We have allocated additional funding to assist us in implementing the new accommodation standards which will cover the entire continuing care system, and that means our lodges, designated assisted living facilities, and long-term care facilities.

Prior to last week's break there was much discussion in the Assembly about the standards and our progress in implementing

them. My ministry is working closely with Alberta Health and Wellness, which is responsible for the health care services in continuing care, while Seniors and Community Supports is responsible for the accommodation side. As we bring the new standards into force, they will include new monitoring, reporting, and enforcement processes as well as the development of a new concerns resolution process for residents and their families. The funding that we've allocated, Mr. Chairman, through the budget will allow us to begin implementing the standards this year, which I know is important to all members of this Assembly and the Albertans that I've been hearing from as well.

When you consider continuing care, there is a full range of options available to Albertans, beginning with our lodges, where seniors receive assistance with their meals, housekeeping, and other accommodation services; designated assisted living, which is for Albertans with high health needs who also require accommodation services; and long-term care, which is reserved for those Albertans with the most complex or highest health care needs. When we refer to our standards, they will address the accommodation services in all these different facilities.

Through the lodge assistance program we provide grants on behalf of nearly 90 per cent of seniors living in provincially supported lodges. That funding helps lodge operators address increasing operating costs while ensuring that the program continues to support low- and moderate-income seniors. This year we will increase that budget by \$9 million, bringing total spending to more than \$30 million annually.

As you may know, Mr. Chairman, seniors entering lodges today are older, frailer, and have higher needs than ever before. About two-thirds of that funding increase will be used to support recommendations of the continuing care task force, which will allow us to provide increased support to some lodges that are providing special dietary meals, increased housekeeping services, and additional monitoring. These enhanced services are making a difference for those seniors, and with this funding we are working toward ensuring that lodge operators have the support that they need to continue offering those enhanced services.

Like the range of continuing care options, our province also has a range of housing programs which are responsive to the unique needs of low-income seniors, individuals, families, and persons with special needs. The most immediate need is to assist those who are homeless, those who require our assistance, usually in the form of emergency accommodations. We've substantially increased our support of homelessness and transitional housing spaces over the last two years, which demonstrates our commitment to addressing this issue and to working with community groups who are meeting the needs of homeless Albertans on a daily basis. I know that we have a very important conference in Calgary this week regarding this issue. It is important to note that significant funding – there was a 40 per cent increase in funding last year, and we've now increased the funding once again this year by nearly \$3 million, or 14 per cent. This support will help address the demand for emergency spaces and assist operators with the cost of providing services.

While most of this funding is for operating expenses, funding will also be allocated through the provincial homelessness initiative to meet the needs in our province's seven major urban centres, and you know that those are Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat. This funding is allocated to these communities, and they can use it to address local priorities based on their community plan, which can include new capital projects or to expand capacity in their existing facilities.

This year as well, Mr. Chairman, we've also increased our support for our province's subsidized housing units in the new budget. We

currently have nearly 25,000 provincially owned or supported housing units that provide safe and affordable accommodations to over 47,000 low-income Albertans. What makes these units so effective is that the rent is subsidized at 30 per cent of a household's income. When you consider that these Albertans would otherwise struggle and pay substantially more than that in the private sector, you can imagine what a difference this program is actually making. We've increased our support to housing operators by about 9 per cent this year, primarily to cover increasing operating and maintenance costs for these projects.

3:10

I'd also like to briefly mention that we've increased our support to the rent supplement program, which subsidizes rents for low-income Albertans living in privately owned apartments. Like our provincially owned housing, the rent supplement program effectively caps the rent at 30 per cent of the household's income. We were assisting 4,000 households through this program, and with new funding allocated in Budget 2006, we will assist another 600, which is a significant increase of 15 per cent.

With that, I'd like to briefly discuss our capital funding. You will see, Mr. Chairman, that our capital funding allocation is reduced, but that is because we had some large, one-time funding to programs last year. This year we have \$44 million for the final year of the current phase of the Canada/Alberta affordable housing agreement. This program has made such a difference over the past four years. When I signed the phase 2 agreement with the former federal minister, Joe Fontana, back in August, he spoke very highly of Alberta's support of this program.

We are certainly leading the nation in this area, Mr. Chairman, with funding committed for nearly 3,070 units to date. While this program is focused primarily on high-growth urban centres, we also have \$24 million for the final instalment in our rural affordable supportive living program. This program will help establish new supportive living units in our rural communities throughout the province. These projects will help to keep families together and ensure that our seniors have access to services that they need in their own communities.

Before I finish speaking about capital projects, I'd also like to briefly mention that the ministry has been allocated a one-time increase of \$117 million to settle loans, first established in 1990, with the heritage trust fund. These loans were internal to government and have no effect on government's overall spending. Settling these loans, however, will simplify accounting for future years. These loans helped fund the construction of our provincially owned subsidized housing units, which, as I explained earlier, are certainly valuable to our work to assist Albertans who require housing services.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to talk about a very key area of our ministry, which is supports to persons with disabilities. This year we have an initiative link to the MLA task force that will allow us to provide younger Albertans with special needs with additional supports to participate in rural communities when they are residing in a continuing care facility. This is an important new initiative, and it is also a good example of how our programs have really evolved and moved to be more responsive and supportive of persons with disabilities.

In the context of our \$1.8 billion budget it is important to note that more than \$1.1 billion of that budget is allocated to only two programs: the assured income for the severely handicapped and the persons with developmental disability programs. These are very important programs because together they help address the unique needs of people with disabilities in our province. Part of the benefit

of having all programs that support adults with disabilities under one ministry is that we can consider their needs and respond to them in a more holistic way.

The AISH program provides both income and health supports for approximately 34,000 Albertans with disabilities. The AISH program has seen very substantial funding increases two years in a row, Mr. Chairman. Our budget has increased \$85.5 million this year, which is nearly 18 per cent for AISH recipients. That's very significant because it allows us to fully implement the recommendations which were made by the MLA committee which reviewed the AISH program last year. These changes include increasing the maximum living allowance to \$1,000 a month, which will start this month, providing personal income support benefits, and increasing the employment earning exemptions for the approximately 14 per cent of AISH clients who work. The budget will also allow us to cover anticipated caseload increases as well as cost increases to the comprehensive health benefits package that the program provides. In addition, we are providing additional support to assist AISH clients to cover the accommodation costs of living in continuing care facilities. These individuals are receiving what we call modified AISH benefits. We have also increased their living allowance so that they have additional funds at the end of the month for their personal expenses.

The AISH program has truly been renewed, Mr. Chairman, and with the new legislation currently being discussed in the Assembly, I'm confident that the program is more responsive to the disability needs of clients than ever before, which brings me to the persons with developmental disabilities program, known as PDD.

There have been some concerns raised about the funding to this important program. In February I announced a \$10 million increase for front-line, contracted agency staff wages, which was a much-needed wage increase, that was made retroactive to April 2005. Then on budget day the Finance minister announced an additional \$13 million for PDD. All together that's over \$22 million in new funding, a 4.6 per cent increase to the PDD program since last year, which has brought total funding to nearly \$509 million for the approximately 9,300 people receiving PDD support. That is very significant, Mr. Chairman, because, as you know, the funding has gone up by 84 per cent since 1999 while caseloads have grown less than 30 per cent during that same time. I've assured people in PDD that we have worked and will continue to work with individuals, families, and service providers to meet the needs of persons with developmental disabilities.

I would be more than pleased to answer any questions that may come about. I know that AADL, Mr. Chairman, is important as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd certainly like to thank the minister. I think that was a very comprehensive overview. However, there are some questions that do remain. Many of my questions may well be philosophical in nature, perhaps, as opposed to actual dollars. I think the minister used the word "people." This department is about people, and people often come along with philosophical views of how things can be done. Attitudes can make a huge difference.

Over the last number of years long-term care has been slowly deregulated. Possibly that's because we don't have elected health care boards. Be that as it may, we now have housing under one ministry and care, which is often referred to as a service, under Health and Wellness, but it's still the same vulnerable members of our society that we're talking about. Sometimes the questions overlap, and it may be difficult to answer them specifically.

There was \$140 million for upgrades of facilities. My questions on that one would be: how many of these facilities are private, for-profit? How many were public and turned over to private operations that may be for profit or not for profit or actually turned over to local foundations? How many started off as public and have remained in the public system? What amounts of public dollars are going into these facilities? More importantly, I think my question would be: how are these dollars actually tracked after they've been given to the health regions? How many of the foundations actually have requisition rights? Is that a concept that's being considered for other foundations that may arise in the future or actually are, perhaps, public at this point? How many public dollars are actually going into seniors' centres? These are the centres where people meet to socialize and learn and those sorts of activities. Again, how are those dollars tracked, or do they go through municipalities, and the only way they can get it is through FCSS?

3:20

A figure of \$250 million was suggested to meet the recommendations identified from the Auditor General's report to improve continuing care throughout the province. Again, it becomes sticky because of the complexity of having it under two ministries. How are those dollars being divided between the ministries? Are those calculations being based on standards that haven't come out in their totality yet? One of my questions was going to be the date of release of the standards. You addressed that in a fashion, but I guess that I would like a date if I possibly could have that. It's unfortunate that the standards hadn't been released prior to the debate on Bill 205 because I think it would have made more sense, and certainly the arguments from my side would have been more in depth and perhaps might have pushed it forward into Committee of the Whole, where we could have discussed them in a much broader fashion and perhaps even more specifically if we knew exactly what they were.

The minister has often referred to the concerns resolution process. In relation to the bill that I had on the floor, Bill 205, I guess my question still would be: where exactly does the buck stop when there's a problem?

The business plan refers on page 327 to

the shift to supportive living from long-term care accommodation by facilitating the development of affordable supportive living options, and maintaining quality supportive living . . . In addition, the Ministry will work to adjust long-term care accommodation rates in a fair and incremental way.

A question that arises around that one would be: have there been any dollars put aside to actually evaluate the success of this changeover to supportive living? I had a question further on, but I'll put it into here. Are these standards actually going to come out with provincial definitions, that will be across the province as opposed to being different within the regions?

The seniors who aren't considered low income and wouldn't qualify for financial benefits: how can we ensure that they have safe, affordable care and housing without having to spend all of their savings or, in fact, in some cases having to bankrupt their families so that by the time that next family gets into long-term care, they won't have the dollars that they're going to require?

There's also confusion when it comes to identifying and understanding the basket of services and levels of care provided in homes. Again, this would refer to clear definitions. I'm hoping that that means it is across the entire continuum of long-term care. Systems must be in place so that residents and families know what level of care to expect, and then they can decide on the type of facility that would best meet their needs. I believe that that choice in some areas is not available. People are being assessed for a certain level of care; therefore, that's where you're going to live.

I think that despite the increases that have been given to PDD, I'm hearing that there is still a great deal of discontent out there, particularly in the segment of people who are functioning to the very best of their abilities within our society. Some are actually attending postsecondary schools, but they simply can't do it without their workers with them. I'm wondering if there's any contemplation of extra dollars coming out of supplementals because, as we know, budgets appear to have ways of finding magic dollars after they've actually been released.

I think that for the moment I would ask for responses from the minister on that, and as other people speak, I may have other questions. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, would you like to respond now or have a few speakers?

Mrs. Fritz: I'll respond to the last question now, I think, Mr. Chairman. Others may have more questions regarding the housing side, along with that, as they ask questions.

The question about PDD that was put forward, Mr. Chairman, was regarding funding and whether or not there would be further funding in supplementary estimates over the \$509 million, whether or not we're looking at that for the first, second, or third quarter of next year. That remains to be seen because this budget, as you know, has just been announced, and the community will be responding to their needs.

The way that the budget is allocated, Mr. Chairman, is that Treasury Board allocates the funding to the ministry. The ministry then allocates that funding to the provincial board for persons with developmental disabilities, and then that is allocated to the six regions. The regions then take that funding and allocate it to the agencies that they're going to contract services from, and the agencies hire contracted workers with that funding. Then, finally, it reaches the client. So there are a lot of steps in there.

We are looking to increase accountability and to more transparency with the funding. The reason I say that, though, is because this ministry for the first time has had persons with developmental disabilities under one umbrella along with our AISH recipients, so disabilities as a whole under one umbrella. Our AISH budget, as I indicated earlier, has increased by \$85 million this year, which is an increase of 18 per cent. That budget is accessed by persons with developmental disabilities, and their budget increased by approximately 5 per cent.

You can see that it's a little bit early to know, by the time it reaches down to the contracted agencies, whether or not they will be looking for further funding. I suspect that the one area where they may in the future be for staff providing the service to our people with disabilities. That's approximately 12,000 staff that would be looking for funding. So that's the answer to the question regarding a supplementary estimate increase in funding.

One other thing, Mr. Chairman. As I said earlier, this budget is \$1.8 billion. Of that money, \$1.1 billion is for persons with developmental disabilities and for persons on AISH, so a significant part of this budget is for that area.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Further to that answer, if I might. I believe that I had sent a letter to the minister asking if the PDD boards may be reviewed. I think what I was asking for, after the explanation, is that it's very, very complex to get those dollars down to the front-line person, the person who's using it. I'm just wonder-

ing if the minister would be free to make a comment on that. I really believe that there's an easier way to get these dollars, which, quite frankly, would probably save a whole pile of dollars as we cut out some of these middlemen. I think that's probably what I'm getting at.

3:30

Another thing that I had forgotten to say, too, was that the Premier had mentioned that actually it was being considered to have continuing care, seniors, whatever we want to call it, under one umbrella. Having AISH and PDD I believe is probably a first very, very good step so that we can actually not have to divide it between two ministries. So a comment on perhaps where that process is going as well would be appreciated.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We did have a good conversation, as the member mentioned, regarding the number of steps that are taken with the allocation of funding through the ministry to persons with developmental disabilities, a person receiving supports. I can tell you that it has worked for a number of years, but I agree with the member – she had brought that forward to me – that it is important that we re-evaluate and look at all the number of steps and see where we may be able to save costs, whether they're administrative costs, whether they're, you know, operational costs in a particular board. That is being contemplated, and I'd ask the member to stay tuned about that.

The question that was raised in the Assembly before through the member was that of having long-term care not divided between the two ministries but placed together, as you mentioned, hon. member, under one umbrella, and at this time that is not being contemplated to my knowledge.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I thank the minister for the comprehensive approach. I'd like to go through, as I see it, sort of the four main areas and make a few comments and ask questions. I know that the minister probably can't get through all of it, and perhaps she'll have to reply to us by letter.

The first category is the seniors. Just some general comments if I may, first, Mr. Chairman. Last year the consumer price index for lower income households in Alberta increased much more than for higher income households, and unfortunately many seniors fall, as the minister is well aware, into that category. The government still did have the audacity to boast that our government will also reduce school property taxes by over 7 per cent and continue to protect Alberta seniors from paying increases in school property taxes, but we notice that there's still more money coming in as a result of the price of property going up.

I guess that the question we asked last year, I think, is still relevant, and perhaps the minister can take this: rather than sort of a selective tax break to perhaps the wealthier seniors, why not a tax break for all seniors, not just those still lucky enough to own their own houses? I know that this is all money, but I would remind the minister – and I know it's not in her department – that we did offer tax breaks of \$370 million to the wealthiest corporations in the province. A lot of seniors could have used that particular tax break.

I think, Mr. Chairman, the point that I'm making to the minister comes down to the priorities that we have. This money, if it had

been given to all seniors, low income and the rest of it, could have circulated among the economy and probably have been better for everybody in terms of even enhancing the economy. I guess that that's the point I'd make to the minister – I know it's not going to change in this budget – that the last thing we needed in an overheated economy was that tax break, and certainly a lot of seniors, especially low income, could have used that particular tax break.

The other point would be a lobbying one, Mr. Chairman, coming back from question period. Again, we're talking about two departments here, but I take it that the two ministers work together. The ministry business plan, I think, lists pharmaceuticals, and certainly we agree. I think the minister of health in a speech to the Calgary chamber talked about a 17 per cent increase as the fastest growing component of health care costs. Obviously, this particular group is going to be the group that has the most cost here. Again, if she has any clout with the other minister and the government, we would really push our party's pharmaceutical savings agency program. I hope that the government is looking at this because in our estimation if we did what New Zealand did, then it would be the bulk of this that would save us \$75 million in the first year and after that over \$100 million. It would be good, again, for this particular group. So I pass that on to the minister and hope that she would push for that.

Let's look again briefly at long-term care. Admittedly, there's some more money, but I think that even the minister would admit that the supplementary funding in March of \$36 million was well below the minimum \$250 million recommended in the MLA review. Still to this day we're getting complaints in long-term care. As recently as last week I had people coming forward about problems there in terms of long-term care. We haven't even begun, I don't believe, to solve the problems in this area. Our seniors are receiving inconsistent service across the province. Some facilities charge for certain things, some don't, and the minister is well aware that not even the Auditor General could make sense of the billing schemes that are used across our 150 or so facilities.

Again, we come back to the point – we made it, I think, both of us last time – about the need for standards. The Member for Lethbridge-East talked about, you know, a commissioner or an advocate or something. We need to have some way to implement and to know what's going on, and we need to press for the standards that we've talked about. We need to legislate minimum requirements for the number of nursing staff and staff-to-resident ratios. We have no minimum requirements. We need at least four hours of care per day. Alberta's requirement of 1.9 hours is not enough. We need standard qualifications and training for staff – we have no legislated standards – and we have to take inspection seriously.

In all due respect, even if the MLAs that are going around the province were saints – and I've never accused them of being that – it's not the way to do it, where people know two or three weeks ahead that they're coming in. This is why we were suggesting a seniors' advocate or commissioner. They could begin to go in unannounced and toughen up the standards. To the minister, there are still things happening in seniors' care that are not acceptable.

We'll continue, I'm sure, to have this debate, but I asked the questions that went to the minister of health about, you know, the money. Were they tracking the money? The minister's aware, and in fairness to the minister of health, she said: no; maybe we should be. Again I would remind the minister that the massive long-term hike of 2003 – it seems that they're paying a lot more out of their pockets or their families' pockets for a lot less, and there's no tracking going on there. Now, I know that's under the other minister, the minister of health's department. She told me even as late as today that she's going to try to look into that. I think that we should be looking in this rich province at perhaps reversing some of

those long-term fee hikes because it has created a lot of hardship for a lot of families. Again, in a wealthy province like this surely we could afford it.

I keep coming back: if we can afford \$370 million in the budget to the wealthiest corporations in Canada and the world, surely we should be able to do this. We have to follow the money. There's no tracking. So if that minister is talking to the other minister, I hope that they can at least do that.

3:40

Let me move quickly from there to AISH. I guess that the one question I have is about the waiting times, and it's good that the minister is trying to get the waiting times down. The current wait time is 30 days, and the plan for this year is to drop it to 25 and then to 24. The question I'd have: if we can move that quickly down five days in one year, what's the ultimate goal of the waiting list? The sooner the better, but what's the ultimate goal that the minister wants to get to?

I was just a little curious: the government's 18 per cent announced last week will still leave AISH recipients with less than the MLA AISH Review Committee asked for, a little less than we advocated during the election. The thousand dollars which the AISH recipients will now be eligible to receive is certainly welcome, but it was \$25 less than requested. I've wondered why the \$25 difference from the review committee when they looked at it. Twenty-five dollars doesn't seem like a lot, but it certainly is a lot to these people when you live on that sort of amount.

Again, I make the case for indexation. If we can index MLA salaries, certainly we should be able to index the most vulnerable in society so that they don't have to wait for another review. The minister knows that there was – what? – six, seven years before they got any increase at all. I think the minister mentioned that they'll review it in a couple of years or something. It seems to me that if it works for MLAs, indexation should be automatic in terms of people on AISH and, I would argue, for other vulnerable people too.

The only other point I would like to make: there still are a lot of people falling through the holes. I raised this question about the Winspear fund with the minister of human resources, but there were a lot of AISH people on there too with emergency funding.

Just to give the minister a couple of examples to show that there's still some difficulty in the AISH area. For example, a man with terminal cancer requires coats and boots for his wife and three young children. This 43-year-old man has been diagnosed with terminal renal cell cancer. He's on AISH, admitted to palliative home care. On AISH he needed to go to a private firm to get \$500. I know the minister is not aware of this specifically. I can certainly send over this report. Another: a 64-year-old man was diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer that spread to his bones. He needed a grant for \$500 to help pay half a damage deposit. Another one, a grant of \$500: a young man moved to a new accommodation. He had to pay his damage deposit and utility hookups out of his AISH income, which then left him falling behind in his rent and utilities. There's a whole raft of them, these sorts of things, and I know that the minister from time to time will look at these.

This is still happening with the Winspear fund, and there were a number of cases, not all in AISH, some in Human Resources. But they looked at this and said: well, we just have to help these people out. I would suggest that this is the government's responsibility rather than a private fund. If the minister didn't see this particular report, I would certainly be glad to make sure she gets a copy of it. So that's the point I would like to make about AISH, Mr. Chairman.

The third is PDD, and I just have some questions for the minister. I've had discussions about the PDD and whether a 2 per cent

increase is a cut or not. My understanding from the minister – and I hope that she'd correct me if I'm wrong. I know about the \$10 million, and that was desperately needed, although some people are arguing, as the Member for Lethbridge-East said, that they're still not living in great luxury. But they certainly appreciate getting the \$10 million. Now, in the budget she's saying that there's another \$13 million for the service areas, if I heard her right, and I hope I did. That would raise it, rather than 2 per cent across the board, to I think she said 4.6 per cent. I'd just like to confirm that with the minister, if she could do that sometime while we're here. We're still getting a lot of letters and calls, you know, about the funding in this area.

I would point out what the reality was with the 2 per cent. I know that it was happening across the province, but in terms of the Edmonton area, which I know best, they were projecting – I don't know if this was before the budget, and the minister's aware of that – that they would have a budget deficit of nearly \$10 million. They laid out why they had that deficit. It was new people coming in during the year, for instance, that weren't covered to begin with, and there were all sorts of reasons. Then they would have a deficit of \$12 million for 2007-2008, and they just had no way to cover this deficit.

Now, I don't know if other districts are in the same position, but certainly that was their position, and they laid it out fairly dramatically, and it did mean cuts. Whether there was more money there or not, the reality is that with inflation and more clients to service, they were facing a crisis. I'm trying to fit in my own mind what the minister said with the extra \$13 million into this, whether this is in the equation or whether they're still in the same position. It's not only them. I know that the south board was facing some of the same sorts of problems. I'd like some clarification on that.

I'm not sure how much time I have left.

An Hon. Member: Five minutes, Ray.

Mr. Martin: Okay. Thank you.

The last part of the minister's portfolio is the housing. She talked a fair amount about that, but one thing that has become painfully apparent during this last session is how grossly inadequate our current shelter capacities are as many women and children are turned away each year from shelters. That becomes a serious problem.

We've had bills in here talking about stalking, and they're good bills, but the problem is that right now I know that in Edmonton – and I'm sure it's true in other parts of the province – a lot of people are turned away. They just can't take anymore. So we put in new bills, and again they were good bills that we supported. There are just not the capabilities there. I know that there's a 39 per cent increase in housing, but I guess my question would be: what does the minister see in terms of women's shelters and the desperate need there? I know that in Fort McMurray it's a problem and, I was told, in Grande Prairie and other places. I'm sure that Calgary, Lethbridge, and others might be facing the same problems. I think that there's a real need there to deal with that issue, especially in view of some of the other things that we're bringing through the Legislature.

Mr. Chairman, I would just conclude by saying to the minister that there are a lot of areas here, but if we would get some written answers. I know that a lot of things that I'm talking about are political in nature, and we may have a disagreement with the government about that. We'll debate that in the budget, but there are some specific questions that I do have about this budget, especially in the PDD funding, to see where that sits so that we can get back to some of the people that are contacting us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll address that last question first regarding the PDD funding, if that's all right, although I know I had discussed it earlier. In regard to persons with developmental disabilities there is a spending target of \$508.7 million. That target is comprised of funding provided by our ministry, of course, as well as revenue from other sources – for example, fees that are collected or interest, up to \$2.1 million there – and the net effect of expense items that do not require revenue; for example, amortization of capital items and vacation liability costs, and that is \$0.4 million.

3:50

I know that your question is specifically about the \$10 million for the wage increase for the contracted workers. PDD will be receiving a \$22 million increase from the ministry in 2006-07. That is a 4.6 per cent increase. That does consist of \$10 million to provide for growth in the number of individuals that are supported by PDD, which is approximately 9,200 people, so that they can live, work, learn, and contribute to community life. Also, there's \$10 million for an increase in wages for the front-line staff that provide supports to PDD. Those funds provide a salary increase to staff that is retroactive to April of 2005. So it's retroactive for the year. Also, there's \$2.34 million to fund future GOA staff salary settlements.

The program receives funding annually, and that's to address a wide range of cost pressures. PDD's first priority, Mr. Chairman, is to ensure that eligible people, as I said, receive the supports that they need to live quality lives in our community. That was another question that you had in regard to the regions and those that say that this funding allocation isn't sufficient to meet their spending pressures.

I believe that PDD will have to carefully manage their caseload, the cost per case growth, and their continued cost pressures for community agencies. While a modest increase has been provided, those three cost pressures still remain, and that may be why you're hearing back when people do overspend on their budgets and continue to look for further funding, which was back to this question: will that happen in the estimates?

I think that it's really important to recognize that it's changed. AISH had been way over here, at arm's length, and PDD over here, but now under the one umbrella, the disabilities area, PDD clients receive AISH dollars as well. Part of the 34,000 clients on AISH includes the 9,200 people with PDD. So not only is it the significant budget of over \$500 million just allocated to PDD, but if you think of a dotted line going down between the two, PDD accesses AISH, which is the thousand dollars per month here in April for the living allowance, which is the medical benefit of a medical card and optical, dental, no health care premiums, et cetera, which is – and I want to talk with you about this too – the personal income support, which may address the case that you brought forward for utilities, for example.

Someone on AISH may require support in that area. That's a new initiative that came out of the AISH review. We have legislated this personal income support benefit, and that will be approximately \$360 for each client if they apply when they have these types of needs that you identified. When the AISH budget is increased 18 per cent, the PDD budget is increased 4.6 per cent. When you see that the clients can access both, that's a significant increase in funding. So I'm hoping that that does address that question.

Just quickly, Mr. Chairman, another question that had come forward was about the school property tax assistance. Yes, that is a program that is in place that is working, and it is for senior homeowners. It's to shield them from the increase in the education

portion of their property tax. The school property tax assistance program provides an annual rebate per household to cover those increases, but it's not based on income. It provides long-term protection against increases in the school portion of the property tax. Approximately 60,000 senior households, or 35 per cent, received rebates in 2005-06, and that was approximately \$39 per household. The payments ranged though. You know, that's an average. The payments did reach up to \$1,700 for some households. As the property taxes rise, it allows our seniors to remain in their homes for a longer period of time, and that's a benefit to the seniors overall.

What you wanted to see was that we take that a step further and that we offer savings to seniors with taxes in other ways as well. We're certainly always reviewing and seeing how we can assist seniors in that regard, and I'll take that under advisement here from you today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I'd just like to quickly follow up on what we were talking about in terms of the school tax. Because this department deals with people, this is a story, a people story. When I was in Fort McMurray last week, I visited the seniors' centre, and one of the suggestions that they made was about the school tax. What they're saying is that if they took the seniors that pay into the school tax and actually took that tax and put it into seniors' centres, they felt that that was a better use of the seniors' portion of the education tax.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wasn't ready quite that fast. I thought I had one more speaker, but that was a short one.

I appreciate the minister for the excellent presentation that she gave at the start. I realize that some of my comments will be repetitive, but I think perhaps that will compound the desire to get it done and fix some of those things. I'm pleased overall with the increase in the budget, and we'll just go and address some of the various issues as we go through there.

I probably want to start by just going through the expenses with the school property tax assistance. Seniors trying to live in their homes definitely struggle. The property tax and the reassessment of houses is a real struggle for them. Many seniors that bought their homes at \$35,000, \$40,000 are now being assessed at \$100,000, \$150,000, in the big centres maybe \$200,000 or more. Their income and the Canada pension plan and the other pension plans certainly have not kept pace. I would continue to urge the government to remove property taxes completely from senior citizens on the education portion of it. That would definitely be a benefit.

Running a surplus, we're definitely overtaking our people, and that would be one area where I feel that we could easily move forward that would be of great benefit to all of the seniors and to our communities as a whole because they could stay where they've been for years. They're an important hub of their community. To have to move out because of economic reasons, to me it is very disappointing when they have to do that.

To go to the next step, it's been mentioned many times, but I guess I'd like to talk about AISH and the income for the severely handicapped in that we've raised it. I think anybody in the province realizes that it's a real struggle for them to get by. They come and get together in the same apartments and other areas to try and make ends meet. What I would really like to see is a government that's helping people to help themselves.

We've raised the AISH earnings from \$200 to \$400 before there are any clawbacks. I really see that there are some individuals that can move into and be part of the workforce, but there's such a huge gap. They have a job that may be only paying \$200 or \$300 a month, and they don't dare take on anything more because if they do, they lose their AISH. I mean, if someone's bringing in an income of \$2,500 in this province today, that is not an excessive amount of income. I've asked many times in the House that we should just be raising the tax – well, we shouldn't be taxing anybody under \$20,000, \$25,000. More importantly for people on AISH or with PDD, we should be encouraging them, with our shortfall of employment in the province, to get out and get a job, and if they could earn \$1,200 a month, they should enjoy the fruits of those labours. By working full-time and still having their assistance, they'd be able to dig themselves out. They'd start to have something that's of consequence, and they'd all of a sudden start to feel a part of and have that reward of full employment.

Right now across the board for anybody who gets a little bit of income, immediately that extra help they get from the government is taken away, and they say: well, why should I go and work for \$1,200 or \$1,500 a month when I get a thousand dollars a month for being on AISH or PDD or whatever it is? So I'd really encourage the government once again that with our huge surplus this is an ideal time to allow those people to go out and work and to still have that support. So if something happens in three months, they've still got it, and they don't have to go through all the bureaucracy, if something fails, to try and get back into the system. They feel safe, secure there, and there's no encouragement to get out.

4:00

I'd like to go a step further to help those people with low income and all those in the fact that if they were to set up a savings plan, much like we encourage parents right now to invest money into an RESP, with their social worker for when times get tough – if their car breaks down or their water tank goes in their house, whatever it is, if they had a savings plan and they weren't in dire straits as soon as they hit something, it would be a benefit. If we were to work with their social worker and start a savings plan that they would have cosigning on and encourage them by matching a percentage, that if, in fact, they got out there, were working, and then when all of a sudden things get tough and they need \$2,000 to rebuild their car, there's a savings plan there that helps them to keep going . . . [interjection]. Well, we're working up to that.

You know, you've got to be visionary, looking to the future, not just to the fact that they don't have it. We want them to earn some money. They have to have a vehicle, quite often, to get to a job. Why do we take all those what I call necessities in this life and say that you're not allowed to have them? It's shameful. We shouldn't be doing that to them. Anyway, I would encourage a savings plan where the government would perhaps match, like we do with RESPs, and encourage them to start saving so that they have that and they're disciplined in that area.

Another area that I'd like to talk about is with the PDD and the inequities in the funding across the province. For the areas in the south it very much seems like there's higher funding per capita going into different regions. They don't understand it, and it's something that I feel needs to be addressed and at least allow the regions to understand.

I've talked to you before about the provincial board and definitely have a problem. In the past, before things were restructured, the different boards from the regions were there, and they were accountable to the different facilities that were helping those people through PDD, but now those boards are very much like our hospital boards,

that are under the thumb of the minister. These regional boards are very much under the thumb of the provincial board, and it seems like they're more accountable and have to worry and be dictated to on what they're doing. It would be great to see the regions given back their authority and their due diligence in serving the people in their area and not having to justify to a provincial board. It seems very frustrating to them.

Another area. Perhaps I'm missing the news; I get a lot that I'm trying to follow. There are a lot of individuals that are coming from child care and moving into PDD as they hit 18, and these facilities have already been told that there's no more funding to come to them, and they're in a real dilemma. They can't accept new clients because there's no new funding. I don't know if you've announced anything on that. I haven't heard it. No one has commented to me on that, but we need to have a program in place so that they know that when a child turns 18 and going forward, those programs are extended and coming forward. Right now the biggest fear, I guess, is for those parents not knowing what happens to their kids. The unknown is always the worst. It might not even be that bad, and the ministry might say, "Oh, no, we're going to look after them," but the fact of the matter is that the parents and the PDD facilities that I've gone to all have a great fear of where these individuals are going to go and how they're going to be there.

Another area with the PDD that I've had a few people bring to my mind is that in so many of the budgets that we have, whether it's the hospital, education, seniors, child care, we really don't know – and the good Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview brought it up yesterday – what the real cost is of looking after these children with PDD. What are the parents paying, and is there some way that we can facilitate and help the families more directly? It seems very much like we're organized and set up: if you bring them to us, we will help. But if you stay at home, there are lots of questions on what their motives are and whether they're trying to take advantage of the system. That runs not only to those with developmental disabilities. It also runs to seniors that are having to move out. If there's, you know, home care or an enhanced lodge, how much are we spending when we move a senior out of home care and say, "Well, you need to come to enhanced living," and they move in there?

What are we really subsidizing in those areas, and would we not be better off to allow a family member to move in that might be paid or to bring in a live-in caregiver? What are the real dollar values there, and are we taking people out of their community, out of their families by saying: well, we won't give you the money, but we will give it to these facilities? I would like to see an actual assessment to show how much we're really paying and family are paying total cost as opposed to: well, could we do more to help in-house, in-family care to look after these?

I have great faith in the assessors that assess these individuals. They know that this much money is needed and that the care is being given there. I don't think that we should say that it shouldn't go to the family or to one of these other facilities. Again, that assessor is being held accountable to see that there is no abuse in the system, but if the assessor can't do that, well, then, why have them? Let's get rid of them. But I say that they can, and I have great faith in the assessors and those people that are doing those that they can and will do a great job on that.

I guess that one of the other things, the implication of funding reduction, that one of the facilities has brought to me, is: are there funding cuts in PDD? We've questioned this back and forth. From down in the south the staff had a proposed 8 per cent cut because of the size of their facility. It's another one of those questions that I don't know has been addressed yet, and I look forward to the

minister answering on that. In the budget that they received, they were saying that they're going to get an 8 per cent cutback. It's very difficult for them to know where they really are in those areas, so hopefully that could be clarified, and they'd understand that.

Skipping down now to rural affordable supportive living, \$24,000,000. I'm not sure – and I'm not fully up to speed on what all of the program is – but I think that's a good initiative. Definitely we need more facilities in rural Alberta. There's already a shortage in the big cities. I've talked to people that are living in some of our small communities: Cardston, Magrath, Taber, Milk River. They're having to move into Lethbridge, but they would dearly love to have seniors' facilities and be part of their community and stay there. So I would encourage the government to continue looking in that area to see what they could do to help those facilities because I know there are many people that are coming forward that want to do those areas and provide that for them.

I'd also like to talk a little bit about private care. There's one facility – and I haven't talked to them, so I'd hate to bring up their name specifically – and they've set up a seniors' home. It's a private centre. People have paid to go in there, and the seniors that I've talked to that have gone in there absolutely love it. It's small, just 10 people in there. One registered nurse is the one who set up the facility, and she lives there. It's her home. They retired and built this what I'd call a retirement home, but they treat those people like royalty. If they don't wake up till 8 o'clock, they can come and get breakfast then. They can have the kitchen.

When I talked to the owners of the facility, the requirements were onerous on what they had to meet for government regulations. Safety is always an issue. We definitely want to keep them safe, but sometimes our regulations are ridiculous when we take two steps back and look at them and ask: why have we put all these things in? The example with this one is that they were half a mile away from a six-inch main line. In order to put in a firefighting facility, because they had over eight people, I believe it was, they had to spend I think \$70,000 or \$120,000 in order to put in a six-inch trunk line to have the overhead sprinklers meet the so-called engineering specs. They were way, way overdone, in my opinion. There are many areas like that where facilities struggle in wanting to provide an excellent service, yet with our safety rules and regulations sometimes we need to take a second look and realize that this is a small facility, that it's not a facility with 120 people in it.

The other thing I'd like to encourage on that aspect is that one of the great fears we have in our society today is the pandemic or spread. When these seniors come together and they live in a facility, the bigger it is, the more they'd get affected if, in fact, something comes into their facility. That's where rural Alberta and those small areas have an excellent opportunity to have small, functioning facilities that keep their community alive. There are tax dollars that are going back to those communities and jobs that keep them there, but the most exciting thing is that you don't have a huge group being brought together. They're much healthier, and their standard of living and the personal touch that is received in those facilities are very impressive in the ones that I've visited. I'd encourage the minister to continue looking at and finding some of those different facilities.

4:10

I'm just checking through the list here to see what else we had. [interjection] Checking it twice too.

Anyway, overall we need to realize that the most important thing as government here is that we have to look after those that are most vulnerable. I know that it's in your heart, and you're reaching out and doing that. I hope that you'll continue to have your ear open to

the ideas that come forward, that we can and will look after our seniors better. To me the key there is that we don't want centralization. We want to meet them, if possible, in their homes, in their communities, in a small family setting, not in huge facilities, though they may be necessary in some of the areas. Smaller, more dispersed is what I've received.

It's the same with the PDD in that they, too, love their little, small groups where they can get together in the different towns. It's a great benefit to those people that they don't have to travel long distances or actually get up and move their family to the city because they have children with disabilities and problems. I'll encourage the government to continue looking down those roads.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I'll just attempt to answer a couple of those questions, and if you don't mind, I'll put the others in writing and give that to you, hon. member.

You began with vote 2, about the education portion of the property tax for seniors and the importance of seniors staying in their own homes. I couldn't agree with you more because it's true, and we are attempting to do that. We have a number of programs – some I addressed in my opening remarks – that assist seniors. Especially as people age, their oral health is extremely important, and one is, of course, the dental and optical assistance program. That program is for low- to moderate-income seniors so that people with moderate incomes living in their own homes accessing this program realize a cost saving where they don't need to pay for their oral health care. As I said earlier, we have about 14,000 seniors that access that program right now per month, which is an incredible number of people – and we're pleased about that – that are realizing that that is there in place for them.

The maximum coverage is available to seniors with incomes that are less than \$20,000 and to couples with incomes less than \$40,000, and that's at maximum coverage. The partial coverage is available to seniors with incomes between \$20,311 and \$30,310 and to couples with incomes between \$40,620 and \$60,620. That's up to \$5,000 of basic dental coverage every five years. So you can see that that is significant.

Another program that we have in place as well – I know that you mentioned, as I said, the tax program – that assists seniors with staying in their own homes is the premium-free Alberta health care insurance. All seniors are exempt from paying health care premiums, and that is a saving of \$520 per year for a single senior and \$1,056 for a senior couple. That, too, is another significant saving, that thousand dollars.

Then we have our premium-free Blue Cross coverage. That means that premiums are paid for all seniors, their spouses, and eligible dependants at a maximum of \$25,000 in benefits per year and per person. It covers 70 per cent of prescription drug costs so that seniors pay 30 per cent and up to a maximum of \$25 per prescription or refill. It also covers the ambulance services, clinical psychological services, home nursing care. What I'm just trying to show you is that there are other programs, meaning that it's comprehensive, holistic, and benefits the seniors overall so that they can stay in their homes.

We have approximately 360,000 seniors in the province. Eighty per cent of the seniors in long-term care and in our supportive-living facilities receive significant support through this department, which is why we had that \$10 million increase in the third quarter for long-term care. That assists our seniors as well. I hear what you're saying about regulations not being too onerous, especially in our

rural communities. That, of course, is something that we can always evaluate.

Your comment about fire and needing sprinklers: I think that that is an important regulation, and I know that you agree with that. It's important because seniors that are in homes, when they've left their own homes, have more chronic needs. They're very frail, for example. In our lodges the average age of a senior is 86. Their frailty includes mobility problems, meaning they're using walkers or wheelchairs. Those are significant things in our lodges, not just mobility but vision and oral health. That age is 86.

As you move up the line, which you were talking about, I think, maybe with the unique home that you were discussing, we do pay people to have seniors in unique homes in the province and in the rural communities. We fund every bed that's available, whether they have a senior in that bed or a person that may have a disability. We fund that whether they're there or not. We try to keep the home fully funded so that as they go through the transitioning of their patients or their clients, they can receive funding.

In the area of PDD, though, I hear your comments about the provincial board, that people in the community have commented on that to you. We did have that conversation, and I would just ask that you stay tuned because you will be seeing changes in that regard soon.

Also, when you indicated about the south region shortfall of 8 per cent and that they said there is a funding cut, I've tried to explain today: there is definitely no funding cut. There is a significant amount of funding in this program. Out of the total \$1.8 billion that we have in this budget, \$1.1 billion is for people with disabilities, and it's significant funding. The south region, though, overspent their budget, and now they would like more funding once again for the overspending that did occur. I know that 21 per cent of their budget goes toward administrative costs, and I can send you more details in that regard later as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few comments that I'd like to make, but first of all I'd like to congratulate the minister on a job well done, not only for Albertans but for my constituents in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. You have made a difference. You know, I'm so proud that I was able to get support for capital projects in Whitecourt and in Onoway. Also the concerns that came from seniors throughout Whitecourt-Ste. Anne that I needed help with, you and your ministry were there to help me.

I want to talk a bit about the PDD increase and how that relates to wage increases. You know, if the lion's share of that increase will go to wages, how much will be left for those that really need the care? I have a constituent that is very concerned about this, and I have a family member, too, that has previously lived in the Michener Centre and is now in a group home that gets funding through your ministry, so I'd like to know a little bit about that.

I have a facility in Mayerthorpe that's about 40 years old, you know. The staff offer great services – they're dedicated; they're loving – but the seniors that live in there live, I guess I'd say, in cubicles. I look forward to an opportunity for the Lac Ste. Anne Foundation, that takes care of the Mayerthorpe facility, to be able to access funds that may be available through your capital projects.

4:20

I'd like to know if there are opportunities for funding in your capital funds for retrofits and for those renovations that need to be

made. With these new facilities in Whitecourt, which is in the west end, and Onoway, in the east end of my constituency, and Mayerthorpe, in the centre along highway 43, I do see an opportunity for seniors from those communities to move back home. Then I do see some opportunity in Mayerthorpe, where we may have some opportunity to go in there and do some retrofits, maybe make two units out of three, but they're going to need some help, and they're going to need some funding. So I'd like to know about that.

I will end this off, again, thanking you for all the help that you've given my constituents and the caring and loving way that you have treated them whenever they've approached you. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, did you want to respond?

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for those kind comments, hon. member.

The lodges renovation and repair funding was part of the \$140 million that was allocated in this area, and \$15 million was allocated last year for this as one-time grant funding. It was provided to lodge operators to assist with the renovations, as you mentioned, for the smaller cubicles, knowing the mobility problems and so that people could access the bathrooms and whatnot, and repairs to the facilities. This funding priority was for life-safety items, repairs to major building components, including the windows, the heating, the plumbing, and the electrical equipment.

The number of lodges that we were able to assist: we had 86 lodge operators that requested funding, and they are being assisted with their first priority items. That is, 77 of the 86 lodge operators are being assisted, and all lodge operators were asked to submit their renovations and repair funding needs. The lodges with the life-safety items and repairs to major building components were given first priority.

Do we have that funding in this budget now? The answer is no. It was one-time grant funding, and it was provided last year. Those decisions on a priority basis have been made. I'll send you the information about PDD.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very, very pleased to rise today to speak to the estimates on this department. I must commend and congratulate the minister on a professional and comprehensive presentation. I'm sure the minister would like to see more money go to our seniors, our persons on AISH and PDD, and to see some ways that we can deal with the poor in our society that cannot deal for themselves quite often. I mean, I heard from the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner who said that we should have savings plans for people on AISH. Gosh, that would be wonderful if there was that sort of level of income there for people on AISH.

I managed to procure some movie theatre tickets for a couple that are in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning who are on AISH. They continually are budgeting, they told me, you know, for things like bus passes and trading off a bus pass for one month from one of them to the other so that they can have some transportation and some entertainment and some variety in their lives. I managed to get them these movie theatre ticket passes, these \$20 sort of things, and they went for a family celebration to see a movie. They said that to them the definition of luxury was what they had, was to see this movie and to actually have buttered popcorn. For them that was the definition of luxury.

It would be very difficult to see a savings plan with these levels that we have right now in our society where they can save any more than just a few dollars or pennies a month.

On PDD: I was at a town hall meeting last Thursday at an historic church in our capital city of Edmonton. There was not a representative from the fourth party, the Alliance opposition. There was not a representative from the third party, the New Democrat opposition. There was not a representative from the government, either in the public service or an elected official, yet here was a full, full church of people, many of them on PDD, many parents. They were very, very concerned, so they asked me, "Are you the government?" I said, "No, I'm not the government. I'm in the opposition." "Well can you speak for the government?" I said, "No, I can't speak for the government. I'm here to listen." "Well what can you do for us?" "Well, I can say what I would like to see."

I heard from these individuals, who were shocked. I'll ask a question about PDD, and I'll bring it forward from these people to the minister. They said that Edmonton would see a 3.8 per cent reduction in their PDD funding, which would cause great hardship for many of the contractors and for many of the people that they are dealing with and for.

They spoke of the great concerns over the maintenance and retention of employees. The Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne mentioned that just before me. I think it's a huge concern as the conventional oil industry and other employers provide tremendous opportunities in work and much better paying opportunities and work that draws people from all areas of our economy and, certainly, from the lower paying areas. Historically, it has always been in areas such as PDD and the provision of support for seniors as well.

They said that the \$10 million increase amounted to 30 cents per hour, which for them was significant; it was substantial. Thirty cents an hour really meant something to them, and they were happy to see it. But 30 cents an hour really was not going to do them any good because the way the budgeting is working and the way their employers are having to deal with the budgets and the restrictions that are happening now, they would have reduced hours. So the reality is that there would actually be much less income for many of the individuals working in that. They were saying that they would be forced to leave their employment and leave the assistance of these people. Many were almost at a loss as to what they could do to try and deal with these problems.

Many of these outfits, many of these companies are so tightly budgeted and just have so very little to deal with that they become very, very stressed on a few minor areas. In reality, to hold many of their people they would need \$2 or \$3 or \$4 an hour, which if they were in the oil sector, would be nothing to give. I've heard of welders being asked to go on standby when it was warm in the wintertime, and they were just being held on the company payroll and staying at home in north Edmonton for \$350 a day. For some of the people who work in these areas, that would be just a wonderful windfall that would be beyond their comprehension.

The problems with Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, I think, were documented by the Auditor General, and the need to look at these was looked at very clearly by the committee, the MLA task force. I think the members of that task force desired to come up with some solutions. I attended some of those meetings, and I've had the opportunity to speak with many people who have been affected. Some members of my family have been affected by difficulties and severe problems with the system. That is why I think Bill 205, that was put forward by the Member for Lethbridge-East to institute a continuing care commissioner, should have gone forward. I had put forward at an earlier stage that such a position could even be called an inspector general.

4:30

I think there would be a great deal of feeling on the part of many, many seniors that they would not have that fear of retribution that so many of them have when they are bringing up any problems that

they might have with their facilities. This is a very, very real fear. They're old. They're elderly. They're frail. They don't have a feeling that they can fight back anymore. Many of them don't even have anybody that can speak for them. It is such a problem for so many that they lose hope.

We had many things that were brought up: the inadequate facilities in some areas, sometimes poor maintenance, understaffing – the staffing problem is becoming unworkable for many of these facilities – the lack of staff training, the standards problem, the lack of accountability directly due to conscious decisions made by this government in the past. I would ask the minister to look at something like a continuing care commissioner in the future because I think an independent office with the power to inspect facilities and to ensure compliance with standards would do a great deal to give a sense of stability, a sense of ability to deal with their problems for many seniors and would, in reality, enhance the lives of our seniors.

There's often confusion among seniors and families when it comes to identifying and understanding the basket of services and levels of care provided in homes. I'd ask if the minister could look in the future – because I don't see it here – to provide a consistent province-wide classification system in order to eliminate this confusion. Terms such as “assisted living,” “lodges,” and “supportive living” must be clearly defined. The government must also require that all homes outline in unambiguous terms who is responsible for the cost and delivery of these services, that they be really defined in clear ways.

Systems must be in place so that residents and families know what level of care to expect and can decide which type of facility would best meet their needs. In the Alberta Liberal opposition we've also called for a website, a simple thing to be created, where all facilities are required to fully disclose their staffing, their levels of service, their programs, and all related costs and fees.

Some specific financial questions from the estimates on page 372. For line item 2.1.2 I'll be a little bit more specific than the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. There seems to be on line item 2.1.2 a discrepancy in the '05-06 budget. There's a difference between \$8,652,000 and the '05-06 forecast of \$5,652,000. The question is: how does the minister account for the dramatic reduction in spending for the Alberta seniors' benefit and school property tax assistance program delivery?

Another question is: what steps has the ministry taken to more accurately forecast its spending? It's difficult, but it's such huge numbers and such broad projections in the population that it would be appreciated if we could see some sense of an answer to that question.

The minister mentioned it in her earlier answer, but I think it should be underlined and be made clear that the Alberta Social Housing Corporation debt repayment – and I believe that was to the heritage trust fund – is something that is to pay an old loan. Really, it's nothing new, and it's not providing new monies that could be seen to be dealing with providing more assistance to seniors.

It continues to come up again and again that much of the confusion among Albertans about programs and services – and I think all MLAs here get that, people coming to their office. They get this confusion, and it's related to continuing care and the result of housing and health care and human resources and others being split between various ministries. As well, last fall the Premier indicated that consolidating seniors' programs and services is “under active consideration.” To build a little bit more past the previous answer, can the minister explain why this plan was abandoned?

I've mentioned the Auditor General. What steps is the minister taking to ensure that the Auditor General is able to determine how much money is going into long-term facilities, what it's being used

for, and how effectively it can be spent? To echo the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in the problems with the 2003 increases in accommodation: I hear this time and time and time again, that there is some need to take care of that because this is still a huge hardship for many seniors. What will the ministry do to at least ameliorate some of the accommodation rates which were increased so dramatically a few years ago?

The importance of this ministry is huge. It is one that in many ways determines how we're seen outside of Alberta in terms of how we deal with those who are disadvantaged, and I just hoped that we could get some more for many of these people. More isn't always better, but for many of these people there is a clear need.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I answer the questions any further, could we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to introduce the staff that I have here with me this afternoon. I'm pleased they were here and have heard all the questions that we've had so far, and there'll be more to come. I'd ask that they rise as I introduce them to you: my new deputy minister, Tim Wiles; Dave Arsenault, our assistant deputy minister of strategic planning and supportive living division; Mahmud Dhala of our financial services area; and Jason Chance, our communications director. Of course, many of you know my executive assistant, Wendy Rodgers.

Thank you.

head: 4:40 **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Seniors and Community Supports (continued)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to stand this afternoon and give a little bit of a testament first to the minister that wears her heart on her sleeve. Last fall during the caucus retreat in Bonnyville-Cold Lake the minister so graciously met with the PDD community in my constituency, and they raised the different issues and concerns that they had. The culmination of that meeting led to a presentation last week of a \$600,000 cheque for low-income housing for PDD clients in our constituency.

At that presentation, Mr. Chairman, the parents of these unfortunate individuals spoke of the minister who came and listened and did not interrupt but continued to listen, and they felt that that was a rare quality in politicians. So I guess that maybe I learned something from that personally myself. At the end of the discussion the minister made a firm commitment to assist them, and the culmination of the hard work over many, many years by these individuals will soon be realized before the end of this year.

To the minister all I can say is: continue the good work. The good work that you've done without the assistance of a deputy minister leads me to believe that now that you have a deputy, we can see a lot more great things to come from your department to assist the seniors

and other individuals in need in our province. So I look forward to that.

I had some questions to ask the minister, but they have been asked by previous members, so I won't take up any more of their time. I just want to say thank you very much to the minister, who wears her heart on her sleeve.

Mr. Chairman, is it all right to give the minister a hug before I sit down?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to get a few minutes to get on the record with some of the issues around this portfolio. I was the previous opposition critic for seniors. This department is slightly reconstituted, but because of the constituents I represent, AISH is a big issue in my constituency, as is Aids to Daily Living, and I continue to be interested in seniors' issues because I have a fairly high percentage of seniors living in my constituency. I'm also interested in housing. So let me run through some of the issues I want to underline for the minister but also a few questions I have along the way. I'm aware that we're starting to get short on time for this debate, so if she wishes to reply in writing to allow others to question her today, that would be fine by me.

I'm wondering if we're anticipating any future increase in Aids to Daily Living. When we look at her long-term, rolling, three-year plan, can we expect that there would be any kind of indexing or a consistent inflationary increase for ADL? The flip side of that is: can we be expecting that there is going to be any kind of reduction or clawing back or delisting or any change in the level of benefits available through that?

While I'm on the subject of indexing, I would urge the minister to consider indexing PDD and AISH. We keep getting into this cycle where there's no indexing. Yes, there's been an increase this year, but there won't be next year or the year after that or the year after that. We get four, five, or six years down the road, and the rates are seriously behind inflation, and then it's a fairly large budget increase to look at, and I know that it's difficult for the minister to go before Treasury Board and argue for quite a large increase.

If the government MLAs in this House believed in the wisdom of indexing the MLAs' salaries to the Alberta weekly wage, I fail to understand why that same wisdom isn't transferred to the benefits that are available for PDD and for AISH. I hasten to add that the Alberta Liberals believe that MLAs' salaries should not be set that way. It shouldn't be set by ourselves. It should be decided by an independent committee.

I'm looking to the minister for clarification now around housing, and whether her ministry covers shelters and how much of that she covers. Perhaps she can give us a list of where, under which department, we would find funding for things like temporary shelters which include a mat program – in other words, mats on the floor that people sleep on overnight – whether she is covering the women's shelters now, if there's a portion of her budget going toward women's shelters or if that's still coming out of Children's Services. It continues to irk me that we have women's shelters under Children's Services, but this government doesn't seem to see the irony in that.

Is she responsible for the transitional housing as women, for example, move away from the short-term, three-week shelters and into what we call transitional – that's three months or even further than that – third-stage housing? Is she covering that, or is that in a different location?

We do know that she is responsible for the housing in Fort McMurray, and I was looking for more leadership from the minister

around that housing crisis in Fort McMurray. I was up there last week, and I was really shocked at the position that this government would put that city in. I expected that there would have been a better understanding and more support for that particular city. So much of the wealth that this government is able to get its hands on and exploit – I mean, the people in Fort McMurray didn't put it in the ground, but they're certainly helping to get it out. I was shocked at the position that they have been left in, to fend for themselves there.

I realize that the minister has released, I think, at this point two small amounts of land to allow for additional housing to be built, but the crisis there is far beyond two allocations. I was looking for a longer term plan with some vision to it that would give us some idea that Fort McMurray was going to be able to come out of the situation that they're in within a specified period of time, whether it's three years or five years or seven years or 10 years. At what point would we expect that there would be enough housing units there to support the workers that need to be on-site for the projects that this government is approving through its processes?

I was able to meet with groups like Canadian Mental Health, and I went to see the HIV/AIDS network. I was visiting with some of the people associated with the regional health authority. The same issues just come up over and over again. They can't get a quality of life up there because they can't get enough workers to build those recreational facilities and cultural facilities that would give them a quality of life because there's no place to house the workers.

So there really needs to be a team effort here, and I was hoping that I would have seen more of that. I'd like to draw the minister out on what she sees as the longer range solutions to this because if we don't see action that starts today for five years down the road, then five years down the road we're going to be in an even worse position. So what is the vision from the minister regarding that?

A number of people have spoken about the move of the government toward an enhanced living, or assisted living, or supportive living, situation. I note with some chagrin that this idea sprang from a very good idea that was started, I think, in Copenhagen, in which they started a supported living environment for people with dementia, and then it got picked up in the States, and God bless them, they do seem to be able to take a good thing and pervert it in the good old U.S. of A. It turned from a very positive, supportive environment into a way of having people pay for things more and more, so getting away from the medical model and calling it a housing model.

4:50

Really, what we know happened in the States is that you've got what used to be a long-term care facility, except that if you've got someone that, you know, can't really propel themselves down the hall to the cafeteria for lunch, well, the solution to that is to give people more choice, and I'll put quotations around that word "choice." So they now have the choice of paying someone \$2 to wheel them down the hall, or, gosh, they'll extend the eating hours so if it takes you an hour to get yourself down the hallway, dragging yourself in your wheelchair, by the time you get to the cafeteria, it's still open.

I'm really offended by the thought that that's the situation that we would be in in Canada, that we would be steering towards, you know, racing towards the bottom in the care that we give people. But there's no question that the model that is being followed with this supported, slash, enhanced living is exactly that model. I'm interested to see how the minister is going to roll that out over a five-year plan and how many of these units she expects to see under her ministry three years out, five years out, and 10 years out and what kind of fee structures will be associated with the services and with the accommodations there.

I appreciated my colleagues from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview

and Cardston-Taber-Warner raising the issue of earnings thresholds for people on AISH. I think that that is an area of great fear for people. I know that the government was trying to take some tentative steps in that direction, but they've created such fear over the years for individuals in these programs that somehow they'll lose their benefits if they start to earn more money. I think that there's more that can be done there, and I encourage the minister in that direction.

One of the questions that I get from constituents is whether there is any consideration to making funding for alternative medicine available through the seniors' programs. Increasingly, people are being steered towards acupuncture or various kinds of alternative therapies that are not covered under traditional health care plans. Nonetheless, that's what's being prescribed for them, or seniors are being encouraged to try those therapies out, but they find it very restrictive because they're paying out of pocket for it. I'm wondering if the seniors' benefit program is looking to make any kind of an allocation or an allowance for payment that people could apply for, to cover additional costs that come through an alternative medicine program.

So those are some of the questions that I'm looking for the minister to discuss. Obviously, I'm most interested in the longer range policy frameworks, to hear what she has in mind there that goes beyond the exact numbers on the page now. In particular, I'm looking to see whether the government is planning on continuing to follow the path that they're on right now or if there are, sort of, larger plans in the future and what those would be.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the member for bringing forward the Alberta Aids to Daily Living program at the beginning of her comments because I didn't have an opportunity to address that in my opening remarks. As you know, this program provides assistance to people who have a chronic disability or an illness, so that they can access basic medical equipment and supplies, and that will allow them to be more independent in their home or in a home-like setting. This program, AADL, supports approximately 78,000 clients annually, so over a five-year period more than 400,000 Albertans may have used this program on a cyclical basis. For example, some may receive a new hearing aid or walker every five years, if needed. It's an important program for people, so that's why they do access it frequently.

Mr. Chairman, back to the question that the member had asked, the budget for AADL benefits has increased from \$79,185,000 to \$83,935,000 for '06-07. It's really important what that increase is for. It includes a million dollar increase to begin the implementation of a three-year pilot project for augmentative communication devices. The community has been asking for that for a very long time. This is an initiative that my assistant deputy minister, Dave Arseneault, who is here today, put forward and advocated for strongly on behalf of people. I'm glad that he did because we did receive funding this year. The pilot is going to assist Albertans who have difficulty communicating due to medical conditions or physical disabilities.

The budget also includes \$300,000 for an innovative program assisting Albertans with problems such as diabetes, and that's to lower their risk of foot amputation. It will be instituted at high-risk foot clinics in both Calgary and in Edmonton.

As well, a \$3.45 million increase for the AADL program supports the caseload growth, price increases, and necessary maintenance to computer systems. Current program pressures include an increasing volume of clients, the complexity of needs, and the increasing costs.

These pressures are due in part to the changing demographics, which you can understand, of an aging population and the health system's move to provide people with health services in the community rather than facility care, which goes back to many of the questions that you've brought forward here today. So from '94-95 to '04-05, over the 10-year period, we've had a 16 per cent increase in the number of clients, with significant increases this year alone in this program for important needs.

The other area, Mr. Chairman, that I'd like to address as well because the member did mention that she had been to Fort McMurray and what she saw were the needs there and asked about the Fort McMurray land sales and how they relate to this ministry – we know about the Auditor's recommendations. Because of those recommendations I have brought in an improved process to sell Crown lands in Fort McMurray. It's through the Alberta Social Housing Corporation that those Crown lands are available. The process that we developed is open, is accountable, and I believe that it will help address those concerns, but more importantly it will truly help to have housing developed quickly. There was a new request for proposal process that I did bring in. It included strict timelines for housing development, providing affordable housing for low-income Albertans. Also, there was a set price for the land. That reduces the impact of the inflated market that the member referred to in Fort McMurray.

The parcel that we just sold recently is known as parcel D. The agreement for that parcel was between our corporation, Alberta Social Housing Corporation, and Centron Residential Corporation. The sale of that parcel was finalized on February 9, 2006. Now, my understanding from my communication with the municipality, with the planning people there, and with my department is that they're actively working on planning and engineering approvals. They are anticipating completion of that parcel D land development by the end of 2007, Mr. Chairman. It is anticipated, as I mentioned earlier, that that parcel alone will bring 2,800 housing units and it may even be over 3,000 if the density increases, which I understand is a request through the proponent to the municipality.

So we have had an open review process, considered a number of factors, including new affordable housing, and I have to tell you that I am confident that this is the best overall proposal for Fort McMurray with parcel D. More importantly, every 90 days we're bringing another parcel on the market. We are bringing parcel F onto the market, which will provide 220 acres. That RFP is out there now. We're looking for approximately 1,500 housing units with that parcel. Then after that parcel, by the end of June, when we've received the proposals and made the decision, we will include a condition that the development of the lots will need to be completed by 2008.

5:00

Then immediately, too, we've been working with Sustainable Resource Development, and that's to obtain another 102 acres of land to be included with the existing 204 acres in the North Parsons Creek. That together could add up to another 1,800 housing units. As I said, I'm confident that that is going to meet very quickly the housing needs of people in Fort McMurray.

Thank you for letting me put that on the record, Mr. Chairman, and I will answer the other questions in writing.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make a few remarks and also compliment our Minister of Seniors and Community Services for the simple reason that in West Yellowhead we have aging population.

Of course, I really want to mention Grande Cache. She was a

driving force to help us move forward on the aspect of a lodge in Grande Cache called the Whispering Pine. I think that's a real model to have in smaller communities. We're able to work with Peace Country health to have the units connected, so we saved a lot of money in operations, especially the aspect of laundry, and with food services and everything.

I just find that working with her is such a pleasure, to move along the common-sense things. I mean, this one project that I'm speaking about today has been going on for quite a while. Sure, we had to work through the different authorities to move ahead to get the land to build it, but I just want to reiterate the great co-operation I had from her on this project.

Furthermore, with Evergreens Foundation we did some changing in the town of Hinton. There was an expectation with Mountain View that we had some long-term care units there. We had some assisted living units. We also had a dementia area. Through the work of her and the previous minister we were able to do some changing in there. We've doubled the amount of rooms for dementia, and we went with designated assisted living in the town. We're almost full there with that aspect. The people are very pleased with the kind of service that we're getting, and we're moving along on that.

I guess that the other thing that I have a little bit of wonderment – and I would like to ask the minister on this if she could basically give me understanding of it. We have some people in our area that are sort of looking at the aspect of working on and possibly setting up some low-cost housing units for the seniors in our area. I notice in her budget that on the line item talking about Canada/Alberta affordable housing, for 2006-07 we have \$44 million, but basically there's no more for the out-years of our three years. I realize that this could be a program change or just a program system that we had prior to her becoming minister. I'm just wondering what her ministry is doing to move forward so that we can have programs like this since we have an aging population, if we can work with the municipalities and with entrepreneurs to put up facilities like this so that our seniors are able to stay in our communities because they are a great asset to our communities.

I also want to compliment her on the work she's done to try and move ahead with Jasper. As you realize with Jasper, in a national park a lot of times it's hard to get any type of development. Once again, what we're working on in Jasper is a system where we can move together with Aspen regional health authority to put a lodge in the community so we can have those people stay. What transpires, as you know, in a national park the majority of the time is if you've got residency there, you have to have a job. We don't want to lose those people because they're a great asset.

I guess my final comment I would like to make is about the remote housing. I know that some of my other colleagues, like the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater and the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, have done a lot of work convincing previous ministers to move ahead on this remote housing. We have to look after the aspect of our people in our region, and we were able to get the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation some manufactured homes on their different co-operatives. You wouldn't believe how much that has helped the area, and they have got good residents there. They're great contributors to our society. This is going to certainly help in the long run with the elders.

Conversely, when we opened up the Whispering Pine, a lot of people felt that the elders from the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation would not move in there. Well, I'm sorry to tell you, but they did, and they enjoy it immensely. They're very well in the community. I think that with this type of program we have to look at where we came from and give some support. So if I could have the minister give me an answer on that funding, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Once again, on behalf of all the citizens in West Yellowhead I just want to compliment her for great co-operation and basic understanding of what we have to do to move forward to make a precious resource of the seniors, and therefore we'll be a lot better off in years to come.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, would you like to respond?

Mrs. Fritz: Just briefly, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the Member for West Yellowhead for those kind comments because he's a strong advocate and understands this Canada/Alberta affordable housing agreement very, very well. As he indicated, the funding for this program will be ending March 31, 2007. It's a program that we're moving into our fourth year with. We've had \$153 million dedicated to it since June 2002 in support of affordable housing units being built across the province. So \$44 million has been budgeted this year, for 2006-07, to complete phase 2 of the program, and that includes \$22 million in funding from Alberta and \$22 million from the federal government.

Having said that, when you asked about our vision or our plan for the future, with the new federal government we are hoping that this program will continue. As the member knows, Mr. Chairman, and helped to bring this change in the funding that was allocated to the various projects, phase 1 had approved a level of only \$50,000 per unit, whereas now the phase that we're in, it's \$150,000 per unit, which means that we're building 400 units with the funding up to March 31, 2007. So it's a significant contribution to the community for housing, and I am hoping that in the discussions we have with the federal government, we will have the program continue after March 31, 2007.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'll be very brief. I just wanted to address some comments that pertain to the new housing units in Fort McMurray. I, too, was up there last week. You can send me the answers in writing.

I'd really like to know what the criteria would be to get into that housing. What I'm concerned about is the people that are there trying to create community. They want to stay there. They want to live there. They've got grandchildren. What I'm so afraid of is that it will be the transient workers that are there until the project is built, the physical buildings are built, and then they're long gone. So I'd just like to know what that criteria is to get into that housing because I think it's very, very important that we address the fact that we have a community in crisis. If more transient workers can go in with their little LOA cheques in their hands, it's not going to help.

Oh, and one more thing: check the contracts with the companies. I do believe that there are some contractual obligations out there that perhaps they're not meeting, like by providing camp housing for their own workers.

5:10

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Seniors and Community Supports for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$1,911,905,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report the estimates of the Legislative Assembly and the estimates of Seniors and Community Supports and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following departments.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, expense, \$45,936,000; office of the Auditor General, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$19,166,000; office of the Ombudsman, expense, \$2,327,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, expense, \$2,515,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, expense, \$410,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, expense, \$4,510,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,911,905,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we now adjourn until 8 p.m., at which time we return in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:13 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 4, 2006**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/04/04

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order. Before we proceed with the item before us, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Curry.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members present in the House this evening a group of volunteer workers who are here for volunteer services for the Cross Cancer Institute, University of Alberta hospital, Ronald McDonald House, Canadian Blood Services, and Kids Kottage. They are here for six months: leaders Bernie and Bernice, Dennis and Jewel from Manitoba, and volunteer workers Heather Anduruh from Kansas, Jolyn Kramer from Arkansas, and six girls, Rosanna Penner from Nebraska, Mandy Koehn from Texas, Kay Wedel from Mississippi, Tina Koehn from Kansas. I may have missed a couple of names here. If I have, I apologize for that. They're seated in the public gallery, and if they would rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House, please.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Energy

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. [some applause] We obviously need a little more energy among this group, but we'll get that going as the night gets going.

I'd like to first take the opportunity to introduce a number of officials from the Department of Energy and from the Energy and Utilities Board. This is clearly one of the most exciting departments in this government, in this province, in this opportunity of this province for the future ahead. First, I'd like to introduce Dan McFadyen, Deputy Minister of Energy. He recently joined us as of January. To the right of him is Don Keech, assistant deputy minister. We also have with us David Breakwell, assistant deputy minister; John Giesbrecht, chief financial officer for the Energy and Utilities Board; Joe Miller, our executive director of policy, planning, and external relations; and Katherine Braun, associate executive director, electricity. I'll have them stand and please accept the warm welcome of the House. There are others listening in attentively to this exciting debate that we'll have tonight, and we look forward to comments from all members.

We know of the prosperity that Alberta enjoys presently and has over the decades because of the energy industry. This industry is going to continue to play a very prominent role and should play a very prominent role in the future opportunities for Alberta. We've had record levels of energy activity this past year. Exploration, development, production, technology advances continue to be coming in a variety of methods, improved environmental technologies, and protection. The list is really getting quite vast as the ongoing improvements and efficiencies in the industry itself.

Oil sands productions are really at the infancy of production at this stage, about a million barrels a day. Probably by 2007 that might represent close to 75 per cent of the total oil production in Alberta.

We know of our conventional sources – we've been producing them for decades – and we still have vast untapped conventional sources of gas and oil. In fact, with technology improvements we'll probably find a whole new Alberta just in all of our conventional sources of oil and gas.

Yet we continue to have enormous activity and opportunity in the unconventional sources: the coal bed methane, tight sands and shales, the gas that would be available in those areas, the oil sands themselves. Then if we start adding onto all of that the coal opportunities – with the advances, really, in some of the technologies in the future coal can and should play one of the clean environmental solutions of energy as one of the more economic platforms to accomplishing that objective.

We are very much working in the department on an integrated energy strategy that looks at the integration of all of these sources of hydrocarbons together with renewable sources. We could be at the forefront of all energy development and continue to be global energy leaders. We have centuries of opportunity, and it really is only going to be the challenge of putting together and managing that opportunity that would limit us.

This past year we've had more than \$14 billion that came through energy resources, 35 per cent of the total provincial revenues, a record year in many aspects. The next year, going forward, looking at our estimates, likewise should be a very promising year for the energy industry in Alberta. They'll continue to provide a very substantial source of funding for priority programs as they have continuously done for health care, education, social programs, and the like.

We've also announced that Alberta consumers will continue to have the protection of the monthly natural gas rebate program. It was extended for three years and is now a six-month program, starting in October through the end of March. So there's a rebate that's commensurate as the price of natural gas goes up and down.

We'd also like to just mention that for us to continue to ensure that we tap into the opportunity, we're going to ensure that investments are made so that Alberta continues to build the capacity and capability needed to support the innovation that's needed to be at the forefront of a globally competitive energy sector. We are certainly monitoring and looking at Albertans receiving their fair share of the resources through royalties, taxes, bonuses, and rentals. We likewise will make sure that we're attractive to investors, both conventional and unconventional sources alike.

I know that in the estimates, in the budgets there's continuously the discussion about the government's projection of commodity prices into the future, and that will no doubt continue to be again this year. It's very volatile, and it doesn't matter what number you pick; you're likely to be wrong. You certainly might get some indications of where revenue and commodity prices might go, but they have very significant sensitivities. Just for example, in Budget 2006 a \$1 change in oil is \$104 million. A 10 cent change in natural gas is about \$123 million. If the exchange rate changes by 1 cent, that could have a \$172 million change in revenue. So minor changes, really, in these commodity prices do have substantive impacts upon the revenues of the province, both up and down.

With respect to the royalty structures one of the very significant aspects of the department is establishing royalty policies and collecting of those revenues to ensure that Albertans receive their fair share. We want to ensure that we remain competitive and attractive to investors so that it will create that growth and employment opportunity for Albertans into the future. There have been

numerous studies on our royalties regimes. Van Meurs, Wood Mackenzie, even our own associations such as CAPP in Alberta as well as other competitive sources talk about our royalty regimes as being quite tough in many respects. Yet I would say that in the work that we've done in the department, we do continue to establish and find that we are obtaining a fair-share value for Albertans.

I would like to in one discussion of royalties, though, announce that one thing that we've been working on for some time and we are going to commence starting today is that we are reviewing the Alberta royalty tax credit program. We will be talking specifically to industry about the purpose and need of that program. Clearly, the Auditor General has spoken about identifying the needs of that program, so we are now actively going to be reviewing that program. Any changes, if they were to happen, would be made by January 1, 2007. The review will focus on ensuring that this tax credit is meeting its intended purposes, simplifying it, replacing it, or eliminating it, all of the above. We will work aggressively to ensure that programs that continue to go forward are designed to meet the purposes and reflect the vibrant time of the day.

With respect to energy price forecasts Budget 2006 assumes that we are using an average \$7.50 Canadian per gigajoule for natural gas. That's lower than last year's third-quarter forecast, yet we've already seen quite a bit of softening. Natural gas prices have gone up from \$15 to the peak and back down into the \$7 range, substantive volatility just even within the one year. For oil prices we're going to be using a benchmark of \$50 U.S. west Texas intermediate crude oil price. Once again, it's almost impossible to estimate what that price might be.

8:10

But in forecasting for budget purposes, I would continue to say that it would only be prudent that you establish and let the public know what your assumptions are. We've given the price sensitivities to that. When prices go up and down, public will be able to quantify the impact of that variation from our budget. Also, we want to ensure that we don't get too aggressive on those price forecasts so that you don't want to undermine your ability to finance the programs that are in your budget. You ought to be some degree of conservative in forecasting, not out of line. So it's going to be impossible to ever say that you will ever get something like this forecasted correctly.

The highest bonus this year: our bonuses came in at \$3.4 billion land sales, a record year, about three times higher than any other previous record high. This year we're going to forecast land sales at just under \$1.5 billion, which would be the second highest year ever, though substantially down from this, more in acknowledgement to put it back in line of not knowing how to forecast the level of activity that may occur this year, though the forecast in our estimates still would end up being second highest ever.

In respect to the Auditor General's comments we have accepted all of the recommendations, and we are actively working on those. I'd be happy to answer any questions if committee members had them going forward.

I'll spend a few moments just talking about some of the changes in the budget itself, in the estimates for this year. The Energy ministry's operating spending for 2006-07 is \$218 million. That's an increase of \$16 million over the forecast of 2005-06. That's up 8 per cent over the third-quarter forecast. The capital investment budget of \$18 million is \$5 million higher than the previous year. That's up 28 per cent over the third-quarter forecast. These are both an acknowledgement of two key areas of investment, both in the department and in the Energy and Utilities Board.

There's an acknowledgement of the high level of activity that's

occurring and the need for having ensured that we are properly resourced with people and systems to keep pace with both the regulation and the monitoring and the compliance of the industry as well, not just approval of applications. This is in recognition to see that the industry and the department and the Energy and Utilities Board are both adequately financed to keep pace with competitive wages, tracking the people to hire additional staff, and see that we have the resources to update some antiquated systems that are badly in need over the next few years, that our budget accommodates to replace those old systems. They'll be adequate for the time, but given the level of activity, those upgrades are necessary.

As we've worked with the Energy and Utilities Board and with industry and our own department, this should address the needs of being able to keep pace with the level and quantity of activity that's coming at them to be able to manage on an efficient and daily basis.

I think I'll leave my comments there. We'd be happy to entertain any questions that the members have on our estimates through the evening and respond in more detail as needed.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. One of the most fascinating aspects of being an MLA is the people that you meet. This evening on the steps of the Legislature I had the great fortune of meeting a very interesting and diverse group of visitors to our city, accompanied by a recent immigrant to Edmonton. Living in Edmonton now but originally from El Salvador is Julio Orellana. Accompanying him is a visitor from Cuba, Mr. Lazaro Rosa, and three visitors from Mexico: Miguel Angel Reyes, Carlos Chulin Cordillo, and Maria Concepcion Chulin Cordillo. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm reception from this Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: For the benefit of those sitting in the galleries, we are at the committee stage, which is a much more informal session of the Assembly. That's why you see people moving around, removing their jackets. It's a little more relaxed. In a regular session it's much more formal.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Energy (*continued*)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's with interest that I stand to participate in the estimates debate this evening on Alberta Energy for the fiscal year for which we are currently debating the entire budget. Now, I'm looking first at the three-year business plan, and I'm also looking at the fiscal plan, and sometimes I'm referring back to the annual report from the previous year of the Department of Energy.

The hon. minister is absolutely correct: this is a very, very important ministry. It is responsible for not only collecting our royalties but ensuring that there's a regulatory framework in place so that resource companies can have confidence in this province and its regulatory approval process.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor, and I think he deserves the courtesy of a little silence in the room.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Now, certainly the Department of Energy is requesting the total supply of \$132 million for operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases. This is an increase of roughly 10 per cent from the fiscal year '05-06 forecast. The ministry will be spending in total \$219 million, which is an increase again of 8 per cent from last year's forecast. The majority of the increase, as I understand it, is the spending that will be used by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to accommodate improvements to regulatory requirements and operations practices relating to the public and environmental safety and reliability and adapting regulatory activities to new energy sources, such as coal-bed methane.

Again, I can't emphasize how important this department is to not only Albertans now but for future generations because this department has the responsibility of making sure that we are receiving a fair share of the royalties that are created, the Crown revenue share from resource development. I was disappointed. I learned earlier this winter – and it was certainly reflected in the business plan – that the actual percentage of the royalties that we're collecting is going down, but I'm pleased to learn from the minister that there's going to be a review of the royalty tax credit. Certainly, that may have been necessary whenever resources were more modestly priced for natural gas on the North American market and for oil on the world market.

There are a lot of issues to discuss in this small department. Particularly, at this time I would like to focus on royalty rates, the accountability factor in all of this, and certainly on electricity. We can't forget about electricity. Mr. Chairman, in the business plan on page 144 it states that "Alberta will have a financially stable, open and accountable government." In the spirit of accountability will the hon. minister please begin sharing royalty information with the owners of the resources: Albertans?

8:20

Now, the hon. minister referred to a Wood Mackenzie study, and I sure would like a copy of that. I would like to see how that study compares our royalty structure to that of, for instance, let's say, the lower 48 states or Norway or Alaska. If that information exists, I would appreciate that. The hon. minister mentioned another study. I couldn't hear, but I believe it's the same one that the hon. minister referenced in question period about three weeks ago. If we're going to have this open and accountable government, well, let's put our money where our mouth is and provide this not only to this hon. member but through the House to the general public. We have to question: who, exactly, is Alberta Energy accountable to? If your goal is to be open and accountable, can we expect that you will be making public the details of all reports on your recent royalty review? I know that we can go back to different annual reports, and we can certainly see where there are royalty reviews all the time, but I think it is important.

Another question that I have for the minister is: how does the hon. minister plan on facilitating a more open and transparent department? A guy shouldn't have to fight for this information. It should be tabled in the Legislative Assembly maybe on the second or third day of session, at the start of session. It should be a routine matter. We shouldn't have to fight for this or ask for it. That, Mr. Chairman, is quite important because I do notice that in the fiscal plan we are changing how we track the forecasts of natural gas prices.

I'm reading directly from footnote (a) on page 101, the economic outlook. This is the same economic outlook where I can't find a comparative price of electricity, but we'll get to that later. That used to be always in here, but it's not anymore because I consider this government to be ashamed of what electricity deregulation has done to prices. They've gone nowhere but up.

- (a) The natural gas price is the US price of natural gas at Henry Hub Louisiana, as this is the benchmark for natural gas prices in the rest of North America. Since many consultants do not forecast the Alberta Reference Price, which is used in the Alberta Budget and is the basis for Alberta natural gas royalty calculations, the table has been changed this year to the US Henry Hub price of natural gas. The Alberta Government forecast in the table above is also the US Henry Hub price.

My questions would be: if we were to use the Henry hub price, which I suspect we are, will that make a difference in how our royalties are calculated? Can the minister tell us how using the Alberta reference price in the past has impacted royalty calculations? Have we lost money that we should have been collecting? Has Alberta Energy conducted any studies to determine whether using the Alberta reference price in the past to determine royalties has resulted in lost revenues? If not, will you do so? Will the minister provide a comparison of the royalties collected using the Alberta reference price versus the Henry hub Louisiana price for the past 10 years to prove that we have not lost revenue?

Again, the hon. minister talked about the Alberta royalty tax credit, and that's good news, as far as I'm concerned, because it's a program that we don't need at this time, as far as I can see.

Getting back to the business plan, on page 147, Public Awareness and Understanding: "In order to support future energy development, Albertans need to be confident that energy resources will continue to be developed and managed in a responsible manner." How can Albertans be confident that energy resources are managed responsibly when, again, we have such difficulty in getting information from the department? Given that the Albertan slice of the pie has declined by 4 per cent since 2001, what is the department going to do to restore confidence in resource management? From page 158 what steps has the minister taken to more accurately forecast revenue numbers?

Mr. Chairman, in the business plan on page 148: core business 1, goal 1, performance measures, Crown revenue share of industry's net operating revenue. We talked about this earlier: energy companies are making record profits, yet our cut in percentage is decreasing. Again I have to ask: how much revenue are we losing at this time of opportunity that could be saved for future generations? Certainly, many people are quickly becoming aware of just exactly how much money this government is spending, and we still have that same long list of problems. We're spending more and more money, and we don't seem to be solving any of these problems. When we're spending the money, we've got to be conscious of the fact that we also have to be saving money. A lot of this resource revenue belongs to the hon. minister's children and great-grandchildren. Certainly, we have to make sure that there's something set aside for them.

Again in regard to page 148, why is the department failing to meet your core business 1 goal? Who is responsible for the failure to meet this goal? Given that you've allowed Albertans' share of resource revenue to decline by 4 per cent since 2001, how can you claim that the royalty structure is now healthy and competitive? What are you doing to ensure that you do not miss your own targets again this year?

You maintain the status quo for your targeted share of profits from resource development through to 2008-09. When will this government raise its targets to take advantage of the current economic

situation? I'm not going to call it a boom. I'm just going to call it a prosperous time.

Energy companies are exceeding their revenue goals off Alberta's resources while you cannot even meet your own modest goals. Isn't it time that we adjusted the royalty structure? We have a 25 per cent royalty on synthetic crude production after capital costs are paid, and that's net. So why can't we have 25 per cent as a target for conventional crude oil production and natural gas production?

Failing to meet the department's goals results in the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars. Can the minister please explain this evening his department's failure to collect sufficient royalties on behalf of Albertans? On the issue of royalties I also have some additional questions as to how that is calculated. When we look at the department list, we see natural gas and by-products. We see crude oil royalties. We see bonuses and sales of Crown leases, synthetic crude oil, rentals and fees, coal, and then off that, of course, is the Alberta royalty tax credit. We have all these programs for royalty reduction programs. I think that we have 10 going at the present time. I know that two years ago we had nine, but I think that we have 10 now. I could be wrong. If I am, I'd appreciate a correction from the hon. minister.

When we look at natural gas and by-products royalty, what are the by-products? What's included in the line item natural gas and by-products royalty? Does it include pentane? Does it include butane, propane? If I could have a breakdown of exactly what this by-products category consists of. Is it NGLs, or natural gas liquids? What exactly makes up that royalty, or are they separate? I know that if you look at Stats Canada production figures, all those by-products are listed separately, but which ones are included in the line item natural gas and by-products royalty?

8:30

I think it's a good idea that bitumen now has its own separate line. A lot of people in this province don't realize the difference in price between conventional crude oil production and some of those heavier oils, and I think that's a good idea. Certainly, if I could have that information, exactly what makes up that item and what is included in it, I would be very grateful.

Now, in the time permitted – there's not much time to discuss this department's budget, I'll say that – if we could spend a little bit of time on electricity. There are certainly a number of outstanding issues surrounding electricity, whether you're in southern Alberta or whether you're in Fort McMurray. In southern Alberta, of course, many people are questioning this whole idea of the Montana/Alberta tie-line and how it is necessary or why it is necessary.

Certainly, documents that have been provided to this side of the House indicate that in some cases exports of electricity will drive up the price here domestically. When we think of the domestic price, we just have to look at the wholesale electricity market last year in this province. The average wholesale market price of electricity in 2005 was \$70 a megawatt, which was up from roughly \$54 the year before. Now, that's a significant increase. We're all told – and the minister and the government are trying to sell us this bill of goods – that electricity deregulation has worked and will continue to work, but that tells a different story.

You have to look at the prices. Prices haven't gone down, and I don't think we can blame it on the cost of natural gas. That's only a small portion of that price increase. We just can't simply say: oh, the price of natural gas has gone up, so the price of electricity has gone up.

We've got transmission issues. In fact, I don't know where to start on the whole issue of transmission. Certainly, I was taken aback, to say the least. I got another phone call from an unidentified

person. It's not long ago that we had asked in question period because of the whole issue of the Department of Energy's paper on role and mandate requirements for Alberta electric industry implementing agencies, as it was called, this whole role and mandates policy paper that was produced by the electricity business unit leader, Mr. Kellan Fluckiger.

People were up in arms over this. They thought it was wrong that only certain stakeholders had been consulted. The hon. minister stood in this Assembly and said, "Oh, no; the consultation process is good," and the hon. minister indicated that he was quite satisfied with it. But more and more people are coming all the time with more and more information that they're not satisfied with it. Not only some of the electricity retailers but, for instance, the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta in a letter dated December 7 were very dissatisfied with it. The EUB felt that they weren't consulted in a manner that was respectful of their regulatory role, and I agree with the EUB, and now we've got the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta expressing the same sort of displeasure.

So I get this phone call, and it was from a concerned Albertan who wouldn't identify themselves to me. I could look in my Daytimer, and I could tell you what day it was. It was shortly after I had asked for the resignation of this electricity business unit leader, Mr. Kellan Fluckiger. I would like to know what sort of conflict of interest rules the Department of Energy has. There was a serious matter brought to my attention, and I think it has to be dealt with. Now, according to this source – and I would really appreciate it if the hon. minister would follow up on this and get to the bottom of this. Hopefully it's not true, but this source by telephone indicated to me that Mr. Fluckiger's spouse is CEO of AltaLink and felt that there was a conflict of interest there because Mr. Fluckiger is setting the rules for the transmission policy.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, would you like to respond?

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. On some of the comments I'd be happy to supply a little more detail in due course. I'd like to first state a couple of things that got repeated a number of times.

Talking about fair share of royalties, specifically in the business plan notes it goes down to 19 per cent, as if we are somehow losing a percentage in the take. That's kind of the reference: that the slice of the pie is decreasing, that our cut is decreasing. Actually, our royalty rates haven't decreased. It's not a result of our structures having been changed to take a lesser percentage. Our percentages are still there. So when price goes up, we do too. Our structures are factored by two things: the price of the commodity, both for oil and gas, and by the production volumes. So there are two things that come into play with how much we'll get.

As we get more mature fields, as the production volumes go down – and they are in our conventional fields of gas and oil – those wells become less productive, so they will have a lower royalty rate associated with them. What we're trying to ensure is that you don't make the cost too prohibitive so that those wells are shut in. You want to extract all the resource you possibly can, so you want to still encourage those low-producing wells. The economics are still there so that they can produce from low-producing wells, and we have more and more of those in Alberta. We don't have some of these large pools of conventional sources compared to, say, Norway or something like that. Production volume has been one of the real key successes, actually, in helping to get the last incremental barrel of oil or the last amount of gas that you can from that well.

But the other very significant change that's caused in the overall

average is the fact of the increasing production out of the oil sands. The reason why it's gone from, say, the mid-20s down to 19 per cent in our business plan is that our oil sands royalty regime is at 1 per cent until payout. So you can see in the estimates this year that we're getting \$1.716 billion for the crude oil from bitumen royalties. It was \$1.184 billion last year. When you see the more oil that comes from the oil sands, that royalty structure is different, so it's going to change the average mix. We're not reducing our take on all of our conventional oil and gas. It's just that when you add in increasing production from a different source, of course it changes the overall averages, and that's what's happened to the take. It hasn't changed anything, that we are getting less. You have to look at and separate the two.

The design of the generic royalty regime for the oil sands was to ensure that these are the highest producing sources of oil in the world. These are the highest risk projects, because of the high cost structures, of anywhere in the world. This is still a volatile commodity. Heavy oils aren't even commanding \$60, like you'd mentioned. Heavy oils have had a very substantial differential in the past year. They've only been commanding the \$30 range for a good part of the year. Our heavy oils in the oil sands take substantial investment of upgraders to get them so that we can even get to that price.

These are very expensive, long-term projects, and it really is in our best interest to ensure that that risk capital is paid out quickly so that we will have a long-term, viable project, so that those jobs will be secure for the future. It was designed with two things in mind. These projects are the least cost-incentived projects in the world, though the resource is great, so you have to take into account also the multi-billion dollar projects' high capital. When you blend in something like oil sands, which has been a very successful regime thus far, the projects are now starting to pay out faster because of high prices, so we will benefit on the upside sooner on more of those barrels than in the past. That will start altering, once again, that royalty percentage share that we take.

8:40

We're just at the beginning of the stages of production in oil out of the oil sands, about a million barrels today. In a few years we could be at about a million and a half barrels a day of production, just in our next three-year business plan. We're forecasting that in another decade it could be up to about 3 million barrels a day. As those projects come on, it is going to take some time, another decade or so, before those projects all get paid out. This is long-term, patient capital both for industry and for Albertans to ensure that there's a long-term viable future for these oil sands in a world where commodity prices can come back down. There are lots of scenarios that could see commodity prices for oil and gas in North America come right back down. We're not forecasting that to be a substantive change though we are seeing some even in our own forecast, not being quite as aggressive on that price because there is a lot of downside risk to that price as well.

You'd mentioned the Henry hub price and why not use the Alberta reference price. One of the great things that's happened is we've created an Alberta hub, and it's a market hub. It's actually one of the largest gas-trading hubs in this world. What we want to continue to build on is that we have this trading platform right here in Alberta, and they use the Alberta reference price.

The Henry hub is another market. We don't price our gas off Henry hub. It's only used there for comparative purposes. It wouldn't change what our take would be. It's just that you would base your royalty on a different reference price. So we've used and want to strengthen the Alberta hub as being the right marketplace to develop more trading to be expanded off this and that our gas is

traded off this hub. We'll continue to reference that that's the price that we realize on the sale of that product right here.

There are different oil commodity prices throughout the world. There are different gas commodity markets in the world. You can use them for comparison's sake, but it doesn't change that we would take more or less. You would just now all of a sudden use a different reference price if you wanted to price everything off a different market. We use it because this is the market that's been established in Alberta, where the gas is sold closest to the point, one which we want to continue to develop and increase.

Natural gas and by-products: I'd be happy to get a list with more detail. That clearly will include all of the natural gas liquids. You'd mentioned some of the propanes, butanes, pentanes and the like, and C₅ and plastics. We do realize royalties on all those structures, on all of those products. That's included in there. I'd be happy to give you more of a breakdown on that.

You'd mentioned also some of the studies: Wood Mackenzie. Van Meurs was the other one that I'd cited previously. I'd be happy to share those studies. I don't have any problems with that. A lot of our work does stay. We have been preparing for it. We do a lot of work internally, continuously. This isn't a matter that you're commissioning a report. We do continual monitoring of our royalties and of places around the world, so we would have to go to quite a bit of work in just comparing and building reports. This isn't an event other than that it's something that we continually monitor. If we get to the point of having a report prepared, I'd be happy to share that report. There's no intent to have to do anything other than ensure that Albertans understand what it does mean and to what extent you can benchmark and ensure that we are receiving our fair share, all things which I'd be happy to share with yourselves and with the public.

One of the royalty things we have looked at is the programs. That's why the Alberta royalty tax credit is something where we are undertaking a very significant review as to the need for its continuation. We will look at that one with respect to the small companies in particular as to: is there really a need to continue with that with the small companies? Clearly, there's less of that need demonstrated with the larger companies. So we'll take a look at that. Any changes would be happening through this year, best implemented in January of 2007.

The reason I say that is the history. The Alberta royalty tax credit program actually came back in '74, when the federal government disallowed the deduction of royalties. In response to not being allowed to deduct royalties, as with any other royalties that were allowed for federal tax deductions – this was singled out, so the Alberta government of the time put in an Alberta royalty tax credit. Later on the federal government had a number of tax changes introduced: a resource allowance, which was an approximation of the royalty deduction. That's changed over time. Prices collapsed, so there have been modifications of this program through all these years. Now, all of a sudden when we were examining this project, this program with the Alberta royalty tax credit, in light of higher price scenarios not having been anticipated, is there really a meaningful need to continue this program?

The reason for January of next year: that will be the final transition of the federal tax changes to allow for the full deductibility of royalties. They're eliminating the resource allowance. That will be phased out by the end of this year, and the full deductibility of royalties happens as of January 1, 2007. As well, they were allowing for corporate income tax changes for the oil and gas industry. So the timing coincides with the federal government finally reversing all those policies which led to the creation of this program in the first instance.

On electricity. You had mentioned the Montana/Alberta tie-line. That's a merchant line. That's a private-sector line totally. Exports don't drive up prices domestically. It really depends on what markets are everywhere else. What has happened in natural gas – and it's not really a fair comparison to take natural gas and electricity in this sense. The natural gas supply has really been constrained in North America, and it's a North American contained market. Electricity is somewhat of a North American contained market, but the capacity to find substantially more generation of all sources is quite unlimited in electricity. If there's a market for it, they will find an ability to put on new generation.

Quite to the contrary, what more interties would give us would be more stability in our system. We have already a tie-line between Alberta and B.C. We already export or import, both ways. These lines aren't just a one-way export; they are for imports too. When all of a sudden we're a growing market and we have a need or a plant is down, if you have other plants because of more export and import capacity, we will find more stabilization of our own market. We will find that even the generators here will have a broader market to both sell their product and to import in the time of need to meet the demands right here. They will also then be subject to having to be competitive with the broader markets of electricity.

You mentioned that one of the successes has to be price. You say that the price hasn't gone down, but quite frankly, price has gone down substantively over this. In the early days of deregulation price spiked because of natural gas. The first spike that we'd ever seen to that extent was when gas – we were used to gas being in the \$2 to \$3 range – all of a sudden went to the \$10 to \$12 range. The first time we'd ever seen a spike like that happened to coincide with when we deregulated. It led to the substantive increase in electricity costs. Today one of the main contributing factors to higher electricity cost is natural gas. Natural gas is not the price it used to be a decade ago. I don't know if it's five times as much, but it's still in the \$6 to \$7 range. It's been up to \$15 this year. It traditionally was in the \$1 to \$2 range. It is a major component of an increasing cost in the market unrelated to anything to do with deregulation. It is a cost that's borne not just here but throughout, clearly, North America in the gas market that we have.

The other thing we see is that there's been a substantial drive towards environmental issues, which we support. Being prudent energy developers, we want to attend to the environmental kinds of questions: how do energy and environment kinds of things coexist? In that light, there's been a greater demand placed on natural gas as a cleaner burning fuel rather than things like coal. What has happened in response to that, though, is coal. Genesee 3 that's come out recently has introduced a very . . .

An Hon. Member: You had to do it, didn't you?

Mr. Melchin: Yes. Should we mention coal one more time?

What coal is doing and will do for the markets of the future is that they, too, can address the environmental issues but not at the same price as old coal was. Genesee 3, one of the later ones, has come in with a substantive decrease in the NO_x and SO_x in particulates and even in carbon dioxide. That's the direction you want to go, but it is at a higher cost. If you want electricity, it is still more competitive than other sources that we could bring in.

8:50

We still have in Alberta, other than hydro – we're not blessed with everything. We have many great advantages here. Hydro is not one of them. Still our sources of electricity are the least expensive of anywhere in Canada other than hydro. We have produced a very

good market, one of the overwhelmingly great successes of generation in excessive capacity: in the last couple of years a very substantive reduction in electricity prices in this province is a clear result.

You look around even to the provinces to the west and to the east of us. They're facing, really, shortages when they don't have the markets that are growing as fast as ours, and a very high, escalating challenge they're going to have in their electricity costs. I would say, on the contrary, that we've had a tremendous success in deregulation in price to Albertans. It's not lower than historically because of the factors that have changed both environmentally in gas and the like, but those are things to which we have all come to accept are the right directions in developing of energy.

You mentioned the conflict of interest of Kellan Fluckiger. That has been through all the ethics. Those have been declared. It is true that his spouse is not the CEO but is a member of AltaLink. That's correct. But that has been cleared and vetted not by our own Ethics Commissioner but by all of the codes of the departments to ensure that the conflict of interest has been addressed and that there is not as is being purported. There should not be a penalty to have your spouse employed somewhere. These things have been declared openly before the contracts were let, so certainly all the precautions have been made to ensure that he, too, can do his job without being placed in a conflict of interest.

Allegations to the side would be complete unfair statements, and I would stand up in defence of a person that's doing tremendous work. He has an enormous understanding and a great understanding – spend the time with him – of electricity and markets in general and has provided tremendous benefit and value to this department in particular. So happy to clearly state that those issues have been dealt with prior to any of these allegations being made, to ensure that Albertans are protected from there being a conflict in any real or even perceived fashion.

Happy to respond to any further questions of the members.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise with great interest to speak on the Energy budget for this year. I would like to thank the minister for his thorough preparation, and his staff as well, and also for the line of communication that the minister has extended towards me on a regular basis to discuss specific issues. Certainly, we don't see eye to eye on many of these issues concerning energy, but we do have, I think, a similar goal in mind, which is to provide energy revenue and energy for domestic consumption here in the province of Alberta. So I'm sure we can work that out somehow.

I'm hearing at least a couple of encouraging signs, especially in regard to revisiting the royalty tax credit regime, and I know that many people across the province would be very heartened to hear that. I am a little disappointed to know that we're not going to go there for another year. Regardless of changes in the federal tax credit deduction scheme, I think that it's incumbent on and, in fact, the responsibility of this House to make sure we are capturing revenues that are otherwise not tax revenues, Mr. Chairman. They are a question of ownership, and royalties are paying that portion to the people of Alberta that is otherwise theirs. For every day that we fail to impose a royalty regime that is capturing that money in a fair and reasonable way for every single Albertan, then I believe that we are doing a disservice to both them and to our economy.

I just wanted to briefly go over the numbers in the budget, and then I have quite a number of questions. If the minister would answer me now or in writing later, either way is fine with us.

First, the revenue changes for this past year and then projecting to next year for both natural gas and crude and synthetic crude oil. I

think one of the issues or one of the flags that should be raised, Mr. Chairman, in regard to how natural gas and crude oil royalties are actually going down in terms of the revenue being captured is that we must be concerned, as the minister pointed out, that the crude oil and natural gas are coming from depleted resources. I believe that if there are not other ways by which we can highlight how finite these royalties are and, in fact, how finite these products are, then perhaps this is the most graphic example that we can show Albertans that, you know, oil and gas revenues from royalties and, indeed, the domestic products that we consume in oil and gas are finite here in this province.

We need at this juncture to look for a way to bridge into other fuels, to encourage conservation, and to make sure that we are capturing the revenue from the last bits of these reserves before they are finally depleted. A third of the entire budget, to my calculation, in fact is coming from this ministry. If we could expect a 13 per cent decrease in the royalties over the last year in both oil and gas, then I think that should be a red flag that we all should take very, very serious note of.

In regard to other royalty revenues coming in, I think that I would like to just highlight briefly the coal royalty, which otherwise is – no one's hitting the thing when I say coal; I don't know why. [some applause] There we go. This is static, right? I would just like to highlight that at this juncture. Perhaps I'm not familiar with how much, more or less, coal we are in fact cutting in the province here, but I think that we have to remember that if we are going to move forward on using coal technology, which I have some reservations about, and burning more coal in the province of Alberta, we should consider changing this royalty. This, again, is going back to the old trap that we found ourselves in with oil and gas, saying: well, we have to give them a good deal because otherwise they will go elsewhere, and la-di-da. But, in fact, with the depletion of hydrocarbon reserves around the world once people set up, let's say, a coal-fired electricity plant in a certain area, they're not going anywhere.

I think it's important for us to charge a fair royalty that probably reflects the environmental degradation that is resulting from the burning of that coal, including the holes that are dug and whatnot, so that, in fact, we are thinking more seriously about what we're burning. There's this perception out there which I find troubling, which is that we're sitting on an infinite mountain of coal which will somehow come in to save us all, a special, clean Alberta coal. You know, there is lots there, but I think we need to be a little bit more prudent and thoughtful about it as opposed to the sort of gold rush mentality that has depleted our conventional reserves of crude oil and natural gas in this province so quickly and, I would say, perhaps prematurely consider that we do need the domestic-consumption production of natural gas to survive in this province for ourselves. We have to wonder what we're going to do if it's all gone.

I have just a number of questions, as I said, for the minister in regard to the budget, and I'm going to move through them reasonably quickly. I'm feeling constrained here, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned. This is a very important ministry, and I think that we need to focus more attention, perhaps, on it than we do. I hope that some of these issues come up during the course of the next year or so and that we can revisit them because I know that the public certainly has an interest in them, both financially and otherwise.

The ministry is forecasting \$11 billion in the next year, a third of all provincial revenues. As I said, we must be very careful to imagine what it would be like for anything less than a third to be coming from that source. The budget bases its numbers on \$50 per barrel for oil and \$7.50 per gigajoule. In a way this is sort of a two-edged sword. I'm happy to see that these projections are more

realistic, but they do sort of fall within the very minimum projections for the next year that I had found from various sources I have in Calgary energy companies. I was told that if the fee goes a dime under \$50 and \$7.50, then you can call him because those would be very, very lowballing but not entirely unreasonable. So it's good to see that there is some movement that way. They're at the low end but more realistic than in past years.

9:00

I'd like to ask why the government has suddenly decided to raise its numbers after years of these huge surprises, which were not surprises at all, which ensured billions of off-budget spending. I'm wondering what the big change is here. Why are we being somewhat more realistic? I'm certainly hoping that this is the first of many changes which move toward more accountability and transparency because, of course, these off-budget spending sprees that we've seen over this last year and other years as well are very confusing and certainly less than democratic, I would say, Mr. Chairman. I'm wondering if maybe this is a way of keeping some ministers off of these giant, unbudgeted surplus purses that they like to throw around. Hopefully, they might stick to their budgets a bit better this year.

Given that the energy prices are hovering around \$60 a barrel right now and factors leading up to this sharp increase in prices, including decreasing fuel reserves around the world, environmental disasters in the U.S., and continued instability in the Middle East, I would like to ask: why does the minister foresee a sharp decline in oil revenue over the next few years? There seems to be in the budget this downward sort of trend, and I'm curious to know why that might be so. For example, the natural gas prices just happen to be low, and I know that some energy companies were experiencing some difficulties with that, but that was because of the very warmest winter on record. Certainly, once the heat that probably corresponds with that warming trend hits the U.S. market, the air conditioners will fire up, and we'll see natural gas fly high once again.

This government keeps talking about its concern about health care costs supposedly eating a third of the budget, but more than a third of our revenue is from nonrenewable finite sources. So I would like to ask the minister what he is proposing that we replace these decreasing oil revenues with if not alternative and renewable energy sources. I find it difficult to swallow that we would move from one fossil fuel to another, and I'm wondering if perhaps this government is thinking about changing the minister's title from Energy to the Minister of Fossil Fuels, since we don't seem to be focusing on anything else besides those particular products.

Minister, please, if you could explain to me as well why the energy and utilities regulation is seeing an \$8 million increase. I'm curious to know where or why that money is going there and why it's increased by that amount. I would like to know.

As well, given that the EUB has somewhat of a mixed reputation in regard to independent regulation of the energy industry and that the public is often perceiving the EUB to be more industry-favoured rather than perhaps looking at things in a more judicious way – I'm asking this because one of the key elements, I think, of the Auditor General's report and something I'm very concerned about is increasing the effectiveness of the verification program for royalties, verifying if, in fact, energy companies are paying the royalties that they should be for the energy that they're taking from the ground. So I'd be curious to know more precisely how this might be improved over this coming year because a lot of it is now, Mr. Chairman, on the honour system.

While we certainly do expect the best from people and the best of their behaviour at all times, we do, as a regulator, need to expect less

than that and, in fact, put measures in place to regulate in a policing sort of way to ensure that we are getting the money that we need. I seem to recall that there was at least \$300 million or \$400 million worth of royalties that seemed to be, well, not missing, but there seemed to be some confusion about. So I would like to know what the progress is on verification.

In that regard as well or more generally in regard to royalties, if the minister is committing to some change or a review of the royalties, I think it would be reasonable for us to see something of what he has in mind in regard to perhaps a draft proposal of where the royalty program is going at least in terms of its objectives and its performance rates because, again, we have some difficulty with that at this point in time. I think that the public and the industry deserve to know where we're going.

Given, Mr. Chairman, that global oil reserves are dropping and that access to them is becoming increasing difficult and given that Alberta's oil sands have recently been recognized as the second largest oil deposit in the world, I'm assuming that the oil sands development is here to stay. Given that this industry is no longer in danger of moving in a downward trend, I would ask the minister if he would be willing to change the royalty scheme that is currently used in the Alberta oil sands. I'm asking to look for a reasonable regime that is going to be more in keeping with the tremendous revenues that are being generated from the oil sands at this time.

This government has insisted that one of the reasons our oil development bonuses are so high and our royalties kept to a minimum and our corporate taxes kept so low and lowered still even more in this year's budget is so that we can maintain Alberta's competitive edge in light of rising labour and energy costs. Even if we buy this — of course, I have my doubts — I'm wondering: how can this government not encourage and reward through incentive programs, research grants the development and use of cogeneration sources of energy in the industrial sector? We have a tremendous potential for cogeneration across this province, and we need to encourage that in a more proactive way. Certainly, it's there if the balance sheet demonstrates that it's useful, but I think we need to encourage that to make it easier so that industry generates this energy right at the source. That's always the best way to conserve and to be efficient.

This would bring down everybody's energy bills, increasing our industry's competitive edge, and this is one of the ways by which we can change the way we use energy here in this province. So I'd ask if the minister would commit to examining the possibility of microgeneration projects like we see in other countries. I know that in Norway and in Great Britain microgeneration is a very hot topic and not just a hot topic but something that will bear fruit in the next while. You know, it's interesting to see that countries that are serious about reducing their greenhouse gas emissions are also countries that lead the way in providing alternative energy sources, which actually bring down the cost of energy in the long run. So I would like to be counted amongst those regions of the world to do that, and the sooner we do it, the better.

While we begin to develop alternative generation projects, I would like to just focus on another contentious issue in terms of energy in this province, which is coal-bed methane extraction. I would like to know if we could have the review of the coal-bed methane extraction that was done last year in public and see exactly where the government is going in regard to that. We're seeing a tremendous amount of criticism by residents living in places where coal-bed methane is being tested and utilized, and I would like to see where the government's going with this in a transparent sort of way. I don't preclude the possibility of extracting coal-bed methane, by any means, but we have to make sure that we don't do it at the expense of the surface rights of farmers and people who live in the affected regions.

9:10

I would also in that regard ask if the minister would commit to giving landowners, the people who are affected most directly by CBM developments, the people whose land is devalued, whose air quality is degraded and water as well, primary consideration in the review debates instead of making them queue up as observers or peripheral stakeholders. This is a big problem, Mr. Chairman, and I'm hoping that we can meet it head-on in an honest and transparent fashion.

So in that regard I would ask if the ministry would commit to a moratorium on coal-bed methane projects until a nonpartisan public environmental health and safety review can be conducted. We've seen such reviews in the United States, and I think it's a useful process. Sometimes it's a dirty process, but it is a democratic process nonetheless.

I know that my time is limited, so I just want to switch gears here a bit in regard to increasing royalties. My issue here is that we need, I believe, a royalty increase that is reflective of the windfall profits that are being generated at this time, very much like a progressive tax regime, which we should be familiar with here in this province. The windfall increases along with the amount that's being made at any particular time, and I think it's incumbent and responsible for us to in fact enact something like that so that we are recovering the money which is now being generated at a windfall rate but won't be soon enough.

In that regard as well, I think it's our responsibility to manage how the industry grows in terms of energy in this province. By having low royalty regimes, we're contributing to this gold rush mentality, where there's all manner of drilling and activity that outstrips our capacity to regulate it, outstrips our capacity to support it, and often outstrips our capacity to in fact even meet the labour needs that are there. So instead of developing it all at once, I think that we should be trying to have some regulation there. I think it's good for all of us, for longer term development of important resources, for the conservation of those resources, and ultimately for better profits over a longer period of time.

Thanks a lot, Mr. Chairman, and I wish I could have another 20 minutes.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess that in your opening comments you said that you didn't quite see eye-to-eye on all facts. We'd like to confirm that that still is the case, especially after some of those comments. In fact, quite the contrary. We have a very different viewpoint on many of the policy kind of questions you said.

You know, when we talk about royalties and the assertions of low rates and giving it away and all that, it's not surprising to hear that the answer is: let's have a tax at a higher per cent, put a higher per cent to everything we can so that we can create a smaller pie, drive everything out, let the investment go somewhere else, let the jobs go somewhere else. That seems to be a philosophy that permeates continuously: why would we want anybody to have a profit? I mean, it's such a terrible thing to have a good year; therefore, if we take everything and extract everything that's supposedly windfall, that would be good for us all.

What has happened by being competitive is that we are attracting people, and it's been very much a success. There's lots of oil and gas around the world. The challenge is that there aren't places where it's safe. There aren't places where it's actually competitive and where you have fiscal regimes that actually work. The reason they're coming to Alberta is because those things are in place. It's

not just by accident and by luck, just because we have all these resources that we're finding success. There are many, many places throughout the world that can't attract people and capital for projects that are a lot less costly and expensive than the ones right here in the oil sands. It is because of setting competitive environments that let people reinvest the profits, that create greater productivity, greater returns, and greater benefits for the government, for the people, and for jobs, and that's what's been proven out.

We talked about this extrapolation, that we're somehow lowering our rates, which is not true in royalties at all. What is happening is that, yes, our average has gone down because, as I mentioned earlier, oil sands are starting to come in as a higher volume of production at a higher percentage of the royalties. That's maybe lowering the overall average, but we're still collecting those same percentages everywhere else. In reality, we collected resource revenues last year of just under \$15 billion. It's not going down. We used to average \$4 billion through the '80s and '90s. That's the average. Now prices have gone up and have done a lot for that, but volume increases are also substantively doing it.

There's also the assertion, that I do agree with, of the integration of hydrocarbons, nonrenewables, and also renewables. You had some good ideas about continuing to be at the forefront. You talked about microgeneration kinds of projects on the electricity front to even some of the other renewable sources of energy that could come. I think that's the right approach, to start building off the hydrocarbon base that we have, to start allowing for the other ideas to come forward by research, by technology, by facilitating so that there's a methodology to bring these things into the mix. Over time they will play a part of the solution and a larger part of the solution. Let's not forget that even with our conventional sources we leave 73 per cent of the conventional oil in the ground. We leave 40 to 50 per cent of the conventional gas in the ground.

An Hon. Member: Terrible.

Mr. Melchin: That is terrible. It's technology kinds of questions that will continually improve that, and we'll find a whole new Alberta. We've said that before. We know where it is, and it's technology that's going to be the ability to unlock and, rather than leave 73 per cent of the oil in the ground, to leave only 50 or 40 or 30 or 20 per cent of that oil in the ground. It's those things that will continue to expand the life of the conventional reserves not for decades but into the next century.

Our unconventional sources have centuries of supply. Why do we put so much emphasis on them? They still provide the most economic environmental solution to energy affordability for the public. They still provide so many benefits. It's going to be a substantial source of energy for the next century because of the demand for energy and the growth of energy not just in growing economies like our own but throughout the world.

The ARTC. We need time, even for January. You want to do it instantly, but you need time to give notice to industry, to have discussions with industry on any of the programs we have, and January is a pretty fast date.

Depletion of reserves. I think I've spoken quite a bit about that.

You mentioned more realistic projections. You know, anybody can forecast. The fact is that you're likely to be as wrong as any other forecaster on a commodity price. We might say that we're more realistic today. Some think: why all of a sudden did we raise ours this year? Industry too. No one, when they saw the first blips – oil has been in the \$20 to \$30 range, if not lower, forever. We've never seen any period of time above \$30 for oil until the last couple of years. When you saw the first year going up, no one had the

expectation that this might be sustained. There's too much risk associated with it. It could also fall back into the \$20 range. Today there's maybe a little more growing confidence with more experience and time, and that's why we've increased our projections.

All of us, I guess, are becoming more accustomed to it, that our economy has adjusted to a higher price scenario. It hasn't caused a recession, but it has caused a substantial increase in costs to industry, to individuals, and it is and can still be a potential softening of the economic question in the United States, Canada, China. There is still substantive risk of that price being lower than where we forecast. I know you can choose a higher one, and you might likely be right, but you could just as easily be wrong. Therefore, in this case I would say that we have been actually fairly aggressive in our forecast.

9:20

The EUB. I just want to comment about the Energy and Utilities Board. It's easy to make an assertion about the public perception that they're favouring industry, but that couldn't be further from the truth in this sense. They process thousands of applications every year. It is by policy of the government to which they're applying those regulations. It's the standards of Sustainable Resource Development, of Environment, of Energy, and together with the other bodies out there, when they develop standards, they do provide a very efficient and thorough regulatory environment. The objective is not to say, no, and put a closed for business sign. It's only to suggest that we can approve those applications if they meet the appropriate standards. Given the quantity of applications there are bound to be some challenges and some concerns, but they do a very valuable, very independent, and a tremendous service to the public.

Auditor General, verification of amounts paid: we have accepted those. You know, there are a lot of ways. With the extrapolation of the industry because there are so many joint venture agreements on all of these wells and with the reporting of information, there are so many checks and balances that we are collecting the right volume of production data and quantity of royalties that the risk level is really remote that we are not collecting it. Now, the Auditor General talks about some risks of having volumetric accuracy and data. Those things are being addressed, are being actively worked on. The Energy and Utilities Board recently put out directive 019, Compliance Assurance-Enforcement, effective January 2006. If you're interested, you might refer to that one in particular as to some of the progress being made on that front.

On the statements such as: oil sands are here to stay. There's no longer any danger; therefore, just change the generic regime to which you've invited everybody to invest, investment structures that are over decades. Now that you've got their money in, just all of a sudden change the financial structures.

There is still a huge, huge risk to all of these industries. I'll mention again that these are the highest cost oil deposits of any other in the world to extract. These are still at the margin, still risky projects given that they need decades to recover the very significant risk capital that is put up front. So, no, I wouldn't suggest at all that that would be prudent in Alberta's interest in receiving the long-term fair share that just because you have a high price today, everything changes instantly. We also benefit on the high-price scenario. That means that all of these barrels are being paid out faster, the risk capital is recovered faster, and we are going to the higher rates, 25 per cent of net, on a much sooner basis, which is the exact design that will benefit Albertans.

You mentioned to encourage cogeneration, microgeneration projects. I'd agree with that. We will continue to explore how you can facilitate. One of the advantages of our deregulated electricity

market is that we've seen more variety of cogeneration, of wind, of renewables than any other jurisdiction. It's because we've created and facilitated a market that doesn't respond to only building the one megaproject plant, like we did in the past under the regulated model that had to guarantee the supply for everybody; therefore, you only did the 400- or 500-megawatt plants, and in Alberta coal was the predominant source to which we'd build and some hydro. What we have done by creating a market is that you allow the facilitation of some of these things to come in, so I think that would be a great expansion, even the ideas that you suggested would just add to it.

Coal-bed methane extraction. Categorically we'll not entertain a moratorium. There's no need for it. The risk is not there in that category, and it's fully unwarranted to mention that there's a risk for the public to their health, their safety, their water. Yes, there's lots of coal-bed methane, but we've had decades of experience with drilling in shallow areas, in southeastern Alberta in particular. These wells are not unlike all those wells. Yes, there's a little different formation. Yes, there's a little difference in techniques, but it's the same drilling rigs. It's the same operations. Yes, there have been some procedures that are somewhat different, but for the most part they look the same. They're the same procedures. We have tremendous experience and standards set by the Energy and Utilities Board for regulating this type of production. This is not new production. It's not new in methodology. It's new because it's going to get larger, and in that seam it's going to become larger. It's not new in methodologies and design and regulation.

That said, because it is going to become even larger in scope, it was at the initiative of this department to create the multistakeholder advisory committee two years ago. That report has had a tremendous amount of public stakeholder involvement, feedback: industry, landowners, all of the people whom you mentioned. That report, a draft one, was out last fall. The final report is in our possession at this stage, and it's an excellent report. It does talk about the air and the water issues. You've heard some of that from the Environment minister in a previous question period. We've heard about baseline testing of water, a lot of these things. We and industry too want to continue to be at the forefront of all regulatory and environmental standards for development so that we can safely and reliably develop these resources to ensure that the water and the aquifers are not destroyed. We do have lots of practice to ensure that that's the case. What we're going to do is to continue to improve. As we learn more, as we gather more information and more science, it will only help us in the future to guarantee the reliability and the confidence of the public, which is truly at heart too.

From that report we hope to come out with an action plan of the various departments that are impacted. It's got many recommendations by the Energy and Utilities Board, by the Department of Energy, Department of Environment, Department of Sustainable Resource Development, and a couple of the other departments. There are a number of recommendations. We are going to be coming out with an action plan. These are some very solid, thoroughly thought through ideas that we plan to implement. There's a process we're taking it through right now. We've just had this report, so we're actively working on that, and it should be out in the near future, to make that public and to demonstrate in what fashion we will continue to gain and show the support of the public that this can be done safely and reliably, which is being done.

I think I'll conclude my remarks at this point. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, appreciate the opportunity to stand up and respond to the 2006 budget for Energy

and to the business plan. I think that it's very exciting and that our opportunity here in Alberta truly is unique, and we want to be as innovative and efficient and wise as we possibly can be. I want to see a wonderful, integrated energy system. I think all Albertans do realize, as the minister mentioned, how much goes into our health care, our education, our social programs, and the other benefits that we have. Therefore, we do want to look at things in a beneficial way.

At this time I would also like to compliment the minister and the government, that I appreciate a conservative estimate on the value of gas and oil. I think that that's a wise and prudent way to look at things. Let's not count our chickens before the eggs are hatched because things can happen. It does worry me that we're already at an unsustainable level on what our spending is if that glitch was to occur again, and I certainly feel that we need to address and be aware of that.

I'm pleased to hear that they're going to have a review on the royalty tax credits. I wish that would have started three years ago so that industry could have had lots of heads-up time. I understand the importance of industry needing to know the rules and regulations long in advance and the detriment that it is to investments if, in fact, we're changing those rules, as we did with the NEP and saw the drastic reduction and the removal of equipment from our province because of a government change in policy. Though I'm going to mention many things, at no point do I want to see a drastic change or anything that would upset the apple cart and cause damage to our industry or the faith that we have throughout the world that this is a great place to invest because we have a stable and understanding government of the importance of investment here in Alberta.

I would also like to comment, I guess, on the conservative side as well, that everybody says that we're in the information and technology age. I still feel, though, that we're very much caught up in the energy age. With that, at any time fusion could be discovered, and perhaps the carbon world would be to the side, and we would be left out, perhaps like Newfoundland without its cod, if a breakthrough in technology was to come forward. So I feel that that also is something to be cognizant of. Like I say, I am grateful that they are looking at the different reviews for the royalty tax credits and other areas. I think that it is something that definitely needs to be done, and I appreciate their going into that.

I very much would like a copy of some of the different documents that you mentioned. Please send them down this way as well. We don't want one party receiving that benefit and not the rest of the House, as was earlier mentioned by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

9:30

I guess I'd like to go into some different areas. Your business plan: there's way too much – I see I forgot to start my clock. There's just an immense amount of information. It is such a huge portfolio that I feel I can only scratch the surface.

Speaking of surface, I'd like to go into surface rights. This is an area of concern that a great deal of people are calling me about. I'd like to address a few specific cases just to make you aware of some situations. It's been brought up many times that in the last 20 years there's been no increase in what landowners receive from oil and gas exploration. The landowners are just now starting to realize and run into the different problems that are affecting them. I'll give you a couple.

I wasn't able to get up and respond to the historical railroad society bill, Bill 203, and I was disappointed. I sat in here and wasn't able to get in line and get recognized. Stirling has the Great Canadian Plains Railway Society there. It's an historic one, and

they've set up on a little piece of land. They've lost their spur lines, or they will lose them, and they want to be able to run one. As we've been discussing here, it would have been a great asset to the tourism industry there. They own I think 60 acres, and they want to set up a track to run around. Lo and behold, though, there's a high-pressure pipeline going through there. ATCO says: oh, sure, go ahead, but you need to put in this \$100,000 worth of structure before you can do that. Yes, there's benefit to those things, but landowners very much receive the brunt from the EUB and the gas pipelines that they, in fact, seem to own those areas, and we are reduced to tenants on the land in many areas.

I would certainly ask and appreciate and many landowners throughout Alberta would appreciate it if you would readdress and look at surface rights and perhaps make the EUB more aware of that. As I've mentioned to the minister before in private, if they won't allow elected people to that board, perhaps appoint people that specifically look after the interests of landowners and the difficulty that they run into when they do that.

I have another landowner who in his best interests wanted to level his land so he could flood irrigate. There are 400 feet of high-pressure pipeline going through his property that prohibits him from doing that. It costs \$35,000 to lower the line so that he can flood irrigate.

A gravel pit that has a pipeline going through it: \$200,000 worth of gravel underneath the pipeline, a million dollars to move the pipeline.

The reason why I'm pointing these out, Mr. Minister, is because there are high costs, many times 30 and 40 years after a pipeline goes through, to the detriment of the landowners, and there is no compensation for them. It becomes a liability for them, yet the province seems to state that that is the way it is to be.

Just to read from your opening statement, it says here that "Alberta owns 81 per cent of the province's mineral rights. The Ministry of Energy manages the development of these resources on behalf of the people of Alberta." I appreciate and understand that responsibility, yet I have to question: why do we always seem to give precedence to what's under the land and not on the land?

I'll give you an analogy of this. We have a lot of people in the province with kidney problems who have to have dialysis. If, in fact, we just have surface rights, should we as a people look at having everyone tested and typed and say: "Well, you know, you don't need two kidneys. We're going to take one out because we have other people that, in fact, need a kidney. We're going to take it from you and give it to these other people." That's very much how landowners feel. Whatever is inside or under their property, they become insignificant as property owners, and the EUB is just going to arbitrarily say how much compensation they will get, and they're going to take that. So that's a concern, and I would really appreciate the minister looking into it and standing up for the rights of property owners.

In your business plan you talk about value-added. I'm a great advocate of value-added, and I feel that we need to be doing all we can here in the province to continue to put in incentives so that businesses will come, will have the desire to set up businesses here because we are a business-friendly province, and we know that that gets the economic wheels spinning and is of great benefit to the people. We need to take a closer look at the big picture because many people seem to have the attitude: not in my backyard. I think we need to educate Albertans and understand better that we want to process those things.

I'll give the example of the tanning industry. We used to have a lot of tanneries here in Canada, but because of the acids, the tannic acid and the other dangerous chemicals that are associated with that,

we've pushed the market off to China, and it's done over there now. I've seen pictures of how they process those hides. There is no environmental concern, and that stuff is now just dumped. If we set up rules and regulations here in Alberta, we can process those in a safe and proper manner rather than pushing them off, perhaps sending our bitumen to China. How they process it may not be in a very environmentally friendly way. I'd like to see the processing done here, where it is controlled and regulated in an environmental way, in the best possible way in the world, and to continue developing the technology so that the whole world can benefit from it.

I'd like to see new regulations whereby competing companies – one of the concerns that landowners also have, going back, is that the EUB takes the stand that it's the corporation's right to be able to put in a pipeline even though there might be one there. You can get as many as three pipelines crossing a piece of land by three different corporations. I feel that the EUB should take the flip side and say: "You guys figure it out. You're putting one pipeline through here, and if you can't decide, then we'll arbitrarily tell you what it's going to be and how you'll defer that." We don't need more pipelines; we need efficiency and to save the industry and use more gas.

Another concern that I've had many complaints about is the competing attitude of having to suck the gas out because of the different locations of the wells. We're burning up a lot of our own natural gas just so we can suck it out of here before competitor B over here can get it. We're burning up 25 per cent of the gas here, but economically it still balances out. I think that we need to look and address something like that, where it's not who can haul out the most the fastest who wins. We need to look at some way – and I'm sure that your ministry has got lots of great ideas, if they'd address that – to weigh that out so that we'd bring it out in a good fashion and not just burn up that gas to help extract it.

The use of water in the industry is very concerning to many Albertans. In light of the research just recently released by Bill Donahue and David Schindler, I think that it should, as mentioned today in question period, heighten our resolve to do something about that. I'll use the example of California, how they very much take the attitude that they want to reduce smog. They pass a law, and lo and behold somehow technology catches up, and they're able to meet it. I think that if we were to look at regulating water use and what could actually go down those wells, maybe that would fast-track sequestration or who knows what to look at different technology because we can't afford to be putting water in the ground to get oil out. In my little finite understanding of the industry it just seems to go against all common sense for me.

I'd like to switch for a minute – as two previous speakers said, we run out of time here very quickly – to talk a little bit about electrical generation and what we could possibly do. We have a lot of innovative ideas going on in the province. Down in my area there are a lot of windmills going up, and they're a great benefit to the system. We've had many mentions of the Alberta/Montana link going in there, which will benefit, and a lot of windmill people are looking and wanting that to tie in there.

Once again we come back to a land-use problem and what we're going to do there. I've had several landowners come and talk to me about this. We need this land-use study put in place, and we need to really think: where do we want these corridors? We need to get actual transmission corridors. Why put them through the most pristine and the most productive part of the province? Perhaps the government needs to be more involved in where these lines are going and not just private industry to push it through. It just seems like further east is a beneficial place to be putting major transmission lines to go north and south because what we're really trying to do, I understand, is to go north and south rather than east and west, where we're kind of locked in, and to look at that.

9:40

One of the things that we need to address that landowners are frustrated with is that their house could be on the corner of a quarter section and the transmission line can be one yard across, and there is no compensation. That goes back to the corridor region. In fact, if we were to set up some regulations on how far we're going to buy out, you know, whether it's a quarter mile, a mile, we need to address that and let landowners know: look, we do have a plan; we're going to protect you.

You know, it's like dams. It's like so many things: roads, everything else. There are some times when we're in the wrong place. The transmission lines need to come forward because I don't think there are too many Albertans that would say: we want to get rid of them all; I don't want them in my backyard. We see them, but we need to have a better handle on how we're going to compensate landowners as we want to go through or right beside them, and look at that.

Looking at some other areas here, these are just some ideas that many of the constituents and other people have come to me with. What would it be like if today our highways were owned by private corporations and we had to bid to get on, and they were to possibly say: "You know what? We're too busy here. We're hitting peak traffic flow. Those with the biggest bucks can come on." Right now we're facing that with our shipping industry to China. There are a lot of smaller industries that have lost because there aren't the containers or the ships to get things over there. So the lower products are lost, and we can't compete.

It's very much that way with the electrical. If, in fact, we were to maybe look at owning the big transmission lines and some of these other ones, we could regulate who and what could come on and not have a monopoly that is prohibitive to the small generator. One of the things that was brought up last year and that I'm very much in favour of is zero-based metering at the very least to allow people to set up and to be self-sufficient in a small way yet be contributing back into the big grid. It's there, and we need to work out a more equitable way that's innovative for the small guy to be able to be part of that and to be able to get on this so-called highway with his moped and not say, "Well, there are only super semis and super Bs on here." Right now the small generator cannot get on and link up. You either have to cut and be off. It's prohibitive, and there isn't any innovation there.

Another area to look at – and this kind of crosses over with both oil and with electrical generation and not really in your jurisdiction. We've talked a lot and they're talking about a bigger piece of the pie, and I want to use the example of the electrical industry first; for example, wind farms, where it's easier to do the economic analysis of it. If, in fact, you put up a million dollar generator, they need to be able to generate, you know, a hundred thousand dollars a month before it's economical and see that the wind is there. They might pay 3 per cent royalty to the landowner on that windmill. Yet if electricity was to double and there were now set costs on their capital assets and now electricity is producing \$200,000 for them, the fact of the matter is that that landowner getting \$3,000 a month is going to go to \$6,000.

If we were to link that royalty somehow where it was to double if, in fact, the product doubled – and we have to take into account, you know, the different industries, what their costs are. For example, with the tar sands the extraction costs and the use of energy are very high, so they can't necessarily be the same, whereas with electricity with a fixed cost they could easily double it from 3 per cent to 6 per cent. They're getting \$200,000 a month, and the landowner, then, would get \$12,000 instead of just \$6,000. It would be a win-win situation for everybody, and there would be a desire to go there.

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

I really feel like we need to be more innovative in how we bring industry in and to allow that. On innovative ideas I'd like to address a specific concern in my area, Rogers Sugar. The sugar beet industry is big down in Taber, yet many times it is on shaky ground because of the cost of energy. Yes, since the Alliance pipeline and the NAFTA agreement came in, we're in a situation where we have to compete now on a world market. My good neighbour here talked about cogeneration. I've talked to the people at Rogers Sugar, and the cost of converting over to coal to generate the heat to process the beets is prohibitive. But if they were able to have incentives, much like the tar sands area, where capital could actually be recouped, perhaps they could switch over to a coal generation and cogenerate electricity with the excess when their season isn't being used and have something there. But we need to come up with some more innovative ideas to have industry able to utilize the coal and to move forward because natural gas has gone through the roof and makes many businesses, like I say, at best not economical.

It's another major problem for farmers and irrigation in the south. All the residents of the province are hurt with the price of natural gas. The province has done very well, and because of that you have the rebate program, which Albertans can certainly appreciate.

Another innovative idea that came up after reading your report was new to me. I don't know; maybe I'm going to run out of time here. On page 144 it says that conventional crude oil royalties are received in kind. Perhaps that's one of the solutions that we can have. We should take natural gas in kind, and we could redistribute it through the co-ops, a certain percentage to Albertans, and there would be no cost. It wouldn't affect NAFTA, and it would benefit Albertans that we could receive that at a very – well, like Medicine Hat. They're in their own area and capable of using that.

We need to come up with an innovative way where Alberta is not competing with the rest of the world for what our natural resources cost. That just seems like a natural, where we could and should move any way that we could possibly jump through the hoops to benefit Albertans rather than to suffer the consequences of a tightened market and export which is hurting us.

There are a few other questions that perhaps you could explain to me; for example, the \$40 per metre that Albertans pay to Direct Energy because of the cost of the purchase of the billing agents. I've never been able to understand the EUB, how they . . .

This is really sad that we run out of time so fast.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. I'd be more than happy as questions come forward – I've mentioned, actually, to all of the opposition members that certainly are critics of the energy department that I'd be more than happy to facilitate dialogue on an ongoing basis. This doesn't have to be an event that happens only at this stage. If there are questions and things we can help out, we'd be more than happy to do just that. So it doesn't have to start and stop on a clock that's just right here.

That said, you went through a whole host of ideas. You're suggesting that there could be some innovation. I don't know how to necessarily respond to all the what ifs and could be's. I think the challenge in energy development of all sources is: how do you create some more innovation? That's at the heart of this. Technology and innovation are going to be the formula for success, so how do we continue to see that we do just that? The Minister of Innovation and Science has obviously been paying very close attention here to

ensure that he's captured all of the innovative thoughts that could be here for his own department. But it is in part true, so if there are some ideas that come out of here that we see are things we could act on soon, we'll be more than happy to report back on them.

One of the things that you also mentioned was about various royalty studies being done. That would be circulated to the House at large, so they'll be made available.

Surface rights does get also as a topic much more into Sustainable Resource Development, which has the Surface Rights Board directly under them.

It is true that one of the challenges that we have and will continue to have, probably in growing proportions, is the balancing of those accesses to the surface rights and the competing interests of those surface uses, be it recreation, be it agriculture, be it some of the very forested areas or even ecologically sensitive areas and the like. Those are the ongoing enormous challenges, and I would only concur that that's a balancing, forever moving, difficult one to satisfy everyone.

9:50

Compensation is at the heart of a lot of these questions too. I think that's a real statement. You still have to somehow ensure that in both high-price and low-price scenarios the industries can survive. You don't build the structure so expensively that if oil and gas prices also return to low prices, everybody's out of business. So that's a tough structure to have to see about getting the balance.

We've heard the comments. You know, it's hard to predict the future. You put these pipelines in. They're in there for lengthy periods of time, and times change, and needs for that community and those lands will change. So I do think those are worthy comments, that we continue to explore how we can find solutions to those ongoing problems. You need the co-operation of those landowners to continue the confidence to develop the mineral resources going forward, and I think that's a fair statement.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

When you talked about how that extrapolates to some of the utility corridors and the siting and location of those, that's a similar challenge that we have. No one really wants those power lines in their back yard. There's no easy answer to that question. But compensation is part of that mix as well. I know that's been part of our – we've had a Committee on Transmission. The Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne is chairing a committee that has been very much looking at those issues and has worked with the various boards and agencies to deal with what is fair, appropriate compensation when you're siting these lines.

Long-term planning and trying to move them further east – actually one of the long-term plans looks like we'll probably need both those utility corridors on the western side and on the eastern side. Likely, then, the connection is in one or two spots throughout the province, especially as we're growing. I think it is the right approach that we look more forward in planning for those utility corridors, putting those caveats on, getting access to those lands now, resolving those conflicts now for the long-term planning in future. We very much support – and I know our committee that's working on it; that's part of their work and suggestion.

That will form very much the basis of not just finishing up this 500 kV line and the one in southwestern Alberta that are the urgent need today but how we look longer down the road and plan with those stakeholders, when you have an appropriate amount of time to plan, with all of the landowners, and to look down the road and ensure that you've put in place those transportation highways for electricity for the long-term future and viability of this.

Ideas such as – you know, you've gone through a whole host of

them, things even like zero-based metering. We need to be able to accommodate and examine and explore how to encourage more efficient use, not whether it's in that or what you said about the use of natural gas and the burning of it. All of those things, energy efficiency and less waste and more capturing of emissions, are part of the platform as well so that they become end-use, valuable products rather than just waste products. All will become part of that really, I think, the future of development and use of energy.

One of the things you commented on, I think, that is really quite insightful for the challenge we face is the value-added opportunity, which is enormous. We are great resource extractors, but we have an enormous opportunity to also be providing more finished goods. Out of this service when you think of the development of the oil sands, we have been very much working and trying to get in front of how you do more than just take bitumen out of ground and ship that to United States or China for processing, especially if you introduce overlays of different standards in things like, say, a Kyoto accord.

If we punish ourselves so that we price ourselves out of the market of being able to do that processing, then we allow all of that to go somewhere else like China, as the example mentioned – not that they would, but they might – or a different country. It could be any other Asian country. It could be even the United States. It could be somewhere else. They could end up producing those value-added products at standards lower than we might. So in the context of the world environmental outcomes it would be a worse outcome rather than us trying to be at the forefront of the energy and environmental solutions to these questions.

That doesn't mean you go ahead with zero emission because that technology as yet is too expensive, but you continue to advance, probably incrementally, with technology and research and best available equipment and practices that keep moving the yardsticks forward, so we demonstrate to the world how to progress on that front. We need to in our integration, be it from royalty – that's part of the royalty review we're thinking about. How do you ensure that the structure would be built to facilitate doing the value-added here?

One of the real encouraging signs that is happening in the marketplace already. We've been concerned about bitumen being produced or sold and upgraded to the light grades of crude in places other than Alberta. We're even looking at studies on doing the refining here. I don't know how far we can keep moving up there. The feedstock for the petrochemical industry – it's in those areas that we can put quite a bit of priority to ensure that as these projects get positioned, we're thinking about those next steps down the road, especially as the capital is being invested and before it gets invested in some other jurisdiction, making it too late for us to actually be able to do it here.

What is one encouraging sign, actually, is that the list of projects for upgraders today is projects that are either in place, announced, or money is already being raised. There's a list of upgraders that have been announced to produce about 2.7 million barrels per day of oil. What is a very good sign is that most of the bitumen projects that are going in the oil sands are actually now a contemplation of the markets reacting to building the upgraders here. So we've gone to one step of threshold, I think, already. Our designs are helping us facilitate to get to that step. The next step is the continual push to the feedstocks for petrochemical refineries and looking at those other structures.

We've had also quite a bit of work done on looking at ethane extraction off even the Alliance pipeline, for example, as a project in specific. We're looking forward to: how can we do more value-added to our more long-term secure supply of ethane stock for the petrochemical industry here.

An Hon. Member: How many barrels is that?

now have an active role in protecting against, investigating, and detecting mortgage fraud. As I said earlier, mortgage fraud has become an issue, a real issue here in this province. There are examples, and they have been discussed at previous stages of this legislation in this Assembly. There are straw buyers. There are flipping properties. There are low down payment scams.

The committee that was formed a year ago to combat the growing problem of mortgage fraud in Alberta has delivered, as I understand it, its final recommendations to the government. These recommendations, as I understand it, are reflected in this bill. Certainly, when we look at this and we review it, it should be beneficial to both buyers and sellers.

Now, I understand Alberta Government Services and the Real Estate Council of Alberta have developed a tip sheet to help consumers, lenders, and real estate professionals protect themselves from mortgage fraud. This is a good thing, and I look forward to it. I hope that this government also is going to provide a tip sheet for consumers so that they, too, can get in on these dollar deals for property and everyone can qualify for the purchase of surplus government property for what amounts to giveaway prices.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks on Bill 13, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006, and I certainly hope it follows its purpose and that we will now have a first line of defence against mortgage fraud in Alberta. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close debate.

Mr. Strang: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

**10:10 Bill 23
Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now ask that Bill 23 be read a third time.

I thank all colleagues in the House for their input into the Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006, and my only comment, to follow up on yesterday's discussion in Committee of the Whole, is that Bill 23 addresses the authority of conservation officers but not operational matters such as how many officers should be employed.

Other than those comments, again, Mr. Speaker, I thank colleagues for their input and ask that the bill be read a third time.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise on behalf of the Official Opposition this evening and speak to Bill 23, the Provincial Parks Amendment Act, 2006, in third reading. I'm sorry I missed the debate yesterday in the committee stage, but I did have a chance to review some of that. I appreciate some of the explanations that were offered.

I had indicated in second reading that I and my colleagues from the Official Opposition would be supporting this bill. I believe it does accomplish a number of important things, not the least of which, Mr. Speaker, is moving a number of issues related to land-use dispositions out of regulations and into the act. I've been known to comment many, many times in this House on my concern over the propensity to move legislation into regulation. Here's an example

where we're going the other way, and I appreciate that. In fact, the opposition has commented, lamented many times on the fact that this House does not sit as many days as other Legislatures. I would hope that the goings-on this fall in terms of selecting a new leader for the governing party would not interfere with a fall sitting, Mr. Speaker, because there is important business for the province to be done. Certainly, we're looking forward to the opportunity of being here this fall to do that.

Back to the bill at hand, Mr. Speaker. As I said, it does accomplish a number of things. I'm particularly supportive of the stronger fines that are going to be in place for serious infractions that may take place in provincial parks. I think that the parks certainly needed tougher legislation to protect them from industrial activities. It may not go far enough. We still have a situation where in many parks the density of oil wells is actually higher than in some nonpark areas. We allow drilling to continue in the Rumsey natural areas, as a matter of fact, and in many natural areas, so I'm not sure that the bill goes far enough, but certainly, again, it is a step in the right direction.

We would have liked to have seen the special places campaign restarted, Mr. Speaker, and that doesn't happen in this bill. I think it's fair to say that it's important to seek a balance and ensure that there are proper offsets within those protected areas between industrial use and recreational use.

Mr. Speaker, we talked before – and unfortunately it's not reflected in the bill – about the idea of enshrining the requirement to maintain current park master plans. Currently, too many park master plans are either out of date or, in the case of some parks, there isn't a plan at all. We would have liked to have seen a requirement that a transactive park master plan be completed every seven years and that that would have been approved by the minister and tabled in the Legislative Assembly. I think that that would go even further in terms of addressing some of the concerns that the Official Opposition has.

There has been some money announced for infrastructure renewal in some of the parks. In fact, one of my favourite parks, Miquelon park, is closed this year, Mr. Speaker, for some renewal, which as a frequent user of that park I know for a fact was long overdue. What's missing is a meaningful renewal program for all of the parks that would include regular maintenance so that we don't find ourselves in an infrastructure deficit relative to the provincial parks such as what we're seeing, in fact to the tune of billions of dollars all across the province. So that's something that's not in the amended act that I would have liked to have seen, but again it's definitely a step in the right direction.

I talked in second reading, Mr. Speaker, and I do just want to reiterate how I'm pleased to see that in the amended act the minister will actually have the wherewithal to allow free flight activities to take place in the provincial parks. As someone who participates in that myself, I find that very important.

The minister indicated in second reading that he wasn't aware of the fact that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford partakes in hang-gliding, and I'd like to offer right now to the minister that at some point if he'd like to come out and partake in hang-gliding lessons, I would be more than happy to offer them. [interjection] Now, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is asking whether or not I would supply the minister with a parachute, and I must admit that I hadn't really contemplated whether or not I would make a parachute available to the minister, but you never know. There may be an occasion when he might need one. I'm not sure.

I think, lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to wax eloquent for a second about the value of provincial parks, and I think I may have had an opportunity to do that last year during debate at some point.

I was fortunate enough to have grown up in this province with parents who owned what at that time was probably one of the very first motorhomes in existence on the highways in Alberta. It was actually built by Atlas Van Lines in Edmonton. They took a cube box and converted it into a home on wheels. It wasn't pretty. We have pictures. It looks somewhat like an apple box. But my parents were very insistent that from the Easter weekend right through to the Thanksgiving weekend every year they would get the children out of the city at every opportunity, and we spent literally every weekend out of the city and primarily in provincial parks. So I grew up with a tremendous appreciation of our special areas in this province and a recognition of the value that parks and protected areas can have and do have in terms of raising good citizens. I'd like to think that that might in fact have something to do with the fact that I turned out to be a relatively good citizen myself and stand here in front of this Assembly today having the opportunity to speak about the value of our parks.

So, Mr. Speaker, again, anything that we can do to protect and preserve the parks and the value that they provide to Alberta citizens is very worth while. As I've suggested, perhaps in this amendment we didn't go quite far enough but certainly a step in the right direction, and perhaps next year we'll be back here with another

amendment in front of us that may even go that next step. Were that to be the case, I'm sure it would meet with my support as well.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to lend my support to Bill 23 in third reading, and thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development to close debate.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for his thoughtful comments and personal history and call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The Acting Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the progress made this evening and the events of the day I would like to move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:20 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 5, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/05

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 63 grade 6 students from Westlock elementary school. They are accompanied this afternoon by their teachers, Mr. Dan McDonald, Mrs. Maggie Cournoyer, Mr. Marcel Turcotte; student teacher Miss Heather McMillan; program assistants Mrs. Heather MacKenzie and Mrs. Randi Lethbe. Their bus drivers are with us as well, Mrs. Kerry Perryman, Mrs. Susan Jaeger, along with parent helpers Mrs. Ezan Lategan, Mrs. Heather Christenson, Mrs. Rachelle Koch, Mr. Todd Ducharme, Mr. Ryan Stonehouse. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure on behalf of the Minister of Advanced Education and MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today Dr. Don Cook, his wife, Dianne Cook, and their nephew Chris Rodgers, who are all seated in the members' gallery. Both Dianne and Don are constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud, while Chris Rodgers is visiting us from Ottawa, where he's employed with Natural Resources Canada. I would just like to point out that this is his first trip to Edmonton, where he's having meetings with certain officials. Just prior to this he was in Cambridge Bay, where he was having other meetings. I'd ask Chris and Don and Dianne to please rise now and accept the warm applause of our Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, once again on behalf of the Minister of Advanced Education I have a second introduction that I'll make with great pleasure, and that is to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly six outstanding members of the Council of Alberta University Students, more commonly referred to as CAUS. These outstanding individuals represent the interests of students at the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. In fact, many of them took part last year in the consultation A Learning Alberta, where, the Advanced Education minister tells me, they brought great insight and value to those discussions, to the process, and offered important contributions.

I would ask each CAUS member to please stand and remain standing as I call his or her name: Jen Smith, CAUS chair and student union vice-president external at the University of Calgary; Samantha Power, CAUS vice-chair, student union vice-president

external, and student union president-elect at the University of Alberta; Graham Lettner, student union president at the University of Alberta; Bryan West, student union president at the University of Calgary; Jason Blades, student union vice-president, administration at the University of Lethbridge; Duncan Wojtaszek, CAUS executive director.

Mr. Speaker, we thank these young individuals for working with us and for their constituent students to ensure that we have an affordable, accessible postsecondary education system in Alberta for Alberta students. God bless you and thank you all.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the community sponsors of the School at the Legislature program seated in your gallery: from Priority Printing Ltd. Mr. Tim Downey, president; from Access and Canadian Learning CHUM Television Edmonton Mr. Craig Roskin, station manager; Mr. Eric Rice, manager, creative/production services; Ms Pam Hnytko, publicity manager; and from the downtown Rotary club Mr. Jack Clements and Mr. Sol Sigurdson.

This program gives grade 6 teachers from all over the province an opportunity to relocate their classroom to the Alberta Legislature for a week. Supported by 35 teachers and over 400 parent volunteers in fiscal 2005, over 800 students from 32 classes attended the School at the Legislature program. We're very grateful for the support we receive from our community partners, and I would ask our guests now to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a large group of mostly seniors from Lacombe that have travelled up here today with a tour group. With these seniors I'd like to introduce a few individuals. Mr. John Parsons of Parsons tours is the tour group leader. He is a virtual walking, talking encyclopedia of Alberta. This man knows, I think, probably more about this province than anybody but yourself. Along with him in this group are a number of special guests that I want to introduce. First of all is my father, Mr. Ralph Prins; my sister Judy Van Heron; my father-in-law, Mr. John Oudman; my wife, Pauline Prins; and a couple of aunts and uncles, Gerrit and Dorothy Meindersma and Jake and Agnes Prins. This is not really a family reunion because there's a total of 36 of them up there, and my family is a lot larger than that. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce three guests who are seated in the public gallery today: Mr. Ken Eshpeter, who's a grain farmer and former reeve of Flagstaff county; Mr. Paul Schorak, a retired Alberta government employee and former reeve of Flagstaff county; and Jerry Iwanus, a real estate appraiser and former mayor of Bawlf. I'd ask them to rise. They are from the Battle River-Wainwright constituency area. They're members of the executive of the Alberta Liberal constituency association. We're proud to welcome them to our growing team. They're rural Albertans concerned with the state of agriculture in Alberta, and they are here to witness democracy in action. I know they look forward to participating in the democratic process. Please give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure to introduce a very good friend of mine and ours who served with me as my former administrative assistant, then went on to International and Intergovernmental Relations, and now is in the private sector. I'd like to introduce to this Legislature Jamie Davis, who's in the members' gallery, and ask that he receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of Edmonton-Rutherford and a very dedicated public servant, the manager of my constituency office, Mr. Daniel Langdon. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Agricultural Assistance

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers are facing an unprecedented income crisis and are being forced to leave a cherished way of life on the family farm. The federal government wants to change the CAIS program, but they need support of all provinces. Farmers want to make a living. They deserve to make a living. They work hard to make a living, but low commodity prices and skyrocketing input costs are tough realities. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given that the minister says that there is, quote, no question that the CAIS program needs to be fixed, how is he going to fix it?

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. There are a number of ways that we can fix CAIS. The federal minister and all provincial ministers met two and a half weeks ago in British Columbia to talk about just that. In fact, unanimously all provincial ministers of agriculture – Liberal, NDP, and Conservative – agreed that CAIS in its principles is exactly what we're looking for. What we need to do is fix the administrative side of it, and I'm happy to report that our group, our management of the CAIS program through AFSC, is leading the country in software development. It's leading the country in turnaround time on CAIS applications. We have made substantial strides in fixing or moving towards fixing. It's by no means fixed yet.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will this minister commit to making rural development a priority by ensuring that any agriculture assistance programs are designed to sustain the family farm?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member needs to do a little bit more research because 97 per cent of the farms in Alberta, the 53,000 of them, are family-owned farms. The other 3

per cent are probably owned by shareholders who are also from the same family. The idea is that the programs we're putting out there are to sustain agriculture and the industry of agriculture in this province. We have done a great deal of work in making sure that what we bring forward as business risk management programs for agriculture in this province are not designed to create an atmosphere where farmers are trying to farm the program. What we want to create is the environment where farmers get their income out of the marketplace, and we are there to help them in a disaster.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. I note that the minister refers to sustaining the industry of agriculture, so I ask: will the minister make a distinction in policy among agribusiness, farm co-ops, and the family farm?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to make a distinction when some of those farm co-ops are owned by families. Some of those agribusinesses are exactly what we need to do in agriculture to sustain it. We talk about a value chain. We talk about having our producers have ownership in everything, from field to plate. That's what sustainable agriculture and making the family farm sustainable into the future in a global environment is all about. If the hon. member would like to spend a couple of hours with me and a number of producers from this province, I could perhaps educate him a little more on that.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Care Services

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is already experiencing a shortage of doctors and nurses in the public system. Allowing doctors to work both privately and publicly will only put more stress on a system that already has a limited supply of physicians. This government has not presented any evidence, none, to suggest that the third way reforms won't lure doctors away from the public system to work in the more profitable private system. To the minister of health: does the minister deny that allowing doctors to work in both systems will place doctors in a conflict of interest?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that essentially it depends on how you do it. We've talked about a regulated private delivery system, a system whereby we make the first principle a strong public health care system and evaluate any access proposal on the basis of whether or not it would have any impediment or infringe. Now, it's true that during the public consultation process people that expressed interest or concern about that asked for more detail, asked for very specific items that we would use to evaluate an access proposal. I have assured those people along with members of the college, with people that represented the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the nurses and pharmacists that we would do an evaluation or a description of what protocol would be used to value the merits of each proposal to ensure that we protected a strong public health system.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why is this government considering placing doctors in a position where there is a motivation to provide services that aren't necessary just to make a profit?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little confused by the question because I wouldn't believe that any surgeon would deliberately do anything that wasn't, in the long term at least, something that was necessary to be done. If this is an attempt to talk about medically necessary or the definition of what is nonemergency services or nonessential, then I don't think that we can do that in the time that I would have to answer here. I would say this. I'm quite of the belief that any doctor that would advance a clinical procedure would advance it on the basis that both he and the patient's condition were evaluated to need that procedure at some point; if not today, in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has the minister or her department done any research into the impact of the profit motive on the prescribing habits or surgical procedures of medical doctors?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there may well be a plethora of data and research on this. However, having said that, it would be better for me to do an evaluation of what we have so that I can bring it forward.

Let's be clear. The policy framework generated a lot of discussion around how the doctors would be utilized in terms of the policy on choice and patients paying for access. It also generated a lot of discussion around sustainability. We intend to provide more detail in the weeks and months ahead. I'll be very pleased to look into the data that could be presented relative to doctors' prescribing and procedures.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Galfour Development Corporation acquired from this government in 1988 two parcels of land amounting to 223 acres in size for \$2. They sold this land in 1999, only seven years ago, for over \$21,000 per acre, or roughly \$4.8 million. Buy for pennies, sell for millions. A good deal for the developer, a very bad deal for taxpayers. To the minister of infrastructure: given that the current owners of this land now have a mortgage registered with Alberta Treasury Branches for \$20 million, how does this minister justify the sale of this land for less than a penny per acre?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, this is dating back to that 20-year issue again, and the fact is that our research currently, as far as we've gone, but we're getting more, shows that when that land was originally purchased – and you have to understand that it was a large parcel of land – in order for the government to get a portion of it, of course, they had to strike a deal. The other would have been to subdivide, and rather than going through that whole process, the province had a purchase agreement for the entire block. Part of the agreement was that once the government had determined exactly what they needed, they would return to the owner for \$1 the remaining parcels of land from the overall agreement that was entered into. That's what the hon. member is talking about. That is what has happened. This nonsense about selling the land back for a dollar – that was part of the original agreement when they purchased the whole parcel.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why was the sale of this land never made public?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, these are agreements that the public could get, and I'm hoping that before too long I will have them physically and I will be able to table them. I don't have them yet today, but I can assure the hon. member that that will happen.

1:50

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why was this deal not registered with land titles on the documents that are associated and come with those land titles?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member filed documents from land titles that clearly showed the transaction of the land, so I'm not sure what he's talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Health Care Cost Projections

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government keeps repeating the very scary but very unsubstantiated claim that health care costs will eat up the entire provincial budget in 24 years. Similar claims made five years ago in the government's Mazankowski report have been proven false, yet the Premier and the health minister keep repeating their message of fear, hoping, no doubt, that with enough repetition Albertans will finally believe it. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. What research has she or her department done to project the costs of health care in Alberta over the next 24 years, and will she please provide it to the people of Alberta and table it in this Assembly?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to point to the evidence of the last six years where we have been consistently exceeding 9 per cent. For this year we've added \$735 million. Perhaps the most frightening thing is that there doesn't seem to be any way to reduce health care expenditure without directly impacting the health of Albertans.

I'd ask the Minister of Finance to supplement, based on the financial projections.

The Speaker: No. We're going to move on.

The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would expect the minister to know that.

Can the minister tell the House what the increase has been in health care costs in this province, factoring in both inflation and population growth?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's more than inflation and population growth. It's also the aging of our citizens. It's the rapidly escalating costs of drugs and new technology where we're going up by 13 to 17 per cent. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor. That's who is recognized.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's most helpful.

I think it's fairly responsible to give documented evidence about this. We'll be doing our budget estimates later this month, and we

can go into great detail about what our projections are. Frankly, when you're dealing with over \$10 billion for 3.3 million Albertans and when you are looking at the fact that on any measurement scale we are over \$400 per capita higher than any other place in the country on our expenditure and when we are the highest in Canada and we have consistently maintained that position, I think it would be better to provide detailed explanations about every factor that is causing this inflationary impact.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister has clearly either not done her homework again or at least cannot show her math or won't show her math, will she do the right thing and admit that the third way is based on false premises and withdraw it now?

Ms Evans: No.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. [interjections] The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has the floor.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care certainly is recognized as the number one issue throughout the province and consumes approximately one-third of our budget. We have experienced a great deal of reform, everything from regionalization and appointment of health boards to the shutting down of many rural hospitals. Efficiency is not always found in centralization and larger facilities. Often there are many services that could also be available throughout the province. One would assume that the minister has appointed capable, competent administrators for the health region. However, the minister appears to have handcuffed them by not allowing them the freedom and autonomy to bring services and procedures that they feel are important to the region. The Chinook health region has a desire . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, let's get to the gist of it all. Okay?

Mr. Hinman: I have 45 seconds, don't I?

The Speaker: You're way beyond that.

Mr. Hinman: The health region has the opportunity to bring a doctor from the U.S. to perform angioplasty. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister reverse her decision and allow the CHR to recruit a doctor to perform angioplasty and receive the necessary funding for that service?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in the extensive preamble the issue of angioplasty was not clear as it related finally to the question, so I would like an opportunity to look at the Blues and respond to that question. It seems to relate to the Calgary health region, and I'd like more information about it before responding to that question.

Mr. Hinman: It would be better if they listened to the preamble, but thank you. [interjections] It was within my parameters.

My second question is also for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister realize that she is putting rural people at risk of losing their doctors by shutting down rural hospitals and opening up urgent care facilities before a billing formula for those services provided by the doctors has been provided?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat confused about what rural hospitals we would be shutting down. We have not made any move to shut down rural hospitals. None of the policy framework identified shutting down rural hospitals. It talked about wiser use of facilities where we could in fact bring in more primary care networks. It talked about use of community-based facilities. It talked about a number of things in terms of co-operation between the regional hospital authorities, between the various providers in the province. There has been no suggestion of shutting down rural hospitals.

Mr. Hinman: Why has there been two years of negotiations since the closing of the Picture Butte hospital and the opening of the urgent care centre, and the doctor still has not been paid for his services provided there?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to look into the circumstances at Picture Butte. I have visited the long-term care facilities there and the wonderful use being made of a facility where assisted living capacity has been built and where a number of different measures have been undertaken to acknowledge the demographics in the community. There has been extensive work done to provide more immediate services there to make sure that the community is working together. The MLA in the area has been very involved in consulting on the various ways that we can make better use of facilities, and there are new dollars that have been spent there in private/public partnerships to make it better – and “private” meaning nonprofit work done by community members – to make sure that we're building on the capacity in that particular community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Forest Sector Competitiveness

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government of Alberta announced a partnership with the Alberta Forest Products Association to help address the industry's competitiveness challenges. This release follows the one from the industry's product figures for 2005 that show a decline in revenue for Alberta's forest sector compared to 2004 and predictions of worse news in 2006. My question is to the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How do we respond to the concern that the Alberta government is bailing out industry through this partnership?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta industry to their credit, as I have said, is not asking for a bailout for their industry. What the Alberta Forest Products Association is asking government for is a common dialogue and good approaches to staying competitive globally. That's what they see in this partnership that we announced today.

What we will do through this partnership is conduct a current survey on assessment of the industry and their competitiveness. We will consult, and we will propose solutions that address both industry and forest community needs. Finally, we want to make sure that that's the way that we operate an effective and relevant matter as it pertains to the industry and its changing dynamics.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:00

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first and only supplementary question is to the same minister. Will this project emphasize secondary and value-added products?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a follow-up to our questions in question period over the last couple of weeks. Sustainable Resource Development already has a number of initiatives under way with industry and research organizations to add value to our forest products. We recognize that getting more out of a tree is the future for our industry in Alberta. The partnership that we announced will address the whole of the competitiveness issues and the challenges and potential solutions specific to the Alberta industry from the primary right through to secondary manufacturing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Private Health Insurance

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many international trade law experts have raised serious questions about the impact of private health insurance and private health delivery on the future of the public system due to international agreements such as NAFTA and the WTO's general agreement on trade and services, yet this government continues to ignore the risk. My questions are to the minister of health. How can the minister maintain that proposed reforms allowing more private insurance and more private delivery will protect the public system when the real decision-maker on this will be a NAFTA dispute panel, not the ministry?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, during the public consultation process and on behalf of the opposition party the hon. member raised this question, and I will give the same answer that I gave then. It is my understanding that with very carefully articulated government controls built around what we would do – bear in mind that we're still defining the government as being protective of the public health system so that somebody that was working in the public health system as a doctor or a team providing the service can be very careful in articulating under what circumstances we would engage private providers – the public health system would still be in control of the provision of private service through the definition of the access proposals, and we should not see the impact of NAFTA, as is being suggested by the member opposite, as having any effect in that kind of capacity.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the same minister: when the minister contracted with Aon to design a system for parallel private health insurance in Alberta, were they asked to assess the risk this could pose because of our obligations under international trade agreements?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, Aon was not contracted to define any part of a private parallel system for Alberta. Aon was asked to define some actuarial models that would enable us to understand what the costs would be if there was any different mix of paying for public/private care. That report is something that has yet to be tabled with me, is not something that has been a driver on the health policy framework, and is not something that we should be talking about in terms of how we would look to the future for payment of public or private care in the province.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the same minister: given these binding international trade agreements, why would the minister choose to lock us into an untested and unwanted relationship with American insurance companies that we may not be able to reverse? Why would you make that choice?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that choice has not been made. That choice and the questions that are being raised by the hon. member are hypothetical at best. They do not deal with the reality of how we intend to proceed . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have made no selection that would mitigate one way or the other to opening the doors for other private deliverers, either medical professionals or private insurance companies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Canadian Agricultural Income Assistance Program

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been much discussion on the federal government's future plans regarding the Canadian agricultural income stabilization, in other words CAIS, program. In Ottawa it was reported that the federal agriculture minister, Chuck Strahl, is encouraging producers to approach the provinces if they wish to replace CAIS. I know that this question has been brought up already, but I like to keep my questions positive. We get enough negativity from the other side of the House as it is. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member has the floor. Please proceed.

Mr. Groeneveld: My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given what we heard a few weeks ago at the ag ministers' conference about the need to transform CAIS, what is the minister planning to do now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again a good question. It was, as I mentioned earlier, about two and a half weeks ago in British Columbia when the federal/provincial/territorial ministers' meetings were held. The provincial ministers unanimously said to the federal minister that "replace" is not the word that we would use, that "transform" is the word that we would use. We believe that the principles of CAIS are sound, but it needs to be fixed. It needs to be transformed into what we want it to be. So it is very frustrating to hear the federal minister still describing it in terms of replacement.

In fact, this morning I met with the Canadian Bankers' Association on ag issues and ag lending. I would say that that meeting was very positive about the direction that we're taking in fixing CAIS, and I believe that we're on the right track. The federal position, the Liberal position of ad hoc payments: they didn't get it when they were in power, Mr. Speaker; they don't get it now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the same minister. What kind of CAIS program is the Alberta government pressing for, and how does he see it helping the farmers in the short term?

Mr. Horner: Well, the first part of that, Mr. Speaker, I did answer somewhat in the first question today in the House. On the second part of that question, about short-term response and getting dollars into producers' hands, in fact Alberta presented a proposal to the federal government some time ago that we believe would flow dollars to producers very, very quickly utilizing the CAIS program, with a retroactive adjustment to the reference margins across the board for all producers. It's targeted. That's what we like about the program. It reaches producers in need. It reaches those producers who have gone through a period of rough years in the last few years, and we can handle those types of payments very, very quickly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is again to the same minister. The minister mentioned that he went and met with the bankers this morning. Could he tell us why he did that?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the bankers in the ag industry are extremely important. [interjections] If the hon. members would care to listen, they might learn something.

The banking industry is extremely important to the agricultural sector, as we know. The bankers need to be our partners in putting forward these programs. The problem with the changes that we've made to our various business risk management programs is that most of the banks and the accountants are sitting back saying: when you guys are done tinkering with all of this, we'll come to the table. What I wanted to express to them was, "We're done tinkering; we're starting to fix the problem," and we want them to be our partners in fixing that problem.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

School Infrastructure in Calgary

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The closure of a school has a lasting effect on its community spirit and economic viability. Last night the Calgary board of education, handcuffed by this government's flawed space utilization formula and failure to accommodate the reduced class size initiative, announced the closure of a relatively new school in Calgary terms, Jerry Potts school, built in 1971. As the dominoes continue to fall, the English program at Varsity Acres shifted across a six-lane, 70-kilometre stretch of Shaganappi Trail to Marion Carson school while the Brentwood elementary regular program closed and Juno Beach Academy got its marching orders. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Given that these dramatic changes, which all occurred in the Calgary-Varsity constituency, that I represent, are echoed on an ongoing basis throughout the province, how can you justify the unnecessary grief, frustration, and anger felt by thousands of students, their parents, teachers, and trustees caused by your ministry's faulty funding formula?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, quite a bit of nonsense in the last part of that question. Let me just say that we have something like 13 brand new schools that are opening in Calgary over the next several months. That's what the Calgary board of education through its consultation process arrived at. They made decisions. They are locally elected people who deserve the respect of the member who just asked the question.

2:10

Now, we have to understand, Mr. Speaker, that when new schools are built in one area, they will have an impact on students that are being bused out of that area to attend a school over here. So that's the net result of it. The Calgary board has taken this consultation program very seriously. They've done a thorough job on it, and we have to understand that they are certainly empowered to make those decisions about closures in one area and openings in the other. I might add that we funded those new schools to the tune of about \$111 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the minister: given your ministry's death knell either by closure or collapse of hundreds of Alberta schools, when will you change the utilization formula to accurately reflect the reduced class size initiative?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's so unfortunate to listen here to such a bunch of nonsense being asked. You know, it's just absolutely nonsensical. When you consider that we've just added through this budget that's before the House right now 330 million more dollars to education and that we're providing \$5.3 billion, which amounts to about \$26.5 million per school day, don't give me that nonsense, hon. member opposite, because it's just not true. There are a lot of good things happening. We have the best education system in Canada and one of the best in the world, and it's time we started recognizing that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Education minister: will you commit to resolving the educational program and infrastructure funding shortfall through the established budgeting process rather than through off-budget spending? Where's the plan?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think it's been made fairly clear over the last few days, but if it hasn't been for this member who's asking the question, let me make it clear again. We do have responsibility now in Education for the entire school infrastructure envelopes. Those envelopes are comprised of three things: new school constructions, plant operations and maintenance, and the infrastructure maintenance renewal. We do have a plan that we are completing from previous years, and we're marching forward with bringing in a new plan approximately in June. That's the target date. At that point he'll see how that dovetails out of the existing budget and perhaps some help from elsewhere. Who knows? The fact is that right now we have a capital plan. There are billions of dollars in there, and there are some school construction projects already budgeted in there, 21 of which will be completed this year, 51 of which will be completed over the next several months. So there's \$734 million from the infrastructure budget augmenting current school infrastructure needs.

Royalty Tax Credit Program

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, since its inception in 1974 the Alberta royalty tax credit has assisted the oil and gas sector in our province. This program returns a percentage of Alberta's Crown royalties back to the companies through the income tax system, and this in turn, of course, spurs oil and gas exploration and development. Over the past few years Alberta has seen several oil and gas companies

dramatically increase their exploration activities while realizing record profits. My question is to the Minister of Energy. In light of Alberta's active and robust energy sector, is the Alberta royalty tax credit still a necessary program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true that this program originated in 1974 in response to circumstances of the time when royalties were not allowed for deduction for income tax purposes on federal taxes. It's gone through a number of changes over the years to respond to differing circumstances, not just nondeductibility of royalties but price, when low prices were there. In response to today we've decided and even last night in estimates announced that we are reviewing the Alberta royalty tax credit program.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, last fall the ARTC and the Alberta royalty system were the subject of recommendations made by the Auditor General, including the Department of Energy's controls and accuracy of well production data. Again to the Minister of Energy: how is the review of the ARTC helping the Ministry of Energy ensure that Albertans are receiving their fair share of royalties?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, receiving the fair share is really one of the paramount reasons, fundamental principles, behind the royalty structure as created. We have been working very closely with the Auditor General's department. He specifically commented in his last report about the Alberta royalty tax credit program in response to that and in response to our review of royalties in ensuring that Alberta is receiving their fair share. In light of changing circumstances of the markets today, higher prices and the like, it is for those reasons that we're specifically reviewing that program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. My final supplemental is again to the Minister of Energy. When can we expect the review of the Alberta royalty tax credit to be completed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We expect the review of this program to be conducted over the next few months. It's our anticipation that any changes would be effective as of January of 2007, so it would be a very short time period.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Aon Consulting Inc.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall the Conservative government gave a \$1.5 million contract to Aon, one of the world's largest insurance corporations, to cook up a private, parallel health insurance scheme as part of its broader agenda to bring in privatized, two-tier health care. Other than the original request for proposals everything else about the Aon contract and the work they are doing is being kept secret and hidden from Albertans. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the minister's professions to engage Albertans in the scrutiny of her third-way proposals, why is she not lifting the veil of secrecy and making public for the benefit of Albertans the studies and reports that the Aon corporation has been doing using 1.5 million tax dollars?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, although the tone of the question is quite alarmist, there is a simple and clear message. What Aon was contracted to do with about a million and half dollars was to define actuarial models to give us some opportunity to study exactly what the state of the art was in terms of current funding and what it would mean if we changed any mix of funding on things like but not exclusively held to continuing care or drugs. What we've also had to look at and ask them to evaluate was to make sure that they factored in a model that would take care of those with pre-existing conditions, noting that today seniors don't pay for health care premiums. So it was something that was going to take an extensive amount of work, and my department asked for more time to work with Aon because the original models built did not answer all the questions they felt they should answer before delivering it to me.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I ask the minister: how can the minister justify the continued secrecy when the Aon study was supposed to be completed by January 20, 2006, yet absolutely no information has been released to Albertans paying Aon's tab?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, if I don't have the report or the policy and recommendations that would be a natural outgrowth of the report, there seems to be no prerogative in releasing something that is yet unfinished business. I want to be sure that we do a prudent evaluation of what they are evaluating themselves and what kind of natural policy outgrowth there would be. I think it's responsible to wait and make sure that we've got all the i's dotted and t's crossed before coming forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has no research, no information to proceed with the third way, yet she wants to go ahead with it. Given the minister's refusal to come clean on the Aon study, will she at least commit to providing the results of last month's so-called third-way consultations with Albertans at the same time as they are provided to the government caucus, and if not, why not?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, maybe it sounds petulant of me, but I have never cast aspersions on any of the members that sit in this House nor the opposition, and by suggesting that I don't come clean with things, by saying that I wouldn't come clean with things, you are directly taking an attack at my character, and I refute that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

2:20

School Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fiscal dollars for schools are missing for the best education system in the world. The entire modernization and renewal needs of the Edmonton and Calgary public schools surpass the estimate for the whole province. While the government has a long list of spending priorities, it appears to me that parents and children aren't a priority of this government. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Why did the minister call a meeting to discuss the capital priorities of each school district when he already had their three-year capital plans, and we're already waiting for a decision from the minister? Why did he have the meeting? [interjections]

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a strange question, I agree. However, let me try and answer it.

The meeting that I held on March 24 was with school board chairs so that we could discuss several important issues. One of them was infrastructure primarily because the infrastructure envelopes, which I alluded to even earlier today in this House, have now been transferred from Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation over to the Ministry of Education. I had to answer questions from the school board chairs so that they would know how this affects their local planning and so on. I have seen what their capital plans are that were submitted last year, but there are some changes, hon. member, that they themselves wish made. So we're going through that process of listening to them, as we always do. We listen, we review, we discuss, we decide, and we keep them very much in the loop in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the minister's comments, in light of this, the multiple supplementary requisitions for '05-06 budget for plant operation and maintenance, does the minister believe that a 5.1 per cent increase for spending is sufficient for this year? Will it fit the needs of schools across the province of Alberta and those in the Edmonton area? Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the increase in plant operations and maintenance takes us up to about \$395 million. That's a sizable amount of money for heating and lighting our schools and looking after custodial costs. Now, that having been said, I don't want to confuse that or have the member confuse it at all with the IMR, or infrastructure maintenance renewal, envelope because that envelope in fact increased by 68 per cent, up to \$81 million. So we're flowing more and more money into the system. I hope the hon. member isn't criticizing that. Those two envelopes have received sizable increases. Is more money needed? In some areas perhaps that is the case; in other areas perhaps not. That's what we're reviewing right now, and that's what will be in the plan that will come forward, I hope, later this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister open the capital projects envelope? Will there be schools in the 75 new neighbourhoods in Edmonton and 40 new neighbourhoods in Calgary? When will that envelope be opened? Thank you.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe there will be 13 new schools opening in Calgary between now and the next several months, totalling about \$111 million. There will be 20-some new schools opening elsewhere over the next several months, and there will be 51 other new schools, projects, or modernizations or right-sizing or upgrades and so on opening over the next several months, as I indicated earlier. So once we've finished all of those openings and we track them through, we will then see what the impact is, such as what his colleague from Calgary-Varsity asked about on the neighbourhoods where students are being vacated or where the population is shifting or where we have declining enrolments. There is a lot of complexity to this issue, and we're going to be addressing that complexity in this new plan that will be coming forward very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

School Infrastructure Maintenance

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A growing number of residents in the constituency of Calgary-East are so concerned about our schools' structural integrity. They are telling me that unless the government is getting out of the business of educating young Albertans, immediate investment in deferred maintenance projects in many schools across the province must be made now. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Education. What plans does the minister have to address this issue now that the responsibility for the deferred maintenance in schools has been transferred to his department?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we are certainly very much in the business of educating our young people, and I think that all members here know that. I've alluded earlier today to the \$5.3 billion that's going into this area. Now, that includes a significant amount of money for school infrastructure, for plant operations and maintenance and so on, to the tune of about \$734 million in total. That having been said, we are working on this new plan, which I've just talked about here, and part of that plan is to look at the so-called deferred maintenance. But let me make it very clear that local boards, which are constituted from locally elected trustees, have the right to make local decisions from within their envelopes. A lot of those envelopes exist today, and some of them that I've looked at, I noted, haven't been touched for a couple of years in some cases. So I'm hoping that, perhaps, in the region that he represents, both of those boards will take a look and see if they have any available monies and that they will continue making the priority decisions necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what consultations has the minister had with the school boards to identify the priority schools of each board?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've consulted three times now with the boards in the past year and couple of months. Throughout those meetings, particularly the one we just had on March 24, we went around the table and every single school board chair or vice-chair who was there had a specific comment about certain items. A lot of those items had to do with school infrastructure maintenance needs. We are now looking at what their priorities are. We don't see all of them, but for the ones that they have highlighted for us, we are now seeing where they fit in terms of critical or emergent or need to have or whatever. As we come forward with our plans, there will be more opportunities for those consultations to occur because they're a very good two-way street for communication and for resolving and solving problems.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when will this plan be made public so affected students, parents, and staff at these schools are informed of your department's plans of action to address these pressing needs?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my sincere hope that we'll have that accomplished somewhere in the month of June. That will include some additional contact with our experts in Infrastructure and Transportation, who have a lot of expertise in this area, working with staff in my area, working with locally elected trustees and with

their counterparts: secretary-treasurers, deputy superintendents, and so on. As soon as we feel we have that plan fleshed out and ironed out to the best of our abilities and as soon as we can put the appropriate amount of dollars required that would otherwise be approved, we'll be making further comment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

International Medical Students

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency has a significant number of medical professionals who came to Canada based on their qualifications and experience but are doing ordinary jobs to provide for their families. I have received many complaints from foreign student doctors about one particular group getting 80 per cent of the total licences provided by the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons while others are denied for not meeting Canadian standards. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the minister doing to address this issue?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question and one that several people have asked me about. In the first instance and most recently we provided \$3 million for international medical graduates to come to Canada, to come to Alberta and specifically to have an opportunity to interface with residency programs at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta. It's our expectation that dependent on the specialty this will assist us in providing spaces for at least 14 of these international medical graduates.

The other thing we're looking at and contemplating is a second intake. We have had essentially one intake in universities on an annual basis. We are looking with Advanced Education at the possibility of a second intake process, allowing us to maintain spaces for educating those graduates that have come from either Australia or Ireland, for example, who are Canadian students who have by necessity taken their training in other universities and other places, so we can provide them some opportunity as well. But it's an issue that we're looking at not only with the federal counterparts in terms of immigration policies but to try and expedite this with the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you. Will the minister increase the quota for medical students in Alberta because 14 extra residency seats are not enough?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that is our target. We have added, as you will note, some student capacity for physicians in Calgary at the University of Calgary, and we are looking at a workforce plan in conjunction with the Minister of Advanced Education to not only look at those placements for foreign students but expansion of other programs. Here at Capital health one thing that isn't well understood is a clinical assistant program that's been very successful, enabling us to add some of the foreign trained physicians. But the hon. member makes a good point. It's something that we continue to work on with the universities, to see what we can do to increase that capacity.

Mr. Agnihotri: Same minister: will the minister urge her federal cousin in Ottawa to update the information they provide to health professionals considering immigrating?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, we really hope to do that. There are many issues that I'm looking forward to talking to the Minister of Health about, and this is one that I will also advance. I'd be pleased for any of the documentation any member of the House wants to provide me in support of raising this issue.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, before too long I'll call on the first of six hon. members to participate, but first of all some history. While E. Peter Lougheed was the only Official Opposition leader in Alberta's first 100 years to become a Premier, four former Official Opposition leaders were to become Lieutenant Governors. John C. Bowen served as Lieutenant Governor from 1937 to 1950. He served as a Liberal MLA for Edmonton from 1921 to 1926 and was not re-elected in 1926. Mr. Bowen's tenure was the longest of any Lieutenant Governor in Canada in the 20th century. He died in Edmonton on January 2, 1957, at age 84.

John J. Bowlen served as Lieutenant Governor from 1950 to 1959. He was first elected in the 1930 election as a Liberal representing Calgary, was re-elected in 1935, then ran as an independent in 1940 and was re-elected. He was defeated in 1944. During his term he was referred to as the Vice-regal Cowboy. He died in Edmonton on December 16, 1959, at age 83.

J. Percy Page served as Lieutenant Governor from 1959 to 1966. He was elected as an independent in Edmonton in 1940, re-elected in 1944, defeated in 1948, and in 1952 was elected as a member of the Progressive Conservative Party, as he was again in the 1955 election. He was defeated in the 1959 election. Perhaps Mr. Page is best known as the coach of the very famous Edmonton Grads basketball team, which was famous internationally. He died in Edmonton on March 2, 1973, at the age of 84.

J. Grant MacEwan served as Lieutenant Governor from 1966 to 1974. He was elected as a Liberal in 1955 in Calgary and was defeated in the 1959 election. Dr. MacEwan was well known as an agriculturalist, popular historian, educator, public speaker, conservationist, and publisher of a multitude of books. He died in Calgary on June 15, 2000, at the age of 97.

Of Alberta's 16 Lieutenant Governors four were former leaders of the Official Opposition. A fifth, Helen Hunley, was a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Happy birthday today to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Enoch Cree First Nations Casino

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today in recognition of the Enoch Cree First Nation and their initiative to construct and operate Alberta's first ever First Nations casino.

In 2001 the Alberta government approved the First Nations gaming policy, the government's commitment to provide First Nations with an opportunity to enter the casino business as a means of improving economic benefits to their communities. This coming fall the Enoch Cree Nation will open the \$140 million River Cree Resort and Casino that will include a 255-room, four-star Marriott hotel, a state-of-the-art sports complex, several restaurants and bars, meeting and conference facilities, a health club and spa, and a 62,000 square foot casino with 600 slot machines, 40 gaming tables, and a high-limit gaming lounge.

The River Cree Resort and Casino will bring new employment

opportunities, at least 300 new jobs for members of the Enoch band and residents in surrounding areas, and will generate significant economic spinoffs for the region. It is anticipated that the casino will provide \$9.3 million in funding to the host First Nations charity as well as \$32 million for the Alberta lottery fund. Forty per cent of these funds from the Alberta lottery fund will go directly into the First Nations development fund grant program for social and community development projects for First Nations. These funds will also help create much-needed economic growth and stability for the First Nations communities. A portion of the Alberta lottery fund revenues generated at the Enoch Cree Nation casino will also be used for traditional lottery fund initiatives, which benefit all Albertans in a variety of ways from new playgrounds to programs for seniors.

Mr. Speaker, First Nations casinos are good for Alberta's First Nations and for all Albertans, and I would like to extend my congratulations to the Enoch Cree Nation on the upcoming opening of their new casino.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wetaskiwin and County Sports Hall of Fame

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the efforts of a group in my constituency to promote and recognize excellence in athletics. On Saturday, March 18, the Wetaskiwin and County Sports Hall of Fame held their inaugural induction dinner. The hard work and dedication of all who are involved with this project is to be admired and applauded. This project will better our sports community and have a positive effect on aspiring athletes, coaches, and other sports-minded individuals by showcasing what has been achieved by Wetaskiwin area residents.

While I don't have the time to mention everyone involved, I would like to single out the president, James Pelehos, who, along with the board of directors, was responsible for this initiative.

On that evening we honoured those who have made a great contribution to sport in our community. This ceremony recognized not only the contributions of athletes who get us on the edge of our seats but also those without whom our teams would have no coaches nor a league in which to compete nor a venue in which to play.

The hall of fame recognizes outstanding contributions in six categories: athlete, builder, team, special, honorary members, and pioneer award. The inaugural inductees include the Falun Live Wires ladies softball team, Doris and Cec Colwell, 1904 Wetaskiwin Cubs men's baseball champs, Al Arner, Norm Brown, Clayton Monaghan, Norma MacEachern, Glen Jevne, Randy Wyness, Val Fonteyne, Sandra Wright, and Rodney Schneck. These inductees' contributions to sport in the Wetaskiwin area have been immense.

Not the least is inspiring and helping area children of all ages to become involved in sport. Participation in athletics gives youth a sense of pride and accomplishment. Additionally, the health benefits of an active lifestyle are immense. Highlighting the success of those who came before will hopefully inspire more people to become involved in the sporting community.

Thank you.

University of Calgary 40th Anniversary

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in recognition of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the University of Calgary as an autonomous university. The institution's history is, however, much older than 40 years and can be traced to the Alberta normal school for training teachers, which was established in

Calgary in 1905, making it the oldest postsecondary institution in the province. In 1945 the normal school became a southern extension of the University of Alberta Faculty of Education.

2:40

In 1951 the Calgary University Committee urged an expansion of the Calgary branch of the University of Alberta. As a result, first years of the bachelor of arts and bachelor of science were offered. In 1957 the name was changed to the University of Alberta in Calgary, or UAC. In 1958 sod was turned for the present campus of the university. However, functioning as a branch campus of the University of Alberta, UAC was deprived of its rightful place in the academic sun, and in 1963 students, with the tacit encouragement of their professors, began a drive for autonomy from the University of Alberta.

On May 1, 1965, the University of Alberta at Calgary was granted academic and financial autonomy. The Faculty of Engineering and the division of continuing education were founded. At last, with the proclamation of the Universities Act on April 1, 1966, the university became a truly autonomous institution under the name the University of Calgary. Dr. Herbert Stoker Armstrong became the first president of the U of C.

With the arrival of autonomy the university began to truly blossom as the faculties of Fine Arts, Graduate Studies, Social Work, and Medicine were created. The following year, 1967, at the first convocation, held on March 29, the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson became the first recipient of a degree from the University of Calgary, an honorary doctorate. The next year, 1968, the Business school was established and offered a four-year bachelor of commerce, and the board of governors approved the establishment of the School of Nursing.

I'm sure all hon. members join with me in congratulating the faculty, staff, and students of the University of Calgary on their 40th anniversary of autonomy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Governance and Democratic Renewal

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to talk about the need for democratic renewal in Alberta. I am proud to have been chosen to chair the Alberta Liberal caucus committee on governance and democratic renewal and to report that in the last few months my caucus colleagues and I started looking at ways to restore democracy and encourage citizen participation and engagement in this province. Our work is challenging, exciting, and thoroughly rewarding. It can be divided under three main headings: legislative renewal, electoral reform, and transparency and accountability.

Reforming the electoral system was the theme of an important and interesting forum which we held on February 13 at the Stanley A. Milner Library here in Edmonton. Changing the Face of Democracy was the name chosen to begin the journey of examining and improving our first past the post system of voting. British Columbia studied this system, and we hope to learn from their experiment.

The Official Opposition invited two members of the B.C. citizens' assembly to tell us about their experience and the results of their work. The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform was the fulfillment of a campaign promise made by Gordon Campbell, while in opposition, to correct the system which saw his party win a majority of votes yet fail to form the government. When he became Premier, he also wanted to right the inequity, which saw a complete lack of opposition when people cast ballots for candi-

dates whose parties did not win. Citizens were invited to participate; 180 people were chosen from all 79 constituencies, including two members from the First Nations community. Those chosen went on to study election practices in 23 jurisdictions within the Westminster system, so for someone in this House to imply that to look at electoral reform would somehow be contrary to British parliamentary tradition would be an inaccurate assertion.

The volunteers had many meetings, and they even went out into their constituencies to inform the public and to poll opinion. When they reached their decision, the clear winner was the single transferable vote, or STV, a version of which was in use in Alberta until 1955 and similar to the civic voting system we had in Edmonton until the 1960s.

Stay tuned, everyone, for part 2 of our series Changing the Face of Democracy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Joseph Anthony (Tony) Mercredi

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to bring to your attention the passing of a great Albertan and a proud aboriginal leader. Tony Mercredi was a former grand chief and an accomplished aboriginal rights activist who died last Sunday of colon cancer at age 58.

Mr. Mercredi, who was a Dene from just outside Fort Chipewyan in northern Alberta, was a celebrated former chief in his own band, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, and a grand chief of Treaty 8, which represents 23 Alberta First Nations. In the 1980s Mr. Mercredi helped negotiate the Meech Lake accord, fighting for constitutionally entrenched aboriginal rights. He travelled extensively, explaining treaty rights to the United Nations in New York, and he made a presentation on inherent rights to the Vienna convention on human rights. At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro he shared the podium with the late Jacques Cousteau.

He was a father, a grandfather, and at the time of his death still studying to become a pastor.

Mr. Mercredi was born on June 26, 1947, near Old Fort Point, the place he always called home and returned to many times throughout his life. After finishing high school, Mr. Mercredi studied political science at the University of Western Ontario. Eventually he was drawn into politics. Mr. Mercredi's decisions were always well considered, his leadership style kind but firm and rooted in the traditions of his nation. Mr. Mercredi believed deeply in securing rights for aboriginal people, but he also wanted to help his band get on its feet financially and politically.

Mr. Mercredi leaves his two children, Nicole and Edmund; his mother, Victorine; nine siblings; and four grandchildren. His funeral is scheduled to take place tomorrow, which is Thursday, at the Roman Catholic church in Fort Chipewyan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Health Care Reform

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak today on the government's third way. After 15 years of rule this administration has failed the tests of governance and leadership, most recently in its dishonest attempt to sell Albertans on the third way, a two-tiered health care process. This erosion to a cherished public service, touted as a way to improve access and sustain the funding for illness and injury care, violates the evidence, Canadian values, and basic business principles.

Despite repeated calls for a careful analysis and real health reform

in the past decades, what we have in the third way is an ideological blindness and the support of vested private interests. There has been no systematic attempt to examine critically current spending on the health care system; to establish specialized public centres with tight referral systems; to establish needed primary health care centres, that have shown efficiencies for 40 years, along with alternate funding for physicians; to optimize scope of practice of all health professionals as teams; to investigate meaningfully prevention and health promotion; and to expose the adverse impacts on business and competitiveness.

In terms of business principles the most fundamental premise of private enterprise is that of social supports, equal opportunities. These must be there to enable people to compete economically. Health care is one of those basic needed rights in our society to meet human potential. In addition, the Canada Health Act and basic ethical principles clearly cannot support physicians working in both the public and private systems at the same time, a clear conflict of interest that this government persists in promoting.

The third way violates both evidence and public values and follows a pattern of many years of public policy failure, including the handling of BSE, chronic wasting disease, coal-bed methane and water protection, electrical deregulation, neglect of seniors, the poor, and the handicapped. The third way does not represent progress. It does not represent governance or leadership. It represents incompetence or corruption. Albertans will decide.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, you caught my eye when the previous member was speaking.

Ms DeLong: I'm a little unsure. Are we allowed a point of order at this point?

Speaker's Ruling Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. member, the chair will not recognize any points of order with respect to members' statements. The reason for that is that when the House dealt with members' statements a number of years ago, this was an innovation brought into this Chamber, and originally they were statements of a certain length of time. Hon. members would be given the freedom to participate on any subject they wanted to and to have an opportunity uninterrupted. We've had occasion in the last number of years where hon. members have attempted to interrupt another hon. member when they're giving a members' statement, but the chair has in all cases said, no, that would not be viewed as a point of order.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present to this House today, the first with 304 signatures of people mostly in the Calgary and Edmonton areas. They say:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to recognize the financial burden borne by postsecondary students in this province, and to take action by implementing a significant rollback of tuition fees.

The second petition, signed by 96 people primarily from the Calgary area:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:50

Ms Blakeman: Yes, indeed. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to rise today and present the first 116 signatures of what I know are going to be thousands on a petition which is petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to abandon plans to implement the third way; not to allow expansion of private, for-profit hospitals; to oppose contravening the Canada Health Act; and asking the government to vote against any scheme to pay for private health care insurances for services that should be covered by medicare. One hundred and sixteen signatures from across the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first of all like to table a petition with 119 signatures on it. The petition urges the government of Alberta to "eliminate private clinics and private delivery in the health care system, and develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen and extend Medicare."

The second petition is from my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona, also with 119 signatures on it, also urging the government of Alberta to "eliminate private clinics and private delivery in the health care system, and develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen and extend Medicare." So far, that brings the total on this particular petition to 953.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We're not all tabling the same petition, are we?

Mr. Martin: No, we're not, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to present in this Assembly a petition on behalf of a group of my constituents. The petition is signed by 116 students at Sir John A. Macdonald high school which is located in my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill. The petition calls on this Assembly to urge the government to take action to reduce teenage smoking in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce a petition signed by 106 concerned Albertans primarily from Calgary, Airdrie, and surrounding communities. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income supports benefit levels may be increased.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to table 15,297 names primarily raised by two people of the Chinook regional health authority, Alan and Mary Heggie, who are petitioning to have radiation therapy services made available in Lethbridge. It's my privilege to present on their behalf.*

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of tablings on health care again today. From Isabel M., a letter noting that she feels that the poor would not have health care in the future.

From Blayne Newton, with a copy of an article called Alberta's

Chicken Little: After All These Years, Why Run into Foxy Loxy's Jaws?

From Don Ronaghan, asking for dates and times of public meetings where members of the voting public can attend and give input.

From Marty Richardson, asking why the government doesn't reopen second-year and third-year nursing school programs so that nurses could be educated and ready to work more quickly.

From Cec Race, who submits a satirical poem which is an expression of his opposition.

From W. Procter, who hopes that the third way will get dropped like a hot potato.

From David Pearce, who notes that many of the so-called cost savings come at the expense of the lower ranking front-line staff and from union bustings.

From Ray Palmer, who feels that physicians, if they're going to practise in both systems, should have to be in one or the other.

And from Mike O'Reilly, noting that he cannot afford to pay for special care and that it is totally wrong and should not be allowed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings this afternoon to support the questions I asked in the Legislative Assembly earlier today. The first tabling is an Alberta Government Services land titles office document. It is a document that indicates there was a transfer of land for \$5.2 million from the Galfour Development Corporation to two numbered companies, one in Edmonton and one in Vancouver. This document is dated 1999, I believe. Yes, July 1999.

An Hon. Member: It's getting better.

The Speaker: Well, we'll deal with the chair in these matters, okay? Let's continue to move.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. The next document that I have is also an Alberta Government Services land titles office document. It is a caveat forbidding registration, and it is a document that associated Galfour Development Corporation and the notice that Peterco Holdings Ltd. has an interest in the land held by Galfour Development Corporation.

The third document that I have, Mr. Speaker, is the short legal title for west of the fourth meridian, range 25, township 52, the fractional southeast quarter of section 9. This is a historical title.

The fourth document that I have is from the Alberta corporate registry system, and it is the details on Galfour Development Corporation. This document is dated January 31, 2006.

The last document that I have to table – and I appreciate your time and patience, Mr. Speaker – is a historical land title certificate for a property west of the fourth meridian, range 25, township 52, the southwest quarter of section 9.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a letter from Pierre Gosselin. Mr. Gosselin is appalled at lengthy wait times but is adamant that the third way is not the solution. He says that the solution is simple: reinvest in health care the same way that the government's cuts destroyed it.

Also, on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona a

*See p. 735, left column, para. 8.

couple more tablings. One is from Elisabeth Ballermann, who is the president of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta. Ms Ballermann agrees that there are ways to improve the existing system but disagrees with the proposal to allow doctors to straddle the public and private systems and feels access should be based on need instead of ability to pay.

The third letter is from Lucia Teixeira, also opposed to the so-called third-way proposals, who says that a private, parallel health system would take providers away from the public system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling today is a letter from Vinay Jhass, who describes the government health policy framework as vague and compares it to a campaign pamphlet. Vinay wants us to listen to the will of the people and assures us that the third way will be as disastrous here as it was in England, Australia, Spain, and Italy.

The second tabling is from Edmonton-McClung constituent Ms Lorna Berlinguette with respect to violence against indigenous women in which she urges the government to improve police response protocols to missing person cases, protect the rights of sex trade workers, and provide funding for more shelters and counselling services.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Little Bow, do you want to try it again?

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that 15,297 signatures weighed on my mind. I might have presented it as a petition, and in fact I should have presented it as tabling a return. I apologize, and here it is one more time on behalf of Alan and Mary Heggie, from southern Alberta.

Thank you.*

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my pleasure to table the appropriate copies of the annual report card for 2004-2005 of the School at the Legislature. This program is cosponsored with community members Priority Printing and Access Media Group along with VIA Rail Canada and the Edmonton downtown Rotary Club.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness: a document, undated, entitled World Health Organization Report on Health Spending in Western Europe.

head: 3:00

Orders of the Day

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order.

head:

Main Estimates 2006-07

Infrastructure and Transportation

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Acting Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I start, I would like to introduce staff from the department that are here with us today: Jay Ramotar, the deputy minister; Rob Penny, assistant deputy minister of transportation and civil engineering; Jeanette Espie, executive director, office of traffic safety; Barry Day, assistant deputy minister, capital projects; Winnie Yiu-Young, acting assistant deputy minister, policy and corporate services; Gary Boddez, chair, transportation safety board; Angela Paterson, director of policy and corporate services; Bart Johnson, director of communications; and John Enns, executive director of property management. If you folks would please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Roads and infrastructure play a critical role in the success of our province and the quality of life for Albertans, and the number of these Albertans is steadily rising. Alberta is experiencing unprecedented growth. As our economy continues to flourish, our province is attracting more and more people; our population is continuing to grow. According to Statistics Canada, during the last three months of 2005 the population of Alberta has grown more than five times the national average, gaining more than 25,000 people between October and December. As the province grows, so do the number of challenges faced by the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. The state of Alberta's core infrastructure and our roads and highways has become a high priority issue for this department and for this government.

Deputy Minister Jay Ramotar, his executive team, and everyone who works in Infrastructure and Transportation continued to do a very outstanding job for the shaping of Alberta's infrastructure. This department is ensuring that Alberta's infrastructure continues to serve today's Albertans and will meet the growing demand in the future. Roads and facilities are the backbone of our communities. The Alberta government recognizes the important role that infrastructure and transportation play in the success of our province. It demonstrated its support with unprecedented funding for infrastructure in last year's three-year capital plan and again in this year's plan.

Over the next three years Infrastructure and Transportation makes up over \$7.7 billion of the 2006-09 government of Alberta capital plan. The estimate I am presenting is closely tied to the capital plan. In fact, about two-thirds of the voted budget for '06-07 is related to the capital plan.

Thanks to the ongoing support from the government, the ministry has undertaken a number of programs and projects over the last year. I would like to share some of these with you today as I present the ministry's estimates for the '06-07 fiscal year. This year the department's estimates to be voted include approximately \$2.6 billion for expense and equipment/inventory purchases. Approximately \$1.1 billion is for capital investment. This makes an overall budget of \$3.7 billion. This figure does not include \$148 million in statutory capital investment funding related to the P3 project for Anthony Henday Drive southeast. This is the southeast section of the Edmonton ring road.

Of that \$3.7 billion, \$345 million is for noncash items like amortization, nominal sum disposals, and consumption of inventories. This leaves the ministry with \$3.4 billion as an actual spending target for programs. As in past years there will be two votes, the expense and equipment/inventory purchases vote and the capital investment vote.

First I will address the expense and equipment/inventory purchases vote, which has a spending estimate of \$2.6 billion. Programs that fall under this category are generally related to operations and maintenance. In past years this category included funding for supported infrastructure, including schools, postsecondary institu-

*See p. 734, left col., para. 16.

tions, health care facilities, and rural affordable supported living. However, this funding, over \$700 million, has now been transferred to the respective program ministries, so I won't be speaking about these areas any further.

What the category does include is \$317 million for government operations. This funding enables the ministry to maintain the day-to-day operations of government-owned properties as well as leases and the Swan Hills Treatment Centre and capital and accommodation projects. Funding is also for the maintenance of government-owned facilities, site environmental services, land services, and the management of government air and vehicle services.

Alberta is known for its safe and efficient highway network, and we're intent on maintaining this reputation. The expense and equipment/inventory purchases vote includes \$360 million for provincial highway systems and safety. This funding goes towards the maintenance of highways, vehicle inspection stations, rest areas, and transportation infrastructure in provincial parks and on native lands. Under this program the ministry is providing \$37 million for transportation safety services. These dollars support vehicle and driver safety programs, monitoring of the commercial carrier industry, a number of traffic safety initiatives, including the implementation of the new traffic safety plan, and the operation of the Transportation Safety Board.

Our province is only as successful as its cities, towns, and villages. To support municipalities, the expense and equipment inventory purchases vote includes over \$1 billion each year for the next three years for Alberta municipalities through various municipal support programs. This includes the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, which government introduced last year. The program provides municipalities \$600 million a year as part of the five-year \$3 billion program. The program allows municipalities to target funding at infrastructure pressures they deem to be priorities. Using these funds, local governments can direct funding at projects, including roads, bridges, public transit, water and waste water, and emergency services.

In addition to the municipal infrastructure program Infrastructure and Transportation is providing grant funding to municipalities through other initiatives. These initiatives include \$32 million for the Water for Life strategy to address regional water systems; \$30 million for the Canada/Alberta municipal rural infrastructure fund, a cost-shared program between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments; \$14 million for the infrastructure Canada/Alberta program, another cost-shared program between the federal, provincial, municipal governments and one that puts a focus on green infrastructure projects; \$57 million for the new deal for cities and communities, a federal program initiated last year which sees federal fuel tax dollars flow back to the Alberta government, where it gets distributed to municipalities; and some \$309 million for other transportation grant programs. These fundings provide formula-based grants to assist counties, municipal districts, special areas, and Métis settlements in developing and upgrading their network of local roads and bridges.

The expense and equipment/inventory purchases vote also includes approximately \$480 million for other programs and services related to operations and maintenance. Most of this funding, \$362 million, goes toward the energy rebate program, which has been extended to include the month of October. An additional three years has also been added, and the program will now run until March 31, 2009.

3:10

The funding also includes \$50 million for the new capital for emergent projects program introduced last year. The CEP is meant

to address small, emerging capital needs that fall outside the current capital plan. This \$50 million represents the expense portion only, and additional funding is also included in the capital investment vote. Finally, funding is also allocated for programs and strategic services, which is primarily for the program support staff.

The second category of spending is for the bricks and mortar and asphalt that make up the roads and facilities of this province: \$1.1 billion in funding under the capital investment vote will go towards government-owned infrastructure, including facilities and provincial roads and highways. The capital investment vote allocates \$139 million for major construction projects and land purchases. This includes funding for projects such as the Royal Alberta Museum and the Calgary Courts Centre. The land purchases budget is \$13 million and is largely to purchase land that will enable us to proceed with construction on the ring roads in both Edmonton and Calgary.

The capital investment vote allocates some \$801 million for the provincial highway network. The provincial highway network includes building and enhancing provincial highways and bridges, so we can continue to meet the transportation needs of Albertans and others who drive through our province.

Some of the major projects include twinning highway 63 south of Fort McMurray, and the government will start twinning the 240-kilometre highway between Fort McMurray and the junction of highway 55 near Grassland this year; continuing work on the north-south corridor, Alberta's part of the Canamex trade corridor, that stretches some 600 kilometres from Anchorage, Alaska, to Mexico City – Alberta's leg of it stretches about 1,175 kilometres, and we're about 80 per cent complete already – continued work on upgrades to highway 63 and highway 881 in and around Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo region; and continued improvements to hundreds of kilometres of highways throughout rural Alberta.

Provincial highway network funding will also allow construction to continue on new key segments of both the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads. This funding will assist government in meeting its target to complete the ring roads by the year 2015. We are in the request for qualification stage of a potential public/private partnership arranged for the northeast leg of the ring road in Calgary.

As I said earlier, the capital investment vote does not include the \$148 million in statutory capital investment funding related to the P3 project for the Anthony Henday Drive southeast. That's the southeast section of the Edmonton ring road. This is not voted because no cash outlay is required by government up front, one of the benefits of P3.

Finally, the capital investment vote includes \$148 million for other programs and services carried out by Infrastructure and Transportation. The majority of this funding, \$122 million, is for the capital for emergent projects, CEP, program, which I mentioned earlier. The CEP is meant to address smaller emerging capital needs that fall outside the current capital plan. This program has both an expense and capital investment portion. Some of the funding in this program is a result of reprofiling cash flows from the '05-'06 fiscal year.

The ministry will also invest some \$26 million for water management infrastructure, supporting construction and rehabilitation of dams, canals, spillways, and other components that make up our water management infrastructure. Funding will go towards rehabilitating the Carseland-Bow River headworks system and the St. Mary to Milk River Ridge reservoir.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation of Infrastructure and Transportation's estimates for the '06-'07 fiscal year. I would like to reiterate that the department did a wonderful job over the last year and made many strides in ensuring that Alberta's roads and infrastructure will meet the needs of Albertans for many years to

come. I expect that we will see the same outcome from the work this year.

I would be only too happy to take comments and questions now, Mr. Chairman, as we move forward to vote on these estimates.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I don't know whether to extend congratulations or sympathy as your workload has doubled with your double ministries.

I am pleased that the government, specifically Infrastructure and Transportation, took our Liberal opposition advice of returning the infrastructure responsibility back to the major ministries of Education and Health and Wellness. With decision-making power comes funding and responsibility for accountable, transparent, well-planned taxpayer dollar expenditure, and as the ministers of Health and Wellness and Education know, they are being grilled on that responsibility on a daily basis in this House.

The Department of Infrastructure and Transportation is requesting a total supply of \$3.7 billion for operating expense, equipment/inventory purchases, and capital investment. Last year it was \$3.1 billion. The 2006-2009 capital plan commits \$13.3 billion to provincial and local infrastructure over the next three years, compared to the \$9.2 billion budgeted in the 2005-08 capital plan. I want to commend the Minister of Finance and the acting minister of infrastructure for putting this in the budget rather than off-budget spending. Thank you.

With regard to the air fleet, it's unfortunate that the government members aren't more satisfied with their taxpayer-funded, on-autopilot air limousine service. I know that on a scale of 1 to 6 it only received a 5.1, and the target is 5.6. Will regular members be able to find a seat on the plane while leadership hopefuls flit about the province at taxpayers' expense during the leadership campaign? Has the department done a cost-benefit analysis of the government's aircraft fleet "to ensure that program operations are aligned with program objectives, user needs, and use policies" as was pointed out on page 23 of the Auditor General's report? Will the acting minister release the flight logs as the former minister had promised to do this week? Will Albertans know on a daily basis during the leadership race which ministers are flying and for what justifiable purpose? I suggest that the minister post this information daily on the government website during the leadership race.

The government is allocating \$362 billion – sorry, \$362 million; I wish it were billion – for energy rebates in 2006-07. However, in the last fiscal year it was expected to have spent \$726 million, according to government estimates on page 291. Why is the government lowballing the estimate? Why is the government relying on the sustainability fund to cover its overspending initiatives?

With regard to highways, the government lottery estimates indicate that provincial highway rehabilitation is being cut from \$99.7 million in 2005-06 to \$63.3 million in 2006-07, according to page 290. I would appreciate having an explanation for this reduction, considering the larger scale projects, including ring roads and the twinning of highway 63, as was noted yesterday by the minister, not at the expense of highway 881 upgrading. The capital plan indicates a "\$1.7 billion increase, with \$1.4 billion in additional funding for highways in key regions." This comes from page 70 of the report. We're pleased to see that the government listened to the opposition and Albertans' concerns that highway 63 needed to be twinned. That's a key project, and I give the minister and the ministry full credit. I am so glad that this is finally happening. We've been calling for it since the late '80s. We've seen this

government make other promises, such as the McDermid report, but unfortunately they haven't followed through. I'll be talking about the McDermid report in another section.

3:20

How does the government expect to fill the potholes when the price of oil and gas drops? If the government would adopt our surplus policy, as it seems to be adopting so many other policies that we have put out, 25 per cent of surpluses would be put into an endowment fund, providing ongoing funding. Unfortunately, we do not see a capital fund in this budget like we're proposing. What we do see is a capital account, something that the government can drain while resource revenues are at all-time highs, putting Alberta's future in jeopardy.

With regard to the business plan, goal 2, "plan, develop and manage government-owned . . . infrastructure." This is found on page 257. With regard to the physical condition of provincial highways and the allowable percentage in poor condition, the last actual allowable amount was 11.2 per cent. When you add that to the number that were allowed in fair condition, basically we have over 60 per cent of Alberta highways being tolerated at between fair to poor condition. Last year this department was increasing the target for highways in poor condition from 11 per cent to 18.5 per cent. Hopefully, we're heading in the right direction.

Highway 2 provides such an advantage to the Calgary/Edmonton corridor. I would like to know why highway 3 heading east and west wasn't twinned to provide the same economic opportunities, to create a southern corridor as opposed to simply passing lanes so that you can pass by the opportunities.

With regard to infrastructure debt, on page 77 of the capital plan it states: "alternative financing can be used to fund capital spending." Why is the government claiming that it is not running a deficit when it enters into P3 contracts that extend payments over multiple years? The ring road payments are extended over a 30-year period. We have no crystal ball capabilities of analyzing what our infrastructure interest debt repayments will be in each of those 30 years. We're gambling. There's far too much gambling going on within this province. What is the current dollar figure for the infrastructure debt? The last figure we heard was in the \$7.3 billion area. We keep hearing larger and larger amounts coming from health regions and coming from school districts. I'm just wondering if that has been added to the current deficit/debt. How can the government claim that it's debt free when the deferred maintenance shortfalls continue to grow?

As indicated on page 290 of the 2006-07 government and lottery fund estimates, why is the government operations budget increasing for property operations and leases? Would the minister please elaborate on the \$3.8 million being invested in the strategic economic corridor investment initiative, which is found in government estimates on page 289? Also, page 289 of the government lottery estimates shows that noncash items are increasing from \$271 million in 2004-05 to \$345 million in 2006-07. We'd like to know why, and if you could, please provide us with a breakdown in writing so that we could appreciate that significant increase.

As indicated on page 290 of the 2006-07 government and lottery fund estimates, why is the minister's office budget increasing from \$450,000 in 2005-06 to \$495,000 in 2006-2007? I'm sure that needy communities would have appreciated a share of that lost \$45,000. As indicated on page 290 of the 2006-2007 government and lottery fund estimates, why is the deputy minister's office budget increasing from \$470,000 in 2005-06 to \$535,000 in 2006-07? It seems that there is an awful lot of money being increased within the department itself, that isn't getting out to average Albertans. As indicated on

page 290 of the 2006-2007 government and lottery fund estimates, why is the department's communications budget increasing from \$788,000 in 2005-06 to \$810,000?

We're seeing all these internal increases. I would like to see that these actually represent investments for Alberta in increased efficiency. Possibly the RAGE ministry should look into the efficiency as well as the Auditor General. Would the minister please provide a detailed list for the increases in the strategic services budget indicated on page 290?

Municipal infrastructure. We have a very active mayor in Calgary, and he does appreciate, as noted, the Finance minister's visit with him, which provided him with some temporary relief. Explanations were provided, and hopefully dollars will soon be sent. Likewise, Mayor Mandel of Edmonton, who takes a quieter approach but has equally worthy concerns. Hopefully, the budgets for the municipalities will increase. That \$3 billion figure basically will come to an end next year. What will it be supplanted by?

The capital plan has also failed to provide municipalities with sustainable funding. This is noted on page 73. The government continues to prefer grants, which do not meet the long-term needs of municipalities. Far too much is ad hoc. The municipalities need sustainable, committed infrastructure financing. Sort of doing the napkin approach just does not work.

The government's estimates indicate that land and site environmental services are receiving \$13 million. This is indicated on page 293. Why, in this particular case, is funding for this initiative so low? It seems that environment loses out. The Environment ministry received only 1 per cent of last year's provincial budget, and \$13 million for land and site environmental services I don't believe will come anywhere near to providing the necessary protection and the rebuilding of the areas in question.

Under the client satisfaction survey the percentage of municipal clients satisfied with the overall quality of service is still very high. It's dropped slightly, very slightly. Could the minister please provide the question or questions that provide this overall score? In other words, are these questions designed to require a positive response? Could we please see the survey? Also, could the minister please provide the name of the market research contractor that conducted this survey, and who are the municipal clients that are asked this question?

With regard to overall infrastructure, can the minister provide us with the total cost for the Calgary courthouse that is expected for completion by 2007? This courthouse has gone through a series kind of like phoenixes rising from the ashes, but each time the phoenix rises, it's a smaller bird than it started as. The initial plan called for approximately \$350 million. When that ran up to the \$500 million cost with some very funny, creative excuses that it had been asked to become planeproof after 9/11, it went from a P3 project to a regularly funded public works project. However, two of the courthouses that were originally included in that \$350 million estimate were left out. So what we're getting is more for less.

3:30

The government lottery estimates indicate that the infrastructure Canada/Alberta program is being cut from \$27 million in 2005-06 to \$14 million in 2006-07. This is on page 290. I would appreciate an explanation on this line item. Why has it been halved? Is the program coming to a conclusion?

How can this minister assure rural Albertans that the \$24 million allocated to complete the rural affordable supportive living program is enough? This is noted on page 76 of the capital plan.

This budget has also provided inadequate funding for long-term care facilities. The government lottery estimates indicate that the

seniors' lodges line item is being cut from \$5.5 million in 2005-06 to nothing in 2006-07, and this can be found on page 291. What is the matter with the initiative that it is now being dropped? What is it being replaced by? That, perhaps, might be the question.

Business plan goal 6: "Collaborate with other ministries in the development and preservation of schools, post-secondary institutions and health facilities through the provision of technical expertise and project management services." That's found on page 261. I would be very appreciative of the acting minister explaining just how much freedom both the ministries of Education and Health and Wellness have in determining their infrastructure allotments. Possibly the Minister of Finance could provide some of that information. Do the ministers of Education and Health and Wellness come to the Ministry of Finance separately now? Is there any commitment to go through Infrastructure? Can they appeal directly to the Finance minister in their proposed budgets?

Health facilities. Physical condition, percentage in poor condition. The last actual was 4 per cent. The target is 4 per cent. Could the minister please provide the names of the hospitals that it expects to remain in poor condition? Why is the target for hospitals in poor condition not zero? At least it's in better shape than the highways.

Schools. Physical condition, percentage in good condition. The last actual, 61 per cent. I'm sure that estimate was done before Marlborough Park's roof came close to a cave-in. I'm surprised, actually, that it's as high as 61 per cent given that the average age of schools in Calgary is 48 years. But how can we accept a target of 75 per cent? When we have royalties and surpluses in this province totalling billions, why do schools and health regions have to come on bended knee before their departments to receive the funding that is essential? It's a matter of: are people an investment, or are they simply a line item, part of a deficit?

Why is the government allowing 4 in 10 Alberta schools to be in fair or poor condition? The 3 per cent of schools in poor condition is the most concerning statistic seeing that recently we've had to see a school evacuated. Schools were neglected in this budget. On Monday the Education minister is quoted as saying: I think there is some great urgency with respect to certain health and safety concerns at some schools; help is on the way; there are unbudgeted surplus dollars in that budget – if we're successful and if the plan is embraced by cabinet and caucus – that the source money could come from. That's a lot of maybes. I'm not sure to what extent, having handed off those infrastructure responsibilities, the minister can comment on those questions, but if he can, if that is still part of his concern, I would appreciate his comments.

The capital plan does not indicate the construction for any specific new schools. Again, we're in a transition period. I'm not sure to what extent the minister has responsibilities in terms of his collaboration with the ministers of Education and health care, but if he could clarify his role in terms of approving projects and assisting with financing. Does he go together with the ministers and approach the Minister of Finance for the funding?

The government is committing to new modular classrooms . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, would you like to respond?

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll respond the best I can. It's rather confusing when members jump all over in the books. I'm only keeping track myself, so on the questions that I miss, we'll get the answers to you in writing.

The member spent a fair bit of time talking about the aircraft. It's really quite interesting when you look at what the Auditor General had to say about aircraft and use of aircraft. He was suggesting that,

in fact, we use them more. He was suggesting that we replace aircraft because of their age. When you talk about using aircraft for campaigning, the fact is that the only – the only – people that can schedule an aircraft are ministers, and as the Premier has said, any minister that is going to enter the race must resign by June 1. So as far as I'm concerned, there is a real safeguard in place relative to the supposed use of the aircraft for that function.

Now, you mentioned the logs. I want to make it clear. There's a difference between the manifest and a log. We will not be posting the log; we will be posting the manifest. The reason that you don't post the log is simply because there's private information on those logs – for example, phone numbers of individuals and those types of things – because that's what the pilots take onto the aircraft with them. If there are messages that they have to convey as they're in the air, those numbers are on the log. You will get the manifest which shows the destination, all of the passengers on board, the purpose for the trip, and that sort of information. I think that really, quite frankly, that's what you would be interested in, and I'm sure it doesn't make a lot of difference to you how much fuel is on board and exactly what time the aircraft took off and exactly what time it touched down. The information on where the plane originated, where it's going to, who's on board, and the purpose for the trip: that's all on the manifest.

The energy rebates: you asked why we didn't budget for the full cost. Well, that's quite simple. If gas prices are high and therefore we have to pay out more money under the rebate program, the sustainability fund, in fact, will have the additional money, so we can take it out of the additional money in the sustainability fund. You cannot nor can anybody else forecast exactly what the price is going to be. Nor can you forecast the weather. Of course, we don't know how much gas is going to be consumed, so we put in a reasonable number. If we get lower gas prices, if we get a reasonable winter, there will be no problem. It will be below that number. Yes, if gas prices are high, it will be higher. However, the sustainability fund will have those extra dollars, and we can take it that way.

3:40

Now, you talked about provincial highway rehabilitation. The reason that those numbers, from '05-06, are currently this much lower in '06-'07 is because of some 30.5 million dollars that was given during the last fiscal year. It was given to that line item, so we're not budgeting it this year because the dollars may not be there. That's why that difference. I'd be really happy if we were able to get those extra dollars, but currently we can't.

You referred to the McDermid report. There were a lot of very good proposals and information in the McDermid report. The fact is that we've implemented quite a few of them. There are a number of them that cost extra dollars, and we're working our way through them. You'll see a safety plan coming out, and it will implement some more of those recommendations, but it is one of those things that takes a little bit more time.

You mentioned highway 3 east and west and asked why we're not twinning it and why we're spending the amount of money on the north/south. Alberta is an export province. We export so many goods, and much of that travels by truck. The U.S. is the number one buyer of our products. So a commitment was made back – I don't know – in the late '90s that we would put a real effort into the Canamex highway. There's been a great deal of effort to get that highway twinned because of the trade issue.

We recognize that highway 3 is very important, that east/west corridor, and there have been dollars spent on it. There's more work being done. There's some engineering being done, particularly

looking at the Crowsnest Pass area and what we can do there. That's just one of the east/west corridors. There are others that are being looked at because, truly, getting out to the coast is also important for our trade and for people.

Now, you talked about P3s and the gamble. I'm sorry; I don't know the number on the courthouse, but it's a P3. You indicated that it's not P3. It is a P3. Your definition is not the same as mine. The government can still pay. That's not the issue. The fact is that when it's a P3 like we've got in the courthouse, it was done by the private sector. We've got a firm price on the building. We've got a 30-year contract. They're responsible for all of the maintenance and the operation. Those are all predetermined. They're in the contract today. It's a P3. Quite frankly, when you see the escalation in the price since they started, since the ink was dry, we're very fortunate that we got a P3 because all the way to the furniture, which is included in the original, you'd pay a lot more for it today if you had to go out and buy it, but that was all included to start with. So it's turning out to be an even better deal.

As far as two courthouses that were not included, that's not true. That's not true at all. The fact is that there were different configurations. The one that was chosen had as many square feet as the one that had the other configuration. It was basically about a million square feet. That's about what it was in all the different configurations.

It is true that originally we were hoping that all three courts would come into it. The Court of Appeal decided that they didn't want to, so they're not in there, but certainly the other two courts have got what they need to have.

Mr. Chase: Wasn't the aboriginal court supposed to be part of the project?

Mr. Lund: No. There was no aboriginal court as part of it. There were three courts. The Provincial Court, the Court of Queen's Bench, and the Court of Appeal were the three originally that we were hoping to house in the one area, the one structure.

You talk about the debt in infrastructure. It's true that there is a backlog. You questioned what that number is. Well, that's a very difficult number to really quantify. The reason that it's difficult is that if you have a structure that, say, is 90 per cent of new, would you say that there's a deficit in that building? If it's 50 per cent, what would be the deficit? Would it be 50 per cent of the replacement cost, or what would it be? Now, what we did in, particularly, schools – and it started in about '98 – is we did an audit of the schools. What they did is they took an assessment of the schools and then came up with a number that would put them up to about that 80 per cent of new. They came up with a number, but that doesn't mean that there's that deficit because you can easily live with and work with – and it's very functional – that small level. Yet there's a number there. So they added them all up, and they came up with some different numbers.

I don't know – I haven't come across it exactly – what we're using as a number today as far as the infrastructure debt, if you wish, but one thing is very, very positive. If you look in the third-quarter report of the province – and I forgot the page number – you will see that if you take the assets of the province, whether it be physical or monetary, and all of our liabilities, in fact we're the only jurisdiction that is truly debt free. We have a number that is above all of our liabilities, and the Treasurer, I'm sure, could supplement that answer quite easily.

You asked about the strategic economic corridor investment initiative. This is to accommodate minor construction costs, such as interim engineering and planning, for the strategic economic corridor

investment initiative program. That's what those dollars are for. As you can see, it's a new line item, and that is the purpose of it.

You talked about the minister's office and the deputy minister's office. As you know, in '05-06 the two, infrastructure and transportation, were melded together, and what has been found in the minister's office is that it wasn't a realistic number. In fact, if you take the percentage there, it's a 10 per cent increase in the cost, but this is a more realistic number of what it costs in those offices. The fact is that as far as the deputy minister's office, once again that's the same situation. When they melded the two departments together, they didn't take the number out of infrastructure and the number out of transportation and put them together. That's not what they did for the '05-06, and they then found out that, really, it was a lowball number.

You talked about communications, and you wondered about the \$22,000 increase. Well, in fact, that's allowing for salary increases. It's only a 3 per cent increase, and that's to accommodate the salary increases.

3:50

You asked about our budget relationship with schools, postsecondary, and health. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, those are not found in here at all. There's about \$700 million in that area, that used to be housed under supportive infrastructure. There are two kinds that we used to have, the government owned and the supportive, which were those things like schools, hospitals. But those are now found in those others, so I can't comment on them and on what dollars are going to rehabilitation, those kinds of things.

Also, you mentioned the problem with that school in Calgary where there was a roof problem, Marlborough. It's unfortunate, of course, that that happened, but I also know there was some money that the Calgary board of education had that originated back in '01 that was given to the Calgary board for the infrastructure renewal program, and they are just now spending it.

Mr. Chairman, I think that that is what I caught, but we will answer more of your questions in writing.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The minister is new but not so new in this department. When I was a trustee, of course, he was in this particular department, so I'm sure he has some knowledge of what is there that would take others to get up to speed. [interjections] I saw that. I'm going to lobby for you, hon. member. My fans over here want me to.

Mr. Chairman, I want to just make some general comments about the infrastructure deficit and why we're here because the numbers look huge when we look at it in terms of the budget. Remember that when we got preoccupied with the economic deficit back in the mid-90s and concentrated only on that, we did let a lot of other things suffer, including the infrastructure and, I would argue, health care, education, all the other valuable services that we needed.

At this point, with an overheated economy, I would suggest that we are playing catch-up. Whether this is enough money to catch up in a very short period of time, I doubt it, but sometimes it's what we can do at that particular time. When I look at the budget highlights, Mr. Chairman, it sounds like a lot of money: \$13.3 billion over three years. It is, I guess, a lot of money, but we are playing catch-up. I don't know. When we look at the problems – and we can talk about hospitals, schools – and we look at roads and we look at water and all the rest of the things, it may not even be enough at this stage.

I guess my argument – and we can't roll the clock back – is that we should not have been so preoccupied with just the economic deficit that we allowed this to flow. I'm not sure we're saving

money over the long run in doing what we're doing in terms of playing catch-up. If we had been doing some of those needed infrastructure things like roads and hospitals and the rest of it, we probably would have paid a lot more money. Now we're competing with the overheated private sector, as the minister is well aware, and probably paying a lot more than we have to for our infrastructure needs right now. It's hard to get, as we know, labour. It's hard to get supplies. So it's much more expensive than it would have been a few years ago.

Whether the \$13.3 billion over three years is the right figure or not – probably we need more, but, as I say, on paper it looks like a lot. I notice, though, that the total capital and operating budget, including energy rebate funding, is down this year from last year about 10 per cent. I think it's \$2.5 billion to \$2.2 billion. In view of all the needs we have, I wonder if the minister would comment on why that is the particular case that we're talking about. I think it's \$3.6 billion in provincial highways and municipal infrastructure that was announced and the rest of it, but we're facing some real problems just maintaining what we have, as the minister is well aware.

In this particular budget, as I say, the catch-up – we're having CBM-related problems in Rosebud. We know what's happening with our schools, and I can talk more about that, but I know that's not under the minister. I'll save that mainly for Education. I do have some questions there, certainly, about the well-publicized Marlborough elementary school. These are things that have occurred because we have allowed our infrastructure, as I said, to slowly die while we concentrated on one area, and now we're paying the price somewhat for that, Mr. Chairman.

So I would hope – and I'd say this to the minister, for any influence he has with the Minister of Finance over there – that we will not allow this to happen again, that in our budgeting, whatever budgeting we do on a regular basis, there is that recognition that we have to balance off the various deficits: the infrastructure deficit, the social deficit, and the economic deficit, the economic problems. When we're out of debt, that should not be a problem. But I suggest to you that we're probably paying too much now, and this is going to go on with an overheated economy, Mr. Chairman, I would say for a number of years. Again I would come back to: what number we need is a very difficult one to grapple with at this particular time.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to just move to – and we had some discussion about this. There are a number of departments involved in the Alberta Water for Life initiative. This seems to me to be crucial right now, and certainly this ministry is part of it. I notice that in this year's budget there's a 63 per cent cut in the investment in Alberta's Water for Life initiative. Now, I bring this up in view of the fact that we've had some startling revelations, certainly from Mr. Schindler, about what's happened to our rivers because of the economic development in Alberta. Obviously the tar sands have some role to play in that. We've had some discussion about coal-bed methane in this particular Legislature, and it seems to me ironic that when we're moving ahead with these sorts of megaprojects and economic development, we're cutting back on what was, I think, a worthwhile initiative. I would ask the minister to comment on why it is that when all these things are happening and the news is out there, we're actually cutting back on what is a good initiative. In doing that, can the minister explain why last year's forecasted spending on this initiative and this year's estimates are so very, very different?

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

You know, I would just come back to the environment here, that this minister is playing a role in. We're doing the right thing with

Bill 1, the cancer endowment, and we're pushing into some of these other areas, but with our rivers it looks like it's impacting our neighbours; rivers in Saskatchewan, for example. They're complaining and others are complaining, and Mr. Schindler is saying that this may be the case. It seems to me that we have to take a real look at this and at the very minimum reinvest back into our Water for Life initiative so that we know what we're doing.

Mr. Chairman, we don't have a lot of time. I just want to move into the discussion more on the P3s. There's always been a private perspective. We let out tenders, we ask the private sector to come in with the best bid, and in the past we owned those particular buildings. With all due respect, the Calgary courthouse was going out of control, so we had to move away from that particular P3. It was financed the regular way, through the private sector admittedly, because the costs were skyrocketing. I think that if the minister checks, he'll find that that's the case. But let's have a discussion about the P3s generally. Everywhere they've been tried they've been a disaster. They brought in P3s under a Liberal government in Nova Scotia, and the new Conservative government had to get rid of them. In Britain they've been a disaster. I look at the Henday, the biggest one that we have going right now. I know it wasn't on this minister's watch, but we were told one thing, and then the documents kept coming different. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers' value for money report, building this road using public dollars would have saved taxpayers most likely about \$71 million. In the worst-case scenario Albertans would have saved \$6 million. The best-case scenario would have saved \$73 million. Either way, this was a gift, Mr. Chairman. The point is that when this occurred, we were told one thing, and the numbers came out very different. We'll have to wait down the way to see how this ends.

4:00

Mr. Chairman, the point I want to make to the minister is that when we talked about the Calgary ring road, the questions that were sent out with the particular release said: "How can you ensure the P3 won't be more expensive?" Well, it says: "The three proposals will be evaluated" – and I'm not talking about the Calgary ring road – "against a public sector comparator to ensure they represent good value for government and taxpayers. If clear benefits cannot be demonstrated, the project will not proceed." But then they won't release the public-sector comparator, that they at least did with the Henday, because, we're told, that might distort the bids. That was the answer from the previous minister. Well, surely the public of Alberta, that is putting this up, should have the right to know what we're dealing with instead of hiding it.

The real question they have in this press release: "Isn't a P3 just another term for debt?" Answer: "No. The government is simply paying for the project over a 30-year period rather than all at once. The Alberta government would not start making annual payments until after construction is completed." I've said in the past, Mr. Chairman, that if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck. It's still money that's going to be coming out of the taxpayers' money over a 30-year period. The Anthony Henday will be over a billion dollars – I don't have the exact figures – when we pay that over 30 years. It's still a debt. It's still going to come out of the taxpayers' money.

So no matter how many ways you want to put it, that's what it's going to cost the taxpayers of Alberta. Before, we owned the building in the traditional way, and that was part of our assets. So to be fair to people, don't send out documents, if the bureaucrats are up there, and tell us this. This insults people's intelligence. They know that on Henday we're spending another \$32 million a year,

and it will come from the taxpayers of Alberta. That has to be looked at over the long range of time, too, when we're doing this.

I don't know what this preoccupation is with P3s. Admittedly, as the minister said, the private sector plays a very important role. It always has. They bid on these particular documents, we see if they have the wherewithal to do it, and then we take the best bid. It worked well in the past. I don't understand this preoccupation, especially when they have the record that they have all over the world. Is it ideology? Is it the concept of ideology over common sense? I don't know. Maybe the minister can tell us.

I know they'll all get up and say that P3s are wonderful, but even he will admit that the Auditor General – and I know the government has accepted the recommendations, although I still haven't seen how the Henday and the Calgary ring road will follow with his recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, I just really say to the minister: let's have some caution. I don't know how far along the Calgary ring road is in this P3 proposal. Perhaps he's been briefed in the brief time it's been there about where that stands. It's my understanding that it's not a done deal, at least from the releases, but I'd like to know exactly where that stands at this particular time.

Mr. Chairman, I want to move on fairly quickly to Fort McMurray and the roads in that area. Recently, as of yesterday, I put in a petition on moving the pace along for highway 63, and I think that highway 28 tags into that. It seems to me that the whole engine of economic growth that we've been talking about centres around that Fort McMurray area. It's a very dangerous road, I'm sure the minister is well aware, and I know that we're moving in some direction. People there want it speeded up. That's almost 9,000 names that I've put in from this one petition from people in Fort McMurray and Edmonton about speeding up that process. If the minister can, would he give us an update of what the most recent time frame is for that to be twinned, if there's some possibility.

As I say, we're using that whole area as sort of a cash cow. At least we should have safe roads going up there. If he could also talk about highway 28, where that stands, because that connects to highway 63. [interjections] Mr. Chairman, my fans want me to also bring up 813. Right? Highway 813. Please give us an update on where that is in the government's plans, how soon we can move ahead on 813. I know certain members would be . . .

An Hon. Member: Highway 813.

Mr. Martin: Highway 813. Yes. I've said it. All right? [interjections] Well, you can talk about that too, but make sure that you talk about 813.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to conclude by asking in a general way about the so-called \$13.3 billion that comes back there over the three-year period. Is this the reality, or is there going to be perhaps more money as we go through? I guess I want to know how solid that particular number is. We seem in budgeting to move fairly quickly through. We have a budget, and then pretty soon we're into other estimates and money going. Perhaps when he's doing this – and maybe it's premature to ask, when the minister has just been brought back, what sort of figures are we looking at with the economy? Have they been doing any projections over the next five to 10 years? If we're moving ahead as quickly as we are with a number of these projects, I'd like to have some estimate about where we're perhaps going if he's able to do that. I would understand if he hasn't had time to do that.

I would just conclude, Mr. Chairman, talking about the schools. The question I have – and that's another whole issue that I think we'll save for the Department of Education, having formerly been

a trustee. The minister is aware that we had public schools falling apart in Edmonton because the majority of them now are over 50 years of age, and the maintenance is becoming insurmountable. We moved from Infrastructure to Health and Education, and there would be a joint sort of sign-off, if I can put it that way, on any major projects. Now I'm told that there has been some announcement – I haven't been able to see where – that these would be solely under Education and Health and Advanced Ed now, those three departments. I'm wondering: if that's the case, is that permanent, or is that just a temporary situation while we sort through the people that are coming and going in terms of government? Is this sort of a permanent solution, that the capital projects and maintenance will fall under those three departments rather than Infrastructure in the future?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

4:10

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for those comments. You talked a lot about the debt and the accumulated debt and whether, in fact, this is a correct amount of money to be spending at this time to catch up. One of the things I must point out is that it is true that there was a period of time when there wasn't a lot of money spent on some of this infrastructure as we were wrestling with our deficit and debt. However, if we were just happy to catch up with what we lost, that wouldn't be too bad, but the fact is that at the rate the province is growing, the demand for new – and always in these situations you don't start collecting the taxes until after people are here and after there's activity going on. So we're sort of behind the curve, as it were, in that the services are required now, but the payments start coming later. It is an issue of trying to balance what is the right number.

You mentioned the overheated economy. Absolutely, that is a problem. To get work done today is considerably more expensive than it was two years ago: materials, labour, the whole thing. So the more we dump in, the more we help heat the economy. I think that it's important that we recognize that fact and be careful just how fast we're doing it.

You commented in more than one area about a reduction. One must look at the budget for '05-06 as opposed to the forecast. The forecast includes the money that was put in during the course of the year. So that's why you'll see that reduction if you just look at the forecast, but you won't see that it's a reduction if you look at the budget for '05-06. I just wanted to point that out.

Water for Life is a prime example. There was some \$54.1 million added to that program during the fiscal year. As I was just explaining, in '05-06 the budget was \$32.2 million. The budget this year is \$32.1 million. But the forecast was \$86.21 million. That was because there were dollars added in. Now, as you know, this is a very, very important area, and the Minister of Environment has said many times that he would like to see a minimum of a hundred million. So we recognize the issue, but this is a budget, so we have to work within the dollars that are available. The Minister of Environment, I know, has some money that he uses for this Water for Life strategy, things like basin planning. That's one of the things that's happening. Certainly, I agree with the member that, in fact, this is an important one that we need to continue to take a serious look at.

P3s. Now, you and I will never agree. I know that. I know that because we believe in saving money when we can, and I'm not sure that that's part of your ideology. The fact is that the Calgary courthouse – and it really bothers me when I hear people saying that

it was exploding. No, that wasn't the case at all. Because of the way that the accounting principles work, yes, it did look like it went from 300 and some million dollars to \$500 million. But that was because it was going to be booked in two years at present day value. That's where the difference comes in. The fact is that we are very, very fortunate that we got a P3 with the courthouse because if you look at costs since the ink dried to today, the costs have gone way up. I was heavily involved in that one, so I know a little bit about it. The fact is that I went to the Auditor General and asked him: "Could you give me a number? What is the off-loading risk? What is that worth as a percentage of the total cost?" Because that's what we're doing. That's one of the big things that you've got to consider when you look at a P3: what are the costs that you're off-loading when you move over the risk?

The contractor reported to us that when they went to purchase just the rebar for the Calgary courthouse, the price had gone up \$8 million from when they first had estimated the cost – \$8 million just for the rebar, never mind the cement and all of the other building materials and the way those costs have gone up. The other thing is that that courthouse will be completed and will be opening in the fall of '07. Had we done it in the conventional manner, you wouldn't have that, of that kind.

Now, as far as the highways are concerned, I believe they are probably an even better deal. But you've got to remember that none of these P3s go ahead until the business case is done. When you talked about "why aren't we releasing the comparator?" whatever that comparator is then becomes what the proponents would use as the base. Why would we do that? Why would we give that? What will happen is that the day the tenders are opened, the comparator will be released, and that will happen. But you never give that kind of information to the folks up front. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we're at the point of the request for qualifications relative to the northeast portion of the ring road in Calgary.

We'll get back to you on all those different highways. I could look up a lot of it, but that would take a considerable amount of time, so rather than that, we'll get back to you with the time and the numbers and what is ahead of us there.

As far as the schools are concerned, there is still discussion going on about just exactly how this is going to work with the line ministries having the money in their budgets and the capital. That's all I can tell you at this point. We're still trying to figure out what the most efficient and best way of doing that is.

While I'm on the schools issue, even though it's not in our department any longer, in both Calgary and Edmonton it's a major problem because of the location of the schools. The old schools are built in the areas where there aren't nearly so many children. We heard today the problem as soon as the boards want to close schools, and the member, having been on the school board, knows how difficult that is. We know how difficult it is for boards to close schools, but the fact is that in some cases your utilization goes way down because the children aren't there. You have to bus; that's an added cost. Yet probably the right thing to do would be to close it and to build a new school closer to where the children are.

This is not a new phenomenon. I remember the Minister of Education back in the early '90s pointing out to us in Calgary a problem that was developing because that's when the city was really expanding, so you had a lot of families living out of the centre core and the school, of course, in the wrong location.

So with those, Mr. Chair, I'll get back in writing on those other questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to speak on infrastructure. I guess I'd like to start off by reading halfway down the page on page 253, under Aging Infrastructure: "A significant backlog in deferred maintenance has been created." It's sad that we're in that situation, that we were so busy paying off the debt that we didn't realize the accumulation of the backlog. As it goes on to say, "Major repair can be expected to cost more than routine maintenance would have cost, and all-out replacement can cost up to five times what repair would have cost." It's hopeful that we can catch up because of our windfall revenues, but the question is: are the priorities going to be in the right place, and what are we going to do about that? [interjection]

You'll have to talk louder, Shirley. I can't hear you.

4:20

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Hinman: I apologize. [interjections] That's right. Surely, whoever is speaking should speak up.

First of all, I'd like to start with a few highways because that is the backbone of our trade industry and how we move things around. You've mentioned many times about the twinning of the Can-American highway.

There's still a problem down in my area in Milk River. It's long overdue. It should be taken care of, and it isn't. One still has to wonder: why is it continuing? Milk River is in a dilemma there. Their hospital has been reduced and shut down to barely what you'd call a swing-bed operation. They have the desire there to downsize the school because the ratio isn't good enough for the facility they have. They're talking about taking away their big gym down there because they don't have enough students. So all three of those are a triple whammy for Milk River. On top of that, with where they want the twinning to go, they want to take out the elevators and move the railroad tracks. It'll be a major loss in their tax revenue when in fact they lose the elevators that are there in the community.

This government promised a long time ago to take over the secondary highways throughout the province, and they were going to pave them. Highway 501 west of Cardston has still not been paved. It's a treacherous road at best, and when the weather is poor, which is often the case down there close to the foothills and getting into the mountains, they actually can't run the buses more often than on most roads because it's in such poor shape. I know that the previous minister has been trying to strike some deals to cover that, but to date I'm not sure if, in fact, an agreement has been agreed on. It's a real struggle.

Another intersection: highway 36 and highway 3 there at the Taber sugar beet factory. I'm sure that the hon. minister has been down there and seen that. It's a problem there. In your first goal in your report it talks about helping municipal governments achieve infrastructure where industry and highways meet. The town has asked for an overpass. They're putting in lights. It's going to cause major problems there, they feel, in the area.

The question that I would like answered if you have the answer is: how does the government make a decision on putting in an overpass? Is it the traffic flow? Is it safety? Do you have numbers? Is there something that we have to reach? Everyone has a question on that as well as highway 3 going to Medicine Hat. You've mentioned it several times today already, but I would really like to see a report that shows the traffic flow on the major highways in Alberta and those intersections and what type of formula this government has or the priority list on when these areas might receive the upgrade that they desperately need.

Like I say, it would really be nice to have those volume reports and see if you're there. When you take those volume reports, for

example, do you monitor during the sugar beet harvest when it's going to Rogers Sugar, or do you go in the spring when there isn't the harvest going on and all of the traffic that's there in the fall between the corn and the sugar and everything else, the potatoes that are growing out there? We have two major potato plants in the area also. The amount of trucks on the road has really increased in the last 10 years there.

Then we'll go on a little bit further. Just when we're talking about Taber and in that area, it seems that we've created a monopoly on the road maintenance system. It's very frustrating for some of those MDs that there are certain areas where they have to look after and maintain the road between different highways when they would very much like to go back to the old days where they could bid and take the maintenance in an area. But it just seems like what we've created is a multilevel marketing scheme where the two big companies, Carmacks and Volker Stevin, can monopolize an area, and then they subcontract out the work to be done. It seems like we're paying a very high fee for the management of the road maintenance. Many of the MDs down there would like to be able to bid on it; others are happy with the service. So I realize that this is definitely a balancing act, but it's something that they would appreciate looking into.

I guess that I'll expand a little bit further just on highway 501. A group of individuals tried to put in a bid to get that paved and raised some money, and the government said that there was a liability problem and that that wouldn't be doable. Yet with the bid that came back, what the government paid for six or eight miles was a significant amount more than what the private bid was. This government talks about P3s and lots of those types of things. I believe in opportunities to bid and to take what best serves the province, yet here's a case where it seems like the province has turned a blind eye and says: well, no, we're going with our system status quo. You haven't fulfilled the promise of paving those secondary roads, and this one is a fairly important one.

I guess that I'll touch on the same thing that's been brought up many times, a little bit different twist. We definitely have a superheated construction industry. With the \$13.3 billion that's been promised over the forthcoming years, there's a shortage of equipment and manpower to do that. There's no question that the bidding has gone up. Whether it's 30 to 50 per cent, it's significant. Everybody knows that.

It seems like we're put in a situation where it's the last day on the island. We're going to go home from our holiday, and we've got to spend everything now. It just seems common sense to me to look at those infrastructure debts, what needs to be accomplished, and to allow the different municipalities to take that money that's going to go there, put it in the bank, and then let them use their good judgment on when an opportunity comes to get the upgrade they need or to do the repair work. That way they can look at it and say: "You know what? We don't have to spend the money this year and, therefore, lose 30 per cent. We would rather wait one or two more years and get the full job done rather than just half the job with the same amount of money." I think it would really take a lot of the pressure off in this superheated economy and the inflation that we, ourselves, are creating by putting more money in there and saying that it needs to be spent now.

I guess that the other area I would like to touch on is the schools and the formula that they have, needing to reach 80 per cent occupancy. I understand that it works well for the cities, but there again rural Alberta needs a different look at it. I'll refer specifically again to Milk River. They raised a lot of money many years ago and put up a beautiful gym, and now Infrastructure says, "Well, you really don't need that big of a gym for such a small school," and they're considering tearing it down. It just seems sad that they'd

want to do that when we could keep that gym and just tweak the formula rather than say: well, this is the formula; we've got to tear down this many square feet because if we don't reach 80 per cent occupancy, we can't rebuild. It just seems a little bit backwards in our thinking and not as forward thinking as we should be, wanting to destroy those good rural schools that are still usable for the students there.

Another question that I have: dams and off-stream storage. I wasn't able to get through all of the report like I would have liked to, but I haven't been able to find anything on that. I believe that's in this portfolio. We're trying to hammer out an agreement down on the Milk River. When we come up with that agreement, which I understand could be as early as next week, are we in a position to move forward and to develop the dams and off-stream storage in southern Alberta? There are several on the books that could be and, I believe, should be looked at. Are we in a position to be ready to take the opportunity to put those structures in place? Water is very critical in the south, and something that we're really desperate for is increased storage there.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that that covers most of the subjects that I wanted to cover, so I would appreciate hearing some of the answers on that. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for the comments. I find it interesting, of course, when people talk about the backlog and that we should have done more a few years ago; 20/20 behind is always very, very easy. Nobody had any idea that we were going to hit a boom like we've hit in these last years. While it's easy enough to look back and say, "Yes, we should have done more when the cost was lower" – I'm sure all of us would agree – the fact is that at the time nobody had any idea that this kind of a situation was coming.

4:30

You talked about Milk River and the town. The bypass around Milk River is, as you know, a very, very expensive situation, with the railway tracks and the elevators and the whole situation there. One of the things that we ran into as far as the bypass is concerned is the fact that because of the rail and the federal involvement there had to be a very extensive EIA done, and that's in the process. So that's being completed, and hopefully we'll be able to address that issue because, certainly, it is important that that one be finished.

I'm sorry; I can't tell you on the overpasses exactly, but we'll get information to you. It'll be a combination of factors, of course, the amount of traffic, the danger. I've been down on those highways when the sugar beets or the potatoes are being harvested and even just the traffic with the silage operations and the amount of trucks that are on the road and those kinds of things. I know, for example, that with the beef plant, the Cargill plant at Brooks, they were looking at a flyover. I don't know whether that was ever done. I'll have to check that out.

The bidding for maintenance. As a matter of fact, those contracts are five-year contracts. So every five years there's a new tender. I know that in the area that I live, the company that had the contract for the last five years lost it based purely on bidding. Now, you talk about the municipality getting into that business. Quite frankly, I don't agree. I don't agree that municipalities should be into that kind of business. That's not their core business. I really have difficulty if they start getting into that kind of business when to serve their ratepayers is what they should be concentrating on, not other kinds of business.

I didn't catch exactly what you were mentioning on 501 as far as a private bid and what that might be. Yes, when Premier Getty was in an election, he committed to paving all the secondary highways. Those of us that were on municipal councils knew at the time that that's not achievable. Sure, you could go out and put some pavement on those roads, but what good would it do? The base isn't there, the width, so you have to do all that construction. What we are doing to try to accommodate more of the secondaries is do some secondary and perhaps turn it back over to the municipality once we've done the capital so that they can maintain it. There are cases where it's very inefficient for us to be doing the maintenance on some of those, especially when you look at snowplowing and sanding in the wintertime. We need to work on more of those.

You mentioned about the money to the municipalities. Well, in fact, the \$600 million that goes annually to the municipalities, they've got 10 years to spend. That was for the very reason that you touched on, so that they can make the best use of those dollars. They get the money. They bank it. It's there. They can take 10 years to spend it. I think that was a real wise move when the decision was made to allow them the 10 years.

An Hon. Member: Where does the money go?

Mr. Lund: Well, I know that the market is going up, but what goes up, comes down, so we'll see. I know that some are spending a portion of it and saving some. I know that it gets frustrating sometimes when you see money sitting in the bank and not working. Nevertheless, I also really appreciate the fact that the more we put in, the less value we get for the dollar. So we have to be cognizant of that.

You commented on schools. Now, because of the way the utilization formula works, we established – and I've forgotten the number now – schools by necessity, and it was to accommodate the very thing you were talking about. Even though it's not in my portfolio any longer, I would be very disappointed if there was talk of tearing down a perfectly good gym because it didn't fit in the formula, and I'm sure that the minister of learning would agree with me. So if in fact that's what is happening, then you need to talk to him. One of the things we were really encouraging is that the community use those facilities more as well. That way, hopefully, it could be handled.

The water issue and the storage: if you noticed, in my opening comments I talked about the \$26 million that is set aside to do the very things that you're talking about. Absolutely, that's got to be part of the Water for Life strategy, more off-stream storage. That's critical. We've got to get moving on a lot more of it. Currently, about 70 per cent of our water eventually flows into Saskatchewan. We need to capture a lot more of it when the rivers are high, so we get that.

That's it, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Degore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to talk about a few of the trips that I've had around the province and talk about municipal infrastructure to start off with.

Mr. Tougas: Do you have slides?

Mr. Bonko: No, I don't have slides. Thank you, though, for asking.

The latest trip that I had gone on with a number of my colleagues was up to McMurray, where a lot of the boom seems to be happening and a lot of controversy with regard to lack of funding. We were

driving up there, and I probably know why the Minister of Environment doesn't drive his Smart Car up there: some of those potholes would probably swallow it. They are huge. The road conditions with the amount of trucks travelling back and forth on there and just the sheer traffic and volume – I mean, when you're trucking 4,000 or 5,000 workers back and forth, your roads are going to take a beating. Absolutely. There's no doubt about it. The road conditions there are deplorable, just like a lot of places, but we're just concentrating on McMurray for right now.

We talked with a number of the civil council members and business owners there, and they all came up with the same conclusion: we certainly feel that we are neglected up here in McMurray; we would like to see more infrastructure. Some of the concerns were about taking a percentage of the royalties. I know that this ministry can't control that part of it. This controls infrastructure. But the point was that they feel that if that much money is coming out of the whole industry and the area up here and we're taking in that much more people than we would normally accommodate, then we would need to have a little bit of consideration with regard to funding.

I did talk about the roads. Even going up from McMurray across the bridge – and I'll note that it's just a single bridge – up to a number of the plants, it is quite concerning there. Whether you have to ride on a bus or you drive in a car or a rig, you're almost sometimes taking your life in your hands. You pass some of the markers there. You can see, certainly, that there were tragedies on the road, because the hard hat is there on the cross with the flowers and wreaths to pay respect. A number of deaths have occurred, and that's just from McMurray north. I'm not even talking about the 63 between Edmonton and McMurray.

That's a nice piece that was given within the Speech from the Throne. My only concern was: what and why has it taken so long? There are still a number of injuries and deaths that occur. Perhaps we can speed that up. We realize that that is a very, very busy road to the north, and we're continuing to ask for more investment. Without the needed investment in roads, how are you supposed to get up some of these big coke machines that do come up there, 580 tons that are driving on a road that I don't believe would have ever been built to withstand some of that tonnage?

4:40

The single bridge, that dual lane that does run over the river there separating McMurray and the rest of the oil sands, is a big concern. If that ever has an accident or is shut down, that's going to essentially bring everything to a grinding halt on there. It would certainly be nice to see an additional upgrade or another means to be able to get across the river, perhaps another expansion there.

The other thing in McMurray again is water. You have a town that's base was about 40,000, and I believe that's what the infrastructure and water needs and facility handling was able to accommodate. But now that the population there balloons anywhere from, you know, 50,000 to 75,000 depending on the time of the year, you're going to have that much more stress on the water conditions and on the facility itself. So, I mean, the concerns about the upgrades.

Door to door a lot of people talked about being neglected, about the total infrastructure. They'd like to see more facilities put in there for the kids to be able to get off the street. Drugs are a concern and if you're able to have them do something constructive. Some of these community facilities, a pool or just a gym or hockey arena, would be great, to be able to give them something like that, to have something for the kids to get off the street and do something constructive. That's something that all of the other municipalities –

I know that the big cities like Edmonton and Calgary have various, you know, community facilities where they have a pool and a hockey arena all adjoined into one centre. That would be something great for McMurray to have and to be able to enjoy.

Another trip I had taken – and I'll probably get applause from the Member for Lesser Slave Lake – was up to the town of Lesser Slave Lake. I talked to a number of MDs, surrounding areas, as well as the town council in there as well. They were concerned about the quality of water, potentially, from some of the runoff of the confined feedlot operations out on the outskirts and how that is going to actually impact them. They're worried about the increase and the need to upgrade their water facility. They're also worried about when we handed out the big rebate cheques, \$1.4 billion. Now, that could have really offset a lot of these infrastructure needs, at least in some of the smaller towns and municipalities. Whether or not it resonated as well with as many people, that's debatable, but again that could have certainly gone a long way to offsetting a lot of the needs in some of the smaller rural communities, which are being pinched for infrastructure. Their main concern is affordable housing, let alone some of the specifics that I mentioned.

If we're going to go down, then, further, we'll talk about highway 2 between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary. Some people talk about the facts about a high-speed rail link. The jury's still out on that. What we're concerned about is even the roads and upgrading with some of the bridges that are going along there. I mean, I have actually seen only a couple of patches on some of the highway between Red Deer and Calgary that have been upgraded and do look a lot better, but there is still a need to ensure that some of that road is maintained and is kept well driveable, especially in the winter conditions too.

Moving into the hometown that I reside in, Edmonton, some of the council's concern was with the ring road. It's on the track. It's on the radar scope, but we're hoping that it can be pushed a little bit further and a little bit faster. We had at one point the bridge concerns. Now, I'm not sure if those were actually ever addressed, that concern where they had the design or some specifications on the bridge. At one point there were engineers out there to look at some of the concerns that had previously been missed. But some of the councillors said that the ring road is certainly one of the priorities that they do want.

If not that the ring road can be completed, we can also look at some of the upgrades on the Yellowhead. That's getting awfully busy between the west and east of Edmonton, and the big trucks and the cars that are going along there are just spelling disaster in some cases. We could certainly use more overpasses to be able to alleviate some of the ongoing traffic concerns and the backlogs.

Another one would be, well, look at the Whitemud that they have. You have one accident on there, either direction, and it puts a stalemate on the entire traffic process depending on where it happens. It blocks it back for hours. Maybe we'll upgrade that or give them a little bit of relief to be able to put on upgrades. That would certainly be well received in that section of town as well.

The hospitals. Well, everywhere where the towns and municipalities are growing, they're looking for hospitals. Certainly, Edmonton is no different than McMurray or Calgary. Again, you know, we have got a growing population, and I think we'd be able to need to fit, for the concern is to have those hospitals in there. McMurray's main concern for the hospitals was that they can't even get some of these machines, such as MRI machines. They actually have to have some sponsors from the big oil and gas industry purchase these and put them in the hospitals, which is awfully sad if that's the case that is happening. It's more like: sponsor your spot. That should never happen. I think that's always the responsibility first and foremost of the government.

Hospital upgrades. Again, that's a huge concern, especially in Calgary, where some of the beds aren't going to be completed for another two years. The need is there. The need is now. In Edmonton we've had a couple of expansions, such as the east hospital and that addition to the Sturgeon hospital, but that still doesn't relieve some of the congestion and some of the backups that we do have within our own hospitals that are currently there, the Misericordia and the Royal Alexandra.

Going over to school buildings. Having sat as a trustee prior to this, the concern always was with the infrastructure and the ongoing backlog of the school buildings envelope there. I know that that's not necessarily part of this ministry, but at one point it was. This government is so sure that they've paid off the deficit. There is an underlying deficit here, and that's infrastructure. I don't know exactly what the number is. I'd estimate it between – what? – \$7 billion and \$10 billion of deferred work that's gone on for a number of years, that really wasn't addressed. It was kind of put on the back burner. Now we do have a huge concern. The other concern is the lack of labour and affordable costs. From what we once projected, the cost of building has skyrocketed from the delays and the increase in labour costs. Now, I'm not sure how you're going to address that one. It's just that, you know, when we've not addressed it to begin with, we're continuing to put it past, and it's going to continue to cost more and more.

Those are just a couple of the concerns, Mr. Minister and Mr. Chair, that I would raise as some of the specifics under this ministry. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. We all acknowledge that, in fact, Fort McMurray has a great need, with the rapid growth, the traffic that's up there, the activity that's going on, and certainly we are attempting to address it. I want to point out to the member, though, that, for example, the Fort McMurray municipality gets some \$17.5 million from this department for infrastructure. Of course, there are other grants that come from other departments that they're getting. That's the municipality. That's not money that we're spending directly in those areas.

You commented on highway 63 and then: what else? Well, I'll just run through some of the what else. There's a lot more. We'll probably see more. The twinning of the highway south: of course, if you were up there more recently, you would have seen that that work has already started, and that will all happen. We will be twinning 63 north up to Fort MacKay. We'll be paving the rest of 881. We're building a new bridge across the Athabasca. You're right; that is a problem right now. If something should happen with that bridge, things would really get shut down, so there's a big need for that. Then along highways 63 and 881 seven truck staging areas will be completed. Those are pretty critical, particularly when you're moving that heavy, big equipment. They've got to have an area to get off the road so that traffic can continue to move. Then, of course, right within the city itself there will be intersection treatments, which will greatly improve the situation within the city.

You commented on the water situation. Truly, that is a big concern across the province. There are many places. There is no question that we need to really be focusing on clean drinking water for sure and, of course, proper treatment of the sewage and waste water.

4:50

You talked quite a bit about a lot of extra spending. Now, I always find it really interesting here. Just a moment ago we heard

one member talking that when we dump all this money out, we're getting less value for our dollar, we're inflating things and all that, yet we hear that we should be doing more.

There's an interesting stat that I want to give you. In the budget this year, the capital plan, we will be spending about \$1,300 per person. The average in all of the provinces across Canada is \$400. We're spending \$1,300; average in Canada is \$400 per person. I'm pretty proud of what we're able to do. To accelerate it? Well, I know that it would be nice to have some more of those things right away, but the fact is, I think, that we have to get a balance here. We've got to be careful that we don't overheat the economy even more and get less value for our dollars. So we'll be looking at that.

The situation with the MRI. Tell me what's wrong with industry buying an MRI. I don't get it. I don't know what's wrong with that. The fact is that the government has got so many dollars to spend. If, in fact, industry is prepared to step up and pay for an MRI, that's great. That's wonderful. Then we can do more in another area or do more in Fort McMurray because of their huge demand.

I'm not going to get into a discussion about all the hospitals because that's more appropriate if you talk about that when the Minister of Health and Wellness has her budget before the committee.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The acting minister of infrastructure indicated that only ministers are permitted to use the government planes, which would prevent leadership candidates from flying. At the same time, you said – and I know this was the case last year as well – that in order to justify the use of the planes and not have a single individual travelling from A to B, you would like to have the planes utilized to justify the fuel, so you'd have many people on the plane. Now, we know that last year there were a number of nongovernmental ministers, particularly an individual by the name of Rod Love, who racked up a number of frequent flyer miles at taxpayer expense when he was not contracted or directly employed by the government. Is this a change in policy, that only ministers are permitted on the planes? If so, when was this change indicated? I'm not aware of it, and I think the ministers who are currently elected would like to know that. How will you prevent leadership contenders who are currently elected from riding on government planes at taxpayers' expense for their own self-promotion?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Chairman, I said that it's only a minister that can book the aircraft. Only a minister can book the aircraft, and there has to be a purpose for the aircraft.

You mentioned an individual. I don't know what the circumstances were. The fact is that there are times when nonelected people are on the aircraft. If they're doing some work for a department, they may ride on the aircraft if, in fact, they're doing some work for government somewhere.

The idea of one individual on the aircraft. If at all possible we avoid that situation, but that can't be avoided at all times. There are times when a minister has to be at a certain place at a certain time, and the only way that they can get there is with an aircraft. What we meant when we would prefer that they don't travel with just one passenger is if, for example, there is a minister going to Calgary, say, and he has to be there at 9 o'clock in the morning, and another one is going at 10, well, get together and go with just one aircraft. Those kinds of things.

I know from my own experience – it hasn't happened very often, but I can think of two or three occasions where I had to go and I

didn't take my EA. That would have put two people on, but there was no need for the EA to come along. There were no staff coming, but I had to go. I had to meet with people. So it does occasionally happen, but we try to make sure that it's to a minimum.

You will see that there are times, particularly when there's a committee that has some people that are not MLAs on it, and, for example, they're going to hold a hearing somewhere, there may not even be a minister on, but a minister has got to be responsible for booking that aircraft. The minister that would be responsible to book the aircraft would be the minister that's in charge of that committee. So if there's an individual on a committee, a public member, yeah, they would ride on the aircraft. That's true. As far as I am concerned, there's been no change in the policy. I'm not aware of a change.

Will a candidate for the leadership be on one of our aircraft? Yes, but it won't be for campaign purposes. Yes, if they're still an MLA. If they're an MLA, they can't book an aircraft, but if the aircraft is going and they're going as an MLA, then they will be on the aircraft.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've just got a few items that I want to express. I guess what I want to talk about is highway 40 north. First of all, I want to compliment the department for their diligence to move forward and do the S-curves just south of Grande Cache and also for the help that they afforded us last year to do some upgrading on highway 40, especially the overlays.

I guess what I want to state and state strongly is that we have to look at moving more to put some passing lanes on highway 40 north for the simple reason of the amount of traffic that is going up there. Just to give you some idea, the town of Grande Cache has close to 4,000 people living there. This year we have in the neighbourhood of 3,500 people living in bush camps north and south of Grande Cache. Then the other thing is the resurgence of the oil and gas industry in that area. Prior to 1997 they used to just drill and cap. Now that we've got delivery through the pipeline system, it is really busy. Of course, last year they put in a pipeline for Syncrude. This year they're putting another 104 kilometres of pipeline in there. So it's really busy.

I guess the other thing: just north of Hinton, where we're utilizing the LOC of West Fraser, we have 4,000 vehicles a day on the LOC road. They're utilizing a lot of that because of the aspect of moving on highway 40 north. For hauling different aspects of dangerous goods, they can't use it as much. I guess what I'm looking at is if we can sort of move up and at least start doing some passing lanes there because when they're bringing in a compressor station or something, they have to block the traffic. They have to wait until they get to an area where there's a turnout. You know, we're getting a lot more people in that area. Of course, that area now is serving a lot of the Peace River country, and we have to move and look at some passing lanes.

5:00

I guess that I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about highway 47 south, that also goes into the old trunk road, and that goes into the hon. minister's riding. A number of years ago, when the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville was the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, we were able to develop a partnership, basically a P3, and build a bridge across the Brazeau River, which has served very well. But because of the large usage by oil companies, what's happening right now is it's affecting other industries, and they're utilizing the roads that are built in the forest management agree-

ments. Their cycle times now are anywhere from 20 minutes to a half hour longer, so it's costing them a lot more. I know that we work on road-use agreements, but I still believe that we have to look at that.

As some of the members from the other side were talking about Fort McMurray, well, I don't want to disillusion them, but West Yellowhead is having the same problem, maybe not to the same magnitude, but in respect to what's transpiring there, it is the same magnitude. I'm just wondering if the minister can comment on the possibility of looking at a program where we're moving towards doing some upgrading and a plan so that when I go back to my riding, I can let my constituents know that we are going to be moving ahead on at least highway 40 north and also on highway 47 to the trunk road to his constituency in Rocky Mountain House.

Thank you.

Mr. Lund: Thanks to the hon. member for those comments. I'm sorry, but I'm not up to speed on exactly what we have in store for highway 40 either north or south. I must inform the House that the plaque with the name of the Member for West Yellowhead on it on the bridge that was built across the Brazeau was planted on the side of the bridge that was in my constituency, so he got all the credit for it.

What is happening, Mr. Chair, is that there are deals being struck. One that I'm familiar with is in the Rocky constituency, and this agreement was struck about a year ago. The department is paying 50 per cent, and the municipality is taking the lead to gather up the other 50 per cent, and it looks like it's going to involve the First Nations, the municipality, and some forest companies.

Now, the member mentioned about the turnaround time, and this is really interesting. The one forest company that is really interested in participating did a study on what the benefit would be to them if that road was upgraded and paved, and I was quite surprised at the kind of numbers they came up with because of that turnaround time issue, and then, of course, you throw in with the turnaround time the safety of having those kinds of roads done. So I think there's a real possibility there to get into some of those bigger partnerships.

The bridge that the member referred to: the fact was that for any rig move across the Brazeau River it cost the companies at least \$180,000 to get around that crossing because they had to go a long ways east, get across the river, and then come back west. I'm sure they've probably recovered their investment already because of all the activity that's in there. So I think that there are opportunities like that that we need to explore.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. More flight questions; it intrigues me about the possibilities. If a sitting minister supports a leadership candidate, can he or she simply say, "come fly with me," which is, basically, an end run? To what extent is the potential overuse or abuse of these planes going to be controlled?

One last comment. I know my hon. compatriot from Calgary-Currie would like to speak about Advanced Education concerns. I'd like to put in a plea as the hon. Member for Yellowhead put in. I'd like to put in a plug for the twinning of the bridge leading to Drayton Valley in the constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar, which, like Fort McMurray, sees the wealth go by rather than staying in the town. Please add that bridge to the list.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Chairman, I can assure the member that there is an approval process with the aircraft, and we will be watching that very closely because I think it reflects on all MLAs if, in fact, there is

abuse. We will be watching for abuse, and we will be watching very closely what exactly is happening.

On the issue of Drayton Valley, in fact, they are currently doing a traffic count on that issue. There is the possibility of lighting the bridge to assist in the wintertime. I don't know if the member has been across that particular bridge, but that can be a bit of a problem, just the configuration of it and the way it sits there. I do have to say that to twin it or even to just widen it will be a big undertaking because of the location and how it's situated. But it is on the radar screen, and they're doing some studying on it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I guess one point that I forgot to mention to the hon. minister goes back to the aspect of the resource roads. As you realize, we never seem to get enough dollars put into that funding.

I'm just wondering how we can work that because it works as a great partnership with the municipalities. With the Yellowhead county and, I know, more than likely with the MD of Greenview in my riding they have a lot of resource-based people that are working, and they're taking the goods out of the area; therefore, the direct cost is on the municipalities. I know one good example just east of Edson is Wolf Lake Road. That service is all down in the area into Drayton Valley-Calmar, even up into Rocky Mountain House. So I'm just wondering if we can work a little bit better partnership so that we can get more money in that funding. I know that a lot of times we work with the industries to try to get them to partner up, but they always say they're paying enough taxes. So I'm just wondering if we can really look at that issue because it's a safety issue. A lot of the forest industry is hauling out of those areas, taking fibre into Whitecourt-Ste. Anne too. So if you could give me a comment on that, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Mr. Lund: Well, I thank the Member for West Yellowhead for those comments. Certainly, that resource road program is a very important program as he commented, particularly in the timber. It happens in the oil industry as well, but in the timber the companies are harvesting the fibre in one municipality, using that municipality's roads to move it to their mill, but there are no taxes coming out of the area where they're doing the harvesting. So I think that his suggestion of increasing the resource road program and trying to leverage that money is probably a very good idea. I think we need to take another look at it, and I thank him very much for that suggestion.

5:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe that I only have a few minutes, right? We end this at 5:15, so I'll be very, very quick here.

Just curious on the advanced education, postsecondary, front. If the minister could give me a sense of the sort of dollar value behind working with postsecondary institutions to provide the expertise that Alberta Infrastructure has on building a physical plant and various other things for our colleges and universities, which have in and of themselves a pretty substantial infrastructure deficit, as the minister knows. The infrastructure responsibility on one level seems to have been handed back to the Ministry of Advanced Education; on the other hand Infrastructure is still involved here. So if the minister could just very quickly give me sort of a dollar value that I can attach to that division, or sharing, of responsibilities, whatever it is, and perhaps a little bit of insight into Infrastructure's role and

whether this will actually help speed construction of new capital projects in our advanced education system or whether it just kind of bureaucratizes the system.

Thank you.

Mr. Lund: Thanks for those comments. The fact is that the dollars are all now housed in Advanced Education for postsecondary. Health has all of the health capital dollars; Advanced Education, all the postsecondary; K to 12 . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$2,593,312,000
Capital Investment	\$1,089,590,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The newly appointed Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It has indeed been a very illuminating afternoon of debate, and on that note I would move that the committee rise and report the estimates of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Infrastructure and Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases,	\$2,593,312,000;
capital investment,	\$1,089,590,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I would move that we now call it 5:30 and that we reconvene tonight at 8 in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, April 5, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/04/05

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: Good evening. I'd like to call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Executive Council

Mr. Klein: Mr. Chairman, I move the estimates for Executive Council.

Mr. Chairman and hon. members, I'm pleased to appear before this committee to discuss the 2006 to 2009 Executive Council budget estimates and, of course, the business plan. Programs under Executive Council include the office of the Premier, Executive Council, corporate internal audit services, and the Public Affairs Bureau. My remarks this evening will include a brief fiscal overview for 2006-2007, and then I'll provide some details on upcoming initiatives contained in the business plan.

Executive Council spending for 2006-2007 is forecast at \$25.3 million, an increase of approximately \$3 million over the 2005-2006 budget. The increase covers three areas: \$1.4 million for salary adjustments and increases to pension plan contributions, and I would point out that all ministries across government are seeing the same increases; \$1.4 million to implement recommendations of the Public Affairs Bureau review, which I will explain later, which includes adding a small number of FTEs; and some \$200,000 for Executive Council to cover additional costs due to the expanded strategic planning work of the policy co-ordination office and for additional support to the Lieutenant Governor's office.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to offer an overview of Executive Council program areas and goals as outlined in the business plan. I'll begin with a brief summary of programs under Executive Council. They include administrative support to cabinet and cabinet committees, my offices here in the Legislature and in McDougall Centre in Calgary, the protocol office, administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor, the Alberta Order of Excellence Council, and the deputy minister's office, which includes support for policy co-ordination as well as business and strategic long-term planning for the government as a whole.

A key activity for Executive Council is co-ordinating the government's long-term strategic plan for the province and the government's three-year business plan. As I touched on earlier, part of the \$200,000 in this year's budget for Executive Council will support the expanded role of the policy co-ordination office in co-ordinating efforts on those plans.

Now, Executive Council works to ensure that individual ministry strategies are co-ordinated and that all ministries are working collaboratively on government's priorities. For example, the policy co-ordination office supports government's work to achieve the four main strategic priorities. Those four priorities include building Alberta's infrastructure, building and educating Alberta's workforce, using and respecting the land, and of course improving the health care system. The office also works to identify and assess strategic long-term issues requiring a policy review, improve overall policy co-ordination across government, facilitate collaboration amongst ministries to achieve more integrated policy, and facilitate and monitor work on priority cross-ministry initiatives and related strategies. Government and Executive Council also work with

private, public, and not-for-profit sector partners and individual Albertans to set and co-ordinate those strategic priorities for the long term.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to now touch briefly on the protocol office and the office of the Lieutenant Governor. As members of the committee will know, the protocol office is responsible for provincial government ceremonial events and visits from international dignitaries, senior dignitaries. This year protocol staff will co-ordinate numerous visits of international dignitaries to Alberta, including heads of state, foreign ministers, ambassadors, and consuls-general. The protocol office is also busy co-ordinating the May 2006 visit of Canada's new Governor General, Her Excellency the Right Hon. Michaëlle Jean.

In addition to co-ordinating these visits, the office also provides important protocol advice to government offices, community groups, the private sector, and individual Albertans who may have questions about protocol requirements for special events. One provincial government ceremonial event the protocol office is responsible for is the Speech from the Throne, delivered by Alberta's Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Normie Kwong. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to point out the exceptional role the Lieutenant Governor has played as the Queen's representative in Alberta. His first year as Lieutenant Governor was an incredibly important and busy one with the royal visit and hundreds of centennial celebrations across the province, and I think he did a wonderful job. The Lieutenant Governor keeps a very active public schedule, and a small increase has been budgeted to provide him with communications and writing support for his official duties around the province.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to now turn to another part of Executive Council, and that is corporate internal audit services. This past fiscal year included three important changes for the office of corporate internal audit services, with more changes planned for the coming year. The first change already in place is the appointment of a new chief internal auditor, Heather Zomar, who brings with her an extensive background in risk management. One of Heather's first objectives on the job was to address questions around the identity and the role of the internal audit within government, which brings me to the second important change. Early on Heather determined that one of the best ways to clarify the role her office plays in government was to change its name.

The new name, corporate internal audit services, was chosen to clearly differentiate between the three separate audit functions that take place in government. We all know about the office of the Auditor General, the department's specific auditing services, and, of course, corporate internal audit services. These three audit functions have been a source of confusion, not the least of which is a source of confusion for me. Most importantly, however, the new name was chosen to bring together two important aspects of the office: corporate, to signify that internal audit provides assistance to government as a whole; and services, to illustrate the servicelike nature of internal audit. The goal of this office is to advise departments on the types of systems and controls that should be in place so that taxpayers get maximum value for dollars spent while helping government managers and employees be more productive and effective in their jobs.

Effective use of taxpayers' dollars brings me to the third change within corporate internal audit services, and that is the transfer of some audit staff back to specific ministries. By nature ministries that provide front-line services and income supports to Albertans, ministries that have small amounts of money that are continuously moving in and out of the departments, require more internal auditing services. To accommodate this need and to ensure the most effective use of taxpayers' dollars, some audit staff have been moved

back to certain ministries such as Seniors and Community Supports, which administers the persons with developmental disabilities program. Additional upcoming changes for corporate internal audit services include a stronger focus on risk-based auditing. This is an emergency and strategic audit methodology that will allow the office to focus on high-risk systems. Heather and her staff will be using a best practices review to help them develop a made-in-Alberta audit program designed to provide the most efficient and effective assistance for managers and employees.

8:10

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to now touch on the business plan strategies for the Public Affairs Bureau. The bureau supports all eight of the government's three-year business plan priorities, and while the bureau's work is diverse, each communications program across government has a common goal of making sure that Albertans receive the information they need quickly and effectively. Recently the bureau underwent an internal review to make sure that that goal was being accomplished in the best possible way. The review was conducted by an MLA committee, or a committee headed by an MLA, the hon. Member for Calgary-West, and recommendations were presented to caucus last September.

The review identified the following overarching goals: to strengthen strategic communications, to enhance internal communications, and to better co-ordinate corporate services like the government of Alberta home page, advertising, and research. Of course, the driving force behind the review and the goal of the Public Affairs Bureau remains providing Albertans with high-quality, co-ordinated, and cost-effective communications.

As I mentioned earlier, this year's budget shows a change in expenses for the Public Affairs Bureau to support that goal. The additional dollars will help ensure that Albertans continue to receive high quality and co-ordinated communications from government. Albertans have told us that they want more communication about the government programs and services that matter the most to them. That budget increase will help make that happen.

In addition, the new FTEs in the budget will focus on the third goal of the review, and that is better co-ordination of corporate services like the government of Alberta home page, advertising, and research. I would like to point out, Mr. Chairman, that the budget increase is to allow for better co-ordination of advertising that delivers important information to Albertans.

This year advertising campaigns co-ordinated by the bureau and funded by ministries across government will inform Albertans about a range of topics from social campaigns on crystal meth awareness and family violence prevention to information campaigns and programs such as farm safety and the Alberta lottery fund. Government has a duty to tell Albertans about its decisions and policies and about upcoming initiatives, so the additional dollars will help us to better co-ordinate in the quick and efficient delivery of information to Albertans and also allow the bureau to provide more strategic and targeted communications that address Albertans' priorities.

In an effort to strengthen the bureau's strategic communications, the business plan organizes upcoming communications activities into five strategic priority areas. The first strategic priority is to ensure that Albertans receive ongoing, effective, and meaningful information about government's long-term plans. Mr. Chairman, as I said before, Albertans have told us that they want more communication about the government programs and services that matter the most to them. That's why the plan includes increased co-ordination of information about key government programs and public opinion research to ensure that Albertans are receiving the information they require.

The bureau's staff in all ministries of government have a unique ability to not only communicate with Albertans but also to understand Albertans' perspectives on a large number of government programs. This allows government to incorporate those perspectives into our long-term plans and in turn communicate those plans back to Albertans. This is an important example of the bureau's role in two-way communications with Albertans.

The second strategic priority, communicating to Albertans about how government will manage the province's growth, is another key focus of the bureau's business plan. Mr. Chairman, by growth I'm referring to Alberta's booming economy, growing population and, of course, the challenges and opportunities that that growth represents. So upcoming plans to communicate about growth include informing Albertans on ways that government is improving the province's infrastructure and transportation systems, the creation of effective traffic safety programs to crack down on aggressive and careless drivers, and the development of an Alberta energy strategy to make Alberta a leader in the global market and to ensure the best return to Albertans as resource owners. The strategy also involves giving Albertans continuous updates on our province's fiscal situation.

The third strategic communications priority is building and educating tomorrow's workforce. Mr. Chairman, this priority includes investing in the people of Alberta and communicating to them the opportunities available to invest in themselves and their future. Bureau staff assigned to ministries across government will assist with a number of varied communication initiatives that fall under this priority. What they all have in common is a focus on training and educating Albertans, attracting and retaining skilled workers, and ultimately addressing Alberta's labour shortages.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to turn now to the bureau's fourth priority, and that is creating a dialogue on land use and the environment. This area of the plan involves continued communication with Albertans on our province's resource and environmental management, greenhouse gas reduction, and the Water for Life strategy. Albertans' quality of life depends on the wise management of our provincial resources, especially Alberta's water supply. Related communication initiatives will focus on enhancement to municipal water and waste-water treatment facilities, reducing the risk of liabilities from flooding, and testing and protecting Alberta's water supply. The bureau will also support government's plan to explore the use of surplus revenue to create a lasting legacy for the environment.

The bureau's fifth strategic priority is emergency communications. It is obviously my hope that a serious public emergency never occurs. However, the government has a fundamental obligation to be prepared should one occur, and detailed and co-ordinated emergency communications is an important part of that preparedness. Mr. Chairman, I can tell members that planning for emergency situations, such as pandemic flu, environmental incidents, and public security threats, is a top priority for government and for the bureau.

I'd like to now turn to the bureau's second core business and goal, which is making sure that Albertans have quick and easy access to government information. For many years the Service Alberta call centre and Alberta Queen's Printer served as front-line service points within the bureau. Members will note, however, that these areas are not mentioned in this year's business plan. As a result of the internal bureau review, the Service Alberta call centre and the Queen's Printer have been transferred to other ministries as of April 1.

Government Services already oversees the Service Alberta website and over-the-counter elements. It makes sense for the full program to function under that ministry. As a central service the Queen's Printer has moved to Restructuring and Government

Efficiency, RAGE. Both services were a valuable part of the bureau, and I am confident that they will continue to be a valuable part of government. Of course, the bureau will continue to ensure an efficient flow of information to Service Alberta staff who deal with public inquiries on key government programs and announcements.

The bureau will also maintain other important services for Albertans to gain quick access to government information, and the bureau will continue to ensure that two-way communications vehicles are timely and efficient so that they provide Albertans with the best means of accessing government information.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my introductory comments. I welcome any member of the committee to ask any questions they may have about the 2006-2009 business plan and, of course, the estimates for this fiscal year.

Thank you.

The Chair: Before we proceed, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. Following this exhaustive introduction of estimates, it's my pleasure to introduce some of my favourite constituents from the community of Lorelei Beaumaris and, in particular, representing the Lorelei Pathfinders and Guides. Today with the Pathfinders and Guides are some leaders: Dawna Shirley, Angela Stringovits, Angie Amer, Jan Sutherland – and Jan is also the president of the Lorelei Beaumaris community league and a tireless worker in the community – John Dugdale, Elizabeth Story-Tiedemann, and Todd Dutchak. I would like them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

head: 8:20 **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Executive Council (continued)

The Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciated the extensive comments from the Premier in introducing his budget for Executive Council. I think it's worth noting that this is, presumably, his last budget unless he pulls a sort of Pierre Trudeau and calls a snap election or something. I don't know. Anyways, I'm honoured to be here for this discussion.

I think it's worth setting out a contrasting sense of what Executive Council might be like and then comparing that to the budget. I couldn't help noticing today that Executive Council seems about to expand by another member in the cabinet, and I'm concerned, of course, about the growing size, the growing number of cabinet ministers. I think it will be at 24 now. It's a trend that I would like to see reversed and sent back, perhaps closer to 17 or so, when this government first came to power.

I'm also and have been for many years an attentive student of the Public Affairs Bureau, which I have described historically as kind of a secret weapon for this government and a very effective one. I recall the time when this Premier first took office and the changes that were made to bring the Public Affairs Bureau into reporting directly to the Premier's office. One of the effects of that was to

politicize the Public Affairs Bureau in a way that it hadn't been historically, and I think that that's an unhealthy trend.

I've talked to former employees of the Public Affairs Bureau from times when other people were in the Premier's office, and they've shared with me, for example, accounts of being approached by cabinet ministers to prepare speeches and saying to the cabinet ministers, "You know, Mr. Minister, that's not the Public Affairs Bureau's job; that's the job of your political staff." Of course, that's completely changed now. The Public Affairs Bureau is a political servant of this government and, frankly, of the Premier. It provides enormous resources for the Premier's message to get out, which is fine, except it becomes very much a political message, even to the point, I'm quite confident, where staff with the Public Affairs Bureau draft questions and answers for use in question period, the infamous puffballs.

Mrs. McClellan: You're not serious.

Dr. Taft: I am serious, yes. The Deputy Premier is questioning my comments about the role of the Public Affairs Bureau. Certainly, it has been my experience in places like the Public Accounts Committee, sitting beside government officials, to watch them follow along line by line as they read off the question from a government member of that committee and then read off the answer from the Premier or other ministers. So I do know that the Public Affairs Bureau has a substantial role in those kinds of affairs.

I would like to see a return to the depoliticized version of the Public Affairs Bureau and a recognition that of course we're all politicians and we all need political communication staff but that that line needs to be drawn around those staff and separated from the public affairs agents who are working in the public service.

I'm also equally concerned, I guess, about the role of the internal audit committee, and I'll come to that in a minute. So I make those as some general comments.

I'm also concerned, of course, about the long-term growth of the spending of the Executive Council. As the Premier said, a 13 per cent increase this year, which I might note – I can't resist – is significantly higher than the increase in the department of health. I think that we need to make a serious effort at containing costs in all departments, including Executive Council, as we seem to in Health. So broad comments there.

Now, I will ask some questions of the Premier, and if he is inclined – and I think he usually is. I understand that he may not have the answers, but if you have the answers or reactions, you're welcome, of course, to make them, and I'll be very interested to hear them.

If we focus for a moment on the Public Affairs Bureau, the Premier went through four, as I recall, strategic priorities for the Public Affairs Bureau. Last year there were six. Two have been removed, and I would be curious to know why, if I've got the correct information here. One was to "ensure Albertans are aware of opportunities available to themselves and their families." The other, strategic priority 4 last year, was to "provide disadvantaged and vulnerable Albertans with information on available programs and supports." So I'm just curious, if I've got the correct information, why those changes were made.

Goal 1 this year for the Public Affairs Bureau is to "increase communications with Albertans" in priority areas, as the Premier said. I'm on page 173 of the business plan here. The goal says that Albertans "have a right to receive clear facts about the issues faced by the province so they can form their own opinions about how they want government to handle those issues." We are concerned about the approach of the Public Affairs Bureau to some government

initiatives, such as the third way, in which internal communications documents that we've obtained and have made public have spelled it out that the government's communications plan, in the government's own words, is designed to, quote, shift public expectations. In other words, the communications efforts of this government, of the Public Affairs Bureau around the third way actually have been intended to shift public expectations so that they no longer see health care as an entitlement.

I find that when I read those internal documents and I contrast it to the public goal of the Public Affairs Bureau that speaks about providing information so that Albertans can form their own opinions, I think there's a real contrast there. Are we just providing objective, open information, or are we actually wanting to change and shift public expectations? So it's a difference between communications and propaganda, I guess, Mr. Chairman.

Any comments the Premier has on those would be most appreciated.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, in the preamble the hon. member alluded to the bureau being a political servant to the politicians. I don't see the bureau as that at all. As a matter of fact, just to set the record straight, I had to ask my communications director where the bureau was located. It's somewhere near where the Department of Environment is located. I'm not quite sure where the building is. I can tell you that except for the briefing prior to this estimates hearing, I had no communications whatsoever with the Public Affairs Bureau.

8:30

Mr. Chairman, there are five priorities, as I outlined, and one of the priorities is not there because it's already been achieved. That was the complete rewrite of the Alberta statutes, and that was a priority that was completed last year. In addition, the Queen's Printer and the Alberta Connects number have been transferred to other ministries.

The five strategic priorities are, one, to "ensure Albertans receive ongoing, effective and meaningful information about government's long-term plans." Mr. Chairman, as I said before, Albertans have told us that they want more communication about the government programs and services that matter the most to them. They want open, honest information, and that's why the plan includes increased co-ordination of information about key government programs and public opinion research, to ensure that Albertans are receiving the information they require.

Mr. Chairman, the second strategic priority is communicating to Albertans about how government will manage the province's growth. This, of course, is another key focus of the bureau's business plan, and it's extremely important that we communicate properly what we are doing to meet the challenges of that growth. As I pointed out in my speech, by growth I am referring to Alberta's booming economy and its fast-growing population and the challenges, of course, and the opportunities that that growth represents.

The third strategic communications priority is building and educating tomorrow's workforce, and this, of course, is consistent with Bill 1 last year, the Access to the Future Act. This priority includes investing in the people of Alberta and communicating the opportunities available to them to invest in themselves and their future.

The bureau's fourth strategic priority is creating a dialogue on land use and the environment: extremely important, especially as the minister now prepares a land-use strategy and the Minister of Environment works on the Water for Life strategy. This area of the plan involves continued communication with Albertans on our

province's resource and environmental management, greenhouse gas reduction, and of course, as I mentioned, the Water for Life strategy, which is extremely important. As a matter of fact, it was mentioned in the media by Dr. David Schindler, a well-respected environmentalist and an expert on the use of water.

The fifth priority is the bureau's emphasis on emergency situations, and this is absolutely necessary. You know, I saw it in action when I travelled the province reviewing the damage from floods. I saw it in action at Pine Lake when I visited the tornado site. It's obviously my hope, as I said before, that a serious public emergency never occurs. However, government does have a responsibility and a fundamental obligation to be prepared and to communicate what all emergency authorities are doing should an emergency occur.

The Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments from the Premier.

We can switch topics from my old favourite, the Public Affairs Bureau, to a new favourite, the internal audit committee and internal audit services, which the Premier briefly described in his opening comments. There are, as the Premier said, three audit functions. There are getting to be a lot of audit functions, and I can understand why he said that there's some confusion around that. I find it a bit confusing as well.

The vision of the corporate internal audit service is to "be recognized as delivering high quality internal audit services with objectivity and professionalism." That's their vision. That's great. The mission is to "provide objective and independent assurance and advisory services." Most members of the internal audit committee are, in fact, public servants, deputy ministers. The one external member of that committee is also the vice-president of finance for the PC Party, Mr. Gary Campbell.

I just have to ask: of all the people in Alberta, of all the people with expertise, why this one particular person? He may well be qualified, but he certainly isn't the only one who's qualified, and surely the government realizes that there's a tremendous appearance of conflict of interest or of an internal and unfair and even inappropriate relationship when you have the vice-president of finance of the PC Party sitting in on the internal audit committee of the government. There's a merging there, an overlap of politics and public service that I think needs to be reconsidered. In fact, I would rather just have it ended. When I read that the vision of the corporate internal audit services division is to be objective and independent and I see that kind of a relationship, it doesn't add up for me, so I really need the Premier to justify that. Frankly, again, if I were the Premier, that's the sort of relationship I would end. I'd hope this Premier will do the same thing.

There are quite a number of questions around internal audit services. Given that the office of the chief internal auditor is supposed to co-ordinate its work with the work of the Auditor General, which again the Premier referenced, and provide a basis for the Auditor General to rely on the work of the office of the chief internal auditor, it does get confusing. You've got the Auditor General and the chief internal auditor. What steps is the Premier taking? What safeguards are in place to ensure that the internal audit function of the chief internal auditor doesn't actually obstruct or in some way substitute for the more independent arm's-length work of the Auditor General? We've got the Auditor General working with the internal auditor when I'd rather the Auditor General was going straight to the department. That's a relationship that I think has a risk of becoming a control valve, an access limiter for the Auditor General.

Why does the internal audit charter say that the work of the internal auditor is to reduce the extent of external audit procedures when in fact what people want, I think, are more external audit procedures, more external arm's-length reviews of government, not less, especially not less done by a committee in which the vice-president of the PC Party sits? There is a really complicated and probably unhealthy web of relationships here.

8:40

Given the close functional relationships between the internal auditor and the Auditor General, I'm wondering if the Premier is aware of or if maybe somebody else is aware of any plans to reference the body, reference the office of the chief internal auditor in legislation in relation to the Auditor General. Perhaps there could be a formalization in legislation of the relationship so that we know what the limits and opportunities are here.

In the spirit of opening government accountability up to the public, I'm wondering if the Premier could table any recommendations, any at all, made by the internal audit committee or the chief internal auditor to deal with some of these problems. Frankly, in particular because the Premier spoke about risk and the special knowledge of the new chief internal auditor in risk management, has there been a risk assessment done of the persistent overspending across government departments year after year now for some years? Has there been a risk assessment done of the government's growing direct dependence on energy royalties? What are the risks that we face from sudden drops in the prices of oil and gas and, therefore, a direct hit to our royalties? Any risk assessments done by the office of the chief internal auditor on those areas would be much appreciated.

I've also got questions about the relationship between the office of the chief internal auditor and RAGE, Restructuring and Government Efficiency, because the office of the chief internal auditor is responsible for improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and economy of government operations, including financial and nonfinancial matters, which sounds to me like the job of the Minister for Restructuring and Government Efficiency. How do these two connect? What's going on here? Maybe we can get rid of one or the other? Maybe we can. It wouldn't be a bad suggestion, in my view. I guess that if we're going to keep that overlap, which appears to be the case at least until the next election, why is the Deputy Minister of RAGE not on the internal audit committee? So there's a suggestion for the Minister of RAGE. Maybe that deputy minister, given the department's mandate, should be sitting on the internal audit committee.

There's a whack of questions there, and I don't know if the Premier is prepared at this point to respond to those or if he'd like to come back at a later time. I do also before I sit down – and I guess that'll be perhaps my last crack at it here – just have to raise a concern about the extent of the increase in the budget for Executive Council over the last few years. I think that if we go over the last three or four years, there's something like a 60 per cent increase. The Premier's office, in particular, has had a budget increase of 67 per cent since 2001-2002, and that's a tremendous increase, 67 per cent in five years. That's unsustainable. We hear that word so often in here. That is a rate of increase that is unsustainable. So some explanation for that and some sense of how we are going to stop this rapid growth in the budget of the Premier's office would be much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, an increase related to millions of dollars doesn't relate to a 13 per cent increase on a \$10 billion budget. If my math is right, a 13 per cent increase on \$10 billion dollars is \$1.3 billion dollars. That is a huge, huge amount. So when we compare apples, we should compare apples and not mix them with grapes, oranges, grapefruits, and other things.

Mr. Chairman, relative to Gary Campbell it was news to me that he's even on the internal audit committee. But the internal audit committee chair – and I don't know who that is – appoints people to provide external viewpoints as well as specialist business, financial, or audit expertise. This is in keeping with the internal audit committee charter. I can tell you something: Mr. Campbell has his ear to the ground. He is well known in the city of Edmonton and throughout the province and is a person who keeps his ear to the ground and finds out what is going on.

I would like to point out about the honorarium – Mr. Campbell is a lawyer, so obviously he can earn a lot more than \$118 for up to four hours and \$196 for a full day. I think that he can earn a lot more than that. It is, in fact, a volunteer job.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. member asked about risk assessment on energy royalties, and what if there is a drop. That question I will take under advisement because I think that that is a reasonable question to answer. I don't know if the internal auditor or corporate services auditor has addressed that issue relative to risk management, but it indeed is a good question and deserves an answer.

On the issue of the internal audit committee it was a recommendation of the Auditor General. He recommended that we set up the internal audit unit. The Auditor General, Mr. Fred Dunn, reviews how the internal audit is carrying out its function. I'm sure that he will address the question of a political appointment, particularly as it relates to Mr. Campbell.

As I pointed out in my initial remarks, the internal audit services role is to advise management on processes and systems and controls. The purpose of the Ministry of RAGE, Restructuring and Government Efficiency, is to look at the plethora of regulations, rules, policies, written and unwritten, and legislation that fills volumes and volumes and volumes and volumes and find out what is useful and what isn't useful. So really there is a distinct difference between the function of the internal audit services role and the role of the ministry. I can tell you that relative to the internal audit services an advisory committee, called the internal audit committee, of which Mr. Campbell is a member, also includes a number of deputy ministers and two external people, one of which is Mr. Campbell. I don't know who the other one is.

8:50

Mrs. McClellan: Jack Halpin.

Mr. Klein: Oh, Jack Halpin. Okay. Well, he's an FCA; I know that.

They review the work plan of the internal audit services, the corporate internal services, and make recommendations as to whether Heather Zomar is carrying out her functions and her duties.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'm very pleased to be able to rise and debate the estimates of the Executive Council and the hon. Premier. I think one of the things that I'm going to regret about the hon. Premier is that we haven't had as much time to debate as I would have liked. I always enjoy engaging the Premier in the House.

I'd like to begin by asking about the increase in expenditures for

Executive Council as a whole and, in particular, the expenditures for the Public Affairs Bureau. I know that he has dealt with this in part, but there has been an increase of about 16 per cent in Public Affairs. If that was a one-time thing, Mr. Chairman, I think we could appreciate that, you know, it's a fairly small number, and it isn't a problem. But it's been a fairly consistent aspect of budget, since I've been here, at least, that the Public Affairs Bureau tends to increase more, in a general sense, than other expenditures within the government. I see that the Public Affairs Bureau in this case has an increase in the number of personnel, of full-time equivalents in the department. This year's budget says that there are 109 employees in the past year, but when we go back and look at the last year's budget, it listed 133 employees in the Public Affairs Bureau.

One of the things that I find difficult to follow, Mr. Chairman, is just how people are apportioned to be on the books of the Public Affairs Bureau or performing similar functions in the line departments of government and how, you know, people do similar functions, how decisions are made, where they sit, and whether or not we could have some consolidated information on all the number of people performing those kinds of communications functions whether or not they're in the Public Affairs Bureau or assigned to some other departments in the government.

Mr. Chairman, the Premier has talked about the role of the Public Affairs Bureau in dealing with public emergencies, and he's mentioned a couple, including a visit to Pine Lake. There was another emergency more recently at Lake Wabamun in which it took the Public Affairs Bureau five full days to inform residents of the Lake Wabamun area that they may have been exposed to toxic chemicals. That was a serious lapse, so I wonder if the Premier can indicate if he's taken any action to make sure that that sort of thing doesn't happen again. I'm assuming that he wasn't satisfied with that kind of communication, but the Public Affairs Bureau's task is to ensure effective and timely communications with Albertans during public emergencies. I think that it would be reassuring for all of us and, in particular, people in Wabamun to know what the government has done to make sure that this kind of thing doesn't happen again.

The target for public satisfaction with government communication priority areas in the 2005-06 fiscal years was 65 per cent, but I'd be interested in knowing how the government plans to raise the public satisfaction by 10 per cent and how that's going to be done.

I would like to know with respect to international travel, maybe a question there, how the government makes decisions about expenditures to ensure that ministers travelling abroad can do so most efficiently. There was a minister who travelled to Hong Kong in December 2005 and expended \$14,727 in travel expenses, but even if it was travelling first class, it would be less than half of that. So it means that at least \$11,000 of that was for expenses other than air travel. I'm just wondering what criteria Executive Council uses or the Premier uses to control travel expenses when people are travelling abroad.

You know, I'm really interested in the whole question of how we control or what guidelines are set for expenditures. I know that the Premier has said, Mr. Chairman, that they want to bring the increase in health care expenditures down to the rate of inflation. This has clearly not been accomplished, not only in health but in other departments, including the Premier's own budget. I'm just wondering why health has been singled out and whether or not the government is going to try and apply the same yardstick to other expenditures. Health is clearly the largest expenditure of any department in the government, but it is certainly not the only one. Although Mr. Mazankowski predicted four or five years ago that expenditures would rise to 50 per cent of government program expenditures, they

have, in fact, remained fairly static at 33, 34 per cent of total government program expenditures. So I'm just curious about how that objective was arrived at and why it's seemingly only being applied to Health and Wellness.

I'd be interested in the Premier's answers to those questions, Mr. Chairman, and I'll take my seat.

The Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To answer the last question first, again I would remind the hon. member that you can't relate my budget or the budgets of other ministries to the Department of Health and Wellness because we're talking about 10 billion – billion – dollars. That's a huge amount of money. I don't think that this room would be big enough to hold it if you had it all in loonies, 10 billion loonies. That is a huge amount of money, and we're talking about increases to that budget. We're talking about asks of 13 to 20 per cent and actual giving of 7 and a half per cent on average to that department. So that clearly is unsustainable.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. member asked about the Wabamun issue. I'll deal with that first.

9:00

First of all, we did receive the report prepared by Eric Newell, who was asked to do an assessment of the whole situation. I can tell you that communications staff – that is, staff of the Public Affairs Bureau – were on the site immediately upon finding out. Well, within a half an hour or so. There were some issues that are still being sorted out on receiving information from the company, in other words the railway company, and communicating correctly that information. But our communications people were on the site immediately and were communicating the best possible information that they had at that particular time.

The expenditures. Now, I will certainly take this up with my chief of staff and caucus relative to the expenditures. But the reports relative to international trips: reports are filed on the website, including the expenditures, and these are all published and very open and very transparent. On that particular issue and on that particular trip, if the hon. member will provide me with the information, I certainly will check it out.

An Hon. Member: We also issue news releases in advance.

Mr. Klein: Yes. I'm just reminded that prior to any trip being taken, a press release goes out explaining the purpose of the trip and the estimated cost of the trip. The trip includes not only the minister's expenses and airfare but those of his staff and any officials that he takes along with him.

Now, relative to the Public Affairs Bureau the breakdown is as follows. There are 117 full-time employees in the Public Affairs Bureau. In strategic communications – strategic communications, I will stress – we have added five new full-time employees to implement the recommendations of the review committee headed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

I can tell the hon. member that communications staff are seconded to 23 departments to develop and implement communications plans and programs. Those in the department plan, co-ordinate, and execute cross-government communications activities. They co-ordinate government communications to and from Albertans for government initiatives and during public emergencies, and that has already been alluded to. They're responsible for co-ordinating government communications to and from Albertans on priority areas for government initiatives, and they're responsible for providing

specialized writing and editing services to government. By writing and offering specialized editing services to government, I don't mean in a political sense but in an information sense.

Relative to corporate communication services there are 13 full-time employees, and that includes one new full-time employee to implement the review recommendations. Corporate communication services manages the government of Alberta website – that's very important – manages the Alberta Connects phone and e-mail system, provides advertising consultation and support to ministries, coordinates corporate advertising, and also distributes government news releases. That's under the corporate sector.

Under corporate services, as opposed to corporate communication services, there are 21 full-time employees, including two new full-time employees, to provide additional human resources and records management support to Executive Council, including the corporate internal audit service. Now, this corporate services section manages the human resource and financial needs, provides business plan and budget preparation, performance measurement co-ordination, annual report development, and record management and FOIP administration, and that is a huge, huge task. FOIP administration is huge, and thank God, for the opposition across the way, that they have those FOIP services. They provide information technology support and provide technical support for major government news conferences and announcements.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today we're examining the budget estimates for Executive Council: the brain, if you will, of this government, where all decisions are made, i.e. cabinet, and where the sales job to market those decisions to the public is planned and communicated; that is to say, the Public Affairs Bureau. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, the leader of the opposition, has asked very good questions. Most of them were on my list of things to ask, so he, frankly, stole some of my thunder. But he is the leader and he can have that, absolutely. I will try to brief.

One thing I really cannot help but notice – and it was alluded to, Mr. Chairman, and I have personally said it before, last year when we discussed the previous year's budget – is that this government is bloated and is getting fatter. Immediately after the November 2004 election a whole new ministry was created, and ironically it was created to make government leaner and more efficient.

An Hon. Member: Which one was that?

Mr. Elsalhy: It was called Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

An Hon. Member: RAGE.

Mr. Elsalhy: RAGE, yes.

Only 16 months later, Mr. Chairman, and just this afternoon a new cabinet post was custom created, or tailor-made, to fit the hon. Member for Little Bow, who now joins cabinet as someone referred to as the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How many Progressive Conservative MLAs does it take to keep this machine running? How big will cabinet get for all work to be done? Compare this again, as was mentioned, to the lean cabinet back in the early '90s, and you would notice immediately that there's something wrong with this picture today.

With a larger cabinet there are more employees on staff, bigger salaries, including this member now receiving more than what he

was earning as just a private member, and a bigger severance package or transition allowance when he's no longer here and more capital spending. Oh, and get this, Mr. Chairman: this hon. member, or minister, now is going to be the minister in charge of capital planning. Well, I guess this is not good overall, but maybe the only positive thing would be for those infrastructure employees getting some overtime, you know, as they move four new cabinet ministers to their new, nicer office locations and the three ministers who left cabinet to pursue the Tory leadership adjust to their new, more humble surroundings.

Speaking of cabinet shuffles, the Liberal opposition members chose between them three MLAs from the government backbench to be promoted, but our picks were not selected, unfortunately. Well, you can't ask for everything. It would not be good. It would make too much sense.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, Executive Council did not lose any staff, nor did its budget shrink after transferring responsibility for Service Alberta to Government Services and the Queen's Printer to Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

9:10

I know we've spoken about RAGE before. I really think that what they're trying to do is add more work to this ministry because all of a sudden after SuperNet is finished, they only sell surplus and stuff like that. They're trying to find work for this ministry, and it's not justified.

An Hon. Member: Mo, you still haven't got it quite right.

Mr. Elsalhy: As a matter of fact, the Executive Council budget is growing, and 10 more full-time equivalents are going to be added.

Last year I talked about my concerns surrounding the Public Affairs Bureau, and I will not repeat them today, but I want to put on the record that they still exist, if not compounded and if not getting worse. The whole mandate and structure of this body must be re-evaluated. It has to be restored to a dialogue with citizens type structure compared to its current objectionable propaganda distribution role. It should be there to ask the public their opinion and to receive direction and feedback, not to steer public opinion or deliver spin.

The other thing I want to talk about tonight is finances. In this year's budget estimates the office of the Premier and Executive Council is asking us to vote \$6.6 million, which is up 14.8 per cent from the 2005-06 forecast; similarly, \$14.4 million for the Public Affairs Bureau, which is up 15.7 per cent since last year. Now, that's really a lot of money, Mr. Chairman.

I usually find it useful to compare Alberta to other jurisdictions in Canada to see how well or how poorly we measure against them. Typically I look at our neighbour to the west, British Columbia, and our neighbour to the east, Saskatchewan. I often include Ontario in my comparisons because people say that Alberta and Ontario, economically speaking, occupy the front seats in Canada. It is needless to say, of course, that B.C., Saskatchewan, and Ontario spend less on their equivalents of our Executive Council and mass propaganda machine than Alberta does.

To use just one example, I'll cite some numbers for reference. British Columbia's 2006 budget, which coincided with ours – they came within two weeks apart – lists operating expenses under their executive and support services, which includes their office of the Premier and the executive operations, at \$6.9 million. I know that the very few of my esteemed colleagues across who are paying attention will comment immediately that this is more than the \$6.6 million that our Premier is asking for. However, I have two points

to clarify. First, this represents a reasonable increase in British Columbia of only 4.2 per cent over their 2005-06 forecast compared to Alberta's 14.8 per cent increase. Second, when you also look at their intergovernmental relations secretariat, which is something not even remotely resembling our mammoth Public Affairs Bureau, their 2006-07 estimate is only about \$3 million. So, in effect, when you add those numbers, you add \$6.6 million for the Executive Council plus \$14 million for the Public Affairs Bureau. That's \$20.6 million in Alberta versus \$6.9 million plus \$3 million, which is \$9.9 million, in British Columbia.

Now, why are we comparing both jurisdictions? Because it's a province with a comparable population and a fairly similar scheme for how their finances are conducted. Where it differs is that B.C. is working on addressing its deficit and repaying its debt, so it is trying to be fiscally restrained, or conservative. On the other hand, you look at Alberta – debt free on the books, awash in nonrenewable resource revenues – and our government forgot the lessons learned from the past and is spending and growing like there is no tomorrow.

I know that some people would find this interesting, to say the least, that it's coming from the Liberals, who advocate or support program spending. However, the conclusion I'm starting to reach now, Mr. Chairman, is that we as the Alberta Liberals represent or occupy the political centre in this province. It's the whole idea of balance. It's really how you spend the huge amounts of money and on what: prioritizing, setting goals, setting targets, and respecting performance measures.

If this increase in money for the Executive Council or the increase for the Public Affairs Bureau was spent on schools or roads infrastructure or AISH or PDD recipients or a personal income tax cut or trying to strengthen our public health care system or eliminating the need for schools to charge fees for basic instructional services, things like that, then you would not get any criticism from this side. However, in less than 13 years, as I mentioned, you have added seven ministries, and you are now creating associate ministries. The size is growing, and the operational costs are ballooning. We definitely have issues there.

My esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Riverview also mentioned the corporate internal audit services. I appreciate the explanation given by the Premier, but I disagree with the direction to rename it to a corporate audit because I think that the term "corporate" further removes this department away from the public eye, and it doesn't in my humble opinion contribute to transparency and accountability. It was also mentioned that the line is being blurred between the Progressive Conservative Party as a party, as a political structure, and government in general. It was quoted that the vice-president of finance for the PC Party is also sitting as an independent member on this internal audit committee.

I have another example, which might not necessarily be under the immediate responsibility of Executive Council and the Premier, but again as the head of the government he would be interested to find out. Another example would be the manager of government services at the Workers' Compensation Board. He also happens to be the vice-president of communications of the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta. You know, if we're trying to eliminate even the remote appearance of conflict of interest or if we're trying to really draw the line between what is partisan and what is government – government is here to serve everybody – then I urge the Premier to be looking at things like this, you know, to clean up government and avoid that even remote appearance of conflict of interest.

Most of the other questions I had were already asked and answered. I appreciate my chance, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your indulgence.

The Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll try and answer as many questions as I possibly can.

Relative to the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency I explained that this department will focus on going through the massive amount of regulations, legislation, policy initiatives that have been developed over the past God knows how many years to determine what is relevant today and what isn't relevant. I think that overall and over a period of time we will achieve efficiency in government, and we will achieve effective restructuring.

Relative to tomorrow's announcement of a new associate minister I would remind the hon. member that we have received in terms of infrastructure spending something in the neighbourhood of \$13 billion.

Mrs. McClellan: Thirteen and a half.

Mr. Klein: Thirteen and a half billion dollars. We need someone to keep that in line. Mr. Chairman, I would remind this Legislature that most of the spending requests, at least suggestions for spending, come from the opposition. Relative to infrastructure we need someone to really do some capital planning because there has to be some rationale to road systems, to schools, to hospitals. We need to do this.

Relative to the comparisons that the hon. member alluded to between B.C. and Saskatchewan, I don't think that you can compare because I don't know what Executive Council is responsible for. In other words, the hon. member mentioned that they have \$6 million in British Columbia assigned to Executive Council, that could include the Premier's office. If it includes just the Premier's office, it would be very, very low. I have a chief of staff, who has an administrative assistant. There's the deputy chief of staff, the director of scheduling. I have two administrative assistants, a receptionist. Then there is an executive assistant to the Government House Leader, David Gillies, and an assistant to the executive assistant to the Government House Leader, Michelle Zolner.

9:20

Then we don't know if B.C. or Saskatchewan has a correspondence unit attached to it. This is under my budget. The correspondence unit includes eight staff, and believe me, they are busy. I don't count my mail; I weigh the mail. You know, I say, "Well, what is it today?" "It's 30 pounds." We have a manager of the correspondence unit. We have seven correspondence writers. We have all of the Public Affairs Bureau attached to my department. I have my own communications staff. That includes the director of communications, who's sitting in the gallery, the media relations manager, the communications manager, and the communications officer.

We have the Calgary office. I don't know if he includes the Vancouver office as well as the Victoria office. There's an executive director, a secretary, a receptionist, the building co-ordinator, and a communications manager.

Then there is Executive Council itself, which includes a deputy minister, a secretary, an executive director of policy co-ordination. That position is vacant right now. There's an issues manager, policy manager, policy manager, planning manager, administrative assistant, administrative assistant, deputy secretary to cabinet, co-ordination officer, cabinet policy co-ordinator, cabinet policy co-ordinator, co-ordination officer, co-ordination officer.

Then in protocol, which is also assigned to Executive Council –

and I don't know if it happens in B.C. or Saskatchewan – there is the chief of protocol, the secretary, the deputy chief of protocol, the protocol officer, director of Government House, the associate director of Government House. I don't know if that's assigned to the Executive Council in B.C.

Then there is the office of the Lieutenant Governor, and all the expenses associated with the office of the Lieutenant Governor are charged to Executive Council. So I don't know.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, here's an answer. B.C. moved their Public Affairs Bureau.

Mr. Klein: Oh, I see. I have this note here, where B.C. moved its Public Affairs Bureau to its Department of Finance.

I am advised that we have compared our Executive Council costs to other provinces in the past, and our size of budgets are similar in range. That's the advice I get.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I've just got a couple of questions with regard to finance then. Specifically, one would have been: why does the office of the Premier get a 12.6 per cent increase, and could this money that the increase equates to, which is about \$750,000, be better spent on funding school nutritional programs or with the drug awareness/resistance education? I know that the drug program, the task force that the Premier's wife is in charge of, certainly could use money like this, and it would offset perhaps the ongoing experimental use by the kids. Have it in junior high and reinforce it in high school. They're just not getting the message yet, and I think that money could be better spent putting it into drug programs.

Another one: it looks like the Lieutenant Governor's office is getting an increase of about \$100,000. This is after the centennial budget. I'm not sure if there is an explanation for that particular piece.

We've talked a little bit about the Public Affairs Bureau getting a 15.7 per cent increase to its budget year. This is a staff that many are complaining about, that is overabundant in use. It's far larger than that of the White House in the United States. We're wondering if the increase is for the advertisement of, perhaps, the push of the third way still. How can the Premier ensure that the money or the resources don't indirectly provide leadership candidates with potential free advertising on the public dime? The other point is: within the Public Affairs Bureau is the corporate communication service getting an increase of about 30 per cent?

My last piece there, Mr. Chairman, would be with recommendations for the Auditor General. We can empower the Auditor General to have the same far-reaching powers as that of the federal, of Sheila Fraser, because quite frankly right now the Auditor General does not have the power and ability to do overarching audits and concerning internal audits that we would like to see. We'd like to see him with a little bit more power. That would obviously give a little bit more credibility to the position.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Does the hon. the Premier wish to respond?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't think that there is a computer large enough to compute what percentage of our total budget is \$750,000. I think it must be one one-hundredth of 1 per cent. I'm certain that, you know, a program could do with that money, but there is sufficient money to address nutrition programs.

There is sufficient money to address drug-use prevention programs. There is a huge amount of money being spent on programs, about \$28.3 billion – \$28.3 billion – and the hon. member is talking about \$750,000. It's a lot of money to me, it's a lot of money to everyone here, and it's a lot of money to the hon. member, but in the scheme of things, as I say, it would hardly compute. You would need a very, very large computer to figure it out. I don't know if anyone is figuring it out here.

An Hon. Member: Working on it.

Mr. Klein: They're working on it. Yeah, right. A lot of teachers in caucus and a lot of teachers over there, and still it takes a lot of figuring out to make the computation.

What was the other question? I don't know what question was asked, Mr. Chairman, but I did comment on the comment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It almost seemed like we're on a merry-go-round here and it's going faster and faster. We're going to end up falling off.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Hinman: Question? Can't you guys come up with something new? [interjections] It's only once a week. Think of something new. [interjections] Start watching.

The Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has the floor.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get up and to address the budget of the Executive Council. I guess I'll have to start off with: I must say that I'm a little bit alarmed at the number of times the Premier has gotten up and said that this is a minuscule amount. I was always taught that if you don't look after the pennies, you'll never be able to look after the dollars. I'm concerned with the discussion going on so far regarding that.

I guess I'd like to go to page 173, where it says, "Increase communications with Albertans in the areas they identify as top priorities" and to reread, "They also have a right to receive clear facts about the issues faced by the province" and "clear and timely communications" from this government. Many good points have already been brought up, but the dilemma that I am constantly asked is: what are their real plans? What are they doing with health care? We would really appreciate a more forthright government that would say that these are exactly what we are doing, not just that doctors can work in and out of the system and that they're going to have private insurance. How are those things going to be implemented? We could have a real discussion on that.

9:30

Also, when it comes to the Public Affairs Bureau, the vision there: "The Public Affairs Bureau will be a centre of communications excellence and one of Albertans' preferred choices for news and information about their government's policies, programs and services." I must say that the programs, the policies, and even the ministries are changing at such a fast pace that it's very difficult for Albertans – seniors, PDD people, caregivers, anybody – who wonder, "Where do we apply, and how do we find out what programs are there?" It isn't clear. I'm hoping that with the extra staff and the things that they're bringing forward they can make it

clearer and more simple for Albertans to find what they need. Even municipal governments making applications for their different policies and programs are finding it very difficult to track down the ministry and where it is. Infrastructure and Transportation has now been split again, and the schooling is taking over the infrastructure there. There's this constant change, and it's a major concern.

I also have to comment on the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency and the fact that we're following B.C. and their example, but I don't think they created a whole ministry in order to reduce their red tape and the plethora of regulations which they had. It just seems that we've gone full circle here.

I appreciated the Premier when he came in and said that we need to restructure government, we need to reduce the size, and we need to be more efficient. I feel that we need to go back to that instead of expanding to 24, 24 and a half, or 25 ministries, however we want to count them. Very alarming to the people of Alberta, I believe, the growth of this government. The Premier has mentioned many times that, "Well, you know, 13 per cent or 22 per cent in Executive Council doesn't really count," but it's the discipline on whether we're going to continue. When the Premier came in, that was very much his goal: we're going to cut; we're going to hold; we're going to be restrained.

He made the comment a few weeks ago which proved to be so true, "It's much harder to manage when we have money than when we don't." I think we need to take a couple of steps back and say: "You know, we need to tighten the belt. We need to put away in this time of plenty." They've mentioned many times that we need to be conservative when we look for the income and the revenue from our oil and gas because that could change drastically very quickly, and we need to be prepared for that. What we've currently got isn't sustainable with a slight drop in the price of those commodities.

I guess the other thing I'd like to address is number 3 under the strategic priorities, building and educating tomorrow's workforce. I appreciate the ideas and that we're working with Advanced Education and labour supply and the apprentice and skills programs, but I'm concerned. Many times we talk about early education. I'll go back a few years. In my high school years I had the opportunity to try welding, drafting, woodworking, plastic, pottery, glazing, auto mechanics, assistant teaching . . . [interjection] I did a lot and had that opportunity. Absolutely.

What I would like to see is to go back to that. We have kids that, by the time they reach grade 9 and grade 10, are no longer interested in academics. Our schools are being reduced, and if we want to put money anywhere, we need to increase the trades. We need to increase the industrial arts in many of these schools and catch them earlier, so when they leave high school, they've tried several things. Whether it's electronics, whether it's mechanics, whether it's woodworking, they have an opportunity to engage. We get them going in extracurricular sports, and we get them going in the arts, but we need to get them going in the trades industry.

I'd like Executive Council to consider bringing that into the high school level because that's where the kids drop out. If they've had the opportunity to try several areas, I think that that would be a great benefit to the youth of this province, to be able to keep them engaged and find something exciting that they like.

I guess I'd like to close and thank the Premier for his comments. When he was asked a few days ago if he had any, I guess, instructions for the next leader, he said, "Well, whatever you do, keep a balanced budget, and don't go into debt." I hope that we would remember this currently and realize that now is the opportunity to protect ourselves from doing that.

The Premier put in legislation years ago that all surpluses would have to go to paying down the debt. I would very much like to see

Executive Council take the step now that all surplus would go, perhaps, 50 per cent to savings and 50 per cent to a tax refund, and then there is no fighting over what to do with the surplus. It's already legislated. We know where it's going. If we had a \$5.8 billion surplus, half could go into the heritage trust fund; half could go back to refund the flat tax. Of \$5.8 billion it would be \$2.8 billion or a little bit more. Albertans could in fact enjoy that, and we wouldn't be having this dilemma and this fight over where to put the surplus every time, which seems to be a major problem.

With that, I'll sit down. Thank you.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Chairman, there are all kinds of suggestions, including those from the opposition, as to what we should do with the surplus. Thank God we have a surplus instead of a deficit.

A number of points were raised by the hon. member, and I'd like to reply to those points. First of all, I didn't say that \$750,000 is minuscule. I did say that it's a lot of money to all of us, including members of the opposition, but in terms of this year's \$28 billion budget, you would need a computer as large as this room to compute what percentage of the total budget that is. That is what I said. Apparently, the computers that we have here won't calculate that many front zeros. It's one one-thousandth or less of 1 per cent. But it's still a lot of money.

I would like to say something, if I may, about this government because it was raised. It was raised in the context of not looking after our house, and indeed we have looked after the house very well. I would remind the hon. member that when I came to office, there were in excess of 30,000 public service employees. Now there are 22,927 – 22,927 – who work directly for government. We have no control over what the regional health authorities or the school boards hire in terms of teachers and medical caregivers and so on. But those who work for the government directly: 22,927, down from 30,000.

I can tell you relative to the welfare rolls that they have not grown. We have still half as many people receiving welfare payments as there were in 1991 – half as many people receiving welfare.

Relative to ministerial responsibility. First of all, I mentioned that we have had something like \$13.5 billion in requests for capital spending, and we need to get a handle on that. But as the opposition, including the Alliance opposition and the ND opposition and the Liberal opposition, so often point out, the buck stops here. The one thing I have learned in my 25 or 26 years in politics is that the buck does stop here. If a public service employee, no matter how senior, screws up, the buck stops here. So if we are going to have ministers to take the blame, you might as well have the ministers. Indeed, we're only adding one more minister, and that is an associate minister to look after a very serious situation in a very significant department. That is the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, where the requests, as I have mentioned, have exceeded \$13 billion.

9:40

The hon. member makes some interesting comments relative to building and educating Alberta's workforce, and on this point I have to agree with him.

Mrs. McClellan: Whoops.

Mr. Klein: The hon. Provincial Treasurer said "whoops," but I do have to agree with him.

Not so long ago, less than a week ago, I had a meeting with the Canadian Home Builders' Association. They raised this very point that high schools – and I'll address this to the Minister of Education

because it will be addressed to him if it hasn't already been – are not concentrating on shop programs like electronics and woodworking and welding and so on, and they ought to be.

Now, the Canadian Home Builders' Association have provided – and I have sent it to our Minister of Human Resources and Employment – a tool box. This tool box doesn't contain tools; it contains a lot of information, and I'm sure that the hon. minister will share it with the Minister of Education. It contains a lot of information on how a young person can pursue a trade as opposed to going to university or a college, how that person can pursue a trade. Believe me, I was telling the story of an individual in our caucus who was a welder by profession and could make as a welder about 10 times the salary that he's making right now or that he will be making. He said: "If you were a welder, I would hire you tomorrow. Well, I'd hire you right now. I'd hire you yesterday."

The Home Builders' Association is working very hard to first of all encourage high schools to reinstitute shop programs and, secondly, to have young people pursue trades. I'm advised by the Minister of Education that he will address these issues in his first-ever high school completion symposium this fall. Perhaps the hon. minister can attend, and this, by the way, was mentioned in the throne speech.

So on that point I agree with the hon. member.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to thank Mr. Premier and all his staff, who worked so hard to prepare this budget. This ministry of Executive Council consists of three or four major departments: the office of the Premier, corporate internal audit services, Public Affairs Bureau, and the latest that the Premier just added, the land-use strategy. I will touch on a couple of them because I don't think I have enough time.

Despite losing responsibility for both the Service Alberta call centre and Queen's Printer, the overall Executive Council budget is increasing 13.5 per cent, estimates page 180. The budget for the Premier's office has increased 67 per cent since the year 2001.

I have a few questions for the office of the Premier. Why was the responsibility for the Service Alberta call centre and the Queen's Printer moved to Government Services and RAGE, respectively? Why, given the shift of these areas, is there no ability to reduce the budget for Executive Council? Why is there an increase in overall staff of 10 full-time employees? That is also on page 187. With the reduction in areas of responsibility shouldn't this go down? What specific positions are being filled by the PAB's eight new full-time employees? What specific positions are being filled by corporate internal audit services' two new full-time employees? How will anyone know whether they are necessary, useful positions that provide value to Albertans?

The annual report for Executive Council in the year 2004-05 reports that the total compensation for a number of senior positions increased dramatically. Is it safe to assume that the chief internal auditor increase from 131K to 184K is simply due to a person holding the position for the full fiscal year, or is there something else here? Why did the executive director of corporate communications get an increase of nearly 30K, now totalling 143K, between fiscal years ending 2004 and 2005?

The Public Affairs Bureau is supposed to be nonpartisan, but I'm sorry to say that the government is the only one who uses the money from this department. I think that if it's nonpartisan, if there is a priority sometime, they should give money to the opposition to use, money for advertising, especially now that the third way is coming. At least they should have the say to advertise their points of view in the media.

The structure and function of the Public Affairs Bureau has recently been reviewed. When can we expect to hear of the outcomes of this review? Mr. Chairman, will the Premier relinquish control over the PAB and return the communications professionals to their departments, where they can truly serve Albertans in a nonpartisan, professional way? Is moving the Service Alberta call centre out of the PAB part of this review? Does it mean that the PAB is even less about two-way communication and dialogue, as is claimed, and even more about one-way spin?

The PAB's strategic priorities have all changed in this year's business plan. Last year's plan included two priorities that would seem to be worth mentioning. Number 2 was to "ensure Albertans are aware of opportunities available to themselves and their families." Number 4 was: "provide disadvantaged and vulnerable Albertans with information on available programs and supports." Will the Premier agree to make such information public in the name of goal 2? I saw it on the government's website: making government information more accessible.

Another one that I want to talk about is strategy 1.3, the communications strategy about building and educating Alberta's labour force. We were in Fort McMurray last week and discussed with some stakeholders. We should give some priorities to the people living in Fort Mac because they are the people giving us most of the money, and in return they're not getting enough. I suggest, Mr. Premier, to make a note of this one.

9:50

Strategy 1.2 is centred on ensuring "Albertans and all relevant stakeholders are informed of government's efforts to manage growth and prosperity." When we talk about prosperity – I mean, all Albertans work so hard. They have sacrificed in the last 10, 15 years, so everybody deserves part of the prosperity. I know that Mr. Premier has already helped the AISH and some other departments, but there are still low-income people that are suffering, and the gap between rich and poor is widening. I ask him to make a note of this. If possible we should give them priority and help them out as much as we can because they have sacrificed a lot, and they deserve this.

The next one is the internal audit services. I think we should give some more powers to the internal audit services department like we have in Ottawa, the federal government, like Sheila Fraser. In Alberta every time we see the Auditor General's report, most of the recommendations are suggestions. I'm not criticizing him. I'm not the authority. I'm just suggesting, Mr. Premier, that he can look into it and be a little bit more strict in the future and make sure that if the Auditor General finds something suspicious, they should point it out a little bit more strictly, like Sheila Fraser did in Ottawa. I'm sure that they will find lots of things happening here in . . .

Mr. R. Miller: Do you think they might find some skeletons?

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, you may say skeletons, but I don't say it's skeletons.

Definitely, I'm in favour of giving some more powers to the Auditor General so that they can investigate properly. I saw an investigation of the Applewood community in Calgary. That was Community Development. I'm not sure whether they returned that money to the government. There should be a process where the minister or the Premier should have some authority. We should be very strict on that.

I know that I'm running out of time. I once again thank the Premier and the staff for working hard. If he can answer my questions tonight, that would be appreciated. If not, he can always respond in writing as soon as possible.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you. I'll try and cover as much ground as I possibly can, Mr. Chairman. In the overall budget \$1.4 million is for salaries. There's no reason why any of the staff connected to Executive Council should be treated any less than any other employee of the provincial government. Now, that's \$1.4 million. The Liberal opposition would be the first to complain if I treated my staff differently than any other employee. They would be the first to complain.

The only extraordinary expenditure was the result of a review of the Public Affairs Bureau, which resulted in a \$1.4 million expenditure for more staff. I'd like to comment just a bit on the review. The PAB review committee, as I mentioned, was headed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West. They recommended to increase the corporate and strategic communications focus of the bureau. This was no different than any other internal government review, and the changes amount to a minor tune-up for the bureau. A minor tune-up. The people interviewed as part of the review did so with the expectation that their comments would not be made public, and the committee's recommendations were provided for internal purposes only. The interviews were conducted in person or over the phone, and no minutes of committee meetings were kept. Since this was an internal government process – an internal government process – and since the findings were prepared for Executive Council management's information only, we won't be releasing the committee's report or the government's response other than what is contained in the budget, and that is a direct result of the review.

The Auditor General, I would remind the hon. member, is an officer of the Legislature and is fully accountable to the Legislature. But I can tell you, notwithstanding Sheila Fraser, the federal Auditor General, that Mr. Dunn does a thorough job as an officer of the Legislature. When he submits his reports on any government – what is the proper word? – department or any government deficiencies or functions within a department, he makes recommendations to correct those deficiencies, and we act on all those recommendations. If we don't act on those recommendations, then the Auditor General is required by legislation to do a qualified audit of the particular department or situation to find out why we didn't accept the recommendation. So it's all open. It's transparent. He is accountable to the Legislature, and believe me, we either have to accept his recommendations or submit ourselves to a qualified audit, which is much more severe than the original audit. So the Auditor General is very valuable to the government in making sure that we remain efficient, accountable, and responsible.

10:00

I'm just trying to think of what other questions he asked. Oh, I'm sorry. Mr. Chairman, the executive director of communications and the salary increase: I'm not sure to whom he refers, but I will try and read *Hansard* and review the situation.

I thank the hon. members opposite and all my colleagues for their kind attention this evening. Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Chair: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Executive Council for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Expense	\$25,294,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's been a very exciting and entertaining and informative evening tonight with our Premier at his very finest and best. Well done, Premier, on the responses. I'm sure there'll be more chatter later.

Nonetheless, on that note, Mr. Chair, I would move that the committee now rise and report the estimates of Executive Council and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Executive Council: expense, \$25,294,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I would move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, April 6, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/06

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure that I have this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the grade 6 class from the Bentley elementary school in my constituency. I have to apologize to them that because of the turmoil in the building today I wasn't able to spend much time with them. They're in the members' gallery along with their teachers and group leaders Mr. Mervyn Leidl, Ms Diane Scarlett, and Mrs. Wendy Friesen. I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 24 guests here today from the Kneehill Christian school in my riding, which is just outside the industrious village of Linden. There are 24 guests, made up of students and teachers and their helpers. In addition to the students, we have Miss Terri Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Les Klassen, Mr. Bert Boese, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Baerg, and Mr. and Mrs. Lorne Toews. I'm not sure which gallery they're in. There they are in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise and introduce some special young guests from my constituency. We have with us this afternoon students from the Evansview school in Evansburg along with their parents and teacher helpers. I had the pleasure of joining this very bright, young group of Albertans for a photo this afternoon. I'd ask my guests now to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour today for me to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly three very special guests: Brendalee Loveseth, who's a legislative assistant; Mrs. Lois McLeod, who's been my constituency assistant from Little Bow for 14 years; and my wife of – holy cow, Mary – 36 years. Would you please rise.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure again today to introduce to you and through you to all

members of the Assembly a group of bright, young kids from the Clive school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Robert MacKinnon, and I believe this is his 17th or 18th trip down here to the Legislature with children from the Clive school. With him are parent helpers Mr. Vince Landry, Mrs. Hanne Giles, Mr. Abe Klassen, Mrs. Paula Law, Mrs. Carol Law, Mrs. Rachel Stahl, Mrs. Kathy Walker, and in addition to these helpers there's always the bus driver, Mr. Robert Smith. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly five visitors from the Edmonton Seniors Centre who are joining us in the public gallery. I'd ask them to please rise. We have Mrs. Joyce Cwyk, Ms Hilda Doyle, Ms Elizabeth Doktor, Ms Thresa Ramsay, and Ms Evelyn Morrison. They are standing now. I'd ask you to please give them a warm welcome to the Assembly.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of students from my constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Visiting us today from Innisfail is a bright group of 46 students in grade 6 from the Innisfail middle school along with their teachers, Judy Bourne and Mary Schatz. Within that group I would also like to give a special welcome to parent helpers Trevor Lawrence, Tina Reid, Michelle den Dekker, Eva Looker, and Mike Wilkie. I think they won't be in until later, but I wanted to give them a great welcome anyway.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Reform

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After years of mismanagement and inaction by this government the Peace Country health region and, in particular, the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Grande Prairie is facing a crisis. They're short 75 health professionals, which is affecting core hospital services, including medical units, surgery, orthopaedics, psychiatry, the emergency ward, and long-term care. This government's disregard for rural Albertans has become so apparent that even the government's hand-picked chairman of the Peace Country health authority says that he is receiving only nominal response to the very real crisis he's facing. To the minister of health: what action is the minister taking to end this crisis immediately?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health and Wellness has been in close communication with the people in the regional health authority of Peace Country. We recognize that there is a crisis there where people are not having the support that they would wish to have. I responded to it somewhat yesterday in a previous question relative to some of the shortage of physicians and the health care professionals. We are looking at a relationship with another health authority to in fact second on a temporary basis some professionals there to bridge the gap so that the Peace Country health authority can function as fully as possible to assure patient safety.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that

this crisis, as the minister confirms, has been developing for years, can the minister explain how this government failed to prevent this crisis from developing?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, while the hon. member opposite would like to believe that this is something that's been going on for years, it is, in fact, a function of a number of things: workforce, yes, but also some very unfortunate situations that are best discussed in a private situation when you're talking with human resource personnel. We do not in this House discuss why a member of any staff left. If there are personal reasons, we honour that. So there are a number of people that have had other options, other relocations for personal and private reasons.

Beyond that, Mr. Speaker, it's a challenge, and I guess the good news about the Alberta economy is that it's robust, that it's attracting a number of people, and it's put a lot of pressure on the infrastructure both in Northern Lights and Peace Country. We're doing our best to provide recruitment for those situations. It is not a statement about any lack of due diligence relative to rural Alberta. One more fact: since 2004 we've had a 3 per cent increase in physicians in rural Alberta, which is significant.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: when will this minister recognize what the chairman of the Peace Country health authority recognizes and what a number of Tory leadership candidates have already recognized as well, that the third way must be dropped?

1:40

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have to believe that there isn't a member of this House that doesn't want us to proceed with the many policies in that document of the health policy framework that say that we are working towards access and sustainability. There have been one or two policies that, admittedly, have actually been confrontational, obviously, to the opposition, that have been queried, not slammed but have been queried, by people who have asked for more detail. I think that rather than throw the whole thing out, as I hear on the other side that they would like us to do, we should actually keep trying to advance towards sustainability, accessibility, and at all times doing what we can to support a strong public health care system.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Cabinet Appointments

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier loosened another notch in the government belt to further extend an already bloated cabinet. The creation of yet another minister position brings the total now to an unbelievable 25, almost half of the members of the caucus. Ironically this comes just a year after the creation of another cabinet spot designed specifically to help streamline government. My questions are to the Minister of RAGE, Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Was the minister consulted on the efficiency of restructuring cabinet to include yet another ministry? Was he consulted?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across knows quite well that the appointment of cabinet is entirely in the Premier's purview.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of RAGE.

The Speaker: It's called Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Dr. Taft: The Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Okay. Thank you. To that minister: is it the minister's position that a larger cabinet is a more efficient cabinet?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member said earlier in the first question, that's in the complete purview of our Premier.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency: can the minister tell us if he or any of his ministerial counterparts will be acquiring an associate minister to help further the efficiency of this government?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, again I will have to say that that's under the complete purview of our Premier.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. Bonko: Yesterday in the House the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation referred to the \$1 land deal to the Galfour Development Corporation, owned by Mr. Joseph Sheckter: "You have to understand that it was a large parcel of land [and] in order for the government to get a portion of it, of course, they had to strike a deal." Mr. Sheckter did more than strike a deal; he hit the jackpot. My question to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: why was the \$1 buyback price needed to strike a deal when Mr. Sheckter had already been overpaid \$6 million for the land, according to the Provincial Treasurer at that time?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that if the member would go back and read *Hansard*, he would see that, in fact, when you buy large blocks of land, as I explained yesterday, the person that is selling the land – if you were going to define exactly what you needed, it would have to go through the whole subdivision process. So what happens: the whole parcel is bought. Incidentally, likely they will bring up another parcel because in fact there were four parcels, totalling about 800 acres. The way the process works: the government took title of the whole parcel. Part of the deal was to then subdivide out the area that we needed for the ring roads and give the other back to the person that we purchased the land from in the first place.

But, Mr. Speaker, in case the second and third questions have something to do with the current value, I must caution that I can't get into this too deep because the fact is that there's currently a civil lawsuit. So if that's where they're heading, then we cannot get into it.

Mr. Bonko: To the same minister: why was the surplus land given back to Mr. Sheckter's company for less than a penny per acre when the government's own independent appraiser valued the land at \$45,000 an acre?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, obviously the member has never purchased land – obviously he hasn't – and probably has never purchased anything more than a bicycle. The fact is that it was part of the agreement to sell that we would subdivide and purchase the land that we needed for the ring road, and then the seller would take posses-

sion of the remaining parcels. That's exactly what happened, and that is what was in the original agreement to sell.

Mr. Bonko: Why didn't other landowners who had their lands expropriated for the ring road receive the surplus land back at pennies per acre? What made Mr. Sheckter so special?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, of course, there are different ways of purchasing land. There's the method of negotiating, and then there is the ability to expropriate. That's another way. There can be a negotiation subject to the expropriation, which basically means that the initial price would not be established but would be established at a later date. In this case there was a negotiated agreement, and the other parcels that may have been purchased along the right-of-way could have – I'm not sure, but they could have – been expropriated. In the case of expropriation, they only expropriate the land that they need. They don't expropriate the whole parcel. So that's the difference. Perhaps, if they need even more information on this sort of thing, they should put a written question because this is a fairly complex area.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, before I begin my question, I wonder if might ask for some guidance from the chair. I understand that the appointments to the Executive Council are entirely within the purview of the Premier, yet I would like to ask questions related to that. Can you advise me how to proceed, please?

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party is a big boy with a lot of experience in this House, and the hon. member knows full well how he should proceed, so continue.

Mr. Mason: Actually I don't, Mr. Speaker. I asked the question legitimately. Well, then, I will proceed as best I can.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I have no idea what question you want to raise, so how can I give you any advice? So proceed and we'll find out.

Cabinet Appointments

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yesterday's cabinet shuffle was disappointing but hardly surprising for those who have watched this struggling government for some time. First, one of the most intelligent and loyal ministers in this government was unceremoniously dumped from cabinet. Second, representation of Edmonton, of women, and of youth was overlooked in favour of cronyism. My question must apparently go to the Deputy Premier. Were there no qualified women available in the caucus to be appointed to cabinet? Were there no qualified women?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I will again remind the hon. member that appointments to cabinet are not a matter of House debate. You may debate the choices; you may debate policies in those areas, but they're really not a matter of debate here.

However, I do take exception in the preamble to the dumping of a minister because in my knowledge of the events a very talented minister with a great deal of integrity stepped down from cabinet.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Jumped before he was pushed.

To the Deputy Premier: were there no qualified Edmontonians in the Conservative caucus available to be appointed to the cabinet?

1:50

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier has the floor.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of very talented people that may not be entirely in Edmonton but are in the capital region. I will point out that the minister of health is from Sherwood Park, an overpass away, in the greater metro region. Of course, we have the Minister of Education, again a very talented and dedicated Edmonton minister in the cabinet. I might also say that a number of MLAs from this region play a very major role in a number of committees. I would point out members of the Agenda and Priorities Committee, the Member for Sherwood Park, the Member for Edmonton Mill Creek. We have the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, again, a member of that committee. So to suggest that this city has been overlooked is entirely without foundation.

I would be very dismayed if this hon. member tried to in any way through his comments impinge on the very, very good working relationship that we have with the mayor and the council in this city and the best interests of all the people in this city.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, after the next election they're going to have to go to Wainwright to find a representative for Edmonton.

Was there no qualified member of the caucus who is under the age of 45 years that could have been appointed to this cabinet?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to offend the members of this caucus by asking them their ages.

You know, I find one thing very curious in this hon. member's line of questioning. He spoke about qualified women. Half of the women in our caucus sit on the front bench. Half. Now, I am looking at the ND caucus and seeing that there are no women.

The Speaker: In response to the hon. leader's original question to whom he should direct the question, it seems to me that he followed the correct procedure.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Health Care Guarantees

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question in a very, very, very long time is to a very capable woman, the minister of health. Madam Minister, the Prime Minister of Canada, the government of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, and the Alberta Medical Association have all endorsed the concept of care guarantees. I know how much you care and why you care for the public health system, so could you tell me how you plan to deal with this concept of care guarantees?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of ways that I plan to deal with it. It is a good question because in the last few weeks and months there has been significantly more said about care guarantees. I know what the Prime Minister is urging us towards, and that is more timely access and making sure that we look at benchmarks as things that are firm commitments by health regions of the country to advance the case of public health care delivered in a timely way and making no excuses about lapses.

I would like to just say that we've taken to caucus the outline of a plan. I will be going further with care guarantees as a plan to caucus. I intend to talk to the Minister of Health for Canada more about the expression of interest in this concept as he has identified both through the Prime Minister and in the throne speech.

Further, in discussion with Senator Kirby this morning I have talked to him about what kind of targets and planning we can do to make sure that we bridge from a situation where care guarantees are an aspiration of the federal government to something where it's practically possible because of resource planning, because of human resource planning, and things that we can do at the provincial level.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much for that answer, Madam Minister.

Care guarantees have the ability to make the government and RHAs accountable for access, which is, realistically, the number one health care issue in Alberta. When can we expect this idea to be made public and to be taken public for discussion?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope soon. I can't give a date, but I would hope that sometime this spring we will have an answer. Clearly, in the letter that our Premier just received from the Prime Minister of Canada, he identified that the health planning that was done in the policy framework was laudable and that many of the issues in that framework were things that he commended us for, acknowledging that the primary responsibility for the province was in health care delivery. So I hope in the next few weeks to be able to bring a plan to caucus and be able to advance it by discussing it further with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the other health care professionals.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope that by the end of June we would have at least made some statement about our support or the qualification of any support level for care guarantees for more timely access.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

How will you deal with the new federal minority government on this issue when they face tremendous pressure to enforce the Canada Health Act? In many ways the care guarantees may be the compromise that is needed to ensure compliance with the Canada Health Act.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, during the last election I noted with interest that all of the parties – whether they were the winning party, the successful Conservative government, or the Liberal Party that is now in the opposition or the NDs – had advanced the issue of care guarantees. I think that what I would first illustrate to the Minister of Health is our interest in being co-operative. I would show the success of the work improving access times in the hip and knee replacement project, the fact that we've advanced at least \$15 million more this year for improvements on the coronary artery bypass grafts, on mental health, on prostate and breast cancer, and on cataracts. I would illustrate how we are advancing, at least philosophically and practically, towards a position of shortening the wait times and hope that he would understand that what we are attempting to do is to meet those kinds of targets.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week we revealed that this government had sold 260 acres of prime residential land in southwest Edmonton for \$3. Today we learned that there is

yet another parcel of land sold for \$1. After 35 years in power this Progressive Conservative government has so many skeletons in the closet that the PC flag should be the Jolly Roger. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. If the \$1 buyback was only part of the original agreement when this government purchased these parcels of land, why are the remaining details not registered on the title?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I didn't explain well enough the process, and maybe I need to go through it a little slower. The fact is that if an individual or a company, an entity, wants to sell a portion of the land, then they have to have it subdivided. If the government wants to take only a portion of a parcel, then the easiest way to do it is to buy the whole parcel, take out whatever is necessary for the government need, and then return the rest of the land to the seller.

Mr. Speaker, this was the agreement. That's the way it was struck. In fact, I get a little nervous when we start talking about the value of it because, as I indicated earlier, there is currently a lawsuit against the government over these parcels.

Incidentally, yes, there are four parcels. It's about 800 acres – I'm doing your research for you – and we gave back about 290.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:00

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of infrastructure: who now owns this latest parcel of land that was sold to Mr. Sheckter for a dollar? Who owns it now?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there was nothing sold for a dollar. Absolutely nothing. There was land returned to the seller, and in order for that transaction to be legal, you have to have a dollar. That's the process. In fact, I've got no idea who currently owns it. Nor do I care who owns it. That was returned to the seller, and there have been transactions, I'm sure, with that land. What the member should be doing is praising the Lougheed government for thinking about buying these corridors because if we were to go and purchase those properties today, we'd be paying several times what was paid back then.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how many times did this government meet with Mr. Sheckter before agreeing to this buyback for \$1 of all these parcels of land? How many times did you meet with him?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, this was 20 years ago.

Mr. MacDonald: Eighteen years ago.

Mr. Lund: I don't care if it's 20 or 18; it's in that neighbourhood. That was before I was in this House. That was before our current Premier was in this House. So to say that it's this government is wrong.

As a matter of fact, there are a number of things that we've done since then. For example, when we purchase land today, it's gazetted. Back in those days it was not gazetted. That's one of the things that we did as a government, and it's the right thing to do. It's open and accountable. There's nothing shady about this at all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Trans-Alaska Pipeline

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that presently the state of Alaska and their main oil companies and explorers in Alaska are having a talk on a major pipeline that's going to affect Canada. That pipeline is going to go from the north of Alaska down to the southern part, across Yukon, into B.C., and into our Alberta territory. Now, I'm very interested to know if that pipeline is going to be a line that goes straight through Alberta or if it's going to hook into our hub. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Can you tell this Assembly: what is Alberta doing in connection with the Alberta hub or the bullet line that's being proposed from Alaska?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to be able to stand and respond to some of the last questions that the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne will have in this House for some time.

It's been the Alberta position for some time and will continue to be that the Alberta hub is at the central point of our policy and direction. We would welcome that there be more resources from the north, that they be developed, but the Alberta hub, being the central point, is going to be the formation of our direction. We will not support a bullet line coming into this province and exiting straight out. That will not be something that we will support. That's being communicated to all parties – the producers, the state of Alaska – and to all other provinces.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again to the same minister: if there's not going to be a bullet line and they're going to be hooked into the Alberta hub, what advantages can our petrochemical industry see for having this volume of gas coming into our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our position on the Alberta hub actually makes a lot of sense for the producers from the north. They, too, have acknowledged the tremendous economic advantage of connecting into the Alberta hub. It provides access to multiple markets instantly once it arrives here. You're going to be able to utilize excess, spare capacity of existing pipelines to take it to differing markets. We will ensure that there's take-away capacity of Alberta gas to ensure that it's not stranded. The point which he mentioned is that access to the liquids for the petrochemicals so that there's a long-term supply is very vital to ensure that we have a long, prosperous opportunity for the petrochemical industry in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: given that the Alaska economy is as hot as the Alberta economy, where is the labour pool to build such an enormous line, and where is the labour pool to help develop that petrochemical industry here in Alberta?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I hadn't realized that the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne was volunteering to go back to being a welder on that line. We'll need a lot of welders. We're going to need pipefitters. We're going to need many people to help. It's not just that; there's the pipeline from the Mackenzie Valley as well. That's the challenge. It's a wonderful challenge to have. We have

so much activity in the oil industry, and clearly it's not just confined to Alberta. The Alaska pipeline is going to put a tremendous stress on additional labour, certainly, access to labour from Alberta and across the country and also qualified people from around the world. We're going to have to ensure that the training is part of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Health Care Reform Public Consultation

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 23 more than 400 Albertans attended a public forum on health care hosted by the Alberta Liberal caucus in Calgary, a strong indication that Albertans care about the future of health care, that they are hungry for genuine consultation. There were no government members in attendance despite the invitation that was extended to the Premier, the health minister, and all government MLAs on March 8. To the minister of health: why does the minister continue to refuse to attend or hold public town hall meetings?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, some time ago, at the end of February, we announced that throughout March we would be conducting stakeholder meetings, that we would accommodate members of the public who came forward and asked to have an opportunity to be heard. Many of those, in fact, were heard either through MLAs who made arrangements in their constituencies or by invitation from the people that called my office. We have had an opportunity to evaluate what was said during the health policy framework. Could I reflect through the last few years on the consultations that were extensive and exhaustive on the Mazankowski report? Many of the policies from that health policy framework are an outgrowth of those. So it's not as if we have not consulted.

Mr. Speaker, we have not tabled legislation at this point. We have got some indication of how many Albertans feel about the policies, and we'll look forward to a complete analysis of that and then act in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of health: given that the minister only provided Albertans with a vague policy framework, leaving Albertans desperate for details, will the minister commit to transparently collaborating with Albertans before legislation is forced through?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have every intent of indicating to Albertans exactly what we've heard in the consultation process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. At what point will the minister provide real answers to the questions from doctors, seniors, rural Albertans, and even her own members?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, on Friday morning I will be meeting with some physicians on the issue of opting in and opting out. We have never said that we wouldn't still entertain, as we always do, comments from the public. It's just that we have not had any plans for further public consultations. So we continue to get that feedback.

Mr. Speaker, I have spent an extensive amount of time doing follow-up with every one of the larger groups who did pose ques-

tions. We will continue to respond to them. When we're ready, in due course we will bring forward the plans of this government in response to the people on the health policy framework.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Contaminated Sites Cleanup in Calgary

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Calgary-Fort constituency covers the largest industrial park in Calgary, and its surrounding living environment is of critical importance to the daily living of my constituents. My question today is to the Minister of Environment. Given that the Lynnwood Ridge contamination cleanup in my constituency has still not been started, dragging on for four years, too long, and missing too many construction seasons, my constituents become impatient. Can the minister update us on this action of speedy cleanup and when it will start?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My approach would be simply: damn the torpedoes; full speed ahead. To the hon. member, I know that his residents – we all value this environment. Our ministry actually acted very quickly in terms of issuing protection orders relative to this site. As you know, the protection of water and the protection of our citizens was top of mind. But after the order was issued, for the benefit of this House and Albertans I want to say that there were over 225 homes that were impacted, and Imperial Oil took the proper approach. They bought over 200 of those homes. There are about 20 homes that are in fact remaining, and my ministry is working closely with their officials to ensure that they continue to enjoy the protection of our water and the environment, that I know they enjoy, in the hon. member's constituency.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given another situation in the southeast corner of the community of Ogden, where the seepage of cleaning chemicals from the large rail yard was discovered two years ago contaminating underground water, can the minister update us on this cleanup as well?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, one of the key planks of our Water for Life strategy is exactly that: protecting underground water. In fact, I might say that the air quality tests that have been completed in all the buildings that have been affected, of course, have come back in a very positive manner. I might also say that we've required Canadian Pacific Railway to install leading-edge technology to preserve air quality, remove any contaminants, and also monitor the groundwater to ensure that contamination does not leave the area. Now, my ministry continues to work closely with the Calgary health region as well as with CP Rail and will continue to do so in protecting the residents in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. There's another situation in the northeast corner of the industrial park where there was a recycled-oil plant demolished by fire. Now it's found that it has contaminated the land there. I will ask the minister to update us on that cleanup as well.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is making reference, of course, to the Hub Oil site, which now does not pose any threat to residents. My ministry has, in fact, an action plan from Hub Oil in terms of putting land back into use, and that could include commercial and industrial activity. Once we, the Ministry of Environment, are satisfied with Hub Oil's plan and it meets our very, very strict environmental standards, full implementation of this plan will be carried out. I do expect that the plan will be finalized before the end of this year.

To the hon. member: all three sites which the hon. member has mentioned are being cleaned up according to very strict specifications of Alberta Environment, and I want to say as Minister of Environment that our responsibility is to ensure that every Albertan enjoys the environment we've been blessed with.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Fort McMurray Infrastructure Needs

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At Tuesday's municipal council meeting in Fort McMurray a regional councillor confirmed what the Alberta Liberal caucus heard during our latest visit to Fort McMurray, that there's deep concern that the Conservative leadership race could hurt the region's infrastructure priorities. He's concerned that Fort McMurray's interests will be pushed aside or overlooked. Yesterday in budget debate we were pleased to hear the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation state, "We're building a new bridge across the Athabasca." Could the minister please provide the residents of Wood Buffalo with a specific timeline as to when this project is going to be completed?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to assess exactly the dates because, of course, there are a number of variables. It's going to be a very expensive project. We have already committed to a number of major projects in the Fort McMurray area, and of course it will depend a good deal on availability of labour, of materials, of money as we move forward. I can tell you and the people of Fort McMurray that it's on the radar. It's in the planning, so it will eventually happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the soaring construction costs in Fort McMurray, why didn't this government boost the interest-free loan that it offered them when this year's budget was announced because the loan amount is not adequate anymore?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the whole thing with budgeting by the provincial government is a case where you have to look at what is the most critical need, at what has to be done across the province. We can't just focus on one area. Yes, we know that there's a huge, huge demand, a huge need in Fort McMurray and surrounding area, but we are doing things like twinning highway 63. We are finishing the work on highway 881. It's going to be paved all the way. There's a number of other projects that we're funding in that area. The bridge is going to be built. I can't tell you exactly when, but we will build it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that Fort McMurray desperately needs more land for residential development and given this government's willingness in the past to make substantial land deals for a dollar or two, will it offer Fort McMurray the same deal in the Timberlea area rather than charging them market value?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's reasonable that the Minister of Municipal Affairs deal with this question given that the loan referred to in the earlier question is actually a Municipal Affairs loan. I want to make it clear that that loan has not been drawn upon yet, that we're working very closely with the city council in Fort McMurray, and that we will continue to work with them as their needs progress. With respect to the land, we've been monitoring the situation for some time. Seniors has got a very good plan in place. Again, Municipal Affairs is working with the council, continues to work with the council, and is committed to stay on this file as long as is necessary. I can assure the member and I can assure the people of Fort McMurray that we will not allow their situation to fall off of our radar screen. I can assure you of that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Royalty Rates

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Danny Williams has a lot of good advice for Progressive Conservatives in Alberta. He said, and I quote: how can we ask our citizens to continue to bear the burden of high oil prices and turn to companies making billions of dollars and give them tax incentives and breaks on fuel prices? That is not to mention the burden of high utility costs, disappearing water, and dead-end energy planning for the future here in this province. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Given that our fire-sale royalty regime is so far out of step with the going rate paid everywhere else in the world, will the minister now commit to royalty rates that give Albertans fair payment for our energy assets?

Mr. Melchin: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the assertions are completely false, the answer is no.

Mr. Eggen: Well, considering, Mr. Speaker, that hundreds of millions of dollars of Albertans' money will fly out the window while the minister waffles on royalty reforms, why can't the minister impose at least a modest increase in the royalty rates now based on windfall profits that are currently being enjoyed by energy companies?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, you have to remember that our royalty regimes have been put in place in response to the very unique and specific characteristics of our resource. We have some very small-producing conventional wells, a fraction of the volume of many areas of the world in our conventional sources. They come with still some very fixed costs and operating costs that are very expensive. When you look at the economic rent, that's what royalty regimes are designed upon: to ensure that we get our fair share of the economic rent or the excess profit. That has been accomplished in our structure. We have one of the highest cost producing areas of the world. Oil sands is the highest cost area. The largest amount of dollars invested is required to get into the oil sands. All of these factors have to be taken into consideration in designing royalty regimes, which our province has been overwhelmingly successful in, creating more economic activity than any other place in the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the minister when he and the EUB will then get tough on energy companies to ensure completeness and accuracy of volumetric production data on the royalties that we should be collecting now based on the regime that we have now.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General raised the issue of volumetric data in his last report, and I'd like to comment that, yes, we have accepted those recommendations. The EUB has already put a directive out on that that has been in place as of January 1 of this year if he wishes to refer to the directive. Furthermore, there are many ways to ensure that the level of risk is very, very, very minimal in potential loss of royalties. Given the complexity of the industry, the multiple joint venture kinds of partners, the multiple parties reporting on the same level of activity on any one well reduces the risk to a very minimal amount. The structures put in place will continue to ensure that Albertans do collect all the royalties as required.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

2:20

Rural Policing Services

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true that our province's booming economy is the envy of every province in Canada, not to mention across North America, but our healthy economy also attracts criminal activity and not just to the big cities. Criminal networks are spreading out into rural communities and setting up shop. My questions today are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. In Budget 2006 you announced the addition of 80 new RCMP officers. Where will these officers be stationed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, yes, in Budget 2006 we did add 80 new RCMP officers to work on the front line, which actually complements the additional 130 that were announced in last year's budget for front-line policing. We don't do the operational side of where they will go. That's the assistant commissioner of the RCMP, Rod Knecht, that will make those decisions. There are a number of areas that they have to look at: criminal caseload, population growth, and those types of issues that they have in their communities. They look at all of those, and they'll make a decision on where to deploy those in one of the 104 detachments we have throughout a very large geographic province. But if the hon. member has a concern regarding any one of his communities in his constituency, I'd be more than happy to speak to him about that.

Rev. Abbott: Very, very perceptive. Given that the small community of Breton in my constituency recently lost an RCMP position, how can they qualify for the criteria for placement of one of these new officers?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I'd be more than happy to speak to the member, but, again, obviously the municipality of Breton may want to speak to the assistant commissioner. There are other opportunities as well, though, to enhance your local police service through an additional contract with the RCMP through

Canada. So those options are all open, and we can explore those in any community throughout the province as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: would the minister please provide an update on the Alberta police and peace officer training centre and advise how RCMP would utilize this facility?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the police and peace officer training centre, we're moving forward with that program. We actually had to ask the municipalities for additional time for our review committee to go over all of the submissions that we did receive. I think that we were a little astonished with the number that came in. We're working on all of them right now. We hope to have a short list selection by some time in the first part of May, and as we move forward, obviously, we'll be notifying those municipalities. But the plan is in place. We're progressing on the plan to take that before Treasury Board. We're refining the business plan right now, and we'll be taking that to Treasury Board in the next short while.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Specialized Drug Court

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The war on drugs has been a colossal failure. No one is winning. On the supply side drug dealers and organized crime are destabilizing the world, and on the demand side our sons and our daughters are literally dying. The war on drugs just simply fills our prisons to overflowing with offenders with substance abuse problems, and we desperately need other solutions such as drug courts. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Will the minister report on the progress of the Edmonton drug court, and also tell us whether Alberta Justice is supporting a new drug court in Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a good question. Last year the federal government indicated that they were prepared to entertain pilot projects with respect to drug courts across Canada and solicited applications from courts that would be interested in holding or setting up a specialized drug court. In Alberta we had two applications go forward. One was from Edmonton; one was from Calgary. I'm pleased to say that the federal government at that time chose the one in Edmonton. I believe that there were other ones from other parts of the country that were also selected. The Edmonton drug court is in its initial stages. I think it is too early to make any determination with respect to it, but it is a pilot project. We are monitoring it.

I think it's important to understand that the reason that the federal government is involved in a drug court is because this is the one area where the federal government is responsible for the prosecutions. The prosecutors in a drug case are federal Crown prosecutors. Our involvement as a province is to provide support through the provincial court judges, the facilities, and through to the staff that would be in the court at the time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Yes. My supplementary question is to the same minister. He didn't answer the question about Calgary. There seems to be a lot of interest in Calgary about the setting up of a similar drug court. Would Alberta Justice support that?

Mr. Stevens: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we're interested in discussions with the people in Calgary who are interested in pursuing this. As I indicated in my initial answer, there was an application at that time. But additional resources are provided by the federal government relative to a matter which is in large measure, through the prosecution, dealt with by the federal government. I would say to the people in Calgary: contact your MPs; contact the federal Justice minister. I'm happy to work with them to try and arrange for the same kind of support for Calgary that Edmonton got so that we can have a pilot project down there also. I'm perfectly accepting of having another specialized court if we can provide the resources on our side.

Dr. B. Miller: On the same subject. There are so many of our inmates in prisons that have addiction issues. My question is to the Solicitor General, minister of public safety. Will the minister provide mandatory drug treatment programs for offenders in our prisons before they are released back into our community?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do provide programs in our centres for those individuals that do have addictions, and there are a number of programs for them. Obviously, not all offenders go into our correction facilities once they are sentenced. Some of them are released on conditional programs. Some of those programs do include drug addiction programs, whether it's through the John Howard Society or whether it's through some of our other stakeholders that we utilize within the community. So not all of them pertain to just our correction facilities. We do have programs as well in there, but I'd like to remind the hon. member that it is difficult because the average length of stay is only 34 days in a correctional facility. Those are some of the issues we have to deal with. While they are in our facilities, we do deal with the issues, and we do have doctors and psychologists and specialists that are there to assist them.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, very shortly I'll call on the first of a number of members to participate, but first of all our historical vignette of the day. Today four members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly will be appointed to the cabinet, or Executive Council of Alberta, for the first time. Their tenure as a minister will begin immediately upon the administering of the oath of office.

Such, however, has not always been the case in Alberta. If you had been appointed to the provincial cabinet following the 1905 election and you were re-elected in the 1909 election, you could continue to hold a cabinet position. However, if you were an MLA appointed to cabinet for the first time in the post-1909 period, you had to return to your constituency and be re-elected in a by-election. By way of an example, D.M. Marshall was elected as a Liberal member for Olds in the general election of March 22, 1909. He was nominated for the position of minister of agriculture, returned to his constituency, and then was re-elected in a by-election held on November 23, 1909.

This practice was to continue following the general elections of 1913, 1917, and 1921. It was discontinued following the election of 1926. During the time between the elections of 1909 and 1926, 14

such by-elections were held. Five were held in the post-1909 period, one was held in the post-1913 period, three were held in the post-1917 period, and five were held in the post-1921 period. All new appointees were successful in their by-election bids and subsequently served as ministers of the Crown.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: 2:30 **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: I'll call upon the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that I've introduced this group before, but they weren't in the House. Now they've arrived, so I'd like to welcome them. They're 46 students from grade 6 at the Innisfail middle school in Innisfail, and they're accompanied by their teachers, Judy Bourne and Mary Schatz. With that group I would also like to give a special welcome to parent helpers Trevor Lawrence, Tina Reid, Michelle den Dekker, Eva Looker, and Mike Wilkie. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Tartan Day

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise in this Assembly today in recognition of Tartan Day. The 6th of April marks a significant anniversary for Scots across this province, this country, and many parts of the world. Tartan Day is celebrated to commemorate the signing of the declaration of Arbroath, the Scottish declaration of independence, on April 6, 1320. This declaration has been recognized around the world as one of the earliest statements of the rights of humanity to a peaceful, productive, secure, and well-governed life and has become the standard for freedom from oppression and for responsible government.

Also, it's the day to recognize the tartan as a symbol of Scottish culture and clans, providing Scots with a visual symbol of their heritage. Tartan Day offers us the opportunity to recognize the important influence of Scots to the progress of civilization and good government.

Moreover, it allows us the occasion to celebrate the significant contributions made by Scots in our province. From the first contacts of Alexander Mackenzie in the 1780s and the arrival of the fur traders in the north to the coming of missionaries in the south, Scots have played a major role in the formation and progress of our province. Our province has seen significant Scottish influence on almost all areas of life. From early exploration and settlement, government, business and industry, or cultural life Scots have played a vital role in Alberta. Our first Premier, Alexander Rutherford, was even of Scottish descent.

Mr. Speaker, in view of the contributions of Scots to this province, past, present, and future, I ask all hon. members to join me to celebrate Tartan Day.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Finola Hackett

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am particularly proud to rise today to recognize the achievements of a very young constituent of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville who is a true champion. Ms Finola Hackett at the ripe age of 14 and from the fabulous town of Tofield beat out 28 finalists and 160,000 other students across Canada to become the two-time – I repeat: the two-time – National Spelling Bee champion.

Finola, in true Alberta style, beat the representative from Ottawa by spelling the word "dghaisa," which, of course, we all know is a small sailboat from Malta. What makes this so phenomenal, Mr. Speaker, is that I tried to find the word in the *Oxford* dictionary, and it's not there, so how this young girl knew how to spell the word . . .

An Hon. Member: You didn't know how to spell it.

Mr. Stelmach: Maybe that's the problem here.

Finola is a very talented individual in both music and dance. Her family is on their way back from Ottawa. I'd just ask all members to join me in congratulating not only a great ambassador for the town of Tofield but also a true Alberta champion, Ms Finola Hackett.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Calgary Infrastructure Needs

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a time of strong and rapid economic growth within our province. Our healthy supplies of energy resources along with an overwhelming demand for labour have made Alberta a very popular place to call home. All across our province we're experiencing an enormous increase in population as our strong economy continues to attract hard-working and free-enterprising people from all over the country.

As an MLA from Calgary I just want to focus on the Calgary example. All my MLA colleagues from Calgary witness this growth. The Calgary population will increase by 50 new Albertans every day. This represents a severe challenge to Calgary. It is imperative that we are able to address the needs of the growing population by maintaining a quantity and quality of public services. In order to ensure that the citizens are getting the most reliable services possible, it is important that the local authorities and institutions receive appropriate funds from the government, taking into account the estimated growth of population.

As another example, as Calgary continues to grow, there is increasing pressure on the city's infrastructure. There are now close to 60 per cent more the number of vehicles on Calgary roads today than there were 10 years ago. That's about 30 more vehicles added each day, contributing to the considerable traffic congestion throughout the city. Roadways, schools, and health care facilities have all continued to experience the stress of accommodating more and more people.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that it is important to sustain the progress of our economy and promote Alberta – Calgary, Edmonton, and elsewhere – as the finest place to work, live, and raise our families. I believe that this can be accomplished by funding which goes along with population growth.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

National Daycare Program

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The prairie giant Tommy Douglas said that the ultimate test of society was not how its members relied on themselves but how we care for each other. Health care was pioneered by New Democrats, accepted by Conservatives, adopted by Liberals, and paralleled by Social Credit governments. It is not a partisan but a human issue that grows out of a recognized need for us to take care of each other.

In earlier days religious denominations provided help to their members in time of need. In our day this function has been assumed by society as a whole. Child care is a new issue for our generation. It comes from two causes: more families with two parents in the workforce and many families led by a single adult. Few families can afford private child care. Like health care and education earlier, the first initiatives in child care were undertaken by churches. By the 1990s the need was part of the election platform for the Liberal Party of Canada. It took another decade for the national child care agreement. This was achieved by bargaining a variety of agreements between Ottawa and the provinces and territories.

Now a new government in Ottawa plans to scrap the agreement and replace it with a tax credit for parents and incentives to business. It says that it wants to provide greater choice, yet choice was written into the agreement by Alberta's government. There is nothing to stop the Conservatives in Ottawa from introducing their tax credit and keeping the earlier plan, nothing except attitude, a belief that we are not our brothers' and sisters' keepers and that the best society is one where self-reliance is the prime virtue, everyone for himself or herself.

That was the attitude that sank the *Titanic* 94 years ago: a society that boasted new luxuries for those who could pay and space in the lifeboats for those who could get there in time. It took disaster to establish a principle that seems obvious now, that of lifeboats for all. This is a principle of caring that needs to be learned by those who are steering our ship of state.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Mason: The provincial government's third-way proposals to implement two-tier health care are the most radical changes to our health care system in a generation. These proposals will inevitably lead to the deterioration of the quality of the public system, higher costs, and longer wait times. As Albertans become aware of these effects on their health care and their quality of life, opposition has grown, and no wonder. The rural areas of Alberta are already struggling to keep their doctors and other health care professionals. The third way will worsen the situation, leaving thousands of Albertans with far worse health care. Astoundingly, the government has done no research into the impacts of the third way on rural health care.

The government has repeated the claim that within 25 years health care will consume the entire budget of the province. However, there is no indication that the Minister of Health and Wellness has conducted any research to back up these claims. It's an unsubstantiated claim designed to frighten Albertans into supporting more private health care. At the same time, the government refuses to implement proven cost-saving measures within the public system, such as a pharmaceutical savings agency proposed by the NDP that would reduce costs by \$75 million a year in the first year alone.

2:40

During the 2004 election Albertans were told by the Premier that he had no plans to privatize health care and that an election was not the time to discuss health care policy. As a result this government

does not have a mandate from the people of Alberta to dismantle our public health care system. The government has an obligation to Albertans to clearly set out their plans for the health care system and seek a mandate from the people of Alberta in an election before proceeding. Anything else is both deceitful and undemocratic.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on to the next order of the Routine, there is a very distinguished Canadian, if my eyes are serving me correctly, in the members' gallery, and I would like to have him rise. Mr. Jim Edwards is a former Member of Parliament representing a constituency here in Edmonton, a former member of the national cabinet, and I believe currently chairman of the University of Alberta. Welcome, sir.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 294 individuals who petition the Assembly to urge the government to "recognize the financial burden borne by postsecondary students in this province, and to take action by implementing a significant rollback of tuition fees."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to submit some petitions. The first one is from 221 students from the U of A, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to recognize the financial burden borne by postsecondary students in this province, and to take action by implementing a significant rollback of tuition fees.

Similarly, on behalf of my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity 213 signatures from the University of Calgary for the same petition. That brings the total to 3,702.

Also on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity another petition urging the government of Alberta to "consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition with a hundred signatures on it calling on the government to abandon its plans to implement the third way health care reforms, for the Assembly to defeat legislation allowing expansion of private hospitals, private insurance, and allowing doctors to work in both the private and public systems, and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to table today. The first is another instalment of the petition that urges the government of Alberta to immediately provide funding to enable municipalities and the RCMP to hire 500 additional community police officers. This is 150 signatures.

I also have a petition with 114 signatures calling on the government to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health reforms, for the Assembly to defeat legislation allowing the expansion of

private hospitals, insurance, allowing doctors to work in both the private and public systems, and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition with 98 signatures calling on the government to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms, for the Assembly to defeat legislation allowing the expansion of private hospitals, private insurance, and allowing doctors to work in both the private and public systems, and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to present a petition from people, all resident in the city of Calgary, all with, you know, very high incomes, I understand, to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, now assembled. "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 302 students petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to "recognize the financial burden borne by postsecondary students in this province, and to take action by implementing a significant rollback of tuition fees."

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday, April 10, I will move that since there are no written questions appearing on the Order Paper, there will be none required to stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday, April 10, I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head:

Introduction of Bills

Bill 208

Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, the most important right in a free society is the right to disagree with and to criticize government policy. Bill 208 would strengthen this right.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Bill Pr. 1

Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 1, the Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill will amend the Burns Memorial Trust Act to allow for the trustee to determine the amount of trust income to be distributed to beneficiaries provided that the amount is not less than the amount prescribed in the regulations under the Income Tax Act of Canada for disbursement quotas for private foundations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Bill Pr. 2

Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act.

This private bill will repeal and replace the original act of 1962 and update the corporate governance provisions of the original private act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of tablings of letters from individuals. The first is from Stewart Millman, noting that our private system is the most expensive per capita system in the world and the most inefficient.

Next is from Jonathon Lytton, who is concerned that allowing physicians to jump between private and public systems will achieve precisely the opposite of what the people of the province need.

The next letter is from Matthew Smith, who notes that to standardize the referral procedures and invest in a province-wide system to manage health care referrals is more successful, and "seriously, invest in disease prevention."

Next is from Donna Sahuri, who notes the conflict of interest in having doctors work in both systems and wonders, "Whose best interest would it be to provide proactive medical advice to avoid these surgeries?"

2:50

From Danny Sutherland, who notes, "If the current health system is so unsustainable, then why are we receiving \$400.00 cheques?"

From Frank Meunier, who states, "We Canadians are proud of the fact that anyone – no matter what their economic status – can receive quality care."

From Elisa Sereno-Janzen and Tim Janzen. They believe, "It is time for Alberta politicians to think of those of us on the middle and bottom of the totem pole of our economy."

A form letter that is signed by a number, but two specifically: Janet Carruthers and Elizabeth Loeffler.

Thank you.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(5) I would ask the Government House Leader to share with us the government business for the week of April 10 to 13.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would be indeed a pleasure to do that. On Monday, April 10, in the afternoon we will deal with private members' business, which normally includes written questions, motions for returns, public bills and orders other than government bills and orders. On Monday evening from 8 to 9 we will continue with private members' business in the form of motions. That would be Motion 506. At 9 p.m. we will go to Government Bills and Orders, and in Committee of the Whole we should be able to address Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act; Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act; and Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006.

On Tuesday afternoon we'll deal with government bills and orders, specifically Committee of Supply, that being day 6 of 24, and the item under discussion will be the Ministry of Environment as per the Official Opposition's request. Tuesday evening at 8 we will deal with Committee of Supply, day 7 of 24, so to speak, and that will be the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. Assuming things go well and we have time, we would very much like to look at second reading of Bill 28, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act; Bill 24, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act; Bill 25, the Securities Amendment Act; Bill 26, the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act; and Bill 27, the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act.

On Wednesday, April 12, under Government Bills and Orders we would look at Committee of Supply, day 8 of 24, and consider estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education. Wednesday evening we will look at day 9 of 24 and in Committee of Supply discuss the estimates of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. There being time thereafter, one would hope to get to Committee of the Whole on Bill 10, the Engineering, Geological, and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act; Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act; Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, and otherwise as might be indicated on the Order Paper.

Thursday, April 13, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we would do day 10 of 24 under Committee of Supply and consider estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services, and that should be it for that week. There may be other stuff on the Order Paper that could get attended to. We'll see. Thereafter, I'm anticipating that the House would adjourn for one week for Easter and return on April 24.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Human Resources and Employment

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders the first hour is set between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

The hon. Minister for Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move the 2006 estimates for Human Resources and Employment. In addition, I'd like to introduce the staff that are here with us today, who will be taking notes and helping me throughout the process: Ulysses Currie, our deputy minister; Alex Stewart, assistant deputy minister of corporate services; Duncan Campbell, senior financial officer, finance and corporate services; Shelley Engstrom, director of financial corporate services; Dale Silver, assistant public service commissioner of PAO; Erin Johnston, executive assistant of PAO; and also, of course, Donna Ballard, my executive assistant.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I would also like to take a moment at this time to thank the other 2,000 or so staff that we have that work very hard for our government to deliver services to the public. Thank you very much.

Alberta, of course, is in a very fortunate position, Mr. Chairman. One of the challenges we face is managing the growth and opportunities our strong economy brings. Human Resources and Employment will continue to meet the needs of today while taking steps to ensure that Alberta's prosperity continues in the future.

To make the best of our opportunities and to address our challenges, Mr. Chairman, I'm asking for \$790,278,000 to support the work our ministry requires. The ministry, of course, includes the Department of Human Resources and Employment, personnel administration office, Alberta Labour Relations Board, and the Appeals Commission for workers' compensation. The workers' compensation, which is an independent, employer-funded organization, is not included in the ministry's business plan.

Alberta's economy is hot. In 2005 our unemployment rate continued to be the lowest in the country at 3.9 per cent. Our success is a national good-news story, and Albertans should be proud of what they have accomplished by working hard. It is a good time to be a worker in Alberta. In 2005 the average Alberta wage increased to \$21 per hour. I'm sure you have noticed that help wanted signs are popping up all over.

Employers are having a tough time finding and keeping workers. Human Resources and Employment has just wrapped up consultation on a proposed strategy to guide labour force development over the next 10 years, and this is short- and long-range strategy. I expect to release this final labour force strategy this fall; however, we are also taking action now to deal with the short-term issues.

In 2006 and '07 Human Resources and Employment will dedicate close to \$294 million to programs and services to address skills and labour shortages, an increase of approximately \$25 million over what was spent last year. This includes, of course, investing in skills training, offering services to job seekers and employers, and providing supports to working people, such as the Alberta child and adult health benefits. We will help more Albertans take training, bringing the total to over 30,000 people. For example, an estimated 5,000 people will be helped with their tuition and living expenses while they learn a trade, training in occupations experiencing labour shortages will be available to 4,000 people, and 1,200 people will be able to take self-employment training.

3:00

I have always said that our priority is to help groups underrepresented in the workforce to get the skills and support they need to get jobs and keep jobs. This year Human Resources and Employment will invest over \$6 million in aboriginal training to employment, an increase of \$4 million. By partnering with aboriginal communities in the private sector and training institutions, we expect 1,300 people to obtain new skills. We will also continue to provide specialized services to people with disabilities, young people, immigrants, and older workers.

This fiscal year Human Resources and Employment will invest over \$45 million, which is an increase of \$6 million, to implement strategies under the Alberta government's immigration policy. English as a Second Language training will be expanded, allowing a total of 3,500 people to benefit; 1,300 foreign-trained professionals will be assisted to get the Canadian work experience they need to fill job vacancies; and we will work with professional associations to assist in timelier foreign credential recognition.

Human Resources and Employment spent less than expected on training in the last year. We have made program changes to help us meet our targets this time. As you know, we no longer have welfare offices in Alberta. We have now 59 service location centres across the province, where we help both job seekers and employers, and of course 19 of these 59 centres are colocated with the federal government. We also help people over the phone and the Internet. In 2006-07 we will increase funding to job placement services to enhance and expand our services.

Throughout the province our staff are developing innovative ways to partner with business and the community. Just a couple of weeks ago Human Resources and Employment worked with community groups in Red Deer to hold a job fair, which attracted 88 employers and more than 2,000 job seekers.

The nature of the work done in our offices has changed considerably in the last decade. Once our people enter the workforce, Human Resources and Employment wants them to be safe on the job. Phase 2 of Work Safe Alberta is under development and will continue to identify new opportunities to reduce injuries in Alberta work sites. We will focus on youth and industry sectors with poor safety records. Since we implemented Work Safe Alberta, the lost-time claim rate has been reduced from 3.4 per cent in 2000 to an estimated 2.4 in 2005. This is a 24 per cent drop, a record low, and means that there were 10,000 fewer work injuries last year compared to where we would have been had we not improved the system. Claims fully funded by the workers' compensation have dropped by \$285 million per year, which means additional dollars for the employers.

I am committed to building on this success. This fall I held a minister's forum on workplace safety to consult with stakeholders on a new three-year strategy, the workers' compensation health fund, a workplace health and safety program, contributing in excess of \$12 million to support Work Safe Alberta. In 2006-07 workers' compensation will contribute an additional \$2 million. As a result, Human Resources and Employment plans to hire more occupational health and safety officers and other staff who will work with stakeholders to ensure our workplaces are safe. As part of Work Safe Alberta we are also developing a road safety at work strategy, working with Alberta Education to enhance workplace safety resources in schools, and promoting best practices.

Despite our hot economy there are Albertans who have significant challenges that make it difficult for them to get jobs or keep jobs. These not expected to work clients will see their financial assistance increased by 5 per cent starting May 1 of this year. This will bring the total spending on financial health and other benefits for this

group to more than \$151 million. Close to 12,000 Albertans will benefit from this rate increase. For example, a single parent with two children will receive an increase of \$51 per month, raising the family's monthly financial assistance to \$1,030 per month.

Human Resources and Employment is also increasing the support available to individuals and families who are making a fresh start after leaving abusive situations. Our budget requirement to help people in transition, in other words people who are between jobs or already working, is lower in 2006-2007 due to Alberta's strong economy and our success in helping people move back into the workforce. In fact, an average of 26,900 households received financial assistance in 2005-06, compared to 28,935 the previous year. This is a decrease of more than 2,000.

If our caseloads had remained at the same levels as they were before the welfare reforms which were commenced under this good Premier and our government in 1992, the government would have spent an additional \$600 million per year, or a total of \$8 billion since 1992. That's a lot of money saved, Mr. Chairman, and that money, of course, was directed to other high-needs programs. During my answers, I may expand on that particular area. As a result, this year Human Resources and Employment can commit more money to supporting employment and training. While the total amount committed to helping people in transition has decreased, I want to make it clear that we are not decreasing the amount of assistance that we provide to these individuals and families. In '06-07 we expect to spend \$138 million on financial health and other benefits for people in transition. Of course, people who are between jobs also benefit from our investment in employment services.

I'd like to take a few moments now to discuss the personnel administration office, better known as PAO. Maintaining a strong public service is very important to Alberta because without a strong public service and good employees our system of government would probably not operate. PAO works with ministries by developing and implementing progressive corporate human resource strategies. Our government faces the same challenges as other employers in Alberta. We are trying to find and keep talented employees in a labour market where there is a lot of competition for workers. Our demographics show that 40 per cent of the executive managers in our public service are over the age of 55; 27 per cent of all management employees are eligible to retire by 2007 and 2008. It is important to invest today to maximize the impact of those changes and make sure that we have a strong public service for tomorrow.

This year the PAO budget is increasing by \$4.1 million to approximately \$17.7 million. This additional funding, of course, will benefit all ministries across the government. Three million dollars is going to an executive and senior managers' development initiative so that as current leaders begin to retire, there are people with knowledge and skills needed to move into their roles. The remaining increases will be used to support other human resource initiatives to ensure that our public service is an employer of choice with a quality work environment and quality employees.

I would like now to turn my attention to the Appeals Commission for the Workers' Compensation Board. The commission is independent from the Workers' Compensation Board. It hears appeals from workers or employers on decisions of the review bodies of the Workers' Compensation Board. The operating costs of the commission are paid from general revenue and then reimbursed from the workers' compensation accident fund. An increase of \$1.4 million in the commission's budget will help decrease the number of days it takes to process these appeals.

3:10

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, in 2006-07 Human Resources and Employment will build Alberta's workforce and continue to help

those in need. Over \$790 million will be invested in Alberta's people, skills, and workplaces and in building a strong public service.

I have presented the highlights of where these dollars will be invested. I look forward to comments and questions from the hon. members, and I will try to answer as many questions as possible. If there are any questions that I can't answer today, of course the staff are here to take notes, or we'll read the Blues and answer in writing.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I must compliment the minister on a professional and well-delivered report on a very, very important department of this government. This ministry, indeed, is important. In fact, along with Education and Advanced Education it is one of the most important when we look to the future of Alberta. It does cover skills development. It does cover people in need. It does cover labour relations and personnel administration. It does cover WCB. It does cover the Appeals Commission. It does cover so much, but much of it deals with how we work and how we develop our workforce. The minister mentioned that there is a major push to have a final report on the labour force strategy for this fall, and I welcome the moves that are being made in order to at least look at this.

One of the greatest problems we have seen in my short period in this Legislature is the fact that there is not a lot of information on the labour market that has been provided to really give a true picture of how the labour market operates in our province and in our country. So often – and I've said this before – we've relied on certain studies that have been done by certain organizations, which are good organizations, and they do them in good faith, I'm sure, but perhaps they will do a survey of large employers, and those large employers will say that they will need lots of employees. It's sort of like going to do a survey in a grade 3 class and asking them how much candy the grade 3 kids will want in the next year. Of course, they'll say they need lots of candy. They'll always need lots of employees, in the same sense, when you're talking to large employers.

Some of the studies are very good. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has come up with some that I think are quite comprehensive and deal with a lot of smaller businesses, and they look at the needs. One of the interesting ones in the CFIB studies, of course, is the fact that one of the problems is the ability to pay for new employees. What that underlines for small businesses in our Alberta market is the clear fact that much of the demand side in our market today is being driven by \$60 to \$70 per barrel oil and similar high levels of pricing in gas, because of those high levels, the incredible amounts of wells, incredible amount of exploration, and incredible amount of pipeline work and other activity that we see in the conventional oil and gas industry.

We also see down the road an incredible amount of need in the oil sands industry. We're seeing right now in Fort McMurray the development of projects which we knew were coming for five years, which we have had approved for quite some time, which we knew were in development for a long time. Obviously, we didn't have the labour market things that we needed for Fort McMurray in place for that area for now. We're going to have a greater problem down the road as our actual needs increase. I'll get back to that a little later. But the need for good statistics which really look at the actual supply side and how we can also affect the supply side is absolutely important in the development of this ministry.

Now, I'll just touch on a number of the line items in the ministry. We have many, many different types of projects that are coming up

that will need skilled employees, that will need people to work and who will actually have to have their skills and trades and other types of professional qualifications developed and put into the proper perspective and proper force for our economy.

Just to look at a number of line items – and I'll go through them, starting on page 276 of the government estimates. Some of these will just be questions as to the nature of the changes in the spending.

I look at 2.2.3, youth connections. I see a budget increase in 2.2.3, but if we look at the actual spending of the 2005-06 forecast, it shows as a decrease. Why is that?

I look at the basic skills and academic upgrading, and I don't see a significant increase in that. You know, we're seeing a lot of need to bring those basic skills up.

One that gives me some consternation is the decrease in the disability-related employment supports. If I could have some understanding of why there is a decrease at all in 2.2.6.

The STEP program, 2.2.7. I see that the budgeted amounts are the same and stayed the same although the budget was not at all nearly taken up last year. I think that the STEP program opens up some opportunities, and I know it'll close fairly soon. You know, I look to some of the initiatives such as the one put forward by Ruth Kelly, the past president of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, to provide summer employment for aboriginal students. If this could somehow in the short term be looked at to ensure that the STEP program could be made available to employers in this area, this would be of great benefit, I think, to many aboriginal students to get into the workforce this year.

I look at 2.2.8, the self-employment training. Again this was an area where the monies were not spent from the budgeted year, so the budget is much reduced. I talked to many people in my constituency, and self-employment and small businesses are areas where I think we could see some major effort put into publicizing the things that people could put forward to be self-employed.

I appreciate the comments of the minister in his opening statements on supporting people in transition, but I still wonder why these income supports are so decreased in much of 2.4. In reality, some of the supports across the board do not reflect the fact that many of these supports did not go up for many, many years.

3:20

Just moving on to page 277. You know, I look at some of the professions and occupations. It's one of the things that, as legislation is put forward in this House, often does not get very much publicity, but it's very important to those people in those professions. Being in opposition, I of course take the responsibility seriously to speak to these professions and to try and understand some of the varying needs that are targeted by this legislation, which affects how our economy works in a big way quite often.

I was at a rally here some few weeks back with people who are very, very concerned about the upcoming veterinarians' amendments. They are stakeholders, and they complained that there was no government representative that would come out. You know, I'm very pleased, most often, with the employees from Human Resources and Employment, and many of them do an excellent and very professional job. It would be very nice to see, when there is a request for consultation, a request for government representatives – it doesn't have to be politicians or MLAs or the minister – at least some help and some information from those that provide some understanding from the government.

Again, you know, I seem to have run into that somewhat with the bill regarding engineers and engineering technologists. It seemed to drop off the radar screen for a bit. Some things were problematic, I think, for both organizations, APEGGA and ASET, the association

that represents the engineers and the one that represents the engineering technologists, on how that developed. I'd like to see the departmental representatives work very, very closely to try and deal with some of the issues that these organizations have. Some can be very difficult and almost need the wisdom of Solomon to try and take care of, but they are indeed very important for the tens of thousands of people working in these occupations.

The Labour Relations Board, item 4. I've heard tremendous criticism of its operations over the last year and a half. Some people, well-respected lawyers, have called it the Christian Labour Association implementation board or the CLAC state union board. The impression of fairness for some reason does not seem to exist. This is supposed to be just like any court, where the reputation of the adjudicator, the reputation of the board, the reputation of what in fact is a labour court should not be in question as an independent and impartial arbiter.

In looking at item 5, the personnel administration office, there are indeed many challenges, and I touched on those in some questions in question period and on how the ministry will look at it. I've had some people in the government who have come to me quietly and questioned what the government is doing in its own demographic in its attempts to actually bring aboriginals into the workforce in the government, in attempts to increase its access for people with disabilities, its access for people who are nontraditional perhaps – I don't know if nontraditional is the right word – nontraditional employees for the Alberta government.

WCB has made some improvements. I think there always is a need for greater improvement in WCB. It's an area of great controversy. It so often is an organization that touches on people's lives when they are reduced from being productive citizens almost immediately, at least in the severe cases, to those who all of a sudden have no income and may have no prospects and, in the very difficult cases, go through endless appeals and difficulties with some of the caseworkers. Many, many of the caseworkers are very professional, very good, but you run into the odd ones, and somehow I don't know if there are all the proper safeguards in place to ensure that indeed all of the caseworkers are taking the best interests of the people who look to workers' compensation as their fallback. All workers, indeed, look to that in many, many occupations because they have to deal with it because there is no recourse to the courts. This is the nature of workers' compensation.

I've had some of the people in occupations come to me, again, to look at improvements in how workers' compensation affects them specifically, and I think my colleague from Edmonton-McClung will speak to that. I hope he has time to get up. One for sure is the extension of the period for myocardial infarction for firefighters past the 24 hours to at least a week. Another would be the extension of that to other emergency workers, specifically volunteer firefighters, who are often in exactly the same situations that professionals are, and certainly with police and emergency personnel and other personnel who are involved in this area.

The clear need to look, though, in this next year to try and ensure that we take care of some of our labour-market problems I think is paramount. There's going to be great and increased controversy as we look for ways to provide personnel for the oil sands. There is a very well established interprovincial labour mobility system in place that has actually been able to supply most of the projects to date. There continues to be unemployment in other provinces.

I would ask the minister to look at some of the successes in the department in the past with engineers, to look at perhaps expanding past the engineers and into some of the trades areas, to look at the Pacific Northwest as an area to have greater provincial mobility for workers. This could provide economic advantage not only to

Alberta but also to our neighbours in the northwest states and the other provinces and territories as well in Canada.

The nature of our labour market will see huge ups and downs as price fluctuations, as projects, and as the nature of the workforce even within those projects moves up and down. There are cycles even in a major oil sands plant where, for example, all the insulators will be hired at the end, and there will be none needed at the beginning, so you'll have big unemployment in the province if all those projects go at once and need their insulators all at once. The same goes often with welders and such.

3:30

You get interindustry movement. Conventional oil and gas will often take rig welders, who are also often in demand in the pipeline industry, which is also very related to conventional oil and gas. Quite often these rig welders will move into industrial welding and can do so quickly. It makes for stats that are sometimes difficult to understand. Those things should be brought into flow in terms of how we train people and how we bring immigrants into the country.

The steep employment curve in conventional oil and gas – and it's not exactly a curve. It's been a cliff as tens of thousands of wells have been drilled in Alberta. This steep cliff is something that will cause some difficulty in the future because once all of those are drilled and the numbers for drilling drops off, suddenly we don't need all those people.

The Chair: Does the hon. minister wish to respond?

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I would like to thank the hon. member for his professionalism. As my critic he always handles it very professionally and is always interested in making it better for the employees out there. So I thank you for that and also thank you for some of the recommendations you've made.

To start with, you mentioned the labour force strategy, the short- and long-term, the 10-year strategy we're developing, and you're thinking of, you know, the positive sides on that. I would also hope that as the process moves forward, you would help us whenever you can participate in the process because I'm sure that you have some expertise in certain areas that we may not, and we sure can use your assistance.

You are right; there are real problems in identifying labour needs. I think it's something that probably should have started years ago, but industry and training institutions were doing their own assessments and determinations as to what jobs may become available and the types of training programs that may be developed in order to provide the labour force that was needed.

You are right; the oil sands industry is going to continue to provide thousands of jobs in the next 10 years by all indications. In fact, I think that within 10 years or less there will be over 400,000 jobs developed, and by all indications we may be able to provide, you know, 300,000. That would be a shortage of at least 100,000 employees. So, yes, we have to do a lot of work to ensure that we do meet the needs.

One other that you mentioned that's really important is the Youth Connections itself and some of the decreases in expenditures in that and also, of course, the decrease in employment disabilities and the STEP program not being fully utilized. I would suspect that the reason for that is the competition from the private industry, which possibly pays more. STEP has to pay minimum wage. Competition from the private industry probably hires a lot of these youth that used to work through STEP programs. On one side, it's positive. On the other hand, as long as we don't reduce the STEP program to

the point where it's not there anymore if the economy goes down. It's always hard to bring back programs. So we'll have to make sure that we do proper marketing, maybe more marketing in the STEP program to ensure that it's fully utilized. On the side of STEP for aboriginal communities or aboriginal youth, again, I know that's a real challenge, and we will definitely do more work on that.

One area you mentioned also, which is very important, is the income support and the lack of increase in providing more dollars for those people that are not expected to work. For the benefit of the members here and the public I'd just like to explain what has happened in the area of welfare reforms and how we're where we're at today because it is very, very critical.

Back in '92-93, when our Premier took over and started restructuring government, I was assigned as the minister of family and social services and aboriginal affairs. At the time the welfare caseload was about 97,000 cases, and 80 per cent of the people on the system were single people and couples without children, that were ready to go to work. They were using up most of the dollars that the high-needs area needed, like persons with developmental disabilities, aboriginal people, and also, of course, children's services, who were under this department. Our plan with the restructuring was to get those 80 per cent back into the workforce as quickly as possible through training. Today you see the welfare caseload down to around 25,000 cases. Only 12,000 of those are expected to work. The other 12,000 or so are not expected to work, and we need to continue looking at how we may assist those. It may be wise for some families to move into the AISH program because I think AISH may provide them more money and more benefits than being on Alberta Works. So we're looking at that very closely.

What has happened since the restructuring started in 1993 is that the original target was laid out to have children's services with its own separate ministry, and as part of the reforms, of course, today you see the hon. Children's Services minister, sitting next to me here, with a pretty large budget. The program I think is going well because those dollars are now concentrated on families and children. At one time those dollars were used by single people and couples without children, sitting on the system. The other part, of course, is the aboriginal section of the original department. Again, there is a minister of aboriginal affairs now, whose sole responsibility is to work with aboriginal people. The third one, of course, is persons with developmental disabilities, which now has its own ministry, also, with its own budget, concentrating on expending those dollars in those high-needs, targeted areas.

So I think that the social reforms worked very well because the money now is used by the high-needs area. That was the original plan back in '92-93, and I think it's worked very well. What we need to do now is monitor very closely for those 12,000 or so that are not expected to work. How can we further assist those people?

Another area that you mentioned was the professions and occupations. The veterinarians were one you mentioned that had a concern. The proposed bill, of course, in that particular area was pulled and, therefore, will not go ahead at this time. The other one you mentioned, of course, was the engineers and engineering technologists. We've been working with those two groups. Both did a presentation to the standing policy committee. There is a letter going out from our department to both of those organizations, suggesting as to how they may resolve the disagreement they have.

Of course, the other that you mentioned, which is very important again – and thanks for all of those recommendations – is the issue of the Labour Relations Board and its neutrality. We'll definitely have a serious look at that.

3:40

The PAO in relation to hiring more aboriginal youth in government. We definitely need to do a lot of work on that. I do get phone

calls from people asking me: how do I get on to be a government employee? I think we need to look at the field level mainly as to: how does a person, say in Athabasca, access a government job? There are challenges, and I think we can always improve that.

The Workers' Compensation Board. I would like to thank you for your comments. Yes, I think they've made improvements. The approval process, to start with, I think has improved quite a bit. Of course, the appeals process and the timeline it's taking to do appeals and stuff like that I think has also improved. I'd like to thank you for your positive comments on that. Of course, we'll continue monitoring the workers' compensation very closely in relation to firefighters, police, and other volunteers, and you can be assured that we will make adjustments in that particular area as required. Again, I could use your help in that area.

The other one, of course, is the mobility of workers not only within Alberta but also across Canada and maybe even into the U.S. You mentioned the northwest region, if that is something that we need to look at.

The last one you mentioned before the clock rang was the issue of immigrants and the need to possibly have more immigrant workers in Alberta. Of course, I am in charge of the Alberta immigration policy, which we announced last fall. Basically, that policy is designed to market Alberta. In the past what happened is that we worked with the federal government under their immigration policy. In fact, if an employer wanted to hire an employee through either the temporary foreign workers or through direct immigration, they had to go through the federal government.

As you're aware, the federal government's policies in the past have been to bring at least 250,000 people into Canada. The problem with that is that most of the people settled in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec, and a smaller percentage settled in areas like Alberta. In fact, through the normal immigration process, out of 250,000 I think that we got 16,000 last year, and 3,000 of those moved back to larger centres. The other part is that 50 per cent of the people that came through the immigration were professional people, and only 5 per cent were technical trades, so we need to make some adjustments there.

Now, I haven't met with the new immigration minister yet. I am in the process of setting up a meeting to try to find out what their policy is going to be and how we may improve the process. Through Economic Development, who is a partner in our immigration policy along with the Minister of Advanced Education and the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, we are putting a process together that will actually go out and market Alberta. I won't be doing that; the Economic Development minister will. Once we go out and market Alberta and convince the individuals to come to Alberta, then what we'll have to do is ensure that the federal government's approval processes are in place to deal with them as rapidly as possible so that they can come here.

Another one, of course, that I've been working on is with an individual restaurant owner, in fact in Edmonton here, where they said, yes, we can bring family members that want to come here and work, but the criteria you have to set up as far as giving them a stable employee for a year was not there. In other words, they could spend money, bring an employee into Alberta, and the employee could leave immediately and go somewhere else. They're making some good suggestions as to how we could allow companies like that to bring people in, work, and stay at least maybe a year on the job before they can move on to another job. I think that's another thing we need to look at, more flexibility in that area.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In 20 minutes I'm sure we can cover quite a large territory.

Mr. Cardinal: We need your help.

Mr. Martin: Oh, I know that. I know that, yes, and you're about to get it.

Mr. Chairman, I want to first of all talk, not for a long time, about the labour laws in this province and, as we have an overheated economy, to try to find some balance in terms of the employers and the employees. Of course, we will come back, first of all, to what we know about some very terrible strikes that have occurred. The most recent one was, of course, at Tyson, where you had an antilabour employer that was bound and determined on a first contract to get rid of the union. The minister and I have had this conversation, and I would hope that he would not rule this out. Finally, the union was able to win there, and they did establish a contract, and they're now settled in that particular union, with Tyson being famous throughout the world for being antilabour, sort of Arkansas first laws.

The point that I would make to the minister is that these things come and go, and as surely as night follows day, there'll be another confrontation if we do not have first contract arbitration. It seems to be working well in all the other provinces except three, especially the major provinces that have large labour forces. I think, Mr. Chairman, that first contract arbitration forces both sides to negotiate. Otherwise, somebody else is going to come in with arbitration that one or the other may not like or both of them may not like. So I think that is a very important situation. I know the minister said previously that they would look at it. When I asked him questions, he said: stay tuned. So I'm staying tuned, but a reminder that we think this is absolutely crucial.

Now, I believe that in this province we have the most unfair labour laws, you know, in the country. I know that they like to say "the world," well, maybe the most unfair labour laws in the world or the universe because that seems to be what the government talks about all the time. But, Mr. Chairman, that in particular should be, I think, a no-brainer. Nobody wants to go through the Tyson thing again, I don't think, employers or employees, if they have common sense and want some way to do it. We certainly don't have to open up the whole labour code to do that. I would hope – and I will keep putting pressure on the minister – that he begins to look at that.

I know it's not going to happen with this particular government, but if I had my druthers, I'd do as other provinces have done. When you see these particular strikes – and I go back to the Gainers strike in the 80s where you had replacement workers walking across the picket lines – that leads to a very dangerous situation, Mr. Chairman. At some point I would hope that we would look at banning replacement workers because I think strikes would be settled a lot quicker.

The only other thing that I want to talk about in the labour laws that did come up, too, that I think we should look at comes back to what the hon. members talked about: the Labour Relations Board. There is a perception – and we must be clear about this perception – that it's unfair, that the Labour Relations Board is always going to come on the side of management. I think the most recent example of that was in the Finning situation. Well, we had the example going back with health care.

I remember being here in the Assembly very early on where there were the 24-hour unions, where companies could get out of union contracts by setting up spinoff unions for 24 hours. That was a major debate. I really worry about that tendency. It again deals with our friends CLAC. It seems that they are involved here all the time. The Labour Relations Board ruled, I think, correctly on Finning and

then reversed themselves with the bigger one, where you can set up subsidiaries as they did in Finning, where one company can say: well, we still own it, but we can go across the street or down the way a couple of blocks and set up another subsidiary, and therefore we don't have to belong to that same union. I think this is a very bad tendency that major corporations could start to do. Why did the Labour Relations Board rule that they still had union rights or successor rights to begin with and then turn it over? I think it's those types of decisions that always seem to go against labour that have people bothered. If people don't trust sort of the quasi-judicial boards set up and they believe that they're one-sided – and Finning was a good example – then you're not going to get the sort of co-operation that we need in this overheated economy.

3:50

I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, if we could begin to look – I hesitate to open up the labour laws, though, with this government because it could get worse for labour. I think those are really absolutely crucial things if there's to be some semblance of fairness. I think it makes good economic sense to have that fairness, too, as we're trying to bring skilled employees in. They want some fairness in the workplace, so I would suggest to the minister that he at least take a look at these sorts of things. Those are sort of big issues. At the very minimum I think that if the minister said that he was going to keep looking at first contract arbitration, that would at least be a start. I, for one, would applaud him over on this side if all of a sudden we were to see that.

Now, just moving along, another area in labour that doesn't fall in the labour code but is a real irritant is this division 8 with Horizon. Mr. Chairman, it bothers me that we can have this sort of act. I know it was used in the past. I believe it has been there in the tar sands. The minister can correct me, but it has probably been in the books for 30 years or so, but it was never used the same way it was used just recently to deal with the CNRL project. For the first time in 30 years the government is allowing an oil sands project to bypass normal collective bargaining with the construction trades, which guarantees working conditions, wages, and benefits for skilled tradespeople. In one case I know it has to do with overtime, I think going from double time to time and a half.

Mr. Chairman, again, I suggest that if we want to have labour peace, there has to be some fairness. I can't believe that with this other union, the union of convenience for employers, CLAC, waiting to be there all the time, this is fair. I would suggest that we need skilled tradesmen. We really do. We need to bring them in from other parts of Canada. We need to do all the things that the Member for Edmonton-Manning was talking about in terms of training. But if you have labour laws that people perceive as unfair, it's going to be very hard to get this.

Now, I know that this is not part of the labour code, but I doubt that there would be anywhere else that I am aware of in Canada that would ever have a section 8, this sort of bill, and for it to be used. I think that we'll regret that in the future. I'd hope that the minister would never use that again and would do something about getting good bargaining for us, getting good collective agreements. The building trades in the province have bent over backwards in the past to be co-operative on major projects, and, Mr. Chairman, I'm sure they would do it again, but you can't do it this way. You can't do it this way. Again, these corporations aren't exactly poverty stricken. They can afford to pay a decent wage. The Alberta advantage has to be there not only for the companies but for the employees.

I want to move from labour laws, though, into sort of the employment standards debate. I know that there's been a review. I think, from my understanding of my conversations with the minister, that

we're still under review and that there won't be any announcements until next spring, perhaps, but I would like to throw out some things.

I was shocked, and maybe the minister was too, and I would like him to comment about the compassionate leave. It seems that, Mr. Chairman, we're the only province that doesn't have compassionate leave for people who are looking after relatives that are I guess dying. They can't take time off. There's no such thing as compassionate leave. This is certainly not an Alberta advantage that I think we can be proud of. I would ask the minister for his thoughts on that.

As I understand it, compassionate leave works much the same as pregnancy and parental leave. A person is allowed to return to the same job after time away. I'm told that workers in Quebec and Saskatchewan can receive up to 12 weeks of compassionate leave. The Liberal government in B.C. has changed its employment standards; it gives eight weeks. Of course the federal government has it. So I'd like to ask the minister if that's part of the review for employment standards. If not, it should be, I think.

The other comments I want to make on this are on child labour, Mr. Chairman. In this overheated economy we can't take 12-year-old kids. It's time for them to be kids. If the parents need money, that's a different issue. That should not be part of the employment standards. I would hope – again, I know the minister has made comments about it – that we look at this whole situation of child labour. I think it's wrong. I think it can lead to safety concerns. I think there are all sorts of problems. Surely employers in the fast-food industry or wherever they are can afford to do better than that.

That leads me to – and I just have one question, and I'm not sure the answer to this that minister can allude to – the employment standards if we're looking at night work. I remember in Calgary a few years ago a young woman was killed at work. Are we reviewing that whole situation? I know it happened under a federal act in Ottawa recently. Is that being reviewed, and are the standards there for people that happen to work alone at night? It's a very dangerous situation in cities that are growing. They're not the same cities that they used to be. We know that those things are there. So I'd ask the minister if that's part of the review.

The other part of the review, Mr. Chairman, that we really have to look at is the whole idea of farm workers having no employment standards. Now, nobody is suggesting that people who work on a farm are those one or two people that are there periodically. We're not talking about this. We have a growing agribusiness in this province, and for an agribusiness to not even have to go by minimum employment standards, to me, is absolutely ridiculous.

I use the example – and I've used it with the minister before – of the most recent strike at Tyson, UFCW. On the one side of the road you had people fighting, admittedly, to keep a labour union, fighting for a labour union; you had people with the same company right across the road that didn't even have employment standards. Now, does that make any sense at all? Surely, we've got to get away from this idea.

If it's a family farm, we could say one or two employees or whatever. But we have a growing agribusiness, and surely, Mr. Chairman, they should be part of the labour code. I think that's a no-brainer. If you're talking to people – you have to convince the others – talk to them about Tyson: one, a labour union; across the street, employees without even employment standards. I think that says it all. So I would hope that that would be part of this review, and I'd look forward to it.

Mr. Chairman, the other area I want to talk briefly about – there's a lot we could talk about with the WCB, but we don't have that amount of time – is the Appeals Commission. The minister had some interest in that. We keep getting more and more calls into our

constituency office. I don't think I'm speaking for anybody here. The WCB and the Appeals Commission take a lot of our time. We've increased the staff over there, but there are still six months delay on the Appeals Commission. Justice delayed that long is justice denied. Now, there are other problems with the Appeals Commission about who they're hiring, and the minister knows that a lot of them are coming right from the WCB. Some people believe that there is still that culture of denial there. There seems to be a preoccupation with people moving from one step into the other. Surely we can do better with the Appeals Commission in terms of the delays, and I wonder if the minister can give us an update on what's happening there. Why are we increasing employees from 33 to 50, yet the length of appeals is still longer and longer. Perhaps he could talk to us about that.

4:00

In the remaining time I just want to quickly turn to Alberta Works. The minister has alluded to this. It's nice, yes, that there was a 5 per cent increase, but I would suggest that in this day and age, especially if you live in the major cities – I think I have figures here that if you have one child and yourself, you'd make 900 and some dollars. I would just ask any Member of the Legislative Assembly if they could live on that. The minister has alluded that the people that he wanted are not there now. I think he said that roughly half of the 25,000 are people that can't work and never will be able to work, and a lot of those people are falling through the cracks. I mention that because I've talked to the minister before about the Winspear fund, a private fund that's really picking up this sort of work.

Just let me give the minister two or three examples here of how these people are falling through the cracks and are having to go to people like Winspear. It's nice that they do it, but it shouldn't be their responsibility. They have other things to do. Just a couple of examples, and these are the type of people that I think the minister wants to help.

Here's a disabled student who registered for courses at Concordia College, a grant of \$400 that they handed out. This young woman is a student at Concordia College. She was registered in a career development program but was unable to work during the summer break due to health problems. She had to make a deposit to secure her courses for the next term when her student loan would kick in. Income supports would not pay for this. Now, this is a person that is trying to pull herself up, if you like, and get to work. Surely, that's what we would want them to do. That's the type of things that are happening. Even the 5 per cent increase is not going to deal with this.

Here's another one. A young woman on income support wanted to take courses at Olds College. This young woman was on income support as an unemployable client. She was registered in a career development program but was unable to work during the summer break. Her counsellor felt that the Olds program would be useful to her training program and would help her explore future job options. It would be a one-time occurrence. Income support would not cover that. Again, precisely, Mr. Minister, the type of people that you want to help, trying to help themselves but not getting that little extra.

Another one here: a grandmother with the custody of grandchildren needed to relocate. They gave her a grant of \$700. This woman was married for many years and raised four children. She has legal custody of her grandchildren. Her husband became involved with addictions, and she left him. She had found accommodations and paid the damage deposit. She works for \$7.50 an hour. Social assistance would not help her because her income exceeds \$750 per month. She was in need of assistance to pay the

first month's rent and to help pay for the groceries until her next paycheque as she had used her available money to pay the damage deposit. Again, a person trying to help herself, Mr. Chairman.

Finally, one other one: a grant of \$500. This woman was on income support of \$635 per month. Her rent was \$600. So she's meeting her rent costs but not eating properly. It was not taking care of her personal needs. She was malnourished and very depressed. So her social worker was working to get her support increased and help her find work. These are surely the types of people that we should be helping. These are people trying to help themselves, Mr. Chairman, and I think we really need to take a look at that.

Let me just conclude. The minister talked about the labour review. Correct me if I'm wrong. I thought he said that they would be coming back with this by the fall. I would hope that one of the things he would look at – and I only have 20 seconds here – would be with the Minister of Education. If we're going to deal with people, that dropout rate is one of the major concerns that we're going to have in a labour review in this province.

I think that I'm near the end of my time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Those are good comments, of course. I know that the hon. member and I have worked together on issues like this for, I guess, over 10 years now, maybe longer. We do share similar concerns about the needs of people that are not expected to work, or the high-needs area of our public out there.

The first area he mentioned was in relation to the first contract arbitration. Yes, that is an important area, and we've discussed it back and forth. I've asked my department to pull all the other contracts that are in place. The last one I was reviewing – and the member and I discussed it – is the B.C. model. Yes, I intend to look at these models, and if there's anything that would be suitable for Alberta, of course, I'd have to take it through the process to start with: the standing policy committee, cabinet, full caucus, and then legislation if that is what's required.

When you look at the labour relations issue itself in Alberta, we do quite well. You know, there are, I believe, about 1,200 or so collective agreements; 99.4 per cent of the collective agreements were agreed upon without any major labour disruption. It's very unfortunate that the Lakeside Packers situation went the way it did because everyone gets hurt when that happens: the workers, the community, the industry also. I did tour that plant. Some improvements have been made; no doubt, more will be made. The local union member, of course, was there with us, and I gave him my card along with my cell number where he can phone me any time, 24 hours a day. If he thinks as a local union representative that there is something wrong, that the company is not living up to their commitments, he would call me immediately, and I would go down there immediately to sit down again with the local union rep and also the manager from the company. So those doors are open, and I hope that he does call me if there's a problem. You know, if you're talking to them – I'm sure they call sometimes – make sure you let us know because I have no problem going there.

At this time they feel that things are improving and that, you know, the company is doing some changes. I guess that, unfortunately, maybe it took some form of a strike to improve the situation. If that's what it did, then that's good. Hopefully, we shouldn't have to have a strike to improve working situations in industry.

The other item you mentioned, of course, is division 8. As you're aware, that was used a number of times in Alberta in other locations

before. At this time because there is a legal challenge filed already, I won't comment on it here. But I will ask my staff to look at the Blues and *Hansard* and give you whatever comment we can within our rights without getting in trouble with the law. So I promise you that we will do that.

The employment standards, of course, as you're aware, are under review. You know, the process is under way, and definitely compassionate care is being considered as part of the review. The review, no doubt, will include the youth workers you mentioned and the night workers, et cetera. So far the government has received input from about 5,500 Albertans during the public consultation process. That also involved about 750 employers. We are currently analyzing all of the feedback we've received to date from the discussion guides and also the telephone surveys.

4:10

There are a number of employment standards that require further consideration. We anticipate that there will be follow-up with affected stakeholders on technical aspects of the code, and we are in the process of planning these consultation sessions. It's been 18 years since the last employment standards review. That's a long time. When the economy is booming like it is in Alberta, it's a long time. We intend to finish the process by March of '07, so hopefully, you know, if there's any legislative changes that are going to be required, we can do them at that time. It will also deal with the youth workers, of course, in the whole process.

The other issue you mentioned is the issue of farm workers. We've talked about that issue before. When you're talking about the farm operations themselves, farming is a very, very important industry in Alberta. A lot of farmers are struggling at this time. With the way things are set up, to implement new standards or conditions would probably create further hardship for the agriculture industry itself in Alberta. The hon. member and I have discussed the issue of the cookie factory, for example. Well, that might be a little different situation than the actual farm operation. It's something that, again, we'll review further and maybe drop you a note.

The Workers' Compensation Board, of course, is an independent body. We just have legislation. It's owned and operated by the companies themselves that pay into the compensation fund. Again, I will review *Hansard* and get them to respond directly to you, with copies of letters to myself. If there is anything we can do to improve the situation, of course, we'll continue working on that. That is our target: to ensure that when someone gets hurt, the application is processed as quickly as possible. I think that that's improved drastically because I remember that one time it took so long that the people had to go on welfare so that they could continue to meet their financial obligations and then had to pay back the system. That's not there anymore. It doesn't take that long now to approve a package, so that's a step in the right direction. I think that the backlog of the appeals process is also improving, but it can be better. You can be assured that whatever we can do, we'll continue working with the board and their staff to make it better.

The last item you mentioned, of course, is the 12,000 or so people we have that are not expected to work. Yes, I agree that we'll have to continue monitoring that situation closely and looking at how we may assist that particular group of people.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've just got a few items that I would like to discuss to get some clarity on from the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. I guess, first and

foremost, I must compliment his staff for their diligence. Every time the staff from my offices phone him, they get back to us right away and certainly help us. Even though we have a flamboyant economy, we still have some issues in labour.

I guess I'm wondering about moving ahead on Alberta Works. What happens sometimes with some of the people that are caught in this position where they're trying to better themselves to move on so they become more self-sufficient is if they get their wages up just a bit, then there's a clawback or they are unable to get health benefits. So I would hope that what we would do for these people that are trying is that we would take a more collaborative approach to work with them.

Then on the aspect of your number one core business. As I review that and think about it, I know that, you know, it's very positive, and I appreciate that. I know that we're working on it. Alberta has a productive workforce that meets the needs of the economy today and into the future, but I guess what I'm really looking at now, being that labour is short in my region – and it's not only the skilled. We really need some help in some of the hotels and fast foods, where a lot of them now are willing to set up accommodations and everything else to have them come in and help them move along. So I'm just wondering how the minister is working on that issue with the federal government. I realize that it's not his portfolio, immigration, but I'm sure that he's working with Economic Development, too, to make sure that we get these people in.

Then, I guess, in co-operation with the aspect of the Minister of Advanced Education, are we enticing and working with some of the people on Alberta Works to try and move them into a trade? That is going to be another area that is going to make it awful hard on our regions now because I know a lot of our trade people are getting to the age of retirement.

One other area that I was wondering about too: the co-operation and the understanding we need with a lot of parents now, where their children are of the age that they don't need as much looking after. I know that we worked with the Yellowhead regional consortium to get some money out of the Advanced Education department to move forward to have a nursing program in our region. Therefore, they live in the area, so then they don't have to travel that far for their practicum, yet they can work in the area. So I'm just wondering if we're working with Advanced Education to look at some of these because we have a lot of people that with a little bit of enticement and that, we can get some of these people back in the workforce.

The other thing I want to thank the minister for is the aspect of the co-operation that we get in some of my aboriginal communities, especially with the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation in Grande Cache, where they are working with the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on partnerships with the industry. So we've been able to move along on that aspect too.

The bottom line is: what I'm really looking for is help on the aspect of being able to look at the labour force we have now and where we can involve other people in the area. How are we campaigning to get that? I mean, when you look at your number one goal, that's where we need to move. I know that we've got competent staff in the region, but I think we need some stronger direction so that we can move that so that we can get more people in the workforce to help these different industries. It's getting to dire straits now. You're going through the major communities now. We've got so many people working in bush camps. Well, when you come into the local towns of Edson, Hinton, Jasper, Grande Cache, a lot of the facilities that have been open 24 hours now are closed because they can't get staff.

So if the minister can sort of give me some insight on what he's trying to do with our other departments and with the federal

government to try and alleviate and bring on more people that we can get into the workforce.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

4:20

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just very briefly I'll answer some of the questions, but some we'll do in writing. I'd just like to thank you for your concerns and your positive comments and good suggestions because it is a critical area. I think your area probably faces the same problems or the same challenges that most jurisdictions in Alberta are facing. You know, when you go back 15 years, it was completely the opposite. There were no jobs or very few jobs around. Today we are faced with too many jobs and not enough people, so I'd rather have the problem we have today because it's something that's positive, and it's something that I think we can handle.

You mentioned the Alberta Works and some of the policies we have in place in relation to clawbacks. Most of our programs are designed to encourage people to get back into the workforce. I'll get my department to look into that specific area of yours to find out if we are administering that office differently than any other office because we operate with just the opposite attitude. We'll do almost anything within our policies to ensure that transition takes place when people are ready to get back into the workforce. So, you know, I promise you that.

Of course, you mentioned the labour shortages, especially in hotels and the fast-food industry. Again, that's a challenge we have across Alberta. I think the labour force strategy, the 10-year strategy we are developing, will deal with both short- and long-term strategies.

We have to look at all the areas he mentioned, including immigration and the First Nations, and I'll give you an example. In Canada there are about 200,000 First Nations youth between 15 and 25 years old that could be trained and could be put back into the workforce. I am arranging a meeting with the federal minister of Indian affairs right now to talk about a couple of things: off-reserve housing for one, and the other one, of course, is the labour force strategy and labour problems we have. For the 200,000 youth that are there now, some on reserves, the unemployment is very high. It could run 70 to 80 per cent or 90 per cent, yet the industries are next door.

Where we've made changes and we've proven that when you do social policy changes like we have in Alberta, the unemployment rate of First Nations off the reserve is only 9 per cent. Yet if you go to a reserve next door, it's 80 to 90 per cent, so there is something wrong. What I believe is wrong – and this is what I'll be talking to the minister of Indian affairs about: to look at changing the social and economic policies on the reserves like we did in Alberta.

You can see. When you go back to '92-93, which I mentioned earlier, the welfare caseload was 97,000, a \$1.7 billion budget, 5,400 staff. We had welfare offices all over the place, and 80 per cent of the dollars at the time were being used by single people and couples without children that were ready to go to work.

You mentioned assisting people to get back into the workforce. I think Alberta has done well because the caseload today in Alberta – we have no welfare offices, we have 59 employment centres and 19 co-locations with the federal government, and the caseload of employables and trainables is almost nil. So they are back into the workforce. A lot went through training programs.

It's not only my department that does it. Advanced Education was heavily involved in it right off the bat. In fact, we used to put through sometimes 35,000 individuals that were on assistance at one

time through training programs, and they've become independent and self-sufficient. So I think that portion as far as the opportunity to train more people that are on assistance is limited because I think most of them have gone back into the workforce. But we will continue working with the federal government, this time in relation to the aboriginal issues with the federal minister.

The other person, of course, we need to work with is on the issue of immigration. I won't repeat myself because I already mentioned the processes we have in place in relation to immigration.

One area I may not have mentioned was the issue of individuals – for example, if a restaurant owner, say, in Edson wanted to bring a member, say, from a foreign country to come and work for them, the policy that we have presently is that, yes, they can come and work. But as soon as the employee gets settled in with housing, health care, and everything else, they could leave that employer and go to another employer. Those are some of the things I think we need to look at to ensure that there is some protection for those people that can find employees in other countries and bring them down here. They cover all the costs, et cetera, et cetera.

So, again, thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few points here. First of all, I'd like to compliment the minister on being in the right area and being sensitive to the people that he serves in the department. I think it's commendable. I also would like to commend him on being open and able to listen to comments and give some reply.

Let me just comment first of all, then, that if I understand the mission of the department, it is to assist and support the clients that he deals with, the people he deals with. I was wondering if he would just tell us or answer the question of how the new approach to daycare will affect the clients that he works with. I'd be very interested. I think there are a fair number – and I may be wrong about this, and he'll correct me – of single women with children. I just wonder what the implication is there for them in terms of the support service you offer them.

The other thing I'd like to talk about just briefly is job placement and career development. The thing I'm wondering about here – and maybe you want to comment – is the training of your staff. I've listened to you answer questions, and you're suggesting that a lot of the staff are being put back into careers, vocational. The implication is that you're looking at vocational counselling, career development, and that kind of thing. So maybe you could tell me about your staff's background because that intrigues me. Do they have counselling training that you're looking for? Do they have experience in testing, for example? Do they have experience in the world of work? That kind of thing. I'm just trying to get a feel for that kind of thing.

The other question I'd like to ask you – and I'm rushing quickly here – is to comment on the mechanisms you use in the department to interface with business: what kinds of things come about and the specific processes you may use for that. I'd be interested in knowing that.

The question, again, that I'd just mention that I'd like to also ask you is on youth employment. I noticed – and I'm not sure, Mr. Chairman, if I'm allowed to use the name of the company. Anyway, I noticed, getting coffee the last two or three weeks, that some young people are able to handle it very well, and for some people I think it's over their head. I think the member from the third party mentioned today child labour. What I'm wondering is if there isn't some way of doing work exploration and giving kids of that nature

– you may want to use some summer initiative. You may want to do it with other departments of government. I can think of – what's it called? – the ecology corps that they trained. I'm thinking more about a vocational setting and training for students that may be open, to be mature enough to go into these projects with small business. I think that would enhance the summer population, too, to be able to do something productive. Again, that takes money, and you know more about where you can get that kind of thing. But I think there's a need for that.

The other aspect I think, Mr. Minister – and it's a dream of mine – is that we look at the Edmonton region to develop what I'd call an exploratory centre for careers. I know that now we don't have the large vocational schools anymore, but I'm wondering if industry and government could meet and look at what I'd call an exploration centre so that people that you're dealing with and also some of our people that may go into apprenticeship programs in the schools could go in and get an experienced level of exploring what they may want to do in the future and meet people from industries. Maybe even like a career fair concept of some type.

4:30

Now, I guess apprenticeship is one other thing that I'd like to mention. I'm not sure exactly, again, how your department, sir, interfaces with schools, but I think that there's a lot more we could be doing in that area of schools, especially for kids that are not going to be in the academic stream. I think that we have to first of all – and this is not your area – have good career counsellors in our schools. In many of our schools that's lacking, and hopefully we'll see some change in that. I think there's a whole need to work with disadvantaged students in schools and make sure that they have access to some of the things that you talked about earlier.

I would just mention quickly one other comment. I don't know if this is the forum to do this, but I'll just mention it. One of my constituents was offered a job in your department, sir. Unfortunately, at the eleventh hour, after quitting her job with the city of Edmonton and then receiving a letter from your department that she had a job, about a week before she was to report, she was told that she didn't have the job that she was going to get. She didn't have it any longer. Now, I haven't heard from her lately. I'm just suggesting that in personnel practices, I think it's very important that there's a sensitivity here. This particular lady that I'm talking about was a single mother with a child, and maybe she had some experiences in her life that I don't know about. Maybe I could eventually come and see you privately when I hear from her and see how she's doing.

So I'll just leave those comments with you, sir, and hopefully I can hear a few of your comments. Thank you very much, and keep up the good work. I appreciate it.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much for your positive comments and compliments and, of course, the continued good working relationship between us. I appreciate that.

You mentioned the new approach to daycare and what impact that may have on our programs. Of course, what we do is that, number one, we don't claw back. If there's additional money provided to individuals under this program, we'll not be clawing back the money. In addition to that, we will monitor the situation very closely and determine what impact it has, if any. If it's a negative impact, then we'll have to look at a policy change. I don't mind doing that because that is a high-needs area. You know, both the daycare and also the day home concept works quite well because a lot of families use the day homes.

In relation to training of staff, from social workers to career counsellors, you're exactly right. It's a good point because it's not

mentioned very often. When we started back in '92-93 to reform the welfare system, we had 5,400 staff. A lot of the staff were trained social workers, and their role was to try and counsel individuals. In most cases the only time they had, because of caseloads, was to provide financial support. These were vouchers or welfare cheques. When we started reforming the system, one of the concerns that staff had – they said: “Yes, we can put people back into the workforce. Yes, we can reduce the number of clients we have, the number of files we have. But what happens to our job?” In '92-93 I promised: “Yes, years down the road you’re going to be a career counsellor, a job placement officer. Most of the clients you’ll be dealing with will be placed in jobs or training programs, and we’ll only provide the social supports that are necessary to ensure that people become independent and self-sufficient.” That’s exactly what happened. Now most of our people are trained career counsellors, and 85 per cent of the people, in fact, that come to our offices in Edmonton here are with the general public. Only a small percentage have some financial or social support programs.

So, yes, the criteria have changed. People are now career counsellors, job placement officers. Placement officers even do follow-up on a job. We’ve gone that far, even, for the hard-core cases. I can tell you one thing: the clients are much happier. Nobody wants to be on welfare. We’ve almost eliminated welfare in Alberta. Also, the staff: the staff are more positive when they see positive results, and I find the staff are a lot happier. That is one of the reasons, also, that I came back to this department. I purposely asked our Premier to bring me back here because I had some concerns in caucus, you know: you have no welfare caseload, but you’re asking for \$700 million to operate the department. My argument is: look, it takes all that money to keep people in transition to the workforce rather than getting back on the welfare caseload.

The other promise I made is to ensure that their jobs are protected as career counsellors, job placement officers, et cetera, et cetera, instead of handing out welfare cheques and vouchers. So I think that’s been really, really positive.

As far as exploratory centres for careers, that’s a good point. We need to do a lot more of that. NAIT has a number of programs right now where they go out into various areas to be exposed to welding, carpentry, and different programs. These are mobile units.

One of the things that’s popped up lately – and you’re exactly right on it – is the issue of vocational schools. Where the schools at one time had equipment for mechanics, equipment for welders, carpentry, cooking, and a number of other programs, for some reason – I don’t know what the reason is – a lot of those have closed in a number of areas. I don’t know if it’s finances or what, but it’s something I think we need to activate because when you look at the apprenticeship program, although the apprenticeship program is not under my department, the average age of a journeyman in Canada is about 51 years old. [interjection] Yeah, that’s right. Almost as old as me.

The average age of a person completing a four-year program to be a journeyman is 26 years old, yet if you go to a school in Athabasca in my constituency or Lac La Biche, that region, over 60 per cent of the students want to take technical trades. Why are we not, you know – if a person knows at grade 10 that they want to be a journeyman carpenter, why is it taking so long? Why is it taking from grade 10 until a person is 26 years old to get their first ticket? So we definitely need to improve that area.

The other area that was important and he mentioned, of course, is youth employment and stuff. That is a very sensitive area. The way we have it set up right now, of course, is that the employer and the family have to agree that the person can be employed in certain jobs. In fact, there has to be an agreement signed by the parent and also

the employer, and a copy of that comes to our department. If there is a complaint, then we’ll investigate. In fact, sometimes we’ll investigate without a complaint and have a look and see how things are going.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to participate in this budget debate on Human Resources and Employment. This ministry, as was mentioned more than once, is quite an important ministry, and its work is greatly appreciated by everyone in this House and the people that its services affect.

4:40

If you look at departments under this minister like Alberta Works, including employment training services, income support services, child support services, and health benefits, more notably the Alberta Blue Cross drug benefit list and the drug benefit supplement – and I can probably talk at length about that because I’m a pharmacist, as you know, but I won’t. Employment standards is another area, and workplace health and safety, immigration, labour relations, professions and occupations, labour market information for businesses, and all that stuff. Under the purview of this minister you also get certain boards: Alberta Labour Relations Board, as was mentioned, the personnel administration office, the PAO, Workers’ Compensation Board, and the Appeals Commission through the Workers’ Compensation Board. So it’s really quite an extensive and far-reaching department, if you will.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

I have to say that this whole business around Human Resources and Employment and the work that this ministry does is interesting to me. Having said that, I also find it sometimes difficult to fully comprehend. Honestly here, I’m trying to fully understand the ins and outs of this ministry, especially when it comes to programs that are geared toward the needy, the sick, disenfranchised, or disabled. Of course, what adds to the confusion sometimes from a layman’s standpoint, somebody who is new to this House, are situations or instances where one might compare programs under the purview of this minister to similar programs or others, like programs that are under, for example, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, who in turn shares some of her responsibility with the minister of health. So you get this bit here, that bit there type of situation.

In light of recent cabinet changes and cabinet growth I actually looked at this this morning, and I’m, like: why don’t we consolidate these programs from all these different ministries into one central area? If you’re a person who is in need of care or you’re a person who needs to be looked after or cared for, there is one department. We can maybe rename the Department of Seniors and Community Supports to the department of seniors and community services and just have it as one collective agency that looks after all of these sort of holistically.

Some of those who need AISH are also afflicted with disability, and some of them are also trying to be trained and to get back to work, so it might be one person seeking support or seeking help from three different departments. Why not have it in one central area, providing that service collectively or holistically? This is definitely one of the areas that my colleague from Edmonton-Manning is looking at as the Official Opposition critic, you know, and it’s hopefully going to be part of our next platform in the next election.

Part of my intrigue again, Mr. Chairman, also stems from some work I did personally and town hall meetings that I hosted together with my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie. Under the leadership and guidance of our honourable and esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Manning we held meetings in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer when the Alberta Liberal opposition was reviewing the employment standards. We met with many Albertans. Some were workers, be it unionized or not. We met with employers, mostly small-business owners. We met with students, and we even met with parents of children who are now allowed, as young as 12 years old, to join the workforce, sort of like cheap labour. This is a move that definitely was opposed. I know that the minister is faced with pressures, you know, and certain realities that he has to work with, but this is definitely a direction that my colleagues and I did not support. Anyway, I did learn a lot from those trips; hence, my interest in attending today.

Employment standards in particular must in my opinion be thoroughly and periodically evaluated, and they should be improved. We're looking at things like wages, working conditions, safety, the issues surrounding holidays, the relationship between the employer and the employee, and things like that. I realize that the hon. minister and his staff are trying very hard to address those situations. Like I said, it is not an easy task, but in my opinion a lot more can be achieved.

Most of my technical questions from today's budget estimates have already been asked by the previous speakers, Mr. Chairman, but one question in particular that I would like to elaborate on pertains to minimum wage. Even with the increase last year we're still in the bottom 50 per cent if we compare Alberta to the other provinces and territories. Surely, in this day and age and with our massive revenues and surpluses we can readdress this issue. I would suggest, personally, an annual review of minimum wage and tying it to market-basket measures and/or inflation. You know, you have many indicators that are readily available that would tell you what's fair and what's the acceptable minimum and so on. Perhaps we can even take it a step further and stipulate that it should not be lower than, say, 40 per cent of the Alberta average hourly wage.

I have printed some press releases from the ministry's website. I note here that on January 31, 2006, there was the Building and Educating Alberta's Workforce survey, which was conducted and, as it says here, "developed to guide Alberta's labour market development and investments over the next 10 years (2006-2016) to ensure individuals and businesses are able to compete within an increasingly global and knowledge-based economy." Now, this is wonderful, but that was really what triggered my colleagues and I to actually tour the province. We felt that an online survey was not adequate. We're faced with similar restrictions or similar objectionable practices currently as we discuss things like the third way, Mr. Chairman, where the consultation process was very limited and not open or accessible enough. So we feel that to do it online is only one way, not the only way.

We know that on March 10 the consultation process for that particular purpose was concluded. We know that the minister also announced that his consultation included certain meetings, and his communications people highlighted in that press release that 60 key stakeholder groups were involved. So I would be very interested to know which interest groups were involved, and I would appreciate receiving the results or the findings of that consultation. We think that if we're looking at 2006 to 2016, if we're laying the course and charting our path for the next decade, we definitely have to do a tonne of consultation here and involve as many people as possible, from employee and employer groups to chambers of commerce to parents of people who are in the workplace and so on and so forth.

So again we're urging the minister to not only rely on online consultations from now on and to share the results with the opposition and with the people of this province.

I talked about minimum wage, but I also have this press release, which was released on March 3, 2006, talking about hard-working Albertans creating thousands of full-time jobs, which is great. I am actually happy to be living and working in this province at this stage. It's amazing. But, again, my overriding argument will always be that a lot more could be done. Alberta's unemployment rate, as per this press release, "remained the lowest of all the provinces for the second year in a row," which is great, and "Alberta's average hourly wage continues to climb . . . an 8.7 per cent increase" from 2003 to 2005, and it now hovers at about \$21.39.

So back to my 40 per cent suggestion. If we do a minimum of 40 per cent of the average hourly wage and call that our minimum wage, I think that would not only be fair, but it would be applauded by everybody. I don't think it would necessarily add any unnecessary burden to the businesses we have in this province.

Another layer I would add, Mr. Chairman, is to expand something like the STEP program, the summer temporary employment program, which was designed to encourage students to work and encourage employers to hire people and subsidize that wage or salary as an incentive to small business. I always advocate for small business. It's also part of my experience as a pharmacist working in an independent store. Sometimes it is difficult to compete with the bigger firms or the more established companies. So why not look at this as sort of a tool to level the playing field and have more, you know, availability or more access to small business owners? So now they can attract, you know, energetic, educated, smart individuals rather than just competing with the bigger businesses on wages only. Some of those small businesses, of course, are family operated or owned, and it would really be difficult for them to compete.

4:50

Potentially, we can even think about the third way, as I mentioned, because once or if it is implemented against the wishes of Albertans, this disparity, this gap, between small businesses and the larger firms is going to get wider and bigger. You know, why would an employee apply to work in a small store or sort of a family operation when he or she can go to a bigger firm and get their private health insurance paid for by that firm? This is definitely going to be restrictive on small business, and we know that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and people like that are looking at this. There are going to be implications and consequences, and I would urge the minister to maybe look at this from his department to see if maybe an incentive or a subsidy could be offered for smaller firms to be able to afford retaining or attracting employees.

Another issue was that when we discussed in this House extending presumptive coverage for cardiovascular events for firefighters, I and my colleagues in the Liberal caucus wanted to extend that presumptive coverage to a week instead of just 24 hours, but this suggestion was rejected by the government members. We could have compromised, perhaps, and settled on about 48 or 72 hours, but again there was no success there. We also wanted to extend the same protection to other emergency response personnel, like ambulance workers, paramedics, police officers in certain situations, but again we did not meet with support from the government side.

What was amazing, Mr. Chairman, however, or really puzzling is that the government didn't allow us to try to extend the same courtesy to volunteer firefighters, who work just as hard as their employed counterparts. So it didn't really make sense that, you know, if you're employed as a firefighter, you would get this, however small, 24 hours, but if you're a volunteer, then you don't get it. They do the same work, and they are faced with the same

threats and stresses. So again I would urge the hon. minister to revisit this whole issue and either himself or through a private member bring it back to the House and look at this, you know, with the same favourable eye as we did in the fall sitting. It's the angle of fairness and care.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your indulgence, and I thank you for this opportunity.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Yeah. Just very briefly. Most of the questions we'll put in writing for you. One area I'd like to ask you to assist is in relation to the STEP program and small business. Maybe you can, you know, provide some information, and we can sit down and look at what options may be available, just what thoughts may be there to improve the situation. There's nothing out of the question, you know. We can do that.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The other area you mentioned that I just want to touch on briefly is the issue of providing a program for seniors, persons with developmental disabilities, children in high-needs areas. You mentioned that maybe, you know, one department or one ministry should provide all those services. At one time, when I became the minister of family and social services and aboriginal affairs – I mentioned earlier the caseload, the dollars spent, et cetera, under one ministry. We looked after family and social services, we looked after children's services, we looked after persons with developmental disabilities and also, of course, aboriginal affairs under that department.

The whole restructuring, then, was to go in the other direction, actually, where we'd, you know, take the people who are employable and trainable back into the workforce. While we did that, then we'd redirect the dollars and actually develop the Ministry of Children's Services, for an example, its own ministry with a budget that concentrates on dealing with children and families to improve the service to the people. The cost is about the same. The cost hasn't really increased that much. Then there are persons with developmental disabilities and seniors, who now have their own minister, their own budget, and they concentrate, again, on providing a really good service for those high-needs areas. Of course, the other one is aboriginal affairs. Now, it also has its own ministry, and that's a very high-needs area. They concentrate on providing high-quality services because it's a high-needs area. Then the department I operate now with Alberta Works and those other programs support people to get back into training and into the workforce. So I think that that has worked quite well.

No doubt, when you really look at the overall cost – when I took over as sole minister with those four high-needs areas, my budget then was \$1.7 billion. When you look at the combination of Children's Services, Seniors, PDD, my department, and the aboriginal affairs department, I don't think they run \$2 billion. I think it's less than that, yet there are four ministers and four departments concentrating on providing a good service for those high-needs areas. So I think it's working quite well. It's never perfect. You know, it's a challenging area, but I think that Alberta has done quite well in providing services to the high-needs area. I have to agree that there are pockets where we need improvement. Again, you know, the issue of people that are not expected to work: we need to monitor that very, very closely to ensure that what we are doing is right.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There are some further items that I'd just like to touch on somewhat. The labour market strategy that the government is looking at has identified a need down the road, quite a ways down the road actually, a shortage of a hundred thousand people that we may need. I really haven't seen the absolute proof for that, and it seemingly is something that is far down the road, that you have to be very, very careful of.

Many of the members in this House were in Alberta when we went through the downturn in the 1980s and saw, I think, the construction portion of the Alberta gross domestic product drop from 12 per cent to 2 per cent. We saw the multinational oil and gas companies go elsewhere for various reasons, and the oil prices died. Basically, a lot of the activity ended, and there was no work. A lot of people that I speak to now are happy that there is lots of work right now but are very concerned that we might face the same thing in just a very few years. There really is not overwhelming evidence that we might need a hundred thousand. We may need more. I would just say that we must be very, very careful and prudent in looking at how we deal with our workforce.

Now, immigration is important. It is something that will determine the future of many businesses, will determine the future of many industries, and indeed will determine the future of Alberta. The use of temporary foreign workers is something that has become very distasteful and an issue for many workers, especially in the building trades, because many of them think that it's being used as something to further the interests of some employers who just want to avoid them.

The nature of trying to bring immigration in and then using temporary foreign workers brings about some inherent difficulties. The labour force strategy identified that retention in Alberta is a very real problem. Retention is something that is very difficult if you don't have certain factors in place for a worker, like their family here. Certainly, a temporary foreign worker will not have their family here, and they will get pressures to leave and will want to leave very quickly to see them and do those sorts of things. I heard the former minister of transportation talk about immigration at a west Edmonton business luncheon here just some weeks ago, and he's talked of meeting the leader of communist Vietnam. That leader in communist Vietnam said that he would love to drop 200,000 people on the international market and have them send home money because he had lots of unemployed. He said that they could be trained to build any project, and I'm sure they could. Vietnamese are very resilient and very intelligent and very capable people.

5:00

But I don't know if that would be the real solution for Alberta, to have those workers come in as temporary foreign workers. I expect we'll see an expansion in the provincial nominee program given some of the statements of the federal government. I think the provincial nominee program and to bring actual immigrants in is probably a much better way to do it because somebody who comes in with a family, somebody who comes in with the idea that they will be staying here and will be working and living and becoming an Albertan will work to have them stay here, will solve that problem of retention that has been identified as something that is so difficult for Alberta for some reason over the years in competition with some of the bigger cities that we see in the rest of the country and certainly in the continent, to be truthful.

The need to access some of our present unemployed and to deal with the problem of vocational training – and this deals with

education as well – is something that is of severe concern to many employers: numbers like over a million unemployed youth in Canada between the ages of 18 and 25. Some different figures are used for the apprenticeship starting age, but I've seen averages of the actual age being 25, and that seems to just be a total disconnect.

As has been mentioned by the minister, part of the problem is: why do we not have as much vocational training in our schools? I've spoken to teachers and administrators and principals, and they say that you can't get a tradesman to teach anymore because he's going to make a lot more out in the field. Maybe there's some need to combine some compensation programs somehow to deal with that.

There's need to somehow look at how we give incentives to our high schools and our junior high schools for vocational training because they're dumping their programs. For example, Jasper Place composite is not composite anymore; it's Jasper Place high school. We have these things which are working against vocational training.

RAP, the registered apprenticeship program, has worked nicely, some employers and some apprentices have told me, in a few trades but not in very many. A number of employers have told me time and again that they're just getting the dregs. They're just getting the outcasts and the people that don't want to work and maybe are problems. So they've rejected the RAP program. There are very few in that right now, so I think we have to somehow look at extending that past mechanics and extending it so that it actually works to attract kids somehow and to give some sort of incentive for them to be involved in there.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview mentioned the importance of first contract legislation, and I think there are economic arguments to move ahead on that. Certainly, in Alberta there has not been a high record of strikes. I think all Albertans have a can-do mentality and want to be working and don't want to be out on strike, and when they do so, they're doing so for a reason. Certainly, when you look at something like the building trades, I don't think they've had a strike or a strike in the oil sands or anything like that for a generation. Nobody as much as can even remember one. Some have been long in their career and have not even seen that. There's a commitment to build, a commitment to work, and a commitment to make things happen in our province.

I hear now, though, that there's beginning to be less of a problem with the jingle in the jeans, sort of thing. There's less of an incentive now because of the economics. There will always be people that will want to get a stake together, who will want to work, who want to work as much as they can. You know, a lot of the actual restaurants and other businesses in Edmonton and in other areas, being farms and such, have been started by tradesmen who got their stake together in the oil industry and in the oil sands and other areas.

Employment standards now puts a limit of 24 and four on the number of days a person can work, with 24 days on and four days off becoming a very overused way of scheduling work. I know some employers that actually do that and do far more than that and get away with it. To extend that, I think, would make things far more difficult in areas like my riding of Edmonton-Manning and, indeed, I think, all over the province where there's no parent at home for extended periods of time because they're working. A lot of these parents just don't want to be away that long. If we're setting up our workforce, I think we're putting in place a time bomb for lesser productivity just to take short-term needs into effect. I think most of those workers would rather not be forced because when they are in that situation, usually they're told, "That way or the highway," and there's no third way.

The labour costs are not, I think, a huge issue in Alberta. I look

at page 123, the Alberta advantage in the economic outlook there are 11 cities, and Edmonton has the lowest cost of many major cities in North America on this graph, and Calgary is number four. The actual labour costs have not been high.

Productivity in our economy is affected by and how we're going to be building some of these projects will be affected quite a bit by things such as hours of work. In employments and standards we have to look very, very carefully at it because we could cause problems in retaining workers who just don't want to be forced to work those types of hours. We don't really have the labour costs. They're not a huge problem in Alberta. It's odd because we have a booming economy, and there are quite a few people that would like to come here and work.

The immigration thing I'd touch on again. I think the Member for West Yellowhead had some very good statements on the problems that small business is having. We've got to be careful about not looking after those problems. Many of these small businesses are restaurants. I mentioned another time in this House how a very nice restaurant in my area has cut their lunch hour trade off because they just can't get a sous-chef. At the same time two sous-chefs I talked to the same day – one was actually a full chef – were heading out to the rigs. You know, they could make twice as much. That's the nature of this particular boom. The nature of that boom is that many of those people once those wells are drilled will be back into other areas, and it might not be a hundred thousand. They won't necessarily be drilling all those wells forever because there are only so many areas to drill, and we've got to be careful.

Some of the other areas that deal with productivity – I think productivity is something that we should always try and remember. Some people look at it as a difficult and a dirty word. The transportation issues in and around Edmonton: we will see some changes in where people are working and what jobs Albertans are working at.

A project just talked about recently, it's an Inco project in the minister's riding, will draw a lot of people who are presently working in Lloydminster and in Fort McMurray and that could have been working on some of the other projects. They will be drawn into those upgraders. There could be many, many thousands, and we may have a productivity problem because of transportation in the northeast of Edmonton and even in the Redwater/Athabasca area. We've seen it actually in the Scotford project. We've seen it in my riding at Christmastime, when everybody who are all working outside of the city right now came back to the city.

5:10

It's something that people call counterintuitive. The *Edmonton Journal* couldn't understand why jobs are down in Edmonton, 16,000 in its last report. It seems like everybody is working, and everybody is employed, and everything is up. Well, the thing that's happening is they're all in the bush. They're all at Lloyd, they're all at Fort McMurray, they're all in the Peace, they're all in the northeast Peace and B.C., and they do come back. Once many of them come back to work on the upgraders, we're going to see a change in the labour market, and we're going to see some real demands on transportation on the north side. Many of us saw that at Christmastime, when many of them had a week off, and that will be amplified and made worse. We, perhaps, should be looking at that as a productivity as well as a transportation item in the near future because this will be affecting those huge projects that will be taking place in Fort Saskatchewan, in Redwater, in the area northeast of Edmonton.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for

the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the following questions after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Human Resources and Employment for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$790,278,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It has indeed been a very pleasurable afternoon discussion. On that note, I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the estimates of the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Human Resources and Employment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$790,278,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bearing in mind the enormous progress that was made this week, mostly on estimates, I would move that the House stand adjourned at this hour, which we would call 5:30, and that we reconvene at 1:30 on Monday.

[Motion carried; at 5:14 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 10, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/10

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our people. Let us be guided by our deliberations this day. Amen.

Hon. members and individuals in the galleries today, would you now please join in the singing of our national anthem in the language of your choice. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to introduce two distinct groups today. The first group is a very special group because they feel like family to me. They are Emilia Karosas, who emigrated from Lithuania, a place where my grandparents on my father's side were born, and her daughter Nejolla Korris, who is very active in the Lithuanian community and who will be visiting Lithuania very soon. Every one of you know at least one member of this family, our wonderful young page Taddes Korris, who is here today and celebrates with me the opportunity to welcome both his mother and grandmother, who are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please rise, and could we give them a wonderful welcome.

The second group today, Mr. Speaker, is 65 students and an additional number of group leaders and parent helpers from Campbelltown elementary school, including a class of French immersion students. They are seated in both galleries. Let me cite the teachers' and parent helpers' names for you. The teachers are Mrs. Roes, M. Levesque, M. Wu, Mrs. Klaassen, Mrs. Nichol, and M. Perrault, also parent helpers Mr. Graham, Mrs. Gelineau, Mr. LeBlanc, Mrs. Tomkins, Mrs. Bambush, Mrs. Girard, and Mrs. Steinke. Would the students with their parent helpers and teachers please rise, and would we all please give them a warm welcome on this occasion.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today and introduce 28 visitors from the St. Joseph Catholic school in Whitecourt. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 25 special guests from my old community school. They're in the public gallery. They've come an awful long distance on a bus today. I'd like to introduce their teacher, Mrs. Booth, and parent helpers Mrs. Lahd, Mr. Deitz, Mrs. Prentice, Mrs. McKay, Mrs. Fetkenher, Mr. Henry, and Mrs. Heather. This is one of the first schools I'm aware of that went to the four-day school week. Milo is a small village at the north end of Lake McGregor, a really nice middle-of-the-prairie vacation spot, where there is lots of sailboating and lots of fishing. I'd like all our guests to rise and receive a special warm applause.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to all on this beautiful Alberta day. It's my pleasure to introduce two constituents from the oil sands capital of the world, Fort McMurray. With me today are Iris Pasareno, the program director of the Salvation Army START program, and Niki-Lou Mackin, who is the co-chair of Family Voices in the northeastern region. They are truly two champions, capturing the spirit of having energy in Fort McMurray, caring for those in need. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the members assembled Ryan Schubert, a resident of Fort Saskatchewan, a first-year political science student at the U of A, and a worker in several successful campaigns. Also accompanying him up in the gallery is Theresa Lightfoot, who serves the constituents of Strathcona from the office here in the Legislature. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two incredibly important people in my life. The first is my strength, my confidence, my rock: my wife, Sue. The second, I'm proud to say, is my future and the future of this province, my son, Austin, who's three months old. I'd ask them to rise in the gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a young lady that I have known for many years. As a matter of fact, this gal and I graduated from Blackie high school together. Her name is Sheila Macklin. After high school she received her postsecondary teaching degree and taught in the Willow Creek school division for many years. Always an avid reader, she was appointed to the board of the Marigold library system in 1998 and for the last number of years has served as chairman of the board. We are all aware of the tremendous success of the Marigold system. No doubt, Sheila is here today to check out our new Minister of Community Development,

responsible for the libraries. I would ask Sheila to please rise and receive the usual warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

1:40 Tuition Fees for Postsecondary Education

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the new Minister of Advanced Education noted over the weekend, this government's approach to their alleged top priority, advanced education, has been, quote, willy-nilly and no plan, unquote. News flash: there's no plan in any other ministry either. My first question is to the new minister. When can we expect to see the long-awaited draft tuition affordability policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess that it's kind of a unique opportunity to say that for a maiden question, being presented by my critic, who's also my constituent, I want to make sure he understands that my door is always open for all of my constituents. I don't ask them how they voted.

On the question, this was with Don Braid in Calgary, and I must say that he as well as his wife, Sydney Sharpe, who's also a journalist in Calgary, have always treated me fairly. We were talking about what happens when there's a perception that if you build something in Edmonton, you have to build one in Calgary too. What I want to do is essentially have an 80,000-foot view of Alberta, look at where all our facilities are, look at where all our students are, look at where the bottlenecks are, and make decisions that Albertans will understand.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was in answer to my second question, so I'll reask my first. When are we going to see the tuition policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much. I heard you this time. I had an opportunity to meet last Friday with my executive committee and this morning with 150 of my staff. I can tell you that we've got a great team. I'm being assured that over the next few weeks the reports on both A Learning Alberta and tuition are going to come my way. I will take them through the process that we have with respect to standing policy, cabinet, and caucus. So stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Watching that channel for a long time.

Given that today, April 10, is the second anniversary of Mount Royal College's written proposal to become an undergraduate university, can the minister confirm that MRU will be a priority if and when he comes up with a plan?

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much for that question, hon. member. Mount Royal College is doing all the right things. You know, they've applied for applied degrees. There is a whole list of them: bachelor of nursing, bachelor of business administration, bachelor of

arts, bachelor of arts in justice studies, bachelor of science, bachelor of communication. Those particular applications are currently being reviewed, and as soon as that is done, we will proceed further.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Rod Love Consulting Inc.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Official Opposition revealed that the Finance ministry paid the Premier's former chief of staff, Rod Love, \$46,000 in 2004. When asked why the consulting contracts did not provide adequate documentation for the services received, the minister stated, "A significant amount of advice . . . was provided verbally, some probably in written form." This government appears to have learned nothing from the Kelley Charlebois scandal. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. Given that the minister stated that some of the services were probably in written form, why did they not show up in the access to information that came back to us?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, you may recall that when the question came from across the way last week, I said that I would review that and see if there were any written reports, which there aren't. It was strategic advice. It was given in verbal form. I indicated as well that Alberta Finance had reviewed its contracting mechanisms, which I think is a good thing and a positive thing. We should all do that on a very regular basis and have some very stringent terms of reference and expectations that will be in any contracts that we write with anyone for consulting or any other endeavour. They will lay out very clearly what the expectations are and whether it will be written reports, advice strategy that may be verbal. It will be very clear in all contracts as to what the expectations are of the person that we contract with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister tell us if Mr. Love won the \$46,000 contracts through a proper competitive tendering process?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I cannot say that with any certainty. I was not the person who entered into the contract. Again, I will review that and get the hon. member an answer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister assure this Assembly that contract completion evaluation forms were signed and dated for the \$46,000 as per the Auditor General's recommendations following the Charlebois scandal?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I can review that for the hon. member and get back to him.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Private Health Insurance

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our publicly funded health care system offers Albertans a competitive advantage that will be lost under the third way. Increasing the role for private insurance shifts costs to individuals and will increase the financial burden for

businesses that are forced to spend more on employee benefits. For private-sector employers it will mean reduced profits, and for the public sector it will mean reduced services. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the larger employers are in a better position to afford extended health benefits, what is the minister doing to prevent smaller employers from being placed at a disadvantage when it comes to attracting and retaining workers?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the health policy framework did not contemplate that we would introduce private insurance in either a mandatory or voluntary way. Our whole discussion surrounding this has been relative to the removal of the prohibition for people in Alberta to purchase private insurance. Simply that: removal of the prohibition. There's no barrier in Saskatchewan, no barrier in Manitoba. In fact, there are no barriers in five provinces and territories. The only barriers that exist in terms of purchasing private insurance are in Quebec, B.C., Alberta, P.E.I., and Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, since the Chaoulli decision by the Supreme Court, which identified that it was mitigated against the Charter rights of the people in Quebec to have a prohibition on private insurance, and since many constitutional lawyers believe that this is transposable – in other words, section 1 of the Canadian Charter is like section 7 of the Quebec Charter – we have been looking at removing the barrier to providing private insurance opportunities for those who wish to avail themselves of them. That has no suggestion whatsoever of the government either selling insurance or forcing that on anybody.

Ms Blakeman: It has everything to do with it.

To the same minister: given that auto manufacturers like Toyota and GM have chosen to operate in Canada rather than in the United States because medicare saves money, why would the minister proceed with third-way private insurance initiatives, removing barriers, or however she wishes to frame it, that will increase costs and make Alberta less competitive? Why would you do that to us?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that my first answer was particularly clear, that we were not trying to do anything that would in any way affect the stability of the health insurance program here under the Alberta health insurance plan, the medicare plan. But I will take the opportunity to remind Albertans that almost a third of the services that we pay for here from our general revenue fund are things that the Canada Health Act does not mandate us to pay for. We do so under our health insurance plan, the medicare plan. They can call it what they will. The Alberta health insurance plan that we currently have covers Albertans for chiropractic services in co-payment, responsibilities for much of podiatry services, for much of psychiatric services, and for many other services that are not mandated under the Canada Health Act.

Mr. Speaker, I would just take exception to the fact that there is some belief being perpetrated by the opposition that we are going to foist private insurance on Albertans or corporations. We have absolutely no intent of doing that.

1:50

Ms Blakeman: It's called delisting.

To the same minister: how does the minister intend to deal with increasing costs in the public sector given that organized labour is now encouraging groups to include a clause in contracts so that extra costs generated by the third-way reforms will be covered by the employer?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I've had the distinct pleasure of meeting with some of the organized labour groups either because they came in for consultation or in one instance because I went out to visit them

at the offices of the AUPE, the public employees, over on 170th Street. They never ever once suggested to me that they were introducing extra clauses in bargaining. They did identify that if there were extra costs as a result of any moves that we made, they would be looking for those from employers, but I assured them on that occasion that that wasn't the case.

Mr. Speaker, we know today that we get less than a billion dollars from our health care premiums, and there's less than \$2 billion that comes from the federal government. So in terms of a budget that's over \$10 billion, there's a considerable amount that comes from the general revenue fund. Whether it's under this government or any other government, there's a considerable gap in what we're receiving for revenues and what we're actually expending.

Mr. Speaker, none of the labour groups have made contact with me to formally indicate that they are writing those clauses for collective agreements.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Opposition to the government's two-tier, private health care scheme is not limited to New Democrats, the Friends of Medicare, or even Martha and Henry. It's not limited just to the Tory leadership contenders either. No less a person than the Prime Minister of Canada himself, a Tory, has fired a warning shot across the bow of the Minister of Health and Wellness on her third-way proposals. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the Prime Minister of Canada wrong when he expresses concern about dual practice creating conflicts of interest for physicians as there would be a financial incentive for them to stream patients into the private portion of their practice?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's letter has some wonderful news in it in that for the first time a Prime Minister of Canada has written a letter to this government suggesting to our Premier that much of what we have done is laudable but also that, in fact, the provinces themselves have the responsibility for the delivery of health care. We have never had that acknowledgement before. The Prime Minister opened the door for the health minister, myself, to have discussions with his Health minister surrounding some of those proposals. He's identified a concern; he's expressed it relative to doctors working in both systems.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to use the opportunity to speak to the Health minister about why we would engage in that kind of opportunity. We are in fact trying to make sure that we protect great doctors from leaving and moving over to the private system, where, for example, in Quebec there's absolutely no control, nothing that implies that those doctors make a contribution to the public health care system. They move to the private system without any engagement whatsoever in on-call or any other capacity.

So I have received that concern. I acknowledge that concern expressed by the Prime Minister, and I hope to persuade them to look at some of the other options or at least why we are providing the options that we have in the health policy framework.

Mr. Mason: The minister should have kept reading after the first paragraph. The Prime Minister goes on to say that allowing double-dipping doctors "legitimizes queue-jumping as it provides an approved mechanism for patients to pay to seek treatment at the front of the line." Given that, is the Prime Minister wrong? Will the minister come out of her message box and answer the Prime Minister's question?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will be pleased to answer the Prime Minister's question and the Minister of Health's question. In the manner in which this is posed, it would sound like there hasn't also been a kindly gesture made by the Prime Minister for us to engage in further dialogue. I think he made some pointed references to things that he would like us to review. He also identified care guarantees for us to review and indicated that there were discussion points that he encouraged us to be a part of. I am confident that we can engage in that kind of discussion.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the Prime Minister has expressed concern about the dual practices proposed by this minister being a magnet for rural physicians to migrate to urban centres, what guarantee can the minister give – guarantee – that rural doctors will not leave rural areas and small towns and move to the big cities where they can make more money? Is the Prime Minister wrong?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the hon. member on this point, and I think his underlying message is: what are we going to do to make sure that there's an adequate workforce in rural Alberta if in any capacity of the system we introduce private care? I think that's a very legitimate concern. It's one that many of the rural MLAs here in government have expressed to me. We have a workforce plan that is being developed in more detail to try and make sure that we're attacking the workforce from a number of areas. I think that what we have to do in detailing the type of supports that could be provided or the framework for private delivery is make sure that whatever type of private delivery is done would not negatively impact the public system. I use my favourite example of the ophthalmologist in Calgary that spends two weeks of every month going to California to lecture at university because he is not able to do a full four weeks here because he's paid only for the amount that he can afford to do within a two-week period. In fact, if he were to practise here in private care, it would not negatively impact rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to tremendous growth in Calgary and area, including of course Calgary-Lougheed, over the past decade, many of my constituents have expressed rather extreme concern about traffic congestion. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Could the minister please update us on the status of this important project?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important road, of course, not only just for the city of Calgary but as we look at the Canamex highway and how this all ties in together. The road, of course, goes through some of the Tsuu T'ina First Nation, so there has to be negotiations with the First Nation, and those negotiations seem to be progressing quite well. There's real motivation on both sides to complete them. However, there's some discussion about the appraised value of the property, and of course that is very important because that relates to what the First Nation is to be paid.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister unless he would like his associate minister to be part of the answer. The question is: when will the negotiations

conclude – not begin but conclude – with the Tsuu T'ina Nation so that the project can be undergone with construction?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the negotiations are moving along quite well. However, I can't give a definite answer on how soon they'll be completed. I can tell the hon. member that a lot of preparatory work is being done, like some of the engineering, some of the public consultation, and some of the functional planning. Of course, the environmental issues are being looked at as we speak. So we're getting in the position where once it's ratified, we'll be able to move forward quite rapidly.

Mr. Rodney: My final question, then, to the same minister: once an agreement is reached with the Tsuu T'ina Nation, can you tell us how long it will be before construction begins and people are actually driving on a ring road in the southwest part of Calgary?

Mr. Lund: Well, as I indicated, a lot of that preparatory work is being done. The actual engineering, of course, the detailed engineering, would take probably six months, maybe a little longer. Then, of course, the contract would have to be tendered. So I would imagine that it would probably be at least a year after the negotiations are completed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

2:00 Applewood Park Community Association

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General found that the Applewood Park Community Association could not show how it spent its third grant of \$20,000. In fact, nearly \$6,000 is missing; no receipts, nothing. The 2006 fiscal plan states very clearly that the Wild Rose Foundation board is seeking recovery of the third grant of \$20,000. To the Minister of Community Development: has the department collected the money back, yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. As he indicated, the Auditor General came up with some recommendations, so an entirely new set of guidelines and accountability requirements has been developed for the program. The new guidelines and the accountability requirements were developed by the department's staff, and they were reviewed by an independent agency. The program has recently been reinstated, and in regard to the Applewood grant I can inform the member that the file has been forwarded to the Crown debt collections to recover the funds. The process is now under way.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: does the minister know what happened to the \$6,000 missing in the third grant?

Mr. Ducharme: I'm not aware of that, but as I indicated, we are going to recover the monies.

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, you should know that.

Anyway, to the same minister: given that the auditor for Applewood and the chief financial officer for the Calgary-Montrose constituency association are the same person, can the minister offer any explanation or assurance to this House that funds were not used in support of constituency association business?

Mr. Ducharme: I can't speculate on that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Bowness High School

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bowness high school is a vibrant school with academic, drama, dance, mechanics, construction, computers, and multimedia education. Unfortunately, for years health concerns have also been attributed to the old math wing of the Calgary Bowness high school. My question today is for the Minister of Education. What steps will the government take to address health issues in this facility?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta provides money to locally elected school boards, who in turn prioritize the expenditure of those dollars. In fact, we provide hundreds of millions of dollars to accomplish these purposes. Let us say that locally elected school boards are the government's trustee, and in this particular case they have taken some very positive steps. They have done some extensive air quality testing. They have found no health-related concerns. As a precautionary measure they did remove the carpet in that math wing, and they'll do whatever else is required to try and eradicate the problem. But at the moment there is nothing that can be tracked to that specific problem.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In addition to health concerns Bowness high school is in need of modernization. Does the modernization have to be designed to strictly follow our old school utilization formula, which includes things like narrow hallways, smaller classrooms, generally trying to get the square footage of the building down, or does the board just have to design the school to be cost-effective to maintain?

Mr. Zwozdesky: That's a complicated question, Mr. Speaker. Let me say that school boards develop their capital plans, and this particular renovation request for Bowness high was, as I recall, in the 11th ranked spot for priorities from what I remember the board having turned in relevant to its '05-06 needs. I don't know if that will move up the ranking schedule or not when the June requests come in from that particular board. However, I am satisfied, at least for the time being, that the formula that has been used has had some merit, and if necessary we will be addressing that and perhaps changing some of it now that we have the responsibility in Education to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. My final question regarding Bowness high is very direct. Is money forthcoming from Alberta Education to address the needs of this high school and other school facilities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it depends on what the specific needs might turn out to be, and that has yet to be determined. If it's determined that monies are needed for some new construction, it could come out of one envelope. If it's a different type of upgrading or modernization or more of an infrastructure and maintenance renewal type of project, then that money would come out of a different envelope. But it's always up to the priority of the local school board and how they feel about it.

The second part of the answer is this: I have been asked to develop a school infrastructure plan that will deal with new construction needs, new school replacement needs, modernizations, upgrades, rightsizings, and so on. That includes modulars and portables as well as the second envelope, which is infrastructure and maintenance renewal. I hope to have that plan ready sometime in June, and I'm then going to be sharing it with the school boards; in fact, they'll be helping develop it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday the minister of infrastructure stated in regard to the sale of Edmonton ring road lands: "If we were to go and purchase those properties today, we'd be paying several times what was paid back then." Yet records show that this government purchased ring road land in 1981 for \$42,000 per acre, and then sold most of it in 1999 for only \$7,500 per acre. It appears that while ordinary Albertans are charged premium rates for property in Edmonton, some companies which donate to the Progressive Conservative Party acquire land at fire-sale prices. My questions are to the minister of infrastructure. Why did this government sell the ring road land to Lehigh Portland Cement Limited for only \$7,500 per acre when taxpayers forked out \$42,000 per acre 18 years earlier?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that it seems to be getting better. At least they gave me five minutes' notice today of this very complex deal, and I'm now requested to answer questions relative to it. Once again, we'll have to investigate. We don't know the details of this. Actually, some of this dates back to '92, so it's getting to be quite old. But we will investigate it and see what we can find.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the process in his department for appraising such lands given the huge discrepancy between the purchase price and the recent sale price?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, once again, I've got to investigate what this deal was all about. As you remember, last week we had about six questions relative to some land that was purchased, and in part of the agreement there was excess land to be returned to the person that sold us the land in the first place. I don't know, from the quick perusal that I've had of this particular deal, which amounts to several pages, just what all of the answers are.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a process question.

However, will the minister ask the office of the chief internal auditor to investigate the liquidation of this land and others like it?

Mr. Lund: Once again, we'll look into the whole situation, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:10 Calgary Registry Services

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has recently come to my attention that the Department of Government Services forced a registry agent to sell their registry, which was located in downtown Calgary. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Why did your department take this action against the owner of this business?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Shaw is correct. Government Services did uncover a long history of unprofessional practices, and there were some contract breaches, so I have to say that as a result of the investigation that was conducted by the department staff, the owner was notified to sell the business; otherwise, his agreement would be cancelled.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. I just have one supplemental. As a result of your ministry's actions, will Calgarians now be forced to travel to other locations in the city to be served?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, Calgarians will not have to travel to another location. This agency has been sold. Government Services will work with the new owners and operators to ensure that there's a smooth transition, and Calgarians will be served properly and correctly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Serviced industrial land around the Yellowhead Trail and 178th Street is now listed for sale at at least \$55,000 per acre. Members of the inner circle of the PC Party, including Jack Agrios, Robert Lloyd, and Gary G. Campbell, sold land to the province in 1981 for \$42,000 per acre, a deal worth \$6.2 million for themselves, but now we find out that it's a bad deal for the taxpayers because the government turned around and sold this land in 1999 for \$7,500 per acre. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Is Gary G. Campbell, the gentleman who was one of the sellers of that land in 1981, the same person who now sits on this government's Internal Audit Committee as a public member? Also, is this the same person who is a fundraiser for the PC Party in Alberta?

An Hon. Member: Is it the same guy?

Mr. MacDonald: Same guy.

The Speaker: The latter part of the question, dealing with political party matters, is really not relevant in here. The first part is, though.

Mr. Lund: As I indicated earlier, this is the same parcel of land that the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung asked about. We will be looking into the whole situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that Lehigh Portland Cement sold the land to CN immediately after they purchased it from the government, was there a public tender on the sale of this land?

Mr. Lund: Same answer as last: we'll have to look into how it was handled. It was a number of years ago.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why is this government selling public land now for so little when last week the hon. minister stated in this House that we're selling land now for the taxpayers and indicating that we are getting more money for it than when we purchased it when we were accumulating this for the ring roads? Why is there this liquidation price for this specific parcel of land?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, in the process that we use today – and this is what I will refer to – we get the land appraised. We will then put it on the market through real estate companies. They attempt to sell it. In some cases, in fact, it's sold for even more than the appraised value. If there's something different with these lands, we'll try to find out what exactly it is. But at this point that's the process that we use to make sure that we're getting top value for the land for the taxpayers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Security of Children's Services Offices

Dr. Pannu: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the NDP opposition has learned that on the weekend of April 1 and 2 a number of computers were stolen from the Children's Services ministry offices located on the 11th floor of Sterling Place. The 11th floor houses a number of very important children's services, including resources for children with disabilities and adoption services among others. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Why did the minister fail to publicly disclose the thefts of laptop computers from its offices if for no other reason than to at least reassure the families of the Children's Services' clients and the general public that confidential information has not been compromised?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I have to say in all honesty that I'm not aware of this situation, but I certainly will check into it immediately after question period and get back to the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these computers were stolen over a week ago, why have none of the officials briefed the minister about this, particularly in light of possible breaches of client confidentiality?

Mrs. Forsyth: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of that, but as I said to the member, immediately after question period I will be going to my office and I will be finding out why that has happened, and I will get back to him.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, it's really surprising that the minister hasn't learned about this very serious breach of security.

Given that we have been told that the stolen computers were laptops, making it more likely that sensitive data is stored on the computer's local drive than on a server, how can the minister be so lackadaisical about the whole matter rather taking responsibility for her own failure to do anything about it?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that I'm not is lackadaisical. I can tell you that the minister is sitting here quite taken aback by his question. I was not aware of it. I think that probably being honest about the situation is the best policy. I have indicated to him that I will immediately after question period go up to my office and get to the bottom of this and get the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Traffic Safety

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September 2004 the government accepted all the recommendations of the McDermid report *Saving Lives on Alberta's Roads*. It has been more than a year and a half since, and while we continue to hear about the fatalities on our roads, we have heard little about the government's plan to implement these important recommendations. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. When will the government take action and finally implement the recommendations of the McDermid report?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that immediately when that report was given to the former minister, he got together some 12 government departments and some 35 groups of stakeholders, and they went through the report and came up with a traffic plan. Now, some of the plan has been implemented, things like passing an emergency vehicle and that you have to reduce your speed if you're in a lane next to it down to 60 kilometres or whatever the posted speed limit if it's below that, but there are a number of things that are in that plan that require a lot of work, changes of legislation. Some of it is to do with engineering of the roads, some that are controversial and will be going out for further consultation. So it's not as though there's been nothing done. We will be implementing even some more of it fairly shortly, but there has been progress made.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. How much longer do we have to wait before all this traffic safety plan is finally implemented?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, there's a lot to be done here with things like engineering, legislation, but there are some controversial parts to the proposal as well, things like the speed on green photo radar, the fact that people over 75 would have to have medical assessments done annually. Those are very controversial things, so we will be putting that out for public consultation. They're just proposals coming out of the committee, but we want to consult with Albertans and find out whether, in fact, those are the kinds of things they want to see happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

How is the minister going to make sure that we have enough police officers, special constables for enforcement since one of the main recommendations of the McDermid report was enforcement?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. In fact, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and myself and the Minister of Justice are meeting tonight at 5:30 to discuss the traffic safety plan.

As well, though, in response to the hon. Member for West Yellowhead's question there are a number of issues that we want to look at, obviously education and enforcement. Interdiction teams are very critical as we move forward regarding traffic enforcement education for all of our highways. But the real issues that we want to look at are the 400 fatalities and the, I think, 18,000 or 13,000 serious collisions on our highways in Alberta, which, obviously, have a huge impact on the lives of those individuals that have been injured but as well on our whole health care system. We want to be able to look at the strategies in place throughout Alberta so that we can work with our officers, whether it's police officers, whether it's sheriffs, whether it's peace officers that are hired by municipalities, that are in place right now. It's a strategy to build on how we can educate the community, educate young drivers, educate old drivers but, as well, ensure that the enforcement initiative is there to provide again that understanding by drivers that have the privilege of driving in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling in Horseshoe Canyon

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Environment announced much-needed baseline testing of water wells as now a mandatory requirement prior to coal-bed methane drilling only after public pressure from the opposition along with rural Albertans. This is progress, but many landowners have serious questions about the contamination of groundwater and drinking water over the past five years. What can Albertans count on in terms of lost confidence in the investigation of this department in holding responsible parties accountable? To the environment minister: will the minister appoint an independent, scientific panel to investigate the impacts of five years without baseline testing?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank the hon. member for recognizing the very positive and proactive action that the Ministry of Environment has taken pertaining to the issue of water. I also want to say that the protection of our air, our land, and our water is a top priority for me as the Minister of Environment, and I am the Minister of Environment. With every fibre of energy that I have, we are testing – not only that, but we have an independent panel that is reviewing the results of the baseline testing that we are developing. Even more importantly, we're going to be comparing apples and oranges and turnips, not, shall I say, the examples of where we are doing some testing that ultimately were comparing apples, oranges, and turnips as opposed to in fact comparing apples and apples. It's a very proactive approach that I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View would agree is very positive in securing our water supply well into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could we try again? To the Environment minister: what is your department doing to establish an independent, scientific panel to investigate five years without baseline testing of the Horseshoe Canyon?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, for any member of the public or landowners located in the Horseshoe Canyon area or anywhere else in this province, they can, number one, call our hotline, which is a 24-hour environmental protection hotline, relative to concerns raised. It's 1-800-222-6514.

Also, pertaining to independent reviewing, test results will be shared directly with the landowners as well as with Alberta Environment. We will then review the results of the database of information from this very proactive testing that we're doing, and we will report it in a very transparent way to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: why does the Energy and Utilities Board refer water contamination complaints from a landowner to the company drilling the coal-bed methane well rather than investigating the complaint?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the first responsibility of any company that's applied for an application to drill is to follow all of the standards that are there. Therefore, if there are problems and concerns, it is their requirement, first and foremost, to be proactive in dealing with the landowners on these issues. That's how it is, and we would continue to encourage that.

The industry has been very proactive even on the water issues that you'd mentioned. It's the industry working with stakeholders that has brought forth these recommendations that there be baseline testing. This has been very much supported. These are the kinds of initiatives that industry continues to work with. There are challenges from time to time given the quantity of the activity, but they take a very proactive establishment to ensure that those water, environmental, and landowner issues are dealt with. It's in their interest, and it's in all Albertans' interest.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Water Quality in Wabamun Lake Area

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On August 3, 2005, a train derailment at Lake Wabamun caused over 700,000 litres of bunker C crude to spill into the lake. Since that date, the village of Wabamun has had to truck in water for its potable water use. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is his ministry doing to resolve this ongoing concern?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I want to say how proud I was of Alberta Environment when we issued enforcement orders to Canadian National within the first 48 hours of the incident. I also want to say that our Water for Life strategy, which commits to safe, secure drinking water for all Albertans, is something we take very seriously. We're working closely with the municipality. As well, we're working with Capital health. I want to reassure all members of this Assembly but also all Albertans and especially those in the Wabamun area that they presently have access to a supply of water which is safe and clean. They will continue to have that safe, clean drinking water. As we go forward in our Water for Life strategy of our regional system, we're working very closely with the affected municipality involved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. There are a number of other municipalities in the area who have water concerns not directly related to the CN spill; however, they do have issues regarding potable water. So I'd like to know what his ministry is specifically doing to address these regional water supply issues.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good question because of the importance of groundwater wells. In fact, you may not be aware, but there are three new groundwater wells that have already been drilled for one of the municipality's villages. These are being connected in a regional way to the existing treatment facility, which again, I think, is taking energy and resources, pulling them together to ensure that safe and secure drinking water. These wells will supply water for the village in the region for many years to come. So I want to personally assure everyone in this House, all Albertans, and the members of Wabamun that we will continue to do everything possible in securing safe drinking water for the members in the Wabamun area based on this terrible, what I call, ecological disaster that took place last summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. He's responded in regard to the village of Wabamun's concerns directly, but I wonder if he could tell me what the long-term commitments for other communities in the Wabamun region are regarding their water concerns as well.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as you know, we have a new policy committee chair of Energy and Sustainable Development, which is so keen on our Water for Life strategy. He's from Battle River-Wainwright, and he often pontificates about the importance of water.

I want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that as we go forward, the \$174 million in the Minister of Finance's estimates, of course, as part of our budget this year will be a welcome addition of money that, in fact, will help supply some of those regional water treatment facilities that we are endeavouring to prioritize in terms of that secure, safe drinking water that I've spoken about earlier.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Caribou Mountains wildland provincial park was designated as home for one of Alberta's threatened caribou herds. On Friday we discovered that the advisory committee struck to develop a plan to steward this precious ecosystem has gone off the rails and recommended revoking the wildland park status. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Will the minister assure this House today that he will not allow the Caribou Mountains provincial park to lose its protected status as a wildland provincial park?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta considers all suggestions that Albertans bring forward. The

local community nominated the Caribou Mountains wildland area for protection through the special places program. As the questioner has identified, a local advisory committee is working with parks staff on the management plan for the Caribou Mountains wildland area. Input from the public and stakeholders regarding the management plan will also be considered. There is presently no industrial activity occurring in the Caribou Mountains wildland. Hunting and off-highway vehicle use are allowed. As has been identified by the member, the issue is off-highway use off designated trails. I basically just was briefed on it briefly today. I cannot provide you with an answer today, but I'll certainly be looking into the matter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit today to table all recommendations made by all parks advisory and planning committees in this House?

Mr. Ducharme: My understanding is that it is a public, local committee. I will be looking over the recommendations that come forward and will do the right thing at the appropriate time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It's not just this park. It's all parks advisory plans, please.

Given the lack of legislated protection from industrial development such as drilling in the Rumsey natural area will this minister commit to actually protecting Alberta's protected areas?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, the government does try to provide a good balance in regard to the benefits of the natural resources that we have along with the protection of our environmental areas. I'm sure that all considerations will be put on the table at that time, before a decision is made.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of a number of members to participate in Members' Statements, but first of all I want to start off today with a quotation.

There have been significant extensions in the amount of time and effort required by an M.L.A. The very nature of the expansion and growth of Alberta has expanded those duties. The nature of modern government has expanded those duties. The modern communications age has expanded those duties. I think that has been a very useful expansion, and I think a very good thing for democracy that we in fact do have a much closer contact with our constituents because of modern communications.

That quotation is found in *Alberta Hansard*, November 2, 1972, and those are the words of Dr. Hugh M. Horner, who was the federal Member of Parliament for Jasper-Edson from 1958 to 1967. In 1967 he was elected as the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne as a member of the Official Opposition and served as the Opposition House Leader from 1967 through to 1971. He was re-elected in 1971, 1975, and 1979 in the constituency of Barrhead. He resigned in September 1979. Among the portfolios held by Dr. Horner in addition to being Deputy Premier was that of minister of agriculture, the portfolio currently served by his son the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Dr. Horner passed away on March 25, 1997.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House several guests here who come in support of Bill 206. Some of them are from ECMAS. I'm not sure whether I have all the names up there, but let me just say a few names: Gary Devries, Verena Primeau and her wonderful little son Brayden, Kay McCaig, Elsie Cable, and Abdulahi Mahamad. Could you please stand?

Thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: I'd like to introduce a good friend of mine and a good friend of many MLAs. He's off abroad right now studying, but he took the time to come and visit us today while he was touring this part of Canada. I'd ask Bart West to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Child Access Exchange Centres

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The initial period following a divorce or separation is often a stressful and confusing time for a child. This stress is further compounded by the sudden absence of one parent from the home. Study after study has shown that children are much happier and healthier when they have access to both their parents.

Reducing the obstacles to child access and visitation is an important way to ensure that children have the opportunity to spend quality time with both their parents and realize their full potential. One method of addressing child access concerns would be to establish provincially designated child access exchange centres for individuals to use both voluntarily and on court order. These would be childcentric facilities where one parent could drop off the child to be picked up by the other parent in a neutral, confrontation-free environment.

The standardization of such facilities would ensure that drop-off and pickup services were delivered in a uniform and non-confrontational manner by trained personnel and staff province-wide. In addition, the staff at these centres could help foster understanding between parents and guardians and help them better resolve disagreements pertaining to access and exchange of children.

I have received correspondence on this matter from community organizations such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary and the Southside Christian daycare in Edmonton, who have expressed their support for designated child access exchange centres. Moreover, these groups have indicated that they would be willing to offer their sites for use as designated access exchange facilities.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly feel that the provincial designation of child access exchange facilities would be a valuable step in reducing the stress associated with child visitation and access.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Una Maclean Evans

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to take note of one of my constituents. On March 11 last Mrs. Una Maclean Evans celebrated her 80th birthday. This recognition was researched and written by our mutual friend, John Patrick Day.

Mrs. Evans has been active at all levels of public life in our province and country for 60 years, ranging from her service in World War II to her ongoing interest and advocacy at all levels of government.

Hon. members will possibly first think of Mrs. Evans for her service on Edmonton's city council. During that time she was instrumental in changing the entire direction of Edmonton's transportation policy and in planning the direction of new subdivisions, most memorably that small city now represented by our colleagues for Edmonton-Mill Creek, Edmonton-Ellerslie, and Edmonton-Mill Woods. Anyone who served with her will recall the great intelligence and integrity she brought to city council. She remains quite active in advising and assisting civic organizations and in keeping policy matters before the public.

For several years she served honourably and well as a citizenship court judge. In this capacity she welcomed several tens of thousands of new Canadians to this country as citizens. It is perhaps possible that some hon. members here are among their number.

Mrs. Evans, of course, was married to the well-known and well-loved journalist, Art Evans. This in itself would have made her a public figure. As she often remarks, she was never quite sure how much of her home life would appear on the front page of the *Edmonton Journal* the following morning. I think, though, in this regard, accompanying her husband, Art, on his round of community places, coffee shops, hotel lounges, and other such places kept Una close to the ground, hearing what the people of Edmonton and Alberta were really saying. She remains a good listener today.

More significant – this is what she thinks is her own greatest contribution – is her historical work on the UFA government and its leading members. As a researcher for the Glenbow-Alberta Institute she conducted long and detailed interviews with former Premiers Brownlee and Reid, not to mention many others. Most of the historical record we have of those governments is her work. I would also add, Mr. Speaker, that there is hardly a part of Alberta's history that does not have some contribution by her to our knowledge of it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

2:40 Longest Indoor Soccer Game

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here in Alberta we have a long-standing tradition of athletic excellence, from our professional teams to the excellent showing of our provincial athletes at the recent Olympic Games.

Today I bring forward another example of this excellence. Yesterday morning dozens of athletes wrapped up their participation in the world's longest indoor soccer game. One hundred and sixty people spent 36 hours playing soccer in an attempt to break the world record. I'm sure that once their sore muscles subside, they will realize that their endurance has led them to a great accomplishment. I understand that their attempt will be submitted to the *Guinness World Records* book.

Setting a world record demands the most from a person's physical abilities and concentration and determination. Considering the popularity of this sport across the world, it would be exciting if a

group from Alberta is able to carve out a special place in history. Events like these also raise the many benefits of sports: they keep us active, Mr. Speaker, healthy, and on the right track to success.

The legacy of this weekend will go beyond setting the record. The world's longest indoor soccer game was also a fundraiser for the Mill Woods youth centre. Thanks to their efforts \$65,000 was raised. These funds will benefit Mill Woods' youth through the support of a drop-in centre.

I'd like to ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating these young people on raising the money and doing this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Before and After School Care for Children

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a booming economy, and with a booming economy comes booming economy problems. One major concern that we are facing everywhere in Alberta is the great demand for employees in every area of industry, small business, retail, health care, home care, and school-age care.

Red Deer Child Care has been forced to close two of their before and after school programs because they are unable to find qualified staff. High staff turnover is a fact of life in child care, but the situation is growing worse every day. Low unemployment rates and low wages for child care workers have not allowed Red Deer Child Care to replace staff.

Closure of more programs is imminent. These closures will not only impact the immediate families but will have a domino effect on the rest of the community and the province. If parents do not have consistent, safe child care, they are left with few choices: not working or leaving their children in unsupervised situations. Employers pay the price, too, with increased absenteeism at work as parents try to juggle their lack of before and after school child care.

Before and after school child care is a concern for all communities in Alberta. If we believe that it takes a whole village to raise a child, then this is a time when the whole community needs to work together. Corporations, governments, and communities should come to the table together to brainstorm for solutions to this mutual concern. Perhaps industry and small business need to adopt flexible hours for employees with children. Perhaps corporate sponsorship of before and after school programs is a solution. Perhaps volunteerism has a role to play in this issue. Perhaps more government funding is also part of the solution. There is more than one solution to a concern that affects everyone.

Mr. Speaker, for the sake of our children, our communities, and our economy it's time to come to the table together to find the solutions to a safe and sustainable before and after school child care system.

University of Calgary Achievements

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak today on some of the accomplishments of the University of Calgary as it reaches the milestone of 40 years of autonomy. In its 40 years as an independent, public university the U of C has grown in status until it has become one of Canada's pre-eminent teaching and research universities.

In teaching the university has gone from an enrolment of 4,000 in 1966 to over 27,000 today. During the same time period the number of graduate students exploded over twelvefold, from 334 to over 4,200. Degrees granted went from 635 in 1966 to over 6,200 last year, bringing the total to more than 110,000 graduates who have received their degrees from the U of C and who have gone on to contribute to the growth and prosperity of our province. The

university now offers over 2,400 different credit and noncredit courses, and its library holdings now exceed 2 and a half million books and periodicals.

In the field of research in the most recent fiscal year the U of C brought in over \$280 million in research revenue, which places it among the top seven universities in Canada. In many diverse areas, including petroleum geology, civil engineering, anthropology, chemistry, and medicine, important discoveries and breakthroughs have been made which have pushed back the frontiers of knowledge, enriched our province and our country, and contributed to the greater public good. Last year the U of C received record donations of \$70 million, bringing its total endowments to \$330 million, which is among the top 10 in Canada.

But the University of Calgary is not content to rest on its laurels or to maintain the status quo. Under the inspired leadership of President Harvey Weingarten the University of Calgary is boldly moving forward towards a vision of the future. The U of C is proceeding with innovative ideas which will focus the university on areas of excellence and which will meet the aspirations of the people of the city and the province in which it lives.

I'm sure all hon. members will join me in congratulating the faculty, staff, and students on the success of their gala last evening, which had a sellout crowd of 750 Calgarians, including our Minister of Advanced Education, our Minister of Health and Wellness, and our Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I look forward to the bold and innovative plans that they have outlined for the future of the University of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Proportional Representation

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, to continue my changing the face of democracy in Alberta series, I wanted to talk more about B.C.'s citizens' assembly. As I mentioned before, the assembly members settled on the single transferrable vote system as the best suited for British Columbia's purposes. The people of that province, represented through the assembly, wanted to revitalize their democracy. The government wanted to encourage more participation and to offer the assurance that no vote is wasted and that all voices are heard.

We know, and the people in B.C. knew, that opponents of proportional representation usually raise flags with respect to the perceived or anticipated threat to effective local representation and the possibility of growing party powers through the use of central candidate lists. The B.C. citizens' assembly heard those very concerns as they studied the different models and came up with the idea that is proportional representation within each constituency, not throughout the province; that is to say, outcomes are still going to be determined locally, not dictated centrally or top down.

The recommendation was that constituencies would be merged or combined into larger electoral districts to be represented by multiple MLAs. In large, densely populated urban ridings you can have up to six or seven MLAs while in rural areas only two or three would be needed. The actual overall number of MLAs will not change from their current total of 79 members. The Premier would still be the leader of the party winning the most seats, but cabinets can now include members from other parties, and coalition governments would be encouraged in situations with close vote counts.

A referendum was held in B.C. in May of 2005, and when the numbers were tallied, 77 of the 79 constituencies and 57.8 per cent of those who voted supported proportional representation. The idea

fell slightly short of the arbitrary 60 per cent approval threshold chosen by the Premier. When asked, the people who voted against it simply explained that they needed more information. You see, there was no funding for educating the electors, and the work done was voluntary by the citizens' assembly alumni, who acted as ambassadors to their communities and tried to explain the merits of their decision.

That proposal is going to be reconsidered in 2008 in the municipal elections and, if successful, is going to be implemented in the 2009 provincial elections.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to present a petition of 175 names of students and staff from the Sir John Franklin school in my riding of Calgary-East. This school is located in the community of Mayland Heights. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to take measures to reduce the number of teen smokers in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition from 11 residents of central Alberta from the Olds, Carstairs, Bowden, Sundre, and Penhold areas. It says:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta as reported by Health Canada, that include but are not limited to; (1) a tobacco tax increase, (2) legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing, and (3) legislation to make all workplaces completely smoke-free.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table 104 names from the Calgary area calling on the Legislature to consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased.

Dr. B. Miller: I'd like to present a petition by 98 citizens who also urge the government of Alberta to "consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling a petition from citizens across the province but mainly from Edmonton and Sherwood Park urging the government to, number one, abandon its plans to implement the third way health care reforms; two, defeat legislation allowing expansion of private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta and permitting doctors to practise in both the private and public systems; three, oppose any action by the government of Alberta that would contravene the Canada Health Act; and four, vote against plans that would force Albertans to pay for private health insurance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm privileged to present a petition to this Assembly with 28 signatures from the Cardston-Taber-Warner constituency. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta as reported by Health Canada, that include but are not limited to; (1) a tobacco tax increase, (2) legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing, and (3) legislation to make all workplaces completely smoke-free.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to give oral notice today of the following motion:

Be it resolved that the following changes to the following committees be approved by the Assembly: on the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts that Mr. Griffiths replace Mr. VanderBurg as deputy chair, that Mr. Groeneveld replace Mr. Oberle, that Dr. Brown be added; on the Select Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund that Mr. Johnston replace Mr. McFarland; on the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Mr. Strang become deputy chair, that Mr. Mitzel replace Mr. Ducharme; on the Select Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing that Mr. Oberle replace Mr. Groeneveld; on the Select Standing Committee on Private Bills that Mr. Webber replace Mr. VanderBurg, that Mr. Rogers replace Mr. Oberle; on the Select Special Standing Committee on Members' Services that Mr. Knight become deputy chair, that Mr. Lindsay replace Mr. Horner, that Mr. Lukaszuk replace Mr. McFarland.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 29
Environmental Protection and
Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill would bring forth six amendments. The first amendment provides authority for a new regulation to allow the electrical sector to conduct emissions trading in nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide. This amendment will help make Alberta's air emissions controls some of the toughest in North America. It reflects a consensus among industry, government, and nongovernment stakeholders as well as the recommendations of the clean air strategic alliance.

The second amendment clarifies industry's obligations to report and remediate contaminated sites closed before the EPEA was enacted. This amendment ensures that any closed sites that continue to have an adverse effect on the environment are reported and cleaned up.

The third amendment allows us to improve our programs for reclamation of coal and oil sands mines and ensures that we promote and acknowledge progressive and ongoing reclamation of these sites.

Mr. Speaker, the next three amendments would, number one, streamline the approvals process by supporting continued use of codes of practice for activities with low environmental impact, give Alberta Environment the flexibility to partner with a broad range of organizations and individuals to deliver our environmental protection mandate, and, number three, increase the amount of environmental information Albertans can obtain without the need for a

formal request through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

I ask for support on these amendments.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 29, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 33

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 33, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this act will increase the basic spousal and eligible dependant tax credit amounts by \$100 on top of inflation-proofing, or indexing, for a total increase of \$376. These large tax credit amounts are the highest by far in Canada, and they are the key reason why over 1 million of Alberta's 2.36 million tax filers pay no provincial income tax. It will also reflect changes in federal legislation and implement miscellaneous housekeeping changes.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a first time]

Bill 34

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, between 2001 and 2004 we reduced our general corporate income tax rate from 15.5 per cent to 11 and a half per cent. The small business rate was at that time cut in half to 3 per cent, and small business income threshold was doubled to \$400,000. This act will reduce the general corporate income tax rate to 10 per cent from 11.5 per cent and, again, will also reflect changes in federal legislation and implement miscellaneous housekeeping changes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a document containing nearly 20,000 signatures of Albertans. Now, that's a petition. I recognize that petitions and documents as such cannot influence matters before courts. Judges, crown prosecutors, and the officers of the court must be free and act without any interference. However, these Albertans have clearly expressed their view that the rules on bail restrictions for those charged with serious

offences should be reviewed. It is appropriate, then, Mr. Speaker, that a policy of this petition be accepted.

As bail in a Criminal Code matter is under the purview of the federal government . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I have repeatedly said: let's be very, very precise with tablings. Table it.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you.

Mr. Horner: On behalf of the Minister of Environment, Mr. Speaker, I request leave to table Alberta Environment's Standard for Baseline Water-Well Testing for Coalbed Methane/Natural Gas in Coal Operations. This is part of the Water for Life strategy's goal of safe, secure drinking water and supplies. I have the requisite number of copies here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, and they're all concerning questions from earlier today in question period. The first is a reference document indicating the sale of the land 4, 25, 53, 21, southwest quarter in the restricted development area for \$6.2 million. This happened in 1981.

The second tabling I have is from the Alberta Government Services land titles office. It's a transfer of land from the province to Lehigh Portland Cement Limited for \$1,800,000, and this document is dated the 30th of March, 1999.

The last document I have is from the Alberta Government Services land titles office, and it is a transfer of land from Lehigh Portland Cement Limited to the Canadian National Railway Company. This document is dated the 18th day of March, 1999, and the sale of this land includes the price of \$1,700,000.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of individual letters from people, the first from Dr. David Fleiger wondering what is the devil in the details around allowing doctors to practise in both systems at the same time.

Next, from Roxanne Felix noting: how will the government measure that all people receive the same quality of service, and what are the outcomes for that?

From Robert Evans noting that in the U.S. a middle-class family member hospitalized for a week had a bill of \$45,000. He's against private health insurance.

From Hank and Sharon Espeseth a number of questions but asking: "How is the average citizen to pay health [care insurance] premiums from limited income? And what about pre-existing conditions?"

From Diann Duthie giving her experiences, that her care surpassed that of a friend's who received it at the Gimbel clinic and raising the concerns of doctors as salesmen.

From Lana and Andy Dong asking for clarification on how doctors practising in both systems can be efficient and cost-effective.

From Harvey Dick and Laurette Lund noting a number of points but the first being that private for-profit clinics "will take all of the easy, high margin surgeries . . . leaving the more costly procedures for the Public system."

From Melanie Crisfield noting that "as a society, we should value the health and productivity of all Albertans," that this will not happen with private care.

From T. and E. Cliff, noting that with a scheme the poor could sell their place in the queue to make money, and that would be taxable, so the province could make additional money on it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one letter to table, with the appropriate copies: a letter from a constituent, Michelle Chaloner, in which she asks about the third way and points out that it will "undermine Alberta's public health care system."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from Judith Da Silva. Ms Da Silva is very concerned about funding cuts for adults with developmental disabilities. In particular, she is concerned that this will cause staffing shortages due to low wages and that further staff shortages will make it impossible to adequately help individuals to "become productive and intricate parts of their communities." My colleagues and I have received over 80 such letters.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table appropriate copies of a letter dated April 3, 2006, sent from the Prime Minister to the Premier of this province. In the letter the Prime Minister notes that allowing doctors to practise in the public and private systems would create conflicts of interest, allow queue-jumping, and encourage rural physicians to move to urban centres.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first tabling today is a letter from a senior citizen, E. P. Ellis, expressing strong opposition to the third way and urging the government to study the recommendations of Roy Romanow, which could help sustain the public health care system.

The second tabling is from Ms Valerie Shell with respect to funding for persons with developmental disabilities. She disagrees with the minister of health, who claimed that Alberta is seen as heaven, because that description doesn't extend to her daughter's situation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first, another third way letter from a constituent, Anne McCracken, concerned about the impact of the NAFTA agreement and also whether or not we can have fair administration of public funds in a system that allows doctors to work both the public and private sides.

The second tabling this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a freedom of information request from the Official Opposition to the Department of Gaming. It would appear as if this is further oral or verbal consulting services supplied by Rod Love to the Minister of Gaming.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings, all regarding Bill 206, Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act, the first one from the Boys and Girls Club, pleased to offer their community-based sites as potential designated and assigned approved sites.

One from Southside Pentecostal Assembly, again, offering their facilities.

A couple from Ontario in support: one from Fathers are Capable Too, a parenting association; a further one from the Canadian Children's Rights Council, who wrote in support of Bill 206.

The last one is from Jim Baccari, who signs as a friend to ECMAS, MERGE, and MESA, hoping that this will help parents find a common ground for co-parenting their children.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Order Paper Changes

The Speaker: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, I'd like to draw to the attention of all hon. members the Order Paper. There are some modifications in today's Order Paper to reflect various appointments and resignations which took place last week.

Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006, currently at third reading stage and introduced by the former Minister of Government Services, now appears under the name of the new Minister of Government Services.

Bill 15, International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act, now in Committee of the Whole and introduced by the former Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, was changed April 4, 2006, to reflect the name of the acting minister. The bill now appears under the name of the new Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Motions Other than Government Motions 520, 544, and 577 have been withdrawn to reflect the appointments of the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne and the hon. Member for Little Bow to Executive Council.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, April 6, it is my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than**
Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading

Bill 203
Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway)
Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006.

During the first two stages members on both sides of this Chamber supported this bill and what it is trying to achieve. Some hon. members spoke of the importance of trains in opening the west and, more specifically, Alberta's railway heritage and its impact in our 100-year history. Some members also discussed the success of the four existing operations which preserve and recreate our rail heritage. The Alberta Central Railway Museum, the Alberta Railway Museum, Fort Edmonton Park, and Heritage Park have done a great job of not only maintaining working heritage rolling stock but also of recreating the rail experience of yesteryear for many Albertans.

We also had some questions raised by hon. members, and I would like to take this opportunity to address these questions now. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie had a number of questions, and I will answer these in the order in which they were raised by my colleague. Mr. Speaker, the member raised a question about the definition of a heritage railway, which includes the following: a railway that is "comprised of rolling stock and structural facilities, any of which was manufactured in 1965 or earlier." This part of the definition was recommended by stakeholders, and I understand that it is in tune with the age of the equipment presently being used by the operators of railroad park museums.

The second question which was raised by the member was concerning the last part of the definition of a heritage railway. This section of the definition reads that a heritage railway "is operated for the sole purpose of providing rides to individuals and is not operated for the purposes of transporting goods or commodities for a toll or a fee or of being a common carrier." The intent here is pretty clear. It is true that the Alberta Central Railway charges fees for rides, but even in that statement, we can see that they are charging for a ride, not for transporting goods or people between destinations. If this were the case, then the railway would be considered a public railway.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

3:10

A third question raised by the member was asking for a clarification between a heritage railway and an amusement railway. The main distinction between the two is the age of the rolling stock which is being used in the park. An amusement railway can use any age of equipment which they choose. It does not have to have been manufactured before a certain point in time. Quite the opposite when we talk about heritage railways.

The entire drive behind introducing this legislation is to better recognize the contribution which is made by heritage railway operators in preserving pieces of Alberta's heritage. This is accomplished by adding the heritage railway category in the Railway (Alberta) Act, around which regulations appropriate to the historical railway equipment will be written. At present railways in park settings fall under the same regulations as national carriers.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie asked for an example of how present regulations do not work for heritage railways. The best example which I can think of has been raised by many of my colleagues and has to do with track inspection. At present the operators of the Alberta Central Railway Museum must inspect their track twice a week. This operation runs two trips daily, five days per week for five months of the year. This means a total of 10 trips per week in a train which does not exceed 10 miles per hour. In comparison, national carriers CN and CP also need to inspect their track twice a week; however, these rails are carrying far heavier loads at much higher speeds, and there are more than 10 trains passing over these rail lines in a week. This is only one example,

but it illustrates the difficulties which are being experienced by the operators of heritage railways.

By reducing the difficulties facing heritage railways, this bill has the potential to lower the expenses for the operators of the affected railways. It is the intent that the department of infrastructure will work with the stakeholders after the passage of this bill to draft appropriate regulations to their operations. These regulations would of course be drafted in a way that safety remains the highest priority. Having said that, there can be operational requirements which these railways are currently meeting which are likely unnecessary. If these requirements are altered to suit the needs and operations of the railway affected, then there can be cost savings. Regulations and safety requirements are necessary, but it is paramount that they are appropriate to the function of the equipment and operators to which they are being applied.

Mr. Speaker, through Bill 203 we will be assisting vintage railway operators in this province. The idea for Bill 203 was brought forward by the operators of heritage railways, and they have been consulted in the drafting of this legislation. In every discussion with the operators it has been stressed time and again that safety is the number one concern, and Bill 203 will not change this. The organizations which operate heritage railways do a great service for Albertans in preserving our railway history and by providing our citizens the opportunity to ride the rails as early Albertans did.

I'd like to thank all my colleagues on both sides of this Chamber for their support and for the questions which were raised during the debate. I ask that they once again support Bill 203 and pass it through third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really am pleased to be able to speak to Bill 203, the purpose of which is to take into consideration the difficulty of the Alberta Central Railway Museum as well as the three other active sites in Alberta that utilize vintage equipment on full-gauge tracks. These include the lines at Fort Edmonton Park, Calgary Heritage Park, and the Alberta Railway Museum.

By creating a heritage railway designation under the Railway (Alberta) Act, we will build a platform to free them from the unnecessary burdens they currently face. By following this legislation with more appropriate regulations, we will be giving them a chance to operate under more fitting guidelines but will not be giving them free reign that could possibly endanger the visitors and riders. I think that railways have a very strong connection to our past and teach us a lot about the history of our province and how it developed, and they can also teach us about the future and how, in fact, they will come back to serve us again here in Alberta. Effort to support the continued use of trains is worthwhile.

I have a number of observations about the subject matter of this bill and the intent of this bill. First, it recognizes the principle that one size does not fit all. This is true for the special class of railways we're discussing here that have vintage equipment, often of wooden construction, slow speeds, and low tonnages. However, it is also true at other levels of the rail industry.

Last year, in addition to the Wabamun spill here, there were some serious derailments in B.C., including two on trestle bridges on the British Columbia Railway. One of these spilled toxic chemicals that killed virtually all the fish downstream in the Cheakamus River. The British Columbia Railway was recently taken over by CN, but it is not built to Canadian National standards. Many of the bridges are wooden grasshopper trestles built out of the sides of canyons and

mountain slopes. Its curves are tight, and some of the grades are steep. However, CN was attempting to operate this line with milelong, heavy freight trains as it does on its transcontinental main lines. The Canadian Transportation Safety Board recognized this. In its report on the accidents it restricted CN to trains of 80 car lengths in this territory in the future.

A parallel situation existed in Alberta in the former Central Western Railway that ran 20 years ago. Central Western was able to operate a line that CN had found unprofitable by working on different scale. Instead of maintaining a dozen distinct trains with separate staff on each, workers doubled up and did different jobs on alternate days. They ran trains two to three days a week, cut the grass along the track, and did shop work on the equipment the other two to three days. They could save costs here, but they had to lay more out in other areas. For instance, because the track was of older, lighter steel, it could not handle the heavy grain trains that operated the main lines on the major carriers. Even the large grain cars from these trains could only be filled to two-thirds of their normal capacity. These are examples of differences in operating conditions between different freight railways that are common carriers.

Then, there are different standards for passenger operations. Passenger trains are shorter and lighter than today's heavy freight trains. This means they can start and stop more quickly and travel at higher speeds. A line that is designed primarily for passenger traffic will have a number of features different from a freight line, including banking to prevent people and dishes being thrown to the outside edge on curves. A freight line that is used to handle passenger trains must either upgrade its trackage to this standard or limit them to lower operating speeds.

I have fond memories of travelling on the train 23 years ago. Two weeks ago I also had the opportunity to join a group of friends for a day trip to the mountains on Via Rail's train the Canadian. I was impressed by the atmosphere, the decor, the food, and the service. The dome and dining cars, built in the 1950s and refurbished, are only semi wheelchair accessible, yet the staff proved very adept at manoeuvring me through passageways and up and down stairs. I understand that handling special-needs passengers is part of their training and is upgraded regularly. I strongly urge any member of this Assembly to support the retention and increase of this service from three times weekly to daily as Via would like to do in time for the 2010 Olympics. It is an excellent way to see the country, meet people, and reduce the traffic on our roads.

Regular passenger services, heritage railways, heavy haul, and short line freight operations all have different conditions and point to the need that underlines Bill 203. Canada's two major railways, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific, led the continent in the size and efficiency of their operations. They have achieved this position by maximizing what they do well: hauling heavy, long-distance, bulk freight commodities. But because they are good at what they do and serve a vast majority of the market does not mean that their operational standards should apply to everyone. Mr. Speaker, our legislative framework must address all needs and situations, and that is what this bill is trying to do.

3:20

While supporting, I have a couple of questions that perhaps the hon. member can answer at another time. Of the four Alberta heritage railways he cites, two, Fort Edmonton Park and Heritage Park Calgary, are freestanding lines; that is, they do not directly connect to any other railways. Any equipment, locomotives, or coaches brought in and out must be loaded by crane onto flatbeds and hauled by truck. The other two lines, Alberta central and the

Alberta rail museum, do connect to the railway grid, one to CP and the other to CN. This means they can receive and send out equipment by rail if it meets interchange standards or if the railways agree to handle it under special conditions. My point is: is the difference whether a heritage line connects with other rail lines not as important as the distinction between a heritage railway and a common or statutory carrier? Is this a difference, or should it be recognized, perhaps, in this legislation?

My second point is about the maximum speed on heritage railways; 30 kilometres per hour translates to about 20 miles per hour. North American railways, Canadian ones included, still use miles as a unit of measurement, and 12 to 13 miles per hour, which is what 20 kilometres per hour comes to, I believe is below the speed at which some excursion trains operate using heritage equipment. I believe the 30 kilometre per hour maximum for heritage trains operating in rural areas, with longer stretches of track than Fort Edmonton and Heritage Park conditions, where they can operate faster without risk to people on the ground that comes in an urban park setting is reasonable.

I am happy to endorse Bill 203 and the sector of heritage preservation that it benefits. I think Bill 203 achieves the desired end in a simple way and at the same time gives these historic sites the designation of heritage railway, which is accurate, fitting, and worthwhile.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. This bill would amend the Railway (Alberta) Act to create a new heritage designation for railways that meet certain criteria.

Bill 203 would currently apply to four historical railway attractions in our province: the Alberta Railway Museum, Fort Edmonton Park, Calgary's Heritage Park, and the Central Alberta Railway Museum. These railways are currently classified as amusement railways and must often adhere to regulatory standards that are intended for different usage. The object of this legislation is to create a new set of rules that would be more appropriate for these railways. The creation of a new heritage designation would allow greater flexibility in the operation of railways located at these historical attractions. By reducing some of the cumbersome rules and regulations that often burden these railways, they would be able to cut down on operating costs associated with overregulation. This would lead to potential savings from maintenance costs, which could be redirected to other vital areas.

When there is talk of regulatory change, many people often assume that there will be a corollary drop in safety standards. However, hon. members can rest assured that that will not be the case for these railways, Mr. Speaker, for at least as far as rules and regulations relating to safety are concerned, standards that are appropriate to the speed and the operations of those railways will be taken into consideration. Safety will obviously remain the number one priority for these railways and for the government, and any future regulatory changes will be sure to reflect the priority of safety.

The new rules that would result from the creation of a heritage railway designation would not compromise the safety standards in place at tourist attractions. The Department of Infrastructure and Transportation would work with stakeholders and other agencies to develop appropriate rules, regulations, and standards that would better reflect the unique nature of these railways. New regulations

would be more indicative of the operational realities of these heritage railways. Regulations and rules are not one size fits all, and this bill would reduce some of the unnecessary red tape.

This would be consistent with one of the goals articulated in this year's throne speech, which announced the government's commitment to undertake a comprehensive regulatory review intended to review and identify unneeded rules and regulations.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 could also increase the potential for heritage railways to better maintain the character and historical nature of the trains that they operate. I'd like to offer one example to illustrate this point. For example, current regulations could require a specific type of brakes or a specific type of crossing warning system to be used in conjunction with the operation of these railways, and these particular mechanisms might be more expensive than required – by mainline railways such as CP Rail or CN Rail. While they might be necessary for trains that travel at higher speeds and that cross highways or transport people or goods over long distances, they may not be required for the purposes of slow-moving locomotives at the Alberta Railway Museum, for example, which are used to provide rides to visitors.

Under new regulations for heritage railways the original integrity of the trains could be enhanced. The regulations could allow for more use of original equipment. Moreover, the potential savings on maintenance costs could allow the Alberta Railway Museum to be better maintained in its more original and more authentic state.

Over time the importance of trains in our society has diminished, and steam locomotives are no longer the engines driving our economy, so to speak. New technologies and improvements to our highways have lessened the prevalence of railways in our society. There may be fewer lines today, but the tourist destinations that would benefit from heritage designation would ensure that railways and the past are not forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, we do have a responsibility to do all that we can to protect this part of our history. We need to ensure that future generations of Albertans understand and enjoy this once prominent part of our heritage. I want future Albertans to know and love the distinct sound of the steam engine as it travels down the rail tracks sounding its whistle. Bill 203 provides an excellent opportunity to aid this noble pursuit. The designation of heritage railways and the subsequent reduction of the overregulation and obstacles encumbering these railways assists these historical tourist attractions in maintaining the high level of service and historic value that Albertans have come to expect.

The heritage railway designation would do more than aid affected railways through regulatory change. It is also a symbolic gesture that would show a commitment to preserving this important part of our history. The new heritage designation could breathe a new life into Alberta's historical railway attractions. The debate surrounding this bill and the subsequent changes may raise the profile of these attractions and draw more Albertans out to enjoy the Alberta Railway Museum, Alberta Central Railway Museum, Heritage Park, and Fort Edmonton Park. The heritage designation could also add further credibility to these railways and generate further interest among Albertans eager to learn more about our history.

Regulatory changes resulting from Bill 203 could facilitate the creation of more heritage railways by reducing the red tape and may even result in the future establishment of more museums and tourist attractions dedicated to historical trains.

Mr. Speaker, there are many valid reasons for supporting Bill 203. I'm very supportive of this bill, and I urge fellow members to support the bill in third reading.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to rise today in order to join the discussion regarding Alberta's heritage railways. The operators of these facilities need us to redesignate these railways so that they are not faced with excessive costs in trying to obey standards that were not designed for them in the first place. It is unreasonable for us to expect the operators of these small railways to follow the rules set out for big operators like CP Rail and CN Rail.

These parks are not making excessive profits on train rides by any stretch of the imagination, Mr. Speaker. In some cases rides on these historic trains are free with admission to the park or museum. In order for these groups to follow the rules, costs must be incurred for an individual to inspect the lines a certain number of times a week or perform other tasks that these regulations demand. I do not believe it would be unreasonable for new legislation to be passed in order to create more appropriate standards for these heritage railways.

3:30

Safety would of course still be a first priority, Mr. Speaker. Albertans need not be concerned as to the safety of these railways after they have been redesignated from amusement railways to heritage railways. These rules would be specific to these railways but would still provide for safe operation. They would simply be specific to heritage railways. The safety of these railways would in no way be compromised.

Mr. Speaker, our heritage railways are an important part of our history. They give our children an idea of what the west was like in the past when trains crossed the vast expanse that was the new frontier. Trains were a fixture in our communities, and it would be a tragedy to lose this part of our heritage.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a minute to discuss some of the history and facts about one of the parks with a heritage railway that would benefit from Bill 203 and the eventual creation of appropriate regulations for these small operators. The railway I would like to discuss is that of the railway at Fort Edmonton Park. The train running in this park is a remnant of the train that began running in 1902, over a hundred years ago. The train was run by Edmonton, Yukon and Pacific Railway, or EY & P Railway, whose operations carried them throughout the Edmonton area. This railway carried passengers until the middle of the 1920s and ceased its main operations in 1951. The railway did continue to be used as a spur line as opposed to a main trunk line, however, until the 1970s.

Most of the railway cars date back to 1905 or 1913 and were purchased from the Northern Alberta Railway. The most impressive part of the train, the locomotive, was built in the early 1900s in Pittsburgh by the Baldwin Locomotive Works. It took a whole year for the park to restore this piece of the train. Originally the locomotive was used in the state of Louisiana. For 50 years it pulled both passengers and freight.

Mr. Speaker, at present the park offers rides for free on the former EY & P Railway, stopping at both the entrance to the park and at the rear of the park, where the fort is located. This train is a moving timepiece, capturing the essence and the spirit of a day long ago.

Mr. Speaker, these railways are there to teach our children and youth about trade and the building of our province and western Canada in general. Without these railways Alberta would not be the province it is today. There may be some individuals who believe that the current rules work fine for these operators as they have the option to apply for exemptions from them. Those involved do not feel, however, that the system is very responsive. Therefore, why not create legislation that deals with their needs separately? Why not create legislation that would actually be geared towards these heritage railways? Why make these parks and museums follow

standards that were not designed for them in the first place? In most cases these railways are only part of a park's or museum's historical offerings. In Fort Edmonton Park they have buildings and streets dedicated to different time periods such as 1885 Street, 1905 Street, and 1920 Street, for example.

Mr. Speaker, this park charges a very reasonable fee for entrance to its facilities. I do not think that this park or any other facility can afford to focus a great percentage of their time and funding on following rules originally designed for railways such as Canadian National or Canadian Pacific. We would be doing our children a great disservice if we did not try to help out these facilities by creating legislation designed for them particularly. These four historical trains at Fort Edmonton Park, Alberta Railway Museum, Calgary Heritage Park, and Alberta Central Railway Museum are providing our kids with the opportunity to ride a full-size train. This is an opportunity they may not otherwise have.

All full-size trains are regulated under the Railway (Alberta) Act. However, under the current legislation there is no special designation for heritage railways. This bill, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, has been proposed to address this need.

Mr. Speaker, I support the small heritage businesses in this province, and I would happily endorse reasonable changes that would support them. As MLAs for Alberta I suggest that we come together in order to create legislation that will have a positive effect on these important historical facilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Alberta's railroads are an integral part of the heritage of this province. From the late 19th century, when the first railroad was struck in Alberta, to the present day railways have served as an important link between the people and the communities of Alberta. My own father participated in laying railroads across Alberta. Not only did railroads aid early settlers to Alberta in founding the communities that now make up the province, but they also allowed for the marketing and transporting of the goods and ideas necessary to sustain these communities.

Mr. Speaker, the heritage of this province is something that we as Albertans cherish. Creating tangible links to our past allows us to see where we came from and contributes to the overall vitality and richness of life in our province. Unfortunately, preserving our heritage is something that can often be extremely costly and burdensome to nonprofit groups that choose to take on this important responsibility. This is particularly true with respect to the preservation of railways.

The present legislation governing Alberta's railways often compounds this challenge in that it simply does not take into account the operating realities for our heritage railways. Under the current legislation Alberta's heritage railways adhere to the same standards and operating procedures as national carriers such as CN, CP, and Via Rail. It simply is not realistic to expect these organizations to continue to operate in this manner. Bill 203 will rectify this situation by creating a designation that recognizes the special contribution that Alberta's heritage railways make to the cultural and historical mosaic of this province and that will better reflect the operating realities that organizations responsible for preserving these railways face. Only railways that were constructed prior to 1965 and which are not used for commercial purposes will be eligible for this designation.

Presently the Railway (Alberta) Act, 2002, stipulates that all railways operating in the province fall into one of three classifications. These classifications are industrial, public railways, and amusement railways. At present heritage railways typically fall within the amusement railway classification. This is problematic for a number of reasons.

Firstly, amusement railroads must follow the same rules as railways operating on mainline track. This means that, for example, heritage railway operators must inspect their tracks twice per week. This is perhaps not necessary as heritage railways operate at far lower speeds, much less frequency, and over considerably lesser distances than do railways which operate on mainline track. Moreover, it is not reasonable to expect organizations operating on very limited budgets and with a very short yearly operating period to perform inspections this frequently.

Secondly, the current legislation affords very little flexibility to the operators of heritage railways. In order to apply for any exemptions to the current legislation, heritage railway operators must go through a time-consuming process. This process wastes valuable resources that could be put to use to maintain and better their current railways and enhance their value as historic sites.

Finally, the current system misclassifies an important aspect of our province's history. Generally speaking, heritage railways are currently classified as amusement railways. Certainly, it is not to categorize an important part of Alberta's historical legacy as amusement. Mr. Speaker, there is nothing amusing about this classification. To describe heritage railways in this way is in effect to lessen the value of our province's past. We must simply find a way to more effectively capture the significant contribution that railways have made to this province.

Bill 203 will help to remedy this current situation by creating a system that recognizes the historical value of railways, is responsive to stakeholders, and accurately reflects the operational realities faced by our heritage railway operating groups. By creating a specific classification for heritage railways, we will ensure a system that is able to flexibly respond to current and future challenges posed to heritage railroad operators. A separate classification will allow for regulations that are specifically tailored to the needs of heritage railway operators and the environment in which they must work.

3:40

Recent events such as the CN spill that occurred in my constituency at Lake Wabamun in August of '05 have highlighted the need to keep our railways safe. Some concern has been raised that this bill would compromise public safety and our environment by lessening the standards that railway operators must face. Indeed, the contrary is true. By creating a separate designation for heritage railways, we will be able to create safety standards that better reflect the unique operating environment of these railways. Moreover, by separating heritage railways from mainline commercial and industrial operators, we will be able if necessary to strengthen regulations for these commercial operators to address current safety issues without unduly harming our heritage railways. Ultimately a system that is more responsive and better fitted to the needs of those operating under it will also increase safety for the general public.

I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that there is nothing that is more important to me than the safety of Albertans and the integrity of the environment, and I certainly would not support legislation that would in any way compromise this.

In recent years much progress has been made in the area of legislation that pertains to the railways of Alberta. The creation of the Railway (Alberta) Act in 2002 transferred authority of short-line railways operating in Alberta from the federal government to the

provincial government. This helped to make the system more efficient by localizing it and making it better able to respond to the concern of stakeholders.

While this is certainly an improvement over the previous system, the unfortunate reality is that the position of heritage railway operators was largely overlooked in the creation of this legislation. Thus Bill 203 is really about building on the progress made by the creation of the Railway (Alberta) Act and extending its benefits and efficiencies to the operators of heritage railways. As with many other pieces of legislation the benefit of time has allowed us to see possible shortcomings and areas where improvements can be made.

It is time, Mr. Speaker, for us to make the necessary changes to the act so that our heritage railways can operate in the most efficient way possible and continue to educate Albertans on the meaningful contributions that railways have made to our past, present, and future. I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 203 and take decisive action to facilitate the preservation of an important part of our heritage. By passing Bill 203, this House will demonstrate that it is willing to preserve our heritage for future generations to enjoy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and join the third reading debate on Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006. I was very pleased to see so many of my colleagues rising to speak in favour of this bill. I was even more pleased to see the genuine interest expressed in our heritage from both sides of the House. I think that our appreciation for the past is a universal concept, and I commend all hon. members who shared their views on this legislation.

We've heard so many stories and anecdotes, some of which made very definite points about the relevance and importance of this bill. Every Albertan treasures their heritage, and its preservation is a pressing concern.

This is what Bill 203 is attempting to do: to aid a limited and specific group of heritage railroads by providing a separate and distinct classification for them. Those who sacrifice their time and labour for the love of history should be helped in their efforts in every possible way. They shouldn't be subject to undue restrictions and regulations that don't necessarily apply to their situation. With Bill 203 an attempt is being made to advance the interests of Albertans by preserving our past. It is a very simple proposal with very simple intentions.

I would like at this time to address a few of the comments made by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I would like to thank the hon. member for sharing with this Assembly her recognition of the importance of heritage and the vital role that the railroad played in our province's past.

I would, however, also like to address the comments made by the hon. member in relation to the insurance coverage that is utilized by the railroads affected by the proposals of Bill 203. A statement was made to the effect that the bill will help reduce, among other things, the insurance costs of railroads affected by the provisions of the bill. I would like to point out that the bill effectively creates a separate classification for the railroads which does not have any direct bearing on the insurance burden they will incur. It may or may not, but this is an issue that will be determined solely by the regulations. Insurance assessment is a departmental responsibility. It is not within the scope or the intent of this bill to set specifics for rate reductions or rate determinations.

There was also a comment made to the effect that a probability existed of non-Canadian insurance companies providing service at

present to currently operating heritage railroads. I cannot answer whether or not that is actually the case, but I would like to clarify that it is completely irrelevant to what is being proposed in Bill 203. The relationship between a historic railroad operation and an insurance company is determined by financial or other considerations and is made wholly outside of the legislative realm. Insurance rates are determined by insurance companies regardless of which country it is located in and are based upon the unique situational operating conditions of the railroad in question and risk assessments done by the appropriate department. Once again, regulations and assessments will be the final determining factor in the insurance costs that are incurred by the railroads. Bill 203 will have no effect on the business practice of insurance companies, and railroads will be able to buy insurance from companies of their choice regardless of whether it is domestic or not.

The hon. member also made reference to a historical railroad in Manitoba, the Prairie Dog Central Railway, and how its situation was similar to what we have in Alberta. I would like to address this point as it is not an entirely fair comparison if made in relation to Bill 203. The Prairie Dog Central Railway operates on a line of tracks in the Winnipeg area and goes from the Inkster junction station to the town of Warren, Manitoba. This is unlike the railroads which are affected by Bill 203, which currently operate entirely within a park setting. Section 2(a)(d.1)(i) states that for the purpose of the bill: "is operated wholly or in part within the confines of an historical park or similar park or site." The Prairie Dog Central Railway travels a considerable distance completely outside of a park setting and is therefore quite unlike the railroads covered under the provisions of Bill 203. It is quite similar to the Alberta Prairie Railway, which operates out of Stettler and which is unaffected by Bill 203. As the train operates over a great distance and passes through populous areas and crosses roads, it was felt to be more appropriate that it not be classified a heritage railroad as defined by that bill.

The railroads affected by Bill 203 operate fully within the parks, parks which bring thousands upon thousands of tourists from around the world to our province. They come to experience our heritage, heritage which has been preserved through the hard work and vision of dedicated Albertans. This tourism gives Alberta international recognition, but more importantly it brings history alive in our own backyard. We don't have to travel halfway around the world to experience the past as it was. We have it alive and well in our own backyard.

Bill 203 recognizes the importance of this heritage while at the same time providing an opportunity for smoother operations of these railroads. By recognizing their unique situations, we are enabling the creation of a new regulation that will have the potential to facilitate the daily operations of these historic treasures. At the end of the day a recognition of history is the purpose of Bill 203. The bill recognizes the importance of the railway in the formation of our province and honours it and our pioneers by helping to preserve it for our children and our children's children.

3:50

As legislators we have the responsibility to represent the best interests of Albertans in all that we do. Private members' bills provide us with a unique opportunity to bring forward issues that are important to our constituents, issues that do not necessarily deal with government policy or so-called big issues like energy revenue or health care. There is a time and place for debate on issues like those, and there is a definite need for private members' bills like Bill 203. With this bill we are seeking to preserve Alberta's heritage, something I feel is worth while debating, something I feel honoured to have been given the opportunity to stand and express my opinion on and, in turn, hear the opinions of other hon. members.

We cannot understand the future without a link to the past, and Alberta's heritage railways provide that link. They provide it for every Albertan, and I'm sure Albertans will agree that we have been representing their best interests in our debate on Bill 203.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for introducing this legislation. Offering our opinions will support preserving the proud heritage of Alberta, and I'll ask all members of the Legislature to join me in doing so.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for bringing forward this bill. This is a functional bill and one that all members of this Legislature appear to support, as they should.

During the debates in second reading and Committee of the Whole we heard numerous positive comments and personal stories surrounding Alberta's railways and trains generally. From rides on railways as a child to squishing pennies on the tracks, I believe that most members of this Legislature have had some personal experience with trains and the culture, if you will, surrounding them. They are part of our heritage, our past. They brought this province and the whole country together, and many settlers chose to settle in Alberta near the railways because of the increase in opportunities for trade that the railroads provided. Many of our Alberta communities are located where they are because of their proximity to the rail lines. Thus, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's railways have been an integral part of Alberta's heritage and the building of this wonderful province.

Bill 203 will help to preserve this heritage by ensuring that those who still run heritage railways have regulations that apply to their needs in particular. We should not require them to follow regulations designed for the larger railroads, such as CP and CN, when they do not travel the same amount of distance or carry the same types of loads, et cetera. Mr. Speaker, I don't think any of the members of this Legislature dispute the fact. Thus, I would like to take this opportunity to attempt to respond to some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The hon. member stated during the Committee of the Whole stage that he wished there were some bills other than Bill 203 that were bills that Albertans want to see. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006, is in fact a bill that Albertans want to see. I know that this is true of the stakeholders in this situation, who want to see legislation that is specific to their needs rather than being lumped in with the needs of Alberta's entire railway population. They are Albertans, are they not?

I also believe that Albertans would like to see legislation that promotes the interests of our heritage businesses. Without those operators Albertans may not have the opportunity to enjoy the experience that a ride on a heritage train can bring. Parks such as Fort Edmonton Park and Calgary's Heritage Park provide Albertans with a chance to look back and see what life may have been like for those Albertans that settled here before us. Therefore, I believe, Mr. Speaker, that this is indeed a bill that serves the interests of Albertans.

In mentioning that he would like to see more bills dealing with priorities for Albertans, the hon. member stated that he wanted to see more bills regarding security for transportation. Now, I'm not entirely sure what the hon. member meant by this statement, but I believe that Bill 203 actually does deal with security and transportation. Bill 203 will ensure that the new regulations still have safety in mind when dealing with heritage railways. Bill 211, the Traffic Safety (Mandatory Motorcycle Training) Amendment Act, 2006,

which has gone through first reading, will provide another opportunity for this House to debate transportation issues. I'd also like to point out that in the budget this year spending on Alberta's highways increased \$3.6 billion in order to improve our highways, including the twinning of highway 63. This also brings me to the member's postulation, essentially, that Fort McMurray is getting nothing from this province.

In relation to Bill 203, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie did not state that it was a good bill. I agree that it is a bill that will bring the regulations for those heritage railways in line with their needs and with their usage. The member supported the bill during the Committee of the Whole stage, but mentioned that he would like to see more bills regarding resource policies, savings, prevention of crime, and other issues that are a priority for Albertans.

I believe I have already expressed my reasoning for believing that this bill, Bill 203, is an important issue to Albertans. I also feel that the priorities of Albertans are being looked after in the proposed legislation we have seen in this House this spring session.

In relation to preventing crimes, as the member brought up, we have had numerous bills before this House this session that have allowed for discussion on this point. For example, Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006; Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act; private member's Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006; and Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006, have all provided a great deal of opportunity for discussion on crime prevention.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that in questioning the importance of Bill 203, we do a great disservice to the bill. Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta)(Heritage Railway) Amendment Act is a good piece of legislation and one that will be beneficial to all Albertans by helping out those individuals and groups who run our heritage railways within parks and museums.

In responding to the request that we discuss savings, Mr. Speaker, we as a Legislature have in fact had the opportunity to examine the issue of saving. The budget tabled on March 22, 2006, includes \$4.1 billion that has been allocated to various areas, such as \$1.9 billion to savings and endowments such as the heritage fund and \$325 million to our sustainability fund.

We've covered a number of those issues already that the hon. member wishes to talk about as opposed to bills such as Bill 203, which brings me to the fact, Mr. Speaker, that private members' bills can only address certain issues as there are parameters that they must be brought forth within. If we were to address an issue of appropriation in a private member's bill, that would be against the rules, if you will, because it would then fall into the category of a money bill. As private members we cannot ask that legislation involved in the allocation of the province's funds be created through our private members' bills. I am surprised that the hon. member would even suggest that we try to deal with that in our private members' bills. I am sure that he must know what the limitations are on such bills already. Thus, I think he should understand that the needs of the stakeholders involved in Bill 203 are well suited to discussion through a private member's bill.

These facilities – Fort Edmonton Park, Alberta Railway Museum, Calgary Heritage Park, and Alberta Central Railway Museum – operate on short tracks. They could definitely use a revamp in the standards that require them to follow the same procedure as the large commercial or industrial railways.

Mr. Speaker, our Alberta railways provide a great deal of nostalgia for older Albertans and a source of enjoyment and opportunity for discovering Alberta's rail history for the younger

citizens of this province. Railways brought this great expanse of land that we call Alberta together in a time when travelling great distances was a difficult and challenging feat. They made trade and habitation possible throughout much of this province.

I ask that all members of this Legislature join me today in supporting Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta)(Heritage Railway) Amendment Act. This is an important bill even if all members of the Legislature do not agree that it is so. I'd like to again thank the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for bringing this bill forward and for all the work that the member and the stakeholders have done in creating this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Did the Minister of Justice want to speak? There are less than two minutes. I'll recognize you.

4:00

Mr. Stevens: Well, I can certainly in that time period, Mr. Speaker, congratulate the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for bringing forward what is not only good in policy but good in practice legislation.

Heritage Park for my first two terms was a part of Calgary-Glenmore and now forms part of the northern boundary of the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore. I'm intimately familiar with it. Heritage Park has operated for in excess of 40 years, and for many of those years the heritage railway line that operates there has been operational. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that they have operated that without any problems, any safety issues, whatsoever.

They in large measure rely on volunteers. I think that each year in excess of 60,000 volunteer hours are put into the park, generally, and many of those are with respect to the railway. Last year somebody came to town, so to speak, and started to suggest that the higher standards applicable to the common carrier railways be applied to Heritage Park. For a period of time there was an issue as to whether or not they would be able to continue to operate their heritage railway.

So, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member, thank you very much for bringing this forward. I can tell you that the staff and directors of Heritage Park are most appreciative of your good efforts.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to close debate.

Mr. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to thank all the stakeholders in our railroad museums for their input into this bill. The need for a special designation that is heritage railroad in the Railroad (Alberta) Act was first raised by them, and I want to recognize them for that. Secondly, I want to thank all the members of this Assembly. There are many of you that have spoken to this particular bill, and to my recollection I believe that all of you have spoken in favour of the bill. I would just encourage all of you to vote in favour of the bill at this time.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a third time]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 206

Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon and begin debate in second reading on Bill 206, Designa-

tion of Child Access Exchange Centres Act. I'm looking forward to the debate today and hope to see many different takes on the issue.

I bring Bill 206 forward to this Assembly because I believe that families are the most important part of this province. Families are not only important; they are vital to the success of our society. There are many types of families in our society: from single-parent families to two-parent families to extended families and community families. There are different families, but the one thing that's vital in all of these families is that there needs to be the presence of both mother and father whenever possible. Both parents need to have a presence in their children's lives. That's my reasoning for bringing Bill 206 forward.

I have been concerned that many of the children in Alberta do not have positive access to both of their parents when a marriage breaks down. In debate today I think we're going to hear a lot about how the divorce rate is on the rise. To me this is extremely unfortunate, but it is a reality of the world we live in today. I realize that marriages break down for many reasons, and I'm not saying that they should all be fixed. My concern is that the children in these broken marriages are often put in the middle of these situations, and there is difficulty in children having access to both parents.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak about a couple of things this afternoon that I have found in my research for this bill. First off, it's widely accepted that parental divorce is extremely difficult on children. It puts incredible strain on their lives and does have long-lasting effects. Children are exposed to high levels of stress during the breakup of the family unit, especially when there's a battle between parents for the custody of the children. Once divorce and separation has occurred, the stress levels do not go down but actually rise because they now have to deal with spending time with parents in two different households. What's also found is that this stress level rises higher if there is persistent conflict between parents after separation, especially if conflict continues during the exchange of children. Stress levels rise even further when there is continuing conflict over access to children. Studies have shown that conflict between parents over their children have long-term effects on development, especially into adolescence.

One thing that I would like to mention is that it's often the case that fathers are the ones who are viewed less favourably in terms of access. There is one statistic given by Braver and O'Connell that states that 25 to 35 per cent of custodial mothers try to interfere with a father's visiting rights. As well, Department of Justice statistics show that 48 per cent of nonresident parents do not have regular access to their children and that 25 to 35 per cent of nonresident parents with access orders are denied access to their children. Now, this kind of statistic is alarming, in my opinion. Both parents need to have access to their children, especially when it's granted.

I think that the fathers have to work the hardest to see their children, and in a majority of cases mothers are looked at more favourably in raising children. Now, I don't necessarily disagree with this, but the onus is usually put on the fathers to ensure that they're able to see their children. It's usually the father that has to go and pick up children from his former home in a lot of cases, and this causes much of the conflict in regard to access. This type of conflict is hard on children and hard on the parents as well, especially the noncustodial parent. There are many studies that have also found that fathers stop trying to see their children after so many years of separation because it has become so difficult for them to gain access to the children that they do stop trying.

Like I said before, the onus is on the father to ensure that he can see his children, and this is very difficult and does not help to alleviate the situation of conflict. This is horrible. Children need to see both their parents, and they need influence from both their

parents. Both the mother and father need to see their children, and they need to have influence over how their children are raised. Fathers are vitally important to the life of their children. If the father starts to give up trying to see his kids because it's become too difficult to do so, it has long-term consequences. There are plenty of examples of kids who turn to a life that's not beneficial to society because they lacked the father figure or, conversely, the mother figure in their lives.

I want to stress how important both parents are to the life of a child. When children have the influence of both their mother and their father, they're often raised to be very productive and important members of society because they've had the total, full, support of both their parents. In fact, it has been shown that the number one determinant of whether a child is successful in life is whether or not both parents were involved in that child's life.

That's why I bring this bill forward. This is extremely important to me because I believe that if we allow a place where a mother can drop off her child, where the father can pick up the child without conflict with the ex, the children will be better off. I envision this bill making it easier for noncustodial parents to get access to their children in a positive, conflict-free environment.

I'd like to paint a picture of how I envision this bill working. First off, a family breaks down. During the divorce proceedings the judge decides that the mother gets custody of the children; however, the father gets to see his children every weekend. So mother, weekdays; father, weekends. Fair enough. Now, the way the schedules work is that the father cannot pick up his children from school because he works too late and must go to the home he used to reside in with his wife and kids to pick them up. When the father comes to pick up his children on Friday evening, he walks through the front door to greet his children, and he's met by an ex-wife and quite possibly the new love of the wife. This situation is extremely difficult for fathers, and it's very tough on them to keep their heads held high, especially in the first couple of years after divorce.

4:10

This sort of conflict is very real, and it's one of the reasons why some fathers decided to forgo many of the visits with their own children. It's also a reason for many fathers simply just giving up on access because it's become far too difficult. However, with Bill 206 the judge in the divorce proceedings could order that the mother must take the children, after school perhaps, to a facility designated by the minister where the father could pick up the children. Conversely, an even better situation would be if the mother and father come to the conclusion on their own accord that there is conflict and voluntarily decide to use a designated facility to necessitate access.

This is my main hope for the bill: that families will be able to use these designated facilities voluntarily. This facility could be a daycare, a boys and girls club, or even a church. When the father finishes his work day, he can come and pick up the children without having to face his ex-wife and her new life. I believe this will minimize and pretty much eliminate any kind of emotional conflict that there might have been in other situations.

As well, the staff at a facility would keep documented evidence that the children were dropped off by one parent and were picked up by the other. This way if ever there is a conflict involving access and it comes back to the court, there is third-party, documented proof of the access and the exchanges. If one of the parents does not live up to their end of the agreement, the judge would know this and be able to rule accordingly.

I believe that this bill will help the majority of families in Alberta who are dealing with access issues. This bill is a tool which is meant

to help all those families where one parent has difficulty seeing their children because they're not comfortable going into a home where they possibly once resided. I believe my bill can help families grow stronger even if they are separated. I think it offers children the chance to see both their parents without being stressed out because of tension between the mother and father. Better and easier access allows for happier and healthier children.

I appreciate that there are many views on this topic, and I look forward to hearing all of them this afternoon. My hope is that all members will think critically of this bill and will come to realize how important this can be. I urge all hon. members to support Bill 206 this afternoon.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak to Bill 206, Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act, and I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this bill forward. I, too, agree that it's very important. The bill facilitates the creation of child-access exchange centres, where the exchange of a child between parents, guardians, or other individuals involved in the life of the child can take place in a neutral, impartial facility. These centres will also ensure that the exchange is documented.

In essence this bill is aimed at making the transition for a child easier when she or he is exchanged between parents or guardians. The logic is that without such centres the exchange of a child often takes place in a confrontational or tense environment, thereby making the transition difficult on the child.

As I'm looking at the suggestions for this bill, I have some questions that I think need to be addressed, like: where are these facilities going to be located? Will there be centres designated in rural communities, northern communities, and aboriginal communities? Will these be government buildings that are going to be designated as centres? What type of agreement are you referring to when you say an agreement between parents or guardians?

I'm wondering, too: where you say that those two persons "are not to be in each other's presence when they exchange . . . the child," will these centres only be available to the individuals who have been ordered not to be in each other's presence during the exchange of a child? Will these centres be available to individuals who may not have a formal order to stay apart but who, regardless, prefer to use the centres as a means of exchange?

The conditions on access to the centre make me wonder, especially that some individuals are going to have to "pay or agree to pay any fee charged by the centre." It seems to me that by making individuals pay to use these centres, we may limit their practicality. It may be more useful to provide the services free of charge, and we do need more elaboration on that.

I recently became acquainted with a young woman who had experience with such an access facility in another jurisdiction. Her family had gone through a very messy divorce in which one parent was awarded sole custody because of the mental instability of the other. Because of the instability factor and the court orders that restricted this parent from normal access, this kind of access centre was the only way the children could have limited contact with the one parent until they reached an age when they could decide for themselves what further contact they would like. It seemed to work in that case, and in the circumstances where these limitations apply, I would support the provisions of this bill.

I want to note in response to the previous member's comments that there are many cases where the father does have the right to access but never uses it, never indicates any desire to use it, although

the mother perhaps would like him to. Of course, we can believe that children should have the love and nurturing of two parents. The reality is that some adults have their own interests as a priority. I can speak of situations where the father has been the stable, caring, and devoted parent, and the mother has pursued her own interests and shown little concern for the children. We need to be careful when we're making assumptions here about the situation the children are dealing with and which parent is taking the responsible, mature, and caring role.

The objective of this bill is a positive one. I believe that creating these centres should reduce the level of stress on a child in a case where the parents or guardians do not get along or have a history of confrontation or violence. It is abusive for children to be involved in those types of situations where they are seeing and hearing violence.

In short, I think these centres will foster a more structured, controlled exchange between parents and guardians and allow those exchanges to be documented, which may be useful for the provincial courts. The provincial courts may find the creation or designation of such supports beneficial as the bill requires that exchange times and other information be documented.

In conclusion, there isn't anything much here that I'm concerned about except what I have mentioned, about the use of these centres and the fact that some people will have to pay to have these centres available to them. I guess I would have to say that if we can get some answers to those particular questions, I believe I can support this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to be able to rise and enter the debate on Bill 206 today, the Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act. As I look at the preamble of the bill, it says, "Whereas there is a need to encourage parents and guardians to have access to their children in keeping with the best interests of [children]." When I look at that particular statement and we start to look at what is good for children and what it is that they need in their lives in order to help them to grow and become all that they can be and what environment that is that would allow that in the best way, for me the tragedy of this piece, of course, is divorce.

I often think back to the '70s when I think I first recognized that divorce existed. I'll even go back before that. I remember that my grandmothers used to call divorce "d-voorce." It was like the big D word, and it was not a common practice in their day. You know, in spite of the problems that were within families, families often stayed together.

I also remember in the '70s when they started that common thinking that if you were unhappy in your marriage, your children would be happier if you got out of that marriage because if the parent was happy, the child would be happy. I think that in some ways that kind of thinking sort of gave people permission, and you started to see the divorce rate climb and climb rapidly.

4:20

It's been so interesting to watch later studies. I remember reading one in *Reader's Digest* not so long ago where they said that they think that thinking was wrong, that, in fact, children are much happier in a marriage even if it's an unhappy marriage if their parents stay together, that the children actually fare better in those circumstances. In further looking at the study, they said that in divorce boys act out right away and that girls often don't act out

until they try to form permanent relationships of their own later in life and that those kinds of things become very, very destabilizing to them.

First of all, I'd like to say that I wish that there didn't have to be divorce, but I'm pragmatic, and I recognize that there are a lot of children that are involved today in families that experience this condition, so we need to look at those issues.

When I look at whether both parents need to be involved in their children's lives, you know, to me that is a no-brainer. I think we all accept that value and understand it. I consider myself to be an expert only in one thing, and that is being the mother of four sons. I mean, I've been their only mother, so I must be the only expert because I'm the only one that has been there as well as a father in their life. I've always said to my kids that there are two types of love. There's a mother's love, and then there is a father's love. I've always considered a mother's love to be more emotionally supportive, perhaps. I know that when my boys have problems, they tend to come to me before their father sometimes because they know that I'm going to be a little more patient, perhaps, in some aspects of their lives than their dad might be.

When you raise four sons, you quickly realize that there are times you really need a father's force as you're trying to keep them from going over the fence. All of my sons at this point in time are over six feet tall. They're bigger than I am. They're physically stronger than I am. I think they're still afraid of me, sort of. I don't know why when I look at them. But when it comes to their father, they can all describe the look. They call it the look. Now, my husband is not even aware that he has a look, but every one of my sons can tell you what that look is. They can even imitate the look, and they can tell you how terrified they are of the look, not that he's ever had to do anything beyond look at them, but there's just something in a boy that understands that look. I would say to you that a mother brings certain things to a child and a father brings certain things to a child, and they're both all so important. So I would agree with the hon. member who brought forward this bill that access of both parents is critical in a child's development and in the prognosis of their future.

I found it very interesting as I was talking to my son the other day. I was lamenting the fact that I'm a mother of four boys, none of which has chosen to get married and provide the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw with grandchildren. I'm one who thinks that's a great idea, and they, of course, keep reminding me that they have lots of time. I said: well, I just don't understand what it is with your generation; they're marrying so much later. I said: even when they do form a permanent relationship, they often want to test run that relationship for a long time before they actually get married; it's almost like they have a fear. I said: what is the problem with your generation? He said to me: "Mother, don't look at our generation. Look at your generation. In fact, many of my generation are the walking wounded of divorce, and they are afraid. They're very afraid. They lived through those circumstances. They know what those battles were like between their parents, and they don't want to take a chance or a risk." So he, in fact, blamed us, which all kids are very, very good at, turning things back on their parents. But in this instance it did stop me, and I did reflect on that, and I thought maybe he was making a very good point there. So I think that that generation definitely can tell us about what it looks like when moms and dads do not have good access to their children and in fact children become the bargaining chip sometimes in marriages that are breaking down.

Some of the toughest files and moments in my constituency office have been when constituents have brought to my office the fight that they could not solve in their marriage and did not seem to be able to

solve through the courts, so they bring it to my office thinking I'm going to help them find some justice that they haven't found anywhere else. I think the part that has always dismayed me is that it always seems to be about the fight and not about the child, and I always caution and advise them to please look to their children's best interest in these circumstances.

When I look at this bill and the merits of it, at first glance I like it. I like the fact that we're trying to keep the best interests of children, but when I move on to the next paragraph where it says, "Whereas the Province should promote access exchange in a positive environment by designating existing [child care] facilities for this purpose," I think: is this a good practice? I'm not certain, Mr. Speaker, and it's one of the reasons that I wanted to be here for today's debate. I wanted to be able to hear what other members had to say about this. I have some concerns about this. I'd like to hear some answers to this. Is this a good practice?

I'd like to hear whether the Minister of Justice, in fact, thinks this would work well with the court systems, if this could be a good practice. I need to know: would this create or move a flashpoint to a place where other children are present, and do we have some concerns around that? I mean, the last thing that I would like to see is centres becoming the place where parents battle with other children present. There would have to be some special circumstances around these centres that are chosen and some special kind of training that would happen for those staff members that would participate there.

Can we feasibly do this across the province? That would be another question that I would have. I know that we often talk about rural Alberta and how their services are a lot further apart.

So those are three of the questions that I would like to see answered before I could support or not support the bill, but I do fundamentally believe that children always benefit when they have access to both parents in their lives and that it is critically important to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Bill 206, the Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act, is trying to grapple with serious problems. I note that the member said – and I think we could all agree – when she introduced it that "there is a need to encourage parents and guardians who are separated or divorced to have access to their children." She goes on to say, "This bill promotes access exchange in a positive environment by designating child-centred facilities in Alberta for this purpose." I believe that we can all agree that it is beneficial for both parents to be involved with their children. I suppose that in an ideal world we wouldn't be in that position, divorced or not, but it happens. So I compliment the member for trying to deal with this.

I'm not going to go through clause by clause at this particular time, but I want to just lay out some concerns that have been said to us by the NDP opposition, and perhaps the member can allude to it later on in the debate. The act proposes to designate existing child care facilities as child access exchange centres, but it does not establish a mandate for such redesignated centres. For example, what services are to be offered there? Are they merely sites of child exchange, or are there to be supervised visits? I'll get in to what I'm talking about. Nor does the act stipulate staffing, security, or funding issues, Mr. Speaker, rather leaving everything to regulation or applying existing child care facility standards. Now, I believe that these are clearly insufficient. We need all the necessary additional

requirements or modifications to be legislated to ensure that they receive proper funding and attention.

The act stipulates that individuals may use the services of the centres either by court order or by agreement, but I think that in that case, we have to define what agreement or services mean. The bill as it is does not establish whether or not these exchange centres would be merely exchange centres or sites of supervised access. As the member is well aware, the needs of each are quite different, and they must be addressed.

I'll point to what I'm driving at. The bill – and maybe the hon. member can talk to it – does not begin to address the reasons why people might use child exchange centres. Domestic abuse is often one of the reasons at least. The figure that we have is that of 76 per cent of women and children who are victims of domestic abuse, more than half of them flee their homes with their children. More than 30 per cent of them have been there before, and a little better than half of them eventually press charges and manage to extricate themselves and their kids from dangerous situations. I know that that's not all the cases, but that happens.

4:30

Now, once they do, many of these women find themselves victims of retaliatory violence and must therefore make use of child exchange centres to ensure their continued safety while obeying court-ordered visitation rights of their former spouse lest they be charged with denying visitation rights. The point I'm making is that these exchanges now take place at Edmonton Police Service or RCMP detachments. The reason, of course, is obvious: security measures to protect both mother and children. The mother is guarded in a back room while the police or RCMP exchange the children with the father at the front of the station.

That's one type of situation we have to look at. I take it – and the member can perhaps enlarge on this after – that that's not the situation that she's looking at because we have to be very careful in that situation. Obviously, supervision is absolutely necessary, I think, in those cases. Perhaps this is what we're driving at, but it's not clear in the bill, and that's why I'm asking that this be clear. Child exchange arrangements are not always, of course, due to violent circumstances. Rather, the realities of divorce or separation result in difficult situations for all involved. A neutral exchange centre is laudable, and I believe that that's sort of what we're looking at.

This is a great idea, but I think we need a little more in the bill, in the legislation itself. For example, I don't know if the minister is aware that the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters has produced an in-depth analysis of this issue, one that recognizes the many complicated facets of the problem, the least of which is that child access exchange centres need a whole new type of staff: part social worker, part remand centre guard, part psychologist, part legal aid, part mediator. I would suggest with all due respect that leaving such staffing requirements to regulation – and we know what's happened in long-term care – often doesn't work. It does not ensure that proper funding is dedicated to the training of such staff, that the staffing levels and competence will be monitored, what training staff will undergo, and what support staff will be on hand.

In other words, we're into a very complicated area, and I think we need to spell this out. The idea, I believe, has merit, but it can't be left to regulation. I think this is too serious a problem. I see that the centres themselves must be multipurpose to accommodate for the various domestic situations leading to their use and also to reflect the needs of children in question, whose ages can range, you know, from infant to teenager. Their security and comfort must be paramount, and simply redesignating child centre facilities, even modified, will

not do so. So what we're suggesting is the training, and some thought has to be put into this.

One I will bring up. I said I wouldn't go into it, and I won't go into all the sections. I would like the member to take a look at section 4(3). This stipulates that use of the centres may be denied if either parent does not wholly comply with requirements for use. Now, obviously, we understand that there must be consequences, you know, if people lie to the centres or whatever, but denying their use would hurt the children more than anyone else. I think then we go against what the bill wants. The whole purpose, I think, of this bill is to do what's right for the children so they have access. I would ask the member to take a look at that particular section and see if it doesn't defeat the purpose for what the bill wants.

I would suggest – and maybe it's necessary in this – that it's a bill that's a good idea, but probably we're asking to do too much in this bill without the detail. We really, before we pass this bill, I think – hopefully the member would agree – need detail regarding safety requirements, staffing requirements, parental agreements, et cetera. The fact that these are all left to regulations modelled by existing centres ignores the reasons these centres are so needed: to make use of child exchange centres to ensure their continued safety.

I guess what we're saying also here: if we're going to use daycare centres, that's a very different role. Again, it comes back to what I was talking about with the training and the rest of it. If it's an exchange and they're doing other things, they can't do that. There's going to have to be the other trained people. You're going to have, perhaps, teenagers around, you know, in a daycare. That's not necessarily bad if there's proper supervision there.

I could go through this, but I don't think it's appropriate at this stage. Those are some of the broader concerns, and they would tie into sort of the preamble that I talked about: the use of daycares, sections 2(1), 2(2), 3, and 4.

I guess what I'm basically saying, Mr. Speaker, is that this is probably a good idea. Something needs to be done. I think we need to flesh it out a lot more because just setting this up, if we don't have, as I said, the proper standards, the proper training, and what the purposes are, how this works with the daycare that we already have – some other members have talked about, you know, the differences between rural Alberta and, say, Edmonton or Calgary. I don't think we can leave it to regulations. It's just too important.

I will certainly commend the member for bringing it forward. I think the idea is good. It's the direction we have to move in, but we'd better think it through and have the proper safeguards there.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and join the debate on Bill 206, the Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act. I'd also wish to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow for initiating discussion here today as I feel this is a subject worthy of attention.

I feel that this is an issue of family dynamics. Strong, healthy families are the backbone of this great province. Families give purpose and identity through collective values and beliefs. They form the foundation on which to build solid, vibrant communities, providing a sense of cohesion and co-operation to all our citizens. Having said that, times have regrettably changed. When many marriages once remained intact through good and bad times, nearly half of all marriages within Alberta now result in separation or divorce. This is an issue that has surely had an impact on more Albertans than can be imagined and has altered the once strong

family dynamics for both parents and children. Unfortunately, we can't change what has been done, but we do have an opportunity to help parents and especially children cope. We should do all that we can to ensure that despite these discouraging situations where families become separated, the best interests of the children are considered in an attempt to maintain relatively strong family dynamics.

A strong sense of family is extremely important to children of any age. They must feel safe, comfortable, loved, and at peace. They need to live in an environment that is supportive and stable. In most situations children are very tuned in to what is going on around them, seemingly able to sense positive and negative energy. Mr. Speaker, the breakup of a family can have an undeniable impact on children. Divorce can lead to feelings of confusion or abandonment. It may also alter a child's perception of healthy relationships. Studies have shown that children of a divorced family are more likely to experience academic, behavioural, and social problems further on in life. These feelings may also apply to the parents as they attempt to come to grips with the end of a marriage.

Regardless of the situation opportunities should be provided to help everyone involved, particularly children, adjust to the changes as well as they can. This bill would offer that opportunity. We should be doing all that we can to help all Albertans live healthy and happy lives.

The majority of divorces result in a child living with only one parent and in some cases living in a completely different town or city than the other parent. This makes visitation on the part of the nonresidential parent challenging, to say the least. Mr. Speaker, for example, in some studies it is estimated that in regard to children in Canada living with only their mother, nearly half of these people visited their fathers at least once every two weeks. One-quarter of the children saw their fathers only once a month or less. Some statistics paint an even bleaker picture of the years following a divorce. It's estimated that two or three years after a divorce roughly one-quarter of children in Canada never see their fathers at all. These numbers indicate that a great deal of children in Canada may not be seeing their fathers nearly enough, and Alberta is no exception.

4:40

Additionally, there are sometimes cases when the residential parent will interfere with the visitation process in an attempt to deny their former spouse from accessing the child. A situation like this not only impedes the right of the nonresident parent to see his or her child but ultimately denies the child the right to visit with a parent that they may not see very often. This presents the need for exchange centres where certified individuals are present to document any relevant data pertaining to the exchange. As outlined in Alberta's child care regulations, this could help to ensure that all appropriate access orders are being followed. In the event that they are not being followed, the court would then have the ability to review said documentation and to make an appropriate ruling based on the findings.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 will increase fairness in regard to visitation in that it would not allow the custodial parent to unjustly withhold access to the child and through documentation provided to the courts create a safeguard, protecting the rights of both the noncustodial parent and the child. This is the biggest strength of the bill.

Several supervised access and exchange centres do exist in Alberta; however, there seems to be no regulatory consistency in terms of how they each conduct their business. Many other jurisdictions in Canada and outside the country are facing the same challenges as we are in this regard, although some have taken

different approaches to resolve the issue. The province of British Columbia, for example, has approximately 10 locations that provide supervised access and access exchange of children. These facilities are regulated by the supervised access and access exchange program and are responsible for a series of directives, most of which relate to their staff. These regulations are in place to ensure that all staff members are trained and equipped to provide a safe access and exchange environment for all family members under a variety of circumstances.

The use of these centre, however, does have some limitations, Mr. Speaker. Only families who have been referred by a court justice are permitted to use the service. These particular families may only use the service for a three-month period, although extensions may be granted in some cases by the court. Even though the families who use these services may do so for a given period of time, the constraints do oblige the families to explore other independent, long-term solutions for visitation or the transfer of children.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that this aspect of the child access centres in British Columbia should be closely considered. Not only does this province provide a valuable standardized service to those in need, but it also facilitates a process where the family must work together toward creating a long-term solution regarding the issues of exchange on their own. Current programs within Alberta do exist to an extent although it's important to make constant improvements. An advanced system could aid in improving relations between family members to some degree and could also alleviate some pressure that is being placed on the access facilities by promoting the family to become self-sufficient.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, this is what the process should be all about. Separated families that are unable to interact cordially for their child's sake should have access to a facility that will open the possibility for impartial exchange while learning how to compromise and to make similar decisions down the road on their own, although I would cite that after reviewing Bill 206, I was struck by the fact that this legislation is being proposed to the Assembly before we have completed the cross-ministry initiative dealing with visitation exchange.

Alberta Children's Services and the Department of Justice and Attorney General are both currently working on the project, which aims to shed light on the realities of this issue and explore the options available to improve the situation within the province. The current cross-ministry initiative led by those outstanding departments is designed to take an environmental scan of safe visitation exchange centres. This pilot project, so to speak, came from a large investigation by the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying entitled Finding Solutions Together. The report listed safe exchange as an aspect of visitation that required attention and investigation.

Results of the current initiative are, to my knowledge, not far off, and if we proceed with Bill 206 before that time, it seems to me that we might be putting the cart before the horse and, in doing so, defeating the purpose of completing the initiative altogether. It's important to be patient. However, with this being said, I think that this bill does provide us with a good starting point for discussion. In due time if legislation leading to the designation of child access exchange centres was passed, our province would become the first to do so. This act could demonstrate to all Albertans that the government is committed to helping separated families interact in a way that always keeps the best interests of their children at mind. Therefore, I strongly urge all members to join me in supporting the intent of Bill 206.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by Calgary-Hays.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to make a few comments on this Bill 206, Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act, and thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow for this initiative. I came into this discussion asking the questions: how serious is this and what are the numbers? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow has indicated the seriousness of the issue, that children do not have access to their parents when there is a broken marriage, and it is a very serious matter. She offered the statistic that 48 per cent of nonresident parents do not have access to their children. That's a very serious statistic.

I don't need to be convinced that there's a need for a safe, secure environment for the exchange of children. Having been involved in marriage counselling throughout my previous career, I think the most difficult thing was just dealing with the tremendous anger and vindictiveness on the part of parents who are going through a divorce, an anger so great that sometimes I felt threatened myself, so I can imagine what young children feel when they are put in difficult situations when their parents are in conflict. So I don't need to be convinced of the need for this kind of thing.

The next question I had was: well, are there other alternatives? Maybe there are other structures that could provide this kind of thing. I know that there has been discussion in the past about a unified family court, and perhaps one of the services that a unified family court could provide would be this kind of service.

Why do we need such legislation if, as the hon. member mentioned, there is a volunteer aspect to this? I suppose that we wouldn't need legislation just to cover the volunteer aspect, but it's the court order aspect that we need to seriously consider. So if the court order is involving custody issues and the transference of the children, then it makes sense that there be a designated exchange place where the parents can take their children.

Okay. I'm convinced that we need the legislation. What kind of legislation? I notice that there are lots of examples throughout the country. It's easy to find examples. Just google through the Internet. There are different kinds. As the previous speaker mentioned, there are different types of centres.

In the state of Maryland, for example, such services are provided through the circuit courts of Maryland in co-operation with Catholic charities of Washington DC, which is interesting because the hon. member did raise the issue of the use of churches. I don't think the bill is specifically focused on daycare centres. I don't know why we get hung up with daycare centres because there are lots of other possibilities for the focus of this kind of facility, and churches would be a good one. I think that in Maryland it's not quite as developed as the hon. member envisions in this bill. I don't see that in Maryland they use trained staff, for example, and there's no cost involved, which is interesting. They don't charge anything. They just provide through churches a comfortable place for children to wait until another parent picks them up.

Now, Ontario is an interesting example. I know that some hon. members don't think that many good things come from Ontario, but Ontario has supervised access centres. In fact, there are 52 of them in Ontario. These supervised access centres provide a safe and secure setting where visits and exchanges can take place under the supervision of trained staff and volunteers. So it's much greater developed in Ontario. It's funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General and delivered through partnerships. So, again, there's that partnership aspect, which I find intriguing. I don't see anything in the bill that indicates that, that there ought to be partnerships between government and, for example, children's mental health

centres or YMCAs or YWCAs or churches or local children's aid societies to provide these kinds of centres.

4:50

In the Ontario example there's a cost, as is recommended by this bill, but it's a limited cost. It's actually a well-defined cost, a one-time yearly fee up to \$300 or a per visit/exchange of no more than \$25, which I think might be important. Also, in Ontario fees are waived for those unable to pay, which I think is also extremely important for families on low income.

As others have mentioned, there's the issue of the training of staff. There's the issue of cost and how this is funded. There's also the issue of what department this would come under. I mean, if this was brought not as a private member's bill but as a government bill, it would probably be more specific about which department it would be under. In the case of Ontario it's the Attorney General, so the equivalent here is the Minister of Justice. I could see Justice bringing that as a government bill so that this would be authorized under Justice. The same with Saskatchewan. That's administered through Justice and their social work units. I think that's important to know exactly what we're doing here in terms of developing this legislation. The bill leaves it quite vague in terms of the minister. The minister would be whatever minister is defined under section 16 of the Government Organization Act. It would be better if it came as a bill from Alberta Justice, and we could move from there.

Anyway, those are my initial comments on this bill. I thank the member for bringing this because this is, indeed, an important issue.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise in this Assembly and join the debate on Bill 206, the Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Speaker, our children are the future of this province. In order for our province to continue to enjoy the economic prosperity and social stability that we are currently experiencing, it is essential that we do all that we can to ensure that our children are given every advantage possible. In this regard, I'm encouraged to see that this government continues to fund education and children's services so that our programs for youth are the envy of the country and our children are given every opportunity to succeed in the competitive world of tomorrow.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, while we ensure that our children are properly educated and enjoy the best access to social programs, there may be more that the government could do to ensure that the children are taken care of during cases of divorce. Divorce is, at the best of times, an extremely painful and difficult experience for a child. Divorce subjects children to conflict and instability at a time when they require a stable and nurturing environment. These difficulties are often compounded when there is conflict regarding visitation with children or parents are simply denied access to their children.

Our current laws surrounding access and visitation are quite difficult to enforce. While courts do have the power to fine or jail those who willfully violate an access order, the reality is that a lack of adequate documentation often allows one parent to hide behind conflicting testimony and deny the other parent access to the children.

Denial of access is something that occurs far too often in Canada. In 1999 the National Longitudinal Survey of Children & Youth found that in cases where children of divorce were living with their

mother, only 47 per cent of children saw their fathers regularly. This is not fair and it is very harmful. Statistics have shown that trauma caused by divorce or separation has many detrimental, long-term effects on the personal development of a child. Children of divorced parents are far more likely to have behavioural, academic, and other types of social problems. Sadly, these problems often become far more serious later in the child's life, especially when children are denied access to one parent.

One American study which tracked 6,400 boys over 20 years found that those who grew up without the active involvement of a father in their lives were three times as likely to commit a crime. Moreover, the state of Wisconsin reports that in their state children who grew up without the involvement of both parents were 12 times more likely to serve time in jail than those who came from intact, two-parent families. We must ask ourselves why this is happening. The answer to this question is that raising a child is something that requires the time, energy, and love of two parents. We are fooling ourselves if we think the children are as likely to be successful later in life when they are denied contact with one parent.

I support Bill 206 because it puts into place a system that ensures that in case of divorce or separation children continue to have regular contact with both parents. By setting up a system whereby documentation of access exchange is kept by a neutral third party, we are making it easier for our courts to enforce access orders and thus more likely that both parents will continue to play an active role in a child's life after separation. Bill 206 will help protect children at a time when they are most vulnerable.

One of the chief criticisms of Bill 206 has been cost. Some of my colleagues have raised concerns about the costs that would be incurred to set up the system for designating and regulating child access centres. While I believe that cost is an issue that merits careful consideration, I also see an opportunity for us to save money for the taxpayers of this province. There are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, Bill 206 will help our courts to perform their functions far more efficiently. Currently courts are forced to devote a considerable amount of time and resources to enforcing child access orders and monitoring compliance. A system whereby accurate documentation is kept will allow our courts to easily monitor compliance with a child access order and act swiftly in cases where one parent is denied access.

Secondly, there is a great potential to save money with respect to criminal justice. There is ample evidence, some of which I have previously discussed, that suggests that children are far more likely to commit crime later in life if they do not have the benefit of having both parents play an active role in their lives. As we all know, the social and monetary costs of crime are staggering. Housing an offender in Alberta costs several thousand dollars per month; moreover, there are additional costs such as court costs, administration, and costs to reintegrate an offender into society. This is not to mention the economic costs that crime has on businesses and private citizens as well as the many negative social implications of crime. Mr. Speaker, if by passing Bill 206 we can put into place a system that contributes to the stability of a child's life and make it less likely that a child will commit a crime later in life, then I think that is a worthwhile investment.

Another concern that has been raised is that the province may be legally liable if during a supervised exchange the safety of a child is compromised. This may be a risk, but I believe that Bill 206 actually reduces the risk to children by putting into place a system whereby the Alberta government works with child care providers to ensure that staff are adequately trained to handle child access situations and to minimize conflict. Minimizing the risk to our

children and ensuring their safety and future health must be foremost and trump all concerns about legal liability. Mr. Speaker, to be sure, Bill 206 does have drawbacks and potential risks. Still, I feel that the potential benefits to Alberta's children far outweigh the risks.

Ensuring the future of our children must be a priority for government. Bill 206 will make a positive contribution to this endeavour by reducing the amount of stress that thousands of Alberta children whose parents divorce or separate are subjected to. This will pay dividends in the future by reducing social problems and contributing to the stability and vitality of Alberta. I urge all members of this Assembly to strongly consider making an investment in the future of this province by giving their support to Bill 206.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the Minister of Children's Services.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and participate in Bill 206. I feel that this is a very important issue, and I am very glad that the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow has brought this bill forward so that we may debate it.

Families are the foundation of Alberta, and it has been proven time and time again that it is imperative that children, as they grow up and develop, have both parents involved in their lives and that both parents are active participants in their development. It is to the detriment of a child when either of his or her parents is no longer part of their life. Doing what is best for the children of Alberta is something I am sure that every member of the Legislature would agree with. Protecting and helping our children grow into productive and successful individuals who help make this province an even better one is an ideal that I am confident we are striving towards.

As an Albertan I am concerned with the vast number of couples who have separated or divorced within the province as well as within the country as a whole. Back in 2003 there were approximately 8,000 divorces in Alberta, a very large number, Mr. Speaker. With the breakup of so many Alberta families we must ensure that children have as many opportunities as possible to remain in contact with both parents.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206, the Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act, proposes one method for facilitating the continued relationship between noncustodial parents and their children. This can be done by designating facilities that are already children-specific, such as daycares and clubs, as areas for the exchange of children between their parents, thus cutting down on the need for the parents to come into contact with one another following a difficult divorce or separation.

One of the great aspects of this bill is that these designated child access exchange centres can be used both on a voluntary basis or by court order. Allowing average Albertans who are struggling emotionally with separation or divorce to use these facilities is a proactive step toward ensuring that both parents are able to actively participate in their child's life regardless of what may be going on between the two parents. Allowing these centres to be used under court order will also provide a useful tool for the courts. Not only will this help them to ensure that children are able to associate with their parents, but the staff of these child exchange centres will then also be available to record the access exchange between the two. This is an important feature of the bill, Mr. Speaker. Having these facilities available for the courts to assign couples to use in exchanging their children will no doubt be a useful resource for the courts to use. In having an independent third party that is able to record any

information the court may request, such as the time a child was dropped off and picked up at the centre, the courts will then have available to them a record of the access exchange.

As well, courts could possibly assign guardians to use such a centre for a period of time if they feel that previous exchanges have been too difficult on the child. Courts could also use these designated child access exchange centres if a couple has appeared before them and the story presented is conflicting. Thus, as has been mentioned, the courts can order the use of such facilities so that documentation of the exchange could be carried out by a neutral third party, and it would be available for the courts to use. Currently judges are always making decisions in this regard on he said/she said circumstances. By having documentation present, the courts will be able to make better decisions. This clearer picture presented to the courts of how well both parties have been doing in terms of following access exchange agreements will serve to be extremely beneficial.

Mr. Speaker, whether these facilities are used voluntarily or by court order, they are a good resource for Albertans to ensure that those involved in a child's life remain in a child's life whether their parents separate or divorce. I believe that as the government any time we can reasonably encourage parents to take an active role in their children's lives, we should do so. The development of youth is influenced primarily by their parents; thus, they should both have the opportunity to participate in their child's life. In fact, our Family Law Act recognizes parents as the greatest influence in children's lives. If we can promote the access of parents to their children, I believe we should do so. The designation of these centres would provide such an opportunity. If these sites were also used voluntarily by some families following separation, it may reduce the amount of stress that children experience when their parents are no longer together. I'm sure that we have all seen the effects that divorce has on children. It can affect their ability to sleep, their performance in school, and their overall happiness. These designated centres for access exchange have the potential to reduce the level of stress that children face in such situations by increasing the likelihood that they will be able to remain in contact with both parents.

The designation of child access exchange centres for the purpose of voluntary or court-ordered exchange of children in a child-centred, neutral, and impartial facility with the ability to document the exchange is a good resource for any couple going through separation and for the courts, as has been mentioned. These centres will also be a good resource for separated parents to use in that the facilities designated by the minister will no doubt be places that are already used for the care of children or as a space for their recreation. Thus, children will not be exposed to a confrontational, negative environment such as a police station while access exchange between parents is occurring.

Mr. Speaker, I focus primarily on parents accessing their children as it is parents who have the greatest influence on a child's development and their life in general. However, I would also like to point out that the bill does not exclude others who have a valid interest in the child's life. Therefore, it does include guardians as well as other individuals, for example grandparents. This is an important feature since these individuals can often be left behind in a situation of separation or in the event that other people in the child's life are not getting along. This allows access to occur between a child and those people who are important in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, a week ago the members of the Legislature passed my motion, Motion 505, recognizing the positive and critical role that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren and encouraging access when it is in the best interests of the child.

Grandparents are definitely an important part of many children's lives. This bill would help to ensure that grandparents have access to their grandchildren even when there is a conflict or disagreement with the children's parents.

Again, in keeping with what is in the best interests of the child, Bill 206 can help ensure that those with a legitimate interest in a child's life are able to remain a part of the child's life. Because these centres could be such a useful resource as a place for separated parents to go voluntarily, for the courts to order couples to go, for the documentation of access exchange, and for potentially facilitating access for grandparents with their grandchildren, I stand to give my support to the Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services, followed by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 206, the Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act. First, I would like to commend the hon. member for bringing forward the bill, that her heart is in the right place on the well-being of children. I think all members of the Assembly would agree that protecting children who are innocently caught in the middle of a parental dispute is of the utmost importance. Sadly, too many Alberta families have experienced violence resulting from conflict between parents. Too many children have paid the ultimate price for violence between family members. Providing children with a safe place to visit family is an admirable goal.

Our communities also recognize that it's an important issue. When my ministry had the province-wide Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying in 2004, safe visitation and exchange was identified as an area to explore further. I'm pleased to say that we're working to develop an Alberta solution to the issues in the best interests of the children. Safe visitation is in our current cross-ministry business plan. Together with the Minister of Justice, Children's Services staff have been working to understand the issue and the services that are now available. We've completed an environmental scan of programs across Canada and the United States, and we'll use the information to determine the next step for a safe visitation and exchange model that best meets the needs of Albertans.

Although this work is well under way, there are still many avenues to explore as we work towards building services that meet those needs. For example, we have to determine the value and the principles that will guide safe visitation and exchange programs in Alberta. We must look at ways of training staff in already existing agencies to build on the quality of service they provide. We must also develop a sustainable plan to expand availability and access to safe visitations. Our key consideration is keeping the focus on the best interests and safety of children.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, appears premature given that there is still limited understanding of the services that currently exist, the diversity between existing programs, and a lack of knowledge by those programs regarding best practices related to the safety of the children involved. We also need to further examine the various needs of rural and urban communities. One single approach cannot work in circumstances that vary widely from family to family.

It is important to note that Alberta has several projects already working to provide children with safe access to family members. For example, Mr. Speaker, the YWCA Sheriff King Home safe visitation program in Calgary works with parents to provide a safe place to have court-ordered supervised visits or monitor exchanges.

Also, our regional child and family services authorities fund many agencies that provide supervised visits between children and families. The clients served through these agencies are not specific to custody and access disputes. The focus of supervised visits is to maintain a child's safety in a wide range of circumstances. These local projects give us a good example to follow but need to be considered in the larger context of helping families across the province.

5:10

I would also like to mention that we are in the process of reviewing the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act and the regulations that apply to facilities providing care to children. The outcome of this important review could also have an impact, especially if it is to apply to the proposed safe visitation centres.

Children's Services, Mr. Speaker, is certainly supportive of initiatives to ensure the safety of children and families and to promote appropriate parental contact. Before proceeding, it is fundamental that information about current practice be thoroughly reviewed. Doing so will ensure that we have the best and most current information from which to move forward and make decisions for children. I would also suggest that it would be wise to ensure that any proposed legislation addressing safe visitation and access takes into account the findings and expertise gained through the cross-government ministry. This will ensure a co-ordinated, sustainable approach to addressing the issue of safe visitation and access.

At the end of the day we need to realize that this is not about adults; it's about children. I am very supportive of anything we can do to keep children out of harm's way while maintaining important connections to their family. However, Mr. Speaker, the issue is complex. The work we're doing now to more fully understand the issue and put together the best possible service for Alberta's children must happen first. Only once we've got a better grasp can we move forward with effective, accessible, and sustainable help for children who need a safe place to visit family members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 206 in second reading. I'd like to start by congratulating the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow for allowing us the opportunity to discuss this important issue.

Bill 206 highlights an important justice issue facing many separated families. It is a sad truth that many children do not continue to have a close relationship with both parents after separation. Children benefit from knowing that they are loved and wanted, and we need to keep working to reduce the impact of family breakdown. Fortunately, many parents in Alberta manage to put their children first and to work together to keep the children's relationship with both parents intact.

Before I speak to the specifics of this bill, I'd like to clarify a question of terminology that arises from the difference in federal and provincial legislation. The federal Divorce Act refers to a parent's time with a child as "access" while Alberta's Family Law Act calls this "parenting time." Each of these terms is correct, and though access is the term more commonly known, parenting time is what this time is intended to be. This time together is very important for both the child's well-being and for the parent.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that every member in this House has received calls from constituents who are not able to see their children. I can tell you that this government has been investigating

the options for helping families find solutions. I appreciate that the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow has raised the question of exchange centres for children.

Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons that children are not able to spend time with both parents. This makes the issue very complex. In some cases the problem is simply logistics. One parent may move away from the children to find work or family support after a relationship breaks down. In these cases it becomes extremely difficult for parents to see their children and remain a meaningful part of their lives. In other cases the problem is that one parent deliberately makes it difficult for the other parent to continue a meaningful relationship with their children. Unfortunately, some parents do use their children as a means to get back at their former partners. For some it may be an issue of control instead of what would be the best for the children. A study appearing in the *Family Relations* journal indicates that as many as 25 to 35 per cent of parents admit having interfered with the other parent's time with a child.

Mr. Speaker, there are other serious reasons parents give to explain why they deny the other parent time with their child. For example, we've all heard terrible stories of parents showing up to visit their children when they've been drinking or using drugs. Also, some parents might not yet have the skills or experience they need to keep their children safe and well cared for during visits. Some may have a history of violence. At other times the problem is that one parent simply does not make the effort to see their children. There could be many reasons for this also.

Some parents do not ask the court for court-ordered time with their child. Others fail to show up at the scheduled time. Other reasons include emotional concerns, a lack of a proper home to bring the children to, or frustration at dealing with the other parent. Failure to exercise access and access denial are very complex issues, yet I think we would all agree that we want children in Alberta to be able to have a healthy and continuing relationship with both parents in most cases.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that some of the initiatives offered by Alberta Justice through family justice services have helped a great number of Alberta children maintain a good relationship with both parents. While parenting disputes arise – and in many cases they inevitably do – this ministry has ensured support to resolve conflicts. Over the years we have offered increasing levels of service to help families get through separation or divorce and to protect their children during the process. These services are in addition to the many supports offered by other ministries, such as Children's Services and Human Resources and Employment.

We also help parents of young children going through separation or divorce through the focus on communication and separation course. This specialized course is offered at no charge and helps parents learn how to better communicate even though they may be in conflict.

Mediation services have been another key component of our services for many years. Every year about 2,000 families use our mediators to work out their custody and access disputes, and over 75 per cent of these parents reach an agreement that works for them. For most parents this service is also available free of charge.

This past October the Family Law Act came into effect. This act continues the effective access enforcement provisions formerly contained in the Domestic Relations Act. Through those provisions people being denied court-ordered time with a child can seek relief from either the provincial court or the Court of Queen's Bench. The act also helps those parents whose children are not returned to them or who incur additional expenses because the other parent does not

appear for scheduled time with the child. To make that legislation effective for parents, family justice services offers assistance to parties in bringing forward their court applications, and new initiatives are being considered as we seek to improve service.

I appreciate that the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow has raised the question of exchange for children. It's an important concern for this government. I would like to note that as a result of the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, work on the cross-ministry safe visitation and exchange initiative has been started. The goal of that initiative is to improve the quality and consistency of safe visitation and access to programs across the province. Key staff from both Justice and Children's Services are working on this project as we speak. The hon. member's work has helped put focus on this very important issue facing many Alberta families, that of facilitating access to their children, but I would prefer to allow the cross-ministry group to complete its work before considering passing any legislation in this area.

There have been a number of questions posed by members who have spoken to this bill this afternoon. They need to be addressed. I would respectfully submit that there needs to be appropriate consultation with people who are involved in this area, the stakeholders, because they will be able to offer insight.

To give you an example, Mr. Speaker, in the Department of Justice we have initiatives such as domestic violence courts. There is a new initiative called ARTAMI, which is the Alberta relationship

threat assessment management initiative. These matters did not occur overnight. There was a great deal of consultation and a great deal of work that went into these particular matters before they ever saw the light of day. They have started as pilot projects, and it has been an issue obtaining resources in order to expand these projects once they get going, not only in the location where they happened to start but also to other parts of Alberta.

While this is a very good idea, Mr. Speaker – that is, to improve access to children – it is also an idea that requires a great deal more work and answers to many of the questions that have been posed here this afternoon. So I would encourage that this matter not proceed at this time, but I do congratulate the hon. member for bringing it forward.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I would move that we now call it 5:30 and reconvene this evening at 8.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 10, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/04/10

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Use of Highway 41

506. Mr. Mitzel moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to promote the use of highway 41 up to and including highway 63 from Wild Horse to Fort McMurray as an alternate north-south transportation corridor from the United States.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to stand tonight and present to you Motion 506. What I'm proposing here tonight will be beneficial to our transportation system and to the economy of our province as a whole. In 2005 Alberta's exports of manufactured goods hit a new high of \$79.2 billion. This was up 18 and a half per cent from the year before, with more than half of these exports going to the United States. Alberta does a great deal of business with the United States, both exporting and importing. We must have the necessary transportation corridors in order to ensure that our roads and highways can support our growth as a province. This is what my motion proposes.

By promoting highway 41 as an alternate north-south corridor with the United States, Alberta would be better able to move products and machinery more easily and efficiently to northern Alberta and Fort McMurray. Also, by promoting this highway as an alternate supply chain, we'll be able to stimulate economic opportunities for these communities located on the eastern side of the province.

As I previously mentioned, Mr. Speaker, Alberta does a lot of trade with the United States. Just to give you a better sense of how much trade we actually do, between 2000 and 2004 we exported approximately \$255 billion worth of products from all industries to the United States and imported about \$48 billion worth of products from the United States.

The oil and gas industry in this province spends a great deal of money on machinery and equipment. Something like \$4 billion is spent on machinery and equipment, with the greatest portion of this being used in Alberta's oil sands. In 2004 we imported about \$3.3 million worth of oil and gas field-related products from the Midwest United States alone. In urging the government to promote highway 41 as an alternate north-south transportation corridor, I'm asking that we have a transportation corridor to better serve these trucks hauling heavy machinery and equipment to our northern energy projects from the United States.

There are a great deal of north-south truck trips that happen daily in our province, and according to a recent report developed by the Van Horne Institute, 25 per cent of this country's heavy trucks are located in Alberta. This same report noted that our traffic volume as a total is going up 3 and a half per cent every year. It also notes that over the next 10 years we'll see an increase of 40 per cent of Alberta's total traffic volume. The need for good transportation corridors and alternate routes for traffic is therefore quite evident.

Mr. Speaker, when we discuss traffic volumes, it's quite evident

that our main north-south corridor with the United States, highway 2, the Canamex, is heavily used. If we promote highway 41 as a supply chain, we can possibly reduce some of this heavy volume. Highway 41 has relatively low traffic volumes and can therefore support an increase in traffic by these heavy, wide, and slow-moving vehicles. Highway 2 and highway 36 will not be able to accommodate these increases in traffic in the future. What I'm talking about is the increase of 40 per cent in the next 10 years. Highway 41 will help to mitigate some of these pressures.

Mr. Speaker, by promoting the use of this transportation corridor, we can also ensure that these big trucks bypass Alberta's more highly populated areas. Highway 2 travels directly through Calgary and Edmonton, our two largest urban centres. By using highway 41, we can relieve some of the pressures due to traffic volumes on these highly populated centres. By doing so, we can also ensure that regions on the eastern side of our province see an increase in economic opportunities. With more truck travel we should see an increase in commercial businesses such as restaurants and mechanical shops amongst others.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that it's not too uncommon for trucks coming from the United States to clear customs in other provinces, at other border crossings, before continuing into Alberta. This translates into a loss of business for existing Alberta companies who would benefit from having these carriers travel through Alberta en route to northern Alberta. If they cross in British Columbia or in Saskatchewan and travel up through either of those provinces before coming across to Alberta, this means a loss of business for Alberta companies. It may also mean that some companies may choose to locate in other provinces rather than Alberta in order to take advantage of this business.

By promoting highway 41 as an alternate north-south transportation corridor and, in conjunction with this, asking the federal government to give Alberta a second 24-hour crossing at the current Wild Horse border crossing, we could encourage these trucks to come directly into Alberta from the United States. This would increase our potential for economic development. Mr. Speaker, for the amount of trade we do with the United States, we need a second 24-hour border crossing in order to accommodate this business. In contemplating my motion, I hope that the government will also consider urging the federal government for a second 24-hour border crossing. By opening a second 24-hour border crossing at Wild Horse, we could encourage some of these trucks to cross the border into Alberta from the United States and travel up the eastern side of the province by way of highway 41 and up to highway 63 to reach Fort McMurray and our Alberta oil sands.

Mr. Speaker, in asking the members of this Legislature to support my motion, I'm not suggesting that any other corridor be ignored or not considered as a transportation corridor as a result. We need to promote highway 41 as an alternate route to northern Alberta to ensure that trucks coming from the Midwest cross into Alberta and travel through our province to reach the oil sands rather than doing so by travelling the majority of the distance through another province. We should promote highway 41 in order to stimulate business in this area of the province, and we need to be sure that the heavy equipment and machinery used by our northern energy projects can reach their destination easily.

The use of highway 41 as an alternate supply chain could be one part of our provincial grid of highways. Eventually we may see the entire province covered with economic opportunity, infilling every area within this grid. Highway 41 can be viewed as a skeleton with the possibility for subsequent ribs to be added to the frame.

Mr. Speaker, promoting highway 41 as an alternate north-south transportation corridor with the United States will increase Alberta's

transportation system. It will increase economic opportunities with the eastern side of the province and will likely help alleviate some of the strains due to the traffic volume that currently exists along highway 2. This would be a good step toward improving our overall provincial transportation strategy. It's an opportunity to be proactive rather than reactive.

I look forward to the comments from my colleagues and all members of the Legislature regarding Motion 506. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I very much appreciate the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat's Motion 506. I'm in complete support of the motion. The southern part of our province economically has been basically ignored for the last number of years. It seems that the Calgary-Edmonton corridor is the area where the province spends and receives quite a bit of its money from. That leaves the southern portion, such as Medicine Hat and Lethbridge, out of the loop. Highway 41, promoting its use and not only its use but the maintenance of it, which I would think would be part of the motion, is extremely important because without that ongoing maintenance the accomplishments that the member is suggesting will not occur.

I mentioned in earlier discussion that I'd like to see another highway to Medicine Hat improved upon so that we're not just dealing with the north-south corridor. Although the greatest part of our trade is with the States, we do have to consider east-west transportation, and that's where I would like to see the twinning of highway 3 come into place. In expanding our trade globally, internationally, as well as strictly with our main trading partner, the States, this government has recognized the importance of investing in the Prince Rupert container shipment port. While this particular highway 41 would not contribute directly to moving goods up and through to Prince Rupert, I believe that the southern highway 3 would accomplish that end.

8:10

Also, as the member pointed out – and I don't want to go repeating everything he's put forward – the importance of taking some of the load off highway 63 makes absolute sense. Highway 63, highway 881, and Fort McMurray infrastructure in general have been ignored by this government, yet private companies are still willing to invest billions of dollars into further oil sands extraction. Of course, in order to facilitate and speed up this process, we have to get the heavy machinery up there. That machinery cannot go by rail. It's too heavy. The rail allowances are not wide enough to accommodate the type of heavy equipment that needs to go up, so using highway 41 as an alternate access route takes a lot of that heat off highway 63. It's not an either/or; it's a multihighway approach.

Unfortunately, the province has seen fit to see almost 60 per cent of our highways be in poor to fair condition. So I would hope that if this motion passes, which I would encourage all members to support, there will be a built-in ongoing maintenance plan for the highway so that we have some assurance that it won't be allowed to deteriorate to the point that highway 63 has.

Speaking of deterioration, this weekend I had the opportunity to travel down to the Finance minister's territory, and I made the mistake of taking highway 9. So while I'm talking about 41, I also want to put in some honourable mention for highway 9. It's a sad circumstance that in order to get to Drumheller from Calgary, one of your options would be to take highway 9.

Speaking also of the importance of east-west highway corridors,

to try and get away from highway 9, I took the Trans-Canada back to Calgary. I tried a different route when I was enjoying the East Coulee festival. I thought: my fifth wheel can't take it anymore; I'll try a different route. So I went onto our main east-west thoroughfare of the Trans-Canada. I would hope that the Infrastructure and Transportation ministry will have a good chat with the federal minister of highways because the Trans-Canada is in terrible shape. We must promote not only the north-south corridors; we have to promote the east-west connections as well.

The opening of an additional customs agency makes tremendous sense as well. Particularly during the period of the BSE and the ranchers' beef disputes we received a lot of difficulties from our Montana border. It may not have been deliberate, but it certainly had the perception of a great deal of extra inspection of vehicles, a very slow process getting across the border. Of course, for Alberta's economy, whether it be on the hoof or boxed meat processed here in Alberta, that north-south corridor is extremely important. Having a second station at which to cross as well as improved security relations with our southern neighbour would do us great facilitation for improving our truck traffic.

I'm not sure if the member had considered the possibility of a parallel rail system at one point, but we certainly need a variety of transportation routes to open up our north. Possibly considering a rail connection would definitely be helpful.

Once highway 41 does connect with highway 63, hopefully there will be a promotion and maybe even a speedier result for the twinning of highway 63. As we all know, that highway needs to be not only upgraded, but the grading of the highway itself needs to be changed. So any improvements that can see our highways returning to the standard that they were prior to 1992 I would very much support.

For that reason I very much support, as I first indicated, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat's Motion 506. Well done.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is always an honour to stand before you and this Assembly. I truly appreciate the opportunity to join in the discussion of Motion 506 here tonight. I'd also like to take a moment to commend the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for introducing this proposal.

As Albertans today we are certainly envied by our neighbouring provinces as well as most of the United States. The cities of Calgary and Edmonton are rightly being recognized world-wide as economic, political, and cultural powerhouses. This success is not the product of luck or random good fortune, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta spirit is the reason for our success. I see the hard-working, persevering, entrepreneurial nature of citizens first-hand every time I deal with my Battle River-Wainwright constituents, and I know that other members of this Assembly see it in their ridings as well. As the representatives of these citizens it is only fitting that we reflect the same outlook while we govern this province.

Motion 506 is a fine example of how we continue to show Albertans that we are dedicated to providing for their needs. It is also an example of our vision for all regions of our province, not just our major centres. To a large extent the current economic growth that our province is enjoying is focused in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary and the communities that exist along the highway 2 corridor between them. By creating an alternate north-south transportation corridor, we will be benefiting many regions, Mr. Speaker. Pressure will be taken off the other often overcrowded routes. This can ease the maintenance costs of these highways and,

most importantly, improve the safety for all travellers using them. If the Alberta government would also request that the federal government open a second 24-hour border crossing at Wild Horse, the import/export capabilities of this province would be enhanced. This aspect of Motion 506 has obvious benefits to the entire economic structure of this province.

Today it is becoming more and more apparent, Mr. Speaker, that alternate routes are needed not only to deal with growth but to create economic growth. Just recently numbers were released showing that Alberta's population grew by 25,100 people simply from October to December. This rate of expansion equates to .76 per cent population increase over that time period, dwarfing the national average of 0.14 per cent. This news made the headlines in many local and national papers, and it certainly deserves the attention of this Assembly. We as the leaders of this province must step forward to address the growth and prepare for the years to come. One of the best ways in which we can do this is by expanding our infrastructure through timely and appropriate projects. These projects need to be expertly planned and done in ways that not only deal with this issue but deal with the issue in the best possible way.

In the case of our highway system the utilization of different routes such as the highway 41 route from Wild Horse to Fort McMurray or even potentially the highway 36 route, now called the Veterans memorial highway, will address the demand for increased north-south transportation. It will also revitalize rural areas. Once the concept behind Motion 506 is expanded to create a so-called transportation grid, all rural Albertans will be strengthened in many ways, Mr. Speaker.

The need for transportation is a key factor in Alberta's rural development strategy. As chair of the steering committee on rural development I was lucky enough to ask rural Albertans what they felt the problems were in their communities. Many rural residents feel that the roads and other transportation services that serve their communities could be enhanced to inspire economic development. This is seen as a significant challenge, but one that can be overcome through efforts such as Motion 506.

8:20

By moving in this direction, we will be acting directly toward at least two of the pillars, Mr. Speaker, outlined in the rural development strategy: number one, "providing opportunities for rural communities to develop strong economies and benefit fully from the Alberta Advantage," and number two, "ensuring that rural communities have the capacity, the quality of life, and the infrastructure necessary to remain vibrant and attractive places to live, work and visit." Establishing a more expansive transportation network will sustain rural communities, providing security to their economic base and community capacity, both of which are essential to their survival. The use of highway 41 and highway 63 or highway 36 as an alternate north-south corridor will provide that lifeline to rural areas that it covers.

Motion 506 fits well into the rural development strategy, Mr. Speaker. It's a proposal that wields enormous potential for numerous regions in this province. It also creates a beginning point from which a complete transportation grid can be expanded to touch the entire province. It is a vision for trade and transportation within this province. Our duty as legislators of this province is not to ensure that one or two cities or regions or jurisdictions are represented; it is to ensure that all of Alberta is served.

An Hon. Member: Including Wainwright?

Mr. Griffiths: Including Wainwright.

Motion 506 is a fine example of how we can continue to achieve this mandate. It's a step in the right direction, Mr. Speaker. In one way or another all the constituencies in Alberta could be beneficiaries of a transportation network. That is why all the members in this Assembly should join with me in supporting the principle of Motion 506.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Motion 506, that urges the government to promote the use of highway 41 up to and including highway 63 from Wild Horse to Fort McMurray as an alternative north-south transportation corridor from the United States.

This motion, Mr. Speaker, highlights two things. First, the motion attempts to promote discussion about opening the east side of the province for economic development and trade and, number two, the motion makes no commitment to infrastructure upgrades. The motion is not controversial. I'm sure that it will help rural Alberta. Of course, an alternative route from the U.S.A. to Fort McMurray would reduce strain on central Alberta. This motion makes no commitment to infrastructure upgrades. The motion is primarily for economic discussion.

I have a few questions for the sponsor of this motion. Will the trade corridor actually be used by industry? Does the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the sponsor of this bill, actually have a plan for developing highway 41? Has the member looked at traffic safety? Has the member lobbied the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to implement the McDermid report on traffic safety? Could the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat provide us with an update on the condition of highway 232, which is the American highway leading up to highway 41, ending at Wild Horse? Is the hon. member aware of the most popular commercial route for traffic travelling west on highway 16 from Saskatchewan en route to Fort McMurray? Presently is most traffic turning north on highway 41, or do they continue west before turning north? What is the fastest route for commercial traffic to Fort McMurray from highway 16 at the Alberta/Saskatchewan border? What is the safest route for commercial traffic to Fort McMurray from highway 16 at the Alberta/Saskatchewan border? I mean, the main thing is the plan. Building a castle in the air is something else. How much approximately will this project cost, and where will the money come from? Are we going to use the money from the government side or plan for a P3 or what?

Those are the few questions I would like to ask the sponsor of this motion. Otherwise, you know, this is a good motion. I support this 100 per cent.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, also, consider it a great pleasure to join in the discussion on Motion 506, Alberta's alternate north-south transportation corridor. I appreciate the comments that have been made here so far tonight. I would also like to extend a thank you to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for introducing this proposal.

I'm a very strong supporter of this motion and its suggestion to create an alternate north-south transportation corridor through the promotion of highways 41 and 63. I'm also a proponent of a

transportation grid, that has been mentioned by other fellow members. This motion obviously talks about transportation issues, but what it really is, Mr. Speaker, is an important part of a much larger rural and economic development strategy for a significant part of this province.

On that note, I would like to take a moment to share a project with you that has great potential to be an integral part of this future grid. After all, it seems logical to me that after we have reinforced the north-south connections both to and through this province, we would shift our focus to the east-west projects. The Howse Pass is one such route which I feel deserves attention in this regard. You know, we can talk about highway 1, the Trans-Canada highway, and the Yellowhead Pass, but the Howse Pass doesn't have a road. I believe this concept, which involves the expansion of highway 11 through the Howse Pass, has been looked upon with favour for more than 60 years.

With the tremendous growth that is occurring across this province, the time is certainly right to look forward. Much of the demand that this latest boom has created has been in central Alberta, and the businesses of this area need a substantial east-west corridor now more than ever before. I'm not saying that we should start clearing the right-of-ways tomorrow or any time soon, but we should certainly look more closely at the realities of expanding highway 11 through the Howse Pass. I know that the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce in addition to all the central Alberta municipalities find the latest findings in the prefeasibility study on the Howse Pass and this route to be positive and worth further investigation and investment and exploration, and I fully agree with them on this new initiative.

The merit for the Howse Pass expansion lies in the economic infilling that results when a transportation network is set up. The same would be true for future enhancements of the east-west routes through Kicking Horse and Grande Prairie. However, the need for the Howse Pass is more imminent. In the spirit of Motion 506 I would like to have this government consider a prompt and transparent assessment of the Howse Pass expansion. This study should be used in part to raise the level of awareness of the project with municipal officials, all provincial representatives, and the general public.

I know that there are probably some people who feel that projects such as the highway 41 expansion and Howse Pass extension will have a negative environmental impact. While the impacts of roads are very real, as in all situations there are often many sides of the issue that we can look at. Considering that this route would save the total travel distance for numerous highway users, I would like to see an emissions-savings calculation done as part of a comprehensive Howse Pass study as well as the studies for the highways 41 and 63 possibility. The actual number of vehicle miles travelled would be greatly reduced for both north-south and east-west routes. Perhaps this would be a balancing factor for the concerns for environmental impacts and other cumulative impacts that highways would bring.

Another thing that I would like to talk about is the development of water systems. Now, this is totally different from highways, but I think it's an illustration to show what happens when you develop other infrastructure in the province. I want to talk about water systems for municipalities and for farms in east central Alberta. I can speak from experience on the development of adequate and good quality water in communities. If you look at the building of the north Red Deer River water system from Red Deer to Blackfalds to Lacombe and Ponoka, you will see that even before the water is flowing, there is a building boom going on in anticipation of the increased and secure supply of water. This means jobs and security for workers and their families. It means economic activity that has

huge spinoffs that will benefit a much larger area if not the whole province.

8:30

Another possibility for this area, east-central Alberta, is the further development of gas resources throughout this area in this part of the province, gas resources and gas lines with the possibility of straddle plants and the further development of petrochemical plants and related industries. This is what happened in my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka in the Joffre and Prentiss areas. The industry that is established there is only there because of transportation to water and the availability of feedstocks like ethane, propane, and butane. This has created thousands of jobs, a huge tax base, and security for families in the area.

If we continue to move forward, first with Motion 506 and then with other pressing projects, we'll be well on our way to creating a transportation and employment legacy for the entire province, from east to west, north to south, urban to rural. I'm sure there are critics out there who say that such a plan is excessive, that a transportation grid of this nature is only a pipe dream that is unpractical and unnecessary. To these people I just say: look at the past. The former leaders of our country saw the necessity of the railways to bring in goods, services, and citizens to the western prairies. They had their detractors as well, but they moved forward because they had a grasp of the present and a vision for the future. If it were not for their guidance, the province of Alberta may have never been born.

With this in mind, we the leaders of today need to support the creation of a co-ordinated transportation network across this province, and Motion 506 is a great place to start. I ask the members of this Assembly to recognize the opportunity that is here before us today to expand our north-south transportation potential. By moving forward with this motion and investigating east-west routes to complement these actions, we will have undertaken the beginnings of a comprehensive transportation grid to serve this province well into the future. When we discuss these kinds of issues, we are often accused of overstating the benefits, but if we look at the lessons we can learn from history, we will see that most often we vastly underestimate the end results of these ambitious projects. So this is part of my vision, Mr. Speaker, for the future of this province. I certainly hope that you my fellow colleagues will join me in making it a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak on Motion 506 this evening, and I would like to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing forth this proposal. I think it's incumbent upon this Assembly to think creatively about transportation and development in this province. I know, certainly, that the eastern side of our province, while enjoying some development in the past, is probably looking forward to some development along this roadway, highway 41, and the economic benefits that it would receive as a result.

Where roads go, economic development is likely to follow, Mr. Speaker, and certainly we've seen in the past where good industrial roads and well-built roads usually end up with economic development along the corridors. Highway 41 has tremendous potential just because of its capacity to move, perhaps, around some more congested areas that we have had spring up over the past 30 years or so and move goods and services up to Fort McMurray, not just Fort

McMurray but also the heavy oil centres up around Cold Lake and Lloyd and Vermilion. Past Lac La Biche there's a whole myriad of possibilities that I could see by focusing on this route.

I think that most members here would agree with me that the necessity of having an alternate route to move large, heavy equipment is painfully obvious. If you travel, say, along highway 36 or even 21, it's very common to encounter a number of oversized loads, which are certainly a sign of economic activity, which is good, but are also a traffic hazard when multiplied across the road. I saw the other day several, perhaps four, of these very large oil installations moving along, and when they sort of meet on a two-lane road, it's a somewhat disconcerting thing. So just to think of that highway 41 as sort of meeting that function I think would assist us considerably.

Highway 2 is such a busy corridor, both for the movement of people and of goods, that it makes sense to move transport trucks off the main highway, especially if they're travelling north to Cold Lake and to Fort McMurray. It's unrealistic to consider that regular citizens would be using this road so far out of the way, so the corridor I think we must focus as a heavy transportation for trucks and oversized loads specifically.

By moving heavy oil sands related traffic off of highways 2 and 36 and 21 as well, we reduce the need for a great many travel advisory warnings in regard to heavy and dangerous goods, which limits our access to these roads for individual vehicular traffic. I think, however, we cannot move this traffic onto a less developed highway system as highways that typically service these trucks have been specially designed. I would suggest that this motion gives us an opportunity to think forward on this, but there are many practical considerations that would involve a tremendous expenditure in infrastructure. These heavy trucks require extra load-bearing capacity on the road. Accesses and slopes have to be re-evaluated. So there would be a number of considerations in that regard, but it's certainly not insurmountable.

One issue that I would just like to point out, though, is that at Wild Horse it's not a 24-hour border control right now, and then south of there secondary road 232 from the States is not a well-travelled or developed route at all, so there would have to be some integrations with the state of Montana to co-operate with such an endeavour because certainly 232 is very undeveloped, even less so than highway 41. We certainly do support the opening up of alternative routes that may prove more efficient for north-south transportation, but I think that there is a problem in regard to lobbying the Americans in this regard. You know, they would have to be in full co-operation with that, and we must take that into consideration.

The proposed north-south corridor travelling up highway 41 to join 63 has very few industrial centres on it, although there are a number of towns. This might seem ideal for the transportation of oversized and dangerous goods. It does complicate emergency service access in some of the areas and limits the servicing of these roads to some degree as well. Because of the lower population along this proposed route it raises the question of basic services, I guess, as well for trucks moving through the area, but as I said before, where the roads do go, the traffic and economy is soon to follow, so one sort of breeds the other.

Long combination vehicles, or LCVs, make up about 1 per cent of our traffic on Alberta roads, but if we move industrial traffic over to this proposed corridor, we must be prepared for LCVs to make up a much greater percentage of vehicular travel on this route, so the road conditions must be made safe and fortified for this. Currently the conditions on these roads are not met at this point in terms of tracking weather and issues like that too. So those are just some considerations that we have to consider.

The government announced that it plans to have highway 63

twinned, which is fantastic, but it will take a number of years before that project is complete. I suppose that we are looking at this as a motion right now for highway 41, but considering the tremendous pressures on our capacity to build these days with so many projects going on, we'll just have to look down the road for 41.

Another issue that I just wanted to bring up is the Canamex trade corridor, which is to facilitate north-south trade specifically. The standards for the roads making up that corridor are aligned somewhat loosely, but still there is an international standard for the Canamex road, and the services being offered along that route are quite extensive. You know, we do have a lot of new economic activity in this province, but I do not want to take away from the focus on the Canamex trade corridor, which is very important to the future of this province's economy.

8:40

So, in closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my appreciation and my support of this endeavour, and I hope that the people in east Alberta have an opportunity to have their road upgraded to a standard that might approach other highways in this province. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today and join the debate on Motion 506, sponsored by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. Our province is growing at an almost unbelievable rate. Our population is booming. In the fourth quarter of 2005 alone our population grew at five times the national rate, which translates to about 25,100 new Albertans. More than 17,000 of those new arrivals came from other provinces. Our province has not seen growth of this magnitude since the petroleum-fuelled boom times of 1979-1980.

People are flocking to our province to share in the Alberta advantage. Low taxes, strong social programs, no provincial sales tax, and a robust economy are attractive incentives. The unemployment rate in Alberta is about 3.9 per cent – let me repeat that, 3.9 per cent – the lowest rate in Canada. Albertans also have the highest median family incomes in Canada. Half of Alberta families earn \$61,800 or more after taxes.

Mr. Speaker, our economy is flourishing. Flourishing may even be understating the situation. Our economy is red-hot. Over the past decade Alberta has consistently had the highest rate of economic growth in the country. In 2005, for example, Alberta's economy grew by about 4.9 per cent.

Now, the city of Calgary offers a wonderful illustration of this staggering economic success and growth. Calgary is our nation's number one economic performer. In fact, Calgary is North America's fastest growing economic region. Over the past five years the Calgary region has had an average annual population growth higher than any city in Canada. Calgary also has the youngest and most highly educated population among the six major markets in the country.

Alberta has also consistently had the highest investment per capita among Canada's provinces. In 2005 \$60.3 billion was invested. This is about triple the 1995 level. This figure works out to about \$18,250 per capita, more than double the national average. Alberta's exports of goods and services have more than tripled over the past decade, to about \$86 billion. Much of our trade is conducted with the United States. In fact, the U.S. is by far our largest trading partner, buying over 89 per cent of provincial exports. In addition, the U.S. provides two-thirds of foreign investment in Alberta.

Alberta's energy sector has been a huge component of trade with the United States. For example, in 2003 the combined value of energy, mining, and petrochemical exports to the U.S. was more than \$42 billion, or 83 per cent of Alberta's total export to the U.S. I like numbers.

Mr. Speaker, the oil sands development near Fort McMurray represents the largest oil sands reserve in the world with over 174.5 billion barrels proved reserves. Development of oil sands and production growth require significant resources and logistical planning, and billions of dollars are spent each year on machinery and equipment to this end. Not surprisingly, much of this equipment and machinery is imported from the United States.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 506, which calls for the government to promote the use of highway 41 from Wild Horse to Fort McMurray as an alternative north-south transportation corridor, is an excellent idea. Increased use of this corridor would provide one more option and positively contribute toward our province's continued development and maintaining our incredible economic momentum. We should consider innovative ideas such as this to reduce the stress on our existing infrastructure and facilitate economic development in our province. This proposal would provide a more direct route for trucks destined for Fort McMurray travelling north from the mid-western United States, from where an estimated \$3.3 million in oil and gas field-related products were imported in 2004 alone.

This proposal would also be beneficial to the city of Calgary. By promoting the use of this alternative north-south corridor, existing pressure on infrastructure in the Calgary region would be reduced. Thank goodness. Also, it's important to note that when Fort McMurray benefits, Calgary also benefits as Calgary is Canada's energy capital and is a central hub to our province's thriving oil and gas industry.

Motion 506 could facilitate further trade with the United States and encourage additional economic expansion in our province. We should consider new ways to open up our province to continued growth and foster our economic potential and prosperity. Mr. Speaker, I support Motion 506 and urge the other members of this Assembly to consider the merits of this proposal.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the time to stand up and join the discussion on Motion 506, and I appreciate the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing this forward. There's no question that the highways are becoming the backbone of our province as they've torn out most all of our railroads. But I have a few questions, I guess, first for the hon. member. That is: on the U.S. side of the border, if he's familiar, are they're planning on upgrading highway 87 north from Billings to go and hook up with Wild Horse? I appreciate his comments and his desire to be there, but I wonder if we're building something that has no connection from the south, and that worries me a great deal, that they want to have the best possible route, the most convenient for those that are transporting the goods and looking at that area. I guess we need to take one step at a time.

Looking at the map and the north-south connections, we see interstate 15 coming up to the Sweetgrass-Coutts border crossing and the opportunity there as soon as we cross into Alberta to look at highway 36. It just seems like that's a much more popular route, and if we were to build on that hub, we'd have greater success.

It's also very true that in transporting, we want to go the most direct route possible, and highway 36 lines up that way very well.

If, in fact, we need to cross over, though, I wonder if it wouldn't be more prudent to develop highway 36 to Taber and then a four-lane highway on highway 3 going to Medicine Hat and continue developing our east-west highways and use 36 as the main route going north-south as a secondary route to the Queen Elizabeth II and the Canamex highway. The great advantage of highway 36 is that it is a direct route, and it gives people the opportunity to cross, whether it's on 9 or 16 or 13 or highway 3, to go east and west. I very much would like to see highway 36 also brought into the discussion and to see which one is the most economical and the best to serve the entire province for the benefit of the transportation of goods. It very much does appear, though, that our east-west highways are lacking, and because of that, perhaps, we seem to think that we need to have a highway further over to the east because there aren't the good crossroads. Hopefully, we could upgrade that.

The other point that I would like to bring out is that there's been lots of talk about power line transmissions. We need to develop a new corridor that is serving the whole province, and it just seems like 36, going north-south, would serve the province very well. It would handle the large equipment that needs to go up north to Fort McMurray, whereas I question – and perhaps the good member could tell me – if at Wild Horse on the U.S. side the roads are sufficient. Like I say, when they come to Billings off 90 or 94, is there a route where that big equipment would possibly be able to go north? That is a concern for me. I would very much hope that he could address that, seeing how it's his bill and the passion that he has for that highway 41.

8:50

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just thank the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for the opportunity to talk about the development of highways here in Alberta because it is very much a factor that we are a bottleneck when moving goods north and south, east and west. We do very much need to find another secondary route that we can develop to benefit all the travellers of Alberta and to make it safer here. Because of the congestion moving this heavy equipment is causing a problem.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege and opportunity to address the motion brought forward by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I think that for so much of the time here in Alberta in the last couple of years we've been focused on Fort McMurray and all of the growth up in Fort McMurray. Quite frankly, the Cold Lake Esso development and other heavy oil development around Cold Lake and Lloydminster are certainly there for the long term for this province, too, and just on the Saskatchewan side there's huge potential for mine development and also heavy oil. So the route of highway 41 – it makes a lot of natural sense that we would guide the traffic through from Minneapolis, Minot, and over to Havre instead of going up through Portal. So there is an opportunity for us to become and maintain the gateway to the north being Alberta, not just Edmonton.

I think, Mr. Speaker, if you just look at the map that we have now with the great conglomeration down highway 2, it looks too much right now like a one-legged stool. I think that by moving over to highway 41 and developing a specialized, specific truck route, we would be able to develop a border crossing with this in mind: it can have the latest concerns of the American homeland security bills looked after; freight can travel both ways at the speed that industry wants it to now.

We know that we have a tremendous backlog at times at Coutts. We know that the tourism industry is more inclined to go to the mountains, to go through that area. Well, let them go. As a trucker for 20-some years I know that they probably didn't like following a big load, and I didn't like following a Winnebago being pulled by a Volkswagen with 12 kids and a dog at 52 miles an hour up a big hill either.

So I think that the hon. member is onto an idea that we need to look at as a government as developing – now, I don't want to use the term that he used, “skeleton,” because I don't think that's really a proper term. I think that a foundation for a grid for highways, the east-west development the hon. member talked about, is very important. The basis is there, but let's lay out the strategy for the long-term foundation and stability to the transportation industry. I think that in developing these main highway corridors, we need to keep in mind that much of our exports go out in pipelines, and we need to be able to have access to these pipelines. The whole deal. We need to look at the land that we need for what we need to transport, and we need to build it with that in mind.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that everyone would support this motion with the intent the hon. member has. As someone who's lived in that area and has seen the huge development all up and down the east side of Alberta, I think it gives Alberta just another opportunity to diversify, to add stability to the long-term goals, and to give the people on the east side of the province a part of the tremendous Alberta opportunity that we're faced with in the next generation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my chair. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to join the discussion on Motion 506, the Alberta alternative north-south transportation corridor. Transportation is an issue that many Albertans are concerned about as our population and economy grow, and therefore I'm happy to have the opportunity to discuss possibilities of solutions for improving Alberta's transportation corridor.

Mr. Speaker, I do believe that Alberta needs to promote another transportation corridor for vehicles, especially commercial vehicles, heading from the United States to northern parts of our province. Promoting highway 41 as an alternate north-south corridor is definitely one possibility and a great one. As I'm sure we are all aware, Fort McMurray and our Alberta oil sands and other northern energy projects are the destination for many heavy tractor-trailers coming up from the United States. Therefore, I think that it's important that we are discussing different points for their travel in order to reach northern Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, northern Alberta is full of potential when it comes to our economic development through tourism, transportation, and what have you. If we can enhance our transportation corridors, we can hopefully increase our economic growth. This is true for all Alberta, not just northern Alberta. If our corridors serve their purpose well, new commercial opportunities will no doubt be encouraged.

Alberta highways essentially form a grid of highways travelling from east to west and north to south. The more able these routes are to handle commercial vehicles and the transportation of goods, the more economic activities will be possible for our province. I'm always pleased to be looking for new ways to bring new, enhanced, current economic opportunities to Alberta. We have a strong province with boundless opportunities for new business enterprises.

Again, by improving our transportation system within the province, we can advance development on the eastern side of the province and in the north as well as develop within the entire province.

Mr. Speaker, \$3.6 billion was allocated to improve our roads and highways in this year's budget. This includes the twinning of highway 63 and highway 43 as well as expansion of both Calgary and Edmonton ring roads. Our roads and highways are a priority for Alberta's government. I believe that the recognition of highway 41 as an alternate north-south transportation corridor fits in well with the government's effort to improve our roadways and promote better transportation systems for our province. With the development of the oil sands the entire northern area of Alberta needs to be supported through development of transportation corridors to enhance Alberta's economic development as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, this is an interesting topic and one that I'm happy to have had the chance to discuss. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing forward this motion. I hope other members of this Legislature will offer support for Motion 506, as I am doing tonight. I look forward to hearing what comments the rest of the members of the Legislature have regarding Motion 506.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I commend the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for his motion. I think it's a commendable goal to promote the use of highway 41 as a north-south trade corridor. I would like to point out, however, that highway 2, or the Canamex trade corridor, which is Alberta's main north-south corridor, has by far the greater volume of north-south traffic, and it still needs resources as well. There are still stretches of undivided highway south of Calgary, between Calgary and Fort Macleod, and there are areas of congestion, particularly in the city of Calgary on the Deerfoot Trail.

There are many priorities for highway infrastructure, including highway 43, highway 36, highway 63, and, yes, highway 41, so I would hope that by supporting Motion 506, it does not imply that some sort of priority should be given to developing that corridor at the expense of other important priorities.

With that qualification, I would support the motion.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to commend the hon. member for bringing this one forward. As has been pointed out, we have in the past concentrated on the Canamex highway, and of course to get through the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, very expensive. As was just recently pointed out, there needs to be more money spent on that particular road as well.

When you look at a map and look at what's out in the eastern part of the province, it is a good idea to upgrade highway 41, but I do also want to point out that it's extremely important that we be sure to take a good look at the east-west roads as well. When you go down to highway 3 and its connector link highway 1 and then, as the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka talked about, highway 11 through the Howse Pass, from the economic studies that have been done there, it's a very, very viable pass. As a matter of fact, if you look at the history of the railways, that's where the railways should have gone, not through Calgary.

9:00

The Acting Speaker: I hate to interrupt the hon. Minister for

Infrastructure and Transportation, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate on Motion 506.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all the members of this Legislature for their comments towards Motion 506. I'd also like to recognize my researcher, Elizabeth Jeffray, who is up in the stands listening to this very carefully. She worked very hard on this for me. I believe we've had a very productive debate here tonight, and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to address some of your comments and concerns.

I'd like to begin by discussing some of the comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and also the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie regarding promoting maintenance. The first thing to consider is that the highway is already there. It's not a scenario of "build it, and they will come," but realistically it's "recognize it and promote it, and they will use it." I guess the other points on the east-west ribs: these will go a long way to infill the province and improve our total transportation infrastructure.

I'd also like to thank the Member for Battle River-Wainwright for his positive rural comments. The question I answered about building it and they will come also answers the question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie about what it will cost.

He asked a question also about the safety of the highway. If I may read this, "the majority of Highway 41 is classified as a major two lane highway" at the moment. It

meets, or exceeds, the Typical Minimum Acceptable (trigger) Values for Pavement Quality Index except for approximately four sections . . . all less than a kilometer long . . . For Surface Distress Index, there are two cases (ranging from . . . 18 kilometers to 16 . . .) where Highway 41 does not meet the Minimum Values. [However, it] exceeds the Minimum Values for all other sections of the Highway . . . exceeds the Typical Minimum Acceptable . . . Values in the Structural Adequacy Index.

So I think that answers that question for the member.

I'd like to thank the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for his comments regarding the east-west continuum on the grid.

I'd like to thank all the other members. One question was asked about the Montana side of the border. Montana is looking at its future needs regarding their highway stretches. They are supportive of the improvements and have invited us as their northern neighbours to participate in talks regarding their transportation future at the moment. The other question was regarding the highway from Billings. Well, this highway down here would connect up with Havre and highway 2, that goes east. We're talking about traffic and transportation supplies that would be coming from the Midwestern states, not from the south, and therefore would be using the Minneapolis-Minot area and hopefully be using Havre as opposed to the north portal port in Saskatchewan.

I think we've heard a great deal tonight about Alberta's population and economic growth and pressures on the growth points on our transportation system. We've discussed the enormity of our trade with the United States and the need for highways to support this trade. We've discussed how a second 24-hour border with United States would help to improve trade with the United States and facilitate greater economic opportunities with this province.

We've also heard how the recognition of highway 41 as another transportation corridor within the province would ease the traffic volumes on highway 2 and create greater economic growth for the eastern side of the province and for Alberta as a whole. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to reiterate that this is but one step in the creation of a provincial highway grid. If we can promote highway 41 as one

of those grid lines, we will always be able to add more ribs to the system, thereby creating a greater opportunity for economic infilling in every region of the province.

I'd like to thank all the members once again for their support and their contributions to the discussion. I hope my colleagues and all members of this Legislature will support Motion 506 tonight as the promotion of highway 41 has the potential to create many economic opportunities in the province and the potential to help deal with the increase in traffic volumes along our major routes and in our major cities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 27

Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It's my pleasure tonight to move second reading of the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that there were some demonstrators out front of the Legislature this afternoon. I'm not sure if that was this bill that they were demonstrating on. If it is, I would just like to put some of them at ease. Although this is what some might consider to be controversial, we are in fact repealing an act that really hasn't been used in some 20 years. In fact, all of the processors and packers and many of the folks we've had contact with very recently have said to us that this is not an act that they use. For that reason, we've decided to remove it from our legislation as federal regulations and, really, the marketplace are dictating what is happening as far as grading of these types of products.

Just to note again, Mr. Speaker, I did mention when I brought this act in that some kids may believe that this means that vegetables won't be on their plates. That's not true. They will still have to eat their vegetables, and certainly my kids will as well.

With that – and I know that there are many, many members of the House who would like to speak to this bill, but we do have other things that we need to do – I would move that we adjourn the debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 16

Peace Officer Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to respond to the points and questions that have been raised about this bill. There

appears to be confusion on what this act is intended to do. We are not changing direction as some members of the opposition have suggested. The intent of this legislation is to clarify the roles of peace officers to develop a more co-ordinated law enforcement system to support the work of police services across Alberta.

There are currently 275 employers and 2,800 peace officer appointments in the province. The process to hire peace officers is a two-pronged approach. The province is the largest single employer. All levels of government, health authorities, and postsecondary institutions apply to the Department of the Solicitor General and Public Security for authorization to employ peace officers. Once approved, the employer may in turn apply for individuals to hold a peace officer appointment. The peace officer then reports to the authorized employer. This is clearly outlined in section 10 of the bill, that states: "The authorized employer of a peace officer is liable for the actions and omissions of the peace officer while the peace officer is acting within the scope of the peace officer's authority, responsibility and duties." This remains unchanged from the current legislation governing this program.

9:10

The role peace officers will fulfill in a municipality is based on the needs of that particular community or organization. The jobs could include traffic duty, court and prisoner security, commercial vehicle inspections, animal bylaw control, and fish and wildlife management among others. The proposed amendments will not expand these roles or increase the number of peace officers. They are intended to clarify the existing roles, strengthen accountability within the program, improve the quality of services, and increase co-ordination with police services.

During debate there have been comments that this draft legislation includes security guards and the use of private security. I want to be very clear to opposition members that security guards and private investigators fall under a separate piece of legislation, and that legislation is the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act. That act is currently being reviewed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

This legislation, Bill 16, is a result of extensive consultations with police services, police commissions, the RCMP, the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, municipalities and counties, community associations, police associations, educational facilities, and health regions. We have talked to anyone and everyone that is or would be an employer of peace officers, peace officers themselves, and police representatives.

During the review of the special constable program we sent out discussion guides to all police services, including the RCMP, police commissions, and police associations across the province. We received nine submissions from these organizations, which were thoroughly reviewed and considered when changes were being contemplated. We also met with these groups almost two dozen times to get their feedback throughout the process to ensure that we were on the right track. Overall they support the directions outlined in this legislation. We have every intention of continuing to work with them as we develop the regulations and policies.

Criminal Code authority. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora raised several scenarios that need to be clarified. In terms of criminal matters police officers are always in charge. This won't change. The current policy is very clear concerning all Criminal Code occurrences such as arriving at a murder scene or discovering drugs in a vehicle. To ensure their safety, peace officers will continue to be thoroughly trained to know the circumstances under which they must contact the police and request assistance.

Training is another key that has been mentioned several times. I

want to make this point very clear: peace officers are not police officers, so they won't be trained to the same level. They do not investigate the types of serious crimes police officers do. Having said that, the training they will receive will accurately reflect their responsibilities. We will work with stakeholders to develop the training and recertification for all peace officers and their employers. Creating these provincial standards is vital to the quality of the program, the safety of the officers, and the safety and security of the public. Consistency in how training is delivered will ensure the highest possible standards across the province.

Increased accountability reassures the public that peace officers are doing their job and maintaining the highest regard for professionalism and the rights of the citizens they serve. We're strengthening the standards of accountability to ensure that both employers and employees adhere to the requirements across the province. Authorized employers will be required to investigate complaints and report them to the director of law enforcement within the Solicitor General and Public Security, who has increased authority to investigate a situation if it is not resolved in a satisfactory manner. The employer is also required to report specific incidents such as use of force to the director. The complainant also has the ability to request a review of their concern by the director if they are not satisfied with the employer's decision.

In addition, the director is also required to investigate certain situations and may request a police service or other persons to conduct an investigation into an incident or take over an investigation if it's in the public interest to do so. This process ensures that concerns or noncompliance issues are dealt with in a responsive manner. This will result in increased accountability and transparency across the board. The complainant will be updated every five days on the status of their case. Pending the outcome of the investigation the director of law enforcement has the ability to vary, suspend, or cancel an employer's authorization as well as a peace officer's designation. This direction is also supported by our stakeholders. We strongly believe that these lines of accountability will meet the needs of communities and organizations who hire peace officers.

The hon. member has also suggested that peace officers should report to the local police commission. I can't state this enough, Mr. Chairman. Peace officers do not perform the same function as police officers, nor do they have the same level of responsibilities, so we don't feel that they should report to the police commission. The legislation will ensure an effective process of accountability.

Complaints and discipline. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora raised concerns about the terms "frivolous" and "vexatious" regarding complaints. These would be complaints that have no merit or are deemed to be contrived or trivial. Similar wording is used in the Police Act. An authorized employer could dismiss the complaint, but it would still be reported to the director of law enforcement, who could still order an investigation.

The hon. member also suggested the necessity of independent investigation by a public body. The use of a public body would add unnecessary layers and drag out the entire process without adding value to the outcome of an investigation. Being responsive to the issues is paramount to resolve these situations in a timely manner. The process established in the legislation will ensure that the complaints are managed in an appropriate, timely, and fair manner. The outcomes will produce results that will satisfy the public's confidence that the system works the way it was intended to. To this end, we feel that there is no need to establish another level of bureaucracy.

School resource officers. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill

Woods raised a concern that peace officers may take over the role of school resource officers. We are not aware of any peace officers formally being tasked as school resource officers. There are a number of municipalities that have their peace officers involved with school programs to help deliver safety awareness programs such as bicycle safety, crosswalk safety, and some antibullying programs. The issue of school resource officers is a matter for the school board and police service to discuss and determine how best to meet the community needs.

Equal pay. During second reading debate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre questioned the pay that peace officers receive. She suggests the government is trying to find a cheaper way of delivering services. Mr. Chair, that's simply not true. As I have stated several times before, peace officers are providing a complementary service to police officers. The peace officer's rate of pay is determined by the individual employer and varies across the province. It's reflective of the individual's role and responsibilities. Again, let me be very clear: peace officers are not filling the same role as police officers. Their responsibilities are very limited, and they do not have the same level of authority as a police officer. With separate and distinct responsibilities it's obvious that they would be paid differently.

Equipment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity made comments about equipping peace officers with protective vests and puncture-proof gloves. The decision on whether a peace officer would receive this equipment would be made by their employer. That decision would be based on the peace officer's role. For example, a fraud investigator may not require a vest or gloves.

Vehicle markings and uniforms. Several questions have been raised regarding uniforms and vehicle markings. We're currently developing new uniform insignia and vehicle markings based on feedback from stakeholders during the special constable program review. Once we have finalized a mock-up, it will be sent to stakeholders for further review and feedback.

Transferring levels. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity also raised questions about a peace officer's ability to move from one level to another. Bill 16 creates the foundation that will clarify the role of each level of peace officer, and the policy that flows from the legislation will make the distinctions crystal clear. The policy that will support the legislation will clarify four levels of peace officers. There will be two levels of authority for Alberta peace officers and two levels of authority for community peace officers. Alberta peace officers would work for the provincial government. Community peace officers would work for municipalities, health authorities, postsecondary institutions, or police services. A peace officer's level will be determined by their employer and level of responsibility. Conceivably, a peace officer could move into another level or area provided that they have the necessary level of skill, training, and expertise.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, peace officers provide a service that is critical to the safety and security of our communities. Their service is designed to complement, not replace, police officers. The proposed Peace Officer Act will ensure a more effective delivery of law enforcement services that will help make Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to rise tonight and participate in the debate on Bill 16, Peace Officer Act. I probably have to start by saying that I'm not a legal expert, and my prior involvement with or exposure to matters surrounding law enforcement does not really exceed that of a spectator or observer.

9:20

An Hon. Member: Ticket receiver.

[Ms Haley in the chair]

Mr. Elsalhy: I have only received one ticket in my entire life. Thank you very much.

However, today as an elected representative I have to wade into this discussion and express my point of view, especially as the questions that I have are shared by many ordinary Albertans out there.

I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, who is the critic for both the Ministry of Justice and the Solicitor General and Department of Public Security, has spoken before me at this committee stage. I know that he went into some detail on some of the clauses and provisions of this bill. I was also disappointed that the common-sense amendment that he suggested last week was rejected by the government members. However, tonight I want to try to cover some more territory and raise the following points.

One, with regard to part 1 of the bill dealing with employers' authorizations and peace officers' appointments, what is going to be the definition of an authorized employer? Who would qualify, or which entities are going to be captured under this definition? We've said time and time again in this House that we have concerns when things are left to be placed in regulations or discussed behind closed doors or left to the sole discretion of the minister and his staff, his inner circle, things that are done in regulation and are not put within the act or debated on the floor of the Assembly. So I have certain examples of situations, and I need clarification.

Take, for example, private companies which offer home or business alarm monitoring and security services. When the alarm sounds or a burglary is detected, sometimes an emergency response vehicle is dispatched. Sometimes this crew is comprised of one guy only. Sometimes it's two people. Sometimes it's a guy and his dog, for example. Will these people then be called and expected to behave like peace officers?

Do you remember the idea a short while back when it was brought up that some rural government MLAs don't feel secure in their homes and would like the Legislative Assembly Office to pay for their home alarm monitoring? I thought that was exaggerating a bit, and from an expense standpoint I believe that it would be a minimal monthly cost on their part to ask the taxpayers to cover it. I was reminded, however, that some of those rural settings see homes or ranches few and far between and that if someone is unhappy about a certain direction or decision taken by that particular MLA or his caucus colleagues, that person or group may decide to pay a visit to that MLA's home, and we know how scary or uncomfortable this can get. The point is: will home alarm response personnel be captured under this act?

Another example. Is this act going to cover companies which offer bodyguards or personal protection services?

A third example can be bouncers at bars, lounges, raves, and concerts. [interjection] Okay. We can call them crowd controllers, but will they be considered peace officers too? You see where I'm going with this, Madam Chairman.

Take this as an example as well. Will our employer, the people of this province but in the more technical sense the Legislative Assembly Office, or LAO, qualify to apply as an employer under this act now so that all 83 of us MLAs would become peace officers as well? We're responsible, smart, and dedicated. I would certainly agree to receiving the necessary training required and potentially participating in this new capacity. I know that some of the hon. colleagues would say that they don't like this idea, probably because

of the risks and inherent dangers that are involved. Why would we want something for or wish something on somebody that we do not want for ourselves?

Seriously, though, I can count numerous occasions when I personally wished that I had policing authority or some sort of a mandate maybe not to intervene in a situation but at least to report it with some force. Take for example traffic violations – speeding, tailgating, zigzagging, or careless driving, things like that – as simple as they may be till there is some loss of life or damage to property.

I once witnessed a large truck tailgating a little old lady in a small sedan. It was sort of road bullying if I can refer to it as such. On the back of his truck was an identifying letter code and a phone number for people to report him if he was driving badly. Well, I did just that, and the lady on the other end of that line first tried to dismiss my complaint, then she started questioning whether, in fact, I saw their truck on the road and if I could describe the truck. She wanted me to read her the licence plate number and so on, and that's all going on while I'm driving. Then she implied that maybe the little sedan was driving too slowly and that perhaps the driver of the truck was frustrated and some nonsense like that. Boy, that day did I wish to have been not only able to complain to his company, which may or may not take any action, but I also wished that I had the power to perhaps assign him demerit points or maybe place a note on his driving record or something like that.

Another incident happened right in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung one Sunday afternoon when I was driving with my wife and children down 178th Street. Right at the bus stop next to the YMCA there was a teenage girl exposing herself and signalling at cars driving by. Not only was I upset about what I saw, I was concerned about that young lady perhaps being on some drug or substance or even alcohol and the risk that she ran if someone sick-minded pulled over and offered her a ride and the risk, in fact, that she could have caused a traffic accident as people were slowing down to look at her and to check what she was doing.

That afternoon, Madam Chairman, I phoned 911 and reported her. They were nice and professional on the phone, but they asked what triggered me to report it and why did it matter to me. When I explained that I was a parent and a concerned citizen and that I was also the MLA for that area and that I found this behaviour objectionable in my neighbourhood, the officer did not hide his surprise that I had chosen to take action, and he thanked me for bringing it to his attention. What could I have done differently? I don't know, but calling 911 was the only thing that I could do, and that was the only thing that came to my mind.

The question is really this. If we are serious about stepping up our crime-fighting efforts, why not fully recruit, train, and retain top-notch, qualified, full-fledged police officers rather than relying on those peace officers? I don't want to delegate more responsibilities to a new class of officers who don't receive the full training and resources necessary like their full-fledged counterparts.

You know, Madam Chairman, you can draw some sort of a parallel here with some of the changes that were done to our health care system, for example, over the years. You remember back in 1992-93 when the axe fell and many of our hard-working registered nurses were fired or let go, and then we've seen over the years that LPNs – and no disrespect to LPNs and the hard work that they do – were given more to do. They were assigned more responsibility, but they themselves sometimes admit that they need more training and more professional development. After LPNs were sort of elevated, then you got nursing attendants or orderlies that are now doing what the LPNs were assigned initially and so on. So we're deregulating services, and that might actually affect the quality of the service offered.

Now, you notice that I mentioned training. What conditioning, physical and mental, are we going to offer these guys? How extensive and comprehensive would their scenario training and situation practice be? Will they receive ongoing training and professional development opportunities?

I also know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore has some specific areas that he wants to cover, so I promise to brief, and I will focus on just a few.

Section 5 in part 1 of this bill is talking about an employer's authorizations. It sets out the process that an employer has to meet in order to be authorized to engage the services of a person as a police – as a peace officer. You know, I get this tongue twisting between police officer and peace officer, and I think it might be intentional to some extent. Specific requirements are providing the information required to apply for and receive authorization from the minister. Also, the employer must comply with any conditions provided for in the regulations, and we've mentioned regulations and how uncomfortable we are with this direction that the government seems to be willing to take all the time. But on to my next point.

What is obvious here is that most of the substance governing an employer's authorization is left to the discretion of the minister. What are the standards of conduct that apply to peace officers? What are the policies that authorized employers must abide by? All of these important details are left to the minister to decide, and the minister can change those from time to time, again without it ever being debated here in the Assembly. Can the minister give us a sense of what policies, practices, procedures, and standards of conduct will apply to peace officers?

9:30

This section also gives the minister, as I mentioned, the ability to alter the terms of reference at any time he or she pleases: very strong control for the minister; too much concentration of power within one department or one level of that department. Again, I find this questionable.

It also appears that this particular section is worded to allow the minister flexibility in determining what authority peace officers can and cannot have. So if we're confused or hesitant at the beginning, you can probably appreciate why we might be hesitant or reluctant, you know, two years from now, four years from now. As ministers change and as cabinets change, to leave this to the will or the whim of the day is probably not acceptable. How will things like this be determined? Will policing services and employers be consulted before changes are made? For example, if the minister wants to expand the authority of peace officers for traffic enforcement, will the RCMP be consulted in this process, or will the minister's department just make the decision and tell everyone that this is the policy from now on and expect everyone to adhere to it and abide by it?

On to my next point, talking about the use of titles, which is section 11 under that part. I know that, you know, most of these suggestions might appear to be common-sense ones: the use of titles in accordance with the regulations, which level of peace officer gets which designation, and all that stuff. The only negative aspect of this is that the public may find this confusing, to say the least: different designations, different levels of authority, different job descriptions if you will. You know, as an elected person I find it difficult to understand who is a level 1 APO versus a level 1 CPO, for example. Everyone knows what a police officer is and what a peace officer does, but it is probably going to be hard on just the average person to determine whether this person who's pulling him over or this person who's searching his house or this person who's pushing him aside has the right to do so and has the mandate and training to do so.

Does the Solicitor General have a plan to deal with this confusion?

Will there be a public awareness campaign to educate the public as well on which peace officers do what and where and when? How much is such a campaign going to cost, and is that cost justified? If not, why has this department not considered the public's perception of the peace officers and the inevitable confusion? Again, that's going back to my point that perhaps we should have spent our energy and our resources and our money training more full-fledged, regular peace officers than we are going for that sort of level b.

Section 12 talks about restrictions with regard to uniforms and weapons and stuff like that. Again, this is not really a major issue, you know, talking about what colour uniform or what badge they might wear or all that stuff, but when you're talking weapons, this is a bigger sphere that we have to investigate more thoroughly. The minister must ensure that the difference is clear so that the public knows the difference between the two levels of law enforcement.

Subsection (2) states that the peace officers can only have in their possession the weapons and equipment that they are authorized for in their appointment. So this is a good clause, but a lot of clarity has to be factored in here because different situations have different pressures, and we don't want to have instances where a person is making rash decisions to discharge a weapon, for example, when other avenues could have been investigated. So that's, again, part of the training, you know, in terms of empathy training, language training. Sometimes there might be language barriers. We've heard over and over again that miscommunication might lead to dire consequences.

Also, section 13 is talking about peace officers providing emergency services. We need a lot of clarification here. Are these guys going to be the first-response people at a certain scene? If there is, you know, injury or a situation after, let's say, a crime has been committed or there's an accident scene and these guys are the first people there, will they be trained to perform CPR, for example, or some sort of resuscitation? Will they have access to communication devices that might summon better trained emergency response personnel to that scene?

This section allows the minister in the event of an emergency and with the consent of the authorized employer and the peace officers themselves to

by order declare the peace officers

- (a) to have jurisdiction in all or any part of Alberta, and
- (b) to have the [additional] authority, responsibility and duties specified by the Minister.

Subsection (2) states that an order under this section expires after 90 days unless it is renewed for a period of time as specified by the minister.

As noted previously, special constables were utilized effectively in London, for example, after the subway bombings. So we're not necessarily against them as people and as, you know, people who are trying to do a service to Albertans, but we want to empower them and to give them the tools necessary for them to do a good job and to not necessarily be inferior to or less than regular, full-fledged police officers.

I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora talked at some length about part 2, which is dealing with complaints and discipline, so I'm not going to go there per se. I know that I promised you that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has more to say. He's advising me that he wants you to stay tuned and continue to be alert and attentive.

With that, I will take my seat, Madam Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity, and I thank you for your indulgence.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.
Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. It's very nice to see someone from the female persuasion in the chair. It's very nice. [interjection] No. We're certainly advocates for equality in all ways.

I rise with a great deal of interest to speak on this bill in committee this evening. I've been studying this issue and debating it, rolling it over in my mind over these past couple of weeks because I certainly do recognize the value and the fine work that special constables undertake on our behalf for the public. Much of it is dangerous work, as several members have spoken to already. But, you know, there's a real difference between training of police officers and peace officers. Given that police officers receive 35 weeks of training compared to peace officers' only two weeks of training plus four days weapons training, I must pause to wonder not only whether or not we're properly qualifying these people but whether or not they are sufficiently trained to cover the scope of the job that we are asking them to do with the expanded roles that seem to be in line with this bill and the shortage of police officers that we have in this province.

According to Statistics Canada Alberta has one of the very lowest per capita police services in the country: one officer for every 600 Albertans. My understanding is that that is the lowest in the west, west of Ontario or even, I think, west of Quebec actually. So I'm wondering if we are trying to perhaps fill that gap with an expanded role of peace officers. I guess we have to take a sober and logical look at whether that's the best way to provide policing for Alberta.

9:40

I have a number of specific questions to ask in regard to this bill on separate sections and then just general, so let me just make the general comments first and carry on. First of all, with this bill are we not in fact heading towards more lower paid positions on which to off-load police responsibilities? This is a real concern that I think is shared not by just myself but others. As my hon. colleague from Edmonton-McClung mentioned, there is a comparison that we can perhaps make in the nursing profession, and I am concerned that this might be happening in our policing service as well. I mean, certainly you can realize efficiencies, Madam Chairperson, by looking at different ways to deliver services, but if, in fact, we are just basing it on cost efficiencies as opposed to policing efficiencies, I think that's where I would like to place some logical inquiry or questioning.

Second of all, my question is: are we endangering the peace officers by asking them to pick up more and more police services? Subsequently, should their pay perhaps not reflect this danger, and then if we're going to pay them more, why don't we just hire more police? This is a circle that, again, we saw in the nursing profession. LPNs, I believe, just received an 18 per cent raise. An LPN with full experience and working, let's say, a differentiated shift is making the same as a nurse anyway, so in terms of savings, I don't necessarily see that.

The question is arming different forms of peace officers and the danger that we could be putting them in with arming them. I think that's something else we have to look at.

What oversights, as well, are we putting in place to ensure that this peace as opposed to police officer, of course, will be held accountable to the public and accountable in a way that we can in fact count on? We've run into a number of difficulties with accountability with our police service, so I think it's important for us to put in some firm guidelines before trouble might develop. Again, with less training I can see a potential for problems.

Accountability to an employer is insufficient when you're dealing with complaints given that we know nothing about training or

employment requirements. We need to be assured that all complaints will be dealt with seriously and by an appropriate body that's well versed on the issues that are being raised. Relying on your employer is not enough as the employer might not have the legal wherewithal to properly assess the situation, so this lack of public oversight must be addressed. It's a very large and profitable, expanding industry, the private security industry, and I think we owe it to the citizens of Alberta to set up an independent regulatory board and board of inquiry to deal with these things.

We might hear the argument that this act pertains to peace officers rather than police officers, but when we see more and more police duties being handed off to peace officers, this argument becomes moot, particularly given that this bill attempts to address the increasing demands placed on peace officers, and the redesignation from special constables I think is an indication of the desire to tie them into police work, so we cannot argue that they are not a police force, just simply doing a lot of police work. I find that to be a rather spurious argument at best, that we heard previously on this issue.

The argument was also raised that there's nothing new in this legislation, that there is no hidden agenda, and that we're not inventing any new roles for people. If you follow that argument a bit further, Madam Chairperson, perhaps then all that's intended is cementing in regulations the rights and responsibilities pertaining to this already existing relationship, but I would say that if there's nothing broken, then why fix it? If it wasn't broken or bending, let's perhaps firm up this relationship before we have some further trouble. I don't see that we are in fact addressing what the full nature of this bill is head-on by suggesting that it's not bringing up new ideas.

Just because the relationship between police officers and municipalities has been useful in the past doesn't mean that we can't improve on it. Asking for public oversight of peace officers is a democratic and reasonable request, and I think that that is the general way by which we can provide a service to this province here in the Legislature: to provide accountability and a democratic means by which to oversee these institutions. So it's incumbent upon us to in fact put those things into place.

Those are some of my general comments.

Specifically, I think that there are at least four or five places in the actual legislation that have some problems. I guess the first place that I would like to look at is on page 4, section 5(3). It says that the minister may require an employer to "implement or comply with policies, standards of conduct, practices, procedures, protocols or rules provided for in the regulations." It says "may," and I think that perhaps "must" would be more emphatic in that situation because, of course, as I said before, that is what we're meant to be doing here in the Legislature, not just suggesting that there should be standardizations but, in fact, putting those into practice.

On page 13, section 23(2), it says, "An inspection under subsection (1) must be conducted at a reasonable time." What does that mean exactly in terms of an inspection? I would perhaps seek further clarification there.

On pages 17 and 18, section 29, the ministerial regulations listed allow for control over many recommendations found in the special constable review. Again my problem is with this "may" issue as opposed to strengthening that perhaps with "will," and might we be imposing regulation as opposed to just suggesting it?

So these are my concerns, Madam Chairperson. Certainly, we do recognize the value of peace officers in their various forms as helping to provide and keep the peace in our province. I just want to tighten up this legislation to some degree and clarify the intention of the bill as well so as not to be somehow suggesting that we don't

require more actual police officers throughout the province of Alberta.

Thanks a lot.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Edmonton-Decore.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Bonko: Oh, I may raise some, though. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for my being able to speak to this specific one. When my colleagues were up in Fort McMurray just a couple of weeks ago, we did talk to some residents door to door, and there was some appreciation for what the special constables have done thus far as far as curbing some of the traffic concerns and the flows as they go up and down the highway.

The biggest concern was the safety not only of those on the highway but of the special constables. Need I remind this House that there have been a number of deaths of police officers with what appears to be perhaps a simple pull-over. A park that looks over the river valley in Edmonton was dedicated to one such officer, Officer Ezio Faraone, who pulled over two low-lives and was shot and thus, you know, passed away, and that park was named after him. This was a fully trained officer, not someone who went through basic training – I will highlight that part: basic training – however much that is according to this specific act.

A camera could and should be installed now with these special constables. This would in fact be something that I think could benefit all involved. It's not something that's new. It's something that's already being used. This technology could serve two purposes. One, it could review cases where there's a dispute between the driver and the so-called peace officer or the special constable. Who knows what could happen with the camera? They could be used for a testimony, or it could be used to ensure ongoing improvement on this pilot project for the special constables. After all, they're in ongoing performance, and we'd review that ongoing performance.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There would be far less training, as we said, with this situation compared to the RCMP or the city police officers. Last spring we talked about the public oversight committee and who would oversee or intervene on behalf of the public when such a question arose. [interjection] Exactly.

With the questioning of city or RCMP officers, who comes under the review under section 2? Who are the investigators, impartial or independent, for the special constables, who now carry side arms?

9:50

Other sectors – and it was mentioned this evening by the Member for Edmonton-McClung – of the public who do maybe constitute special security also carry side arms, such as Loomis guards or Brinks guards. Could these people become special constables? They already have FACs and engage with the public. I don't know, but it does beg the question because there is such loose information. Similar to the third way it lacks in detail.

The main point is that there is a lot that's left in the regulations, and due to this, we can't be sure as to what the final effect of this act is because the act in itself serves as a framework without much being in the details. We don't know about the training of the peace officers. Will they receive different levels? What qualifications are necessary? Are those requirements going to be stringent like with

the police officers, or are they going to be accommodating for the private security officers? Details like this I think are important, and they're left in the murky recess of the regulations.

Perhaps this is because the details haven't yet been decided, or the minister wants to push ahead without the careful process or the details being released. This is not in the public's best interest. These are going to be officers delivering at the level of law enforcement that is beyond the former restrictions of that of the special constable, areas that the police officers work within. We need to know and the public has the right to know that the people doing this job are trained and mentally fit to react in all the situations. However, again, we do not know about these very important details because they're all left within the regulations.

If we talk about section 21, conduct of appeal – and that appears on page 12 – this states that part 2 of the Police Act applies to an appeal made under section 20. Part 2 of the Police Act deals with the process of the Law Enforcement Review Board, also known as LERB. There are certain sections of part 2 of the Police Act that are exempt from applying under this section, but it's because it deals specifically with a chief of police or police officers that it does not specifically apply to the peace officers.

Subsection (2) allows for the LERB to require the person making the appeal to produce all copies that are relevant to the information to the LERB, and that's fine. We have no problem with that.

Subsection (3). This is an exemption to the clause that applies to a peace officer giving testimony in the LERB appeal hearing. Where a peace officer is compelled to give information to the appeal, if that evidence tends to incriminate him or her or subject that person to punishment or establishes his or her liability, it shall not be used against them or that officer in any of the civil proceedings. This exemption is in effect if the officer is being charged with perjury or the giving of contradictory evidence. Similar clauses apply to police officers under the Police Act, so it's inconsistent that the same rules apply to the police officers. So there is a question of concern with regard to that subsection there.

Subsections (4) and (5). Basically, these two subsections state that the Law Enforcement Review Board must give its recommendations to confirm, reverse, or deny the appeal. The key work here is "recommend." In other words, the decision of the LERB is not binding and/or final. It's left to the minister, which is later explained in section 22, to determine if the recommendation of the LERB is to be "confirmed, reversed or varied." The question here is: why does the minister need that final authority on the decision-making ability of the Law Enforcement Review Board? Does the minister think that he has more informed opinion than the members of that board?

This section is problematic because it allows the minister to vary or overturn decisions of that law board without stating why. There's nothing here that states that the minister must inform the complainant in writing as to why the decision was varied or reversed. There's no appeal from the decision of the minister. The decision is final. This authority of the minister takes away the ability of the LERB to make the binding decisions based on their expertise. The question is: why must there even be the ability to appeal to the law board when the minister has the ultimate authority? The authority of the minister to overturn decisions of the LERB or alter them makes a mockery of the fairness of the appeal process. This is no different than the Minister of Justice having the ability to overturn decisions of the Court of Appeal without an explanation. Can the minister explain to us why he wants to have the authority to reverse or vary the decisions of that law board?

This is one of the most controversial parts of the bill, and I cannot support it as it gives the minister far too much power over an appeal body. It is not in the interest of justice to have a government

minister have that much ability to reverse decisions of a quasi-judicial appeal board without any explanation.

Those would be some of my specific concerns with this particular piece, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. [interjection] Careful. The last guy that did that lost his seat.

An Hon. Member: I think I'm good for a few more months.

Mr. Mason: Move to Edmonton.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to rise and speak in committee to Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act. I want to just raise a number of questions that I have. One deals with the level of training for peace officers as opposed to police officers. As my colleague from Edmonton-Calder has pointed out, the bill deals with training. Police officers receive 35 weeks of training, and peace officers receive two weeks of training and four days of weapons training. That is a concern, I think, with respect to the degree of employment of people as peace officers as opposed to police officers. If the bill has as one of its unwritten intentions the extension of peace officers into a number of areas with a much greater use of peace officers to supplement police officers, then it gives rise to the possibility that they may actually be asked to serve in positions for which the training is completely insufficient.

Mr. Chairman, I know from personal experience that the training period for a bus driver, a transit operator in Edmonton is six weeks of training, including a week learning on the trolleys. Two weeks of training and four days of weapons training for people who are responsible for enforcing laws and, in fact, are armed to do so and may indeed be called upon to use their weapons really is insufficient if these people are going to be placed in positions where they may need to use force or the threat of armed force in order to do their job.

So the real question that I have, then, is: given the bill and its attempt to sort of unify definitions for all peace officers and regulate those things, what really is the result going to be? Is the result going to be more and more and more use of peace officers and falling into beginning to provide services that police officers no longer do? Then they may place themselves and potentially members of the public in jeopardy if they're put into positions for which they are not adequately trained. I can certainly foresee and anticipate that there may well be positions or situations for which two weeks' training is insufficient.

The question that I would like the government to respond to is: just exactly what limits do they propose on the operation of these peace officers, formerly known in many cases as special constables, and will the special constables in fact be putting themselves or anyone else in harm's way through a lack of training?

10:00

A related question to this, Mr. Chairman, has to do with the potential for peace officers being used increasingly by private employers. The question is: what private employers does the government anticipate peace officers working for? What is the government's intention with respect to private employers who may wish to employ special constables? Is there, in fact, going to be a much greater utilization of special constables by private employers, and is this merely something that will allow the government to unfund or reduce funding or fail to provide new funding for full-fledged police officers?

Mr. Chairman, I know that in the election the NDP opposition put forward a proposal that we hire 500 additional police officers in this province. Interestingly, Alberta has one of the lowest numbers of police officers per capita in the country. Our proposal would have increased the number of police officers in Alberta to or above the average in the country. The government has yet to take action to bring it up to that level. They have seen, I think, the writing on the wall – and we'll take some credit there – and have decided to hire some additional police officers and provide more resources so that that can be done. Most recently they did that with the RCMP.

Mr. Chairman, tonight I attended a meeting dealing with community issues, including drugs and prostitution, that was put on by the city of Edmonton as part of their Safedmonton project. It was attended by a number of city councillors and by a number of MLAs from the Legislature. The new chief of the Edmonton Police Service, Mike Boyd, was there, and he gave an excellent presentation, also Kate Quinn from the organization PAAFE. It's an organization dealing with trying to reduce prostitution in the city and get street-involved women off the street.

There were lots of community people there, and it was interesting, Mr. Chairman, the great lengths to which people in the community were prepared to go as volunteers to take on tasks to assist the police and take on tasks that brought their neighbourhood back under their control. But it was also disturbing, the extent of disruption to community life by the activities of drug traffickers and pimps and so on. The extent of the problem and the task facing the police and the community are very great.

I'm not certain how this bill will affect that fight, Mr. Chairman. I believe that just setting out new rules around peace officers and unifying the definition of peace officers in and of itself is not really the solution. Clearly, the Edmonton Police Service and I think the Calgary Police Service and urban police forces in general didn't get a fair share of the increase that was recently announced. Certainly, the government needs to go farther in supporting community policing in this province.

It's been my experience – and I have some, dealing with some of these issues as a municipal councillor – that community policing and fully-trained police officers who practise community policing are one of the best assets a community can have. Repeatedly I've seen community police working with people in the community – with agencies, with community leagues, with interested citizens, with local businesses, with local politicians, with landlords, with all sorts of organizations, even service clubs – and getting them involved in the community, developing a strategy, bringing together the resources that are latent in the community, and mobilizing those resources towards solving the problems that exist.

I'm not convinced that simply extending the number of peace officers is going to resolve those issues. I think, Mr. Chairman, we have to be tackling crime at its root source. We need to be working with the community to develop strategies that actually make the problem go away rather than continually just responding to it over and over and over again. When the police get a call for service, they keep going back to the same place over and over again instead of considering what needs to be done specifically to get rid of the source of the calls by solving the problem that is engaging the police and disrupting the community and hurting people in society. Those things are important.

Another thing that's very important, Mr. Chairman, is, in fact, that there's a consistent failure on the part of the government to adequately fund the services that are necessary in some of these communities to prevent crime or to allow people that do get off the street or have gone through some corrections to actually get back on their feet and be a strong, contributing member of the community. That's a difficulty.

I remember the bill, a private member's bill, put forward by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North dealing with young people who may be addicted to drugs and allowing their parents to put them into mandatory treatment. While we supported that bill at the time, Mr. Chairman, we reminded the House and the hon. member that, in fact, the number of places that were available to treat youth at that time were oversubscribed based only on the young people who were voluntarily willing to enter treatment. We warned that unless those rehabilitation spaces and drug treatment spaces were expanded, the bill would be of no effect because you'll just simply be trying to push more people into a fixed number of spaces, and if it's already oversubscribed, it won't make any difference.

Of course, the government has not adequately funded those things, and there is still a significant shortfall in the number of places. So if the government is not willing to put our money where its mouth is, then we can see that, in fact, we're not going to bring about change in our society and in this province on some of those kinds of things.

Supporting the police, Mr. Chairman, in my view means not just changing the definition and not just putting more what used to be called special constables, more peace officers with a lower level of training in to fill the gap. We need to provide, number one, an adequate number of properly trained, highly qualified police officers in sufficient number. Number two, we need to ensure that the most up-to-date and progressive techniques of policing are used in the province, and in my view that is community policing. It's unfortunate that in recent years in Alberta police forces the commitment to community policing has eroded. Based on what I heard from Chief Boyd, I hope that at least in Edmonton it's going to be making a strong comeback. That's the kind of policing that actually resolves problems, that prevents crime and doesn't just simply lock up people who have already committed the crime. In my view the real key is to prevent the crimes in the first place, to solve the sources of the crime as they emerge.

10:10

Finally, the last important piece is that there needs to be supportive social programs and community-based programs to enable people that do want to get off the street, that do want to get away from crime or have been released from jail and want to make something of their lives and go straight. There needs to be those kinds of supports in the community available to them so that they can do that. You know, we won't tackle drug crime, we won't tackle the effects of drugs unless the government invests much more significantly in treatment, drug prevention programs, addiction support, and all manner of those types of programs.

Mr. Chairman, we could go down the American path. I know it's very popular among some Conservative circles to follow the model that people who are involved in crime should have higher penalties, stronger penalties. That's very popular among Conservatives right across the country. In fact, I just heard Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister, talk about his government's commitment to stronger penalties for criminals. You know, that has a certain resonance. We could follow the American model. That's exactly what the Americans do: they have stronger penalties, and they incarcerate more people per capita than any other country in the world.

If you do crimes in the United States, you do get locked up for a long time. Many states have three-strikes-and-you're-out kinds of laws, which put people away for the rest of their lives in some cases. Of course, the United States has some of the highest crime rates in the world, particularly in the western world, so obviously that approach does not work.

What you're doing by locking up many people is simply providing

them with on-the-job training to become career and professional criminals when they eventually do leave. The vast majority of people who are committed to prison, regardless of whether or not we have stronger penalties or moderate penalties or whatever kind of penalties, do come out and do come back into the community. When they come from prison, if they're not rehabilitated, they are at least trained in a vocation, and that vocation is often gang activity and becoming a professional criminal. It doesn't solve the problem. It's very, very expensive, and it's a tremendous waste of our fiscal resources and a tremendous waste of the resources of the people that are involved there. It should be avoided if possible. We should find alternate measures that will help people integrate into the community and act in a responsible fashion and not in a criminal or a marginal fashion.

If we look at the United States, Mr. Chairman, we can clearly see the fallacy of the argument that stronger penalties and more police to arrest people is in some way a deterrent to crime because the opposite is proved by the case in the United States. They have more crime and more serious crime, more violent crime than we do in Canada as a result of their punitive approach to corrections.

We need a more nuanced and balanced approach, Mr. Chairman. As I indicated, it includes having sufficient resources of highly qualified police. It involves involving the community in a community policing approach. It involves making sure that programs are there for people who need them. I'm not sure that this bill gets us any closer to those goals. It certainly has some value, I suppose, in making things a little bit more simple and systematic, but the real risks that I haven't heard addressed yet are that we are going to simply be increasing the levels of less qualified police, cheaper police in different forms, including peace officers employed by private employers, instead of a comprehensive crime strategy based on community policing and based on adequate funding of the various aspects of policing, supports for communities, and the kinds of social programs that are necessary.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd be pleased to take my seat and listen with interest to the many comments from the other side on this bill as we do our due diligence as we work through this bill with the kind of scrutiny that it clearly deserves.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Chair's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before we proceed with the next item before us, I just need to draw to the attention of all members – and this is an issue of courtesy – that when any member is speaking, other members should not really be standing with their backs facing the person who has the floor at the time. This is just a courtesy. I'm just drawing this to everyone's attention; I'm not singling out any one person.

Bill 20 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to speak in Committee of the Whole in two stages, the first stage to review the eight amendments that this bill presents and then to answer the questions from members when we had the second reading.

In reviewing the eight amendments of the FOIP Act, the first amendment, the published works in a library of a public body, clarifies that the FOIP Act does not apply to these published works. The issue central to this amendment is not one of access but of privacy. An individual can make a FOIP request for a library book, but the library can refuse to process the request and direct the applicant to obtain it in a more suitable way by borrowing the book or purchasing it. The amendment addresses the technological developments that allow an individual to self-publish works which may contain personal information. This amendment will require libraries to give some thought to privacy before they place a privately printed memoir containing personal information about others onto their shelves. The privacy protections in the act will not apply as long as the library has collected books in accordance with an acquisition of materials policy. Most libraries have such policies in place to guide their acquisitions.

The second amendment limits access to ministerial briefing material for five years. Specifically, it provides an exception to the right of access for government records created for briefing a minister who is assuming a new responsibility for a ministry or briefing a minister for a sitting of the Legislative Assembly. For briefings for a sitting of the Legislature the five-year period was chosen to coincide with the life of a Legislature, which is five years at most. The same period applies for briefings developed for a minister assuming a new responsibility.

Amendment 3 limits access to records relating to an audit of the chief internal auditor of Alberta for 15 years. This amendment adds a mandatory exception to disclosure for records held by a public body that relate to an internal audit and applies to the records of all audits conducted by the chief internal auditor when those records are in the custody of the auditor or a public body. An individual can still make an access request for records about a program or service of a ministry but not for records about the audit.

Amendment 4 is to further enhance the security of Albertans' personal information. Currently the act allows a public body to disclose personal information to comply with a subpoena, warrant, order of a court, or a rule of court; however, it is not clear which court these provisions refer to. The proposed amendment clarifies that a public body or its service provider may disclose personal information only if ordered to do so by a court with jurisdiction in Alberta or in accordance with a rule of court binding in Alberta. This will make Albertans' personal information less vulnerable to collection by foreign agencies.

The fifth amendment suspends the processing of an access request while the Information and Privacy Commissioner consults with an applicant on whether to allow a public body to disregard a FOIP request. Before a public body can disregard a FOIP request, it must seek permission from the commissioner. These requests are rare. In 2004-05 there were only six such requests, and there were only 10 in all of the previous three years.

10:20

As the decision to take away an individual's right to make a request is a serious one, the commissioner consults with the FOIP applicant. Since the commissioner's consultation takes time, typically a decision comes after the legislated 30-day response time has expired. The problem is that complying with one provision of the act causes the public body to breach another provision. The amendment is purely administrative.

This amendment would allow the 30-day processing timeline for a FOIP request to stop while the commissioner makes his decision. Concerns were expressed in second reading that public bodies could make more requests to the commissioner to disregard requests in order to delay the processing of requests. Should this occur, the commissioner has the ability to immediately order the public body to resume processing the request. The commissioner has the power to immediately deal with any public body that is out of line.

Amendment 6 sets higher penalties for disclosing personal information to a foreign court. Should an individual or a corporation disclose personal information pursuant to a subpoena, warrant, or court order when that court does not have jurisdiction in Alberta or pursuant to a court order not binding in Alberta, that person would be guilty of an offence and would be subject to a fine. The proposed fine for corporations could be up to \$500,000 to deter such disclosures, and prosecution would have to commence within two years of the offence.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may delete a public body from the list of government agencies, boards, and commissions in the FOIP regulation in specified circumstances. Before a deletion can occur, the commissioner must be satisfied that the deletion is "not contrary to the public interest." Deleting a body from the list does not necessarily mean that it is no longer under the FOIP Act. If the body operates as a part of a ministry or as part of a local public body, the FOIP Act still applies.

A body can only be deleted from the list if all of the following apply – the government of Alberta does not appoint the majority of members of the body, the government of Alberta does not provide most of the funding, and the government of Alberta is not the controlling shareholder – or if one of these conditions exists: the body has been discontinued; the body has amalgamated; the body is a local, public body, not a government public body; there is a more appropriate act, the Personal Information Protection Act or Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, that should apply to the body. Also, the minister will be able to delete public bodies from the list under the same conditions in between updates of the Lieutenant Governor in Council regulation.

The eighth amendment is about the ministerial authority to bring a public body under FOIP. Finally, this last amendment allows a newly created government agency, board, commission, or committee to be made subject to the FOIP Act more quickly. This new regulation-making authority gives the minister the ability to bring a newly formed government body under the FOIP Act without waiting for the next amendment of the schedule of public bodies in the FOIP regulations. Without this temporary designation the new body would be subject to the Personal Information Protection Act until the next regular update of the regulations.

The second part of my Committee of the Whole presentation will be to answer the questions that were raised in the second reading. The Member for Edmonton-McClung asked why five years had to pass before members' personal briefing notes could be viewed. The amendment act will only limit the right of access to briefings provided to the minister when he or she assumes a portfolio and when he or she is preparing for a session of the Legislative Assem-

bly: those two instances. The FOIP Act was never intended to cover records relating to the workings of the Legislature. Nevertheless, after five years these records become fully subject to the act. The five-year time period was chosen because it restricts records prepared for the legislative session only for the life of the Legislature.

The Member for Edmonton-Calder asked for clarification regarding the proposed inclusion of public works available online or in public libraries. The FOIP Act was never intended to apply to published works. The act already allows a public body to advise an applicant to obtain materials that are readily available on a website, from a library, or for purchase as it is unnecessary to use the FOIP process for such materials.

This new provision is being added to address privacy concerns. Technically, the FOIP Act applies when a library buys or lends an autobiography or other book that contains personal information. This was not the intent. Technology has made it very easy for individuals to publish works themselves, perhaps only producing a single edition. This provision ensures that libraries give some thought to privacy before they put a privately printed memoir containing personal information about the author's family members and perhaps members of the local community on their shelves.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre was concerned that the documents from the chief internal auditor would be exempt from FOIP requests for 15 years. The position of the chief internal auditor is relatively new in government, and this limited exclusion for the chief internal auditor's working papers and reports is comparable to the exclusion of the Auditor General. The aim is to continue to protect the provision of advice within government to ministers and their senior officials from their professional advisors to ensure the quality of ministry programs and services. The FOIP Act will continue to provide access to other departmental records about a program or service of a ministry. In addition, the Auditor General will still be able to review the records of the chief internal auditor and publish any findings that he believes to be of interest to the public.

To answer the member's second concern, changes to the FOIP Act will not affect operations of the Public Accounts Committee or other processes of the Legislative Assembly.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre was also concerned about health information. Health information is subject to the Health Information Act, so I would refer this question to Minister Evans.

I answered the question from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, but I will repeat my answer to the question of why five years. The five-year time period was chosen because it restricts records prepared for a legislative session only for the life of that Legislature.

To his second question, of exempting the chief internal auditor for 15 years and how the government is then made accountable, I would say that the Auditor General has full access to the records of the chief internal auditor and can publish any findings he believes of interest to the public.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie also asked a third question, regarding FOIP fees being restrictive. FOIP fees generate a small percentage of the cost of underwriting the FOIP program. Those fees have recently been reviewed, and many fees were reduced as of February 8 of this year.

The last question from the same member was about the priorities of this government. The FOIP Act attempts to balance the right of access and the right to privacy. This government has taken a strong stand on protecting the personal information of Albertans that has been entrusted to its care. Privacy has been a defining issue of this new century, and we want to be in the forefront when it comes to

ensuring that privacy is an important value in the delivery of programs and services to our citizens.

Mr. Chairman, I would call for adjournment at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've had the usual pleasure of excellent progress tonight, so I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act, and progress on Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried]

10:30

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 16. The committee also reports progress on the following bill: Bill 20.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I would move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:31 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 11, 2006** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 06/04/11
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two groups of students. First, seated in the public gallery is a group of 25 inquisitive grade 6 students from Annunciation school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Leslie Zydek. I'd ask them to please stand and accept the traditional warm greeting of this House.

Seated in the members' gallery is a group of 39 sharply dressed students from Aurora charter school. They are accompanied by two teachers, Mrs. Vicki Leong and Mr. Jamie Andrews. Mr. Andrews, by the way, is participating in a teacher exchange, and he is visiting us all the way from Australia. Would you please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this House?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of bright and intelligent students from Steele Heights junior high school. On April 25 these students will be travelling to Atlanta, Georgia, to compete in the FIRST Lego League World Festival representing the province of Alberta. The team's challenge is to build a completely autonomous Lego robot capable of completing several defined tasks during a two-and-a-half minute competition. The students have designed their robot and as a team will demonstrate its abilities while competing against 64 teams from around the world. We'd like to congratulate them on their achievement in representing our province and wish them the best of luck at their competition. I would now ask that they rise as I call out their names: James Hoffman, Graeme Archibald, Matthew Music, Bradley Matsuba, Paul Gelinias, Ryan Bliemel, Chris O'Donnell, Jesse Squires, teacher Vin Stocking, and parent helpers Darryl Hoffman and Mark Archibald.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions for you today. I would first like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Jack Century. Jack is a petroleum geologist who founded and chaired the environmental geology division of the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists in 1990. This is the largest earth science society in Canada and has over 3,500 international members. Jack's main concerns are related to energy sustainability and environmental issues, particularly those of the

Alberta oil sands. He's lived in Calgary for many years and is very welcome to have this opportunity to visit the Legislature. I would now ask Jack to please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 23 students from the mighty Spruce Avenue elementary school along with Miss Shelly Juhlin, aboriginal commitment coach Mr. Kyle Campiou as well as parent Miss Jennifer Dubois. They are on tour today and having a wonderful time. I would ask them now to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly three newly elected student leaders from the University of Alberta Students' Union. They are Samantha Power, president; Dave Cournoyer, vice-president external; and Chris Cunningham, vice-president operations and finance. They are here today to watch the proceedings of the House and to remind the government of its commitment to an affordable and quality postsecondary education system that's accessible to all Albertans. I understand that they're seated in the public gallery. I would now ask these guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Government Accountability

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the federal Conservatives in Ottawa are introducing a bill to improve government accountability and openness, but the Conservative government of Alberta refuses to do the same for the people of this province. Alberta has a system of grants, contracts, and land sales that's out of control, no mechanism to bring it under control, and a taxpayer-funded propaganda bureau to continuously remind citizens to just keep moving, that there's nothing to see here. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. Will she support an all-party legislative committee to make recommendations to strengthen the statutory authority of the Auditor General so that he can follow the money to the end recipients?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no need to do that because the Auditor General today has that authority. The Auditor General in this province is an officer of this Legislature, and he has the authority to follow the money right to the end and, in fact, has done so on a number of occasions. So I think the question is quite redundant.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, he doesn't have the same authority as the federal Auditor General.

Again to the Deputy Premier: given the clear failure of this government to protect whistle-blowers at the Alberta Securities Commission from retribution, when will this government introduce legislated whistle-blower protection for public-sector employees?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, in reference to the Alberta Securities Commission and whistle-blower rulings, that has already been done and has been in place for some time now. As far as an overall government policy we've made it very clear over and over and over

again that no one who brings forward a valid concern will have any adverse repercussions at all.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: when the feds are cracking down on the lobbying industry, why is this government allowing it to flourish behind closed doors? Why won't she acknowledge a problem exists?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, a rather obtuse question at best. However, whatever he might be referring to, contributions that are made to political parties here are a matter of public record if that's the part he's talking about.

Mr. Taylor: I'm talking about lobbyists.

Mrs. McClellan: People that come to meet ministers in ministers' offices: that's an occurrence. I suppose you could suggest that everyone who passes these doors, whether they come to see the opposition or the government or the third party or the fourth, et cetera, would be a lobbyist. I'm not sure exactly what he's framing the word "lobbyist" around.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that there is no behind closed doors as far as we're concerned. People who come into our offices are met. They usually discuss matters of mutual interest but certainly matters of interest to them, and I would be against anything that would preclude the public from coming and meeting with government to express their interests or their concerns.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

1:40 Rod Love Consulting Inc.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, if it looks like a skeleton and smells like a skeleton and rattles like a skeleton and especially if this government says that it's not a skeleton, then it's probably a skeleton. To the Minister of Finance. Now we learn that Rod Love Consulting billed Alberta Finance a further \$25,022 in 2004-05. Will the minister please tell Albertans if the same loosey-goosey process was used to justify this latest contract?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I've answered questions on this contract at least twice in the House. There was definitely a contract with the minister of the day for specific services, which were performed. I also outlined in this House and I would be pleased to table at an appropriate time the contract policy that I put in place as Minister of Alberta Finance. It's very specific. It's very rigid. I have given the elements of it, but to make it very clear, I would be pleased to table that policy.

Mr. R. Miller: She's already tabled the policy, Mr. Speaker. She should table the contracts.

My question is for the Minister of Energy. Given that 2004 documents show that Rod Love Consulting received 48,625 taxpayer dollars from the Energy ministry, can the minister please tell us what goods and services were received to justify this payment?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, it's a delight to be able to stand. He's absolutely correct: \$48,625 was paid to Rod Love Consulting through the period of April 2003 to March 2004. Those are public documents that we put out in public accounts, available to the

public. It's disclosed. It's open. Nothing hidden for it. This one was for strategic advice that was provided to the department. It has been reviewed by the department. Value has been received for that. It's been appropriately disclosed, and all terms of that contract were fulfilled. All things were very open and accountable to the public.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can you say sponsorship scandal?

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that 2004 documents show that Rod Love Consulting received \$8,484 from the Department of Municipal Affairs, can the minister please tell us and all Albertans what goods and services were received to justify this payment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be more than pleased to advise the member. I would like to add that this is no secret document that arrived at this. This is our own public accounts. Public accounts revealed that there was roughly an \$8,000 expenditure to Rod Love Consulting. The individual was contracted to provide facilitation of a day-long workshop between the developers' association of Alberta and municipalities in the development of regulations regarding off-site levies. I understand that the day was very successful, that all the participants were very pleased with the outcome. It ultimately resulted in the development of regulations, that are now in place.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Alexander Forbes Elementary School

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall I asked the Minister of Education if he was aware of the situation at Alexander Forbes elementary school in Grande Prairie. He said that he had met with the parents, and he would undertake to fix the problem. The budget has been introduced, and the schools in Grande Prairie and other parts of the province were left out, Mr. Minister. How long will the 330 students in mouldy 25-year-old portables continue to wait for a more modern school in Grande Prairie, sir?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of speaking with the chair of the parent council just a few days ago and explained to her that as soon as we finished our budget estimates, in a few weeks, I would be getting back to her. So if the hon. member would just stay tuned, we'll be getting along with this new plan, that will be coming forward shortly thereafter. We'll take one project at a time, then, and start addressing the needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the teachers and administrators in Grande Prairie believe they are teaching in the best education system in the world when portables are lacking suitable washrooms and the walls and floors are mouldy, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think everyone here knows, but in case they don't: we do have the best education system anywhere in Canada. That's the truth. We also have one of the best education systems anywhere in the world. That's a tremendous credit to the

students, the parents, the teachers, and our other education stakeholders. There are situations that occur from time to time, obviously, where some maintenance needs to be done or some replacements or modernizations need to be done. We are putting the plan together right now to ensure that those projects get done on a priority basis. I've indicated publicly, and I'll reiterate it for this hon. member's ears, that Alexander Forbes is absolutely a priority. As soon as we get the money allocated, we will be helping the school board there with that priority.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why was there no funding in the budget to fix the problem? The minister was quoted as saying: I am pursuing it and will solve it soon.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I've just indicated that that's exactly what we're doing. Let's be clear that every school board does receive a significant amount of the now \$81 million for infrastructure, maintenance, and renewal projects, and they also receive a portion of the \$395 million in operational and maintenance funding. From within those envelopes they have some abilities to fund some local projects as well.

Now, we do have a bit of a backlog with respect to modulars and/or portable needs, and they're being built as fast as they can be built. We're getting them out to the highest priority areas on that basis, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

School Property Taxes

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, for the fifth straight year this Conservative government has broken its promise to freeze provincial school property taxes in absolute dollar terms. Alberta homeowners will on average be facing a school property tax increase of about 2 per cent this year. The raiding of the municipal property tax base by the province continues unabated despite previous promises. To the Minister of Finance: can the minister tell us why, despite the fact the Minister of Municipal Affairs sold a false bill of goods to Alberta's municipal leaders at their annual conference last fall by promising school property tax reductions, this year's budget once again sees a hike of school property taxes?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely disagree with the hon. member's preamble in its entirety, and I would invite the Minister of Municipal Affairs to answer this.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond. The assertion that a promise was made that there would be a freeze of municipal property taxes this year is completely inaccurate. There was a commitment made a number of years ago which as a result of the events of 9/11 became obsolete. There have been over time some commitments made to try and revert to some form of relief to municipalities. In fact, this year we did succeed in reducing the amount of the increase to only one-half of the new assessment so that municipalities this year were able to retain the tax revenue on half of all the new construction in the past year.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that when I attended the AUMA conference, I clearly heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs indicate that it was at least his intention that the province would vacate or reduce its dependence on the property tax and when I

attended the Alberta school trustees' convention, the learning minister gave an opposite indication, can the Minister of Finance please tell us what the government's long-term plans are for the school property tax?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs just answered that very well by saying that the government vacated half of the room of any new growth.

There is a process that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is leading. He has mayors, councillors on a committee that is establishing the roles, responsibilities, and relationships. I made it clear when I spoke at AAMD and C that I wanted to see that work done this summer. Once we establish whose role it is, then we'll establish very clearly whose responsibility it is to fund it. Of course, the third part of that, relationships, is incredibly important to our urban and rural municipalities.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that one minister is telling municipal councillors one thing and another minister is telling school trustees quite a different story, when will the government get its act straight and live up to the promise made five years ago when Dr. Steve West was the Provincial Treasurer?

1:50

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I've just cleared that up I think. I spoke at AAMD and C. My colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs was there. A number, in fact, of my colleagues were at the table. I spoke about the committee that's dealing with roles, responsibilities, and relationships. I said very clearly – and the Minister would support this – that we wanted that work completed by this summer. I have spoken individually to AAMD and C chair, AUMA chair, mayors and told them exactly the same thing, and frankly they concur and are prepared to meet the challenge. We have broken no promises. We are not telling different stories. We are telling exactly the same story, and our municipal leaders will bring us that information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Groundwater and Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been hearing a great deal about the potential of coal-bed methane development as an economic opportunity, but my constituents are also asking questions about the risks this new type of development has for the environment, particularly on our water supplies. They want to know that this government will do everything possible to protect our precious water. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister explain what he is doing to make sure our water is protected while Alberta develops this new energy resource?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member and to the House, obviously this is part of our direction on our Water for Life strategy. First and foremost, the new standards, the newest standards anywhere in North America, that we implemented last week are about protecting not only our land but our air and our water. So no longer do I say: the mother ship. I say: it's the law. I will enforce the law to protect that land, that air, and that water because every Albertan has that right, and that's exactly what we are doing.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: how does the department decide on the baseline testing standard of 600 metres?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I'm not a scientist. Many of you may be surprised that I'm not a scientist. [interjections] It's true. But what we do is that we use the best scientific evidence. What we have been doing is working closely with our scientists and biologists and chemists and also working with a very notable environmental group, the Pembina Institute, who traditionally are not always positive about some of the work that is going on in this province. I want to say that Dr. Mary Griffiths, who is a leading scientist in this area, agrees with the distances that we are doing so that we are ensuring that safe drinking water that the hon. member speaks of.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: what is the Minister of Environment doing himself to make sure that testing takes place?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, first of all, on our Water for Life strategy, we're executing it. Second of all, the \$174 million from the Minister of Finance, which I'll be dealing with in estimates this afternoon, is a critical component of that relative to that testing. Third and foremost, this is a transparent process, where we share the scientific evidence not only with the landowner, but we share it with the public because the public have a right to know, and this government and this ministry are transparent about these important issues.

Methanol Spill in Mitsue Creek

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, on January 18 a tractor-trailer carrying 52,000 litres of methanol used as antifreeze in oil pipelines flipped over and spilled most of its contents into the Mitsue Creek. The attention must now turn to the cleanup of the creek and possibility of contamination of the nearby lake. The government is responsible to act decisively in events of hazardous spills. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. What has been done to ensure that Mitsue Creek is cleaned up and there are no long-term, lasting effects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, thank you. To the hon. member: first and foremost, our environment people have been on-site. We have what is referred to as a SWAT team, which is ultimately a team that we overcommit to and overreact. So, to the hon. member, the approach that we are taking is that we overreact and then pull back resources as opposed to underreacting. So we're overreacting. We're working closely with the stakeholders, and we are taking a very diligent approach to ensure that that lake and that stream and that area are protected well into the future.

Mr. Bonko: To the same minister: given that for the spill at Mitsue Creek Alberta Environment held both the company who owns the hazardous material and the transporter responsible for the cleanup and remediation, can the minister tell us if this is, in fact, the normal operating procedure of Alberta Environment?

Mr. Boutilier: Obviously, the law of Alberta, perhaps the strictest law in all of North America if not in Canada, for certain, number one, is this: the polluter pays. Is there any question about that? The polluter pays, will continue to pay because this resource is owned by all Albertans. Not all Albertans would have to pay; it is the polluter

that will continue to pay. We will continue to enforce that type of regulation because it's the law in protecting the land, air, and water.

Mr. Bonko: Given that for the Mitsue spill both Celanese and Boychuk Trucking, the owner and transporter, were held responsible for the spill, can the minister explain why Imperial Oil was not held responsible along with CN for the Wabamun disaster? Why the difference in policy?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, one of the interesting things about the law in Alberta is that we do investigations. The fact is that the Ministry of Justice – and he may want to supplement – has 13 files of intensive investigation relative to the sad situation that I refer to as an ecological disaster. I can assure the member, I can assure everyone in Alberta that the full extent of the law, both in spirit and in letter, will be followed relative to this ecological disaster.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Groundwater and Coal-bed Methane Drilling (continued)

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Coal-bed methane development is increasing in my constituency as well and, indeed, throughout much of the province. There are still many questions about the safety of the groundwater and aquifers. In coal-bed methane development a process that requires fracturing, or fracking, the formation to recover gas from the coal seam is being used. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What is being done in the energy industry to ensure that groundwater is being protected due to the fracking process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first mention that the techniques employed in the coal-bed methane are not at all unlike our shallow and most of our gas drilling that we've done for decades in this province: the same typical drilling rigs that go in and a very structured and rigorous process to ensure that there is protection of all aquifers and all zones in all formations. So you can rely upon the fact we've had a tremendous amount of experience in dealing with fracturing techniques. They have to break apart that zone where the gas is so that it will flow into the well bore and up to the surface. So it's very critical in the design of engineering, which is done year in and year out over the decades, to ensure that they can control any migration of any foreign substance out of that zone to another one. So the freshwater is protected as the requirement of drilling.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the Minister of Energy. Can Albertans be assured that these measures will go far enough to ensure that Albertans and their water supplies are safe and being protected?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the regulations that are put in place are literally designed to do just that. They can take great confidence that they have a regulator in the Energy and Utilities Board that knows and has the basis of knowledge and expertise to be able to ensure the safety of these resources.

I thought I'd mention, though, how that groundwater is protected. When they actually drill through a formation like our aquifers where the water is closer to the surface, it is required that all those wells in the completion be cased or cemented so that there can be no migration of gas into that water from a lower surface to a higher one. There is a very stringent way that they can ensure that the freshwater is also supplied, that there's a surface casing requirement as well. There are additional requirements put in the regulations to ensure that the surface water is not contaminated with drilling and activity and fracturing that's below that level.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the Minister of Energy, and this is relating to the preliminary findings document that was released last summer by the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee. It outlines a number of recommendations related to water and coal-bed methane. My question is: when can Albertans expect to see the final report from this committee and the recommendations associated with water and the coal-bed methane development?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there's been a Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee that's been hard at work over the past two years in conjunction with our department, the Department of Environment, and the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. Jointly we have been working collaboratively. We have the report in our hands. We're working through the policy questions of that. It's an outstanding report. It will only help improve an already good existing regulatory environment. We do anticipate that this report should be released to the public with our recommendations within the next weeks to the next month.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

2:00 Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1980 the then Minister of Environment wrote a letter to the Premier proposing that the government identify "special interest names" who had received special treatment in the purchasing of lands for the ring road in Edmonton. Perhaps this explains why some companies today, such as Lehigh Portland Cement Limited, are able to flip land before they actually even pay for it. It appears that the Alberta advantage extends to some people more than to others. My questions are to the minister of infrastructure. Is it the policy of this Progressive Conservative government to target special-interest names for land transactions while other Albertans are "dealt with in the usual departmental manner as provided by legislation"?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it appears that there has been over the last ten days a pattern developing here where the members opposite have dug up something from back in the '80s, 20 years ago, and they don't have the courtesy of giving me ample time to get the information on the land that they're going to ask about. If they're really, really interested in getting answers about what happened, I would urge them to send me the information so I would be prepared.

From the first set of questions, when they dragged the name of Mr. Sheckter through the mud – and I really am opposed to that kind of thing – I remember telling the member that, in fact, we buy a parcel of land, have it subdivided, then return – return – which was in the original agreement. I would like to read to the Assembly and

all others interested the offer to sell. The purchaser, who is the government,

at its sole expense, shall on or before the 31st day of December, A.D. 1987, or sooner if practicably possible, subdivide the Sale Lands from the remainder of the Lands, (which remainder is referred to as the "Remaining Lands"), and the Purchaser shall thereafter, at its expense, transfer the Remaining Lands to the Vendor, who is the person that sold it, in this case Mr. Sheckter, or its nominee.

This is exactly what I told the members, and they're trying to pretend as if we sold it for a dollar, which in fact was in the agreement, and I'll be filing this agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This answer had nothing to do with what I asked, the policy question.

Is it the policy of this government to open up the sale of surplus lands purchased for the ring roads here in Edmonton and in Calgary to the general public, or are such lands only reserved for identified special-interest names?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we do advertise it for sale, but as it relates to the issue that they brought up yesterday when they dragged through the mud the name of another prominent citizen in the city of Edmonton, Mr. Gary Campbell, for those parcels of land that we sold to CN and Lehigh Cement, we had two appraisals, and we sold the land to them for the highest of the two. I hope to be able to table that.

Mr. Elsalhy: To the same minister. Given that Lehigh Portland Cement agreed to transfer this land to CN Rail on March 18, 1999, nearly two weeks before it officially purchased it from the government, on March 31, 1999, can the minister explain how this deal was negotiated with the province? Were they guaranteed this land no matter what? Were they assured that they would get it?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the fact is, as I said earlier, that we sold at the higher of the two appraisals. It's none of our business what the purchaser does with the land.

As a matter of fact, it's rather interesting: a major development in the city of Edmonton, the intermodal, where CN purchased the land so that they could accommodate that major development. An extremely important thing for the city of Edmonton. So I'm really surprised that members representing the city of Edmonton would in fact be pooh-poohing that kind of an agreement because the fact is that it's extremely important for the city of Edmonton.

The Speaker: The chair heard the hon. member indicating that he would be tabling the appropriate documents at the appropriate time?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I will be tabling this document.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta agriculture producers are frustrated and perplexed. One day they hear that the province and the federal government are coming up with a plan – and I stress – to transform the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, otherwise known as CAIS. The next day we hear out of Ottawa that the federal government is intent on ditching CAIS and starting over again. My first question is to the

Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and it is a simple one. What is going on? Will Alberta farmers and ranchers have a CAIS program or not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, I too obviously was frustrated with the comments that came out of Ottawa last week about the CAIS program because only weeks before that all of the provincial ag ministers and the federal minister did agree to transform CAIS, not to replace it. We don't want to start from scratch and end up at the same point where we are today two years from now. The CAIS program and its principles are sound, and after a very quick survey of our ag community last weekend, we've discovered that our ag community is indeed looking to transform, not to replace.

After my conversations with the federal government and, indeed, with their further communiqué just recently, I think last Friday, it now appears that we're a lot closer than we thought we were in terms of what we're doing. It seems that the federal government may be suggesting that they would fix CAIS and replace that disaster component with a separate program or another option that works. Mr. Speaker, we're not opposed to that. In fact, it's something that we've been advocating for some time.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is again to the same minister. The argument about replacing CAIS or fixing it wouldn't exist if we had a program that worked for Alberta producers. What's broken, and how are you going to fix it?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. We've had a lot of discussion about what we can do to make some changes to CAIS. It is a national program. Alberta has actually been at the forefront of doing some of those changes with the negative-margin discussions that we've had, with the three-year averaging pilot program that we've had, which other provinces are looking at. We've made the commitment that we're going to share the information as to how well that is coming to our producers.

We know that administration is also a serious issue within the program. In fact, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey cited administration as the number one cause for concern in the program. The principles around it, the targeted application of the program, are sound. We want to maintain that, but we want to fix it by fixing administration, by trying some new things in the pilot project that we did, by bringing our national partners onside, and by bringing the federal government onside with our changes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the same minister. My question is: what is the minister's plan of action when he's going to meet with the other agriculture ministers and the federal government in June? I mean, what can the producers expect?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal government has told us that they're going to be bringing forward some proposals in June. What the producers can expect from the Alberta government is that we're going to stand for what the producers have told us they want to see in that type of a business risk management program. We're not going to abdicate our responsibility to our producers in this province. It won't be just Alberta's voice at the table. All of the other provincial ag ministers are of the same mind as it relates to a

business risk management program. They are all of the same mind when it comes to the fact that ad hocs don't work. We recognize that. It's unfortunate that the current opposition in the federal government hasn't figured that one out yet.

As I said, the federal minister has said that he's bringing forward some proposals on transforming the income stabilization part and replacing the disaster component. We are interested in looking at those proposals, but if they don't fit what Alberta producers want, we may have to review our options at that point in time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:10 Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A 1995 settlement proposal between the late Joseph Sheckter and the province reveals how land was acquired for the ring road in Edmonton. It appears that taxpayers were the big losers again, while the land speculators and the developers were the big winners. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Why is the return of surplus ring road land to Mr. Sheckter in 1989 by the province for \$1 per parcel not mentioned in this settlement proposal from 1995?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it's rather disheartening that the member is not listening or is incapable of understanding what I read from the agreement dating back to 1987, so I'll read it again more slowly. The purchaser, who is the government,
at its sole expense, shall on or before the 31st day of December, A.D. 1987, or sooner if practicably possible, subdivide the Sale Lands from the remainder of the Lands, (which remainder is referred to as the "Remaining Lands").

That means that whatever we need, we take it, and then we subdivide and give a title to the remainder of the land; that's in this agreement.

And the Purchaser shall thereafter, at its expense, transfer the Remaining Lands to the Vendor, [who is Mr. Sheckter's company], or its nominee.

"Transfer" the land. This is the original agreement.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how many millions of dollars did Triple Five make by buying property and then selling it to the government for the ring road in Edmonton? How many millions of dollars did they make?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, that is totally unrelated to the question that he asked to start with. Once again asking a question – if they're really interested in the answer, they would have given me the detail at least two days ahead so that I could present the answer. But this pattern that has developed: they are not interested in getting the answers. They're trying to make it sound like some individuals are getting special deals, and that's not true.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister should have the settlement proposal in his ministerial binder.

Now, again, in light of the evidence presented by Mr. Sheckter in 1995, will this government start a full, independent judicial inquiry into the purchase of all ring road land and the sale of what was deemed surplus?

Mr. Lund: No.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Postsecondary Education Review

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the new Minister of Advanced Education told this House that he expected to receive the reports from the accessibility and tuition affordability reviews in the next few weeks. From that point on these reports are going to disappear down the black hole of the standing policy committee, cabinet, and caucus review process. First, my best wishes to the new minister, and I follow that with a question. Exactly when is the minister going to make public to Alberta's postsecondary students, faculty, and other stakeholders the reports resulting from the postsecondary review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much. It's a very good question despite some of the black hole inferences. As you know, standing policy is a very important process because proposals from Albertans can come there and result in action. Albertans are closer to this government than ever before or anywhere else.

With respect to the question, as I indicated yesterday, I do expect to get the reports, which I really look forward to getting within the next few weeks and scheduling the government's response, to going through the process – standing policy, cabinet, caucus – as quickly as possible. I want to assure the hon. member that nothing is going to disappear down any black holes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: as a new Minister of Advanced Education will he make a clean break with the past and make the reports from the postsecondary review available to student unions and faculty associations at the same time that they are forwarded to the government standing policy committee? If not, why not?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member does not understand the process. You know, before reports can be released to the public, there has to be an approval process to release them. That starts in standing policy and goes to cabinet and then caucus. So as soon as they're available for distribution to Albertans, we will be providing them.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, given that this review was a public review, why is the minister now saying that this review belongs to the government and not to Albertans? When will he release this report? That's our question. Why is he keeping it a secret?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure about any secrets because I haven't seen any of those reports yet. They are coming in the next few weeks, and we will process them as soon as possible because they deal with issues that are extremely important to students and to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ownership of Resource Revenues

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the great moments in Alberta's first century was in 1930 and the achievement of the

natural resources transfer act. Since that date every Premier of Alberta from Brownlee on has fiercely protected Alberta's natural resources. My question today is to the Deputy Premier. Will our Premier, who is meeting today in the east to discuss the equalization formula, restate and reinforce Alberta's long-standing policy that not only do the natural resources of Alberta belong to Albertans but also the revenues derived from those resources?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations are indeed in Montreal today, and they are meeting with the Council of the Federation to discuss a report on fiscal imbalance. There is no question that Alberta and Albertans are proud contributors to Confederation, always have been. But make no mistake: under the Constitution natural resources belong to Albertans, and it will be Albertans that decide how that resource money is used.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Deputy Premier. After 30 years of equalization the list of have-not provinces continues to grow rather than shrink. This province and this government have had some experience with turning the hand up from the handout. Will the Premier in Ottawa be giving any advice to the other Premiers on how to turn the equalization formula from a handout to a hand-up program?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, there is no question that equalization has not always led to provinces reducing their dependency. In fact, there have been a number of reports written on this very subject, some that suggest that some provinces will take decades to recover from the equalization payments that they've received. Mr. Speaker, you might recall that our Premier was a very strong supporter of Newfoundland receiving a fair share of their natural resources in order for them to reach a level of independence rather than dependency. It has always been our philosophy that you should give a hand up, not a handout.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Deputy Premier. What are the government's long-term plans to protect Alberta's resource wealth? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier has the floor.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that you can do, but actually, constitutionally, we do own the resources and have the determination of how they're spent.

I think what's maybe as important in this conversation is to continue to ensure that people across this country understand what this industry in particular means to the rest of Canada. The energy industry actually prepared a report that showed very clearly that the largest tax benefit of this industry in fact goes to Canada, about 41 per cent, higher than what we receive as a province, which is about 36 per cent. The balance of that tax revenue is shared among other provinces. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that all Canadians understand that every part of this country benefits from the industry and the activity around that industry.

I think, Mr. Speaker, there's no question that most people understand that Alberta contributes more per capita than any other province in Canada, and in fact I think most people understand that

there are only two provinces that are net contributors. What we need to work towards is ensuring that all provinces in this confederation are strong by giving them a hand up, not a handout.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Capital Planning Portfolio

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta taxpayers are troubled by this government's excess. My questions are to the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, capital planning. Given that the majority of, to quote the Minister of Health and Wellness, heavy lifting for infrastructure has been handed back to the ministries of health and education, reducing your department's responsibilities, why does it take two ministers to carry out the job?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question, a question that I think a lot of people will be asking in the future, and I think the answer has to be reflected in the future. There is a huge potential, an awful lot of investment that's going to take place in this province. I believe the Premier had indicated over the past period of time that capital planning was a very necessary and integral part of our future. I think it's an exciting time, and I guess that's why the Premier appointed me as Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and as minister responsible for capital planning, so that we can put together a solid plan so that all our municipal partners, our school boards, our colleagues, our MLAs know in a predictable way what's going on in the future.

Mr. Chase: Again to the associate minister: how does the minister justify to Alberta taxpayers the cost of his unnecessary political appointment?

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, what you see is what you get, and I think you may not like my answers sometimes. I guess what I would say to people that ask for this: it's a very important portfolio; there is over \$14 billion worth of projected investment in capital over the next three years, over \$4 billion this year alone. Don't you think that requires a little bit more than four-day planning, like most people expect?

Mr. Chase: My final question again to the associate minister, and the minister received this question prior to question period: what would be the full financial benefit for the associate minister, including salary increase, averaging of severance benefit, committee payments, vehicle allowance, and any other monetary benefits for one year?

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I do want to indicate one thing very clearly. Over 14 years ago, when I ran in a by-election to become a member of this Assembly, I did not know, nor did I care how much an MLA made. What I along with what I hope a lot of MLAs in this Assembly did was to run to try to make a positive difference in this province. When the Premier asked me six days ago to assume this position, the first question out of my mouth was not: how much do I make? To this day I'm only assuming that my stipend will be the same as any other member of cabinet.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Supports for Aging in Place

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few concerns have surfaced in my recent talks with the senior groups in my constituency. The government encourages senior Albertans to age in place and to stay in their own homes as long as possible. The costs of living are rising fast, but their incomes are fixed. My questions today are to hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given that the minister presented her ministry budget last week, what are the new, specific items in your plan to help senior Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the Member for Calgary-Fort I certainly understand the concerns of seniors, especially those on fixed incomes. I, too, realize the importance, hon. member, of our seniors living in their own homes, staying in their own homes that they've often lived in for many years close to their friends, their families, and their local community centres.

Mr. Speaker, we do have seven programs that are important in this ministry that address the various needs of seniors through the financial or health support needs. One that I would like to mention to you is the Alberta seniors' benefit program. That program supports 142,000 seniors per month. It has a significant budget through the ministry. In fact, it has the highest monthly payment for our seniors and the most generous income threshold for seniors of any provincial program in Canada. So all the programs together in the ministry do assist our seniors in living independently in their own homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that dental health is a key concern for Alberta's seniors, can the minister advise how she is addressing this important concern?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, that too, Mr. Speaker. We all know that oral health is fundamental to the quality of life and well-being of our seniors, and we did introduce the dental and optical assistance program last year. That program has been so successful that we currently have a take-up of 14,000 seniors per month that are accessing that program.

To address the needs of the oral health of our seniors living in our continuing care centres, which we've heard in the Assembly before, I was pleased to recently approve an \$800,000 pilot program with the leadership of the Alberta Dental Association and College. That mobile dental program will go out to our senior centres, and it will offer reliable, affordable dental services for our seniors in the community. Importantly, too, it will go out to the remote centres and, as well, serve seniors that we know to be shut in in the remote centres. So we're looking forward to measuring and tracking that and seeing if that is assisting in the long-term care centres as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. My senior constituents also expressed a concern about the rising property taxes on their homes. A big chunk of it is to the school tax. They say that they have been paying taxes all their lives and that they need a break as they don't have any children attending school now. What can the minister do to address this concern of rising property taxes and school taxes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have an established program in the ministry for our seniors, the education property tax assistance for seniors program, and that offers a rebate for increases in the education portion of the seniors' property tax over the 2004 amount. Since the amount that they pay is fixed at the 2004 levels, seniors no longer have to pay any increases in the education portion of their property taxes. It's available – that's important to know – to all senior homeowners regardless of their income. We did have 50,000 seniors access that program in 2005, and it as well assists seniors with what the Member for Calgary-Fort has brought forward to the Assembly today.

Thank you.

2:30 Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll call on six today to participate in Members' Statements, but first of all just a brief review with respect to some items so that hon. members know about the history of Alberta.

In 1901 the area to be known as Alberta had a population of 73,022 people. Between 1901 and 1905 some 40,000 homesteads were granted for future Albertans, and in 1905 the life expectancy in this province was 53 years of age.

On April 25, 1906, a motion by Calgary Liberal MLA W.H. Cushing to make Calgary the permanent capital of Alberta was defeated by a vote of 16 to 8, and Edmonton was declared the capital.

In 1906 the speed limit within cities in Alberta was 10 miles per hour, and in the rural part of Alberta it was 20 miles per hour.

In August of 1907 the sod for the new Alberta Legislature Building was turned, and in October 1909 Governor General Earl Grey laid the cornerstone for this building.

In 1914, on the eve of World War I, the population of Alberta had surpassed 470,000 people, two-thirds of whom were farmers or farm-related people.

head: Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Challenge North 2006 Conference

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week on April 5 through 7 the Northern Alberta Development Council hosted the Challenge North conference in the town of High Level in my constituency. This conference is held every three years, but this is the first time it was held in such a northern location and in such a small town.

The purpose of the conference was to address the issues many communities in the north are facing, either the challenges of unprecedented growth or the inability to capture growth and development. Northern Albertans gather at the conference to network and share ideas and to listen to some fascinating guest speakers share their thoughts and ideas. Some 215 delegates were in attendance, Mr. Speaker.

Information sessions were designed to help delegates build and expand effective community, industry, and government partnerships. Sessions included information on forming aboriginal partnerships, on education needs, on infrastructure needs, and on a host of other topics.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the chair of the NADC, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, and the entire NADC staff for

the great decision to step away from the norm and to host the conference in the town of High Level. I also want to thank them for a truly great conference, a wonderful opportunity to forward the cause of northern development.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend everyone in the town of High Level, from the organizers to the town staff to the hotel staff, who once again, as they always do, took it to a new level of excellence and did a great job of showcasing the north.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

SAIT Polytechnic

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak on an increasingly important and urgent need for Alberta's continuing economic development and prosperity. It is the development of our human resources, the skills and the expertise of workers in Alberta.

SAIT Polytechnic is embarking on its development of a new state-of-the-art trades and technology complex that will bring Alberta and Albertan learners to a higher level. SAIT plans to double the number of seats it will offer in energy, construction, manufacturing, automation, and transportation. All are industry areas with huge demands for more skilled workers. SAIT plans to meet the demand in this area by offering an additional 2,735 student seats in certificate, diploma, and applied degree programs as well as 5,898 more apprenticeship seats.

With its track record and past achievements I'd strongly suggest that our government support and continue to invest in SAIT. It's public money well spent, an investment with a solid and high return to Alberta.

Last year SAIT selected one of its key partners and allies as recipient of the 2005 president's partnership award. Along with previous recipients such as TransAlta Corporation, Calgary Motor Dealers Association, EnCana Corporation and with its global presence in the energy industry around the world, Nexen Corporation is well known for its leadership in the business community. Nexen, through its president and chief executive, Charlie Fischer, supported nearly \$3 million in scholarships at SAIT.

Late last year Mr. Keith MacPhail, president and CEO of Bonavista Energy Trust, donated \$10 million toward SAIT, and this donation is matched by our government's funding. Yesterday the Enerplus president gave \$5 million to SAIT.

I would like to ask the Assembly to recognize and thank these corporate leaders for the future of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Pat Fredrickson Rita McGregor

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now like to recognize the outstanding achievements of the two ladies we are celebrating today. These ladies are licensed practical nurses, Pat Fredrickson and Rita McGregor.

Both these women represent the finest in leadership in the nursing profession and have influenced nursing policy provincially and nationally. In fact, Pat Fredrickson was among the health care professionals who received Alberta centennial medals for their exceptional contribution to the community and society.

I join your colleagues in thanking you for the dedication to advance licensed practical nursing, and good luck with your future endeavours.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intent of my member's statement is to challenge the new Minister of Community Development to raise the profile of the parks and protected areas portion of his portfolio.

Since 1994 parks and protected area's infrastructure along with health, education, community services, and seniors, to name just a few, has suffered greatly from this government's neglect. While paying down the \$23 billion debt that the government had accumulated through poor management was eventually accomplished due to the increased global price of oil and gas, in the interval the condition of parks and protected areas deteriorated greatly.

Although the reinvestment in Alberta's photo op, pavement parks such as the Canmore Nordic Centre and a handful of interpretation centres, has mercifully begun again, the wilderness parks and protected areas, the diamonds in the rough, have been at best ignored and at worst deliberately abandoned. Considering the small percentage of land set aside, less than 5 per cent for parks and protected areas, Albertans expect that the government consider these areas sacred and do its utmost to protect and expand them.

Government bills 18 and 23 are heading in the wrong direction when they remove public advisory boards and buffer zone protection. The proposed coal-bed methane intrusion into the Rumsey ecological area as well as an attempt to remove the protected park status of Caribou Mountains provincial park to permit drilling is offensive to hundreds of thousands of Albertan environmental and outdoor enthusiasts.

The new minister has a chance to make either his mark or blot on Alberta's park landscape and personal well-being. Hopefully, the minister will whip up the enthusiasm of his caucus members to protect existing parks from industrial intrusion and to support extending protection to wilderness areas like the Castle Crown by establishing the 1,040 square kilometre Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp wilderness park.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bow Island and District Emergency Services

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 8 I was given the opportunity to present the Alberta emergency service medal to a number of very deserving individuals from the Bow Island and district emergency services. In order to be eligible for the medal, nominees must have worked for at least 12 years in municipal emergency services. The nominees in Bow Island all had numerous years of service, combining for a total of 268 years of volunteer service. Two hundred and sixty-eight years. Giving anywhere from 13 to 42 years of service, each of these individuals has dedicated a great deal of their time and energy in serving their communities.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, the colours of the Alberta emergency service medal represent the qualities that the nominated volunteers and the winners have. The blue on the ribbon represents the province of Alberta while the three white stripes represent good service, loyalty, and conduct. Each of those nominated for the emergency services medal from the Bow Island and district emergency services deserve our appreciation and respect for the volunteer work that they do.

Again I'd like to extend my congratulations to those winners of the medal and to all the nominees. Volunteers need to be recognized for the volunteer work that they do. Without volunteers Alberta would not be the wonderful province that we know and love today.

Mr. Speaker, April 23 to 29 is National Volunteers Week, and I'm proud to have been given this opportunity to discuss a great group of volunteers who have given so much to their communities and to our province generally. They have selflessly dedicated their time and energy, and I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank them for their efforts.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Water Management

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the province's much-vaunted Water for Life strategy Albertans should by now have a comprehensive strategy in place to protect Alberta's drinking water. We're still waiting. Recent reports have underlined the urgent need for a strategy to ensure that safe and reliable sources of water are available to all Albertans.

The urgency of the situation extends beyond Alberta's borders as our neighbours have voiced their concerns about the decline in water levels and the quality of rivers flowing to the east, north, and south of our province. It is hypocritical for the government in its Water for Life strategy to stress the importance of water to Albertans and then fall behind in terms of meaningful legislation and regulations governing the industrial use of our water. In some cases the water used by industry is locked away forever in coal seams or down oil wells, never to be recovered again.

The situation is urgent. There should be immediate steps taken to ensure that there is no privatization of Alberta's water, that there are no interbasin transfers of water, and that there is strong and meaningful legislation passed here to protect water from pollution and overuse by industry. Individual household consumers throughout the province must be assured of pure and inexpensive drinking water for their own domestic use. Our province's water must be maintained as a publicly owned resource. We must not allow the private trading of water and not allow the sale of water to other countries, particularly to the United States.

Albertans know the vital importance of water to their continued health and prosperity. It's time for the government to ensure that it's properly protected.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 51 energetic young Albertans from my constituency. Basically, they're petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition from 60 residents of central Alberta, from the Mirror, Bashaw, and Alix areas. It says: we the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta as reported by Health Canada that include but are not limited to a tobacco tax increase, legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing, and the legislation to make all workplaces completely smoke free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a Standing Order 40 application.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I will move under Standing Order 40 of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm the position that revenue from nonrenewable resources should be excluded from the formula by which federal equalization payments are calculated."

The Speaker: Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Bill 30
Persons with Developmental Disabilities
Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move first reading of Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006.

This legislation will enhance the way our province administers the persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, program. Bill 30 proposes that the roles and responsibilities of the PDD Provincial Board be transferred to the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports and that the reporting lines of the PDD community boards be enhanced so that they would report directly to the ministry. This legislation will enable the ministry to better co-ordinate programs that support adults with disabilities, which were placed under the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports in November 2004.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move that Bill 30, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Bill 31
Health Information Amendment Act, 2006

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 31, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2006, for first reading.

This legislation will make substantial amendments to the Health Information Act to reflect changing technology and to better assist in the administration of health care spending in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 31, being the Health Information Amendment Act, 2006, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Bill 32
Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce first reading of Bill 32, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act.

This new legislation will not only incorporate much of what was in private member's Bill 201 but will also replace the Human Tissue Gift Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 32, being the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not usual that we would table this, but given that the opposition seems to want to play games with the land that was purchased from Mr. Sheckter, I'm filing today five copies of the agreements for four parcels, clearly showing that, in fact, the land that was in excess would be returned to the vendor.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from myself that has been sent to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The letter responds to the questions he raised yesterday regarding the theft of computer equipment from Children's Services, and I trust that the information in this letter will answer his questions. As I stated in the letter, Albertans can be assured that no client information was stored on the stolen laptops, and at no time was personal information at risk. The police are investigating this incident.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:50

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today, and they all relate to my questions earlier in question period. The first tabling I have is a settlement proposal between Joseph M. Sheckter and the province.

The second tabling I have is a page from the *Alberta Gazette* from 1981 indicating that land in the northeast section of 29-51-24-W4 was sold for a total amount of \$4,394,500, or \$55,000 per acre.

The third tabling I have is a historical title of land, and it indicates that this land changed hands from Robertson Properties to Aristocrat

Holdings and the amounts that this land was bought and sold for are in this historical title.

Now, certainly, this next document is also a certificate of title from the north Alberta land registries district, and this is the southeast quarter of section 8, township 54, range 24, west of the fourth meridian. This is also land that was addressed in question period today.

There is also a certificate of title from the northern Alberta land registries district, and this certifies that the Atlantic Dairy Farm Ltd. and 248290 Alberta Ltd. are owners.

This is a certificate of title indicating that Tigris Holdings Ltd. is now the owner of a one-third interest.

The last tabling that I have is, certainly, an Alberta registries land titles certificate. This is for 4, 24, 51, 25, northeast section, and this indicates, again, that land in 1981 was sold to Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta for \$6.2 million.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. The first is from Jim Moses, noting that by setting up a pay-for-service system, it's diluting the existing capacity by removing doctors and nurses, et cetera, from the health care system.

The next letter is from Ian Morgan, noting that "foreign qualified immigrant doctors and nurses can be brought to Canadian standards."

A number of suggestions from K.T. Moorthy and S. Moorthy, noting that they need to ban smoking in the workplace and public places; supporting sporting activities by reducing the cost for rental of ice time and playing fields, et cetera; a number of very proactive suggestions.

From John Mathewson, wondering if the Premier is taking into account "potential rising government income that will be produced by the rising population of workers . . . It is critical that Albertans are confident that the numbers are derived fairly as we weight the argument."

The next letter is from Adele McDonald, noting that public health care "has always recognized . . . and managed the balance between services that fell within – and outside – of the public care system."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the proper number of copies of a paper called Equalization Reform: A Fair Deal for Saskatchewan. The paper supports Alberta's position that nonrenewable resources should be excluded from calculation of federal equalization payments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, each with the requisite five copies. The first tabling is a memorandum dated October 9, 1980, from then minister of environment Jack Cookson to then Premier E.P. Lougheed with respect to Edmonton's and Calgary's RDAs and containing those quotes about special interest names which I used in today's question period. Another sentence of note in that memo talks about purchasing land "quietly, quickly and cleanly."

The second tabling is Alberta Government Services land titles office document number 992086598, showing Lehigh Portland

Cement Limited offering to sell a certain parcel of land to Canadian National Railway Company on March 18, 1999.

My third tabling is also an Alberta Government Services land titles office document, 992086220, showing Lehigh Portland Cement Limited buying that same parcel of land from this government on March 31, 1999, almost two weeks after they had already offered to sell most of it.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, pursuant to the Farm Implement Act the Farm Implement Board 2005-06 Annual Report.

**Speaker's Ruling
Petition Procedure**

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I go to the Standing Order 40 application, just a note with respect to petitions. We do have a standing order with respect to petitions, Standing Order 83(3). In the case of one petition that was filed today by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, it doesn't meet the requirements of that particular standing order, so the petition is being returned. It is an onus of responsibility on members to know what that standing order is.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a Standing Order 40 application.

Federal Equalization Payments

Mr. Mason:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm the position that revenue from nonrenewable resources should be excluded from the formula by which federal equalization payments are calculated.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In order to satisfy you and the House that this in fact is in order, I'd like to make the following comments. First of all, it appears, based on the research that we've been able to do, that there will be no suitable opportunity to raise this in another forum. I think the closest, perhaps, would be the estimates of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, but it in no way affords an opportunity for the House to clearly express a position with respect to this matter. So we are unable to find any other opportunity for the House to clearly express its opinion on this very important question.

With respect to urgency, Mr. Speaker, just today the Premiers are meeting in Montreal at the Council of the Federation. Each of these provinces will be arguing in their own self-interest, and we believe that it's important that Alberta's position would be best represented if we could show broad political support for the position that nonrenewable resource revenues ought not to be included in the calculation of equalization payments. We know that the Premier is down there, that it represents a position, as we understand it, of the government, but I'm not aware of any occasion in which the entire House has had an opportunity to express its point of view.

Mr. Speaker, adding to the urgency is the position of the government of Quebec. They have been very clear that they would like to see nonrenewable resources included in the calculation of transfer payments. If that were to happen, of course, it could have a significant impact on Alberta's overall financial position.

We believe that it's important at this point to have this debate and, particularly in light of recent political developments in the province of Alberta, to express the position nationally based on the entire Assembly rather than just the position of the Premier and the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the arguments. We believe that this is the only and, in fact, the best opportunity to express this position. We also believe that given recent political developments and the negotiations currently taking place in Montreal, it is not only timely but very important to express a clear and united position from the province of Alberta. So I would respectfully request unanimous leave from the Assembly in order to debate this. If that were to be given, we are prepared to commit to only one short speech on the matter, and we would ask other parties to consider the same thing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under a Standing Order 40 application unanimous consent of the Assembly is required in order to give consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: As the estimates this afternoon of the Ministry of Environment are coming up, I just want to leave, hon. members, with this short little historical vignette with respect to ministers of Environment.

3:00

There was a Minister of Environment once who actually sat, I believe, in the same chair that the current Minister of Environment is in. The rule of the day said that you had two hours for your estimates, and a minister at that time was given 30 minutes' speaking time. The then Minister of Environment began to verbalize lucidly, not unlike certain other ministers of Environment, and reached the point of 30 minutes in his discourse at which time he concluded in his mind that he was not finished. So he asked the chair to ask for unanimous leave of the House to continue speaking. The House gave the minister unanimous leave. The minister proceeded to go on for another one hour and 30 minutes and completely and totally filibustered his estimates. We arrived at the two-hour time frame in which there was a demand for the vote to be taken, and the vote was taken. But thereafter the House levelled the playing field with that particular Minister of Environment to his woe.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Environment

The Chair: I'll call the hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to say this afternoon that on such a beautiful Alberta day perhaps I could be asking for unanimous consent that we reconvene out on the lawn of the Legislature, which would be a beautiful thing. I guess that I could try that motion, but it may not be administratively possible. That being the case, joining me today is my huge staff: the Deputy

Minister of Environment, Peter Watson, as well as Laurent Auger, le chef du cabinet. I'm pleased to talk today. It's an honour and a privilege to talk about Environment's business plan for the fiscal year.

Let me begin by walking you through some of the major changes in my ministry's expenditures. There has been an increase of about \$1.7 million for approvals required under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the Water Act. We issue these approvals for new activities that might have an adverse impact on the environment, such as oil sands projects or new drinking water systems.

We also have reviewed our program to identify projects with low environmental risk because I do believe that risk assessment is so critical in terms of how we use our energy in the most efficient way possible. For example, we will implement new standards for urban drainage and storm runoff works and temporary water diversions and no longer have to issue approvals for those works. That's a small example of the efficiencies we are building within our ministry. As a result – and I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View would appreciate this – we've been able to reallocate \$600,000 because of that efficient use of our time and energy and money into '06-07 to higher risk approval activities.

We now also require professionals to sign off on the remediation of petroleum storage tank sites. Professional engineers from APEGGA will review these sites to ensure that they are properly cleaned, and we will audit these sites.

We will also continue to be involved in the higher risk sites area. For instance, under the compliance and enforcement categories the educational activities that we have always conducted in this area are now being assigned to the ministry's educational awareness program. Now, this results in a decrease of about \$490,000 in this program. However, I want to stress that we have not reduced any resources for the field inspections and surveillance of the activities. What we are truly looking for are the outcomes that are so important relative to how we spend our money, get the best value for our money and the lowest environmental risk relative to what we're dealing with. This is just another small example.

So we will continue to enforce and take action on those who do not follow our strict environmental legislation, but we also want to educate Albertans to make sound environmental choices. It's almost like the boy and the man who sit on the end of a dock, and the question is: do you give the boy a fish when he's hungry, or do you teach the boy how to fish? Ultimately what we are doing is using our energy in a way so that for generations to come that boy will be able to fish based on the lessons that he has been taught relative to the environment. That's exactly what we're doing. I know that my wife will be very proud of that story that I just told this afternoon.

One other small example of that is monitoring and evaluation. This program area increased by \$1.5 million. You ask me how much? One point five million dollars because we are improving and expanding our information systems for measuring groundwater and other water sources, which are so important on the blue gold that we talk about in this Assembly.

We're also making it easier for Albertans to access information by expanding what we put on our website. We truly believe that information is so critical in terms of the mapping, the geological work that we're doing relative to the information of groundwater aquifers, and how we share that in an open, transparent way with all Albertans. We continue to enhance those procedures and that framework that we have in place within the Ministry of Environment.

The increase of \$200,000 in this program reflects the cost of sharing information with partners such as the Clean Air Strategic

Alliance, CASA, and the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment. Now, in one small area, water operations, I want to say that a decrease of \$900,000 is reflecting savings through an increased use of technology, again for programs that maintain provincially owned water infrastructure such as is often referred to as on-stream storage, but the real word, I think, is more appropriately framed as a dam.

A decrease of half a million dollars was achieved by moving more initiatives into, again, our education program. That's aimed at teaching that boy how to fish as opposed to giving him a fish in terms of the important environmental seeds that we work for into the future.

Also, on an innovation and policy perspective we are increasing \$1.8 million under initiatives of sustainable resource environmental management, which I know that the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development supports, SREMs such as emissions trading systems, a streamlined regulatory system for upstream oil and gas, and better systems for managing contaminated sites.

From a drinking water perspective, we're increasing it by a small amount of \$36,000. This, again, supports the workforce needed for the drinking water branch, which is part of Water for Life. In addition to the workforce increase in this area, we are also devoting about \$1.7 million – you asked me how much; \$1.7 million – in each of the three areas out of our Water for Life budget to help small communities have the support they need to continue to provide safe drinking water. I know that to my colleagues all over this province it's so important to have safe drinking water in our smaller communities as we work collectively with them as partners. Partnership is very important. A partnership is: what can we do for you that you can't do, and what can you do for me that I can't do? Collectively we're using a resource end of Alberta Environment to work toward strengthening that partnership.

I want to say that in reclamation we're decreasing about \$1.2 million, but this \$1.2 reflects the upcoming completion of reclamation work at the Smoky River coal mine. I know, to the hon. members, that the Smoky River coal mine is an important initiative that I think it is very important.

An increase of \$3.7 million supports a number of critical initiatives such as programs that help First Nations. I know, to the hon. minister of aboriginal affairs, that the programs that will help our First Nations and small communities supply clean drinking water and make sure that they have dependable backup systems and maintain healthy aquatic ecosystems are so important.

Again, speeding up completion of flood risk mapping throughout the province is an important initiative.

As well, groundwater mapping throughout the province with a focus in the next two years in central Alberta is a key area where we have been focusing some of our dollars and our infrastructure.

Partners with communities and Albertans to improve watershed conservation through the Alberta Water Council and other partners is another important initiative.

I want to conclude on this point by saying that part of our Water for Life strategy, again, in helping us achieve a very noble goal: we want to improve our water conservation by 30 per cent by the year 2015. I want to say that I know that that goal is being achieved as we speak through our Water for Life strategy.

3:10

On the issue of climate change, of course, we are increasing about \$43,000 to support some of our workforce needs in the critical area. We continue to focus on technology developments, such as the Drake Landing solar community in Okotoks. To the hon. member from Okotoks and High River: I'm looking forward to joining him.

Last week, as you know, he was very successful in getting from the Minister of Environment an additional half a million dollars based on a question that was asked in this House. I want to say that he has actually started quite an incredible trend because everyone now thinks that when they ask a question to the Minister of Environment, they are going to get a half a million dollars. I want to assure you that that is not always the case. But I want to say that this type of initiative, pertaining to the Drake Landing solar community, is an important one when it comes to looking at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and intensity, and I want to applaud the hon. member for his good work working with partners in that community.

I also want to say that we will continue to work with the federal government to influence national and international agreements. In fact, I will be attending later in May in Bonn, Germany, with the federal Minister of Environment, Ms Ambrose, where Canada will be leading the way, and I know that Alberta plays a key role relative to the importance of the plan we have in place.

Did you know that we're the only province in Canada that has a climate change law? No other province in Canada has a climate change law, and I'm very proud to say that it's right here in this province. Just like it's right here in this province: we were the first province in Canada to have a Ministry of Environment, dating back to 1971, for some of the members who may not be aware.

An increase of \$700,000 also reflects a commitment to sharing timely and accurate information about the environment with Albertans and our partners and our stakeholders. We want to ensure that all Albertans are well-informed in a transparent, open process when we come to making the right choices about the environment, and I want to say that that is working very well.

From an integrated resource management perspective, we have an increase of just under a million dollars, reflecting our new environmental response team. Of course, this team is a recommendation of the Environmental Protection Commission, which I established last August as a result of the ecological disaster that took place in Wabamun. Working very closely with the hon. member from the Stony Plain area, I want to say that that is moving ahead on schedule, on time, and, I might add, on budget.

From an intergovernmental relation perspective, we are increasing about \$130,000, that reflects a focus on stronger partnerships, on environmental research with the Department of Innovation and Science, and I had an excellent visit last week with the Alberta Science and Research Authority, where they are doing excellent work with the Ministry of Environment.

I want to continue on and talk about the fact that no matter what it is that we do, we want in this 21st century to move away from labels because labels just simply disenfranchise. They just simply pigeonhole. Basically, a label just simply says: you go in one corner, you come in another corner, and let's come out fighting. Well, I think that is really not a good efficient use of energy, and this budget this year reflects that we are using our money and our dollars in a more efficient way because rather than labelling and rather than disenfranchising Albertans, what we are doing is working in partnership with Albertans. My good friend, who I had breakfast with last Friday morning in Vancouver, Dr. David Suzuki, said that what we want to do is move away from labels. Labels we should keep not for people but for planets.

What it really does more than anything is that it talks about the importance of our education system in terms of teaching that boy how to fish because, ultimately, this is generational. This is a long-term approach. In fact, some of our dollars this year will be reflected in the youth summit. This will be the first-ever Alberta youth summit all across Canada, that's going to be held in Kananaskis in the early months of the fall. In fact, what we will be

doing is we'll be having university students, college kids, kids from high school, but also grade 5 students. The grade 5 students will be there because of the fact that that's where they learn about the important principles of the environment. Again, we're taking those seeds and planting them so we have long-term impact of the money we're investing in education.

From a land perspective and contaminated sites I want to say that this is an important issue relative to the cleanup and the reclaiming of contaminated sites. Our legislation is without question the strongest in this country. My ministry acts immediately where contamination exceeds environmental standards or could cause potential health risks. We use environmental protection orders if deemed appropriate, if needed to ensure that the company cleans up. The polluter will pay because it's the law. We will continue to protect our land, air, and water as we move forward because we have strong Alberta laws. For example, we used environmental protection orders with a company in northern Alberta after tests confirmed that salt runoff from their site was contaminating adjacent property. It's just one small example where the polluter pays for any violation of a law that takes place in the strong Alberta law that we have.

I want to use another example of things that we are doing that I think are so important. Immediately after the spill at Wabamun we issued enforcement orders, which clearly outlined the steps that Canadian National, CN Rail, needed to take to clean out the lake to our strict environmental standards and to keep the public informed on the cleanup status. That's so important. I want to say that I was proud to hire Dr. David Schindler from the University of Alberta, who, as you know, is a leading ecologist, as well as Dr. Ron Goodman, who was the cleanup manager for the *Exxon Valdez*. We took that action in the first 24 hours.

I want to say that I compliment my team of people within the Ministry of Environment, who acted very conscientiously, and the good work that they have done relative to restoring and building back the confidence of the people in the Wabamun area. We are continuing to be involved with our staff. We have an office in Wabamun to ensure that. Residents have questions. I think that's a good investment of Alberta Environment dollars, that this budget is all about. We will continue to hold CN's feet to the fire to ensure that the laws are followed and also to ensure that the lake is restored to its full and best use for its residents.

I want to also for a moment take an opportunity to say as we go forward that, clearly, I believe our Water for Life strategy is perhaps the most progressive piece of public policy that we have in our government. Perhaps I'm biased as the Minister of Environment, but it is forward thinking. Not only are we thinking about down the road; we're also thinking about around the corner. I think that in this 21st century that is the type of public policy that Albertans are expecting on such an important resource as our blue gold.

I want to say that we have a target of a 30 per cent improvement in water efficiency by the year 2015. That means that for the way we use our water today, we have to do an even better job pertaining to the issue of water conservation. To meet this target, we are working with our municipalities and also with industry to measure actual water usage. We are educating Albertans pertaining to water conservation. Again, we're feeding that young boy who is sitting on the dock. We're planting seeds.

I don't know if you are aware, but about 50 years ago there used to be a sign. It was a regulation of government, and it used to say: do not spit. That was the law. There used to be signs saying: do not spit. If you notice, today there are no signs anywhere in Alberta that say: do not spit. The culture and our society have come to understand what is expected of them. In the same context as we go forward with our young grade 5 students, we want to plant the seed

so that from an educational awareness perspective it's not about "do not spit" anymore. It's about what we are doing individually as Albertans in protecting and sustaining our environment today and well into the future.

I want to say today: do we need to start putting signs up? I don't think so because I think Albertans are already there when it comes to the fact of how important the environment is to them in terms of their children and their grandchildren and their way of life. As Minister of Environment responsible for the Water Act I also want to say on the quality of water in Alberta that I will continue to use every fibre of energy in my body to ensure that safe, secure drinking water is top of mind when it comes to the actions we take and in the money reflected in this budget when it comes to the money we expend for protecting our water.

3:20

The tests that are being carried out relative to coal-bed methane drilling will show well water quality. They will show well water production capacity in terms of flows. They will also show the presence or absence of methane gas in the well. What we are doing is developing a rock-solid base of information that we will be able to use. Information is truly power when it comes to the decisions we make pertaining to water usage and water conservation. We have a very open and transparent process that we are using for any landowner anywhere in Alberta. The new standards that we have put in place and the monies that we are expending will force any industry that is doing the drilling to pay for the testing: 100 per cent of that testing will be paid by industry. In fact, any resident who has a concern or even a fear of anything that is going on can relieve those fears because we have a 24-hour hotline at 1-800-222-6514 that any resident anywhere in this province can call at any time and get answers. Of course, Alberta Environment will be there in terms of being able to react quickly to concerns.

It's so important that citizens are also the eyes and ears of Alberta Environment officials. If everyone thinks about it, we all have individual responsibility in dealing with the environment. I think this is an important approach of spreading our wings and our tentacles even further. Again, we may not have to beam up to the mother ship because the tentacles to the mother ship will be to every Albertan, so ultimately we will have all corners of our province covered.

Alberta leads this country when it comes to drinking water programs, and my ministry, I want to say, has just completed the most comprehensive review of its drinking water facilities anywhere in North America. I think those were dollars well spent, and I think the money that will be allocated in this budget this year will also be well spent in terms of securing that blue gold.

I also want to say that last week Dr. David Schindler, who I consider a very good friend, in his report confirms what we are already doing. Water is scarce in Alberta and across the prairies. This is especially important in southern Alberta, which has a long history of drought. I don't know if you would be aware – did you know that 200 years ago the North Saskatchewan actually suffered a major drought in this area? Two hundred years ago there was a major drought right here in the North Saskatchewan River that was unprecedented. So we use the information that Dr. Schindler has provided in this type of forward-thinking reporting, that Alberta Environment welcomes.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my leave. I'm quite prepared to answer any questions from members from all parties in the Assembly this afternoon.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is my privilege to stand and comment on and ask questions about the estimates briefing for the Department of Environment. I thank the hon. minister for his comments and for his attempts to lead the province on environmental issues. I have to acknowledge that this minister has inherited a mess from years of neglect and underfunding, with grossly deficient staff numbers and capacity to measure and take action on issues relating to our environment.

This is the third most vital issue to Albertans, the protection of the environment, which requires significant investment in testing, analyzing the results of the tests, and taking action on the results of the analysis. It has been over a decade since the Department of Environment has been adequately funded to do its job, and the results are showing themselves. With less than 0.5 per cent of the provincial budget there is a profound loss of confidence in the capacity of this Environment department and this Environment minister to carry out the responsibilities of protecting our water, our soil, and our air. Fundamentally, this has impacts on the public health and safety. Clearly, in the area of groundwater alone there has been a serious lack of ability to monitor, to analyze, and to hold industry accountable for the progressive loss of quality and in some cases quantity of water in our groundwater aquifers.

There has been a lack of capacity in the Alberta Environment department to do comprehensive environmental impact assessments. We continue to rely on industry to do their own environmental impact assessments on approval projects. This is clearly a failure of leadership by this government. The lack of investment, the lack of putting the environment first is a failure of vision and the recognition that we cannot sustain any kind of economic activity and health in this province until we invest properly in the environment. Legislation is fine, and we have good legislation. The problem is enforcement. We have no capacity to enforce the good laws that we have. Industry is being called upon to regulate itself. This cannot be sustained. The people of Alberta are increasingly anxious, angry, and demanding a more accountable system.

We have thousands of contaminated sites around the province, and unfortunately there still is no fund which will deal with the cleanup costs. Many of these companies have walked away. They have gone bankrupt or changed ownership, and now the public purse will be on the line again to clean up these messes. This clearly has to be dealt with. The debt that we are leaving to our children is absolutely phenomenal in terms of multibillion dollar cleanup costs because of the failure to establish a cleanup fund in the interests of all Albertans.

The Water for Life policy is a good policy, but it is simply ideas. We need action after three years on this plan. It is simply a plan that needs to be implemented, and funding needs to be provided to allow the watershed groups to do the research, to do the planning, to do the testing, and to carry out the actions needed to protect our water, particularly our watersheds. We will spend billions and billions of dollars, as we are doing again this year, on treating water because we are not protecting the water in the first instance at its watershed level. Now we're seeing signs of that in the groundwater particularly. We must invest in the Water for Life policy and get it going on the ground.

One of the fundamental aspects of investment in sustainable water and other environmental characteristics is an integrated land-use plan. In 15 years this is the third attempt to get an integrated land-use plan in this province. Failure to plan is planning to fail. Without this land-use plan industry is simply going from place to place, project to project, and the regulatory bodies have no capacity to say no because the government has already sold them the land, sold them the subsurface rights. They have to be allowed to go ahead,

then, without serious attempts at a systematic, overall provincial plan that would protect us into the future, protect industry into the future, and protect our fundamental lifeblood, groundwater, into the future.

We have to be able to do cumulative impact assessments. We're still not doing them. The upgraders in the industrial heartland are still going ahead without a proper scientific assessment of the cumulative load on the atmosphere, the cumulative load of pollutants on air quality, water quality, soil quality. There are significant concerns out there. Again, huge investment is needed in the scientific realm of doing cumulative impact assessments in order to make decisions about what is sustainable and what is not sustainable.

Finally, there needs to be funding for meaningful public consultation. When a decision is being made in their locale, whether it's an intensive livestock operation or industrial activity or a refinery site, people have to be meaningfully involved in those decisions, or we're headed for increasing community fracturing and increasing court challenges at a great cost to both communities and the province.

We are looking for serious investment in the Environment department, significant courageous leadership to move this agenda forward, and once again are disappointed at the very small increase in budget that this ministry has to work with. The Water for Life strategy got a \$3.6 million increase this year. How is that going to actually move the series of watershed programs that are needed, that are already being degraded, especially in the South Saskatchewan basin? How are we going to get a handle on some of the overallocations that have already been made in some of these watersheds? These watershed groups have to be adequately funded to do the work, or we're headed for real trouble. So I would appreciate some answers to some of the questions around investing adequately into this ministry, questions around how the integrated land-use plan is going to unfold and what proportion of investment this ministry has to pay into that and is compromised as a result of it.

3:30

You've indicated \$33 million to improve our understanding of groundwater. That's a very important initiative and is long overdue. With the complaints and concerns based on testing that I've heard, we have a major problem in our underground aquifers that we have only begun to address. We also need to do much more in terms of the characterization of volumes and chemistry under surface because of the tremendous number, over 300,000, of wells now in this province, some of which have been there for 75 years and are breaking down and are continuing to show signs that they, too, are contributing to gas migration and to connections between aquifers, with one aquifer polluting another. So we have serious questions around how you're going to address these issues without more funding. We will do all we can on this side to ensure that the pressures are mounting to get this ministry adequate funding to do its job.

There was discussion last fall about interbasin water transfer into the special areas. I hope that the lack of legislation this year to review it reflects a change in culture here, that we cannot continue to take water to people and support unsustainable development in the areas that are drought ridden. We have to bring people to water. It's a question, I guess, also of whether or not this minister has decided against this. I hope he has. I think that would be a progressive decision. We've already had two major interbasin transfers in the province, and with climate change coming, it's clearly going to be an increasing demand for these unsustainable practices.

In relation to climate change I'm hoping the minister will look at enforceable limits and shift away from this intensity target. When the oil and gas industry is burgeoning as it is, there is only one way

that our contribution to climate change is going, and that is through the roof. We have to have building code changes and vehicle emissions testing and a greater commitment to renewable energy. I've spoken with the Energy minister. He doesn't express any interest in renewable energy. I'm hoping the Environment minister will press for more renewable sources of energy. We simply cannot continue on this single-minded approach to fossil fuel extraction.

In relation to the climate change program I'd be interested to know how the minister assesses the impact of the climate change program so far. It's been a number of years since it's been going, and it's been doing some good work but extremely limited because of the very low budget it's working with. We need leadership on this climate change file. We are the richest province in the richest country in the world. We are looking for leadership on climate change.

Another area of concern is holding industry accountable for pollution. The minister has stated several times in the House that he plans to hold industry accountable. Well, that requires much greater investment in testing and monitoring and holding the various industries accountable. We need to see that, and we need more money invested in those areas. Your staff are clearly handicapped by a lack of technology, a lack of manpower to do what is vital to all Albertans.

In terms of emergency preparedness another question I had is: how much money now is coming out of the Environment budget to ensure emergency preparedness, and is it appropriate that no new money is coming in for this extended job that is needed to ensure a prompt and effective response to environmental disasters?

It isn't clear to me how much is going to be spent on this new groundwater testing program. It's been indicated that the industry will pay the shot, but from what I've seen so far of the protocol, I think it's inadequate. Indeed, the most expensive tests have not been included in the protocol, and that is isotope testing. If industry is not going to pick up that tab, then we really don't have an adequate baseline assessment. All we know is whether there's gas or no gas in the water. Without isotope testing we will not know whether new gas that comes in is actually coming from deeper sources or not. So I hope we can get some further scientific review of the protocol before it gets established for May 1 because the chemists who have spoken to me about it feel that it is simply not going to answer the question of what caused a water body to be contaminated if we're simply looking for whether there's gas or no gas. There have to be much more sophisticated testings in the protocol.

In addition, we need to have some funding committed to an independent evaluation of the testing process. I don't see anything in the budget to address the 20 or 25 families whose water has been either lost or contaminated. I don't see anything in the budget to investigate those, and these are extremely expensive investigations. If we don't do a good job on those, we are going to be in serious liability from a public point of view, and these are going to end up in court. My understanding from the chemists is that each one of these isotope tests that's required in some of these complaint problems could be upwards of several thousand dollars. I do think we have to find out more about how you're prepared, within a very limited budget, to address the concerns of these families. It's my understanding that the minister has also guaranteed clean water, potable water for families that have been impacted. I'm waiting to see how that will unfold, but it's clearly yet another stress that hasn't been adequately provided for in this budget.

A question I raised earlier this week is that of the importance of now looking back over five years of coal-bed methane drilling and the potential impacts that these have had on other areas of water, some of them on public lands, some of them on private lands where

no one has actually recognized that their water has changed. A huge investment is going to be needed there as well to assess just what impact this has had on our groundwater.

So with those comments and questions, Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down, and I welcome the responses from the minister.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much. You've covered quite a lot of important points, and I certainly agree with them. I want to say that at one point I used to say that I always found myself to be an optimist and not a pessimist, but then I've also been accused of being colour blind. If I could draw an analogy, an optimist always thinks that the light is going to be green, and a pessimist always thinks that the traffic light is going to be red. But you know what? The truly wise person is colour blind to each. I guess that when I was accused of being colour blind, I thought it was inappropriate because optimism and pessimism are really all about labels and really provide no real constructive measure when it comes to the work that we do relative to improving the environment we enjoy.

Relative to renewable energies I want to first comment that you may not be aware, members of the Assembly, but the lights that you see in this very Assembly, the thousands of lights that are here, are in fact an initiative that Alberta Environment worked on with Alberta Infrastructure to ensure that this is renewable energy. Did you know that the lights in here are solar powered? In fact, did you know that 90 per cent of the energy that the Alberta government buildings use is by renewable energies? I think that statement in itself speaks for the actions that the government is taking when it comes to renewable energies. I know that all members in the front row and in the back rows and all across this side of the government certainly agree with the important initiatives of renewable energies.

I might also say on a personal note that I'm looking forward to constructing and erecting solar panels on my cottage this summer. In fact, I have to reposition the cottage a bit to make sure that I get the most intensive part of the sun that is coming in. But, again, that is a personal responsibility that Albertans are demonstrating each and every day when it comes to environment protection and sustaining and enjoying what we've been blessed with.

3:40

If I could for a moment, the hon. member did talk about the idea of the dollars that we have in terms of saying that it didn't go up as much as others. That is true, and I recognize that. But I think it's equally important to recognize that as we go forward, we also have to talk about what we have put in place in terms of feeding that boy that's on the wharf because what we have done is establish watershed councils. They are out there being our eyes and our ears. They are doing things. And you know what? A tribute to them for the little funds that we do dedicate to them, it's absolutely incredible the value that we get in return. So often it is believed that if you spend a lot of money, you should be getting great value.

In the dollars that we spend with our water councils across Alberta as part of our Water for Life strategy, the watershed councils are providing, if I could use the term – it is absolutely priceless. It is truly priceless in terms of the value they are providing to us and our ministry in terms of their excellent efforts relative to the issue of watershed monitoring as well as the work that they do on the water councils that we have established as part of our Water for Life strategy across Alberta.

I also want to take a moment to say that climate change and the renewable energies that we have undertaken as a government is a commitment that has been ongoing for the last few years. The

reason behind that is that it's everyone's business, and it makes good sense, and I say sense, s-e-n-s-e, and cents, c-e-n-t-s. I think that reflects the value of Albertans. They want to ensure that their government dollars and their own personal dollars are used in a way that is efficient, that is an effective manner relative to protecting the environment but also in terms of their individual needs.

So as I talk from a personal perspective about this summer; in fact, investing money in solar panels to put on the roof. The solar panels that I'm going to be constructing I think are a small example of the way Albertans think. I'm looking forward, in fact, to never getting a bill from any utility company or any water company because I'm going to be able to heat the water and provide the lighting because of renewable energy from the solar panels.

I ask each and every one of you to put up your hand if, in fact, you have renewable and you've taken that initiative as a personal responsibility. If you haven't, that's okay. I'm not here to say that that's not good, but think about it. Think about it this year. Being a Bob Vila and getting out there and picking up, you know, and constructing is actually healthy. It makes you forget about politics, and it actually talks about more important values in life, and that is the renewable energies that the hon. member has talked about.

I can only say: judge me by my actions, not by my words. The actions that this minister is taking and the personal actions I am taking, I can assure you, are towards those long-term sustainability efforts in terms of protecting and sustaining our environment and also, I might add, in helping financially because financially we're more efficient when we're using the solars and the renewable energies that we invest in.

An Hon. Member: What about your Smart Car?

Mr. Boutilier: The Smart Car is just another small example. Do you know how much it costs to fill up a Smart Car?

An Hon. Member: How much does it cost?

Mr. Boutilier: It costs \$9. And you know what? In actual fact my wife and I have an SUV. In the middle of winter in Fort McMurray, when we're in the middle of the snow . . . [interjections] It's true. Do you know what? That costs \$68 to fill, but I tell that I have a great degree of pleasure knowing that it costs \$9. I was saying that it makes good sense, s-e-n-s-e, but it makes good cents for my own wallet, c-e-n-t-s, because of the fact that we are using our dollars in an efficient manner. I think that is what makes good sense.

So as we go forward on some of the initiatives, the \$170 million that is reflected in this budget, in our three-year business plan, is specifically for the important questions the hon. member has asked when it comes to water infrastructure, when it comes to not only just simply taking ideas but taking those ideas and putting them into action, and that's exactly what we are doing with the \$170 million.

The hon. member has mentioned also an important point – and the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development may want to comment on this as well – on the issue of an integrated land management perspective. I believe truly that the more proactive thinking this government shows rather than thinking in silos – the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, the Minister of Energy, and the Minister of Environment are collectively working together rather than thinking that it's one ministry or the other. The land, the air, and the water cover all ministries in one way or the other. It may impact Health. It may impact Infrastructure. It may impact Sustainable Resource Development. But what's most important is that we are making efficient use of our energy. We are using our energy in a positive way, and I think that that is really what is so important.

If I could just use another example of how we are pooling our energy together. It's on the cumulative impacts. It is so critically important today. In fact, just the other day I was speaking with industry relative to water needs, in terms of inflow needs. I, of course, have been speaking with Dr. Schindler, who is a wonderful independent adviser from the University of Alberta. I truly have always welcomed his advice and his experience and also the science that he provides. Actually, I'm looking forward in the next couple of weeks to being with Dr. Schindler as we visit what I call out in the trenches at Lake Wabamun, seeing first-hand the scientific work we're doing, the monitoring we're doing, the evaluating we're doing to ensure safe, secure drinking water.

From a cumulative impact perspective I want to say that as we continue to see certainly in my own backyard, the oil sands capital of the world, Fort McMurray – let me assure the hon. member and all hon. members that on cumulative impacts, first and foremost, number one, the Athabasca basin will always be protected so that I can answer to my grandson 50 years from now that when his grandfather was Minister of Environment, we did the right thing, took the right actions, had the right laws and the proper regulations in place to ensure that 50 years from now we can sit out there and fly-fish on the Athabasca River and that the basin has been protected.

We use a science base to be able to determine that, and I can assure you that in my discussion with industry that basin will be protected – that is my own backyard – just like all the basins in this province will be protected because that is the value. If we eliminate the political rhetoric and the platitudes and get to the value, every single Albertan wants to ensure that the basins we enjoy in this province, that we've been blessed with, will be protected and will be sustained. They will be. We are taking action to ensure that they will be.

From a cumulative impact perspective I am working closely with all of the stakeholders both environmental and industry, the CEMA group, which is the cumulative environmental impact group, that is of course situated in northern Alberta with the oil sands development. We are working with them on the integrated land management perspective. We are working with them in terms of the issue of water inflow needs.

I might say that sometimes it comes to a reality that there is never agreement, and that's where Alberta Environment believes in a consensus base, just like the CASA approach that we've taken in the past, but we also believe that it's so important as we work forward from a consensus-based approach that the inflow needs that we will provide to industry, who require water for the development of the oil sands, will never ever compromise that value that Albertans have; that is, protecting and securing ecologically the basin of the Athabasca.

The real issue is about optimization, and that fits so nicely into our Water for Life strategy. It's about: what can we do better? You know, that really reflects a value that Albertans have. We have an attitude in Alberta that we can always do better, and I believe that the goal set out by the Water for Life strategy, that by 2015 we will have a 30 per cent improvement in our water usage, is so critical. The reason I say that is that that is exactly the value and the principle that I am imploring upon industry in terms of the full optimization and usage of what water, in fact, is taken out of the river, how it is conserved, how it is recycled, how it is put back into the river.

For instance, in terms of critical points: when there are droughts, how are we better going to use our water? It's a very good question, and that question is exactly what I'm working with all our stakeholders on. If there is a drought, the bottom line is that there will come times when industry will not be allowed to take water out of

the river because the value we have and that Albertans share with us is this: we will not compromise the ecological and the biological value of that basin. So we will not damage it.

3:50

Do we have other options? Absolutely. First of all, it would seem to make good sense that industries work with each other, that industry work with the Ministry of Environment when it comes to conservation and optimization; for instance, things such as perhaps even an off-stream storage area, a reservoir so that in drought periods we can in fact capture the advantage of thinking ahead. But not just with the Ministry of Environment. I'm expecting every industry to be working collaboratively. In fact, maybe it makes sense that rather than building five off-stream storage units that would be of benefit, maybe there only needs to be one in terms of what can be done by that collaboration of working together.

I have an expectation, and it's a value that's reflected in Albertans' way of thinking, and that is optimization when it comes to water conservation. We are using that type of direction in our Water for Life strategy, and in terms of industry I will continue to hold their feet to the fire relative to the actions that they take regarding optimization, regarding conservation to ensure that we are thinking collectively together rather than independently.

We are looking for that interdependence among the users of our water. Great examples of that are in southern Alberta. I think the province of Alberta perhaps has the greatest reputation for water management over the last 100 years. Certainly, if you go and look at what's taking place south of the international border, you'll quickly learn what things are being done, that perhaps they are following – not perhaps, they are following – many of the actions we have taken in the last 100 years. There is no question that Albertans are experts when it comes to water management, and I'm proud as the Minister of Environment to be associated with so many Albertans that are water experts.

Industry needs to understand and fully comprehend that there is an expectation of them from a cumulative impact approach that they will work collectively with each other, that they will work and follow the regulations of this Environment ministry. We will use our stakeholder group. Again, we have a consensus-based cumulative impact committee in Fort McMurray. There have been areas where there has not been agreement, and that's where I as Minister of Environment will instruct what the law will be relative to the strong Water Act that we have in this province. That actually is taking place as we speak, today. I might add that I am putting, shall I say, very, very strong directives to industry in terms of that optimization of our water.

I look forward in the months and years ahead to being able to say that, one, we have protected our basins. We will always protect our basins, and no industry anywhere will ever damage our basins. That's a value that Albertans share and, I know, support in terms of the direction that our Water for Life strategy has been taking.

Cumulative impacts is something for which we will continue to use all of our resources from all corners of our province. There is no political border for water, there is no political border for land, and there is no political border for air. We need to be looking broader than silos, and that's exactly what our ministry is doing. We don't have silos in the Ministry of Environment, and I might say that at this time in this place there are more integrated approaches taking place with the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development, with the Ministry of Health, with the Ministry of Energy than ever before when it comes to these important initiatives that we are taking forward. SREM is just one small example of that type of approach that we are taking.

I do have some more information that I'd like to talk about, that the hon. member has brought up, which I think are important points, and I thank him for them because it allows me the opportunity to talk about some of the things that we're doing; for instance, our strategy for sustainability in the government of Alberta initiative. As we look at safe, secure drinking water, we also want to look at healthy aquatic ecosystems. We want to ensure that quality water supplies for our economy as well as for the basin are there long into the future, so we have a variety of programs. For instance, a major initiative in '06-07 is that we're developing a drinking water abatement program. That's where we're developing a program to support smaller rural centres and First Nation settlements to lower the risks associated with supplying safe drinking water through remote monitoring, operating training, and backup systems.

This also supports the rural development strategy, that the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright is so familiar with. I'm so pleased to say today that he now chairs the Standing Policy Committee on Energy and Sustainable Development. I was not aware, but did you know that the hon. member, in fact, has an honours in environmental science? I was quite shocked to learn that. He has assured me that he is not educated beyond his own intelligence, so that is very important as well.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that as we go forward in '06-07, we will spend on both operating and capital over \$10 million just on this small drinking water abatement program. We also want to continue to support our waterworks operators to implement a source to tap a multibarrier approach to improve the safety and security of our water delivery system through our approved facilities. This includes providing abatement and operation support to assist these facilities and completing the development of an alternate lab accreditation program to reduce operating costs while maintaining safety.

Also, we want to sustain the quality of life in Alberta's healthy aquatic ecosystems. We're developing a new test technique and tools for defining, monitoring, and assessing water. It also talks about the quality and health of the aquatic ecosystem, enhancing our knowledge required to assess the ecosystem's cumulative impacts of development. We also continue to work closely with our partners, with the Alberta Water Council system, part of our Water for Life strategy.

The Water Council, I might say, hasn't been mentioned here, and actually I haven't received a question. To the members across the way: maybe a question will come in the future because I would welcome the opportunity to talk about the great work by the Water Council but also relative to our provincial wetland policy. I have not heard anyone talk a lot about wetland policy. Wetlands are, of course, an important part of our system relative to our environment in the future. So maybe in the weeks ahead we'll be hearing about wetlands. That's so important, the wetland policy relative to the good work that the Alberta Water Council is carrying out for me.

I also want to talk about the reduction of risk and liabilities from flooding. As you know, in terms of the three top issues this ministry has dealt with in the last year, two of them were dealing with the Wabamun spill as well as the flooding down in southern Alberta. I want to say that I'm very proud of our people in the Ministry of Environment, very proud of the partnerships they have and the capacity they have in working with local officials at the municipal order of government. That, collectively, is why we don't need sometimes as much money as you would think. What we're doing is pooling our resources together. Ultimately, Albertans, who own and enjoy this beautiful resource, don't charge us to do things because they are the eyes and ears of the capacity that we have. I want every single person in this province to bear some of their individual environmental responsibility because ultimately, then, it

doesn't cost the taxpayers money because they're doing some of the work for us. So that's very important as we go forward.

I want to talk about the values of reusing and recycling; that is so important as well. I might add that for any of you who would like a free recycling container, please feel free to contact my office as we have these wonderful educational tools regarding the recycling containers that educate young people about recycling, reusing, being able to take plastics, aluminum, as well as glass so that they're recycled in a proper order.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you as well to the Minister of Environment for presenting his budget for this year to this Assembly. I would like to make both some general and specific comments in regard to this year's budget, and certainly the minister can feel free to answer me in writing or verbally or both. I would appreciate either interaction.

I'm very interested in this ministry, as many Albertans are across this province. I just wanted to remind this Assembly briefly what the core reason or business of the Ministry of Environment is and then, perhaps, use that as the framework by which I can apply some constructive criticism. The core businesses of the Ministry of Environment are to assure environmental quality in the province, make sure that Alberta's environment is clean and safe, receive effective and efficient services in regard to environmental issues, share environmental management and stewardship, and work with others to safeguard the environment.

4:00

Now, my most general criticism of this year's budget echoes, perhaps, what I had mentioned last year but even more emphatically so, that this budget as a whole is woefully inadequate to meet any or all of these needs in a realistic and honest manner. So we continue on for another year, Mr. Chairman, I think with lots of interesting ideas concerning the protection and enhancement of our physical environment but with very little means by which to enforce, to regulate, to monitor, to police the very intense impacts that we have on our natural environment here in the province of Alberta in 2006 and 2007. We are in the midst of an unprecedented amount of economic and industrial growth from the tip to the toe of this province, east to west. There has never been such economic investment and industrial development, resources extraction, population increase, infrastructure building, yet here we are again with pretty much the same number of a budget for the Department of Environment.

I know that the minister has told me that he has pushed hard to increase this budget, but then it really, I think, speaks to me to the lack of value that this government puts on the ability of this department to monitor and to regulate and to protect our environment that he has been refused, and in fact we end up with the same numbers that we had last year: considering inflation, really a reduced number for this ministry.

We see specific increases in some small areas. Certainly, the Water for Life initiative is an example of where we do see some investment. I'm encouraged by that in some small way, minus the fact that we haven't seen a concrete sort of plan coming out yet.

In regard to monitoring and enforcement and, as I said, this policing aspect of this ministry's duties I really, really have grave concerns. I think what we saw last year in Wabamun is indicative of that, and I know that what's come of that – and I'm encouraged by it to some small degree again – is the environmental SWAT team,

for lack of a better word, which has been promised. I await to see the results of that. I certainly was encouraged by some of the parameters that were set out to implement that early response emergency team. Hopefully, we can see something better for there.

I'm thinking of other things that would be similar to \$143 million for the whole of the Environment budget. You know, I'm thinking about the South Edmonton Common interchange, which was considerably more than that. To compare the two, perhaps, is slightly unfair, but I think it gives us an indication, Mr. Chairman, of where our priorities are in regard to budgeting the resources of this province. For us to spend considerably more on one overpass system, albeit a very interesting and undoubtedly complicated one to negotiate once it's finished, and for that to exceed by half the entire Environment budget I think tells us that we have a problem in regard to environmental protection.

I beg to differ with the minister. I think that in 50 years from now we still have time to change and to reform ourselves. Reform might be an interesting word echoing through here in the next 12 months or so. I think that we need to do something now, and with each opportunity that slips away from environmental protection, the sadder and the poorer we leave this place for the next generations.

Perhaps more disconcerting than this small sum the government has allocated to the ministry, that basically ensures that all other ministries can function, is the fact that the Minister of Environment's business plan is written in such a way as to seemingly place principle responsibility for all matters environment related, be they preservation, reclamation, stewardship, et cetera, upon the citizens of Alberta and, by proxy, the industry that our citizens of Alberta are engaged in. It goes back to some criticism that I often remark on here in this room, and that is that the basic responsibility of the government is not being realized here. We are meant to be regulating and to be providing some framework by which industry and individuals can operate in this province. We are doing a disservice to both industry and individuals and the environment by not enforcing that regulation in a reasonable way through this House.

The much-lauded Water for Life strategy and many other documents and performance plans that come out from this government seem to lay the principle responsibility of care for our environment on the individuals in this society, the regular folks. While that might be proved useful to some degree, I think that it abdicates some fundamental responsibility that will only lead to disastrous consequences.

While it is, of course, every citizen's duty to do all they can to minimize their own personal environmental impact, we as a New Democrat caucus find it curious that not once is industry actually named in this business plan. The rather broadly inclusive and completely nonspecific term "stakeholders" is used, which I'm getting a bit tired of – when you overuse a word in a nonspecific way, it loses its value – which one could assume refers to industry as well as average citizens. Continued emphasis on shared environmental goals, stewardship programs, endowments, educating the public and whatnot all results in the overall impression that anything wrong with the environment in Alberta is the problem of the individual. I would once again say, Mr. Chairperson, that this is a very dangerous strategy on which to base an environment policy.

The Auditor General's findings would seem to support this, for the last eight years – I suppose it was the preceding Auditor General – recommending that the minister obtain sufficient financial security to ensure conservation and reclamation of industrial sites. We need to heed the Auditor General's concerns about this for eight years. I think that's time slipping by, not doing something that is very important to this province. Currently no sufficient security is sought for large land-disturbing industries like coal and oil, natural gas, and

the taxpayers, regular people, are left footing the bill for reclamation projects that are otherwise abandoned by industry.

So I would ask the minister: please, would he be finally addressing the recommendations of the Auditor General regarding financial security for land disturbances? Will he table a specific plan and enforcement policy that might back up this policy? Second of all, must the Auditor General be the one to point out these inadequacies for another eight or 10 years or so while the minister speaks in a very generalized way about local watershed stewards and allows industry's methane to leak out of the citizens' water taps in CBM situations? I would certainly like to see some specific answer on that. Would the minister as well push to have financial security legislation updated before all remaining oil and coal sites are drilled?

Specific to the budget, Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask why it is that this government manages to spend outside the budget in just about every other ministry except this one. The Minister of Environment is either much more efficient, I suppose, with his spending, we could say, or this government is simply thrifty and not thoughtless where the environment is concerned and refuses to give this ministry any more money than the tiny little amount that it allocates every spring. Does the minister care to comment on the fact that his ministry is actually losing money this year? His overall budget has only increased by 1.5 per cent while inflation, according to Statistics Canada, which is a very low number – I would suggest it's higher – is at least 2.8 per cent. I would say that here in Alberta it's closer to 3 or 3 and a bit.

Enforcement. As I said before, specific now, monitoring and enforcement are very important in all ministries but perhaps more so for Environment. Without proper monitoring and enforcement, this ministry is rendering ineffective and unproductive whatever good intentions it might be putting forward in paper or verbally.

The assuring the environmental quality program has its budget increased by \$2.9 million, an increase of 3 per cent, barely above inflation. How can this minister justify the 6 per cent decrease in compliance and enforcement and the 13 per cent increase in approvals after a year that has seen so much activity and so much crisis? I think that those two numbers tell us a lot of what we need to know about the problems of this ministry: a decrease in compliance and an increase in approvals. I find that to be very troubling.

4:10

The citizens in Rosebud can light their well water on fire, and they're trucking water into ranches in the area because the cattle refuse to drink from the streams and from well water. Meanwhile, the events at Wabamun last summer are labelled an accident or an environmental disaster, which he likes to say verbally. In the ministry business plan it's just called an incident. If we're going to call it an ecodisaster, we're going to have to devote some funds to rehabilitating the lake and make sure that we see the results of the investigation on CN coming out in a reasonable time. We've been hearing for the last six months or more since CN was raided, and we haven't seen any of that information at all. I think I probably have more information and have released it in regard to CN's activities than this ministry has, and we need to see if CN is in fact culpable for the full disaster on this lake. The part of justice that we like to hear from the Tory side is timeliness in judicial process, and I think that we are behind the times in regard to the prosecution of the perpetrators of the Wabamun disaster.

Given that the citizens in the area surrounding Wabamun went for days without even being told they were being exposed to a toxic spill, it's even more shocking. It's outrageous that the ministry has seen to cut its reclamation and emergency preparedness budget by 25 per cent according to this budget. I find that to be unbelievable.

How can the minister justify this decrease? What possibly could be said to warrant the decrease in a budget meant for reclamation and for emergencies?

Is the Water for Life's sizable increase in the budget for this year indicative of an attempt to actually address some of these issues? I would like to see if perhaps we're moving from one place to another in order to address what is obviously a gaping hole in enforcement and reclamation and emergency preparedness.

The ministry's business plan likes to use verbs such as assist and recommend and work with and develop and implement, restrict, fine, punish, and any of the other verbs that might indicate that the ministry has some weight to throw around, but we don't see any real sign of that. I'm saying that fine, punish, restrict, and implement are things that we might like to see more of and less of this sort of work with, recommend, develop and whatnot because you do have to have the teeth behind the regulation that you put forward as considered to be important. Rather than endless platitudes and stated commitments to ensure high-quality environment, will the minister please actually commit to be pushing toward some change in this ministry: stricter emission standards, harsher penalties, quicker action in emergencies.

In regard to the goal to increase the use of renewables and alternative energy generation in reality we only see 1.2 per cent of energy generated in Alberta from renewable and alternate resources, and I would like to ask the minister, then, what he's going to do to change this. Why are the targets so low in years to come: 2.5 and 3 per cent respectively for the next two years?

Climate change. The climate change program budget only increased by 1 per cent between last year's budget and this year, and I would like to know why the ministry is not making any serious commitment on the question of climate change. We are seeing now from even the very most conservative circles that climate change is in fact upon us, and the main contributor to this climate change is human activity producing carbon dioxide into the environment.

As we develop our oil sands in northern Alberta, we will become one of the very largest, if not the largest, single source of CO₂ not just in North America but in the entire world. We need to do something about it. This is not acceptable. We're heading down a dead-end road that is only going to lead us to necessitate emergency change further down and lay that upon our next generations of people. Really, it's irresponsible to do that. We can spend the money now. We have the capacity to do some bridging into other forms of energy and to promote conservation. Really, there is no magic silver bullet that's going to save us from using hydrocarbons and to something else at this point in time. We can wax poetic about scientists saving the day, the 12th hour, the 11th hour, but really the main means that we have at our disposal right now is conservation, and we're not supporting conservation in any realistic way here in this province right now. It's a shame. It really is.

You can realize efficiencies in regard to electricity use that would not necessitate building new power plants or running these big 500 kV lines down to southern Alberta, which were mostly for export anyway. There are lots and lots of ways to produce electricity on a local level and to conserve the energy that we are using so that we don't even need those things. Once we set up the infrastructure that uses a coal-based system or a combination, we're stuck with that for a long time afterwards. Really, it's a dead end. We need to be supplying a system that is increasing its renewable factor and that does not continue to give people the illusion that they can consume energy with impunity. It's irresponsible to do so, and it goes against any best principle for change.

This whole \$3.6 million for our climate change program is not nearly enough. Considering the potential severity of consequences

of ignoring climate change, \$3.6 million really is just for public relations, as far as I can see. All of the intensity targets that we've set to suggest that we're actually doing something, again, are just simply for communications – otherwise known as propaganda – purposes.

What is being done in regard to the Clean Air Strategic Alliance regarding the capture of waste heat as an alternative source of energy? Cogeneration and all of the efficiencies that can be realized from an energy-producing province could revolutionize our energy production in this province, yet I see very little being done to encourage that sort of behaviour.

I just have a few more budget things that kind of pop out here to me. I would like the minister, please, to explain the massive increase in last year's expenditures related to intergovernmental relationships and partnerships and explain why none of that additional money is needed this year.

Number two, the ministry's business plan shows that stakeholder satisfaction with ministry programs is very, very poor: 55 per cent. First of all, who are these stakeholders? How has this number been generated? What's the minister proposing to do to address such public dismay with this ministry's performance?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. member, first of all, for recognizing our efficiency within the Ministry of Environment. He did say that our ministry is obviously efficient. Certainly, that is correct. We are efficient, and we'll continue to be efficient.

I want to say, though, that enforcement issues that the hon. member talked about are very important. It seems like some of the repeating comments this afternoon – and I understand – are more about: well, your budget only increased a small amount. Really, I want to share with you that I believe that the Ministry of Environment's budget, in terms of value, is worth billions of dollars because we have Albertans each and every day out there doing a lot of the work for us so that we can concentrate our time and effort on ensuring that Albertans are following the law through strong enforcement principles, where we have dollars allocated for enforcement to ensure that the law is being followed.

I thank Albertans as a whole because they are our eyes and our ears. They are the ones that are carrying out so much of the work be it on watershed councils or be it on our water councils. I want to say that I believe truly that our budget is worth billions and billions of dollars based on the good work and the excellent work of Albertans each and every day, many of the Albertans that give us our jobs in terms of the elected positions that we have. It's truly Albertans that are doing some of the great work for us through water councils, through watershed councils, through cumulative impact associations and stakeholders.

I think that that is important to recognize and to indicate so that any comments today saying that there's perhaps not enough money – sure, just like the way we run our household: would we like to have more money in our budget? Yes, we would. On the other side of it: do we have our neighbours help us to build a fence? Do we have our other neighbours help us to build a roof or repair a roof? Yes, we do. So it may not be reflected in the budget. Maybe it's simply perhaps a pizza and some Coke afterwards that determines that we got real value for working in association with each other. Let's not lose sight of what makes Alberta great. It's Albertans' energy, harnessing that energy. I know that our Ministry of Environment, in fact, harnesses that energy when it comes to getting

good work and, in fact, demonstrating that good work each and every day.

4:20

Pertaining to the issue of climate change I'm very proud to say that I was the only provincial Minister of Environment in all of Canada to speak at the United Nations to 189 countries in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In fact, I was invited to speak because of the initiatives and the green energy that we have demonstrated, the fact that 90 per cent of our green energy is in fact provided in the provincial buildings across the province – even the lights, as I mentioned earlier, that are in this room today – also because of the technologies and the innovation that we have. Clearly, we're going to be able to share the science and innovation and technologies that we have with the rest of the world because of our forward thinking. In actual fact, we will even have better long-term sustainable results in our energy efficiency because of the fact of that technology.

What are we doing? We're bringing in good people, bright minds, so that that technology that is not even created – did you know that the solutions five years from now have not even been created yet? What we are doing is creating an environment through such areas as the Alberta Research Council, our Climate Change Central board, the area boards, and the Minister of Innovation and Science: all of these collective energies we are using and tapping into.

For instance, did you know that, in actual fact, there are nine ministries that are carrying out duties relative to our Water for Life strategy? Not just one, Alberta environment protection, but nine ministries. Water, air, and land are impacting so many ministries when it comes to the good work that is taking place. I think it's important to recognize that we are not pigeonholing this just simply into one ministry. That's why I say that my ministry is truly worth billions of dollars because of the many partnerships that we've developed relative to educating and promoting best practices when it comes to such things as water used, for instance, for crops and livestock. We're also working with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development when it comes to so many best practices that we could use from an agricultural perspective. We also are working closely with the Alberta Water Council to develop strategies to help meet these important targets that I've set out. So let's not lose sight of the important initiatives that we're working with relative to the good work that we are doing.

I think it's also important to recognize that we are spending more than \$10 million on climate change through the Climate Change Central board and the work of the other ministries. You may not be aware, but the Climate Change Central board is the only climate change board in all of Canada, once again a first for Alberta. I think it reflects again our forward thinking. I want to compliment our Premier because it was about eight or nine years ago – in fact, I had the honour at the time of being the chairman – when the Premier asked to play a role in formulating Climate Change Central. I want to say that that forward thinking – well before others and the buzzword of climate change was out there – by our government and the actions and the direction from our Premier demonstrated that, in actual fact, we are not only out in front; we're around the corner when it comes to the proactive approach we're taking, when it comes to such important issues as climate change and in terms of the actions we are taking. So I don't want to lose sight of the important fact that over \$10 million is actually being carried out.

When it comes to emission standards, our emission standards in the province of Alberta without question are the highest standards and are leading North America. How many other ministers in terms of other provinces can stand up and say that relative to what we're doing?

Let me give you an example of that. We have taken some huge steps when it comes to keeping toxins out of the air. Our action plan includes cutting mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants in half. I ask you: by how much? By 50 per cent by the year 2010. This is a reduction of about 1,200 kilograms. You asked me how much? Twelve hundred kilograms annually. That's a substantial amount when it comes to what we're doing. We also are requiring a reduction in nitrous oxide emissions by 50 per cent by the year 2025. That's a reduction from 140,000 tonnes to 60,000 tonnes per year. Did you know that we require a two-thirds reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions by 2025? That's a reduction from 180,000 tonnes to 65,000 tonnes. The mercury emissions regulation that, of course, I talked about in this House when I received some questions from the hon. member earlier during this session, the fact that we now require industry to design and install a mercury control program in their plants by the year 2010 – that's four years from now – is certainly proactive, looking outside the windshield down the highway as opposed to looking in the rear-view mirror. It's so important for us to be looking to the future in terms of protecting the environment. That's exactly what we are doing. I want to say that they are just small examples of some of the things that we're doing.

I also want to say that relative to the issue of Wabamun there is no question – I just received a note that I have to move my estimates. I will move my estimates at the appropriate time, but I appreciate the wonderful reminder because we work as a team when it comes to important initiatives.

I would like to continue on. [interjections] Would you like me to carry on? Would you like me to ask for unanimous consent? I would like to ask for unanimous consent to carry on for the next period of time because I have so much to say.

The Chair: You still have 10 minutes.

Mr. Boutilier: I still have 10 minutes. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, then, I will continue on.

I want to talk about approvals for a moment because the hon. member asked some very good points relative to the approvals and compliance numbers that, in fact, we have. I want to say today that the approvals and the compliance that we carry out within the province of Alberta are so important.

I want to say that the more money we spend on issues such as those in the speech I made earlier, there is no increase or decrease in compliance because we've moved our money to focus in on sweeps. I don't know if you're aware of what that means, but in order to move forward, what we try to do is more education to ensure companies do what they need to do. But we are not afraid of enforcing the strong Alberta laws that we have because the strong Alberta laws are something that Albertans expect of us. From an enforcement perspective it's so important as we go forward that the enforcement efforts we are taking are strong, are direct, are transparent, and that we communicate with all Albertans relative to the work we are doing there. We'll continue to do that because of the important value that Albertans place on that type of initiative.

I want to say that it's a common goal in each of the sectors that we work with on a very frequent basis, as we work collectively together, that we want to ensure things such as building an excellent program for launching public awareness when it comes to education campaigns, stewardship campaigns, programs for paint and construction and demolition waste, the organics in packaging and printed material.

When's the last time any of you were to a Future Shop? It is my dream that we will have a conservation strategy that when you go to a Future Shop to buy a headset or an iPod, you won't need a chainsaw to open the package. In fact, did you know that 140,000

accidents actually take place every holiday season, Christmas season, because when people are opening the packaging, it is so strong and it's so encased with plastics that there are 140,000 injuries that take place? So rather than requiring this incredible, incredible waste of plastic and paper, I believe in a conservation strategy that forces small business or big business to in fact not have packages.

4:30

In fact, what do you think of this? When you go to the grocery store to shop in the next while, bring your own actual shopping bag with you rather than using and wasting the plastics that they provide to you. Bring your own bag with you. Okay? Show individual responsibility. Albertans are doing it, and I applaud those Albertans that are doing it. How many in here bring a bag with you when you go to buy your groceries? Well, I do, and others do. I've seen the hon. members from Calgary and from down in Cypress-Medicine Hat. They are taking that action. Again, it doesn't need to be a government regulation. You can do it by your own individual action. These types of examples are, I think, really important.

Now, I want to say that the hon. member also talked about reclamation. We have a very aggressive plan when it comes to reclamation. We are responding to the recommendations of the Auditor General. Security is in place, and I want to say that we take the recommendation seriously. We will continue to work with industry and environmental stakeholders relative to this important issue, when it comes to that of reclamation, and that's exactly what we are doing.

Pertaining to stakeholders, including industry, NGOs, citizens, and other levels of government, our job is to provide oversight and to ensure that the environmental outcomes are met. We are the regulatory backstop. It's like a baseball game. You need a backstop there, but ultimately the players are each and every one of us. Industry, NGOs – all citizens are involved. I want to assure the hon. member and all members of the Assembly that all Albertans can be assured that the Alberta environment protection ministry is the backstop when it comes to regulatory backstopping the laws that we have, and I will continue to be that backstop because I believe that we need to continue to work collectively together.

Let me just say, Mr. Chairman, that my ministry is without question in the billions of dollars. I thank the Albertans that give us our job, and I'm sure all members will join me in thanking Albertans for providing the work and for the individual responsibility that they take. Many of them actually volunteer to sit on a watershed council, to sit on a water council, to sit on a cumulative impact, to sit on a variety of committees that are so important in doing the work of Alberta Environment. Is there a lot of money associated with that volunteerism? No, there's not because that is truly, just like MasterCard, priceless. I want to say that as Minister of Environment that's how I view their work each and every day and that priceless effort that they put in because of their commitment to the environmental principles that I've talked about.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say today that the questions that have been asked are important questions. They're good questions. I want to say that we'll continue to enforce those principles that we have in protecting and sustaining for the long-term benefit of all Albertans 50 years and a hundred years from now.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, share enthusiasm for the environment, as does the minister and the other members that

have spoken here and as most Albertans do. It is exciting, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the minister at this time regarding his portfolio.

One of the things that I'd have to say is that we are bringing all Albertans together, Alberta businesses, and the environment. We are a family, and if we don't realize that, we're going to die because we need to sustain all three in order to enjoy the prosperous and good times that we have here.

We very much need to find a balance between energy and the environment, and I appreciate that the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Environment are showing more co-operation and having the desire to work together. Being a long-time scouter, I've always believed that it is our stewardship to use our resources wisely. If we don't leave the province in better shape than what we found it in, then it's: shame on us and what are we doing?

Our forefathers had a time when they struggled through the Dirty Thirties, and we saw the land erosion and the problems that went forth. Innovation and the people of Alberta overcame that. Once again we're in a time where we're destroying much of our environment, and we need to take a step back to see how we want to do it. To quote from a speech that Mr. Manning recently gave to many of you, he said: the environmental impact of energy extraction in a province built on oil and gas wealth needs to be addressed. I feel that we are doing that, but we have a lot more that we need to do in order to reach that challenge.

Perhaps the biggest challenge that we face as a province is because of the prosperity that we're enjoying, and too often we don't look after the bounty. A number of times I've gone into the mountains to a pristine, unique place, and people are wanting to chop down trees or do other things because they say: well, nobody else gets here. But in no time the footprint of human invasion destroys that environment, so we want to put it high on the list. So I ask the question: what can and should we do as Albertans for the environment?

I would like to start off with some environmental initiatives. We just currently filled the Alberta furnace replacement program. That initiative was filled, and the people of Alberta responded I think more overwhelmingly than the ministry expected, and that was shut down, saying: well, we've reached that.

I'd like to talk about some other initiatives that we should and could be doing. I very much appreciate the different communities throughout the province that are wanting to put in environmental, I guess, communities and the money that the government has put in there, but I ask the question: is a half million dollar grant the proper way to go at that? Or should we be putting in business tax credits or property tax reductions that would have people want to develop and reap the benefits but not have to put in the dollars? Too often when government is the one who is putting the initiative forward, it's not necessarily the best – well, what would I say? – free enterprise that takes place, but they're being driven very much by the different programs that are put out there. So perhaps if the minister would consider looking at more tax incentives like we use in the oil and gas industry to bring on those initiatives, it would be a benefit.

There are many areas where we could have green power, whether that's solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, biomass reactors, or even thermal biomass reactors, that take a huge capital expense to put up, yet there are no tax incentives or even a dropping of tax in order to bring that investment into the province at a greater and more amiable rate than we are at the current time. So I would encourage the minister to look at the different initiatives that we could do.

Some other ones. There are some very unique and – well, what would I say? – excellent toilets. When Australia was faced with the Olympics down there, they designed a new two-flush toilet that is

slowly starting to come into the province. What could we do if we were to give a tax credit of \$100 a year to a family that wanted to install the two-flush toilet or, for example, that new Banff area that's going to collect their rainwater and use that for flushing their toilets? There are many, many good ideas out there, yet there's no initiative or no incentive other than our own personal ones to do that. There are many Albertans that are doing that, but let's inspire them to reach greater heights and to quicken the pace of our turnover by putting some initiatives there where they are rewarded more than just by the personal aspect.

I want to speak for a minute and read a quote. When one first reads it, it's almost offensive, but it says, "The best thing that could happen to the environment is free-market capitalism." That was by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., not the source you'd think it would come from.

I'd like to refer for a minute to my area down in Waterton national park. It's a very beautiful, pristine area there. The ranchers were being driven out by people who wanted to go in and put up cabins in other areas. I had many of them come to me and say, "Well, Paul, you've got to do something to stop this. I said: "Well, it's a free market. What can we possibly do?" I more recently had those developers come to me, and they're concerned. They said: "Paul, you've got to stop this. We can't afford to buy the land for development because now the conservation groups are coming down and spending more money than we can for development." That is the free market. If, in fact, it is so near and dear to Albertans, allow them to put the money in there and protect our property. They will do as they're doing in my riding down in the Waterton area.

4:40

There are a few other areas that I wanted to go into. We've spoken a lot about water, but I'll touch base on it just for a little bit here today. The Water for Life strategy, to my understanding, is three years old now, I believe, and it was said there in the intent of going out mapping and having inventory and testing the groundwater and aquifers throughout the province. One of the most alarming things that's come out in this last week – and you're saying that it's law now – is this water well testing if, in fact, we're going to have any development for the coal-bed methane or anything else.

I asked the minister: do you realize that we have many underground waterways and aquifers that are larger than just a quarter section or 600 metres? Many landowners have talked to me and are concerned about this. They say: "You know what? They're going to drill a mile away, but I know that that aquifer I pull my water out of goes out that distance, one mile away." Yet we're saying that, oh, it isn't going to affect you because the science says that 600 metres is a good distance.

I put it to this House that it isn't a good distance, and there are many waterways that go for miles, underground streams that flow. The farmers and ranchers are tapped into those streams, and we need to have a much broader view. We need to go forward and actually do this mapping that we've been talking about and not protect it for a 600-metre region around a home.

We need to go forward. We need to do the entire mapping. We need to do the testing, the isotopes, and know what's down there to prevent a disaster in the future. An ounce of prevention is better than a pound or a billion dollars' worth of cure after.

I'm very concerned about that, and I hope that we can readdress this temporary 600-metre law that's been passed and that the EUB is facing, but it's not sufficient. Science tells us that these underground aquifers are much larger, and we need to look at that. I hope that the minister will take note and be able to act on that.

There are other areas when it comes to water. He's referred several times to flooding this spring, and the damage that's done by

that flooding is enormous. It's caused a lot of problems throughout Alberta, but we also have to look at it from the other side. We lost a lot of opportunity when that water went down and left the province on its way to the ocean. I would ask the minister again: how many environmental assessments have been done? Is the off-stream storage and dams that could be put in place for 20 years down the road there, and are we ready to act upon them?

If an international agreement is reached for the Milk River, have we got our house in order to act promptly and quickly on that opportunity to place water storage on that river? I hope that we do and that the minister could update us on that and let us know. All across the province I would ask that we would be doing that and enhance the studies if they're not done so that we are prepared at a moment's notice when the opportunity is there.

Other initiatives when it comes to damming of the water and using it for the production of agricultural produce. Irrigation continues to grow in my area in the south. It's definitely the breadbasket of Alberta with the diversity of products that are produced down there, but one of the ongoing challenges that we're faced with is updating many of the old canal structures and realizing that as you're wanting to reach that goal, buried pipelines are a much better and more efficient delivery of water. Not only that, if we were to take the initiative to put in some larger pipelines, there's a lot of head or pressure that could be developed that would dramatically reduce the amount of energy that we need to irrigate our lands if we use the initiative and look and do the engineering to capture that energy and use it.

Another area that I'd like to switch to is the flaring of gas wells. It's been an ongoing problem. I've spoken of it in the past. We do have the ability. Because that gas is just being flared, you could easily bring in compressors and have those companies compress that, put it into tankers, and use it in other parts of the province. It seems wrong that we can just flare it and it's gone and that there's no value to it.

Another area of concern. I guess I should start this by saying: what environmental regulations could we adjust in the province that would be a benefit to our environment as well as to business and take some of the competitive angles out? Two or three areas. One is that our pooling system currently often puts two companies into competition to see who can get the gas out of the ground quicker, and they sometimes use as much as 25, 35 per cent of the energy in order to suck it out because it's to their economic benefit but not necessarily to the province's. Whether we could look at some regulations to do that from an environmental point perhaps would be a benefit.

Also, the environmental impact of all the pipelines that cross our property. If Environment would say that pipelines are intrusive and we don't want that many, perhaps we could look at passing an environmental law where they have to get together and co-ordinate the use of fewer pipelines rather than so many that are currently being used. Another area that we'd like to see is basically, like I say, with the pooling, to somehow adjust it so that the competition isn't there to try and take it from the neighbour or the competition before they get in and have time to drill a well and capture that.

The other area I'd like to switch to is electrical production. There's an enormous opportunity to produce electricity, whether that's with a small windmill at someone's home or out on the farm, whether we use solar energy or other areas, but there's no incentive there from the government, whether it's tax credits or something else, to put that in there other than the fact of people wanting to be self-sufficient, which is an inherent trait with Albertans. Perhaps we could go back, and one of the most important things to do would be to look at zero-based metering again for both industry and home-

owners, that would be a benefit, in order to increase the production of electricity throughout the province.

I realize here, as I'm looking at my notes, that another area that I missed on initiatives is that there are a growing number of Albertans that are actually drilling down 100, 200 feet for thermal heat in order to heat their homes. Actually, a few people have contacted me wanting to disconnect their gas lines to their house because they're using geothermal heat to warm their homes at a cost of between \$5,000 and \$12,000. Is that another area where we could look at perhaps some incentives to reduce the necessity of natural gas for many things that we have in our homes?

Another concern that I have is the geologists and the mapping that has gone on across the province for the fossil fuels is just immense, and the amount of seismic work and all of those things that we have, yet we haven't started to scratch the surface on doing that for water assessment, which you've talked so much about and is so near and dear to you. I wonder if there isn't some way, possibly, as these drilling processes continue, especially with coal-bed methane, that they need to report the different aquifers as they're drilling and as they strike and go through a water zone. My understanding is that it would be easy for them to document and to perhaps assist Environment in doing a lot of the assessments going on there.

You've spoken passionately about innovation and the abilities that we have, and I'm very much in tune with you on that. What can we do and what can we discover here in Alberta that we can share with the rest of the world? One of those is coal generation of electricity. We have an immense amount. We could bring in a lot of research, and to have zero emission I believe is achievable and something that we should look at with coal gasification, with CO₂ sequestration, and inject them down into the different areas in order to increase the production of oil.

Perhaps the biggest and most important point – and you've brought this out – is: what can we do and what technology can we share with the rest of the world? I'm still very much concerned with the 500-plus coal-generation plants that China is wanting to come forward with in the next 10 years. If we don't do the research and develop that here, there's very little chance that they're going to do it over there. We live in a prosperous land. We have the revenue and the ability to do it, and I would encourage the Minister of Energy to continue working with the Minister of Innovation and Science to get perks and ideas that would aid the industry in developing that so that we could have clean-coal production of electricity, that would benefit all of us, not just here in Alberta but around the world.

4:50

Perhaps, in closing, I would just encourage the minister to realize that he very much has the opportunity to protect the environment as he works with the different ministries. As you said, there are nine other ministers that you're working with. Our environment is our most important asset. Human nature in the past has been to use and move on, but we don't have new places to move to. We were the last frontier. We're developing it here. We have an abundance of resource, but let's balance the two. Let's make sure that this is something that will benefit not only us at the current time but future generations so that they can look back and see the stewardship that we used for the benefit and the protection of the next generation.

With that, I'll wait to hear from the minister. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much. I certainly agree with a lot of what the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has said. I couldn't agree with him more in terms of the examples of Climate

Change Central where we had a furnace retrofit program where \$300 was offered as an incentive. If you had an old furnace that was in fact emitting and was inefficient, we offered \$300 as a tax incentive that citizens could then apply for. Not only have we broadened that, but we've expanded it now to washing machines, for the efficient use of water. I don't know if you're aware, but for those of you that do your laundry, there are more efficient washing machines today.

I want to commit to the hon. member, as well, that we will continue to look for innovative fiscal tools so that we'll be sustainable well into the future. In fact, it's where citizens recognize that it's good sense for them in terms of the operation and the usage of the resource we have, but it's also good for the government because it makes the Alberta environment a better place. I believe that when we talk about climate change, when we talk about fiscal instruments, that is so important for us.

[Ms Pastoor in the chair]

I believe we need to continue to focus on best practices. So what are the best practices? In fact, if I were to go around to every member of this Assembly and ask what are the best environmental practices that we carry out each and every day, I know that one of them is simply this: I get into my little Smart Car and I drive to work. There's even a better smart practice than that, and that's walk to work or bike to work. I think we all know that. Certainly, that's a long way to go from driving an SUV to get to work in terms of what that cost is on a daily basis.

Now, I also want to talk, for example, about the initiatives that we've taken. I want to say to the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster that I'm going to be visiting his constituency later on this evening. I've had the honour of visiting down in the Milk River area. Lakeland College is where they're actually using new, innovative alternative energy solutions because of biodiesel. That's where they're able to take a waste stream and turn it into the biodiesel that is being used now. I want to compliment the ideas that the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster had, and I'm looking forward to visiting the students at Lakeland College later tonight. I also want to say that it's a real tribute to the students who have shown their typical ingenuity where they're taking this potential waste stream, but it also provides a cleaner energy solution, and that's exactly what the hon. member has been talking about.

What are the best practices that we can demonstrate? Of course, Albertans have been so innovative and entrepreneurial. One of the weaknesses we had in our furnace program was that when we retrofitted their furnace or they decided to replace it with a new furnace, what happened was that they took the old furnace and put it in their garage and actually used it for another energy source. I guess one of the flaws of our program was that we had to make sure that it was completely retrofitted and wasn't used in an inefficient way to heat your garage. So we've got to perhaps strengthen our public policy. But that's the entrepreneurial spirit that Albertans have in terms of best practices.

I want to say that as we have moved to so many important initiatives from a broad range of water management tools and techniques, we will continue to use our resources available in a variety of ways when it comes to flood risk avoidance and warning. We also are developing, of course, regulatory and nonregulatory tools and incentives to encourage, support, and reward good environmental performance. We're also developing and implementing a third-party contracting program to support and assist the minister's efforts to review major projects. We're also providing a review and a process to increase capacity to continuously improve

and integrate the regulatory regime, including clarifying approval requirements, streamlining it, and evaluating and streamlining reporting requirements, that are so important to us.

But it's really important, in response to the recommendations of the Environmental Protection Commission, to build ministry capacity in terms of supporting all hazards, environment incident planning, which the hon. member has mentioned, and response systems throughout the province and improve business continuity regarding planning and preparedness in partnership with Emergency Management Alberta and the other government stakeholder agencies. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is responsible for Emergency Management Alberta, which is so important, but I want to say that collectively we're working together with all of our energies so that we get the best result and the best outcome in serving Albertans. I can assure members of this Assembly that that's exactly what we are doing.

I don't know if you are aware, but actually for the washing machine rebate program we had over 3,000 citizens from Alberta that applied – in southern Alberta, central Alberta, and northern Alberta – and actually had their washing machines retrofitted. As much as that may seem small, just think of the water that we have saved from a conservation perspective. So you may not be aware, but we had over 3,000 that in fact applied and were successful in being able to take advantage of this instrument.

Mr. Lund: How does the program work?

Mr. Boutilier: The way the program works is that you apply on our website. If you go to Climate Change Central and energy solutions, you see that if you want to go ahead and retrofit your washing machine or retrofit your furnace, you can apply. Of course, what I'm encouraged by is that we actually have more applications than we have money. So, obviously, having, as the hon. member talked about, different fiscal instruments that we can use to incent I think makes so much sense and is no cost to the government because what we're really encouraging is best practices, that is so important.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The hon. member did talk about flaring. I don't know if you are aware, but CASA, the Clean Air Strategic Alliance – I want you to be aware, to the hon. member, that we had over a 62 per cent reduction in flaring. I want to let you know that that is so important. In fact, I want to let the hon. member know that we're going to increase that number even higher in the future because flaring reductions are the good work of Albertans coming together, working together to get the desired environmental outcomes. So we've had a 62 per cent reduction in flaring, which I think is a tribute to Albertans who have worked on this consensus-based model.

I also want to say that for the furnace rebate we had over 1,700 applications and, in fact, spent almost half a million dollars relative to that. But I'd like to enlarge that, and I'd like to engage even more Albertans because they truly are best practices.

So what we have been doing is investigating by investing significant dollars in research into so many areas. I'm looking forward, I want to say, to the fact that this province will be the first province in all of North America, the first state for those in America, when it comes to a CO₂ pipeline, a pipeline that will take something that has been determined to be not good, in fact is contributing to global warming because it's really simply humanly made, the CO₂ from our car or whatever. I want to take all of that CO₂ that is harming our climate, global warming, and I want to put it into something good. So I want to take all of the CO₂ – I want to capture

it and store it – and use the CO₂ for enhanced oil recovery, put it to something good.

5:00

I want to be able to do that in a way that we will have a pipeline network all over our province so that this pipeline, I am convinced, will in fact surpass the Kyoto targets that were established by perhaps a flawed public policy example. I do want to let you know that I believe that it is so important as we go forward that we will surpass the Kyoto targets, and we'll do it because of the innovation and the technology that we have in this province. I want to say that the hon. member talked about that we're going to export that technology and that smartness all across the world. Albertans will have a reputation as being the leaders because this province will not only be, as the Minister of Energy often talks about, the energy capital of Canada; we will become the environmental capital of North America in terms of our leadership and innovation that we are going forward with so that we will share it with countries like China, that has 300 coal generating plants coming forward.

We're going to be doing it in a way that, clearly, even the new Minister of Government Services – I know that he's shaking his head in agreement with the Minister of Energy when it comes to these environmental practices. I want to thank him for his good work as the former chair of the standing policy committee because many of those initiatives on mercury regulation that we have put in are the strongest standards in the country, and they're right here in the province of Alberta.

Now, I know that often the media don't in fact talk about those types of good, positive, proactive measures. In fact, it's really interesting. You may not be aware, but this week when we announced the standard on water in terms of what we're doing, did you know that as much as there have been lots of concerns in the past months about water, which I think are legitimate and important, what is really important is that it seems like this good news and the positive stories about what Alberta is doing, reflecting the value of Albertans, is not being seen on the front page of the newspaper or as the lead news story? If it's not bad news, then it's not necessarily news.

I'll tell you that I will stand on the highest mountaintop of this province to talk about the excellent work of Albertans, the excellent work of their practices, and the excellent work that we continue to do as a government in protecting this environment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Before I recognize the next speaker, would the minister like to move his estimates?

Mr. Boutilier: It would be my pleasure to move the estimates of the Ministry of Environment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the hon. minister. I can tell and so can everyone in this House that this minister is passionate about the environment, absolutely. It reflects in his tone of voice. It reflects in his spirit. It also reflects in his answers to all the questions that were asked so far. If anything, he definitely tries to understand his department, and he's representing it quite adequately.

I have just a few points, and I realize, looking at the clock, that I might not receive a full or comprehensive answer, but I'll get them on the record. I would appreciate it if the hon. minister reviews *Hansard* and then possibly responds in writing.

This is quite an important ministry, of course, and as mentioned by the speakers before me and by the hon. minister himself, it deserves more attention, and it deserves more recognition, and it needs to be empowered more. I noted, and so did my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, that the budget for this particular ministry only receives .5 per cent of the total provincial budget. For an important ministry like this one I think that this is an estimate, an allocation that needs revisiting. This is quite low. As was mentioned before, it needs to at least be quadrupled from this current level to have any decent effect on the environmental affairs of this province.

Now, over this past week there was a lot of talk about government size and about, you know, restructuring and how things could be done better and so on. I'm of the belief that the two departments, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, did not need to be split when it happened and that maybe one area of streamlining and consolidation and saving taxpayers' money would be to bring them back together into one. Really, some of the work is shared. It could be run centrally by consolidating both departments. That's a comment on sort of the budget angle of things.

My main focus today, Mr. Chairman, would be around water. Many people talk about water as the greatest resource and how it's more important to our lives and the lives of our offspring, our children and grandchildren, than things like oil and gas, for example. I'm not taking away from oil and gas, and I'm not belittling those other resources, but basically water, in my opinion, is the utmost resource.

Recently my caucus colleagues and I went up to Fort McMurray, where this hon. minister comes from, and we had wonderful visits with the constituents there. Water was brought up two or three times in discussions with the locals not in terms of, you know, the quality of the drinking water and so on, but basically some of the residents – and I'm sure that this is a concern that the hon. minister shares – were concerned about water usage for industry and how the oil sands projects, huge revenue-generating opportunities for this province, are also placing a bit of pressure or some strain on our water system, for the water that they draw out of the Athabasca River is never put back. Now, I know that there's an argument that these oil companies recycle some of that water. I agree, but they recycle it for their own purposes. They recycle it internally, and it is never put back into the water source where it came from. So it is, in a way, water that is lost. It never comes back.

Another area is about reclamation and restoration of oil sands land. We received a tour of Albion sands, and we were also shown a video and a slide show of how land is reclaimed. I must admit that it was eye opening. It was really amazing. However, one concern I have as a layman – I'm not a scientist, but as a layman. You remove the top layer of land, which is sort of the cultivated component, you set it aside, and you store it. Then what you do is that you excavate, you remove the oil sands, and you process them. Then you have the sand that's left in that tailings pond at the end and some water. This land is sort of restored back by putting the sand back and then replacing that top layer.

The question I have is basically a question of volume. If you've taken, let's say, 10 cubic meters out and now you're putting 7 cubic meters back in, the elevation of this land is lower than it was originally. I would ask the hon. minister if he's considering all this new research about land fillers. There is technology out there now that talks about land fillers. They're inert substances that are totally innocuous and are put back to restore the volume of the land. Why would this be important? Well, first, over time if the topographic and the geographic image, or map if you will, of those lands is changing, the least we can do is restore it to as near natural a state as possible.

I would use the parallel of having mountains and valleys. Mountains are there for a reason. People look at them as sort of anchors, and I'm not only referring to them from the Biblical sense. From a topographic definition they are there for a reason, and basically it's for seismic control. It's for, you know, different reasons pertaining to the environment. So I would urge the minister to consider the use of land fillers to restore the height or the elevation of those lands after they have been excavated.

Water. Back to that main issue, water being the main resource. We've heard over the past few weeks some complaints or some cautions about exporting water outside of this province. You've heard this from scientists. You've heard it from, you know, citizens groups. You've heard it from noted Albertans – the hon. Peter Lougheed as one example – saying that maybe we should be thinking twice before we export any drop of water outside of this province. I know that the minister is definitely aware of this and is considering all the different aspects of something like this, but it was worth putting on the record that there is definitely mounting opposition to exporting our water when the resource is dwindling, and it is disappearing.

5:10

If I we're going to sell water, my approach or my advice would be to sell a finished product, the bottled water, the commercial retail type of water, and you sell it at a premium. If you ask me, Mr. Chairman, I would charge more for a barrel of water than we do for a barrel of oil. We're using water to make oil. Oil is not more important. If we're selling water to the U.S. or whomever, we would sell it at a premium in a finished-product format. We're not going to truck it in the raw format to whomever uses it. You know what? They might end up selling it back to us as bottled water, which really defies any sense from a business standpoint.

It was also mentioned about conducting a total inventory: surface water, deep aquifer, rivers, well water, the whole bit. I definitely support this, and I look at it as a snapshot, a picture of where we're at today. Then we can use it as a benchmark against which we measure where we're at tomorrow and a year from now and 10 years from now. There are technologies out there which might not be as expensive as people would think. You can take satellite imagery. They call it piercing satellite imagery, which basically pierces the layers of earth, and it tells you how much water and where.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoon, I must now put the

following questions after considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Environment for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$142,091,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$1,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that we rise and report the vote on the estimates of the Ministry of Environment and seek leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, '07, for the following department.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$142,091,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and reconvene this evening at 8 o'clock in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:14 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 11, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/04/11

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Municipal Affairs

The Chair: I'd call on the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure this evening to move the estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs for the fiscal year 2006-07, and I'm also looking forward to presenting and discussing the three-year business plan for 2006-2009.

Just before I get started, Mr. Chairman, if I could, I would like to introduce some of the staff that have joined us in the members' gallery this evening: Deputy Minister Dan Bader; assistant deputy minister, local government services, Brian Quickfall; acting assistant deputy minister, public safety division, Ivan Moore; executive director, financial and information technology services, Peter Crerar; communications director, Jay O'Neill; and many have met my executive assistant, Richard Westlund.

The Chair: Hon. minister, I was requested to have some introductions before you start. Would that be okay?

Mr. Renner: Sure.

The Chair: Is it agreed to have Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a fine group of young people, the 114th Lorelei Cubs. They are today assisted by leaders Mr. Joe Hart, Mr. Scott Wilson, and Mr. Mike Sokoluik. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of our Assembly.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Municipal Affairs (continued)

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks again, Mr. Chairman. I want to also welcome the Cubs here. I was in Cubs a long time ago. In fact, it was so long ago that I was in Cubs that we still had green uniforms and short pants. So that was quite some time ago.

Mr. Chairman, before I move on to the rest of the report, I was in the process of introducing my staff, and I know that they've heard me say it before, but I want to reiterate how proud I am of not only the executive staff that are with us this evening but all of the employees in Municipal Affairs. No matter where I travel all over the province, whether it be to municipalities, to various associations,

I get nothing but compliments about the professionalism of everybody that's working in Municipal Affairs. I think it is worth noting that this is an organization that really is truly committed to their stakeholders, to our municipalities and to Albertans, and I want to publicly acknowledge that before I go on any further.

Mr. Chairman, I'll start my presentation by providing an overview of the '06-09 business plan. This will illustrate the basis for our spending estimates. Our '06-09 plan hasn't changed much from our '05-08 plan. In most cases it's been fine-tuned to reflect opportunities and challenges that have been identified. We've identified four opportunities and challenges that have affected our business plan.

The first is our relationship with our municipal partners. The ministry has an opportunity to play a significant role in making services provided to Albertans more effective and efficient. The key role to this is enhancing the relationship between government, municipalities, and municipal organizations. The Ministry will be working with its municipal partners to identify ways to enhance these relationships through various mechanisms, such as the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability.

One of the challenges we've identified has to do with growth. With growth intensifying in many areas of the province, municipalities are in some cases struggling to address this growth. We've heard from our stakeholders that they want us to work with them to address broad planning and coordination issues. This will help us to both maximize opportunities and minimize disputes.

Tied into this is the challenge of municipal financial sustainability. The rural development strategy hit the nail on the head when it pointed out that while some municipalities are growing, others are facing economic and demographic decline. Municipal Affairs needs to work with other ministries to determine what the province might do to work with these primarily small urban and rural municipalities to assist them in exploring ways to deliver services within the constraints of their resources.

The final challenge that we've identified deals with public safety. The safety of Albertans is a priority for Municipal Affairs, and we're working extensively with our many partners to enhance the province's ability to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and emergencies. Part of this process involves completing a risk management which will include all hazards from weather to terrorism to environmental incidents. We will also continue to work specifically on hazards to critical infrastructure as well as high-priority issues such as pandemic influenza and business continuity planning.

Continuing in the public safety vein, the province's safety codes and standards need to continue to be reviewed and revised. This is in response to industry innovation and to ensure that buildings and equipment are constructed and operated safely. An opportunity for us in this area involves working with Alberta's fire service to develop a framework to assist in better co-ordinating the fire service operations across the province. This will provide communities with the option of choosing service standards that most appropriately meet their local needs. With the ongoing support of partners the ministry is committed to addressing new opportunities and challenges, accommodating new technologies, and developing effective solutions to meet the changing needs and priorities of Albertans.

In terms of our strategic priorities our first priority focuses on provincial/municipal relationships. The key here is to work with our municipal partners to reassess and better define the roles and responsibilities of municipal governments and their relationship with the provincial government. Increased clarity regarding roles and responsibilities will enable each order of government to more efficiently and effectively deliver the services for which it's responsible.

We'll also help determine the most appropriate funding vehicles attached to these roles and responsibilities. The role in this case is an understanding that clearly delineates which order of government is best suited for delivering which services.

Our second priority is emergency management. Local and world events have emphasized the need to enhance existing provincial government emergency management. We also need to further develop provincial and local capabilities to deal with major emergencies and disasters. While we have a solid emergency management framework in place here in Alberta, my Environmental Protection Commission's report into last year's train derailment at Wabamun pointed out the need to focus on this for enhancement. The report made several recommendations where we could improve our collective preparedness and responsiveness to emergency situations. Addressing these recommendations is a priority for Municipal Affairs. We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that our citizens and infrastructure are safe from all hazards and that response and prevention activities are planned, practised, and co-ordinated.

Our third strategic priority has been modified a bit from last year's business plan. It's been changed from land-use policies to using and respecting the land, but the goal is still the same: an updated set of land-use policies that are co-ordinated with and supported by affected provincial ministries and municipal stakeholders. We'll achieve this by working with other ministries in the context of land-use framework to ensure that the land-use policies remain appropriate. This will ensure that policies meet the challenges and needs of municipalities and Albertans in a way that balances the interests of all parties.

Our fourth strategic priority is to focus on intermunicipal partnerships. We will continue to encourage and facilitate partnerships involving joint planning, innovation, and common opportunities for things like shared resourcing and the delivery of services and programs. This approach provides opportunities to deliver services more effectively, which will help municipalities make the most of limited resources. Our goal is an increase in the number of municipalities working co-operatively to improve service delivery, including partnerships established through the regional partnerships initiative.

Our fifth strategic priority deals with safety system enhancements. I mentioned the growth that's occurring across the province. Part of dealing with this growth is to review the province's safety legislation to ensure that it's current and responsive to changing needs. This review is already under way and includes a move to introduce harmonized objective-based codes in the building, fire, and plumbing disciplines through national and international code standards.

I also mentioned our work to establish a unifying framework for Alberta's fire services. We feel that this will provide a strong foundation for innovation in the fire service as well as the ability for fire departments to deliver fire services that meet individual community needs. This ties in with our goal of continuing to meet national and international safety code standards.

Our final strategic priority is newly identified and deals with municipal growth pressures. I think you'll find that this issue runs through much of our work in the coming years. Municipal Affairs will continue to evaluate the impact of high growth on municipalities, including infrastructure, land-use service, and revenue needs. This will help us to assist in building the capacity of these municipalities as well as improve the co-ordination of the government's response to growth-related challenges. We want to ensure that high-growth municipalities in the province are better able to anticipate and meet growth-related challenges. This should result in a reduction in the number of disputes caused by development

pressures and help ensure that Alberta's continued economic growth is not impeded by a lack of infrastructure and services.

8:10

In terms of our core businesses they have remained the same; namely, an effective, responsive, co-operative, and well-managed local government sector; financially sustainable and accountable municipalities; a well-managed and efficient assessment and property tax system in which stakeholders have confidence; a comprehensive safety system that provides an appropriate level of public safety; an emergency management program that enables effective mitigation of, preparation for, response to, and recovery from major emergencies and disasters; and in relation to the Municipal Government Board an independent system that administers appeals and issues timely and impartial decisions of high quality. As you've heard, we've set ourselves an ambitious course, and I have no doubt that we're up to the challenge.

So now that we've heard a little bit about our future, I'd like to identify some of the spending estimates attached to our plan. For '06-07 expenses and equipment/inventory purchases we're seeking approval on a total of 140 and a half million dollars. This is an increase of \$13.4 million, or about 10.5 per cent from our '05-06 budget of \$127 million. Our revenues for '06-07 are expected to be approximately \$28.1 million.

Municipal Affairs is made up of two main divisions: local government services and the public safety division. I'll start with the local government services. This division is responsible for \$111.2 million of our total '06-07 expense. You'll note that this is the lion's share of our budget, but with 356 municipalities and more than 1,900 elected officials to support, it's a big job that requires commensurate funding.

Mr. Chairman, \$86.6 million of the division's amount is for grants to municipalities and other local government entities. The final \$24.6 million is needed for nongrant initiatives, which I'll describe for you. Funding for the local government services division supports key initiatives such as supporting the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability to explore issues around municipal sustainability and to enhance provincial/municipal relationships; supporting strategic projects related to the evolution of provincial/municipal relationships and provincial/municipal planning co-ordination to support economic and population growth; supporting the municipal excellence program and other initiatives to improve the knowledge of municipal administrators and elected officials; providing improved linear property assessment by using the Alberta linear property assessment system; conducting detailed assessment audits of municipalities to help ensure that municipalities are being assessed fairly and consistently; supporting municipalities through facilitating and encouraging intermunicipal co-operation and self-directed dispute resolution; and, finally, administering the municipal internship program, which works with Alberta's municipalities to train future municipal administrators.

The expense total for local government services is rising to \$111.2 million from \$99 million, an increase of \$12.2 million, or 12.3 per cent. This is primarily due to the addition of interest costs on a loan to Wood Buffalo that was made earlier this year to help with some of the infrastructure needs as well as increases to the grants in place of taxes program, which I'll talk about shortly. In terms of program amounts, specific to \$86.6 million.

Local government services administers the department's five major grant programs for municipalities. The unconditional municipal grants program provides grants to municipalities for their general use and to help offset some of the costs of restructuring municipalities. This program also provides funding for the regional

partnerships initiative. The estimate for this program is \$17.6 million.

The second program is the grants in place of taxes program, which I referred to earlier. This program provides grants in place of municipal taxes on certain property owned by the government. There are currently more than 6,600 properties that fall under this program, including things like the northern and southern Jubilee auditoriums and the new Calgary courthouse. The estimate for this program for '06-07 is \$36.7 million.

Financial support to local authorities funds a number of initiatives in support of municipal associations, mediation, internships, and the ME First energy savings program. The estimate for this program is \$16.4 million.

We also deliver the very popular municipal sponsorship program, which supports municipal innovation and co-operation as well as projects that improve municipal government practices. The estimate for this program for '06-07 is \$13.7 million.

Finally, we have the municipal debenture interest rate program, which subsidizes the interest rate paid by municipalities on certain high-interest debenture borrowings from the Alberta Capital Finance Authority. The estimate on this program, which is being phased out as these high-interest rate debentures mature, for this year is \$2.2 million.

I'm reading this somewhat like an auctioneer because I'm afraid that whoever wrote my notes got a little bit optimistic about how much I could actually say in 20 minutes, so you'll have to excuse me. If it's going a little fast, we'll get into it a little later, I'm sure.

Next we have public safety, which accounts for \$14.7 million of the ministry's estimates. Funding in this division supports key initiatives such as implementing the action plan approved at the January 2005 federal/provincial/territorial meeting of ministers responsible for emergency management. It includes things like establishing a national emergency response system and establishing a critical infrastructure protection strategy for Canada; developing an annual process for conducting a provincial all-hazards risk analysis, which will provide relevant information to provincial emergency management stakeholders with the goal of forming mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery strategies; supporting the Fire Services Advisory Committee and its project partners in their work on the Alberta risk protocol, the ARP project, which will help municipalities identify risk levels and appropriate levels of response within their communities; partnering with fire departments to deliver the fire services training initiative, which gives firefighters from across Alberta access to high-quality, certified training at regional centres located throughout the province; providing emergency management training to municipal officials and ground search and rescue training to emergency response personnel to enhance their ability to prepare for and respond to emergency situations; and continuing to monitor the Safety Codes Council administration of the underground petroleum storage tank site remediation program, which was created to help municipalities and small retail operators clean up their contaminated sites.

Also part of our estimates is the Municipal Government Board. The board is responsible for deciding property, linear, and equalized assessment appeals. They also deal with a limited number of subdivision appeals, annexations, intermunicipal disputes, and other matters referred by myself or by cabinet. The estimate for the Municipal Government Board for '06-07 is \$3.1 million, which reflects their commitment to hearing and issuing decisions within the legislated time frames despite increasing volumes and greater complexity in appeals.

Finally, we have ministry support services, which provides the two divisions as well as my office with legal, financial, information

technology, communications, human resources, business, and administrative support. They're a hard-working group, and the '06-07 estimate for this area is \$10.4 million.

I hope I've been able to clearly illustrate to you what it is that Municipal Affairs does and how we plan to make use of our estimated budget for this year. We have a very strong business plan as well as a variety of excellent programs and initiatives, and when you combine the two, you will see that we are indeed working towards Municipal Affairs' mission, which is to "ensure Albertans live in safe, well-managed communities . . . served by open, effective, accountable and well-managed local governments."

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to answer questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

8:20

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the minister for his rapid-fire comments there. He delivered them right on time, and I'd better watch my own time here.

The minister and I and probably everybody pretty well in the Assembly will agree that this is a very important department, that the structures we provide for municipalities to manage their responsibilities, to indeed manage their destinies is so important. The tools they have, the supports they're given, the resources they're provided to do the job are vital.

Our caucus has travelled extensively around Alberta this year, and we've visited, of course, the two big cities. We're in Calgary extensively. I'm in Calgary almost weekly, sometimes two or three times a week. We've gone to all of the sort of middle-sized cities: Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, which is the hometown of the minister, and Lethbridge. I'm going to reserve some special comments for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and Fort McMurray in a moment. Of course, we're going through the smaller cities like Olds, for example, and Lloydminster and all the many smaller cities and towns constantly. Just yesterday I was in Hinton and Edson and Spruce Grove and Stony Plain and so on and, of course, enjoying all the counties and municipal districts in between.

We're meeting with many, many of the councillors, sitting down listening to them, as the minister does, and learning what their concerns are and what their success stories are, and there are some wonderful success stories that I really like to encourage. I'm most impressed, for example, with the efforts of Red Deer city council to eliminate homelessness. I think they've set a goal of zero homelessness in Red Deer by the end of this decade. I think that sort of thing is terrific. I do note that a number of Alberta cities – Calgary in particular and, close behind, Edmonton and a number of other Alberta cities – have been listed as some of the best cities in Canada and for a couple of places in the world on a couple of lists.

Mr. Renner: Lloydminster.

Dr. Taft: Yeah, Lloydminster is another one – that's right – the minister points out.

So we have lots of success here, but there's no question that there are some enormous challenges. I did say a moment ago that I wanted to reserve a special comment for Wood Buffalo and Fort McMurray. I'll go there right now.

In the last year I've been up there three times. Almost our entire caucus was up there two weeks ago today and yesterday, and other MLAs have been up there repeatedly. Fort McMurray and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, like every part of Alberta, face challenges of growth, but having been up there a number of times, you can feel the difference in the stress that the growth faced

by Fort McMurray is imposing as opposed to the growth in any other part of Alberta.

I was telling the people of Fort McMurray, the city councillors and the school trustees, that they have as much as anything a communication problem to communicate to the rest of the province how big their challenges are. I toured Syncrude last summer. We toured Albion sands a couple of weeks ago. These are projects. The Albion sands project outside Fort McMurray was a budget of I think about \$6 billion for phase 1. I told them that people don't understand what \$6 billion is. You've got to communicate that because other municipalities, as much as they're facing growth, aren't facing that kind of growth.

I thought about it for a little while, and I called back to our research staff. I said: what's the value? What's the value of the Calgary skyline? What's the replacement cost of that photo you see of the Calgary skyline with the Calgary Tower and Bankers Hall and the Petro-Canada tower and so on? You could replace that skyline. You could replace all the class A office space in Calgary for less than one phase of one oil sands plant, for less than \$6 billion. The total investment in downtown Calgary, which is going through an oil boom in the last 10 years, is barely half of \$6 billion. It's barely \$3 billion.

When Fort McMurray talks about the challenges they face, they're facing the challenge of something like 10 Calgary downtown skylines being built over the next decade there supported by an infrastructure built for probably 60,000, accommodating 75,000. That's not happening anywhere else in Alberta. That's not faced by the people of Red Deer or Medicine Hat or Edmonton or even Calgary.

So I have tremendous respect and sympathy and understanding for the challenges faced particularly by Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo, and I would encourage this minister to look at special means beyond just a loan. I think it's a \$130 million or something loan for the city of Fort McMurray, which drives them further into debt. I think that they are now per capita the most indebted municipality in Canada. We need to go beyond that, and we need to recognize that that region is in a league completely separate from anywhere else in this province, in this country, and we need to rise to that challenge.

I also sometimes get concerned because as we go around talking to councils, you hear the rivalries, and you sometimes hear resentment even. I hear people say: well, the rest of Alberta is sucking money out of Calgary to pay for school facilities or this or that or the other thing. When you go to rural areas, they say that the big cities are sucking the oil wealth out of these areas to build those big office towers and so on. I would ask all of us to remember that we're in this together as Albertans, and it's not just a matter of rural areas sucking the wealth out of the big cities or the big cities sucking the wealth out of the rural areas or what have you. We're all in this together, and we need to come together as Albertans and, indeed, as Canadians. If we do that, we can achieve remarkable things.

The challenges that we hear about from municipalities of various kinds across the province frequently stem from growth pressures. The minister himself made a particular note of the growth pressures facing the cities, and those pressures turn up in the form of labour shortages. Again, the most extreme case is probably Fort McMurray, where they've had to approve a work camp inside the limits of the townsite of Fort McMurray in order to attract labour to work on municipal infrastructure, but that's true in Medicine Hat too. There are labour shortages and challenges in Medicine Hat and in Lethbridge and across the whole province that's having inflationary pressure on municipal governments, particularly their infrastructure demands, and it's causing various other challenges for them directly and indirectly.

The infrastructure problems and challenges faced by Alberta are immense. This government is taking some correct steps. We need to consider the possibility in the Wood Buffalo region of just biting the bullet and saying that this is a city that all odds indicate will be 125,000 people in the next five or six or seven years; let's get on today with building infrastructure for a city that size so that by the time the infrastructure is built, by the time sewer treatment and water treatment and roads and recreational facilities and so on are all there, the population and the scale of the infrastructure will meet because right now we're years behind, and we're always aiming too short. But infrastructure challenges plague cities and towns and municipal districts across the province. Calgary struggles. Edmonton faces big challenges as well.

Another thing we hear about a lot – and the minister mentioned these – although I would like the government to move much more quickly and aggressively on this, is the need for a land-use strategy. The conflicts between one form of municipal government and another – Red Deer city, Red Deer county; Grande Prairie city, Grande Prairie county; Calgary, Rocky View; et cetera, et cetera – are destructive. There's not a systematic way to manage them. There's not a clear set of rules. There's not any real strategy in place province-wide that imposes a set of rules and a structure for municipal districts to sort these issues out, to say: here is appropriate land use for Rocky View, and that's not appropriate for something else. So we need to work very hard on accelerating the government's efforts on land-use strategy. There are models to follow. These are issues that have been addressed in U.S. states and in a number of other provinces. We're behind the eight ball. Let's get out in front of it.

8:30

There are some other particular issues. I mentioned Red Deer city's goal of eliminating homelessness. I wish that all municipalities would get serious about that goal. I am concerned with the extent of homelessness that I see now, for example, when I'm in downtown Calgary, where I am, as I mentioned earlier, very, very frequently. It's a problem in that city. It's a problem in this city. It's a problem in Grande Prairie. We need to get serious about homelessness.

We need to get serious about policing. We need to revisit and continue to revisit – and the minister isn't the only one responsible for this – policing issues and policing funding formulas for municipalities.

There are water challenges of various kinds, both drinking water supply, regional water systems across municipalities, and water treatment/sewage treatment challenges.

Recreation challenges. Living in the neighbourhood I live in and representing the constituency I represent, the river valley flows right through the constituency, and it's within a few minutes' walk of my house. There was a time when that was a leading park globally. I'm sad to say that too often now as I walk through the river valley park in Edmonton, it looks shabby. The pathways aren't in good repair. The fences aren't in good repair. There's too much litter. By and large the facilities are now years and years old, and that's a problem.

There is incredible opportunity, though, as well, and I'd love this government to seize the opportunity. I would love, of course, to lead a government that seizes those opportunities. The River Valley Alliance, that proposes a wonderful park system from Devon through to Fort Saskatchewan, needs to go ahead. Let's get on with that. Let's recognize that that's a wonderful asset that touches many municipalities and would help them all. That same kind of thinking needs to be brought to municipalities across the province, whether it's Fish Creek in the south or development of Nose Hill or development of parks in Grande Prairie or where have you.

Arenas as well are a challenge. We far too often see our arenas overtaxed, overused. They're pushed to the limit, operating at midnight or later, not just for ice hockey but for lacrosse and, of course, for indoor soccer. Why is it that we can't provide enough arenas for our citizens?

Finally, I will mention the arts in general and the huge role that the arts play in making our towns and cities special places to live, adding the richness to urban life that takes it from being just existence to having purpose and pleasure and beauty. Our support for the arts in this province lags terribly. It's an embarrassment, and it needs to be corrected. We could do so much with relatively little in Alberta through stronger support of the arts.

That's kind of a broad oversight of some of the issues, some of the challenges, some of the opportunities that we see for municipalities.

I'd like to turn specifically, as the clock runs down on my time here, to some questions. Perhaps first and foremost on the minds of many municipal councillors are questions around taxes and tax opportunities. They often speak about the need for more tax tools. There's discussion of various options. You know, we've all heard the calls of one degree or another for the province to abandon the school property tax and open up tax room for municipalities. We're not in favour of an entire abandonment of the school property tax. A hard cap at the 2004 level, \$1.2 billion as I recall, would be an outstanding step and then a gradual rollback but not a complete elimination.

My question to the minister – and I think he's probably prepared or willing to engage in a little bit of back and forth. This is such a fundamental question. What options has this government considered and either is still considering or has eliminated for providing municipal governments with more tax capacity or tax ability? Do you want to respond to that? And then I'll ask a few more questions.

Mr. Renner: I'm more than happy to answer the question. I just want to address a few of the comments that the hon. Leader of the Opposition brought forward in his discussion. I think he makes some good points, and there are some areas that I want to just briefly discuss.

He points out, and quite rightly, that there are challenges. Municipalities throughout the province are facing challenges. Some are facing challenges related to growth. Others are facing challenges related to the lack of growth and a declining tax base and declining infrastructure. To some extent it maybe could be accused of spin, but I prefer to think of these challenges more as opportunities. When we identify where there are challenges, rather than looking at these as impediments, as barriers, let's see if we can see them as opportunities, find some ways that we can actually engage in and create success out of these opportunities. Let me give a couple examples of that. There was a good deal of discussion around Fort McMurray, and no one can deny that there are tremendous "opportunities" in Fort McMurray, very real challenges.

Before I forget, I want to acknowledge that the MLA for Fort McMurray certainly has kept this minister and all ministers more than aware of issues related to Fort McMurray. Like many other ministers I've had the occasion to visit Fort McMurray on a number of occasions.

There are some things that we can do. One that the hon. member referred to is bridge financing. Let me talk just a little bit about debt and debt limits and the concept here. As the member quite rightly pointed out, Fort McMurray is growing at such a rapid pace that to provide infrastructure for today's population is almost redundant. By the time it's completed, it's obsolete. You really do have to build into the future. There is the fact that municipal infrastructures, particularly rate-based infrastructure like water and sewer and those

kinds of investments, are self-sustaining, and they needn't be part of the overall debt structure of a community. Yes, they're part of the debt, but they're not tax-supported debt. They're rate-supported debt.

The difficulty that you have when you overbuild something is that today's ratepayers can't afford to pay for what tomorrow's ratepayers essentially will be paying for. That's the reason that we go with bridge financing. We provide the necessary funding to make the significant investments today. We defer the need for capital repayments against that loan. We also cover – and it's included in my budget – the interest on that loan, and that's deferred for a period of five years. During that five years the project is completed. The population has increased. Then the rate-supported debt is quite within order. They're in a similar situation to any other municipality that's dealing with rate-supported debt from utilities. So I think that there is a reasonable plan in place there.

8:40

The other thing that I've said when I've met with the council in Fort McMurray is that there's a unique situation in Fort McMurray in that they are a community that will basically be created over a period of 10 to 15 years, and ultimately they could well become the third-largest city in the province of Alberta. They will certainly rival Red Deer, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat. They're already there now, and there's no doubt that they will exceed those populations. But those other cities had 75 or 100 years to develop all of that infrastructure that the member talked about, parks and recreational facilities and all of these kinds of things. Through that 100 years there have been various provincial and federal programs that have assisted municipalities to develop that infrastructure, albeit a little bit at a time, but over a period of time most municipalities have been able to provide a lot of those kinds of facilities.

I've suggested to Fort McMurray that that may well be something that I can do on their behalf, to put together an inventory of this kind of infrastructure that would be comparable to places like Red Deer or Lethbridge or Medicine Hat that is lacking in Fort McMurray and then have a look at how the infrastructure in these other communities was financed and work with them on that. Some of it was financed through local taxes. Some of it was financed through various grants, through various contributions from the private sector.

I think that a case can be made and will be made that this is something that the provincial government should very seriously consider along with the federal government in dealing with an emerging new community and bringing that emerging new community up to the similar kind of standards that the existing communities already have. It's fast-tracking all of this funding that formerly took place over 50 years and putting it all into five or 10 years. That's the reality that we're facing in Fort McMurray. So I think that there are some opportunities for us to work with to deal with these challenges, but we have to look at it through some more innovative ways.

On the relationships that the member talked about, there's no doubt that we are having an increase in the number of intermunicipal disputes. Many of them have to do with land planning issues. Many of them, frankly, deal with the almighty dollar and who's going to get assessment and tax revenue on what and who's paying for whose residents to do this. I think this is another reflection of the tremendous amount of growth that we've experienced here.

We had a system in place in years past, regional planning commissions, that dealt with the planning side of things. Frankly, the regional planning commission system didn't work very well, and I certainly don't think it would work well today at all because the concept of a regional planning commission was that rural areas should serve as land banks for the gradual planned growth of urban

areas into greenfield development. A message that I've been sending to municipalities – and it's as a result of the changes to the Municipal Government Act in 1995 – is that all municipalities are now equal. There is no definition in the Municipal Government Act of urban and rural municipalities. Every municipality has the right to grow, and they are exercising that right. What they don't have a right to do is to impede their neighbour's right to grow, and that's where we're running into some of these conflicts.

We do have something in place now that's called an intermunicipal development plan. They're optional. Under legislation they're one of those that municipalities may enter into. That's something that I think we need to have a good look at, and I've actually floated the idea with some municipalities, to find out if there is a way that we can incorporate something like an intermunicipal development plan and have it with a little bit more teeth than an optional program. As soon as something is optional, you also run into problems in resolving disputes and enforcing something. So that's something that we'll be looking at.

That leads me to the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability. Now, that's the council that I've had the members here in the Assembly and introduced them. Everyone on that council is very excited about the potential that we have to solve some of these issues that we've been discussing tonight. We've got the mayors of both large cities, the mayor of Edmonton, the mayor of Calgary, along with the president of the AUMA, representing the urban municipalities, and the AAMD and C, representing the rural municipalities, as well as myself, so it's a council of five. Those five members have taken on a number of different working groups. We will very shortly be taking those working groups out into the broader cross-section of both public and stakeholder discussion to deal with these very issues, one that the member referred to: opportunities for municipal revenue sources. That gets specifically to the question that you asked. Long preamble.

At this point I am not constraining the council to explore any sources. As long as we have a full discussion, I don't see anything wrong with discussing something. I'm not saying that at the end of the day we're going to accept everything, but I think we have to have a full and thorough discussion not only with the municipalities but with taxpayers. So there will be discussion on additional sources of taxation that have been discussed in the media, primarily by the mayor of Calgary but by others. By all means, the school tax issue is part of this on how we could implement some kind of a phase-into for municipalities, phase-out for the province. There are all kinds of things that we can discuss.

One of the working groups is just looking at the revenue side, total and separate from the expense side, because the expense side is another working group. That's the roles and responsibilities. That's the part that's critical. Until we define what the roles of municipalities are, what the responsibilities of municipalities are, how much it should reasonably cost to run a municipality, I believe it's pointless to start to match up the various sources of revenue. It's somewhat like: we'll just keep throwing money at it until the problem goes away. Well, if we haven't identified the problem, we may never have enough money. So we've clearly said that the roles and responsibilities have to be done in conjunction with.

The third major working group that we have is the relationships group. I'm very, very pleased that that consists of the mayor of Edmonton working in conjunction with Don Johnson, the president of AAMD and C. They're working on this whole issue of relationships and how we can put in place the necessary procedures so that municipalities can work together, can get into regional – not regional governance. Let me make it abundantly clear that I am not saying that we should be forcing amalgamations on people. What I've

consistently said, ever since I became minister, is that I think that there really are some opportunities for regional delivery mechanisms. I see, for example, around the city of Edmonton here St. Albert buses, Edmonton buses, Strathcona buses, all driving around in downtown Edmonton. It seems to me that there should be some efficiencies in having some kind of a regional transit system.

Those kinds of things I think can be very seriously explored in addition to the other area that the member talked about, and that has to do with recreational facilities and how we would have a look at how we deal with those kinds of facilities. Again, what is the role for the province, what is the role for municipalities, and how can municipalities, particularly those that are coterminous, put some of these things together? The river valley project that the member mentioned sounds quite intriguing. I haven't heard a lot about that project, and I would like to hear more. I'm sure that there are many, many other projects that are similar.

We do have success stories. We have municipalities that will come together, put in multi-use facilities, and have two or three municipalities that work together on a project. They're not constantly fighting, but we need to – and I think that's the role of Municipal Affairs – put in place the incentives and the opportunities that municipalities should be encouraged to find a win-win solution. It's to their advantage to work together to form partnerships. I think it's to their advantage, and it's to Albertans' advantage if we get them doing that.

So I hope that answers your question, and I'm certainly prepared to deal with anything else.

8:50

The Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you. I appreciate the minister's comments. I was hoping for something more specific on the list of possible tax tools, but the explanation I got is that you're going to be waiting for the council or the committee to put those to you. I hope it doesn't take too long.

I'll go through just several other questions that the minister can note as I go through them. While we're still on funding, we hear, not just from municipal councils but from all kinds of organizations, tremendous frustration over the one-year planning cycle. I wish that it could get stretched out to two or three years so that some of the inefficiencies of just getting one budget and one round of reporting done and having to turn immediately to start the new one might be improved so that there's longer term stability and reliability on provincial funding. I'm wondering if there are any plans by the minister or the government to develop a more stable and predictable funding framework, such as some kind of a three-year budget cycle that was very solid as opposed to just the current business plans, which are, frankly, unpredictable from year to year.

The question of ambulance support comes up as we go around. There's still uncertainty around how that's going to play itself out. It's a complicated issue although it's been on the government's agenda for some years. So I'd be curious for this minister's perspective since municipalities are one-half of the equation along with regional health authorities – then there are in some areas, I guess, third parties getting into ambulance service as well – any elaboration he can provide on the progress and direction to the transfer of ambulance services or not from municipalities to regional health authorities.

The minister talked and replied to my comments about land-use planning, and we all recognize how crucial and urgent that is. I'll be interested to see what ideas come out of the committee on sustainable municipalities. I can't remember the exact title but something like that.

The whole notion of smart growth. I personally am coming to the conclusion, as I read more and more, that environmental issues are going to be overtaking us in ways that we have not experienced in the past. Climate change, for example, and pressures to reduce energy consumption, to reduce urban sprawl, to protect land and water, wetlands, all of that; I think those pressures are going to become absolutely immense in the near and middle future and will be permanent.

So we might as well, in my view, anticipate that and really get focused on smart growth and reducing the impact of urbanization on the natural environment, doing things like the minister spoke about: supporting urban transit systems that really work well. Every great large city in the world has a really outstanding urban transit system. We're getting in that direction in Calgary, ironically a city that's also incredibly spread out, but we need to go further, and I think we need to make plans and then fund those plans with some real leadership from the provincial government.

Water links into the issue of smart growth, and I'm wondering if there's been effort and attention paid, for example, to using watersheds as planning units in municipal planning and land-use issues because they define so much of the nature of development and land use and that kind of thing.

A different concern around environmental impact comes from the petroleum tank program, which has been on the government books for some years now and I think had the right idea behind it. Am I correct in saying that there's no more funding for the underground petroleum tank storage remediation program? The minister is nodding yes, and I think that is a real shortfall. As I go around this province, the number of abandoned petroleum sites that I see, far too often in prime locations, is a problem. It's a blight in some of our cities and towns. I think this government needs to show some leadership. I look and have to ask, at a time when many petroleum companies are making enormous profits, why the public has to carry so much of the cost and the burden of contaminated gas station sites, and there is any number of those in Edmonton and Calgary and other locations.

I have also made a point of talking to owners of small gas stations who are really struggling because they can't dispose of their businesses. They can't sell their businesses because of the contamination, and the petroleum tank remediation program no longer exists. I would encourage the minister to take a serious look at this program and at least consider ways in which the petroleum industry can be held accountable for sites which it used to draw enormous profits for many, many years. It's a concern, and I could go into dramatic, vivid examples, but I won't elaborate further, to give others a chance to jump into the debate.

The minister talked about emergency preparedness and emergency management responses, and I think I'd give him marks for acknowledging that there were real problems exposed through what happened at the Wabamun spill. We need to learn from those because there will be other spills, there will be other environmental disasters and emergencies, and we need to be much better prepared next time.

It is astonishing to me, actually – after the Wabamun incident I began thinking about this. There was an irony there. I had just arranged to spend a week holiday at Lake Wabamun when this spill occurred, and my holiday went up in smoke because I ended up at any number of meetings with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and others. Afterwards I thought about the amount of train track in this province that runs by water, by lakes and rivers, and it is a miracle, almost, that we haven't had more of those kinds of emergencies and potentially much worse. You know, if that spill had occurred along a river, where the oil was washed downstream into intakes like in the Bow River valley upstream of Calgary, we could

have had a very much more serious problem. So we do have to be ready, and I will support the minister's efforts in improving emergency preparedness in this province.

I will send the minister information on the River Valley Alliance. It's quite an extensive plan. It's being developed for the North Saskatchewan River valley, so I'll make sure that the minister gets that information.

I'm just looking through my own notes here, and I'm thinking that while there are many, many issues on municipal grants and a whole host of other issues, I'll leave some of those for other members to take up. I gave the minister several questions there. If he can respond to those now that would be great, and he can also respond to them in writing.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks. Well, those that I don't get a chance to respond to early, I will respond to in writing. First of all, I want to talk a little bit about the timing of the minister's council. The Provincial Treasurer actually alluded to it in question period this afternoon in that we made it very clear that there is a relatively short timeline. We would like to have the information, recommendations, through the minister's council by late this summer. That allows us to then move into our government planning process this fall, with the intention of having any possible legislation that's required for implementation introduced in the spring session of 2007, about a year from now. So that's roughly the time frame.

9:00

Now that being said, with issues such as the education property tax, one thing that I have said that doesn't often get reported is that when the government is in a position to consider significant tax cuts, I want to be the minister at the front of the line with the solution that says: Finance minister, here is how you can do it. Let's not forget that the Municipal Affairs minister is going to be competing with a number of other ministers. We hear often from individuals saying: well, why don't you get rid of the health care premium? There are all kinds of suggestions on ways that the government can cut taxes, but if we're going to do this and we're going to do it responsibly, it cannot be a one-time tax cut. We can't do it for one year and then go back on our word in subsequent years. So this has to be something that we can be relatively assured is sustainable in the long term.

I really do think that the only way that we're going to be successful in transferring any significant amount of education property tax from the province to the municipalities is to have a win-win-win. There has to be a win for the taxpayer because the average taxpayer isn't going to see it as much of a tax break if they just write the cheque to a different government. So there's going to have to be some way for the taxpayer to save some dollars in this. There's also going to have to be some way that the province is going to benefit from this. Otherwise, I don't have the advantage that other ministers have when they're standing up with their tax-cut proposals. So I'm looking for that win-win-win, and I'm hoping that we can get there somehow.

The one-year versus three-year. We have a three-year business plan, and albeit there is some flexibility, particularly in the third year, I think we do an amazing job of trying to stick to the three-year business plan. Most of the discussion, when it came to putting together this business plan, was related to the third year, not the first year, because we were basically bringing that forward from the previous business plan. Municipalities also have an opportunity to

work in three-year business plans, and some of them are beginning to do that now. I think that it would benefit the municipalities as much as anyone if they would also convert their operations to a three-year business plan.

The Chair: Hon. members, the side conversations are getting fairly loud. I'd appreciate it if you would settle down.

Mr. Renner: The ambulance I can't really comment on other than, as the member knows, the grants for ambulance have been extended for one year. That is the responsibility of the Minister of Health. I have not been advised on what her plans are. Obviously, as Minister of Municipal Affairs I'll be working with municipalities to assist them in whatever transition there happens to be, but I'm not in a position to advise the member tonight on where that is leading.

The land planning. A comment was made, and I've heard it repeatedly, that we have to be concerned about urban sprawl. I don't deny that we have to consider what the impact of unrestrained urban growth is, but I've suggested to some that we don't right now have as much problem, in my opinion, with urban sprawl as we have with urban fringe development. The rural areas, I think, are as much to blame as the urban areas because we're seeing such a huge proliferation of development in that urban fringe area. That is also putting pressure on the relationships. We've got to deal with the urban situation, but we can't overlook the fact that the rural municipalities need to take some of the responsibility and accept some responsibility for this development as well.

Let me just briefly comment on underground storage tanks. The member is absolutely right that this is a program that ran out of funds before it ran out of underground storage tanks. There is an ongoing demand, and should another source of funding become available, I'm more than willing and my officials are more than willing to carry on with the program. We haven't been able to identify that source of funding.

Let me also make something very clear. A number of the sites that we see around the province are owned by small businesses and small retailers, and those are the ones that this program was designed to assist. I'm hoping that at some point, whenever that happens to be in the future, we're able to have a similar program to assist these same folks. We never intended and I certainly would not anticipate any future programs to be intended to assist the major oil companies. The expectation is that they would look after their own.

The problem is identifying the small retailers. It's fine to say: well, the small retailers can't afford it, and big oil companies should look after it. With some of these small retailers it's just about impossible to identify which of the oil companies should be responsible. Once we've been able to deal with the small sites, once we've been able to deal with the municipal sites, then I really think that we can start to put some pressure on the large oil companies to deal with their own sites. There are a significant number of retailers that were and continue to be owned by the major companies. Those ones this program does not deal with. Those are the ones that I would really like to put some pressure on.

In this world you can't identify and say: if you're big, you must clean it up; if you're small, you get to wait. So that puts all that much more pressure, I think, on our department and our government to find some alternative funding of some kind to deal with these small sites, to deal with the individuals, many of whom acquired property that they didn't even know had tanks involved with them. We do need to deal with those, and once we have dealt with those, I'm going to be working with my colleague the minister of infrastructure to put some additional pressure on some of the larger oil companies to clean up their sites because we do have some signifi-

cant problems, particularly in the downtown cores of small-town Alberta. Much of those are sites that are owned by the larger oil companies.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few comments and some questions as we go along. The minister was talking about sustainability. There's one thing that I think is a pet peeve of mine, having been on the public school board. I'm not sure what we can do about it, but I think something has to be done because in many parts of the world they aren't realizing that this is a problem, even in the United States. I'm talking about urban sprawl, especially in our two major cities, Edmonton and Calgary.

For all the reasons that we can talk about, the environment, farmland, what often happens – and this is what puts some pressure on these major cities – is that developers want the expansion. The expansion goes further and further to the edges of the city, and then there's a demand for all the services almost immediately. That comes in terms of schools; it comes in terms of the other services that people want. The city governments are unable to deal with this.

Of course, around Edmonton we have, you know, the competition. The minister alluded to it, that it would be better if we could cooperate and work together on this. Even in the United States they've realized that they've made a mistake with sprawl. Certainly, Europe has learned this lesson. We may think that we have all this land use forever, but we're going to have to come to grips with land use. I wonder if the minister has any thoughts about that and thoughts about what is happening in terms of urban sprawl. We talked about Fort McMurray. I can tell you that on the school board that created a real problem. There was the pressure then: oh, well, you've got to close schools down in the inner city. That leads to, you know, decay in the inner city, which is to nobody's benefit because the population is going out there. So I think it's a serious problem in the two major cities, and I would certainly be interested in the minister's reflections on it.

9:10

Of course, we have mentioned it to the minister of infrastructure, and Municipal Affairs is involved in that. We know that we have – and the minister has alluded to it – an infrastructure deficit. Again I would argue that we got preoccupied with the economic deficit and forgot these other things. So we are playing catch-up to some degree, Mr. Chairman.

I go back to the question period today about the education tax. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this. I think there was a perception at least before this minister that that would at least be frozen at some point. I know that we can say that we've cut the increase, but the fact is that it's still a 2 per cent increase. That is an irritant to the municipalities, as the minister is well aware. He's talked about it. With all due respect, the minister is talking about – and he's right – that you can't take a tax and cut it one year and bring it back the next. It has to be sort of looked at as a permanent solution. I agree with that, but I would also suggest that in this latest budget we give out roughly \$370 million in an overheated economy to a corporate sector that is doing very well, thank you very much. That is money that could have been used, I think, to help out in certain tax breaks like the minister was talking about.

You know, when we get into it – and I'll just allude to it; the Leader of the Opposition did too – I don't know what the answer is specifically, but the minister said that he had a committee, I believe, set up to look at the whole revenue side of it. I take it, then, that that committee is looking at some form of revenue sharing if possible, or

they're looking at all options: gas taxes, whatever. I think he mentioned that there were five people on it: the two mayors of the cities, the presidents of the AUMA and the rural municipalities, and the minister. I wonder if he could just expand on that a little bit if there are some options that they are looking at. Revenue sharing – and there are various forms of revenue sharing; it's a term that we throw out – has been in the discussion phase for a long period of time. Municipalities would like – and the minister is well aware of this – some avenue so that they're not always coming cap in hand to the provincial government, some form of revenue sharing that's theirs so they can budget. I take it that that's what that committee is looking at, so if he could expand on that.

Just a few questions and then a few more comments if I can. I was just sort of curious about the increase in financial support to the local authorities. I believe that that's up \$9.5 million. What I'm curious about, of course, is: what is this money being spent on, and why such a large increase when last year's forecast is well below the budgeted amount? Last year it was forecast at \$6.9 million, and the budget allowed for \$9.6 million. Now we're back up to \$9.5 million. So some explanation of those figures: \$9.5 million last year, but we only spent \$6.9 million. I guess I'm wondering if that's the same situation. Why the overbudget?

I want to talk just briefly about the emergency preparedness of municipalities. It seems to me, Mr. Minister, that we consistently underestimate the amount each year that will be needed for disaster recovery. I know that last year was exceptional. I think that it was \$170 million plus last year, but if we look back – correct me if I'm wrong – we underbudgeted beyond reasonable anticipation. I'm wondering if it is not in this case better – and I hate to say this across the board with this government – when we're dealing with emergencies, to overbudget rather than underbudget each year.

The other question to respond to. The Environment ministry took most of the criticism raised for the government for the Wabamun response, but I would be interested in the minister's comments. Did we learn from this? How does the minister respond to criticism that citizens involved in the cleanup didn't know that toxic substances had been released for five days, and what role did this ministry play? Most of the discussion, I know, was with the Minister of Environment, but it goes over two ministries. I'm wondering: what role did this ministry play in response to the Wabamun disaster? Have they learned anything? What role should this ministry play if something like this happens in the future?

The other thing deals with emergency preparedness. There's been a lot of discussion in this Legislature, Mr. Chairman, about coal-bed methane. It's a serious source of concern for public safety, and I wonder if the minister has some responsibility or is working with the other ministries in terms of some potential problems there. At least some citizens are talking about it, and it would seem to me that if there is a serious problem that it would again fall partly into his department. It stands to reason that with increased development there's going to be increased risk. Given that there is increased oil and gas development within or near municipalities, the question I'm asking is: are we going to increase and not just maintain municipal safety? What are the plans if something serious happens again?

On a little more positive aspect they like to talk about the ME First program, Mr. Chairman. The ME First program was launched in September 2003, and it's a great idea. ME First is a four-year, \$100 million interest-free loan program administered by Climate Change Central that is designed to help municipalities. My understanding is that it is to achieve energy savings, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and replace conventional energy sources with renewable or alternative sources. I would say that that's a very good idea, and I'm glad that the ministry is doing this. I might say to the

minister that perhaps it's time for an expansion of this program. I think it comes to an end in 2007. I would hope that we're looking at expansion of this program beyond that deadline.

I'll just throw out that maybe we can look at the United Kingdom. What they're doing is similar. They have a more expanded program. Obviously, it would be more money, but hopefully in the long run it would save money. In the United Kingdom they include individuals' homes and business owners, not just municipalities. They're helping public buildings such as schools and churches as well as private residences to buy equipment such as solar panels. By subsidizing the mass purchasing of such equipment, the British government hopes not only to decrease harmful pollution but drive down the costs of such technologies by driving up demand and therefore supply. It's good for the environment, and hopefully it could be something that is economically beneficial for the province. I think we've got the right start here with the hundred million, so I would ask the minister if they're looking at expanding that, similar to Britain and all the things that they're doing, to other public buildings and also if that deadline could be extended beyond 2007. I think this is something that is a very good first start, and I commend the ministry for doing that.

9:20

Of course, while we're on sustainability, I think we all realize that the more public transit we have and other infrastructure designed to lessen automobile use – that could also be included in the program. Automobile exhaust represents a major and growing source of not only greenhouse gases but also pollution. Now, I know that you're not going to get everybody out of their cars overnight, probably most of us, but I think this program could be the start of a catalyst in terms of that direction, the ME First broadening. Just a suggestion to the minister that we take a look at it.

I guess that while I'm asking that, does the minister expect to increase the amount available for the ME First program in looking at some of these other suggestions that I'm making? I think it could be a very, very powerful program and a very good one, and I think there are examples of where it has been expanded, as I said, in the United Kingdom that we could take a look at.

Ambulance service was mentioned by the minister. This has created a problem, I recognize. A few weeks ago there was a discussion in the House about a motion brought forth by a government member, Motion 504, calling for and encouraging municipalities to "provide minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services." It's a good idea, but it made no provisions for additional government funds for these services. You can't do that without the government funds.

This became a political issue, as the minister is well aware, in terms of the ambulance system in Edmonton. The figure that comes to mind is \$55 million, and then they backed off, and now Edmonton has serious problems with their ambulances, growing pressure. I know that it's probably true in Calgary and others; I'm just more aware of it in Edmonton. I have it here that in Edmonton the present paramedics union is warning that if things continue at this pace, patients with non life-threatening conditions may soon end up waiting for up to 45 minutes for an ambulance.

Now, the city of Edmonton has responded. Mayor Mandel is now prepared to go halfway and suggests that council should spend \$1 million to hire 11 paramedics. But, again, I think there's some responsibility here. Certainly, with the government announcing they were taking it over through the health regions and then backing off, now it's created, I think the minister would recognize, problems in the cities. That comes from other monies that they would be taking from other areas. So I wondered if the minister would comment on that and if there's anything down the way.

Mr. Chairman, to conclude, because I think there are other people that want to get in, I'll just come back to where we started and talk specifically about the revenue sharing. There's got to be some way. I recognize that the province gave \$3 billion for infrastructure over a three-year period across the province, but with all due respect that's, again, catch-up. The ministry, I believe, just as part of the budget announced that \$10 million to municipalities, and I think they appreciate it, but when you look at 123 municipalities, it's not going to solve a lot of their problems. I'm sure that they receive it and will take it and will use it very valuably, but I think we have to look again at a more sustainable area. Maybe revenue sharing is not the right word, but some way that they can organize their own affairs without having to come cap in hand to the government.

I hope sincerely, Mr. Minister, that the committee that you're working on does come up with some good suggestions and that we can get it through this government because, frankly, that's another level of government. They can handle their own situations well. They have elected people that can run it, I'm sure, just as well as we can the Legislature, but it would be easier for everybody if there was some way that that can be done. So I wish the minister luck. That could be a very important committee, and I hope that they do come back with some form of revenue sharing that will work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to go through most of the questions, some of which I will refer the hon. member to my previous answers, specifically with respect to sustainability and land use. I don't know that there's a whole lot more that I can say there.

On the issue of school tax. If I understood correctly, the member was suggesting that there are some opportunities that were in this budget with respect to income tax that perhaps could have been applied to the property tax. I guess it's necessary again to talk about this long-term sustainability. The difference between an income tax and a property tax is that an income tax is very elastic. As people earn more income, they pay more tax. Conversely, if we ever have a crash and people earn less income, we collect less tax.

Mr. Martin: I was talking about the corporate tax.

Mr. Renner: Same thing. Same thing. In fact, corporate tax is even more elastic than personal income tax because corporate income rises and falls dramatically, and on a recovery corporations even can carry forward losses from previous years. So we can go for a stretch where we have very little corporate income tax if we go through what we went through in the '80s. We have to be cognizant of that.

Property tax, on the other side, is a good tax, and why municipalities use property tax is because it's very inelastic. Property values remain relatively constant over time. Businesses continue to pay property tax even if they're not profitable. They don't pay any corporate tax, but they pay property tax because they still have assets. I'm not saying that it's not possible to trade one off against the other, but there are pros and cons, and frankly I'm not so sure that municipalities would want to get into the corporate tax game because of the elasticity of that form of revenue.

Good question on the support to local authorities. About a \$9 million increase there this year; \$7 million is for interest on the Fort McMurray loan, a \$137 million loan. It's about \$7 million a year in interest. It has to come from somewhere, and unfortunately it comes from my budget. The other 2 and a half million dollars is for a special infrastructure grant that was provided to Banff and Jasper to

help them deal with the unique circumstances there of having a significant tourist population that requires services that are not necessarily covered when we look at per capita grants. They have a relatively small permanent population but need to serve tourists whose numbers are massive. So we put in place a program that will provide 2 and a half million dollars a year for the next I believe five years, Member. I'll confirm that. But it's 2 and a half million dollars this year, anyway, and that's where the \$9 million comes from.

You asked what the role of our ministry and Emergency Management Alberta was at Wabamun. Frankly, it was very little. Our role historically has been one of co-ordinating. We are there to provide services when requested by first responders, and that's the municipalities. Our role is to put in place disaster services plans and to assist municipalities to implement those plans. As a result of Wabamun, as a result of the recommendations that came forward from the environmental commission, we are going to be reinventing ourselves at Emergency Management Alberta, creating an independent agency that will be much more proactive. While we never want to forget that it is the municipalities primarily that are the first responders, always will be, the role of Emergency Management Alberta will become more directive. So rather than being passive, waiting for someone to ask for services, we'll have people on the site that are assisting municipalities and directing them and if necessary advising them what services they need even if they haven't requested it. It's something that we'll have to develop some goodwill over time. We don't want to give anyone the impression that we're simply going to rush in and take over and do everything, but we do see the necessity to be more proactive.

9:30

At the same time Environment has put in place a special SWAT team within Environment that will deal with the environmental impact. That wouldn't be the responsibility of EMA. They'll be there. They'll be there with their people in the same way as Health would deal with health matters. So EMA will continue to be a facilitating organization, but we envision it as being much more proactive and less passive than what it has been in the past. We don't want to get into a situation like we witnessed with the hurricanes in the southern U.S., where everyone was standing around waiting for someone else to ask for assistance. We want to have people there that will be pointing out where the assistance is and acting if necessary but not in a threatening way or a way that would suggest that the local authorities don't have the capacity to deal with the situation.

ME First. Frankly, hon. member, I've been very disappointed with the ME First program. I, like you, think it's an excellent program. Unfortunately, I think we have a number of circumstances that have been working against the ME First program. The most important is that the interest rates are so low right now that municipalities are reluctant to borrow just to save the interest. Many municipalities are debt averse and prefer to pay as you go for these kinds of things. That's part of the problem, particularly in the rural and smaller municipalities. They just don't see the savings to them in borrowing and receiving an interest-free loan. They would rather pay cash.

The other problem that we have with the program is that it's a five-year term on the loan. If you're going to do something that is a large capital project, it's pretty hard to be able to amortize that over five years. Even interest-free principal payments are a little unmanageable for a larger project. We have accommodated a few municipalities with larger projects by calculating and distributing the interest-free portion over a longer period of time, but there are some

restrictions on the program that, I think, have contributed to the lack of take-up on this program.

Nevertheless, we do have a \$4 million expenditure for this year, and we have recently made some announcements of projects that have gone forward. I think that given enough time municipalities may see some opportunities here, but I'm beginning to think that there may be some other directions with which we can more significantly assist municipalities than through this program. Maybe there are some ways we can partner either with the federal government or with other sources to provide some direct grant money as opposed to interest-free loans, which just don't seem to have the take-up that one would expect.

I talked earlier when the Leader of the Opposition talked about ambulance, so I won't deal with the ambulance issue.

The issue of resources. Again, I thank you for your comments. I am looking to have the minister's council come forward with some ideas. My reluctance to start to put specific concepts and suggestions on the table is that I don't want to pre-empt the work of that committee. I don't want them to find it necessary to have a huge debate about something that I put on the table tonight that they may have already considered and decided is not feasible, is not workable. I'm willing to wait, and I ask the hon. member to wait till this summer, until we get those ideas and concepts back. I certainly make the commitment that there will be ample opportunity to discuss those that manage to stick to the wall and look feasible to go forward.

Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to cede my questions at the moment, but I will get back on your list, please.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity and the offer from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to let me go first. I do have, really, some questions around one specific area. This relates, of course, to one of the ongoing issues that I hear about from constituents on a very, very regular basis: market value assessment. Calgary-Currie is by and large an inner-city residential constituency in Calgary. I'm sure the minister is well aware of what has been happening to property values in the city of Calgary over the space of the last year although this issue with market value assessment has been going on for a number of years now.

I'm not sure how to argue this one because, on the one hand, I recognize that when it comes to assessing properties for the purpose of calculating property taxes, the market value approach is probably the least worst system we've come up with yet. I can't call it the best system. Yes, I mean, there's a sense of fairness and equitability in market value assessment that you can't really find in other approaches that have been tried, but we're far from perfection on that issue. Were this the place to get into this debate – and I'm not sure that it is the time and the place to get into this debate – I would perhaps be arguing rather passionately that we need to move right away from property taxes altogether. Let's not just talk about the school portion but moving away from the whole notion of property taxes and looking at new ways of allowing municipalities to raise the revenue they need to cover the expenses that they have. But I think there's another time and another place to go into that in detail.

For the present I'm going to accept that we're stuck for now with market value assessment as the least worst way we have of calculating what property taxes should be. I'm going to accept that that does come with a number of problems, two key problems, really, from the point of view of an inner-city constituency. I think my colleagues

from Edmonton would probably agree more or less that the situation is much the same in the city of Edmonton as well, but it can be particularly acute in Calgary with what has happened to property values in recent months and recent years. First of all, you have a fundamental inequity. You know, the Leader of the Opposition talked earlier about needing to all be in this together and not play one area off against another. I understand that, but the reality is, of course, that areas do play themselves off against other areas.

Part of the problem with the way market value assessment works right now, of course, is that in a city like Calgary residents of desirable inner-city communities where property values are going through the roof – I mean, I'm sure that a house in my constituency, any particular house that I chose, would be worth more now than it was five minutes ago, when I got up to speak; that's how fast property values are rising there – are paying relatively high property taxes. Of course, most of the benefit of that is happening out in the fringes of suburbia, so they're driving back and forth on bumpy roads, they're tripping over cracks in the sidewalks, and they're suffering water main breaks, that sort of thing, for the privilege of living in an inner-city community and paying high taxes.

That's a basic inequity, I think, that exists across the board as far as my inner-city constituency is concerned. Within that context, there are, of course, many, many specific examples of in most cases seniors on fixed incomes who've lived in their house, in their neighbourhood, in their community, in my constituency for decades. They bought the house when it was perhaps worth \$15,000, you know? Today they have developers knocking on their door on a regular basis offering them half a million dollars to sell their property so that the developer can knock down that bungalow and put up two half million dollar infills in its place and double his investment. In many cases we're dealing here with a senior who may be widowed, who's probably living on a fixed income, who on paper is very well off provided that she sells the property. But she doesn't want to sell the property. She wants to stay there for the rest of her life because it's her community; it's her place; it's what she's known.

9:40

If she were to sell it, she might get a half a million dollars for the property, but there's no way she'll get back into the neighbourhood, you know? So she's faced as well, desiring to stay in her house in her community, with ever-escalating property taxes to the point that it gets for some seniors on fixed incomes exceedingly difficult to pay these taxes. You can see it in the week to 10 days after the assessment notices go out in Calgary. You can see across Calgary-Currie by the appearance of new for sale signs that the folks are having trouble with that.

Within that context, I'd like to ask the minister – and I'd like him to refer to line 2.3.1 on page 344, assessment services. I see a decrease of almost \$2 million from last year's forecast of \$9.2 million, almost \$9.3 million, to the estimate for '06-07 of \$7.4 million, which is slightly above what the minister budgeted last year but well below what the minister is now forecasting that his department will actually spend on assessment services. I might be out in left field here – I don't know – but it seems to me that assessment services are pretty darn important because it's their job to ensure that Albertans have as effective and efficient a system of assessment and property taxation as we can under the circumstances. The minister will correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it's the function of this branch to properly apply tax rates to properties' assessed values to determine the taxes payable by the owner of that property. We all know that municipalities rely, perhaps much more heavily than they should in an ideal world, on property taxes as their

main source of revenue. If I'm on the right track, it's critical that this branch do its job right, and I'm wondering why the decrease in the budget of assessment services.

That is essentially my question with, as the minister referred to earlier, a long preamble. So I'll sit down now and wonder if I can get an answer to my question from the minister.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks very much. Well, this time I'll give you the short answer and then the long postamble. How's that? The reason for the decrease in assessment. First of all, Municipal Affairs doesn't do the assessments in the city of Calgary. The only assessments that Municipal Affairs does are linear assessments. We do pipelines, wells, utilities, power lines, those kinds of assessments, so that wouldn't affect the individuals that you're talking about. In fact, we have increased the manpower in that area for some of the reasons that the member has identified, and that was a \$202,000 increase; \$142,000 is an increase responding to increased salary settlements. The decrease of \$2.2 million, for a net decrease of \$1.8 million, is because we have estimated a significantly lower cost of legal fees related to property assessment appeals in the upcoming year. It doesn't have anything to do with our ability to deliver quality work. It has more to do with the fact that we've come through some appeals, and we are anticipating that we won't have to have as much of a resource in our department allocated to dealing with appeals in the future.

Let me talk a little bit about this issue of market assessment. As the member said, least worst way. I've heard it put that way, and in some ways I tend to agree with him. Property tax is a somewhat regressive tax, and if we could replace it with something else – I don't disagree with the member that it would be nice if we could replace property tax with something of a less regressive nature, but we haven't come up with that yet. I'm hoping that some of the work of the minister's council that we referred to earlier may come up with some ideas there. Frankly, I'm not optimistic. I think we're stuck with property tax for some time.

The market value assessment is somewhat reflective of the value of assets. It works particularly well. You do have some anomalies in a place like Calgary where you get one neighbourhood that's really spiralling compared to the rest. For the most part property values in municipalities are relatively comparable within the municipality. Where you run into some real disparity is when you try and compare the values in Fort McMurray to the values in Taber, Alberta, for example. The same property would have a huge difference in value from a market value assessment.

If all the property taxes were used within that municipality, it really wouldn't make any difference because they've set a mill rate based upon the needs associated with the municipality. If we all have high-value houses, then we just set a low mill rate and collect the same amount of money. If we all have low-value houses, and we need the same amount of money, we set a higher mill rate, but because our houses are less, we end up paying the same amount of taxes, so it works out really quite well on a municipality basis.

Where it gets a little complicated is with the education property tax because we're setting one mill rate across the province, and then we get into putting into place some modifiers to try as best as we can to equalize those high-growth areas, those high-rate areas and try to have some comparables with some of the other areas in the province. I'm the first one to admit that the system is not perfect, but we attempt. Like the member says, it's probably the least worst way of doing it.

I do have some suggestions for you to deal with your constituents. One, I just want to remind all members that the government has frozen the education property tax portion of seniors' taxes. If a senior owns a home in the area that the member has been discussing, that tax rate has been frozen at last year's tax rate. That's part of the Seniors budget when we get to it. There will be an allocation in the Seniors budget to cover the cost of those tax increases.

There also is the ability of a municipality to defer taxes on any property. A deferral is not like it costs the municipality because it almost works like a reverse mortgage. It's not a reverse mortgage. It's not that the individual has to go to a bank and negotiate a loan. It's a deferral. There are interest costs associated, but the interest costs are relatively low compared to what you might find on a reverse mortgage, and the administrative costs are relatively low. The province of Alberta basically finances municipalities, so if they had a huge number of these that they were dealing with, I assume that they would be coming to us and asking them to finance these on their behalf, so their cash flow remains even. The amount of taxes that would be payable in relation to the value of the property is relatively insignificant, and I don't think that it would materially affect the value for the sale at some point in time. I think it really is, particularly in some of these very high-growth areas, something that is viable and should be and could be explored.

I'd certainly be willing to assist the member or his constituents in dealing with the city of Calgary to see if we can't get some of these things going because I do really feel for some of the difficulties that some of those individuals are in. Certainly, there are ways that it can be resolved. Oftentimes it's more than just the tax issue that is causing some of the problems. We all know that other costs are going up. Utility costs are going up. There are inflationary pressures on some of these. There may be other reasons why they find it necessary to sell their home. But if they're selling their home purely and simply because they feel they can't afford to pay the taxes, there are ways that we can deal with that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

9:50

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At this time I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the estimates debate for the Department of Municipal Affairs. Certainly, we see that the budget for Municipal Affairs has increased by roughly \$13 million over last year. A lot of the highlights have been outlined by previous speakers, but I have some issues in regard to this department. Consumers certainly have issues in regard to this department each and every time they open their power bill or their natural gas bill.

We know, Mr. Chairman, that the Municipal Government Act gives municipalities the authority to charge these fees on electricity bills and natural gas bills. The whole idea of this is to charge these fees for the use of land upon which an electric distribution system is located as well as the exclusive right to charge these fees through the Municipal Government Act. How are these fees set? Well, the Municipal Government Act allows municipalities to make an agreement with the utilities, as I said, to charge and collect these fees. Certainly we need to pay heed to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and what their recent study from last November said about these fees. I think at this time we can have an alternative way for municipalities to fund their programs. This fee calculation varies across the province.

Now, I'm just going to talk quickly about natural gas rates, and this is as of January 1, 2004. In the city of Calgary it's 11 per cent of total charges before GST. In Edmonton it's 32 per cent of

delivery charges. In Red Deer it's 17 per cent of delivery charges. In Lethbridge it's 32 per cent of delivery charges. In Medicine Hat, the minister's hometown, as we heard earlier, there is no franchise fee agreement for electricity and natural gas, which is unique as the only city with its own gas and electric production and distribution facilities. The citizens of Medicine Hat are prudent. Certainly, they saw through this whole deal of electricity deregulation and natural gas deregulation, which has connected our domestic price to the North American market. They're very, very wise, the citizens of Medicine Hat. So they have no fees. I find it ironic that our minister – and I wish him well in his endeavors with the department now and in the future – is from the city where there are no municipal franchise fees on gas and electricity bills. But that doesn't mean, Mr. Chairman, that I don't want to do anything about it. I certainly would appreciate it if he would work if not at eliminating these fees, at least at getting some sense to this.

I think we should have a look at electricity now. We talked about natural gas. In Calgary, again, the fee as a percentage of total charges on the electricity bill is 10 per cent. In Lethbridge it's 9 per cent. In Fort McMurray it's 6. Leduc is 4. Edmonton is 4. Red Deer is 3.8. Camrose is 2.1. Medicine Hat again is zero. The calculation of these fees is all over the map depending upon which area of the province you're in. How much do local governments collect in fees? The City of Calgary took in \$130 million in 2004, accounting for close to 10 per cent of its total revenues. The city of Edmonton collected \$55 million, the city of Lethbridge \$8 million, and the city of Red Deer \$3 million. In per capita terms Calgary relies more on these revenues than the other cities.

I don't think this is a fee. I've been referring to it as a fee. It's a tax. It really is a tax in my opinion. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business in their thorough investigation and report on this matter asks: where is the accountability?

If the intent of this fee or the tax is to compensate local governments for access to their lands, there is simply no rationale for linking this compensation to a commodity price. One of the principles of fair taxation is that the tax be visible. Although it is true that the fee is now broken out as a separate line charge on utility bills, it can be argued that consumers in Calgary for example do not know that the fee increases with the price of electricity or natural gas . . .

Now, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business goes on to say,

. . . assuming that they are actually aware of the charge in the first place.

That is interesting.

It is extremely unfair that while businesses, and households, feel the crunch of [paying] high energy prices, they are unknowingly paying more to their local government. When municipal governments attempt to increase property tax rates, there is generally much public discussion and debate over whether an increase is required or, at the very least, over the size of the increase. In the case of franchise fees and local access fees, government revenues quietly increase while consumers are left to face high utility bills.

The EUB has expressed its support of delivery charge based fees for natural gas. In 2002, the City of Grande Prairie filed an application with the EUB to change its natural gas franchise agreement. The fee would no longer be based on total natural gas charges but on delivery charges. In its decision on the matter, the EUB found that the change was in the best interests of all stakeholders. The EUB stated that delivery based fees provide more stability for customers and that it supports this methodology.

Similarly, the . . . AUMA has created standardized electricity and natural gas franchise agreements which base the fee on a percentage of distribution or delivery charges. All municipalities can use the AUMA's template agreement when they negotiate agreements with

utilities. When it released the natural gas agreement, the AUMA noted that the choice of methodology was a key element of the agreement.

Now, I would like the hon. minister to consider the conclusions and recommendations that the CFIB has provided. The CFIB recommends that

the Government of Alberta take the initiative to put in place a common fee calculation methodology that ensures that electricity and natural gas consumers are treated similarly across the province and that local governments do not profit from high electricity and natural gas prices.

They also recommend that

local governments, especially those that impose high rates, find ways to lower fee rates and reduce their dependency on municipal franchise and local access fee revenue. Those municipalities who currently charge fees on total charges should voluntarily and immediately abandon the practice.

Also, another recommendation:

Governments should examine all aspects of franchise and local access fees, including but not limited to the following:

- Properly investigate whether the charges are actually a form of hidden taxation and comply with Supreme Court decisions in this area;
- Examine whether the amounts charged to consumers reflect the true intent of the fees.

When the local governments have to rely on this as a revenue source, that tells me that this provincial government is not funding municipalities adequately. I would certainly like an answer in regard to this from the minister. I thank him for listening. This is an important matter.

Mr. Renner: While I would have liked to give the answer, unfortunately the member took so long asking it, I don't have any time left to give the answer, but I'll try and give the very short version. I'll give the member the same answer that I gave the CFIB when they came to see me, and that is that, like the CFIB, the member is bringing his question forward to the wrong body. This is a decision that is made by the locally elected councils, not the province.

It's interesting that we should be talking tonight. A number of members have brought forward the suggestion that we need to explore alternative sources of revenue for municipalities, but I can tell the hon. member that the last thing I want to do is begin to approve additional sources of revenue for municipalities and then have the province be held accountable every time they decide to raise their taxes. That should be their responsibility, not our responsibility.

10:00

While I can understand that there are some concerns that individuals have, all I can say is that you need to take it up with the elected body that's authorized to deal with them, not the elected body that authorized them to levy these taxes in the first place. I think it's appropriate that they do have the opportunity to raise these, and the member has quite rightly identified the reason that they were put there in the first place. If they're not being used the way that they were intended, then I think the city councils and the mayors need to be held accountable, not necessarily the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Let me just very briefly talk about the city of Medicine Hat.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(4), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration for a department's proposed estimates, I must now put the following questions after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$140,468,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee do rise and report the vote on the estimates of Municipal Affairs and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$140,468,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Motions**
Committee Membership Changes

17. Mr. Stevens moved on behalf of Mr. Zwozdesky:
Be it resolved that the following changes to the following committees be approved by the Assembly: on the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts that Mr. Griffiths replace Mr. VanderBurg as deputy chair, that Mr. Groeneveld replace Mr. Oberle, that Dr. Brown be added; on the Select Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund that Mr. Johnston replace Mr. McFarland; on the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Mr. Strang become deputy chair, that Mr. Mitzel replace Mr. Ducharme; on the Select Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing that Mr. Oberle replace Mr. Groeneveld; on the Select Standing Committee on Private Bills that Mr. Webber replace Mr. VanderBurg, that Mr. Rogers replace Mr. Oberle; on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services that Mr. Knight become deputy chair, that Mr. Lindsay replace Mr. Horner, that Mr. Lukaszuk replace Mr. McFarland.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question on Motion 17?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 28
Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Keeping with the business of the House tonight on municipal affairs, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 28, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006.

The Local Authorities Election Act is an important piece of legislation that prescribes the standards and processes for the election of municipal councils and school board trustees.

Before I go into the bill, I'd like to give a bit of background. As most members will recall, in the 2004 municipal election in ward 10 in Calgary there was voter fraud in the use of special ballots. That prompted the Minister of Municipal Affairs to appoint Mr. Bob Clark to conduct an inspection. His report made 16 recommendations, some of which are incorporated into the amendments that are before us tonight. Following that report the Minister of Municipal Affairs appointed an MLA committee to hold meetings throughout the province regarding the act. I was a member of that committee along with the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. A total of 18 public meetings were held in eight locations throughout the province. We heard 66 presentations and received 89 written submissions.

There were several recurrent themes heard throughout the public sessions and in those submissions, but overall what we heard, Mr. Speaker, was that the current process is generally working well, and significant reform is neither wanted nor desired. Some of the themes that we did hear are that the legislation should be more enabling and not prescriptive, that it should provide the flexibility to municipalities to address local circumstances. We also heard that returning officers' responsibilities should be focused on running the elections and not policing them, and that resolution to the problems in the city of Calgary in their municipal election should not result in a cumbersome and onerous process for other municipalities. Finally, and probably most importantly, we heard that voter apathy and low voter turnout are concerns, and any proposed amendments should support enhancing voter participation and involvement.

Mr. Speaker, in support of the feedback from public consultations Bill 28, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006, will improve the act in the following ways: by providing an elected authority with the discretion to make a bylaw regarding the use of voter identification, including the type and number of documents that may be required to verify identification and age; allowing the returning officer to set aside special ballots that are received that the returning officer believes may be in contravention of the act and then to report the alleged contravention to a person or persons who will have been appointed by the minister to determine the validity of the ballots.

Another provision will be allowing the candidate the discretion to appoint an official agent who may act in an official capacity on behalf of that candidate. The bill makes a person who is convicted of an offence under the Local Authorities Election Act, the provincial Election Act, or the federal election legislation ineligible to be a candidate, an official agent, or a scrutineer for a period of 10 years. It also makes candidates, not returning officers, responsible for

issuing identification to campaign workers. It will allow an elected authority with a population of 10,000 or more to set the number of signatures required for nomination up to 100 and the amount of deposit up to \$1,000.

Several other provisions will allow an elected authority, in addition to a candidate or elector, to challenge an election before the courts, will allow a local jurisdiction the discretion to provide written voting instructions in languages other than English at voting stations as required, will allow an elected authority the discretion to have a candidate's campaign disclosure statement audited, and will eliminate the requirements to vote at an advance poll.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is an example of the government's determination to respond to the differing needs of Alberta's municipalities. It is important to emphasize that the amendments have been developed through consultation with Alberta's local governments, school boards, and citizens. Through the many discretionary provisions elected authorities will be able to better provide for the needs of their citizens by encouraging public participation in the election of their representatives at the local level.

In conclusion, these proposed amendments overall will promote integrity and public confidence by providing more security and transparency in the election process.

That concludes my remarks, and I look forward to the debate on second reading. Thank you.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill in second reading. It's a bill that cuts to the heart of our democratic process. It's a bill that has a messy genesis, shall we say. It comes out of a very, very serious controversy involving allegations of election fraud on a substantial scale in a municipal election in Calgary. I think there are still outstanding questions about that scandal and still, I believe, court cases pending. I think we need as an Assembly to pay particular attention to these kinds of scandals and misdeeds because they do cut to the heart of how the democratic system works, and that's through a legitimate, open, honest voting system. So this is a very, very important piece of legislation, addressing a very important issue.

For democracy to have legitimacy and for elected members to have legitimacy themselves, the citizens, the voters in any society need to have confidence that their election processes and mechanics are working properly. Unfortunately, those election processes and mechanics broke down pretty badly in the last municipal election in Calgary in a scandal that involved a number of people, including potentially relatives of a member of this Assembly. This is a very serious situation. We have to pay attention. We have to clean these messes up. If we do not do so, then we are allowing a threat to democracy itself in this province to grow.

One of the reasons that this kind of legislation is so important is that we are watching voter participation rates drop election by election, and they are particularly low in municipal elections. There are undoubtedly many reasons for that, but I am sure that one of those is a sense that the process may be less than entirely legitimate. So we need to reinforce the legitimacy of the process, to clean the process up if we're to reverse the decline of those voter participation rates.

It's worth noting that irregularities don't just occur in municipal elections. We ourselves have raised a concern about irregularities in a provincial election, the last provincial general election, in which votes were cast in Edmonton-Ellerslie – ballots were cast on election date by voters who weren't even in the country and physically were not capable of voting. We've raised those concerns, and we've not had them adequately addressed. We have allowed a provincial

system of election to develop that is open to abuse in ways not unlike the abuse that occurred at the municipal level. That's also a very, very serious issue. In closely contested elections illegitimate ballots can make a difference between the proper and duly elected person attaining office or somebody who could attain office through improper means. Those are things you think about in banana republics where elections are rigged and ballot boxes are stuffed. To think that that culture is beginning to intrude into Alberta is very, very worrisome.

I'm also concerned about this legislation allowing too much discretion to local municipalities. I think that if we're serious about democracy, we need to impose consistency and we need to require a province-wide cleanup of our voting system. While there are many, many good steps in this legislation, I do have one particular concern, and that is that this allows too much local discretion. We could end up, in fact, with a patchwork not unlike what you see in the United States in federal elections there. We were all, I think, astonished to learn what a patchwork and mishmash of electoral processes there are in the U.S., which were exposed in the presidential election of the year 2000, when we discovered that it took some states days and even several weeks to tally up their election results. Some states could do it quickly; others could do it slowly. There were serious questions of distortion of the outcome in a number of states, including Ohio and Florida.

So we cannot take for granted the integrity of our voter system. We have to be vigilant. We have to be assertive. We have to set the highest possible standards to ensure that democracy survives with full legitimacy. While this bill does address some of the issues successfully – at least, it allows municipalities the option of addressing some of the issues successfully – I am concerned, as I said a few moments ago, that it is allowing too much discretion to local authorities.

Certainly, I know that the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and I think also the AAMD and C are onside with this because they don't want municipalities treated like children of the provincial government. They want to be able to control their own voting systems, and I hope it's the subject of some debate in this Assembly. I can see that all the members are hanging on every word I'm saying, listening closely. We have to ask ourselves if we don't in this Assembly have a responsibility to set the bar high on a province-wide basis to ensure that every voter in every election in every voting station in every corner of this province can have confidence in the same level of integrity of their voting system.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will leave my comments for second reading. With that, I will summarize them by saying that this is important legislation addressing a very messy situation, that it allows the right step to be taken, which is commendable, but I raise for all of us to consider the question if this legislation should not in fact require some of those steps to be taken and not simply allow them.

With those comments, I'll wrap up my debate on second reading of Bill 28. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, might we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour

tonight to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a good friend of mine up in the members' gallery that happens to have Easter break right now. He's a very good math teacher in the town of Innisfail, and I think he's been doing that for between 25 and 30 years. He has quite a large grain farm just down the road from my house. I'd like Earl Dreeshen to stand and be recognized by the House.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 28
Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006
(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, a lot of the questions that I have I'll save for the committee stage.

Obviously, how we elect representatives, whether it be provincially, federally, municipally, is very important. The Leader of the Opposition talked about it. We know that there is a great deal of cynicism. There's a great deal of apathy. I think the hon. member bringing forward the bill indicated that. When we have a situation as we did in ward 10, unfortunately that does just add to the cynicism that people have. Frankly, nobody wins when that happens. Nobody wins because it doesn't matter which side of the House you're on. If people have that feeling, then it goes into all politics.

10:20

This is an important part of it, and I would say to the mover of the bill that I've had some discussion too. I think the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and the member bringing it forward indicated a while ago that the concern heard overwhelmingly by the committee was not to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. As they indicated, what works in ward 10 in Calgary won't work in a small village, and to try to impose those things would be very difficult. I also heard that in talking to some people in the rural areas. They thought that if it got too top-down, it would actually discourage people – I think that's what the member is saying – from voting. I can live with that. I can live with that, but maybe we don't need an overall approach, the same for Calgary and Edmonton as for Delia if I could use that as an example.

I do have a couple of questions at the start. I'm not going to go through the whole thing. I recognize the importance of special ballots to our electoral system. After all, a great many people would not be able to exercise their right without special ballots. I have a few questions, that perhaps the member can come back to after, on the provisions made for special ballots in the proposed amendments.

The one question I have. The Leader of the Opposition talked about problems provincially, but it's my understanding that the provincial returning officers do require contact with the person requesting a special ballot. With a request placed on behalf of someone, for example an ailing parent – they're only processed once the provincial returning officer has assessed or actually contacted, written or telephoned, including enumeration if necessary, the ailing person that wants a special ballot. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I see no such stringent measures of contact for municipal authorities. Nor is there any contact policy through e-mail requests. It seems to me that this would be logical. We should have some idea that they do have the authority to actually represent the person that may be ailing or whatever. I'd like the member to comment on that.

The inspection report found that while there are improvements that might be considered for website application, the design, operation, and security of the system of programs were appropriate and were in line with the standards and procedures used by other jurisdictions today. That was on page 46. But here's the conundrum that I see because of the ward 10 thing. Knowing that the ward 10 inspection report also revealed that the major factor contributing to the irregularity was the use of the website application process to receive, complete, and submit special ballots in the names of unknowing electors, I guess this is the crux of it. There are a lot of good things to this bill, but this is sort of the key to the matter in terms of ward 10.

How can this legislation, then, add the right to apply for special ballots through e-mail? In other words, are there technological changes that will be brought in before e-mail requests for special ballots continue? I'd want to know this. Through the e-mails seems to be the problem in this particular instance in ward 10. I want to know how this bill, then, solves that particular problem, still using the e-mails. I think that's the crux, really, of what it's all about. If I can be convinced that that problem is solved and can't happen again, then I certainly would support the bill.

There are some other minor questions that I might have in the committee stage. It seems to me that I still don't understand how this particular part of it – we still have the special ballots through the website. That was where the abuse occurred. Now, with this bill, how will that abuse stop? I think that's really the key thing that we're trying to deal with this at this particular time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for those who have a question or comment.

Seeing none, anyone wish to speak to the bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-West to close.

Mr. Liepert: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

Bill 25
Securities Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today to move second reading of Bill 25. In fact, with the recent couple of days that I've had, it's a pleasure to stand anywhere. Mr. Speaker, I'm moving Bill 25, the Securities Amendment Act, 2006.

The purpose of this legislation is threefold: to enhance protection for investors, to broaden the passport system of regulation, and to allow further harmonization of Alberta's securities regulation with other provinces and territories.

First, Bill 25 would introduce civil liability provisions allowing secondary market investors to sue public companies for issuing false or misleading information. Investors in the primary market who buy shares from public companies, for example as part of an IPO, already have that legal right. Bill 25 enshrines in legislation the same statutory right of legal action for secondary market investors.

I can't understate the significance of these provisions. More than 90 per cent of all securities trading takes place in the secondary market. This includes Albertans with RRSPs, pension plans, and other personal investments. Mr. Speaker, if this bill is passed, Alberta will be working with its provincial and territorial counterparts to improve investor protection across Canada. Ontario

implemented essentially identical legislative changes on December 31, 2005, and other jurisdictions have indicated their intent to do the same.

Regulators have consulted widely on this issue over the last several years, and we believe this legislation strikes a balance between issuers concerned about frivolous lawsuits and the need to enhance investor protection.

Mr. Speaker, I also stated that this legislation will further harmonize Alberta's securities legislation with other provinces and territories. Bill 25 amends or repeals a number of provisions within Alberta's existing Securities Act. The repealed provisions would then be placed into national instruments or national rules regulating securities trading. This helps ensure that our securities legislation remains modern, streamlined, and harmonized with other jurisdictions, particularly Ontario.

Alberta is the second largest capital market in Canada, and it is important to show leadership and keep our legislation up to date. Harmonization and simplification of securities law is essential not just for Alberta but for Canada to compete in a global marketplace.

Now, certainly I'm aware that there are calls for a national securities regulator. Whether that might happen one day, Mr. Speaker, I cannot predict, but at this time the provinces and territories with the exception of Ontario are not prepared to commit to that step. Regardless, the changes we are making in concert with other jurisdictions are required to improve securities regulation across the country.

Last year this Assembly passed Bill 19, the Securities Amendment Act, 2005, which facilitated the creation of a passport system for securities regulation. The passport system was implemented in September last year, giving businesses a single window of access for capital markets across most of Canada. Bill 25 builds on that milestone in provincial/territorial co-operation. These three broad initiatives, taken together, are important to our ongoing efforts to improve securities regulation across Canada. Alberta remains committed to working with other provinces and territories to improve investor protection and enhance the efficiency of Canada's capital markets.

I urge all members of the Legislature to give their support to Bill 25. Thank you.

10:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening and lead off debate on behalf of the Official Opposition on Bill 25, the Securities Amendment Act, 2006, in second reading. I'd like to begin by thanking the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for his comments this evening in second reading, and I'd also like to thank the Finance minister for allowing the staff from the Department of Finance and from the Alberta Securities Commission to visit the offices of the Official Opposition and provide a very thorough briefing on this bill to us. Included in that briefing was what is known as the three-column document. It's something that hasn't always been made available to this critic, but it seems as if we've developed an environment of collaboration and co-operation with the Finance minister, and I appreciate that. I do believe that it leads to better debate in this Assembly and, ultimately, better legislation for all Albertans. I hope that it's a sign of more to come.

In general, Mr. Speaker, I support the intention of this amending bill. The comments that have been made by the mover tonight pretty much reflect what I understand is the intention of the bill in terms of what it would accomplish. However, I would be remiss if I failed to

mention my perpetual concern with the all-too-common practice of this government to repeal parts of legislation and move them into regulations, thereby allowing future changes to be made away from the public eye and outside of the watchful guardianship of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, there have been comments in the media about the size of this particular document. It's a big bill, perhaps the biggest I've seen in the time that I've been in this Assembly, yet when you flip through it, the majority of what you're looking at are sections that are being repealed and then pages of legislation that are referred to in that repealing. I'm certainly not a fan, as I say, of repealing legislation and putting it into regulation.

Having made that comment, I guess that if there was ever a case where I could live with that action, with the idea of repealing sections of legislation and putting them into regulation, it might be in this particular situation. That is because, as the mover indicated in his comments this evening, the intention and, in fact, it would appear to me, the result of this bill being passed would be that it will bring us in line with other jurisdictions, particularly Ontario. If that makes it easier for Alberta business to operate and seek capital in the market, then that is a good thing for all of us, I'm sure.

The minister also referred to the fact that this will allow investors in the secondary market to sue public companies operating in Alberta if, in fact, they provide false or misleading information; so again consumer protection. You won't hear this critic speaking against that, that's for sure.

Mr. Speaker, there was some comment to the fact that currently we have 13 security market regulators in the country and not one, not a single market regulator. There was a lot of talk about that last year as we saw some of the goings-on at the Alberta Securities Commission and how that reflected badly on Alberta, yet there's a general understanding on this side of the House as to some of the advantages of continuing to have an Alberta Securities Commission. Certainly, it provides local companies faster access to public equity. Alberta companies, with that possibility, of course, are less likely to fall by the wayside to central Canadian companies, and it allows us to maintain increased local control. Those are good things.

However, of course, having a multiregulator environment causes a number of challenges, Mr. Speaker. Companies operating in several different provinces have to deal with several different rules, and while I understand that the passport system has made tremendous strides towards addressing that situation, we do still have a situation, particularly with Ontario, as the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky acknowledged, where they're not quite in line with everybody yet. So this does create sometimes conflicting and confusing regulations for investors and for companies that are seeking that capital investment.

I suppose, Mr. Speaker, that others also would suggest that a multiregulator environment increases fees and reduces enforcement. So while this is a step in the right direction or a further step in the right direction, as the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky suggested, Bill 19 last year took us some way down that road, and this is maybe the next step down that road. It does fall short in some areas, particularly in areas that would address some of the problems or concerns that were identified last year, as I said, when we were going through some of the challenges and struggles at the Alberta Securities Commission.

Things that I particularly would have liked to have seen in this amending bill are things that would, for example, Mr. Speaker, prevent Alberta Securities Commission employees and board members from trading in companies that are being investigated. The opposition would like to have seen some regulations prohibiting Alberta Securities Commission and employees and board members

from trading in companies that are listed with the Alberta Securities Commission and would certainly like to see some rules that would restrict MLAs from nominating candidates for commission at the Alberta Securities Commission.

Those are some of the concerns as it relates directly to the Securities Commission.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we've indicated before that moving towards a passport system fails to provide a single enforcement regulator and, again, what that means is perhaps a different level of enforcement or a different application of regulations across the country. That can lead to confusion for investors and, of course, for companies as well.

There's some concern that a passport system might allow market regulators to pass the buck on enforcement files. As an example, the Alberta Securities Commission might investigate a small part of an irregularity and then pass another portion on to a different regulator. One investor advocate has indicated to us that this pass-the-buck system actually risks leaving an investigation incomplete.

Another concern that I would raise is the \$1 million cap on the administrative penalty. Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that there are literally hundreds of millions and at times billions of dollars' worth of trading done with some companies, and a \$1 million cap on an administrative penalty might not be enough, depending on the circumstance. So as we move to committee stage, that would be one of the questions that I will likely be asking.

I'll just highlight some of the good things that I see in this and the reasons why I'll be supporting the bill, two in particular. We talked about investor protection. Currently, people that purchase stocks through the secondary market, as an example, through stockbrokers or online day trading themselves, don't have the opportunity to sue those public companies if there's false or misleading information provided. You only have that opportunity right now if you're purchasing through the primary market; i.e., buying directly from the company. As the minister indicated, in excess of 90 per cent, I think, of trading is currently done through the secondary market. It's time that we caught up with Ontario's lead, and certainly it looks like this amending bill will allow us to do that.

I mentioned a little bit about the move towards a passport system and the fact that there is certainly some value to be gained by harmonizing our security legislation with rules that the other provincial jurisdictions are using as well.

10:40

So I think, Mr. Speaker, that this will be the sum of my comments for this evening. I look forward to having the opportunity to address this bill at the committee stage so that we can dig into some detail on the many, many pages – I think it's a total of 72 pages – of the bill as it sits in front of us.

I thank you for the opportunity to have spoken to it in second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's just say that going through the bill is like reading not a very exciting book. It would be interesting to know if the hon. member has read it all through and understands all of it. [interjection] Yeah. Right. He does, he says. We'll take his word on it for now.

I just want to make a few comments. Certainly, we would all support, I think, the protection for secondary market investors. We have to because let's not forget that the Securities Commission here in Alberta has had a very rough go of it in the last number of years and has lost a lot of credibility, and when they lose credibility, this

is not good, as we'd all recognize, for the economy, especially for small investors in the province.

I might say that while we've had a discussion here in the Legislature about the Securities Commission, not so much this session but in the previous sessions, when I was working in the private sector, there was a lot of discussion back then, you know, eight, nine years ago, about things that were happening with the Securities Commission. They've had, perhaps, not as bad a reputation as B.C. before it, but certainly it was out there. I hope that this particular bill solves some of the problems. Certainly, as I said, things like the protection for secondary market investors, where they will have the legal right to sue public companies: I know that's been somewhat of an issue here with some investors that I've talked to. The minister talks about Ontario enacting similar legislation, and I'll come to that.

We've had some discussion with the Alberta Securities Commission, about protecting secondary market investors. They talk about – and this is one that's a little more disconcerting to me – the second major reason to move legislation to regulation in order to facilitate cross-jurisdictional alignment of policies: they claim that it's more difficult to do this within legislation. Therefore, they're moving these items from legislation to regulation to make them more flexible nationally. These regulations are national rules that carry the weight of law. Therefore, according to the SEC there isn't a loss of oversight in just the switching of who is doing the overseeing.

Well, that may well be the case. I guess that at this point we have to take their word for that. But, again, that begs the question that we're talking about. When we take a document like this and move it back into regulations, how do we ever know if there's something occurring that we should be talking about in this Legislature because we have responsibility? I know it's nice to have the system there. Perhaps it does work better if people can work behind closed doors. But it does beg the question that we should have the responsibility here because, ultimately, we are responsible for it. I understand what they're saying, that they can do this quicker, they can do it better through regulations, that it's easier than trying to juxtapose different legislation. But I would ask the minister: where is that tipping point?

That brings me to the point, and the member alluded to it, that for the life of me I don't understand, with all the problems we've had with these various securities commissions. I remember 15, 20 years ago in British Columbia all the talk there, and we've certainly had our problems here in Alberta. You've said that it may come down the way, but I don't know why we don't move towards a national security regulator as has been called for by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives among many others. The reason I say that is that it's not a federal act. It would be the provinces working together the same as this bill is attempting to do. It seems to me that that would make the most sense rather than moving everything to regulation, that we'd have a national security regulator. We would all be working under the same rules then, and all investors would be protected right across Canada.

I think the member is right that Alberta, with our economy, is probably the second biggest one after Ontario, but it's a global economy now, and what we know of small investors, it could be in two or three different areas. That's the purpose of this bill. I know that, but it seems to me it would have been much better to say: okay; we still have provincial jurisdiction. It's not the federal government but the provinces getting together – we'd have a lot of clout on it, being the second biggest one – and having the same rules laid out as recommended by a lot of people that do the investing. For instance, a national securities regulator would surely have gone much further than requiring the ASC director of enforcement, Mr. Petch, simply donating to charity the profits made from unethically traded stock.

If that was national, that wouldn't have happened, I don't think. The rules would have been there.

The member did say – and I was encouraged by that because I thought this government had sort of ruled it out, you know, that we can't do that, that it's national, that it's sort of the federal government. It's not the federal government. It would be the provinces working together. I think that would make a lot more sense and would be easier than this 162-page book, moving it back into regulation.

So I really would suggest – I know that it's not going to happen here with this bill – that the government take a good look at this. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think Ontario would support a national securities regulation. I don't know where the other provinces stand, but if Alberta put their weight behind it, being second biggest, I think you'd see it come about. So I really would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we begin to take a look at that because most investors that I've talked to think that this is the way to go. It makes the most sense.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate in the bill?

Does the hon. member wish to close?

Mr. Knight: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

Bill 26

Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act

[Debate adjourned March 23: Mr. Strang]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead still has 13 minutes.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to add a few comments to the second reading debate of Bill 26, Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act. Oh, that's right. This was moved by West Yellowhead on behalf of Calgary-North Hill.

This is the second time that this Assembly has seen for the most part the ideas in this bill because it had an earlier incarnation as a private member's bill which, in fact, passed in 2004. My understanding is that there were some concerns that were raised aside from the ones that were raised during the debate of the bill, additional concerns that came to light after it, and that this bill is now coming forward as a government bill and has attempted to address the deficiencies that existed in the previous one.

I remember from the time of the debate that there was a lot of support from emergency personnel, so police officers, firefighters, correctional workers, emergency workers, basically anyone that was in a job where they could come into contact with someone who may have a blood-borne infection – HIV, AIDS, hep C, that sort of thing – where they might get contaminated by close encounters with people, and it was intended to assist them.

10:50

The problem that I had with the previous bill was that it just was too open to interpretation and abuse by others. I think at the time I brought forward issues that were raised by EGALE, which is the Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere. This is a national organization, but they were concerned that the legislation as it

existed could be used to target homosexuals. I think that in my reading of this bill now, those concerns have been for the most part addressed because we're not hauling people off to draw the pint of blood out of them to be tested. There is an administrative function that's now coming in between. I think that's probably what was new in the bill and what will make it successful.

I wasn't very supportive of the previous incarnation because I felt that it could be used to target specific groups of people, maybe not always members of the GLBT community but urban aboriginals or prostitutes or any number of other people who could be sort of targeted as a group. It was just too open for interpretation on that one, but I'm aware that a number of my colleagues did in fact support the bill.

I note that this bill is now based on the Uniform Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act, which is coming forth from the Uniform Law Conference of Canada, and they are recommending it for enactment by all of the provinces and territories. In a quick scan I see that Ontario did pass similar legislation in 2002. There was a private member's bill. It was actually an opposition member's bill, I think, at the federal level, which I don't think ever really got very far. I believe that there's currently discussion in B.C. about similar legislation. So, obviously, this is moving to the front burner if it isn't already there, but it's addressing a situation that many people have identified.

When I go back and look at the Ontario legislation, it requires mandatory blood samples from individuals who expose victims of crime or emergency workers and good Samaritans to bodily fluids. Now, the difference there – I'm sure everybody picked it up as I read that phrase – is that Bill 26 as it stands does not include victims of crime but I think does spell out the other categories.

The rationale for the legislation in Ontario was that it would reduce the number of preventative drug treatments that emergency personnel are required to take, including drugs that have side effects. For people that suspect that they may have been exposed to HIV – and hep C is a different treatment – this is not a pleasant experience. You are basically exposed to a cocktail of drugs. There are fairly significant side effects, and it is uncomfortable, painful for some, myriad side effects. It is not something that you want to be doing lightly or want to do unless you're pretty sure you're going to need to do it.

Part of the issue is: why would we subject these emergency workers who are doing good for all of us? They truly are performing a public service as firefighters or police officers or emergency personnel. You know, they're doing us a great public service, and for us to then place them in a situation where they're not only inconvenienced but have health implications to deal with, we really need to try and avoid that if at all possible, and certainly we want to. I hasten to say that if it's serious and if they need that, then absolutely they should get all the assistance that we can possibly offer them, but if it's possible for us to not have to expose people to that, it would be better.

That was the Ontario legislation.

The federal legislation was from a member of the opposition. It did pass first reading but went to one of their committees for review, and it died on the Order Paper. It did have strong support from some sectors and very strong support from others. We had support from police forces and the paramedics, but the Canadian Bar Association came out against it with some of the same concerns that I was raising. The Canadian Bar Association felt that the federal legislation would not withstand a Charter challenge and would lead to systemic discrimination against certain groups of people. The former federal Privacy Commissioner had serious reservations about what was then Bill C-217 and the issue of mandatory blood testing

in general. He identified a really good test to use, and I'll come back to that later.

The situation that we have right now is that there are only two instances where the authorities can take samples without consent. Those situations are testing for alcohol where there are reasonable grounds to believe that there is impaired driving and DNA samples related to prosecution for certain serious offences. There's a seriousness and a weight to both of these examples. They're both under the Criminal Code, and they do have an expectation that there are reasonable grounds of serious criminal wrongdoing.

Overall, I like this bill much more, Mr. Speaker. I think the intentions of the bill are good. The intentions of the previous bill were good. I just felt it was very flawed in the way it approached it. I've talked already about our need to protect the people that protect us, and I think that is carried through in what's being proposed here. As always, I hope that we're attempting to balance the rights of all people, and that can be difficult. I don't feel that it was achieved in the previous version of the bill, but I think there's more success this time out. You really are trying to balance that infringement. Let's face it; when you're talking about taking blood, you are piercing – I'm sure that there's a legal word for it – the corporeal body. You're piercing their skin to get that blood. You really are assaulting them. You could put it that way. So you've got to be very careful that you're doing this in circumstances where you're very confident that this is going to withstand a number of tests, that you would not be infringing on someone frivolously.

Unfortunately, despite what's anticipated in this bill, it's still likely that we would have to have those emergency workers commence with that cocktail of drugs just to be able to protect them, but if there's a way that we can save a few and balance so that we're able to pass this legislation with good heart, then I think it's worth doing.

We need to be aware that it takes time to get the order that is anticipated and described in the bill and to carry out the testing. As always, we've got to be aware and very cautious that there can be false positives and false negatives. Getting a negative result the first time doesn't mean that somebody is free and clear. They could be in a window or an incubation period, or it could just be a false negative, and we've got to be alive to that. I think there's a minor danger here with the negative test that they could do more harm than good by creating a false sense of security.

11:00

Rev. Abbott: Question.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I'm getting great enthusiasm from Drayton Valley-Calmor. I think he wants us to stay much later and debate much more. Thank you so much. I always appreciate that support from that back corner there. It inspires me and wakes me up, gets me energized. It could be a good night.

I was talking about a negative test sometimes doing more harm than good and that it can create a false sense of security, which in fact is not accurate and can delay treatment. So we've got to be careful about that.

I'm going to go back now to the four tests that the federal Privacy Commissioner suggested when we're anticipating infringing on someone's privacy. The tests were: is the bill necessary? Is this particular action necessary? I think my personal version of that is: is there a problem? Maybe I can prevail upon the Member for Calgary-North Hill to give some additional information on the statistical need for this bill. How many times in a year do we have emergency workers who believe they have been placed in this position? Is it happening, you know, 10 times a night, 10 times a

shift, or once a month? What is the level of demand for this? I think that would be interesting to know, and it helps us judge whether we need to even be bringing something forward that could impinge on somebody's privacy rights if there isn't that large a demand. I'm sure that the member has done the research, and I'm sure that he'll be happy to share it with me as to what the magnitude of the problem is.

The second test was: is the bill effective? My version of that is: is this going to solve the problem? If there is a problem, is this going to do it? What we're seeing here is that it would take time to get an order and carry out the testing; the results are not conclusive, and a negative result doesn't necessarily mean the person isn't infected.

Test three: how much of an invasion of privacy is the anticipated action that's being proposed in the bill? More questions to the member: how many people refuse a blood test when they're asked to give it? In other words, how many times would we have to use this legislation to enforce it if the blood would not be given voluntarily? How often could it be used? How many people could be impacted by it?

The fourth test from the federal Privacy Commissioner was: are there less invasive alternatives to use for the same circumstances? On this one the . . . [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] Oh, that's really disappointing. I'm willing to support this and continue the debate in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate in the debate?

The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill to close debate.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to address a couple of the questions that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre had earlier this evening. One of the things that was looked at – and she did mention the gay community and that she had talked to a gal in some of other groups. When the stakeholder group was first created, they had firefighters, paramedic professions, the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the regional health authority, medical officers of health. The Alberta Advisory Committee on AIDS and the Alberta Community Council on HIV were all included in this. I was privy to a couple of those meetings, and they seemed to think that this would frankly work at this point in time.

One of the other comments that she made about the drug treatments not being pleasant: that's absolutely accurate. What happens to these people when they do become infected or if they think they have a possibility of being infected is that they must go for the drug treatments because there is no alternative. One of the nice things that this bill does is it simply makes the first place they go the communicable diseases database, so hopefully none of this will take place in any event.

One other question that she had was about protecting those who protect us, but I'd like you to take note and pay careful attention to a provision within the act that also protects the source individual in a great many ways throughout this bill. So it's not just the person who's the victim; it's also the person who's the source of the problem.

How many times is it refused when people are asked to give it? Well, right now there's no law in place that allows them to take it, so consequently we can't give you the numbers on how often it's refused. I will check that, and I will check *Hansard* tomorrow to see if there are any other questions in there.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to committee stage on this bill, and I close debate on second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

Bill 27

Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act

[Adjourned debate April 10: Mr. Horner]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The highlights of this legislation indicate that it will remove the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act into enabling regulations as vegetables are now graded nationally.

Certainly, when one looks at this bill and one considers that there is so much legislation and government business that goes behind closed doors, it doesn't hurt. There's no harm in having this bill moved through the Legislative Assembly Act and having it repealed. One only has to think of some of the other matters that sort of routinely go through this Assembly, and there is no public scrutiny. When there's no public scrutiny, sometimes, Mr. Speaker, one looks in the past, and they realize that they have maybe made mistakes.

Now, I go back, Mr. Speaker, to November of 2001, when in miscellaneous statutes we transferred millions and millions of dollars worth of land from one government department to another. That's land that was purchased over the course of time mostly in the early '80s for the ring roads in both Edmonton and Calgary.

So there is a benefit to moving legislation through this Assembly and not through miscellaneous statutes. There was a time when it was thought that perhaps it's possible that this bill be repealed through the miscellaneous statutes, but in light of that example that I just quoted from November of 2001, I think it's a good idea that we let all hon. members of the Assembly have a look at all the legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise this evening and speak to Bill 27, the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act. I had the pleasure of listening to debate last evening when the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development spoke to this bill in second reading, and there was a lot of hooting and hollering and fun poked at the minister and the piece of legislation and a lot of light made of vegetables and the sale of such. I find it ironic that it's left up to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to defend the honour of vegetable growers and market gardeners in Alberta, but here I am.

11:10

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the manner in which vegetables are sold has changed almost as much in 100 years as the technologies with which they are grown. Let us not forget that the beloved Lois Hole, the former Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, had her roots in vegetable gardening. [interjections] Somebody's listening. That's good.

The market garden that the Holes operated on the south-facing banks of the Sturgeon River in St. Albert is still there today. I think all members are aware of her book, *I'll Never Marry a Farmer*. I could go on and on, but it's important that people be reminded that that's where Lois came from.

Mr. Speaker, land in Edmonton's northeast features some of the very best number 1 grade loam to be found anywhere in North

America. This is grade A growing soil which has been and continues to be under attack by urban sprawl and the construction of Edmonton's badly needed and much anticipated ring road. Ironically, this is some of the same land, at least, that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar referred to a minute ago, which has been in the news an awful lot in the last few days.

Mr. Speaker, this primary agricultural land has supported many successful family farm operations such as Kuhlmann's Market Gardens & Greenhouses, Brenneis gardens, Visser Farms, Wallish Greenhouses, Simon's market gardens, Laskiwski's market gardens and greenhouses, and, of course, there are many more. Such diverse crops as kohlrabi, turnips, broccoli, cauliflower, peas, carrots, cucumbers, squash, pumpkins, string beans, cabbage, famous Alberta potatoes, and I could go on and on. These are all grown right here around Edmonton. Don't forget, Mr. Speaker, famous Taber corn. I'm sure there's probably a member in here who would be thrilled at my mentioning Taber corn. Sunflower seeds are grown in southern Alberta, and I'm not really sure whether or not sunflower seeds are a vegetable, but I thought that I would mention them just the same. Of course, we've got sugar beets grown in the southeast part of the province. Some wonderful market gardens operate in the mighty Peace Country, and, in fact, Mr. Speaker, there are even vegetable gardens in Hay River and Fort Smith, north of the 60th parallel in the Northwest Territories.

In the early 1900s, Mr. Speaker, people living in urban centres often had large enough lots that would allow them to grow their own vegetables. For decades those who did not or could not grow their own often had a personal relationship with their local supplier, and they would travel directly to the farm to purchase their produce, milk, eggs, and/or meat. In the '60s and 1970s pick-your-own farms were all the rage, and city folk could make a family day of an outing to the country and buy their fresh produce at a steep discount.

Now I'm going to beg your indulgence for just a minute as I read from an article in the May 27, 2005, edition of the *Edmonton Journal*, Mr. Speaker. This is about the history of farmers' markets. It says

Before 1973, only four farmers' markets existed in Alberta: Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat. The Edmonton City Market was Alberta's first farmers' market and was established in 1900, but despite many years of success, farmers' markets did not initially flourish in this province.

In 1973, Alberta Agriculture announced a new grant program for the establishment of farmers' markets in Alberta under the direction of then minister of agriculture the Honourable Hugh Horner.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is the father of the current minister of agriculture, and I'm surprised that the minister didn't acknowledge his father's contribution to farmers' markets when he spoke last night. Mr. Speaker, it continues:

Under the new program, farmers' markets began to flourish and by 1975 there were 35 farmers' markets in the province. In 1994, the Alberta Farmers' Market Association became incorporated and today there are between 110-120 farmers' markets in Alberta . . .

Farmers' markets provide an opportunity for urban residents to purchase goods direct from agricultural producers and consequently offer a supplementary income source for producers. They also serve as incubators for new businesses allowing them to test out new products and establish markets before growing bigger. For communities, farmers' markets are a social event, a gathering place, and a shopping venue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately far too many children growing up in our cities today believe that carrots come from the grocery store, and they have never had the opportunity to learn anything different. It is my sincere hope that with projects like the City Farm in northeast Edmonton children and their families will once again have the opportunity to visit and experience the farm first-hand by

growing and processing food, caring for animals, and simply experiencing nature. Perhaps along the way they will develop a greater appreciation for vegetables and the sale of vegetables.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one, does anyone else wish to participate in the debate?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We've made some very good progress tonight, and I know that some of the members have some plans afoot. We certainly want to give them an opportunity to do whatever between now and the stroke of midnight, so I would ask that we adjourn the House until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 11:16 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 12, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent and good friend of mine, Earl Dreesen. Earl is a dedicated, long-time teacher and currently teaches math at Innisfail junior and senior high school. Earl and his family share a passion for grain farming at Pine Lake, near my home. Earl has been a long-time supporter of my political career and my association. Earl is accompanied by his son Devin today. Devin is in his first year at the U of A, taking some political science courses. I'd like to thank Earl and Devin for joining us on their school spring break today. Could they rise and all members show them a welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two gentlemen who represent a service club which is well known to all members in this Assembly, the Rotary clubs and Rotary International for Alberta. The first gentleman that I'd like to introduce is Mr. Ed Wilson, who is the incoming district governor for district 5370, as well as Mr. Gordon Boddez, who is the incoming president of the World Community Service society. These two gentlemen as well as a number of others from the Rotary were here today to talk to members about how we might use our process in government to help them do the good work that they do internationally. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Hon. Emilia Müller, the Minister of State for Federal and European Affairs in Bavaria, Germany. Minister Müller is leading a delegation of senior officials to Canada to learn about our system of government. Germany's system consists of a federal government and 16 state governments. Reforms are under way to define more clearly federal and state responsibilities. Minister Müller and I had an engaging discussion on our respective systems of government this morning and over lunch. I'd ask that our honoured visitors, who are seated in your gallery, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly 48 very talented young people from Dunluce elementary school in Edmonton. They're just neighbours to my constituency office. They are accompanied by two teachers, Mrs. Huk and Miss Wynn. I would like them all to rise and accept the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature Mr. Duncan Wojtaszek. Duncan is the executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students, representing 40,000 Alberta university students. He's seated in the public gallery. I would ask my fellow members to give him a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 52 brilliant grade 6 students from Ellerslie elementary school accompanied by their teachers Frances Stead, Tom Jaques, Gloria Spooner, and Miss Tanya Thompson. They are seated in the public gallery. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 36 students from Northmount elementary school in my constituency. They're a bright group of students from one of my favourite schools. They're also accompanied by three teachers: Mrs. Arsenault, Mrs. McConaghie, and Mrs. Lowes. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great amount of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special guests that are here representing the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. The CFIB is celebrating their 35th anniversary this year. They have a tremendous history of advocating for small and medium-sized business. Joining us today in the public gallery are Sasha Angus, director of provincial affairs for Alberta and the Northwest Territories, and Janine Halbesma, policy analyst for Alberta and NWT. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mona Oakes and Marj Bouchard. Mona was born and raised here in Alberta, growing up in Athabasca and getting married and settling with children here in Edmonton. Mona is now enjoying the retired life and volunteering at the Calder drop-in centre as the volunteer co-

chairperson of military whist. She and her husband are active coaching a number of sports, including baseball, hockey, and figure skating.

Marj Bouchard has been an active member of the Rosslyn Community League since 1972. She was also active in the Bill Bouchard memorial hockey tournament with her son Bill and his wife, Sherry,* who have now taken over the tournament. Marj is active with the Calder seniors' centre as the bocce ball director.

Mr. Speaker, I would now ask these two wonderful young people to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the pride of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka: 48 grade 6 students from Lacombe upper elementary. With them today are teachers Mr. Bobb Epp, Mrs. Carrie Lisafeld, Mrs. Christine Graves, Mrs. Jean Kaufmann, Mrs. Leslie Smale, and also parent helper Mr. Brian Nelson. If I could ask them to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

1:40 Investigation of FOIP Documents

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The saga of the government's secret flight logs continues. Now the Information and Privacy Commissioner has requested that a special prosecutor be brought in to investigate alleged document tampering, allegedly done by an employee of Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation to stall the release of information damaging to this government until after the 2004 election. I doubt that the employee would have taken such action of her own accord. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation – and this skeleton is just a little over a year old; it's not 20. Is the person who allegedly tampered with these documents still involved in processing FOIP requests in the minister's department?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, they're still not certain as to the individual who allegedly tampered with any e-mail, so it's hard for me to say whether, in fact, an individual is still in the department. I can tell you that there have been no individuals removed from the department.

Mr. Taylor: To the Deputy Premier: does the Deputy Premier deny that there was any political motivation behind delaying the release of the FOIP flight logs until two days after the 2004 provincial election?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the hon. member is that I have no knowledge of the affair at all.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Deputy Premier again: does the Deputy Premier deny that there were any directives given from any member of government to tamper with the e-mail in question?

Mrs. McClellan: Again, Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the hon. member is that I have no knowledge of any individuals being involved in this at all.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the CNRL Horizon project north of Fort McMurray 50 temporary foreign workers with Shanghai Construction have now moved into camp 2 to work on tank farm construction for that oil sands project. It is common knowledge that 550 more temporary foreign workers are being processed and will move into that camp soon. Thousands of apprentices are waiting for spots at NAIT and SAIT. Many qualified trades workers are available in other provinces. Alberta aboriginals would like to learn and earn and work. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How are Albertan and Canadian contractors to compete on oil sands contracts if foreign contractors with their workforces are given preferential contracts and access to the work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. No doubt, Alberta has had the hottest economy in North America. We're blessed with many resources and many job opportunities and economic opportunities for the businesses and individuals out there. I've always said in this House that our top priority is to hire Albertans first. Hire Albertans first. Of course, we have aboriginal people, we have persons with developmental disabilities, we have older workers, we have youth out there that we can access. That is the number one priority. Second to that, we bring people from outside of Alberta in Canada to also work and share in those opportunities. If that doesn't work, if a company out there can prove that they have exhausted all resources to get local people to work or Canadians to work, then they do apply – and this member knows that it's not the Alberta government – to the federal system, to the federal ministry of immigration in order to bring in foreign workers. That process is in place. This member knows that.

Mr. Backs: The oil sands process for temporary foreign workers was negotiated by this government with the federal government.

To the Minister of Finance: why are the citizens of Alberta making massive tax concessions to encourage oil sands development when they will not and cannot get work on the oil sands developments?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that this comment on development in the oil sands would be more appropriately put to the Minister of Energy, who is very well versed in the activity, the wonderful activity, actually, in our north.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Human Resources and Employment has said a number of times, we have a number of strategies for workforce improvement, looking at employing Albertans first, Canadians next, and then, of course, looking at other workers. There is some suggestion that government should intervene. I have found in my experience that whenever government intervenes in the marketplace, it's not a good thing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Advanced Education: what will the minister say to encourage apprentices, thousands of them, waiting sometimes all night for NAIT and SAIT spots, when they see cheap temporary foreign labour flooding this country and eroding their future working conditions and wages?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In terms of apprenticeship systems I think the hon. member knows full well that Alberta has the best apprenticeship system anywhere in Canada. In fact, we train more than 20 per cent of the Canadian apprentices, and we have less than 10 per cent of the population. We have about 1,400 high school students that are getting started in the RAP program.

Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that my estimates are up this afternoon. I'd be happy to provide him with more details then.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Reform

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the numbers are in, and the third way should be out. Results of a recent poll show that the third way does not have the support of any identifiable group. By gender, by age, by geography, and by political ideology Albertans do not support queue-jumping, private payment, or allowing doctors to work in both systems. My questions today are to the Deputy Premier. Is this government proceeding with third-way privatization legislation this spring that removes the barriers to private insurance and allows doctors to work in both the public and private system? Yes or no?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I understand that it's a Friends of Medicare poll that was released today that shows that about 60% of Albertans are opposed to the third way. I find it interesting that they will take this poll and say that we should act on it when over the last several days I've heard over and over again from the opposition benches that nobody understands the third way. So this is a bit of a travesty, in my mind.

Mr. Speaker, the health minister has stood in this House and commented numerous times on what she heard in her consultations one-on-one and in groups with Albertans. What she heard was that there are elements of the third way that they like very much, and there are elements of the third way that they have concerns about, that we're going to continue to work with them on.

So to give a definitive yes or no today, given all of what I said, would be, I think, quite impossible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. My next question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given that 59% of seniors polled oppose expanding private health care and fear that more costs will be downloaded, what specific actions has the minister designed to assist seniors who face financial hardship if this plan goes through?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am interested in that result that the member has mentioned here and will look into that further in my consultations with seniors. As I explained in this House

yesterday, we have seven programs for seniors in this ministry that are funded significantly through our budget. We have the Alberta seniors' benefit program.

Actually, I'd like to talk about one program that we haven't talked about before in the Legislature, that really does assist our seniors, and that's the Alberta Aids to Daily Living program. There are 80,000 Albertans that are supported through this program, significant funding, a significant increase in the budget this year. That assists our seniors with being independent, with living in the community. I know that it's the only program of its type in Canada, Mr. Speaker, like most of our programs, and they all work holistically together for the independence of our seniors.

I would be pleased to give this member further information regarding all seven. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: after years of teasing, threats, and abandoned privatization plans when will Albertans know exactly what the government plans for our health care system? Give us a date.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the only threat on privatization seems to be, to me, in the opposition benches. Frankly, most Albertans that I talk to understand the private sector's role in health care. They understand that the private sector has played a very positive role in our health system for years and years and years and years and will continue to. I think what Albertans understand also is that our health system is a precious, precious system.

Alberta enjoys the best health delivery system in Canada bar none. Mr. Speaker, that's not simply our opinion. That has been well documented by social policy writers in eastern Canada, by *Maclean's* magazine twice stating that the Capital health region right here has the best delivery system in Canada. What we want to do is have a dialogue to ensure that we continue to enjoy this high-quality health system long into the future. To not do that would be irresponsible.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the tide against the government's two-tier, private health care scheme, the third way, continues to rise. Today a Friends of Medicare poll shows that fully two-thirds of Albertans oppose two-tier, private health care. Also, today Alberta's NDP opposition launched its website, www.ndpopposition.ab.ca, where Albertans can find out how to take positive action to protect public health care. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier herself visit www.ndpopposition.ab.ca and learn why Albertans oppose the third way by a margin of 2 to 1?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've heard the dulcet tones of the opposition leader advertising this on the radio for the last couple of days, and I must say that it did kind of tweak my interest so that I might sit down at my laptop sometime and visit that site.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is: will the Deputy Premier visit the site, which is, by the way, www.ndpopposition.ab.ca, and learn why rural Albertans know that

the third way will cripple health care in small towns and rural Alberta?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this member probably has a little more knowledge about small-town Alberta than my respected colleague across the way. I happen to live in small-town rural Alberta. I happen to have lived in small-town rural Alberta in various parts of this province all of my life, and I happen to interact with people in those small communities on at least a weekend basis now that the House is in and oftener when it is not. I think that what small-town rural Albertans are concerned about is that they continue to receive a quality level of care. I don't hear concerns from them as to whether it's a private-sector delivery model or whether it's a public-sector delivery model. What they do understand is the public pay side of the system.

Mr. Speaker, we have high-quality health services in my communities. We appreciate them, and we enjoy them. We have high-quality health services in this city and the city of Calgary and in our regional hospitals, and I can tell you that rural Albertans appreciate those services as well. So I think the hon. member would do well to come to small-town rural Alberta instead of just a website and find out what's really going on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: given the strong opposition among Albertans to the third way, will she visit www.ndpoposition.ab.ca and use the handy e-letter tool on that site to declare the death of the third way?

Mrs. McClellan: You know what, Mr. Speaker? I will continue to have conversations and meetings and discussions with Albertans on the important subject of preserving a health system that they cherish. Doing that is not hiding your head in the sand, pretending that everything's okay and that costs aren't accelerating and that we're not expending about \$10.3 billion on health care for 3.2 million people.

This is not an issue in Alberta only. There isn't a Premier in Canada that is not having this discussion. There's not a health minister in Canada that is not having this discussion. I only hope that the opposition parties in those other provinces are more constructive than what I'm finding here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Water Management

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Water for Life strategy is important for our future here in Alberta, and we all agree that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. The mapping, recording, and analysis of our water systems will be part of that ounce of prevention for our water in the fact that many of these underground aquifers and waterways stretch for miles and are interconnected. This base evaluation is critical to have if we are to protect our water supplies and landowners from the loss of our most precious resource. My questions today are for the Environment minister. Will you protect our water resources and insist that all of the data on inventory is completed before allowing drilling and development of new wells and not limit it to 600 metres, which is scientifically inadequate and only an arbitrary number that is not in our best interest?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member raises some very important points that I agree with. However, one point that I think needs to be articulated is that of the 600 metres. You may not be aware, but the scientists and the biologists that we used, in fact, were from some leading environmental groups across this nation. We had Dr. Mary Griffiths from the Pembina Institute, who is not always complimentary to this government but in fact indicated that the approach that we are taking and the distance we are taking is the right approach in order to protect and secure our water today and well into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. Will the minister take further steps to protect landowners and our water resources by passing regulations that require oil companies to give prior notice to adjacent landowners within one mile of all development activity, including products to be used in and at the well sites?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as I said in this House in the past, it is the law to protect our land, air, and water. It is the law that we have the strongest regulation. We're the only province in all of Canada that has the standard that we introduced last week. We will ensure that the hon. member's son or daughter will be able to use the basin that's close to him to be able to fish a hundred years from now, if he lives that long, because of the value that Albertans have, and that is that we value our environment, we value our water, we value our land, and we value our air. We are doing everything in order to achieve that objective, and we're doing it as we speak.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Will the Environment minister work with the Energy minister, the E and E, to change the regulation limiting a landowner's ability to hire and be represented by whom he chooses to work with and be present at the EUB hearings?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, not only will I work with this minister, but I'll work with any member in here, any minister, and I will certainly work with you in order to achieve the objective that we want to attain.

The Speaker: Ah, the love.

Capital Planning Process

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, it seems that a day doesn't go by without hearing about the need for more schools, upgraded health care facilities, improved highways, expanded seniors' facilities, and added infrastructure, such as a new remand centre in Edmonton. My questions today are for the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation responsible for capital planning. With so many competing capital needs and demands in all corners of the province how does the government prioritize what gets built and what doesn't?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Battle River-Wainwright. Again, we'd like to congratulate him and his wife on the new-generation Albertan that came into this world this year.

Mr. Speaker, the capital planning process, as I indicated yesterday, is really an important one. It's a huge amount of money, and one of the main things that I think people have to be reassured about is that, number one, health and safety are primary issues in considering any type of infrastructure. Secondly, all the departments, the 11 that we work with and will work with in devising future capital projects, have a handle on the usage, the existing conditions, and the future projections that we see coming out of it. So based on all those factors, I think that you'll be very confident in developing a capital plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. To the same minister: recognizing that Alberta is not growing equally or as dramatically in all areas, what special considerations does your department give to rural Alberta, where well-maintained schools, quality health care facilities, and important community infrastructure are just as important and badly needed as in fast-growing centres?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For those of us that have had past municipal experience, I do think we do appreciate that there are four corners to the province. I do think it's really important, not only in lip service, that we do recognize it, and we will through the budget, which, by the way, will over the course of the next three years allocate over \$3 billion to our rural and small urban municipalities. I think that's fantastic, and I think that's the kind of planning we're looking for in the years beyond the next three.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the transportation system is key to developing economic and trade opportunities in rural Alberta, how will the minister respond to the transportation needs and opportunities of rural communities in the capital planning process?

Mr. McFarland: Well, I think it's a lot of good news that all of us can look forward to. Not only are we devising a plan that will recognize the needs in rural Alberta and urban Alberta, but we also have to remember that within the existing budget – and this will be the difficult part, projecting it beyond the next three years – we're already contributing over \$1,300 per man, woman, and child in the province, versus the nearest province which is about \$400, just on capital investment. How we keep that up is a challenge.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Regulatory Review

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2006 Speech from the Throne states:

This year the government will embark on a comprehensive regulatory review to identify and remove unneeded red tape between Albertans and their government. This will help maintain a competitive edge for business and improve access to services for Albertans.

In a recent survey the percentage of business owners who feel that red tape has indeed increased over the last three years is highest in Alberta at 66 per cent. My questions are to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Given that the minister estab-

lished a committee to reduce red tape, but Treasury turned down its request for funding, what is the minister going to do next?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it is true that regulatory review is a very, very important part of this government, and yes we do have money in our budget. There was a small portion that we asked for in our new budget, which is going to be coming up soon, that he can question me on later. But I want to say that this is so important to this government. We do have a certain amount in our budget already. We also are working on all kinds of different efficiencies and maybe some trimming we can do. We have some good employees in our department that said that they would take some extra time from their jobs they're doing to work on this, and we will be going ahead and getting some regulatory review done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister follow British Columbia's lead and establish regulation benchmarks so that the government and Alberta businesses can actually measure red tape reduction as they go?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, our committee right now, chaired by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, is working on some different types. We may not use the exact same type as British Columbia, but we will definitely show some benchmarks on how we're getting rid of red tape.

Mr. Elsalhy: To the same minister: will the minister ensure transparency and accountability and guarantee that regulatory burden reduction counts are going to be publicly released or publicly shared, again like they do in B.C.?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this government takes a lot of pride in showing transparency in everything we do, and it will be done in this also.

EUB Hearings on Electricity Transmission Line

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, last year the Energy and Utilities Board approved the need for a new 500 kV transmission line from the Genesee power plant to Langdon and chose a corridor through the heart of the eastern slopes area. The proposed transmission line has elicited strong landowner opposition all along this western route, and opponents have asked why they chose the western corridor over the less populated and less environmentally sensitive eastern corridor east of highway 2. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Will the new EUB hearings that have been called reconsider the question of which corridor – east, west, or central – would be the most appropriate, or is it just reconsidering different options for routes within the western corridor?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's correct: the Energy and Utilities Board, in response to a request for variance application from a number of people on the western corridor, as mentioned by the hon. member, has decided to re-open a hearing to make sure that everybody would have an opportunity. These are very important questions, that we site these badly needed transmission lines, that we make sure that we've got them located in the right place. That said, this hearing is for those impacted in the west corridor to bring forward their information, to talk about that being the western

corridor or not. It isn't about opening up the discussion of the central and east corridor though it is for them to provide the evidence in anything that we might hear to make sure that the west corridor is appropriate or not appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. My supplemental is also to the Minister of Energy. In light of the government's new land-use framework initiative and the criteria of best use, will these new EUB hearings take into consideration Albertans' new appreciation of the eastern slopes' environmental and recreational value?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The original decisions and all of the Energy and Utilities Board will take into consideration those environmental, recreational, technical issues. All of those things are part of what any affected person can bring forward. So those members, if they have special issues that they wish to raise, they are allowed to bring that forth in these hearings coming up likely this summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. Where do we go from here? What's the next step in this process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. It has been announced, as mentioned by the hon. member, that Energy and Utilities Board is going to conduct a hearing on the western corridor for the transmission line, this 500 kV line. That will likely happen somewhere late spring, early summer. The date hasn't yet been selected. That will be announced fairly soon. Those that are interested, I would suggest that if they wish to make an application and be part of that hearing, they should get a request for variance – that's the normal application process – and talk to the Energy and Utilities Board. They could help facilitate how they might be able to appear before that hearing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Progressive Conservative government allows the same land to be sold twice by the same owner, both times for millions of dollars. Now, you can't get that deal at the dollar store. Yesterday in the House the minister of infrastructure tabled documents regarding these dollar deals and stated: "I'm filing today five copies of the agreement for four parcels, clearly showing that, in fact, the land that was in excess would be returned to the vendor." This statement is not true. To the minister of infrastructure: where in this offer-to-sell document that you tabled yesterday in this House does it state that the excess lands would be returned to the vendor? That's document 4213.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry, but I don't have the document right in front of me. But I certainly can quote out of *Hansard* because I read directly out of *Hansard*, and I do remember that it is item 6 on page one. Number 6. You have to go past 2 and 3. That's where it clearly shows that the land will be returned to the vendor. "Vendor" means the person that sold it, incidentally.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the hon. minister's information, item 6 on this document states: "Time shall be of the essence of this Offer."

Now, my question is to the minister. Why were only choice properties of prime real estate west of the North Saskatchewan River returned to Mr. Shekter for \$1? Why is this special deal being made?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there are no special deals. As I stated earlier, the fact is that it clearly states that land in excess will be returned to the vendor. Those parcels were quarter sections. So if there's a parcel that's split off in another area, that was part of the original sale.

2:10

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. This is a map that was provided. Given that the government already knew that some of the land would be surplus because the ring road route had already been surveyed, why did you make this deal with Mr. Shekter to return land for one dollar that he turned around and sold for millions?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, first of all, as we pointed out before, this is 18 years old. That was before I or even our Premier was in this building.

Now, as far as: why did we do it? I have explained it, but I guess I have to go through it again. When we bought the whole parcel of land, we knew that there was going to be excess land, but the fact is that if we didn't buy the whole piece of land, if Mr. Shekter or his company would have maintained that land, then they would have had to pay for subdivision, go through the whole issue. The fact is that by the province buying it, we don't have to do that subdivision. We were then able to simply survey it out, create a separate title on the lands that were going to be given back that were in excess and that were identified as being excess in the original agreement, and those were to be returned. Now, to make it absolutely legal, you have to charge one dollar, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Siting of Calgary Halfway House

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The John Howard Society has proposed a halfway house with 32 beds for federal inmates in downtown Calgary. This proposed location is within close proximity of not one school but two elementary schools. It is entirely possible that this facility would house child sex offenders, and having it so close to schools would place the children at risk. It is no surprise that this proposal has been greeted with strong negative reaction from residents in the area. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Does the minister feel that this is an appropriate location for a halfway house?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. First of all, let me say that the John Howard Society is a very respectable not-for-profit organization, that provides programs for inmates coming out of our corrections facilities, both federal corrections facilities and provincial facilities, and they do

provide very good programs to transition offenders back into the community.

The issue, Mr. Speaker, in the two communities of Sunalta and Scarboro is that the facility and the land that they purchased on the site that they planned to build is within two blocks of Sunalta school and five blocks from the Sacred Heart elementary school. The concern that I and many of the residents have is that this will pose a significant risk to those children that are of a very vulnerable age, being in that close proximity to a 32-bed facility that will house sex offenders as well as other offenders from our corrections facilities.

Ms Haley: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what have you done to prevent this halfway house from being built there?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues that we have to look at. I met briefly with the mayor of Calgary last night as well as having sent him a letter on Monday regarding the concerns that we have regarding the safety and security of not just the children in these two schools but as well children in other locations that are close to facilities such as this.

We want to work in the future regarding how we can manage these types of programs but as well ensure that we are not placing at risk children, young adults, those for whom English is a second language, or others that may have disabilities that are in close proximity or in institutions in close proximity to a facility of this nature.

We're working with the mayor, working with a number of aldermen in the city of Calgary, looking at the possibility of other locations that they could purchase, whether it be private land, city land. In fact, I spoke briefly with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation regarding the possibility of the potential for the purchase of provincial land that might be available in and around the city of Calgary as well.

Ms Haley: Well, my last question to the same minister is: what can the residents in and around the city of Calgary do to prevent this from being built in their neighbourhood?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. In this case the John Howard Society provided a community forum that over 200 residents attended. The question-and-answer type of forum was there and available for them. Obviously, more questions were asked than answers provided, but their concerns are related to the safety and security of their children, as it would be in anyone's community. I support the residents wholeheartedly in contacting myself and in contacting their aldermen and other elected officials as we move forward.

I have a meeting with the federal Minister of Public Safety at the end of this month. We'll be speaking with him regarding this as he is responsible for corrections and looking at these types of locations not only in Calgary or Alberta but, as well, ensuring the safety and security of all children in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Investigation of FOIP Documents

(continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this one-party state a culture has developed where the civil service has become politicized. Bureaucrats believe that their job is to protect the government from bad publicity. This culture is growing and is rampant. Now we even

see examples of altering documents to protect the government immediately before the last provincial election. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How does this minister justify employees in his department doctoring e-mails to protect the government?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there's an assumption in that question that I'm not sure is true. I'm not sure if it was a person in our department or who it was that allegedly tampered with an e-mail. The commissioner has not identified. Yes, the commissioner passed it on, but the fact is that the commissioner did not identify. So the assumption that there's someone in our department that did something untoward is purely an assumption.

Mr. Martin: I'm sure that the Privacy Commissioner would not be going to this unprecedented move if he didn't think something was there.

My question, simply, to the minister is this: how far up the chain of command was the decision made to alter a November 12, 2004, memo, thereby ensuring that embarrassing details about high-flying Tories didn't get onto the front page of a major daily newspaper shortly before the last provincial election?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I knew absolutely nothing about this incident until sometime after the election. To have an accusation that someone somewhere did something in order to avoid some information – I can't answer that kind of an accusation because the fact is that I do not have that kind of information. I'm not sure why the commissioner sent it on. I assume that he was anxious to try to get to the bottom of it if there was something more to be found by his further review. I assume that's why he sent it on.

Mr. Martin: Is this minister saying, Mr. Speaker, that the Privacy Commissioner had somebody go in there for a seven-month investigation – they've been looking into this for a long period of time – and this minister knows nothing about it? Is that what he is telling us?

Mr. Lund: That's not what I said. I said that I knew nothing about this so-called tampering of an e-mail. I knew nothing about that. Yes, I knew much about the request for the logs. That was an extremely, extremely expensive adventure that this department had to bear because of the number of logs that had to be looked at. I don't remember the exact number, but I do know that it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 12,000 pieces of paper that had to be gone through, every one of them, Mr. Speaker, in order to fulfill the request that was out there before us. I know all about that part of it, and yes, it did take a long time, and yes, it was a very laborious undertaking. As far as this tampering, I knew nothing about that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

2:20

Rod Love Consulting Inc.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The intrigue continues to grow around the Rod Love affair. At the latest count we have the Premier's former chief of staff being paid \$94,789 for verbal advice, even though the Auditor General condemned this practice following the Kelley Charlebois scandal. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. Given that your ministry employs several well-trained and highly qualified employees, can the minister

tell this House what financial skills and qualifications Mr. Love had that rendered Alberta Finance employees unable to give adequate financial advice? Or was he maybe giving political advice?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely accurate in one thing. I do have some very talented and dedicated staff in Alberta Finance, very capable staff.

I have answered this question on this contract to the best of my ability. I did not enter into the contract. I know no more than I have told this hon. member about that contract. It was for strategic advice, and I expect that is what was received for that. Mr. Speaker, there has been no attempt to hide anything on this. All of the payments to this consulting firm are listed in the blue book that is tabled in this Legislature.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will later today, at the appropriate time, table the guidelines for contracts with Alberta Finance today, and if the hon. member has any questions on any contract that I've entered into, I'd be pleased to answer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. She tabled those policies a month ago.

Given that Rod Love was a paid political lobbyist for Imperial Tobacco at the same time as being a paid strategic consultant for Alberta Finance, how can taxpayers be assured that Mr. Love wasn't advising this minister to further invest in big tobacco?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, Mr. Love did not – did not – give any advice to this minister. I've already made that clear. I have not entered into a contract with Mr. Love.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the investment management division of Alberta Finance are the people who actually make the investments, not the minister.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Deputy Premier: as Deputy Premier can you advise this Assembly if Rod Love is currently under contract, today, in Montreal to provide strategic verbal advice to this government? Yes or no?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I could not say either he is or is not. You know, I don't follow the whereabouts of Mr. Love on a daily basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Alberta Film Development Program

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta film development program was recently transferred to Alberta Economic Development from Alberta Community Development. My question is for our Minister of Economic Development. Does the transfer mean that our government now views film as a business and not an art?

Mr. Dunford: Oh, I love to help out young people, Mr. Speaker. The question, really, is whether we view this as a business and not an art. Certainly, film is an art form, but fortunately for Albertans it's more than that. It's also a business. It's a business that's growing in Alberta. There are tremendous opportunities for young

people within the film industry. It provides them the opportunity for our fantastic postsecondary institutions around the province to get involved in some exciting programming.

Of course, we know that movies and commercials that are being made in Alberta are increasing, and it's for that reason, then, that the government really supports the film industry. It certainly is the intent of this minister to try and grow that industry within Alberta. A way in which to do that and to I think try to take advantage of perhaps synergistic opportunities, film was then transferred to our department. Really, film is a way to market Alberta. We're the department that markets Alberta. I think it's a great fit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. My first supplemental to the same minister. There are some film producers that have been saying that they're concerned about changes to the program. What are you changing and why, and wherever did you find the time to do it?

Mr. Dunford: Well, the biggest change, of course, is in the budget itself. Our estimates will be up later on in this particular session, but we have had a 10 per cent increase in overall funding. Where the producers are concerned – and perhaps this is advice, then, that members of the House would be able to provide to them should they come forward. Basically, we've removed some of the rules around who could actually film in Alberta. We're not saying now that you actually have to have Alberta producers or Alberta creators or screenwriters, but we're providing the incentive. The fact that the more Albertans that you do have, then of course the more we can provide offsetting funds for those particular costs. We haven't tightened the parameters around travel, by the way.

The Speaker: Okay. We'll go on to the third question, please.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. Will these changes compromise the number of films being made in the province?

Mr. Dunford: No, I don't think so. We've had 53 films shot in the last number of years. We think that there'll be more. There's a tremendous upswing in the packages that are being asked for. I think that it's a fun thing for members of this House to be involved in this industry, and I hope that when they get invitations to attend sets, they'll take us up on it. [standing ovation]

The Speaker: That was very nice. This Assembly can be very, very classy at times.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Recognition of Time Served in Remand

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are unanimous in their wish to have safe communities, communities safe for their children and safe from criminals. It's the government's responsibility to protect Albertans from criminals getting an early exit from prison, but conditions at the remand centres in Alberta are so atrocious that offenders regularly earn reductions in their sentences of two or three days for every day served in remand. To the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: given that the conditions in the remand centre in Calgary directly resulted in a heroin dealer being given 3 to 1 credit for time served in that facility, can the minister explain what he is doing to deal with this dangerous precedent?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right that not only in Alberta but across Canada there is a recognition that there is going to be recognition for time served in remand upon conviction of a particular offence. In Alberta I can tell you that as a matter of standard that time is 2 for 1. In other words, there is a doubling of the time in remand recognized in a reduction in the sentence for the accused who is found guilty or who pleads guilty. I can also tell you that across this country, in many of the jurisdictions, that time is more generally 3 to 1, so on a comparative basis Alberta is doing relatively well, but I can tell you that this condition is not unique to Alberta. It is something that is found across this country.

2:30

Dr. B. Miller: To the same minister: given the judge's opinion in the Chan case – and I'll table this case later – that “the reason for giving enhanced credit is the exceptionally hard time that Chan experienced” in remand, can the minister explain how the public can feel safe when criminals are first mistreated in prison and then released early?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no doubt that on each individual case the circumstances surrounding the time in remand is part of speaking to sentence, so the hon. member is correct to the extent that he alludes to that in his question. However, the facts of each case are different, and it seems to me that we're not talking about people getting out of jail earlier. What it does is go to the length of the sentence per se, and those are two different things.

Dr. B. Miller: To the same minister: given that the new Tory Prime Minister has stated repeatedly that if you do serious crime, you'll do serious time, why are his provincial cousins being soft on crime by allowing drug dealers back into our communities early because this government refuses to construct even one new remand centre?

Mr. Stevens: Well, that's an interesting perspective. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this government is not soft on crime. In fact, we have been saying for the last five years that those people who do serious crime ought to do serious time. That is why we have led the way in asking the federal government to change the rules with respect to conditional sentencing. I can also tell you that on the basis of the information that I have seen, Alberta is one of the toughest places with respect to those who are convicted of drug offences. If you go to B.C., for example, I think that something like nine out of 10 people who are convicted of drug offences do not do any time whatsoever. I'm very proud – very proud – of the Crown prosecutors and their success rate with respect to convictions regarding drug offences in this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there was during the question period a point of order raised by the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. We will deal with that as we go through the Routine this afternoon.

In a few seconds from now, I'll call upon the first of seven members to participate in Members' Statements, and then, hon. Member for St. Albert, you may move if you wish.

First of all, our historical vignette of the day.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, on seven occasions in the history of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, strangers – that is, individuals other than members or officers of the Assembly – have been given permission to attend and address our Assembly on the floor.

In 1935 William Aberhart spoke to the Assembly about the Douglas Social Credit plan before he became a member and Premier of the province later that same year. In 1997 wheelchair athlete and fundraiser Rick Hansen addressed the Assembly on the 10th anniversary of his Man in Motion World Tour. Daniel Novak, page speech contest winner, read his entry to the Assembly in 1999. In 2002 Prince Michael of Kent, cousin of Queen Elizabeth II, addressed the House on the occasion of the Queen's golden jubilee celebrations. In 2005 the hon. Sam Lieberman spoke on behalf of the province's Second World War veterans on the 60th anniversary of VE Day. On May 24, 2005, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II delivered the first ever address by a reigning monarch to the Assembly, and on March 15, 2006, Ray Speaker presented an address on behalf of all former members.

Shortly the Assembly will be asked to give permission to allow Her Excellency the Rt. Hon. Michaëlle Jean, the Governor General of Canada, to attend and address the Alberta Legislative Assembly on May 4, 2006.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

National Volunteer Week

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next week, April 23 to 29, marks the celebration of National Volunteer Week across Canada. Over the course of this coming week communities and organizations across our province will be recognizing and celebrating the contributions made by Albertans who donate their time and energy to active volunteerism. Citizen service has always been a cornerstone of strong, active communities and is an essential part of our identity as Albertans.

I'm aware of a handful of events taking place in my constituency of Stony Plain recognizing the importance of volunteers to our community and their considerable contributions. On Monday I attended a volunteer flag raising in Stony Plain. I'm sure that there are similar events planned in other ridings in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize our volunteers and to let them know that their tremendous contributions are genuinely appreciated and not taken for granted. National Volunteer Week allows us a wonderful opportunity to do just that. This year's National Volunteer Week theme is Volunteers Grow Community. Volunteerism is indeed a vital part of our communities. The hard work and generosity of volunteers truly do help grow and strengthen our communities. Volunteers are the backbone of our communities. Their contributions are immeasurable.

With that said, I am pleased to recognize the tireless effort of volunteers in my community, our province, and across Canada. Their thoughtfulness and kindness make life better for us all. In a province blessed with an abundance of resources, our volunteers are one of our most important resources of all. Hopefully, by recognizing our volunteers, others will come forward to volunteer their time to improve and build upon what our communities have to offer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Canadian Federation of Independent Business

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to join the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in celebrating their 35th anniversary. Since 1971 the CFIB has been giving small

firms a big voice in the public arena. Best known for high-profile actions with governments on policies like tax, labour laws, and public-sector spending, they have also achieved many behind-the-scenes changes that have meant real dollars-and-cents benefits to all firms.

For example, persistent CFIB lobbying was instrumental in achieving the capital gains exemption, the small business reduced corporate tax rate, and beneficial changes to the Bankruptcy Act, the Small Business Loans Act, and RRSP rules. Recent efforts in Alberta include working to reinvigorate the province's regulatory reform process, providing new research on municipal franchise fees, and encouraging more competition in the retail electricity market for small businesses.

CFIB has 105,000 small and medium-sized business members across Canada, including 9,200 in Alberta. CFIB members determine CFIB policy positions through regular surveys in a one-member, one-vote system. They survey their members on every issue that impacts small business from taxation, shortage of qualified labour, and WCB to health and work/family balance. Lastly, the CFIB is financed 100 per cent by their members, and they do not receive funds from government, banks, or big business.

Mr. Speaker, myself and many other members of this Assembly came to this House with a background in small business. I believe I speak for all of us in offering congratulations to the CFIB for having achieved 35 years of successful advocacy for small and medium-sized businesses in Alberta and across the country.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

High River and District Health Foundation

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pleasure in rising today to recognize the outstanding work of an organization which is very active in my riding. The High River and District Health Foundation recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. This foundation dedicates its efforts towards raising funds to support health care services in both High River and Nanton. This celebration also coincided with the 20th anniversary of the annual hospital dinner held by the foundation. This year the dinner raised \$55,000 towards purchasing a new residents' bus for the long-term care facility in High River.

Great success has been achieved over the past two decades by this organization. Through their efforts multiple programs have been initiated or supported at the High River hospital. The implementation of a cataract surgery program and continued support of surgical and emergency care at the hospital are only two examples of the benefits which are realized due to the work of the foundation.

Part of the success of this foundation can be attributed to the innovation which they have shown in raising funds to support their efforts. In addition to holding an annual dinner, they also hold the Chinook Country Cattle and Grain Roundup. This unique fundraiser accepts donations of not only cash but also grain and cattle. Using the proceeds gained from this, the foundation acquires a herd of cattle, which are then sent to a feedlot which manages them through the winter using the grain and donated cash. In the spring these cattle are sold, and the profits are used to further the goals of the foundation. This is a very innovative way of fundraising and one which I must say is a distinctly rural method of raising funds.

2:40

The other great factor in the success of the High River and District Health Foundation is the exceptionally supportive community in which it operates. The people of the community believe in the

mandate of the foundation and give it outstanding support year after year.

I would like to recognize the contribution of the foundation and of the community which supports it for the good work which they have done over the past 20 years, and I hope it continues into the future.

Thank you.

Excellence in Teaching

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour and a privilege to rise today to speak about excellence in teaching. Alberta has an outstanding education system. Whether it is the dean of medicine at Harvard or each of us here or so many Albertans serving our communities as doctors and nurses, technologists and technicians, professionals, entrepreneurs and businesspeople, volunteers, or NGOs, all of us are able to give our best because we learned to read, because we got an education, because we went through the education system.

But the system, Mr. Speaker, is nothing without teachers. Each of us has a memory of a teacher who inspired us. Each of us knows that at the core of anything good are good people: dedicated, passionate, and committed. Those talented people in education, those teachers inspired us to think, to sing, to write poetry. Our history includes teachers like my mother, who went out to teach 12 grades in a one-room schoolhouse, or teachers like yourself, Mr. Speaker, who took his team of students from Barrhead to win the national finals in *Reach for the Top*.

Teachers play a significant role in our lives. It is only appropriate that we encourage excellence in teaching, and it is only appropriate that we recognize excellence in teaching. This past week the finalists for the 2006 excellence in teaching awards were announced: 134 finalists from across the province representing many, many more who were nominated by parents, colleagues, and students. I cannot read all of the names of the finalists at this time, so I will table a list at the appropriate time.

But I know you will forgive me for singling out one of the 134 of whom I'm very, very proud. Carrying on the tradition of excellence of his great-grandfather as a teacher, his grandmother and my mother as a teacher, and his mother and my wife as a teacher and junior high school principal, my son, Ian Hancock, who teaches at Sandhills elementary school in La Crête, Alberta, in the riding of the Member for Peace River, was one of those 134 finalists, those 134 excellent teachers who represent the excellence we have in teaching and the hopes that we have for the future of our learning society.

I know each of you will want to join me in congratulating all 134 of the 2006 excellence in teaching award finalists.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Industrial Development

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Smart growth or a free-for-all in Alberta? Albertans appreciate the tremendous contribution made by oil and gas activity in the province. Too often resource companies are being pitted against local citizens, landowners, and environment advocates. The conflict, though, is not ideological. We all need the benefit from the resource industries. The problem is also not primarily with the regulatory bodies: the Energy and Utilities Board and the Natural Resources Conservation Board. The problem is with the lack of leadership in this province expressed in clear legislation and enforced by capable and sufficient manpower.

Albertans want governance that uses good science and public values to guide the scope and pace of growth in the province: smart growth rather than a free-for-all. Again and again Albertans have

been frustrated by the lack of leadership despite reassurance and rhetoric. What is the vision and plan for our lands and water? What rate of development and scope of environmental impact at the watershed level is sustainable? Who decides at the local level for development that is consistent with the region's priorities? What revenue return to the province on resource extraction is fair?

This government has failed to deliver the three most fundamental elements of governance: first, a vision grounded in a legislated land-use framework that balances sustainable economic, environmental, and social values. Two, the government has failed to deliver scientific assessment of the present and projected impacts of development on air, water, and land. Witness the absence of baseline water testing before coal-bed methane drilling and fracturing.

Number three: the government has failed to deliver a process for meaningful public involvement in the key development decisions affecting people's lives and land. The government of Alberta's role is to set the course for development, balancing between public and private interests, short-term benefit, and long-term sustainability for our children's grandchildren. It's time to challenge the Alberta advantage, which without a plan, without science, and without meaningful public consultation fosters a free-for-all for resource extraction at the expense of the environment, community cohesion, and our future.

I used to think that the oil industry ran the province. I was wrong. No one is in charge. The lack of governance is negligence, and negligence is either incompetence or corruption. Albertans will decide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

City of Lloydminster

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would beg to differ.

Recently the Canadian publication *MoneySense* magazine released results on the best place to live in Canada. *MoneySense* pulled data from 108 communities of more than 10,000 people and crunched the numbers to figure out which communities across the country actually do have the best combination of natural advantage and economic good fortune. They focused entirely what they could measure: weather, how many people can walk to work, population growth, household income, unemployment, economic diversity, house prices, and unique community features. The result, no surprise to me, number three on the list and notably in the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency is the beautiful city of Lloydminster.

The city of Lloydminster has many features that cannot be measured so easily: Lakeland College, including the Vic Juba theatre, the new Common Wealth Credit Union centre, the Lloydminster Exhibition Association, and many many more.

Mr. Speaker, Husky Oil has had a long and successful relationship with Lloydminster, and their recently announced expansion of the upgrader as well as the soon-to-open ethanol plant are just more good news for this area.

Business icons like Ray Nelson, like the late John Page and the late Bob Jack Sr. set the bar very high for community involvement. That torch has been lifted and held by people like Cliff Rose, the Musgrave family, Ken Kay at Agland, Wayne King at Grithog, and the Rusway group, all of them donating tremendous time and financial resources to the many community projects.

Mr. Speaker, led by the incomparable Vic Juba, a host of volunteers also contribute daily to make Lloydminster truly a great city to

live near and be from. No community gives more of their time and effort than these.

To Mayor Ken Baker, city council, and all the people in the wonderful city of Lloydminster and surrounding communities, congratulations on being recognized for something we've known for a long time: the city of Lloydminster is truly a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Southwestern Alberta Attractions

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a rich history and a vibrant heritage. The Cardston-Taber-Warner constituency is no exception. The southwest corner of this fine province is full of interesting destinations for our local tourists and international travelers alike.

The Milk River winds sweep through the hoodoos in Writing-on-Stone provincial park, which contains rare pictographs depicting an earlier Alberta civilization, while Warner's Devil's Coulee Dinosaur Heritage Museum and egg site are a footprint of an even earlier time.

The town of Taber celebrates its famous sweet corn with its annual Cornfest and hosts a successful farmer's market with wonderful local produce during the summer months.

Over in Glenwood visitors can enjoy a treat from the historic ice cream parlour and the Cheese Factory Museum. In nearby Hill Spring you can kick up your heels at the Great Canadian Barn Dance, complete with chuckwagon grub and live entertainment.

Raymond is home to Alberta's original stampede and still hosts cowboys and cowgirls on July 1. Motocross riders can also catch some air time at the local motocross track.

The Garden City of Magrath offers a look at agricultural technology development with the Galt irrigation canal and the buffalo sloped grain elevators.

The Stirling Agricultural Village is a national historic site depicting an original 'rurban' layout that is also home to the Galt Historic Railway Park.

Cardston's Remington Carriage Museum is one of Canada's best indoor attractions, displaying over 225 fully restored horse-drawn carriages. The museum has also gained notoriety in *The Simpsons* sitcom. Tourists are welcome at the visitors' centre of the Cardston Temple, another Canadian historic site.

Another gem of the south is Waterton Lakes international peace park, home of the famous Prince of Wales Hotel. Waterton park is a UNESCO world heritage site, just a short drive from Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, also a UNESCO site.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all Albertans, members of this House, and tourists from around the world to visit some of the many wonderful attractions in southwestern Alberta.

head: 2:50

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from 206 Albertans urging the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms, which will undermine public medicare.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I think I pretty much have everybody in the Official Opposition having a petition. Is this correct?

Well, we'll go, then, with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, then to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and then we'll go to the front row.

Okay, hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition from 202 citizens who urge the government to abandon its plan for third-way health care reforms, which undermine public medicare.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. As the past chair of the organization Friends of Medicare it gives me great pleasure to table 205 signatures that the organization collected.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two petitions. One hundred and ten signatures from Edmonton, Calgary, Spruce Grove, and various other places, all from concerned citizens urging the government not to proceed with expansion of private, for-profit hospitals, opposing any action to contravene the Canada Health Act, and voting against forcing Albertans to pay for private health insurance.

The second petition is the same from an additional 208 persons, and again this is essentially against the third-way proposals from the government.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling a petition from 204 concerned Albertans from throughout the province, mostly from communities including Cochrane, Sherwood Park, Edmonton, Calgary, Whitecourt, and Vegreville. It calls on us to defeat any plans to go ahead with the third-way reforms, to defeat legislation that would allow the expansion of private, for-profit hospitals, to oppose any action that would contravene the Canada Health Act, and to vote against plans that would force Albertans to pay for private health insurance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table a petition with 108 names from the Calgary and Edmonton areas calling on the government of Alberta to increase funding "in order that all Alberta Works income support benefits may be increased."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with 228 names on it from the Alexandra junior high school, urging the government to address the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have four tablings. I'm tabling the annual reports for 2005 for the Automobile Insurance Rate Board, for the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, for the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table Finance's contract policy as I indicated I would do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got one tabling. It's five copies of a report released today by the Friends of Medicare. The report shows that Albertans oppose the government's so-called third-way proposals by a margin of 2 to 1.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table here this afternoon. The first one is from William Thomas of St. Albert. Mr. Thomas is a senior who believes that the third way is a money grab for doctors and insurance companies.

I also have a letter from Carolyn Campbell, who's expressing her strong opposition to the third way. She notes that Peace Country health chair Marv Moore has publicly opposed the third way because it will worsen physician shortages in rural Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling today is an e-mail from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Ms Donna Thompson. She asks why our schools need to rely on fundraising so much when Alberta is as rich as it is today. Her children's school's latest newsletter delivered the bad news that they can no longer afford a full-time librarian due to budget constraints.

My second tabling today is from Ms Janna Stirling Gilchrist, urging me to do everything in my power to prevent the privatization of health care. She states that as a taxpayer she is satisfied that her tax dollars go into supporting the public system and ensuring access for all people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the document I quoted from in question period, the judgment of Hon. Justice McIntyre in the case where the accused was given a 3 to 1 credit for his time in a remand centre.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in my member's statement today, I wish to table the requisite copies of a news release from Alberta Education which attaches as a backgrounder the names of the 134 finalists for the 2006 excellence in teaching awards.

As well, the requisite copies of an ad that was placed in the *Edmonton Journal* on Friday, April 7, which has some commentary which is important to the process and, again, lists the names of those 2006 finalists for the excellence in teaching awards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of tablings from concerned Albertans today. First is from Pat Boehm, who notes that "prior cuts to the public health system have been damaging."

Next, from Desiree Bauer, who notes that "women have the most to lose under the Third Way."

From Diana Bacon, who states that "waiting lists of those unable to pay for private service will be longer, not shorter" under the third way.

From Scott Babcock, who notes that with almost a million people in Calgary, why are there only three adult hospitals, that they are the only major metropolitan city without an inner-city hospital, and how that relates to the third way.

From Anne and Dale Rowat, expressing opposition to the third way, believing it introduces the greed factor into the practice of medicine.

From Paul Ammann, who opposes the idea of payment for certain procedures.

From Bill Alton, noting that if there's a private system, it should stand completely alone, and quite a bit of detail on how he sees that happening.

From Allison Akgungor, with a number of responses to the health framework but ending with: "health care must seek to benefit its patients first."

From A. Paziuk, who asks for more family doctors, centralizing record systems, and they advocate creating private labs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, it seems that the chair violated Standing Order 7(4), which allows for the recognition of six members to participate in Members' Statements. Today I called on seven members to participate in Members' Statements. What I find so startling about this is that everybody was prepared. I don't know who we can eliminate, but let's just say that in the spirit of this time of the year we had seven today, and they were all very well done. We'll try and abide by the rules with greater certainty into the future.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation on a point of order.

Point of Order

Imputing Motives

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under Standing Order 23, probably (i) and (l). It reads:

A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . .

(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another member . . .

(l) introduces any matter in debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly.

I would assume that that means that one would understand what they're talking about before they would make comments.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this evolves around the whole issue about the remaining lands, the lands that would not be needed for the ring road, and how those lands would be dealt with in this agreement. Anyone that understands contract law and these sorts of things will clearly understand that when a body like the provincial government takes possession of property and the lands that were not going to be needed for the ring road would at all times remain the property of the vendor, then in fact the lands weren't entitled to the province at any time. Clearly, under the offer to sell agreement number 6 clearly states that these lands would be going back to the vendor.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has had this agreement in his possession for some time, and if he read 6, 7, and 8, clearly it shows that what I was talking about is what was in the agreement right from day one, from the time that the offer to sell was agreed to.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate it if you could rule on it because I believe that it was terribly unfortunate that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would indicate that what we were saying and what is written in the agreement was not accurate.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe that there is a point of order here today. The situation that we have in hand here is that the minister under questioning yesterday referred to some documents and later tabled them. In fact, in examining the documents, which is what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was doing today and questioning based on the documents that were tabled by the minister, he found that three of them contained more or less the same offer to sell agreement, but a fourth one did not. The member was very clear and actually named off the sessional number and the identifier number in his question. That fourth document does not contain the contract specifications that the minister was responding to.

Now, it is the job of the Official Opposition to be holding the government accountable and to be asking for information from it. If I'm interpreting the minister correctly, he seems to say that if the opposition doesn't understand the issue, they shouldn't be asking the question. Well, the point of asking the question is to get information and to help everyone understand the issue.

So I would say that Standing Order 23(l) was not offended in any way, shape, or form. As a matter of fact, I note in a number of cases that *Beauchesne* 409 does state that questions should be asked about important matters which fall "within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the specific Minister to whom it is addressed." That's perfectly appropriate, and that, in fact, is what was done.

I notice later that in 409(6) it also notes that "a question must be within the administrative competence of the Government," and "the Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decision taken in a previous portfolio." Therefore, it was perfectly appropriate that the questions were directed to the correct minister, and he was under, we hope, some obligation to attempt to answer.

As to the citation of 23(i), "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member," I have the questions that the member was asking. I don't have the Blues, so I am unable to check against delivery, but he was asking: why was the choice made to return this particular piece of land to the individual for a particular price? I don't know how that's imputing a motive. It's asking a direct question about why the government made a decision to do something, asks again, you know, given that the government knew that this land would be surplus.

The questions that were asked by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar were all entirely appropriate, were directed towards the minister responsible, did not impugn any motives towards anyone, and they were specifically directed around the fourth document, which does not contain the clause that the minister continues to point out. It has an entirely different clause. The questions were specific to that document, and that was outlined by the member as part of his question.

I'm looking at the documents again, and indeed, yes, there is a section 6 that appears to be identical in three of them but is most definitely not the same in the fourth document, and the questions were around the fourth document.

So there is no point of order here either under 23(i) or 23(l). Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there other members who would like to participate?

Hon. members, the chair has listened very attentively to the questions and the answers in the last number of days and, first of all, appreciates that there was a temperate emotion attached to the questions and the responses by both members participating.

I would, however, like to draw all members' attention to *Beauchesne* 494. Essentially, the subject heading is Acceptance of the Word of a Member, and I quote from *Beauchesne* 494.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly with their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

It would strike the chair that there may be some dispute among the two participants with respect to the facts, and that is part of the parliamentary tradition and the democratic tradition, that, in essence, hon. members may look at the same thing and somehow see two different things. Our job, of course, over time is to try and find the one thing that's common to all.

Thank you very much for the interjections. We'll now move on.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Advanced Education

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders the first hour will be allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

3:10

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure to move the Ministry of Advanced Education's business plan for 2006-2009 and our budget estimates for 2006-07.

I would like to take a moment to introduce the people from the department who are in attendance today. Dr. Bill Byrne is my deputy minister. Please stand. Thank you. Phil Gougeon, assistant deputy minister of adult learning; Mark Douglas, acting assistant deputy minister of apprenticeship and industry training; Rai Batra, assistant deputy minister, strategic corporate services; Gerry Waisman, executive director, learner assistance; Blake Bartlett, executive director, financial services; Bill Spaans, director, planning and measurement; and Michael Shields, communications director for the ministry. I can't really tell if there's anyone else up there that I might have missed, but certainly two people from my office that need to be mentioned are Fran Cuglietta, who's looked after keeping me on the straight and narrow for five years at the SPC, and Jack Janssen, who is providing some valuable services in transition. So these are the people that make it happen.

You know, it's sort of like where the rubber meets the road. We who are elected deal with the big picture. We debate policies, and these professionals make it all happen, so I intend to let them do their job and to hopefully unleash their passion and their creativity to try new things and to celebrate their successes.

My staff will be listening very intently to your every word and reviewing *Hansard* to provide all of the answers to the questions that I may not get to. They are the experts, after all. All I ask of you, hon. members, is that you tell me which page and which line item your question relates to to make their job a little bit easier.

I have some brief opening remarks, and then I will take questions from the committee, but I will share some of my biases and ideas with you as I go along.

There's no doubt that postsecondary learning is a key priority to Albertans, and we need to get on with the job. I want to clear something up right up front because there have been a number of daily and weekly scrums and maybe even some people in this Legislature who have been talking about things like they don't expect much to happen in the next year, you know, lame-duck government, all this sort of stuff. Well, let me say this. Please don't underestimate the resolve and the passion of the people on this side of the House for good government. Please do not underestimate the resolve and the ability of our departments to get the job done. We are open for business, and I know that we shouldn't underestimate the ability of members of the opposition to keep our feet to the fire.

Alberta's future prosperity is a knowledge-based and global economy, and our future quality of life will depend upon having the skills, knowledge, abilities, and creativity to succeed. This is a province that is faced with depleting natural resources, and we're just beginning to catch up with respect to advanced education because the growth has been so phenomenal. But what better way to turn a nonrenewable resource into a renewable one than to invest in advanced education that turns into better jobs for Albertans and, as a result, grows the tax base year after year? Now, that's what I call a renewable resource worth investing in, a gift that keeps on giving and giving, not to mention improving the standard of living and the quality of life for Albertans.

This government's vision for Advanced Education embodies this and more. It's a vision that uses a wide lens in thinking about advanced education, and I have to say that governments do not have a monopoly on good ideas. I intend to be open to good ideas regardless of which side of the House they may come from.

It's a vision that includes the full spectrum of learning. When you talk about advanced education, it's not just about, you know, universities, colleges, technical institutes. It's a full spectrum of learning from literacy, apprenticeship, immigrant programs, second-language programs, distance education, e-learning in addition to the more traditional programs offered through our colleges and universities. From public institutions to private, not-for-profit institutions and private vocational schools, from Alberta College of Art and Design to Zeneba Academy of Esthetics, we have it all, from A to Z. So when we talk about creating more access – call it what you will: seats, positions, spaces, or learning opportunities – we are talking about the whole spectrum of what we do from literacy to postdoc.

It's a vision of a province where education is a valued and central aspect of life from birth right through to death. That's why, Mr. Chairman, we have conceived and, in fact, created a plan called ACES, the Alberta centennial education savings plan, that essentially encourages every parent to invest in the future learning of their children. I find it quite interesting, though, that there was more interest with the \$400 cheque than there seems to have been with the \$800 cheque. We're going to be looking into why that is and improve the results because only about 5,700 children, I think, have been registered in that program.

So this is a province where Albertans, regardless of where they live, have access to learning opportunities, and they have these opportunities in many different forms. I think of the potential of SuperNet, for example, where education is delivered remotely. I think of all of the different applications that we're just starting to see emerge in learning, advanced ed, and health, and so on. This is a real opportunity, and I think that we need to take advantage of it and we need to celebrate the successes and distribute the ideas around the province so that people can learn from each other.

It's a province where education is understood to be a central component of every community and the most fundamental foundation of all for the future. It's a vision of a full and seamless continuum of educational opportunities. Those opportunities are available to all regardless of where they live or at what stage of life they are or their lot in life. The best way to break the poverty cycle is to educate the next generation from early intervention right on through to postgraduate degrees. It's a province where everyone in every corner is able to move through each step in his or her educational pursuit easily and efficiently. If we've got regulations or processes that get in the way, we will find ways to get them out of the way. We want Albertans to be inspired to reach their full potential through advanced learning, to move beyond where they are and where they can be.

So I want to work with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Human Resources and Employment and the Minister of Children's Services and the Minister of Health and the Minister of Innovation too, of course. I want to work with them to turn our kids on earlier in life. So much of what happens in postsecondary starts earlier in life, and I need to share with you a belief that I have with respect to these particular points because I happen to have had an experience 50 years ago, when I was in grade 6.

3:20

An Hon. Member: It's not possible.

Mr. Herard: Absolutely – 50 years ago. You know, it makes you think, doesn't it?

I was in a little country school in Beaumont. In fact, I think we had grade 1 to 12 in four rooms or five rooms or something like that. The principal there was, you know, our math teacher. He was our guidance counsellor. He was the principal. He was the hockey coach. He did all those things. One day I decided to ask him: how do you determine what you should be in the future? He said, "Denis, the word 'vocation' comes from the Latin word 'vocare,' which is a voice from within."

I really think, Mr. Chairman, that maybe we've forgotten that. I think he was right. Fifty years ago he had it right. That's why I want to work with all of these other ministers to see if there aren't ways that we can in fact tune in to the voice from within our children. Once you've tuned into it, then fan the flame because a turned-on child does so much better than one that isn't. I think that there are some direct implications with respect to that and advanced learning because these kinds of things speak to values and attitudes.

I want to share with you some information with respect to other things that are involved in all of this, initiatives such as character education, which I'm pleased to say now is part of the citizenship curriculum. You might be interested to know that, you know, the former Minister of Advanced Education has done an awful lot of heavy lifting. Thank God, because it's making my job so much easier. You might be interested to know that the former minister's wife, Janet, first introduced me to character education, which she implemented at Harry Ainlay high school. I went over there to have a look. I saw it in action, was sold on it, worked with the ASBA committee to get it into the curriculum, then got three boards to present at the SPC and magically pass the motion to make it province-wide.

I think those kinds of initiatives speak to the values and attitudes that we have to have to succeed in postsecondary education because when you think about life-long learning, you have to think about independent life-long learning. The word "independent" speaks to having taken ownership of one's own learning. To take ownership means that you must have the right values and attitudes to make it happen. So I think that these are extremely important kinds of

initiatives to make the transition into postsecondary better and make postsecondary more of a success.

Another aspect of this is applying those values and attitudes to modelling work ethic because when you talk to an employer and you ask him how come your kids lose their first jobs, it's not because they can't read, and it's not because they can't write, count, or communicate; it's because many generally don't have work ethic. They don't show up on time. They don't care about the quality of work that they do. They don't care how many tools they break, how much material they wreck. You know, things like work ethic are so important. Those are the kinds of things that I want to work together with my colleagues to move forward.

The business plan I'm presenting today outlines the decisive and clear actions that our government will take and is taking on the postsecondary front to achieve our vision. The business plan highlights several priorities for Advanced Education. The A Learning Alberta review we undertook last fall involved thousands of Albertans in designing a policy framework to guide the strategic direction of advanced learning for our province. It's my expectation that this policy framework will be released soon. I want to say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that ever since he talked about the black holes yesterday, I've been looking for them. I can tell you that I haven't found any, and I don't think I will.

One specific outcome of the review will be a new tuition and affordability framework for postsecondary education. Yes, that framework will include a new tuition policy, but it will also include measures that address all of the costs that students face in going to school: the cost of books, the cost of living, the cost of relocating from rural areas and small centres. Tuition, of course, is only part of the cost that students face.

One thing that I'm convinced of: it shouldn't be cheaper for a student to go overseas than to study where they were born. That's something that we really need to look at. But at the same time there is a shared responsibility for education on kids and partnerships that involves all of our society: parents, students, government, and employers, who profit from a well-educated workforce. In the end I think that advanced education is probably the best bargain on the planet.

We will also continue with our implementation strategy for the Access to the Future Act, our government's flagship legislation last year. This legislation provided the framework for investing in endowment funds for postsecondary education as it outlined our government's commitment to affordable, accessible, and high-quality postsecondary education. Again, so much of that we owe to my predecessor.

This year emphasis will be placed on the needs of the diversity of communities, cultures, and traditions and their A Learning aspirations and abilities within the province. As an example, collaboration with stakeholders to improve First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learner success will be a priority. Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure that we really have done a very good job of listening to the voices from within of our First Nation and Métis and Inuit communities. Maybe we need to learn to listen closer to their aspirations and then fan the flame.

There will also be a focus on expanding regional and community access through the expansion of a degree-granting capacity within the system, and I can say that there's a lot happening on that front.

We will leverage technology to better meet the needs of learners. As an example, we will continue to work with our postsecondary institutions . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, we only have about three seconds left. It would really help the committee if you would move the estimates that you're presenting.

Mr. Herard: I did move them in my very first statement, sir.

The Deputy Chair: You did?

Mr. Herard: Yes. But I'll do it again if you'd like.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. The table officers didn't hear that part. We will consider that you have moved.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

3:30

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, I heard the hon. minister move the estimates at the beginning of his presentation, so I can vouch for that.

Much to talk about. Much to talk about. Hard to know where to begin. Of course, much of what we are talking about we were talking about here a year ago, so I'm presented with the situation of having a brand new minister and many of the same old problems that we were talking about here a year ago. Some progress has been made. Some progress has been made through the Learning Alberta framework, which I was honoured to take part in at the invitation of the previous minister, and I thank the previous minister for that. The progress, though, seems to have happened in fits and starts. I know that the Learning Alberta process was all-encompassing, and I wouldn't expect that everything would be solved overnight anymore than I would expect Rome to be built in a day, but we do have some problems that need to be addressed and need to be addressed in a timely – dare I say urgent? – fashion.

The postsecondary system that we have in the province of Alberta is not accessible enough, it is not affordable enough, and by so many standards of measurement it is not nearly excellent enough. Now, far be it from me to suggest that the system is bereft of excellence. The previous minister, I, and all people present in this House today know that there are many pockets of excellence in the system, driven by very, very committed men and women who strive for excellence, strive for greatness. Thank God for those people because if it weren't for them, I fear that this whole system would be mired in mediocrity. There's too much mediocrity in the system as it is.

The current minister referred a number of times in a number of ways to awakening the voice within, hearing the voice within. I think another way of expressing that is: creating the conditions to awaken the passion within each person for their calling, the thing that they were perhaps meant to do, destined to do, if you believe in that, and then to fan those flames to encourage that, starting at as young an age as possible so that the fire is burning strong by the time they get to the postsecondary level. But, you know, sometimes those fires can have water poured all over them by an unresponsive, inflexible system, and that problem, as the minister knows, exists in this province today.

The issues are these in a nutshell. The lack of a tuition policy. I heard that the new affordability policy and the new tuition policy which will be part of that are coming soon. I would urge the new minister to attach a date to that. I was after his predecessor for an entire year to try and get a date to that; I don't have one yet. My latest understanding is that it will be sometime next month. I'd like to know precisely when. You know, you've been working on this one long enough now, and you've got a whole army of helpers up there in the gallery. You've been working on this one long enough by now that I think you should be able to give me a date, and I would urge you to do that. That's one issue.

Another issue, which should be covered in the affordability policy as well, is the ever-increasing debt burden on students. The minister made reference to great education as still being the single factor that

is best capable of lifting someone out of poverty. But if we're going to price it in such a way and assist those taking part in it in such a way that they're going to come out the other end with a debt equivalent to a small mortgage, that's one heck of an anchor to tie around their necks at the age of 21, 22, 25. That prevents them from fully participating in society as a fully productive member of the province of Alberta once they graduate. They hold off on buying houses, they hold off on starting families, they hold off on creating the next generation of Albertans, they hold off on reaching their full potential because they've got great big, fat student loan debt to pay off, payments to make every month.

Other issues. The lack of space, insufficient space to accommodate the students who want a postsecondary education in this province and the lack of a published plan for expanding the system. British Columbia has such a plan, and when you publish a plan, when you've got it in writing, it helps to stick to it. Now, the minister referred to spaces or learning opportunities, and he suggested that it doesn't matter what you call them, whether you call them spaces or seats or learning opportunities or Bill or Bob or whatever. Well, it does matter. A seat in a classroom is different, maybe not necessarily better, depending on the context, depending on the circumstance, but it is different from an online learning opportunity, from a distance learning opportunity. A seat in a classroom at a university or at a lab table at a university or at a classroom at a college or at a polytechnical institute is radically different from a literacy learning opportunity. That literacy learning opportunity, granted, is absolutely essential if the person needing that opportunity is ever going to have a shot at occupying a seat in a university or college classroom.

But we have to remember as we talk about expanding literacy programs and tackling that devil and doing all kinds of other things, that we still have a space crunch, an access crunch in our institutes of higher learning, an access crunch that is more acute in Calgary. You know, a recent report by the University of Calgary indicated that the ratio of spaces in Calgary is 461 for 10,000 residents. In Edmonton it's 574. Now, I'm not saying Edmonton has too many, Mr. Minister. We fully support Edmonton getting even more, but clearly Calgary needs to catch up, and I hope the minister will look into this.

One way in which the minister could look into this – and I would urge him to give me a response to this too – is to tell me and this House a little bit about what he sees for a new undergraduate-focused university in Calgary, such as Mount Royal university. When will the minister meet with the president of Mount Royal university – or Mount Royal College, I should say; I'm getting ahead of myself – and other members of the Mount Royal College board of governors to assess their proposal?

The Campus Calgary proposal brought forward by Calgary's public postsecondary institutions in coalition goes well beyond the Premier's promise for increased access. It calls for almost 20,000 spaces – not learning opportunities, spaces, seats to put bums in in front of a desk – by the year 2010. Are those institutions wrong in their assessment of the demand? I wonder if I could have an answer to that question because if the minister or the government thinks that they are, then that's a very key piece of information for all of us to know, for this House to know, for the opposition to know, for the institutions themselves.

A published plan for expanding the system with real targets and real detail as to what's a seat, what's a learning opportunity, what's the difference, where it's going to be, when it's going to be there: that would be extremely helpful to everybody in this province.

The rationing of space is another issue, the rationing of space through two main methods: high costs, which I've referred to

already, and artificially high entrance requirements. Both in terms of the dollar amount that it costs to get into college or university in this province and the marks required coming out of grade 12, we have set those bars so high that that is how we are screening out people who absolutely, Mr. Minister, absolutely belong in postsecondary education. You know, the previous minister and I have had this conversation between ourselves and with others in various groups, and we've both heard and we've both said that the awful truth of the matter is that most of us in this House and most of the faculty members in our postsecondary institutions could not get in today with the marks that they had coming out of grade 12. That is an issue that must be addressed urgently. That needs a plan.

Widespread public perception that cost is a barrier – widespread public perception that cost is a barrier – and the government's steadfast, ongoing refusal to accept that that public perception is reality to the public and to address that by rolling back tuition. Look, it's as simple as this: if you were running a business – and I bring up this analogy because so much of the ideology behind this government's handling of postsecondary education in the province of Alberta over the course of the last 13 years comes across as a market-driven approach to a public good education. There. I'm going to use the market-driven example so you guys over there get it. Okay?

If you were running Wal-Mart and the public perception was that your prices were too high, you'd either cut your prices, or you'd go out of business. Now, the only sane response, in my opinion, to a market-driven approach to a public good like public postsecondary education is a market response. In other words, if these issues are not addressed and are not addressed quickly and are not addressed effectively, then the students and parents of this province should vote with their feet and go to college or university in another province.

3:40

Insufficient and inequitable base operating funding. We've been on about that now for months and years. There are inequities in the funding formulas, and there just simply isn't enough money in base operating funding for colleges, universities, polytechnical institutes to count on a reliable, sustainable, and sufficient amount of money to pay the staff, keep the roofs from falling in, keep the lights on, keep the furnaces going in the wintertime.

An aging faculty and worldwide competition for top faculty talent: that's a very, very real issue. We stand to lose an awfully high percentage of our faculty in this province over the next five to 10 years. Oh, by the way, so does everybody else. Where are we going to get the replacements from? We'd best start competing with the best in the world if we want the best in the world. That's going to take money, and that's going to take better infrastructure, and that's going to take a far deeper and more real commitment to public postsecondary education than we've seen thus far.

An underappreciation of the importance of support staff to the quality of education and research at postsecondary facilities.

A failure to capitalize on the potential of the access to the future fund by capitalizing the fund up to its maximum. I mean, the fund has a cap on it. As I've discussed in this House a number of times, I fundamentally believe that that was a wrong decision, to put a \$3 billion cap on the fund to begin with. The whole purpose of an endowment fund is to be able to continue to put money into it on an ongoing basis and, hopefully, on a regular basis and let it grow and grow and grow because the more it grows, the more income it produces to reinvest in excellence in postsecondary education. So, for instance, if the Alberta Liberal plan had been followed, with the surplus that exists this year, that access to the future fund would already have more than the \$3 billion cap in it.

Now, this government has made a promise, a commitment, an undertaking to have that fund topped up to the \$3 billion mark within three years, but you know, you're a long way – a long way – from getting there. We're at the end of year one, going into year two, and there's not even a billion dollars in there; there's \$750 million, and there's not a dime committed to it in this budget.

Oh, I know the rumours are going around, the buzz. The grapevine is buzzing like crazy: oh, we'll put more money in in the third quarter, off-budget spending. You know, that's like waiting for grandma to die and leave you her estate before you start saving for your kids' education. That's like counting on winning the lottery to do it.

Since the minister pointed out that in his ideological, philosophical world there absolutely is to continue to be a partnership here between the student and the state and private enterprise in the funding of that student's education – and I think parents are part of that mix, too, in the minister's world – then I would suggest that the minister and the Finance minister would set a very, very good example for parents in this province by setting up a regular, sustainable contribution just like you do for your RSP, where you have money coming directly out of your bank account and into your RSP every month on the 15th and the 31st. Right? Do that to the access to the future fund, and take the cap off, and let it grow because you're saving not for any one individual's particular education, although I would presume that as this fund grows, it's going to fund a lot of scholarships and bursaries.

It should, but it should do a lot of other things too. It has the potential to move mountains and make the postsecondary education system in this province the best in the world in all aspects, whether you're talking postgraduate, apprenticeship, literacy, whatever it is. The best in the world: not just a boast from the government benches but reality, truth. The best in the world if you take the cap off.

You know, the other problem that we have, the other ongoing issue that we have that we absolutely must address is the second lowest participation rate in the nation. Close to 80 per cent of jobs require some form of postsecondary education, yet only about 40 per cent nationally of high school students go on to university or college. Looking here on page 77 of the business plan under performance measure 2.c, "participation rate in post-secondary education – Albertans aged 18-34," I see that the actual for last year was 19 per cent. Let's round it up to 20. Eighty per cent of the jobs require postsecondary education, and 20 per cent of our students are getting it. Mr. Chairman, that's a huge problem. The projection is that by 2008-2009 we'll try to squeeze that up to 23 per cent. Well, you know, you haven't set the bar high enough. You need to do more.

This is important. This is very important. This is very important to a number of people who are already declared candidates in the race to replace your current leader. This is important to them because they know that it's important to the people of Alberta. They know that it's important to the mothers and fathers of Alberta. They know that it's important to the students of Alberta, students of any age. They know that it's important to the adult learners and the lifelong learners in this province and to future generations. This is our ticket out of dependence on a nonrenewable resource into a renewable resource economy, where that resource is knowledge. That knowledge can bring us unimaginable possibilities. For one example, we could lead the world in alternative energy technologies driven by the money that our nonrenewable resources produce and the knowledge that we can grow from an excellent postsecondary education system.

I mean, that's just one example off the top of my head. It could be any one of a number of things. Dream. Dream big. We live in a province, perhaps the only jurisdiction anywhere on this planet,

that actually has the potential right here, right now to make it happen. But you've got to take the chains off. You've got to start thinking differently. You've got to start thinking imaginatively and innovatively and creatively. I'm not sure that I see it in here. I see some baby steps – and that's good – but we need to move quickly, more quickly than we have been.

There are a number of things that have become mired down. I don't know whether it's departmental bureaucracy or whether it's a cabinet and/or caucus that hasn't been all that open to some of the ideas that have been expressed over the last year or what it is, but things aren't moving along quickly enough. An innovative guy like Harvey Weingarten, the president of the University of Calgary, who wants to innovate, who sees, for instance, the digital library as a keystone, a cornerstone of that innovation, has plans to spend \$710 million on innovative capital projects for the U of C and can't get but, I think, \$156 million from us, something like that, so he's got to consider borrowing the rest. Dr. Weingarten is just one example.

I've been talking to a number of stakeholders. They see the possibility of some innovation with this new minister. I hope you're up for it.

Thank you.

3:50

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much. I think that the Member for Calgary-Currie is a good example of how astute my constituents are.

Mr. Taylor: Why do you think I live around the corner from you?

Mr. Herard: Exactly.

I do agree with a lot of the things that the hon. member says. I would say that there's no question that we're going to do much better working together on this than working agin each other, for sure.

With respect to the debt burden, I agree that that needs to be looked at as well. Now, if I gave you a date of releasing that report, I'm sure that some people would say that I'm giving you an unfair advantage because you're my constituent. The truth of the matter is that I don't know what the date is. If I did, then I would consider, of course, giving it to you. The fact of the matter is that the reports are being compiled as we speak. I'm told it's weeks, not months – weeks – and that's about the best that I can do.

With respect to Mount Royal College, I have met, of course, with their president on a number of occasions, and we've talked about many, many different ways of achieving what they're trying to achieve. I think he's doing the right thing right now. You know, you can't just go poof, and you're a university. There are so many things that need to add up with respect to quality, with respect to the library, with respect to all of the infrastructure that's required, not only that but the credentials of the instructors, and so on and so forth. They are doing the right thing, and once they've sort of jumped that particular hurdle, then I think that we can look at this and be able to talk about this a lot more. But first let them jump that hurdle.

I agree with the hon. member that what is probably a really traumatic experience is if someone has worked their buns off through high school only to find themselves 2 percentage points below where they need to be to get in. I agree with the hon. member that that is a very destructive kind of experience for somebody. I think that we do need to look at giving them different kinds of access. If they can't get into this particular program, at least don't

turn them away from postsecondary. Let's see if we can find ways of providing access in a different way.

[Mr. Johnston in the chair]

You know, at the beginning of the year you've got all these students that are coming into our universities, colleges, and technical institutes. Some that are, in fact, in the system already, repeating courses, are essentially blocking access to some of these kids coming in. How much of that is there? I've asked the students' union that question, and they tell me that there's really no information system to provide that. I'd like to know how much. I know that both my kids had problems in their first year. That's why I was talking about independent, lifelong learners. They need to have the values and attitudes to in fact have the right mental and spiritual tools to get the job done. So there are many different kinds of access barriers, and certainly the high bar of the marks is one of them.

With respect to the perception of the high cost of postsecondary, the hon. member asked me what I would do if I was running Wal-Mart. If it's a perception problem, I would probably use the tools of his former profession. You know, I probably might use QR 77 and do a lot of advertising or something. If it's a perception, then you need to communicate. If it's a reality, then it's a different action.

Now, with respect to the access to the future fund, the member is quite correct with respect to the total that's in there now. Of course, this is the first year that we're going to have some income to disburse, about \$45 million out of that particular fund. Our Premier has committed that the fund will be \$3 billion within two years, and I think he's got a good record of keeping his promises.

We will be working collaboratively with Human Resources and Employment to address the critical skill shortages resulting from the strong economic growth in this province. In this regard we will be co-leading the initiative of building and educating tomorrow's workforce with Human Resources and Employment. This initiative has been designated a top provincial priority by our government. We intend to enhance Alberta's people capability by better informing, attracting, developing, and retaining skilled workers and also by providing Albertans access to affordable and high-quality educational opportunities. It's about both training and education.

So these are some of the key strategies in the next business plan cycle.

I would now like to outline for you the investments that our government has planned to make to allow us to realize our vision of Alberta becoming a true learning society. Inevitably we have to talk about dollars. I've met with my communications professionals to talk, first, about the benefits that the dollars are buying and not so much about the dollars initially because Albertans don't relate to whether or not we're spending \$50 million here. You know: is that the right amount? Is it too much? Is it too little? That doesn't really tell them very much. So one thing that I will try and do is make sure that we communicate the benefits that the investments are producing rather than simply the investment because it really doesn't mean too much to them.

This year our government has once again made advanced education a top priority. The proposed 2006-07 budget for the Ministry of Advanced Education is a record 19 per cent increase over last year, the largest single-year increase in advanced education spending in Alberta. The total investment in advanced education will reach \$2.2 billion in 2006-07. This increased funding shows that our government is committed to achieving our vision. Is advanced education a priority? You bet it is. Is it fast enough to satisfy my neighbour? I'm not so sure that it is. Our focus on increasing access to postsecondary programs, making postsecondary

education affordable, and increasing the quality of the system will continue beyond 2006-07. Total spending on advanced education will grow to \$2.5 billion by 2008-09.

Those are inputs, and they're investments, but that's only one aspect. We need to find ways to improve productivity as well. We can't keep stretching the rubber band. You know, we've got a pretty good track record of doing that to ourselves in this government when you talk about double-digit increases to doctors, nurses, teachers, and so on at the same time as you lose productivity on the other side. You've got a rubber band in the middle, and you can't keep stretching it because that leads to unsustainability.

One of the things we need to do is see if there are ways of being more efficient. Our budget for 2006-07 includes \$1.4 billion to support the operations of postsecondary institutions. These operating grants will increase by 6 per cent each year for the next three years. Now, that should allow our institutions to make important strides in their plans to improve learning outcomes and to catch up on some things that maybe they've had difficulty doing over the last few years.

It also includes \$273 million for capital grants to postsecondary institutions that will be used to support new and ongoing capital projects. Over the next three years over \$1.1 billion will be spent on postsecondary facilities. We just heard from the hon. member that it looks like Calgary alone could use almost all of that. These funds will enable construction, expansion, and upgrades for various facilities, including the University of Alberta centennial centre for interdisciplinary sciences, phase 2 of the Calgary Bow Valley College expansion, the University of Calgary's digital library, which is part of the Alberta-wide Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library initiative, and capital projects at Grant MacEwan College, Red Deer College, the University of Lethbridge, Lakeland College, and others.

4:00

You know, right now the cost of construction is going up about 1 and a half per cent per month, and some people say even more than that. That's 18 per cent a year. Return on investment income is about 6 or 7 per cent. So what is the cost of waiting? We need to study that, and we need to make decisions with respect to that for all Albertans. As I said before, what better investment than investing in the people of Alberta?

Capital funding is crucial for improving postsecondary access, so is funding more spaces. In support of this, \$183 million is budgeted under the enrolment-planning envelope in 2006-07. This represents an increase of \$61 million, or 50 per cent, over the last year's funding. We had planned to spend around \$30 million with respect to that, but we were able to double it to \$60 million, which is nice. We announced last month that this additional funding will add 2,400 new spaces into the system plus 880 spaces for new degree programs at Grant MacEwan College. Of course, Mount Royal is moving down the road to getting into degree-granting as well. As the programs become fully enrolled in the years ahead, this number of new spaces will reach over 7,000 in total. These funds plus allocations made over the next three years will result in 11,800 new student spaces, which is what the hon. member across the way wants to call them, by 2008-09.

I said before that we need to look at the fact that Advanced Education deals from literacy to postdoctoral work. You know, access to learning opportunities encompasses the entire gamut of the services that are being provided by this department. This is a key part of our efforts, to add 15,000 new learning opportunities into the advanced learning system between 2005 and '08. Yes, most of these opportunities will be actual classroom seats within universities, colleges, and technical institutes, but they will also be in community

programs like literacy, immigrant bridging, English as a Second Language, and so on.

Ensuring that postsecondary education is affordable continues to be a high priority in this budget, and this budget clearly signals our intent to make postsecondary education affordable for all Albertans. We recognize that the cost of postsecondary education is a shared responsibility among students, families, government, and the employment community.

The hon. member talked about, you know, conservative kinds of policies. Well, one of the things that conservatives like to do is say that we're out of the business of being in business. You look at that and say: who benefits the most from the subsidy that is provided to our kids to go to university? So I think that maybe the employment community needs to be more involved, and I think that they are getting more involved. There are a lot of great examples of partnerships where they're stepping up to the plate and participating.

Our government has committed to a second consecutive year to absorb tuition increases for the 2006-07 academic year. What does that do? That leaves more dollars in our students' jeans. This applies to public postsecondary institutions as well as approved programs offered by private, not-for-profit institutions. The tuition support will be built into institutions' ongoing funding so that students won't face a dramatic increase in tuition in September 2007, the so-called triple whammy. Institutions won't lose funding. In fact, this means that when our tuition policy is introduced, it will start from 2004 tuition rates. So we have heard our student unions and our student associations in this regard.

In addition to tuition support, we have budgeted for potential enhancements to our student finance program that are expected to come out of the A Learning Alberta review. The improvements will be the ones that students have told us are important to them, but I don't expect any dancing in the streets.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

In terms of ensuring the quality of postsecondary education, one of the key initiatives is the new access to the future fund. This year, for the first time, as I said earlier, the budget includes \$45 million to enhance the capability of the postsecondary system through matching grants and the support initiatives that broaden access and improve quality, enhance learning outcomes, attract and retain the best faculty available, and expand innovation capacity. Again, thank you to my predecessor and to the staff who have worked so hard to work out this great plan.

Since the fund was created as part of the Access to the Future Act, my ministry has received a tremendous response from individuals and organizations that have come forward to invest in our postsecondary system. These include the Schulich foundation, \$25 million to the U of C to fund a chair and scholarships for engineering students; the MacPhail donation, \$10 million to SAIT for a trades and technology complex; Bill and Mary Jo Robbins, \$5 million to Grant MacEwan; and it goes on and on.

Keeping the momentum of the fund and demonstrating high donor interest is a key component to the long-term success of the fund. Of course, as I said before, I expect the endowment to be fully funded at \$3 billion within two years. What better way to give back to society than to endow our universities, technical schools, and colleges? You know, I'm told that there's about \$3 trillion that is going to change hands from one generation to another over the next 10 years. What better way to make a difference than to endow postsecondary education?

At this point I'd like to give you an overview of the amounts to be voted for Advanced Education and highlight the changes from our

2005-06 forecast. This information starts on page 33 of the 2006-07 government estimates book. As noted on page 33, the 2006-07 estimates for expense and equipment and inventory purchases is \$2,068,035,000. Those are big numbers. The 2006 estimate for nonbudgetary disbursements is \$103,900,000.

Page 35 provides the details behind the figures on page 33. Ministry support services shows a decrease from \$20,479,000 in 2005-06 to \$20,109,000 in 2006-07. The decrease of \$370,000, or 2 per cent, results from projected reductions in supplies and services purchases.

Program delivery support shows an increase of \$1,947,000, or 5.1 per cent, from the 2005-06 forecasts. This increase results primarily from a 6 per cent grant rate increase provided to the various organizations that provide community education programs such as literacy; English as a Second Language, ESL; and inmate education programs.

Assistance to postsecondary institutions shows an increase of \$166,287,000 from the 2005-06 forecast. This increase is made up of \$61 million for the 6 per cent grant increase to postsecondary institutions, a \$60 million increase to expand enrolment spaces, and \$44 million to cover the tuition fee increases for 2006-07, and there's 44 big ones in the jeans of our students.

Postsecondary facilities infrastructure shows an increase of \$88,143,000 from the 2005-06 forecast.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

4:10

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and make a few observations on the 2006-2007 budget for Advanced Education and perhaps raise a few questions that the minister I hope will be able to address either here on the floor of the House or in some other way.

Before I get to the budget itself, let me again extend my best wishes to the Minister of Advanced Education, newly appointed, because his task is quite formidable. It's one of the most important ministries with very long-term strategic significance. Decisions made today are likely to continue to reverberate for a long time to come, so he does need our best wishes. He also is new in the sense that the budget probably was prepared by his hard-working predecessor, who is in the House, and I'd like to thank him for his work not only on the budget but certainly for refocusing the attention of this government to this very important public program that we have, which certainly will have a great deal of significance for our unfolding future.

That said, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say that the budget does show some fairly important commitments, increased commitments to the field of postsecondary education. It's a large system, a system which serves hundreds of thousands of students, probably close to 50,000 faculty and nonacademic staff, perhaps, if not more, a very large number. When you look at the impact of it purely in market and economic terms as an ongoing activity, operation, it perhaps affects the lives and the livelihoods of more than just those who either directly or indirectly work within the system. A very large number of Albertans provide the services and benefit from the economic activity generated by it. It's a very large and significant part of our society and economy.

I just want to say something about the sort of vision that is driving the budget, and that vision is articulated in the government budget documents. I submit, Mr. Chairman, that I've taken a close look at the vision that's the driving force. It's on page 70 of the business plan. It's a fairly comprehensive vision, but it does have, I think, some limitations to it which will affect the way the monies budgeted here will be spent.

The main focus of it is on creating skills and opportunities to enhance the workforce in the province. It contributes primarily to the development of the workforce. That is certainly one very important core objective. The vision appropriately underlines the importance of the contribution that postsecondary education activities make to the development of the workforce for the health of the economy, for creating more wealth, for creating more opportunities for individuals. For Albertans to be able to take part, to have rewarding employment and all of that, is important.

There are other parts of the vision that I think need to also be included that are not in there, that should be added to it, and that is the nonmarket significance of postsecondary education, the role of humanities, for example. Whether it's in universities or colleges or technical institutes, everywhere, I think, exposure to humanities is very, very essential. The guarantor of good in a civilized society, a society which has the sort of civic capacities built into its citizens, does pay attention to investment on the nonmarket side of postsecondary education, which are called the humanities and social sciences.

So the vision I think needs to be broadened, needs to be rearticulated to include a focus of a society that's growing, that's prosperous, that's increasing its economic capacities and economic frontiers to invest deliberately in inculcating, in providing opportunities for Albertans who partake in our postsecondary institutions to have the opportunity to learn in the areas which we call humanities. I wanted to make this point to start out. I find that that's one thing that I do find somewhat missing in the vision.

I was looking at some literature on this, Mr. Minister, and I would just very briefly draw attention to some of the arguments in favour of this. Public investment in the humanities benefits society not in monetary terms – true – but in terms of cultivating people with a stronger sense of humanity and citizenship. The consequences of funding the humanities are instrumental in securing a stock of public good, human capital, in terms of people who carry in themselves the resources of a civilized society.

From this perspective, then, it is difficult to overestimate how valuable a resource this is, that is the humanities. Each generation of students needs to ask questions about what it is to be a citizen, to be benevolent, to be human. The humanities are the location of this engagement. To the extent that professional faculties and applied sciences are even considerably occupied by the need to answer such questions within their own curricula – and that's happening – they have in a sense just learned from the *Oxford* dictionary's meaning of the word "humanize." So there is a growing recognition within the postsecondary institutions about this, and we need to certainly include that recognition in the vision statement that drives the budget document.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'll turn to some specific issues. I think the questions have been raised, and I think the minister has seized the significance of some of these questions related to the second lowest nationally – that is, among the provinces and territories – participation rate for the postsecondary age-going population to in fact take part in our postsecondary institutions. That should be a matter of concern. I know that that's why your predecessor has included in the review among its four major emphases the accessibility issue. But the fact that a very small percentage of Albertans in relative terms take part in the postsecondary system is not merely because there are not enough spaces there. That may be one reason. Affordability may be another reason. We need to pay some attention to it, to ask: why is it that in a province with such a fine and strong history of public education at the postsecondary level we are failing in that we are the second last in the percentage of Canadians taking

part in the postsecondary education system? So that's a huge issue. I think we need to pay attention to it and find remedies for it.

4:20

I hope the minister will carefully read the learning review that will be in his hands, the final report. He says in a couple of weeks. I know that it won't get lost in the black hole for him. When I was referring to this, I was talking about it reaching us. It would be important, Minister, if you would not only pay attention to what's in this report yourself but make the report available to get input and some reactions from other stakeholders, including members of this House. I include myself among those who would be interested in receiving the report, not just us but postsecondary stakeholders all over the province, you know, whether they're students, whether they're teachers, whether they're researchers, whether they're administrators, board of governor members. They would all like to have access to that report as quickly as possible. I wasn't being flippant yesterday when I talked of a black hole. I was trying to make a point.

In that, I hope that this question of relatively low participation rates will be somehow addressed. I'm looking forward to seeing if there are any answers there, potential answers to how we deal with that problem. I don't see in the budget statement papers any particular attention to that part. The accessibility matter is addressed, and I think the whole question of 20,000 new opportunities – no, it says that “15,000 new learning opportunities will have been provided by 2007-08,” and 20,000 such opportunities by 2008-2009. Then what's said here is that this “includes almost 12,000 full-load equivalent student spaces.” So I guess it translates into about 12,000 full-time student spaces.

My question to the minister on this is the following: how many of these spaces will be created at the university level, how many at the technical institutes and apprenticeship levels, and how many at the college level? Our system is quite complex and diverse, and I would like to have information on the distribution of this planned expansion on the accessibility side with respect to where these 12,000 full-time places will be found.

There is mentioned somewhere in the budget documents that the loan remission funds will be increased so that the student debt burden or loan burden can be reduced during their first and fourth years. I have a question for the minister on the amount of money that is available during 2005-2006 for this purpose, I think \$34 million for loan remission purposes under one or another program. Only about \$21 million of that, less than two-thirds of the money budgeted, was in fact used for remission purposes.

I'm trying to figure out why it is that in spite of the fact we hear from students that they're suffering from huge debt loads, we are underspending in the budgeted amount over that year. Are there some barriers? Is it because some changes have been made at the same time in the conditions for qualifying for remissions? Have they been made more difficult for students who qualify for the remissions, or what? Also, I would like to know how many students did apply during that last year for loan remissions and how many of them were successful in getting the remissions because that will give us some idea about why it is that we have fallen short of using the money available for such a dramatic need, a need that students really draw our attention to day in and day out.

I would ask the minister: if this information tells him that it is the tightening of the qualifying criteria for loan remissions, will he revisit those criteria to make it somewhat easier, in fact, for students to seek remission of their loans? I'm asking him to give me at least some indication that he will be inclined to revisit the changes that were made a couple of years ago, which may have made it more

difficult for students who take advantage of this very important program. Total loan thresholds I think were increased from \$20,000 to \$24,000 or perhaps beyond, so maybe that's what excluded or eliminated lots of students from being able to apply for these remissions.

Another question that I have for the minister is with respect to the funds that he referred to as having been increased for student financial assistance. Now, we know that the loans are applicable to students who go either to public institutions or nonprofit public institutions. They are available to all Albertans, but my understanding is that these loans are also available for for-profit institutions that operate in this province. They operate, I guess, on the basis of some sort of licences that they receive from the minister's own department. These may be short-term computer-related programs or massage programs and some others.

I know that I've been visited by students who are unhappy with respect to their experience of going to the institutions, but my question specifically to the minister at this moment related to the budget is if he knows, based on either last year's data or information that we have, perhaps in terms of projected distribution of these funds, what kinds of monies will be going to fund students who seek opportunity to get some training in these for-profit institutions and whether or not this portion of the student financing is increasing from year to year so that this House has some idea about the growth within the largely public sector, the nonprofit postsecondary system, or the for-profit sector.

One of the problems with the for-profit sector that's been brought to my attention by students over the last two or three years is that the provisions that we have for student government for nonprofits and for public institutions are absent in the for-profit sector. So student government through elections is simply not possible. Student representation, therefore, and a forum through which these students can express their concerns to the institution are simply not available. They are not sanctioned. They're not by legislation. If that is in fact the case – and the minister will be able to get this advice from his staff – then my question to the minister is: would the minister be willing to allow this rather, I think, quite acceptable practice, encouraging, in fact, student self-government in all institutions that receive, either directly or indirectly, public funds?

These private, for-profit institutions obviously do not get any direct funds from the Ministry of Advanced Education, I think, but they do get students who get funded by the Students Finance Board, which is public monies. In fact, my suspicion is that in comparison to public institutions or nonprofit, public institutions, a far larger percentage of students who go to these for-profit institutions are in fact publicly funded through the loan programs. I would like to ask the minister to look into this and see if he can confirm my suspicion that that is in fact the case, that a much larger proportion of students going to for-profit postsecondary institutions seek loans from student loan programs than is the case for other institutions.

There is a third problem with respect to the private, for-profit sector. [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired] I will return to this another afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:30

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I do have a very long list of people who wish to participate in the debate, and I do understand that Standing Orders do allow you 20 minutes at a time to speak if you so choose. Brevity would really help in getting more people to participate in the debate.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try and be as brief as I normally am. First of all, I want to say to the hon. member

opposite that as he knows – and I've said it many times over the years – I have a great deal of respect for that hon. member. He's had a long career before this one in postsecondary, and I certainly want to offer him the same offer I made to his counterpart in the Official Opposition with respect to my door being open. We will do much better working together than against each other.

I fully agree with what you're saying with regard to the nonmonetary values of postsecondary education and the vision of including the humanities and the arts. As you know – I think it was last year – I did manage to get a motion passed unanimously in this Chamber with respect to fine arts in our high schools. So I think you know that I'm on the same wavelength there. Of course, it deals with quality of life issues. If we want to attract the best people to this province, they need to see a humanities infrastructure. They need to see arts and so on because they can go and live anywhere. The best people can live anywhere, and they like to be able to use their leisure time in some of the finer sides of humanity. So you won't get any argument from me on that score.

The lowest participation rate in postsecondary . . .

Dr. Pannu: The second lowest.

Mr. Herard: The second lowest. Thank you. Don't want to go any further.

It's a real problem in a hot economy because there is so much attraction to those students who might be marginal in their drive to succeed in education. It sometimes looks so much easier to go out and get a job instead of the drudgery of going to school. We need to work with that. Part of what I was talking about before is that every one of our kids has a flame for something, and if we can learn to fan it earlier in life so that they become motivated through those difficult raging-hormone years, if they can focus and, in fact, be turned on to something and the parents support that, then I think we're going to lose a lot fewer of them out of our high schools, and we will have people who will want to go on to postsecondary, be it on the academic side or the vocational side. So I think that we need to work together with K to 12 to start that process so much earlier and get our kids motivated. We need to find ways to find that vocation.

I'm not sure if I got the right impression with respect to releasing the information that you were asking for coincidentally with the stakeholders and so on, but let me say this: I don't know what commitments may have been made, but whatever commitments have been made I will honour. If there was a commitment to provide the information simultaneously, whatever, I will honour those commitments. Let me check into that because I'm not sure.

Now, with respect to the spaces you asked some very specific, technical questions that the 150 hours since I was sworn in do not really prepare me for. Therefore, I'd be more than happy to let my professionals answer all of those questions in detail for you.

Also, loan remissions. I don't know why the entire amount was not used, but we will find out and let you know. And, yes, I will look at the remission system as you suggest, perhaps, really trying to understand it and how it works and why it works or why it doesn't work in some cases.

The same situation for profit education and how much funding goes into that side of it. My officials are here today, they heard your questions, we'll prepare a response, and then maybe we can sit down and talk about it.

It's an interesting notion with respect to student government not possible. You know, that's almost un-Canadian. There's got to be something in there somewhere that says that you have the right to assemble and complain. So it's an interesting thing, and we'll look into that as well.

I think those were all the questions, and I have very little more information to share, Mr. Chairman, so I won't take very much longer.

Support for postsecondary learners shows an increase of \$27,500,000 from the 2005-06 forecast. The increase includes \$8,100,000 for the newly introduced rural incentive bursary. This new program will be available for rural Albertans eligible for a minimum of \$1,000 in loan assistance when attending accredited postsecondary programs in Canada.

Apprenticeship delivery shows an increase of \$411,000 from 2005-06. The increase results primarily from a projected increase in apprenticeship marketing activities. Apprenticeship marketing includes qualification assessments, technical training for apprentices from the Territories, as well as consulting services provided to international governments. These services are provided on a cost-recovery basis, and there is a corresponding increase in revenue, so this is a cost-neutral initiative to government.

We get down to equipment and inventory/purchases. Program delivery support shows a decrease of \$400,000 from '05-06, representing a reduction requirement for the student finance system renewal project. The system is used to process and administer provincial and federal student loans, grants, and scholarships. The renewal project will ensure that the system meets student needs for online self-service functionality. It would also increase the efficiency of the student assistance process.

Apprenticeship delivery also shows a decrease of \$1,353,000 from the 2005-06 forecast. The reduction results from the completion of the design and development phase of the apprenticeship, trades, and occupations management system, or ATOMS for short.

In conclusion, this government is committed to enhancing our postsecondary system, and Budget 2006 demonstrates this commitment. It is great news for our institutions, our stakeholders and partners in postsecondary learning. It's really nice when you start seeing quotes from virtually all of the institutions saying how excited they are about seeing this kind of a budget. So onward and upward, and I will need everyone's help to get this right.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, I want to basically give you some kudos on what is transpiring in West Yellowhead, especially with your travelling show, especially for the apprentice system for welding. As you realize, with the ballooning population that has transpired in the city of Edmonton and accommodations and that, to get the theory, it takes removal of a person from their rural area into the city. This is really helping, so I want to compliment your staff on that for sure because that's really filling a void in our region.

4:40

The other thing I wanted to talk about was some dollars and cents for programming. I know that we had worked with the previous minister in previous years on programs, and they've worked very well in our region. As you realize, we have a partnership with the Yellowhead region consortium and the Pembina region consortium. That one works in Drayton Valley-Calmar and Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, but we have the same director there, so it works out well.

I'm just wondering if we can work with your department on other programs such as this. What I'm talking about is the aspect of the RN system. We had the school curriculum in YREC in Hinton. Our

people were able to travel from the other areas to Hinton to go to school in the YREC building, and they were able to get there. Their theory was there, and then they were able to work in our hospital.

The big thing that I find there: once they graduate, we know that they're going to stay in the region because that's where their homes are. We're seeing a lot of mothers now whose children have moved on to an age where they don't need the same amount of looking after as they used to in the younger ages. So we're filling that gap.

I'm just wondering if the minister can give me any idea if we come up with some more ideas like this to fill some other gaps that we have, especially in the health sciences, to help us move along so we can put in some program funding money. We don't need any bricks and mortar. Basically, all we need is program funding.

Then, like I'd stated earlier, with the aspect of the same director for the Yellowhead region consortium and the Pembina region consortium it works out very well. When you look at the scope of what we do, we even go into the constituency of Rocky Mountain House. So then you've got four MLAs that are being looked after from that perspective. The bottom line, I feel, is that you can entice a lot of people that cannot afford to leave their family to go into the city for the theory part of whatever course they're going to take.

We're also looking at another aspect. We're going to have to look at helping with the aspect of working with the oil companies. The oil companies now are having some trouble working with the aspect of not getting help. They have what they call PET, which is petroleum education training. What transpires is that they'll go out and try to get people to come and work for them. They'll have the theory portion done by Lakeland College, who will have the course at the YREC in Hinton, and in this way they can have the practicum in the field.

What we've done is we've worked with a lot of aboriginals in our area, and of course when they're in our area, we know that they're going to stay there, and they're going to have people to work. The positive thing that I find is that if they happen to be a Métis, one of the people from the Métis Association will co-sign them, or if they're from a different area, one of the chiefs will co-sign. So there's a commitment there. The last time we did that, there were 15 or 18 of them there, and it worked out very well because there was no discrimination on the aspect of whether they were male or female. They had both there. So I think that's a positive thing because then the oil companies are willing to put in some money to help this program.

So I'm just wondering what kind of partnership Advanced Education will do in looking at something like that. So if you can give me a background on program spending. We're not looking for any dollars and cents for bricks and mortars. We're just looking for program spending.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I appreciate, actually, some of the comments from the Member for West Yellowhead. Some of the initiatives that the department has made in terms of trading apprentices rurally have been good, and some of the ways to try and bring apprenticeship training closer to the person who is going to be the apprentice I think will only have great benefit in terms of the numbers of people who become apprentices. This is a critical area. As the government has identified, there are critical skills shortages, and I will concentrate my comments on apprenticeship.

In many ways, you know, we look at apprenticeship as having had a successful system over the past number of years, and a lot of the

people that are involved in the provincial apprenticeship committees and the local apprenticeship committees and the board are very happy with the results that they see as the end results. Indeed, the satisfaction of recent apprenticeship graduates is 91 per cent, which is pretty good, and those are the people that are coming out of the last year of their apprenticeship. But then I look at our needs. I look at what we must have here in our labour market. I look at the stresses and the distortions in the labour market, and I look at where we're going in the next two to five years and longer and beyond that and the need to deal with this apprenticeship system in some way that will bring some much better results than what we've seen.

I think we have a record number, 47,000 apprentices in our apprenticeship system right now. We had actually almost a record number – I forget – 4,500 graduates, 4,500 journeymen coming out of the system. Now, those figures have kind of stayed more or less the same in percentage over the last 10 years, and I think those figures tell you something that is very, very distressing.

If we were to have 1 in 10 of our grade 10 students get out of grade 10, there would be headlines. There would be just tremendous furor. If we were to have this problem that we have in so few journeymen graduates with so many in the system, we would be having just a tremendous amount of anxiety about what this is doing. It actually is a huge problem for our economy because what we're going to need in the next number of years as our economy shifts from conventional oil and gas, which is the real pull, the huge vacuum truck that's pulling people from almost every sector of the economy right now – it's what's hurting small business. It's what's hurting, you know, caregivers, whatever. It's rippling throughout.

It's actually not the oil sands at this moment, but the oil sands will begin to move into labour shortages and labour demands as we begin the construction of the upgraders near Edmonton and as we look to increased construction of oil sands primary development in some of the plants in the actual Wood Buffalo and Lloydminster and Peace River regions. They will begin to pull increasing numbers of tradesmen, and this is all going to be made worse by the fact of the greying of the population; 2012, I think, is probably going to be the date when we're at the height of it and the worst of it, the time when the baby boomers are retiring.

4:50

A number of questions to the minister that I would just like to reiterate are: how many spaces are there, actually, in the apprenticeship system in terms of being planned over the next one, two, and three years, and how do these spaces relate to the actual numbers that are necessary for each trade? Can they be broken down by trade?

The north and south factors. I'm getting reports of thousands of tradespeople coming in that will not have a spot this year in both the SAIT and NAIT traditional facilities. How can the minister deal with these tremendous pressures? I'm getting reports of people looking to line up for two days, bringing sleeping bags like they're at some rock concert, in order to get a spot months later in an apprenticeship training area, just to get their schooling in so that they can get their ticket. I'm getting reports all over the place of people just not being able to get their books signed by employers, especially on commercial sites where these employers are just using them for a few months at a shot and then sending them home and bringing on new guys, using them as cheap labour and saying that they're providing these numbers. Maybe that's hurting some of our numbers and hurting some of the ways that we're actually dealing with our training, inflating numbers, and they're not actually being trained.

I'm getting reports of sites with 12 and 14 and 18 apprentices on the job site and not a single journeyman. We're not talking 1 to 1

here or even going to 1 to 3, and these can vary between trades. A lot of these are commercial sites, to be truthful, but some of them are public monies, schools and such. Others are apartment buildings and things. We're seeing things that could be a problem for public safety down the road in terms of how these things are being built because a lot of them aren't being fully inspected in the end.

You know, there's a lot of talk about the RAP program being such a success. As the minister just reported, we have 1,400 kids coming through RAP, and it is a major increase, but 1,400 is not a lot when we look at our population. It's not a lot when we look at our needs, and it's not a lot when we look at our planning down the road. We have over a million kids in Canada unemployed and between 18 and 25, and these figures have been fairly consistent. Yet our average apprenticeship entry range is – you know, you get different figures, but maybe 25 is about right; it's certainly not 18. What are those numbers telling us? What are those numbers saying about how we're not preparing our kids for these very, very rewarding types of jobs and very rewarding types of careers?

I go into the schools in my area, and I tell all the grade 6ers that I can to get a trade. Many of the business leaders, many of the community leaders, many of the people that become very successful in life and in our communities come out of the trades. If they want to go to university later on, at least they can pay for it.

Again, back to the problems with apprenticeship. You know, there's obviously a huge problem with our system when we can't even document, when we can't even put numbers to, when we can't even have statistics on how many leave in the first year. There are no statistics kept on first-year leavers. I'm told: oh, well, you know, people will try out different things and move around and do this and that. Well, that's a pretty lackadaisical attitude, if you ask me, on how we're going to be training our people in critical skills areas. We're going to have kids bouncing around from here to there. Like I said earlier, many of them are being used as cheap labour and are not even having their books signed so that they can use these numbers another time.

Union, non-union: it doesn't matter. Union tends to be a little bit more methodical in how they watch and train their apprentices, and many of them are actually far more successful in their numbers. It would be nice if in some ways in more than just a few of the trades they could be empowered to ensure that they could indenture and watch the schooling of their apprentices as they go along to ensure that they are actually fully trained in a comprehensive manner that falls into many of the different areas that would be necessary and useful in their trade.

So often with this so-called multiskilling movement that we have going on right now, it's a deskilling movement that is bringing out people with, say, an electrical journeyman's ticket, and they spend almost all of their four years as a wire-puller, or they've gone on and done other things. We're getting fewer skills coming out of our systems. Yes, you know, in some of the final outputs in the high end of some of our apprenticeship systems we have had a successful system, Mr. Chair, but the reality is that it's beginning to fail. I would very much like to see some tracking of the first-year leavers and something done in that area.

The problems of these irresponsible contractors and the lack of policing, the lack of at least watching or somehow determining whether or not they are taking the training: the nature of apprenticeship is that most of the training is on the job, and because most of that training is on the job and apprentices are accredited for that training, there should be some ability to ensure that the training is taking place. The reality is that we must have some look at how our apprenticeship system is really working. If we are to deal with

critical skills shortages, we must look at these thousands of apprentices that don't have spots. We must look at the real necessity of bringing out tradesmen who have truly portable tickets so that they can bring to each job that they go to the skills and the versatility that can give them the ability to move on in their trade and in their jobs, become masters, whatever, and to give their careers and their clients, the people they do business with, the best product they can.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Member for West Yellowhead, I look forward to visiting your area and soon. In fact, I want to absolutely visit every single system that we have out there to make sure that I get a really good understanding of what's happening where the rubber meets the road. So you can invite your consortium. We'll make arrangements. We'll sit down, and I'll listen. We'll look for ways to look for opportunities in all of this. I know that your consortium is very much involved with the public school system there and the Catholic school system where they're all interconnected on SuperNet, and there may be some things there that we can look at in terms of applications. I know that West Yellowhead over the years has been a long way ahead of many other areas with respect to the use of technology. You know, there may be some solutions there.

Another idea. I don't know if this will work in your area. A friend of mine just retired a couple months ago, and he was tickled pink to have been asked by his employer to come back for a day or two a week. He was just so happy to do that for his employer, to come back and mentor his successor, to come back and talk to kids about the career that, in fact, he had. So that could be an idea of sort of celebrating our golden years and the ability to nurture and mentor kids.

5:00

Edmonton-Manning, it seems to me that you seem to have a fairly good understanding of apprenticeship. I know that my officials have taken good care to take good notes with respect to your concerns, you know, how many spaces over three years and all of those kinds of things. I'm sure that we'll get back to you in due course, and I thank you for those questions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My remarks are going to be based on discussions from Public Accounts this morning, and they're centred around the large percentage of students who are not completing high school after five years or entering grade 10. We see 31 per cent in 1997-98, and while it has improved, it is still high, with 23 per cent still not completing school. Improving the high school completion rate is an issue for the Education minister, I realize, but I would like to talk about what happens to these adults after they leave the K to 12 system.

I just took some rough figures from this morning. Based on the 590,000 students we have in the K to 12 system in Alberta, we have approximately, according to this, 20 per cent, 118,000 students, dropping out of school. I think all of us want Albertans to be productive and fit into society, and I think the K to 12 and Advanced Education systems seem to have this, it seems to me, as their goal, sir. Statistics Canada shows that about 90 per cent of Alberta 25- to 34-year-olds have at least a high school diploma or have attended

some postsecondary education institution. Once these students leave their school, their education becomes an issue for the Ministry of Advanced Education.

I really would pose a few questions for the Minister of Advanced Education. Will the minister consider giving incentives to adults to return and complete their grade 12 education? Again, if we look at those 118,000 people out there, it seems to me there's a requirement or a need to give them some incentive to return to school. Looking at the manpower situation that we have in Alberta, I think this would be worth looking at, sir.

Given that adults who do return to grade 12 may have to leave the workforce at least part-time and potentially give up their wages only to pay a tuition fee, would the minister consider funding the costs of education to grade 12 tuition in Alberta for those kinds of adults, sir? I believe that if we check on that, you'd see that B.C. is doing this, paying tuition fees for adults who come back to school and are successful.

The other thing I'd like to ask the minister: would he try to ensure that there is adequate access for adult learners to complete their high school level in the rural parts of the province? If I remember the 20-year plan that I looked at, I noticed that there was some incentive to school districts to look at the whole business of community schools. I think that in a lot of communities the school is the lifeblood of the community. I think there would be some way of advancing or helping people in the rural areas to get their upgrade. Of course, if you added the tuition factor in terms of an incentive to go back to school, I think we'd be looking after that population.

Maybe the last step the minister would consider: would the minister take steps to allow large groups of adults who have not completed their high school to return and complete an apprenticeship program or ensure that they have the prerequisites to enter other postsecondary programs? I would ask him if he would look at that.

Now, wandering away and looking at a thing I got from my researcher this morning – and I just throw this out to you. At the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia they no longer collect tuition for the PhD level students. I guess the question to the minister: has the minister given any consideration to encouraging either the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary to do the same? My question is in terms of the vein of highly specialized people. I think of the question of the cancer bill, the need to get very, very highly qualified people. I think this could be a good incentive to attract those kinds of people to Alberta, and I think it would be worth having a look at, sir. I'll leave that with you.

Maybe I could wander to one more thing that you said in question period, and believe it or not, I was listening to you. You said that there are 1,400 students enrolled in the RAP program. That's commendable, but I'd like to know what percentage of that group will complete their apprenticeship program and complete it by exploring a trade and being successful in the trade.

So those are some questions, Mr. Minister. Again, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment. I hope you can keep Dave Taylor in line. It's very difficult. We've tried. I know you're the man that can do it.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Herard: If there are others who want to ask questions, maybe I can wait. I want to thank the hon. Member for St. Albert with respect to his comments because I know that he, too, has been involved in education a long time.

In terms of incentives for adults to return to school, a lot of that takes place I think in the Human Resources and Employment area. Typically, people will be in the much lower income area. They could be, you know, single-parent families and so on. So an awful

lot of support is given to give people the skills they require. I will certainly ask my department to consider your ideas, and we'll get back to you on it.

One of the things that I'm wondering about is something that I've seen overseas – for example, in Belgium and France and so on – where what they look at is: here are a couple thousand jobs going unfilled and here are 2,000 or 3,000 people on welfare, on and off. What they do is talk to these people and find out: if you had the opportunity to have any job out there that is available, which one would it be? Then they look at how much skill deficiency there would be between being able to do that job. Then they enter into a contract with the employer that says: if this individual gets the skills they need in six months, will you give him the job? Yes, they get into a contract. For some of them it might take a year, but in the examples I saw there was one hundred per cent success when there was an agreement made and a contract made. These people are now buying their first homes and cars. So I think there are some things that could be done with respect to that.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, there are about two minutes left. Would you like to use them?

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll try to do that. Perhaps in the very short time that's remaining, I can draw the attention of the minister to the business plan, page 77. He and I were speculating about why it is that the participation rate in the postsecondary system in Alberta is so low, as low as we know that it is.

5:10

There may be an answer, Mr. Minister, in that table on page 77. The very last item, 2.g, tells you of Albertans' perceptions about whether they see that the learning system is within the means of most Albertans. The percentage of people who think that it's within their means is steadily going down. It was 75 per cent five years ago. This year, regarding this number, it is 46 per cent, less than half of them. The cost of going to postsecondary institutions obviously is seen as a major factor by Albertans in general, so something needs to be done on the issue of affordability.

If you don't have this document, I'll certainly make it available to you. It was given to me by the Council of Alberta University Students just last week when they came to see me. I'm sure that they met with you or met with your staff. They have some proposals about how to cut down tuition costs. Those are the most visible ones. I'd like to get your reaction to their proposals.

One of the main suggestions that they're making is to delink the tuition revenues that an institution makes from the operational costs of the institution. They're suggesting some alternatives to it. What we have done – saying that 30 per cent of the operational costs of colleges and universities and institutes should come from tuition fees – is a great concern to students. I think that the tuition costs have been driven up because the overall operating costs of institutions move up very, very fast for a variety of reasons. Students are seeking a delinking of the tuition fee policy from the operating costs of the universities and colleges. I'd like to get your response to that. Students, I think, would very much appreciate you taking a close look at this document and its contents.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than

5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the following question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Advanced Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$2,068,035,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$103,900,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report on the vote of the estimates of Advanced Education and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Advanced Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,068,035,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$103,900,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn and reconvene this evening at 8 o'clock in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 12, 2006** **8:00 p.m.**

Date: 06/04/12

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders, as you know, the first hour will be allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, colleagues. It is a pleasure for me to rise tonight and to move my estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and also to introduce to you some guests that we have with us that are truly working for the producers and the ag industry of Alberta and have been for many, many years in many cases and are indispensable in terms of us being able to carry out the policy direction that this government has and the service that we provide to our producers.

They're in our public gallery, and I'd ask that they rise as I say their names. I'd just like to introduce them if I may, Mr. Chairman, the first being Mr. Barry Mehr, who is our deputy minister; as well, Mr. Brad Klak, who is the president of Ag Financial Services Corp.; Faye Rault, who is the assistant deputy minister of rural development. I see John Donner, who is the assistant deputy minister of environment and food safety, as well as Bard Haddrell, the director of the ag info centre. I would certainly suggest to you that we have the best executive team in government, and they're well represented here tonight.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to characterize this year's budget as one of reconstruction and reinvigoration. After coming through several years of difficulty, we're certainly seeing an industry that's undeniably changed. Everyone, whether they're from a rural community that's dependent on agriculture or they live in the heart of our capital city, knows that farmers have had a rough ride over the past several years. We need to work with industry to increase returns from the market and better manage business risk. This has to change, and it's up to the industry working closely with government to make it happen. We've already got a very strong foundation. We just need to have the appropriate direction, and a year without any major disasters would be nice.

Part of my vision is to build on that foundation. There are a few cracks that we need to fix, in particular our trade issues: the World Trade Organization and the huge amount of subsidies world-wide that distort our prices. The Canadian agricultural income stabilization program needs to be fixed. It isn't working in its current format. Of course, we need to find better choices in how we market our grains. We have built a solid base, and if we focus on making that strong, we've got a house that will withstand any storm that tries to take it down. This budget is about confirming the government's commitment to the viability of agriculture in the province.

Before I go into this year's plans, I want to just quickly talk about what we've done in the past year to help position us to move forward this year. We made some changes within the ministry, refocused the work of some divisions and put more emphasis on rural develop-

ment, research, and business development. Some of the financial program delivery has moved from the department to AFSC, or Ag Financial Services, and that's been a very good fit, Mr. Chairman, as that is a financial organization.

We also strengthened our food safety, environment, and strategic policy sectors. With these changes, we feel more capable than ever to help our ag industry take on the rest of the world. That's important because if things go the way we want them to at next month's World Trade Organization meetings, we'll have significantly improved access to the world's markets, and that will make more difference to the bottom lines of our producers than any farm income program could ever hope to achieve.

Back home we're putting forward a budget that will allow us to follow through in a few other areas. Last year we rolled out the government's rural development strategy. Now we're putting our money where our mouth is with \$100 million to establish a rural development project fund. This fund will support communities, regional alliances, and not-for-profit organizations and help kick-start community focus projects that will contribute to the growth and prosperity of rural Alberta. This is a significant investment in rural Alberta and complements the hundreds of millions of dollars that are being invested through individual ministry budgets in areas such as health, housing, infrastructure, and policing, not to mention the other programs and projects that my ministry invests in on an ongoing basis, things like 4-H, irrigation projects, ag service boards, and numerous others.

We decided to go with this fund because it offered the best vehicle to get money out of the community ventures. We're still working out the details, but we know that a third party will administer the fund. An arm's-length board representing all corners of the province will oversee the fund. Projects that are strong on partnership and big on rural impact will take precedence, and the fund will produce an annual report card of results to ensure accountability.

Mr. Chairman, this fund is really just a small part of the government's commitment to rural development. All you need to do is look at every ministry's business plan to see the dollars going into rural communities. About \$260 million in new spending is earmarked for rural communities in this year's budget. Of course, we need the investment and resources to be co-ordinated, to be looked at through a rural lens. That's what the rural development strategy strives to do. So that work will continue to be important to the ministry.

We're continuing to re-energize our livestock industry, and of course we're continuing to hear positive news on this front. The latest is the news that the Montana judge that stymied our recovery last year has thrown out R-CALF's case for a permanent injunction. We know that R-CALF isn't going away, but this turn of events is certainly welcome to our industry. It feels like for the first time in a long time the world is finally coming to its senses on the matter. It was apparent by the reaction of trading nations when we reported our fourth case of BSE in January and the U.S. reported its second homegrown case in March. The reaction of countries such as Japan was measured and reasonable. There were no significant knee-jerk trade interruptions, and except for a few reassurances the new cases garnered little concern.

It has taken a lot of hard work by the beef industry and by governments – Alberta, Canada, and the United States – to get to this point, but it doesn't mean we still don't have work to do. We're continuing to strengthen our livestock industry. The work on our six-point BSE recovery strategy continues. In this budget we've committed \$20 million for specified risk material disposal research. SRMs, or specified risk materials, are the materials that are removed from cattle at slaughter. Soon SRMs will no longer be recycled into

any feed, so what we're faced with is a large amount of excess material that ends up as waste. This funding is earmarked for research into alternative uses and disposal methods for this material.

Now, I know that there's a lot of hurt out there in the grains and oilseeds sector. There has been hurt for some time. In fact, this evening, Mr. Chairman, we were at a reception with the grains and oilseeds, pulses, and potato growers of Alberta. There's a lot of posturing about what to do to support this sector. Recently, my provincial and territorial counterparts called upon the federal government to work on transforming the CAIS program – not to replace it; transform it. We believe that the principles of the program are sound. It just needs to become simpler as well as more bankable, more responsive, and more predictable. We've advocated as well for a separation of the disaster component, which we're pleased to see the federal minister is looking at. We have to better address income risk and make sure we've got a disaster component that works.

We're not ready to throw it out, but we're certainly working to make it better. We know that our grains and oilseeds producers continue to suffer from high input costs and lower commodity prices, and we're going to do something about it. We have a three-point plan, similar to the six-point plan created around BSE, to help deal with the challenges facing the grains and oilseeds sector. As part of this plan we are consulting with grains and oilseeds industry representatives to find long-term solutions to the difficulties the entire industry is facing. We can no longer grow in some cases the same grains for the same export markets or for the same uses. Like we did with the beef industry, we've got to look at every opportunity to derive value from the crops we grow right here at home.

One area is bioenergy. There's great promise for our crop producers in this area, and we're committed to exploring it. I'm really pleased that this government is developing a bioenergy strategy, and our ministry will be a big part of this effort.

I've heard the calls for immediate ad hoc assistance, but this industry needs long-term solutions that reduce producer risk and help farmers out when disaster strikes. We want programs to sustain agriculture in this province, and we've done a great deal of work to make sure that what we bring forward are business risk management programs that create an environment where farmers get their income out of the marketplace while still protecting them in a disaster. That's why we injected \$224 million through the CAIS reference margin pilot program for the 2003 through to 2005 claim years. It's why we reduced premiums for several crop insurance programs through this year's budget. Making programs more workable and accessible is the most sensible and sustainable approach. Ad hoc programs are not the solution, and they don't work.

There are many other initiatives we're working on and have addressed in this year's budget, but in the interests of time I'd like to sum up by going over the planned increases that we have for this year. The ministry's spending has actually decreased from the 2005-06 budget by approximately \$53 million. This is as a result of budget decreases for the following areas: the Canada/Alberta fed cattle set-aside program, which has been discontinued – last year we budgeted \$133 million for this program – and \$43.7 million for production insurance expenses, which is budgeted based on 20-year historical averages. These decreases are partially offset by the following increases: the \$100 million for the rural development project fund, \$20 million for the specified risk material disposal research, as well as \$2 million for irrigation infrastructure rehabilitation, bringing this annual funding to \$24 million per year.

8:10

This budget is based on several assumptions, Mr. Chairman. The

assumption that commodity prices will not decline further than they are. Interest rates will remain stable as will the Canadian dollar. We will not experience a disastrous year of claims under the income stabilization and crop insurance programs. Those are some of the assumptions that we have made in our planning.

These assumptions mean that achieving the plan is subject to some major risks. Widespread crop production losses due to poor weather conditions, including drought, would be some of the risk; major livestock disease outbreak such as foot and mouth, avian or swine flu; further declines in global commodity prices, particularly in crops. Changes in the economy, such as an increase in the interest rates or a stronger Canadian dollar, have an effect on our farm incomes. Those four items could affect farm income dramatically and, in turn, impact indemnities paid out under crop insurance and the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program. We've not built this plan to deal with another disastrous year of claims. We await the federal government's budget to see what they're going to do.

I want to assure all hon. members that the prosperity and sustainability of our agricultural industry remains a priority of this government. Rural Alberta is a priority of this government.

I would like to thank the hon. members for your support throughout this past year. The industry is growing and changing rapidly, and it's more than ready to take on the world. We have the best people producing top-notch product that's safe and nutritious. We cannot be beat given an open market. When the global playing field levels, our ag producers are going to set the standard for the world to follow. We're absolutely committed to working with them every step of the way to help them to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the time this evening. I look forward to the comments and questions. Also, I would ask members who are asking questions if you would identify the page and the area of the plan that you're referring to so that if I cannot get to the answer today, we will be able to give you a written response. The staff, of course, is up there writing away as we speak.

Once again, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the comments and questions part.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate on the budget estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development this evening. Certainly, I think all hon. members of this Assembly recognize the importance to rural Alberta of the department and the programs that are administered through that department.

Now, the ministry this year is requesting a total of over \$1 billion for its three core business areas to facilitate sustainable industry growth, to enhance rural sustainability, and to strengthen business risk management. We see some of the highlights in this year's budget estimates: a \$150 million increase for farm income stabilization. We see a \$71 million increase for production insurance; \$20 million to respond, if necessary, to BSE-related changes in federal regulations to safeguard the livestock feed industry; and this \$100 million for the rural development strategy. I will be following that strategy, that \$100 million strategy with interest. I think it will be money well spent if it's used properly and doesn't become a political fund. I certainly don't want this to be just given out on a constituency basis like some of the other programs in Gaming.

Now, we've all been hearing for some time about the CAIS program. I would agree with the hon. minister that CAIS is not working. It needs to be fixed. It's cumbersome. It's bureaucratic. I often thought during question period, Mr. Chairman, that I should

give the hon. minister a CAIS test, to just go through, for instance, some of the editions of the Canadian Grain News and question the minister on how, exactly, some of these programs work under CAIS. Just give him a test. But I thought that at this time it may be inappropriate now that there are winds of change in the CAIS program. I would certainly agree that we need to make some changes to this.

There are many different opinions on the CAIS program. I was astonished to receive a news release from the county of Two Hills and MD of Bonnyville – this is dated last November – and the subject of this news release is that individuals in that part of the province took enough issue with the remarks made by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs at the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties convention that they issued this press release. They state that

In a meeting with [the hon. Minister of] Municipal Affairs . . . on November 15, 2005, the Minister stated that

- The CAIS Program is very good
- That it will eliminate all the bad farmers
- If small farms cannot be successful, they “should smell the roses and find different careers.”

Now, I find that interesting. I don't know if the present minister of agriculture agrees with that or not, but it is usual for ministers to meet with representatives from the municipalities and counties. The county of Two Hills deputy reeve, Elroy Yakemchuk, apparently challenged the hon. minister about these remarks.

I would like to now ask the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development if his opinion on the family farm is different than that of the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. You know, we all know that family farms are having a difficult time with the escalating costs of energy. Electricity deregulation hasn't worked out in urban areas and certainly hasn't worked out in rural areas. Of course, the hon. minister mentioned some of the weather patterns and also the low commodity prices that are forcing many farmers, particularly young farmers, off the land. Now, Mr. Yakemchuk asks: what would be the definition of a bad farmer? Under these circumstances I have no idea, but perhaps the minister could enlighten all members of the House.

Again, to the minister of agriculture, this is also in the press release: “What did you mean when you implied that if a small farmer cannot make it on 4-6 quarters of land, he should smell the roses and find a different career?” That was apparently the question. This is in their press release, not mine. I want clarification of this, and I want your opinion on this. Do you agree with that? Now, the farmers, as I understand it, were very offended with these comments, and many of them cannot look at finding another career. It's simply not an option.

In light of this, I would like to know, again, what specific programs this government is going to implement to protect and enhance the family farm and encourage young farmers to take up the business. I know that there are programs. I know that people automatically think of the BSE money and how the big packers got a large share of it. I know what the general public thinks, but in this case, I would certainly like to know what the minister thinks.

8:20

Now, specifically on page 86 of the business plan 2006-09 I was comparing the performance measures that are in this document to what's in the annual report for the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. I'm going to have to double check because there seems to be a difference in some of these performance measures that are present for us.

In performance measure 2.b, again, on page 86 we're talking about the

percentage of Alberta production produced under on-farm food safety programs . . . [and] On-Farm Food Safety programs are industry led initiatives designed to provide an optimum level of safety for products produced on farms. These programs undergo national technical review and are implemented by producers with help from their provincial commodity groups. Implementation by producers may be voluntary or mandatory depending on the commodity.

We see under this performance measure, “production produced under on-farm food safety programs,” that for chicken farms it's mandatory, but for hog farms and beef feed lots it's voluntary. I'm wondering if the minister or the department has considered also making those on-farm food safety programs for hog farms and beef feed lots mandatory as well. Now, that is the first question I have.

The second question that I have is in regard to the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation and the morphing of the Alberta Opportunity Company into this entity. Now, I think that it was last year I was asking about the commercial loans that were provided by this outfit, but I don't recall getting an answer that I was satisfied with. Certainly, in 2002, Mr. Chairman, legislation that we talked about in this Assembly provided for a merger between the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation and the Alberta Opportunity Company.

Now, the AOC, as I said, was morphed into this outfit, and while I was spending some time late last fall and early this winter in the Legislature Library going through the *Gazettes*, I noticed that in the past the Alberta Opportunity Company used to list, I believe on a monthly basis, loan authorizations. If they made a loan of taxpayers' money or money from the Treasury, there was a list of who got the money, the purpose of the loan, and the amount authorized for.

For instance, when we look at a numbered company here, Mr. Chairman – why did I pick a numbered company? – the numbered company that I would be looking at from the *Alberta Gazette*, February 4, 1998, would be 738926 Alberta Ltd. in Lamont. It's a motel. The majority owner would be Steve Kumar. The loan authorized was \$218,000, and the purpose of the loan was to purchase an existing business. There are a lot of them here for that month, and they're for amounts that range from \$35,000, \$16,000, and they go upwards to \$885,000, so the Alberta Opportunity Company did post all its loans in the *Gazette*.

Now, I have checked the Agriculture Financial Services Act, and there's no requirement to post these loans in the *Gazette*. I would think that the same practice should follow from the Alberta Opportunity Company through to the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. These are tax dollars. Everyone on the government side of the House is always talking about being open and accountable: oh, yes; we're transparent. But this is certainly not open, it's not accountable, and it's certainly not transparent. I would like the minister's assurance that this is going to be changed immediately and that all the loans that are made for whatever reason through the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation are posted in the *Gazette* in a timely fashion within, say, 60 days of the cheque being cut because I think it's only fair to the taxpayers. If it was done by this Progressive Conservative government at one time, I don't understand why it can't be done now.

Hopefully we're going to have time to get back, Mr. Chairman, to the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. But when we look at the ministry of agriculture, it certainly is important. You know, not only do we have the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, we've got the office of the Farmers' Advocate, we've got the Irrigation Council, we've got the Agricultural Products Marketing Council, the Alberta Grain Commission. We look at the mission and the purpose of this department. It is “to enable the growth of a globally competitive, sustainable agriculture and food industry

through essential policy, legislation, information and services in partnership with vibrant rural communities.”

Now, I have some general questions, and I think we'll start with this one at this time, Mr. Chairman. One controversial program that has been brought to our attention is this Choice Matters campaign. This is, again, in my opinion and in the opinion of people across the province in the rural communities, a taxpayer-funded campaign to lobby the federal government to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board and to convince Alberta farmers to support this position.

Now, in what line item can I find the funding for this campaign? Where is it located? Where is the money for this Choice Matters campaign located? What is the estimate for this program in this fiscal year? How does the minister justify spending money on this program when the Wheat Board is controlled by democratically elected members and is under the jurisdiction of the federal government? Will the minister re-evaluate spending in this area in light of the federal government's desire to maintain the Canadian Wheat Board for the time being? Certainly, we know that there is a motion on the Order Paper, Mr. Chairman, in this Assembly to dismantle the Wheat Board. I've heard the minister's comments even in Public Accounts on this issue. Where is the money to fund this campaign, and how much?

Clean-up costs for confined feeding operations that have gone bankrupt. Who is responsible for the costs of cleaning up confined feeding operations that have gone bankrupt? Again, this is sort of a related question: what incentives are provided to use the best practices on farm activities such as manure spreading and storage?

Now, again, the AFSC continues to provide loans to small businesses and farming operations. Have the chartered banks been consulted on this practice of providing these loans, particularly to small business? I know that a lot of farming operations are dependent on the AFSC, but if we're out of the business of being in business, we already have the Alberta Treasury Branches in operation. That's our state-owned bank here. What is exactly with this?

What programs are in place to encourage young people specifically to enter the agricultural industry? I support the minister fully on his initiatives and encourage him to continue to rebuild the agricultural industry.

8:30

Now, it would be our opinion that a progressive future for the agricultural industry should include producer-owned marketing co-operatives, organic production of meat and vegetables – and that's certainly been started, but I think we've got a long way to go there yet – agricultural tourism, including U-pick, farmers' markets, on-farm programs, direct selling to restaurants, specialty grocery stores, and also value-added specialty products sold to some of the high-end restaurants and grocery stores. What are the supports to these types of organizations, their products, and production methods? Has the minister or any of his departmental officials considered transition funding to cover the operating costs for the seven years that it takes to convert current land in agricultural production to organic farming? I find this budget is more of the same focus as it's focusing again on big agriculture and produces little vision for progressive, innovative activities.

There certainly are environmental issues with coal-bed methane that are being discussed in the Assembly. Questions are coming fast and furious to the Minister of Energy from all parties in the House, but there certainly are environmental issues in the agricultural industry as well.

What economic incentives do you offer or are you contemplating to offer to encourage farmers to steward their land? Do you provide

any compensation for the ecological goods and services provided by woodlands, wetlands on private land? Given the greater social goods that wetland areas provide, especially in the agricultural zone, do you provide any economic incentives for woodlot owners to steward their private woodlands? What economic incentives are provided to encourage low-input agriculture or to consume less energy or less pesticides and fertilizer?

Now, fertilizer is very, very expensive. What are we looking at now? The minister probably has this price per tonne on the tip of his tongue, but I think it's about \$440, maybe \$460 a tonne for fertilizer. I don't know how many producers can afford that, but that's a big issue, and how are we going to deal with that?

Thank you.

Mr. Horner: I note that the hon. member didn't ask for unanimous consent to keep going, so I guess I'll have to respond to some of this.

Prior to doing that, Mr. Chairman, might I indulge to introduce to the Assembly some guests that I see who have entered the gallery who were part of a group that held a reception this evening, which a number of my colleagues and myself were honoured to attend, representing not only the industry which they represent but all of the grains and oil seeds, pulses, and potato growers. These gentlemen are all, I believe, from the Alberta canola commission, and if they would rise after I introduce them. Brian Tischler, Kevin Bender, Andy Haarsma, Stewart Gilroy, and Greg Porozni are in the gallery, and I ask the Assembly to give them a warm welcome. Thank you for that indulgence, Mr. Chairman.

The hon. member went through a lot of different things in his dissertation there, and I guess I'm going to try and knock off a few of them here. The first one was that he mentioned his hope was that the rural development fund would not be a political fund and that it would not be used on a constituency basis, I think is what he said. I would like to make it very clear that what we're talking about doing with this fund is to actually make it arm's length, Mr. Chairman. We want to make it arm's length because we want it accountable. We want it transparent. We want it to react to the desires of the rural communities that are out there that have good projects that need a hand up in terms of getting that project off the ground. We have a report out there called A Place to Grow, which a number of my colleagues in this House put a lot of work into over the last two years, that my predecessor was the impetus to get rolling, that had consultation across this province twice over those two years.

From that consultation came a report called A Place to Grow, which has been introduced in this House, that has 77 recommendations along with a group of principles that this third party or arm's-length group will use to judge every project that comes forward to it. At the same time, we are asking that this group, this third party, will come back to government at the end of each year with a report card, an accountability statement as to what they did with the funds which we have provided to them. They will be able to tell us what the project was and how it did affect and impact on rural development and the rural lifestyles in Alberta.

It is very important to us, Mr. Chairman, that these initiatives come from the ground up, that they're not driven top down, like some of our colleagues opposite might want to have done, but that they're driven from the community, that it's based on partnerships, that it's based on what the community knows as their strengths. They know their weaknesses. What they need is our expertise to help them in whatever way to facilitate that project and to get it off the ground.

So to my hon. colleague, no, it is not a political fund. No, it's not on a constituency basis, and, yes, the funds will be used properly, and it is accountable.

He waxed a bit about contemplating giving me a CAIS test on the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program. I would be more than willing to take up that challenge as long as he would be willing to do the same and to understand what every aspect of that program entails and how the changes that we make to that program may impact different farming operations in our province. I think I might have a better understanding of where that's going and would be perfectly willing to do that.

I believe that where we're going with the CAIS program is where we need to head. It's something that we've had a lot of consultation on in this province. In fact, prior to the reception, which we were at, our guests in the gallery, along with a number of other grains and oilseeds producers, were actually having a meeting with some of our people from the Ag Financial Services Corp., who are the experts in the CAIS program, to talk about where we need to go to listen to the producers about where we need to go with this program and how we make it better.

In fact, what we have found is that we are all on the same page when it comes to the changes that we need to make. We're all on the same page when it comes to the changes which we're planning and which we're proposing to the federal government. The industry has told us that they do not want to throw out the principles that CAIS was developed on and the targeted approach that helps.

The hon. member talks about: how is this going to help the family farm? Well, I would like the hon. member, first of all, to define for me what he considers a family farm and how that relates to the 53,000 farming operations that we have in the province and how many of them he thinks would not be family farms. I know that in my own farm background in our family the farm came under a corporation. It was called Westglen Farms Ltd., and we were very proud of that. A number of my brothers are shareholders still in an entity that is somewhat related to that. That was a family farm to me, hon. member, and while it may have seemed to be a corporation on the outside, it certainly was very much a family farm. Some family farms that I'm aware of are extremely large and considered to be fairly large corporations. It requires a certain level of expertise once you get to those dollar amounts.

There was a comment made – and I take a little bit of exception – about some quotes that may or may not have been attributed to one of my colleagues on the government side from the past year from a municipality. I know that at the meeting that we had, where this was brought up from the floor actually, this was addressed, and I think that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is one of our strongest supporters in cabinet, in Treasury Board, in our government, and in our caucus for rural Alberta and the rural development of Alberta because it includes municipalities, Mr. Chairman, and he is a very strong proponent of that. He's also a small businessman and understands business.

8:40

I think the hon. member attributed to me some sort of comment about: well, if your farm size is four to six quarters, maybe you should smell the roses or something like that. Hon. member, I never made those comments and never would because in my own riding I have a number of U-pick operations. I have a number of ag tourism operations. I have a number of, quite frankly, CFOs that are not on more than two or three quarters. The size of the farm – size does not matter, Mr. Chairman, in this particular case. You can have a very successful farming business on one quarter. In fact, you could probably have a successful business on 80 acres, dependent upon what it is you're going into.

We have specific programs to protect our farming operations because if all of the things that we're working on to make the

environment, where producers and farm operations can generate their margin out of the marketplace – if we're successful on all fronts that we're working on, the programs that we have in place are backstops. They're not programs to protect. They're not programs to insulate. They're not programs to put fences up. They're programs to backstop our producers so that they can be the entrepreneurs that I know they can be so that they can compete in a fair market, in an open marketplace, and get legitimate and adequate returns for the product that they produce.

Things like the World Trade Organization. There's probably over – well, I've heard numbers as high as \$300 billion in upside in commodity prices if we were to remove all of the export subsidies, domestic subsidies, and export supports around the world. That's why the developing countries are wanting to remove those subsidies. That's why countries that are even considered rather socialist are moving away from subsidies because they know that they can't afford to do that, and they know that it simply drives the commodity price down for their producers. It's counterproductive, and there's no reason why we should jump into that game.

Other things that we're doing to help market our product. The hon. member mentioned food safety and security. This is something that has been on Alberta's agenda for quite some time. As a past ag exporter I understand the value of being able to differentiate ourselves in the international marketplace. It is extremely important in today's climate that we play from our strengths, and our strengths, Mr. Chairman, revolve around the ability to have safe food and show the world how we are good stewards of our environment. We probably lead the nation in our environmental farm planned growth. In development under the ag policy framework, which is a national program, we are probably one of the leaders in getting our farmers to look to using this as a marketing tool as well as understanding that we are good stewards of the land because if we're not, we won't make money. We won't be able to create the type of economic growth on farms that we need to have to sustain our agriculture.

The best program that we can do to encourage young Albertans to get into the business of agriculture is to create an environment that makes agriculture profitable. It's no different than any other business that young people might be interested in getting involved in. If it's profitable, that will attract young entrants to the industry. That, Mr. Chairman, is the goal of this government, to make the ag industry a profitable industry, one that people want to be involved in and want to get into. Everything that we do in our department is geared in that direction.

The hon. member spoke a little bit about our business plan and food security on poultry operations and also was wondering why it wasn't on hog farms and a few other places. We have probably one of the best, as I said, food security systems in the world. We work with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency on a number of fronts, whether that's on a reportable disease basis or whether it's not. We have working relationships with all of our livestock sectors on contingency planning should there be a problem. Should there be something that may happen within one of our farms as it relates to the – I think this is where he was talking about the CFOs. No, that was later on, but anyway we'll talk about that now. We have probably some of the best legislation in Canada as it relates to confined feeding operations under our Ag Operation Practices Act and through the Natural Resources Conservation Board. We have made some changes there over the last year as well as a substantial amount of consultation with the industry and other NGO entities that are involved in environmental stewardship. We are certainly, I would suggest, leaders in that field and building upon the strengths that we have there.

The hon. member talked a little bit about AFSC and ag lending

versus the Alberta Opportunity Company and also lending. We did bring in some legislation, and I believe that it was after this 1998 situation that the hon. member mentioned. Freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation may actually preclude us from letting everyone know who's got the loans with different entities. I think that there are a number of farmers and producers who might object to having their finances displayed for all to see. I think that it's important that we keep some confidentiality there so that producers are not concerned about getting a loan from AFSC. In fact, we are considered sometimes to be lenders of last resort. We do have the disaster farm loan program. We are viewed as being agricultural lenders in the community.

We're also viewed as being commercial lenders in rural Alberta and have a very good track record, hon. member, in terms of how well we do in comparison to the other banks. Speaking of the other banks, the hon. member wondered whether we had consulted with chartered banks. In fact, hon. member, AFSC is in many instances the lead bank on a syndication to help develop something in rural Alberta with other chartered banks. The chartered banks and the Farm Credit corporation, which is the federal entity which would be considered similar to our AFSC, in many cases work in conjunction with each other to try to help develop the commercial viability progress or business plan for a particular project. We have, as I said, probably one of the best records in the country in terms of our lending portfolio, and we're very proud of that, actually, because it means that we're developing commercial activity in rural Alberta, and at the same time we're doing it prudently, so taxpayers' dollars are not going to waste.

The hon. member talked about: are we developing things for the young people like developing the organic industry? Mr. Chairman, we do a lot of work through the Ag and Food Council through our business development branch in terms of helping with farmers' markets, in terms of helping with developing the ag tourism portfolio. In fact, the hon. member might be interested to know that that's a \$700 million part of our agricultural economy that I spend a lot of time talking about and encouraging. When you talk about a small farm operation that might be only 80 acres, it might be specializing in exactly one of those areas. My brother-in-law does a lot of organic farming and has made quite a success out of actually turning his entire farm into an organic operation and has grown organic flaxseed as well as other crops that have turned out to be quite profitable for him.

I think I will go now, Mr. Chairman, to one of the favourite topics of this House, and that's the Canadian Wheat Board. The hon. member made the comment about our Choice Matters campaign being a taxpayer-funded campaign to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board, and I really need to correct the hon. member. It may sound good to say that in some of the circles that he travels in. It may make a headline, perhaps, but it's not the truth. The truth is that we don't want to abolish the Wheat Board.

The truth is that what we want to do is create an entity that producers could own that's transparent, that's accountable, that is actually creating some opportunity for our producers in value-added opportunities in this country, that is something that producers can look to and be proud of, and that the majority of Alberta producers might even want to participate in because currently they do not. Our Choice Matters campaign is in our business plan, and it is located in our budget estimates. I don't have the number right in front of me, but we'll get that for the hon. member. I'd also point out that the Canadian Wheat Board spends an awful lot of producer money protecting itself. I'm a little concerned about that. I think producers might want to look at that as well.

8:50

When he talks about democratically elected members, the hon. member should perhaps tell the rest of the story. In order for any change to be made on that board, you'd have to get an 80 per cent vote because there are five appointed members to that board who are not elected by producers. The hon. member was also very correct in suggesting that it's a federal entity, but it's not a national entity. It's not across this country; it is only in four provinces. All I'm asking, hon. member, is to let my people go because we don't want to be there.

I think, Mr. Chair, that there is another type of arrangement that we could make with the Canadian Wheat Board. It's an arrangement that would create the entity that I spoke of before that would be able to take advantage of opportunities coming out of the WTO. It's an entity that might be able to take advantage of new value-added, value chain type of initiatives in the barley sector. It's an entity that might be able to take advantage of new value-added entities in wheat milling in some of the other areas that we've been looking to grow in the value chain for years and years, that have not occurred in this country and should have. I think that what we are offering producers is the choice between staying raw commodity exporters in a commodity global marketplace, where you're doing nothing but chasing the price down, and a choice of having that market at home, where you might be able to generate some additional value out of what you produce and become better marketers in the process.

I think that with that, Mr. Chair, I'll let some other hon. members wax eloquent as well again.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think that we will probably agree to disagree on some very fundamental issues, but that's part of what this Legislature is about.

I want to say to the minister that I have not seen as much pessimism as I have especially in the grains and oil seeds sector. As the minister correctly pointed out, this has been a long-term problem. We went through the livestock industry, and I'll come to that. I was out, just to pass this on to the minister, at a very large funeral in the Andrew area, which was predominantly farmers. Besides wanting to talk about the third way, the other thing that they wanted to talk about was the desperation that they're facing in their livelihood. I'll come to CAIS, and I'm not going to pretend to be able to understand it all other than there's a great deal of dissatisfaction, as the minister is well aware. He's alluded to that. I talked to another big farmer, that the minister is alluding to, and he said that up in Peace River it probably will cost him money to put his crop in this year. It's that difficult. He's fortunate that he can do it this year and hope for a better year next year, but there are a lot of farmers that can't. I know that the minister is aware of this situation, and I know that he cares about it and wants to change that for people.

The minister said correctly that it has to be profitable. Therein lies the dilemma right now in that sector; it generally is not profitable. We can hope and wait. I know that the minister is working hard trying to influence through the federal government what we can do at the World Trade Organization. Well, with all due respect, I think that we've been trying to change them for 20 years. The problem that we face there: I'm not sure it can be changed. Good luck. If we can do it, great, because I agree with him. The subsidies from the United States and Europe are killing not only us here in Canada but, as the minister correctly pointed out, some of the poorer countries around the world.

I would suggest to him that we're naive in the extreme if we think

that the Americans are going to change their policy. The U.S., as the minister is well aware, has a farm bill, and that farm bill is voted on in Washington, not in Geneva. I believe – and the minister can correct me if I'm wrong because he would know this – it's 1 per cent of their national budget. It's about a \$15 billion subsidy. That subsidy is wrong, and we're right to fight it, but the problem is that the politics are in the United States. You're dealing with politics here. We know what it's like with the softwood lumber. We know what it's like when you get into the internal politics of the United States. To think that this is going to change: I sincerely say to the minister that I hope he's correct, that we can make those changes, but deep down . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has the floor. If any of you wish to participate in the debate, please identify yourself, and I will recognize you at that time. Currently the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has the floor.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. I know that the minister was listening, and he's the important one. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The point that I'm making is that this is part of their internal policies, and I don't think this is going to change in the foreseeable future. Along with that, then, the Americans are much more important to what we do, but Europe is not going to change what they're doing either. We know what happens in France and other places if you begin to mess around with certain things that they take for granted. The point I make about this, then, is that we have to look, I believe, internally here in Canada at what we can do to help our farmers. I just don't think the other things are going to happen.

I come, then, to the point where he and I may disagree, and I'm sure we will. It's about the Canadian Wheat Board. For the love of me, I can't see how you can compete. I have a graph here. Correct me if I'm wrong, but we are a trading nation, especially in wheat, and I think 80 per cent of our product goes outside of the country. Yes, we should try to do as the minister alluded to, some value-added, and perhaps there are ways that we can work that through. But because we're a trading nation, when I look at who we're competing with, the Canadian Wheat Board is relatively a very small organization. When you look at Cargill, \$80 billion Canadian in annual revenue; ADM, \$50 billion; Bunge, \$40 billion; Dreyfus, around \$30 billion; AWB, around \$8 billion. The Canadian Wheat Board looks to be about \$2 billion or \$3 billion, somewhere in that range. So, for the love of me, how are we going to have farmers get into that market if we don't have a single selling desk? I don't know. That's the only way. That's why this was formed to begin with.

That's not to say that it's necessarily perfect. The minister and I have talked about this before, that the Wheat Board itself is trying to do some things differently than they've done in the past, and they've been successful – and I'm sure that the minister is aware; I think it was just last week – working with softwood lumber. How big a victory it is over the long run – we've had these before. They formed together against the North Dakota Wheat Commission because that was harassment. The Wheat Board was involved in that, so it played, I think, a positive role there.

And as a person says, maybe we have certain people that we talk to more than others. NFU President Stewart Wells said at a rally in Toronto of 10,000 farmers from across the country – and this is the point I was making – that there is nothing in the WTO for the farmers of Canada. He said that we've been hearing WTO promises for 20 years, and in those two decades an entire generation of

farmers was born and grew up and has left the farm. And I think that's true.

I'll come to CAIS, if I may, in the remaining time.

It's my understanding that this internal fighting between ourselves all the time, you know, with the Wheat Board – those are for it, and those are not; we want dual boards, this, that, and everything – is a waste. The Wheat Board has served us very well over the period of time. Let's see if we can make some changes. The information that I'm getting says, I believe, that the Wheat Board is offering more market choices for farmers. It's offering farmers the choice of selling the crops based on future prices less a discount. There are options that allow farmers to lock in their crop prices, and there are options that allow a farmer to remain in the pool and still get payment up front.

9:00

So I believe that they are trying to change too. Perhaps there is some way we can work this out because I honestly say to you that if there's not some sort of single-desk selling, all those people who think that they can compete against Cargill out in open market are dreaming in technicolour. Let me tell you, that's the case. That's why we formed the Wheat Board in the past. The odd one, but how many farmers are going to be able to do that? I just don't believe that it's possible. That's why we need a single desk, and I think that that's something we can do in this country.

I'll move from there about the Wheat Board. I know that we'll probably agree to disagree about that, but I think it's important. Frankly, it's not your people, like the minister said. I think that was a bad choice of words: let my people go. I'm sure he didn't mean that, and I'll take that at its best. Remember that it's up to the farmers really. With the Wheat Board, the elections, the rest of it, it's going to be up to the farmers. There are less and less of them – I think 3 per cent of the population – but they're the ones that are going to make those choices. It won't be us. It won't be politicians in Ottawa or somewhere else. It's going to have to be the farmers.

Then I'll move to the second thing that perhaps he and I can agree somewhat on. I mean, I've looked at the CAIS, and I understand the frustration of farmers. I honestly haven't found anybody yet that says, "Yeah, it's working well." And, of course, I don't think the minister said that. But, again, that was some of the frustration that I was getting out at Andrew. People say: "It's too complicated. You need accountants to do it." I know there was an announcement, a press release – what? – two or three weeks ago, about some changes that were made. This thing has to work. I don't know if it's CAIS. The federal minister said they may have to start over again. I think that this minister disagrees with that. But we're really going to have to make the thing work, or we're going to lose a pile of farmers in a very short period of time. I'm not smart enough to know all the answers there, but I'm smart enough to know that nobody thinks it's working now. I think time is somewhat of the essence if we're going to keep some farmers in the business.

If we don't do some things internally – I mean, maybe we'll get a miracle at the WTO. I think it's in April or something, isn't it? April, May somewhere? Maybe we'll get a miracle there, and all these subsidies will dissipate, but I don't think that that's the case. I foresee that in the rural Alberta that I grew up in, if we don't begin to do some things here internally and work together, probably the only ones left will be bigger farms, whether they're family or not. The traditional family farm that we know will not be there. Many of them have disappeared now. I suppose collective farms, you know, will still operate, and big farms will be all that's left.

I say to the city people that if that happens, that's not going to be good for you because we've had a relatively cheap food policy in

this country. You can bet that if that happens, the price of food is certainly going to go up. So I would just say to the minister – he knows much more about CAIS than I do. He’s had to. I wouldn’t even take the test. I do stress that I hope that we can solve that and do it quickly. I think time is of the essence.

I just want to move to the rural development fund a bit. The minister got a letter, I believe – all MLAs got a copy of it – from Alan Hyland, from the Palliser Economic Partnership. Of course, we all know that Alan, or at least some of us do, used to be a Conservative member here in the Legislature. He had a point. The drift of it is that he was talking about the rural development strategy. The letter is to request that the rural development strategy be amended to include specific reference to the current crisis in the grains and oilseeds industry. He goes on to say – and I think it’s an important point – that “economic development theory tells us that before we can attract new and diverse industries, we must look after the businesses we currently have and that those need to be healthy in order to provide the base upon which to build new industries.” He goes on to repeat the obvious thing that we’ve just been discussing, that primary grain and oilseeds “is a homegrown business that is not healthy at this time.”

His point, I think, is a valid one. We can talk all we want about economic diversification in rural Alberta, but the bulk of it is going to be centred around the value-added that the minister talked about, the grains and oilseeds. So that was his question to the minister. Maybe the minister hasn’t had time to talk about it, but if he gets a moment, I wonder if he could tell us in the Legislature how he feels about that.

You know, there’s a new message box coming from the government. We checked through, and eight or nine times we’ve heard “stay tuned.” The hon. Finance minister told us to stay tuned about the rural development fund in her Budget Address, and I’ve heard it a number of times from hon. members. I would just like to find out a little bit more about the rural development fund and where we’re going with it. The minister has mentioned that we’ve set aside \$100 million, and we’re asked to stay tuned. I’d like to know when we’re going to begin to look at some of the details, and maybe that would answer the question that Mr. Hyland sent from Palliser. So I’m looking for that.

When can rural communities expect to see the plans for disbursement of monies? The minister explained that it’s at arm’s length from government, and that’s probably good, although I’m not sure exactly what that means. Might the minister, if he has some time, give us some update on possible projects that the fund might be applied to besides those listed in the news release of March 29? For example, will any funds be made available for private citizens rather than municipalities or services, what guidelines, that sort of thing? Will the fund’s administrators work with other ministries to push a rural agenda? Will Infrastructure, for example, partner with the fund to establish and support emergency services even if it’s just outfitting – and we had this discussion in the Legislature – volunteer fire services? Will the minister work to have other ministries match grants with the fund on projects that apply; for example, infrastructures, emergency services, environments, water programs, et cetera?

The minister did, I think, explain why his budget has gone down from the previous year. There’s a \$205 million drop, I believe, in this year’s budget. We have the rural development fund, and I hope it’s not the case that we’re taking money away from the department.

The other few questions as I come near to the end. In view of the minister’s discussion about profitability and planning and competitiveness, its budget dropped there by a third, and I wonder why that would be the case, in view of the things the minister was talking about. Within that department the farm water program has had its

budget slashed in half, from \$4.5 million to \$2 million, and especially with the discussion that we’ve had about water in this Legislature this session, I wonder why that’s the case. Again, with the planning and competitiveness department, the farm income support program has vanished. I don’t think it’s vanished, but we’re trying to figure out where it is now, which department that’s in.

I don’t have time to go through this. I just want to throw out some issues that have come forward to us. I don’t have time to go through it in great detail, but what’s happening with mobile butchers? I believe there are 111. I know that they’re not supposed to be resold off-farm and certainly not for commercial resale, but we’re told that, apparently, this is happening on a fairly regular basis. Of course, there’s a danger there if that is happening, because they don’t have the same standards as meat packing plants and abattoirs.

9:10

We’re told that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is starting to take some action, and I wonder if his department is aware of this and what they’re doing about it. He may not know right here, but perhaps he could get back to me on this because we wouldn’t want an accident to happen inadvertently, you know, with the BSE with the different standards. I’m not suggesting that this is going to happen, but I think it’s an important issue. It’s been brought to our attention, at least, and we’ve been told it’s been brought to the minister’s department’s attention and that they have not been very forthcoming about it. So I’m raising it here so that we can get that information back.

I’m coming to the end, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the minister’s attention. If he can’t answer all the questions here, he can perhaps get back to us at another time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to the hon. member for some very good questions. First of all, the hon. member is very correct in talking about some of the pessimism that is out in the industry and in the sectors today. I think that any time you go through a year like we went through last year or, in fact, the last three to five years, there is going to be a certain amount of pessimism in an industry.

I think that what we’re trying to do is to create the atmosphere where we can pull ourselves out of what really is a crisis in agriculture today. That is around the global marketing that we do, around trying to make new markets for what are traditional markets because if we keep doing the same things that we’ve done, we’re going to continue to get the same results we got. We have to move forward from that, which is why, hon. member, very recently we have been doing some consultations with grains and oilseed producers in Alberta.

We recently, about a week ago, were in Airdrie with a group of about 20 to 25 grains and oilseed producers from various areas around southern Alberta. What we were talking about was not the crisis that we face, not the immediate, what do we have to do to save ourselves, but: how do we make this industry long-term sustainable? Where are the opportunities? Where is the optimism in this industry? How can we achieve what everybody believes is out there?”

I can tell the hon. member that while there is certainly some concern, and we would be naive to think that there is not concern out there in terms of where the grains and oilseed sector is going, there is also some optimism when one looks at what we’re trying to accomplish in the biofuels industry, when one looks at what we’re

trying to accomplish at WTO – and I want to get to WTO in a minute – when one looks at what we’re trying to accomplish in the value chain and new generation co-ops.

Here’s an area, hon. member, where we’re probably going to agree, and you’re going to be surprised about it. I think a new gen co-op where producers own it is a good idea, and I think the marketing management is a good idea. I think that there are opportunities for our producers to diversify their income by having ownership down that value chain. That’s something that we’re going to push. That’s something that we’re going to work through our programming. By that, I mean that the producer might own a piece of that biodiesel production facility. The producer might own a piece of that slaughter facility, which is what’s going on today. The producer might even own a piece of that pasta manufacturing plant some day if we could ever attract somebody to invest in one, so that you didn’t have a single-source supplier, which is currently the problem. The producer might even be in ownership in a malt plant here in this province, a brand new malt plant, if we could ever attract someone to invest in our area when we can get rid of the fact that he would have to have a single source of supply. That’s an important factor, hon. member.

So these consultations – we did one in Airdrie, we did one just last night in Westlock, and I attended both of those. Unfortunately, I won’t be able to attend the one that’s coming up in Red Deer very shortly. What we’re doing is not turning these into big political things. You didn’t hear about me going out and meeting with a bunch of farmers. That’s not the intent here. The intent here is to come out with some ideas and some solutions and some road maps as to how we can help our industry move forward. When we get those three done, we’re going to bring those industry groups back together again at Government House.

The hon. member would know that I had about four consultations at Government House last year on various issues. Food safety was the first one. The next one was on the BSE issue. The next one was on the CAIS program, and it was the producers in that meeting, all 48 producer groups, that decided on the Alberta position for the CAIS program – and that was last May, June – because I wanted to know from our producer groups what they wanted me to take to my first fed/provincial/territorial meeting on CAIS.

The basis of where we’re going on CAIS today came from those producers that met with me at Government House and came out of there with a consensus on almost everything except inventory evaluations, which we couldn’t even get the accountants to agree on, which we’re still working on. But that’s the basis of where we’re going with our CAIS program. I’ll talk a little bit more about the CAIS program later, but the message I wanted to get back to the member is that the consultations are what’s driving our policy as to how we’re going to come out of this crisis.

The WTO. For 20 years the Doha round, all of these things we’ve been talking about – well, if the Americans don’t move, the Europeans won’t move, and if the Europeans won’t move, we don’t have a deal. We talk about in the past that Brazil, India, and some of these countries did not have the power they have today in agriculture, hon. member. The largest producer of beef products today is Brazil. The largest soybean grower today is Brazil. The largest markets around the world are no longer the United States and Europe. They’re in those other countries. So there is a substantial amount of influence being pressed into service, if you will, and remember that the WTO is not just agriculture. WTO is a whole raft of other things that have become in some country’s minds even more important than agriculture. The services sector in India, as an example, has become a huge business for India. There is a huge amount of contracting out under the technology industries that we

have today that is going straight to India and coming back the next day. These types of service deliveries are becoming an important part of the WTO negotiation, and they are pressing all of these countries to sit down and make a deal.

I find it very, very interesting, hon. member, when you talk about the farm bill in the United States. I find it extremely interesting that there’s not a lot of talk of the replacement of the farm bill. There’s a lot of talk about a fuel bill, about how the United States’ ethanol production is going to double between now and 2012. Well, what makes ethanol? Corn. About how the development of the biofuels and biodiesel industry in the United States is growing at a tremendous rate – what makes biodiesel in the United States is soybeans. In Brazil they do not import a lot of oil. They are 85 per cent blend on ethanol. They create their ethanol out of sugar cane. Do you know what happened to the price of sugar cane? It went up.

The subsidy to farming is going to be in the draw off of the product taking it out of the supply, which will increase the price. They finally figured out that by ad hoc programs or per-acre programs all they did was capitalize it into the land base. We don’t want to go there. The rest of the world is going away from there. It’s the last thing that we want to do, but it’s a heck of an opportunity for us.

Mr. Chairman, to the hon. member, I think that if there has ever been a better opportunity to try to get a deal out of the WTO, it is now, and it is to help convince these countries that an aggressive WTO deal is of benefit to all of our global trading partners.

It’s interesting, too, that the hon. member stated that we are the third largest exporter. We are an exporting nation. There’s no doubt about it. Eighty per cent of our product, he mentioned, goes outside the country. The Canadian Wheat Board as an organization is a relatively small organization competing with some very large corporations. I’m sure the hon. member is aware that most of the marketing that is done for the Canadian Wheat Board is done by those corporations which he mentioned. It’s not done by the Canadian Wheat Board. There are 26 agents of the Canadian Wheat Board. Well, there used to be 26. It may have been constricted. Right now I have no idea what the actual number is today because we’ve had a few go out of being agents. The simple fact is that many of those companies are the ones that are doing the marketing of those products.

9:20

The other thing that I would throw out to the hon. member is that the Canadian Wheat Board handles wheat, and it handles barley. It doesn’t handle canola. We have some guests in the gallery from the canola industry. I’m sure that if you asked them, they would not want to have a single desk. I’m sure that you’d also find out if you were out in the country – and probably at Andrew you heard this too: canola was my Cinderella crop; canola was the thing that kept me in business.

Canola, hon. member, is not a Canadian Wheat Board single-desk sold item. It is a free market, and producers are very good at marketing that product. They’re very good at marketing fava beans. They’re very good at marketing oats, which, by the way, used to be under the Canadian Wheat Board. Up until the late ’80s, when it was removed from the Canadian Wheat Board, we did not have one human consumption oat-processing plant in this province, yet we grew most of the oats in Canada. Today we have two at least, and we have a thriving pony oat industry.

The organic growers, for the most part, will tell you that they resent the fact that they have to sell their product to the Canadian Wheat Board and then turn around and buy it back before they can actually send it somewhere else. Ridiculous. It is a throttle on

value-added because the Canadian Wheat Board's sole purpose, hon. member, was set up in the late '30s to export into this global market, which you spoke of, a raw commodity. It was never intended to derive value-added industries in western Canada.

The Ontario farmers in the demonstration, which you mentioned, I would suggest to you are rather lucky because they don't have a Canadian Wheat Board. They do have an Ontario wheat board, but they can opt out of that.

Mr. Martin: They weren't very happy. That's why.

Mr. Horner: I understand what you're saying. Don't misinterpret what I'm saying. If the Canadian Wheat Board were to change itself in the way that the Alberta government is now contemplating that we change it, we would in fact be quite supportive of it. In fact, we'd help structure that so that the farmers have a good competitively owned operation.

The Canadian Wheat Board over the last few years, I will grant, has been offering more choice in some of their product categories, but I will also tell you that I had the chief executive officer of a major world-wide malt company tell me flat out that the reason they are now in a northern United States state is because they did not want to be caught with a single source of supply in the Canadian Wheat Board. By locating just outside of our boundary, they can buy from the board whenever they want. In fact, the board courts them to buy from them, but they don't have to. We lose the jobs, we lose the value added, we lose the opportunity, hon. member, and that is shameful.

An Hon. Member: How do you really feel?

Mr. Horner: Yeah. How do I really feel?

You mentioned that it's up to the farmers to vote, and I would suggest to the hon. member that we've had some very interesting recommendations on how that vote should take place. Certainly, we've had some consultations where a recommendation went forward that the vote should be weighted based on the amount of product perhaps that that producer is shipping to the Canadian Wheat Board. If he has got a bigger stake or risk, perhaps his vote should be weighted heavier. I'm sure the hon. member would agree that that may be a valid situation. It would be interesting to see how that vote would turn out.

I would also suggest to the hon. member that in Alberta – and I was talking about Alberta producers, and these are the producers I was talking about when I made the comment “let my people go,” and I apologize, probably a little bit of overexuberance on my part. In 2003 we did a survey of Alberta producers, and 6 in 10 in that survey would want choice for wheat. Seven in 10 would want choice in barley. I think that's a fairly significant factor, and we should be listening to that.

The hon. member also mentioned CAIS, and we'll talk a little bit more about CAIS. He also mentioned that the federal minister and I may be on a little bit of a different platform. I would suggest to you that after a little bit of confusion about wording, I think we're a lot closer than I thought. I answered the question in the House not too long ago by saying that I think we're a lot closer on where we're going.

Well, what Alberta wants, going back to our meetings at Government House last year, is a business risk management program that is relevant to my operation. If I'm a producer in the province of Alberta, I want a business risk management program that is relevant to my operation, perhaps even allowing me to have an individualized crop insurance program, perhaps even allowing me to have individu-

alized savings programs that are tailored to an investment in agricultural initiatives, perhaps even having the ability to be bankable. Wouldn't that be fun? That's where we need to get it to. We need to have a program, as CAIS was originally designed to be, that's bankable.

I can tell the hon. member that I met with the Canadian Bankers' Association last week, and I put it to them that I was very disappointed that what I hear in the country is that the chartered banks are walking away from agriculture. They assured me that that's not the case, but they also assured me that they are sitting back and waiting before they can use our income stabilization programs as bankable until we're done fiddling with them. The last thing that we need to do is create more instability in our banking community as it relates to our agricultural community. When I told them the changes that we want to make and where we want to go with the CAIS program, they were very pleased with that. They could see where this would help them make better decisions for their producers and the producers to make better business decisions for their operations.

So we want it to be relevant. We want it to be bankable. We want it to be simpler to understand, not necessarily simpler but certainly simpler to understand because it also has to be targeted. It needs to be targeted to those individual operations where the hurt is most felt because if it's not targeted, then, hon. member, we're not being very prudent with Alberta taxpayers' dollars and we're not being very prudent with the industry as a whole.

In order for it to be targeted, it has to have a level of complexity. Therefore, it can be simple, but it still has to be targeted and has to be complex. It also has to be timely. It has to have a component in it that can be triggered quickly, like an advance component, so that I as a producer knowing what my entitlement is for the last year can go to the CAIS office and say: “Boy, I'm in trouble this spring. I need to get an advance on what my CAIS entitlement is going to be. I need it quick and I need it now.” Hon. member, we're there. We have the advance mechanism. There is a half billion dollars available to producers in the programs that we're offering today. We need the producers to take the steps to help us in a very difficult situation. I agree with CAIS, but it's there.

The other thing it needs to be is a tool. We lead the nation, I believe, in the software development of the CAIS program. I applaud the Ag Financial Services group and the president and the entire staff of my rural development and financial groups in the department because under very trying circumstances, as you may imagine – and as an MLA I know that you get these calls as well. Think of the calls that AFSC is getting. At the same time that they are trying to essentially create a program out of scratch, create software out of scratch, take old program information from FIDP and NISA and all these other things and try to make that the history for every producer in this province on 35,000 or 30,000 applications – and we've asked them to make all these other changes along the way – they have done yeoman's work to get us to where we are. When we make a presentation on where we're going, they have the credibility that we're going to get there, and I think they will. In fact, I'm banking on it, as many of us are.

So it needs to be a tool where the producer can go online. I don't know if the hon. member is familiar with a program called QuickTax from Intuit Canada. It's a very simple program. Plug it in. A nice little voice comes on and says: well, we're going to do your taxes today; you need these forms. Hon. member, I want to get to that point where the producer can use it, play with it, use it as a planning tool, and then print it off and take it to his bank. We'll be there I hope by the end of this year if not sooner.

9:30

I think I've talked enough about CAIS. I think I've given you an idea where we're – oh, the difference between us and the federal

government. Alberta has advocated for some time – and this also comes out of our round-table discussion at Government House – that the disaster component should be separated from the income stabilization component. On that I could make this statement. I agree that the disaster component of CAIS needs to be replaced. The income stabilization component of CAIS needs to be transformed. There you have some semantics, but between ourselves and the federal minister we're basically on the same page.

As it relates to the grains and oilseeds industry, rural development is not just agriculture. Rural development is the rural way of life.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased today to rise to speak to the estimates on the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Some of the things that I've just heard echo why many farmers that I've talked to in Alberta are afraid of what's happening with this government and afraid of the upcoming WTO talks. The cheap food policy, as mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, can be reflected in the pricing of commodity goods and the pricing of commodities that we've seen for our foodstuffs and our farm production for many years.

The nature of farm income is such that right now if we didn't have an energy boom, if we didn't have \$60 to \$70 a barrel oil price, many, many, many farms would go under. I think the figure is something like three-quarters of farm family income right now is off-farm family income, and that is indicative of what has happened to agriculture in Alberta.

My family used to farm. Did pretty good actually. Got a good offer on the old homestead. I still kind of miss it in a way.

An Hon. Member: It was more than a dollar, was it?

Mr. Backs: It was more than a dollar.

I still kind of miss it, actually miss it quite a bit, especially in the spring.

Mr. Rogers: The smell of the manure?

Mr. Backs: The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon asked me: the smell of the manure? Certainly.

We would bring all the school kids out some years and herd cattle, get a few of the neighbours on horseback and bring them four or five miles, and it was a big show. But that's not there anymore, and that's not there for a lot of families. In fact, I think that on our old road probably three-quarters of the families have moved, and those farmsteads are no longer there. That's what's happened to Alberta agriculture. It's not there anymore.

We seem to see a move more and more and more to give up to the big foreign owners, the big foreign producers, the big guys that were there in the early days of agriculture in Alberta, the days when the co-ops were formed, when the Wheat Board was formed a little later. The reason why people wanted to have a single source of supply was so that they could control the price to some degree against people who were controlling the price against them, who were keeping the prices down as they're being kept down today.

The source of the lack of farm income right now is the fact that people cannot produce their commodities because they're not getting a decent price. If anybody's read the *Western Producer*, if anybody's read *The Economist*, if anybody's followed Doha, if anybody's followed any of the rounds of the World Trade Organization or any world trade talks that have anything to do with agriculture over the last generation, they would know that the farm bill never

really changes in the U.S. They would find that the Europeans never really change in their price supports for farm goods, and there are some good reasons for that. Many people in Europe in the Second World War starved.

Food price policy is defence policy, and it's considered very differently from what we consider it here today. It seems that it's considered very differently, I guess, by our governments across Canada and in Alberta. I find that odd in terms of how we're going to deal with price supports. Many farmers are afraid of what's going to happen at the WTO if their livelihoods are dealt away even more than they've been dealt away in the past.

It's not only a cheap food policy; it's a high input policy. I mean, the problems – especially if you look at the harvest last fall, which coincided with a very high energy price. A high energy price affects many inputs, everything from fertilizing to grain drying, you know, the gas for grain dryers. People are just getting away from that because it doesn't work anymore. It's not cost-effective in many areas. Many of these things are very problematic, and the inputs are almost not worth it. I mean, to put anhydrous or something like that through, the cost of doing that is prohibitive for many producers now, yet those are the types of inputs that increase production and make an operation efficient.

I have a number of questions regarding page 90, the ministry statement of operations. Just looking at some of the aspects, I can see that there's \$100 million increase between the 2005-06 forecast and the 2006-07 estimates. I think that many people look forward to seeing what that proves to be. But – and there are some big buts – we look that over time the '04-05 industry development of \$132 million is down to \$44 million. That's almost \$90 million. I read \$88 million or \$90 million decrease from that time, just a couple years ago. I wonder about that \$100 million. I mean, it doesn't look so good anymore.

I look at the farm income supports and how they drop from the 2004-05 actual to almost half in '08-09. I look at the program expenses dropping from \$1.287 billion to \$969 million. That's a fairly substantial drop over time, and it seems to be dropping almost every year in the forecast of program expense accounts. I would hope that some of the supports would go down as agriculture prospers and increases, but I see no real reason to expect that. I just see that as cuts, and I would ask the minister to explain those.

Some items seem hard to find in these figures. I just wonder: in terms of some of the alternative cropping, I can't exactly see from these where we're seeing the development of some of the specialty crops like borage and rhubarb and, you know, developing more market and cropping for seed potatoes. I think there are some other areas of Alberta that could do quite well with that. And fibre crops: you know, I was pleased to see the minister speak of some development in organic flaxseed.

9:40

I think fish farming is something that we really have not seen develop an awful lot. There is some for stocking of government fisheries and dugouts and such. But, for example, where is our market development for plate trout, for restaurant trout and things like this, which there is obviously a market for? There are many restaurants which put that forward as an Alberta delicacy.

Mr. Rogers: Rhubarb?

Mr. Backs: Actually, rhubarb is. You know, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon is speaking up an awful lot. Rhubarb is actually very, very well established, and if I remember correctly, I think that this is one of the best areas in the world to produce

rhubarb if anybody is looking for different crops. It's a good area for things like borage. Some members probably don't even know what that is. There are many things like this that can diversify agriculture and can actually improve it. I would hope that the members on the government side would support the development of alternative crops. Actually, rhubarb, for example, is very traditional to the western Canadian diet, so to speak. I could take a little diet.

Back to the WTO, there's no doubt that subsidies are counterproductive on a national and international scale, but I don't think that we can honestly expect the American farm bill to be repealed next month or two months from now. I do not expect, with all the far more larger demonstrations that we see in France and other countries – Germany, Britain even – when any of those supports are decreased just a little bit, that we are going to see those go away.

Certainly, you know, we have some things in common in some ways with countries like Argentina and Australia, Brazil perhaps, in terms of beef production. I even worked for a while on a ranch in Argentina, come to think of it. You know, just remembering some of these things.

Mr. MacDonald: A gaucho, or what do you call that?

Mr. Backs: I wasn't really a gaucho. I mean, I rode a horse and did some things, herded some cattle around.

I would urge the minister to deal with caution when he goes to the WTO because many, many Alberta farmers are fearful of what might become of that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to get to the hon. member's comments, but I'm going to maybe finish off a little bit on the questions from the previous hon. member. He mentioned the budget drop. He thought that it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$200 million. I just want to perhaps go back over that fact. This somewhat answers some of the other hon. member's questions with regard to why the fluctuation in our support program payments and our estimate versus what our actual is.

One has to remember that a large, large portion of our budget is based on our estimate of what the support payments might be through crop insurance, through CAIS, and through some of the other programs that we run: revenue insurance coverage, those sorts of things. We try to estimate based on the best information we can. I mentioned the 20-year historical. We try to estimate where those numbers might land. It's a very difficult thing to do because we don't know and we don't have a great crystal ball as to where those crops and how those things are going to all pan out.

To be more specific, the actual ministry spending decrease from the '05-06 budget is approximately \$53 million. That's a result of a combination of things, one being that the Canada/Alberta fed cattle set-aside program of \$133 million, which was in previously, is gone because, thank God, our borders are open on under-30 month animals, as well as \$43.7 million for production insurance expenses, which also were reduced and therefore reduced our budget. Then we add back in the hundred million for the RDI, for the rural development initiative, and we add back in \$20 million for specified risk material disposal research, and we also add in \$2 million additional money for the irrigation infrastructure rehabilitation. So that kind of balances us out to, net, roughly a \$53 million drop. It's based on the assumptions that we have.

The planning and competitiveness. Both hon. members suggested that, well, gee, we must have cuts in those areas, and nothing's

further from the truth. What we are doing, though, is that we have programs which are no longer available to us, either the fed cattle set-aside program or some of the other programs that were part of the APF. We're working to have what, I guess, would be called APF 2 come forward.

To give an example, the hon. member had asked about the farm water program. The farm water program is an important program, and we do value it. The farm water program budget actually has decreased from \$7 million in '05-06 to \$2 million in '06-07 due to a lack of continued funding from the federal government as per the APF agreement. We are currently working on our agreements with the federal government to restore some of that, and hopefully, hon. members, we'll be able to bring that forward in due course and in due time.

The other thing that the hon. member brought up were the mobile butchers. For many years in Alberta we've had what we call on-farm slaughter for personal use or family use, family being a broadly defined type of a situation. Mobile butchers are operating in the province, and they are for on-farm slaughter. We've had a lot of, you know, somewhat eloquent discussion of what farming was in the past. In many cases I'm glad that farming isn't the way it was in 1930, or we would have a problem. We'd have serious problems all the way through our industry. We want to ensure that mobile butchers are of quality because in large part farmers aren't doing the butchering themselves. They're getting somebody in, or they're taking the quarters to a facility. These mobile butchers have decided to utilize their equipment and their expertise to do on-farm slaughter. They can do that, and it is something that producers and families need to be aware of, that that meat is for their own consumption; it is not for resale. We do have people that are watching that very closely right now, hon. member.

I'm going to move on to, well, the rural development fund. How are we going to do this? I mentioned before that we wanted it to be at an arm's length because the rural development initiative is not based on supports to agriculture and farming. For the farm years of '03, '04, '05 our business risk management programs, our support programs have already put over a billion dollars into the farming community. As I mentioned earlier, there's a half a billion dollars that's still on the table.

The federal government is discussing. I understand that they are going to have some dollars in their budget when it comes forward. When their budget comes forward, we may, hon. member, have to make some decisions about whether or not we are going to participate in whatever they might do, whether or not it's something that we've already done. We might have to do something more. My colleagues are prepared for that discussion, and as and when it happens, we're going to move forward. That's for the short term, and that's to answer the questions as they related to the letter that the hon. member mentioned about the farm community being able to survive so that there is a rural development to have.

9:50

As I said before, rural development is not just agriculture; it is the rural community. It's the vibrancy of rural Alberta. It's the economic development of rural Alberta that isn't just the agriculture sector. It may indirectly be the value chain of agriculture, and I hope it is because that's really where it should be. It should be the expansion of our livestock sector. It should be the expansion of our value-added components that might even be indeed owned by a new generation co-op that's producer owned, or it may even be a partnership with one of those large companies which some members across the way seem to have a fear of. Well, in actual fact, for most production of agriculture a lot of those big companies are our

customers, and we should be acknowledging that we do have those customers.

I'm going to switch now to the other hon. member. I'm not exactly sure or understand which big foreign owners have been buying up small farms in Alberta because I don't know of any, and perhaps the hon. member misspoke. We don't have a large preponderance of corporate farms in Alberta. Well over 90 per cent of the farms in Alberta are family owned, whether that's in a corporate sense, as I mentioned earlier, or whether they're owned as a partnership or whether they're owned in a co-operative venture. You know, we have a large contingent of the Hutterite Brethren in our province that owns a number of operations. I would hope that the hon. member is not referring to those in a negative way. It would be understandable if he misunderstood that, but I hope that's not where he was headed.

He mentioned, too, that he was concerned or fearful about what was going to happen at the WTO. I am hopeful that he also understands that 90 per cent of Canada's agriculture is trade dependent in one way, shape, or another. The WTO is the single biggest thing that is hampering those industries from growing and actually getting the value out of the product that he mentioned that they're not getting. On the one hand, you can't be saying: I don't want that to happen. I'm hoping that he's not suggesting that we would come in with a farm bill type of situation in Alberta. Certainly not only Alberta; not the rest of Canada. As I said before, what happens in those areas – and you did mention that the subsidy levels in both areas have not really changed all that much – is that it does distort those commodities that those subsidies are on, and it distorts the prices. That's why countries that don't get into subsidy game are very much adamant about getting an aggressive outcome in the WTO.

You mentioned Argentina, Brazil. All of these countries do not want to get into capitalizing the land values with subsidy. That's what's happened in Europe and the United States. I happened to have the blessing of being able to live in the United States for about three years and work for one of these large companies which I'm sure the hon. member would feel that he would have something to fear from and had a good deal of time to talk to producers in that area because it was an agricultural venture. I would suggest to you that agriculture and the farmers in the United States feel that their livelihood is just as endangered and that they don't get the return that they should get for the commodities that they produce even though they have this big farm bill. It's because those subsidies have been capitalized in their land values, and the only way they'll get them out is if they sell the land. As we generationalize our farming operations and you have per-acre subsidies that continue to be put into the value of the land when it's sold, you have to continue to raise that per-acre in order to have any additional benefit to it.

The other problem with the farm bill is that it's targeted at a commodity. It's not targeted at an operation; it's targeted at a commodity. I understand that the hon. member had some experience in some international trade and perhaps even some of those ventures where he would understand that a subsidy targeted at a commodity distorts the market for that commodity. That is what we're dealing with. That is where a substantial amount of our problems are being derived from. Subsidy distorts the commodity, distorts the market.

That's what we like about CAIS, by the way. That's why CAIS is considered green under the WTO. It's not targeted at a commodity; it's targeted at the operation. If that operation is in need from whatever disaster may have befallen it, then it should respond. As we've said a number of times in this House and a number of times in the public, it's not responding properly right now. We need to get it there, and we need to make it happen.

When we talk about the competitiveness issues or the drop in support payments, again, I'll go back to the fact that our support level is based on the risk management programs that we have. If there is a higher need, those numbers will go up. If there is a lower need at the end of the year – we see here in our estimates now that we had a reduction of \$43 million on the crop insurance side because we did not pay out that much. We believe that we're going to have some fairly substantial payouts this year, and we understand that and we're prepared for that. But we have to make those estimates in our budgets, and we have to make the estimates on the best available information that we can find based on crop conditions, drought, you know, whether or not we're going to have a large production year, whether we're going to have producers taking up the crop insurance programs that we have out there.

At the beginning of this year and prior to this budget coming in, we did put \$30 million, hon. member, into research and development. The majority of that, \$18 million, went into crop development in the Alberta Crop Development Industry Fund, ACIDF. I probably got the acronym wrong, but pretty close. What that is intended to do is exactly what the hon. member is talking about doing. It's to help the cereals industry develop new products, new ways of working with the cereals that they have or the crops that they have.

We also are working in partnership with the applied research groups around the province. We made a commitment to a group called ARECA, which is really the umbrella of those applied research groups. We have a capital request out there for equipment. The applied research groups around the province are looking to replace what is some very specialized equipment, and I'm very glad that prior to coming into the House and out of last year's dollars we were able to provide over a million and a half dollars to that group for capital funds to be distributed amongst applied research groups across the province. I'm even more pleased with the fact that we were able to give that very large boost to the research and development that we need to do to move our industry to the next step, to move our industry and the value chains that we were talking about, to move our industry along the lines of where it needs to go.

Market development for lake trout. There may be a market for lake trout, hon. member. I really don't know. We do have a business development group that would be more than happy to look at that and perhaps even help you build the business plan around it because that's what we do. We help entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector every day. We look at their business plans, look at the research that's out there on various other ventures and feasibility studies, look at the library of other feasibility studies that might be done, and in fact in some cases help fund those feasibility studies on various new product developments. The member would also be interested to know that the Leduc food laboratory that we have is considered world class in helping entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector develop new products that they can take to market. In fact, we'll even help research the marketplace to find out whether or not there may be a market that they can use this new product in.

We also have a level-three laboratory that is going to be up and running very, very soon to help us with our food security systems to prove to the world that we have the safest food, bar none, of any country in the world. We're able to use that in our investments as a marketing tool. We've done, I think, a yeoman's job in terms of trying to help our beef industry open new markets around the world. At the same time that we've been doing that, we've been talking about other products that we might be able to deliver into those marketplaces.

Last year I was privileged to sign an agreement with the state of Heilongjiang in China, where they are going to mirror our food development laboratory. While it sounds like a little bit of a, you

has been a great deal of attention, to say the least, to the AISH legislation in this province lately. The attention not only centres around the lawsuit from December of 2005, when the government of Alberta settled a class-action lawsuit allocating a hundred million dollars for the victims of decades of illegal debt collection procedures. The government was accused of arbitrarily interpreting its own policies and legislation in order to recover overpayments as far back as possible.

This is one example of this government's attitude in the past toward AISH clients. Certainly, there were comments made by the Premier, and I'm sure that a lot of hon. members of this Assembly on the government side have regrets in regard to those comments. There have been other cases where people have asked repeatedly for an increase in the AISH benefits. I was pleased to see a modest increase in AISH benefits, changes that were made in the last budget.

Specifically with this bill, Mr. Chairman, I think that it's time that we have a look at improving it. The bill, as I understand it, will replace the existing AISH Act and consolidate AISH-related legislation under the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. It is expected that changes in the act will increase flexibility in reporting income and result in fewer incidences of overpayments and underpayments. This act, as I understand it, will also allow for health benefits to be provided to disabled individuals who do not meet the income eligibility requirements but face financial hardships because of their high health costs.

10:10

Now, I think that what we need to do so that there is no doubt for citizens or clients of AISH or their families that they will see an increase in their benefits – it shouldn't be at the political whim of the governing party. Other government programs are indexed. Certainly, with the federal government some seniors' programs are indexed so that as the consumer price index, the cost of living, rises, there is at least a modest increase in their benefits. We as members of this Assembly have a similar program. In fact, it's just this month that I think we received over a 5 per cent increase in our compensation packages. We didn't ask for it, but certainly it was factored into not the cost of living but the productivity of the entire workforce of the province. So if it's good enough for us, it's good enough for other government programs.

I think we should at this time, while we're discussing Bill 21 in committee, consider an amendment. Mr. Chairman, if I could be allowed, please, to have this amendment circulated to all members of the Assembly, and at the direction of the chair I will continue with my remarks.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1. I'll just wait for a minute.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you may proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. For the record I would move that Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, be amended as follows. Section 1 is amended by renumbering clause (a) as clause (a.1) and by adding the following before clause (a.1):

- (a) "Average Weekly Earnings for Alberta" means the average weekly earnings for Alberta as reported by the Statistics Canada survey of employment, payrolls and hours for the immediately preceding year;

Section 3 is amended by adding the following after subsection (4):

- (5) On or before April 1 each year, the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall review the amount of each type of benefit provided pursuant to this section and shall consider annual adjustments to these benefits equivalent to the Average Weekly Earnings for Alberta.

Now, this amendment would take the politics out of any further increases to AISH benefits. I think it's a good idea. It's about time, certainly, when you consider what has happened in the past here with this government and the AISH community. I don't think I need to review that at this time, Mr. Chairman. All hon. members are fully aware that our AISH clients have not been treated with dignity, have not been treated with respect, and it's time that we change that. Everyone has a right to live with dignity and with respect. The payments that have been made in AISH benefits in the past have not allowed a huge number of those clients any extras.

It's been very tough for many of those individuals to get by on the limited monthly income that has been provided. Again, this would certainly be comforting for the AISH clients and their families to know that every year, just like each and every individual hon. member of this Assembly, they may get a 2 or 3 or, who knows, maybe a 5 or 6 per cent increase in their monthly income. We are fortunate, many of us in this province, to be able to participate in the workforce. Many people who get AISH do not, and they have no chance of ever working because of their disability. Now, we need to think about that when we're voting on this amendment.

About 6.4 per cent of Alberta's population between the ages of 16 and 64, or over 200,000 people, have a disability. About 2.4 per cent have a severe disability. That's about 75,000 people, 1 per cent of Alberta's population. Thirty-three thousand people currently receive the AISH benefit, 32 per cent receive AISH because of mental illness, 23 per cent because of developmental disabilities, and 45 per cent because of a physical disability. The caseload has increased from over 16,000 in 1994-95 to 31,000 in 2004-05. In 2005-06 AISH funding was about \$480 million. It is projected that funding will reach \$606 million in the fiscal year 2007-08.

Now, the monthly allowance of \$950 has gone up to \$1,000. Again, for some people that's going to be very, very tight financially at the end of the month at that amount of money. Rents are going up. The cost of living is certainly going up.

I would, in conclusion, ask hon. members of this Assembly to consider this amendment and do the right thing. If it's good enough for us in this Assembly, surely it's good enough for the over 30,000 people who receive an AISH benefit in this province. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Speaking with respect to the increase of AISH payments this current year, I don't know the exact percentage, but the increase is around 5 point some per cent, somewhat equivalent to what, in fact, we saw in the increase in the average weekly earnings.

10:20

However, in doing the AISH review that went around the province and talking to many people and having input from across the province, the recommendation of the AISH review committee was that the amount of the AISH payment be reviewed every couple of years or so. That recommendation allows for the department and the people that can look at this and the people that are receiving AISH to have input into it to help the department determine what the correct value would be. To tie the AISH payment to some number, whatever it may be, this average weekly earnings, would assume that the number is perfect right now. We don't quite know that. We know that a lot of things are changing for AISH recipients, and we have to be sensitive to that. So I believe it's important to keep the flexibility of every couple of years reviewing the amount, making sure that it's the correct amount, and then setting it at that.

So, Mr. Chairman, although I appreciate the intent and the interest with which the member has put this amendment forward, I would have to ask that the members assembled defeat the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that this idea of flexibility that the member is talking about – why wouldn't that work here? That's what the member was saying. We do this with the weekly earnings. We don't go through this process. Why do they need flexibility for that and not flexibility for this? It's a simple, straightforward proposal.

I'm glad that there was some increase. It's up to a thousand dollars, but before we wear ourselves out patting ourselves on the back, when you take that into inflation, the most vulnerable people in this society are not even where they were with inflated dollars back in the early 90s before the cuts. So they're not living in luxury. It seems to me that this is something that we and others have advocated, that we need indexation for these most vulnerable people. The member says: well, the flexibility could be that two years from now they'll review it. Well, they've reviewed AISH a number of times before, and I will commend them for at least getting these increases. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it's around seven years before there was an increase before. As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar correctly points out, if it's good enough for us, it should be good enough for the most vulnerable people. I just don't see the need for the flexibility.

I just remind you that we're up to a thousand dollars as of April 1. Imagine how many people here could live on a thousand dollars. But at least it's a start. It's an increase. It seems to me logical, Mr. Chairman, that we do the right thing and put in the indexation. Almost everybody in Alberta would think that was fair, that people have to live at a certain level. If you're only living at a thousand dollars, I mean, you're not living in the lap of luxury by any stretch of the imagination. At least if it was indexed – and I think this is a good measure that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has brought in – you're not going to fall behind. At least you're going to stay at that thousand dollar level. In another two years from now some of these people's income with inflation would be going down. The cost of living is going up. Why the government refuses to look at indexation for this group of people, frankly, I just don't understand, Mr. Chairman.

This amendment is a good amendment, and I think it gives the government one last opportunity in this session to do the right thing. Treat the most vulnerable in society with the respect that they deserve and bring in indexation. So I certainly say that we should support this amendment, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I very much appreciate the comments of my colleague the hon. Member for Strathcona, and I agree that the amendment should be defeated. I'll add one more reason to his considered reason, and that would be that the average weekly earnings for Alberta simply are that: the average weekly earnings for Alberta. The amendment contemplates that we "shall consider annual adjustments . . . equivalent to the Average Weekly Earnings for Alberta," which would be a considerable boost every year. It's a poorly worded and ill-thought-out amendment, and I would recommend that we defeat it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to this amendment and in favour of this amendment because I think it's clear what this amendment means and says. We're talking about increasing in the same way that MLAs were just increased. I think the increase was 5.23 per cent. It provided some certainty somewhat outside of the political realm, I guess, for MLA increases, and it would be only fair if there was that particular increase together with what AISH recipients get. The Member for Strathcona mentioned, you know, that this is something that has been brought about.

This last increase does not even catch up with the lack of an increase for so many years. I had the opportunity here just recently to give a few movie passes, some of these \$10 movie passes, to some AISH recipients that I know. They're a dear couple and have become friends of mine since I was elected as an MLA, and I've come to understand some of the constraints in their budgeting and how things affect their life. They sometimes have had to trade off just the most minor of things. These movie tickets were kind of instructive because they went to a movie, and they bought popcorn, and they came back – there was a bunch of us sitting around a week or so later – and said that this was the first time that they were able to buy popcorn at a movie. In fact, they hadn't been to one for a long, long time, and it was a luxury for them.

It redefines, I guess, what many of us might think of as luxuries. It tells you how closely budgeted an AISH couple might be and what the constraints on this couple were. They don't have an ability to go out and earn more. They're both medically deemed incapable to work. They cannot work. There needs to be some certainty to AISH recipients that they will at least not have a declining income according to inflation and cost-of-living rises and rent increases. Very few actually do own a home, so they're paying rent increases or tax increases even if the rare one does.

There are many AISH recipients that should, perhaps, be getting WCB, but they're not because they have long-standing, contentious claims. Actually, they're being supported by the taxpayer because WCB is not willing – even with their \$850 million surplus – to begin to deal with so many of these claims.

I would urge the Assembly to vote for this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to add a few comments about this amendment. I believe we as MLAs all received an increase of about 5.7 per cent or something in that neighbourhood. I don't know why we can't make the same offer to people on AISH. Now, people who are struggling on \$1,000 or whatever it is a month are going to feel even a very minor increase in the cost of living. They're going to notice an increase of 25 cents, an increase of 50 cents in some sort of product, in some sort of service whereas we in this Assembly would not even notice it. I don't know why we can't give these people the same consideration that we've given ourselves.

Now, to review it every couple of years is a fine thing. It's good to hear. But the key is that there's no guarantee that they're going to get an increase after a couple of years. This would guarantee at least that they would be seeing enough money to cover the increase in inflation and the loss of income that they're going to see on a year-to-year, month-to-month basis.

So I would hope that the members of this Assembly would consider this amendment. It's not a huge amendment. It's not going

to cost the government a massive amount of money. I think there's an element of fairness here. I certainly hope that they would reconsider your stand and vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

10:30

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Yes. Mr. Chair, I'd like to rise to present a second amendment, that has been recommended to me by the Member for Lethbridge-East. I'll just get that to you and wait until that is distributed.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, you can proceed. We shall refer to this amendment as amendment A2.

Mr. Backs: Just to read this into the record, Mr. Chair, it's an amendment to Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. It reads that the following is added after section 12:

13 By June 1, 2011 and every 5 years after that, a special committee established by the Legislative Assembly must begin a comprehensive review of this Act and must submit to the Legislative Assembly, within one year after beginning the review, a report that includes any amendments recommended by the committee.

Mr. Chair, this is being recommended as a good way to open up this act on a basis after five years and to report within a timely period. I think that it is something that, at the very least, allows review of what goes on with this group in our society so that they will not be left for any longer time than that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Loughheed: Mr. Chairman, I've just received this amendment, and upon looking at it, I appreciate that the member recognizes that legislation needs to be reviewed and to be amended and changed. That's why this act, in fact, is before us as a rewritten act, and that's why there are 30 or 40 or 50 other acts in front of this Legislature. They have been deemed to be requiring change and looking at and amending. But to designate a five-year term upon which at the end of that five years we have a mandatory review I don't believe addresses the needs that may come forward as times change, as things in the act are found to be wanting. If the act is not as good as it could be now, we would have looked for changes earlier and sought to make those in the act we brought forward. We believe it's pretty good as it's been presented, and if it's found wanting, we'll certainly look at it before five years. If it's not, we'll wait some longer period of time.

So again, Mr. Chairman, I'd recommend that we defeat this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to support this amendment A2. Whenever we look at some of the other statutes that the hon. Member for Strathcona mentioned, certainly there are

obligations to review those acts, whether it's FOIP legislation, health information. There are any number of statutes where there is an obligation to strike an all-party special committee to review that respective legislation, hold public hearings after there is notice circulated throughout the province to the public. If it's good enough for those acts, why is it not happening with this?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was absolutely correct when he stated that there has not been a review of AISH benefits for so long that the modest increase that occurred at the first of this month doesn't even help them catch up. It's a help certainly, but whenever we look at the past 10 years of this program in this province administered by this government, I'm sorry, but it has not been good enough.

This amendment would help at least a little bit in ensuring that in the future people are going to have an opportunity and can count on having an opportunity to give their views to Members of this Legislative Assembly on what works in the program, what does not work in the program, what needs to be improved, what needs to be changed.

Now, I would urge all members to support this because certainly it's a step in the right direction towards this House and this government being more accountable to the citizens. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to this amendment. I don't believe that the Legislature is in the habit of tying the hands of the government with respect to individual pieces of legislation. When we suggest that this piece of legislation must be reviewed in five years, first of all it restricts us to a five-year period from this point forward or from whenever this would pass, if this amendment was successful and passed in conjunction with the legislation.

I have to agree with the Member for Strathcona that an effort that allows this Legislature the freedom to look at this legislation on an ongoing basis – and I agree with the members opposite that the people that are served by this act certainly do need our support on an ongoing basis to recognize that as times change, there may be a need for the Legislature to review the provisions of this legislation and other similar pieces of legislation. But I believe that we would be doing a disservice by specifying a five-year period by when we would review this. I think we need the flexibility as a Legislature to look at this legislation on an ongoing basis. If the need arises, we would have the ability to come forward, maybe within a year or sooner, to revise this legislation to the benefit of the people that it serves.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I would encourage that all members defeat this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. I, too, would like to speak on this amendment. I think that if we approach it this way, we are approaching it backwards. The reason that the AISH review was so successful was that we looked at the whole picture of how AISH was affecting the AISH recipients and their whole environment, how Aids to Daily Living was affecting AISH, their housing situation, their living situation, how they were interacting with other people. We looked at the whole picture of how AISH recipients were working in the world or not working in the world. Out of that came the legislation. If you start by looking at the legislation and reviewing the legislation, I think you're starting in the wrong place.

I would very much be in favour of another AISH review in five, six years. I think it was a really valuable exercise that we went through, but I think that if we look at it as a way of just focusing in on this legislation and the possibility of changing this legislation, I think we're going at that the wrong way.

Thank you.

10:40

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

Mr. Martin: I will just raise a couple of quick issues specifically on the bill, and if the member wants to reply to them in third reading, that's fine. It has to do with section 1(i), which states that a

“severe handicap” means an impairment of mental or physical functioning or both that, in a director’s opinion after considering any relevant medical or psychological reports, causes substantial limitation to the person’s ability to earn a livelihood.

The issue here is twofold. Is the director in any way capable of making medically based decisions? In other words, is the director going to be a medical doctor or psychiatrist and, therefore, professionally bound to recognize these issues before being concerned with the bottom line? So I'd like the member to talk about that at some point. Along those lines, how is the director to determine what are relevant medical reports? I think that's also important, knowing what I do from that area.

Then 4(a), ministerial discretion regarding allowing persons whose financial resources – the minister and I talked about this. I think this is a positive thing. It leaves some flexibility.

But 10(2) is another one that I have some concerns about because I don't understand it. It says, “a person affected by a decision of a director, or a person on his or her behalf, may appeal that decision if it is not exempt from appeal under the regulations.” I guess that I'm asking: what could possibly exempt a decision from a client's basic right to appeal it? Perhaps when the member is talking about it, we could have an example of such a decision and what that process would look like.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. We will address that in third reading if that works.

The severe handicapped definition that you talked about there was part of the deliberations in the review. Utilizing people knowledgeable in the area of disability and impairment and being able to evaluate it beyond the medical definitions are important, and that's all part of it. We'll get that response to you one way or another in third reading.

With respect to the other ones I'd have to study that a little further from what you were saying to try and determine what you're talking about there and get back to you on that.

Thank you for those comments.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Mr. Lougheed: Ready for the question.

[The clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee do rise and report bills 10 and 21.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 21. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 10. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly do adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:46 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 13, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/13

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 32 special guests from the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. With us today are 23 grade 7 students from Ardmore school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Jackie Wakaruk, parents Mrs. Darlene Loiselle, Mrs. Kami Bowers, Mrs. Becky Charlton, Mrs. Diane Adrian, Mrs. Becky Cudmore, Mrs. Cathleen Matthews, Mrs. Sharon Theroux, and bus driver Mr. Maurice Roux. My guests are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're looking good in the chair today, I might say.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me today to rise and to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 51 visitors from my constituency, the area of Calmar, which is a booming little community. These constituents of mine have the good pleasure of being in a brand new school, just recently opened. Today they're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Jeanette Wilson, Mrs. Kathleen Sikliski, and Mrs. Sue Biddell and her son Tom. The eight parent helpers with this group of 51 are Mrs. Tammy Hutman, Miss Sherene Sawyer, Mr. James Snider, Mrs. Crystal Fandrick, Mrs. Karen Stepanko, Mrs. Charmaine Robinson, Mrs. Lee-Anne Peel, and Mr. de Martines. They're in the members' gallery. I'd ask them all to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special group that is joining us in the public gallery today, and that is the ESL program from St. Joseph high school. This is a very keen group of people, and we appreciate them coming to visit us in the Assembly. I'd ask them to please rise. I'd also like to introduce their group leaders, Ms Gerry Dawson and Mrs. Cheryl Place. Please join me in welcoming them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my delight and indeed honour today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly three guests, who are seated in the public gallery. They are Erica Bullwinkle, Thomas Bullwinkle, and Erica's daughter, Rachel Weinfeld. Erica is a prominent community activist and currently serves as the first vice-president of the Alberta NDP. Thomas is here to watch the proceedings for the first time as he is visiting our great province from London, England, where he makes his home. Joining them, of course, is Rachel, who has been active on the steps of the Legislature for the medicare vigils, providing sound and technical support. I'd ask these guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you a gentleman who I had a keen discussion with on politics in Alberta. I subsequently invited him to come to the Legislative Assembly. His name is Ryan Antonello. He's a grade 11 student from St. Francis Xavier school. I would ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any others at this time? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a student at the University of Alberta who steals time away from his university studies so that he can work for me in our Glenora constituency office as a special researcher. Peter Marriott is seated in the public gallery with two of his friends, who won't tell me their names. I'd invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Deputy Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Cleanup of Contaminated Sites

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Environment minister likes to say that the polluter pays. For a while there it looked as though he meant it. He indicated that he had a plan for a cleanup fund that would come entirely from industry to deal with contaminated downstream oil and gas sites where companies default on cleanup costs. Then he met with CAPP, reversed his decision, and said that the funds should come from royalties. In other words, the polluter doesn't pay; the people do. To the minister: what did CAPP say to make him do such a one-eighty?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what planet the hon. member is on, but what he just said is totally unfounded, untrue, and without any basis. The polluter continues to pay, following the law of protecting our air, land, and water in this province.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, if the payment comes from royalties, that ain't the polluter paying.

Who does the minister think is responsible for contaminated orphaned downstream sites, the industry or the public?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the past and will say again in this House today and will say again in the future, the

polluter pays because it is the expectation and it is the value that Albertans share with this government that the polluter pays, and we will enforce and ensure that they comply with paying.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister then assure Albertans and all who live on a planet where the sky is blue that this cleanup fund will be developed through new funding collected from the industry and not from the royalties that belong to the people of this province?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I'm so encouraged that the Minister of Finance likes the idea of the environmental endowment fund, that I know you have made reference to in the past as well. Let me make it so perfectly clear: in this province if there is an industry out there, if there is a citizen out there, they will pay because it's an Alberta law. They will continue to pay, and we'll ensure that they will continue to pay.

The Deputy Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Cleanup of Hazardous Spill at Wabamun Lake

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week in the House I asked the hon. Minister of Environment a question about the policies of his ministry regarding hazardous spills, specifically: is it the policy of this ministry to hold both the owner of the materials spilled and the transporter responsible for the cleanup? At Mitsue Lake Celanese is cleaning up the spill. Where is Imperial Oil at Wabamun? To the Minister of Environment: will the minister please tell us what the policy of his ministry is? Are both the transporter and the manufacturer responsible for cleaning up the spills or not? What is the policy?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, it's indeed my pleasure to share with the hon. member, as I have in the past and as I actually shared with many members relative to instances that have just taken place in the last couple of weeks as well as the last month or two, where, in fact, the polluter pays. If an industry is responsible, they will pay.

I think it's important to recognize the proactive approach that Alberta Environment took in terms of containing the actual area where, in fact, an unfortunate spill took place. But, clearly, without any question the polluter pays, not the people of Alberta.

1:40

Mr. Bonko: Can the minister explain, then, why Imperial Oil, with the money and expertise to clean up spills, was not held responsible at the Wabamun disaster along with CN? This is not a question of law; it's a matter of policy.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as you've mentioned a particular company, Imperial Oil, let me give you one example of how the enforcement orders that we had issued are coming to be because of the strong Alberta law that we have in this province, that certainly is supported by the people of Alberta and the citizens that give us this job. Let me give you an example: the refinery down in Lynnview Ridge. In fact, Imperial Oil originally, when it first came out, said that they were not responsible. Well, do you know what happened? Through the enforcement order Imperial Oil has in fact bought over 200 homes because of their responsibility that took place on the contaminated site.

I want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that on that kind of strong, strict law that we are taking, we're working in partnership. We do not believe in this idea of nail and jail and fair and square. What we think is important is that there is a constructive dialogue to ensure that our environment continues to be in fact supported and protected. And that's exactly what this ministry – I'm so proud of the 800 people in this ministry that are doing and living that each and every day.

Mr. Bonko: Last question to the Minister of Environment. Given the absence of Imperial Oil at Wabamun will the minister come clean and admit that this policy was changed due to the failure of his ministry to respond to the Wabamun disaster? The Premier himself admitted that the government was lax.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, first of all, what the hon. member has just said is totally out of context. Again I say to him that in terms of the protection of our environment, sustaining our environment, we issued, in fact, enforcement orders within the first 48 hours. Let me ask members of this House: did you know that that was the quickest turnaround of enforcement orders ever in the history of this province? So I can say that not only are we talking; we are acting.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note – this is important to note to the planet that members are on – that vacuum trucks are out there as we speak, this very minute, in fact, taking and remediating with CN based on our enforcement order. So action is taking place right now, based on the very proactive work that Environment is taking and will continue to take today, tomorrow, and well into the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Rod Love Consulting Inc.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, in the past five years the Premier's former chief of staff has billed various departments more than \$400,000 while at the same time working as a lobbyist for big business. Unfortunately, the lack of a lobbyist registry in Alberta means that we have absolutely no idea who he was lobbying for. It sounds like double-dipping to me. To the Minister of Finance: can the minister prove to Alberta taxpayers that Rod Love was not lobbying for the insurance industry at exactly the same time that he was paid to provide verbal advice to the ministry on auto insurance reforms? Can you prove it?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, maybe it behooves the hon. member opposite to prove that he was rather than just casting aspersions.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, Rod Love doesn't want to give any comment in the public domain, and the ministers don't want to give any comment in this House.

To the Minister of Energy: can the minister prove to Alberta taxpayers that Rod Love was not lobbying for the gas and oil industry at exactly the same time that he was paid to give verbal advice to the ministry on royalty rates? Can you prove it? Yes or no.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, these contracts have come before. Many contracts or consultants are used, a very normal practice. Continuously they provide strategic advice on numerous topics. What is important to note, though, is that I don't think it does anybody good to besmirch the name of any individual, Rod Love or

another. It's simple to come forth with allegations and impugn the reputation of individuals. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the Minister of Energy has the floor.

Mr. Melchin: They're not interested in hearing the answer, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Miller: Every day this week I've asked the questions. No answers yet.

To the Minister of Finance. The first sponsorship article that appeared in the *Globe and Mail* stated, "The Chrétien government has paid a company with close Liberal ties a total of \$550,000 to produce a report of which no trace can be found." That was the *Globe and Mail* talking about the federal government. Mr. Speaker, my question for the Finance minister: what is the difference? What is the difference between that scandal and Mr. Love's verbal contracts with this Conservative government? What is the difference?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the terms of the contract have been made public. As I've said before, I was not the minister who entered into the contract, but it is up to the minister to ascertain as to whether they are satisfied that the terms of the contract were met. What I have done – and I tabled this in the House yesterday. On December 13 – and I think that's probably about three weeks after I was appointed minister – I put a process in place on how contracts would be handled by the Ministry of Finance. That came into effect on January 1, 2005. If the hon. member wants to question me on any contracts that I have signed or entered into, I would be most pleased to do that.

In this House we have repeatedly – repeatedly – answered the questions on this contract. It states clearly in the contract that part of the contract was strategic advice. It does not state in the contract anywhere that it must be in written form. Mr. Speaker, we have answered those questions.

I understand the problem that this group has. We live in a province today that is wonderfully abounding with economic activity. We're debt free. We have the best fiscal framework in the country, the best fiscal environment in the country. Companies are moving here constantly. Our immigration of people here is constant. It's really difficult to find anything that this government has done wrong, so we centre on old news, whether it's an old contract there or a 20-year-old land contract. Get current.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, were you trying to indicate a point of order earlier? Apparently not.

First ND opposition question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Attendance at World Health Care Congress

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eleven thousand dollars are being spent to send the Minister of Health and Wellness on a taxpayer-funded junket to Washington, DC, early next week. The minister will be attending a conference that can only be described as a health care privatizer's wet dream. Sponsors include *The Wall Street Journal*, a who's who of HMOs like CIGNA health care, and Viagra maker Pfizer, the world's biggest drug company. Most exciting of all the minister gets to hear an inspirational video message from one of this government's best pals, President George W. Bush. To the Deputy Premier: given that we've been told time and time again that the government is not interested in pursuing

American-style health care, why then is the Health and Wellness minister spending taxpayer dollars to attend an American health care conference focused exclusively on for-profit health care?

Mrs. McClellan: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member would do well to look at the wording of his preamble with the students in the gallery here. I find it offensive and question whether it should be dignified with an answer. However, I'll assume that there are writers and it hasn't been read prior to.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing that I want to make clear is that this government is open – open – to all information to make decisions, not a closed mind like the opposition members here. It's their way or the highway.

Our health system is so precious to the people of this province and, indeed, the people of this country that the people of this province are willing to enter into a debate. To enter into a debate, you should go in armed with information and intelligence, and any way that we can gather that only moves this consultation forward in a positive way.

1:50

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish that the minister was as open with Albertans as they are with the group that she's talking about.

Given that the U.S. spends 50 per cent more GDP on health care than Canada does, exactly what lessons about sustainability does the government expect its Health and Wellness minister to learn from the likes of George W. Bush and the American corporate elite?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, neither the Canadian system nor the American system, both of which are quite opposite, stand up very well in the world for health outcomes. That doesn't mean that we give up or quit or that we don't try to learn. As I said earlier, any information that we can gather from others' experience, whether it's to move forward in a certain direction or, in fact, to ensure that we don't, I think is important. We'll remain open to hearing from all, including Albertans.

I resent very much this member inferring that, for example, I have not been open with the people I talk to. If he can show any evidence of that or any speeches that I've made that he was either at, which is doubtful, or not at that he heard from, I'd like him to bring them forward because, Mr. Speaker, the one thing I've never been questioned on is my integrity or my honesty.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, they always pull the integrity card when they don't want to answer the questions.

Given that there's overwhelming opposition in this province to the government's privatized, two-tier health scheme, what message is being sent to Albertans when the minister in the midst of this controversy jets off to Washington to attend a conference with the well-heeled apostles of chequebook medicine?

Mrs. McClellan: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think that if Albertans understood that we are not advocating a two-tier, private health care system, the answer is quite different. But if I were to put out a questionnaire that said, "Do you want a two-tier, private health system?" I'd probably get the same results. But what I would do is actually put forward our plan and ask Albertans for their comments back on it, which is exactly what the health minister has done, which every MLA on this side of the House is doing, and we'll take all of that information. We will actually listen to Albertans. They have some very good suggestions. From that will come a health plan that we hope will be sustainable into the future.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Agricultural Assistance

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Agricultural, Food and Rural Development. Mr. Minister, grain and oilseed producers are facing one of the worst financial situations in over 100 years this spring. This is not because of inefficiency, poor harvest, or a factor within their control, but rather it is a direct result of trade subsidies in other countries, including the U.S. Indeed, the current situation mirrors the economic hardship created by external international policies and treatment with respect to Canadian softwood lumber and the ban of Canadian cattle under the BSE crisis. Will the Alberta government and industry step up to these challenges? Alberta farmers are facing a crisis head-on right now, this spring. Considering the economic plight of these farmers, why won't the minister consider an acreage payment this year until trade issues can be straightened out and commodity prices rise to the realistic sustainable levels?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had a little bit of difficulty hearing the last part of that question because some of the members on the other side, I guess, didn't want to hear what is actually quite a good question. The hon. member has rightfully pointed out that we do have a crisis in our agricultural sector today. He has rightfully pointed out that the grains and oilseeds sector is facing some very serious challenges not just in Alberta but across this country, across western Canada in particular.

As it relates to an acreage payment, or per-acre payments, we have done a lot of analyses on that. We've got a lot of history on acreage payments. The global economy and the global subsidies are a perfect example of acreage payments and why they don't work, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the federal government has recently had an acreage payment out there that I'm starting to get calls about: why am I not receiving any dollars? With acreage payments the first thing is: what's fair? Should forage be included in an acreage payment? Should we include all 52 million acres of farmland in this province? Should we be putting more dollars in the south versus more dollars in the north? Should we be doing things on the Wheat Board side or on the oilseed side? You know, these are the things that a per-acre payment does not address, and that's why it doesn't work.

We are working through the advance program under the CAIS program. We are trying to make sure that producers who have need are being addressed through that program, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, it is starting to work. We're also talking to the federal government about those issues.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to remind all hon. members that there are classrooms in the galleries today, and this building is serving as a classroom of sorts for proper parliamentary conduct.

The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize if the hon. member has already answered this question because I really had a tough time hearing it. Mr. Minister, I fully understand that the federal government is contemplating changing CAIS; however, farmers are now receiving bills demanding repayment of their 2004 CAIS advances. Therefore, would you consider writing off these bills or at least delaying payment until . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, there's no preamble on the second and third questions.

Mr. Horner: Again, a very interesting question, Mr. Speaker. The equity loss payments that are out there are from previous years, and these interim payments were based on an estimate of the loss. The short answer to the hon. member's question is that we have a number of different opportunities and options for the producers, one of which is to simply allow these overpayments to be taken out of future entitlements of the CAIS program. Indeed, the producers could even extend it out over a number of years under a repayment program. But, again, we are looking and trying to make sure that we put as many options in front of the producers as we possibly can because we recognize the hurt.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, what else do you plan to do either with the federal government or without them to enable farmers and ensure that they are able to plant their crops this spring? It's a critical issue.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. member: I agree; it is a critical issue. For the past three weeks I've been out touring the province with producer meetings, talking about how we are best able to meet this need, how we are best able to meet the short term as well as the long term. We've had producer meetings in Airdrie and in Westlock and in Red Deer. We're going to be culminating in other meetings across the province. Ag Financial Services Corporation has held 32 meetings across the province in the last 30 days. We've actually had another 18 meetings with regard to the future of crop insurance and the future of the CAIS program.

To answer as well partly on the CAIS initiative, last night in this House, Mr. Speaker, I spoke about the actual convergence of our intent as it relates to the CAIS program with the federal government. To the current there's close to half a billion dollars' worth of program dollars available to producers right now through the programs that are out there today. We are also asking the federal government and pressuring the federal government for responses from some of the recommendations which we've made as it relates to getting dollars into producers' hands now because it is a national problem through a national program. We'll continue to push for those answers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Close to 5,000 apprentices could not find training school spots in southern Alberta in the last year. Close to 5,000 apprentices in northern Alberta had the same problem. The new spots at NAIT and SAIT and colleges do not come close to meeting the demand. Students plan to line up overnight for registration spots so that they can get into school months later. Young people are crying to work, and they're crying to learn their work, yet this government is allowing foreign contractors and their temporary foreign workers into our Alberta oil sands under Alberta's memorandum of understanding to temporary foreign workers in the oil sands. My question is to the Minister of Advanced

Education. When will this government wake up and address the growing crisis of not enough school spots for new apprentices in Alberta?

2:00

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I hate to ask this. Because there was so much noise, I didn't hear the hon. member, but I don't think I'll ask him to repeat. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, please proceed.

Mr. Herard: Thank you. It's an important question, so let's not deal with it that way. You know, we now have more than 47,000 apprentices.

Mr. Cenaiko: How many?

Mr. Herard: Forty-seven thousand apprentices, an increase of 98 per cent since 1995. This includes 18,000 new apprentices last year alone. So we're going in the right direction. We now have 1,100 aboriginal apprentices, which is an increase of 400 per cent, and I think that there is a lot more that can be done there with our aboriginal community. We now have 1,400 high school students enrolled in the registered apprenticeship program, and that is growing in leaps and bounds through Careers: the Next Generation, a foundation that deals with our schools, also staff from my department who are deployed throughout the province to find new apprenticeships. So, Mr. Speaker, I think we're doing a lot to increase the number of spaces.

Mr. Backs: They're lining up, and they're not getting in.

A second question, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what will this government do to ensure that apprentices do not lose valuable work experience and employment by being displaced by thousands of temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware that there are thousands of temporary foreign workers out there. One thing for sure that I do know is that when we do get temporary foreign workers, we make sure that they have the necessary skills in one of our 20 certified apprenticeship programs to do the job.

Mr. Backs: What about our apprentices?

A supplementary, Mr. Speaker, to the minister of human resources: when Rod Love was advising the government on relaxing rules for apprentices and trainees to benefit merit shop contractors, was Rod Love acting as a paid lobbyist for merit shop or acting as a paid consultant to the government or both at the same time?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, you can personally call Rod Love and talk to him about it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmr, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Agricultural Fertilizers and Pesticides

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta farmers have enough challenges with BSE, poor weather, and erratic commodity prices. The last thing they need is more difficulty just basically running their operations. I'm hearing from my constituents that two products they depend heavily on for their operations are no longer

available. My first question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Why isn't 34-0-0 ammonium nitrate fertilizer available to farmers anymore, and what's the government doing to make it available to farmers?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason that 34-0-0 ammonium nitrate fertilizer is no longer available to farmers is because Agrium, who is the company that made this particular product, stopped manufacturing the product last year. They were the only manufacturer in Canada, and they ceased production in June of last year. They stopped making this product because it could be used as an explosive when combined with diesel fuel, and this was unfortunately found to be the explosive used in the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Agrium has advised our department that the liability they faced by manufacturing this product was more than they were willing to accept.

They have, Mr. Speaker, developed a new polymer-coated urea product called environmentally smart nitrogen, or ESN, and the interest in moving this type of product, as it's proven in the U.S. to be up to 25 per cent more productive, is that it reduces the number of passes in the field; therefore, it actually reduces emissions and environmental impact, which is, of course, in Alberta the law.

We're also exploring manure management as a way of meeting some of these nutrient needs. In fact, we're supporting a number of areas of research in particular as part of our grains and oilseed strategy. We've put forward funding through the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund for the development of slow-release fertilizers, and these will contribute to both greater productivity and reduced environmental impact.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental for the same minister is on the availability of another surefire product farmers rely on, which is strychnine for pest control. Will we have enough strychnine this year? Again, what's the minister doing to make sure that it's available to farmers who need it to control gophers?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Agriculture continues to support the safe, proper, and appropriate use of fresh mix strychnine bait to control Richardson's ground squirrels, commonly known as gophers. The year 2006 is the third year that producers will have unimpeded access to a fresh strychnine-based bait product, which our research found is much more effective than dry strychnine bait. In past years both Alberta and Saskatchewan received emergency registrations for strychnine from the federal government, allowing it to be used in the province specifically for ground squirrel control. Last year the Pest Management Regulatory Agency of Health Canada allowed Canadian manufacturers to continue selling fresh bait products to farmers. So it is available for producers to use this year.

One more point, Mr. Speaker. The use of strychnine has some drawbacks, adequate supply being one of them, so we are looking at what else can be done to control these pests. We've involved a

multistakeholder steering committee, Richardson's ground squirrel integrated pest management strategy. Our role on the steering committee is to evaluate current control measures and technologies and to seek out others.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 6 in this House the hon. minister of infrastructure replied to a question from the Official Opposition on the sale of 260 acres of prime residential land in southwest Edmonton for \$3 by stating: "Incidentally, yes, there are four parcels. It's about 800 acres." My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Given that the minister tabled documents on Tuesday of this week indicating that four parcels of land totalling 504 acres were sold to the government by Mr. Joseph Shekter for \$10.2 million, where are the remaining 300 acres of land located that he talked about?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there were four parcels. As it turns out, we retained one entire parcel. So the number of acres that we returned were all parts of those other three parcels.

Obviously, the member is not understanding the whole process, so I think maybe I'll try to break it down into something that's much more simple that maybe he can understand. Given that it's Easter time, as my example I'm going to use chocolate Easter eggs. Now, the member, the purchaser, wants to purchase 504 Easter eggs. He finds a vendor that has in a bag about 790 of them. So he pays to the vendor the price for the 500 then proceeds to pick out the ones that he wants, and he returns the others to the seller. Now, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what happened here. We took the land; we divided out what we needed and then returned the rest to the vendor.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. When you told this House that there were 800 acres of land involved in the transaction, we can account for 500 acres of land in the documents that you tabled in this Assembly on Tuesday. Again, where are the other 300 acres, and how much, if any, has been returned to Mr. Shekter for a dollar per parcel?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, if he wishes to have the details, I can tell him about the details. We had one parcel that contained some 534.29 acres. We bought 274.02 of those acres, leaving a total of 260.27 acres that belonged to Shekter, and there are two titles for those. Then we get into another parcel, and it had some 29.23 acres. On that one, there are 25.89 that were returned. Then we've got another parcel that has some 133.14 acres in it, and we didn't return any of those. We kept it all. Then we have another parcel where we bought 68 acres and returned 4.63. That's a total of 504.39 acres out of approximately 792 or 793 acres.

2:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that you tabled these documents on Tuesday to account for 504 acres of land, can you please table the documents that are related to the other 300 acres, which you talked about last week in this Assembly? Table the documents.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, all he has to do is look on the documents and see the total acres in the parcel before they were subdivided. It's very simple, and I just gave him the numbers. Those are the numbers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

School Infrastructure in Calgary

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta continues to grow at a phenomenal rate. Due to the prosperity of this province and job opportunities we are now seeing the city of Calgary grow by some 20,000 to 25,000 individuals a year. As the suburbs continue to grow, so does the need for new schools. This government is building many new schools across the city of Calgary, but we know that school boards are looking for some 40 new schools in the city of Calgary as well as ensuring that our older schools stay vital. My questions are to the Minister of Education. As the minister who has recently taken on responsibility for school infrastructure, can you tell this House what process you'll be using or initiating to plan for school infrastructure and ensure that these much-needed schools will come to these communities?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, hon. member. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would be very happy to elaborate on that. The process has already in fact begun. It involves a number of meetings and consultations with our locally elected school board representatives, who are there for many purposes, this being one of them. That process also involves looking at the audit assessments, which our predecessor department had responsibility for. It also involves grouping the needs, if you will, for school infrastructure and capital-related infrastructure projects into a more strategic fashion that would allow us to move them ahead perhaps more quickly, and it involves a longer range plan, which we now have the ability to do.

I've written to the school boards, just a few days ago as I recall – I think it was Monday, Mr. Speaker – indicating what that new process would look like, and I'll be waiting to hear back from them very soon. We want to ensure that our future plan, which is to be ready by the end of June, takes all of these factors and numerous others into consideration so that we have something very solid to go ahead with by way of our schools for tomorrow action plan.

Mrs. Ady: To the same minister: will this plan take into consideration what to do with the reuse of sites perhaps that are surplus to school boards' needs now?

Mr. Zwodzesky: That's an excellent question as well. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, having met on numerous occasions now with some of the larger boards in the metro areas in particular, that there are literally dozens of vacant schools sitting on prime space. There are also dozens of other sites that have been municipally reserved, shall we say, for potential future schools to be built. For whatever reasons some of the community needs may have changed, so we're not seeing those sites taken up as readily as was expected. There's a lot of valuable property there that seems to be tied up at the moment. We have a committee that is chaired by the hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, and I'm on that committee with some others. We're looking at a number of strategic ways of improving the situation so that we can deliver on this new consultation process and the resulting plan that will come from it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Aon Consulting Inc.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On November 3, 2005, this government contracted with Aon Consulting to design a private insurance scheme for Alberta's health care system. According to the request for proposal the project was scheduled to take three months. As of April 5, six months later and three months late, the minister of health had still not received Aon's report. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. Given that Alberta Finance is on the steering committee for this project, will the minister tell us when the taxpayers get to see the report they paid for, even a draft report?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's a bit of a stretch to tie what the preamble of that question was into the actual contract that was awarded to Aon. This is a complex area, and that is why you look at a company with considerable experience to provide some modelling and information as to viability or what private insurance providers might be able to do. There is no reason that we would withhold or want this product not to be completed, so as soon as it is completed, we'll be prepared to discuss the results of it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: what explanation for the delay has Aon provided in their biweekly status reports?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I believe all of the time that it's taking to prepare this is simply the complexity of the issue.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will Aon, their parent company, or any wholly or partly owned subsidiaries be able to participate in the very market that Aon is designing?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I come back again: Aon was not contracted to design a market. I mean, you know, come on. We've got a question here in this province and across Canada that's very serious. I have said for over 10 years that health and the importance of a health system should cut above political lines. Everybody in this House should be working towards sustainability of this health system. All I ask of the hon. members opposite is just to interject some semblance of what we're actually contracting into what they say we are doing. You know, if you talk about Albertans and what they know or believe about the third way, all I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that any – any – comments that I've heard from across the way from both parties and the document that the hon. minister of health has filed bear very little resemblance.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

EUB Hearings on Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a problem with the EUB decision to reconsider the west corridor for the proposed 500 kV transmission line west of highway 2. We should be debating much more than just the suitability of the west corridor in regard to

this project. The honest choice would be to open up all aspects of this 500 kV line. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Why doesn't the EUB stage a hearing to discuss whether consumers should be footing the bill for these new power lines with big hikes in their monthly power bills?

2:20

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, he's introduced different issues in the preamble versus the question. First off, there was a needs application, and a lot of work has been done, looking at different corridors where the transmission line could be held. There was an initial hearing on the location some time ago. So it's already had that. With respect to the cost of transmission, transmission has always been borne – we've all paid for it all. You and I, to be able to turn that switch on in our homes, pay for all of it: the power, the transmission, everything that goes into getting that power from the generation through to the transmission and distribution to our homes.

The great thing that will happen: we need these transmission lines to ensure that we can reliably provide the electricity to the homes with the growth that we have, unless he wishes that we don't have the power when needed; and, secondly, it will help reduce line loss. By increasing our capacity, there's actually going to be quite a substantive savings on the lines that are there today given the quantity and level of power that's being pushed over those lines.

Mr. Eggen: Given that it is the Conservative government policy to expand power exports from Alberta, why are the thousands of central Alberta landowners impacted by this massive new transmission line not being allowed to question this policy at the upcoming EUB review and variance hearing?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the last I knew, this line comes from Genesee down through Langdon. I don't know, if you look on the map, that that's anything other than within Alberta. This line has nothing to do with exports despite the fact that exports can also add to the value of Alberta. This is to ensure the reliable delivery of electricity to Albertans so that they can depend upon it every day that they need it.

Mr. Eggen: How can the minister claim that key issues about whether this line is even needed in the first place have been properly dealt with when no landowner or environmental groups participated in the early EUB hearings, that were dominated by otherwise self-interested utility corporations?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, hearings have been available to all stakeholders. They've had a very open process. That's one of the very hallmarks of what the Energy and Utilities Board does very well. They have and intend to look at the interests. It is also in the interest of Albertans to have electricity to our homes. I suspect it's in the interest of us to see that we can turn the lights on in this building. Unless you're saying, "Let's turn them off," I guess that's a policy that we don't support.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Cleanup of Hazardous Spill at Wabamun Lake

(continued)

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Environmental spills are a popular topic today. The ice is started to come off Lake Wabamun, and oil is resurfacing on patches of open water. The ice is likely to

be completely off the lake in two weeks. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister elaborate on what is being done to clean up these patches of open water now to prevent returning migratory birds and wildlife from becoming contaminated with oil?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, responsible for migratory birds, may want to supplement as well, but I want to say: as I speak here in this Assembly this afternoon, CN, Alberta Environment, and vacuum trucks are out there, in fact, taking the oil off of the shore that the hon. member mentions. I think this is proactive.

I want to say that August 4 was an example of an ecological disaster. But, first and foremost, CN is complying with each and every one of the enforcement orders that we have issued. Furthermore, I'm looking forward in the next two weeks to visiting the site with one of the experts that we hired, Dr. David Schindler, from the University of Alberta. Certainly, I appreciate his advice and counsel as we move forward with this proactive plan.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: will the magnitude of this spring's cleanup be large enough to prevent any resurfaced oil from contaminating previously cleaned or unaffected areas of the lake?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, of course, I would love to be able to say here – I pray and hope that will be the end result and the outcome of the action that we're taking. But as we know, Mother Nature also plays a role in that, over which we have no control. Certainly, that is the objective of the Ministry of Environment, working with the good citizens and all those involved in this cleanup.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the Minister of Environment's opinion on whether or not Lake Wabamun will be available for boating and fishing this summer?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, my family has a cottage on a lake, and I want to say this: the value that Albertans place on our recreation and things such as Lake Wabamun, I think, is priceless. So it is my hope and prayer that based on our proactive good work – and to the hon. member, who I thank and who has been right there with us all of the time that we've been there, my vision is that hopefully they'll be out there windsurfing, that they'll be out there boating, and that they'll be out there enjoying what we've been blessed with in Lake Wabamun.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Space in Remand Centres

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta judges are being forced to reduce times served by offenders by giving 2 to 1 or even 3 to 1 credit for detention in the remand centres. Recent judgments have listed the deplorable conditions of the remand centres; for example, overcrowding and double-bunking, violation of religious freedoms, excessive force applied in relation to strip searches, and

on and on and on. All of this evidence has been presented in our courts. My question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the minister tell us if he's prepared to accept this evidence as factual and valid, and what is he going to do about it?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the decisions that judges make are those decisions that the public or legislators don't have an opportunity to question. The issue that the hon. member is discussing regarding the space at the Edmonton Remand Centre is one that is the top priority in our ministry right now, but when we're dealing with all of Alberta, we're talking about remand populations throughout Alberta. In the Edmonton area we are moving them to the Fort Saskatchewan correctional facility. We're utilizing all of our facilities to the maximum amount that we can.

As I mentioned, the ERC is the number one priority for our capital planning for the future. Mr. Speaker, you should know, though, that the remand populations 20 years ago were 30 per cent compared to 70 per cent for corrections; 10 years ago it was at about 50-50. At this point of time, right now, we're at the opposite end of the scale right across Canada, where 70 per cent of offenders are in remand and only 30 per cent are in corrections.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the same minister. Will the Minister of Public Security tell us if he thinks that giving drug dealers easy sentences because of the conditions in remand centres, which is standard practice, as the Minister of Justice suggested yesterday, is protecting the safety of the public?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I made a decision to work on this side of the law in my previous career as a police officer and not as a lawyer and work my way towards the bench, so my point of view and my personal thoughts regarding sentencing drug traffickers may differ from that of a judge or from a defence lawyer. So that's a difficult question for me to answer, but I can tell you what I would do with drug traffickers.

Dr. B. Miller: My last supplemental is for the Minister of Finance. Will this government finally get tough on crime and provide the funds for a new remand centre in Edmonton and an extension to the remand centre in Calgary?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General very properly has brought this forward to capital planning, and I'm sure that our associate minister responsible for capital planning will be working with the Solicitor General to ensure that it's included in our overall capital plan.

I would remind the hon. member that we spend triple in capital of any province in Canada, whether it's spent in our hospitals or our schools or our advanced education institutions or on our roads. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't apologize for our capital plan but do recognize that when you have a vibrant province like we do, when you have economic growth that's projected as ours is with no end in sight to that, it is important that we ensure that we have adequate capital.

One of the challenges, Mr. Speaker, was brought up by one of the hon. members earlier, and that is simply a workforce to accommodate that capital as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the hon. Member for Highwood, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a portion of the 92 students who have come all the way from my constituency of Calgary-Varsity. With them are teachers Ms Smart, Ms Acorn, Mr. Marks, Ms Govier, Ms Sanden, Mrs. McFaul, and Mrs. Berg. If those teachers and their students could please stand, we'll celebrate their arrival.

Thank you.

2:30 **Vignettes from the Assembly's History**

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the first member, I'd like to share the ever-popular historical vignette. This is quoted from the *Edmonton Bulletin*, August 27, 1936.

This is the people's forum. It is the debating chamber wherein proposed legislation must be studied, analysed and debated. The people have a right to know all sides of these discussions. If this province is to be properly governed the greatest freedom of debate must take place within this chamber before the public.

These words came from Samuel Augustus Gordon Barnes, who was first elected as a Social Credit member for Edmonton in the August 22, 1935, general election. Prior to becoming a member, he was an Edmonton school board trustee for 23 years and was president of the Labour Party of Edmonton in 1921. In 1940 he ran under the banner of the Independent Progressives and was not re-elected. He died on April 14, 1941.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

National Soil Conservation Week

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize National Soil Conservation Week, which runs from April 16 to 22. This year marks the 21st anniversary for recognizing the importance of soil conservation in our country.

Mr. Speaker, our Alberta producers are leaders in soil conservation and beneficial management practices. They are dedicated to improving their practices to conserve our important soil resources. For example, nearly two-thirds of our province's cropland is now being direct seeded to improve water infiltration, increase seed bed moisture, enhance organic matter, and reduce the risk of soil erosion. Soil conservation also supports and sustains crop, rangeland, and woodlot production and is important to maintaining other resources such as water, air, and our wildlife habitat.

Mr. Speaker, to continue to assist our producers in soil conservation practices, Alberta has developed a new, free online soil survey of the whole agricultural area of Alberta. This was no small undertaking as Alberta has 30 per cent of the agricultural area of Canada. The soil information viewer consists of soil and air photo information on nearly 26 million hectares, or 64 million acres, so that our farmers and our agricultural and environmental consultants can better understand our natural capital. By conserving our soil,

our stewards of the land can ensure that it functions properly to provide the food we eat and a healthy environment to live in, both for us and for future generations.

As we bring attention to National Soil Conservation Week from April 16 to April 22, it is important for us to acknowledge and thank our producers for being leaders in soil conservation and the sustainability of our agricultural industry.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Vaisakhi 2006

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we celebrate the 307th anniversary of the founding of Khalsa day, or Vaisakhi. It is one of the most important events in the Sikh calendar. Khalsa day, or Vaisakhi, marks the birth of the Sikh nation, and it is celebrated by Sikhs in every part of the world.

Today we celebrate the festival of a nation whose gurdwaras, the place of worship, are open to all: rich and poor, male and female, old and young. We celebrate a religion that respects all other religions and a people who seek to lead a life of compassion, humanity, pity, justice, equality, and truth.

Mr. Speaker, the Sikh community is a vital part of Alberta in every walk of life – in business, culture, legal, medical profession, politics – and they are adding to the strength of Alberta. I want to pay tribute to all Sikhs in Alberta who have done so much to foster an appreciation of the Sikh way of life.

In Alberta it is my mission to create a modern civic society for today's world, to renew the bonds of community that bind us together. That society is based on shared values: rights and duties which go together, tolerance, and respect for diversity. We work hard to provide opportunity for our young, whether it is in enhancing education or in giving hope to the unemployed. In return we demand responsibility, proper conduct, law-abiding behaviour. We stand up for our social, racial, and cultural diversity. We value our differences and respect each other's background, ethnic and religious. As the Sikh teaching tells us: never refrain from righteous acts, whatever the cost.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Salute to Alberta Athletes

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I was privileged to join our Lieutenant Governor and Community Development minister in Calgary to honour some of Alberta's best athletes. Of the 61 Canadians who won a medal at the 2006 Winter Olympics, approximately one-third are Albertan. If you include athletes who are living here to train at our tremendous facilities, that number jumps to three-quarters. The same success holds true for our Paralympians. Albertans accounted for seven of the 13 medals won in Italy. There is a strong support network behind each of these athletes that lets them be their best. We also recognized the efforts of Alberta coaches, officials, and mission staff who were part of Team Canada.

Last night also honoured the Alberta athletes of the year for 2005: skier Sarah Renner, bobsled pilot Pierre Lueders, junior skier Gareth Sine, junior skater Jessica Gregg, and the Edmonton Huskies Football Club.

Mr. Speaker, for many Olympians and Paralympians their athletic journey began long before they booked a ticket to Italy. It began as young athletes in a system that nurtured their talent and gave them the right environment to become even better. Thanks to the efforts of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation Alberta's developing athletes continue to prosper. These athletes will certainly benefit from an additional \$2.8 million going to the foundation as announced in Budget 2006. This is in addition to the \$12.8 million the foundation already puts towards sport development. This government has also invested in our elite athletes by providing \$23 million for the renewal of the Canmore Nordic Centre and \$600,000 for upgrades at the ski jump facility in Canada Olympic Park.

Few Canadians will ever reach the Olympic or Paralympic Games, but we all share in the celebration. Our athletes inspire us to be proud of our country and to pursue our own dreams, knowing that success is possible.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all the members of the House to join me in one final congratulations to Alberta's athletes for their efforts in Italy.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

National Child Care Program

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Alberta Federation of Labour and Public Interest Alberta released a highly informative poll, to which I hope the Minister of Children's Services will pay close attention. The poll explored Albertans' opinions about Prime Minister Harper's stated intention to tear up last year's agreements on child care and replace them with a hundred dollar monthly allowance.

The NDP has been strongly advocating against the Harper alternative and encouraging this minister to fight to protect the agreement and the underlying principles she signed with Ottawa and expand programs initiated following this agreement. Albertans unquestionably agree with our position: 50 per cent of Albertans are outrightly opposed to the Prime Minister's plan; 61 per cent feel the province should continue funding enhanced programs even if Ottawa reneges on the deal; significantly, 87 per cent agree that subsidies should be maintained for low- and middle-income parents so they can afford quality child care; and 85 per cent agree that the provincial government should continue to finance wage improvements and professional development for child care workers.

It should hardly be a surprise to members of this Assembly that a majority of Albertans do not support the federal government's child care plan. As the federal NDP's child care critic, Olivia Chow, pointed out yesterday, most families will only see a fraction of the promised amount. Through taxes and clawbacks many Ontario families will see only \$200 per year. It isn't even enough to buy a year's supply of diapers, Mr. Speaker. Research I have already outlined in this Assembly paints a comparable picture for Alberta families.

So once again I'm calling on the Minister of Children's Services unequivocally to defend last year's child care agreements and the principles underlying them and urge Ottawa not to dismantle the program. Should that fail, I urge the minister to continue funding to enhance programs that most Albertans and Alberta families would like to stay in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

2:40

Criminal Sentencing Guidelines

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our justice system is based on fundamental principles of law: fairness, presumption of innocence, and independence of the judiciary from any political interference. These principles have withstood the test of time. However, there is yet another principle which at this time appears to be questioned; that is, public confidence in the justice system.

As you may recall, some two months ago residents of Edmonton reacted to a highly publicized criminal case by gathering some 5,000 signatures on a petition requesting a thorough review of the sentencing guidelines and rules for parole order dispensation. Again last week residents of Edmonton presented this Assembly with some 20,000 signatures petitioning and requesting the same.

Mr. Speaker, even though individual cases ought not be affected or decided based on petitions or lobby efforts, it is evident that our constituents demand that our justice system undergo a thorough examination. As one constituent pointed out to me, the system ought to be a justice system and not a legal system. Having said this, I urge our Justice minister to continue to collaborate with his provincial, territorial, and federal counterparts in his effort to review parole guidelines and sentencing trends. As elected politicians we must seriously consider entrenching minimum sentences in laws passed in this Assembly and in Ottawa.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Water Management

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government's Water for Life strategy outlines some important initiatives that I believe require the government's urgent attention. Water is a resource that is often taken for granted. Just like our abundant oil and gas resources the water which sustains all of our communities and our industries in Alberta simply cannot be relied upon without significant long-range planning and wise infrastructure investments.

Our efforts in Alberta to address the challenges associated with water fall into two categories. First and foremost, we must ensure the safety of our drinking water, which must be protected by ongoing monitoring and investments in technology and infrastructure for water treatment and waste-water management on a regional basis throughout the province. Secondly, we absolutely must be concerned in the long term about the quantity of the water that is available to us. This is not simply a southern Alberta regional issue but an issue involving all Albertans in all corners of Alberta.

On the first point, about the safety and quality of our water, it is important that Alberta build upon the Water for Life strategy by enhancing it with an integrated water-use management program similar to the integrated land-use program that the Alberta government is planning. This would entail mapping out all of our water resources, including aquifers, and on a regional basis, ensuring that the current and planned usage levels are consistent and sustainable not only for today but for 10 or 20 years down the road.

With respect to the quantity of water Alberta cannot afford to simply wait and see if the dire predictions about the decline of our glacial water sources are borne out 10 to 15 years from now. We must begin to plan and act now to preserve water today rather than wait for scarcity to prompt us into action tomorrow.

Despite the abundant oil and gas resources that Alberta possesses, water is, in fact, our most precious resource. We must take bold

action today to ensure that we have safe and sustainable sources of water for our immediate needs and for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table two petitions. The first petition is from 17 students and staff of Grasmere school in Alberta Beach. The second petition is from 72 students from Harry Collinge high school in Hinton. Both petitions call for concerted government action to address the rise in teen smoking in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition sponsored by the Friends of Medicare. This one has 1,007 signatures. It calls on the government to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms and for the Assembly to defeat any legislation that would allow the expansion of private hospitals or insurance or that allows doctors to work both in the private and public systems and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by 23 students and teachers of the Tilley school. This calls for concerted government action to address the reported rise in teenage smoking in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 203 signatures on a petition urging the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement the third way health care reforms.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A further 202 signatures from communities such as Edmonton, Calgary, Sherwood Park, De Winton, Cowley, Lethbridge, St. Albert, and so on, urging the government not to proceed with the third-way health care reforms.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition sponsored by the Friends of Medicare. This one has 600 signatures. It calls on the government to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms and for the Assembly to defeat any legislation that would allow the expansion of private hospitals or insurance or that allows doctors to work in both the private and public systems and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate petitions. The first one is:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation allowing parents the authority to place their children into mandatory drug treatment and to fund urgently required youth drug treatment centres.

There are approximately 100 signatures on that one.

The other one is 200 signatures here where they urge the residents of Alberta to petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to abandon its implementation of the third-way health care reforms, oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act as well as vote against plans that would force Albertans to pay for private health care insurance for services that should be covered by medicare.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to present a petition from many residents of northeast Edmonton, including the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. It calls upon this Legislature to prohibit two-tier medicare.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition sponsored by the Friends of Medicare. This one has 407 signatures on it. It calls on the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms and for the Assembly to defeat any legislation that would allow the expansion of private hospitals or insurance or that would allow doctors to work in both the private and the public systems and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday, April 24, when the House resumes, I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 15 and 29.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday the 24th I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 26.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

2:50 **Bill Pr. 3**
Edmonton Community Foundation
Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, that being the Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

**Bill Pr. 4
Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption
Amendment Act, 2006**

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 4, the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a list of the speakers at the upcoming World Health Care Congress, which the minister of health will be attending. At the congress she will have the dubious privilege of hearing from so-called thought leaders, including representatives Susan Chambers from Wal-Mart and Michele Schneider of the Avon cosmetics company. The privatization brain trust will be topped off by an inspirational message from President George Bush.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of tablings again from concerned citizens. I'll start with a letter from Shannan Little, who believes the third way will increase waiting lists as doctors cherry-pick for the private practice.

From Joan Lewis, noting the conflict of interest and corruption she believes is being brought forward with this.

From Dennis Kaban, who notes that the government should "listen to the opposition members," they have some good ideas.

From Norma Farquharson, noting that Canada spends 9 per cent of its GDP on health, the U.S. spends 15 per cent, and millions of people aren't covered. Why would we emulate them?

From Clare and Tammy Irwin, who note "that positive results within the existing [public] system can be achieved and resources should be dedicated to the promotion of further similar programmes."

From the Very Reverend Fabian W. Hugh, who notes that in the province we have a great disparity between rich and poor, including the working poor, and is concerned that the third way would affect that.

From Harry Hoffman, believing that we are selling off our province and that profits from third-way privatization health care would leave the province.

From Shirley Harpham, noting that she and her husband have private health insurance through private providers, and they've had a great deal of difficulty with them and don't want to see that in the province.

From Horace Gopeesingh, believing the third way does not address the very crucial issues regarding shortages of personnel, expertise, and facilities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My tablings today are handwritten comments shared with me by Mr. Charles Edward Murphy, who refers to the suggested health care reforms as the third unknown way and says that this government needs to offer "clear,

concise, all-encompassing details of any plan" it is proposing before the government goes ahead with the usual Conservative way and jams it "down our throats."

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's the appropriate number of copies of the poll released by the Alberta Federation of Labour and Public Interest Alberta. This poll found that 50 per cent of Albertans opposed the Prime Minister's alternative plan to tear up agreements on child care and that 61 per cent of Albertans believe that even if the agreements are cancelled by the federal government, the Alberta government should nevertheless continue to fund those programs as they'll be enhanced this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one letter to table this afternoon. It's from the Minister of Community Development to cross-country skier Beckie Scott on her retirement. Beckie hails from Vermilion, in my constituency, and has been an inspiration for skiers not only in Alberta but in Canada and throughout the world. The letter praises Beckie for her many achievements, for her being a tremendous ambassador for Alberta and Canada and wishes her the best in her future endeavours.

Thank you.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I would also note that I'd like to raise a point of order, but at this point, I will, following Standing Order 7(5), ask for the Government House Leader to share the projected government business for the week of April 24 to 27.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to do that. Our projected government House business would include the following. Starting on Monday, April 24, in the afternoon we'll deal with private members' business, that being some written questions and motions for returns. Under public bills and orders we will deal with second reading of bills 206, 207, and 208, time depending, of course.

On Monday evening, under private members' motions I anticipate that we'll deal with Motion 507. At 9 under Government Bills and Orders we will look at second reading of Bill 24, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006; Bill 29, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006; Bill 30, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006; Bill 31, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2006; Bill 32, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act; Bill 33, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006; and Bill 34, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006; and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, April 25, in the afternoon under Committee of Supply we'll deal with the Ministry of Education estimates and otherwise as per the Order Paper. Tuesday at 8 p.m. in Committee of Supply we will deal with the Ministry of Gaming and its esti-

mates. Then in Committee of the Whole we anticipate dealing with bills 14, 15, 25, 26, 27, 28, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday afternoon in Committee of Supply we will deal with the estimates of the Ministry of Community Development and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. in Committee of Supply we will deal with the estimates of the Ministry of Innovation and Science and then Committee of the Whole for bills 24, 29, and 30 and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

Thursday afternoon in Committee of Supply we will deal with the estimates of the Ministry of Health and Wellness and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton Centre on a point of order.

Point of Order Tabling Cited Documents

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in the afternoon during question period in an exchange between the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation the minister quoted extensively from a document. I did wait until after tablings was complete to see if the minister had in fact tabled the documents from which he was citing, and I note that in *Beauchesne* 495(1), (2), (4), and (5), which I can go through in depth, but essentially:

495. (1) A Minister is not at liberty to read or quote from a despatch or other state paper not before the House without being prepared to lay it on the Table.

(2) It has been admitted that a document which has been cited ought to be laid upon the Table . . .

(4) Only the document cited need be tabled by a Minister . . .

(5) To be cited, a document must be quoted or specifically used to influence debate.

As I noted, the minister did quote extensively from the document and held it in his hand through an entire exchange and, I think, perhaps two exchanges with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

I did notify the Speaker at the time that I expected the document to be tabled given the amount of time that had been spent on it. As I say, I waited until the end of tablings to see if that document was forthcoming, and it has not been, Mr. Speaker. So at this time I argue that 495, and the many clauses I've cited, has been breached and would ask that a point of order is found against the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and that the document is produced and tabled in the House.

Thank you.

3:00

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I was just reviewing 495. I recall the incident that the hon. member is raising the point of order on; however, it's not clear to me whether or not the document that the minister was referring to and perhaps quoting from had already been tabled by him earlier. I think we need some clarity around that matter before this could be properly considered.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I anticipated this, so I looked into *Beauchesne's* as well and read from the same clauses that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out. I would like to point out specifically *Beauchesne's* 495(4), which says: "only the document cited need be tabled by a Minister. A complete file need not be tabled because one document in it has been cited." Not having the Blues before me, I don't recall him citing any specific document to

begin with or referring to it by name. If I could get some clarification on that, it would be helpful.

Not having that, does the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung wish to respond to this?

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation was reading at length from a document that he held up and he actually portrayed during question period. It's our submission that he needs to table this very document, and whether in fact it was tabled before or not is irrelevant. It was not tabled before in our opinion.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, just perhaps to provide a little clarity or perhaps even to add to this discussion, it would appear to me, as I recall, not having the benefit of the Blues either, that the minister was extrapolating the acreages from the documents that had been tabled previously. Simply stating that from those documents and those agreements that have been tabled in this House, if one did the math, one would find where the acres were. He did make reference to Easter eggs as well, but we're talking about what he pointed to as opposed to a particular document cited.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else?

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I do recall that when that interaction happened with the minister and on the question, there was an issue about the total number of acreages. The minister did indicate that if you look at that contract, the total acreage will be in that contract. My belief is that the document that he may have been referring to was the actual contract that was tabled on Tuesday.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I would not have raised this issue if I did not believe in all good faith that there was an additional document that was being read from and cited from and quoted from directly. It was a different shape. The offer to sale, the documents, contracts that were offered before are on a legal-size piece of paper. What the minister was holding in his hand and looking down at repeatedly and reading from extensively was not that same shape or size of paper, so I would ask that document that he was reading from please be tabled.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, not having a copy of the Blues in front of me, I will commit to the Assembly that I will undertake a review of the Blues, and if there was a specific document cited, then perhaps there's a reason to have it tabled. I don't have a recollection of that, so I will look at that and make a ruling on it when we come back.

head: **Orders of the Day**
head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Children's Services

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders the first hour will be allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate in the debate.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to move the Ministry of Children's Services business plan for 2006-2009, and our budget estimates for 2006-07.

Before I get started, I want to introduce the ministry staff who have accompanied me here today and are sitting in our members' gallery: assistant deputy minister of ministry support services, Steve MacDonald; assistant deputy minister of community strategies and support division, Niki Wosnack; senior financial officer, Shehnaz Hutchinson; manager of budget strategies, Darren Baptista; budget officer Riyaz Mukhi; visiting us for the first time, CEO for the east central Alberta child and family service authority, David Wilson; my executive assistant, Maureen Geres; my special adviser, Debbie Malloy; and staff from my office, Jeri Romaniuk and Elizabeth Day.

This is a very small representation of the thousands of staff who work in my department, our regional authorities, and our contracted agencies across the province. I commend all of these very passionate people who dedicate their lives to improving those of Alberta's children and families. Mr. Chair, a minister is only as successful as the people she works with, and I can say with confidence that my staff do a fantastic job each and every day, working on behalf of the children and families in this province.

At Children's Services our focus has certainly shifted. The Alberta response has become our way of doing business. It recognizes a range, a continuum of services that are necessary to achieve better outcomes for children and youth. With two new leading-edge pieces of legislation we've transformed our approach to dealing with the problems our children, youth, and families face. I'm referring to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. Today more than ever we concentrate on building strong families and communities.

Trends have changed. Priorities have changed. To reflect those changes, we must also change the way we spend our money. We now focus on a comprehensive system of community supports that promote a variety of care options to give children and youth safe, nurturing, and permanent homes. Fewer children are coming into the direct care of our government. We're providing more services sooner to families, Mr. Chair, and our outcomes are better.

With this year's budget we'll be able to continue building on our successes. In 2006-07 this government is investing a total of \$918.5 million towards children, youth, and families in Alberta. It has an increase of \$99.9 million from last year. It is a budget that we know will give us the ability to continue promoting the development and well-being of children, youth, and families, keeping children, youth, families safe and protected and promoting healthy communities for children, youth, and families.

Today I'd like to share some of the highlights of this year's budget with you. We're investing \$147 million in child care, \$91.6 million towards caring for children with disabilities, \$32.4 million towards the prevention of family violence, and \$17.1 million in resources that support parents in giving their children a healthy start in life.

A significant increase in this year's budget is due to the federal child care funding, which will remain in place until March 31, 2007. Our spending target for this year includes federal transfers of \$85.3 million for the early learning and child care initiative that the former federal government introduced last year. However, we have since been informed by the new federal government that this initiative will be cancelled after the '06-07 fiscal year. This decision by the federal government came too late in Alberta's budget process to determine the possible implications for Children's Services future spending plans. The figures for 2007-08 and 2008-09 each currently include \$117 million for the original federal funding, learning, and

child care initiative transfer, that will no longer be provided by the federal government.

3:10

It's important, Mr. Chair, to remember that this province had already invested \$70 million into child care funding before any news of federal funding last year. The federal funding simply allowed us to enhance and expand our existing provincial child care programs and services, and it's exciting to see such strong support for Alberta's five-point plan.

As you know, I met with the federal minister to explain our five-point plan and to advocate for that plan on behalf of Albertans. While we know that it's important for the new federal government to implement its \$1,200 a year program, we're working hard to find a win-win for our children and families. Mr. Chair, I will continue to advocate on behalf of children, family, and child care providers in this province to identify the funding that will ensure quality, choice, and flexibility in child care. We know that at times it's hard for parents and families to carry the responsibility of raising a child on their own. We're committed to helping parents give their children the best start in life. Through a continuum of supports that promote effective parenting skills, knowledge, and healthy child development, we want to connect parents to the community services and resources that will help them get the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to build strong, healthy families.

This year we're spending \$17 million on parenting resources. It's an increase of nearly \$5 million to establish and operate nine new parenting centres, bringing our network of parenting centres to a total of 45 across the province. Here Alberta parents can access important services in early childhood development and care, parent education, family support, and information and referrals.

To help families meet the ongoing challenges of caring for a child with a disability, we'll invest an additional \$8.8 million. More and more children and families are accessing our support under the new Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. We want to build our successes by increasing our resources and expanding our services for children with disabilities, particularly those in rural and isolated areas of our province. Within this year's additional funding we'll direct \$1.3 million to enhance resources in the rural and isolated areas for respite resources, personal, behavioural, and developmental aide supports, and specialized services for children with severe disabilities. These services are important so we can keep supporting families who care for their children with disabilities at home and improve family functioning and child well-being.

The prevention of family violence and bullying is a priority not only for this ministry but the entire government. It's exciting to lead the cross-ministry strategy on the issue as we continue to move forward and take action. At Children's Services we can't forget that one of our core businesses is to keep families safe. In 2006-07 we'll invest \$32.4 million to support and protect those experiencing or at risk of suffering family violence. We want to make sure that all families in every part of the province at risk of violence have a safe place to stay when they need one. Yes, Mr. Chair, there are times when shelters are full, but let me make it very clear when I say that no one is ever sent away without help. Keeping families safe from family violence is the number one priority for every shelter across this province.

With our stakeholders we're taking action to make sure that shelters can continue to provide needed services, including an additional \$400,000 in funding to continue making emergency support and accommodations available. This additional funding means that Children's Services will provide \$21.8 million to women's shelters this year and will fund a total of 489 beds across the province.

A province-wide review of the women's emergency shelter program is currently under way. We're talking to women's shelter staff and Albertans who receive their services to make sure that we have the right services in the right places and at the right time. We also provide \$600,000 to support HomeFront in Calgary, a community agency dedicated to improving the way domestic violence cases are handled. It relies on a co-ordinated community approach to provide support and assistance to victims of domestic violence. HomeFront is truly working miracles, helping families to break the cycle of family violence.

With increasing advances in technology we face increased pressures to protect children and youth from sexual exploitation. You don't have to read very far in the newspaper to know what's happening. Just last month we heard about an international investigation into a child pornography website managed right here in Edmonton, trading images of child pornography and showing live webcasts of child rape.

Protecting children and youth from sexual exploitation continues to be a priority for our ministry. Spending in this important area has increased by \$1.1 million, or 21 per cent, since 2004-05. This year our budget shows a slight decrease in this area because of a one-time administrative cost for the program last year. This decrease has no impact on program delivery. In fact, we show an increase in the number of children we're serving through PCHIP, and we will be expanding our awareness programs.

Some of the most rewarding moments of this ministry are when we hear the success stories about young adults who were previously in our care. For many this successful transition to adulthood comes as a result of further education, something we make possible for them through the advancing futures bursary program. We provide financial support to children who have been or continue to be in our care to help them attain a degree or learn a trade through postsecondary apprenticeship or other training programs. By providing the youth in our care with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed, we can help them realize their dreams and ambitions, things they may have otherwise never imagined possible.

Since the program began, we've awarded 529 bursaries, but we could be doing so much more. We want to increase our uptake in this program so that we're reaching as many youth as possible. That's why this year we're providing an additional \$900,000, for a total of \$4.1 million, to the advancing futures bursary program. With this increase we hope to award over 500 bursaries in 2006-07 alone.

Family and community support services play a big role in Alberta. We're really proud of FCSS and all of the great things their programs are doing for communities across the province. No other province has a similar working partnership between the provincial government, municipalities, and Métis settlements. Our program is the envy of provinces across Canada and internationally, and we're thrilled to see that our FCSS communities continue to grow. Right now a total of 303 municipalities and Métis settlements are organized into 199 local FCSS programs. People province-wide can access the wealth of services provided through FCSS.

We want to make sure that FCSS programs continue doing the great things they do for Albertans. They will receive a \$3 million increase this year to provide for projected increases in the cost of delivering services and population growth across this province. Over the last five years FCSS grants have increased by 61.5 per cent. With this year's \$3 million increase we'll support FCSS programs across Alberta with a total of \$68 million in funding.

The key to accomplishing all of the great things I've told you about today is the work of our regional child and family services authorities. It's through our CFSA's that we are able to deliver

quality service for children, youth, and families across Alberta. This year they will receive \$650.9 million to do that: child intervention services, child and youth financial support, family support for children with disabilities, child care, early intervention, and other community-based services. This is almost \$40 million more than last year and represents 70.9 per cent of the total ministry budget.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to share with you some of the things we're doing this year at Children's Services. We're clearly committed to doing everything we can for Alberta's children, youth, and families. We've dedicated a total of \$433.8 million to promote their development and well-being, \$465.4 million to keep them safe and protected, and \$19.3 million to promote healthy communities in which they can live.

I'd now like to ask the MLA for Calgary-Hays, who is the chair of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, to please provide an update. Afterwards I am happy to try and answer any questions you have related to the Children's Services '06-07 budget, and I'll be pleased to provide answers in writing to any outstanding questions that I can't answer today. Thank you for your time.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the first hour is normally allocated between the minister and members of the opposition. However, there are six minutes left in the 20 minutes that is allocated to the minister. So, hon. member, Calgary-Hays, I'll recognize you for the next six minutes.

3:20

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister. There are approximately 1,700 facilities under the jurisdiction of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. The committee is currently reviewing a cross-section of facilities including daycares, out-of-school facilities, foster homes, child and youth social care facilities, and women's emergency shelters. At these facilities we are the eyes and the ears for the hon. Minister of Children's Services. When we conduct reviews, we interview service recipients such as children in care, their families and guardians, and service providers. We hear about the services provided and whether or not clients are satisfied. If there are any concerns about the quality of care at these facilities, our members flag them for follow-up by the appropriate authorities. Upon request from the hon. minister we also conduct investigations at facilities and where necessary provide recommendations to improve service delivery.

The committee has a seven-year visit plan to ensure that they conduct reviews in all regions on a rotating basis. This year we will conduct 225 reviews. Our members will visit facilities in southwest Alberta, northwest Alberta, northeast Alberta, Calgary and area, Edmonton and area, and the Métis settlements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's been 40 years since the creation of the first of the special sector ministries in Alberta. The Social Credit government of Ernest C. Manning created the ministry of youth at the same time it lowered the provincial voting age from 21 to 19. The first minister was the hon. Bob Clark, later Alberta's first Information and Privacy Commissioner.

About the same time, the federal government brought in a minister responsible for the status of women. Ottawa already had two special sector ministries responsible for veterans' affairs and for immigrants and immigration. Then some of the provinces added ministers responsible for seniors and finally for children's services. Women, children, youth, seniors, and veterans all represent sectors for which

government has certain responsibilities for persons who are or were vulnerable and have particular needs not being addressed in the mainstream at the time.

Though there may be a tendency to want to group women, youth, and children together, there is one significant difference. Children are one group who are not only vulnerable but who have no vote or voice in our political system. The first children for whom the province was responsible, long before there was a children's ministry, were a particularly vulnerable lot, those who had no families of their own and lived in foster homes, orphanages, and other institutions. Our responsibility to do something for them came not only from necessity because they had nowhere else to turn; it was part of the social conscience pioneered by churches and religious institutions and enjoined by the biblical reminder to tend the widow, plead for the fatherless.

Those included in today's Children's Services are still vulnerable and represent an even larger cross-section of society. We have not only the vital and emergent services for children who are wards of the Crown but issues and programs such as child care, and these are not frills but collective responsibilities, a result of the choices we have made and the economy we have built that requires most families to have more than one parent in the workforce in order to meet the costs of adequate food, clothing, and shelter. The phrase "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" is especially applicable to children, not only our own children but all children in our society.

Children bring us face to face with our own humanity. Our neglect of them in time and attention as well as in material needs reflects our neglect of human values. Giving due attention to children's needs, growth, and vulnerability involves far more than specific programs and institutions administered by the Ministry of Children's Services; it involves most ministries and practically all the major aspects of public policy, including environment, education, health, justice, recreation, and culture.

I would like to thank the hon. minister and her staff for the work they do in protecting our children. It is a challenge and a wonderful opportunity to seek to provide the best options and choices for Alberta families. I appreciate the opportunity I've had to participate in support of this ministry. I'm also grateful for the good working relationship we have established. It is an honour to speak about the budget and priorities for Children's Services, and I commend the ministry for many good initiatives and recognizing needs, new ones as well as old.

I want to talk first about an issue that is of primary importance in this province especially at this time, and that is child care. It is disappointing that the new federal government lacks long-term commitment to quality child care for children and families. The Speech from the Throne did not even mention quality care. There was no sense of direction for the country in terms of developing and nurturing the potential of young children and supporting their families. The new federal government plan for a direct payment to parents is shortsighted when the research so strongly supports investment in quality programs in the all-important early years. A small taxable allowance to parents guarantees nothing but a bit of extra cash to buy a service that may not be available in their community and has no guarantee of quality.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Our federal government is rushing to keep an election promise at the expense of dishonouring the important commitments already made to the provinces. So much work has already been done in communities across the country. Governments, early learning and child care organizations and leaders, parents and practitioners have

been working together for years to finally come up with a concrete action plan based on signed bilateral agreements to build quality child care across the country. Dismantling these child care deals is having serious consequences for the thousands of children on waiting lists.

The Canadian Child Care Federation is Canada's largest early learning and child care organization, a vibrant partnership of 21 provincial/territorial child care organizations representing over 11,500 members, including child care practitioners working in centres and family child care academics, parents, and policy-makers. CCCF is committed to excellence in early learning and child care through best and promising practices, capacity building and collaborations, networks and partnerships. It is their view that it is more urgent than ever that all government parties work together toward a vision that reflects the reality of today's family and the early learning needs of Canada's youngest citizens. What is needed is a deepened, lengthened, and permanent investment in early learning and child care in the coming budget.

Mr. Chairman, the greatest learning takes place in the earliest years of life. Here a child not only learns how to orient him or herself in the world but faces the basic question of value, whether he or she is loved and nurtured for what she is or what she does to satisfy others, whether she is central in other's attention and affection or somewhere on the periphery. On the basis of this, early education curriculum is structured and systems are put in place. Is it better spending to provide the initial supports in having a parent on-site at home or quality and qualified support if required than possibly spending huge amounts for remediation and therapy down the road?

There was a hope last year when the provincial governments and the federal government signed an agreement with the new commitments that the federal government was making with respect to children's services, daycare services in particular. The provinces would receive new funds, which they would then use in co-operation with each other to provide high-quality daycare services, quality that would be measured, and the services would be provided in daycare centres that are primarily there to provide quality services and not there to operate in order to primarily maximize their returns on their investment. In other words, these services will be funded adequately by two levels of government, federal and provincial. Secondly, these services would be universally available. Any expert that you talk to who has done work on child care or on early child development tells you that any money spent on quality child care and early childhood development and education is a return later on, so it's an investment worth making.

If we were to look at it purely from the point of view of economic returns – and I'm sure that all of us agree that there's more to it than just economic returns when you think about children – children's welfare is far more important than merely the economic returns. We know that 70 to 75 per cent of parents with very young children are participating in the labour force, and they have children that need care when they themselves are at work, and 70 to 75 per cent of the parents who are working want to have their children in daycares which are appropriately funded, are appropriately staffed, are safe places, and where children not only can be babysat but can in fact learn and engage in early childhood development programs, daycares that are not only properly funded but are staffed with people who are appropriately educated and trained.

3:30

A lack of funding has been the greatest problem faced by the child care sector in Alberta. The five-point plan established by Alberta addressed the concern by raising wages and accreditation funding for

daycare centres. The maximum income for families to receive full subsidy was increased by 25 per cent. More funding was given to provide opportunities for children with disabilities, and stay-at-home parents were provided a new subsidy, up to a hundred dollars per month for each preschool-aged child to participate in early childhood development programs. Along with this, supports for parents and the early intervention programs and services, including development and screening, have been improved.

I have some questions for the minister regarding child care. Has the minister made any progress in her discussion with her federal counterparts regarding Alberta's early learning and child care agreement that was signed with the previous federal government? I know that you told me there are some meetings coming up, but I'm wondering if you've had any further discussions since we talked. What plan does the minister have for the future of child care in Alberta if the previous agreement is really and truly eliminated in 2007? Given that the federal funding helped to increase child care wages in Alberta, will the minister commit to ensuring that these wages are not rolled back? Let's not go backwards. Let's go forward and keep the gains that we have made with the national daycare agreement.

In the business plan, page 97, strategies 1.3 and 1.4: can the minister commit today to ensuring that these enhancements to the child care accreditation program and training standards for child care professionals will proceed despite the change in Ottawa? I'm wondering: has the minister met with the provincial child care workers recently to hear their concerns? Child care workers need to be valued in this province. They need to be valued anywhere. There is no more important work than child care. Can the minister assure the child care sector that all of the gains that were realized in 2005 will not be lost? The results of a poll conducted by Public Interest Alberta were released today, indicating what we know, that the majority of Albertans oppose Prime Minister Harper's new child care plan and favour the previous federal agreement. Is the minister committed to protecting the interest of Albertans in this regard? Is she or will she be fighting to maintain the previous agreement with Ottawa?

As I continue talking about child care, I'd like to have you all look at out of school care because it is important too. This is an area that needs provincial support and subsidies and standards that match the expectations of daycare centres. Families need the support of the state, industry, and the rest of society. That's us. We need to provide the infrastructure, the money, and the moral and emotional support that can help young families do the work from which we will all benefit. The problem with after school care is that subsidies are needed for many families so that school-aged children will not have to be latchkey kids.

In Edmonton the city's program works well; however, parents in Sherwood Park cannot access subsidies for their school-aged children. Calgary has made it a priority, but it's a problem in many other areas. The only fair way to do it would be to have a province-wide program or have the municipalities all mandated to provide it. They get the money but choose to spend it in other ways.

In municipalities where out of school care is provided, it is done so through FCSS funding based on local decisions to allocate resources to out of school care. These municipalities, however, cannot meet the increasing demand for out of school care, and other municipalities simply cannot afford to offer the much-needed program. The patchwork provision of out of school care is ineffective and not nearly meeting increasing needs. Since Children's Services already monitors and licenses out of school care, why doesn't the ministry take over the program and provide adequate resources and supports to make it an effective program that truly

meets the needs of children and families in Alberta? As I understand it, out of school care is provided by the municipalities through their FCSS funding. I know that right now there's a really big advocacy effort to have this pushed into provincial responsibilities thereby freeing up some of the FCSS dollars for other initiatives. Can the minister tell us if this will be happening?

Another area of concern for me is related to youth shelters. Youth shelters have no source of stable funding other than grants that they get from year to year, and that is not enough. The province has announced a review of this, but why do we have to wait for a review when all the agencies have been asking for the same thing that horse racing gets, which is steady, sustainable funding from year to year? My understanding is that the funding is very piecemeal and their administrators end up spending a lot of time trying to figure out which different grant program to apply to this year and trying to get them up to the level of funding they need to operate. I know that many, many hours are spent with fundraising.

Does this government have a plan for youth shelters and how they are funded? What programs are going to be introduced to ensure that the workers and agencies that care for these children are going to have the stable funding required to provide that environment? I hear that there's a need to provide some funds, either through the Wild Rose Foundation or the Muttart Foundation, to bring the youth shelter managers together in meetings to talk about best practices and allow them to learn from each other. I think that this will be timely when the youth shelter review committee releases its report and recommendations, and I don't know when that's going to be. If shelter managers have a chance to come together once or twice a year, such as groups do that deal with safe communities or agriculture, it would go a long way in helping them to learn from each other about effectively using resources.

Another concern I have when I talk to shelter staff is that they express a concern about the lack of service providers and the lack of support the government shows for the marginalized people of this province. Yet again they mention the horse-racing industry getting the 40 per cent increase. This just doesn't make sense. Service provision industry workers such as youth workers, personal care workers are paid less than any other industry. The people that work in some shelters make the same amount now as those working at Tim Hortons. I don't think that's right. Our children are a precious resource, and they deserve the best we can give them. The lack of stable and predictable funding places a heavy toll on shelter staff to fund raise.

I know that we have youth in transition programs, services, and resources that Alberta's Children's Services provides or offers to youth between the ages of 18 and 22 who have intervention status or an agreement with the director. The goal is to ensure that these youth have a transition to independence plan. The plan addresses such things as their educational and career plans and life skills development. The plan must address the youth's living arrangements and identify family and community connections necessary to support the youth as he or she transitions into adulthood.

However, some shelters tell me that their fundraising provides some funds that allow them to assist work with teens that do not have child welfare status. This is another issue: youth without status who are homeless. Youth homelessness has been identified as a growing national issue by individual researchers, by the federal government's national homeless initiative, and on and on by countless service agencies who work with street-involved youth.

Identifying the complete, accurate number of kids on the street at any one time in Canada is a difficult thing, but the count right now coming from our national government is approximately one-third of the total homeless population, or about 60,000 per year. On any

given night data from the national homeless initiative states that approximately 11,000 youth are homeless. A report providing recommendations for the Calgary nonstatus homeless youth study tells us that a total of 186 youth were surveyed during the period of the study recently, and of those 102 fit within the parameters of their research focus. The conclusion was that it allowed them to produce a verifiable count of 354 individuals in Calgary under the age of 18 who do not have child welfare status and who have identified themselves as homeless.

3:40

Homeless youth are a heterogeneous population. They come from all quadrants of the city and the province. We need a provincial response to the issue of child and youth homelessness which would begin with the commitment of funding to resource community-based transitional housing programs and supports for children who do not have child welfare status. There's a pressing need to expand the number of available beds and the continuum of services available to this population. Addressing child and youth homelessness is a central prevention strategy in efforts to eradicate homelessness.

Looking again at youth shelters, besides predictable and sustainable funding, another issue is the need for qualified staff in our shelters. I am told that we need more on-call workers that can help with assessment and referral of youth. Staff at the shelters are generous and are good enough to know when they are not able to help, but there's often no one to call to give some help and guidance in casework. There's also no one to ask for help on behalf of youth. I can talk about cases I've heard of where there are kids in shelters who have lost a parent in a car crash or who are remembering sexual abuse from earlier years. The staff do not feel qualified to deal with this. That's just wrong. We must provide agencies with enough money to be able to provide services to youth that don't fit into the nuclear family unit. Can the minister tell us what level of funding will be dedicated specifically for youth emergency shelters in the province?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thought the minister was going to respond first. Was the minister not going to respond?

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry. The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I truly do appreciate your support. I would like to touch on some of the areas that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods brought forward. Of course, her first issue is child care, and like she indicated in her speaking notes, we've had several discussions on that particular area.

She asked about the discussion with my federal counterparts. I believe the last time she was in my office I explained to her that when the minister was appointed to her cabinet position, I think it was less than 48 hours after that that we placed a call in to her in regard to the urgency of having some discussion on the child care initiative. From that we set up an appointment, and we flew to Ottawa and met with her and talked to her about the issue of child care, specifically on issues that we felt needed to be addressed. First of all, Alberta's five-point plan, which has been resoundingly successful and accepted by Albertans: we wanted to talk to her about the future funding of that particular initiative.

Besides that we had many, many other questions to talk to her about in regards to the creation of the child care spaces that they were talking about and the money that was involved in that particular initiative. We had asked her about the fact that: who was going

to do the monitoring? Who was going to do the licensing? All of those questions we felt needed to be answered. We came back from Ottawa and within a couple of days sent a letter back to her asking what I consider several pointed questions about the issue of child care, the issue of the creation of spaces that they talked about. I believe it was about 125,000. I can tell the hon. member that at this particular time, on the date of the 13th of April, we have not had a response from her. We are continually discussing the initiative of our child care program.

She asked the question about wages, if the wages were going to be rolled back on the enhancement that we have already provided to the daycare providers in this province, that do an unbelievable, remarkable job and are what I consider second parents to us when we drop our children off. The answer is no. We have no intention of rolling back their wages.

She asked me if I had met with the child care association. The answer is yes. I met with them a couple of weeks ago. I don't have the date in front of me, but there were several from all over the province. Since then we had a very long discussion. They indicated that they were going to go to a meeting, the national meeting, and discuss their views about how they felt about the initiative of the agreement from the federal government. We have since sent them a letter of support. They wanted to have something in writing because of all the questions that they're getting from parents, from child care providers, so we have sent a letter of support and indicated that they would then be posting that particular letter at daycares so that the parents could see that Alberta is supportive of our five-point plan.

The new polls. That's just what I talked about. I have not personally seen the polls other than what was shared just before I came into question period. I believe the poll results were incredibly high at 87 per cent support or something for the child care plan that we're doing here. When I was scrummed by the press, they asked me if I was surprised. I said no, because that plan was derived from Albertans. We consulted heavily, and we will continue to push our plan. I can recall when I met with the federal minister. She said that Alberta was leading the pack across this country because it was so innovative.

The hon. member then talked about out of school care. We have had this discussion in the past, and I indicated to her that we're reviewing. The FCSS program is now being reviewed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. When I was in the meeting with the child care association, they brought that up about the after school program, and I indicated to them that we're well aware of it. We're well aware of the discussions on the after school program, but we're still at this point in time lobbying to just continue to keep our own child care program. That's one of our priorities. I said that it's not a dead issue, but it's not something that's on the front burner for us at this particular time; it's on the back burner, by which I mean, you know, if you've got two on the front and two on the back. We're going to continue looking at that particular initiative.

The social care facility act the hon. member referred to is currently being reviewed by Calgary-Fort. I expect to have that in my office within the next couple of months, and we'll go over that.

She talked at length – and I know this is dear to her heart – about the youth shelters and the review. The question she asked is: why are we doing the review? Well, I can tell the member that when I travelled the province last summer, I crossed the province as far south as you can go and as far north as you can go and made it a point to try and drop in on every kind of sector within the jurisdiction that I had been visiting, so that would be child care, women's shelters, youth shelters. I listened to them quite intently, and it was interesting to me about the different issues in different areas of the province that they're particularly dealing with.

I felt it was important to review the youth shelters on how they are conducting business because some of the things in the discussions when we were visiting the youth shelters struck me as good issues; some of them alarmed me in some way. I thought it was important for me that we do a review. We support the concept of the youth shelters. We support children and youth in this province. We realize that there is a category of youth if you can label them – and I don't like to label people as high risk. We have youth that are in transition. We have youth that are travelling across the country and may access a youth shelter. We have some youth in there that are going through a crisis with their parent. We have some youth in there that prefer not to live at home. We have some youth that have some issues whether it's a death of a parent, that you alluded to, or some social problems. So for me it's a bigger picture on how we're going to deal with the youth emergency shelters.

3:50

Listening to the staff about some of the issues, for example, they feel that the kids should be out of the shelter from 8 to 5, and at that particular time they're looking for work, they're in school, or they may be at AADAC: one of those things. Some of the comments that I heard: on one particular day there may be a youth that may be in some sort of a crisis, maybe showing some suicidal tendencies, and things like that. Should they be out of the shelter because that's the shelter rule at that particular time? You may find a youth wanting to access a shelter at 3 o'clock in the morning because of some sort of crisis situation. I can tell the member that from some of the things that cross my desk on a daily basis there are a lot of not very good or happy kind of homes, where there are some horrific things happening.

I really think that it's important to have that review, see what happens in that review, listen to the people who are working in the youth shelters and hear what they have to say on some of the ideas on how we can move forward, some of the recommendations. I find the greatest way to get good ideas is listening to the people that are working on the front line. So that's why it was important for me to have a youth shelter review, talk to the people who are working in the shelters, talk to the kids and hear what they have to say.

You referred to wages. I can tell the hon. member that I believe it was a year ago – and I don't want to be quoted on exact dates – I gave \$12 million to the agencies because I was well aware of that particular level in regard to trying to keep their wages comparable to some of the government. That was met with applause, and they were very, very pleased about that. The agencies felt that it was a good start because the wages have been a problem, trying to keep their staff because of competition.

But the sad thing in reality at this particular time is the fact that when you have a very vibrant economy – we've got daycare workers in Fort McMurray, for example, that you could be paying \$15 an hour, and they can walk across the street and make \$30 an hour working in the kitchen. It's not just a problem within the Department of Children's Services. It's a problem everywhere across this province because you have a hot economy. I don't think there is a street that you can walk down in either Edmonton or Calgary where you don't see help wanted ads. The restaurant businesses are having problems. The retail businesses are having problems. One of the things that has kept the daycare kind of steady is the fact that we increased their wages in the five-point plan.

You brought up the youth in transition. I can't tell you how proud I am about that particular program. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, who is the chair of the Youth Secretariat, has done an unbelievable job in regard to moving forward some of the issues of youth across this province. Under his leadership, under the secretar-

iat and the work that he's been doing about consulting right across the province, we have put together the Youth Advisory Panel. I believe there are 15 members on there, and they're from all walks of life, from right across the province. I can tell the hon. member that they don't waste any words. They're frank. They're honest. They feel that they are being listened to. That's one of the concerns we've heard in the past, that the youth in this province don't feel that they're being listened to.

We're extremely pleased. We've heard what you've talked about, in fact, about our success with the youth in transition and our bursary program and about the youth who don't have child welfare status. It's something that we've heard and we're looking at. But I'm extremely proud of our youth bursaries and what's been happening with our students that are graduating. I never would've thought they would end up where they are. One thing that the member did ask is that she mentioned, under that program, living arrangements. Under our bursary we do provide living arrangements for those particular youth.

The last thing she talked about was the youth homelessness. I can tell the hon. member that I saw the review. I believe it was done in 2005. I met with a homelessness foundation out of Calgary. We talked at length about how you reach those youth, how you identify those youth. When the hon. member and I met, I said that I think one of the things that we need to improve in our department is education so that youth in the province know what is available to them not only from the department but other sectors across government as far as my hon. colleague that sits next to me, what's available in his portfolio, or what's available through Health.

I can tell the member that we've got two high-risk projects going on, and I spoke to you about that when we met. I'm looking forward to seeing how that's going because it's a pilot project. But we have sent the homeless foundation all of the information we think is pertinent in regard to accessing what we offer and getting the word out on the street more.

I think that's just about all of the questions she asked, Chair. If not, like I said at the beginning when I spoke, anything that I've missed, as we did last year, we'll provide back in writing.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to start with thanking the minister for her introductory remarks and for her continued expression of concern for the interests of children in this province. She indeed does have responsibility for a portfolio which I think provides the most critical services for the children of this province, so I take her words very seriously and take the policies of the department very seriously. They require our close scrutiny and, after that, support so long as we think that those policies are the right ones to provide the services that our children need.

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has already asked several of the questions, and the minister has tried to answer some of those, so I'll try to not repeat. I was looking at the business plan – is it? – of the government. Let me see if I can get there very quickly so that I get the exact title here. The fiscal plan is what I'm talking about. Under Children's Services on page 24 there is a reference to what the minister has already in a sense talked about briefly, that Alberta must "actively participate in negotiations with the new federal government regarding future federal funding" for child care and early learning and child development services.

I'm curious about this. I ask the minister – she says that she will actively participate in negotiations – is it the bilateral negotiations that the minister is referring to here between this province and the federal government, or is it all provinces together engaging the

federal government in some negotiations? If it's simply a bilateral matter, then it's not a question of just participating. I urge the minister to in fact say that she will engage the federal government in coming to some sort of conclusion on these negotiations that she has already started.

We can't lose time on this. We know that services for children not only in Alberta but all over Canada, particularly child care services, are one of the most undeveloped parts of our social and economic policy. Child care is deficient in supply, in the number of places available. It certainly raises very serious concerns about affordability of what is available, and certainly there are concerns about quality control. I think the minister's own five-point plan, that she released in October of last year, October 18, I think, if I'm right, acknowledges that action needs to be taken, that the government needs to come up with a concrete action plan to address some of these concerns and some of these deficiencies.

4:00

I applaud the minister for having developed that five-point plan, which certainly indicates an attempt to seriously address the question of quality, wages for people who work in the field, and their professional development as well as accrediting more and more of the child care facilities so that they meet standards. I notice that the minister acknowledges that these are problems, and she has by way of a five-point plan indicated that she's willing to take action.

That five-year plan related action, Mr. Chairman, was facilitated by the signing of the agreement by this minister with the federal government prior to the last federal election, which resulted in the province of Alberta getting a large amount of money. The minister will tell me exactly: \$117 million a year, I think the minister noted, from federal transfers in this regard. As part of that plan I think it's certainly more than \$70 million. Those new additional funds made it possible for the minister to take some initiatives that have received the support of, well, the vast majority of Albertans.

Today's poll that was released by Public Interest Alberta and the Alberta Federation of Labour shows both support for the federal/provincial agreement that our minister signed on behalf of us and the children of Alberta with the federal government last year and also support for the actions that the minister proposes to take in order beef up the quality of the child care services in this province and move them in the direction of more than just babysitting to beginning to focus on early childhood development, which is, by any measure – whether you look at the work of experts on child care, whether you look at the work of educational experts, all say that those early years are extremely critical and significant for the later developmental success of our children through school on to the labour market and society in general.

What I'm trying to do is to on the one hand compliment the minister for using the additional funds to do exactly what needed to be done. Now that those funds are in jeopardy, the minister cannot assure this House that those additional funds from the federal government for this purpose will be available. It looks like they won't be. So then my question to the minister is: what are the plans that she has in place to replace the loss of those dollars that would have come to us from the federal government had the agreement that she signed been honoured by the government that succeeded the previous government?

If the minister is – and I know she's serious about this. She says that she's negotiating with the federal minister, but the federal minister told her, it seems to me, and the minister has just said, that those funds are not likely to be forthcoming after this fiscal year. Then will the minister join with other provincial governments and with Albertans in this province to send a clear message to the federal government that the federal government must not cancel the

agreement over the next five years as was planned, that the minister signed, I guess, for the first two years? I would like to get the minister to address this issue as clearly as she can. Would she join publicly with other provincial governments to say to the federal government that she is advising the federal government not to cancel those programs and that that program was very, very valuable and they must be kept in place?

Secondly, will the minister, in fact, if she needs help from this House, bring forward a motion in this Assembly seeking the support of all parties represented in this House for her support for that agreement and for her ability to urge the federal government to respect and honour the agreement that Ottawa had signed with the provinces? I would certainly be willing to work with the minister in this House to get such a motion passed. If she would rather have this motion come from this side of the House, I'd be more than willing to take that initiative. I need the minister to address this issue head-on, say yes or no that she will in fact stand up for the children of Alberta on this issue regardless of who is in power in Ottawa.

What's really at issue is not the politics of this whole thing; what's at issue are the fundamental interests of our children. Those children, as the minister herself acknowledged by way of the five-point plan that she developed, are served best if that federal/provincial agreement that she was signatory to is honoured and respected and kept in place. That agreement is in danger. It will be gone if we don't speak out on this. So there's a need for us as a House, as a government, as a province to speak out on it and join our voice with the voices of those who want this agreement to be saved and properly funded.

The alternative Harper plan is simply not designed to address the issue of affordability, the issue of quality control, and the issue of availability of enough spaces. Supply side must be addressed. We need to create spaces in affordable, quality daycare places, where our very, very young children can get the services which will help to begin to learn the skills and engage in cognitive and social and personal development, which is critical to their education later on and to their success in life following that. So that's the question that I have for the minister.

The other questions: some of them are somewhat more specific. I notice that in the minister's budget there's a parenting resources initiative. If she would give us some information on that. There's quite a large increase, about 40 per cent, in that particular line item in the budget. I just want the minister to give us some information about where this money is going. I'm not opposed to it. It's a parenting resources initiative from \$12 million to \$17 million, so about a 40 per cent increase.

In the same vein there's a reduction in some protection of children from prostitution. There's a reduction in the budget, and I wonder if the minister would explain how she justifies that reduction. Is the exploitation of children through prostitution going down? Is it less of a problem today? What is it that explains the 6 per cent reduction in the monies available for this?

Mrs. Forsyth: I mentioned that in the speech, Raj.

Dr. Pannu: We need an explanation of it.

The second is the Child and Youth Advocate. There's, again, an 8 per cent cutback there, and we need to know why that is happening and what's the justification for the drawing of funds from advocacy. If anything, we have more children needing more and stronger advocacy. Why the reduction there?

4:10

The Children's Services 2003-2004 annual report, the department's own report, says that only about 55 per cent of assessed child

care facilities are found to be providing developmentally appropriate environments for children in their care. This is from page 42 of the department's own annual report. Now, with the possibility that the federal funds will disappear within a year, how will it impact the ability of the minister's department to improve this situation? Not all were assessed. Of child care facilities that were assessed, only 55 per cent were found to be providing developmentally appropriate environments. With the focus that the five-point plan of the minister shifts over to the developmental side of child care, are these deficiencies likely to stay in place or is the minister going to find funds elsewhere if her federal counterparts, in fact, withdraw from the agreement which would have provided a substantial amount of money to address these already existing deficiencies in the facilities that we have?

The issue of the caseloads of child care workers who intervene in difficult family situations or take care of children in government custody has been a major one. We know that caseloads have been increasing. As a result, the ability of social workers who do this very, very difficult work to provide the services on time, appropriately, and quality services has declined. Social workers have in fact been accused of failing in their duty to provide the most necessary and critical services. Would the minister please inform the House about how this budget addresses the issue of excessive and intolerable caseloads by social workers who provide these very critically important services to the minister? I was trying to find in the budget where I could see some attention paid to this specific problem, but it's very difficult in those numbers to really figure that out. The minister, I'm sure, knows the answers and would be in a position to provide some answers.

The last question that I have has to do with the Edmonton region child and family services authority and comparing it with Calgary. Calgary has a larger population, we have a smaller population, yet the budget for the Edmonton area child and family services authority is perhaps 50 per cent more. I'm just curious about what explains this. I have no specific questions, but it did pique my curiosity about why this huge difference in spite of the fact that the Calgary region has a larger population to look after than Edmonton area. Maybe it's the demographics of the two cities. Maybe it's the composition of the population, diversity of it, whether it's the income levels. I don't know what it is, but maybe the minister can respond to those.

An Hon. Member: It's a combination.

Dr. Pannu: Well, let's see what the minister knows and what she's willing to share with us on this.

So with these questions, Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down, and I'll look forward to the minister addressing some of these questions. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate having the time to respond to the hon. member. Again, we're going to go back to the child care issue. I guess that, if I may, I'm going to take the hon. member back in time to when the previous minister, who is the minister of health, started the negotiation with the federal government. At that particular time when she was negotiating, they were negotiating on what they call a quad principle. They had an agreement from all the provinces at that time, accepting a quad principle right across the country.

Following that, we had an election. We also had a change in cabinet. I ended up becoming the Minister of Children's Services so was honoured enough to go to my first federal/provincial/territorial

meeting. Now I believe we're going back to about January of '05. The minister at that particular time, Minister Dryden, came into the meeting where all the provinces and territories were sitting and more or less said: this is the agreement that we're all going to sign. I guess it was a national agreement if you can say that. It was an agreement that was supposed to fit all provinces.

If the member recalls, I was painted at that particular time – and I believe it was the minister from Quebec – the black sheep for taking the national child care program off the rails and not getting an agreement right across the provinces and territories on that. I made it very clear to the minister at that time that what Alberta wanted was what was best for Albertans and that the agreement that we would be signing would be in consultation with Albertans on how Albertans wanted us to come up with a plan. Thus far, you see the five-point plan.

What I must remind the hon. member is that even prior to that agreement being signed, we've always had regulated, quality child care in this province. It didn't just come up a year ago that we all of a sudden have regulated, quality child care. It's always been a priority of the government to have regulated, quality child care in this province. In the accreditation program that we have since brought forward over the last, I believe, 18 months, 97 per cent of the child care or daycare providers in this province have been signed up to become accredited. That takes child care one step further, and it provides additional training and gives them incentives in regard to accreditation.

I don't know how much more clear I have to make it to this member. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods knows our support for the child care agreement and what we signed on the five-point plan. I told the hon. member that I had met with – and the name eludes me at this point in time. I believe it's the Alberta child care association. There were probably 15 or 20 of their members from across the province at the meeting I had with them. We talked about several issues, strategies to move Alberta's five-point plan forward. I wrote them a letter of support. I said: pass this on, that Alberta is supportive of the five-point plan. They went to a national meeting. So Alberta's support on the child care is something that is even at their national level.

I would encourage the hon. member, as I did the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, as a child care critic to write the federal government with your support. They need to understand. We have also said to our critics and to every letter that crosses our desk, which are many, in regard to the cancellation of our child care agreement: you need to let the federal government know. It is they that are cancelling the program. We had \$70 million last year. We have \$66 million this year. They then planned to stop our agreement. The third year would have brought us, I believe, about \$117 million and then four and five.

So it's important that if this is an issue not only for the government but for the opposition, they need to make that known to the federal government. We will continue to advocate on behalf of the children, families, and providers in this province. You know, I have to say that – all bragging aside, because this was not a plan that the minister made; it was a plan that was based on what Albertans want, and it's a good plan – it's probably the most innovative plan across this country dealing with the issue of child care.

4:20

I think the other thing that's important to discuss when we talk about child care is the platform that the Harper government brought forward on child care. It was \$1,200 per year for every child under the age of six, I think it was. A hundred dollars a month, which, times 12, works out to \$1,200. They also alluded to the fact of

dealing with, I think, somewhere between 125,000 and 145,000 daycare spaces. They were going to collaborate with businesses. Small businesses, big businesses: they were going to provide an incentive of \$10,000 to that business to create daycare spaces. Well, you have a lot of questions to ask about that particular. Is that \$10,000 a year? For every business that starts opening up a daycare, there are operating dollars that to need to be followed after that. Who's going to monitor them? Who's going to pay for the monitoring? Who's going to pay for the licensing? Who's going to pay for the accreditation?

Now, do you really think, if you've got a small town in Alberta, that you're going to be able to open up a daycare? I think that's a nice thing about the Alberta plan. We have the kin child care program, where if you're in a rural area or a remote area and you don't have access to a daycare, we will pay grandma or grandpa money if mom and dad have to go to work.

So there are many, many questions on the discussion of daycare spaces. There are more questions, I think, in regard to the pinch other provinces are feeling across this country in regard to daycare. For example, Ontario's deal was the fact that all the money they got, they directly handed down to the municipalities for the municipalities to make the decisions on daycare. Every province across this country that has taken their money has decided what they're going to do with it, so it's a problem.

I want to just say one thing. I have to remind members of the House that the Harper government won every seat in this province. They won every seat in this province on their five points, where they talked about accountability; they talked about child care. Some of the other things they had in their platform escape me right now, but that was accepted by Albertans. What I think the problem is on that, in talking to Albertans, is that they thought they were going to get both. So I think that's a message that we have said to the hon. federal minister, and we'll continue talking to them.

You asked about the increase in budget on – I believe it was a line item, but it escapes me.

Dr. Pannu: It's the parenting resources.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you. That increase is going to nine more parent link centres this year. Some money is to go for training tools, resources, and other supports to the parent link centres, accreditation to the parent link centres, and home visitation, et cetera.

You talked about – and I did speak about this, hon. member, in regard to the reduction on sexual exploitation. I talked about \$500,000 of that being for one time to update their computer systems, as is the child advocate IT development. Neither of those dollars will have any effect on the delivery of services. We wanted to get their computer systems and all of that up to snuff. So the decrease has no impact on funding to the Child and Youth Advocate's day-to-day operations. What the new system does – that was the one time – is allow the advocate to meet the requirements for his information collecting and case management requirements, the ability to manage the program.

You talked about caseworkers and the caseloads. I can tell the hon. member that we're developing a new casework practice model. It's actually quite exciting. It's a model that is being developed with staff, with the regions, and of course through work with the ministry, but a great deal of it is in consultation with the staff, on how to deliver services better. Paperwork is a problem with caseworkers, the enormous amount of paperwork. We heard that when we were travelling the province since we brought in the new act, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. We're looking forward to seeing that model come up to my desk and looking at that.

The Edmonton region. I can tell the hon. member that we have had unbelievable co-operation from all the regions in this province

in regard to what's working in their area, what isn't working in their area, how to make things work better, sharing their successes. Their budgets were developed from the regions. So the regions were the ones that developed their budgets in consultation with the people that are working in the field. It was very exciting to see the regions get together and, you know, look at their budgets and develop their particular budgets on the needs of the people that they're trying to serve.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to just take a few minutes again on child care, daycare although there are so many other important areas under your ministry that we need to discuss. I, too, will support any action that we can take as a government in Alberta to let Ottawa know that Albertans want and expect continuation of the national daycare agreement. I do have a plan to write a letter and a plan to send the hundreds of letters I have received to Prime Minister Harper, who needs to remember that he has a minority government and that he is accountable to all Canadians. So I support what you were saying, Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and, of course, our hon. minister.

Going on to other areas. We know that the welfare of children is strongly linked to the nonoffending parent's safety and emotional well-being. We need to pay some attention, I guess, to the need for secure shelters for women who are abused. These places must be safe. Often women believe from experience that they are not safe anywhere because they will be found. I reviewed the Alberta shelter statistics from 2002, information from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, and it's just appalling. I won't go through all the numbers, but one number that bothered me so much was the number of children turned away that year: 9,017. This is a tragedy. What part of the Children's Services budget addresses this tremendous need? What do we need to do to ensure safety and security for women such as these and their families?

Another area I'm concerned about is the need for detoxification help and rehabilitation for children who have been abusing drugs and who are addicted. Many times we have youth in the shelters that need to detox and need to talk to an addictions counsellor, but the counsellors are booked up for weeks, and often there's no room at the detox beds for these youth. I've talked with lots of parents who've expressed frustration, a sense of hopelessness because of the valuable time they lose trying to get their children into the system to get help. Bill 202, that was passed last year, was a step in the right direction, but there are real concerns about accessing treatment and then the transition period after treatment. What do we have in place to evaluate the results of what we stated in Bill 202 and to assess the effectiveness of detaining youth with addiction problems?

I'm aware of three addiction treatment programs in the Edmonton region. AADAC has four voluntary detox beds and eight treatment beds at the Yellowhead Youth Centre in Edmonton, and those beds, of course, are accessible through AADAC. Chimo Youth Retreat Centre is a not-for-profit agency and has a six-bed voluntary addictions treatment program in Edmonton, operated under a funding arrangement with Children's Services and AADAC. Bosco Homes operates a 12-bed drug addictions program in Parkland county on a fee-for-services basis accessed by various Alberta child welfare authorities and other health and social services authorities from outside of Alberta.

4:30

Every community in the greater Edmonton area has community initiatives advocating for more comprehensive youth addictions

treatment services. My own constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods has had a number of town halls on this issue. Community newspapers and letters from schools and parents are irrefutable evidence as communities such as Leduc, Beaumont, Strathcona county, Fort Saskatchewan, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Parkland county, Devon, St. Albert, Drayton Valley, and Edson, and as I say, even my own constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods organize public information meetings in order to address the ever-growing drug menace stalking our kids.

Municipal and community leaders are concerned, and the demand for more and better addiction services across Alberta continues unabated. The meagre response of 24 voluntary treatment beds between Calgary and Edmonton cannot possibly address the obvious problems we are facing in combating addictions among our children and youth. A much broader coalition to combat this modern-day plague is needed.

AADAC does not have the experience of operating child and youth treatment programs. Many NGOs have operated treatment programs in Alberta for years, including drug and alcohol addiction services, yet they've been excluded in favour of the government-run AADAC monopoly. Is it not wise to get all possible stakeholders together to work on the addictions scourge? Many of the not-for-profit and charitable agencies have not only the expertise, the psychiatrists, the medical doctors, and staff trained in addiction treatment but also facilities, which the taxpayers do not have to pay to duplicate.

Addictions affect our communities, our families, our schools, our justice system, and our medical system. It might be useful to have a variety of addictions treatment providers if for no other reason than to discover best practices and cost efficiencies. These agencies are at a disadvantage because they cannot offer the same salaries and benefits as AADAC.

Agencies could operate programs and serve many more children, yet these agencies who have a range of strategies to deal with addictions, including teaching harm reduction and how to take care of oneself, are not getting the referrals. They have had good results, and they are accredited agencies. Why are we not involving them in our efforts to work with families coping with addiction?

Another important agency that promotes well-being for Albertans is FCSS, family and community support services. These are amazing people who have a terrifically challenging mandate. Under the FCSS Act and regulations, FCSS does not focus solely on children and families at risk. It is a universal program for all community residents. I know that we have three centres in Edmonton-Mill Woods, and I am very proud of the work they do. As such, FCSS collaborates at the local, regional, and provincial level with a wide range of government and nongovernment service providers to address the needs of the entire community. I'm very happy to see that Children's Services has increased the funding for this particular initiative. I wonder if the minister could provide us with some details of how this increase in funding will be used.

[Mr. Rodney in the chair]

In the budget press release it states that this additional money will be used to "expand services, particularly for . . . rural and isolated areas of our province." Can the minister tell us which communities specifically are being targeted? Can the minister tell us exactly how this money will be used to expand services? Estimates page 70, line 2.0.3, the family and community support services estimate is \$68.2 million, an increase of approximately 4 per cent from the 2005-06 budget. I know that FCSS is very happy with this increase in their funding; however, I was disappointed to see that this year's increase was less than 5 per cent.

Among the programs that are funded by FCSS are those that support homeless families moving into stable housing and prevention programs that assist families in staying housed. This is a tremendous challenge because of the number of homeless in this province. FCSS is a crucial organization that helps to improve Alberta's social infrastructure. I think a more significant financial commitment from this government would help to improve the already incredible preventive social service network that FCSS supports throughout the province. Can the minister tell us what the future holds for this important program?

In regard to the current FCSS program review, does the ministry intend to consider the additional comments section that is included in the review, and if so, will there be more money for projects to address them? We understand that the FCSS program review is not touching on the financial growth of FCSS. While funding increases about 2.7 per cent a year on average, what is the minister's commitment to significantly increasing the FCSS program budget to better support and improve, I would say, this program, which is much loved?

I also have a few questions about Alberta's promise. This initiative was established in April 2003 through an act of this Legislature. It is designed to encourage all sectors of the community to direct more resources to benefit our children and youth. I quote from the Alberta's Promise Partners' Report 2003.

Alberta's Promise's role is to facilitate partnerships between communities, businesses, foundations, service clubs and not-for-profit agencies, who together share the vision of making Alberta the best place in the world to raise children.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I have some questions about this initiative and its funding. Many communities already have well-established and effective networks for communication and partnerships with each other and with the private sector. It seems that the accountability of the Alberta's promise initiative may result in increased demand on human and financial resources with very little benefit over what is already happening in the communities. I'm wondering if the provincial funds dedicated to the promotion of this initiative could otherwise have been redirected to community agencies that are already there for direct service. Given that Alberta's promise is not involved in fund development nor does Alberta's promise deliver programs to children and youth, why has the minister chosen to increase funding for this initiative at the expense of others?

I also want to talk about the wonderful work of foster parents in this province. These people are a precious resource that must be regarded with respect and support. I'm concerned that the move to place many of these homes under agencies is at the expense of the foster families. Can you explain the apparent difference in funds given to foster families for children that they have that are in the same categories of needs as compared to the funds that are given to agencies for those children?

One other question that I have goes back to that controversial quota system for the adoption of children in the ministry's care. You stated that it was in fact a performance measure. I'm wondering if you can explain why this performance measure is not included in the business plan?

You know, as I talk with constituents and stakeholders throughout the province, I am disturbed by a common theme of fear. People are afraid to talk because of their concern about action that may be taken against them individually or against the agency they represent. They are concerned about repercussions. I know this because they tell me this. This is Alberta, the richest province, probably the richest land

on Earth in terms of resources and material wealth, yet we have many who live in poverty, many who are dependent on the government for supports through no fault of their own. When they or their advocates ask for help, they should be treated with respect and dignity.

I have visited a number of facilities and talked with many individuals who are reluctant to stand up for what is right because they are afraid. Constituents have told me that they have been warned not to complain. One said that they had difficulty with an appeal and were given a few reasons. One reason was that they had spoken to an MLA about concerns. I'm not sure which MLA. These are people who are doing their best to live a quality life, some who are helping others meet their potential, and people who contribute to our province, to their province, in ways other than the material, yet they do not feel supported. They do not have confidence that they are appreciated or that they matter. I know that this is not your intention, but it is a sad commentary and an indicator that we must do better.

Thank you.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you. The questions from the opposition critic from Edmonton-Mill Woods are always very pointed, and I appreciate having the opportunity to answer some of them. Of course, I won't be able to answer all of them. I have staff, like I indicated at the beginning of the deliberation, that would get back to you.

The hon. member started talking about family violence. I can tell her that the issue of family violence and bullying, because I think they go together, is probably one of the number one priorities, that started with this government from a horrific murder/suicide in Red Deer and even before that very, very tragic case. At that particular time the Premier put together a round-table on family violence, and without a doubt it's probably one of the most successful cross-government ministries in government. We have so many departments involved on that initiative from Aboriginal Affairs, us, Community Development, Education, Health, Human Resources, Justice, Seniors, the Solicitor General, and more and more as you keep widening it. We keep trying to keep ahead of it.

This year we are giving \$32.4 million to the issue of family violence, which is an increase from last year's budget. You mentioned some stats that you referred to in regard to the turnaways. That's one of the things I thought that it was important to do a review of in women's shelters because turnaways for one shelter can be different from another shelter. I'd like to give you an example of how loosely or how difficult the term turnaways can be used. You could have a woman that is leaving an abusive situation, and she might hit shelter 1 in Calgary, and it's full. Then they will place a call, and they may try shelter 2, and it's full. Then they finally find a home for her in shelter 3. Well, each one of those is considered a turnaway when what we should be counting is if some person is completely turned away with no shelter facilities at all. I think numbers have to be done properly. I don't think double counting is something that should be considered as a turnaway. We know that there's a problem, but as I indicated in my speaking notes, no woman, or man, for that matter, is ever turned away if they're leaving a situation that is serious. If it happens that a shelter is full, we will find them other accommodation. This is very, very simple.

Then you talked about the safety issues. I visited many, many shelters over my visits last summer, and it's amazing the jobs that these people do in these shelters under very difficult situations. In

fact, one of the shelters we visited last summer was in a red alert, which means there was not only a threat to the woman who was in that particular shelter, there was a threat to the people who were working in the shelter. Obviously, the shelter went into a red alert. Very, very secure. The chances of somebody getting in are – nothing in life is impossible – nearly impossible.

What was amazing to me was how the shelter continued doing their business. The police were there just like that, ready to respond. They were well aware of the situation, and in seconds they were at the shelter making sure that the people within the shelter were safe. The abuser at that particular time – they were aware of the licence plate, all of those things – would be obviously taken away as soon as he entered the shelter.

One of the things that was innovative under our new child care program was to be able to provide some daycare resources within the shelter for when the children were visiting because three weeks – sometimes the women are in the shelter 21 days – can be a very, very difficult time. They were very, very excited about that.

Justice has initiated a new program, and we'll get more information about it. I'm not sure, but I think it's called ARTAMI, an Alberta response team in regard to high-risk people – I've got to stay away from the women and men scenario because we're seeing some numbers going up in regard to men who are being abused – so that they have a response when they know that an abuser is at a high risk and could cause some serious damage. It was very, very innovative.

The world family violence conference that we held last October was an unbelievable experience for me, over 1,100 participants from 31 countries. We had people from Dubai. They wanted to see our shelters. After they spent time touring some of the shelters, they went home, back to their country, and announced 30-plus shelters that they were opening in the country of Dubai, which is amazing. We gathered a lot of knowledge, learned a lot of things from that world family violence conference because you've got people from all over the world. I'm looking forward to reading the final report and then, obviously, sending it to the people that participated at the world family violence conference.

It was important for us at that particular time to encourage another country to hold it because it was an unbelievable learning experience. We thought about how you can continue the process. It's not just a community or provincial responsibility. It's an issue that's affected world-wide. We learned some amazing things at the world family violence conference, whether it's same-sex abuse; child abuse, obviously; family violence abuse. It goes on to some of the countries that are dealing with some horrific things in regard to abuse. So I'm looking forward to that report.

You spent a lot of time talking about addictions. The addictions portfolio obviously comes under the minister of health. I can tell you that we have worked together on a cross-government ministry. The Member for Red Deer-North has been very innovative, and you alluded to her piece of legislation in regard to treatment centres. I don't want to speak on behalf of the minister of health, but I believe they opened up 12 beds at Enviro's base camp and 12 beds in Edmonton to deal with addiction. I can tell you that under our Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act we're having incredible success at an early intervention level, getting to the families early instead of when they come to us at a protective state, where all of a sudden we're apprehending. Our caseworkers, who again I have to say do an incredible job in this province, will work with them, try and get the families into addictions counselling. If we have a child – and we do have children that are addicted to drugs and alcohol – we try and get them counselling. I mean, it's no different than what we do when a child has a mental illness.

The Premier's wife obviously has got her meth task force. We brought forth the Drug-endangered Children Act, that you were very,

very supportive of, where we're apprehending children out of drug-endangered houses. I can tell the hon. member that at least once a week we're apprehending children out of homes where there is drug involvement and under some horrific, horrific conditions.

You talked about the FCSS funding and the future. I know that you're bright enough to see that there's been an increase within the budget of FCSS, and they were pleased. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, as I explained to you earlier, is doing a review. We support the FCSS. It's the only one in Canada. It's recognized not only right across this country but internationally, and we'll continue to support that. What's important for me is for the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to look at where we are on that particular initiative, where we are now, and where we're going to go.

I want to have it on record at this particular time because we've had calls from people that are concerned that they're going to lose the FCSS funding because of the review. I'm going to have it on record. We have written letters, and I met this week with Joe Ceci, the alderman, and he said: Minister, I know that we've got this letter, but there's still that uneasiness. We are going to be continuing the FCSS. So it's on record. The review has nothing to do with cancelling FCSS. It's how we can improve it and how we're going to deal with it in the future.

4:50

You talked about Alberta's Promise. Alberta's Promise was founded on the belief that it takes an entire community to raise a child, not only the government or the charitable sector or the private sector, to have a role in children's development. It is a wonderful organization that several years ago was Bill 1. We're getting rave reviews.

The increase in Alberta Promise's budget was for a media blitz so that every person in Alberta knows about Alberta's Promise and makes a commitment on behalf of the children and youth in this province. So companies, municipalities, agencies commit themselves to providing the children and youth in this province a better life, and they're having wonderful success. I've challenged them to a big challenge, and sometimes when you're setting goals, they have to be realistic, and I don't know if this is a realistic goal: at the end of this year to have every Albertan in this province know about Alberta's Promise and what they do and their commitment to the children and youth in this province.

A foster parent question, and I apologize, I wasn't quite sure about where you were going with that particular question, and it's difficult for me to answer when I really am not understanding. It's going to be in *Hansard*, obviously. We will certainly give you an answer to your question. I can tell you that we value all the foster parents in this province. They do a remarkable job with the children in their care, and we appreciate everything they do and continue to dialogue with the Foster Parent Association in regard to the issues that they seem to be facing. We negotiated a raise for them last year, and we'll continue with those negotiations.

Two more things. You talked about: why were the adoption quotas, I think it was, not in our business plan? Because we keep it in our annual report as a performance measure. While there has been some criticism on performance measures in this government, especially on the issue of adoption, that's a performance measure only. It is a priority for this government to get children who are in care into safe and caring and loving homes. Every caseworker in this province knows – and it's a priority not only for them – to get children out of foster care and into an adoptive home.

A few years ago there was so much criticism about the adoption website and that we were advertising children. I can only tell you the incredible success that we have had on that website in regard to parents who are looking to adopt a child. The hits on that site and

the adoptions that have been done just from that adoption site are probably more than anybody every dreamed was possible. So while we have it in our measures, there was never any financial – no one was penalized.

Managers within the regions get bonuses on their performance measures, but it's not just based on adoption; it's based on a whole bunch of performance measures. Just because they didn't happen to meet their adoption performance doesn't mean that they get slapped on the hand and they're not rewarded. Their performance measures are done like many, many managers within government and many managers in the private sector. They have performance measures that go through a wide perspective on making those agreements. I believe I answered that question in the House, so that will be in *Hansard*.

The last thing the hon. member talked about was repercussions. I was listening intently, but I wasn't quite sure if she was talking about staff feeling that there would be repercussions to them if they came forward with an issue or if it was agencies. I can only tell you that under this ministry no staff or agency will face any repercussions if they have a problem and they feel that they need to be heard. I can tell you that the CEOs and the co-chairs in the regions across this province are dedicated to the issue of children, youth, and families in this province, and they want to hear if there is an issue. They want to hear from both sides, whether it's the family that's being served or the person that's trying to serve that particular family. I can tell you on record that no agency or staff will face any repercussions if they bring an issue forward either to our staff or the regions.

I think I've covered just about everything. Again, if I haven't, I'd be more than pleased to answer more.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak specifically to the important Ministry of Children's Services. Under the business plan on page 94 there are a number of initiatives – intervening early, family violence and protection of children, impacts of substance abuse, child sexual exploitation, the importance of the early years, aboriginal children, and the impact of prosperity, but I'll hone in on the child sexual exploitation.

Under the heading it states that

sexual exploitation of children is a global issue that impacts a vulnerable sector of society. Incidents of child pornography, internet luring and the involvement of youth in prostitution are increasing as communications technology has made access to children and youth by perpetrators much easier.

This is really quite disturbing.

We have loose laws that allow people – maybe their intent wasn't quite there – to get off on a technicality. We have lax laws that need to be tightened up. I'd like to see this minister actually challenge and take the lead on that. Specifically, when we're talking about youth being involved in drugs, drug houses, or being used as mules just for the point of being able to get into the schools as well as being able to use them later on in prostitution because they are now dependent on it as well, and I mentioned the fact about internet luring. There must be minimum standards, minimum sentences that should be implemented within the courts. It's got to be initiated by this ministry working in collaboration with Justice. That would be one specific benchmark that I would measure which would be a huge success. Absolutely.

Is the prevention of sexual exploitation of children still a priority for this government, and if so, why are you reducing some of the funds for this initiative? [interjection] Okay. Well, I'm just getting it on the record, then, for you. Has the initiative taken a back seat to

other new initiatives? If so, can the minister tell us what initiatives will benefit from this reduction of funds? On one hand, you recognize the increasing threat of sexual exploitation of children. On the other hand, you reduce the government funding to prevent such occurrences. I'm not sure where the ministry is going with that. Can you tell me the logic behind the reduction? Can the minister also tell me, in fact, who she consults with when they decide to do reductions in the budget for the important initiatives?

Going on to page 70 here, line item 1.0.4, corporate administration. It says that the estimates here are about \$13.7 million. Now, this looks like an increase of about 15 per cent from the 2005-2006 budget. This looks like it's an increase of nearly \$2 million. When we talk about the big scheme of things, \$2 million isn't a lot of money, but \$2 million in reality is a large amount of money. How exactly is this money being utilized under this initiative with the increase? Can the minister tell us why this increase was in fact necessary?

Going on to another page, page 75, the line item titled Other Revenue. The Ministry of Children's Services estimates that there is about \$9.2 million in other revenue. Can the minister tell us where other revenues will be generated?

5:00

In your business plan on page 95: "Aboriginal children have a higher representation in the Ministry child protection caseload than non-Aboriginal children. The result is higher costs and use of services for this population." I'm sure that the minister would, but I would like to hear it. Has she worked with other ministers such as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development? Clearly, there would be good cross-ministry involvement there.

There's a higher incidence of deaths on the reserves, and that also is alarming. I think that just last year there might have been 30. I don't know exactly. That's really quite sad when you think about it. You know, haven't even reached teenage years and there are already deaths.

The gangs out there are also a concern, but there is a new initiative to be able to bring the kids in and involve them in a group – it's not a gang – that the police are working with. I think that's great to be able to give them some identity instead of having their identity associated with gangs. So I would approve and applaud other initiatives like that working on the reserves.

Again, what initiatives is the minister pursuing to target the aboriginal needs? Given that aboriginal children have a higher representation in the ministry for child protection and caseload, why has the ministry not created a specific aboriginal program, created and directed specifically to address those aboriginal needs and issues?

I'll move a little bit towards some of the Auditor General's report. On page 129 the Auditor General's report of 2004-2005 recommended that Children's Services "sign contracts (whether new or renewal) before contractors supply goods or services." Before the services are even implemented, they need to have that contract. There are now concerns and issues about verbal contracts. I'd hope that these weren't the kind that we talk about on an ongoing basis, with some of the loosely worded and loose contracts just for advice, that these would be, in fact, a little bit more specific and a little bit more concrete. Has the ministry accepted this recommendation, and if so, what has the ministry done to address that specific concern of the Auditor General?

The Auditor General also mentions in the annual report, on page 130: "We again recommend that the Ministry of Children's Services improve its systems to recover expenses for providing services to children and families ordinarily resident-on-reserve." The question is: has the ministry accepted this recommendation given that the

Auditor General notes unsatisfactory progress so far within that recommendation? This is a repeated call for the recommendation. What would the minister be doing to address those specifics?

These are just a couple of issues. I know that there have been a lot that have been addressed, and I appreciate your being able to try to address them as you can. These are some of the specifics that I would like to have, that I've raised here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thanks again, Mr. Chairman. I'm not sure how much time we have left, so I'm going to kind of go very quickly. Again, I'll give our word that we will get back to you through the critic, Edmonton-Mill Woods, with some of the questions that you've asked specifically.

You started off with sexual exploitation. I did mention before that the small decrease has to do with system development enhancements, so the total budget that was reduced has nothing to do with the program. I can tell you that we've got some very exciting things happening on the issue of sexual exploitation. Unfortunately, until we have all our i's dotted and t's crossed, I can't go into it a great deal, but we will probably be announcing very shortly something that is very, very exciting on the issue of sexual exploitation, which includes Internet luring, et cetera.

I will tell the member that under the PCHIP, since the program was proclaimed, we've had approximately 900 apprehensions and 1,300 referrals. The success of that program is amazing. When I started working on it – I use this term loosely, because my staff always go crazy when I say: when I was working on the streets. But when I started on this initiative many years ago, in 1990, before I became elected, I didn't think we'd see the success in the PCHIP that I'm seeing today. When it became Bill 1, it was just something that I don't think I ever dreamt about.

I can tell you that all of the older girls and guys that were working on the street – older: 24, 25 – when I was doing my research said that if that piece of legislation would have been there when they were first on the street, they wouldn't be where they are now, still on the street. I have the opportunity on many occasions when I'm working with children from the Youth Secretariat, the youth forum, children that we've formerly apprehended from the issue of prostitution, how much they appreciate it.

We had a sexual exploitation conference last November, I believe it was. It's the first time that we've brought the players back since 1999. Again, we wanted to look where we were, where we are now, where we are going. It's unbelievable how the streets have changed. Before you used to see the young kids on the street, and you could visibly tell what they were doing. Now we're dealing with cells. We're dealing with sex bracelets, rainbow parties. We're dealing with survival sex, where a child will think it's a good idea, because they want concert tickets, to just come out at lunchtime and turn a trick and they've got the money for their concert tickets. Internet luring, child pornography: all of those things are horrific, that we're dealing with on a weekly basis within the department. One just needs to read in the paper about all the child pornography and issues.

I will tell the hon. member and give my word that we will continue to push the issue with the federal government about tightening the laws. I made a presentation to all of my counterparts across the country at the last federal/provincial/territorial meeting that I attended. As horrific and as straightforward as it was, I'll tell you that it sunk in with them. We didn't mince any words with it. We did a video presentation. I got unanimous support from all of the provinces and territories to support the issue of sexual exploitation across the country.

I then brought that to the attention of the federal minister when I met with her. We're in an early game at the federal government. We've got new ministers that are still learning their portfolios. Then you're starting to hit them with issues on sexual exploitation, child pornography, some issues of family violence. It's way too much. So we're going to let that sit for a bit. I know what it's like to be a new minister, just a little bit overwhelming with everything that's thrown at you, trying to get ready for a question period, et cetera. I can tell you that we've got some really very exciting initiatives coming forward on the issue of sexual exploitation. So be patient, but stay tuned because it's very exciting.

You talked about corporate. That increase is about \$1.84 million: \$1.24 million for salary provisions in order to address management and nonmanagement salaries, increases including the grid adjustments, a half a million in human resource management for training, and \$0.1 million for increased insurance premiums that have to be paid to risk management.

Aboriginal initiatives. Very, very exciting. Sad but true: the high percentage of aboriginals that we have not only within the Children's Services portfolio but, as the former Solicitor General, the high population of aboriginals within our correctional facilities. Sad but true. We're working on some very exciting initiatives on aboriginal issues with not only the hon. minister of aboriginal affairs. I think that it's more of a cross-government, so you'll have Health, you'll have Education, you'll have Human Resources, some of those things. We're very excited about what we're doing.

We originally had a plan – I believe it was last October before the election was called. It was the first time in the history of the Alberta government and in Canada. I had agreement with representatives from treaties 6, 7, and 8 to go with me to Ottawa, meet with the minister of aboriginal affairs – at that point in time it was Andy Scott – to talk about aboriginal issues on reserve and off reserve. Of course, the election was called. New government, new minister. We have just sent a letter to the minister of aboriginal affairs, Jim Prentice, telling him that we want to talk about aboriginal issues. Once we have our initial talks and then, obviously, listen to what he has to say and his ideas, we still would like to continue with the meeting with treaties 6, 7, and 8. I know that my colleague from aboriginal affairs has also written to Minister Prentice of aboriginal affairs.

5:10

We have also got some exciting initiatives happening in regard to aboriginal affairs. My staff is watching me up there and saying, "How much is she going to give out now?" We've got some really exciting things happening on the issue of aboriginal adoptions. I'm very excited about what we're going to be doing after some very hard work within the department and consultation with the regions, the FNAs, and, of course, Métis settlements on how you can move the issue of aboriginal adoptions forward, keeping in mind that when adoptions are handled outside of the aboriginal community, the aboriginal people want to keep a sense of the values and cultures on the aboriginal initiative.

It's always a challenge trying to look at the numbers. It saddens me when I look at the number of aboriginal children I have.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Children's Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$916,770,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that the committee now rise and report the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Children's Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$916,770,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur,

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Speaker's Ruling

Tabling Cited Documents

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, earlier this afternoon in response to a point of order raised by the Official Opposition House Leader, the chair undertook to review the Blues, as promised, regarding the exchange during question period between the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. The Official Opposition House Leader argued that the document should be tabled on the basis that the minister had quoted extensively from it.

The chair has carefully reviewed the Blues and can advise the House as follows. The only reference the minister made to documents was during the last exchange, and it was clear that the minister was making reference to documents that have already been tabled in the Assembly. To summarize the relevant parliamentary authorities, there is no requirement to table a document that has not been cited. The chair once again would refer members to *Beauchesne's*, paragraph 495(4), for this point. Finally, the chair would like to remind all members that once a document has been tabled, there is no need for that document to be tabled again.

The chair will now recognize the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed been another absolutely excellent day of progress. With Children's Services estimates: a lot of inspiring, motivational debate.

Just before I propose the motion, I would like to take this moment to briefly wish a very Happy Easter to everyone who is celebrating and a wonderful break to those who are celebrating the birthday of Khalsa in our Sikh community. May they enjoy an equally fine weekend. To those on the Ukrainian side, Khrystos voskres!

[Motion carried; pursuant to Government Motion 13 the Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 24, 2006 **1:30 p.m.**

Date: 06/04/24

[The sound system was not operational from 1:30 p.m. to 1:59 p.m.]

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: I would ask members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to our former colleagues who have passed away since we were last in the House.

As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen. [as submitted]

Mr. Edward Ewasiuk
September 24, 1933, to April 14, 2006

The Speaker: On Friday, April 14, 2006, Edward William Ewasiuk passed away. Mr. Ewasiuk represented the constituency of Edmonton-Beverly for the New Democratic Party. Mr. Ewasiuk was first elected in the election held on May 8, 1986, and served until June 15, 1993. During his years of service in the Legislature Mr. Ewasiuk served on the select standing committees on Private Bills, Public Accounts, Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act, Law and Regulations, and Public Affairs. [as submitted]

Mr. Frederick Colborne
November 14, 1916, to April 19, 2006

The Speaker: On Wednesday, April 19, 2006, Frederick Charles Colborne passed away. Mr. Colborne was first elected in the 10th Legislature by the servicemen's vote as the representative of the air force, August 8, 1944, to August 17, 1948. Mr. Colborne sat with the two other representatives as a group – navy, army, and air force – on the opposition side of the Assembly. He was elected in the 11th election, held August 17, 1948, and served until July 22, 1971. During his years of service he represented the air force servicemen and the constituencies of Calgary and Calgary Centre for the governing Social Credit Party. During his term of office Mr. Colborne served as minister without portfolio from August 2, 1955, to November 29, 1962, as Minister of Public Works from November 30, 1962, to May 26, 1969, and Minister of Municipal Affairs from May 27, 1969, to September 9, 1971.

Mr. Colborne also served on the select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Municipal Law; Municipal Law and Law Amendments; Private Bills; Privileges and Elections; Public Accounts; Public Affairs; Agriculture and Education; and Railways, Telephones and Irrigation. Mr. Colborne served on the special committees on Education Assistance for Dependents of Deceased and Disabled Ex-Service Men; Electoral Boundaries; Hutterite Colonies; Redistribution/Redistribution Procedure; Rules, Orders and Forms of Procedure; and Workers' Compensation.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Family members of Mr. Ewasiuk and Mr. Colborne are with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. member Edward Ewasiuk and hon. member Fred Colborne as you have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen. [as submitted]

Deaths of Canadian Soldiers in Afghanistan

The Speaker: I would also ask all members to remember four brave Canadian soldiers who died on duty in Afghanistan this past weekend: Lieutenant William Turner, a reservist and Canada Post employee in Edmonton; Corporal Randy Payne of CFB Wainwright; Corporal Matthew Dinning, a member of 2 Mechanized Brigade Group in Petawawa, Ontario; Myles Mansell, a member of the Victoria's 5th Field Regiment. [as submitted]

Hon. Jobie Nutarak

The Speaker: Please also remember the Hon. Jobie Nutarak, Speaker of Nunavut, who passed away yesterday near Pond Inlet, Nunavut. [as submitted]

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly His Excellency Eduardo Tejera, the Dominican Republic's ambassador in Canada. Travelling with him is embassy counsellor Jamie Reed.

Alberta exported \$11 million worth of goods last year to the Dominican Republic, mainly in beans, oats, and tech equipment. Perhaps our greatest export to their country, though, is tourists. Canada is the second largest source of tourists in the Dominican Republic. Many Albertans have enjoyed the warmth of their climate and of their people.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that our honoured visitors, who are seated in your gallery, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [as submitted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is an honour for me to rise today to introduce you to guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These guests are family members of our former colleagues.

Mrs. Wynne Ewasiuk, widow of Mr. Edward Ewasiuk, former MLA for the constituency of Edmonton-Beverly, is here with members of their family: sons Chris and Randall Ewasiuk with Terri Grant and daughters Tina Bourcier and Debbie Lavallee with grandchildren Siobhan and Shivan Lavallee. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome from the House.

Former MLA Fred Colborne, who represented the air force servicemen, Calgary and Calgary Centre constituencies, is represented by sons Tim, Steve, and Dan Colborne and Joe Abbey-Colborne, daughters Susan Thain and Anne Turnbull, and grandson Greg Colborne. If they would rise, please, and receive the warm welcome from the House. [as submitted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

[Mr. Cardinal, Mr. VanderBurg, Mr. Lukaszuk, Mr. Stelmach, Mrs. Jablonski, Dr. Taft, Ms Evans, Mr. Renner, Mr. Coutts, Mr. R. Miller, Mr. Eggen, and Dr. Pannu introduced guests]

head:

Ministerial Statements

Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to recognize national organ donation awareness week, which is April 23 to 29.

Capital health is commemorating National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week to increase public awareness about donation and celebrate Capital health's continuing excellence in transplantation. At this time I would like to introduce three guests seated in the public gallery who all play a key role in our province's organ and tissue program. They are Margaret Lidstone, organ donor co-ordinator with Capital health's human organ procurement exchange program, HOPE; Karen Elgert, organ donor co-ordinator, also with the HOPE program; and Jared Zsombor, tissue specialist with Capital health's Comprehensive Tissue Centre. If you could all please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

In 2005 Capital health transplant teams performed 300 organ transplants. In addition, the Comprehensive Tissue Centre distributed more than 1,700 tissues across Canada for transplantation. If families express interest in donating their loved ones' organs or tissues, Capital health's HOPE co-ordinators arrange for organ donation while tissue specialists with the Comprehensive Tissue Centre, CTC, co-ordinate tissue donation. The Comprehensive Tissue Centre, CTC, is one of only four fully accredited tissue banks in Canada. Working together, these skilled professionals help the donor family carry out their loved one's decision to donate and ensure final wishes are respectfully met.

The Alberta Legislative Assembly is currently considering changes to the Human Tissue Gift Act to strengthen Alberta's donation program. The Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act, Bill 32, clarifies how minors can be living donors, how consent must be obtained for donations, and how the wishes of the deceased will be respected in organ donations. The act will also ensure that every person who dies will be considered for organ and tissue donation with appropriate consent. The objective is to increase the number of donations.

More than 200 people are currently on Capital health's organ transplant waiting lists. More than 20 people are currently awaiting islet cells, and almost 140 people are awaiting corneas. Becoming an organ and tissue donor requires three steps: make your decision to become a donor, sign your Alberta health card, and discuss your wishes with your family because they provide final consent to medical staff.

This week you will see MLAs and many other supporters wearing green ribbon lapel pins to raise awareness for organ and tissue donations. My hope is that more Albertans will make a conscious decision to become a donor and provide the gift of lasting life and health to others. [as submitted]

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the minister in recognizing National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week.

I am very proud of the Canadian tradition of giving freely of ourselves to assist those in need. Donations of blood, tissues, and organs are very much a part of our culture of giving, perhaps the most important part of all for these gifts bestow life itself upon the recipients. For no reward other than the knowledge that their actions will help others, countless Canadians have literally given of themselves that others might live on.

The minister's call for Albertans to become organ and tissue donors is worth repeating. Make the decision to become a donor, sign your Alberta health card, and most importantly of all discuss your desire to donate your organs with your family. Often, grieving

families find it hard to allow tissues and organs to be taken from their recently departed loved ones, but we must ask ourselves this: what better way to pay tribute to the memory of a loved one than to respect their desire to extend life even in the face of death? Donated organs and tissues can add years to the lives of others, and every extra day of life gained is a walking, breathing testimony to the generosity and compassion of the departed donor.

This is a week to celebrate the precious gifts of our province's organ donors and the health care professionals who make those gifts possible, and it is the perfect time for all of us to recommit ourselves to the culture of life that is one of Canada's most cherished values. If it is within your cultural or religious tradition to do so, please sign that card and tell your family why.

Thank you. [as submitted]

The Speaker: [not recorded] If you would make sure that you direct your comments through the chair, then they'll at least be able to read your lips to make sure that we can translate back to other members in the Assembly.

If we would recognize that, we'll now call on the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was quite a set-up.

head: 2:00

Oral Question Period

Health Care Reform

Dr. Taft: This Conservative government has repeatedly confused necessary reforms to the public health care system with dismantling it through misguided privatization schemes. All the evidence shows that these schemes don't work in practice and that Albertans don't want them in principle. The third way is the latest health privatization fiasco, but I fear it will not be the last. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that Albertans have so soundly rejected the Conservative government's two-tier proposal, will she rule out the delisting of services currently covered by Alberta Health?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the health policy framework that went out for discussion never recommended delisting for any service. It looked to the future. It looked to opportunities for full, evidence-based assessments before proceeding with any drug, any technology, or any new procedure.

The health care budget rose by \$30 for every man, woman, and child in Alberta – rose by \$30 – rose by \$91 million in this year's budget. Why? Because of an almost 20 per cent increase for the cost of pharmacare and for drugs. Mr. Speaker, for all new things that come on board it is responsible, with or without reform, with or without renewal, for anybody looking at that budget to determine what is responsible, what is necessary, and what we perhaps could live without. But the health care policy framework never once discussed delisting.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Thirty bucks is a cheap price to pay for a secure public health care system.

To the same minister: what assurances can the minister provide that the proposed process for, quote, determining essential services won't be used to expand a number of services open to private health insurance? Is that what Aon is recommending?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will be pleased to know that our Premier has asked me quite specifically to arrange an

orientation, a briefing collectively for all Members of this Legislative Assembly on the Aon report, and we will do that as soon as we can make sure that our Aon representatives will be able to be there to fully answer. It should be, hopefully, this week.

In looking to what we do in terms of the health care or the provision of services in the future, looking to the definition of essential services, Mr. Speaker, when the legislation is introduced in the House, the members here will have an opportunity to view that and will have an opportunity, as well, to understand the full extent of the consultation we intend to initiate in order to be able to give thoughtful review to the legislative piece.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that services proposed in the future may not be deemed essential enough to qualify for public coverage, can the minister explain how she plans to prevent this turning into two-tier medicine?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's very speculative. At best it's hypothetical; it reaches into the future. To the extent that I'm here, I will continue to do my utmost to make sure that we raise with Albertans not only the policies and legislation that we intend to initiate but keep them mindful of the elephant in the room, and that is the rising cost of health care, which will cripple us if we don't act soon to improve how we deliver health in this province.

The Speaker: The second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Future Plans of the Premier

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, when the Premier announced this month that he would be stepping down from government at the end of this year, he acknowledged that he has received numerous offers to sit on the boards of different companies in Alberta. While these offers may be viewed as generous to the Premier, they also raise concerns over conflicts of interest and government accountability. My questions are to the Premier. Does the Premier feel that it is appropriate to be fielding job offers from private companies while he is still leading the Alberta government?

Mr. Klein: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I can't stop people from offering me jobs. I have accepted none. I have accepted no positions. I haven't made up my mind what I am going to do other than to say that I want to keep reasonably busy, but I want to have time to do the things that I want to do, like golf and fish. I will be consulting with the Ethics Commissioner to find out what I can or cannot do. I will inform the House at that time if I'm asked the question, but I plan to do what is legally required of me.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: the Premier can't stop people from offering him positions, but he can stop himself from discussing them. Will the Premier enforce a personal policy of saying, "No discussion on job offers until I'm no longer Premier"?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, you see those people sitting up there? If they don't ask me, I won't answer. Don't ask me any questions, and then I won't answer. You know, if I'm asked a question, I will provide an answer. I'm to say no to those people up there? They're the people who are asking the questions.

Mr. Speaker, basically, my answer to them is the same as my

answer will be to you; that is that I want to keep reasonably busy. I will consult the Ethics Commissioner as to what I can or cannot do, but I do want to have time to do the things I want to do.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: does the Premier at least acknowledge a potential conflict of interest when he is both running the government and considering job offers from the private sector?

Mr. Klein: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I am not – I am not, not, not, not, not – considering any job offers at this time.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has failed in its responsibility to protect vulnerable Albertans. The track record with long-term care and the \$100 million AISH settlement proves that seniors and people with disabilities are not given the attention or respect they deserve. Most recently the government failed to secure adequate funding for the persons with developmental disabilities program. My question is to the minister of seniors. Given that members of the disabilities community requested a \$20 million to \$30 million budget increase in order to continue providing safe and adequate service, can the minister explain why this community has been ignored?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I take issue with that preamble. I'm surprised that it's coming from this member. I can tell you this. I've been a very strong advocate for persons with developmental disabilities. The disabilities program, as I've indicated in the Assembly before, is now under one ministry. It's a program that has \$1.1 billion in funding. Persons with developmental disabilities receive funding through two streams. One is over \$500 million, and another is over \$500 million, so that's \$1.1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, also, I think it's really irresponsible and wrong to suggest to people that are vulnerable that they're going to have a funding cut or that they are having a reduction in services that would affect their health and safety. That has not happened. It will not happen, and it will not happen under this minister's watch.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister then guarantee that people with developmental disabilities will not have reduced care because of inadequate funding?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee that there will not be a reduction in funding and that there will not be a reduction in services. There has not been a reduction. In fact, the community had asked for a 4 per cent increase in the persons with developmental disabilities funding, and there was a 4.6 per cent increase in that area and an 18 per cent increase on the AISH side of the funding. So I can guarantee that it will not happen.

2:10 Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Okay. The sound system is not working very well here today. Mostly what I heard was the minister in the background

with a whole bunch of stuff going on on the other side saying: it isn't so; it isn't so. Let's not do that. I'll recognize somebody to ask a question, in this case the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Everybody will listen. Then she'll direct the question to somebody, and I'll recognize that person. Everybody will listen then, too, okay? Let's try it and see how it works.

The hon. member.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program

(continued)

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that insufficient funding will result in fewer caregivers and longer wait-lists to receive support, will the minister explain why quality of life for people with developmental disabilities is a low priority for this government?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, this is a very high priority, actually, for our government. There has been a significant funding increase, as I indicated to you, for persons with developmental disabilities. In fact, we are working very hard with the community. Our staff is working with the community. We're working cross ministry with Health and Wellness, for example, for the care for disabilities. As well, we're working with Advanced Education for the inclusion of people in postsecondary education with developmental disabilities.

The way I look at this – I wanted to tell you this, too, Mr. Speaker – is that this is a new beginning for people with developmental disabilities. By having come together under one ministry with a program for disabilities that is funded, as I said, with very significant funding, this is a new beginning for people with developmental disabilities. I can tell you that we are going to listen to people's voices, people from the community, as to what they would like to see within their communities and set the tone for what is right for this program for people overall. The funding is significant.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Aon Consulting Inc.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The NDP opposition submitted a freedom of information request for a limited number of records concerning the \$1.5 million Aon Consulting study of private health insurance options way back on November 15, 2005. After months of stonewalling, in early February the Information and Privacy Commissioner imposed a final deadline of April 15, 2006, to complete this FOIP request. Health and Wellness's reply to this FOIP request is now nine days overdue. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the minister trying to hide?

Ms Evans: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised, and I would apologize to the hon. member for the fact that it's overdue. My understanding is that it was released, that it was a separate document because of whatever you had asked for at the time.

We will be releasing the entire report. We will in fact be doing more than that because the Premier has asked for a briefing of every Member of this Legislative Assembly, full access to the report, full access to all the information, full access to the officials that did the report and anybody else. We are being as open and accountable as we possibly can. That request last November would not have certainly been able to capture the essence of what the results of the report have been, so I'm sure that the hon. member will be pleased

when either later this week or early next week we're able to give you an absolute, thorough report and accounting of that report.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the request also included a request for information with respect to the terms of reference for the RFP and arrangements of which particular firms were bidding and what their bids were and so on. Will that be included as well?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I see no reason why we wouldn't include all of those issues. Remember, though, that when we first had these contracts, there were some requests that were honoured of the people that put in bids for confidentiality. So to the extent that I can provide absolutely everything, I will do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the requested records included also the names, positions, and terms of reference of an industry panel advising Aon Consulting, will the minister also include that information in the release?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I didn't see the particulars of that request. I will review that request and see whether or not there's any reason that we couldn't release, with permission of those people that have been cited, their names. I see no reason why not, but I will review that in the context of my remarks earlier that we are doing our best to be very open and transparent on this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. There has been a lot of talk about labour shortages in Alberta, particularly the need for workers in the oil sands. We've heard concerns in this House that foreign workers are taking away jobs from Albertans. Can the minister remind this House what this government is doing to ensure that jobs go to Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question because, you know, when you talk about Alberta, we probably have the hottest economy in North America. We have thousands of jobs for everybody. I think most jurisdictions in North America would love to have those challenges.

In relation to that question specifically, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to explain first of all because there's some misunderstanding in relation to the temporary foreign workers. The temporary foreign workers' program, of course, is under federal jurisdiction. The hiring of temporary foreign workers for companies is a last resort. Once they've exhausted the process of recruiting locally here in Alberta and across Canada and training local people, then of course, you know, you have to look at other options. But our priority, of course, again is Albertans, the First Nations, persons with developmental disabilities, maybe the older workers that are displaced.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the government is in the process of developing a long-range, actually a 10-year labour force strategy for Alberta to ensure that we do have the workers we need.

The Speaker: We'll go on. The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Can the hon. minister tell the House how many assessments of temporary foreign workers his ministry has completed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Advanced Education's role I think, as the hon. member knows, is really one of assessment of credentials if they work in any of the 20 trades that require journeyman certificates. Essentially, we do this prior to their arrival in Alberta to ensure that they have the prerequisite experience.

To the specific number, Advanced Education has received 941 individual applications for assessment through the group application process. Of these applications, 836 have been approved, and 267 are working in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third and final question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that recently the Minister of Energy announced that in the 2005-2006 fiscal year land sales set records for revenues for mineral rights, the average price per hectare, and the amount of hectares identified for oil sands, which means even more development, can the minister tell us if the current shortage of skilled labour is due in part to the scope and timing of oil sands construction projects, and what are the ministry and the energy industry doing to manage this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first say that our land tenure system is one of the most open and transparent systems in the world in respect to . . .

An Hon. Member: In the whole universe.

Mr. Melchin: As I say, Mr. Speaker, it's one of the best, most open, transparent systems anywhere in the universe.

Mr. Boutilier: Or in the mother ship.

Mr. Melchin: I'm glad that they've been visiting beyond this planet. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

One of the great challenges that came this last year: we raised just under 3 and a half billion dollars from land sales. With that, really, is going to come the start of planning of these projects. This only initiates industry to be able to go out and start their long-term projects. These oil sands projects are multidecade projects. They have to go through all of the permitting through Environment, the Energy and Utilities Board, Sustainable Resource Development, all of the regulatory environment, as well as raising their capital. Then industry likewise has to ensure that they have the labour and skilled workforce to deliver on those for their own shareholders. They are doing many innovative things to help reduce that labour, both through technology, through co-operation, and in many of their structures to help time these projects so that they can address the labour questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

2:20

Continuing Care Standards

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This isn't about the universe; this is about Alberta. A year ago this government promised Albertans that they will take action to improve the state of continuing care, but we need concrete action. Small amounts of money for interim improvements are only a band-aid solution, and it diverts attention away from the fact that there are no enforceable, province-wide standards for care and housing. My questions would be to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Where are the standards that Albertans have been promised, and how much longer are we going to have to wait?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The accommodation standards, of course, are within this ministry, and the care standards are with the Minister of Health and Wellness. We are working together, hon. member, and our staff is working hard in putting everything together with the standards to bring them forward to the Assembly. The standards will cover all that there is in continuing care, the whole range of services that are provided. As I indicated to you in the Assembly before, hon. member, the area of accommodation for the room and board side of these standards, will have monitoring and enforcement and a concerns resolution process along with that.

When can you expect that? I'm hoping in the not too distant future, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we are working closely together, and the standards should be here fairly soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Unfortunately, I missed some of the answer, but thank you. I'll check it again in *Hansard*.

Given that the government refused to support Bill 205 for an independent office with the power to inspect facilities and enforce compliance with standards, when will the minister be legislating standards and compliance mechanisms of her own? I have a feeling that that was partially answered, but I didn't hear it. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and Wellness and I worked together on the process, and, yes, that may include legislation in the future, which I would anticipate would be here most likely in the spring of 2007. There is a large area of the standards, a number of areas that we can certainly put into place without legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. My last question would be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that retraining staff is a critical factor in enhancing quality in continuing care, when will the minister implement appropriate staff mixes and increase staffing levels to four hours of care a day?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there's quite a bit in that question because it talks about the appropriateness of moving to four hours and talks about training. In the first instance, one of the announcements made last week was that the health policy framework will be amended to add an aggressive workforce strategy, that I'll be working on with the minister of advanced learning. Some of the issues that we will hopefully bring forward in an MR this spring will address all aspects

of the health workforce and will be inclusive of that work that we are doing to improve the numbers and the potential for care that will be able to be provided by the LPNs and the personal care aides and others.

On moving to the four hours, as the hon. member knows, in this year's budget we are moving to 3.6 hours. Mr. Speaker, the good news is that in places like Palliser they have just recently, since January, hired an additional 30 staff for long-term care. So we are making some strides in both retention and recruitment of more staff for long-term care facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Walleye Fishery

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most cherished pastimes in Alberta is fishing – I'd say that it's good for health care – and one of the most sought-after fish is the magnificent walleye. This government has closed many walleye lakes over time, and as a result we're starting to see the population numbers inch back up. It is also very good to see that they are trying new initiatives this year for stocking walleye. It can only help our fisheries in years to come. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. When are we going to open up these lakes and give Albertans a chance to fish for the prized walleye?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, we are seeing some recovery of the walleye populations after many years of hard work and conservation in this province, and we have opened up some lakes over the past few years. But the member is right: walleye is a much sought after fish, so to prevent overfishing, what we're hoping to try is an innovative fish tag solution approach to give people the opportunity to harvest walleye in a controlled way. We are proposing this, and we're going to test it on four lakes: Lac Ste. Anne, Wolf Lake, Pigeon Lake, and Lake Newell. It's a balance that we're trying to achieve between conservation and allowing Albertans to fish and to keep at least some of their catch.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: given that there's another fish conservation effort potentially being introduced this year, which involves licensing fish derbies, could the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development tell me: would even the small fishing derbies be charged for a licence under this new policy?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, this is a very good question because none of us want to see the fish resource depleted. We do recognize that there are some fishing events that are small social functions, where the people may not be involved in big prizes or big crowds, while other organizations could actually have greater impact on the resource. I believe that the requirements for a big fishing derby should be different than those for a small derby, and that only makes sense. Our goal is to make sure that we have good, sound practices for all events and to promote low harvests and at the same time give people the ability to catch and release fish. The licensing would only be to Alberta residents as well.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: could the minister tell me if there is broad public support for these proposals?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We've had overwhelming support from licensing competitive fishing as well as the opportunity for a fish tag. We've done this through numerous consultations over the years, and both of these ideas that I have just mentioned have been endorsed by the provincial round-table on fisheries, which is a group of stakeholders. What they've said is that they've taken and shared these ideas with us, and we then have implemented them. We've also shared these ideas with the members and the executive of the Alberta Fish and Game Association.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Temporary Foreign Workers

(continued)

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many years there was a special discriminatory tax placed on Chinese immigrants wanting to work in Canada. This tax was called the head tax. It was designed to ensure that Chinese workers on projects here would not bring their families to Canada and become Canadians. The special temporary foreign worker program for the oil sands negotiated and signed by the Alberta government has the same effect. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why will Chinese temporary foreign workers contracted to work in the oil sands for, potentially, years, to live in work camps here for years not be allowed to have their wives and children immigrate to Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, you know, first of all, I'd just like to clarify one thing. I don't think it's really fair for anyone to bring up these different nationalities in this House. That is not fair. We have a multicultural society here. We all live together and work together very, very well.

I mentioned earlier in the House today, Mr. Speaker, to a former question in fact, that the temporary foreign workers' program is under the federal government.

Mr. Backs: Signed by the provincial government.

A supplementary question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: why would Chinese temporary foreign workers be indentured to their sponsoring employers for years if they want to stay in Alberta and not have the freedom to seek work elsewhere in Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I've mentioned in this House over and over again that this is a free country. We have the hottest economy in North America. We have thousands of jobs. We have the best education system. We have good health care, good policing, low taxes. This is a wonderful place to live. Alberta attracts people from all over the country, and we're so lucky.

2:30

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why are meat cutters working as temporary foreign workers from countries like Sudan being denied places in the Alberta provincial nominee program for full immigration status because those places are being allotted to employers friendly to this government?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, that program is under another ministry, and I can't comment on that.

Postsecondary Opportunities in Calgary

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the city of Calgary, with almost a million people, is growing at almost twice the rate of Edmonton. It's also

creating half of all the new jobs in the province, yet access to postsecondary education in Calgary lags far behind that available in the capital region. In the latest round of access announcements Edmonton received funding for almost twice as many new postsecondary spaces as Calgary. This means that by Advanced Education's own figures there are now 9,000 more opportunities for postsecondary students in Edmonton than there are in Calgary. My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education. What will the minister's department do to address the growing disparity in access to postsecondary education that currently exists between Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure I heard all of that, but I think I get the gist. Decisions about funding for new spaces are made based on the priorities put forth by the postsecondary institutions as well as student demand and Alberta's economy and the need for the province's postsecondary system as a whole. This year Calgary's postsecondary institutions are receiving 938 new spaces, worth \$11.3 million. Edmonton institutions are receiving 829 spaces, worth \$10.2 million. Since 1999 Calgary's postsecondary institutions have received funding for 5,812 new spaces compared with 5,804. So, you know, we could argue back and forth about this for years. I think we need to put that behind us and move forward and deal with the future.

Dr. Brown: My supplementary question is to the same minister. Will the minister commit to a capital plan to allow Calgary's postsecondary institutions to bring greater equity and opportunity to young Albertans in southern Alberta?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think my job is to bring opportunities to all Albertans in all areas of the province, but we are working very, very diligently with the Calgary postsecondary institutions. In fact, I've already met with several Calgary postsecondary institutions, including the University of Calgary and the arts college as well as Bow Valley College. I was busy last week meeting with all these people. As a government we're already funding a number of postsecondary capital projects in Calgary, that will benefit thousands of students in the city and throughout Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Investment in Science and Technology

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is essential that we actively pursue ways to diversify the economy by expanding our economic base. Alberta's reliance on oil and gas royalties is negatively impacting the technology sector. Investment in the oil industry is taking away from investment in the high tech sector, and the recent Alberta Technology Report survey suggested that almost half of Alberta's tech companies would consider leaving Alberta to go to provinces offering better incentives. My questions are to the Minister of Innovation and Science. When is the minister going to put incentives in place to make Alberta competitive with other jurisdictions?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member references a very important report which is actually sponsored by the Department of Innovation and Science. Surveys were sent out to over a thousand different companies, of which only about 100 responded. Quite

clearly in the report the authors have indicated that you can't make a hard and fast decision based on such a small reply to that survey. I just mention that for background.

What is important in that report, because it does highlight a trend that we have been following over a number of years, is that companies in emerging businesses, particularly in the preprofit stage, have indicated a need for access to capital. Mr. Speaker, that is an issue that we have tackled. We announced earlier this year a \$30 million grant under AVAC that will actually go to assist emerging companies in the information technology, the biotech areas, to have access to that capital and mentorship to help them get established in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that this government offers royalty tax credits to oil companies, will the minister implement a similar 30 per cent provincial tax credit for investment in early stage Alberta-based technology companies?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, another important question, a question that we have asked repeatedly of members of our community. Quite frankly, on that question of tax incentives we get a very mixed response. We get half of the individuals saying, "Stay out of that area; continue to apply a low, broad-based tax regime to make sure that all of our businesses are on an equal playing field," and another half – and I'm generalizing – say: provide some specific incentives. It is a question we grapple with. The Minister of Finance may choose to respond. Her officials have examined this question on several occasions. At this point we have not moved in that direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Given that the new spaces announced on March 28 in relation to the 2006 provincial budget focused heavily on energy-related fields, what is the minister doing to increase the number of science and technology graduates?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that one of the things we have to be very proud of in Alberta is some of the initiatives that have been taken by this government to bring technology and science to the forefront: iCORE, for example, has brought in 23 new chairs serving, as a matter of fact, three universities in this province and a couple of hundred graduate students who, in fact, follow these people around the world to learn under them because they are so renowned in terms of their knowledge and their expertise. So I think we have a lot to be thankful for and a lot to be proud of.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Continuing Care Standards

(continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been almost a year since the Auditor General issued his scathing report on long-term care. At the time the Premier promised to take immediate action to implement all of the report's recommendations. But here we are one year later, and there has been little or no progress on the Auditor General's key recommendations. Many vulnerable seniors are still suffering under intolerable conditions. The horror stories continue. To the Minister of Seniors: why has this government failed to

legislate binding, enforceable service standards in all long-term care and assisted-living facilities as recommended by the Auditor General?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I addressed in my earlier answer to the Member for Lethbridge-East, we do take the safety, care, and well-being of our seniors in continuing care with the utmost importance. I can tell you that the Auditor General's report, the recommendations that were made, the MLA task force on long-term care, the area that applies to this ministry – as far as standards are concerned, the accommodation side of the standards, those will address the room and board issues. That will include, for example, nutrition, the setting of accommodation rates, and whatnot. As indicated earlier, we are working toward making that possible very soon, that you will have the standards, and it will include monitoring, enforcement, concern resolutions, and other important elements. You will see that when it comes forward.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we care so much about these seniors – we do – then why wasn't legislation brought forward in this legislative session, almost a year later?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, it takes time when you go to the community as a whole, when you go out in the province. We went out in the province with a task force that had representatives not only from our side of the House but from the opposition. That task force listened to what people said. We actually took that back out into the community, which involves all residents in Alberta, including the stakeholders, including the caregivers, including the people in the whole long-term care system, whether it's lodges right through to designated assisted-living and on to the long-term care component, and that does take time. When we received that back, our staff rolled up their sleeves. They're getting the job done. Our Ministry of Health and Wellness is working with this department. We are working hard to ensure that we have the best standards possible in place, and you will see that soon.

2:40

Mr. Martin: Given that many of these seniors don't have a lot of time – that is, they're vulnerable – and given that the government is still busy changing designations from long-term care to assisted living, which have no minimum standards, how does this help vulnerable people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We did put the funding in place in this budget through the Minister of Health and Wellness budget as well as my budget. I know that this budget was \$2.2 million to ensure that standards are put in place, and that will be coming forward soon, as I indicated to you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Special-needs Education

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some school boards in my constituency are having difficulty meeting the education needs of students with special needs within current funding profiles as determined by Alberta Education. My first question is to the

Minister of Education. How does Alberta Education determine special-needs profiles of the individual school boards?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that it's done on historic incidence of severe disability rates, which is charted throughout the province. This began a few years ago. In fact, we're only in the second year of the new renewed funding framework, which actually is where you'll find the funding specifications.

I should probably indicate to the hon. member and to others here that I think it was prior to 2001-2002, hon. member, that school boards were taxed with having to code and identify and submit claims on an individual, per-student basis. Now, that created quite a bit of an administrative burden and didn't allow them the total flexibility that they wanted. The renewed funding framework that was brought in a couple years ago does that now. So there's a combination of factors that goes into determining what the incidence rate was, but essentially it's based on birth populations that are expected to give rise to these kind of circumstances.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. Given that some boards have to actually subsidize special ed funding from their regular instruction dollars, is the department considering a review of this methodology?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in fact we are considering a review of not only the special needs aspect of education funding but everything that is contained within the renewed funding framework document. I would encourage members to pick up the latest copy, either through their MLA offices or wherever they wish. They can contact a number of sources in Education as well for that same information. We are proceeding with that review. I appointed a ministerial advisory committee to undertake it. We'll have those results soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again for the same minister: is there a specific sunset clause on the current profiles so that a board can be audited to establish a new profile that may better reflect today's realities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, to answer the member's question, there's no specific sunset clause that I'm aware of. However, I should make it clear that if a school board wishes to have an audit done because they feel there is some discrepancy between the total number of special-needs students, be that mild, moderate, or severe, that they have enrolled versus the amount of funding they're getting on the profile jurisdiction basis, they could certainly approach us and ask for that audit to be conducted. We will do it, and then we'll both live with the results, so to speak.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Sale of Surplus Crown Lands

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department of infrastructure is responsible for the sale of provincial Crown lands that are surplus to the requirements of the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads and for ensuring that fair market value is realized from the sale of these lands. We all know that this government sold surplus

land in 1988 for as little as a dollar per parcel, and there has yet to be an adequate explanation from this government. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Given that during the last five years this government has sold surplus lands in the city of Edmonton for anywhere between \$2,000 and \$75,000 per acre, who is doing the real estate appraisals on these surplus lands before they are put on the market to be sold or given away?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where to start on this. We've gone around and around. Trying to demonstrate with the Easter eggs apparently didn't work. I will go through this once again for the benefit of this individual. The fact is that we knew from the plans we had worked through that we needed some 504.39 acres. We knew exactly where we needed the land. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, with all the chirping over there they obviously don't want to hear the answer. That's probably the problem, why they have never figured this out. They absolutely refuse to hear the answer.

The Speaker: Okay. Another question.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: are these surplus lands, the lands that have been sold off in the last five years, those lands which are to be sold, are they available to all investors, or is it the policy of this government to allow only a select few insiders to bid on these lands?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go back to the first one. Of course, I'm going to try a different tack. I think this time I'll talk in the form of pies. We will see that, in fact, there are eight pies. He doesn't seem to be able to understand from the Easter egg one because that was too simple: you count them. Well, you're going to have to cut the pies. So that's the land that you're cutting now. We as the purchaser know that we want 504.39 ounces of pie. We know that there are eight locations where we're going to find these pies. We know that there's an individual that is offering to sell these pies to us, and there are some 795.18 ounces in all of these pies.

Now, we're going to take the pies, and we're going to cut out some 504.39 ounces of pie because that's what we need, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we give back to the seller, to the person that owned them at one time, the remaining amount so that, in fact, we end up with our 504.39 ounces of pie. Now, if they can't understand that, I don't know what other explanation we could give them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister would make a better Santa Claus than an Easter Bunny because he wants to give the taxpayers' land away for nothing.

My next question: where does the government advertise these surplus lands for sale so that Albertans can place an offer if they are interested?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, this will take a little bit of time because there's a lot of explanation to do with how we handle public land. First of all, we look at the parcel that is for sale. If, in fact, it is something that would be used for a public-type facility in a municipality, we may offer it to the municipality for \$1. Then there are cases where the land will be appraised. If it can't be used for a public service, then it will be appraised, and we take two appraisals. Then, if the municipality that it's housed in is interested in purchasing this property for the appraised value from the two independent appraisals, we will offer it for that price. If they don't want to buy

it for that, then we put it on the market through a real estate agency, and we take bids.

That is the standard practice, Mr. Speaker. It's open to the public if, in fact, the municipality didn't take us up on the first right of refusal. That's the process, and it's always followed. Always.

The Speaker: I think that, unfortunately, the time has expired for question period. My apologies.

2:50 Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call upon the first of several to participate in Members' Statements, our historical vignette of the day.

By 1935 William Aberhart's *Back to the Bible Hour* had a weekly radio audience of over 350,000 people. In 1935 Alberta had a population of about 750,000 people.

On August 22, 1935, 81.8 per cent of Alberta's eligible voters, the largest ever, reviewed the platforms of 240 different candidates and gave the Social Credit Party 54.25 per cent of the vote and 56 out of 63 seats. William Aberhart had personally hand-picked Social Credit candidates in every constituency, but he himself was not a candidate. He became the Premier of Alberta but not a Member of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. William Morrison, the Social Credit member for Okotoks-High River, resigned, and William Aberhart was elected an MLA by acclamation on November 4, 1935.

Alberta was to enter a very stormy period. Premier Aberhart led the Social Credit Party into the March 21, 1940, election and emerged with 42.9 per cent of the vote and 36 out of 57 seats. He himself was elected in Calgary.

The political storms, however, were to continue. The press constantly ridiculed Aberhart. The Lieutenant Governor considered removing him from office. Major opposition came from ministers within his own cabinet who felt that he was not determined enough in advancing the Social Credit theories of Major C.H. Douglas.

On a trip to Vancouver on May 23, 1943, he died a painful death from cirrhosis of the liver at age 64. So embittered was his family for the years of criticism that he endured that they cancelled plans for a state funeral in Alberta and buried him in Vancouver.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of six members.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka just indicated to me that the signature of the Premier that I just mentioned, William Aberhart, is found within the desk of the hon. Member for Calgary-West. As, of course, is customary for hon. members who spend their time in here to etch—I shouldn't say this publicly. I hope the mike's not on. But as we're all school children at heart, you know, we always autograph. That's part of the history of this: the internal of these desks.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Deaths of Canadian Soldiers in Afghanistan

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You and I enjoy the privilege of serving in this Chamber because we live in a democratic state. Our past Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. John Diefenbaker best described our freedoms by saying, "I am a Canadian, a free Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship God in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, free to choose those who shall govern my country."

Mr. Speaker, these freedoms do not come without a price. So that Canadians may enjoy these freedoms, some of our finest young men

and women willingly sacrifice their lives in the protection and promotion of democracy. This past weekend we lost four such outstanding Canadians in Afghanistan. Corporal Matthew Dinning, Bombardier Myles Mansell, Corporal Randy Payne, and Lieutenant William Turner lost their young lives doing what they believed in: protecting us.

Mr. Speaker, during such times of sorrow our nation must bow its collective head, lower its flags, and offer its prayers so that our soldiers know that we believe in them, honour them, and appreciate them. Also, we must never forget the families of these soldiers, who must carry on without their husbands, sons, and brothers. We owe our collective gratitude to them as well.

Mr. Speaker, to those remaining soldiers deployed throughout the globe, we wish them safe return.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

National Volunteer Week

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The voluntary sector is one of the most vital components of our society. This week we pay tribute to that sector through volunteer week. This is a nationally proclaimed week held to identify the beneficial and crucial contribution that volunteers make to our lives.

On behalf of my colleague the Minister of Community Development, who is responsible for the Wild Rose Foundation, I would like to ask this Assembly for its unanimous support in recognizing April 23 to 29, 2006, as volunteer week in Alberta.

All across this great province many events and activities are taking place to recognize and thank the volunteers, who play such essential roles in our communities. The Wild Rose Foundation in collaboration with Volunteer Alberta facilitates the provincial focus during volunteer week. This year 146 Alberta communities are participating in this week-long series of events.

According to the 2003 National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations there are about 19,000 nonprofit and voluntary organizations in Alberta, which accounts for 12 per cent of the 161,000 nonprofit and voluntary organizations in Canada. It is estimated that the voluntary sector in our province collectively contributes approximately 449 million hours of volunteer time. This is equivalent to approximately 234,000 full-time jobs. Alberta leads the way in the voluntary sector, and we can all take pride in this great accomplishment. Through the Wild Rose Foundation this government supports the voluntary sector of this province in many valuable ways.

I encourage this Assembly to continue its support and dedication to volunteerism in our province. Throughout Alberta our volunteer spirit is contributing directly to the health and well-being of our citizens and communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Victims of crime deserve compassion and respect. April 23 to 29 marks Canada's inaugural National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. The theme is People, Services, and Laws.

As part of this week communities across Canada have been encouraged to promote awareness of victims' issues and the services and laws that help victims and their families impacted by crime. We

are also taking this time to recognize the contributions of those who support victims. In our province alone over 1,600 volunteers work with professional staff to serve victims of crime.

Here in Alberta we are working to improve awareness about victims' programs and services through a campaign launched in March by the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. The campaign includes a series of radio, transit, and other indoor media advertisements. Posters have also been distributed across the province to be displayed throughout communities, including courthouses, police stations, and probation offices.

After becoming a victim of crime, a person's life can be turned upside down and thrown into the confusing and intimidating world of the criminal justice system. Once they report the crime to police, we want victims to ask the police officer about services available to them or to pick up the phone and call their local victim services unit. Community and police-based victim services units in Alberta can provide information about the justice system, assistance through the court process, and referrals for legal, financial, or emotional support.

Victims deserve to be heard, and these awareness campaigns are an important step to show that we are listening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

3:00

Alberta's Promise

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How do we make a promise a reality? I'm speaking of Alberta's Promise, a hope that is yet to be realized by many of Alberta's children. It is now three years since the government launched this initiative. Some critics may say that we should not be putting out in words what we're not prepared to put into policy. I do not agree. We need words to articulate a vision, but words are not enough.

C.S. Lewis once commented on the expression "a good egg." There are two things that can happen to a good egg: either it becomes something else, or it goes rotten. Mr. Speaker, I believe we're at this point in determining whether Alberta's Promise lives up to its intention. Children's well-being is more than the concern of one ministry. It involves all aspects of public policy. If we are to truly benefit Alberta's children, we must face the challenge of poverty for many children live in families under this shadow. If we are to have healthy children, we must provide health care for all. If we want wholesome children, we must have a healthy environment. If we want children free of intimidation, we must eliminate bullying in public life and in the marketplace. If we want our children nurtured, we must be prepared to support child care in whatever form it is needed.

I urge the government and those who aspire to lead it to review their priorities so that the worthy intention of Alberta's Promise can be a hope achieved and a promise kept.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Sale of Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Documents uncovered by the Official Opposition show that this Progressive Conservative government has failed atrociously in protecting the public interest when it comes to land development, a failure that this government would like to ignore. There are questions that this government cannot or, perhaps more accurately, will not answer. Why are certain land developers able to secure special conditions when

purchasing Crown lands? The answer may stem back to a government memo from 20 years ago which clearly states this government's policies for land purchases, a policy that favoured special-interest names at the expense of Alberta taxpayers. Are these policies still in effect? Only an independent investigation will determine this as this government has demonstrated that it has no interest in telling Albertans what went on.

Instead of pursuing justice on behalf of Albertans, this government chooses to protect its friends and predecessors. Instead of providing meaningful and relevant answers to the questions surrounding this issue, this government mocks the very notion of accountability by criticizing the opposition for raising such concerns. Instead of taking responsibility for their actions, the minister of infrastructure points the finger at his predecessors. Ironically, the same minister introduced Bill 20 this spring, which aims to hide government documents from the public for up to 15 years.

On the one hand we are asked to ignore the past, and on the other we are told that we should not have access to current information. This government's clear disdain for accountability and responsible leadership is becoming quite alarming. Will this government do the responsible thing and initiate an independent judicial inquiry into the land purchase and subsequent sale of surplus Crown lands for both the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads? Doing so would accomplish a number of things. First, it would determine if this government has mismanaged its responsibilities at the expense of taxpayers. Second, it would identify who is responsible for such failures and ensure that those are not repeated. Third, it would determine if such mismanagement continues today and if so who is benefiting and who is suffering. In short, it would ensure accountability for the future even if it was lacking in the past.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

Mr. Prins: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from 60 residents of central Alberta from the Mirror, Bashaw, and Alix areas that says:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta as reported by Health Canada, that include but are not limited to; (1) a tobacco tax increase, (2) legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing, and (3) legislation to make all workplaces completely smoke-free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a petition that I received from 18 staff and students from Rosary school in Manning, Alberta, which is in my constituency. The petitioners are proposing some initiatives that they believe could be used to curb an increase in teen smoking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to submit a petition from 111 Albertans calling on the government of Alberta to "consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition

sponsored by the Friends of Medicare that has 938 signatures on it. It calls for the government to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health reforms and for the Assembly to defeat any legislation that would allow the expansion of private hospitals or insurance or allow doctors to work in both the private and the public systems. The NDP opposition has now tabled 3,300 signatures on this petition.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present two petitions, the first signed by 482 Albertans and the second signed by 98 Albertans. Both petitions urge the government of Alberta to introduce legislation allowing parents the authority to place their children into mandatory drug treatment and to fund urgently required youth drug treatment centres.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Bill 35 Fuel Tax Act

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I request leave to introduce Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 35 would replace the existing Fuel Tax Act, which is outdated and no longer reflects how the tax is charged and collected. The tax framework used in the new act has been discussed with industry stakeholders, and they are in agreement with the framework proposed.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Bill 36 Securities Transfer Act

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 36, the Securities Transfer Act.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, provides a single, uniform source of rules for the transfer and holding of all corporate and noncorporate securities traded in Canada. Most other provinces and territories have either adopted or plan to adopt practically uniform legislation. Providing a single set of rules in Canada will enhance our market competitiveness with the United States and global markets.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move that Bill 36, the Securities Transfer Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 37
Miscellaneous (Provincial Treasurer)
Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I request leave to introduce Bill 37, the Miscellaneous (Provincial Treasurer) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 37 is a housekeeping act that will allow changes in legislation with references to "Provincial Treasurer" to be replaced with "Minister of Finance."

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Safety.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the proper number of copies of a response letter to Written Question 2, regarding provincial protection officers' traffic safety enforcement, from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. The use of sheriffs to supplement traffic enforcement in a pilot project came during follow-up work on the Alberta traffic safety plan. These individuals were identified as a potentially prudent use of resources. This concept is not new. Municipal special constables have been used in traffic enforcement on local roads for the last three decades. I have the appropriate number of copies to be handed out.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and table with the Assembly the appropriate number of copies of my response to Motion for a Return 49 from last session, which simply requires me to provide information pertaining to equating diploma examinations as referenced in the ministry of learning's annual report for '03-04.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a handwritten letter that I have been given a copy of. It's from Mr. Roland Poulin on 94th Avenue in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and it's to our hon. Premier. It is in regard to the third way and Mr. Poulin's reservations about the third way.

My second tabling this afternoon is the appropriate number of copies of a magazine put out by the Historical Society of Alberta, of which our hon. Lieutenant Governor is a patron. The Historical Society of Alberta has put out this magazine called *A Century of Alberta Premiers*. It is excellent reading. In fact, there are many researchers involved with this, including Una Maclean Evans, and she was photographed on page 21 doing an interview with Richard Gavin Reid, the UFA Premier from 1934 to 1935. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you get an opportunity to read this. You certainly are encouraging me to read Standing Orders. You must have been an excellent history teacher prior to your arrival here in 1979, from the historical vignettes you give us. Hopefully, this will provide more information for your most interesting vignettes.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, I do want to thank the hon. member for his generosity in providing me with a copy of the historical document on the leaders of the province of Alberta. The hon. member should

know that there is a reason why I encourage him to read Standing Orders.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to table yesterday's program for the 11th annual Chrysalis achievement awards, which recognize the thousands of volunteer hours developmentally delayed individuals contribute to their Calgary community with the support of their families, enlightened local businesses, and the Chrysalis organization.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My tabling today is from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Miss Grace Wheatley, who wanted to relocate to a more affordable apartment to free up some money for health expenses because she's now working less and earning less but was told by Capital Region Housing that there was a one and a half to two-year wait period for funding to be released from this provincial government. She confirms that there are many people in her situation, and she wants us in this Assembly to promptly act on this ongoing concern.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table today 31 letters, all of which are on continuing care standards and their enforcement, and they are signed by people who live and work within the system.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act a report dated March 2006 entitled the Status of Research on Occupational Causation of Selected Primary Site Cancers in Part-time Firefighters.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Boutilier, Minister of Environment, a response to Written Question 4, asked for by Mr. Taylor on behalf of Mr. MacDonald on March 20, 2006, and return to order of the Assembly MR 5, asked for by Mr. Eggen on March 20, 2006.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, just a reminder that tomorrow Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program will have 83 young people attend. We'll do a special session with them tomorrow morning here in the Assembly, so I'd ask that as you leave today, tonight, you would make sure that whatever papers you have, you just lock them up and put them away because these young people should have no access to any information you have on your desks.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been served on Thursday, April 13, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 15 and 29.

[Motion carried]

Resource Rebate Program

Q15. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. R. Miller that the following question be accepted.
What is the total cost incurred to administer the \$400 Alberta 2005 resource rebate program?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I wish to make a few remarks. First of all, I would encourage the members to reject the question. The reasons for that are as follows. Under the rules of the Legislative Assembly once a written question is accepted, response has to be tabled within 30 sitting days of the date of acceptance. The terms of the Alberta resource rebate 2005 stipulate that eligible Albertans have until December 31, 2006, to file their 2004 income tax returns in order to receive their \$400 cheques. For this reason the final cost of administering the program will not be tallied until approximately this time next year. Once the final amounts are known, the Department of Finance is quite prepared to provide this information to the opposition parties and to table it in the House at the first opportunity.

As a point of interest, in the Alberta Finance news release dated October 11, 2005, it states that administrative costs will be "less than one per cent of the program cost."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Question.

[Written Question 15 lost]

Human Rights in China

Q29. Dr. Swann moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.
What measures has the government taken to work collectively with the federal government and the Alberta China office to address human rights concerns in China, specifically in regard to Falun Gong supporters?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government accepts Written Question 29.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close the debate.

Dr. Swann: I call the question.

[Written Question 29 carried]

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, April 13, I would now like to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 26.

[Motion carried]

Income Trusts and Income Trust Conversions

M26. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including legal opinions, briefing notes, backgrounders, or memoranda, that analyze the impact of income trusts and income trust conversions on Alberta government revenues from January 1, 2002, to April 1, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I would urge members of the Assembly to reject. The reasons for this are that the current policy review of income trusts is at a very preliminary stage and, of course, that it is a very sensitive matter. We will not be providing the requested documents but will consider the release after completion of the policy review and the consideration of its findings by the hon. Minister of Finance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to conclude the debate.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's somewhat disappointing because we're dealing with a significant amount of money. I think the relevance should be that page 139 of the Budget 2006 fiscal plan provides a rationale. As stated in the budget, Alberta Finance has recently estimated the "net revenue loss at about \$400 million per year" from the shift to income trusts and further states that this issue is being examined. Well, would the minister mention this? How long will this take? This is significant cash, a lot of money, \$400 million. I point out that a \$400 million loss of public revenue from income trust conversions when added to the further loss of \$372 million of public revenue from the corporate tax reduction from 11.5 to 10 per cent represents an unacceptable loss of public revenues. This represents a loss to the public treasury of over three-quarters of a billion dollars per year. This is about the same amount as average Albertans pay in the form of health care insurance premiums.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, we talk about health care costs skyrocketing and not having the money and all the rest of it, and here is \$750 million going down the tubes to the wealthiest Albertans, the corporate sector. If we're going to say in the budget – and it's in there on page 139 – that there's \$400 million lost, surely it's our responsibility in this Legislature to know what we can about it at this particular time. It's not good enough to say that the government is reviewing it. How long is that reviewing going to take? How long are we going to bleed from losing this amount of money? As I say, \$400 million is a lot of taxpayers' money. The Legislature is supposed to control the purse strings, and the minister is saying: well, we're reviewing it behind closed doors. Surely it's the responsibility of this Legislature to be reviewing that amount of money and to know what's going on.

I am disappointed, Mr. Speaker, not surprised again but disappointed, that the government has taken it upon themselves to do this behind closed doors. I'm not holding my breath waiting for, you know, a miracle that they're going to vote for us, but I think all Members of the Legislative Assembly should say: this is pretty serious stuff, and we should have the responsibility to take a look at this. So I would certainly urge acceptance of Motion for a Return 26.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 26 lost]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 206
Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act**

[Adjourned debate April 10: Mr. Stevens]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to continue debate on Bill 206 this afternoon. I think the debate that we have had so far has been very interesting, and the points made have been very good. What really strikes me about this bill is that we as legislators have to discuss this issue. I think it's very unfortunate that we are discussing the sad situation that has arisen in Alberta and Canada over the past 30 years. Bill 206 gives divorced or separated parents the opportunity to use a designated centre as a neutral site to drop children off so that the other parent can pick them up without conflict or contact with each other.

There are many situations out there, and there are statistics available that show that some parents are denied access to their children. The department has provided some statistics that show just how significant a problem this is becoming. It is estimated that as many as 48 per cent of all children of separated or divorced parents have little or no visitation with their fathers. There are approximately 166,000 children in Alberta with nonresidential fathers. If you take the 48 per cent I just mentioned and assume that these children have little or no visitation, one can estimate that 79,000 children have little or no visitation with their fathers. Research also shows that up to 24 per cent of nonresidential Canadian fathers do not get to see their children. If this percentage is applied to the estimated 126,000 nonresidential fathers in Alberta, somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000 fathers may not be seeing their children.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The reasons for fathers not seeing their children are varied, and exchange is only a small part of this, but it is a part. I think we have to look at Bill 206 as one designed to help the majority of families who are having difficulty exchanging children, the difficulty as a result of one parent not being able to access their children because of the exchange situation. This is a bill that would work for that sort of situation. It would give parents the opportunity to voluntarily or by court order work together to ensure that their children have access to both parents. It is a bill that will work for those noncustodial parents who have difficulty gaining access to their children because of the situation that presents itself. I think this bill will work for the majority of families in Alberta that do have access/exchange issues. These are issues that we cannot overlook or brush under the carpet. There are parents that have issues, and I think the idea this bill presents is a very progressive step.

During debate there were many concerns raised, many of which were valid, and I think they have to be addressed. One concern raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw was the question of whether or not having access exchange centres would create a place where conflict could occur between parents in front of their children. The point of this legislation is that a parent could drop a child off at a certified centre, like a day care for instance, and then that parent could leave. That way, the other parent who is picking up the child does not have to run into their ex. That is the main intent of Bill 206, to have a place where there won't be any conflict between parents, where there is minimal contact between divorced parents.

I think this would lead to much more civil relations. This is a solution that will help those parents who are having difficulty with access exchange.

A number of members brought up the issue of what to do with violent parents, but this bill is not intended for those situations. In fact, I would argue that the number of children with violent divorced parents is very low, and we have other ways of dealing with that situation. Further, it could be argued that if you do have violence in a relationship, the person perpetrating this violence should not have any access to children. I realize that there is a need for a multitude of solutions to deal with the different situations that will arise when dealing with family law, but even though this is the case, we have to clearly look at a solution for the majority of children who need access to both of their nonviolent parents. We must not focus on only the high-profile violent cases. We have programs and laws that deal with that. This is for everybody else.

Now, even though I am in support of the intent of this bill, I think we have to come to the realization that there are some difficulties with it. Both the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Children's Services spoke about how projects in place are trying to address the problem that Bill 206 tries to solve. I think we have to recognize that this is being done, maybe not quite in the same way that this bill does it, but there is work being done. One of the things that the Minister of Children's Services rightly raised is the issue of rural communities and how this might work for those areas. I know that the intent of the Member for Calgary-Bow was to have this be as low cost as possible, but what happens when, for instance, a town does not have a facility to be designated? For example, just northeast of Red Deer are the towns of Joffre and Haynes. What happens if there is no facility willing to be designated as an exchange centre? Does this mean the parents are out of luck? I think that part of this idea needs to be thought out a bit more before we go too far with this bill.

As the Minister of Children's Services pointed out, there are many avenues that need to be explored before we delve into the solution that Bill 206 puts forward. The rural issue is only one aspect. I think the work that is being done through the cross-ministry initiative may result in some solutions being discovered that will be of benefit to the entire province. I think the hon. minister was completely on target when she stated that one single approach cannot work in circumstances that vary widely from family to family. The family unit has changed, and the government must evolve along with this change.

Further to this, the hon. Minister of Justice made some points as well that I think we need to consider. He stated that there are many reasons that parents are not able to access their children which make the situation very complex. Again, this ties in with what the Minister of Children's Services said, that a single approach just will not work. The Minister of Justice gave some examples of what his ministry and department are doing to ensure safe visitation and exchange with children. He mentioned that the cross-ministry initiative between Children's Services and Justice should be completed before we pass a bill such as 206. If we pass something before the cross-ministry initiative is completed, we may derail some of the solutions that may be found. I agree with the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Children's Services that we should allow the cross-ministry initiative group to complete its work before passing any legislation in this area. We need to have consultation, and we need to do more work on this issue and whatever solution we find. It must be for the majority of families and be a low-cost solution.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 206 – do we hand these out now, Mr. Speaker?

3:30

The Acting Speaker: The Speaker doesn't know what you're trying to move, so maybe you can explain.

Mrs. Jablonski: I would like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 206, Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 206, Designation of Child Access Exchange Centres Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, in essence, this is a hoist amendment. Does anybody wish to speak on the hoist amendment?

[Motion carried]

The Acting Speaker: In essence, this drops from the Order Paper.

Bill 207
Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and
Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences)
Amendment Act, 2006

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise and open the second reading debate on Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006. I do not believe that anyone inside or outside this Chamber will argue that illegal drugs are a problem affecting every culture around the world. The drug trade spans nations and even continents with drugs and precursory materials being shipped to North America from as far away as the South American and Asian continents. Of course, there is a rampant production and distribution business here at home as well.

Having said that, the issue of drugs has long been on the social radar of North Americans. During the 1980s the Americans began their well-publicized war on drugs, and two decades later the battle of this war rages on. The drug culture seems to come in waves, with different drugs being popular at different times. Over the past 20 years the media has portrayed the rise of a variety of drugs, including heroine, cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy, and most recently methamphetamines. During this time many different tactics have been tried and utilized to stop the use of drugs in our society. However, I believe the most important lesson which has been learned from the past is that the drug problem is large, it's complex, and there's no single action or course of actions which will eliminate narcotics. It is necessary for people, communities, and governments to work together to address the problem of drugs on our streets.

On the whole, I believe that between our municipal, provincial, and federal governments as well as the involvement of nongovernmental organizations we have developed a multifaceted approach to tackling drugs at the street level. Through the federal government we see the criminal legislation which is designed to deter individuals from engaging in the drug trade. The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act is a very comprehensive piece of legislation which addresses almost every controlled-drug-related issue as it relates to criminal activity. As what is sometimes a joint effort, the federal and provincial governments both engage in educational initiatives.

Knowledge is a powerful tool, and television is a powerful medium. Combining the two has led to some spectacular results in

this province. The recent advertisements produced by AADAC, which graphically illustrate the effects of crystal meth on your body and your mind, are excellent examples. The feedback from these ads was so positive that it was decided to air them for a longer period of time than originally intended.

Also, at a provincial level the government has addressed and is currently addressing through the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs legislation the issue of children who are in contact with drugs. There is no doubt that we have an obligation to protect children from the dangers which are posed by illegal drugs.

In addition to the protection of children, there exist treatment programs to help those who are addicted to drugs. The list of initiatives to address illegal drugs is long, but my point is that our society is focused on the big-picture issues associated with drugs: prevention through information, treatment of addicts, and criminal prosecution of those who are involved in the drug trade. Because the drug issue is so large and varied, it is understandable that we are focused on the big picture, and some of the peripheral issues may not be as important. It is one of these peripheral issues which I would address with Bill 207.

Mr. Speaker, in a nutshell this bill, if passed, will amend the Traffic Safety Act to accomplish two things. First, it will give peace officers the option – and I do stress option – to seize a vehicle if the driver of the vehicle is charged under section 5 of the federally regulated Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Just to make sure that there are no misunderstandings, section 5 of this act addresses the issue of trafficking in illegal drugs and possession of illegal drugs with the intent to traffic. It does not apply to a charge of possession of an illegal drug. The bill is worded to ensure that the registered owner of a vehicle is able to appeal for the release of their vehicle if they were not involved with or were unaware of what was being done with their vehicle. Additionally, the bill allows for a registered owner to post a security against their vehicle so that they are able to access it even if the registered owner was involved with the alleged crime.

The second outcome which Bill 207 would effect is disqualifying the accused from holding a driver's licence for one year from the date of their conviction.

The reason I have brought this bill forward is because I believe that when drug dealers are driving around dealing drugs, they pose a safety risk to other drivers on the road. There are those who would argue that the connection between these two is tenuous, but I disagree. In discussions with a police officer I was told about an incident involving a drug dealer travelling between Edmonton and Red Deer. According to phone records during less than a one-hour time span of being on the highway, this individual placed 60 calls from his cellphone. That's 60 calls. I would argue that this level of inattention to the road directly because of the drug dealers' business makes them a safety hazard.

Other sections of the Traffic Safety Act allow for the seizure of a vehicle or the disqualification of an individual for holding a licence based on the fact that they are unsafe on the roads. When someone is stopped for drunk driving, police seize the vehicle because this person poses a hazard to others on the road. For the same reason their licence is disqualified. These individuals have been determined to be a danger on our roads, so they need to be removed from them. Why are they a danger? Because their judgment is clouded. I argue that the individuals who are using vehicles to traffic drugs pose a danger to other motorists as well. These dealers are cruising, looking for customers, not being mindful of the road in front of them. They not only pose a danger to other motorists, but they pose a danger to members of society in general.

Mr. Speaker, drugs have a pervasive and negative effect on our

province. What was once an issue solely for the big cities has become just as prominent in small communities throughout Alberta. Dealers are heading out from urban areas to rural Alberta to peddle their destructive wares. By removing the means of transportation from these dealers who are spreading drug addiction across the province, we can begin to address the safety risks which they pose.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it's important that we as legislators send a strong message to drug dealers in our province that this type of activity will not be tolerated in Alberta. I have spoken with police officers about this legislation and have received strong support for it, in particular from Superintendent Jim Steele and Staff Sergeant Keith Janes, both with the Red Deer RCMP detachment. They believe that would be a valuable tool for them to use.

I believe that Bill 207 takes a step in the right direction to increasing safety for Albertans. I would ask the support of all hon. members in this Chamber for this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond in second reading of Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006. I think this bill is directed in the right direction, so I don't question the intention of the bill. I think that in all the discussion that I've read about the war on drugs, one has to be clear in distinguishing the demand side from the supply side, and this bill is clearly directed to the supply side and not the demand side. I think it's quite a terrible thing that through the years we have focused so much attention on the demand side, so we've criminalized the possession of drugs, and the prohibition of drugs has simply not worked in terms of being successful through the years and simply led to putting all kinds of people in prison.

3:40

Interestingly enough, in *The Economist* magazine some years ago there was a whole section of the magazine devoted to drugs, and they put the issue in terms of what they called the heart of the issue and raised the moral question: what duty does the state have to protect individual citizens from harming themselves? Now, that's the question directed to the demand side, and of course we have to be careful in passing laws that protect individual citizens from harming themselves. John Stuart Mill said: "The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." So this bill is directing itself to the right side of things, namely the supply side, because it's drug dealers whom we have to go after, not the addicts in terms of the demand side. I think the question of addiction is a health issue, and too much of our Criminal Code is directed to accusing people of possession of drugs. But it should be dealt with as a health issue. There should be all kinds of programs in place to deal with that, and there are programs available for people who have drug addiction problems.

Of course, one of the issues is the connection between drug addiction and crime, and that is a serious issue if we take a statistic, for example, that 50 per cent of crime is caused by 5 per cent of habitual criminals who are addicts. Of course, in that respect they need lots of programs. We need diversionary programs up front. People committing crimes because of drug addictions need the opportunity to choose between going to jail and going into a rehab program, and we have those kinds of programs here in Alberta. Also, we need rehab programs in our prisons so that people getting out can get integrated back into ordinary, everyday society, having dealt with their addiction issues.

But on the supply side we need to take, of course, a zero tolerance approach to drug dealers. The user is sick; the dealer is evil. I have no quibble with that kind of statement. Dealers, whether they are part of organized crime or part of biker gangs, are maliciously destabilizing society by exploiting human weakness and addiction, so there must be a variety of approaches in dealing with drug suppliers. So this bill is one approach. I mentioned a variety of approaches, the speaker who introduced this bill mentioned a variety of approaches, and this is only one aspect of the approaches that perhaps should be taken.

My only problem with this bill, even though its intention seems to be legitimate, focusing on the supply side of drugs and going after drug dealers – I mean, the Criminal Code already covers much of what this bill seems to direct itself to. If you look at section 5 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, already in place there is this statement: "No person shall traffic in a substance included in [various schedules]" in respect of various drugs. If a person contravenes this section, then of course they are guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment, and there are a number of different terms, depending on what drugs we are talking about. Section 16 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act deals with the forfeiture of property. So if an individual is arrested and his car is towed away because their drugs were found in the car and it turns out that he is a drug dealer and he is charged and found guilty, then all the property is forfeited to the Crown. So I'm not sure what this bill adds to the Criminal Code.

Then there's section 462 of the Criminal Code, which covers forfeiture of property in all kinds of different situations, including the possession of illegal substances and the act of dealing in illegal substances.

I think the Criminal Code is there and should be used in the way it was intended to be used. I think what we need is to have courts that will actually carry through with the charges on the basis of the Criminal Code. For example, it would be good to have specialized Crown prosecutors for drug offences so that the Criminal Code can actually be effective in dealing with drug dealers.

I'm asking myself what, practically, this bill would do, making it possible for a person to lose their licence for one year if they're found guilty of possession and dealing in drugs, the seizing of their automobile. I think that if it's directed at dial-a-dopers, which is an expression that I've come to learn – namely, the transporting of drugs, a go-between, someone who is bringing the drugs from a dealer to the recipient – I'm not sure that this bill is really needed because if police stop a car and find that there are drugs in the car, they can have the car towed away. I'm not sure what this bill really adds.

Many of those who transport drugs on behalf of dealers to recipients actually don't use their own cars. They use rental cars, or they use stolen cars. So I don't know what this bill would really accomplish. Maybe it would only accomplish the fact that it would in effect lead to a greater number of people not having licences, having suspended licences, and maybe continuing to drive on the roads at great risk to the public. I'm not sure what, practically speaking, this bill really does.

The hon. member, in introducing the bill, mentioned that she had some advice from police in Red Deer. I've sought the same kind of advice from members of the Edmonton Police Service, and I'm not encouraged to think that this bill really does anything. If we're really serious about going after drug dealers, we have to have something that's a lot tougher than this.

I would ask: what is the research behind this bill? What is it really going to accomplish? Is this bill just a front, just a facade, just window dressing, giving the appearance that we are taking a tough

approach to dealing with drugs and drug dealers when, in actual fact, practically it doesn't have very much effect at all? It has very little effect and will certainly not lead us to really deal in a tough way with the illicit drug industry, which indeed is a huge, huge problem, destabilizing society throughout our world.

Mr. Speaker, those are my questions and the problems that I have with this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to make a few remarks with respect to Bill 207, the traffic safety, licence suspension for controlled substances violation, amendment act, 2006. The drug trade in our province should be a matter of concern to all Albertans. While I suspect that not all Albertans are in fact concerned about this matter, I can tell you in my experience as Justice Minister and Attorney General that a great number are. In fact, I would say that the majority of Albertans do care deeply about this matter.

3:50

Typically it comes up in my world in the context of the apparent inability of the justice system taken as a whole to appropriately address the plague that, as has been pointed out, is now not just part of the cities but also part of the rural environment in our province and, indeed, across Canada and North America. It involves marijuana. It involves cocaine. It involves manufactured drugs such as crystal meth.

When people ask the question, "What are you doing about it?" ultimately they talk in terms of additional resources for the system, in terms of additional police and prosecutors. In terms of prosecution, this is a matter which is handled by the federal government rather than the provincial government, and I point that out. But they still say, you know, that there should be additional resources. So much of what we're talking about in terms of addressing crime has something to do with attacking organized crime, which is big business. There's not always enough money. In fact, there is not enough money to appropriately address organized crime. Then, of course, you have to be able to prosecute these things.

The fact is that on the street so much of what happens does happen in and out of vehicles. Reference has been made to the dial-a-doper. It's in that context, when those folks are caught, that people complain because the sentences that typically go along with a conviction like that will involve in many instances conditional sentences. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about a sentence where individuals are told to go home and watch television with certain conditions which ensure that they don't have the same freedoms they had before but which fall far short of incarceration. Many people do not see that as an appropriate penalty.

The federal government has indicated that they're prepared to address that. In fact, I think it's currently in the press, that the conditional sentencing provisions will be changed. Sometime in the next few weeks, perhaps, we will see some legislation from them that addresses a reduction in conditional sentencing availability for serious crimes and, hopefully, serious crimes involving the drug trade.

Mr. Speaker, it's that background that ensures that we're always interested in finding new ways to keep our communities safer. Much of the discussion regarding this falls into the field of the federal government because of the comments I've made: the legislation, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The resources relative to detection and prosecution are with them.

I appreciate very much the efforts of the hon. Member for Red Deer-North in coming forward with what is a provincial solution to this particular matter. I think it's worthy of discussion because it allows us to appreciate the issue. It allows us to appreciate the restrictions that we have here in the province in doing some of the things which appear, to common sense, to make so much sense. Why is it that we wouldn't take away a driver's licence and a vehicle from someone who is using that driver's licence and that vehicle to profit through trafficking of drugs, to damage our society? After all, a driver's licence is nothing but a privilege. If you are using a vehicle as your business centre, if you are driving the roads and using drugs and selling drugs out of that vehicle, as has been commented on, then why wouldn't we, as a matter of common sense, disrupt the drug trade by taking away the privilege of driving and by taking away by way of confiscation the vehicle that is owned by that person who is central to it?

Bill 207 would amend the Traffic Safety Act to give the province the authority to suspend the driver's licence of any individual who is convicted of drug possession or drug trafficking while in a vehicle. It would also give the province authority to seize that vehicle in those same circumstances. The drug possession and trafficking charges relevant to this bill are violations under section 5 of the federal Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Mr. Speaker, because these are offences under federal legislation, licence suspensions and vehicle seizures of this sort are complicated by the question of jurisdiction. We must be aware that the province is not completely free to enact provincial penalties for federal legislation. However, while it is not always the case, there are situations where we have authority to do so. For example, at this time the Traffic Safety Act provides for provincial driving disqualifications where there have been driving convictions under either the federal Criminal Code or the National Defence Act. Provincial driving suspensions for driving convictions under this legislation have been challenged at the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court found these convictions to be valid because the provincial driving disqualification relates to a federal driving conviction. This is an important point. For the province to have the authority to suspend a licence on a federal charge, there must be a driving-related conviction.

In the current proposal we would add provincial driving disqualifications for convictions under the federal Controlled Drugs and Substances Act when the person is in a vehicle. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, although the convicted person may have been in the vehicle with drugs, the federal conviction is not for a driving-related offence. This means that we do not have the connection between a federal driving-related offence and the provincial penalty. The current case law from the Supreme Court of Canada has said that this particular connection is necessary.

Mr. Speaker, there has been some discussion relating to legislation that exists in other provinces and how we might do something similar with this bill. Legislation in Saskatchewan and Manitoba allows the police to seize vehicles that belong to individuals who have been arrested for solicitation of a prostitute. Alberta enacted the same legislation in 2003, but that legislation has not yet been proclaimed.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation in Saskatchewan and Manitoba has not been challenged in the courts, but the same basic concern exists. The concern is that the underlying offence is a criminal matter and not under provincial jurisdiction. This may be perceived as an attempt to legislate in the area of criminal law a matter that is exclusively federal.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify one thing. The province does have authority to restrict drivers' licences for

violations of provincial legislation. For example, in the Traffic Safety Act there are provisions for a driving disqualification where a person is not making their court-ordered maintenance payments. Maintenance arrears are, of course, not driving-related matters, but they are clearly within provincial jurisdiction. Therefore, the province has the authority to link them to driving disqualifications. Possession and trafficking in drugs are not provincial matters, and it is, in all likelihood, a real question as to whether or not we can say that there is jurisdiction to try and link driving and drug possession as Bill 207 purports to do.

I'm not concluding that there is a clear answer to this, Mr. Speaker. What I am saying is that there is a body of law that gives some very clear guidance in the matter, and what I have outlined for you and other members of the Assembly is what that law is as of this time.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that there is a significant need . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, your time allocation has run out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think all of us here can agree that we need to get drug traffickers off the streets, but we have to figure out the best way to do it. I was glad that the Minister of Justice explained some of the problems with jurisdiction between the federal and the provincial because I was sort of curious about the fact that we did pass some legislation here, that the minister alluded to, having to do with johns and prostitution. It was our understanding, as the minister said, that they have passed the same laws in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. They are working. That was part of our concern. We can pass what we want here, but if we can't proclaim it after we pass it, there's not much point.

4:00

I was going back to the bill that the hon. Justice minister talked about. In going through that, beyond sort of the federal and provincial jurisdictions and who does what, before I would commit to offer our support to the bill – and I throw this out – the first major issue we have is the fact that in order to have a driver's licence suspended under this amendment, the drug trafficker in question must be the driver of the vehicle when committing an offence. I think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and others have said that this is sort of problematic. The issue here is that being found guilty of an offence carries not only a fine but a potential jail sentence. Now, depending on the drug being trafficked, if it's not a conditional sentence, jail terms could range from a minimum of eight months to a maximum, I suppose, of life imprisonment.

I guess the first question then, if that's the case, is: what good, therefore, is a driver's licence suspension of a year if the person is in jail for two or five? It seems to us that the problem is partly solved there, and the bill doesn't allude to that. Does the amendment mean to apply a driver's licence suspension from the time of release from jail or from the seizure of the vehicle used? Section 3 of the proposed amendment seems to indicate immediate seizure. Is that, in fact, what it's doing? If the suspension does not apply as of the arrest and assumed near-immediate charge of drug trafficking, how are we stopping drug traffickers from simply going out and getting another car? As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora mentioned, we know that they borrow, they steal, they rent cars, whatever. We're wondering how that would stop them from doing that.

There is the obvious thing about the civil liberties too. The American Civil Liberties Union found that immediate seizure of

vehicles was contrary to law as it occurs before the individual is found guilty of the crime with which they are charged. Therefore, we must ask: if seizure is immediate but suspension is not, what message is being sent? It's still clear in the courts that you're presumed innocent until guilty. What if the individual charged is granted bail, and the trial takes a year to conclude? We know that in some of these cases that's, in fact, what happens. They are technically allowed to drive, albeit a different vehicle, until they are found guilty. So what is this amendment doing? In other words, you can suspend their car, it takes a year for this to come to court, and they can still drive another vehicle. Fairly easy to do. So what purpose is this suspension meant to serve? You see it around the inner city, that drug traffickers can just as easily walk to their sales or take other transportation. It's happening all the time.

Also, the stipulation that you must be the driver of the vehicle when you are caught in the act means that if your friend or acquaintance or spouse or sibling is the driver, their licence is not suspended, nor is yours. Again, you have to be the driver. If that's not the case, I'd certainly like the member to elucidate. What purpose is the suspension meant to serve?

Let me just conclude by saying that I understand the reason that the Member for Red Deer-North wants to come forward with a bill like this. It is a serious problem. We all recognize this. For instance, in the city of Edmonton the police in a northern part were telling me that they can recognize 23 different gangs – 23 different gangs – by names in the city. A lot of them have to do with drugs. No doubt about that. So we do have a very serious problem.

I suppose the advantage of bringing a bill like this forward is that at least there's some debate about the seriousness of the problem, but with due respect I say that I'm not sure that this bill accomplishes what we want it to accomplish. The fact that people are on drugs: I can point out that we'd better do a better job in our schools in such high risk areas. Full-day kindergarten, kindergarten, high school graduation: all those in the long run will probably have a bigger impact. The Minister of Justice talked about the justice system. There's obviously work to do there, but it's going to be a multifaceted approach if we're going to seriously deal with this particular problem.

Again I come back to the point that we said that if we're passing legislation, we can pass what we want here. If all of a sudden the Minister of Justice and the lawyers say, "Hey, we've got a problem; we can't get this through," and we don't proclaim it, then what's the point? The message I got from the Minister of Justice was that we'd be facing the same sorts of problems here if we pass this particular bill as the one that we passed dealing with the johns and cars back in 2003. We passed it. It passed in the Legislature here with all good intentions, but we haven't proclaimed it. So I would suggest that until we deal with that particular bill, because I think there's a similarity here – one that has already passed the House, and we can't proclaim it – there is not much point going through here, passing it through three readings, and then having it sit there for four years. I think we should probably go back to the drawing board on that particular bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006, Bill 207, before the Assembly this afternoon. I think the amendment to the Traffic Safety Act is very important, very critical, and where we want to move forward in the future regarding a

number of areas in protecting society: protecting those most vulnerable, including young boys and girls, young teenagers, from the effects of drugs and alcohol but, as well, as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General mentioned earlier in his comments, those involved in the prostitution, or sex trade, industry.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through the amendments to the Traffic Safety Act, or Bill 207, we talk about dealing with controlled drugs and substances, the CDSA as it's commonly referred to. The drugs involved in these types of cases are obviously drugs that are illegal in all parts of Canada but, as well, have created devastation for many families, for many children and adults. In attempting to look at new ways of service delivery or new ways of being able to investigate or looking at new tools for police officers or those in law enforcement, I think the hon. Member for Red Deer-North has come forward with a tremendous bill that will have that effect in the community, that will have that effect on those that want to continue to traffic illegally in those types of drugs or narcotics and who are really traffickers in sending kids through hell.

When I say that, Mr. Speaker, it's because I worked, in fact, undercover for a number of years. I saw the devastating effects of what cocaine, what crack cocaine can do, what heroin does to an individual. Now, with the scourge of crystal meth in our community, this is a tremendous bill that we can use and look forward to in the future.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, years ago, when I was giving evidence on a drug trafficking charge in Calgary, the justice in the Court of Queen's Bench at that time sentenced a cocaine dealer to three years in a federal institution for selling me one gram of cocaine. Obviously, those sentences have changed in the last 20 years. That's how devastating it was 20 years ago. Today it seems that a lot of drugs are allowed more in the community than others.

So when I see this bill coming forward, I think this is tremendous. It provides for the deterrent that will be out in the community for drug dealers, whether it be organized crime members, whether it be, you know, the eastern European gang members that are throughout this province, whether it's the bikers or the Hells Angels throughout this province, or whether it's any of the other aboriginal or Jamaican-based organized crime groups that Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta has reported yearly in their annual report, that's made public.

4:10

I want to assure, Mr. Speaker, that I fully support the fact that this law will provide all Albertans with the ability to ensure that this is another tool. This is another opportunity that there is a deterrent. If those who want to traffic in illegal drugs are going to be using a vehicle, if they're going to be transporting those drugs from Calgary or from Edmonton to Fort McMurray, and if they get stopped on the highway, that vehicle will be seized.

Mr. Speaker, just recently – and you're probably aware of the article that was reported by the Edmonton Police Service through IROC, integrated response to organized crime, two weeks ago, roughly – two individuals, one from Calgary and one from Lethbridge, were arrested here in Edmonton with, I believe, \$114,000 in cash and 20 kilograms of cocaine in their vehicle. Now, I don't know the details of the case, and I'm not going to speculate on what the details are, but obviously they were doing some travelling throughout the province. As good as Travel Alberta is – and that theme is great – they're trafficking in narcotics throughout our province, whether it be up in Grande Prairie or whether it be in Fort McMurray. I'm very proud of the officers that worked on that case and, obviously, the seizure of those drugs, taking them off the street and placing them in a lock-up but, as well, destroying the drugs,

which will occur later as their court case goes through.

Again, Mr. Speaker, these are issues and these are cases that are at the forefront. We've seen more of this type of activity as this province grows and as the economy grows. We aren't just getting, you know, the individuals that will want to come to Alberta to work hard to earn a good salary and a good living and to raise their kids in the best environment that they can. Many of them come from economic areas throughout Canada that don't have the financial capability that can provide them with the necessities of life, so they are moving to Alberta. Yes, there are various problems that come with that, and one of those is the drug trade.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, where an individual has his vehicle seized, I think it's going to be a tremendous deterrent to those that want to be in that field. We know for a fact that in some of the drive-by shootings that have occurred throughout the province and from the description of vehicles that have been laid out, many of them have been newer, fancy cars: some BMWs, some Hondas, and some other fast and fancy and all decked-out cars. This, again, ties in with the drug industry, ties in with that gang activity. Obviously, if they're going to be using that motor vehicle for trafficking in these types of substances, I am all for the Member for Red Deer-North's bill to move forward.

The hon. Minister of Justice spoke regarding the effects of a conviction. He spoke regarding the procedures regarding laws, regarding court cases, regarding appeals. I'm not going to speak about that, but I do want to just mention that we've seen a societal breakdown in our inner-city communities, whether it's in Edmonton or Calgary or whether it's Fort McMurray or even Grande Prairie now, and including Lethbridge and Medicine Hat and our larger centres, where we can see a degree of population within those inner cities that are succumbing to the social ills of our society today, whether that be drugs, whether it be alcohol related, whether it be prostitution related. All of these tie in with each other. The drug trade is tied in with the prostitution, or the sex trade, and it is tied in with alcohol abuse.

It also provides, Mr. Speaker, some of the worst things, that we don't want our children to see. Those are the condoms and the needles, the used needles in the front yards and on the front streets and the driveways and back alleys of our communities. The only way is for us to come up with laws that are going to create a deterrence for individuals to continue this practice.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think Bill 207 is a driving force of where we want to go. I think this will provide police officers with a tremendous tool in the surveillance that's done regarding major investigations. As well, a police officer that's checking a vehicle on the side of the road for speeding and/or if they found that there were drugs in the vehicle could in fact seize the vehicle because of the fact it was being used to transport illegal drugs. Obviously, those illegal drugs would be listed as they are now under the CDSA, Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I'd just like to say that I support this bill a hundred per cent. There are a number of areas that as government we have a responsibility for. As I mentioned earlier in my comments, these are opportunities for us as a government to look forward to and move toward changes to make our communities safer, to make our communities more secure as well as to ensure that those who want to traffic in these types of illegal substances are apprehended and that their net worth can be investigated by Revenue Canada and that their vehicle can be seized and provided to the government.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak on Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006. First off, the motivation behind this bill – and I very much agree with it and agree with the push to try and do something to deal with the great problem we have with drug dealers in our society and the problems that the Member for Red Deer-North has so aptly described and the difficulties that we have in this area to provide our police officers with a tool, as the Solicitor General so aptly described. You know, to provide something different, something new I think is very important. I don't know if this exactly provides something new, but it is good to have something here that we can begin to bring greater public pressure, bring a greater sense of the feeling of Alberta and Albertans to those, perhaps, who have some of this jurisdiction federally to limit the use of drugs through whatever means – the crystal meth, the heroine, the cocaine, the crack, whatever, you know, the always very, very debilitating substances that drug dealers prey upon the ignorance, I suppose, of many young people and the problems that arise from the use of these drugs. It is very, very important to try and come up with some ways to deal with that.

I've had a number of complaints in my constituency, which has a large rural component even though it's a constituency in the city of Edmonton. There are farms, there are acreages along Manning Drive and along Fort Road and through that whole area who have had regular complaints because it is an area where some of the drug dealers drive out to meet their customers, I suppose, and to make deals, and it's up the driveways of some very, you know, responsible members of the community, community league leaders and such. They've been coming through with complaints. They're a little too far from north division to see a quick response. There's usually not a ready and regular police presence. Like in almost any rural area you're not going to have a regular police presence down a country road, and this is what we have in some big sections of northeast Edmonton. This is where we seem to be having a number of these drug deals coming down and people going to buy and dial-a-dopers picking out certain driveways and dealing with this problem where some of the individuals that own these homes have resorted to having scare-away devices, lights that'll flash on them and all the rest of it, just to keep the drug dealers away from their area.

4:20

If we were to have some sort of legislation and to speak here about it to ensure that our federal counterparts will be pushing, those that enforce the laws and those that deal with them in the courts will understand that the Legislature is very concerned about this and that we want to see some action and some use of those federal provisions that are already there. As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora aptly put forward, there is already some power on the part of the federal government to go forward on this problem, and sometimes we just have to see some of these powers used.

The problem that may arise with this bill, though, is that it seems like it is ultra vires. The BNA Act or the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments may bring about a number of problems in that way, and it may never see the light of day. There may be charges where it is to some degree grandstanding, but in many ways I don't mind that this type of an issue is brought forward so that, as I said earlier, the Legislature lets it be known that it is very important for the people of Alberta to see some action on this issue and to see some moving forward to try and control the devastating aspects, the devastating effects that the drug trade in many of these substances has had on our communities.

When I was in Fort McMurray a few years ago – and I've heard

similar things in other parts of Alberta – there were even drug dealers hanging outside the playgrounds of elementary schools. This was related to us by the RCMP there, that they were selling – the term that was used was the dragon, which is heroin, selling that in elementary schools. It's just almost beyond belief for me that such drugs would be marketed to elementary students in our schools. I can think of worse things to do than seize the car of those people that are trying to prey upon our young people by doing such things.

The Member for Edmonton-Glenora certainly spoke about the difference between going after supply and demand, and certainly some of the other members did speak to trying to reduce the demand through I think education, trying to ensure support of families of those kids that are at risk, trying perhaps to have some extra kindergarten time, to just having some recreation.

Although my riding's actually outer city and much of it would be deemed suburb, it has some inner-city aspects in certain of the neighbourhoods. I was at a school here just last week speaking to a couple of grade 6 classes, and then I had a chat with the principal afterwards. Many of these students are new to Canada, and they're new to Edmonton, new to Alberta. What happens with many of these families is that they are low income, sometimes almost no income. These kids don't get anywhere, and they're preyed upon somewhat. You know, you hear about their visit to the Legislature being such a special visit to the kids from the school because many of the families don't even visit a park. They've never been to the zoo. They've never been out to our lovely Legislature Grounds. It's a far ways away, and for some of them even a few dollars for the family to make such a visit is a lot, or the time, if their parents have been working long hours, is very, very difficult.

The need to deal with, you know, greater recreation, greater things for the kids to do I think is key, is important, is something that we have to be looking at to ensure that we take away the demand, that we take away the ability to influence these kids from some of these drug dealers, that we take away the influence of a number of the gangs. The Solicitor General mentioned many of them. There are many, many, many gangs active in Alberta, active in Edmonton, and those gangs will prey upon kids. They'll prey upon some of their runners. This will perhaps . . . [Mr. Backs' speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and address the Assembly on Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006. I've been very pleased – and I'm sure the people of this province will join me in saying so – with the recent efforts made by this government in an attempt to curb the manufacture and sale of illegal drugs.

It's this last point that I'm glad we're addressing: the sale of illegal drugs. I think that when we discuss strategies to stamp out the drug trade, we often don't give enough consideration to the mechanics of how these poisons are actually distributed or purchased within our communities. When criminals go out to push drugs or score drugs, they often do so with the help of an automobile. We've all heard of the infamous dial-a-dope networks where a quick phone call gets drugs delivered to your door in the space of a few short minutes.

The implications of this practice are very disturbing. Think about it. We have individuals driving around in our communities with thousands of dollars in drugs and drug money, peddling their poison door to door. To a drug dealer a car is a business tool that makes business easier and more profitable.

Mr. Speaker, we also have the opposite situation where people looking to score drugs drive around streets and alleyways looking for drug dealers. Once again, this presents the obviously dangerous situation of drugs and money changing hands, an activity which we all know can and often does lead to violence and gunplay.

Aside from this and aside from the obvious evil of drug trafficking in general, we must also consider the implications of automobile use by those engaged in these illegal transactions. It's a case of people who are flagrantly disregarding the law. They're already thumbing their noses at social responsibility. They have no regard for themselves or those around them, and when they climb behind the wheel of a two-tonne automobile, there's a recipe for disaster close at hand.

Criminals and cars are a bad mix. Throw in narcotics and they have the potential to become deadly. Driving while high, fleeing the police or a deal gone bad, hurrying to get to the next transaction, or any combination of the three makes the combination of these people and their automobiles a ticking time bomb.

Mr. Speaker, we already have laws in place that place prohibitions on impaired driving and trafficking or buying narcotics. I've already mentioned that these people have no regard for the law. They obviously don't care about the consequences that are currently in place. As a result, they pose a distinct safety risk to honest, hard-working Albertans. This is why I believe that Bill 207 presents us with a unique opportunity, an opportunity that will enhance public safety and get those caught drug-trafficking off the road by proposing two unique and effective measures.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, the first provision of Bill 207 that I wish to address is the one that would allow a peace officer to seize the vehicle of anyone who is charged with drug trafficking or possession with the intent to traffic. This is a good idea, an idea that will serve two important functions in making our streets and our neighbourhoods safer. By seizing the vehicles of those charged with these drug offences, we would effectively be cutting off their livelihoods at the knees. Without a car it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to continue dealing drugs or, at least, to continue dealing in the same quantity with the same efficiency.

The best feature of this bill seems to be its application to those who have been charged. Mr. Speaker, if the offender is out on bail in the period of time between being charged and convicted, they wouldn't have a car unless they put up a substantial security deposit. If they are convicted and don't do jail time, they still wouldn't have a car. The loss of the car would be permanent upon conviction, which represents a significant financial setback for the drug dealer. In order to recommence illegal activity, a new vehicle would have to be purchased, a measure which could prevent further illegal activity.

Mr. Speaker, the deterrent factor would also be extremely high. I'm sure that many aspiring drug pushers would change their plans if they knew that they faced the potential loss of a multi-thousand dollar investment. This might present even more of a deterrent than the threat of jail time. I think that we've all seen examples of drug dealers whose vehicles aren't transportation; they're ego extensions. The profits that they make off the pain of the innocent often find their way into big engines, loud stereos, and custom rims. While they can already be seized as proceeds of crime, the provisions of Bill 207 would add to and reinforce existing laws. For people such as these a loss of status might be even more frightening than the loss of freedom, not for all but maybe for some, and if we can make even one drug dealer choose his car over his profession, then we've succeeded.

Mr. Speaker, realistically, there are no easy solutions to winning the war on drugs. We can't fight on one front. We have to engage in small battles that address the multilevel nature of the drug trade. Drugs are everywhere in our society. They're being manufactured and grown in our neighbourhoods. They're being sold on our streets and taken into our schools.

The people who sell them are innovative, so we, too, must be innovative in stopping them. Bill 207 represents such innovation, and it serves to challenge our traditional notions about fighting crime and improving the safety of our society. We must build on what is already in place. We must continually find new ways to discourage criminal activity.

Mr. Speaker, the second action proposed by the bill is the disqualification of a drug dealer's driving licence for one year following conviction. This takes the seizure measure one step further and serves as another vital means to decrease the threat that these people pose to the citizens of Alberta. Such a disqualification is only fitting. I think that I've made it quite clear that drug dealers present a huge danger to the public on our streets and highways. Seizing their vehicles will get them off the road. Taking their driver's licence away is a logical extension to this. It presents an extra measure of insurance.

Driving is something that we all take for granted. Most of us do it every day and don't give it a second thought. We share the roads with thousands of other people on a regular basis, and we depend on their responsibility. We drive to work. We drive our kids to school. We frankly don't pay much attention to the person in the next car. We take it as a matter of course that they are like us, that maybe they're taking their kids to soccer practice or taking a briefcase full of papers to the office. Maybe they're taking a bag of cocaine and a loaded handgun to a drug deal. If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, then I think that the safety risk they pose on the road is fairly self-evident, and they shouldn't be on it.

Driving is not a right; it's a privilege. A vehicle is not just a means of transportation. It can be a weapon in the wrong circumstances. If a criminal is caught with a gun, the gun is taken away, and it's not given back because it's a public safety risk. In narcotics-related cases a car should be treated the same way. I don't want drug dealers in our society at all. I especially don't want them on the same roads used by my family and my friends. If they insist on using their vehicles to spread their poison, then we should prevent them from doing so by any means necessary.

Bill 207 provides us with those means. It provides a way to severely cut into the livelihood of drug traffickers by taking away their transportation. It will discourage them from continuing or, hopefully, even starting to sell drugs by threatening their means of transportation. It will help make Alberta's roads safer for the thousands of innocent people who use them every day.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I believe that Bill 207 will be another valuable weapon in the fight on drugs and an excellent means of enhancing public safety. I wish to offer it my full support, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also privileged to be able to rise in this Assembly today and join the debate on Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

For far too long those who use motor vehicles in the commission of a crime have endangered the lives of Albertans. Numerous

criminology studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between crime and motor vehicle collisions and fatalities. For example, a 1975 study demonstrated that those who were involved in criminal activity were also more likely to cause a fatality with a motor vehicle. Additional studies have shown that the antisocial behavioural traits displayed by criminals tend to manifest into aggressive and dangerous behaviour behind the wheel. We simply must put a stop to this. More Albertans are dying every year due to the callous and reckless actions of criminals who turn an automobile into a murder weapon.

Of particular concern is the use and distribution of narcotics and other illegal drugs and their ability to detract from traffic safety. There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that narcotic consumption impairs cognitive faculties and awareness and is a major contributor to motor vehicle collisions and fatalities. Moreover, illegal drug activity creates a culture of violence that, when combined with an automobile, can be lethal. The distribution and consumption of illegal drugs is unacceptable under any circumstances but is particularly damaging when combined with the operation of a vehicle.

We already have existing laws that provide for the disqualification of those who drive while under the influence of narcotics or alcohol. Further to this, it is essential that we do everything possible to ensure that those who are involved with illegal drugs in other ways are kept off our roads and prevented from harming innocent Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of Bill 207 is to give law enforcement and traffic safety officials a tool that will allow them to remove from the road those who disregard our society's laws against the trafficking of drugs. Specifically, Bill 207 provides for the seizure of any motor vehicle that is used for the purpose of trafficking drugs. Additionally, this bill would amend the Traffic Safety Act so that an individual convicted of drug distribution would automatically be disqualified from holding a driver's licence for one year from the date of conviction. By removing drug traffickers from our roadways, we will undoubtedly increase overall traffic safety and prevent senseless motor vehicle collisions that end and destroy the lives of many Albertans every year. The greatest strength of Bill 207 is that it allows us to make our streets safer while at the same time fitting into a comprehensive strategy for preventing the distribution of drugs in Alberta.

The use of illegal drugs, especially among youth, is having numerous detrimental effects on Alberta's communities. Drug manufacturing, the use of drugs, and trafficking contribute to violence, health problems, environmental degradation, and other long-term social problems. All across this province there are examples of lives ruined and communities threatened by problems that are caused by the distribution and use of drugs.

Currently we are working on a strategy to stop the distribution of illegal drugs in Alberta. This strategy includes new mechanisms to educate citizens about drugs and treatment programs to rehabilitate those who have become users. It also includes enforcement mechanisms to encourage respect for the law and impede the manufacture and distribution of illegal drugs and narcotics. Bill 207 fits into this strategy because it aims to stop the spread of drugs by putting an additional weapon in the arsenal of law enforcement and removing a tool from the hands of criminals.

4:40

Motor vehicles are an important tool of the trade for drug traffickers. Dial-a-doper networks use vehicles to deliver drugs to the homes of users at a moment's notice. Moreover, vehicles are an important link between the manufacturers, buyers, and sellers of these drugs. By removing this link, Mr. Speaker, we will help to

staunch the flow of illegal drugs in our province and ultimately make our communities safer and better places to live.

Some have expressed concerns that this bill could lead to administrative delays and put additional demands on the time of our peace officers and the resources of our law enforcement agencies. May I remind this House, however, that enforcing existing drug laws and dealing with all the safety concerns and social problems that drug activity creates already puts a considerable demand on the resources of this government.

The most important job of our peace officers is to ensure the safety of Albertans. Making it more difficult for drug dealers to do business will ultimately lead to a safer Alberta and, therefore, will make the jobs of our peace officers less challenging. In the long term this could make it easier for our peace officers to perform their jobs, which will increase efficiency and save the taxpayers of Alberta a considerable amount of money. Moreover, drug use puts increased pressures on other government programs, such as health and social services. Reducing the proliferation of drugs in Alberta and increasing overall traffic safety will help to take the pressure off these programs, thereby saving resources.

Mr. Speaker, licence disqualification has proven to be an effective deterrent against various forms of crime and other harmful and illegal behaviour. It has been an integral part of programs that have successfully reduced the incidence of impaired driving, thereby saving lives. Vehicle seizure has also proven to be an effective deterrent against certain types of illegal activity. Several provinces have already put in place laws that provide for the seizure of a motor vehicle that is used in the commission of various types of offences, most notably prostitution. I think that it is very encouraging that society is recognizing that motor vehicles play a very important role in criminal activity and, therefore, that this criminal activity has many negative ramifications for traffic safety.

Mr. Speaker, society and, particularly, we as politicians and lawmakers are just sick and tired of drug activity and all the negative impacts of the drug trade and drug use. We need every tool that we can get to help fight this scourge. This is one more tool that we can use to slow down or stop the drug trade and protect our children. So I applaud the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for introducing Bill 207 because this bill takes into account the effect of drug trafficking on traffic safety and provides a workable solution that will help to protect Alberta motorists while at the same time tackling the problem of drug distribution, a problem that negatively impacts our communities.

I urge all members of this Assembly to take action to promote safety on Alberta roads and empower law enforcement officials to protect Albertans by preventing those who traffic drugs from operating any kind of motor vehicle. Supporting Bill 207 will help to achieve these goals, so I would encourage everyone to support this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006. I rise in this House to join the debate, as I often do, with a sense of bemusement. I mean, this bill and the logic behind it as expressed by a number of people who have participated in the debate so far, a number of the hon. members, has so many holes in it that you could drive a fleet of tractor-trailers through it.

You know, if you want to do something positive about traffic safety in the province of Alberta, something that will make a real

difference, wear your seat belt. If you want to do something positive about the war on drugs, something that will make a real difference, do something about tobacco. In fact, this House about a year ago had a chance to do just that with private member's Bill 201, and government members so watered it down as to cut the legs out from under it, and I don't know why they did. I honestly don't know why they did. I honestly don't know what the threat to peace, order, good government, individual liberty, civil rights, and public safety is by having a uniform, province-wide ban on smoking in all public places. It makes sense to me. It makes a good deal more sense to this hon. member, Mr. Speaker, than it does trying to take away the cars of drug dealers.

Government members opposite, when they're unshackled from the party line and actually able to speak out and speak their mind, like to say that one of the reasons why they belong to the party opposite is because they don't believe in passing laws if the laws are going to be inherently bad laws. Well, this is inherently a bad law. It's based on a number of fallacies, one of which is a stereotype expressed just a few minutes ago about the drug dealer being the sole proprietor in the province of Alberta of a souped-up car, you know, one of those lowered-down, tricked-out usually Hondas or Acuras, in my experience, that if you see somebody driving one of those cars anywhere in the province of Alberta, he must by extension be a drug trafficker. Well, where is that written, Mr. Speaker? Where's the evidence for that?

I remember back in 1975 when I was living in Toronto and working an evening shift, which brought me home usually at somewhere between 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning, being pulled over regularly by metro Toronto's finest because at the time I was driving a blue, four-door, nondescript, mid-size Chevy with no chrome on it and black-wall tires and because I was in my early 20s and, I was going to say, had hair down to my shoulders. But what the heck? I had hair back then. To metro's finest I looked like a suspect. You know what? I wasn't. [interjections] I know. To the government members opposite I still look like a suspect, but that's my point exactly: they are the victims of stereotypical thinking.

You know, if you want to talk about a class of vehicle, perhaps, that we ought to be talking about seizing on a regular basis – because we all know that this ties in directly to drug trafficking; at least I thought we did – why don't we just seize every Harley-Davidson on the roads of Alberta? That's the vehicle of choice of motorcycle gang members, and they deal drugs. I haven't heard a word about Harleys. Now, I'm not recommending that we seize every Harley-Davidson in the province of Alberta because that would capture in that net I think a lot of innocent people who don't deal drugs. But, I mean, a stereotype is a stereotype.

If you want to talk about taking away an important tool of the drug trafficker's trade – and I refer back now to the opening of debate on this bill – why not take away their cellphone? You know, the driver that the hon. Member for Red Deer-North referred to, the drug trafficker who made 60 cellphone calls in the space of – what was it? – an hour, 28 minutes, however long it was, certainly didn't do that by pushing the buttons on the AM/FM stereo in the tricked-out Acura. He did it by dialing the keypad of the cellphone. Let's take away the tool that is responsible here. I don't know, by the way, I have no more idea how you would enforce a law banning cellphones or seizing cellphones from drug traffickers than I have any idea how you're going to enforce this ridiculous law. If you could do it, that would more severely hamper a drug dealer's ability to ply his trade, to sell his wares, to deal drugs to people than taking away his car.

You know, if you take away his car, he's only going to steal another if he's really doing well at the drug trade because it will be worth his while. He already knows how the system works. He

already knows that he's not going to get much time for stealing a car. First of all, as any drug dealer will probably tell you, it ain't illegal if you don't get caught. He's banking on not getting caught. As long as he doesn't get caught, it's worth the risk to steal another car when you take his tricked-out, souped-up Acura away, so he can continue doing his dealing.

4:50

There's an awful lot of money to be made in the trafficking of drugs. I think it's about time we stopped and asked ourselves the question: why is that? Why is there so much money to be made in the trafficking of drugs? It's because there's demand, hon. members. There's demand for illicit drugs. If I had a dime, even a penny, for every dollar that the governments of the western world have spent fighting the war on drugs, I'd be a very, very, very unimaginably wealthy individual. Yet as the hon. Member for Red Deer-North herself alluded to, the war on drugs has been going on for 30-plus years now led by the White House, which is doing just about as well in that war as it is in Iraq. I think it's time to revisit the strategy, folks. I really do. I think it's time that we stopped trying to fight this war on the supply side and started getting really serious about the demand side, about what we're going to do to drug-proof our kids, to begin with.

Now, I don't have the time to debate that here today, but I would invite you all, before you just put up your hand and say, "Yes, motherhood, hot dog, apple pie, and tricked-out Acuras; let's pass Bill 207 because it's an easy thing to do to make us look like we're doing something about a problem when we're not doing a thing about it," to think about that. I would invite you to think about really getting serious about the war on drugs and attacking it from the side where the problem exists, and that's the demand side.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and join the debate in support of Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006. I would also like to recognize the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing forth this initiative because I believe that this debate will go a long way in helping the fight against drug crime in our province.

The illegal drug trade is an ever-increasing problem in our society, and Alberta is no different. In our province alone there are thousands of cases each year involving the possession or the sale of narcotics. The sobering reality is that illegal drug activity in this province has the potential to affect all Albertans from schoolchildren to our senior citizens.

Whether it is happening on their neighbourhood street corner in broad daylight or whether it is concealed from the public after dark, drug activity affects us all. The people who choose this sort of lifestyle pose a legitimate threat to everyone, Mr. Speaker. Their actions involve personally consuming or distributing harmful chemicals and substances, usually with little concern for anyone else around them. Additionally, the means by which drugs are being sold and distributed is also worrisome. Any method of distribution that helps dealers to circulate their product, including motor vehicles and operating licences, should also be considered a threat to our public security.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, not all citizens within our province have or will directly experience the negative effects of illegal drug

activity, but preventative actions taken now could guard against the possibility of that happening in the future. The very fact that some individuals choose to bring these harmful and dangerous substances into our communities, jeopardizing our comfort and security, creates the need for the government to do all that it can to protect the citizens of Alberta in any way possible. I feel that Bill 207 is simply another weapon. It's another tool that authorities could utilize in the fight against drug activity.

This proposed piece of legislation and its underlying concept is not a complex idea. Nor is it a new idea. Precedent has already been set in the form of the Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2003, which is currently awaiting royal proclamation. Under this act authorities have the ability to seize a vehicle from an individual in the event that prostitution-related charges are laid. There are obviously other means which aim to discourage prostitution-related activity. However, the act awaiting proclamation is yet another method to fight this sort of crime in our province. Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 could have a similar effect on drug-related crime in Alberta by removing from our roads vehicles and drivers that are unsafe due to drug-related activity.

There may be debate regarding the possibility that Bill 207 could infringe on the constitutional rights of the individuals who have been apprehended by police. Nevertheless, I believe that it is important to first protect the rights of innocent Albertans who could experience the negative effects of this type of criminal activity. This bill could be added to the growing collection of deterrents that intend to help rid our communities of hazardous drugs and the people who control them.

A vehicle seizure could really hit home for these individuals, proving it to be quite difficult for them to continue functioning the way they once did. A dial-a-doper operation provides a good example in this case. This venture is very similar to a common food delivery service. Typically a client will contact the restaurant to place an order to be delivered directly to their home, where the client will pay for the food, usually with an extra delivery service charge. The dial-a-doper business works in a similar fashion although here drugs are the product of choice. Users need only to make a simple phone call to have hard drugs delivered right to their front door. The ability for a distributor to use a vehicle to transport the drugs directly to the buyer's home allows for the entire activity to be conducted discreetly, making it very difficult to detect.

Mr. Speaker, this type of activity is becoming more prevalent in our province because it offers drug dealers the opportunity to go about their business with relative freedom and continue to endanger the safety and well-being of others on the road in the process. By using their vehicles as means to deliver these dangerous goods, the vehicles themselves become threatening to our communities. We should be doing something to remove them from our roads. Bill 207 will help to do that.

Our government should constantly be looking for new and innovative ways to serve the citizens of Alberta. Our legal system should be a reliable structure, an intricate collection of laws that complement each other and come together to provide Albertans with an extremely effective and efficient system of governance. It is a foundation that must be continuously built upon to ensure that our laws are always becoming better and stronger.

In the case of illegal drug activity, Mr. Speaker, we should arm ourselves with as many tools as possible to get traffickers and their vehicles off the streets. I feel that it is important to build a strong, united front when taking a stand against the drug trade. We should let it be known that drug trafficking will be handled without leniency

in our province, and Bill 207 is another step in that direction.

This piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, will give peace officers another instrument to combat the drug trade while maintaining the efficiency of the system as the foreseeable costs of the process will not be the responsibility of the government. An individual who has been charged with a drug-related offence will be held fiscally accountable in that they would have to pay for towing charges, storage, and any related insurance costs and any fees relating to returning the vehicle to the owner when appropriate. Giving authorities the power to seize their vehicles provides an opportunity to cripple the ability for individuals to complete their drug transactions.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 would give the province the authority to deliver an even more serious blow to the drug trade by disqualifying individuals who have been convicted of a drug-related crime from holding a driver's licence for up to one year. Not only would this provision get offenders off the road; it would serve to keep them off the road for a sustained period of time. Denying access to vehicles while potentially eliminating the ability to drive any other vehicle gives the authorities a very powerful method to aid in the fight against drug crime in our province. It is important that we use any means necessary to take a stand against the illegal drug trade in Alberta, and Bill 207 would significantly limit the ability of individuals involved in drug activity to conduct their business.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support this proposed legislation as I feel that it will help to develop even stronger laws that intend to send the message that drug activity will not be tolerated here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

5:00

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important issue, and I'm glad to be given the opportunity to stand today to join the debate on Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006. This is an interesting and important bill and one that I'm hoping all Members of the Legislative Assembly will consider and support.

Anything that distracts you from driving potentially poses a danger when an individual is operating a motor vehicle. People who are using their vehicles for the purposes of facilitating the trafficking of illegal substances are no doubt distracted by a variety of factors. Such individuals could potentially be distracted by talking on their cellphones to conduct their dealings, possibly trying to find a location. They could even be working directly with their product; bagging pills, for example. In the worst-case scenario they might even be sampling their product while they're driving. My point is that these individuals will be distracted while driving and not giving the needed attention and care they should be giving to their driving, endangering the public and themselves.

Individuals who traffic and possess illegal drugs obviously have little respect for our laws, Mr. Speaker. Thus, it is feasible that this would include our traffic laws. These laws, namely the Traffic Safety Act, ensure the safety of Albertans. Bill 207 provides our province with the ability to make certain that these traffic safety issues are not taken lightly and that Albertans remain safe while travelling our province's roads and highways.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 provides a system for addressing this problem. Firstly, if an individual is charged with trafficking drugs

or possessing drugs with the intention of trafficking them while operating a motor vehicle, a law enforcement agent will be able to seize their vehicle under the Traffic Safety Act. If people are using vehicles in such a way, why should we not find a way to prevent this from occurring in the future? By seizing their vehicle, we will be seriously restricting their ability to traffic drugs in the future. Drugs are a serious issue in this province and across the entire country. With the increase we have seen in methamphetamine production in every passing year, we need to do everything in our power to protect Albertans against the scourge of drugs in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing a great deal as a province to fight drugs, such as investing \$14 million in increasing addiction services for youth through AADAC. This is a great way to help Alberta's youth battle drugs and to discourage Albertans from using drugs in the first place. We need to do everything we can to ensure that the spread of drugs within our province is discouraged. We must – we must – frustrate and disrupt the business of drug distribution. Let's be clear: this is a big business.

Another positive aspect of Bill 207 is that if the individual is charged and the vehicle is seized, then it is the responsibility of the registered owner of the vehicle to pay for the towing and storage. Thus, individual municipalities will not be responsible for the costs associated with storage of these vehicles. This is a very important distinction, Mr. Speaker. Those who are charged should foot the bill and not the taxpayers. We want to make it much more expensive to conduct this nasty business.

Of course, Bill 207 makes provisions for the registered owner. Were they not involved in the trafficking of drugs or the possession of drugs for the purpose of trafficking, these individuals would have the option of appealing the seizure of their vehicles with the Alberta Transportation Safety Board.

After granting the ability to seize vehicles, the second major aspect of this bill is the ability to disqualify individuals who are charged with drug trafficking or possession of drugs with the intent of trafficking from holding a driver's licence for one year after the date they are convicted. Mr. Speaker, this aspect of the bill will do a great deal to ensure that those individuals who choose to traffic drugs within our province do not pose a threat on our roads. While taking away their vehicle may slow some drug dealers down, taking away their licence for a year will make certain that if they're able to get their hands on another vehicle, they will not have the legal right to operate it. This also ensures that those individuals who borrow someone else's car or who use a rental car to traffic drugs will have a good deal of difficulty continuing with such practices.

Mr. Speaker, driving is a privilege; it is not a right. This is definitely true, and in circumstances such as this, I do not feel that it is something that can be expressed enough. Rights are things that cannot be taken away. However, privileges must be exercised with great responsibility. People who are caught trafficking drugs within our province certainly should lose the privilege to operate a motor vehicle. It is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly, and it is hard to imagine that individuals who are out polluting the minds and bodies of Alberta's youth with drugs or endangering them on our roads should hold such rights. Individuals need to learn that abusing the privilege to operate a motor vehicle has a very real negative consequence.

We have done this already, Mr. Speaker, with the Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2003, which gives the power to seize vehicles when prostitution charges are laid. As a Legislature we passed this bill on November 24, 2003, and by all accounts it is set to be proclaimed in the very near future. If we can seize vehicles in prostitution-related offences,

we should have the same power when vehicles are being used for the purpose of trafficking drugs. Both are abuses of the privilege to drive and therefore should result in serious consequences for using a motor vehicle in making illegal activities possible.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will serve not only to address some of the traffic safety issues that can potentially arise from using a motor vehicle for the purposes of trafficking drugs, but it will also be another tool for our law enforcement agents in their work to prevent crime from taking place and in protecting Albertans generally.

Mr. Speaker, drug trafficking is a major part of criminal activity in our province, and the numbers speak volumes. For example, in 2003-04 there were 2,201 cases of drug trafficking in our courts, 881 of which resulted in guilty verdicts. Of these, only 365 resulted in jail time, 412 resulted in conditional sentences, 117 resulted in probation, 92 received a fine, three received restitution, 21 received absolute or conditional discharges, and 678 are cases for which there are no statistics or information on the outcome of the case. This data is already approximately two years old, and it is quite likely that there are many more individuals involved in the drug trade in our province than there were two years ago.

Bill 207 would help ensure that officers had some flexibility in seizing the vehicles of those charged with trafficking drugs. This would be another beneficial tool for law enforcement agents in the fight against drugs and crime in Alberta. We have the opportunity today, Mr. Speaker, to act proactively in the efforts to rid our province of drugs and the negative consequences that result from the drug trade. We have the opportunity to ensure that our roads and highways are safe. With this bill we can give our law enforcers another resource to protect our streets and the citizens of this province. We have the capacity to take away the privilege to drive from those who choose to abuse it by using their vehicles as an instrument in the trafficking of drugs. Essentially, Bill 207 gives us the ability to strengthen traffic safety within this great province.

I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing this piece of legislation forward. This is a practical bill, and I hope all members of this Legislature will join me in supporting it today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to speak on Bill 207. First, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for the thought and hard work she put into this legislation. It is important to find new ways to address the fact of illicit drugs in our province. Drug use and distribution is a growing problem in our province, and it is important that we take the necessary steps to reduce and eliminate the harm they cause to individuals, families, and communities.

To begin, Mr. Speaker, I must say that fighting the war on illicit drugs has to be multifaceted. It's obvious and common sense that like many other activities, it's demand and supply. We should do all we can to fight on these two sides. Indeed, the bottom line on drug dealing is money, so we need to fight it on the financial side, tracking the financial transactions from drug money and personal wealth generated from it. We need to fight it by tracking the substances and equipment used to make the drugs too.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, I can continue to be politically rhetorical on the ways to fight the war on drugs. I can keep debating on the ways of fighting this and other social ills, but as a responsible legislator like many of you here I want to speak on a concrete step taken to fight

this nasty social war. The primary purpose of Bill 207 is to improve the safety of Alberta's roads by removing from our roads vehicles and drivers involved in the drug trade that endanger the safety of other motorists. This would be accomplished in two measures: number one, giving peace officers the authority to seize the vehicle of a driver charged with drug trafficking or possession with the intent of trafficking while operating a motor vehicle, and number two, giving the province the authority to disqualify individuals convicted of the offences previously mentioned from holding a driver's licence for one year.

While there are several examples of vehicle seizure and licence disqualification laws similar to those proposed by Bill 207 both in our province and in other jurisdictions, I would like to focus the majority of my remarks this afternoon on these measures. In Alberta peace officers and the registrar of Alberta currently have the ability to suspend the driving privilege of individuals for a variety of reasons. The rationales for the licence suspensions range from impaired driving offences to accumulation of too many demerit points to one's licence to certain convictions under the federal Criminal Code and National Defence Act. Criminal Code convictions resulting in the disqualification of one's operator's licence include impaired driving, dangerous driving, and hit-and-run offences. Additionally, individuals may also be disqualified from holding an operator's licence for failure to meet maintenance enforcement obligations.

Now, this list is certainly not exhaustive but shows that our province already has similar legislation on the books regarding driver disqualification to deal with issues relating to safety and Criminal Code convictions. A peace officer in Alberta also has the authority to seize a vehicle under certain circumstances, and the Traffic Safety Act also provides for seizure of vehicles in prostitution-related offences.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we also look at other jurisdictions. For example, in Nova Scotia they include a provision in its Motor Vehicle Act to allow the seizure of a motor vehicle for contravening the section of the province's Motor Vehicle Act or of the federal Criminal Code relating to motor vehicle suspension. Manitoba and Saskatchewan also have similar legislation in place. In addition, Nova Scotia recently passed legislation that amended the Motor Vehicle Act to enlarge the list of offences for which an individual's driver's licence can be revoked if convicted. Bill 250 from the Minister of Justice is an interesting part of the legislation. When it was first introduced in second reading, it became, as Bill 250, An Act to Further Discourage the Theft of Gasoline and Diesel Oil. The bill was designed to punish individuals convicted of theft of gasoline and diesel. Essentially, if someone was convicted of the crime of gassing and dashing, he could have his or her licence revoked for six months for the first offence and two years in the event of subsequent offences.

California is another jurisdiction that offers a good case for study of legislation similar to Bill 207. In 1998 the state of California passed legislation that provided a revocation of driving privileges for persons convicted in specified drug offences. Mr. Speaker, the legislation authorized the Department of Motor Vehicles to suspend immediately and delay the issuance of a driver's licence to any individual convicted of possessing, selling, or manufacturing illicit drugs. Driving privileges are suspended or revoked for six months on the receipt by the DMV of a court abstract noting conviction.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 would provide one more tool for our enforcement officials to protect and enhance the safety of Albertans and solidification of legislation based on sound public policy. Drug dealers who use their vehicles in the commission of these crimes

pose a danger to other motorists and pedestrians. These traffic safety concerns are often overlooked when discussing the larger drug problems in our province.

I want to suggest and encourage our Legislative Assembly to support this bill and urge all members to see it through second reading. With this, I want to thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly on this bill. I appreciate what the hon. members have said about how every little bit against the drug trade helps. Quite frankly, from my point of view, if we are serious about this, if we find a vehicle with crystal meth or crack cocaine in it – I don't care if it's in minuscule amounts – seize the car, put it in a pound, and when we're done going to court with these kids, then we'll talk about getting it back.

The hon. member talked about how we could have had a province-wide smoking ban. Well, then, let's support a province-wide ban on crack and crystal meth in any amount. Not just pushers. Who are the pushers pushing it to? Our kids. If kids realize that when they're out with a friend who uses this crystal meth or crack cocaine and they pick him up in mummy's or daddy's Excursion and they get caught, they're going to have a hard time explaining to them why they don't get the vehicle back for six or seven months or as long as this character can have a lawyer to keep it out of court. If we're serious about it, let's forget all of this crap about human rights and personal rights and freedoms. You know, let's start to put real pressure on dope dealers.

It's astounding, Mr. Speaker, that we have people say that there's a dial-a-doper thing that works, that people can actually phone and get drugs delivered to their home. The RCMP can't figure that out? I mean, where do they get the numbers? Bathroom walls; from their other friends. You would think they would phone and have the drugs delivered and put the guy in jail. But nearly a decade – and I shouldn't use the term, but I just can't help myself – of liberal judges telling us that we have to be more worried about the rights of the criminal than protecting our kids have made a system that puts provincial bodies like this in a difficult spot. We don't make criminal law, and the RCMP have their hands tied in many ways. What they'd like to do is probably get most of these pushers off the continent, put them on the planet that we were going to visit before.

If you're asking Albertans or Canadians, "Do you think we're going to be tough on people by seizing the vehicle of a pusher?" they would say: take them all. If you're around crack, around crystal meth, take the car, take the truck, put somebody in jail, do some real time. Treat the seriousness of this epidemic with some real penalties, and you might start to make – people don't go from goody two-shoes to hard-core drugs overnight. They start with a little bit. They ride around with their friend. They have a little dope. The friend might do some crystal meth. They might do some crack. It's not worth the police time to bring them in, give them two weeks of phys ed. Can't even give them a spanking. I would say: take the car; let's talk about it down the road.

Mr. Speaker, these laws don't satisfy some of us, but they're the best that we can do in this Chamber.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close debate.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, making our roads safer and interrupt

ing the flow of drugs on our streets is a good thing. One of the members spoke about having a new or a different tool to help deal with interrupting the flow and keeping the roads safer by giving police officers an effective tool to use. I find it disturbing that the member opposite thinks that the attempt to help keep our communities free of cruising cars selling drugs is amusing. Drugs, organized crime, addictions, and death are not amusing. Quite the contrary.

Mr. Speaker, it is a defeatist who says: "Oh, they'll just get another car. They'll just lease another car, or they'll drive while suspended anyways." Does this mean that it's better to do nothing? This bill will not be a panacea, a great cure for a big problem. What it will do is interrupt the flow of drug trafficking on our streets for a moment, maybe for an hour, maybe for a day. I would suggest that the more we interrupt the flow of drugs on our streets and the more we try to tackle the safe driving issues, the more we make dealers

and traffickers understand that we won't roll over while they take over our streets.

Mr. Speaker, I now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a very interesting debate this afternoon. Given that good progress and the fact of the hour I would move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 24, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/04/24

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

School Nutrition Programs

507. Dr. Taft moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to support improved health, educational, and social outcomes for children by providing increased, dedicated funding for school nutrition programs for at-risk children in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a motion that we've been considering in our caucus for many, many months. Indeed, as the Leader of the Opposition I first began speaking about my concerns with school hunger almost a year ago in a number of speeches. I was struck at the time at how audiences responded. When I raised that point, there would be spontaneous applause from audiences whether they were audiences of families and parents or of teachers or of wealthy professionals and business leaders. Everybody across Alberta understands that in a province with this kind of wealth it is completely – completely – unacceptable that there are children going to school hungry. To add insult to that injury, we have a government that refuses to take any direct action to address this problem.

So we have been working on this issue and this motion for many, many months. We think that it is an obvious step forward for a government to take. The motion urges the government to consider action to address school hunger. It is a manageable problem. It's an identifiable, measurable response. It's affordable. Indeed, what's not affordable is inaction.

The trends in Alberta are troubling on these kinds of issues, Mr. Speaker. We have a trend, clearly, of increasing personal wealth for many of us, a tremendous amount of money in government coffers, a government that, in fact, has so much money that it's starting to just mail it out to people willy-nilly. It has no coherent policy for what to do with that wealth and seems to have precious little interest in the long-term building that could be undertaken with that wealth. When I say building, I don't mean particularly roads or schools or hospitals. I mean people, and especially I mean children.

We have a trend in Alberta where the wealth is getting concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, and poverty is getting concentrated in more and more hands. In fact, various studies now indicate, for example, that Calgary not only has the highest percentage of high-income residents of any major city in Canada but has the highest percentage of low-income residents as well. I think that's shocking. Those low-income residents count among them tens and tens of thousands of children. These children, ages three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, go hungry in this province. Many of them go to school hungry in this province, and they have to depend on charity to be fed. They have to depend on groups like the Edmonton Real Estate Board to do fundraisers so that there can be lunch programs. They have to depend on companies like EPCOR to do Christmas programs to raise money so that there can be food for hungry children in Alberta schools.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this government need to open their

hearts to these children. They need to understand that this is a real problem. Too often – and I can see it and hear it in the government members here this evening – they shrug this issue off as if childhood hunger is something found only in Third World countries. It's found here in Edmonton. It's found in Red Deer. It's found in Medicine Hat. Mr. Speaker, it's found in your own constituency, where there's a food bank, a food bank in your constituency. We have a government that has sat on its hands while 75 or more food banks have arisen in Alberta. School nutrition programs are a way to get at the root of this problem.

This is not an issue of intruding into the responsibilities of families. It is not the child's fault that they're born into a family that for whatever reason doesn't feed them. It's not the fault of a child going to kindergarten hungry that his mom is working at a minimum wage job and can't afford food at the end of the month. It's not the fault of a child going into grade 2 hungry every day that her parents divorced and that she's living with a dad who is on shift work and doesn't get up in the morning to make a lunch. I don't care whose fault it is. What we care about, Mr. Speaker, is that there are hungry kids who need to be fed, and this government has the means and the resources to do it, to feed those kids, and it will not do so. It is a complete moral failure of this government.

The benefits of addressing this problem are immense. Setting the moral issues aside, we know that well-fed children are going to learn better. We know that children going to school hungry are not going to learn well. We know that children going to school hungry and sitting in a classroom and falling behind are at higher risk of failing the achievement tests, for example, that this government supports. They are at higher risk of dropping out. They're at higher risk of health problems. They're at higher risk of justice issues and law problems. They're at higher risk of all kinds of problems which spill over back onto society. We could address so much of this now. We could cut these problems off at an early stage by supporting school nutrition programs.

Mr. Speaker, I know that a number of my colleagues want to speak to the issue. I know that they have matters they want to raise. We've looked into the costs of this program. We've looked into the extent of the problem. We believe that there are tens of thousands of children going to school hungry in Alberta every day, and we believe that for substantially less than the subsidy this government gives to racehorses, we could feed all those hungry children in Alberta. The sad truth is that this government seems to give a higher priority to thoroughbred horses than it does to hungry children. I think that's appalling, and I think that every one of the government members here should be embarrassed. Frankly, I think that they probably are.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will listen carefully to the debate. I will see if any of the government members rise to engage in this debate. I will listen carefully to what they say. What I will listen to most carefully is the silence if there is a silence from the government on this issue, because we will not rest until this problem is addressed.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to just speak briefly. I think that while the hon. member was giving his speech, I found myself growing angry at his comments rather than the issue that he had raised, an issue that I think deserves to be raised and discussed appropriately in this House. The things that he said, that we don't care or that we're not interested or that we have all of this wealth and don't use it appropriately – I think that I would like to just remind everybody of a couple of things.

8:10

Children's Services is a program designed to help children in this province. This year's budget is \$916,770,000. K to 12 schooling is over \$5.3 billion this year alone. Those are just two areas where we are trying, I think, as a province, as a society to deal with those very fragile and important elements of our society called children.

I raised two children. I'm one of those divorced, single mothers that the member talks about in a way that insults me. I cared very much about . . .

Dr. Taft: I was raised by a divorced mother.

Ms Haley: You had your say, hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor.

Ms Haley: I'm one of those single moms that got up every morning and made lunch for my children and tried to make breakfast for them and worked very hard to try and ensure that they had food, clothing, and shelter. So I don't appreciate that whole idea that children who are in trouble or in despair are automatically in a single-parent family. It's simply not true.

To bring in the horse-racing industry as another example of government largesse to our favourite people—a lot of the people that work at the track and have jobs because that program exists are the very people that he's talking about. They're lower income jobs. He's not talking about a handful of people that might win a purse at a horse race. We're talking about the people who groom those horses, clean the barns, prepare the track, run the kiosks in the service areas. These are not \$60,000-a-year jobs, Mr. Speaker; they're the lower income jobs. We've been trying to make sure that that industry could even survive. That money that comes into the lottery fund would not come into the lottery fund to be disbursed to other parts of our community if it wasn't for the slot machines at the race tracks. So like it or not, it serves the purpose of supporting that industry, but it also supports a great many families, most of them here in Edmonton. You might want to think about that one.

So while I agree that I don't want any child going to school hungry in this province ever, I know that in my constituency, where I have a great many students, I think close to 18,000 or 19,000 students, we have one school in a socioeconomic area of my city that is a lower income area, and the school division made a decision, in fact, to bring in a hot lunch program for that school, and I commend them for that. They had some extra money. They do some fundraising, and they've made it possible for the children in that school to be able to count on that. At the other schools in my constituency it was not felt that the need was there.

So if this is a matter of trying to help specific schools in specific areas where there's a lower income or an issue along that line, then I'm in favour of it. If it's about putting a hot lunch program into every school in the province, then I am not in favour of it because it isn't necessary. The vast, vast, vast majority of parents care very much about whether their children have food every day. We get up, and we go to work, and we make sure that that happens.

So, hon. member, a little less rhetoric and a little more detail would have been appreciated, perhaps an estimate of what you actually think this really needs to cost, and a lot less insulting language to those of us who have done our jobs as parents.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise tonight and indicate that I am going to be supporting Motion 507, put forward by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. I've had, I guess, the experience, first, as a city councillor and later an MLA for a low-income constituency and a low-income ward of dealing with a number of schools in which hot lunch programs are provided. I've attended schools and helped serve the lunches. I've attended fundraising events for school lunch programs and got to know many of the fine people who deliver these programs.

Now, Mr. Speaker, wherever hot lunch programs are in place, school attendance improves, learning and educational results improve. You know, there is often the case where some children—and I'm not attempting, in saying this, to suggest that anybody here is in this category. I don't wish to be either patronizing or insulting to other hon. members, but it is sometimes the case in inner-city schools and I'm sure in some other schools as well where it's the children themselves that get themselves to school. They are sometimes the most responsible member of their family. They may come in at 10 o'clock in the morning, and they haven't eaten, but they are making a heroic effort to get themselves to school. Sometimes they have to sleep because they haven't had enough sleep, and sometimes they haven't had enough food.

It's very clear that in both the United States and in Canada the results of these programs have been carefully studied and monitored, and there is a tremendous response as a result of hot lunch programs in the schools. Sometimes the nutritional components of these programs are not always the best, but they are certainly, I can assure hon. members, superior to the type of nutrition that these children in these situations might expect otherwise.

So the question is: when, then, should they be provided and where? I was once of the same view as the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, that they should be very targeted, and only certain schools, certain children really needed them, but that doesn't take into account the dynamics of schools and children. To identify children in a school as needing the hot lunch program and others as not needing it places a stigma on those children which makes it very, very difficult for them and which really sets up a system in the school of haves and have-nots.

I think that people that have worked in this area for some time have come to the conclusion that in schools where there is a significant level of need, the program should be provided and should be made available to any child who wishes to take advantage of it. That doesn't mean that they would necessarily be in every school, but where they were in schools, each child would have an equal opportunity to participate in the school.

There are plenty of opportunities for parents who have more resources—educational, social resources, financial resources—to participate in the putting on of these programs and to assist in their delivery both financially and through volunteering. There is lots to be done by parents who do have resources to contribute to those children who do not.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is a good program. I think that it is up to the government to talk to the people in the field, both to academic experts and people in the front lines who organize these school programs, who raise money for them and who administer them, and to the parents. It's up to the government to come up with proposals to extend hot lunch programs. It's not up to members of the opposition, with their limited resources, to do it. It's up to the people who are responsible for the governing of this province, the people who are responsible for the education system to do that.

Now, I'd like to go back a little bit in time. Mr. Speaker, as we know, the opposition ranks have been swelled of late by the addition of an additional member, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, who

sits now behind us. At one time that hon. member was the minister of learning in this province. Sometime after 1998 he was interviewed by the *ATA News*. The *ATA News* said:

Delegates to the Alberta Growth Summit in April 1998 recommended that, “[in] cooperation with communities, hot lunch programs should be implemented immediately in schools where there are hungry children. Lunch programs should exist in all schools by 2005.”

Now, that’s from the government’s own growth summit in April of 1998.

8:20

The *ATA News* asked the then minister, “How do you see that recommendation being implemented?” The former minister said:

Well, to be honest, this is a recommendation that I have not had time to look at completely. At the moment, we give school boards the prerogative to provide a hot lunch program, and I believe we’ll continue with that. I think schools have put hot lunch programs in certainly the most critical areas. I believe, obviously, that kids have to have food in order to learn. But this is something that we will be looking at, and at this time, I just can’t say how it will be implemented or when it will be implemented.

That was some time ago, Mr. Speaker. How long has it been since that member was the Minister of Education? At least before the last election.

An Hon. Member: Eight years.

Mr. Mason: Yes. So it goes back eight years or so, and still the government has done nothing. They’ve had time. They certainly have money. What they don’t have are the right priorities.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition talked about horse racing, and the \$63 million that we spend on the horse-racing industry has been characterized by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere as helping poor, low-income people who work in the stables and work at the track. Mr. Speaker, I know some of those people. Some of those people live in my constituency, and I can tell you that very, very little of this amount of money trickles down to them. If we took the \$63 million and divided it among all the people who groom horses and feed them and look after them, they would all be certainly wealthier than most people. If you divided it up equally, they’d probably get as much as a cabinet minister or more. So to suggest that the subsidy for the thoroughbred industry is in some way a low-income subsidy is to misstate the situation rather dramatically. It is, in fact, a misplaced priority of the government, subsidizing an industry that should be able to stand on its own.

The government long ago established the principle that it would not be in the business of being in business and that business should stand or fall based on its competitiveness and its ability to be in business. But they made an exception, and \$63 million a year for horses and horse racing is really a subsidy of the people who raise the horses – in other words, wealthy, landed people, Mr. Speaker – and it has no basis in this Assembly.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will urge members to support the motion, and I’ll take my seat. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise this evening and join the debate on Motion 507, school lunch program funding. Albertans are enjoying the most prosperous period in our province’s history. Energy prices are at a record high, the provincial debt is gone, and our labour climate is attracting people from around the globe. As we enter our second

century, we are doing so with every possible financial advantage. This prosperity cannot be considered universal, though, unless every Albertan has the opportunity to benefit from it. It is an unfortunate fact, but it is a fact nonetheless that despite the favourable economic climate in Alberta, there are some people that are not benefiting. They haven’t been left behind. They simply haven’t had the opportunity to catch up yet.

Mr. Speaker, it’s often easy to pass judgment on those who aren’t doing well, but I have seen it happen time and time again in my own constituency, with the operative word being “time.” A great deal of my constituents are recent immigrants to Alberta. Often they come from other nations or other cultures. I know from personal experience just how hard it can be to immerse yourself in the job market of a foreign country. It doesn’t happen overnight. This adjustment period takes time, and this time can be difficult for most families. I’m always amazed by the dedication and perseverance of new Albertans that live in my constituency. They often work 16 hours a day, seven days a week in an attempt to make a better life for themselves and their families. Sometimes, however, ends don’t always meet, and all too often a family’s children suffer as a result.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the value of good education. I think we also know that to take advantage of Alberta’s top-notch education system, children need to have their basic nutritional needs met. A mind can’t be filled when it’s attached to an empty stomach, but regrettably some children still go to school hungry and come home hungry afterward. Motion 507 is proposing that a school lunch program be funded for at-risk children, an idea that I think has the potential to build on the already strong commitment to the well-being of Alberta’s children and families shown by our government. It is an idea that gives us the opportunity to do better.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that we have in place several excellent programs for assisting those who are economically or socially disadvantaged. These programs work, but there are still children falling through the cracks. There are still children who go to school hungry. This is not because they have bad or abusive parents. If this is, in fact, the case, then we have several laws in place to put a stop to this behaviour. Perhaps the family’s breadwinner is sick and unable to work. Perhaps an emergency has come up to deplete the family’s savings. Whatever the reasons are, good, hard-working people can sometimes find themselves financially unable to cope with the day-to-day needs of their families.

I think that providing children with a good and nutritious lunch at school would go a long way toward alleviating the concerns of a child’s family. It would be one less thing for parents to worry about as they regain their financial footing, and it would represent a hand up instead of a handout. The benefits would be so obvious. Children would concentrate on their studies instead of their stomachs, and the financial and emotional burden on parents would be eased without any of the stigma that is, regrettably, so often attached to traditional social assistance.

Mr. Speaker, in a province with the wealth of Alberta I think we must make every effort to ensure that every Albertan is given the opportunity to prosper. We can’t forget that as we move forward, there are those who are falling behind through no fault of their own. They work hard, they try their best, but sometimes they and their families need a little help, and we should provide it. I think that funding for a school lunch program as proposed by Motion 507 will ultimately be a good investment. The children of Alberta, regardless of the social or economic standings of their parents, deserve every possible advantage that we can offer them. A school lunch program is a good way of doing so. It will help Alberta’s at-risk children take full advantage of their potential, and a better and brighter future will be the result.

Mr. Speaker, this is a goal that I believe should and does transcend party lines or ideological differences, and as such, I am pleased to support Motion 507.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

8:30

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very encouraged to hear those fine remarks from the Member for Calgary-East, I believe it is, very encouraging. It shows he's done his homework.

I have in my career, Mr. Speaker, been a teacher, guidance counsellor, superintendent of schools, janitor, associate superintendent of schools, school trustee, and I can tell you that there are a lot of children that go to school hungry. One of the things we talk about in Alberta is giving everyone an equal opportunity. I think it's important that we do this, and I can't think of a more suitable way of doing this than providing kids with the proper nutritional programs in our schools.

I think that it's significant, though, that we have a program that is based on some sound principles, that the program that we would implement has some nutritious and safe food values, is accessible and nonstigmatizing, is community based, is culturally appropriate, has parent and family involvement, has a nurturing and caring environment, and has a potential to teach, not only in the sense of meeting the children's needs from a dietary point of view but also of being carried back into the home and the parent and family values of what to eat and not to eat. The aspect that we're looking at is a shared funding proposal, and it's also an education for the public.

The question of costs was talked about by a member across the way, and one of the ways we could start this is to probably look at \$10 million. If we looked at \$10 million for our program to start, we would look at 91,000 children each day getting snacks; 59,000 children each day would be getting breakfast, and 25,000 children each day would be getting lunch.

It was interesting in our visit to Fort McMurray, Mr. Speaker. We visited the Clark school. A really interesting program there in their elementary – I believe it was grade 1 to grade 8 or 9. The food for that program was supplied by a large oil company in Fort McMurray. The students at Keyano College would come in at noon and serve the program to the kids, and there was some learning going on. I think that's a tribute to the volunteer component and the community and the oil companies working together.

One other aspect. In my constituency, St. Albert, at Sir Alexander MacKenzie I had the opportunity to see the children with special needs preparing the breakfast program every morning at 8 o'clock. These children prepare the program for the students that take advantage of the breakfast program there. So there are lots of good things going on now.

Now, if we wanted to look at pie in the sky and if we looked at doing this across the province, \$40 million would give snacks to 364,000 children and breakfast to 236,000 children and lunch to 100,000 children. That's what it would cost, Mr. Speaker, to initiate this program across the province and make Alberta significant in looking after the dietary needs or the nutritional needs of our children.

I had the opportunity today to look at the research by the Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy. It talks about healthy schools, nutrition, and physical activity. Now, I'm pleased to say that this government started a program I think a year ago of a half hour of daily activity in physical education. I think it's going over well, but we have to look at that as one part of the cycle. It seems to me that it's important we look at the other aspect of nutrition.

There's a study done by Taras and Potts-Datema, 2005: 19

published studies "link participation in school breakfast programs with increased achievement as measured by standardized test scores and grades." Now, maybe we can get rid of the standardized tests.

Participation in school food programs has also . . . shown to have a positive effect on psychosocial outcomes, leading to lower levels of anxiety, hyperactivity and depression. Other factors, including absenteeism, tardiness, class participation, and suspension rates are affected positively

by having a nutritional program along with a good physical education program.

Research also shows that student achievement can be maintained if schools provide more opportunities for physical education, even if class time for academic subjects is cut back. Physical activity can help increase students' ability to concentrate and reduce disruptive behaviour, which can have a positive impact on academic achievement.

So what we're saying here, Mr. Speaker, is that if we combined both the physical activity and the nutritional programs, I think we would be doing a lot for our students. I think we'd also be tackling the whole question of obesity that we have across Canada, not only in our students but with some of our politicians. We'd be doing some real headway there because by example we teach. I think we have to do a lot of work on that in terms of setting good examples for many of our constituents. So this program, again going back to cost, would cost \$2 per student per day. I think that's also very significant.

Let me then look at a few other things here that I think are significant. If I can just quickly turn to your area of the province, Mr. Speaker, if I'm not mistaken, this Westglen principal – am I allowed to say the principal's name in the House? I think his name is Phil Corning. "Westglen School is a Grade 5 to Grade 8 Middle School in Didsbury, consisting of 330 students from all walks of life. There is a heavy emphasis on reading and writing in this school, as I understand it, and "all students ages 10 to 14 are usually hungry all of the time," it says here. At this particular school, which you're probably much more aware of than I am,

Breakfast for Learning provided the school with the opportunity to test and prove this theory. In 2004, Westglen School successfully implemented their "Food for Thought" breakfast program using the funds from BFL along with community donations and hundreds of hours of volunteer work.

Now, what was interesting:

Staff invited a number of "Interesting" Grade 8 boys, who tended to frequent the office for a variety of reasons, to help with the breakfast program. The boys took a lot of ownership in the program, and soon took over the distribution of food, being ever watchful over the especially needy students. The boys instinctively knew who to watch out for and took care of them with kindness, courtesy, a good sense of humour, and always with a sincere concern for every child's well-being.

This service learning has become an integral part of this school, sir.

The most compelling argument in favour of the "Food for Thought" BFL program is its connection to student results. Westglen has a large population of special needs students who have difficulties with reading. A study of the Provincial Achievement Test results showed an overall improvement in all test areas. Mr. Corning [the principal] believes that these results came from both the strong emphasis on teacher training in Writing and the [special] nutrition program. The staff noticed a more alert student population once the no "junk food", no soda pop, and healthier snack choices were initiated. "The Breakfast for Learning funding has helped us anchor our nutritional program by beginning each day with something substantial".

So what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the evidence seems to be leaning to not only better academic achievement in school and a better knowledge of what's proper to eat but also enabling them to get more out of school attendance-wise and so forth. I think it

speaks for itself that we look at this program and hopefully support it by supporting this motion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all members who've participated so far in this debate because I don't sense that anyone here would be opposed to what the gist or what the thrust is behind this motion, minus some of the rhetoric that was provided by the mover. But that having been said, I know that his intentions are quite honourable, I'm sure.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we've heard this issue raised here in this House in question period and in various other debates. At some point I think we also have to talk about the other side of this equation. That other side of the equation is: who is ultimately going to be responsible for clothing and for sheltering and for feeding and for otherwise caring for and rearing our children? Obviously, nobody likes to see kids undernourished or live without shelter or without clothing or warmth or without the so-called basics of life – nobody wants to see that – but so too is it important to continue cultivating a culture where people take responsibility for some of life's needs, particularly when it comes to children.

8:40

In our government we have a number of outstanding programs in Children's Services or in the Department of Health and Wellness, for example, where we care for children, where we help them out, where we help families out. We have some of these programs, also, that we copartner with these ministries from the Department of Education's perspective. We have a number of other programs that are part of our social safety net in the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment.

I just want to give people at least some level of comfort to know that approximately 70 per cent or perhaps even more of our school boards already provide some form of partnership programming for breakfast programs or hot lunch programs or snack programs or whatever have you. Quite obviously, they use our government-provided monies in most cases to help support those programs, and that's not a bad thing whatsoever. The fact is, though, Mr. Speaker, that they do that as part of a nonmandatory address to local needs. We have other parts of the province where some school boards don't particularly have that need, so they may not choose to provide it. But they do this in partnership with community-based agencies and volunteer organizations who, according to the letters and phone calls that I've had at least, are quite proud and quite pleased and honoured in some cases to provide that kind of partnership program. So there's nothing wrong with what the hon. member is presenting here in this motion other than he is suggesting that it be made mandatory. Dedicated funding I believe is the wording he's using.

Now, I want to also emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that school boards asked for and want flexibility with monies that come from the Department of Education – in other words, from the government of Alberta – because Alberta Education, as you will hear tomorrow when we discuss estimates for the Department of Education, is essentially a flow-through arm of government. About 98 per cent of the \$5.3 billion that we will provide to education this year will flow right out to school boards, and they will decide how to use it. That's pursuant to the renewed funding framework. So flexibility is what they want. They want to be able to address their local needs as they see fit, and we continue to allow them to do that. There are very few examples where we dictate how monies ought be spent or where we provide so-called labelled or targeted dollars.

That having been said, Mr. Speaker, we need to be reminded again that we are privileged to live in this province and in this country. But in this province in particular, in terms of education, we provide the most money per capita of any province in Canada for education. We provide the most money per student of any province in Canada. In fact, we spend about \$26.5 million each and every school day to help support the best education system in Canada and one of the best in the entire world.

To quote the hon. member's motion back, just a couple of quick comments here. "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to support improved health," et cetera. We're already doing that. We're already supporting improved health initiatives, many of them. Then he goes on to say "improved educational," et cetera. We're already doing that. This year's budget contains 330 million brand new additional dollars, Mr. Speaker.

Then the motion goes on to say "social outcomes," and we have higher social outcomes resulting from these investments and from other partnerships that we're already providing not only in education but for the whole nine yards of government.

Then he goes on to say "by providing increased," et cetera. We are providing increased dollars, Mr. Speaker: 330 million increased dollars. Now, nobody is bragging about that, and nobody is complaining about that. That's just the fact. We are providing the money that is necessary to continue providing the outstanding educational opportunities, but we do it with our partners, the school boards. They, in turn, want the flexibility of allocating those dollars as they see fit to meet the local needs because, after all, they are locally elected officials just like we are. They're doing their job, we're doing ours, and so are the other levels.

Now, the other part here is to do with "dedicated funding," and that's where we need to draw a bit of a distinction, a bit of a fine line, which I've already commented on earlier. I'll just move on quickly because time is ticking away here.

The motion ends by talking about "at-risk children." Mr. Speaker, we are providing a number of services already not only to help identify at-risk children earlier but also to provide earlier intervention and to provide additional programming dollars that would help with earlier detection and screening as well. We've just done that with the announcement of 22 brand new parent link centres as recommended by the Learning Commission. That takes us to 36 important parent link centres. I can tell you that if the opposition members would only do just a day's worth of homework, they would be absolutely amazed, not to mention impressed, with the results coming out of those particular parent link centres.

In special needs we're providing almost \$400 million in this coming budget, assuming it gets passed tomorrow. We're providing additional dollars for ESL children, which some other members commented on. We're providing additional monies for First Nations, Métis, Inuit children. We're into hundreds of millions of dollars here, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of money in the system, a lot of money, but it's the school boards who will target those monies at the local level after we've provided them.

So I am sympathetic to where the hon. member is coming from and, for that matter, to where even one of the NDP members is coming from. I could probably even support an amended version of such a motion if it weren't rather entirely politically motivated on the one hand and if it weren't worded in a mandatory fashion where school boards were being forced, were being mandated, were 100 per cent required to provide the kinds of programs being asked for here. [interjections] School boards are doing a pretty good job in that respect, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Education has the floor. Let's hear what he has to say.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yeah. Thank you. I listened very quietly and very competently, I hope, to what they had to say, and it's too bad they don't afford the same respect in return sometimes.

Now, what I'd like to just wrap up with is just to reiterate that nobody is going to try and tell me, after having grown up in a small community of 200 people, how important it is for people to care for themselves and how important it is for children to not go hungry and what the linkages are between education and a full stomach and so on. I don't need that lecture, Mr. Speaker. I know very well what the implications and consequences are, but so, too, is it important to realize what the responsibilities are of other people.

Now, the final point is that we want to also comment on some of the other programs that are available here, for example our AISI programs, where we provide \$71 million for some creative, innovative-type programming. I think it's important for the hon. members to overcome some of their own ignorance and realize that we have hundreds of millions of dollars available in the system and school boards want that flexibility.

It will be very difficult for me to support this motion, and I'm sorry I can't support it because of the way it's worded.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was afraid we might run out of time on that particular piece on 507. I will read, in fact, the motion, and it does say:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to support improved health, educational, and social outcomes for children by providing increased, dedicated funding for school nutrition programs for at-risk children in Alberta.

Now, that doesn't sound too politically motivated to me. That sounds like a real, honest to goodness thing that's trying to help all children in Alberta.

8:50

I do support this particular piece. It seems like it's a no-brainer here. If we can in fact dedicate \$1.4 billion in resource revenues to every man, woman, and child in Alberta, then surely we can come up with .1 per cent of the overall operating budget within our province. Point one per cent is not very much money there, Mr. Speaker. Point one per cent would actually provide snacks to approximately 364,000 children each school day. Point one per cent of the budget would provide breakfast for 236,000 children each school day or lunch to 100,000 children each school day. I'm talking .1 per cent, a very small number when you think about the vast majority that we do have in our province.

We talk about the Alberta advantage. We'd like to ensure that everyone receives the Alberta advantage. No matter how bad or how big or how small that individual is, they should be able to receive that Alberta advantage. We talk about how Canada is, in fact, the country of opportunity. Well, let's centre it to the richest province in that opportunity, and that's Alberta. If everyone is not receiving that opportunity, then the Alberta advantage is not being fulfilled.

We talk about the fact that it maybe only costs \$2 per day. Meals in Edmonton public, or at least in Edmonton, are provided by the hospital kitchens. They're delivered to the schools. Paid workers from the local community are used to deliver and to serve the students, and then the hospital provides and cleans up all the dishes and utensils.

As a school trustee previous to coming here to the Legislature, I

do feel very honoured to be able to speak to some of the initiatives that the school board does in fact put forward with support from the communities. You have the city centre education program as well as the City Centre Church program, which do see the benefits of being able to help the students within the communities. It's not necessarily that they may be from single-parent families. They could be from two-parent families. The point is that they're going to school hungry. They have a choice? I don't think so. The choice is: they go to school.

I know that there are many, many teachers who do have their hearts in their jobs as well as bring extra meals not only for themselves but for the students that they know go hungry. I think that is very admirable. They don't have to do it. They probably have children of their own that they're providing for, but they're providing for other students whom they know don't come from a great background. That's unfortunate, but they're taking the initiative. As we always say, it's that proverb: it takes a whole village to raise a child. Well, the students are seeing the benefit from that from the school. The teachers live and breathe right there. They're trying to impact it directly.

At Edmonton public schools, like I said, we have many, many kids there. It may not just be from the lowest area; it may be from just a little bit outside that area. But there are students going to school hungry. It's not just in Edmonton. It's in rural areas, where you see an increase in food banks popping up over the last year. We've seen an increase and a need for food banks themselves to sit in the rural areas and in the city areas. So it's not like it's just suddenly appeared. It's becoming an epidemic that people are going hungry, and that's not fair when we talk about the richest province in Canada.

All other provinces except for Manitoba and Alberta provide targeted-support school nutrition programs. I think that's worth repeating. All other provinces except for Alberta and Manitoba provide, in some way, targeted funding for that. I think it's sad that we can't do that. We can give bursaries to other provinces. We can give money to very worthy causes. We have tsunami disaster relief, but we can't take care of our own. I think that's really sad.

We've heard from members opposite who do support it, members that would actually consider making an amendment to it. The point is that we need to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens, our children, are supported. It would be an honourable thing, and it doesn't have to be politically motivated. The Speaker says it in his prayers: let us all come together for the good of all when we do our deliberations, when we do our debates, such that all would be served. I think this particular motion would ensure that all would be served if we support this particular piece.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 507, and I want to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for his motion. I think the goal is laudable. I have to say, though, that I believe that the methodology is flawed.

I don't believe that we need wholesale programs in our schools, Mr. Speaker, to feed children. I agree with the member that at-risk children should be supported. He suggests targeted support. I would suggest maybe a program that is run through our local health units that works with these at-risk children through the education of their parents on nutrition programs. Where necessary, I believe that assistance could be provided, targeted assistance to these families – and I would agree with the hon. member that no one wants to see

children arrive at school hungry – to ensure that these children would not arrive at school hungry and that they would be fed and ready to learn.

Mr. Speaker, wholesale programs in the schools, I believe, can have an unintended impact probably counterproductive to that which the member is hoping would be garnered, where children who are poorly nourished would feel shy to be identified, to be singled out to participate in these programs. On the other hand, we could see these programs feeding larger numbers of children in an effort not to single out specific children. I would suggest that an unintended consequence of this is that we would have a number of parents – and I think one of the speakers earlier talked about the responsibility that we have to nurture and prepare our children for school – who would send their children to school hungry, unfortunately, because someone else will feed them. I don't think that's the type of society that we want to encourage.

Mr. Speaker, I laud the intent of the motion by the hon. member, but I cannot support his methodology. Thank you.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to make a couple of observations. When I held the portfolio as Minister of Children's Services, at-risk children were defined as those who needed the protection of the state because, in fact, they were at risk of some harm. One might assume, then, that those that would be at risk would be those that were from homes where there was poverty or family violence or some other type of social behaviour that would predispose a child to being at risk. In fact, one of the things I learned during my tenure in that capacity was that the poor have very little. The poor have their children and families. They love them a great deal, and they are very often the ones that pay most attention to feeding their children properly and appropriately.

Sometimes those in homes where affluence is prevalent, with two cars in the driveway, perhaps a boat or a motorhome, are more at risk because, in fact, their children are assumed to be intelligent enough to get their own food after they go to school, and they're left to their own devices. It was a great shock to me to knock on doors of wealthy homes at suppertime during the time that we were campaigning and find children still at home alone because families hadn't returned to feed their child. So I realize that at risk does not know any socioeconomic barrier in the strictest purpose of at risk.

What I would encourage all hon. members to do would be to take a look at a program that Sandra Woitas has been very involved in here in this capital region which is teaching both the parents and the children about proper nutrition, and after a two-year pilot has in fact advanced the case that they can influence feeding behaviours and food choices so that children are less likely to be predisposed to diabetes or some of the other things that poor nutrition will precipitate, including obesity. Perhaps in actual fact what is really needed for children in schools is a proper understanding of their own nutritional needs and what fuel it takes to keep that little body and engine burning. If you teach a child about good nutrition, it may be of greater advantage than actually providing them with the food.

I'd like to just also make one other observation. In the early '80s, when I was president of the School Boards' Association of Alberta, the issue of feeding children at school came to bear. Inevitably, many of the school boards rejected it at that time because of the feeling that if the dollars were available, they should be available to serve the three Rs, the basic needs of educating the students, and that the parents themselves were responsible for providing the lunch and ensuring that the child had a good breakfast, lunch, and supper, proper rest, and the other needs, that we should not in fact attempt to make schools all things to all people. I think that that has become increasingly a pressure on our teachers. So if one could frame a

motion to the effect that the expectation would be that no dollars would be subtracted from the educational needs of the students, that might be an interesting position to take.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker . . . I thank you for this privilege.

9:00

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister of health, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to close debate on Motion 507.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened to the debate, and it's been a spirited debate. I appreciate everybody's participation although I found myself disagreeing, sometimes vehemently, with some of the comments that were made.

There were questions to me, after my opening remarks, about details, and my colleagues provided many details on issues like cost, the fact that the Edmonton program runs for an average of \$2 per student per day. Two dollars. A toonie a day: that's what we're talking about for each student. This is affordable, Mr. Speaker.

There were questions around how extensive this problem is, and I think that's a good question. It's not an easy one, necessarily, to pin down, but in 2003, for example, over 10 per cent of Alberta families with two or more children were living below the low-income cut-off, considered in poverty. That level is steadily increasing and, I don't doubt, has continued to increase. Over 54,000 Albertans rely on food banks, and 1 in 5 children live in poverty, facing a continually rising cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, this is a widespread problem. In fact, in doing some of our background research, we spoke to a representative of the Greater Edmonton Alliance who referred me to a parish survey done by one of the major churches in Edmonton. It found that school hunger is far more widespread than we would assume, that this is not just limited to particular neighbourhoods or particular socioeconomic statuses or groups. In fact, it's surprising how many kids from apparently prosperous families end up in school hungry.

So this is a significant problem. It's a serious problem with long-term consequences. It's widespread. It's not costly to correct, and indeed I put it to all of us here that the money put in to address this problem will pay itself back over and over and over as those children grow into adults.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all the members here tonight to consider supporting this motion. It's a motion specifically written, despite the comments of some members, to focus on at-risk families. There's nothing mandatory about this despite the comments from the minister. Indeed, I would ask the minister to consider a moral test because he was asking the question: who is responsible for feeding children? Who is responsible for clothing and housing them? The moral test for the minister to consider is that if a hungry or naked or homeless child was on his doorstep with no options, would he feel compelled to look after that child? I speculate that he would, and I speculate that all of us here would. It's a different situation when we're dealing with hungry children and clothing and sheltering children than when we are dealing with options like a child looking for tickets to tomorrow night's hockey game, for example. That's not a moral issue, but it is a moral issue to feed those children. I ask the minister and all members here to consider that issue as they weigh how to vote on this.

I think that all of us here, despite our differing views, would agree that children in Alberta should not be in school hungry. I think the solution to this problem is apparent. It's affordable. It's before us. It's within the hands of this government to take this problem and

solve it or to take this problem and ignore it. I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, and I put it to all of us here tonight that it is our moral duty – our moral duty – as leaders of this society to take this problem and solve it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 507 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:06 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Flaherty	Miller, R.
Backs	Hancock	Pastoor
Bonko	Mar	Swann
Cao	Mason	Taft

Against the motion:

Ady	Jablonski	Oberle
Boutilier	Knight	Ouellette
Coutts	Lindsay	Prins
DeLong	Lougheed	Rogers
Doerksen	Magnus	Snelgrove
Evans	McFarland	Stevens
Goudreau	Mitzel	Tarchuk
Groeneveld	Morton	Zwozdesky
Haley		

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 25
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 lost]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 24

Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate April 12: Mrs. McClellan]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening and speak to Bill 24, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006, as opposed to 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, and so on and so on and so on.

Mr. Speaker, Yogi Berra said: it's just like déjà vu all over again. When we look at the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, Yogi Berra was right. Year after year after year this government comes to this House with an amendment to the Fiscal Responsibility Act asking Albertans to allow them to spend ever more of our nonrenewable resource revenue. This flies in the face of what Albertans are telling this government. It flies in the face of what I've been saying for the last 18 months, since I was elected. It flies in the face of what the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is telling this government. It flies in the face of what the Canadian Federation of Independent Business is telling this government. It flies in the face of what the Alberta chambers of commerce are telling this government. It flies in the face of what the editorial boards of both major newspapers are

telling this government. It flies in the face of what Link Byfield, of all people . . .

An Hon. Member: A small "I" liberal.

9:20

Mr. R. Miller: I wonder what Link would say if he heard that we referred to him as a small "I" liberal.

It flies in the face of even a number of the candidates for leadership of the Conservative Party. Mr. Speaker, it's not just myself, a lone voice out in the wilderness calling for some vision out of this government, some long-range planning, some real concrete road map as to where we're going to go with the future of this province, how we're going to take advantage of the absolutely unbelievable opportunity that we have had laid before us. In fact, it is people across this province from every political stripe.

I'd like to touch on that for just a second too, if I may, Mr. Speaker. In the 18 months since I've been elected, I've had the opportunity to travel, not a lot because, frankly, we don't have much of a travel budget, at least not on this side of the House. But in the little bit of travelling I have had to do, certainly I've spoken to as many Albertans as I possibly can, and I've not yet found one who disagrees with the idea that we need to have a real vision, a real plan, a real concrete road map for how we're going to treat this opportunity that we have in front of us with natural resource revenues literally providing us more money than any of us could have dreamt about. It doesn't matter whether they're Liberal supporters or lifelong Conservative supporters or otherwise. They're all saying the same thing. I just honestly cannot for the life of me imagine why this government hasn't heard that. At least, if they have heard it, they've chosen to ignore it.

Here we are again this year with the government asking to be allowed to spend in this case now up to \$5.3 billion of our natural resource revenues, and only a very short three years ago, Mr. Speaker, that number was \$3.5 billion. So in three years' time we've seen a 51 per cent increase in the amount of natural resource revenue that they're wanting to spend. At the same time, we all know and this government has acknowledged that this boom is not going to go on forever. These numbers that we're seeing are not going to be here forever. In fact, in their own budget documents this year, as an example – and I'll just pull one out – synthetic crude and bitumen royalties are forecast to drop from \$1.7 billion to \$1.3 billion in only two years' time. Now, I'm not sure why that is. They talk in here about: "Adjustments within the royalty system to treat all projects on a similar basis are expected to take place." I'll be asking the minister about that when we get to the budget debate.

The point is that even their own planning is acknowledging the fact that this is not going to go on forever, and in fact perhaps it's not going to go on for very long. Yet they continue to put themselves in a situation where they're ever more reliable on this resource when economists the province over and the country over are saying that now is the time that we have to use some forward thinking and set some of this aside so that not only will we benefit from it, but in fact future generations will benefit from it as well.

Now, Mr. Speaker, last week the Leader of the Official Opposition released a number of documents entitled Alberta Horizons: The Time to Dream is Now; The Place to Dream is Alberta. It was very interesting to me to see that, in fact, these documents were very, very well received out there in the real world, outside of this dome, across Alberta. Even editorialists who would not normally speak out or write in favour of the Official Opposition of this province gave our leader, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and the Official Opposition caucus tremendous credit for coming out with a docu-

ment which reflects some policy but probably more importantly reflects a number of ideas that Albertans can be discussing, that sort of throws some ideas out there and encourages input and feedback.

I think it's fair to say that almost across the board we've been applauded for trying to spur this dialogue forward. I'm really pleased to see that there are people in this province that are, you know, acknowledging the good work that we're doing and are looking forward to participating in that. I think it's a very important exercise, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure it will produce tremendous results, and I don't mean just for the Liberal opposition although certainly that would be a nice side benefit. I believe that it will produce tremendous results for the future of this province, and that is really what it's all about.

One of the ideas that's suggested in there – and it's not a new idea; it's something we've been talking about for some time, and certainly it's something that many of these groups that I mentioned a few minutes ago have also talked about – is the idea of setting aside some resource revenue, making it a legislated mandate to set aside resource revenue as opposed to the sort of helter-skelter, ad hoc manner in which the government treats resource revenue right now.

The Official Opposition – and I'm sure that all members are aware of this; we've talked about it a lot – does currently have a surplus policy which would deal with surpluses in the following manner, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-five per cent of all budget surpluses would be allocated to the heritage savings trust fund, and that would mean that that fund would actually have a chance to grow as opposed to the manner in which it's been decimated by this government over the last 20-odd years. Thirty-five per cent of all budget surpluses would go into a postsecondary endowment fund. This year alone that would mean that \$3.5 billion could have been allocated to that fund as opposed to the artificial \$3 billion cap that this government has put on the fund. Even with this year's budget we'll be well under a billion dollars still in there, I think. The number is \$750 million, if I remember right. Twenty-five per cent of a budget surplus would go to address the infrastructure deficit and the remaining 5 per cent to an endowment fund that would endow the soft sciences, the arts and humanities.

We recognize, as have many others, that a surplus policy is vulnerable to off-budget spending and doesn't necessarily accomplish what is really the potential given the situation that we find ourselves in now. As a result, I would think it's fair to say that we're leaning more and more towards a nonrenewable resource revenue policy, as has been suggested by many others. The number that we mention in this document, Alberta Horizons, is one-third. That doesn't mean that we're married to one-third, but it throws it out there, and according to most of the numbers I've seen, one-third is doable. It's quite feasible.

The Canada West Foundation has done a tremendous amount of research on this. Several economists have contributed. Dr. Ronald Kneebone, in a recent publication entitled *Seizing Today and Tomorrow*, goes through the past 23, 24 years identifying the amount of natural resource revenue that would be available for savings. In the last five years, which are the most relevant, I think, given where we're at right now, the average amount of resource revenue that would be available for the savings is 45 per cent, based on Alberta Finance's own numbers. The lowest was for 2002 – this was the year following the 9/11 disaster – and even that year 22 per cent would have been available. Every other year the lowest number was 42 per cent.

It's clear to me that if you were to pick a reasonable number, somewhere below 40 per cent, it's doable. If you pick 30 or 33 per cent, I would argue that it's very doable. If you wanted to be very

small “c” conservative, you could do as Alaska does with their fund and drop it down to 25 per cent. But, Mr. Speaker, the point is that this is a conversation that Albertans need to be having, that they are starting to have based on the comments that I've heard as I travel the province. The benefits of adopting such a policy are unquestionable whether it be something like the Alaska permanent fund, where they rebate a portion of that savings back to the people, which, as you all know, is not my first choice, certainly, but it's an option, I suppose, or whether it be to establish endowment funds and set aside billions of dollars in savings accounts that can benefit us today and in the future, as I've already outlined. There's no question that saving some of this revenue is so terribly important.

9:30

I've talked before about the fact – and I really believe this to be true – that 23 years post the last recession here we are today evermore dependent on the oil and natural gas sector than we were then. My fear is that we really have not learned the lessons of the early 1980s, that we are as vulnerable, if not more so, today to another such recession as we were then. That causes me unbelievable concern because I lived through that time, as did probably most members in this House.

I was newly married and had just purchased a home and was operating a small business that was fairly heavily financed, and I know how difficult those days were. We were fortunate. We were able to pull ourselves through that time without having to walk away from property, selling it for a dollar as many did, without having to pull up roots and go back to what might have been our home province because we simply couldn't make it here anymore. I would be loath to see those days happen again in Alberta, but, Mr. Speaker, it's not unimaginable. One thing we can certainly do to protect ourselves against that is to start thinking in the way of enduring prosperity, and I do not believe that this current government has really taken any serious steps towards that.

You know, just looking at the numbers here as I prepare for debate on Bill 33 and Bill 34 tonight, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006, and the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006, I note in there that personal income tax will account this year for approximately \$6 billion in revenue to this government. Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not unimaginable that a fund built up from natural resource revenue could in a very few number of years accumulate to the point where you could put a serious cap on personal income tax and perhaps even some day eliminate personal income tax altogether. That's not unimaginable if we were to take advantage of the situation that we're in today.

We're collecting at this point only \$2.2 billion in corporate tax. It seems a little unbalanced there, \$6 billion from personal income tax and only \$2.2 billion from corporate, given the fact that we have some corporations in this province that are doing very, very well right now. But, Mr. Speaker, that's a combined total of only \$8.2 billion of the total revenue of this province that is coming from income tax of either the corporate or personal nature.

Again, if we were to start saving a large percentage of our natural resource revenue, it's not unimaginable that someday in the not-too-distant future we could put a very serious cap on and perhaps even eliminate those income taxes. You know, given the worst-case scenario that I was mentioning a few minutes ago, just think of the advantage that would give to this province if we could give our citizens, particularly our small and medium-sized businesses, that sort of an advantage. That would be the Alberta advantage.

It's just one of many ideas that are in this document Alberta Horizons. Again, I think it's incumbent upon all of us to be having that conversation, and I know that Albertans are having that

conversation. I know that because I hear it when I'm out there, and I'm sure members of the government side are hearing that too. But as a collective unit, as a government caucus they've not gone there yet. You know, I fully expected that we would see something in this year's budget documents that would move in that direction. Instead, what we saw is an increase to \$5.3 billion in the amount of natural resource revenue that they're allowing themselves to spend. They craft this in such a way – I love this. I talked about it last year too. They talk about limiting themselves to spending \$5.3 billion in natural resource revenue when, in fact, what they're doing is allowing it to grow from \$4.75 to \$5.3 billion.

Then they talk about the amount of money that they've got in short-term savings, Mr. Speaker. That money is in vehicles like the sustainability fund and the capital account, which by their own admission are short-term savings vehicles and, in fact, many would argue not much more than a government slush fund allowing them to announce projects in rural communities and make cheque presentations. Boy, I've seen an awful lot of these lately on the front pages of rural newspapers, with the local MLA standing there with a cheque that actually says the name of the constituency as if that MLA and his constituency somehow have the power to present millions of dollars from the constituency office to the particular project.

Believe me, I'm not speaking out against the need for improvements to a lodge in a small community, but it's the manner in which these cheque presentations are being done and the implication that somehow that particular constituency office is responsible for securing millions of dollars and there's a direct link between that particular rural MLA and the constituency office. The cheque that's being presented in this event has actually got the member's signature on it even in some cases. It's pork-barrel politics at best and, perhaps, misrepresentation at worst.

An Hon. Member: Name names.

Mr. R. Miller: I heard one of the hon. members across the way, Mr. Speaker, saying, "Name names." Well, you know what? I'll do better than that. We'll table copies of those newspapers in this Legislature, and you'll all have the opportunity to look at them. It is quite crass, to be honest.

Now that I'm on a roll, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to talk about an event that I attended on Friday where we were meeting with the Economics Society of Northern Alberta. The guest speaker was a gentleman by the name of Tony Morehen, who is the chief economist for Alberta Finance, a bureaucrat, I would point out, and not a politician, although you would never know it from the manner in which he spoke that day. I would have sworn that he was running for public office because he was more political than almost any minister could have been were they speaking there.

One of the things that he talked about – and remember that he's speaking to a room full of economists. This was quite entertaining, actually. He talked about this year's budget and the forecast for next year, and he talked about those two years having only – and he put a graph up on the screen that showed this – \$300 million of wiggle room, as he described it. The titters amongst the room were quite telling. I don't think he left that room with a lot of credibility because I think the economists in that room understood that there is somewhat more than \$300 million worth of wiggle room in this year's budget. The fact that rather than having come forward with a plan that would see some of this money set aside in a serious way as opposed to the short-term savings accounts, which allow the government to do such open-ended things as improve balance sheet line items as is described in the legislation, is astounding to me and,

as I say, I don't think bore a lot of credibility with the economists in the room either.

Well, would you look at that? I was just going to collect my thoughts for another comment. It appears as if I've run out of time for the time being, Mr. Speaker, but I thank you for the opportunity to have spoken to it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Under a section of the Standing Orders, 29(2), I'm entitled to ask the hon. member a question, am I not?

The Deputy Speaker: We're not into Standing Order 29(2)(a) until after the next speaker.

Mr. Mason: Okay. May I be the next speaker then, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Please carry on.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFarland: Maybe you can ask yourself a question.

Mr. Mason: That would provide, hon. member, not only an intelligent question but an intelligent answer.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise to speak to Bill 24. This bill is rather misnamed the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006. In 2003 the first version of the Fiscal Responsibility Act set the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that could be accessed by the government for program spending at \$3.5 billion. In 2004 the act was amended and raised the limit to \$4 billion. In 2005 the act was further amended and the amount was set at \$4.75 billion. This act will raise the amount yet again, this time to \$5.3 billion. This is an enormous amount of money.

9:40

I guess someone might look at the books of the government, look at the tremendous inflow of nonrenewable resource revenues to this government and say: well, it's not really that much. But what the government has done is forgotten the basic principle of nonrenewable resource revenue, and that is that it is nonrenewable, yet it is being spent by this government as if it would be forever available. In other words, the government is basing programs on this revenue, very significant amounts of programs, that one day will not be supportable, will not be sustainable when this revenue is no longer there.

This reminds me of the very short-term thinking that prevailed in some quarters in this province in the late 1970s. We've seen, in fact, that under provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility Act the Provincial Treasurer of the time, then Pat Nelson, when there was a sudden drop in oil and gas prices, was forced by the act to order very, very quick cutbacks in spending, including preventative programs for at-risk youth and children, including aboriginal youth and children. It led to quite a response, particularly from the aboriginal community. We were just debating a motion that would have put in place the hot-lunch programs for children. If that were passed or if other programs are passed, they are put at risk by the government's growing dependence on nonrenewable resource revenue. We've seen even in the last few years the government having to make cuts to critical investments in young people in this province, at-risk children and youth, because of a drop in oil and gas prices. That tells me, Mr. Speaker, that we are already too dependent on these nonrenewable

sources for our program spending, and the government proposes to increase that dependence.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, what the government is doing is cutting its sustainable tax base and has taken another step along the misguided route set out a number of years ago by then Provincial Treasurer Steve West to cut the corporate tax rate in this province from 15 to 8 per cent. There is, in fact, an additional cut in this budget of \$550 million in corporate taxes. This comes at a time when these corporations are earning record profits. Record profits. They're making more money now than they have ever made, and the government proposes to cut their taxes.

Now, I heard the Provincial Treasurer say in defence of corporate tax cuts – it was about a year ago, and I don't know the exact date – that the reason that they were introducing further cuts to the corporate tax rate was to stimulate the economy. So the Treasurer admits that cutting corporate taxes has a stimulative effect on the economy. I hardly need to point out that the economy is overstimulated and that small business and the public sector and some portions of big business are no longer able to get the labour they need or the materials that they need. Anyone who has tried to arrange house renovations, for just one small example, in the last year or so knows very well that the demand for goods and services, particularly labour, in this province is out of control, yet the government is offering a massive corporate tax cut which will give the biggest corporations an even greater advantage in accessing the limited labour and materials at the expense of other businesses that don't receive this and at the expense of individuals who don't receive this and at the expense of the public sector.

So it is absolutely the most irresponsible tax cut that this government has ever made. It's going to create more problems in the economy than we have yet seen. The dislocation caused by labour shortages and shortages of materials is already hurting the economy badly, and this corporate tax cut will worsen that far too much. So there's a corporate tax cut – I should correct myself. The corporate tax cut is \$265 million, and the additional take this year by this bill from the nonrenewable resource revenues is \$550 million.

Now, some others have had some points to make here, and I would quote some of those. The *Edmonton Journal* says that the point here is not that extra spending was unwise, but rather it makes a mockery of the budget process and, in the process, tends to obscure from view and insulate from proper debate in the Legislature the real rate of increase in spending. Another one, from the *Edmonton Sun*: the capital plan, another of those money pots that the Provincial Treasurer's predecessor, Pat Nelson, set up to make following the Tories' bouncing budget ball all but impossible. Another one from the *Sun*: hiding the surplus money in sustainability and endowment funds and the heritage fund doesn't make it any better; we're all for saving nonrenewable resource revenues, but it's starting to look like the government is creating endowment funds solely for the purposes of hiding surpluses and to avoid dealing with the political problems of having this kind of resources available.

Here's one from the *Edmonton Journal*: it's not that the Provincial Treasurer doesn't know what she's doing; it's rather that her government doesn't know what it's doing. It hasn't set out a detailed, workable, long-range plan to spend surplus money. It's not just spending on the fly; it's spending on the whim. And it goes on: the government is throwing money around like an armada's worth of drunken sailors, undemocratic drunken sailors I should add.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we believe that there should be a minimum of unbudgeted surpluses. It's the policy of the Alberta New Democrats that forecasts in costs or in revenues from oil and gas should be as accurate as possible, and we've shown in the past that we can more accurately predict those things than the government has. By simply

going to the experts in the field and taking a selection of their predictions and using those, we've shown that we can predict more accurately on the price of oil and gas than the government has.

Now, unfortunately, the Liberal opposition has based its financial policy on unbudgeted surpluses. In other words, they are assuming that there will be what we call planned unbudgeted surpluses, which sounds like an oxymoron, but it's really what the government has been doing. With their policy of one-third/one-third/one-third they build in an assumption that there will be unbudgeted surpluses. It's our view that all of the surpluses should be budgeted for as accurately as possible, and then you can decide what to do with it. To have deliberately unbudgeted surpluses is fiscally irresponsible in our view, and both the Liberal and Conservative parties are guilty of making that mistake.

The NDP believes very strongly that today's oil and gas resources, today's nonrenewable resource revenues belong to all generations and not simply this one, so they should not provide the broad base of government expenditures. Rather, the majority of those things should be invested in things which will position Alberta in the future so that the same prosperity that we enjoy today will be available to our grandchildren and to our great-grandchildren.

The government's policy is precisely the opposite. It is to consume and use the value of our nonrenewable resource revenues for this generation alone, and maybe some will be left for the next one and maybe a little bit for the one after. Our view is that almost all of that revenue needs to be invested in ways that ensure the environmental and economic and social prosperity of future generations of this province, and that is not what this act does. As a result, Mr. Speaker, we cannot support it, and we urge all hon. members to defeat it.

Thank you very much.

9:50

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. leader, hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available. Any questions or comments?

Seeing none, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege, as always, to rise in debate on legislation in this Assembly. This is an important and major bill, and it's one with which we in the Liberal opposition have serious, serious issues.

As I read through and about Bill 24, I can't help but ask: what is the intent of this bill? Why is the government doing this? Why is it asking this to go through the Legislature? I can't for the world understand why this piece of legislation is before us. I worry about its impact. I worry about its intent. I think, in fact, this legislation is taking us as a province in exactly the opposite direction than we need to be going.

It's clear, as the two previous speakers have indicated, that we are on an unsustainable trend in our spending and in particular in our spending of nonrenewable resource revenues. We have a government that in 2004 allowed itself to spend 3 and a half billion dollars in nonrenewable resource revenues, in 2005 increased it to \$4 billion, in 2006 \$4.75 billion, and is now proposing allowing in 2007 \$5.3 billion in nonrenewable resource revenue expenditures.

We need, in fact, Mr. Speaker, to be taking our spending in exactly the opposite direction. I can tell you that an Alberta Liberal government would set the objective of breaking the provincial government's direct dependence on nonrenewable resource revenues. We should be aiming at taking that number not higher but lower. Indeed, we should be aiming at having a government that doesn't need to draw any direct money whatsoever from nonrenew-

able resource revenues because its financial situation is so strong.

This sets us up for long-term disaster, Mr. Speaker, so we will be strongly opposing this piece of legislation. There are four particular reasons that we will be opposing Bill 24. It's really no plan at all, is it? It's not sustainable. There's no intention here to build up savings, and it represents a breakdown of fiscal discipline.

I'd like to speak to each of those issues one by one. First, this government lacks a plan for Alberta's future. It's pretty obvious. It's widely recognized in the public, it's widely recognized in the editorial pages, and indeed it's widely recognized by this party itself as has been exhibited a few times in the last month or so.

We as the Official Opposition and as the Alberta Liberal caucus have put forward a surplus plan. As the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford indicated a few minutes ago, we are in fact reviewing that plan. The plan that we have stood behind to this point has served very well, but it's based on surpluses. It's based on 35 per cent of any surplus going into the heritage fund to ensure that Albertans can enjoy lasting benefit from the current energy boom, another 35 per cent going into a postsecondary endowment fund to achieve excellence in our colleges and universities and technical schools, and 25 per cent into a capital account to eliminate the province's very, very significant infrastructure debt, which ranges, depending on which government minister you're speaking to, anywhere from \$7 billion to \$12 billion. Finally, Mr. Speaker, our policy calls for 5 per cent of any surplus going into an endowment fund for the arts, humanities, and social sciences up to a maximum of \$500 million.

I won't repeat the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford other than to say that as good as that policy is and as useful as it has been, we think that it can probably be improved, and we will be looking at and debating whether we should shift it from a surplus-based policy to a policy based on actual nonrenewable resource revenues. But at least it's a policy, Mr. Speaker. At least it's a plan. At least it's a vision to say: "This is what we would do with surpluses. This is what we would do to convert Alberta's nonrenewable wealth into something permanent." We see nothing equivalent to that whatsoever, no plan really, from this government. This bill does not advance a plan, and that's one of the reasons that we're going to be opposing it.

Our second reason for opposing this legislation is that, quite frankly, it's not sustainable. Spending nonrenewable resource revenues is not a permanent solution. It's not bedrock upon which to build Alberta's long-term prosperity. All kinds of groups have pointed this out, and it only stands to reason. If we keep spending more and more nonrenewable resource revenue as fast as it comes out of the ground, when it stops coming out of the ground we crash, or just as likely when the price drops, we crash.

There is a better choice, and that is to take the example of Norway and save. Get aggressive in saving this wealth. That, Mr. Speaker, is the third reason that we oppose this legislation. This government is failing to adequately save resource revenues for current and future Albertans.

Actually, one of several groups commenting on this breakdown is the Canada West Foundation. It points out that prior to 2005 of the \$122.9 billion in natural resource revenues collected by the Alberta government from 1977 to 2004, over 91 per cent was spent. We're spending it as fast as it comes out of the ground, and that is brutally unwise.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are three of the reasons we're opposing this legislation. The fourth, frankly, is pretty straightforward: this legislation represents a breakdown of fiscal responsibility. There is no sense of discipline either in this legislation or, frankly, in the behaviour of this government. We need budgets brought forward,

and then we need budgets stayed with. We have a government that within hours of budgets being introduced has ministers who are openly speaking of off-budget spending. That is a breakdown of the most basic tool of public management, which is the control of your budget. This government has lost that control, and this legislation is merely one symptom of that loss of control.

Mr. Speaker, I think this will prove to be a defining issue in the coming months and years of this province. Do we follow the example presented by this bill and spend more and more of the capital that makes this province so wealthy, or do we take the opportunity we have right now and save that capital and have it there permanently, drawing down merely on the interest and the earnings of that capital forever? The Alberta Liberal caucus strongly endorses the latter position, and I would say to you that most opinion leaders and probably most Albertans will prove to agree with us. So rest assured that this bill will not receive our support. We as the Alberta Liberal caucus have a better plan.

On that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move adjournment of debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

10:00

Bill 33

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure tonight on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance to move second reading of Bill 33, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill has among its primary purposes, of course, to assist Albertans by increasing the income tax threshold from \$12,900 up to \$14,899, thereby allowing Albertans to earn more money and to keep that money before having to pay tax. The general thrust is therefore very positive. I'm hoping that other members here will see it in that same light, in that same way.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening and speak to Bill 33, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006. I believe this bill has already been moved. Actually, the Finance minister spoke to it on the 10th of April, but I appreciate the comments of the Minister of Education. I guess it's been moved twice now. I don't know what that means if anything.*

Mr. Speaker, I've recommended to my colleagues in the opposition caucus that we support this bill. I think it's an opportunity to give a small, albeit very small, break to Alberta taxpayers. Given this time of plenty, it's not a bad idea that we do so although I would certainly submit that there would be better ways to do it. I outlined some of those earlier this evening when I was speaking to the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006, and my belief that we should be saving and allowing some of the resource revenue that we are experiencing right now to benefit not only today's Albertans but also future generations.

The proposal in this bill is to raise the tax exemption by \$100 when you take out the factor of indexing. Mr. Speaker, that, quite frankly, isn't going to make a lot of difference for a lot of Alberta families. Depending on where you fall in terms of your overall income, probably not much more than about \$35 per individual or

*See p. 1000, left col., para. 8

\$70 per family. It's not a lot of money and probably won't make that much difference, have that much of an impact on most families. I think it does allow this government to once again chant their mantra that the only way taxes are going in this province is down, and we've heard some of that. Really, it's virtually inconsequential.

The total cost to the government is \$77 million, Mr. Speaker. In light of the conversation we had earlier this evening on Motion 507, which would have seen us establish a province-wide hot lunch program, there were comments about what you could buy with \$10 million. Just imagine what \$77 million might be able to accomplish, and compare that to the inconsequential impact that \$35 is going to have on low-income individuals. I'd be willing to submit that most of those people would be willing to forgo their \$35 in favour of a program that would ensure that no child went to school hungry in this province. As I say, while I'm not going to vote against it, I really wonder if maybe it's a little bit misguided and if we couldn't have been a little more creative and a little more imaginative with what to do with \$77 million.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other little things in here that are worth highlighting: the fact that we're paralleling federal legislation and allowing the increase in the deduction of medical expenses to go to \$10,000 from \$5,000. Certainly, there are many individuals and families in this province for whom that will be a benefit. Also, the addition of an adoption expense credit, maxing out at \$10,000 or the total of the adoption expenses, whichever is less.

Certainly, I know a number of families who have adopted. In fact, my parents adopted a young fellow who lived in our home for 10 years before we finally decided that there was no way we were going to allow him to be moved from the home, and we'd better make it official. So I have some experience with this. I know a number of families who have adopted children both from within Canada and a couple from overseas. I'm certainly aware of some of the expenses that can come with that, and the fact that we're going to parallel federal legislation and allow an expense credit for that is certainly something that I would be supportive of.

Mr. Speaker, we've talked a lot tonight and there's been a lot of conversation about a plan versus no plan or whether or not the budgeting in this province is worth the paper it's written on. I could go on and on all night about that. I guess, again, the fact that we're going to give a little bit back to some people, especially those in the lower income brackets who desperately need it even in a province experiencing what would appear to those on the outside to be absolutely incredible wealth. I'm not sure that the people in Ontario or Quebec necessarily understand the gravity of the situation that many, many thousands of people face in this province. The streets are not paved with gold in Alberta despite what, certainly, some people outside of Alberta think, and I think it's fair to say some members of the government caucus think. It's clear to us that there are families that are desperately in need of a little bit of assistance.

As I said, I'm not going to vote against this. I'm going to support it and recommend to my colleagues that they do the same, but I think it does sort of speak to the bigger issue that we've highlighted a number of times tonight. I'm just not sure that there isn't something a little more creative that we could have done that maybe would have provided even more relief to Albertans.

Of course, I'm not going to take my chair without highlighting the one tax cut that I believe and the Official Opposition caucus believes this government should be instituting, and that is an elimination for all Albertans of the health care premium tax. Mr. Speaker, this is a tax that currently collects – I believe this year's budget estimate is \$882 million, which is a sizable amount of money but by the government's own admission only a small percentage of the health

care budget. We're one of only three provinces that currently collects that tax.

It doesn't really serve much of a purpose, in my mind, other than ideologically the government believes people have to know that there's a cost associated to their health care, and this is one way that they see that message being sent. I would certainly submit to the Speaker and to all members that all Albertans understand that there is a cost to health care, and the fact that we have a tax that we have to pay on that service doesn't necessarily do any more or less to inform Albertans that there is a cost to their health care. I think Albertans are smart enough to understand that there is. If we really want to give a tax break, I think that that's one we could do.

10:10

I've had people say to me in the past: is it sustainable? I've gone through the numbers. I don't think I have to do it again, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, when you look at both the budgeted surpluses and, as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood referred to, the planned unbudgeted surpluses that we've seen in this province over the last many years, \$875 million, \$882 million, whatever that number is for health care premiums, is clearly sustainable if, in fact, the political will is there to eliminate that health care premium tax. It's clearly doable. All it takes is some political will on the part of the government to do so, and it could be gone. We could sustain it. There's absolutely no doubt in my mind about it. That's the one tax that I would like to see.

Since we're going to be talking about corporate tax in a minute, I might as well just say it now, and I won't have to say it then. This is a move that would benefit small- and medium-sized businesses in this province as well. Were we to eliminate the health care premium tax, it would benefit individuals and also small businesses. From my background as a small businessman I know, and in conversation with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business they confirmed that many, many small businesses in this province will pay either half or in some cases all of the health care premium tax as a benefit to their employees because it's one of the few benefits that they can afford to offer. If they are small enough to the extent that they can't afford a full benefit package, that's the one area that they can offer up in this current labour shortage climate to give some sort of benefits to their employees. Clearly, that would be a benefit to those small- and medium-sized businesses as well, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I'll end my comments and recommend, although I have some reservations, that the members of this Assembly support Bill 33. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise tonight to speak to Bill 33, the Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006. As the hon. Minister of Finance briefly explained in the introduction of this bill, this act will increase the basic spousal and eligible dependent tax credit amounts by \$100 on top of the inflation-proofing or indexing, for a total increase of \$376. This strengthens the government's focus on building the Alberta tax advantage.

From 1999 to 2001 the government phased in substantial cuts to personal taxes, including the introduction of the single-rate tax and the highest basic spousal and eligible dependent amounts in Canada, Mr. Speaker. This resulted in a 20 per cent reduction in personal income tax rates, saving Albertans some 1 and a half billion dollars. We indexed our tax system in 2001, ensuring that the benefits of these cuts would not be eaten away by inflation. This indexing of exemptions has now removed provincial income tax costs from an additional 143,000 Albertans.

In Budget 2005 it was announced that annual indexing of the Alberta family employment tax credit would commence in July 2006, increasing benefits to working families. With these benefits a typical single Albertan can make \$15,800 and a typical working family with two children can earn \$37,000 before paying any provincial income taxes, Mr. Speaker.

The increase in the basic spousal and eligible dependent tax credit amounts in this bill was based on the findings of a comprehensive internal review of Alberta's tax system conducted last fall. This tax review confirmed that Alberta's tax system remains both competitive and fair but also identified lower and middle-income Albertans as a priority for future tax cuts, Mr. Speaker. This act will do exactly that. With these proposed changes more low-income earners will be added to those shielded from provincial income taxes in the future. This means that 1 million of Alberta's 2.36 million tax filers pay no provincial income taxes.

Albertans continue to pay the lowest overall taxes in Canada. Alberta's system rewards work effort while at the same time allowing Albertans to gain, to earn more income before they start paying any provincial income tax. Our low-rate, broad-based policy provides a level playing field, letting the market, Mr. Speaker, not government, determine the best places to spend and invest.

I urge all members of this Legislature to give their support to Bill 33. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: I would like to ask the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon if he has considered the advantage of eliminating health care premiums for those families and whether or not a significant tax reduction for working families like that might not be better than the 20 bucks or so that most people are going to save through this measure.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to respond to the hon. member. Thank you, hon. member. Certainly, while I appreciate your thoughts on the elimination of health care premiums, I think it would be wrong to trivialize the importance of this tax cut for the low-income Albertans that will benefit from this. The whole discussion of health care premiums is certainly a good topic for another day, but I think it's beyond this discussion.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you rising again under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: Although it's tempting, Mr. Speaker, I'll just speak to the debate on the bill as a whole.

The Deputy Speaker: Proceed on the debate.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 33, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006. It ought better to be referred to as the very small income tax reduction amendment act.

I just want to say a few things about this because I think that this is a very, very small reduction. I am not one to trivialize \$35 for people who don't have very much money. Particularly, I don't want to give any impression that I think that savings in personal income tax are unimportant, but I really have to ask the question why the

government's reduction for individuals in the personal income tax is so small, \$35 or \$70 a year if you have a family. At the same time, the government is charging people a great deal more in terms of the health care premiums, which is a flat tax, which affects the lowest income families much more than it does high-income families, who pay exactly the same amount. There are lots of people who are already below the income tax cut-off who still have to pay that tax. So it is perhaps the most regressive tax that the government has imposed on Albertans.

The government likes to pretend that it's to remind us about the cost of health care. Of course, every member of this Assembly knows or should know by now that it has nothing to do with health care at all. It goes into general revenues and is not used as a source of funding specifically for health care. So it seems to me to be a much better target if you want to really help people in low- and middle-income tax brackets with their tax bill.

So why is the government introducing this? Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't help but wonder and believe, in fact, that the real reason the government has brought this in is so that the massive corporate tax cut doesn't stand alone, so that the government can say: "Yes, we're giving a huge, multimillion dollar tax cut to corporations who are earning the highest profits in history," and it's a \$265 million break, "but we're going to take \$35 less in taxes from the average working person." So I believe that this is just to make the bigger corporate tax cut palatable. I don't see another reason for it.

It's clear that if the government really had the interests of working families at heart, they would eliminate the health care premiums, which is a much larger amount of money, and save an average family up to \$1,200 a year. That's what the government should do instead of doing this. But I think, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, what the government is really trying to avoid is having to go to voters and say: "Yes, we gave a tax cut to the big corporations," who didn't need it, "but we didn't give anything to you." Now they can say at least that they gave something.

10:20

I see no value in voting against this bill, but I do think that the government has missed an opportunity. It's missed the boat, if you will, on providing real tax relief to working families in this province. They've had that opportunity. We've been pushing them for years and years and years to do that. They did have the sense of timing at least to extend that reduction on health care premiums to seniors just before the last provincial election. Perhaps they'll have a good sense of timing and eliminate it altogether before we get to the next one. One can only hope, Mr. Speaker, but clearly the government is more interested in rewarding the corporate sector. I'll have more to say on that when we debate that. Suffice it to say that that measure is extremely inflationary and quite out of place in the current economy of this province.

So we will be supporting Bill 33. It represents, in our view, a very tiny baby step towards fairness and equity in the tax position of individuals, but it doesn't go nearly far enough.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. minister of health on the debate.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, thank you for recognizing me. I just want to clarify to the satisfaction of the hon. member who has just spoken that 140,000 fewer people paid health care premiums this year, to the tune of about \$30 million, which was an acknowledgement of people who were at the lower end of the economic scale, defined sometimes as the working poor.

Mr. Speaker, it is not true that the health care premiums per se do not fund health care directly. By practice over the last several years if there are surpluses in the amount predicted for health care premiums – in the example of 2005-06 there was some \$28 million that was considered over and above the amount that was allocated from the budget – those monies are directly assigned to health care for the purposes of offsetting any other additional expense that may be incurred because of the assumption that those individuals are receiving health care benefits. During supplementary estimates I identified quite clearly that those monies were in large part used to fund the over \$26 million that were part of additional supports for long-term care for ceiling lifts, for medication supports, for administrative supports, and for staffing. It was directly because of those dollars that were defined as receivables above what was budgeted for and expected.

So this government by policy has acknowledged the value of health care premiums when in excess at least of that budgeted amount, and I'd say that while we have less than \$800 million collected in health care premiums in Alberta – and the budget is still over \$10 billion, at this stage \$10.3 billion – the real obvious and glaring deficiency, if you will, is that the consumer has paid an amount which has little or no bearing whatsoever on the total cost of health care.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members rising under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments of the hon. minister. I would like to ask the hon. minister and just make sure that I've understood you correctly: of the \$28 million last year, the health care premiums unbudgeted surplus that was put back to health care, I would like to know what percentage of the total take from health care premiums that represents.

Ms Evans: I would rather not guess at that, but if you assume that it was budgeted last year at about \$765 million, it would be a very small percentage overall. But it's still a considerable amount of money. I will in fact, Mr. Speaker, provide for the hon. member and members of the House a tabling tomorrow that will represent the accurate figures.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the debate? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the time to be able to stand and speak on Bill 33, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006. I thank the government, and all Albertans do any time taxes are going down. I also thank the government for all those people that have been taken off of the Alberta health care premiums. It was a significant move, and those people that benefit from that are very appreciative.

But to me as government we would like to increase that amount, and the first thing that I would also like to reiterate is the fact that we need to try and reduce taxes all that we can. It's a great spur to the economy, and the one that just seemed like the most obvious, where we can reduce the size of government and reduce taxes and all of the work that goes with the collection of Alberta health care premiums. It would just be a significant help to Albertans to eliminate those.

So I would continue to urge the government to continue looking at that and to try and raise that forward. If we were to need this \$1.1 billion or \$900 million for Alberta health care, I think that at a time of surplus like this we could actually reassign our flat tax and say that 2 per cent of our 10 per cent flat tax is going to be considered to go to Alberta health care. We are in a surplus time, and that's the time when we can reduce these taxes.

The other area that I'd continue to urge the government on is to raise our level. There's no question that we have the lowest taxes in the country, and Albertans benefit from that, but low-income Albertans still struggle to get by. It just seems wrong to me to start taxing Albertans at \$15,000 when we have such a surplus, when we could raise it to \$20,000 and help out those low-income families to a greater extent. By helping them, we're helping the province.

I feel that that would be a very good area to move to not only for the people of Alberta but we have a surplus in our federal government as well. The \$8,000 that they have is inadequate to start taxing people. We need to be in a position of leadership here in the country, Mr. Speaker, and show that we can and will raise the basic tax exemption across this country. We should be the leader in that area and urge other governments, provincially and federally, to follow our lead.

We're in a unique situation when it comes to the amount of income that we've got here in the province. We've gone through a long time where we had legislation that said that all surplus money must go to paying down the debt. It just seems that it would be in the interest of Albertans if we were to pass new legislation to say that we're going to split all surplus money: 50 per cent is going to go directly to our heritage trust fund, or a higher amount if we want, and then 50 per cent of the surplus would go back to the actual taxpayers.

I believe that the budget showed that we collect about \$5.8 billion in provincial income tax. That's a huge amount, yet with our \$10 billion surplus we could have and I believe we should have given back that income tax. It doesn't cause any problems. It's not income that's going to be taxed by the federal government. It's a surplus, and it could go back. So I would urge the government to continue looking at ways that we can help the Alberta taxpayers.

They brought the point up many times that, no, you can never take a tax off because it's so hard to get back on, and they use that for the health care premiums. You know: well, we need that \$1 billion, and I can understand that. But that's the unique situation with a tax refund, where if we pass the law, we don't need to eliminate any of the taxes that we have, although I feel that we should. Then automatically that money would go back to Albertans, and that to me is really where we should be looking at it.

Another area that's of great concern – and the province and the federal area are in turmoil over this – is the child daycare centres. The federal government is giving \$100 a month. What would happen if here in Alberta we were to take the lead and give a \$5,000 per child tax credit to families that have children under six? Right now the economic conditions are such that it is very difficult for parents to stay at home and look after their kids. We're in a unique situation where we have a surplus. That option I believe should and could be available to Alberta parents if we would just take the initiative to lead that area and once again benefit all of Canada by showing the right area to look at those tax credits and where we should be reducing tax.

10:30

Overall, Albertans are grateful for the surplus that we have. It's how and where we're going to prioritize it. I would prioritize it, once again, first, by eliminating health care premiums; second, by raising the basic tax exemption; third, let's start giving a tax refund back on the surplus; and fourth, by seriously looking at what type of child tax credit we could be giving Albertans here in this province, where we're doing so well at this time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, anyone else wish to participate in the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a second time]

Bill 34

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance to move Bill 34 at second reading, that being the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006, which will have some very positive benefits to it as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to offer an apology to the Education minister. I said earlier when he moved Bill 33 for the second time that I understood that it had already been moved once by the Finance minister. Perhaps it's the late hour. My eyes saw second when, in fact, when I checked *Hansard*, it was actually the Finance minister moving the bill in first reading. So my apologies to the Education minister. I didn't mean to put a scare into him like that.*

I would like to acknowledge the Finance minister for her cooperation on both Bill 33 and Bill 34. In fact, I would also like to acknowledge a recognition that the Finance minister was given this evening. I know that some members were at a dinner hosted by Edmonton Northlands after their AGM this evening, and the Finance minister as well as the Premier were presented with honorary lifetime memberships by Edmonton Northlands. I thought that was a fitting tribute for those two individuals but particularly for the Finance minister, whom I've come to know quite well and work with closely. That was very nice.

I'd like to thank and acknowledge the minister once again for the fact that in both instances, Bill 33 and Bill 34, she provided staff that made themselves available to myself and my staff to give us a thorough briefing on these two bills as well as making available the so-called three-column documents which the government uses to outline the changes in legislation and why they're being made. Those haven't always been made available to us. I find them very helpful in terms of preparing for budget debate, Mr. Speaker. I believe that having that opportunity with staff from Alberta Finance certainly makes for better debate and, ultimately, better legislation. Really, that's what it's all about. So I do appreciate that.

When we talk about Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006, Mr. Speaker, as has been pointed out, I believe, by the Finance minister when she introduced the bill in first reading, this bill will cut the corporate tax rate from 11.5 per cent to 10 per cent. I'm going to offer my qualified support to this bill. As a small-business person having operated a business in this province for many years I can appreciate the difference that this will make to small businesses in particular.

I talked a little bit a few minutes ago about some of the challenges facing small business, one of those being the fact that many small businesses do pay the health care premium tax or a portion of it. It would have been my preference to see that removed; nevertheless, this is a move that has been promised to business in this province since 2001 and is finally taking place.

I know that when I speak to groups like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and other stakeholders, they're certainly supportive of this, and I can understand the reasons why. As I say,

I will be offering my qualified support as well, which is probably more, quite frankly, than the government will be getting from my colleagues in the ND opposition, who, I'm going to guess, aren't going to be nearly as supportive.

I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. I touched earlier on the fact that according to the government's revenue estimates for this year, they plan on collecting \$6 billion in personal income tax and \$2.2 billion in corporate income tax. As I was reviewing those numbers, it prompted me to think on a much smaller scale of the example of the city of Edmonton where the mayor is lamenting the fact that we collect an inordinate amount of waste collection fees from business as compared to individual homeowners. I'm thinking that here we have sort of the opposite. We seem to be collecting an inordinate amount of tax from individuals as compared to what we collect from corporations. So while I'm not necessarily against the idea of the government finally following through on a promise that they made five years ago, it does make me wonder if perhaps we're not giving a greater advantage to corporations than we are to the individuals.

Then I thought: well, I'll just look at the dollar value that we're giving. I mentioned a few minutes ago when we were discussing Bill 33 that the cost to government of making the tax cuts that are being made in Bill 33, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, are about \$77 million, yet when we look at the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, the cost there to the Alberta government is about \$265 million, Mr. Speaker. So with a little bit of quick math you can see that corporations are actually receiving more than three times the tax break that individual taxpayers are receiving. So, again, while I'm not necessarily speaking against this act, I'm questioning whether or not, in fact, we couldn't have given individual taxpayers a little more break than we did given that the corporations are realizing more than three times the benefit than that which individual taxpayers are receiving.

I would also like to just point out a couple of things as far as individual sections. The idea of moving the rate from 11.5 per cent to 10 per cent: as I said, it's been talked about for years, promised for years. It does sort of beg the question: why are we making this tax cut in this year? I'm not sure what sort of an answer I might get from the minister, but I'm going to guess that it would be hard to justify it by saying that there's more money this year than there was last year or the year before because, clearly, when you look at the numbers from the previous two years, that's not necessarily the case.

So I guess the question is: did the government committee examining corporate tax cuts recommend it this year? Has the Tax Review Committee finished their job of reviewing the tax regime? If that is the case, I'm wondering if the minister would commit to tabling that report in this Assembly so that all Albertans would see the results of that report and the recommendations that were made out of it to the government caucus.

Section 10 talks about allowing the minister to waive penalties or interest owing. That prompts me to wonder whether or not the minister has used power such as that in the past and, if not, whether she's aware of whether or not those powers might have been used by another minister in the past and, again, if that has in fact happened, whether or not she might be willing to table copies of those actions having been taken in the Assembly so that all Albertans would be able to see for themselves under which circumstances penalties and interest owing might have been waived.

10:40

Finally, Mr. Speaker, section 13 talks about clarifying the definition of insurance companies to ensure that, in fact, all companies operating and selling insurance in this province are paying the

*See p. 996, right col, para. 12

3 per cent insurance tax, which is another tax that I've referred to in the past as being a hidden tax. I sincerely believe that most Albertans are unaware of the fact that 3 per cent of their insurance premiums is actually going to the government. I'm going to guess that if there was a way that I could somehow get that message out to Albertans, there would be a hue and cry about that because I think that most Albertans feel that they're paying enough tax already. I know that those that I can touch and make aware of the fact that they currently do pay a 3 per cent tax on their insurance premiums are very clearly not happy about this.

Again, if we really wanted to give a break to all Albertans, that's an area we could look at. I don't think there are too many Albertans that don't find themselves having to purchase insurance at some level, whether it be a business insurance or a homeowner's insurance or a tenant's insurance or, of course, the oft discussed and talked about auto insurance.

So in this section, then, as I say, we're talking about clarifying exactly what the definition is of an insurance company to make sure that the government is collecting that 3 per cent tax. It begs the question of whether or not – and I'm sure it must be the case – in fact, there have been some insurance companies avoiding paying that 3 per cent tax through some loophole or other in the current legislation. I'm wondering whether or not the minister would provide in writing to this Assembly an estimate of the amount of money that has not been collected from those companies if, in fact, they have found some loophole that they were using and found a way around that. Clearly, if the government sees fit to add that clarification of the definition, I'm going to guess that there must have been a reason why they felt it necessary to do so, and I would be most interested to know and I think most Albertans would be most interested to know how much tax revenue the government should have been collecting from insurance companies and perhaps somehow missed and allowed that to slip through their fingers.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I'll be offering my qualified support for this bill. Again, it's not necessarily the highest on my list of priorities, but I think that given that the government has made a commitment many years ago and certainly small and medium-sized businesses have been looking forward to that commitment being lived up to at some point – I think the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner said that any time there's any sort of tax relief for Albertans, it's a good thing. Given the current economic situation I suppose that that's true. In light of that, I will be, as I said, offering my qualified support and recommending to my caucus that they do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening to speak to Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006. As the hon. Minister of Finance outlined in the introduction of this legislation, the main purpose of this act is to reduce the general corporate income tax rate to 10 per cent from 11 and a half per cent, as was outlined in Budget 2006. Yes, this is tax relief. While Alberta's economy is strong now, cutting the corporate income taxes will benefit the province for years to come. This reduction will save businesses \$265 million in 2006-07 and encourage more investment in our province.

The government recognizes the importance of low corporate taxes in developing a strong economy. Between 2001 and 2004 we reduced our general corporate income tax rate from 15.5 to 11.5 per cent, Mr. Speaker. At the same time, the small-business rate was cut

in half to 3 per cent, and the small-business income threshold was doubled to \$400,000. In 2005 the government undertook an internal review of the province's tax system to assess whether our tax system remains competitive and fair and encourages economic growth. The review identified the general corporate income tax rate as a priority for future tax cuts.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is not just competing in Canada with other provinces and territories but in a much larger global marketplace. Other countries around the world have reform proposals in mind that could sharply lower corporate taxes. The further reduction of the general corporate income tax rate to 10 per cent is necessary to maintain Alberta's competitive advantage. Enhancing the Alberta tax advantage for businesses helps to attract investment and encourage entrepreneurship, meaning that Albertans will have more jobs, stronger communities, and a much better quality of life.

Most of the other amendments are technical or administrative in nature and to keep the provincial legislation consistent with federal legislation, Mr. Speaker.

A couple of areas I'd like to point out for the information of the House, Mr. Speaker. Bill 34 will allow the communication of tax information to the Chief Electoral Officer or his designate to ensure that associated corporations are complying with the requirements of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. A company that claims an insurance policy reserve under the federal act will be deemed to be an insurance company for insurance corporation tax purposes and required to pay the tax.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of the House to give their support to Bill 34. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung was quite right in predicting that we would be opposing this. In our view, this tax cut is irresponsible and makes Alberta's network of social programs unsustainable.

We think that it's unwise for a number of reasons. First, it ignores the fact that Alberta's budget is well above its tax base capacity. We're already depending far too much on oil revenue, and to further undercut our stable sources of income is unwise, to say the least, and potentially disastrous. In fact, the government's own budget documents state:

With no general sales tax, payroll taxes or capital taxes, Alberta's tax base is relatively narrow compared to other jurisdictions.

You see? They admit it themselves.

While this is a benefit to Albertans, it also comes with some risks.

A broader range of taxes means more stable revenues. With relatively fewer . . . sources, predictable funding for key public services is at more risk in the event of an economic slow-down.

Consequently, it is inadvisable to eliminate or dedicate more taxes.

That's from a section called Alberta Tax Advantage. It's on page 134, Mr. Speaker. Eliminating taxes is precisely what the government is going ahead and doing, and their ability to fund core programs is at risk by their own admission.

Mr. Speaker, also over the past five years the government has reduced business taxes by over \$265 million per year. In the 2004 budget, cuts to corporate income taxes started in 2001 will save Alberta corporations \$434 million in taxes in that year. These savings are on top of savings from cuts to other corporate taxes such as the elimination of the financial institutions capital tax and a drop in the railway fuel tax, and that comes from Budget 2004.

In two years alone, then, the cuts from 12.5 to 10 per cent will have taken, by a conservative estimate, more than \$700 million out of government revenue. That \$700 million would have paid for three times the amount urged as an increase for seniors in long-term care throughout the province, which is only \$250 million. That \$750 million would pay for more than twice the amount of new schools being sought by the Calgary board of education. How can the government consistently applaud itself as providing one of the best education systems in the world and announce that its strategic plans prepare students for the workforce and citizenship when it denies both the building of new schools and the repairing of old ones? How can this government face its citizens with such pride when it is denying children their future for tax cuts that are not needed and are damaging in other ways?

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, to lower our already low corporate tax rates in order to attract more corporate investment risks us establishing a race to the bottom in terms of corporate taxes throughout not only Canada but the U.S. and Mexico as well. We cannot afford to become the Third World labour tax equivalent of North America in order to attract investment, much less when we already have some of the poorest labour laws in the country. The government's own internal review on tax policy found that we are competitive within North America in attracting investment and skilled workers, so why, then, is this necessary?

10:50

Mr. Speaker, I've also said that this is inflationary and will give the largest corporations, who are already flush with cash, a tremendous advantage in competing with smaller businesses for labour and materials, not to mention individuals and the public sector. So on all fronts this is ill advised and unnecessary and dangerous in the long term.

I was interested, Mr. Speaker, to hear that the Finance critic for the Liberal Party had some comments and offered his qualified support to this corporate tax cut bill. At the same time, he qualified it and noted that three times the tax break is being given to corporations as to individuals and asked why we need to do it at this time of the year. Notwithstanding that, the Liberal Finance critic supported this corporate tax cut bill.

Mr. Speaker, I've been in this House for some time, and I've observed the Liberal caucus in question period and in debate. The Liberals want more for education, more for health care, more for seniors, more for the environment. They want more tax money for students, more for schools, more hospitals, and they want more roads. The Liberal Party opposes an increase in the use of nonrenewable resource revenues for program spending, and it opposes increasing the amount the government receives from gambling. So the Liberals want to have it all. They want to spend in every area more, more, more. They do not wish to increase the amount of spending from nonrenewable resources, they do not wish to increase the amount of spending coming from gaming, and they are now in favour of significant tax cuts which will cost the Provincial Treasurer hundreds of millions of dollars. The Liberals want to have their cake and eat it too, but it doesn't work that way.

You know, I want to suggest that the only fiscally responsible party in this Assembly is the Alberta NDP. While we want some of the same things that the Liberals want, we know that those things have to be paid for. They have to be paid for in some way. If you're not going to keep your taxes where they are and you don't want to spend resource revenue and you don't want to have gambling revenue, Mr. Speaker, there's only one other answer, and that's to borrow money. We are also opposed to that.

There is no magic solution, Mr. Speaker, to the problems facing

this province. If you want to have a high quality of education, if you want to have a high-quality public health care system, you have to pay for it. This tax cut will render the province unable to afford those things other than to continue to do what they're doing now, which is to use nonrenewable resource revenue, to use the wealth of all generations of this province for this generation only, and that's wrong. That's morally wrong. That's what the government is doing, but the Liberal answer is no better.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I wonder if the hon. member could enlighten me. You said that it would render us unable to do these things when we're talking \$2.2 billion, I believe, in total tax credit. When we have a surplus that could be five times that, how would it render us unable to carry on business by giving a modest tax break to the corporations?

Mr. Mason: A good question, hon. member. First of all, it's not a modest tax reduction. The plan of the government is to reduce corporate income taxes from 15 to 8 per cent – in other words, cut them nearly in half – which will make us by far the lowest in the country.

Secondly, my point is simply this. The Liberal position is not to increase our dependence on nonrenewable resource revenue, which seems to be what this hon. member is suggesting that we could do, and in that case, Mr. Speaker, we are against that as well. We certainly don't think that we should be spending nonrenewable resource revenue to pay for increases in ongoing program spending. Those increases need to be provided primarily from stable, ongoing sources of revenue such as the tax base. That's our position. We think that's the only fiscally responsible position.

There are really only two fiscally responsible positions, Mr. Speaker. One is to maintain our tax base and pay for good service levels, good programs in health and education. The other is to cut corporate taxes and also cut program spending in those areas, not a position we support, but at least it balances the books.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to stand up for a minute and go over Bill 34 as well. In response to the hon. member, I'm disappointed in the fact that this government has promised a reduction from 15 to 8 and we're moving so slowly and cautiously, like we're in trouble here. I would urge the government to continue moving in that direction to lower corporate tax. In response to that, small business really is the backbone of this province, so once again I would urge this government that just as we need to look after the individuals, we also need to look after small businesses.

There are several things that we can do. I'm going to bring up again, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought up, that by eliminating the health care premium, this is another benefit to small business because many of them do pay that on behalf of their employees. We need to make Alberta the area where we can and should have value added to all of our resources that we have here. We want more jobs for the people, better paying jobs. By doing that, we want businesses that are strong, and businesses are stronger and able to compete on a world basis, which is what we are. It's a global economy now. It isn't a trapped area where we can say

that we're selling to Saskatchewan or somewhere else. We're competing with China. We're competing with India. Those areas, as I've said before, don't have the social programs that we have here, yet we're competing with them. So if we want to keep our corporations here and we want people employed here with those jobs and to process our resources here, we need to continue lowering the corporate tax to be able to make them competitive on a global basis.

I'd also like to address the fact that it is great that we've raised the threshold from \$200,000 to \$400,000, but once again with inflation and the value of land and property and every other area that's gone up so much, we need to look at keeping track or continuing to raise that threshold for small businesses to make them viable.

I'd also continue to urge the government to address the problem of passing on the family business. It doesn't matter whether that's the farm, whether it's a dry-cleaning or accounting business. It's a major problem to pass on these businesses. Often we lose good family businesses because of the tax structure.

I want to go back to the promise and not moving to this 8 per cent reduction. I was very disappointed with our federal Conservatives, who promised a six-month capital gains exemption and now are saying that they're not able to deliver it. I would urge this government: let's not be in a position where we tell businesses that we're going to do these things and then put them off, especially when we're in the situation where we can do it. There is no reason why we don't do that.

We need to also, I feel, continue to look at innovative ways of bringing in more businesses. Just as we've been with the tar sands in allowing that capital investment and receiving their money back, we need to do that in other areas in this province, whether that's a packing plant, whether it's in pulp mills, whether it's in canola crushing, whatever that industry might be. We need to look at other areas where we can have people wanting to put their seed money into value-added processes and into businesses so that we can continue to have those good jobs here in the province.

I vote in favour of Bill 34. It's a step in the right direction again. We want to be lowering our taxes. That always is an economic boost and will actually increase the amount of taxes that come in by lowering taxes because the economy spurs on and will do better. I have great faith that this is a step in the right direction and urge the government to continue following their program and to get to the 8 per cent quicker rather than later.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

11:00

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner about his theory that the more you lower taxes, the more revenue you get from taxes. I would wonder if he thought, then, that we could maximize our tax take by eliminating taxes altogether.

Mr. Hinman: There are some interesting studies on the economy of doing that. Everything has a curve, a U-curve, and it goes down and up, and there is a point. But there's no question right now that our taxes are excessive. We have a surplus, and that means our taxes are excessive unless, as you were pointing out earlier, we want to increase our social programs. Perhaps there are areas where we want to do this, but I believe that with priorities and long-term planning we could greatly increase the support for those people in need and have what we call targeted social programs rather than universal programs, which we seem to be falling into more and

more. We need to actually look at those who need help. Like I say, for people with low incomes, let's raise the basic tax exemption, target those people specifically.

There is always a balance in payoff, but when it comes to corporations, we can use the banks for an example. They have huge profits every year. They set up their business plan, and they follow through on that. If you were to say, "Okay, let's double our taxes on the banks," all they do one year, two years down the road, is that they say: "Okay, we want this much profit. We need to do this to stay in business, to be viable. Cheques are no longer a dollar apiece; they're two dollars apiece. To use a debit card is no longer 25 cents; it's 50 cents."

When we tax the businesses that are in our community, whether it's the hardware store, the dry cleaners, whatever is in our community, when we raise those taxes, they in turn have to raise their costs to the consumers. When it's the mechanic in town, if his property taxes go up, he's going to turn around and it's the consumer that loses. Corporate tax doesn't benefit the economy and those people that are living on a fixed wage.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a second time]

Bill 30

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening to move second reading of Bill 30, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006.

This legislation will enhance the way our province administers the persons with development disabilities, or PDD, program. It'll do that by helping the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports better co-ordinate all the programs and services that address the needs of persons with developmental disabilities in our province. At the same time Bill 30 will allow the ministry to continue to benefit from the expertise of PDD's six community boards, which have demonstrated excellence in how they develop and implement service plans on a local level. These are important changes to governance, but they will not affect front-line services, and that is an important point to consider.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to review the major structural and governance changes set out in Bill 30. The preamble of the act will feature two new provisions which reflect an amended governance structure and the increased responsibilities being transferred to the government of Alberta. Specifically, the provincial board will be dissolved, and a mechanism will be created to provide greater input from the community boards into the future direction of programs that support the inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities into community life. This will include a direct reporting relationship between the ministry and the community boards and an advisory role for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, which is chaired, as you know, by the Member for Strathcona.

The Premier's council, which also reports through the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports, will provide strategic advice and input on the needs of persons with developmental disabilities. The ministry will assume the roles and responsibilities of the provincial board as outlined in the current Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act. Mr. Speaker, the provincial board has been successful in a number of areas, but there are a

number of functions that the ministry is simply better positioned to take on, including issues of accountability, including auditing procedures, program policy and direction, and overall co-ordination of supports provided to people with developmental disabilities.

With Bill 30 the ministry will be responsible for developing policies for the provision and consistency of programs working directly with six community boards, allocating funding to those boards, and co-ordinating the delivery of programs and services. Naturally, Mr. Speaker, there will be a transitional period during which these responsibilities will be transferred and the new governance model is adopted. During that transitional period, the ministry's intention is that the programs and services provided to persons with developmental disabilities will continue to be delivered in an effective and efficient manner. In other words, the transition should have no impact whatsoever upon persons who receive supports from the PDD program.

Once that transition is complete, the new governance model for the program will be fashioned along the lines of the Child and Family Services Authorities Act, whereby Alberta Children's Services administers its programs through 10 regional child and family services authorities. The ministry will move toward a model that is similar to the structure currently being used by Alberta Children's Services. Within that structure community boards will become agents of the Crown and will report directly to the ministry.

Other provisions laid out in Bill 30 regarding the community boards include the following. The ministry may provide administrative and other support services to the community board. The minister, on the recommendation of the board, will appoint the chief executive officer of each community board, and each community board will develop plans for the delivery of services in its region subject to the approval of the minister. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the ministry will have the ability to provide written directions to the community boards on how they will be required to carry out their duties and various functions, on how they will set priorities and co-ordinate work with other government departments and public and private bodies to avoid duplication of effort and expense in services. An amendment to the existing legislation will also clarify that the community boards cannot operate on a for-profit basis and must use all funds to carry out statutory powers and duties.

On the housekeeping side of things, obsolete references to facility boards will be deleted from the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act and the Health Information Act. This is simply because the reference is outdated as facility boards have not been in place since the year 2000.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, regarding the creation of regulations Bill 30 stipulates that the minister may make regulations regarding appeals, conflict of interest matters affecting members of community boards, and the functions, powers, and duties of the chair and CEO of a community board and that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations prescribing services that may be provided by a community board.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to move second reading of Bill 30, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006. I encourage all members of the Legislature to support this important legislation as it continues our work to better co-ordinate all of the programs that provide a full range of supports to persons with disabilities.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I would like to thank the minister for sharing the three-column document with me and also

for the briefing that we had together. The briefing was very factual, and I really believe that this type of dialogue is appreciated. I believe that the benefactors of these types of dialogues are all the people in Alberta.

I'm pleased with this act. I had actually asked the minister to review – actually, the provincial board was what I had heard from the people that I had spoken with. So I'm quite pleased with some of the things that have come forward under this bill. I do have a few reservations about a couple of things. There was just one problem that I had. I do realize that the ministry is quite open when speaking with me, but my understanding was that when my staff had approached some of the community boards, the dialogue was cut off at that point. So perhaps that could be looked at.

11:10

The other question I had was that I'm not sure what the qualifications were for the person that actually had done the restructuring. I don't know if I can mention the name or not, but there was a person that had done the restructuring, and that report hasn't been made public, so I'm not just sure what his qualifications would have been to do that.

The other problem that I have – and I do realize that it reads that the minister's duty is to appoint the community board CEOs. I think that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has addressed that, but I'm not sure if I heard it correctly. I really think that the CEOs should totally be hired by the board that they are responsible to. Perhaps the minister could oversee it, but I think that too much power is going to the ministry. That would be one way that I would take it back and give it to the local boards.

The other part where again I think that there is too much power going to the ministry and away from the community boards is that the minister would give them directions on how to carry out their powers and duties and how to set priorities and how to co-ordinate programs. Now, for someone who for the last 10 months has been yapping about provincial standards and enforcing them, I realize that this just falls right under that, but I still would like to see a little bit more power and autonomy given to the local boards because if this is going to fall under and open up in the way I'm hoping it will, it really will allow those boards to get that front-line problem right into the minister's office and cut out a lot of the middle people. I believe that by the time it gets to a minister's office, it's been so watered down that it isn't the true fact at all.

The other question that I would have about the ministry – again, I'm back on my mantra of accountability and standards – is: what steps would the ministry take to really improve the transparency of how the boards work through to the ministry? I believe that their first contact is the assistant deputy minister, which is fine because it does get it into the ministry. But I'd like to be very clear on how that transparency would occur.

I believe that there were some very worthwhile projects going on, that they were updating contracts, policies, and manuals and that at one point it was the responsibility of the provincial board. I'm assuming that that is something that is being taken into the ministry with, I believe, 35 staff members, which I will address a little bit further. But probably some good work has gone on under that, and I'd like to see that out in the public but, also, that it not be lost.

I also would like to make just a little comment about the Premier's council. I understand what some of these are for, but again I think it's too many people involved in the process. The Premier's council would be asked to provide advice on the needs of people receiving PDD supports. I honestly believe that that should be the responsibility of the regional boards. Again, as I've said before, these are the people that will be hearing the front-line problems, and if it goes

through too many and there are too many people hearing out there, it gets watered down, and the true facts and the true feelings of the people, in fact the people that may well be neglected, are not getting through to the ministry.

Part of what I'm talking about is certainly what I learned on the MLA task force. I think that that task force was wonderful in terms of us actually being able to hear what the people's problems were, where their issues were. They actually could come to us with feelings which were very easily translated and put into the ministry. I really have a problem with too many people being involved in passing on information to the people that ultimately make the decisions.

There are 35 staff that would be transferred to the ministry. I probably will get shot when I leave this building, but I'm not altogether sure that all of those 35 staff really have to go to the ministry. Perhaps they could – I don't know – maybe go somewhere else. I'm not altogether sure that their jobs aren't redundant once you eliminate what their need is. The fact that the ministry has put together AISH and PDD is, in my mind, I think quite a brilliant stroke and will help to be able to get the common problems. It is the common person. It is one person that could well be collecting AISH but also needs the PDD supports. I'm just not convinced that that much staff is really necessary.

Also, there was going to be a saving of \$11 million by eliminating the board. I'm sure it meant the staff because I don't think the board had a budget of \$11 million. At least, I certainly hope they didn't. I would like to see that savings of \$11 million go directly to the front-line people, to the contract people who try to provide front-line staff and actually can't afford to pay a proper wage to them which, in fact, would then give you the continuity of staff that's required. So I certainly would have dibs on that \$11 million if I had it in my hand.

Sorry. I'm getting mixed up here.

An Hon. Member: The snoring is keeping the rest of us awake.

Ms Pastoor: I'm so sorry that I'm keeping you awake.

An Hon. Member: You're not. [interjections]

Ms Pastoor: They're all awake now. Thank you.

Actually, I think that's probably pretty much what I wanted to say. Those were really my concerns. I think it boils down to that I really would like to see a much clearer line from the regional boards, who understand the problems on the ground and getting them directly into the ministry, where something can change or so that at least the ministry is aware of it at that point.

There is no speaking of funding, which is an entirely different issue. This is an issue of governance, so all I'm going to speak about is the governance part of it.

I would compliment the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for bringing this forward. I think there has been some good work been done here. I would like to see it tightened up.

With that, I would say thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few points that I would like to comment on on this bill. First of all, to definitely thank the minister for responding so quickly. She was looking for input on what to do to help the people with PDD as there is a wide perception across the province that there is a cutback. They were very concerned about being able to keep their current, I guess, help

to their individuals that were there. So it's very rewarding for the facilities in my area. They're very grateful for this change with the elimination of the provincial board and hope that the streamlining will continue to improve and that they'll be able to be more functional on the regional level and to help those areas work.

We continue to urge you to streamline it and to be able to reach out and touch at a closer level, and as the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East also mentioned, we want those areas to be accountable and the CEO to be accountable in the region and focus on meeting the services of the people in their area.

11:20

The other area that hasn't been addressed – and I hope that the minister can move forward on this – is the high turnover rate. That continues to be a problem. It does seem to be twofold. One is the wage level that these recipients receive. The other area, though – and I'll speak in contrast to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East – that we continue to talk about is having to have provincial standards, provincial standards, provincial standards. What I've found with the people that work in PDD is that many of them are families that have had someone in that situation or are working in that area. In rural Alberta they can't afford to go and get so-called standards to work with those people, whom they love and are concerned about and are reaching out to members in their community. I don't know that we need to raise the standards other than the fact, maybe, of raising the wages for those people that are working on that local level and perhaps increasing the funding for some of those facilities because they are having a hard time making ends meet, especially when we continue to see the high cost of operating and maintaining buildings and the cost of heating them. All of these are major concerns in those areas.

The other area that I've talked to the minister about – and I'll bring it up again tonight – is to put the trust and the faith in those people that are assessing these individuals in the regions. Across the province it isn't equal funding for equal problems. It seems like the central area, that was pointed out to me, gets an increased amount of funding though they don't necessarily have the problems in other areas. The per capita distribution of funds doesn't work well when the south has an increased number of people with PDD. Perhaps they go down there because of the nicer winters – I'm not sure – but we have a greater number down there. It needs to be addressed more on the services provided than just a per capita per region basis because the south definitely struggles in that area.

Once again I'd like to thank the minister for streamlining this and eliminating the provincial board. The facilities in my area are thrilled about that. If we can continue to function and look at the recipients and how we can continue helping them, I am confident that the minister, with her compassion and desire to help these people, will have some more innovative and improved legislation coming forward in the future.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006. It's a bit of a mouthful, but I think the act in general has some very positive elements and leaves us with some questions as well.

The bill proposes that the roles and responsibilities of the PDD Provincial Board be transferred to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and that the reporting lines of the PDD

community boards be enhanced so that they would report directly to the ministry. So there are some positive elements.

In section 7(b) of the amendment act (3) states that “a Community Board may not operate for profit and must use all its funds to carry out its powers and duties under this Act.” That’s something we certainly see as positive. The minister is responsible for ensuring that the boards don’t duplicate services, and that’s good, but the act also allows the minister to establish services in an area directly, notwithstanding the fact that the board may already be offering those services. That’s something we’re kind of curious about, Mr. Speaker. It seems somewhat contradictory. Perhaps the minister should have the power to make sure that the board receives the additional support that it needs to meet the needs in that area rather than setting up some duplication. But I’d be pleased to hear the minister’s comment.

The Alberta Association for Community Living will be rallying here tomorrow, and I guess this is the thing that I’d like to get to, Mr. Speaker. It’s great to streamline the delivery. It’s great to make sure that the delivery is more community based, but we need to be clear and honest and straightforward about whether or not the amount of money that they are receiving means a cutback in the level of service that people are receiving. It’s fine to say that more money is being given in an absolute sense, but we all know that costs increase. There’s inflation. There are lots of factors which can mean that even an increase in funding means a reduction in services. So we need to know very clearly what exactly is going on.

The minister has stated that there is more money flowing to PDD programs and services, but then the question arises: why is the Edmonton community board for persons with developmental disabilities sending out letters requiring service providers to cut 3.4 per cent from their budgets? That’s a real question. Maybe our math is off, Mr. Speaker, but we think that a 3.4 per cent cut is not a net gain. I think the minister needs to deal with this.

We have, for example, the Winspear fund, which is a private initiative, catching people as they fall through the cracks. Those are some of the most vulnerable people in our society, Mr. Speaker, so the act in a sense begs the question about what’s actually going on with persons with developmental disabilities and the services that they receive. The fund, for example, paid out \$65,000 to help individuals and families in need. There are some pretty big cracks in the system if private endowments are having to step up to the plate and meet the needs of those families and individuals.

I guess that I could go on about that, but I do think that it’s important to all of the families of people with developmental disabilities to know clearly what level of service they’re going to receive, if people are going to be cared for with compassion at the level that they require or whether they’re going to have to be running to private-sector endowments to try and get top-up money or services that they can’t otherwise achieve. I think it’s incumbent upon the minister to explain this very clearly.

You know, it’s fine in question period to say: well, we’ve increased the budget. We all know how it works in question period. But there are going to be a lot of people here tomorrow that are looking for answers. They are very concerned. They’re dependent

on government programs. They don’t have other options. Their basic dignity is at stake.

So, by all means, let’s pass the act, but it’s time that the government spoke clearly to those people and to this Assembly about the actual situation there and that we resolve this question in the interests of all people. The measure of a society, someone said – and I can’t remember who it was – is really how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. I think that this is a time to take that as our watchword.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one, the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My comments will just be very brief. I’d like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. He is well known for his compassion and his wisdom and his hard work, which we did see through the AISH review and the recommendations all being passed unanimously and making a very real difference in the lives of people with disabilities, which does include persons with developmental disabilities.

I would like to thank the members that spoke here in the Assembly for their support for this legislation, Mr. Speaker. As was mentioned, it is about governance, which is a very real change, and about bringing the regional boards closer in with the ministry and closer in to the funding that is available for persons with developmental disabilities.

11:30

Also, just as importantly, I’d like to take the opportunity to thank the provincial board, Mr. Speaker, because the provincial board has set the tone. They have provided the vision, and they have provided the principles that have been very outstanding, which is why we are where we are today with persons with developmental disabilities, our program being a program that is renowned throughout Canada, across other provinces. It is important to take this next step in governance, and that is what this bill is about with local autonomy. So thank you.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I’d like to call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is late. I think that instead of proceeding with more business of the House we should simply adjourn, noting that we’ve made excellent progress today, and reconvene tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; at 11:32 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 25, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/25

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

On the Holocaust remembrance monument located on the grounds of the Alberta Legislature are found the following words: "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the tormented." These are words written by Elie Wiesel, a survivor, a poet, and a Nobel prize recipient. On this day may God provide all innocent victims of racism and genocide eternal peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly guests from and representatives of the government of the Philippines. They are in the Speaker's gallery. On an unofficial visit to the province of Alberta is Senator Edgardo Angara. Senator Angara is the longest serving Senator for the Philippines. He's accompanied by escorts Mr. Lito Rocque and Mr. Augusto Tugade. Also with Senator Angara is the Honorary Consul of the Philippines, Edmontonian Esmeralda Agbulos, and her husband, Virgilio Agbulos. The Philippines is a valued trading partner for Alberta. They have recently visited your offices, I believe. The Philippines is the heritage home of more than 36,000 Albertans. I ask this Assembly to give the Senator, Honorary Consul, and their escorts our very warm traditional welcome, sir.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Royal Canadian Legion's Alberta-Northwest Territories Command takes a keen interest in promoting the values of good citizenship among young people throughout the province. The Legion is in partnership with the Legislative Assembly office in a program that reflects that good work. It's Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day. We're very appreciative of both their financial support for and their involvement in this annual event, which began last evening and will conclude later this afternoon.

In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are Mr. Don Orr, the Legion's command first vice-president, who is accompanied by his wife, Beryl Orr, and Darrel Jones, the Legion's chairman of the Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program, with his wife, Darlene. Mr. Orr and his Legion team have been instrumental in ensuring that participants have been well looked after so far. I'd like to invite our guests now to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members 71 students from across the

province who are here today as participants in your MLA for a Day program. The participants have spent time with the Royal Canadian Legion, debated a resolution, visited in their members' offices, had lunch with you, and following question period they will receive a tour and briefing on the constituent elements of this House. The ultimate aim of the day's activities is to further develop an interest and an understanding of our parliamentary system. Our shadow colleagues are seated in both galleries today. They are accompanied by their Legion chaperones, Marilyn Brooks, Muriel and Walter Heselwood, and Gordon McDonald. I would now ask all of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two ladies who I had the privilege of meeting today at the Holocaust memorial ceremonies. They are Mrs. Gillian Horwitz, vice-president of the Edmonton Jewish Federation, and Dr. Frances Cyngiser, co-chair of the Edmonton Holocaust Remembrance Committee. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly eight outstanding teachers from the Lacombe composite high school. I think they may be playing hooky today from school. I promise that I won't tell their principal. They're on a tour of the Legislature and learning about government. I'd like to introduce them. They are Corvin Uhrbach, Steve Kabachia, Don Webb, Ron Thompson, Jason Petrie, Dean Zepick, Christine Parent, and Michelle Kline. I'd ask them to rise – they're in the public gallery – and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pleasure today in introducing to you and through you to this House three people who had taken part in the PDD demonstration on the steps of the Legislature. I would ask that they rise: Shantel Timmerman, Derrick Seabrook, and Anita Ferri. Paul Bellemare is with Edmonton Skills, Shantel and Derrick are with the Edmonton self advocacy federation, and Anita is with the Gateway Association for Community Living. I would ask that the House welcome them in our traditional manner.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a group of seniors who are touring the Assembly today, who I met earlier, and we spoke briefly. They are seated in both the public and the members' galleries. They're called the Probus Club, and I understand that they meet regularly at the Mayfair Golf and Country Club, which is in my constituency as well. I ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to

introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a class from one of the many fine private schools in my constituency, Calgary Academy. These are the winners of the grade 7 and 8 debate tournament, and they're accompanied today by their teachers, Danielle Hucaluk and Charles Brodeur. I see that they're in both the members' and the public galleries. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly three guests. They are here today to call on the government to restore funding for persons living with developmental disabilities. These guests came for the rally for persons with developmental disabilities at noon today on the steps of the Legislature. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly as I call out their names: Lindsay Caldwell, Alberta Association for Community Living; Wendy McDonald, Family Voices; Michelle Arkie, Abilities in Action.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you this day a few people that I have visiting. To start with, I have 26 grade 12 students from Magrath high school. Their motto is Zenith, which is reaching for the top. I'm pleased to have them here. They have two great teachers that go to great lengths to bring the students for the third time now, Darryl Christensen and Roger Baldry. I'd ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

It's also a pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you a friend and a colleague from the Alberta Alliance Party. Kathy Rayner is the chief administrator of the Alberta Alliance Party, where she works to promote prudence and accountability in government. Kathy's dedication and service to the people of Alberta is not always fully recognized, but today I'd ask her to please rise in this Assembly and receive the warm welcome from the members here.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Postemployment Opportunities for the Premier

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From Peter Elzinga's consulting to Rod Love's lobbying to Murray Smith's board positions this government has turned conflict of interest into business as usual. Now the Premier has openly admitted to being courted by organizations unknown to fulfill positions unknown for purposes unknown. Unfortunately for democracy in Alberta, our Conflicts of Interest Act doesn't go far enough to ensure that public interest come before private enrichment. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the federal conflict of interest and postemployment code states that "A public office holder shall disclose in writing to the Ethics [Commissioner] all firm offers of outside employment that could place the public office holder in a position of conflict of interest," will the Premier commit to following these same open and accountable rules?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate and repeat: I am not considering any offers at this time. Maybe later. Secondly, the

Ethics Commissioner will provide me with a letter tomorrow, I hope – at least, I've been promised – outlining the legislative requirements relative to disclosure. Thirdly, I have received some job offers. Many of them I would like to table at the appropriate time. I don't have the documents here. But numerous letters – oh, thousands of letters – some of them asking me if I would assume running in Saskatchewan or Manitoba or Ontario. Those are job offers. I received another job offer that this hon. member would be interested in in that he's attracted to the media. One was to informally take over the CBC.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He completely sidestepped the issue, of course.

Again to the Premier: will the Premier at least excuse himself from any cabinet discussions which may relate to or affect any of the organizations that have made offers to him?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I will be very diligent and follow the letter of the law as explained to me by the Ethics Commissioner in his letter. I'll be glad to table that letter once I receive it. I will abide by all of the conditions relative to the ethics rules.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: in the interest of democracy and accountability, given that the Premier stated yesterday that he doesn't care if the cooling-off period in Alberta is extended to 10 years, will the Premier follow the recommendations of the Alberta Liberals and at least increase it to one year?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I will follow to the letter of the law, the law that was passed by this Legislative Assembly, including members of the opposition.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Workplace Health and Safety

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 28 workers and families across the world observed the Day of Mourning, a day to remember loved ones and co-workers killed on the job. Last year 143 workers were killed on the job in Alberta, almost three every week, the highest number since 1982, yet this government has a weak record in enforcing safe practices in the workplace through prosecutions and fines. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. While Ontario pursued 2,392 workplace safety prosecutions in the past five years, Alberta has pursued only 41. Why isn't this government getting tough on workplace safety violations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question and a very important question because any time there is an injury or a fatality, it's very, very unfortunate. We wish as the government in Alberta that none of that would happen, even with our hot economy. Alberta takes workplace health and safety very seriously. Inspections and orders have increased tenfold since 1997. Now listen to this: spending has increased \$7.2 million in 2001 to \$18.9 million in 2006-2007. Work Safe Alberta was introduced in 2002 specifically to reduce injuries. There are 152 workplace health

and safety staff, including 87 occupational health and safety officers, 80 workplace policy standard staff, and 12 partners in health and safety. Alberta has the second-lowest rate to Ontario of work-related injuries in Canada. I think Alberta is doing very, very well. In fact, Alberta also has the hottest economy in North America.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given all those resources that he listed, why in five years have there only been 41 workplace prosecutions in Alberta? What are they doing?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, like I said before, we've increased our budget from \$7.2 million to \$18.9 million. Our priority is to make sure that the workplace, in fact, is safe, not necessarily to prosecute everybody that may have an accident.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will this government follow the lead of top major Alberta corporations and go for a target of zero workplace incidents, zero injuries, and certainly zero deaths?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, like I said in my opening comments, that is our priority: to have no accidents, no fatalities, and have a hot economy. Those people do not like the hot economy. It is challenging, of course. We work very closely with Workers' Compensation, who in fact have refunded hundreds of millions of dollars back to employers because we operate a safe employment record.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

1:50 Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans with developmental disabilities have made important contributions to our province's culture and prosperity. These citizens need the assistance of the community to reach their full potential. The government's approach to PDD funding is questionable. An increase in funding that fails to cover inflation and the increasing number of PDD clients is in fact a funding cut, and there are people here today to attest to that. My questions would be to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given that the Edmonton PDD community board is cutting community services by 3.4 per cent and the Calgary community board is cutting individually funded services by 2 per cent, why does the minister believe that insufficient budget increases won't result in reduced services? That is what is happening.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that question from the hon. member. As we were out today with wonderful people from throughout Alberta that have developmental disabilities and their advocates and stakeholders, I had the opportunity to meet for approximately an hour through the audience and talk to people about their concerns. I know that this member heard very much the same.

The facts are, Mr. Speaker, that the funding has increased 84 per cent over the past six years, which is significant. Also, the caseload has increased 30 per cent over the past six years, which is substan-

tial. When you have that kind of growth and that change in a program, there comes a time, which is now, to review it for effectiveness and for efficiency. We need to hear, as we did today, the voices of people that are experiencing the need for the services and what those would be and what those needs are and how we can continue to fund those.

I know that this issue is serious. I am concerned about it, Mr. Speaker, and I am looking very, very closely. We were here last night until midnight. You were here, hon. member, as we addressed the governance issue. I am looking very closely at how we can address what seems to be a disconnect or a gap in services and in funding with the eight layers of what funding has to go through in order to reach the client. So we're on the same page.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Given the 10 per cent increase to family support for children with disabilities, why was the budget increase for adults with disabilities so minimal?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can refer that question to my hon. colleague regarding the Children's Services budget.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that we're talking about two different issues. We're very proud of what we do under Children's Services with family supports for children with disabilities. It's very unique in Canada; in fact, it's the only one in Canada. We believe that if you have the early intervention in dealing with children with disabilities, once they reach the age of 18 and go under PDD, it's a nice link.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I know that this happened this afternoon on the Leg. steps, but will the minister commit to engaging with families and the front-line stakeholders in making future decisions about the funding and the structuring of PDD?

Mrs. Fritz: Oh, Mr. Speaker, that's so necessary. We do that now. In fact, we have the president from AACL here, who met with me in my office along with the members from Family Voices. When we hired the new CEO in Calgary, for example, we ensured that Family Voices was at the table in that hiring. We will continue to have members of the community. We'll have stakeholders. We'll have our regional board chairs. We'll have people work together as we move forward with this because we are making an important step here.

As I said, I do hear the concerns, but I want to really reassure people with developmental disabilities in this province that the services that are required, that are necessary, and especially those that affect their health and their safety will be in place, and that is not going to change, Mr. Speaker, just as the funding is not going to be reduced.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports spoke to the PDD community protesters today, telling them that she is their advocate. The minister has repeated in this House over and over that there are no cuts to PDD programs, yet the Edmonton regional PDD board says that it is facing a \$10 million shortfall due to inflation and increases in

caseloads and that service cuts are inevitable. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will the minister explain why she has been consistently telling this Assembly that there are no cuts to PDD programs?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, I will address that, Mr. Speaker. You're right, hon. member; I am an advocate for persons with developmental disabilities. I have reviewed this letter. I am understanding more and more about that information, that letter, why it was put together in the way that it was. A part of that is that it was next year's budget that people were looking at as they addressed this letter, and it's my job, my responsibility, as I said earlier. I will do this. The buck stops here. I will do this.

Mr. Mason: It hasn't so far.

Mrs. Fritz: Yes, it has.

If I find that there are essential services that affect the health and safety and well-being of individuals and that families are not being included in the discussions as the regional board chairs have told me that they are, that will be my responsibility to ensure that it changes, and I will.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this minister tabled a budget that has cuts, and she knows it. When she told protesters on the steps that she would advocate on their behalf, why didn't she also tell them that her department's budget estimates for this upcoming year have already been passed in this Assembly and that they include the very cuts being protested today?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, there aren't any reductions in the overall funding for PDD. There aren't. That is an inaccurate statement, and the member knows that. I'm beginning to learn as a minister that many times the preamble isn't quite being in a responsible way what is actual. That is not actual. There is an overall increase in the funding. More importantly, this whole area is under one ministry, which means that we have a better opportunity, as we move forward with this, with our regional board chairs, with the governance to address these issues, and we will. It's true.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that Denise Young, the director of community development for the Calgary Scope Society, wrote to the minister and said: "Let me assure you that agency budgets have been cut in the Calgary region. We were originally asked to plan for a 2.6% cut on contracts, but this was later changed to a 2.38% cut," will the minister take back that last answer?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know that the budget has been increased overall by 4.6 per cent for PDD, don't you? You do. You know that. He knows that. I spoke with the regional chair, Alex Hillyard, for an hour yesterday about this issue, and he has assured me that he is working with families, that there are not essential decreases in services at all in Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Tuition Fee Policy

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, last year the government introduced the Access to the Future Act, which outlined a commitment to accessible, affordable, and quality postsecondary education in the province.

As part of that commitment, the government promised that a new tuition fee policy would be developed. However, we've yet to see any changes in that tuition fee policy, which is dictated under the provisions of the Post-secondary Learning Act. Meanwhile, Alberta has the second-highest tuitions in Canada. My question is to the Premier. Given the fact that the new tuition policy cannot be introduced until the present legislation is changed and that there may be no fall sitting of the Legislature, how does the government propose to implement a new tuition fee policy?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mr. Klein: No. It's an interesting question because it's a question that I was pondering.

I understand that our new Minister of Advanced Education is now preparing enabling legislation to be tabled this spring, not next spring but this spring, in this sitting, not the next sitting but this sitting, of the Legislature. Of course, this will pave the way for a new tuition policy to be implemented. I might add that it's not only tuition that is being considered but all other costs associated with achieving an advanced education.

2:00

Dr. Brown: My supplementary question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Can the minister advise when the new postsecondary student tuition policy would be announced and implemented?

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much for the question. Of course, the Premier is bang on. I think he pretty much covered it. We will have a new tuition policy in place this coming fall, giving institutions a full year to put the policy in place by September 2007. As the Premier said, we are paying tuition increases this coming fall, and we are scheduled to have a new tuition policy in place for September 2007, but our institutions need to know earlier than that. They need to know by about January 2007 in order to get their prospectuses and so on in place, so as the Premier suggested, I am as we speak planning to bring forward enabling legislation this spring that will allow us to implement the new policy.

Dr. Brown: My second supplementary is for the same minister. Can the minister assure Alberta students that any new policy will ensure that the tuition fees are not increased under the new policy?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, as you know, there have been some reports that have been leaked that I'm not all that sure were the actual reports, and I hope that the member who leaked them will change his distribution list to put me on his leak list.

Dr. Pannu: I'll do that.

Mr. Herard: Thank you.

You know, there were 3,000 people that worked on this project, a Learning Alberta project, and I know that they are going to be presenting some very good advice to us. What I can say to you, hon. member, is that those recommendations that currently fit the policy framework we will act upon immediately, and those that we need to bring in and discuss through SPC, cabinet, and caucus, new policies, we'll take through the process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Children's Services Special Case Review

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the Children's Services minister announced that she was going to release all reviews conducted when a child who has had contact with Children's Services dies. When asked in this House about a specific case, that of Nina Courtepatte, the minister replied, "We'd be pleased to provide our special case review recommendations on this particular file." Almost a year later the minister has yet to make good on these commitments. To the Minister of Children's Services: given that the minister has had almost a year to put this incredibly important process into place, can the minister explain why family members and the public are being forced to wait so long for this information?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a simple answer. The particular case the hon. member is referring to is still before the courts.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: can the minister tell us if the special case reviews which were supposed to be made public uncovered any serious concerns with the safety of children in provincial care?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to make comments on a specific case. I can tell the hon. member that any time we do a special case review and there are recommendations that come out of those special case reviews, we implement those recommendations.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: given that Albertans have a right to know that their children are safe in provincial care, will the minister commit to making the special case review information available to the public on the Children's Services website?

Mrs. Forsyth: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I brought that up. I mentioned that in the Legislature before. I said that under my ministry, which I took over in November of 2004, I have made it very clear that any time a child is seriously injured or dies in the ministry's care, we would be pleased to provide that special case review on our website. We have to make it clear: those reviews will not go on our website until they go through the judicial process and that is completed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Highway Safety

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of economic and population growth, highways have become much busier in Alberta. Highway 21 in my constituency is very busy, and there is also the potential for more collisions. In recent months we've had an increase in law enforcement presence on highway 21 thanks to a pilot project involving provincial sheriffs and the RCMP. Can the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security provide us with an update on how the pilot project is working?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Yes, the pilot project began this past January. One RCMP officer is working with two sheriffs in each of the communities of Fort McMurray and Boyle and two teams in Strathcona.

From the information that I've received recently, the enforcement is of a substantial nature. They are educating individuals. They are issuing not just summonses but, as well, warning tickets to individuals for all violations, whether they're stop signs, seat belts, or speeding, and a number of other summonses as well. The project is moving along and probably progressing a lot more positively than we originally thought. Actually, we've received overwhelming support from the communities, a number of e-mails coming into our office and to various officers regarding their support for seeing the additional enforcement on our highways, slowing down the traffic, and making our highways safer.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, since there has been successful enforcement and increased writing of tickets, could the minister let us know who receives the fine revenue?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue isn't about fine revenue. The issue is about traffic safety and the whole issue that the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation started two years ago with the McDermid report regarding looking at a traffic safety plan, vision 2010, looking at how we can make our highways safer throughout the province, what is required to do that, whether it's prevention and education programs as well as enforcement programs in the future, and how we can tie our enforcement capability together throughout the province utilizing sheriffs, utilizing transportation officers, utilizing the RCMP, utilizing the city police services in conjunction with the AMA to ensure that we have all those programs in place, including provincial checkpoint programs for impaired drivers, throughout the province.

So, yes, these funds do come to the province of Alberta, which goes into our revenue but will be extended back out into the community regarding programs such as this from which we're seeing a real benefit, and we'll see those numbers of fatalities decrease.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since there has been some positive reports and the minister has outlined some steps, could he elaborate on what the next steps will be throughout the province?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, another very good question. The next step, as I mentioned, is that we want to see a reduction in the number of fatalities and the number of serious injuries on Alberta's highways. Obviously, this has a huge impact on our health care system. If we can reduce the number of fatalities on our highways by one – and I'm hoping we can do it by at least 10 to 15 per cent – the additional enforcement that we provide will provide that education that we want to go to. But this pilot project is one where we're looking at a new model of service delivery, tying ourselves in with the RCMP, freeing up the RCMP to strengthen their time or add to their time on criminal investigations, allowing sheriffs to do traffic enforcement and allowing them to do traffic investigations up to injury accidents, working in a stronger partnership throughout the province in an integrated fashion. We will be looking in the future at those serious highways in the province like highway 43, highway 8, highway 1A, highway 21, and possibly highway 22 down south that have been and have proven to have been very dangerous to drive on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

2:10 Sale of Surplus Crown Land in Edmonton

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January 2002 two numbered companies purchased 11 acres of land from this Progressive Conservative government in the new Cameron Heights subdivision for \$55,000 per acre. These same two numbered companies also purchased land in 1999 in Cameron Heights from the Galfour Development Corporation for \$21,600 per acre. Galfour Development Corporation got the land from this Progressive Conservative government for pennies per acre in 1988. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Given that this government sold land in the very same neighbourhood for \$55,000 per acre in 2002, why did this Progressive Conservative government sell this land for pennies per acre in 1988?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, you know, talk about mixing apples and oranges. In 1988 the value of land was very depressed. In 2002 the value of land is up. So it's very, very plain to see why you would have two different prices.

Since we had difficulty yesterday getting the member to understand, I do want to add a couple of things about the sale of land. The process starts when a department declares land surplus and does not have use for it. The first step, of course, is to canvass the rest of the government whether, in fact, there is another department that has use for that land. I didn't mention that one yesterday. There is another case, Mr. Speaker, where occasionally you may have a parcel of land where access is nonexistent once we take what we need. We will then offer that land to the adjacent landowner. And there are times when we have sold land for \$1. A good example is CKUA: we sold the building and land to them. In Red Deer at Michener Centre we sold the building that was damaged plus land to the regional health authority. In Wetaskiwin we sold the old courthouse, an historic site, to the city of Wetaskiwin for \$1. So that is the range of things.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that this land is worth at least \$12 million today, why did this government not act as a land bank, hold onto the land? Why did you sell it? [interjections] I'm sorry?

The Speaker: The hon. member has the floor. He's got a question. Proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Why was this land not held onto until 2002 and then sold after the Anthony Henday Drive was announced? That drove up the value of the land, and people are willing to pay \$55,000 per acre for it. Taxpayers lost \$12 million.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I guess that, once again, it is wonderful to have hindsight. Wonderful. None of us would ever make a mistake if, in fact, we knew that these things were going to happen. It's terribly unfortunate that the hon. member obviously has never dealt in land or anything else substantial. He would understand the way that prices go up and down, and it is extremely difficult to forecast. Really, is it a sole role of government to bank land until eventually the price goes up? I think not.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that taxpayers have lost \$12 million in this neighbourhood alone because of this Progressive Conservative government's bumbling incompetence, when will you initiate a full, independent judicial

inquiry into this deal, which has turned out to be a very, very bad deal for the taxpayers?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, this is getting almost to the point of being ridiculous. To talk about a judicial inquiry over the legitimate sale of land I find almost unbelievable. I wish that the hon. member would really take a close look. He would see that, in fact, the process has been open, transparent. We attempted to get the best value for the government at the time. We're not going to end up trying to imagine what the value of land would be 10 years from now and then not sell anything up to that point. That makes no sense.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Battle River Water Supply

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Camrose in my constituency is a lively, growing community. As it continues to grow, there is a concern that in time development will be constrained by its water supply, which comes out of the Battle River and Driedmeat Lake. The concern centres on quantity and quality of water from the Battle River source. My questions are all to the Minister of Environment. What is Alberta Environment doing to ensure that reliable water supplies exist in the future for Battle River water users such as Camrose and surrounding villages and communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Water for Life strategy obviously is a very progressive strategy, and it's more than just a strategy and a policy. It is a strategy that has teeth. It has \$172 million that has been committed to it. It really is so important in terms of water usage in bringing us all together, working together. Of course, right now, as I speak, watershed planning management is going on in the area, which is so important, bringing all of the users to the table because when we have all of the users at the table, we have to first determine what will be required to protect the ecological basin of the Battle River.

Second of all, then, is: what is required for its users? By working together in a plan under the Water for Life strategy, that's what we're doing so that we can protect well into the future, to allow our economies to grow but at the same time protect our basin.

Mr. Johnson: The second question to the same minister: given that the Battle River is facing increasing demands for its water, how will the minister ensure that the many groups competing for a water supply from this river will all have their voices heard?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. Having everyone at the table, as I mentioned in my previous answer, is so important, also balancing the environmental concerns, ecological concerns with economic development. So as we go forward, it's important to recognize in our Water for Life strategy – did you know that one of the goals of our Water for Life strategy in terms of conservation is to in fact improve water usage among the existing users as well as the new users who are coming to Alberta? One of those objectives is, in fact, to have a 30 per cent increase in terms of water usage by the year 2015, and we're on plan in order to achieve that objective in our Water for Life strategy.

Mr. Johnson: Again to the same minister: why don't you simply pipe water from the North Saskatchewan River, where it's not fully used, to the Battle River so that it can be fully used for the benefit of the people of the area?

Mr. Boutilier: I think, hon. member, that certainly could be one of the solutions, in fact, once we clearly understand the water usage, how it's being used, how we can improve the usage of the water. We also want to look at potential water supplies and alternatives. Some of that is off-stream storage, some of that potentially could be on-stream storage, and one of them is also potentially the transfer of water from the North Saskatchewan River, all of those options. All of the people at the table will be participating in that with that knowledge to get the right answer to protect the environment and also to ensure that our growing economy can in fact accommodate that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Provincial Parks Infrastructure

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mismatch of government spending and the priorities of Albertans is made clear by the recently released survey of visitors to the network of parks and recreation areas. Victims of shortsighted cutbacks, the basic infrastructure of everyday parks is in a poor state. My questions are all to the Minister of Community Development. Given that almost half of all campers surveyed had negative comments about facility conditions, will the government commit to rebuilding parks infrastructure across the province and not just in a few specific campgrounds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's parks attract 8.5 million visits a year; 1.5 million of those are from out of province and contribute \$1.3 billion annually to Alberta's economy. Budget 2006 responds to the feedback that we've received in regard to our infrastructure deficiencies. Twenty-four million dollars in capital funding will renew aging park facilities, and another \$1 million will help to operate four new interpretive centres and monitor water quality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Community Development: given that campers are dissatisfied with the value of the camping fee as it is now, how can the minister justify increasing the fee in the future, as the former minister stated in his press release?

2:20

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, for 2006 fees for basic campsites range from \$5 to \$20 per day depending on the location and the amenities that are being provided. Camping fees are dedicated revenue for Alberta parks and do not go into general provincial revenue. Those dollars are then reallocated back into the ministry to do further improvements.

Further, I'd like to comment, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta is one of the few jurisdictions that does not charge any fees for day use, and the majority of our visits are for day-use facilities.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, my third question, again to the Minister of

Community Development: will the minister commit to improving park information services and improving the park reservation system to address the high levels of dissatisfaction with these services?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that the Ministry of Community Development will do whatever is in their power in terms of the proper things to ensure that the experiences in our parks are enjoyable for our visitors and for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has to give the final rubber stamp to admit temporary foreign workers. However, the entire rest of the process is controlled by the provincial government and employers such as the division 8 designation for the Horizon oil sands project and setting up a special group process for assessing qualifications. The Advanced Education minister admitted yesterday that out of 941 applications received, 836 temporary foreign workers have already been approved. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why are these 836 jobs not going to Albertans or Canadians, including aboriginals, youth, legal immigrants, or refugees already here?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. For a number of weeks and months now, in fact, the issue of the temporary foreign workers has been brought up. When I look around this House, I see lots of foreign workers. In fact, I'm probably the only member that might not be. That's even questionable. What makes Alberta and Canada strong is that we are a multicultural society. Jobs are open to various nationalities, but our first priority is to hire Albertans, Canadians, aboriginals, persons with developmental disabilities, older workers that may be displaced. We have a hot economy out there. There are jobs for everybody.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish some on the other side were temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister. The minister repeated again that his first priority is Albertans, aboriginals. He goes through this particular line. My question is again: why, then, have these 836 jobs not gone to these people he's talking about and gone to temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, this member knows – he's been around the House a long enough time – that any approval of temporary foreign workers or immigrants is done by the federal government, not the province.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the point I was making.

Why does this minister refuse to admit that it is his government, not the federal government, that is leading the parade when it comes to setting up special rules through measures such as the division 8 designation for the CNRL Horizon project and through such measures as fast-tracking the assessment of credentials of temporary foreign workers? That goes against the people that he's talking about.

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, again, this is what makes

Canada strong. We are open. We are in a world economy now, and we have to share some of the benefits we have in Alberta. But when it comes to workers, Albertans, Canadians, persons with developmental disabilities, older workers like me, and aboriginal youth come first, and that's one very important area. There are 200,000 aboriginal youth between the ages of 15 and 24. With minor changes by the federal government – I have said this over and over again – we could have those 200,000 aboriginal youth working in those darn jobs in Fort McMurray.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Assistance for Alberta Athletes

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While it's true that Alberta athletes have enjoyed tremendous success on the international stage, including the Olympics, Paralympics, and Commonwealth Games recently, many of these athletes continue to struggle to make ends meet even as they're representing our country and dedicating themselves to be their absolute best. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. I know that these athletes currently receive some funding from Sport Canada through the athletes' assistance program, but what is this province doing to support its athletes?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member alluded to, these athletes who compete for Canada are supported through Sport Canada, an organization of the federal government. I'm unable to speak to their funding levels as it's not in the jurisdiction of this House. However, with Sport Canada responsible for funding national athletes, it allows this government to focus on two priorities. One, in supporting the development of provincial-level athletes, last fiscal year this government provided \$12.8 million in funding to provincial sport associations and to sponsor the Alberta Games and Team Alberta at interprovincial and national events. Two, we are working with partners to provide exceptional training and competition facilities in our province for Canada's national athletes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I only have one supplemental question for the same minister. There's some good news; I'm hoping there's a little more. Over the years I've spoken with a lot of athletes at all levels across the province, and there's a common theme about this stretching of resources. My final question is: can they look forward to increased support when it comes to sport development programs and renewal of facilities that need renewal?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, we recently addressed these issues. The Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation will be receiving an additional \$2.8 million to their annual operating budget this year, bringing that to \$15.6 million for sport development. A portion of the increase will go to developing athletes by strengthening programs which have already produced many talented competitors who went on to become international stars.

Our second priority is to strengthen and renew our existing facilities, many of which are legacy projects from the 1988 Olympics in Calgary. These facilities are 20 years old now, Mr. Speaker, and need to be renewed to continue to be effective. The government is doing its part. We committed over \$23 million this past year for the renewal of the Canmore Nordic Centre in time to host the first

World Cup event in 16 years. The centre is also home to the national cross-country ski and biathlon team. We also provided \$600,000 to upgrade the ski jump at Canada Olympic Park, ensuring that athletes can continue to train in Canada, and we will continue to work with our partners to see what else can be done.

The Speaker: As the hon. member had a preamble in his second question, I gather that he's waiving the third. Correct?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Reform

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta spends only 5 per cent of its provincial GDP on health care, the lowest of any province in the country. Other measurements, like health spending as a per cent of government revenue or as a per cent of government expense, show that the numbers are declining. What we need from this government is fewer myths about health funding unsustainability and more answers about their real intentions. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the evidence that health care spending is not unsustainable, why does the minister only quote the total spending and ignore all other measurements?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that will happen tomorrow is that we will be able to provide not my view but the view of the people that did the actuarial analysis on modelling sustainability in terms of health care expenditure. I'm confident that then it will become clearer that our projections of doubling the number of people that are 65 and over, who currently consume about a third of the health care expenditure – when we double those in 2025 to about 18 per cent of Albertans that are 65 and over, if that same record holds true, we will have considerable pressure on continuous care, from long-term care, from pharmacare, new technology on the health care expenditure. It doesn't matter how much money you earn; it matters how responsible you are in the spending. So, quite frankly, I think we have to look to the future about sustainability.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister: well, given that Aon Consulting found that private insurance models are not an affordable way to deal with health care pressures, is the minister planning to create or assist the private market for private insurance by delisting publicly insured services?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, yesterday there was an inquiry from the leader of the opposition, a member of the hon. member's own team, about if there was an intent to delist service. I identified at that time that neither in the policy document nor any other statement by any member of this government has there been any assigned delisting of service. I regret and I feel somewhat frustrated that people are attempting or that this member is attempting to scare or concern people about things that are absolutely not true, absolutely not planned, absolutely not the intention of this government.

Mr. Speaker, if I may go back to the point about how much money, today we spend about \$400 more per man, woman, and child in Alberta than anyplace else in Canada. How much more should we spend to get to the right number for the hon. member opposite?

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister: given that upcoming legislation will "establish a process for determining essential

services,” is it the minister’s plan, as a way to save the government money in the future, to withhold public health care insurance coverage for any new procedures, technologies, or pharmaceuticals?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, when the legislation is tabled, then we can have the conversation.

Vignettes from the Assembly’s History

The Speaker: Hon. members, before calling on the first of several members to participate, our historical vignette of the day. On this day we commemorate the remembrance of the Holocaust. I would like to quote directly text found on pages 213 and 215 in the book *The War that United the Province: 1939-1945*, volume 8 in the series Alberta in the 20th Century. This text that I’m going to quote is written by Steve Weatherbe, and I will quote the text in its entirety. I begin now.

Aberhart, despite his own Germanic background, was unflagging in his support for the postwar dismemberment of Germany.

This did not stop his critics from hinting at secret Nazi sympathies; no populist radical was safe from such libels. It was all the worse for Aberhart because his enemies were willing to take his fights with Ottawa as evidence of sedition. National commentator C.S. Burchill warned readers of the *National Home Monthly* that Alberta was rife with Nazi sympathizers and that Aberhart led the pack. Burchill cited the Germanic ancestry not only of Aberhart but also of his civil servants; 250 of their names began with “K,” he noted, while a further 46 opened with the even more sinister “Sch.” Clearly, Alberta was “ripe for treachery.”

As the war progressed and Hitler’s extermination of European Jewry came to light, anti-Semitism became more disreputable, but it thereby became a convenient weapon to be used against one’s political foes. To the embarrassment of Aberhart and his senior cabinet minister Ernest Manning, their ideological inspiration, Britain’s Major C.H. Douglas, grew increasingly anti-Semitic during the war years. Aberhart shared Douglas’s conspiratorial world view, but considered the ethnicity of the “Big Shots” and international financiers to be irrelevant. Whereas Douglas (like Hitler) swore by the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a phony document whipped up by the Tsarist secret police and purporting to detail a Jewish plot for world domination, Aberhart and Manning denounced them as a fabrication. Incredibly, Douglas came to believe that Hitler himself was part of the Jewish conspiracy and was faking the final solution in order to spread Jewish agents, disguised as refugees, throughout the world.

Many of these ideas were transmitted to Alberta through the Social Credit Board, which at one point had sought, almost successfully, to overthrow Aberhart. By 1940 the board’s chief representative was L.D. Byrne, one of two Social Credit experts Douglas had sent to Alberta to guide the province in instituting Social Credit doctrine. In 1942 Aberhart’s many Jewish supporters demanded he purge the anti-Semites in his party and repudiate Douglas. He responded that he lacked the power to oust members but promised to do what he could “to put the brakes on this foolish spirit of anti-Semitism.” Both Aberhart and Manning made statements denouncing anti-Semitism. Through the Bible institute’s publication *The Prophetic Voice* Aberhart declared that any nation that harmed its Jews was cursed before God.

head: **Members’ Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Yom ha-Shoa, Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you mentioned, today marks a very important day, Holocaust Memorial Day, or Yom ha-

Shoa. In recognition, Albertans are encouraged to join communities around the world today to remember and reflect on the persecution of over 6 million people of the Jewish faith as well as millions of others who have perished in acts of genocide.

Through our remembrance we mark our respect and extend our compassion to the Jewish community. In addition to raising awareness and understanding of the Holocaust, ceremonies around the province give Albertans a chance to show their understanding and compassion for those who have suffered and continue to feel the repercussions of the Holocaust.

While this is a day of remembrance, Mr. Speaker, I would also suggest that it is a day for action. I would urge all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to actively promote acceptance of all people and to protect their rights and uphold our way of life in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Canadian Transplant Association Transplant Games

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are among the most generous people in Canada. We know this because we boast the highest levels of volunteerism in the country. Yesterday in this House the Minister of Health and Wellness recognized that this is national organ donation awareness week. I don’t want to repeat the excellent comments made by the minister, but I did want to share with the House a unique event taking place in Edmonton this summer.

I’d like to invite Albertans to continue with this spirit of giving by getting involved with the national Transplant Games, which will take place in the city from August 8 to 13. The national Transplant Games is Canada’s largest organ donation awareness event, in which transplant recipients of all ages gather to celebrate the active, healthy lifestyle possible for many following transplantation. The games offer transplant recipients an opportunity to say thank you to their families and health care professionals for the care they provided and continue to provide. The games also send a message of thanks to the many donor families who made the difficult decision to donate their loved ones’ organs, and they send a message of hope to the thousands of Canadians who are still waiting for their second chance at life.

I encourage all Albertans to continue with their spirit of giving and to volunteer their time to the Canadian Transplant Association for this very important event. More details can be found at www.cta-alberta.com.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Wilderness Association Climb for Wilderness

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to congratulate everyone at the Alberta Wilderness Association on an extremely well-organized event that was held this past Saturday. During the annual Earth Day climb and run for wilderness almost a thousand athletes climbed all 802 stairs of the Calgary Tower, right to the top. They raised more than \$100,000 for wilderness and wildlife protection in Alberta.

The top climbers on a team were Luke Way, who matched his record of 30 ascents, and Rosemary Gerspacher, with 28. The youngest climber was only two years old – that was little Madelaine – and if that’s not impressive enough, Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to report that the most experienced climbers were also the top individ-

ual fundraisers. Phyllis Hart is 91 years old. She raised \$2,700 and climbed the tower twice, while Ward Neale, who's 82 years young, raised \$970 and started the day with a one-kilometre run and a trip to the top of the tower, topped it off with another eight climbs of the tower.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, our hon. Liberal colleagues challenged our PC caucus in the event, and despite great efforts they couldn't quite beat us in the number of team climbs. Let's just say that we were able to reach just a little bit above and beyond in terms of fundraising in the midst of our friendly rivalry.

I'd like to thank my colleagues and our Calgary-Lougheed PC Association for their support and acknowledge my fellow climbers, including Joey Redman, who's here today as part of your MLA for a Day program; my web page designer, Thaddeus Brasok, and his little son, Harrison; Jim Hoey of TV's *The Dimestore Fisherman*; and the ever impressive Member for Calgary-Foothills as well. Perhaps you'll join us next year in the climb, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Centennial of Labour Organizations

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On August 6, 1906, the Edmonton Trades & Labour Council was issued its first charter. This document recognized the council as the voice for labour in Edmonton and northern Alberta. This year, 2006, marks 100 years of labour council activity in Edmonton and northern Alberta.

The first council has grown and developed and given us the northern Alberta building trades council and the Edmonton & District Labour Council. It is the centennial year for both organizations, and for those 100 years I present the thanks of all Albertans. I present the thanks from the people of our great province for building much of Alberta. Many of the great buildings, the oil sands plants, the power plants, the technical institutes, the universities, the schools, the roads, and so, so many things that we call and recognize as our Alberta were a result of the sweat from the brows of workers proud to be members of these councils. Our Alberta workers are truly the real Alberta advantage.

Nursing us back to health, clearing the snow, administering our governments: so, so many things have been done by these Alberta workers. There is so much more that we must thank these councils and their members for: weekends off, overtime pay, fair wages, safety legislation, child labour laws, and the many things that have built up and grown the fabric of Alberta society. These were a result of the work and pressure from these labour councils and their members. These councils have pushed us to build and strengthen medicare for most of the last 100 years and continue to make it part of the Alberta advantage.

Members of their affiliated unions have been elected as Members of this Legislative Assembly for almost every party that has stood in this House. They may have had different perspectives, but they all knew the value of work, the value of working people, and the progress that the union centrals have worked for and won.

I congratulate both the Edmonton & District Labour Council and the northern Alberta building trades council for their first 100 years, for all that they have accomplished, and for all that will come in the future.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past month the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports has repeatedly stood in this House and denied that cuts to PDD programs and services were taking place in the province. Well, a number of people took time out of their day to come to the Legislature today to protest the government's funding plan, and the hundreds of letters received by my colleagues and I demonstrate that these cuts are an immediate reality for many Albertans. The minister attempts to hide behind a small increase in the dollars allocated to PDD but refuses to acknowledge that inflation and the costs of rapidly increasing caseloads have far outstripped this meagre increase.

As the minister knows, an inexcusable number of disabled Albertans live on or below the poverty level. Even those families who have higher incomes face challenges that result from managing the individual needs and health complications of loved ones. Regardless of income, disabled Albertans and their families face particular obstacles and barriers to full participation in society. If the government doesn't have a role to play in supporting people past these barriers, then who does?

I find it striking that in most of the phone calls, e-mails, and letters I have received, the main emphasis is on supporting people's participation in the communities: finding work, doing volunteer activities, socializing and engaging in activities which many of us take for granted but which pose challenges for many PDD clients. These are not unrealistic demands, and indeed funding such programs ought to have a higher priority than providing \$360 million in corporate tax cuts and \$400 million lost to a shift to income trust. Ultimately the demands being made are more than reasonable. The government should make a strong commitment to improving the wages of PDD staff and protecting those wages from inflation. It should also ensure that none of the PDD's clients or their families have services reduced. The services are an important part of ensuring that all Albertans are able to be contributing and happy members of our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Immigrants of Distinction Awards

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to showcase the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society. The organization lists their mission as being dedicated to immigrants and their families in order to ensure that they have the opportunity to become full participants, both as beneficiaries and contributors, in Canadian society. Their vision that equal and open participation by immigrants and refugees is possible and should be strived for is certainly something that I believe in as a member of this Assembly.

I am mentioning this fine organization here today in recognition of the 10th annual immigrants of distinction awards, that were held on Thursday, April 20. The Calgary Immigrant Aid Society holds these awards as a means to recognize the exceptional achievements and contributions of immigrants and refugees within the city of Calgary.

Specific awards were given in the categories of arts and culture, business, community service, and distinguished professional. Of course, it's difficult to choose a winner in competitions of this nature, especially considering the great accomplishments of many new Calgarians. Proof of this lies in the fact that the award of distinguished professional was shared by both nominees, Margaret Styczynska and Sinisa Sonny Tomic. Winners in the other categories included Nashir Samanani of Elluminate Inc. for the business

award, Tsenden Dhogonpa for the area of community service, and Alexandra Haeseker in the arts and culture section.

The Calgary Immigrant Aid Society is committed to equity, inclusion, diversity, and accountability. The award recipients personify these attributes, and I hope that this Assembly continues to uphold and strengthen these principles through our words and actions. The efforts of the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society and the winners and nominees of the 10th annual immigrants of distinction awards contribute to the strength of this great province every day, and I'd like to thank them for their great work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of the distance from the capital I very seldom get guests. It takes considerable effort and time and money to come and visit us, so I'm very pleased today that I do have a group. I hope that they're still upstairs. I think they are. They're from the Living Springs Christian school in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti. There are 12 students and seven adults in the group. The teacher is Miss Amy Bueckert. The parent helpers are Mr. Lynn Isaac, Mrs. Nancy Isaac, Mr. Galen Loetkeman, Mrs. Glenda Loetkeman, Mr. Tim Toews, and Mrs. Starla Toews. I would like us to show our welcome to them in appreciation of the effort they made to come and visit us today.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition to the Assembly that I recently received from 103 staff members and students of Fairview's St. Thomas More Catholic school regarding a smoke-free Alberta. This is to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking as reported by Health Canada.

I've got the necessary copies. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from 208 Albertans asking for the maintenance of universal public health care and our medicare system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be tabling tomorrow.

head: 2:50 **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation on behalf.

Bill 38

Livestock Identification and Commerce Act

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to

introduce Bill 38, the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act, for first reading. This being a money bill, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been informed of the contents of this bill and recommends the same to the Legislature.

This bill consolidates and revises provisions of the Brand Act, the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, and the Livestock and Livestock Products Act. The bill seeks to facilitate fair commerce, increase the protection available for livestock buyers, and promote the integrity of marketing practices within the livestock industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several documents to table today. The first is a budget planning document from the Edmonton PDD board. Despite small funding increases the board predicts a sizable deficit that will necessitate cuts to the PDD services.

I also have a letter from Denise Young, the director of community development for the Calgary Scope Society. The letter and accompanying sample contract illustrate the harmful impacts of the 2.38 per cent reduction in agency budgets caused by a PDD funding shortfall.

I also have two samples of the 200-plus letters I've received on this issue. One is from Derrick Seabrook, who is very concerned that they will lose the excellent staff at his home.

The second is writing on behalf of Joanne Visser, who is her sister. She points out that thanks to PDD and other services her sister has moved from institutionalized care into a community setting, where she has thrived. She is thoroughly disheartened that her sister and others like her will have their funding slashed by \$500 per month.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is the program for the 2006 Food for All Seasons: Feed Edmonton's Food Bank gala, which took place on Thursday, April 13. It was a wonderful evening in support of a great cause, and I thoroughly enjoyed visiting with the outstanding volunteers and benefactors, listening to the keynote speaker, Ms Paula Simons, and the live auction by Mark Cunningham. I felt welcomed and appreciated as not only . . .

The Speaker: We're just going to table it, okay?

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. Thank you.

The second one, then, is a letter from an Edmonton-McClung constituent. Her name is Dr. Minnan Liu. She's really concerned about allegations that the Chinese government is harvesting organs without consent from living Falun Gong practitioners in concentration death camps, gives examples, and wants us here in the House to condemn this brutal persecution.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 10

letters from families, staff, and residents of long-term care expressing their concerns. The letters are from James New, Herta Duncan, Denise Ryan, Hope Pennock, S.M. and N.L. Tomlinson, Mary Pasula, Marilyn Slemko, A.M. Rennie, Raminder Gill, and Carlene Lewis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In light of the fact that I'm still receiving letters from constituents regarding the third way, I've made a commitment to those individuals to continue to table their letters. I have one from a constituent by the name of Mr. Ronald Goss, who says no way to the third way; one from constituent Valerie Moore, who says that "it is time for this government to listen to the people"; and one from constituent Dorothy Tovell, who says, "Please do not support legislation that threatens our public health care system."

As well, Mr. Speaker, a number of tablings. I made a commitment last night during debate to table copies of newspaper articles showing Conservative MLAs handing out cheques, representing them as if they're coming from the MLAs themselves. I have a copy of the *Nanton News* showing the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development handing out a cheque for \$600,000, with his name on it as if it were written by himself; a copy of a newspaper clipping showing the MLA for West Yellowhead handing out a cheque for \$1.35 million; a copy of the *Cold Lake Sun* showing the Minister of Community Development handing out a cheque for \$300,000; and lastly, a copy of the *Ponoka News* showing the MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka handing out a cheque for \$734,000, once again very clearly with his personal signature on it, representing it as if this money is coming from himself.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 10 letters today. These letters are from families, staff, and residents who are involved or are dependants within the continuing care system with their concerns. These letters are signed by Joyce Prosper, Phan Wu Yuan, Rani Anand, Dorothy Butte, Asmeret Tekie, Bella Chin, Linda Song, Virginia Capicio, Cindy Fung, and Dorothy Chand.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. This is information supporting my question today in the Legislative Assembly. The first one is from the city of Edmonton, the tax assessment and collection property tax search summary for 11 acres of land that's described as plan 0024559, lot A, in Cameron Heights.

The second is proof from the *Alberta Gazette* from January 31, 2002, of the sale of this land for \$614,400 to the numbered companies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have eight letters that are from family, staff, and residents who work with or are dependent on the continuing care system. They are signed by Awetash Terere,* Dalida Tobar, Pamela Burgess, Jeanne Jensen, Jean Jackson, Elizabeth Csunyagh,* Liberty Pestano, and Karen Molloy.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk Assistant: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Facilities Review Committee Act the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee annual report 2004-2005, April 1, 2004, to March 31, 2005; pursuant to the Dental Disciplines Act and the Health Professions Act the Alberta Dental Association and College 2004-2005 annual report; pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists 2005 annual report; annual report for the College of Hearing Aid Practitioners of Alberta 2004-2005.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Education

The Deputy Chair: As per our standing orders, the first hour will be allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and colleagues in the Legislature, for this opportunity to present our estimates for the Ministry of Alberta Education for kindergarten to grade 12 programs and so on.

I want to begin, Mr. Chair, by just briefly introducing some folks who are here, who help serve the interests of K to 12 education in the province. Sitting in the members' gallery are my deputy minister, Keray Henke; assistant deputy minister Mat Hanrahan; assistant deputy minister Lois Hawkins; Jeff Olson, executive director of finance and strategic services; George Lee, senior manager of corporate budgets, finance and strategic services; Brad Smith, senior manager of school budgeting and funding, finance and strategic services; and Bob McManus, assistant director of communications. Listening somewhere, with a brief eye ailment, is our director of communications, Kathy Telfer, and my executive assistant, Pam Boutilier, is working away listening in as well. I wonder if they would just rise and receive the warm thanks and welcome of the House for their outstanding service. Thank you, all.

3:00

Mr. Chairman, let me begin by explaining that the mission of Alberta Education is to show leadership and to work with our stakeholders to make sure that students attain the knowledge and skills they need for lifelong learning, work, and citizenship. Seven basic principles are at the centre of our business planning for Alberta's kindergarten to grade 12 education system. Those principles serve to inform us that we are student-centred and that our highest priority is the success of our students, that every student has the right of equitable access to a quality education consistent with their needs and abilities, that we are collaborative, that we are innovative, that we are accountable to Albertans, and, finally, that parents and students have choices because the education system is flexible and responsive to student needs.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

That's the opening, Mr. Chairman, that will guide the rest of this afternoon's discussion.

With that, I hope I am able to move these estimates at this time and continue on with the permission of the chair.

The Deputy Chair: Yes, you may.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much. In that vein, then, I would like to move specifically to the 2006-2009 business plan, which identifies strategic priorities that the government of Alberta supports in our three-year business plan. That includes support for the healthy development of Alberta's children and youth, success for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners, preparing Albertans for lifelong learning, ensuring the financial stability and accountability of the kindergarten to grade 12 education system, and of course keying in on school infrastructure needs.

Albertans expect our education system to prepare our students to succeed in a future of unlimited possibilities, and with this in mind, Mr. Chair, I am both pleased and honoured to present these budget estimates and the business plan for '06-07. However, before we examine the budget estimates in any great detail, I want to specifically note for everyone's attention that there are seven programs that will be referenced in the budget this coming year. This aligns with the seven programs of the Alberta Education income statement. The breakdown of those different programs begins on page 135 of the budget document.

The budget estimates before us today will provide a 6.7 per cent increase, or an additional \$330 million, in program support toward the K to 12 education system, for a grand total of \$5.3 billion in the 2006-2007 fiscal year. Our voted estimates begin on page 133 of the 2006-07 government and lottery fund estimates book, and as questions come my way, I would appreciate it if people would mention a page number and perhaps, if it's available, an element number, which will make responding to questions much more efficient.

Before we get into the nitty-gritty of the budget, I also want to explain that the Ministry of Education budget has two primary funding streams. The first stream is what we call voted government and lottery fund estimates, which total \$3.82 billion and comprise about 70 per cent of our budget and which we will be voting on today. The second stream of funding comes from education property taxes, which total about \$1.48 billion and comprise the remaining 30 per cent of our Education budget for K to 12. About \$1.3 billion of that \$1.48 billion resides in what we call the Alberta school foundation fund, which, as we all know, is governed by statute. The remainder, or about \$169 million, goes directly from municipalities to those local separate school boards that choose to collect their education property taxes in that manner. When we combine the \$3.82 billion in voted estimates with the \$1.48 billion in education property taxes, it brings the total support for kindergarten to grade 12 education to the \$5.3 billion for government's '06-07 fiscal year which I mentioned a few minutes ago.

Now, with respect to the programs. Program 1, ministry support services, is the corporate function of our department. Support to this area will actually decrease by \$1.2 million, primarily due to funding for one-time initiatives for technology that were generously provided in 2005-06. Because they were one-time, they weren't carried forward, so there's an explanation for that decrease.

Program 2, operating support for public and separate schools, will increase by \$185 million, or by 8.2 per cent, up to \$2.45 billion. This money will go almost entirely towards increased grant funding for 62 school jurisdictions and 13 charter school operations. This \$185 million increase represents only the general revenue fund

portion of support to school boards. Another \$1.3 billion in support comes from education property taxes, as I mentioned previously. In total, government and education property tax support to public and separate school boards increases by \$194 million, up to \$3.9 billion for 2006-07. This represents an increase of about 5.2 per cent for this fiscal year, not for the school year, which starts September 1, or five-twelfths of the way through our fiscal year.

Operating support for public and separate schools includes grant dollars for our renewed funding framework, which will be going into its third school year of implementation this September. This framework is very important to school boards because it provides them with both per capita funding and credit enrolment unit instructional grants that give locally elected school boards flexibility to meet local priorities. Plus, that renewed funding framework also provides differential or additional funding for cost differences that are beyond the control of an individual school board. These differences take into account factors such as large changes in enrolment, differences in the number of special-needs students, the requirement to operate small schools in remote areas, and/or higher costs of doing business as a result of geography, and so on.

Now, with respect to the school year, as opposed to the government's fiscal year, base instruction grants will increase by 3 per cent for the 2006-07 school year. All other grants will increase by 2 per cent.

The Education budget also anticipates and will provide funding for increasing numbers of children with special needs and for students who require English as a Second Language programming whether they are Canadian-born or foreign-born. In fact, Mr. Chair, grant rates will increase in these areas by 2 per cent, and there is also an allowance for a 7 per cent increase in the number of children receiving early childhood services, ECS, funding for mild and moderate special needs, a 10 per cent increase in the number of children requiring program unit, or PUF, funding, and a 12 per cent increase in the number of students requiring instruction for English as a Second Language.

This budget also carries forward support for high-speed networking so that schools can take full advantage of the SuperNet and of the transportation fuel subsidy to address the continued high cost of fuel for school busing.

Under the banner of provincial initiatives where we actually specify where and how dollars may be spent, the budget also provides increased grants to school boards for our class size reduction initiative. That will be an increase of \$16.6 million, up to \$126 million in other words, which represents an increase of 15.1 per cent.

At the start of the class size initiative it was recognized that lowering the class sizes in kindergarten to grade 3 would be the most challenging task. Now that the 2005-06 jurisdiction class size reports have been reviewed, we know that all grade groupings are at or below the guidelines set out in ACOL, or virtually all of them are, with the exception of kindergarten to grade 3. By the end of the 2005-06 school year, which is rapidly approaching, all school boards were to have an average class size in kindergarten to grade 3 of 18.5 students. In fact, 38 school jurisdictions will not quite meet that target if something is not done, and this is a concern.

3:10

At the same time, we have also heard that some school jurisdictions are having difficulty continuing to meet next year's guidelines due to challenges such as availability of classroom space and recruitment of new teachers. Therefore and because of these reasons, school boards will be given additional flexibility and a little more time to plan for and to reach the average class size guidelines

that were recommended by Alberta's Commission on Learning. That recommendation suggested that those jurisdiction averages be met in a five-year time frame. We have done our best to try and get them accomplished in the three-year window, but through my discussions with school boards, we encountered what some of their challenges were, so we've allowed an extension of time and flexibility to help address the situation.

For the 2006-07 school year funding will be focused as follows. One, all school boards will receive a 3 per cent increase to their 2004-05 class size reduction funding initiative to ensure that they can retain the 1,685 teachers they have hired over the past two years as part as our class size reduction initiative. Two, the 38 school jurisdictions that have averages in kindergarten to grade 3 above 18.5 students will in fact receive the funding necessary to reach a jurisdictional average of 18.5 for kindergarten to grade 3.

Obviously, this will require about another 250 teachers – new, additional teachers, I want to stress – who will need to be hired, and this budget will help provide the funds to help accomplish those new hirings. To ensure that school jurisdictions can attract and retain the 250 teachers required to get to that guideline of 18.5 students per class, funding will be allocated based on \$70,400 per teacher. This, Mr. Chair, is the midpoint of the teacher salary grid.

This budget also provides a 6 per cent increase to another important area, which we refer to as student health initiative partnerships. We have 15 of these that provide integrated health, therapy, and emotional and behavioural supports for identified children with special health needs.

Funding for the AISI project will also increase; that is, our Alberta initiative for school improvement. That increase will be 2 per cent, and it will go up to \$71 million for local innovative programs and projects. Mr. Chair, these projects include things like professional learning communities in schools, early literacy, math skills, and stay in school programs that support student learning. I might stress that this money will fund the first year of a new cycle of three-year projects for this highly successful AISI initiative.

Program 3, which is support for teachers' pensions, will increase by 6.3 per cent, or by \$20 million, up to \$339 million. Of that amount, \$152 million will address government's responsibility for the unfunded liability of the Alberta teachers' pension plan, and \$187 million will go towards government's share of the current service payments.

Under current legislation, Mr. Chair, government is responsible for two-thirds of the unfunded pension liability for teachers and for one-half of teachers' contributions for current service; in other words, for service earned as a teacher after 1992. The increase, of course, is due to higher contribution rates that were implemented in September 2005 as well to teacher salary and grid movement increases and, finally, to additional pension costs associated with hiring more than 250 new teachers starting this coming September under the small class size initiative.

Program 4, which is program delivery support services, is a program that provides help for delivery and development of curriculum standards, governance, achievement and diploma testing and rewrites, technology support to develop and deliver print and electronic learning resources for teachers and students, and, finally, for corporate administration such as financial reporting and budgets. This program will increase by 1.1 per cent, or by \$667,000, up to \$59.7 million.

I should point out, Mr. Chair, that about one-half of this program is related to ministry salaries. The increase will support negotiated salary increases for staff. The other half of this program is related to bringing in expertise for assistance, such as contracting teachers

to mark diploma exams or to assist in curriculum development and so on.

Program 5, quickly, is basic education programs. In this envelope we provide support for teaching and learning resources, and we provide technology support, such as high-speed networking connectivity. Support for this program will decrease by 5.5 per cent, or \$4.5 million, due to a \$6 million projected decrease in sales of learning resource materials and a \$0.5 million decrease for one-time funding provided last year related to student transcripts, that will not be required this year. This is offset by a \$2 million increase to support high-speed networking.

I also want to clarify, Mr. Chair, that last year our Learning Resources Centre experienced exceptionally high sales volumes due to a special agreement we have with the B.C. government for learning resources. In fact, we saw \$6 million in one-time sales toward the very end of the year as a result. This was an initiative where the B.C. government provided one-time funding to their school boards in 2005-06 for textbooks and learning resources, which they ordered through our Alberta Learning Resources Centre. We do not expect that same level of sales from B.C. again this year, and that accounts for the bulk of the decrease, for those members who were asking or were wondering about it.

Technology support for high-speed networking will actually increase under this envelope by about \$2 million, up to about a total of \$8 million.

Program 6, Mr. Chair, provides support for Alberta's accredited private schools, private early childhood services operators, and for designated special education private schools. This program will increase by 5 per cent, or \$6.4 million, to \$135.5 million.

I see that the time is ticking away on us quickly here, so I'll just jump to program 7. I'll come back and answer questions in more detail on program 6 if anyone wishes. Program 7 provides support for school facilities or infrastructure, which, I think everyone here would know, was officially transferred April 1, 2006, to Alberta Education from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation. Therefore, funding for school facilities now resides entirely within Alberta Education's budget, and there are three envelopes there: one for school construction or school capital, the other one is for infrastructure maintenance renewal, and the third one is for plant operations and maintenance. Perhaps we'll get into some discussion as to those amounts in specifics; however, suffice it to say that the total amount being transferred from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation over to the Ministry of Education will be about \$734 million this particular year.

Mr. Chair, I'll just conclude by stressing that with the money that we're getting into Education under the infrastructure banner from Infrastructure and Transportation, we will conclude 21 school capital projects this year. In other words, 21 new projects will be completed. We will also have built and placed about 109 modular classrooms, and together we'll be providing more than 10,000 brand new spaces for Alberta students.

We're very proud of our education system. We're very proud of our teachers, of our students, of our administrators, of our trustees, and together we will continue providing the best education system in all of Canada as we strive to become one of the best in all of the world.

I will look forward to some lively questions and answers now, Mr. Chair, and I would just remind hon. members to please cite a page number and an element number if you could. That would help facilitate speedier answers.

Thank you for your kind attention.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

3:20

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I may not be able to follow the format that the minister has set for me in terms of pages and so forth. Our team will comment on different parts of the budget. I believe I heard the minister say that the transfer of funds – and maybe you could just nod to me if I'm on the right track – for infrastructure was April 1, '06. Was that correct, Mr. Minister? Thanks very much.

From what I'm able to gather, Mr. Chair, professional people across the province – trustees, teachers, the ATA – refer to this as a hold-the-line budget. With this in mind we're going to go through it, if the minister doesn't mind, on some topic areas, starting by raising the issue of infrastructure because our mail and phone calls and delegations tell us that there is a serious infrastructure problem or deficiency across the province. We look at that as about a \$400 million infrastructure deficiency. There are hundreds of new neighbourhoods across the province that have no schools: 40 neighbourhoods in Calgary and 75 in Edmonton.

The other thing that bothers us terribly is that there doesn't seem to be an acknowledgement of the community school concept in our urban centres, and that concerns us.

The government has met with school districts to discuss off-budget spending for schools. Considering that each school district provides capital plans to the minister, and therefore the minister knows what the capital priorities are and could have included these priorities in this budget, why is there no money in the budget for new schools? It seems to me that we're here in '06-07 discussing the budget, and we are not clear why there is no money for new schools in the budget. We look at the media and press releases, and we hear that there will be new funding announcements just around the corner.

My question to the minister is: where is democracy in a system that relies excessively on off-budget spending? Why weren't these schools, the capital projects that school boards have submitted to the minister, in the budget to enable us to discuss these issues presently while we go through this budget? Why won't the minister commit to debating the budget for new schools in the Legislature with other budget estimates? Quite frankly, it smells a little bit like a political agenda, but he'll probably straighten me out on that.

What is the plan to address the problems of infrastructure in schools in Alberta, Mr. Minister? Maybe you could tell us that. How can the minister talk about the best education system in the world when the schools are literally crumbling around students' feet. We have heard of the problems in Grande Prairie and some of the issues there. We have heard even my own colleague talking about the Ellerslie campus, about the water problem. So we think one of the biggest issues in the budget that bothers us is that there's no clarification about what's going to happen with schools across Alberta. Trustees are saying to me: "Why doesn't the minister listen to our plans and discuss them with us? Do we not have priority? Why is he taking up all this administrative time getting us to submit these plans to the minister and not doing anything about it?" I think one of the biggest areas is the Calgary public school board. They have a number of issues. I've certainly read some of the letters that the chairman has written; they've been well written and well documented. So that's the first big issue, Mr. Minister, that maybe you could clarify for us.

The next one we look at is students with special needs. We raise the issue of students with special needs. One significant concern is funding for students with severe disabilities. This group receives about \$20,000 a year when they require a full-time aide costing \$50,000 a year. The business plan states that there is more money for children with special needs. I guess what we're asking, Mr.

Minister, if you could help us, is: where is this described in the budget, this more money for this particular group of pupils? Is the specific problem of funding for aides, teachers' assistants, going to be addressed by this budget or something down the line that we don't know about? What exactly are the increases in special-needs funding? How is this budget going to change conditions for children with special needs in Alberta schools? We'd like some clarification if we can get it on that, sir.

The next issue – and the minister talked about it in his good summary at the beginning – is the class size initiative. The class size initiative received, I believe, in the budget \$126 million this year, or an increase of 15.1 per cent. We are concerned, sir, about how slowly class sizes are being reduced, the link between class size and infrastructure, and how the class size is calculated. Class sizes are becoming smaller as mandated by the class size initiative; however, the utilization formula has not changed. The utilization rate for the school is calculated by dividing enrolment by capacity with complex adjustments for special cases. Smaller class sizes lower the utilization rate, making it more difficult to gain funding for new infrastructure under existing practices, sir.

How is the minister addressing the conflicting demands of the class size initiative and the school utilization formula? Will the class size initiative provide capital funding for schools or just funding for more teachers? We're not sure about that. For example, in my constituency we have a problem with infrastructure and space as we try and get more teachers involved. Is the funding sufficient to meet the class size targets described in the Learning Commission report? That is 17 students for K to 3, 23 students for grades 4 to 6, 25 students for grades 7 to 9, and 27 students for grades 10 to 12.

The Learning Commission recommended average class sizes for school jurisdictions rather than legislated, hard-and-fast rules for maximum class sizes. Considering that we have received reports of teachers with classes of over 35 students despite the class size initiative – and I think you talked a little bit about that in the percentage that you mentioned; you may want to bring that in here – would the minister consider measures other than jurisdictional averages to assess actual class sizes? Or will the minister acknowledge this weakness and take steps to address the calculations of average class sizes by removing abnormally small classes from the calculation? I'll be interested in hearing comments on that, sir, because I found this difficult to understand. Maybe you can clarify this for me. That's why I raise these questions.

The other issue that we'd like to address, if we can, is plant operation and maintenance, sir. If we understand it, PO and M increased by \$19 million, or 5.1 per cent. This increase is barely above the 3.5 inflationary increase, and I think the increase went up a quarter today, if I heard correctly, but I may be wrong about that. PO and M has been an area where the government has requested supplementary supply of \$24 million in 2005-06. We recognize that in that I think there was money for diesel and that kind of thing. So we understand the issue there, but maybe you'd like to clarify a little bit more if this is going to be adequate. Will the budget increase of 5.1 per cent be sufficient to provide the boards with the stable, sufficient, and predictable funding they require to plan for the whole year, or will boards need to come cap in hand for another allotment in mid-year? In other words, will there be enough money to carry on with plant operation and maintenance in the budget as you see it, sir? Maybe you can give us some insight on that.

Then we move to – and we may be wrong on this one – staffing of the department. It's my understanding – and I could be wrong in these figures – that presently there's an increase from 691 to 696 staff in the central office. We would like to know what this staff will be used for and what divisions or branches of the department they

will work in. We'd like to have some insight into that. We'll look forward to your answer to give us some clarification on that.

3:30

Now, one of the areas – and I haven't got the necessary background on this – is the funding model and audits, and one of my colleagues will speak more in depth about this. The government completes audits of a school in a jurisdiction. If overspending is discovered, funds are clawed back in future years. The clawback takes funding from future students, who were in no way involved with the overspending. As such, this process seems to be unfair to future generations of students. If the minister is aware of clawbacks as a result of audits based on credits taught, such as those in St. Albert Catholic high school, why is the minister allowing this practice to continue?

Now, you know, many times I'm asked: is criticizing the good minister about what he's doing all you can do? I think that's a good point. In terms of asking the minister if he has a vision down the line, I would just like to spend a few moments talking about what we would do as a government if we were to form the government, what we would do that's different than what's presently going on.

One of the things that we would do as a Liberal government in Alberta: we would look at full junior and full-day kindergarten right across the province. We would also look at diagnostic testing for K to 3. We would get rid of achievement testing at the grade 3 level and maybe carry it on at 6, 9, and 12, but certainly we would do more remedial work at the elementary level. We would do more screening with students. We would do more helping them prepare for learning. We think this is very, very important. We think the government is remiss by spending a lot of money foolishly at the elementary level.

We think that having access to specialists in schools such as social workers, guidance counsellors, and psychologists is crucial. We think that there's a need for a vocational thrust through the system, not only in the sense of saying that we're going to do something about the vocational thing but giving it some credence, giving it some prestige, and having a program for vocational students with a diploma in vocational education or a diploma in career education, something of that nature, to recognize the importance of that stream and to meet the manpower needs of the province of Alberta.

We hear constantly about this wonderful apprenticeship program. We have difficulty as a group across the way finding out how many students are in this program and how many complete it. We think the number of kids completing the apprenticeship program is a lot less than we're hearing about although I must commend the minister that in Fort McMurray their program is, I think, one of the best in the province. Of course, that fits in well with the oil industry and what they do.

Money to fund established techniques to improve the dropout rate. We think there are enough innovative situations in the province right now that if they had some unique funding, like the teacher-counselor concept, like the teacher assistant concept, these kinds of things, different stimulating ways of keeping kids in school. They could be unique and doing things that are very, very interesting.

The other thing we'd look at if we were government: we would look at the whole question of system-wide school nutrition programs. I want to compliment the hon. Member for Calgary-East for his good comments yesterday on that. He showed me a lot of insight into some new thinking that he proposed. We need funding to address the community use of schools because we think that in a lot of communities this could be the key for helping adult education, senior events, and so forth. We need to look at that whole thing and see if it's viable.

I think that another thing we would do is look at the resolution of the unfunded liability problem. What was very interesting to me – and I know the minister should be commended on going back to local bargaining, but I thought he would tell us a little more about local bargaining that he was proposing with a different flavour. We've studied this very carefully, and we think there are some different things that should be done with this. One of the things, Mr. Minister, is this whole business of the tripartite system that the Alberta teachers are proposing. I think it has some merit in looking at ongoing ways of dealing with things like unfunded liability, problems that come up within school systems on an ongoing basis. I think also that we would look at, hopefully, allowing school boards to become more involved in policy and more involved in planning.

Maybe I could just say three other issues before I sit down, Mr. Minister. Could you tell us what the status of the DARE program in schools is, and are there any plans to look at it in junior high school? We don't hear anything about the drug problem. I just got back from British Columbia, and I can tell you that in the Kelowna area this crystal meth thing is out of control. Schools there are just pulling out their hair. I'm just asking: has the minister got any initiatives or any thoughts on this that could give us some idea about what could happen?

Has he got any thoughts and further thinking about the whole question of junk food in schools and where that's going? That will be brought up later on, I believe.

One more issue. Current funding for new schools only provides funding for the bricks and mortar of the buildings, not for the items inside the school such as textbooks, science equipment. Will this be addressed? Is it addressed in this budget, or do you have plans down the line to look at this matter?

So with that, Mr. Minister, I'll thank you for allowing me to speak to your budget. I'll sit down, and maybe you'd like to address some of the questions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much to the Member for St. Albert for raising some of the important issues before us today. The first comment was with respect to the transfer of responsibility. That's correct. That happens as of September 1, but of course it'll officially occur once this budget is endorsed and embraced within a few weeks. Suffice it to say that on the three envelopes of funding that I mentioned, school capital funding – that's about \$258 million – is coming our way; the plant operations and maintenance budget, which is about \$395 million, is coming our way; and the new infrastructure maintenance and renewal funding, which is \$81 million, is also coming our way. I believe the three together would total \$734 million.

You know, it's interesting to hear the comment about hold-the-line budgeting. I read those headlines as well, hon. member. It might be true in a couple of the very many, many aspects of the budget, but let's not forget that we're increasing the budget overall by 6.7 per cent. That's a very significant increase, I think. It takes us up to \$5.3 billion and gives us an additional \$330 million to work with, but that's the key part of the phrase: to work with. We rely on locally elected school boards to do their best to work within those budgets, and it's certainly generous. It could always be more, I suppose. But we rely on them to do what's correct at the local level and also to be accountable back to the taxpayers of this province for those budgets.

The comment with respect to off-budget spending, I think you called it, and how it relates to capital priorities and capital plans that are submitted by school boards is also an interesting question. I'll respond this way. I think the specific question was: why is there no

money for brand new school announcements in the current budget we are discussing? The answer is that we could have held back on the \$207 million of new school construction projects that we made last September, in '05. We could have held that back until now, but, you know, my experience in government is: when you need money and some is available, you take it. You receive it and you employ it because you know it's needed. So we took the money that came available from unanticipated surplus dollars, and we used it to fund dozens of projects across the province.

In fact, that money has been melded in with some of the amounts I referred to earlier today. Some of it is spread out over a couple of years, granted, but the fact is that we will be able to complete 21 new-school projects, which I alluded to earlier in my comments. What I didn't get to because time ran out was the fact that we will begin or continue 51 additional projects with those monies. So there's a tremendous amount going on.

3:40

But it's important to realize, members, that what we are working on right now with the school boards is this new plan for the working title project which we've called schools for tomorrow. As part of that, I've asked school boards to please provide me with their revised or updated capital plan submissions by not later than June 2 so that we can get on with this as quickly as possible. I've asked them to provide their information in a slightly more strategic way. I've talked with several school boards already, and they understand fully what I'm asking them to provide.

The first part is to provide a complete list of their new-school construction requests, which can be comprised of new schools that add capacity for more students because of increased enrolments, or it can be new schools that are replacement schools and simply continue the existing capacity.

The second part is a list of school preservation construction requests. This is everything to do with expansions, modernizations, upgradings, rightsizings, and so on.

The third part would be a list of emergent modular needs. Now, modulars are the new steel-frame construction units, typically housing up to about 25 students, with much better ventilation systems and sound systems and wired capacity for new technology, computers, and so on and so on. They really are a godsend, you might say, because they are helping us replace many of the old portables that are out there right now.

You were asking questions about: where is the democracy in the system that relies sometimes on off-budget monies? I can tell you that there isn't a school board out there that doesn't welcome off-budget monies. There isn't a school board out there that doesn't welcome monies, period, when they have a need for them. So I will continue to press as hard as I can for additional monies, and if they happen to crystalize in a formal budget, perfect, but if they happen to come off budget, well, we'll take the money however we can get it when we know that it's necessary.

You asked the question: why not debate new schools now? Well, we are asking first for a plan to be arrived at. You may recall that there was a major plan done in 1999-2000 called the new century school plan, and literally billions of dollars were rolled out or contemplated at that time. It took about three or four or five years to actually deliver the majority of that plan. There's some planning that goes on every year, obviously, but as we inherit the responsibility for more and more of this planning to occur, I can assure you that we will be talking more about what those new school needs are right across the province. We were fortunate to receive that \$207 million, but I also understand that it wasn't enough to address all of the needs, quite obviously, throughout this great province. There are more needs that exist today.

You mentioned: how can we talk about having the best education system in Canada when certain things aren't right? You cited Grande Prairie and Ellerslie. Well, I can tell you that just last week we did make an offer to the Grande Prairie public board with respect to a school project that they brought to my attention a year ago and re-emphasized again in September, and we're just waiting now to see what they want to do. We've offered them 20 brand new modulars to replace 13 out-of-date and otherwise lacklustre portables that, frankly, just need to be replaced. I've told them that that was a priority, so we've made them that offer to help get that done.

The interesting thing, hon. member, is that should they choose to take up that offer, then we would begin with them. They would do it, and we would help them do site preparation immediately on July 1, moving forward so that come September 1 or in time for their school start-up, we hope we would have those 20 modulars in place, fully hooked up, and so on. Now, I don't know what their response will be to that.

Now, with the Ellerslie situation that has been mentioned two or three times, I just want to politely but bluntly say that we're really waiting on municipal hookups there for their water and sewer capabilities, but the fact is that fresh water is trucked in there every day. It's a system that is working as well as it probably can under the circumstances. As soon as the city runs the lines up there, which is their responsibility to do, then those hookups will occur.

You mentioned something about the minister not listening to your plans and not doing anything about school infrastructure and whatever else it was. I am listening to the plans, and more particularly I'm listening to the plans that are being enunciated by the school boards because they, too, are elected officials. As you know, I've met with them three times in the space of a year and a bit, and I hope to continue meeting with them as long as they want to continue meeting with me because we do get a lot of good work done. There's no question about that. Can we do more? Sure we can, and we're trying our best to do that.

You mentioned Calgary public's needs in particular. It might interest the hon. member to know that just last week I met for over two hours with Calgary public. I met for almost two hours and a bit with Calgary Catholic. We started looking at their infrastructure needs in great detail. I'll be doing this with the two Edmonton metro boards here as well very soon and with other boards as we look more closely at their particular needs.

The needs of some communities, as we would all know, are completely different as you go from one part of the province to another. Province-wide we have rather a flat enrolment – rather flat – but in some areas we have burgeoning populations, Fort McMurray for example, but not necessarily equally burgeoning student populations. There's an interesting phenomenon there. In Grande Prairie we have both unarguably occurring. We have a burgeoning student population that is reflective of the burgeoning general population. Now, Fort McMurray is experiencing some of that as well, and I don't want anybody to misunderstand that, but it's a slightly different phenomenon.

In other places we might simply have aging infrastructure. We might have very, very old portables, such as is the case at Alexander Forbes in Grande Prairie, or we might have a lot of older, even sandstone structures that were built decades ago in Calgary. They're very famous for those, as you would know. Some of those are historic sites. There's a series of things that have to be looked at here.

With respect to your questions about special needs I can tell you that special-needs funding has increased almost every year that I can remember, but for this particular budget year that we're talking about now, there will be an increase of \$34 million, or about 9.7 per

cent. That will take us up to \$373 million for special needs. I think that's a very generous and significant one.

What we typically try to do, hon. members, is ensure that we have enough money built into the budget, based on our jurisdictional profiles and other information, that accommodates both increased volume for special needs as well as increased price. By price I simply mean that the complexity of the students might be changing, and therefore the cost of providing the services changes, as it would do also with the aides and other staff members, if you will, teachers and so on, who are involved in helping out. So there is quite a bit of that happening.

I don't have the exact page in the budget. That was your question. Does somebody have the exact page for special needs in the budget? I would just convey it to you if I knew it off the top of my head. I don't. I'm sure that if you looked at maybe page 146 or thereabouts, hon. member, there is a general summary. I'm not sure that the detail is there, but we'll try and get you the page number where special needs is particularly cited.

Moving on with respect to the class size initiative, you're correct. There is about \$126 million this year. It is a significant increase in the amounts you mentioned. The class size reduction initiative had an increase of \$16 million, which is about 15 per cent, and that will allow school boards to hire well over 200 new teachers. Now, remember that we're averaging this, and I mentioned in my opening comments that I think the average costing that we've put into the budget is about \$70,400, in that ballpark, but I know that there will be a number of teachers hired for far less than that, and you know that as well, and there will be some hired at a little bit higher than that, but as an average that should allow us to accomplish that goal.

3:50

I realize that time is moving on here. I just want to mention this quickly though. When the class size reduction initiative was first ushered in two Septembers ago, it was thought that the entire jurisdictional averages recommended by the Learning Commission could and would be met within a three-year time period. Enormous dollars have flowed out so far, well over \$200 million. I can't remember if it's \$214 million or \$294 million, but it's 200 and some million dollars in total so far, and all of the class size reduction targets that were envisaged after the two-year period have been met or exceeded, in other words bettered, for grades 4 through 12. There might be one exception here or there, but I'm pretty confident that it's virtually 100 per cent.

Where the system hasn't yet met the target is in K to 3, so that's why we're putting emphasis there. Now, some school boards did that right off the get-go because that's where their immediate pressures were. But I'm talking province-wide now, and I'm talking about several dozen school boards that have not met what they and we expected they would meet by way of a progress target after the two-year framework. So it's caused us to sit back, stand back, respond to parents, respond to school boards, and say: hang on a minute here; we've got to take a new, fresh look at this.

Now, no one to my knowledge made specific commitments this far out to hire more teachers than they would have until the budgets have been approved, obviously. So we shouldn't be seeing any school boards that are vulnerable, so to speak, or being short-changed in any way. What we're simply doing is saying that it's time to just refocus this lens a little bit. It's for this coming year only. We'll try and sort this out a little better with them and help them through it.

At the same time, we need to look at one other important factor that was tremendously impacted, hon. members, by the class size

reduction initiative and that's the area of infrastructure. School boards have told me almost to the person that the class size reduction initiative is a wonderful thing but that the pressure it has put on the system for more classroom space, for more teachers to be found and hired, some with specific skill sets, obviously, for certain subject areas – that part of the equation just needed to be looked at more carefully. Therefore, we've just slowed this down for this year. But let's not make any mistake about it. We're still going to be helping school boards hire somewhere between 200 and 250 brand new teachers over and above the 1,685 teachers that have already been hired in the first two Septembers of 2004, 2005.

So I think that's fairly positive news, but I hear what you're saying about it. It leads into that question that you asked: will the budget provide just money for the class size reduction initiative and nothing for capital infrastructure? Or you asked something along that line. Well, there are significant monies already in the budget for both. For example, with respect to infrastructure on page 135 you would find that the budget proposed is \$115 million over last year's forecasted budget and \$180 million over last year's budget. So government is responding to identified needs, and we're increasing funding as those dollars become available. That's just one example of that.

You asked a question about jurisdictional averages. The reason that we do jurisdictional averages, hon. member, is simply because that was what was recommended in the Learning Commission's report, and I think that was because school boards themselves didn't necessarily want mandated capped sizes of classrooms. The explanation is very simple. Let's just theoretically say that we made it a law in theory, hypothetically speaking, with respect to a cap size for a particular grade level, and it's 18 kids. Now, what do you do when the 19th and the 20th kids show up? Do you hire a whole other teacher? So some flexibility has to be kept in mind, and that's what school boards impressed upon us. So that's good.

On the other side, I'm not immune to factors like you've just mentioned, where you might have a class of over 30. That's what we're working on now, to get those few sore thumbs, so to speak, dealt with. Having been a teacher – and I know that you have as well, hon. member, and others here have too – we know how challenging that can be, depending on the demographics and learning abilities of your students, of course.

The other question you asked about was with respect to PO and M, plant operation and maintenance, increases. Is it enough or is it not enough? It's about 5.1 per cent of an increase, up to \$395 million. You know, we're working with the school boards on this because I'm sharply aware of the increased costs of some basic things, but PO and M, generally speaking, is with respect to the cost of turning on the lights every day, with respect to heating the schools every day, with respect to custodian/janitorial services, that type of thing. We hope that that increase will work, and if it doesn't, then I'm sure that the school boards will be letting me know. That's what we got, so that's what we're passing on, hon. member.

You asked about staffing within the department. The specific question that you asked was on the increase from 691 to 696 FTEs. I think it's on page 145, at the bottom. The answer is that the additional five staff spots are related to implementation and support of the accountability factor in relation to our work with jurisdictions, where we collect and analyze a very broad array of items, many, many of them, and how they pertain to our accountability pillar. We have measures there, as you would know, and we help keep jurisdictions up to speed with that, and we help interpret and use that information for various purposes.

I'll continue with other stuff in the next segment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Going through estimates, you get 20 minutes, and you sort of have to pick, I suppose as the minister does, things that you want to concentrate on. I want to talk about some specific issues, but just generally to begin with, I think we'd be kidding ourselves if we didn't recognize that there are still some educational issues simmering in terms of funding and the rest of it.

The minister is well aware of the last poll I've seen. It was last September or so. The Ipsos-Reid poll revealed that 72 per cent of Albertans still believe that the education system is not adequately funded. They're looking at things like school fees, and the minister has alluded to class sizes and the rest of it. It doesn't matter, Mr. Minister, if we throw out big figures to people; it doesn't mean much. It is a lot of money, but education is an investment, I think we'd both agree. It's not an expense overall. Sure, we have to try to put the resources in the most efficient way we can, but when you throw out big numbers to people, what they understand is what's happening in their own school or in their own classroom and if they see problems there. That's why I think that poll is still there.

I would remind the minister that to some degree we are playing catch-up, having been through the strike as a trustee in Edmonton public, the fact that the arbitration came in at 7 and 7 and we were given 4 and 3. There were a lot of teachers laid off, I know, in Edmonton public. To some degree I would say that we've probably caught up. Generally, when you talk to people, it's hard to say whether it's better or worse, but most people feel that we're sort of where we were before arbitration. There's some improvement in terms of the class initiative, I think, especially at the K to 3 level. We may not be there yet, but I'm told by people that we've seen some improvements there. Some classes in junior high and senior high are still pretty heavy.

The minister talked about capping. I think the problem with averages is that in a special-needs class you can't take that many kids. So you could have a nice average and still have a lot of classes over 30 because of the makeup in that particular school. That's why I believe that at some point there's some sort of capping. It doesn't mean that with the capping you'd have to hire somebody with one or two students later. You'd take that into the average. But I think we have to begin to look at that. Just generally those are some issues.

4:00

I want to come back to the Learning Commission. The minister knows that I'm going to raise certain things. I'm sure he's well aware of that. I want to talk about the remaining outstanding items on the Learning Commission. I mean, we could go through the Learning Commission and say that, yeah, we've done some things here; perhaps not enough. But I want to talk about the remaining items.

First of all, the fact that I'm very disappointed in our reaction on the junior kindergarten and kindergarten. The Learning Commission said that those are probably two of the most important items they made. I'm not suggesting that we need it immediately to go throughout the province. Probably financially that may not have been in the cards. But in the schools I represented and still do as an MLA – I represent the city centre project, and I know the minister is aware of that particular program. It's had a dramatic impact on those kids to have that sort of help. The Edmonton public and other boards have done this.

[Mr. Goudreau in the chair]

I just happen to understand Edmonton public the best, the 18 high-needs schools and Dr. da Costa's work – I'm sure the minister is aware of that – and the tremendous impact that's had on those kids. If we don't do the job there – in fact, I can say that when the cuts came after the arbitration with the city centre project, yeah, they said that small classes are important. But you know what they said? Full-day kindergarten, junior kindergarten, and reading recovery were probably even more important. That's how much of a priority they put on it.

You know, I look at the figures – and I'm using the Learning Commission's figures – to see if we could afford it if we picked, you know, full-day. We already have half-day kindergarten. If we just did it in what we call the high-needs schools, that would have been \$21 million more in junior kindergarten, and funding for kids at risk was pegged at \$42 million. With all due respect, Mr. Minister, I think we could have afforded that. I think it's the pay-me-now or pay-me-later sort of syndrome. If these kids don't get that opportunity, they're going to be behind all the rest of the way through school, and we're going to end up with some of the problems that we face. I know that the minister knows this, and I know that he probably faced some pressures from some of his MLAs. I'd be surprised if this minister didn't believe this. That's why it was so disappointing that we couldn't start there, at that level. It didn't need to be universal, right across the scene.

So now Edmonton public and, I expect, others are going to have to decide whether this program is important enough. The AISI funding is running out. Is this program important enough that we take money from other instructional dollars? Then you get into the problem that other people don't think that's fair. I know that it's not going to happen in this budget, but I'd say to this minister: let's go back and review that in a very short period of time. I think that it's, as I say, pay me now or pay me later. That's so absolutely crucial for those schools. I can't say it strongly enough. I would hope that this is not a final answer, the announcement he made – what was it? – a month or so ago. I will keep pursuing that particular issue because it was something that was very important to me as a trustee.

I'll be quick on some of the other ones. You know, there's that saying: just say no to drugs. I can say something very quickly to the minister. One of the outstanding items is principals taken out of the bargaining unit of the ATA. Just say no. Just say no. It doesn't work. In fact, I don't know why the Learning Commission advocated it. They went out and talked to Emery Dossdall in B.C., who is the minister. He told them that it didn't work. I think the system works well now because it's more of a collegial model, the principal and people working together. The minute you start to have the principals out of the bargaining unit, it becomes sort of – they're at a different strata. Then you have to have the ATA involved much more and the rest of it. So I would say: just say no to that one.

The bargaining is a tougher one, the provincial bargaining. As a trustee in the Edmonton public we thought we could do our own bargaining. In fact, I sat in the unit. I also know that a lot of the rural boards don't want it, so there's a mixed message being sent there. The ASBA has basically endorsed provincial bargaining, but all the metro boards, to my knowledge, are saying no. So we have a split there. It makes it difficult for the minister.

At the very minimum if you're going to move towards provincial bargaining, the government has to be at the table. You cannot have an internal group like the ASBA bargaining if they don't have access to the money. So if we're going to look at provincial bargaining, then we have to bring the government to the board because they're the ones that control the purse strings. You can't bargain with

people who don't control the purse strings. That's the only thing I would say. As a school trustee in Edmonton I thought our system locally worked very well, but I also understand that there's a big split on that within the community. So that would be my advice there to the minister.

I'd like to turn to the whole area the minister talked about: \$180 million more on schools. This has been a big issue here. The reality is that we're playing catch-up again with our school maintenance. Again, if I come back to my experiences as a trustee, we had schools falling apart, and the ones that seemed to be built in the '50s were the worst because they weren't built to last. The maintenance dollars were not coming in fast enough, and you're always sort of playing catch-up with one or the other.

I would want to ask here, though, if the minister – and this is a school I know he cares about – could do something in the Edmonton public to loosen up the situation with Victoria comp because it's having a ripple effect on all the rest of the schools in Edmonton public. As the minister is well aware, when I was there, they were going to change it and partially knock down part of it. Now we find, because of inflation and what's going on, that that's too costly, and now they're looking at a different school. We have to make a decision here on this school. Remember that they were promised, back when, \$64 million and then totally for our budget I remember \$35 million, and \$30 million was going to go into Vic comp. So it has really played havoc there, and I think it's time that we did something with Vic comp. I know that the minister – I remember from meetings we had – had some interest in that particular school and seeing it go ahead. That should be a priority because, as I say, it has had a ripple effect on all the other schools in the Edmonton public.

The reality is that we're playing catch-up. We can say: \$180 million more. Yes, I don't doubt that that's the case, but the reality is that like the rest of the infrastructure budgets in the province, we have a deficit of playing catch-up. Calgary has probably been the most aggressive, but I know that the minister has got letters from Edmonton. I think the minister brought up the Grande Prairie situation. The MLA for St. Albert: we're getting these calls – I'm sure the minister is – from all over the province. It's a lot more money, but the reality is that we may need more. Rather than us doing it later, I would have liked to have seen in this budget how we're going to deal with this deficit problem, this maintenance problem over a three- to five-year period as part of the budget.

Now, I'm not going to turn it down if there's unfunded money in June or whatever. I'm sure the school boards will take it and say thank you very much, and I'm certainly not going to say: don't give them the money. But the reality is that that's not the proper way to budget. I would suggest that if it takes \$180 million or \$500 million more a year to catch up in the five-year period, that should be part of the budget. It shouldn't be based on unbudgeted surpluses because it makes their budgeting at the school board level very, very difficult. How do they do it? We may get a school; we may not. We may get maintenance money; we may not. Nobody is budgeting properly when that happens.

4:10

Flowing from that, Mr. Chairman, is a specific question to the minister because we've had this discussion. I've been very concerned about the way the school closure process works. We had this discussion last year, and I recollect the minister saying that they were looking into it. The process here in Alberta does not work well. We talked about the variations in construction, of taking out education, taking it over, that they will get rid of some of the situations where the per-student factor was based on the size of the

halls and the bathrooms and all the rest of it. That seems to be a no-brainer, and I would hope that there would be some clarification on that. I would think that that would probably be better being under the Department of Education. They would understand that more than infrastructure, who deal with roads and the rest of it.

It's the school closure process, again, that worries me. Remember, Mr. Minister, we talked about the fact that Ontario got rid of this sort of payoff, the inner city against the suburbs. It's true in rural Alberta, too, where you have to close down schools to get new ones. Remember, we talked about that. They got rid of that in Ontario. They said:

There have been "rewards" in capital funding for closing schools which has distorted facility considerations. Some boards felt compelled to close schools in one area to be eligible for new schools in another, even if the sites were far apart. Some boards closed school prematurely to become eligible for new replacement schools. The ministry will no longer recognize closed schools as creating eligibility for new school grants.

The point I want to make there, Mr. Chairman, is that I would hope that we're looking at this closure process. The minister, I think, said that they were looking at the school closure process as part of the act. It creates enemies. It pits schools against schools, it pits neighbourhoods against neighbourhoods, and it doesn't make sense. I would really hope that we are looking closely at the Ontario model. If a school closes itself because of lack of students, eventually it will do that whether it's in rural Alberta or not, but they should not be rewarded by saying: oh, if you close a bunch of schools down in the inner city or one town or another, somehow you'll get another school. It's unfair. It doesn't work. I remember the minister saying that they were reviewing that, so I'd like his comments on that if we could, Mr. Chairman.

The minister is talking about high school completion rates, and that's a big concern in this province. I think we have some of the lowest – for some reason in rural Alberta I think the minister has alluded to kids getting jobs making more than the teachers. It's a little harder process to tell them that they have to stay in school, but they have to because down the way we're creating a big social problem.

I want to say to the minister – I think he said something about this – that round-tables are nice, but there are some things that we can do. I think the minister knows this. In Edmonton public we had to deal with the number of counsellors. Maybe I'm biased, having formerly been one, but I think that has an impact on the number of counsellors we have and the number of people that work in library services, learning resources. I expect that this is true throughout the province. The memorandum from Edmonton public on September 27 showed that the number of school counsellors has dropped from 99.1 full-time equivalents, FTEs, in '90-91 to 43.8 in 2004-2005. The number of learning resources, mainly librarians, dropped from 81.7 to 12.1 FTEs. Now, these are people that deal with literacy, and these are people that as counsellors deal with students in not only career counselling but personal counselling. They have a big impact on whether kids stay in school. The minister would be aware of this.

The figures I've seen indicate that if a kid comes out of grade 9 one year behind in reading level, their chances of being a dropout are very significant. Most of them will drop out. Even one year. So that's why I think librarians are that important. We may need a special initiative, as we did with the class learning sizes, something to deal with that problem. But I suggest very strongly to the minister that this is at least one part of the puzzle. I would argue that if we don't do something with the high-needs kids at the earlier levels that I was talking about, we're still going to be facing a problem in those

schools, and of course we need to do more for aboriginal education because they have a tremendously high dropout rate, and some things seem to be working better than others.

I'm moving along fairly quickly here, Mr. Chairman. The other thing I wanted to briefly talk about is the unfunded liability. I know that this has been raised in question period, that we have the \$6 billion, and I know that there was an agreement in '92. We know all that, but something that worries me is that it could be a \$46 billion problem down the road. Then that has implications not only for the teachers; it certainly has implications for the province in terms of our financial stability down the way. I think the question is: do we work on a \$6 billion problem, or do we work on a \$46 billion problem?

I would remind the minister that another province, Newfoundland, has wiped out its teachers' pension liability with negotiation, and the elimination in Newfoundland just came up as part of the agreement between teachers and the government. It will see the government of Newfoundland and Labrador pour \$1.952 billion into the teachers' pension fund. In return, the province's 6,400 teachers agreed to enter into a four-year collective agreement for the period between September 1, 2004, to August 31, 2008, which will see a wage freeze in years 1 and 2, and a 3 per cent increase in each of years 3 and 4. If they can do it, we should be able to do it, because to postpone the problem is going to cost us more.

Mr. Chairman, I'm almost out of time. I realize that by looking at the clock. But those are some of the issues. I would have liked to talk about too much predominance of standardized tests – we've done some work on that, as the Member for St. Albert did – but time runs out. Thank you.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for raising actually some very, very good points. We may disagree on some of the methodology to a few of them, but I think spiritually we probably would agree on most of them.

I'll begin just by commenting on the poll that I think was cited at the beginning of his comments, and I would simply like to rebut, if I could, by saying that of all the parents that were surveyed across the province, 83 per cent of the parents expressed great satisfaction with our education system. In general, the public responded with a 72 per cent satisfaction rate. So I think that on balance things are pretty good. Obviously, they could always be better. They could be better in virtually every part of our personal and professional lives, but in terms of the education system the results are there. We have the highest funded education system anywhere in Canada. It's the highest per capita, Mr. Chair. It's the highest per student, and we have the best results on virtually everything. So we're very proud of that. Can it be better? I've said it before; I'll say it again. Of course it can. That's what we're working on: constantly improving, constantly pushing our own borders, and constantly trying to help our students up the ladder of preparation aimed at success.

I am aware of some of the difficulties that still exist with respect to special-needs funding. I think there was a point made in that respect, that when we're talking about class size averages on a jurisdiction-wide basis, they don't mean a lot to the people who are having the other side of the experience, larger than ever classrooms. I have some in my own riding, and I'm sure that others do as well. But, still, we're working away on that. I expect some tremendous progress to be made in the next two years as we complete that five-year window.

With respect to remaining recommendations in the Commission on Learning report I know that there are a lot of people who would support additional junior kindergarten programs, and I know that there are others who would like a full-day kindergarten program.

I'm well aware of that. The only thing that we said, however, is that we're not going to force them onto the system.

Now, that's a key word. We're not going to make them mandatory, but that doesn't mean we're not going to support the provision of them or that we're not going to step up to the plate and provide money, because we do. We provide about \$241 million in this budget alone, but the difference is – and you would know this perhaps better than most in the Chamber, hon. member, because you've been a trustee – that school boards do still want flexibility. You are correct that it will vary from metro centres to large urban centres to rural areas. That's true. There's a great amount of variety that we're proud of in this province, so finding a way of addressing everyone's needs and desires has been extremely challenging. I don't think that there's a part of government that doesn't experience some of those issues on a jurisdictional basis.

4:20

Let me just say this in response to what we are doing to help the so-called at-risk children that need that additional assistance and so on. This past year we opened something along the line of 22 brand new parent link centres.

Mrs. Forsyth: Forty-five in total.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Forty-five in total this year? Yeah, there we are. The Minister of Children's Services, who leads that initiative – and I partner with her and help where I can – has seen to it that these parent link centres, in response to a recommendation out of the Learning Commission, I might add, fulfill their function of helping parents help their kids. Some of it becomes medically involved, and we have the Minister of Health and Wellness that will chip in and help out in that respect as well.

In my experience I've found this. These parent link centres are helping parents and the system in general to do far earlier interventions, far earlier screening, additional diagnostic-type screening that really helps to identify what kind of help a particular child needs. But let me just give you one example of where I wish things could be a lot better: speech-language therapy. You know what, hon. member? If we had more people in that profession, we would absolutely see them being hired. The fact is that there's a shortage world-wide, not just in Alberta or in Canada. You just can't seem to find them. They're almost as scarce as welders in the construction business. You just can't seem to find enough of them. The minute they graduate, they're snapped up. Still, there is a lot of good work going on there, and, yes, I am familiar with Dr. da Costa's work.

You mentioned reading recovery. I agree. That is very important. I don't have any argument there. But I stress that just because we didn't make these programs mandatory doesn't mean that we're not continuing to do something about it.

I think that you said something about: is this the final answer? Well, that's the answer for that particular recommendation, but the next question is this, at least in my mind. If you're not going to make junior K mandatory and you're not going to make full-day kindergarten mandatory, what are you going to do? I mean, that would be the logical question from my perspective. So what we are doing is constantly adding additional dollars to the system. We're working with partnering ministries, as I just said, to create other ways of addressing this. We're involving the communities more so to help them out because Alberta is a very different place from corner to corner to corner to corner. I agree. It doesn't need to be universal, and some strides are being made. So I hope that you'll take some comfort in that, and we'll see what else develops as we go forward.

With respect to another issue coming out of the Commission on Learning, the principals being in or out of the ATA. As you may recall, the government did accept that recommendation, and my predecessor, in fact, had hired a gentleman, I think out of the Rocky Mountain House area, to do a survey and a report. I have that report. I haven't acted or responded to it yet, but I hope to get that done fairly soon one way or the other.

I do understand the point of collegiality that you mentioned, and having been a teacher in a larger school, a very large school, for a while and in a smaller school, I understand the difference there. Having grown up in a very small rural community where we only had a handful of teachers gave me that experience as well.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The collective bargaining model is another issue, and I'll just re-emphasize again that 59 per cent of the school boards voted to accept the model proposed by the Alberta School Boards Association, the so-called ASBA model, but, obviously, 41 per cent didn't. Then there were a few – shall I call them fence-sitters? They liked the concept of a new collective bargaining model, but they didn't like the specific proposal that ASBA had come up with for their own particular reasons. Still, when you counted up the number of students that were represented by the boards who didn't like province-wide bargaining or didn't like the specific model that ASBA proposed, they represented about 50 per cent of the total student base across the province. It was almost a dead even split, almost right down the centre of it. So I think we took the position that we took with respect to, specifically, the ASBA model and indicated that we could not support that model as presented.

Can government be at the table for future bargaining? I think you asked that question. Other people have asked this question as well. We have resisted that temptation, and I think we will continue to resist it because in keeping with what I just explained about the local bargaining model being kept local, so too is it important for us to recognize that school board officials, school board trustees, are locally elected folks and they have a role to play in this. I would get concerned after a while as to how much of a role we're really leaving in the hands of elected school boards if we were yet to take that away from them, you know. So that's an important point.

Your other point was with respect to Victoria school for the arts or what was once called Victoria composite. Yes, that is a fond place to me, having taught there for a number of years. I recall the announcements of the \$63 million and then the \$51 million and then the \$35 million or \$36 million or whatever. I should tell you that we do have a proposal that came in for 1,700 students at that particular school. I understand that they now have around 2,000 students already or soon to be enrolled. I'm not sure if it's current, right this minute, right now. I understand that it is right now. But that figure that we're talking about doesn't necessarily even include anything for the demolition cost for the current school.

You will remember that there were three different proposals, right? One was for a brand new, stand-alone over there and knock this one down. The other one was to build something new and keep part of this and so on. It's gone along the way quite a bit, but it's not quite there yet. I would say that even with the \$36 million, hon. member, assuming that goes ahead as planned – and we'll see what those monies will bring – that will be the most expensive school project, I believe, in the province's history, even at that amount.

I'm not arguing for a moment because I think the arts are extremely important, and that model is unique in Canada. So, too, is the Grant MacEwan arts model. It's unique in Canada. They are absolutely amazing. You hear about Grant MacEwan, for example,

in other parts of the world where I have had the pleasure of travelling to and visiting. So, too, I expect the same will occur with the Victoria school for the arts. I think it will become Juilliard north, if you will, for that age group. They do tremendous work there, and they do it very successfully. But we still need the community to come together a little bit more on this, hon. member. That's why we don't have any one finalized, settled solution yet to comment on.

Very quickly moving ahead to the point you mentioned with respect to deficits. I can't remember the exact point you mentioned, but it was something about proper ways versus improper ways to do budgeting. Now, if you're talking about the school infrastructure piece – and I think you probably were – I am very aware of some of the deferred maintenance as it's called, or the backlog, in both the O and M envelope, which is the routine, day-to-day upkeep stuff, and also in the IMR envelope, which is the infrastructure maintenance renewal budget. I'll say this. With respect to the infrastructure maintenance renewal budget, which is where most of this would come in, we are going to increase that funding envelope by 68 per cent, from \$48 million to \$81 million if the numbers serve me correctly, and they do. That's a tremendous increase, but, you know – I've said this to my colleagues as well – that's still not enough because there are some significant other factors to keep in mind here.

4:30

One of them is the sharply rising costs of labour and of materials and of equipment. Even though a 68 per cent increase sounds impressive – and it is; let's face it: a 68 per cent increase in any part of the budget is huge – when you're facing backlogs that are four, five, six times that amount, that is where we have an issue. That's what we're trying to work on with this new plan that we're working on for June. I don't know yet what the success of that entire plan will be, but I have to be confident that it's going to reflect very honestly and accurately what the needs are in a prioritized fashion province-wide.

Your comments about the school closure process I will probably respond to in some greater length in writing because of time. Suffice it to say that I am aware, having just inherited all of this three weeks ago – the files, that is – of the issues you've mentioned with respect to how hallways or gymnasiums or closets or whatever it is may or may not have been counted in terms of school utilization of space.

I want to say that people that I have met over in the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation are extremely capable, talented, and professional people who know this area very, very well. I had my first meeting with them about a week and a day ago, as I recall, and we spent a couple of hours together looking at issues just like this. I told them what my expectations were, and they told me what their expertise and experiences were. We're trying to come together in the middle and sort this out to everyone's benefit. I don't like seeing schools pitted one against the other or neighbourhoods being pitted one against the other, and we've lived through a few of these together.

I can't recall what the details of the Ontario model are that you referred to, and I don't know if we have that model in our shop or not. We probably have it. I wouldn't mind taking a closer look at it then.

What I can tell you in having met with some of the school boards – and perhaps some of the trustees were from other parts of Canada and brought this idea here. I don't know. They indicated that there was thinking about the community playing a larger role, not just the elected school board folks or the government but the community. Now, that's one issue.

The other issue that I hope to look at through this plan in June that I'm going to come up with is with respect to where the schools are

physically located in relation to where the population now lives. We see neighbourhoods maturing now to the point where there may be very few kids there, but the school is still there. What is the impact going to be of a school board looking at a potential closure in that area and the building of a new school, a replacement school as it were, in an outlying area so that we can avoid some of the transportation costs, the busing times, and all of that? I don't honestly have that answer sorted out yet, but I want you to be aware that we are looking at those aspects as well.

On high school completion rates there are things we could do now, absolutely, and we're doing them. I have mentioned this in all three of my meetings with the school board chairs or school board trustees in general. I know that more counsellors would probably help and that we need to be careful when talking about that whether we mean guidance counsellors or work counsellors. A huge difference between the two. I would suggest that work counsellors are very important and fulfill an important role, obviously. However, guidance counsellors tend to do a little larger array of counselling. That would be one area that I'd like to strengthen going forward, but I don't have those dollars built into the budget to make any announcements at this point.

I feel similarly about librarians. Librarians are a critical part, and they, too, would impact in a positive way our high school completion rates. We have seen a large number of library technicians come into the system, but I think we all know that that's not the same as schoolteacher librarians. They perform different functions. In fact, library technicians don't typically have the authority to even supervise or to teach a class of children whereas library teachers do. There are some fundamental differences there. I agree, though, that it's very important, and that is an initiative that came out of the Learning Commission in part as well. I have met with the Library Association once or twice now, and I don't have any huge progress yet to report on that front, unfortunately.

The FNMI, First Nations, Métis, Inuit piece, the aboriginal education piece that you mentioned, is important. We are strengthening that. I don't have all of the dollars just handy in front of me right now, but I do notice, for example, that Edmonton public will receive over \$7 million, almost \$7.1 million this year. It's probably an increase of about 2 per cent, somewhere in that neighbourhood, I think.

Similarly – I meant to give this to you earlier – with the ECS instruction funding Edmonton public will be getting \$13.6 million this year for ECS or kindergarten-type programming. Plus, for ECS mild/moderate disabilities and gifted and talented they'll be receiving about \$683,000 this year. Again, another increase. For ECS program unit funding, PUF funding, they'll be receiving \$15.8 million, which is about a \$300,000 increase in that category. So there's quite a bit going on there, and we're pretty pleased with that.

My final comment, quickly, is with the unfunded pension liability, which I think you referred to. We will be providing through this current budget about \$152 million for addressing government's responsibility for a two-thirds share of that unfunded pension liability, which is, as you know, consistent with the 1992 agreement. The question is: what is the impact of the unfunded pension liability on the recruitment of future teachers and on the retention of existing teachers? I would say that there are some unpleasant possibilities of negative impacts if we don't do something about it, but I don't have the mandate at this point to do anything about that. We have talked about this with the ATA, we have talked about this with the Alberta School Boards Association, and it's an issue that we continue to see some movement toward. Newfoundland wiped out theirs and made a four-year deal, as you know.

I'll stop there. I hear the bell, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, given that there is a great demand for members to participate, the chair is going to recognize the following: Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods, and then the minister.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to take this opportunity to rise and raise with the minister a few issues which I've raised with him on previous occasions. One of them was alluded to by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and that is the issue of high school completion rates. I would like to know whether or not we've made any progress in that regard over the past year. Would the minister also advise whether or not his department has taken any initiatives in this budget to improve any progress that we have made?

The second is the issue of participation rates in the postsecondary education system. I realize that it's not primarily in the bailiwick of your ministry. However, decisions on whether to pursue postsecondary education and training are decisions that for the most part are made during high school. The die is cast, so to speak, at that time on the career paths, whether it be trades, colleges, technical, or university. I wonder whether the minister could comment on whether there are any measures being taken by way of improving career counselling or similar measures to encourage more participation in postsecondary education, particularly in view of the economic circumstances that we are in right now, where there is temptation for young people, perhaps, to go out and make money in an easier manner to their long-term detriment.

The third issue that I would like to address to the minister is another one that I've raised on previous occasions and that relates to the age of leaving high school. I would like to know whether the minister has any intention in the future or in the plans to proclaim the School (Compulsory Attendance) Amendment Act, 2003, which was passed in the 25th Legislature, whereby it would make compulsory attendance necessary until the age of 17 years. As the minister is aware, that has been on the books for two or three years now, and I'm wondering whether or not there are any plans or any budgetary provisions to implement that in the future.

4:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've got some specifics that I'd like to look at, but as I was thinking about this very important budget and this very important portfolio, our Ministry of Education, I felt that it was important to look at the long-standing education pedigree that needs to be recognized in this province. It began in the late 1930s with the election of the Social Credit Party. William Aberhart, an educator himself, served as Minister of Education as well as Premier. Together with his deputy, G.F. McNally, and H.C. Newland and John Barnett of the Alberta Teachers' Association, they formed a formidable team for educational reform. Particularly interesting was the partnership between the Premier and his deputy minister. In background and temperament they were very different men, yet they shared a common commitment to education, which is exactly what Alberta needed.

Aberhart was a small "c" conservative. Religiously, he'd be called a fundamentalist. McNally was a Deweyite, trained in the progressive school of education at an American university. Both were prepared to be radical and flexible in facing the need for change. McNally recognized that any solutions must fit Alberta's situation, that they could not be superimposed from some other experimental school system somewhere else. Aberhart recognized the need for students to be exposed to other points of view. As

Minister of Education he signed letters defending the teaching of evolution in Alberta high schools at a time when this was very contentious. He stated that exposure to scientific theories was a necessary part of a liberal arts education.

McNally, the progressivist administrator, was also a churchman. He donated a trophy for citizenship to a Calgary postsecondary lay training school. It was awarded annually to a student chosen by secret ballot by his or her classmates. McNally believed that citizenship was a necessary ingredient of a good religious education. That school was later studied by Americans, who said admiringly that they'd seen nothing like it in their experience. A later group of Americans did the same recently in commenting on Edmonton public schools leading the way in innovation, in school-based budgeting, alternative programs, and a relaxation of boundaries. An issue of educational administrator was devoted entirely to what was happening here, the first and only time it focused on a single district. This commitment to education continued two generations, through Social Credit and into the early years of the Progressive Conservative government. Politicians and teachers saw each other as allies, not adversaries, in the need to better Alberta students and society.

Alberta's educational excellence is also recognized at the postsecondary level. A friend of mine, a graduate of the University of Alberta, was accepted into doctoral studies in education at Oxford 15 years ago. He was pleased and surprised to learn from his adviser there that the faculty considered our graduate school here to be among the top in Canada. The U of A's new president is committed to making her institution a world-class university. This achievement is not far off. It grows out of a dream by Alexander Cameron Rutherford and Henry Marshall Tory a century ago, when they built a campus south of the river. It is paralleled in a province that now has four full-fledged universities and a number of colleges offering university-level courses and approaching university status.

Yes, Alberta has an educational pedigree of which we can be proud. It was begun with the first Liberal government, reformed by Social Credit, fostered by progressives and early Progressive Conservatives, and needs to be conserved by all Conservatives to take their name and our heritage seriously. The past decade of using education as a chopping block for budget cuts is a bad dream from which we are thankfully beginning to awaken. I and my colleagues look forward to renewing this province's commitment to education. Given the opportunity, we'll see an Alberta whose motto, Strong and Free, is rooted in an even more enduring line: you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. When that happens, we will be able to look back on the past decade of educational cuts and controversy as a blink or hiccup against a backdrop of history and of promise that is bright indeed.

My first area of concern has to do with high school funding and course completion and credits, that sort of thing. Since funding is based on course completions in high school, they only receive funds for actual courses completed; that is, where there's been 50 per cent attendance and a minimum mark of 25 per cent. I know that some schools feel that they have invested heavily in staff time, smaller classes, aide time, calls to parents, attendance policies, tutoring students, and making plans to assist students at risk, but if the student is not successful or does not attend in spite of all these efforts, there is a loss of funds to the school.

Another thing to consider is clawbacks which result because of audits. This has affected every CTS school, any school with CTS courses, because of funding based on individual modules. The problem was the number of prerequisites required. If a student completed the intermediate level but had failed the beginning module, the credit funding was removed. Because of grandfathering and Alberta Education searching out individual models, schools have

been affected. I believe they're suggesting now to clump the modules in three- or five-credit groups, which will be better overall, but this really looks like a return to what was the case 12 years ago where we taught, for example, beauty culture 10, 20, and 30. Why they changed this is beyond me. Those schools that were offering the three-year or full program were of course hurt the most.

The concern that the requirements for the apprenticeship board and Alberta Education differ is also a huge one. For example, if you look at cosmetology, nail art 2160 was a prerequisite for manicuring 2, 3, but nail art is not recognized by the apprenticeship board. Schools that only offer partial programs were dinged even bigger time because they didn't have the prerequisites, and cosmetology has been the biggest hit.

Now, if the student passed all the courses, no search was done for prerequisites. As soon as a failing mark was issued, however, a complete history was done, and money was taken back. Clumping modules into three- or five-credit clumps could get rid of this problem. I think also that we could get advice from the people who are in the front line. Maybe that's a novel idea, but it's a good idea. Until they are seriously changed, this existing model's delivery problems will continue to arise.

Education should not be funded on a business model because it is not a business. It is a tool whereby society assists, as much as possible, future citizens in becoming contributing, active, and moral members of society. Because human growth and development cannot be legislated, automated, or regulated, funding schools as though they were factories creates the groundwork for a dysfunctional education system and produces not only poor results but a liability in the future.

CBC's Wild Rose Forum during the week of March 6, '06, discussed a study which estimated that a possible 40 per cent of Albertans are essentially illiterate. This is a staggering number. However, considering the way public schools are funded, perhaps it's not unexpected. The funding crisis in public education is bound to produce poorly educated young people, and that was bound to become eminently visible sooner or later.

I've seen enormous changes in the way education is delivered to students. Some of the changes have been very beneficial. For example, technology has helped students to become more aware of the world in which they live and has provided them with vast amounts of information. Some of the changes have been less than beneficial. We've also seen enormous changes in the attitudes towards learning on the part of large numbers of students, and it has not been a change for the better.

For whatever reasons many children are coming to school with impaired abilities to learn, to read, or to concentrate. Some are severely impaired, and their problems are being addressed as best the schools can. Some are impaired only just enough that they do not receive any extra assistance, and since the burdens on classroom teachers are tremendous, the problems of these children remain unaddressed for years. As they progress through school, not because of capability but because of age, their deficits become larger and larger. By the time these children become disillusioned young adults entering high school, their reading and academic deficits are so large that they feel that they can never catch up or succeed.

4:50

The way schools are funded – and at this point I'm speaking about high schools – contributes enormously to the problem of providing appropriate education for all students. Yet at the same time the Department of Education requires that teachers provide appropriate education for all students. In a population area where large numbers of students tend to be reluctant learners, schools face uncertain

funding levels from one year to the next. Having to rely so heavily on payment for completion of credits and for retention on a year-by-year basis makes it difficult for these schools to plan longer term programs that will address students' needs. Because of the volatility of students' lives, one year may be a great success, another may not, and with funding fluctuating accordingly, as if students were blocks of wood that could be carved identically, a program cannot maintain itself over the rougher times.

Another thing that is happening about the funding is the coercion used on teachers to ensure that students pass their courses, sometimes whether or not students have fully demonstrated understanding of the outcomes/concepts prescribed in the government's various programs of study. This coercion creates in some financially struggling schools a certain disregard for how students pass to get their credits. These schools may demand that teachers push, pull, or drag students across the passing mark line, thereby allowing the school to receive its funding. Development and reinforcement of behaviours that are detrimental both to the student and to society as a whole can easily ensue.

For example, when a class of students is given an assignment and a reasonable due date, responsible students adhere to that due date. Responsible students ensure that they work on the assignment, clarify whatever they can't understand, and submit the assignment on time. On the other hand, students who do not take personal responsibility do not make good choices, and when the due date arrives, they do not hand in the assignment. Many students make excuses. If each incomplete assignment eventually affects the bottom line in funding, teachers are expected to get that student to do that assignment. On one level it is, of course, a good thing that teachers do not allow students to remain irresponsible. However, the real emphasis is not on ensuring that students learn to take personal responsibility; it is on ensuring that no funding is lost.

Schools need to be assured of an adequate block of funding each year. Schools, unlike factories or other industrial or business undertakings, cannot be treated as though their products can all be made, shaped, molded in an identical manner. Stable and adequate funding allows schools to function, whether they serve an academically elite population or a population comprised of less able students. Without stable and adequate funding we teach too many of our students, young people who are already disillusioned and angry with adult society, that school is irrelevant, adults are fools, and society has abandoned them. It's a high price for society to pay.

Along with stable funding there are some other things that we can do. I think that if we could provide additional funding to enable jurisdictions to offer early intervention programs – and I know you're looking at that; I really emphasize the need for full-day kindergarten – we could avoid some of these later problems. Alberta Education should ensure that there is additional funding to support guidance and counselling services. I like that you mentioned that. We need to support them and to co-ordinate the delivery of multi-agency and school-based services, including exit interviews of students leaving school, to find out why that's happening.

Again, I'll go back to high school counsellors. I think there's a need to have a formula, a student/counsellor ratio in place. With the limited resources of child welfare there are a lot of families and students that are falling through the cracks, and we're not able to meet the demands in the school properly. I think that there are just not enough resources. If we look carefully at perhaps including social workers or children's services workers in the school building to work alongside school staff, I'm wondering: would we see a greater co-ordination and a more seamless approach to getting these students and the families the help that they need?

In addition to the school counsellors, I'd like to mention again that

we do need librarians. We do need adequate funding. Teacher-librarians are essential. But we need money yearly to keep up the libraries in schools. One of my elementary schools had an audit lately, and their status says that they need \$60,000 to catch up and then \$5,000 a year to make up for the past cuts.

Another area that I'm concerned about is school fees. Albertans with school-age children have become accustomed to a bill coming home in their child's backpack which asks for payment of school fees. I think that with the booming economy that Alberta is experiencing and the wealth that we're experiencing, not seen for many years, we should be assisting those that are trying to improve their quality of life. In doing so, they are contributing to the richness of our province. I believe we should look at the elimination of school fees.

Another area related to that, I suppose, is fundraising. This is a huge problem. I have letters from parents from numerous schools in my own constituency saying that they're concerned about the lack of identifying and funding basic education in Alberta. Computers are seen as tools to success and learning and part of the Alberta curriculum. Why, then, are parents having to fund raise to purchase computers? Parent fundraising is also subsidizing school expenses such as the school intercom system, headsets for the teachers, library books.

One school council is telling me that in the past four years they have provided over \$40,000 to the library. They're talking about buying computer labs, \$20,000 that they've put in; school photocopier, \$10,000; AV equipment, \$4,000. The bottom line is: why do we fund raise and attend casinos to pay for computers, library books, playgrounds, and all these other things that I've mentioned? Again, if literacy is important, why isn't there a literacy fund for each school to draw on and use so that they have proper books in the library and other resources that are required?

I wanted to say something about AISI funding. I believe that the professional development it has allowed has been amazing. Focusing on teacher practices in the classroom and looking at results have all been relevant. It's important, and I'm glad to hear that AISI funding is going to continue.

I know that the reading recovery program was a Rolls-Royce. It had a massive impact, but it costs one teacher who sees one student at a time for half an hour. It's being cancelled because schools can't afford it, and that truly is a shame.

You mentioned the shortage of speech and language therapists. I'll include school counsellors in that. By that I mean trained school counsellors. That's happened, I think, in large part due to the fact that the jobs were disappearing with all of the cutbacks. People didn't see that there was any reason to be confident that they'd have a job. I'm glad that you're recognizing a need for these people. I hope that we'll get them back.

The 45 parent link centres, I want to say, are wonderful. I'm glad that we have initiated that and that we're continuing that program.

The unfunded liability. I know that many have mentioned it today. Could you explain to me, because I need to understand. You said \$152 million for unfunded liability, \$187 million to the current service payment. What's the balance? Like, where does that leave us? How big is the problem with this unfunded liability? It is a big concern. I'm glad you're addressing it. I'm glad it is on the radar screen at this time.

Special needs. I want to mention that. I think I've got a few more minutes. Curriculum is changing. New textbooks are required in many of our regular programs, and the province doesn't provide any money for those changes. Funding for special-needs students remains inadequate. For example, an aide costs the school close to \$40,000, yet the direct funding that we're getting from the province

is about \$20,000. That means that we're taking \$20,000 from the general operating funds, and we're stealing from the other programs.

5:00

How are we working towards prevention through early intervention for students at risk of school failure with school districts across the province? The pilot junior kindergarten at Norwood, Delton, and Spruce Avenue are exemplary models that are in place, models that we need to expand on.

Thank you.

Chair's Ruling Speaking Order

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the chair had indicated that given the long list of names that we had, the chair would recognize the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, and then the minister. I do know that there are two other members who wish to speak, but that's what the chair had indicated before.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Chair, I will try to be brief so that we can get the other members' questions on record because I assume that that's what they want.

Calgary-Nose Hill asked about high school completion rates, and I want to just give him and other members here some comfort knowing that we have a variety of very innovative and creative ways of addressing high school completion, and we see that as we hop around and visit school jurisdictions. Some have an arts focus, a programming focus in the cultural vein. Others stimulate interest in the CTS or industrial arts vein. Others perhaps have more of an academic bent. Suffice it to say that jurisdictions are now offering very wide and diverse courses that perhaps they weren't always able to offer and are enticing students to hang in there longer.

In fact, we are seeing the high school completion rate averages moving in the right direction. They have improved virtually every year for the past several years on average, and our projections are right on target with what is in our annual report. So we're pretty confident and comfortable that we're meeting them. Of course we'll do more, I'm sure, after we finish our round-tables this spring or this summer as we travel the province and as we culminate with our high school symposium later this fall, assuming that we're able to get it all done in the time frame available. I hope we can. That's all good news.

With respect to participation rates in postsecondary, I'll just say that we're seeing tremendous results coming in – we truly are – as a result of our RAP program, the registered apprenticeship program, and with respect to the YAP, the youth apprenticeship project. We have a new one now that we've been working on called learner pathways, which is a cross-ministry initiative between Alberta Education, Advanced Education, and Human Resources and Employment. It includes kindergarten to grade 12 students as our first thought, obviously, but we work with these other ministries because we know that we're trying our best to encourage students to not only complete high school but go on to some form of postsecondary, be it in the arts or industrial arts, skilled trades, or academic pursuits. We have those specific goals.

Your question with respect to the age of leaving high school and whether or not we're able to proclaim a higher age: not at this point. This is a longer, more complicated answer, Mr. Chair, so if the member will indulge me, I will respond in writing. I have done this

before. It's about a three-page letter, so I will provide that information there.

Very quickly to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who is also a former teacher, I appreciated your historical lesson, your vignettes, as they were. What sort of jumped out at me, of course, is not only the pedigree, as you referred to it, that has been created but the relationships between Premiers and ministers and deputy ministers. It occurred to me how privileged I feel to be sitting right beside the Premier in my role as Minister of Education because it ties in back with the Aberhart days as it does back with the Rutherford days, where there was a very close relationship. In fact, it was so close that it was one and the same person. Our Premier is extremely supportive of our educational initiatives, and I know that I can always count on his support to take it even further.

The high school CEUs I'll just comment on very quickly, Mr. Chair. This area is under review. I heard a lot about it, on March 24 in particular, from school board chairs. I think we have to just remember that, fundamentally, we do expect accountability, but we don't expect to be unreasonable in our approach to it. We need to keep in mind that most of the funding recoveries, or clawbacks, or whatever the word is that some people have used here this afternoon, relate to a funding request that should not have been asked for in the first place. Some school boards actually told me that they understand that. The trick here would be to not incur those kinds of situations to begin with, and then there is no need for any recoveries or whatever.

I am sensitive to the point, however, of the 50 per cent attendance minimum or whatever it is – I've just forgotten the exact criteria – the 25 per cent minimum test score. There are things like that. I am sensitive to that because I know that when school boards do their planning, they don't plan on students dropping out on the 49th per cent day, so to speak. They've incurred the costs: they've hired the teacher, they bought the equipment, and they bought the supplies and whatever. I'm not sure what we're going to do about it, but it's one reason why I asked the deputy minister and his staff to get me back some information on this, and let's see what we can do about it. We had a very good dialogue with the teachers.

Mr. Chair, how much time do we have left, roughly?

The Deputy Chair: We have about, I would say, five minutes.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, maybe I'll just stop there so that the Member for Calgary-Varsity can get in a couple of points.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, I will respond in writing to the rest of your questions.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, we have about five minutes.

Mr. Chase: Thanks very much. I wish I could talk 10 times as fast.

The lack of support for education in this province was my prime motivation for becoming politically involved in 1997 in a support role as a Calgary-Foothills Liberal Constituency Association director. Education concerns noted over a 34-year teaching career, which led to my running in 2001 and again in 2004, continue to drive me. I'll primarily be using the Calgary example, with which I'm most familiar, as the petri dish of problems faced by students, parents, teachers, trustees, support staff, maintenance and custodial support throughout this oil and gas rich but education vision poor province.

Last May the Calgary board of education presented to this province a capital plan that covered three years, 2005-2008, and that was presented to the then minister of infrastructure. Of the 13

projects listed in the 2005-2008 capital plan, only one was approved for provincial funding. No new schools were announced the year before, though the Calgary board of education did submit a 2004-2007 school capital program. The board submits a three-year capital plan and a 10-year facilities plan to the provincial government annually. I would suggest that local boards attend to their homework and vision for the future to a much larger extent than this government.

Since 1995 Calgary's population has increased by well over 200,000. It's the equivalent of tacking the city of Regina onto our borders. In 2004-2005 alone over 23,000 new residents moved into Calgary, and that growth continues. In Calgary there are approximately 40 new and developing communities in varying stages of development with no public school presence. High school population is increasing, especially north of the Bow. At least two new high schools are required.

This next figure I cannot believe. The Calgary combined boards of education bus in excess of 50,000 children a hundred thousand kilometres per day. This is a waste of children's time, school board resources, never mind the environmental effect and the resource depletion associated with it.

Fifty per cent of our schools are 40 years or older, creating a backlog of deferred maintenance and facility upgrade costs. When you add the Calgary Catholic with the Calgary public, the deferred maintenance is well over half a billion dollars. There's no excuse for this being left to this sad state.

5:10

With every new school constructed in the newly established suburbs, there is a corresponding decline in enrolment in schools in established suburbs or the inner city: close a school, kill a community, kill the price value of the homes that are in the existing community. Why would people want to move back into an area that doesn't have a school? Very short-range planning.

There's a whole series of problems along with school closures. Since the 1999-2000 year – and I'm just going back five years basically – the board of trustees of the CBE has closed 18 schools and five programs. This year, of the programs closed, Fred Seymour elementary school and Jerry Potts school as they currently exist were closed. Added to that, four of the entire schools and programs out of the whole city were in Calgary-Varsity. It greatly upsets me that the school board was forced by poor planning in this province that doesn't take into account the reduced class size formula and the school utilization space formula.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than

5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the following questions after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$3,824,278,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$1,000,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report the estimates of the Department of Education.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases,	\$3,824,278,000;
nonbudgetary disbursements,	\$1,000,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members for participating in the estimates of the Department of Education today. We have again seen a great deal of good progress and some very good discussion, debate. Some interesting points were made.

On that note, I would move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 tonight in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 25, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/04/25

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the 166 Blue Quill Scout group. There are 12 of them present. I'm doing this on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who is not here tonight. We welcome this Scout group here. Their group leaders are Darren Gordon, Lorne Purantz, and Dave Young. I would like them to stand, and we'll extend our warm greeting to them.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Gaming

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to move the estimates for Gaming and for the Alberta lottery fund.

It's my pleasure to be here today and to discuss the Ministry of Gaming's 2006-2007 estimates. Our ministry does good work. Every year Albertans see that good work first-hand. They see new playgrounds, new community buildings, and new social programs for seniors. This year we intend to continue to ensure that the revenue derived from gaming and liquor benefits all Albertans.

Maybe my staff can't get through security. I'm not sure. At any rate, I will have some staff members up there. [interjections] I can handle it. Maybe they're at the casino. I'm not sure.

The Ministry of Gaming is somewhat complex in its organizational makeup. In order to put our estimates into perspective, it's important to understand the different entities and their responsibilities. I ask that the committee bear with me while I briefly introduce each entity within the ministry. First, we have the Department of Gaming. The department's area of responsibility includes the strategic direction for the province's gaming and liquor policies and communications. It is also responsible for the administration of several lottery-funded programs, including the popular community facility enhancement program and the community initiatives program.

The estimates for the Alberta lottery fund are included under the Ministry of Gaming. It is used to support thousands of volunteers, public and community-based initiatives annually. The ministry also includes the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, or AGLC. The AGLC regulates all gaming and liquor activities and establishes operational policy for these activities within a provincially approved framework. In addition to these entities, Gaming is also responsible for the Horse Racing Alberta Act and the Gaming and Liquor Act and the Racing Appeal Tribunal.

My main focus today will be on the Department of Gaming and how we intend to spend the \$202 million reflected in those estimates. This includes our request for funding for the community facilities enhancement program, the community initiatives program, and the other grant programs from the Alberta lottery fund.

Before looking at the department details, I'd like to briefly mention the Alberta lottery fund. The Alberta lottery fund provides the extras that help improve our overall quality of life in this province by funding volunteer groups and public and community-focused initiatives. There is little doubt that the funds benefit Albertans. Some of the Alberta lottery fund is allocated to programs in the Department of Gaming, and the rest of it is allocated to programs in other ministries. I'll leave it to my colleagues to speak to the lottery funds allocated to their individual ministries this year. I'm sure that as people have been in the House and listening to the estimates over the last few weeks and as they stay tuned over the next few weeks, they'll hear mention of funds in their estimates that are coming from the Alberta lottery fund.

However, I will speak tonight to my ministry, the Ministry of Gaming's lottery-funded programs. This year the ministry is requesting funding for two very important grant programs: the community initiatives program, or CIP, and the community facility enhancement program, known as CFEP. Without them many worthwhile projects and initiatives throughout Alberta would never come to fruition.

I'd like to share with you some feedback we received at various trade shows that we attended this past year. These are comments that people shared with our staff as they manned the booths at these trade fairs. "Thanks to CFEP the Darwell library has a new facility. Without this grant we couldn't have done this. This program is extremely beneficial to all types of community groups."

"I come from a small community. We have benefited many times from lottery funding for our recreational buildings. We have been happy for this support."

Another quote: "Thanks to a previous lottery grant our school library was able to move forward into the 21st century with new technology. Thank you so much for making a difference in the lives of our students."

This feedback is important to us. It shows that Albertans want and need lottery funding for their communities. Again this year we plan to invest back into Albertans and into their communities. Again this year we're requesting \$38.5 million for CFEP and \$30 million for CIP.

Another program under the ministry is the horse racing and breeding renewal program. Horse racing and breeding renewal is another highlight of this fiscal year. It goes without saying that these activities have a long and valued history in this province. It is continually proven year in and year out that they contribute to Alberta's economy, benefiting everyone from the breeder to the farmer who grows feed for the horses. A recent economic impact study commissioned by Horse Racing Alberta shows that the industry generates annual economic benefits of over \$355 million to Alberta. Additionally, the industry provides over 2,700 full-time jobs and supports over 7,800 Albertans.

This year we have budgeted \$63 million for the horse racing and breeding renewal program. The \$18 million increase is due to projected revenue growth resulting from an increase in the number of slot machines and their performance at four racing facilities. As with all our flow-through arrangements the actual amount of the grant will be determined by the actual revenue generated. The government's share of net revenues generated by slot machines at racing facilities flow in part to the horse racing and breeding renewal program and in part to other lottery-funded programs.

The department also deals with exhibitions and fairs. I will continue with a related topic, and that is the exhibitions and fairs. The item is particularly important to me, having seen the value of a regional exhibition first-hand in my hometown of Grande Prairie, where my constituency is. They are the heart of the area's agricul-

tural activities. They bring together people from all over the province. They provide facilities for the local communities, and they provide valuable economic spinoffs for local business.

As I mentioned to the committee last year, funding to each of our two largest exhibitions, Edmonton Northlands and the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, will remain at \$10.35 million. In addition, \$2.66 million will go to seven other major fairs and exhibitions located in the seven major cities around the province: Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, and the three others. This will also help support the various programs offered by those facilities, including fairs, trade shows, and other community events that they host every single day of the year.

This fall the first ever First Nations casino is expected to open in Alberta. This achievement will be the result of hard work and consultation with Alberta's First Nations. In 2001 this government made a commitment to give First Nations an opportunity to enter the casino business as a means of improving economic conditions in their communities. Through the First Nations gaming policy an amount equal to 40 per cent of slot machine proceeds in First Nation casinos will go into the First Nations development fund grant program. All First Nations in Alberta will have the opportunity to apply for funding for special and socioeconomic and community development programs that they identify under this program. So whether they happen to be the host of a casino or not, all First Nations get to share and make application to the development fund grant program. These projects may include education, health, infrastructure, and addiction programs. These funds cannot be used for capital operations or financing costs of gaming activities or facilities.

8:10

The \$20 million increase from the 2005-2006 forecast is due to the fact that no new First Nations casinos were operational last year. To date five First Nations have received approval to begin construction on their casino facilities. The Enoch First Nation, just on the western outskirts of the city of Edmonton, is expected to be the first one to open their facility this fall. Since this is a flow-through arrangement, the revenue has to be generated before the flow-through grant can be provided, and the actual amount of grants will be determined by the slot revenue generated at First Nation casinos. Again, the government's share of net revenues generated by slot machines from the First Nation cash flow goes in part to the First Nation development fund program and in part to other lottery-funded programs.

We also are involved in the bingo business. The bingo associations grant program is the third and final flow-through arrangement. Each year thousands of charities throughout Alberta depend on bingo proceeds for their worthwhile programs and initiatives. The bulk of the bingo proceeds go directly to the nonprofit groups who work those bingo events. However, as part of the ministry's efforts to help revitalize the bingo industry, which has been in decline for a long time, new games such as keno and electronic bingo are now offered in bingo facilities.

The bingo associations grant program was initiated in 2002-2003 to enable all the net proceeds from these electronic activities to flow to the charities that use these activities for fundraising. Our estimates show that \$10 million will be generated for charities from bingo facilities that hold electronic bingo and keno events. All benefiting charities have been properly registered, and their use of proceeds is thoroughly scrutinized to ensure that these funds are going to eligible uses. As you will note, we are requesting a \$2 million increase from last year's budget. We are expecting higher levels of activity and upgraded electronic bingo machines to

generate increased funding for the charities that are working those bingos.

Another lottery-funded program is other initiatives. This pool of funding provides us the flexibility to react quickly to high-priority initiatives that arise in the year and may fall outside the parameters of other government programs.

Our final lottery-funded budget component is \$1.6 million for gaming research. This maintains the level of spending from other years.

To wrap up our budget request, Mr. Chairman, my ministry remains committed to ensuring that our administration costs are kept to a minimum. This year \$4.1 million will go towards the cost necessary to administer the department and its lottery-funded programs. This is only 2 per cent – 2 per cent – of our total \$202 million allocation this year and is comparable to our prior year's budget.

As you've heard, Mr. Chairman, the Department of Gaming is requesting approval of its \$202 million budget for 2006-2007. As in the past our primary goal is to ensure that Albertans continue to see the maximum benefit from the province's well-managed gaming and liquor industries. Albertans expect and Albertans deserve to see new playgrounds, buildings, and programs in their communities.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that this is a responsible budget, and I will answer questions. I see that the staff members have arrived, so I will introduce them at the end of my presentation here. With us is Ann Hammond, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Gaming; Marilyn Carlyle-Helms, the director of communications; and my executive assistant, Chris Brookes.

Thank you, all members, for your attention.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister for that mercifully brief description of his department. We have a long night ahead of us, so I figure we should just move it along. It's my pleasure to begin the debate on the Gaming ministry. I think I'd probably rather be at Rexall Place with most of the other people here right now, but we do what we have to do.

I agree that when the minister says that your department does good work, it doesn't mean that you couldn't do it better, so some of the questions I'm going to ask today are going to clarify some of the issues in your department and maybe improve the situation a little bit in some cases.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to do more of a give-and-take sort of thing, where I'd like to ask a few questions and give the minister time to answer them rather than just going on a 20-minute rant, if that works for you. I hope that works for everyone here, and we can get through it a little bit faster and a little bit more effectively, I think.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, is that okay with you?

Mr. Graydon: Oh, yeah.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, you may proceed.

Mr. Tougas: Well, I'd like to start with some questions about the other initiatives program. As I recall – and I'm sure you do too – the Auditor General found that there were some gaps in the way the other initiatives program was operating. It appears that there were no real rules written for the other initiatives program, at least nothing that the public could see. I think the Auditor General pointed out

that there were some deficiencies there, and I want to know if the ministry has made any sort of progress in clearing that up.

I know that there's a lot of value to the other initiatives program. I had an experience with that myself with the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society. It's a very worthwhile group. They were desperately short on cash, and I alerted them to the other initiatives program. They applied, and your ministry acted very quickly and supplied them with \$75,000, which kept them going in a time of crisis. So I can see why the other initiatives program certainly has some benefits, but if I hadn't known about it, they never would have heard about that money. They had never heard of it. They didn't know it existed, and I think most people don't know that it exists. It certainly has some value, but I would like it if, when I'm done asking this first batch of questions, you could address what you've done to improve the public's knowledge of the other initiatives program, the criteria, and to lay out for the public exactly how these grants are arrived at.

I notice that under the other initiatives program – at least, I believe it's under other initiatives – the Alberta Junior Hockey League gets \$25,000 a year, and the teams in the league get between \$7,500 and \$8,500 a year. Now, this comes under other lottery spending, I believe. Is this the type of thing that falls under the other initiatives program? Is it a regular grant that they get without having to apply for it? Maybe you're not familiar with it. If you aren't, I'd appreciate some answers to that at a later date.

I'm also curious, when it comes to the other initiatives program, where the total of \$11,088,000 came from. It's sort of an odd figure, and I'm just wondering. In the past it's been as high as \$16,700,000, and now you've got it at \$11 million. How did you arrive at that number?

Some of the other programs: community initiatives and community facility enhancement program grants. You're absolutely right. They do a lot of great work for everyone in Alberta, but I would like to know if we could get some numbers from the minister so that we can determine if the \$30 million for community initiatives and the \$38.5 million for community facility enhancement are the right numbers. Now, I think the best way we can judge that is if we actually had an idea of how many grants are being received and how many grants are being rejected so that we can get an idea of whether this is an adequate amount. I mean, are there hundreds of grants that are being turned down because there's not enough money in these programs, or is that a rarity?

I'd also like to know, if possible, if you could tell us if there are people who have received approvals for grants but then the grant money ran out and they had to do it again the next year, if this is something that happens from time to time, if it's rare, if it's fairly common. I suspect that some of these things you'll have to supply in writing later, so I would appreciate a commitment to supplying the answers to that if you don't have them right now.

Continuing with these program grants, I'm wondering if you've considered the maximum that you're allowing these days. I believe it's \$125,000 for some programs. I'm wondering if maybe this doesn't sort of drain the pot dry a little bit earlier than it should. If some of the groups are perhaps a little bit better organized, a little bit more professional at their fundraising, they might be able to scoop up a lot more money a lot faster than some smaller groups. I'm wondering if maybe that number should be a little bit lower so that we can level the playing field for a small group that maybe is getting lost in the shuffle while some of the other groups are a little slicker at it and getting the top dollar year after year. I wonder if you could address that and if you've given that any sort of consideration at all.

8:20

You also discussed the bingo associations grant program. I

appreciate your explanation of that. I wasn't too terribly familiar with that. I believe your estimate of that is \$10 million. I'm just curious, again, where you came up with that number. Is this based on all these new games of chance that you're introducing as well?

So if you could answer some of those questions for me right now, I'd appreciate that. Once you're done, I have a few more questions for you here as well.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Graydon: Yeah, you bet. I may not answer them in the same order they were asked, but I will cover them all by the time I'm finished, I would hope.

I think the first questions dealt with other initiatives and whether there were, you know, specific criteria around that. I guess it's basically designed as, if you will, an emergency fund to be called on, to be accessed for something unexpected. A very good example that I can give I believe was in the community of Viking, where their arena burned down. They did have insurance, but the insurance that they had fell far short of what it would cost to rebuild that arena. It would be certainly outside of the maximum \$125,000 normal CFEP thing. So they made an application, and it was felt that that was a very appropriate use for that community to use other initiatives funds.

Another one that you talked about, I believe, was hockey teams getting a grant from other initiatives. The Alberta Junior Hockey League, I believe, was the one you talked about. Yes, it has been kind of an annual thing although they do need to apply. I'm not sure how many teams there are in that league, but as opposed to processing 12 applications or whatever the case may be, the league itself makes an application under other initiatives. They get the one grant, and they divide it up amongst the teams in that league. That's why it is handled through other initiatives as opposed to receiving individual CFEP grant applications or CIP grant applications from their not-for-profit junior teams every year.

The total amount is just an amount that Treasury allocates to us for that program, and we live with it. As you mentioned, it's a little lower this year than some other years, and that's despite requests from us to keep it up there because it's certainly well accessed and well used for emergency situations. We were fortunate this year that when it came to the Katrina disaster and the Pakistan earthquake disaster, we had surplus funds that we could call on for those two \$5 million donations. But if we hadn't had the surplus funds to call on, those would have come directly out of other initiatives because that's a perfect place for an event such as that to access the funds.

No, we don't advertise it. We don't advertise CFEP and CIP either. You won't see an ad in your local newspaper saying: apply for a grant from the government. But I believe that when people approach their MLAs on all sides of the House, certainly MLAs are aware of the other initiatives. If they've been paying attention at all to these estimates over the last few years, they're aware that that fund exists, and they're aware that it traditionally funds expenditures higher than the \$125,000 limit.

I'll skip to that \$125,000 number now before I get back to some other questions. Actually, the most pressure I get is to increase the \$125,000 as opposed to decreasing it. What we're finding is that with construction costs – and we all know what's happening with that in Alberta with the economy the way it is – that \$125,000, although it sounds like a lot of money, just doesn't cut it with these big projects. As a result, people are coming and asking for more and more and more, and the \$125,000 is the limit. So we do find that we have to turn down more than we probably used to in the past because we do run out of money. We also find that we have to cut people's

requests back. Their expectation is that they're going to get more than that, but we have to really stick to the policy and say: "No, I'm sorry. That's as much as we can do."

If there are applications on file at the end of the year and we're out of money, those applications are carried over into the next year. They don't have to reapply. It's just that they may not get their grant in March, but they'll be early in the lineup come April or May, when the new budget kicks in. So they don't lose their spot in the line, if you will. They are still in the queue to receive their grant if they're an eligible-based group.

The revenues in bingo. It's pretty well a mathematical formula based on the number of locations, the traditional play that's been going on in bingo. We have taken a considerable hit in the bingo revenues. Charities have taken a considerable hit, if I might say so, particularly in the city of Edmonton with the smoking regulations that are in now. Bingo revenues have declined, and one of the ways that we're trying to get that revenue back to those charitable groups is to allow them to access the electronic bingo machines, that are a little more high-tech – people seem to enjoy that – as well as the game of keno, which you can play at a bingo hall. We are trying to help the charities, particularly, as I say, in those communities that have gone 100 per cent smoke-free, because their revenues have dropped. The revenues in casinos dropped as well from July 1 of last year, when they all went to nonsmoking in the city of Edmonton. They are slowly coming back again, and over time they will get back to where they were, but initially, certainly, that had an impact on the revenues at casinos and, more importantly, at the bingo halls for the charities involved.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Thank you. Just in regard to some of your answers, the money for the Junior Hockey League comes from the other initiatives program, but I believe you said that it's more of an emergency fund for programs that fall outside of it. I don't see how a regular cash donation to a hockey league qualifies as an other initiatives grant. Perhaps it should go under Alberta sport and recreation or something along those lines. It's also my understanding that the league receives \$25,000, and each team receives between \$7,500 and \$8,500. I don't know whether they all have to apply for it or not, but that's hardly an emergency situation. That's something that should be looked at in the future, I think.

My question was regarding the Auditor General's report on the other initiatives program. I didn't hear whether you have addressed that or not or whether you're making any moves towards clearing that up. When you say that you don't advertise it specifically, that's true. None of these programs are advertised, but it still isn't something that people really have a very good grasp of. As I recall, the Auditor General's report said that the rules for this are not posted on the website. There's no application form or anything along those lines, so it still has kind of an underground feel to it, where people really don't know that it's there.

Ms Blakeman: Underground? It's a slush fund.

Mr. Tougas: It could be a slush fund. It could be something like that, where it's a large pile of money that's at the minister's discretion with no particular rules in place.

I still would like to hear if you are going to do anything about what the Auditor General had to say about that.

Moving ahead to the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, AGRI, I was at their conference in Banff last weekend. It was an excellent conference, and I understand – and I hope you can confirm this for

me – that they have a new five-year deal in place or are looking into a new five-year deal. I was going to bring this up and say that it's about time that we actually had consistent funding for this organization. It looks like maybe some steps have been made in that direction as it is right now, so perhaps you could clear that up. I heard that from some members of the board. I never heard a confirmation of it. I haven't seen a press release, so I wonder if you could clear that up for me right now. Giving them long-term, sustained funding will give them the opportunity to do what are called longitudinal studies over several years. It's a term I just learned the other day, so I wanted to use it today.

Ms Blakeman: And you used it very well.

Mr. Tougas: I used it very nicely. Thank you.

The organization has been getting the same amount of money for several years. It's been the same, I think, since it began. I'm sure it's probably time that these guys started getting a little bit of a funding increase, either a regular increase or just a boost of some sort. I was talking to a fellow from the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre, I think it was called. They get over \$4 million a year for funding for problem gambling research. With all the money Alberta is making on gambling, I think it's time that we gave these guys certainly some more money to do some of the very good work that they're doing.

8:30

Moving on to casinos. I think I asked this last year, and I don't know if I got an answer for it then. I'm curious if the government has any long-range plans for the number of casinos that you have planned for Alberta. There are a number that are on the board right now that have been given approval, not just the First Nations ones, but I think there are some expansion plans. I think we're at 16 casinos in Alberta now – is that right? – so we're going to be up to 20 or more in a short time. How many is enough? How many is too many? I mean, is this something that has come up in discussions in your department, or is this just sort of ad hoc? Do you kind of play it by ear and say, "Okay, we're going to call it quits now"? At what point are you going to have too many casinos in Alberta? At what point are there going to be too many slot machines? You could make the case that we already have way too many slot machines in Alberta. I would like to know if you have any future plans for casinos.

Also, regarding the First Nations casinos, are you concerned that these casinos will draw customers, clients, whatever you want to call them, away from some of the other casinos? I mean, is there a saturation point, where these casinos are just cannibalizing other casinos instead of actually generating more business?

If you could address some of those questions, I'd appreciate it, and then I have a few more for you after that.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the minister, I've just been advised that the score is 1-0 for Edmonton.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Graydon: And I don't have any bets on the game either.

Okay, other initiatives. I think the very title is a perfect title. While we do use it as an emergency fund and it's accessed in case of an emergency, it is for other initiatives that don't fit the strict rules of CFEP and CIP. The hockey teams that you talked about are a very good example. I'm not sure that they would fit the strict guidelines of, certainly, the \$125,000, the not-for-profits, although they are not-for-profit teams. They are scattered across the province,

and it's been determined that they are a worthwhile cause in the communities that they are operating and playing in. So that's where it is funded from. I guess if it came out of the traditional CFEP or CIP programs, that would be that much less that could go to other community groups in the constituencies across the province. I think it's a great place to fund programs like that or initiatives like that. As I say, it allows the other money in the traditional two programs to go to other worthwhile causes.

The Auditor General. I know that we're very conscientious with the applications and extremely conscientious about how the money gets spent once it is granted to an organization. We get accused of being overregulated and overaudited, if you will, in some cases, but I'm a strong defender of the audits that we do and the amount of due diligence that we take. We're dealing with an awful lot of cash money here, and it would only take someone with a little bit of sleight of hand to siphon off a tremendous amount of money that should go to a charity. So I'm a strong supporter of all the forms and applications and audits and reports. I know that they're as long as your arm, but I think they're required because we are dealing with cash money that could easily go astray. I'm very confident that it doesn't go astray. If we hear even a hint that there may be a little bit of money that hasn't been used appropriately as per the request, we have audit teams who would go in and very closely scrutinize that. That is strongly supported by the Auditor General.

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute. As you mentioned, they had their annual meeting and conference in Banff this past weekend. Yes, we are in the final throes, if you will, of signing a five-year contract with them, which does give them assurance as opposed to year by year. At the moment it's set at \$1.5 million, but that is something, I guess, that could be negotiated over that five years. The assurance they have is that we're going to be funding them over a five-year contract. It's my understanding that they're agreeable to the terms that have been laid out, and so are we. So it's just a matter of days or weeks until that is signed. Certainly, they're still getting their funding. That hasn't been cut off or anything like that.

Of the money that they've got to this point, a lot of it has been used for what they call capacity building: getting staff on board in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge, where they operate in those three communities. Now that the staff and, kind of, the overhead is up and in place, we feel that it's adequate for them at the moment to carry out the research that they want to carry out.

I, as well, spoke to the fellow from Ontario who suggested that if Ontario gave their researchers \$4 million, Alberta was being a little chintzy. But if you look at, perhaps, a number like the per capita contribution to gaming research by Alberta or by Ontario, I think we would stand in pretty good light.

I did attend two or three weeks ago the responsible gaming conference in Toronto, which had delegates from around the world. There were delegates there from New Zealand, Australia, Holland, and pretty well every province in Canada. The people that I talked to there felt that the Alberta government was quite generous in our contribution to research, and they admired the way that we not only gave them the money but the way we stayed out of their business once we gave them the money.

I can stand and say with a clear, clear conscience that we have never told them to hold back any of their research. We have never directed what results we want to see out of that research. We may give them topics that we would like to see researched, but that's it: no direction as far as what we expect from that report. Certainly, any of the research that they do, once it's vetted by their professionals and once they get their work done, they're free to post whatever they want on their website and circulate it. We've seen that some of their research has not been that favourable to what we're doing. I

admit that. But it's out there, and we accept their research for what it is.

Casinos. You're right; at the moment there are quite a few casinos that have gone through the eight-step process. We've talked about that in here before. It's a very complex and detailed process from step 1 right through to step 8. Step 8 is when all the due diligence has been done, all the partners and financial backers have been checked to the nth degree, and basically they're given permission to go ahead and construct a casino. They are not really given the licence to operate that casino until it's finished and ready to go. They have to prove that they've built what they said they were going to build and that it's equipped the way they said they were going to equip it.

As you mentioned, there are several, particularly First Nation, casinos that have received the okay to proceed, but at this point in time they're not proceeding. They're not constructing. Maybe they're still working on financing or whatever the case may be, or maybe there are internal band questions that they're trying to get settled amongst themselves. At any rate, they are not proceeding at this point in time, and we just need to wait and see whether they proceed or not.

We open up tourist destination areas. We kind of block our casinos into those areas. We open up those areas for applications and say, for example, "Okay, the board feels that there's room for another casino in the greater Edmonton area," which they did, oh, a year and a half or two years ago. I think it was even before I came on board. But they opened up that area. There were several applications, and at the end of the day there was one application approved. That casino is under construction in northeast Edmonton. There are no areas open at the present time that I'm aware of. That's not to say that someone couldn't come along and say, "We think there's room for another casino in the northeast part of the province" or wherever the case may be and start down the eight-step process.

8:40

In that process the board looks very closely and very detailed at the market and determines, as you said, whether all we're doing is taking revenue from one charity over here and giving it to another one there. There's not much point in having people work twice as hard for half as much money. So they are very careful about, if you will, awarding a casino licence or giving people their approval after the eight steps and take into consideration that the market is what they're looking at.

There is no question that a concern right now, the Enoch casino – we're sure that it will be a smoking casino. It's outside of the city of Edmonton, so the city bylaws governing smoking will have no impact on that casino that they're building there. It's a \$120 million project, I believe. It's a 12-storey hotel operated by Marriott. I've been out to tour it under construction. It will be a first-class operation. It'll be something that certainly the Enoch band can be proud of, and Albertans can be proud that we're building casinos that are tourist draws and destinations. Part of their casino will include – actually, finished already are twin ice arenas, indoor ice arenas attached to that casino. There are entertainment rooms. They have plans for soccer pitches and ball diamonds and that sort of thing. The market they're after is adult tournaments and bonspiels, if you will, to have those people stay in their hotel, use their recreational facilities, including the casino, of course, as a recreational facility.

There are approved applications at the moment. One is very close to construction in Camrose. That's the only traditional casino that I know of that has gone the eight steps, has approval to start construction. They may have moved a construction trailer onto the site, but that's about as far as they've got at this point in time. The

other traditional casino that has been approved, the only other one, is the one in northeast Edmonton. It's well under construction, but the completion date is many months down the road.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. As the previous critic in this area, you know, your interest never goes away. I've been listening carefully. We're still not getting a clear answer on whether we're going to see any specific criteria for the slush fund known as other initiatives. That has been put on the record very clearly by the Auditor General. I'll ask one more time to see if we're going to get anything clearly laid out as to criteria. I did manage to sort of wheedle a vague criteria out of the previous minister in one of our exchanges during a budget debate, which did set out that it was for larger amounts of money, that it could involve grants that carried over a fiscal year which allowed the government to channel much larger, in the millions of dollars towards certain projects, that it was at the discretion of the minister, that it's not publicly known that this exists. You have to kind of be an insider. So it does look like a slush fund. You're going to have to work hard here to get on the record and convince me otherwise because by any definition, my friend, that's what it looks like. So I'd certainly encourage you to be able to get that criteria clearly stated and as part of information that is publicly available should the public seek it out.

Another question that has arisen many times over the years and I would like to raise again is that we often hear that government MLAs have control over the CFEP money or the CIP money that is available in their constituency. What we're led to believe is that there's an allocation or that the money is divided up equally or somewhat equally in every constituency, but the government MLAs are aware of how much money, and they orchestrate how much money and who gets what in their constituency. I'd like to hear what the minister's take on this is.

I recently had a group approach me and say that they were trying to get some money for a playground. They had gone to their local MLA and were told by the office staff, well, so and so only gave X amount of money for playgrounds, and they were looking for a more significant playground. I think that it was actually a multicomunity playground. They were looking for more money and were trying to talk to me about what other sources were available. I was really interested in their having been told that so and so MLA for blah blah, you know, only allocated X amount of money. I was really interested in that because I thought the decision was made through very careful criteria that were set out and administered by civil servants. Once again this little issue keeps raising its little head, so I'd like to get the minister on record for that one.

Could I also know, please, what year of the three-year cycle we're in with both the CFEP and the CIP grants? I understand that those still go on a three-year cycle and that the minister does decide at the end of every three years whether the program will be extended or not. Could you let me know what year we're in and whether there's anticipation that it will be rolled over and started again?

I'm also interested in another issue that has come up before, and that's an issue around double-dipping. Now, strictly speaking, in my definition of double-dipping that would be getting paid from two or more sources for the same activity. I know that a while back there was some real interest from the government members around organizations like arts organizations getting operational funding through AFA but at that time also applying for special project money through Community Development. I suppose in that mix could also be considered a grant from CFEP. There was great pressure not to allow this terrible double-dipping, which at the time I argued wasn't

double-dipping because they were doing different projects for the grant money they were getting from each different grant. I'm interested in whether the Gaming ministry has a policy on double-dipping, question one. Question two, how do they define it? Question three, are they anticipating putting anything in place over this fiscal year or in the three-year business plan cycle that we're looking at that would restrict any organization from applying for more than one grant from government no matter what the source?

Here's another example. I know that a number of golf courses can get funding from one source, and then they're going back and getting CFEP money. Good example. Is that considered double-dipping if they're getting sort of operational funding or repeated funding from another source and then they're getting a CFEP grant? I'm mostly interested in hearing whether there is any move towards restricting organizations to only applying for one kind of grant, and that would include a CFEP grant. This one's come around before, minister, and I've argued successfully that CFEP and CIP should not be in the mix because they're for a different purpose, but I'd just like to know where we're at with that.

Finally, I'd like to hear a discussion from the minister on the horse-racing initiative. Now, when this initiative was first announced – and I'm thinking that we're not sure where we are in this three-year cycle, but I'd bet you that we're probably seven or eight years into this initiative – it was three years. It was to be, I think, up to \$45 million over three years. It was a very finite program which was intended to increase the racing purses to attract and rejuvenate the horse-racing industry.

At the time I did an awful lot of research into what was the future of the horse-racing industry, and what I found out was that it's dying. The number of race days that everybody is having are reducing and reducing. Essentially, the bettors were more interested in betting on a simulcast of a big race like the Kentucky Derby or the Queen's Plate or whichever one you want to come up with. They found it more interesting to bet on the really good, big races that could be simulcast than on a local race. There were fewer and fewer local race dates. What it was looking like was that the – I'm going to apologize in advance here because I can't remember how they're rated – racetracks like Edmonton and Calgary, whatever ranking they're in, were going to disappear. The small ones like Lethbridge may well make it because for some reason they could sustain their market, but for the other two, where you had bettors in Edmonton and Calgary, for instance, they wanted the big races to bet on.

8:50

That was supposed to be a finite project. Now here we are in, I think, the third cycle of this, and we're now up to giving the horse-racing initiative \$63 million a year. You're going to have to work hard to convince me that this isn't a massive propping up of a dying industry. I know that the Minister of Finance gets up and says: oh, all kinds of people make their money through the horse-racing industry. But, frankly, there are about 40 good breeders in this province, and they're the ones making the money off of this one. So I'd like the minister to explain to me why we are pouring \$63 million a year into a horse-racing industry that is dying, which essentially, it could be argued, benefits basically 40 breeding operations. That's a nice operation there.

I don't see improvements in the number of race days. I don't see improvements in the number of attendees at the racetracks. I do see an increase at the racing entertainment centres, which is not the racetrack. That's a different deal. They're watching the simulcast there. I'm seeing the government continue to fund something without reporting back to this Legislative Assembly and to the people of Alberta about a particular project. I would argue that the

project has failed, and I'm questioning why we continue to see the government support the horse-racing initiative and increasing amounts every year, Mr. Minister. I mean, we started out, I think it was, at \$17 million and \$18 million, and then it went up a bit. Now we're doing \$63 million a year.

When I look at things like hot lunch programs, when I look at housing initiatives, when I look at all kinds of projects in this province, frankly, I'm really angry when I see \$63 million going to horse racing. You know, I look at my small business people in downtown Edmonton that are looking for a break or venture capital or a way to get going. They don't get to access that money. They're certainly not one of the 40 breeding operations. What's the deal here? I know that you guys take a lot of flack about this. I know that you get teased a lot about it. Frankly, you should because along with your slush fund I think that this horse-racing initiative is a highly questionable activity on behalf of the government.

Finally, to wrap up, could the minister discuss whether it was considered how addicted to gambling revenue this government is and whether there is any kind of discussion or study or analysis that is going on right now as to backing off the dependency that the government now has with over a billion dollars of revenue being generated for the province from the proceeds of gambling? That revenue is not rising at the same accelerated rate as it was, but nonetheless it continues to get higher every year. Does the ministry just have a policy of, "Great; let it keep rolling in; we're going to keep using it," or is there any anticipation that, you know, it's inappropriate for a provincial government to be addicted to gambling revenues and that we're going to start backing off by 10 per cent a year for 20 years or whatever until we don't engender that or what? I'm wondering what your actual philosophy and attitude are about the government itself bringing in revenue on a regular basis and anticipating that revenue through gambling sources.

I've gone through about five major topic areas there. Understandably, you may not have some of the detailed responses that I'm seeking or the more thorough responses, and I'm happy to accept those in writing if you could endeavour to get those to me. I know you've got crack staff. If you could try and get those to me in writing before I'm expected to vote on the final budget, I would appreciate that because then I could be doing it with that information in my head.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Graydon: Okay. Well, I'll answer some, and some, obviously, you will end up getting in writing too.

We started off with other initiatives, and you're right, it tends to be large amounts. It certainly tends to be too much to handle in one year in some cases, so we spread it out over two or three years, and that does happen on the larger projects.

Another organization – autism, I believe it was. My colleague back here isn't available at the moment, but that was just another one that came to mind. The Autism Society in Calgary, the new Ronald McDonald House in Calgary, Rotary Challenger Park in Calgary: those are the kinds of projects which tend to be multimillion dollar projects. As I say, you know, it's nice to have the other initiatives fund to draw that from because that leaves the \$30 million that we talked about in CFEP and CIP for the smaller projects, and we do a lot of them.

You talked about government control. You know, they are very carefully examined by staff. Every application goes in to staff. I can assure you that there isn't a constituency in the province that's left out, that every constituency accesses that fund, and you might be surprised that some of the opposition constituencies end up getting more money than government constituencies. It's not really a

criteria when we look at the applications. It's: is it a good application? Does the staff say that it's a good application? Is there money available? If the answer is yes, that's just the way it's handled.

We're in the first year of a three-year cycle, you mentioned.

Ms Blakeman: On CFEP?

Mr. Graydon: Both of them, yes, I believe.

Your discussion about double-dipping was interesting. There are certainly no new restrictions planned, and I don't consider it to be double-dipping because the programs are so different. CFEP is very clearly a capital program. CIP can be operational funds, so you can get funds to hire staff to get you going on a new program, a not-for-profit. Maybe they need someone to do some computer programming for them, or they want to hire a staff member to go out and raise funds for them, a fundraiser so to speak. They can access CIP for that. It's not capital. The programs are very different.

The Foundation for the Arts. Certainly there are groups that get money from the Foundation for the Arts. There's no question about it. They also can apply for specific project funding under those programs. I've never ever considered that double-dipping. The uses are very different.

Horse racing. Oh, we could talk for a long time about horse racing, but I obviously need to start out with the thing that we always start out with, that there's not one nickel given to horse racing until somebody plays a loonie at the slot machine at the racetrack. If you play the slot machine at the Casino Yellowhead, Horse Racing Alberta gets nothing from that, not a penny. But if you go to Northlands and play the slot machines there, there are flow-through funds that go to Horse Racing Alberta, there are flow-through funds that go to Northlands Park, and there are flow-through funds that go to the Alberta lottery fund. So there are several partners in the money that's generated at a racing entertainment centre.

The industry is being rejuvenated. If you ask people in the industry, they are spending more money on breeding stock. I talked to a fellow on the weekend who said that as a result of the rejuvenated industry, the fact that the purses were going up and that it looked like there might be a new racetrack built in Calgary, he was investing \$400,000 in a new barn down near Olds, Alberta. He said he had staff – oh, he employed two or three trainers, and I forget how many people; anyway, considerable staff – and he said that if it wasn't for the horse-racing renewal initiative, he would be out of the business, guaranteed, 100 per cent not involved. So the money that he's earning through purses is allowing him to reinvest in the business and increase the product.

Handle is the term used to indicate the amount of money bet on horse racing. The handle for simulcast racing is going up. You're very correct that people like to bet on the Kentucky Derby and the Breeders' Cup, but they also like to bet on the Premier's cup in Alberta and the big stakes races in Alberta because the purses are higher, the quality of the animal is higher, and it's a more predictable race to handicap, if there is such a thing. The purses are going up in simulcast, and the live handle is going up as well. I believe this is the only jurisdiction in North America that's seeing an increase in handle. So that speaks something about the initiative that we're taking to renew the industry: the only jurisdiction where the handle is increasing as opposed to going in the tank. If you look across North America, you'll see that in a lot of cases they're called 'racinos,' a combination of racetrack and casino, and just about every state in the U.S. has gone that way to support the horse-racing industry because they are finding that it's a good mix of entertainment. There are people who go to the racetrack for the entertain-

ment value of the racing, and there are people who go there for the entertainment value of the slot machines. We're happy to provide that entertainment for them.

9:00

It's a little bit misleading to say that there are only a few breeders benefiting. I would like to think of the several hundred people who work in the backstretch cleaning stalls and exercising horses at Northlands, Stampede, Evergreen Park in Grande Prairie, and in Whoop-Up Downs in Lethbridge. In a lot of cases those people would be almost unemployable if they weren't doing those jobs, and they're doing a very good job of it. They're well respected and well treated. They take advantage of the daycare centre that's been provided at Northlands specifically, so if they have families, they can do their job and put their children in the daycare centre that's on track.

There are a lot more people and a lot more economic spinoffs than just to a few breeders. You know, the horse isn't much good if it's not being fed, if it's not being cleaned, if it's not being watered, if it's not being exercised, trained, or if somebody doesn't ride it around the track in a race. There are even jockeys who are benefiting from this. We can talk about horse racing forever. We'll agree to disagree, and that's kind of the way it's going to be.

The figure of \$63 million, I believe you threw out, is a complete estimate. That's exactly what it is. It's a very mathematical calculation. Number of machines, dollars per hour into the machine, number of hours that they're open, based on past performance: here's how much potential there is to earn. Now, it can go down or it can go up, but it's our best guess, if you will, of what is available at those racetracks.

It's particularly hard to predict over the next couple of years because of the new track in Calgary, which is talked about and appears to be moving ahead, but the start-up date keeps getting moved back. So we put money in our estimates, that we think the track in Calgary will generate so many dollars, and then they say: oh, we won't be open that year; we won't be open until a year later. So those estimates are pretty fluid, and we just do the best that we can and hope that they get that project going.

You talked about whether the government is hooked on gaming, if you will, or addicted to gaming. Certainly, we are unique in Canada with the charitable model, and I guess I have to ask the question: we know there's going to be gaming, so who do you want in it? Do you want the Bandidos, the Hells Angels, or the government of Alberta? Who do you want to be in the gaming business in Alberta, because where will the profits go? Where will the profits go from organized crime? Organized crime will be in gaming if the government isn't in gaming. Guaranteed, 100 per cent they would be in the business, and you wouldn't see one nickel going to your playground or one nickel going to the Foundation for the Arts or one nickel going to any of the good causes that we support every single day.

So, yes, we're in the business, and we're going to stay in the business. We are going to keep it current. Eighty per cent of Albertans are responsible gamblers. They think of it as a good form of entertainment. They go. It's not an issue with them. It's just a good night out, and away they go. Yes, we know that there's about 5 per cent of the people that have the potential – potential – for an addiction problem, and of that, less than 2 per cent will be the people that you read about, unfortunately, in the paper that stole from their employer or lost the family home or whatever the case may be. We know those numbers. We work very hard at reducing them.

We make improvements every single year. We take initiatives. We just opened responsible information centres. We opened one in the Palace Casino in Edmonton a month ago. We're opening

another one in Calgary in the next week or two. They're staffed by trained addictions counsellors who are employees of AADAC. You can go up to that booth right on the casino floor and ask your questions about the true odds of a game. They're told the truth about all these fallacies, that if you pull the handle, you might win, and if you push the button twice, you're going to lose, and all these false theories. The truth is told to them that, no, that makes absolutely no difference at all. It's a random number generated, that you absolutely one hundred per cent cannot influence the outcome of that slot machine. The only thing that's a hundred per cent guaranteed is that if you play long enough, you're going to lose all your money.

So they're told that. They're handed brochures if they want that. If they want to have a private meeting, there are private rooms to go with the addictions counsellor and get that information. That's just the latest initiative that we've taken to help people, and we will continue with that. That particular program is a two-year pilot program, and if it proves to be successful, as it appears to be taking off and that it will be successful, then it will be expanded across the province.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark raised an issue with respect to the rules on smoking at the proposed casino at the Enoch First Nation. One of the questions that I would have for the minister is that I understand that the Enoch casino would not be subject to the smoking bylaws of the city of Edmonton. However, my question is whether or not that casino will be subject to the laws of the province of Alberta and, therefore, subject to any future regulations restricting smoking. In other words, is there something in the granting of the casino licence which provides that they will conform to any future regulations regarding smoking?

A second question that I have is relating to the apparent proliferation of casino groups, the groups that obtain the two-day casino licences. There seems to be some significant change in the makeup of those types of groups. Whereas once they were largely community associations, charitable groups of broader interest and broader participation in the community, they seem increasingly to be more small, ethnic or sports-oriented groups that have a very narrow focus and whatnot, and it seems like the legitimate community groups are having to wait longer and longer in the lineup to get their casino licences.

Thirdly, there was one other issue that I wanted to raise, and it was with respect to the community poker tournaments. I'm led to believe that there could be permission given to communities to operate these Texas hold'em type tournaments provided that the house does not take any of the proceeds of the gaming or the buy-in. I wonder if the minister could clarify what the rules are relating to those particular issues.

Mr. Graydon: Sure. Well, to deal with the smoking on reserve, certainly, as far as the operation of the machines and that sort of thing our agreement is that, as with other casinos, the government owns the slot machine. The First Nation or the casino operator owns the chair you sit at. He owns the ashtray that's sitting there if you happen to be in a smoking casino, pays the staff, owns everything else in the place. The First Nations are going to honour those same regulations.

I think that if they decide that it's going to be a smoking casino, it will be a smoking casino, and there's nothing that the province of Alberta can do. They are a First Nation under federal government rules and regulations if they're even governed under those. We're seeing an issue in eastern Canada as we speak, I believe, about

jurisdiction and rules. So I think they're pretty well calling their own shots when it comes to smoking in that casino.

9:10

Your mention of charities is an interesting one. If there's any real pressure that the department gets, it's not for less casinos. It's for more, and it's for more casinos from charitable groups who are not happy with the three-, four-year wait that they have to get in to work a casino. As groups have found, you know, bingo revenues have gone down, but, boy, you can make a nice little ton of change by working a casino. So more and more groups, as you said, are applying. As a result, the wait-list has gotten longer and longer and longer. So they're saying, well, you know, build us another casino. We're not really sure that that's the answer. As I said, there's not much point in having you work twice as hard and make half as much money.

The other issue that we're finding, of course, is that casino revenues are pooled. If you happen to work a city casino, at the end of the quarter your pooled share may be \$70,000 or \$80,000. If you're working a rural casino in Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Red Deer, some of those more rural locations, the pooled amount that your charity would receive would be probably about half that much. So they're not particularly happy about that as well.

The other issue that we're finding and you mentioned is the smaller groups. One of the regulations is that, number one, you have to have approval for what you're going to spend your charitable money on. Secondly, you have to spend it in two years. Some of these groups are making so much money, they're having trouble spending it in two years. Then they apply for extensions, or they try and get another project going or whatever the case may be. So they've been maybe more successful than some people are expecting.

I know that the commission is doing a review at the moment about the whole idea of pooling and the whole idea about spending the money in two years and the whole question of wait-lists. They're trying to come up with some solutions. If there are any issues, as I said, that are raised with the department, those are the most prevalent that end up on my desk.

Poker tournaments: oh, yeah, an interesting topic. Everybody is caught up in poker fever these days. You can't turn on your television set in the evening or maybe in the daytime too – I'm not sure. Certainly, there isn't a minute that goes by that you can't be watching some kind of a poker tournament on TV. As a result, it has caught on around the province. It has become extremely popular at the casinos. They have 24-hour poker rooms where people go 24 hours a day: go off shift at midnight, and go play poker if you want. It is a card game controlled by the Criminal Code of Canada, so we need to be conscious of the rules that they have in place. Yes, the rule is that if the house is taking a cut or profiting in any way from that poker game, then it's illegal. That's just the way it is.

So the not-for-profit groups, to my knowledge: I don't think any of them have been approved at this point in time, but I'm not sure. I don't know of any at any rate. But another group like – well, there are groups that say: we don't charge so much per hand for playing poker, but we charge everybody, you know, \$10 for the coffee that they're going to drink or something. Well, no, I'm sorry. All of the money from the poker game has to be distributed to the poker players. The house can't take a cut unless you're playing at a licensed casino in the province of Alberta.

Chair's Ruling Speaking Order

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the first speaker that was recognized did indicate to the chair that he wanted to use the 20

minutes back and forth, but none of the other speakers indicated that upfront. Now I do have requests from Calgary-Nose Hill as well as Edmonton-Centre to go again. However, because I've been keeping track of people who identified that they want to speak, the chair will recognize members in the following order – and in between the minister will be recognized to respond – Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Nose Hill.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps, upfront, I would like to be able to exchange back and forth if that would be permissible.

The Deputy Chair: We will allow that, hon. member.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. It's been a very interesting conversation that has gone back and forth, and I've changed my position many times on where I should start. I think I'll go back to where I was originally going to start, and that goes back to the criteria of applications for CFEP and CIP and the other initiative programs. It is very frustrating for the people that have contacted me on what the actual criteria are in making those applications, and when they've been turned back to them, there's never any explanation, really, saying why or what they need to change or do to help them with applications. I've received the criteria from the Gaming minister, but still as I go back to the various organizations, a number one concern of the people that contact me is that they don't understand what the criteria are. As the good Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out – I'm disturbed to hear that it's not just my area that has been told that the MLAs have a certain amount of money that they're allotted to give out in their constituency.

Ms Blakeman: Government MLAs.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Government MLAs. Thank you for that correction. A very critical point to point out.

I've had many organizations, whether they're historical societies or libraries or whatever else, that are very much under the impression that the government MLAs have a slush fund that they can allocate to their area and very much make those people dependent on those MLAs. So I would appreciate the minister getting up again and clarifying that so that I can take *Hansard* back to explain to the good people of my constituency that this is not government policy and to clarify that because it would be my number one major concern with this ministry.

To jump back now, I was shocked to hear the government say that we want to be in the gambling business because if we don't, we have illegal organizations that want to participate and take up that area. This is unbelievable to me, and I guess I have to wonder if the think tanks are looking at opening up legal government drug centres to compete with the Hells Angels and those organizations so that therefore people won't be going to these illegal organizations. Perhaps we're going to be opening up Vegas chicken homes, or prostitution centres, so that people won't be going to illegal facilities.

I'm just wondering if this is government thought and process on how we're going to limit all of these vices that are a curse to our society, that we're going to go into competition and make it legal for government but illegal for anybody who isn't in government. Like I say, that was quite startling to me, and I'd like some clarification on that if we're going to be expanding our gaming and lottery to entertainment as well and other areas in that direction.

I would like to address to the minister at this time that the other initiatives program has done a lot of good in the province. I won't argue with that, but I still have problems. Many of the people say to me: why do we have to be dependent on this? They love the old heritage trust fund and that area where they were making applications. But with the other initiatives program has the Warner Hockey School ever contacted the ministry to look at something like that? With the money that we see going into horse racing and other areas, I think maybe this other initiative should be going to special schools. There's one in Vauxhall wanting to open up for baseball development and the Warner hockey school, which I still think would be an outstanding project here in the province. I would ask the minister that he maybe look into that or set up a meeting with the Warner hockey school on making that application because there is a fair amount of money that's needed there.

Perhaps it's just my shortness of time, but the minister has talked about the amount of funds coming in from horse racing, and I can't see the line. I see the line where there's \$63 million going out to horse racing. I would appreciate it if he could point out to me the money that has actually come in and the flow-through fund that he talks about to see what the actual income is from the horse racing. If he could point that out for me, I would really appreciate it.

Maybe I'll just let him answer those few questions, and then we'll proceed if that's okay, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Graydon: Well, sure. I guess that when it comes to CFEP and CIP, I'll repeat what I said before. There is not a constituency, including yours, that has not received many, many grants. There's not a constituency that hasn't been refused a few as well. That goes across the province. It's based on the application. It's based on the money in the fund. The MLAs in all cases are invited. If you want to put in a letter of support to the group, you're certainly welcome to do that. Some MLAs do; some don't. It's their own personal initiative whether the group approaches them for a letter of support. I don't have my list tonight, but I certainly have a list of projects in Cardston-Taber-Warner that have been funded through both those programs.

9:20

Yes, I can give you a list of ones that have been refused too. The reasons why? You know, I don't have those details. The staff has a rating system, and they check off various points. Number one, is it a registered, not-for-profit society? I mean, that's question 1. Is the use of proceeds something that we would consider appropriate for the use of gaming funds? I suspect that that's maybe where your Warner hockey school falls into. I have met with that group. I've had a presentation from them. I went to Calgary, actually, and had an audiovisual presentation from that hockey school. It is a good project, and they to date have been unsuccessful. It is a school. I don't know if it's classed as a charter school or not, but I think of it as that because it's very specifically geared to young ladies, I believe, who want to pursue careers in hockey. We don't use lottery money to fund school programs. We don't. I'm sorry. We may top up the computer budget, or we may buy some equipment for the gymnasium, but we don't pay teachers' salaries and we don't build schools out of lottery funds.

I'm not sure, but I'd probably have a question back to you about: should the government be in the gaming business? Do you think prohibition works? If you do, by gosh, there are a lot of people involved in the liquor industry and in the gaming industry that would like to talk to you. I don't think it works. I'm very comfortable in saying that if government wasn't regulating gaming and if government wasn't regulating alcohol in this province, those two products

would still be available in Alberta. There are costs and there are benefits to both these businesses, guaranteed. We know that, and we have to, if you will, put up with some of the costs, but we also are able to take advantage of some of the benefits. I think that all Albertans should be involved in the benefits as opposed to a select few who are maybe pursuing illegal activities.

On the other things you talked about, I guess common sense would answer those questions.

Mr. Hinman: I guess I'll comment on prohibition versus promoting. I think there's quite a difference. I have to comment that I guess it seems like this government is very much promoting these industries, and I don't see them as great.

Another question I have is going back to the problem gambling research that is going forward. Albertans are definitely grateful for that program that's there, but has there been specific research done on a cost benefit? Is it really a benefit to society? I have to ask the question. We're promoting gaming and lottery, and it's playing on a human weakness of wanting to receive something for nothing. That hope that we can get something is a very intriguing carrot, especially to the people with lower incomes. They have that desire that this is my one lucky chance to buy the lottery ticket, to win at horse racing. What is the impact on those lower income Albertans that seem to be the ones that are there the most?

With that logic that the government is going forward with, it seems like I'd have to ask the question: should we not be promoting smoking, then, and increasing taxes so that we can have a better benefit to Albertans? We know that the answer to that is no. We don't benefit from promoting smoking and having a heavy tax and say: well, it's going to offset the other illnesses in our society. I feel the same about gambling. Why do we want to promote it and see so much advertisement for lottery, gaming, and those activities? I feel that that's a wrong direction, to be trying to intrigue and increase the number of Albertans that come to these facilities, whether they're casinos, whether they're bingo facilities. It just seems like a poor route to be going down.

No, I'm not advocating prohibition, but I'm certainly not advocating the amount of promoting that we do. Along with that promoting, the toughest thing is that one of the better ways in order to, I guess, create loyalty is by creating dependency. Many of the charitable organizations, many of the sports facilities, the arts, all of those areas that are benefiting at this point from gaming feel very loyal to it and the promotion of it because they're dependent on their organizations. Without it they couldn't succeed. I would urge the government to look at other ways, perhaps taking a percentage of our oil royalties and saying, "This is going to go to these other facilities," and not having them be dependent on gaming and lottery. That's the game that we've played, and people have to line up in the queue to participate in those areas. I don't think that it's for the betterment of our society.

You mentioned a rating system and, first, is it a charitable organization and those areas. Is that open public knowledge, and do we have access to know what that rating system is? More importantly, when a facility or an organization has asked for funding, does the rating come back and say, "Well, you only scored 55 out of a hundred, and you need to get over 65"? This is the area where I'm asking. They really have no idea where they're out of line or if there's something that they need to change in their facility. They don't know how to reapply, yet they're in dire need. I've very much as an MLA endorsed many of them asking for funds, yet we seem to be running into a brick wall and not able to reach that.

I'll make the comment and the question, I guess, that I hear too often. Who's addicted more to gambling: the government or the

people that are participating in it or those who are receiving the funds doing it? I think it's something that we need to take a couple of steps back and look at and look at the best interests of Alberta and come to a little bit better balance because it seems like we're all rushing to the lottery fund, and I don't feel that it's healthy.

I'll let the minister perhaps respond to those.

Mr. Graydon: Well, first, let me say that there is a huge demand for the kind of entertainment we're providing. If there wasn't, nobody would show up. Okay? If there was no demand, we wouldn't be building casinos. If there wasn't, we wouldn't have applications for companies to build new casinos. If there wasn't a demand, I wouldn't have these charities saying: build more because we want the waiting time to be cut down. So there is a huge demand for the entertainment that's provided at a casino.

When it comes to advertising, you will never see a government advertisement saying: go play the local casino. Western Canada Lottery advertises the 6/49, for example, and those kinds of things. Western Canada Lottery is made up of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and we're a shareholder in Western Canada Lottery. They do advertise and buy advertising in sports facilities and that sort of thing, but certainly the government of Alberta doesn't advertise. The casino owners can advertise. They advertise entertainment that they're featuring on the weekend and that sort of thing, but I can assure you that no part of the government's budget for advertising is saying, "Go down and play poker tonight or go down and play roulette" or something like that.

Your comment about cost benefit is very timely in that the whole conference that was just held in Banff was centred around: is there cost benefit? And there is. The researchers are having trouble getting their heads around what the criteria might be. How do you measure it? They talked around it for several days, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was there. He spent more time at the conference than I did, and I'm sure that he will reconfirm that they were having a hard time getting their heads around: how do we measure the cost, and how do we measure the benefit in terms of coming up with something that makes sense? There would be no argument that there is a cost and there is a benefit. No argument. But how do you measure it into a number or a statement that is reliable and accurate and makes sense?

9:30

When it comes to CFEP and CIP applications, I know that we have excellent staff both in Edmonton and Calgary. You would be dealing with the people out of the Calgary office. I know that if they get an incomplete application, those kinds of things, they're the first ones on the phone back to the group saying: "Here's what we need. Here's what you left out. Here's what we're looking for." They may not call back if it's a rejection, but certainly they try and help them through the process. Their job is to get as many of these applications fulfilled and as many groups satisfied as possible. As I mentioned, that's getting tougher with the costs that are going up; the money is running out quicker than we would like. But I can assure you that our staff try if at all possible.

We had an issue a while ago about some people applying for a nonmatching part of a grant where it was supposed to be matching. Those are the kinds of things where the staff will say: no, we can help you through that. Not every grant has to be matching. Even if it says it's a matching component, there are parts in there that we can waive, depending on the circumstances, the organization. The staff are the first ones to tell them that that's an option and to help them through it.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, you have about three minutes.

Mr. Hinman: Super. That's all I'll take.

I appreciate the minister and the information and the enlightenment that I've received. I'll just make a quick comment about the advertising and billboards. We banned alcohol and tobacco signs at sports events, and they said that they'd never survive. You've mentioned that there is an increased demand, and I don't argue with that at all, but it's that promoting. I think that these facilities could go on if, in fact, we didn't have the billboards and the advertisement that goes on. They just checker the highways as you're going into the cities to come to this casino, come to this area. I go back to the cost benefit, perhaps Adam Smith's invisible hands, that we're not looking at the real cost to those people, that 5 per cent, and how devastating it is to their families. How do you put a price on that? I would urge the minister to continue looking at those things.

I appreciate the answers that I received. I'll probably have to come to his office to try and help facilitate a few of those applications from my area, but thank you.

Mr. Graydon: Just one quick point on the revenues. Actually, ticket revenue from 6/49 and the scratch-and-win, those kinds of lotteries, is going down. It was the big deal a few years ago, when it was first introduced, because it was the first kind of lottery we had, the 6/49 and the big payouts and all that sort of stuff, but now there are other entertainment options, so the gross sales of those kinds of products are on the decline as opposed to increasing.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I just had to get up in response to some of the comments that the minister made. Now, come on, Mr. Minister. How long are we going to quibble about whether or not the money that goes to the horse-racing initiative is made possible by the government? Of course it's made possible by the government. If you want to quibble about whether it's coming directly into government coffers and then going back out again, fine. Play that game. We all know that it's through the government's acquiescence and actual facilitation of the process that that money, \$63 million, is going to the horse-racing initiative and not going to a hot lunch program.

Now, because it's going into the slot machine, it's being counted in the count room and a higher percentage cut off and left there for the organizations. Usually, it would be scooped up, come back to the government, flow through, and go back out to other organizations through whatever lottery-funded initiative you want to talk about, be it AFA, Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife, Wild Rose, CFEP, CIP, whatever.

What is happening there is that the money is going to that horse-racing initiative, and it is foregone revenue from those other granting funds and ultimately from other organizations in the community. That money, \$63 million, if it was not flowing through to a horse-racing initiative, would be going into the rest. That extra 35 per cent that's going to the horse-racing initiative that allows them to make that money would be going back to the government and would be coming out to the rest of the groups through one of the other lottery foundations.

You could call it some other name if you want, but let's face it: the government is facilitating this process. Frankly, I just think you look silly trying to pretend that because everybody knows that 63 million bucks is going to the horse-racing initiative. For the minister to constantly stand up and wave his hands and say, "Oh, no, no, it's

not the government that's granting this money," you just look silly because everybody knows 63 million bucks is going there, and it wouldn't be going there without the government.

The other thing raised both by myself and by the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner that the minister has sidestepped again is about who makes the decision about the CFEP and CIP grants. Both of us have asked the minister to confirm or deny that government MLAs have a direct role and perhaps total decision-making power for the CIP money that is allocated to their particular constituency. The minister has given the same response, that there are criteria that are looked at, et cetera, et cetera. He's sidestepping the question we're asking. So one more time: who makes the decision in all 83 constituencies consistently? Do we have the staff doing it according to criteria laid out, or do we have a second scenario where in constituencies where there is a government MLA in place, the government MLA makes the decision about how much money is happening? So I'll put that one on the record one more time.

I'd like to go back again on the horse-racing initiative and ask: what is the criteria that is being used to measure the success? The minister claims that the horse-racing initiative is successful. By what criteria are you doing that? You're talking about an increased handle. Okay. Let's see what your performance measurement is there. What's your target? I don't see that in your business plan. So what exactly is the performance measurement that you're using? What's your criteria? What's your target? How's that all coming out?

And, please, trying to tell me that the people that muck out the horse barns are somehow getting a cut of this \$63 million: I mean, it's going through to the breeding operations. That was the point of it. That's why it was set up. It was supposed to be going to the breeders and to the larger purses.

The other thing that's of interest. The minister was talking about the new problem gambling initiatives that are happening on site in casinos. One of the interesting things about that is that there's a 48-hour cooling-off period. So if you go in there and go, "I've got a serious problem, and I want to register as a problem gambler so you won't let me in here; I want to take advantage of that program," they say, "Absolutely; no problem; come back in 48 hours." Well, what's the use in that? They were ready to do it then. That's like somebody saying, "I'm ready to quit smoking; give me the patch; I'm going to slap it on; I'm ready to go," and someone says, "No, no; come back in, you know, two or three days, and then we'll give you the patch." If they're ready to go, they're ready to go. Why is there a 48-hour, or maybe it's 24-hour, cooling-off period?

We've tried three times here, between the efforts of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and myself, to get the minister on the record as to the clear, measurable criteria for the slush fund, and again the minister has sidestepped it and not answered the question directly. So I will take it, then, that there is a refusal on behalf of the minister or the ministry to follow the recommendations of the Auditor General to put those in place.

Those are the rebuttals that I wanted to make while I had the opportunity. Thank you very much for the exchange that I've had from the minister today. I appreciate it very much.

Mr. Graydon: Okay. Well, contrary to what the hon. member might believe, not everyone feels the same way about the money going to the horse-racing industry. People understand that if the machines weren't at the racetrack, they wouldn't be getting a cut of it. They understand that it's another form of entertainment offered at the racetrack. Maybe a husband and wife go. The husband bets the horses, and the wife goes to play the slot machines.

9:40

Some of that money that's located in the facility at the racetrack is returned, flows through back to the industry. We're not trying to hide anything. The number \$63 million keeps coming out, but that's clearly an estimate of what might be earned. It is not a grant. It's not a guarantee. It is clearly an estimate of the percentage of revenue from the slot machines at racing entertainment centres. That's what they're called. That's what they are.

They don't qualify to be a racing entertainment centre if they don't offer live racing. You can't have a racing entertainment centre and just put a TV up on the wall and show a simulcast. That doesn't cut it. You don't get any money for that. You have to be a racing entertainment centre and offer so many days of live racing every year. That qualifies you to be called a racing entertainment centre and qualifies you to apply for some slot machines. At the moment there are four locations in Alberta: Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, Calgary, and Edmonton. Those are the only places that offer live racing and the only places that have racing entertainment centres.

The criteria that we use to see whether they're successful or not. Gosh, there are pages full of criteria that we measure and that Horse Racing Alberta measures. Handle is one of those things, how much is actually bet. The breeding stock in the province is another measurement, the amount of money that was spent purchasing that breeding stock, the number of Alberta-bred horses that are winning races. The amount of money won by Alberta-bred horses is another measurement. There are pages and pages of criteria that we use to measure if this thing is working or not. If it wasn't working, you'd see us retreating out of it, but it is working. The industry is getting healthier. I don't know. You can tell the guy in the backstretch that he doesn't deserve to get paid if you want, but he wouldn't have a job if we didn't have this program and if the breeder didn't hire him to do his work.

The 48-hour cooling period is clearly indicated on the self-exclusion form if you ask for the voluntary self-exclusion. It can be waived if they ask for it. There's not much point putting that on the form, you know: we have 48 hours, but if you don't want that, it can be. It's on there at the express opinion and advice of professional addictions counsellors at AADAC, who advised us on that form and said: you should have a 48-hour cooling period because you may get someone who is just there for the entertainment, but maybe that one particular night they lost more money than they thought they should have or they wanted to, so they say, "Okay, I'm going to sign that form." Well, once you sign that form, and once it's filed, I mean, it's a legal document, and you're not getting in anymore. If you get recognized, you're escorted out the door. That's it. They may decide in the 48-hour cooling period, the next day: "Gosh, this has only happened to me once in the past year when I lost \$200, and my limit's a hundred. It's happened to me once in the past year. Maybe I was being a little rash with that decision to sign that form last night." So that's why the 48-hour cooling period is there, fully supported by professionals from AADAC.

To answer the question about slush funds, there is no slush fund.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to seek some clarification from the hon. minister regarding the issue of smoking on the Indian reservations. While I recognize that the First Nations are not subject to some of Alberta's laws as they've got a primary relationship with the Crown in right of Canada, it's my understanding that the federal government conceded the right to regulate gambling to each of the provinces. It's also my understanding that

it's conceded that the Crown in right of Alberta has an undisputed right to regulate gambling within our boundaries. Given that the Enoch nation has gone through all of these eight steps, or however many there are, in order to apply to the government of Alberta for a casino facility licence, I must presume that they, too, have conceded the right to regulate the licences to the province of Alberta. So my simple question is: why can it not be made a term of granting the licence or a term of the contract that the facility would have to comply with the health regulations of the province of Alberta? That is my one question.

The second question that I have is: can the minister advise on the mechanism for allocating casino slot revenues and whether that is done on an equitable basis right across the province in Calgary and Edmonton and the rural areas?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, just before you respond, according to our rules in my opinion this appears to be asking for a legal opinion. That is not necessarily the purpose of the estimates, so you may proceed as you wish.

Mr. Graydon: Okay. Thanks. Yeah, if the Minister of Justice would be here. I know that he raised the question at the last meeting of Justice ministers from across Canada. His question was: if Internet gambling is illegal in Canada, how come the First Nations in Quebec are operating Internet gambling sites and the federal government is letting them get away with it? While the federal government says that they have to honour some of these rules, there are certain First Nations in this country who tend to ignore those Canadian rules and seem to be getting away with it. It is an issue that, unfortunately, I don't think we're going to solve in Alberta.

The question of the distribution of lottery funds. As mentioned, they're pooled, either urban or rural. In the city of Edmonton they're all classed as urban casinos. That amount of money is pooled, and at the end of the quarter it's divided equally amongst the charities that worked for that quarter. Rural casinos would include, I believe, St. Albert. Probably Grande Prairie is in the same pool. I'm not too sure. There aren't too many others out in the north rural part. They would be pooled. As mentioned, it's a concern in that, certainly, if you're participating in an urban pool, the charity is going to end up with a lot more money than those participating in a rural pool.

As I did mention, the commission is studying that issue at the moment. It's a bit of a no win because if we leveled it across the province, obviously the urban charities would cry foul, that they're getting less money, and the rural charities would be happy because they're getting more money. At the end of the day it probably will have to be a political decision.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few other quick comments. I was worried my three minutes had run out.

Dennis Gartman runs quite a famous investment letter. The most profound advice that he gives is: do more of what works and less of what doesn't work. I think very much that lottery and gambling and those areas are not something that work great for society. Once again I would urge that we look at doing less.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre brought up this 48-hour cooling-off period. I would like to talk about that a little bit. I was down at a committee meeting in Helena last week, and they got talking about gambling. I think it was in the state of Missouri where they actually have a list, where people with problems can go in and say, "I don't want to be allowed into these facilities again," and

they're banned. They can do it right there when they realize the problem, when they're in the remorse state, and not two days later. I just want to enforce what the Member for Edmonton-Centre is saying, that we need to address that and try to look at helping these people. If we wait until after the moment has passed, it's like somebody who's checking themselves into the hospital or something, and you say: well, you know, come back in 48 hours and see if it's still a problem. It just isn't in the best interest.

Another part about doing more of what works and less of what doesn't work. I find that these meetings like we're having here work much better in the conversation back and forth and the exchange of ideas, yet we're always limited to two hours. This afternoon, unable to speak on Education, it was very disappointing. I just want to make the point that maybe with some surplus money and funds you have left over – we have a \$4.3 billion teachers' fund liability debt. This province has had in the past a law that we had to have surplus go to eliminating the debt. Perhaps we need the different ministries, if they've got a surplus, to put that surplus into the teachers' pension fund. Maybe that would be a good place to go to eliminate the rest of our debt that we've incurred here.

9:50

Mr. Graydon: The voluntary self-exclusion program is one that we operate in the province. It's successful. There are several hundred people who have taken advantage of that program, have signed themselves out, if you will. There are very sophisticated cameras, et cetera, security devices at the front doors of these casinos. With the cameras they are able to recognize people who have signed the self-exclusion form. Some people even go so far as to try a disguise. They've signed the form, but then they say: oh, I want to go back. They try a disguise, and we've been able to stop them from going in. No, they're excluded, and that's all there is to it. The 48-hour clause, as I mentioned, is in there at the advice of trained addiction counsellors.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Just one more point about the voluntary exclusion plan. Wouldn't it make more sense to accept the form right away and then give them the 48 hours? If you really insist on that 48-hour plan, say: you can phone back in 48 hours, or you can come in. Accept it right away; not tell them to come back. Does that not make a little bit more sense?

You said that there are sophisticated cameras and all that sort of stuff. The woman I spoke to when I brought this matter up initially said that unless the people who run the casinos know you, there's no way anybody is actually going to be able to see you that well because it's just a book of photos. So unless the people who are running the casinos are well versed by leafing through all these photos, you can really circumvent this quite easily if you just go to a different city. If you go to Red Deer or Calgary and you're a regular in Edmonton, you can easily work your way around it. But if you really insist on that 48 hours, start it and then give them 48 hours to think it over.

Mr. Hinman: Buyer's remorse.

Mr. Tougas: Buyer's remorse. Exactly. Give them a chance to think it over. You know, if a drug addict comes in and says, "I have trouble," you don't tell him to come back in a couple of days. You help him then. I think you should apply the same rule to this.

Mr. Graydon: Well, to compliment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, my critic, he did bring that suggestion

forward when we discussed this earlier in the session at question period, and it made sense to me. I felt that it was made in a sincere attempt to help with this issue. I have sent that information over to the commission and asked them to follow up on that idea. I'm sure that they will follow up with AADAC. Maybe we'll see some changes; maybe we won't. But I can assure him that the idea was not thrown out of hand. It was advanced forward. Someone is checking to see whether that would be a positive move or not.

You probably can move from one city to the other and beat the system if you want. There's always a way to beat the system. Some of the casinos have more sophisticated security measures than others, if you will. Some of them have fantastic security cameras that can read a licence plate two blocks away and that sort of stuff.

It was just the last week or so that someone showed me this system where they input your photo into the computer. They actually ended up moving their camera so that they got a better shot of your face. Then there's software that will determine certain features, you know, if your left ear is lower than your right or whatever the case may be. The software puts all of that together and alerts the operator that this person is on the list.

True, we do depend on the staff at the front desk, at the security desk. Usually it's people trying to get back into the same one that they traditionally go to. You know, you may think: gosh, how can they remember a hundred people? They're probably not trying to remember a hundred people. There are probably many fewer than that at that one specific casino who would try to come back and would be caught. New technology will become more and more effective, and we want to help those people if we can. That's our goal.

The Deputy Chair: I guess that since we're dealing with the Gaming minister, I'm just tempted to state this. Calgary is leading 3-2, and Edmonton is leading 3-1. So that's a good sign from the Gaming minister. Alberta is leading both ways.

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Gaming for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Expense	\$201,627,000
Lottery Fund Payments	\$1,306,155,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I might point out that the Medicine Hat Tigers also won tonight.

I move that the committee rise so that we can report the estimates of the Department of Gaming.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply

has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Gaming: expense, \$201,627,000; lottery fund payments, \$1,306,155,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 29
Environmental Protection and
Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 29, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, proposes six amendments that will ensure that Albertans will continue to benefit from some of the most stringent environmental protection legislation in Canada. The first amendment will ensure that the emissions trading regulation, which came into effect on February 22, 2006, will have full authorization under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, making it one of the toughest regulations of its kind in North America. The amendment will allow the electricity sector to conduct emissions trading in nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide. One of the main areas of focus in our plan to address climate change is the development of technology to reduce emissions in Alberta. All of our compliance tools will be used to ensure that electricity will be generated to meet the new, best available technology/economically available standard at the end of their design life. Not only will emissions trading offer a performance incentive by allowing for the generation of emissions credits when operating at better than required performance levels; it will also encourage early shutdown of older units and new emission controls at existing units. The amendment follows the consensus recommendations of the Clean Air Strategic Alliance and has the support of industry, government, and nongovernment stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, the second amendment clarifies industry's obligations to report and remediate contaminated sites even if they were closed before the EPEA came into effect on September 1, 1993. The intent of the amendment is to ensure that industry remains responsible for old sites where contamination causing an adverse effect is discovered or becomes apparent. Any closed sites that continue to have an adverse effect will be reported and managed appropriately. Remediation certificates will be issued for sites that are cleaned up to Alberta Environment standards. This will ensure a timelier cleanup and also indicate when the cleanup is complete and when industry's legal obligations are met. As land changes hands, banks will be more willing to lend money once a certificate is issued.

This amendment supports the recommendations of the Contaminated Sites Stakeholder Advisory Committee and significant stakeholder input. The two-year consultation process with stakeholders included industry associations, nongovernmental organizations, Alberta Environment, Municipal Affairs, the Farmers' Advocate, Finance, Energy, the Energy and Utilities Board, Canadian Bankers' Association, Alberta Urban Municipalities

Association, and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties.

10:00

Mr. Speaker, the third amendment upholds the EPEA's existing principle of polluter pays in that it supports the reclamation security system for coal and oil sands mines. Companies will be responsible for reclaiming land as soon as possible. This can mean not waiting until the whole mine is finished before starting reclamation. This returns the land to a productive state faster and reduces the overall active footprint of the mine.

The amendment further provides authority to implement a new tool called a record of progressive reclamation. This new tool will act like an interim reclamation certificate by formally acknowledging that the company has done the majority of costly physical work on the site. The record will be a formal acknowledgement of industry's initial stage of reclamation work, where the majority of the reclamation costs are incurred. The amendment also provides broader authority to write reclamation security regulations to ensure that funds are available when they are most likely needed for reclamation.

Mr. Speaker, the fourth amendment expands the type of regulatory tools we use and supports the continued use of codes of practice for activities with low environmental impact. This will streamline the approvals process, ensure environmental protection, and reduce the regulatory burden on industry, municipalities, and Alberta Environment. Codes providing province-wide operating rules for an activity lead to regulatory fairness and consistency. Examples of codes of practice currently in use include activities that are typically predictable and operate in the same way regardless of their location in the province, such as codes of practice for small incinerators, codes of practice for pits, and codes of practice for waste-water systems using a waste-water lagoon.

The full range of prevention and enforcement response tools under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to respond to noncompliance still applies. All operations under a code of practice will continue to be inspected by Alberta Environment.

Mr. Speaker, the fifth amendment allows Alberta Environment to partner with a wide range of organizations and individuals in order to deliver our environmental protection mandate. The amendment specifically broadens the list of candidates to which the minister may delegate work. This supports a place-based approach to environmental management. In order for successful partnerships to exist, government partners need to have the authority to advise, consult, and become engaged in the process. This amendment will allow them these capabilities. As with all partnerships we will ensure that accountability frameworks are in place.

Mr. Speaker, the final amendment allows the minister to make a regulation listing information that can be released to the public. This increases the amount of environmental information Albertans can obtain without the need for a formal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act request. Releasing environmental information on a routine basis will improve public access to information.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for support of these recommendations, and I move adjournment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 32

Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The principles and policies in this legislation before us today reflect the recommendations of two advisory committees for organ and tissue donation and transplantation. The new legislation will broaden the scope of and modernize the Human Tissue Gift Act, originally passed in 1973.

The first key component consists of changes to definitions in the legislation. The definitions that are currently in the Human Tissue Gift Act need to be updated to reflect and include modern technology and procedures. New and revised definitions will make the act consistent with current standards. Among the updates are changes to the definitions of "tissue" and "transplant." They'll be defined distinctly now, whereas in the current legislation they are both under the definition of tissue. The new section includes definitions for "donor," "estranged," "immediate family," and "independent assessment committee."

The second key component speaks to living donations by minors. The current act does not allow for living donations by minors. The new act will enable minors to consent to donation in specific situations or require the consent of a guardian and the approval of an independent assessment committee in other situations. All living donations by minors will be addressed in this legislation: donation of by-products from a medical procedure, donation of regenerative organs or tissues, and the donation of nonregenerative organs or tissues.

A minor who is 16 years of age or older or who is living independently of a guardian can consent to donate by-products from a medical procedure. The donation of medical by-products has no foreseeable medical consequences for the donor. An example might be the donation of amniotic tissue obtained during a Caesarean section. A minor can make a living donation of regenerative organs or tissues with the consent of a parent or legal guardian. Examples of regenerative tissues and organs include a liver lobe or bone marrow. Now, because there may be medical consequences to making a living donation of regenerative organs or tissues, the consent of the parent or legal guardian will be required as well as the requirement for an independent assessment to ensure that the minor's interests are indeed protected.

The donation of nonregenerative organs or tissues will always have medical consequences for the donor. For that reason donations of this type will not be allowed by minors less than 16 years of age and will also require the consent of a guardian and the approval of an independent assessment committee.

The third key component of this legislation describes the operation of independent assessment committees. This independent assessment is designed to protect the minor donor, especially when the legal decision-makers may be compromised in their ability to make a decision in the best interest of the child. An example of this situation may be when a child is considered for the donation of a kidney to a sister, brother, father, or mother. In this scenario the parents may be unable to balance the best interest of one family member with that of another.

An independent assessment committee will be established and must include three people not involved in the donation or transplantation, including one physician, one psychiatrist or psychologist, and one additional person. The independent assessment shall ensure that the agreement has been obtained from the minor to the extent possible considering the minor's age, that the donation presents minimal risk to the donor, and that no coercion or pressure has been placed on the minor. The independent assessment must be unanimously in favour of allowing the donation. The donation cannot proceed if any of the three individuals does not agree that all of the above conditions have been met.

Another area of change is in regard to consent requirements. They've been revised to address certain gaps. These include how consent must be documented if the consentor is not physically capable of providing written consent or, in the case of a cadaveric donation, if the next of kin is available but not physically present to provide consent. If a consentor is physically unable to sign, consent must be documented in the presence of two witnesses. In the case of a cadaveric donation by next of kin who are not physically present, one of the two witnesses must be knowledgeable and inform the consentor with respect to the nature and consequences of the donation. Minors and dependent adults are now specifically addressed.

A provision has been added to ensure that consent as documented on the back of Alberta health care insurance cards is considered valid.

10:10

On to the fifth key component, which deals with respecting the wishes of the deceased. The current legislation does not ensure that the donor's expressed wishes take precedence over the wishes of the family, but the new act includes an addition so that the known wishes of the potential donor take precedence even if they conflict with the wishes of the family. This, of course, represents a change in current practice. Clinicians generally require consent from next of kin even when the known wishes of the deceased were indicated by a donor card or other document. So this change will strengthen the donation program.

Consent by next of kin is another key change in the legislation before us. Current legislation does not speak to an estranged spouse. The new legislation will exclude estranged spouses or estranged adult interdependent partners from the consent hierarchy as it has been determined that since they are estranged, they do not have a right to provide consent.

Mr. Speaker, consistent with proposed changes under private member's Bill 201, changes are being made to the area of mandatory consideration for donation. Currently there are no mandatory consideration, documentation, or notification requirements. The new Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act will ensure that every person who dies will be considered for organ and/or tissue donation. The objective of these amendments is to consistently consider all potential donors in an effort to significantly increase the conversion of potential donors into actual donors. The process of donation consideration will be carried out and documented by medical practitioners in conjunction with appropriate donation agencies.

The seventh key component is the addition of sections that address safety and quality. Current legislation does not contain any quality assurance mechanisms. Proposed changes will require all individuals, agencies, and regional health authorities that conduct donation and transplantation procedures and activities to be registered with the provincial government. All of these organizations must comply with this act and forthcoming regulations, including any regulations regarding registration requirements or accreditation. This will include agencies that broker tissue. The list of registrants will be disclosed to the federal government and/or other regulatory organizations as required.

Changes have also been made to the area of information confidentiality. Proposed changes will protect the privacy of individuals while providing explicit legislative authority for the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information for the purpose of the act. Personal information will be required to seek consent, to screen donors, and to carry out procurement and transplantation activities. Proposed changes will integrate and align with provincial privacy legislation.

In relation to the area of buying and selling tissues and organs, the current act prohibits anyone from buying, selling, or otherwise gaining from any tissue for transplantation purpose, medical education, or scientific research. This provision has been revised to apply to organs as well as tissue, and the offence for noncompliance has been significantly increased. In fact, penalties for all types of offences have been increased in the new legislation.

The offence for knowingly contradicting the current legislation is a maximum fine of \$1,000 and up to six months' imprisonment. While this offence provision may have been adequate in 1973, when the act was introduced, it's no longer viewed as an effective deterrent. So in the new legislation the general offence provision has been increased to a maximum of \$10,000. This could apply to a health service provider who intentionally disregards requirements or procedures or to an individual who wrongfully obtains consent.

A specific fine for breaching the information confidentiality provision has been added and could result in a fine of up to \$50,000.

The fine for buying and selling human tissue or organs has also been specifically addressed. Since the objective of this prohibited activity is financial gain, a significant fine must be in place to function as a deterrent. This fine will be \$100,000 and/or a term of imprisonment of up to six months.

Regulation-making powers have been added in the anticipation of carrying out the intent of the act. The regulation will provide more details with respect to the designation of donation agencies, establishment of independent assessment committees, and registration of individuals and agencies involved in organ and tissue donation, procurement, and transplantation.

Finally, this bill will repeal the Human Tissue Gift Act and the unproclaimed Human Tissue Donation Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, which was passed to amend the Human Tissue Gift Act. Mr. Speaker, these changes reflect the considerable feedback that has been received about this issue. The new legislation will broaden the scope and modernize current legislation to more accurately reflect and regulate organ and tissue donation as well as transplantation in the province.

With all of that, Mr. Speaker, finally I move second reading of Bill 32. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 32, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act. I am quite supportive of this legislation and expect to see it get fairly speedy passage through this House.

There are a couple of questions that I would like to ask on a few current issues. What's that incredibly lurid phrase they use, ripped from the headlines of today, that I think has raised the darker side of organ and tissue donation and transplantation? I'd like to make sure that this legislation is anticipating that and will cover any of those situations. I'll come back to that later.

Essentially, what we've had here in my time is that in '98 we had the Human Tissue Procedure Statutes Amendment Act, which got debated and passed but didn't ever get proclaimed. Immediately following that there was a committee with a very long name, and then there was a second committee with an equally long name in 2002. My understanding is that this bill is springing out of the 2002 committee. The long name for that one was the Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation Interim Implementation Committee. It should get a prize here for the longest name. In between that we had Bill 201, which was a private member's bill, the Human Tissue Gift Amendment Act, which was brought forward by the MLA for Calgary-West, the same sponsor now of government Bill 32.

When Bill 201 was up for debate, we noted that it was based on legislation that was attempting to have it conform with the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. Now, 201 did pass second reading and then was subjected to one of the periodic magical disappearing acts that the government members are able to do with private members' bills. I understand that this was partly because of the medical community expressing concerns with being put in essentially a conflict-of-interest position to their medical vows in that they were expected to take action to obtain consent for a donation when the death of a patient was imminent, which runs against their try and keep them alive and do no harm.

We have some examples before us. Very interesting. I'm noticing that a number of provinces are coming to more or less the same point. We've got a private member's bill sponsored by a member of the New Democratic Party in Ontario that is based on presumed consent, which is the sort of negative billing option. I will be very interested to watch the passage of that because I really believe in organ and tissue donation. I'm aware that we are, as always, struggling to be able to have this process work for us. I'm very proud of the Canadian tradition we've always had of donating blood, and we do well by that. In comparison, in the States, for example, people are paid to give blood. So I'm really proud of that Canadian tradition of donating, but we're struggling with it often because, as I mentioned in the response to the ministerial statement that I did yesterday, the individual may well have given their consent, but the family balks at the time that they're approached.

10:20

Some of that appears to be addressed in this bill, but I think we need to watch the progress of that Ontario private member's bill. I'm moving on to the side of looking at a presumed consent model just to be able to get enough of those organs and tissues available for transplantation.

We also have another private member's bill, I think also in Ontario, that is based on a mandatory direction, which I think essentially requires that everybody state one way or another whether they're willing to participate in organ donation or not, but they're going to have to say it one way or another, which I suppose is another way of doing this. This bill may well pass before then, but I still think we should keep an eye out on this. We have legislation in New Brunswick that basically prevents families from overturning a deceased person's wishes to donate. So lots of activity on this front across Canada.

A big part of that is that we're all aware, or we should be, that between 15 and 20 per cent of all people on waiting lists die before a suitable organ is found. In 2004 there were 313 transplants performed in Alberta, but 534 people were waiting for a transplant, and 42 people died while waiting for a transplant. So there's a great demand there for us. There's lots of possibility, and I would really like to facilitate that process.

What we're seeing is that the rate of transplants has not kept pace with the transplant waiting list. Part of that is that we have people where the acuity level is less. They're not as sick, and they are living longer and are able to stay alive long enough to actually receive the transplant, and that's causing the longer waiting list. On the other hand, we can't keep up with what's needed there.

One of the questions that's always being asked by the government is: how do we keep our system sustainable? Frankly, this is one of the answers. There's no quick fix. There's no umbrella solution to that question, but there are a number of ways of going at that, and transplantation is one of them. The annual cost of supporting a person with a kidney transplant is 40 per cent less than if they had stayed on dialysis. Now, there's a considerable savings.

A couple of quick issues that I wanted to raise. [interjection] Did I hear someone say question? That's just incentive to keep me going here. Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

The two issues that I had referred to earlier were that terrible situation in the U.S. where we had a funeral home that was using bone marrow and tissue from cadavers that were under their control and responsibility. They were harvesting it and selling it. This, of course, has now been transplanted into people, and there are huge questions about whether potentially we've transplanted cancerous cells or HIV or hep C or any number of other serious diseases into people. I'm noting that in section 3, which is dealing with transplantation and medical education, there are two sections that talk about, you know, not using "tissue, organ or body donated under the Act except for the purpose for which it was donated" and that no one "shall use, procure, transfer or process any tissue, organ or body for transplantation except in accordance with the regulations."

I just am looking for assurance and proof, if I can get it from the sponsoring member, that a situation such as I've described would in fact be covered by the act. We have someone selling there, but we don't have someone purchasing the parts to start with. They're basically harvesting them without permission, and I want to make sure that that's being covered here, because while we've got this legislation in front of us, let's not make the mistake of not covering what we know is a possibility. In other words, does it actually cover the situation of stealing the organs and tissues and then offering them for sale further down the line?

The second situation I have gone through and I don't find anything prohibiting this or anticipating this. Someone brought to my attention that there was a group of doctors in Guyana that were talking about harvesting organs there and then essentially exporting them, sending them to Canada to be used here. There's nothing that's being addressed in the act about that sort of coming from somewhere else. Obviously, our act is anticipating that it would all come from Canada, but it's not prohibiting something coming from somewhere else. I think we need to be careful about that, so I'm looking for the sponsor of the bill to detail that and tell us how it's going to be handled and give me a specific citation in the bill where that's anticipated and where it would be handled.

Finally, as we've noted, there have been a couple of runs at this that were not successful. I'm looking for assurance that the bill actually would be proclaimed. What is the anticipated date of proclamation? Often a bill will receive royal assent and will get proclamation six months down the road or a year down the road, once the regulations and the program that supports it have been put into place. So what is the anticipated proclamation date for this legislation assuming that it passes in this spring session? I'd like to know what's up there.

The other thing was that Bill 201 was setting up a number of other agencies or funneling-through agencies, and all of that has completely disappeared in this act. At the time we were told that Bill 201 was being withdrawn because it was substantially similar to coming government legislation. I was looking at the two pieces of legislation, and the concepts are substantially similar, but the actual implementation is quite different. So I'm wondering what happened to the processes that were being outlined in Bill 201 around the use of those various agencies in the community through which they were organizing and tracking and in one case storing tissues and organs.

Finally, we did have – oh, I've said finally several times; sorry about that. When will the government be implementing the recommendation that was made in the 2000 report of the first committee, which was the Alberta Advisory Committee on Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation? That was to make strategies for "initiating discussion about end of life decisions,

including opportunities for donation . . . an important element of pre-licensure education and of continuing professional education” for health care professionals like doctors, nurses, social workers, et cetera. Is that still on the table? How does one integrate and make sure that we don’t cause doctors that conflict-of-interest position where they are counselling end of life at the same time as they are committed to trying to extend it?

Those are the questions I wanted on the record. I’m looking forward to hearing back from the sponsoring member. I’m happy to receive a written explanation if it’s anticipated that there may be some delay in time between now and the next time the bill would come forward. I know that sometimes the backbenchers that are sponsoring bills do give me information in written form, which is very helpful, before the next time we get up to debate it. So thank you very much for the opportunity.

10:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a privilege for me to stand and speak in second reading of Bill 32, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act. As I was part of the discussion on Bill 201, I really think that this is a tremendous improvement. I’m glad that we went through that process of debate on Bill 201, a private member’s bill, and this is now the result of a process of consulting with stakeholders and so on. This is a great improvement. It’s a very positive bill and contributes, I think, a great deal to establishing the right kind of basis for donation of tissue in this province.

We’ll get a chance in Committee of the Whole to look at specific wording in this bill. I, too, have the same kind of questions that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre has about the issue of harvesting of parts. There was a particularly disturbing article in the *Globe and Mail* on March 18, which was entitled *Raiders of the Lost Parts*.

A ghoulish scam reveals the dark side of the booming tissue-harvesting business: Corpses’ bones (including those of former Masterpiece Theatre host Alistair Cooke) were stolen and replaced with PVC piping. Some of [these bone parts] were sold in Canada. Do you know where your transplant’s been?

It’s an interesting question.

So that whole issue of the harvesting of parts and the transporting of those parts to other parts of North America is really a serious issue. I think that section 3 in this bill goes a long way toward establishing strictures to prevent this from happening. But as my hon. colleague has mentioned, I think we’ll have to look at this carefully to see whether, indeed, it answers the problem or not. It does suggest that anybody who receives a “reward or benefit for any tissue, organ or body for use in transplantation” and so on would be open to sanctions, and the sanctions are rather high, in this case even as high as \$100,000 or imprisonment for contravening this act. So I’m encouraged by the points under section 3.

In terms of research “only a university with a medical, dental or related health program may use a body donated under this Act” for research, and that’s a really good thing. So I think that section is very good.

I am also impressed by the wording for the deceased donor section, involving the family and laying out all of these levels of discussion that have to be gone through in the case of someone who is deceased and the consultations that have to be made in order for that person’s body to be used.

In terms of a living donor the whole issue of consent is here clearly laid out, that consent is necessary, and when the adult person lacks capacity to give consent, then there is a turning to personal directives and so on, which is established under other acts. So that, too, is good.

The section on determination of death: I’m impressed by that too. I did raise the issue of the definition of death and determination of death when I dealt with Bill 201 because there are lots of issues around that. In this bill it clearly outlines that the physician who decides on the determination of death should not be the same physician that is involved in the transplant procedure. I think that’s a good safeguard.

Also, the issue of mandatory consideration for donation I think is a tremendous improvement over Bill 201. I was quite concerned with Bill 201, which seemed to suggest that a donation agency would come into a hospital and lurk in the halls of the hospital and look for the perfect specimen who would be able to make their body available for transplants and tissue donation and then try to persuade that person to give their consent. I thought: well, wait a minute; a person who is actually dying in a hospital has enough to deal with in terms of dealing with their own death, let alone have somebody come in and try to persuade them to donate their body. That section is not here; it was taken out. That’s a tremendous improvement. So the mandatory consideration for donation is simply left in the hands of a medical practitioner, where it should be. The medical practitioner makes a determination of death and recommends in terms of tissues and organs for transplantation, and the donation agency then has to work through the medical establishment to determine how to proceed. I think that the procedures here and the requirements for written consent are all quite clear.

I really like the tone of this bill because I think there’s a danger that we get into language such as the language of harvesting body parts. I don’t like that language. I like the language of giving, of being a donor, of donation because I think it’s an important moral question. To whom do body parts belong? Do they belong to the person who is dying? Do they belong to the state? In my view, a human person is an embodied person, not a soul with a body attached. The body is essential to one’s own identity. So if a body is to be made available in terms of body parts, it must be as a gift, and we must see it as a gift. It always must be a question of giving. So if the person is living, then they must give consent that they’re going to give their body parts. The family has to be involved if the person is not able to make a decision themselves, if they’re not capable, and I think that’s always where the emphasis should be.

I noticed also that the reference to religious beliefs is not included here. I don’t know why that was left out because I think that it’s important that the religious beliefs of a person while they were living should be honoured in their death. Maybe it is covered in some way here, but I would like to know where it is covered.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That’s all I would have to say about this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Any other speakers?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed to close debate on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, our fine colleague the Member for Calgary-West has done yeoman’s work in both the private member’s bill and this one. I know that he is eagerly anticipating researching *Hansard* and is happy to entertain questions received tonight as well as anything else during Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a second time]

Bill 24
Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate April 24: Dr. Taft]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Oh, I can't let this one go by, Mr. Speaker. Honest to goodness, I have seen a version of this bill, Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006, which is currently before us as Bill 24, go by – oh, let me think – four times before? Yeah, here we have it.

I mean, basically, what this government does is set itself a law so that it can go around and tell everybody that it's being fiscally responsible, and then as soon as it doesn't work for them, which is, like, the next year, they just change the law. They don't actually adhere to the rule that they set in place for themselves. They just change the rule so that it will fit what they've now done with it.

10:40

That's exactly what we have in this situation. We have nonrenewable resource revenue that is being used in the budget. They set themselves an amount of money last year, I think it was, or two years ago, \$4.75 billion, and now one year later they can't even adhere to that, and we're at \$5.3 billion. So, you know, they don't even follow their own plan. What is the point of even listening to the plan? Why do they spend any time even developing it? I'm wondering if they have any intention of following any of this.

I think what I'm more concerned about under all of this is the government's attitude around nonrenewable resource revenue. I think that there are two points that we need to be really concerned about. One is: what do you do with surplus revenue? We need to have a plan for surplus revenue. Certainly, when we went through the last election, the Alberta Liberal plan was very well received at the doors when we talked about what our surplus policy plan was. That was 35 per cent reinvested into the heritage trust fund, 35 per cent into a noncapped postsecondary education fund, which, by the way, wasn't just about university but also about apprenticeship and colleges and anything that was basically postsecondary. Then there was a capital fund amount of 25 per cent, which was essentially to eliminate the infrastructure deficit that the government has now created, and a final 5 per cent into a humanities and social sciences and arts endowment fund. There's a plan. I'm happy to have the government steal it from us. Go right ahead. I think it's a great idea. Actually, they did sort of take part of it in the postsecondary legacy fund that they set up a year ago.

Mr. Speaker, I think that there's another side to this that we need to consider carefully, and that is the fact that this government is now spending more of its resource revenue. We're spending our inheritance. We're spending what's coming before us. If you take away the resource revenue from what we've got coming into this province, we can't sustain what we're spending with the rest of our revenue sources through income tax and licences and various other means the government has to raise funds. So we are now dependent on spending that revenue as it comes in, and that's a really bad habit. That's equivalent to living from paycheque to paycheque, which this government so despises in the population.

That, in fact, is exactly what it's doing here, except that it's not just paycheque to paycheque. That nonrenewable resource revenue belongs to all of us, including the children, and what we're doing right now is spending our parents' share of that nonrenewable resource revenue, our share of it, and our kids' share of it. Frankly, 20 years from now it won't even be there for them to be able to get a share of in the same way.

So I'm really seriously starting to look at whether we shouldn't be

looking at some amount of money that we pull aside before it even gets into the government coffers, that we divert a certain percentage of our nonrenewable resource revenue and take it off to the side right away, understanding that this is the future's money and that we need to be setting it aside to help us bridge when the natural resource revenue starts to diminish for us. Maybe we're looking at a third of it that we set aside into endowments or into the heritage savings trust fund. I mean, there are lots of examples for us to look at: Alaska, Norway, various other places. The fact that we're just taking that money straight in – it's like a tap we're hooked up to, a hose that we're sucking as much as we can out of – is just wrong.

I really have concerns about the government's ability to hold itself to any kind of spending plan. We've got people talking about off-budget spending before we've even passed the budget, and that happened last year as well.

So, frankly, surpluses are very bad for this government. It doesn't seem to have any kind of self-restraint and any ability to get a reasonable plan and stick to it. This bill is a prime example of their total inability to do that. I mean, the whole bill is two lines long. The Fiscal Responsibility Act is amended, and then it changes the amount of money. That's the whole point that it's in front of us in the Assembly today.

I won't be supporting this bill. I know it's late at night. I know people are tired and crabby, and the game is probably still on. Somebody told me a score.

Mr. Graydon: Not on this side. Nobody over here is tired and crabby.

Ms Blakeman: Excellent. Well, thank you for the encouragement. That's good. We'll stay much longer. Thank you. I was going to sit down, but if everybody is so keen to keep going, then, I certainly can do that.

I think it is about a long-range plan. The government occasionally, you know, talks about the 20-year plan that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud came up with, but it is so vague as to be meaningless. When you look at the various components of that, it really doesn't tell you what the government is planning on doing. It's not a plan. It's some sort of really loose vision that doesn't give much direction to what's happening. I think this government is in serious trouble. They've taken a lot of criticism recently for not having a plan, and I think there's a reason why that's sticking. There isn't a good plan here, and there's certainly not one that the government has the wherewithal, has the stamina, has the fortitude to stick to. Any reason at all is a good reason to vary off of this.

So what are we going to see come forward next time? What we've got already is planning to go forward and spend even more of that nonrenewable resource revenue. Fiscal year 2004 was \$3.5 billion, 2005 was \$4 billion, 2006 \$4.75 billion, and now we're looking at \$5.3 billion. That's what's happened to it just over the last couple of years. That doesn't show any kind of restraint to me. It doesn't show any kind of planning. It just shows: where do we get more money from to do whatever we want to do? I think we as stewards of natural resource revenue have to be much more careful than what I'm seeing coming out of this government. I don't see the ideas coming either about exactly where we would want to spend that money. The whole thing just smacks of old, tired, and let's do what we did last year but a bit more. I don't think that's the expectation that Albertans have.

So thanks for the opportunity to speak some more. I know we've got some other bills up tonight, and I'm eager to get on to them. I will cede the floor to others that are interested in continuing this debate.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Any other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

Bill 31

Health Information Amendment Act, 2006

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 31 proposes amendments to the Health Information Act. These amendments are, in fact, a culmination of stakeholder feedback, input from an all-party Select Special Health Information Act Review Committee, and analysis by Alberta Health and Wellness. Approximately 72 individuals, stakeholders, and organizations did provide feedback during the initial phase of the Health Information Act review. These proposed amendments are required by the department or the health system for things like enhancing the use of the provincial electronic health record, co-ordinating the retention periods for health records held by professional bodies, and clarifying disclosure rules.

10:50

In order to have greater accountability in how funds are spent, the department is recommending information disclosure for the limited purposes of determining a person's eligibility for health services, payments, benefits, or for auditing those services and payments. These limited disclosures would be done among governments and some third parties for the purposes of paying for services and ensuring accountability. There is general acceptance of these proposals by the majority of stakeholders, including the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and Government Services.

The all-party Select Special Health Information Act Review Committee made broad recommendations that health information must be reported to the police for public safety purposes. Mandatory disclosures have not been enabled by this bill; however, there are significant amendments that would allow discretionary disclosures for reasons of public safety to prevent or report health system fraud, et cetera. These disclosures will be at the discretion of the custodian and are limited to specific data elements. These amendments balance the privacy of an individual's information with the protection of the public and the health system.

A significant amendment is to allow the Health and Wellness department to compel reporting on health system management information matters, initially in regard to community-based drug dispensing information. This is an emerging issue recently raised by the department. The change would allow the department to better track drug trends as the growing cost of pharmaceuticals has a significant impact on health care budgets. It will also have a positive impact on patient safety issues. Facilitating greater use of the electronic health record would allow pharmacists and doctors to have more accurate patient drug histories. Each year 18,000 Albertans require hospitalization due to improper medication use.

A further recommendation not addressed by the select committee has been raised by Government Services in response to the USA PATRIOT Act. It deals with the need to protect the privacy of Albertans by ensuring that their health and other personal information cannot be automatically disclosed in response to a U.S. court order. Alberta Government Services is recommending an amendment to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and a complementary amendment to the Health Information Act to

ensure a consistent response for foreign contractors. This will apply to disclosure provisions in the Health Information Act that allow disclosure without consent of a court subpoena, warrant, or order. The penalties for a violation of this disclosure provision would increase to a minimum penalty of \$2,000 for an individual and \$200,000 for a corporation to a maximum of \$10,000 for an individual and \$500,000 for a corporation.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 31.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I've been looking forward to this because I was actually on the special committee to review the existing Health Information Act, and what fun we all had. So now we finally see some of the fruits of our labour coming forward in this bill. I've been going through it, and I think in some cases I've been able to match the recommendation.

Sorry, let me back up a bit. The committee did produce a report and a number of recommendations. There were a lot of them. I think we're into the 50s, actually, 59 recommendations. There you go. A number of them were saying that the committee should be restructured and should examine various other aspects, but quite a few of the issues that we dealt with are in fact reflected in Bill 31. We accepted a number of written presentations, and there were also public presentations that were made to the committee, raising a number of different issues.

What we need to remember, if I may just sort of do a really brief little refresher course, is that the Health Information Act is exception-based legislation. It essentially says that we don't disclose people's personal health information except under the following circumstances, and then you get the rest of this quarter-inch thick bill that basically outlines how that happens or under what circumstances that happens.

Now, there are also two ways. There are the sections that talk about disclosing information with the consent of somebody and disclosing information without the consent of somebody. This is where we need to be very, very, very careful because we need the co-operation of the public in order to have this system work. We need people to give us health information, and if they think we're not going to do the right things with it, they won't give us the information, which stymies our system.

Especially when we look at innovations like electronic health records and even electronic medical records, we really need the co-operation of Albertans to give us the information. That is balanced by legislation like the original Health Information Act and by Bill 31 to have restrictions and limitations in place on how we're going to use that information or allow others to use that information. So it's a fine balance, and we need to be careful here because we can do this well and advance forward, or we can do it not well and hamper some really wonderful opportunities to enhance the health care system.

The second suggestion of the night from me to my colleagues on the government side. You know, I think we all recognize that electronic health records can help streamline our system and correspondingly reduce costs, but it relies on people having trust in what we're doing, and it relies on our being able to use their information appropriately. I would argue that in many cases we collect too much information from people, and we use it too much, but that's another, longer argument.

Let me attempt to address what I'm seeing here or some of the questions that have arisen for me already in this legislation. I believe, and I'll ask for confirmation, that the sections about the registration number for the health services providers is reflective of recommendation 13.

Let me go at this another way because in second reading you're really talking about the principle of the bill and not a sort of clause-by-clause examination of it, which is hard to do in this context, Mr. Speaker. So I'm asking you to grant me a bit of leeway here because we have to work with the details of what's here.

I'm wondering which sections in particular the sponsor of the bill believed were addressing the concerns around the PATRIOT Act. If I may correct the sponsoring member, the PATRIOT Act indeed had a great deal of discussion in the review committee. It was most certainly raised in that committee, so the member's statement that it wasn't considered is not factual. We had a great deal of discussion about it. You're reading the final report, which does not include many hours of meetings and discussion. Believe me: that was discussed. So what section in here does he believe is addressing the concerns that were raised around the PATRIOT Act?

Just as a refresher for everybody here, the concern there was that the U.S. passed the PATRIOT Act, and where it started to affect us is that it basically said that the U.S. government could use personal information that any of its companies held even if it was on other people. So, for instance, if we had a health care provider or insurance provider in some way or somebody . . .

An Hon. Member: IBM.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, that's right.

This is very far reaching because if we had a contract with IBM, an American firm, which we do, to take our data on health information and put it onto reel-to-reel tapes for storage for archival purposes, under the PATRIOT Act the American government could get our personal health information that is held by IBM. That's what that act was enabling. So what can we do to protect our information, and what clauses in here, exactly, does the sponsoring member believe are going to protect us in that case? I'm assuming that it's probably section 3 and possibly one I'll come back to later, but I'm interested in hearing that in particular.

11:00

The second one, that I believe may be the one they're trying to use to address the PATRIOT Act, would be appearing on the top of page 4 and which is amending section 35, adding in talking about courts having jurisdiction in Alberta or a rule of court that's binding in Alberta. If this is what they're trying to protect us from the PATRIOT Act implications with, let me know that. If not, please tell me what mischief this clause was designed to address. Generally speaking, when you get amending formulas brought in or you get legislation like this changing an original act, it's trying to address a situation that has arisen or a problem that comes up or a mischief that's been created. What are you looking to address with that particular clause?

Now, you've got some housekeeping there where you're going from an ethics board to a research ethics board. That's fine. It's a little housekeeping change. It shouldn't be identifying anything. I think this is referring to recommendation 39, and I'm just checking about the scope. That should come under the sections on scope and use of individually identifying health information. Is that what we're up to here?

I think that we've got recommendation 27 in section 35, which is the disclosure of diagnostic treatment and care information without consent. We need to be really careful about this because this is where people have to trust us that we won't be disclosing that personal health information without a really good reason and with a lot of limitations on how it's done and with a great deal of oversight and double-checking and guards in place to make sure that it's not abused.

So that's section 5. This is where having an all-party committee that worked out some of this legislation in advance would be very helpful because then I could have just worked through this, but this government won't go for those kinds of committees.

Okay. What's significant about this is that it is without consent. Part of what's important here is how long the information is kept. History itself is never stale-dated, so once we've collected this information or we've allowed someone else to disclose it, that information is out there forever. We can't get it back from them, so we've got to be really careful when we let it out there. What we're talking about here is the government of Canada or another province being able to get at this information. Why are we doing that?

Now, one of the other issues that was very contentious in the committee – and I want to make sure that we don't get anything being snuck into this legislation – is in the section that's talking about registration information to complete warrants. I want to know whether we're getting implementation of the contentious issue that was around allowing or actually forcing – this would be allowing – medical professionals to have to disclose personal health information about someone that was in the hospital in response to a request from a police officer in a nonemergency, non-life-threatening situation. That was the contentious part of this because I believe that where it was emergency or where it was life-threatening, there were already provisions that would allow for the provision of that information.

I didn't believe that it was appropriate for us to have a sort of general fishing trip, for a police officer to wander in there and see if his favourite top five criminals happen to have broken their legs or cut their hands on a piece of glass and were currently in the hospital, and they could then get a mitt full of information about them, including their health insurance, their whereabouts, home addresses, telephone numbers, and all of that sort of stuff. I'm looking for the assurance from the member that that is not being enabled under this legislation that's being brought forward in Bill 31. There are a number of sections that talk about it.

The problem is that lots of times police officers don't have all the information they need to complete a warrant. They need a home address or they need some kind of personal identifying information, and if they can wander into the hospital and say to the nearest doctor: "Gee, I'm looking for Joe Blow. Is he in here? By the way, what's his home address and his telephone number?" if there's a clause that allows that to happen, then it's not for us to be putting health professionals in a position where they're doing the work for police officers. That was very contentious in the committee. The recommendation was actually put forward by the committee by a majority vote, and I certainly wasn't supporting that. I want to ensure that that is not being contemplated in this legislation.

That's the stuff that's showing up at the bottom of page 3, which is amending 35(1) and various subs under that, where we end up talking about:

For the purpose of complying with a subpoena, warrant or order issued or made by a court, person or body having jurisdiction to compel the production of information or with a rule of court that relates to the production of information.

So I'm looking to make sure that we're not allowing them to sort of warrant information shop here.

I have additionally a question about some interesting language that's being used on the bottom of page 4, where it's talking about:

For the purpose of obtaining or processing payment for health services provided to the individual by a person that is required under a contract to pay for those services for that individual.

What's being contemplated here? Are you talking about a guardian? I don't think so. I'm wondering if you're not talking about a private health insurance plan that would be required or contracted to pay for a particular service for somebody. Can I get an explanation of

what's being contemplated there? This could be referring to section 28, but I'm wondering what the "pay for" part of it is about. Could this also be around a delisting of services that somebody would have to pay for something? What's being contemplated there?

There's a section that's being deleted here, and that's the requirement that if information is disclosed by a custodian – and again this is individually identifying diagnostic treatment and care information. So a custodian is disclosing this to a health professional body for purposes of an investigation or a discipline hearing, a practice review, or an inspection. Right? There were clauses that required that the information be destroyed and at the earliest possible opportunity if the complaint doesn't go forward. Now, I think I'm remembering a discussion that they wanted to be able to hang onto that information for a period of time because sometimes the complaint is not resolved or it comes around again in a slightly different form, and they didn't want to have already dumped the information. That might be what's being contemplated here, so let me know if that's the case. If not, why are we dropping or deleting the requirement that the health information – and this is individually identifiable information – be destroyed?

11:10

We're adding in a unique identifier number, which again there was a great deal of controversy about. My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar – well, I'm sure he'll want to get in on this discussion because he really did not like that concept. But I see it's coming in here.

I'm wondering about section 7 – I believe it's reflecting recommendation 34 from the committee – how it affects a fee-for-service or a contract provider. Does it limit investigation of fraud or abuse of the system for a private provider? The way this is laid out now, it looks to me like you couldn't investigate a private provider based on what we have in Bill 31 here, so I'd like some additional information on that.

Oh, my time is going to run out before I am anywhere near finished. On the section appearing on page 6, which again is amending section 37 in the main act talking about a custodian disclosing health services provider information, how does this affect a private provider? I'm sure the member is well aware that 30 per cent of our health services are currently provided out of the private sector. It's very important for us that we know how they're supposed to handle information and how we're able to investigate them. So questions about that as well.

There's an entirely new section in here that's adding a new section after section 37. It is around the limiting of fraud and abuse of the health services, and it's looking for information about individuals, but it also gets into being able to provide or collect information on the health service provider. Now, I'm wondering here if we don't have a back-door provision being added. Another very controversial aspect of the committee was the health service providers, which for the most part are doctors – right? – and pharmacists, I suppose. They did not want individually identifying information out there, and right now the act basically protects that. There's tombstone information and very little else. I'm wondering what's possible under this new section appearing on pages 6 and 7 and 8, I think. Is that going to allow more information to be released or demanded about health service providers through that section?

I'm assuming that section 8 is corresponding with recommendation 43. You can get back to me on that one.

I think my time is almost out, and I know that there are others that want to speak. I'm hesitating on supporting this in second reading until I get some answers back about exactly what's being anticipated.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

**Bill 15
International Interests in
Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to bring Bill 15 to the Committee of the Whole. This bill is motivated by Canada's signature on two international agreements, the first one being the convention on international interests in mobile equipment, also known as the Cape Town convention, and secondly, the protocol on aircraft equipment. These two agreements create a registry of financial interests in aircraft equipment. The registry will give banks more confidence in the security of their airline loans. Bill 15 creates legislation that will link Alberta to this international registry once Canada ratifies.

Canada has already said that it will not ratify the agreements until a critical mass of provinces indicate support. With Bill 15 Alberta would become the third province, after Ontario and Nova Scotia, to pass legislation that links us to this international registry. Ratification is likely to happen over the next 12 to 18 months.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 15 does not amend Alberta's Personal Property Security Act, nor does a new registry on aircraft equipment affect registries for Albertans' cars, trucks, and homes. Bill 15 does allow Alberta to exercise our jurisdiction in an area where the federal government has reached an international agreement. This will help companies like WestJet take advantage of future lower financing costs on new equipment.

Speaking of costs, Mr. Chairman, debate during second reading raised the issue of associated costs to the government of Alberta. The international registry is designed as a self-financing entity and, accordingly, will not be an expense for the Alberta government. Also, when the time comes for our government, we will work through my ministry with our colleague provinces and the federal government to ensure that the convention and the protocol are implemented consistently across Canada.

I conclude only by saying, Mr. Chairman, that I encourage all members to support the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act at this stage of reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would rise to support this bill. I had a fairly thorough briefing with the former Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and feel that in a way it really is just global housekeeping at this point in time. It's sort of a small step on our part if we're only number 3, which I understand.

The one thing that I would like to think and dream is that if we're making it easier for WestJet, it might be cheaper to fly. I know that that also is pie in the sky. However, that isn't really what I think the point of it is. It also would actually help not just the aircraft but also the parts that would be going across the different international borders. So I would support this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 27

Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister for Infrastructure and Transportation on behalf of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Chairman, I'm extremely pleased to have the opportunity to talk to this extremely important bill that has outlived its usefulness. This bill eliminates the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act and the two associated regulations, the vegetables sales regulation and the grades, packages, and fees regulation. This act was enacted some 50 years ago to define grades, package sizes, and inspection protocol for major vegetables that were grown in Alberta.

Times have changed since this act was originally introduced, and federal grades and standards are being utilized across the entire industry to create consistency and to make interprovincial and international export as simple as possible: one consistent standard simplifying exports. Industry is very supportive of the elimination of this unnecessary and unused act.

11:20

Ms Blakeman: Oh, the glorious vegetable. I've been very impressed with the passion that this particular repeal act has raised, particularly with my colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford, who in second reading gave an impassioned speech supporting market gardeners.

Interestingly, I have a great respect for vegetables, and I have to eat a lot of them because I can't eat meat. So, boy, am I a fan of vegetables. But I've got to admit to you that I am more than willing to repeal the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act, which stands before us in Committee of the Whole as Bill 27. I would like to wish it all good sailing down the channel of repeal. At this point I think we could call the question.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others?

Mr. Chase: I heard the cries of the vegetables.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Vegetables are a maligned outfit. They're quite often confused; for example, tomato, to-mah-to. Is tomato a fruit, or is tomato a vegetable? Any act that clearly defines and distinguishes between fruits and vegetables is especially important, and I'm glad this government saw fit to repeal the act because that clarification is now ever present.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? Are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 27 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report Bills 15 and 27.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 15 and Bill 27.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour and the considerable progress made this evening, I move that we now adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 11:25 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, April 26, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/26

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Mar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sir, it is a privilege to rise in this Assembly and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very honoured guests: the ambassador of Croatia, Her Excellency Vesela Mrden Korac, and Mr. Korac, both of whom are in your gallery. The ambassador has represented Croatia to Canada for six months, since November of last year. However, as a career diplomat she is no stranger to our country of Canada. Ambassador Korac was in Canada a decade ago, from 1994 through 1997, as the first Croatian chargé d'affaires to Canada and as a counsellor at the Croatian embassy in Ottawa, and we are happy to welcome her and her husband back to Canada.

Alberta and Croatia have a small trade relationship, and about 10,000 Croatians are living in our province as Albertans. Ambassador Korac is in Alberta today to explore how her country and our province can develop closer and better ties and a more productive relationship in the years ahead.

I ask our guests to rise in your gallery and for the members of this Assembly to give them the warm traditional greeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et à l'Assemblée, une délégation de Sénateurs français, membres de l'Association interparlementaire Canada-France du Sénat.

Ce matin ces invités spéciaux ont eu l'occasion de rencontrer Dr. Jean-Michel Turc, consul honoraire de la France à Edmonton et président directeur général du Alberta Cancer Board, qui leur a donné une visite guidée du Cross Cancer Institute. Cet après-midi le groupe rencontrera des membres de la communauté francophone et visiteront le Campus Saint-Jean à l'Université de l'Alberta. Demain le groupe ira à Fort McMurray pour visiter les sables bitumineux, et ils termineront leur séjour en Alberta avec des rencontres à Calgary pour discuter des opportunités d'investissements et d'échanges commerciaux entre l'Alberta et la France.

Je suis heureux de vous présenter en premier lieu M. Claude Saunier, Sénateur des Côtes d'Armor, vice-président du groupe interparlementaire France-Canada du Sénat; M. Michel Guerry, Sénateur représentant les Français établis hors de la France; M. Joseph Kergueris, Sénateur du Morbihan, et son épouse, Mme Kergueris; M. Yannick Texier, Sénateur d'Ille-et-Vilaine; M. Matthieu Meissonnier, administrateur du Sénat.

Les accompagnant aujourd'hui sont M. Luc Serot Almeras, consul

général de la France à Vancouver, et la Sénatrice albertaine, l'honorable Claudette Tardif, qui est la vice-présidente de l'Association interparlementaire Canada-France du Sénat.

Je leur demanderais de se lever et d'être reconnus par l'Assemblée. Je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour leur souhaiter une bienvenue chaleureuse.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to the Assembly a delegation of Senators from France, members of the Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association and, specifically, the Senate group.

This morning these special guests had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Jean-Michel Turc, the honorary consul of France in Edmonton and president and CEO of the Alberta Cancer Board, who provided a wonderful tour of the Cross Cancer Institute. This afternoon the group will meet with members of Alberta's franco-phone community and visit the Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta. Tomorrow the group will travel to Fort McMurray to see the province's oil sands development and then proceed to Calgary to discuss further investment and trade opportunities between Alberta and France.

I am pleased to first introduce Mr. Claude Saunier, Senator of Côtes d'Armor and vice-president of the Canada-France Senate group; Mr. Michel Guerry, Senator for French expatriates; Mr. Joseph Kergueris, Senator of Morbihan, and his spouse, Mrs. Kergueris; Mr. Yannick Texier, Senator of Ille-et-Vilaine; Mr. Matthieu Meissonnier, Senate administrator.

Accompanying them today is Mr. Luc Serot Almeras, consul general of France in Vancouver, and Alberta's own Senator, the Hon. Claudette Tardif, who is the Canadian co-chair of the Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association.

I would ask them to please stand and be recognized by the Assembly as I invite the members of the Assembly to join me in extending them a warm welcome. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, hon. members, I have the great pleasure of introducing Dr. David Carter, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. Dr. Carter served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for 15 years. He was first elected on March 14, 1979, for the constituency of Calgary-Millican and then subsequently for the constituency of Calgary-Egmont in 1982, 1986, and 1989. He served as the ninth Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for seven years, from 1986 to 1993. He was the second ordained clergyman to serve as Speaker. Reverend David Carter now is the minister of St. Margaret's Anglican church, nestled in the Cypress Hills of southern Alberta. He's also a renowned author of such books as *Behind Canadian Barbed Wire*, a story of the prisoner of war camps in Canada after the Second World War. I'd ask members to join with me in welcoming Dr. Carter once again to our Legislature.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are going to have a blast here this afternoon. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly eight members of the Bureau of Learners from Alberta Speakers Team, commonly known as BLAST. BLAST team members are adult learners who have worked hard to improve their

literacy skills. Through the BLAST program they learn to develop their public-speaking abilities so that they can talk about their experiences with others. They then move on to take part in speaking engagements across the province in schools and community groups, sharing their stories of courage and determination. Together they emphasize the importance of literacy and inspire others to take the steps necessary to improve their skills. Literacy is a vital component of Advanced Education's family of programs.

These remarkable individuals are with us today and are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask each BLAST member to stand when I call his or her name. So let's blast off: Jacquie Coulas, Kalvinder Dhillon, Lillian Gallant, Jill Manning, Scott Maslyk, Paul Ruot Galuak, Leonard Duby – and you might remember that Leonard was Alberta's first recipient of the Council of the Federation's literacy award, which was presented last year – and Philip Beakhouse. I'm sure that many of you recognize Philip because he works right here in the Legislature. Philip often shares his successes with his Legislature colleagues, and they celebrate these achievements with him. The BLAST team is joined by Janet Lane, executive director of Literacy Alberta, and Cindy Easton, manager of the literacy help line of Alberta, also with Literacy Alberta. Please join me in extending the warmest welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of our colleague the Minister of Human Resources and Employment I'm delighted to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly 10 staff members from the Department of Human Resources and Employment. They are doing their public service orientation tour. I'd have them stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's very appropriate today that while most Albertans are caught up in the chase for the Stanley Cup, I have a classroom of grade 6 students from Alberta's most famous hockey town. I speak of Viking, Alberta, and the Sutters of course. Joining the 38 students here today are their teachers, Muriel Hill, Debbie Snider, Trudy Josephson, and Anna Rutledge, and their parent helper, Colleen Loveseth. I would ask the students and their teachers to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 35 visitors from St. Mary's high school in Vegreville. Just like the hon. member who introduced Viking as the home of the famous Sutter family, we're known, of course, as the home of the world's largest Easter egg. These fine students are seated in the public gallery. They're accompanied by teachers Mr. Steven Tymko and Ms Shalynn Zakordonski. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House the Propane Gas Association of Canada. We have here several people:

Sharon Lemke, Dan McPhee, Bill Egbert, Leslie Siegman, Rick Evans, Bruce Osborne, Harry James, Wyatt Lund, Jack Osland, and Brian Shaw. I see that they're all standing, and if we could all give them a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 46 visitors from Bow Valley College in my constituency of Calgary-Buffalo. These students are from the social studies program at Bow Valley College that is currently studying Canadian government. They are at the Legislature today to get an inside look at the government in action, and I trust that their visit will be a pleasant and informative experience. I had the pleasure of meeting with these students earlier this afternoon. Their intelligent questions and dedication to learning will ensure their success in the future. Travelling with the 46 students are their two teachers, Ms Susan Jolliffe and Jeri Wylie-Smith. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly someone who 25 years ago, when I was first learning how to hang-glide, I literally and figuratively looked up to. Bill Leegsma was flying off mountains while I was on the training hill, and he's making his first visit to the Legislature today. I would ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Nick and Margaret Carter. Nick and Margaret have been active members in their community, and Nick also serves as the Grand Exalted Ruler of Edmonton Elks lodge 11, which is the Edmonton local located in Edmonton-Calder. They have three wonderful children – Michelle, David, and Deborah – and five grandchildren. Nick is also a cancer survivor and is grateful for the facilities like the Cross Cancer Institute. I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Nutrition Programs in Schools

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week this government shut down a Liberal opposition motion urging for sufficient resources to be made available to feed the tens of thousands of children who go to school hungry every day right here in Alberta. Just the next day the Premier announced his plans to participate in a taxpayer-funded world tour before he retires. In a province as wealthy as Alberta it is shameful – it is shameful – that eliminating child hunger is not a government priority. My question is to the minister of learning. Given that 3,000 children are on the waiting list for a volunteer-run hot lunch program in Edmonton alone, when

will this minister admit that there is a problem with child hunger in this province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear in the House during that particular debate on that motion where we stood on this matter. The fact is that we're providing \$5.3 billion for kindergarten to grade 12 education, and within that envelope there are dollars, flexible dollars, available to school boards to virtually do a lot of these innovative kinds of programs.

I should point out again, in case the hon. member didn't hear it clearly earlier this week, that approximately 70 per cent of school boards throughout the province do provide one form or another of a hot lunch program or a breakfast program or a snack program or some nutritional program in partnership with a community agency. They're very proud of that, and so are the community agencies. So it's not as if these issues are being ignored, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Taft: But they are. There are 3,000 kids in Edmonton on a waiting list.

Again to the same minister: given that almost all other provinces recognize what many studies have shown, that proper nutrition is essential for learning, why did this minister choose to vote against the Liberal opposition's motion to allocate proper resources to remove child hunger in Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm so grateful for this question because it will give me a chance to remind the opposition leader of what I really said. What I really said was that I could support a motion like this if it had a friendly amendment and if that friendly amendment didn't compel in a mandatory fashion school boards to provide those kinds of programs because they want some flexibility at the local level. They are locally elected to make local decisions. All that he would have to do to gain this minister's support would be to review that word "dedicated" or labelled or targeted funding in his motion, and then we could have that discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like the hon. minister to return to the motion and tell us what wording it is that he thinks compels school boards to deliver this program. He's misreading the whole thing.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I just exactly did that moments ago, but the hon. opposition leader was too engaged trying to tell us why he might support unelecting school boards in the province, and he didn't hear the answer. That's the exchange he was engaged in.

I'll repeat it, and I'll say it more slowly, Mr. Speaker. I said on Monday when the motion came up, and I'll say it again, that this minister could possibly have supported such a motion because we understand the value and the balance required with nutrition and food and clothing and shelter and how, essentially, parents have to provide that but in some cases don't. We could support that – this minister could – if it didn't have the word "dedicated," which translates as labelled or targeted funding. That goes against the grain of flexibility, which school boards are looking for.

Premier's Travel

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's long goodbye has cost this government some cabinet ministers and any semblance of a legislative agenda, and now it looks as though it's going to cost Albertans tens of thousands of dollars. Taxpayers will be sending

the Premier and his Tory entourage on an all expense paid, first-class tour of Russia and China and France and Ukraine. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the Premier will be retiring within weeks of these expensive trips, won't he admit that it is pointless for him personally to be making these contacts?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the last time I looked I'm still the Premier, and as Premier I intend to serve Albertans until the day I walk out the door. I will continue to pursue every opportunity that exists to build on the tremendous success of this province. When the time comes and details are finalized, we will issue news releases that will include itineraries and estimated costs, and those details will be posted on the website for anyone in the world to read.

1:50

I'll be promoting Alberta's oil sands to business interests in France, including investment, technology, and equipment supply. We already have one French company, Total, with very substantial investments in the oil sands. I have announced already that it's my hope that someday we will eradicate cancer. Dr. Turc, who was introduced in this Legislature earlier, will be part of the mission, and I'll be touring cancer research and treatment facilities in France, which I'm told has the best in the world.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier said just yesterday that he'll be taking the minister of learning along as his translator, can't he find a less expensive translator and leave the minister here to do his job?

Mr. Klein: Fine. I don't know if the hon. member can translate Ukrainian. I don't think he can. He doesn't speak Russian. As a matter of fact, he hardly speaks English.

I'm visiting Alberta's sister provinces in Ukraine for the first time since we signed agreements on various areas of co-operation. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member recalls, the governor of Lviv was here, and we hosted a reception for him. He was here for the centennial celebrations, and of course we signed a protocol of agreement with Lviv. So this is a reciprocal visit, given that governors from those sister provinces have been here. There is one other province, and I can't pronounce the name, but maybe you can.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Ivano-Frankivsk.

Mr. Klein: Right.

The Speaker: And we may get to it in the third one.
The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier just said that part of his agenda is to help find the cure for cancer, why doesn't he use some of the resources for this trip to solve school hunger in Alberta instead? Why don't you do something useful instead?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education already outlined very clearly the policy of this government and the opportunity to give flexibility to school boards, unlike the autocratic, compulsory attitude of the Liberal Party where they want to force everyone to do everything that they want. They want to force everyone to do everything that they want.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Benefit Design Options Report

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government seems to be the only jurisdiction constantly fearmongering its citizens about the future of the health care system. Canada and the United States are the only places that experienced a baby boom, while Japan and many European countries already have an older population. They are not experiencing the catastrophic scenario of unsustainability that this government is predicting. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that all the evidence already showed that privatization wasn't viable, what was the point of this \$1.5 million exercise with Aon?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, last October when we released the RFP for a contract subsequently managed by Aon, we were looking at an Alberta database, an Alberta model that would look at our growth scenarios, look at the costs, look at the probabilities, and look at the fact, too, on areas where we have a high incidence of costs, like pharmacare, where we have services provided to Canadians that are not necessarily covered under the Canada Health Act in terms of supplementary allied services, look at nonemergent services, look at the continuous care program, look at those elements and see in the future what the aging population would do. We noted in Finance that we didn't have people that were building actuarial models. Although there was the latitude to spend \$1.5 million, about \$1.3 million was spent on the contract.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the same minister: given that competition has proven to drive up costs in the public health care system, and the minister's own framework suggested more co-operation between regional health authorities, is the minister considering accepting Aon's suggestion for increased competition in the public system? How does having the Royal Alex compete with the Misericordia get us anywhere further? It doesn't.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the Aon presentation that today was made to members of all sides of the House, including the hon. member opposite, very clearly articulated that Aon Consulting was not there to do a policy recommendation or a policy review. Somehow in the question there is an implication that that is something that has been recommended by Aon as a policy of this government. It has neither been recommended nor does this particular document become the basis of any policy that we're directing now.

What we are looking at in the policy framework is the kind of regional co-operation and collaboration that should take place, the use and the role of hospitals, the use of community facilities. That's quite separate and apart from the kinds of things that Aon evaluated in their actuarial modelling of issues surrounding mandatory provision of health care insurance, which we have chosen not to implement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister: given the concern about containing costs, why isn't the minister implementing public system cost savers like bulk buying pharmaceuticals, including midwifery services under the public insurance plan, specialized surgical centres, or any number of other good ideas we already have?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, for a minute there I thought I heard the hon. member opposite say "specialized surgical centres." I must explore that with her later to find out under what auspices she was considering those because over the past several weeks all I've heard is that the sky is falling.

Mr. Taylor: Go to an ear, nose, and throat specialist and get the problem fixed.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.
The hon. leader of the third party.

Health Care Costs

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for the briefing – I'll start with that – because it gave us some good stuff to ask questions about. The government has hired Aon at a cost of 1 and a half million dollars, one of the world's largest insurance corporations, to come up with scary scenarios designed to frighten Albertans into believing that we cannot afford to maintain our public health care system. If we take Aon's word for it, we are expected to believe that the entire provincial budget will be consumed by health care by the year 2025. What nonsense. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why should Albertans put any stock in the 20-year financial projections done by Aon, which are based on assumptions generated by the Ministry of Finance, which has underestimated government revenues to the tune of \$41 billion in the last 13 years?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. Provincial Treasurer will supplement my answer. Quite frankly, by looking at the models for private insurance and determining that we would not pursue those models of private insurance, from the perspective of Aon Consulting, who is not itself an insurance company, albeit subsidiaries of that company do insure, they certainly did not come forward with anything that would be a conflict of interest. In fact, they recommended quite the opposite, that we not engage in any of those particular options.

In terms of the assumptions that Finance makes in terms of financial information, to the Treasurer, please.

The Speaker: Perhaps they'll get that in another question.
The hon. member.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, that is the government's own number.

This is again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why should Albertans put any stock in the Aon report which assumes that health spending will increase by 10 per cent a year for the next 20 years when health spending has only gone up at a rate of 5.9 per cent every year since 1993?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that Albertans, including the hon. members opposite, really look at every part of that report and determine what, in fact, they would shoot down in the assumptions in that report. That report looked at a middle-growth scenario, looked at not only the figures from Finance but, in fact, comparisons across the world, looked at their actuarial design. One might say: well, why do they have the expertise to do that? We did a lot of work in framing a request for proposal that would get us an unbiased report on that.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think that if anybody can identify what

was wrong with it – I note that the members that were there and stayed until the very end heard that they looked at a number of the ways that they predicted resource revenues, which in the next 20-year period are presumed by Aon's report to decrease in terms of the valuation of all of the other kinds of costs. So if you look at the fact that they depleted the amounts of monies that were attributable to resource revenue, you can hardly argue that we were using any inflationary factor to try to in fact scare the Alberta public. They used modest assumptions. They followed through with a document that I'd like to see quite specifically what Albertans would say is wrong with their assumptions and wrong with their conclusions.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, why should Albertans accept the cost projections and fearmongering contained in the Aon report when the government has rejected excellent ideas for actually bringing down the costs of health care, such as the NDP's pharmaceutical savings agency that could save us \$75 million a year in the first year?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I can't resist saying this. This minister has taken more hits than George Chuvalo by the members opposite on both sides of the bench. Quite frankly, this kind of a hit, this kind of fearmongering that they continue to do is because I don't think they have a leg to stand on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Education Issues

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Education mentioned to the Committee of Supply, which due to the two-hour time constraint I was unable to participate in, that program number 3 is up by 6.3 per cent. Of that, \$152 million will address the government's responsibility for the unfunded liability of the Alberta teacher's pension. To the minister: could you please explain both to the citizens of Alberta and the teachers how \$152 million addresses, as you said, "government's responsibility for the unfunded liability of the Alberta teachers' pension plan," which is over \$4 billion?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Certainly, and thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, prior to 1992 the teachers' pension plan was largely underfunded both by the teachers and by government, so in 1992 an agreement was struck whereby the government of Alberta undertook responsibility for two-thirds of the unfunded portion. The funded portion is done on a 50-50 basis. Now, teachers undertook responsibility to pay for one-third. Our share on an annual basis is now going to be \$152 million this year, and it will grow proportionately thereafter. So the exact answer is that the \$152 million that is in the Education budget that was debated and passed yesterday is reflective of our commitment to honour our obligation.

Mr. Hinman: I'll have to do the math. I don't see how that catches up.

To the Premier: will the Premier follow his own legislation to put all surplus revenue to pay off debt or offset debt with a trust fund, as you have with the provincial debt as it comes due, by creating a trust fund for the teachers' pension before implementing new programs and increased spending?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll defer to the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, in the financial statements of the government the pension liabilities are below the line, so in fact our commitment to remove debt is met.

Mr. Speaker, there's no question that we are as interested and concerned as anyone about ensuring that we have absolutely no financial obligations in the way of debt. However, I'm proud to say that under this government, this Premier's leadership in sound fiscal management we are prepared to meet all of our obligations in this province.

Mr. Hinman: I don't know how this spending spree will end.

Again to the Minister of Education: will the minister act as fast as possible to address the 50 per cent of Alberta students who do not go on to postsecondary education by implementing a work experience program in high school that addresses the needs of the students as well as the insurance liabilities of the schools and the employers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of work experience related programs that are really turning in very successful and proud numbers. We work in conjunction with the Ministry of Advanced Education to deliver those. Included in that bevy of options are programs such as RAP, the registered apprenticeship program, and YAP, the youth apprenticeship program. We have a new one now called learner pathways. We have a number of outreach sites that school boards have in place right now where students have that experience, and we have a number of CTS programs as well. I'm grateful for the question. It is an important area, and we are making good progress there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Federal/Provincial Fiscal Relations

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to live in Alberta. Why? Because evidence of a thriving economy is all around us. We have low unemployment, Albertans have new opportunities, and the province leads the country in most economic measurements. We know, however, that this has not gone unnoticed by other parts of the country. Sometimes being the leader makes you susceptible to the envy of others and to those who claim it is unfair. My first question about equalization is to the Premier. How is the provincial government ensuring that other Canadians understand how our province's economic success benefits the rest of the country?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, we can't really ensure that everyone understands, but certainly I've been saying in speeches in . . .

An Hon. Member: In China.

Mr. Klein: No, not in China. They understand. Unlike the Liberals they understand in China. It's their cousins. It's their Liberal cousins in Ontario that don't understand, and I've been in Ontario on numerous occasions to explain that we are a caring and we are a sharing province and we are the largest net contributors to Canada on a per capita basis.

Mr. Speaker, I point out the Canadian Energy Research Institute, and I allude to the report that they released recently indicating that the federal government is the largest recipient – the largest – whether it's a Liberal or a Conservative government, of the tax revenue that

will be generated by Alberta's oil sands between the year 2000 and 2020. According to the report Ottawa will collect some \$51 billion – billion – or 41 per cent, of the estimated \$123 billion in taxes associated with the oil sands facility. Just from oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Finance. What is this government doing to ensure that Alberta's success is not somehow hobbled by changes to equalization or to transfer payments or to some other program they come up with?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there is and has been concern raised by some groups in the province, and I think this is an area that's not well understood by many. There are people who would tell us that we should just stop our transfer payments to Ottawa. Well, in fact, the government of Alberta does not transfer money to Ottawa. The benefit, as outlined by the Premier in his answer, is gained in Ottawa by taxation, taxation that Albertans pay when they file their federal income tax, which the federal government under the Constitution has the ability to collect.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing I can tell you is that under our Premier's leadership, working with our Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and certainly the Minister of Finance, we will be in constant contact with our counterparts across Canada and review each of the studies and reports that come forward on this. We will make sure that there is nothing that goes forward that in any way unfairly impacts Alberta.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the Minister of Finance. Can the minister tell this House and all Albertans more details on what is happening in those discussions with her counterparts across the country. How are they trying to get our money?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, I think that what many provinces are saying is that they want a larger amount of money under equalization. Equalization is something that Alberta has been a strong supporter of, a proud supporter of, because what equalization does is it ensures that every province in Canada can offer quality core programs to their people, their constituents. But having said that, we are following this very carefully. We will ensure that the reports are vetted, and we will not support a program that increases payments to provinces based on poor policy developed in those provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Appointment of Chief Judge

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The appointment of a Chief Justice of the Provincial Court of Alberta is important not just to the legal community but to all Albertans. It is absolutely critical that the judiciary operates fairly, openly, and most importantly with complete impartiality from interference from any other entity, especially political influence. Albertans and the legal community have many questions about the process that led to the appointment of Gail Vickery as Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta.

My questions are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister tell us what considerations were involved in this appointment process, who made the decision, and what criteria were used in screening and evaluating applicants?

Mr. Stevens: It is an excellent question, and certainly I think that the points raised by the hon. member in his preamble are accurate with respect to the importance of this particular position. The Chief Justice of the Provincial Court of Alberta does have a very important role in our justice system, and it is important that we do a good job and appoint a very, very qualified person, and I'm very pleased to tell you that Judge Gail Vickery is indeed a very qualified individual.

Under our rules, Mr. Speaker, the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court has a seven-year appointment. The retiring Chief Judge is Chief Judge Walter. His term is up in May of this year. Last December, as part of this particular process, I as Justice minister did two things. Firstly, what I did was I said to all Provincial Court judges in the province of Alberta by way of a memo that as a result of Chief Judge Walter's term coming to an end in May, they should, if they were interested, send applications through to the department and that we would receive those.

As part of the process of vetting I asked that a committee be established. Now, this was a completely new process, but I thought it was important that it be done, that a committee be established to vet those applications, not knowing whether there would be one or whether there would be 115 because there are 115 Provincial Court judges. That particular committee, Mr. Speaker – and I'll end with outlining who was on it – comprised the current Chief Judge, the former president of the Law Society of Alberta, the Deputy Minister of the Justice ministry, and the chair and one nonlegal member of the Provincial Nominating Court Committee.

Dr. B. Miller: To the same minister: can the minister tell us if the new Chief Judge's involvement in the Multi-Corp affair was considered along with close personal ties to the Premier? Did the minister or the committee consider if this would interfere with judicial independence?

Mr. Stevens: You know, Mr. Speaker, there are typically two things in life that we all recognize as being certain, and those are death and taxes. But I think that there's a third that we can add, and that is that this Liberal opposition will at every opportunity take an opportunity to impugn the reputation of good people outside of this Assembly in here without the courage to go out there and say those things. I'm particularly distressed because, candidly, I thought that this hon. member is one that stood apart from that, from this particular group.

Let me address the issue of the process. What I asked this particular committee to do was to review the applications and to provide a list of those applicants who were qualified to do the job, and I received that list. Judge Gail Vickery was on that list, and ultimately she was selected from that list.

But allow me to say this, Mr. Speaker. The obligation of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General is to receive this information and to consider that along with other things. I for one had no knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the preamble of this last question, so to the hon. member I can say: it was not a consideration. In fact, I can tell you that Judge Gail Vickery had a reputation before becoming a member of the judiciary of this province that I am envious of, and I had, I'd like to think, a reasonably successful, modest degree of success as a lawyer before coming to this Assembly. She was one fine lawyer, and she's been one fine judge, and we should be thankful that she accepted the position.

Speaker's Ruling Protected Persons

The Speaker: Hon. members, as all hon. members know, the chair has no knowledge of what the nature of a question is that will be forthcoming, but the chair is knowledgeable on the rules of the House and would refer all members to *Beauchesne* 493(1): "All references to judges and courts of justice of the nature of personal attack and censure have always been considered unparliamentary, and the Speaker has always treated them as breaches of order."

The chair did see some movement in anticipation of a point of order – the question was raised, and the answer was provided by the minister – when it went beyond the normal 35 to 45 seconds that we require in anticipation of a perceived point of order.

So, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, please proceed with your third question, recognizing what has just been quoted by the chair with respect to the rules of the House.

Appointment of Chief Judge (continued)

Dr. B. Miller: I'm just concerned about the process. I have a conscience. I represent Albertans.

Will the minister follow the example of his federal cousins and adopt a scrutiny process, like the federal government is following, allowing an all-party inquiry to ensure that judicial independence is not compromised and appointments are not just patronage appointments?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, please sit down. There are two ways of going with a question. One is a very direct way, and the other one is an interesting, behind-the-door way. I think that the hon. member just took the latter approach in the third question. The chair is not going to allow a member of the judiciary to have his or her reputation tarnished in this House in any way, shape, or form.

We're now moving on to the next question. The next question comes from the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:20 Native Friendship Centres

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the last census the number of aboriginal people living in urban centres has doubled and in some cases tripled. Today half of all aboriginal people live in cities. Calgary has a vibrant friendship centre which helps aboriginal people make the transition to urban living. The city also has Canada's fourth largest aboriginal population, with 22,000 people. To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: what kind of funding do you provide to native friendship centres in Alberta?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, friendship centres are really vital to Alberta and, most specifically, to aboriginal people because friendship centres are more than a gathering place. They actually help aboriginal Albertans make that transition to urban life. As a result, we do provide some funding to them, approximately \$650,000 annually. However, we have not seen any change in that amount for a long time, and therefore I would encourage those boards to continue to work with me and with their MLAs to ensure that we can continue to receive a little bit more dollars.

Mr. Johnston: To the same minister: given that since the '80s native friendship centres have not received a funding increase from

the province, what plans do you have to provide funds to help these unique organizations?

Ms Calahasen: First of all, Mr. Speaker, we are always looking for ways to be able to work with the friendship centres because they do serve a really good population within the aboriginal community. This year through my department we had an additional \$100,000, which we were able to put to good use. We gave Red Deer Native Friendship Society some money to establish what we call a community liaison contact. The second one was to the High Prairie Native Friendship Centre Society to provide youth programs. The third one that we were working with was the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association itself to assist in project management training for their staff and, as well, Peace River, which is the Nistawoyou friendship centre, to host a spiritual and health gathering.

Mr. Speaker, it's always very difficult for friendship centres because they are dealing with the fastest growing population in Alberta, and that's the aboriginal community. So we're trying to make sure that we do work with them to ensure that we can provide any help that we can to them.

Mr. Johnston: My second supplemental to the same minister: is there any other way that we can support friendship centres by encouraging the development of partnerships that benefit urban aboriginal people?

Ms Calahasen: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. First of all, one of the areas that we've been working on is to facilitate and work with other ministries, such as Children's Services, Economic Development, and Community Development, so that we can begin to see how we can build those partnerships. We have also encouraged the federal government to work with us on the friendship centre area as well as the municipal districts so that we can see the partnerships occur.

We've seen a lot of partnerships start to happen, and we've been encouraging other kinds of partnerships to occur. We've been working with seniors, as I indicated in one of my previous answers, in housing and dealing with urban aboriginal housing as well as the housing that they're having to deal with in these areas where they're located. Mr. Speaker, we're also developing strategies with the AUMA and the AAMD and C so that they can work more effectively with aboriginal people in their neighbouring communities. Of course, the urban aboriginal strategy is another area that we can push. So we've got some strategies which we will continue to work with.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Education Funding for Lethbridge

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Education minister boasts of spending \$5.3 billion on education, but Lethbridge's public school board will have to choose which services to cut next year. Yes, cut teachers. We can do without the Minister of Education. We can do without the janitors. Without teachers there is no education. My question is to the minister. What is the Education minister's response to the horrifying funding situation in Lethbridge caused by this inadequate hold-the-line budget?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge public has a budget for the '05-06 government fiscal year of about \$59 million. The budget that we approved yesterday will see their budget rise to about \$59.6

million. I hardly think that that can be interpreted as a cut or a slice or whatever it is that she was saying in the preamble.

Ms Pastoor: Doesn't meet inflation.

How many other school districts are also victims of this hold-the-line budget that doesn't cover the cost of inflation, or is Lethbridge the proverbial canary in the coal mine to assess how deep these cuts can go?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member asking the question hasn't had a chance to review *Hansard* from yesterday, wherein I outlined all of the increases, but with the permission of the House I'll start all over.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I'll condense them a little bit. Okay.

First of all, there's an overall increase to the K to 12 education budget of \$330 million. That's 6.7 per cent. That will include increases to all three infrastructure envelopes: school construction, operations and maintenance, and infrastructure maintenance and renewal. That includes increases to transportation, up to \$232 million in total. That includes special needs, an increase of 9.7 per cent, up to \$373 million, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for referring to and using the word "construction." How much longer will the residents of Lethbridge wait for the much-needed high school as costs continue to rise without even a shovel in the ground?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be part of an announcement I think it was last September or October wherein we announced to date the single largest project that I'm aware of for a joint project in the hon. member's hometown. I know it was 20-some million dollars, as I recall, and it's a collaborative project which sees a much-needed new high school being built there. I would have thought that the hon. member would have known about that because it was front-page coverage. Specifically, it was \$27.6 million for the west Lethbridge high school new education centre.

Now, we've since corresponded, and I understand that they have some cost escalations. We've looked at those, and things are under control there. We're looking forward to a school opening very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Home Schooling

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that our government has been working to update the home-education regulation. Many parents who home educate their children are already starting to plan for next year and are wondering what the status of it is now. Reflecting inquiries and concern from my constituents, my question today is to the Minister of Education. When will the updated home-education regulation be available for use by parents who educate their children at home?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as most members here would know, we have a significant enrolment of home-educated students. They work in co-operation with a local co-operating school board. As a result of extensive consultations over the past couple of years we found it necessary to update the current regulation. However, the short answer to the member's question is that the new home-ed

regulation is just about completed in terms of its drafting, and we'll have the new home-ed regulation out very soon. But in the meantime, hon. members and Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that I have extended the current home-ed regulation through to the end of July.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that some caring and dedicated parents who believe in home-education for their children have expressed concerns about student assessments, stating that their children do not necessarily follow the Alberta program of study – and it is true – how, then, does the government know what home-educated Albertan youth are learning and how they're learning it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in a nutshell, we and the parents and the co-operating school board and for that matter the students know exactly how they're doing because the whole process starts with the parents sitting down with a co-operating teacher, who is there from the co-operating board, and they design a program specific to that student's needs. There are a variety of programs that can be followed. Thereafter the co-operating teacher visits the student, visits the home – visits the location, in other words – works one-on-one with the child or the student and monitors the progress. Then at the end of the year, depending on which grade level they're at, they have an option of what type of assessment might be done. It's all done in co-operation with skilled and trained professional people. So there's a fairly good method in place now.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that we all expect Alberta youth to go to postsecondary education and career training, facing a really competitive world outside their home environment, how can the government ensure that home-schooled students meet the qualifications for acceptance in postsecondary learning?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. The answer, of course, is this. First of all, it's the responsibility of the home-educating parent to ensure that the track they put their child on yields the particular result that they are seeking. If they're seeking a postsecondary entrance result, there is advice on procedures and policies and guidelines that is available through the co-operating school board. Secondly, it should be noted that many postsecondary institutions don't require specific graduation diplomas to be provided in order to facilitate access to that particular institution. So there are responsibilities there, there is advice there, and there are programs of study routes to be taken which parents should be well advised of.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

PDD Program Review

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues its lengthy track record of ignoring the needs of vulnerable Albertans and punishing those who challenge bad government policy. Despite the minister's efforts to pretend that cuts to services for people with disabilities are not happening across the province, yesterday's protest and a chorus of letters and e-mails from distressed PDD recipients and their families prove that there's a real funding

problem. But when people have the courage to stand up and speak out in this province, this government responds with bullying and intimidation, with phony financial reviews and phony audits. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why is it that these types of reviews only happen when people publicly voice concerns that are embarrassing to the government?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I am not bullying and intimidating. I can tell you, by going out to a rally for an hour and speaking with individuals about their concerns, that I was pleased to actually have a lot of hugs from people as I went through and as they gave their stories and shared with me what the real issues are. I was also pleased to be able to let people know that we are reviewing this situation. This review started some time ago. I had mentioned that to you in the Assembly previously. As we had AACL here yesterday, it's a review that is very inclusive. It has stakeholders. It has people from my ministry. Families themselves are a part of this. It will take some time to complete that review. It's an important initiative, and it is taking place. It's not bullying to do a review.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, the point is: given that yesterday the minister said that the problems seemed to be with the community boards, it's not a real review. Isn't that a form of intimidation when people speak out against government policy?

Mrs. Fritz: No. Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is no.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, how can the minister pretend to be an advocate for disabled Albertans when she responds to their requests for funding with punitive reviews and insufficient funding?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, this review is actually going to be very helpful as we move forward with this change in governance that we have. I think that tonight we're debating this in Committee of the Whole. I'm looking forward to the participation of the community at large, of my ministry as a part of the review. Stay tuned. We'll have the results for you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Government House Leader noted a point of order, but I think I dealt with that purported point of order during question period. Unless there's something pressing, I'm not quite prepared to recognize the hon. Government House Leader with respect to that point. I think it's been dealt with.

Historical Vignette

The Speaker: Hon. members, with respect to an historical vignette let me talk to you about the Privy Council of Canada.

Rev. Abbott: Oh. Timely.

The Speaker: Timely.

Appointments to the Privy Council for Canada are made by the Governor General upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister. All current and former members of the federal cabinet are members of the Privy Council, but the Prime Minister may recommend the appointment of other distinguished Canadians as well. While the Privy Council is constitutionally an executive advisory body, convention has limited the advisory duties to those members who are currently members of the federal cabinet. An appointment to the Privy Council is intended to be a great honour.

A number of Alberta's Premiers have been appointed to the Privy Council, including Arthur L.W. Sifton, who served as Alberta's

Premier from 1910 to 1917. He was appointed to the Privy Council on October 12, 1917. Charles Stewart, who served as Premier from 1917 to 1921, was appointed to the Privy Council on December 29, 1921. However, interestingly enough, both Mr. Sifton and Mr. Stewart received their appointments when they were named to the federal cabinets of Prime Ministers Sir Robert L. Borden and W.L. Mackenzie King respectively. Premier Ernest C. Manning, who served as Premier of Alberta from 1943 to 1968, was appointed to the Privy Council on July 5, 1967. Premier E. Peter Lougheed, who served from 1971 to 1985, was appointed to the Privy Council on April 17, 1982.

All former Alberta MLAs who have eventually been appointed to the federal cabinet have also become members of the Privy Council for Canada, the most recent of which is former MLA Stockwell Day.

Appointments to the Queen's Privy Council for Canada are for life.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Anniversary of Chernobyl Disaster

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This day marks a sad anniversary in the history of the world. Twenty years ago today one of the four reactors at the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl in the Soviet Ukraine exploded, releasing over 50 tonnes of radioactive material into the atmosphere, an amount greater than the combined bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The world first heard of the accident two days later, when Swedish monitoring stations detected the radiation that spread across northern and eastern Europe, contaminating millions of acres of farmlands and forests. Thirty-two people died from the immediate explosion. Dozens more suffered radiation burns. The accident eventually killed 5,000 people from cancer and other radiation-related illnesses and left a legacy of illness, suffering, and shortened lifespans for generations. The last working reactors at Chernobyl were shut down in 2000, and the plant was closed. But the lingering impact continues to confront scientists, health professionals, the nuclear power industry, and international policy.

Mr. Speaker, no one felt the impact of that explosion more keenly than the 300,000 Albertans of Ukrainian heritage, who saw so much of their ancestral homeland devastated, perhaps beyond recall. All Albertans felt the suffering of those affected and the fear that spread with the radiation. Alberta reacted with compassion and generosity, providing financial assistance and medical care at the time and in the years since.

Albertans have continued to open their homes to some of the 3,000 children from the Ukraine and neighbouring Belarus who are sent abroad every summer, when radiation levels are highest. Mrs. Klein visited the Chernobyl museum and paid homage to the victims of the disaster on the Premier's mission to the Ukraine in 2002.

Mr. Speaker, the devastation of Chernobyl has revealed the Alberta heart. On the 20th anniversary we look back with horror and look ahead with the Ukrainian people to a stronger partnership in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

2:40 Bureau of Learners from Alberta Speakers Team

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Literacy is important, but you don't need to believe me. Believe our guests introduced by the Minister of Advanced Education earlier today. They can blast the

message much more powerfully than I. On March 11 they celebrated a graduation ceremony that I was unable to attend, so I'm delighted that the members of the BLAST team could join us today and be recognized.

Reading and writing are integral to everything we do. Sometimes we take these skills for granted. We forget that without these fundamental capabilities even the smallest tasks can be challenging. These skills are absolutely critical if we are to be successful in work and participate in our communities.

Literacy is essential for continued learning. It provides the foundation for further education and, ultimately, for maximizing one's potential through knowledge. Given the importance of literacy, programs that help and encourage Albertans to improve their literacy skills are vital to our province.

Earlier this afternoon the hon. Minister of Advanced Education introduced the members of the Bureau of Learners from Alberta Speakers Team, or BLAST. Through this program adult learners develop their public speaking abilities and then take part in speaking engagements across the province. Members of the BLAST team share their personal experiences, telling others how they improved their literacy skills and what it means to their lives. Through their stories they inspire others to have the courage and perseverance needed to develop their reading and writing skills, and they remind others of the importance of literacy. Believe me, Mr. Speaker, they are powerful stories of lives changed.

Literacy Alberta is a great organization that works year after year to support and assist learners in their literacy development. It deserves our thanks and our appreciation. The BLAST team deserve our recognition and our admiration for their courage, their achievement, and their willingness to share their experiences with others. All of our guests – Jacquie Coulas, Kalvinder Dhillon, Lillian Gallant, Jill Manning, Scott Maslyk, and Paul Ruot Galuak – deserve great admiration for their achievements and for their willingness to share their journeys with others.

I particularly want to mention Leonard Duby, who you may be aware won the first Council of the Federation literacy award for Alberta last year, and our own Philip Beakhouse, who works in the Legislature Building every day – day in, day out – making it habitable for us to work. Philip overcame a brain tumour, which was finally removed at age 25. He never learned to read or write until now. A friend urged him to join PALS in the mid-1990s, and literacy has changed his life.

Please join me in congratulating Philip, Leonard, and all the members of the BLAST team.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Democratic Renewal

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I continue my series of talks on democratic renewal in Alberta. To start, let me share with the hon. members one of the four Alberta Liberal caucus documents collectively called Alberta Horizons, which all state that the time to dream is now, and the place to dream is Alberta. In this particular one the dream is to revive democracy in this province.

Why do we even dream? Dreams are jumping blocks to great achievements. There was the dream which later became Canada. There was the dream which later offered us public, universally available health care. There was the dream that this province could potentially be out of debt one day. Et cetera. But do we stop dreaming if things are better today than they were yesterday? Do we become lazy and complacent and stop thinking about our children's future? The answer, Mr. Speaker, is definitely no.

The Alberta Liberal caucus has a vision for this province's future and the people and policies to take us there. Part of our work focuses on electoral reform. It is noteworthy to highlight the fact that British Columbia, for example, has fixed election dates, something we Alberta Liberals advocate as evident in our private member's bill, Bill 210, calling for just that: fixed election dates.

We also want to increase voter participation. Under an Alberta Liberal government we will ensure that every vote will count. Albertans, Mr. Speaker, will not have to vote strategically ever again.

Furthermore, on the issue of campaign financing we are going to mandate donation limits to restore faith in the electoral process, where people are elected on their merits and with true grassroots support, not bought by special-interest lobbyists and big business.

Other areas we're working on include legislative renewal, restoring government accountability, and improving transparency and access to information.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, we advocate better government with the same virtues valued by Albertans in their daily lives – freedom, fairness, trust, honesty, and hard work – virtues which are unfortunately lacking from this 35-year-old, tired government.

To be continued.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Democratic Renewal

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Horizon's democratic renewal. Yesterday afternoon during the education debate/debacle players and audience members present witnessed the fragility of Alberta's ongoing, one-act democracy.

Under the auspices of this government's staging directions, Standing Orders, the Minister of Education figuratively strolled the stage, soaking up the spotlight without fear of the appearance of an offstage hook from his government's designated deputy drama critic. From time to time he would gaze appealingly into the gallery for the offstage prompts of his forgotten lines. Opposition players' stage entrances were not only hindered by the minister's lengthy soliloquies but were blocked by a backbench chorus not content to discuss their concerns offstage while waiting in the wings.

Fortunately, well prior to the afternoon performance, undaunted by an army of government stagehands led by an ever-expanding troupe of deputy and assistant deputy ministerial stand-ins, the .3 opposition researcher had boldly defied the odds by prearming his critic's role of David to do battle with the government Goliath. Having thoroughly prepared and rehearsed their scripts, the opposition troupe was ready to engage.

Meanwhile, on stage the real fate of billions of Albertans' dollars was being decided at the surreal rate of millions a minute. With the cancellation of the fall legislative theatrical accountability session/season in both 2004 and now again in 2006, is it any wonder that half of the once Alberta democracy subscribers, now barely 50 per cent of eligible voters, feel so disenchanting that they no longer wish to attend or participate in government preorchestrated, first past the post performances?

Democracy in Alberta is desperately calling for a scene change, for new players supported by a visionary script. This is why both the Alberta audience and the media reviewers are applauding and embracing the recently released Alberta Horizons four-pillar policy provincial Liberal blueprint. Economic and environmental ideals are balanced on a broadly inclusive social policy base supported by a

democratically engaging plot line which lays out a sustainably prosperous future for all Albertans.

The curtain is rising.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Zaheed Damani

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today during National Volunteer Week to recognize a very special young Calgarian. Last night at Volunteer Calgary's 10th annual leadership awards, attended by the hon. Minister of Community Development and the chair of Alberta's Youth Secretariat, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Zaheed Damani was the senior high recipient for the leaders of tomorrow award.

I can think of no better recipient, Mr. Speaker. Zaheed is an incredible example of community leadership and education. He's involved in the advisory panel for the Alberta government's Youth Secretariat as a leader, researcher, and presenter. He is also the province's youth representative on the learning Alberta advanced education learning subcommittee, that guides government direction for postsecondary education. In addition, Zaheed has held other volunteer positions with the Ismaili Muslim community, Boy Scouts, Camp Discovery, Child & Youth Friendly Calgary, Calgary Inter-faith Food Bank, and many other organizations at his school within Calgary and in southern Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, it makes me so proud to see such incredible dedication in one individual. When you take a look at his fellow nominees, there is no doubt that Alberta's future is bright.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank Zaheed for his volunteer efforts, and I am sure we will continue to hear great things about his work in the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Volunteer Calgary Leadership Awards

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to honour the hardworking and dedicated volunteers honoured at last night's Volunteer Calgary's 10th annual leadership awards. Awards were handed out in seven categories, demonstrating the diversity of ways that volunteer Calgarians make an important difference in our community.

Lynne McShane and Connie Cook from the Glenbow Museum were recognized for leadership in volunteer management.

The Mustard Seed storefront 101 was named leader in the community for its successful and innovative volunteer program that advances the mission and goals of the nonprofit organization.

The outstanding efforts of youth who are making a difference in our community were also saluted. Youth award winners were Courtney Leach, Keirstyn Secord, and Zaheed Damani.

Excellence in workplace volunteerism was also recognized by Volunteer Calgary. Southport Dental Care received the gold medal, GWL Realty Advisors received the silver medal, and CIBC Wood Gundy won a bronze award.

For the first time this year there was a new award recognizing pets for the many and varied activities they are involved in that make our community a better place. Charlie, a five-year-old yellow lab/golden retriever assistance dog, was singled out for an award.

Volunteer Calgary's VIP award recognizes the outstanding contributions of individual volunteers. Hattie Boothman from Meals on Wheels received this year's award.

Harold Merrick received this year's heart of Calgary award, which

recognizes individuals who have strong enthusiasm and take responsibility for creating a healthy and caring community through civic participation.

Congratulations to all these award winners and all the nominees for making a difference in our community.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: I'd like to congratulate three members here who just participated in Members' Statements. Might I congratulate the Member for Edmonton-McClung, the Member for Calgary-East, the Member for Calgary-Foothills for knowing the Standing Orders of the House and for abiding by the Standing Orders of the House. But to the hon. Members for Calgary-Varsity, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, and Edmonton-Whitemud, perhaps a review of the Standing Orders might be appropriate. In particular, the chair would like to draw their attention to Standing Order 7(4).

Speaker's Ruling Standing Orders

The Speaker: Now, I am going to make one other comment here today. I have ruled out points of order, and I've ruled out points of privilege with respect to members' statements. Every once in a while something is said in members' statements which, however, does cause some movement by the chair. Today the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity in his member's statement alluded to the Standing Orders of this House and said that they were government Standing Orders of this House.

The chair is a nonpartisan member of this Assembly, and the chair has during the nine years that he has been the chair insisted that all Standing Orders be done by unanimous consent of all members of the House. The Standing Orders are not owned by one section of this House; they are owned by all members of this House. The Standing Orders belong to this Legislative Assembly, not to a particular caucus. That utilization of the truth is inappropriate, and it's wrong because in addition to the orders being the Standing Orders of the House, all House leaders of all parties signed off on them and advised me in no uncertain terms that all of their members supported them. For a member to then stand up and criticize them, the member is only criticizing himself, so one should look in the mirror periodically.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week the hon. Premier promised to table with the House copies of an anticipated letter he alluded to that would come his way from the office of the Ethics Commissioner which would clarify postemployment restrictions as they apply to members of Executive Council under a particular act. On his behalf I'm pleased to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from the office of the Ethics Commissioner, dated April 26, 2006, in that regard. I'll just quickly add that the Premier will also be meeting with the Ethics Commissioner to seek yet further clarification as may be necessary on May 3.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a petition that I received from Barbara Brown, dated April 10, 2006, with approximately 800 signatures from Albertans from the Peace

Country who are concerned not only about the loss of doctors in the Peace Country but also that doctors and nurses are being over-worked. They are urgently requesting attention to this matter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table 10 letters from family, staff, and residents who are either involved in or dependent upon the continuing care system in this province, expressing their deep concerns about the state of that system. These letters are signed by Fred and Marie Nash, Roger Johnson, L. Howard, Linda Wood Edwards, Bob Peel, C. Isabel Pangrass, Betty and Joe Sparling, Doreen Rennie, Sheila New, and Evelyn Patterson. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table these 10 letters from family, staff, and residents who are dependent on the continuing care system and expressing their deep concerns about how the system is operating. They are Shabantla Devi, Mary Roy,* Marie Bell Tonganis, Geena Mohanan,* Susan Aup,* Leena Prasad, Seema Kumar, Mom Melo, Jocelyn Gerald, and Jane Moorenya.*

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Ms Sheila Haddad, who is disappointed with the Prime Minister's decision barring the media from ramp ceremonies and not lowering the Canadian flag to honour fallen troops. She, however, commends Alberta on lowering the Canadian flag on the "day of increment."

My second tabling today is 10 letters from families, staff, and residents who are all involved in the long-term care system expressing deep concerns with the way the system is run and the quality of care offered. The names on these letters are Milo Kasala,* Raymond W. Bradley, Grace Johnston, G.M. Staines, Donna Slywka, Debbie Woloshyniuk, Shelley Mathiason,* Arla Stevenson, Esther Eiler, and Donna and Bill Buchanan.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Community Development

The Chair: I'd recognize the hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the estimates for Community Development for the year 2006-2007. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of various individuals who make my ministry the success it is. Seated in the members' gallery are Neris Havelock, my executive assistant; Sue Bohaichuk, assistant deputy minister for strategic corporate services; Pam Arnston, executive director of financial services; and Kathryn Weigers, director of communications. I'd ask them to please stand. Please join me in giving them a traditional warm welcome.

Mr. Chairman, my ministry also relies on the commitment of other individuals who are unable to be here today: the Wild Rose Foundation chair, Krishan Joshee; the Alberta Foundation for the Arts chair, Audrey Luft; the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission chief commissioner, Charlach Mackintosh; the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation chair, Orest Korbutt; the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation chair, Irene Nicholson; the Government House Foundation chair, Linda Mackenzie; the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund Advisory Committee chair, the Member for Stony Plain; Fay Orr, my deputy minister, and her executive team; and the entire staff of Community Development.

Mr. Chairman, our operating budget this year is \$242 million. That is just 85 cents out of every \$100 this government will spend on programs this year, yet this small investment has a big impact on those areas that add to and, in some cases, define our quality of life as Albertans. About one-quarter of my budget goes directly to Alberta's communities as grants to libraries, the arts, sport and recreation, volunteer organizations, community museums, and human rights education.

Our foundations and agencies contribute to 260 community-based museums, more than 500 arts groups and about the same number of individual artists, 104 provincial sport and recreation organizations that have a total of 1.2 million members. Tens of thousands of volunteers donate 449 million hours a year to their communities, plus 314 public library service points loan over 30 million items a year to Albertans.

In addition, my ministry directly operates more than 500 parks and protected areas, operates 17 provincial museum historic sites plus the two Jubilee auditoria and the Provincial Archives, sponsors sports, recreation, and competitive games like the Alberta Games and Team Alberta at the Canada Games, provides programs that support and develop volunteerism, and ensures fairness by supporting the Alberta Human Rights Commission and sponsoring the Francophone Secretariat. All this work adds up to a quality of life that builds Alberta pride, which makes Alberta a better place to live, work, and visit, and that has a big impact on our economy.

The impact is significantly higher than our \$240 million investment. My budget helps leverage an annual economic impact of \$3.4 billion a year in cultural activities, \$2.2 billion in sport and recreation, and \$1.3 billion in parks tourism. We cannot take sole credit for this impact, but we are important contributors.

Every grant dollar from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts leverages \$12 in community spending. Every dollar in grants from the Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation leverages \$5 in the community. Communities that host the Alberta Games average a \$3 million impact. The impact of international sporting events is measured in tens of millions. The World Masters Games last year had an impact in Alberta of \$30 million.

3:00

Volunteerism has a major economic and social impact: 19,000 not-for-profit and voluntary organizations in Alberta with 176,000 employees. Albertans volunteer 449 million hours of service a year, equivalent to 234,000 full-time jobs. Alberta-based nonprofit and voluntary organizations have total revenues of \$10 billion. Beyond the money is the impact on our quality of life and reputation.

Provincial parks help keep people healthy and rural economies strong. Libraries support lifelong learning and in small communities are access points to government services. The arts promote innovative thinking, provide avenues for expression, and nurture mental and physical health. Museums and heritage management protect and educate about our history and identity.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Volunteers are more likely to make charitable donations and to participate in community organizations. Human rights protection and education foster equality, promote inclusion, and reduce discrimination. Physical activity reduces obesity, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. For youth it also reduces the rates of drug and tobacco use while increasing academic achievement.

Our sports development programs and training facilities are respected across the country and the world. Almost 30 per cent of Canada's medal winners at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Turin were from Alberta and another 42 per cent trained here, giving Alberta a stake in 72 per cent of Canada's most recent Olympic medals.

Colleagues, the budget allocated to Community Development may be listed in the estimates as an expense, but we all know that it is an investment.

My budget for 2006-2007 shows a net decrease of \$40.2 million from last year's third-quarter forecast, but the changes are not readily apparent, with some programs ending and new resources added. Several initiatives from last year do not continue in 2006-2007: \$1.7 million for major sporting events in 2005, like the World Masters Games, was one-time funding. The \$2.5 million NHL teams initiative is discontinued. The \$20 million in new library grants was one-time funding that came out of 2005-2006 surplus and is not part of this year's estimates. The \$13.5 million film development program is transferred to Alberta Economic Development.

Considering these reductions, my base budget actually reflects enhanced program funding: \$7.1 million in lottery funding is added to the five lottery funded agencies. That is a 13.4 per cent increase over the previous year. This increase is allocated with an eye to balancing our priorities. Three million dollars is added to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to support Alberta's creative side; \$2.8 million is added to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation. The \$1.3 million balance is distributed among foundations that support community historic resources, human rights education, and volunteerism.

One million dollars is added to parks to monitor drinking water quality to new and higher standards as well as to operate new interpretive centres in four parks. Built as centennial projects, at a cost of \$17 million, the new interpretive centres will serve visitors to Writing-on-Stone, Lesser Slave Lake, and Dinosaur provincial parks and Cypress Hills interprovincial park. Parks also benefit from a small increase in fees, all of which is dedicated revenue to offset parks maintenance and services.

Six hundred thousand dollars in one-time funds go to showcase Alberta at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. This is the first time in its 40-year history that the festival is featuring a Canadian province, and about 1 million American tourists, businesspeople, and policy-makers are expected to attend.

At \$59 million our capital spending this year is similar to the funding provided to our lottery funded agencies. The single biggest beneficiaries are visitors to Alberta's parks. The 2004 parks survey shows only 38 per cent of visitors were very satisfied with parks facilities. This budget allocates \$24 million to rebuild visitor facilities as part of a three-year, \$60 million commitment. This investment protects facilities, with an estimated replacement value of \$437 million.

The remaining \$35 million continues our commitment to two centennial projects: \$20 million will expand the tourism and educational potential of the Calgary Zoo, already recognized as one of the world's leading zoos; \$15 million will help build a new home for the Art Gallery of Alberta as a provincial showcase of the best and most inspiring art.

Rural Alberta is also a major beneficiary in this budget. More

than half of the province's public libraries serve communities of fewer than 1,200 people. Libraries in these communities can borrow from libraries across the province to meet almost any information need. For example, Acadia Valley in southeast Alberta has just 512 residents. One in three is a local library member. Those few hundred borrowed over 1,600 titles in just one year. Small-town libraries are also access points for a range of government services online.

Every Albertan lives within 100 kilometres of a provincial park or protected area, and Albertans use them, making 7.5 million visits a year to their provincial parks. An additional 1 million visitors come from out of province. Much of the \$1.3 billion a year generated by parks tourism is spent in rural centres on gas, food, and lodging. This does not include secondary spending on the goods and services that support camping, fishing, and outdoor recreation.

Colleagues, I ask that you approve the estimates for Community Development for 2006-07. This budget features ongoing support for the ministry's core services, small but important and well-allocated increases in priority areas, and judicial investments in parks infrastructure and continuing centennial legacies. With your approval this budget will help sustain the quality of life Albertans enjoy and will start to strengthen priority areas as we head into Alberta's next century.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move my estimates. I'm ready to accept questions and will answer as many as possible here today. If I'm unable to answer the questions right away, I will respond in writing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to begin by commending the minister on his open approach. I and my researcher had the pleasure of meeting with the minister this morning and were very warmly received. It is my belief that the minister, with his experience as party whip, will stand out and stand up for parks. As I indicated in my member's statement when I said that there was a chance to leave either a blot or a mark, I believe this minister is going to leave a mark, and for that I am grateful.

With regard to the parks and protected areas I want to also thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for allowing me to proceed, as I have a travelling engagement later this afternoon. I also want to thank the minister for indicating his willingness to provide written answers. That will go a long way in terms of dealing with the frustration I experienced yesterday at not having a full chance to discuss.

The forecast spending for parks is \$148 million in 2006-2007, which is down from \$165 million in 2005-06; \$1 million to operate four previously announced park interpretive centres in Lesser Slave, Writing-on-Stone, Cypress Hills, and Dinosaur parks, and to monitor water quality. I'm glad that investment is being made. However, \$24 million this year to rebuild parks infrastructure is a bit of a concern because that's less than half. It's down from \$50 million that was dedicated to it in 2005-06. Over the next three years \$60 million is committed for infrastructure. I'm hoping that that figure will be adequate. From personal experience, I've seen how rundown a number of our parks are. The core business of the parks and protected areas division is to preserve, protect, present, and promote the appreciation for Alberta's historical resources, add culture, and provide opportunities for heritage tourism too.

Questions I have with regard to infrastructure, which I'm pleased to receive in writing. Considering that the economic impact of the 8 million visits is \$1.3 billion a year, that means every \$1 investment in the park system pays back about \$9 to the provincial economy.

That being the case, why don't we reinvest more into park infrastructure? We'll get a better return.

While the government press release boasts spending on capital projects, it masks the fact that the total capital spending will be lower in '06-07 than the previous year. Equipment and inventory purchases were down by 21 per cent. This includes all capital purchases under \$5 million and might include such things as vehicles, computers, or park equipment and mobile accommodation. The questions would be: are any of the equipment/inventory purchases going to improve park facilities in smaller parks, such as replacing picnic tables, fire rings, et cetera? This is on page 100, line 5.0.3, of the estimates. Hopefully, some of that money is also going to go to repair the fences around the various sites to keep the intrusion of free-range cattle out.

3:10

Capital investment budgets. Projects greater than \$5 million are down to \$21 million in the '06-07 compared to \$46 million in '05-06. That's on page 101, line 5.0.3, of the estimates. This is still far better than the '04-05 actual, where the total investment was \$7 million. If we can keep heading up in terms of parks and protected areas infrastructure spending, I will support the minister for every appeal he makes for additional funding, provided it's within this budgeting process. I would like to know what parks have requested this money. I kind of think most have, if not all. Where will the money be spent? Is there a capital plan which includes priorities for infrastructure renewal in Alberta parks? I commented about the fact that there were only 45 management plans, but we had over 512 parks and protected areas. I'm looking forward to seeing those plans.

In the area of conservation are there any habitat restoration projects taking place in the Alberta parks? What line item is this addressed in? In my own personal experience at Cataract Creek, Bell Pole was allowed to use the access roads into the park, took out a beautiful aspen parkland campsite to get at its logging. I'm hoping that that has been restored and this might be part of the project.

The most underrepresented natural area in Alberta is the grasslands. If you looked at a map showing the underrepresented area and the private land in Alberta, they virtually overlap. Combine this with an income crisis in the farming industry, and it looks like there may be an opportunity to solve two problems at once by providing economic incentives to protect grasslands on private land. We already have a number of private and public trust organizations being founded to help preserve our land loss. Has the minister considered working with Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to develop policy that works for the conservation of the grasslands and considers the need for farmers to address their income crisis? This might be a buy-back program to encourage farmers to convert marginal areas back to natural grasslands or heritage rangelands, possibly with some organic or sustainable grazing taking place on the range. This could be a win-win for farmers and conservation groups.

With regard to staffing I've frequently complained about the 50 per cent reduction in conservation officers and the effect that that has on both visitor information and parks and protected areas protection. Full-time employment is increasing by two full-time equivalents. Will these staff be in the park areas or somewhere else in the department? This comes from page 107 of the estimates.

Park conservation officers. Throughout the entire province there are 70 permanent conservation officers. An additional 88 will be added in May for the summer season. This is the same number of permanent officers as last year, and the seasonal number is slightly higher. Having spoken to a number of seasonal conservation

officers who would like to have a permanent career in conservation, I hope that there will be an opportunity for these individuals, having demonstrated their abilities season after season, to receive full-time employment. This works out to one staff for every three parks or one staff for every 130 square kilometres. My researcher was hoping that the minister might provide a few staff with binoculars so that they could cover the wide range. Has the minister considered the impact to the rural communities of relying on seasonal employees that are near Alberta's parks; for example, experiment with employees living in the gateway communities near the parks rather than commuting from Edmonton just for the summer season?

Scientists and planners. The previous Community Development minister was unaware that there were caribou living in Alberta's parks, much less doing anything about ensuring that their habitat was properly stewarded. Is there sufficient staff such as biologists to work with SRD to manage endangered species such as the caribou, the swift fox, or the grizzly bear within our parks and protected areas? Are there sufficient planners and project officers in permanent and year-round positions to participate in regional planning exercises and park planning exercises that are vital to the management of park ecosystems?

Other priorities. The minister knows that this is a favourite of mine. We talked about it this morning. Will the minister work to preserve the Castle wilderness? Will the minister work to improve access to information by tabling planning documents, provide money to support the planning processes, complete a thorough economic benefit study of the contribution of Alberta's park system to the economy and indirectly – well, I guess it is directly – the effects it has on our health system? Because healthy people don't end up within the system. If he says that they already have, tell him to send us and the NGOs a copy. The footnote is there, and if you have it, I would love to receive it. Then we could have it in the library because, unfortunately, the latest version we have is 1996. So I would be appreciative of receiving that document and having it tabled and available in the library.

Performance measures. The only performance measure for the parks and protected areas department is camper satisfaction. I talked about visitor dissatisfaction in my questions yesterday. I had a good discussion with the minister today with regard to improving the electronic booking of parks, and I am confident that he will work towards that improvement. Why doesn't the ministry develop a full set of indicators for the ecological health of Alberta parks? Why not evaluate whether people are appreciating nature and understanding the purpose of parks rather than just being satisfied? We need to up the ante. People are very satisfied after visiting West Edmonton Mall or Disneyland, and it doesn't mean that the parks are serving their public purpose. I believe their purpose should be to appreciate and enjoy nature along with conserving our flora and fauna, our ecological integrity. We should focus on parks as places to enjoy the outdoors and conserve nature. This performance measure at this point does not assess that.

Also, one of the sad circumstances is that the conservation officers rarely have the time to interact with the campers, to talk to them about the local flora and fauna. In the majority of our parks we don't have the interpretive guided tours anymore. I know that my wife and I tried to provide information, which was provided to us by the government in terms of maps, posters, and so on, to educate the visitors to our campground in the southern Kananaskis, the provincial campground of Cataract Creek.

Other issues of concern. The Maqua Lake forest recreation area. We've received reports that this area is closed to the public and has been for some time, several years, it appears. I would appreciate knowing why the park is still closed. Are there plans to reopen it?

Given the demand for parks, why aren't we providing access and/or resources to keep these areas open?

Financial questions. What parks does the minister plan on making the \$24 million investment in in the form of infrastructure? The reference pages are 100 and 101 in estimates, line 5.0.3, which I've previously referenced. How do you plan on assessing the need for infrastructure development, and how will the minister prioritize projects to ensure that they are based on the greatest need and not some other criteria? As I mentioned this morning when we discussed with the minister, while I'm extremely pleased that the Canmore Nordic Centre has been polished up – it's a jewel – there are a number of wilderness parks that have not had that same kind of shining. Why is total spending in the parks and protected areas division down by \$17 million? This is a reference to page 115 of the government business plan, expense by core business.

3:20

The Auditor General had no recommendations in the parks and protected areas division.

I wouldn't be surprised, Mr. Minister, if this comes to you as a surprise because you've just taken over your department, but it came as a tremendous surprise to both myself and my researcher. Wal-Mart is now the official marketing sponsor for Alberta's parks information site. This includes a link to Wal-Mart's corporate site. I know that Wal-Mart allows campers to park in their lots, but are we not experiencing internal competition? What is the ministry receiving in exchange for Wal-Mart being the corporate sponsor? Will the minister make all documentation related to the agreement with Wal-Mart as the marketing sponsor public? This would include the RFP for sponsors, all other applicants, a description of what criteria were used to assess and select the sponsors, a description of what support Wal-Mart provides to the Ministry of Community Development. Now, if that Wal-Mart sponsorship will put a conservation officer at the entrance to every park, welcoming them to the park and talking about the special deals in creek aisle 4, then I think it would be a great sponsorship.

Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Chairman, as was indicated by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, we had agreed that I would be responding to him in written form as he had other commitments. So if we can move on to the next speaker, please.

The Chair: Okay. I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Edmonton-Strathcona, I'll recognize you next.

Dr. Pannu: Sure. That's fine.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure to rise and participate in the budget debate on the estimates for Community Development. First of all, I want to thank the hon. minister and his whole staff for preparing and presenting a good overview of the budget. Also, thanks for the efforts and their hard work. It's not easy to answer all the questions in 20 minutes' time or maybe a little less or more. If you can't answer all the questions, please provide them later on in writing, as you already said, but I would like to see them in full detail.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to start from the estimate on page 98, line 2.0.2. The estimate for arts is \$2,268,000, a small decrease from the 2005-06 forecast. Given that your ministry overspent in 2005-06 by \$700,000, why haven't you increased the funding for the arts this year so that you don't overspend? Why hasn't the government made arts funding a real priority yet? How will this money be utilized this

year? Has the new minister met with the arts community yet to hear their concerns regarding funding? Why did the former Minister of Community Development pretend that he tried to get \$40 million for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts? I read it in the newspaper, but now the ministry has changed, and I have to ask the new minister to work on this again because there are lots of stakeholders in the arts sector requesting more money.

I think \$40 million is very reasonable because they are creating I think 3,500 jobs in the arts sector. The Alberta arts sector spent on operations and production in 2004 at least \$120 million. The arts sector adds to the Alberta GDP each year. So the money we are receiving from this sector is not even close to what we are returning to them.

Next I move to the estimates on page 98, line 2.0.4. The estimate for sport and recreation is \$1,439,000, virtually no change from the 2005-06 forecast. Why has the government again chosen to ignore the sport and recreation community in Alberta? The previous minister assured Albertans that sport and recreation funding was a priority for this government. If this is the case, why have you chosen not to increase funding for sport and recreation? How does the new minister plan to promote a healthier, more active population if funding for sport and recreation remains stagnant? What plans does the new minister have for implementing the Alberta sport plan? Will additional funding for the Alberta sport plan come from this line item? What does the minister have to say about the government's disappointing lack of funding to Alberta's sport and recreation community? The former Minister of Community Development responded to my debate in the last budget that we will have a new sport policy in this session as well as a cultural policy, but I haven't seen anything so far.

I move to the estimates on page 98, line 2.0.6. The estimate for the Francophone Secretariat is \$932,000, a 13 per cent increase from the 2005-06 budget. Funding for the Francophone Secretariat has increased substantially over the past few years. Can the minister tell us how the additional funding will be used, and what does the minister hope to accomplish by raising the funding by more than a hundred thousand dollars?

Estimates, page 98, line 2.0.11. The estimate for assistance to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is approximately \$22,080,000, an increase of 16 per cent from the 2005-06 budget. Although this increase is most welcome, it is once again far below what the arts sector requires in this province. Is the minister prepared to work with the arts sector to ensure that their concerns are addressed? Is the minister willing to commit today to making arts funding a real priority for this government in the years to come?

Arts groups have been asking for a substantial increase in funding to support them for years. It has been estimated that the arts contribute approximately \$150 million annually to the economy of this province, yet this government continues to rank among the poorest supporters of the arts in Canada. The point here is – and it is agreed upon by so many stakeholders – why does the Alberta provincial government consistently fail to support the arts when municipal and federal governments recognize the importance of the arts?

Can the minister explain to these artists why they are always underfunded? The previous minister claimed that he did not have caucus support for a substantial increase to arts funding. What is the new minister going to do to change this? It was in the newspaper that the former minister worked hard and tried to convince the caucus for \$40 million, but the revenue department maybe didn't agree with the hon. minister. Now it's up to the new minister to recognize and do something for the arts sector, where so many people are involved, and they've been struggling for a long, long

time. I hear in this Chamber most of the departments sometimes say that they are number one, number two, whatever, in their own department. As far as I know, I was reading one of the articles somewhere that we are behind in arts funding. We are behind the federal funding as well. Numberwise we are number 10 in Canada. Incomewise it's huge revenue coming from this sector. We should focus a little bit more on the arts sector.

3:30

Now I move to page 98, line 2.0.13. The estimate for assistance to the Wild Rose Foundation is \$8.116 million, a 4 per cent increase from the year 2005-06 budget. The funding for this line item saw a minor decrease between 2004-05 and 2005-06. Can the minister tell us why he has increased assistance to the Wild Rose Foundation this year? Will any of this additional money go towards implementing the Auditor General's recommendation in his annual report? Will any of this money be used to further investigate the Applewood grants? Has the minister determined yet who was responsible for providing false or misleading information on the Applewood grant application? When can Albertans expect to see the Applewood money returned to the government, where it belongs? What is the minister doing to ensure that another Applewood does not happen?

The next is on page 111. Under core business 2, goal 3, it states that one of the goals of the government is to provide "financial and consultative support through . . . the Alberta Foundation for the Arts." Why, then, does the Official Opposition continue to hear from the arts sector that this government does not support them? Why does this government continue year after year to disappoint the Alberta arts sector? When will this government stop making false promises and truly support the arts community in this province?

Next I move to strategy 3.4. This is again on page 111, under core business 2, goal 3. The government plans to "introduce an inclusive cultural policy to promote Alberta's cultural, historical and natural heritage." Again, this looks like a hollow strategy. We have been hearing for some time that the government wants to introduce a cultural policy, but there is no action. How can this government develop an inclusive cultural policy when it fails to show sufficient support for the arts and cultural sectors in this province? What can the minister tell us about this government's progress in developing this policy? We were expecting a cultural and sports policy in this session. This is what I was promised by the former Minister of Community Development, and I haven't seen anything so far yet. How long before we see some signs that this policy is in the works? What does the minister expect this policy to look like? Can the minister elaborate on the strategy and tell us specifically how he plans on making this a reality?

In the business plan, page 111, core business 2, goal 3, strategy 3.5, the government is co-ordinating the province's participation "in the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C., to increase awareness and appreciation of Alberta culture." I'm happy that our artists are going to Washington. We are not against that, but this seems quite hypocritical. Why is the government taking steps to promote Alberta's cultural and arts achievements in foreign countries when it does not even support them here at home? Why doesn't the minister show more of a commitment to the arts and cultural community in Alberta if he's so enthusiastic to promote it elsewhere? Given that the Alberta government consistently ranks among the worst supporters of arts and culture in Canada, what is the logic behind this initiative? What does the minister expect to gain from this initiative? Will this initiative result in greater government support for the arts and culture sector in this province?

In the business plan, page 113, core business 3, goal 4, performance measure 4(a), adult Albertans' perception of how well human

rights are protected in Alberta: last actual, 2004-05, 87.6 per cent; the target for the next three years is 88 per cent. This seems like a pretty low target given the importance of human rights. Does the minister believe that setting a higher standard for visitor satisfaction at provincial parks than for the protection of human rights is appropriate? This government continually repeats how fantastic things are in this province, yet less than 90 per cent of Albertans believe that human rights are protected well in Alberta. Why does the minister aim for only 88 per cent on this performance measure? It would seem appropriate that this performance measure be among the most important in this ministry, yet you have set a relatively low target for the next three years. Even more alarming is that we are falling short on this performance measure. Does the minister agree that 87 per cent is far too low for this particular measure? Has the minister compared this rating to other jurisdictions in Canada to see how Alberta compares? Why doesn't the minister make this initiative a greater priority?

Now I come to the recommendations in the Auditor General's 2004-05 annual report, page 137. "We recommend that The Wild Rose Foundation review the results of our audit into the grants to Applewood Park Community Association and take appropriate action." What updates can the minister provide regarding the Applewood grants? When does the minister expect to have the contested money returned by Applewood? What has the minister done to date to address this recommendation by the Auditor General?

From the Auditor General's 2004-05 annual report, page 142:

We recommend that The Wild Rose Foundation improve its grant systems for the International Development Program by:

- obtaining third party evidence that matching funds exist before approving grants,
- enhancing the review of accountability reports, and
- establishing a way to obtain assurance that grant funds are used as intended.

What progress has Community Development made to date regarding this recommendation?

I again want to repeat that in this article I read in one of the books, it said that the amount of taxes collected from the arts sector in Alberta each year is \$19.6 million. Their revenue from the Alberta lottery fund in 1992-93: \$153,708. I just want to say that the revenue coming from the arts sector is maybe a little more than what we are helping the arts sector with, so we should focus a little bit more on this.

3:40

I mean, that 7 per cent increase this year was the second in the last 16 years. It is not enough. I commend the former Minister of Community Development. He took the initiative, and he started increasing grants to community developments. I commend him for that. After him another minister tried, and I read in the paper that he worked really hard to get \$40 million for the AFA. My humble request, once again, is to the new minister to focus and convince the caucus and give the arts sector a little bit more attention. Forty million dollars is reasonable because if you see the job creation, it's 3,500 jobs created in this sector. They deserve it.

I leave it to you. I don't want to say more than this. Maybe I'll comment a little bit later on. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now I really understand what rapid-fire questioning is all about. I'll certainly give an attempt to address some of them.

One of the questions that the hon. member asked was: why aren't

we spending more on the arts? Hon. member, we've worked with the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to provide an increase of nearly 16 per cent for this coming year. Alberta's arts community has grown at an incredible rate. Recognizing this, the government has allocated an additional \$3 million in funding for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in this year's budget. The new funding will be allocated to priorities outlined in the foundation's strategic plan and will support existing clients and services in the areas of arts creation and production, arts promotion, arts participation, and art collection and display.

Government support for the arts goes beyond the foundation. For example, an additional \$600,000 will be dedicated to the Alberta program at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which will feature contemporary Alberta, including artistic expression, ethnic diversity, industry and technological innovation. Also, \$15 million, as I indicated in my opening remarks, will be provided to assist in the creation of the new Art Gallery of Alberta. There are other recent examples that have just taken place: the renovated Jubilee auditoria at a cost of \$72 million. We contributed \$500,000 to Alberta Scene in Ottawa and organized Alberta Tracks at a series of 10 free concerts in 10 Alberta communities, featuring 30 Alberta musical acts.

Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts uses a formula to determine the amount of funds allocated for all operating grants to organizations. The foundation has been granting funds to eligible applicants on a fixed budget for approximately 15 years. Based on statistics for the last four fiscal years, applicants have experienced funding that is between 43 per cent and 69 per cent of what they should receive to ensure that they are sustainable. Research has been conducted and presented regarding foundation programs that are subject to the most severe proration. All are prorated. Community support organizations receive the lowest rate, about 30 per cent. The number of applicants to this program has increased by approximately 25 per cent every year for the past three years. So, yes, there are certainly some challenges there and certainly a challenge for this new minister as he starts to work on his upcoming budget that will be forthcoming in a year's time.

You asked questions in regard to the funding of the sport plan. As I indicated in my opening remarks, the Alberta sport plan will benefit from the contribution of \$2.8 million that was put into the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation. The decisions on how these funds will be distributed will be made in the near future by the board, and I can certainly say that a portion of these funds that were allocated there will be used as it was emphasized in the sport plan. While it will not address all the challenges faced by the sport and recreation network in Alberta, it is a promising step in the right direction. I will continue to work towards finding solutions to address other areas of the sport plan.

You asked questions in regard to the increase to the Francophone Secretariat. There was a 13.1 per cent increase in the budget towards the Francophone Secretariat. Seventy thousand dollars of that amount is an increase in projected funding from the government of Canada for francophone-related community projects, and \$38,000 of that amount is an increase for government-wide union-negotiated salary settlements and management compensation adjustments. Basically, the adjustments are there for extra funding arrangements that we make on a sharing basis as we meet with various community groups, francophone groups across the province, where they come in as equal partners, and we get matching dollars from the federal government. So it's an enhancement of services in that way.

You spoke in regard to the targets on human rights. In 2004-2005 nearly 88 per cent of adult Albertans felt that human rights were well protected in Alberta. In setting our targets, hon. member, we use a

three-year average with a 1 per cent stretch allowance factor. We feel that by doing that, we're being realistic and that it is a target that is attainable.

You made remarks in regard to the Auditor General's recommendations regarding the international development program. Following the recommendations that came forward from the Auditor General, an entirely new set of guidelines and accountability requirements has been developed for the program incorporating all of the Auditor General's recommendations. The new guidelines and accountability requirements were developed by department staff and reviewed by an independent agency. The program is reinstated, and funding proposals are now being accepted.

If I may, after he conducted the audit, the Auditor General's recommendations were basically threefold. One is that the foundation should obtain "third party evidence that matching funds exist before approving grants;" two, that the foundation should enhance "the review of accountability reports;" and three, the foundation should establish "a way to obtain assurance that grant funds are used as intended."

Basically, the current status is that the Wild Rose Foundation has incorporated all three of the Auditor General's recommendations into their grants processes as follows. At the application stage organizations that do not produce audited financial statements will now have to obtain third-party evidence that matching funds exist before grants are approved. Two and three: at the accountability stage the foundation has enhanced their review of accountability reports and strengthened their process to be assured that grant funds are used as intended, and initial discussions with the Canadian International Development Agency took place regarding possible on-site verifications. Because the agency does not perform their own project evaluations, it was suggested that the foundation perform their own project reviews or contract the same firm as the agency to complete these project on-site reviews on their behalf. The foundation is currently researching this issue, which will include taking the appropriate budgetary measures in anticipation of these annual on-site verifications.

The new guidelines originated from the review conducted by the foundation with representation from the Canadian International Development Agency and International and Intergovernmental Relations. The foundation then contracted Agriteam Canada, an independent agency, to undertake the final review of the documentation to examine the overall program parameters. On February 2, 2006, the Wild Rose Foundation publicly announced its new guidelines and accountability requirements. Funding proposals are now being accepted.

In the case of what's happening with the Applewood situation, all that I can advise the member is that the file has been forwarded to the Crown's debt collections to recover the funds, and the process is now under way.

Why are we doing the Smithsonian? It's basically to increase tourism and investment opportunities. It's going to provide American decision-makers and policy-makers with an understanding of issues that are important to us such as energy and agriculture, and it will certainly help Albertans make valuable contacts in one of the most powerful cities in the world. Mr. Chairman, this is an incredible opportunity to promote our province to the largest trading partner and enhance our trade relationship, which is already worth \$60 billion. There will also be a variety of long-term benefits from Alberta's participation, including improved relations with the decision-makers in legacy projects, including a music CD and educational materials.

That's all that I have at this moment, Mr. Chairman.

3:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to the 2006-2007 estimates for the Department of Community Development. Let me at the very outset congratulate the new minister for taking on this responsibility. It's indeed an important ministry, in my view. How to come to the conclusion that it's an important ministry is not by looking at the total number of dollars that it spends but the significance of every dollar that it spends in the area of cultural development of communities, parks and recreational areas, arts, human rights. All of these are very, very important areas of activity in which government is involved. It is indeed, in my judgment, a very important portfolio, and I think the minister is up to the task.

I was very pleased to receive an invitation last week from the minister to meet with him. I and my colleague for Edmonton-Calder took the opportunity this morning to have a brief meeting with the minister. I have known the minister for many years in various other contexts. We've been on various committees together, worked together to address matters which are the responsibility of the whole House sometimes. I'm very pleased and looking forward to the opportunity of working with the minister. I know that he has some challenges, and I want to assure him that we'll extend our full support on matters on which we all agree that we need to work together.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I want to just suggest that I'd focus perhaps on the arts and libraries, that area in particular.

Maybe I can start with some simple and specific questions which go back to the Auditor General's report and recommendations with respect to the work that the AG looked at that this department has done in previous years. I have with me some pages from the AG's report for 2004-2005. I want to just read the general sort of recommendations that the AG makes on page 147. It says that the

Ministry of Community Development's Parks and Protected Areas Division contracts out the management of approximately half of the provincial parks and recreation areas to private operators through facility operating agreements . . . we recommend that the Ministry evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the service delivery alternatives for operating parks and protected areas.

That's a very specific recommendation. These are the dollars that we spend and the effectiveness of that expenditure.

Looking at the estimates volume on page 99, I think the minister drew to the attention, I guess, in his previous remarks that the budget for the parks operations – so this is line 5.0.3 – has increased from the forecast for 2005-2006 of 34,871 million to \$37,996 million. It means about a 7 to 8 per cent increase over the year. Now, there is an increase here which on the surface would seem that the step is being taken in the right direction, but in light of the AG's recommendation about evaluating the cost effectiveness of alternatives for parks and protected areas division contracts, I would like to ask the minister two questions. First, given that about half the parks in the province are indeed contracted out, how much of this close to \$38 million is allocated, in fact, to paying for the contracts to provide these services through private contractors? What percentage are they in terms of dollars? You know, of the \$38 million is it \$10 million? Is it \$20 million. How much exactly? What are those amounts?

Secondly, what steps have been taken specifically to follow up on the AG's recommendation to "evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the service delivery alternatives for operating parks and protected areas"? What seems to be hinted at here, as I read this recommendation, is that there's maybe an alternative way of delivering those

services so that we can use the dollars more efficiently and effectively and use them more smartly so that every dollar that we spend takes us farther along the line of providing services and improving their quality than may be the case with contracting out. That's one question.

The second one is a follow-up on the next page, page 148. It has to do with monitoring performance of private contracts.

Parks and Protective Areas staff has been working with the area offices to ensure they obtain adequate documentation to properly monitor operators' performance.

These are the AG's report's words.

The Ministry has developed checklists indicating what documentation is to be obtained from parks operators and we are satisfied that the information is sufficient to monitor performance.

However, we examined the files of 17 park sites and found that some files did not include all the required information, such as visitor statistics, monthly revenue and annual expense reports, and inspection reports. In addition, there was limited evidence of review and analysis of the documentation that was obtained.

The report goes on.

To finish implementing this recommendation, the Ministry needs to have a system to ensure staff consistently complies with the guidelines for collecting and analyzing information from operators.

Obviously the AG's report comes to the conclusion that not in every case the staff did its work. So the system needs to be in place to ensure that this happens. My question to the minister is: will he please look into this question and let me know if there indeed is a new system that has been put in place to comply with this particular recommendation of the Auditor General as indicated in the report of 2004-2005? So these are two questions specific to the Auditor General's report.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity asked a question specific to Wal-Mart's sponsorship of parks programs, and I would request that the minister send the information that's been requested by the Member for Calgary-Varsity my way as well. I would very much be interested in the set of questions related to Wal-Mart's involvement with the parks and recreation programs. So any documents, any information that's available I would welcome having.

A few other specifics here. I note in the business plan on page 115, under Ministry Statement of Operations, the revenues. There is a considerable increase projected here under premiums, fees, and licences. When the minister and myself and my colleague from Edmonton-Calder were meeting this morning, we all agreed that the importance of parks areas, parks and recreation for Albertans, the access to these facilities, facilities in good shape and form, is very, very essential. Most Albertans like to be able to go out on the weekend with families, with children and be able to use these parks. We want to of course not only make these parks available but ensure that they are accessible and affordable to Albertans.

4:00

There is a considerable increase there in the revenues drawn from what I would call user fees or licences and fees. I notice that the 2006-07 estimates are about \$9.385 million compared to the 2005-06 forecast of \$8.4 million, so close to \$1 million extra is estimated to be realized over the next year.

Now, looking at the fiscal plan tables on page 62, I notice that there are hefty increases for provincial camping fees. This is page 62 of the fiscal plan tables. There I notice that provincial camping fees will go up. Backcountry and basic camping fees for the current year, the year just past, have been at anywhere between \$3 and \$17. They'll be jacked up in the new budget to between a range of \$5 and \$20. The considerable increase from \$3 to \$5 at the lowest end is close to about a 60 to 70 per cent increase in the fees, and at the

upper end from \$17 to \$20 is another, I would think, about a 20 per cent increase.

Similarly, in camping services it was up to \$3 in the year just past, and it will go up to \$5, again exactly a 40 per cent increase anticipated in the fees there. Similarly, for group camping and day use the fees have been, during the year just past, in the range of \$25 to \$130 depending upon the size of the group, the amount of space used, I suppose, or whatever. These fees are going to go up at the lower range from \$25 to \$35, close to a 60 per cent increase or more, and at the upper end from \$130 to \$250 minimum, which is a huge increase, close to doubling, close to a 90 or 100 per cent increase in the fees there again.

Similarly for reservations, the fees charged for that, from \$6 up to \$6 plus first night: that was the rate the year just past. It will go up to \$8 plus first night. Again the increase is in the neighbourhood of 35 to 36 per cent.

So huge increases, in my view, that are built into the revenue projections. I want to ask the minister: how is that to be justified if our goal is, in fact, to encourage Albertans to engage more actively in recreation? It's good for health. It's good for family relations and growth and development. Why is it that we are increasing these fees at such punishing rates when we know that such increases are likely to discourage people, not encourage them to make use of these wonderful places we call our parks and recreation areas? So those are some specific questions that I have.

Now, going back to some of the other issues of arts funding, there has been interesting commentary in the wake of the presentation of the budget, Mr. Chairman, on the arts side of the funding for this department in the budget, and I want to perhaps draw attention to this, put on record some of this. I have a sort of statement here from the media, and I think it's worth the minister's notice. Arts leaders are disappointed by a smaller than expected increase in provincial arts funding, and they criticize the provincial government for its shortsightedness with respect to the budget.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts' budget for 2006-07 is \$22.6 million, and the minister I think appropriately drew attention to the fact that this is an increase over the \$19 million last year, but certainly it's far less than what it's reported the former Minister of Community Development in fact asked for, about \$40 million. I think that the former minister's request had the strong support of the arts community across this province. No wonder that the arts community is extremely disappointed with the very small increase that the budget in fact allowed in the area of the arts foundation and the arts in general. It's only the second funding increase, I must note, for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in 16 years. That is worth noting.

Tom McCabe, the Theatre Calgary president, says as a reaction to what he heard, "It's just shortsighted and it shows a lack of vision in this government." Mr. McCabe is one of those who organized a petition which was received I think by the former Minister of Community Development. From what the reports says, there was support for the former minister's request across the cabinet table, but the proposal got shot down at the Treasury Board. I'm quite surprised by this, and the community representatives in the field of arts activity certainly are not pleased with this.

The increase of \$3 million. Yes, it's an increase, but it is far short of what is needed and "necessary to sustain and increase the arts and culture that this province enjoys," Mr. McCabe said. It is true that the government is spending over \$600,000 to present the cultural wealth and the arts production of this province in Washington, DC, this year as part of the centennial, I suppose, but it's a one-time kind of thing. Although that money is a welcome use of public money to promote interest in our cultural life here through what will be done

in Washington, certainly it's not good enough to provide encouragement and support for the sustained growth in this most valued activity in our communities, from small towns and villages to big cities. There is, I think, a reason for the minister to pay some attention to it, and I urge him to look into this matter and try again this year. I wish him luck on that one.

The entire budget for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is a third of what the horse-racing industry's is. You can make some comparisons because that's where the government's priorities come in. [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired] Is that it? I'll come back.

Thank you.

4:10

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll attempt to answer some of those questions that came forward.

The hon. member had made reference in regard to the Auditor General's audit report pertaining to the contracting out of park facilities. I can inform the member that the audit recommendations have been fully implemented, a cost-benefit model has been adopted, and the office of the Auditor General will indicate full completion in their report, which will be released in September.

In regard to the monitoring of contractor performance for the parks a new process has been developed for monitoring performance. Satisfactory progress has been recognized by the office of the Auditor General, indicating that it's very positive and encouraging of our results to date. The office of the Auditor General will conduct another audit this fall to determine if their recommendation has been completely implemented.

We spoke briefly in regard to the fee increases in the parks. The new fee schedule provides the flexibility and the incentive to operators to respond to local market conditions, including the ability to offer off-season, mid-week, and other discounts. Camping fees and services have not increased since 1998. Meanwhile, the costs of providing these services have increased significantly over the same period. Contracted operators have requested a fee increase to cover their increasing costs and the increase to the minimum wage that has been implemented.

Under the new fee structure Alberta's provincial campgrounds remain competitively priced relative to neighbouring jurisdictions such as the national parks. Users of Alberta's provincial parks also do not pay any park entry or day-use fees, unlike some of our neighbouring jurisdictions. The changes also encourage contracted operators to reinvest in facility maintenance and development. It will be the operators' responsibility in their best interest to determine fair and competitive camping fees within the limits that have been specified by the department.

We spoke about the special event permit fees. It's to reflect business opportunities associated with the use of the parkland. Criteria are being developed, based on a number of activities and a number of park locations, to reflect the larger fee. Special events organized by the department or by the many friends-of-provincial-parks organizations, for example Parks Day, will continue to be on a no-charge basis. School groups also will continue to not be charged for special events on parkland.

Disposition fees are basically equivalent in most cases to fees being charged by Sustainable Resource Development for the use of general Crown land. A number of these disposition fees have not increased since 1983. Fee increases reflect the considerable increases of providing utilities, water and sewer services, garbage collection, and road maintenance within the parks. I can also point out that there will be no increase in grazing fees for 2006-2007.

The member spoke passionately in regard to the arts. As I had indicated in responding to the previous member, I think I answered quite a bit of them in detail. I won't go through it again. However, as I indicated to that member, it will certainly be a challenge that I'm willing to undertake as we go forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and join the debate on estimates for the Community Development department and to congratulate the new minister on his new posting. I realize that part of what we are doing here is calling upon the new minister to defend work done during his predecessor's watch, and that's not, I'm sure, always the easiest thing to do, to know the mind of the previous minister and know why the decisions were made in the way that they were and precisely, you know, what the thinking was that went into that. Nevertheless, that is the new minister's cross to bear.

So I rise this afternoon really with only one specific question about a line item in this budget, but I hope to engage the minister in a little bit of discussion that's perhaps a little bit more philosophical and forward looking because it's always interesting to be able to have the chance to discuss with a new minister what that minister's vision is for the department that he's taken over and that sort of thing. The specific question first of all because we'll get that one on the record, and then the minister can answer in the House today or answer in writing. It's his choice as far as I'm concerned.

It has to do with line 3.0.1. The estimate for human rights and citizenship is \$4.405 million this year, a small increase of about 4 per cent from the 2005-2006 forecast. On 3.0.2 much the same thing: a small increase in the assistance to the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund from the '05-06 forecast of about \$200,000, from \$1.265 million up to \$1.465 million. The same question, really, on both lines: can the minister explain why there wasn't a greater increase provided for these line items given the importance in general terms, obviously, of protecting human rights in this province, given the satisfaction rating, which we think the minister has set rather low at 88 per cent and which hasn't quite been achieved, even at that point, yet? Can the minister tell us if he plans on increasing the budget or the staff of the Human Rights Commission in the future? Can the minister explain how this mechanism can be made more effective in resolving disputes if more money is not allocated to this important initiative? That's my one question area. If the minister could answer those questions specifically, as I say, either orally or in writing, I'd be very satisfied with that.

Now if I can take the minister back to two areas, really: support for the arts and culture and support for sport and recreation, both of which I think are fairly significant parts of the mandate of the Department of Community Development, and I may spin off a question from there as well. There's been some discussion, some fairly specific questions asked by hon. members before me in those areas and some answers provided already by the minister. I don't know if I can remember the minister's words exactly, but I take him back to one of the answers that he was providing around the budget estimate for sport and recreation, where he indicated that, you know, things are getting a little bit better – these were not his exact words – and it's not what that segment, that sector of society would like, but it's a little better than last year. That sort of thing.

I think we could say the same thing about arts funding too. It's a little bit better than last year, but it's not what the sector wants. It's not what the sector needs. It doesn't address all the years where

there haven't been increases at all or there haven't been sufficient increases, significant enough increases.

I got to thinking as the minister was answering: what would happen, what would the world look like in the Ministry of Community Development if the minister took either one of these areas or, frankly, many areas under the umbrella of his mandate – it could be parks, protected areas, museums, historical sites, whatever – and said, "Next fiscal year we're actually going to choose this one area, this target area, and we're going to bring it up to what the sector says it needs in order to do what it wants to do"? What would that look like?

Let's say we caught up arts and culture for nearly 20 years of funding shortfall. It's been nearly 20 years since they had a significant increase. Yes, I know that the minister will point out that there's a 16 per cent increase this year, but it's not enough. That's 16 per cent more than what was enough in 1987. It doesn't catch them up. The minister acknowledged as well that the sector has been growing and that it's tough for his department to keep up with that.

4:20

What would it look like if you made a concerted effort to keep up with that? I realize, you know, that what I'm arguing here hypothetically is that you pick arts and culture or you pick sports and recreation or you pick some other area of responsibility in your department and you say, "This year we're going to catch them up, and everybody else is going to hurt for another year" or something like that. What would that look like?

I want to spin off from there and get into the minister's head a little bit if I can about the vision and the philosophy that he is going to bring to his new portfolio over the course of this next fiscal year because that will help us understand what his priorities are and, if not to expect, what to hope for in his budget, in his estimates 12 months from now. It will give us some indication as to what to say to stakeholders as well because they talk to us regularly. They talk to us regularly about how the funding just isn't adequate to do the job.

You know, on this side of the House we think that's important because we think that you're dealing with some of the softer stuff that government deals with in the Department of Community Development. You're dealing with things that may create economic activity, and in fact they do create a great deal of economic activity – the minister has acknowledged this himself – but in a more indirect fashion than when you punch a hole in the ground and get some oil out or something like that.

The softer side of the economy if I can call it that, while it may not seem as sexy or as quick to return on investment, often over the long haul returns not only a very respectable economic return on investment but also has a real, positive impact on quality of life in our province. That positive impact on quality of life, especially when you're considering something like arts and culture, can in and of itself be a real attractor for highly skilled, highly talented, highly educated members in good standing, if you will, of the knowledge economy that we need to build in this province for the 21st century. So there are returns to be had from this.

So I'd like to get from the minister, if I could, some philosophical sense of what he sees as important within and underneath the umbrella of his ministry. Perhaps his ministry is too big, or perhaps his ministry is big in the wrong places, small in the wrong places. Perhaps his ministry should be streamlined. I don't know. This is not advice. This is speculation on my part. I'm not going to give the minister advice unless and until – well, no, I'll just say until – I hear some sense from him of what he sees as his vision and his priorities here.

You know, there are things that happen under the umbrella of Community Development that, as an outsider looking in, you might be tempted to say are things that, kind of like on *Sesame Street*, don't necessarily go together: one of these things is not like the others, or all of these things are not like the others. It looks as though the department could be kind of a catch-all for things that couldn't be shoehorned in any other department, you know. You've got arts and culture. You've got sports and recreation. Yes, both are leisure-time activities, and parks and protected areas involve leisure-time activities, so I guess there's the big, broad, vague connection between so much of this. But, really, just because all those things are leisure-time activities, does it take the same sort of expertise to run a world-class, world-leading network of parks and protected areas as it does to oversee the creation of great art and great culture? I would argue that maybe it could, but it probably doesn't have to.

So do we want to continue down the path we're on? Do we want to look at things in a different way? Is it time to spin off sports and recreation into its own ministry? By the way, before anyone on the government side accuses me of trying to make the cabinet bigger and pointing out that that's contradictory to everything we've said about cabinet being too big already, I would suggest that if you're going to create another ministry, you look for one you can get rid of at the same time, one or maybe two, because I think things are a bit bloated. [interjection] I'm not talking about getting rid of your ministry, Mr. Minister, at least not yet.

In fact, what I am suggesting, I guess – and I didn't want to get into the advice giving, so I'll put it as a question. Are there, maybe, mandates and activities in your ministry and in sectors of our society and sectors of our economy that would be better served if we didn't group them under the one ministry because they don't really fit together? I guess I'll leave it at that.

Again, I look forward to the answers that I get from the minister. The specific answers to my specific questions can be delivered orally or in writing, but I would love to hear a little bit of philosophical musing from the minister now if I could.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for his comments and some of his questions. I'll attempt to get a few of them, and those that I happen to miss, I'll follow up on. Many of your questions were similar to the other comments that were made, a little bit, in regard to the shortfall and funding in the arts. I guess that while the previous minister did not get the full proposed funding, we are confident that there will be significant positive impact on the arts sector as a result of the \$3 million in new funding.

In the areas of funding that would go to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for creation, production, promotion, participation, and selection, 88 per cent of Albertans feel that our arts achievements are important. We have, hon. member, the fourth highest performing acts attendance in the country, so there's certainly a great interest by Albertans in the field of the arts. We are pleased that we have been able to make some progress with the funding needed, and I will commit to continue to work with the arts sectors on their requirements in the future.

I guess I could share the same things when it comes to the sports. One of the first functions that I had the opportunity of attending was the dinner that took place in Calgary a couple of weeks ago to honour the Alberta athletes that participated in the Olympics. Of course, there are various sectors that came forward and had a spokesperson. It was a fairly well-orchestrated and concerted effort

to certainly pass on to the new minister that, yeah, we appreciate the funding that's there, but there could be a little bit that could be done. Their message was not focused at the elite athlete stage, because the federal government takes over that level. Where their concerns were is that they felt that there were maybe opportunities that were lost by other Albertans, where financial restrictions prevented them from developing, you know, their skills, et cetera. I guess we could say the same thing in terms of the arts.

I'm certain that in the next little while I will certainly work hard in terms of being able to meet with the various groups on the arts and the sports side and the wilderness groups, all the things that basically fall within this ministry, to gather a better understanding of their needs and see if we can come up with some kind of plan to be able to address those as we go forward, as we plan into the future years as the budgeting processes come forward.

There was a question in regard to the increase to the funding for human rights. The 16 per cent increase this year certainly represents a significant increase. It'll be utilized to further support community groups and education programs.

We strive to maintain high-quality service through the 48 full-time equivalents that we have in this department. It's something that we don't take lightly and something that we're certainly working towards.

Should we pick one sector and have measures to work on it rather than trying to split up the egg? Well, we use a variety of tools to determine funding requirements for our various quality-of-life sectors. I think the last thing we want to do is to go and pit one against the other. I'm certain that there has to be a balance, and from seeing the correspondence that I've seen come into the office in the short time that I've been there, everyone seems to be going after their slice of the pie. So it's something in terms of being able to set up our funding decisions based on consultations with the stakeholders, to make comparisons with other jurisdictions across the country, and to consider the economic implications on the other sectors.

4:30

A very small portion of our expenditures, less than 4 per cent, goes to internal support. The remainder goes, basically, into direct program services.

I will review the comments that you have shared, the challenges and visioning comments. As I make my way through this ministry, we'll work at getting a better handling and understanding of it as we go forward to being able to provide good services for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for your report. I have one issue that I would like to bring to the minister's attention this afternoon, and that relates to a park in the city of Calgary which is a provincial park. It's called Fish Creek provincial park. It's located in the south end of the city of Calgary along the valley of Fish Creek. It's one of the largest urban parks in Canada, in fact one of the largest urban parks in North America.

I know that there's been considerable discussion over the effects of the flooding last year on the park and particularly on the structures which facilitate visitor-oriented facilities, things like pathways and pedestrian bridges. However, I believe that the floods are by and large a natural phenomenon, and if anything, they've helped to maintain some of the riparian habitat in the park.

What I want to raise with the minister this afternoon and bring to his attention are concerns over what I believe is mismanagement of

the park from a natural ecosystem point of view. As the minister is aware, my educational and professional background includes involvement in the biological sciences, and I have a lot of personal knowledge with respect to Fish Creek park. My great-grandparents settled in what is now Fish Creek park over 120 years ago. I grew up in the area which is now the park. I swam and fished in the creek. I hiked over every corner of that park. I shot gophers and pheasants on it. I camped on it. So I have an intimate knowledge of it.

When it was created in 1975, I rejoiced that the natural beauty of Fish Creek park would be preserved for future generations. I've continued to visit the park periodically over those many years throughout my life and to monitor its condition. Unfortunately, there have been a lot of changes in the park, and most of them have been to the detriment of the park.

When it was created in 1975, Fish Creek park was a natural jewel, but sadly over the years the park has changed. While the north slopes still have fine stands of white spruce and there are aspen stands and there are cottonwoods in the riparian habitat along the creek bottom, the native grassland community, which predominates the park, is largely disappearing. It is being replaced by invasive species like brome grass, like the misnamed Canada thistle, and many woody herbs. The loss of this has been the loss of the native prairie ecosystem along with its wildflowers and its attendant native birds.

So many people misguidedly think that neglect of an area or leaving it alone is a way to preserve a natural area. They think that this is the answer to management, that nature left alone will stay static. But a prairie grassland ecosystem is not a static ecosystem unless it has outside forces, and those forces in the past have been the forces of either fire or grazing. Unfortunately, since 1975 Fish Creek park has had the benefit of neither of those forces, and the result has been a degradation of the natural ecosystem. This is a great loss, I would say. I would say, in fact, that there has probably been more ecological damage to Fish Creek park in the 31 years since it was created as a park than in the previous 100 years of ranching by the families in that area.

What I want to do this afternoon is ask the minister whether he will use some small resources to seek the advice of some outside experts, possibly some volunteer experts, into the state of Fish Creek park with respect to its natural ecosystems and whether or not he will take some corrective action to look at this whole issue. Better still, would he be willing to accompany me and one or two plant specialists on a tour of the site of Fish Creek park?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the member for his comments in regard to his concerns regarding Fish Creek park. As you indicated, yes, there was some flooding damage that did occur at Fish Creek park in 2005. I'm informed that the repairs there have commenced and, unfortunately, may take up to three years to complete. It's my understanding that there's going to be \$7.5 million that will be expended in terms of repairing the flood damage that has occurred there.

I thank you for your concerns on the natural ecosystem management, in particular for the comments that you made on the grasslands of the park. I'll certainly take this under advisement and be able to respond back to the member. Having given the description that you gave of as a youngster going through all the nooks and crannies in the park kind of reminded me of having done similar types of things in the parks in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency.

Yes, I would certainly be amenable to accepting that invitation to go visit the park with you. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity to participate in the debate on Community Development's estimates. Most of the questions I had already been asked. I appreciate the hon. minister's insight and his promise that answers not readily available today would be coming forward later in writing.

One observation I made, Mr. Chair, is the way the different government departments receive their funding. This observation might not be entirely applicable or fair to this hon. minister because he is newly appointed and he is learning about his ministry and trying to grow in his role, which is great. But, for example, you hear instances of this ministry asking for money, as was mentioned before, and not receiving all of it. You can extrapolate, and you hear, for example, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports asking for money for her programs, and then not all of what she asked for is allowed. It really begs the question: how does that work really? Cabinet should all be one unit. When members of cabinet approach the other members of cabinet for funding or when they approach the standing policy committee for funding, is it a matter of ranking? How are those priorities set? Again, this might not be a specific question to this ministry. It's more of a process question. How is that done?

Community Development, for example, received a 14 per cent decrease this year compared to the 2005-06 forecast. Some things have gone up, some of which I agree with and some of which I don't, and some things have gone down. For example, I noticed that the ministry support services have gone up by about 10 per cent. I typically think that if things go up to match inflation, then that's okay, but when they go up a lot higher than inflation or a lot quicker, then we need clarifications and explanations.

Human rights and citizenship, as was mentioned, had an increase of about 9 per cent, which is fine. Cultural facilities and historical resources went down by about 6 per cent when compared to the '05-06 budget. Again on the positive side, the parks and protected areas have received a 20 per cent increase. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity has done a lot of work, sometimes in question period, sometimes in collaboration with the minister, and we hope to take some of that credit. Nevertheless, it is a wonderful direction. But some things have gone up that we question, and some things have gone down.

4:40

Some of those financial questions, Mr. Chair. Think about the ministry support services, for example. When we look at the minister's office itself, the minister's office has received an increase of about 6 per cent. I know that sometimes the argument would be that if you're thinking billions of dollars in general, you know when you look at the entire budget for government, then 6 per cent, which really translates into \$465,000, might not be too much. But, again, it is more than inflation. So why was this increase necessary? How will this additional money be spent? It also sheds light on the pattern. There has been a pattern for the past several years that there is an annual increase in the minister's office budget.

Furthermore, you can take it a step further and look at the deputy minister's office. For that particular situation we are seeing a 9 per cent increase over the '05-06 budget. Again, in dollars it's about \$660,000. What more are we hoping to achieve this year to justify the 9 per cent increase in the deputy minister's office?

I know the comment was made about the size of government. It

is not necessarily only how many cabinet ministers we have; it's also the size of our individual departments. Are they efficient? Is the money being spent on front-line services and front-line staff, or is it mostly for administrative and support services to the minister? I'd rather spend this money outside of the Legislature, outside of the minister's office, and have it allocated to those different programs in the community.

My focus today, Mr. Chairman, is going to be on the cultural facilities and historical resources. The estimates on page 99, line 4.0.4, estimate that historic sites and cultural facilities are going to receive \$9.79 million, which is a 2 per cent decrease from the 2005-06 forecast, so this amount is going down. Furthermore, the 2005-06 forecast is itself \$10.09 million, or 4 per cent more than was budgeted.

Again, many members in this House have made the observation that there is the budget, then there is the forecast for how the budget has changed – is it more, or is it less? – and then there's the estimate for next year. The estimate is 2 per cent less, but the forecast is 4 per cent more. Are we lowballing it intentionally? Hon. minister, why did this department overspend by more than \$300,000 last year? That's the difference between the forecast and the budget. Why didn't the ministry anticipate this extra expense when preparing the budget for last year, and why aren't they preparing for it this year, when they are trying to pass the estimate today?

Also, on the same page, page 99, line 4.0.7, the 2005-06 forecast for acquisition of historical collections is \$1.64 million, which is 64 per cent more than was budgeted in 2005-06. Now, this might be above board, and it might be kosher, but I need to receive clarification from the hon. minister. What was this amount for? What did they buy, basically? What did they end up purchasing?

Furthermore, I want to mention a conversation that I had with a constituent who has a lot of experience in that realm of history and heritage. He made a recommendation, and I promised that I would actually deliver it to the hon. minister in charge. Particularly in reference to community schools that are targeted for closure or that already have been closed, he said that maybe we could look at using community schools which are no longer being utilized for education as historical sites, as archives, as neighbourhood libraries. He even went on to say that some of those schools are, you know, 80 years old, 90 years old, almost the same age as our province, so they are definitely within that definition of being heritage sites or historical sites.

This constituent of mine also went on to suggest that maybe they could be used creatively to support the arts and culture community by allowing them to be used as lofts or studios for artists. We can charge rent. We can charge usage fees. We can also look at the gym and use the gym space for community sports even after the school has been closed, you know, for both adults and children. You can run a playschool, or you can run daycare programs, all that stuff. You can use the stage for performances by different cultural, musical, ethnic groups, use that stage for different performances. You can even look at using the labs for, you know, young and aspiring scientists who want to conduct minor lab experiments. So instead of closing them, they could be under the purview of this hon. minister and used as community focal points, attraction points, libraries, like I mentioned, theatre, art, and so on.

What we will achieve in so doing will be to preserve a historical site; like I mentioned, some of those schools are really old and should be preserved. We are going to preserve green space, and we're also going to allow them to continue to offer a service to the communities in which they are housed. I guess what I'm really saying is that, you know, if a school has to be closed, and that is the decision that was reached by the local school board in consultation

with those parents, then maybe this ministry could acquire that site and preserve it. They can make money from it. They can just keep it for the public benefit instead of, you know, destroying it, tearing it down, and selling it for commercial development, for people to build condominiums, or for a big retail box store to come in and take it over. So that's just a thought. As I promised my constituent, here it is; it's on the record.

[Mr. Webber in the chair]

Estimates, again on page 99, line 4.0.10, estimate that for those cultural facilities and historical resources grants the amount, Mr. Chair, is going to be zero. This is different from what we had in 2004-05 and, indeed, for 2005-06. It was a modest amount; it was about \$1 million. Is this initiative going to be cancelled? That's the question. Can the minister explain why there is no money set aside for cultural facilities and historical resources grants this year? If it's going to be continued, how can we continue it with no dollar allocation? If it's going to be scrapped, why are we doing this? So why is it not sustainable?

Again, a very small expense on page 100, line 4.0.2, which is the estimate for equipment/inventory purchases for the Royal Alberta Museum here in Edmonton. The purchases amount that is allotted is \$150,000. There was no such amount in 2004-05 or in '05-06. So, again, to the hon minister the question would be: how will this money be spent, and what are they hoping to buy for the Royal Alberta Museum?

Mr. Chair, these are just some of my thoughts on Community Development, and I appreciate the time that I was allowed. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Well, we have a new chairman.

I thank the hon. member for the questions. I'll attempt to address some of them. The first one is: why don't we ever get the dollars that we ask for? I guess that's the same question I ask my wife when I go for an increase in my allowance. It's because there's only so much money, I guess, to go around. In all honesty, you can certainly be aware that all of the ministries go with major asks when they bring their budget proposals forward to the Minister of Finance. She has to basically do that balancing act in terms of putting it where Albertans are requesting it. As we know, the major departments that have been receiving the major increases have been Health, Education, Advanced Education, and Infrastructure and Transportation. Of course, everybody's there, but I guess the areas that could make the bigger impact, you know, seem to get the bigger dollars. So it's certainly a challenge for the Minister of Finance.

Yes, our budget decreased due to the elimination of one-time spending, but overall we did see an increase in our budget.

You asked questions in regard to the increases to the ministry support services. The increases that the ministry is experiencing are no different than any of the other ministries across the government of Alberta; mainly, salary settlements have impacted all the ministries. There's been no growth in full-time equivalents in the minister's office or in the deputy minister's office.

4:50

Several of the initiatives from last year do not continue in our budget for 2006-2007. As I had mentioned in my opening comments, there was \$1.7 million for major sporting events in 2005. The World Masters Games was one-time funding. The \$2.5 million in NHL teams initiative is discontinued now, and the \$20 million

that went out to the libraries as a form of grant of last resort is no longer there.

You asked the question regarding the funding of cultural and historical sites. There have been changes because of the centennial initiatives that were there. There was a commitment to the Edmonton 2004 centennial celebrations that took place. There's reallocation of equipment and inventory purchases for exhibit development. There was one-time funding for the heritage resource management information system and definitely anticipated decreases in dedicated revenue from the government of Canada related to the historical places initiative.

Now, in the 2005-2006 budget there was a forecast variance of \$24.1 million increase. That included centennial grants to the Calgary Zoo for the project discovering gateway to the north initiatives of \$15 million, and there was Calgary's Heritage Park Society for the redevelopment of the park at \$9 million. That's where there were some extra dollars that would have shown that we had overspent last year for one-time initiatives.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak this afternoon. I know that some of the subjects that I'm going to speak about have already been mentioned, and I hope that I take a little bit of a different slant that would express some of the frustrations that I may have. First of all, Mr. Chairman, I really want to say that I believe that our parks are our signature for Alberta, and I believe that our parks should be recognized as emeralds of our province for our visitors when they come to Alberta.

When we go into the parks of Alberta, one of the most consistent and common concerns that people have is staffing, staffing not only for the parks' maintenance but also for interpretive centres. I want to refer, Mr. Chairman, to an interview that I once saw that involved the CEO for A & W. The interviewer made comment to the CEO about the success of A & W, and the first question was, "Was the success of A & W because of the root beer?" The CEO says, "No, it's not." He says, "Was the success because of the burgers? Was it the mama burger, the papa burger, the teen burger?" The CEO says, "No, it's not." So he says, "What is the success?" The success, the CEO said, was consistency of the bathrooms, having them clean, that people knew when they came to the restaurant that there would be a standard.

Mr. Chairman, we need to maintain those standards; we need to maintain that consistency. We need to maintain the consistency not only within our own parks but also the parks that are privately run. I'm not sure what the minister's direction is in regard to the allocation of staff, but I question: do you have more staff allocation in the parks?

Mr. Chairman, my next comments have to do with the arts. I very much appreciate the money that has been and is being put into the arts, but I still believe that in a province such as ours there is room to have more support for the arts. I think that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations made mention of it one time when he talked about: in 200 years, who and what will we be remembered for? It will not be for our GDP, for sure, but it will be for our culture, and part of our culture, of course, is the arts.

Presently we have I believe it's just a little over \$7 million that is given to the foundations. Mr. Chairman, \$3.1 million of that goes to the arts: I believe \$600,000 this year to the Smithsonian, leaving approximately \$2.5 million for the arts. Mr. Chairman, that may seem like a lot of money, but in consideration of all of the arts we have in Alberta and all the potential that we do have, I would like to

see if there could be a little extra allocation in that direction.

One other comment that I'd like to make. You were at an award presentation yesterday that recognized volunteerism. There were 600 people at an award presentation in Calgary for accomplishments and dedication of volunteerism. Volunteerism is the heart of Alberta. Without volunteerism – and I have to speak for rural Alberta – rural Alberta would not look the same. Our arenas, our culture, the support that volunteerism gives to rural Alberta is beyond compare. A lot of our volunteers, to coin a phrase that is being used, are burned out. We do need support for our volunteers, and that support may be in support of structure or in support, I guess, in a lot of different senses. One of the main challenges that volunteers have is trying to support utility costs at the same time as trying to raise funds for projects.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, I again want to thank you for the opportunity to say a couple of words. I would very much like to praise the minister for the work and the support that he has given to the directions that I've talked to. If he could just kind of have a little bit of discussion on the comments that I have.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In responding to the parks' full-time equivalents, currently, member, we have 270 provincial parks and provincial recreation areas that have facilities capable of providing revenue. The parks in protected areas are using facility-operating agreements to manage operation of facilities at 200 of these sites, and the operations of the other 70 sites are being managed through a combination of service contracts and department staff. Private-sector operators are responsible for running the facilities and are a key component to our success. We're hoping that with the increases that have been allocated to them in regard to the camping fees that they're allowed to charge, there will be dollars that will allow them to be able to enhance our sites and to possibly provide, you know, services and amenities to the camping public.

On our own full-time equivalents relating to the facilities that we operate, they were increased by eight full-time equivalents this year, and last year there was an increase of 10. I'm really hoping that the improvements that we do to our parks infrastructure over the next few years will certainly help to enhance the camping experience for visitors and Albertans alike. Hopefully, if there are more people that are enjoying that experience, there is the opportunity for extra revenues to come in. As you are aware, a portion of the revenues that do come in are rededicated back to the operation of our parks. So if we're more successful in attracting more users, then there'll certainly be the opportunity of having more dollars to reinvest into our facilities.

5:00

Your comment in regard to volunteers I take wholeheartedly. I come from a background of being a volunteer. It was so nice to see the elderly gentleman that won for the heart of Calgary yesterday. He retired back in 1980 at the age of 65, and he still continues to volunteer to this day. His closing remark last evening was: to all of you people that are retired out there, please take the time to consider volunteering if you haven't done it because it adds to bring a lot of quality of life not only to yourself, but you're able to contribute to your fellow Albertans and neighbours. It was nice to see someone in his 90s, still out there volunteering on a daily basis, come up and put out the challenge to all the retirees that are out there.

I thank you for your comments on the arts funding. I've responded to that.

As I indicated earlier, I'm up to the challenge in terms of working with the various communities to see what we can do in the future. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very quick. I have a few questions left.

Hon. minister, I do understand the importance of the Smithsonian folk festival. The government gave them a \$1.5 million or a \$1.7 million grant. I'm not against that, as I said before, but I just want to remind the new minister that one of the very active associations in the southeast consists of 11 leagues. It's the Mill Woods Presidents' Council. The Minister of Education and myself requested the then Minister of Community Development for just a couple of thousand. They actually were celebrating Canada Day as well as centennial day together. At that time the minister said that they didn't have money. I mean, when a festival like this or any other festival outside Alberta comes, then the money in millions comes.

My question is: where did the money come from afterwards? When we asked for just a couple of thousand dollars because they didn't get the money from HRDC – they always get the money from the federal government because they celebrate Canada Day, and 60,000 people come and enjoy their celebration every year. That grant was refused. Now, suddenly millions of dollars come. It's a big question I want to ask the new minister and find out. I mean, this department is to promote community development. If the people who are involved in the community, the leagues, don't get money, this is shameful for the government if we don't help them when they are in need. Normally they don't ask the provincial government for the money, but when they were really in need of some amount, a couple of thousand or \$5,000, at that time the former Minister of Community Development said that they didn't have money. That was my first question.

The second one is about book publishers in Alberta. Some book publishers didn't get a grant from the Alberta government. They had to shut down the business. Then they moved because the big fish eats the small fish. This is what happened, and some of them are moving out of Alberta. What plan does the government have to help them? We want them here because we want all the books published in Alberta. If we really want to promote everything Albertan, we should help them from time to time. I just want to know from the hon. minister what plans we have to stop them from moving from Alberta.

You mentioned, answering my questions, that a 16 per cent grant was given to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. That's wrong. A 16 per cent grant was given for total community development. It's only \$3 million. I think the grant is about a \$3 million increase, which is not 16 per cent because it was \$20 million before. Now it's very close to that. We were asking for \$40 million or something. Please give us a breakdown because Community Development in total includes so many departments like human rights, cultural facilities, historical resources, parks and rec, and everything. If you say 16 per cent for everything, that's right, but that 16 per cent increase is not for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. They are in dire need of money. Lots of stakeholders keep in touch with us, and they are not happy.

You answered my question about the sports plan. I have the sports plan prepared in 2003 by the Alberta government, and it's still lying somewhere. I want to know when this government is going to implement that. The former minister promised that it would be in

this session, the sports plan as well as the cultural plan. I haven't seen anything, and I didn't get a proper answer for that. So please.

Thank you.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, hon. member. You do make the comment in regard to the Smithsonian, the dollars that are being invested there to the tune of \$600,000. We must remember that that is an opportunity, I guess a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that the province of Alberta has been given in terms of being able to showcase itself in terms of being able to attract future tourism and future investments into the province of Alberta.

In regard to the community leagues I'm sad to hear of the funding request last year. I just would reflect it back to the member: was there any thought of maybe making an application through the Minister of Gaming through the community initiatives program? That was something that my community came together on, and we were able to access dollars through that type of funding and put on a party for in the neighbourhood of 10,000 people who joined up in the community of Bonnyville.

Your book publishing comment. I'll take that under advisement. I don't have an answer for you at this point in time.

I will double-check, looking back in *Hansard*, if I misled you with some statistics, and we'll get back to you on that.

The sports plan and the cultural plan. I've seen the briefings on them. As I indicated earlier, there's \$2.8 million that went into the sports funding arena, which I guess could be part of saying that it's a slow implementation to the sports plan, but it's certainly something. That, along with the cultural plan, will be something that I'll be looking at in the near future.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

5:10

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I ran out of time last time as I was making some comments on the general situation with respect to arts funding in the province. I was comparing what we spend on the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in our budget with what this budget for this year has allocated for the horse-racing industry. There is something wrong with the priorities. That's the point that I was trying to make: \$63 million for horse racing – a massive increase, by the way, from last year – and only \$22.6 million for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. The increase in budget for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is one-quarter of the increase that the horse-racing industry has received, a 10 per cent increase, as the minister pointed out, for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and close to a 40 per cent increase in the funding for the horse-racing industry.

The Stats Canada report in 2005 ranks Alberta, Mr. Chairman, the last when it comes to per capita public funding for the arts among the country's provinces and territories. Even Newfoundland, one of the very poor provinces, pays more in arts funding per capita than the province of Alberta does.

So there is something for the minister to ponder. I know he's new to the ministry, but the responsibility is there, and he has to address these. There are some numbers that need to be looked at.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the questions after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Community Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:
 Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$229,798,000
 Capital Investment \$20,749,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.
 The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report the estimates for the Department of Community Development.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under

consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Community Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$229,798,000; capital investment, \$20,749,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
 The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening when we will reassemble in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, April 26, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/04/26

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head:

Main Estimates 2006-07

Innovation and Science

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The first thing I have to do because you reminded me is move the estimates of the Department of Innovation and Science.

I'll now resist the urge to sit down and listen to the discussion. I actually am going to make some comments. I'm going to do something very unusual tonight. I'm actually going to stick to my notes. This will be a first, and it'll surprise the people that work with me.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to review the Innovation and Science estimates for '06-07, and I'd like to start by introducing Innovation and Science staff present this evening: Barry Devlin, who is the senior financial officer; Anne Douglas, director of communications; and Donna McColl, assistant communications director.

Mr. Chairman, I have a name for our department, the little department that could, because we do a lot of great things.

Ms Calahasen: Is that on your notes?

Mr. Doerksen: No, that's not on my notes.

Of course, if there's any additional information required to answer questions this evening, we will provide those answers in writing.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta is a very attractive base of operations for researchers and scientists looking to carry out investigations. With their knowledge and contributions and with business and financial plans aligned with the government's vision of long-term prosperity for Albertans, unleashing innovation is becoming a reality. Alberta Innovation and Science provides leadership and makes strategic investments in research, science, and technology initiatives in three priority areas: energy, information and communication technology, and the life sciences, which include agriculture, biotechnology, forestry, sustainable resource management, and water research. These investments are a natural fit with the province's strengths, and together they are helping Alberta build a knowledge-based economy that can compete effectively in world markets.

Where innovation flourishes, one will find well-qualified professionals, a solid infrastructure, access to funding, and of course vision. With \$56 million to be voted on for innovation implementation and \$80 million for building and enhancing innovation capacity, Alberta has the building blocks for success within its grasp. With strategic advice from the Alberta Science and Research Authority we are working to build this culture of innovation and success to ensure Alberta's prosperity for generations to come. Government endowment funds and support for students, universities, and research institutes are helping to ensure that Albertans develop the right skills and that we can attract and retain others with the necessary skills to help us keep moving forward.

There are four organizations which are accountable to Albertans and report to the government through Innovation and Science. They

include the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research, also known as Alberta Ingenuity, the Alberta informatics circle of research excellence, also known as iCORE, and the Alberta Research Council.

The additional investment of \$500 million to the AHFMR endowment by the provincial government enables it to expand health research and may speed important breakthroughs and discoveries. This year the foundation announced \$48 million to 63 researchers in provincial universities, hospitals, and institutions. Investing in people has been a key strategy to build capacity and power in health research. The foundation has invested more than \$850 million in people and infrastructure in Alberta. The results of this long-term support have yielded tremendous benefits for Albertans in terms of basic biomedical and clinical advances in diabetes treatment, organ transplantations, cancer therapies, advances in bone, joint, and cardiovascular care, and new technologies. The foundation's support of world-class scientists and students working in a broad spectrum of research across Alberta is critical to our profile as a health care and innovation leader in Canada.

The Alberta informatics circle of research excellence, also known as iCORE, is in its fifth year of operation. Since its inception iCORE has invested \$50 million in building 24 research teams, which have attracted more than \$200 million in additional research funding from government and industry. These strategic investments have drawn many internationally acclaimed scientists to Alberta. Equally important, iCORE has been able to attract, retain, and educate many talented young Albertans in fields as diverse as computer software, wireless communications, and nanotechnology. iCORE also supports connections between university research and industry partners. This year four new funding partnerships were developed with Suncor, Matrikon, Castle Rock Research, and General Dynamics. iCORE together with the new ICT institute continues to ensure that Alberta has the highest calibre of scientists and graduate students bringing new discoveries to industry and strengthening Alberta's competitive position.

This year the Alberta Research Council celebrates 85 years of contributing to Alberta's growth and development. The ARC develops innovative solutions to industry and government, helping to increase the value of our natural resources and helping companies to grow. The ARC's focus on industrial bioproducts is helping our province to capitalize on the potential for building a strong bioeconomy. Through the Alberta fibre road map project the ARC and Forintek Canada will explore opportunities where industry can use Alberta's unique infrastructure to exploit new market opportunities from our fibre resources: trees, agriculture fibres, and polymers from the petrochemical industry. The experts at the ARC also take an integrated approach to managing water quality and quantity. Their water management systems and conservation technologies are improving the productivity of water use in industry.

Last year the government provided an additional \$100 million to the Alberta ingenuity fund. Alberta Ingenuity continues to be well positioned to support science and engineering research that will propel Alberta into the future. Alberta Ingenuity currently supports five research centres critical to the province's economic and social well-being – machine learning, water, carbohydrate science, in situ energy, and prion research – and is looking to establish others. Increased funding will also be used to expand the industry associates program, which seeks to increase research expertise in Alberta companies and to help recent graduates gain applied research experience by contributing to a company's research activities.

The Alberta Prion Research Institute, established with government funding in 2005, is dedicated to the discovery of science-based

solutions to the challenges associated with prions, the proteins best known for their link to BSE. Seven projects have recently been awarded funding, and several world-class prion researchers are in negotiations to relocate to Alberta. Planning is also under way to provide opportunities for Alberta companies in prion research.

Mr. Chairman, many sound investments in research and technologies will be made in 2006 and 2007. One very good example is the recent \$30 million grant to expand AVAC. This grant will extend AVAC's successful formula for providing support to early-stage business development in the areas of information and communication technology and the life sciences. Operating within the existing AVAC organization, this expansion will offer mentoring, marketing, and financial assistance to help develop more successful start-up technology companies, offer better leveraging of resources, and improve the quality and number of investment-ready companies.

The Alberta Life Sciences Institute has now been established with a mandate to foster the development and growth of the life sciences sector. I am very pleased to co-chair the institute with Dr. Rob Rennie, a respected venture capitalist with 20 years' experience in the life sciences sector. Dr. Rennie was also a member of the Alberta Agriculture Research Institute. This new institute will work closely with the existing agriculture and forestry research institutes but will focus on integrating challenges and opportunities which cut across these sectors. The new institute will work to create partnerships and develop a shared vision, leading toward the alignment of many organizations which together can build a truly significant bioeconomy in Alberta.

8:10

The Life Sciences Institute is focusing on areas including bioproducts, which include bioenergy, biochemicals, and biomaterials; health innovation; research management innovation; genomics; nanotechnology; and bioinformatics. The institute will identify and take advantage of opportunities critical to the province's future and to our traditional life sciences sector: agriculture, forestry, health, biotechnology, and water. We've already seen excellent results from work in some of these areas, work that has been done in collaboration with several government departments.

The Alberta Science and Research Authority in collaboration with the Alberta Water Council has developed a water research strategy to accomplish the province's goals in the Alberta Water for Life strategy. Implementing this strategy is a priority.

Bioenergy is another key opportunity for our province. This work is based on the growing international interest in biofuels such as ethanol as well as increasing recognition that agriculture and forestry waste can be used to efficiently produce energy. Alberta is developing plans to take full advantage of these opportunities. With continued effort and investment and with a shared vision of its stakeholders, the Life Science Institute will develop the kind of innovation necessary to advance Alberta's resource economy to the next level.

Our commitment to expanding Alberta's research capacity is significant. Almost \$27 million, to be voted, is required to meet our business goals for research capacity and science awareness. Nearly \$22 million is allocated to energy research to expand the province's research capacity in energy and climate change.

The major emphasis in the coming years will be on accelerating the development and utilization of clinical technology and broadening the economic value of this vast resource for Albertans. This investment will help to ensure that Alberta will always have access to long-term supplies of sustainable energy and clean water, factors that contribute to our superb quality of life.

The funding attracts matching and supplementary financing from

the private sector, research organizations and agencies, as well as other governments. A good example is EnergyINet, the Energy Innovation Network, which was officially launched from Ottawa and Calgary in March of 2005. The Alberta Energy Research Institute is the catalyst behind this national network of industry partners, researchers, provincial governments, and the federal government. EnergyINet's membership includes the provincial governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, the federal government, and 18 national and international energy companies.

Alberta's integrated approach to energy research and innovation covers six key areas: oil sands upgrading, clean-coal technology, CO₂ management, enhanced oil recovery, water management, and alternative energy development. Alberta believes that climate change issues are best addressed by investments in technology and innovations right here in Alberta and in Canada.

Mr. Chairman, the board of the Alberta Science and Research Authority has identified the development of Alberta's ICT sector as a top priority for our province. This industry sector develops and adapts technology platforms that are the basis for innovation across all sectors of our economy. To accelerate the growth and prosperity of the province's ICT sector, the Alberta Information and Communications Technology Institute has been established. The institute is co-chaired by the Member for Calgary-Bow and Dr. Roger Smith, former iCORE chair. It will provide strategic advice and policy recommendations to government regarding research, development, and commercialization activities.

We are building our reputation and expertise through collaborations on national and international levels. My department continues to develop and foster affairs with industry and research professionals in China and California. The 2006 technology mission yielded a number of new projects and strengthened our ties with these important jurisdictions.

Three excellent examples of this collaborative model were formalized in January at a technology mission to China. Government's investment of \$350,000 in a joint research laboratory project is supplemented by \$150,000 from the University of Alberta. The research will be conducted in state key laboratories throughout China. The joint research project will focus on three main areas of research: nanotechnology, environment, and energy. Projects will be identified based on their importance and interest to both Alberta and China. The first five joint research projects have been approved, and scientists will begin their collaborations this year.

A partnership between Banff New Media Institute and Cyberport, a Hong Kong based IT firm, was also formalized and is exploring opportunities in research and development, including scientific and professional exchange, education and training, and encouraging technology and business partnerships among small- to medium-sized digital media companies in Alberta and Hong Kong.

A partnership formalized by our Premier in 2004 recently received an additional \$100,000 grant from the government. The Harbin Institute of Technology Research Innovation Centre opened in January. It focuses on a dozen research areas, including sensor networks, transaction management and security, and machine learning. Long term this new centre of research and knowledge exchange will further develop Alberta's international partnership and enhance the province's research capability.

Mr. Chairman, California is also an important partner in our efforts to unleash innovation. Several projects between the Alberta government and HP are in the proposal stage and stand to enhance Alberta's research and development capabilities, making our province more competitive in a global economy. The establishment of a new facility at the University of Calgary for advanced data centre operations is providing the capability for leading-edge

simulation and modelling. This will lead to more rapid discoveries in product development.

In another instance research at the National Institute for Nanotechnology will develop tiny sensors to improve medical and environmental diagnostics. The vision is that diseases like cancer will be diagnosed while the patient is still in the doctor's office instead of having to wait for results from a lab. This will cut down on the time to treatment and reduce costs, something we can all appreciate.

A third example of our collaboration with HP involves video conferencing. The University of Alberta is combining virtual reality research conducted by Dr. Pierre Boulanger, an iCORE industrial chair at the U of A, with research on desktop immersive video conferencing under way at HP Labs in Palo Alto, California. The combination of these efforts promises to give conference participants a virtual 3D presence in video and the perception of a more realistic interaction. These research collaborations extend ongoing relationships between HP and Alberta universities.

On the medical front an enhancement of current collaborations between government and an international biotech company, Varian Inc., means that Alberta's Magnetic Resonance Diagnostic Centre at the University of Alberta is getting a boost for collaborative disease diagnosis research. With \$1.5 million in funding the centre will use the emerging science of metabolomics to provide more accurate and timely diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring of diseases like pneumonia and asthma. The extension of this agreement continues a collaboration that began in 2004 between the Alberta government and Varian in funding the diagnostic centre. The Alberta government is contributing \$400,000, and Varian is supporting the project with in-kind contributions and leveraging its relationships with other industry partners.

Another result of the recent technology mission to California is an agreement between Roche Molecular Diagnostics and the University of Alberta that may someday mean a better life for organ and tissue transplant recipients. The Alberta transplant applied genomics centre is a collaboration between the University of Alberta, the Roche companies, and the government. Dr. Phil Halloran, who heads the centre, was initially attracted to Alberta by AHFMR. His team will study organ and tissue transplant patients to better understand why our bodies reject transplants. The information collected will help in developing commercial diagnostic technologies to help physicians monitor transplant patient responses to antirejection drugs and ultimately help to customize drug dosage and type to each patient's needs.

This project demonstrates how Alberta's reputation for medical research excellence attracts international companies to invest here. This multimillion dollar project is designed to lead to the commercial development of new diagnostic technologies, generating licensing fees for the University of Alberta and potentially creating spinoff companies in Alberta. Investments like this will ensure that the benefits of research, technology, and innovation such as jobs, business, and economic growth remain in Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, our early successes often grow to become significant interests. One of those is the IBM Centre for Advanced Studies, which now includes services science. By successfully integrating technology within business processes, the resulting efficiencies help organizations to become more competitive. With a government investment leveraged with IBM and the University of Alberta, services science brings together two powerful entities: the University of Alberta, with its experience and skills in computing science, business, engineering, and law, and IBM's access to industry, technology, and global collaboration. This research partnership will help make Alberta-based businesses more competi-

tive and equip university students with skills they need to succeed in their careers. That will be valuable to all Albertans in years to come. The ability to attract scientists of the highest calibre is a tribute to the Alberta advantage and to the solid reputation our province has built in the international arena. [Mr. Doerksen's speaking time expired]

I would ask for unanimous consent to finish my last 30 seconds.

[Unanimous consent granted]

8:20

Mr. Doerksen: We provide funding prudently, Mr. Chairman, and because these investments are strategic and relevant, other stakeholders are prepared to work with us and join us in funding these initiatives. Both the Innovation and Science business plan and fiscal plan are in step with industry, other governments, and research institutions. Alberta prospers through innovation. A strategic approach helps us achieve the goals set out in the government's 20-year plan and Alberta's value-added strategy, securing tomorrow's prosperity.

Mr. Chairman, this is the vision of the Department of Innovation and Science. The estimates before you provide some of the resources necessary to bring this vision to reality.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members the 9th Hermitage Scout group, 20 strong in number, in the public gallery along with their group leaders, Nancy, Shane, Teresa, Chris, as well as a parent volunteer, Robert. They've come here to witness the legislative process here this evening, and let's give them a warm traditional welcome, please.

Thank you.

head:

Main Estimates 2006-07

Innovation and Science (*continued*)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, I must start by saying that I'm really envious of the hon. minister and his contingent of wonderful staff sitting in the members' gallery. I wish I had the same support writing my speaking notes. Why did they not want you to digress or deviate from the script? You know, whenever you do it, you sound intelligent, so they should have allowed you some room to manoeuvre.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity as I rise this evening as the Official Opposition critic for Innovation and Science. I must admit that I do enjoy a fairly straightforward, civilized relationship with the hon. minister. I can probably attribute this to how our personalities are compatible or perhaps that his department is not contentious. Nor is it plagued by controversy.

As critic in this particular case, Mr. Chairman, I find myself offering suggestions and advice more often than I am criticizing or condemning. In my view, this is 50 per cent or more of the opposi-

tion's role: to participate in positive and constructive dialogue. Even if and when we complain about something, it is usually for the public good. As such, I know that my concerns and suggestions, which I'm about to state on the record, will be discussed and examined by the minister and his most able staff, and whatever doesn't get answered live in debate tonight will be delivered back to me in writing. I must confess again here that when I trade places with the hon. minister, I am more than likely going to keep most of those staff in their places to allow them to continue their excellent work.

On a different note, Mr. Chairman, there seems to be a disconnect between how this government claims to appreciate and value this ministry and the actions taken or monies spent on its programs. For example and before we get into the financials, when the cabinet was reshuffled after two ministers resigned their posts and a third was evicted from the Tory caucus and yet another new ministry was created, the government's own press release on April 5, 2006, ranked all the ministries in order of precedence. This ministry scored 13th place out of 25. I take this as this ministry not being recognized to its fullest potential. I know that some of the traditional arguments would involve making the argument that things like health, education, and infrastructure, for example, would take precedence, but I would argue that so does this ministry.

During debate on supplementary supply, Mr. Chairman, the hon. minister agreed with me that his ministry needs or deserves more money, but in fact this overall estimate tonight of \$143 million represents about a 12.7 per cent reduction from the 2005-06 \$164 million forecast.

With that, it is interesting to see the budget for ministry support services – that is to say, administration and personnel – growing by about 7.2 per cent. The minister may indicate that this is standard across all the ministries, but I would still appreciate an explanation from him as to why this is taking place, particularly when this figure keeps rising year after year. During supplementary supply, when I was talking about allocating more money to this ministry to support its programs and services, I must be honest: I was not thinking more money just for salaries, pensions, or benefits.

Moving on, innovation capacity looks like a 9 per cent increase over the 2005-06 budget, modest considering how important this work is. You know, Mr. Chairman, after losing or relinquishing the responsibility for corporate information and communications to the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, which really needed something to do to justify its existence, this department we're examining today has only one single core business left, and by that I mean innovation.

As I read on page 270 in the 2006 business plan how this ministry's work relates to the government of Alberta's strategic direction and given that unleashing innovation is supposed to be the number one opportunity in the government's 20-year plan, why is the government not putting a greater emphasis on the activities supported by this ministry? There seems to be a disconnect, as I mentioned, between words and action.

Also, given that the ministry seems to play a central role in the government of Alberta's overall three-year business plan – and by that I mean goal 1, which states, "Alberta will have a diversified and prosperous economy," the issue of diversification here, Mr. Chairman – why is there not greater support being given to truly creating a knowledge-based, value-added economy? A \$20 million reduction from '05-06 to '06-07, a \$20 million reduction from last year's forecast, would seem to represent either a lack of confidence that the ministry is contributing to the government's goals or a lack of genuine commitment to those goals. Can the minister briefly share with us his comments and thoughts on why this is going on and his

interpretation of this situation? How hard is it for this hon. minister to talk to Treasury Board, for example, to secure funding for his ministry? I guess what I'm really saying in plain English is that this cabinet has to put its money where its mouth is.

Moving on to the ministry's goals, goal 1 is basically to implement innovation. It lists a few strategies under that goal, and all of those strategies are good. The question again would revolve around the budgetary commitment. It is important that we don't forget the important differences in mandate between all the different parts of our research community. Our advanced education institutions in particular have a critical role to play in applied research and commercialization of our discoveries, but they also have to be careful to maintain their academic integrity and to operate sort of at arm's length or as distantly as possible from industry and industry's interests.

Performance measures with regard to goal 1. I need to receive clarification on the definition of "support innovation." How do we support innovation, and how do we measure that? Given the concern that high tech is being squeezed out by energy in terms of capital investment – we all know the stories that 50 per cent of ICT firms in Alberta are contemplating or thinking about leaving to other markets – what are we doing to assess and to address that?

Moving on to goal 3, which is to "accelerate innovation in the energy sector" – that's on page 275 and 276 – I have to say here that Alberta needs to diversify its economy. I've said it time and time again, and we even had some exchanges during question period. However, I feel that this government has failed to support that kind of development, making us more dependent on the oil and gas sector. The business plan on page 275 says that energy-related revenues account for more than 25 per cent of all government of Alberta revenues, and we know that this Legislature is also considering Bill 24, which is basically increasing our dependence on nonrenewable energy resource revenues. This is an amendment that keeps coming back year after year. So, again, are we diversifying, or are we just relying on one type of research?

8:30

General points that I would go on to mention would include the need to ensure that we get all the value from our energy resources. Second, I would say that we need to ensure that we support efficient extraction, which is, you know, a no-brainer. People agree. We also need to leverage our position as leader in the current energy resources market to become a leader in future energy technologies. So use the revenue that we're getting today to expand into new horizons and to investigate new technologies.

Energy is confirmed as the economic driver for Alberta and the reason why we are allegedly debt free, notwithstanding, of course, things like the infrastructure deficit and the unfunded teachers' liability as just two examples. Nevertheless, energy is why we're doing remarkably well and things are looking even more promising today. It is convenient to showcase and promote our energy sector at times – take Murray Smith in Washington, Mr. Chairman, for example – while at other times this government finds it convenient to lowball that picture like today when they released the much-anticipated Aon report.

I know that this is slightly off topic, but it's definitely related to some extent, Mr. Chairman, when you consider that this government uses this report that they released to estimate that by 2016 health expenses would eat up 50 per cent of the entire provincial budget and that by 2025 it will consume most of it. Part of that ominous calculation is based on, among other things, an assumption that energy resource revenues are going to go down from \$12.3 billion in 2005 to only \$6.6 billion in 2025. My question is: how come? I don't know where Aon is getting their information from.

My question is: do we need to invest more in energy research, or don't we? We definitely need to invest more in energy research, as we hope to continue to be a major player on the world market. However, a qualifier here would be that we also need to focus on clean energy solutions: wind, solar, geothermal, hydro, indeed clean coal, if there is such a thing, as was heavily promoted by the hon. Premier in his infomercial and the Speech from the Throne, and cleaner fossil fuels like propane, for example. Today we all in this House received visits from members of the propane producers association. I'm talking about just that. Again, we can be leaders in research: develop, patent, and sell our technologies and products to the world at a premium.

Moving on to goal 4, Mr. Chairman, to accelerate innovation in the ICT sector. Again, it has been reported, as was mentioned during question period, that about half of Alberta's technology companies would consider relocating outside of Alberta because of a lack of funding, weak capital markets, et cetera. So when will the new ICT strategy be completed and released publicly for comment? Is the minister working with Industry Canada and economic development authorities in both Edmonton and Calgary to address this situation? We are working with industry to encourage ICT research, but shouldn't there be a role also for NAIT and SAIT? Does the minister know how many of the new graduate spaces that were announced by the Minister of Advanced Education are going to be reserved for ICT grads?

You know, it is important that we recognize the importance of this ministry and its potential but also to highlight areas which are lacking or need improvement. For example, let me remind you, Mr. Chairman, and everyone in this House, that almost one year ago, on May 12, 2005, exactly, I stood up during question period and asked the hon. minister about provincial funding for Edmonton's wet lab. I asked him back then when this government was going to commit its share of the necessary funding for that facility. Back then it was, actually, almost more than two years after that feasibility study was conducted and the funding from both the city of Edmonton's Economic Development Corporation, the EEDC, and the federal government's western economic diversification program was secured. So the funding was there, but the provincial government did not back then contribute its share. All that was missing was to know when that money was coming forward.

I even commented that delays could lead to the redirection or loss of funding. This was in May 2005. In August of the same year we in the Official Opposition were talking to city of Edmonton officials who hoped to receive final word from this government as to when that money was coming forward. They hoped they would receive this by the end of September '05. They predicted that the situation was going to become much more critical and that cost overruns would be inevitable if that date passed. They even feared that any unjustified delay could jeopardize the quality of the facility built. Needless to say, Mr. Chairman – and you guessed it right – nothing got done.

Just yesterday, Mr. Chairman, April 25, 2006, we learned that Edmonton city council had to vote to allow a \$5 million loan to rescue the wet lab project whose costs jumped from \$14.2 million to \$19.2 million in part because of the delay in receiving the provincial grant as outlined by the EEDC executives in their submission to city hall. They even indicated that there is some risk that some of the added cost might be recouped from taxpayers as the rent charged will not cover this loan in its entirety. The questions back then were and still are today: why this delay, and what's the holdup?

I can continue on a whole number of subjects and issues, but another one that really comes to mind, Mr. Chairman, involves research pertaining to the oil sands. Recently the Liberal caucus

visited Fort McMurray as part of our province-wide outreach initiative. Of course, we were interested in learning more about the oil sands and the extraction process and the enormous opportunity and all that stuff, but we also wanted to hear from the people of Fort McMurray about their issues and concerns. One issue that was brought up time and time again was about the copious amounts of water that go into extracting the oil and the fact that it's water that is never replenished. It's water that's lost forever. It ends up in tailings ponds. Some of it just sits there, and a minuscule amount is recycled for on-site cooling or otherwise minor purposes, but the bulk of it is gone. If you take it from the Athabasca River, it's gone.

What research initiative might there be or that is currently being worked on to (a) look for or identify other substances to be used in the extraction process to spare our most valuable resource, water; (b) if it's inevitable that some water is going to be used, how far does our research go to minimize that amount and to maximize how much of it is reclaimed? Is this under AERI maybe, or which other program does it fall under? I don't know. Actually, I can probably even expand a bit more to oil sands extraction technologies themselves. What programs or initiatives are there under this ministry to minimize the adverse impact of oil sand development on the environment?

You know, Mr. Chairman, another layer that I can add here would be with regard to the new kid on the block, namely coal bed methane. Is this ministry currently working on or is it willing to be working on new, safer fracking technologies? Is this minister going to work with Alberta Environment on baseline water testing protocols and technologies? Again, let's put our money where our mouth is and recognize that it's not only an essential service or an obligation to our farmers and ranchers, but it can also be looked at as a revenue-generating and money-saving invention, where we use it locally for our purposes and then export it or sell it to new markets as well.

Moving on, Mr. Chairman, to page 315 pertaining to iCORE. iCORE is definitely a very important program aiding in the attraction and retention of grad students and faculty members in information and communications technology. It has implications for industry, implications on the academic life; however, we occasionally hear complaints about the application and approval process, and in some instances there are allegations that institutions intervene inappropriately in this approval process. So my question would be: do institutions have a legitimate role in screening, evaluating, or otherwise affecting the success or failure, the outcome, of that application?

You know, I have here a letter that was shared with the Official Opposition from a researcher in Calgary. This particular copy of a letter is dated March 28, and he sent it to the Deputy Minister of Innovation and Science. It basically raises the same allegation, that the U of C intervened to intercept an application. This matter is now before the courts. Did it really need to reach that far? Did these researchers have to go to court to prove that they were worth going through the iCORE application? I don't know. I'm not just making a case out of one example, but there are allegations out there. I would appreciate the hon. minister's thoughts and comments on the entire iCORE program but more specifically on the application process: if there's going to be an appeal mechanism for people to, you know, try to appeal before having to resort to legal action.

8:40

More on this ministry, Mr. Chairman. In examining the Auditor General's recommendations for the period '04-05 in the Auditor General's report, they found several errors and differences between some information and the source data. I know that towards the end

of that report they talk about how the ministry is progressing and that that progress is acceptable or within the parameters that the Auditor General stipulates. I would actually appreciate receiving some information from the hon. minister. You know, what specific methodologies were found to be wrong or inferior that the Auditor General had to raise that, and then what did the hon. minister and his staff do to address that to prevent it from reappearing in the following year or the following years?

Just general questions, Mr. Chairman. I need to know if the minister is able to tell us, whether today or later in writing, what percentage of total research funding is provided without matching funding or matching grants. In essence, you know, how much is it that we give without requiring the applicant to look elsewhere first, and how much of it is done when we actually invite or encourage matching grants? I need to know where that break is.

Also, I need to know what percentage of our research dollars that are allocated through this ministry goes to or is allocated towards government of Alberta funding that is tied to industry projects. I mentioned how, you know, we need our universities to be at arm's length, similarly here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Before I recognize the minister, I would like to maybe remind the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky that *Beauchesne* 501 to 504 deals with the displaying of exhibits in the Assembly. You might want to look at your desk and take remedial action.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Chairman, as usual the Member for Edmonton-McClung has offered very comprehensive and thorough analysis and suggestions. I've always taken his comments in the manner in which they were intended because he does provide some very valuable comments, but I do have to respond to the one remark that he made, whereby he suggested that at some point in time when we trade places. I have no intention of crossing the floor. I don't know if that member was inviting an invitation to cross the floor, but if he is interested, he should call me.

I'm just going to cover a couple of the points you raised. I can't possibly answer everything you raised, but there are a couple of points I do want to make. You started off by talking about looking at the trends of funding, and I think what's important to remember when you look at the funding trends is that if you go back in previous years, there are a number of one-time items that you have to factor out when you look at the support that we give to the particular ministry. I would note that the increase at the time of \$30 million, the Alberta Prion Research Institute, the \$38 million, were all one-time items. So you should discount that in terms of when you look at the actual trend.

Also, not showing up in our estimates is the impact that increasing the endowment funds has. So if you look at the additional investment of \$500 million to the AHFMR, the \$100 million to the Alberta ingenuity fund, because those are endowment funds, that actually then begins to increase the amount of research effort that comes out of those institutions. So, in fact, we are seeing a larger impact in particular research.

Lastly, I'll say that – and I've made this comment before – it's not necessarily so important what appears in the estimates of Innovation and Science as the effort that is directed by all of government and other ministries at innovation and research in their areas. Health, for instance, will have areas of mental health research. That's why I used the comment earlier that we're a little department that could. Our role is to influence other departments and make sure that they are continually improving and looking at ways they can research and innovate. So it doesn't all have to be in Innovation and Science.

The member brought up the report that he raised in question period the other day about half of the firms considering leaving because of funding. I would just point out to the member – and he knows this – that that is only one element in a very comprehensive report. Of course, it's an item that attracted media attention because that's the one that they like to zero in on. It has the biggest impact. Again, I would say that that was a very small sample size, and the report itself says, and I'm paraphrasing, that you can't really draw hard-and-fast conclusions on that kind of sample size. I also indicated in my answer in question period that notwithstanding that, there are some trends in there that we've known about, particularly with access to capital, that we have to continue to look at. We have made an initial step, at least, with the investment in AVAC.

I'd also point out that there's a bit of an irony in that report. The same report suggested that we should look at certain incentives like an R and D tax credit. Many of the companies, a large percentage actually, did not take advantage of the tax credits that are available to them. So there's a bit of an irony in that report. I think you have to really look at the report in its entirety in terms of what it says. But it is a good report. I mean, obviously we don't want our companies to leave Alberta. That's the bottom line.

A little bit about energy. I'd just like to remind everybody in the Assembly that energy is a technology business. We often just throw out the term "the energy business." Well, frankly, our energy business is the result of good technology and good people applying good technology. We can use those strengths in everything that we do because we do have good people.

What I'd like to see in clean coal, of course, is a complete move to gasification of coal. Right now through the Alberta Energy Research Institute we're looking at making sure that we understand the characteristics of Alberta coal. While there are gasification technologies available, you have to make sure that they fit to the properties of the coal that we have here in Alberta. We are moving in that direction, and I hope to have some exciting things develop over the next year, which we've been working on.

I also want to pick up on your wet lab comment. We've been following that story a little bit too. I don't want to get into who did what because I'm not sure that that's terribly helpful. I was pleased to see that the city of Edmonton endorsed the continuation of that project in their council meeting yesterday.

There were a number of conditions to that particular wet lab, including the necessity for them to have the lease requirements in place before they could advance the money. It would be unfair to characterize the Alberta government as the reason for the construction overruns because there were a number of conditions that were required in that agreement. Our money did not go to construction. Our money is primarily going to equipment, which has nothing to do with the cost of the construction. So there were a number of different factors. I think the important thing is that our people have to do proper due diligence, and I expect that from them in any kind of proposal. We want to make sure that the money is well spent and well utilized. Together with the city of Edmonton and the federal government that wet lab project is going to proceed, and we'll continue to build on that research park, which is so important. So I did want to comment on that because we have been following the same discussion.

On your comments about a role for NAIT and SAIT I couldn't agree more. Actually, we have had several arrangements with both NAIT and SAIT in terms of helping to develop some of their applied technology. That applies not only to NAIT and SAIT. I also want to see all community colleges across Alberta get involved in that because they have expertise to offer. So I appreciate your comments on that.

8:50

The Auditor General's report. Again, if I don't remember all of this, we'll correct it in writing. I believe his comments were directed mainly at how we calculated our performance measures. It had nothing to do with inaccuracy of financial reporting. Our books have always been very properly reported, the expenditures properly recorded, but it's how we calculated some of the – what do you call it? – ratios that was problematic, and we've been paying attention to that and trying to improve that. So thank you for that.

There was one more thing that I was going to say. You made some comments about iCORE, and I've taken note of those. We'll look at those. I haven't been aware of any consistent problems with the process. I do know that the iCORE program has been phenomenally successful in terms of the kind of people that it's attracted and the disproportionate number of graduate students that we have in Alberta as a result of that program. So it has had tremendous outcomes, but we'll review your comments with respect to the process. We'll look into that.

How much is required without matching? I don't know what the percentage is. We'll look at your question on that one, but I think it would be fair to say that we look at leverage as an important element in everything that we do. We don't ever want to put \$1 in just from us. We want to leverage that with other granting agencies or industry or whatever so that we can actually bump up the total amount that goes toward particular innovations.

I did want to point out, too, that there is a very good report on the sponsored research revenue to Alberta universities. You go back to '95-96, when total sponsored research at Alberta universities was under \$200 million. If you go 10 years later, we're up over about \$650 million to Alberta universities. So the growth in sponsored research is a really good indicator of how much commitment that we've had. The province's share, compared to everybody else, has shown the biggest increase. Frankly, where we could do better in the province when you look at all of our things is on the BERD measure, which is the business investment in R and D, to get the business investment up. We lag behind other provinces in that area.

So thank you for your good comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Innovation and Science and his staff as well for preparing a very thorough budget for this coming financial year. I hope that my criticisms are taken in the spirit of constructive assistance in regard to Innovation and Science. I have a very strong personal interest as well as a categorical interest in the success and the expansion of this ministry.

In regard to the history of this ministry I believe that it is in its relative infancy. I was very, perhaps, heartened or even inspired to hear the hon. minister suggest that the job of this ministry is to influence and somehow guide the research and innovation in all departments of this Legislature. In fact, I would like to see that. As you will see, my comments are directed in regard to this comment in quite a complimentary way because one of the issues that I do want to talk about this evening is just maintaining the scientific integrity and independence of research and the value of maintaining the integrity and independence of research when we are looking for science and innovation to in fact help our economy and the people of Alberta in the broadest possible way.

Just very quickly, my analysis of the budget highlights is that this ministry is in fact seeing a decrease of \$14 million in its overall budget from 2005-2006. However, I am aware that this is including the one-time \$30 million grant to AVAC Ltd. for the IVAC technology commercialization initiative of 2005-2006. Setting aside this

one-time \$30 million, the program spending will grow, in fact, by \$16 million, or 9.7 per cent, of which I am very supportive. However, certainly, as was pointed out previously, I believe we should be increasing this budget by more than this amount because, of course, the overall actual amount of \$181 million is quite small in regard to how effective the research can be done. It's very expensive to conduct scientific research, and we need to support that in the most generous way possible. So \$2 million for new technology commercialization initiatives in this budget this year, \$5 million for the identification and pursuit of priority research initiatives, especially in regard to energy and life sciences, and \$9 million for the Alberta Research Council in regard to research and for core funding as well.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, I would say that I would encourage a higher percentage increase in the budget of Innovation and Science over this next year if at all possible because, in fact, the overall budget in actual numbers of dollars is, I believe, quite small.

I'd just like to go back then. As I said, the minister mentioned that his job and the ministry's job is to influence research and innovation in all other departments. I would just like to be more specific in regard to how we might do that in a better quality sort of way. So my first set of comments is in regard to academic integrity and the adherence to pure science as much as possible.

The issue of public dollars being given to private companies appears to be more relevant to some research institutes as opposed to others. The Alberta Energy Research Institute, for example, is entirely a private/public partnership at work, and I certainly don't discount the value of that by any means. On the other hand, though, the university research and strategic investment program directs the public dollars to researchers in public institutions. From the 2004-05 Innovation and Science annual report sponsored research reached \$584 million in 2003-04, 35 per cent above the \$434 million from the year before.

While we can appreciate that no research institute is in the position to look at research grants and take them for granted or otherwise deny them, so to speak, there is anecdotal evidence that corporate or industry-sponsored research very, very often affects the outcome of the research in question. For example, Dr. Nancy Olivieri from the University of Toronto last year quoted that over 90 per cent of published drug research shows that the drugs, in fact, work well. A 90 per cent success rate in any scientific research is simply not possible, Mr. Chairman, or logical, for that matter. The vagaries of human research are just not that good. Quite frankly, the success rate should be more in the range of 50-50.

I bring this up because, of course, on sponsored research, then, the proposals submitted by students or the researcher may be skewed for what the industry is in fact looking for. If the student or researcher proposes something that is not, perhaps, in keeping with what the company that is sponsoring the research actually wants, they might get passed over.

There is also the matter of government coming to rely on industry to fund all research. You only have to look at the University of Alberta's campus to see the simultaneous lack of government funding and the relative abundance of industry dollars at work. In the past few years engineering, biological sciences, and a host of other very worthy, let me say, Mr. Chairman, science and technology fields have seen their facilities upgraded, often quite dramatically. New buildings are being built. Lab equipment is being purchased, et cetera.

9:00

At the same time, more and more of the other faculties have in fact seen their funding eroded, their buildings falling into disrepair, and the faculty staff shrinking. The reason for this divide, in my

mind, Mr. Chairman, in part is because industry, particularly the petrochemical industry, has picked up the funding slack for this provincial government, funding those sectors whose research it can benefit from most directly, leaving other sectors, in fact, short of public funding. Unfortunately, this seems to be lost on some of our research initiatives here, and the government is funding neither sector in a satisfactory way.

Speaking of not funding satisfactorily, Mr. Chairman, Innovation and Science's website states:

The Government of Alberta's commitment to energy research is more important today than ever before. Alberta's conventional oil and gas supplies are declining, and relying solely on current methods of production is not an option. Research is needed to develop [other] ways to recover the significant amount of conventional oil that is left behind, as well as less energy intensive methods to extract heavy oil and bitumen. Research is also necessary to enable the energy sector to reduce the impact of greenhouse gases and other emissions.

Now, I find that a bit disconcerting, Mr. Chairman, because nowhere is it mentioned that alternative energy source research is in fact undertaken by the Ministry of Innovation and Science although I do know that they have sponsored some things in regard to this. It's no wonder, then, that the Minister of Environment can only hope for a 2.5 per cent goal of Alberta's total electrical energy to be produced by renewable and alternative energy sources. That would be more than double last year's total, which would be almost negligible.

So I would like to ask the minister then, please, if he would not feel compelled to in fact increase the focus of this ministry to pursue research into alternative fuels. In fact, nonhydrocarbon-based fuels is what I'm trying to promote here. The necessity of this is not in question, and the importance of research at this juncture I think is absolutely critical. In the seven years since this ministry has been created, I would like to ask what percentage of total energy research dollars have been in fact invested in alternative energy sources. I would be curious to know.

The ministry's energy strategy, a clean energy future, actually seems a bit misleading because it says that the province must "develop new sources of energy, such as natural gas from coal beds." Again, why do we have the sole emphasis on extracting more of the same kind of resource rather than, perhaps, switching and extracting another sort of resource? My comments in this House have been clear in this regard. We know that it is possible through the investment of public dollars to in fact move away from hydrocarbon-based fuel dependency. So I'd ask if the minister could please give more details on the clean-coal technology. According to experts, there is no such thing yet.

Now, the potential for biogas, or gasification, is something that I, in fact, have a great deal of interest in as well. Certainly, I'm not being unrealistic in being critical of the coal rhetoric that has been coming from across the floor so far because we do recognize the necessity of developing clean-coal technology, but to presume that we do in fact have it in our possession I think is misleading. Then we have that doubly misleading misappropriation of language, talking about the fact that Alberta coal is, in fact, clean. You know, this is stretching the credibility of all of us here to suggest that the public would just swallow this. In fact, we need to do real work on real solutions to try to burn coal in the cleanest way possible. So gasification is more expensive. The technology requires more research. We have the means by which we could finance and spearhead that research, but let's be honest about what needs to be done and what we are in fact doing.

Finally, the government recently announced the mandate and board members of the new Alberta Information and Communications

Technology Institute, so I'd ask the minister if he could please give us the details regarding how the board will be providing direction for public investment in research and development activities throughout the province. For example, I would like to know what proportion of public funds will be directed to private companies in regard to this initiative. How will the public hold accountable the new board? What priorities for research will be established, and how will this be determined? In other words, the whole parameters of this institute.

In regard to the support of Bill 1, Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, the throne speech this year highlighted the creation of a cancer prevention legacy fund. This will help to meet the three goals set by the government: reducing the incidence of cancer by 35 per cent by 2025, reducing fatalities by 50 per cent by 2025 . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, the noise level in here is getting fairly high. If you would like to take your conversations back out into the hallway, that would be more appropriate. Thank you very much.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It works too. That's very good. It's much quieter.

An Hon. Member: It won't last long.

Mr. Eggen: Well, yeah. It won't last very long.

In regard to cancer I would just be curious to know: what role do research institutes and research projects under this ministry play in the government's setting and achieving these goals?

Given that the name of Bill 1 was the prevention rather than treatment, I would be curious to know if this ministry would be putting pressure on others to institute prevention-based initiatives and research into the same, in regard to smoking particularly, and looking as well for genetic solutions to fighting the cancer gene. As well, I would be curious to know what role institutions and projects currently under the Innovation and Science ministry would have to play in this fight against cancer.

My last comments are just of a general nature, Mr. Chairman. I would like to know what the 10 per cent increase to the deputy minister's office budget is specifically targeted towards. Is it to an individual project or initiative? What exactly is it? Number two, why is there such a sharp increase in the innovation and service excellence programming, and what might that be spent on? It's almost a doubling of that line from the budget last year. Finally, what is the nature of the doubling of the innovation and service excellence program? What is this money being spent on? And so on and so forth.

I'd just like to once again thank the minister for his attention to detail. In the spirit of constructive criticism, I might hope that he and his ministry would consider what I have done with my research.

Thank you.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Chairman, like the previous member, this member has always been very constructive and helpful in his comments, and he continues to be that. I would say consistent as well because I was expecting him to focus on alternative energy, and he did that. He would have disappointed me if he hadn't talked about that.

I do want to make a few comments to some of your remarks in terms of the influencing and guiding that our ministry tries to do. If you review the Alberta Science and Research Authority Act, you will see that there is a requirement for the ASRA board, as I'll refer to them, to do an annual review of all departments and what they're doing with respect to research and innovation. That's one way in which we provide some guidance and direction to the government as

a whole, and it is a part of our legislative mandate. So in hindsight, when you look back at that act that has been passed in my time, it's a very good mandate to hold all of government accountable or at least be able to ask them questions about what they're doing. So there is one element.

9:10

You raised a very important question with respect to academic integrity, and I think that's something that we'll always wrestle with: to try to keep a proper balance, make sure that there isn't undue influence from industry. But it also strikes at part of the problem in that we are told continuously that in Alberta we need to do a better job of commercialization and not just pure science. So there is a balance to be sought there, but it is a very important question.

I followed the case that you cited with a great deal of interest when it happened several years ago because it did highlight the problem. I would point out, though, just in terms of pure statistics, that for the '04-05 year of the total sponsored research in universities \$264 million – I'm using round figures – was from the province, \$250 million from the federal government. It was actually the first year that the province contributed more than the federal government. Only \$56 million, actually, came from industry. So I don't think we're out of whack at all in terms of that scenario. But it's a very good question.

Your questions on energy. I will have to review the website to see how much emphasis we do place on alternative energy. I was actually surprised that there was no direct mention made of what we are doing in that area. So we'll check that out and make sure that that is covered because, in fact, we are doing work in that area, and we should talk about that. I do appreciate your approach, recognizing that we do want to move toward using Alberta's existing natural resources. You can't just abandon those fields. But particularly on the coal side, you have to bring technology to a place where it has a minimal impact on our environment. I like to refer to it, basically, as an energy mix. You want to have a good energy mix. You're not going to focus on one at the expense of the other. Again, I appreciate your comments there. You've always been consistent on that.

With the ICT Institute, it is largely strategic in nature in terms of the advice it's giving. It'll operate similarly to all of the other institutes that we currently have in terms of its accountability, in terms of its reporting and its mandate. But, again, we'll report back to you in more comprehensive terms the exact mandate, what the expectations are for its delivery. Really, I would say that, fundamentally, we are looking to renew our ICT strategy from about five or 10 years ago.

I was actually glad that you raised the cancer prevention legacy fund because it was not something that I raised in my comments and actually had intended to earlier. So I was glad you brought that up. How do I put this carefully? You would hope that in the area of research everybody would kind of get along and all collaborate and do things together, but like everywhere else we see that there are vested interests and people that have their own ideas about how things are to be done. So you've got a number of different people working in this area. You've got the Alberta Cancer Board, of course, and you've got the ministry of health. I raised this issue with the Life Sciences Institute at our first meeting and said: I really need your advice on this. We need to not only as a province, but we need to as a country – in fact, it's a global issue – collect and pool all of our talent as much as we can and solve this thing for the good of everybody. It's not just an Alberta problem or a Canada problem. The more we can break down the barriers between researchers, share ideas, and collaborate, the sooner we'll beat this thing. That would be my hope, so I appreciate your comments on that. It's a very

important issue to all of us and touches all of us personally. So, again, we'll respond in more detail to your specific questions and appreciate your honest and straightforward manner.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and participate in the estimates of Innovation and Science. Sometimes it's not easy to answer all the questions in a short time, so I request of the hon. minister – he can give me this in writing whenever possible, but I want everything in detail.

Under this core business there are about five main goals. My colleague already discussed three out of the five.

I would like to talk about goal 2, which is to build research capacity. All strategies sound good. A question about budgetary program commitment, strategy 2.1: why not look at the counterpart to iCORE, ICT, and other priority areas? Strategy 2.4: what projects are ongoing to determine the skills required for innovations?

There is considerable scientific basis for believing that innovation is a human capacity nurtured outside of the sciences just as well as within them. While it may be outside this minister's specific administrative area, I wonder if the minister supports initiatives throughout our education system to increase our students' capacity to innovate? Does he also support a new endowment fund, one that would mirror existing ones in science and engineering and health, for arts, social sciences, and humanities? This is a recommendation of the System Transformation Subcommittee of A Learning Alberta review, a policy of the Alberta Liberals, and it could use this minister's support.

Performance measures. There aren't the performance measures to assess whether very many of these strategies are successful. Why not measure science and technology awareness? Why not measure national chairs awarded to provincial professors, et cetera?

Now I move to goal 5, which is to accelerate innovation in the life sciences sector, page 278-9. The Life Sciences Institute and the ICT Institute don't yet seem to have much of a presence on the ministry's website. When will the public be able to go and read about their activities? Key priority areas appear sound on page 278. Key will be the capacity to fund these projects as well as coupling them with adequate monitoring, testing, enforcement where applicable: bioproducts, health and nutrition, platform technologies, sustainable resource management, prion science, water sustainability and safety, et cetera. When will the new water research strategy be developed to support Water for Life, which right now is just rhetoric?

9:20

There are other miscellaneous ideas for debate to be filled in by those with interest and expertise. Some ideas and some of my points have already been raised by my colleagues, and I have some other points to raise. Allow me to start with environmental research. Overall, facilitating research in the area of environmental protection and enhancement should be one of the priorities of this ministry, yet it appears pretty minor compared to the other areas. Can the minister just comment on what sort of a balance he believes his ministry is striking to support the kind of sustainable economic development Albertans want?

The next one is clean-coal technologies. When I search on the ministry's website for research projects involving clean-coal technologies, nothing comes up. What projects are being funded to search for these mythical technologies? What is the total value of these projects given the Premier's insistence about the bright future of clean-coal technology? Why return to a technology that we know

cannot be as clean or sustainable as promising alternative energy technologies?

Alternative energy. What portion of the AERI activities are going to alternative energy technologies? Does the minister believe this is to be sufficient? Are the minister's funding guidelines and processes fair to all proposals, including those exploring alternative energy technologies?

The next one is agriculture: import costs, biofuels, future of the family farm, making sure innovations and technological advances can be assessed by smaller operations.

Next is forestry: protecting massive public value in forests from pine beetles, value-added industries, et cetera.

I have some financial questions. There are undoubtedly a number of very good things going on in the minister's department. Certainly, increased R and D and strategic research export is needed if this government's dismal record on economic diversification is to be improved. However, it is important for the opposition to ensure that the public is getting a bang for our buck and that the government puts its money where its mouth is. Can the minister explain what led to the decision to increase the spending of last year's budget? If it's important enough to do, it should be important enough to budget for.

A significant amount of the unbudgeted spending went to the technology commercialization initiatives, element 2.0.1. Can the minister outline specific outcomes of this increased funding for technology commercialization? If not, why not? Given this increase, shouldn't there be a specific corresponding performance measure for commercialization? What measure is the minister using to ensure that these public dollars have their intended effects? Can the minister tell us which organizations or entities this additional funding for commercialization went to or what form this funding took? Did it go directly to firms, or is there a program within the Alberta Research Council? Did it get put through the heritage assessments commercialization initiatives? Just how did this work? This is one of my questions.

I also want to know why this minister's budget is decreasing over last year's when the business plan's first goal, page 274, is to increase government spending in support of innovation from 1.42 per cent to 5 per cent over the last 15 years? Not off to a good start. Can the minister explain briefly exactly how his department measures this funding percentage? What line items in which departments go into making it up? Overall, funding for innovation capacity, element 3, is being cut by 12.4 per cent from 2005-2006 forecasts. Research capacity, element 3.0.1, is being reduced by 15 per cent. Energy research, element 3.0.2, is up 12.5 per cent. Life sciences research, element 3.0.3, is up 10.3 per cent. ICT research, element 3.0.4, is staying essentially the same.

There was a significant increase in equipment and inventory purchases under element 2.0.2, page 307. What was this for, and what was the rationale for the year 2006-07 budget that is more than double the budgeted amount of 2005-06 but less than half than what was spent? This trend in substantial off-budget increases last year followed by reductions again this year is reversed in the expense portion of element 2.0.2, innovation and service excellence program. I understand that this stream is part of the innovation program that supports improvements to government service delivery. Can the minister explain this pattern? Would this program fit better under RAGE, particularly now that RAGE has taken over responsibility for corporate information and communication technology?

On page 309 it is reported that the expenses of the Alberta Research Council last year were less than budgeted and now have gone up again but are still projected to be lower than was budgeted for the year 2005-06. Why?

On page 311 there is significant fluctuation in other revenue in the budgeted amounts, about \$2,458 million less than was budgeted for

the year 2005-06, \$48.7 million. Is this a reflection that some of the revenue streams were not as good as anticipated? Is this related in any way to commercialization initiatives that are not as successful or realized as quickly as you had hoped for, or is this contract revenue? If so, which organizations or companies contracted with the department? Which organizations or individuals did the contractor research? Again, on page 311 I note that within the Alberta Research Council there are two subelements: number one, core research funding, and the second one, contract research. Contract research is budgeted to be more than 40 per cent higher than the core research funding. It is typical for contract research to be significantly higher than core research. Can the minister explain why this is so, based on his understanding of how each of these types of research support various departmental and provincial goals?

9:30

On page 311 again, under innovation capacity, this pattern of overspending in the year 2005-06 followed by the reduction in 2006-07 is repeated for the expenses for the Alberta science and research investments program. Can the minister explain the need for the increase and, if this increase was warranted, how he determines to reduce it in the future?

The ministry has announced that a fourth stream of ASRIP funding was being developed that would co-ordinate more specifically with the federal funding, particularly the Canadian Foundation for Innovation. Wouldn't an entirely new funding stream with the potential to leverage additional federal dollars warrant a greater increase?

Page 311 again. Expenses for the Alberta Science and Research Authority have doubled, from \$1.1 million to \$2.2 million. While this is not a lot of dollars, it is a substantial percentage increase that requires explanation.

Page 311 again. Can the minister explain the rationale behind the allocation of funding to the three research priorities for his department: energy, \$21.6 million; life sciences, \$17.2 million; and ICT, \$14.7 million?

Page 315. iCore is potentially a very important program, aiding in the attraction and retention of grad students and faculty members in the information and communication technology fields and connecting industry and academia. However, we occasionally hear complaints about the application and approval process. In some instances there are allegations that institutions intervene inappropriately in this process. Do institutions have a legitimate role in screening, evaluating, or otherwise affecting the success or failure of funding applications?

I also want to pass on some concerns I have heard about an organization that this caucus has always been supportive of, namely the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. There are apparently some medical researchers in Alberta who have concerns. The concerns cut across a number of issues, and I would welcome the minister's comments on each of these, or perhaps he could undertake a review of some of the terms of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, known as AHFMR. This foundation's goals and the institution's strategic goals may not always match, putting at least some researchers in a difficult position.

I'm talking about the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research again. This foundation has a poor reputation, among some at least, for not providing sufficiently competitive salary packages. This foundation has an unpredictable evaluation process for ongoing salary support. This foundation supports basic salaries rather than specific medical research, and it's been reported that the University of Calgary's Faculty of Medicine is more dependent for basic salaries on this foundation than is the U of A.

On a related topic I would ask the minister to have a discussion with his colleagues in Advanced Education and the institution to ensure that everyone is on the same page. There are numerous accounts of how the new Heritage Medical Research Building was built as a shell, but the responsibility for equipping it has basically been off-loaded onto the institution and, more troubling, onto the academic positions. [Mr. Agnihotri's speaking time expired] Just one minute, please. These doctors are running around begging for money to equip this building rather than attending to their research and their patients . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, your time has elapsed.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Chairman, he certainly deserved the same courtesy that I got for going a little bit over his time, so we're more than happy to give that to him.

You asked a lot of specific questions that we'll address in writing. I will make just a couple of quick comments from your remarks. You raised the issue of research capacity, and you talked about the arts, social sciences, and humanities, which is a topic that comes up on more than a few occasions. Quite clearly, in our approach we have targeted in quite a focused manner ICT, energy, and life sciences.

I appreciate your comments on the arts, social sciences, and humanities. It is a topic that needs to continue to be discussed, so I do appreciate your comments on that.

[Mr. Prins in the chair]

You made some comments about science awareness, and again that's a critical component in terms of making sure the public is aware of the science that we do and understanding the science that we do and understanding what the benefits are. A challenge that I often give to researchers is that they have to help me to translate to the taxpayer the benefit of what they're doing and how it actually impacts on their lives. Most of us, when we look back, understand how science and research have affected our lives, so intuitively we say, "Yeah, there are going to be good things that come as a result," but still it's an ongoing challenge. We have increased the budget on science awareness, particularly at the student level. We have beefed up our budget this year on that one.

You talked about page 278, "accelerate innovation in the life sciences sector." I would just comment on that particular item in that we just established this year the Life Sciences Institute. The act provides for an MLA co-chair for all of our institutes. I deliberately appointed myself as co-chair of this institute because I wanted to raise the profile of that particular institute and the importance of it in the future. A lot of us worry about our dependence on oil and gas and the energy sector, and really the message I was trying to send with that is that we see the life sciences sector as a very important future part of the province, and we're trying to give it some profile and some direction. So I appreciated your comments on that, and I hope that's helpful.

You asked a lot of questions, some financial questions about technology commercialization and getting a bang for our buck, and those are good questions. I think you asked some questions about measurement. We do an annual report on the scientific activities of the Alberta government whereby we analyze all of the contributions on science activities and related science activities, and we publish those to our stakeholders annually. So we do a continual review of our activities. Again I'm not going to get into the specifics, but that is something where we do to try to hold ourselves accountable and measure progress we're making or not making.

Just a few comments about the Alberta Research Council. You talked about that. You were right to point out the contract revenue side. The contract revenue or expense side in our budget is largely outside of my control. A substantial portion of the revenue from the Alberta Research Council and the accompanying expenses are a result of contract revenue either with government agencies or private business. So it just becomes mainly a flow-through in our consolidated books.

9:40

We have to take the numbers that they give us in terms of their budget. If they're down or up, I have no way to control that, but we do have to report it this way. The annual government contribution is quite clear, and we do stick to that figure in terms of what we provide them for operations. But, again, when you look at our budget, you have to factor out the contract revenue to really get a fair picture of the trends of our support for research and innovation activities. Yeah, when you're reading our budget documents, it can be very confusing because you have to factor out all these one-time things and these contract revenues, and it does make it difficult.

Lastly, just on the AHFMR I've noted your comments about the concerns that you have heard. I wasn't aware of such concerns, so I have taken note of that. I would say that this is the 25th anniversary of the AHFMR. I think it was last year we had an international review of the activities and results of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medicine Research, and they gave a very strong, ringing endorsement of its success and its impact. I think that overall its impact from a goal point of view has been very, very excellent and very strong, but you have raised some issues and ones that we will review when we look at the notes.

Thank you for your comments.

The Acting Chair: Thank you to the hon. minister.

The next speaker is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Go ahead.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to participate in the estimates debate this evening on the Department of Innovation and Science. Certainly, whenever we look at this department, it could be considered the quiet department, but hopefully it is a quiet achiever.

Now, there are many different research projects going on within this department, and I've been listening to the discussion this evening on coal and clean-coal technologies. Certainly, there is research going on that I understand the department is monitoring. This research is going on in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, with CO₂ sequestration. I think this is a very important research project. A lot depends on this project. The information I have is that it is going quite well and that the CO₂ sequestration project that's going on in Yorkton is raising significantly the production of mature oil formation.

Whenever we talk about the capture and the storage of CO₂ in this department, we're missing one word there, and that's the capture, the compression, and the storage of CO₂ in flue gas emissions. The word "compression" is important because that's the one that costs you the money. I would like to know what progress has been made on the research in this province by this department, precisely how much money is being spent, and where it is being spent in this province on CO₂ sequestration projects. It is the future.

If we're going to have coal-fired generation in this province, hopefully in the near future we are going to look at the capture and the compression of those flue gas streams. I think we should be experimenting with the entire flue gas stream to see if it can be used

to enhance oil recovery in some of our mature fields around our coal-fired plants west of the city. Certainly, there are any number of mature oil fields there. I would like to know what we're doing with that research. I certainly see where there are significant amounts of money.

Maybe the minister has already mentioned this and I missed it, but what exactly is being spent this year on agricultural research? It is my information that we spent \$38 million on prion research last year. Is that continuing? I think so, or at least I hope it is. I apologize to the minister in advance if he has discussed this earlier. Mr. Chairman, you're right: it was quite loud in here. I may have missed that. An update on that and the total figure: I would be very grateful for that information.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Last year there was \$700,000 spent in this department encouraging innovation – innovation – within the government of Alberta. So the Department of Innovation and Science was spending \$700,000 on a project to encourage innovation. I didn't think it would be necessary to spend any money on that. I just thought they would do it anyway, particularly with the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency showing leadership and leading the charge, if I can use those words in this matter.

The department was set up with a significant amount of fanfare. In fact, in the last fiscal year there was a \$2.5 million transfer from this department to Restructuring and Government Efficiency. I'm wondering if there is going to be another transfer from this department and if RAGE, Restructuring and Government Efficiency, is going to go even larger. I would like to know the answer to that question.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I see in the government estimates for 2006-07 on page 312 the full-time equivalent employment statistics; the department has 108. That's no change from last year. The Alberta Research Council has close to 600 employees, and in iCORE there are four employees – four.

Now, I just thought I would have a look and see how this department does in hosting expenses, and I thought I would have a look through the *Alberta Gazette* for the year 2005. The department, I think, is very gracious when they host. Certainly, they do it quite often. I'm not saying that it's not necessary. It probably is. There are a lot of scientists that need to get together and talk.

If we look through this – and these are just rough calculations – there are well over \$115,000 in hosting expenses that exceed \$600 amounts. What amounts are there below \$600 that have not been listed publicly in the *Alberta Gazette* for this department. If I could have a breakdown of that with the department itself, with the Alberta Research Council, and with iCORE, I would be very grateful. If we're spending that amount over 600 bucks, how much are we spending in amounts less than that? I don't see it in the budget here. I'm looking at the statement of operations, the expense amounts. I don't see it listed in here, and I think taxpayers have every right to know.

9:50

Now, iCORE has four employees. It's a small part of the operation, but they have hosted significant events. One was a conference in Banff for \$36,000. This was the Banff Informatics Summit from June 9 to 11, 2004. This was obviously in Banff, three and one-half days of open lectures. The conference only lasted three days. There were three and a half days of lectures and workshops for iCORE chairs and the research teams. Are there any events of this nature scheduled for this fiscal year? If there are, how much is it going to cost? That's just one example.

There's a significant amount of money here. A year ago there was \$2,300 spent on a press conference. The function was a joint launch of two new iCORE research programs. The press conference was held in two locations, as I understand it: in Edmonton and in Calgary. This press conference was to increase awareness of the new research programs. Well, that's fair enough, I guess. I just want confirmation from the minister that these expenditures are valid considering the fact that there seems to be only four full-time employees in that part of the department. Now, there are certainly other listings here, but people are very, very busy hosting in this department, and I would just like the minister's input on this and what is planned for this fiscal year.

Also, the recruiting and retaining of scientists. I understand that that is going quite well. How much of a problem or is it not a problem to attract top-notch young scientists from across Canada to the Research Council?

If he could provide, Mr. Chairman, answers to those questions, I would be very grateful. Thank you.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Chairman, I would just thank the member for his questions. Again, as with the other ones we will endeavour to reply in specifics in writing. He does refer to us as a quiet department. I'm reluctant to give this advice to the opposition, but maybe they should give me a harder time, which might help get our budgets up so we can spend more money on innovation like they support. But you can just kind of ignore that advice.

The member talked a lot about CO₂ sequestration and the importance of that, and we can certainly find out that information and provide it. I would note for the hon. member – and he probably is aware of this – that there is a company, actually, a private company out of Red Deer that has on its own, without any government support, captured all the CO₂ out of the petrochemical plants and is using it for enhanced oil recovery in oil fields. They're doing that because the economics make sense. Quite often the challenge in this particular area is the transportation issue of getting the CO₂ to the depleted oil fields. So it's not necessarily so much the technology as it is that particular question.

Again, it is an important area. It was actually highlighted in some of the events that I attended. I went to the Montreal conference on climate change. That was a topic there, CO₂ sequestration capture and storage, so the member has raised that particular issue.

You raised the issue of prion research and the \$38 million. The \$38 million went to the Alberta ingenuity fund to fund a multiyear research program on prions. It was not all invested in research projects the year it went to the ingenuity fund, but it was intended to be spread out over five, six, or seven years. So it's actually an ongoing kind of commitment to prion research. It was a one-time transfer of money but a multiyear expenditure on finding science-based solutions to the BSE issue.

The member has raised a number of questions about hosting expenses. Quite admittedly, Mr. Chairman, we do get involved in a number of scientific conferences, and we make no apologies for that. That's how we build relationships between researchers in different jurisdictions and different countries so that we can share knowledge, share expertise. You can't always do that sitting behind a desk in your office. You have to get out and meet people and talk to them, so we do that.

Another thing we're involved in, of course, is the Banff Venture Forum whereby we bring venture capitalists into our province from across Canada and from the United States to listen to presentations by our companies. We put money into helping that happen because that's an important element of commercialization, of building a venture capital industry in the province and providing that capital

education endowment fund. The fund would help achieve system excellence throughout Alberta, resolve postsecondary accessibility issues for both rural and urban Albertans, and provide funding and spaces for apprenticeship and training programs across the province. Twenty-five per cent would go into a capital account to eliminate the province's \$7.2 billion infrastructure debt over the next 10 years and to address critical municipal infrastructure plans across the province. Invest 5 per cent of the annual budget surplus, up to \$500 million, into an endowment fund for the humanities, social sciences, and arts to supplement existing funding and encourage development in these fields.

The second one: spending nonrenewable resource revenue is not sustainable. A number of organizations are proposing savings strategies—the Official Opposition, Canada West Foundation, Fraser Institute, former Premier Lougheed, and some other economists—but I think this Tory government, Mr. Chairman, is still not listening to our policies and policies from very wise people. While every time they are asking us to show the policies, when we show them the policies, they say that it's crap, and sometimes they throw it out. I don't know.

This third one I want to mention is this: failing to adequately save resource revenue for current and future Albertans.

The fourth and the last: using resource revenue for annual budgetary spending demonstrates a lack of fiscal discipline. The consequence is that the province fails to show Albertans a clear vision or road map for the future. In contrast, in 1976 Alaska learned from its previous oil boom, when it spent most of the revenue on short-term program spending.

Everyone in this province is saying that we should legislate to save, and this government is legislating to spend. It is unbelievable. We have a plan for investing Alberta's surplus dollars and would create a lasting legacy for this province, but where is the government's plan? We need a strong, long-term vision, not a one-time drop in the pan. Instead of talking about where we will invest the surplus during the next quarter, let's talk about the next quarter of a century. How do we want Alberta to look 50 years from today?

10:10

Mr. Chairman, as I said before, this present government is a directionless government. They have no foresight. There's a huge windfall, and they are spending money like drunken sailors, some people say. This is the time, if not for us at least for our children and our grandchildren, when we must have long-term, sustainable policies on our resources.

We have seen that this government has not produced any policy on capping municipal education property tax. The teachers' pension plan is still there. They only throw money when there is a dispute or something, a lump sum amount of money without any long-term future plans.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

Failing to add funds for the future. I know they invested \$1 billion in the heritage savings fund, which is a good thing, but I want to see the funds go into the savings fund according to a plan. So far they don't have a plan. I would say that they just put in some lump sum amount of money depending, I would say, on the mood of the government.

Eliminate health care premiums. This issue was raised last election and the election before, and that issue is still there. Lots of stakeholders keep on asking or writing letters to my constituency, and I don't have an answer for them. I can only request the members sitting here, and they can pass it on. They can discuss it in

their caucus. This is a tax, and we should have a policy. We should discuss this very seriously. I know that lots of members across the floor believe that this health care premium is a tax and that it should be eliminated, but it's still there.

This government throws money if they see problems when they are drowning in cash, and their strategic plan has gone out the window. I haven't seen any diversification policy. Electricity deregulation: do you think it's working? Most of the people, all parties, know that it's totally a failure. Why is it a failure? Some people say that it's ideologically based and that it was not thoroughly discussed or whatever. I know that if we come back to a regulated system, it will cost a huge amount of money. There are so many factors involved. We should seriously consider this because people are still complaining about their utility bills, and every time somebody asks me, I don't have the answer. I am here to tell each and every member here to think about it, at least for the people who elected you. They put trust in you, and they are paying more money because of the wrong policies of the present government.

The next one I want to discuss is diversification. If you have any policy on that, I would love to read that. Lots of people are asking. This oil or gas or all the resources will finish some say in 20 years, some 25 years. At least we should stand on our, you know, feet. I mean, we are answerable to the people. We should have a proper policy on this particular issue as well.

I already mentioned the resource policy. Environmentalists are not happy. Every day during question period questions are asked, and the answers, everybody knows, are not the answers stakeholders want to listen to. It's not appropriate what they want. As members of the opposition we can just ask the question. Seriously, if we don't have a proper environmental policy at least for 20 years, 25 years, then I think it's not good for all of us, good for our coming generations.

The government has banned deficit budgets. Why don't they ban nonemergency budget spending? I mean, if they can ban a deficit budget, why can't they ban their budget spending? Every time there are estimates or budget debates, the government keeps on spending, overbudgeting, and there's no stopping. Sometimes even 25 per cent overbudgeting. Twenty-five per cent overbudgeting. If I have a certain amount of money, I certainly will look into the matter. If I have a certain amount of income, I will spend accordingly. The hon. Finance minister is here, so I request that of her too whenever we have a budget. I know that there could be some problems, but in future we shouldn't overspend. It should be like we have a law. We ban the deficit budget. Why can't we do something to stop this nonemergency budget spending? That's what I want to see instead of overspending budget after budget.

This is my second year here, but the members who have been here for the last 10, 15 years are talking about this budget thing. This government keeps on repeating. They are not listening. If we really listen to the people who elected us—it's about time. Listen to them, and don't overspend our budget. This government is always proclaiming accountability, and they always proclaim that they are fiscally responsible. I don't see anything. If the government is fiscally responsible, if the government is accountable to the people, then we have to have long-term sustainable policies. I don't see any.

The government uses taxpayer money as a political football. We have had a huge surplus in the last few years. That doesn't mean that we just keep on spending like crazy, especially when election times come and they just throw the money. This is not democratically right. It's about time to think, but for the last many, many years just to win the election, throw some money, sometimes in the name of rebates, sometimes in the name of resource cheques or whatever. I don't mind. Lots of people are asking me about the

\$400 cheque. They say, “Why don’t you guys like us to get the cheque?” I said: “I’m not against giving you the money. I want the government to give you more money than this, but they should have a policy like Alaska. They are giving the dividend, but they are not giving money from the principal.”

10:20

What I want to see is a plan where they have a proper savings fund. Out of that savings fund, whatever the interest – let’s talk about the total royalty. In approximately 12 years time if we have a royalty of about \$130 billion, it’s a huge, huge amount of money. If we had had a plan 12 years back, \$130 billion in the bank, that dividend, I mean, Albertans could have, maybe, \$1,000 a year. Now, the government is using that taxpayers’ money as a political football. They are playing games with Albertans’ money. It’s not our money; it belongs to Albertans. They sacrificed a lot, and they deserve to see a policy on the resources. They deserve to see a policy on savings plans and a diversification strategy.

Another thing. People are talking about the shortages of labour. We have a question period. The critic for human resources is asking questions; some other people are. I’ve received numerous calls from my constituents. Some people like the foreign workers; some people don’t like the foreign workers. But if we sit down, maybe all party members sit on an all-party members’ committee, and discuss the shortages of labour and make a proper policy, that would really, really help Albertans who put their trust in us. But this fiscal responsibility is not that. We are only leaning towards one class.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It’s with interest that I rise to participate in the debate this evening in committee on Bill 24, which is going to increase the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be used for budget purposes from \$4.75 billion to \$5.3 billion. Certainly there have been questions from previous speakers in regard to the spending habits of this provincial government. There are many, many people from different walks of life and different organizations who have concerns about the spending by this government. In 10 years spending has essentially doubled. We still have the same problems with our public health care, certainly with public education, our roads, our bridges. We seem to be spending more and more. I don’t know whether it’s the infrastructure deficit that we can’t eliminate because of the past, when we avoided even the debate on if there was an infrastructure deficit and how large it was.

Now, certainly the Minister of Finance – and this is the first opportunity I’ve had to publicly state that I appreciate her measure in the budget to remove some of the long-term debt that the Alberta Social Housing Corporation held with the heritage savings trust fund. We discussed this last summer, I believe, at a heritage savings trust fund meeting, and the minister went away, I think did the right thing, and got rid of that debt.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

That was a good thing to do. I was hoping also that the savings for the Alberta Social Housing Corporation would be used to provide much-needed additional housing or housing units. Maybe I will be pleasantly surprised in the next fiscal year, and that will be done. I would like to express my gratitude to the hon. minister for taking the initiative to do that because in this day and age, with our fiscal

surplus, that deal just didn’t make any sense. I appreciate the hon. minister’s efforts, again, to help that situation.

Now, with this budget, as I said earlier, everyone has some concerns. When we go through this in the limited amount of time that we spend, Mr. Chairman, in discussing each department, it doesn’t look like we could cut much. Every dollar is being prudently allocated or spent. But when you look in the blue books, the public account documents, at what actually was spent by this government, I’m not so sure that we are spending our money prudently. In fact, I’m convinced we’re not. Yes, I’m convinced we’re not spending our money wisely.

Now, you see the global amounts in each department. I’m just going to pick Health and Wellness, and we could start at the minister’s office, and we could go through the next element: physicians’ compensation, on-call programs, primary care. We can go through to the regional health authorities, we could go into the Justice department, and we see these line items, these elements with X amount of dollars. But when you see the spending come out the other side in the blue books and you see the amount that, for instance, IBM gets for supplies and services, you see the amounts that we spend even in office furniture – RGO comes to mind. I don’t know whether these contracts to this RGO outfit are bid or tendered or whether they’re just on some sort of system that doesn’t agree with the free-enterprise system, where they’re sole service contracts or whatever they are. Now, you see, we’re spending millions of dollars. Even in my own office, Mr. Chairman, I’ve been offered new furniture, and I’m quite happy with the old stuff. There doesn’t seem to be any end to the spending. I can understand where people are trying to look after me and give a person good working conditions, but I’m quite satisfied with that old green leather furniture that the Social Crediters bought. It’s still functional, and it’s still comfortable. So, you know, a tiny measure like that. The Minister of Municipal Affairs is shaking his head, but tiny measures like that, if you save small amounts here and there, add up. They certainly add up.

10:30

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was anxious to participate in the debate. It’s not long ago since that hon. member was quoted on the budget process in this province, the hon. member being one of the leadership contenders and the former Minister of Advanced Education. He indicated in the *Edmonton Journal* last month that he’s not too keen on the idea of more cheques. These are the legacy payments. We’re talking about another legacy payment. We had a legacy payment of \$1.4 billion here, the Premier’s legacy payment. I’m concerned that Bill 24, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, is just softening up the Provincial Treasurer’s purse for another legacy payment, and I don’t think that that is in the best interests of the province at this time. The former Advanced Education minister, as I said, was not keen on the idea of more cheques.

Mr. Chairman, a former member of this Assembly, a former Minister of Economic Development, no less, Mark Norris, also a candidate for the Premier’s office, in the same article – pardon me; this is from the *Calgary Herald*, on March 22 of this year – indicated that he had concerns as well. He speaks out against this idea of another legacy payment or rebate. He goes on to say here that repeated rebates will become “habit.” He doesn’t say it’s a bad habit. He doesn’t say that it’s a good habit. He says that it’s a habit. He also states that they could also lead to demands for an annual resource dividend similar to the one found in Alaska. He concludes by stating . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, there's a lot of noise being generated from this area over here. I know that they're probably important conversations, but they could take place out the back. If you would allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to continue.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have to take Mr. Norris's words in this House seriously. This gentleman is one of the contenders for the Progressive Conservative leadership. He states: "I would hate for people to say 'Welcome to Alberta. Here's your cheque'."

Mr. Norris also adds in this article that the massive budget surpluses experienced by the government in recent years – and there's a \$7.4 billion surplus forecast for this year – are partly due to "bad budgeting and overtaxation." Yes, hon. minister. Bad budgeting and overtaxation. This is from the *Calgary Herald*. This is from Mr. Mark Norris. If a former minister of this House, the former Minister of Economic Development, is stating that there has been bad budgeting and overtaxation, we should take a look at what that former hon. member had to say, and we should consider that when we're discussing Bill 24 here. What exactly does the former member, Mr. Norris, mean by bad budgeting? Does he agree with this side of the House? Does he agree with the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie that spending is out of control on that side of the House and what the hon. member stated about the lead-up to the next election? If you think spending is out of control now . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Chairman. This hon. member nor no one on this side of the Assembly thought we should expand the size of cabinet and then have this Department of RAGE. Goodness, we would like to see a smaller size government spending less money.

The Chair: Hon. member, I believe the Speaker has cautioned us in the House before about using proper names for departments instead of acronyms.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I apologize to the hon. minister. The Restructuring and Government Efficiency department.

Now, Mr. Norris had concerns about bad budgeting and overtaxation. We talked a little bit about the bad budgeting practices. Many members have expressed some concerns. But overtaxation brings me to the next point, our gasoline tax. Hopefully, the hon. minister is studying this just like the hon. minister studied the idea of reducing the payments for the Alberta Social Housing Corporation that were in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. Some day I'm going to open the paper and I'm going to be surprised because the hon. minister is going to agree that maybe while these crude oil prices are as high as they are at the wellhead, we could reduce our take at the pump on our provincial tax on gasoline from 9 cents down to 5 cents and give everyone a little bit of a break. Now, I don't know. The next time I see Mr. Norris I'm going to ask him if he considers that to be one of his issues of overtaxation.

I wonder about the future. Hon. members were talking earlier, Mr. Chairman, about future revenues to this province and who will be paying the tax bill in 15, 20 years. Will a large percentage of that come from personal income tax? Will it come from corporate tax? Will it come from resource royalties for this provincial government? Who will pay that? Hopefully, Mr. Norris is going to discuss this whole issue of overtaxation at length during the upcoming campaign. That's certainly going to be an interesting campaign.

Those are some of the ideas from some of the individuals who want to lead this party. They're not very far off the mark when they express concerns about how we're budgeting.

Certainly, when you look at the budget again, there is room for improvement. You look at some of the things that this side of the House has suggested. Before I conclude, I really have to remind all hon. members of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's idea of having money set aside. We need to set aside a lot of money – we really do – for the hon. minister's grandchildren. I believe it was last year during the Queen's visit that the hon. minister's granddaughter was in this Assembly. We look at that, and we think that perhaps she will follow in her grandmother's shoes. In 40 years, 45 years, maybe she'll be the Minister of Finance. She'll be wondering: "Did they save the money they should have saved in the heritage savings trust fund? One year they made an announcement that if they had inflation-proofed it, it would really be valued at \$19 billion, not \$13 billion. If they even had inflation-proofed it, it would have this value. Maybe they should have been more anxious to save money than just spend it in frivolous ways."

10:40

I consider that legacy payment to be frivolous. When I go through the *Alberta Gazette*, Mr. Chairman, and I see the amounts that we're spending on road construction and the increases in those contracts, I have to question how this whole thing is being administered. We can't blame this on the high cost of steel, or we can't blame it on a shortage of cement, or we can't blame it on machines or the fuel to power them. We have to look at how we're administering these contracts. Contractor after contractor seems to be going back to Treasury Board for contract increases that go from 15 to 20 per cent, in some cases to 96 per cent. The question is: are we managing these resources wisely?

Again I would urge caution in support of this bill, and I would like the government to consider the Alberta Liberal plan. The Alberta Liberal plan would be to take our dollars, save about a third of it, spend about a third of it on infrastructure, and then take the rest and invest it in our future by making postsecondary education accessible and affordable to as many Albertans who would like to improve the likelihood that they will improve their compensation packages at their jobs by getting more and better education. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation has grave reservations about those ideas, but the voters in the last election certainly did not. They liked the idea.

Mr. Lund: Why didn't you get more seats then?

Mr. MacDonald: We got a lot more votes, and we got a lot more seats. A lot more. We will work hard, and we will see what happens in the next election.

An Hon. Member: I can hardly wait.

Mr. MacDonald: Neither can I. I'm looking forward to it actually. I might even get down to Rocky Mountain House and campaign. If I have time, I will.

Certainly, one of the things that this government has done is put us in this surplus position, where we do have a fiscal surplus. After the silly deals that were made, sometimes land transactions for a dollar, sometimes in the amounts of blocks, 90 acres, 100 acres, the relevance with this bill, Mr. Chairman, is that we are now looking at what to do with the surplus. We had a deficit from the same government. We have to make sure that we don't repeat the same mistakes they made and increase the deficit. Some of these deals that they made: bad deals, really bad deals.

This idea of spending money on special warrants. I was just looking at some papers before I had an opportunity to speak on that. We can't go back there.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had a 10:30 appointment, so I'm going to be brief. You've got other people that want to speak on it. I really appreciate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder for allowing me to jump the queue here and speak to it. I have to stand and say that I'm against this bill. I would have liked to have seen an amendment that maybe would have made it appropriate, the fiscal irresponsibility bill, and then could possibly look at voting on being irresponsible. We're in a unique situation here in the province of Alberta, Mr. Chairman, in that we've hit the lottery. We have money coming in. But too often we see those people that have done so well for years run into big winnings, and in less than a year they've destroyed themselves. Money is something that is very difficult to handle.

I was at an investment seminar years ago, and the person was presenting and talking about living within your budget and the importance of always being fiscally responsible and saving, or paying yourself, 10 per cent minimum and putting it away. He talked about Ivana Trump and the fact that she spent \$5,000 a week in maintaining her house with flowers, and he went through all the things. She couldn't change her lifestyle when she got divorced, and the courts awarded her that same amount because that was the lifestyle she was living. We are definitely getting that way, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Hon. members from Lac La Biche-St. Paul and Edmonton-Calder, there's a lot of noise being generated from your area. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has the floor. If you need to carry on your conversation, please do so outside.

Please carry on.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have a real problem here. Even in the Aon report that we spent \$1.3 million dollars for, they projected that in short order our revenue from oil and gas is going to drop from \$13 billion down to \$6 billion. Even Aon has projected, using government figures, that we're going to be in a position here in short order, not accounting for the increase in health care costs, where we're not going to be able to have a sustainable budget. We've continued to bloat the size of government, bloat the budget to an unprecedented level, and it's just, as I said before, irresponsible to go on this spending spree and say that we're doing it for Albertans. We may be, but we're certainly not doing it for the next generation of Albertans.

There is not the money going into infrastructure and long-term facilities that are going to benefit us in the long run. We've gone through one cycle where we've had to blow up hospitals, shut down hospitals and recreation facilities that organizations can't afford to keep up. The last time government went on one of these spending sprees – and I just am amazed that they need to increase this amendment from \$4.75 billion up to \$5.3 billion. It just isn't necessary.

I strongly object to this bill, and I think that Albertans feel the same way, that we don't need to amend this. If anything, we should step back and follow Norway at this time. We should be shooting for the goal of putting all of our oil and gas revenue into the heritage trust fund for another day and start living off the interest rather than living off the principal and eroding it away. In 20 years it hasn't grown, and it's a major concern.

I appreciate the time to speak on this and hope that we have a standing vote on this so that people can be held accountable for voting for this increase in the budget.

The Chair: Before I recognize the next speaker, I'd like to apologize to the Member for Edmonton-Calder. I meant to say the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I would ask that this area please respect the members that are recognized to have the floor.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

10:50

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I rise with some interest in speaking to Bill 24, Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006. I haven't had an opportunity to speak on this yet, and I confess that I have a number of serious concerns that this bill brings to mind. I certainly would like to be on the record as opposing the essence and substance of this bill.

I would like to ask, first of all: what exactly was the point of passing the Fiscal Responsibility Act if it has to be amended every year to allow this government to continue its misspending of oil revenues? The stated purpose of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, Mr. Chairman, when it was first introduced was to allow for sustained program funding when prices fall in the energy market. So no matter how unlikely such a fall might seem, this government cannot continue to ask for a bigger slice of the pie no matter how worthy the projects might be, because the pie, in fact, is getting smaller each year. It's being eaten up much quicker. Since these are all nonrenewable resources, we might find ourselves without any pies at all in the future.

This government is consistently stepping away from sustainable resource development. The entire revenue system is built around oil and gas: not taxes, not other industries but nonrenewable, hydrocarbon-based energy. When the oil and the gas dries up or we have finally exhausted these resources to any real degree and perhaps compromised the environment to be able to produce much of anything else, then on what will this government depend for revenues for programs it has made dependent on such resources? I myself fully intend to stay in this fine province, and I would like my family to do so as well. I refuse to leave, Mr. Chairman, a legacy that is not sustainable for those future generations. I believe it's incumbent upon all of us here to think of those people as well.

When we're done exporting our oil and have neither saved a portion of the proceeds for future generations nor a portion of the oil itself for domestic use, what will our program spending rest on? The government is chronically spending surplus money and, after we finish with our budget, unbudgeted surplus money and is chronically spending far over and above the tax base that we've set out for ourselves, all the while in fact reducing that very tax base and increasing our dependence on nonstable sources of income. This is a recipe, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest, for disaster in the future. Frankly, we as the New Democrat opposition caucus are surprised, to say the least, that the government is in fact asking for this increase yet again.

Last year while debating Bill 37, both the Official Opposition and the NDP opposition expressed very serious concerns relating to unplanned, off-budget spending of the underestimated resource revenue. Given that we keep raising this issue, on a perennial basis it seems, that we keep trying to get this government to establish long-term spending and savings plans of some sort for both resource revenue and surplus monies, how can we be asked yet again, then, to sign off on an increase that will, sure, go to good and necessary programs but whose funding should be guaranteed and stable rather than dependent on the peaks and valleys of the energy market? It's

as though the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who voted for members of the opposition parties don't seem to count for anything in the overall decisions that are made here in this Chamber.

How can this government give corporate tax breaks as well to the tune of \$265 million and, at the same time, in the same breath in fact, ask to access an additional \$550 million in oil revenues? Might we not simply go without those corporate tax breaks this year and cut the additional \$68 million, say, on the horse-racing subsidies and finally close that money-losing business in Swan Hills? These are a few things that we could easily swing together to raise that \$550 million. The government could as well access \$214 million from what it's squirreling away in the capital and sustainability funds. Instead of spending the additional \$550 million, this could go into the heritage fund and perhaps begin a trend of saving oil revenues, Mr. Chairman, instead of spending them. We have a problem with sustainability, and in the long term it will only come back to haunt us.

One of the biggest issues, I guess, that I can see with this budget is that \$265 million in corporate tax breaks into an already overheated economy, Mr. Chairman, just speaks not only of lack of planning, but it's almost like it's a deliberate overheating of the already very hot economy. We can't just look at booms as a monolithically positive event. There are many problems that are associated with them, and booms will increase the possibility of bust, quite frankly, in terms of economics. So spending and throwing extra spending pressures into an economy that's already overheated is, in fact, very dangerous and has consequences not only for this province but for the entire Canadian economy.

Why has this government been so resistant to dedicating 30 per cent of its oil revenues to savings as was done by previous Conservative governments? Clearly, we can afford it now, and with dwindling resource revenue looming on the not-so-distant horizon, it is becoming increasingly necessary to face the fact that our resource-based economy, our fossil fuel-based economy can't continue to go on as it has for so long.

So, Mr. Chairman, I do speak out quite strenuously against this particular bill, and I hope that we can find some other way by which we can in fact pay for programs, save for the future, and also run a responsible and balanced economy here in the province.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to participate at this stage of debate on Bill 24, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006. The name itself, actually, is interesting. It's almost like an oxymoron to some extent because this is a piece of legislation that we amend, as was mentioned, yearly. Every year it comes back to the Legislature, and there is a request for more money and more reliance on nonrenewable resource revenue.

It is introduced in such a way that one would think it's really no big deal or it's business as usual, but in fact I, too, find it questionable and objectionable. It was mentioned time and time again – some of the hon. members across are commenting: not again; we've heard that argument before – but it seems to be falling on deaf ears, so maybe we need to repeat it. Maybe somebody would listen or a light bulb would go on. The government is heavily addicted to oil. They're increasing their reliance on nonrenewable energy resources, which is something that is not sustainable and something that is unpredictable. Savings are not following at a comparable rate. So you take it with the one hand, and you're not saving any of it.

It was also mentioned in this House numerous times how we compare against jurisdictions like Alaska and Norway, and I'm not

going to repeat that argument, but I think that my overarching statement would be that a plan and a vision are urgently needed. In my opinion, ad hoc, one-off decisions that are sort of unplanned and unjustified are not the right way to go. I'm not alone, and members of the opposition are not alone. Members of the public and, indeed, researchers and scientists in the community have indicated that the trend is alarming, to say the least. Take, for example, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. They have issues with this fiscal irresponsibility.

11:00

I will definitely mention a few others in due time, but first let me go over why I find this approach offensive, or why I don't agree with it. As I mentioned, there is a lack of plan. There is no solid plan that a person can refer to from year to year. It seems to be: money is coming in; let's spend it.

My second point would be that, as I mentioned, it is not sustainable. People like the Official Opposition, former Premier Lougheed, different economists in the community, people like the Canada West Foundation and the Fraser Institute, for example, which are most of the time thought of as reputable and trustworthy think tanks, have also sounded the alarm that this cannot continue the way it is. They have actually even raised questions as to: where is that fiscal discipline, that fiscal conservatism that this government prided itself on furthering? Where is it now? That's the question.

Third, the government is also failing to adequately save resource revenue for current and future Albertans. We've mentioned how the heritage savings trust fund has only finally received \$1 billion this year after many years of neglect. So, again, I find this alarming.

In the week of April 17, Mr. Chairman, as an individual I went online, and I surveyed interest rates that are readily available online at the various major banks in Canada, trust and insurance companies, and, you know, anybody who would have a program that offers guaranteed investment certificates. You know, on the one hand you have \$1.4 billion that was actually done in resource cheques, and there are musings now that there might be another round of rebate cheques. Again, an ad hoc decision that was not planned and wasn't well thought out. Why don't we look at what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie suggested? Invest into a dividend fund and then give out the dividends without shrinking or jeopardizing the principal.

So I went online, and I checked all those interest rates. For a simple GIC the range was between 2.3 per cent to about 4.4 per cent. The highest place, I think, during that week was PC Financial, President's Choice.

Anyway, this is an individual talking to a bank. How about a government talking to a bank? How much of a better deal would they have actually achieved talking to a bank? They don't have to go with a GIC. They can go with another instrument, something that gives them a better return. Or as a government they can go to a bank and say: "We will give you \$1.4 billion. What is the percentage rate you can give us?" The bank would probably say: "Oh, I can give you 8 per cent. I can give you 9 per cent."

Mrs. McClellan: We're getting 11. Why would we go to the bank for 8?

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. The hon. Minister of Finance says that they can get 11 per cent if they save that money.

Based on my calculation, Mr. Chairman, with this 4.4 per cent, which is the best deal I can get as an individual, it would translate into about \$78 per year per family in Alberta forever, and that's based on an estimate of 3.35 million people living. So \$78 per year

per family forever, and that is not counting that the principal might also grow depending on what financial instrument you use.

Now, you don't have to give a dividend. If it's \$78 and you might think that it's not enough, you can invest it into reducing personal income tax, for example. This year the government reduced personal income tax by only a meagre amount of \$35. It was also noted that \$35 doesn't buy you much, and that it was really ridiculous. Business received a slightly better reduction, from 11.5 per cent to 10 per cent, but some of the businesses surveyed said that they didn't need it, and it wasn't really warranted, especially when the economy is so hot. So we don't know the rationale there. But \$78 is more than \$35, so here's an example, and the principal is still safe.

You could have actually eliminated health care premiums. You could have invested into a pharmacare program, especially with the argument that drug costs are rising beyond control and the government is forecasting that it's not sustainable and all that big argument. Many different ways to invest wisely, and unfortunately they're not being investigated adequately.

Back to health care very briefly. I know it was mentioned before. Actually, I myself talked in budget estimates with Innovation and Science about that Aon report that came out this afternoon. That report, which was commissioned by the government, forecasts that energy revenues will decline between 2005 and 2025 by about 50 per cent. Now, again, I don't fully trust that estimation. But, anyway, that's what the government's own report is forecasting. It goes down from about \$13 billion to \$6.6 billion, which is almost half. So why are we relying on a resource that by the government's own measures is dwindling or going away or disappearing?

My fourth point, Mr. Chairman, on why I don't like this piece of legislation goes back to that fiscal discipline component. We are entrusted with all this money – and, you know, some would argue that it's really no thanks to the financial wizardry of this government; it just happens to come. What are we doing to justify to our grandchildren, as mentioned before? No. Sorry. We spent it all.

The many people that commented on this include the Canada West Foundation, as I mentioned. In one of their reports prior to the 2005 third quarter budget estimate update, they said that of the \$122.9 billion in natural resource revenue collected in this province since 1977, 91.4 per cent – the bulk of it, 91.4 per cent – went into a combination of current consumption and debt repayment, while only 8.6 per cent was saved in the heritage savings trust fund.

Another page from that report, if you will, says that since the creation of the respective funds – Alberta has the heritage fund and the permanent fund and the petroleum fund as in Alaska and Norway – Alaska has allocated 16.2 per cent to their fund, and Norway allocated 61.8. Alberta has allocated only 8.6 per cent. The Fraser Institute also commented, and I mentioned this before in this House, that Alberta has deteriorated in its standing compared to most of the other governments in Canada on something called the government spending subindex, dropping six places, or six spots, from second position to eighth in 2005. So in 2004 it was the second-best place, and in 2005 it was the eighth. Spending increases, according to the Fraser Institute, are a cause for concern and could potentially jeopardize the fiscal advantage that this province exhibits or displays now.

So every year we ask for more reliance on something that is nonrenewable when, in fact, everybody who understands finances advises us to use more reliable, more steady sources of income, things other than the nonrenewable energy sector, like taxation, for example, premiums that are collected on various services, income from other sources like agriculture and forestry and all that stuff, and so on.

Mr. Chairman, I don't think it will come as a surprise to you that I'm going to vote against this particular bill tonight. I'm also going to vote against it every time it's re-presented into this House because it really, simply doesn't make sense. If it defies common sense, if the average person on the street says, you know, "I don't like this," if this is something people don't practise in their households, then why are we practising it in this House? I don't spend more than I make, and I usually budget based on steady sources of income. I don't rely on potential lottery wins to budget for my household.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11:10

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 24 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:12 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For:		
Abbott	Fritz	McClellan
Ady	Goudreau	Melchin
Amery	Griffiths	Mitzel
Brown	Hancock	Ouellette
Calahasen	Jablonski	Prins
Cao	Johnston	Renner
Cenaiko	Knight	Rodney
Danyluk	Lukaszuk	Rogers
Doerksen	Lund	Webber
Ducharme		
Against:		
Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Pastoor
Eggen	MacDonald	
Totals:	For – 28	Against – 5

[Request to report Bill 24 carried]

Bill 30

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments?
The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Some of the remarks that I was going to make were basically made in second reading, but I'd just like to recap some of my feelings on this bill. I'm pleased with the way that it's been restructured because I think that it helps clarify the reporting. I think that I have this right – and if I'm wrong, I would ask the minister to correct me on this – that the regional board chairs would then report to the assistant deputy minister. That direct link into the minister's office would extend the power of the board because the people would complain to the board. Then the board would directly go to the ministry. I just feel that there were too many – what's the word? – gatekeepers before the information actually got to the minister.

The other thing that I had spoken about was the provincial

standards and, in particular, how people are assessed so that they can access PDD. I'm aware that there is a document out there that makes it a little bit more difficult to be able to actually get into PDD. In fact, it's changed it to something called emergent only. This would apply to people who actually would be PDD recipients, but they are not 18 yet. When they turn 18, they can be reassessed and not make it into the system. I think that has to be looked at.

For instance, one of the concerns that I had cross my desk and, actually, is still sitting on it was from a woman who had a child who was autistic. Now, I know that this falls under Children's Services, but the principle is the same. The child is autistic and had all of the services that he required, but when he went to school, that help was taken back, and the help was only available for so many hours. The woman's question to me, which rightly was asked, was: how can my child be cured at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and then be autistic again at 9 o'clock the next morning? It's a good question, and the same principle can apply at the PDD level to 18-year-olds or when they turn 18.

The regional boards. I would like to know, too, how many paid staff they would have. Could they not maybe pick up some of the staff that is being released from the provincial board, which I believe numbers 35 with \$11 million attached to it? That seems like an awful lot of money, and I'd like to see that bureaucratic section of it maybe cut down and that money put right into the front lines.

I guess what I would like to see in terms of the layout of how this works is: here's the client, and then there's the worker, that is the actual service deliverer. That truly, in my mind, is the most important person. That's the one that really makes the difference in that client's life. Then the next worker would be the assessment and case manager. The case manager would then report to the CEO, the CEO would report to the board, and the board to the assistant deputy minister, which seems like a lot of people because the only one that's really doing the work with the client is the one single worker. We now have seven people involved in delivering perhaps just three hours of care to one client a day. I think that that can be streamlined. Yeah, it can definitely be streamlined.

Also, the fact that regions differ in their needs. They also differ in the numbers. For instance, I know that Fort McMurray has a large number of brain-injured clients that need that extra-special care, that perhaps isn't a factor in, say, Lethbridge. The regions have to be able to have a way of getting their specific needs through to the minister's office.

The other thing that I would like to see – and of course this is, I guess, a kind of dream sequence – is that the community boards at the regional levels would actually be elected from within their community, that the CEOs would be hired by the regional boards, and that the ministry and the board together would come up with the contractual obligations that that particular CEO would have to meet.

11:30

I'd also like to see on the boards, however the numbered boards would be, some persons at large, ones that aren't even connected with the system, someone that would just come in and be able to oversee it and bring a fresh perspective, who doesn't have either a monetary interest or, in fact, an emotional interest because they have somebody in the system.

Also, I would like to know how this appeal panel would work. The reason that I would ask that is that I'd like to know what it would look like. I did serve on the Canadian pension board tribunal, and there were only three of us. We had two months of training, and it was a three-year appointment. There was a small per diem and expenses if it was out of town. But that worked very, very well in terms of an appeal panel. If it is the same people hearing, they get

very, very good at looking at it in a fair fashion. So I'd like to know what that appeal panel is going to look like.

Just to wrap it up, I guess what I'm really saying is that I feel that the bottom line would create a leaner ministry and a leaner board structure so that, in fact, complaints can come quicker, and it allows the ministry to be more responsive to problems, that just cannot fester for months and months. People are suffering in the meantime. This will be legislation. This is a legislated bill. But I would like to see other parts of the ministry legislated. The reason I'm saying that – I don't even have to think about this present minister; this present minister gets it. I am worried about future ministers, and I want to make sure that if this goes forward in the manner that I think it's going to go forward, the good work that is being done now will be continued, and we won't have to rely on making sure that we have as good a minister as we have now. If someone comes along later that isn't as good, that good legislation is there, and they'll be able to work within it.

Other than those few questions, I would recommend support for this bill to go forward out of Committee of the Whole.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act. The main objective of this bill is to eliminate the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board that oversees the six regional community boards, transfer responsibilities of the provincial board to the ministry, and enhance the role of the six regional community boards. The regional community boards will report directly to the minister and will be responsible for the local governance program delivery and co-ordinating other supports. According to a government of Alberta news release from April 11, 2006, the goal of this reform is to "enhance the role of the community boards that administer services . . . while improving the province's ability to better co-ordinate all the programs that provide support to Albertans with disabilities.

Changes to the system are absolutely necessary, and we recently requested that the minister conduct a comprehensive review of the governance structure. However, we do not know how the minister arrived at the decision to eliminate the provincial board in order to improve efficiency and how the changes will impact the community boards. The community boards we contacted were unable to comment on how the elimination of the provincial board would impact their operation. The minister claims that the goal of the reform is to improve accountability and transparency, yet the community boards have been directed to not comment. Hardly an improvement.

I have a few questions, Mr. Chairman. Building Better Bridges is a report on programs and services in support of persons with developmental disabilities, PDD, released in March 2000. It contains 10 recommendations directed towards improving the governance and service delivery of the PDD programs as well as addressing the needs of other persons with disabilities who do not fit under the current mandate. This review did not recommend eliminating the provincial board. How was the decision made, and what review or reports were completed? Which groups were consulted?

Lorne Taylor recently, in the fall of 2005, prepared a report on PDD governance. When will this be made public, and when will Albertans be able to see the recommendations made by Lorne Taylor about the PDD governance structure? Did the report recommend the elimination of the provincial boards? Why were the community

boards given the direction to forward all questions to the departments? How are we supposed to understand and evaluate the impact of this change to community boards when they have been directed to not answer questions? How much money will be saved and where? How will that money be allocated? What arrangements have been made to prepare the department to take on these additional responsibilities?

Given that 35 provincial board staff are being transferred to the ministry, what specific changes will be made to ensure that programs are being delivered in a more co-ordinated, effective, and efficient way? This minister claims that this reform will improve accountability, administrative efficiency, transparency, and create more equitable delivery of programs. How? What steps will the department take to ensure that services are delivered in a fair and effective way? What steps will the minister take to improve transparency?

Section 24 of the current PDD governance act includes a section requiring the minister to conduct a comprehensive review of this act.

The Minister must begin a comprehensive review of this Act within 3 years after June 18, 1997 and must submit to the Legislative Assembly, within one year after beginning the review, a report that includes any amendments recommended by the Minister.

How will this section be updated?

Last year the Auditor General made recommendations for the ministry regarding PDD. The provincial board has drafted new contracting policies. The new policies detail the requirements to be met in preparing business cases and also include guidance on contractor selection, which is on page 294. Will the ministry maintain these contracting policies? How will contracting work?

11:40

At page 295 it states that "management of the Provincial Board indicated that the problems identified as a result of the OCIA reviews will be addressed as part of the project to update their contracts, policies, and manuals." What will happen with the projects like updating contracts, policies, and manuals that were the responsibility of the provincial board?

I'm still not sure whether I should support this bill. I still have questions. Maybe I will listen to the other speaker, and then I will decide. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise with interest in speaking for my first time on Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act. You know, I have quite a number of concerns in regard to this act. We have as well in fact as a caucus been doing some outreach on specific elements of this bill and have come across some concerns from the PDD community. So I just wanted to articulate those to the minister specific to certain sections and pages of this bill, and perhaps she can provide me with some illumination on these bits.

First of all, just a general concern that I have is: what exactly did prompt the retooling of this act in the first place? According to the PDD groups that I've been speaking to, the functioning of the provincial board, in fact, was economical and efficient. So why are the roles and the responsibilities of the provincial board being transferred over to this ministry? What is the expected efficiency or benefit that can be derived from this?

While it seems to make sense that the ministry that is in charge of the PDD program should have a direct line of communication with these programs that support people with disabilities, the proposed amendments themselves seem to indicate that the transfer of responsibility would result in some duplication of services rather than creating any efficiencies. For example, section 9 of the proposed amendment states that the minister may, if she finds that

it in the public interest, offer programs or services in regions even if the same services are now being offered by a community board. I find that somewhat questionable.

In section 10 of the proposed amendments the text states: the minister may give community boards written directions on how to avoid duplication of effort and expense in the provision of services. So if the ministry proposes to offer services already offered and in the same breath says it will give advice on how to avoid such duplication, I just have to wonder at the overall effectiveness of these amendments. If the purpose of these amendments is to make things go more smoothly in conjunction with the transferring of responsibility to the minister for the purpose of increasing accountability, will there be an increase in funding to ensure that we at least keep these services intact even if they're not being increased?

The Alberta Association for Community Living had their rally here to protest these funding cuts. The minister has stated that there is, in fact, more money flowing to these PDD programs and services. If this is so, I'm wondering why the Edmonton community board for persons with developmental disabilities is sending out letters requiring the service providers to cut 3.4 per cent from their budgets. Perhaps our math is off, but I don't think so. I think that there is a real discrepancy here. If the minister, as she mentioned, could find efficiencies in administration, then that's great. If we can realize money to the front lines where there is a need, then that's great too. But I beg to differ that, in fact, there has been anything misleading in the line of questioning that we've been taking this week. It's clear that the people who actually are receiving these services have a serious concern, and their concerns deserve to be met. To suggest that there is no essential cutback in the actual provision of monies to specific services, I just beg to differ on that.

The Winspear fund, a private initiative, is having to catch people as they fall through the cracks that this government has not only ignored but created through a lack of commitment towards the most vulnerable people in our society. Last year the monies from the Winspear fund paid out just over \$65,000 helping individuals in dire need. So how does the minister respond to the evidence that obviously there are these anomalies in our system? We're looking to help people in the best possible way, and this is the place by which we can do so.

Specific to key sections of this bill that I have concerns with, the first one is on page 2, section 4. It says that this amendment does away with provincial boards. Their function is filled by the minister and community boards. There are some consequential amendments that do away with references to these entities throughout the proposed amendments. As I have said previously, the PDD community has pronounced that they are opposed to this change. The provincial boards were not inefficient, nor were they inexpensive to run.

If I can just turn attention, then, to page 5, section 9. This section is changing to state that the role of the minister is to work with other ministers and governments and public and private bodies to "co-ordinate the provision of services to adults with developmental disabilities." So I'd like to ask: what does the inclusion of "private bodies" reflect in terms of care trends throughout the province? What is the proportion of services and programs offered through these private bodies, and what's the difference in rates and quality of care between private and public bodies?

Over on page 5, section 9, this section seems to be amended to state:

Notwithstanding the regulations, if the Minister considers that it is in the public interest to do so, the Minister may provide or arrange for the provision of services in any region, whether or not those services are also being provided in that region by a Community Board.

Of course, this begs the question as to whether this, in fact, facilitates a duplication of services. If the services offered by a community board are insufficient, can the minister not just simply order the increase in such services that are needed? If they're not found to be inadequate or inappropriate, then are there not licensing or quality control issues, then, to be addressed? That's a problem.

Over on pages 5 and 6, section 10, the amendment reads, "The Minister may give Community Boards written directions . . . on how to avoid duplication of effort and expense in the provision of services." Then I say: what about section 9(2), regarding the minister providing duplicated services? This seems to be at cross-purposes at best, Mr. Chairman.

Over on page 8 section 15 states that "the Minister may, in accordance with the regulations, establish one or more appeal panels to hear appeals under this Act." In the previous legislation you had the right to appeal directly to the provincial board, but now there is an intermediary with no appeals process spelled out as it was in the previous legislation. Nor is the form of the appeal in fact stipulated in this new amendment contentwise and formwise as it was in the previous legislation. So I'm asking: is this to make the appeals process more flexible? How will the appeals process in fact change in reality? I think that many people would like to know.

Over on pages 10 and 11 section 21 amends the old section 23. "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations . . . respecting appeal panels, appeals and the decisions of a Community Board that are exempt from appeal." My question is: what decisions might be in fact exempt from appeal? Was there in the past any history that we can make reference to that would suggest this to be necessary? Was the whole process in general ever challenged? What is the rationale of having decisions that are above appeal? That seems to be again contrary to best practices.

So I do have a number of I think quite significant specific concerns. If the minister would be so kind as to address those and others, then perhaps we could seek clarification that would allow our caucus to consider support.

Thank you.

11:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I promise to be brief. Most of my concerns were addressed in this stage of debate and earlier ones.

As I read this proposed Bill 30, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006, I must start by saying that under the guidance of my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East we don't seem to find it too contentious, and we are leaning definitely towards supporting it.

Some of my comments, Mr. Chairman. For removing the provincial board or absorbing the membership of the provincial board under the wing or the control of the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, the rationale used by the hon. sponsor of the bill was to basically improve efficiencies. I need to seek some clarification on this. You know, we're basically just moving those 15 members between different areas, from one designation to another. The budget for that board was \$11 million, and there seems to be some belief that we're going to save some of that money by moving them within the ministry or under the minister directly. However, it was mentioned at one point that members of the Alberta Association for Community Living say that those board members are mostly volunteers, so these are people who are not paid a salary or a wage. They're basically paid in honorariums and per diems. So some clarification would be greatly appreciated as to how much of that \$11 million we're hoping to save and which areas we would be realizing those savings in. That's the first comment.

My second one. You know, we definitely agree that changes are needed and that reform or fine-tuning or streamlining is warranted, especially when dealing with front-line services and especially for people that really need those services. PDD clients are definitely in need of protection and support, and anything we can do to reform or streamline the services that they receive is advised. However, we don't know how the hon. minister arrived at the conclusion that the way to do it or the way to improve efficiency was basically to eliminate or disband the provincial board. So again some clarification would be great.

Now, it was mentioned in this House, especially this week, about the rally in front of the steps of the Legislature. The two arguments in this House, Mr. Chairman: did they receive an adequate raise in their funding or didn't they? The hon. minister actually has gone to great lengths in explaining that they did in fact receive a 3 per cent increase in this year's budget over last year's. Yes, that's great, and we're not arguing with that or quarreling against it, but is 3 per cent enough to cover things like inflation, rising costs that actually do go up from year to year, and also for the new clients that are coming into the program? This is where the miscommunication exists. Basically we're saying that it's not enough, and the minister says: well, it's more than last year.

This year's budget is done. It's finished. You know, it's voted on. But maybe for next year's budget this might be a consideration for the hon. minister to look into, and I would definitely urge her to commit to evaluating the adequacy of funding for PDD support programs on an annual basis. Every year there has to be an evaluation or an assessment of the impact that the funding, whatever the level, has on services, staff, and all those things. So do it yearly and also commit to consulting with the PDD families and front-line care providers. People make submissions to the standing policy committees and so on, and that's how the budget is arrived at, through that process. Why not involve the people who are really affected by those decisions from the beginning? In so doing, we can always reach sort of a consensus or a compromise, and it would definitely alleviate some of that potential for them to be unhappy or to be not satisfied and having to resort to other means like, you know, picketing or demonstrating in front of the Legislature. So involve them at the beginning, and treat them as partners.

Moving on, the minister has also stated in the House and in news conferences that a review of PDD has started some time ago, and she promised to make those results available as quickly as possible. So I'm urging her to honour that promise and to share the results with the House as soon as she gets them. But if the House is not sitting, Mr. Chairman, I would urge her to consider sending those results to each of us MLAs in our constituency offices because this is an ongoing concern, and if we have the chance to report on something positive to our constituents, it would be tremendously appreciated to share that positive outlook to the future and to tell them that this is the information that the minister is sharing with us, that these are the findings of that review and here are the changes that are going to be implemented starting next year.

I had questions with regard to the line-by-line and provision-by-provision analysis since we're in committee. One of those was pertaining to section 9, talking about the minister's role. Now that the minister is, as I mentioned, absorbing the provincial board under her, it now proposes to expand the role of the minister by transferring those responsibilities directly to her. You know, this might not necessarily be a bad thing, but it always raises flags as to how much power the minister has. Are we advocating sort of a direct intervention model compared to an organization that is at arm's length? Again, it might be fine in this particular situation, and, yes, there might be some efficiency to be realized, but I need an assurance from the minister that it just doesn't simply mean concentration of

more power into her hands as seems to be the case with the other ministries in this cabinet.

Moving on to section 19, which basically amends section 21 of the existing act, and that talks about personal information. As you know, Mr. Chairman, I happen to be the Official Opposition critic in charge of privacy and freedom of information and all that stuff. This section also proposes or adds the mechanism for the minister to use and deal with personal information on clients and on and from community boards and the appeals panel. What are we doing to ensure that there are privacy guarantees in place to guard against loss or theft of information on those PDD clients and to make sure that it is used for the purposes that are stated and that there is no potential for any misuse? So, you know, people are becoming increasingly aware of privacy concerns. We keep telling them to guard their information. Now that the hon. minister is taking on more responsibility as a trustee, if you will, a custodian of that information, what is she going to do to assure us in this House and to assure those 9,300 PDD clients that their information is not going to be misused or misplaced and that it's only used for the purposes that are stated?

I can go on, Mr. Chairman, but in light of the hour – it's a new day today – I think I will reclaim my chair, and I thank you for this opportunity.

12:00

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[The clauses of Bill 30 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 20 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed my pleasure to rise and participate in debate on Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006. I would start off by reiterating some of my previous comments that I made during second reading, that this bill is actually half good, half bad. We have great achievements and great progress in terms of the protection of privacy of Albertans and their information, but then we also have sections in this proposed bill that are definitely questionable and offensive not only to the opposition but to members of the public at large.

I note, Mr. Chairman, that there was some media interest in this bill. The media seem to think that the 50 per cent that is positive should definitely go forward – and that's our position – but that the 50 per cent that is questionable, that is adding layers of secrecy to this government should be rejected or thrown out. As such, it is my honour and pleasure to introduce an amendment to Bill 20. I would definitely share it with the House if you'll permit me.

Rev. Abbott: Question.

Mr. Elsalhy: Nice try.

The Chair: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A1. Now, does everyone have a copy?

Hon. Members: Yes.

The Chair: Does the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On this amendment A1 what we're proposing here is to definitely remove section 5 of the proposed amendment. Now, section 5 is amending section 24 of the original legislation by adding section 2.1, talking about the chief internal auditor and, basically, making the findings or investigations or any information that is given to or collected by the chief internal auditor of this province hidden or covered for about 15 years since the audit to which the record or information relates was completed. So any information that is given to or collected by the chief internal auditor will be sealed from public scrutiny for 15 years. It definitely raises a lot of concern in my mind and in the minds of many Albertans why such a move is necessary.

Now, the chief internal auditor operates in co-operation with the Auditor General. Some of the arguments from the government side seem to indicate that his role is advisory in nature. I find this a hard pill to swallow, Mr. Chairman, because the chief internal auditor is there to provide evaluations and assessments of government expenses and programs. Yes, part of his work might be advisory. But that is not an excuse to hide it from public scrutiny, especially in this day and age when the talk and the flavour of the month is transparency, accountability, and being open. There's a saying that if you have nothing to hide, you hide nothing.

Mr. Chairman, I can go on and on talking about why this is not acceptable and why this amendment is hoping to remedy that deficiency in this bill. In essence, what I'm offering is for the government side to co-operate with us by allowing our amendments to move forward. We would find it extremely easy to support the remainder of the bill, which I mentioned was positive and timely. We don't need more layers of secrecy. If we're trying to fix the image of the government and displaying, you know, open, transparent, and accountable behaviour, then we would definitely support this amendment moving forward to remove and strike out the offending section 5.

I invite further comment from my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In speaking to the amendment that has just been proposed for Bill 20, I would like to say that it is open and transparent. The reason I would say that is because all records from the internal auditor are available to the Auditor General at any time. The Auditor General represents the interests of the public. Therefore, I believe that it is open and transparent because he has the ability to call those records up. So I don't believe that this is a good amendment, and I would not support this amendment.

At this time I would call to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 24, Bill 30, and progress on Bill 20.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

12:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 24, Bill 30. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 20. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 35
Fuel Tax Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act.

Mr. Speaker, just a few comments on this act. In fact, there are no

policy changes in this act. It is a rewrite of the act to bring it up to the present day. There is some clarification in this act as to how the fuel tax is collected, which really speaks to the size of this act. We've gone through the act very carefully and made sure that the definitions are clearer and more timely to today's language in dealing with these various fuels, making sure that the clarity is there for the persons who are impacted by this act, clarification as to who pays the tax, how they pay the tax. Also, a section of it deals with areas where there are issues around the collection of tax and how you deal with that.

We thought it was important that this act be reviewed, that we ensure that there was clarity around the act to ensure that people impacted by or using this act understand clearly that there should be no hindrance or interference with carrying out this act and that, indeed, if there are infractions under this act, that there are penalties that would speak to the seriousness of that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to comments on how members in this Assembly might feel that we could further clarify sections or, indeed, to hear their comments as to whether we have clarified this act in an appropriate way. I know that most members of the Legislature will have had some contact with constituents with this act because, of course, it has been in place for some time.

Mr. Speaker, with those opening comments and that explanation I look forward to hearing from members on this particular act when we have an opportunity to debate it in this House and would adjourn debate on this act at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, given the hour and the progress made this evening, I would like to move that the House now adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 12:16 a.m. on Thursday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, April 27, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/27

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

On this day let each of us pray in our own way for all who have been killed or injured in the workplace. Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted. In a moment of silent contemplation may we now allow our thoughts to remember those taken before their time, those who have suffered through tragedies, and reach out to the families, friends, neighbours, and communities most immediately impacted. May God provide them eternal peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and introduce some special young guests from my constituency. Many years ago the community of Whitecourt had an opportunity to be a twin community with Kamiyubetsu in Hokkaido. Today joining us here is a group of students from Kamiyubetsu along with the students from the Whitecourt Hilltop high school. I'd ask them now to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. I think they're on both sides.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What a privilege today to introduce some enthusiastic students from Madonna school, who are accompanied by parents Mrs. Pinkoski and her cute little girl with blonde curly hair, that was with them when we had the photos taken, and Jay O'Neill, who is not only a parent but is also the communications director for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Rudanec. I'd like to ask that they please rise and that we give them the honourable welcome that they so richly deserve. They're right up there in the members' gallery.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to recognize a group that's travelled up from our constituency. It's the first time in 15 years that they've been able to come up: the R.I. Baker middle school. They performed last night at the annual general meeting of the College of Alberta School Superintendents. They were an excited little group, and they were a little tired this morning. They're not quite here yet, but I did want to recognize the three teachers that came with them – Cynthia Fritzer, Sandy Koberinski, Allison Thorton – along with parent helpers Sue Wells Paterson, Pam Quinn, Karen Thompson, Norma Enns, Jen Broderson, Beth Hinton, April Horvath. I had all 50 of them in my office, a little sweaty for a little while. They had a great time, they enjoyed the building, and they wanted me to especially thank you for a very memorable experience.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled a group of two classes from Strathcona Christian Academy, accompanied by teachers Ryan Marshall and Alan Foster and also parents Len Koop, Myrna Poettcker, Eva Balogun, Lisa Brower, Ruth Naundorf, and Teresa Sabo. I believe they're in both galleries. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a delegation from one of Alberta's truly fine schools, which happens to be in my constituency, Parkview school. There are 29 members of the delegation, three parents or teachers – Miss Jenny Kane, Miss Erin Darling, and Miss Carrie Peacock – and, I believe, 26 students seated in both galleries. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of all MLAs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this House guests from Calgary whose family members suffer from gastroparesis, a painfully debilitating digestive disease which negatively impacts the quality of life of thousands of Albertans. I would ask Jeanne Keith-Ferris, Paul Sénégas-Joue, Marie-Noëlle Sénégas, and other members of the group to now stand and receive the traditional greetings of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce some guests. The first one is Olav Larsen. Olav was a transit operator with Edmonton Transit, so he and I go way back. We've had the odd debate at union meetings, and he used to let me ride in the cab of the LRT when he was driving. He's now retired. With him are his brother and his brother-in-law from Denmark, Arne Thomsen and Erling Larsen Vind. They've just completed a trip to New Zealand, where they visited relatives in Christchurch, New Zealand, and they're returning to Denmark tomorrow. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three very special women seated in the public gallery: Alice Burghardt, Rita Burton, and Sonia Barton. These ladies are active members of the Calder seniors' drop-in centre, and they are constituents of mine. They are here today to observe the proceedings of the Legislature, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

National Day of Mourning

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. April 28 is the

National Day of Mourning for workers who have been killed on the job. Last year in Alberta 143 families and countless friends suffered the loss of a loved one who died from a job-related injury or illness. That is 19 more tragedies than the year before, which is unacceptable and a wake-up call for all of us.

Occupational health and safety is a social responsibility. We must do more to ensure that all Alberta workers are safe on the job. Government along with our partners in industry and labour will renew our efforts to reduce workplace fatalities and injuries through Work Safe Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, almost one-third of our workplace deaths are traffic related, so the Alberta government is developing a road safety at work strategy. It will include effective practices, driver training, awareness, and enforcement, and all aim at reducing the number of these needless fatalities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for the moment of silence that you gave earlier for the injured workers and the Day of Mourning, and I thank you, Mr. Minister, for your moving words. The death of a loved one or a respected colleague in any circumstance is tragic. The thought of the death of a loved one while they're at work strikes fear into the hearts of all. It is a horror when it happens.

April 28 is the Day of Mourning for those who have died because of their work. It is the day of mourning for their families, their friends, and their co-workers. It is an international day of mourning because these tragedies must be remembered by everyone, and we must honour those that are gone.

I have seen and felt the electric feeling that sweeps through a job site when a worker is lost. I've seen and felt the horror and grief that sets in in the face of unexpected tragedy. Big, burly construction workers will cry, hug each other for support. Some will just grasp their hands, their arms together, and words will just be unsaid. Women on the job are often strongest and are looked to for support. Prayers are said even by those who often do not pray. Tears are shed. The hat is passed for the family.

But life goes on. Such deaths are senseless; such deaths are unnecessary. We can speak statistics. We can speak about the rise and fall of death and injury rates. These statistics are senseless. One death is too many. Statistics don't cry; widows and children do. Statistics don't make it better. Deaths should not be predictable. They are immeasurably costly. If numbers are important, the death rate should be zero.

I ask that you all think to the future and find ways to end workplace death, to seek ways to help the hurt, and to ensure that the families who are left behind are cared for. Today I do ask that you all mourn for those who have died because of their job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: To the hon. leader of the third party: I suspect that there'll be a request for unanimous consent for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to participate.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members of the Assembly. Last year 143 Albertans died in the

workplace, the highest number, unfortunately, since 1982. Each of these workers left behind friends, family, and a community to mourn them. It is my honour today on behalf of the NDP to stand and express our solidarity in that mourning and to join our brothers and sisters in the labour movement in renewing our call for safer workplaces and tougher sanctions on employers who shirk their responsibility to ensure worker safety.

While I appreciate the minister's message today on the importance of worker safety, I can't help but point out that this government does not have a sterling record of promoting the rights and dignity of working people.

In last year's annual report the minister reported that the lost-time claim rate, which is a good measure of how often workers are being injured on the job, is nearly 25 per cent higher than the ministry's own targets. The result is that last year a shocking 170,000 incidents were reported to the WCB, a rate of almost 500 per day. Alberta's lost-time claim rate is among the highest in the country. Even worse, our workplace fatality rates outstrip those of Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia.

We can certainly be proud that the Day of Mourning is a Canadian-born tradition that has been adopted by over 70 countries around the world, but we have much work to do to ensure that all Albertans are treated fairly at the workplace and returned to their families safe and sound when the day's work is done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The long list of town hall meetings in rural Alberta continues to grow as concerned citizens speak out about their fears regarding coal-bed methane drilling in the Horseshoe Canyon formation on or near their properties. In Ponoka, Trochu, Torrington, Camrose, Wildwood, and Wetaskiwin thousands of Albertans are telling the same story: our groundwater could be in jeopardy from coal-bed methane drilling if it is not properly managed. These Albertans have lost faith in this government's ability to investigate the groundwater changes, and they are demanding answers. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the baseline water testing protocol being proposed has not been independently reviewed by scientists, will this Premier immediately strike a team of water experts to review the baseline water testing protocols?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy respond. As a matter of fact, it's timely that the question be asked because the hon. minister held a clinic on coal-bed methane this morning, a clinic so that everyone understands what coal-bed methane, or natural gas from coal bed, is all about. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the assertions are absolutely false as to: is there confidence? Do we have enough information? Do we have enough experience and confidence to be able to develop natural gas from coal seams? There are about a hundred thousand wells already drilled over decades in Alberta's shallow gas formations. Southern Alberta has decades of experience drilling into similar formations, through similar depths, same techniques, and a very good track record on these. There's another report coming out that will only strengthen an already very good regulatory structure.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that it is now clear that coal-bed methane drilling does impact groundwater differently than conventional natural gas extraction, will this government develop coal-bed methane-specific regulations to guide the development of this resource so that the water quality is protected?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, there are very stringent regulations relative to the production of natural gas from coal bed, as there are relative to the production of natural gas from any other source; i.e., drilling in a conventional way. Again I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, once again, this type of drilling, this type of activity is very like all of the shallow gas well drilling we've been doing for decades in this province. There is a very stringent requirement on production, on drilling, on casing, and on completion so that there won't be migration of gas from one zone to another, so that there won't be contamination from the lower zones into the freshwater aquifers. It's of that that's very paramount. What the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee has been working on for the last two years, the report of which we will be releasing with our recommendations in the very near future, will already increase a very good statistical scientific base of being able to ensure and verify that this is being done appropriately not just now but in the decades ahead.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess to the Minister of Energy then. Is this minister, judging from his last two comments, denying that there have been any cases of aquifer contamination as a result of coal-bed methane drilling? Is he saying that there are no cases of that?

1:50

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that there have been over a hundred thousand wells drilled in shallow gas formations over the last decades. We have a tremendous amount of experience in dealing with all of those same techniques: the drilling, the fracturing, the completion, all of those things. We have a tremendous amount of very good history.

Does that mean that there aren't incidents? There's no such thing as any activity without some incident. That said, we have natural gas everywhere. In our freshwater wells that they're drilling into, where there is freshwater – there is natural gas in the coal and the tight sands and the shallow formations. Part of the reason why in this province people come to explore for natural gas is because it is everywhere.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chernobyl has seared a nuclear scar on the hearts of Ukrainians around the world. At least tens of thousands have died in Ukraine. Hundreds of thousands have been affected by radiation; millions may die in many countries. Nuclear power scares people, yet two days ago the Premier said that he may talk nuclear for the Alberta oil sands when he visits investors

in Europe. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier commit to independent evaluation with full public disclosure of any nuclear proposal for Alberta if he moves on this before his retirement?

Mr. Klein: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to set the record very, very clear. I am not a proponent of nuclear power, but as we move toward becoming a centre of excellence in energy, we have to consider nuclear power. I'm a big fan of coal. I'm a big fan of wind and hydropower and solar power and any form of energy alternate to conventional oil and gas, which is running low. It's time to build on the expertise we have developed in this province to become an energy capital. Indeed, the universities of Alberta, Lethbridge, and Calgary are contemplating now an institute of energy learning to make sure that this province becomes the energy capital from a learning point of view.

So, Mr. Speaker, certainly I will undertake to disclose anything that I learn about nuclear power.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supplementary question to the Premier. Will the Premier commit to a referendum in Alberta before he moves on nuclear power for the oil sands?

Mr. Klein: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I am not moving on nuclear power. Someone else is moving on nuclear power. It's been mentioned to me that one company, Total, is interested in nuclear power, generating electricity from plutonium or uranium for their tar sands operation, but that's all I know about it. I am not a proponent, and I am not pushing nuclear power in any way, shape, or form.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He's talking about it.

To the Premier: why doesn't the Premier just skip his taxpayer-paid vacation to Ukraine and the rest of Europe and donate that money to Chernobyl orphans?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, in order to set the record straight, I received a letter from the governor of Lviv oblast. It's dated January 21, 2006; this is long before the leadership convention. It reads:

Dear Premier Klein,

Let me express my respect to you and once again confirm our interest and readiness to further mutual Canadian-Ukrainian relationships and cooperation between our regions in various fields, understanding that the governor of Lviv oblast was here in Edmonton.

The Protocol of Cooperation between the Lviv Oblast State Administration and the Government of Alberta signed in 2005 forms a solid basis for developing of our contacts.

Attached to this letter please find our proposals to the cooperation between the Lviv Oblast and the Province of Alberta. I propose to consider them during planning of 2006 activities. I would appreciate comments and proposals from you.

It is also a pleasure to invite you, Premier Klein, as well as Alberta's official and business delegation, to visit the Lviv Oblast at any time that is convenient to you. This will offer a perfect opportunity to have more detailed discussions of our economic cooperation for 2006 and further develop mutually beneficial contacts between our regions.

The Speaker: The Premier will table the letter later at the appropriate time.

Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Facility Standards for Funeral Homes

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year the former Minister of Government Services struck a steering committee to look at the composition and role of the Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board and to review the recommendations that the FSRB has proposed to regulate that industry. The Official Opposition has been in contact with smaller funeral service businesses that have concerns regarding the proposed minimum standards, the effect that these standards would have on the industry, and the motive behind the proposed changes. To the hon. Minister of Government Services: will the minister table the report that was submitted by the AFSRB in 2005 recommending minimum facility standards for funeral homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, and I thank the member opposite for asking the question. It's a very serious issue we have here in Alberta. Some 10 years ago, Mr. Speaker, the Funeral Services Regulatory Board was established, and this ministry through the former minister has asked for a review of that. I'm glad to work with the member opposite to ensure that Albertans are served fairly and equitably across the province on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one of those questionable recommendations is that all funeral service businesses must now have a chapel to be licensed, is the minister at all concerned that such a requirement would effectively put smaller funeral service providers out of business?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no way that we are going to corner the funeral service business for large corporations in Alberta or small corporations. We have an opportunity throughout Alberta, through our small communities and through our large communities, for funeral operators to operate throughout Alberta. There is no intention of shutting down any business. If you have specific cases, and if you're hearing of any cases that may affect someone's business, you bring those to me, and we'll deal with them together.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you. My last question to the minister would be: would the minister commit to consulting with representatives from across all sectors of the funeral service industry, including alternative, nonprofit, and indeed small rural funeral homes, before acting on any of the recommendations that were submitted by the AFSRB?

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, Mr. Speaker, I can advise you that the review that's being done is a review made up of members from the funeral industry, from members at large, and from the department. Again, when I get that report, I'd love to work with this member on it, and we'd go through the recommendations at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's forest industry contributes billions to the province's economy each year and is the lifeblood of dozens of resource-based communities, but the government remains silent on the framework agreement that's being negotiated in Washington, DC, between the Canadian and American governments. This agreement would restrict access to the United States' lumber market by Alberta forest companies, while refunding only a portion of the duties that have been illegally collected over the past years. The question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Given that the provincial governments in B.C. and Ontario are saying that this is a bad deal, why has the Alberta government failed to stand up to its Conservative cousins in Ottawa in favour of Alberta jobs?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I should advise the hon. member and members of the Assembly that Alberta has been fully engaged in the dialogue regarding the softwood lumber dispute. I've taken calls from Ambassador Wilson, who has been our chief negotiator on this particular file.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, at this point there's a term sheet, and the term sheet has not yielded an agreement yet. It's quite clear that in the open federalism that Prime Minister Harper has talked about, he wants greater involvement on the part of provinces and territories and the industry with respect to their putting input to negotiations that clearly fall within the federal jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, at this point it is too early to tell what the response of the Alberta industry is going to be. I have some ideas as to the direction that they may take. Really, we want to represent the interests of industry, but we will not speak on behalf of industry. They can certainly speak for themselves. It's our intention to continue to work with the federal government in looking at the terms and conditions set out in the term sheet. We view this term agreement as being simply a starting point and not necessarily an end point.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why is the minister not availing himself of an opportunity to stand up for Alberta jobs and to speak out against the potential for limits being placed on a permanent basis on Alberta lumber products going to the United States? Why don't you take the opportunity to stand up for Alberta forestry workers?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of Alberta's industry and its workers we want to seek a negotiated settlement in this matter, and puffery on the part of a government to say that this is a terrible deal is not going to advance our negotiation. So we will continue to work on getting the right deal for Alberta industry and for Alberta workers. We'll do it through negotiation, not through puffery in the media. We want to make it clear to the hon. member and to all Albertans that we will not accept a deal for the sake of getting a deal. We will wait until we get the right deal at the right time on our terms.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll ask the minister another time. Will the government accept any deal that places restrictions on Alberta softwood lumber exports to the United States? Will you accept a deal that restricts our exports to the United States? Yes or no.

Mr. Mar: The fact that the hon. member would ask for a yes or no answer clearly indicates to me that he fails to understand the complexity of this deal. The issue, Mr. Speaker, is not simply about volume limitations. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, it is not simply about volume limitations. It is also about any duties. It is also about the allocation of any volume that is placed upon us by the federal government. It is also about the return of the \$5 billion that has been improperly collected by the United States. So to answer a question simply with a yes or no on a very small part, a significant part but only one part of the overall agreement in the softwood lumber dispute, you clearly cannot give a yes or no answer to such a question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Demographic studies show that our school-aged population is dropping at close to 2 per cent per year and that 400,000 new jobs with only 300,000 being filled will occur in Alberta in the next 10 years at present immigration rates. The then minister of learning in conjunction with the federal Liberal government signed a temporary foreign worker agreement dealing with Fort McMurray in an attempt to deal with the labour shortage. Would the minister amend an oversight in this agreement to allow unions as well as employers access to this program when workers are not available in Alberta or Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question and a very important question. We are so blessed in Alberta to have such a good government and such a good, good diversified economy that has developed in the last 15 years thousands of jobs for all Albertans and possibly Canadians.

The MOU, hon. member, was simply a way to have the federal government recognize the importance of the oil sands to the Alberta and the national economy. The MOU outlines federal requirements for the hiring of temporary foreign workers by oil sands companies. The MOU also outlines the conditions and responsibilities of the oil sands companies and the recruitment and hiring of temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Speaker, the challenges we have in Alberta – you know, most jurisdictions in North America would love to have the challenges. Government alone cannot resolve the challenges we have in that particular area. It's going to take industry, it's going to take the federal government, it's going to take the province, it's going to take the unions, it's going to take the opposition – in fact, we'll ask for your help to assist us in meeting this challenge that most jurisdictions just dream about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In that vein, then, would the minister consider working with labour unions and employee organizations and the federal government to develop a made-in-Alberta immigration policy to alleviate potential labour shortages in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. I think that about four ministries were involved in the development of the immigration policy for Alberta, which was transferred less than a year ago to my department. It's a very aggressive policy. It is designed to attract and retain immigrants to this province, as you are aware. As I've said before, you know, the existing policies and targeted numbers of people that were to come to Canada through the federal immigration policy is around 250,000. In the past Alberta only received 7 per cent, or about 16,000 individuals. Out of the 16,000 about 3,000 of them moved back to other jurisdictions for various reasons.

I've had my first meeting already with the federal minister of immigration, Mr. Speaker, and he is willing to sit down and discuss a number of issues as to how we may resolve the beautiful challenges we have in this beautiful province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Would the minister on behalf of all Albertans sit down with the federal government and attempt to obtain the same rights with respect to immigration that the province of Quebec has enjoyed for the last many years?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that it has been the desire of this provincial government to move forward in a bilateral way with the federal government to improve our ability to have influence on the immigration of skilled workers to this province. The difference now is that Prime Minister Harper has made fairly recent pronouncements about open federalism, most recently at the Montreal chamber of commerce, and he gave us some very, very encouraging indications about what it is that he meant.

I think what this means for us is that with a greater recognition by a federal government of the roles and responsibilities of provinces, there may be a greater opportunity now, more than before, under the previous Liberal administration, to move forward on this type of a bilateral arrangement. So the province of Alberta will be committed to continuing to work with the federal government on finding ways of addressing our skilled labour shortage. As an example, the area of settlement funding, where new immigrants can access a range of programs and services to ease their transition into Alberta, is one area where we think we have some very, very good progress to report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Gastroparesis

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While no cure to date has been discovered for gastroparesis, a federally approved, highly effective treatment device exists. Quebec's universal public health care covers the \$10,000 cost of the device that dramatically improves the patient's quality of life. I'd like to thank the Speaker for allowing the GUTS buttons to be distributed to members of the House so that they can encourage awareness and support for the public health care treatment of this disease in Alberta. My questions to the minister of health have been previously discussed with members of her ministry. To begin with, would the minister please inform our guests and members of this House at what stage provin-

cial recognition and approval of the Enterra Therapy for the treatment of gastroparesis stands?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

2:10

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member opposite for his courtesy in providing me a written question today and also for the buttons in the House to profile something that hasn't been easily understood or controlled.

Gastroparesis is a condition where the stomach, almost without warning sometimes, involuntarily causes vomiting by an individual. The type of device that the hon. member opposite references is a stimulation device that helps control this urge by the stomach to expropriate its contents. The GES device, or the Enterra Therapy device, was referred to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research for a technological assessment of the effectiveness of it, and they have provided a report that has not concluded or has not given conclusive evidence that this is adequate for ensuring that we would provide public funding. So, Mr. Speaker, we have referred it to the Alberta Medical Association and to the regional health authorities, who will conduct yet another review of it and provide information later this month so that our ministry can make a determination about whether or not to publicly fund this device.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Ms Minister. I very much appreciate your support.

Given that the minister indicated in her March 14, 2006, letter that while her ministry does not issue proclamations, she would offer support by issuing a province-wide news release to help raise awareness of gastroparesis. Can she assure our guests in this House that the news release will be forthcoming?

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I can. We indicated at the time that I wrote in response to the hon. member that we would do what we could to provide support for the organization, but we aren't in the business of proclamations. I could keep this House and the department busy with that sort of thing. It's logistical, which is the reason that we don't do that.

However, what I'd like to do before issuing any kind of release is to get the results of the report later this month, take a good look at that and determine whether or not, based on the evidence, we can justify taking further action as a government. I think that there's a lot of reasonableness in the request. Then we will go forward and work with the association so that we can come up with something that will support their goals in publicizing something that can sometimes be a very embarrassing condition.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the minister: what hope can the minister offer to the thousands of Albertans suffering daily from the debilitating effects of gastroparesis?

Ms Evans: I think, Mr. Speaker, the hope I can provide is that this government and this minister are taking a very serious look at it. I think anybody who has had any association with people with this type of condition or other medical conditions that are not easily explained hope that the people that are advocates on their behalf will take a serious look. I am simply waiting at this point for further information. Medical assessments from AHFMR were not helpful, particularly in giving extra support to the plight of this group, but I

think that the work we're taking now to pursue it one step further should assure the group that we are looking after this in a way that is trying to provide some assurance that we're not going to let it die until we see what we can do to help.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Alberta/B.C. Joint Cabinet Meeting

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and B.C. hold their annual joint cabinet meeting tomorrow. Already we're hearing about a trade agreement that will open up business access to both provinces. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us if such an agreement is part of tomorrow's discussions?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it is true that interprovincial trade between Alberta and B.C. is on the agenda as are other things. Our provinces have a very unique relationship. We're continuing to build on our previous commitments to harmonize regulations, reduce trade barriers, and improve efficiencies. I explained to the media the other day that not all are satisfied with this and that there are some concerns which I'm sure can be ironed out. But, fundamentally, every time we agree to a common standard and a joint initiative, we remove another barrier to trade that costs money and productivity, and of course we move to improve the competitive environment. So if we reach agreement, it will create a single Alberta/B.C. market and set a new standard of co-operation in interprovincial trade in Canada.

Mr. Webber: My first and only supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What industries and aspects of business will this affect?

Mr. Mar: It is quite a wide range, Mr. Speaker. It ranges from everything from transportation and government services to municipalities, but the long and the short of it is that workers, businesses, industry organizations, investors should be excited by the potential that this agreement entails. The agreement on internal trade that has been struck among and between provinces of Canada goes much further. It's much more specific. It does have a dispute resolution mechanism that has real teeth in it.

The long and the short of it is that this agreement will create a 7.5 million person marketplace, which will be the second largest economic region of Canada, so we are quite excited about the opportunity to move this forward. There is a transition period during which some of the details and some of the concerns that the Premier expressed on behalf of some of the parts that are in the agreement can be resolved, over the period of time of the transition, which will take two years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Municipal Sustainability

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Property owners in many Alberta municipalities question the fairness of their market value assessments. It is the role of the assessment services branch, specifically the assessment audit unit, to make sure that municipal assessments have been properly and accurately done. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that he is cutting the budget of the assessment services branch, apparently for a lower cost of legal fees related to appeals, will this affect the ability of the assessment

audit unit or the provincially appointed Municipal Government Board to provide a fair and timely decision for all appeals?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that same question was asked when the discussion of my budget was up, and I believe I answered it at that time, and the answer is the same. There is, in fact, no cut in budget this year other than a reflection of an anticipated reduced cost as a result of fewer appeals that are defended by the department. But the assessors and assessment division within Municipal Affairs remains intact and exactly the same as it has been.

I might also point out to the member that assessments in each individual municipality are the responsibility of that municipality, and Municipal Affairs does not get involved in doing the individual assessments. Our role is one of audit to ensure that there's equity and fairness throughout the province.

Mr. Taylor: Well, exactly, Mr. Speaker. Since it's critical that there be oversight of the determination of market value assessment to protect homeowners from unfair or inaccurate assessments, can the minister tell us what he's doing to ensure that such oversight is being provided?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say two things. First of all, we continue to be vigilant in our efforts to audit individual municipalities, whether they be jointly working together or working together as a group to conduct their municipal assessments. There is a vigilant audit group within our organization.

As a matter of fact, at lunch today, Mr. Speaker, I was speaking at the Alberta Assessors' Association, who are meeting here in Edmonton. Although I don't anticipate that I will be contributing in a significant way, one of the commitments that I made was that I would go with our audit division into a municipality just to personally see how an audit is conducted and work with them at the grassroots level on that audit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the real problem, of course, is that the property taxes aren't up to the task of covering the cost that this government has downloaded onto our cities and towns, when is the minister going to identify some new areas for local governments to collect revenues or else give them a bigger, sustainable share of the province's loot?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I've answered that question numerous times in this House. I've indicated – and I will again – that I'm very proud to be working with the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability, with the mayor of Edmonton, the mayor of Calgary, the president of AUMA, the president of AAMD and C to discuss the issues involving roles and responsibilities. The purpose of that discussion is to determine: what are the roles of municipalities, what are the roles of the province, and which level of government should most appropriately be providing services to its citizens? Once that has been determined, we can then determine how much it should cost, and then we'll begin the discussion of how it should be paid for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:20 Oversize/Overweight Trucking Permits

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I continue to receive

numerous complaints from commercial truckers who say that they cannot get through on government phone lines to get the permits they need to haul oversize or overweight loads. These complaints have been coming in for months if not years, and in fact I've raised this issue in the Assembly before, yet there seems to be little progress. These people cannot do business without these permits, and their delays adversely affect many other related industries. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What is his department doing to address this long-standing concern?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it is true that there has been a problem. Of course, at the rate that the province is growing and with the number of trucks and particularly the number of heavy loads that are requiring permits, the system has been very taxed, so we have been moving and are going to be implementing a new system. In fact, the central system that was in place some time back is being replaced. What will happen is that for most permits – there are about half a dozen exemptions – they will be issued through the registry agents as they get trained up. We've got some 19, 20 of them on the way in the province already. They will be offering 24/7 service, so that should alleviate it. The implementation is going to be very soon. As a matter of fact, after the 1st of June of this year for anyone that is faxing, the fax will then be transferred into a registry, or they can go directly into a registry. Then as far as phone calls are concerned, after the 1st of July those, too, will all go to registries.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, and thank you, Minister. Well, given that these measures may speed up the process to get the permits, there will still be truckers that inadvertently or purposely break the law and are caught. Currently, Mr. Speaker, these people need to attend court to pay a fine. This has got to be costly to the court system. What is the minister doing to streamline this process?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, as we speak, the process is being changed. In fact, there are a whole host of areas where there will be the ability to pay a fine as opposed to going to court. This is a very important move because we know the difficulty in the court system with all the areas that are now going to court, the overload that they have. To be able to pay a fine and not have to go to court will be very important. That doesn't mean that someone, if they dispute the ticket, isn't going to have the ability to go to court. Yes, they will still be able to go to court, but the ability to pay it – for example, a trucker from Lethbridge gets a ticket at High Level. Well, under the current system he either has to appear in High Level or would have to have an agent appear for him, so there's all that additional cost. Plus, it's going to be great for the court system that it will be streamlined.

The Speaker: The hon. member understands that as a result of his lengthy preamble on the second question, he will forgo the third question.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Education Funding for Lethbridge

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Education minister ignored the horrific funding situation in my community. The facts are that the Lethbridge public board will need to cut \$2 million in spending as a result of this minister's budget. To the Minister of Education: can the minister tell us how many teachers

Lethbridge public will have to cut and how many more students will have to be in a class to cover the \$2 million shortfall?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday that Lethbridge public has currently a budget of approximately \$59 million and that that budget on the basic side will probably increase to about \$59.6 million. Then there's additional money coming in on the infrastructure side which will take it up over \$60 million. So there is no cut that I'm aware of that's part of this equation.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we will be providing additional dollars both through the basic instruction grant increase, which I think is about 3 per cent, plus 2 per cent to all the other parts of the renewed funding framework document. That will result in about 330 million new dollars going into education province-wide, and Lethbridge public will be a significant recipient of those dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. The budget was a shortfall, not cut.

When will the minister admit that Lethbridge public is only receiving a 2.31 per cent increase and that whatever other increases he may describe are simply not making it down to the local school board level?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't have all of the documents just in front of me, but my recollection is that Lethbridge public will be receiving an additional \$2.4 million, or a 3 per cent increase, to retain 60 teachers that have been hired under the class size initiative over the past two years and that as part of the budget just recently approved here, they will receive additional dollars as well if they have not yet met the commission target guideline or our guideline for class size averages in the kindergarten to grade 3 level. I believe they may already be at that level for grade 4 to grade 12, which virtually every school board in the province is. So we're targeting our monies for those areas that haven't yet met that commission guideline and the internal province of Alberta guideline figure.

The final point, Mr. Speaker, is just to say this. School board budgets are due in to the Ministry of Education by the end of June. We will know by the end of May, for example – and they will as well – how many teachers are retiring and otherwise taking leave or moving. So let's just wait until the final numbers get a little closer to finalization before we get too excited.

Ms Pastoor: Lethbridge is being punished for complying.

Again to the same minister: given that the minister claims to be flowing through 98 per cent of his budget, how can the overall budget be increasing 6.7 per cent when the schools in my community are only getting 2.31 per cent?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think there has to be a realization of a couple of things. First of all, we do flow out about 98 per cent of all the dollars we receive in the basic portion of our budget for Education. That is a truism. Secondly, we'll wait for the final budgets to come in – that'll be at the end of June, as I have indicated – and adjustments and so on will be made. But one of the most critical things to remember is that we fund a lot of our programs on a per capita basis. Now, province-wide our student enrolment in kindergarten to grade 12 has either flatlined or it's declining. Yes, it does provide some challenges because other areas are escalating in terms of their enrolment growth.

We're working with the school boards very closely. I was with superintendents yesterday. I had a good, long talk with representatives from the Lethbridge school board in particular, and I encour-

aged them to please work with my officials to sort out some of these discrepancies in numbers which the hon. member who just asked the question is floating around.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

National Child Care Initiative

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Early today I sent a letter to the Conservative government in Ottawa about how little their so-called child care allowance will benefit most Alberta parents. I will table the letter and related documents later. Recent calculations show that lower and middle-income parents will get to keep as little as 17 cents on the dollar, with the rest taxed back by Ottawa, and in exchange for this minuscule amount of assistance going to parents, Ottawa is tearing up previously negotiated provincial child care agreements. My question will be to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that the city of Edmonton is the latest to add its name to the list of objectors, why do this minister and this government refuse to speak out more loudly against the Harper child care scheme, that will disproportionately harm hard-working Alberta families in the hundreds of thousands who need child care assistance the most?

2:30

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there can be a bigger advocate in this province for Alberta's five-point plan than this minister. On numerous occasions I have told the hon. member across the way about all of the things that we have done there. I can go back to a year ago January, when the previous Liberal government decided that they were going to have a child care plan that was equal for all of the provinces and we said no. We wanted a five-point plan that was based on what Albertans wanted and put that off rail and continued to lobby on behalf of Albertans. May I remind the hon. member that the five-point plan that Alberta has put together was based on what Albertans need. I have written to the hon. minister. I flew to Ottawa and spoke to the hon. minister. I have spoken to the media about our aggressiveness. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I guess they don't want to hear the rest of the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the Quebec government is negotiating a side deal with Ottawa to keep federal dollars flowing into their child care and early childhood programs beyond 2006-2007, why does this provincial government remain silent and not stand up for Alberta's parents by doing the same?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member was here when we went through Committee of Supply when I was talking about my budget, and I was very clear about the plans that we're doing in Alberta. I called the minister probably 48 hours after she was elected. She didn't even have an office, let alone a phone number. I flew to Ottawa. I have written her. I have said that Alberta continues to lobby on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the minister will table that correspondence.

Should the federal government, against all reason and common

sense, proceed with its so-called child care allowance, will the minister at least guarantee that social assistance and other income support to Alberta parents will not be clawed back as a result? If not, why not?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, golly gee willikers, Mr. Speaker, the only thing you can guarantee in life is death and taxes, but I will tell you that we will continue to lobby on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ghost-Waiparous Recreation Area

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. With the summer season fast approaching, attention is again focusing on the very popular Ghost-Waiparous area northwest of Calgary. Every year I hear from constituents expressing concerns over some indiscriminate uses and possible negative impacts on the terrain, vegetation, wildlife, and water quality. They agree with the need for a management plan, have participated in significant public consultation, and are very interested in the timelines for implementing such a plan. Can the minister please advise the Assembly on the status of the Ghost-Waiparous management plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is true that over the past five years the Department of Sustainable Resource Development along with departments like Community Development and Environment along with industry, municipalities, off-highway vehicle associations, and recreation users have worked very diligently on a consultative process to put in place a Ghost-Waiparous access management plan.

This last year the off-highway vehicle associations and motorized vehicles have worked very diligently on coming up with a managed trail system that will be implemented this spring. The reason for implementing it this spring is that we want to increase public safety and minimize conflict and make sure that the sustainability and the integrity of the land are kept in place out there. We want to have it for future generations, and, Mr. Speaker, a forest land-use zone regulation will be put in place this spring to regulate it as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the very same minister. I know the minister knows that this area is popular to literally thousands of Albertans, and I wonder if he could tell us how he plans to educate users on the impending regulations for the area.

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. In fact, there will be new rules for the area, and those rules will be in place. It's important to educate the people that have traditionally used that area as well as the new users to make sure that they know the rules so that the place can have some semblance of order because what we're looking at is public safety. We have 40 new guardians hired this year. As a matter of fact, this morning I was in Hinton at our training centre where those 40 new guardians will be trained to implement those new rules as well as our respect the land program. We also made sure that we have a dedicated brochure on the new trail system, put in simple language, that they can give out to the

users of the area so that everybody will know and understand the use of the area.

The Speaker: Hon. member?

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll get to Members' Statements just momentarily, but first our historical vignette of the day. On September 22, 1933, Vivian MacMillan, a stenographer employed by the government of Alberta, and her father, Allan D. MacMillan, brought a civil suit against Premier John Edward Brownlee under the Seduction Act seeking damages and compensation for Brownlee's alleged seduction of Vivian MacMillan from the time she was 18 and over the course of three years.

Premier Brownlee categorically denied the allegations, asserting in his defence that there was not a word of truth in the MacMillans' suit and that he intended to defend the action to the limit. Brownlee issued a counterclaim in November 1933 alleging that Vivian MacMillan together with her medical student suitor, John Caldwell, had conspired to level false allegations against him.

After a sensational – underline the word “sensational” – trial on June 30, 1934, jurors awarded \$10,000 in damages to Vivian MacMillan and \$5,000 to her father. The trial judge, William C. Ives, admonished the jury for reaching a verdict inconsistent with the evidence, overturned the decision, and imposed court costs upon the MacMillans. Despite Judge Ives' actions Brownlee recognized that the jury's initial verdict signalled an end to his political career.

On the morning of July 5, 1934, Brownlee delivered his resignation and that of the entire cabinet to Lieutenant Governor William L. Walsh. The resignations were effective July 19, 1934. On the same day Richard G. Reid, Provincial Treasurer and United Farmers of Alberta member for the constituency of Vermilion, was sworn in as Premier.

In the general election of August 22, 1935, Richard G. Reid, John Edward Brownlee, who ran in Ponoka, and the United Farmers of Alberta government were defeated in a landslide victory by the Social Credit, which won 56 out of a total of 63 seats in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

There are a number of postscripts to this vignette. Postscript one: in 1937 the MacMillans successfully appealed Justice Ives' decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. Postscript two: on June 4, 1940, Brownlee's appeal of the Supreme Court's decision to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council of the United Kingdom was dismissed. Postscript three: the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, located in the United Kingdom, was the highest court of appeal in Canada in 1949. Postscript four: the law firm Brownlee LLP bears the name of Alberta's fifth Premier.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is a great day. I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 21 visitors. They are seated in the members' gallery. They come from High Prairie, and they attend Northern Lakes College. There are 17 students and four staff. The staff are Mrs. Christine Neidig, Ms Catherine Rigaux, and of course

parent helpers Mr. Jim Meldrum, who's a bus driver, and Mrs. Susan Cunningham, who is also a bus driver. They have travelled a long way, and I'd request this Assembly to give them a very warm, warm welcome.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an outstanding group of students, teachers, and volunteers who represent the best and the brightest of rural Alberta. The Raymond show choir comes from a school of 230 students. The choir of 80 voices, almost one-third of those students, performed in the Glenwood and Fort Macleod schools on their way to Edmonton. During the lunch hour the choir performed in the rotunda under the direction of John Squires and Jolene Paxman.

Raymond high school excels in sports and academics as well as the arts. We often state in this House that we judge society by how well we protect and care for those who are vulnerable. However, the other side is true; that is, the development of our cultural arts showcased today with the Raymond show choir inside this architecturally beautiful building. The Raymond high school graduates all-round students. These students are more than jacks of all trades; they are masters of many. I would like to thank them for sharing their talents with all of us today and for the dedication and the personal sacrifices of their teachers and community volunteers, in some small way saying thank you to the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks for announcing a new school in Raymond last year.

At this time I would ask the Raymond show choir, the volunteers, and the teachers to please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Armenian Genocide

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 24, 1915, several hundred Armenian community leaders and intellectuals in Constantinople were massacred. This was the beginning of the Armenian genocide, that is commemorated each year at this time. Not long after the massacre of these leaders by the young Turk faction of the Ottoman Empire a mass deportation and systematic annihilation of Armenian men, women, and children failed to shock the world into action. Over 1.5 million Armenians were murdered. My grandparents, by the grace of God and the love of a Turkish family, survived this massacre. It is important to remember the Armenian genocide because there is a direct connection to the Cambodian killing fields, the Rwandan genocide, the Bosnia-Herzegovina genocide, and the Jewish Holocaust.

In preparation for the invasion of Poland Adolf Hitler said:

Our strength consists in our speed and in our brutality. Genghis Khan led millions of women and children to slaughter – with premeditation and a happy heart. History sees in him solely the founder of a state . . .

I have issued the command – and I'll have anybody who utters but one word of criticism executed by a firing squad . . . Accordingly, I have placed my death-head formations in readiness . . . with orders to them to send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language . . . Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?

It is not enough to just remember. We must also act. Just as the Member for Stony Plain asked in his statement on Holocaust Memorial Day, I too would urge all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to actively promote acceptance of all people and to protect their rights and uphold our way of life in this province. Mr. Speaker, with our thoughts and with our actions we can show that we remember.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Hobbema Community Cadet Corps

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and recognize an exciting program which is taking place in my constituency. The Hobbema Community Cadet Corps, which commenced on November 22, 2005, promotes community involvement, volunteerism, assisting in traditional community events, and scholastic achievement. This program is cast in the same mould as a program which began operating in Saskatchewan roughly 10 years ago and which is operating in various provinces throughout Canada. A unique aspect of this program is that it is organized and run by the youth who participate in it with facilitation by adults.

One of the founding principles of the program is that while sponsors pay for uniforms, cadets do not receive their uniforms for free. It is necessary for the cadet to work off the \$200 cost of the uniform by providing volunteer services in their community at the rate of \$7.50 per hour. This translates into each cadet providing at least 26 hours of volunteer time, which gives the cadet the opportunity to build stronger ties with their community while reinforcing an important principle of the program, namely accountability. Another great aspect of this program is that it is closely tied with the school which the cadet attends. A cadet's level of success and, therefore, advancement through the ranks is directly linked to their grades and their attendance in school. So if the cadet wishes to succeed in the corps, he must also succeed in school.

In general, then, the cadet corps provides a supportive environment where members are able to attempt new challenges. This program has enjoyed amazing success in the short time in which it has been operating. Since its foundation the Hobbema community cadet corps has grown to over 400 members.

I'd like to congratulate all of the cadets who are making this program successful beyond any expectations. I would also like to congratulate the RCMP members, especially Corporal Huculiak and Sergeant Linnell, who volunteer their time to assist with this very successful program.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Privatization

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The privatization of registries and auto insurance in this province has had a negative effect on countless Albertans, from concerns over security issues such as identity theft to a higher cost of goods and services once managed by the public. Many of my constituents have raised concerns that in the days since Alberta's privatization of these industries, costs have increased while services decreased. They believe that this government does not create policies in the interests of Alberta consumers. Despite promises that privatization would reduce prices and improve services, this simply has not been the case.

In the year 2003 the Consumers' Association of Canada released a report that confirmed that Albertans are suffering under the

government's privatization agenda. The report states that Alberta consumers can expect to pay, on the average, twice as much for auto insurance as consumers in the three other western provinces, who have maintained a public system. This is unacceptable. Whether it is auto insurance, electricity deregulation, or health care, this government continues to pursue its privatization agenda, fuelled by a blind faith in the merit of competition.

In the interests of my constituents and all Albertans I urge this government to put an end to this disappointing trend. In general, privatization has not brought savings for Albertans as promised, nor has it brought about better service. When developing its policies, the government must be responsible and ensure that these policies will benefit all the people in this province and not only a select few.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Conflict in Sudan

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recognition today of the Armenian genocide and our recent commemoration of the Jewish Holocaust moves us deeply. We have pledged ourselves as Albertans and Canadians to never again allow such violations of humanity. Eleven years ago the world watched in horror but failed to act as 800,000 Tutsis were massacred despite desperate pleas from around the world.

In Sudan, before the carnage began in Darfur, before 2003, more than 2 million died and 4 million were displaced, driven from their homes in oil-rich lands in southern Sudan by the murderous government of Khartoum. Now, in the past three years in Darfur the death toll has reached 400,000 men, women, and children and 2.4 million internally displaced, now at risk of starvation. Aid agencies, including Albertan Val Laforce of Medicine Hat, are leaving the area due to increasing violence and are calling on all citizens in free countries to act. African Union troops have not been effective, and the UN is unlikely to mobilize an international force.

It's time for Canada to lead. Violations of international law and humanity anywhere are assaults on all of us. We are either complicit in silence and inaction or we stand for human rights and security. An informal group of citizens, including former MP David Kilgour and myself, have written to all MPs and Senators, urging Canada to leave the bleachers and lead, to quote Prime Minister Harper.

NATO forces successfully and legitimately sidestepped the UN and saved the civilian population of Kosovo. If European citizens can be saved in Kosovo, cannot Africans be saved in Darfur?

I call on each member of the Assembly and all citizens to contact their Member of Parliament this week and express the strongest possible support for international action, led by our federal government, to immediately intervene in the emerging genocide.

What will you tell your grandchildren when they ask what you were doing when Darfur went down?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

2:50 Parks and Wilderness Areas

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The signs of spring are finally upon us. The weather is getting warmer, grass is showing signs of green, and for many families this is the time to dust off the camping gear and make plans to spend some time in our provincial parks. I'm afraid that if they haven't been there for a while, they might be in for a rude awakening.

Years of neglect have left our province's parks in an inexcusable

state of disrepair. I'm hearing an increasing number of complaints about the quality of our parks, and no wonder. This government does not treat our parks and recreation facilities like valuable resources. They seem to merely tolerate the existence of many parks rather than protect and enhance them like the treasures that they deserve to be treated like.

Rather than protecting ecosystems, this government allows development activities directly inside park boundaries. Alberta wilderness areas are often fragmented and disconnected from creating a continuous ecosystem. The EUB is currently considering a proposal to allow Petro-Canada to construct a well site and access road in the Naraway woodland caribou herd's range in the northern foothills. Meanwhile, Canadian logging giant West Fraser continues to log critical caribou and grizzly bear habitats on our public lands. They hold tenure rights for over half of Alberta's foothill ecoregion, which contains the last remaining intact woodland caribou habitat in Alberta. Camping areas around Fort McMurray, which were once recreational destinations for many Albertans and a large appeal for living in Fort McMurray, are now being used to accommodate the booming population in that region.

Aside from the intrinsic value of protecting our wilderness areas, parks provide an opportunity for Albertans to engage in affordable family recreation and to reconnect with nature. It would be a shame to see opportunities for families to learn and experience our natural world permanently lost because this government will not stand up to industry and won't provide adequate park wardens and fish and wildlife officers to maintain the integrity of our provincial parks.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Athabasca University

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to share with members an Alberta success story. That success story is Athabasca University in the Northern Alberta Development Council area.

Athabasca University was created in 1970. In the early years, between 1972 and 1975, Athabasca enrolled 650 students. This was a modest beginning. But take notice of what happened, Mr. Speaker. Since then Athabasca has become Canada's leading distance education, online university. It is Canada's open university. When I say that Athabasca University is an open university, I mean that Athabasca makes it possible for Albertans to earn a university degree regardless of where they live or where they work, regardless of their commitments to careers or families. Athabasca gives all Albertans access to a university education.

Last year Athabasca University served over 32,000 students. Most of these students are Albertans, but there are also students from every part of Canada, provinces and territories, and also from around the world. Athabasca University is not only the fastest growing university in Alberta, but rumour has it that it is the fastest growing university in Ontario as well.

Athabasca University offers professional programs and programs in the arts and sciences. Athabasca's MBA is one of the largest and most successful business programs in the country. But that, Mr. Speaker, is not all. Last year Athabasca University became the first Canadian university that can officially offer its degrees in the United States.

Athabasca University has taken the idea of Campus Alberta to heart. Athabasca has partnerships with all other colleges around the province. Mr. Speaker, we should be proud of the education we provide in our province at Athabasca University.

The Speaker: I must say that I'm very encouraged by the perfor-

mance of the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul today. That statement was one minute, 59 seconds, so the member listened very attentively to the adjudication of Standing Order 7(4). The chair will now provide that reminder to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to present over 2,100 signatures on petitions from people who were most anxious to let the government know about their opposition to plans for expansion of private, for-profit hospitals and allowing doctors to work inside and outside of the system, any action by the government to contravene the Canada Health Act, or to paying for private health insurance.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday, May 1, either I or one of the deputy leaders will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 14.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday, May 1, one of our deputy leaders will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 23, 24, and 25.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings. The first has to do with a discussion that was held in this House on March 1, conducted between myself and the Minister of Health and Wellness on gastroparesis concerns.

The second tabling is a letter I received, which was very much appreciated, from the Minister of Health and Wellness indicating her support for a province-wide news release to help raise awareness of digestive disturbances.

The third is the responses I received from the minister regarding questions with regard to gastroparesis from the Committee of Supply meeting on March 1, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two documents to table today. The first is a letter I sent to Prime Minister Stephen Harper this morning, urging him to revisit the whole issue of the future of the national child care program and his proposed alternative to it, the child care allowance scheme.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is entitled *The Incredible Shrinking \$1,200 Child Care Allowance: How To Fix It*. Its author is Ken Battle, and it's published by Caledon Institute of Social Policy. The paper argues that the Prime Minister's proposal is social policy by stealth, which includes the use of arcane and poorly understood technical mechanisms to implement public policy changes without public explanation of the real consequences.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table on behalf of the Minister of Finance five copies of a letter she sent to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on matters raised by him during question periods on April 4 and 10 through 13 regarding Rod Love Consulting Inc. During at least two of those exchanges the minister undertook to review the issue and provide more information to the member, who will have received earlier today the information that I am now tabling.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period today our hon. Premier indicated that he would table the letter dated January 21, 2006, from the Lviv oblast state administration in Ukraine, which is addressed to our Premier and includes an invitation for our Premier to visit Ukraine. I should add that there's a page 2 to that letter, which contains a list of at least nine initiatives to be followed up during the meetings in June, I believe, and that includes five that are specifically education related. So on behalf of the hon. Premier I'm pleased to table the required number of copies in that regard.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, pursuant to the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act the APEGGA, Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta annual report 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Zwozdesky, Minister of Education, pursuant to the Government Accountability Act the Alberta Education 2006-2009 business plan and the school jurisdictions' audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2004, sections 1, 2, and 3.

head: **3:00 Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the Government House Leader to share with the Assembly the projected government business for the week commencing May 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be very happy to do that. On Monday, May 1, in the afternoon, that being private members' business, written questions will be dealt with, motions for returns will be dealt with as enunciated by myself just a few minutes ago, and Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders will include second reading of Bill 208 and Bill 210. Monday evening under private members' motions we should be able to deal with private member's Motion 508. At 9 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders we should deal with the government motion with respect to Her Honour the Governor General of Canada's address to the Assembly coming up on May 4, and then we should go on to second reading of Bill 29, Bill 31, Bill 35, Bill 37, Bill 36, and Bill 38, and following that, in Committee of the Whole Bill 20, all of that subject to availability of time and so on.

On Tuesday, May 2, in the afternoon, that being a day for Committee of Supply, we will deal with Government Services

estimates. In the evening on Tuesday we will deal with Committee of Supply again, specifically International and Intergovernmental Relations estimates. Following that, in Committee of the Whole we will hopefully be able to deal with Bill 28, Bill 33, Bill 34, Bill 20, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, May 3, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders it will be a day of Committee of Supply, and we will deal with the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development and its estimates. In the evening we will deal with another Committee of Supply, specifically the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General and their estimates. Following that, under Committee of the Whole I anticipate that we will be able to deal with Bill 14, Bill 25, Bill 31, Bill 32, Bill 26, Bill 29, and Bill 20, and otherwise as noted on the Order Paper.

On Thursday afternoon, May 4, we will of course be pleased under government motion to receive Her Honour the Governor General of Canada for her address to the Assembly. Following that, it will be a day of Committee of Supply, at which time we should be able to consider the Solicitor General and Public Security's estimates and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Health and Wellness

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In addressing the estimates today, I would like first of all to introduce people in the members' gallery that are accompanying me, staff that will make sure that we respond to those questions that we may not be able to have either the time or the capacity to follow through with. I would invite members to acknowledge the presence of Bruce Perry, ADM in charge of finance; Peter Hegholz, who is a very strong support there for our financial matters; Murray Finnerty, who is the CEO in charge of AADAC; and from our office special policy adviser Michael Debolt.

In general on the 2006-07 budget, it has increased to \$10.3 billion, an increase of \$735 million, or 7.7 per cent, over last year. Nearly two-thirds of the Health and Wellness budget is being provided in operating grants to health authorities. Base operating funding to health authorities increases by \$338 million, a 6 per cent increase on average. Health authority funding was allocated to address population growth and inflation costs ranging from 4.9 per cent for the Chinook health region to 8.3 per cent for the Northern Lights health region. The allocations provide fair and sufficient operating funds to maintain existing and new services. We fully expect that health authorities will be able to manage within their budgets.

Seven hundred and forty-eight million will be spent on health capital, including \$672 million in capital grants to health authorities. Spending on the 2006-2009 capital plan will increase by 74 per cent over the previous three-year plan to \$2.9 billion. This includes \$2.5 billion for health facility projects, including the Alberta bone and joint institute in Calgary and the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute in Edmonton as well as health facilities in a number of communities. These projects will add an estimated 2,000 new beds, \$309 million over three years for health information systems,

including the electronic health record, Alberta Netcare, and diagnostic imaging.

Physician services receive an allocation of \$1.88 billion, which includes \$75 million for alternative payment plans to allow academic physicians to focus more time on research, education, and delivering specialty care to Albertans; \$70 million for primary care initiatives; \$21 million for the physician office system program to expand the electronic health record to physician offices. Twenty-seven million will be spent this year to reduce wait times for hip and knee replacements as well as breast cancer care, coronary artery bypass surgery, MRIs and CT scans, and prostate cancer care. The Alberta hip and knee replacement project, which decreased wait times for orthopaedic surgery from 47 weeks to five weeks, will be used as a model to reduce wait times for other surgeries and procedures.

Forty-two million will be spent to improve continuing care by increasing the number of nursing hours and personal care in long-term care facilities, increasing therapy, implementing new health care standards, and improving case co-ordination. This increase is on top of the \$25 million increase provided in 2005-06. Mr. Chairman, since March of 2005, at the end of the 2004-05 budget, we have increased the funding for long-term care by a total of \$83 million through funds spent at year-end, in-year spending, third-quarter spending, and the spending that's implicated in the budget of 2006-07.

Income thresholds for Alberta health care insurance premiums increased by \$5,000 on April 1, 2006. This change will mean that an additional 140,000 people will no longer pay health care premiums or will pay at a reduced rate, saving them about \$30 million in 2006-07.

Twenty-five million will be drawn each of the next three years from the \$500 million Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund to expand cancer screening programs and develop a virtual cancer research institute to co-ordinate cancer research.

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission's budget is increasing by \$19 million, or 25 per cent, to \$95 million in 2006-07. Fourteen million of this increase is being used to implement services to help children abusing drugs, including providing 20 confined residential beds.

For the first time the Alberta Health and Wellness budget has surpassed the \$10 billion mark. Every hour we spend more than \$1.2 million to maintain and improve Alberta's health care system. Total Health and Wellness spending will account for 36 per cent of government's total expense in 2006-07. If health spending continues to grow by 8 and a half to 9 per cent, health spending could consume about 60 per cent of the total public spending in Alberta by 2025.

3:10

What we've accomplished. Let me touch briefly on the ministry's recent accomplishments. The international health symposium was held last May, featuring 28 speakers from nine countries and over 400 delegates participating. The goal of the symposium was to identify innovations that drive excellent health systems and healthier populations. In July the 13-point action plan *Getting on with Better Health Care* was released and followed up by the submission of more than 450 online and written surveys. Government accepted the *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care* report in principle and committed over \$36 million in new funding to correspond to recommendations to improve continuing care health services, accommodation, and quality of life issues.

In October \$1.4 billion in funding was allocated to 20 capital projects across the province to add bed capacity in the form of new buildings and renovations and expansion of existing facilities. Under the mental health innovation fund a total of \$75 million was

granted to 30 new projects over the next three years to provide a wide range of mental health services. Fourteen local primary care networks are now in operation throughout the province. The networks involve more than 500 physicians and serve 770,000 patients, and, Mr. Chairman, that continues to expand even today.

The Smoke-free Places Act was implemented January 1, 2006, to prohibit smoking in any public place or workplace that is accessible to anyone under the age of 18. The Cancer Prevention Legacy Act was introduced to create funding that will go towards putting Alberta at the forefront of cancer prevention, screening, and research.

The health policy framework was released in February, identifying 10 new policy directions to guide innovative changes to the public health care system, addressing rising costs of pharmaceuticals, rapidly changing technology, and a growing and aging population. Consultations held in March determined how government should proceed with implementing policies, and eight of the policy directions will be going ahead. We'll be introducing legislation later this spring to help government advance its health care renewal plans.

Our priorities for this year. The ministry's vision is for Albertans to be healthy, to work and play in a healthy environment. The mission of Health and Wellness is to "support individuals, families and service providers in making the best decisions about their health." To provide this support, we will provide leadership and work collaboratively with partners to help Albertans make the best decisions about their health. The ministry fulfills this mission through its three core businesses: being an advocate in providing education for healthy living, providing direction and funding for quality health and wellness services, and leading and participating in continuous improvement in the health system. In addition to the ministry's ongoing core activities, we have two strategic priorities this year: finding innovations to make health services more efficient, responsive, and accessible and strengthening public health risk management capacity.

As we look to the year ahead, we will continue to consult with Albertans on improving our health care system and making further progress on other key goals. We will continue to address four immediate government priorities reinforced by the international health symposium: promoting wellness, particularly of children and youth, advancing primary health care, realizing improvements in mental health services and delivery, and making the electronic health record a robust reality in 2008.

Mr. Chairman, obviously besides these four priority areas, we will work very hard on the cancer legacy project as identified in Bill 1. Our Healthy U program will continue to promote the benefits of healthy eating and daily physical activity to Albertans, with a special focus on children and families. This winter more than 6,000 Albertans visited the Healthy U Crew booth at 18 different events across the province.

Health and Wellness is working with Alberta Education to address healthy eating and physical activity for schoolchildren. We will continue to establish more local primary care networks in all nine health regions, and when all 29, which we anticipate, are operational, they could include as many as 900 physicians and many other health professionals. The primary care initiative has led to 24/7 access to primary health care services and will be the new model to lead the future of primary care in Alberta. We will capitalize on the success of the hip and knee replacement project, using it as a model to reduce wait times for other surgeries and procedures, and will continue expanding Alberta electronic health records, making more patient information available to health professionals across regional health authority boundaries by 2008.

Other priority areas in the business plan include improving access, where we will strive to reduce wait times for elective surgery, and

improving access to primary care, subacute home care, and pharmaceuticals. Mr. Chair, I will never be satisfied until no child in Alberta has to wait for treatment or care when they need it.

Promotion and prevention. We will encourage Albertans to take greater responsibility for their health and wellness. Mr. Chairman, if you get up in the morning and you don't love what you see, then it's time to make yourself into a healthier and better person.

Mr. Chairman, children's health will continue to be a top priority, emphasizing and encouraging lifestyles, improving the rate of immunization against common childhood diseases, and reducing harm from violence and drugs. We will expand community-based care, strengthening care for seniors, persons with disabilities, and those with addictions and mental health needs, who will be able to receive the care they need on a timely basis in their communities.

In continuing care improvements will be made by increasing daily nursing and personal care hours from 3.1, which was the previous standard, to 3.6 for long-term care residents, noting, Mr. Chairman, that through this past year most achieved the standard of 3.4 hours by August, and finally, by January, all had achieved that standard.

Implement new health care standards, improving case co-ordination, and manage growing costs of emerging technologies and pharmaceuticals. Health and Wellness will work with authorities and health care professionals so that the right technologies and drugs are used at the right time for the right condition. It is important that all Albertans have access to quality pharmaceutical services regardless of their financial situation.

On health workforce recruitment and retention, working with our partners to ensure that we have the right mix and enough health providers to meet current and future needs, we are pleased to advance the case of working with Alberta Advanced Education, assuring that we will make great strides in closing the gap between what we have and what we need.

Improving access to mental health services has to be a huge priority for all of us. Regional health authorities particularly will be required to report on mental health plans by addressing the need for mental health services.

Our electronic health record, or Alberta Netcare, will continue to expand to help more efficient and effective service delivery.

We will work to prevent Albertans from being exposed unnecessarily to communicable diseases, working to strengthen the system, responding to public health issues and risks, working to assure that Albertans get timely information on how to protect themselves. In short, Mr. Chairman, working not only within Alberta but with our federal partners to pandemic-proof as much as possible our Canadians.

We will work to prevent Albertans from being exposed to environmental health risks, protecting through education, regulatory enforcement, and partnership with other agencies.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to just summarize our challenges. We continue to face a number of challenges in working to improve the health care system. These include population growth and changing demographics. Currently 10 per cent of Alberta's population is 65 years of age and older. This population is expected to increase to 13 per cent by 2016 and then 20 per cent before 2030. The population continues to shift from rural to urban centres and is one of the highest population growth rates in Canada, at approximately 1.5 per cent per year.

Other challenges include the cost of emerging technologies and pharmaceuticals, workforce shortages, expectations for health service quality, increased health spending, public health risks, aboriginal health needs, mental health challenges, and addiction issues. Mr. Chairman, we face the stresses of a robust economy and

Albertans that have come in to work in this economy and don't have the full capacity of families behind them.

3:20

Mr. Chairman, we face the challenge of Albertans who are not prepared to take sufficient ownership for their own health and wellness. It is something that we will continue to try and stress through program delivery, reminding people like the 18- and 19-year-olds that just because they're not seeing a TV ad reminding them not to smoke, it doesn't mean that they shouldn't be looking after their lungs. I'm astounded how frequently Members of this Legislative Assembly sitting on the opposite side continue to imagine that this government should be responsible for making changes in human behaviour in everything from nutritional needs to the health and living habits of Albertans. We carry an enormous responsibility for ourselves, and we must never lose sight of that.

While we face enormous challenges, we're fortunate to have many opportunities to address these challenges and to work, through foresight and innovation, on addressing those challenges. According to the 2005 Alberta Health survey, 88 per cent of Albertans were satisfied with the way health services are provided; 86 per cent indicated satisfaction with the quality of care they received. They frequently, though, remind us that they wish to have greater access and more timely access, a challenge not only in Alberta but across the country.

While Alberta's health care system continues to receive high marks, there will always be room for improvements. We will encourage regional health authorities to be more innovative and more accountable. As I discussed, we will emphasize wellness. We will make strategic investments to improve access and quality for all Albertans, including the aboriginal communities.

All of the ministry's spending will focus on the most effective and efficient use of resources and continuous service quality and improvement. Our government sees a healthy province as one of the most important resources for the future. The health and well-being of each and every Albertan will be our top priority as we implement the Health and Wellness business plan in the coming year.

Thank you. And, Mr. Chairman, may I move the estimates of Health and Wellness?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Hon. members, before I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm just delighted to welcome to the public gallery several people who have joined us to witness the Health and Wellness debate. The first person I'd like to introduce was a colleague of mine, and she is currently a city councillor for the city of Edmonton in ward 1. Many of you will remember her serving very well on this front bench as the opposition critic for social services, which included child welfare and disability programs, between 1997 and 2001, a very vigilant defender of the vulnerable, and that's Linda Sloan. She is here today with Monica Rosborough and Anton Szabo. I'll also note that Kevan Rhead, who is a long-time advocate on health care, is joining us as well. Now, I'm going to have Kevan add to the whole bunch, and I'll get you all to stand. Please welcome them. Thank you.

I'll note that Councillor Sloan is very particularly interested in improvements for ambulance services and emergency room wait times, and she's done quite a bit of work on this under her assigned section as a city councillor.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Health and Wellness (*continued*)

Ms Blakeman: What I'd like to do today, Madam Minister: I've got about 20 areas of interest I'd like to talk to the minister about and get some responses on. I'm thinking that if I do about two minutes each, that's 40 minutes' worth of talking, so I'll try and do this in two sections of 20 minutes each.

I am going to start, actually, with a question about ambulance services. Now, shortly after the minister was appointed in March of 2005, which was, I think, exactly one month before the municipalities were to hand over responsibility for ambulance services to the health regions, the minister announced that that program would not be going ahead and plans would be put on hold indefinitely. That caused great consternation. We talked about it quite a bit at the budget debates last year because they had in fact been instructed to allocate their money for ambulance services to other divisions, and they did. Then when they had to keep running them, they were either having to run a debt or cut services in other areas, which was most unfortunate.

I understand that the ministry is planning to re-evaluate whether to proceed with this transfer, and there are pilot projects complete in the Palliser and the Peace Country health regions. With that is a corollary issue around emergency room overcrowding. That's a constant issue and often goes hand in hand with the issues around availability and wait times for ambulances. I think that connected to that is insufficient funding by the government to increase the number of acute care beds, which would ease the backlog in emergency room admittances. So there's been no increase in funding for the municipal ambulance program, and the funding that was announced by the minister last year was already well known to be insufficient at the time.

One of my questions is: will the minister explain why the decision was made not to increase funding for ambulances? Can you update us on the status of the pilot projects in Palliser and the Peace Country health regions? I'd like to know which stakeholders are being consulted as part of this pilot project. Are all of the municipalities that are in the regions involved in the decision-making process of an analysis around the success or the status of those pilot projects? I'm interested in whether the minister has received any complaints from the municipalities about the management of the pilot projects. I know, in fact, that they have, and I'd like to hear a discussion about that. I'd like to know when we can expect to see a report made public on these pilot projects.

We have seen a dramatic increase – in some cases, I think, a tripling – in the number of code reds and code burgundies in Edmonton and Calgary caused by a number of factors, but I would venture that it's a lack of staffing, a lack of beds, and overall management. One of my perennial questions is: given that, you know, the pressures on the emergency rooms happen every year at the same time – we know it is flu season; it's entirely predictable; it has happened every year that I've been in this Assembly – why can the government not plan adequately for these flu seasons and get ahead of this? Why does it always seem to be scrambling and behind on it when we know it's coming, when we know it happens at the same time every year? Does the ministry have some level of code reds or code burgundies that they will accept or tolerate? Is there a tolerance level there, and beyond that everything kicks into high gear? What's the issue?

There was a pilot project that placed paramedics in the emergency rooms to reduce the amount of time that the paramedics in Edmonton spent waiting in emergency departments. I'm wondering if the minister has considered expanding that program if I'm thinking of the right program. I know that there's a problem with the handing off of patients that come in ambulances. They have to officially hand over their patients, and if there's nobody to accept the patients, then the ambulances have to sit and wait. That's part of our problem with the usage of ambulances. I know that I can say that accurately from Edmonton. So, you know, when we have slower response times, that's sometimes because we've got one or two ambulances sitting in the loading bay in the hospital waiting to hand over their patients so they can leave and go and get somebody else. This paramedic program in the waiting rooms should alleviate that. That's why I'm questioning whether there's a plan to expand that or put it in every hospital or what the status of it is.

The other issue around transport of patients that's arisen is air ambulance services. Now, this was cut by \$4 million. That's appearing on page 258 of the estimates. Vote 2.2.4 went from \$40 million to \$36 million, and the municipal ambulance program received no increase. That's staying at \$55 million. Can the minister explain her decision to cut funding in this area and essentially also cut it from municipal services seeing as we've now had two years' worth of inflationary and volume increase costs that are putting additional pressure on that \$55 million worth of funding there?

3:30

I'm going to move on to an issue of— well, see, that one series of questions took me six minutes. I'm never going to get through this all.

Okay. Midwifery is the next issue I'd like to bring up. In 1990 the organization I then worked for, the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, made a very thorough recommendation about making midwifery services a recognized profession, forming standards and credentials for it and covering midwifery services under health care. In 1991 the Health Disciplines Board recommended public funding of midwifery care. In 1993 there was an additional government-funded body that also recommended the same thing. Since then and in my time in here we've had a series of health ministers, all of them running different pilot projects and studies and explorations in different areas with slightly different focuses.

We know that the full course of midwifery care costs between \$2,500 and \$3,000, which is significantly less than a normal delivery in a hospital, which is around the \$4,100 mark. That \$4,100 is not including the cost of follow-up examinations, epidurals, and other expenses. So again I'm asking the minister why it's taking so long for the government to follow through on funding when midwifery care could alleviate pressures in so many different areas. Why will the ministry, why will this government not support midwifery services being funded under health care? It makes sense. The studies support it. The pilot projects support it. What is the problem?

In 1991 the Health Disciplines Board recommended the development of a baccalaureate program in midwifery as well. We are seeing midwives leave the province either because of the high costs of their operating versus how much money they can make right now and the difficulties they're encountering in their ability to practise but, I think, also experiential training. So I'm asking if the ministry will work with the Department of Advanced Education to establish a baccalaureate program in midwifery. If that's already under consideration, what is the timeline that is being considered there?

I'm going to move to long-term care, Minister, which is appearing

on page 31 of your business plan. There are lots of nice words in here about improving the quality of continuing care services by implementing new standards for long-term care centres and continuing care services, et cetera, et cetera, but really what we've seen is \$42 million that is being provided to improve continuing care throughout the province. I think the minister said \$83 million, and I'm interested in how that divides out because our count is \$42 million.

Of course, what is really lacking are the standards, which is what was promised. It was agreed to. We're coming up to the anniversary on May 9 of the Auditor General's report on long-term care. We had a private member's bill brought forward by my colleague from Lethbridge-East, who is currently the opposition critic for seniors, attempting to set up a commissioner that could oversee and monitor and enforce standards, and that was voted down by the government members.

How much longer do we have to wait? Where are we at with the standards? What is taking so long to get these standards in place? I mean, there are best practices that exist in other provinces and in other countries. The long delay is causing suspicions, and this is what starts to happen. We know that long-term care is one of the four areas that the minister continues to investigate as outside of the total health care package. Long-term care was one of the four areas identified in the Aon report. It is a mix right now of public and private funding. It is ripe for private insurance schemes to come in. When we don't see standards of care or we see the development of standards of care taking so long, we start to become suspicious that there's a delay that is allowing for the creation of a market, or there's a delay in order to somehow facilitate the private insurance market for long-term care, allow them to set up or get what they want or influence these standards in some way.

During that particular debate with my colleague from Lethbridge-East the minister had concerns about a resolution process, and I'm wondering what the minister had in mind that would make the establishment of a continuing care commissioner unnecessary. Maybe she can elucidate that.

On February 23 of this year we had the government accepting the recommendations from the MLA task force, recognizing that the current system is insufficient, but it had no strategies for standards or enforcement.

Now, I know that the Health Facilities Review Committee can conduct inspections and make recommendations, but there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that those recommendations have been implemented. It's all a sort of, "Well, we'll say this nicely and hope that you do it" set-up. I note that the '05-06 budget for the Health Facilities Review Committee was \$622,000, but the forecast spending for '06-07 is \$822,000, and I'm wondering what the extra \$200,000 is for for this particular committee, which doesn't have the power to enforce after all of that. So please tell us what the extra money is for.

Without standards in place, what measures will the minister take within the next year to ensure that patients are receiving adequate care and attention? If there's nothing for them to measure against and nothing to mark it against, how is the minister going to be ensuring that this happens?

How close is the minister to bringing forward legislation? We are almost at the end of this spring sitting. According to what I'm hearing from my colleagues on the other side, it's highly likely that there will not be a fall sitting in which legislation can be introduced and passed. By next spring we're into a leadership race for the Conservatives and a new leader and may well be into an election, so what is the timing the minister is anticipating to introduce legislation that would contain new standards?

Could the minister tell us what the government plans are for standardizing staffing levels in long-term care facilities and also around regulating personal care attendants?

Now, I notice that the minister has agreed to increase the hours of care per day from 3.1, which was a new standard, actually, that's only been achieved recently. It was 1.9, I think. So 3.1 and now to 3.6. For most of the year the minister talked about 3.4, so I'm interested that we've got to the 3.6. Is there any consideration to increasing this to four hours per day, which is another recommended benchmark that some people have been hoping for? I'd like to see what studies and reports the minister was using to have reached the 3.6 level. I know I was looking at certain recommendations from certain groups, but I'd like to see what the minister was looking at.

3:40

I'm also interested in what research and reports have been considered regarding the optimal workload mixes and staff mixes between RNs, LPNs, PCAs. How is that mix all going to work out? Do you have a grid on that that shows us that in a given facility with a certain type of patients this is how that is all going to work out? How many of each would be useful to know.

A final question connecting the Aon report and long-term care and possible private insurance for long-term care. Is the minister doing any follow-up from that Aon report that would be looking to encourage people to be taking more of the payment costs for long-term care? Obviously, those people that have been reassigned to the housing models move out of a copayment with the government and into paying a hundred per cent. So we're just looking at the people that are still in long-term care facilities and how much they're paying for essentially their room and board. The government is still paying the health portion of it.

I'd like to quickly move on to primary care, which is appearing on page 220 of the business plan and page 258 of the estimates, vote 2.1.4. I heard the minister talk about care being available 24/7. All good. A number of people and experts from across the world, I think, have said that primary care is one of our best weapons in having a healthy population and being able to address a healthy population in a timely and cost-efficient way. On the primary care networks that have been established: just confirm, please, that we're past the pilot project stage. I believe that what we now have are 14 primary care networks, with about 500 family physicians participating.

I'm wondering if the additional funding will be used to expand primary care networks. Will we be having more of them or as many as want to start up? Will that money be made available for them, or is it finite? How many more primary care networks are expected to open this year, and where will they be located? Is the minister taking any kind of a management role or planning role in where these networks would be located? How many of them? How many to open over a certain period of time? Or is this sort of a free market, and whoever wants to open one is free to go ahead and do that?

Other than the primary care networks, is the ministry considering any other plans for primary care?

I'll have to come back and do my second half later.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, and thank you for the questions. I'll be as succinct as I can be, and then hopefully we'll be able to supplement later. Let me start on the point that I'm very appreciative to have the former social services critic here. The experience with local government now no doubt is enhancing the view of the

very complex service; namely, ambulance or emergency patient transportation. I'd had that privilege for some time, so I know that it's a complex area.

First of all, we did not increase funding this year although we recognize that the \$55 million did not cover the full costs of the ambulance. But we look forward to the ambulance advisory committee, on which in this city, the capital city, we have a member, Mr. Steve Rapanos, who has been involved in ambulance delivery and responsible for that. So I know that they have been working diligently. In fact, we've put municipal representatives on that committee, and they are the ones that are coming up with a recommendation.

There are two areas that I think the hon. member opposite has cited. First, on how the projects are doing and who is being consulted and the decision-making process, I expect to get a final report from the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, who has been working as chair with the chair of the Peace region, Marvin Moore, to bring forward some recommendations for us to consider. The complaints about the pilot projects have predominantly occurred in Peace River as a community being concerned and not somewhat on stride with the health region of Peace River, and there have been several efforts to try and work and resolve the issues there.

On one hand, if I'm looking at it as a health minister, it would be much more convenient to have everybody in the pilot. However, as a former reeve I also have sentiment for people who want to direct their traffic in the way they see fit. That was one of the initial problems in regional health authorities: assuming that a more coordinating role might mean that they were going to in a manner of speaking take over ambulance delivery. So we've got a lot of work to do there.

I'd just identify that I've had an opportunity on two occasions, as recently as last evening, to speak with Mayor Mandel and this city about ambulance delivery. These identified yet one more problem, and that is the lack of collectibles. Sometimes, I believe, the communities are not able to collect the amount of revenue due them for the ambulance, and he has an uncollectible bill of some \$2 million, which is double what it is in Calgary. I spoke with the mayor of Calgary about that, so he's going to check about it.

Suffice it to say in summary that we will get a report fairly soon and be able to identify what the issues are there and what the progress should be for our government in responding further in their responsibilities to help and support the health delivery through emergency patient transportation.

In terms of the work in this city with the Capital health region and paramedics who often are slowed down in their capacity to do proper work as ambulance support personnel because of staying in the hospital to ensure that the triage is appropriately followed through, there is a report that I'm waiting for, but I know that the health authority has been trying to work to improve and enhance that due diligence.

Finally, in terms of the air ambulance the reduction of \$4 million was a reflection of less funding required in 2005-06 due to lower utilization and fewer air miles. It simply wasn't a service that was used as much. So at this stage it was deemed that it was monies that could be expended in other areas of the health budget. As you'll note, hon. member, we've been trying to cope in a way that's responding and responsible but placing the dollars where they're most significantly needed.

If I could talk a bit about midwifery, I have great empathy for the sentiments expressed by midwives to have more support. We do support the work of the Association for Safe Alternatives in Childbirth, the ASAC group, who'll be celebrating their International Day of the Midwife at the Alberta Legislature Grounds on

May 7. Mr. Chairman, a great part of the opportunity for midwives to become more involved rests in the hands of physicians under the terms of the trilateral agreement. So we have been funding supports for them on a variety of fronts, including some of the educational supports, but we have been hopeful that the primary care networks will take on more of that responsibility. Health regions can fund midwifery services based on their assessment of community needs, but as the hon. member has noted, we have not seen as much support by the regions as we had hoped. Funding, though, for three midwives has been provided to the shared care maternity program in WestView health centre, so there is some hope that things will come forward.

In terms of more support on the baccalaureate, that has been something that I have on the agenda to advance as we work on our workforce strategy.

If I may, on long-term care I'd like to just indicate to the hon. member that the \$83 million is a function of taking \$5 million from accruals not expended in the budget of '04-05. So towards the end of March we took \$5 million there. We had \$10 million in the '05-06 budget that was designated to increase long-term care hours to 3.4 hours, and we advised the regional authorities to support and match that \$10 million from funds within their budgets. So within the amounts of money that were given to each authority, we asked them to supplement that \$10 million with an additional amount to make sure they match that target.

3:50

Many were able to do that and were able to do that by August, but some were not able to do that. So in the third quarter, when we provided \$26 million, \$15 million of which was for the staffing levels, that completed the support that was required to assure that absolutely everybody else was up and running and had fully funded the amount of 3.4 hours on average per-patient care. So you have \$26 million from the care amounts that were also provided for additional support on therapy and \$42 million that was designated in this year's budget. I'm merely saying that since I came into this position last March, we started with that additional \$5 million, then \$10 million, a total of \$83 million if you add the \$42 million. I went over that figure several times thinking that you probably would ask me about it today because I know your concern about long-term care.

Now, on the Auditor General's report we have accomplished many of the initiatives, but we obviously believe that there's more to be done. If we were moving from 3.6 to 4 hours per day in 2007-08, if we were to be able to do that, it would require an additional \$53 million. To the hon. member, I think that the biggest difficulty we've had is getting the number of personal care attendants properly trained and in place to fill those positions. So a great part of our initiative on the workforce strategy will be to do the training and through the year monitor our progress in being able to make the right staff mix in the right place at the right time to deliver long-term care.

The reason the standards document hasn't come out yet is quite simply that I was not satisfied in the first instance, nor was my colleague the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. We issued two papers last year on long-term care, the definitions for everything from assisted living to ways and processes that we believed would be appropriate. I'm also looking at some of the additional supports beyond the regular staffing mix. I'm just giving you a little heads-up here. I'm looking at other things because my belief is that we should be looking at hydration and nutrition as key elements in those standards.

I'm going to try to see if I can encourage the hon. members on all sides of the House to support some pilots that would enable us to see

how we could do with people that came in with those designated opportunities, much like we have neighbourhood moms properly trained to go in schools to help monitor school programs. If we can get retired nurses or properly trained professionals to help us with the feeding and hydration of people with multiple sclerosis and long-term care needs, maybe we'll have less use of a microwave that's reheating food for somebody because someone hasn't been able to feed them on time. I mean, I think one of the biggest things in long-term care is providing the proper nutritional supports so that they maintain their health, and then their poor little bodies don't break down.

The Health Facilities Review Committee has an increase in funding due to the activity that's anticipated and as a result of the comments by the Auditor General. Clearly, those Health Facilities Review Committee members are entitled to go in without invitation and without notice to make sure that we have the proper types of inspection in place when we have had concerns expressed about long-term care.

Standardizing our staffing levels and regulating the PCAs are things that you have mentioned that I hope we'll be able to demonstrate in short order here when we get those standards in front of Albertans. We have been working with health authorities, alerting them to the standards that are coming. We know that many of them are attempting to put them in place before they are out there because we've done a lot of work with not only the nonprofits but the for-profit groups that have been talking about that. I'm going to ask that our staff follow up on your question on studies on the 3.6 level. I think that's an important element that we should respond to.

In terms of the Aon report on long-term care, I have absolutely no intent of using that document as anything more than a source of advice about the expected increases in pressures on long-term and continuing care and in terms of encouraging people to take advantage of that themselves in the future. I think it will speak for itself as Albertans become aware of the number of pressures on long-term care and the need to find the right and suitable accommodation for themselves. So at this stage that would not be something that I would be personally inclined to move forward on. I'm much more focused right now on how we deal with the rising costs of drugs, and that will be my area of emphasis from the Aon report because not only in the bulk buying but in some of the other areas of improving our pharmacare delivery I think it's important.

Mr. Chairman, in my opening remarks I did comment that we have 14 networks for primary care, and we will be expanding to 29, with an expected 900 physicians. I mentioned that previously. Perhaps the hon. member didn't catch that. My role in the placement of those: I am not involved politically, but I am anticipating that the regional health authorities are working with their physicians to make sure that that happens. One of the delays I found is that they're all busy trying to find new ways to do the same things that were done in other areas, so this is a period of inventing things, and that's putting some of the difficulties in place. In other words, if you and I were to negotiate a primary care network, two other people in another community might say: well, those aren't the standards and things we want. So that's partly what takes some time, but by year-end we should have 29 in place, and I think that that will be extremely positive.

Mr. Chairman, there was another question, I suspect, about the timeliness of putting primary care in place and making sure that it's working well for people. I'm quite proud of the fact that at least 14 networks were in place by year-end. We've had some discussions about the use of staff. Frankly, if I could express a hope for the future, it would be that these primary care networks would absorb additional personnel.

Chiropractors, for example, have identified the hope that they would be embraced in the circle of a primary care network, and I support them on that. Why not? I support the use of other alternative professionals. We had an excellent presentation on the third way from a young acupuncturist that said that he suspected that many of the alternative therapies that could be delivered in a primary care network by well-trained and certificated and accredited acupuncturists would also provide support. Thus far it hasn't been embraced, but these are the kinds of things, when we look to the future, that I think we will see that will enable us to advance on some of these fronts.

So, Mr. Chairman, I think with that and with the thought that some of the thoughts that were expressed by the member opposite may not have been answered, I will sit down and allow the member to continue.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, I just want to remind everyone that this weekend we will be having some mock parliament happening in the Assembly, and there was a request from the Sergeant-at-Arms that everybody clear their desks, particularly your laptops. I'm just reminding you to do that before we adjourn for the evening.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

4:00

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for her detailed questions, many of which the minister answered, and I thank the minister for those answers. I want to ask about a number of things.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, during the travels of the NDP caucus around the province dealing with health care, one issue that's repeatedly come up is a lack of coverage for physiotherapy. We've heard from physiotherapists, and we've also heard from patients in the province about this issue and the cuts that have been made which don't allow proper rehabilitation of patients and just the difficulty that physiotherapists have faced in trying to plan an actually effective treatment plan for people given that they may need a number of visits and they're limited and restricted in the things that they can do and the number of times that they can see people and the costs that that then passes on to the health care system when people aren't properly treated and rehabilitated. I'd like the minister to address what the department has done and plans to do with respect to funding for physiotherapy and whether or not she sees that as something that can be an investment so that longer term costs for the health care system are limited.

Another area that I'd like to ask about is the question of rural health care and the retention of physicians in rural areas and in small-town Alberta. That's another area we've heard quite a bit about. The rural physician action plan, which has a \$6 million estimate, has no increase this year, and I wonder what the minister can tell us about that particular decision and what plans the ministry may have to allow smaller centres in this province to attract and retain doctors. What sort of health care facilities are most appropriate, and what other types of health care professionals do we need to attract – for example, nurse practitioners – and how can those services best be provided in rural areas and in smaller centres?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has dealt in part with the municipal ambulance issue, and the minister has provided some response on that. I'm trying to find my notes. Well, I'll come back to that one, Mr. Chairman.

I want to talk a little bit about aboriginal health strategies. This is another area in the department that has a fairly significant cut. I think there's a 23 per cent reduction in aboriginal health strategies.

Can the minister explain how that decision was made and what the challenges are among aboriginals, both urban aboriginals and those who are not, and what the government's plans are with respect to that?

I want to talk a little bit about the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy, which is pretty much static. The Premier has talked on a number of occasions about wanting to cure cancer, and I think that that's an extremely noble goal, Mr. Chairman, but not one that I think is going to be accomplished by one province regardless of how much financial resources they are prepared to put towards it. That's a world-wide effort and has to be shared around the world. I'd just like to know what the impacts on the funding for cancer prevention programs are expected to be and what longer term plans the government has with respect to that. I do want to raise a question of smoking in connection with cancer reduction. I see that there's a dramatic increase among young people smoking in the province, and I would be very much interested to know what the government is planning to do about that.

The minister talked a lot about how individuals need to take personal responsibility and not always ask the government to do it. I guess I would put to the minister the question: if the government doesn't get involved in something like youth smoking and says, "It's simply up to the individual, and we're washing our hands of it," to take the argument to its extreme, that "that's a personal choice and not anything to do with the government; it's not our responsibility," then what in the long run is the impact on the health of people and on provincial health care budgets? Surely prevention and government involvement in prevention programs have got to be a very high priority if we do want to get control over health care costs. This, Mr. Chairman, is very, very central to our view that the government does need to be engaged with its citizens in encouraging healthy behaviour. The language around people taking personal responsibility I think needs to be clarified because it certainly could be seen to imply that the government is not going to be engaged with its citizens in terms of encouraging that sort of thing.

I want to talk about the wait time experiment. I think it's an area where the government deserves a great deal of credit around the joint replacement program. I know that the minister has talked about extending that beyond hip and knee replacements and introducing the same process for breast cancer, MRI and CT scans, and other preventative and early detection measures. In our view, Mr. Chairman, this shows that innovation within the public system is the key to meeting the financial challenges in the future. Now, obviously, this is a wait time issue rather than a direct financial issue, but ultimately the more efficiently we can use our existing health resources, the more we can resist pressures to spend more money into the future.

That brings me to the question of drug costs. I know that the minister has just said that focusing on drug costs as a driver of health care costs is going to be a great priority of hers. I certainly applaud that. I think that that is clearly one of the areas that needs to be looked at, and I wonder if the minister is willing to look again at the proposal that we made in a private member's bill, that was defeated at second reading, to establish bulk buying of pharmaceuticals. We believe, based on the experience in New Zealand, that we could save \$75 million a year on drug costs in the first year alone if that kind of approach was done just in Alberta.

I know that there have been some national discussions about doing it nationally. It would be preferable to do it nationally, but when I did meet with the minister about that issue, I was disappointed to learn that there really wasn't a lot of progress nationally about establishing pharmaceutical bulk purchasing across the country, that a great deal of work needs to be done, that other provinces and the

federal government may not be particularly interested in pursuing that to a rapid conclusion. I guess that my question to the minister is: if there's an indication that there may not be a speedy conclusion to federal and provincial negotiations around this issue that produces a practical and meaningful result in a reasonable period of time, will the government be prepared to go it alone and establish a model or pilot project on bulk purchasing of pharmaceuticals right here in Alberta and thereby provide the leadership that may be necessary across the country to do that?

Now, I want to ask a little bit about health care premiums. I think that we've had some mixed messages from the government on health care premiums as to whether or not they're actually something that are helpful in terms of reminding people of the costs of health care. That's what the Premier has said. As a whole they pretty much look like a tax to us, Mr. Chairman, because they are not dedicated for health care, and there's no relationship between your use or need for health care and how much you pay. It's not based on your income. It's a fixed amount. The government's move towards eliminating health care premiums for seniors and lower income people is laudable, but can we in fact expect the government to move towards eliminating health care premiums altogether?

4:10

The minister said in answer to one of my questions I think this week that any surpluses in health care premium revenue is in fact dedicated to the health budget. I'm just wondering if she could elaborate on that: how long that's been around and how much money since it's been introduced in each year has gone into health care and where into the health care budget exactly it goes.

I want to talk a little bit about the Aon report, Mr. Chairman. I thought that the Aon report was interesting in that it indicated that private insurance may well not be the answer, and that was a bit of a surprise to us, quite frankly. What did concern us about the Aon report was its projections of costs for the health care system into the future, and that's really something that we have a great deal of concern about because it's been this unsustainability argument that has underpinned repeated attempts to move into the area of private health care.

Of course, the experts will tell us that private health care will increase your costs and not reduce them, so when we see the kinds of projections that Aon has come up with, we are very, very concerned. For example, projecting an annual increase out for 25 years of 10 per cent doesn't seem to us to be a reasonable assumption at all. If you measure back before the cuts in the mid-90s to today, increases in health care spending have actually averaged about under 6 per cent, not 10. But if you measure from the depth of the cuts in the mid-90s, the slope of the line is much higher, and that's how they got their 10 per cent. That's unreasonable. Increases in health care costs have been overestimated, and provincial growth and provincial revenues have been underestimated, so of course you get a very, very large gap over time.

I would just like to know if the minister is open to alternate information with respect to sustainability. We believe that innovation in the public system is the key to controlling costs.

I guess, Mr. Chairman, that in conclusion I want to say a few words about the third way and the process that we've gone through. I know that the minister said the other day that she feels a bit like George Chuvalo, and I promised her a helmet. I want to assure the minister that we have a strong passion for public health care. There has certainly never been anything intended personally at all with respect to this.

I want to say for the record, Mr. Chairman, that I've been surprised a number of times about the minister's honesty with

respect to certain things that have come up in the issue. She at no time tried to hide what the government was planning, and she did not hide the results of her consultations or attempt to change the data that was there. She was, I think, at all times quite honest with Albertans about what the government was doing and what the response of Albertans to that was. Although we believe that she was certainly going in a direction we didn't support, we felt that she did so with honesty and integrity. I just wanted to say that to the minister.

We're going to continue to do whatever we think we need to do to fight for public health care. We also believe that we need to innovate with the system, and we need to grapple with the challenges of growing costs. We think that there's a better way to do that, and we're going to be committed to continuing to participate in that debate.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my comments. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, particularly to the hon. member for that last comment. I'd just indicate that for some years now, in fact I believe it's for about five or six years, physiotherapy services have been at the discretion of the regional health authorities. They haven't been funded by the department.

Mr. Chairman, at the time that we came through all of the regions last June and asked them about the success of many of the ways they were delivering care, a physiotherapist came forward. She has been very involved in the PEP program, supporting parents who have needed additional supports because of children on drugs. She operates a clinic, and she said that at the time that we made the move to transfer the responsibility to health authorities and health authorities encouraged physiotherapists to become more entrepreneurial, they thought that the sky was falling. Now she'd have it no other way. She said: we have been better able to address efficiencies and patient care; we've been able to get some latitude in how we deal with patients and billing and so on. She was much more positive about it.

While in some communities there may have been suggestions by physiotherapists that they have not got the umbrella of support from the department, the regional health authorities have been doing a great deal of work to determine what treatment and duration is required, and they have varied. Capital health led the way, and Calgary has moved in that capacity. Others have moved in other ways to manage it. It may not be ideal, but as one of the allied services, one of the services we fund that is not required by the Canada Health Act, we have looked at local decision-making to account for priorities for some of the ways that dollars are expended, and some have made that choice.

In terms of the rural doctor shortage this is going to have to be a part of our workforce plan, and I'm just speaking to the hon. member opposite. Some of the things that have been so unfortunate this past year have been rural physicians with personal crises that have kept them from fulfilling the mission that they originally set out to do. Without divulging sad personal situations, it has certainly compromised the effectiveness for a seamless delivery in some of the isolated and remote communities. We're looking at some things that are akin to respite so that when rural physicians are absent from the job or where lapse of service could occur, we have other health authorities to go in to plug in that support.

Now, the hon. member has noted that there are no additional dollars there for the rural physicians, but we have added to our alternate physician planning. The ARPs have gone up from \$35 million to \$70 million in this year's budget just like the primary care

networks have been funded, last year \$35 million up to \$70 million. So there's more funding for what we hope we'll be able to develop for some of the rural authorities, which is more support for the retention of rural physicians.

We found one other thing that the hon. member might be very interested in. We found that frequently some of the rural and outlying regions were targeting the same physician, so they might in fact attempt to recruit from three different authorities one physician located, for example, in Germany. They would have a recruiter from all three authorities over romancing one doctor. We have got to change it so that there's a more collaborative framework in the romancing of required physicians.

The bigger thing, I think, is the initiative we've started with the \$3.4 million to have an influx a second time in the year, not just the fall influx of doctors into the universities but the \$3.4 million that's going to allow us to support international medical graduates, which, in fact, could be our own grads returning home because we don't distinguish international medical graduates coming to Alberta. That's an interesting thing. People think we're robbing from someplace, but if you graduate from an international school someplace, in Dublin, Ireland, or in Australia, you are as much an IMG candidate as somebody who might be from that country themselves. So that \$3.4 million that we put in in March will enable us to hire, depending on the speciality, about 14 to come in and serve in a residency program and become qualified as doctors.

4:20

We are looking now at a program that will enable us to bring forward all of our grads; in fact, invite everybody that's gone away from Alberta to take training in other countries to come back and have a second entry point in Alberta in the springtime so that they can take advantage of some of those times when residents may have more opportunity for placement with co-operating physicians in the educational institutions. We're looking at places like Grande Prairie and Lethbridge and Medicine Hat and Red Deer, other outlying centres where we might find qualified, willing doctors to give them this support in their internship and their residency.

Last night at the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame dinner I spoke with the president of the Canadian Medical Association and contemplated some of the programs we should look to. One that I'm favouring right now is the removal of the responsibility of residents to pay back their tuition until they've completed their residency requirements.

The second would be that we look at sponsoring med students by relieving them of a portion of their paybacks on student loans if they serve for an equivalent period of time. Let's say one year of student loans for one year of service in psychiatric medicine, for example, right here in the province, provided they stay here.

So some alternative approaches to getting physicians and getting them into rural communities and not just in Medicine Hat but in places like Hanna and in places like Brooks and Strathmore because those are the places where so much more support is needed. That's where I'm hoping we can not only bring them back to live and also to work here but that we not beggar our neighbours in other countries or in other provinces but legitimately bring Albertans back to Alberta.

I've been given several figures. I know that the hon. member for south Calgary – I'm sorry; it escapes me now, but her son is a physician. She said that she believes there are 300 Albertans out there that are taking training elsewhere that she would hope we would be able to track back. Across Canada I believe there are some 600 physicians that are being educated offshore that we could bring back to Alberta and into rural communities. I note that that would

be a very positive way of ensuring that people who were very comfortable in this environment would be able to be retained and work here.

Just talking a minute about the aboriginal programs, we did reduce the grants that were being provided over and above the monies that are provided to regional health authorities for aboriginal programs with the thought that we would go after in a tenacious way the federal government because we've been funding grants where they have not. The most incredibly difficult thing has been to keep backstopping programs when the regional health authorities are trying to do some of that and when we're trying to get them more involved in the programs.

The reduction was really in some of the funding that was on, I would say, an ad hoc basis in grants. It wasn't a large amount of money, but we're going to work more on the federal government to make them ante up to the plate, where they belong. It sickens me to think that there are reserves in Alberta where women are working in shelters, bringing food from their families' tables to feed the people that are on reserves and denying themselves the salaries they should have because they are not being given sufficient monies in transfers to support them. I'm going to be very tenacious on that because those people don't deserve it and it's disgusting. I'm sorry to get caught up on that, but I feel very strongly about it.

In terms of the tobacco and what the government does. It's interesting that in those stats that came out the other day for the 15- to 19-year-olds, we're doing less well. We're doing better with the 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds, but with the 18- to 19-year-olds no question we need to start finding ways to target them again. We had that as part of our advertising program. People at the time noted last year that the federal government was doing more with tobacco ads. They stopped those wonderful tobacco ads at some point in the middle of the year, and all of a sudden we were flat. Those figures that were on the Alberta ads of people melting before your eyes were pretty effective. I personally like the one that has that woman that dissolves from being sort of a hottie to something with fangs and a tail and horns and the rest of it. That would stop me from smoking. But we have to get smarter and do more due diligence on that, and that will be a thrust of what we're doing.

In this past year a lot of our efforts in AADAC have been on residential treatment.

I do like the NDP program relative to bulk buying of drugs. I don't know if we'll ever get it with other areas, but I think the work we've done to put all of our own ministries together will start gleaning some support. We just recently, yesterday in fact, released the Aon report to the drug manufacturers so that they could tell us how they would see us justifying those rising costs and what we should be doing about those rising costs. I'm looking forward to innovative approaches that they will bring forward to see how we can more responsibly deal with drug issues and the rising costs of drugs and technologies. During the third-way discussions it was intriguing to have them come forward and tell us on at least two occasions that we could probably save other areas of our budget funding if we spent more on drugs. So I'm going to be interested to learn exactly how that can be done so that it is responsible.

Because of my own natural aversion, having alternative therapies of vitamin E and Vitalux and lutein for my eyes in my cupboard, I don't have all the other products that most other people might be considering part of a proper storehouse, and fortunately I haven't needed more drugs. But we have to find ways to curb our costs, and I think you've hit on something that is going to be a thrust of our work. I will mention it when we have the meeting with the B.C. cabinet because it's part of my concern.

Now, with the health care premiums normally any surpluses

arising out of premiums would go to the general revenue fund. I mean, that's where they go. But then Health has been permitted the argument that – for example, in 2005-06 we had about \$28 million that were surplus in health premiums. If we have a need for those health premiums as we did in the long-term care, we can argue that this is an ideal place to look at that funding to be utilized. These are one-time funds though, so we have to be careful because these funds have to be used for certain initiatives. Wait time backlogs is another example which could be used. But it's not so much a policy as it's been more of a practice where that argument can be made because of additional funds.

We noted that in this past year we've had significant wait times, pressures in high-growth places like Fort McMurray. Some of those health care insurance premiums have come because of more Albertans coming forward. So we looked at the revenue, we asked for some consideration, and when we tabled the supplementary estimates, we asked for the consideration of government for use of those revenues to help us this year with access and wait times.

Now, in terms of the Aon report and other alternatives and innovation, other revenues that work in that category – as you note, the resource revenues weren't shown to rise. Other revenues were shown to rise. Other kinds of costs were shown to rise. I wouldn't say that we would get a clean bill of health from Alberta Finance about that, because in showing the reduction of revenues on the resource side, it may well be that those are not predictions that our government is willing to make, but those are predictions that Aon made. In questioning them myself, they said that regardless of what Alberta Finance or our own government would wish to make, they did a lot of work on it, international work and comparisons, and believed it was really a responsible reflection.

Then I look at John Lau's comments as the president of Husky, who said that he believes that we will have some constraints because of the lack of being able to attract a workforce up to Fort McMurray. Even if you talk to Ted LeLacheur in this community with his moving and cartage company, he's concerned about the reduction of able and available labour because of the draw for the larger projects, and it may well be that these are indicators that people like Aon are looking at to say: will we be able to sustain and maintain this high growth in the resource sector? You know that today, well, the streets look paved with gold up there or black liquid crude. You think, well, yes, it will happen, but we – at least I – have lived through times when the economy has bust before, so I'm assuming that when they look out 20 years from now and see the reduction there, it may only be in their view, but it really intrigued me.

4:30

I like the increase in other revenues because it's suggestive that we'll get more smart technology here. Only hindsight is 20/20, but when I look at that Aon report, the part that's concerning me most is that figure to 2016 because it is in the foreseeable future. It is something that concerns me, and I just have to look back at the last five years and see the doubling up of our health care costs without really doubling our population. I just reflect on the joys of being on Treasury Board and being reminded about how much we're increasing our budgets on a regular basis and thinking: is there another way to do it?

I'll tell you two things that I think, out of several. I think that there has to be a pan-Canadian strategy that acknowledges sustainability of health. I think it would be absolutely wonderful if health ministers and Premiers across this country and through the territories could actually agree that these were critical issues and these were ways to attack it. I think they've looked at it before in the light of transfer payments, but I don't know if it has been looked

at before in the way that we try and get Canadians to be educated on sustainability.

On the other end of it I think we should look at my belief that no child should have to wait for anything and try and focus on reducing wait times for children. Reducing wait times for everybody for absolutely everything would reduce all of those costs that are attributable to waiting and getting painkillers and getting prodded and poked and diagnosed so frequently and staying in hospital and waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting. I think that if we could evaluate the cost of wait time, it would be huge.

I think it will probably be beyond my term – if I look at this term of office that we have until the next election – before we really are able to achieve that business of no child waiting for everything because behavioural problems and psychological problems and mental health problems for children have been tolerated for so long that we have got a deficit in the number of psychiatrists and psychologists that can properly deal with those issues. The COPE program, that deals with adolescent behaviours and getting adolescents support earlier, is one of the things that gives me hope there, but we have to make a dedicated effort between schools and hospitals and communities to work together and recognize that everybody is responsible.

I'll go back to the time when I was a reeve and a municipal councillor, and I thought that that was the government's problem. Not ours, but the provincial government's problem. I thought that they should have to solve the problems because it would mean that they should give the money. But I think that when we have communities putting in curfews, we recognize that communities are beginning to recognize that a government that's under the dome way over there isn't going to do it at the local community level. So local communities in identification, in help for assessments, in building safe communities have a role to play. Beyond that, we have a role to play in educating.

This comes back to my point on the workforce, some clinical psychologists and psychiatrists to help us with the very real problem of children's mental health. I think that if we could have picked up that Fraser Mustard report and said across this country that we believe that the Mustard McCain report has the elements for making this society a healthier society, a more sustainable society, we'd have been a lot better off. To that end, we're working in this budget on the early childhood development focus along with other ministries, like Children's Services, who are trying to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have to observe that spending 135 minutes on a budget that has got over \$10 billion worth of expenses is not enough time.

A couple of cleanup issues I'd like to do. One is to go back to the issue of acute-care beds. I note that there are 2,000 new beds. How many of these new beds are in the city of Edmonton? I'm also wondering if any of these beds have been previously announced. This government is getting into a habit of constantly reannouncing things and adding on one new element. So of these 2,000 new beds, how many are going to Edmonton, and have any of them already been announced as part of any other initiative?

I'm wondering if the minister can outline what efforts both the department and the regional health authorities are taking to address the wait times for the city ambulances in the emergency departments. I had addressed a bit of that before.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

There's been some work done on acute-care beds in Edmonton and Calgary, and the numbers I'm working with – these came from the regional health authorities, by the way – say that in 1993 in Edmonton there were 2,807 long-term and acute-care beds. Today, Madam Minister, there are 2,084 long-term and acute-care beds. So my question is: how does the department justify decreasing the number of beds in Edmonton over the last 13 years when we've had a fairly significant increase in population, not to mention the other inflationary costs that are involved in that?

I will also note that that same astonishing decrease in acute-care and long-term care beds was not reflected in Calgary. They did have a small decrease but a very small decrease, nothing compared to what I've just outlined for the Edmonton area.

I think there's a lot of work to be done around the primary care networks. Specifically, what direction has the minister given to the primary care networks to offer additional supports to facilitate more efficient discharge from acute-care hospitals? We're better at doing that but not fully. How do the primary health care networks fit into picking up people that are being discharged from those acute-care beds?

The last question – a cleanup again on the emergency – is a notation that if the government had put sufficient resources and supports into place, the Edmonton taxpayers would not be paying the equivalent of four full-time equivalents' worth of staff to sit waiting in emergency. So I continue, with the assistance of my previous colleague, to push the minister on that. It's fairly alarming to watch what's happening both with ambulances and the emergency rooms and, further to that, the acute-care beds.

I want to go back to the primary care networks. I think there's great potential here, but I'm wondering if the minister is considering giving more specific direction to these networks. Part of my frustration in this is that they still seem to be doctor driven. Everybody takes a step back and goes: well, I can't really, you know, direct this. But the government can use the funding that they're giving to these primary care networks to direct policy, to make things happen as an incentive in some cases or as a disincentive in other cases.

When we go back and talk about the midwives, for example, there's nothing that requires those primary care networks to seriously consider putting a midwife in every region. Without clear direction from the government that that's what's expected, nobody's going to pick it up. I mean, they could use all of that money from a primary care network, you know, to hire a couple of nurse practitioners and call that it. So my frustration is starting to grow, that we're not actually seeing those teams integrating. The minister talked about acupuncturists and chiropractors. I'm talking about midwives. All of these are possibilities, but I don't really see it coming into place.

Part of that is: what criteria? I'm looking for what performance measurements have been set in place to measure the effectiveness of these primary care networks. By this time next year they will have been running for at least a year and in some cases much longer than that. How is the ministry going to measure the effectiveness of these specifically and address some of the issues that we've raised here around (a) can we get some of these other care professionals working to their full scope of practice, and (b) getting some of the variety of health care professionals we're looking for into those primary care networks?

4:40

Has the ministry considered any other options for primary care reform aside from the primary care networks? Please give me additional information on that. An example would be increasing the

number of community health centres. The three that I'm thinking of are the Boyle McCauley, the Alexander health centre in Calgary, and the Calgary Urban Project.

Still on primary care networks. What criteria did the ministry use in evaluating the applications to become a primary care network and receive funding for it? Also, were any of the applications or letters of intent declined?

Again with the performance measurements and the evaluation of the success of the projects. When could we expect a report that would be dealing with this? Included in that report, how are the primary care networks working in rural areas as compared to urban areas? What is the total cost of maintaining the primary care networks on an annual basis? What are the specific responsibilities for both the patients and the physicians that are participating in primary care networks? What is the code of expectations and responsibilities that is inherent? Are they signing a contract? Is there some laying out of the expectations?

Again, some discussion or acknowledgement from the minister around: we still have doctors as gatekeepers in the system here. Rather than doing what doctors do, we still have them as the central point, the gatekeeper, admitting who gets in and who gets out and who gets funding and who's included in the primary health care networks. Is that appropriate? Are they the most appropriate people to be driving that?

Health workforce. The minister did talk a little bit about that. I'm wondering about succession planning as we look to not only an aging of our population but an aging of our health workforce population. What programs are in place for recruitment of health professionals as part of succession planning for those that are expected to be retiring soon? Could I get some details, please, from the minister about exactly what programs she and the Minister of Advanced Education are working on around efforts to recruit and train health professionals? How many spaces or seats are being put in place or added to the health professional programs? What is the list? Does the ministry know how many health care professionals they will need five years out? Ten years out? What specifically is the goal for bringing in foreign-trained professionals and getting them accredited and certified and out and into our workforce? How many new ones are we looking at adding? The minister talked about potentially bringing in 300 Albertans who are out there at international medical schools, bringing them back in, but what's the number that you're looking at for those trained in other schools?

What was behind the decision to not increase the rural physician action plan? The minister mentioned that there was additional money put into the ARP, the alternate something, something, but what exactly is behind the decision not to increase specifically the rural physician action plan? Is the ministry considering any other programs to ensure that health professionals remain in the public sector?

The minister has talked a little bit about mental health, but I note that even though 1 in 5 Albertans will be affected by mental illness in their life, the government is only providing \$69 million in mental health promotion services and care. Perhaps I've missed something. Is there any other way that mental health services are being funded in the province? Does it come out of any other pot of money or any other ministry, or is that it?

How was the money used to ensure that appropriate supports are in place to transfer people from hospitals into the community? What exactly is the status of the mental health care plan that was announced in July 2005, Getting on with Better Health Care? Does it even exist yet? Is it available? What are the benchmarks that are in place there? What are the performance measurements? What are the anticipated outcomes? What are the dates that are attached to

that? What exactly are the steps involved in integrating mental health services into the overall health care system in the province?

What reports or standards or best practices are the RHAs using to develop local initiatives with the funding that's coming from the mental health innovation fund? How is the success of these initiatives to be measured to ensure that they are in fact improving services for the mentally ill? What plans for long-term funding are in place beyond the three-year, \$25 million mental health innovation fund? Or is that the end of it? That seems to be the case, but I'd like to know exactly what's being anticipated there. Is there funding for preventative mental health services, such as counselling and the development of community networks?

Closely connected to that is the issue of addictions. There's a lot of talk about helping addicts here. The minister talked about children waiting and waiting to get services. Well, especially around mental health services and addiction services, which are closely aligned, there are pitifully few addiction and detox beds to deal with this, and now we've got the new bill in place where children can be committed by their parents to be detoxed. Again, beyond that immediate five-day detox there are no addiction beds available for them. So questions on that.

Pharmaceuticals. The minister has talked about some things that she'd like to look at. She is suggesting that she would be working with the federal government. I mean, all of this is kind of an if, and it's all in the future. What concrete plans is the minister working with right now around pharmaceuticals and getting a national pharmacare program in place or getting an Alberta version of that in place?

We've talked a bit about aboriginal health and the cutbacks, a 23 per cent cut to aboriginal health strategies. I recognize that this is taking away the programs that the minister feels the federal government should be stepping up to the plate for. Will there be any replacement for any of these programs coming from any other department, or is it just: the feds had better pick it up?

Health care premiums. I have to differ with the minister. I heard her say yesterday that, you know, the health care premiums are somehow an insurance program. They're not. They're simply a tax. They have nothing to do with risk. They have nothing to do with actuarial tables. It's not; it's a flat tax. It's charged to everybody. It doesn't even go into a particular budget stream. It goes into general revenues. Again, is the minister considering eliminating what is a tax; that is, the health care premiums? Or am I hearing that those would in fact be increased? According to Aon, I think they were calling it prefunding or a surplus from the health care premiums, and any surplus realized would then be put in a separate pot to somehow offset increased costs in the future. Particularly odd.

Moving on, I was in Fort McMurray a month ago. A number of health issues arising out of that community, particularly around mental health services. Again, a great deal of stress being experienced by that community. There are not enough counsellors available, period. There are some private health ones, but the private health plans won't pay for services outside the area. The Canadian Mental Health Association is fielding over 50 calls a week that they forward to the nurse at the hospital, who refers them to the health line. It's just a terrible situation at the other end. There's such stress.

4:50

I've also heard a number of comments from Fort McMurray about how they really are in a position where they have to provide the infrastructure and the staffing to deal with a huge population, but they're only being funded based on the per capita that is official. So they're actually providing services for all the people in the camps,

but those people don't have a postal code in Fort McMurray. So the regional health authority is not receiving funding for those people, but they have to provide the services for them. What is the minister doing specifically to recognize the unique and unusual circumstances that Fort McMurray, in particular, is into, and what immediate help can they be expecting over the next three years? I think that they're a special case and that they should be treated that way.

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission budget is increasing by \$19 million, \$14 million being used to implement services for children abusing drugs. That's 20 residential beds. I talked a bit about this before with the addictions. I also note that the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy was reduced. Very frustrating when I hear the minister, you know, talking about people quitting smoking and recognizing the problems with teen smoking, and then we reduce the amount of money for the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy.

Now, I made a 20-minute presentation in here during the debate on the cancer legacy bill around power walls, and I'm asking the minister to make a commitment today to bring forward legislation that would ban power walls in Alberta. That's one very concrete step that we can take to reduce and, I hope, go a long way towards eliminating teenage smoking. If you go back and read my comments from *Hansard* that day, I was working with students from the Nellie McClung school in Oliver in my constituency, and they had done a number of statistical analyses and brought forward, you know, films and work done by others to show that those power walls – that is, that wall of cigarette packages that is at the point of sale, point of purchase – are closely associated in teenagers' and young people's minds with other things that they're allowed to have, which is the candy. They walk up, and below the counter is the candy and the gum, on the counter is the lottery tickets – I can't believe that – and then when they look up at the clerk, it's completely filled with cigarette packs advertising cigarettes. They've done studies to show that kids can name brands. They can name the brands of all the cigarettes. They can name the colours of the packages. And they don't smoke, or they're not supposed to.

So there's one simple thing that the minister could be doing, and I'd like to get a concrete answer from the minister about whether she will consider bringing forward legislation on eliminating power walls. That has been done in some of the other provinces very successfully. They can show the improvement rates. I encourage the minister to do that. Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nunavut, Quebec, Ontario, the Northwest Territories, and P.E.I. have all passed legislation to prohibit power walls. So I encourage you to follow that.

A few other financial questions. What accounted for the \$101.9 million increase to the support programs? What was included in that? Why the dramatic funding increase? Could we get a breakdown of the Standing Policy Committee on Health and Community Living? They received \$112,000. This is the committee that the opposition members are not allowed to attend. It appears to me that this is just a monster big lunch and dinner budget and should not be paid for from the provincial budget. It should be paid for from the caucus budget seeing as only Tory caucus members are allowed to attend. That's appearing as vote 1.0.12.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member opposite has asked more questions than Carter has pills. I don't know if I'll be able to cover much more than two or three, but I'd like to give two or three answers and then refer the rest. I think that particularly on bed capacity I have a lot of responses that I could give here. She's asked

for some very useful and detailed information, and I'd like to make sure that we don't short-sell that.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I cannot promise that the bed capacity announced last year, when we talked about an additional \$1.4 billion for health, hadn't been announced before because functional studies and planning for beds had been announced, and to that extent announcements had been made for some of the planning. I think that's been the difficulty. I know that thanks to Madam Treasurer and her initiative to try and make sure that we fund things in a way that acknowledges both capital and operating expense and that we don't announce things and keep doing it over and over again, we'll see changes in the policies that will be delivered as program ministries become more and more responsible.

The projects that were announced on October 14, 2005, an estimated 665 acute care beds and 85 long-term care beds, will be built. The capital projects in the Capital health region will deliver 459 additional acute care beds and 100 additional long-term care beds. In short, we can give a detailed breakdown on that, but I think that a better way to do that, because of the long-range view that has been acknowledged by the hon. member, is to reach back, to look some years back – and we'll get the Blues – and record just exactly what happened to show that difference over a period of time.

I would like to comment on the remarks about the Alberta health care insurance program because although the hon. member has referenced it as a tax, when you talk to actuaries, they say that it is a public insurance program. It has all the earmarks of accountability on deductibility, on delinquent accounts and collections. It is unique in that the premiums collected, obviously, do not cover all the costs attributable to the program like other insurance programs do, and Albertans are all entitled to receive the supports and are not denied services on their inability to pay, but premiums collected in Alberta are a contribution against health care costs.

A public insurance program of any kind is still defined as some form of insurance program because of the way it's managed. It is not managed, as many taxes are, on the supports for a given number or an expanded number of service deliveries. That was my reference yesterday, and I was sure that sooner or later somebody was going to ask me about that because people do like to think of it as a tax and not necessarily as an insurance plan. But for our legislative purposes and for the way it's used, it is considered and collected very much like an insurance plan.

I'd like to just talk a little bit about the primary care networks and offer to the hon. member that we will get more criteria relative to how these are formed. They are very much a negotiated circumstance, but I do tend to agree with your observation that in many respects they are doctor driven because the doctors are still part of the lead role in managing and executing those agreements. That is why to a large extent our policy on a patient-centred, patient-delivered, and patient-focused approach was the number one policy in our health policy framework, Mr. Chair. We believe that that emphasis would de-emphasize the tendency to operate the health care system in support of doctors without due regard for the patient-centred approach that we hope will be a part of the way the future of our system will look.

There were many questions that I'm going to reference about the use of paramedics in the delivery of patients to emergencies and the overlap when there was not sufficient staff to triage those patients. There have been unique circumstances in that intensive flu season that, I agree, saw the management challenged, particularly when more than one set of paramedics were accompanying patients in a

hospital. Capital health, when I spoke with them, advised me that they had been looking at and hoping to implement the use of paramedics who were there for the purposes of delivering a patient and, if another team arrived, to use if possible just one set of paramedics and release the other ambulance, or other two ambulances in some instances, so that there was not a situation where there were several people tied up accompanying several ambulances.

5:00

We have had challenges in both Calgary and Edmonton with the code burgundies and code reds, and we will be looking at the deployment of the emergency services staff within those hospitals in conjunction with how the regional health authorities bring back their management strategies on this. But if I may, Mr. Chairman, there are such differences in the way ambulance providers, contract providers or staff providers, have conducted themselves that it has been partly that that has contributed to the long-term review by the ambulance advisory committee and how most successfully to do it. Different labour agreements in this city, for example, have been extremely different than some of the regional providers in the area. So we've got a lot of work to do to see whether we can do that in a way that can be complementary to the needs of the municipalities as well.

Several questions on the mentally ill. Several questions on addictions. I would just point out that in the Getting On with Better Health Care document, released last July, many of these strategies that related to some of the other questions of the member, including work on the aboriginal focus, were contained.

I will get more detailed information on Fort McMurray. Last fall, I believe November and December, we were hearing that the Northern Lights board would run out of money. That did not happen. They did not run out of money before Christmas. We did have some opportunity to provide them some supplementary funding with the in-year budgets of the Health and Wellness department. We note that if we challenge people to deal with their initiatives, they can often come up with very innovative solutions. I'm very optimistic about the new CEO that has taken charge in Northern Lights, for example. You may have read recently that that CEO compelled six physicians who were late with their charting to get on with getting those charts in place and did in effect suspend privileges until they were caught up with their charts. Four have now caught them up. What I really like is that in terms of patient safety there is a lot of due diligence that's going on there that we should applaud and encourage because we can do better with it.

I'm also going to advise the hon. member opposite that three regions have had efficiency audits that we have done. Now those efficiency audits are in the hands of those boards and CEOs, and I think we'll see some work that will enable us to determine how the regions have been accountable on some of these initiatives and, hopefully, improve.

Mr. Chairman, all of the other questions on how we help with integrating mental health programs in the future I think I'll leave to written responses so that there's some opportunity for the hon. members opposite to continue their questions in the time we have left.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. A few follow-up questions. I'm wondering: the minister has talked quite a bit about holding consultations but without getting sort of specific. The more cynical side of my brain is thinking: oh, yeah, I've seen this one before. The government announces it'll do consultations and then does them

over the summer when nobody's available. They don't give enough time for people to alert their membership to come out. So I'd like to get some sort of firm commitment from the minister as to what her timetable on consultation is. Will she advertise it publicly well in advance, so groups can get prepared? Will they be open to the public or just to an invited group? I'd encourage it to be public and, of course, to consider doing it outside of the summer months, when people are more available.

The hip and knee project that was done here in Alberta that we all are so impressed with, the times. I've heard that there's been some request to the minister that she allow this project to continue but as a half public, half private scenario. I'd like to get some assurances from her that that would not be how that project would proceed but also that the other projects that are being considered – we're now referring to the mammographies and a number of other areas that would be modelled in the same way – would not be modelled in anything other than in a public system.

The electronic health records. I'm aware that there was set-up money that was given to the doctors' offices to help them move onto this system. I'm wondering whether this seed money to help establish it will become ongoing operational money for these doctors, or is there a cut-off for it? I think there was a cut-off date, and the doctors are now saying that they're either not ready or now need a different kind of computer or a bigger computer. I also continue to be concerned with the minister allowing development of different kinds of operating systems for the electronic health networks. So I'd like some comment on that, please.

I'm wondering if there has been any discussion or any proposals or considerations for off-budget spending that's happened thus far. The minister is looking at me strangely, Mr. Chairman, but honestly we have heard other ministers discussing off-budget spending, and we haven't even passed the budget. So I'm putting that one on the record for an answer.

I'm wondering whether the minister has done any work with her colleague from Environment around health and water issues. We've got more and more calls every day coming from people worried about the quality of their water, the effect of some of our natural resource development and production on water sources. We still don't know how much water we've got under the ground although we know how much above ground. What plans are happening there? I think there needs to be a stronger tie between health and how that could be affected, which would include adopting something like the Liberal proposal for the health impact assessment so that we wouldn't get any legislation coming forward unless we'd already considered how it might impact the short- and long-term health of the people in the province.

The workforce planning. We haven't tracked our workers to date, so we don't really know where they are now. What is being anticipated or being put in place now to track where our workers are? What can be done? Edmonton has done the health tracking for the overall population. Is that being done across all of the regions with the support of the ministry?

I'm hoping I can give a few minutes more to my other colleague. [interjection] Oh, he's waiting. Okay. Excellent. Thank you.

I'm going back to the numbers that the minister gave me on the long-term care. So the \$83 million that she laid out, I'm understanding, is \$5 million from 2004, \$10 million from 2005-06, \$26 million that was put in in '05-06, giving us \$41 million, and then the \$42 million that's in this year's budget. That accounts. So we're going all the way back to 2004 to pull that \$5 million from there. I find that a little odd.

Just an observation. I hear the minister say one thing, but then she seems to be proposing things that run counter to that. You know, an awful lot of her opening remarks were spent on how unsustainable

the system is. That's mirroring what was coming forward in the Aon report, but frankly the Aon report figures are not believable. I mean, they've got the heritage trust fund disappearing out of existence, I think, within six years. It's just not realistic. And natural resource revenue would go down from \$12 billion to \$6 billion. We haven't seen that yet in history. Our resource revenue continues to go up, so what would make them all of a sudden decide it was going down? Then they've got the costs increasing by extraordinary amounts. It doesn't seem to take into consideration any attempts at prevention or wellness or any successes in any of that at all. So a lot of attention being spent on how unsustainable the system is.

Then she talks about things like how important mental health is, but we can't get the actual connection where the funding is transferred into those areas to support the successful transition of people from institutions or from programs and into the community. We know how to do this. It's out there. There are lots of best practices we could be adopting, but we're not doing it. We're not transferring the funds.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry. Could you just explain? You said that we didn't start this until 5:15.

The Deputy Chair: We finish at 5:12 on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. We have to report back to the Assembly by 5:15. That's the Standing Order.

Are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$10,289,506,000
Capital Investment	\$32,056,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to report the vote carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:13 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Brown	Goudreau	McClellan
Calahasen	Graydon	Melchin
Cao	Haley	Prins
Cardinal	Hancock	Renner
Coutts	Jablonski	Rogers
Danyluk	Johnston	Stelmach
DeLong	Knight	Tarchuk

Doerksen
 Ducharme
 Evans
 Forsyth

Liepert
 Lukaszuk
 Mar

VanderBurg
 Webber
 Zwozdesky

Against the motion:
 Blakeman
 Mason

Mather

Miller, R.

Totals:

For – 31

Against – 4

[Motion to report the vote carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report the estimates for the Ministry of Alberta Health and Wellness.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$10,289,506,000; capital investment, \$32,056,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been an incredible week of great progress. On that note, I would therefore move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until Monday at 1:30.

[Motion carried; at 5:28 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 1, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/01

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of the Legislature. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and to the visitors with us today, we'll now participate in the singing of our national anthem, and we'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Would you all please participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Well, I think I can safely say that Mr. Lorieau is pumped.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Scott and Janice Johnston. They are in your gallery, I believe. Scott and Janice are constituents of mine, living in Edmonton-Whitemud, but members here will know them in their roles as members of the local media, with 630 CHED and CBC respectively. While they're extremely busy reporting on the hot stories of the day, their more important role is in the raising of and being parents to a young leader in this province. Yes, they are parents to none other than our page Samantha Johnston, and the time they share with Samantha is very special to them. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed a pleasure to introduce a constituent of mine. Mr. Karl Ryll is a tireless volunteer with the Caernarvon Community League in Edmonton and pretty soon, probably to our Solicitor General's delight, if things go well will be serving in EPS, protecting us here in Edmonton. I would ask Karl Ryll, who already is standing, to receive the traditional welcome of all members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of students from Medicine Hat Christian school. They're with their vice-principal, Mr. Shade Holmes, and his wife, Gail.

This is the first school that I've had an opportunity to introduce since I was elected. This grade 6 class was the lucky winner of a trip to our province's capital to take part in our School at the Legislature. Access: The Education Station and Canadian Learning Television sponsor a school from northern Alberta, north-central Alberta, central and southern Alberta to attend the School at the Leg. program. The school's transportation to the capital as well as accommodation costs during their stay in Edmonton are covered by Access and CLT. The program includes a guided tour of the Legislature, a chance to observe the members of the House in action, as they are doing this afternoon, and much, much more. School at the Leg. is a wonderful program, and I hope these students enjoy their Legislature experience.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the students and their vice-principal from the Medicine Hat Christian school to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, who has 67 school visitors today from the Lacombe Christian school. It would be great to have him here. Because of his Dutch heritage he could probably pronounce these names better than I, but I'll do my best. They're led by their teachers Mr. Tim VanDoesburg, Mrs. Stephanie Littel, Mrs. Willeke Kraay, Mrs. Charlene Gallagher, and by parent helpers Mr. Bernie Kolkman, Mr. Andrew Zuidhof, Mrs. Vivian Kooyman, Mrs. Anita Swier, Mr. Troy Ogle, Mrs. Jeanne Ebens, Mrs. Dana Van Gyssel, Mrs. Janet Noordhof, Mrs. Louise Macleod, Mrs. Mirjke Kleinlugtenbeld, Mrs. Lyda Stijter, Ms Gerlinda VanGinkel, and their bus driver, Mr. Nick Den Oudsfen. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today, the first being a group of intelligent and energetic and very inquisitive students from St. Augustine school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. There are altogether 43 students, I believe, as well as teachers/ leaders Mrs. Lidstone and Mr. Tran and a parent helper, Mrs. Beth Williams. I think they're in either one or both of the galleries. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

In my second set of introductions, Mr. Speaker – I don't think I need notes for this one – I'd like to welcome back to the Assembly on a return visit my parents, Art and Barbara Miller. They've been away in Arizona, and they're back now that the snow has gone. Making their first visit to the Alberta Legislature are my dad's brother Ernie Miller and his son Helmut, my uncle and my cousin. I'd ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 18 students from Coronation school in my constituency. They're accompanied by their teacher, Ms Arlyn Belden, and a parent, Mrs. Darlene Elias. They're in the members' gallery, I believe. I would ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

I'm also pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House my wife, Rhea Jansen, who is behind me in the members' gallery. You know, my wife comes from a family of 12 children, and it must be said that the in-laws are really the spice of the family, so it gives me great pleasure to introduce my brother-in-law, Gus Van Soelen, who is from Wellandport, Ontario. I'd invite them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. I'm very delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Kelly and Tyra Hennig. Kelly and Tyra are residents of my constituency and have lived in Lauderdale for the past 10 years. Kelly works as a teacher and an administrator for the Head Start program. He remains active in his constituency and the broader Edmonton community through his work as a professional and volunteer. Tyra works with families dealing with domestic violence at the Edmonton Women's Shelter and has been doing so for the past six years. They're both seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them now to rise and please receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Leith and Kirstin Cardinal. Leith was born and raised here in Alberta and has been working in the financial industry for the past five years. Kirstin is a second-year commerce student at Grant MacEwan College. Together they are the proud parents of their young son, who is going to be an Edmonton Oiler someday. They, too, are seated in the members' gallery, I believe, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

head: 1:40

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Sale of Progressive Conservative Party Memberships

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend the Member for Strathcona attended a walk in St. Albert organized to raise money for the Multiple Sclerosis Society. While there, the Member for Strathcona handed out brochures – I'll table copies of them – urging Albertans with disabilities to buy a \$5 PC Party membership so that they can select the new leader of the PC Party and, I quote from the brochure, "make a difference." The Member for Strathcona is also the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. My first question is to the Premier. Does the Premier approve of the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities using his position to sell Progressive Conservative Party memberships?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken to the hon. Member for Strathcona about this issue, and I suspected that it would be raised in the Legislature. His answer at the time was that persons with disabilities ought to be included in the political process, and this is simply a way for them to be included.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: is it the position of this

government that the only way the interests of persons with disabilities will be heard in this province is if they buy memberships in the PC Party, which is what this says?

Mrs. Fritz: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier indicated, the Member for Strathcona is very – well, in fact, he's just outstanding as the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. His approach, I would understand, is very much for full inclusion and that people with developmental disabilities should not be left out of any process in any way. I mean, I wasn't at this walk that you're referring to, but I know that whatever did occur at the walk was done in the best interests of persons that were involved.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then back to the Premier: will the Premier stop the chair of his council on persons with disabilities from using his position to sell PC Party memberships, and if not, does anything go then, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Klein: Well, I don't know if anything goes. You know, Mr. Speaker, I harken back to the last leadership campaign. There were many, many Liberals and NDs who bought memberships. Many, many. As a matter of fact, I recall one Liberal buying a membership for one of my nomination meetings and then ripping it up in front of the person who sold it and saying, "I won't need this anymore" and throwing it back at her.

The Speaker: We will have a tabling later.

Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Resource Revenues

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Aon report presented last week portrays a bleak fiscal picture for Alberta's future under this regime. In a report designed to scare Albertans about the sustainability of the public health care system, Aon has confirmed that this government has absolutely no long-term fiscal plan. By 2025 the government is projecting to collect half the current amount of resource revenues and only a fraction of today's investment income. To the Minister of Finance: given that the projections in the Aon report are based on information from Alberta Finance, is it this government's position that resource revenues will decrease by half between now and 2025?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, let's set the record straight on what the Aon report did say. I read it; I think many of you in this room read it. What it said is that if we continue on the spending track that we're on, we would be in very serious positions.

Some Hon. Members: Revenue.

Mrs. McClellan: The opposition are saying: "Revenue. Revenue." They haven't figured out yet that there's a correlation between revenue and expenditures, and it's this government's view that you should have more revenue than you have expenditures.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll give the minister a second chance with the same question. Given that the projections in the

Aon report are based on Alberta Finance information, is it this government's position that resource revenues will decrease by half by 2025, which is what the report says?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it is our view that they certainly could, and that is why each year we have a very prudent forecast for energy revenues and why this government under the leadership of this Premier created a sustainability fund that would be there to cushion any variations in that. I'm on record as saying that I believe that the sustainability fund should grow. I'm on record along with my colleagues here as saying that we should increase our savings. Our budget indicated how we are increasing those savings, whether it's through endowments or whether it's through adding to the sustainability fund or to the heritage fund. We also know that the fiscal policies of this government are creating opportunities in this province that will increase our revenue from both corporate and personal taxes without raising those tax rates; in fact, lowering them.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Finance and again drawing on the Aon report: given that the projections in there, based on her department's information, forecast the decline of the heritage fund, is it indeed the expectation of this government that the heritage fund is in long-term decline?

Mrs. McClellan: No, it isn't, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we began inflation-proofing the heritage fund two budgets ago. Then in the third quarter of last year we added \$1 billion to the fund, and in the budget this year we added another billion dollars. We've made it clear that when it is possible, we're going to continue to increase that so that it is of benefit to this province over the future.

Mr. Speaker, you can read reports. You can spin out what you want from them. We gave Aon the very best information we had, obviously, not trying to hide absolutely anything. What it speaks to is responsible fiscal management, and this government has a record of that.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Labour Issues

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Go, Oilers, go.

Seriously, May 1, May Day, is a traditional day to honour workers world-wide. In Alberta this government has worked to weaken labour laws. It has a poor record of labour support and development. Retention, getting workers to stay longer and put down roots in our Alberta, is a long-lasting and increasing problem. Many things can be done. Many things should be done. My question is to the Minister of Finance. As the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said in this House in 2001, "It's a long overdue bill," why has this government not proclaimed Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Credit) Amendment Act, from that year, 2001?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will proclaim that act in due course, in due time if it's the most appropriate way to reduce taxes for our consumers.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the minister of human resources: to fix some labour law to stop a replay

of what happened at Lakeside last year, will the minister push for first contract arbitration and impose arbitrated first contracts under existing laws in the meantime?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Go, Oilers, go.

I've said before, Mr. Speaker, that 99.9 per cent of the collective agreements in Alberta are in place without any labour disruption. As long as that process continues, then why would you want to make changes?

Mr. Backs: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will you encourage low-income workers to stay in Alberta by mandating a regular annual review of our minimum wage so that these workers can expect an increase sometime before 2012?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. In the hot economy, the thousands of jobs in Alberta there are very, very few people that work for even close to the minimum wage.

Mr. Renner: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Health Care Spending

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Aon report contains very scary scenarios about health spending eating up the provincial budget over the next 20 years, including draining the heritage fund. However, the NDP opposition analysis, based on 20-year actual historical averages, shows that average health spending increases are much lower than those cooked up by Aon Consulting at the behest of this Conservative government. I'll table that at the appropriate time. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why would Aon project an 8.4 per cent annual increase in health spending over the next 20 years when the actual spending increase in the last 20 years has been a much lower 6 per cent per year if not to scare people into accepting more private health care?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, for the last six years the spending has increased by over 9 per cent on average. One year it was over 14 per cent. It's been 13 and a half per cent. The track record in the most recent past has shown that the incredible rises in the costs of technology, new procedures, new ways of doing things, and in the drug costs have inflated much more than they ever have. I should also point out that Aon, unfettered by the views of politicians and the people on this bench, provided their actuarial analysis based on the kinds of work that they do. They're professionals at it. They took the figures that we provided, and they took a look at what we've been doing in health care and the track record not only in Alberta but in other parts of Canada, and they are all very strong indications of increase.

Mr. Mason: She who pays the piper calls the tune, Mr. Speaker. Unless this government is prepared to lay all its cards on the table, including tabling the Aon model with its supposed 400 variables,

why shouldn't Albertans dismiss Aon's financial projections as being nothing more than an attempt to frighten Albertans into accepting an expanded role for private delivery of health care service?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm really intrigued by the fact that, number one, we chose not to use the information that we had looked at in terms of any kinds of world-wide demonstrations of private/public payer for health. We looked at that through the Aon report, and it said that there was no advice to increase any private insurance. So we said we weren't going to do it. Number two, we invited all members of this Assembly – and the member, thankfully, chose to attend – when Aon presented it. Number three, I think that the real question is this: why are we so afraid to look at this last five- and six-year track record of health care spending and continue to think that this might extend itself over the next five or six years? We are aging; we know that. We are seeing more technology; we know that. So for the hon. members opposite to say, "Well, why are we trying to do something that would appear to be out of the ordinary or frighten people?" – we're not trying to frighten people. We are actually telling people that the reality is that we're spending more, we're growing older, that there are more things to spend our money on, and we'd better be careful.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the minister admit that the reason the government has spent so much on health care in the last few years is that they're still trying to make up for the cuts of the mid-90s, which devastated our health care system?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, if that were the case, you'd have to look at the fact that today we're spending over \$400 more for every man, woman, and child than they are anywhere else in Canada and say: is that the case across all of Canada, that somehow we have all gone into a nosedive on expenses? In fact, our health care, when you get into the system, is doing better than it is in many other parts of Canada. We have had consistent reports that the Capital health authority, for example, has the best health care delivery system in Canada. So for the hon. member opposite to try and suggest otherwise is just not the case.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has put in place a \$755 million grains and oilseeds program from which Alberta farm producers can receive funding, but getting that funding means that Ottawa has to receive the CAIS information it needs from this province and other provinces to start processing payments. My understanding is that there has been a delay from Alberta, which means that some producers aren't receiving their money. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can the minister explain how this delay could have happened and why some producers have received cheques under this program and others are still waiting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. There is some good news in this, and that is that roughly 18,000

producers in Alberta have received their funding under the grains and oilseeds payment program, or GOPP. The delay for some producers and all corporation farms in the province – in other words, farms that have been incorporated, not that they're not owned by families or anything – is due to the requirement for supplementary information from files that were held by the Ag Financial Services Corporation. It was very detailed information, and from the time when the original request came in from the federal government to essentially go in and pick this information out of our files, it took a little while, about eight weeks, to get that information together in a format that the federal government payment processing system would be able to recognize and use. I have to say, too, that this was really a very big problem in provinces like ours that manage the CAIS program themselves. Included in that would have been Ontario and Quebec and, potentially, Prince Edward Island as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. Can producers who didn't participate in CAIS expect to receive a federal payment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the short answer to that question is yes, they can. If you participated in the CAIS program in 2004, you're automatically going to be involved in the federal program if you had net sales and if you qualified under the criteria which they've set out. But producers who are not participating in CAIS or who began farming in 2005 would have to submit a grains and oilseeds payment program application by the end of May. That application form, as I understand it, is available on the Ag Canada website. Producers should be aware that there are deadlines and there is information that needs to be submitted to the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What other supports have been made available to our struggling grains and oilseeds producers?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had that question or a similar question in this House this spring because this spring has shown that we do have a crisis in agriculture, and that's in our grains and oilseeds sector. We're trying to address the short-term needs by doing things like the reference margin pilot project, which we did last fall, which is adding over \$224 million into the farming economy in our province. That's not available anywhere else in Canada, just in Alberta. We've also raised the revenue insurance coverage for prices by 7 per cent to help offset some of those rising input costs. Again, that's not available anywhere else in Canada. Finally, we also did a 20 per cent decrease to the production insurance premiums, again only in Alberta, not anywhere else in Canada. Going forward, we're looking at a number of ways that we might be able to look at the long-term survivability, the long-term profitability of our agricultural sector because it's important for them, but it's also important for rural Alberta.

2:00

Tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, we have the federal budget, as I understand it. We are waiting to see what is going to be in that budget so that we can react appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Sale of Surplus Land in Fort McMurray

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The incompetence of the department of infrastructure regarding the sale of surplus government land continues. The land speculators continue to cash in at the expense of taxpayers. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Was the real sale price for 157 acres of surplus land sold in Fort McMurray on May 16, 2005, \$2,800 as listed twice in the *Alberta Gazette*, the official public record of this Progressive Conservative government?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, the information that I have is that the \$2,800 was for 46.33 acres. The fact is that I don't have the information on whether it was serviced land: all of that kind of detail that makes a big difference on the appraised value of a piece of property.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why was the sale price in the *Alberta Gazette* \$2,800 when documents at the land titles office indicate that this land was sold for \$2,800,000? Why the big difference?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether the member has got the same land and whether there's a mistake in the decimal point. I don't know, but I certainly will take that under advisement, and we'll investigate what the difference is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, for the record, this \$2,800 number has been in the *Alberta Gazette* since last July. To the same minister. If this land was sold for \$2,800,000, that works out to \$17,800 per acre. Why was that land sold for that amount when the government only weeks later set a \$50,000 per-acre price in Fort McMurray? Why has that land been sold so cheap?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my answer to the last question, we'll have to investigate further. I don't have the benefit of the land titles information. I'm not sure that he's talking about the same parcel. We will undertake to investigate, and we will get back to the member on the discrepancy if there is any.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the government of Canada announced that an agreement has been reached with the United States on the end of the softwood lumber dispute. For all the positive response from other lumber-producing provinces on the end of a 25-year disagreement the best the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations could say is that he is cautiously optimistic. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can he explain what he is concerned about?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, there are two concerns that are my chief concerns in the matter regarding softwood lumber. First of all, I want to say that we don't have a deal on softwood lumber yet. What we do have at this point is a framework that will be the basis for creating a deal. So this is just the first step in developing a final legal text that will finally bring this dispute to an end. The second of my concerns is that the agreement that we're working on is not free trade; it is about managed trade. Alberta and Canada still face potential limits on our share of the U.S. market and the possibility that export taxes will be put in place if lumber prices fall and if we exceed our historic market share.

We do need an end to this dispute. This framework, if it moves forward into a final legal text, will give us one. Industry will get back at least \$4 billion of its duty deposits, and there will be no further U.S. trade cases during the time that this agreement is set in place, which is currently set at seven years and can be reopened for an additional two years beyond that. The Alberta government, Mr. Speaker, will continue to work with all parties involved to try and move forward on the final text.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first and only supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is this deal good for Alberta lumber producers?

Mr. Coumts: Mr. Speaker, the United States is a significant market for Alberta forest product manufacturers, and for many of them it's their biggest single market. Negotiated agreements are not perfect, and this particular proposed settlement is no different. This framework would give certainty of access to the U.S. markets, certainty of the export rules. Alberta has about 7 per cent of the Canadian exports into the United States, so some stability and predictability for that 7 per cent is something that is good for us, on which we can operate. Also, we have stakeholders from small mills to large mills to secondary manufacturers, and this framework agreement would affect each one of them differently. Some of the members of our industry are raising concerns over certain aspects of the agreement and rightly so, given their varied interests.

I met with our industry last week, Mr. Speaker. We're working very, very closely with them to review this agreement and identify some of the areas and address some of the concerns that they have, and we will continue to work with them.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Arts and Culture Funding

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition has been very vocal in urging this government to recognize the value of the arts sector in Alberta. Unfortunately, this government's track record is very, very disappointing. Despite being the wealthiest province in Canada, the Alberta government is consistently ranked among the worst supporters of arts and culture in the nation. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. What will the new minister do to improve upon this government's poor history of funding for the arts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated during estimates last week in regard to arts funding from the Ministry of Community Development, Alberta's arts community has grown at an incredible rate. Recognizing this, the government of Alberta has allocated an additional \$3 million in funding for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in this year's budget. The new funding is going to be allocated to priorities outlined in the foundation's strategic plan and will support existing clients and services in arts creation and production, arts promotion, arts participation, and art collection and display. Last week during estimates I also indicated to the member that I was looking very much forward to being able to meet with all the different arts communities within the province in the near future to be able to have further discussions as to what can be done to increase funding for them into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is the minister considering further restricting the sources and types of grants that the arts community can receive?

Mr. Ducharme: At this point in time, hon. member, I have not had an opportunity, being new to this ministry. As I indicated, I will be meeting with the groups. As far as the distribution, I know that it's a percentage of the funds that go out to each of the groups. We will be looking forward in terms of meeting with them to have further discussions on the allocations.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: will the minister commit today to once again making arts and culture funding a top priority for this ministry?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, funding for the arts and culture, the different departments that are responsible, is always a priority for the government of Alberta. Basically, this year there is a total expenditure going out to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in the neighbourhood of a little less than \$23 million. It may be not enough dollars in terms of what everyone is asking for, but hopefully we can strike the right balance with all the different communities in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Chronic Wasting Disease Control

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. At this time of year many hunters are making plans for the coming season and are getting ready for the hunting draws that take place starting June 1. I'm receiving calls from hunters in my constituency asking about further hunting opportunities. Can the minister tell us if he will be using recreational hunters instead of government resources to control the spread of CWD in southeast Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta provides a wide range of outstanding hunting and fishing opportunities across this province. Last year we increased the numbers of resident hunter tags in the chronic wasting disease controlled areas, and that's from Lloydminster all the way down to the hon. member's riding, Cypress-Medicine Hat, and I can guarantee this hon. member that we will be expanding on this program again this year. We find

it a particularly useful technique to deal with wildlife management problems. However, we do need government staff to effectively reduce the deer populations in targeted areas as well. So we're seriously committed to making sure that we can control this disease that could have an effect on 400,000 wild deer in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Again to the same minister. I understand that the CWD winter management program in southeast Alberta just wrapped up. Can the minister provide more of an update and tell us why this program is so important?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, the results of the controlled program confirm that our aggressive response is justified. We had collected almost 1,700 wild deer along the Saskatchewan border, nine of which tested positive for chronic wasting disease. That brings the provincial total to 13 since 2005. These positive cases show that we have caught it at an early stage, and that's important. We have to be diligent in our efforts, and we can be successful in eliminating chronic wasting disease from this area. Big game hunting contributes about \$110 million to this province, and that's why we must continue with this aggressive approach.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Highway Traffic Enforcement by Sheriffs

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the end of June the six-month pilot project utilizing sheriffs for highway traffic enforcement will be finished, and then supposedly the RCMP and the province will evaluate this program and determine its effectiveness and then decide whether it should be expanded. However, the Solicitor General has recently stated that his department received \$4.6 million to hire more sheriffs to patrol Alberta highways. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the minister tell us why he is already planning to hire more sheriffs before the end of the pilot project and before a complete evaluation of the program has been completed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and go, Flames, go.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora raises a very good point regarding the provincial sheriffs, regarding the budget allocation that we received in Solicitor General and Public Security this spring and, as well, the estimates that we'll be deliberating this Thursday afternoon. The pilot project is very positive with the results we've seen thus far. The number of summonses that have been written regarding stop signs, speeding, no seat belts – those are issues that we want to deal with, and those have been the major causes of fatal accidents in this province over the last number of years, where we've had 400 fatalities per year. We want to see those numbers go down. When we look at providing this program into Alberta and look at those highways that are killer highways and those hot spots where we have to provide more enforcement, these officers have already proven in the three and a half months, almost four months that they've been involved in the program to be very successful, and we have received numerous e-mails from individuals saying that the program is working very well.

Dr. B. Miller: Will this minister assure this House that he will not expand the program unless he has complete endorsement by the RCMP and other municipal police services, and will he release the results of the evaluation publicly?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, as the pilot project moves forward, yes, we are evaluating it. A senior officer from the Calgary Police Service has been seconded to our department to begin the review which, in fact, starts today. He'll be working on that over the next number of weeks. We'll be bringing, obviously, that information back to our ministry to determine what the real effects of the program have been and where we want to look in the future.

The McDermid report, which authored the traffic safety plan and the vision 2010 project, recommended 83 officers, Mr. Speaker. We're looking at adding another 42 officers. The issues are where, when, how, looking at infrastructure issues. But we will be.

Dr. B. Miller: Given that this government reads reports of the Fraser Institute as the gospel and that one of their recent reports recommended the replacement of the RCMP by an Alberta police force, will the minister assure this House and all the residents of Alberta who value the RCMP and their dedication to service that he will not replace them with sheriffs?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, I met with Commissioner Zaccardelli Thursday night in Ottawa, and I reassured him as well as every RCMP member across this country that our contract with the RCMP is in place until 2012. We are preparing for negotiations with Canada, as are eight of the other 10 provinces and the three territories in this country. We are doing a value-for-dollar study on the RCMP and the PPSA, the provincial police service agreement, to ensure that when we enter negotiations with Canada, we're going to be fully prepared and look at what the citizens of this province want both municipally and in the rural areas.

So, yes, the RCMP are aware of the sheriff program. They're aware of the sheriff pilot project. They're aware of where we want to move in the future regarding traffic enforcement. They have the opportunity to complement the RCMP by providing this level of service regarding enforcement. Education is required. It is needed. We will work with the RCMP on a partnership.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Caldor, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

CO₂ Capture and Sequestration

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province desperately needs to clarify to the public what its intentions are regarding CO₂ capture and sequestration. Shell Canada, with its first-quarter profits in the range of \$447 million, would like to capture and inject CO₂ into geological formations to enhance oil recovery and would like public funds to help them do it. They imply that this is a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, even though this is not necessarily true. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that Shell Canada's profits last year exceeded \$2 billion, will the minister rule out the possibility of offering public money to assist in building CO₂ capture and injection systems for this or any other corporation?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we have actually been working with industry conceptually on a CO₂ pipeline for enhanced oil recovery. We have challenged industry to bring forward a business case for this, ensuring that we can recover sufficient quantities of oil, that clearly there would be an uptake for the province on royalties.

Those things should be on commercial terms. That's how we approach industry. I find it ironic in some respects that on one side you get the pressure from the same opposition members about climate change and so forth, asking the federal government to continue to put in lots of money, compelling the governments to have to solve the climate change question with government monies, and on other hand saying: keep us out.

Mr. Eggen: I didn't say that, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the development of CO₂ capture and sequestration systems would be a huge undertaking costing billions of dollars, wouldn't it make more sense to invest at least as much time, labour, and money in ways to actually conserve fuel and develop renewable energy systems?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, conservation of energy is always a very good stewardship issue for all of us. As users of all energy we'd be wise to take the best means and time to reduce our consumption of energy and to be efficient in that. So the industry itself is very much proactive in investing in technology and equipment to be more efficient in their use of energy. All of us would be wise to take that approach.

That said, I'm still quite curious, given the pressure that comes from the opposition parties, about their stance on Kyoto. Are they going to continue to push the federal government for us to have to put in all the dollars that he's all of a sudden opposed to?

Mr. Eggen: Injection for oil recovery is different from keeping it in the ground for CO₂ storage.

Instead of giving energy corporations a pointless tax break in an otherwise already overheated economy, why wouldn't the minister consider a modest increase in the royalty rates to perhaps help pay for schemes that actually achieve CO₂ reduction?

Mr. Melchin: I'm not quite certain of this one. So all of a sudden we're supposed to increase royalties so somehow we can take that money to put into the schemes that he's opposed to our putting it into. I'm not clear on his objectives there. I'd like to know, actually, even with respect to climate change, are they or are they not opposed to the previous federal government's push towards setting aside a billion dollars for things like carbon dioxide sequestration? In our instance we are challenging industry to look at — there's already one commercial pipeline that we were at not that long ago that was put on with no government money. They've captured carbon dioxide off at the Joffre plant, and they're putting it into some oil fields. It's a technology that works, and with the price I think industry will find greater success.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:20 Employment Opportunities for Foreign Students

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the federal government announced that international postsecondary students in our province will now be allowed to work off campus. With businesses across Alberta in desperate need of workers this is great news for our province. It will not only help fill some of the immediate job vacancies out there; it would also make it more likely that foreign students will decide to stay long-term in our province and put their skills and training to work in our communities. My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education. Why is there a limit of 20 hours per week that international students are allowed to work under this new agreement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that the first reason is so they have some time to cheer for the Flames.

Seriously, this is going to really help a lot of foreign students in Alberta get employment and get to make relationships with employers because, quite frankly, only about 60 per cent of our foreign students stay here after their studies. Anything that we can do to establish relationships with employers that would last longer than that, the chances are pretty good they'd stay. God knows, we need them all.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: why are foreign students who are attending private, nonprofit institutions excluded from this agreement?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I'm told that this agreement was negotiated under a different regime in Ottawa. As you know, you often have to look at the fine print to find out exactly what Dr. Welby kinds of initiatives were built into those. Certainly, I think that we need some flexibility in all of those things. Although the new agreement largely focuses on international students, there is a stipulation in the agreement that allows foreign students at private, not-for-profit institutions to participate in this program. Unfortunately, none of the seven jewels in our postsecondary system – I'm talking about the private, not-for-profits – currently fit the requirements. I can tell the hon. member that I've actually started a process through my officials to communicate with the federal government because we need them to get out of the way. That's the Conservative way.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: will this agreement take jobs away from Alberta students looking for valuable work experience?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, from what I understand, we can't find enough people to take all of the jobs that are currently vacant in Alberta, so I rather doubt that this will have any impact at all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Highway Safety

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday afternoon at approximately 4 p.m. a bus collided with a pickup pulling a trailer on the QE II south of Leduc. Fortunately, due to a variety of factors, including daylight, good fortune, and a divided highway with a wide, grassy median, this accident was not a repeat of the multiple injuries and loss of life which occurred last spring on highway 28. My concern has to do with the aftermath of no advance warning provided of the accident scene on either side of the highway from at least 6:30 p.m., when I came suddenly upon the multiple-vehicle traffic backlog, to 9 p.m., when my colleague from Calgary-Currie drove by. My question is to the Solicitor General. Given the review of the horrific bus accident last year on highway 28, the density and speed of the traffic on the QE II, and the time it took to remove the vehicles from the median, why was no advance warning provided for several hours for drivers approaching the accident scene?

Mr. Cenaiko: Now, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the lineup of vehicles heading into Edmonton especially on a Sunday evening is very, very large. There was advance notice regarding vehicles that there was an accident up ahead, but obviously it wasn't five kilometres down the road to what I'm told was the length of vehicles lined up to get into the city of Edmonton. There were measures taken to ensure that traffic was diverted around. Two lanes of traffic were closed. One was allowed open for southbound travel, and one was allowed open for northbound travel into the city of Edmonton. Obviously, in cases such as this, with the seriousness of an accident of this nature we have to ensure that the scene of the collision is secure so that proper investigation can take place and ensure that those that may be injured can be looked after by emergency personnel attending.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the solicitor general. Will the minister in light of yesterday's bus accident and others, including the horrific crash on highway 28, conduct a thorough review of response and safety protocol following a highway traffic accident?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what we are looking at doing regarding the utilization of Alberta sheriffs on our highways, regarding those dangerous areas on our highways where a sheriff could in fact assist the RCMP. They have done this on highway 21 and 63 right now: assisting the RCMP in providing traffic control at a collision on our highways, assisting them in taking witness statements at a traffic scene as well as assisting them in the investigation, not doing the investigation but assisting and complementing the RCMP in the investigation itself. Whether it be an injury accident or whether it be a fatality, the sheriffs are there, would be there and available to assist them. As we go through our project and we expand that level of service, there may be officers that are placed in the Leduc detachment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How much longer will Albertans' lives and well-being be compromised before this government fully implements the recommendations of the McDermid highway safety report?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, as you know, we've been working on the report with some 35 organizations and cross-ministry. The people have met. They've come up with a number of recommendations. We've implemented some of them. There are some that have to go out for further consultation, and we're currently in that process, so we will be implementing many of them very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Residential Tenancy Dispute Resolution Process

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year about 5,000 cases go to the Provincial Court of Alberta to resolve landlord and tenant disputes. With the claims limit for Provincial Court having gone up, quite appropriately so, and with more and more issues in civil, criminal, and family law going to family court, the court is getting very busy. With a growing recognition that a better way of

resolving issues and disputes includes alternative dispute resolution processes such as mediation, I was absolutely delighted to hear today that the new residential tenancy dispute resolution service started in Edmonton. My questions are for the Minister of Government Services. Can the Minister of Government Services enlighten this House and Albertans as to how that dispute resolution process will work for landlords and tenants in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the previous ministers both of Justice and Government Services, who had such an impact on getting this thing moving. Yes, this morning I did have the opportunity to open the office. You know, Mr. Speaker, like the question raised, there are 5,000 of these disputes that end up in our courts each and every year. We expect about 1,500 of those to be taken care of through this dispute mechanism. Simply, landlords or residents will have an opportunity through the Ministry of Government Services to pay a \$75 fee, sit down at a table, work out the dispute, and when they leave that table, a binding agreement will be had.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very supportive of this process. I think it's going to be an excellent process for landlords and tenants. I'm wondering if the minister can tell us when it will be available to other Albertans outside of Edmonton.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a one-year pilot project, and like all projects at the end of that time we'll evaluate the success of this project. It's my intention, though, Mr. Speaker, that upon the one-year completion of this program we do a quick evaluation. If there's a need for this across Alberta, we'll put it in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:30

Midwifery Services

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. May 7 marks the International Day of the Midwife, but midwives in Alberta are finding it increasingly difficult to operate because of a lack of recognition and support. In 1991 and 1993 the Midwifery Regulations Advisory Committee recommended that midwifery be a service funded by government. Thirteen years later funding is still being denied. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the lack of public funding has led to an exodus of midwives from Alberta, when is the minister going to put incentives into place to ensure that midwives don't leave the province?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have had many conversations with the people that are negotiating primary care agreements. The physicians presently in most of these networks have not taken advantage of an opportunity to have the support of midwives. It has been something that the midwives have raised with me. We've had conversations about it. Some additional financial supports have been provided to the midwives for a number of different activities, but at this stage I can promise nothing, only that we'll continue to try and advance their case when we talk about primary care networks. I indicated the same thing for chiropractors, another group that wants to be involved with primary care networks, and I think it's just because of the newness of this that we haven't advanced the case to the extent that we should have.

Ms Blakeman: Thirteen years is new?

Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that the evidence shows that midwifery services are more cost effective than hospital deliveries, why is the minister ignoring this evidence and avoiding the opportunity to save money?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, what is new, just to clarify for the hon. member opposite, is the work that we're doing with primary care networks. This year we have doubled the funds. There is some \$70 million there to facilitate that expansion, and I'm optimistic there will be something.

In terms of the evidence of cost it is not strictly on the basis of cost alone that we have been told that there has been less embracing of this. In some parts of rural Alberta they've cited a number of reasons. The physicians have raised everything from liabilities in deliveries to other ways in which they are hoping to facilitate, but we understand rather recently that some of the urban authorities are looking at the possibility of integrating midwife services within the hospital setting in order to take advantage not only of the reduced cost but of the opportunity to have a very caring and nurturing environment, especially where deliveries are uncomplicated and are able to be managed very effectively in this context.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The final question, again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that the health regions have not been as supportive of midwifery services as the minister had hoped, will the minister mandate that funding be available in each health region to fund midwifery services? They need a bit more encouragement from the top.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would look at that. Clearly, there's an opportunity, but one of the reasons that regional health authorities have opportunities to make choices is the very nature of the governance model, which has enabled them to make those choices in consultation with their health care providers. So it's not a matter of simply mandating either; it's an opportunity to work with our partners. I think that in the total what is most crucial in this issue is to respect the rights of families that would have preferred to have had midwives and have questioned why, when they are saving the system that amount of money for a physician by paying their own midwife experience, they can't have some consideration for the support. So I think that both the hon. member opposite and I are on the same page. It's a matter of continuing to work to see if we can advance that not only in the context of the regional authorities' responsibility but because of some of the resistance that we have encountered from some of the other providers.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today 15 different members participated, and that was 84 questions and answers, which is very good.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Now to our historical vignette of the day reflecting 100 years of democracy in the province of Alberta. Four different political parties have formed the government of Alberta in Alberta's first 100 years. The Liberal Party was the government in the first four Legislatures. In the election of 1905 it received 57.56 per cent of the votes and held 22 of 25 seats. In the election of 1909 it received 59.26 per cent of the votes and held 36 of 41 seats. In the election of 1913 it received 49.23 per cent of the votes and held 39 of 56 seats. In the election of 1917 it received 48.14 per cent of the

votes and held 34 of 56 seats. In these first four Legislatures the Conservative Party held the second largest number of seats: three out of 25 in 1905, two out of 41 in 1909, 17 out of 56 in 1913, 19 out of 56 in 1917.

In the election of 1921 the United Farmers of Alberta formed the government with 28.92 per cent of the votes but with 38 of the 61 seats. The Liberal Party received more votes, 34.07 per cent of the votes, but elected only 15 of 61 MLAs. In the election of 1926 the United Farmers of Alberta elected 43 of 61 MLAs with 39.68 per cent of the votes. The Liberals won seven seats with 26.17 per cent of the votes. In the election of 1930 the United Farmers of Alberta won 39 of 63 seats with 39.41 per cent of the votes, and the Liberals came in second with 24.59 per cent of the votes and 11 MLAs. The election was held on June 19, 1930.

Alberta's next election was held five years and two months later, on August 22, 1935. The election of 1935 saw the highest number of candidates, 240, and the highest number of political parties to date, 12. The turnout of voters was massive, with 81.8 per cent of eligible voters voting: 95.4 per cent of the electorate voted in the constituency of Cardston, 91.6 per cent voted in the Olds constituency, and 90.3 per cent was the turnout in Acadia. When the results were in, Alberta had a new political party governing them. The Social Credit Party won 56 of 63 seats with 54.25 per cent of the votes. The Liberals received 23.14 per cent of the votes and won five seats. The United Farmers of Alberta, the government in the previous three terms, received 11 per cent of the vote, and it was completely shut out with no seats.

Tomorrow, part two.

Hon. members, before I call on the first of hon. members to participate in Members' Statements, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to the Assembly a number of active Alberta citizens. These include Judy Johnson, Verne Johnson, and Gerard Liston, all directors of Campaign Life; Mary Lou Veeken, Jill Cahoon, Michele Dow of United Mothers, Knights of Columbus, United Families of Canada; Reverend Terence Chang, Reverend Garry Rohr, Ray Wiens and his wife, Katherine, and Reverend Eve Bassett, all partners in the Edmonton Faith Coalition for Natural Marriage; Robert Picard, member of the Knights of Columbus of Edmonton; and Therese Gervais, representative of REAL Women of Alberta. Our guests are seated in both the members' and the public galleries, and I would ask them now to stand up and be recognized and invite the members of the Assembly to join me in extending a warm welcome.

Thank you.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every member in this Legislature understands how hard and how painful it is for parents to stand by and watch their children destroy their lives. Sometimes

it is important for children to suffer the consequences of their actions, and other times it's a matter of life and death.

2:40

The Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, which will be proclaimed on July 1, will give parents a very important tool to help them help their drug-addicted child to avoid death and to re-embrace life. This legislation, known as PCHAD, is the result of addicted youth asking for help; of parents asking for help; of all the members of this Legislature, government, and opposition working together to pass this legislation; of ministers and deputy ministers of five departments working together; and of AADAC counsellors and administrators putting in long hours to ensure that this legislation would be ready for proclamation. This legislation, thanks to this team of caring people, is a gift of hope to parents who love their children and who will do whatever it takes to save them from a life of dark streets, cold jails, hospital wards, and early graves.

PCHAD will give parents and guardians a new option to apply to the court for an apprehension and confinement order to have their child placed in a protective safe house for a maximum of five days. During this confinement period AADAC will work with the child and the family to engage them in developing a voluntary treatment plan. Parents will be able to call AADAC for help after July 1.

Mr. Speaker, we do not have the research to show how effective this intervention will be; however, some believe that it will be 50 per cent. The Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre in Calgary has an 80 per cent success rate after five years. We should strive to make the 80 per cent rate of success our goal in all treatment and healing programs.

Mr. Speaker, PCHAD, thanks to the many long hours and hard work of dedicated people, will give parents a new hope to lead their children to a new life.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Samantha Johnston

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize an intelligent and talented young lady from my constituency who recently competed against girls from across Alberta and on March 31 was crowned Miss Alberta at the provincial Job's Daughters pageant.

Job's Daughters International is a youth leadership organization for young women between the ages of 10 and 20. The Alberta chapter is very active, with bethels in Edmonton, Calgary, St. Albert, and Red Deer. Building on a rich tradition and heritage, it teaches important skills for life such as leadership, organization, teamwork, and self-reliance.

Throughout the year Job's Daughters plan and share many activities, including serving the community by visiting hospitals and homes for the elderly to offer friendship to people who may be lonely or sad. I met the new Alberta queen at a Remembrance Day ceremony, where she was participating in the remembrance by laying a wreath.

Every spring the Alberta members of Job's Daughters get together for the grand session, where the pageant takes place. This year it was held in Edmonton. All contestants in the pageant competed in written tests, ritual, and interviews. They were also subjected to impromptu questions on stage.

Our contestant won a trophy for the highest written test score and went on to score the highest overall mark and be crowned Miss Alberta. It's been almost 10 years since Miss Alberta has been an Edmonton representative. Miss Alberta will represent the province at the Miss International Job's Daughters pageant, to be held at the

supreme session in August in Vancouver, and for the next year she'll travel the province acting as an ambassador for Job's Daughters, promoting the interests, welfare, and growth of the organization.

Mr. Speaker, our new Job's Daughter Miss Alberta is none other than our own Legislature page, Samantha Johnston. Samantha is currently a 16-year-old honours student at Strathcona composite high school. She enjoys softball and canoeing and is a member of the high school's students' union. Her leadership skills and work ethic have been recognized in her selection as a page, and I think it's safe to say that she is definitely a strong leader for our province now and into the future.

On behalf of all residents of Edmonton-Whitemud and all members of this Legislature I congratulate our page Samantha Johnston, the new Job's Daughters Miss Alberta. We look forward to her success in the coming years.

The Speaker: Samantha, why don't you take a bow. [applause]

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Action against Poverty

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to report on the Calgary round-table on child care I attended with three colleagues on Saturday. One thing that emerged from the discussion was a recognition that child care is not an issue of public versus private or parents versus programs. Child care is often an issue of people and poverty, poverty in the midst of plenty.

If you think you've heard that last line before, you're right. That was the slogan on which William Aberhart ran to victory in 1935. Aberhart's successor and our longest-serving Premier, Ernest Manning, knew about the effects of poverty. He toured Latin American countries that were being bled of their oil as people lived in poverty. He determined that the wealth from Alberta's oil boom would be shared with the people and not all siphoned off in corporate profits. In an online discussion three weeks ago *Globe and Mail* columnist Jeffrey Simpson wrote of Alberta's capacity to lead the country socially as well as economically. He suggested that this is one province that can effectively abolish poverty and lead other provinces to do the same. Simpson's suggestion is a good one.

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first North American leader to link economic, political, and social rights: the freedom from want and freedom from fear to the traditional freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Roosevelt mentored Lyndon Johnson, whom we remember for Vietnam. Johnson did not want to get involved in a foreign war at all. His focus was his war on poverty, part of the program he built on John F. Kennedy's new frontier.

I end with a quote from Kennedy's inaugural speech of my youth.

To those . . . in the huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of . . . misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required – not because the Communists [are] doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

Let us make that resolve our own and start with those who live in poverty among us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

National Mental Health Week

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in recognition of Mental Health Week, which occurs during the first week of May. About one in every five Canadians will experience

some form of mental illness in their lifetime. More and more people are becoming aware of mental health issues and recognize the importance of mental health to one's overall wellness. Mental Health Week allows us an opportunity to learn more about and increase awareness of mental health issues.

This year the Alberta Mental Health Board's campaign theme for Mental Health Week is Stress: It's What You Do about It. Specifically, it targets youth ages 13 to 18. The Alberta Mental Health Board says that stress is a normal part of life and some situations are more stressful than others. It's what you do about it that makes a difference to your well-being.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to recognize that youth are also subject to both stress and mental illness. Another positive initiative that the Alberta Mental Health Board has taken regarding youth and mental health is the launch of a new magazine called *Grip*, written for youth by youth. The magazine is intended to be a source of information for young people that will help youth to better cope and understand issues relevant to young people.

Mr. Speaker, we're fortunate to have a greater awareness of the importance and value of positive mental health. Mental Health Week is a prime time to encourage people across Alberta and across Canada to learn more about ways to maintain and improve mental health.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Education Week

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 30 to May 6 is Education Week in Alberta. All across our great province schools will celebrate this occasion through events and activities involving staff, students, and members of our schools' communities. This year's Education Week theme is Learning: It's Yours for Life. The theme is fitting because the mission of Alberta Education is to ensure that students obtain the knowledge and skills required for lifelong learning. Examples of our education system's commitment to lifelong learning are abundant every day in Alberta's elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. From top marks in academics to pursuit of fine arts, trades, and athletics Alberta's K to 12 students are gaining valuable life skills and a knowledge base that will prepare them for a great future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge our great teachers and the innovation shown by school administrators and school board staffs in support of Alberta's students. We are blessed in this province to have a dedicated community of education stakeholders who hold in high regard the value of education and the well-being of our students. In keeping with this year's theme, Alberta will continue to promote the importance of lifelong learning as a way for each Alberta student to maximize his or her true potential. Excellence in learning outcomes means that all students are well prepared for lifelong learning, work, and citizenship and have the skills and knowledge to be successful.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to salute all of the nominees for the excellence in teaching awards, which will be awarded this coming weekend in Calgary. In particular I would like to recognize Mo Brenneis and Jim Nahrebeski from my constituency.

I invite all Albertans to acknowledge and recognize Education Week, and I sincerely commend and thank those who contribute to our education system and the future potential of the students in classrooms all across Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

2:50

Health Care Spending

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'll be tabling New Democrat projections about health care spending and its impact on our future budgets. Our analysis shows that the doomsday predictions contained in last week's Aon report are off the mark at best and trumped up political calculations at worst. In fact, they are the latest in this government's continuing attempts to frighten Albertans into accepting privatization of our health care system.

Just a few years ago this government was using predictions based on the Mazankowski report to convince Albertans that radical changes and privatization were needed to stop out-of-control health care costs. In March I released information showing that instead of taking up to half of all spending by 2005, as Mr. Mazankowski predicated, health spending has stayed at approximately 35 per cent of overall program spending since 2000. But like a dog with a bone the government has now released numbers from a \$1.2 million report that are just as cooked up as the guesswork contained in the Mazankowski report. The Aon report predicts that by 2016 health care spending will garner 50 per cent of the provincial budget and that by 2017 total provincial expenses will exceed revenues, causing a budgetary deficit. Mr. Speaker, their numbers are just plain wrong.

Our analysis, which is based on actual 20-year trends, shows that average health spending is lower than what Aon is predicting and that our average revenue growth is much higher than Aon's numbers. The sky is not falling, Mr. Speaker. It is true that there are significant cost drivers in health care, but it is also true that these can be managed. Many European countries have already dealt with aging populations and still manage to control health care spending, keeping it below the spending per capita that we do in Canada. More importantly, there are real opportunities to innovate within the public system to maintain a health care system for future generations. The NDP's plan to create an Alberta pharmaceutical savings agency and rein in escalating drug costs is just one example.

Health care costs are a legitimate concern but are manageable with innovation and planning. Unsubstantiated 20-year projections do a disservice to public debate on health care policy.

Thank you.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to advise you that I'll be requesting leave to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the future of Alberta's five-point plan for child care in the wake of the federal budget which will be presented in Ottawa tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a document that is relevant to those interested in this afternoon's debate on Bill 208. This document outlines the parallel in wording between the federal Bill C-38 and Bill 208, which will be debated in this Assembly this afternoon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. These tablings are to back up my information from question period earlier today. The first tabling I have is a copy of the *Alberta Gazette* from July 15, 2005, page 1736, and it indicates that 157-plus acres of land were purchased for \$2,800 from the Alberta government by Fort McMurray Housing Inc.

The next tabling I have is a transfer of land from the Land Titles Act, and this is from the Alberta Government Services land titles office. It indicates that there were not 46 acres, but there were 157-plus acres in total transferred from the ministry of infrastructure to this corporation on May 16, 2005, for \$2,800,000.

The third document is also in regard to that land sale as well.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to table the appropriate number of copies of the PC Party membership application handouts distributed over the weekend by the hon. Member for Strathcona, referred to by the leader in his first question this afternoon.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling copies of a news release and background issued by the NDP opposition today. They contain our calculation of yearly budget deficits and surpluses based on 20-year averages in growth in revenue and health spending. They show that the predictions of the Aon report are well off the mark and also demonstrate the savings potential of innovations such as the Alberta pharmaceutical savings agency proposed by the NDP opposition.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before dealing with the application for Standing Order 30 – it's presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona – we will first of all deal with a point of order that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader caught our eye with during the question period. Following that, I intend to make a statement with respect to a motion and a private member's bill.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Point of Order
Oral Question Period Rules**

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to your attention some concerns that I have with respect to a question that was asked specifically today by the Member for Edmonton-Manning. As you know, we have a tradition in this House of members asking a question followed by two supplementary questions, and there's been an increasing tendency in the House of late, and I think witnessed today by the series of questions from the Member for Edmonton-Manning, where instead of having one question with two supplementaries, we are in fact getting to the point of each member asking three sometimes totally independent questions, sometimes not even of the same minister.

I would like to bring to your attention *Beauchesne* 410(8), where it says that "Preambles to questions should be brief and supplementary questions require no preambles." Mr. Speaker, you have reinforced that on many occasions. Then it goes on to say, "Supplementary questions should flow from the answers of Ministers."

I also refer you to *Beauchesne* 414, where it actually then goes on to make further reference to supplementary questions and, in fact, refers us to *Erskine May*, so I'll now move to *Erskine May*, page

354. Under Oral Answers and Supplementary Questions it reads: "An answer should be confined to the points contained . . ." This is talking about ministers. "The Speaker has stressed that the length of both ministerial replies and of supplementary questions should be curbed. The Speaker has suggested that lengthy answers should be circulated." There's a section here that I had read earlier. It refers here to supplementary questions and suggests that supplementary questions should follow out of the original question.

In the case of today's question the Member for Edmonton-Manning had a rather lengthy preamble, in which he made reference to the government having labour laws that were, in his opinion, unsatisfactory and talked at quite some length about labour laws and issues related to labour. Then his first question, the only question according to our tradition in this House, was to the Minister of Finance, and it was related to tax policy. His question was: when will the minister be proclaiming Bill 207, which would bring about a tax deduction for tools for an apprentice?

3:00

Now, had the supplementary questions been leading out of that question, then he should have been asking the minister for some further clarification, perhaps on how the minister was proposing to implement this proclamation, but instead his first supplementary question was totally unrelated to his question. It was referred to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, in which he asked the minister when he was going to be introducing first contract legislation. His second supplementary question, increasingly referred to by members in this House as "my third question," was again to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, referring to minimum wage legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I simply ask that you clarify with members of the House what questions and supplementary questions should entail and call members to order when they stray too far from the general definition of supplementary questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address the point of order that has been raised by the new Deputy Government House Leader and, indeed, to assert that there is no point of order here.

When we look at *Beauchesne* 410(8), it does indeed say, as the new Deputy Government House Leader has said, "Supplementary questions should flow from the answers of Ministers." Well, as the Speaker himself and many, many members opposite have often underlined to me, this is question period, not answer period. In fact, there is no obligation on behalf of ministers, as has been well pointed out by the Speaker himself and many members opposite, to provide answers in response to the questions that we've asked. In fact, I would maintain that it's a contest to see how ministers cannot answer the questions that have been put before them. So it is an impossibility in this particular House and certainly during my time here to in fact craft the supplementary questions in direct response to the answers received from the ministers. I would argue that we would be delighted to do so should we, in fact, receive answers that respond to the questions that have been asked, which is not the current state of this question period.

There was one other point that he had made, on 414. The same thing: that the following supplementary question would flow from "the answers that have been given." Well, once again, the same problem, Mr. Speaker. The answers aren't given, nor are they required to be given. The tradition in this House has been to have a preamble with a main question followed by two supplementary questions.

Now, what we actually had in the preamble today, Mr. Speaker – and I'm looking at the Member for Edmonton-Manning's notes. He covered a number of topics in his preamble, including the fact that it was May Day, a day to traditionally acknowledge workers, that the government had weakened labour laws, that it had a poor record of labour support and development and retention, that it was important to get workers to stay longer and put down roots in Alberta, and it was a long-lasting and increasing problem.

When I look at the cluster of questions, they do indeed flow directly from the preamble that the member laid out. The first question, about the proclamation of the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001, is flowing from his statement in the preamble around retention. It's harder for us to get workers to stay in the province when they can't be recognized in that simple way by a bill that, in fact, was passed by this Assembly but has never been proclaimed. The question was a direct question. It did not seek an opinion. It did not discuss a matter before the courts. It did not refer to something in the media. It didn't do any of the other long list of things that are not to be done in questions. It did seek information: why it hadn't happened. It was not frivolous. It's a perfectly reasonable question to ask. It was urgent and timely; today is the traditional day of labour. It was within the administrative competence of the minister to whom it was directed. It was not sub judice, et cetera, et cetera.

The second question was asking about first contract arbitration, Mr. Speaker, and that reflects directly back on the earlier comment in the preamble around labour laws, labour support and development.

The third question, again on workers, refers back to both the retention issues that were raised in the preamble and the labour laws and labour support. Everything that flowed from those three questions related directly back to the preamble, which, Mr. Speaker, in this House is the very best we can do seeing as we don't get answers from ministers from which we could craft supplementary questions.

I argue that despite raising 410(8) and 414, there is no point of order. I do note that we have an agreement in this House that's generally put together by the House leaders and endorsed by the Assembly that if there cannot be agreement reached by the House leaders, the decision is rendered by the Speaker on, in fact, the order and number of the questions that we have as a tradition in this House.

So I argue that there is no point of order. Thank you so much for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Anybody else want to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise here on this point of order, and I thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for her very thorough explanation of how that question should be dealt with.

Just to add a couple of things. You know, in *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 425 it states that "members should be given the greatest possible freedom in the putting of questions that is consistent with the other principles." On page 430 it also goes on to talk about some changes in the 36th Parliament in 1997, and this is in the second paragraph: "Speaker Parent allowed the practice [of supplementary questions] to be modified by not insisting that an additional question be, strictly speaking, supplementary to the main question."

Now, the questions that were involved here did actually follow from the preamble and actually did follow from the answers of the minister. The preamble did say: issues regarding May Day. It did

say: issues regarding labour issues, labour law and how, specifically, worker retention is a growing and important problem in Alberta.

The tax cuts for tools, if it was implemented and proclaimed, would be something that would work to maintain workers in Alberta. The question on retaining workers by having first contract arbitration would also be something that would reduce labour conflict and would work to hold workers in Alberta by having labour laws that would not scare them away. The Lakeside Packers thing had world-wide media and was very difficult for Alberta's reputation, and I hope that that would not happen again. Even the minister of human resources said that there would be some good cause to look to implementing such a law, and even the Premier said such a thing.

The question of the minimum wage is also an important law. If we are to attract workers to Alberta, it would be something that would be well received by people who are unskilled and people who are students coming out of university.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, I think we'll come to a ruling on this very important matter. Now, listen everybody. For more than a billion-plus people in the world today is one of their most important days. It's May 1. It's called May Day. The whole history of the 20th century itself surrounded May Day for, as I said, 1 billion or more people in the world.

Today the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning – and I can't believe, in fact, that all questions weren't dealing with labour as this is the one day – gets up, and he says in the first part of his preamble, "Seriously, May 1, May Day, is a traditional day to honour workers world-wide." In the supplementary he talks about labour laws. In the third one he talks about workers. Well, as far as I'm concerned, if any day of the year there should be some latitude given by the chair with respect to the connection of questions, this should be the one if it's on the subject of labour or anything else.

Now, the citations that have been cited here: fine; they could be applied. I'm not sure if I understand from the hon. Deputy Government House Leader that the chair should now insist that ministers should actually give answers to questions or not, but that has already been dealt with by the chair, and he's already agreed that there was some latitude with respect to that and that we probably would not be proceeding in that way.

3:10

Of all the research that was done, actually the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has found the paragraph that sums it up best, and it's located in the book *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, edited by Robert Marleau and Camille Montpetit. In addition to allowing flexibility with a lack of connect between questions, it has been a recent practice in the country of Canada that, in fact, will go the same way that we allow splitting the questions as well. It would not be normal to basically have three different questions on three different subject matters, but there was enough connection with respect to May Day, labour workers to make sure that this happened.

So thank you very much for that discussion for 20 minutes. By the way, there was no point of order.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

The Speaker: The chair would like to make a statement pertaining to a matter of business that will be addressed by the Assembly this evening, namely Motion Other than Government Motion 508, standing in the name of the Member for Foothills-Rocky View. The issue of anticipation may arise as Motion 508 deals with the subject of fixed election dates, as does Bill 210, which is sponsored by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Under *Beauchesne's* paragraph 566(7) "a motion dealing with the same subject-matter as a bill . . . on the Order Paper for second reading [should not] be considered." This rule of parliamentary practice is based on the principle that an Assembly should not consider the same matter twice. Under the rule stated in *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 512 and 513, a matter must not be anticipated if it is contained in a more effective form of proceeding based on the descending scale of values where bills have priority over motions, which in turn have priority over amendments.

Even in the House of Commons this principle is applied in a more lenient manner when it comes to private members' business. After stating the basis for this ancient rule against anticipation, Marleau and Montpetit in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* say this at page 477:

An exception has been allowed, however, in the case of an opposition motion on a Supply day related to the subject matter of a bill already before the House. Under the normal application of the rule, the Chair would refuse the motion because it ranks as inferior to a bill. The Speaker has nonetheless ruled that the opposition prerogative in the use of an allotted day is very broad and ought to be interfered with only on the clearest and most certain procedural grounds.

This tendency not to rule private members' business out of order on the basis of the rule against anticipation is reflected in the 24th edition of *Erskine May* at page 389, where it is stated that because of the limited opportunities that exist for members in the British House of Commons to raise matters with ministers, "the rule is therefore enforced much less strictly than before."

Hon. members, the chair and the table officers have researched this issue and believe that this is the first time that the issue of anticipation has been raised with respect to a private member's motion and a private member's bill. It differs from a March 28, 1995, situation reported at page 872 of the *Alberta Hansard* for that day, when a private member's motion was struck out because it was on the same subject as a government bill. The alleged conflict here is between a private member's motion and a private member's bill.

Given the process for arriving at the order of motions other than government motions and private members' bills, a member proposing a motion would not necessarily know what was in such a bill until it was given first reading. The chair would also note that Motion 508 may have a similar subject, but it is not identical to Bill 210. The debate would not necessarily be the same.

The chair has always given the widest latitude possible to private members' business consistent with the rules and practices of the Assembly, which are in large part derived from the 1993 reforms which made Alberta a leader in private members' business. The chair will whenever possible allow debate to proceed. Given that there are differences between Motion 508 and Bill 210 and that one cannot say with certainty when Bill 210 will be considered by the Assembly, the chair does not find the motion out of order, so the debate can proceed.

I am providing this ruling at this time in anticipation of the possibility of such a motion being raised later in the day or at 8 o'clock tonight. The bottom line is that both Motion 508 and Bill 210 can proceed.

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a Standing Order 30 application.

National Child Care Agreement

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with that order, Standing Order 30, I rise to request leave to propose the following motion.

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of

the [House] to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, specifically that cancellation of the child care agreement concluded and signed by Alberta and the federal government in 2005 puts into jeopardy the funding that makes possible Alberta's five-point plan for child care,

which enjoys vast popular support in the province.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, if I may make a brief argument for urgency. As we are all aware, the federal Conservative government will bring down its first budget tomorrow afternoon, in perhaps less than 24 hours from now. In that budget we expect to see the first steps towards implementation of Conservative policies in various areas, including Canadian child care. One casualty of the changes Ottawa is going to announce in tomorrow's budget is the likely cancellation of the bilateral federal/provincial agreements on child care signed last year. Albertans overwhelmingly oppose such cancellation and strongly support Alberta's five-point plan made possible by this bilateral federal/provincial agreement. These proposed changes are of serious consequence, and a thorough debate on the implications of tomorrow's federal budget is urgently required.

Alberta's parents are worried, Mr. Speaker, because the Minister of Children's Services in the House has still not been able to provide Albertans with clear commitments and details about the future of Alberta's five-point plan should Ottawa announce tomorrow the cancellation of its agreement with Alberta. It's urgent that Ottawa hear the views of this Assembly on this very, very important issue.

Last week I challenged the minister to table correspondence between herself and the federal minister, and I hope that she will do so shortly. Until that happens, Albertans won't know whether the minister is following in her Quebec counterpart's footsteps and is, in fact, able to negotiate a side deal to ensure the continuation of the funding for Alberta's five-point plan and the improvements to quality child care services promised in it. In fact, Quebec offers an important insight into why a broad-based debate on this issue is urgent and important. Quebec has replaced Alberta as a leader in encouraging women to enter the job market due mainly to its highly accessible and affordable quality child care system. Alberta, once a leader just 10 years ago, has now fallen behind.

This Assembly has not had the opportunity to debate thoroughly Alberta's response to our child care needs and how changes as proposed by the Conservative government policies in Ottawa will impact Alberta families. We have had heated debates in this Assembly about the so-called labour crunch, and if women are not participating fully in the labour market, then it can only make this crunch worse.

There's something fundamentally wrong when a government such as this prefers to exploit temporary foreign workers rather than encouraging full participation . . .

The Speaker: I think, hon. member, you should stick to the urgency of the argument, not give your argument. If you win, you'll have a chance, but we'll never get to know if you're going to win unless you give us the urgency argument.

Dr. Pannu: I will, Mr. Speaker. Returning to the issue of urgency, this matter is urgent not only because it will have consequences for our very young children and their ability to take advantage of quality child care facilities but also because it will have larger implications for our economy. That's why I thought I should perhaps raise that issue. But I will take your direction.

I would strongly urge this Assembly to undertake an immediate debate on the future of child care, and I would hope that such a debate would result in a unified commitment to the so-called QUAD

principles in child care – quality, universality, accessibility, and development programming – a desirable framework for further development of Alberta's child care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

The Speaker: Standing Order 30(2) reads the following:

The member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

It would it be appropriate to hear two additional speakers, one perhaps the Government House Leader, one perhaps the Opposition House Leader. That would be enough, then, before we come to deal with this matter. The hon. Minister of Children's Services, do you wish to proceed first?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on the debate on Standing Order 30, I believe it is, on urgency. You know this very well. You've led us for the last several years in regard to what is in Standing Order 30.

I have to stand up and say that I don't believe that this is a matter of urgency. We have had many, many discussions in regard to this five-point child care. The hon. member across the way talks about the likely cancellation of the five-point plan in regard to the federal budget tomorrow. We have not heard that budget. I can tell the member that we've had lots of opportunity to discuss this topic in the House, in Committee of Supply during the debate of my budget. In fact, Mr. Speaker, at that point in time I encouraged the hon. member to write the federal minister, to send their letters of concern.

I can tell this House, Mr. Speaker, that we received \$70 million from the federal government last year. We got \$66 million this year. It's business as usual for the parents, families, and the daycare workers in this province.

I have also made it clear on numerous occasions what I have done in regard to our conversations with the federal minister. Forty-eight hours after she was appointed, we called. We have sent two letters. I have also had a meeting, and, if I may, we have another meeting planned with my federal colleague at the end of May.

I think it's important that the hon. member understand that there are many issues to be discussed about this particular initiative. It's just not the cancellation, but we're looking at the seats that are available, the number of daycare spaces that are going to be created. The money that is in that particular budget we need to discuss. I think we have to meet with the federal minister, which I told you we were going to do. I understand that the details may – may, I may say – be provided in the federal budget tomorrow.

To summarize, Mr. Speaker, our five-point plan that's in place right now is working, and it's working very well. I will continue to lobby on behalf of Albertans and their families and the daycare workers. I've made that very clear in this House on many occasions. We have made our commitment about the importance of choice for Albertans.

Given all of these facts, I cannot understand why the hon. member suddenly suggests that there is a need for an emergency debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak in support of the motion that has been brought forward by my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Speaking to urgency, there are a number of tests that are offered to us.

Standing Order 30(1), matters must be of "urgent public importance": I would certainly argue that children are of public impor-

tance and of a wider public importance as well, aside from the urgency.

The emergency is that the federal budget comes down tomorrow. This is our last opportunity to make any differing resolutions if we would choose to do so prior to that decision that would be rendered by them.

We have no bills on the Order Paper that would allow a specific discussion on this point during a debate of a bill.

We did have a budget debate on Children's Services, but that was on April 13. Again, we have no opportunity in a budget debate to argue what is before us specifically.

There are no opportunities for motions other than government motions to come forward. Those, of course, were set last September.

Any written questions or motions for returns submitted specific to this question as of today would not be heard for a matter of many weeks, which would not be addressing the urgency of what is put before us.

I think that when we look at Montpetit and Marleau, at 585 it sets out before us an argument that the issue has to be "immediately relevant and of attention and concern throughout the nation." That is certainly the case. It is, I would argue, not a chronic issue like unemployment rates, for example. It would I think fit under some of the occasions that have been set out in M and M 585 to admit that it is of urgency; for example, work stoppages, strikes, international crises. This certainly is a crisis if we're not able to care for our children appropriately.

With those arguments, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that in fact this is urgent. We have no other opportunity to be raising this issue and giving it any kind of satisfactory hearing. Given that, I would ask that the Speaker find in favour of the urgency of the matter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, thank you very much for that participation. We are prepared to deal with this matter. First of all, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, proper notice was given of the intent to bring forward the motion under Standing Order 30, and that's appreciated. That notice was received in my office at 11 o'clock this morning so that it did provide some opportunity to do some study and some research with respect to the matter and also to anticipate the arguments that might be forthcoming here in the Assembly this afternoon.

The key thing here is dealing with a genuine emergency calling for immediate and urgent consideration. In essence, the member's proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on the cancellation of the child care agreement concluded and signed by Alberta and the federal government in 2005, which according to the member's motion puts into jeopardy the funding that would give effect to Alberta's five-point plan for child care. The chair has not heard conclusively whether or not such an agreement has been cancelled, but the chair did hear conclusively from the hon. Minister of Children's Services, who participated in this particular motion, that basically this five-point plan is proceeding and is going.

The relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debates are *Beauchesne*, paragraphs 387 to 398, and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589.

The chair has also listened to the lack of opportunity alluded to by the hon. Opposition House Leader with respect to this matter, but did not hear the hon. Opposition House Leader indicate that an appropriation bill with respect to all of the budgets of the province of Alberta still has to be dealt with by this Assembly. That certainly would afford an opportunity. Although the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services were considered and approved by this Assembly on April 13, 2006, there is opportunity, in the eyes of the chair, with

respect to even the bill process with respect to this, in addition to question period.

Secondly, I don't know: can anybody in the House tell me what's going to be in the federal budget tomorrow? I have no idea how you can anticipate that. It may very well be that we have brilliant people here who all have read it conclusively and know exactly what's in it. That being the case, you could probably do quite well as consultants outside of this Assembly. From a speculative point of view I don't know whether or not the federal budget will do it.

There's no doubt in my mind that this would appear to some to be a matter of considerable interest, but whether or not it's a matter of such urgency to warrant postponing the business of the Assembly this afternoon is really the question. The conclusion of the chair in reviewing this matter since mid-morning and hearing the arguments today is that the request for leave is not in order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, April 27, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 14.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Investment in Tobacco-based Companies

Q14. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Miller that the following question be accepted.

How much money in total did the Alberta heritage savings trust fund invest in tobacco-based companies in the fiscal year 2004-05 broken down by individual company and amount invested in each?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are seeking the information because we are concerned that there is a contradiction in the government's policies regarding tobacco use and tobacco reduction. On the one hand, we have the Minister of Health and Wellness identifying tobacco reduction as a means of achieving better health and wellness for our population, but then on the other side of it, we saw during a budget debate recently that the amount of money for the tobacco reduction program has in fact been reduced. So right there one very small exchange shows you the contradictions that we're dealing with when we look at what the government is doing, and we are seeking clarification. We believe that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund has chosen to invest in vehicles that include tobacco-based companies, and we are seeking specific information on which companies those are and exactly how much money has been invested in each.

Thank you very much.

3:30

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I am pleased to report that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 14.

The Speaker: To conclude debate.

Ms Blakeman: Excellent. Thank you very much.

[Written Question 14 carried]

head:

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, April 27, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 23, 24, and 25.

[Motion carried]

Margaret Kool Marketing Inc.

M23. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the contract between the Ministry of Health and Wellness and Margaret Kool Marketing, mkm, awarded following request for proposal 05-243.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government will be rejecting Motion for a Return 23. When the public body is considering giving access to a record that may contain third-party business or personal information, the public body must provide written notice to the third party and/or individuals prior to disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Therefore, a request for this information must be made under the FOIP Act.

The Speaker: The hon. member to conclude the debate.

Mr. Martin: That's a real winner, trying to go through the FOIP Act, as we found out just recently from this minister's department, Mr. Speaker. They ignore that, the same as they do the rest. It was 10 or 15 days late, and you pay money.

I would remind the minister that this idea of the third party – Margaret Kool Marketing was contracted to develop a communications strategy to sell the government's third-way scheme. Again, Mr. Speaker, it was taxpayers' money. Now, the government may decide not to proceed with the third way. I doubt that they're getting a refund from this particular group. We know that it was a pretty ineffectual strategy. Maybe the government should be demanding their money back. The point is that it's not the government's money. They contracted it out. They were hired with taxpayers' money to provide this information to the government.

Again I would say that the minister often talks about being transparent, Mr. Speaker. Well, for those who contract with government – I don't care if it's third party or not – that should be part of it. If you contract with government, you should be prepared to be transparent in terms of your dealings with the government. Making a copy of this contract would be a way to ensure transparency in contracting. This is always going to be a loophole, this third-party business. Then we try the FOIP, and we notice that FOIP is cutting back in what we can do there. It takes forever to get it. They don't follow it the way they're supposed to. How are we supposed to get information from this government? That's the point we're making.

This contract is not two private companies out there working together. This is taxpayers' money being put together to sell a program for the government, yet the taxpayers, who foot the bill, aren't allowed to see what's going on, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly

not surprised by this reaction, but obviously transparency with this government doesn't mean anything.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 23 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Margaret Kool Marketing Inc.

M24. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents produced for the Ministry of Health and Wellness by Margaret Kool Marketing, mkm, under the contract awarded following request for proposal 05-243.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the leader of the NDP we'll try again. In this case we're not asking about the contract. We're asking for the information that was given to the government from taxpayers' money.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be rejecting Motion for a Return 24. When the public body is considering access to a record that may contain third-party business or personal information, the public body must provide written notice to the third party and/or individuals prior to disclosure in accordance with the FOIP Act. Therefore, a request for this information must be made under the FOIP Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to conclude debate.

Mr. Martin: Here we go again. The minister – I've known her for many years – must be embarrassed by this, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that the government has decided not to proceed with its third-way reforms, it makes it all the more important that all the reports and other documents prepared by Margaret Kool Marketing be made public. Surely this Legislative Assembly and through this Legislative Assembly the people of Alberta have a right to know what their money didn't buy. We understand that they did focus groups. We should know what those focus groups had to say. They must have produced a strategy for the government with recommendations for direct communications, brochures, leaflets as well as recommendations for print, radio, and TV advertising.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that if the government wants to be transparent and open – and, again, I know that the minister has talked about it – surely this would be seen as something the public should know. Otherwise, Albertans can only conclude that the government has something to hide, maybe keeping these documents secret so that they can be pulled off the shelf in the future when the government once again tries to make another run at selling Albertans on privatized, two-tier health care.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps talking about FOIP. She knows the problems that we've had just recently with FOIP, with getting information from her department, and how this is an alternative. How else do we get information from this government? FOIP doesn't work. We can't get it through the Legislature. I mean, I guess this is just the way this government operates and intends to keep operating.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 24 lost]

3:40 Northeast Calgary Ring Road

M25. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the public-sector comparator done for the northeast Calgary ring road project, which was announced as a public/private partnership on February 24, 2006.

Mr. Martin: Try, try again, Mr. Speaker. This is a major, major project, and surely we have a right to know what we're looking at in terms of the public-sector comparator as compared to what comes in from private companies, whether we're in the ballpark or not.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation I would like to advise the House that the government finds it necessary to reject this motion. A public-sector comparator was prepared for the northeast Stoney Trail and formed part of the business case. When the northeast Stoney Trail was announced, it was also stated that the cost estimate for the project would not be released so that it would not prejudice the tendering process. The public-sector comparator cannot be made public before bids come in from the P3 proponents as that could affect the bidding process. The public-sector comparator, once finalized, will be sealed and provided to Alberta Justice. It will be opened only after all bids are received from the P3 proponents. This will ensure against any suggestion or perception that the public-sector comparator could be adjusted after bids come in. The public-sector comparator can be made public at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I anticipated that answer, and it is unusual. Public-sector comparators have been done before. It seems to me that if they're saying that that could influence the bid, well, maybe we should be looking at the whole of P3 proposals if that's the case. The public-sector comparator is exactly what we should be paying, and I don't see that having it out there ahead, as has been done in the past, would influence that. But seeing that that's the case, I'll take the minister at his word that the government is committing here, I understand, to make the comparator public after the fact as soon as the bids have been received. I'll certainly take them at their word on that.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 25 lost]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 208
Protection of Fundamental Freedoms
(Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to open debate today on Bill 208, the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. The most important right in a free society is the right to disagree and criticize government policy. For this reason it has been protected in every major rights document

in Canada's illustrious political lineage: the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, the American Bill of Rights, the preamble to the British North America Act, the Diefenbaker Bill of Rights, and most recently the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Despite this noble pedigree of freedom, this most fundamental right, the right to disagree with and criticize government policy, is under attack across our country. In British Columbia a teacher, Dr. Chris Kempling, was suspended without pay because he publicly disagreed with the Liberal government's same-sex marriage law. Also in British Columbia the Knights of Columbus have been sued and fined because they refused to rent their hall to a same-sex wedding party. In Ontario a leading gay rights activist has called on the government to cut off funding to the Catholic separate schools and all other private schools that don't include same-sex marriage in their curriculum. Right here in Alberta the respected Bishop Fred Henry of Calgary has been charged not once but twice with so-called hate speech crimes for publicly advocating the defeat of the federal Liberals' same-sex marriage bill. These incidents are all clear violations of Canadians' rights of freedom of speech, press, religion, and conscience.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 would prevent these types of rights abuses. Bill 208 would ensure that when it comes to public discussion of the same-sex marriage issue, no individual will be punished, no community group will be sued, no school will lose their funding, and no student or teacher will be coerced or punished for publicly disagreeing with same-sex marriage. What Bill 208 does not do is interfere with the legal right of gay people to get married. This is the law of Canada, a federal law, and there is little that this Assembly can do about it.

There is something that we can do about the use or, rather, the abuse of courts and human rights commissions to silence and punish public disagreement with same-sex marriage as a matter of public policy. This is precisely what Bill 208 does. Bill 208 consists of a preamble and amendments to three different Alberta statutes: the human rights act, the Marriage Act, and the School Act. In the drafting of Bill 208 I followed as closely as possible the wording of similar rights protection provisions in federal legislation as evidenced by the documents that I tabled earlier this afternoon.

When the Liberal government of the day embarked upon the mission to redefine marriage, they were warned that there was a risk that the new same-sex marriage law could come into conflict with the traditional rights of freedom of speech, religion, and conscience. To remedy this, the Liberals initially sought to add specific protections in their own bill to address this conflict. However, in 2004 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that protecting these rights against provincial infringement could only be done through provincial legislation. If you imagine the protection of fundamental freedoms in this context as a circle, what the Supreme Court did was draw a line through the middle of the circle and say that half is federal and half is provincial. The feds have filled in their half. Bill 208 would fill in Alberta's half, using the identical wording to the extent possible. Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 merely completes what Parliament wanted to do but was prevented from doing by its jurisdictional limitations. It ensures that extending the rights to one group does not restrict the rights of other groups.

The preamble to Bill 208 declares three things. It affirms the fundamental right of freedom of conscience and religion. It declares that these freedoms protect any church official from being forced to perform a same-sex marriage contrary to his or her religious beliefs or conscience. It also declares in straightforward, clear language that "it is not against the public interest to hold and publicly express diverse views on marriage." The wording of this preamble is virtually identical to the preamble of federal Bill C-38.

The first section of Bill 208 amends the Alberta human rights act. It states that no person or organization shall be deprived of any benefit or be subject to any other obligation or sanction under this or any other law of Alberta solely because of their publicly stated views on same-sex marriage, whether they oppose or support same-sex marriage; that is, it protects both sides of this debate. This protection would be added to section 11 of the existing Alberta human rights act, which is the section that provides a number of legal defences against complaints of discrimination. In layman's terms this means, at least in Alberta, that there would be no more hate speech prosecutions like the Bishop Fred Henry case, no Knights of Columbus incidents, no Chris Kempling job loss incidents, and no cutting off of funding to separate or private schools that exclude same-sex marriage from their curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, the second section of Bill 208 proposes an amendment to the Alberta Marriage Act. Again, it has the same intent as the corresponding federal provision in Bill C-38. It protects church officials from being forced to perform same-sex marriage against their religious conscience. It also protects marriage commissioners from losing their jobs for refusing to perform same-sex marriages. Notwithstanding the federal protections the Supreme Court has clearly stated that since solemnization of marriage is an exclusive provincial power, only provinces can protect this right. Bill 208 provides such protection.

The third and final section of Bill 208 proposes an amendment to the Alberta School Act. As education is an exclusive provincial jurisdiction, there is no parallel provision in C-38. While the amendments to the human rights act also extend to the School Act, for further clarity this amendment ensures that the freedoms of conscience, expression, and religion are explicitly protected in the context of Alberta's public, separate, and private education.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, good public policy is often a question of striking the right balance between competing claims and interests. Bill 208 strikes such a balance. It would ensure that creating the new right to same-sex marriage does not lead to restrictions on the rights and freedoms of those who disagree with same-sex marriage. Bill 208 completes what Parliament wanted to do but was prevented from doing by its jurisdictional limitations: to ensure that extending rights does not restrict the rights of other groups.

Mr. Speaker, if this Assembly fails to enact Bill 208, we will have provided less protection for the fundamental freedoms of Albertans than the Liberal government of Paul Martin provided for the rights of Canadians. Surely Albertans expect and deserve better than this. Accordingly, I would ask all members of this Assembly to support Bill 208.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm getting quite a list here. I'm going to sort this out in just a second or two, but first of all, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly four individuals that are sitting in the members' gallery. They come from quite a long ways away; they're from my constituency of Dunvegan-

Central Peace. The first is Greg Radstaak. He's the CEO for the Smoky River economic development organization that we have there. The other individual is Charles Doyle. Charles is the mayor of the village of Donnelly and also a teacher. Gary Doran is a businessperson in the Falher community. Last but certainly not least is Réal Garand, also a businessperson in the MD of Smoky? River. They are here to meet later on with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. I'd like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 208
Protection of Fundamental Freedoms
(Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006
(*continued*)

The Speaker: I'm now going to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, to be followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, to be followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, to be followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, to be followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and I will continue on the list momentarily.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to enter this debate on Bill 208, the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. There are three parts to this bill, and I know that I'm not going to get beyond the first part because my main concern is to deal with the tone and content of this bill as a whole, which I feel is in opposition to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

While it begins in its preamble to refer to section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, such as freedom of religion, Bill 208 conveniently overlooked section 15 on equality rights; namely, that every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination . . . based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

It has been assumed that this list of the grounds of nondiscrimination is not exhaustive and that courts will recognize new grounds when necessary. As a matter of fact, that has occurred. The Supreme Court of Canada, in dealing with the case of the Crown versus Vriend, read into Alberta's Individual's Rights Protection Act sexual orientation as a nondiscriminatory ground. So when we read Alberta's Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, for example section 3, where the grounds for nondiscrimination are listed – race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, and so on – we can assume that sexual orientation is now understood to be included even if it is not mentioned. That's the way the law of the Supreme Court of Canada would interpret our human rights legislation.

The legislation passed by the House of Commons, the Marriage for Civil Purposes Act, affirmed at the outset that the Parliament of Canada is committed to upholding section 15 of the Charter. On that basis it enacted the following: "Marriage, for civil purposes, is the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others." That is the law of the land. The right to have a civil marriage – underline that: civil marriage – must not exclude same-sex couples.

The House of Commons legislation did recognize the importance of section 2 of the Charter, especially the guarantee of freedom of conscience and religion, and on that basis enacted the following: "It

is recognized that officials of religious groups are free to refuse to perform marriages that are not in accordance with their religious beliefs.” So that leaves churches and synagogues and mosques to pursue their own religious beliefs. Some will perform same-sex marriages; others will not.

In contrast to the federal legislation Bill 208 proceeds in the opposite direction. On the basis of its appeal to section 2 of the Charter – that’s where it begins; freedom of conscience and religion – it proposes to limit or amend three different acts: the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act; the Marriage Act; and the School Act. I think it does so in a way that the grounds for nondiscrimination are compromised. The proposed amendment to the human rights act, for example, purports to be defending the rights of persons or groups to express their opposition to same-sex marriage. But this point I think is recognized over and over again in interpretations of section 2 of the Charter, that freedoms such as freedom of religion and freedom of expression are finite, limited freedoms. Freedom of religion is not an unlimited right, and it’s easy to argue that freedom of religion is actually limited by such basic democratic principles as the equality rights outlined in section 15 of the Charter. Freedom of expression is obviously limited if such expression willfully promotes hatred against an identifiable group. In that respect, the Supreme Court decision of the Crown versus Keegstra is still important reading for all Albertans and Canadians.

We must ask, concerning the persons or organizations mentioned in Bill 208 – namely, those who wish to oppose same-sex marriage – why they are singled out for special treatment. Religion is already a protected ground for nondiscrimination, and I think it would be a big mistake to identify particular religious groups or interest groups and include them in human rights legislation. We can ask: are such persons or groups disadvantaged? Is Bill 208 referring to recognized disadvantaged groups which have been deprived of benefits because of discrimination?

Human rights legislation, Mr. Speaker, has been adopted in Canada to protect groups of people in our society who are disadvantaged and have been subject to discrimination. The Supreme Court made it clear that when a particular group such as gays and lesbians are singled out, the effect is that a burden or disadvantage is imposed on them and not on others. Benefits are withheld from them which are available to others. To withhold civil marriage from same-sex couples is to withhold a benefit which is available to others.

Bill 208 wishes to ensure that groups who are opposed to same-sex marriage are not excluded or subject to discrimination, but the question which is all important is: what burdens are imposed on such groups, and what benefits are withheld from them? Such groups are in no way to be considered as disadvantaged groups. It is a misinterpretation of the human rights acts to place this kind of limiting clause in the act. A parallel example: many people, including myself, have very strong views against gambling. To be sure, there are limits to my freedom. My conscience will not allow me to participate in gambling or to work in a casino, but I’m still able to express those views. I still have freedom of expression, freedom to express my religious views. I think that that’s really important. Whether you’re in the pulpit of a church or whether you’re in the Legislature, I can express my religious convictions against gambling.

I see that there’s nothing preventing people from expressing their religiously based views on same-sex marriage, regardless of what their views are. Whether they’re against same-sex marriage or for it, they can express their views in their churches, in their communities, and those religious-based views can be expressed here in the Legislature. So I find it very difficult to try to kind of narrow the

scope of the human rights act by making reference to a specific group which is not in any way disadvantaged.

In terms of marriage commissioners I have problems there too. We’re talking about civil marriage. Marriage commissioners, if they want to be marriage commissioners, should follow the law of the land and perform the marriages of same-sex couples. If they don’t like that, if they can’t uphold the law of the land, they should consider not working as a marriage commissioner. After all, Mr. Speaker, we’re all limited in our freedom of expression. We have to make choices, and it seems to me that if they want to be marriage commissioners, such people should make the appropriate choices.

4:00

Under section 2 of the Charter it is important to recognize the pluralism of religious beliefs in Canadian society. There are a variety of religious beliefs about same-sex marriage. Some religious groups oppose it; others support it. I encourage people in the community rooted in their religious beliefs to express their views. We as legislators should hear those views. But when it comes to the secular, civil sphere of society, I think that there’s no room for discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Bill 208 intends to establish a limit, an exception to this, but in so doing, it in effect fudges the distinction between church and state and allows for limiting clauses, which goes contrary to the expressed goal of our human rights act.

Bill 208 makes it possible for a certain group of people to express discriminatory opinions in the secular, civil sphere of society, promoting the refusal of benefits to same-sex couples and promoting the refusal to participate in or teach parts of a curriculum which deals with same-sex marriage. Mr. Speaker, the effect of such limits or exceptions placed in these various acts is to send the message to all Albertans that it is permissible and perhaps even acceptable to discriminate against individuals on the basis of sexual orientation, and I find that totally unacceptable and contrary to section 15 of the Charter. So I would recommend voting against this bill.

For me personally it is morally and religiously offensive, but putting aside my own religious beliefs, I think that in the context of a legislative debate we have to deal with the issue of the nature of human rights legislation and what is in our Charter. It seems to me that this bill flies in the face of our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What we should be dealing with is a government bill, such as Bill 171, passed by the Ontario Legislature to amend various statutes, removing all references to exclusively opposite-sex spouses, so that same-sex couples are not excluded from all of the statutes in Alberta. The wording of marriage ceremonies for civil marriages that marriage commissioners are to carry out should also be changed so that same-sex couples are not excluded.

Mr. Speaker, those are my remarks, and I recommend voting against this bill.

The Speaker: The next four speakers will be the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, then Edmonton-Calder.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can’t express how pleased I am to be given this opportunity to rise and address this Assembly on the very important issues brought forward by Bill 208, the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. I commend the Member for Foothills-Rocky View for bringing this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, I’d like to begin by stating that I have above all else a deep and abiding faith in God and a very, very strong commitment

to upholding traditional family values. As a husband and a father my beliefs form the foundation of my life and guide me in every decision that I make. I'm also proud to serve God in my capacity as an ordained minister. It's been one of the greatest honours of my life to bring the teachings of Christianity to others in my community. I've seen time and time again the positive benefits that result from a strong faith and a deep commitment to the family.

A cornerstone of my religious beliefs is the ceremony of marriage, a union that is defined as being between one man and one woman. I have performed many, many marriages, and it never ceases to fill me with wonder and joy when a man and a woman become one in the eyes of God. Mr. Speaker, I don't agree with homosexual marriage. I don't believe that it is in accordance with Christian teachings. It goes against my entire system of beliefs, and I could never perform such a marriage in my capacity as a reverend. My faith simply does not permit it.

This is a province of wide diversity. Many Albertans share my viewpoints on this subject, but some do not. I am vocal about my position. Some are equally vocal in opposing it. Do I agree with them? No. Do I celebrate the choices they make? No. Do I accept them as equals with the absolute right to state their opinion without fear of persecution or punishment? Absolutely. That brings us to Bill 208, a bill which provides an ultimate and final guarantee that the freedoms of expression and religion that Albertans enjoy will have definitive, legislated protection.

I support freedom of conscience and freedom of religion absolutely and always, not selectively or when it's convenient. I will not support the legislative suppression of anyone's belief system, even when it's contrary in every way to my own. A relationship with God and a Christian belief system are individual choices, but laws are universal. They apply to every member of society regardless of sexual orientation, race, or religion. If they do not, we cannot consider our legislative structure to be either fair or just. Laws must protect everyone equally, not just selected groups of people.

Bill 208 provides through a series of amendments to existing acts guarantees that defend the rights of religious officials, organizations, parents, and teachers to act in accordance with their beliefs on same-sex marriage without fear of retribution. Why should anyone face negative consequences for expressing their beliefs? Why should any member of our society be punished for refusing to act, teach, or raise their children in a fashion contrary to their faith or personal morality? Does legally enshrining one position on an issue and silencing public opposition protect anyone's rights? No, it doesn't. Despite the best of intentions categorical protection does nothing but fuel the engine of hatred. Bill 208 recognizes the rights of all groups to enjoy freedom of expression and freedom of religion. It gives back to the individual the autonomy to make decisions based on a nonimposed moral code.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I'm a parent. Do I want my children to be taught in school that same-sex marriage is a positive thing? No, I don't. No way. Do the parents of the other children in my class share those convictions? Maybe not. Does the teacher support same-sex marriage? Maybe, maybe not. It doesn't matter, and it shouldn't matter. Taking the position that the teaching in favour of same-sex marriage should be mandatory is hateful. Requiring a child to learn that same-sex marriage is positive is hateful. Punishing someone for not wanting to teach or learn that same-sex marriage is positive is contrary to every principle of a free and democratic society. That's the issue we're debating today, not whether same-sex marriage is right or wrong, not whether it should or shouldn't be allowed.

Bill 208 addresses the deeper and more fundamental rights behind the issue, the rights that transcend boundaries of politics and

religion. What the bill does is that it gives back to the individual the right to decide, without interference or sanction, whether they oppose or support same-sex marriage. Its purpose is to reinforce rights, not to take them away.

There is a lot of division over this issue. I think that a great deal of it comes from a sense of uncertainty. Those of us with strong religious convictions against same-sex marriage are becoming increasingly concerned with the possibility that we might one day be forced to accept a position that our religious beliefs do not allow us to. As a minister I'm especially concerned that a refusal to perform a marriage ceremony could result in legal repercussions or human rights complaints being levied against me. Bill 208 would protect me in this regard, and it would protect all religious officials and marriage commissioners who also don't agree with same-sex marriage on moral grounds.

Mr. Speaker, I make my beliefs public, and I share them with others. This is what a minister does. I do not, however, require my beliefs to be practised by those who don't agree with them. I don't force teachers to teach them in our schools. So should we have laws that make church attendance on Sunday mandatory? No. Alberta does not have the Lord's Day Act any longer. No, we don't because forcing a business to close on Sunday was seen as discriminatory on religious grounds. In the interests of fairness and freedom, the law makes no distinctions and leaves the choice to attend church or to open a business up to the individuals. But there are those who would refer to my beliefs as hate speech. I'm shocked and saddened by these comments. The promotion of hatred is disgusting, and it's one of the last things that I would ever do. I support the traditional definition of marriage. How is this hateful?

According to a 2005 Ipsos-Reid poll 56 per cent of Albertans opposed gay marriage. Does this mean that over half the people we interact with on a daily basis are hatemongers, that they should be open to the same sanctions as white supremacists and skinheads? Absolutely not. I would never promote hate against anyone, nor would any of my former parishioners or any of the other decent, hard-working Albertans it is my pleasure and honour to currently represent. Because we disagree with or don't celebrate an activity does not mean that we are hateful. Mr. Speaker, disagreement is the basis of democracy. Its presence is the sign of a healthy society. Its absence is the sign of tyranny, a tyranny that Bill 208 will prevent once and for all.

The pioneers who built this province came here from around the world. They fled persecution and war to make a new home where the principles of co-operation and peace were practised instead of just dreamed about. Today we enjoy an incredible diversity of ideas and culture, and Albertans would have it no other way. Mr. Speaker, I would have it no other way.

4:10

Our ancestors have fought and died to defend the freedoms that we take for granted: our freedoms to think, act, and believe what we want, our freedom to raise our children as we want, our freedom to worship the god of our choice and abide by his principles. Bill 208 guarantees these freedoms, and it does so without discrimination. It affirms the principles of religious freedoms set down by the federal Liberals in Bill C-38. It upholds section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees the freedom of conscience and religion. It enshrines with legislation a concept that is integral to the health, diversity, and continued well-being of our society and the dignity of Albertans.

It is, in short, a bill that guarantees mutual respect. It allows individuals to address without fear of censure or reprisal a contentious issue according to their own moral beliefs. It will go a long

away toward alleviating the fear, mistrust, and anger that have been so regrettably prevalent in the debate on same-sex marriage and will hopefully be accepted as a universal proposal that transcends party lines.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to give this bill my enthusiastic support, and I strongly urge every member of this Assembly to join me in doing so. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In speaking in second reading to Bill 208, the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, I first want to underline – I know there were notes coming from the sponsoring member: would members of this particular opposition caucus have a free vote? I want to underline again that in this Assembly for this caucus reaction to private members' bills is always a free vote. Always. So although I've heard one of my colleagues speak and I have a pretty good idea of how he might be voting on this, how other members of my caucus will be voting has not been discussed. We don't do that. It's a private member's bill. It's always a free vote.

I also note that we are working with a duty caucus today, so there may well be members who would wish to be in their place and are unable to be and have commitments in other places or perhaps are on their way back here and hoping to get here in time for a vote. I don't know. We're dealing with a duty caucus today.

What I see contemplated and somewhat laid out by the proposals in Bill 208 are competing or contradictory rights. I think we have to be very clear about our arguments here. Essentially, Mr. Speaker, all provinces signed onto the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as did this province. It voted and passed it and agreed to abide by what was set forth in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, so we all signed onto this. I'm always saddened when I hear people somehow believing or putting out there that we had nothing to do with this. Well, we did. It was a Canadian venture, and we were all involved in it. Through our elected representatives, yes, indeed, but that's the way many of our laws are passed. There was certainly opportunity for people to give input as this was being debated across the country.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

My interpretation of this is that we have one identifiable group that would like to have the right to have a certain group adhere to certain principles. They're looking for protection that takes them outside of what exists now. In my reading of it it appears to say: "We'd like the protection to be able to discriminate. We want to be able to say that our rights are above another group's rights." We try very hard in Canada not to do that. There's an old description of the law in which it says that my right to swing my arm around with a fist at the end of it ends at your nose. So what I choose to do in my sphere is acceptable, but it's not if I impose it onto you in a way that is particularly harmful or discriminatory.

That's what the Charter is trying to do: to set out where that inequality has historically been in our culture and to try and address that. I'll note that section 15(2) of the Charter goes – my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has already talked about section 15(1), in which the equality rights are laid out, that "every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination." Then it lists all of those that were specifically written in at the time this was passed in 1982. It came into effect in 1985. Since then, we have had other decisions that in fact write it in, so it doesn't appear here, but it has been written in and accepted that way.

I note that what we anticipated at the time was the attempt to right

the wrongs that had gone before us. Thus you get 15(2), which says:

Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of,

and then we get the same list again,

race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex [which includes sexual orientation], age or mental or physical disability.

So not only did we contemplate that we wished to structure a society in which everyone is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law, but we recognized that some groups historically had not, and we wished to correct that. We would allow groups that were there to ameliorate conditions to continue with their work.

What I see here is an argument that religious rights should trump the rights extended under section 15, and nothing in the Charter sets that out. No right is higher or lower than any other right. There is some distinguishing language that's used in the Charter. In some cases it speaks about every citizen, which is different from every person in the country. There are those kinds of distinctions, but at no place does it say: this group has more rights than the other group. The point of it was to try and achieve equality there.

What is interesting is that we have always upheld any faith community's ability to enforce their beliefs or tenets on their own members. For example, we have the Catholic faith, which does not believe in divorce or does not encourage that, and they are able to say to their own members: this is what we believe, and we will not give you a second marriage in our church; we choose not to do that. Now, that's fine. That's taking their religious beliefs and holding it inside of their church to their own community, but they cannot go further than that and say: no other person would be allowed to divorce and remarry. They hold that religious freedom inside of their religious community.

I've heard an argument this afternoon that somehow criticizing public policy is what is being promoted inside of this legislation. I would argue against that. Criticizing public policy is not the same as promoting unequal treatment, an attempt to limit the rights and privileges of any other identifiable group. Again, I'm back to the pitting of one set of rights above another. That is not what we have in the Charter.

It seems to me that we are mistaking religious freedoms and the protection of those religious freedoms and the ability to act out the beliefs of one's faith community as somehow being an override of all the laws of the land. In fact, they must all exist, somewhat uncomfortably I'll admit, but they must exist side by side.

When I actually look at what is being proposed in this bill, section 1 is amending the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has already spoken about that. Essentially, I see it as attempting to protect those groups who choose to provide unequal treatment to others. In other words, they choose to discriminate against others, and they wish protection in doing that. It's the absolute opposite of what is anticipated in the Charter under section 15(2). I don't believe in that, and I can't uphold it.

I think that part of what we need to do here is what I often do when I'm trying to figure something out to see whether it's fair or not or equal treatment or not. I'll often take another group and substitute them into there. If you take what's being put forward in this bill and substitute, for example, mixed race or people of different faiths becoming married, does this still read as a reasonable attempt to limit the freedom of others? I would say: no, it doesn't. At that point it becomes clear that this is a religious grouping that is trying to limit the powers and the privileges and the rights of another group of people based on very identifiable characteristics.

4:20

Section 2 of the bill is amending the Marriage Act, and it is proposing that a public servant, such as a marriage commissioner, would be allowed to refuse to solemnize a marriage. Again, we have to remember here that there is a separation of this. Not all clergy are automatically marriage commissioners, and not all marriage commissioners are members of a faith community. Certainly, within faith communities they are entitled to do as they need to with their own members but not to impose that on others.

Thank you for the opportunity. I will not be supporting this.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to join debate on Bill 208, the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act. I believe that in implementing this bill, we can ensure that Albertans' rights as enshrined in the Canadian Charter are further built upon and protected. Albertans' freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and freedom of expression would be protected by the implementation of Bill 208.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in over a dozen years as an educator and administrator at each division level in various disciplines, including religious education, I've learned that the citizens of this province place a great deal of importance on our education system. Now, it's well recognized that parents are the primary educators in their children's lives, and their role is pivotal in their education. They choose what schools to send their children to. They choose whether to home-school their children, and they choose whether to place them in a private institution. Parents are to do what is in the best interests of their child, and they have the right – I'll repeat that; the right – to be informed regarding what their children are being taught in school. That allows them to be an active participant in their child's life, and it helps them to make good decisions with respect to determining the best course of action for their child. That is exactly what Bill 208 is designed to do.

The proposed modifications to the Alberta School Act would help support parents and students in ensuring that parents are notified that same-sex marriages and relationships will be discussed in the classroom, and it will provide students with the option to not attend a course when this is discussed. It would further ensure that students are not penalized if they don't attend, and it would make certain that no teacher shall be required to teach students about same-sex relationships. Thus the changes to the School Act as proposed in Bill 208 would serve to protect teachers as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this is a good bill. It will enhance the rights and freedoms of all Albertans. I think that it's imperative to stress the value of the proposed amendments to the School Act. This important aspect of the issue has the possibility for far-reaching consequences in the future.

Mr. Speaker, under the United Nations universal declaration of human rights, article 26(3), it explicitly states that parents have the "right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." Under the United Nations declaration of the rights of the child, principle 7, paragraph 2, it's stated that "the best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible [when it comes to] education and guidance." That responsibility lies first and foremost with their parents. In other words, a child's parents have the right to express what they believe to be in the best interests of their own child.

Our very own School Act agrees with this. It states in the preamble that, indeed, "parents have a right and a responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children." The

involvement of parents in the life and education of their child helps ensure that the best possible choices are being made for the child. So parents need to be notified when same-sex relationships are going to be discussed in school so that they can be involved in the child's schooling and determine whether or not it would be beneficial for the child to attend such a discussion.

Mr. Speaker, parents have the right to teach their children their religious and moral values and the right to be notified when topics within the educational system, such as same-sex marriage, are not in line with such beliefs. Now, as a province we already allow for parental exemptions from human sexuality education. I can tell you that the process is that parents are notified that this content will be discussed as part of the child's curriculum in grades 4 through 9 and as part of the high school curriculum in career and life management courses. They're then given the option to have the child exempted from these discussions. So I ask then: why can we not do the same for discussions on same-sex relationships? Parents should be given notification that their children's curriculum will include discussions on such matters and then given the option to remove their child from such deliberations if they choose.

Now, I realize that at this time schools in Alberta are not covering same-sex marriage and sexual orientation as part of the curriculum. Even so, I think it's important that we add such provisions to the School Act now to ensure that in the future of our province we don't run into the same problems that other jurisdictions have.

Other members have mentioned, at least in passing, British Columbia with numerous and serious problems related to these issues. Just to give you a little background, Mr. Speaker, most of the independent schools in B.C. are actually considered religious institutions. They're publicly funded, and therefore they're required to follow the curriculum in B.C. Now, the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal at the present time is challenging the B.C. curriculum as it feels that the curriculum does not portray a positive view of those of a different sexual orientation. Apparently, it is not enough to simply refrain from discussing the issue or avoid negative portrayals. They feel that positive portrayals must be included in the curriculum. Some individuals feel that because these independent schools receive government funding, they should follow the decisions of the tribunal, whatever they happen to be. Now, I expect that all hon. members of this Legislature can appreciate the tension that such a state of events must produce. This is a situation that I would hope to avoid in Alberta by amending our School Act before such issues arise.

I know that teachers in B.C. are also feeling pressure in this climate. The example has been raised of Mr. Chris Kempling, a B.C. teacher and counsellor suspended twice, as a matter of fact, by the B.C. College of Teachers for expressing his thoughts on these issues. In 2001 he wrote to his local paper expressing his concern regarding health risks from teaching same-sex relationships in the school curriculum. In 2005 he was suspended a second time for testifying in the parliamentary hearings on Bill C-38, the federal government's bill changing the definition of marriage. I find this extremely unfortunate, and I hope that we can avoid that here with the implementation of this act.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not basing this argument on the experience of one person or one province. It has happened in other places, including Ontario, where activists for same-sex rights have actually lobbied the government to sever funding to private schools, including Catholic separate schools, which opt to not include discussions on same-sex marriage in curriculums. This is problematic and, again, can be avoided by explicitly simply stating in the School Act how teachers, parents, and children's rights will be protected by amending this legislation as well as by the implementation of the

Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure that the problems in B.C. and Ontario do not happen here. In amending the School Act, we protect students, parents, and teachers by ensuring that they're given due notification of same-sex marriage content within the curriculum and by granting the option to parents for their children to opt out of discussions.

Truly, it comes down to this. This is not about taking away people's rights. It's about protecting people's rights. The freedom of conscience, expression, and religion of all Albertans would be protected by Bill 208. Therefore, I'm proud to stand today to give my support for this bill, and I trust that other members of the Legislature will do the same.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

4:30

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with pleasure and interest to speak on the bill for this afternoon, Bill 208, the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act. In my view this bill seeks to strengthen or change three areas. First of all, as the hon. member who brought forward this bill said in his first reading: "Mr. Speaker, the most important right in a free society is the right to disagree with and to criticize government policy. Bill 208 would strengthen this right." As well, this bill seeks to amend three other pieces of legislation: the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act as well as the Marriage Act and, finally, the School Act as well. So it's a very sweeping piece of legislation which crosses over to many areas of provincial jurisdiction, but also, I think, has some interference with federal jurisdiction of which I think we need to take note.

The School Act, in particular, is amended to allow for teachers to opt out of teaching curriculum that mentions same-sex marriage, to allow for students to not attend classes or courses where same-sex marriage is taught, and to require the school to notify parents if the same-sex curriculum is being taught. Finally, the last amendment, which I find certainly problematic and certainly on constitutional grounds may strike the other two amendments, but this one is otherwise certainly problematic.

Mr. Speaker, in 1929 Canada's highest court of appeal ruled that women were in fact included in the category of persons. Five Alberta women lead the charge, and this Legislature celebrates them today with displays throughout the visitors' centre. The Persons Case, as it became known, established that social definitions can and must change as society does. The fight for civil human rights for women was long and difficult and is ongoing here today. A similar fight for equal recognition of rights has been going on in Canada's gay and lesbian communities for quite some time now, and since the late 1990s a lot of progress has been made.

In April 1998 Alberta's Individual's Rights Protection Act was determined to include sexual orientation as prohibited grounds for discrimination. In January 2001 a pension plan decision recognized that same-sex couples must be recognized as full partners in claimant's benefits packages. In April 2001 the Intestate Succession Act was made to recognize same-sex partners inheritance rights. In December 2004 the Supreme Court of Canada recognized in its historical reference that same-sex couples could marry as marriage was the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others. Finally, in June 2005 the Canadian Parliament voted for Bill C-38, which recognized same-sex marriage. This bill also recognized, on the advice of the Supreme Court, that religious officials would not be forced to perform same-sex marriages.

When Bill C-38 was voted in, only Alberta, Prince Edward Island, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut had yet to recognize this right. Realizing that pursuing an article 33 Charter challenge was impossible, the Alberta government since July 20 of last year recognized the right of same-sex couples to marry. So here we are today. Life goes on just as it always has except that the lives of a marginalized group have been made more equal to the rest of the population by being accorded these rights that all heterosexual individuals in Alberta have fought for for so long and enjoyed exclusively.

The proposed amendments before the House today, I believe, are running in contravention to this movement towards equality, and we must identify each section for the problematic areas that it does identify.

First of all, in regard to human rights this bill is confusing, not the least of which by using Alberta's own human rights legislation to deny human rights by permitting discrimination. The amendments to our Marriage Act propose to allow marriage commissioners to refuse to marry same-sex couples while the proposed amendments to our human rights legislation would deny these same-sex couples the right to sue for discrimination.

While the wording of the human rights amendments may be read as attempting to narrow such discrimination to only those areas in respect to marriage between persons of the same sex, this could also be used to discriminate in other areas. This amendment is so broadly written that it includes everyone and everything. No organization or person is to be deprived of any benefits nor be subject to any sanction, based on the right to express and exercise their freedom of conscience or religion. This exercise could quite easily include denying services based on moral grounds. I find it quite ironic that the human rights prohibition against denying people's benefits could be used to do just that: deny people's benefits. While these amendments would not stand up, Mr. Speaker, to a Charter challenge, I find it remarkable that this bill is proposing to subject Albertans to such difficult and trying litigation just simply to try to regain the rights that are already awarded to them through our highest law, the Constitution, and upheld in our highest court, the Supreme Court.

The second category is, of course, in regard to marriage. We are certainly not as a caucus or, I think, anyone else here contesting the rights of religious figures in religious institutions to refuse to marry same-sex couples on religious or moral grounds. The Supreme Court has already pronounced itself in favour of clergy retaining that right to refuse such marriages. Rather, the attempt to include under such exemptions civil commissioners is what we are in fact opposed to. The Supreme Court decision and Bill C-38 both recognize the right of religious officials to refuse performing same-sex marriage, but neither extend this exemption to civil marriage commissioners. The House must not attempt to legislate around our highest courts and our highest law, and in fact to do so is merely spurious and otherwise will be struck down later.

Finally, the School Act. As ironic as using human rights law to deny human rights might be, this proposed amendment to the School Act seeks to include in the diversity in shared values section of the School Act, which upholds that all educational and instructional material must reflect the diversity of our society and honour and respect and promote that diversity, and is saying that teachers and students may not be subjected to material that "marriage may be a union between persons of the same sex." I find that difficult and, certainly, ironic to see placed in the inclusive and diversity promoting section of the School Act an amendment that means the denying the very spirit of the section which it's meant to amend.

Not only are these proposed amendments to the School Act difficult to accept and inherently discriminatory; they amount to a

degree of censorship that would be very much impossible to administer. Given the broadly inclusive definition of what may be excluded from teaching, the amendment requiring that “where part of the curriculum . . . consists of teaching that marriage may be between persons of the same sex, the school must advise the parents . . . prior to the material being taught,” would be next to impossible to administer, Mr. Speaker, given the vagaries of teaching and the textbooks and the breadth of curriculum and whatnot. It certainly is problematic at best.

If the purpose of our education system is to prepare students for citizenship, I believe that we’re doing them a disservice by restricting their access to materials that reflect the diversity of our society and the diversity of social options available to our citizens. It is the mandate of parents to look after their children, to decide those things, and to enforce those values in their own children.

Thank you.

4:40

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today as well and join the debate on Bill 208, the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. The issue of same-sex marriage is an important matter to many Canadians. It has inspired passionate debate from both proponents of the issue of same-sex marriage and its detractors alike. I strongly believe that it is in the best interest of this Assembly and of the electorate that we represent to engage in informed debate. With that said, I think that there are some general misconceptions regarding the intent of this bill that must be cleared up.

Bill 208 is not about limiting or taking away rights. It is about protecting and enhancing rights. Frankly, this bill is not even about same-sex marriage at all. It is about protecting existing freedoms. It is about protecting our fundamental rights to freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech. It is about protecting parental input regarding the education received by their children. As a Christian, I believe very strongly in the traditional definition of marriage, the union of one man and one woman. The idea of homosexual marriage flies completely contrary to my religious and moral beliefs.

I have heard from many, many individuals in this matter, and I am confident that the majority of my constituents in Lacombe-Ponoka feel the same way. They’re disappointed and frustrated with the federal government’s decision to legalize same-sex marriage. But whether we like it or not, same-sex marriage is the law of the land in Canada. The definition of marriage falls within federal jurisdiction, and last year the federal government passed legislation, Bill C-38, the Civil Marriage Act, on the matter and effectively legalized same-sex marriages across the country.

Bill 208 will do nothing to change that. This legislation will not prevent the marriage of same-sex couples. It will, however, build on what the then Liberal federal government tried to do when they passed Bill C-38. It will protect existing freedoms that may be affected by the creation of the new right to gay marriage.

The federal government recognized some of the potential conflicts that may arise from the legalization of same-sex marriage and addressed them in their legislation. C-38 originally included provisions to protect religious officials from being forced to perform marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples, to protect marriage commissioners from losing their jobs for refusing to perform same-sex marriages, and to protect the freedom of individuals to speak out against homosexual marriage. However, in the Supreme Court’s ruling on the issue of same-sex marriage our high court indicated

that several areas relevant to the protection of certain rights included in the federal legislation, the rights addressed in Bill 208, fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces. Because of this, the federal government was forced to remove these protections from the text of the act over to the preamble of the act, where they do not carry the force of law.

Bill 208 simply mirrors the provisions that the federal Liberals included in Bill C-38 that were ruled to fall under the domain of the provinces. In fact, the wording of the pertinent portions of the two pieces of legislation is almost identical.

One important part of Bill 208 is the proposed amendment to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. The amendment would unambiguously protect the freedoms of conscience and religion as specified under section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Bill of Rights. The amendment to the act, the addition of section 11.1, would protect individuals or organizations who expressed their views based on freedom of conscience or religion contrary to gay marriage or in favour of the traditional definition of marriage and family values. This would protect Albertans’ democratic right to free speech.

This is one of the fundamental freedoms necessary to any strong democracy as a healthy democracy thrives on the dissenting opinions and informed debate of its citizenry. Shutting down one side of the debate on an issue is undemocratic and un-Canadian. Currently, that is exactly what is happening to individuals who speak out against a same-sex marriage. As other members of this Assembly have illustrated previously during the course of this debate, individuals who speak out against gay marriage or the homosexual lifestyle for religious reasons have been faced with charges of discrimination in several Canadian jurisdictions, including right here in Alberta. This is precisely why these protections are necessary.

As other members have highlighted, the protection of religious officials and marriage commissioners is also necessary. Currently individuals in other jurisdictions are facing negative repercussions for refusing to perform same-sex marriages, that are contrary to their religious beliefs or moral values. We must ensure that their rights are also protected. Bill 208 would amend the Marriage Act to do just that by allowing members of the clergy or marriage commissioners the right to refuse to solemnize marriages that are not in accordance with their religious or moral practices without the fear of negative reprisal.

Mr. Speaker, I’m also pleased to see the inclusion of the amendments to the School Act in this legislation. It is important and necessary for parents to take an active role in the education of their children. The provisions regarding the School Act contained in Bill 208 would mandate the prior notification of parents and students when material pertaining to same-sex marriage is to be included as part of a course’s curriculum and allow students and teachers the option of opting out of attending or teaching courses containing such material without penalty. This opt-out arrangement would be similar to the existing provision regarding sexual education in Alberta. I think it is important for children and teachers to be free of coercion and to not be forced to learn or teach subject matter that is contrary to their moral or religious principles.

As a parent and as a Christian I believe that these protections are essential. My wife and I have taken our right and responsibility to make decisions regarding our children’s education very seriously. Our four children grew up in a Christian household, and we made the decision to send them to independent Christian schools that reflect the values and beliefs important to our family.

Mr. Speaker, the protections included in Bill 208 are of vital importance in guarding the freedoms of Albertans. The right to free speech and expression, freedom of religion, and freedom of

conscience are an essential part of our identity as Canadians and Albertans. It is important to ensure that these pre-existing rights are not eroded by inclusion of new rights.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to thank the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View for sponsoring this thoughtful piece of legislation. This moderate, well-reasoned legislation is designed to protect our fundamental freedoms. Because of this, I'll be voting in favour of Bill 208, and I urge the rest of this Assembly to see its passage through second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I realize that there are a number of members who wish to participate in this debate. Therefore, I'll keep my comments uncharacteristically brief.

It is said that politics and religion, like oil and water, don't mix. I disagree. Both our religious or agnostic and political beliefs underlie and guide our actions. Inclusion is an extremely important tenet of both my faith and political views. While I was raised in the Christian faith, the god to whom I swear allegiance goes by a variety of interchangeable names: Allah, Yahweh, Krishna, Manitou, Buddha. Regardless of the creator's name or the follower's religious affiliation, at the heart of all religions are the guiding principles of love and acceptance, universally expressed as the golden rule of do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

As a child in Sunday school I heard frequently the participation plea, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." There wasn't an accompanying list of disqualifiers or restricters as to which children were welcome or under what conditions. Bill 208, I believe, speaks more to rejection than acceptance. It seeks to build walls and barriers rather than tearing them down. I am opposed to exclusivity which claims that certain people's secular or religious priorities are more important than others. I believe that Bill 208, rather than enshrining and protecting universal rights, is very selective of which rights will be protected.

I am opposed to Bill 208.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 208, the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View. We are fortunate to live in a country where we are afforded certain rights by virtue of being Canadian. We are free to live our lives in accordance with the faith of our choosing. We are guaranteed the right to live our lives free of discrimination. We are free to speak out against government policy that we disagree with.

These fundamental rights are enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and are a significant element of our identity as a nation. These freedoms are an important symbol of what it means to be Canadian. They are a primary tenet of our strong democracy and represent the importance of respect for both the individual and society. These rights allow us as individuals to go about our lives with dignity and self-respect.

Balancing the competing rights of individuals or groups is often an arduous task for legislators and the judiciary alike. The guaranteed freedoms of one person or group are often in conflict with the freedoms of another. For example, freedom of religion also means freedom from religion. Free press often conflicts with personal privacy.

4:50

The legalization of same-sex marriage offers a vivid illustration of conflicting freedoms. The creation of a new right for members of the same sex to marry has strained other pre-existing rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and freedom of conscience. Mr. Speaker, while it pains me to speak about the federal Liberals in a positive light, it must be said that they actually did a pretty good job of recognizing these conflicts. They included in the federal legislation that legalized gay marriage, provisions that would address the tension of conflicting freedoms and protect certain pre-existing rights affected by the legalization of same-sex marriage. In its decision on the matter, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that several of these protections fall under provincial jurisdiction and that those sections of the federal legislation do not carry the force of the law. Bill 208 simply does what the federal government intended and fills the jurisdictional gaps noted by the Supreme Court.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 is comprehensive and well-thought-out legislation designed to protect the rights of individuals and groups that may be affected by the legalization of same-sex marriage. The scope of this private member's bill is fairly broad, proposing amendments to three separate pieces of legislation: the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, the Marriage Act, and the School Act. Each of the amendments will entrench legal protection of specific fundamental freedoms that could be adversely affected by the legalization of homosexual marriage. While the definition of marriage falls under the federal authority, the solemnization of unions is within the jurisdiction of the provinces. It is the responsibility of the province to take into account how the legalization of marriage of same-sex couples would affect marriage commissioners and religious officials and act to ensure that their rights are not eroded.

It is our responsibility to make certain that the proper balance is struck between the rights of homosexual couples and the rights of the clergy and marriage commissioners in matters pertaining to the solemnization of same-sex unions. If a marriage commissioner or a priest is forced by law to solemnize a union that is contrary to his religious beliefs, then his fundamental right of freedom of religion and conscience has obviously been compromised. Does this sound like an adequate balance for all parties involved, Mr. Speaker? No, it does not. Bill 208 seeks to rectify this problem. Alberta's Marriage Act would be amended to allow religious officials and marriage commissioners the right to refuse to solemnize the marriage of same-sex couples if to do so would be contrary to their religious or moral beliefs. Additionally, they would be able to do so without the fear of prosecution or persecution.

It must be stressed that no one's rights will be diminished or removed by such a provision. This will not take away from the ability of same-sex couples to wed. They will still be able to find other marriage commissioners or religious officials whose personal, religious, or moral beliefs would not compromise their ability to solemnize such unions, but it would better protect the rights of other affected individuals.

Bill 208 also includes amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act that would serve to preserve and enhance existing rights of individuals to free speech, thought, and expression regarding the issue of same-sex marriage as well as freedom of religion and conscience. This would protect individuals from facing human rights complaints for espousing the views of the Catholic church or speaking out against the legalization of same-sex marriage. Some may argue that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms already offers these protections, but Bishop Fred Henry from Calgary may beg to differ. Bishop Henry has been charged with so-called hate speech for espousing the views of the Catholic church

and speaking out against the legalization of same-sex marriage not only once but twice. Mr. Speaker, I'm as Protestant as they come, but I find this absolutely abhorrent.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that the proposed amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act would also explicitly enshrine the rights of same-sex couples in provincial legislation. The beginning of the proposed section 11.1 reads:

No person or organization shall be deprived of any benefit, or be subject to any obligation or sanction, under this or any law of Alberta, solely by reason of their exercise, in respect of marriage between persons of the same sex.

Again, this amendment would not weaken or eliminate anyone's rights or freedoms. It would fairly balance conflicting freedoms by legislating for clarity the protection of existing freedoms and the protection of the new freedoms created for homosexual couples by the federal legalization of marriage.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will also amend the School Act for further clarity to ensure the explicit protection of conscience, religion, and expression in our schools. Bill 208 would allow teachers and students to opt out of portions of courses related to the teaching of same-sex marriage without penalty, much like the opt-out provision in place for sexual education. Also, the amendment would make it necessary for students and parents to be informed in advance prior to the teaching of material regarding same-sex marriage. These provisions recognize the importance of parental involvement in a child's education and that some families may wish to address certain sensitive topics in their own homes in accordance with their personal religious and moral beliefs.

I have heard from many Albertans on this matter, and many of my constituents are concerned about the legalization of same-sex marriage. Many are concerned about how their existing rights will be affected. These are serious concerns that need to be addressed in a thorough and considerate manner. When granting new freedoms, it is also important to protect and preserve the existing fundamental freedoms that are essential to our identity as Albertans. That is the very purpose of this legislation, Mr. Speaker. This bill truly would protect and enhance the rights of all Albertans regardless of sexual orientation or religious affiliation.

I am most pleased to support Bill 208 and urge the other members of this Assembly to do so as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find myself in a curious position here in a couple of senses in that on Sunday, June 11, the annual Pride parade will take place in Calgary. I've been asked to take part, which I normally would be quite willing to do except that I have a previous commitment that day. I will be at church helping in the dedication of our new sanctuary, so I won't be taking part. That's on a very person level.

On a more general level I see the merit in a number of points made in Bill 208, yet when I take Bill 208 in total, I see that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. It goes too far, in my view, in my reading of it. Rather than merely enshrining and protecting everybody's right to be everybody that they are and believe everything that they believe and swing their arms without hitting the guy next to them, as my colleague for Edmonton-Centre put it a few minutes ago, I believe from my reading of this that this, in fact, will create a situation that will get in the way of other people's rights, and I don't think we need to go there.

You know, I might be prepared to support Bill 208 if it were amended or if certain clauses were taken out or if certain things were rewritten, and, you know, I suspect that what we're really going to

need here is a rewrite of the bill in order for me to support it. But I can't support it in the fashion in which it stands because it does go too far, and I'll give you a couple of examples of that. For one, the issue of amending the Marriage Act to allow religious officials and marriage commissioners to refuse to solemnize a marriage where the marriage is between two persons of the same sex if solemnizing that marriage would violate the person's religious or moral beliefs.

5:00

You know, I think the Supreme Court made it pretty clear in its ruling that the right of a same-sex couple to be married in this country did not extend to religious groups that oppose this very notion because of their particular religious beliefs, and I think the Supreme Court made it very clear that if a church or a synagogue or a mosque elected not to perform same-sex marriages, they were absolutely within their rights to do that.

Now, I happen to consider myself a Christian, and I happen to consider, by the way, that there is a much broader scope of Christianity and definition of the term Christian than is sometimes applied when people stand up and identify themselves as Christian. I'm a Christian that belongs to a Christian church that does perform same-sex marriages from time to time. That's left up to individual congregations, individual churches to decide. Not every church in my denomination will perform same-sex marriages. Some will; some will not. That should be their choice. The Supreme Court allows them to make that choice, just as it would allow an entire denomination, an entire faith group to make the decision, if it so wished, that it was not going to perform same-sex marriage. I support that utterly. The rights of some should not trample on the rights of others. But that street goes both ways.

Where I have a problem with this – and it's a huge problem – is the fact that along with allegedly taking steps to ensure that here in the province of Alberta what the Supreme Court said really stands, we've included marriage commissioners. Marriage commissioners are not priests. They're not ministers. They're not pastors. They're not rabbis. They're not imams. They are provincial agents, provincial civil servants, employees, in essence, of the government of Alberta. While I will defend to my death the right of a minister or a rabbi or a priest or any other man or woman of the cloth to refuse to marry Adam and Steve or Liz and Joan because it goes against his or her religious beliefs or the beliefs of his or her faith community, I will not support the right of what I see as essentially a government employee to duck out of doing their job, doing the job that their employer tells them to do, because they don't happen to agree with that part of it.

That's not in the employment contract the way I see it. It's not in the employment contract for anybody. If you work for a company that asks you to do something that you have a problem with, as long as it's not something that they're asking you to do that is blatantly illegal or unethical, but you've just got a problem with it because of your own belief system, then, you know, to quote so many free enterprisers: find another job. Gosh knows we spend enough time in this House talking about how easy that is in Alberta because there's such a labour shortage that crosses all fields of endeavour these days.

So I've got a problem with the fact that this bill would amend the Marriage Act in such a way as to extend to marriage commissioners the right to refuse to perform a marriage of a same-sex couple. Federal legislation I think was very clear although it does get a little muddied when you go to the application province by province of the federal right to decide who gets married and you try to put that against the provincial right to decide what the ceremony is going to look like. But I think it's pretty clear in this case that federal law

would be supreme, and if the feds say that same-sex couples can get married in a civil ceremony, then it's pretty clear that it's up to marriage commissioners, who are provincially appointed and anointed, to perform those ceremonies.

Much the same argument I would make has to do with the School Act amendment, that would allow students and teachers to opt out of attending or teaching any part of a course that references that marriage may be between persons of the same sex. It also has provisions for notification of parents if such curriculum is being taught. As well, students and teachers cannot be penalized for not attending or teaching that part of a course that references that marriage may be between persons of the same sex.

Well, methinks the lady or the man or two men and two ladies or, you know, one of each protests too much in this case. I mean, gosh, I've had two kids come through the public school system, and the sex education of any description that they have gotten since they entered grade 4 has been pretty minimal. We've signed them up for every course every year, but there's just not a lot of sex education that happens within the public school system in the province of Alberta. That goes even though we are one of the better provinces at tackling the issue. But we still like to dance around the issues. We like to avoid talking about the elephant in the room whenever we can when it comes to sex education. We do allow parents to opt their children out of taking sex education. We already do that.

No teacher – no teacher – is going to be forced by their principal in the public school system to go down a road that they are personally uncomfortable with when it comes to talking about sex education. A principal that I know recently said to me that you can always find somebody else in the school. If that particular teacher has a problem with teaching that particular part of the sex education curriculum, you can always find somebody else who won't have a problem with it and will step up to the plate on that issue. Sometimes it's the school nurse, where the school nurse is available. You know, what we really ought to be aiming at here is generally elevating the level and the amount of sex education in our public school systems in any event.

I could, I think, support this if it focused exclusively on teachers in faith-based private schools, but again it doesn't. It crosses over, in my reading of this, to the public school system, and I don't think that we should be catching up public school teachers, who are, again, employees of the state ultimately, in any measure that we would seek to take to protect the religious rights and freedoms of people and faith-based organizations within the context of this issue.

Those are my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not be supporting Bill 208 in its current form.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand before you and the entire Assembly and join the debate on Bill 208, the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. I certainly appreciate the insight and thoughts that have been shared by my colleagues here today. I'd like to take a moment to recognize the courage and judgment of the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, who's brought this legislation forward.

Having the strength and determination to approach controversial subjects is truly important for any government. Mr. Speaker, the discussion of this topic both inside and outside of this Assembly has been quite passionate. Having an issue or a piece of legislation conjure up strong feelings and opinions is not a bad thing. It simply shows that the situation needs our attention.

The concept of ensuring that the rights afforded to same-sex

marriage will not infringe upon the rights and freedoms of those who disagree with same-sex marriage is not a groundbreaking idea. In fact, it was first included as part of Bill C-38 by the same federal government that legalized same-sex marriage in Canada. While Parliament wanted to act on this front, they were unable to do so because of jurisdictional issues. The Supreme Court determined that certain matters pertaining to the protection of rights were to be addressed by the provinces. That's why Bill 208 has been brought before us in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

This is not an act of defiance against the federal government, and it is in no way a tool to deconstruct the rights of same-sex couples to wed. Mr. Speaker, this may come as a surprise to many people who view our province as, shall I say, less forward thinking. However, just as the economy of our province has shown the ingenuity of our citizens, so too does our legislation.

The controversy of same-sex marriage has received a lot of attention in the recent past. Now it seems as if most of the comments surrounding it are whispered by many and addressed by few. There remains a definite split in Alberta regarding the views of our citizens on the issue of same-sex marriage. Rather than cause further division, this bill takes steps to mend the situation. The proposed Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, gives Albertans the protection of rights they deserve regardless of religious affiliation or sexual orientation.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, in particular it is worth pointing to the wording of section 11.1, which, if passed, would markedly strengthen the rights of same-sex couples while protecting the religious freedom of others. By entrenching these rights, we are giving Albertans the opportunity to be free to do as they choose in terms of marriage and religious practices. To me, this is a true example of multiculturalism, a concept which the entire country is built upon.

The policy of multiculturalism in Canada is meant to protect the identities and ancestry of all our citizens. It is on this belief that I base my stand in support of Bill 208. Just as those who believe in the right of same-sex marriage should be entitled to that right, those who choose to uphold their religious beliefs should be able to exercise their faith. The protection and enhancement of religious rights are important to me on a personal level, and I know that many Albertans share my sentiments.

Mr. Speaker, to better illustrate the purpose of Bill 208, I would like to use a valid example from our neighbouring province to the west. In British Columbia a lesbian couple entered into an agreement to rent a hall from a Knights of Columbus organization. When the Knights were later informed that the facility was to be used to permit a same-sex marriage ceremony, they proceeded to cancel the contract. This action was seen as unjust by the couple, and as a result, they filed a human rights complaint against the Knights of Columbus.

While some of you may already be familiar with these events, I wanted to bring it to the attention of the Assembly because it clearly shows why this bill is needed. The same-sex couple who wished to be married legally had the right to do so. The couple also had the right to celebrate the occasion with their friends, family, and community through a ceremony and gathering of their choice. It is also the right of the Knights of Columbus to deny the request of the couple to hold the wedding service in their facility. This is not because of a personal vendetta the organization holds or its desire to persecute or discriminate against the couple. They had the right to cancel the contract for the wedding because same-sex marriage goes against the religion the organization represents.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a case where one board member or one

Knights group decided to fight something without grounds. The religion in which the Knights of Columbus believe is openly and clearly against same-sex marriage. By denying the use of their hall for the performing of the couple's marriage ceremony, they are simply acting in accordance with their long-standing faith and moral beliefs. It's also worth pointing out that to my knowledge the couple in question were not abused in any way by the Knights of Columbus.

Bill 208 is not calling for the protection of those who want to act maliciously towards people partaking in same-sex marriage. In fact, by entrenching the rights of same-sex couples, it is ensuring that this does not occur. By giving religious organizations the choice to opt out of the dealings of same-sex marriage, we're not saying that such places should slam the door in the faces of these couples. Instead, it would be great to see organizations and people who feel that they cannot be a part of the marriage of two people of the same sex sharing information on alternative venues and service providers who would partake in the event.

The fact that cases involving same-sex marriage can and will continue to be brought before courts is also an important aspect to discuss in relation to Bill 208. It is my understanding that Bill 208 will provide some much-needed clarification in terms of the rights of our citizens. Legislation that sets out parameters and clearly defines rights that reflect beliefs and wishes is needed now more than ever. With more and more issues being decided by our courts, it's about time that we stepped up to the plate as the legislators of our province. The people of this province do not choose us to serve them because they want us to sit idle; they've put their power into our hands so that we can make laws and regulations that support what they believe in as Albertans.

Standing by as our courts become the creators of quasi-legislation is a failure of our mandate as members of the Assembly of this province. The courts have and will continue to have their place in ensuring that we are not abusing our powers; however, they are not designated to replace us.

As an MLA I have tried my very best to determine what my constituents want. I've also listened with open ears to what I've heard outside of my riding and in this Assembly. Taking all of this into account, I firmly believe that supporting Bill 208 is the right thing for Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a true privilege to be able to stand up this afternoon to discuss Bill 208. I thank the member for bringing forward this private member's bill. It's a very critical one. There have been some excellent points brought forward from both sides, and I hope that we can continue to learn and discuss and that as legislators we'll be able to pass this bill because it will be for our benefit and the future benefit of Albertans. I'm going to go on a little bit of a different tangent because many different things have already been discussed. We don't need to be repetitive, and I know that there are other people who want to speak.

It's very sad when we look back in history and we see the discrimination and the different injustices that have occurred in the past. We have tried as legislators to correct that whether it's internment from war, whether it's suffrage, or whether it's the homosexual persecution that has gone on. The way that they have been treated in the past, there's no question that as we look back, we can see the injustices that have occurred. What we're trying to do is to balance those out and see that we live in a just society, one where we're all protected equally under the law.

This bill being brought forth is trying to tip back the scales again

because so often when we get something out of balance, as it was in the past, we overcorrect, and it's out of balance. I see Bill 208 as a balancing bill, one that will bring justice back in and yet protect our rights, which is what we're trying to do here in the province. As is so eloquently put out, we don't want to chase around in a circle. It has been cut in half, and the provincial area now needs to be balanced so that we have that.

There are many issues when it comes to religious freedoms under section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We need to realize that religious freedoms are critical to the prosperity, the freedom, the happiness, and the peace that has gone on here in this province. In order to continue with that, we must recognize religious freedoms and realize the benefit of the diverse religious beliefs in this country and how we can and should get along as opposed to religious countries and their oppression against other freedoms and, specifically, religions.

I want to give a few examples. One, if a person's religion does not allow him to eat pork, does that mean, because we've given him the permission to have a store, that I can go in there and demand that I want pork, and this person has to bring it in so I can buy it because that's the closest store? No. He has that religious right to not bring in those things. Perhaps he doesn't like cigarettes though it's a legal substance. We cannot pass a law that, if people with religious beliefs don't want to promote these things, says: "No, it's the law. It's legal. You have to have it."

The current situation is very much such that religious persecution is taking place again, and it has been mentioned many times. Bishop Fred Henry has been taking the frontal attack on this, trying to protect the religious rights, so this is an area that we desperately need to look at and address in order to help those religious leaders who are trying to teach and share the value with their flock. They're not allowed to have freedom of expression as has been brought out by both sides of this argument. We need to take a calming look and realize that there isn't freedom of expression on both sides with the current bill or with Bill C-38 at the federal level. Like I say, we need to balance that out.

It's been brought up many times about the rights of parents to teach our children their religious rights, their values, and their principles. Once again, this bill will work on allowing parents to have that right again. There are many cases. I don't believe the case in Massachusetts has been brought up yet. A father of a kindergarten student wants to take his son out of that, and the Massachusetts courts have said, no, he has to be there, and they've banned the father from coming onto school property. So there's no question that this discrimination is taking place now on the other side, and it's critical that we balance this scale.

5:20

This is an excellent first step that needs to be taken to rebalance that scale, but there's still the question on the publishing of religious thoughts, as Bishop Henry has, that I'm not sure this bill protects. That would be another area that I feel we'd need to go forward and look at. I don't know that this bill gives protection to churches or societies, as was being mentioned, that don't want those activities going on there. It still is possible to sue them.

Back in the spring of 2002, with the Durham Catholic district school board in Ontario, they ruled there that that student was allowed to bring his boyfriend to the prom in contradiction of their religious beliefs.

There's no question that there are many, many examples to show us that justice is not being served again, that there is an imbalance of the scales, and it is the provincial jurisdiction to see that we balance these things out.

I would like to specifically thank the Member for Calgary-Foothills for bringing this bill forward so that we can have this debate. We can continue to learn, to study, and to understand the problems so that both sides can be protected and that we can benefit here in Alberta to continue with our freedoms and to go forward.

In conclusion, what I feel is most important is that we take a look at Bill 208, read it for what it is, and realize that this is a balancing bill, one that will protect rights here in Alberta. Albertans want this bill. There's no question. The people that I represent have been very forthright in coming forward and telling me that they're very nervous about their religious freedoms and their beliefs and that this is a good balancing bill.

I'll very much be supporting this. Thanks once again to the member for bringing this forward.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View to close debate.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the proposed bill once again and conclude this afternoon's debate. I'd like to thank all of the colleagues here who've provided thoughtful and constructive criticism of Bill 208. I understood most of the speakers on our side and the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to support the goals of Bill 208 but perhaps suggested better ways to that end. In terms of criticisms from my friends to the left here: why is this necessary if the Charter is already there? Well, it's for the same reasons that your federal friends thought it was necessary. It's a question of balancing rights as so many other speakers have pointed out. The question of interpreting the Charter and balancing rights is not a monopoly of judges. All the leading constitutional scholars in Canada talk about Charter dialogue and a shared responsibility between Legislatures and judges to both take responsibility in saying what rights mean and, also, how they should be balanced. This is clearly a question, Mr. Speaker, of balancing rights.

The hon. members for Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-Centre

showed the usual Liberal proclivity for running off to the courts and trying to suggest that Alberta would be better governed by courts in Ottawa than by their own people here. I was also a bit curious to hear the recommendation that we should adopt the Ontario legislation that's been passed in that jurisdiction. I'll be eager to see the Liberal Party campaign in the next election on the platform of deleting the words "mother" and father" and "husband and wife" from the statutes of Alberta. Good luck. This is Alberta, not Ontario.

There was some serious concern that I'd like to address that was brought up both by the Member for Highwood and also the Member for Calgary-Currie, a question that perhaps Bill 208 is overbroad in the sense that it attempts to deal with three different statutes. It may well be that the amendment to the human rights act, which is the first section of my bill, is sufficient to achieve these objectives in the sense that it applies its rights protections to itself and the wording of that amendment is "any [other] law of Alberta." Obviously, any other law of Alberta includes both the Marriage Act and the School Act. I would suggest that this is something we could pursue in Committee of the Whole.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank all the members for their thoughtful criticisms. There may well be a better way to achieve these same ends. I look forward to discussing alternatives during Committee of the Whole, and I will be supportive of constructive amendments to address these concerns. With this in mind, I'd ask everybody here today to support Bill 208.

I now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour, I would move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 1, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/05/01

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Fixed Election Dates

508. Dr. Morton moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation requiring fixed election dates every four years or whenever the government loses the confidence of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured this evening to open debate on Motion 508, fixed election dates. A healthy democracy is a vital source of our national well-being. The accountability of the government to the people directly contributes to both our prosperity and our freedom. Democratic elections and responsible government are tools of the people and for the people. It is of paramount importance that our citizens have confidence in and participate in these institutions.

While our current parliamentary system has served us well, we must recognize that the signs of democracy in Canada and Alberta are ailing. Voter apathy and cynicism are becoming more common. Each election seems to bring about further decreases in voter turnout and greater disinterest in the political process. Voters are becoming frustrated with our democratic process and more and more cynical towards politics and politicians. While there is no single cause of this negative trend, a significant factor is the absolute discretion of the government of the day and specifically the Prime Minister or Premier to call elections whenever they judge it to be in the best interest not of the province or the country but of their own government.

Currently in Alberta provincial elections are triggered when the Lieutenant Governor dissolves the Legislative Assembly at the instruction of the Premier. Section 3(1) of the Legislative Assembly Act directs that "no Legislative Assembly shall continue for [more] than 5 years from the date" of the last election. However, the exact timing of an election is at the discretion of the Premier. Essentially, the current practice allows the government to call an election whenever it believes it has the best chance of winning based on economic and political considerations. Considerations of fairness and the public interest have no place in this calculus. The decisive factor and indeed the only factor is the naked partisan self-interest of the government of the day.

In just the past decade at the federal level Canadians have been forced to put up with this contempt for democracy on three different occasions. The recent Liberal government of Jean Chretien twice called elections only three and a half years into five-year mandates, the second one only months after the creation of the new Canadian Alliance party. The Liberal government of Paul Martin did the same thing in 2004, calling an election only months after the merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative parties and before the new party could have its first convention. No wonder Canadians have become cynical about this process.

So it comes as no great surprise that one of the first acts of the newly elected Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen

Harper has been to propose legislation that would establish fixed election dates for federal elections and put an end once and for all to this sort of partisan trickery.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 508 proposes a similar solution for Alberta. Motion 508 urges the government to implement fixed election dates. A fixed election date can be defined as a recurring set date or time frame in which general elections are held. This motion proposes that general provincial elections be held "every four years or whenever the government loses the confidence of the Assembly." This is what's called a flexible fixed system, and it would allow us to protect our parliamentary tradition while still realizing the advantages of fixed election dates.

Mr. Speaker, there are many recognized benefits that would accompany the implementation of fixed election dates. First and foremost, it would promote fairness. All parties and all candidates would be on an equal footing as far as prior knowledge of election dates is concerned. All political parties and all candidates would have the same opportunity and the same time to develop better considered and stronger policies to present to the voters.

Set, stable election dates would also contribute to administrative efficiency. Elections Alberta would be able to prepare in advance if it were to have prior knowledge of the precise date or time frame when a general election would take place. This increased administrative efficiency could extend to the government as a whole and contribute to more effective, efficient, and open governance. Set time frames would facilitate a predictable planning and budgeting process and thus a better use of government resources and thus taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Speaker, a less obvious but, in my opinion, highly important benefit of fixed election dates would be to facilitate the recruitment of a more qualified and more diverse set of candidates for public office. The current system deters successful mid-career men and women from considering public service as an elected candidate. With unpredictable elections and candidate nominations often taking place in mid-summer with only several weeks' notice, potential candidates have no opportunity to discuss possible career changes with their spouses or business associates. Fixed election dates would change all of this. Everyone would know in advance and could plan accordingly.

Fixed election dates would also facilitate greater civic engagement in our province. Voters, teachers, educators, and the media would benefit from the extended preparation time that would accompany fixed election dates. This could contribute to more informed debate and also to increased volunteerism. By consulting with Albertans and selecting a specified, consistent time frame that minimizes seasonal constraints, voters could be better able to plan in advance for provincial elections, thus resulting in increased voter turnout as well.

Mr. Speaker, the introduction of fixed election dates into our system of parliamentary democracy is not a new concept. In fact, it has become increasingly popular across our great country. It is a democratic reform that has been discussed and even implemented in several other Canadian jurisdictions. British Columbia was the first province to pass legislation mandating fixed election dates, in 2002, and last May, of 2005, B.C. voters took part in Canada's first ever provincial election occurring on a date set by law. Newfoundland and Ontario have also passed legislation mandating fixed election dates, and the first such elections for both jurisdictions are set to be held in October of 2007. As I noted earlier, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his newly elected Conservative government in Ottawa have also committed to implementing this reform at the federal level.

One need look no further than Alberta's own history to see the benefits of fixed election dates. Since 1983 municipalities in Alberta have held fixed-term elections. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that now is the time for members of this Assembly to engage in democratic reform and democratic renewal. Voter cynicism is at an all-time high, and voter turnout is at an all-time low. At a time when demands for democratic reform and enhanced accountability are growing across Canada, the government of Alberta could and should consider ways to address the democratic deficit. Indeed, Alberta should be a leader.

As we begin our second century now as one of the most important members of the Canadian Confederation, we should put partisanship aside for a moment. Who knows which party will govern Alberta 50 years from now? Indeed, who knows what political parties will even exist in 50 years? Here is an opportunity to do not just what is good for the party but what is good for the province and not just what is good for the next election but what is good for the next century.

After the Liberal sponsorship scandal in Quebec and the sordid backroom dealings uncovered by the Gomery commission, Canadians and Albertans want more accountability and more honesty in government, in all governments. Albertans have a right to expect a best-practices regime, and we in this Assembly have the duty to deliver it. Mr. Speaker, fixed election dates would be one important step in this direction, and I ask all members of the Assembly this evening to support Motion 508.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to propose an amendment to Motion 508, and I have the required number of copies here. Can I read it now? I want to amend Motion 508 by striking out "to introduce legislation requiring fixed election dates every four years or whenever the government loses the confidence of the Assembly" and substituting "to initiate a process to study the benefits and disadvantages of implementing fixed election dates with the intention of introducing legislation based on the recommendations arising from that study."

Mr. Speaker, I think I heard the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View talk about consulting with Albertans, and that, in fact, is what this amendment would do. Not only do I not disagree with the hon. member's premise that it is a timely topic and, I think, one with much interest, but I agree with nearly everything he said. I especially agree with the part that says that we need to consult with Albertans and understand how they want to approach this.

8:10

Mr. Speaker, P.E.I. just went through a referendum of sorts with their voters talking not only about maybe fixed dates but a blended proportional representation system. I think the government felt very strongly that this was good, but the people turned it down very strongly, so we aren't always in touch with how they want us to approach this. I believe that when British Columbia talked about the idea of fixed dates, they had a coalition of citizens set up to debate it and talk about it and take it around the province. I think that people felt involved then, and I think it worked very well, but I'm not exactly sure that term limits may be the answer to voter apathy. As the hon. member mentioned, municipal governments have been on fixed election dates for quite some time, and I would suggest that voter apathy in our municipalities is even worse than in the provincial government elections or federal elections. So I'm not sure that's the answer to voter apathy. I think that maybe getting in touch with

the voters and engaging them will probably bring back their participation.

I'm also concerned, Mr. Speaker, that if we set our dates too restrictively, when we coincide with municipal election years or when we happen upon the same time as a federal election, we may, you know, kind of upset the apple cart from an unplanned thing, so we need to talk about that. Maybe a four-year term, a four-year term, and then a five-year term to get away from the municipal government. I don't know, but I think the citizens will tell us.

Mr. Speaker, I know it's not the case with the hon. member now, but it normally seems that opposition parties or parties that have lost an election often try to scramble for excuses about why they didn't get more seats. Quite honestly, everybody runs under the same rules. First past the post might not be perfect, but it is the same for all parties.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the Assembly will give kind consideration to the amendment because I think it is important to get out and talk with Albertans. I know that many American states have gone to term limits, which seems to be the next flavour of the day around election changes, and I can tell you from many people down there that they feel that term limits have handcuffed electors. They may get elected in their first two years and be dealt out the second term. They may even get a committee chair. In their third term they may become quite influential, but in the fourth term the administration knows that their time is nearly done and they can ignore them without regard for having to face them in the future. So sometimes we do things in what we consider are the best interests, and the results are not only not what we wanted there, but they're negatively affected.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all people to give consideration to the amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Speaking simply to the amendment, I would like to point out – and the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster knows this – that there's really no need for this amendment because the motion, as it were, if it were to be passed, simply urges the government to take action. It doesn't bind the government to take any action whatsoever. If it were to pass, the government then can decide whatever course they wish to choose. If they wish to choose some sort of a consultative process with Albertans, which would probably be recommended, then they can do so, but certainly there's no need in particular to change the wording of the motion as it now sits. In fact, all it really does is take away from valuable time that we could better spend debating the actual motion itself.

I would certainly suggest that we vote against the amendment, and I would urge all hon. members to do the same. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. When we get to a serious matter here on fixed election dates, all of a sudden we're getting an amendment that we're going to consult. Well, you know, where have we been? We've been advocating consulting for a long period of time. I have no objection. I think we should do very much what British Columbia did with their citizens' coalition. They looked at all sorts of things beyond the four-year process. When I look at this – we're near the end of the session – it says, "To initiate a process to study." Well, to initiate a process: how long will that take? Then we'll look at the advantage and disadvantage. I mean, frankly, to the

hon. member, I see this as putting it off rather than dealing with the specific issue.

All we're saying here is that we would take a look. The member is suggesting that we take a look at the four-year mandates. It doesn't have to be November 17. It could be May 17 or whatever so that they wouldn't counteract the municipal. Again, that doesn't preclude, as the hon. member previous said, having a study in all sorts of situations that we should look at. But if we take this now and just vote this out, then this is gone down the tubes for another – well, we're told that we may not have a fall session, and the earliest we'd be looking at to initiate a process is probably next year.

The member previous, the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, is right. There is that cynicism out there. I'm not suggesting that fixed election dates will solve all that, but surely it's at least a start, to take a look at some of these things that other provinces are taking a look at. Then if we want, if we pass this and should we begin to look at it, there's nothing to say that we can't broaden and take a look at some other things. I'd like to take a look at proportional rep and some of the others. But I think this puts the whole process off for another period of time, and I would much rather, say, take a stand on one thing here and move on in that direction.

So for that reason I think Motion 508 is not needed, and I think it slows down and hampers the process of looking at democratic renewal at this particular time. I would suggest that we defeat the motion, look at the election dates, and then if we want to from this Legislature – I certainly don't disagree with going out to the public and asking what they think about democratic renewal. As all members have said, we certainly have some work to do out there with the public, but it shouldn't have to be an either/or at this stage. Let's deal with at least one concrete proposal that's being brought forward here by a government member without initiating a process that may come sometime, who knows when, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would be difficult to speak to the amendment without speaking to the motion at the same time. The Member for Foothills-Rocky View has brought a matter before this Legislature, a motion, that is very timely, and it seems to be a matter that's quite widely discussed not only in this country but in many other jurisdictions. The matter of democratic renewal is something that's very trendy at this time and perhaps sought after by Albertans.

The amendment that's brought forward by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster is not counterproductive. As a matter of fact, I would even argue that it further enhances the motion brought forward by the Member for Foothills-Rocky View. It gives us now a manner in which we can introduce the motion to the Alberta population and how we are going to discuss it and debate it and what process it will take.

Indeed, I agree with the Member for Foothills-Rocky View. There is a great deal of cynicism out there in the public, and it's quite palpable, and that leads to a lack of participation during our elections, both provincial and federal and perhaps even municipal. So anything we can do in this House to enhance participation, to diminish the cynicism that exists out there in the public would be laudable and would be required of us and also probably, one could argue, allow all parties to draw a high quality of candidates to run in elections, which again would benefit Albertans from all perspectives and on a nonpartisan basis.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are some issues that will have to be

considered, and those are the issues that will be addressed by the amendment by way of consultation. For example, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster addressed a very serious issue of collusion between both municipal and provincial elections. You know, one could argue that in Alberta we already have preset election dates because when one looks historically, at least over a couple of decades, we have them every four years almost without exception. But we know that it's counterproductive both on a municipal level and a provincial level to have two elections running simultaneously or nearly simultaneously. That perhaps would even further deteriorate participation in elections.

So what we may have to do by way of consultation is examine whether there is a requirement to amend the municipal act now and somehow offset by way of a formula or mechanism the municipal elections from the provincial, and those are things that I would like to hear about.

8:20

I think that it's an enhancement to amend the motion and to require public consultation because I don't think we have a monopoly on knowledge in this particular House. I don't think we have a monopoly on understanding the system. There are many other jurisdictions out there in the Commonwealth that have been experimenting with such renewals, with such initiatives, some to their success, some to their detriment. I think that those are experiences on which we should be drawing. Most importantly, we should be asking Albertans how they feel about it, what their ideas are, and if we are to go ahead with this – I personally think that we ought to – how they would like to see it entrenched into Alberta legislation.

So I will support the amendment most definitely because it gives us a process. I think that we should have a committee of experts out there consulting with Albertans, asking Albertans, asking experts, academia and others, within our province to tell us how we should proceed with it, but at the same time, notwithstanding the amendment to the motion, I will also support the motion in principle because I think it's very timely.

The partisanship of our politics very often makes for good theatre, Mr. Speaker, and makes for good columns in newspapers, and that is good because at least it gets Albertans involved on that level. They read about it. But we also have to give Albertans some predictability and let them know that even though historically we have partisanship, this province is run in a very methodical manner and that elections can be depended on and happen always at the same time and that Albertans can prepare for them.

So I support both the amendment, Mr. Speaker, and the motion in principle. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise this evening and address the Assembly on Motion 508, fixed election dates. I understand that the Oilers just tied the game, so it's 2-all.

The mechanics of any political system must out of necessity operate in a way which best engages and reflects the wishes of the people it governs. In Alberta I think that we've done a fine job . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, we are on the amendment.

Rev. Abbott: I'm speaking on the amendment, yeah. Like the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs you first must talk about the motion before you can talk about the amendment.

In Alberta I think that we've done a fine job in fulfilling the second part of this obligation. Of course, the results more than speak for themselves. The wishes of Albertans are reflected very well indeed in this Assembly, but the engagement of our citizens in the political process seems to be in a downward spiral. Voter turnout continues to decrease, and political apathy is becoming more and more common. A pollster phoned a house one day and asked the resident: what is the biggest barrier to political involvement today, ignorance or apathy? The resident angrily replied as he hung up the phone: I don't know, and I don't care. With Motion 508 as amended, I believe that we are being presented with an opportunity to take positive steps towards resolving this problem.

Obviously, studying the creation of fixed election dates will not be the only solution. Like any other problem, there are several factors which must be considered. Like most of the issues we deal with in this Assembly, the matter of electoral reform is extremely complex and doesn't lend itself to generalizations or quick fixes. I do believe, however, that fixed-term elections would be a step in the right direction or, as the amendment says, at least something worth considering.

Encouraging a specific and legislated electoral timeline would not only go a long way toward restoring public faith in the political system; it might also serve to increase the productivity of government as well. How so? Well, one of the biggest factors would be the removal of the election cycle uncertainty with the establishment of a set date. In the business world deadlines serve to set a definitive framework in which stated tasks must be accomplished. They provide motivation, and they allow employees to more effectively manage and distribute their time. That's not to say that our current electoral system breeds inefficiency. Quite the opposite. Whether an election is called in the next day or the next two years, I myself and each one of my colleagues will still be working as hard as we possibly can to represent the wishes of our constituents. We will continue to achieve great things on behalf of Albertans, but I think a fixed election date would help us to work more effectively and achieve even more.

The Alberta government was the first in Canada to adopt the practice of producing three-year business plans for each ministry. This was an innovative idea in 1993 and remains an excellent idea today, Mr. Speaker. These plans serve to not only showcase the clear and definitive direction of ministries; they also provide an organizational performance framework that increases both productivity and public confidence. Now, this is only one example of the Alberta government's long-standing dedication to political accountability and results-based improvement, a tradition that we can and must continue to build upon.

To guarantee that the people of Alberta will continue to benefit from a transparent and accountable government, we must continue to find new ways to adapt to changing demands and perceptions. Thus, the organizational framework imposed by fixed election dates as stated in the amended motion could serve in much the same fashion as government business plans. The establishment of a set time frame in which to work could enable the government to more aggressively develop and pursue its stated objectives. This drive could inspire voters to become more involved, which in turn could inspire more action. The cycle, once begun, would be self-perpetuating, the end result being . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, Edmonton-Rutherford is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In our Standing Orders where we're talking about debate on an amendment, 20(2) reads, "A member, other than the mover, speaking to the amendment must confine debate to the subject of the amendment." I would submit that the amendment specifically talks about removing the clause that says "introduce legislation" and then refers to "initiate a process to study the benefits." I would expect that the Speaker would ask all members to do as the Standing Orders ask, and that is to speak directly to what the amendment is asking us to do so that then we can vote on the amendment, yea or nay, and proceed with debate on the main motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the point of order, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Yeah, on the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I've mentioned the amended motion several times. I'm trying to put some argument in for why I agree with the amended motion. I gave the hon. member the courtesy of speaking without interrupting him on a point of order, and I would hope that he would do the same for me. I'm simply speaking to the motion as amended because I believe that the amendment should be supported. I've made that case several times. I've made it very clear that I'm talking about the amended motion, and I would like to proceed with my speech.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else on the point of order?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, on the motion that we amended, as the hon. member across said – he didn't finish the amended part, that said that we would continue to introduce legislation. I think his point of order about this deleting legislation is incorrect. In fact, the amended motion still says, "With the intention of introducing legislation based on the recommendations arising from that study."

Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, I'm saying to consult Albertans and then introduce legislation, like the hon. member is talking about, as opposed to simply going ahead and introducing legislation without consulting.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else on the point of order?

Hon. members, today we were dealing with a motion, and an amendment was brought forward by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. We are governed by the Standing Orders, that each one of us has subscribed to. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, Standing Order 20(2) states, "A member, other than the mover, speaking to the amendment must confine debate to the subject of the amendment."

Those are the Standing Orders. I am a servant of this Assembly, and it's my job to enforce the Standing Orders, that each one of you has approved. I agree that there is a point of order, and I'll caution everybody who is speaking. I have a list of people who wanted to speak on the motion that was before us, and then an amendment came forward, and anybody can speak. Technically we have 10 minutes at a time for a person to speak, and once the clock runs out at 9 o'clock, debate stops, we call for a vote, and that's how it will happen. I would caution everybody else who wants to speak on the amendment to stick to the amendment that's before us.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Had that point of order

not happened, my speech would have long been over by now, but I will finish it anyway.

8:30

Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: While I enthusiastically support in principle the concept of fixed-term elections as proposed by the amended Motion 508, I think we must also give any future legislation to this end a great deal of careful consideration. That's why I agree with this amendment, Mr. Speaker.

I've touched on some of the potential benefits, but we also must be acutely aware of the very real negative consequences that could accompany any hasty or ill-conceived changes to the Election Act. The objective of electoral reforms is the improvement of the democratic process. As such, they must only be legislated after careful consideration and an objective consideration of all possible implications. That's why I agree with the amendments to Motion 508.

This evening's debate on this motion has been vital in this regard, and I certainly look forward to hearing the remainder of it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else on the amendment?

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and speak in favour of the amendment. I want to talk specifically about what the public consultation as suggested by this amendment would deal with. I think that in order to do so, it's important to put this issue into context and to understand that while I certainly am sympathetic to the original motion in that there are some pros involved with fixed election dates, there are also some cons. I think it's important that we put this into context. I'd like to talk a little bit about the pros and cons and then at that point, I think, elucidate to all of the members why it's important that we consider the amendment's proposal; that is, to initiate a process to discuss and in one way or another study the benefits and disadvantages of implementing the fixed election dates.

It's important for all members to understand that a number of other provinces, including British Columbia, Ontario, and Newfoundland, have each passed legislation setting fixed election dates. The federal government has also commented on it and is in favour of fixed election dates for federal elections although no amending legislation has been introduced. New Brunswick, Manitoba, P.E.I., Quebec, and Saskatchewan have all mused to various degrees but have not set out any specifics to the best of my knowledge. Finally, of course, municipal elections, which I'm extremely familiar with, here in Alberta are held on fixed dates.

There are a number of factors weighing in favour of the opposition to or the implementation of fixed election dates in Alberta. On the positive side, planning for elections would be easier, particularly for the Chief Electoral Officer, who'd also be able to conduct enumeration, hire and train staff, and produce election materials all based on a preset schedule. Citizens may be better able to plan and to participate or involve themselves in the election process, not just as voters but also as possible candidates or, certainly, as volunteers. It would also prevent a scenario in which existing governments can manipulate the process to either extend their time in office or find a more strategic time for an election depending upon the issues of the day. Political parties may be better able to attract qualified candidates willing to serve knowing that they could better plan their career and personal lives around the certainty of when an election is coming. There are some very positive aspects to this that I think

could improve accountability to the public. In fact, in 2004 Environics Research Group reported that 81 per cent of Canadians preferred that federal elections be held on a fixed date every four years.

There are, Mr. Speaker, also some factors that can be seen as negative to the holding of elections on set dates. Primarily, there is some thought that setting fixed election dates might have the effect of extending the campaign season. Rather than a concerted campaign focus from the moment the writ is dropped, there's a fear that electioneering could begin by some eager candidates months before the set date. The worry is that some candidates, and in particular incumbent candidates, could lose focus on the issues of governance and instead put all their energies into getting elected or, in the case of incumbents, re-elected. It may also increase the risk that an Alberta election could be scheduled at the same time as the federal election although this year I think we had an opportunity to see that that can be worked around.

So there are a number of initiatives, I think, that we should give pause for thought that complement the amendment that's before us, suggesting that we should implement a study to have a look at the benefits and disadvantages of implementing the system.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if the determination is made that the election dates are appropriate for provincial elections in Alberta, consideration ought also to be given to the question of whether the dates should be completely fixed or whether more flexibility is appropriate. The more flexible date, perhaps specifying a one-month or two-month period in which an election must be held, provides flexibility to deal with unforeseen circumstances in a way that the completely fixed date, such as a third Monday in November, does not.

Secondly, we would also want to give consideration as to what would happen if the Legislature is dissolved in a period between one fixed election date and the next. Is the election date unchangeable and unaffected, or would it simply renew itself on a four-year basis? In that case, Mr. Speaker, there may be some issues around the inflexibility of that fixed date, so my earlier comment would apply.

Again, these are the kinds of issues that I think this study would have to take into account. Any kind of legislation that would be introduced would have to take all of these kinds of issues into account.

Mr. Speaker, on final thought, I think we should give some real good thought as to whether or not fixed election dates should be considered as part of a more comprehensive package of electoral reform. Currently, as members know, the Chief Electoral Officer has brought electoral reform issues to the attention of our all-party Committee on Legislative Offices. I might suggest that this committee or a committee similar to this committee may well be the process that members might want to consider should this amendment be approved tonight.

I encourage members to support the amendment and give some of my ideas, my thoughts a little bit of thought of their own when they make their decision on how they should feel towards this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will look at the amendment to a motion that I consider to be very important. I want to thank the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View for bringing the motion forward and for this opportunity now to discuss the amendment. The motion is to establish fixed election dates for general elections in Alberta. The impact of that would be to make the timing of elections nonpartisan, thereby increasing accountability of government to the electorate and to provide certainty to the elector-

ate as to when elections will be during a relatively convenient time of year. Now, this amendment, which I oppose, is stating that there's uncertainty and we need to find out more about what our electorate are thinking.

I believe that Alberta has a democratic deficit. This is something that's discussed quite openly in our province. The causes are complex and require multiple changes. This change that was suggested in the motion before the amendment of course won't fix everything, and it certainly won't do it overnight, but it's a good way to begin the process of increasing accountability and reducing voter cynicism.

I know that a national poll in May 2004 found that 81 per cent of Canadians want fixed election dates. There are all kinds of examples in this country of provinces addressing the question of fixed election dates. B.C. and Ontario have already implemented fixed election dates. B.C. already had its first fixed election on May 17, 2005. New Brunswick's Commission on Legislative Democracy has recommended fixed election dates on the third Monday in October. The P.E.I. government and the opposition leaders have also indicated support. Fixed election dates were part of the Conservative Party of Canada platform. Saskatchewan and Quebec have also engaged in significant discussions about electoral reform.

We know already that fixed election dates exist at the municipal level and that that works very well. I think that this amendment, which would delay something that's very important and, to me, clearly needed, is unnecessary.

Leaving the calling of elections entirely at the discretion of the sitting government means that elections can be called when it's politically convenient. Elections should be about the regular process of holding governments accountable. They should be held on the electorate's timetable, not the government's, and I believe that that's what this motion is all about. I don't think that we need to delay it by accepting this amendment.

8:40

Considering the four-year timeline that is suggested in the motion, in practice the average maximum in most jurisdictions has tended to be approximately four years. Therefore, I think that in practice this will not make elections more frequent. This is about certainty, predictability, and accountability, greater certainty to the voting process for parties, candidates, and voters.

I believe women's groups in particular have indicated that this would help more women candidates plan to run for office. Greater ability to plan and certainty about the term could well attract greater quality of candidates and perhaps reduce cynicism related to partisan timing of elections. Fixed dates are part of a broader attack on voter apathy and declining voter turnout. Fixed dates could be coordinated with greater nonpartisan public information campaigns, particularly for first-time voters. There are many more pros that I can see, and I still want to reiterate that in terms of this amendment I believe it is unnecessary.

When you look at this idea of having fixed election dates as a breakthrough in Canada, it's actually quite commonplace elsewhere in the world. In looking at Fixing Canada's Unfixed Election Dates, Henry Milner assembled pertinent information on the rules regarding election dates in some 40 democracies world-wide. Only a quarter have unfixed election dates, another reason why I oppose this amendment, which would delay something that I think is urgently needed to begin to address our democratic deficit.

Would Canadian democracy be better served if Parliament and the other provinces adopted fixed voting dates, following the lead of BC? After examining the standard arguments, Milner finds that on

balance the fairness and administrative efficiency of fixed elections outweigh the added cost due to longer campaigns. More importantly, he argues, fixed election dates can be an important element in a comprehensive strategy to address the democratic deficit. They can help remove seasonal obstacles to voting, reduce voter cynicism at the manipulation of election dates for partisan ends, and attract more representative candidates – especially women – by allowing them to plan well in advance.

Beyond this, fixed election dates could enhance the effectiveness of a variety of measures designed to actively boost voter turnout. The planning and staging of public events, such as seminars, adult education activities, and public information campaigns, [forums] to raise interest and involvement in public affairs can only benefit from having the date of the next election in view.

I know from the high school aspect that knowing when an election would come would help plan curriculum that would provoke some interest and some participation in the election process, whereas now there is always uncertainty, and then they get a very little bit of time to start planning forums and that sort of thing.

With young people voting less, civics education is a key measure.

With fixed voting days [I believe that] teaching civics could be more effective. In planning the content of civics courses targeting the young people who are about to become citizens and voters, educators would know the dates of the upcoming federal and provincial elections . . . so they could better incorporate these elements and line up knowledgeable resource people for their classes.

Milner recommends that a precise election date be adopted. He argues in favour of early fall for the date, explaining that formal campaigning would thus begin in mid-August, which marks the end of the vacation period and the beginning of the political season. Third, in case of a premature election he recommends

an arrangement like the one chosen by BC and Ontario, under which the calendar resumes with the next regular election, in the fourth calendar year following the unscheduled election.

So, again, we already have people in this country moving forward, taking steps to address this deficit. I don't think there's any question that the appetite is there from the electorate. So, again, I am not supporting this amendment.

A number of arguments have been advanced in favour of change, and the most common critique of unfixed voting dates has to do with fairness. Why should the party in power have a special advantage in planning electoral strategy due to its inside knowledge of when the next election will take place? Why should its leaders be permitted to time an election to exploit conditions favourable to their re-election? Governments without fixed elections can manipulate economic policy and election dates so as to face voters at a time most conducive to attaining their electoral objectives.

As I conclude, I think Canadians are demanding changes in ethics and in accountability. They want a strong Canada resting on ethically based democratic institutions. They want honesty, fairness, and transparency to be the rule, not the exception in political life. Wherever we can, we must put an end to backroom opportunism in politics. I believe that this motion is a worthy one, that it answers a need. I do not support the amendment because I think this motion is important. We should support it now as an important step to address our democratic deficit.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Mittel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon.

Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for proposing an amendment to Motion 508 as proposed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View. An amendment to initiate a process to study the benefits and disadvantages of having fixed election dates is very important, I think. There are comments from Albertans that we have not consulted with Albertans, and it is the process this government has put forward that we will consult with Albertans on issues as important as this. I don't believe we have consulted with Albertans on this.

Take, for instance, Mr. Speaker, municipal governments, urban and rural. They have not been consulted, and I know that they have fixed elections. By looking ahead, I think they would like to see what effect this would have on their particular elections because their elections are in three-year cycles. If ours were perhaps in four-year cycles, there certainly are times when they're going to overlap each other and perhaps happen in the same year. Depending on the time it may happen in the same time of year. People certainly have spoken to me when I've met with them about having a fixed election date so that they knew what would happen ahead, but at the same time I don't think that they've been given the pros and cons for this. I think they want to know what would happen if, in fact, there were fixed elections, both pros and cons.

I think that people are not necessarily happy with elections. Take 2004, for example. There were three elections in 2004. By the time the provincial election came around, people were very tired of elections, and I think that we have to probably believe that the poor voter turnout had something to do with the fact that this was the third election that they had gone to in that year.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that we have to consult with Albertans. We have to listen to what they have to say and listen to the pros and cons on this before we go ahead with something that could be very detrimental.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and speak against the amendment urging the government "to initiate a process to study the benefits and disadvantages of implementing fixed election dates with the intention of introducing legislation based on the recommendations arising from that study." There are lots of reasons.

First of all, as my colleague already mentioned, this is not a bill; this is a motion. A motion is always urging the government to consider. Okay. So the member from Lloydminster in this amendment is urging the government. This is not a bill, but this is a motion.

8:50

The second point I want to raise is that 81 per cent of the poll is in favour of the reforms. This is the CBC. I mean, I read it in the paper a long time ago. As one of the speakers already mentioned, there are at least six or seven provinces considering adopting this reform. I commend the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View for introducing this motion. I think we need sweeping reforms in Canada as well as Alberta, and this is a good motion. I think instead of just introducing amendments which are according to me not needed at this time – anyway, we are dealing with this amendment.

This particular issue, this particular motion is a nonpartisan issue, and we should all consider it very seriously because, as I said, 81 per cent of the people all over Canada – 41 countries throughout the world, their lower parliaments, Legislatures, have adopted this reform, and I don't know why we need to study the benefits and disadvantages. I mean, this is not the right step. I think that this motion, this idea is badly needed at this moment. If we pass this

motion, I'm urging the government to consider these fixed dates for general elections. If there's a minority government, then it's an exceptional case.

As the member has already said, most of the civic governments have already adopted this reform. I don't know of any reason why we need a study. I mean, the government studies so many other issues, and we spend lots of money. After that, if you see the record, even after spending lots of money, we still couldn't implement those studies.

I request that the member withdraw this amendment. I think it's not a good idea because 40 countries in the world have this system, and we badly need the sweeping reforms not only in election dates but electoral reforms. There are so many other things we can introduce at a later stage.

Other things I want to discuss are some pros and cons about this motion. The greater certainty in the voting process for the parties, candidates, all the voters. Women's groups in particular have indicated that this could help more women candidates plan to run for office. I think this is an excellent idea. If we have a fixed date, it will solve so many problems, especially in the electoral system. A greater ability to plan. Certainty about the term could well attract a greater quality of candidates – I think one of the other speakers already mentioned this – and reduce cynicism related to the partisan timing of the election.

Fixed dates are part of the broader attack on voter apathy and declining voter turnout. We see that not in this election but in the 2000 federal election there was only an 18 per cent turnout between the ages of 18 to 20, so if it helps the the young generation to come out and participate in the election system, I think it's a good idea. Fixed dates can be co-ordinated with the greater nonpartisan public information campaigns, particularly for first-time voters. It also improves accountability, transparency, and judgment of the voters based strictly on the record over a set period, not after economic upturn or politically motivated spending. The voting process is more accessible to certain voters based on the seasonal case availability.

Mr. Speaker, if we stick with this motion, we will have better electoral planning by election authorities, including ensuring an up-to-date voters list for each election. Fixed election dates can provide for co-ordination with the otherwise costly by-election. A certain set deadline to achieve things would focus the minds of a sitting government.

As we all know, the present government here in Alberta is not choosing the fall election date sometimes for the sake of voters but for their own political purposes. It's time to stop playing politics with the election dates. I think that's the idea, that we have a fixed election date. Calling an election less than four years into their mandate sends voters to the polls unnecessarily. I think it's ridiculous. I mean, we should look at it very seriously. The Alberta Liberal plan for democratic reform seeks to end the era of a closed-door government. Our first move would be to establish fixed dates for elections as the hon. member – I mean, I commend him for introducing this motion and asking the government to look into it. Elections should be held on fixed dates that suit the democratic wishes of Albertans, not the government. At this moment the government always sees which way they benefit. They call the election whenever it is suitable for them. This is not right. We are elected by the people, and we should always listen to the wishes of Albertans.

The Alberta Liberal plan for the fixed election dates calls for elections to be held on the same day every four years. The day would be determined by an all-party committee. Under this plan Albertans could count on being able to hold the government to account at regular, consistent intervals. The government wants an

early election for all the wrong reasons. Suppose auto insurance prices are going up. The government sometimes delays the election. Sometimes they call the election early. I mean, they are playing political games.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with Lloyd from Lloydminster that a fuller public consultation would be appropriate. It would enhance my motion, so I consider that a friendly amendment and would encourage people to support it.

I'd like to respond to one criticism brought by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs that fixed election dates might lead to longer campaigns, and I draw the Assembly's attention to a recent comment by Peter Dobell, who is the founding director of the Parliamentary Centre, an organization that studies parliamentary reform projects. He rejects the argument that fixed election dates will lead to longer campaigns. He says that the longer American campaigns are driven by the need to raise large sums of money, which doesn't apply at the federal level because of public financing and applies with not much force at the provincial level because of the smaller amounts required.

9:00

To conclude, I'd like to thank the other members of the Assembly and especially members of the opposition parties for their contributions to this debate and urge all members to support the motion as amended.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else on the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've chosen to do things in the correct order tonight.

I know that I don't have very much time left, but I would like to speak to the motion itself, Motion 508, as recently amended by this House. I find myself by and large agreeing with the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, which doesn't happen very often. It wouldn't have happened this afternoon, but certainly most of his comments tonight I can agree with. I would only suggest that we should extend the debate to include the entire openness and accountability package which has been tabled in the federal Parliament by his Conservative cousins.

A lot of the points have been touched on already tonight, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to point out just a couple of them. I really do believe that this is an idea whose time has come. As somebody mentioned earlier – I believe it was a minister from the other side, talking about the Environics poll in May 2004 that showed that 81 per cent of Canadians favour moving towards fixed election dates. Certainly, that would coincide with what I hear on the doorstep.

There was a lot of discussion about encouraging voter participation. One of the things that we saw most recently in Alberta in the 2004 election was some voter confusion over the fact that we'd had three elections so close, in fact within a period of six months. You throw the U.S. federal presidential election into that mix, and there was a lot of confusion. One of the comments I heard time and time again was: "Why are we having an election right now? It's only three and a half years since the last one."

I think, clearly, that if you look at the example of municipal elections, it's been shown for many years that fixed election dates

work. People know when to expect an election. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to suggest that they build their lives around an election date, but certainly it's not uncommon to hear instances where people accommodate an election date by deferring their leaving on holidays or making sure that they participate in an advance poll before an election, that sort of thing. Often if an election is sort of sprung on us by surprise, those sorts of accommodations aren't even necessarily possible or, at least, the task may become too onerous. I'm thinking of snowbirds, for example. When they're spending the winters away in the south, there is an opportunity for them to vote in an election, but the process is such that often they choose not to be bothered with it because it takes a little too much time and effort. So anything we can do that would encourage people to be involved and give them the opportunity to be involved more readily, certainly I would support that, and indeed the entire opposition caucus would support that.

There was some talk about extending . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View to close debate on Motion 508 as amended.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned earlier, one of the great virtues of our parliamentary system is its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The experiences in British Columbia, Ontario, and Newfoundland show that in response to voter cynicism and a declining interest in political elections, fixed election dates offer not a complete but a partial remedy to that problem and a step forward in addressing the democratic deficit. I think that these concerns apply with just as much force in Alberta as they do at the national level, and I think that the motion as amended tonight addresses that concern and deserves the support of the members.

Again, I'll just thank all members for their remarks and urge them to support the motion as amended. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 as amended carried]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, a number of you were looking at me when the clock struck 9. Just for your information, according to our Standing Orders we have 60 minutes for debate on the motion itself. We had a point of order that took about four or five minutes away from the debate, and that's why we went beyond the 9 o'clock mark, to complete the 60 minutes.

head:

Government Motions

Address to the Legislative Assembly by the Governor General

18. Mr. Renner moved on behalf of Mr. Zwozdesky:

Be it resolved that the Assembly invite Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, CC, CMM, COM, CD, Governor General of Canada, to the floor of this Chamber to address the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, May 4, 2006, and that this address be the first order of business after Prayers and that the ordinary business of the Assembly will resume upon the conclusion of Her Excellency's address. Be it further resolved that Her Excellency's address become part of the permanent record of the Assembly.

[Government Motion 18 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 29
Environmental Protection and
Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate April 25: Mr. Mitzel]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 29, Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006. I welcome the opportunity to encourage enhancements to our environmental protection in Alberta. I believe a good deal of this bill provides meaningful strengthening of existing legislation, particularly in relation to emission controls, trading, codes of practice for low-risk activities, accessibility to sound environmental information.

However, I do have some real concerns about one area of legislation, that of contaminated sites and their management. The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act requires the reporting and immediate cleanup of spills and accidental contamination when it occurs. The principle of polluter responsibility and polluter accountability for costs of cleanup is fundamental and must be strengthened, not weakened. I will therefore be bringing forward several suggestions to try to ensure that such is the case, to strengthen already good legislation under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the amendments proposed there.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are increasingly anxious about the accelerating rate of industrial development in Alberta, particularly in this time of booming oil and gas prices and the headlong rush for profits. We already have over 350,000 oil and gas installations here and over 370,000 kilometres of pipelines in various states of aging and corrosion. Our air, water, and soil are under threat, and we must take this threat very seriously now. Monitoring is showing progressive degradation of water, both surface and groundwater, and soil loss and contamination in relation to industrial activity. Virtually every section of this province has now got signs of human activity.

9:10

Albertans have placed their trust in Alberta Environment as the regulatory authority to establish science-based standards beyond which contamination will not be allowed and to which industry will be held accountable. New bills must move the protection and enhancement agenda forward and ensure that our children and grandchildren have access to wildlands in perpetuity, species protected rather than diminished, and the natural capital of our landscapes, which are valued for both monetary and quality of life purposes.

An integrated land-use plan and framework is absolutely essential for us to establish the kinds of priorities and protection that our environment and our human interests and values need. The natural history of human incursion across the land both here and elsewhere is consistently and progressively damaging. For us not to move forward with stronger legislation to ensure sustainable development measured in economic, social, and environmental terms would be a travesty of our role as regulators and managers and custodians of this infinitely valuable legacy that we inherited and must pass on to our offspring. Therefore, we must, in amending the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and other legislation on the environment, ensure that we do not in any way weaken our capacity to monitor, analyze, and hold accountable those people, companies, and organizations that allow release of contaminating substances.

Let me take the opportunity at this time, though not directly

related to this bill, to applaud the minister for proposing the environment endowment fund, a fund which is long overdue and would be much supported by this caucus, fully funded by industry, and again in keeping with the responsibility of industry to clean up adverse effects.

The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, 1994, deals with the release of substances into the environment and sets out requirements for the reporting of such releases to Alberta Environment related to air, water, and soil. These have to be addressed and even more consistently enforced. Further on in one of the sections under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, and I quote: The director, in an approval, may specify more stringent limits than are in the substance release regulation but may not relax the limits. It is expected that substance releases to the environment will be minimized by applying pollution prevention practices and the best use of available demonstrated pollution technology.

Several elements, then, are missing from this Bill 29, and I would seek over the next couple of days to work with the minister, to talk about some possible amendments which have to do with the following issues.

Number one, to ensure that all spills are reported promptly and cleaned as soon as possible, not postponing them for years without orders or prosecution and cleaned up at the whim of the business or industry.

Secondly, more and more contaminated sites are deemed too expensive to clean up to equivalent land use, to be free of contamination, and are therefore allowed to follow what is termed a risk management approach, which means covering the contaminated soil in many cases – and this is being suggested for the old Hub Oil site in Calgary – and then monitoring the groundwater around the site to see whether any leakage actually occurs off site or into the groundwater. This is not responsible cleanup, and it's not holding responsible parties accountable for equivalent land-use reclamation.

Thirdly, under the amendments companies will be able to transfer a contaminated site to a municipality in lieu of back taxes or as a gift or where the site is orphaned; that is, has lost its owner. Albertans expect that where those lands are contaminated, they be properly reclaimed and the soil remediated before any such transfer. This is consistent with the principles of polluter paying and polluter accountability.

Fourthly, under the amendments inspectors would be given the responsibility of assessing contaminated sites. It's not clear that there would be at least a minimum basic set of guidelines for them to follow, beyond which they would have some discretion, but that minimum baseline set of criteria must be there. If this is the case, there could clearly be inconsistent reclamation and inadequate reclamation in some cases. I would want to ensure that that was not part of the intention of this amendment.

Finally, the passing of authority for site assessment and certification to appointed inspectors as opposed to staff within the department would raise the question of potential political conflict of interest and political appointments. I think all of us would agree that we must avoid this as much as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I think those summarize my main concerns, and I would welcome some opportunity for further discussion on those points. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are certainly some good parts to the bill, but there are some things that are a little disconcerting. Perhaps it's because we need more information.

The bill is a major bill bringing forth six amendments, and as I say, most of it would probably be good, but there are some concerns that we have. I would like to put them out, Mr. Speaker, perhaps for some more debate or amendments in the committee stage.

The proposed amendment relating to the minister's right to delegate to any person a great many of the minister's duties and obligations is somewhat disconcerting. I know that the intention is that it may give Alberta Environment the flexibility to work closely with environmental experts of great renown such as Dr. Schindler, for example, but what is to prevent this partnering from occurring with so-called environmental experts tied to the oil industry? In other words, what oversight is available and guaranteed to prevent conflict of interest in such partnering?

I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Environmental Law Centre has contacted the Minister of Environment's office, I'm told, to discuss its concerns with Bill 29. I believe that they have recommended – and it seems to me to make some sense – a public registry of all delegations and transfers of power as well as guaranteed access to all accompanying documentation: contracts, agreements, et cetera. Such an amendment would recognize that it may be beneficial for Alberta Environment to partner with various groups and individuals in certain situations yet recognize that public accountability, guaranteed by such a registry, would help to ensure not only the judicious use of delegation but proper completion of statutory obligations as delegated.

I guess my question would be: that has gone, my understanding is, to the Minister of Environment, and I wonder if the hon. member would be discussing such amendments relating to the public accountability of delegated powers. I think that if they did that, they could follow the purpose of having more flexibility of dealing with known experts in the area, but also there would be some recognition to the public that this was not being abused. So I wonder if at some point he would at least comment if they're taking a look at that.

The government press release announces that "another proposed change will improve programs for reclamation of coal and oil sands mines, and ensure progressive and ongoing reclamation of these sites is promoted and acknowledged." Well, nobody is going to argue with that, but I guess the question that would flow from that is: how exactly is this promotion of reclaimed sites accomplished by the bill? For instance, how does the minister propose to promote past reclamation when, according to the Auditor General, the ministry does not obtain sufficient financial security from current sites to ensure reclamation? So the point is that if the Auditor General is concerned about what we're doing now, how do we go back in this bill and promote the reclaimed sites? It's going to take some money, I would think.

9:20

I probably know the answer to this, but I'll throw it out: why is so much emissions trading relegated to regulation? I understand that you need some flexibility from time to time, but is there nothing we can do in legislation to ensure proper emissions thresholds? If this section's purpose, as I say, is to strengthen emission controls, it seems to me that there should at least be some part of the legislation that we can look at rather than regulation. Again, the member is well aware that with regulations, the public, you know, and the Legislature for that matter, have no control over that. At least could the hon. member clarify what some of these regulations might look like? How would they be determined? What is to prevent industry from setting its own thresholds given that the minister may choose to delegate to industry its own regulation? So I think it's clear that we have to have some more knowledge of this, Mr. Speaker.

Given the extension of reporting and remediation responsibilities

backwards to before the EPEA was enacted, section 12, and given that the Auditor General's 1998-99 report found that Alberta Environment was not collecting sufficient security to adequately cover costs of remediation – in 2004-2005 this program still had not been addressed – we have a serious problem here going into the present. My question would be: what does this new backwards extension of remediation responsibility actually amount to, and again how does the hon. member respond to the Environmental Law Centre's concerns regarding reporting of historical releases?

Without making failure to report such releases an offence, it can easily be argued that this amendment has no teeth. You know, there has to be a stick there too because, otherwise, you're not going to know. I guess the question would be: would the hon. member consider the amendments proposed by the Environmental Law Centre, those relating to sections 227 and 228 of the original act, making failure to report historical releases an offence? It seems to me that we have to do that if we're serious about the reclamation, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I guess the question that also has to be asked is: what about companies that are now defunct? I think the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was alluding to that. I guess the only answer to that is the Alberta taxpayer left holding the bag in these cases. How do you go after defunct companies? It's very difficult. But is there a process there, or is that just going to be something that we have to bite the bullet on?

The hon. Minister of Environment mused a while ago, and we wondered if the member knows or the minister can relate to this, about an environmental royalty initiative for covering the costs of reclamation projects. That might be some way, at least, to begin to look at it, Mr. Speaker.

There's just one other area, Mr. Speaker, that I want to talk about, and that's a change where previously section 112 read:

- (a) take all reasonable measures to . . .
- (ii) remove or otherwise dispose of the substance in such a manner as to effect maximum protection to human life, health and the environment.

Now the proposed amendment to section 12 would read:

- (ii) remediate, manage, remove or otherwise dispose of the substance in such a manner as to prevent an adverse effect or further adverse effect.

It seems to me that that's almost a step backwards. The original measure seemed to me to be stronger in terms of what it was saying. While we, of course, recognize that there was a wide variety of techniques and technologies resulting in both immediate and progressing reclamation of polluted sites, as I say, the original section seems to be much more demanding than the proposed amendment. We're suggesting to the member: why not continue to require "maximum protection to human life, health and the environment" as well as "remediate, manage, remove or otherwise dispose of the substance in such a manner as to prevent an adverse effect or further adverse effect"? Read this way, the amendment would actually strengthen remediation responsibilities rather than water them down. So I would hope that they might take a look at that.

Mr. Speaker, those are the major concerns I have. I may have to look at, in committee stage, amendments and others, but we'll wait and see what the hon. member has to say.

Thank you for the time, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The object of Bill 29 is to amend the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to strengthen emission controls, clarify clean-up requirements for

contaminated sites, establish codes of practice for low-intensity and low-risk activities, enhance the ability of Alberta Environment to partner with a broad range of individuals or groups, and make environmental information more accessible to the public.

I find that there is a series of amendments in Bill 29 that are designed to improve the government's response to the cleanup and remediation of historical contaminated sites. While this is a positive move in regard to the fact that some of the amendments are consistent with the recommendations of the Contaminated Site Stakeholder Advisory Committee, including stakeholders such as the Environmental Law Centre and Toxics Watch, these amendments fail to fully implement the CSSAC recommendations in a singular and integrated effort.

There are too many problems with other aspects of this bill to support without significant amendments. My concerns come from communication with the Environmental Law Centre. The Environmental Law Centre, ELC, is a registered charity incorporated in 1982 to provide an objective source of information on environmental law and policy in Alberta and Canada. The ELC's mission is "to ensure that laws, policies and legal processes protect the environment." In pursuit of this mission the ELC seeks to achieve the following: "enactment and effective enforcement of sound environmental law and policies; and [effective and] informed public participation in environmental regulatory, law-making and decision-making processes."

They are pleased to see the expansion of protection for municipalities from liability for contamination. This provision is consistent with the recommendations of the Contaminated Site Stakeholder Advisory Committee, and it supports the enabling of creation of a broader range of documents by the minister as set out in section 3 of the bill. They see this as positive, but we suggest that section 3 be amended to include a requirement to undertake public consultation as an initial step in the development of such documents.

They are less supportive of section 9, which expands the range of documents that can be incorporated by reference into regulations under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. Such a step has the potential to make it much more difficult for Albertans to determine and understand regulatory requirements. Alberta Environment must be strongly committed to broad public access to these documents and to clearly and explicitly incorporating such documents, where merited, into the regulations.

Another concern stated by the Environmental Law Centre is regarding sections 4 to 6 of the bill, which expand the scope of delegation and transfer of administration of powers and duties under the act from government employees to "any person." They understand that such a change will facilitate the implementation of programs such as third-party reclamation or remediation certification. But the extensive scope of these amendments without clear checks and accountability requirements is the basis of the concern. These sections, without amendment to include such requirements, are inconsistent with basic principles of public accountability in relation to regulatory responsibilities. It will prove very difficult for the public to assess whether statutory responsibilities delegated or transferred under these provisions are properly carried out.

So the suggestion is that sections 4 to 6 be amended to provide for a publicly accessible register of all delegations and transfers of administration made under the act, which would include access to the relevant agreements or other documents. These provisions should also require annual public reporting by parties to whom powers have been delegated or transferred.

9:30

The CSSAC recommendations are the result of in-depth, commit-

ted work and negotiations by a wide range of stakeholders on complex issues. They recognize that there are still outstanding issues, resolution of which are key to the successful implementation of an improved regulatory system for contaminated sites. It is essential that CSSAC complete its work on the outstanding issues identified in its June 2005 report. Alberta Environment should refrain from further implementation activity until such time as those issues have been resolved and changes can be made in a complete and integrated fashion.

Another concern is section 12 of the bill, which replaces section 112 of the act and recognizes a wider range of steps for dealing with contamination, effectively downgrading the level of remediation required. Currently section 112 provides that a substance causing an adverse effect must be dealt with "in such a manner as to effect maximum protection to human life, health and the environment." The proposed amendment would change this to require action "in such a manner as to prevent an adverse effect or further adverse effect." This reduction is neither justified nor warranted in relation to expanding the measures that can be taken to respond to the effects of substance releases. The suggestion is that section 12 should be amended to retain the level of protection currently imposed in section 112 of the act.

Section 13 of the bill seeks to provide clarification regarding environmental protection orders and historical releases of substances. The ELC is concerned that this section contains no preventive element, which would effectively limit the director to taking action only when adverse effects have occurred and are obvious even if he or she is aware of the potential for such effect before it occurs. Section 13 should be amended to enable the director to issue an environmental protection order if he or she is of the opinion that an adverse effect may imminently occur.

I guess that when I'm looking at all of this, my conclusion is that I cannot support this because I hear cynicism and anger from many Albertans as they observe industry run roughshod over the environment. It is clear that this government is reluctant to in any way ruffle the feathers of industry and, therefore, allows contaminated sites to go on for years. There's no regulation for timelines, so we continue to have our earth contaminated by toxins, and the potential damage spreads. We need a department with teeth to prosecute and demand action to protect our environment. However, with only .05 per cent of the provincial government budget Alberta Environment does not have the manpower to monitor industry and our environment. The power of industry and the weakness of the Department of Environment have led to a lack of confidence that this government truly values the protection of the environment and truly understands the impact of failed action on the future of this province.

We are blessed with a wonderful environment. It is our responsibility to protect and preserve it. This bill does not do enough. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise again and speak to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Just one second.

Hon. Member for West Yellowhead, were you wanting to rise on Standing Order 29(2)(a) to ask a question or comment?

Mr. Strang: No. I want up next.

The Acting Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, you may proceed.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, it's my great pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 29, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006. There are six amendments to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. The electricity sector will be allowed to conduct emissions trading in nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide. There is a clarification of industry's obligation to report and remediate contaminated sites closed before Alberta's current legislation was enacted on September 1, 1993. The goal is to ensure that any closed sites which have an adverse effect on the environment are reported and cleaned up.

An amendment is made to address the reclamation of coal and oil sands mines, to improve programs. It ensures that progressive and ongoing reclamation of these sites is promoted and acknowledged. The amendment supports the continued use of codes of practice for activities with low environmental impact. Another amendment is supposed to allow Alberta Environment the flexibility to partner with a broad range of organizations and individuals. There's an amendment to increase the amount of environmental information publicly available to Albertans without having to go through a formal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act process.

Mr. Speaker, the main object of Bill 29 is to amend the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to strengthen emissions control, clarify cleanup requirements for contaminated sites, establish codes of practice for low-intensity and low-risk activities, enhance the ability of AENV to partner with a broad range of individuals or groups, and make environmental information more accessible to the public.

AENV is implementing the recommendation of the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, CASA, electricity project team, the EPT, for the management of air emissions from the electricity-generating sector in Alberta. The EPT recommended new annual limits for nitrous oxide and sulphur dioxide, SO₂, emissions and an emissions trading program for those two substances. The amendments to the EPEA allow unit operators some flexibility in meeting their new targets and also create an incentive for operators to make emissions reductions before units must meet new annual emission limits.

Alberta Environment is now implementing new annual nitrous oxide and SO₂ emission limits for electricity generation units. Mr. Speaker, these limits are based on an intensity rate. This is a problem because focusing on emissions intensity, emissions per dollar of GDP, means that emissions intensity can decrease while absolute emissions and environmental impacts continue to rise. The focus on emissions intensity as a target for reduction is the same as the Alberta government plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions as opposed to using Kyoto absolute emissions reduction targets.

Here is a clear example. Between 1990 and 1998 Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions intensity fell by 14.5 per cent while absolute emissions rose by 19 per cent. In this bill, by relying on emissions intensity instead of absolute reductions, electricity generation will still be allowed to increase their absolute emissions, but they will have to control and decrease the level of emission intensity for SO₂.

9:40

The recommendations of CASA must be supported as a positive move. Even though we would like to see a reduction in absolute emissions, the creation of the emissions trading program creates an incentive to make emissions reductions before the new annual emissions limit must be met. The system works as follows. The emissions credit system will help electricity producers reach their reduction target by offering them another option. They can install the best available pollution control technology to reduce emissions,

or they can shut down power units that produce a high proportion of their emissions. However, if neither of these options is considered viable and a company is producing more nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide than the new regulation allows, the unit can then buy emissions credits from a company that has done better than its regulated targets. This system applies only for Alberta producers within Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the system has been used in the United States for over 10 years now in response to trying to control emissions that were causing a severe acid rain problem over very large areas of the country. Legislation was passed in 1990, and the first compliance period was 1995. This system of cap and trade is also being used extensively in California to control SO₂ and nitrous oxide. This program, the Regional Clean Air Incentive Market program, RECLAIM, began in 1994. There has been success in reducing the amount of SO₂ and nitrous oxide emissions in the U.S. since the inception of these programs.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, the establishment of the emissions trading program and baseline emission limits is a positive move to address air quality and environmental concerns. This represents the implementation of the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, CASA, who have publicly stated that they are very pleased with this move. Martha Kostuch, a strong advocate of the environment who represented the Prairie Acid Rain Coalition and the Bert Riggall Environmental Foundation on the electricity project team, supports this move fully. Also, the Pembina Institute's Mary Griffiths supports this move as it came as a recommendation of CASA.

This part of Bill 29 should then be supported as our stakeholders unanimously supported this part of Bill 29. However, the only concern we should have is whether reliance on emissions intensity reduction instead of absolute emissions reduction is the correct standard to be applied. Remember that the made-in-Alberta plan for greenhouse gas emissions instead of adherence to Kyoto protocol reductions was largely determined to be ineffectual because it also relied on emissions intensity reductions. Put it this way: emissions in Alberta would still increase but at a lower rate than business as usual. It seems ineffectual to allow the sector to continue to pollute but just slow that level of pollution. Metaphorically, this is the same as letting a car go off a cliff at 50 kilometres per hour instead of 100 kilometres per hour. Either way the car will still be destroyed. The real solution is to stop the car, not just slow it down.

There are a series of amendments in Bill 29, Mr. Chairman, that are designed to improve the government response to the cleanup and the remediation of historically contaminated sites. While it is a positive move in regard to the fact that some of the amendments are consistent with the recommendations of the Contaminated Sites Stakeholder Advisory Committee, including stakeholders such as the Environmental Law Centre and Toxics Watch, these amendments fail to fully implement the CSSAC recommendations in a singular and integrated effort.

The section 2 amendment is to repeal a section of the EPEA. This is a positive amendment as it protects municipalities from liabilities for contamination and should aid in the redevelopment of brownfield sites within Alberta. This is consistent with the recommendations of the CSSAC. However, even with the positive elements of this amendment it allows municipalities who acquire contaminated land after the previous owner abandons it or declares bankruptcy or land that is acquired by dedication or gift to be absolved of any duty to remediate the land if it is contaminated.

This government, Mr. Speaker, continually states that the polluter will pay. However, in this instance municipalities are protected from liability for the contamination of the sites they acquire. It then becomes unclear after the municipality acquires the land who is

responsible for the cleanup of contaminated sites. If both the municipality and the previous owner are not held liable, then the environmental contamination will not be cleaned up adequately. Even though this amendment will allow for the redevelopment of brownfield sites, it lets the polluter off the hook if the site is orphaned.

The next one I move to is section 11, Mr. Speaker, which amends section 110 of the EPEA. This is a clarification of an existing revision of the EPEA in relation to the reporting of an historical release. However, the new duty to report that an adverse effect has occurred and is occurring in respect to that release lacks a mechanism necessary to ensure that failures to report under the new provisions are an offence and to establish a penalty for such an offence. Without a compliance and enforcement provision, which could be accomplished by amendments of sections 227, 228 of the EPEA, the new duty to report will be ineffective.

Now I move to section 14. This section provides an enabling function to allow for inspectors to issue remediation certificates. The main problem here is that there are not many inspectors in the Department of Environment, and those who are not qualified enough to make decisions about remediation efforts will be implementing complex decisions about the level of information needed on substances and affected areas. It is obvious that current staffing levels are insufficient to make these assessments. In addition, by allowing two levels to issue remediation certificates, the director and an inspector, the government is proposing an amendment that could easily result in broad variation in the application of requirements.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn this debate, please.

The Acting Speaker: You made a motion to adjourn debate?

Mr. Agnihotri: I make a motion to adjourn this.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

9:50

Bill 37
Miscellaneous (Provincial Treasurer)
Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Minister of Finance and move second reading of Bill 37, the Miscellaneous (Provincial Treasurer) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Let me say at the outset, Mr. Speaker, that this bill, being miscellaneous statutes, contains absolutely no new policy, organizational, or other substantive changes. It is strictly a housekeeping bill. Let me give members some examples of the kinds of changes that it includes. Some 300 consequential changes are being made to align 83 individual acts with the current titles and responsibilities of the Minister of Finance and program ministers as defined by the Government Organization Act, its regulations, and various orders in council. For example, in approximately 25 acts references to the Provincial Treasurer are being replaced with the Minister of Finance where it is appropriate to change only the title.

In approximately 45 acts references to the Provincial Treasurer are being replaced with minister where significant responsibilities for financial administration were transferred in the mid-1990s from the Provincial Treasurer to individual program ministers, such as the minister designated by the Government Organization Act.

Approximately 10 acts refer to outdated titles, such as minister of revenue, Deputy Provincial Treasurer, department of Treasury.

Consequential changes need to be made and applied to these acts to reflect current titles appropriate to the individual act.

Another 10 acts refer to outdated responsibilities for financial administration. As noted above, significant responsibilities for financial administration were transferred in the mid-1990s from the Provincial Treasurer to the appropriate program minister. Outdated responsibilities of the Provincial Treasurer for financial administration are replaced with current responsibilities of the Minister of Finance and of individual ministers. Amendments address the detailed provisions of some acts which describe how certain financial transactions are to be handled.

Mr. Speaker, I ask on behalf of the Minister of Finance for the support of the House on this piece of housekeeping legislation.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin debate on Bill 37, let me just say that my wife is not going to be happy. Apparently, I have to keep my playoff beard for another two weeks or so. Go, Oilers, go. For those members who are not aware, the Edmonton Oilers scored in the last minute of play and won the game 4 to 3 tonight.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is indeed my pleasure to rise this evening and speak in second reading to Bill 37, the Miscellaneous (Provincial Treasurer) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. As pointed out by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, this bill is substituting Provincial Treasurer and other incorrect language with Minister of Finance and the correct language in some 80 different acts and updates the appropriate responsibilities to the appropriate ministers. It is my recommendation to my caucus colleagues that we support this bill.

A little bit of historical information. If we go back to the year 2001, Mr. Speaker, the Government Organization Act consolidated the departments of the Provincial Treasurer and the revenue minister into one ministry, the Minister of Finance. As a result, as has already been pointed out, some 80 acts require updating.

Now, I'm just going to go through some of these – and the minister has already outlined, you know, the number of consequential changes that are being made, the fact that there's no new policy. He referred to 45 acts where references to the Provincial Treasurer are being replaced with minister and where significant responsibilities for financial administration were transferred in the mid-1990s, Mr. Speaker. That certainly brought to mind for me at least and, I would think, for others the question as to why it took 10 years for us to reach the point where we recognized that perhaps there was a need to update the legislation. Further on, we understand that there are 10 acts that refer to outdated responsibilities for financial administration. Again, these go back to the mid-1990s. I'm not sure if we're finally seeing the benefits of the Restructuring and Government Efficiency ministry or not, but 10 years later we're updating some things that, clearly, are long overdue in being addressed.

Now, I would like to once again thank the Finance minister for making her staff available to provide a briefing on this bill. I do have one question, and I'm not sure if I'll get an answer on it tonight or not, but I am curious. When the staff came over to my office to provide the briefing, they also touched on the telecommunications act and left me, at least, with the understanding that this act may also be addressed in this statutes amendment act. Specifically, it was dealing with repealing a section that dealt with the AGT Commission and the merger between AGT and Edmonton Telephones, and that's clearly not in the act now. So I'm not sure if maybe the staff are misunderstanding or perhaps it's been decided that it's going to come forward in a different fashion or maybe they just left this with

us by mistake. I'm not sure. It was discussed at that time, and it's not here today, so I'm curious about that. If there's an explanation, I would be interested to hear it.

Also, Mr. Speaker, then we talked about the fact that this goes back to 2001 when those two ministries were combined. I guess the very first question that jumps into my mind is: what took so long? Why did we wait, you know, five years or thereabouts to take this action? Have there been any consequences, negative perhaps, to the government or to Albertans for having waited so long? I doubt it. I would hope not. But it does cause one to question, I suppose.

Mr. Speaker, at times governments rearrange themselves, some would argue, to make themselves look busy. Often, particularly after an election but also quite often after a cabinet shuffle, you'll see a number of ministries being switched around in terms of their responsibilities, often including a name change. I have to be honest with you; as a small businessman who was involved in the printing industry for many years, this was always a boon to our business and I'm sure to many others when governments took that step. So sometimes when you have these combinations or splitting of ministries, there is, I suppose you could say, a positive economic spinoff for business in this province, but I'm not so sure that it's always necessarily the best use of taxpayers' money. I do recall at the time when those ministries were split from the Finance minister questions about whether or not it was the most effective thing to do, and then, of course, some years later we saw them being recombined. Again, I suppose that maybe it's an indication of some good work being done by the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. I'm not sure.

Just a couple of other quick comments, Mr. Speaker, and then I'll take my seat. In particular, I mentioned that there are 80 different acts that are being amended, and one of the ones that jumped out at me that we're amending is the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Hon. members will know that we currently have an amending act to the FOIP legislation in front of the House today, so I'm not sure which is more effective or efficient to deal with: the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act in this fashion or if it should have been included in the amending bill that's before the House already. It was a question that crossed my mind.

We have a reference in here to amending the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act. Mr. Speaker, certainly as a member of this Assembly I'm aware of the fact that that act is still in place, dealing with some former members, I think, probably in most cases long past former members of this Assembly. But I would submit to you that most Albertans probably are not aware of the fact that there's still a Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act in place and active. Most Albertans understand that pensions for MLAs were done away with in 1993, and I think most Albertans would be surprised to learn that 13 years later we're still dealing with that act.

10:00

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the one that causes me the most consternation, I suppose, is making the amendments, as the minister described in this case, to the Fuel Tax Act. We have already had a completely rewritten Fuel Tax Act introduced in this Legislature just last week, I believe, and it's being debated in the next few days. I find it interesting that we're amending a Fuel Tax Act which has been completely rewritten, and we'll have an entirely new Fuel Tax Act because it will be passed in a matter of days or weeks. I wonder why, and here I'm going to suggest that either the Finance minister or the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, perhaps, wasn't so terribly efficient. I don't know why we're taking

the time to amend an act which is currently being completely rewritten and, as I say, undoubtedly will be passed by this Assembly in short order.

So those are my comments, Mr. Speaker, on Bill 37. As I say, I certainly do concur with the minister and the Finance ministry staff that there is no policy change in here. It is strictly housekeeping, although as I've pointed out, it does cause one to ponder at times as to some of the rationale that is being used. Certainly, on the whole it seems to accomplish what is being set out and ultimately, I suppose, will be good legislation for Albertans.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a second time]

Bill 36 Securities Transfer Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure tonight to rise and move second reading of Bill 36, the Securities Transfer Act.

As I explained in first reading, the purpose of this legislation is to provide a single, uniform source of rules for the transfer and holding of all corporate and noncorporate securities traded in Canada. I'm going to use this opportunity to speak a bit about how this legislation came to be and why it is so significant. The act is modelled on a consultative draft of the Uniform Securities Transfer Act, USTA, which was prepared several years ago by the Canadian Securities Administrators' Uniform Securities Transfer Act Task Force. The task force conducted extensive public consultation in 2003-04 on successive drafts of the Uniform Securities Transfer Act. The USTA has received strong and favourable support. In 2004 the Uniform Law Conference of Canada approved the consultative draft, the English version, of the USTA.

Mr. Speaker, stakeholders, including the Bank of Canada, have expressed strong support for prompt, uniform implementation of securities transfer legislation within Canada. The enactment of a uniform statute within Canada represents an important example of interprovincial co-operation in responding to the needs of Canada's capital markets. The legislation provides a modernized, uniform set of rules for the transfer and holding of securities and interests in investment property that harmonizes Canada's laws as much as possible with the new, uniform commercial code in the United States, in force in 50 states.

On December 1, 2005, Ontario introduced a Securities Transfer Act in the Ontario Legislature which is practically uniform with Alberta's legislation. Most other provinces and territories have also done the same or plan to. It's clear that both the provinces and the industry recognize the importance of this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, implementation of the proposed act will require consequential amendments to other provincial acts: the Business Corporations Act, the Personal Property Security Act, and the Civil Enforcement Act. By placing securities transfer provisions in the Securities Transfer Act, securities transfer laws will apply to all types of issuers, including corporations, income funds, and the Crown. The Securities Transfer Act also amends Alberta's Personal Property Security Act to ensure that it is harmonized with the proposed Securities Transfer Act. Establishing a codified set of rules for the transfer and holding of securities and investment properties removes uncertainty about which laws apply to market transactions.

With the advent of electronic trading it provides legal clarity to

modern security transfers. This is essential to ensure that Canada remains competitive not only with the United States but in an expanding global marketplace.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of the Legislature to give their support to Bill 36. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening and speak to Bill 36, the Securities Transfer Act, 2006. You know, my mother always told me that I should be a securities lawyer. Well, actually she didn't tell me that, but when I look at a bill like Bill 36, I sure wish that she had pushed me in that direction. Nevertheless, here we are, and I'm learning an awful lot about securities.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. Forgive me if I reiterate some of them. Again, I can say right up front that I will be recommending to my caucus colleagues that we support this bill. There's some good work in here but, again, some questions and some good comments that came out of the debate in Ontario that I will be sharing with you in a few minutes.

As has already been outlined, Bill 36 is designed to update the securities legislation to accommodate advancements in stock purchasing. The evolution from paper stock certificates to electronic security transactions is expected to reduce administration and cut costs and make us more competitive on both a national and an international basis. I think it's no secret to anybody who has ever dealt in stocks and securities that very few of us actually hold the paper certificates anymore. That's a rare thing, indeed. So, clearly, there's a need to do this.

Bill 36 modernizes the legal framework for securities transactions, and certainly one result of this will be to reduce investor risk. Bill 36, in fact, would harmonize our legislation with other jurisdictions, including the United States. A large percentage of securities transactions, we know, are now cross-border between Canada and the United States, so certainly that would make sense. The one thing that it does not do – and this was identified as a concern in Ontario as well, Mr. Speaker – is that it does not improve the Alberta Securities Commission enforcement branch. That's something that certainly the Official Opposition would have seen included in here, but we'll talk a little bit more about that later.

Now, historically, Mr. Speaker, as I said, securities transactions involved a paper certificate. As the number of transactions increased over the years, paper clearly became impractical and the movement of such paper probably even more so. This created a logical environment for electronic securities transactions. The financial evolution means that investors would not require a paper certificate anymore to demonstrate that they had purchased or owned securities. Today this process is known as an indirect holding system.

10:10

While security transactions became electronic, security legislation did not necessarily modify at the same rate. As a consequence, a number of problems are surfacing. First, investors are having difficulty using electronic securities as collateral because security legislation is not providing legal certainty. Secondly, without clear legislative rules to detail the electronic security transfers, this area remains ambiguous, adding risk to the investor. Thirdly, the United States has updated its securities laws to accommodate the indirect holding system, but Canadian regulators are lagging somewhat behind.

Now, as the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky pointed out,

Ontario has more or less taken the lead in terms of updating their policy. It's interesting to point out that in Ontario that legislation was vetted by an all-party committee, Mr. Speaker, something that doesn't happen in Alberta. Certainly, in Ontario in the case of that all-party committee all parties supported the legislation unanimously. So I think that's a good indication that, in fact, all-party committees can work, and when the legislation is good, they can work very well and, in fact, agree completely.

Now, I'd just like to go through a number of the pros and cons, I suppose, Mr. Speaker, of Bill 36. Security legislation needs to reflect progress in the marketplace. Most people would agree that issuing paper certificates, as I alluded to earlier, would be unrealistic by today's standards, and I don't think that there's any expectation on the part of the investor that that would happen. Bill 36 attempts to adopt these changes; that is, to move from paper to electronic. In Ontario Minister Phillips indicated that the administrative burden that could be saved is anywhere from \$100 million to \$140 million. So, clearly, there are some cost savings to be realized as well for the industry.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, without updating current industry practices into legislation, the current system will continue to remain somewhat ambiguous in a legal sense. Again, that can lead to investor risk, and investor risk leads to reduced investment. Bill 36, as I've already pointed out as well, attempts to harmonize our legislation with other jurisdictions, including the United States. Ultimately, that should make trading more efficient.

Now, I mentioned that the bill doesn't do anything to improve enforcement practices at the Alberta Securities Commission. I think that we also want to watch closely the ramifications of this bill, should it pass, once it's passed, particularly as to the potential for cost savings, whether or not it does in fact benefit industry in that regard and makes us more competitive on a global basis, which is part of what it's intended to do.

I have some questions, I suppose. Again, as I mentioned when we were discussing Bill 37, why has it taken so long for this bill to come forward? I would like to thank the minister once again for providing her staff, including a securities lawyer who has spent a large part of his life working on this. Clearly, you know, it's a complicated piece of legislation. It's not something that could happen overnight, but I think that when we look at the advent of computers and day trading and, you know, do-it-yourself investors, it seems, at least to my uneducated mind, somewhat odd that it's taken this long for us to bring forward legislation that would allow us to catch up to the electronic age.

I'm wondering, from either the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky or the minister, if Alberta gave any consideration to watching Ontario's situation once they've put their legislation into place and just sort of seen how well it works or if we decided to move ahead without waiting for that to happen. Clearly, it would seem to me that we've decided to move ahead without waiting for some actual experience from Ontario.

I mentioned that there are some concerns out of Ontario about the regulator side and the fact that the Ontario Securities Commission – at least, some that are fairly close to it would say that it's no further at arm's length from their government than our Securities Commission is here. Certainly, that's been an issue in the Alberta Legislature for at least the 18 months that I've been a member of this Assembly.

The Official Opposition is hopeful that Bill 36 will increase Alberta companies' opportunities to raise capital. I'm wondering if maybe the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky would like to address that aspect of the bill in more detail, perhaps when we get to the committee stage, and I'm curious whether or not Alberta Finance has

done any calculations as to what that savings might be administratively, if it's anywhere near the number that has been mentioned in Ontario.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to just touch on some of the debate that came out of the Ontario Legislature, and the reason for that is because the government has talked an awful lot about how this bill pretty much parallels exactly the legislation that was introduced in Ontario. So I thought to myself: well, if the bill is almost exactly the same as the legislation in Ontario, then some of the debate might be similar as well. I was quite pleasantly surprised to see that some of the concerns raised by – oh, I guess that they would probably be Conservative opposition members in Ontario. Some of those concerns are pretty much in line with some of the concerns that I have with the bill here in Alberta.

So, as the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky mentioned, the bill was first introduced in the Ontario Legislature on December 1 of last year, and then on April 26 of this year, so only last week, the bill was in second reading in Ontario. Gerry Phillips, the Minister of Government Services, acknowledged that one of the reasons that they introduced the bill back in December was to give other provinces an opportunity to examine the bill. He notes in his comments on the 26th of April that Alberta has “introduced a very similar piece of legislation,” and in fact we know that to be true.

Then, Mr. Speaker – I believe this is another government member – Mrs. Liz Sandals from Guelph-Wellington indicates that she's surprised that it took so long for Ontario to update its corporate laws, “especially those relating to securities transfer,” very much like my thoughts when we were briefed by the minister's staff here. Even a government member in Ontario is a little surprised that it's taking so long for them to enact this legislation. The same member from Ontario, Mrs. Sandals, comments on the fact that, in fact, they do use an all-party standing committee system in Ontario and that all three parties involved voted unanimously to support the bill that was being dealt with in Ontario. So, again, if it can work in Ontario, I don't see why it couldn't work here.

An opposition member, Mr. Joseph Tascona from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, spoke that afternoon. He commented, as I suggested, that the opposition in Ontario had concerns about the Ontario Securities Commission not necessarily being more than arm's length removed from the government and wanting to “make sure that everybody feels that the rule of law has been respected and that there's fairness in the process that goes on in the investigation and also in the prosecution.” You will know, Mr. Speaker, that those are concerns very much similar to concerns that the Official Opposition has raised here in Alberta.

Another member, Mr. John O'Toole from Durham, in speaking to the bill in Ontario, which, again, Mr. Speaker, is by all accounts almost identical to the bill here, asks: “I mean, who's checking the checker? Isn't that an age-old question? Who checks the checker?” Then he goes on to describe the fact that in Ontario, very much like in Alberta, the Ontario Securities Commission sets the regulations and they do the investigations and they basically do the prosecuting as well. So it's the age-old question of the fox guarding the henhouse, I suppose, and that was a very serious concern that the opposition in Ontario raised when this very similar bill was dealt with there just last week.

The same Mr. O'Toole says: “Minister, there's a lot of work to be done on this, and I commend you on the little that has been done on the securities transfer issue. It seems like a rather long bill that hasn't got a lot in it.” I'm not so sure that that's exactly the case with this, but as I alluded to in my opening remarks, it's certainly a very, very long bill. While I do believe that it goes some measure in terms of addressing some of the issues facing investors in Alberta,

I'm not so sure that it necessarily does all that we would have hoped that it would do.

10:20

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I think I've pretty much said what I needed to say in second reading. I look forward to the committee stage of debate on Bill 36. There may be an opportunity for some amendments although I must concede that in speaking to the stakeholders that I've spoken to, they seem to be genuinely pleased with the direction that this act would take us. As I suggest, it would appear that, in fact, it's perhaps long overdue if anything. So, certainly, it's something that will be supported by the Official Opposition.

I thank you for having given me the opportunity to speak to it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a long bill, so I'll make a short speech. I always like to help out and make the people over there happy.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that this bill has to come. I'm trying to remember. I think it was 1967 when the paper blizzard shut down the New York Stock Exchange, and we're still dealing with paper. I take it that the major purpose of this bill is to recognize that we're in a very different situation in that securities can't remain paper based as they have in the past, and we have to move on with this. So I don't think you'll have any argument on this side about the necessity for doing this.

I'm pleased that all the provinces are trying to get their act together. But, Mr. Speaker, it begs the question, again, that I asked when we dealing with the regulatory part of it. If this makes sense that we have to do this together as the member was talking about, the global society and that, why can't the provinces get together and have a national securities regulator? It seems to me that rather than dealing with all these different bills all over the provinces, we could be working together in a much better way. Certainly, we've had our problems here with the regulation and that. I don't expect that we'd have the problems once we do this. But it just seems to me to be unnecessary duplication, and I think the minister, on the previous bill dealing with the regulatory agent, said that maybe we should be looking at that. I would like us to go in that direction because it seems to me that that would solve some of these problems.

It's not a federal act. It would be the provinces working together under one national securities regulatory body. Maybe it could be in Calgary or wherever. But all the things that we're doing, this bill and the previous bill, Mr. Speaker, seem to me to indicate that we have to work together, all the provinces certainly. As the member talked about, this will make us more competitive with the Americans on commercial transactions. I guess that I don't understand the reluctance, in doing what we're doing here with these bills, trying to make it so that there's some reasonable movement between the provinces, why we don't look at that regulator.

I think that in the introduction the previous member said: maybe that's a way to look at it. I would hope that if there was some influence that they would look at this down the way. We'll pass this. Certainly, we have no objections. I think that this is an absolute necessity in this modern day and age. But I would hope that we would take a look down the way at the national securities regulator.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky to close debate.

Mr. Knight: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a second time]

Bill 38

Livestock Identification and Commerce Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise this evening and move second reading of Bill 38, the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act.

This legislation is primarily a consolidation and revision of three existing acts: the Brand Act, the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, and the Livestock and Livestock Products Act. It will be jointly administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Livestock Identification Services Ltd., which serves the ministry as a delegated authority.

Mr. Speaker, we needed to develop this legislation because it is evident that the livestock industry has changed significantly over the past few decades. Not only do livestock transactions occur more frequently; they occur across a larger region and may involve numerous sales agents, dealers, and owners. It's no longer a case of one owner raising an animal from birth to slaughter. It's become a much more complex system than that. The industry has certainly changed, and so must the way we regulate it.

Working with the industry, we've put together legislation that should be much more effective in addressing the realities of today's livestock industry. The proposed legislation will enhance and streamline the identification and sales transactions related to livestock. We started working with stakeholders in 2003, and through three years of close consultation with the industry we've put together legislation that reflects the goals of both government and industry.

I'd like to provide the members with a brief overview of the proposed legislation, how it revises the current legislation. The current Brand Act serves to establish a system of identifying livestock. The allotment of brands is used to identify who has an ownership interest in the livestock. The proposed legislation maintains these primary provisions but clarifies the legal effect of branding and livestock inspection and confirms that placing a brand on livestock creates a presumption of ownership. The inspection process is in place to assist in ownership determination. It broadens the types of identifiers that livestock inspectors can use to identify livestock such as the national Canadian Cattle Identification Agency tag program. It also provides flexibility in defining livestock as cattle, horses, and other species designated as livestock in the regulations.

The current Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act serves to facilitate fair commerce by providing a set of industry-wide rules and forms associated with livestock transactions. It requires the inspection of livestock as well as the use of bills of sale and the completion of manifests. Currently, the security interest declaration on the manifest is voluntary. The proposed legislation will maintain these primary provisions but will make the security interest declaration mandatory. It will set out a mandatory requirement that sellers disclose security interests in the livestock they are selling. It clarifies that the purpose of livestock inspection is to confirm that the person possessing the livestock is indeed the owner or the owner's agent and that the sale proceeds are flowing to the correct party. It also confirms that inspections are required prior to transporting livestock out of Alberta and on arrival at inspection sites. It also standardizes the use of manifests and bills of sale.

The regulations will address the operational details relating to where and when livestock inspection is required and operational details relating to inspection fees. The provision for inspection fees and associated commission results in Bill 38 being classified as a money bill.

Additionally, the legislation will extend a provision called the statutory bar to conversion. This is a practice that protects buyers from being sued by the seller's lenders. This legislation addresses the anomaly that the first buyer is protected but in theory subsequent buyers could be sued. I say theoretically because it has not been used in practice. Lenders rarely attach security interests to specific livestock, and unlike with cars there's no way for a buyer to check for liens and no ways for lenders to identify a specific asset. This provision is conditional upon meeting the requirements of the legislation. It will bar conversion lawsuits against buyers who follow the requirements of the act, pay in accordance with the manifest, and otherwise engage in a bona fide transaction.

The legislation is intended to improve the efficiency and certainty of commerce in livestock. It reflects the commitment of both government and industry to improve industry's due diligence practices, including those that relate to better recognition of the security interests of lenders. The statutory bar is designed to enhance market certainty to avoid any lingering uncertainty that might affect the market when people not engaged in a transaction nonetheless acquire the risk of liability.

10:30

The current Livestock and Livestock Products Act serves to promote the integrity of marketing by increasing the confidence in livestock transactions through dealer licensing, dealer bonding, prompt payment to deemed trust accounts, and other appropriate business rules. The proposed legislation maintains these primary provisions by clarifying the requirements for dealer licensing, bonding licence suspension, and usage of trust accounts. It requires livestock dealers receiving money from the sale of someone else's livestock to deposit those sale proceeds into a trust account to protect the seller's money. It also clarifies processing related to making a claim on a dealer's security.

Currently the Livestock Patrons' Claims Review Tribunal functions pursuant to its regulation. The tribunal administers two assurance funds funded by participants. The proposed legislation maintains these primary provisions and will continue the tribunal and its two funds as well as clarify the tribunal's role and function. In the end, this consolidated and revised act will help the day-to-day commerce of the livestock industry operate in a more transparent, harmonized, and predictable manner.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation was built during three years of intense consultation with the livestock industry, and we believe that this legislation reflects the goals of the government and industry. The act reflects and balances diverse interests to drive commerce forward. It reduces lending risk by promoting the integrity of livestock marketing. I believe that enactment of the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act is in the best interest of the livestock industry and the lending community. It's certainly going to help our industry advance in the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, that pretty much sums up the nuts and bolts of the proposed act. I encourage all members of this Assembly to give their full support to Bill 38. However, even though I know that there are many, many waiting to speak to this bill, we have many other things on the agenda, so I would move that we adjourn the debate on this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 20
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Chair: When we last adjourned on this subject matter, we were dealing with amendment A1. Are there any comments, questions, or further amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? On the amendment that's before us, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to the proposed amendment to Bill 20 introduced by the Official Opposition. The wording of 24(2.1)(b) is very general, and it would expand the scope of restricted information greatly. Again, this appears to be an attempt to hide government information without justification and diminish accountability.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, this section demonstrates the hypocrisy that exists within this Progressive Conservative government. On the one hand, we hear this government praise the value of accountability and criticize the unethical activities of the former federal government. On the other hand, this proposed clause would protect this provincial government from public scrutiny. It is absolutely outrageous that this government would propose and expect Albertans to accept an amendment that would hide chief internal auditor documents from public access for 15 years. Clearly, this government has developed a sense that they are somehow above accountability. I support this amendment because we don't want this power-corrupt government to add more layers of secrecy and reduce legitimate access to information.

This House should focus on protection of the privacy of citizens of this province. This should be the priority of this government. Many people have concerns about identity theft and fraud committed on and off the Internet. People don't want to wait for years for the Privacy Commissioner to review their cases. There are lots of delays and pending work, and people are frustrated, angry. The Privacy Commissioner may need some more staff or resources to review those cases.

Even with the required amount of money for the information, it takes a lengthy time. We get half of the document blacked out, sometimes blank ones, or withheld. Let me give you the example of a FOIP request I made for an agreement between the Allen Gray long-term care facility, a care centre in my riding, and Capital health. After paying a certain amount of money, the statement and some papers I received were not the current statement or the current papers. It was six or seven years old, and it took me two months, maybe three months. I hope it's not repeated again like this for somebody else. The people living inside the long-term care centre are vulnerable. They wanted the answer right away, but because I was totally dependent on the FOIP department, I couldn't help them right away.

I definitely support 50 per cent of this bill, Bill 20, but also there were already a few amendments introduced. I oppose 50 per cent of the bill, those which are already mentioned in the amendments.

This government might be thinking that they are here forever, but I'd just remind them that every kingdom has to fall one day. It is about time to be transparent. Otherwise, the time is running out.

Two weeks ago, Mr. Chairman, I heard complaints from two constituents against the office of the Privacy Commissioner. I have those papers with me here. Maybe I will ask permission to table those letters. I can't do it because they didn't give me the undertaking yet. They filed their case against their former employer, who has used their extensive personal information – name, address, phone numbers, bank accounts, signatures, SIN numbers, e-mail, et cetera – to violate their privacy by sharing information on the Internet and by contacting their banks, watching them in their homes and at work, et cetera.

First, the commission asked them to submit a written submission through a lawyer, then the oral part of the inquiry, and then investigations. The people whose privacy was violated, not the defendant, made these efforts. I mean, the commissioner didn't even ask the offender to come and explain his side of the story. But the people paid money, filled out all those forms. After even 19 months they didn't get any proper answer, and they are frustrated. The guy who is to be blamed got bankruptcy and didn't show up at the inquiry, and he should be liable to come to the commission. Now his company is bankrupt, and he has started a new company. I don't know how the commission will follow that person because now he's working under some other company name. The process has taken 19 months, as they said in this letter, with no outcome yet in sight. They invested time, money, resources, and they are still frustrated.

10:40

The reason I'm supporting this amendment, Mr. Chairman, is because the present law has got no teeth. We must focus on protection of privacy of citizens in this province. From the proposed amendments introduced so far, this bill could be very satisfying to Albertans. Then we will support this bill. Otherwise, at this stage, as I said before, we support 50 per cent of this bill, and 50 per cent of the bill needs proper amendments.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment to Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, which strikes out section 5. As indicated, the wording in 24(2.1)(b) is very general and would expand the scope of the restricted information greatly. Again, this appears to be an attempt to hide government information while at the same time suggesting that we are trying to open up the information to the public and other interested parties to hold the government accountable.

Clearly, one of the great needs in this province is to reassure people that we do want more involvement of people in the public process and the policy process to encourage more critical thinking and to demand accountability, and this will not move us toward that. It will actually diminish that accountability and demonstrates a level of hypocrisy, Mr. Chairman, on the one hand, where we praise the value of accountability and, on the other hand, fail to actually produce in terms of this legislation. Along with others that have spoken, I think we will have great difficulty in approving this without further changes.

Some of these are housekeeping changes, but on balance this will not enhance the transparency and accountability of this government. The perception from us on this side of the House is that it will make things more expensive, more difficult, more discouraging, and

undermine the public process that we all seek, on this side of the House at least. This will not serve democracy and, in fact, could promote corruption and public policy that ignores the realities on the ground. If people cannot get access to the information readily, obviously this is not a win for transparency and accountability.

A confident leadership is not bent on covering up but, rather, opening up to engage citizens in a dynamic and democratic exchange of ideas about where we're going and, just as important, how we're getting there, on whether we are following ethical, fair, and accountable processes or not. A public that doesn't know what is being decided and how it's being decided is an increasingly isolated, cynical, and disengaged population.

I'm afraid that for this particular amendment I can't find the support, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment has to do with the chief internal auditor, and along these lines I find it, frankly, unbelievable that we would take a 15-year exclusion of documents belonging to the chief internal auditor of Alberta and say that we cannot have access for 15 years if the government doesn't want us to look at that.

The purpose of the chief internal auditor of Alberta is to provide independent objective assurance and advisory services. It assists management in meeting business objectives by evaluating and making recommendations to improve the government's risk management, controllership, accountability and governance processes and to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of government operations.

That's right from the government website. Given that mandate, it seems to me that that's what they want. Government by extension is: we want to be efficient and the rest of it. But the Legislature is to also look after and control the cabinet and the government, Mr. Chairman, and to exploit from FOIP the auditor's documents to see how the government process is working, what controls are there, what accountability is there. It seems to me that that's precisely what we should be doing here in the Legislature, and I find it unbelievable that we'd have to wait 15 years before we could actually take a look at what was happening if that's what the government wanted.

Mr. Chairman, we're talking about transparency, accountability. We hear lots of lip service here. What we're doing is going backwards. Dealing with FOIP now, getting information, is difficult to say the least. Now we're even making it harder. I can't understand why we'd be worried about assisting when the mandate on the website says that it's assisting management and "making recommendations to improve government's risk . . . controllership, accountability and governance processes and to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of government operations." Why would we want to hide that? That makes no sense to me at all. There may be a temporary reason that we couldn't do it in FOIP. I can't for the life of me think of what that reason might be. But 15 years? Fifteen years? It's unbelievable.

I think that if this government believes in transparency, they should at least give lip service to – it seems to me to be common sense that we should remove section 5 of this proposed amendment. Certainly, in the NDP we would support the amendment coming from the Official Opposition, Mr. Chairman. You know, I don't understand these sorts of draconian measures – I really don't – what this is all about, why now we're bringing all these changes in in what I believe is a totally unnecessary way.

Mr. Chairman, I would certainly encourage members of the

Assembly – I won't hold my breath – to support this particular amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise to speak on the amendment to strike out section 5 of Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006. I think it's important to speak to this because, realistically, in looking at the section and the fact that the government is looking to amend section 24 after subsection (2), which clearly deals with some of the things that should be there that should be accessible by FOIP, this really brings clarity to the charge that this is not the freedom of information act but the privacy and secrecy act. The desire of the government to bring secrecy to the whole notion of this type of legislation is indeed so particularly odious.

I think this should be opposed on substantive technical grounds. Dealing with section (2) and looking at the fact that it is the section that opens up areas for the purpose of being accessible to the public – indeed, the government's amendment deals with closing it off. It deals with refusing: "must refuse to disclose to an applicant." That's the whole thrust of that whereas the actual section (2) does not deal with "must refuse"; it deals with the whole fact of trying to open up and to deal with, actually, the true purpose, which most Albertans and most acts of this type are meant to deal with. This is a restrictive measure, the government's amendment. This is, I think, not something that the public of Alberta, the citizens of Alberta, the people across this land think that these acts are meant to deal with and to achieve.

10:50

In terms of the construction of the law, I mean, if we look at the whole section, it looks at the more realistic ways of statistical surveys, things that have been around for a while, substantive rules. These are things that should be opening up. I expect that the will of this Legislature will be seen in the courts. The will of this Legislature will be seen in the courts. I hope that this is quoted to be seen that way, especially from the opposition's point of view, that this particular amendment on the government's side is something that should be turned down, turned out, and refused in any court challenge. That is something that I think will happen in the future because it does not apply to that particular section.

For that reason, I ask everyone here to accept the amendment and to strike out section 5. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise this evening and speak to the amendment moved by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung, which would see section 5 struck out of Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006. I'll try to be relatively brief because the hour is late. There's still a little bit of a hockey game involving a team from down south somewhere that apparently is tied after the second period, and I'm going to guess that some members might wish to catch the remainder of that game. So we'll try to finish this off fairly quickly.

It may have been touched on already, but the wording of this section 24(2.1)(b) that currently exists in the government's proposed amendment, and is being recommended by the Official Opposition to be struck, is terribly general and would appear that it would in fact expand greatly the restriction of information. I think that the hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning pointed out that it certainly

appears not only to the Official Opposition but to media outlets in this province and, in fact, to almost anybody who's ever tried to access information through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, that this act is much more about the protection of privacy than it is about the freedom of information. All we're doing here, it would appear to me, is further enabling the government to do just that, protect information.

I find it ironic, quite frankly, that on a day when we've talked an awful lot about openness and accountability and restoring the confidence of the electorate in their elected officials, we now find ourselves debating a bill that, in fact, clearly goes the opposite direction by making it ever harder to access information about the goings-on of the people's government. In fact, it was pointed out by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that 15 years is what this section 5 is calling for, and I just can't imagine why there would be any need to protect information of this government for 15 years. Bear in mind that this is not 15 years from the date that something happens; this is 15 years from the time that the chief internal auditor actually either drops his investigation or completes his investigation, which could have been going on for a period of years prior. So we could in fact be talking 20 years or even longer from the time that a situation develops and the chief internal auditor is brought in to investigate. It's incomprehensible to me.

The Premier, who's retiring, will have been here for 13 years. I think this really puts it into context: this is saying that we would not be allowed to access information for two years before the current Premier became the Premier. Fifteen years in an awfully long time. They say that in politics a week is a long time. Fifteen years is literally an eon, and it's outrageous, quite frankly, that we're being asked to have the people of Alberta wait for 15 years before they can access information that the chief internal auditor would have been looking at.

You know, let's also remember that the chief internal auditor doesn't report to the members of this Assembly. He reports to the government, to Executive Council. It's often been suggested – I can't say it for a fact, but it's certainly been suggested – that some members involved in that audit are nothing more than patronage appointments, friends of the government, and certainly . . .

An Hon. Member: Close friends?

Mr. R. Miller: Perhaps even close friends.

Maybe that's why we're asking to protect that information for 15 years. I'm not sure, but it certainly pauses one to think. As I said, in an era when openness and accountability are, sort of, the buzz words – and there's certainly a greater appetite for that from the people of the province – this is clearly a step backwards.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, I would just like to point out, as it regards this particular amendment asking to strike out section 5, that the unethical activities of the former federal government have been mentioned in this House a lot today and, in fact, a lot over the last 18 months since I've been here, but the question is: how are we to be assured that similar unethical activities aren't taking place here in Alberta with this government? Again, by hiding that information away that might show – perhaps it would show that there haven't been similar unethical activities taking place here. Perhaps it would show that this government is clean as a whistle.

Mr. Backs: Come on. Look at those faces.

Mr. R. Miller: They're clean as a whistle, those faces.

But if that's the case, Mr. Chairman, then why are we taking such drastic measures to protect that information? Why aren't we

throwing the books wide open and inviting Albertans to come in and have a look if, in fact, things are as clean as whistle? But we're not going that way. In fact, we're going the other way. So that certainly is troubling to me and, as I said, not only to the opposition but to several others out there as well.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would certainly recommend that this particular amendment as moved by the Member for Edmonton-McClung be supported by all members of this Legislature. I think it is one of many changes that would have to occur in order for this amendment to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to receive the support of this member. It would be a step in the right direction were we to pass this amendment. I look forward to hearing the result of the vote, and then perhaps we can move on to further amendments as I know that they're coming as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, as I said, I wasn't holding my breath, and it was a good thing when I'm expecting transparency and openness from this one-party state government. Again, it seems to me that we're moving backwards. We're taking a freedom of information act that was difficult enough to deal with, to get the answers that you wanted, and we're making it even more difficult.

11:00

The reality is that it seems to be that in other jurisdictions where we don't have one-party rule, we seem to be moving in the other direction. We had a discussion about the cynicism and apathy and all the other things. Well, no wonder. People can't get the information. We can't get the information. I try, Mr. Chairman, through Motions for Returns, Written Questions. We get stonewalled there. They say: go to FOIP. We get stonewalled there. Now we're going to make it even more difficult in what, as I said, was a most difficult proposal. No wonder there's so much cynicism out there.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Again, why do we have to take an act and sugar-coat it and say, "Well, it's to deal with the USA PATRIOT Act of the United States," and then stick on all these amendments that make this government even less transparent and more secret? I guess that's what comes when you've had absolute power for so long. You don't want to share information. You don't want it to get out, Mr. Chairman. We have to protect it. We have to sugar-coat it. We can't let the public know what's going on. That seems to be the reality of what we're facing here.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I want to again look at one specific part of FOIP in this, the five-year FOIP exclusion of ministerial briefing materials. I take it that the argument for this is based on the argument that public access to these documents may impair the government's ability to prepare for session. Frankly, that's absolute nonsense. Legislative debates based on such notes are public, and to bar them is to invite accusations of secrecy. For a government already plagued by lack of accountability and transparency, we're amazed that they would even have the gall to bring forward these amendments.

I mentioned before in this bill, Mr. Chairman, that the very spirit

of democracy rests on the fact that the government is formed by and for its citizens. Therefore, its documents, preparatory notes, and discussions must be made public and available to the public, particularly considering that such ministerial briefings do not – and I stress this: do not – and should not be considered as revealing the substance of the deliberations of the Executive Council any more than any other ministerial comments and debates do in the Legislature. They're public. You can't stop it. Maybe we'll find a way to not have *Hansard* next. Maybe that's the next step with this open government. [interjection] Tried that last week, yeah.

I just don't understand this sort of overkill about information. Is it that they're worried that something will come out and embarrass the government? Whenever governments try to block and control things, Mr. Chairman, that's inevitably when they get into more trouble.

I just want to be helpful here, Mr. Chairman, be helpful and try to help this government. The Official Opposition tried to help them out a little while ago, and they turned it down. So in the spirit of co-operation, I'd like to bring in a further amendment. I have the copies here that I would hand out. Do you want me to wait until it has time to go around or proceed?

The Deputy Chair: I think you may proceed.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It was under my colleague Dr. Pannu that this was signed to move that Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, be amended "by striking out section 4."

Now, section 4 has to do with what I was talking about, Mr. Chairman, the five-year FOIP exclusion of ministerial briefing materials. I want to repeat; these are briefing materials. This has nothing to do with deliberations of Executive Council. As I said, briefing notes should be no more valid than what people say in the Legislature here. Why we'd want to have these out of the domain for five years is overkill frankly. As I said, in the spirit of co-operation I would hope that the government members would think

that we're going too far with this and support this particular amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I'd beg leave to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I call for a vote on the motion to adjourn debate, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A2.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Renner: I'd move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 20.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 20. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour and the fact that the south is about to join the north in celebrations, we hope, I move that the House now adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 11:08 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 2, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and of our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I had the pleasure of attending an art show of donated art from Mexico, and the proceeds were sent back to Mexico for the children. I took the opportunity of inviting the Minister of Culture of Colima, so it is my honour today to stand and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the hon. Minister of Culture of Colima, Mexico, Ana Cecilia García Luna. She is accompanied by Rebeca Gonzalez, Leonor Sanchez, Fernando Rodriguez, Fernando Rodriguez Jr., and Cristina Amaro. If we could all give them our traditional welcome.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature two guests that are in the members' gallery, Margaret and Britney Millar. Margaret is a business owner in Kingston, Ontario, but most importantly, I think, she's here to meet the McClellan clan as Britney Millar is my son's fiancée. Britney plays for the Chimos women's hockey team here. I hate to admit this, but they lost to the Calgary Extreme in playoffs. I'd ask both of our guests to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise today and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Mr. Fred Atiq and Mr. Charles Hare of Fiberex Glass Corporation. Mr. Atiq is the founder of Fiberex and an award-winning industrial engineer. Mr. Hare is Fiberex's customer service manager and helped Fiberex win a supplier of the year award in 2002. Fiberex is one of the largest independent glass fibre manufacturers in North America. They operate a state-of-the-art facility in Leduc. Fred and Charles are here today because they are very concerned about dozens of power failures that have disrupted their operations in the last few years. They're hoping that they can get some quick action on that. So I would ask Fred and Charles to please stand and receive the warm welcome of all MLAs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed a pleasure again to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly a fine group of some 60 students from Edmonton-

Castle Downs, namely from St. Lucy Catholic elementary school. They are accompanied by Mrs. Cole Macedo, also Ms Isabelle Dennis, Mr. Daniel Forestier, and Natalie Mercy. All of them were guided through this Legislature by my junior high school teacher, Mr. Charles Grelli. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour again to introduce a group of people from the Countryside Christian school, which is located near Edberg. There are 19 people here from this school. They are led by their teacher, Mr. Justin Thiessen, and parent helpers Darcy and Maxine Goossen and Reg and Connie Siemens. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of this House 43 happy and excited students from St. Patrick's community school in Red Deer. This group of smart and enthusiastic students are among the most culturally diverse classes in Red Deer, with students born in Colombia, the Philippines, China, and St. John's, Newfoundland. We can celebrate a very bright and colourful future in Alberta. They are accompanied by their principal and teachers Mrs. Kathleen Finnigan, Mrs. Irene Pickle, Mr. Jon Burkinshaw, and Karen Peden. They're in the members' and I think the visitors' gallery as well. I would ask them all to rise to receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House two people from my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat. Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop live in Bow Island. Eric is the head of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta. I think they're seated in the public gallery. I'd like to ask Eric and Darlene to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly the newest member of my staff. Mr. Malcolm Lavoie is a third-year honours economics degree student at UBC. He spent two years on the national swim team and, indeed, swam in the world championships last year. He is also fluently bilingual in French and English. I would ask Malcolm to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Reliability of Electricity Supply

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The deregulation of electricity in this province has threatened the financial viability of untold numbers of businesses, including a number in the Leduc-Nisku industrial area. Ongoing power interruptions have cost companies

such as Fibrex Glass Corporation millions of dollars. This government's failure to enforce reasonable standards on the deregulated electricity industry could force successful Alberta businesses to other provinces. My questions are to the Premier. Is it the position of this government to have electricity consumers, who have already lost \$9 million due to the deregulation policy, then pay millions more for transmission and distribution system upgrades just so they can have reliable electricity?

Mr. Klein: Is it the policy? No, I don't think it's the policy. I don't know about the Department of Energy, Mr. Speaker. The minister is away, and I will take that question under advisement. Oh, I understand the minister of agriculture can respond.

Mr. Speaker, just before I turn it over to him, I've had the opportunity of visiting this plant. That's when they were using gas, and of course the price of gas is so expensive. I've seen the news release that the Liberals put out on this particular situation. Apparently the report they refer to does not say who should cover the additional cost for power upgrades. As I pointed out, the Energy minister is away at the Western Energy Alliance meeting, so I'll have the hon. minister of agriculture respond as best as he can.

The Speaker: We'll move on to the next one. Perhaps there'll be time.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that this particular issue has gone on for years and the solution is well known, will this government commit now to take urgent action to address electricity problems in the Leduc-Nisku industrial area?

1:40

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, before I turn it over to the hon. minister, the news release says:

"This government must show some leadership and support a real solution to this power supply problem," said Taft. "In the wealthiest province in Canada, why are some businesses experiencing Third World power problems?"

But he doesn't offer a solution.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, acting in the capacity of Minister of Economic Development while he's away, it is my understanding – and the Premier actually is very correct when he talks about the fact that the issue is well known. Fibrex has been in discussions with Economic Development in the recent past. This is a request for something that is above what is standard in the industry in that area. We recognize that there's a new substation that needs to be built in that area. In fact, the EUB has approved that, and it will be moving forward.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're just looking for action here.

Given that Fibrex is actually now considering relocating to Manitoba, jeopardizing the jobs of 170 Albertans, will the Premier agree to meet with the Fibrex CEO and other members of the Leduc industrial business community immediately in order to decide upon a solution?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister indicated that a new substation is going to be built. I've already met with the individual

involved, but I'm always interested in touring his plant. I found it a very interesting exercise. The last time I toured, he was complaining about the price of gas. He's converted now to electricity, and we're trying to resolve that problem.

The Speaker: The second Official Opposition question will come from the Leader of the Official Opposition, but just a reminder before we move on. First of all, we do not make mention of the absence of hon. members in the House on a given occasion, and secondly, we do not use the names of members in the House either.

Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Resource Revenues

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this tired Tory government can't stick to a budget, has watched the heritage fund lose 50 per cent of its value, and has no long-term plan for our economy after this latest oil boom. High commodity prices continue to make up for poor fiscal management by this Conservative government. Now the Aon report based on Alberta Finance projections shows that Alberta is on a fiscal downward spiral. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Will this minister follow the Alberta Liberal lead and save greater portions of the unbudgeted natural resource revenues so that Alberta's economic advantage becomes genuinely sustainable?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say a definite no to accepting the Liberal policy. Had we done that, there would be needed health facilities that would not be under construction, there would be twinning of an important road to Fort McMurray that wouldn't be under construction, and many other things.

However, I do take exception to his comments about the heritage fund losing its value. There's no question, Mr. Speaker, that there is a change in the value of the heritage fund because a number of assets were removed from it. But today the heritage fund, in fact, has an additional \$2 billion value, and it is a true and a real value, and it's projected to have a value of \$14.6 billion at the end of this fiscal year. To commit a definitive amount, a percentage of revenues, to that when this province is experiencing 4.5 per cent growth – the anticipated could be over 5 per cent – and much-needed capital to support that growth I think would be irresponsible.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the government's own numbers predict that Alberta's prosperity may not last, will this minister reject additional shortsighted prosperity bonuses and chose sound fiscal management over personal political legacies?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let me correct . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier has the floor.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, let me correct one thing right off. This is the second day in a row we've heard that the Aon report uses Alberta Finance's numbers. In fact, if you read the report, if you understood the report, you would understand that they are using an assumption of a reduction of 3 per cent per year in resource revenue. It's their assumption, not Finance's assumption. Now, we do in a very prudent way show oil and gas royalty revenues at what we believe is a very appropriate, conservative estimate. However, Aon's numbers in that report are not Finance's numbers. They are

an assumption. If they understood economists, they would know that economists use a base of assumptions to lay out a long-term strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is it this minister's or is it this government's position that in the long term Alberta's resource revenues are going to diminish 3 per cent every year? Is it a valid assumption?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have analysts from the oil and gas industry, from the private sector that we use to base our assumptions on every year, and every year we're criticized by the opposition because we're low on our assumptions. So I say again: what we do is base our assumptions in a very conservative way to ensure that we can maintain the important programs that we have for health, education, seniors, children. You can't get an analysis of oil and gas beyond one year, let alone two or three. We know there's volatility, and that's why we have a number of protections in this province such as the sustainability fund to guard against that volatility.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Sale of Surplus Land in Fort McMurray

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In last year's special report by the Auditor General on the sale of surplus government land in Fort McMurray the following was noted: some land sales were not publicly tendered, no analysis of appraisal, no independent review and challenge of sales. Yesterday the minister of infrastructure could not provide accurate, detailed information on the latest surplus land sale of 157 acres that occurred last summer in Fort McMurray. My first question is to the minister. What was the appraisal value of that 157 acre parcel of land?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member asked questions about the sale of some land in Fort McMurray, and I said at the time that we would investigate because I, of course, did not have the information right at hand. I did point out to them that it could be possible that there was a misprint in the *Gazette*, that in fact the decimal was in the wrong place. That turns out to be true, and I will be filing papers to show that. The hon. member said that it had been in the *Gazette* since July 15. That is untrue. The fact is that it was changed back on February 28 of '06 to the correct number. There was another mistake in it that the member did not notice as far as the property was concerned, and that was in the numbering of the lot.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. For the record, Mr. Speaker, the *Gazette* that's in the library indicates that that land was sold for \$2,800.

Now, my second question: given that over the last six years the government sold surplus land in Fort McMurray for over \$36,000 per acre, why was this land sold for less than half that? Why was it not sold for the market price?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there's land being sold in the city of Fort McMurray. There's land being sold outside of Fort McMurray. To compare apples and oranges and stand up in this House and pretend

that they're the same is ludicrous. They're not the same. As I pointed out earlier, the *Gazette* was changed. It was corrected on February 28. To say that that \$2,800 number was accurate, no, it wasn't accurate. I've got proof here that it was changed. The correct number is on the title of the land: \$2.8 million, Mr. Speaker, not \$2,800.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not talking about apples and oranges here. We're talking about the difference between incompetent and inept.

Now, my next question: why did the government not wait until the Auditor General finished his report into surplus land sales in Fort McMurray before proceeding with this land sale?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the process used on land sales is that, first of all, it's determined whether a department within government needs the land or not. If the answer to that is no, then the land will be appraised, and it will be offered to the municipality at the appraised value. If the municipality is not interested in it, then in fact it will be advertised and put on sale. As a matter of fact, many times we end up getting more for it in the sale than it's appraised at.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

School Board Finances

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School boards across the province are facing a financial squeeze. Edmonton public is the latest school board to be looking at a deficit. In their proposed planning base document presented to the April 18 board meeting, they have projected a \$7 million deficit in this year's budget. My question is to the Minister of Finance. At a time of multibillion dollar surpluses why are school boards facing a financial squeeze so severe that they are forced to run deficits?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish I had the answer to that. We have school boards that are elected to carry out the business of providing an education program for our students. We're charged here with ensuring that they have financial opportunity to do that. Education received over a 5 per cent increase in this year's budget, and I think the Minister of Education expects that that should suffice to operate those schools. However, I can say that the Minister of Education is working with all of the school boards, has met numerous times with them, prebudget and postbudget, to look at all of their concerns whether it be capital or operating. I would say that some of the areas of concern for school boards have been on the operating side with costs in energy. The minister has very rightly brought that forward, and we have responded in the past year to help them with that. So I would expect that Edmonton public will be meeting with the Minister of Education to deal with this issue.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the minister said that it's a responsibility given to this government to present enough money to do the job. The point, to come back, is: why are our school boards facing budget deficits that will inevitably lead to cutbacks of teachers and deterioration of learning conditions when the kids return next fall?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, as I said, school boards are elected. They're duly elected by the public to operate schools.

The minister has provided over 5 per cent in operating alone in this year's budget to school boards. Now, if the Edmonton public board is experiencing a problem, they can meet with the Minister of Education and explain why they in particular are facing this problem.

I don't understand it. We pay on a per-pupil basis. We have programs that deal with special needs, ESL: a number of things, Mr. Speaker. So I can't speak for one board as to why they find it difficult to operate within the budget they're given. There are sixty-some-odd boards in this province.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, this is something coming from this Minister of Finance, who had \$3.2 billion in supplementary estimates, and we're going to lecture the boards on how to do it.

My question is to the Finance minister, Mr. Speaker. Doesn't the Finance minister see the irony of this government being able to afford to give away \$370 million in lost revenues to a corporate sector that's doing really well at the same time that school boards are facing such a financial squeeze that they could be laying off teachers this fall? Doesn't she see the irony of that?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, I see the irony in the hon. member not being able to understand the correction I made in his numbers on the corporate tax reduction that was in this year's budget. I pointed the page out to the hon. member, and I invite him to attend the estimates – I think it's a week tomorrow – to further discuss this. The preamble to that question included comments on a supplementary requisition, of which a fair number of those dollars went to education. My point is that you don't like supplementary estimates, but you want more money for all of these things.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat: there is over a 5 per cent increase to education in this year's budget. I know that the Minister of Education has had repeated meetings with these boards. He has met with every board when they wanted to meet with him. If Edmonton public is experiencing difficulty, I know that the Minister of Education will be sitting down with them forthwith.

Alberta/B.C. Trade Agreement

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, Alberta and British Columbia held their annual joint cabinet meetings last Friday and signed a landmark trade agreement that is being described as setting the standard for free trade within Canada because of how far it goes to remove trade barriers. When we think of trade barriers, we think of tariffs and import quotas and things like softwood lumber issues. We know that we don't have those kinds of barriers between our provinces. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What kinds of barriers does the new Alberta/B.C. trade agreement remove, and what does that do for our economy?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, what this free trade agreement between our two provinces will create is a marketplace for 7.5 million people. It'll be the second largest economic region in Canada. What it does is remove barriers to things like trade, investment, transportation, energy procurement practices as four examples. For example, if a tour bus operator is working out of Golden, British Columbia, for temporary movement of their buses into Lake Louise, they won't need different permits. They'll be able to come in without a great deal of additional restriction. Skilled workers will be able to move back and forth between two provinces. If you're registered as a business in one province, you can do business in the other province. These are all examples where there will be a great deal of economic activity generated among and between these two provinces. Another

example would be in the area of government procurement. Suppliers from either side of the border can meet the procurement needs of governments. Engineers and architects will be able to practise in both provinces.

We're very, very excited about this, Mr. Speaker. While there are not the same kind of barriers that exist among and between countries, there are barriers that exist interprovincially. We think that the rest of Canada should follow Alberta's and British Columbia's lead on this.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is also to the same minister. Given Alberta's already tight labour market and the fact that we will have a shortage of about a hundred thousand workers over the next 10 years, how will the free movement of Alberta workers to B.C. help our industries and businesses?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, this agreement is not intended to drain workers from Alberta but, in fact, create opportunities for them and also help to attract workers to come to this province. Once workers know that they're certified in one of the economies, that they can move freely to where the other jobs are, where there's a great deal of economic activity as there is in Alberta right now, we expect that people will be moving in. As we move forward on reconciling the occupational standards, skilled workers from British Columbia technical schools and universities certified by B.C. standards will be able to work here in Alberta. So it can work both ways, but we think on balance it's going to work very much to the advantage of both provinces.

2:00

Mr. Shariff: My final supplementary is also to the same minister. Would this agreement apply to every profession, including professions such as medicine, engineering, or other professions?

Mr. Mar: There is an agreement on internal trade in Canada, Mr. Speaker, that says that you are part of the agreement if you're specifically listed in the agreement. The agreement on internal trade that exists among and between provinces in Canada is very weak. It's not very specific. There's no real dispute resolution mechanism that is of particular advantage. However, in our agreement with British Columbia, instead of saying that you must be in the agreement, we assume that everything is included in the agreement unless you're specifically enumerated as an exception.

So there are some exceptions, Mr. Speaker, with respect to water and environmental protection that will remain within the purview of each individual province. Health and social services, social and aboriginal policies, labour standards, consumer protection, taxation of royalties, public safety: these are all things that will be exempted from this agreement. So those will continue to be within the purview of each individual province, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Integrated Land-use Management Strategy

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Forest Products Association released its survey of Albertans' values of their public lands. The survey clearly describes the failure of this government to meet Albertans' expectations and that Albertans expect their government to play an active role in forest management. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why has this government consistently failed to implement any land-use strategy, considering that more than 80 per cent of Albertans support an integrated land-use management?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Forest Products Association did do a survey of Albertans, and they did come up with Albertans' values in relation to the forests and public lands. Albertans were wanting to make sure that tree planting and replanting and reforestation was their number one priority. Protection of the wildlife and habitat in which wildlife live was another priority. Harvesting practices and the management of ecological impacts were definitely on their minds as well as regulations and restrictions on industrial land use. We're not surprised at those values because the Department of Sustainable Resource Development and this government share those same values and want the same things to happen on the land. Our policies have been put in place over this past number of years to make sure that those values are kept for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll go with my first question again because the minister did not answer it. The government has failed consistently to implement a land-use strategy. How long can we expect one?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, I did mention that we identified the issues. They're consistent with the issues that this government deals with on a day-to-day basis. We do have management practices in place to make sure that we use best practices. We plant more trees than we cut every single, solitary year. That's consistent with Albertans' values. We do management plans to protect the wildlife and protect critical habitat in forested areas. Our forestry management practices are among the best in Canada, if not North America.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that reforestation is a fundamental expectation of all Albertans, when will the minister require that oil and gas operators reforest disturbed lands that they already harvest?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, we have very strict rules in place to manage the impacts that industry has and the activities that they have on the land. We have many strict requirements for companies to use best practices and to try and reduce the footprint by ILM practices. Industry through the chamber resources and through their own associations, both oil and gas and forestry, is looking at integrated land management. They're wanting to reduce that footprint. It saves them money, it saves the environment, and it is consistent with the values that Albertans have put in front of the AFPA.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Agricultural Trade

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development was in Geneva last week attending WTO agricultural negotiations. Agriculture is an industry that has a large reliance on trade, so these negotiations could have a major impact on our province. It is my understanding that very little progress was made at these meetings. Could the minister please explain what this means for Alberta's producers and processors?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. The WTO, or the World Trade Organization, talks are extremely important to Alberta's producers. We're probably 80-plus per cent trade dependent in terms of our agricultural industry, so a positive and aggressive outcome at the WTO is critically important to us. It is unfortunate that they missed their April 30 deadline, which was set last year in Hong Kong. But from my meetings with those individuals I would say that the negotiations are far from dead. There's no formal ministerial meeting in Geneva at the end of April, but they have committed to the next six weeks of very intensive negotiations. They are going to be going very hard trying to overcome some of the impasses that were there. Really, a clear political commitment is needed from all of the countries, including Canada, to ensure that we do get an ambitious and timely conclusion to those negotiations. I'm still hopeful that we can get there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. With the federal government being responsible for negotiations, what role did you as a minister play at these meetings?

Mr. Horner: Well, that is correct, Mr. Speaker. It is an international agreement that the federal government is responsible for. Agriculture is the key to our getting an agreement. The federal minister has committed to being consultative with us on whether or not and how he's going to proceed on that, and I'm very confident about that. It was also important for us to make sure that we had some idea where these negotiations were going because we have to make those plans, we have to make those policies, and we have to work with our ag food industry. There's a lot at stake here. We had meetings with Canada's chief negotiators, and we pressed Alberta's trade interests in those negotiations. We also were able to give to him our priorities as to where we thought this would be the best outcome.

We also had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to meet with more than 12 of the ambassadors and senior trade negotiators in Geneva in the day and a half, two days that we had to express to them what Alberta's position was and why it was so important to a province like Alberta. We also had many members of Alberta's ag industry with us in Geneva.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given that a finalized deal could present challenges to some segments of the agricultural industry, what is being done to prepare industry once a deal is complete?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, a deal is not going to happen overnight, and anything that is decided is not going to be implemented overnight. Certainly, there are some decisions that have already been made; for example, the removal of all export subsidies by the year 2013 as well as work on domestic support. So there are things that are going to happen over a period of time, and as I said before, we want to get a better understanding of where these negotiations are going to land and what effect that may have on some segments of our industry in a negative fashion so that we can prepare them, so that we can work with them. Indeed, we've opened those discussions with them and have been talking to those industries over the last year. We've had two round-tables on the WTO

negotiations and the possible outcomes, and we're moving in that direction.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Tuition Fee Policy

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three questions to the Minister of Advanced Education on the report prepared by the Transforming the Advanced Learning System Subcommittee of the A Learning Alberta review. Is the minister satisfied that the recommendation to merely roll back tuition to 2004-2005 levels, when they were at the time some of the highest fees in the nation, really fulfills the Premier's promise of the most affordable, entrepreneurial, and innovative tuition policy in Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to tell the hon. member that I'm now on the NDS' leaked distribution list, and I see that maybe he is too. With respect to the recommendations what I can tell the hon. member is that we are beginning tomorrow morning to meet about many things. Stay tuned.

Mr. Taylor: All right, Mr. Speaker. If that's the case, then, is it the minister's position that tuition will be manageable for every Alberta student and that fees will never again become too high?

2:10

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that one has to look at the tremendous value that postsecondary education is to the future of all Albertans. I think one has to look at a balance: a balance between parents, who ought to be partnering with their own students; business – you know, the word business doesn't seem to come up that often with respect to support for postsecondary students – the students themselves; and, of course, government. What we're going to do, hon. member, is strike a balance that I think you're going to be happy with.

Mr. Taylor: Well, the minister has promised legislation this spring, Mr. Speaker. Will he commit to keeping the legislated tuition controls in the act, or is this something else he plans to move into regulation and beyond the scrutiny of the public, the Assembly, and the students of Alberta?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I know that the legislation is progressing through the process. I know that tomorrow I'm being asked to go to Leg. Review on it. Stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been hearing a great deal about the potential of coal-bed methane development as an economic opportunity, but my constituents, like most rural Albertans, expect their well water supply to be safeguarded from contamination and depletion. That was reinforced in a meeting that I had last week with several of my constituents over this issue. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Given that 90 per cent of the rural water supply comes from groundwater, can the minister explain what he is doing to make sure that my constituents' water is protected while Alberta develops coal-bed methane?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, all Albertans should expect an essential, basic principle of safe drinking water, and that is happening, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, and all Albertans. I think it's important that as part of our Water for Life strategy about 30 days ago we announced a new water standard when it came to coal-bed methane: effective May 1 testing is required by all industry and companies that are doing any potential drilling. Before they are issued a licence, they have to do the proper baseline testing. Three areas that we look at are, one, the water quality; two, the pressure of the water that is in existence before any drilling takes place; and of course then the issue of the presence of any methane that may be in the existing reservoir.

As we move forward, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and all Albertans that we'll continue with the geological mapping and inventories of our ecosystems and watersheds. That is all part of our Water for Life strategy.

Mr. Johnson: My second question to the same minister: how can my constituents trust industry's test results? Who will make sure that the tests are performed correctly?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and all Albertans that this is a very open and transparent process regarding the testing that is done, that is obligated to be reported back to the actual residents that perhaps could be impacted or that have complained regarding the coal-bed methane drilling. Also, Alberta Environment as part of our ministry's responsibility is working very closely with the lab, the accredited agencies that are doing this water testing to ensure that safe drinking water is provided to all Albertans.

Mr. Johnson: My final question to the same minister: who can my constituents call if they can no longer drink from their water well because of fears of contamination?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the fear of contamination, I think, is an important responsibility of each member in here when it comes to getting the facts out. There is a 25 to 30-year history of geological testing, mapping. The new standards that we introduced are all part of what the expectations are of Albertans. I think it's also important that any Albertan who has a concern can call the 24-hour environmental hotline, which is 1-800-222-6514. We will not only investigate. We'll work closely with the partners, with industry, with the proper testing to get to that ultimate blue gold that I talk about, that we'll continue to protect and sustain well into the next hundred years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Métis Hunting Rights

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the government accepted the recommendations of an MLA task force on the interim Métis harvesting agreement, a document which has left a legacy of confusion and ill will that will take some time to heal. The question that remains is: how did the interim agreement ever see the light of day in the first place? My question is for the minister of aboriginal affairs. Why has the Minister of Justice, who was not involved in the writing of the interim Métis harvesting agreement, been handed the lead on this file?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me talk about what happened. I think that you have to understand process in government. There were negotiations that were determined by the three ministries: Alberta Justice, Sustainable Resource Development, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development – three ministries. At that point the negotiations took place with the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council. Those negotiations then were determined in terms of recommendations that were brought to the table. Those recommendations were taken to Agenda and Priorities, and Agenda and Priorities directed us to take them to cabinet. At that point cabinet made the decision that we would go ahead with the recommendations.

I would like to say a little bit about those interim Métis harvesting agreements. They have provided us with a way to be able to understand whether or not there were some areas that we needed to expand on, to change. As you know, they're called interim agreements. We were breaking new ground, Mr. Speaker. We were making every attempt to make sure that nothing would happen out in the field that would create chaos. What we wanted to do was to be able to ensure that the province continues to manage its natural resources.

Mr. Tougas: To the same minister: in that the infrastructure minister was quoted as saying in reference to the aboriginal affairs minister that she didn't take it through the process, that it was there before we knew it was there, why did the minister circumvent her own party's rules and push through this agreement?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just outlined what process we utilized. In terms of whoever said what, I don't go into he said, she said, they said, whatever. What I deal with are the issues. The issue of the day was to be able to see what we could do in terms of making sure that we had issues that we had to deal with. We wanted to make sure that there would be no chaos out in the field. We had to ensure that we were going to get people to come to the table. The Métis Nation and the Métis Settlements General Council said that they would come and negotiate with us, which we did in good faith. I think that in terms of what the situation was, we had a really good group of negotiators, who, I think, deserve a lot more than what you're saying, Mister.

Mr. Tougas: At least I got a "Mister" out of it.

Now, after more than a year under an agreement that granted Métis wide-ranging hunting rights, how is the minister now going to tell the Métis people that the rights they have today may no longer apply tomorrow?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, answering on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Alberta has always been a leader in recognizing the Métis culture and Métis society. We wanted to negotiate an agreement that struck a balance between the rights of Métis people and legitimate concerns with respect to fish and wildlife conservation. So the interim agreements have served their purpose. We did have to respond at the time to the Powley decision, a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. The MLA committee was struck to address the concerns that arose as a result of the interim agreement. In the course of preparing the report, this committee has consulted with First Nations, with Métis organizations as well as conservation groups, outdoor organizations, and members of the public. I'm optimistic that the new agreement is going to ensure hunting and fishing opportunities for all Albertans while respecting the constitutional rights of aboriginal peoples.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution-related Offences

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In May of 2005 this Legislature passed Bill 39, which corrected deficiencies in an earlier bill which allowed the seizure of vehicles involved in prostitution offences. Last May the government indicated that it expected proclamation of Bill 39 by last fall, and even just six weeks ago the then Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation said that he expected proclamation within the next month or so. Well, residents in inner-city neighbourhoods that are plagued with this problem continue to wait and are getting increasingly impatient. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given that our neighbouring provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba have had vehicle seizure laws involving prostitution offences in place for several years, why is it taking Alberta so long to proclaim its own legislation?

2:20

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it is true that this is taking much longer than we had anticipated. We had hoped that we would be able to be at a point where we could proclaim the act much sooner. Currently we are continuing to work on the regulations. There has to be a lot of consultation with the law enforcement side and with other aspects of seizing a vehicle. So we're hoping that it can be proclaimed very shortly because it's extremely important to curb prostitution.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister perhaps be a little more precise as to exactly when residents of neighbourhoods who are impacted by street prostitution can expect these negotiations to be complete, and can the minister assure the House that this legislation will be proclaimed before this Legislature rises from its spring sitting?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very hard for me to assure the hon. member that it will be proclaimed before this session rises. I don't know when it's going to rise. Perhaps he does, but I sure don't. I've got to tell you that we are continuing to work on all of the aspects of this exercise. It's not quite as easy as it looks on the surface because we are taking property before a court case, so there are some unique aspects of this kind of legislation. But we are working on it. I hope that we can proclaim it very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister please be a little bit more expansive as to the precise nature of the difficulties or the issues that need to be negotiated before the legislation can be proclaimed? Could he itemize those for us?

Mr. Lund: As I indicated, there are a number of administrative procedures that we have to go through in order to seize a vehicle. It also gets into a whole area with the RCMP, the city police, and other law enforcement agencies, exactly how they're going to handle this situation. As I said earlier, really what we are doing is we are seizing vehicles prior to there being a conviction or going to court. So that whole administrative procedure is one that we have to be sure that we're on solid ground and are able to do. We all know that it's the right thing to do, but legally it's sometimes difficult to work our way through and make sure that we can do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Skilled Labour Shortage

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of construction union constituents advise me that they find it difficult to obtain employment in their trade and that the supposed shortage of skilled workers in Alberta is a figment of this government's imagination. Apparently, many union workers line up at union halls in search of work. I also hear that for this very reason local unions oppose the possibility of importing skilled workers from abroad. However, I have some conflicting information that I need clarification on. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: has the minister examined correspondence issued by Alberta union local 488 dated July 25, 2005, addressed to their U.S.A. counterpart union requesting a transfer of 10,000 workers from the U.S.A. to Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: That's what happens when you have a good government and a strong economy and thousands of jobs. Mr. Speaker, I have seen the letter that the member is referring to but certainly cannot speak about why a particular union may take one position or another. That is their business. But I can say one thing: there is definitely a shortage of labour in Alberta. It is real. There is a real shortage. Alberta's economy has created skills and labour shortages throughout the province and does create many challenges for us.

As everybody knows here in this House and in the province, we are going to have over 400,000 jobs in the next 10 years, and with the existing processes we have, we can only create 300,000 jobs. Mr. Speaker, that is a challenge. But you can be assured that we still have the Alberta priority of hiring Albertans first, Canadians, ensuring that there's mobility throughout the country, and of course there are aboriginal persons, persons with developmental disabilities. The aboriginal youth, I've always mentioned, is one very important area. There are 200,000 aboriginal youth aged 15 to 25 years old, and there's lots of unemployment and underemployment on those reserves.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I will be tabling that letter later.

To the same minister: is the writer, Mr. Rob Kinsey, correct in stating that as of spring 2006 there are some 3,000 steam fitter, pipefitter, and welder positions available in Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: As I said before, Mr. Speaker, there are skills and labour shortages in many sectors throughout the province because of our strong economy and good government, of course. We can't say exactly how many positions are available in these occupations because the companies in Alberta do not by law have to report what positions might become available and may be reported.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is confusing. Is there a shortage of skilled labour? Are unions opposed to importing workers from abroad? Which one is it?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, there are skills and labour shortages in many sectors throughout the province because of our strong economy and good government. Again, one thing I want to say: I can't speak on behalf of any union and what the union wants to do. I've said that before in this House. The unions run their own shops, and I think that in a lot of cases they do a good job.

Our government, on the other hand, is spending close to \$300 million, Mr. Speaker, to help support and ensure that people get the

proper training they deserve. Maybe the Minister of Advanced Ed would want to supplement on this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Funding for Wellness Initiatives

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Incoherence, poor planning, false assumptions, and fearmongering have been the highlights of this government's health strategy. On top of that, the government is constantly saying one thing and doing another. My questions are to the minister of health. Given that the minister has claimed that we can reduce health system costs by promoting the health of children, why does the government refuse to support a school nutrition program?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the school nutrition program, as well explained by my colleague the Minister of Education, would be under the auspices of the school in terms of the school trustees, the local priorities. So school nutrition programs are not a part of my mandate.

However, the school boards, the Ministry of Education, myself, and the Ministry of Children's Services co-operate on a number of programs that benefit schoolchildren, including the physical fitness program that has been initiated, where students are receiving regular physical fitness. Many of the conversations we've had on the cross-ministry initiatives – both the ACYI, administered by the Minister of Children's Services, and the health initiatives lend themselves to conversations about improving the wellness of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, for example, in Eastglen school there was a wonderful demonstration of mental health awareness in launch of mental health awareness week. So in many activities we're integrally involved. But the actual policy development and the initiation and delivery of that policy would be, essentially, the purview of the Minister of Education.

Ms Blakeman: Say one thing; do another.

Again to the minister of health: if this government truly wants to make the population healthier, why was the funding for the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy cut in this year's budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we had hoped to take very real advantage this year of federally initiated and advertised programs, particularly as it came to national ads. There were some excellent demonstrations of advertisements, television ads that we believed could enable us to divert some of our funds into other areas. Through the chair of AADAC, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, we will be undertaking further investigation of what we should do to make sure that we reach those target audiences where tobacco has been apparently on the increase. But we're very pleased with the results we're getting for 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the minister of health: when will the minister stop blaming individuals for rising health care costs and support programs that will truly reduce the cost in the public system, like a pharmacare program?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been working on a pharmacare program, but this minister has never once blamed individuals. This minister has cited a number of the rising costs in health care. Many governments are doing exactly what this government is doing. We're looking at those cost drivers and how

we can maximize efficiency in some areas, how we can improve wellness, and how we can in fact target those areas not only of the rising costs of pharmaceuticals but also use more evidence-based information for improving and adding to our system. We look forward to making some of those cost efficiencies really benefit Albertans as well as benefit the health care system overall.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I will call on the first of six to participate, but first of all we'll have our historical vignette of the day.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: This will be part 2 of an historical overview. On March 21, 1940, Albertans elected their second Social Credit government with 42.9 per cent of the votes and 36 of 57 seats. For the first time in our history the Liberal Party was neither the government nor the second-largest party in the House. Nineteen independents were elected with 42.4 per cent of the votes. Liberals elected one member.

The election of August 8, 1944, saw the Social Credit government returned with 51.88 per cent of the votes and 51 of 57 seats. The second-largest grouping was three independents with 16.75 per cent of the votes. Two Co-operative Commonwealth Federation MLAs were elected with 24.92 per cent of the vote. There were no registered Liberal candidates in the election of 1944.

On August 17, 1948, 55.63 per cent of Albertans voted Social Credit and returned 51 of 57 MLAs. The CCF polled 19.13 per cent of the votes and elected two members, as did the Liberals with 17.86 per cent of the votes.

Four years later on August 5, 1952, the largest number of political parties ever, 13, contested the election. The Social Credit Party received 56.24 per cent of the votes and elected 53 of 60 MLAs. Three Liberals were elected with 22.37 per cent of the votes.

On June 29, 1955, in Alberta's 50th anniversary year, 37 of 61 seats went to the Social Credit Party with 46.42 per cent of the votes. The Liberals elected 15 members with 31.13 per cent of the votes.

In Alberta's 14th election, held on June 18, 1959, 55.69 per cent of Albertans elected 61 Social Credit members out of 65 seats. The Progressive Conservative Party elected one MLA with 23.88 per cent of the votes. For the first time in Alberta's history a political party received more than 200,000 votes; Social Credit received 230,283 votes.

Almost four years to the date later, June 17, 1963, the Social Credit Party won 60 of 63 seats with 54.81 per cent of the votes. Two Liberals were elected with 19.76 per cent of the votes.

In Canada's 100th year and on May 23, 1967, 44.60 per cent of Albertans returned 55 of 65 MLAs to the Legislature as Social Credit MLAs, and six Progressive Conservatives were elected with 26 per cent of the votes. The New Democratic Party received 16 per cent of the votes and elected no MLAs while the Liberals elected three MLAs with 10.81 per cent of the vote. This was the ninth election victory in a row for the Social Credit Party.

The score to date is four Liberal governments, three United Farmers of Alberta governments, nine Social Credit governments.

Tomorrow, part 3.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Red Deer Vipers Hockey Team

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you probably know, Red Deer is located on the busy, booming corridor between Calgary and Edmonton. Because Red Deer is the centre of paradise, not only

do we have the privileges of cheering for our own teams – the Rebels, the Chiefs, and the Vipers – but we have the glorious opportunity to choose between Alberta's great teams in Edmonton and Calgary. In fact, it's not unusual to see a car going down the road in Red Deer with an Edmonton Oilers flag on one side and a Calgary Flames flag on the other.

Last night the Edmonton Oilers fans had the chance to celebrate a great first-round victory against the Detroit Red Wings in the Stanley Cup playoffs, and last night the Edmonton fans were erupting with joy. Alas, the Calgary fans were sad because they have to wait for the seventh game to celebrate, we hope.

Red Deer, however, gets to celebrate a great victory for one of their very own teams, the junior B Red Deer Vipers. The junior B Vipers are a team of young men between the ages of 18 and 20 who play hockey for the love of the game. Some players work, some go to school, and some work and go to school while they play hockey. With hard work and dedication these young hockey players earned the title of Alberta junior B champs for the second time in three years and the western Canadian champions, the highest honour for this level of hockey.

Mr. Speaker, please let me congratulate the players and the coaches of the Red Deer Vipers: Jared Brookes, Dan Saniszlo, Cody Mast, David Horsley, Ryan Kure, Dave Dow, Devon Haley, Brent Foord, Jay Adams, Kelly Rogers, Ryan Lund, Ryan Edgeworth, Brian Renaud, Colin Christensen, Randy Kloss, Dave Kozlowski, Brett Sparks, Taylor Britton, Stephen Gebbink, Bryce Campbell, Mark Walper, Adam Casemore, Mark Horsley; coaches Mel Christensen, Trevor Stoddard, Nick Kletke, Barry Brookes; their general manager, Gilbert Renaud; and their trainer, Lynn Richards.

Mr. Speaker, go, Vipers, go. Go, Oilers, go. Go, Flames, go. Long live hockey.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wetaskiwin Leaders of Tomorrow Awards

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and recognize the achievements of a diverse group of young individuals from my constituency. Each and every year Wetaskiwin and Camrose hold separate award ceremonies honouring the volunteer achievements of young Albertans in the area. The leaders of tomorrow awards recognize and highlight the commitment to community which is displayed by the nominees. The age of those nominated ranges from six years of age all the way up to 25. While only eight people receive the leaders of tomorrow awards, being nominated is a sign of the commitment which these young people have shown to a variety of causes. The nominees volunteer for many varied organizations, helping out many different parts of their community.

On April 24 the dedication of four young people from Wetaskiwin and area was recognized. The recipients at this award ceremony were Destiny Schmidt, Katherine Fraser, Sonja Fedorak, and Christopher Kirwan.

On April 26 four outstanding individuals from Camrose and area were honoured for their achievements. The recipients at this award ceremony were Shawn Eelhart, Jodi Harrison, Jamie Wold, and Jennifer Redstone.

Each of the winners as well as all of those nominated have demonstrated a strong interest in making their communities a better place to live. I look forward to seeing what amazing feats all of these young people will accomplish in the years to come. These individuals have been recognized by their communities as the leaders of tomorrow, and their actions leave no doubt that they are also leaders of today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Universal Child Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Universal child care and caregivers. This past Saturday, April 29, the hon. members for Edmonton-Mill Woods, Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Mountain View, and myself sponsored a child care public forum at the Banff Trail Community Centre, located in the Calgary-Varsity constituency. Sixty-four individuals from a variety of child care backgrounds, including stay-at-home mothers and fathers, public and for-profit daycare workers and owners, representatives and care providers from before and after school care organizations, shared their concerns. Regardless of their personal situation or their varying approaches to providing care, the common message that they shared was their love and concern for the well-being of children.

2:40

They also stressed the need to raise government awareness of the importance and the value of caring for children, whether in the home or in an accredited institution. They praised the Alberta Children's Services minister for the bold five-point plan which she had negotiated with the former federal minister, Ken Dryden, as a good first step. The plan recognized the need for accreditation and funding increases for institutional caregivers as well as financial support for stay-at-home parents. Everyone present called upon our provincial Minister of Children's Services to honour her commitment to the principles of the five-point plan regardless of Prime Minister Harper's failure to recognize the importance of and to fund the inclusive plan that was 18 months in the making. They urged us and through us the Minister of Children's Services to work with them to create and fund a made-in-Alberta plan which recognizes both the value of children and their caregivers, whether within or outside of the home.

We have pledged our commitment to work with and assist in the organization of child care committees as well as to hold child care public forums throughout the province. Today's children determine tomorrow's future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Portage College Sports and Education Dinners

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 28 and 29 Portage College hosted two major fundraising events in Cold Lake and Lac La Biche. The annual sports and education dinners saw 240 participants in Cold Lake and 250 in Lac La Biche.

The headline speakers were two well-known Albertans: former NHL hockey star and Stanley Cup winner Brian Skrudland and world long drive champion Jason Zuback, who has won the championship an unprecedented four times. The funds raised from these two popular events will go towards supporting learners of Portage College through bursaries and scholarships. Additional speakers included scholarship recipients Richard Baikie and Belva Cardinal as well as local athletes, Canadian bodybuilding champion Tammy Becotte, and former NASCAR driver Ken Staples.

The result of these two fundraising events was that more than \$35,000 will be added to the scholarship endowment at Portage College for future learners. There is hope that these funds will be matched perhaps on a 2 to 1 basis from the access to the future fund through the Department of Advanced Education. This could generate an additional \$70,000, bringing the total amount raised in the two events to over \$100,000 in scholarship funds.

At the Lac La Biche event Canadian Natural Resources announced

a generous donation of \$150,000 to Portage College to demonstrate the commitment of CNRL to the communities they serve in north-eastern Alberta. We thank them for their continuing support.

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to see these initiatives geared at improving our postsecondary services for students in northern Alberta.

Thank you.

Motion Picture Industries Association Awards

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this past weekend in the city of Edmonton 1,000 members and friends of the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association gathered to honour and recognize the best in class. I was privileged to join about 20 of our colleagues from the Assembly at the 32nd annual film and television awards gala dinner. More than 600 entries resulted in a total of 53 category winners ranging from best actor and actress to cinematography, costume design, and finally, best overall production. The big winner of the evening was the film *Waking Up Wally*, which most in the Assembly will recognize as the Walter Gretzky story.

Mr. Speaker, an evening like this past weekend gives one a brief glimpse into the incredible potential this renewable resource has for our province. We have more than 3,000 Albertans earning a living as members of our unions and guilds in their roles as cameramen, actors, grips, costume designers, writers, directors. Of course, the foundation of our industry is made up of the hundreds of producers and production companies and small businesses that serve this great industry. Many of those small businesses, which range from caterers to equipment rental firms to hotels and restaurants, are located in rural Alberta. Many of the productions recognized this past weekend were filmed in locations such as Drumheller, Canmore, High River, Bragg Creek, Peace River, and Longview.

I should point out that the Alberta motion picture awards, known as the Rosies, is the largest provincial event of its kind in Canada, a tribute to the commitment and enthusiasm of the people that make up our film and television industry. So today I would like to recognize these 53 award winners and all of the committed Albertans that make the Alberta film and television industry the envy of Canada, an industry we can all take pride in.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Groundwater Safety

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On gas migration and groundwater. Alberta has a brilliant future in energy development, both nonrenewable and renewable, but it must be done right. Public health and safety comes first. Water quantity and quality are paramount in ensuring people's health and livelihoods.

It has long been known that many groundwater sources in rural Alberta contain hydrocarbons, especially methane gas. The question that continues to be asked by landowners and not answered by regulators is whether the gas is indigenous to the water well or it migrated into the water from nearby oil and gas activities. Industry has done investigations, and little public information is available. There is now substantial evidence from laboratories and researchers across the province that gas has migrated into aquifers in some instances due to fossil fuel extraction. However, this has not been systematically examined to identify specific causes and remedies. We don't know what we need to know to assure citizens, especially rural landowners, that their lifeblood is safe.

Several steps are needed to ensure safe, sustainable groundwater. Number one, Alberta Environment must establish a valid, reliable baseline testing protocol, both quantitative and qualitative, for

groundwater in conjunction with scientists and laboratories. Number two, Alberta Environment and the EUB should establish a public and independent groundwater committee on gas migration and groundwater to oversee the investigation of groundwater problems, starting in the Horseshoe Canyon, and make recommendations. Number three, Alberta Environment should move quickly to establish accurate groundwater mapping as a priority in the Horseshoe Canyon. Number four, the Energy and Utilities Board must review and implement the best available technology for CBM extraction to ensure minimal adverse effects. Number five, the Environment and Energy ministries should consider a multistakeholder organization similar to the Clean Air Strategic Alliance to review and make recommendations on CBM to ensure that regulations reflect the priority of environmental protection and groundwater protection.

Future generations will judge us on the degree to which we face our ignorance of our groundwater, learn what we need to, and prevent further migration of hydrocarbons into our aquifers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following private bill proceed: Bill Pr. 1, Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006.

The committee recommends that the following private bills proceed with amendments: Bill Pr. 2, Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act, and Bill Pr. 3, Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006.

As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the proposed amendments to bills Pr. 2 and Pr. 3.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations.

The Speaker: Will all hon. members who concur in the report please say yes.

Hon. Members: Yes.

The Speaker: Would those who oppose please say no. It's carried.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a petition that I received from staff and students from the Nordegg school in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. I have six copies from the six petitioners, who are proposing some initiatives they believe could be used to curb an increase in teen smoking.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have, actually, three different batches of petitions. I'll present them as one. They total 3,126 signatures. These are all from people who were protesting the government's third way, asking them to abandon those third-way plans – obviously, they were successful – asking to

defeat legislation expanding private, for-profit hospitals, and asking the government to uphold the Canada Health Act.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition from my constituency in St. Albert, which totals 75, regarding the implementation of the third way, which will drain key resources of the public system, and the contravening of the Canada Health Act. The same with the petition from 204 constituents in rural Alberta. I'd like to table these with the gentleman to my left.

Thank you.

head: 2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a memo dated April 18, 2006, from Corinne McCabe and Bob Holt, executive directors with the Edmonton public school board. The memo refers to the board's proposed planning base for 2006-2007 and notes an anticipated \$7 million deficit for the 2005-2006 school year.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today five copies of the *Alberta Gazette*, part 1, February 28, 2006. It clearly shows that there was a correction in the *Gazette* which shows that the land in Fort McMurray sold to Fort McMurray Housing Inc. was sold for \$2.8 million, not the \$2,800 that was formerly indicated. I can inform the Speaker as well that there will be another erratum. In fact, this one still says that it's block 1, lot 2, and there were two parcels: block 1, lot 1 and lot 2. It's interesting to note that this land was appraised at \$1.8 million, and we received \$2.8 million for it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter to which I earlier referred from union local 488 to their U.S.A. counterparts, advising that this government is "conspiring" to import workers from Venezuela, South Korea, India, or Pakistan but instead invites 10,000 workers from the United States.

Thank you.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head:

Main Estimates 2006-07

Government Services

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you very much, and good afternoon, colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to move the estimates for Government Services and speak to the business plan for 2006 to 2009.

Government Services touches the lives of Albertans each and every day. Whenever someone in Alberta registers their car, buys a house, starts a business, or needs help to deal with a consumer issue, they are accessing the services, products, and information offered by my ministry, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to share with you today the business and financial plan that we've outlined for the next three years to ensure that we continue to provide these and many other services to Albertans effectively and efficiently.

Before I do that, I want to thank the previous ministers that have taken over this posting and have done a great job and made my job a lot easier. This department is very well run, and I have to tell you that I'm so very, very proud of the staff that work for Government Services but, more importantly, work with me. Up in the gallery today we have with us my assistant, Daryn Fersovich, who came with me from the chairmanship of the standing policy committee on energy. He has been learning this posting with me and has been doing a great job. Beside him is Colleen Quartly. Colleen has been just an outstanding member of my team in the office.

Mr. Chairman, I'll start by giving you an overview of the three core businesses. First, we provide efficient and secure access to government programs and services. This includes our licensing and registration services as well as the Service Alberta website, a new addition to Government Services, and the Service Alberta call centre, which was recently transferred to Government Services from the Public Affairs Bureau.

Some of the staff that has just joined us I'd like to also introduce. Like I said earlier, I've had just a great team that have got me up to speed with this ministry. I'd like to mention the deputy minister, Mr. Robert Bhatia. Robert would have been here today, but his mom was in a car accident, and he's where he should be: with this family. He has given me the opportunity to work with some great people: Laurie Beveridge, the assistant deputy minister of consumer services and land titles; Wilma Haas, the assistant deputy of Service Alberta and registries; Sue Kessler, the acting assistant deputy minister for program support services; Lori Cresey, our senior adviser officer; and Cathy Housdorff, our communications director. Cathy has been very, very valuable to me, giving me advice on the many people issues that we deal with. Also today joining some of the staff is Donna Rogers. Donna, as most of you know, served the previous Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and Infrastructure and Transportation. She has been around here for a while, so when Donna says something, I just say, "Yes, Donna, I'll do that, thank you," and I just get to work.

Anyway, about our ministry. As well as the Public Affairs Bureau, we deal with the second core business, and it's to support a fair and effective marketplace here in Alberta. We do this by regulating a variety of businesses that provide services to Albertans and by providing consumers the information they need about their rights and responsibilities. Also, under our second core business the Utilities Consumer Advocate represents the interests of Alberta residential farm and small commercial consumers in the restructured utilities market. They work towards improvements in the regulatory process and the service delivery. I think most of you here know my background in this Legislature on protecting consumers on the utilities side, so I'm very much interested in working with these folks within my ministry.

Finally, our third core business is that we provide strategic leadership in information management and access and privacy protection. That includes the responsibility for Alberta's privacy legislation and overall approaches for managing the information of government.

In providing these core businesses to Albertans, Government Services strives to fulfill our vision to serve Albertans with excellence and innovation.

Now to our business plan. Mr. Chairman, to effectively manage our core businesses, we developed our business and financial plan by prioritizing our programs and services to focus resources on the most critical areas. To do so, we considered the impacts on Albertans, our legislative mandate, the financial benefits realized, and the opportunity for future expansion of the program. We also took into consideration the growing challenges facing us as a government and as a ministry.

The biggest challenge we face is simply how fast this province is growing. According to a recent Stats Canada report, Alberta's population increased by more than five times the national average during the last three months of 2005. That's amazing. You ask me: what was that? It was more than five times the national average during the past three months of 2005. Our economy has also been growing by leaps and bounds, bringing with it, you know, a wealth of new opportunities for this province.

3:00

Our economic and population growth also brings us new challenges. This is particularly true for Government Services. As I outlined earlier, Government Services delivers many of the day-to-day services that the provincial government provides to Albertans. They demand that the services increase as our population does. For example, Mr. Chairman, with the significant increase in the numbers of homes being built, bought, and sold in Alberta, there's an equally significant increase in land title transactions.

I have to tell you about an experience that Daryn and I had down in Calgary when we went to the land titles office. These queues of documents come in each and every day, and in each file there's a land transaction. They deal with files not in numbers of one, two, or three; they deal with it at six feet as an average working day. Six feet of files. The day or two previous to the day that we visited the land titles folks down in Calgary, 12 feet of transactions came in. It's amazing, the volumes and volumes of work that this department does, and they can only keep up because they're so experienced and so dedicated, Mr. Chairman. I'm so very, very proud of the fact that we have people that can take on that work, take on that challenge, and deliver to Albertans each and every day.

We experienced an increase of nearly 975,000 land transactions, including both registration and searches, this year compared to '04-05. This upward trend is expected to continue as well. That's what I talk about when I talk about six feet a day of files in an office, and all of a sudden one day 12 feet appears. You know, there's a huge, huge increase in the workload that Government Services staff have.

The increase in homes being built has also put pressure on consumers, who seek reputable contractors and tradespeople. We hear from members from Calgary who talk about a home being completed every 45 minutes in Calgary. The growth is just amazing in parts of our province, and all that growth is managed through Government Services. This challenge translates into an increased workload for our staff that investigate consumer concerns. Demands on our motor vehicle and vital statistics registries are also on the rise, with no end in sight. As we all know, with 65,000 Albertans moving to this great province each and every year, they need services, and Government Services staff and this ministry will deliver. In addition to the increases in the sheer volume of transactions, we're also seeing an increase in expectations. Albertans expect a very, very high level of service, and we plan on delivering, Mr. Chairman. You can count on that.

But more than ever Albertans expect us to be diligent in identifying mortgage and identity fraud and ensuring the security of the documents and the information that we hold. For this reason, Mr. Chairman, my ministry will colead one of the government's eight

top priorities, and that's protecting people's personal information. We talked a little bit about this with staff in the last while. We do a little exercise in our home. We have a shredder in our home, and my mom and my sister and my brother bring documents to our house every time we have a birthday or a gathering. They use our shredder, and they're shredding these documents.

I think each and every one of you have probably received a credit card in the mail, and it says: just simply call in and activate this and sign it, and you've got a credit card. Well, you know, identity theft is on the rise, and when we have the activity that we do here in this great province, we also have some con people that are out there willing to take advantage of people. So I've talked with our staff. Maybe we need to make consumers aware of the risks of taking one of those credit cards that we get in the mail or taking our utility bills and just throwing them in the garbage. A lot of us rural MLAs that live a couple of blocks from here that like to walk to work – and I've talked to most of you – have all seen people digging through the bins, and you never know what they come up with. Mr. Chairman, maybe we're going to have to have a shred day or something like that in Alberta to teach people about the value of the identity theft that may be occurring each and every day in our back alleys. Maybe we're going to have to do something like that to make Albertans aware.

But, Mr. Chairman, we also need to improve Albertans' awareness of the services offered by the ministry so that they know where to turn when they need us and of the renewal of our personal property, land titles, and motor vehicle registry systems so that we can meet the growing demands for the services and increased security requirements.

Mr. Chairman, keeping the extensive portfolio of legislation and regulations that we're responsible for current and responsive to emerging issues is very, very important. You know, Government Services is up to the challenge, and we are continually striving to enhance our services to meet the growing demands. I'd like to outline for you now some of the specific opportunities that we have identified to improve service delivery in many areas of the ministry through the strategic application of resources and technology.

In support of our three core businesses we have prioritized our programs and services to focus our resources on five major goals. Our first and our highest priority is "efficient licensing and registration services." You know, we work hard to make sure that our registry services are accessible, affordable, and secure. As stewards of personal information of Albertans, Government Services has the responsibility to ensure the integrity of this registry information and protect it from all risks, Mr. Chairman.

Of the five registries that exist in Government Services, vital statistics produces documents that are amongst the most sought after by identity thieves. You know, these documents, such as birth certificates, can be used to obtain other important documents such as drivers' licences and credit cards, so we're developing a more coordinated and integrated approach to security solutions for the vital statistics registry. Changes include improvements in the physical transfer and storage of registry documents, information technology access to registries, and processes that promote compliance with any security measures.

We are also committed to keeping our fees affordable and are confident that our key services will remain competitively priced below the national average for similar services. Mr. Chairman, I have had lots of discussion with our staff to make sure that we are competitive and that we will remain competitive. We continue to provide examples every day of the Alberta advantage through such things as the low cost of registering your home. I bet most of you in this Assembly didn't know that currently we are 82 per cent below the national average on the cost of registering a home.

Mr. Danyluk: I didn't know that.

Mr. VanderBurg: The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul didn't know that either, and I'm sure that most of us didn't know that.

On our automobile registration fees, most recently I've been given the information that we're 27 per cent below the national average, and our driver's licence fee most recently is 29 per cent below the national average. Mr. Chairman, these are figures that we can be very proud of. We are competitive, we offer a great service, and I'm not shy about telling Albertans about this fact.

In addition to measuring our fees, we also measure our success by ensuring that clients are satisfied with the services they receive from our registry agents, and, Mr. Chairman, they are. Albertans continue to be highly satisfied with the service provided by registry agents, and the most recent results show that 89 per cent of the clients using our registry services are satisfied. That's a pretty great figure.

You know, I would say that this is a significant accomplishment since Alberta's vibrant economy and population boom mean that our registry systems support over 17 million transactions every year. [interjection] The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul says, "17 million?" Yes, it is 17 million. That's five transactions for each and every Albertan. Whether you're using our services electronically or at the door, that's a lot. I would say that over the next period we'll see even a greater pressure on our registry systems. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, economic growth is particularly evident in the record number of transactions completed by our land titles staff as well.

3:10

Mr. Chairman, extra funding in the past years for additional staff helped to ensure that turnaround times remained at acceptable levels and that client satisfaction remained strong, and it has. As economic growth in Alberta has continued, extra funding has been included once again in our budget to hire additional staff at land titles. I will stand here and I'll tell you, colleagues, that additional staff are needed because of the growth and because of the expectations that Albertans have for great service, and we'll provide that service.

We're also working to improve our systems to manage this growth, and as we progress further with our registry renewal initiative, we anticipate additional improvements to our service delivery for all registries. In total, our registry and licensing services account for 76 and a half million dollars' worth of expenses, and I'm glad to say that we generate revenue in excess of \$376 million. [interjection] The Member for Calgary-Shaw asked me to repeat that. We spend 76 and a half million dollars, and we collect \$376 million. Mr. Chairman, this is a great accomplishment for Government Services, and, you know, we contribute to the greater wealth of this province.

Our second goal relates to Service Alberta, where we strive to provide "efficient and convenient access to government information and services" across all delivery channels. The most recent result shows that 74 per cent of Albertans surveyed are satisfied with their access to government information and services and that 74 per cent are satisfied with the timeliness with which these services and information are provided. It's like I told my sons when they came home with their report card and said that they got 82 per cent or 74 per cent. I'd say, "Well, what about the other 26 per cent?" or "What about the other 18 per cent?" We can do better. We will, Mr. Chairman. I can guarantee that.

Effective April 1, 2006, government approved the transferring of the Service Alberta call centre, also known as the RITE centre, to Government Services from the Public Affairs Bureau. Mr. Chairman, that number remains 310-0000, and we all use that each and

every day, especially when we're travelling up and down the road. It's a handy number to know. Transferring this significant and well-used public service to our ministry provides a tremendous opportunity to fulfill our long-term goals for Service Alberta initiatives and to facilitate both the service improvements and operating efficiencies.

Mr. Chairman, I can talk for hours on this ministry, and I will.

The Chair: Hon. minister, you haven't moved your estimates yet. Would you like to do that?

Mr. VanderBurg: Oh, yes, Mr. Chairman. I did move that right at the beginning of my speech, but I will do that once again.

The Chair: We didn't get that.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay. That's fine.

The Chair: That way, we have something to debate.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the clarification, and thanks to the hon. minister for moving his department's estimates for 2006-07. I respond in my capacity as Official Opposition critic for Government Services.

To begin with, I must emphasize the positive and functional relationship I have had with the former Minister of Government Services and his staff and now with this new minister, who just last week stood in this House and offered to co-operate with me and with all other Albertans. On Thursday of last week my researcher and I had the pleasure of meeting with the minister, the deputy minister, the communications director, and the minister's assistant. It was sort of a get-to-know-you type meeting and an informal discussion on the issues.

You know, Mr. Chairman, we have many opportunities in this House to act synergistically, but sometimes we don't seize those opportunities for whatever the reason may be. I can tell you, however, that this hon. minister is genuinely interested in co-operation for the benefit of all Albertans and in the interest of doing what's right for the land and its people. As such I, too, will reciprocate and will not only offer to work with him; I will insist on it. I also want to thank the staff at Government Services and wish them all the best.

Now we move to the budget estimates. As the minister mentioned, under Ministry Support Services on page 246 of the budget the estimate for the minister's office is \$402,000, which is an increase of 31 per cent over the 2005-06 forecast. Can the minister tell us why this increase was necessary and if it was planned ahead of time? Or was it only an effect of his assuming this new role? Will the minister be increasing the number of employees who are going to work in his office, and if so, why is it necessary? The increase for the deputy minister's office is not as pronounced, and I think that's good.

We move on to consumer services and land titles, which also appears on page 246. Line 2.0.1, program support, the estimate is \$607,000. Now, this is a 60 per cent increase over the 2005-06 forecast. Can the minister tell us why such a significant increase in funding was necessary? It's also interesting to notice that this particular program underspent by \$201,000 last year, based on the forecast figures. So can the minister tell us why in one year they're underspending, which is really good – you know, if they don't need to spend it, then they don't – but then all of a sudden there is an increase of such dramatic magnitude? Did the minister encounter

any serious concerns or complaints in program services last year to warrant such a big investment? How exactly will this additional funding be utilized, and how does he anticipate this money improving program supports?

I am moving on to Service Alberta and registries, which received a significant portion of the hon. minister's introduction this afternoon. On page 246 as well, under line 3.0.1, program support is increasing by 29 per cent over the '05-06 budget. It's now going up to \$840,000. Now, this is a significant increase, and again I would appreciate any clarification from the hon. minister as to why this increase in funding was necessary and why so drastically. Were there problems that occurred in program supports, or were there objectives that were not met; hence, the increase in funding?

Moving on to 3.0.2 on the same page, Service Alberta is now going to receive \$1.88 million, which is 22 per cent higher than was budgeted last year. Again, this is a significant case, in my view, of overspending. Why did Service Alberta exceed its budget last year and now are receiving more money this year? What factors contributed to that overspending? Service Alberta is essentially unchanged from when it was under the Public Affairs Bureau to now being under this hon. minister. So where is the discrepancy, and what's happening there? Also, from an efficiency standpoint we notice that the Public Affairs Bureau, after relinquishing this responsibility to the hon. minister, did not shrink in size. So they're not getting any smaller. This ministry is also growing. The program was transferred from A to B, but there's more money being pumped in and more FTE staff. Again, we need clarification from the hon. minister.

Moving on to 3.0.3, registry services, which is again a significant component of this ministry, are receiving an 18 per cent increase over the '05-06 forecast. It's now stipulated at \$26.4 million.

3:20

The Official Opposition continues to hear from Albertans who are very unhappy with the registry services. You know, it would be very hard to justify putting more money into a program that doesn't seem to be receiving a lot of favourable review from the citizens and from the customers that actually use that program. Most of those complaints are regarding the level of service or the quality of the service delivered. I know that the minister quotes satisfaction surveys and so on, but again it's a matter of how representative the sample data are and which people are responding and which people are withholding the response and so on and so forth. Mr. Chairman, as you know yourself as an MLA and as all members of this esteemed House already know, most of the questions raised pertain to the privatization of the registries and, as I mentioned, the services delivered and the quality of the service but also the fees charged and general questions with respect to privacy and security of information.

Today I was discussing this very subject with my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning, who is hoping to speak after me, and we agreed that we both like not having to wait in line for extended periods of time. Also, we like having the choice of location, hours of operation, et cetera. But what else did privatization accomplish? As I mentioned, we all receive complaints from constituents about the registry fees and how they have gone up substantially after privatization.

The hon. minister indicated that our registry fee structures are competitive compared to some other jurisdictions. But the question here is: are they really? Why hasn't there been a study conducted to fairly and independently evaluate the effects that this has had on fees? How can we be assured that, yes, indeed, we are competitive? Asking a person if they think \$20 is fair is different from comparing

our \$20 to the other jurisdictions in Canada. Also, how do we compare ourselves to ourselves, factoring in inflation and how costs typically rise, sort of a before and after assessment, before privatization versus after privatization, comparing Alberta to Alberta, not just Alberta to other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan and British Columbia?

Also, I would personally advocate for a periodic review of all the fees charged, both the government component and the registry agent part. We can probably say, "Let's do it every three to four years," for example, to make sure that Alberta is always in the bottom 25 per cent on the fee scale across Canada. So maybe it should be a target not only to assess satisfaction amongst the users or the customers that actually access registry services, but let's set it as a target for this government that we always have to be within the bottom 25 per cent on that fee scale.

If you're thinking more towards including the U.S.A. and Canada as one big region, you know, thinking about NAFTA or free trade, for example – and now particularly, as of today, for example, our dollar is at the 90-cent U.S. mark – how about expanding this registry fees review to include the northern or northwestern states as well to make it a comprehensive and thorough national/regional review?

Mr. Chairman, if I move to the business plan, page 203, under goal 8, ministry services, it states: "Maintaining a competitive licensing and registration fee structure in support of the Alberta Advantage." So, again, it's the idea of: where does that Alberta advantage extend and who does it extend to? When aiming to maintain a competitive structure, does the minister know how competitive we are today compared to, say, 10 or 12 or 15 years ago? That's the question of the before and after, as I mentioned before. If the minister has any statistics as to what is deemed to be attributed to inflation only versus the higher fees after privatization in terms of what percentage the government keeps for itself and what percentage the registry agents charge, then that would be very useful.

Moving on in the business plan, page 208, performance measure 1.c, comparing us to other jurisdictions: this is where I'm saying that we should really set our own goals to be in the bottom 25 per cent rather than just evaluating it. When it's convenient to highlight that we're competitive, then we do; when it isn't, then we don't talk about it. This is me trying to be the consumers' advocate, Mr. Chair. It's looking after business and allowing business to grow and services to be delivered more efficiently while at the same time looking out for our consumers and protecting them.

Another issue at the registries is security, and by that I mean two things: one, the ease with which one can fraudulently obtain government ID. We've received many communications from people in Alberta who have talked to the MLAs from the opposition about, you know, how it's very easy to obtain government ID or a birth certificate, for example. Number two is the security of the documents and information housed in or handled by registry offices. Continuous training and professional educational development for our registry agents are important. Fairly and adequately compensating them so that they don't yield to financial temptation is another angle. We can even add another layer here: empowering and protecting them so that they don't succumb to threats or bullying from organized crime and biker gangs, for example, all that stuff. Identity theft is a growing problem, and tackling it starts at the front line, at the local neighbourhood registry office front desk.

Before I conclude this point, Mr. Chairman, I just want to make an observation. I thought that after privatization this government was going to spend less on registries as it claims to be out of the business of doing business, but the trend is that they spend more

each year. The Auditor General in his 2004-05 report on page 211 indicated that the ministry spent \$37 million from 2002 to 2005 and now expects the costs to significantly exceed the original \$100 million estimates. They call it the registry renewal initiative.

Take into consideration, Mr. Chairman, please, that this is so while no significant work has been started on (a) the motor vehicle registry or (b) the registration subsystem of the land titles registry. So what exactly are we looking at here, and how can this be justified to Albertans, who are now being asked to fork out the money twice: right, as a registry services user or consumer paying more; left, as a taxpayer supporting more government spending on the registries? So we need clarification here, please.

Moving on, under the government and program support services estimates on page 246, line 4.0.1, this is a 16 per cent increase from the 2005-06 budget, a significant increase. Can the minister tell us why this increase was necessary? How exactly will this additional money be used? Were there concerns with program supports from last year that needed to be addressed?

Line 4.0.4, the estimate for legislative planning and freedom of information and privacy services is a 60 per cent increase – 6-0 – from the 2005-06 forecast, now going up to \$749,000. Now, this is very significant. I'm approaching this from two sides because I also look after freedom of information and the protection of privacy as the critic. So how much of this money is going into the implementation of the proposed amendments to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which is now being discussed in this House under the title of Bill 20? Now, it's no secret, Mr. Chairman, that the opposition is definitely against the passage of certain parts of Bill 20, and we are concerned that some of this money might be used toward adding more layers of secrecy to a government that is already overly secretive.

When we met with the minister last week, as I mentioned, he assured us that he's interested in working with Albertans. I think that this is one area where he can demonstrate such genuine interest by agreeing to some of the amendments that the opposition is proposing to make the government open, transparent, and to hold them accountable. Adding more layers of secrecy now, especially with this estimate, is the wrong way to go.

3:30

Moving on to the Utilities Consumer Advocate, which was briefly mentioned by the hon. minister. I have to start by saying that my feelings go out to the deputy minister after his mother's car crash, and I wish her and him all the best.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate, as is evident on page 247, line 6.0.1, is receiving a 40 per cent increase from the '05-06 budget. Again, very significant. Can the minister tell us how exactly this money is going to be spent? How will the Utilities Consumer Advocate be improving his advocacy services for Albertans?

We raised this last year in budget debate, and we're doing it again this year, that we think it is not the proper way to go to have the Utilities Consumer Advocate, who advocates on behalf of citizens and people and consumers, be the same person as the deputy minister. He's wearing two hats, and we think that there is a conflict or at least that he might not be allocating the necessary time and resources to doing both jobs efficiently. Nothing against the person, but the question is with the scope, the mandate, and how effective this position is. Especially after deregulation many people have issues. Their only recourse is to go to the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

The role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, Mr. Chairman, also comes into question because this government seems to think that the bulk of his job is to inform Albertans on why deregulation of utilities

was good for them. So it's more of a sales job rather than a recipient of complaints and somebody who reacts to those complaints. Why is this government increasing the budget to educate consumers about government policy instead of advocating on their behalf? Again, we think he should be at arm's length, and we think that it's time to separate the role of the deputy minister from that of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. If the minister agrees and if he takes that direction, I would not only be appreciative, I would actually support him and back him on that decision, the issue of impartiality and the issue of doing their job effectively.

Mr. Chairman, I can probably go on and on dissecting the line-by-line composition of this budget, but I can't help but drift back to the angle of consumer protection. Alberta does not have a stand-alone consumer protection act, unlike other jurisdictions. I know for sure that Ontario, for example, has one. Instead we have several little acts here and there dealing with various topics and instances but nothing central or paramount or overarching. So I think it's time now, in Alberta's second century, to look at a stand-alone consumer protection act, and it would be great if the hon. minister champions that cause and puts it forward. Again, this would be something that I would be in support of.

This is an item that I forgot earlier. On page 207, under core business 1, goal 1, strategy 1.3, to "undertake initiatives to validate and secure information held within the Ministry's registries." On the issue of privacy again, can the minister tell us exactly what initiatives are in place or what is being currently worked on, you know, to secure and ensure the safekeeping of information that is either housed in or processed by Alberta's registries? The issue of security does not only extend to the equipment or the computers or the records but also to the personnel and to make sure that these guys are trustworthy and that we are minimizing the possibility of leaks and waste and abuse.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. You know, I appreciate the comments that the Member for Edmonton-McClung has made. I do expect that I'll have to give you some of the answers in writing because I don't think we'll have the time to cover it all. But we are working on the issues that you have raised.

Mr. Chairman, in the upcoming years we look forward to working with all ministries to enhance the services offered through the Service Alberta call centre and the content and functionality of the website that they offer. We'll also collaborate to develop a business and service delivery model that will position Service Alberta to deliver more services on behalf of government. For example, in order to meet changing expectations for licensing and registration services, we plan to implement online renewal of licences for regulated businesses. I think that will really enhance the services needed. The Service Alberta initiative amounts to approximately \$2.4 million of our expenses.

Mr. Chairman, under our third goal we aim to ensure that Alberta has "informed consumers and businesses and a high standard of marketplace conduct." The success of this program is mainly measured by client satisfaction, which is very high for both the call centre and our tipsheets that we provide. Investigative services are evaluated based on the likelihood that a client would recommend this service to a friend, and our indication is that 84 per cent that have used the service would recommend it to a friend. I think that that figure speaks for itself.

Oversight and management of Alberta's residential tenancies legislation was also a major initiative related to this goal. This

legislation provides a framework for Albertans who rent their homes. As we talked about yesterday in this Legislature, we introduced in Edmonton a pilot service to handle landlord and tenant disputes without resorting to the courts. This service will allow Albertans to resolve tenancy issues in an effective and economical manner without placing an additional burden on the justice system. Mr. Chairman, 5,000 cases went to our courts last year dealing with residential landlord disputes. It's hoped that through this service we can divert about 1,500 of those cases through the Government Services ministry and provide a much quicker service and for sure a less painful method of resolving disputes rather than using the courts.

On other fronts, we'll continue to consult with industry and the public, and yes, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, I'll be working with you on issues that affect Albertans each and every day. To the Member for Edmonton-McClung, you had brought up issues that a lot of people that you talk with aren't happy with our service. Maybe that's because you're an opposition member – I don't know – but people come to me, and they're pretty darn proud of the service they get. But I'll make that commitment to you, right here in front of all our colleagues, that if you have any specific concerns and if people come to you that aren't satisfied, I'd ask you to write down their name, get their address, get their concern. We have staff up here that handle that. They specialize in dealing with people. Let's not just talk about "people are unhappy." Let's get those unhappy people and make them happy people, and let's get these stats up for all Albertans. So I'd like that commitment from you that you'd do the same.

Mr. Chairman, I think that we can serve Albertans in a much better fashion if we get everybody on the same page. Our department staff will ensure that those people are taken care of whether they are your constituents, mine, or the members' around here. All Albertans deserve good service, and we'll provide that.

On other fronts, Mr. Chairman, we'll continue to consult with our service providers in an effort to develop the most efficient structure for the Funeral Services Regulatory Board, just to name one. Again, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung had brought this to my attention, and we will make sure that we enhance consumer protection dealing with those sensitive issues.

We allocate about \$10 million of our expenses to protecting and educating consumers. Again, the Member for Edmonton-McClung brought up the Utilities Consumer Advocate office. I would say, Mr. Chairman, that this service as provided is one of the gems of Government Services. You know, whether you have a concern or whether a constituent has a concern, we can just simply pick up the phone, call the Utilities Consumer Advocate, take it off your desk, put it on theirs, and when they phone the utility company, I'll tell you, they pay attention. That's what this service is for. I'm very proud of the fact that so many Albertans have received such great service out of our advocacy office, and they'll continue to. We'll get that message out to Albertans to make sure that this office is there for consumer protection. It's not there for the utility companies; it's there for consumer protection. So you can count on it that we'll be sending that message to Albertans over the next few months.

3:40

Mr. Chairman, our fourth goal – and this would cover off a lot of the points raised – is to provide effective advocacy for those 100 million residential, farms, and small consumers that receive utilities. The Utilities Consumer Advocate undertakes a number of vital activities, including ensuring that utility companies address those consumer questions and concerns in a timely and fair manner, not just the call centre. This is going to be in a timely, fair manner, and

those Albertans will get results, I can assure you that. Also, on the utilities advocate's interests with the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board and their other regulatory proceedings, we're there to make sure that consumers are represented. It's not our intention that we take over the intervenors that regularly attend, and I can tell you that there are lots of people that make a profession and a very good living intervening just for the sake of intervening. We're there to protect consumers.

In the coming three-year cycle the Utilities Consumer Advocate intends to improve representation of consumers at the regulatory hearings. If we need to bring in some specific witnesses or experts, we will, and we'll make sure that consumers' issues are taken care of. We'll make sure that we make Albertans more aware of the role that's offered by the UCA office, and we'll meet that challenge.

Mr. Chairman, I think most, especially the rural members, are aware that the new regulated rate option will come into effect this July, and we're going to make sure that the UCA will play a role informing consumers and stakeholders. I think especially the REAs, that represent the farm consumer out there, will need a little bit of help, and we'll provide that. Therefore, this year we're also implementing a program to build consumer understanding of their options in the restructured electricity and natural gas markets and increase the awareness of the services that the UCA can offer.

The UCA, let's not forget, is fully funded by the electricity and natural gas consumers through the electricity balancing pool and the natural gas distributors, respectively, at a cost of \$6.7 million per year. Any funds not required for the program in a given year are carried forward to the next year.

Mr. Chairman, I talked about five goals. I got through four of them, and our fifth and final goal is to provide "effective programs and services for information management, access to information and protection of privacy." Again, the Member for Edmonton-McClung had talked about the protection of privacy. Both the business community and the public make good use of our information services. We respond to over 180,000 calls and 10,000 e-mails per year and receive approximately 700,000 hits on our website per month. The member behind asked me, "How many hits was that?" That was 700,000 hits per month on our website. That's a lot of hits. I can tell you that I've used that website, and it's very friendly to users. Those of you that are interested, I encourage you to take the time to see how you can better serve your constituents by knowing that website a bit.

Mr. Chairman, new this year. Government Services will provide leadership through the development of best practices and educational tools for protecting people's personal information, a top priority of the government of Alberta and a top priority of this ministry. Another major initiative under this goal is our comprehensive review of Alberta's private-sector privacy legislation, scheduled to start by July of '06. This legislation establishes clear, concise, and common-sense rules for private-sector organizations that collect, use, and disclose personal information here in Alberta.

We also plan to work with the Provincial Archives of Alberta to develop a comprehensive digital preservation system to ensure that information of historical significance to the province is preserved digitally and can be accessed into the future. You can only imagine what we would have in our vaults across the province.

Nearly \$3.3 million of our expenses are allocated to information management, access to information, and protection of privacy services. I think that would answer another one of the questions that the Member for Edmonton-McClung has raised.

You know, as you can see from the programs and services that I've spoken about today, our ministry has a major impact on the lives of all Albertans. We take pride, Mr. Chairman, in delivering

high-quality services, and I'm very pleased that the government's new budget provides significant funding increases of over \$10.3 million to allow us to continue the level of quality. The additional funds will allow my ministry to address the many challenges that I've mentioned here today.

Of that funding, Mr. Chairman, \$3.2 million has been allocated to address the protection of personal information held in our registry system and to augment training and support for registry agents. Seven hundred thousand dollars has been added to our land titles division to address the increasing demand for services. Like I talked about, when I went into that office and they were dealing with six feet of files, all of a sudden one day 12 feet come in. You know, expectations of Albertans are high. They deserve good service. You can't do that by sitting on your hands and expecting the issue to go away. We need to recruit people, we need to get them into our training program, and we need to put them to work as fast as we can. The Member for Edmonton-McClung is nodding his head. I can tell that he understands this issue. This is a growth issue that we're facing in this province. We'll manage this. Maybe not to the expectations of Albertans instantly, but we'll manage this. I can assure you of that.

There was a million and a half dollars that will be used to address inflation areas and volume increases related to our information technology services. Like it or not, inflation exists, and we have to meet that.

I talked earlier about the pilot project for the opportunity for landlords and tenants to resolve disputes out of court. We'll spend about \$300,000 on that. That issue won't go away. It's my expectation that next year we'll be talking about this again. It'll be a higher figure. I really think that for this service, which we're going to offer Albertans once we do an evaluation of the one-year pilot project, you'll be hammering me for all Albertans. You'll say: why aren't we delivering this service to the folks down in Calgary or in Red Deer or in Mayerthorpe or in High Level? My answer to you will be that this has been a successful pilot project, and we'll have to find the resources.

You know, to think that we can deal with 5,000 cases of landlord/tenant disputes in the courts when we can have an opportunity through mediation – well, it's not even mediation. It's an opportunity to sit around, discuss this problem one-on-one, pay \$75 to do that, not hundreds and hundreds of dollars hiring lawyers. I think the court application alone is \$200. So I think that you'll be hammering me on this a year from now: why aren't we spending more to deliver this service throughout Alberta? I can tell you that we won't just jump into it. We'll evaluate the program, and you and I will talk about the successes of the program and how we're going to convince our colleagues around here to spend a little bit more money and deliver that service to all Albertans.

3:50

Also, you asked a bit about the extra money that has been spent on the access to motor vehicle information. Yes, we're spending almost an extra \$300,000 to expand our ability to review and ensure compliance of various users of motor vehicle information, so that's where we're spending it.

I think \$1.6 million also will go towards increasing public awareness of the services provided by the UCA, so you're going to see some information going out to Albertans. That has to come from somewhere. It'll come out of this budget and the increase that I'm defending here today and asking for your support.

Mr. Chairman, \$1.1 million of that increase will be used to fund government-wide increases in manpower costs. Again, that's a fact of life.

Finally, we've added an additional \$1.6 million for previously approved increases in amortization and minor adjustments for several programs.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I believe we put forward a fiscally responsible business plan that reflects our continued commitment to excellence in providing vital services to all Albertans.

At this time I'll sit down and hear from other speakers. If for some reason I haven't covered off every point that you've raised, my staff are making some notes and will provide you with some additional written information.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and enter the debate on the motion that was put forward by the Minister of Government Services less than an hour ago, which is about approval of the estimates for the department for the current fiscal year, 2006-2007. I should extend my best wishes to the minister, who is relatively new to his portfolio. He seems to be already fully engaged with the challenges that he faces and the opportunities that he has in order to improve the delivery of services to Albertans that this government provides, to protect their private information, and to make information accessible to them better and faster than has been the case, looking at the record of this government.

Before I get into these issues and get into them in detail, let me quickly put on record the fact that the minister's and my acquaintance goes way back, long before either I was a member of this Assembly or he came in post the election of 2001. I was a young teacher, I guess, at the time in Whitecourt, and he was a very young student in the school where I was teaching. He reminded me as soon as he got elected. In fact, he produced a school yearbook of those times, which had a picture of me with a crewcut. It was kind of an interesting reminder.

An Hon. Member: No. You?

Dr. Pannu: That's right. I wondered if he almost violated my privacy by sharing that picture without first consulting with me. It was quite a pleasant reminder of my wife's and my stay and work in Whitecourt for a little over two years in the early '60s. I'm very pleased to now see this member as a colleague and as a minister doing the things that he is doing.

With respect to the estimates before us, I think many questions with respect to the budget items have been raised, and the minister tried to address several of them. One that I have is about the Utilities Consumer Advocate. There's a fairly large increase in the budget there, I think 40 per cent, from \$4.58 million for 2005-06 to 6.4-plus million dollars now. We do need some more information from the minister, although he tried to address this issue, I think, when the question was asked by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung. But more information would be helpful in satisfying me that the quite substantial increase that is showing in that line item is in fact justified and is something that I should vote for.

The ministry's business plan states on page 211, although the Utilities Consumer Advocate's budget is being increased quite substantially, that only 31 per cent of Albertans surveyed were aware of the roles and services that are provided by the same office, so a very small percentage, less than one-third, of Albertans are even aware that an office like this exists. I wonder what the reason for this is. It has to have something to do with more than just the fact that this office is only three years old. I think it was established in 2003, if I am correct, but that alone doesn't explain such a low level

of awareness among the Albertans who were surveyed with respect to what this office does.

My suspicion is that if the Utilities Consumer Advocate took more of a public stance on issues and concerns that are brought to his attention by Albertans, if he made his position public more often, if he advocated more than just sending back information when someone complained, that would be a better way of raising awareness than just, I suppose, spending money on increasing awareness through education. Education may be necessary – that is, provision of information on a broader scale – but building a more public advocacy profile for this office might be the way to go if Albertans are going to see much value in the money that this government plans to spend on this office. This office has to be more effective in the eyes of Albertans as an advocate on their behalf for them to have an interest in the office.

The business plan does set a new level of awareness, I guess about 50 per cent, but that's still, I think, very modest given the importance that was attached to this office when it was established in the wake of the deregulation of our utilities in this province and the public outcry over the negative impact that that deregulation had on their pocketbooks. It still continues to bother them to a very large extent.

One interesting report that the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate produced in February 2005 still noted concern over electricity deregulation. I know that this minister as an MLA before he became minister was very much involved in addressing those concerns. This report said that all of the five options suggested by Alberta Energy for the future of residential electrical sales would penalize bill payers and benefit sellers. The report's authors added that we are surprised and disappointed. Albertans expect and deserve that their government will protect their interest in this policy where the individual has little influence on options.

4:00

Clearly, the advocate's report here I think puts a finger on a very important issue. It seems that there may be a need to change the powers of the advocate, or some regulations surrounding those matters may have to be changed in order for the advocate to be able to be more effective in providing the protection against those deregulation policies. Better still, I think it might be important to heed the message in that report and perhaps revisit the question of deregulation and if that needs, in fact deserves a closer look for deregulating the system. In any case, there is a concern there that's expressed by the report, and I would like to hear the minister's response to that.

I think the report makes another interesting observation, Mr. Chairman. The consumer advocate's report does in fact express real skepticism about the eventual success of deregulation, based on his survey of the experience of other jurisdictions in North America where deregulation has not succeeded at all in meeting the expectations that were associated with that by the advocates of deregulation. Here's a quote from page 14 of the report which I think would be of interest to the minister.

Government's transition to a competitive retail market has the potential to impose additional costs and risks on small consumers who could face 40% to 45% higher prices based on the current offerings by competitive retailers.

This is on page 14, and the report, of course, is from 2005. It does raise questions about the future of deregulation given what the consumer's advocate has to say. So that's sort of one area.

I want to quickly switch, Mr. Chairman, to another issue which in the business plan is one of the core businesses of the department. It has to do with access by Albertans to the information that they may need about the government. Now, in that connection I think the report of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner,

that the minister, I'm sure, is aware of – I think this was completed and presented to the government several months ago – has led in fact to the proposed changes in some of the legislation. Some of those changes are included in Bill 20.

While there are some I think justifiable responses by way of proposed changes in the legislation which address the concerns created by the PATRIOT Act in the U.S. and how it might impact the ability of the government to protect information related to Albertans, there are some other very unacceptable aspects of Bill 20, which I want the minister to perhaps look at. I'll be very happy to meet with him in the next day or two to see whether there is any room for making changes in the legislation so that it doesn't make it even more difficult for Albertans to have access to the information that's very, very important for them to make sure that the government has the levels of transparency that they expect this government to have.

The two items there that I have concerns about and have heard from other Albertans expressing concern about, including the press in this province, have to do with two sections, one which will make inaccessible, beyond the reach of Albertans, access to briefing books and briefing notes that the ministers have. I just want to remind the minister that it was that information included in briefing notes that led at the federal level to the sponsorship scandal becoming public. The rest is history. We know what's happened as a result. So that's one part of Bill 20 that I want him to perhaps pay some special attention to. As I said, I'll be very happy to meet with him on very short notice to see if he would be willing to discuss it with me.

The second has to do with the internal audit reports, that that information will not be accessible to Albertans for 15 years after the report had been prepared. That makes the situation worse than it is presently. So Bill 20 has parts of it which will make, in fact, access to information much more difficult and beyond the reach of Albertans, thereby defeating the very purpose of the act that's being amended.

Past that, I have some questions for the minister from the 17 recommendations that were made by the Information and Privacy Commissioner with respect to what needs to be done to change our existing statutes in response to the concerns expressed by the B.C. Information and Privacy Commissioner by way of a long, lengthy report on the impact of the PATRIOT Act in the U.S. and how we need to change our legislation to make sure that our information doesn't get called into courts without our knowledge and revealed to jurisdictions outside of Alberta and Canada.

Recommendations 3 and 4 deal with legislation. There are five recommendations there, Mr. Chairman, which deal with legislative changes, and I'm talking about numbers 4 and 5 of those recommendations. Recommendation 4 says:

Ensure that the offence provisions of the FOIP Act and the HIA . . . That is the Health Information Act.

. . . can be reasonably sustained, that is, the standard is not so high as to preclude a reasonable chance of conviction. The current standard is "willful".

I want to ask the minister what actions either he's proposing to take or the department may have taken already with respect to implementing recommendation 4. Similarly, recommendation 5 says, "Consider the advisability of making similar amendments to the Health Information Act." So those are the two recommendations. I hope the minister can answer that question or that at least he will take it under advisement and inform me about it later.

Mr. Chairman, then I go on to the section on the commissioner's conclusions, which is section 4.3 on page 36. In the last paragraph of that section on the commissioner's conclusions this is what it says:

The position of Canadian ICT outsourcers linked to US-based companies remains unclear and would benefit by reinforcement in law and in model contract provisions. These improvements to legal and contractual frameworks should be matched by more rigorous attention to outsource agreements management by public bodies which choose to use them.

My questions for the minister are these. Does the department have an up-to-date list of public bodies which use information contractors for technology purposes, outsourcers? Does it have a list of those public bodies that outsource this information? Secondly, is that list public? Will the minister make this list public? If it's not already complete, if this list is not up to date, if this list is not there, when does he expect this list to be completed? Unless that is done, any changes in legislation or policy will be all for naught.

Another question that I had is with respect to recommendation 13 under the section Policy/Operational. It's recommendation 13, the very last part of the recommendation. Again, given the pressures of time, I will not read the whole recommendation into the record but part of it.

Whether to make such policy into law poses a dilemma, as discussed. As stated, the decision to outsource is based on a large number of factors. The decision to outsource outside of Canada requires reconsideration of these factors in light of the fact that the public body is that much more removed from the outsourcer.

The reasons that are given are these:

- Different laws;
- Different customs (are laws pertaining to fraud, theft of information and so on regarded or enforced differently?);
- Different workforces (are the outsourcer's employees more transient, less reliable, more difficult to hold accountable, etc.?)

To conclude this recommendation, the Information and Privacy Commissioner gives very strong advice. It's that "the gains realized from outsourcing have to be weighed against the risks presented by the nature (sensitivity, value) and the volume of the information outsourced." My question to the minister is: what action, if any, has the ministry either already taken or is planning to take with respect to recommendation 13?

A few more matters, Mr. Chairman. How much time do I have left?

4:10

The Chair: Thirty seconds.

Dr. Pannu: Oh, 30 seconds. In that case, I think I'll conclude and sit down, and maybe the minister will respond to what I have said already. Perhaps I'll have another chance to make some more comments.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Don't worry that you just have 30 seconds left. I did send a note up to my staff to make sure that we set up some time to talk together on some of these issues because there's no way in this set amount of time that I'll even have a chance to answer everything raised.

You know, Mr. Chairman, it's said that the first 10 years of your life set you for the rest of your life, so I thank the member opposite for all that he had done for me in my first 10 years of life and for many, many of my friends that I grew up with in Whitecourt.

The Chair: Hon. minister, perhaps if we could get the ministerial conference in the corner to quiet down a bit, I'd be able to hear you better.

Please proceed.

Mr. VanderBurg: My batteries went dead in my hearing aid, so it doesn't matter anyway.

So I thank the member opposite for his questions. You know, you talked about the Utilities Consumer Advocate funding, and the increase is laid out very well on page 247 of the document. You're right: we have had an increase in our expenditures. In '05-06 Government Services moved to a single deputy minister as opposed to one for the department and one for the UCA.

The Chair: Hon. minister, if I could just interrupt one more time. The conversation that's going on there makes it very difficult to hear you. If you want to carry it on in the back room, that would be good. Please carry on.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. Mr. Chairman, we had combined that to ensure the continued excellence in service. Operational responsibility for the UCA was moved to the assistant deputy minister of consumer services and land, who also acts as the assistant Utilities Consumer Advocate. The deputy minister within the government has more impact, authority, and ability to influence government policy and marketplace behaviour than an outside body. The minister already has a mandate to be the protector of the consumer, so the UCA role fits well within his portfolio, and you can be assured that I'll be taking great interest in this role.

It's important to increase the awareness of the UCA so that consumers become aware of the service available to assist them in making their energy choices if they choose to go that route and in dealing with their utility concerns. I've experienced within our constituency the very valuable role that the UCA can play when you do have utility concerns. When the UCA picks up the phone, like I said earlier, and calls the utility company with a concern, there's action. I will make a point of talking with our utility companies about how we can better interact and get better results for all Albertans when they do have a concern.

So it's important to make Albertans aware of this service. We've initiated steps to further advance this awareness. We're doing that by communication via our website and consumer information centre, so I'd ask the member opposite to take advantage of that website and give me your opinion on what you see. I need that feedback as well. We're going to make sure that there are speaking engagements by the advocate and staff, so if you have an area where there are utility concerns, contact me, and we'll make sure that we have an opportunity for the advocate and our staff to get out throughout Alberta and meet with consumers.

The Utilities Consumer Advisory Council has been throughout Alberta. I don't know if you've taken the time to go and attend one of those meetings, but those town hall meetings are very, very important, and we'll continue to do those.

I'll make myself available for media interviews on various topics, and I think you've seen me. I've only three or four weeks in action in this ministry, but I'm not afraid to attack consumer issues, and we'll do that. A full-time consumer and market communications manager will be involved with making sure that this does happen.

The UCA information materials, including a folder for plain energy language contracts, must be distributed to consumers when they sign the contract. I witnessed a lot of these contracts that were given to Albertans early on in the marketplace, and I'll tell you, you needed a Philadelphia lawyer to explain to you what it really said, plus you needed better glasses than I had to read the fine print on the back side. I don't think it's very smart on behalf of utility companies to offer a product like that to average Albertans. It's different if you're an Alberta Newsprint or a Millar Western, that I have in my constituency, that use a couple of million dollars a month worth

of energy. Well, they have people on staff to make sure they get the best deal, but our neighbours and our family sure don't have that opportunity. So that's where the UCA can play a very, very important role.

We're going to target marketing and advertising, and we'll include that in trade shows. All of us in our small communities have trade shows, and thousands of people walk through those trade shows. That one-to-one information, I think, is very, very valuable because you know yourself that you can take an ad out in the *Edmonton Journal* or the *Edmonton Sun*, and who knows who's reading it? But when you're out at one of our local trade fairs, you can directly talk to the people that walk by you each and every day.

The UCA has developed a protocol for co-operation among small consumer intervenor groups at regulatory proceedings of the EUB. By providing a protocol for review and consultation on regulatory issues, we've reached consensus on more issues, and we're improving the strength and effectiveness of all interventions while maximizing the return to the consumers. Mr. Chairman, you know how important that is at our homes each and every day that we get the best deal that we can.

The protocol has been included as part of a memorandum of understanding between the advocate and consumers' groups. A list of signatories include the AUMA – the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association – the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Public Institution Consumers of Alberta, the Consumers' Coalition of Alberta, the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops, the Alberta Federation of REAs, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Alberta chapter. So we're working with those groups to make sure that Albertans are protected on the utility side.

4:20

The percentage of intervenors expressing satisfaction with the co-operative protocol utilized by the Utilities Consumer Advocate was dropped for the following reasons, and I've made some notes. The survey of intervenors, including parties outside of the signatories to the protocol, including industrial consumer organizations: these parties can oftentimes be at odds with positions taken on behalf of the small consumers. Given the very small population of intervenors and conflicting interests of some of the responders, this measure was not an accurate indicator of success. Accordingly, it's been dropped as a measure.

The member opposite also talked about the privacy of information, and maybe I can talk a little bit about that. I can assure you that protecting people's private information is one of government's top priorities, one of the ministry's top priorities, and one of my top priorities. So I agree that the two of us can work together to better provide that protection, and we'll set up a meeting very, very shortly to discuss those issues together. That's why we've introduced specific amendments to the Alberta Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and that'll clarify the disclosure rules and increase penalties for violation, Mr. Chairman. For example, the amendments will clarify how the act applies to library collections of certain records of the internal auditor and ministries, and punitive fines have increased up to \$500,000 from a maximum of \$10,000 previously; \$500,000 new, \$10,000 old.

We are exploring other solutions together with other departments across government to address the potential for foreign authorities to view the private information of Albertans without proper authorization, including changing the language of our own contracts. This concern is nationwide, and we'll continue to work with other jurisdictions in a common approach to ensure that the issue is raised at a national level. I haven't been briefed on exactly when that'll

happen, but when that happens, when that opportunity exists for me to meet with other ministers across the nation that are dealing with this, I'll make sure that you get that information because I see how important this is to you.

This legislation establishes clear, concise, and common-sense rules for private-sector organizations that collect, use, and disclose personal information here in Alberta. All legislation is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it continues to meet the need as it was intended. We're looking forward to receiving feedback from business and the public on this important legislation, and from you, sir. The legislation review will commence on or before July of this year.

Consistent and effective management of all information assets across government, including electronic records such as e-mail: Albertans will be able to access the digital archives of governments in years to come just like they can access paper records at the Provincial Archives today.

So to the member through you, Mr. Chairman, we'll provide additional written information for you on those topics and look forward to our meeting in the next coming weeks.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by commending the minister and his predecessor for the excellent service in the motor vehicle registries in the province of Alberta. Not only has there been a proliferation of locations at which one can obtain a licence, but the efficiency of those operations is highly commendable. Having said that, I want to raise to the minister's attention some concerns that I have and some particular data that I wish to bring to his attention as well relating to out-of-province vehicle registrations.

During the month of April 2006 the fine folks at the Calgary-Nose Hill constituency office conducted a small survey of licence plates in or near my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill and northwest Calgary. We surveyed samples of 100 vehicles and counted how many vehicles were out-of-town licences. This was done during the third week of April. Transport and commercial vehicles were excluded from the survey, and the survey was repeated five times in a single day.

The results of those counts ranged from 3 per cent to 9 per cent out-of-province vehicles per hundred vehicles, which produced an average of 5.25 per cent of out-of-province licences on a total sample size of 500. A similar count was done on the QE II between Calgary and Olds with two samples of 100 vehicles, and the results were 5 per cent and 3 per cent, for an average of 4 per cent on a total sample size of 200.

As I said, the survey was done in late April, which is not a prime tourist month, and I'd venture to say that most of those vehicles were individuals who have moved into Alberta and, particularly in the case of Calgary, have moved there and chosen not to convert their licence plates within the mandatory 60-day period that our legislation provides. I suspect that many of those vehicles have failed to register because of (a) the out-of-province inspection requirements in our legislation and (b) the fact that they have cheaper public insurance available in the home provinces.

Now, based on the completely unscientific survey which we conducted and the total number of vehicles registered in the city of Calgary, which is 743,767, that would mean that roughly 39,000 out-of-province vehicles are driving through the streets of the city of Calgary alone. If that is so, at \$70 per licence this would translate into roughly \$2.7 million per year for one city alone in lost revenue. The concern is that this revenue is being lost to the maintenance of our roads and our infrastructure.

I believe that some sort of program ought to be co-ordinated in order to increase the compliance with the requirement to get Alberta licence plates once people move to the province. The question I guess I have for the minister is whether or not there are any statistics kept regarding the number of people that are moving into the province vis-à-vis the number of new vehicle registrations, because I assume that most of these people that are coming to the province come with their vehicles, and whether or not there is some way to do some calculations on the statistics with respect to compliance with the registration requirements under our legislation. Further, I'm wondering whether or not some sort of a selective enforcement program could be co-ordinated with the checkstop program or with some other program which the Solicitor General may be capable of conducting.

Those are my questions.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you for those comments, and I would say that most of them are comments. In my earlier discussions I had talked about the pressure on Alberta border to border: 65,000 people moving to this province. You know, we are going to face an increase of about 10 per cent in our registries in the upcoming year, and you know very well that once you become a permanent resident, you need to change your driver's licence; you're going to need to change your licence plates. I understand that even as early as last week, with the meetings between the Premiers of British Columbia and Alberta and other ministries, we will have some common work between our provinces on registries. Where that ends up, I don't know.

I can say that I haven't got any specific data that I have seen to date on how many Albertans are driving around with, you know, licence plates from other jurisdictions. I would say that in my community, Whitecourt, I probably experience the same kind of stats that you have. When we had our standing policy committees in Fort McMurray, I would say that it was even greater. But it all works out in the end, and I think that we're going to see those folks not only change their registration but, more than likely, make investments in Alberta, stay here because they're working here and they're finding that Alberta's a great place to work and live and play and raise their family.

So if there are some statistics that I can share with you, I will get those from the ministry and will pass them on, but I don't have anything at my fingertips that I can say will give you some solid evidence to back up your information.

4:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to express to the minister congratulations on his appointment. It's been refreshing listening to him this afternoon. The last time I met a minister of that calibre, I got fired. So I hope that doesn't happen to me in the House, told to sit down.

The first thing I'd like to ask the minister is if he could enlighten me if he has any views on drivers' licences for seniors. I have a constituent who's concerned about the cost of his licensing and the kind of bad press he gets, and he's kind of getting worried. He's of the vintage of over 75. So maybe I could get his views on that.

Also, I have another constituent – and I think I've filed the letter in the House – I don't know what his particular handicap is, but he has to renew his licence every year. I think it's the cost factor and also the doctor's inconvenience, yet I know the handicap causes him worry on his ability to continue driving. I was wondering if the good minister could share any insights he might have into that issue?

The one other issue is from a constituent, and he's a good Tory, by the way. He's a teacher who has problems with his fire insurance. He's tried to get help through Government Services and now is probably seeking legal advice. I was wondering if the good minister could identify someone in the department that I could refer this gentleman to talk to? He's a very good teacher in my constituency and is sincerely seeking advice and assistance.

So I'll leave those three concerns, and maybe he would comment on that for me.

Turning to the specific budget as such, on page 246, line 2.0.2, the estimate for consumer services is \$6.03 million, a very small increase of 4 per cent from the 2005-06 forecast. The Official Opposition continues to hear from Alberta consumers who complain that this government does not provide satisfactory services, yet you have only increased consumer services funding by 4 per cent. I guess the question to the minister is: can the minister tell us what he plans to do about better services for Albertans? He's kind of talked about that at various times this afternoon. How can this department improve its service to Albertans if the funding for consumer services is not increased? How can the minister justify giving his office, as it says here, a 31 per cent funding increase when consumer services is receiving only a 4 per cent increase?

Turning to the estimates on page 246, line 2.0.3, the estimate for land titles services is \$12.71 million, an increase of 6 per cent from the 2005-2006 budget. I think I heard it correctly from the minister there: all that deluge, I think, of 975,000 transactions. There has been an increasing awareness of the frequency of mortgage fraud in this province. Can the minister tell us if any of this increased funding for land titles services will be directed towards combating mortgage fraud? How exactly will this additional money be used given that the 2005-06 forecast for this line item indicates that land titles services overspent last year? I can certainly understand why from his earlier remarks. Is the minister confident that 6 per cent is sufficient for this year, based on the increase? What is the minister going to do to ensure that land titles services does not overspend again this year? It sounds like they're really, really, highly involved and have a heavy, heavy load to bear.

Then if I could just turn now to the strategic information technology services estimates on page 247, line 5.0.2., the estimates for the systems transformation of \$12.921 million, a 26 per cent increase from the 2005-06 forecast. There is a significant increase in funding here, Mr. Minister. Can the minister tell us why such a large increase for systems transformation was needed and how exactly he sees this additional money being used? Can the minister provide us with some details on the budget item?

The last one, Utilities Consumer Advocate. I'd just suggest to you, Mr. Minister, that on that particular issue if there's anything that you can do for education for my constituency of St. Albert, we would welcome certainly in September having a crew out to talk to us because we get a lot of concerns, and many times if we were better educated ourselves, we could do a better job of helping our constituents.

So with those comments – there are a few more, but I'll let my colleagues talk to them later. Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Member for St. Albert for raising those issues. I'll ask you, Member for St. Albert: when you have a concern, don't file it in the House; give it to me. We'll make sure that your constituent gets taken care of. We've got some great staff, and they've got the ability to deal with those issues. So don't bother filing it in the

House. Let's deal with your constituents like I deal with mine. We take care of it right away.

The same with your constituent with the fire insurance issue: give me a note on that. Give me the particulars. I don't want that here in the House. We'll have someone within the department have a look at that. That's serving Albertans, and I make that commitment to you that our department will take care of your concerns or your constituents' concerns equally to that of mine or my colleagues' on this side of the House.

You talked about senior drivers. Well, I guess maybe in some areas they're getting a bad rap, and in some areas maybe we need to have a look at the way that we deal with some of our safety issues. I've had constituents come to me and say: "Please take away Dad's licence; we don't want him on the road." I say: "What are you doing about it? Are you going to the RCMP and saying that?" "No, we want you to. We don't want to be the bad guy." So I think Albertans need to take a little bit of responsibility on their own when they're faced with those issues.

I'll tell you, my father-in-law is 84 years old, and he's pretty sharp. I have no issues with him coming at me or at my family on the road, but there are young drivers that are coming at me and at my family down the road that I'm concerned about as well. So I don't know if I'm willing to say that I'm going to single out any specific age class. I think that we have mostly good drivers in this province, but we have some bad drivers. I've made a commitment to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to work with him on ensuring that all drivers are treated fairly but that we do something about the bad drivers on our roads.

Yes, you heard me earlier talk about the 975,000 increase that we've had at land titles, 975,000 files. Like I talked about earlier – and I'm not sure if you heard – you know, when I did a tour of just one of our offices and I asked them, "Normally, how many files do you deal with here in a day?" they said, "Well, six feet of files." Maybe the deputy can give me a thumbs-up. I think that was 4,000 land registries in the six feet. So in one day previous to my visit 12 feet came in: 8,000. Well, that's just not going to go away by magic. We have to deal with those files. We have to deal with them in a timely manner, and the staff has to have the tools to deal with that.

So we'll need to bring on some extra staff, and you'll hear me next year because I don't expect that the volumes that Albertans are faced with today will be any less next year. The growth here, in this city alone, and in your city is absolutely unbelievable, so we'll need some people to deal with those issues and those pressures. I won't apologize for coming here and asking for more dollars for staff to deal with increased pressures. If we don't have the increased pressure, we're not going to ask. I can guarantee you that.

4:40

A little bit on mortgage fraud. It's serious. You know, we talked earlier about identity theft, and with all this activity here in this province, there are some shysters moving to this province as well, and they're following the dollars that are generated. You asked me: what is Government Services doing about mortgage fraud? Well, Government Services established a special committee on this subject last year with representatives from government, law enforcement, and the financial, legal, and real estate communities, and the committee has made some recommendations which include developing best practices to help government and the real estate industry combat mortgage fraud. We're amending provincial laws to permit increased sharing of information related to mortgage fraud. We're raising the public awareness of mortgage fraud and the penalties for participating in such crimes. We have to nail these guys and nail them quickly.

The ministry is already acting on the committee's recommendations and has introduced amendments to the Land Titles Act and to the Real Estate Act in response to the committee's report. Proposed amendments to the Land Titles Act would give the registrar of land titles greater discretion in requesting additional proof of identification for a registrant and to refuse registration where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a transaction is related to fraud. The proposed amendments to the Real Estate Act will clarify that the Real Estate Council of Alberta has the appropriate powers to investigate mortgage fraud and enhance their ability to share personal information about mortgage fraud and the perpetrators while respecting the privacy rights of individuals. We have to make sure that those rights are always respected in Government Services and the agencies that we work with.

Government Services provides a tipsheet on this matter. Again, like I talked about earlier, I challenge you to check out our website and look at the ability to get good information for consumers on that website. It's a great website. If you see deficiencies, let me know. We'll have our staff and our in-house people make sure that that's corrected.

The Real Estate Council of Alberta is becoming the first mortgage broker regulator in Canada that requires all licensed mortgage brokers and realtors in Alberta to complete a mandatory education course on mortgage fraud before renewing their licence. I think that's one of the pieces that you asked about: what are we doing about mortgage fraud? Well, that's what we're doing with our partners. The Canadian Institute of Mortgage Brokers and Lenders is developing a mortgage fraud red flag checklist for their 3,400 members. I think that goes a long ways to protect Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to the estimates of this department. I must commend the minister, who's a new minister, for becoming fully cognizant and fully grasping of his department in such a short period of time and looking to bring forward I think some very, very interesting and very timely and important things for the people of Alberta. Not to discount the previous minister, who I think has brought forward some interesting proposals in the department.

I am very interested in the landlord and tenants program that is coming forward, and I hope that that one will be pursued with vigour. I think that will hold some good potential to save money for the province, save time for our courts but, most importantly, will settle disputes in a quick and timely manner, and I've heard of many of them from constituents in my area of Edmonton-Manning.

Many of the areas that I would have liked to cover have actually been touched on already, but there are a few that I'd like to mention. This department is very important in terms of the nature of information and personal information that it deals with. One area that has become very much highlighted in the recent past is the problem with secure drivers' licences and the need to come up with something that will ensure that there is no fraud in this area, that there are no forgeries in this area, and that people are not using it in identity theft and all the rest of it, be they bikers, as mentioned earlier, or be they terrorists that might be using these identification pieces for much worse types of ends.

I see that the Canadian Bank Note Company has been given a multi-year contract to look to these secure drivers' licences. I guess a question arises as to how that was tendered. It is a private concern. What was the nature of the sourcing of it? Was it a sole-source contract? Was there any competitive tendering? Another question

that would arise is: will that be reviewed periodically? Another question that may arise from the work of the Canadian Bank Note Company is: exactly how long is their contract supposed to be going, or is it just something that will be renewed and renewed and renewed? What work is the Canadian Bank Note Company doing when they are actually visiting many of the registry offices on-site? What is the purpose and role of those visits?

On another topic, the minister mentioned that there is a lot of revenue coming out of this department, hundreds of millions of dollars. I read here \$284,494,000. Well, that's a lot of money. That's a lot of money. It's good to see that there is a surplus of revenue, but on the other hand I look at it as being tax and just another tax on hard-working Albertans. You know, looking at all the other revenue sources that we have for the government of Alberta, do we have to pull so much from these licensing fees and all the rest of it so that there are these types of actually very, very large revenues coming to the government in this area?

I understand that the minister said, for example, that we have a cost of a driver's licence which is 29 per cent below the national average. Well, you know, it's obvious that other jurisdictions are probably looking to this as a tax source as well. Maybe the whole idea across the country of using the fees or taxes that come from this source may be out of line, and Alberta could take the lead to simplify where our funding comes from and to take a look at this.

I know that a lot of words have been said about the increased access to registries and how that has made it more convenient. I think there was some feeling – and I'm just speaking anecdotally – that you could get better access in the years immediately after this was brought in. I'm beginning to see more and more lineups as I go to these places, and it seems to take more and more time. I wonder if they're being properly staffed, if we're seeing that these registries are putting proper training towards all of their people, and if in fact as the conventional oil industry pulls from all over, these registries are not in difficulty right now in getting people and that that is beginning to hurt service. To see a satisfaction level of 89 per cent sounds good, but if we're in this type of business, which is a retail level type of business, 1 in 9 is maybe not a very good percentage of people who are coming through the doors that leave with a lack of satisfaction.

4:50

Perhaps we're, you know, seeing a phenomenon that we're seeing right across many sectors in Alberta and something that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business identified in actually a very good survey, where they identified that I believe it was over two-thirds of businesses are having a problem keeping employees because of the fact that they don't think they can pay the rate to keep them and they're competing with the conventional oil and gas industry, which is able to pay much, much higher wages, salaries, and benefits. If we are seeing the wage rates in the registries much, much, much below and we start to see a drop even further in the satisfaction rate, I think it's something that the ministry should look at and see what may be done in this area. I had one report from a constituent who at one time, I guess, used to work for the government in this area. He said that the average wages are now about 68 per cent below what they were when they were actually with the government. It's astounding to see that the figure is that much.

The figure of 74 per cent satisfied with the access to government service in general is actually a very low figure. It should be much higher. I would hope that the department would look to very much try to improve that figure. Customer service to Alberta taxpayers, to Albertans is an important goal that I think we all must be looking to ensure is a high, high priority for our fellow citizens.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung asked me just to put forth a question on the FTEs, the full-time equivalents, and on the increase in the numbers of employees. Now, I know that the minister did mention that a little bit earlier, but I'd like a little bit more detail as to where these FTEs are actually going. Why the increase in employment? Which jobs will these people be doing, or for which roles in the ministry are these particular increases in employees going to be?

Another area was the issue – it was mentioned quite a bit earlier – of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. The awareness of the Utilities Consumer Advocate is not high in the population, with only 31 per cent of Albertans actually understanding that this important consumer advocate is there for them. There continue to be many people very interested in getting this type of service. To better publicize that and get it better known is I think something of great importance. I'd just like to ask the minister why it is the deputy minister that is taking that role. It seems to me that the deputy minister's role is something that is very much a full-time job in itself. This particular position could be one that certainly could see a much more focused effort by a single individual.

Other than the interest that I have in FOIP and the need to ensure that freedom of information and privacy are fully accessible, that concludes my comments. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, and thank you for your interest in the landlords/tenants program. I think you would get a lot out of coming just a few blocks over and paying a visit to the office. It's also the same office that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is located in. I think you could probably learn something that you could pass on to your constituents, and if you're hearing of landlord/tenant disputes, maybe there would be some pamphlets or something there that you could pass on to your office.

You know, you raised the point about the office, and I'll make sure that we get enough information sent to each of our constituency offices throughout the province so that we have that information. Remember that it's a pilot project for the Edmonton area. Like I had stated earlier, I do expect that the pilot will be successful, and I do expect that this would be a way that we can save a lot of court time and Albertans a lot of money. So I would encourage you to take an hour out of your day when we get out of session to go over and have a look at the office, and if I'm here in Edmonton at the time, I'd like to go over there with you and hear your views on it.

Yes, we do generate some extra revenue and I think about \$300 million more than we spend, but, as you know, through our registries it's kind of like user-pay. The money that we have here transfers over to the minister in front of me, and he spends big bucks on rehab and restoration of our highways. So this is just a small way to contribute to those costs.

You talked about registry lineups or maybe specific problems. We have 225 registries that provide Albertans with a broad range of services, but if you're aware of a certain registry that's not providing the service to Albertans that they should be getting, I'd like you to make me aware of that. I'll have that discussion with my staff, and we'll let you know what will be done about that. We do want to ensure that Albertans receive service that's acceptable. You know, at certain times – it doesn't matter when – you can go to the Dairy Queen and hit a lineup of 20 people, but we have to make sure that that's not consistent. So if that is a concern in your constituency, I'd ask you to bring that to me, and we'll deal with those specifics. Of course, by doing that, you can help me get those satisfaction rates up.

You talked about the deputy also being the advocate. I'll tell you

that that shows you the talent that this man has. This guy can adapt to those concerns, and he's handling it. Until he tells me that he can't handle it, I think we'll just leave it alone.

The next topic that you talked about was FTEs. We really want to make sure that we justify that additional labour that Government Services brings on and that those folks that we bring on are actually providing services to Albertans. I did scratch down some notes that I can provide you on those FTEs. As I talked about earlier, we continue to experience increases in the volume of transactions. Land titles, for example, experiences increases of 7 per cent a year. That's quite an increase. I talked earlier with the other member about an increase of 975,000 transactions last year in land titles alone. That's huge. That's a huge volume. In the ministry we deal with 17 million transactions throughout Alberta, you know, five for each and every Albertan. That doesn't happen on its own. Those take some time; they take people, and I'm not afraid to say that we have the people to meet that challenge.

5:00

A key indicator such as housing starts is up 6.4 per cent in the first 11 months of 2005, issuance of building permits up 40.8 per cent, and the number of resale homes up 13 and a half per cent in the first 10 months of '05. As the economic forecast suggested, these trends will extend well into the future. That's what we're doing with FTEs.

I'll also tell the member that when I witness these volumes, this six feet a day increasing to 12 feet, those volumes aren't only for land transactions. Maybe you should have a look at your next assessed value of your house compared to when you bought it. There's a lot of equity that Albertans have built up in their homes, and I think that, you know, we're seeing a lot of these volumes through land registries. Because of that assessed value, people are saying: maybe I need to purchase something else, and maybe I'll use my home for equity because it's a cheap way at this time for financing. Also, too, that may bring expectations that Albertans may be biting off a little bit too much.

I've seen this happen before. I remember when my wife and I had our home mortgage. It came to time for renewal, but that was renewal at 19 and a half per cent. I was glad that the province of Alberta shielded me. At the time I was a supporter of the Alberta Treasury Branch, and they shielded that down to 14 per cent. We're not quite into that scenario, but I am concerned that Albertans may be taking new mortgages and second mortgages out on their homes to buy motor homes and cars. But all of that requires registration, and we deal with that. Those are choices that Albertans make, and we handle those choices well.

When we determine staffing levels, the ministry must also consider the lead time to train new recruits. As an example, to get a paralegal out of a university or a college and get them into our system, get them working, first of all you have to have an experienced person to train that person, so you take that experienced person away from what they're doing today to train a newer person. They just don't come into land registries as a paralegal and start dealing with those files. They need some lead time. It takes approximately two years for those land titles personnel to reach the desired level of expertise. This doesn't just happen overnight and by itself. It happens with a commitment that we have from our ministry and from the staff that we have.

I want to also talk a little bit about our staff. You know, I've just had three or four weeks to meet the staff in this ministry. I've had the opportunity to attend some recognition of those staff. We have people that have worked 40 years plus in government, you know. I was signing the staff recognition letters to congratulate them, and I can tell the member opposite that I don't remember a lot of the names of the staff, but I can remember the years of service.

I was so very, very proud to be associated with folks that have been with this ministry 40 years, 35 years, 30 years, 25 years, and then also to have the opportunity to meet those people and to meet those new people that are coming on board that are looking to these folks that have been with us 35 and 30 years to mentor them and to get them up to speed with the issues that we have in land registries. I'm very proud to be associated with folks that have that kind of commitment, and I think that alone should tell the members here in this Assembly about the dedication and the commitment that the ministry staff and everybody that I'm surrounded with has. I couldn't stand up here today and talk about the issues in Government Services if it wasn't for the great people that have surrounded me to get me up to speed with the issues in this ministry.

You also mentioned the issue of identity theft, and I can tell you that I take this seriously and that Government Services staff throughout our ministry will tackle this problem of identity theft. It's too bad that the crooks seem to be always one step ahead of all of us, but protecting people's private information has been designated as one of the top priorities in our three-year business plan. Again, that doesn't come just out of the sky. We have to put people and resources to attack that problem. We're going to work with other ministries to make sure that we have the right people doing the right work to make sure that we can tackle this issue and that we charge these folks, that we don't just identify it and do nothing with it. We have to make sure that these folks are charged.

Government Services has already developed fraud prevention materials for registry agents, introduced a new secure driver's licence, and introduced new privacy initiatives to help ensure that the personal information of Albertans remains secure. By leading the protecting people's private information initiative and assisting in developing policies, procedures, guidelines, and documents, Government Services will ensure that it as well as other ministries is providing appropriate protection to personal information in their custody or under their control.

I had an opportunity to witness, again on one of my short visits, that we have some special investigators working with the Solicitor General's department folks to make sure that when you provide identification to our registry agents – it may be for a new Albertan getting a driver's licence. That new Albertan will need to surrender their previous documents for us to go through and make sure that these documents are correct, that these documents that are being provided to us show the past record of driving experience. You know, I'm talking specifically about the graduated driver's licence. If you're from another country and you say, "Well, yes, I have a class 1, and I've driven for many, many years in my country," we're going to make sure that that experience actually has happened because you and every one of us want to make sure that those drivers of vehicles on our roads are licensed properly and have that proper experience and that they are well qualified to drive, especially the big trucks, up and down our highways.

I could go on and on about some of the issues that we are dealing with to tackle the problem of identity theft, but I think I can tell you – and I think you see the commitment that I have and our staff has – that we will tackle this. But I end with a question back to you. If you hear of these issues, if you see a problem in your neighbourhood or in your constituency or in your caucus, will you make me aware of this so we can deal with it head on? You know, don't table your document here in the House. Don't file it. Come to me. We'll deal with it, and we'll get those services for Albertans that they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. Mather: Well, one of things that I've been thinking about is this identity fraud concern, and I think the hon. minister has answered and convinces me that he shares that concern.

5:10

The other issues: I guess the questions that I've had have mostly been answered. I want to also thank the minister for all of the answers that we've received because it indicates a real concern for Government Services.

One of the areas that I wanted to ask about and have on record is related to the number of employees that are going to be hired. Full-time equivalent employment for Government Services increased from 500 in 2005-2006 to 555 in 2006-2007. This is on page 253. I have been wondering: will these additional 55 employees be working in specific areas? Can you tell me what they will be doing and why there was a need to hire another 55 for the department? That was one of my questions.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department for Government Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$109,226,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report the estimates for the Department of Government Services.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Government Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$109,226,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening, at which time we'll reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 2, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/05/02

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. Before I recognize the minister, I'd just like to welcome all the members in the members' gallery from different points around the province that are here for the Forum for Young Albertans. Just for your interest we're in Committee of Supply, and during committee it's a little less formal than the normal proceedings, so you'll see members without jackets on, and they're not necessarily sitting in their own chairs although they have to be in their own seats to be recognized to speak. So that's why we're a little less formal.

head:

Main Estimates 2006-07

International and Intergovernmental Relations

The Chair: I will now recognize the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Mar: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At the outset I want to say that I'm pleased to move the estimates for the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

In attendance with me this evening, Mr. Chairman, are a number of people from the department, and they are in the members' gallery. They are names that may be familiar to many of you in the House, and I'll ask them to rise and be recognized: Gerry Bourdeau, deputy minister; Carol Chawrun, communications director; Marvin Schneider, executive director, U.S. relations; Garry Pocock, assistant deputy minister; Daryl Hanak, acting Alberta trade representative; Steve Pritchard, executive director of the Smithsonian project; and, finally, Mr. Lorne Harvey, executive director of corporate services.

Mr. Chairman, Canadian mass media guru Marshall McLuhan was right: the world has turned into a global village. The job of my ministry is to help Alberta get along with its neighbours around the world in a way that assures our own economic and social future. We work with our Canadian neighbours to co-ordinate Alberta's role as a partner and share in interprovincial and national partnerships like first ministers' councils, the Council of the Federation, the Western Premiers' Conference, and the annual Alberta/B.C. cabinet meetings, which, of course, were just held last week. My ministry helps Alberta to work with our international neighbours by providing input into federal foreign policies, operating the Alberta office in Washington, pursuing relationships with 14 twinning provinces and states around the world and negotiating more at this time, co-ordinating missions to other countries, and welcoming dignitaries representing a world of opportunity to the province of Alberta.

This ministry is going to continue to raise our profile with our largest trading partner. Our biggest opportunity is Alberta's presence in Washington this summer as we are featured at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, a festival which over 10 days will expose Alberta to somewhere between 1.2 million and 1.5 million Americans.

The World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong last December gave Alberta an opportunity to pursue improved and more secure access for Alberta goods and services in global marketplaces.

Now, given the opportunities, the strategic priorities for this ministry that we'll call for this year are quite clear. Relations with

other Canadian governments remain a priority, and Alberta continues to chair the Council of the Federation until July, that is this summer.

Internationally we will work to influence federal foreign policy in areas that are important to Alberta and to enhance our own bilateral relations with other countries through our Premier's missions, incoming delegations, and major events like hosting the Pacific Northwest Economic Region meeting, which will take place in Edmonton this summer.

We will continue to expand Alberta's influence with our largest trading partner through the Alberta Washington office and this year through Alberta at the Smithsonian. Negotiations to expand trade and reduce barriers to trade continue to be a priority this year internationally and within Canada.

Building and maintaining relationships across borders, time zones, cultures, and sensitivities comes at a price but, I should say, Mr. Chairman, not a very big price. The proposed budget for this year for a world of influence and reputation is just \$10.7 million, and this includes a net operating increase of just \$770,000. That this can represent a net increase of 8 per cent underlies just how small the base budget really is. Most of this net increase, \$600,000, covers Alberta's per capita share of the increased cost for operating the Council of the Federation, and the rest meets negotiated salary increases and amortization.

The \$10.7 million in our budget also include \$1 million for the one-time funding to support Alberta at the Smithsonian. That is less than \$1 per person to bring Alberta to the more than 1 million people expected to take part in the festival and to 100 U.S. Senators and 435 members of the House of Representatives and the hundreds of policy and business leaders we're targeting by invitation. That kind of influence cannot be judged by its cost. That one-time \$1 million is added to this year's allocation to our international relations division; however, I stress that this is not an operating increase.

To meet the internal cost pressures, international relations also receives \$100,000 reallocated from the Canadian intergovernmental relations division. The Canadian intergovernmental relations division shows a budget decrease of \$410,000 from 2005-06. This shows the net difference between the \$600,000 added this year for Alberta's increased contribution to the Council of the Federation and the end of one-time funding last year to host the Western Premiers' Conference and the Council of the Federation. This apparent decrease from last year's budget does not represent a cut in the division's operations or services.

The overall budget at my ministry is small compared to other departments, but we are fully committed to openness and accountability for every one of those dollars and to the people of Alberta. All expenses related to international missions are reported in their entirety and posted on the ministry's website within two months of the mission's conclusion. We weigh the cost of every event and expense against the benefits to the province, always cognizant of the fact that each contact and negotiation leaves an impression on people as well as on paper and positive attitudes help build beneficial agreements.

We can point to agreements and initiatives that resulted and will result in measurable savings to Albertans. We just signed an internal trade agreement with the province of British Columbia to remove barriers to trade, investment, and movement of labour between our two provinces. The Conference Board of Canada points out an estimated 1 per cent of gross domestic product lost to interprovincial trade barriers in Alberta and British Columbia. That figure is approximately \$2 billion a year. Already we are saving \$2 million in capital and \$300,000 in operating costs per year from joint vehicle inspection stations under a previous agreement with the province of British Columbia.

Looking further afield, our annual report shows that we welcomed more than 70 incoming delegations last year, each one representing an international community. The Premier's planned mission to Ukraine and France will further build a growing respect and relationship to the benefit of Alberta business and industry for years to come. We are now working to influence the new federal government's position on World Trade Organization negotiations in areas of interest to Alberta producers. The Washington office is providing invaluable assistance in promoting Alberta as a secure North American energy source to the United States.

Mr. Chairman, the experienced professionals at International and Intergovernmental Relations are good at providing a quality service to the Alberta government, to visiting dignitaries and overseas missions, to our relationships and trade negotiations nationally and internationally. Last year we exceeded our target for client satisfaction across the ministry in Canadian, international, and trade relations. Our Washington office set out to participate in 75 events and opportunities to advance Alberta's interests in the United States, and we met that target.

The Alberta government's current business plan seeks to unleash innovation, lead in learning, compete in a global marketplace, and to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. The relationships with other provinces and the federal government and the relationships we entertain and develop with other countries are essential to creating and seizing those opportunities.

8:10

Mr. Chairman, the world is a global village, and my ministry's \$10.7 million budget will help our province keep and expand our place and role in this community. With all of that in mind I respectfully submit again that we move the estimates for this department.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's with interest that I rise to participate in the debate this evening on International and Intergovernmental Relations budget estimates. Certainly, building good relations with our neighbours is important, but whenever we look at this department with its 61 employees, or full-time equivalents, it may be a small department, but one has to recognize the significant contribution it can make to good government.

Now, the hon. minister certainly stated correctly that the budget for this year will be roughly \$10.6 million and there hasn't been that much of an increase from one fiscal year to the next, which is probably true. But when you look at this budget over a two-year period, you can certainly see where there is almost a 20 per cent increase in this department's budget. We have to be careful whenever we compare this fiscal year that we're discussing in the budget, Mr. Chairman, to the previous fiscal year. I would urge all hon. member of this House to go back a couple of years, and that will give us a better snapshot of exactly how much money is allocated and where it is to be spent.

The first thing that would come to mind with this department is the trade office in Washington. There are many people from across this province who have questioned the merit of these trade offices, particularly this one in Washington. In the time we have, certainly last summer there was quite a controversy over the role that Mr. Murray Smith, a previous Energy minister, was having in that job. There was the whole issue around Mr. Smith accepting and then quite correctly resigning from a position on the board of Tusk Energy Corporation.

He, in my opinion, is certainly considered an employee of the Alberta government under the code of conduct and ethics for the public service of Alberta, and I don't know how Mr. Smith's appointment was allowed to remain in light of the fact that this was a clear violation of the code of conduct and ethics for the public service of Alberta. Now, I don't know what kind of arrangements have been made, but I for one think that is unacceptable. It was unacceptable last summer, and it is still unacceptable now, and there has never been really an answer. There has been acknowledgement of this appointment and then the resignation of, I shall say, the appointee, but Mr. Smith has still got his well-paying political patronage job in Washington.

I know that other hon. members of this Assembly will say: oh, no. In fact, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is shaking his head. But, no. This is, hon. minister, a patronage appointment, and I don't know how we can see it as anything else. Under this minister's watch I'm confident that it won't happen again. I was disappointed, and whenever one looks at the previous annual report of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, you can see where there were questions raised about Public Service Commission hiring practices. Now, I'm going to read this:

Alberta continued to express its concern over the federal Public Service Commission's use of geographic hiring criteria, a practice that prevents qualified candidates from applying for federal jobs solely on the basis of their geographic location. This matter was raised by Alberta at the most recent meeting of the Committee on Internal Trade and is presently being pursued by Alberta officials. It is expected that the Ministry, in collaboration with Human Resources and Employment, will use the dispute resolution provisions of the [agreement on internal trade] in resolving this matter with the federal government.

Now, that's fine. I'm not saying that the province doesn't have merit, but why does it not look at its own hiring practices? There are many that could argue correctly that, for instance, the appointment or the hiring of Murray Smith was simply done on a political basis. After the election there was a position, a well-paid position, created for this individual, the equivalent of a political soft landing, and it's not right. It was pointed out not only by the opposition but by various media in the province that it was not right. I don't know how this government could make a comment about another level of government and the Public Service Commission's hiring practices and allow this to continue. I just don't understand that. Hopefully, it won't happen again. As I said, Mr. Chairman, I have a great deal of confidence in this minister, and I will be very surprised if that happens again.

While we're on the subject of Washington, in the budget that's been set aside for the celebration of Alberta at the Smithsonian, will there be any extra money required to finish that project? I know it's going to be a 10-day festival, and we have read about it. There have been two allocations to date. Can the minister assure the Assembly and the taxpayers that all the bills are going to be taken care of in this budget?

Mr. Chairman, certainly, with this \$10.6 million budget I would like to turn the attention of the Assembly to the business plan, page 282, the Council of the Federation. On March 31, 2006, the Council of the Federation commissioned a report reconciling addressing Canada's fiscal imbalance. Would the minister update Alberta's response to this report addressing Canada's fiscal imbalance?

Also, on the next page, 283, bullet 1: "Successfully conducting, co-ordinating, and participating in intergovernmental negotiations and discussions to advance Alberta's interests in Confederation." In what specific ways has the department followed up on the report by the MLA Committee on Strengthening Alberta's Role in Confederation? Has the committee taken any steps to support Alberta

separation? What work has the minister done in examining the issues surrounding a firewall? I thought that firewalls belonged in laptop computers and in building codes. I didn't think they belonged in a country, a federation such as ours, and I don't think many Canadians do either.

Now, Mr. Chairman, has the ministry examined the issue of an Alberta pension plan? Have you had a look at that? What conclusions have been drawn? Will the minister provide information, documents, or reports that his ministry has prepared on these issues?

8:20

Canadian intergovernmental relations, page 284 of the business plan. [interjection]

Now, I heard, Mr. Chairman, that someone has a buddy named Danny Williams, the Conservative Premier of Newfoundland, who had a lot to say about this Progressive Conservative Party's actions on the last day of March in Calgary. Obviously, his remarks were not heeded by all members of this Assembly, but perhaps after this session ends, they will have a chance to review his remarks and take them into consideration. But some of those leadership hopefuls, particularly those that are in the back of the pack, may have to work so hard to try to catch up that they won't have time to have a look at Mr. Williams' remarks.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, the department, as I understand it, will promote solutions to redesign federal/provincial financial arrangements, including the Canada health transfer, the Canada social transfer, equalization, and cost-sharing arrangements. How does the department propose to redesign the Canada health transfer? How would this department redesign the federal equalization program?

Now, I'm going to have to go back for a minute to Washington, DC, and this is in the government's estimates on page 322. We can also have a look at this in the business plan as well on page 285. I would like a detailed breakdown for the \$1.4 million budget of the Alberta office in Washington. What exactly are we spending that money on? What percentage of that budget is being spent on the salary of Alberta's representative, Murray Smith? How much money is the department spending on leasing accommodation for the Alberta representative in Washington, DC? Mr. Smith has gone somewhere where he'll hardly have to wear a cardigan sweater, and he won't have to turn the thermostat down. He might have to wear a sweater in the fall on the golf course. I'm sure that his heating bill and all his utility costs are probably paid for.

Also on page 322, Mr. Chairman, international trips. The Premier has recently announced a world tour before his retirement in December of this year. How do Albertans know that they are receiving value for their money on this world tour? Who is paying the Minister of Education's tab on this? I'm certain that it's not coming out of the hon. minister's department. I can't understand why the Minister of Education would not be more interested in fixing some of the schools here in the city of Edmonton. Anyway, if you could answer those questions or provide the information at a later date, I would appreciate that.

Also, what co-ordination occurs between International and Intergovernmental Relations and the Public Affairs Bureau and other government departments in setting up these trips? Who decides where to go, and who decides which backbench MLA is going? Certainly, when we have a look at the strategies and some of the travel that's involved, there is an initiative on Alberta/Ukraine relations to enhance bilateral relations with the Ukraine. There is a lot of travel to Alaska, to Montana. We're talking about the Canadian/American Border Trade Alliance, the Western Governors' Association, the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, the Council of State Governments.

Now, that would naturally bring us to the whole issue of electricity exports and what role, if any, this department has had in the discussions to increase electricity exports to the Pacific Northwest. I'm not certain that the Department of Energy is willing to share their plans with anyone in this province, including members of the government caucus and including members of Executive Council. I'm not sure that that information is being shared with everyone. So if the hon. minister was to tell me that his department was not involved in any of these discussions, it wouldn't surprise me, but these discussions are very, very important.

There has been to date no information provided to tell consumers, Mr. Chairman, exactly how much money they will save if we allow an increase in our export of electricity to the United States either through Montana or through B.C. There has been no valid economic argument presented as to how this will benefit consumers. The discussions are certainly going on. The discussions are going on between various electricity bodies in America and the Department of Energy.

Now, what role this department plays in that I don't know, but they could play a significant role. In fact, the hon. minister is a lawyer by profession and certainly would be very familiar with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in America and how their rulings may or may not apply to the transmission system in this province if we are to increase electricity exports. I can't get any information from the Department of Energy. I suspect that they don't have any. Maybe this is a job for International and Intergovernmental Relations, to get involved in this matter and protect the interests of consumers.

The generators have certainly made it known that they would like to see an increase in electricity exports. We're going to eventually see, Mr. Chairman, in this province, if we were to look at the south part of the province as a step on the ladder and the north part of the province as another step on the ladder – if we're not careful, we are going to develop a series of steps on that ladder which are going to increase from the north to the south electricity exports to America. At the very top of this ladder would be, of course, the proposed dam on the Slave River, the proposed 2,200-megawatt hydroelectric dam there. That would be on the border with the Northwest Territories.

Now, the hon. minister talked about good relations with our neighbours. My next question would be: have there been any discussions with the governments to the north, the territories, in regard to developing that hydroelectric capacity? Certainly, we talked about this before, Mr. Chairman, in this House. Some government members don't want to talk about their past, but in the past, in the election of 1982, one of the planks of this Progressive Conservative government was the development of this hydroelectric resource. I'm wondering if any of the shelves in the library have been dusted off and those reports have been removed by the hon. minister's staff and if they have been read and if discussions are going on with the neighbours to the north.

While we're also talking about our neighbours to the north, what involvement does this department have with the Mackenzie Valley pipeline? Where does the hon. minister stand on that Mackenzie Valley pipeline? Hopefully, the minister would be supporting it, and hopefully the minister would be ensuring that – you know, this gets back to the whole issue of firewalls. We don't need firewalls. What we need is a government that's going to ensure that as this natural gas comes from the north, the petrochemical industry in this province has an opportunity to extract that ethane.

I look forward to further debate on this issue. Thank you.

8:30

The Chair: The background conversations are steadily increasing

in volume. I would ask that we either keep those conversations down, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, or perhaps take them out into the committee room.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Chairman, I listened very carefully to the comments by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I thank him for his comments and his questions, largely which I would characterize as a piscatory exploration not only of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations but also of a number of other departments. But my undertaking to him is to review *Hansard*, and if I'm able to distill any cogent, reasonable, and relevant questions to the department, I'll be happy to answer them at the appropriate time in written format.

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise with some interest to make some comment and criticism on International and Intergovernmental Relations, and I thank the minister for his very concise comments in regard to the activities of this particular ministry. As the hon. minister mentioned, it's not a large ministry but certainly an influential one and an important means by which we reach out and interact with other provinces, the United States, and other countries around the world.

I found it somewhat interesting that the hon. minister chose to quote Marshall McLuhan, who is very well known for speaking on the media. Actually, interestingly enough, Marshall McLuhan was born an Albertan, born right here in Edmonton. It's not a well-known fact. Certainly, he did most of his work at the University of Toronto.

It's an interesting, perhaps, stepping-off point for myself as well. Of course, in the discussion of the global village that Marshall McLuhan expounded on back in 1964 or '65 when he wrote the book *Understanding Media*, he was talking about this process of making culture and government and everything to do with human relations somewhat homogeneous throughout North America just because of its natural geographic singleness and a single language throughout most of North America. He was commenting with some despair at how there is this process towards homogeneity and making things the same, I suppose, from north to south.

Certainly, although this is a larger process that goes beyond our ability to control, at the same time I think it's important for us to defend against that to some degree and make sure that we are in fact looking critically at this process of making the world smaller and making sure that our own Alberta interests are being looked after more and in primacy over any other actions that might be taking place, particularly to the south of us with a much more powerful and influential neighbour. So my comment in regard to intergovernmental affairs in the most general sense is looking to make sure that we are looking after Alberta's best interests and being aggressive and somewhat critical as well when faced with decisions in regard to international and interprovincial trade and such things as that.

The main point that jumps to mind for me when examining this ministry's budget is sort of the lack of specificity. The breakdown of the budget kind of shows things in the most general way and very all-inclusive, so it somehow precludes any specific knowledge for me except through questions that I can ask. I think we have to wait for the annual reports to give us more specific information.

I find it interesting that there is a biennial client satisfaction survey, the performance measure of choice for this ministry. It poses questions that are so broad, such as "How satisfied are you with this service area?" or they're so specific that not meeting them

satisfactorily is next to impossible, like the question that I see here, "I was able to access the website easily," which isn't really a question at all.

Another example that I see here – this is from the business plan – illustrates rather nonspecific information about this ministry. On page 286 of the business plan a performance measure states that there were 75 significant events or opportunities to advance Alberta's interests through the Washington, D.C. office. I would like to ask the minister: what does this category, significant events or opportunities that advance Alberta's interests – what does all that capture? What is included in those 75 things? Perhaps if we could see some examples, that would be much more illuminating.

I think that Albertans need to know exactly what's going on with International and Intergovernmental Relations. It's very important. The decisions that are being made in the United States, in Europe, and in Asia, federally as well, are very, very prescient to our understanding and to our decisions that we need to make on a daily basis. So I think that perhaps more, we could say, clarity and transparency would be appreciated from this ministry, and I'm sure that the new hon. minister would agree with me in that regard.

Regarding this whole idea of full disclosure this ministry like all ministries I believe should post all expenses and not just for international travel. I know that in British Columbia we have the capacity to look at all expenses that are incurred on the Internet, and while this might seem like a great mass of information that might sort of overwhelm us, I think it does provide that sense of transparency that our taxpayers would appreciate.

Actually, thinking of Marshall McLuhan again – I guess we can use that as a theme, right? – another quote that I always liked of his was that "mud sometimes gives the illusion of depth." I think that we can pass through the mud that sometimes is thrown up to confuse individual citizens by providing full transparency. I'm just asking in the broadest possible way. I have an example here of a five-day trip to Hong Kong in December of 2005 which cost \$14,000 in travel expenses, and while I understand that it is expensive to travel at a level that's necessary to interact with ambassadors and trade missions and whatnot, I think that the citizens of Alberta would like to see where that money is being spent. So it would provide, perhaps, reassurance and illumination that would keep the mud, as Mr. McLuhan would say, from being thrown up into confusion.

8:40

The ministry has its Washington office, and last year it received a 38 per cent boost to its funding, bringing up its funding overall to \$1.38 million. Surprisingly, it managed to stay within that very large budget. This year again another large budget is being asked for, so I'm looking specifically for performance measures that would perhaps justify this expenditure. I know that we've had some controversy in regard to this office. I'm not suggesting that the office is not necessary, but certainly it seems like a place where a lot of money is spent, including the \$230,000 remuneration for our emissary there, which was topped up with an extra \$30,000 for other things, I suppose. For my constituents, say, for example, this just seems like an incredible expenditure of money on an individual, and I would certainly like to see some more specific performance measurements, perhaps, and justification for that large salary.

Some of the performance measures that I would like to see specifically from that Washington office would be in regard to the whole BSE situation. BSE is creating a tremendous amount of uncertainty in our cattle industry, and borders seem to be opening and closing and not just between us and the United States, so I'd like to ask what the Washington office is doing specifically to ensure that Alberta cattle producers will be able to sell their beef across the

border and to other places as well. Other countries sometimes will look at our open situation with the United States as being a potential place for infection as well. So it certainly is a complicated place to go, where our Washington office needs to take some leadership.

As well, there has been some political backlash regarding the selling of fake licensing here in Alberta through our privatized registry system, and I would like to ask the minister if we have had more input with the Department of Homeland Security in the United States, who stated back in February that they would be addressing this specifically. I just wanted to know what specific interactions we have seen there. Have we had to impose changes based on concerns from the United States that we were posing a security breach here in the province of Alberta by not controlling our privatized registries properly?

This next topic I have particular interest in because, of course, it's unfolding by the day, and this is the whole softwood lumber issue. The softwood lumber issue seems to have a framework by which we can resolve the dispute to some degree, and the minister mentioned that he was cautiously optimistic in regard to this potential resolution. I just wanted to ask specifically if the minister has made inquiries as to how our own provincial sawmill and pulp industry will be affected by this framework for resolution of the softwood dispute.

One of the difficulties that we're seeing is that smaller sawmills and pulp producers in the province have been on the brink of extinction because of this softwood dispute, so I'm certainly hoping that with whatever we might be signing on to here, we are first and foremost protecting our sawmills, which are often the lifeblood of small centres throughout the province. I would hate to see something in this framework agreement that would somehow compromise the ability of small producers to be continuing their operations.

As well, I would like to ask the minister if he believes that the payback of 80 cents to the dollar in this softwood dispute framework is sufficient considering, I believe, that it's \$5 billion in tariffs that we've paid. If our own province represents at least something like 10 per cent of the total production of the country, then it's quite a significant amount of money to perhaps sign away for the sake of some tentative agreement.

I would like as well to just bring up this whole issue of the trade investment and labour and mobility agreement reached between Alberta and British Columbia. Today I believe the hon. minister brought up and said that health and social services, social and aboriginal policies, labour standards, consumer protection, taxation of royalties, and public safety would be amongst the exemptions from this agreement. According to the minister these are all exemptions and will remain under the sole control of each province. Perhaps I would like to ask the hon. minister to explain a bit as to why these areas were made exempt, and we would certainly like to hear about the mechanism by which it was decided that these areas were to be exempted from this agreement. There are comments around, that I've heard, that this agreement might in fact serve to worsen labour shortages across provinces, and we're asking if there's anything being done to perhaps investigate that allegation or that information that's being passed about.

Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but intergovernmental affairs would seem to be having some decision-making process over this new federal government budget initiative in regard to child care, and there seems to be a lot of confusion as to whether this new budget is giving a child care benefit or, in fact, is just paying sort of a baby bonus to individuals with children under six, which seems to be fine, but calling it a child care funding initiative I think is somewhat deceiving. So I would like to ask if the minister would be playing any active role in this issue as well as any re-evaluation of equaliza-

tion payments into the federal government. There seems to be a lot of discussion around that, and I think that we have to be very diligent in ensuring that Alberta's interests are being looked after in the best way possible. I would like to ask then, as well, what the minister's assessment of budget windfalls or shortcomings for Alberta are, how that might play in the federal arena.

Those are some of the comments, Mr. Chairman, that I have in regard to this intergovernmental affairs budget. It's a very interesting, as I say, sort of ambassador for Alberta in the interprovincial and federal and international stage, and I am certainly looking with some anticipation with the present minister in charge. I admire many of his abilities, and I hope that he can engage the outside world to Alberta's best advantage.

I'll leave you with one more Marshall McLuhan quote that I like as well since we heard it. This is a good one, but sometimes it can lead us astray. He said, "I may be wrong, but I'm never in doubt." With that, Mr. Chairman, I beg your leave and thank you for the opportunity.

8:50

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mar: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I did listen carefully to the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. I did find that he's done his homework and made a number of comments that I thought were insightful and asked some questions that, in fact, had specificity and cogency to them. I will also give the undertaking that I will endeavour my best to review *Hansard* for his questions, but let me take some time to address to the best of my ability now some of the questions that he did ask. I'm glad he recognizes the important role that the department plays as an adjunct to many other departments, be they in the area of agriculture or in the area of health and so on and so forth.

He asked about the cost of \$14,000 in Hong Kong. I'm assured by the previous minister that this involved the costs of four people going over to Hong Kong as part of the discussions on the WTO. The cost of airfares to and accommodation in Hong Kong by itself are quite expensive. Fourteen thousand dollars strikes me as being perfectly reasonable, particularly in light of the accomplishments that were made by that mission at that time, that involved not only supply management but also issues of what's referred to as NAMA, which are nonagricultural products, as part of WTO negotiations.

He asked me to outline some of the rationale for the costs incurred in our office in Washington and what has been generated in terms of activity there. The Alberta Washington office has generated unparalleled and unprecedented U.S. media coverage of the province of Alberta and its key role in North American energy supply and security. The media coverage certainly has elevated Alberta's profile in the United States. I don't think that we've ever had front-page coverage in places like the *Washington Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Washington Post*. CBS's newsmagazine *60 Minutes*, which featured the oil sands in January of this year, precipitated many, many calls to the Fort McMurray area with respect to our oil sands activity in northern Alberta.

Not only has there been significant media coverage of Alberta as a result of the Washington office but that office and the office holder, Murray Smith, have been instrumental in providing contacts and support and technical information to U.S. policy-makers and have given ministers from this province great access to appropriate people in Washington. The office has also lobbied on behalf of Alberta's agriculture sector, advocating the reopening of the U.S. border to Canadian cattle and beef, including a BSE policy forum that was held on Capitol Hill. I should say that the office has also

provided leadership in the planning and execution of the province's participation in the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and will capitalize on the momentum generated by the incomparable coverage and attention that Alberta will receive as a result of that event.

The hon. member asked a very specific question about the softwood lumber deal. I believe that yesterday in question period I did address this question somewhat. I indicated that we were cautious about this and optimistic at the same time; optimistic because there is now a framework agreement but cautious because the framework agreement only provides a basis for a finalized deal, the legal text of which will be generated over the next few weeks. So the reason for the caution that I expressed is that we want to ensure, as the hon. member has asked, that the details of what's worked out pursuant to the framework agreement will ultimately be a benefit to Alberta producers.

He asked a very specific question about whether getting \$4 billion of the \$5 billion collected by the U.S. was an appropriate return. I would argue, Mr. Chairman, that this is not a perfect deal. A perfect deal would have resulted in all \$5 billion coming back, including interest, but always when it comes to negotiations, what you can attain and what you desire are often two different things. This appears to me to be the best deal that we can in fact achieve or attain. I suppose we could have taken the position that we wanted all \$5 billion back, but this may have ended up resulting in a protracted litigation that would have cost many, many, many, many more dollars than we would actually recover. It would be, perhaps, a situation where it is better to negotiate certainty of access to markets now rather than have the uncertainty associated with litigation long into the future.

The hon. member asked a very specific question about the trade agreement that we recently struck with the province of British Columbia and wondered why certain areas were exempt. I think many people would recognize that in some areas there are particular sensitivities that may exist between two different provinces with respect to the control of something like a social policy or the environment, so at this time those areas are exempt. That doesn't mean that at some point in the future there might not be some form of discussion where you might merge agencies that are separate agencies between two different provinces or at least increase the amount of co-ordination between two such agencies.

One area may be something that was discussed at the joint B.C./Alberta cabinet meeting, that being the co-ordination of efforts between the B.C. cancer board and the Alberta Cancer Board with respect to co-ordinating their research activities. That would be an area that falls within the overall rubric of health but still may be a fruitful area for a continued co-operation between those two areas.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat, and again I thank the hon. member for his thoughtful questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To begin with, I want to offer, I guess, both congratulations and condolences to the new minister. I do want to commend him for recognizing the important role of family and deciding not to be part of the leadership race because of his love for his family. I commend him tremendously for his priorities.

One of the things that's interesting is that when Mr. Smith went to Washington, a Mr. Chase came to Edmonton. There is, I believe, a kind of direct relationship in those two events. Although my hon. members from Calgary-Currie and Calgary-Mountain View had no

difficulty defeating recumbent incumbents, it added to the ease with which I reached Edmonton.

My concern with the former Member for Calgary-Varsity and his qualifications: I would very much like to know to what extent there was a competition for Mr. Smith to receive this Washington appointment, what qualifications the minister possessed, had demonstrated, and so on that made him rise to the surface, overcoming all other challengers. I'd like to know, for example, without necessarily naming names, how many other challengers there were.

I'm also concerned about Mr. Smith's selection based on Mr. Smith's very costly history for Albertans. Mr. Smith was the Energy minister during the period of deregulation. During that period Albertans basically lost anywhere between \$5 billion to \$7 billion in hardware, transmission lines, and so on in failed power auctions. I guess that would be a good reason to send Mr. Smith down to Washington.

9:00

Mr. Smith also made the comment, that my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar attested to, that, well, if you're cold or if the price of gas or electricity is too high, you can put on a sweater. That showed a tremendous amount of compassion for Albertans suffering from the deregulated price of electricity and the failure of the then Energy minister to bring in the promised gas rebates. It was very convenient prior to the election in 2001 to offer those energy rebates and then basically forget about them for the next two years.

Also, Mr. Smith as part of his past history stuck Alberta consumers with a \$1.5 billion cost in transmission lines. Instead of just sort of splitting the bill with industry, Mr. Smith suggested that, no, this was for the consumers' benefit, and therefore they should pay for it. He'd already increased their prices; now he was increasing their hardware.

Now, Mr. Smith has been down in Washington. He was down in Washington at the time, as former members have pointed out, when we were suffering from a BSE crisis and a border closure.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, a point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Point of Order Relevance

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has gone on at some length about Mr. Smith and the conduct of his office in a previous time period. I'm wondering what the relevance is to Committee of Supply on the department of international and intergovernmental affairs. I see no relevance whatsoever in this diatribe.

The Chair: Anyone else on the point of order? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Chairman. There's no point of order here. There was no citation. I'm sorry; there's no point of order here.

The Chair: Before the hon. member starts, I will point out that it was pointed out earlier today that the use of the names of fellow members in the House is against the Standing Orders. It does say that you can't use your own either.

The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, and I'm glad that slipped under the radar.

With regard to the relevancy, this department, whose funds and budget we're discussing tonight, is directly responsible for the appointment of that former member, Mr. Smith, to Washington, so my comments have direct relevancy because, obviously, we want a very capable individual in Washington dealing with our affairs.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: To go back, the former minister and now our man in Washington was there during the BSE crisis. He was also there for a large part of the softwood lumber dispute, as has been alluded to by former members. If this minister can point out the achievements, the speedier border opening – we seem to have a disagreement as to whether leaving a billion dollars behind for American forestry companies to use to fuel suits against Canadian softwood is a good idea or not. I can't help but think that a bird in the hand is worth a billion in the bush given the American presidential reference.

While I want Alberta to strike out on its own and develop its own trade deals, I'm not sure that we could not in partnership with the federal government, particularly now that it's that much easier for our provincial Conservatives to deal with the federal Conservatives, have a joint-space trade office. If we feel that this is necessary, why couldn't we potentially be sharing space and some form of leasing agreement, sharing our knowledge?

It seems to me that it would be under this particular ministry that the suggestion was made to gainfully employ former Alberta-elected Senators-in-waiting. At one point it was proposed that we have a stipend for these formerly appointed individuals or elected Senators-in-waiting and that we provide them with some kind of space or an allowance so that they could hang out in Ottawa until such time as, potentially, a Conservative government was elected. Well, we've had a Conservative government elected, and I haven't heard of any hasty calls from the now Prime Minister Harper to appoint some of those Senators-in-waiting. I know that one of the Senators who was elected has been gainfully employed in this House, but I won't mention his name.

I'm also concerned about where we stand with the federal government in terms of Senate reform. I know we've talked about an elected Senate, but on the other two Es of the Senate – I'm not sure to what extent we've discussed the potential new role of elected Senates with provincially elected Senators rather than the current appointments. It will be interesting to see. If the hon. minister would like to clarify the role he sees for elected Alberta Senators within the federal process, I would be pleased to hear his response.

I'm also concerned about BSE and the lumber. I would be interested in this minister's opinions and in what discussions he's had with our representative in Washington with regard to the proposed border wall and the access that we have to the States. I know that one of the things the minister indicated was that by having a representative in Washington, there's been an opportunity to highlight and profile Alberta and that part of that profiling could potentially result, given the right types of promotion, in further business here in Alberta. We've had the business of Hollywood coming to us because of our backdrops, which may not continue for many years into the future because we're intruding on those so-called Hollywood backdrops with an awful lot of drilling activities and a variety of other activities such as clear-cutting and so on, which makes our backdrops somewhat more of the receding type than the ongoing, preserved environmental beauty. It would be interesting to know if the minister can pinpoint specific examples or provide any kind of monetary numbers on where the appointment of Mr. Smith has had direct benefit if there's a financial value to his contributions.

Chair's Ruling Citations for Points of Order

The Chair: Hon. members, again the noise level is increasing.

While I've interrupted and have your attention, on the point of order that was raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, no citation was raised. The proper citation would have been Standing Order 23(b)(i). It did bring the speaker to focus a little bit more on the subject rather than on the personality, but a citation is required when you do bring forth a point of order.

I hope as well that this pause would also cause us to reflect that when I raise the question of noise level, it's adhered to for a while.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, please continue.

9:10

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll try to be more dynamic and exciting so that I can hold everyone's attention. I know that my former students were always on the edges of their desks waiting for the words of wisdom to follow. [interjection] Well, he's awake.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: I would also comment that with regard to the BSE and our oil sands, we have provided our American neighbours with some wonderful opportunities and, I believe, at our economic expense. We know that during the BSE crisis the American packing plants in Alberta did extremely well. The all-party committee that was formed asked the packers to open their books. That was prevented from happening because of a federal Conservative member. So my hope is that with the interrelationship of Conservative to Conservative, possibly we will have a better understanding.

I'm also concerned about the opening up of our environment particularly, as I mentioned, in the oil sands. We offer not only to America but to the world the greatest stable opportunity for oil and gas extraction, yet the royalty structures that we have agreed to, the 1 per cent which upon completion becomes 30 per cent, leaves us open to what I would see as almost a plundering possibility. Our southern neighbours receive the benefits of our oil, but they don't have the tailing ponds that we have as a result of our trading deals. I would hope that through this minister we could potentially with the federal government be renegotiating the prices that we get for our resources because I don't think we're served well.

I'm not going to talk about the Kyoto protocol and water transfers. I'm going to leave that up to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to raise. But considering what's happening in Bolivia, considering what's happening in Venezuela, considering the difficulties that are happening politically in the Middle East, we offer a tremendous stability. I think that there should be a price for that stability, and I would hope that the hon. minister would recognize that and possibly pass along to the appointed individual in Washington to drive a harder bargain. I'm not suggesting using oil as a lever with the softwood. I don't think that's the way to go. But I think that we should be recognizing that there is a tremendous environmental price and legacy as a result of America's growing dependency on our resources.

With regard to our intergovernmental relationship with Ottawa, I would hope, as the Member for Edmonton-Calder pointed out, that this minister might be talking with the federal child care minister, who has basically abandoned the opportunity for increased accreditation in daycares, better pay for daycare providers, and who has not recognized the need for stay-at-home parents with this \$100 a month, which is a taxable part of the income for most families.

My hope with the intergovernmental affairs minister is that we're going to be looking for other economies to balance our future needs.

Our relationship with America has been profitable, but it's also been costly. I mentioned the environmental costs. Hopefully, some of the previous trips to China that have been alluded to will produce direct results. I know that China would like to put their imprint into our oil sands development as well.

I think we have to be very cautious that we're not viewed strictly as hewers of wood and gatherers of water, that our manufactured resources are as important if not more important. I know that the minister of agriculture, who will be speaking later, pointed out that he'd rather see beef in a box than beef on the hoof. Likewise, we have so many of our sawmill operators going belly up due to the softwood lumber problems, yet we're still sending trees instead of lumber across the border. So I would hope that this minister would encourage other departments such as Sustainable Resources and support the agricultural ministry in selling finished products, whether it be refined oil, butane, methane, et cetera, whether it be the beef in the box, or whether it be the plywood, the sheet lumber, the paper, as opposed to sending our raw products south and then paying for the price of having the finished product shipped back to us from the States.

These are all hopes. I know that other members wish to participate. I'll look forward to whatever responses the minister can provide.

The Chair: Hon. minister, do you wish to respond?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the estimates briefing for International and Intergovernmental Relations. I'm particularly interested and will be brief on the issues of international action.

I don't know much about this ministry in relation to some of these environmental issues but would like to hear if there are any connections with the federal government in relation to the Kyoto and climate change issues, what, if anything, the department has in the plans at the present time in relation to international commitments on reducing greenhouse gases. Are there any kinds of connections with the Alberta Environment department? How does that connect between the two departments? What kinds of communications on international affairs would occur in this regard? Would the minister's department have anything to do with economic estimates of our international commitments, and is that part of the role of the International and Intergovernmental Relations department? If not, is there a potential for evolving that role with a view to having greater influence both federally and internationally?

In respect to water and the bulk sale of water, obviously many of us are concerned about the commodification of water and have been reassured in the past that this is not on the agenda both provincially and federally. The pressures are increasing. Has there been discussion, and what is the nature of the pressures that the department might be feeling on the issue of international or even interprovincial trade in water? Have any policy options been explored or developed on this? What research might be done, and what are the implications if the U.S., for example, did press the issue and seek to have access to our water?

A third area that I've been interested in these last few months has been the issue of foreign workers and what, if anything, this department has to do with the foreign workers issue. There seems to be a tension between provincial and federal counterparts over this whole issue and temporary foreign workers. What, if any, role does this department have there?

Those are the key questions I wanted to find more information on. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9:20

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, in dealing with the comments made at the outset by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, I thank him very much for his support expressed for my position on seeking the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta. I will only say this, Mr. Chairman. There are many titles that a man may earn during his life. Those titles may include honourable, they may include minister, they may include Premier, but there are none that are more important than the title of dad.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View raised a number of very important policy questions, and I will say that the role of my department is this: it is to provide support for departments, like the Department of Environment, vis-à-vis other governments, be they other provinces or the federal government or perhaps even states or jurisdictions outside of Canada. So the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations would not itself have policy perspectives on areas of bulk water transfer or with respect to foreign workers or with respect to the area of Kyoto and climate change, all of which are important issues. But we would provide assistance in terms of dealing with other governments on these matters.

The hon. member knows that some of these matters, like environmental issues, have very much a perspective that covers different geopolitical boundaries. So we do provide important advice in working with other governments but don't have a particular policy perspective that would be independent of the Department of Human Resources and Employment or the department of health or the Department of Environment.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I think I'll take my seat and be happy to entertain any other questions that may arise.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise tonight and speak to the estimates for the current fiscal year for International and Intergovernmental Relations. I will be very brief tonight. I have really just one question that I don't believe any of the speakers have touched on yet this evening. I think it's a relevant question and should be asked, so I made a point of coming over this evening so that I would have the opportunity to ask.

For the minister. It's been brought to my attention that a lot of preliminary work has been done on the feasibility of establishing a trade office in the Middle East. When I look through the annual report of the ministry from 2004-2005, there's a results analysis on initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region, China and Korea, initiatives in Europe, both Germany and the Ukraine, and I note that we have international governance offices in China, South Africa, Russia, and Mexico, Mr. Chairman, but no reference that I could see there whatsoever to the Middle East. Certainly, when I go to the business plan for the ministry for this current year, again there's an awful lot of talk about improving international trade in various parts of the world, but I couldn't see any specific reference to the Middle East.

Given that there's an awful lot of oil and gas activity taking place in the Middle East, and certainly Alberta is renowned to be a world leader in oil and gas activity in North America, I'm concerned that perhaps we may be missing trade opportunities or not realizing the full benefit of trade opportunities coming out of that part of the world. So I guess that specifically I would like to ask the minister what the ministry is doing to actively pursue economic opportunities

in the Middle East and trade relations with Alberta's oil and gas sector specifically. Also, when was the last time that the Alberta government ran an economic trade mission to the Middle East? I'm sure there have been some. I'm not currently aware of when they would have been. Also, I'm wondering whether or not there is a plan in place at the current time for opening a trade office in the Middle East.

I've been led to understand that, in fact, the agriculture minister and his ministry are supportive of such an idea, yet that's not necessarily the case with Economic Development. I'm going to assume that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations would perhaps be in the mix there as well. So, certainly, I think the minister may be able to shed a little bit of light on that, and that would be my question.

I'm hoping I can have some response this evening, and if not I'll certainly look forward to a response soon. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford should know that the offices that are in places like Tokyo, Beijing, Seoul, Hong Kong are offices of the Department of Economic Development, tourism. The only international office that falls under the purview of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations is the Washington office. The other ones as trade offices fall within the purview of a different department, so I'm not vested with any information with respect to any current plans to open an office in the Middle East. I'm not briefed on any such matters. So that will be a question that you will have to refer to the appropriate minister.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Again, I have more questions. I'm disappointed that the hon. minister has not indicated that he will endeavour to answer my questions from our previous discussion, and I note that with significant interest – significant interest, Mr. Chairman.

Now, again, I have questions in regard to the proposed Senate reform that has been discussed. Certainly, this department in the past has analyzed Senate reform and Senate nominee elections. You know, the credibility of this government on Senate reform and Senate nominee elections is certainly in doubt. This is a government that in the past has agreed to elect regional health authorities and then fired them.

So my questions, Mr. Chairman, in regard to Senate reform and the Senate nominee election are: has this provincial government engaged the new federal Conservative government on Senate reform? What long-range plans does the ministry have in place to pursue the idea of the triple-E Senate? We all know how fond this government is of spending public money on ad campaigns and public awareness campaigns. Is there one in the works by this department in regard to the triple-E Senate? If there is, how much of the ministry's budget is being devoted to this issue? Also, have any formal or informal discussions occurred between the Alberta and the federal governments in the past year regarding this elected Senate, and what were the results of these discussions?

9:30

Also, I too have some questions in regard to the Kyoto protocol, the business plan on page 285. Has the provincial government

engaged the new federal Conservative government on the Kyoto protocol? What steps is the department taking to address the Kyoto protocol in future years? How is the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations working towards helping Alberta meet its Kyoto targets? What strategy has International and Intergovernmental Relations developed to deal with Kyoto? Are they working with other government ministries? What's going on there? Will the minister provide this House with copies of any economic impact assessments done by his department relative to the Kyoto protocol? Again, Mr. Chairman, will the minister provide copies of the documents his department has supporting the Alberta government's position relative to the Kyoto protocol?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View had some similar questions in regard to water. [interjections] They must be discussing selling memberships over there, Mr. Chairman. Seems to be going well too.

Now, exporting water. The business plans, again on page 286. We have some indication in the business plan of the future of water in this province and some of the discussions that are ongoing, but who is the department consulting on this issue? What work has the department done on examining the issue of water exports? Have any policy options been developed? What research is being conducted?

Also, the issue that was examined by the hon. member from Mountain View was the whole issue of foreign workers. If we look at the business plan on page 285, there is, certainly, an indication that there is to be a design, and implementation, and management of governance of "projects, particularly in priority countries, working with ministries, educational institutions, and private sector partners." Now, I realize that the whole memorandum of understanding for temporary foreign workers was implemented by a former minister of this government who is now sitting as an independent, but we need to have an examination of this, and I think that this would be the department to do that examination. I'm wondering if there's going to be any money allocated to do this.

Certainly, there could be work done with the federal government. First off, there should be a determination whether these workers are necessary. I did a little phoning around here this week, Mr. Chairman, and I was surprised at the number of outfits in the oil patch who indicated to me that they were not hiring staff at this time. It has nothing to do, they assured me, with breakup or any other thing. So examine the whole issue of whether we need temporary foreign workers.

The hon. minister talked earlier about being good neighbours. Well, I think we should first be good neighbours with our provincial cousins and ensure that all the people in British Columbia and all the people in Saskatchewan or Manitoba that may be interested in coming here have a chance to do so. Even if it's working temporarily – whether we consider a month or a year a temporary basis is no matter – we should ensure that all Canadians who are interested in coming here and working in our north developing the oil sands have a chance to do so. Certainly, the department could look at this issue.

I'm not convinced that Human Resources and Employment is doing it. Certainly, in Advanced Education they seem to just want to pretend the issue is not there. There are many examples of Canadians looking for work. Perhaps our minister could see what other Canadian provinces are doing in regard to manpower commitments and if they have any surplus in their labour force that perhaps could be employed here.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity talked about the whole issue of child care. Certainly, I was pleased to learn that child care negotiations were part of last year's business plan. I can only assume that that is going to be the case again. I was pleased to learn

that the ministry had worked closely with Children's Services during the negotiations and will continue to support Children's Services in their endeavours. The hon. minister is not sitting too far from the Minister of Children's Services, so I'm sure those discussions and negotiations will continue with the Ministry of Children's Services, and hopefully the hon. minister is going to provide advice as well.

Certainly, there has been in the past, and the minister has talked about, the ongoing co-operation between Alberta and British Columbia and the joint cabinet meetings that have occurred and the meeting that occurred recently. There are a number of Alberta/B.C. agreements that have been signed. I hope that the minister can provide to this House an update on what negotiations are occurring at this moment.

What are we doing in regard to some of our oil royalty rates? Will there be consideration of a royalty structure that is identical, perhaps, in both provinces? I don't know if the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View is going to be happy to hear this, but I am concerned about the difference in the coal-bed methane royalty structure in British Columbia. That may increase or enhance coal-bed methane development there at the expense of coal-bed methane development in Alberta. If the minister could update us on any of the negotiations that are going on in regard to this, I would appreciate it. Certainly, B.C. has some different ways of regulating their oil and gas industry, and there are some who say that their regulatory process is more streamlined than ours.

There are other questions, Mr. Chairman, that I have as well. I don't know how much time we have, but certainly there are many trade issues that the ministry works with. There's the issue of Canada/U.S. wheat. Again, live swine between Canada and the U.S. is a trade issue; aircraft conventions, the UNESCO draft international convention on cultural diversity, the Chinese investment in the oil sands.

Now, as I understand it,

in November of 2004 the Ministry co-ordinated provincial initiatives related to achieving a presence in the federal government's China-Canada Energy Working Group, which is a forum for the discussion of Canadian and Chinese energy issues and interests, including oil sands development. These efforts resulted in the federal government agreeing to establish a separate session to allow Alberta to present information to the Chinese on the oil sands.

I don't think that we need to import Chinese workers on a temporary basis. I don't think that's good for the Chinese, nor is it good for Canada or Alberta, but certainly I think we should be encouraging Chinese investment in the oil sands.

9:40

I know that last summer, Mr. Chairman, there was significant interest expressed by the Chinese in investing in a major American oil and gas company, and of course the Americans would have no part of that. When we see the implications to our beef producers when the border with America was closed as a result of the BSE, we have to be very cognizant of what happened. It should be a reminder to us that we need to make sure that all our eggs, so to speak, are not in the same basket. I'm not talking about an Easter basket here but a market basket. That's why I think it is very, very important, and I would encourage the minister through the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations to find ways to encourage Chinese investment in the oil sands and also ensure that our export markets are diversified.

It's not in our interests to see all our bitumen production or our oil and gas go just to one market, the American market. I think that this is a very strategic development for our petroleum and particularly our bitumen production. It's in our interests to ensure that we have access to the Pacific Rim countries. Certainly, there is significant

talk – and I think it's more than talk, but I think a pipeline is going to be built, whether it's to Kitimat or to Prince Rupert. Some of that production, at least, should go to the Pacific Rim. It don't think it's in our interests to see all this production going to go to Long Beach, California, for instance. I don't think that is in our long-term interest.

If we diversify our export market, I think we're all better off for it. What I would like to see this ministry do is take a very active role in ensuring that the export of our bitumen production is diversified. It's important not only for the market basket, Mr. Chairman; it's also important because with that pipeline from the Pacific tidewater to Edmonton then on to Fort McMurray there is going to be an additional line or loop, a much smaller line, that incredibly is going to take petroleum distillates from other jurisdictions, other oil fields in the world, to Fort McMurray, and it is going to be added to the bitumen before it is exported.

So the fact that we have in the past failed to protect our distillate production is now costing us because a lot of these liquids are of course running down the alliance line through the American Midwest. As a result of that – and I'm not saying that's the sole cause of this shortage – incredibly we will be importing some petroleum distillates to use as a dilutant in bitumen shipping, and this is where we're going to get it. So it's an important issue, and I certainly hope that the department is going to have an active role in any discussions.

Now, the softwood lumber dispute. We saw earlier this week where there was finally a resolution to this, and I'm wondering how this will affect the community timber program in Alberta. I know that this department, Mr. Chairman, in the past has been active in developing some solutions to the softwood lumber dispute, and I'm wondering if the minister could give us an update on that, please.

Also in the past, in reviewing the financial statements of this department, one will see that there are some deficiencies in the management employees' pension plan. Now, at the end of 2004 the management employees' pension plan reported a deficiency of \$268,000, and the public service pension plan reported a deficiency of almost half a million dollars, and in 2003 that was over half a million dollars. What's being done to eliminate that deficiency? Where would I find that? In the estimates? If that is being fixed, I would like the hon. minister to point out where I could refer to that.

While we're on the topic of pensions, Mr. Chairman, is Murray Smith eligible for a pension once he retires from the political patronage appointment in Washington, DC? Did that compensation package come with a pension? It would be very ironic if the hon. minister was getting a pension because, certainly, he among others was advocating that pensions were not necessary at one point in his political career.

I understand that there are 60 or 61 members in this department. Does the ministry still share staff with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development?

An Hon. Member: They do.

Mr. MacDonald: They do? Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Hon. minister, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Chairman, I'm at a loss. I could not possibly have anticipated a wide range of policy questions that are really outside of the purview of my own department, but I will attempt to spend some time going through the comments. There may have been a

pearl of wisdom in the comments just made, but I will be shucking many, many oysters to find it.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm going to try and be very direct so that you're able to respond in kind. The trade office in Washington will celebrate its second anniversary this summer. I had asked earlier about the justification. As a teacher I frequently issued report cards. I'm wondering if the minister has provided a report card and if the Auditor General has been called upon to do a value-for-money audit of the effectiveness of the office. If it turns out that in this government's wisdom and through the Auditor General's verification there is value in this trade office, I'm wondering if the minister would comment about future trade offices. Throughout the discussion we've talked about not having all our eggs in one basket, and we've talked, as the minister did, about the need for a global market, a global economy. The obvious government that we have had trade missions to has been China, but the sort of sleeping tiger could also be a description for India. I'm wondering: to what extent has the minister considered potentially, again, as I said, not having a separate trade office but having an office within a Canadian embassy in India to talk about trade possibilities?

9:50

The other area that has been talked about is temporary foreign workers versus landed immigrants. Alberta is definitely the land of opportunity, and the government feels that we don't have sufficient in-province, in-country workers. I would be interested to know to what extent the intergovernmental relations minister has talked to his federal immigration counterpart to facilitate the immigration of the specific needs that we have in this province. Of course, one of the most outstanding needs that we have – and the government has tried to address this through third-way Americanization, privatization – is medical specialists. So I'm wondering to what extent the minister might be working along, as I say, with the federal immigration minister to speed up the process and the certification recognition for medical professionals.

I would very much appreciate having these individuals as landed immigrants, contributing to our taxes and to the quality of our life through the ethnic diversity, more than simply being indentured labourers, basically, being manipulated by not only their foreign government but by less-than-desirable employers working in some of our northern tar sands production areas.

The questions, again, then, to the minister: what kind of evaluation has there been of the trade office? If it turns out that this is a good way to go, in what other countries might we consider opening trade offices? To what extent has the minister been able to discuss with either the federal intergovernmental relations minister or the immigration minister about bringing to Alberta the type of talent where we definitely have a scarcity, such as the medical profession?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Chairman, I should have thought that the issue of medical professionals would have been raised, perhaps, by the hon. member last week when the estimates of the department of health were before us. I note that at the standing vote time there were only three such members that in fact were in attendance from the Liberal opposition. I will simply say again that I will review *Hansard* to determine any relevant questions that may be specifically with respect to this portfolio.

The issue of trade offices in India, which the hon. Member for

Calgary-Varsity suggested, again, would fall within the purview of the Department of Economic Development. The office in Washington is not a trade office per se. It is co-located with the Canadian embassy in Washington, but its function is not trade per se, although the United States is our largest trade partner, with some \$65 billion worth of material moving to our export markets south of the border. The purpose of the individual, Murray Smith, in our office is to facilitate good political relationships with policy-makers, decision-makers in Washington. He's done a fine job of that. I've outlined already some of the very specific results that have accrued to the benefit of Alberta as a result of his efforts.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would appreciate an opportunity to ask a few more questions about some of the intergovernmental relations with the federal government. It's not clear to me how and in what ways your ministry interdigitates with health and social services on issues like the transfer and equalization and cost sharing, and I would appreciate knowing more about, specifically, the equalization program and what role you play in either changing that relationship or continuing to support it and how you feel that's doing in relation to fairness to Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Chairman, these are very, very important issues for the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, also for the province of Alberta as whole. With respect to equalization, fixing the fiscal imbalance, I can advise the hon. member that at this point there are now two reports that have been issued. One report, issued at the time of the meeting of the Council of the Federation in Montreal approximately three weeks ago, was a report that was commissioned by the Council of the Federation that outlined an actual formula for equalization and the equalization program.

More recently, Mr. Chairman, there has been a report that has been issued by the federal government – in fact, it was just this week – and it talks about a process by which provinces and territories and the federal government will be involved in the creation of a program to deal with fiscal imbalance. So at this point, in specific answer to the questions raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, there isn't a formula yet that has been agreed to by the provinces and territories.

There has not yet been a proposal for a specific formula by the federal government. What the federal government has done is set out a process by which they hope to achieve a formula. The main work is done by the Department of Finance. The Provincial Treasurer has responsibility for that, but the Department of IIR is involved at the side as an adjunct to discussions and a policy position that would be taken by the Department of Finance. So we work with the Premier, with the Minister of Finance to move forward on negotiating the position that ultimately is taken by the government with respect to items like fiscal imbalance.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Alberta has used the agreement on internal trade on two occasions that I'm aware of. I'm wondering: in regard to internal trade practices are there any challenges currently under way? Are there

legislation, but there are some reasons to be cautious. We have a lot of features in this bill. The livestock identification and ownership: well, this act confirms that placing brands on livestock creates a presumption of ownership and that the inspection process is to assist in ownership identification or determination.

We're looking at another feature, which is the acceptance of other livestock identifiers. This act, as I understand it, broadens the type of identifiers that can be used to identify livestock to include identification devices used under other industry programs such as the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency tags.

There are also features around the bills of sale. This act establishes mandatory content for a bill of sale. Sellers and dealers will be allowed to customize the form of their bills of sale to meet their needs and practices.

Security interest and lien declaration: the act sets out a mandatory requirement that sellers disclose security interests in the livestock they are selling.

Prompt payment for livestock: the act requires all purchasers of cattle and horses to pay within two business days after possession or price discovery, whichever is later. There is protection of a seller's sale proceeds being held by a dealer. There is buyer's protection against conversion lawsuits.

There is standardized documentation.

There are also features to determine purpose and procedures for inspection, inspection sites, dealer licensing, and the livestock assurance fund.

You know, a strong cattle industry is vital to Alberta's economy. The minister has articulated that many times in this House. We know that the cattle industry has suffered as a result of the BSE crisis, and producers have been suffering from the ongoing issues of high input costs and low commodity prices at the farm gate. We should support legislation that will give the industry more efficiencies and, as a result, make it more competitive. But how will this bill affect the family farm in any way? There is a provision that requires payment within two days. I think this should benefit the smaller operators.

There have been many discussions not only on CBC radio but elsewhere in regard to organic producers.

10:10

An Hon. Member: The CBC?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, the CBC.

I would certainly think that there is no difference between any type of beef production. Alberta Beef certainly supports Bill 38. Now, as I understand it, not only to the minister but to his staff, to their credit they have discussed this bill with the beef producers. I don't imagine the hon. minister has discussed this with R-CALF. I don't see any reason why he would. [interjections] I didn't hear what the Minister of Environment, the minister with the green shirt, the light green shirt . . .

Mr. Boutilier: Mother ship.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. It's a fashion statement, certainly.

Mr. Boutilier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, on my shirt, I think under citation 23(c), (b), and (e).

I take back my point of order on my shirt, the disparaging remark by the member.

The Deputy Speaker: There's no point of order.

Carry on, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we know the importance of the cattle industry to this province, and we know the importance of the value-added chain of that industry. I do have, however, some questions in regard to this legislation. We could perhaps have these questions answered during committee if that is appropriate.

In section 81 there is a time limit on prosecution. "A prosecution for an offence under this Act may be commenced within 2 years of the date of the alleged offence but not afterwards." I'm wondering why the minister and the department picked two years here. I'm curious. We could go into the cupboard and have a look at various statutes in this province, and there would be a wide range of time in which prosecutions could take place. I'm wondering if two years in this case is enough.

Also, in part 4, section 66, there is in this section an outline on tribunal and assurance funds. I would like a detailed explanation regarding this tribunal. I know that all of this is going to be done through regulation, but who are the members that the minister may have in mind to appoint to this tribunal, how many, and how much, if anything, would they get paid? Now, the tribunal is going to have significant power or authority. I note here that "the chair and other members of the Tribunal have the same power as is vested in the Court of Queen's Bench for the trial of civil actions." How is this tribunal going to be selected? How are they going to be paid? How many people will be on there? You know, all this is going to be done in regulation. I would just like to know, and I'm sure other Albertans would as well.

Now, section 88, section 122(4) of the Business Corporations Act. In regard to this could I please have from the minister an example of which corporations are going to be delegated authorities "in respect of the carrying out of a power, duty or function under this Act." If he could provide me with an example, I would be grateful.

Towards the back of this prospective legislation, or Bill 38, is detail on regulations. We're looking at details here for the regulation of prescribed livestock and prescribed livestock products, and the minister may make many regulations. Have the poultry producers or the turkey producers or any other parties that may have an interest in this matter been consulted in regard to this legislation? Certainly, when we look at the poultry industry, it appears to be singled out in this legislation by inspectors. Is there any relationship between the outbreak of bird flu in various flyways in Europe and Asia and this legislation? [interjections] You know, they may laugh across the way. For instance, let's look at what happened in the lower mainland in B.C. in the Fraser Valley, where entire flocks have had to be destroyed.

Now, what exactly is planned with this legislation? Is it to protect public safety? Hopefully, there never will be an outbreak of bird flu. For those members who are interested, we in the North American flyway are protected in some way by the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other side. Hopefully, this would not be an issue with this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, those are certainly some of the questions I have at this time. If we have any other questions regarding this bill, Bill 38, I'm confident that the minister will during committee provide an answer for Albertans through this Legislative Assembly.

With those comments, hopefully, Bill 38 will be exactly what Alberta beef producers want and need to make their industry more competitive. Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Environment raised a point of order. Then he withdrew it. Just for the

Assembly's interest, he did cite 23(b), which reads: a member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member "speaks to matters other than . . . the question under discussion." The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was speaking about the hon. minister's green shirt, which is clearly not mentioned anywhere in Bill 38. So had the Minister of Environment not withdrawn the point of order, it would have stood.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm sure it was with regard to the green grass upon which the cattle graze that prompted the comment.

I am in support of Bill 38. I just would like some qualifier-type questions to be answered. One of the impacts of Bill 38 is that the bill will streamline the inspection process currently completed by a delegated authority and licensed inspection services. If we go back in time to the first case of BSE, one of the problems in the identification of that case and the subsequent loss of billions of dollars in our global exports was the fact that we didn't have sufficient inspectors. It was, I think, because of a case of elk with CWD that it took three months before the actual BSE was confirmed in the original animal. That original animal that suffered from BSE had come from a farm in Saskatchewan that, unfortunately, a cousin of mine also purchased cattle from, and as a result his whole prized Hereford herd had to be culled.

10:20

What I'm wondering with regard to the CWD is to what extent, if any, this bill considers the testing for CWD. There is a concern, again going back in history, that when we imported elk from the States, within that herd there were cases of CWD that had potentially spread throughout other herds in the province. Along with CWD and the potential of contaminating wild herds, I know that the government has taken some precautionary measures in the southeast part of the province in terms of going after wild deer and testing those deer.

It seems to be somewhat of a catch-22 as to whether the CWD originated in domestic herds or whether it was transferred to domestic herds through the wild animals themselves, and these questions of intertransfer of CWD cause concern. So I'm wondering if the inspection process that's being discussed in Bill 38 deals with that particular concern.

The other concern, again with common potentially transferable animal diseases, is bovine tuberculosis, which apparently a number of the buffalo in Wood Buffalo park suffer from, and apparently that same disease is quite rampant in the herds in the Caribou Mountains provincial park. Ranchers, apparently, in the area of the Caribou Mountains park are concerned about their beef herds coming in contact with the buffalo.

Apparently, buffalo have a little bit of difficulty, I gather, distinguishing the difference between a female cow and a female buffalo. If they have an opportunity, they will take advantage of it. I gather that ranchers are concerned about the spread of this bovine tuberculosis, and that's why they've been calling for the culling of the herd. I'm wondering if the minister can tell me if there's been any development of a test for bovine tuberculosis other than . . . [interjection] Well, it deals with the inspection process, and that's what I'm trying to understand. Again, I'm trying to understand the inspection process. If there is such a thing as a bovine tuberculosis test without a postmortem effect, we could save a number of our buffalo. That's a concern I have.

I also have a concern as to whether we have increased the testing

of our live cattle as part of renewing our trade agreements with Japan. With regard again to the inspection process, have we developed an economic method of BSE testing for live cattle, or is it strictly that we're catching them in the slaughtering process? While they're alive and prior to exporting live cattle, is there any way that we have now of economically creating more testing?

Under Bill 38 it talks about protecting buyers of cattle from debt. It talks about increasing fines and allows fines to be levied on a per-head basis. One of the after-effects of the BSE crisis was farmers being forced economically to abandon their herds. Animals were dying of malnutrition. I'm wondering if to any extent Bill 38 on the per-head basis area and the fines provides any kind of support for farmers and ranchers who are still suffering from the economic effects of BSE.

Another area. I know that the minister has talked about this in Public Accounts. The minister expressed reservations about the CAIS program, and I'm just wondering if Bill 38 offers any recommendations or substitutions for the CAIS program, keeping in mind that this is a city fellow talking to an agricultural expert.

Thank you very much, and to whatever extent the minister can answer these questions, I would appreciate it.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available after each speaker from this point on.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few points, questions. I haven't been through the bill, the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act, as much as I wanted to, but one of the questions I have for the minister is: do they consider – and I haven't been able to find it anywhere – tattoos for purebred breeders? Often they don't want to put a brand on their cattle. I'm just wondering if that is recognized as an identifier. On page 6 under (n), "identifier" means," it goes through, but it doesn't talk about tattoos.

I'm also wondering about the new electronic tags, if they're coming through. Perhaps it's in here and I've missed it. Are these types of identifiers working for identification in there? It mentions in here freeze branding and hot branding. I've been told by some – and perhaps it isn't practised anymore – about acid branding. Are there any problems with that?

Also, some of the breeders that I'm aware of have been doing their number branding or personal identification on the opposite side of the cattle from where their brand is. For example, if their registered brand is on the left hip, they would put a number brand on the right hip. I'm wondering if that's legal because in here it says that it must be on the same side. I'm wondering if that's new to this legislation or if it's been that way and people haven't been following the legislation.

Other than that, I appreciate the minister bringing these three things under one act and trying to simplify it and bring it together because identification in commerce is certainly important in the cattle industry. I thank him for the efforts of going out to the industry and putting this together and, like I say, hopefully making it simpler, but it's still plenty complicated.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?
Would the minister like to close debate?

Mr. Horner: Yeah, I would.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to cover a couple of points before we did close the debate to maybe shorten the next phase of this bill.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned that he would have liked to have seen the three-column document. It's unfortunate that he was not able to attend the briefing session we had for the opposition a few days ago. He would have had opportunity to do that, and perhaps we wouldn't have gotten into all of this discussion about testing and a bunch of other things that are nonrelevant to what this legislation is.

When it comes to animal health, when it comes to protection of the animals' rights and animal husbandry, those are covered in totally separate acts. This has absolutely nothing to do with those. A number of the comments that were raised by the Liberal opposition were based on BSE, CWD, transferability of animal diseases: absolutely nothing to do with this legislation, totally irrelevant to what we're talking about here. I would encourage the hon. member to perhaps obtain the documents that we did send over to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar because a lot of that was in there, and it would save you the time of going through the legislation.

10:30

In regard to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner the whole idea of bringing the three acts together was indeed to create an atmosphere where we could use these new forms of identification, like the radio frequency ID tag. That's part and parcel of what we're trying to do here: to bring three acts that were done many, many years ago up to the new standard. Indeed, those things are in there, and once we get into some of the other questions in Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker, I will perhaps have more to say on it.

With that, I would ask that we call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a second time]

Bill 29 Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate May 1: Mr. Agnihotri]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few brief comments on Bill 29. Overall we have to applaud any enhancements to environmental protection in Alberta. I believe that most of this bill provides for a bulking up of existing legislation, particularly in regard to emission controls, trading, codes of practice for low-risk activities, and accessibility to sound environmental information.

As my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned last night – and I agree with him – the primary area of concern in this bill is in regard to contaminated sites and their management. The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act requires the reporting and immediate cleanup of spills and accidental contamination when it occurs. Certainly, this is something we can all get behind. The principle of making the polluter pay, not the government and certainly not the people, must be paramount. I understand that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View will be bringing forward a number of amendments in committee to ensure that such is the case and to strengthen this bill.

Albertans have made it abundantly clear that the health and well-being of their environment is of paramount importance. Increasingly we are getting more and more worried about the impact of industrial development in Alberta, particularly at this time of record-high oil

and gas prices and our headlong pursuit of profits. The numbers are quite staggering: over 350,000 oil and gas installations here and over 370,000 kilometres of pipelines, not all of which are in new or in pristine condition.

Alberta Environment has the awesome responsibility of watching over our most precious commodity, and every piece of legislation regarding the environment must be carefully studied for its impact. Albertans have placed their trust in Alberta Environment and the Alberta Legislature, so every piece of environmental legislation must be carefully examined. In amending the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and other legislation on the environment, we must guarantee that we do not in any way weaken our capacity to monitor, analyze, and hold accountable those people, companies, and organizations that allow release of contaminants into our environment.

Mr. Speaker, there will be plenty of debate during committee on the nuts and bolts of this bill and how to improve it, and I trust that the government will listen to any amendments in the spirit that they are intended, with an eye toward improving Bill 29, which will ultimately lead to a cleaner and healthier environment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In this province value quite often seems to have a dollar sign attached to it. My concern has to do with the environmental ministry receiving half a per cent of this government's budget and being expected with that half a per cent of government budget to provide the protection that Bill 29 is suggesting that it undertake. This province seems to be hell-bent on extraction of resources. The government backpedaled a bit, I'm pleased to see, on the MOSS, the minable oil sands. The former minister that we referred to earlier in discussion, now our representative in Washington, Mr. Smith, from Washington urged the Alberta government to get the oil and the gas out of the ground as quickly as possible because of its economic value.

Albertans have told this government that the three most important areas that have come out in poll after poll after poll are health care, education, and environment. Environment seems to be not only from a monetary standpoint, which is symbolic of the attitude this government provides for the environment, but in terms of practice something that is talked about but not followed up on. I am concerned that in the limited parks and protected areas, the 4 and a half per cent of land use in Alberta, intrusion has been permitted by oil and gas, by forestry, logging, et cetera, that we can't even protect this small percentage of our province.

There has been talk – and I'm sure the drilling rigs are on their way – of the Rumsey ecological area. To what extent the Whaleback will be protected is not clear. There does not seem to be a desire for this government to advance with any rapidity on protecting the Castle Crown wilderness area. While Suffield falls under the federal government's auspices because of the military base, I would like to see Alberta at least setting aside a portion of the land and saying: this land is sacred; no industrial intrusion will be permitted into these spaces.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and myself have been out to a series of rural forums that were held by land-use concerned individuals about the environmental effect on their groundwater of coal-bed methane drilling. The Minister of Energy said: well, drilling for regular gas and drilling for gas in coal, or coal-bed methane, is very much one and the same. However, as the hon. Member for Calgary-

Mountain View has pointed out, we need baseline testing. The type of baseline testing that's absolutely necessary to protect our water, which the hon. minister so frequently refers to as blue gold, is testing that involves isotope testing. We not only need to know what type of gas is in the water; we need to know the percentages and the types of gas that are there.

We lost our opportunity. The government allowed the economic activity of coal-bed methane to go ahead, and now we're five years behind in trying to track the effects that the drilling has or hasn't had in the Horseshoe Canyon, where the majority of the drilling has taken place. We need to have the scientific expertise to have a form of baseline testing that is comprehensive. We need to have a committee of experts such as Dr. David Schindler, who seems to be in the favour of this government in that he was appointed to the committee to look at remedies to the Lake Wabamun spill. We desperately need that expertise.

10:40

This province is out of balance. Economic drivers are sacrificing environmental viability. A First Nations expression is that we borrow this land from our grandchildren. As a grandfather I'm extremely concerned about our economic rush. I'm not the only one concerned about the economic rush. Some people would try and sideline me or label me as a tree hugger. I'm concerned about the long-term effects. I'm concerned about not knowing how vast or how narrow our underground aquifers are. We are rushing into a circumstance that could potentially contaminate those aquifers.

We can't drink oil; we can't drink gas. When I've been out in the rural public forums, I've recounted the story of King Midas, and that sort of works very well with the minister's comment about blue gold. Maybe that's why I think in terms of King Midas. King Midas asked for the power to turn anything he touched into gold. The thing that he valued most was his daughter, and he lost that daughter when he touched her. She turned into gold.

My concern is that we are selling off our future to the highest bidder at this point in terms of the rapidity with which we're drilling without having gone back in time and tried to decide to what extent and to what quantity and what percentage the gas that occurs in water has multiplied. We don't know for the last five years what extent drilling has had on the loss of pressure for wells. Until we have both the past history and a viable baseline testing for future drilling, we are putting the safety of our water at tremendous risk. Coal-bed methane isn't the only risk to water. Water is to an extent a renewable resource, but, as we know, with the glaciers rapidly melting and the demand upon our rivers for a variety of industrial and agricultural usages, we are putting our future water availability at great risk.

In March, when we as a Liberal caucus went up to Fort McMurray, the oil sands companies that we talked to were proud of the fact that they had not taken full advantage of the water allotment that they were permitted to take out of the Athabasca River. As the oil sands expand, more and more permission will be given to draw water from the Athabasca River. The Pembina Institute, Dr. David Schindler, the Parkland Institute, a variety of reputable organizations and scientists have spoken out about the problem of the continued draw from the Athabasca River. We've taken some steps to limit further drawing from the Oldman River, but the government is still willing to do interbasin transfers.

Water is beyond a doubt with air, with land our most important natural resource. People are our most important resource. The future is not being looked into in our out-of-balance economic drive. If we don't take the time to slow down and get it right, we won't have a second time.

When I've spoken to representatives of oil and gas companies in our rural outreach, they've said that they want very definite regulations from the government. They said: give us the regulations, and we'll follow them; we're in this for the long haul. Self-reliance and self-governance isn't good enough. This government has to set the example and set the requirements. Set the bar for any resource extraction companies to meet, and they will meet it. We have examples of companies who are meeting these standards, but we need to raise the bar because water, air – obviously, we can't live without them.

I am concerned that while this Bill 29 starts to address some of the areas, such as abandoned well sites – although it still puts Alberta taxpayers on the hook for the cleanup, particularly of any companies that have gone bankrupt in the meantime – our environment continues to be threatened.

The government does not seem to be particularly selective of where it undertakes an economic activity; for example, the placement of wind energy turbines. While this is the alternative energy we very much appreciate, we question the location in the Cypress Hills where original historic fescue grass exists. We also are concerned about the effect on historic natural grasses where there's a proposed site east of Fort Macleod.

No amount of money, no amount of development, no amount of immediate gratification can pay for the loss of our future and the future of our grandchildren. We need balance in this province. We need the government to recognize that .5 per cent is almost not worthy of discussion. Albertans have been deserted by a government that puts immediate economic prosperity over long-term economic prosperity and over the quality of life and the survival of Alberta as we know it. The environment deserves much better than it is receiving at this time from this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member. As I listen to his speech, I just have one simple question: have you even read the bill?

Mr. Chase: Yes. To respond, I have. In addressing the bill I talked about its shortcomings. I talked about what it contained, I talked about it being a good start, and I also talked about its shortcomings. What it is missing is considerably more important than what it contains, and I am suggesting that the government look at these shortcomings, and within this bill, possibly during Committee of the Whole, we'll try to address its shortcomings with amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

10:50

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a great deal of interest in making some comments to Bill 29, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006. I see a great diversity of amendments within this act, six of them otherwise. The scope of the sum total is quite wide, and certainly I do see some merit in at least half of them. Really, I am quite optimistic that with some amendments this bill, in fact, would be a net gain to enhancing and protecting our natural environment here in the province, but I do want to put in that caveat that I do have some amendments to bring forward.

The proposed amendments from the minister here I just want to

make some comments on specific to sections 4, 5, and 6, Mr. Speaker, straightaway. The proposed amendments relating to the minister's right to delegate to any person a great many of the minister's duties and obligations is somewhat disconcerting. Yes, this may give Alberta Environment some flexibility to work closely with environmental experts of some renown, and certainly we have quite a number of excellent experts in many areas right here in the province, but I also am concerned that perhaps there's nothing to prevent this partnering from occurring with environmental experts that are tied to industry. I think the independence of a tribunal or a consulting group is absolutely paramount when we're dealing with the environment, so I would ask: what oversight is available, then, and guaranteed to prevent conflict of interest with this partnership section of this bill?

I know that the Environmental Law Centre has contacted the minister's office to discuss their concerns with Bill 29, which very closely mirror my own concerns and the concerns of my caucus on Bill 29. The Environmental Law Centre recommended a public registry of all delegations and transfers of power as well as guaranteed access to all accompanying documentation: contracts, agreements, such like. Such an amendment would recognize that it was, in fact, beneficial for Alberta Environment to partner with various groups and individuals in certain situations yet at the same time recognize that the public accountability guaranteed by such a registry would help to ensure not only due process and the judicious use of delegation but also the proper completion of statutory obligations. So I will ask the minister then: will he be discussing such amendments relating to the public accountability of delegated powers? This is something that is absolutely crucial to the effectiveness of this part of the bill.

The ministry's government press release announces that "another proposed change will improve programs for reclamation of coal and oil sands mines, and ensure progressive and ongoing reclamation of these sites is promoted and acknowledged." I would like to ask: what exactly is this promotion of reclaimed sites accomplished by this bill? Does the minister propose to promote past reclamation when, according to the Auditor General, the ministry does not obtain sufficient financial security from the current sites to ensure reclamation? We have in the oil sands area some of the very largest sort of waste acreages that you'll find anywhere on the planet, and we have not seen adequate reclamation of tailing ponds and some landfills as well. I'm just not seeing that there's any real incentive for the various companies up there to in fact engage in starting to do effective reclamation, especially of tailing ponds. Perhaps they would if they had a financial assurance that would be submitted before that would somehow force them to engage in reclamation.

I would like to know: why is there so much emissions trading relegated to the regulations part of this bill? There's nothing that we can put into legislation to ensure proper emissions thresholds. If the section 8 purpose is to strengthen emission controls, why are there no controls to be put into legislation? Why are there no details? I think that it is the dominion of this House to put in guiding principles, and when we're dealing with the environment, with air pollution, I think it's incumbent upon us to in fact put those right into the legislation and not leave it to the vagaries of regulation.

So I would ask the hon. minister, please, to clarify what some of these regulations might in fact look like. If we're not going to see them in the law, then I think it's incumbent upon him to at least give us some idea of where he wants to go. What might some of them be? How might they be determined? What's to prevent industry from setting its own thresholds given that the minister may choose to delegate to industry this part of the regulation? We've already seen the fiasco of the alleged Kyoto targets that have been set here

by this government, which aren't reduction targets at all but intensity targets, which are less than meaningful. I don't think we want to head down that same path with this important bill.

Given the extension of reporting and remediation responsibilities backwards to before the EPEA was enacted in section 12 and given that the Auditor General's report from a few years ago found that Alberta Environment was not collecting sufficient security to adequately cover the costs of remediation and that, in fact, in 2004-2005 this problem had still not been addressed after six years of being addressed by the Auditor General: with all of those things in mind I'm just curious to know what this new backwards extension of remediation responsibility actually amounts to. I think that after six or seven years this needs to be addressed in a meaningful way, and I just don't see it happening here in this section 12 of this Bill 29.

I'd like to ask as well: how does the hon. member respond to the Environmental Law Centre's concerns in regard to the reporting of historical releases? Without making the failure to report such releases an offence, it can easily be argued that this amendment has, in fact, no teeth. So I would ask: will the hon. member please consider the amendments proposed by the Environmental Law Centre, with whom I've been interacting quite closely here, especially those relating to sections 227 and 228 of the original act, making the failure to report historical releases an offence?

How about companies that are now defunct? The Alberta taxpayer is often held holding the bag after such a cleanup, and in fact companies are restructuring themselves so that they can disappear or implode or fall into a giant trust hole upon the completion of a project. With the scale and scope of the projects that are going on here now, it would be frightening to think that once they're done, they will simply cease to exist and thus cease to be able to pin any responsibility on them for the huge cleanups that are involved with these energy sites.

Does the hon. member know if the ministry is pursuing the environmental royalty initiative that he proposed here in this House in March, right? I was very heartened to hear it, but I also felt the stinging slap of some unseen force that suddenly removed the hundred million dollar a year concept to build an environmental trust fund, which I found very encouraging but then equally discouraging once it suddenly disappeared.

11:00

In the old act, section 112 read something like this: "take all reasonable measures to . . . remove or otherwise dispose of the substance in such a manner as to effect maximum protection to human life, health and the environment." Now the amendment says in the new bit, section 112: to "remediate, manage, remove or otherwise dispose of the substance in such a manner as to prevent an adverse effect or further adverse effect."

While of course we recognize that there are a wide variety of techniques or technologies resulting in reclamation of polluted sites, the original section, in my mind, seems much more demanding than the proposed amendment. I would ask the hon. minister: what, in fact, prompted the language change in this section, and what does it represent substantively, if you please? Why not require or continue to require this maximum protection of human life, health, and the environment as well as remediate, manage, and otherwise remove the substance in a manner to prevent the adverse effect? If you stick those two together, the amendment I think then would be strengthened in remediation responsibilities rather than watered down. That would be my suggestion for that bit there.

Finally, what do the amendments to section 146 of the original act actually propose to do? Will your average person living in this

province actually have better and freer access to information, or does this act restrict information? What do the changes allowing the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations concerning the access to information actually mean? Why do they seem limited to the progressive reclamation sites?

Mr. Speaker, those are my observations that I would like to bring up at this point in time in regard to this bill. I do have lots of specific comments on some of the language in each section, which I will reserve for the next reading. As I say, there are a couple of sections that I think deserve some amendments.

All of those things being said, at least we do have an environmental bill that has come up. Considering the wilful ignorance that I think takes place in regard to environmental protection in this House, I find that I have to look for some small signs of hope in the midst of everything else to suggest that we are addressing environmental protection and enhancement. Bill 29 does do that, so that gives me something to at least hang my hat on.

Thank you for the opportunity to make comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there others?

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened very carefully to all of the comments, concerns, and questions from all of the members that have spoken to this bill last night and tonight. I can assure you that I will be answering those questions, and I will be answering them when we go into Committee of the Whole. With that, I'd like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 28
Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise tonight in Committee of the Whole on Bill 28, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006. I just want to take a few minutes to respond to some comments made by members of the opposition during second reading. The Leader of the Official Opposition stated during second reading:

For democracy to have legitimacy and for elected members to have legitimacy themselves, the citizens [and] the voters in any society need to have confidence that their election processes and mechanics are working properly. Unfortunately, those election processes and mechanics broke down pretty badly in the last municipal election in Calgary.

Well, as so often is the case in this House, the Leader of the Official Opposition is wrong.

The election processes in Calgary absolutely worked in the 2004 municipal election. The current process in place caught the attempted fraudulent voting, and there was not one special ballot that was in dispute that made it into the system. The process was caught, and the people have been charged with voter fraud.

Now, while the process worked in detecting the fraudulent ballots, the process that the returning officer was to follow wasn't as clear. So one of the changes being proposed in this bill is an amendment which will have a person appointed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs make a determination on those special ballots that were set aside by the returning officer, and this will help close the gap in that process.

Mr. Chairman, the Leader of the Official Opposition also expressed concern that the bill allows too much discretion to local municipalities. Again, I've heard in this Assembly the Leader of the Opposition criticize the government for treating municipalities like children, and now he says we shouldn't give those municipalities the discretion to customize their own voting process. What works in a municipality of 1 million people is a lot different than what works in a village of several hundred, and our committee heard this request time and time again during the hearings throughout the province.

Finally, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview had concerns during second reading around the process of special ballots and whether direct contact is made by the returning officer with the person requesting the special ballot. The process in this legislation regarding special ballots will mirror what is currently in the provincial Election Act. Therefore, special ballots could be requested by e-mail, and there would not be direct contact. However, the important thing for the member to remember is that the special ballot only has importance when it is returned. He should be aware that when a person requests a special ballot and returns it, he or she must also sign a declaration similar to what is signed when voting in person. That declaration is a legal document, and if it is determined to be fraudulent, then appropriate court action will occur, as in fact it did in ward 10.

All of these changes are designed to enable as many people as possible to participate in municipal elections. Both members that I referred to this evening mentioned in their remarks the concern about the low voter turnout. Our committee was also concerned about that and cognizant of the fact that when it recommended many of the changes in the proposed bill.

With those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to discussion in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise with some interest to speak on some of the specific elements of Bill 28, Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006. I certainly have reason to believe that this is a utilitarian and perhaps even somewhat progressive piece of legislation, that seeks to enable council elections to function in a more smooth and reasonable way. Certainly, we are as a caucus with the New Democrats considering tentatively supporting the legislation. I just want to look at some of the specific language that this bill has and try to look for some clarification and ask some questions. That sounds like fun.

11:10

Starting with page 1 of the bill and talking about "presiding deputy," this presumes to mean a person "who has been appointed as a presiding deputy pursuant to section 14, by a returning officer." Mr. Chairman, the creation of this new position begs the question: why is it needed, and what exactly is this new position addressing? It seems to me that it's already covered somehow, but perhaps I'm not seeing something that the authors could illuminate for me.

Section 10 of these proposed amendments reads, "A presiding deputy shall carry out the duties of a presiding deputy under this Act and any other duties that a returning officer assigns to the presiding

deputy.” This doesn’t really clarify why the position is needed, in my mind. Obviously, we can assume that it is to give the returning officer something to look like the eyes and ears on the ground, I suppose, and allow the returning officer to be in more than one place at one time and address several issues in a more timely fashion. Perhaps the hon. member could give me a little additional information on that section, and we’d be happy to accommodate for that.

On page 2 it says: give unto the elected authority “the power to pass bylaws and resolutions.” Okay. This gives more sort of regional and jurisdictional flexibility, I suppose, to address needs that may arise in regard to special ballots; for example, when they must be received by and whatnot, opening of polls, and posting of voting instructions, I would presume in other languages as well. I don’t know. So that looks fine.

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Page 3 deals with impartiality.

- 13.1(1) A returning officer must be independent and impartial when performing the duties of a returning officer.
- (2) No local jurisdiction, its officers or any other person shall obstruct or attempt to influence the returning officer in the carrying out of the duties of a returning officer.

The specification of impartiality seems to me a little bit odd given that it’s so obvious. You know, there haven’t been any accusations of partiality in recent years. However, many of the amendments being proposed here reflect the desire to anticipate potential problems, so I guess that, really, it can’t hurt.

Just pursuant to this impartiality section, though, if you do want to mention it, then I think you have to have measuring sticks by which to look and see if someone is, in fact, impartial. Do we look at, say, the associations of that individual, perhaps potentially being a relative of a candidate or perhaps a member of a certain political group or what have you? I mean, these things are perhaps what we should look at not just municipally but provincially in terms of returning officers because, of course, if it is even perceived, like if someone is married to someone who is a member or an executive of a political party and then is a returning officer, then I think that the potential for a perceived lack of impartiality is there. I guess we might as well take it the whole nine yards if that’s the way we want to go.

Pages 4 and 5 talk about a person being not eligible to be nominated as a candidate in any election under this act if on nomination day the person has been convicted of an offence under the Election Act. Okay. That’s pretty straightforward. Prohibitions in regard to official agents and scrutineers as well: that’s got no problem at all.

Page 5 specifies that nomination forms must include “the name, address and telephone number,” and I presume that this is the candidate’s campaign manager. But what if the candidate doesn’t have a campaign manager? We might want to suggest that this section read, perhaps: if applicable. If someone maybe doesn’t have an official agent or what have you, then it’s not an issue.

On page 5 again it talks about the minimum number of electors required to sign the nomination of a candidate. That number must be at least five and not more than 100. The maximum used to be 25. Why is it changed from 25 to 100? What’s the purpose of this? Are we serving the best interests of accessibility and democracy to increase that by such a large amount?

Page 6 talks about clearing up something about candidates’ responsibility for the actions of their campaign workers. The imposing of liability, though, Mr. Chairman, on candidates for the

doings of campaign workers is very contentious and I think is perhaps a little dangerous. In that ward 10 case the candidate had to resign her seat and did not face charges, but five of her campaign workers were charged. I don’t know; perhaps we are opening a can of worms here that is beyond the ability of legislation to deal with. A court of law might be better suited to deal with these sorts of goings-on, cheating and whatnot, in a campaign.

Pages 7 and 8 talk about the languages section. I don’t see a big problem with that, but I guess I would ask the question: will the province, Municipal Affairs, be responsible for the procurement and translation of instructions? I’d be curious about that.

Page 10, I guess, is a bit peculiar because it says that notice of a bylaw to be passed under section 53 must be circulated in one newspaper publication or mailed directly to every residence. I would just like to perhaps highlight the idea that the section should say something like “a major newspaper” because, of course, there are many newspapers around, and if you pick something that is not widely read, then perhaps you wouldn’t be giving justice to this section, getting the information out like you should.

Other than that, I guess those are the main areas that I wanted to just point out, looking for clarification from the authors of the bill. My colleague previously mentioned the concerns we had in regard to special ballots, and I think that the hon. member did address that in his comments here earlier this evening, so that’s good.

Hopefully, we can see some proper administration of democracy at the municipal level here in the province. We certainly have in the past. I think that one of the things that’s important for us to try to encourage is the overall participation rate of voters in municipal elections. Hopefully, having smooth and straightforward regulation that shows transparency and impartiality will help to promote a higher voter turnout in municipal elections in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

11:20

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I want to hand out both bouquets and beefs. Under the bouquet I would like to thank the hon. promoter of this bill, who also comes from Calgary, that great city where the Flames will soon win. The bouquet I wish to provide is the fact that such great consultation took place. Eighteen different opportunities were provided to Albertans to comment, question, provide input into Bill 28, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006. For that, the hon. member deserves praise, as do the members of his committee.

With regard to the beefs, the hon. member suggested that the problem in ward 10 was caught with great speed, and he suggested that our hon. Leader of the Opposition should have realized the speed at which the difficulties were caught. It took weeks and months before the government finally got involved in the process. One of the reasons they got involved in the process was that a Calgary judge had several questions that were not able to be answered, and the individual whose campaign managers and members subsequently faced court challenges basically pleaded the Fifth, and the expenses associated with a trial and investigation were waived.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

However, in the meantime, other candidates involved in that election received no financial support, and their court costs in trying to get to the truth were in the \$50,000-plus area. Had the Alberta

government moved in somewhat faster than snail or glacial pace, these expenditures would not have taken place.

I would like to see the same kind of effort, the same type of election improvement concerns that Bill 28 provides for municipalities provided to our province. The need for identification of voters is absolutely a part of the democratic process. In a provincial election as well as a municipal election there should be a requirement for picture ID. The confusion that arose over the mailed-in ballots still has to be addressed to a greater degree, but with the majority of voters showing up to register their votes personally, having at least one picture ID with another accepted form of ID, a health card, whatever, would ensure that the process is, indeed, valid.

In the provincial election the same type of controversy did not exist to that magnitude, but there was definite controversy with regard to what constituted a spoiled ballot in the Edmonton-Castle Downs constituency. Three times the original vote was upheld. Three times the same ballots were gone over, and the same conclusions resulted. However, with a judiciary review the result of the Edmonton-Castle Downs election was reversed.

It would be great if elections were so successful that there was no controversy, that the person who won, Mr. Chairman, won hands down, that there was no doubt about the integrity of the process. This bill goes a long way to improving the municipal process. I would like to see the same type of energy, effort, and scrutiny applied to the provincial process.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that, and I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 28 this evening. Certainly, when we review this bill in committee, it's important that we remember that we must promote integrity and confidence in the municipal election process by setting election standards that result in a more secure and transparent election process. It has been discussed here before that we must acknowledge and encourage the public's role and participation in the election process and ensure that the legislation permits both small and large jurisdictions to respond to their specific needs by permitting some discretionary procedural options within the framework of this legislation.

Certainly, when we're looking at amending the Local Authorities Election Act to make it more secure and transparent, the first issue that comes to mind is the Calgary ward 10 election in 2004. Of course, there was the subsequent review of that incident, and we have this legislation before us. We also have participation by Mr. Clark, the former Ethics Commissioner. The events that led up to this sort of – well, it wasn't really an inquiry, Mr. Chairman. Some members of the government caucus, the Progressive Conservative Party, at one point had advocated for an inquiry, but it was decided that there would be this inspection and that the inspection would get to the bottom of these problems with the ward 10 vote.

Now, we've been through this before in this House, but certainly the allegations that were presented in the ward 10 voting scandal were serious. Whether we had this inspection process or this inquiry or a combination of both through this MLA review committee, we're sitting here this evening in committee discussing Bill 28.

You know, there were statements made. This is a statement from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's discussions at second reading were challenged earlier in debate, Mr. Chairman, by the hon. Member for

Calgary-West. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview had this to say. This is from the *Calgary Herald* dated Thursday, December 16, 2004, and this is in discussions around the guarantee that the inspection that will be conducted may not be the same as a public inquiry. The hon. member stated, and I quote: this feels like Tory insiders covering up for Tory insiders. End of quote. We can't have a process where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview or anyone else does not have confidence in the system. I hope that this bill is going to protect and enhance municipal elections.

11:30

Now, Mr. Chairman, as was previously discussed in this Assembly in regard to this matter, there were a lot of allegations that have led to this Bill 28, but we can't ignore the fact that election officials rejected over 1,200 mail-in ballots for that ward. The person who initially won the election had to resign a short time after that. Under the Election Act we know that no one can supply a ballot to any person or request a ballot in the name of some other person whether the name is that of a person living or dead or a fictitious person. Offences under this act carry a maximum penalty of \$10,000 or six months in jail, so this is a serious issue, and this bill is hopefully, hon. Member for Calgary-West, going to deal with this in an effective manner.

Have there been any other cases in Alberta where there has been election fraud at the municipal level? Well, I can't recall any, Mr. Chairman. Other hon. members of this Assembly may be able to help me. I can't think of any other examples. I can certainly think of an example at the provincial level. This has been discussed in the Legislative Assembly, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and is around the whole issue of special ballots.

We have to be very, very careful about how we administer these special ballots. When we look specifically at section 38 of this legislation, Mr. Chairman, and the special ballots process, the key provision here is that it allows the returning officer to set aside special ballots received that are believed to be in contravention of the act. They can then report the alleged contravention to a person or persons appointed by the minister to determine the validity of the ballots.

This section is a direct response to the ward 10 situation in Calgary. This is a provision designed to ensure integrity in the process and also ensure that the returning officer is not put into a position whereby the returning officer has to police the provisions or has to accept special ballots that they feel are questionable. That certainly didn't happen at the provincial level with my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie. It was discovered that there were special ballots that went through the whole system there, and unfortunately the people who had supposedly voted were outside the country and had indicated – I'm not sure, but I think by affidavit – that they were certainly not in the country and did not vote, but someone had somehow used their name to vote. We may make light of a matter like that, but if we go up to the north side of the city, there were three votes that determined an election. So every vote counts, and we should count them carefully. Whether it's 1,266 or 4 or 3, every vote counts.

When we go through this, whether it's section 32 or section 33 or section 56, this bill will certainly strengthen our process.

As I understand it, the city of Edmonton has had a look at this legislation. They expressed no concerns. The AUMA was also contacted. They were involved in the consultation process and expressed no reservations about the content of this bill. This bill leaves the decision-making in the hands of the local authorities. This respects municipal authority and autonomy instead of prescribing rules to them like they are children of the province. This

bill, I think, will go a long way to ensure the integrity and confidence in the election process at the municipal level with respect to the autonomy of municipalities.

Now, with that, I would like to remind all hon. members of this Assembly – and I'm sure they all are keenly aware of this – of the fixed election dates that occur on the municipal calendar. This seems to work very well for the municipalities, and I think it would work equally well for this Assembly, Mr. Chairman. There's no one challenging me on relevance, but we're in committee, and I'm allowed a certain amount of leeway in discussion of this bill. Certainly, I would encourage all hon. members as they review this legislation to be mindful of the fact that there are set, fixed election dates at the municipal level. I think, even in light of the hour we should consider that at this level of government as well. I think it's a step in the right direction, and when we talk about promoting the integrity and confidence in the municipal election process, we should talk also about promoting the integrity and confidence in the provincial election process. That would certainly be one way of achieving that.

This bill unfortunately doesn't go to any length to encourage more citizens to participate in the election process. Certainly, Mr. Chairman, when we look at the press release that was issued regarding the recommendations of the Local Authorities Election Act review and the fact that the minister accepted recommendations of the MLA committee and the fact that the committee recommended that the amendments which are reflected in this bill be made prior to the 2007 general election, there is no information, particularly when we think about the campaign process, about how we could encourage or increase the voter participation rate at the municipal level. It is part of this bill, and it's a part of this bill that's absent.

How do we do that? Australia, Mr. Chairman, has some tough laws to encourage voter participation. You have to vote. I don't know if we need to do that here, but there has to be a way to encourage citizens to exercise their democratic right, not only at the provincial level but certainly at the municipal level.

Maybe October is a bad time to have the elections, but in the cities people are not voting in large numbers. If it was predominantly a rural province with no large urban centres, well, we could say that farmers don't have the time in October because they're busy getting their crops from the fields, and they wouldn't have time to listen to the campaigns, maybe attend a forum, and then exercise their vote. But that's not the case. In urban areas there's no reason in the world why people can't take half an hour out of their day, if they're eligible, and vote. Voter participation rates are going down, down, down. There is no attempt in this bill to stop that decline and reverse it.

11:40

Mr. Chairman, I'm having a good look at this. There is no indication that this matter has been considered. Certainly, I'm not going to be proposing an amendment at this time to Bill 28 to try to fix that, but it is something that this House should consider. How do we improve the voter participation rate at the municipal level? I think it's about time we did this. If the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has any thoughts on this – or maybe it has been discussed. I understand that the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster was also involved in this committee. Perhaps he could assist this House and give us an update regarding this and if this issue was discussed at all. There are a lot of recommendations here, and we are implementing most of them, from what I can see, but this is one issue that I think warrants further discussion by this House.

With those comments at this time on Bill 28, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to another hon. colleague. Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 28 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 32

Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very briefly, there were a couple of questions posed by the members for Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-Glenora during comments in second reading debate, and I'd just like to quickly touch on those.

First of all, the Member for Edmonton-Centre expressed some concerns about whether the act will ever be proclaimed. I guess that I would like to assure the hon. member that since the introduction of this act I've had a number of groups approach me such as the Alberta Medical Association, and I can tell the hon. member that between these groups and myself we will ensure that the bill is proclaimed, that there's no delay in that.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre also mentioned the cost savings that the system would enjoy if we increased the number of donors, and again I couldn't agree more with her.

The member did raise some concerns regarding the selling and purchasing of tissues and organs, and that is expressly covered in the legislation under section 3(5). The regulations will specifically set out the rules and requirements of any organs or tissues being brought into Alberta for transplantation. These organizations tasked with procuring tissues in Alberta are accredited by the American Association of Tissue Banks or the Eye Bank Association of America, and they will ensure that proper screening and handling procedures are in place. Also, Health Canada has developed safety standards which organ and tissue procurement and transplant agencies must adhere to.

Once this legislation has passed, it will enable the government to require that all organs and tissues used for transplantation in Alberta, regardless of where they come from, come from accredited sources. In other words, Alberta transplant teams can only deal with organizations in other provinces and countries who meet minimum safety and consent requirements.

The member will also note that fines for contravention of this act have been substantially increased, which should also deter any persons thinking about such activities.

The member also raised issues around imminent death, and that has been dealt with in this legislation to the satisfaction of the medical community.

Finally, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora had some very complimentary comments, and I thank him for those. The only question he posed that I could see revolved around the issue of religious consent, and I'll concede that that's one area where he probably has more expertise than me. However, it's my understanding that most major religions encourage organ and tissue donation. Many of them at the very least allow their followers to

make a personal decision in this regard. Religious beliefs vary greatly even within the same religion. My main comment regarding religious consent would be that if someone does object to donation of tissue or organs based on religious beliefs, they should make known to family members and document that expressed wish. In the absence of any such documentation it will be the family which makes the final decision.

With those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd be pleased to listen to others here in committee. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I want to indicate to the hon. member that I support the bill in all its facets. I would like to make a recommendation to the hon. sponsor of the bill, and that is to consider not only the signing of the Alberta health care card but also allowing the signing of the back of the licence because quite often the documentation that gets picked up is the photo documentation, and if we can capture the desires of the individual to donate their organs and tissues, it doubles the potential of life being passed on.

With regard to that desire, I want to provide the motivation for that suggestion. This letter came from Sandra Ronney, and it's self-evident.

In December, we lost our very healthy, 20 year old daughter, Raelyn Palmer, in a tragic car accident in downtown Calgary. I thought it appropriate that now, during the national awareness campaign for tissue and organ donation, I point out what I believe to be a serious flaw in the Alberta organ donation program.

Raelyn and her sister Megan were both adamant that they wished to donate their organs if anything should ever happen to them. When they received their Alberta Health Care cards, they signed the organ donation consent with me as a witness. How proud they both were to have made and committed to that decision! Both my husband and I signed our cards as well.

When EMS arrived at the scene of the accident in the early morning of December 2, 2005, the only identification they took with them to Foothills Hospital was Raelyn's driver's license, as that ID had her photo on it. I was told by the police officer who attended the accident that this is the only form of identification that usually accompanies accident victims to the hospital. Raelyn always carried her Alberta Health Care card and it was with her at the time of her death, yet her organs were not harvested because medical staff at Foothills did not have the authority to do so without her signed consent form. Because Raelyn died at the scene of the accident, we were not notified of her death until it was too late for doctors to ask permission to harvest her organs. I am truly disappointed that her wishes were not carried out and, every time I hear the advertisement for the current awareness campaign, I think that if we had a better consent system, perhaps her wishes would have been carried out and, through her death she may have saved lives.

My question to you is this: Why can we not include this consent on our driver's license as, I understand, is done in other provinces in Canada? In many cases such as this, EMS cannot afford to take the time to rifle through a purse or wallet for anything other than photo ID. It therefore makes sense to me, that

government issued photo identification such as a driver's license should include such crucial information.

I look forward to your thoughts on this issue.

Best regards,
Sandra Ronney.

She is a Calgary-Varsity constituent who asked me to share her concerns.

Thank you very much. I would like to call the question.

11:50

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 32, Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 32 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Renner: I'd like to move that the committee now rise and report Bill 28 and Bill 32.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 28 and Bill 32.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the progress that we made this evening, I would move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 11:54 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, May 3, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much. Of course, Mr. Speaker, your constituency is Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, and we all know that some very special people in Alberta come from Barrhead. One of them is my wife, Phyllis, and another one is a special woman who has joined us this afternoon. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mrs. Joyce Shaw.

Many Albertans like to connect to our open and accountable and responsive government through a front-line staff person in our district offices. They appreciate the top-level service that they receive from Albertans like Joyce Shaw, who works for Sustainable Resource Development in the fish and wildlife division office in Barrhead, Alberta. Mrs. Shaw is an expert at answering questions about hunting and fishing and problem wildlife and for sure other areas. She knows who to talk to if a question comes up. That's because she has been providing this service to Albertans for 50 years. On May 1, 1956, Joyce joined the Alberta public service and remains an employee to this day. She is the longest serving employee in the Alberta government. During this time Joyce has provided committed and dedicated service to the people of Alberta.

I see that Mrs. Shaw is standing. The folks that are joining her today are Mr. Milt McKee, a fish and wildlife officer in our Barrhead office; Mrs. Eleanor Frazer, Mrs. Shaw's sister; Mr. Bob Frazer, her brother-in-law; Mr. Harry Barton, her brother; Mrs. Cecile Barton, her sister-in-law; Mr. Val Fischer and Mrs. Doreen Fischer; and Joyce's niece Rhonda Kozak. Mr. Speaker, this is an exceptional, dedicated lady. I see them all rising, and I'd ask the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Hon. members and to the minister, thank you very much for that kind introduction of a very significant constituent of mine. I just want to add a couple of words to Joyce. She not only has endured 50 years in the public service of the province of Alberta. That is half the history of the province. She is also, however, a very professional person, a very warm person, and a person very much loved by the people I have the privilege of representing. Can you imagine, hon. members – can you imagine? – how much roadkill has crossed her desk in the last 50 years? So, Joyce, well done. And she's continuing to work.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have three introductions today, and they're seated in the members' gallery, the public gallery, and your gallery. The first is an impressive group of high school students from the 2006 Forum for Young Albertans. They're here from all over the province and are spending this week learning about the

inner workings of the provincial government. Yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting with them to talk about my role as Premier and answer some insightful questions they had about politics in our province.

Second, it's my pleasure to introduce Colin and Lila Eicher. Colin is the owner and CEO of June Warren Publishing, located here in Alberta. They publish, among other publications, *Oilweek* magazine. Colin was also the successful bidder on a lunch with me at NAIT's annual bigwig cruise fundraising event. He and his wife, Lila, and I just enjoyed a terrific meal of egg salad sandwiches. We enjoyed the meal in support of NAIT's education programs.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to introduce Deborah Owrain, her husband, Doug, and their daughter Kristine, who are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. Deborah has been a wonderful addition to the Legislature family over the past years as deputy secretary of cabinet. Her husband, Doug, served as vice-president academic and provost at the University of Alberta. Deborah and Doug will be leaving Alberta this summer as Doug has accepted a position with the University of British Columbia at their Kelowna campus. Their daughter Kristine is off to Carleton University this fall, where she'll pursue a degree in journalism.

I would now ask the Forum for Young Albertans, the Eichers, and the Owrains to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of home-educated students from my constituency of Stony Plain. There are seven students accompanied by their leaders Mrs. Ferne Cymbaluk, Mrs. Jolene Burnstad, Mrs. Dawn Sirdar, and Mrs. Janet Sawatzky. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a real honour for me today to introduce 17 dynamic young students from the aging and soon to be replaced Delnorte school in Innisfree. They are accompanied by their teachers, Miss Tiffany Tomkow and Mr. Mike Strom, and by their bus driver, Mr. Barry Feschuk. Out in Innisfree we say that we don't have a lot of students, but quality beats quantity every time. I would ask the students to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Darcie Acton, who resides in the hamlet of Wagner in the Lesser Slave Lake constituency. She is accompanied by her father, Jim Acton, of Edmonton. Darcie is the fund development co-ordinator for Northern Lakes College and a councillor for the MD of Lesser Slave Lake. She is in Edmonton for discussions on postsecondary education and the Northern Alberta Development Council.

Mr. Speaker, Jim Acton has had a distinguished career in government spanning 38 years as the director of operations and construction for Alberta parks and then as the government liaison for international sporting events. He is the founding director of the Alberta Provincial Parks Alumni and was the liaison for former Premier Lougheed at the Sarajevo Winter Olympic Games in 1984. Jim most recently served as one of Alberta's centennial ambassadors.

Mr. Speaker, if I could ask Darcie and Jim Acton, who are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, to stand up, and I would ask the Assembly to give them great applause.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 18 of Alberta's brightest and best students. That's right. They're here in the public gallery today. They hail from Lakedell school, and they're accompanied by two teachers, Ms Arlene Jackson and Mr. Rick Southern. I'm just glad that they could visit us today, and I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly John Patrick Day. John Day is a local historian. He is a keen observer of local, provincial, and national politics, and it is also interesting to note that he was also a coach of a rival high school *Reach for the Top* team when you were involved in those competitions. He told me earlier that your teams were always well prepared and very, very competitive. Mr. John Patrick Day is in the public gallery, and I would now ask him to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Continuing Care Standards

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nearly a year after the Auditor General's scathing report this government finally released their new provincial standards for continuing care. Unfortunately, it appears that Alberta seniors will have to wait even longer for the complete remedy to our province's ailing long-term care system. In fact, legislative changes won't even be made until next spring. My questions are to the Premier. Why is this government releasing standards today but waiting until the spring of 2007 to make any legislative changes?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports can speak to the specifics, but I can say that the significance of the new standards is not just the improvements to accommodation standards. What we will now have is consistency across the system.

I'll have the hon. minister provide the details.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased that these standards are here today, and I know that everyone in this Assembly must be just as pleased. You're absolutely right. I think that we really need to thank once again the MLA task force, that met with Albertans and met more than once. I think we need to thank the Alberta Senior Citizens' Housing Association, the Long Term Care Association, the operators, the regional health authorities, absolutely everyone who had input into these standards. This is such good news that they're here today. As the member said, it has been a year. It's been a very thoughtful year. It's been a year of hard work. Our staff have worked very hard, and they need to be thanked as

well. As you read through these, hon. member, you will see the goodness that is here for all Albertans in long-term care, in supportive living, and in our lodges. I look forward to any other questions there may be.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us how many of these standards – and there are three different kinds: the health, the accommodation, and the facilities, I think – will be legislated?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's entirely up to the minister as to whether legislative changes are required, but all facilities and operators are expected to implement these new standards as soon as possible. We will see them implemented either through regulation, policy, or legislation, as I understand it, by April 2007. I'd like to remind the hon. member that you just don't snap your fingers and expect changes to fall from heaven.

Ms Blakeman: You've had a year.

Mr. Klein: It's less than a year, Mr. Speaker, and all of the recommendations will be implemented.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the Premier: can he tell us why an independent provincial monitoring and enforcement mechanism was not put in place to ensure compliance with this standard? We've got checkerboarding across the RHAs. Why wasn't it independent and provincial?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, checkerboarding is the wrong term to use because what the report accomplishes is consistency across the system. Relative to the specifics of the questions, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important to recognize that the accommodation standards are going to apply for the very first time to all 400 facilities – to absolutely every facility – whether it is public or privately funded. That alone is key. I think that it's also important to recognize that there will be an accreditation process for every single one of those facilities as well.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: This government's notion that long-term care and aging will be responsible for bankrupting the health care system has resulted in new standards that off-load responsibility to regional health authorities, residents, and their families. Policies to ensure compliance with continuing care health service standards have also become the responsibility of the RHAs. My question would go to the Premier. Given that this government is off-loading responsibility for monitoring compliance with the standards, what additional funding will the RHA be getting to meet these standards?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll take the question under advisement, but I will say that, you know, it's never enough for the opposition. I would ask all hon. members to bring some perspective back to the debate. We do have a younger population than the national average, and our spending on long-term care is higher than the national

average. So funding is not the only answer. Obviously, we need to do a better job, and that was pointed out in the report. The new standards that have been accepted by the minister will go a long way to addressing the concerns that have been raised.

Ms Pastoor: The next question again would be to the Premier. Why is the government off-loading more and more of the costs for continuing care services onto residents and their families? These are the ones that are paying the price.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Finance supplement, but I can tell you that relative to long-term care, the accommodation fees were increased to bring them in line with the cost of providing the service, and that's the only increase there has been. Relative to the specifics of the question, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, very briefly. I think the Health and Wellness estimates were in this House a week ago tomorrow, last Thursday. I'm sure that when those estimates were reviewed by the opposition they noted that there were additional dollars put in the budget for this very reason. In fact, Mr. Speaker, some of the controversial in-year spending went to this area as well. So to talk about off-loading to the RHAs, we have in fact front-loaded changes that are going to be made.

1:50

Ms Pastoor: I probably should have said downloaded.

What is the position of this government that residents in publicly funded centres should receive different levels of health care services than residents that are in privately funded centres? [interjection] I'm sorry. To the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the answer to that question. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I realize that this is a question for our Minister of Health and Wellness, but having said that, I would just like to add to what you'd mentioned, hon. member, about the off-loading. In the budget, as our Minister of Finance indicated, we made a significant change in funding for people living in our long-term care facilities. One was the designated assisted living facility. I spoke to that in the estimates. We did add approximately \$5,000 to each resident in that facility to assist with accommodating their care as 80 per cent of the seniors living in care receive subsidy through the government for that care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. leader of the third party.

National Child Care Initiative

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Child care professionals and families with children in Alberta continue to voice their concerns to the Official Opposition regarding the future of daycare in this province. In a meeting with the Minister of Children's Services this week the minister assured me that she would not allow the new federal child care plan to result in rollbacks in the progress that was made through Alberta's five-point plan. To the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister elaborate on how, specifically, she plans on maintaining the financial supports that were achieved

through the five-point plan in light of the cancellation of the previous federal agreement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. I spent about 15 or 20 minutes with the Liberal opposition critic, as I did with the NDP opposition critic, explaining what was contained in the budget. What I did explain to both of them is that we were getting very little detail at that particular time. We're still looking for more details on the federal budget. I told both of them that I'm meeting with my federal counterpart at the end of the month and hope to ask many, many questions. I did indicate that the budget for last year from the federal government was \$70 million; this year, \$66 million. It's in our budget. We will continue to operate as usual.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: given that a recent survey released by Public Interest Alberta indicates that only 37 per cent of Albertans support the new federal Conservative child care plan, is the minister lobbying her federal cousins to extend the previous agreement with Alberta beyond its scheduled cancellation?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't comment on the Public Interest Alberta survey. I can comment on the fact that Albertans overwhelmingly voted for the federal Conservatives in the last election. They took every seat in Alberta. I can tell you, though, that I will continue to lobby on behalf of Albertans when I meet with my federal counterpart at the end of the month.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the minister has commented in this Assembly that Albertans should direct their concerns to Ottawa, can the minister clarify exactly what role she is playing in this whole process?

Mrs. Forsyth: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. As I have indicated in this House on many occasions, once the federal minister was appointed I probably phoned her within 48 hours of her appointment to the position. At that time she didn't have an office or a phone. From there I have followed up with two letters, and I have flown to Ottawa on behalf of Alberta's children and families.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Kelowna Accord on Support for First Nations

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Successive Liberal and Conservative federal governments have repeatedly betrayed Canada's aboriginal peoples. Yesterday's federal budget, which tore up the Kelowna accord, is just another in a long list. As a result, a historic opportunity to close the economic and social divide between aboriginal and nonaboriginal Canadians may be lost. My question is to the Premier. Is the Premier or is he not prepared to stand up for this province's aboriginal peoples by demanding that his federal Conservative cousins in Ottawa reinstate the Kelowna accord?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the Prime Minister, if backed into a corner, will have the tendency of saying no. Now, I did have the opportunity of speaking with him shortly after he was

elected. He indicated at that time that he has no intention of abiding by the Kelowna accord. Rather, he would bring in his own programs to address the concerns and the needs of Canada's aboriginal people. That is a simple fact of government.

Now, certainly there was concern expressed at the dinner that the new Prime Minister hosted for all the Premiers and the territorial leaders, that he should continue with the Kelowna accord, which I think designated some \$5 billion for various aboriginal programs. He indicated at that time again that he was going to continue with his own programs. So that is the political reality, and we'll have to see how it washes out.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why is it that this Premier will jump to the barricades at the slightest thought that Ottawa might be after Alberta's resources even if that's an imaginary threat, yet when it comes to a program that could make a tremendous difference for aboriginal people, his criticism is almost nonexistent?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, relative to the first part of the preamble, there is no fear that that will happen with a Conservative government in Ottawa. There would be fear if it were a Liberal or an ND government because all they want is money, money, money. That's all they want: money. They don't want to be accountable; they just want money.

Mr. Speaker, I have stood up, and I have expressed my views on the Kelowna accord, but the Prime Minister will do what his political sense tells him to do.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the federal election is over. Why doesn't the Premier take off the duct tape and stand up for aboriginal people in this province? Now is the time.

Mr. Klein: Pardon me? I don't know what he meant by the duct tape. Is he alluding to Peter MacKay's comments, or he is alluding to Discovery Channel where a person from up north, deemed to be one of Canada's worst handymen, uses duct tape? I don't know.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Canada Pension Plan

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans take a leadership role when it comes to doing the right thing. Short-term pain for long-term gain. This current government came to power by acknowledging the debt and deficit and promising to do the right thing. We have another debt, and it's now time to recognize it and do the right thing again. Albertans' share of the unfunded liability of the Canada pension plan was reported to be \$55 billion by the MLA Committee on Strengthening Alberta's Role in Confederation. This pension debt along with the teachers' \$4.4 billion debt must be addressed. To the Minister of Finance: could she please inform us on the current unfunded liability of the Canada pension plan and what is considered Alberta's share?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the last actuarial that was done of the Canada pension plan to my knowledge was in 2003. It was an estimate at that time by the actuarial that it was about \$516 billion. Alberta's share would be about 12 per cent of that. However, having said that, this does move, certainly, as the workforce changes and so on. It is also my understanding that there will be another actuarial of that plan done in 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will this government do the right thing and take a leadership role by giving our notice to opt out of the faulty Canada pension plan?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did have a committee that looked at these things. I'm never stuck in a time warp. I'm willing to look at things on a fairly regular basis if there's a better way and a better plan. At the time that the committee did review it, my understanding is that they didn't advocate it. As I say, Mr. Speaker, this government's fiscal policy is ensuring that we have a strong fiscal position. If there are new arguments to be put forward on an advantage to Albertans and to Alberta to look at a pension plan, we're open to looking at those things.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. Finally, to the same minister: will the government direct our surplus revenue into the heritage savings trust fund, which we could transform into an Alberta pension plan for the benefit of Albertans now and in the future?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have certainly begun the process of renewing and strengthening our heritage fund, which has been a tremendous asset and continues to be a tremendous asset to this province, envied by many provinces in Canada. We began by adding \$1 billion to the heritage fund in the third quarter of last year. We included another billion dollars to that fund in this year's budget. We began inflation-proofing that plan in the previous budget, and we'll continue to do that as we legislatively can.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a growing and vibrant province. We have, as everyone knows, significant pressures on infrastructure, on our schools and health facilities. We'll ensure that the most pressing needs are met in those areas, and we will continue, as our policy clearly states, to save a portion of the surplus.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's federal budget included \$1.5 billion for Canadian farmers, but it comes with a high price tag because the federal agriculture minister says that he's going to scrap the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, or CAIS, as it is called. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Will our Alberta producers be in limbo while the federal and provincial governments start from square one with a new income stability program?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I too was very concerned about initial reports from the federal government saying that they were going to replace CAIS. We've said all along that CAIS needs to be fixed, that it needs to be revamped, but we certainly didn't want to start from square one, and our producers and our governments don't want to start from square one. So my provincial colleagues and I were on a conference call with Minister Strahl late yesterday, and he did clarify his intention. The federal government does plan to split CAIS into two different programs: one an income stabilization program, one a disaster program. In fact, Alberta has been advocat-

ing that type of change for some time. As far as the income stabilization side is concerned, the minister did talk yesterday about improving and revamping the program. That says to me that the basic principles of the CAIS program are still very sound, very solid, and that's what we're going to be building upon.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I don't care how we label the program. We can call it Fred. We can call it Bob. We could give it a new acronym. We can call it the Canadian revenue agricultural appreciation program if that works. What I really care about is that it's the best thing for the producers and it's long term sustainable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. The budget announcement – and I stress: the budget announcement – also included reference to the new inventory valuations for producers in the CAIS program. What will this mean for the pocketbooks of Alberta producers?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was another element to the federal budget that we were pleased to see. It appears that the federal government is proposing retroactive adjustments to the CAIS program, to the inventory valuations, back to 2003, similar to what we did back in the fall on the retroactive adjustments of the averaging on the reference margins. If that is the case – and we believe it to be – we do have the system in Alberta to make that calculation fairly quickly. We also have the system in Alberta that will be able to do that without a lot of going back to the producers.

I find it interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government is talking about revamping and improving. This is one of the improvements that we have been talking about for some time. In fact, if this turns out to be the route that they're going to take, producers will need to be in CAIS to share in these dollars that are coming from the federal government. It is targeted support, and we support the federal government in this initiative and how they're rolling it out.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we are in a situation where farmers are in a desperate situation. My final question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development again. How soon will these changes occur, and what role would the provincial government play in bringing them about?

Mr. Horner: Well, as I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government has made several of these kinds of suggestions, perhaps not in the exact same way that they're rolling out from the federal government as we saw yesterday. The National CAIS Committee is meeting as we speak. They're going to be discussing and crunching the numbers today, tomorrow. The federal minister is actually going to be in our province in the near future. We believe that we'll be able to turn these things around fairly quickly in the calculations, but it will depend on all the provinces coming onside as to how we're going to deliver this and how we're going to move it forward. I believe that all of the provinces are keenly interested in working with the federal minister to make this happen as soon as possible, and we await further details from the federal minister in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's sale of surplus ring road lands at fire-sale prices continues. In 1996 this

Progressive Conservative government sold 94 acres of surplus ring road land in southwest Edmonton for \$5,200 per acre to Gerard and Reta Haarsma. We already know that in 1999 the Galfour Development Corporation sold land in the same end of town, which they had purchased from this government for pennies per acre, for more than \$21,000 per acre, an astonishing profit margin. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Why is this government continuing to sell taxpayer land for a loss when private developers are able to flip the same land for astonishing profits?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, if the member was actually really interested in finding out what happened on a specific sale, he would give me a chance to look up what exactly happened. You know that we sell hundreds – hundreds – of parcels of land annually. To pick out one parcel and then ask a number of questions about it without giving me the benefit of having a heads-up to the parcel and being able to come forward to the House and present the facts I think certainly indicates that he's really not interested in what happened.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that on the parcel from two days ago, the fact is, as I proved yesterday, we sold that parcel for \$2.8 million.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Lund: For \$2.8 million. The fact is that it was assessed and appraised at \$1.8 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why did this government sell 94 acres of land to the Haarsmas for less than half of what the taxpayers paid for it in 1985? Why are you giving that land away?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I hate to have to give the members a bit of a history lesson, but the fact is that back in the '80s land was selling for a very high price. In the mid-90s the price hadn't started to escalate yet. Probably, if that same piece of ground was up for sale today, you'd get more than the \$500,000. I know that that could very well be because the price of land is going up. So to take an apple from 1985 and think that it's going to be the same as an orange in 1996 – it's just ludicrous to think that there's that kind of a comparison.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. What is ludicrous is that the taxpayers have been burned by this Progressive Conservative government.

Again to the same minister: who in the Progressive Conservative government did the appraisal on the 94-acre Haarsma parcel and determined that the land was worth less than half of what the taxpayers paid originally for it?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I get a chance to investigate this sale, we will be able to give you all the details, but I suspect that the land was appraised and that it was put up for tender. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that any appraiser we use has got a licence. It's got nothing to do with whether it's a member of the Progressive Conservative Party or any other party.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

2:10

Workers' Compensation

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's booming economy is no doubt thanks to productive and hard-working Albertans. With a workforce in the millions accidents, very unfortunately, do occur. Therefore, the workers' compensation coverage and the process of handling claims becomes very important to injured workers and their families. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment responsible for WCB matters. I understand that the Minister's Monitoring Committee on Workers' Compensation has completed their report on the implementation of the reform to the workers' compensation plan. What is the status of this report? When will it be publicly released?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Those are very good questions. The Minister's Monitoring Committee on Workers' Compensation was created in February of 2003 basically to oversee the progress made on implementing recommendations from the Friedman and Doerksen report. Of course, the original date of the committee's report was March 2005, but this was extended to February 2006 so improvements could continue to be made in areas where there are ongoing challenges for the Workers' Compensation Board. The committee's report was submitted on time, but it still has to be reviewed, of course, by the full caucus. We would hope to release the report before summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Given that injured workers suffer very much physically, mentally, and financially and the necessary reforms for the WCB have been identified for years, can the minister inform the Assembly what specific important reform the WCB has implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Originally the Friedman and Doerksen report included, I believe, 59 recommendations, and of course 49 of those 59 recommendations of that absolutely good report have been released. I'll just give you three or four of the ones that are really, really important to the public out there and the people interested in the Workers' Compensation.

The Appeals Commission for workers' compensation, for example, was separated from the Workers' Compensation Board. The Workers' Compensation Board now holds annual meetings, and they're also open to the public. The workers' compensation files are made more accessible to claimants, and one of the most important parts is the reporting to the minister now. A medical panel process was established to resolve conflict on medical opinions, et cetera. So that is very important.

Mr. Speaker, the monitoring committee reviewed the information from the Workers' Compensation Board and the Appeals Commission and agreed that for the vast majority of the recommendations good progress has been made.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Given that a large number of injured workers are too weak in English language knowledge and communication to fight for their

rights, how does the minister ensure that they are not unfairly and unjustly treated in their WCB claims?

Mr. Cardinal: That's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the Workers' Compensation Board offers translation services to injured workers. Actually, they also pay for the services. In addition to that, an injured worker can bring their own translator. Also, the Workers' Compensation Board has posters in 14 different languages to explain how you may access workers' compensation if you are injured.

Additionally, through our department we do spend close to \$30 million a year on English as a Second Language. In addition to that, Athabasca University as of September of this year, I believe, is launching English as a Second Language through distance learning.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Provincial Water Supply

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water, both surface and groundwater, is the lifeblood of the province, and under this government it is declining in both quality and quantity. Growing agricultural, industrial, and population demands are occurring in the absence of an integrated land-use plan and a groundwater inventory. To the Minister of Environment: how long will we wait for an inventory of our groundwater in order to properly manage our water?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the preamble was somewhat vacuous in the fact that what he asserts is not entirely accurate in this context. Our Water for Life strategy, first and foremost, is the most progressive water strategy in North America. Second of all, he is aware that we are doing mapping as we speak. Third of all, the actual mapping that we are doing as part of our Water for Life strategy also takes a look at our lakes and our streams: what the water levels are, what we have to do to improve water management. I can assure all Albertans that that's exactly what we are doing because it is the law to protect our land, air, and water. We're doing it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government is already charging the hydroelectricity industry for water use, when will the minister institute appropriate charges for water across the board?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, you raise a very important point. We will never rule out that option. The reason why: our most progressive strategy, Water for Life, in fact says that we will look at options. But one of those options right now is in the context of conservation. How do we optimize? How do we use proper mechanisms to ensure that our water is going to be there even with some things that we don't have control over such as Mother Nature and during drought periods? What are we doing in water management in terms of off-stream storage and on-stream storage? What are we doing to better optimize? All of those things are options. However, to the hon. member: we believe that conservation and how we use water today is the best approach in terms of going forward as opposed to quite simply saying, "We're going to charge you now." I do believe, though – and the hon. member is aware – that we charge money for water now. It's called treated water, and in fact every city charges as people use it. I will never rule out an option of

potentially charging in the future. Right now my energy is spent on conservation and the best optimization of that valuable resource we have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two-thirds – two-thirds – of all the water allocations in the Athabasca basin are for oil sands. Will you consider charging for water use?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, let me repeat to the hon. member: we believe that conservation practices are important. We also believe that all of the stakeholders have to be at the table. Rather than this company or that company, we are taking a totally regional approach. We are using our watershed councils, part of our Water for Life strategy. We are using our water councils and watershed monitoring. We are working with the cumulative impact people, the cumulative impacts of oil sand development. I can assure this member and all Albertans that 50 years from now I will be able to go and fly-fish in the Athabasca basin, where water is being withdrawn, because we will ecologically protect the basin now, tomorrow, and in the future based on our water strategy.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's rural municipalities are the backbone of this province. It's no secret that Alberta was formed from the hard work of our agricultural community. Recently the government of Alberta announced \$10 million through the targeted investment program in unconditional grants to municipalities that have limited financial resources to work toward long-term sustainability. In my constituency of Highwood there was no funding. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why are some municipalities receiving financial assistance while others are not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Local governments, especially those that are faced with limited financial resources, require strategic solutions for long-term sustainable growth. The grant eligibility amounts under this targeted investment program are based upon the formulas that were developed by both the AUMA and the AAMD and C and are done in such a way as to identify municipalities of the highest financial need. The targeted investment initiative is really a significant first step as we seek permanent, long-term solutions. I might also add that it is my priority and that of my staff and my department to seek long-term solutions to this problem so that this becomes not an ad hoc annual program but a long-term program that's funded every year.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. Can the minister explain the criteria used to determine the funding levels for urban municipalities?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this year there was a \$10 million payout in this program; \$5.9 million of that was distributed among approximately a hundred different urban municipalities. There are two areas of funding, the first being full funding. Under full funding we identify municipalities that have less than \$40,000 in per capita

assessment. That is then paid out based on the population so that there is a maximum of \$300 per capita, so the grants range from a low of \$80 to a maximum of \$300. Under partial funding there is a per capita assessment of between \$40,000 and \$45,000, so those municipalities receive between \$40 and \$300 per capita. The primary consideration, though, is that in all cases these municipalities have mill rates that are higher than average, so we've identified that they have a low capacity to generate tax revenue and they're doing their very best with the capacity that they have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the same minister. Probably just as important, if not more, can he explain the criteria used to determine funding for the rural municipalities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rural municipalities were done in a very similar manner. The balance of funding of approximately \$3.9 million was distributed among rural municipalities, and the difference there is that an additional factor is added on. In addition to assessment on a per capita basis, there's also an assessment on a per-kilometre basis because, as you know, rural municipalities have varying numbers of kilometres of roads for which they're responsible. The same as the urban municipalities, they again have higher than average mill rates, and their taxes are on average higher. They have a low assessment both on a per capita basis and as a factor based upon the number of roads that they're responsible for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

National Child Care Initiative

(continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's federal budget confirmed the very bad news that the bilaterally negotiated federal/provincial child care agreements are being unilaterally killed by Ottawa Conservatives. These agreements are being replaced with a so-called universal child care allowance that will benefit most those who need the support the least while doing little or nothing for lower and middle-income parents in need of quality child care. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that today we all know for sure that federal monies in support of Alberta's five-point child care plan are scheduled to evaporate by early next year, is the minister prepared to fight harder, and if so, how, to convince her federal cousins to respect the previously negotiated agreement, that is so important for the future of Alberta's children?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how this minister can fight any harder, honestly, unless I bring my boxing gloves out. I'll reiterate. The federal minister hadn't even been appointed, and 48 hours later we called. She did not even have a phone. She did not have an office. We immediately followed that up with a letter. I then flew to Ottawa to discuss with her my concerns about the child care program. I have since followed that up with a letter. We now have a federal/provincial/territorial meeting on the 29th of this month.

As I've explained in this House, there are many questions that need to be answered. We need to find out about the original hundred

million dollars that was promised to the aboriginals. We need to find out about the hundred million dollars that was for a data strategy. We need to find out more information about the child care and the original discussion about the \$10,000 that was to go to businesses on child care. There are many, many questions. I will continue to lobby on behalf of Albertans and their families as our five-point plan was based on Albertans' needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me ask the minister the same question again. Maybe she can be a little more specific about her answer. What exactly is the minister's action plan now when it comes to convincing her Ottawa cousins to continue funding this vital agreement beyond next March? Will you give us some details?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's yelling across the floor about details. I have phoned. I have written. I have flown to Ottawa. I am going again on behalf of Alberta's children and families to lobby on behalf of Albertans in regard to Alberta's five-point plan. I will also be talking to my provincial and territorial counterparts so that we can come together as a group and explain to them that we need more information, and we'd like the original plan that was in the agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister seems to have no concrete plan to take any action, will the government and will the minister or will she not at the very least join the five provinces who have already committed to not clawing back provincial tax credits and income support payments from parents eligible for the federal child care allowance?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I spent about 20 minutes yesterday with this hon. member after I got the budget by e-mail. I sat down and explained to him, and I also explained to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. She obviously got it. He didn't. I have told him and made a commitment that there will be no clawbacks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Continuing Care Standards

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province's new standards for health in long-term care centres lack consistency across the province. RHAs are delegated the responsibility for filling in the details of policy and for monitoring and enforcement; in effect, a checkerboarding of compliance across the province depending on how much room is left in the RHAs' budgets. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why was funding not provided to the RHAs to ensure equal levels of monitoring and compliance across the province?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, across the province there are unequal resources in communities and unequal numbers of people. What we have is "shall." I should have counted the number of times we say shall in those standards because we say the regional authorities shall do this, shall do some other things particular to ensuring that the patient focus care is given. What I suspect is being missed is that in

the very back part of those standards the Health Quality Council is responsible for the health quality matrix, and they have been granted the right to be as fully operational as a regional health authority. It will be partially their job to ensure that the quality matrix is applied, to make sure that quality care is delivered regardless of whether the regional health authority or other kinds of measures are being undertaken currently to make sure that the job is getting done to the benefit of the patients.

Ms Blakeman: No. Still different.

Again to the same minister: given that the RHAs will be the fox monitoring compliance on their own long-term care henhouses, why wasn't an independent – independent – provincial monitoring and enforcement mechanism put in place to ensure compliance with standards?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta I think we're uniquely lucky to have two ministers who are accountable for the delivery of both the care standards and the accommodations standards for seniors in long-term care for continuing care. Beyond that, we've identified the quality assurance council as being there to be a watchdog. We've identified through the work that we do through the Health Facilities Review Committee and the initiation of a legislative framework that is much stronger than before on quality delivery and on having quality operational plans and care plans and involvement on behalf of the resident. We have several people that are accountable for delivery of that care that residents or their families or caregivers can appeal to. Beyond that, we have to make sure that families themselves and guardians take some accountability for reporting those incidents that may have been untoward in the delivery of care. So at this stage hold the elected officials accountable, look at these standards as a stronger enforcement, and look over the next year to two years to see if we have improvement. I can assure that you we will.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what is the minister doing to prevent conflict-of-interest issues from arising with RHA board members who are involved or may be involved with private continuing care delivery?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. We obviously have regional health authorities that are in charge of delivering care through various publicly funded facilities and then going back to examine the care. Well, that is why this year in anticipation of these care standards, in consultation with Dr. John Cowell, who has been delivering a very strong product in the Health Quality Council, we developed a framework and a regulated environment for the Health Quality Council to be an equal partner with regional health authorities. Whether you're in an acute-care setting, in a long-term care setting, in supportive living, whether you're receiving continuing care in any part of the system, they are a form of assessment body that can make sure that we are delivering quality care.

The important thing here is that if we were leaving it exclusively to the purview of a regional health authority, the implied criticism of the hon. member may be valid. But under these circumstances we have yet another body built within the ministry to conduct and follow up on that framework and to make sure that the quality is there regardless of whether it's a publicly funded facility, a not-for-profit facility, or any other facility that receives public funding, Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the patient.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Federal Funding for Policing and Security

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the federal Conservatives announced their first budget. A key component was an increase to the law-and-order agenda with what is being hailed as the largest financial infusion in recent history for policing, border security, anticrime measures, and help for victims of crime. Roughly \$1 billion in new money over two years will be spent for approximately 20 initiatives. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the minister highlight what areas of public security will benefit from the increased spending?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very encouraged by what we saw in yesterday's federal budget. I think we support any efforts that enhance safety and security for all Canadians, obviously, which includes Albertans. One of the initiatives that will have a direct impact on public safety in our province is the \$161 million that will be injected into federal positions for the RCMP for roughly 100 officers that will be coming to Alberta. These are federal positions, which would include those areas of investigation such as commercial crime, drugs, immigration, passport as well as border patrol, the integrated border enforcement team that they have in southern Alberta.

As well, another \$95 million was added for new transit security for municipalities throughout Canada, which, again, will assist in utilizing systems for terrorist attacks as well as the ability to do some projects regarding emergency preparedness, to respond to emergencies throughout Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with the Hon. Stockwell Day last Friday in Ottawa, and we reviewed some of these issues that came out of yesterday's budget presentation. These are issues that are of concern for all Albertans as well and issues that we don't take lightly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: what does yesterday's announcement mean for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I mentioned, the federal budget will provide an additional 100 RCMP officers that will come to Alberta. These are not front-line officers, as I mentioned. As well, though, we'll have a better understanding of the impact of the federal budget as we get more details and explanations on all of the packages that come out. I can say, however, that the addition of more RCMP officers to tackle growing concerns such as gang violence, gun violence, the illegal importation of guns and drugs into Alberta and into Canada obviously will have an effect. They will become partners with our 5,300 officers that provide policing throughout the province, and we will continue to work with the federal government on any new policing or security initiative for Canada and Alberta.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, in keeping with our discourse on the hundred years of democracy in Alberta, I must apologize. The length today is a little longer than the norm.

In the general election of August 30, 1971, 46.4 per cent of the votes went to the Progressive Conservative Party, which elected 49 of 75 MLAs. The Social Credit Party received 41.1 per cent of the votes and elected 25 MLAs. The Progressive Conservative Party became the fourth party to elect a government in Alberta.

On March 26, 1975, 62.65 per cent of Albertans elected Progressive Conservatives in 69 out of Alberta's 75 seats. The Social Credit Party received 18.17 per cent of the votes and elected four MLAs.

Four years later, on March 14, 1979, voters voted 57.4 per cent Progressive Conservative and elected 74 of 79 MLAs. The Social Credit Party received 19.87 per cent of the votes and elected four MLAs.

On November 2, 1982, 588,485 Albertans gave the Progressive Conservative Party 62.28 per cent of the votes and 75 of 79 seats, the New Democratic Party elected two MLAs with 18.75 per cent of the votes, and 947,644 Albertans cast ballots, the largest number to date.

In the election held on May 8, 1986, only 47.25 per cent of Albertans voted, one of the lowest turnouts in our history. The results gave the Progressive Conservative Party 51.4 per cent of the votes and 61 of 83 seats. The New Democratic Party elected 16 MLAs with 29.22 per cent of the votes.

Less than three years later, on March 20, 1989, Albertans returned to the polls and 44.29 per cent of voters gave the Progressive Conservative Party 59 out of 83 seats. The Liberals received 28.68 per cent of the votes and elected eight MLAs, the New Democratic Party received 26.29 per cent of the votes and elected 16 MLAs, and 53.6 per cent of Alberta voters voted.

In the election held on June 15, 1993, the turnout was 60.21 per cent and 991,472 ballots were cast. The Progressive Conservative Party received 44.49 per cent of the votes and elected 51 of 83 members. The Alberta Liberal Party received 39.73 per cent of the votes and elected 32 MLAs. The New Democratic Party elected no MLAs with 11.01 per cent of the votes. The highest number of candidates to date participated, with 382 candidates.

On March 11, 1997, voter turnout was 53.75 per cent and the Progressive Conservative Party elected 63 MLAs out of 83 with 51.17 per cent of the votes. The Alberta Liberal Party elected 18 MLAs with 32.75 per cent of the votes. Two New Democrats were elected with 8.81 per cent of the votes.

For the first time in Alberta's election history ballots cast surpassed one million, with 1,016,000 voters participating in the election held on March 21, 2001. The Progressive Conservative Party elected 74 MLAs of 83 with 61.91 per cent of the votes, the Alberta Liberal Party elected seven MLAs with 27.33 per cent of the votes, and voter turnout was 53 per cent.

On November 22, 2004, 450 candidates, the largest ever in Alberta's history, contested the election, which saw voter turnout at 44.7 per cent. The Progressive Conservative Party elected 62 MLAs of 83 with 46.8 per cent of those votes, the Alberta Liberal Party elected 16 members with 29.39 per cent of those votes, the New Democratic Party elected four MLAs with 10.2 per cent of those votes, and the Alberta Alliance Party elected one member with 8.7 per cent of those votes. The voter turnout, again, was 44.7 per cent, the lowest ever in the history of Alberta. In one constituency, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, voter turnout was only 26.4 per cent. However, the Progressive Conservative candidate won with 63.2 per cent of those votes.

The electoral score to date: Liberal governments, 4; United Farmers of Alberta governments, 3; Social Credit governments, 9; Progressive Conservative governments, 10.

head: 2:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat and Lethbridge Centennials

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year on September 1 our province celebrated its centennial anniversary. This year on May 9 two of Alberta's fine cities will also celebrate their 100th birthdays. The year 1906 was when both Lethbridge and Medicine Hat were incorporated as cities in Alberta. Both of these southern Alberta cities have contributed greatly to the province's overall growth. Lethbridge, in fact, is Alberta's fourth most populated city. It is home to the University of Lethbridge, whose construction integrated the building with the surrounding hills. Because of its placement and design, the school is sometimes referred to as a ship in the desert. The city is also home to the High Level Bridge. Completed in 1909, the bridge has the greatest height and length of any bridge of its kind anywhere in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Medicine Hat is also a particularly wonderful city. Most of the city makes up the constituency of Medicine Hat, represented by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. My own constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat includes the southern and southeastern sections of the city. The city has many great features, one of which is that it has the distinction of being Canada's sunniest city, receiving approximately 2,500 hours of sunshine annually. The city also only gets about 230 millimetres, or just under 10 inches, of moisture every year. It houses more than 100 parks and 85 kilometres of trails, giving the approximately 56,000 residents of Medicine Hat plenty of space to get out and enjoy the city's fair weather.

Medicine Hat also has the lowest property taxes in Canada and is known as Alberta's gas city because of the abundance of natural gas in the area. In fact, only a year after Medicine Hat was incorporated as a city, the famous British writer Rudyard Kipling said: Medicine Hat was born lucky; people in this district seem to have "all hell for a basement." This Alberta city has a rich and interesting history and is a wonderful city with great residents. I'm proud to represent this city and surrounding areas as the region's MLA.

I'd like to wish both Medicine Hat and Lethbridge a happy centennial anniversary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

National Mental Health Week

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The first week in May is National Mental Health Week, and I'd like to acknowledge the work done in my constituency and throughout Alberta by the many agencies working to offer support to people living with mental illness. From the Pride Centre volunteers to the part-time person at West Edmonton Seniors to the staff and volunteers from the offices of the Canadian Mental Health Association across Alberta to the hard-working health professionals working in the hospital psych wards and clinics to the many not-for-profit agencies like the Schizophrenia Society, who advocate for research dollars and other support for schizophrenia, and other organizations involved with bipolar, OCD, depression, ADHD, psychosis: thank you to all. You make a difference. You may not see it every day, but your work is helping people to live and cope as best they can.

I need to include other organizations on that list, agencies that exist to offer other services but who develop an expertise in working with people with mental illness: inner-city organizations like the Boyle Street Co-op, the Hope Mission, the Herb Jamieson Centre,

the George Spady Centre, the Sally Ann, HIV Edmonton, and the many projects of the City Centre Church Corporation and indeed the staff of our constituency offices and still others, like those dealing with addictions, drug use, people involved with the correction system, like the John Howard or Elizabeth Fry societies.

Mr. Speaker, I know that I missed many individuals and groups with that short, short list. The point is that lots of people are involved because we want to be, we need to be, and we have to be. Mental illness is all around us. We have not achieved a good mix of community programming to support the deinstitutionalization movement of many decades ago. Government continues to promise concrete plans and assistance and continues to fail to follow through. Meanwhile, the cost of mental health service delivery and the cost to society is very high.

I recently visited Fort McMurray, an extraordinary city with amazing potential and phenomenal growth. They have stress, anxiety, and depression but few counsellors.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wetaskiwin Centennial

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise in this House and recognize the upcoming centennial anniversary of one of the cities in the constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Wetaskiwin was first incorporated as a city on May 9, 1906, and at that time the city had a population of roughly 1,650 people. This was two years after electricity was first installed in the city and one year before the CPR built a station in Wetaskiwin, a landmark that still exists today.

Since that time much has changed. Over 11,000 people now call Wetaskiwin home. While much has changed, ties to the past have been well preserved in this city. Wetaskiwin is home to one of the oldest provincial courthouses constructed in Alberta. Dating back to 1907, this structure is an impressive example of turn-of-the-century architecture with carved columns and ornate cornice work. Today this grand old structure is being renovated to be the city's new city hall, a worthy centennial project for this 100-year-old building.

Another remarkable landmark in this city is the Wetaskiwin water tower. Having served the people of Wetaskiwin for 100 years, it is the oldest working water tower in western Canada. It has also recently been refurbished as a provincial centennial project to stand tall and prominent on Wetaskiwin's skyline for another 100 years.

Wetaskiwin is home to the Reynolds-Alberta Museum, an institution which is dedicated to preserving, restoring, and exhibiting mechanical artifacts, bringing to life Alberta's transportation, aviation, agricultural, and mechanical histories.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that Wetaskiwin is also home to the Alberta Central Railway Museum, which re-creates our province's historical railway experiences.

Mr. Speaker, Wetaskiwin is one of Alberta's spectacular rural treasures, exhibiting much of our Alberta history. I invite all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to visit Wetaskiwin on this their special centennial year. Happy 100th birthday, Wetaskiwin.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Labour Market Supply

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The woes of the Alberta labour market will only worsen by using temporary foreign workers

and temporary foreign contractors. Temporary foreign workers, without their families and the freedom to move between employers, will not stay in Alberta. They are only a short-term fix for short-sighted employers.

The driving force in our labour market has been very high oil and gas prices. The conventional oil patch has been sucking up workers from other sectors of the economy like some big vacuum truck. When they're paid big bucks for the short term, people will often leave their long-term work. This is what is happening.

Alberta and northeast B.C. have been going crazy in the bush. It is a conventional oil and gas boom that we are in. Contrary to popular mythology we are not in a construction employment boom yet. Labour supply is tight in housing construction because those workers leave to make more money elsewhere.

Counterintuitively, Alberta construction employment was down on a year-to-year basis in five of seven months between September of 2005 and March of 2006. We actually have available workers in most industrial trades but not all. The electricians' hall in Edmonton, for example, has almost 3,000 Alberta tradesmen out of work and ready to work. Many are still available in the rest of Canada. Some trades are in short supply because their skills are also in demand in the conventional oil patch or for short-term plant shutdowns.

Some unions do seek tradesmen from the U.S. because many of their own members would sooner work conventional oil and gas than a CLAC or merit job. These oil sands employers who are crying for temporary foreign workers are those who cannot get help because they will not pay the pensions and other benefits workers want. It is bizarre that some large projects are seeking labour concessions in the face of a tight labour market. It is sad that this Conservative Alberta government is accommodating them.

We still need skilled people soon. We have the people to train: Canada has over a million unemployed youth between 18 and 25; more women want into the trades; 76 per cent of farm family income is off-farm, and most farmers have trade skills and want work; immigrants want to learn. We must ensure that these jobs are for the benefit of Albertans and Canadians. All oil sands work must have some benefit for Alberta. Why just let all the benefit flow out of Alberta?

The Alberta government should cancel its special temporary foreign worker deals in the oil sands and concentrate on training Albertans and Canadians and real immigrants first so that there will be real long-term benefit for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. R. Miller: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Bill and Elvie Brown

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great honour to rise today and bring to the attention of this Assembly an approaching milestone in the lives of two very special constituents of mine. The constituency I'm proud to represent is home to thousands of remarkable people but none more so than Bill and Elvie Brown. During their life together they have shown an unmatched devotion to their community, their family, and to each other, and on July 22 they will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary. They have faced the past seven decades together through good times and bad, through

sickness and health, just as they pledged to do so long ago. Their union has produced two children, 12 grandchildren, and many great-grandchildren. It has touched the lives of countless others who have had the privilege of calling them friends.

Bill and Elvie recently moved from their home in Czar, where they lived for almost 50 years, to the Battle River Lodge in Wainwright. While their location has changed, their dedication to each other has not. It remains as strong today as it was in 1936.

As Bill and Elvie celebrate a milestone achieved by few, they will do so with my sincere congratulations, Mr. Speaker, and best wishes for many more years of health and happiness. In a world where divorce and conflict are all too common, they stand as an example of dedication and devotion that we can all admire and aspire to, and I encourage my colleagues to join me in doing so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member left 35 seconds on the table there, which really helps overall, considering other members did not.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Provincial Pension Plan

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. As an MLA I enjoy productive discussions on positive ideas that add to the long-term prosperity of our province and to individual Albertans. Mr. Speaker, in the coffee shops, the media, and even in this House here we have numerous discussions about what to do with our resource wealth. In the early '70s the heritage savings trust fund was established as a vehicle to accumulate resource revenues. Fortunately, this fund was there to help Albertans during the difficult time of the 1980s.

Now we need a plan for the future. The current 10 per cent contributions to the faulty Canada pension plan is not in the best interest of Albertans. The Canada pension plan is largely unfunded and fails to provide a respectable retirement.

Mr. Speaker, we should be establishing an Alberta pension plan supplemented by our surplus resource revenues. By combining the surplus royalty revenues and the existing heritage savings trust fund, Albertans would be able to build a pension fund to benefit all Albertans. The new plan would be seamless and totally transferable, offering greater benefits, better security, and flexibility as evidenced by the Robson report, commissioned by this government in 1999. Albertans could take pride in having their own, more equitable Alberta pension fund.

The Alberta pension fund would also create a pool of investment capital available to Albertans and our businesses similar to Quebec's *caisse de dépôt*, which has more than \$133 billion available to Quebecers. An Alberta pension fund would reduce waste by creating a public expectation to save for the future. It is said that every dollar wasted today is 10 less dollars for retirement. The resources of Alberta belong to all Albertans, both those who live here today as well as those who'll live here in the future. By building a fund that belongs to all Albertans, we would be using our resources to the benefit of all Albertans.

In summary, an Alberta pension fund would yield economic and political returns. We need a made-in-Alberta solution to provide a respectable retirement plan for Albertans. Let's give serious consideration to creating an Alberta heritage pension fund.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a petition from 1,140 residents of Alberta. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to . . . defeat legislation allowing expansion of private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta and permitting doctors to work in both the private and public system, which will drain key resources from the public system . . . [and to] vote against plans that would force Albertans to pay for private health insurance for services that should be covered by medicare.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 382 people which expresses their opposition to the third way now and certainly for the future.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports I'd like to table five copies each of Continuing Care Health Service Standards, Supportive Living Accommodation Standards, Long-Term Care Accommodation Standards with the hope that this sets a new tone for a better and more qualified delivery and monitoring of long-term care and care for Alberta patients wherever they are.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you have a tabling?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings in relation to my question earlier today in question period. The first tabling I have is from the *Alberta Gazette* dated June 29, 1996, and this is the 94 acres of land that was sold for \$500,000.

The second tabling I have is also in regard to this sale, and it is a transfer of land from the former public works minister, Stan Woloshyn.

The third tabling I have is an Alberta Registries land titles certificate in regard to this land and the transfer of this parcel of 94 acres for \$500,000 to Gerard Peter Haarsma and Reta B. Haarsma of 199 Street.

The fourth tabling I have is a letter dated May 1, 2006, to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, and this letter outlines the reasons I believe that we need an independent judicial inquiry into the sale of surplus ring road lands in both Edmonton and Calgary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the appropriate number of copies of the 2003 and the 2004 vital statistics annual reviews. These reviews summarize all births, marriages, deaths, and stillbirths that occurred in Alberta during those years. Any member wishing to receive copies of these can obtain them from my office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to table five copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View requesting that Bill 208, Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, be given early consideration by Committee of the Whole on Monday, May 8, 2006.

The hon. member for Edmonton-Rutherford on a point of order.

Point of Order Interrupting Members' Statements

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon during a part of the Routine which we call Members' Statements, there were a number of interjections made by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar during a member's statement that was being given by the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Now, while I cannot find the specific citation that rules out interjections during Members' Statements, you will know that it is the convention of this House that we not interject during that particular part of the Routine. I certainly can cite in our Standing Orders section 13(4)(b) which states, "When a member is speaking, no person shall . . . interrupt that member, except to raise a point of order." I would submit to you that the two members that I mentioned were in violation of our Standing Orders and the convention of this House by making those interjections during the member's statement, and I would ask that you find that, in fact, there was a point of order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Anybody else want to participate in this point of order? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the member raising the point of order is correct. We have a convention where we do not interject into other member's statements, so if my insertion of accurate figures into the statement was of any interference, I do apologize.

Rev. Abbott: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to stand and certainly apologize if the member thought that I had made any untoward statements with regard to the member's statement. The fact of the matter is that the Bible clearly says, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." As we know, the members on that side of the House do the same thing to us when we stand on our members' statements as well.

The Speaker: Well, that's certainly interesting.

First of all, hon. members, there is no Standing Order pertaining to interjections or heckling during Members' Statements. That has never been the case, never been. What has been said by the chair on numerous occasions is that the chair will not entertain points of order or points of privilege as a result of comments made during Members' Statements. So there's nothing different with Members' Statements than any other part of the Routine.

3:00

The chair would like to caution members that the convention, the rules that are found in all the historical documents that we have, including Standing Orders, pertain to heckling and interjections at all parts of the Routine. It does not single out Members' Statements. The same applies during question period. The same applies during opportunities for members when they're tabling things and when they're giving speeches or raising questions.

I'm greatly encouraged by the interjection from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford because I'm sure that as the whip of his caucus he will now ensure that his members henceforth do not interject at any time during the Routine, in the same way that I'm sure the Deputy Government House Leader along with the government whip have heard that this will be the new decorum in the Assembly led now by the Official Opposition. Starting tomorrow,

we'll see this rule applied. I can't speak on behalf of the third party. They haven't chosen to speak yet today. But I suspect that it will be just so quiet in here tomorrow that it will be remarkable. I would be very surprised if such a thing happened.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Sustainable Resource Development

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders the first hour will be allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you. Colleagues, thank you and good afternoon. Mr. Chairman, I rise to move the budget estimates for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development for 2006-2007.

I'm pleased to be here today to talk about our budget, but before I begin, I want to outline what I'll be speaking about today. I will be reviewing the ministry's overarching challenges and priorities for the coming year and how they will be served by our budget for 2006-2007. Then I'll explore several of the key initiatives that will be led by program areas in the year to come.

Before beginning, I'd like to introduce some of my department staff sitting in the members' gallery. I'd ask you to welcome Jamie Curran, my executive assistant; Brad Pickering, my deputy minister, and his executive assistant, Paul Leeder; Stew Churlish, assistant deputy minister for the finance and administration division and senior financial officer; Craig Quintilio, assistant deputy minister for the lands division; Cliff Henderson, assistant deputy minister of our forestry division; Ken Ambrock, our assistant deputy minister of fish and wildlife; a new member of our team, Brian Gifford, chair of the Surface Rights Board and of the Land Compensation Board – Brian is right there in the front row; Brian, just give us a wave so everybody can see you – Morris Seiferling, our assistant deputy minister of sustainable resource and environmental management; Joyce Ingram, executive director of our corporate business support; Dave Bartesko, manager of sustainable resource and environmental management; and Joan McCracken, our assistant director of communications. I see Joan up there as well.

Those are our staff. Those are just a few of the 1,900 dedicated, professional staff who enable Sustainable Resource Development to carry out its business each and every day of the year. These people do great work on behalf of sustaining the province's resources, and in doing so, they improve the quality of life in Alberta today and for Albertans to enjoy.

One example of exceptional effort is, of course, Mrs. Joyce Shaw from our Barrhead office, whom we honoured here today in this Assembly for her 50 years of service to the Alberta government. Perhaps I should say 50 years of service and counting as Joyce continues to help protect Alberta's natural resources for future generations. I'm desperately proud of the work that is being done by Sustainable Resource Development staff, and I commend all the staff for their tremendous efforts and their accomplishments.

Mr. Chairman, people are important to any organization, but to this ministry they are essential. They fulfill a mandate that is far

reaching. As the primary manager of Alberta's wildlife, public lands, and forests, the ministry works with industry, communities, and other stakeholders to provide opportunities that support prosperity.

[Mr. Johnson in the chair]

Simply put, our job is to steward Alberta's natural resources. We work hard to ensure that our resources are managed for the benefit of both present and future generations. In doing so, we must achieve a balance between conservation and development, taking into consideration the economic, social, and environmental values of all Albertans. This is a difficult challenge, made even tougher by the unprecedented level of activity we have had on the land today here in Alberta and the new challenges that we face on the horizon, challenges like upstream gas and oil development, increased oil sands activity, and wind power, which are being added to our existing activities of oil and gas, agriculture, ranching, forestry, and recreational access to public lands.

It is all about the land, Mr. Chairman: how we use it and how we ensure that future generations have the same opportunities to enjoy the land. This is especially important to me personally. I'm from a small town, rural Alberta. I grew up there at a time when everyone believed that we lived in a land of plenty and that it would never end. Today I know better. Yes, we are blessed with abundant natural resources in Alberta, including the land and the resources on and under it. These resources are renewable, but they are not limitless. I believe that we have a responsibility to be stewards of our natural resources to ensure that we can enjoy them in perpetuity. It means placing the highest priority on healthy lands and natural resources for the future to leave this wealth in good shape for the people of tomorrow. It is about stewardship, protecting our natural resource wealth for future generations.

Budget 2006 is all about providing resources to sustain the land. Overall, the ministry's operating budget increases by \$13 million to \$238 million while the capital plan grows \$11 million to \$39 million. The increases include \$5 million this year, part of a \$15 million increase over three years, to fund initiatives to better manage the land. The \$5 million includes \$1 million allocated to land-use framework consultations with Albertans. Those consultations will begin this spring or early summer and include regional and provincial forums as well as public education and awareness programs, that are so important.

The \$5 million increase also includes \$2 million in funding for enhancing land-use planning and partnerships to improve public rangeland and to help us look for opportunities for greater efficiencies in stewardship of the public land base. These efforts will include entering into partnership agreements to develop new tools for the sustainable management of public rangelands, tools that will help us assess riparian health on grazing lands, for instance, and grazing distribution patterns. The work will also include helping public grazing reserve associations to repair the damage caused by recreation and resource development. It will also involve moving into an electronic process for handling oil and gas dispositions, improved disposition and inspection processes, and increased resources for access management planning for the Ghost-Waiparous and Bighorn areas.

Taken together, this \$2 million in increased funding will allow the department to better meet the demands for land-use dispositions and to do the follow-up work needed to ensure that those impacts are reduced and that Alberta lands will be available for the use and the enjoyment of future generations.

3:10

Another \$2 million of the \$5 million budgeted for 2006-2007 will enhance natural resource information for land-use decision-making. The natural resources information project is a multi-year undertaking to update existing data and provide new information on grassland, vegetation, watersheds, forest resources, and land use/access. Once the information is acquired, it will be accessible all across government.

We will also look for information partners with rural municipalities, government ministries, and others to leverage our investment in the data. By doing so, we will provide the foundation for accurate and timely natural resource data needed for informed decision-making. This new information will allow us to move ahead on the provincial grazing reserves program and the grassland vegetation inventory, both of which support the sustainability of rural Alberta. We'll also directly support the sustainable resource and environmental management initiative, that is part of our land-use framework.

While that completes the overview of the major commitments contained in Budget 2006-2007, I will now review the commitments associated with the ministry's three core business areas. They are lands, including rangeland management, dispositions, and management plans; forestry, including timber allocations and controlling wildfires; wildlife, including fisheries and habitat management.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The ministry is also responsible for the Surface Rights Board, the Land Compensation Board, and the Natural Resources Conservation Board. As I mentioned earlier, Brian Gifford, the newly appointed chairman of the Surface Rights Board and the Land Compensation Board, is with us today. I am sure that he appreciates the importance of the land management tasks that are ahead of us. We have a lot of responsibilities in a lot of areas that are important to the present and future of Albertans.

When it comes to lands, which is the first core business, it deals with developing common goals for Alberta's public lands that address multiple stakeholder demands. The ministry has responsibility for 60 per cent of the public land base in Alberta, an area that includes 90 million acres in the green area and 10 million acres in the white area. This land base is under tremendous pressure today: pressure from population growth, from increased economic development, and from people who enjoy the land for recreation activities. These pressures will only increase in the years to come, and the ministry has to be positioned to manage that increased pressure.

Our immediate challenge includes managing increased volumes of disposition applications as well as the increasing complexity of issues on the land base and resolving increased conflicts amongst users. Budget 2006 specifically addresses these pressing challenges. As I have noted, additional resources this year strengthen the department's capacity to process and manage the growing number of dispositions and to have new sources of information to assist decision-making. I want to say that again: to have new sources of information to assist decision-making. That's so important. For example, the \$2 million commitment to improve natural resource information will provide among other things new grassland vegetation information about Alberta's grassland natural region near the Drumheller area. Aerial photography will also be used to upgrade the national forest inventory, the road network, water data, and the Crown's portion of the Alberta vegetation inventory.

Other expenditures of note include \$300,000 to help restore the productive capacity of the provincial grazing reserves and \$100,000 dedicated to a partnership to help halt the spread of noxious weeds from vacant public land.

In forestry the challenges in our second area are no less daunting than those affecting our overall land-use decision-making. The province's forests provide multiple benefits to Albertans thanks to a combination of leading forest management, wildlife protection, and industry practices. We do a great job of sustaining the resource but not without having some hurdles to overcome. For example, wildfires are a continual threat to our forests, we currently face infestations of mountain pine beetles, and the forest industry itself is struggling under global economic pressures that threaten its competitiveness.

Budget 2006 gives us some ammunition to take on these challenges. Our capital budget is part of a \$28 million commitment over four years to upgrade our air tanker bases across the province, improving the safety of our wildfire fighting operations. In addition, we'll put a \$14 million commitment this year as part of a \$42 million allocation over three years to upgrade provincial air tankers themselves, to better protect Albertans and their communities from wildfires. Meanwhile, the ministry's operating budget receives \$2 million for wildfire reinsurance, to help spread out the year-to-year spikes in this cost area. Another \$2 million is budgeted for this year's FireSmart program, to continue our efforts to reduce the threat of property and community losses from wildfires.

Turning to the mountain pine beetle, the ministry's operational budget receives \$2.6 million for beetle work, part of the commitment of \$7.8 million over three years. We want to continue our efforts to help prevent the spread of the pests in Alberta forests. Our policy was and remains: a hundred per cent control of infested trees. The funding for 2006-2007 will be used to continue this work, to conduct aerial surveys to identify infested trees. We'll do ground surveys to locate any new infestations and cut-and-burn activities to get rid of the forest pests.

We will also be hosting a major summit on mountain pine beetle at the end of May. What we'll do is bring together municipalities and specialists in the field to help us attack this forest pest, including representatives from British Columbia, who are partners in this with us. They'll be sharing the valuable lessons that they've learned fighting the beetle on the western side of the Rockies. The funding provided for beetle efforts is money well spent, Mr. Chairman, on the challenge that is both serious and formidable.

The ministry's operating budget for 2006-2007 also allocated \$1.5 million to fund restoration of older cutblocks in need of replanting, to help reassure that we will continue to have an abundance of forest resources for our future. This is part of a three-year commitment to reforestation that we initiated last year. Still with our forests, the budget also commits \$600,000 to promote forest products and market diversification. We feel that this is part of our future as well. This expenditure is part of our continuing effort to ensure that Albertans receive the highest possible value from our forest resources. It is also one part of the overall three-year, \$1.8 million commitment to our value-added strategy designed to enable us to better compete in global markets.

In terms of fish and wildlife, our third core business, Albertans have a deep-seated connection to this wonderful natural resource, just as we have a profound responsibility to sustainably manage fish and wildlife values for future generations. We have key priorities for fish and wildlife management in this year's budget allocations. Among the highest is \$600,000 for grizzly bear research and management, including bear DNA census work to determine our populations. It's a commitment that we made, and that commitment is ongoing.

An additional \$240,000 is to develop and implement the BearSmart program to minimize bear/human conflicts. We're going to be rolling this out across the province very soon this spring, and

we're going to go through our educational partnerships. We'll encourage communities and towns to set standards for safety for residents that live in bear country, to be able to have them learn how they can reduce possible and potential bear attractions.

Work will also include stepping up our bear aversion and bear management efforts, which are so important, that people rely on as well. I recently participated in a bear intercept feeding program, which supplied roadkill feed for bears as an alternative to ranchers' livestock.

The 2006-2007 budget also provides \$25,000 for caribou management. We are committed to working with our departments, industry, and stakeholders to protect and recover woodland caribou and its habitat, and we are taking significant steps to ensure that woodland caribou remain on the provincial landscape. Following up on work done in the past years based on the caribou recovery plan, that means greater protection for caribou. For example, we have established a single Alberta caribou committee to co-ordinate management activities. We've also undertaken innovative programs like the caribou cowboy initiative, that prevents caribou from being hit by vehicles along highway 40. As well, we continue to work closely with industry to protect caribou habitat from harmful industrial encroachment. Efforts include reducing the width of seismic lines, inducing companies to share roads, promoting best practices, and adjusting harvesting sequences.

3:20

Over the past 10 years, Mr. Chairman, industry and government have contributed over half a million dollars a year into managing and monitoring caribou. Our 2006-2007 budget also provides funding to continue our work with the species at risk program, including species assessment, recovery planning, and implementation of recovery plans. Since the year 2000 this area has received over 1 and a half million dollars to help recovery planning and on-the-ground conservation efforts, a work that will continue in 2006 and for wildlife disease and surveillance work as well.

The budget will also allow us to continue our efforts to revitalize Alberta fisheries, including increased recreational opportunities. These are our fish and wildlife numbers for the year ahead at the moment, and if we can do anything to increase allocations, we will.

I've been speaking for some time about the program priorities that we will be able to serve through Budget 2006. Now I'd like to speak about what it will mean in terms of people. Last year we committed to bring 40 additional full-time and seasonal staff. We now have a total of 126 field, fish, and wildlife officers and 10 superintendents. This year we're allocating \$720,000 for 20 seasonal public lands and forest division guardians to work throughout the province to deliver environmental and stewardship messages to the many people who will enjoy recreational land in this province. This commitment is part of the ministry's efforts to foster a strong stewardship ethic amongst Albertans who enjoy the province's natural resources. For example, we have established the public information and outreach branch, which brings together education services from across the ministry to better serve Albertans by providing education about stewardship.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my privilege to be able to speak to this ministry. I'd first of all like to congratulate Mrs. Shaw as well for 50 years of service. I'm not sure if maybe we hired her when she was 15 years old.

Mr. Coutts: Twelve.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. Well, that's even better.

The minister covered a number of areas: land use with oil, gas, agriculture, recreational use. That's pretty much how I want to start my specifics here. This provincial government does prefer to manage the forest by volunteer co-operation between industries, but clearly that's not enough. This government is committed to a massive industrialization strategy, I believe. Unfortunately for the various industries, whether they're forest, mining, oil, gas, perhaps coal, and ranching, there are going to be concerns with how we're able to manage the cumulative impacts. I believe that we're going to be caught in the crossfire there in the struggle for environment and lands and the animals as well, which the minister did mention.

Let's just talk about some of the industry's impacts here. When we drill a well, three kilometres of seismic lines are usually cleared when we're trying to obtain that area for oil and gas business, and then there are permanent structures that are left, which is concerning. At the current rate of disturbance every square kilometre of forest logged results in about 1.8 kilometres of fragmented habitat. This is exactly the habitat that the minister mentioned that he does want to preserve with regard to endangered or threatened species, and we can go on to specifics such as the grizzly bear, which was mentioned, and the Little Smoky caribou herd or, in fact, just the caribou herd itself.

Those are concerns that Albertans have listed and e-mailed and called about, with participation from groups such as the Alberta Wilderness Association or CPAWS. Those committed groups want to ensure that those two listed animals remain on the landscape for a very long time for generations to be able to enjoy in their natural habitat, Mr. Chairman.

If we talk about the grizzly bear, I would commend the minister on his three-year moratorium that was placed upon that. When we're looking for a little bit better information, he has committed to in fact using more monies to do a new DNA study as well as trying to get a handle on exactly the amount of bears. I would certainly like to know, as all Albertans would like to know: do we have an estimated best guess as to what we have out there currently as we're planning for the moratorium for the next three years?

The minister also talked about the fact that he'd like to lessen the amount of bear/human contact. I think that's commendable because one death is too many, but we have to realize that when we're in their territory, we're going to actually have more impacts, and we're going to have more encounters as we try and go to more areas out there. Has the minister considered the bear dogs they use? I believe they're about a \$3,000 price tag and several years for training, but they're apparently well versed, as far as dogs go, with being able to keep humans safe. The same sort of thing with regard to ranching and sheep, the same with bear dogs: to be able to maintain the bear's distance from human contact.

We talk about \$250,000 allocated to the woodland caribou study. I'm not sure how that number, \$250,000, was obtained. Again, I think we need to realize that the whole reason why the caribou in that particular area of Little Smoky are in fact shrinking is because of the intrusion of the oil and the gas or the forestry and/or recreational use, which I'll get to a little bit later.

Some of the specifics I wanted to talk about were perhaps the boreal forest, where there is ongoing development and investment, a hundred billion dollars in announced investment in northern Alberta in the boreal forest. This region provides Alberta with fresh air, it supports the valuable energy and forestry sectors, and it's home to over a hundred thousand Albertans. The government participated in the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. Do the estimates contain any funding to support any recommendations from the Boreal Futures forest study report? One

of the first questions would be: is the minister going to commit to implementing, backed with full funding and legislation? Why is the government not using a strategic model to develop a strategic plan for Alberta's northern landscape? Why would the government not be using fiscal incentives to promote conservation within that region of the boreal forest?

I'd like to go on to forests again with community timber permits. Community timber permits are ideally designed to encourage local economic development and to meet the needs of small, local wood producers. While the local economy and the development of the manufacturing of local wood products in this program is good, it isn't happening. I believe that there are some loopholes. The minister continues to convert community timber permits into commercial timber permits when the permit holder no longer meets the requirements. If the minister is aware of this loophole, when does he intend to in fact fix that particular problem? What is the minister going to do to ensure that microscale operators can continue to operate and play an important role in providing local economic development and supply locally produced products as well as being able to have that economic base? Another concern with regard to that would be: has the minister considered or evaluated the impacts of allowing the transfer of community timber permits to commercial permits in terms of Crown revenue from stumpage fees? Those are some of the specifics on the woodlot.

Going to areas outside of that, burned-out areas as far as reforestation, I'm not sure who actually has the responsibility. As forest fires are now becoming an obvious thing within the province – there are some several hundred that were burning – whose responsibility is it to reforest the burned-out areas? Certainly, there are FMAs, and there are permits held within various communities or within large-scale logging, but whose responsibility is it?

3:30

Let's talk about the development or at least the process with the land-use management. I think we've all got a stake in this, Mr. Minister. I think that you talked about the fact that you're looking for new sources, I believe you said, for decision-making such as perhaps opposition as well. Perhaps that could be an opportunity for an all-party to be able to go and help you design or at least improve upon what you have to start with with the land-use management. The opposition right now does currently have plans – and they're in print in a red book – for land-use management for all of Alberta. I think there could certainly be some suggestions in there that the minister could carry on or could in fact improve upon.

In land-use management there needs to be a real effort with regard to being able to have off-road use. Neighbours of mine, in fact, go south of Calgary to be able to use their ATVs or their quads. That's a long drive, but they don't mind it because they think they get a good weekend out of it. They're able to do some camping and off-road use. But if we set aside areas that are already, in fact, not too valuable for ranching or for farming, agricultural – and I've talked with those at the Alberta Fish and Game Association as to their take on having some specific areas set aside so that they do have it to be able to use at their discretion, say 30 kilometres square with some hills and that. That would be an opportunity for them to be able to have their own area instead of continuing to encroach on some of the habitat areas where they continually are pushed and forced to go because of development. They said that they would certainly be pleased and could support something like that if we did have some designated sites, perhaps in the northern part of the province, some central, and of course down in the south part of the province as well. That would be great to be able to have that.

We talked about how as the minister was growing up on the

farmland, he thought that this could last forever and that as he's gained a little bit more wisdom, he realizes, in fact, that the areas and lands aren't going to last forever with our continued development.

We talked – and, in fact, I brought it up in the past – about roadless areas. Has the minister considered having roadless areas where absolutely no activity would occur? There would be no roads for camping, hiking. It would be roadless, as I said. I used this before with regard to last year's estimates and review of this ministry.

We talked about the Alberta Forest Products Association's survey. I talked about it yesterday, brought it up with regard to some specifics on the questions and how the overall general population doesn't feel that the ministry or the government or, in fact, the industry is doing enough to protect. It is the ministry, the government's responsibility to ensure that the lands remain vital and they remain clean and usable. So, again, would the minister be able to give his take with regard to the survey? There were many specific questions on that, and I'd just like to see if he would be able to speak on that particular piece.

We talked about the pine beetle and their co-ordinated effort with B.C. to be able to talk and try to eradicate it. Well, this has been going on for some time. Have we talked about or even considered bringing in some experts from the U.S. side? I know that they've had this particular pest down there for some time. Have we considered bringing up some experts to be able to talk about where they are with regard to being able to manage this?

There's a joint effort, I believe, between here and B.C. on one of the Willmore areas. There's going to be a combined or at least a joint effort on the burning. We talked about some of the controlled burns before. In fact, the minister in his opening piece talked about how 100 per cent of infected trees will receive treatment such as eradication and burn. That's reactive. We're talking about proactive.

We can't anticipate where these bugs are going to be going, but if we could in fact start taking out some of the older trees, which I believe they're attracted to – I know we've got to, you know, either log them or we've got to cut and burn them. I mean, either way, we've got to ensure that the forest industry, which is a \$4 billion industry and employs 59,000 people, Mr. Minister, remains vital and it remains strong because of all the people that are involved. [interjection] I know that you know that as well. I'm just reminding you of that particular piece.

The fishing derby. We raised that last time, on the lakes. When the thaw would come, you said you would certainly monitor the activity on the lakes as far as the overfishing and the concerns about that. Has the minister come up with any sort of specifics as to the concerns that were raised with the Pigeon Lake fishing derby and the overusage or the overfishing that does occur on that one?

Let's go to some of the efforts on the southeastern Alberta side. We'll talk about the culls on the deer. In fact, the fish and wildlife department had concluded and had done a cull in that area. It was successful, I guess, by their terms, and they called it off early. There are some reports suggesting that perhaps the culls aren't effective. The CWD is out there. Do we actually have an idea right now as to where it's coming from or the effects or where they are? There has been little talk on that particular area as well.

I'd also like to raise one of the concerns from the AWA. They're concerned – it's just rumours right now – about funding for a species at risk program that has been cut due to the administration boondoggle, they're calling it. It means the portion of the \$48.7 million in line 3.0.1 that's endangered species will not be funded. I certainly would like some comments on that. The Alberta Wilderness

Association has stated that they are just entering into a busy summer this season in this type of work, and many consultants, researchers, university students are very anxious to get out in the field and start their careers – hopefully, it'll be long careers – within that particular work. Can the minister explain line 3.0.1, fish and wildlife, on page 406, detail the program level in writing? Specifically, how much money will be going to that thing?

The multiple species at risk program in southern Alberta. There is a report. The last one that was issued came out in June 2004. It's chaired by the Member for West Yellowhead. I don't believe that there has been another report since then. It looks great on paper, but that's as far as it goes. We contacted a number of people in various areas and industry to come up and get together, beef producers, fish and game, but there's not really much that comes out of this except for a report. In fact, I never see anything concrete, you know, to be able to get some of these particular species that they have concerns with listed as threatened.

We've got woodland caribou in here. It's still in fact endangered and on the verge of threatened. We've got the peregrine falcon as well as the grizzly bear. They're all listed in here, but again what good is this report if it doesn't go any further except in writing? I never hear much about this, and I'd like the minister, perhaps, to be able to comment on that particular piece as well.

I've given the minister a couple of specifics. I'll sit down here and see if he'd be able to answer some of those right now, then.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. member opposite for the questions and, first of all, some of the general comments that he began with, certainly about land use and sort of putting out a position from the opposition side about the need for land use. He brought in a number of questions that I certainly would like to have the opportunity to talk about because land use – no matter where I go or where I speak or who I speak to, Albertans really value the land.

The land has given us all the wealth that we have had in this province, Mr. Chairman, not only what's on top of it, whether it's grass or whether it's trees, but what's underneath the ground, the nonrenewable resources that are underneath the ground. All of these things have made Alberta what it is today and the quality of life that we have. I know that the hon. member appreciates that and certainly wants to make sure that those kinds of activities remain but, at the same time, that it's done in a responsible way. Albertans want that too. Albertans value that.

3:40

He mentioned the Alberta Forest Products Association survey that they'd done. I thought it was a very good report that was brought forward by the Alberta Forest Products Association, and I thought it was very noble of them to actually go out and find out what Albertans valued. Albertans certainly did value the fact that they wanted to see the forests sustainable. Secondly, they wanted to see habitat preserved for wildlife. Thirdly, they wanted to make sure that there were provisions and regulations in place to help protect all of that. That is exactly what Sustainable Resource Development wants as well, and that's what we're trying to do on behalf of the people of Alberta.

When I go out and talk about that with the people, I talk to them not only about what we do today but also what we have to prepare for in the future. What we have to prepare for in the future are policies that will deal with a busy landscape, with all the activities that traditionally we have had and will continue to have that preserve

that quality of life but also having to deal with population growth. That population growth is going to change the demographics of the province. How do we deal with that? At the same time you've got industry doing a good job. You've got everybody employed. You've got population growth. Then how do we enjoy ourselves? How do we get into the backcountry? How can we make sure that that backcountry is there for future generations to enjoy as we do today? How do you manage it so that it's not destroyed and that it can be there for future generations?

Part of the framework that we're working on for the future is to take into account all of that busy landscape, the population growth, the expectations when you get into the backcountry and how you manage that, and at the same time look at conservation and preservation so that the Alberta that we see 50 years from now can be somewhat similar to the Alberta that we see today. That's the future, and that's what we're going to be working on. I want to talk about that a little bit more before I end this particular segment.

I want to talk about what's happening today. We have policies in place today that ensure good management of the wildlife, good management of the fish, good management in forestry. Our policy today is to make that sustainable for today. Now, I don't want the hon. member to confuse the land-use framework that's coming forward in the future with the policies that are in place today. While we're developing the land-use framework for the future, it's important that we keep the economic engines running today, so we continue to work on the policies that we have today in terms of making sure that our companies have good management practices, that they have good plans put in place, good cutting sequences, annual allowable cuts that are kept to the companies' standards. We have standards and regulations. We keep the companies' feet to the fire in terms of how they go about and do their work and make sure that the public interest is looked after in terms of management of the forest.

Also, on the public lands side it's about stewardship. Certainly, our grasslands have to be well looked after. Of course, it's all the things that you put in place to make sure that those are going to be there to serve the needs of today but also be preserved for the future.

I want to get to industry for just a moment. Industry itself, oil and gas and forestry, have been working in the northern part of this province for a number of years. They are pushing us to come up with good policies on integrated land management. They're already working on integrated land management, using the same roads to get to a cutblock or to get to a series of well sites. That reduces the footprint on FMAs. It reduces the footprint on public land.

Particularly the oil and gas industry now have the kind of technology that when they go and do seismic lines, they don't have to do the 60-foot lines or the 30-foot lines. They're now down to about two metres, and that reduces the footprint as well. So we're all getting a little bit smarter in terms of integrated land management. Now, what that does: it helps the habitat. That helps preserve the habitat for our grizzly bears, our caribou, and all of those types of things. So industry is taking a very responsible approach to working with us on integrated land management in this busy landscape.

I want to talk about the future of land use in just a moment, but I want to answer some of your questions. You talked about habitat for bears, and you mentioned what the numbers of bears are. Well, we have six or seven zones in the province, and we're continuing with our DNA study. Right now grizzly bear populations can only be estimated, and it's very, very difficult. It takes a long time to get all the DNA census. So in each zone they're pretty well estimated.

Because the estimates in our first set of numbers for each zone are strictly estimates, we want to have a better idea of the numbers, so

we didn't put a moratorium on hunting. We suspended the hunt for three years. The hunt was and could still be in the future a management tool for the numbers of grizzly bears. But let's take a look over the next three years with this DNA study at exactly how many grizzly bears there are across the entire province and not just in individual zones. That decision will be made for the future.

But here's what happens if you suspend a hunt and you have more interaction as our population grows and we get into the backcountry with our style of living or our style of recreation: we have to be more bear smart. We're unveiling a BearSmart program here within the next two weeks. We're going to let the population of Alberta know about how to conduct yourself in the backcountry, some of the things that you should take responsibility for yourself in keeping bears away from humans. When you have a bear/human conflict – it doesn't matter whether it's an automobile or whether it's on a trail or whatever – and our fish and wildlife guys are called, the bear generally loses.

So we as people have got to assume some responsibility. The BearSmart program is going to outline some of those responsibilities: how we keep our food in camp spots and even how to make sure that they're more secure so that the bears can't get to them. The bear gets used to human food. They know where to go find it, and what happens then is that you get into the bear/human conflict, and we would like to stop that.

Now, you talked about the success of the Karelian dogs. The Karelian dogs were a pilot project, part of our initial BearSmart program, and the pilot project was started in the Crowsnest Pass. I got to know those little puppies when they were just secured by the department staff down there in the Crowsnest Pass, in the Blairmore office. That pilot project has worked out really, really well, so we're going to be expanding on the Karelian bear dog as part of our BearSmart program.

The other things: helping communities establish where their trails are, making sure that berry bushes are away from the trails, and again trying to get that distance between bears and humans. The biggest thing, as I said, is to make us as individuals aware of the fact that we have a responsibility as well to make sure that that separation is there. We can't always be relying on the bear to be making that decision because the bear is hungry. They have an insatiable appetite, and they'll go wherever the food is. That's why you see bears crossing back and forth over the Alberta and British Columbia border. It depends on where the food is. So to get back to the numbers, that's another reason why it's very hard to tie down the numbers, and we're really pleased to have the kind of co-operation that we have from British Columbia in trying to tie those down.

The same thing happens with the caribou study. Some of the dollars that we're putting forward is a partnership with industry and our stakeholders to make sure that the habitat is there and that the preservation of the habitat is there for the existence of the caribou, looking after natural predators, like the wolves. Nobody likes to go out there and destroy any wildlife, but when you have one species as a predator to another and that species is in danger, then you have to do something. It's part of our management tool. You have to make sure that the caribou are going to survive.

3:50

The other thing that we're doing, which is a great partnership with industry, is that we've taken a corralled area – it's a very large corralled area – and we're taking the caribou cows that are going to be giving birth this spring, and we've protected them in this corralled area. It was part of a conservation to make sure that the young calves that are coming up will have a survival rate. We and the industry think that that's really, really important for the survival

of the caribou. So they are doing the responsible thing, and it's, again, part of our management.

Conservation of the boreal forest. You were talking a bit about that and looking at a strategic model for the boreal forest. You know, we look at policies. Alberta is only part of the boreal forest. It includes a number of provinces across Canada, and we certainly take our part in looking at the conservation laws and the policies in protection of the boreal forest of not only those other jurisdictions but also what happens, certainly, in our own forests. We look at it as part of our responsibility in responsible forest management. We want to have a healthy forest ecosystem. We know that we have to have a competitive industry, and we know that if that industry thrives, then we've got vibrant communities, and we've got people that have a quality of life. They have schools, they have hospitals, and it's a quality of life that they enjoy. If it's important to Albertans, if it's important to the sustainability of the resource, then it's important for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development.

What we've done is we've recently endorsed a boreal forest framework, which endorses what we believe is sound science and public partnerships to help address the boreal forest challenge. The first partnership under the framework is an agreement with Ducks Unlimited, which I've met with many times, to share expertise on watershed and water preservation because that's part of good habitat. That's part of one of the four corners of the framework that we're looking forward to in the future as well. But we want to share our expertise on those watersheds and, of course, integrated landscape management in the boreal forest.

It's a good point that you brought up that nationally the boreal forest represents 75 per cent of Canada's forests. In Alberta we've got about 10 per cent of that, as I said earlier. We've got foothills, we've got boreal forest, we've got parkland, and we've also got Shield ecosystems in that as well. The campaign is aimed to protect 50 per cent of the national boreal forest and establish Forest Stewardship Council certification for the other 50 per cent of the region. Alberta practices are considered amongst the best, and we're part of the planning standards that are recognized internationally. So the boreal forest is important to us.

The next thing I want to talk about is in terms of making sure that the habitat is preserved – that's kind of the context that you were going in – and also on the viability of the resources. Pine beetle: last year during estimates you talked about an Alberta-made solution. Now, this year you're saying that maybe we should be looking at expertise from somewhere else. Well, we've been doing that for a number of years. When it was first found out that the pine beetle was going to be a problem and it was coming our way, we were working with British Columbia, we were working with Montana, and we were working with Idaho. We know the folks down there. We take best practices from what they have done in the past. We apply them to what we have to deal with today. More importantly, now that the pine beetle is on our border, we have been very proactive in trying to stop it at the border. As a matter of fact, our goal is to take 100 per cent of the trees that are infested and get rid of them.

As a matter of fact, I want to share with the hon. member and the House and actually with all Albertans just a progress report on what we have done to date. We do aerial surveys, and then we do on-the-ground surveys. So far what we've done is we've done them in various regions across the province, and I've got five or six regions here that I just want to bring you up to date on.

In the Kakwa wildland park we have completed our survey. The trees that are to be cut are 283 trees. What we've done so far: we've completed 97 per cent of that control by cutting and burning 275 of those trees.

In the Willmore wilderness park – this is a big area where the beetle is coming over – we're ongoing with our survey. We have 7,480 trees to be cut and burned. At this point in time we have cut and burned 1,820 of those trees, so we have a long way to go there. With this big area of beetle-infested trees, that's where we would like to do the prescribed burns. We would have done that last September, but with the high humidity and the rain that we had during September, it wasn't practical to go in there and burn that area. We were hoping that maybe the cold winter would get rid of them, but we didn't have that cold a winter over there, so we're going to have to look at another opportunity to do a prescribed burn over there to make up the difference on those trees. I'll share this with you a little bit later on this afternoon.

We have the great co-operation of Community Development in going into these parks and identifying and cutting and burning these trees because they see it as a preservation of the other trees that could be infested years down the road.

When it comes to the southern Rockies area, in the Bow Valley we've completed our surveys. Trees to be cut and burned: 315. We're a hundred per cent done there. In Spray Lakes we've completed our surveys. We have identified 909 trees, and a hundred per cent of that has been done at this point in time. In the Oldman area we have completed our surveys, and we have cut and burned 81 out of the 102 trees that have been identified, and although that has been suspended for a short time, we'll have to pick that up in the future. The Crowsnest Pass: the same way. Our survey is completed, and we have identified trees to cut and burn at 1,226, and we've actually cut and burned 1,176 of those trees. In the Peter Lougheed area we have a status of ongoing surveying. We've identified 17 trees, and we will be looking at cutting and burning those 17 trees as well.

So far, the total of trees to be cut and burned is 10,332 and of trees that we have cut and burned is 4,593, so we have a long way to go.

At the next opportunity I will finish off on fishing derbies and . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the allocated time has run out.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to rise and make some hopefully constructively critical comments in regard to the Sustainable Resource Development budget. I'd like to thank the hon. minister and his staff for coming out with a very extensive group of information in regard to the budget and certainly some degree of clarity that makes my job a lot easier.

Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to look at the budget here in regard to the various categories of core business that the minister has identified: forest protection, forest land resource development, fish and wildlife management, rangeland management, and land-use disposition management. The ministry, of course, uses these classifications, so for my purposes it makes things similarly easy, I guess.

4:00

So, first of all, the issue I'd like to ask some questions about is in regard to wildfires. This is the season where the fire season starts, and unfortunately we already have several hundred hot spots across the province. I guess that this is a perennial question, but I do want to talk about it anyway. You know, clearly, this ministry is in need of significant funds in its planning and operations, and I believe that there is a gap here in the way that wildfire management allocates its funds. Every year it's probably a similar problem. Last year the ministry budgeted \$62 million for its wildfire management program, and then by supplementary estimates that amount was increased last year by 143 per cent up to \$149 million.

Now, of course, I'm not by any means advocating the refusal to grant emergency funds to fight fires and to let these fires rage out of control or anything like that, but I believe that we know from year to year consistently that the wildfire issue is a problem. It's a growing problem due to the increased human use of our wilderness areas, especially in northern Alberta, and the tendency for climate change as well, the drying out of the forests. This past winter was an extraordinarily light year for precipitation, and it continues into the spring. We can see a trend, certainly over the last 10 years or so, that I believe would precipitate the increase to this fund significantly, by at least 50 per cent. We know that, in fact, we're going to end up using it.

It's just good budgeting management practices. It gives us something more to work with. Perhaps we can talk about the wildfire question in more detail if we are in fact allocating those funds during the budget process so that we can look at the details of how we might tackle this problem in a constructive and creative way. Certainly, most of the dollars do go to direct firefighting, and that's necessary, as I said before. But at the same time, I guess, if we saw an accurate number from the beginning, then I think it would help us to employ best practices here during the budget debate every year.

I have a quote here from last year. "If we go over our budget, then we can go to the sustainability fund." This is the minister from last year. Of course, that's true, but I would just like to ask then: why does this ministry consistently underestimate wildfire operation budgets every year? Last year the minister admitted during the debates that "when you take a look at the number of wildfires that we have each year and you look at the \$75 million that we have, that just basically gets us started." Again, that's from last year. By the minister's own admission this budget is grossly insufficient, so why not simply budget properly? That's my comment that I would like to make on that. Obviously, there is yearly variation to the expenses that this program might incur, however fires have consistently been increasing over time.

According to the minister's business plan and his estimate debate comments from last year one of the focuses of the department is education and awareness. However, according to the department's website more fires are caused every year by humans than by natural causes, lightning and such things. While lightning-strike fires might in the end prove more destructive in terms of hectares burnt, there is little that we can do with that one. The fact is that in 2003, which seems to be the latest available data from that site, 661 fires were caused by humans compared to 527 caused by lightning strikes. This to me, Mr. Chairman, suggests that the education program led by the ministry is not entirely successful by any measurable standard.

My question is then: does the minister have more up-to-date data in regard to these incidents? Why is there no data more recent than 2003? As well, I would like to ask if the minister will post this information on the website and give Albertans an indication as to how successful the 2004 wildfire prevention campaign was. This was the last time that concerted effort was being made to educate the public according to the website, and we would like to see some definable measurements as to the success of this expenditure from the budget.

As well, I'd like to ask what the minister is doing to educate people in regard to their responsibilities concerning wildfires. Recently there was a citizen who was fined \$500 for starting a fire on his property that spread to a nearby forest. Five hundred dollars doesn't seem like very much at all, and it doesn't seem like a deterrent otherwise. I would be curious to know if the minister would be raising the amount that individuals are fined for in fact

causing the start of a wildfire. I think that education mixed with deterrence is the combination that we use in the Justice department, and the SRD department would do well to learn from that precedent.

I think the issue that overrides many of these SRD categories – certainly, the wildfire section being no exception – is that we have the encroachment of increased human activity into formerly wild areas. We have to be realistic that the economic performance of this province is largely determined by how we use these resources that were formerly wilderness areas. You know, forestry, oil and gas and energy exploration, and a wide range of other activities in these formerly wild areas are causes of the wildfire increase that we see in combination with change in the climate drying out these northern forests.

I think we can expect reasonably that this trend will continue in terms of lack of precipitation and increased human activity in the wilderness areas. My comment that I've made several times with regard to wildfires and to all of these categories is that we need an integrated approach that will encompass not just the SRD development strategy but that of Energy and that of the Ministry of Environment, agriculture, and other ministries as well so that we are looking at an overriding plan that can be used to see what the province is going to look like in the next 30 to 50 years. As it happens, without an integrated plan it's sort of every person for himself, and the wilderness invariably loses out in that sort of scenario, Mr. Chairman. In regard to wildfires, without an integrated land-use strategy we are just creating the conditions by which more wildfires of greater intensity will be likely to visit us within the next season and coming seasons.

The next category that I have here is in regard to grizzly bears. Last year the minister announced that six biologists and one caribou/grizzly bear manager will conduct important scientific research that will help address the growing pressures faced by Alberta's wildlife population. I would like to ask the minister to update the House as to what research is being undertaken and what results, if any, will be forthcoming.

4:10

As well, I would like to ask if the minister can explain what will be involved in the BearSmart program. I heard something about it here. I think that in regard to identification of and maintaining the integrity of the bear habitat, this is the issue that I find is like the elephant in the room that nobody talks about. We're dealing with not just grizzly bear habitat and management but wolves and caribou and a range of other wildlife that I think serve as indicator species for the overall health of any given ecosystem. Obviously – and this is the unsaid comment that I believe – you know, with the crisis in the grizzly bear population, the caribou population, and now the wolves and whatnot, we're not protecting the ecosystem that all of these organisms require to survive. So the depletion of the eastern slopes natural areas and the failure of this government to protect those areas is the direct reason why there is a problem with the grizzly bear population in the first place. Same with the woodland caribou. The wolves are suddenly having a field day with the woodland caribou because the natural balance of that ecosystem has been almost irreversibly set out of whack by intensive oil and gas operations in those areas.

So we have to obviously face this fact. This idea of ad hoc, sort of fly-by-night solutions to try to save these populations will not go anywhere until we face the fact that the ecosystems have to be protected, the habitats have to be protected for these and all other species in a larger, integrated fashion.

The next topic that I would like to just comment on briefly is in regard to the chronic wasting disease problem that we have mostly

in eastern Alberta. On this topic of CWD, the disease may have devastating effects not only on Alberta's game farmers but also on Alberta's wildlife populations. Government officials have so far assured the public that CWD has not had significant incursions into Alberta's game farms. However, if it does, the results could probably provide the finishing blows to an already embattled industry.

On March 23 of this year during question period the hon. minister again asserted that the key to reducing the incidents of CWD was by "reducing deer density." Again, I realize that there is a problem with the overpopulation of deer in some areas, but I would ask also to beg the question: does the minister not think that the ever-shrinking habitat may be a reason for the increasing incidence of CWD and that further culling the deer herd may not be, in fact, the best approach? Rather, it may be part of a larger approach which includes dedicating more land to native species. Of course, if you have a concentration of a certain species in smaller areas, then the incidence of disease can be more likely.

In order to save a species, the province is considering allowing more of them to be killed. In a specific area along the Saskatchewan border the government is apparently considering changing the hunting quotas. I would be curious to know what the changes will be for the upcoming hunt, including the cull that is precipitated by the spread of CWD in eastern Alberta.

The next category that I have here is in regard to the pine beetle. We would love to have specific information on the 10,000 or so trees that were identified by the minister as being focused on for destruction to try to control the pine beetle infestation. I would like to know some more specific information as well about the intentions of the ministry to control the infestation in the Willmore wilderness area. It seems to be the most prevalent part of the province that has infestation. If controlled burns are going to be utilized here at some point during 2006 to control that, where might those controlled burns be taking place? We'd certainly welcome increased awareness and research on the Rocky Mountain pine beetle infestation, so the minister's comment in regard to a conference that is going to be hosted I guess later this month is welcomed.

We know that the larger issue in regard to the pine beetle being able to move across the border, the Continental Divide, is because of climate change. Cold snaps are just not happening that otherwise would kill the beetle in its larval stage when it reaches our areas, where we traditionally have these very long cold periods. Certainly, we know that this is a manifestation of climate change, a harbinger of much more significant changes to come, I would suggest, Mr. Chairman. I think, again, this is a part of what we need to do: to have an integrated solution or an integrated means by which Environment and Energy and SRD and Agriculture can work together to address these large overriding issues such as climate change. I'd ask the minister if he could perhaps elaborate on that, if climate change specifically has been a topic for interministerial consultation.

The next category that I would like to discuss briefly is concerning softwood lumber. On page 356 of the ministry's business plan strategy 4.2 states that the ministry will "work with International and Intergovernmental Relations and other jurisdictions to resolve the softwood lumber trade dispute." Now that we have a framework agreement negotiated by the federal government, I think it's incumbent upon this ministry as well as others to do some serious critical work as to how this framework agreement will play out to ensure that it benefits our provincial pulp and lumber industry to its greatest potential.

I guess that just to have this framework agreement in place is some reason for cautious optimism. However, the proof is in the

pudding, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, we have to look carefully as to what's going to happen because we saw already for the first negotiated part of this deal that we only ended up with 80 cents to the dollar on the illegal tariffs that were imposed upon our industry across the country. If this is their opening bid and if this is any indication of what sort of goodwill or otherwise that the Americans are going to bring to the table, then I think that we have to be on our guard most strenuously because, of course, the industry that we're talking about here is quite significant for Alberta and employs many tens of thousands of workers across the province.

Thanks.

Mr. Coutts: I want to thank the hon. member for some very astute questions. My answers will probably be a little shorter this time because some of them I have covered or parts of them I have covered, but I'm going to try and deal specifically with some of the questions that you asked.

Before I do, Mr. Chairman, there's another person from Sustainable Resource Development that has joined us in the gallery here. I just want to welcome Lauren Parker from our minister's office to the proceedings this afternoon. She's a young university student, working the summer with us, who is very interested in what happens with her future, and the land-use framework is one of those things that she's really interested in. Lauren, welcome. It's good to see you.

4:20

Regarding budgeting for wildfire, hon. member, things haven't changed since last year. We use our base budgeting to get our contracts set up so that we have everything in place for our wildfire season. You're absolutely right; this particular season we don't have a lot of moisture like we had last year. We didn't have a lot of moisture during the winter. As a matter of fact, these last few weeks we've even seen a lot of not only prairie fires but also forest fires. I think we're up about 150 per cent over last year in the number of forest fires and the amount of hectares that have been burned because of low humidity and the low level of moisture that is in the ground.

We know that we're going to have a very difficult season this year. We are prepared for it. That's what the base budgeting does. We go to the sustainability fund when we need extra funding on an emergency basis. It's something that has worked effectively for us. The reason that it has worked effectively is not that we're underfunding or underbudgeting or undervaluing our forests or our forest fire commitments; we just don't know how much is going to be needed. So for us to come here today with an actual budget figure is pretty well impossible, but with the ability that we have with the emergency fund, the sustainability fund, it really works very, very well. We do have the dollars to make sure that we're set up for the season, that we can have the infrastructure in place for the fire season so that we can protect communities and protect people's lives.

When I talk about preparedness, I also have to mention the fact that we're upgrading. The capital infusion that we get this year and in subsequent years will help us with our air tanker bases, which will provide a better service, as well as re-equipping our fleet of air tankers to make sure that we get out to the fires with the best possible equipment. So we welcome that capital infusion as well as the infrastructure on the ground to make sure that we're more efficient and can get out to those fires as quickly as possible.

With regard to education on the causes of fires you wondered about the latest update and the data that was available and posting that on the web. We'll continue to post on the web when informa-

tion becomes available so that it's made available for Albertans and interested people like yourself. We want to make sure of the education component: again, people taking responsibility for their own backyards, making sure that they don't flick that cigarette onto the ground, making sure that they put out their campfires, making sure that there are burning barrels in municipalities where they live in forested areas, making sure that they abide by fire bans, making sure that when municipalities put fire bans on, we're consistent with their fire bans as well, using proper media outlets like radio and television to let people know about the fire situation and the hazards that are out there.

This last weekend, driving up from the constituency on Saturday night to attend the junior forest wardens annual conference in Leduc, I heard an advertisement on the radio at least five times advising people: "It's a very dry year out there. Please use caution when you're dealing with fire in forested areas. Use caution when you're dealing with your own fire on the dry prairies." That type of thing. It's a resource. It's part of our stewardship. It's a resource that we've got to protect.

The other thing that we do particularly involving communities is our FireSmart program. We continue to get the funds that we need to take that program to communities and to individuals that are close to and live in the forested areas. We're grateful for that because it's a very successful program and we want to continue it. As our forests mature and as we, expanding populations, want to enjoy our forests, we've got to take the measures to protect them as well.

Raising fines is one thing that I hadn't thought of, but it's one of the things that we will look at. Of course, collecting them is another thing, but certainly it's something that we will look at.

Grizzly bears. Have we got the staff in place? Yes. We've been able to maintain the staff that we had last year to continue with the DNA census. We want to make sure that we're dealing with more specifics when dealing with grizzly bears. We also need to make sure that as we go into the future, we have the best science available to make the determination of the estimated number of bears out there and the areas in which they congregate.

I mentioned to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore about the BearSmart program and the education that's required. Yes, people have got to know that bears are in their area, but they also have to know why bears are in their area. Is it because they're leaving garbage out in unprotected garbage bins, or is the landfill not being protected by proper fencing, et cetera? Are there things in the community that bears like to come into because they have this insatiable appetite? Is it all blamed on some of the ecosystem being forested and that type of thing? Last year I had the opportunity to go to the university and talk to a group of people that were doing some bear work. You can't blame the forestry industry for the loss of ecosystem. Even the roads that we travel on, bears come out and eat plants at the side of the road as well. So, again, trying to create that buffer between human and bear conflict. We think that it's a balance we're striving for in the province between our existence and our quality of life and the wildlife, that we like to see, that we like to enjoy, and that people like to have a hunting experience with.

You mentioned the caribou and ad hoc plans. I don't think that they are ad hoc plans. I think the recovery plans that we have in place, that are vetted and looked at by our recovery teams, which have stakeholders from all of the affected areas, are well-planned documents and I believe are very well executed by industry and government and the various stakeholders. We have people in place to check up on those plans, to see how well they're working, and to continue to work on them. Do we do a good enough job communicating that? I would like to think that we do a very good job of communicating that, but, you know, if it's the difference between

going out and seeing a caribou or making sure that your young person gets to soccer, maybe the soccer is more important today, that type of thing. They may listen to the soccer announcement before they'll listen to an announcement on whether or not there are enough caribou out there. But it is an important part of our ecosystem, an important part of our province, and we try to find the balance.

That brings me to chronic wasting disease. This answer is for Edmonton-Decore as well as yourself. You talk about the chronic wasting disease and the actions that we're taking to provide that balance along the Saskatchewan border, right from Lloydminster down to Medicine Hat and south into the Cypress area. The criteria that we use for the cull of the deer in that area is part of a national strategy. It's part of a national surveillance that we're a part of.

You talk about chronic wasting disease: where did it come from? Well, it came from Saskatchewan, and ultimately it came from North Dakota. The disease is spread from infected herds in both of those locations. What we're trying to do in using this national strategy is reduce the herds to reduce the incidence of the disease being spread between the wild deer along the border. We find that the closer to the border we get, the more incidents we have of chronic wasting disease. Again, reducing those herds is part of the national strategy to make sure that we can absolutely stop that disease at the border. We need to stop the infection from coming over into Alberta because if it gets a hold in Alberta like it has got a hold in Saskatchewan, if we're not proactive in getting rid of the diseased animals, it will spread not only to the 400,000 deer that we have in this province, but it will also spread to elk populations. If it spreads to those populations, then it will continue to spread, maybe to our domestic populations as well. So that is our way of managing that particular disease: at the border and keeping it there.

4:30

Pine beetle. Well, yes, I will provide you with the information that I shared with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. Certainly, nature could help us here in this fight by having a colder winter. It hasn't happened. Is that climate change? I don't know, but the fact is that nature has not co-operated with us with minus 40 degrees, so we've got to do everything we can to stop that beetle at the border.

What we need to do – and this is what I was getting at in my previous answer to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, so I'm going to continue. Regarding the pine beetle, it's important that we take those shared best practices that B.C. has learned and that we have learned in this last couple of years and all the advance work that we've done and come up with a strategy on how to get rid of this beetle. That's why we're having the pine beetle summit at the end of May. We're making sure that we have all of the information on the table and that we're being proactive with the information to get rid of this beetle.

It's absolutely necessary that we do a number of things on a number of fronts. It's not just identifying and cutting and burning the trees. We also have to take a look at the threat to a mature pine forest because that's the eventual food for the pine beetles that will be available this fly season when they leave their parent tree and go to other trees. We're looking at strategies like cutting sequences for our forestry companies if they have identified pine beetle in their area, and those cutting sequences will be part of our management plans to make sure that the food source for the pine beetle is taken away but at the same time making sure that those cutting sequences are all part of a good management plan. It takes a lot of work to do that.

On softwood lumber, the framework that is put in place, we will continue to work with the industry to define some of the issues that

they have. When we go into the legal text based around the framework, is it perfect? No, it's not 100 per cent perfect, but there are some things that are very positive about the framework that's put in place on the softwood. Federal governments have gotten together, both Canada and the United States, and they've decided on this framework.

What it means to Alberta, which only has 7 per cent of the exports, is that it gives us seven years and a two-year extension of certainty in softwood. We had a deal that nobody liked – everybody lived with it, and nobody liked it – where there was a countervail duty put on all of the product going across the border. That duty was held in bank accounts in the United States, and that's something that our industry didn't like. Getting 80 per cent of that back plus 10 per cent of it going to market development and things like disaster relief for Katrina: those will be some positive things that will happen for our industry. Industry has always said that they would like to have as much come back to their industry as possible, but leaving 10 per cent of it on the table is certainly something that they knew might have to happen. Certainly, they would want 100 per cent of it.

The idea of an alternative dispute mechanism being put in place is another positive thing. Rather than having the litigation going on over the border that costs millions and millions of dollars, having an alternative dispute mechanism put in place is another positive thing on the softwood framework. Again, I'll just repeat myself by saying that we will work with our industry to make sure that the legal text looks after their interests as well as we go forward.

While I have the floor, Mr. Chairman, I would like to just talk about a couple of things about integrated land management. This kind of goes off to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. We talk about integrated land management for the future. In my previous conversations, I was talking about some of the policies we had right in place today, but when you talk about integrated land management for the future – and I have read your booklet. I have read it. It's a number of chapters of things that have been done and could be looked at and should be looked at, and we have been doing a lot of those things with our sustainable resource environmental management office. We had said in the year 2005 that we would look at a land-use framework. That was announced in the Speech from the Throne in 2005, and in 2006 we expanded on that. We have set up a sustainable resource environmental management office to develop a framework. The framework will be somewhat different because it will be more policy orientated.

Looking towards tomorrow, the document that has been sent over by the Official Opposition, is basically a number of chapters of what could be done. Well, we're going to be more proactive than that, Mr. Chairman. We're going to go out and we're going to talk to Albertans this year, this spring, about their values. What do they see in the land? What do they see in terms of reducing the footprint, making sure that industry could still work, still thrive, still survive and provide good employment for people, but at the same time how can we do it better? How can we come up with integrated land management? We've talked with municipalities. We've talked with the AAMD and C. We've talked to the AUMA. We'll be going out and talking to urban communities about their values as well. What does it take to make a city a great place to live? How can we deal with the urban sprawl? How can we deal with rural sprawl as well? We'll be having a talk with them about their values.

Then we'll be talking about access management. While we're talking about access management, this spring, within the next week, we're going to be unveiling the access management plan for the Ghost-Waiparous. It's just one of many access management plans that we have across this province. You know, there is lots of criticism about what goes on in the backcountry. Certainly, when

you see landscapes that are destroyed and just left for our department to go clean up after or rehabilitate or reclaim, we don't have the resources to do all of that. But, you know, we have 95 per cent of the people that use the backcountry that are really, really good at it, and they like it, and they enjoy it.

I'll get back to access management planning in just a few minutes.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A couple of items that I want to bring up today with the hon. minister. What I want to talk about is your goal 2, Alberta forest and forest communities' protection from wildfires. I guess what I want to do first of all is compliment the minister and his staff for the FireSmart program, especially in Grande Cache, and now we're doing quite a bit of work in the town of Hinton. Also, I want to compliment your department for the aspect of co-operation with the national park. We've done a lot of work in there, and we've got everybody onside. So I just wanted to note that about your fire protection.

The other aspect that I was looking at is on your goal 4, "Alberta's forests support a competitive and sustainable forest sector." As we're moving along, I would really like to see us look a lot more at the added value. I know a lot of our forest management agreements have got certain clauses and everything in there that state what they have to do. I think we have to be more imaginative now and get more value out of that. We've got to get away from the old adage of hewer of wood and drawer of water. We've got to really make sure that we work on that.

4:40

We also have got to be really concerned and work with communities because when you look at the amount of communities that we have in the forest industry, we've got in the neighbourhood of 50. There are 10 or 12-odd ones that are out there, and that's their main resource, the forest industry, and that's the economic driver, so we've got to really work with them and get some understanding.

I guess the other thing I want to talk about is with your ILM aspects. I know that we've talked a lot about the aspect of integrated management on road systems. I think we've got to be a lot more aggressive with the aspect of the Energy department because in my riding, especially in one area, we've got one road where we've got over 4,000 vehicles a day on that, and that's just an LOC. You know, the average now is about 30-70. Thirty per cent of the road is used by the people that built the road; 70 per cent is by the oil patch. So, you know, it's good that we have that type of usage – I mean, there are road-use agreements and everything – but what I'm saying is that to minimize the footprint in the area, we have to play a stronger role on that, and I would like to see us push that a lot harder.

The third thing I want to talk about: Alberta's forests and forest landscapes support healthy ecosystems and vibrant communities. As we move along and work with the aspect of stewardship, I think we have to get a lot more involved with the aspect of education. We have done that in some areas, but I think we have to get a better understanding and get a lot more people involved, especially our schools so that our young people have an understanding of it. I know that we've done some work on that.

When we come to the mountain pine beetle, I just strongly believe that what we're doing is a good thing. Quite a bit of it is through neglect by our neighbour, by not acting soon enough. I guess we have to really work with the threshold around the aspect of the mountain passes coming into the western part of our province. We have to work with Jasper national park and, of course, Banff national park and work a lot faster and harder on that. I'm just wondering if

we're working with the aspects of the forest companies in the area because at some time we might have to do an accelerated cut plan to make sure that we remove the food source from these beetles that are coming through from our neighbouring province.

The last one that I have is on your goal 5, that I just wanted to talk a bit about and question and get a possible answer on a couple of aspects. As I look at page 406, line 3.0.1, I look at what we had as actual in 2004-05, almost \$40 million. It was \$39,989,000. Then what we had projected for 2005-06 was \$45,970,000. So we're looking at about a \$5,981,000 increase. But then when we move on to 2006-07, we're looking at \$48,743,000, which is only an increase of \$2,733,000 over the previous year.

I guess that with your goal on Alberta's fish and wildlife resources and their habitat – healthy, productive, and sustainable – I come to the aspect of the species-at-risk committee and of the scientific subcommittee. As of the end of 2005 we have enacted already 15 recovery plans. Then when you look at the aspect of species that have been considered to the end of the year 2005, we've looked at 46. So the pressure is on on some of these species, and we've done some great work, and I certainly appreciate the efforts that the Scientific Subcommittee have done because they've done a real great job.

I've got to compliment the perseverance and the understanding of the 19 other groups that are on the Endangered Species Conservation Committee because we've had very good attendance, very good interjections. We've always come to a good plan that we submit to the minister, and then of course he gets back to us and lets us know, and that's how we move on to the recovery plans.

So I guess my bottom line on this aspect is that I'd like to have the minister give us some insight. Looking at those figures on page 406, it's hard to decipher what amount we're going to add in there because, as you know, the pressure is on. I guess the other thing is combining that with your goal 3 and goal 5, to get the message out. I know that one of the hon. members from the other side said that, well, you know, all we do is to paperwork. Well, at least we're showing what we've done. We're the envy of all other provinces because we're moving ahead. We publish those reports every other year. It gives people an understanding of what your department is doing to look at this aspect, and we have the great support of a lot of people.

I guess one thing that I'd really like to compliment your staff on is the western blue flag recovery team. It is a peripheral species, and what transpired in southern Alberta is that we found a few colonies of it. Of course, people were reluctant to get involved. Through the team of people in the south, they got some of the people together and the recovery team.

The other thing that they're doing now: they're not doing them in isolation. They're working with other species that we have to get more information or recovery plans on, so they work together on it. The bottom line that we're finding now is that we're finding other people saying: oh, well, I got this on my property. So they're seeing that we're out there and doing it in a progressive way.

I think we're going to be able to move along a lot better on a lot of these species because the people in the recovery team have proven themselves, shown how they can co-operate with the aspect of the farming or ranching industries so that they can move ahead. They're not getting the aspect where they feel, number one, that we're going to expropriate their land. They're working in co-operation to move ahead on that.

So if you could give me some insight on the aspect of funding on that and then any of the other four items that I mentioned in this, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I want to be able to just take a few moments here and provide some answers to the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. Thank you very much for the comments on our staff. It's a difficult job when you're in charge of the entire province of Alberta from border to border to border to border with the amount of staff that we have, but we have excellent staff. They are concerned about fish, wildlife. They're concerned about the forest. They're concerned about the ecosystem. They're concerned about sustainability. It's a balance.

You're absolutely right: I believe our FireSmart program is one of those initiatives that tries to minimize the effect that fire would have not only on communities but also on the forest itself and that ecosystem that you talked about.

4:50

We also are grateful for the co-operation that we get from our national parks. You mentioned two or three things there about the corridors where the pine beetle would come through and corridors, obviously, for wildfires as well. We get great co-operation from our national parks in dealing with disease and fire as well. B.C. certainly has come to the table, and our parks people on the federal side have come to the table as well. We really enjoy that co-operation that we get because we can share best practices, and that helps us come up with the strategy that we have put in place. They're going to be participating in the pine beetle summit as well. So I'm glad you mentioned the parks.

Forest competitiveness, value-added. Certainly, our contract with Forintek helps us build on the value-added component. Industry itself puts a lot of dollars and energy into value-added, but more importantly they are also taking a look at the product that we have in the forest that can adapt to a marketplace. Then we together have to see how we can take and put that into our annual cuts to make sure that we have the product that can fill that marketplace.

We're working also with the Department of Economic Development and tourism to look at opportunities in the world for forest competitiveness. We think that that's going to help make our industry more viable for the future, recognizing the problems that they're having in the competitiveness, with cheaper workforces in other countries, faster growing trees, the fact that we're a long ways away from a port to get some of that export over there, and those types of things. So those are some of the things that we have to deal with.

Your comment on integrated land management, being aggressive there. We know that we have to be aggressive there, but when you're dealing with integrated land management, you have to plan better. There's a lot of economic development happening. You can't be taking different roads to go to different opportunities. We think better planning with communities, better planning with MDs, better planning with the industry and other stakeholders is necessary. You're right: you can take a road that might be suitable for a logging road, and all of a sudden you've got 4,000 or 5,000 vehicles a day going on that road. Then how do you upgrade it, when do you upgrade it, and for what purpose? So that's part of our better planning.

Forest landscapes and education. You're absolutely right: it's needed. It's part of our aggressive plan in trying to let the people know about the biodiversity that's in the forest. We have a biodiversity program that also involves endangered species. We want to continue with the species at risk, and I have to say that we have probably the best example of how to handle endangered species in our province, probably across Canada. We want to make sure that

the work that's being done there continues. Our biodiversity program that we have industry involved with, that we have stakeholders involved with, will also help us continue with that species at risk program and make sure that it continues to be a success.

I want to get back to the wildfire there because you're asking about the increase. The actual increase for wildfire in our base budgeting is a \$2 million increase in the wildfire reinsurance program, plus we've put an extra million dollars – and this is on page 406, that you've made reference to – into funding for manpower costs. Of course, we looked at an increase in transferring equipment and inventory purchases to our operating expense as well. That's to make sure that we've got the proper things in the proper place at the proper time to fight wildfires. It's a better use of the dollars.

Then what we have is a .1 per cent increase for the Hinton Training Centre. I have to say that that training centre just does an excellent job in terms of preparing the people that go out into the forests, put their lives in danger to protect not only the resource but also the communities: everything from helitack operations, who are trained right there at Hinton, as well as our guardians, who are trained there and who will go out and help educate people and provide more of a presence in the backcountry.

Of course, we also have a .1 per cent increase for our junior forest wardens and junior forest rangers in the province because it's the young people we need to invest in to make sure that they're well aware of what's going on in the forest.

So I hope that those kinds of answers are the type of thing that you were looking forward to, and I'll wait for the next one, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to ask the minister some specific questions again that I didn't have probably the chance to ask the first go-around with regard to some of the timber lot questions.

I might as well go through here. Is the minister going to continue to convert community timber permits into commercial timber permits when permit holders, in fact, no longer meet the requirements? If the minister is aware of this loophole, when will he close it up?

The other one was specifically with regard to the interim Métis harvesting agreement. The minister of aboriginal affairs has always said that it's a cross-ministry development with regard to this signing initiative between aboriginal affairs, Sustainable Resource Development, and of course Justice. What, in fact, did your particular ministry have to do with regard to that particular agreement? When we talk about the Alberta Fish and Game Association, those particular members were obviously definitely opposed to that particular piece, so I'm not sure if the agreement was signed after or before consultation had even begun with that group. With this new piece that's going to be going out and new consultations that are going to be taking place, how much is your department going to play in that particular role and how much consultation will be given to, in fact, the Alberta Fish and Game Association organization? That's one of the specifics there.

The other one, just to make sure that I get back to the woodlot piece, is the microscale operators. Are you going to make sure that they continue to play an important role with the economic viability of rural areas and ensure that some of the local suppliers are able to produce and maintain those jobs in that market? In fact, if one of the big producers say that they cannot produce in that area and make a go of it, they want to in fact relocate some of their operations such

as in Hines Creek, will there be some consideration for the local mills to be able to take over some of the FMAs in that area then?

Going on to confined feedlot operations. Out of the 50 staff that the NRCB currently has right now, how many are inspectors for confined feedlots? How many of these staff make unannounced visits just to ensure that the amount that the feedlot originally said they were going to be operating under is in fact checked out in an unannounced inspection to ensure that they are keeping up to what the original permit is for?

Another piece here, then, is the reforestation. How many forest management units and oil and gas operators are actually harvesting more timber than the timber companies? I believe I touched on that somewhat. We talked about how much they do cut out for the seismic lines to be able to put down some of the compressor stations and that. Is that taken into account under the annual allowable cuts for some of the areas there?

So those are some specifics right there. I'll let you answer that, hopefully within the allotted time.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much. Now, I've got a couple of things to answer from your previous and certainly from this last little bit that you asked a few questions on. In the time remaining I hope I can get it all done.

Métis harvesting. It is an interim agreement, and our role in that interim agreement is to make sure that we monitor the resource and do the enforcement. There have been some questions around the Métis harvesting. Certainly, when I go to Fish and Game Association dinners and that type of thing, on a regular basis there is some talk about whether the interim agreement would ever be made permanent. The government has gone ahead with an analysis of the interim agreement and, as was announced this last week, is looking at a process by which we can renegotiate. Our role will continue to be in providing information to the renegotiating team about the monitoring and our particular role in making sure that conservation is paramount. So that remains to be seen for the upcoming year, how that renegotiation goes, but we still have an interim agreement, and our role will still be to make sure that we monitor and fulfill the obligations of the interim agreement.

5:00

When it comes to forestry and the permits for smaller operators, there's no doubt that there's some consolidation going on there. There's no doubt that some of the commercial timber permits are made available to some of the smaller operators and the woodlot operators. There is some consolidation going on, and we've tried our best to make sure that we accommodate some consolidation. I know that the hon. Member for West Yellowhead had a number of small operators, and they've consolidated themselves to get some tenure. They think that that's some security for them. We know that in the province we have some very small operators, we have some medium operators, and then we have some very large, corporate operators. It's all part of our forest industry, what makes Alberta a great place to be able to live and certainly to work. If there is a problem, if there is a loophole, we'll certainly check into that, and I will get back to you personally on that one.

Another area that you had earlier talked about with the smaller guys was some secondary manufacturing operations and that type of thing. Certainly, we see a great opportunity in value-added as we pursue that, as I was speaking with the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, a great opportunity for smaller operators to fit into that. We see an excellent opportunity. Of course, the softwood lumber

framework helps deal with the opportunity for secondary manufacturers to thrive in that marketplace as well.

Confined feeding operations. As you know and as I shared with you on a couple of occasions, what we've done is that we've gone through a search for a chair and a CEO for the operations part, for the NRCB, and those announcements will be made very shortly. On the operations side I believe that we have about 52 staff. If that's different, I will also let you know, but the last count that we had across this province dealing with applications, dealing with making sure that the regulations were looked at, dealing with enforcement and that type of thing, and dealing with people that make inquiries and providing education about confined feeding operations – those staff are in place to do that.

In terms of timber use on outlines and that type of thing, as I said, we have a much smaller problem there. Forest companies and oil companies are getting together to make sure that they use all the timber. No longer do they do a cutline and take the timber and burn it at the side of the road. It's too valuable a commodity. So that is being done today.

You talked about fishing derbies, and that's a very good point. We'll now put a licence out for fishing derbies. The small fishing derbies of 25 people or less will have a minimal fee. We want to make sure that it gives us an opportunity to know where a fishing derby is and how big or how small it is. If you get to a larger fishing derby – and they're all going to be made available to Alberta residents – a licence for that will take into consideration the size of the derby. We want to make sure that we give the people information about catch and release. A large fishing derby might be hard on the resource, but that'll give us an idea of whether or not the resources in that lake can actually stand that kind of a fishing derby. It's not to restrict anybody; it's just to give us an opportunity to provide nonprofit groups with the ability to have their fundraiser but at the same time protect the resource.

Particularly, I want to refer to the fishing revitalization, the extra million dollars on page 406 for fishery management revitalization. That's mostly for the walleye initiative that we've put forward. We're taking Alberta eggs and turning them into young fish, and then we're going to be opening up our hatchery in Cold Lake, making sure that we have walleye fisheries available. We're going to try and put together a pilot project in four lakes – Wolf Lake, Pigeon Lake, that you mentioned, Lac Ste. Anne, and Newell Lake – and try a tag system. The walleye is a much sought-after fish. You put the walleye into the lake and it can get fished out very quickly, so we want to make sure that more Albertans get an opportunity to go after this much sought-after fish. Therefore, we're looking at this tag system not to penalize anybody but to give more people an opportunity. It's part of our revitalization.

Now, I believe I've answered all of your questions. I just want to talk about the land-use framework in summing up here. There is \$2 million this year for additional land management activities and, of course, \$2 million for improved land information systems. This will help us set the stage after we do the consultation with Albertans. There's no sense in doing the consultation with Albertans and finding out what their values are if you don't already know what's happening on the land and having sort of an inventory of that. We're going ahead with this very strategic plan so that we know what's happening on the land today and we can adapt it to take into consideration Albertans' values and what we see as policy for the future in dealing with the issue that we talked about earlier of integrated land management, growing populations, access management, and conservation and preservation.

It has to come forward in a complete, sort of global perspective if I can say that. Of course, we're going to have competing interest;

we know that. But as we go forward over the next few years, we think that we've got the dollars in place to deal with a proper land-use framework that will take into account not only what's happening in other jurisdictions but also what's happening on this unique landscape of Alberta, our busy landscape. We want to come up with an Alberta solution to land use in the future.

The Alberta solution is one that is unlike any jurisdiction across Canada or any jurisdiction across the United States. We have high use of oil and gas. The forestry industry is doing very, very well here, and of course the people using the backcountry and access management. So we have to work with our partners to make sure that that goes forward in a positive way, the way that Albertans want, and the policies would be put in place to reflect that.

One of the things that I've mentioned today so many times is partnerships. I was referring to this earlier with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. One of the partnerships that we have that is really starting to take shape is our partnership with the off-highway vehicle community. It is an industry here in Alberta not only in the summertime with ATVs but also in the wintertime with snowmobiles. We're now having industry associations. We've had discussions with the industry to talk about safety for ATVs and doing it in a controlled way, not giving the impression that they can go down the middle of a stream and that being sort of the fun part of it. You even see them coming up with brochures now of ATVs and fathers and sons on a trail, on a managed trail, on a designated trail, and that's what we need to get to. You talked earlier about designated areas. This is what we need to do in terms of access management: make sure that we have people going on trails.

5:10

The industry itself is going to be one of our partners in coming up with access management and trail systems that will work. We have local clubs who are responsible for putting together a lot of the trails that we have in use today, and they have participated heavily in our access management plans. Do they agree on absolutely everything that comes forward? No, because they have had access to the backcountry, and then when you go ahead and designate some trails, they feel like they've been restricted.

You know, as I said earlier, 95 per cent of the people that are out there are very responsible. They've gotten together in their local clubs, and they've put out brochures. They work with our Department of SRD to promote the respect the land initiative. It's an educational initiative that we have. So they work very, very closely with us to let their riders and their membership know that they have to take the responsibility and take the lead on making sure that they watch out for wildlife, that they go into safe areas, that they stay on well-defined trails, that they go across bridges and not through water courses.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$229,636,000
Capital Investment	\$33,200,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report the estimates of the Department of Sustainable Resource Development.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases,	\$229,636,000;
capital investment,	\$33,200,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the House now stand adjourned until 8 this evening, at which time we'll reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, May 3, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/05/03

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Justice

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to present the budget estimates for Alberta Justice and the Attorney General.

Before I begin, however, I wish to introduce members of the executive management committee and senior officials who are attending here tonight. These are folks who in the area of justice make the government look good, make the ministry look good, and, as a result of all of that, make me look good. My eyesight is such that you all look the same from down here, but I'm pretty sure that these are the folks that are there: Terry Matchett, deputy minister; Nolan Steed, assistant deputy minister of legal services; Ken Tjosvold, assistant deputy minister of criminal justice; Gerald Lamoureux, executive director, court services, planning and business services; Dan Mercer, assistant deputy minister of strategic services; Shawkat Sabur, senior financial officer; Sylvia Church, manager of business planning in strategic services; Manuel da Costa, executive director of the maintenance enforcement program; Sharon Lepetich, senior adviser to the deputy minister; and Mark Cooper, who is director of communications. Also from my office are Andrea Hennig and Jeremy Chorney.

Before I make my comments, I thought that I should say to the hon. members opposite that the hockey game is on. You do have an opportunity to listen to my comments and accept that what I have to say is correct and cut the estimates short by about two periods. We can take a little adjournment between, say, 8:20 and 10 o'clock, watch a little hockey, come back and do some legislation. What's important: you have to listen up to what I say here so that you know that I'm answering all of your questions in my initial comments. [interjections] Only with the consent of the opposition. We wouldn't want to be accused of being oppressive here.

The business plan guides the overall direction and sets the goals for the ministry on how to meet our vision and mission. Our vision: "A fair and safe society supported by a trusted justice system." Our mission is

to protect the rights of all individuals in Alberta and advance the interests of society by fostering:

- Safe communities
- Access to justice
- Respect for the law
- Understanding of and confidence in the justice system
- The legal foundation for social cohesion and economic prosperity.

The budget supports the direction laid out in the business plan by funding initiatives that meet our goals. Briefly, the five goals of the ministry are as follows. Goal 1 is to "promote safe communities in Alberta." Goal 2 is to "promote a fair and accessible civil and criminal justice system." Goal 3 is to "provide access to justice services for Albertans in need." Goal 4 is to "improve [knowledge] of and confidence in the justice system." Goal 5 is to "assist

government ministries to achieve their objectives through provision of effective legal and related strategic services."

Alberta Justice has identified a fair and accessible civil and criminal justice system as one of its goals. Our objective is to make using the justice system easier, more understandable, and more user friendly for Albertans when they need it. We also must ensure that the system is working effectively. A growing population and economy in our province have placed increased demands on the justice system. I'm pleased that the department is slated to receive an increase in its budget this year to respond to those demands.

The Alberta Justice and Attorney General budget to be voted on for the 2006-2007 fiscal year is \$342 million, an increase of \$56 million, or 19.6 per cent, over the 2005-2006 forecast. Of this, \$35 million is for program expenses, and \$21 million is for capital investment. This new funding will make communities safer and give Albertans quicker, easier access to the justice system. Some of this new funding is aimed at shortening lead times to trial and responding to an anticipated rise in cases due to an increase in police resources.

I'll begin this evening by providing you with some highlights of initiatives we are undertaking this year with the new funding we have been allocated in this budget. You'll see how these link to our goals in the business plan, and I'd be pleased to address any questions you may have at the appropriate time.

I'll begin with initiatives that come under our court services division. The overall purpose of court services is to promote fair and equitable access to the justice system for all Albertans, which aligns with goal 2 in our business plan. This year's budget for the division is \$143.9 million, which is an increase of \$10.2 million, or 7.6 per cent, over the past year.

The government's commitment to safer communities resulted in Budget 2005 funding that added nearly 200 police officers through the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security. These officers are fighting organized crime, Internet crime, illicit drugs, and child exploitation as well as providing additional policing for rural Alberta. Increased policing increases demand on the courts. Alberta's Provincial Court is experiencing significant workload pressures, and lead times continue to rise in some locations of the province. Because of the increased complexity of the cases before the court, trials are taking longer, which adds to the backlog of cases.

The average number of trials scheduled has also increased dramatically in some parts of the province. Compared to February 2005, the average number of trials scheduled has increased by 6.4 per cent province-wide. In communities in the Calgary area the increase is 36.9 per cent, and the regional courts have increased by 19.6 per cent. More judges and court staff are needed to help ease these pressures.

Mr. Chairman, \$4.9 million will go towards appointing six additional Provincial Court judges, hiring their 18 support staff as well as hiring 34 front-line court staff across Alberta. This will improve lead times, handle an increasing workload, and provide improved services to the public and the judiciary. Front-line court staff will help alleviate current pressures in Alberta's courts. These positions are required to maintain adequate courtroom and counter service levels to the public and the judiciary. This funding will allow the courts to operate more effectively and provide Albertans with improved service.

One of the key initiatives this budget supports is new funding for family justice services. In 2006-2007 \$1.4 million has been allocated to expand services to families going through breakup. The first step of the family justice strategy was the proclamation of the Family Law Act last fall. The Family Law Act is part of a larger strategy to encourage people to resolve family problems in a more constructive way. The new funding for family justice services will

support that strategy by providing more dollars for things such as information and assistance to help people through the court process, mediation to help with parenting issues, education sessions about communicating and parenting after separation, and helping people get information and resolve child and spousal support disputes. These services help families understand and resolve issues and disputes relating to coparenting and child and spousal support.

The goal is to be supportive of individual family needs and promote collaboration between parents so that they take into consideration the best interests of their children. The breakup of a family is obviously a very difficult time for everyone involved. By improving access to these services, handling the necessary legal process will be easier, faster, and less confusing.

In 2006-2007 about 20 new staff will be hired in regions of the province where in the past services have been more limited. The new funding means that we can enhance our out-of-court dispute resolution services, including family mediation. Mediation helps separated parents come to an agreement regarding the parenting of their children in a less confrontational manner than appearing in court. We've had a great deal of success using these approaches in projects throughout the province.

The new funding will also allow us to strengthen existing services and expand them to other communities in the province. Mediation services continue to be expanded to reduce travel and wait time for those who want this service. In 2005-2006 we hired five family court counsellors across the province, and in 2006-2007 we're hiring two more, one in Hinton and one in High Prairie. We've also hired four additional staff to prepare court orders so that people in Provincial Court receive their orders on the same day. We'll be hiring four more staff for that purpose in this year.

8:10

The case-flow conference program expanded to Calgary in April, where two case-flow conference co-ordinators will be hired. The program provides an alternative to a docket appearance before a judge in Provincial Court when an applicant files a claim for a parenting order, a guardianship order, a contract order, or an order to enforce time with a child under the Family Law Act. Since October 2001 a pilot project in Edmonton Provincial Court has reduced docket appearances in family court by 58 per cent. When the applicant does not have a lawyer, cases are automatically referred to the case-flow conference program. The case-flow conference provides an opportunity for discussion of the issues in a private, less formal atmosphere than a courtroom. Parties are provided information regarding resources available to assist them in resolving their dispute, or alternatively claims may be finalized if the parties are consenting to the terms of orders.

More staff has also been hired for the Family Law Information Centre to assist with child support calculations and to provide self-help booklets and other legal information for self-represented and unrepresented litigants. The majority of these positions will be in rural Alberta, where this service has not been available in the past.

Another service for families going through breakup is the parenting after separation seminar. These seminars, that provide information to parents who are breaking up, are being expanded to more Alberta communities. As access to family justice services is improved, the time and cost to families in reaching a resolution to their issues is reduced, and that makes the justice system better.

The number of self-represented and unrepresented litigants in Alberta courts is increasing, most commonly in family and civil claims court matters. Self-represented and unrepresented litigants have a significant impact on the day-to-day operations of the courts. They often do not have enough knowledge to adequately represent

themselves in court. As a result judges and court staff spend time assisting self-represented litigants, which is an inefficient use of the court's time. To provide services and information for self-represented and unrepresented litigants, \$720,000 has been added to this year's budget.

The civil mediation program will receive \$871,000 to expand services to more communities outside Calgary and Edmonton. This program complements existing dispute resolution process, including the traditional court process. Mediation works, whether it's for family law or civil law matters. It gives people with disputes a way to work out a solution for themselves. Increased mediation means that more civil disputes can potentially be resolved without going to court, and that means that judicial and legal resources can be used where they are most needed.

Jurors play an essential role in the justice system and maintaining safe communities in Alberta. Albertans make a necessary and valuable contribution to our justice system by agreeing to appear and serve as jurors. To compensate Albertans for some of the wages they may lose by sitting on a jury, \$280,000 has been allocated to increase the daily fees and expenses paid to the jurors.

The major information systems that support the Alberta courts and prosecution service are dated and need to be upgraded to meet the standards and needs of court administrators, Crown prosecutors, the judiciary, and ultimately our public. One million has been allocated to identify the business requirements, including the business case and strategy for development of a comprehensive information management system. It's a multi-year project that will require additional funding as we move forward with this important initiative. This system will increase the efficiency of the court process and enhance the service provided to Albertans.

I now move to the criminal justice area of the ministry. The overall purpose of the criminal justice division is to promote safe communities in Alberta by effectively conducting criminal prosecutions and striving for just outcomes, which aligns with goal 1 of our business plan. This year's budget for criminal justice is \$50.1 million, 6.4 million of which is in new funding. A priority for Alberta Justice is a fair and accessible criminal justice system. It makes sense that a functioning justice system should have adequate resources to do the job.

Mr. Chairman, the 2003 national statistics show that Alberta has the second highest prosecutorial caseload in the country at 358 cases per prosecutor. In 2005 the Alberta government committed to safer communities through the greatest single-year increase in rural and organized crime policing that this province has seen in 20 years. Additional Crown prosecutors and support staff are required to effectively prosecute charges generated by additional police officers on our streets. I'm pleased that Alberta Justice will be adding to the prosecution service significantly this year with 20 prosecutors and 22 support staff. Many of the prosecutors will specialize in areas such as family violence, child exploitation, organized crime, and economic crime. There will be five new family violence prosecutors, four new prosecutors in the integrated child exploitation unit, also known as ICE, four new prosecutors in the integrated response to organized crime, also known as IROC, one new prosecutor in the integrated market enforcement team, also known as IMET, and one prosecutor in the Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative, also known as ARTAMI, as well as general prosecutors.

Organized crime and Internet crime are increasing in Alberta. For example, in 2000 Alberta had three Internet child pornography cases before the courts. There are now about 90. Successful organized crime and cybercrime prosecutions depend on prosecutors being knowledgeable and available to work with police at an early stage in

the investigation. Cases are increasingly complex and require specialized knowledge and a consistent approach to prosecute effectively.

In 2005 Edmonton experienced 38 homicides. This was almost double the 1999 to 2005 average of about 22 homicides per year. Many of these homicides arise from organized crime and drug-related activity. Organized crime is heavily involved in identity theft and mortgage fraud, two of the fastest growing types of economic crime in Canada. A recent *W-Five* documentary referred to Alberta, unfortunately, as the mortgage fraud capital of Canada. New police resources will assist in addressing these sophisticated crimes, and Justice will be there to assist the police in investigations and effectively prosecuting the resulting charges.

Sadly, Alberta continues to have an unacceptably high rate of family violence. Alberta Justice takes family violence very seriously and is committed to providing safe communities for all Albertans, and that includes freedom from violence within our homes. We need to provide victims and witnesses with services as soon as possible and protect them from further abuse. We also need to ensure appropriate sentencing of perpetrators to reduce the likelihood of them reoffending. Alberta Justice is involved in a number of initiatives to help combat family violence. For example, domestic violence courts have been opened in Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, and most recently Fort McMurray. These courts allow for charges to be dealt with quickly by dedicated prosecutors and provide the best opportunity to help victims and, where appropriate, direct offenders to court-ordered counselling.

In this year's budget we're allocating \$935,000 in new funding to hire Crown prosecutors and support staff who specialize in family violence. Domestic violence courts with specialized Crown prosecutors work with the provincial family violence treatment program framework. The framework is a cross-government initiative that's designed to provide co-ordinated and integrated assessment, treatment, rehabilitation, and follow-up services to victims and perpetrators of family violence. Linking government with community services improves our ability to deal with domestic violence cases more quickly and effectively. Albertans who are dealing with family violence need help, and they need it as soon as we can possibly provide it. I'm optimistic that this new funding will contribute to breaking the cycle of family violence and protect the safety and security of children, families, and our communities.

The Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative is intended to reduce and manage the risk in high-risk family violence and stalking cases, ultimately resulting in fewer stalking situations, injuries, and family violence related deaths in Alberta.

8:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege for me to stand up and respond in this budget discussion on the Department of Justice. I commend the hon. minister for the business plan, and I commend the department for a lot of good ideas. Funding increased by more than \$35 million from last year, an 11.2 per cent increase, and it seems like a lot of the money is going to really good ideas: family violence, more judges, more Crown prosecutors, and so on.

I'll follow the business plan with my remarks, starting with the first one: "promote safe communities in Alberta." I'm going to start with a topic which the hon. minister didn't mention, but it's covered in 1.2 under the strategies of goal 1; namely, having to do with traffic safety, improving road safety in Alberta. I read very carefully

the McDermid report, and the statistics are just simply staggering. The McDermid report was issued in June 2004. It states that "3,875 people died on Alberta roads between 1992 and 2002" and "traffic crashes take six times more lives than homicides." Despite all of our emphasis in terms of dealing with crime in our criminal justice system, it's just unbelievable the number of lives that are lost on our highways. "The societal cost of traffic collisions . . . is estimated at close to \$4.7 billion in 2002." So adding all of the costs together – health care costs, property losses – the economic cost to Canadians in general "is as high as \$25 billion a year."

After having met with stakeholders and having reviewed the Alberta government's approach and the basic best practices of other countries and provinces, the report focused on the fact that, in Mr. McDermid's opinion, there's a lack of overall leadership here in Alberta. We need a plan. We need some kind of cross-ministry initiative or delegating of responsibility to a single ministry. I guess my question to the minister is: what is the involvement of the Department of Justice in working with the other departments to carry this important, important topic along? Are there a lot of cross-ministry initiatives going on? The McDermid report listed a whole lot of things that could be done in terms of various committees that could be formed: a ministerial leadership committee, a deputy ministers' committee, a multisector advisory group, a single office for road safety, and so on. I don't know to what extent any of these things have been adopted.

It's interesting that the report also mentions the whole question of funding. We usually think that, well, you can't just throw money at everything. But, as a matter of fact, it gives an example of a state in Australia where there was a concerted effort to put money, a big chunk of money, \$20 million, into dealing with road safety, and it did make a difference. It really did make a difference. I think that's what Albertans are looking for here in this province. So that's the first point I want to make.

Now, going on to the very next point in the business plan, 1.3. In this point it's suggested that the ministry wants to "enhance the capacity of the Prosecution Service to align with increasing police resources to prosecute serious and violent crime to the fullest extent." While this is an admirable and needed goal, it seems to me that it's pointless if those charged and convicted with serious crimes like drug offences, violent crime, and especially child exploitation and abuse crime are being handed light sentences due to harsh conditions at the remand centres. I go back to the questions that I asked the hon. minister in this House some weeks ago, in particular 2 to 1 or 3 to 1 sentencing, as happened recently with a convicted heroin dealer. What is the minister going to do to get rid of this practice? I mean, it's a tremendous problem given the conditions at all the remand centres. I don't know what judges can do, but certainly something has to be done. I think it's a serious threat to the public safety of our communities if offenders who commit such serious crimes are coming back into the community much earlier than perhaps they should.

Now, moving on to the next point in the business plan – namely, focusing on the courts – the goal of promoting "a fair and accessible civil and criminal justice system." I think the last time I talked about this business plan, I spent a lot of time focusing on the fact that so much talk is focused on getting tough, having tougher sentencing, even though the evidence provided by criminologists seems to be conclusive that incarceration for the traditional reasons such as rehabilitation and deterrence simply doesn't work.

The current emphasis of the federal government and the Alberta government on increasing mandatory minimum penalties for violent crimes assumes that serious violent crimes are the result of rational calculation, weighing the costs and benefits of the crime: will I get

two years or five years or 10 years? As a matter of fact, as criminologists point out, most violent crimes arise out of conflictual and highly stressful situations and often involve a high use of alcohol and/or drugs. There's a recent American survey that was published in the paper just a few days ago that discovered that most people, including criminals, are pretty ignorant about the criminal justice system and what the penalties are for various crimes. So you can make laws tougher and sentences tougher, but if perceptions do not change, then deterrents simply won't work. In my philosophy and approach to crime it's preferable to invest most of our money in crime prevention, dealing with the social determinants of crime rather than more money into prisons, but that doesn't seem to be the way that this country is going.

I am impressed by the business plan of the Department of Justice because of its emphasis on alternative sentencing approaches, more approaches that deal with restorative justice. The hon. minister mentioned a number of examples of mediation programs, mediation programs with families, which is really, really important. I'm just looking at 2.3 of the business plan on page 295: "Develop, evaluate, improve and co-ordinate mediation and other dispute resolution initiatives." I think that's great. If we look at the estimates, 2.2.4 and 2.3.4 on page 332, we notice that Calgary civil mediation and Edmonton civil mediation show a slight increase from last year's forecast. Calgary received a \$40,000 increase, and Edmonton received \$40,000. Mind you, those budget items are small compared to a lot of the other budget items, and it raises the question of whether there is enough money going into mediation programs.

I had the privilege of meeting a young woman in Lethbridge and discussing the mediation program there that's sponsored through Queen's Bench. I understand that it's a pilot project. Certainly, a program like that saves money in terms of the courts because a lot of people have their problems dealt with through the use of a mediator and never have to get to court. I understand that the mediators are actually paid under contract with the clients, but there needs to be money to cover supervision and also support staff. I can't determine how much of the budget for the Lethbridge court is going to mediation. The hon. minister mentioned regional civil mediation and the tremendous increase there in terms of money, going from \$267,000 to \$748,000, and I think that's to be applauded because certainly we need to have people out in rural areas helping with mediation.

8:30

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

Now, just moving on to the next section, number 3: "Provide access to justice services for Albertans in need." There is a reference on 3.5: "In coordination with Seniors and Community Supports, review all submissions from the public and feedback from the stakeholder focus groups and draft a revised Dependent Adults Act." That's a process that's ongoing right now, I think, but I wonder: what is the involvement and what is the contribution of Alberta Justice to this process? The Dependent Adults Act deals with the important area of care for people whose illness or injury leaves them incapable of making their own decisions. The act covers the role of the public guardian and trustee, and it's extremely important.

I have a case in my riding. It's similar to the Terri Schiavo case in Florida. In this case a young wife suffered a stroke, leaving her in a comatose state and under the care of the public guardian. Her husband, who is many years older, has had many grievances about the way she is being cared for, but he's been frustrated time and time again because he doesn't know how he can have an impact on the situation. There is a lack of mechanisms through which he can

report what he considers to be abuse. Whether it is or not, he just doesn't know what to do. He could of course go to court, but he is not a wealthy man. He doesn't have much money. The only way he can challenge the authority of the public guardian seems to be through the courts. But, not having enough money, it doesn't provide an option for him.

This raises a serious issue about the Dependent Adults Act and other acts which are similar, such as the Powers of Attorney Act, the Mental Health Act, the Protection Against Family Violence Act, and Protection for Persons in Care Act. There are inadequate monitoring mechanisms in place to prevent or detect abuse, there are limited mechanisms for reporting abuse, and there are no clear guidelines with real clout for intervention where abuse is suspected. In most provinces appeals can be made to public authorities and there is an investigation and something is done, but here in Alberta the philosophy seems to be that the government should play a limited and minimalist role, leaving everything to the individual to do his or her own investigation and then take it to court and let the judge decide. Everything focuses on the individual making the complaint utilizing his or her own resources, rather than on the public responsibility, the public obligation to care for these people who obviously need our care.

I hope Alberta Justice is going to make a good contribution to revising the Dependent Adults Act and give it more clout, and maybe that'll lead to looking at all the other acts, too, that they would be coming up to a level which I think we need them at in terms of really having teeth so that investigations can really take place.

Let me mention one of those acts again and emphasize it: the Mental Health Act. This is Mental Health Week. I know that there's no mention of the Mental Health Act in the business plans of the Justice department, but really this week is Mental Health Week, and my heart goes out to men and women in our community who struggle with mental illness.

The relationship between crime and mental illness is quite challenging and complex. I have visited a man in prison who is there for a serious offence, who in my view clearly is suffering from mental illness. He has paranoia. He has illusions of grandeur. You only need to talk to him for a little while – I'm no psychiatrist – and you realize what kind of problems he has. But while in prison he has no treatment, and he will be out soon. So how is society protected when such a person comes out of prison without having any treatment for mental illness?

I have another constituent who did not actually harm anyone, but he threatened to do so because he wrote threatening letters. He ended up in Alberta Hospital for a number of years. Now he's living in the community, and he's placed under the burden of appearing on a regular basis for his medication, and he has to appear before a review board on a regular basis. The review board bases its judgment entirely on the advice of his psychiatrists. This young man has no relatives or no advocates who can speak on his behalf. I have read the transcripts of his coming before the review board. He does his best to defend himself, but the medication that he has to take has a debilitating effect on him, and he's not able to pursue a normal life. My heart goes out to him. He doesn't have anybody, a patient advocate, who can be there for him.

So I guess my question is to the Minister of Justice. I really applaud the effort to have so many special prosecutors focusing on things like family violence and the tremendous effort to focus on family violence in this province. That's really, really commendable. Then, all the other things that you mentioned. One could also talk about specialized drug courts, specialized mental health courts. To what extent are prosecutors and lawyers trained to deal with mental health?

Howard Sapers, who is a former MLA in this House and is now the ombudsman for prisoners in Ottawa, his last report stated that at least 15 per cent of inmates in our prisons are suffering from mental illness. I think that more emphasis has to go into this area of dealing with mental illness problems. There are lots of other points that I could raise, and maybe I can come back to them later if I can figure out where all my notes are.

Lastly, I just wanted mention that there's a fatality inquiry. There's a new fatality inquiry report on Kyle Young that's just out, a 96-page report with a whole series of recommendations. I appreciate on the website of the Ministry of Justice a very helpful answering of questions about fatality inquiries, what cases go before the Fatality Review Board, who calls a public fatality inquiry, what happens at a public fatality inquiry, and how one can obtain a report of a fatality inquiry. One question that's not mentioned there which I think is all important is: who follows up on the recommendations of a fatality inquiry?

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The fatality inquiry reports go to the Minister of Justice. Is there a process of reporting of compliance with the recommendations? Is there an obligation of departments to report back to the Department of Justice on what they are doing to comply with recommendations? Would Alberta Justice – for example, in the case of the Kyle Young fatality inquiry – be prepared to work with the Solicitor General to make sure that some of those recommendations are carried out? I wasn't sure in terms of the actual department who handles fatality inquiries. Is that in the deputy minister's office? Is that under strategic studies? It's difficult from over here to figure out where everything is happening.

Those are some of the areas that I would like to explore and hear some response about, but in general I'm very pleased. I think that the government is channelling the funds into proper things that really need to be attended to.

One question – I think you alluded to it – in terms of wait times for trial. There are more Crown prosecutors. There are five new judges. Will this actually mean, then, that we can expect a shorter time between being charged and the first inquiry and then between the inquiry and the trial? Is the government planning to adopt some guidelines? Other provinces have adopted specific time guidelines, insisting that those time strictures be followed. It seems that Alberta is not quite willing to go that far, leaving it more open to the discretion of the judges working with the prosecutors and defence lawyers and so on. I wasn't clear exactly what the direction of Alberta Justice is on that.

Those are my questions for the moment. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8:40

The Chair: Before I recognize the hon. minister, I've been informed that the score in the game is 2-nothing for Anaheim.

Mr. Stevens: I'm going to fight back the tears to carry on this evening.

Thank you, hon. member, for your comments and your questions. I'll attempt to address many of them orally, but to the extent that I don't, we'll review the transcript and provide written response later, and that will be true of all hon. members who make comment and ask a question this evening.

I think that before I get into the questions per se, the speaking notes that I was provided with for this evening were more extensive than the first 20 minutes, so what I'm going to do is just start by

finishing off on that because there is some very good information here that I think that you will appreciate hearing. I left off describing in very general terms ARTAMI.

ARTAMI is one of only two such initiatives in Canada. The other is part of the Ontario Provincial Police service, where there hasn't been a single domestic violence related fatality in cases referred to that unit in the 11 years that it's been operational, so the statistics are fabulous. These efforts demonstrate that intervention can make a real difference in preventing domestic violence fatalities.

Here in Alberta ARTAMI will use a collaborative and co-ordinated team approach, with police, Crown prosecutors, a family law lawyer, and mental health experts working together to add a dimension of threat assessment expertise. ARTAMI will assess threats, manage victim safety, and implement suspect mitigation strategies.

This year ARTAMI will be funded with \$300,000 from the Justice budget and \$1.7 million from Solicitor General and Public Security. This \$2 million will help to better co-ordinate police, legal, mental health, and other experts in assessing threats, managing victim safety, and finding ways to prevent family violence and stalking-related deaths. Mr. Chairman, I'm confident that the new additions to the prosecution service will advance the government's goal of promoting safer communities.

The civil law branch of the ministry provides effective legal and related services to government and other ministries, which aligns with goal 5 in the business plan, and the budget for civil law is almost \$25.4 million for this year. Civil lawyers in the department provide the important role of giving advice and representing the government on a wide range of issues. They assist in drafting government public bills, provide advice on matters ranging from legislative policy to the Constitution to aboriginal law. They provide legal services to all government ministries on matters before the courts and tribunals.

Alberta Justice helps to provide for another important service to Albertans, and that is the support for legal aid. This year's budget to support legal aid is \$43.2 million, which is an increase from the past year of more than \$12 million. The increase in funding will help legal aid address many of the funding pressures it currently faces from increased demand and increased operating costs. Providing a service and access to justice for people who need legal aid is crucial work. Legal aid is not free, not for the client and not for us. With increased case complexity legal aid is getting more costly to provide.

In addition to my ministry's increased funding for legal aid, more federal funding for legal aid is necessary. Justice ministers across the country have requested that the federal government come to the table with substantial new dollars for legal aid.

Mr. Chairman, I'd now like to turn to this year's budget for staff in the Department of Justice. Alberta Justice is a manpower department, employing many highly trained individuals. The services Justice provides are heavily dependent on the knowledge and skills of its staff. The Department of Justice prosecutors, lawyers, trust officers, court staff, and maintenance enforcement program staff are important to the functioning of the justice system. Justice used about 68 per cent of its ministry budget on staffing in 2004-2005. By way of comparison, the percentage of the budget used for manpower in a department like Infrastructure and Transportation is relatively small, at 3.6 per cent for the same year, because the bulk of its money funds building projects. Last year Justice had the third-largest number of staff within government departments. This year it will rely on its 2,506 employees to provide services directly to Albertans. This means that Justice is disproportionately

affected by salary increases. In this budget there is a \$7.6 million increase from across-the-board salary, benefits, and settlements.

Funding of \$22.8 million has also been allocated to address the ministry's capital requirements in the year 2006-2007 budget. The majority of this funding, \$18.9 million, will be used to install the technical infrastructure and equipment needed in the Calgary Courts Centre to provide electronic evidence, including video, audio, and computer.

Each courtroom will have one of four levels of technology. All courtrooms will have standard technology, including digital recording, audio amplification, internet connections, and assistive listening devices. In addition to the standard courtroom technology, some courtrooms will be equipped with video conferencing technology. Ten mobile digital presentation technology carts will be shared between the courtrooms. These carts contain a document camera, DVD/VCR player, and video and audio input from the presenter's computer. Finally, some courtrooms, including the large trial and high-security courtrooms, will have a permanent technology cart installed.

By establishing four levels of technology for the courtrooms in Calgary, we'll be meeting the technological needs of court users while minimizing the related costs to taxpayers. Additionally, the courthouse will be wired so that expansion of technology in courtrooms can be accommodated as demand increases.

Other capital investments in the 2006-2007 budget include \$800,000 for the maintenance enforcement program to enhance its management information system and to upgrade its telecommunication system, \$700,000 to replace the Public Trustee information system, \$400,000 for software system redevelopment in the motor vehicle, accidents claims, personal injury claims program, and \$200,000 to replace obsolete lab equipment for the medical examiner.

Those, Mr. Chairman, are the comments that I wish to make with respect to the budget of Alberta Justice and Attorney General. I must say that I feel very good about the budget this year and some of the important pressures that we will be able to address in a very meaningful fashion.

What I'd like to now do is address some of the questions that the hon. member asked in his comments on the budget. With respect to the fatality inquiry process, the Justice department is responsible for the fatality inquiry process. That is why the reports come to the Ministry of Justice, whereas in fact from a program perspective, I would say that for the most part the Ministry of Justice is not the ministry that is directly impacted by it. So, for example, in the report that was referred to by the hon. member, I believe the Infrastructure and Transportation, the Municipal Affairs, and the Solicitor General departments are all impacted in one way or another by the recommendations. The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General does not follow up with these other ministries to ensure that they follow and implement the recommendations.

I can tell you that as a matter of government policy we do take these matters seriously, and as a general rule, the recommendations are reviewed and followed up on. That is the general rule. If you have specific questions with respect to a particular inquiry and whether or not the recommendations had been followed up, I'd recommend that you address those concerns to the ministry that was responsible for them. I'm reasonably satisfied that you'll find out that they have been responded to or are in the process of being responded to for the most part. Obviously, sometimes it's a matter of resources, and if it's a matter of resources, it may take longer. That is the general approach that we have in government relative to fatality inquiry reports. We do take them very seriously. The whole point of it is to ensure that we as a society learn something about the

tragic death that is the subject of the inquiry. If we don't take the recommendations seriously, then we fail as a society in trying to avoid similar deaths going forward.

8:50

Questions were asked by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora with respect to the study and work relating to a revised Dependent Adults Act. That is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Justice and the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. There is a study ongoing at this time that is chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, and I believe that later this year there should be a report that is available to my ministry and the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports relative to the recommendations arising out of that.

The Dependent Adults Act is actually an act that is under the responsibility of the minister of seniors. So our involvement in Justice would be to supply support with respect to this because we have some expertise in legislation and whatnot. We are also responsible for the Public Trustee, and there's a Public Trustee component. There may be some other aspect of it that we're responsible for, but in my own estimation, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and her department have a larger interest in the legislation and the recommendations. It's not that we are not involved; we are very much involved, but I consider the lead ministry, in truth, to be the other ministry and not ours.

The Mental Health Act. You're quite right, hon. member, that mental health issues are serious issues in society, serious issues in our justice system. But the Ministry of Justice is responsible for a segment of the justice system. We're responsible for the prosecution. The Solicitor General is responsible for the investigations. The Solicitor General is responsible for the incarceration and what follows, and questions relative to those aspects of it should be put to that department. I understand that the estimates of the Solicitor General will be up tomorrow for consideration.

Mr. Cenaiko: We work in a partnership, Ron.

Mr. Stevens: We do work in a partnership, as the hon. minister has just pointed out to me. We do try to be seamless. We do try to support one another. But the fact of the matter is that in an operational way there are things that are within our responsibility and purview, and we deal with those. Some of the comments that the hon. member has made certainly belong within the justice system, but they aren't necessarily matters for which this minister is responsible.

The hon. member started with comments regarding road safety. There is a cross-ministry initiative between the Solicitor General, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, and the Minister of Justice relative to the McDermid report. You're quite right. This is a serious matter within Alberta. In fact, we have been meeting relative to this, and there will be some developments that I'm sure you will hear about in the weeks ahead. The role of Justice, apart from being a support role, really comes in the prosecutions relative to highway safety matters and to provide support. Once again, this is an area where much of the upfront work would be done through the other two ministries, with the Ministry of Justice, in large measure, being the prosecutor in the piece.

The Member for Edmonton-Glenora then moved on to talking about remand issues and the 2 for 1 rule. Just for those who are listening, the 2 for 1 rule effectively is that when a sentence is made in a criminal case, the judge will often give credit, 2 for 1, for time spent in remand. For example, if someone spends three months in remand and the sentence would otherwise be two and a half years, the actual sentence is two years. The hon. member says: well, that

gives rise to light sentences. In a fashion it does, but I would point out that in Alberta it's typically 2 for 1 that you experience. This is not a condition unique to Alberta. It's across the country. There has been a dramatic growth in the number of people spending time in remand. That has resulted in this particular approach by the courts in giving this credit.

The issue with respect to public safety, however, I would point out rests, in my opinion, more in the parole end of it than it does at the beginning. In other words, someone who gets three months' credit in the example that I gave and who has, in fact, a two-year sentence likely will spend some fraction of that time in jail as a result of the parole rules. While I'm not familiar with those because they are also handled by the Solicitor General, it would be something like 40 per cent of the time would be spent in prison in that type of situation, 60 per cent of the time in the community if, in fact, there are no extenuating circumstances to keep the accused in.

The reality is that the way our system works is that, except in the most heinous of crimes where there are life sentences, people have an opportunity to get out of the prison system as a result of the parole rules which allow for relatively early release. That certainly would be relatively early release in the minds of the public who, candidly, don't understand very well how that part of our justice system works. But I don't think, if one wanted to debate the issue, that the real problem relative to keeping people off the streets is in the upfront sentencing as it relates to the 2 for 1 rule on time in remand; rather it would be more arguably at the other end as a result of the parole rules.

The hon. member mentioned some comments about fair and accessible criminal justice system principles. I think that essentially you were saying, hon. member, that in your estimation it would be preferable to treat the cause of the crime rather than the way that we deal with it, which is to incarcerate. There are a number of reasons to incarcerate. One is retribution; one is denunciation. In my estimation, those are significant and valid reasons for people to be put in jail.

We look at safe communities as one of our strong principles and the perception of our communities to ensure that they remain safe. I would suspect that something like 5 per cent of the population or less are responsible for the crimes that are committed in our society, and 95 per cent of the population truly are law-abiding people who have a perception with respect to how safe our communities are based on how we deal with the prosecution and incarceration of people who ought to in fact be incarcerated.

That is why we have been urging the federal government for some time to change the rules with respect to conditional sentencing. People read the cases on a daily basis in our papers, hear about them in our radio and TV reports, and the conclusion that they often come to is that people who do serious crime don't do serious time because conditional sentencing clicks in and people go home and watch television, albeit under certain conditions, but the fact is that they don't do time. That is more of a problem with the perception of how well the justice system is working.

9:00

I know that the hon. member is often interested in what I'm reading, so I'll give you a hint as to a book I think you ought to read because it contains some interesting observations. It's called *The Prince of the City*. It's a book about Rudy Giuliani. There was some incredible success in New York City in addressing crime on the streets when he was the mayor. For anybody who had been in New York City in the '80s, you know what it was like and how many people were on the streets, how much crime there was, how much graffiti there was, how much garbage there was. Candidly,

while New York was still a pretty interesting place, it didn't feel all that safe.

I'll continue later.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening over the last hour with a great deal of attention to the exchange between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General related, of course, to the estimates before the House, which I understand the minister has already moved for approval or that he'll be moving for approval later on. I didn't hear him move. [interjection] Right.

I just want to say that while I've been listening to this, I've been asking: are there many questions that remain to be either repeated or that, if they're not asked, I should ask? I won't waste the time of the House in just going over the questions that have been raised. The minister has either already addressed some of them, or he will be addressing them by way of his written response, I presume, if the time runs out.

One observation that caught my attention when the minister was talking about his budget has to do with how much of the ministry's budget really gets spent on staff salaries. It's unusual. It's almost like an educational institution, you know, where most of the budget goes towards paying the salaries. Did you say 67, 70 per cent or so? It's very large. It's very untypical, I suppose, of the ministries in general. That's a very interesting factoid.

In light of that, I want to ask the minister. The increase in the budget for this year is about 11.1 per cent, \$35 million. How much of the \$35 million will go towards meeting the increases in the salary bill, just specifically? Of course, there are some new hirings, as you mentioned: 21 new prosecutors, some of them very specialized, five judges, support staff, office staff. They're all there, but I'm interested in knowing, given the amount of the budget that's dedicated to paying salaries and benefits for several thousand employees of the department, how much of the \$35 million increase will in fact have to be spent on the existing obligation with respect to salaries and benefits.

The other question that I had here. One thing that stood out as I was looking at the numbers here was the very large increase – and justified, I'm sure, but I don't know the exact reasons for it – for legal aid; you know, a 40 per cent increase over last year, about \$12 million more than the previous year. Two questions on that. What's this increase for? Is it sort of a response to the unmet demand over previous years? Have we been underfunding this particular item, or have the requirements for qualifying to receive legal aid been relaxed so that there are more people, in fact, who are expected to take advantage of legal aid? What exactly is it?

A third thing. I didn't raise this question last year, but several years ago I remember that there was a great deal of concern on the part of the legal community who provide these legal aid services that remuneration was way too low compared to their counterparts who are in the fee-for-service sector of the legal practice business. Is it also, then, an attempt to enhance the payments for lawyers who provide legal aid services? So there are some of the questions. I'm sure that the minister will have adequate answers for this.

A few other questions here for the minister. I'm sure that the minister is very much involved with the Métis hunting rights issue. I think it's covered under his ministry. There have been some changes to the interim agreement. What are the implications of that with respect to this ministry's responsibilities, I suppose, with respect to enforcement of these agreements? Are there some legislative changes that are anticipated? If so, what will they be?

Will it need an increase in staffing or infrastructure to respond to the MLA committee report if it is implemented?

I'm not entirely sure from my notes, so I want to be very tentative about this. The minister will correct me. I confess that I'm a little bit unsure about the facts here, but I understand that one of the proposed amendments, changes to the hunting rights of the Métis is that they will have to surrender to the government any parts of trophy animals that cannot be consumed, eaten or whatever. What would be required in order to implement this recommendation in terms of increased staffing or other arrangements? Other hunters, of course, non-Métis hunters, won't have to surrender any parts of the animal, but Métis hunters, I understand, will be required to if this change is made. It's a question related to the definition of Métis status. Is the minister going to develop some means of clarifying the issue of who enjoys Métis status in the province and who doesn't, and what different rules will apply to hunting with respect to the Métis and the non-Métis population in the context of this controversy of the changes in the interim agreement?

Can the minister explain a bit about the increased funding that the aboriginal court worker program will receive? Exactly what is this aboriginal court worker program, and what exactly does it entail? What exactly will the increase cover in terms of services or activities, hiring of more staff or other resources, and whatever have you? I understand that the last report on aboriginal justice initiatives I think goes back to 2003, as I recall from the departmental website. Should we expect another review this coming year on aboriginal justice initiatives, and if so, when should one expect it?

9:10

I want to move on now to the domestic violence issue. Mr. Chairman, this minister has been quite candid about the sad situation in this province with respect to the very high degree or high rate of family violence. It's clear that when there's violence, there are victims of that violence. When there are victims, they sometimes have to escape abusive situations and seek refuge or protection.

Now, there are facilities, shelters where victims of domestic violence seek some protection. Given that the rate of domestic violence seems to be certainly not abating – I don't know if it increased – I wonder if the minister has some information on the rate of increase and if the situation is in fact becoming worse in spite of the measures that have been in place? If that is the case, has the minister set in motion some review to see why the measures that are in place, that have been in place have not been effective?

The numbers are not with me. I don't know the numbers. I hope the minister will throw some light on whether the measures in place are in fact leading to mitigation and abatement of domestic violence. If the contrary is the case, then is it time, in fact, to undertake some review to seek some more effective means and certainly review the ones that are not working and ask why they're not working and what needs to be done?

I'm not sure if the funding for shelters, women's shelters in particular – although we talk about domestic violence in order to not make the mistake of assuming that the victims are always women. There may be some cases where there are males too, but far more often than not it is women and children who have to use these shelters, and the shelters have been overcrowded. That's the information that has been available to us for many years now. Many women with children have to be turned away, as a matter of fact, from these safe places called women's shelters. I'm not sure if these are funded by the ministry or by some other ministry. Maybe the minister of children and family services does that. So the question is: what is the minister doing or what actions are in the process of being considered in order to reduce the number of people who need

to seek shelter in these places? If the minister is not responsible for increasing the spaces in these shelters, at least he can address the question: is he concerned about somehow reducing the numbers who seek these shelters by reducing domestic violence? If so, what is being proposed or considered?

There is an interesting statement on page 291 of the business plan. It's the phrasing of the statement that intrigued me. It says that "in 2004, women living in Alberta were the most likely in Canada to report spousal violence." The word "report" is the one that I'm curious about. We know that spousal violence reporting usually is underreporting. Most people hesitate to report it. Most spouses, particularly women as well as men, I suppose – there would be hesitation to report. The numbers are staggeringly high as they are, but I think they may be underreporting.

Is there any implication in this wording that somehow the reporting in Alberta is the highest and, in effect, the incidence is the highest in Canada? I think they need to be very clear about what we are putting in these official documents. I suspect that what's being said here is that the fact that women are most likely to report violence in this province also means that domestic violence against women is the highest in Alberta. But there is some confusion here in the language. I just want to draw this to the minister's attention, that it's not clear to me what inference to draw from it.

Does the minister work, in fact, in co-operation with his counterpart in the ministry who is responsible for family and women's services to address the issue of shelter beds and their shortage in the province? Is he in a position to take some initiative and, in fact, then work with his colleague on addressing this issue? I don't see the deputy minister here at the moment, so we'll save him this question.

There were one or two other questions that I had. On the identity theft, it's clearly a growing challenge in the province. That's quite clearly recognized in the business plan of the ministry. We know that some of this identity theft has been reported with respect to some drivers' licences, you know, that the registries have issued. In Calgary there was a case. There may be other privatized services that may have made the incidence of identity theft more of a problem than it has been in the past. Certainly, it is a very serious problem, both from the point of security and the ability of other law enforcement authorities outside our own provincial borders to be able to rely on the identity documents that we issue in this province.

What security measures is the ministry taking to make Albertans' identity documentation more secure? Was the incident in Calgary with respect to that private registry a unique case, or does it suggest that there may be a larger problem across the province? Either way, what kind of information do we have based on which we can say either that it is unique and just a one-off thing or, on the other hand, that we need to be far more vigilant and take a closer look at our arrangements with respect to how secure these privatized facilities for providing different kinds of identity documentation are across the province?

Another question. I think Canada has two credit bureaus. One's called Equifax, and the other is called TransUnion, I believe. These two do not, as far as I understand, share information with each other concerning fraud warnings on credit cards. It seems to me that it's rather irrational for the agencies not to do this, unless protection of privacy laws prevent them from doing so. Would the minister like to comment on this? It seems to me that credit card theft and fraud related to this could be handled in a more timely manner perhaps if there were some co-operation across these agencies which deal with credit cards and credit issues.

I was looking at a couple of line items on page 333. I will come back to it later.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9:20

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. In case I failed to do it at the outset of my remarks this evening, I do wish to move the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. It would indeed be sad if we went through all of this and failed to say those magic words. It gives people an opportunity, in any event, to support the estimates at the end of the evening.

The Chair: As per Standing Order 57(1), I might add, Minister.

Mr. Stevens: Indeed.

Just to end my thought with respect to the book I was referring to, *The Prince of the City*. The reason I ended up reading that particular book was because of the broken windows approach that was so successful in New York City to reduce crime. There's a reasonable portion of the book that deals with that particular matter. It's a very well-written book. It's got lots of interesting comments regarding the politics of New York City that would be of interest to the hon. member. A theme that runs through it is that it's a city that has traditionally been very liberal in its Democratic government. I use that in the sense of small "l" liberal and big "D" Democratic. So the social programs there have been over the years well supported, indeed perhaps incredibly generous. But there are some comments made ultimately about the morality perhaps getting ahead of the practicality in terms of successfully addressing the issues of societal safety and crime on the streets. I would recommend reading that book. It's a very interesting read. It does deal with a lot of those things.

Now, some comments regarding the questions asked by Edmonton-Strathcona. The situation with respect to legal aid now for some time is that we have been funding at a certain level and that the expenditures of Legal Aid, as funded by government, have been greater than the amount provided on an annual basis. Some time ago – it would be before my time as minister – a lump-sum amount was provided to Legal Aid as a fund which they could draw down to meet annual expenses. That fund has been used now last year and this year, and at the end of last year, as a matter of fact, they were starting to get to the point where there were very few dollars left in that particular surplus fund, if you will.

So what we are doing as a result of the increase here is we are giving them stable annualized dollars in our budget to meet the dollars that they otherwise have had as a result of a drawdown from that special fund I referred to together with the annualized amount. So what we are giving them this year is more or less what they got last year from the province of Alberta to support the legal aid budget. It does not involve an increase in scope of the program.

Actually, in terms of the entire country we provide an excellent program. We, unlike most other provinces, have an aspect of civil legal aid that is simply not available elsewhere. You can talk to the folks at Legal Aid. It's always got challenges. It's the nature of the program. But the fact is that in Alberta we have a relatively good legal aid program compared to other jurisdictions across the country.

One of the issues, of course, is to attract more dollars, and those asks have been made to the federal government, the previous federal government, this federal government. There was hope that there would be an increase in this year's budget. The reality is that the new Conservative government is relatively new, and its priorities were such that they did not have an opportunity to fully canvass the legal aid program in time for this budget. So what they did was they extended the legal aid funding that is provided by the federal government, which essentially goes to criminal law, not civil, for

one more year so that there is a year of time that they can review this matter, have consultation with the provinces. I would anticipate that we'll understand a year from now, when the next budget comes down, as to what the position of the federal government will be regarding funding of this particular program.

I think that for your purposes, hon. member, we have just entered into a new five-year contract with the Law Society of Alberta, who is one of the three parties together with the Legal Aid Society of Alberta. That was inked within the last month or so. I think there is stability in funding. There is stability in purpose. There is stability in governance. There is not an issue, at this point in time, regarding remuneration of those who supply the services. There's, of course, always a challenge with respect to meeting the demand that is there, and obviously on the civil side of things there is a great deal more demand in terms of scope than is in fact offered even under our program, which is, as I said, one of the very best in the country. I think you can be reasonably satisfied. If you talk to the folks from Legal Aid, they will say that we're doing quite well here in the province.

On the Métis harvesting. Métis harvesting per se is an issue that is a cross-ministry matter, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and also Sustainable Resource Development. So when you talk about enforcement, that in large measure is Sustainable Resource Development. When you talk about some of the funding issues, that in large measure is Aboriginal Affairs. The legal service is one of the things that I indicated in my opening comments that we do. We provide legal services to other ministries in the government. That is our role here.

There was a Supreme Court case in 2003 called *Powley*. It was an understanding of that that drives us to where we are. There is a need for renegotiation of the interim agreement. That is very much a legal matter. That is why the ministry of Justice is involved as it is. Of course, we go down that road together with Sustainable Resource Development and Aboriginal Affairs because they continue to have significant interest in the subject matter of the discussion.

The issue with respect to Métis harvesting is that the *Powley* case said essentially that Métis people can harvest for food. You make reference, hon. member, to trophy hunting. Well, trophy hunting is not for food per se. So the comment was that in order to ensure that people hunt for food, then the trophy part of the animal, to the extent we're talking about a trophy animal, ought not to be kept, and that way what remains is for food. Métis people can, like all Albertans, apply for the permission and right to hunt trophy animals and do that to the extent that they get that permission. So it's not that it's not available. The issue that we're talking about under this Métis harvesting is harvesting for food purposes.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona made reference to the court worker program. We, in fact, have just finished a review of that program. That's a very successful, well-regarded program in the justice system in Alberta.

9:30

The review was chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort together with colleagues from Lac La Biche-St. Paul and Calgary-Hays. The purpose of the review was essentially to find out what was happening, to determine the satisfaction level of the stakeholders in the system – that would be the users of the program, the courts and others – to see whether or not there was consistency among the various programs in the province. What was appropriate? What wasn't? How could we advance the program? Was there training that we could offer in terms of ensuring that there was consistency from one place to another? Things of that nature.

The court worker program is for aboriginal people. There is funding from the federal government that does go into this particular program. It is a provincial program. It's one that is very much respected both by the people who are the users of the program and the courts, who are the beneficiaries. The court worker people provide information with respect to the justice system. They are resource people in the location who can help people who are interfacing with the justice system who do need some assistance. They typically are not legally trained people. They are not, typically, people who can as a result of their training provide legal services, but they have a wealth of experience, which they can share and which is much appreciated by the courts because you now have a better informed person who is going through the justice system.

That, obviously, is one of the issues that we face in the justice system; that is, the unrepresented or self-represented litigant who doesn't understand the rules but needs some guidance in order to make contact, ask the right questions, perhaps get a lawyer, perhaps get some advice from the duty counsel, and so on. This particular system has just been reviewed. We're just in the process of looking at the report in government. It's going to go through the typical standing policy committee, cabinet, caucus review. I can tell you that it makes some recommendations for enhancement to the program. The budget that we have here would see some additional support being given in the form of management that has a supervisory, educational type of component to ensure that there is enhanced monitoring and enhanced co-ordination, to improve deficiencies as they may exist in various programs, to enhance consistency of approach, to make sure that people are doing what they should be doing. You'll hear more about that, hon. member, as we go through that. I anticipate that that is a report that probably will see the light of day, so you will have an opportunity to read it. Once again, it's going through the process, so I can't speak prematurely. My colleagues, obviously, will have to make that decision.

We'll provide you with the statistics we have regarding domestic violence in the province. I don't have those with me here, but it's appropriate that people know what we know, and I'm happy to provide that to you. Our emphasis on domestic violence arose in 2003 as a result of a conference; I believe it was in Red Deer. So we've had an emphasis on domestic violence in our justice system since that point in time. In Justice what we've been doing is get domestic courts up and running, ensure that they are successful, provide additional resources to them so that they can expand within the community and that we get them expanding throughout the province. That requires people in the communities to support them because it's not just lawyers; it's also the people who provide the support at the back of the courtroom. It is a cross-ministry initiative with other ministries who provide that social support for the victims and also assistance to the accused.

The whole idea of the exercise is to get this matter dealt with earlier so that there is less opportunity for recantation of the complaint by the victim, which is a problem if it lasts too long, to get people into some support systems. The recidivism rate in Calgary in the HomeFront program, which has been, I think, going on the longest of all of them, for people who have gone through the support system is something along the lines of dropping from 36 per cent to something like 5 per cent. So the success of having this program up and operating and people going through it does lead to less repeat offence. That is something that we can do in the justice system.

There's a handbook that was prepared in co-operation with the Solicitor General's department and which is now in the hands of all of the people in the province who deal with this. We have sent it across the country because it's a wonderful resource. People in other jurisdictions are appreciating that we have got a very good

piece of work here that they can use in other jurisdictions also to address domestic violence from whatever perspective they happen to see it, whether it be a prosecutor or the police or a social worker.

Identity theft. You're quite right; this is a very serious problem. I had some statistics for you with respect to child pornography. I think it was three cases in 2000. Today: 90 cases. That's very much an Internet-driven matter. Identify theft is very much an Internet-driven matter. Truly, while I don't have the statistics to share with you, my own sense of it is that identity theft may be a far greater issue than even child pornography, and child pornography as an issue is horrendous. I can tell you that Canada as a country has not dealt with this issue. There are other countries, like Great Britain, which have started to deal with it, that have a centralized system. We are looking to other jurisdictions that do this for some guidance.

I can tell you that it's my intention, along with the Solicitor General, to raise this at the next federal/provincial/territorial meeting of Justice and Solicitor General ministries, in October of this year, so that we can start that process of developing a co-ordinated effort. It does have to be co-ordinated. This is very huge. This is very complicated. I remember hearing from some expert about the Internet being used to effectively be a market for the exchange and sale of stolen credit cards. I mean, it's one of those situations where if you're in the know, you know how to log in, and you get to trade these things the way you would comic books. You know, it's hard to believe that that kind of thing exists, but that's the extent to which, I understand, this particular crime has grown. So this is an area where we have to get involved in a coherent way.

Your comments with respect to Equifax and TransUnion, from my perspective, raise the issue of disclosure. In order to be able to address this, you have to be aware that identity theft has occurred. You need to have an obligation on the part of people who are in the position of holding a lot of personal information to tell us rather than to bury the fact that there has been this kind of disclosure. I'm talking about insurance companies, banks, people that have a lot of our personal information, have your credit card, your bank balances, your home address, those kinds of things. If there is a breach, they need to tell us. I think that there needs to be a sharing of that kind of information appropriately among people that we can trust as a general proposition.

I can also tell you there, hon. member, that my department at this point in time is following up on an initiative that the state of California has taken. There's a Senator down there who introduced a bill which essentially does have an obligation on the part of people who hold this kind of information to tell the authorities when there is a breach so that we can follow up on it.

These are early days relative to this particular crime. We have a long way to go. The good news is that we've identified it as an area, but as a country we haven't begun to fight this. It's necessary to start right away if we're going to make some material gains in that area.

9:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I made the comment earlier that incarceration does not fulfill the purposes of rehabilitation and deterrence, and the hon. minister pointed out the importance of the term retribution. Interestingly enough, I don't know why, but I brought with me to the House the Supreme Court decision *Her Majesty the Queen versus C.A.M.*, 1996, in which Justice Lamer actually defends retribution as being the accepted and, indeed, the important principle of sentencing in our criminal law. It's a very interesting statement, perhaps surprising – I don't know – where he

defends the idea that, you know, retribution, which is a very old concept going back to the very earliest times, is not vengeance.

In primitive times it was family vengeance, family feuds. The understanding of retribution is that the state will pursue justice on behalf of people who are the victims of crime. Retribution focuses on the moral blameworthiness of a particular offender. It's not denunciation. Denunciation is declaring to the community that what has been done is wrong. Retribution focuses on the moral essence, the blameworthiness of the offence. It's interesting that that is the overwhelming emphasis of criminal justice today.

There's a whole other stream of thinking which is present in western society and also in eastern societies, when you think of all the different religions of the world, and that's the emphasis on reconciliation, on restitution, on what we now would call restorative justice. I think that restorative justice is what's coming in the future in terms of determining the content and the essence and the quality of our justice system. I think it's commendable that the Justice department's focus is also to a great extent on restorative justice with the emphasis on mediation programs, diversionary programs, alternative sentencing. I wish that there was more money going into that, and I'll say the same thing tomorrow when we look at youth justice committees. We need more money into those kinds of efforts because I think that that's what the future is going to bring: more emphasis on restorative justice.

Just another comment along with others on legal aid. The hon. minister is recommending looking at what's happening in the U.S. I'm not sure that that's always good, especially in terms of legal aid. If I understand 3.6 on page 296: "Work with the Legal Aid Society of Alberta to implement a staff counsel pilot project in the adult criminal court in Edmonton." Now, I raised questions before about the movement towards a public defender system. Is this what this is about, the staff counsel pilot project? In other words, the Justice department would be hiring lawyers not just on the prosecution side but also on the defence side to work for legal aid. I think there are a lot of problems with that. The very situation of having the government hiring lawyers to work on both sides of a criminal justice issue I think has problems.

Also, I don't know what kind of consultation the Minister of Justice is having with the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association because reports that I'm getting are that a lot of lawyers in private practice have been taking legal aid cases for years and years and years and would love to continue to do that and fear that they're going to be cut out of that kind of work. I think that there are legitimate concerns around that. I have to really commend so many lawyers who do work for legal aid and do pro bono work. It's just marvellous.

Tomorrow night is the annual meeting of the Edmonton Centre for Equal Justice, which also does tremendous work with people who live in poverty, who do not have the money to even go to legal aid. There are a lot of lawyers who do pro bono work through the Edmonton Centre for Equal Justice, and I think that that's just tremendous, quite commendable.

I have an amendment that I would like to propose, Mr. Chairman, if I could do that now. I have it right here, an original and all the copies.

The Chair: Okay. Give the page an opportunity to distribute them, please.

Okay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I believe you can proceed.

Dr. B. Miller: I think everybody has it.

The Chair: There are just a few more to distribute, and I'd just like to update the Assembly: I've been informed that Anaheim won the game 3 to 0.

It looks like all the amendments have been distributed. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move that the estimates for the Standing Policy Committee on Justice and Government Services under reference 1.0.8 of the 2006-07 main estimates of the Department of Justice and Attorney General be reduced by \$99,000 so that the expense and equipment/inventory purchases to be voted is \$342,337,000.
Can I speak to it?

The Chair: Yes. Please proceed.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Chairman, just to speak briefly to it. I have attended this standing policy committee on justice, and I didn't find it a useful activity on the part of myself. It's held in a room in this building, and you have members of the staff of the Justice department coming in, the minister and deputy minister, and even the press in the room at the back, and I as an MLA am not able to ask questions or participate.

The Chair: Hon. members, the noise level is increasing to the state where it's hard to understand this hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, I can speak louder. I'll use my preacher's voice.

Mr. Snelgrove: Speaking louder doesn't make you smarter.

Dr. B. Miller: It'll get your attention.

The Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the floor.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is something that has come up over and over again. These standing policy committees are not all-party committees. If we look at the federal government and the tremendous work that all-party committees do, if we look at the select committee on conflicts of interest that is happening now – it's an excellent committee led by an excellent chairperson – it shows what an all-party committee can do working together. I think that I would yearn for this kind of thing to be present in our legislative system, where as an MLA and as a critic for Justice I could participate in such a committee and contribute my great knowledge and understanding to the process of this committee.

So I would recommend that we adopt this amendment, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'm pleased to rise in support of this amendment, proposed by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. If I may call this the Sapers-Dickson memorial amendment in honour of previous colleagues of mine on this side who regularly brought forward a similar amendment. I think the point needs to be made very strongly in this Assembly that what the government chose to do when they established the standing policy committees is that these are internal committees of the Tory caucus, of the government caucus.

9:50

They are not legislative committees, they are not open to all members of the Legislative Assembly, and they should not be paid for with legislative funds. These are internal government policy committees, and that's been well admitted and on the record many times by members opposite, no different than if we formed a caucus committee on our side to develop policy. Those lunches and transportation and payment for chairpersons and vehicles that are provided for a chairperson: all of that is covered by this budget. It is, frankly, inappropriate. This is not a legislative committee. I don't think that salary should be paid to the individual from Legislature funds.

If anything, I would argue that this committee is anti-Legislature in that it is moving the debate and the openness and the transparency and accountability of this Assembly out of this Assembly and behind closed doors into a private Tory caucus meeting. That's what this committee is. They have the gall to then come to the taxpayers and say: pay for our dinners, and pay for a salary top-up for our committee chairperson and a car to be provided for them.

That's why we have asked for that amount of money to be reduced from the budget, because it is inappropriate as a Legislative Assembly expenditure. If the government wishes to do this, fine. Then do it internally, pay for it out of your allocated caucus funds, and get on with it. But don't pretend that this has anything to do with a democratic process in Alberta because it doesn't. It's an internal working, and it should be paid for internally by the caucus budget, not by this one.

I've often heard members on the other side say: oh, this is how we develop all the wonderful policy that we give to the people of Alberta, and that's why they should be paying for this budget. Well, actually I'd argue against that. There's no accountability. There are no minutes kept of those meetings. There's no *Hansard* kept of the meetings. So it's strictly on an hon. member's word that they raised an issue or campaigned for something or tried to convince their government colleagues to adopt a particular policy. We have absolutely no way of knowing that they actually raised that issue and argued for it or indeed what they argued for. We have no idea of being able to ascertain whether they voted for something or against something. Nothing.

There is absolutely no record kept of what goes on in those committees, and most of them are behind closed doors. Occasionally they are open to the public, but again only government members are allowed to participate in the actual working of the committee. As my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora stated, the media and other members of the Assembly, that being members of the opposition, are relegated to sort of sitting on the side. They're not allowed to ask questions. They're not allowed to participate in what's going on.

So we have no accountability for citizens to be able to find out how their MLA actually proceeded with this committee. There's no record of it kept in any way. There's absolutely no transparency for what went on. We don't know what arguments were presented for or against any given policy. For citizens that are trying to find out whether their point of view got represented and they happen to have a government MLA, there is absolutely no way for them to find out what happened there unless their MLA, you know, chooses to tell them: this is what I said, and this is exactly how I said it.

I think it's important that we raise this issue, we put it on the record, we let people like those people that are joining us in the public gallery today know that their taxpayer dollars are being used to fund an internal, private working committee of the Tory caucus. To pretend that this is somehow part of a legislative, democratic process is a perversion of the term, frankly. The government, I

believe, has trivialized the importance of this Legislative Assembly through the introduction and continued maintenance of these committees.

I am often, I think, in my role as House leader asked to go and speak to groups of young Albertans who are in here occasionally, Mr. Chairman, as MLA for a Day and the Forum for Young Albertans, for example. Often I'm representing the urban or the opposition point of view. There's a government MLA that's assigned to do this, and there they are happily saying: "Oh, yes. There's this committee, and we argue everything out behind closed doors, and then that's it. We don't have to do anything in the Assembly." Right. Well, exactly.

The people in the gallery have no idea how that decision was reached by government, and very little is said in debate by government members: very unusual to have government members stand in this House and put their individual perspectives on the record in *Hansard* for all the world to see how they feel about a particular bill. We will get the sponsor of the bill speaking, perhaps one other person, and that's it. The rest of the work is done by the members of the opposition, who are mostly questioning things. So I really find the development of these committees and the continued maintenance of these committees to be a perversion of the democratic process in Alberta, and I do not believe that the funding should come through public sources for it, certainly not treating it as though it were a legislative function because it is most definitively not.

So I would argue in favour of this. I think that if the government wishes to keep those committees operational – and I think there are four or five of them – fine. You are free to do so. But they should be paid for out of the government caucus funds, and they should not be paid for in the manner in which they're being done now. That's what we're proposing with this amendment. I thank you for the opportunity. I urge all members to support the amendment.

Mr. Stevens: Well, I'd like to start, Mr. Chairman, by thanking the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for bringing forward the motion. It does seem to me a compliment that they would like to spend the last 15 minutes of my estimates talking about this matter rather than the policy and money being spent in the budget. As the hon. member has said before, he's very appreciative of the good work that people do in my ministry, and I'm very proud of my colleagues and the work they do in the standing policy committee, which is a committee of cabinet. It is a part of the policy-making process.

Some years ago when I was a private member, I had an opportunity to attend a parliamentary conference in Quebec City. Of course, as you know, Mr. Chairman, those involve private members from across the country. What struck me at that particular meeting was how satisfied the government private members from Alberta were compared to the government private members from other jurisdictions, where, generally, I would describe the attitude as being one of being very much in the dark as to what the government was doing and not having a sense of participation. This is a particular process that our Premier brought in that was successfully part of the city of Calgary governing process, and it remains, too, to this very day as far as establishing policy is concerned. The standing policy committee process now in terms of this Premier's history in politics goes back some 25 years. It's a very successful way of dealing with policy and is to be supported.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on the amendment before the House. I should start by noting that the issue

confessions. Consequently, arguments have been made that police should use the investigative tactics that they have been trained for, and the principle of confidentiality and privacy for patients should not be compromised.

Now, it's really interesting that the context of the debate about confidentiality and disclosure, telling the truth, has shifted. I mean, 30 years ago all of the literature around medical ethics was focused on the relationship between the physician and the patient and to what extent the physician should disclose everything that the physician knows to the patient. Should the patient be told the whole truth about their illness, their disease? There was lots of discussion about that in the literature. That's a serious issue. Maybe we can learn from that; I don't know. The primary concern of medicine in that example was the potential benefit or harm in a course of action. I mean, the issue was how much truth, when to tell the truth, how soon, how clearly. The movement through the years in terms of medical ethics has been in the direction of fuller disclosure, that the patient has the right to know the truth, that the patient needs to know everything that the patient wants about their illness. So the whole debate has moved in the direction of greater disclosure.

Now, in this bill we're not dealing with the relationship between physician and patient. We're dealing with the disclosure of information, the truth about a person's situation, his illness or disease, to other parties. It's a very interesting question. I think that this bill tries to steer between the issue of privacy and the right to privacy and the greater good of the public, especially if public safety is at stake. There are some questions. For example, section 5(vi)(r) enables the disclosure of health information for the purpose of "processing payment for health services provided to the individual by a person that is required under a contract to pay for those services for that individual." Does that also involve disclosing of health information without consent to insurers? That would be a question that we might raise.

10:10

Bill 31 gives health professionals the discretion to disclose health information without consent to police and prosecutors. What protections are in place for health professionals who choose not to provide confidential health information in response to a request from police if they feel that they shouldn't disclose the truth because of their relationship with the patient? Their primary focus is the health of the patient. It puts the health professional in a difficult situation whether to disclose this information: would that be to the benefit of the patient or not? So I don't know. Those are ethical questions that I think need to be raised and have already been raised in the second reading debate. Perhaps more of those issues can be elaborated on as we move into Committee of the Whole.

On the whole, I think that this bill is well crafted. There seem to be lots of safeguards here in terms of the nature of the information that's to be disclosed, and then there is a procedure, and there's an outline of exactly what the information should be. There's a list; namely, the name of an individual, the date of birth of an individual, the nature of any injury or illness of an individual, et cetera. So I think the safeguards are in place. I think that in general I would support this bill, but it will be interesting to see members raise issues about component parts during Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we're at the stage in second reading where 29(2)(a) is available if anyone is interested.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak for the first

time to Bill 31, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2006. In my estimation it is a well-constructed piece of legislation on the whole, although there are several sections of it that our caucus finds a bit disconcerting. Perhaps we can seek clarification on a number of these issues and, hopefully, then will be able to forward our tentative support.

The legislation, as the hon. sponsor of this bill said at the very beginning, is to make substantial amendments to the Health Information Act, reflecting changing technology and to better assist in the administration of health care spending in Alberta. Those are all laudable goals, Mr. Speaker, and I would seek to ensure that Bill 31, in fact, does work to assist the administration of health care spending in this province. Certainly, this is a central issue of this spring session regardless of the absence of actual third-way legislation, which seems to have flown away like the winter snows, which I think was a very happy occasion for most Albertans. I think our task now is to get down to the business of reinforcing and building our public health care system and strengthening and modifying it for the coming century, and I will throw myself wholly behind that job.

Looking at Bill 31 specifically here, I believe that many of the changes certainly are innocuous and simply involve updating the legislation to reflect existing policies. For example, changing "ethics committee" to "research ethics board" throughout the language of this legislation I think is appropriate. Many of the amendments are restricting foreign access to Albertans' health information, which I find again quite heartening as long as we are making substantive measures to ensure that and are fighting off the temptation to allow private insurers to operate in this province in any extensive way, which, of course, would preclude any real ability for us to protect health information. Of course, private insurers, just by the nature of their business and the actuarial means by which they come to do business with people, require the very most private information from us and require the trade of that information as well to ensure the functioning of their business. Certainly, again, not seeing any substantive change in that in spring in the legislation in regard to the third way was useful and helpful to all of the people of Alberta.

Protecting against the PATRIOT Act, I think, is probably what some part of this legislation is attempting to do, which is good, and we must make sure we strengthen that. For example, in section 5 the disclosure for the purposes of collecting payment for health services seems to hint at some possibility of private health insurance, and I am putting that out there if that, in fact, is the intent of this amendment in section 5.

Also, the provisions made for the disclosure of private health information if it is for the good of public safety raises the question of what situation or circumstances this legislation might be anticipating. Is the partner legislation Bill 26, the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act? How will disclosure to police services, the ministers of health and justice help the good? How are we going to operate that? It's very thin ice in regard to the practice of protecting the private individual and protecting the public good. So I'd ask the hon. member to perhaps give us more detail regarding such disclosure and interaction with these other public entities. What sort of situation would, in the minister's mind, require disclosure for the sake of public safety?

The amendments in Bill 31 reflecting changes in technology recognize that certain computer databases that log details regarding access to information do not require the recording of two very important pieces of information regarding disclosure that are included in the access to other forms of data keeping other than computers. These two pieces of information are, first of all, to whom the disclosure is made, and number two, the purpose of the

disclosure. Both of these details are recorded under other forms of disclosure but not for computer access that uses the ID. Consequently, the access log is less detailed than what is required under current legislation. So I would ask the hon. minister how this shortcoming might be addressed. Or am I barking up the wrong tree? Is this not considered an important detail to you? I think that perhaps it might be considered an important detail to the public.

What other information might be included in the regulation part of this act? What is available for disclosure? Like it indicates in section 10 of the proposed amendments, what might this include, and what potential situation is this loophole meant to anticipate? What information could the minister provide to help us illuminate this section 10?

Finally, how are these amendments meant to address the tracking of drug trends as put forth in the government press release? It seemed to be a rather enigmatic reference in the release in regard to tracking drug trends. Is that for the individual? Is the government perhaps considering putting this information together to consider the tracking of collective trends in the use of pharmaceuticals in the province? Then perhaps I would say that considering the bulk purchasing of pharmaceuticals would be a useful end in collecting such data and, in fact, the enacting of some sort of provincial pharmacare plan in the province of Alberta, which I think would go a long way to addressing any concerns about increased public health costs in the province of Alberta.

10:20

I know that in regard to the increase over time, the numbers certainly are very much in dispute and, I would suggest, do not reflect anything outside of the normal growth in relation to our GDP growth and population growth in this province, but we certainly do want to realize the maximum efficiency for our public health care dollars since the backbone of what makes a public health care system strong is the economic efficiency of it. So public buying of pharmaceuticals under some sort of provincial pharmacare plan would go miles, or kilometres I should say, to helping strengthen our public system for these coming years.

I will leave off with that at this point, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we have those specific concerns in regard to this bill, and if they are adequately addressed, I can see no reason why we shouldn't recommend support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise tonight to respond to the bill that's before us, Bill 31, Health Information Amendment Act, 2006. At first look I think it appears to be okay, and I am definitely leaning towards supporting it as well. The issue of health information and who owns it and who can access it and which types of information we collect and for what purposes has been a big topic at many discussions, both formal and informal, which I took part in.

I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre indicated that she will provide qualified support after certain things are addressed and certain questions are answered and with amendments at the right stage of debate. I rise today to just talk about it both as an individual and also as a health practitioner. It is understandably an important issue and is not to be taken lightly. Custodians or keepers of health information, be it physicians, pharmacists, nurses, diagnostic and lab facilities, et cetera, are becoming increasingly aware not only of their responsibilities to guard and properly handle sensitive private health information but also of the risks inherent and the built-in liabilities.

As a pharmacist myself, at some point a couple of years ago our association was demanding clarifications and explanations from Alberta Health and from legal experts in the field in instances where the Health Information Act seemed to be conflicting or competing with privacy legislation. Almost no one wants to be breaking the law intentionally, and equally, Mr. Speaker, no one should be placed in a situation where he or she breached some clause of some act in good faith or in carrying out his or her duties.

One aspect is defining who collects what information, for what purpose, and who he or she can release it to. You know, a simple example, Mr. Speaker, would be whether a mother or a guardian has the right to know if her daughter is on birth control pills, for example. A more serious case is when you get the RCMP requesting someone's complete medication profile. Disclosure is the issue here then. We need to balance the protection of personal information and guarding an individual's privacy with the protection of society or the public and securing our health care system against the threats of misuse or abuse. [interjection] Yes. It's the issue of balance. Absolutely.

Other questions which come to mind include this whole issue of harvesting prescription data and selling it to marketing and drug manufacturing companies as part of their market research. That drives up health care costs, of course, and we're not sure if they're using that type of information in a fashion that is above board and in a way that is useful to the consumer or whether, in fact, that sensitive information is being misused.

Also, we have to be sure that in instances where information as such is being harvested for whatever purpose, all sensitive or identifying information is purged. There was a case in the U.S., I think, in 2001 where a famous company that had a contract with all the drugstores in a certain state, promised the association in that state and promised the individual stores that when they collected that information, they were going to program the software in such a way that it purges or deletes all the identifying information. Needless to say, that did not happen, and it was a big embarrassment for the association that agreed to that contract. It was a big embarrassment for that state government, and the company ended up being fined, and I think they lost their licence for a period of time. So, again, we have to learn from other people's mistakes, and today is a good chance for us to review all those scenarios.

Also, how about patients that are enrolled in research studies? Now, most of the research studies nowadays are double-blinded. Most of the times there are confidentiality agreements that the patient enters into with the research lab or institute or the drug company that's conducting that research. But exactly how are we getting the assurance that we need that all sensitive information, identifying information – patient names, addresses – is being removed from that package? Most companies will tell you that they only need the age, the health status, prior conditions, and all that stuff, and they don't need to know the name of the person, where they live, or any other information. But, again, we seek assurances.

Furthermore, what about the residents in long-term care? They receive medication in their carts. They receive doses sometimes three or four times a day. How do we assure them and their families that their information is being guarded and that no one would know what they're on and what X person is being prescribed for what condition and so on?

Another layer we can add is prison inmates receiving drugs. Their privacy is also something to be protected.

Mr. Speaker, I do not disqualify the need sometimes to share certain pieces of information between practitioners to achieve better medical or pharmaceutical care. Take, for example, a physician in an emergency situation who wants the drug profile on a patient to

figure out what that patient was on and for what conditions. In a trauma situation, for example, the patient may be unconscious or unable to speak or understand. Do we wait to receive consent, or do we act immediately? I would say that we act immediately because in a situation like this the person cannot speak for themselves, they cannot make that decision, and saving a life takes precedence.

Conversely, when a patient requests his or her complete profile to take to a specialist or when he or she is switching physicians, the pharmacist is only happy to co-operate since it is the patient himself or herself, or his or her parent or guardian if that patient is a child under 18, that owns that information. That file belongs to the patient. Mr. Speaker, when you yourself go to your druggist, you own that file, and pharmacists do it free of charge as well. On the other hand, some clinics charge a patient to release his or her file to him or her, which raises some questions in people's minds as to the issue of ownership and whether, in fact, this is just a delaying tactic to not release that information or whether, in fact, they look at it as revenue. I definitely think the patient owns his or her file, his or her information, and that health practitioners simply collect, share, and safeguard that information.

As was mentioned before, two of my caucus colleagues, the members for Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-Gold Bar, both sat on that Select Special Health Information Act Review Committee. It is good to see that some of their good work is being implemented, and I commend the government for bringing it forward. It's also good to see that some of the more contentious or controversial suggestions which my colleagues expressed opposition to were adjusted to preserve or protect individual privacy. Again, this is useful, and I think it's positive.

I'm also thinking, Mr. Speaker, that when pharmacists wanted access to lab results, for example, and were met with some resistance, it was not because of privacy concerns but, rather, unfortunately a few physicians from the old school thinking that they did not want to cede some of that responsibility to someone else, sort of like protecting turf, if you will. It is reassuring, however, that Alberta is now moving toward an integrated, collaborative model of health care delivery with primary care networks and that there will be a need to share or access information more regularly and more closely but, again, with the necessary safeguards and checks. As my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora mentioned, there are safeguards and checks in this piece of legislation, and that's why I'm leaning towards supporting it. Again, qualified support.

10:30

Now, again from my experience as a pharmacist and speaking of checks and balances, take, for example, Alberta's Wellnet, now called Alberta Netcare. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that I can actually get in extremely hot water if I access your own health profile without authorization? I have to get your authorization to access your file on Alberta's Wellnet, and I also have to demonstrate a need to do that. I do have access, and I can do it without your permission, and I can actually tell you or tell other people what you're on and for what purpose and, you know, how many times you filled it and when the last time you received it was and all that stuff. But the issue of authorized access and different levels of security and different passwords for different sections of Alberta Wellnet is a very positive development. I only access information on patients that are mine, that are clients of my pharmacy, before I even attempt it.

This system keeps track of who accessed what information when, why, and from where. So I can do it right here in the Chamber from my laptop, or I can do it from my home, or I can do it from my drugstore, or I can do it from Mexico. The system keeps track of

who is accessing what, when, from where, which is really positive, and it alleviates some of the concerns that not only pharmacists but physicians and nurses had when Wellnet was being constructed and was being put together.

Bill 31 in general terms extends two basic rights to Albertans. The first is the right of privacy and the protection of confidentiality, which I mentioned, and this is positive. The second one is the right to access their own information in the custody or under the control of custodians, including the right to examine, obtain a copy of, request a correction or amendment to recorded personal health information. That's also in keeping with recognizing that patients now are partners in their own health. So if you're going to empower a person to fully engage in looking after themselves from the health angle, then the least you can do is give them information that is useful to them and that is current and timely.

One more point, Mr. Speaker, before I conclude is the modification in this Bill 31 with regard to disclosing information to law enforcement agencies. It was recommended when the committee was reviewing the Health Information Act to just give a blanket requirement for health professionals to disclose information to law enforcement agencies regardless, that whenever they ask for it, you should just agree and release it. It is reassuring to see that Bill 31 did not go that way and that, in fact, it offered balance by leaving that authority with the custodian. So now the custodian himself or herself has the power to adjudicate or judge whether in this particular case releasing this information is warranted or if it's the proper thing to do. In fact, they can decide to withhold it, and the police have other ways, as in seeking a court order, for example.

This issue was definitely highlighted by both the Edmonton and the Calgary police services. But the recommendation to call for a mandatory disclosure was definitely something that we in the opposition and many Albertans found offensive. Again, it's commendable that this bill is not going that way and that it's leaving this as a responsibility that falls under the purview of the custodian or in many cases the practitioner that looks after those patients.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for this opportunity, and I will listen to more debate. Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of things that I would like to discuss with this bill. The hon. member ahead of me has said that the question is: who owns this information? I believe that I own it. It's my information.

So I would like to go back to the very start of how this information even gets into the system in the first place. The buzzword in this province is personal choice. That choice, then, almost automatically takes you away from the system and makes you accountable as opposed to the system. So when the person does make the choice, they are then responsible. The question to me would be: how really informed are they when they make that choice? The choice that I want to make is the fact that I don't allow this information to go into the system in the first place, and I think that that's a personal right. I don't see that there's any manoeuvring room in this particular bill for that specific personal choice.

I think of the primary care networks that are being created. You then become a file with four and five and eight, 10 people having access to that file. It's not as if it necessarily goes into this private, confidential computer system. That is one of the things that bothers me the most with this bill. I really do not see any personal choice in saying, "No, I do not want to share my information with the larger system," and in fact that you could own your file or that it would be

then written between you and your doctor or whichever care personnel you're using.

I would just like to have that concern put on the record. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 31, Health Information Amendment Act, 2006. If I recall, this bill was preceded by a special select committee of the last Legislature. The Legislature before this one was created by the elections in 2004. I was a member of that special select committee that was established by this Legislature to review the existing Health Information Act and to make changes in it, which was I think required by the existing piece of legislation, which required that five years after that bill had come into force the whole legislation be reviewed.

So I recall some debate at the time which certainly had to do with the protection of this very, very sensitive personal information related to one's health and the ability of the custodian to disclose it on request from law enforcement authorities or from various agencies of the government. We had come before that committee many groups and individuals concerned about the possibility that the review might lead to relaxation of the conditions attendant upon disclosure of that information.

I remember that the Alberta Medical Association made a very strong representation to the committee at the time and expressed very, very serious reservations and concerns on behalf of its membership of the obligations that an act like this would impose upon them, having to disclose information of their patients to law enforcement agencies or other government agencies under certain defined conditions. Doctors, of course, and their representatives spoke passionately about the confidential nature of the information that's exchanged between them as practitioners and their patients and the fiduciary responsibility and the moral commitment that doctors make to dealing with their patients and the information that they surrender to them about very personal sorts of things about themselves and not to disclose it to third parties. So that was one concern that was expressed.

10:40

On the other hand, of course, we heard from representatives of pharmacists, from representatives of pharmaceutical companies. The pharmacists, on one hand, and the pharmaceutical industry, on the other, for different reasons wanted the ability to have access to the information, especially information having to do with the use of certain drugs or the pattern of drug use by us as patients. The concern among the committee members and others that was put before the pharmaceutical industry representative at the time was, of course, about the nature of the commercial interests that the pharmaceutical industry would have in having that information and wanting to promote or to market certain drugs. Was the commercial interest of the pharmaceutical companies the same as the public interest that the changes in the Health Information Act were supposed to serve? So very serious issues were raised and dilemmas presented to this committee.

This bill, I think, needs a very thorough scrutiny of this Legislature before it receives its support and final consent. I would be very concerned if this piece of legislation makes it obligatory for doctors to disclose the information then prevents the doctors from receiving in the first place the very relevant information that they need in order to provide the proper treatment for their patients.

If the patients know that the information that they are giving to their doctors is likely to be disclosed and that doctors have no

recourse but to disclose it because they are required by legislation to do so, they may under certain conditions be reluctant, as a matter of fact, to share that information with their own doctors. This patient/doctor relationship adopts a relationship of confidentiality and mutual trust. The doctors see themselves as the trustees of the information in the interest of the person who's providing that information; that is, the patient. So there is a risk in requiring disclosure of patient information by doctors to third parties that either that doctor will have difficulty adducing that information from their patients and, therefore, will err in making appropriate diagnoses and prescribing appropriate treatments subsequent to that or that the doctors might be conflicted by the oaths that they give with respect to respecting that confidentiality, on the one hand, and then breaching that confidentiality because a particular piece of legislation or statute requires them to do so.

So those are some of the sort of principle concerns that were expressed, I think, to the committee. I believe it's two or three years ago. I hope I'm not oversimplifying those. The contents of this bill need to be judged and scrutinized in light of some of these principle considerations, which have to do with our obligation to protect the nature of the doctor/patient relationship that the medical profession considers essential to enhance their ability to provide the best possible care that they can to their patients. What's at stake if diagnostic errors are made because appropriate information is not accessible to doctors is the health of the patients, of course, the health of Albertans, the increased costs to the public health care system because if the diagnosis is wrong, then clearly the resources that the doctor commits to providing a cure or a prescription may be wasteful.

Thirdly, the efficiency of the system in general in terms of providing timely medical service which is appropriate to an Albertan suffering from a certain illness or disease may be compromised, and the cost-effectiveness of the system may also be compromised. So there are important considerations here that I think need to be addressed as we go through this bill, particularly during the next phase of its study, during the clause-by-clause study and the debate during the committee stage.

At this stage I think I just wanted to lay out some of my recollections from my work on that committee. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you might have been on that committee as well. I'm not sure if you were on it, but I think you might have been.

I think the intention of the legislation is made explicit in the news release from the Alberta Health and Wellness ministry. It says that the proposed amendments will do the following: "Allow information disclosure among governments and some third parties for the purposes of paying for services and ensuring accountability." Now, third parties could be insurance companies that provide insurance for some medical services that are presently not covered, but they could also come into the field to cover services that may be delisted in the future. So I have some concern about what these third parties are, what conditions are anticipated under which third parties will have access to this information for purposes of payment for services. It does concern me that this reference to third parties having access to this information for the purposes of payment for services may imply the introduction of private health care in this province. I just want to underline the fact that it's a possibility here and underscore the fact that there's a need to be concerned about what the bill might intend, in fact, to achieve.

There's another: "Allow discretionary disclosures for reasons of public safety and to prevent or report public health system fraud." Now, true, I think we need to make our public health system as fraud-proof as possible. That certainly would be important in order to increase its efficiency, reduce costs, and reduce waste, but again

I think we need to tread carefully with respect to this matter. We need to know what the instance of fraud is, what the possibilities are, what the potential for fraud is, and then take appropriate action if you're convinced that there is a serious problem.

"Allow Alberta Health and Wellness to better track drug trends." I think it's in principle not a bad thing because there are various drugs for the same illness that compete with each other for markets, and it is in the interest of the public health care system of Alberta, if it is to save costs, to be able to track drug trends and to identify drugs which are of equal value in terms of health outcomes but are, in fact, cheaper, and therefore doctors and the medical profession perhaps should be encouraged to prescribe those rather than the more expensive drugs which may be marketed through high-pressure marketing activities by pharmaceutical companies. Fine. Again, I think that as long as this drug tracking is for purposes of controlling drug costs and ensuring that appropriate drug use is made in the system, it's something that is worth our support, but we need to be looking at other implications of it.

10:50

Another purpose that's stated here in this release is, "Facilitate greater use of the electronic health record by giving pharmacists and doctors more complete patient drug histories." I think that's a very worthy goal to be achieved if we can achieve efficiencies through this electronic health record and transmission through those records of the appropriate information between and among doctors and perhaps between doctors and pharmacists.

Another purpose: "Protect the privacy of Albertans by ensuring their health and other personal information cannot be automatically disclosed in response to a United States court order under the Patriot Act." I think that is an extremely important concern. This is a concern that came up again and again at the proceedings of the committee. Mr. Work, the Privacy Commissioner, appeared before us, as a matter of fact, and undertook at that time to review, in conjunction with a review being done at the time by the province of B.C., to see what kind of legislative changes we need to make in order to protect the health-related information of Albertans that may be in the hands of insurance companies and others which are subject to the PATRIOT law in the U.S.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity and will sit down and give other members a chance to speak too.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill to close debate.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken at some length regarding the contents of Bill 31 at the time that I moved second reading. I will have some further comments to make in response to issues raised by members of the opposition when the bill moves to committee. I would urge all members to support Bill 31 on second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 14
Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to address the remaining issues and questions that were left outstanding during second reading.

Before I do that, however, I'd like to introduce an amendment being proposed for Bill 14 and ask for its circulation in the House. Perhaps I'll wait until it's circulated.

The Chair: We will call this amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, you may proceed on amendment A1.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Section 2(18)(b)(iv) of Bill 14 contains an amendment to the practice statement of opticians which includes a reference to assessing eye health. The intent of the amendment is to ensure that the college of opticians has the jurisdiction to regulate its members when performing assessments, including sight testing and refractions. This activity is currently undertaken by opticians. While Bill 14 met this objective, the College of Optometrists is concerned that the use of the term "assess eye health" implies a broader range of activities.

The councils of the Alberta College of Optometrists and the Alberta Opticians Association have agreed to a revision that would replace the phrase "assess eye health" with "conduct assessments." The proposed House amendment will continue to meet the original objective, using wording that has been agreed on by both optometrists and opticians. The proposed amendment is intended to reflect the service currently provided by opticians, which is conducting assessments. The amendment does not change the scope of practice.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move the amendment, which states that section 2(18)(b)(iv) is amended in the proposed clause (c.1) by striking out "assess eye health" and substituting "conduct assessments."

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on A1.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have received some correspondence, not truckloads but some, from opticians operating in Edmonton-Centre. They have put the case before me as well that is in fact reflected in this government amendment, so obviously the government heard a good deal about it as well. The issue that was being raised was that it should not expand the scope of practice beyond what was laid out. This does give the impression that it was going to be allowing for prescription services for the opticians to be prescribing, which would be expanding their scope of practice.

Obviously, this is a fairly comfortable fit for everyone that is involved in this particular area, and I have no objections to it. We have not received any stakeholder feedback that would indicate that there is a huge push-back against what is being proposed here. Everyone seems to be willing to accept it, and I am willing to do that as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I, too, have received a fair bit of information regarding this concern of opticians in regard to this one particular section. I do want to acknowledge the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat's capacity to recognize this as well. Undoubtedly the other side was receiving the same sort of message.

This amendment to section 2, sort of changing the language and making it less specific, is certainly welcome from that industry. I had said before in second reading of this bill that, in fact, we had to

be very careful about repealing provisions and changing the regulation of the ability for certain professions to carry out certain procedures. I think we have to be sure that we're consulting with the various practitioners of all health care professions before we mess around with it.

11:00

Of course, the individual colleges that might dictate pharmacy and medicine and optometry and dentistry and the like all have their own very specific concerns. In fact, I received some correspondence from the massage therapist practitioners speaking specifically on section 25, making sure that they are not excluded from determining their own profession regarding the dissemination of information and application of their craft.

I think that it's important for us to recognize the value of this particular amendment. I, in fact, welcome it, and so do the opticians. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak briefly to the amendment as well. As you know, in years past I spent a good deal of time as an elected official working on the Health Professions Act and so came to know many of these professions almost on a first-name basis, so to speak, and became very, very familiar with some of the issues that are involved. The issue with respect to eye health is a long-standing one that we spent many, many hours on in discussion with the various professionals that are involved in providing services, with the optometrists, the opticians, and the ophthalmologists, or the three Os as they became affectionately known.

I think what needs to be made very clear through this amendment is that the prescribing of lenses continues to be a restricted activity and is not involved in the scope of practice for the opticians. There has been some confusion about whether or not the conducting of assessments as is proposed in this amendment would include prescribing corrective lenses. I'm satisfied in the discussions that I've had with the member as well as the minister that this amendment and the intent of the bill itself is to clarify that the conducting of assessments is a completely different service than the prescribing of lenses, which remains a restricted activity and would not be done by anyone other than those that have the restricted activity within their scope of practice.

With that, I support the amendment before us.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: Yes, Mr. Chair. Just for clarification may I ask a question on this?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I guess that my question would go to the mover of this amendment. I would like to know if, in fact, the prescribing of prescriptions, then, would still remain with the ophthalmologist. I'm thinking of prescription drugs, drops, et cetera.

Ms Blakeman: Yes.

Ms Pastoor: But not with the opticians?

Ms Blakeman: That's right. It's not expanding this one.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I have my question answered. Thank you to my hon. caucus member.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do have a couple of concerns and questions for the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat regarding conducting assessments which are referred to in the amendment. What I would like to be informed on is whether or not refractions are part of those assessments and, as the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat had indicated, whether or not those would be used for the purposes of prescription? While I recognize that prescriptions would not be to an outside body or an outside provider, would it be possible to do an assessment and have those lenses prescribed in-house? In other words, would there be some limitation on the choice of the individual if they did have an assessment or a refraction done in the context of the optician's office?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In answer to that question, basically refractions refer to tests that measure the refraction error of the eye. The tests are noninvasive and are not dangerous in any way. The purpose of the test is to gather information. A similar example would be blood pressure testing, which is noninvasive and provides information. Basically, refracting is collecting data. The amendment on conducting assessments was agreed to by the College of Optometrists and the Opticians Association as an alternative to having the words "assess eye health" because they felt that assess eye health was too broad a statement that perhaps could be construed to be out of their scope of practice. So that's why it was changed. They both agreed to that, and that is why the amendment is here.

To answer the other part of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill's question regarding prescriptions, as I mentioned, refracting is collecting data. In fact, the chair of the ophthalmology department at the U of A wrote me a letter, and he clearly supported the practice of opticians doing refractions because adding refractions to the practice statement for opticians does not give them the right to prescribe. It only ensures that those opticians who are currently refracting may be appropriately regulated under the regulations for the college of opticians of Alberta under the Health Professions Act.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A question for the hon. member. You just mentioned that opticians are not allowed to prescribe. I understand that when optometrists write a prescription, that that can be used anywhere. They can take that prescription and use it anywhere, you know, to obtain glasses or contact lenses or whatever. I'm just wondering: if opticians are allowed to do refraction, is that not then used to prescribe or, I guess, to make glasses or to make contact lenses? If it is, then is this not the first jurisdiction in North America to allow opticians to perform a refraction?

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Chairman, are we not still speaking to the amendment?

The Chair: Yes. We are on amendment A1.

Mr. Mitzel: Okay. I'll continue on, then, with refractions. Really, refractions are not part of conducting assessments as far as the terminology for the amendment is concerned, but if you wish, I can continue on.

The Chair: As long as your comments are restricted to amendment A1.

Mr. Mitzel: Okay. Well, you mentioned prescriptions. As I mentioned before, opticians can perform refractions, which is gathering information. This information then is sent to optometrists in order to do a prescription. Opticians cannot prescribe.

Ms Blakeman: They collect the information.

Mr. Mitzel: They collect the information. That's correct.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

11:10

The Chair: On Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act as amended, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to now address some of the issues that were raised during second reading. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre expressed concern about the statute of limitations being increased to two years and that increasing the timelines from six months to two years may not be enough time. I really appreciate the concern. It should be noted, however, that the two-year time limit refers to the time for the commencement of the prosecution.

There was also a concern expressed that the minister is being given the authority to choose who is recognized as a member of a profession. The issue is regulating, not recognizing, professions. Not all professions are regulated. As currently worded, an application to regulate a health profession under the Health Professions Act must be made by an association representing the majority of the practitioners in the profession. To determine that an association represents a majority of persons carrying on that profession in Alberta, it's necessary to identify the members or practitioners of the profession currently practising. This includes identifying the members of the association making the application and other practitioners who are not members. This is extremely limiting. Also, it is often only when legislation is being developed that basic requirements for entering into the profession are clearly defined. Thus, before a decision is taken to regulate the profession, it may not be clear whether an individual will ultimately qualify as a member of the profession.

The amendment would give the minister a broader discretion to initiate investigations where appropriate. With the amendment any professional association representing practitioners of the profession could apply to the minister to have a health profession regulated. The minister must then decide whether it's in the public's interest to proceed with the application. The association making the application simply initiates the process. It does not necessarily define the scope of the investigation, nor will the association making the application necessarily become the regulatory body for the profession. It's important to emphasize that the minister is not being given the authority to choose who is regulated or recognized. That decision rests ultimately with the Legislature. Professional self-governance is not a right but a privilege which is delegated to professions only when the public interest is served by doing so and the advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages.

There was a concern about the Association of Massage Therapists

and Wholistic Practitioners being left out and whether there would be consideration of a lower level of training or varied levels of training so that they could still be regulated. The first issue that has to be considered is if this profession should be regulated. An investigation to determine whether a profession should be regulated under the Health Professions Act would not leave any association or group of practitioners who want to be heard left out of the investigation process. In conducting an investigation the Health Professions Advisory Board would be expected to ascertain the qualifications and the minimum standards of competence that are required for a person applying to practise their profession. When a decision is made to regulate a profession, the intent is not to take away a practitioner's ability to accept referrals or to charge for the provision of massage services, rather it's to ensure the practitioners who do so meet acceptable standards.

Any regulatory initiative would have to address the concerns of current practitioners who do not meet the requirements for registration once these have been determined. Having different levels within the profession is certainly one option. Other options include grandfathering and allowing for upgrading programs or opportunities to challenge the requirements. The amendment to the act will allow the minister to initiate the process to determine if the regulation is appropriate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said that for the last 22 years the province has required that an application for regulation by health professions must be made by an organization that represents the majority of the persons carrying on that profession. In point of fact, that's not the case. Before the Health Professions Act, the Health Disciplines Act generally permitted an association representing a health profession to apply under the act to have a health discipline designated. The only time the Health Disciplines Act required that the association represent a majority of practitioners was if the application concerned a profession that was already regulated. This ensured that if a profession was regulated by another statute, the government would only consider bringing the profession under the Health Disciplines Act if the majority of the members of the profession agreed. The provision addressed a concern that a disgruntled minority within a profession or perhaps a minister would initiate an investigation and force a profession that was already regulated under the Health Disciplines Act.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

There was mention of the health policy framework. The Health Professions Act, not the bill being debated today, is mentioned in the framework. The act was passed in 1999 and came into force in 2001. The amendments before us have risen from issues experienced by the professions and the government in administering the act since it came into force.

In regard to the professional regulations that are under development, the regulations for chiropractors, dental hygienists, opticians, respiratory therapists, occupational therapists, and pharmacists are being finalized. The process, however, takes time as final drafting issues still need to be resolved. Once a draft is finalized, it must be approved by a council of the college before it is submitted for final approval by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Specifying a date when a professional regulation may be ready is not realistic. Nonetheless, it's anticipated that these regulations will be forwarded for approval this spring.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder raised a concern about using the term "specialist" in an injudicious manner. The addition of this authority will permit the regulatory bodies for each profession to restrict the use of the title "specialist" by their members. This

authority will provide a level of protection to the public. If a member of a profession specializes in an area of practice – for example, a physical therapist who is a sports medicine specialist – and wants to advertise to the public as such, that member may be required to meet the criteria set by the council of their college.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View said that there was a need for every profession to have a separation between their licensing body and their professional interest body. The Health Professions Act does not require absolute separation between regulatory and union functions. With respect to fee negotiation and other economic activities, the act mandates a functional separation but not an absolute physical separation.

Further to the minister's comments regarding consultation transparency, the amendment to section 25 of the Health Professions Act simply enables the minister to initiate the process to determine whether or not it is appropriate to regulate a health profession. Within that process, organizations that represent the practitioners of the profession in question and other professions will have an opportunity to participate in the Health Professions Advisory Board process.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. These are my comments, and I ask the committee for consideration of Bill 14.

The Acting Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. Thank you for the explanation from the sponsoring member. I am going to go back to a couple of areas that I raised concerns on.

For the most part, he did answer my question or address my concerns, but the area that is continuing to cause the most acrimony or conflict is the section in this bill which appears as section (4), which is amending section 25 of the original bill. Specifically, that's the one that is taking out the provision that an application would "be made by an organization that represents the majority." That's being deleted, and essentially it's now being left to the discretion of the minister. "If the minister is satisfied that this is in the public interest," they can proceed, which frankly I think is a good amendment to be bringing in. We have some long-running, acrimonious difficulties with some professions that have either subsections or have developed sort of additional arms of their particular kind of practice, and the majority rule just doesn't work. The minister does need the flexibility, and I recognize that. As I said, I'm supportive for the most part.

11:20

However, the concern that I brought forward was around addressing that concern that manifests itself most distinctly in the massage therapist example, which is that you have a group of people who are not going to meet that standard. That's not to say that individuals may not progress beyond that and take additional training, but that level of health service provision is never going to meet the standard that's being set because the standard is one involving scope of practice for health professionals.

Essentially, massage therapists I think don't claim to represent themselves as health professionals, but they are offering a service that many people find contributes to their health and well-being. The issue here is that if they are not recognized officially in some way, they in fact would lose the ability to be charging for their services and being able to seek reimbursement through private insurance plans that detail, of course, that this has to be recognized in some way or that a doctor has given a prescription for the person to go ahead and do this.

I'm still looking for some kind of concrete accommodation here.

What I heard from the sponsoring member is: "Well, there are different ways of dealing with this. You could try this, or you could try this, or you could try that." What I'm looking for from the sponsoring member is confirmation that it's expected that the ministry will work with this particular group and any others in similar situations. I'm not aware of who those might be. I'm talking specifically about the massage therapists because they will have to fit to a different standard. I fail to see why we can't have a secondary standard put in place here that is a subsection that recognizes that the services provided can be recognized as helpful, with health meaning, but they don't meet the higher standard.

I think I gave an example before of when I was in British Columbia and had an injury that was causing me a great deal of pain. It was limiting mobility. I went in and I said, "This is what I need." They said: "Oh, yes, you need a registered massage therapist who has health training. They have three years' worth and X number of hours of supervised training. That's who you need because it's of a medical level." There was an arrangement made for me to hook up with that person the next day. The only thing they could offer me on the first day was, literally, a massage therapist who does a nice relaxing massage, which wasn't incredibly helpful to what I was seeking. But they recognize in B.C. that there are differing levels of it. I'm seeking assurance here that the department will proceed and work with the massage therapists immediately so that they don't get cut off. If this bill passes, that's essentially what would happen to them. Without assurance that work will be done to accommodate them, I raise serious objections. I guess that is what I'm saying.

Overall on that amending section I think it's a good idea, but here's the catch. This is the holdback. It may be the one and only exception, but it might be indicative of some other areas although I'm hard-pressed to think of what those might be. I'm looking for, rather than just a "well, this could happen or that could happen," an actual commitment that there will be an approach and a working relationship established between the massage therapists and department officials to in fact work towards some kind of accommodation. I don't want to leave these people out in the cold, in other words.

The one other section that was problematic for me – and I didn't hear the member address it – is the one around the complaints. Okay. That's coming up as section (7) in the bill on page 4, which is amending in the original bill section 54(1), which is striking out that a person may give a written, signed complaint to the complaints director regarding blah, blah, blah. That was being struck out, so it wasn't requiring a written complaint any more.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Then it went on to another section, in fact, section (8) in the amending bill, section 56 in the original bill, that's saying that, well, it could be done on oral information. I really believe that if you are making a complaint about somebody, if it's serious enough to start an investigation, then the information should not be oral or anonymous.

Now, if there were reasons of expediency or imminent danger or life-threatening or something, well, then let's put that in the act, but none of that is flowing from the amendment that I'm seeing here. I think what's important here is that we maintain the ability of someone, literally, to cross-examine their accuser, which is what our court system is based on. If I'm going to say, "You done me wrong, and you violated some particular provision," you've got the right to say: "Okay. You say that. You identify who you are." I get to question you about where that came from. We don't deal with stuff based on anonymous phone calls or, you know, a message left on an

answering machine or even an unsigned note slipped under the door. You can't do that here. You've got to know who you're talking about and what the contextual circumstances are. On that basis, you could be going ahead and dealing with a complaint that's coming from someone who was, frankly, medically delusional or paranoid.

So I think we have to protect here, and either I didn't hear the explanation or the member didn't address it. That's the other area of concern that I have here. I was looking for something to be done to assure me that we would not end up in that situation, where this could be done anonymously or just on an oral basis. I think it is fairly serious when you start to get into complaints around professions and regulated professions.

Those continue to be my areas. I will look forward to hearing what the member has to say, and based on that, I will consider whether I will be supporting the passage of this bill in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My remarks will be short as I stand simply to voice a concern that has been presented to me. I've had constituents raise questions about refractions being performed by opticians who, I am told, do not have the training to detect possible eye health risks such as eye diseases. The question presented to me was whether or not there is any danger of compromising eye health through refraction examination by opticians. I wonder if the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat can clarify this for me.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll clarify this first question, then get back over to the other questions. I might say thanks to the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Performing refractions refer to tests that measure the refractive error of the eye, and the tests are really noninvasive. This brings up the issue that you mentioned about whether there's a health risk or not. They're not dangerous in any way. The purpose of these tests is to gather information, and as I mentioned previously, a similar example would be blood pressure testing, which is also noninvasive and provides information. It's collecting data, and really that's what it is. I hope that answers the hon. member's question.

11:30

Back to the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre regarding the massage therapists. As I mentioned in my remarks on the previous question, there is an option there for perhaps grandfathering or for allowing for upgrading programs or whatever. But besides that, I think the amendment refers to the initial application received by an organization. This is an organization seeking to become a regulated profession. That's really what this amendment speaks to. It's been difficult in practice to know whether a group represents a majority.

The amendment allows, I believe, for greater flexibility. I know that the member asked about whether there would be assurances that there would be different levels of training that would be regulated. This amendment allows for more flexibility to let this happen and for any of these referrals of applications to the Health Professions Advisory Board, the body responsible for undertaking the investigations of the applications for regulation. I think there's flexibility in the amendment to allow that to happen. To state emphatically that it's going to happen: I don't believe that's what the amendment was for. It's to allow the flexibility to be able to do this.

On the other point that you had, with regard to section 54(1), you spoke to the complaints. Really, 54(1) has been changed and substituted to say that "a person who makes a complaint to a complaints director regarding a regulated member or a former member must do so in writing and must sign the written complaint." It also goes on in section 56 – this has been amended though – to clarify that a complaints director will have the flexibility to accept a verbal complaint should a circumstance arise. So what it's doing, really, is giving the complaints director or the minister the flexibility to address this.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, will promise to be brief on this Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. I have general comments and then one specific comment at the end.

My general comment is with regard to something I talked about earlier when we were discussing Bill 31, Health Information Amendment Act, 2006. It's that angle of working collaboratively and looking at the patient from a holistic standpoint: one patient, multiple-disease state or multiple afflictions, many practitioners looking after that one person. However, it's the model that is currently being proposed in Alberta, which is the working together model and practitioners co-operating and sharing information.

I do not disqualify, of course, that there are situations where we need regulations. We need professional conduct guidelines, codes of ethics, competency assessments, requirements for continuing education, and discussions or decisions made on membership fees for belonging to a certain professional body, like a college or an association, for example. I mentioned that, you know, some of those concerns are general, and they don't really pertain to one profession or the other. You can apply the same argument to any number of professions, and it equally holds.

How about if we talk about professional fees charged for various services rendered? Physiotherapists, for example, a while back raised concerns with respect to the fees they can charge and the number of visits a patient is entitled to have; for example, after a motor vehicle accident. Many of the concerns were basically stemming from what they perceived to be lack of consultation. They were not involved in the decision-making, and they feel that the decision was basically arrived at by insurance companies sort of lobbying to go a certain way. They don't feel that they can deliver a good enough service or a professional, quality service for the fees that they can now collect. Many of them have let staff go. Many of them have reduced their hours of operation and things like that. So the issue of consultation, the issue of, you know, what is deemed appropriate, what is deemed fair from a compensation standpoint . . .

Ms Blakeman: Why do we allow an insurance company to set the rate?

Mr. Elsalhy: Why do we allow an insurance company to set the rate, which sometimes might appear to be lobbying from big business to do something that is not necessarily in the best interest of the patient? You can look at it from a conflict of interest standpoint as well because insurance companies should really just provide what is necessary because they collect hefty amounts of money, and when it's time for them to furnish a service or cover it, then they look for ways not to.

Take pharmacy, as another example, and the difficulties pharmacists face when negotiating fees with Alberta Blue Cross either

annually or every number of years. You know, Mr. Chair, it is not known to me and to many professionals and many Albertans whether, in fact, Blue Cross receives any sort of direction from the government or whether they operate at arm's length. Sometimes it is convenient to say that they're independent and that they run their own affairs, but then at other times they are portrayed to be an extension of the government and that it's the Alberta provincial insurance agency or, you know, state insurance.

I can go on, Mr. Chair, but the point really is that government, third-party payers, and front-line providers, no matter which profession you're talking about and which service is being provided, should sit down together in good faith to discuss the issues, determine the fees, determine what's provided for, what's covered and what's not. Potentially, you can even expand it to include members of the public because the trend now is to include members of the public on various committees and various boards. So why not involve them in the negotiation process whenever a profession is dealing with the government or with a third-party payer to arrive at those fees?

Now, the specific point that I referenced earlier was definitely mentioned before and was touched on by the hon. sponsor of the bill – and I thank him – and also by my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. It's with regard to the Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners. I, too, received a communication from them. It was really pleading with myself and members of this Assembly to try to intervene on their behalf because they feel that they were left out, that they were not adequately and thoroughly consulted. In fact, in their own words, they say that they knew about this amendment simply by chance.

One of their arguments, which I find strong, is that the consultation paper which was sent out was sent out to groups that are deemed to be health profession regulatory boards, but they think – and I agree – that the discussion should have involved people who are on volunteer boards. So not the regulated associations but the volunteer professional organizations. The other thing they object to – and I kind of agree – is that the amendment was deemed to be minor and that it was only like sort of housekeeping or a little cleaning, but we feel that it really does involve a big scope, and it's not anything minor.

We discussed section 25(2)(a), which talks about organizations making an application when they are representing a majority of those members. The Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners and myself to some extent are concerned that maybe in the future, because now we're allowing minority organizations to apply, we might be dividing professional bodies into competing or quarreling factions. You know, a certain group of practitioners might apply to the one agency because their policies are favourable. Another group might apply to that other one because their professional standards are higher. Then you might have situations where you get disparity in the level of quality of service and also in the fees charged. You will notice that things will become not even or not fair across the board.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I thank you for this opportunity to put my concerns on the record, and I invite further discussion.

11:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for those remarks from the hon. member. A lot of the remarks that the hon. member made really concerned the professions and the practitioners co-operating, but the bill really speaks not to that they're allowed to charge but whether there's an opportunity to have

them officially recognized so that they can be regulated. I agree with the member that certainly they should get together and work out proper payment schedules that fit the needs that are there. I've heard the same remarks from practitioners and from other residents in my constituency regarding the inability to receive the amount of service that's required in order to be able to get whatever condition they have corrected.

I think the other item that you mentioned was with regard to the massage therapists, and you're right. As I mentioned, they certainly feel that they have been left out, and I've also received those same letters. Really, I guess this is where the bill is hopefully set up so that with the flexibility there will be an opportunity for the minister to be able to address whether any one of those different groups should be or should not be regulated, whether they should be organized as a profession. This goes back to the comment that the Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned about perhaps different levels of training. So I think the flexibility is there. I'd certainly hope it is.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know I sort of touched on this during the speech on the amendment, but I guess I would just like to ask if the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is aware of the letter from the Alberta Association of Optometrists dated May 1, 2006, which says that optometry is not willing to live with opticians performing refractions. Again, I'm wondering if the hon. member is willing to add the word "supervised" somewhere in this Committee of the Whole stage, if he could add the word "supervised," saying that the opticians must be supervised by optometrists in order to make sure that the right job is being done here. So it's just a question, I guess, to the hon. member, and I'm wondering if he's seen this letter and what his response is to it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I have seen the letter. I've gone through it, and I've spoken to the executive director of the College of Optometrists, and I've spoken to the executive director of the association of opticians also. The point is that when we tried to get consensus between both those organizations, we could not get that consensus, and that's why that was not put in there.

I think I can harken back perhaps to an incident some years ago when optometrists were given the authority to provide medicine, to provide drugs. Now, the college of ophthalmologists protested very, very strongly with regard to this. The same type of discussion and concerns and differences were raised then as are raised now with the opticians and the optometrists. That whole thing has become a nonissue for the ophthalmologists and the optometrists, and they're working together. It's our hope that this same thing will happen with the opticians and the optometrists.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you. I think that in the last go-round the sponsoring member got closer to what I was looking for, which was some sort of lifting beyond what was actually on the page here. Essentially, we're creating a situation with this amending act that didn't exist before, and it has implications for a group of people who were able to get references through the health care system and charge for their services. With the passage of this, they will no longer be able to do that. I was looking for assurance from the

sponsoring member that there were other ways for the group to go at it, that the ministry was willing to do it, and I've now heard that from him.

I'll be going back to the Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners and advising that they get in touch with the department and start to work with the minister to see if they can get a secondary level of standards put in place that would address what they need to do from a public health point of view, for example. So the possibilities are there, I have the assurance, it's in *Hansard*, that's what I was seeking, and I'm happy to go forward with the act at this point.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 14, Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 14 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 25 Securities Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity this evening to speak to Bill 25, Securities Amendment Act, 2006, again. I appreciate the comments made earlier this month by the hon. members for Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I'm pleased that they both recognize the importance of the legislation. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford indicated that he generally supports the legislation, most especially the provisions enhancing investor protection. There are two House amendments to Bill 25. I will get to them momentarily.

First, I'd like to respond to comments raised by the hon. members during debate in second reading two weeks ago. Both members talked about the idea of a single securities regulator for Canada. Certainly, this is not surprising. You know, the mention of it, of course, was even in the last amendment that we brought in a year ago. The question was brought up then, and we had some debate with respect to it. The answer now, Mr. Chairman, is no different, really, than it was then. The provinces and territories may one day decide to go down the road toward a single securities regulator for Canada, across the country, but we don't really know when that will happen, and we can't predict the future. At this point all of the provinces are not prepared to do that.

Regardless, I think that what we need to focus on now are the steps in this legislation. They're steps that must be taken whether or not we end up with a single regulator. Whether Canada's capital markets are eventually regulated by a single authority or not, we're out competing on a global scale, and these amendments are necessary. If we're to remain competitive, we need to harmonize securities regulation across the country and broaden the passport system implemented last year.

Part of harmonizing Alberta's securities regulatory regime with

other Canadian jurisdictions involves repealing some provisions of Alberta's existing Securities Act. Those provisions would then be placed into national rules. I'm aware that both members were wary of this during second reading debate. However, national rules, or national instruments as they are called, are subject to a public consultation process. Canadians and, of course, Albertans will still be able to review the proposed regulations and provide their input.

Mr. Chairman, previously the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford praised the investor protection aspects of Bill 25 but said that he wanted to see more in the way of enforcement. Certainly, enforcement and investor protection are key priorities in the ongoing work between Alberta and its partners in security reform, but I would remind the hon. member of some of the improvements to enforcement that we added to the Securities Act last year. Briefly, the changes included a broader and more powerful prohibition against making untrue or misleading statements, prohibiting manipulative transactions and trade activities that artificially inflate the market, adding a prohibition against front-running, adding a new obstruction of justice prohibition dealing with activities that hinder or interfere with reviews and investigations, and expanding the insider trading prohibition.

11:50

Mr. Chairman, that's in addition to giving the Alberta Securities Commission and Alberta courts new enforcement powers and increasing the maximum administrative penalty available to the commission to \$1 million. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford expressed some concern earlier at the amount of the penalty, however, but I must say that it's in line with other large jurisdictions in Canada, including Ontario.

Now, I realize that the hon. members had some other concerns, but let me remind them that this is part of a much larger, ongoing process. Canada leads the Council of Ministers of Securities Regulation and is working diligently with the other provinces and territories to improve the securities regulatory system in Alberta and across Canada. Investor protection, which is closely linked to enforcement, is a fundamental objective of the work the provinces and territories are doing under the memorandum of understanding that was signed in September 2004.

Mr. Chairman, I hope these comments are helpful in clarifying the issues before the Assembly.

I would ask to have the amendments we are proposing distributed.

The Chair: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Mr. Knight: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll just wait a moment until they're distributed.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Amendments to Bill 25, Securities Amendment Act, 2006, are as follows. Section 3 is struck out and the following is substituted: sections 7 and 7.1 are repealed; section 36 is amended by striking out "and" at the end of proposed section 180(1)(d) and substituting "or".

Mr. Chairman, to speak just briefly to the amendments that we're proposing, the first amendment is the provision on deemed insiders of an income trust and, along with other detailed insider reporting requirements, is being repealed so that it can be placed in national rules.

Section 36 of the Securities Amendment Act, which amends 180(1)(d) in the Securities Act, will be changed by replacing the word "and" with the word "or" at the end of the section. What that

does is make it consistent with the structure of section 35 in the Securities Amendment Act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on amendment A1.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Chairman. In regard to this amendment could I have some clarification, please? I don't see this amendment as signed by either the hon. member or Parliamentary Counsel. Is it just the original that was to be signed or the entire House that was to receive a signed copy? Could you clarify that for me, please?

The Chair: Hon. member, if you look up in the top left-hand corner, it's initialled. It's a government amendment, and that's apparently acceptable. Peter Pagano.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Now, at this time I have a question for the hon. member, and it isn't specific to this amendment but to the remarks that he made leading up to the introduction of this amendment. Perhaps I will cede the floor to another hon. colleague until this amendment is dealt with, and I will direct my questions at that time to the hon. member.

Thank you.

The Chair: Anyone else wish to speak to the amendment? Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Now, on the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a question for the hon. member in regard to the administrative penalty. The hon. member, in his remarks about 10 minutes ago if I heard him correctly – and if he could clarify this, I would be grateful – indicated that there was an increase in the administrative penalty. This was in regard to the commission. There was to be an increase in the administrative penalty to a figure of not more than \$1 million for “each contravention or failure to comply. Now, section 199 presently reads, as I understand it, and I'm quoting here, Mr. Chairman, “The commission may order the person or company to pay an administrative penalty of not more than \$1 000 000 for each contravention or failure to comply.” Could the hon. member please clarify what exactly he's referring to when he indicates to the House that there was to be an increase in this administrative penalty?

Thank you.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, if I might. The part that would've been perhaps misunderstood was that what I did say was, “I would remind the hon. member of some of the improvements to enforcement that we added to the Securities Act last year.” That was one of the amendments that we made last year. So what you're reading there is exactly right: it was a million dollars. That's already been done. We're not doing that in this particular amendment. It was an amendment that was done in the last Securities Act amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that clarification from the hon. member.

Now, in regard to the commission and the fact that there was a substantial increase in Alberta Securities Commission fees in the hon. Minister of Finance's recent budget. I believe it was an average of about 8 per cent. I don't have the fiscal plan with me here. An hon. colleague borrowed it and has yet to return it. Could you confirm that the increase in fees to the Alberta Securities Commission is going to be used to pay for this increased enforcement as a result of this bill?

Thank you.

12:00

Mr. Knight: I would have to reply to the question, I think, by advising the member that I will get an answer for the question because I honestly couldn't say that the fees are directed specifically to enforcement. If that's the question, then I'm afraid that I'm unable to answer that question at this time.

Mrs. McClellan: The fees that are collected are entirely for the operation of the commission. The commission is not funded by the Alberta government at all. It is funded by industry. We can inquire as to whether they designate certain fees to certain parts of the operation, but I would suspect that it contributes to the overall operation of the commission.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise on Bill 25 here in committee. I feel that this is an important bill as it affects the operations of the securities market and a basic tool of the economy. I'm glad to see that we're debating it at some length here and, indeed, staying until after midnight to proceed with this because there are literally untold billions of dollars at stake in how we handle these debates and the rules we put in place.

As I think all members here will know, the Securities Commission in Alberta has been the subject of a lot of controversy in the last 12 to 18 months. As many people will also know, I have defended the notion of a local, provincially-based securities regulator, the Alberta Securities Commission, in contrast to many others in this country who support a single, national regulator. There are arguments on both sides.

My reason for supporting an Alberta-based provincial securities regulator is that they do allow some adaptation to local circumstances. They are more easily accessible to a local investment group, and indeed as we know, in Alberta in general and particularly in Calgary there's an extremely vigorous public investment community. For them to have direct access to a securities commission is important. For that securities commission to be harmonized with other securities commissions in Canada, as Bill 25 is doing, I think is a step in the right direction.

However, I am concerned – and I just wanted to get this on the record, Mr. Chairman – that at some point the credibility of the Alberta Securities Commission becomes so tarnished that I begin to wonder whether I ought not to change my position and consider supporting a national regulator. I haven't done that, but I have considered it, and I would do it with great reluctance. I need to be blunt: the only reason that I would do it is that the leadership provided by this government on the Securities Commission has been so weak and poor that the record of the Alberta Securities Commission is now really tarnished in Canada and, indeed, in some other international markets. I won't belabour the issue given the late hour, although there are members here who were asking me for details.

Bill 25, I think, is a complicated bill. I'm not an expert in the details of securities regulation, but I'm going to assume that it's well

crafted in pretty well every detail, although we have seen a couple of government amendments. Whenever that happens, it does make me wonder what other things might have been missed in drafting a bill. I'll assume that this bill is well intended and now, with the government amendments in place, is well crafted and will move forward with harmonizing Alberta's securities regulations with the rest of the country.

I am concerned that it's too late for that and that the forces moving towards a national securities regulator have now gained so much momentum because of the failures, frankly, of governments like this government to vigorously clean house in the Securities Commission, that in the longer term this entire bill may be overwhelmed by larger national forces.

It's a step in the right direction, but my real concern is that it's too little too late. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Chairman, I just want to make a couple of comments. I appreciate the support and the interest in the Securities Commission as an important part of our economy. I would reference the hon. member to my colleague's comments when he spoke to questions on second reading on this. Something that we have said consistently is that all of the work that we are doing in the passport system, which all provinces have signed onto in Canada with the exception of Ontario, does lead to a very positive end if it is decided at some point that there should be a common regulator. As I was reading the budget information from the federal government, there is a section in there – I'm sure that everybody is just gripped by reading this stuff – focusing on priorities, turning a new leaf on this, and they do talk about a common regulator.

What work we've done over the past two years is to ensure that we move to harmonization across Canada in an orderly fashion. In discussions with securities ministers on this, including Ontario, who has been involved in these even though they're not a signatory, and in discussions with the committee who provided the report, it was very accepted that all of the work that we have done is extremely beneficial down the road. None of it is wasted. It's recognized that if you were going to move to a common regulator or a national regulator, it would indeed take years to get all of the complexity of these securities regulators into place. So I want to reassure the hon. member that the work we're doing on this bill is important. All Legislatures in Canada with the exception of Ontario are doing this very thing. We have agreed on these amendments as a group of provinces, and we all agree that it's in the best interests of securities regulation, whether it's enforcement but mostly in harmonization so that we do have commonality.

There are, indeed, some concerns from some provinces that are very valid – they may not be our concerns – in moving to a common regulator. We're trying to understand their concerns, and we're trying to work with them to see if we can overcome those concerns so that we can further the harmonization of securities rules across the country.

I just wanted to assure the hon. member that the work we do on this is not wasted. It's important, whether we stay with the passport system, which may be, or whether we move to a common regulator at some point. I can assure you that Alberta's interest is in providing the best securities commission for our capital markets in this province.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

12:10

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 25, Securities Amendment Act, 2006. Like many

Albertans I'm very concerned that the Alberta Securities Commission operates in a fair and perceived to be fair manner. Some of the events of last year, some of the reports that we've seen in the media, and some of the godawful things we've heard in some of the executive suites of the Securities Commission have appalled many Albertans and have brought the whole system into disrepute.

Now, looking at this, it looks to harmonize, of course, and as the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, has stated quite clearly, that is good for a qualified sense of agreement, I think, but we must be careful.

I have some questions. Part 1 on page 6 of the three-column document says:

Add a new provision following section 33 to permit the Executive Director to make permanent cease trade orders without a hearing against a reporting issuer for a failure to file continuous disclosure documents within the prescribed period or when an issuer agrees that its financial statements have not been prepared in accordance with . . . Generally Accepted Accounting Procedures.

Now, the question is: how can investors be confident that the executive director will enforce against his or this government's friends?

An additional concern is in part 5. The proposed amendment is to "repeal section 76 and replace with harmonized and modernized provisions that will permit the Executive Director to impose terms and conditions on a registration at his discretion based on Ontario section 26(2)." That's page 7 in the three-column document. We're again concerned about the executive director's discretionary powers, and I would ask that that be commented on to give us some real hope that this is going to be all above board.

Another question is in part 15, sections 184 to 192. That's page 19 in the three-column document. I wonder if you could please explain this section. Who will appoint the independent committee to oversee the activities of a mutual fund or a nonredeemable investment fund? How can investors be confident that their mutual fund company is not interfering with the company's own independent review committee?

These are a number of questions. I'll pause now. I may have some more at a later time here, but that's something to look at, and I would appreciate, you know, a comment on these items.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to go back, if I could, to the amendment that the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky introduced. I didn't get up and speak to it, and we allowed it to go through, but I'm wondering if I could get some clarification because it really does put us at a bit of a disadvantage when an amendment comes forward that is striking a further section, but there's no reference in the amendment to what that section was.

In this particular amendment that the House recently passed, we changed the amending Bill 25, section 3, which read to strike section 7 in the current legislation, and we have now struck section 7 and section 7.1. I understand that the explanation that's offered in the bill on 7.1 is not required to be there according to legislation, but certainly we didn't have an opportunity to check what 7.1 was that we are now also striking. I'm wondering if you could offer an explanation as to what was in that section that has now been struck as well.

Mr. Knight: To answer the hon. member's question, Mr. Chairman, under section 3, section 7 is repealed in the act that we're dealing with here. Section 7.1 actually follows onto that. Section 7 is

“deemed to be an insider of a mutual fund,” and section 7.1 deals with “deemed to be an insider of an income trust.” So it’s the same; it just follows on. The one issue deals with mutual funds, and 7.1 deals with income trusts.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you for that explanation. Perhaps I missed it earlier when you introduced the amendment, but is there some new provision in the regulation, then, that’s going to cover those off, or are they just deemed not to be necessary any longer?

Mr. Knight: If I might, Mr. Chairman, all this will do is put both the mutual fund insiders and income trust insiders – you know, it was a housekeeping thing that was obviously overlooked – into national instruments, the regulation around who is deemed to be an insider. That’s all it’s doing.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess my main concern with the whole act, then, is that it’s become painfully obvious that what we need to do is not just look for some piecemeal harmonization of the Securities Commission with the other securities across the country but, in fact, move to a national securities system as we’ve been pushing here for quite a number of months and through the last session. It seems obvious that there is an appetite for this in the financial community here in Alberta, and the majority of provinces are interested as well. Now, we could say that Alberta is the second, perhaps, biggest economy in the whole country and, certainly, very influential at this juncture. So I think that if we were to be the advocates of a national security exchange, probably that would tip the balance in favour of actually putting this together.

Mr. Chairman, my recommendation, then, in general and specifically on each part of this bill is that perhaps we can take it back to the salvage yard and take some small pieces that would otherwise form the bones or the beginnings of a national security exchange commission, and that’s, in fact, the way that we should be proceeding here in this House.

When we’re dealing with billions of dollars flowing through the stock exchanges and with Alberta’s economy moving so dramatically forward as it is, it’s just so important for us to provide that regulatory stability here from this Chamber and from a security commission that can be counted on as well. Really, considering the situation and the circumstances that have followed in the preceding months, I think we would be sending a very positive signal to the market that we, in fact, want to move national. When you’re looking for advantage for Alberta by introducing this idea and being sort of the leader in this, I think we would gain a lot of advantage and influence in defining the terms of what that national security commission is going look like.

So you sometimes have to seize opportunity when it presents itself. Timing is everything. I believe that we would be best served by, in fact, moving to a national securities commission, and we should take leadership in the formation of that. Really, this Bill 25 would be better served if we were kind of taking it to the scrap yard and moving it to build this national harmonization. There are lots of little bits here that could help that, but the ultimate definition of that harmonization would be to have a national securities commission.

Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, the debate goes on with respect to a national regulator. Certainly, we’ve had members

opposite indicate support for a national regulator and some that indicate displeasure in a national regulator. The displeasure in the national regulator, I guess, seems to be driven by the fact that they would like to have an Alberta securities regulator, but the mismanagement of the securities system in Alberta is so terrible that we are going to force somebody – I’m not sure who – to come into the province and take over the securities regulation and do it for us under a national securities regulator.

12:20

That might come to pass. I mentioned before that I really don’t have any way to predict the future. However, I do know what we’re doing today, and I know that there is not an appetite in the country at this point in time to have a national securities regulator. Ontario would like to do it if we do it under Ontario’s terms. In Alberta we’re not prepared to do that. We have an extremely robust securities trading market in the province of Alberta, the second largest in the country. If the records – and I don’t have them, unfortunately – were before us, I think you would see that there hasn’t been a marked decrease in the volume of trades in Alberta’s marketplace with an Alberta securities regulator or even under circumstances where it appeared as though the Securities Commission was under attack and had a tarnished reputation.

So, Mr. Chairman, I’ll just close with that. Everything that we’re doing here would be necessary to be done whether or not we move towards a national securities regulator. If it comes down the road one day, we will be much more prepared by having these amendments in place, having our securities regulator in line with the passport system and the systems across Canada, and we can knit the whole thing together much easier.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just another comment. There has been an awful lot of talk this evening about a national securities regulator or a common regulator. In preparation for debate on this bill the Official Opposition caucus consulted with a securities lawyer. I think I mentioned the other night that I wish I was one. My mother tried to push me that way, and I resisted. Silly me.

An Hon. Member: But now you’re an MLA.

Mr. R. Miller: But now I’m an MLA, which is almost like being a securities lawyer, tonight at least.

So we certainly consulted with a securities lawyer. We consulted with the Investment Dealers Association and also with a nationally renowned investor advocate, Mr. Chairman. The one comment that I want to make is this. I understand that both the Finance minister and the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky have commented on this issue a number of times tonight, about the fact that the work that has been done so far will not be wasted no matter what happens eventually, and I appreciate that.

The concern from the investors advocate is that we not allow this to be considered to be the last word on harmonization. I haven’t heard a lot of talk about it, but I’m going to assume that both the minister and the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky understand that there’s a lot of work yet to be done, that if, in fact, we don’t end up with a common regulator or a national regulator, the job isn’t finished and there is still a lot of work to be done in order to harmonize securities laws across the country, province to province. That was certainly a concern that was expressed by the investor

advocate, and I think it's important that that be noted in the debate tonight.

Thank you.

Mrs. McClellan: I'd like to respond very briefly to that. There is a work plan for this, and this is an orderly plan, and you see this happening in each province. All the provinces, with the exception of Ontario, support the passport system. All of the work from the amendments in this bill move that system forward one more step. It would be an expectation that there would be further amendments in the next session of the Legislature to continue to move that work forward.

I wish I had been thinking; I would have had more up-to-date figures on how the work on the move to harmonization has been effective to this point. I will endeavour by third reading to give you an update on the number of filings, et cetera, that we've had under the new system. It appears that it is working quite well, and companies are utilizing that. There is a big advantage to being able to file in one province and not have to do the re-filing in each of the others. I will endeavour to have those up-to-date numbers for that at third reading.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Well, I guess that in the spirit of co-operation and looking for something to salvage from here, I was just looking through the proposed amendments that have been brought forward here with Bill 25. You know, some of the reforms certainly seem to make sense, and they do pave the way for harmonization, that could result in the beginnings of the framework for a national securities commission.

Some of these, for example, that catch my eye, that I think are most promising, I suppose: this section on interim orders, which is to harmonize powers to cease trades across jurisdictions as well as the procedures for issuing and revoking cease trade orders, certainly seems to be eminently sensible. The section in part 5 which is talking about registration for the executive director and the section, again in part 5, regarding suspension, cancellation, and restrictions: these are just some of the examples of, sort of, the start of how we could in fact take the lead and send a positive message to Ontario, in particular, that we are open to some negotiation on creating a national securities commission. My understanding of why Ontario has been somewhat recalcitrant in being able to accept this concept is just because so many of the other provincial securities trading centres have been so sort of maverick and unstable in their behaviour over the years. You know, I'm not just talking about Alberta. In B.C. we know just how infamous the market was there for quite a number of years, and they have applied a series of reforms there as well.

I guess Ontario has been kind of sitting back because they are the largest, but you know that we are closing in on the Ontario securities market in terms of trading volume. The strength of our energy market would in fact allow us to provide a leadership role. If we sent out an indication that we are willing to play, so to speak, I do believe that we could not just be asking, as the hon. member suggested, for external forces to come in and take over our Alberta market. I'm suggesting quite the contrary, Mr. Chairman. I'm suggesting that we take the lead, strike the iron while it's hot, and in fact we would find ourselves in a leadership position on the national stage. So, far from bringing Ontario people to come in and try to take over, I'm suggesting quite the opposite, that we use our leverage as the second strongest market in the country and with the

greatest rate of growth of any securities trading system in the whole country and take the lead and sort of retool Bill 25 as a gateway to establishing a national securities commission.

I know that people are quietly and not so quietly saying this, especially in Calgary, where a lot of trading is happening, that they would prefer to see it. It would provide the stability that they need in such a market, and it would as well send a positive message out to not just the Canadian market but the world securities market that Alberta is open for business, has put some of its indiscretions behind it, and is ready to go.

12:30

Certainly, I don't think that we've seen a change in the volume of trade as a result of some of these indiscretions in the past, but that's just because we know that so many of these corporations that are trading on our markets are pretty much guaranteed investments. We know that the energy sector is going great guns, and with all of these subsidiary corporations and businesses that are associated with that, we can pretty much know that there is going to be growth there. So it's almost as if the Alberta Securities Commission grew in spite of itself over these past few months. The overriding heat and buoyancy of our markets has carried us through, but that won't always carry us through by any means. People do look at these small markets as more speculative, and that's why we can solidify the reputation of these markets by having a national securities commission.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I offer anyone to give me some suggestion in that regard. Thanks.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 25, the Securities Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 25 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you. I move that we rise and report bills 14 and 25.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 14 and Bill 25. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 35
Fuel Tax Act

[Adjourned debate April 27: Mrs. McClellan]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise this evening and speak to Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act, 2006, in second reading. I'd like to begin by thanking the Finance minister for once again providing staff in our offices with a very thorough briefing on this bill and for providing the three-column documents. As we know, not all ministers provide all critics with the three-column document. Some won't even let us see it, others will let us see it but not take a copy, and this minister is very kind in allowing us to retain a copy of that three-column document. It does certainly make for better debate and more informed debate and, as I've said previously, I would like to believe ultimately better legislation for Albertans. Really, isn't that what it's all about?

Several comments about Bill 35, which I understand is basically a complete rewrite of the Fuel Tax Act as it currently sits. According to the government's briefing it is necessary to streamline and simplify the manner in which the government collects fuel tax in its various forms and from the various stakeholders involved. I can't remember the exact number, but I believe it was some 40-odd different contracts that are currently in place with various groups and agencies to collect fuel tax. The way it was explained to us in the briefing, Mr. Speaker, every time there's a change made, it involves changing all 40 contracts as opposed to just one. The intention, as it was explained to us, of the streamlining that's taking place in this act would be that, in fact, if there's a change, then only the legislation would have to be changed as opposed to 40-odd contracts.

So I suppose that from an efficiency point of view that would make good sense although I must say, Mr. Speaker, that when I see something like that, it causes me to ponder and wonder if perhaps the government hasn't had some difficulty in collecting the fuel tax under the current regime. Again, maybe that's why it's being changed, and maybe that's a good thing. But I would be curious to know if in fact that was the case and, if so, what the effect of that might have been on the Finance department in terms of lost revenue and ultimately, of course, money that may have been lost to the taxpayers. So that would be one of the questions that I would look for some comment on.

Now, the minister will know that last week or two weeks ago we had a group in from the Propane Gas Association. One of the things that they're certainly lobbying the opposition parties for – and I know that they're lobbying the government for it as well – is either a reduction or a removal of the fuel tax on propane-powered vehicles, Mr. Speaker. Right now I think they pay 6.5 cents tax per litre on auto propane, which is less, admittedly, than the fuel tax on gasoline, which is 9 cents per litre. But I think that given the comments that the government has made over the last several years about promoting alternative fuels – and certainly they promote ethanol-powered vehicles and natural gas powered vehicles by not having any fuel tax on those fuels that are used for motor vehicles. [interjection] My colleague from Edmonton-Manning is suggesting that we should treat Alberta drivers using propane to power their vehicles the same way as B.C. does, and I think that that's the submission that was made by the association when they presented to the government and to opposition parties.

As I said, in terms of promoting alternate fuel usage, there would be a good argument for doing that. Propane is recognized as being one of the cleanest burning fuels. There was a time in the mid-80s, Mr. Speaker, when there were a number of rebate programs available for propane conversion. I can't recall the exact numbers at this moment, but I think that something like 300,000 vehicles in Alberta were running on propane. Today we're down to somewhere in the area of 60,000. What that means, of course, is that propane has virtually fallen off the radar in terms of usage in automobiles. The reason, quite frankly, is that it just costs too much money to convert, and with the fuel tax on there we don't give a break that might actually make a difference in terms of encouraging people to explore that as an alternate fuel. I would submit that it might be time to consider giving a little bit of a tax break to users of propane as an auto fuel.

Now, I mentioned earlier this evening to the minister the idea of perhaps giving an even greater break to farmers on their diesel credits, Mr. Speaker, and the minister cautioned me that I should be careful when I suggest that because farmers aren't the only ones who use diesel. Certainly, she's right. The trucking industry and others, I'm sure, probably the oil and gas sector, and there would be many others who use diesel. But let's face it: there's no question that the agricultural community is struggling in this province and has been for a number of years now. I had a farmer friend tell me that he sold some wheat a couple of weeks ago at the same price that it sold for in 1958.

12:40

Mr. Backs: How long has it been since farmers got a break on their fuel?

Mr. R. Miller: My colleague from Edmonton-Manning is asking: when was the last time farmers got a break on their fuel? Well, I do know that the current discount of 6 cents per litre on diesel fuel went into effect on February 25, 1994. What that means is we haven't adjusted the rate for farmers in 12 years. There's no question, Mr. Speaker, that in 12 years there has been a substantial change in input costs for farmers.

I'm just looking at some information that I pulled off the government's own website. This is the Agriculture, Food and Rural Development website. I think, Mr. Speaker, it's very important that I acknowledge that because in great big letters on the website it says: "Note to Users: The contents of this document may not be used or reproduced without properly accrediting the Statistics and Data Development Unit, Economics and Competitiveness Division, AAFRD." Since I'm using it in my comments tonight, I believe I have now credited that particular division.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the input cost for diesel fuel on the farm, this current graph goes to January of '05. At that time the farm price for diesel fuel was about 50 cents per litre, and if we look to the end of March of '06, it's currently about 65 cents per litre. So just in that period of a little over a year the price to the farmer has gone up 15 cents per litre, and there is no recognition in this act of that fact by giving farmers any more of a break.

Now, I have another graph here that also came from the agriculture website. It shows an even more dramatic increase in input costs for farmers, Mr. Speaker. While I'm looking for it, I'll just mention that a similar situation exists for farmers when we talk about propane on the farm or if we talk about natural gas. Now, there's one that is quite startling. Just in the last year alone – and unfortunately *Hansard* wouldn't likely reproduce the graph – it shows a relatively flat line from January '05 to July '05, and then it skyrockets to more than double the price. Certainly, we know that this is a big issue for farmers, likewise with electricity and purple gasoline.

Purple gasoline: this is an interesting one. I mentioned earlier that

the minister accommodated us by providing staff for a good briefing. One of the things I learned from that briefing is that it's not really purple gasoline anymore, Mr. Speaker. I did not know that. I think we all grew up referring to purple gasoline, and indeed the agriculture website today, the graph I pulled down, talks about purple gasoline, but apparently it is red. So there is something that if you didn't know before, you know now. It's Liberal red gas and, apparently, properly referred to as marked gas.

Mr. Backs: Like the Calgary Flames colour, though that's burnt out.

Mr. R. Miller: My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning just mentioned the Calgary Flames, and unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there will not be a battle of Alberta this year. That really is unfortunate. It really is. I'm not sure if that's relevant to the Fuel Tax Act, and if I don't move on, I'm likely to be called on a point of order, so I think I'll move on.

Mr. Speaker, I was looking for some information going back a little bit further, and I found it here. Diesel fuel on the farm, if you go back to 2002: 36 cents per litre. So that would be less than half the price that they're paying on the farm today. Again, no extra recognition for the agricultural community in this bill of the fact that their input costs have more than doubled, yet the discount that they get on diesel is exactly the same. Purple gas: 51.9 cents per litre in 2002. Of course, we know that it's an awful lot more than that now. Propane: 30.71 cents per litre in 2002. And on it goes. Boy, natural gas: \$4.48. I think that the last number on the graph showed it a whole lot more than that.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think that when we look at the agricultural community in particular, I do believe that there is some measure that could have been taken. It wouldn't really cost an awful lot of money to extend a little more of a benefit to the agricultural community. According to the Alberta Finance website, currently the various programs providing farm fuel benefits are only costing \$120 million in total to the government. [interjections] I hear some hon. members over there – and I'm going to assume that they're urban members and not rural members – commenting that it's a lot of bread, and it is a lot of bread.

Here's another example. I think it was the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill who suggested that it's a lot of bread. Check the price of a loaf of bread today, and go back and check the price of a loaf of bread in 1970. You know what? It's not that much different. It really isn't. So you have to feel for the farmers because they're certainly not benefiting from the increased costs. Certainly, their input costs in terms of fuel – the fuel tax is not benefiting them nearly as much as it perhaps should.

Now, I have several more comments, but really it would be more along the lines of breaking it down into sections, page by page, and I think that I will save those comments, Mr. Speaker, for when we get to committee stage. I do plan on introducing at least a couple of amendments, perhaps more.

I guess the other thing that I could talk about briefly – it has been discussed in the past, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asking to speak, so perhaps he's going to mention it again. In the past at least the Official Opposition critic has called for some sort of a gas tax rebate to consumers when gasoline gets above a certain price, Mr. Speaker, and I think that the number that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has called for is 4 cents per litre when oil gets above \$35 a barrel, I believe it is. We know that right now the gasoline tax that's collected is 9 cents per litre, and the Alberta government to its credit has finally made some accommodation for municipalities. They return 5 cents per litre to the municipalities. In the past when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar

has suggested this tax cut when oil prices get high, the minister has said: well, the municipalities aren't going to be very happy about that suggestion. I think that perhaps the minister wasn't fully understanding that the suggestion wasn't that the municipalities suffer but, rather, that the government, because they collect higher taxes from the oil fields – they collect royalties from the oil field, although certainly there are those who would argue that the royalty structure needs to be reviewed and that perhaps we should be collecting more. There are many who argue that. The intimation would be that when things are going that well, the government could afford to forgo 4 cents per litre to the consumer. It would be the government that would be forgoing that, not the municipalities. There was never any intention on the part of the Official Opposition to suggest that the municipalities should be doing without their 5 cents per litre. That was never suggested, and if the minister understood it that way, then hopefully that will provide some clarification for her.

12:50

As I said, Mr. Speaker, the remainder of my comments I think I will save for the committee stage when I bring my amendments.

Oh, one other thing. I almost forgot. It was in the news today, and I thought this was quite interesting. As of today all provinces east of Ontario are now regulating gasoline retail prices. I'm not suggesting necessarily that Alberta should be regulating gasoline prices at the pump, but the fact that it's happening everywhere east of Ontario certainly says something. If there are a number of governments in eastern Canada that feel that the consumers need some added protection from their government from potential gouging by oil companies and retailers, then that says something. I think that we should at least be paying attention to the fact that half of the provinces in this country have taken that step. As I say, I'm not suggesting that we have to go there yet, but I would hope that we're monitoring, as my colleague from Edmonton-McClung suggests, because we all know that this government claims to be very good at monitoring. They do a lot of monitoring, and this might be an area that they would like to monitor as well. I would think that given the current world situation with oil and the uncertainty involved, this is one area that might merit some monitoring.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and cede the floor to somebody else. I look forward to having the opportunity to speak to this bill in committee and at that time also having the opportunity to bring forward some amendments.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to rise and participate in this stage of debate on Bill 35 dealing with the fuel tax. I promise to be brief. I just wanted to follow up on what my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford mentioned in his talk on fuel tax and the different fuels that we can use in this province. We all know that looking for alternate fuels is the way of the future. He mentioned propane as a cleaner fossil fuel, and then we all know about hydrogen cells and solar and all that stuff for cleaner sources of energy.

Now, he mentioned something that is very current in terms of provinces east of Ontario legislating retail gas prices, and I noticed something else that is also very current as of today, actually as of yesterday since now it's Thursday, officially. So that was yesterday, Wednesday, Mr. Speaker. There was a poll conducted in the U.S. which indicated that most Americans blame the Republicans for soaring gas prices. Now, is this because of their foreign policy,

perhaps, or decisions at home? I don't know. President Bush's popularity is measured at around 33 per cent nowadays, but when people were asked just in terms of gas prices, people gave him only a 17 per cent approval rating.

Now, it would be very interesting, Mr. Speaker, if people in Alberta were surveyed to see what their reaction is to the current gas prices at the pump and whether this Progressive Conservative government has done enough to alleviate that concern. People say that this is a producing province and that they find it puzzling and troubling that they're paying so much at the pump. They can't really understand it, and they're frustrated, and they're confused.

The poll that was conducted in the U.S. during the period of April 28 to 30 also asked people which party they thought would see to it that gas prices become lower. Forty-seven per cent of Americans picked the Democratic Party compared to only 20 per cent for the Republicans. Again, how would Albertans react to such a question here if they were asked, especially in light of the Alberta Liberals' repeated calls to lower the gasoline tax?

I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar is going to definitely speak to this as it was his suggestion, that he repeats every year and, apparently, gets the same answer from the government every year. He definitely recommended that we cut the gasoline tax from 9 cents per litre to 5 cents per litre, and he indicated in his calculation that this would only be done whenever gas prices exceed \$36 U.S. per barrel. About two or three weeks ago we measured this to be at least a \$260 million savings for Alberta motorists. The government's own fiscal plan for 2006-2009 shows that for every \$1 increase in the price of a barrel of oil, the Alberta government itself reaps \$123 million in extra revenue.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar and as the members of the opposition keep saying, it is time for the government to start sharing some of that money and putting it back into the pockets of Alberta drivers. The average Albertan uses about 2,400 litres of gas every year. That means that if prices at the pump reach, you know, \$1.30 or \$1.40, as is forecasted, a typical driver under our plan would save in excess of \$120 a year. Now, to some that might not be a significant sum of money, but to others it is a lot of money.

The angle about the municipalities not getting their tax stream to help them look after roads and other infrastructure requirements – we think that by lowering it, it's the government that is sharing some of that resource. Municipalities will not be adversely affected because they still get that 5 cents per litre that is going their way.

Now, further to this, with regard to regulating gas prices at the pump in Canada, I can also mention something that happened Wednesday, Mr. Speaker, in the U.S. as well. When President Bush was made aware of his approval rating, he summoned the House, both Democrats and Republicans, and he asked them to pass a bill that would see criminal penalties and huge fines of up to \$150 million for energy companies caught price gouging. What are we doing in this province to monitor the oil companies and make sure that they're not price gouging in this province? You know, some hon. member is saying that this is federal. Yes, but this provincial government keeps talking about autonomy and decision-making and that we should protect the consumers in this province, so maybe we should look at this as a provincial solution.

They'll also charge penalties and have prison terms for retailers that are price gouging, so I think it's time for us to potentially consider something of this nature in this province. It is noteworthy to mention that it received a lot of support from both sides in that House, in Congress, where it passed with 389 for and 34 against. So that was definitely a solid vote to consider price gouging as a criminal offence and to have hefty fines and prison terms for people caught doing it. I definitely advocate such a measure because

market forces dictate how prices go to some extent, but there could be an angle of greed as well or some other reason why we're paying so much at the pumps.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat, and I thank you for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available now and after every speaker from this point on. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. How does the hon. member explain the question of supply and demand with respect to gasoline prices? It seems to me that the oil companies charge what the market will bear for the gasoline. If there's a shortage, the price goes up. If demand exceeds supply, the price rises, and vice versa. So if we lower the tax, it doesn't in any way change the supply and demand equation. The oil companies are able to command the same price for the gasoline as before you lowered the price. The question is who gets the money, whether the government gets less and the oil companies get more or vice versa.

1:00

So, you know, this is a question that I don't understand. The Liberal Party has put forward the idea of reducing the taxes and seems to believe that this will bring down the price of gas. If the price of gas is actually determined by supply and demand, then that will not happen. It will simply reduce the government's take and increase the take of the oil companies. I wonder if the hon. member can explain that economic theory to me.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually thought that myself. It is a fair question, I must say, and the hon. member mentioned . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has the floor.

Mr. Elsalhy: The hon. member mentioned the theory that companies charge what they can get. I think that to some extent that might be true, but it's the angle of monitoring prices and determining what is fair and what is not. If they're caught charging the same amount after we've reduced the tax because they can get away with it, then that's where we can say, "No, this is not accurate. This is not correct. It's not good for the consumers." We would hold them to account and say: "You were supposed to reduce your prices at the pump by 4 cents a litre. You have not done it. You've in fact put the money in your own pockets and denied it from going on to the consumers." There would be repercussions and consequences. Maybe if they're caught once and they're penalized, they might not do it again.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a follow-up question. It sounds to me like the Liberal Party, then, is proposing that they would control gasoline prices. If that's the case, why don't they just order the oil companies to lower the prices by 4 cents?

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, it seems like the NDP are advocating some scenario like what happened in Bolivia, for example, where the government took over the oil companies and the refineries and . . .

Mr. Mason: How did you get that?

An Hon. Member: Sounds like it to me.

Mr. Elsalhy: That's what it sounds like, Mr. Speaker.

However, under a Liberal government prices for all commodities will be periodically reviewed to make sure that those prices are fair to the consumers. We want companies to continue to make profit and to make decent profits to be able to pay corporate taxes and so on; however, it's the consumer protection angle. So, you know, whether in fact we would dictate that they lower their prices at the source or whether we would monitor it at the pump and then take action accordingly would be something that we would be definitely willing to consider.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On the bill, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate this evening on Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act. Now, Bill 35 rewrites the fuel tax. The government claims that we need a smoother administration. Certainly, I wonder whenever I go through the public accounts documents and I see the line items for various agencies across the province who are collecting the tax. I see an amount given back by the government for any number of reasons. One has to wonder just exactly how this fuel tax is being collected and the administration of various fuel tax exemptions.

Now, certainly this bill, I think, should be supported, but when we look at the Alberta Fuel Tax Act and the fact that there are direct taxes on consumers for the purchase of not only gas at the pumps but also unmarked fuel – and this unmarked fuel includes gasoline, diesel, and propane. I'm wondering if the New Democratic party has ever burned unmarked fuel.

Rev. Abbott: I highly doubt it.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar highly doubts it, and I'm with him. You know, I have this vision of the New Democrats in their van, and they're running around with a four- or five-foot green garden hose, a three-quarter inch diameter one. That would be the extent of their concern with reducing the price of fuel for consumers.

Certainly, I think that whenever we look at the price that many consumers are paying, whether they're small business owners or whether they're individuals going back and forth to work or families with their busy schedules taking their children to soccer, to other activities, whether it be a dance class or music lessons, whether we like it or not, the majority of us in this province drive and drive our families from place to place. I don't think we should feel guilty about that. The distance between our cities is great. If you go from High Level to Medicine Hat, it's going to take you a fair amount of driving time to get there, a very long day. We need to have affordable fuel prices.

That's why I think it would be very good if at this time our provincial government realized this. For the benefit of all members, the current tax rate on a litre of gasoline, for instance, Mr. Speaker, is 9 cents. One of the ways we could help consumers is by reducing

the provincial government's take on the tax that we're charging currently on gasoline. Now it's 9 cents. We could reduce that by 4 cents.

I think the government has been wise in providing some dedicated revenue from the gasoline tax for municipalities to fix their bridges, their roads, and their streets. I don't think it would be wise to change the rules for the leaders of our various municipal governments. They have budgeted, they have planned on getting that money. Let's make sure they do get it.

We could reduce the price of gasoline by 4 cents a litre at the pump. Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood is worried that, well, the greedy oil companies will just move in and take that 4 cents and add that to their already substantial profits. I don't think that will happen because I, for one, have confidence in the free-market system. For instance, if one gas company is to move in and decide they're going to take that 4 cents, the second retailer will say: I can sell more gasoline. That's how the free market works. So I'm not at all concerned that if we were to go ahead with this tax cut, the greedy corporations would just start lining their pockets. I have a lot more faith in the market than that.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

1:10

Now, when we look at the royalties that we are getting at the wellhead from crude oil production and the substantial increase in royalties, we can afford to reduce gasoline taxes. Perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood is so isolated from the real world because he's like the rest of us in this Assembly, Madam Speaker, with our gas cards; we forget.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize your point of order.

Point of Order

Incorrect Reference to a Constituency

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I would just ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to identify my constituency correctly. It's Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald: I apologize to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for that oversight.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Now, we in this Assembly with our gas cards, sometimes we can forget, because we don't pay for all of our fill-ups, just what exactly consumers face when they fill up their vehicles. It's 60, 70 bucks. In some cases it's higher than that. I would urge all members of this Assembly to consider a gasoline tax cut at this time. It is a good idea.

When we look at the federal budget that was just presented to Canadians yesterday – when the current Prime Minister was in opposition, well, there were going to be some significant cuts not only to the GST but to gasoline because I think that at that time the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who is now the Prime Minister, realized just how gas prices affect Canadians. It's a big country, as the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar reminded us. Distances are vast. Our transportation costs are high. I think that in light of that we can make a real difference here.

If gasoline was roughly selling for, let's say, a dollar a litre, that four cents a litre would be 4 per cent saving. Anyone who was operating their business would notice that saving at the end of the month if they had a small modest fleet of vehicles in their business. It would certainly work for them.

If we can't afford a tax cut in our gasoline prices at this time, Madam Speaker, I don't know when we'll ever be able to afford it. This has been an idea that the former Member for Edmonton-Rutherford presented not only to our caucus but to the entire province. Mr. Wickman recognized the cost of gasoline and how it could put a dent in one's wallet, so to speak. He was the first person to come up with this good, sound policy. While we enjoy high royalties in this province, let's share, again, those resources with the citizens. Now, how much would this cost the treasury? Two hundred million dollars a year, maybe a little bit more than that. I think we can afford it.

One other benefit, Madam Speaker, to this reduction in gasoline prices would be that it would help reduce energy inflation in this province. I would again remind all hon. members that if you went to a store, if you got it, a truck brought it. Trucks. Well, they may burn gasoline. They may burn diesel. They may even burn propane. Who's to say? I think that if their fuel costs were reduced, we certainly wouldn't stop it, but we would reduce or alleviate energy inflation, and we could help out the price currently at the pump. I would urge the hon. Minister of Finance to consider this. Certainly, I was pleased to learn – at least, I was left with the impression, Madam Speaker – that the hon. minister was considering this as a tax cut.

When we look at Bill 35, Fuel Tax Act, and we go through it in detail, we should remember the other programs. But before I go there, it's not that long ago, Madam Speaker, that we reduced the taxes on railway and aviation fuel. Now, we have at this time a program – and this the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood would certainly be aware of – that I can't understand why we need at this point. There's a program in place to give resource companies a break on their fuel costs for activities that are conducted off-road. My question to the government would be: if we can afford this at this time, let's also consider consumers. Many resource companies get a modest break, a wee break on their fuel costs for their activities off-road that are powered, I guess, by an internal combustion engine. If we can provide those tax cuts and from what we've done in the past, I would urge this government again to consider a tax cut on gasoline. The price at a dollar a litre is high enough to encourage conservation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, there are those that say: oh, well, let's have gasoline at \$1.20, even \$1.25, even \$1.30, even \$1.50 because the higher the price, the more we will encourage conservation. Well, I maintain that we are encouraging conservation already. If gasoline is at 80 cents or 85 cents or 90 cents a litre at the pump, that price is high enough to change consumer habits. One only has to stop at the first set of lights one would encounter after leaving this Legislative Assembly and count the cars. There are a lot of four-cylinder cars there, new ones.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar if he believes that there are enough

corporations that operate internationally to extract, refine, and distribute oil and gas products, gasoline, to constitute a free market and whether or not he's aware of examples in which the prices were set by means other than the free market. I just wonder if the hon. member can justify his remark that the free market operates with respect to international oil and gas companies and how many there are and how many it would take to have an effective free market.

1:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that question from the hon. member. Whenever you look at the international oil industry, one has to realize that Alberta is one of the very few places where private-held corporations can invest. Now, when you look at the countries in the Middle East, they're Crown-owned oil companies. We look at Venezuela. Bolivia was mentioned. Bolivia has a lot of gas interests. We look at the Soviet Union.

An Hon. Member: No such country, my friend.

Mr. MacDonald: Russia. I stand corrected.

So you have all these different countries, so many countries in the Middle East, where the state controls oil and gas production and marketing. I would much prefer the system that we have in Alberta than the system that, for instance, existed in Iraq, where you get a vinegar jug and you go to the edge of a pipeline and you hope you get yourself a gallon of gasoline. If we have a market where we have competitive retail – and I think we have a competitive market – it will work. It will work. I don't want to see state-owned enterprises involved in oil and gas exploration and development and the refining industry. I think what we have here, whenever we compare it to other places where it's state owned, is working much, much better.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a comment really. There were once what they called the Seven Sisters, which were seven major international oil companies based mostly in the United States but also in Holland and in Britain. That's now down to four. No serious economist or analyst of the oil industry believes that there's a free market with respect to oil and gas. You know, I think that it's pretty clear that if taxes were reduced on gasoline, the same price would remain at the pump. I would just suggest that the argument that cutting taxes on gasoline would somehow bring down the price because of some free-market mechanism is a fantasy and very ill-advised public policy. If we want the oil companies to make a higher profit than they already are, then why don't we just say so? But that's not the position of the NDP.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can't help it if the NDP are jealous of our policy, which is to reduce gasoline taxes. Certainly, whenever you talk to people in the city, the overwhelming majority want to see gas taxes cut so that they have more money in their pocket at the end of the week. I can't, again, help but think that the hon. member is just jealous.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise with interest to make some comments on Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act. This bill is wide ranging in its scope, and a lot of its individual components are overdue, certainly. I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Finance for bringing this forward. I guess much of this reform that the amendment does bring forward has to do with making it possible to streamline the 40 some-odd separate regulations in places where the fuel tax is applied here in the province of Alberta, and certainly that would be laudable if we are able to adjust and to account for each of those 40-some places in a more reasonable sort of way.

I was curious to hear from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford that he was given a three-column document in regard to a briefing on Bill 35 because I would certainly appreciate seeing that as well. Certainly, while we have our own vast research capacity, we have analyzed and looked at this bill at least to some degree. I guess the scope of this bill is quite wide. It's really not just an amendment but a complete rewrite of the whole thing.

One thing that I would like to comment on, though, first of all is that I would like to ask the minister if we could have an accounting of perhaps revenue collection from the old act because I would suspect that, you know, because of the cumbersome nature of the old Bill 35, we were in fact not having a full accounting of taxes that were meant to be collected. I would be curious to perhaps see an analysis of where we were losing revenue and what sort of revenue we might have lost from the previous act so that we can make sure we tighten up Bill 35 in the best possible way and ensure that we're collecting the revenues that are due to the provincial government.

It's important to have these different tax structures in place serving the economy in the best possible way, Mr. Speaker. The price of fuel for each individual part of our economy is becoming an increasing expense of doing business, be it from agriculture to industry to looking for more oil and gas throughout the province. So it's important that we regulate how that expense is going to impact that industry and ensure the continued viability of these various industries.

The first one, the most important one, of course, is the subsidies to farm fuels to ensure that the proportion of the fuels that are being used for agriculture is not exceeding the viability of the overall budget for any given farm operation. I know that the price of fuel has put tremendous strain on farm operations in these past couple of years, and while we do have a subsidy program in place, I think that we need to perhaps revisit some of these prices. Certainly, for example, the price of diesel fuel more than doubling in the last couple of years has really put serious strain on the ability of farmers to operate at all, not even to turn a profit by any means. Many farms run on a continuous loss basis, and I think that it's incumbent upon us to realize that our agriculture sector is an essential industry in the most basic way, that we have to have a diverse and vibrant agricultural sector to ensure the long-term survival of the province.

If it does cost us from other sectors to properly subsidize the fuel consumption of farm operations, then so be it. I think that a proper investigation of the whole economy and budget of any given farm is absolutely essential for us because we're losing farm operations every year. Especially, smaller family farm operations are in serious jeopardy in this province and are giving way to larger corporate operations which are far less secure in terms of our long-term food viability. I think that the Fuel Tax Act, Bill 35, really comes back to that: to revisit and ensure that we can adjust the rates in a quick and equitable way to meet the needs of farmers across the province.

1:30

Other forms of fuel tax are a very important part of the long-term budget of the province but also a way by which we can send a

message, I suppose, to consumers that the cost of running their vehicles and whatnot is not just the considerable personal cost that they put into the gas tank every week or maintenance of their car but the price of the infrastructure of roads and highways and servicing and safety and policing and all of those very important services that we provide here through the province of Alberta. So the fuel tax serves to help pay for those things. It is an important source of income, and it's important that we maintain a reasonable level of taxation on fuel.

I think that every time the price of fuel goes up in a significant way, certainly we have to react as a provincial government, but we don't have to react in a knee-jerk sort of fashion. You know, we've created a society where a single internal combustion vehicle is important, but it's also something that deserves taxation. If we are not realizing a reasonable tax from single vehicle operations, then in fact we're probably doing a disservice to the sort of long-term planning and functioning of the province. We want to encourage alternative transportation systems in this province, Mr. Speaker, and by collecting a fuel tax we have a means by which we can guide our transportation sector into other ways of moving people around. In fact, our provincial portion of the fuel tax on individuals is certainly significant, but it's not by any means the largest part of the overall gasoline price at the pump.

I think that people are often confused, and in fact the pie chart that they put on the gas pump is designed to deliberately deceive consumers because it gives this false impression that taxes take up by far the largest piece of the oil pie. [interjection] Yeah, you were fooled by it as well. But, in fact, if you look at it, they have the price of oil in there as that very largest chunk, and that's the same company that pumped it out of the ground and then refined it and made it into gasoline as well. So they take their pound of flesh from that portion of it as well.

To suggest that the poor oil companies are only getting that tiny, tiny little sliver that you see on that very deceptive pie chart on the gasoline pump is entirely wrong. It's one hundred per cent deceptive, and to play into that sort of thing by suggesting we take some small provincial gas tax cut to alleviate the price at the pump for consumers here in Alberta when the price goes up is absolutely ridiculous. I mean, there are many, many other ways by which we could alleviate that cost to consumers here in the province of Alberta, but to suggest looking at those few pennies that the Alberta government collects is absolutely ridiculous.

You look at the proportion of the overall price of a litre of gasoline and see how the curve is going quite steep, but the price of the tax stays the same, so it becomes irrelevant to suggest that that would have any serious effect on the overall budget of someone's monthly expense of driving a car. It just slips into obscurity or into irrelevance as the price of gasoline goes up and up and up. So that's another criticism of the idea of changing the provincial fuel tax besides the fact, of course, that the gasoline companies will simply absorb and slide into that space and charge many pennies more for their gasoline. Just wait until the 1 per cent GST reduction comes in and watch how retailers will simply jack their price up by at least 1 per cent to fill in that gap. That's exactly what will happen.

So, anyway, back to the other portions of this Bill 35. My reading of it is that there are a couple of sections here where I would perhaps suggest an amendment, but otherwise just the fact that the ministry has gone through and identified all of these places is cause for optimism because at least we can now see where those revenues should be coming from, and hopefully we can collect them in a more scrupulous sort of way.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will pause to allow someone else to make comment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I have a number of questions for the hon. member. The first one is: what does the member consider a reasonable tax on gasoline? Name the number.

Mr. Eggen: Well, I believe that the tax structure that we have provincially is working quite well; thank you very much. It's not an onerous portion of the overall price per litre, and in fact it serves a number of very important purposes, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it allows us to pay for at least some small portion of the very large, expensive infrastructure that it takes to have our single vehicle internal combustion sort of transportation system that we use here in the province. Really, it's heavily subsidized anyway in regard to that because of the overall price when we think of the tremendous expenses that we put into roads, the money we put into roads, not to mention the cost to the environment. As I look across our major cities, Edmonton and Calgary, there is a pall of air pollution that is increasing every year, and I would think that that is part of the cost as well of this reliance on gasoline.

I think that we need to have that structure of taxation in place to be able to develop other alternative transportation systems. I think that we're in a situation now where we have to start to make investments in other forms of mass transport, with buses in the cities, increased LRT systems, and whatnot, so we need a means by which we can provide revenue to make that transition from a single vehicle transportation system in our large urban centres. So the price that we're charging on the provincial side is perfectly reasonable.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, were you rising under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hinman: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Hinman: I just wondered, because he's the Environment critic, if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has seen any studies or reports that would show what level of taxation, if it came in, we would have with biodiesel and ethanol and other products in the province that would help us transform to cleaner fuels. You know, he's talked about these other modes of transportation. Perhaps he's had some reports and could inform us at what point we could switch over and use cleaner fuels.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. That's an excellent comment. We can provide taxes on gasoline, but we can also provide breaks and subsidies on other fuels. There's always a formula, the tipping point, where it becomes more economical for individuals to use different sorts of fuel in their vehicles. The transition from single vehicle transportation, of course, is going to be very gradual, and we have to recognize that we're going to have these vehicles for a long time. To increase the percentage of ethanol, say, into the fuels that go into those single vehicle automobiles would be certainly less invasive on the environment.

1:40

That's where we can start to talk about tax differentials – right? – when it becomes financially acceptable for someone to make that

transition or to even go to the other pump where perhaps it's an ethanol blend or, as we saw before, when it was economical to use propane and make the conversion. This is where the government here can provide the incentives, but to suggest a regressive sort of backing away of the very reasonable fuel tax that we do charge here on gasoline is regressive and doesn't look to the future at all. In fact, what it does do is it just sort of leaves us in a holding pattern and not moving ahead on other forms of fuel.

So the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has a very good point. There is always a way, a formula by which you can reach that tipping point and make it financial. Once it becomes affordable, then biogas and ethanol and other forms of fuel or even hydrogen in some circumstances can become economical. It is all a question of supply and demand.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you have four seconds.

Mr. Mason: Yes, I do.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're all talking about Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act. I think we're all in agreement in some way, shape, or form that there needs to be some sort of basic provisions for the consumer here. It should in fact be some sort of fuel tax act. As to what, that's yet to be determined.

Speaking for my family, there are four of us in the household that drive. We go to the pumps, and I'll tell you – you know what? – that you end up having a conversation when you're pumping the gas, and time after time people feel that they're being screwed at the pumps. They feel that the average Albertan is at the mercy of those that are running the, I guess, whole monopoly, whether it be Shell, whether it be Texaco, whether it be Mohawk, whether it be Petro-Canada. The consumer is the one that pays. They say time and time again that they can't understand why we here in Alberta are paying such high prices when it's our gasoline that we're buying, in fact.

Mr. Magnus: Sure they understand.

Mr. Bonko: I don't know if they understand. No, I don't know if they understand. I don't understand. It doesn't seem right. [interjections] Well, that's it. Perfect.

You know what? They're consumers, and they pay a big price for their insurance, yet they're paying a price for maintaining their vehicles. It's a costly endeavour just to be able to drive. They say: "Okay. Prices are going up again. I'm going to take the bus." But you know what? Buses aren't cheap anymore because again it's a ripple effect. It seems like every time gas goes up, everything else goes up. They talk about produce going up. They talk about fruit and vegetables going up. Everything seems to go up because of gas.

Now, I'm having a hard time justifying everything else going up, but that's what they're saying. Everything seems to be going up. Perhaps it's because they have to transport the goods and services that they're going to pass along.

An Hon. Member: Airline tickets.

Mr. Bonko: That's right. Also mentioned is airline services and tickets going up as well. Well, the aviation fuel is a whole other thing, but I'll get to that one.

Like I said, when we are talking to people at the pumps, people are finding it pretty outrageous. You know, even just regular gas is

now at \$1.09, and then you go to mid-grade, which is at \$1.13, and you go to premium, which is about \$1.20. I'm having a hard time even coming up with the fact that they can justify paying that. It jumps in leaps and bounds, maybe 5 to 6 cents on the first jump, but it takes so long to come down. There's just no actual justification as to that. Why does it in a single night go up, you know, 8 to 10 cents, and it takes three to five to eight weeks to come down?

Miraculously, every long weekend or a holiday when people are looking at travelling the province, going to see loved ones, see parents, prices always go up. Is it a coincidence? I don't think so. They know that the consumers are going to be driving the highways. Consumers are going to be getting in their cars, taking a vacation, going out, leaving the cities, getting away from it, and they're going to be gouging us. It's just a phenomenon that happens. I'm sure there's a day they call each other along the gas bar strips and figure out, you know: what's a good price to charge people? But people continue to pay it. It's supply and demand.

People in rural areas, especially the rural MLAs or the people that are working out of town, maybe get a discount with regard to their employers paying a portion of it, but the average person doesn't get a break on it. The people here within the Legislature do get a break on it, but no one else gets a break. [interjection] Yeah, there is someone snoring in the House here. It's unfortunate that we're all not on our toes here listening to the debate. It could be the member from Rocky Mountain House. Isn't it Rocky Mountain House? Rocky Mountain House. Yeah, that's where the snoring is coming from, then, perhaps.

Anyways, getting back to the gas piece here, I think I said that we're all in agreement that something needs to be done. It's just a matter of exactly what. It probably would be great, you know, with the Smart cars. That would be another thing, but that doesn't altogether prove to be very viable when wintertime comes. You get stuck in the middle of the thing, and you're hoping for good Samaritans who can afford to drive to be able to push you out.

Mr. Eggen: They're easy to push.

Mr. Bonko: Exactly. They're easy to push out, but it's the fact that you've got to be pushed out.

So, you know, here we are stuck with the solution here, and people are complaining.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

The Deputy Speaker: I've been listing to the debate for most of the evening, and we're hearing about the cost of commodities of all different sorts. I'm looking through the bill, and the bill is the Fuel Tax Act. In second reading we talk about the principles of the bill, and I haven't heard a whole lot of discussion around the Fuel Tax Act. Perhaps if all the members read the bill first, they could focus their comments actually on the bill.

Please proceed, but focus your comments from this point forward on the bill.

Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: Well, I think I did mention the fuel tax at least once or twice there, Mr. Speaker. But if that's the will of the Speaker, then I guess I could in fact open up the guide, as you say, and continue with it as briefly as I can on occasion.

Debate Continued

Mr. Bonko: Again, going back to the price of gas, Mr. Speaker, and

all the tax on that gas – some are saying that it's a federal deal. Some are saying that it should be the provincial responsibility to ensure that at least the consumers, the people of the province are shielded. I know that in other provinces they have put forth some sort of legislation that the big monopolies have to justify the price going up. They have to make sure that they can in fact justify it. People are talking about supply and demand, and I can understand that portion of it as well. But, again, if we have a hurricane down in the south and some of the refineries are knocked off, that still doesn't account for how you can have even perhaps a 25 per cent increase.

Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down and perhaps wait to have some more enlightening debate, and I can get up and speak as well then.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, I'm assuming under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hinman: No. I was just hoping to speak on the bill for a minute.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar under 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. Three years ago we had urged the government to conduct an inquiry into gasoline pricing in the province. We had asked the Premier to initiate a public inquiry into this matter. If the hon. member has suspicions about the free market, do you think that if we had an inquiry into gasoline pricing and the market structure in this province, the hon. member would be more confident in the marketing system?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for raising that point. I think that would be a hell of an idea. [interjections] A heck of an idea. The sound does echo differently from here to over there.

I would have more confidence and I think consumers would have more confidence if, in fact, their government took interest and took the proactive approach to ensure that the pricing is fair and equitable and can be justified. But for the fact that it isn't right now and we have made no inquiries as such, people are still left wondering as to the question: is it fair? Is it equitable? The government isn't saying anything.

People are talking all the time. I'm sure MLAs on an ongoing basis continue to get calls at their office. I know I have, even if it's just from rural people calling and complaining, those that have the hobby farms out there, about the tax and about the gas itself, that it's just unreasonable, and again from the city people as well saying: "You know what? This gas is just too darned expensive." So, yes, I think an inquiry from the government would most justify my curiosity and settle my concerns with that.

1:50

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no one else, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on the fuel tax bill.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to get up and to speak to Bill 35, Fuel Tax Act, at this early hour of the day and to hopefully clarify a few things and the concern.

I guess I want to refer back once again to the Fort McMurray area

and the incentives that the government has put in place in order to bring industry in there to develop the tar sands and wanting to move on with that. But we have a definite problem in our cities with the consumption of gas and diesel and the fuel things. To go back to the saying that Ronald Reagan always liked best: tax more what you want less of and less what you want more of. I'm just going from page 11 on the rate of the tax.

11(1) The tax required to be paid pursuant to this Act shall be paid at the following rates:

- (a) with respect to gasoline, diesel and other prescribed fuels, \$0.09 per litre;
- (b) with respect to aviation fuel and locomotive fuel, \$0.015 per litre;
- (c) with respect to liquefied petroleum gas, \$0.065 per litre.

That's the one area, I guess, where I have the greatest concern. We have a production of approximately 10 billion litres of propane or liquid gas here in the province, and we export 80 per cent of that. It just seems: why would we want to export one of the cleanest fuels that we could use here? It's an easy gas to move around the province. It's much better than our natural gas, which takes high pressures of 3,000 psi in order to get very much in there, yet we've put in such a disincentive here to use up the liquid petroleum that we have here in the province.

I just would like to see more incentives, that we would use a product that we have here and have the ability to use in the cities and different areas. It's just an excellent product. It just seemed wrong to put such a high tax on it and to make it prohibitive to make the conversion over to this. We would like to use the cleanest fuels possible. We have an opportunity to do it. It's just disappointing to see, like I say, such a prohibitive tax put on the propane fuel.

The propane people came here last week to lobby the government, and I was disappointed to hear their response: "Well, you know where we're at. Why haven't you been here?" I was astounded to hear that. We make globe-trotting trips to try and find out new technology or go to France to supposedly find out how to deal with cancer research and all over, yet with our own production here in the province we don't have the initiative to get out and to look and promote our own products. I think we should be looking in our own backyards.

On the other side of the coin, in talking to the canola growers, they would like to see production of ethanol and biodiesel and those areas there. We need to look at some sort of incentive in order to bring these clean fuels to use here in Alberta. I believe that we could be innovative in different areas. The companies that want to put up refineries in those areas for the tar sands get good tax breaks, yet again we don't see anything in here to bring the initiative or the investment into the biodiesel or the methanol production. It would be good to be a little bit innovative and to look at those other industries and the cleaner fuels.

You know, taxes are a very driving element. It always amazes me how many people buy or sell different things, farmers especially, trying to get around to save some money, to change their inventory in other areas. It's the same with the taxes on the fuel. We could and should do better. I would urge this government to look at those fuels that are what we consider greener fuels and to reduce the taxes and to put incentives in there so that we could have more of that here in the province and could be leading the country in that area.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 26
Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. member for Edmonton-North Hill. No. Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: You know, it's bad enough, Mr. Chairman, that the Flames lost tonight. Now you're calling me an Edmontonian.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to rise and address issues regarding Bill 26 that were brought up during second reading. The Member for Edmonton-Centre said that the bill had good intentions, and I'd certainly agree with that. She did ask, however, about statistical need for the bill and how many times in a year we do have emergency workers who believe they've been placed in this position. In Alberta the numbers are likely to be small, probably less than 10 a year. However, the act was broadened so that good Samaritans could also make application under the act in addition to the police, firefighters, paramedics, corrections officers, and special constables, who are the key drivers of this legislation.

The member also asked about the effectiveness of the bill. The objective of Bill 26 is to minimize the impacts of being exposed to bodily fluids while carrying out duties as a police officer, firefighter, or paramedic or as a result of providing emergency assistance to someone. The faster information can be obtained about a source individual, the more effective it will be. However, the rights of the source individual cannot be overlooked, and I think that this bill strikes a very good balance between the time it takes to get an order and the protection of the source individual against an unreasonable invasion of privacy.

First responders believe this legislation will provide peace of mind for themselves and their families. They face tremendous stress when exposed to the bodily fluids of other individuals. The legislation will assist them in making decisions regarding postexposure prophylaxis for communicable diseases such as hepatitis and HIV. If this legislation provides peace of mind to even one police officer or firefighter, Mr. Chair, it will have been effective.

It's likely that most applicants will have to start on prophylactic medications once the extent of the exposure is determined. However, once test results from the source are available, they may be able to stop their medications.

Regarding the issue of false negatives, the bill does not negate the necessity for appropriate medical care following an exposure. There are protocols for assessment and care following exposure to blood-borne pathogens that will still continue as well as normal clinical practical guidelines.

In addition, an application for an order under this bill had to be made with a physician form, and a physician education program and properly designed physician form will further enable physicians to make the appropriate decisions regarding the need for treatment.

The member also asked: how many people refuse a blood test when they're asked to give it? It's unclear at this point how often the courts will be asked to supply an order when people refuse to voluntarily provide a sample. We don't have specific statistics. However, we believe that having the ability to get the court order will make individuals more likely to provide samples voluntarily.

A question was raised as to whether there are less invasive alternatives to use for the same circumstances. Bill 26 has been drafted to enable the use of the least invasive method of testing. With the new process in place for a possible communicable disease database search we may be able to ascertain accurate disease status on some source individuals without a bodily sample. Since this legislation is not limited to blood samples as medical knowledge and testing procedures improve over time, there will be flexibility with respect to the types of samples required. This will allow for the possibility of less invasive testing.

I'd ask members for their support of Bill 26, Mr. Chairman.

2:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, and thank you for the answers to the questions that were put on the record during second reading of Bill 26, the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act. Having heard that, I'm happy enough to support this bill in Committee of the Whole and don't anticipate bringing forward any amendments to it.

I was pleased to see that it was coming into line with the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. In second reading I had raised the four tests that were set out by the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. The member has answered some of those tests, which were around how much of an issue this is and the issues about the invasion of privacy and the less invasive alternatives. I've gone through section by section and analyzed that. I think there have been a number of processes put in place here to make sure that the rights are being protected, that we're doing the best we can to look after our first responders, our emergency personnel, and balancing that with an individual's right to privacy and not to be subjected unduly to tests.

I like seeing the amount of detail that I'm seeing in this bill. You know, you look at section 3, application for testing order. It outlines the circumstances for when an individual can apply for a testing order, what's required to be in the order to submit the application, identifying the circumstances in which the individual came into contact with the source individual, accompanied by a physician's report. I mean, all the detail is there, and that's what I would expect to see.

You know, section 7 is going over the physician's report. There's an application for a testing order that's accompanied by a physician's report confirming that there was a legitimate risk of exposure. There's a reason to be doing all of this, in other words. It sets out time limits when this should happen.

I think there's been a lot of work done on this bill since it first appeared as the Blood Samples Act in 2004, sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. This is a huge improvement, and a lot of my concerns have been addressed. I always think we've got to be very careful about this and be very careful to balance, but I'm happy enough with the work I've seen the member do.

I'm willing to support it in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to speak on Bill 26, Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act. I would like at this time to express my thanks to the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill for his work on this legislation. Certainly, I think that this is a major rewrite of the Blood Samples Act of 2004. It proposes a new legal framework for requiring individuals to submit a blood sample. For instance, it allows police officers, firefighters, paramedics, peace officers, and

good Samaritans who are exposed to bodily fluids, whether it be by biting, spitting, bleeding, et cetera, to apply for an order for information from the Provincial Court of Alberta. An order for information would allow for a search of the reportable disease databases and, if required, a mandatory blood sample. I see nothing the matter with this.

In conclusion, I would again like to be on the record stating that I appreciate the work that the hon. member has put into this, and I will be very happy to support the hon. member in his work on this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chair, as I participate in debate on Bill 26, Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act, at this stage of debate. Again I promise to be brief in light of the hour.

I didn't have a chance to talk to this bill in the earlier stages, so I just wanted to put some of my comments and thoughts on the record. I would start by noting that the hon. sponsor of the bill has done a good job, and I thank him for bringing this forward. This bill already has the support of police, firefighters, correctional workers, and emergency workers. It is definitely intended to support workers in high-risk jobs who face real danger on a regular basis.

There are currently two instances where bodily samples can be taken without consent, Mr. Chair. The first one is testing for alcohol when there are reasonable grounds to suspect impaired driving, and the second is taking DNA samples related to prosecution for serious crimes. Now, both of these instances are under the Criminal Code of Canada, and they both require that there be reasonable grounds to suspect criminal wrongdoing.

I have some minor concerns with this bill with regard to testing, for example, in that a test can yield a negative result, as was mentioned before, yet we don't know for sure that this person is not a carrier or is not ill with a certain disease. As such, emergency workers and good Samaritans alike will be asked to take precautionary measures, or prophylactic drug cocktails, to avoid contracting the same disease or bug.

Now, from a privacy standpoint the former Privacy Commissioner of Canada has outlined four basic tests to be met. I know that the hon. sponsor has already spoken to some of them, but I'll just repeat them on the record. Test number one is: is this bill necessary? If I'm asking this question, I guess my question would be: what led to the introduction of this act? What circumstances dictated that this Assembly discuss this topic? How prevalent are the cases where communicable diseases are transferred from source individuals to new victims who originally did not carry or have those diseases? You can talk about emergency workers or good Samaritans performing CPR or rescues or first aid.

The second test is whether this bill is effective, and I think it is going to definitely elicit some positive results.

Test number three: how much of an invasion of privacy might there be? The hon. sponsor talked about people who refuse a blood test, for example. We need to maybe keep some statistics on how many people willingly agree and how many people need convincing and how many people are adamantly opposed to it and would not budge and would not yield.

Then test number four: are there less evasive alternatives? We know that there are new technologies now that are not as invasive, things like, you know, breath tests or ultraviolet cross-skin scanners that are being used now with some success and so on and so forth.

My next concern is whether, in fact, passing this bill might inadvertently lead to, you know, instances where we actually create or spread fear or panic. For example, if what we're dealing with is

something of the scope and magnitude of things like SARS or avian flu or HIV or AIDS or Ebola, these are bad bugs or bad viruses or bad diseases, and if there's reason to believe that a certain infection is widespread or is spreading, then there might be hysteria or mass panic. So, again, maybe safeguards as to how the public is going to be informed and when and where those tests would be required.

2:10

My next point would be pertaining to the privacy of the collected data and the integrity and security of the communicable diseases database. It's being left for regulations. The definition of communicable disease and also the database and how it is managed is left in regulations for the minister in charge to look at. So we need to get some assurances that the information is going to be guarded and is only going to be used for the purposes stated. This is definitely a fine line that we're walking here to balance privacy and safety.

My next point would be with respect to the dignity and respect that are afforded to the source individual, the person that we're asking to test. They need to be treated with dignity and ultimate respect. It's maybe stressful enough to ask them to undertake a blood test. Then, you know, we need to tell them that we're doing it for their well-being and that of society at large. So dignity and respect are important.

I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre talked about some section-by-section and line-by-line analysis, but I wanted to focus on section 13 with respect to the results of the analysis and how the sample results are going to be utilized. The medical officer of health must "provide a copy of the results to the applicant's physician and to the source individual's physician," so the source and the target, and inform the applicant and the source that their physicians have also received the results. So not only give them the information; tell them that they have it and that "the results of an analysis are not admissible as evidence in any criminal or civil proceeding."

Section 16 talks about confidentiality, and I briefly touched on that. Again it's that issue of privacy.

Section 19 talks about the offence and penalty. It says that contravening this act would make the person liable for a fine of not more than \$2,000 for the first offence and not more than \$5,000 for subsequent offences. Now, I just need clarification as to what would constitute a contravention of the act or a breach of the act. Is it the person refusing to give a blood sample, or is it maybe the person at the other end refusing to take a blood sample? So just a definition of what would be deemed a contravention of the act would be most useful and most appreciated.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity to speak.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 26, Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 26 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 33

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't have an awful lot to say. I've made most of the comments that I wanted to on Bill 33, although I could always change my mind. I made the comments that I thought were particularly relevant during second reading, although I would like to reiterate that while this bill does provide a modicum of tax relief, particularly for low-income earners, which is always a good thing, the Official Opposition caucus still believes that we should be eliminating the health care premium tax. Another one that I'm particularly passionate about is the 3 per cent insurance tax, which I believe most Albertans aren't even aware they pay.

I do have a question on section 4, Mr. Chairman, in this amendment act as we discuss it today. Section 4 talks about increasing the base salary for spousal and eligible dependent tax credits from \$12,900 to \$14,899, yet on page 136 of the 2006-2007 fiscal plan it states that "we will also increase the basic, spousal and eligible dependant amounts by an additional \$100, raising the amounts to \$14,899 for 2006, up from \$14,523." So the question I have is: why is the legislation presently using \$12,900 instead of the \$14,523 that is referred to in the fiscal plan? I'm assuming that that has to do with the indexing that has taken place since that part of the bill was last amended, but I don't know that for a fact. I'm wondering if the Minister of Finance might be able to clarify that for me.

I guess the only other question I have is a relatively minor one as well. Section 7 of the amending bill refers to the 2006 taxation year, and I believe it either cites in the bill or I saw it elsewhere that that, of course, would start on July 1 of this year, 2006. I'm wondering what impact that might have on the government's fiscal year since, of course, that doesn't coincide with the taxation year. We're actually in the 2006-2007 fiscal year for the government right now. I'm sure that this is probably a bit of a conundrum for the government any time because their fiscal year doesn't match up entirely with the taxation year. That was a question I had, just curious what the impact on the government's fiscal plan might be with making that change.

Those were the only questions I had at the committee stage, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to receiving a response from the Minister of Finance, and I will take my seat and allow somebody else to ask their questions. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

An Hon. Member: Calder.

The Chair: Oh, Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. We have some latitude in our geographic associations here at this hour. It seems like the south end of Edmonton and the north end of Calgary are joining, and the west and the north are moving.

Anyway, I'm happy to make some comments on Bill 33, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act. I don't think I've had an opportunity to speak on this before. I guess the overall criticism that I would put forward is that it doesn't seem to be a significant tax saving in a very progressive sort of way; in other words, allowing greater tax savings to be realized by persons and families who would

most need it. You know, that's a fundamental problem with our whole tax regime, Mr. Chairman, in this province. We've gone away from using a progressive system to administer or levy our tax system.

A progressive tax system is really the fundamental basis of a sound, democratic system because, of course, without being able to adjust for different income levels, then you are creating vast inequities between different levels of income. Most of the democratic world, in fact, uses a progressive tax system, and we do use it when we need to here, when we realize it. Unfortunately, it creates serious problems. Whenever we talk about personal income tax amendments or changes, what have you, that fundamental problem exists. What we have with this current amendment is certainly an adjustment, but it's not a significant one in terms of the amount of monies that people are realizing in savings.

2:20

I think that at this point we need to look at some individual sections of the bill here. I guess my first place in the bill would be over on page 4. This is adding the clause regarding the \$400 prosperity cheque sent out in the fall. It says:

In the case of an individual who is an eligible individual in respect of one or more qualified dependants but is not eligible in respect of himself or herself to a rebate under this Division, \$400 for each qualified dependant.

This allows for all children born in Alberta as of the cut-off date to qualify for the prosperity cheque despite their parents not having paid taxes in Alberta that year. I think this is probably a reasonable means by which to capture as many people as possible, so I commend it for that.

As well, just looking here, it says that Albertans are settling for a hike in the basic personal tax exemption from \$14,523 to \$14,899. The hike amounts to only, really, a \$10 savings on top of the \$25 break gained from inflation indexing. So, Mr. Chairman, that only adds up to 35 bucks, right? You know, giving us a \$35 tax savings, considering the \$265 million, say, corporate tax break that we saw in this same budget, really points to the sort of skewed priorities, I think, that the government has. You know, we came up with sort of this ad hoc \$400 prosperity cheque, but really if you want to build savings or pass on savings to each individual, the best way to do it is through the taxation system. It gives you a framework. It gives you accountability. It hopefully allows for you to make adjustments according to a person's income. It can be something that people can count on. It provides a lasting framework over time.

That's where we need to go if we are going to in fact try to make adjustments for inflation or give people some equity back from windfall energy revenues or what have you or even to help people with their energy bills as well. Through the tax system is a way by which we can do that. It certainly does make more sense. So, please, when we are looking to do the same next year because we know that there will be windfall revenues in our budget, I would ask that we look to reforming our personal income tax system and then use that system as the framework by which we pass on savings to every Albertan in the most equitable way possible.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 33, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 33 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 31

Health Information Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have this opportunity to address the questions about Bill 31 that were raised during second reading. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre had asked whether the sections about the registration number for health service providers are reflective of the review committee's recommendation 13. I can confirm that this is directly related to the Select Special Health Information Act Review Committee recommendation 13.

Regarding the PATRIOT Act, let me make a couple of points. The following sections address the concerns of the PATRIOT Act: section 3, section 5(i) and (ii), and section 17(a), (b), and (c). Those particular amendments are intended to protect the privacy of Albertans by ensuring that their health information cannot be automatically disclosed in response to a U.S. court subpoena, warrant, or order.

Currently under the Health Information Act health information may be disclosed on the authority of a court, which is not specifically defined. This legislation would now define the court as being a court that has jurisdiction in the province of Alberta. Without limiting the definition to Alberta, of course, individuals and companies that may be subject to a U.S. jurisdiction, such as parent companies of Canadian operations, may have to disclose health information to comply with the law under which they are incorporated.

Changing from an ethics committee to a research ethics board is directly related to the review committee's recommendation 39, which reads, "The term 'ethics committee' should be changed to 'research ethics board'." Research as defined in the Health Information Act includes "academic, applied or scientific health-related research that necessitates the use of individually identifying diagnostic, treatment and care information or individually identifying registration information, or both."

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre had asked about other governments being able to access health information. The committee recommendation is reflected in section 5(i) of the amendment act, which enables other provincial and territorial governments to obtain information about health services which they fund and which have been provided to the persons under their jurisdiction. This would enable the various provincial and territorial jurisdictions to use the information and also to develop appropriate policies and to plan and manage their health system.

The hon. member also posed questions regarding the registration information to complete warrants, the removal of provision 35(1)(j), and the addition of section 37.3. The addition of section 37.3 is intended to address committee recommendation 31. This amendment would enable custodians to exercise discretion in disclosing a limited amount of health information to police and prosecutors for reasons of public safety. These specified data elements may enable the police to obtain a subpoena, warrant, or order issued or made by a court to access additional health information.

With the amended provision a custodian could respond to a request from the police service, and they could initiate contact with the police if they felt that that was required. The amendment enables the disclosure of health service provider information for public safety as this is a piece of information that the police may require in order to obtain a subpoena or a warrant or an order. These provisions would replace what is currently section 35(1)(j).

The amendment in section 5(r) regarding payment is intended to enable the disclosure of limited health information without consent to third parties for payment purposes. An example is to enable third-party insurers to adjudicate the payment of health services or products without referring to the individual for consent. So this does not refer to a guardian as they would not be under a contract.

The member also posed a question about the removal of what is currently section 35(4)(b)(ii), which speaks to the information being disclosed by a custodian to a health professional body. The current wording in the Health Information Act is not consistent with the wording in the Health Professions Act. This causes a conflict for the custodian who is disclosing the information to a professional body. So by removing the section requiring destruction of the information at the earliest opportunity, the intention is to harmonize these two pieces of legislation and to rely on the records retention provision in the Health Professions Act. That retention period is now 10 years.

2:30

The hon. member also asked about committee recommendation 34. The addition of sections 37.1 and 37.2 is intended to address this recommendation.

The scope of the Health Information Act is primarily the publicly funded health sector. Custodians include fee-for-service providers. The Health Information Act does not apply to providers who offer privately funded health services. The new section addresses disclosure provisions only. They have no impact on the ability of custodians to collect or demand additional health service provider information.

Section 8 does indeed relate directly to the committee recommendation 43, which reads:

The requirement to note every disclosure of individually identifiable health information without consent should be retained and amended to not require notation of the purpose of the disclosure when the disclosure is made electronically through a system with automated audit capability.

In other words, there is an audit trail there left by the electronic sending.

Mr. Chairman, these are my comments. Before I proceed, I would like to introduce an amendment being proposed for Bill 31 and ask for its circulation in the House.

The Chair: We'll wait a moment till they're distributed. We will label this amendment A1.

Okay. Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, you may proceed.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment now being circulated in the House references section 2(b)(ii) of the bill, which proposes to add a registration number to the list of data elements that are included in the definition of health services provider information in the act.

Now, in a recent order the Privacy Commissioner ruled that since the term "registration number" was not specifically identified in the act, it was not health information, so the intention of the department was to add the registration number to the list of health services provider data elements in an effort to be consistent with the inclusion of the licence number and to align with the principles of the Health Information Act.

While the department considered this somewhat of a housekeeping amendment, concerns have since been raised that it may have had some unanticipated impacts for third parties. One such third party has appealed the decision of the Privacy Commissioner with respect to the collection of health information, and that decision is currently undergoing judicial review. The department is proposing to monitor that court proceeding and re-examine the issue as required. I would like to point out to hon. members that it was not the physicians who asked for this amendment.

The Chair: Does anyone wish to speak to the amendment?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: I'll adjourn debate on the amendment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 34

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise tonight and speak to Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006, in committee stage.

I want to start out by making some comments regarding debate in second reading and a reference from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the leader of the third party, who noted that I was offering my qualified support for a corporate tax cut and made some comment about the fact that the Alberta Liberals want everything for everybody. I will admit that we're not like the NDs, and we don't necessarily believe that big government is good and big business is bad. We're not even necessarily like the Conservatives, who believe the opposite. They would tend to believe that big business is good and big government is bad, or at least they used to believe that big government is bad. More recently, of course, with the addition of ministries like Restructuring and Government Efficiency and an associate minister of transportation, I'm beginning to wonder if maybe they don't believe in both big business and big government at the same time.

Ms Blakeman: Well, they don't walk the talk.

Mr. R. Miller: That would be the case: they do not necessarily walk the talk.

When we look at Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, in the committee stage . . .

The Chair: Members, if we could keep the background conversations down, it would be appreciated.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Not really an awful lot of concerns regarding the legislation per se, but I would like to point out a couple of them. In section 2, which is identified as accommodating federal legislative changes, I'm wondering if the Finance minister might be able to elaborate on the reimbursement of the Crown charges. This is something that comes out of page 1 of Bill 34. Also, again I'm wondering if the minister might be able to provide an example of when section 12.1(1) would apply.

Then in the three-column documents, Mr. Chairman, that were

provided to us when the minister's staff gave a briefing, on page 1 of that document they refer to the fact that Alberta is not paralleling the federal transition process. My question would just be: why was it deemed not necessary in that particular case to parallel the federal transition process?

Now, section 4, Mr. Chairman, is the section where we actually identify that the cut is to be to 10 per cent from 11.5, which it is currently. I'm curious to know why the minister chose to make that cut this year. We all know that that's a cut that has been promised for some time now. I think it goes back about five years. Every year the business community, especially the small-business community, has been asking the minister and, in fact, lobbying the government and lobbying the opposition for that cut to finally take place. Every year the minister says, "Well, you know, it's one of many tax cuts that are under consideration" and that they always consider tax cuts and that they're always willing to look at tax cuts. But year after year it's been put off and put off and put off. Finally, this year we see it come forward.

The question is: why this year? In particular, I'm wondering whether the government committee that she referred to last fall that would be reviewing the tax regime in fact finally did recommend that the cuts should go ahead this year, Mr. Chairman, and if so, if that was the case, if she would be willing to table that committee's report in the Legislature and let all Albertans see the recommendation.

2:40

Section 7(1) refers to mutual trusts. Since in an earlier bill that was dealing with securities, Mr. Chairman, we actually struck a section that dealt with income trusts and it was indicated that it was being folded in with mutual trusts and that the two were being treated similarly, I'm wondering if that's the same case with this section 7(1).

Section 10 allows the minister to waive penalties or interest owing, Mr. Chairman. I'm wondering if, in fact, the minister or the ministry has ever actually used that power under the act and, if so, if the minister might be willing to make available to this Assembly an itemized list of when that power has been utilized, once again so that all Albertans would have the opportunity to see which corporations have been granted that exemption or granted that waiving of their penalties and interest owing.

Ms Blakeman: Special status.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, you know, Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Centre is suggesting that perhaps some corporations in Alberta might be given special status from this government. I'm certainly not saying that that is the case, but I think it would be fair to say that there are a number of Albertans who would suggest that it might be the case. If it isn't, then there would be no reason to withhold that information from Albertans. If it is, then all the more reason why I should be asking the question, I suppose.

Ms Blakeman: Well, it's certainly not transparent.

Mr. R. Miller: It would speak to transparency and openness, suggests my colleague for Edmonton-Centre, and I think that that's a fair comment. There's been a lot of talk, Mr. Chairman, in this Assembly this week about the issues of openness and transparency. I've said many times that anything we can do to assure Albertans that their government is operating in an open and transparent manner, that would be a good thing. In fact, I believe we had a draft report distributed to MLAs this week on the Conflicts of Interest Act

Review Committee. I know that it was discussed in this Assembly last night, and there was discussion about the fact that we are finally dragging this Assembly into the 21st century in terms of a little more openness and transparency. As I said, that's a good thing. Certainly, if we could do likewise with the Corporate Tax Amendment Act, we would all be better served for that.

Section 13, Mr. Chairman, clarifies the definition of insurance companies to ensure that they are paying the insurance tax. Now, I think I mentioned in debate earlier tonight that any time the government changes a section like this to ensure that somebody is paying a tax, it would cause me to question whether or not, in fact, somebody hasn't been paying a tax. Therefore, I wonder whether or not the Finance ministry has perhaps been allowing revenue to slip through their hands and at what cost to the Alberta taxpayer, at what cost to the finances of this province. So that's certainly a question I would have, and I'm wondering if at some point the minister might like to comment on that. If, in fact, that is the case, once again I'm wondering if maybe the minister would provide in writing an estimate of the amount of money that may not have been collected from insurance companies as a result of the legislative wording the way it is now and the prompting of this change in the wording of the legislation before us today.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, section 14. I'm wondering if the minister might identify for us why section 106(1.01) is being substituted.

Those would be my questions for this evening, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to a response from the minister either tonight or at least hopefully before this bill gets to third reading. That would help me to determine once and for all whether or not I'm going to continue my qualified support for this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: I am very interested in speaking to Bill 34 this morning, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006. The robust economy that we are enjoying in Alberta is due in no small part to the activities of our many fine businesses that operate in the province, and we certainly wish them well. We have no problem. In fact, we encourage the business activity that does go on in the province. We have seen unprecedented growth and development of so many sectors of our economy in the last 10 years. It's quite remarkable. Alberta has shone as a business centre for not just Canada but across North America. That is a positive thing. It affects most people in a positive way in this province.

Considering that, Mr. Chairman, and considering the boom that we are experiencing at this point in time and the robust activity in our economy, I think that by the most conservative estimates of economists then, it's certainly not the time that you continue with corporate tax cuts. It runs exactly opposite to best practices in regard to managing a boom. I find it remarkable that this agenda continues on. What we do need to do is manage our taxation system according to how the economy is performing. If the economy takes a downturn, then that's when you give the tax cuts to businesses. We certainly recognize the value of that and encourage it to happen.

But this is not the time when you have a downturn in the economy. It's quite the opposite. So it's as though you're using a tool that you have at your means and firing it off at exactly the time that you don't want to use it. It paints the government into a corner to do so, and it is, quite frankly, irresponsible to do so at this point in time. We certainly don't preclude the possibility of using tax cuts in a measured sort of way according to how the economy is performing.

So I just really wonder why this agenda moves on. There have to be ulterior motives in mind. I think of a whole range of reasons why

the government would continue with more tax cuts in the midst of a very large boom cycle in our economy. It seems irresponsible because, in fact, you can overheat an economy. This is a widely observed phenomenon economically. That's why on a federal level governments manipulate the interest rates up and down, to manage an economy, to make sure that it's not overheating. So while we don't have that means at our disposal here in the province, we certainly do have the capacity to tweak our taxation system.

2:50

You know, cutting the corporate tax rate is unwise for a number of reasons. First of all, it ignores the fact that Alberta's budget is well above its tax base capacity. We are already depending far too much on oil revenue alone. So to further undercut our stable sources of income, that is taxation, is unwise, to say the least, and potentially disastrous, and I'm not just making this up.

The Chair: Hon. members, I know that everyone is anxious to get on the speakers list, but the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has the floor. I'd be happy to recognize everybody else as soon as he's done.

Mr. Eggen: No worries. I certainly have a lot to say on this, and I'm not going to stop. You know, why are we running this Legislature in the middle of the night? It's because we have a government that's undemocratic. You want to make decisions in the middle of the night and pass things through as if we're smugglers or something like that when, in fact, we can do this in the light of day. There's nothing wrong with running this Legislature during normal hours as opposed to in the middle of the night. I find it absurd that you people sit around and don't listen to what's going on, want to jam things through, and then somehow complain about it afterwards. It's ridiculous, it's undemocratic, and I really don't see the value in it. I think the public has a right to know that that's the sort of thing that goes on here, and I don't think that we're making wise decisions in the middle of the night.

I will continue with something that all of you should know, the Conservatives and the Liberals both, and that is the unwise choice of making corporate tax cuts in the middle of an economic boom.

Mr. Cenaiko: What's in that water?

Mr. Eggen: I wish I had something in the water, definitely.

You know, in fact, the government's own budget document states that

with no general sales tax, payroll taxes or capital tax, Alberta's tax base is relatively narrow compared to other jurisdictions. While this is a benefit to Albertans, it also comes with some risks. A broader range of taxes means more stable revenues

spread out over a wider area.

With relatively fewer . . . sources, predictable funding for key public services is at more risk in the event of an economic slow-down. Consequently, it is inadvisable to eliminate or to dedicate more taxes.

This is right from the document from your own government, page 134, Alberta's Tax Advantage.

Yet eliminating or reducing corporate taxes is precisely what the government is doing. Further lowering already extremely low taxes while at the same time declaring that because it is so dangerous, they find it inadvisable to dedicate more taxes. In other words, no more tax-based funding for core programs because there are no taxes to fund them with. So we find the irony in doing this. Certainly, during the time of an unprecedented economic boom the whole concept seems irresponsible at best.

Over five years this government has reduced business taxes by 4 per cent. This may seem like a small percentage, but that innocuous amount totals over \$265 million in lost revenue this year alone. In the 2004 budget:

Cuts to corporate income taxes started in 2001, and will save Alberta corporations about \$435 million in taxes this year. These savings are on top of the savings from cuts to other corporate taxes, such as the elimination of the financial institutions capital tax and the drop in the railway fuel tax.

In the last two years alone, then, the cuts from 12.5 to 10 per cent will have taken more than \$700 million out of government revenue. That \$700 million would have paid for three times the amount urged to increase and improve on seniors' and long-term care throughout this province, which was only \$250 million. That \$700 million alone – and remember that's just from two years, not in the whole five years of cuts in the regime that has been set out – would pay for more than twice the amount of all the new schools that are being looked for by the Calgary board of education.

You know, I find it absurd that this is would even be brought forward when what we're doing here is not only changing the corporate tax rate but over time changing the capacity for the government to even govern. So that's why I find it equally disconcerting, and perhaps, I guess, it tells us more about the Liberal opposition than I knew from before. When you are deciding to reduce that tax base past the level where a government can effectively govern and provide the services that are mandated from that government, then I would suggest that that's an irresponsible approach to governance. In fact, you can't have everything. You can't have it all ways. I expect it from the Conservatives. I was very disappointed to hear it from the Liberals. At the end of the day is it up to the New Democrat opposition to be the conservative voice of reason in these issues? Well, I suppose so. I just wish there was more of us.

Secondly, to lower our already low corporate tax rates in order to attract larger corporations who face growing pressures to compete not only here in Canada but on a global basis – this comes from the budget speech – risks establishing a race to the bottom, I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, in terms of corporate tax rates throughout not only Canada but U.S. and Central America as well. We cannot afford to become the Third World labour tax equivalent of North America in order to attract investment, much less when we already have some of the more nefarious laws in regard to labour in the whole country.

It's a difficult situation. I know that we have to compete with other jurisdictions, but you know the competition does not have to be a race to the bottom. There is a recognition that a stable sort of social structure, social programs, as well as a fair wage initiative in certain areas does attract businesses too. It attracts the sorts of businesses that perhaps Alberta is in a position to want to have more than others. So a corporate tax cut just on its own is not necessarily the way to catch the biggest fish. The biggest fish can be caught, as well, through presenting a balanced social fabric that is somehow conducive to raising families and to creating stability. This is something that corporations look forward to as well.

According to the 2006 budget documents the government's own internal review of its tax policy found that "we are competitive within North America in attracting investment and skilled workers," which is great.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

So let's find that level and stay there. Attempting to demonstrate

that our government must be proactive in lowering corporate tax rates, the budget documents also reference recently proposed tax cuts in Germany, which would lower the rates there from 25 to 19 per cent, still twice the rate that we have here in this province. The only province with a lower general business tax rate is Quebec, with 9.9 per cent. This places us second in Canada with the lowest business tax rates, with our closest tax neighbour, B.C., weighing in at about 12 per cent.

The government's insistence that only by lowering income tax rates will we continue to attract investment and, therefore, skilled workers I think is at best problematic. It threatens to create something of what you call a catch-22. A cut to 10 per cent won't help with the labour and real estate shortages plaguing the province. "The knee-jerk reaction is that a cut in corporate income tax rate will just accentuate the obvious flow of investment that's already well under way towards Alberta, but at the same time businesses might be dissuaded by some of the bottlenecks that [in fact] are arising." This is from an economist at BMO Nesbitt Burns Inc. and from the *National Post*, which is certainly a conservative paper, at best.

You can in fact impede the progress of your economic growth by allowing it to be overheated and not to be regulating it in a reasonable sort of way. We're not suggesting that we dive into the economy so much that we are somehow interfering with its logical progress, but we are suggesting that we do use the means at our disposal, which is a reasonable tax rate, a reasonable corporate tax rate as well as a personal tax rate that will in fact bring in stable revenues for the government as well as have these different sectors pay their due, and the economy will chug along just fine.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

3:00

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bill 34 went through second reading on April 24, and I would just like to address a few of the points that were raised at that time. This tax rate reduction will save Alberta business some \$265 million in 2006-07. I'd just like to reiterate that helping Alberta business is helping Albertans. While Alberta's economy is strong now, cutting the corporate income tax rate will benefit the province and its residents for years to come. The lower corporate income tax rate builds a strong foundation for tomorrow's economic growth and job creation so that Albertans will have more jobs, stronger communities, and a better quality of life.

There was also a member that questioned why the tax cut was proposed this year. As I previously mentioned, the government undertook an internal review of the province's tax system to assess whether our tax system remains competitive and fair and encourages economic growth. This review identified, Mr. Chairman, that the general corporate income tax rate is a priority for tax cuts. In 2001 the government promised to take action on reducing corporate taxes. We initiated the process when we reduced our general corporate tax rate from 15.5 per cent to 11.5 per cent between 2001 and 2004. At the same time, the small business rate was cut in half, to 3 per cent, and the small business income threshold was doubled to \$400,000. This bill's proposed cut, to a 10 per cent proposed general corporate income tax, will be another very positive action to help us maintain the competitive advantage of Alberta businesses. The low-rate, broad-based tax environment is a hallmark of this province. Our tax system is simple and transparent, resulting in lower administrative and compliance costs for taxpayers and improved accountability for Albertans.

Just to respond to another point raised by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Chairman, with regard to the companies

claiming the insurance reserve, this change will ensure that any companies claiming this reserve will also now be subject to an insurance premiums tax. That's reflected under section 86.

I would encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to rise in committee to talk about Bill 34, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006. I rise also to raise concerns about continuing corporate tax cuts and, with my colleague from Edmonton-Calder, have serious concerns, particularly at this time. It is totally inconsistent with principles of sustainable economic policy to be contributing to an already overheated economy in this province.

We've seen unprecedented profits in the industrial sector, particularly the oil and gas sector. The primary industry to benefit from this tax will be the oil industry. It fails to stimulate the diversity that we need in our economy and continues to promote the oil and gas sector over others and to benefit them when already huge profits are being made. We're having tremendous demands, tremendous problems in getting the labour to deal with some of the other important issues in our province because that industry is sucking up everything.

We already have the lowest or very close to the lowest corporate tax in the country, certainly well below most of the other provinces. We are creating an imbalance in Canada. We are already dealing with significant federal tax deductions with this latest budget. We are indeed going to benefit businesses to the tune of \$265 million by this 1 and a half per cent reduction in corporate tax, but where could this \$265 million be invested? In human and environmental protection, surely. This would go a long way to removing the health care premium for Albertans, which is a regressive tax that is penalizing our most vulnerable population and making health care less accessible. We are not funding persons with developmental disabilities adequately. There's a tremendous strain now among caregivers and among those who are the most vulnerable in our society. Indeed, we may stimulate more jobs, we may stimulate more business, particularly in the oil and gas sector, but what about our other responsibilities to Albertans and the significantly larger investment that's needed for protecting our environment for the future?

So I, on balance, have very strong feelings about this 1 and a half per cent reduction in corporate tax and feel that any responsible economic management would see that this is not appropriate at this time, and I certainly will not be supporting this bill along with others in the House. I'll leave my comments at that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 34, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 34 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

Bill 29
Environmental Protection and
Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to start by answering some of the questions from second reading, and I'd like to take this opportunity to begin by addressing comments previously raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, most of which were related to the second amendment, dealing with contaminated sites.

In response to comments on why management of contaminated sites is allowed in the bill, well, these amendments will facilitate cleanup and redevelopment of brownfield sites by incorporating flexible risk management options for protecting health and environment. Cleanup is the option that is promoted above all else through remediation certificates under the EPEA. But when the cost of cleanup becomes prohibitively expensive, there are other, more flexible options that will provide the same level of health protection and allow beneficial reuse of the site, especially for sites that have an active potential for redevelopment, such as Hub Oil. Sometimes risk management alternatives bring revitalization to a community when the alternatives are brownfields.

With regard to the hon. member's concerns about who has the liability for contamination on lands that are transferred to municipalities, I'd like to clarify that the initial persons responsible will remain responsible for cleanup of the contamination and will continue to be pursued using all the enforcement tools in the act. AENV is committed to ensuring that the polluter pays. The amendment simply ensures clarity that a municipality that receives land is not considered one of the parties that is held responsible.

Alberta Environment is developing new regulations specifically addressing the issuance of remediation certificates. The hon. member had concerns as to how inspectors will make consistent decisions on when to issue a remediation certificate and who will be issuing the certificate. The regulation will stipulate the remediation standards that must be met and the information that must be submitted with the application for a certificate. The department is also working with professional organizations to support the use of professionals to sign off on the application, indicating that all requirements have been met.

These measures taken together ensure that very clear rules are in place. We have the additional assurance that professionals review the application. This regulation is being drafted with input from the Contaminated Sites Stakeholders Advisory Committee. The department maintains the authority to issue reclamation and remediation certificates and documents. The department does want to expand the role of professionals such as agronomists and engineers in conducting the work and reviewing the applications. The minister would consult with stakeholders before implementing any expansion of this role to actually issuing the certificate on behalf of the department.

3:10

Finally, to address the hon. member's concern on conflicts of interest with partners, the selection of partners will include reviews of conflict of interest. Alberta Environment will develop agreements with partners so that they are clear on accountabilities, responsibilities, duties, and reporting requirements.

I'd like to move on to address some concerns made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. A question of conflicts of interest was also raised, and I believe I've addressed this issue in my points to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. The hon.

member also asked for a comment on the need for a public registry of all delegation, transfers of powers, and access to supporting documentation. Well, any system envisioned under the partnership approach is one of shared governance that includes publicly open and transparent processes as well as clearly defined roles and responsibilities of all parties involved. These are our standard operating practices, and it's not necessary to be put into the act.

With regard to the hon. member's question on financial security for reclamation, the Auditor General has asked AENV to ensure that it is collecting the full amount of financial security required by the act and its regulations. The department has been keeping the Auditor General's office informed of its progress in addressing that recommendation. Progressive reclamation reduces the liability that must be covered by reclamation security, and thus the combination of a tool to incent quicker reclamation that reduces the need for security and the work by the department to address the recommendations of the Auditor General is complementary.

The hon. member also spoke on the topic of emissions thresholds. Emissions thresholds are set in regulations or standards that are developed with input from stakeholders. For example, the emissions threshold for SO₂ and NO₂ were developed with input from the Clean Air Strategic Alliance and have been set at: nitrogen oxides to be reduced in half by 2005, from 140,000 tonnes per year to 60,000 tonnes per year, and sulphur dioxides to be reduced by two-thirds by 2005, from 180,000 tonnes to 65,000 tonnes per year.

Alberta Environment sets emissions thresholds in consultation with stakeholders. Even if Alberta Environment entered into some form of partnership delivery, the minister would remain accountable for the development and implementation of the thresholds.

The emissions trading regulation came into effect February 22 of this year. The amendment follows the consensus recommendations of the Clean Air Strategic Alliance and has the support of industry, municipalities, NGOs, which include Pembina, the Environmental Law Centre, and government. The regulation is available to all Albertans through the Queen's Printer website.

In response to the hon. member's question as to why it is an offence to not report historical contamination, the department will continue to work on implementing the Contaminated Sites Stakeholder Advisory Committee recommendations. As we work to implement these recommendations, there will be a detailed review of all of the offence provisions in the act and an update of them in a co-ordinated manner. The offence provisions for the duty to report will be included in an upcoming amendment.

In response to the hon. member's question as to who is responsible for contamination from companies that are no longer in business, the definition of person responsible is quite broad, so there may be other parties that can be required to remediate the sites. The Contaminated Sites Stakeholder Advisory Committee has also recommended a formal process to determine who is responsible for cleanups for companies that go out of business or become defunct. The department will continue to work on implementing this recommendation.

Finally, the hon. member asked why a certain reference to the protection of human health was replaced with "adverse effect." Human health and environmental protection are of paramount concern. The definition of adverse effect in the act includes human health, the environment, and safety or property. Thus, the amendment provides the same protection but allows a broader range of options to return such sites in our communities to productive uses.

I'd like to address the comments recently made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. In supporting the hon. member's suggestion for committed consultation on the documents that are incorporated into regulations as they're developed, the minister

continues Alberta Environment's long-standing commitment to Albertans to consult with affected stakeholders in developing such documents. I'd also like to clarify that people can obtain copies of these documents that are incorporated into regulations such as the codes of practice through the Queen's Printer. Others such as the department standards are available directly through the department website or through links to other websites.

In regard to the hon. member's comment on the need for public accountability of delegated powers, I believe this question is similar to the one I responded to from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

The hon. member also asked why the AENV is partially implementing the recommendations of the Contaminated Sites Stakeholder Advisory Committee. I'd like to clarify that the department reviewed the full suite of recommendations and is working on implementing the recommendations in an efficient manner. The approach is consistent with the department's focus on continuous improvement and streamlining of its acts and regulations. The department is committed to continuing work on the remaining recommendations.

I believe I responded to the hon. member's concern over the use of the term "adverse effect" as opposed to "maximum protection to human life, health and the environment" in my comments to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Finally, the hon. member asked why the amendment does not allow the director to issue an order if an adverse effect may imminently occur. The department is implementing the recommendations of the Contaminated Sites Stakeholder Advisory Committee in this amendment. The department will continue to develop policy to clarify the definition of adverse effect so that industry and the public clearly understand that contaminated sites, irrespective of when they were created, must be remediated.

I'd like to move on to the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. The hon. member shared concerns on emission limits for the electrical sector and the fact that they're based on intensity rate. We understand the nature of the concerns associated with intensity targets for greenhouse gas emissions, but the approach for the electricity project framework for NO₂ and SO₂ – this trading system directly connects emission limits to current and planned generation. As such, they reflect a consensus approach for absolute reductions identified through the multistakeholder CASA process, which involved industry and environmental organizations. Again, based on current expectations these limits will result in a 30 per cent to 50 per cent absolute reduction in NO₂ and SO₂ by 2025, which is much below the 2003 levels. Again, this was supported by the stakeholders. There's further support by a five-year multistakeholder review to ensure limits are appropriate and on track to achieve the desired reductions.

I believe I've addressed the hon. member's question on who has liability for municipalities. I've also addressed the member's concerns in reporting historical contamination, and I've addressed the hon. member's concerns regarding consistent decisions from our inspectors for remediation certificates.

I'd like to move on to the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Comments from the hon. member regarding contaminated sites have been addressed in the answer to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. The hon. member's comments regarding polluter pays are certainly appropriate as these amendments do not change the duty or responsibility of the polluter to remediate the contaminated sites on any sites, even older sites. To quote our minister, perfect protection of Alberta's environment remains a cornerstone of Alberta Environment.

On the comments and concerns of the Member for Calgary-

Varsity about the impaired ability of industry to provide protection because of insufficient funds, I believe those have been answered in my answers to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. [interjections]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has the floor.

Mr. Mitzel: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder had some specific questions regarding the public's access to information. I'd like to clarify that the minister is very much in favour of getting information into the hands of Albertans so that they can make well-informed decisions about how their lives, their work, and their communities affect the environment. The current act requires the minister to issue an order to describe the type of information to release and then amend the regulation to describe how the information can be released.

3:20

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to respond to questions. I trust my responses have helped to reinforce the enabling amendments for the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act that have been brought forward in Bill 29. I look forward to your support.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and make comments on Bill 29, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006. I had the privilege of meeting with the hon. member earlier and talking about some of the concerns that underpin our commitment in Alberta to strengthen legislation, not weaken it. The concerns that I have are that, in a few cases only, this bill is actually weakening our protection of the environment and our holding accountable of industry for contaminated sites.

As the hon. member indicated, the contaminated sites advisory group had significant input into the recommendations but had very little input into the final drafting of this bill. One has to wonder if the oil and gas industry didn't have a lot more influence on the drafting of these recommendations because this alleviates some of the accountability of the oil and gas industry in some of its contaminated sites. It should be of concern to all hon. members. We do not want to let industry off the hook in terms of older, long-standing contaminated sites and who ends up paying for it if it ever gets cleaned up or simply postponed from year to year and decade to decade, as has been the case.

With that in mind, I wanted to make three amendments that would, I think, help to strengthen this bill. I would like to circulate the first. I'll read it out after it's been circulated, Mr. Chairman. It relates to section 14.

The Chair: Do you want to perhaps read it out, hon. member, and then we'll know which one?

Dr. Swann: Yes: (a), in clause (c) in the proposed section 117(3) by striking out "or inspector" after "acceptable to the Director"; (b), in clause (e) in the proposed section 117(4) again by striking out "or inspector" after "conditions the Director"; and (c), in clause (f) in the proposed section 117(5)(a) by striking out "or inspector" after "the Director". The purpose of this amendment, Mr. Chairman, as discussed earlier with the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, is to ensure that the standard is maintained and the guidelines are

fundamentally set by the director and that these guidelines cannot be modified by an inspector. They have to be at least met by minimum standards set by the director, and then if the inspector has further standards to require remediation and reclamation, those indeed could be additional to but must be additional to the minimum standards set by the director.

The Chair: We'll refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Dr. Swann: Thank you.

The Chair: As soon as it's distributed, we'll proceed.
Okay, hon. member, you may proceed.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Chairman, I welcome comment, and particularly from the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. The purpose of this, again, is to ensure that it's the director that sets the terms of the reclamation rather than the director or an inspector, giving far too much leeway, it seems to me, to inspectors, who may have variable training, variable experience, and variable pressures upon them. It's clear to me that the pressures could be significant in the field, companies who stand to lose a significant amount of money. In doing the job up to standard, they are required to bring land back to equivalent use, and there are many different ways in which that equivalent land use might be interpreted in the field.

It's very clear to those of us on the environmental protection side that we need to have a very clear, strong, minimum set of guidelines established by the director and that we cannot have any individual judgment at the local inspector level about what those standards should be.

The Chair: Anyone else wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm speaking in favour of this amendment. It's actually very similar to something that I was considering as well. It just gives us a great deal more clarity and ability to pick a person in a position of responsibility. I believe that we want to ensure that the minister is in fact having the best advice forwarded to his office, and I believe that this amendment would help to do so. That's all.

Thanks.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A1 as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise on a second amendment to Bill 29, Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006. I'm recommending that it be amended by adding the following after section 4:

- 17.1 The Minister must maintain a register which is publicly accessible in which is recorded every
- (a) delegation of a power or duty under section 17(1),
 - (b) transfer of the administration of a provision of this Act under section 18, and
 - (c) designation of a person as a Director under section 25(1).

The Chair: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A2. As soon as it's distributed, we can proceed.

If the hon. member would like to proceed, please do so.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This amendment is recommended in order to protect the government from accusations of political appointments. In fact, it's changing the former section, which would require the minister to appoint inspectors or directors that fall within the government purview and are already on staff. This new bill would allow the government to appoint someone outside government to do an inspection or to do a deliberation around reclamation and conditions for reclamation.

3:30

This may raise questions about political appointments as opposed to internal staff with merit around the required responsibilities to assess reclamation. From the point of view of public trust, if this is going to go ahead, a protective mechanism for government would simply be to include that this be made public as opposed to an internal decision, that can be seen to be politically motivated or biased. The amendment attempts to create a stronger sense of public trust and openness about these appointments and that they are truly in the interests of the environment and reclamation and protection as opposed to other interests that might be interpreted.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I am anxious to leap to my feet to encourage all hon. members of this Assembly to support amendment A2 to Bill 29 at this time. Certainly, I would like to thank the hon. member for introducing this amendment.

When we have a look at this, Mr. Chairman, we see that

- 17.1 The Minister must maintain a register which is publicly accessible in which is recorded every
- (a) delegation of a power or duty under section 17(1),
 - (b) transfer of the administration of a provision of this Act under section 18, and
 - (c) designation of a person as a Director under section 25(1).

I'm certain, after having a look at this, that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View must have looked at some of the audits and the recommendations from last year's Auditor General's report, had a look at Bill 29, and decided that this legislation certainly needed an improvement to it to reflect, again, some of the audits and recommendations from the AG's last annual report.

Now, if we have a look at the existing section 17, Mr. Chairman, and that is an amendment to section 146 of the EPEA, we're talking about reclamation here. There is a concern about the potential scope of progressive reclamation. This reclamation may be applicable in certain long-term, large-scale situations such as large oil sands operations. This application, as I understand it, may not be nearly as suitable for upstream oil and gas operations and other conventional operations.

There are questions always, Mr. Chairman, and amendment A2, I think, would certainly go in the right direction about answering these questions. The questions are surrounding the environmental liability that is going to be left behind for future generations in Fort McMurray at the sites of the tar sands, or synthetic crude production facilities, whichever name the House prefers. We have to ensure that there isn't a significant environmental liability left for future generations. This amendment, I think, is an attempt to ensure that we know what's going on there.

Let's have a look at the Auditor General's report. What the

Auditor General talks about here, on page 177, is: "financial security for land disturbances. The Ministry has made unsatisfactory progress determining whether it has sufficient security to ensure reclamation of oil sands and coal mines." This is the Department of Environment, and that's why I think all hon. members should thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

If we go a little further, to page 180 of the Auditor General's report, whether it's on the contaminated sites information system, the fact that satisfactory progress has been made, or we're comparing this to recommendation 31, which indicates that "the Ministry of Environment implement a system for obtaining sufficient financial security to ensure parties complete the conservation and reclamation activity that the Ministry regulates," well, that's where this registry would certainly come into play.

Now, let's have a look at some of the background information that has been provided. Two years earlier, in the Auditor General's 2002-2003 annual report, recommendation 12, page 103, recommended that "the Ministry of Environment implement an integrated information system to track contaminated sites in Alberta." Hopefully, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View will have an opportunity to satisfy this House that the register, which is going to be accessible to the public, will meet that. Certainly, we know that the ministry, according to this audit and recommendation from the Auditor General, "has a variety of business needs for contaminated site information [and] without a complete, accurate, integrated information system, the Ministry can only summarize or report the status of contaminated site files with considerable manual effort," and that "the system . . . should identify the location and characteristics" at each contaminated site, including any "monitoring, recovery, or other actions."

Now, when we look at the financial security for land disturbances, I think we need to have a look at the background here, Mr. Chairman, and see how this works with amendment A2 and what the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is trying to accomplish with this amendment. What is to be recorded, and what is to be made available to the public in this register? Will the financial security to cover the cost of a reclamation and who the operator is be in this register? If the operator is unable to complete a reclamation activity, will that information be available publicly? Will there be any money left over?

When we talk, Mr. Chairman, about the oil sands, there are many people that argue that perhaps there should be a bit of a royalty set aside for cleanup. I don't agree with that. I think that that should come from another source. That should be part of the cost of operation, setting aside sufficient funds. Now, how will this amendment satisfy that? I don't know, and perhaps the Member for Calgary-Mountain View can help me with that. But when a site is reclaimed, or if the operator fails to meet his obligations, as is noted in the Auditor General's report, the registry is there. The registry will work for that, I'm certain. I see the hon. member nodding in agreement, and I'm pleased with that.

Now, we can go back a little further, and I'm surprised at what an ongoing issue this is. Certainly, there are hon. members on the other side of the House that don't want to talk about this Progressive Conservative government's activities going back 20 and 25 years. I'm just talking here about 1998-1999.

3:40

In the Auditor General's 1998-1999 annual report on Environment it was first identified that security may be inadequate and the process for obtaining it applied inconsistently. Now, even back then the Auditor General is encouraging the department to consider a measure similar to what is being discussed here with amendment A2

to Bill 29. That is the whole idea of a register and what information would be provided.

Now, if we look at the 2000-2001 annual report, the Auditor General again recommended that the ministry deal with the risks of inadequate security. The Auditor General noted that there were some large land-disturbing industries, oil sands and coal mines, that were not providing security at full cost of reclamation and that there was no model in place to determine what a sufficient amount of security other than full cost might be.

It's fine for the Auditor General to repeat this concern going back eight years. I don't know if or when the Auditor General's report was considered not only in the drafting of Bill 29 but, specifically, what information the Member for Calgary-Mountain View had at his disposal, but there must be evidence that this proposal will be beneficial. Sufficient information has to be provided. The nature and the extent of the activity has to be in the register, the difficulty of the reclamation or their conservation project, and also the standards. The hon. member discussed this earlier about the reclamation standards. When we look at landfills and hazardous waste and recyclable operators, this could also apply to some of their needs.

Now, in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would urge all hon. members to consider amendment A2. This isn't a matter of tinkering with the bill. This is a genuine, sincere effort to improve it. I think that in light of the Auditor General's observations and recommendations going back to 1998, we should consider this and consider it for the reasons that I have hopefully explained very reasonably to all hon. members.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to an hon. colleague in regard to amendment A2. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Chairman, I move that we adjourn debate with respect to this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee report bills 33, 34, and 26 and progress with respect to bills 29 and 31.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 26, Bill 33, and Bill 34. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 31 and Bill 29. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Speaker's Ruling
Cameras in the Chamber

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the Deputy

Government House Leader, it has been brought to my attention this evening that there has been the use of cameras in this Assembly. I'd like to bring to everyone's attention that this is clearly an infraction of what's acceptable conduct in this Assembly. I have no way of knowing for sure, but I want to make sure that everyone's memory is refreshed on this matter, and I trust that it won't take place anymore.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always good to have our memories refreshed on the rules of the House.

I think that we've put in a full day today, and I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 officially tomorrow in legislative time or, for those who use the regular calendar, 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 3:49 a.m. on Thursday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, May 4, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/04

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks as legislators for the rich diversity of our 100 years of history and culture. We welcome the many opportunities during this centennial year of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and dedicate ourselves to both the present and the future as we join in the service of Alberta and Canada. Amen.

Please be seated.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Governor General]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, the Royal Canadian Artillery Band will now play *Concerto in D* by Georg Philipp Telemann. The timeless splendour and beauty of this baroque music is a fitting prelude to the entrance of Her Excellency the Governor General into the Alberta Legislature. The band is under the direction of Captain Brian Greenwood, who is in the Speaker's gallery.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

Mr. Speaker, Her Excellency the Right Honourable the Governor General awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Excellency the Right Honourable Governor General of Canada.

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Governor General of Canada, Michaëlle Jean, CC, CMM, COM, CD, and His Excellency Jean-Daniel Lafond, CC, their party, and the Premier entered the Chamber. Her Excellency took her place upon the throne]

The Speaker: I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of the royal anthem, *God Save The Queen*. Please participate.

Hon. Members and Guests:

God save our gracious Queen,
long live our noble Queen,
God save The Queen!
Send her victorious,
happy and glorious,
long to reign over us:
God save The Queen!

1:40

The Speaker: Please be seated.

On behalf of all members and all Albertans I would like to

welcome Your Excellencies to this province and to this legislative Chamber. Your Excellency is the first Governor General of Canada to address this Assembly in this room. You do us a rare and signal honour. [applause]

Your Excellencies, hon. members, and ladies and gentlemen, in 1964 these words were said by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada:

The ways of democracy depend upon the conscious support of all citizens. The function of constitutional monarchy is to personify the democratic state, to sanction legitimate authority, to assure the legality of means and guarantee the execution of the public will.

Your Excellency's presence here today reminds us of this and of the pre-eminent role the Crown plays in the life of this country. Her Majesty's words speak to the bedrock foundation that supports our people and the public institutions that serve our provinces, territories, and the nation.

It is fitting and appropriate that Your Excellency sits on this day in the Chamber beneath the flags of the provinces and territories. They are a unique expression of the loyalty and allegiance that members of this Assembly feel to Canada, just as you represent the human dimension of all that this nation is. Welcome, sincerely, to both of you.

It is now my honour to invite the hon. the Premier of Alberta to extend his greetings.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your Excellencies, Members of the Legislative Assembly, I do want to extend a very warm and sincere Alberta welcome to Their Excellencies on behalf of all members of the Legislature. As the Speaker pointed out, this is the very first time that we've had the honour and the privilege of hearing from a Governor General in this Chamber, and we're looking forward with great anticipation to your remarks today. Welcome, once again.

Thank you. [applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

I would now invite Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, to address the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Address to the Legislative Assembly by Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean

Her Excellency: Premier, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, distinguished guests, chers amis. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I feel truly privileged to be here today. It is a great pleasure for my husband, Jean-Daniel Lafond, and me and also for our daughter, Marie-Éden, to begin here in Edmonton our first official visit to Alberta. We may be a bit early for the wild roses, but I would say that the warmth of your hospitality is like the embrace of your Alberta chinooks.

You know, last night Jean-Daniel and I enjoyed an outstanding jazz concert at Canada's oldest jazz club, the internationally renowned Yardbird Suite. This morning Jean-Daniel shared some meaningful time with francophone community leaders and students at the Campus Saint-Jean of the University of Alberta.

Also this morning I was deeply moved and terribly pleased to have spent some time with some of Canada's wounded soldiers and their families at CFB Edmonton to learn more about the Military Family Resource Centre and the challenges facing military families on a daily basis. Of course, my thoughts are with the family and friends of Corporal Randy Payne, who gathered yesterday in Wainwright, Alberta, for a memorial service, as well as the family of Bombardier Myles Mansell, whose funeral was held yesterday in

Victoria. On Sunday my thoughts will be with Lieutenant Bill Turner and his family and friends as they celebrate his life at a memorial service in Edmonton. [applause]

I can say that, clearly, it is not only Alberta's breathtaking scenery and great economic prosperity that is attracting new citizens here. This province has long been seen as a mecca of opportunity. For over a century hard-working and independently minded people have been coming here to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Je sais, par exemple, que dès les années 1700 les voyageurs canadiens-français y sont venus pour la traite des fourrures après un long et périlleux voyage. Je sais qu'en épousant des femmes crie et en établissant des communautés métisses, ils ont commencé une longue tradition de diversité linguistique et culturelle, qui persiste jusqu'à nos jours. Et puis la ruée vers l'or et la construction du chemin de fer ont donné lieu à la vague d'immigration suivante. Puis après la découverte du pétrole en 1947 votre population a doublé.

[Translation] French-Canadian voyageurs made the long and arduous trek to your lands in search of fur during the 1700s. By marrying Cree women and establishing Métis communities, they began a long tradition of linguistic and cultural diversity that persists today. The gold rush and construction of the railway represented the next wave of migration. And then, following the 1947 discovery of oil, your population doubled. [As submitted]

Poursuivant leurs rêves, chaque nouvelle génération de pionniers entrepreneurs a enrichi l'Alberta. Il vous a fallu – c'est impressionnant – à peine 100 ans pour atteindre un niveau de prospérité qui fait l'envie aujourd'hui du pays.

In pursuing their dreams, each new generation of ambitious pioneers has enriched Alberta itself, and in just 100 years you have together achieved a level of prosperity that is the envy of the country.

Who would have predicted a century ago the thriving communities of this province? Did observers in 1905 envision a rich economy based on agriculture, energy, tourism, and of course world-famous Alberta beef? I had some for lunch today. It was just delicious.

They say that journalists write the first version of history, and it's interesting to review what they had to say a century ago on the occasion of your entry into Canada. I was very interested to learn that the *Globe*, for one, was suitably impressed by Alberta. Reporting on the events and ceremonies of September 1905, its representative observed, "An easterner cannot come west without learning that here they never do things by halves." Similarly, Montreal's French language daily, *La Presse*, reported, "With its immense natural resources, its intelligent and active population, one can predict that the new province is called to play a significant role in Canada's future."

The pioneer spirit of independence and resourcefulness in this province is legendary, yet your deserved reputation for fierce individualism and economic self-reliance belie another lesser known aspect of Alberta's character: your people are among the most generous of Canadians. Eighty-five per cent of you make financial contributions to charitable and nonprofit organizations. Combined with those who volunteer their time, 94 per cent of your citizens believe in giving back.

So Alberta's tremendous prosperity affords you the opportunity to make the most of this attitude of sharing. Surely a prime benefit to be derived from such communal wealth is the ability it gives us to ensure that no one is left behind and that each among us has a voice.

1:50

The health and prosperity of every society is compromised by the

people within it who suffer from poverty, who are disadvantaged by birth, who fight against discrimination of all kinds.

Vous savez, je me suis engagée à me servir de mon poste de Gouverneur Générale pour attirer l'attention justement sur la nécessité de briser les solitudes. C'est-à-dire, il faut entendre par solitude les multiples différences qui continuent de nous séparer: celles qu'imposent la géographie et l'âge, le sexe et l'origine culturelle, la langue et la religion, la pauvreté et l'ignorance.

Mais je crois qu'en oeuvrant ensemble, nous pourrions éliminer les barrières qui empêchent, par exemple, les autochtones d'atteindre leur potentiel et d'apporter leur contribution à la société. En reconnaissant aussi la force qui naît de la diversité linguistique et culturelle, nous pourrions enrichir notre société tout entière. Et en collaborant, nous pourrions trouver des solutions valables à l'aliénation sociale qui conduit certains jeunes à l'isolement et au désespoir.

I have pledged to use my office to focus attention on breaking down solitudes, the myriad of differences that continue to separate us, those imposed by geography and age, by gender and ethnicity, by language and religion, by poverty and ignorance.

I think that by working together, we can eliminate the barriers that prevent, for example, aboriginal people from reaching their potential and contributing to society. I also think that by recognizing the strength that comes from linguistic and cultural diversity, we can enrich our entire society. And by collaborating, we can find meaningful solutions to the social alienation that drives some young people to isolation and despair.

The marginalization of any human being is a loss to us all, and nothing in our affluent society is more disgraceful than our failure to nurture and support those who are most vulnerable. I also believe that children and youth represent not only our future, but they are our present. We have a profound duty to them not only to pass on a better world but also to ensure that they have the capacity to embrace it and each other with respect and responsibility.

This, too, is part of our collective dream and an achievement that has eluded many societies. Close to realizing it in so many ways, we cannot afford to take it for granted or to assume that it is someone else's task. I think every one of us, with every action we take and every attitude we express, has really an opportunity to foster respect, to promote dialogue, to nurture co-operation to ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to fully participate in building our society.

It is especially fitting to reflect on the importance of these values here in this Chamber that was home to the first female legislators in the British Empire. Between them Louise McKinney and Roberta MacAdams exemplified such values. They really championed initiatives and supported legislation to help widows, to help immigrants, to help people with disabilities, to help soldiers and their families.

Here in this House, at a time of unprecedented prosperity in your province, I think you have a golden opportunity to continue this tradition. Your capacity to make a difference in the lives of others through your actions and through your decisions is limitless.

So I want to say that I look forward to hearing of your plans and to continuing the conversation we start this week. It will be but the first chapter in our ongoing dialogue. I know that you and the people of Alberta you represent have important matters to discuss, and I think you have very inspiring stories to share and, I must say, valuable lessons to teach me.

So I am here. We are here to listen.

Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup. [applause]

The Speaker: Les mots de Votre Excellence ont retenu l'esprit et la

promesse de la province de l'Alberta. [Translation] Your Excellency's words have captured the spirit and the promise of the province of Alberta. [As submitted]

Your Excellencies, this House would ask that you carry with you as our Queen's representative our good and heartfelt wishes for success in all that you endeavour to do across this great nation.

To conclude our ceremony today, I would invite Mr. Paul Lorieau, who is in the Speaker's gallery, to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all here to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members and Guests:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Excellencies, their party, and the Premier left the Chamber as a fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

2:00

Introduction of Guests

head:

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am just delighted today that we have been joined by some guests in the public gallery. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jo Whitford, who is here with 27 members of the Minerva senior studies program from Grant MacEwan in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. This is a very active group. They host a wonderful seniors' tea during Seniors' Week in the beginning of June. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first person that I would like to introduce is my wife, Karin Olson. She's here for the ceremony today, and I'm just introducing her on the spur of the moment. She doesn't know I'm doing this. I'd ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of all members of this House.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Ron and Lynda Jonson. Ron and Lynda are tireless advocates for senior issues and for improving conditions in Alberta long-term care facilities. Lynda is a former registered nurse, and Ron is a former engineer. Living in Hinton, together they helped form the group Seniors I Care. They're here today to share their concerns regarding the government's recent announcement on long-term care policy. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is an honour today to stand and introduce to you and through you an outstanding group of students from Glenwood. They are 14 grade 9 students. I'd just like to point out at this time that this school is a blended school. There are members of the Blood band that join them, and together they learn, they play, and they have a friendship. It's great to see that community and how together they're stronger. I'd ask them and their principal, Kelly Thomas, and his wife, Kathy, and Mrs. Deb Johnson and her husband, Kevin, if they'd all please stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of distinguished guests from the Senate of Canada who are here this afternoon, no doubt to listen to the speech and comments made by Her Excellency the Governor General. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly. The first one is no stranger to this Assembly. The former leader of the Liberal opposition, Senator Grant Mitchell, is in attendance today. Also, from the city of Edmonton, a Senator that's done a fine job for a number of years, representing our province in Ottawa, Senator Tommy Banks. Finally, also representing Alberta and doing a fine job, Senator Claudette Tardif.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very quickly I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 47 parents and students from home school learning in Okotoks. I would ask them to please rise and quickly receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two aboriginal leaders who are seated in the members' gallery: Alden Armstrong, who is the president of the MSGC, and Audrey Poitras, who is the president of the Métis Nation of Alberta. I'd ask that they stand and receive a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have this opportunity to introduce to the members of the Assembly a person that is no stranger to this Assembly, the first lady Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta, the Hon. Helen Hunley. Of course, she resides in the town of Rocky Mountain House. I would ask the members to give her the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 30 parent helpers, teachers, and students all from my hometown, Coronation, the greatest place on earth to be. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Dan Kinakin, and parent helpers Mark Zimmer, Joyce Webster, Jackie Rodvang, Lori Eno, Greg Schroeder, Angie Whiteford, Barb Smith, Rowena Swahn, and George Nichols. I'd ask them to rise – they're in the public gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure on this special occasion to introduce to you and through you two guests today: my sister, Ms Andrea Rogers, and a special friend, Mr. Maurice Locker. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a volunteer par excellence, a community leader in north Edmonton. Marg Day, could you please rise and be welcomed by the members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly David Kostyk. David Kostyk is a member from Glengarry, now a person within Edmonton-Decore constituency, and resides within my riding. He is a tireless volunteer, recognized for his efforts for community involvement as well as cultural diversity. I'd like David to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of very outstanding and distinguished Albertans, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. They have been meeting yesterday, today, and tomorrow. They travel around the province gathering information and making recommendations to the minister of seniors. They are Mr. Jim Acton, from Edmonton; Diane Caleffi, from Calgary; Jean Dreger, from Calgary; Clyde Elford, from Calgary; Dr. Bill Forbes, of Edmonton; Leonard Olson, I think from High Prairie; Dawn Parent, of Lacombe; Maureen Hemingway Schloss, from Edmonton; Janet Tomalty, from Barrhead; Dr. David Belcher, from Drayton Valley; and Dr. Brad Hagen, from Lethbridge. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Alberta Office in Washington

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our million dollar man in Washington is living up to his price tag. Reports of lavish hosting expenses, numerous return trips to Alberta, and an extravagant \$8,000 a month apartment have many Albertans shaking their heads over the hypocrisy of this action from a former minister of this government who once celebrated layoffs and government cuts. My questions are to the Minister of Intergovernmental and International Relations. Given that most of the hosting expenses racked up by Murray Smith were for wining and dining visiting Tory MLAs from Alberta, can this minister explain what purpose is being served by wooing members of this government?

2:10

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the United States is Alberta's largest trading partner. There are \$65 billion worth of exports that go from Alberta into the United States. It's quite clear that it is important for us to have a good trading relationship with people in Washington. The number of occasions that Mr. Smith has not only hosted members of government from here in Washington – he has also hosted a number of people in Washington and has often facilitated a meeting of the two. The result is that we have built relationships with decision-makers, policy-makers in Washington, DC. Since our office has opened, the government of Alberta, the province of Alberta has had an unprecedented amount of media coverage in Washington. That media coverage is well known. The border has been opened to Alberta beef. There have been more ministers' meetings in Washington than have ever been held before. So the cost is well justified considering that we have a \$65 billion trade relationship.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope I get a straighter answer to this question. Can the minister confirm that Murray Smith is not receiving any personal compensation for speaking engagements he attends in Alberta on the taxpayers' dime?

Mr. Mar: I'm not aware of that at all, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member has some advice on this matter, then he should table it in the House, and we'll proceed on that basis, but to simply go on the basis of innuendo is not appropriate and not becoming of this member.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell this Assembly what checks and balances are put on Murray Smith's expenses while he is in Washington? For example, does his credit card have a spending limit?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, all of the expenses that are incurred as a result of the conduct of his work over there are in accordance with the normal government policy associated with individuals who would serve in the capacity that he serves in, and I can assure you and assure Albertans and members of this House that the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations goes through the same auditing process by Alberta's Auditor General. As we speak, there are people from the Auditor General's department in our department, right now, and they will be there until the 18th of this month. If something arises as a result of the normal course of auditing and the Auditor General has recommendations to make thereafter, we will certainly entertain them and proceed on accepting his recommendations.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Biofuels Industry

Dr. Taft: Future economic opportunity in the form of biofuels is literally out there growing in fields, but this government is once again simply too tired to harvest the economic benefits of this emerging industry. Once again, this government is a follower in a quest for renewable energy. My questions are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given that Agriculture Canada said that mandating an 8 per cent ethanol content in all fuels would alleviate this country's farm income crisis, will this minister

urge his government to mandate ethanol content in all fuels sold in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, thanks to the hon. member for the question because it gives me a chance to talk a little bit about what we're doing in biofuels in Alberta. We have initiated a strategy for biofuels that is probably leading the country in terms of developing a sustainable biofuels industry for our province that isn't going to be sustained based on government grants. It's not going to be sustained based on handouts; it's going to be based on good economics and sound financial sense.

I can say that on my recent trips into Europe with the WTO I was also able to talk to some of the European agricultural ministers about biofuels and where they're headed with their industry, how that reflects upon the biodiesel impact that we might have in Canada in our oilseeds industry, which is a critical component of the grains and oilseed sector. In addition to that, we were able to look at some new technologies on the ethanol production. I think that it would be premature of us to jump in to some old technologies when new technologies are coming to the forefront which are more efficient; they're more economical.

Mr. Speaker, we're looking at pilot projects where we might tie biofuels with biodigesters to ethanol production, which gives us not only an environmental enhancement but also fuel efficiency and feasibility.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like dithering to me.

To the same minister: will the minister of agriculture provide any incentives for farmers to develop biodiesel production facilities and convert farm machinery to take advantage of the wide range of benefits from this type of fuel?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again a good question because we are doing those things. We are actually sitting down, talking to the Minister of the Environment federally, who handles this file, as opposed to the minister of agriculture. We're working in consultation with the federal Department of the Environment and the federal department of agriculture. The federal minister and I have talked about his commitment politically to creating a mandatory blend across Canada, which makes a lot more sense than individual provinces having a patchwork across the country. That's what we're advocating because that makes sense.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More dithering.

Again to the same minister: will the minister provide biofuel incentives to make renewable energy from animal wastes a reality in places like Red Deer county?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member doesn't do research before he asks questions. Alberta is a leader in the dry manure biodigestion field. If he would care to drive a little bit outside the outskirts of Edmonton, he would find North America's first biodigester of dry manure matter at Highland Feeders, just north of Vegreville. We helped put that project on the map.

If the hon. member would also do further research and perhaps talk to that county, he would also understand that I've met with them several times. We are working with them and our federal counterparts to maybe see that project come to fruition, hopefully, in the near future.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Tools for Skilled Tradespeople

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Safe, quality tools cost big bucks for tradesmen. For example, field mechanics need pricey laptops for diagnostics; their trucks when fully rigged can cost over a hundred grand. For many trades it's not a simple tool kit anymore. It is urgent in order to keep, attract, and train tradespeople in Alberta that this government provide more than the small amounts allowed in the federal government's budget. To the Minister of Finance: will the minister commit to having this government proclaim within two months the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act of 2001, now five years in waiting, so that tradesmen and apprentices can plan their tool purchases for this tax year?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we discussed this a couple of days ago in the House. The federal government has since come down with their budget. One of the things that we attempt to do on a very regular basis, in fact all of the time, is ensure that we follow and change our tax policy when the federal government enters into these areas. Our legislation certainly focuses on apprenticeship, and that's important. What I will commit to the hon. member is that we will be reviewing the federal initiative. We will be entertaining, I would expect, changes to our tax legislation to ensure that people who are in those areas have the most advantage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Finance: is the Finance ministry examining any other tax measures to keep tradesmen in Alberta, such as a travel tax break for work trips to Fort McMurray?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I invite the hon. member and all of the members opposite to sit in the Legislature – I think it's a week yesterday – on the 10th when we will have an opportunity for two hours to entertain questions on Alberta's tax policy. It will take about that long to talk about the tax advantages that tradesmen, individuals, businesses, corporations have in this province. I want to make sure that everyone is aware of all of the tax changes that we made in this budget, which have been received very positively by Albertans, by business and individuals.

2:20

I would also remind the hon. member that I've been very straightforward in my discussions on tax policy. We initiated an internal tax review last year. We implemented a number of tax changes. Now, first, we ensured that lower and middle-income persons receive the benefit. You would recall the employment tax benefit, and you would recall that in this budget that becomes indexed beginning this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the minister of human resources on quality, safe tools. What has the

minister done to ensure that his safety inspectors check that the tools and equipment brought in by temporary foreign contractors to our oil sands are up to Alberta safety standards?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, we're fortunate in Alberta to have such a strong economy, a booming economy because of a good government. You know, any person that works or comes to Alberta has to follow the employment standards, and they're the highest in North America.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Continuing Care Standards

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's more than a year since the Premier promised Albertans that this government would implement every one of the Auditor General's recommendations regarding long-term care in this province, yet today seniors' advocate Lynda Jonson told reporters that little has changed, and in fact the situation may have gotten worse. Yesterday's announcement about new standards are so vague, enforcement is so weak, and funding falls so far short of what the government's own MLA committee said was necessary that the government has completely failed to keep its promise to the people of Alberta and to the seniors of Alberta. My first question is to the minister of seniors. Given that the government's own MLA committee on long-term care said that \$250 million of additional funding would be required to raise standards to the level that was necessary under the Auditor General's report, why is the government only providing an additional \$42 million? Why could the government give the horse-racing industry \$63 million but seniors only \$42 million?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to address that question regarding funding for the budget for continuing care, which is administered through two departments, through the Ministry of Health and Wellness and through my department. The \$42 million that the member is referring to, of course, is for the accommodation side, which is within my department. The funding that was put in place with third-quarter funding as well as the current budget over the past three months combined has been approximately \$140 million between the two departments. That was referred to in the estimates by both the Minister of Health and Wellness and myself. It's significant. It's a hundred million dollars more than what the member has mentioned.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And \$150 million less than what's needed.

My second question is to the minister as well. The changes proposed in yesterday's announcement to inspections simply replace a toothless inspection committee with another toothless inspection committee. When will the government commit to having independent, professional, unannounced inspections of our long-term care facilities? Enough of these silly committees.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is clearly one of the recommendations from the MLA task force, and that is exactly

where we're moving toward: unannounced inspections. That will come through with the legislation and regulations that are required. The very first step and the most important was implementing the standards. That did occur yesterday. There's an immediacy to that. Yes, there will be unannounced inspections as we follow through with the monitoring, the enforcement, the concerns resolution process. That's all within the next step.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We also learned that relatives of individuals who are in the Hinton long-term care facility are on 24-hour rotation providing care to their loved ones. Given that situation, how can the minister tell people that they need to keep waiting and waiting? They've waited long enough. People are very, very badly cared for in many of our facilities. When will the minister do something about it?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, people are well cared for in our facilities, and I can tell you this: we very much want to continue to have families involved in the care of their loved ones in facilities. I'm not certain of the particular situation that you're discussing, but I do know my own family and friends' families and people that I've had an opportunity to dialogue with, you know, over a number of years, especially as an acute-care nurse for 20 years. Families become very involved in the care of their loved ones that are, well, in long-term care especially. Yes, families will rotate on a 24-hour basis when they're involved in care. I hope, actually, that families continue to be involved.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Significant new responsibilities have been downloaded onto continuing care facilities and the nine regional health authorities, who have been given an entire year to implement a patchwork of separate policies and processes. It appears that this new continuing care system offers very little consumer protection to Albertans and allows the government to avoid accountability. My questions are to the minister of health. Why did this government choose to define nursing services like bathing, personal hygiene, and toileting as personal care services rather than essential health care services? Is it because residents are going to have to pay for them?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me clarify that there is no intent to have persons pay for those care services. What is intended is that there's a personal care plan for every single resident in any kind of continuing care or care plan where people are receiving publicly funded health care services, and that is more important. For example, you could implement cross-ministry or across Alberta Health and Wellness a standard of three or four baths per week, and if you do that, you're going to severely compromise somebody whose skin is paper thin and who is unable to absorb that. So perhaps the most effective way is to say that the personal care plan must, in agreement with either the person being cared for or their families or their other caregivers not currently paid for by the government of Alberta – are given the kind of care that is most appropriate for them.

Mr. Speaker, in the last two series of questions what I think was

missed in my response yesterday to this Assembly was the fact that in the last few months the Health Quality Council has been given the status and the authority to assess through its matrix of quality the quality of care delivery in any kind of facility that exists in Alberta that is publicly funded as a health care facility. We look forward to their participation.

Ms Pastoor: Given that dependent seniors are being reclassified into assisted living settings, in which they're responsible for more costs, what protections are in place to prevent price-gouging in these settings, private and public?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the very first comment should be that people who are assessed to move into another type of facility, such as assisted living facilities, are not assessed to be punitive but, rather, to provide services that are more appropriate to the kinds of support they need. Regional health authorities have belabored the fact with me that people who exist in long-term care facilities frequently just exist. They don't live in the kind of wonderful, interactive fashion that they could in an assisted living facility. Yes, with assisted living there are other kinds of costs that are described and prescribed. In fact, where somebody is unable to afford costs that are part of their menu, then there is an accommodation that can be made in consultation with the regional health authority.

Ms Pastoor: Will the minister guarantee that the cost to the facilities of meeting the new standards will not be off-loaded onto the residents?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly like to be able to guarantee that, but I'm trying to avoid the word "guarantee" and simply say that the funding that is in Health and Wellness's budget is intended to in fact facilitate the delivery of those care standards with no intent to provide any additional cost to residents. That is certainly not part of the plan.

Mr. Speaker, you know, just once it would be lovely to give a response that people actually listened to.

2:30

Métis Hunting Rights

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Justice released the excellent report of the MLA Committee on Métis Harvesting, under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The report makes some important recommendations to change the regime under which Métis harvesting is conducted in Alberta. Press reports indicate, however, that one of the Métis associations is not receptive to negotiating some of the proposed changes. My question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Will the minister assure wildlife managers, conservationists, aboriginals, and hunters and fishers in the province of Alberta that the recommendations of the Métis harvesting report will be reflected in government policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly would agree with the hon. member that it was an excellent report that the MLA committee came out with, and I'd like to acknowledge his participation on that committee in producing the excellent report.

The position of the government is reflected in the report, and candidly we acknowledge that the Métis people have a right to harvest fish and wildlife for food. A number of issues were raised in that particular report. We have indicated that it's important that

we as government revisit the interim harvesting agreements that were entered into in 2004 and that we will be doing it in the context of the recommendations.

We intend to proceed on the basis of negotiation in good faith, and I see no reason at this point in time to deflect from that particular objective on the basis of some editorial or newspaper articles. I believe, on the basis of what I know, that the Métis people have a good reason to ensure that the rights that they have are appropriately and properly reflected in the agreement, and that is how we are going to proceed.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister outline to the House a time frame for implementing those recommendations into law?

Mr. Stevens: Well, the recommendations, Mr. Speaker, are going to be implemented, on the basis of what I have indicated, in a new agreement with the Métis people, so that is where the recommendations will be implemented in due course.

Dr. Brown: A further supplementary, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: can the minister advise the House how his department and his enforcement staff will manage Métis harvesting of sensitive species like bighorn sheep and grizzly bears in the interval between now and when a new agreement is reached?

Mr. Coumts: Well, Mr. Speaker, our role in this interim agreement is to continue to manage and monitor and enforce hunting and trapping and fishing regulations in the province under the terms of the interim agreement. We've identified, through the systems we have in place and the registration system we have in place, those sensitive species that the hon. member talked about, that harvesting by Métis is relatively a small percentage of the total harvest of those species.

The renegotiation process that was outlined certainly tells us that if anything is further required in terms of monitoring and managing, we will have the systems in place to do that, and we will continue to do the work that fish and wildlife officers and the department have set up to do to manage this interim agreement or another agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Regulatory Review

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Wednesday, April 12, when questioned about the government's red tape regulatory review, the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency stated in this House that his employees "would take some extra time from their jobs they're doing to work on this, and we will be going ahead and getting some regulatory review done." I cannot imagine that there is too much on this ministry's plate so that it cannot fully tackle this important initiative. "Some" is simply not good enough. To the hon. minister: can the minister tell us how much of a regulatory review his department will be able to complete in their extra time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the hon. member across that it's a very, very important initiative. I want you to know that we're moving along very well with it. We have an MLA task force chaired by the hon. Member for

Foothills-Rocky View and the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and the hon. Member for Calgary-West. They've been meeting diligently with some industry folks from different sectors of our economy. They've been meeting with businesspeople. They've been meeting with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. They're compiling a lot of things, and they're moving forward with reviewing some of the regulations. I'm sure we'll find some streamlining, and you'll find that you'll be very happy with the results.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the hon. minister tell us what important Restructuring and Government Efficiency initiatives will be put on hold, delayed, cancelled, shelved, or otherwise interrupted as staff take some extra time to conduct a regulatory review?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there'll be nothing put on hold. We're going to move ahead with everything we can.

Mr. Elsalhy: My second supplemental to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that the minister was turned down for funding for a proper regulatory review, can he tell us what other proposed departmental projects were turned down for funding by the Treasury Board?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I think the Treasury Board did a very good job with what they had to work with. They had to make their priorities. We will work around our priorities, and we will get things done, what needs to be done for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Climate Change

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Professor Dave Sauchyn from the University of Regina made a startling announcement at an environment conference held here in Edmonton. According to Mr. Sauchyn in the next 45 years the semi-arid climate around Medicine Hat today will spread north, extending as far as my constituency of Red Deer-North. Mr. Sauchyn went on to say, "No matter what action is taken to prevent further change, Albertans will have to . . . adapt to a [new] climate." I'm not so sure that that's a bad thing. With a longer growing season I'd love to be able to grow beefsteak tomatoes and juicy apricots. My question is to the Minister of Environment. In light of this information what is the government doing to ensure that we can adapt to climate change?

The Speaker: Well, hold on a second here. If I understand this correctly, the hon. member wants to know if the Minister of Environment can foresee the future. This is what this question is all about. Give it your best shot, Mr. Minister, but we're dealing with government policy here.

Mr. Boutilier: I can see a future for all of these members in here. I'll share with you later what that is, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say this: I think yesterday's comments by the professor are a validation. As quoted by this independent professor from the University of Regina, there is no other province in Canada that is dealing with the issue of adaptation, adapting to the environ-

ment, like the province of Alberta has. That's part of our climate change plan. I think that even more so understanding how we adapt to change in a climate has always been and always will be our plan because truly our plan has separated us from every other province in Canada. I can honestly say to all members and all Albertans that we are taking action on this important topic in securing our future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My only supplemental, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that the government can't act alone, what can Albertans do to ensure that they are protected from the effects of climate change?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, part of our climate change strategy deals with renewables. It deals with technology, which I presented in Buenos Aires at a COP 10 conference. Also, did you know that this province is the first province in Canada to ever have a Ministry of Environment? Did you know that this province was the first province in Canada to have a Climate Change Central? Did you know that this province was the first province in Canada in terms of having a climate change law, unlike any other province, including even the federal government? Albertans care deeply about the environment, and that's why this province just simply doesn't talk about things; we take action. The validation by the professor is exactly that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

2:40 Southeast Edmonton Ring Road

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency borders on the southeast portion of the ring road. A number of my constituents are concerned that there has been inadequate consultation, a lack of child safety initiatives, and no real sound barriers. My question is to the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, capital planning. Why has this government failed to provide adequate consultation for Edmonton-Ellerslie residents who are directly affected by this development?

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I'd like a little clarification after on the question, but I do think you have to realize that we've got a great news story to tell. Part of it is that in the next three years we're going to be doing a huge number of projects, mainly southeast, Henday road, the southwest, the north ring road. We've got something like 51 school projects, we're going to add 10,000 student places, and the number of highways in the province will exceed 1,000 kilometres, 300 of them brand new.

Mr. Agnihotri: That was not my question anyway. My question was on consultation.

To the same minister: given that the road is less than 100 feet away from some houses in that area, why hasn't the government implemented a child safety strategy?

Mr. McFarland: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that there have been many, many community involvement projects, projects such as the Anthony Henday, that have a lot of years of planning, have had many, many different community groups involved in the planning. If you have a specific one in mind, I'd be pleased to follow it up with the member.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: given the close proximity of the ring road to Edmonton-Ellerslie residents, why isn't the government building real sound barriers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you. Sound barriers, to my understanding, are something that we have looked at, continue to look at. In the case of the particulars, again if you have a particular location, I'd be more than pleased to follow it up with the department on your behalf.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Alberta Office in Washington

(continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It looks like Alberta's man in Washington is living a bit high on the hog at taxpayers' expense these days: \$8,000 a month to rent an apartment near Embassy Row, taxpayer-funded monthly flights back and forth to Calgary, and a \$30,000 bonus on top of an already generous \$233,000 pay package. To the minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations: why is it that when former Tory politicians get patronage appointments to represent this province in foreign lands, they always seem to end up living a lifestyle more akin to Donald Trump than regular working people?

Mr. Mar: If one were to ask the people at KPMG or at Mercer, who do the types of surveys of the cost of doing business in various cities throughout the world, what you'll find is that Washington is a very expensive place to live. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the cost of housing our senior embassy officials with the federal government ranges between \$8,800 and \$11,000 a month for accommodations. My understanding of this is that the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation reviewed all of the different options available for the housing of Mr. Smith. This was found to be the most cost-effective one.

With respect to other expenses, like taxis, which has been raised by the media and by hon. members in this House in the media, the reality is that parking is between \$6 and \$9 for half an hour. It's a common way of doing business. For the first several months that Mr. Smith was down in Washington, he didn't have a vehicle, so he was taking the metro and he was taking taxis.

Mr. Speaker, it may seem like an extravagance to this hon. member, but it is not. It is a normal cost of doing business. It is a normal way of conducting business in a place like Washington, DC.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, certainly it seems like extravagance in accordance with regular people, working people in this province.

I'd ask the minister if he couldn't ask our Washington representative to at least try to find some digs in a different category, a little less fancy than the \$8,000 a month that he's charging taxpayers to rent the current apartment that he has.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I think, like the Amazing Karnak, I answered the hon. member's question before I even heard it. I answered it in my first response. I indicated that my understanding and my briefing is that the department of infrastructure looked at all of the various options. This was the most cost-effective one that was available to us.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, on top of all these perks of office – a \$233,000 salary, an \$8,000 a month apartment, and regular flights back home – why does our high-living man in Washington also get paid a \$30,000 hardship bonus?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, there is no hardship associated with living in Washington, and there is no hardship pay associated with it either. What was reported, in fact, was a \$15,000 allowance that is consistent with federal government policies to note that the cost of living in various postings in the world costs more, so \$15,000 in accordance with the federal guidelines is what Mr. Smith was paid. Now, as the exchange rate for the Canadian dollar goes up, the amount of that allowance will go down. But there is nothing out of the ordinary for the allowance that has been given to Mr. Smith. It is in accordance with federal guidelines.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Water Use by Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Pembina Institute just released a report calling for a moratorium on water licences for the oil sands projects and reductions in how much water is used by the oil and gas industry. This morning I heard the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers on the radio talking about water use for the oil sands. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is the government doing to make sure that industry doesn't use water to excess?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, our Water for Life strategy, of course, is optimizing the use of water. In fact, each and every one of us in here – and I ask you, sincerely, for a moment in terms of water usage. Even the smallest effort – and think about this – like in the morning, when you wake up, turning off your tap when you're brushing your teeth will make a difference in water usage. Do you do that, or do you allow the tap to continue to run? I want to say that at one point I used to let the tap run, but I no longer do it because I'm taking personal responsibility. I'm also looking for responsibility from industry and from all sectors and all industries, not just oil and gas but also agriculture. I want to just end by saying that the optimization of water usage and the conservation of water into the future will no longer be a luxury. It will be a fact and an Alberta law that we are executing through the Water for Life strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since the Pembina report also specifically calls for the government to put a price on fresh water to provide companies with an incentive to maximize efficiency and to seek opportunities to eliminate and reduce water use, my question again to the same minister: are there plans to start charging the oil and gas industry for the water they are using?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, everything has a price. Does water have a price? Unequivocally so. In fact, I would ask you this. If you were in a desert and you had a choice of a barrel of oil and a barrel of water, what is it you would take, and what has value? It's pretty obvious to me what we would be taking. [interjections] Sometimes when you ask rhetorical questions, the answers are very obvious, but I didn't really require a response.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, our oil field injection policy is a

policy that we have implemented. It requires industry to seek alternative sources such as saline water and CO₂, which are other important alternatives to in fact using fresh water. That is also part of our Water for Life strategy.

2:50

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, my final supplemental, again to the Minister of Environment: what is the minister's response to the comments of the Pembina Institute, who is calling for a moratorium on development, and the oil and gas industry, that insists that it's already reducing water use?

Mr. Boutilier: I expect industry to continue to reduce water use. In fact, I expect all Albertans – individuals, industry, and all sectors – to continue to be more efficient in their conservation of water, but I think that to simply say a moratorium does not mean that we are stopping thinking. We are moving forward, executing our Water for Life strategy. It is our goal to have a 30 per cent improvement in water usage by the year 2015. It's a noble goal. We're on track to achieve that objective based on actions that everyone is taking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Sale of Surplus Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Progressive Conservative government's ring road land scandal is certainly a political skeleton that is no longer buried. Land purchased by the government on behalf of taxpayers continues to be sold off at well below real estate market prices. In 2001 MacEwan West Developments paid over \$40,000 per acre to a private landowner. They paid market value. This government, however, continues to sell surplus land for a great deal less than market value. In 2002 a 147-acre parcel was sold to the Royal Development Corporation by this government for one-quarter of what the taxpayers paid for the property in 1981. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Given that taxpayers forked over \$22,000 per acre for land by the ring road in 1981 and the market set the price for land in that area at \$40,000 per acre in 2001, why did the government sell this land a year later, in 2002, for only \$5,700 per acre?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, the saga continues day after day, but he obviously has not really got an interest in why these things happen, or else he would have given me the information yesterday, and I could have had the answer for this particular one today. But the pattern has to be that he does this in the House, so then I have to get the information. I've got the information from the sale he asked about yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, I'll go back just a little bit. With the Sheckter offers to sell, the situation was different. Often in these cases the offer to sell is a different condition. In the particular one that the member asked about yesterday, the individual that was selling it wanted to sell the whole quarter section, the whole thing, so we bought the whole thing. In the Sheckter deals he didn't want to sell the whole parcel, so there is that difference.

The fact is that in 1985 we paid \$11,916 per acre. Today the member talks about 1981. Well, I can tell the member right off the bat that in 1981 the price of comparable land was higher than it was in 1985. However, in 1985 we bought this land. In 1992, after we had taken out what we needed, we were selling on the open market the rest of the property, 49-some acres. The appraised value was \$8,000. We listed it on the market at that price through multiple listings, and it didn't sell.

So in 1995 another independent, accredited, licensed appraiser did an appraisal, and he came up with \$5,500 an acre. This was in 1995. Once again it was listed as a multilisting. It was listed at \$570,000, Mr. Speaker, and the fact is that it wouldn't sell at that price. There was an offer from one of the real estate agents that in fact they would pay \$5,280 an acre, and we accepted the offer. That's the story from yesterday.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if the member is really that . . .

The Speaker: I appreciate this exchange, but before too long I'm going to have to make a ruling on this that we're going to have to be dealing with these things under Written Questions or Motions for Returns. I don't understand the urgency of debating something from 1981 to 1994, and I've given a lot of leeway on this.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, proceed with your next question.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that taxpayers lost \$2.3 million on this bad deal alone, who in this Progressive Conservative government authorized this sale to the Royal Development Corporation in 2002 and why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the guidance. I want to go one step further. If, in fact, this member believes that the taxpayer lost that kind of money, I would ask him to please take it to the Auditor General and have the Auditor General investigate so that we can quit this nonsense in the House.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that land further west of the ring road was sold the previous year, 2001, again by a private owner, for \$40,000 per acre to a local land developer, who in the government appraised this land and let it go for only \$5,700 per acre? Who did that appraisal?

Mr. Lund: The answer is the same as the last one: take it to the Auditor General. I can go through and on Monday have the hon. member ask me the question again, and I'll have all of the answers, but he doesn't seem to accept that. So take it to the Auditor General. Will you do that? I doubt it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Avian Flu

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are relieved to be coming to the end of a not too severe flu season. There are now concerns voiced about a possible avian flu epidemic coming to Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Because avian flu could be brought to Alberta by waterfowl, will your department be involved in monitoring for this disease in wild birds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Alberta certainly has worked very closely with our federal government on a national surveillance program. Migratory birds are under the auspices of the federal government, but each province is responsible for examining the need for their own surveillance program within

their own jurisdictions. So it's really important that in terms of wild birds, we continue to concentrate our efforts on the fall bird migration as this follows the breeding season, when North American and Asian birds use the same areas. My department continues to work on this surveillance program and takes a proactive approach to make sure that we continue to monitor our birds.

In terms of this summer, which is what the question was about, in terms of crows and magpies that may be found on the side of the road, it's really important that as we're checking for West Nile virus, if we find indications of avian bird flu in this, we will also report them to the department of health and to the appropriate authorities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. My second question is to the minister of health. Though the possibility of an avian flu pandemic seems to be more and more unlikely, what measures are being taken to prepare Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to clarify that avian influenza by itself is not a condition or a disease or an influenza that normally attacks humans. However, the disease has become particularly strong lately. H5N1 has had a very significant effect on people who handle poultry. The World Health Organization reports that as of the end of April there have been 202 cases and over 113 deaths. So we are monitoring with not only our department but other departments. We are working with a lot of due diligence to make sure that we are prepared. The program that we've had since 2003 has been updated. Perhaps most significantly, at the world health congress that I attended last month, it was noted that about 35 per cent of health care providers were ready in the case of a pandemic. When they asked the same sampling of people – some 1,500 – how many had in fact prepared their families, only 9 per cent had. There's a message to all of us to look after ourselves and to make sure that we manage the flu and influenza well.

Ms DeLong: No further supplementals. Thank you.

head: 3:00 **Vignettes from the Assembly's History**

The Speaker: Hon members, today the Legislative Assembly made history with the invitation to the Governor General, the first time in our 101 years. That is our historical vignette of the day. We actually made it.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Education Support Staff

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in celebration of Education Week, 2006. I have spent a career in education and worked in education across the province, and while I have worked as a teacher and an administrator, I have always believed that I have worked my whole life as an educator.

This leads me to the topic of my statement today: the unsung heroes of the education system. While people often see and appreciate the hard work and professionalism provided by our teachers, the education system is the product of a wide range of people working together in pursuit of educating our future citizens. Any one of my colleagues who has visited a school will see right away the efficient and friendly administrative support staff, custodians, cafeteria workers, teacher assistants, and many parent and community volunteers who are a vital part of the operation of every school.

Outside the school, bus drivers, traffic patrollers, and lunchtime supervision staff all play a vital role in getting children into the classroom safely. As classrooms in society become increasingly complex, the business of educating our children no longer involves one profession but also guidance and personal counsellors, school librarians, nutritionists, and contributions from other specialists. System governance is also vital, and we need to recognize the work of school trustees, who give of their time as democratically elected governors of the education system. All of these people are part of keeping a modern public education system running and meeting the needs of today's children.

In closing, I feel that it is necessary to say that education support staff are feeling the impacts of shortsighted cutbacks, and the school system will suffer from their loss. I remember a time when a school custodian stopped to tie the shoe of a kindergarten child. It was then that my heart truly realized the value of all educational support staff across this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, did you have a petition?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition sponsored by the Friends of Medicare. This particular group of petitions has 6,388 signatures. It calls on the government to abandon its plans to implement the third way health reforms, which they sort of did and for the Assembly to defeat any legislation that would allow the expansion of private hospitals or insurance or allow doctors to work both in the private and public system, and opposes any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday, May 8, I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 16 through 24.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday, May 8, I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 27 through 32.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Official Opposition House Leader to the Speaker objecting to the request to waive Standing Order 8(5)(c) for Bill 208 without bringing that request to the House for unanimous consent to do so. I have provided copies to the Government House Leader and the House leader of the third party.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last evening

myself and several colleagues from the Official Opposition had the opportunity to attend Edmonton Catholic schools' 17th annual Celebration of the Arts. The theme of last night's gala was Children Are God's Creation, and featured were 630 performers from 18 different schools. I'm pleased this afternoon to be able to table the appropriate number of copies of the program from that wonderful event.

Thank you.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. If I could ask the Government House Leader to share with us the projected government business for the week commencing May 8. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to provide that information. On Monday, May 8, in the afternoon, of course, is private members' business. We'll deal with written questions and motions for returns, as I indicated earlier, and under Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole will deal with bills 207 and 208. On Monday evening private member's Motion 510 and government bills and orders, second reading on bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, and Pr. 3, Committee of the Whole on bills 29, 35, and 20, and as per the Order Paper if we have great success in moving along.

On Tuesday afternoon Committee of Supply, day 21 of 24, Restructuring and Government Efficiency. At 8 o'clock under Government Bills and Orders Committee of Supply will be Economic Development. We'll do committee on bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, and Pr. 3 and bills 36, 37, 38, and 20, and then other bills as per our Order Paper.

On Wednesday, Mr. Speaker, in the afternoon will be Committee of Supply, day 23 of 24, and it will be Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. On Wednesday evening, May 10, Committee of Supply, day 24 of 24, and it will be the Department of Finance. For second reading that evening will be Bill 40. Committee of the Whole will be bills 31, 29, and 20.

On Thursday afternoon there will be the introduction of the main estimates appropriation bill. We'll have third reading on bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, and Pr. 3. We will deal with bills 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 21, 24, 27, and 30, and if we make great progress, any other business on the Order Paper.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: 3:10 **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Solicitor General and Public Security

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present an overview of the Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security estimates and the 2006-2009 business plan.

Before I start, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to introduce staff from my

ministry who are here with us today: Eric McGhan, Deputy Solicitor General and Deputy Minister of Public Security; Brian Skeet, assistant deputy minister and director of law enforcement; Neil Warner, acting assistant deputy minister for correctional services; Jim Bauer, executive director, senior financial officer; Al Sauve, director of Legislature security; and my assistant, Peter Davis. They're all in the members' gallery to observe this afternoon's presentation.

Mr. Chairman, over the next 10 minutes I'll present to you highlights of the services and supports that the Solicitor General and Public Security provides to Albertans. Following my presentation I'd be happy to answer any questions that remain, but should we run out of time, I'd be pleased to provide responses in writing to relevant questions.

Mr. Chairman, in developing our business plan and financial plan, we were guided by our core values of honesty, integrity, respect, ethics, commitment, compassion, and courage. These values are the bedrock embodied in our vision to ensure that Albertans have safe and secure communities in which to live, work, and raise their families. Each and every day we strive to achieve this vision by providing Albertans with a variety of supports and services.

The four goals that lead the programs identified in the business plan are: one, provide leadership in policing and services that promote safe communities in Alberta; two, provide secure and cost-effective custody, community supervision, and rehabilitation of offenders; three, to ensure the safety of Albertans by providing comprehensive provincial security services and crisis management; and four, provide services and programs to support victims of crime.

Mr. Chairman, to help achieve these important goals, the Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security budget for this year is \$450 million, an increase of \$37 million over last year's comparable forecast. Of the total budget \$230 million goes to policing services, organized and serious crime response, and crime prevention programs; \$155 million is spent on remand and correctional centres, offender supervision in the community, and rehabilitative opportunities for offenders; \$26 million goes to security services; and \$16 million is spent on victims' programs and services. This is a significant investment to improve the quality of life in our communities.

When you examine the services we provide to Albertans, it's clear that this ministry is closely tied to one of the government of Alberta's strategic business plan priorities, which is to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. A safe and secure community is where people want to live, work, and raise their families.

With the additional \$37 million in the budget this year we will increase policing resources. The provincial policing programs will increase by nearly \$12 million to over \$155 million. This increase includes \$6.2 million to hire up to 80 additional RCMP front-line officers. This follows the 130 RCMP officers added in Budget 2005 to help fight crime in rural communities, bringing the overall Alberta complement of RCMP officers to just under 1,400.

Mr. Chairman, \$4.6 million is added for traffic enforcement positions, or sheriffs, as part of the province's traffic safety plan and \$1.7 million for the Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative, also known as ARTAMI. This cross-ministry program will better co-ordinate police, legal, mental health, and other experts to assess threats, manage victim safety, and find ways to prevent family violence homicides in partnership with the Attorney General and Minister of Justice.

Mr. Chairman, funding to combat organized crime will rise to \$18 million, a 26 per cent jump. It includes \$2 million to establish a 20-member surveillance team that will work with the integrated response to organized crime unit to provide strategic support to crack down on organized and serious crime.

Another \$1.7 million will go to the integrated child exploitation unit to help catch online predators that use the Internet to sexually exploit and victimize children. Resources for the ICE unit are particularly important at this time. The events of this past March, after arrests were made during an international child porn investigation, demonstrate the need for enhanced resources in this field of work. As you may recall, a major break in the case came in January when Edmonton police arrested a local website administrator.

Finally, the ministry will also continue to work with the province's Crystal Meth Task Force to rid our communities of the scourge of this highly addictive and deadly drug.

We all know that organized crime, drug production, and child pornography are not exclusive to urban communities. Our growing economy is attracting a large number of hard-working people to the province, but it's also a draw to those who want to take advantage of our prosperity. Criminals follow the money. As such, the tentacles of organized crime and gangs are spreading right across our province. We've heard the call from municipalities for additional resources and have answered. Policing assistance to municipalities will increase to \$48 million, or 4.8 per cent. Of that, \$1.6 million will go to municipal policing grants to keep pace with the province's rapidly rising population. However, as we provide additional resources to fight organized and serious crime throughout Alberta, we cannot ignore the fact that gang members are also operating and networking behind bars. The increase in the number of investigations by police is leading to more gang members in jail, and the gang members are continuing to run their operations from inside. Jail might remove them from the street, but it doesn't hamper their activities.

To address this growing problem, I'm proud to tell you that we are the first provincial jurisdiction in Canada to create a correctional services intelligence unit. The CSIU will formalize the process of gathering and sharing intelligence information on known and suspected gang members in our correctional facilities, who they associate with and their activities while in custody. This is vital information for police, Mr. Chairman, because when these gang members are back on the street and committing crimes, police will have a clearer picture of the new ties gang members have made during their time in custody. The \$850,000 investment in the CSIU will also allow us to close the intelligence gap between corrections and law enforcement and help the police track gang members when they return to the street.

As we increase policing resources to fight crime, Mr. Chairman, we realize that this will cause additional pressure on our remand and correctional facilities. Overcrowding has become a serious issue at the Edmonton Remand Centre as remand populations continue to rise. We don't control the intake of people sent to the remand centre. We have to deal as best we can with the people sent to us by the courts. We don't have the option of closing the door and putting up a no vacancy sign. At present there are plans to build a new remand centre in the future, and our department has identified a new remand centre in Edmonton as a capital priority.

In addition to budget and resource increases, there are other key initiatives that our department has undertaken. They include but are not limited to the sheriff and RCMP highway safety pilot project. This pilot project focuses on enhancing the safety of Albertans and partners sheriffs with RCMP officers to perform traffic controls on highway 21 in Strathcona county and highway 63 at Fort McMurray and Boyle. This project will be evaluated in the near future on our ability to enhance enforcement while allowing RCMP officers to focus on more serious criminal matters.

Mr. Chairman, public security and corrections, however, are just two facets of my department's responsibilities. We will continue to

ensure that victims of crime are treated with dignity and respect and that they promptly receive information, assistance, and financial benefits. The report of the Alberta victims of crime consultation set up a 10-year vision for the development of programs and services for victims of crime. Our ministry has completed 13 of the report's recommendations, and we continue to work towards implementing those that remain. This past March we launched a campaign to increase awareness among victims of crime so they will know what programs exist and how and where to access them. The campaign encourages victims to report crime to police and then call their local victim assistance program.

Mr. Chairman, to assist police and Crown prosecutors to investigate and prosecute family violence cases, our department coreleased a domestic violence handbook last November. The handbook, created in partnership with Alberta Justice, is another resource to combat family violence. Guidelines for developing a domestic violence protocol for police services were also distributed for use with the handbook.

3:20

To support greater victim involvement and offender accountability in the justice system, we encourage communities to develop initiatives that deter crime. Our department earmarked \$350,000 in grant money to 16 groups involved in local restorative justice programs. Restorative justice programs are used as an alternative or supplement to any sentence such as house arrest, probation, or a jail term. As part of our crime prevention strategy Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security participated in the first province-wide Fraud Awareness Month campaign this past March. Partnering with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police and the Alberta office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the campaign informed Albertans how to protect themselves from becoming victims of fraud. This campaign was so successful that we plan on expanding it as a cross-ministry initiative with other departments in the future.

Mr. Chairman, our department continues to work collaboratively with other ministries, aboriginal communities, and other stakeholders to address the complex root causes of aboriginal peoples involved with the justice system. The ministry's aboriginal justice initiatives unit works with our program areas, other ministries and agencies in the development of community-based strategies that promote safety and security in aboriginal communities. In 2006 we will contribute \$11 million towards aboriginal justice initiatives, including youth justice committees, programs and services for aboriginal victims, cultural programs in provincial corrections centres, and community corrections programs.

We are sensitive to the unique needs of our aboriginal citizens. As such, we support policing in aboriginal communities. Community tripartite policing agreements are already in place in four other First Nation communities in Alberta. These agreements send a clear message to the citizens of First Nations that the government will continue to crack down on violent crime and gang activity plaguing their communities. The RCMP, the government of Alberta, the government of Canada, and the communities of Hobbema agreed in principle to a community tripartite policing agreement that will boost the RCMP's presence to 32 officers in their community. Hobbema has become a recruiting ground for gangs. The additional officers will also act as mentors and role models for Hobbema youth to help them stay out of gangs.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the mission of Solicitor General and Public Security is to serve Albertans by ensuring safe and secure communities through effective policing, security in correctional services, and when crime is committed to assist those victims of crime. The overview I presented demonstrates that we have clearly met this expectation.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation. I'd be happy to address any questions that members may have, and should we run out of time, as I mentioned earlier, I'd be pleased to provide responses in writing.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to commend the Solicitor General and the department for all of their work in preparing these business plans and estimates, and especially I would like to commend all the public servants who work in the department and who work so hard. I have to also honour the hard-working police in this province and the special constables, who every day risk their lives even to protect the public and provide safe communities, and also the guards in our correctional institutes, who every day also put themselves at risk and do a fantastic job, sometimes in the face of deteriorating conditions, especially in the remand centres, yet they still work very, very hard and do a great job.

In my summary of the figures in the estimates overall the estimate for 2006-07 is \$434 million, up from last year's forecast of \$399 million. Funding for provincial policing increases by \$11.8 million, or 8.2 per cent, to \$155.4 million in 2006-07. This will allow for the hiring of 80 additional RCMP officers and more peace officers for highway traffic enforcement. Funding to combat organized crime is increasing to \$18 million from last year's \$14.2 million, an increase of almost \$4 million, or 23 per cent. This extra funding will allow for a 20-member surveillance team working closely with the RCMP and municipal police services to provide strategic support to fight organized crime. As well, some extra funding will be dedicated to the IROC team, integrated response to organized crime team, and for the new Crystal Meth Task Force. Municipal policing is increased by 4.8 per cent to \$48 million, up from last year's \$45.5 million. That's not much of an increase. I guess it keeps pace with population growth and so on.

In terms of the business plans I just want to comment in my introduction here about goal 1 on pages 342 to 343 under Core Businesses, Goals, Strategies and Performance Measures. Goal one: "provide leadership in policing and services that promote safe communities." In going through the strategies, Mr. Chairman, it's very interesting that there are 18 listed strategies here, and I'm very impressed by the number of strategies that focus on crime prevention. I think that so many of my questions in question period and comments last year to the Solicitor General and also to the Minister of Justice were how there's such a total imbalance between the amount of money focused on building prisons and keeping people in prison as compared to the focus on crime prevention.

I'm very encouraged by the fact that at least nine items out of 18 on this page are focused on crime prevention. For example, 1.2, "a plan to target First Nations gang violence"; 1.7, "the development of effective community justice initiatives that address local crime concerns"; 1.8, addressing strategies concerning sexual exploitation of children; 1.9, "youth leadership development . . . in Aboriginal communities"; 1.10, working to "reduce Aboriginal youth suicide," which is extremely important; 1.11, the youth justice committee program, which the hon. minister referred to, which I think is extremely important, and that's a part of the whole emphasis on restorative justice. Maybe I'll come back to this later because I'm not sure how much money the hon. minister referred to in terms of support to youth justice committees. I didn't quite hear the numbers. I had a visit with a person in Fort McMurray who is chairing the youth justice committee there, and there's a great need for extra resources, especially financial resources, for youth justice committees throughout the province. Strategy 1.12, focusing on response

to family violence; 1.13, addressing bullying; 1.15, dealing with crystal meth. All of these are efforts to prevent crime, efforts in the community to bring about greater awareness, greater education, and to try to get local communities involved in trying to prevent crime in the first place.

I'm reminded of the new chief of police in Edmonton, Mike Boyd, when he says – and he uses a wonderful illustration – that the path of crime is like a stream, and when the police come in and when prisons are involved, that's too far downstream; we have to move upstream and make a greater effort to prevent crime from ever happening in the first place. All of these efforts that are listed here, half the page, are devoted to preventing crime. I commend the Solicitor General. I don't know if this is a difference in strategy and tone in the business plan, but I think it's moving in the right direction. I think that all Albertans would be enthusiastic and want to be involved in a lot of the programs that are listed here.

3:30

Before leaving this page, I want to look especially at 1.18 in the business plan, which is about the McDermid report. I started off my remarks yesterday in dealing with the Department of Justice with the McDermid report, and it applies equally to the work of the Solicitor General. This was a very important report focusing on traffic safety, Saving Lives on Alberta's Roads: Report and Recommendations for a Traffic Collision Fatality and Injury Reduction Strategy, 2004. There are many, many recommendations in here that apply to the Solicitor General.

Just to lift up some of the conclusions. After a lot of study and working with stakeholders and looking at all kinds of information, some of the conclusions are quite startling. Under enforcement various police departments, in reporting to Mr. McDermid and carrying out this study, mentioned how insufficient the resources are in being able to carry out proper traffic safety in this province and how sometimes when traffic safety is considered in terms of priority, it's moved to the bottom of the agenda for many police forces. Now, that's very troubling. Why? Police have for so long had that as an important part of their task and their job. When there is reallocation of money and organization and downsizings, it seems that traffic safety gets to the bottom. Even within various detachments there do not seem to be targeted budgets just focused on the importance of traffic enforcement.

I think that's quite troubling, and I wondered if the Solicitor General would comment about that. It seems to me that that's going in the wrong direction when you consider how many lives are lost on our highways every year. Far more lives are lost from traffic collisions than from homicides. So not to channel money and to be really focused on the struggle, the fight to establish safer highways in this province is a tremendously important point.

Recommendation 7 in the McDermid report is especially, I think, directed to the Solicitor General's department because it deals with the use of new technology in improving the monitoring of safety on our highways. Much has been made about photo radar. I think that Mr. McDermid really emphasized the importance of photo radar on our highways. All kinds of other technology devices, some of which I'm not sure I understand, he lists:

- Expanded use of breath alcohol ignition interlock devices
- Use of roadside cameras
- In-car video technology . . .
- Tachographs (on board devices used to record distance travelled, speed, rpms, stops, [and so on])
- Vehicle data recorders.

A lot of interesting technological suggestions. I'm not sure how many of those have been utilized for policing in Alberta.

At the end of this recommendation 7 he makes this startling

statement. Well, I know that it's not startling, but it's an important statement. "There must be no reduction in the number of police officers presently assigned to the highway patrols." Then he says, "That recommendation has not been endorsed by the provincial government."

Mr. Backs: That is startling, isn't it?

Dr. B. Miller: That's startling. Well, I don't know what the provincial government is waiting for.

Now there's a complicating factor here, and that is the issue of special constables and peace officers. Is the answer to the McDermid report, the response: "Okay; we're not going to increase the number of police officers doing highway traffic safety; we're going to have peace officers doing more of that work"? That's not the response that Mr. McDermid was looking for. I have great respect for peace officers, special constables, but as a matter of fact they don't have the same level of training as police officers. I think that when you look at highway 63, there were not that many RCMP officers doing highway traffic safety. Now we have special constables doing it. We have to still be convinced – I know the pilot project is continuing now – that this is a better way of doing highway traffic safety than having more police officers.

When I was in Fort McMurray, I learned that there actually are only two RCMP officers – one does highway 63 north of Fort McMurray; one does highway 63 south – but with the special constables the one RCMP officer was doing a lot of administration to oversee the special constables. You know, what is the net gain here?

We've raised all kinds of questions before about the danger on highway 63 and all of our highways when cars are stopped. Will special constables be able to handle that? Do they have the proper training? We've asked questions about why the Solicitor General is moving ahead, pouring money into even increasing special constables, peace officers, to do traffic safety in Alberta before the pilot project is completed. I haven't actually received a good response on that issue. My understanding is that this pilot project is ending in June, and then there should be evaluation of the whole thing and then recommendations about how to move in the future. Has the Solicitor General already decided, before the pilot project is over, what direction he is going to go in?

I think the McDermid report still remains to be responded to in some of the specifics and in terms of an overall plan. The McDermid report pointed out that there doesn't seem to be a centralized plan for traffic safety in this province. It's too piecemeal. A whole lot of departments are involved with it. There needs to be, of course, interdepartmental working out in terms of committees and so on. But I haven't heard it ever presented: exactly what is the centralized overarching plan for traffic safety in this province? Are we going to actually put money into this so that we can stop the carnage on our highways? It's an absolutely important issue.

Now, moving on to one of the issues that continues to concern me and Albertans because it's so often in the press. People are asking continually about the conditions of our correctional centres, specifically the remand centres. The remand centre in Calgary was built in 1993 to hold 361 prisoners. Now it holds more than 500. In Edmonton the remand centre was built in 1979 to hold 332 prisoners. Now it holds more than 700.

If we look at some of the court cases concerning offenders, heroin dealers in this province, we find that many of them have been in other remand centres in Red Deer, Grande Prairie, and the conditions of these remand centres are just terrible. I don't know what kind of adjectives need to be used. I've used the term Third World condi-

tions. Overcrowding: that's the biggest issue, I suppose, with double bunking and sometimes triple bunking when a mat is just thrown in the middle for a third guy to sleep in a cell. Cells are very small, poorly ventilated. Some of those who are accused or in a remand centre awaiting trial sometimes spend 23 hours in their cells.

3:40

There are issues around cleanliness, with filthy mattresses, not enough opportunities to actually wash themselves. There are complaints about food and, of course, lack of medical services. Even a fatality inquiry has surfaced that issue with Jody Umpherville, who didn't get the proper medical attention, and she died while being in custody. The recommendation was that there be more medical services, even that a medical officer responsible for the Edmonton Remand Centre would be available.

There are questions about religious rights being violated, vegetarians not being able to have vegetarian meals, and Buddhists not being able to have opportunities to engage in their particular religious activities.

Now, a lot of the evidence comes from court cases, so I'm not referring to newspaper articles or just things that you might pick up from ex-cons, who always are willing to talk about their experience in the remand centres, although I must admit that in one article when someone was asked about being in a remand centre, he said:

I don't want to do no remand time, man . . . That's torture, man. Like, I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy to do time there, okay? I can't handle it psychologically. I will kill myself in there, man . . . Try sitting in a cell 23 hours every day . . . I'd rather do 20 years in the pen than do five months in the remand centre.

Well, Mr. Chairman, there's a real problem with this. I don't know whether it's the intention of the Solicitor General – I don't think it is – that the conditions will be so bad that it would be a deterrence in terms of committing crime. It would be awful to even consider that that might be the case.

Something has to happen here. I mean, this issue will continue to be an issue before this government. [interjections] You know, it's a human rights issue. It's a human rights issue. When people commit crime, they never think about what the conditions are going to be like in a prison. They never think about what kind of time, whether they're going to serve two years or five years or 10 years.

All those studies from criminologists indicate that when people commit crimes, they don't calculate in their minds: well, if I commit this crime, am I going to end up in the remand centre? They don't think that way. Most crime is committed within a conflictual situation where there's a lot of emotion, a lot of passion, and they don't think. In fact, surveys indicate that no one thinks about prison life in advance. Even people who are repeat criminals, when they're asked about criminal sentences, don't seem to know, so it's wrong to even think that prisons are a method of deterring crime.

Now, we have to look at the whole issue of remand centres from the point of view of our responsibility in terms of upholding human rights.

I've only just begun, but I guess my time is up.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, I think we have all afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, I may have missed in my opening remarks that I was actually moving the estimates for the Solicitor General and Public Security. Okay? Just to make sure that that's on the record and whatever. We're going to get them voted on later.

Some very interesting comments were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. He's been a critic on this ministry for the

last 17 months, and we do work together on a number of areas and may have some differences but obviously are both concerned about the policing and corrections and victims in the province.

I do want to respond to some of the concerns that he raised, and I'll close with the comments regarding the remand centre. He did mention – and we may talk about it a little later – restorative justice programs that we provide in the province that are very important, I believe, and are a very critical area regarding providing programs and providing alternatives to sentences whether it's young offenders being placed in correctional facilities versus providing them with other programs in the community. We do provide \$350,000 for restorative justice programs as well through initiative grants. These are very important and critical in the community. That was one of the questions the hon. member raised.

He did go through a number of the goals, and I just want to comment on some of those areas. He made mention of strategy 1.2, where we talk about “partnership with other levels of government,” which is critical, especially at this time with the federal budget coming out yesterday. Looking at our partnership with the federal government regarding various initiatives, obviously with new RCMP officers, federal positions though they may be, they will still be an added component of policing within the province of Alberta.

We are very sensitive to the unique needs of our aboriginal citizens, as I mentioned in our opening remarks, and as such we support policing in aboriginal communities through either community tripartite agreements or self-administered police services. The tripartite agreements are a great example of community policing where government, police, and the community work together to fulfill their vision of safety and security for First Nations residents. The department has signed community tripartite agreements for six First Nations communities to provide effective and culturally sensitive policing. It's been a real opportunity for me to learn and understand more of the culture, having been able to attend two of those signing ceremonies. It's been a great honour for me to have been there to work with the RCMP and with the First Nations communities.

So our department, again, supports five self-administered First Nations police services throughout Alberta as well as any other municipal service, again looking at what the needs are in those First Nations communities. What do they want to see? What type of service level do they want, and how would it better reflect their needs in their communities?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora mentioned strategy 1.7, “Work in partnership with police and other justice practitioners, Aboriginal communities.” Again, Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security is committed to organizations, police services, communities, First Nations, and Métis settlements in administering sustainable crime prevention programs and restorative justice processes. As I mentioned, we provide \$350,000 for restorative justice programs in Alberta, and we provide opportunities for victims and offenders to communicate their thoughts and their feelings. This approach helps victims to heal and makes offenders directly accountable to those that they have harmed or hurt. The ministry currently supports four First Nations crime prevention coordinator positions, and these positions are responsible for developing and administering a wide range of crime prevention programs in 15 member First Nations communities.

Strategy 1.8, together with law enforcement agencies and other government departments to further strategies to address sexual exploitation of children. Again, we are currently addressing this problem through several means. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security co-chairs a cross-ministry working committee under the Alberta children and youth initiative. The working committee

has developed a strategic plan which outlines four key areas of action: education and awareness, prevention and protection, enforcement, and research and training. We will vigorously fight the exploitation of children through the use of increased funding provided in Budget 2006.

Budget 2006 provided \$1.7 million to the integrated child exploitation unit to help catch online predators that use the Internet to sexually exploit and victimize children. Overall, provincial policing funding in '06-07 will increase by nearly \$12 million, or 8.2 per cent, to over \$155 million. The government of Alberta will launch a media campaign this month to raise awareness of sexual exploitation of children and youth through the Internet.

3:50

Strategy 1.9: “Support youth leadership development programming in Aboriginal communities.” Aboriginal people continue to be significantly represented both as victims and offenders in the justice system, not just in Alberta but in every province throughout Canada. As part of our preventative approach to addressing root causes of crime, Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security is committed to supporting youth leadership development programming in aboriginal communities, including programs such as the Alberta future leader's program and aboriginal summer cultural camps.

Part of our support towards youth leadership includes a \$50,000 grant to the Hobbema cadet corps to help pay for the uniforms that they wear. I can tell you, having been there just a month or so ago, that their cadet corps has now increased to almost 400 children in the Hobbema community. It's a tremendous program provided by RCMP members who are volunteering their time to assist kids, to keep kids busy, and to keep them in this program, which is half scout program and half army cadet program. They've mixed the two together. It provides them with a lot of fun and a lot of activities that they can partake in after school, in the evenings, and on weekends. It keeps them busy and keeps them excited with opportunities to have fun with their friends, and it builds their self-confidence and self-esteem. They can say no to drugs, and they can say no to gang activity.

The hon. member brought up as well strategy 1.10, working with stakeholders to reduce aboriginal youth suicide. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security participates in the cross-ministry aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategy, an initiative that was established as part of the Alberta child and youth initiative. In '05-06 an AYSPPS working group identified and provided assistance to three pilot sites to address the root causes of suicide among aboriginal youth. Each pilot site will be involved in the strategy for a three-year period.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The next point I'll move to, Madam Chair: “Through the provision of financial grants and with the support of department staff encourage the involvement of interested communities in the administration of justice programs such as the Youth Justice Committee Program.” Alberta has 121 youth justice committees throughout Alberta, established under the Young Offenders Act and now the Youth Criminal Justice Act. The youth justice committees deal mainly with first- and second-time offenders involved in a minor, nonviolent crime and offer an alternative to placing them in the formal court process, bringing these offenders face to face with their victims and other members of the community. Through this process young people are held directly accountable to their victims and the community. They come together and agree on the appropriate means of restitution. Youth justice committees are an outstand-

ing example of what can be accomplished when a community shows faith in its youth and works to ensure that they are well prepared to become the leaders of the future.

Strategy 1.12: "Work in partnership with other departments . . . to implement an integrated province-wide response to family violence," a very critical area. Reducing family violence continues to be a high priority for the Alberta government. We want to ensure that all of our initiatives are sustained over the long term. Our Family Violence Police Advisory Committee, in operation since 1990, takes an active role in policy and program development with a strong focus on police intervention and increasing public awareness. We have a large number of cross-ministry initiatives with Alberta Justice and Children's Services.

To deal with the prevention of family violence, including the training of police officers and victim advocates, the Domestic Violence Handbook for Police and Crown Prosecutors was released last November by myself and the hon. Minister of Justice along with guidelines to develop a domestic violence protocol for all police services across the province. The 160-page Domestic Violence Handbook for Police and Crown Prosecutors provides information on investigative procedures, prosecutions, victims and abusers, risk factors, and safety planning.

Madam Chairman, the next area is 1.13, working to raise awareness and develop appropriate strategies to address bullying. Again, another issue that we have been working on. We participate on that cross-ministry working committee to implement the recommendations that arose from the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying. In 2005 an awareness campaign focused on children aged 3 to 11. In 2006 a campaign will be launched to target 12 to 20-year-olds. In 2007 attention will focus on raising awareness of adults and their role in preventing and discouraging bullying behaviour among children and modelling positive behaviour. Solicitor General and Public Security will provide a bullying prevention program at the Edmonton and Calgary youth detention centres and other youth correctional centres to work with offenders who have a history of bullying behaviour. The bullying prevention program is expected to be implemented by September 2006.

Madam Chairman, I would like to just add a few more remarks before I let the hon. member ask me some more questions. Strategy 1.15 talks about combating the production, distribution, and use of crystal meth and other illicit drugs in Alberta's communities. I will go into some detail, I'm sure, further on throughout the afternoon. Really, this is indeed a huge issue and a huge area that we have to move forward on. We have provided the Crystal Meth Task Force, which, Madam Chair, you are a member of. A tremendous – tremendous – opportunity for Albertans now to provide information to the task force while the task force consults with the community. Our presentation to the task force, I think, was an opportunity to provide a strategic plan in place to combat what I just mentioned: the production, distribution, use, and clandestine labs throughout Alberta, not just in our major centres but throughout Alberta.

I'm looking forward to the recommendations that will be coming forward to government from the task force. Obviously, we'll work hand in hand with the task force recommendations and the ministries that will all be involved in combating the issues related to illegal drugs. We are prepared in our ministry to continue the work that we're doing already in the education and prevention areas and the areas regarding intelligence and enforcement but, as well, in the areas that we have to regarding treatment and healing, including offenders that are in our correction centres. That is our responsibility, and we take it very seriously.

Madam Chair, the hon. member spoke at length on 1.18, the traffic safety plan, retired Assistant Commissioner Don McDermid's report,

Saving Lives on Alberta's Roads. It is a very comprehensive report, and I think it was very well done. Obviously, Assistant Commissioner McDermid had a tremendous amount of experience in policing in Alberta and throughout Canada. A well-respected police officer throughout Canada. Two of the recommendations really strictly deal with our area. The recommendations fall in line with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, but I'll talk briefly on the two that we are moving forward on at this point in time.

We are committed to work with government, police, and community stakeholders to improve traffic safety in Alberta. The traffic safety plan was developed in response to the McDermid report, which will provide a structure to approach traffic safety in our province to make roads safer, to reduce fatalities, to reduce serious injury collisions, and to reduce collisions in general.

4:00

We are killing 400 people on our roads every year. We have to educate, and we have to enforce that legislation to ensure that we can save lives and to ensure that people become aware that driving is a privilege, right across Canada and in Alberta as well. It is not a right. Therefore, I'm sure that we want to work with the recommendations that are coming from the report, but the recommendations didn't say police officers. They said that they needed officers that would be working in that traffic enforcement area.

What we have looked at are other projects and other opportunities throughout the United States and Canada and what, in fact, we've been doing in Alberta for some 25 to 30 years with special constables, that have been working in municipalities throughout Alberta. We've expanded that program to tie ourselves in with the sheriff's offices from every other province throughout Canada and the three territories. All have sheriffs. We restructured and renamed our provincial protection officers to sheriffs to align ourselves with other provinces. Obviously, when our sheriff's office phones the B.C. sheriff's office, now they know who they're talking to, whereas before they didn't have a clue who a provincial protection officer was. So the term itself was to provide a better communication plan and a better working partnership amongst all of the sheriffs throughout Canada.

We've expanded the model. We've expanded the model and the scope of their practice so that they can in fact do traffic investigation and traffic enforcement. The Peace Officer Act, Bill 16, which is going through the Assembly, will again provide them with the opportunity to do more, provide them with the opportunity to continue to look at other opportunities, whether it's traffic enforcement, whether it's bylaw enforcement for the community in which they are employed, or whether it's working hand in hand with the RCMP on a number of issues that maybe have to be worked on in their community, whether it's a community problem-solving issue or a member of the public's issue dealing with the provincial legislation or bylaws.

So we looked at the sheriff program, Madam Chair, and we wanted to develop something that would be able to provide additional officers out on our highways. We want to look at those highways that are most dangerous in Alberta. For the pilot project we've started on highway 21 and highway 63 as those have been noted as very dangerous highways through the number of accidents that have occurred or the number of collisions and fatalities that have occurred in those two areas. As we advance this new role for sheriffs, we have seconded an officer from the Calgary police service to do an evaluation of the last three and a half, four months of the pilot project as well as for the next month coming to look at how the relationship is working. So he's working with the RCMP, he's working with the sheriffs, he's working with our department

staff, and he's working with staff in Infrastructure and Transportation as well to look at the whole plan, evaluate it, and look at a model for the future. When we talk about where these officers may be placed, we want to ensure that we're looking at targeted highways.

I'll continue on that as we move forward through the afternoon.

The Acting Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and join the debate on the motion that the Solicitor General belatedly put before the House, to debate and approve the budget for his department. I want to thank him for his work and particularly want to compliment the staff of the department, hardworking staff, who did a huge amount of work to get things ready for us to look at.

Certainly, people who work in provincial policing, whether they're municipal police forces and officers or whether they are RCMP officers or peace officers, correctional services personnel, people who look after the detainees and people incarcerated in our remand centre facilities, all of these people deserve our thanks and commendation. This is risky work. It's not easy work to do. It's dealing with people who have problems, people who have committed crimes or may have committed crimes, who may have mental disorders, personality disorders, violent tempers, all of that stuff. So it's tough work, and it certainly deserves our appreciation and recognition of the contribution that they make to make our communities safe and our lives easier.

That said, I will try to not repeat what has already been asked in terms of questions or observations that were made. I hope to limit my questions to matters that, perhaps, may not have been raised or raised in a specific way. In general, I do want to express my satisfaction and pleasure, actually, at the minister's emphasis on restorative justice as an important means of dealing particularly with youth who may err and commit actions which are deemed criminal, and the role that the youth justice committees play in the process of rehabilitating and putting those young people back on the path to behaviour and conduct that is right and proper. I had many years ago the privilege of serving on an all-party committee which came up with the recommendations for restorative justice as a model, particularly for young offenders. So I'm pleased that that has become an integral part of the policies of this government.

The third matter that I want to just raise is the relationship, not so much just the relationship but the plight of the members of the aboriginal community vis-à-vis police, incidence of crime, apprehension, incarceration. I've been looking through the business plan, and there are references here and there, but there isn't sort of an attempt to single out this as a challenge that we need to do some creative and innovative work on. This is something that I find missing. Maybe it's just an oversight on my part because I didn't look on the right pages, but I'd like the Solicitor General to perhaps expand on what's provided in the budget and in the business plan to tackle this very, very serious problem.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I know and we know in the House that while the aboriginal population is growing at a rate that's much faster perhaps than for the nonaboriginal population in the province, it still remains at about 6 to 7 per cent of the total population of the province. Yet in terms of our incarceration rates and their presence in our provincial jails and apprehension rates, they represent close to perhaps 35 to 40 per cent of the cases, a sort of shocking overrepresentation. On the one hand, we could say that that shows the success of our law enforce-

ment authorities to apprehend people who, in fact, commit crime, but on the other hand, we've got to look at the social side of it.

4:10

The overrepresentation of a particular group of our provincial population at the scale at which it takes place with respect to the aboriginal population is a matter that should be of grave concern to us, and I'm sure that it is to the Solicitor General. I want to ask him what specific measures are proposed and reflected in the budget which draw attention to special attempts being made to make a dent in the numbers and the frightening statistics that we deal with year after year after year, with no major change having taken place. What is there that the Solicitor General proposes to do on that front by way of the budget and the business plan? Could he give us the most updated numbers on that in terms of the percentage of Albertans that are incarcerated in our jails and the crime rates? If he can give us some indication because I think that it's important for the House to have an up-to-date picture in terms of exact numbers. If he has them now, fine; if not, possibly later. This is information would be very helpful. Again, I don't find it in the documents that I have before me. I'm sure if I look hard enough, I'll find it somewhere in government documents, but certainly in the ones that I'm looking at now for the purpose of this debate, they're not readily available to me.

The next point I want to raise in general is on a matter of policy – that's what I'm using this debate as an opportunity for – on the community policing model. We have many of our urban communities growing, not just Edmonton and Calgary now. There's Red Deer. There's Fort McMurray. There's Grande Prairie. There's Lethbridge. There's Medicine Hat, so on and so forth. The business plan does very appropriately focus on prevention as much as on apprehension, prevention of crime and making communities safe through prevention. We know that particularly in large urban centres community policing is known to be the most effective way of doing that prevention.

I wonder if the Solicitor General will make some comments with respect to line items in the budget under Public Security; I think it's program support and policing programs. Will he highlight the resources that are being dedicated or directed towards increasing community policing and using it as a model that's more appropriate for prevention and enhancement of community safety? We know that in Edmonton some of the community policing services have been rolled back, and some community police stations have been closed. Norwood is an example of one. Where is the money going to for municipal policing, for example, in the budget? What kind of increases are there in order for urban municipal authorities or the police to move in that direction? I find, again, not much that I can see that I can identify as dedicated sources and funds that will help move with some effectiveness in the direction of community policing.

The next question has to do with private security firms and their use in situations where employers employ these services during strikes for policing pickets, keeping peace between people who want to go in and those who are on the picket. Certainly the practice of the use of private security forces and firms supplying those forces is being adopted by a variety of employers. I'm assuming that overall it's the responsibility of the Solicitor General to make sure regarding this deployment and employment of these private security police forces, peace officers I suppose one would call them, that they are properly trained, that they in fact observe and respect the laws and rules that the Solicitor General's department is responsible for enforcing in the province. There have been problems. During the Telus strike it was brought to our attention that the firm supplying

private security there, or people who were doing it on its behalf, certainly were not the most appropriately trained people. Therefore, there were lots of situations where unnecessary potential for violence was enhanced because these poorly trained security forces were the ones who were handling rather sensitive and difficult relations between different groups of employees, some on the picket line and outside and some who wanted to go in.

Those are my general policy-related questions, and I hope the minister will be able to relate my concerns to the way in which the budget and the business plan address these policy issues.

A few questions from page 394 of the departmental budget estimates. I notice that on crime prevention, while there is a great deal of commitment expressed in terms of the business plan – and rightly so. Minister, you have my support in this and the support of the House that that's the right direction to go. Yet I see that under policing programs, I think line 2.2.1, there's a minuscule, infinitesimally small increase in the budget to support crime prevention. This may be a particular kind of item, but I hope the minister will respond to this. I was concerned about not seeing more resources being channelled towards crime prevention in this item.

The policing assistance to municipalities. Again, a very, very small increase, about 4 per cent or less, I guess. I'm just making some general, sort of mental calculations here. Certainly, the urban municipal scene we know is growing very, very fast in terms of the size of the population. Calgary is growing very fast. We know that Fort Mac is just simply exploding. The population in this city is growing very fast. The same is the case with Grande Prairie and Red Deer, as far as I know, and many other municipalities.

The challenge with this, with the increase in population, with the more transient population being part of these communities does create much more serious challenges for policing, yet the resources that are being now committed to manage these increases don't seem to match the scale of the growth in the size of the challenge. So maybe the minister will take a minute or two to throw some light on this.

The last point, Mr. Chairman, that I want to make. I wonder how much time I have? [interjection] Five minutes. Okay. Good.

I know a serious concern to the Solicitor General and to all of us in this Assembly is the domestic violence issue. There are parts of the business plan that give me the, sort of, assurance that there is a focus on dealing with this issue. What I am concerned about is the escape from the domestic violence that requires the families, women with children in particular, to have to move out to escape serious harm under those conditions of domestic violence and move to women's shelters.

4:20

Women's shelters in this province have been extremely overcrowded, and my briefing notes tell me that last year alone there were over 8,000 women and/or their children who had to be turned away from the women's shelters because of a shortage of beds and space. It's an extremely serious matter. It's, again, a problem that doesn't seem to be declining in the province. If anything, Alberta has, unfortunately, the distinction of being one of the most violent provincial communities across the country, yet we haven't been able to provide even a temporary respite for families that need shelter space in order to escape those violent situations in the family.

So I would ask the minister to comment on where in the budget is an increase in funds to ensure that we have taken note of the desperate situation of shortage of beds in women's shelters and that those spaces will be increased because there is money in the budget. That's a big issue here, and I think we need to certainly take steps to mitigate the problem of these women's shelter space shortages.

Last point. The police college that the minister is proposing to establish in Alberta: where are we at with respect to that? I am hearing that the minister is considering some sort of P3, private/public partnership, on it. It concerns me greatly. I'd like to hear from the minister what his plans are and whether this budget in particular is indicative of some of the steps forward that the minister is taking in this regard. The P3 issue is a complex one both in terms of costs and in terms of quality of training. So I'd like the minister to perhaps visit this issue as part of this debate as well.

I keep on saying that this is my last point. I still have one more. I guess I have a minute or two to use. The point has been made before by a member who rose before me to comment on the budget. It's the increasing use of peace officers to replace more rigorously trained police officers to enforce law and provide safety in our communities. Given the very different training schedules that are used for these two groups, the police officers versus peace officers, it concerns me a great deal that these people, because of their very limited training . . .

The bell has rung. I guess I made my point, so I'll sit down, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A lot of questions there that I'll try to get through here in the next 20 minutes. I did want to finish answering the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora just briefly, and then I'll move into answering of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's questions.

We talked about the sheriffs program. This may answer, as well, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's concern regarding the use of peace officers. All we've done in the last 16 months is highlight the utilization of those peace officer skills that have already been working in Alberta, but nobody ever thought about them. Nobody knew that they were there. I mean, we had the provincial protection officers, 300 of them or so, in this ministry for years and years and years and years, probably 20 years now. All we did was change the name, and it's like we started something new, but we haven't. It's just a matter that now we did change their name.

We are providing them with new training, and we are providing them with opportunities for advancing their skills and their scope of practice, but it is really a practice that's been in place. Special constables have been working in the community of Rocky Mountain House and in Camrose and in Strathcona county for 20 to 30 years. They've been there, so this isn't something new that we just invented, where they just started working. They have been out there in the community.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora talked about the pilot project, though, and I did want to complete my comments regarding where we will be placing them. We are examining, through the data that we have, collision data that Infrastructure and Transportation has right now, where the major collisions have occurred, the fatalities and serious injury accidents, throughout the province. Those are the areas where we want to ensure that we can provide education and enforcement utilizing those sheriff positions.

Yes, we could have hired more RCMP officers. The problem is that the RCMP costs are very high. They are \$158,000. That's last year's costs. Those are going up to \$163,000 per RCMP officer. This is right across Canada. Now, of course, we only pay 70 per cent of that, but that again is still a substantial amount of money.

The officers that we are using are sheriffs. They are peace officers. They are trained to have the skills that we want them to have. In this case it's the ability to enforce provincial legislation – not criminal legislation, provincial legislation – whether it's the

Traffic Safety Act and, obviously, commercial vehicles on our highways, the Liquor and Gaming Act, or one of the other acts that obviously our partners in SRD and Community Development through the parks and fish and wildlife officers can enforce. Those are the types of acts and the legislation that they will be covering in the future as we move forward.

The whole idea behind this – and I think we're all in agreement in this Assembly – is that we want to see a reduction in the deaths, the number of fatalities, and serious injuries that are occurring in this province. I believe the numbers are roughly 400 fatalities, but about 12,000 serious injuries occur each year on our highways, and we have to make drivers more responsible. We have to educate drivers to slow down and/or ensure that they do follow the rules of the road.

I think I've answered all the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and I'll move to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I want to thank both members for their kind remarks regarding corrections officers, the value of these officers and of our police officers throughout the province as well as the sheriffs that we have that are government employees. As I mentioned earlier in my comments, our department holds the values of honesty and integrity, respect, ethics, commitment, compassion, and courage for all of our employees. This isn't just for police officers. These are for our employees in this ministry, all 2,300 of them, and those are the values I want to instill in our employees. They're there to respect each other but, as well, respect the public and those that they serve. That's their role while being employees of the Solicitor General and Public Security.

I do want to thank you for your nice comments, your kind comments regarding the hard work they do with their jobs every day, whether it's in a corrections facility or whether it's transporting prisoners or whether it's our police officers that are working throughout Alberta, from Rainbow Lake to Coutts.

The hon. member talked about the remand centre, some of the issues related to the remand centre, and I just wanted to talk to him briefly regarding the remand centre. Obviously, that is our top priority for a capital project. We are continuing to move forward with that as being a top priority for us. We have to do a lot of work, and obviously we have to take this before Treasury Board, but it is a top priority for us.

We also, in the meantime, have to ensure that we have the space that's available for our remanded offenders as well as our sentenced offenders. That's why we're working with the federal government to develop a contract with Corrections Canada to utilize additional space in Grande Cache for sentenced offenders, who would be transferred from the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre to Grande Cache, thus allowing us the utilization of space at Fort Saskatchewan for a remand centre.

4:30

Obviously, again, though, as the hon. member has mentioned, we have to be very aware of those issues where we have to segregate some of these offenders. Whether it's because they're gang members or whether it's a sexual assault or sexual offence that they are alleged to have committed, we have to segregate those individuals. They can't be left out in the open. Those are issues that we have to deal with every day. So it's not always having three individuals in a room. Sometimes it's one in a room because we're trying to protect them from the rest of the population in there. That does on occasion mean that we do have to put three people in a room.

I've eaten the food, and it's been very good. I'll take the hon. members for lunch one day, and we'll go try it. It's not bad. In fact, we do have a new contractor, and apparently, from comments that

I've heard from inmates, the food is even better than it was before. So that's a good thing. We're moving forward in that direction.

One of the areas we talked about again was the remand centre, and what we're looking at. We are making adjustments to how we're providing that service now. Obviously, we're moving forward with our capital plan as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona spoke briefly on restorative justice programs and the importance of those programs in our communities. As I mentioned earlier, we provide about \$350,000 per year regarding restorative justice grants to various communities throughout the province. The ministry continues to support and assist all communities that express an interest in establishing youth justice committees.

Currently there are 121 communities throughout Alberta that have sanctioned youth justice committees. The majority of the committees are involved in administering the extrajudicial sanctions program for first- and second-time offenders who have committed minor offences. Some of the youth justice committees provide sentencing advice to the local youth court judge. Our department supports the youth justice committees through annual grants, provincial, regional, and local training opportunities, ongoing case management liaison, office space and supplies, and volunteer recognition. Each committee is assigned a liaison probation officer who provides training and ongoing case management advice in that community where this youth justice committee is.

There are approximately 1,400 volunteers throughout Alberta that are involved in addressing youth crime in their communities. It's a tremendous program. It's working very well. It provides youth with alternatives to being incarcerated, and it provides youth with alternatives to a lifestyle that they may have enjoyed but now understand is wrong, that they committed a criminal act. So we are working on it. It's a very important project for us. Restorative justice or youth justice committees are extremely important in our Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security.

The member mentioned the issues related to the aboriginal community. It is a very serious issue related to the small aboriginal population we have in the province of Alberta, the percentage that are involved in criminal activity and/or who are offenders in our corrections facilities. I've got some statistics here that you asked for. While aboriginal people represent 7 per cent of Alberta's population – and this was in '04-05 – they represented approximately 30 per cent of adult in-house correctional centre counts and approximately 38 per cent of young offender in-house correctional centre counts. These statistics are similar elsewhere in Canada, but these are extremely high numbers.

The average number of aboriginal offenders in custody has not increased while the average number of aboriginal youth in custody has decreased over the past several years despite a significant increase in the population of aboriginal people in our province. Despite these encouraging statistics, incarceration and victimization rates among aboriginal people continue to be a concern. Our department continues to work collaboratively with other ministries, aboriginal communities, and other stakeholders on front-end measures that seek to address the complex root causes of community-based strategies that promote safe communities.

We continue to support initiatives such as the youth justice committees, which we just spoke about, but in aboriginal communities: programs and services geared to the needs of aboriginal victims, First Nations police services, crime prevention and restorative justice initiatives, and community corrections agreements with aboriginal service providers. In 2006-07, in this year's budget, the ministry will contribute approximately \$11 million towards aboriginal justice initiatives. That's \$11 million, and these are extremely important

programs. We do have facilities and treatment programs for them throughout the province. So, again, a very, very important program and a very good question that the hon. member asked.

Regarding community policing models and the closing of a community policing centre, that's a very good question, but the issue is that although I do wish I had a say in providing more leadership within our police services, I don't really. I can't. I'm not their chief. We do look at those issues regarding what are best practice models, look at new models of service delivery for policing, but those are decisions that are made by the chief and his executive team, those determinations of what level, what style of policing it is. Is it a zone model style that is involved through the community, or is it a team model that might be utilized? Those are operational issues that I can't get involved in. I'd like to get involved in them, hon. member, but I can't because, of course, they have a chief that has been selected by their municipality and their mayor and council. But we do provide them with funding, and we do provide them with some opportunities to be involved in provincial programs such as our organized crime strategy.

You mentioned policing assistance to municipalities. There was an increase of \$2.1 million to municipalities. This was a new grant base that we came out with last year. Those communities under 5,000 receive free policing provided by the province. Those communities between 5,000 and 20,000 were provided with a \$200,000 grant, a basic grant, and then a per capita of \$8 in their community. Those with a population of 20,000 to 100,000 received a \$100,000 grant and a larger per capita grant, \$14 per capita, to assist them with their policing costs. Calgary and Edmonton received a straight \$16 per capita.

Now, I'm sure you're well aware of the concerns when the mayor of Edmonton and the mayor of Calgary said that all they got was roughly \$15 million and \$11 million and that they need more money for policing. Let me reassure you that Alberta is the only province where municipalities are allowed to keep their fine revenue. Every other province, every other municipality throughout this country provides the fine revenue back to the government. In Vancouver, a similar size to Calgary and Edmonton, Vancouver city itself, for their tickets that they write, the funding goes to the province. The province then writes a cheque for, oh, about half of that back to the municipal police service and says: here's your grant. That's how it works. So we are so much further ahead in this province, and our municipalities are so much further ahead. It really provides our municipalities with a stronger model for providing policing in those municipalities.

When Calgary says that they didn't get funding, we gave them \$15 million. They received about \$30 million in fine revenue that we didn't claw back. They received another \$5 million roughly for organized crime strategies that we have worked on with our integrated model of policing. Those are funds that they bill us for because we are actually paying for those officers in those various areas. Then Calgary also received \$6.5 million from Infrastructure and Transportation regarding the infrastructure of police buildings. They didn't talk about those. When you add all those up, we're looking at about \$55 million or so. So they didn't just get \$15 million when you look at it. The big picture is that they received about \$55 million.

4:40

Obviously, we're doing the same for Edmonton. We're going to get information for the mayor of Edmonton and all seven municipal police services to ensure that we can look at their programs down the road, but I do want to make them aware that they are by far better off in this province than in any other city throughout Canada.

On page 394 you listed line item 2.2.1, crime prevention. I just want to make some comments. You mentioned that it's really only an \$18,000 increase, and you're right. It isn't a great deal of additional money towards crime prevention. But I want to let you know that we do work closely with other levels of government. We have a close tie with the police services' crime prevention units, a very close partnership with them. We also have worked closely with nonprofit organizations regarding crime prevention in our communities. The urban and rural municipalities and, of course, first nations and Métis settlements, obviously, foster locally administered crime prevention programs, community safety, and restorative justice programs. We provide grant funding for them for a number of crime prevention programs.

The principles of crime prevention and restorative justice are supported as a necessary and viable adjunct to law enforcement and other criminal justice processes. Promoting grassroots crime prevention and restorative justice programs ensures that communities have opportunities to participate in the justice process and are empowered to address local crime concerns. Funding is directed to community-based crime prevention grants, \$600,000; restorative justice programs, as I mentioned earlier, \$350,000; as well as specific crime prevention contracts amounting to over \$500,000 in the areas of aboriginal crime prevention programs, provincial crime prevention service agreements, and public awareness activities such as Alberta Crime Prevention Week, which is going to be coming up here shortly, Restorative Justice Week, Fraud Awareness Month, which we began two months ago, and of course a number of crime prevention conferences that are held throughout the province.

The next question from hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona talked about domestic violence, and again both the hon. members mentioned this. This is a very, very serious issue throughout Alberta, and we as a government have not taken this issue lightly. We've worked alongside the Minister of Justice in developing a number of programs, as I mentioned earlier – and I won't repeat myself – regarding that domestic violence handbook for police officers and Crown prosecutors.

Addressing family violence is about a change in attitude and a shift in thinking, which has been occurring since family violence policing initiatives began in 1990. We continue to train police and other stakeholders in this regard. Because of this training, the incidence of family violence will continue to rise because people are becoming more and more aware of the fact that family violence is a crime. Through the family violence initiatives we continue to emphasize the criminal nature of family violence, the effects on children, and the consequences for the perpetrators of this type of violence. In Budget 2006 we've added an additional \$1.7 million, which has been allocated for ARTAMI, the Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West-Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to thank the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security for his passion. I've got a few questions I'd like to ask him. The first one is on his goal 1, providing "leadership in policing and services that promote safe communities." I want to thank him again for his staff that he allowed to come out to my area on the 28th of March and the 19th of April because we held two workshops in our community to get everybody involved from Edson, Hinton, Jasper, and Grande Cache because we've had a rash of different break-ins, petty theft, vandalism. We had some help from the Justice department from the aspect of the court systems. So what I'm really looking at today is, first of all, to thank him very much for the

policing money under 5,000. It has certainly helped things in my region, especially for two of my communities.

One issue on one of the communities that it's already helping is the aspect of the national parks, especially in the summertime. We're just wondering if they've got some rotating RCMP. In the national parks it's always nice if we can have somebody dressed up in the red serge so we can take pictures and promote our province. I'm just wondering if there are some aspects there.

I guess that on police funding I was just wondering as I looked through on your department. Especially on page 394 I was looking at line 2.2.2. As I went through, with your 2004-05 you had \$120,546,000. Then as I jump to 2005-06, you had \$143,601,000. So we looked at about a \$23,055,000 increase. Conversely, when I move into the aspect of 2006-07 with \$155,429,000, we only had an increase of \$11,828,000. On that provincial policing program, you know, the different aspects on crime, as you've talked previously with the other questioners, I was just wondering: what's entailed in that part? Conversely, I look at the policing assistance to the municipalities and that, where we get the lesser funding, which is 2.2.4, where in 2004-05 we had \$42,245,000. Then we moved up to 2005-06, where we had \$45,544,000, where we had an increase of \$3,299,000. Then we move into 2006-07. What we're looking at: we jumped up to \$47,726,000, but we only had an increase of \$2,182,000.

I guess my point is that when we look at these increases, when we have our population in our province increasing, I'm just wondering what type of factor you are you using for these increases. I just feel that we need more of that, and I guess that relates back to what I was talking about with the workshop we had on the two dates in West Yellowhead. We're finding where a lot of costs are incurring. We had one car dealership in 2004. They had over \$20,000 worth of damage in their car lot, and they were only able to collect \$3,200. So, you know, you look at: those costs are backed up onto consumers.

I guess the other thing is that with the petty theft and the break-ins we're finding a lot of that relating to the drug trade and especially to crystal meth. So I'm just wondering what we're doing on that in trying to move that along so we can work with the people.

Then, the vandalism is getting to be rather expensive and hurting a lot of the communities. A lot of it, you know, I just don't understand. In the community of Edson somebody set the soccer change room and confectionary on fire. Thank goodness it was just the roof on that that burnt off. The rest of it was a block building. But it's costing money, and it's costing a lot of strife in the community because they don't see anything. Then, of course, we get damage to our schools and that. I'm just wondering how we're working on that. I guess the bottom line, what I was talking about when I had these workshops – and we're working with your department to move along on that – is that what communities want and are looking at is trying to take back their communities from this type of action, and they're wanting to have safer communities. I'm just wondering how we're working on that so that we can try and help these communities.

4:50

Then I guess that when I look at your goal 4, where you talk about the aspect of providing "services and programs to support victims of crime," we have some crime watch people there, and they're saying that they're not really getting the notification now, especially on the rural crime watch. I'm just wondering what kind of a setup we've got now. Have we sort of let that fall by the wayside?

You look at certain areas. You take highway 16. It's a main

artery, but when you get back into the backcountry, where we've got a lot of oil and gas and forestry industry, I mean, even on one road which is an LOC we've got over 4,000 vehicles a day. In some of our communities, like Grande Cache, their population is around 4,000. They've got anywhere from 2,500 to 3,000 people in bush camps around the community. So we're getting a lot of stress there, a lot of stress on the officers too. I can appreciate that you've got a budget to work with. I've worked with the communities. I mean, the town of Grande Cache: we tried to get an extra officer there, but according to your makeup it wasn't allowed. So the municipality worked on it to get an enhanced policeman in the community.

I'm just wondering: what are we doing to work with the communities, especially on your goal 4, to work on the aspect of supporting different programs and to curtail a lot of this?

Once again I want to thank your people for coming out to my riding and working with us. We're making sure that we're going to move this program along. We're also looking at the aspect of possibly setting up a crime unit scenario for West Yellowhead rather than doing it individually with the communities so that we can look at the aspect of trying to curtail these, getting more people in the communities, might even possibly set up or entice different people to sort of have a crime watch block, and we can work with the RCMP because we're all part of the community.

So if you could give me some insight on those, I'd certainly appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to cover off two final points that I have here from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and I'll then move to the questions the hon. Member for West Yellowhead raised.

Before I ran out of time, we were talking about domestic violence and the real issues related to domestic violence. I just wanted to add, and I mentioned to the hon. members, that in this year's budget, 2006, we added \$1.7 million for the Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative – ARTAMI are the initials – which will better co-ordinate the police, legal, mental health, and other experts to assess threats, manage victim safety, and find ways to prevent domestic homicides.

Our department facilitates and chairs the Family Violence Police Advisory Committee. This committee works closely with Alberta Justice to develop and disseminate domestic violence, police, and Crown protocols. Members also collaborate on police-based training sessions throughout Alberta. A unique aspect of this Solicitor General and Public Security led training is that it is collaborative in nature. Participants come from all backgrounds to learn about family violence not only from the perspective of criminal justice practitioners but also from those who work in women's shelters, with children affected by family violence, or those who provide counselling intervention to offenders. The Family Violence Police Advisory Committee has also worked closely with Children's Services to develop criteria for clear police guidelines in domestic violence cases. The police guidelines have been developed and distributed.

As I mentioned, Mr. Chairman, these are very critical issues. These are very critical programs to our ministry. One other area when we talk about domestic violence or family violence is that of what we are doing as well with relation to Alberta's victims and victims of crime. To respond to several of the recommendations in the report of the Alberta victims of crime consultation, a revised organizational structure is being implemented by the victim services

branch. A grants administration manager, training officer, and an aboriginal programs and isolated communities co-ordinator have been hired by our department. A community and specialized programs co-ordinator and a standards and evaluation co-ordinator will be hired in the near future.

A concept will be developed during this year, '06-07, to provide funding to pay travel expenses for victims to attend trials, observe sentencings, and/or read victim impact statements allowed in court. A victim services awareness campaign was launched on March 6 of this year. The campaign consisted of three radio announcements, which aired on stations across Alberta until April 7, 2006. Advertisements have been posted in restaurants and bars in several communities and in Calgary and Edmonton transit vehicles, and a series of posters have been forwarded to victim assistance programs for posting throughout their communities. Since the awareness program was launched, there has been a 152 per cent increase in the number of hits to the victims' programs section of the Solicitor General and Public Security website.

Consultations with stakeholder groups will continue this year to develop a victims of crime protocol. So, Mr. Chairman, when we talk about family violence, we want to start with, again, education and prevention in the home, but we also want to ensure that our officers are trained and they have the ability to do a proper investigation and/or ensure the safety of the victim, ensuring that we can well recognize the level of threat that may be in the home that she's living in and ensuring her protection. If she is a victim of an assault or a victim of a crime, we want to as well be able to provide her with support services from the community as well as financial support if it's required.

The police training centre. I'll be very brief. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona questioned the model, and we are moving forward as well with the police and peace officer training centre. We are continuing to do more work within government but as well looking at the training issues of our other departments, like SRD, the fish and wildlife officers, the training needs that they have; the Community Development parks officers and the training needs that they have; inspection services officers for Transportation; and a whole host of others, Gaming for example. In Government Services there are officers there as well. Obviously, there are training needs for all of our government staff that are peace officers as well as those 400 to 450 police officers that would get trained.

We're moving forward just in building the package that we have to take forward to the government. As we move forward, though, we are also looking at other opportunities. We hope to announce the site location. We are studying the 30 submissions that have come in to the government to look at for the site of a centre. So we're hoping to do that in the next short while.

The hon. member mentioned: are we looking at a P3? Again, yes, there are always opportunities that we should be analyzing, any opportunities, whether it's government funding or whether it's a P3 model. I think we have to ask those questions on any major project that we look at doing. But, as well, looking at the location, not all provincial government projects have to be done in Edmonton and Calgary. We want to ensure that we're looking at those opportunities, especially in light of our new rural development strategy, that the minister of agriculture is moving forward with.

I think I answered all of my questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and I'd like to now address the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. He raised some points at the beginning regarding goal 1, I believe it was, and providing "leadership in policing and services that promote safe communities." I think he talked about it again at the end regarding crime prevention and

enhancing policing programs throughout his constituency but, really, Alberta in general.

5:00

For the police to be effective, there needs to be public confidence in law enforcement. Our goal is to set up and ensure that fair and objective processes are in place regarding looking at various programs as well as working in partnerships between municipalities and the RCMP, for example, to look at what is required in their community. The elected officials in the community as well as residents in the community have a huge and tremendous say in what level of policing they want, what the services are that are being provided, if they want to expand it. Those are some of the areas that, yes, we have to look at.

Crime is moving from our urban centres to those smaller centres, and as our province grows and as even our smaller communities grow, crime is ever present in all of these little areas. Whether it's petty thefts and break-ins, obviously the root causes are drugs and alcohol addiction, and I don't think that's going to change. We do have a plan in place in our presentation to the Crystal Meth Task Force. It is a very strategic plan, utilizing specialized officers that would be strategically located throughout the province that would have a tremendous impact not just in our urban areas, where they may be located, but as well in our rural areas to ensure that we can cover every area of this province via our regional bases, ensuring that if there were issues in Hinton or Edson or Grande Cache, we don't have to wait for officers to come out of Edmonton or Calgary to respond to issues in Grande Cache or Grande Prairie.

So those are what we're looking at. This is a tremendous project. I'm very excited about it. We're waiting for the recommendations, obviously, to come from the task force, but we've done a lot of work with the task force, and we'll continue to do so. It gave us an opportunity, though, as well to look and examine what programs we are providing presently. It really gave us an opportunity to look at: what are we providing through our ministry and through the Minister of Education's ministry? What are we providing regarding prevention programs in our schools? What are we providing regarding education programs for kids at community centres? This was a real opportunity for us to relook at what we were doing.

As well, if this is the end result, if we want to dismantle and disrupt organized crime, if we want to eliminate the majority of drugs in our community – that is a difficult task, but that's our goal – how are we going to do it? This is how we have to strategize. So everything from education and prevention was looked at and measured. Issues related to intelligence and enforcement and investigations were looked at as well as, again, as I mentioned, the healing and treatment side of the issues related to drugs such as crystal meth, crack cocaine, obviously heroin. Those are the issues that we're dealing with, and we want to ensure that we can address them in the future. So we are moving forward in that area.

Related to smaller communities and the petty thefts and break-ins, again, as I mentioned, these are some of the areas that we will be focusing on in the future. We want to ensure as well, though, that we have a close relationship with the RCMP in looking at their model of policing. We've seen 200 front-line RCMP officers added to the streets in rural Alberta in those communities less than 5,000. [interjection] Maybe a few too many is what I'm hearing.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to say that we want to ensure that our communities are safe and secure. We want to ensure that the ability to investigate criminal activity and arrest those that are responsible is there and that we have the resources there to do that job. We want to ensure that individuals, whether they're seniors or young kids, can

walk through their neighbourhood at night and not feel afraid that someone may attack them. It's that sense of fear that is there, and we want to try to dispel that sense of fear and make them feel that they are safe and secure in the community that they live in.

So we are looking at the number of officers and the number of sheriff's officers. Now there's an opportunity for us to look at the level of police officers that we need in the province as well as the level of traffic enforcement that we need in the province. We want to look at that formula and then determine how many officers or RCMP we will need next year. Where would they be located? In what parts of the province? So those are some of those areas. We're finding that in northern Alberta the crime rate and the criminal caseload is higher. Probably about roughly from the Wetaskiwin parallel going north the statistics appear that they are busier communities in the northern half of the province than in the southern half.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead mentioned rotating RCMP in our national parks, and it's a very good comment. That's something that we'll have to talk to the RCMP about and having RCMP officers in red serge so they could be, obviously, taking pictures with tourists. They are icons for tourism throughout Canada. Obviously, in Alberta with the mountains in the background I don't think you can get a much better picture unless you and I were in it. I did want to just mention, though, that that's something that we'll look at. If additional officers are required in the summer, there is an enhancement program that we do provide to municipalities to have additional RCMP officers in their communities. So that's one of those things that we can look at in the future.

Mr. Chairman, I think I've answered all of the hon. member's questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to be very brief because I guess there's not that much time left. I commend the minister and his department. It's one of the most important departments in government, you know, for ensuring that we have safe streets and that we have the sense of safety on the part of our seniors and the children and in all the ways that we can just be able to walk around our streets. I see that some of the performance factors are not as high as we would like to see in that area.

But I'd just like to look quickly at correctional officers and safety. The safety of our correctional officers is a primary concern. They need the best equipment to protect themselves. In the estimates, page 395, line item 3.2.1, adult remand and correctional centres, under Voted Equipment/Inventory Purchases there's only an allocation of \$150,000, which is the same as last year. Is this small allocation enough to provide the best equipment to correctional officers in order to protect themselves? Do they have the best protective vests available? Can the minister tell us what kind of protective vests the guards at the remand centres wear? Is the body armour issued to these officers capable of withstanding all types of knives or stabbing weapons? Do they all have trauma plates? Can the minister tell us if officers in the remand centres have the best equipment possible to provide for their safety?

What about the safety issue regarding the overcrowding? This creates an unsafe working condition for staff at the remand centres. What is the minister doing to fix this and enhance the safety of remand guards? We've heard from the officers themselves that the number of assaults in these facilities is growing as the population increases. Guards are threatened with serious harm every shift, yet there's no move made to address the conditions that lead to this. Gang members should be separated and isolated. Violent criminals

should not be housed with nonviolent criminals. What is the minister doing to address these issues?

I'll just have a quick point on the police academy. Now, I understand that there are, you know, 30-some submissions or something like that left, and there are two that I think are very strong. There's one from Edmonton, and there's one from Drumheller. They're both very strong, and they both have correctional facilities right near them. They both have good lands. When will the minister be choosing between those two?

I'll just defer to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. He just has one or two more questions.

5:10

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to respond to and answer the questions that the hon. member raised. Regarding the safety of corrections officers' vests and the amount that's listed in here, yes, those are the dollars that are listed for the vests. In fact, there's a media release going out; I think it went out today. In fact, we're going to be showing the new vests that the corrections officers will have; that's tomorrow at 1 o'clock at the remand centre, I believe. We just received them. They are state-of-the-art vests, so to speak. I'm very proud to have received these for our officers.

This is an issue regarding health and safety. This is an issue of protection of our officers who are working with some of the most dangerous offenders and potential criminals, so we want to ensure their safety. I'm very proud of each of those officers and the work that they do. Again, their safety is my concern, and that was one of the first things that I asked my staff to look at when I was first appointed to this position. It has taken some time. There were some issues with previous vests, but I can assure you that the vests that have been selected now are second to none. They are of the latest quality of stab-resistant material to protect officers. Really, it is an opportunity to look at that whole safety issue that you speak of there.

Safety concerns regarding the number of remand offenders that are in there: obviously, that is a concern for us as well. We are looking at addressing those problems by moving some of them out, moving them to the Fort Saskatchewan facility and, as I mentioned earlier, the opportunity to move sentenced offenders to the Grande Cache facility once a contract can be reached with the federal government, with the federal Corrections Canada. So we're working on that.

I heed your comments regarding the police training centre. As I mentioned, we are going through all 30 submissions. We want to develop a short list, obviously look at some site locations in the future. That is moving forward as we go.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the following question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$434,123,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$434,123,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report of the budget estimates and business plan of the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Hon. members, before I call on the Deputy Premier, I would like to remind everyone to clear off their desks because the Forum for Young Albertans will be meeting in here on the weekend, and it would be very helpful.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's been a week of good progress in work in the Legislature. It's been a very special week having Her Excellency here in the Assembly this afternoon. I would move that we call it 5:30 and that the House reconvene on Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 5:15 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 8, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Hon. members and those in the galleries, if you'd now join us in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce Brent Seib, Yaser Shawar, Eman Oliver, and David Lam. Brent is the manager at Westmount Scotiabank and is also a proud supporter of a number of local charities. Over the Christmas season Brent attended the ATCO and *Edmonton Sun* Christmas Charity Auction. He bid and won a fantastic lunch of sandwiches – correct? – for four with me, which we enjoyed this afternoon. Now, I'm told that the auction raised close to \$230,000 in donations, which was shared among Edmonton Catholic Social Services, the Christmas Bureau of Edmonton, the capital region United Way, and the Stollery children's foundation. Each of these charities does important work in Edmonton and its surrounding communities, so I'm proud to be able to support them by having lunch with these four community-minded Albertans. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join me in offering them the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my father, Dr. Fred Cenaiko, who is seated in your gallery. My father immigrated from Poland in 1926. He started his education in Canada, leaving home at 14 years of age to finish grade 12, and later began medical school at the University of Alberta here in Edmonton. On completion he began his medical practice in Wakaw, Saskatchewan, in 1955.

For over 50 years and now at the age of 80 my father has served his community as a family physician in Wakaw with a remarkable commitment based on strong personal integrity and professional ethics. He started satellite clinics around Wakaw, including one on

the One Arrow reserve near Batoche. As a member of the Christian Medical & Dental Associations' missions he travelled to Central America yearly for 30 years, providing both medical and dental assistance to thousands of nationals who could not afford health services whatsoever. My father is also a recognized practitioner in alternative modalities of treatment for chronic pain, and he has people coming from across Canada to see him. His motto is: education is the key to success. He feels that education plays a strong role in giving people the power and potential to do great things with their lives.

Mr. Speaker, my father has received the Saskatchewan Order of Merit, the Ukrainian nation builders award from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and has been nominated for the Order of Canada. Dr. Cenaiko has been a role model and mentor for many in his field and his community and plays a lead role in my life.

My brother Lloyd is president of the Humanitarian Aid Response Teams, HART, which provides programs and medical support to children in Ukraine. He's accompanying my father today.

The hon. Premier and Mrs. Klein and the hon. Minister of Education had the opportunity to attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Ukraine for a children's playground centre and one of numerous orphanages there.

I'd ask my father and my brother Lloyd to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly seven members of the civil service in Sustainable Resource Development. These members are all part of our strategic forestry initiative division in Sustainable Resource Development, and they're responsible for the very important softwood lumber and the value-added portions of our ministry. They're seated in the members' gallery, and as I repeat their names, I'm going to ask them to rise and be recognized by the Assembly as they go about learning more about what happens in the Assembly. The first one is Mr. Pat Guidera, followed by Mrs. Gloria Hossinger, Mrs. Sandra Candeias, Ms Donna Fregren, Mr. Siegfried Bahde, Mr. Paul Short, and Mr. Gordon Giles. I'd ask the Assembly to please give them the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure for me this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 27 of Alberta's brightest and finest and sharpest young minds. They happen to come from the Avonmore elementary school in my riding, and they are here accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Jill Atkins Cyr, and parents helpers Karen Loveridge and Connie Demchuk. I had the pleasure of meeting with them a few moments ago, and I can attest to their brilliance. I would ask all of the students from Avonmore elementary to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members here. Welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of four individuals who are with us today to help commemorate May as Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. This is the organization that

has presented us with the beautiful red carnations on our desks this afternoon, and that's to bring awareness to the concerns of those with multiple sclerosis and their families and their caregivers. I'm pleased to introduce from the Alberta division of the MS Society of Canada Neil Pierce, president; Garry Wheeler, vice-president; Darrel Gregory, director of communications; and Alison Hagan, director of development. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to introduce a class from a school in my constituency which has some specific significance to at least one member of this Legislature and to a former member of the Legislature. It's the Webber Academy, the grade 5 class. They are accompanied today by Ms Janice Chan, Mr. Daniel Mondaca, Mrs. Tanya Ferguson, and Mrs. Janet Adamson, their teachers. I believe they're located in both galleries, and I'd ask them to stand and be recognized by this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to recognize today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very, very special guest, special to me in that she was actually involved in all three of the election campaigns that I ran in, and I would say that she played a very important role in getting me elected three times. That is my granddaughter, who is part of the Webber Academy class. I didn't spot which side she's sitting on, but I would ask Mackenzie Symons, my granddaughter, to stand and be recognized by the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and all members of the Assembly 66 students from St. John Bosco school in my constituency. Now, they're just starting to study government, so they look with anticipation to figure out exactly how things work here. They've got teachers here: Mr. McNeely, Mrs. Adolf, and Ms Giampa; parent helpers Mrs. Pelletier, Mr. Johnston, and Ms Chimenti. I'd ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two constituents of mine from Calgary-Currie: Keith Purdy and Rick Kennedy. On August 20 last year, a fine, warm summer's day, I had the honour of attending their wedding, a civil ceremony performed by an Alberta marriage commissioner that took place one month after federal legislation allowing same-sex marriage was given royal assent. Rick and Keith are fast approaching their first official anniversary but, in fact, have been together as a couple now for 16 years. They tell me that that's the longest relationship in either of their families, which suggests to me that love and commitment to make a marriage work are more important than whether the couple is gay or straight. They're seated in the visitors' gallery, and I would ask Keith and Rick to stand now and receive what I hope will be the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Charan Khehra and his wife, Surender Khehra. Just this past Friday the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers awarded Charan the lifetime achievement award in recognition of his contribution to his community, to Alberta, and to Canada. Charan has an excellent record of public service since coming to this country, including 12 years with the Alberta department of labour as a senior economist and policy analyst and then as a staff member with the NDP opposition caucus. Charan serves on a number of community and other public advisory boards. Surender is also a former government of Alberta employee and is actively involved in the community as well. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would now invite them to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to introduce a special guest in the members' gallery, Ryan Portman, who is a friend and an active and caring member of the Calgary community, a grade 10 student. He's visiting here today to find out what an MLA does in the Legislature. Let's give him our warm welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we've seen so far today, we are very fortunate in this House to introduce some truly inspirational Albertans. It's my honour now to recognize a couple of people that I would fit into that category for sure. One is a legend in municipal and provincial and national politics. Many of you know her. I say that she's a legend; she's also a young lady. She's worked with the likes of Diane Ablonczy, Tony Clement, Scott Brison, Jon Lord, Moe Amery, Mark Hlady, and David Heyman. You know her as Kim Linkletter. She's a volunteer extraordinaire with a few groups, like the Calgary Round-Up Band, Girl Guides, Heritage Park, St. Albert the Great Parish, school parent councils, and a number of local PC associations, including Calgary-Lougheed. Without Kim I wouldn't be here. I guess that I should be thanking you, shouldn't I, Kim? Joining Kim is her lovely daughter Virginia, who I'm sure at the end of the day will have a resumé twice as long. Please help me welcome two inspirational Albertans, Kim and Virginia Linkletter.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a relatively new addition to the staff at the Official Opposition caucus. Earl Woods has been tasked with the enviable job of taking thoughts and ideas of MLAs and putting them into words that match prose and, hopefully, catch the imagination of the citizens of this province. I would ask Earl to please stand at this time in the public gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Issues in Fort Chipewyan

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There is rapidly growing evidence supporting a possible major medical outbreak in northern Alberta. The town of Fort Chipewyan is reporting extremely high rates of cancers and other serious illnesses among its small population. Medical experts, town officials, residents, First Nation leaders, and scientific advisers all agree that the provincial government needs to act now to determine the causes of this outbreak. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that a report was issued in 1999 detailing concerns over the high rates of leukemia, lymphomas, lupus, and autoimmune diseases, why after a year and a half on the job is the minister just now learning about this study and its recommendations?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not just learning about it. As a matter of fact, about six weeks ago on CBC I gave a comment on this very thing. It was profiled at that time. There was the discovery of yet another case of cancer. Actually, for several years now industry, the Northern Lights health region, Health Canada, Environment officials, and Alberta Health and Wellness have been co-operating in doing their due diligence on the kinds of issues that might emerge to identify cancer. It is not conclusive. Everything we know thus far is not conclusive, in fact, that these cases, while tragic and unfortunate, have been caused by any environmental factor.

I can say that the group met most recently on April 25 of this year and reviewed some of the data which may be of significance. We're waiting for them to go through the process of the kind of work you do when you're following up on both the etiology and what the understanding is of the progression.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the minister's comments can the minister tell the House if she knows of any other factors besides the oil sands developments in the Fort Chip area that may be causing the high rates of cancer and other diseases in that region?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that are being focused on; for example, questions by the NRBS and the group's focus on priorities such as pollution prevention, hormone problems in fish, water flows and quality, contaminants, nutrients, safe drinking water, and enhanced environmental monitoring. Two human health-related initiatives are also in place during the review to ensure that there is safety of drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, we have urged that people not panic on this or, in fact, inflame what is a very proper and appropriate scientific investigation. It will be thorough to the degree that all of those partners bring their own expertise on board, and I trust that we will get conclusions that will lead us to find solutions.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that this government and this minister made cutbacks to aboriginal health strategies in their latest budget, how can First Nations people be assured that proper long-term strategies are being implemented to protect them from possible negative health problems?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I will resist talking about the number of people who questioned me on the health budget as it relates to grants

to aboriginal people. My recollection is that approximately 25 per cent of the grants specifically targeted to aboriginal programs throughout Alberta – and those are grants, not the normal day-to-day funding that goes through the regional health authorities. There was a proportionately small reduction in grant programs, recognizing that the grants that were in place in those circumstances were grants where, quite properly, the federal government should cover those costs. They were not significant in terms of anything that I could identify that would impact upon any kind of support that's provided for aboriginal people in northern Alberta. Quite the contrary. These kinds of grants, of which I would be pleased to table a list, supplement other programs and supports that are throughout Alberta.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

School Nutrition Programs

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One must question this government's priorities when they spend nearly a million dollars a year on luxury vehicles for cabinet ministers while neglecting thousands of Alberta schoolchildren who go to school hungry every day. Ask these ministers to give up their \$40,000 government cars, and I bet that they'd make quite a fuss. Ask them to provide funding for school nutrition programs, and they vote it down. Apparently, getting cabinet ministers to work in luxury vehicles is the job of the province, where feeding hungry children falls solely on the backs of impoverished families. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Given that this minister has repeatedly accepted government cars, including, for example, a Buick LeSabre Limited Edition, why is it the government's direct responsibility to provide this minister with a fancy car when it isn't the government's direct responsibility to provide a school nutrition program for hungry children in Alberta?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, you know, you have an option to either accept a government vehicle or take a kilometrage rate. I'm quite sure that the opposition leader takes a kilometrage rate, and if he does, I'd ask him to admit that he does. Perhaps he'd be willing to give his up. The thing is that when I evaluated that from my particular perspective, I found it to be less expensive to the taxpayer for me to actually accept a government car, so that's the decision that I made.

With respect to school nutrition programs I have answered that question in this House at least three or four times. I'd be happy to answer it again because a lot of people, obviously, including the Liberal opposition, don't yet know that we have approximately 70 per cent of our school boards today who do offer some type of a nutritional program. Some have hot lunch programs, others have breakfast programs, and so on. They do it to accommodate local needs, and they do it in partnership with local community agencies, which were referenced earlier in *Hansards* from previous occasions.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Premier. How does this Premier justify government policies that provide high-salaried deputy ministers with a dedicated \$40,000-a-year car allowance when it doesn't provide 2 cents of dedicated funding for school nutrition programs?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Education pointed out, school boards are provided with a budget, and it's entirely up to

the school boards as to whether they wish to spend that money on hot lunch programs or on other issues that they consider to be priorities. I would remind the hon. member that school boards are elected, just as he is elected. A certain amount of money is provided to school boards, and it's entirely up to them as to whether they wish to provide hot lunch or hot breakfast programs.

Mr. Speaker, relative to vehicles the hon. minister explained that there is an option of having a vehicle or taking mileage. I'm sure that the hon. Leader of the Opposition, if he doesn't have a vehicle, takes mileage or kilometrage, which is very significant. I can recall that an opposition member – and it was the NDs who were in opposition at that time – criticized me, of course, as Minister of Environment for taking a plane up to I believe it was Bonnyville from Calgary. But he didn't mention that he drove up there and charged the government – I forget – about 27 cents a kilometre all the way to Bonnyville and back, which amounted to quite a bit.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the minister of learning: will this minister do the right thing and give up his dedicated \$40,000-a-year car allowance until this government can provide dedicated funding for school nutrition programs? Do the right thing, Gene.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to correct myself. It's not 70 per cent; it's actually 77 per cent. It's actually 77 per cent of our school boards who offer school meal programs ranging from daily to perhaps weekly to something else, and they do it in partnership with very proud corporate volunteer organizations to ensure that those children who are in need receive it. Furthermore, if there are children who are in need above and beyond that, we do have a number of other government programs that they might wish to access. I'd ask the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to just briefly augment the other part of the question.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two things will be getting bigger next year: class size and the standardized testing office. Decades of centralization have expanded the central administration office in the Department of Education. This department now has more than double the staff of British Columbia's Department of Education for a comparable number of students and is getting bigger. My question to the Minister of Education: why is the third year of the Alberta Commission on Learning recommendation 14, the class size initiative, being cut when the standardized testing office is expanding?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there is quite a large non sequiter there, but let me address it in any event. The Learning Commission, when it brought in its recommendations, said: here are the targets that we would like you to achieve on a jurisdiction-wide basis over a period of five years. We attempted to do that much quicker. We tried to do it in three years. We had benchmarks set along the way. After the two-year period is concluded, which is this coming June, we know that we will have seen class size averages on a jurisdiction-wide basis reduced to within or to have bettered the targets set at the two-year benchmark in all grade levels except kindergarten to grade 3.

What we've done in this third year is targeted the monies in the class size initiative to do two things: first of all, to retain the 1,688 brand new teachers that have been added to the system over the past two years; and secondly, to target the monies where they are needed most, and that is in the kindergarten to grade 3 level because that is where our class sizes are not yet at the level of 17 on a jurisdictional average-wide basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has the minister considered decentralizing education by reducing the number of staff in his central office and flowing these dollars through to the local jurisdictions that need it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as I recall – and this may be before the hon. member's time in the House – there were a number of comments made with respect to supporting the Learning Commission document. In fact, we have responded with support for almost 90-some of those recommendations, and that has meant – guess what? – adding some additional staff to help accomplish them at the central office. There are a number of outstanding programs that are requiring additional expertise within my ministry, and we have added the staff to arrive at the best practices from around the world, from other parts of Canada, and so on to ensure that those programs are provided to keep Alberta in the position of being able to say: we have the best education system in Canada, and we're working very aggressively to have one of the best, if not the best, in all of the world.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How does the minister justify increasing the number of staff in the standardized testing office by five members to a total of 696 staff when school boards are forced to cut teachers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any school boards that are being forced to cut teachers. I think what's important to remember here is that we are in what we call the preliminary budgeting period. The actual budgets for school boards will be turned in to me and my ministry, as per previous years, on or before June 30. In fact, up until the end of May school boards don't even know, for example, how many teachers will be retiring because teachers aren't required to let their school boards know until the end of May. Now, that in itself will have quite a large impact, and there are other similar factors to be worked in. They have also just received their jurisdictional profile numbers, and they are all getting an increase. I don't think there's a single school board out there that isn't sharing in the \$5.3 billion that this government is providing to educate kindergarten to grade 12 students this coming year.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Donations to Political Parties

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's an old saying that he who pays the piper calls the tune. The 2005 annual financial statements filed at the chief electoral office show the unhealthy reliance of both the provincial Conservative and Liberal parties on corporate donations: 73 per cent of PC Party contributions came from corporations and almost half of Liberal Party contributions. By contrast, over 99 per cent of Alberta NDP contributions

last year came from individual Albertans. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Why does this government refuse to follow the lead of their federal cousins as well as the governments in provinces like Quebec and Manitoba and amend our laws here in Alberta to get big money out of Alberta politics by restricting donations to individual Albertans only?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not surprised at the numbers that the hon. member has put forward, but I would suggest that it has far more to do with policy than it does with anything else. It's well known that this government supports free enterprise, that this government's policies are to keep taxes low to leave more money in Albertans' pockets. I would not dare to speak for the Liberal opposition, but I think it's also well known what the NDs' philosophy is in those areas. So I'll stand for free enterprise, for more money in Albertans' pockets, and that will be the basis that I recommend policy in this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, can the minister then explain why the government is cutting corporations' taxes by 15 per cent in an overheated economy and at the same time cutting important programs for aboriginal children and aboriginal health and so on if not because they've received such massive donations from the corporate sector?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a stretch. That's a real stretch. Good, sound economics would suggest that lowering taxes on all levels is good for the economy. There isn't an economist that I have heard from or read that doesn't suggest that lowering taxes both on the business side and a personal side makes a stronger economy.

In the early 1990s, when this province was struggling with debt, our Premier made a statement and, in fact, a commitment to Albertans, suggested that if we followed these policies, we would reap the benefits down the road. Mr. Speaker, the benefits are here today. Those corporations are the very people who are investing in this economy, that are ensuring that Albertans have jobs, including our aboriginal peoples.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's too bad the disabled and the poor can't make donations to the Conservative Party because maybe they would get some attention from this government.

Given that this government's Ottawa cousins are tightening the existing rules on federal party leadership contest donations, why is the Conservative government refusing to regulate leadership contests of registered political parties, thereby avoiding the mistake of allowing the Premier's chair to be bought by the highest bidder?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak to this, having gone through a leadership contest. Even the NDs can buy a membership, \$5, and they can cast a vote, and the Liberals can buy a membership and cast a vote. Many of them did, and many of them probably will, NDs and Liberals alike, and cast a vote as they did in the last leadership campaign, as they did en masse in the last leadership campaign.

So it's not at my beck and call; it's at the beck and call of the people of this province. By the way, this is the only party with a democratic process to select a leader.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Support for First Nations

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many First Nations are expressing disappointment and calling the new federal government's budget announcement a major step backwards. Their concerns relate to the government's decision to scrap the \$5 billion Kelowna accord aimed at improving the lives of aboriginal people. My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Knowing that this budget is a far cry from the \$5 billion committed in the Kelowna accord, how does the federal budget benefit aboriginal Albertans?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we were very disappointed as well that there was absolutely no mention in the budget about the Kelowna accord. There was a lot of time, a lot of work, a lot of effort that went into that accord to make sure that we were dealing with the gaps in the aboriginal community.

Mr. Speaker, although this budget doesn't address all the targets that we had talked about, there are some examples of some good things that I think can result: as an example, \$450 million for improving water and, of course, the other one is on-reserve housing, educational outcomes, and \$300 million to address immediate off-reserve housing, which is a huge issue, and I think that's what some of the people in the urban areas are seeing; \$2.2 billion to address the residential schools; \$150 million to improve . . .*

The Speaker: Hon. minister, please. Are the numbers the hon. minister is giving applicable to Alberta?

Ms Calahasen: Yes.

The Speaker: All of them? Two point two billion of this, and \$400 million for Alberta?

Ms Calahasen: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I'll just tell you how.

The Speaker: No. We'll go on to the next question.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental to the same minister: given that aboriginal people are migrating to urban centres at an increasing rate, are there any dollars in the federal budget to address this transition?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, just so that people will understand what we're dealing with, the aboriginal community, as you know, is migrating into the cities in massive amounts. As an example, in Edmonton alone there is a population of 40,000 presently; that was the 2001 census. As a matter of fact, in Calgary it is 22,000 people who have migrated into the cities.

When we're talking about urban population, we're dealing with a lot of issues, and I'm very, very proud to hear that we are dealing with off-reserve housing, which has been one of the concerns from the cities, and, secondly, Mr. Speaker, the outcomes for aboriginal women, the children, and, of course, the families that deal with education. As you know, when they migrate into the cities, they deal with the educational component. So, Mr. Speaker, these details, unfortunately, are not fleshed out yet, and as we all know, the devil is in the details.

2:10

Mr. Lindsay: My second supplemental to the same minister: knowing the limited amount of money in the budget for aboriginal people, what are you doing to advocate on their behalf?

*See p. 1347, right col., para. 7

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really proud to be able to talk about it. First of all, I met with the minister of Indian and northern affairs Canada. We discussed the priorities that the First Nations have had, and he's had meetings with the First Nations. I think what we have to do is continue to work with the minister of INAC but also with my government, which has been very key in dealing with a number of issues. I think we need to continue to collaborate with the federal minister, with the First Nations to be able to deal with these things. I will carefully scrutinize the process that will be utilized in determining what the next steps will be in the whole budget process.

The Speaker: The hon. minister will be able to continue her discussion in response to the Speaker Wednesday afternoon when their estimates are designated.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Continuing Care Standards

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Auditor General's report on long-term care indicated that basic standards were not current and that systems to monitor the compliance with standards were not adequate. The continuing care standards released last week were more like suggestions to the regional health authorities than the strong, enforceable standards recommended by the Auditor General and certainly desired by many Albertans. They are too general and too fragmented to protect the health and safety of residents in continuing care facilities. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can the minister explain why she delegated responsibility for monitoring compliance with health standards to the regional health authorities rather than establishing a provincial independent continuing care commissioner as the Liberal opposition has suggested?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For any reader that understands the meaning of "shall," there are many places in the standards that say that the "regional health authority shall," and it's a very definite requirement about what they should do. But beyond that, on the back two pages of the standards, there's a section on the Health Quality Council role. Recently we've worked with the Health Quality Council to place them on the same parallel in authority for quality decision-making and quality monitoring as a regional health authority, and the Health Quality Council has a role and responsibility in making sure that quality is delivered. So within the context of the standards and with an understanding of the new role of the Health Quality Council, it's not only the regional health authority that will be delivering quality but the responsibility of the Health Quality Council to not only assure that health quality is maintained for continuing care but will be in conversations with the regions on those issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I believe those councils should be above the regional health authorities.

Why does the minister find it acceptable for continuing care residents to receive different levels of care depending on which region they live in?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the attempt within the standards is to acknowledge that there are different mixes of populations and different kinds of care provided. There are even different ranges of facilities, from assisted living or places where people receive partial care because of the kinds of acuity they have. So it would be very difficult to respond as the ministry wanting them to receive different care, but we have different kinds of care facilities. As to the quality of care, you should receive the type and quality of care that you need based on the assessment of your personal care needs and the plan that is developed with the long-term care resident and their family. So I would say that if you're a long-term care resident with a particular acuity in one region, you should receive the same type of care, the same intensity, and the same scope of treatment in another region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I agree, but I don't think it's happening. Why is the minister making continuing care staff, residents, and their families wait another year before legislating continuing care standards that would be provincial?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the capacity of some authorities may not be up to the same capacity as others, so we've asked for implementation of certain standards, in particular those that are surrounding patient safety, immediately. Many of them are ready to do that. Some are finding and facing staffing issues, staffing mix issues, where we aren't able to get the required number of staff. But there is good news on the horizon. Recently in Palliser, for example, 30 new staff were retained to support quality long-term care, and we'll continue to develop a workforce strategy that enables them all to be to this standard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Criminal Sentencing Changes

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the federal government introduced two bills that will change the Criminal Code and make for tougher sentences for criminals. Apparently one would impose mandatory minimum sentences for various gun-related crimes while the other would eliminate conditional sentences like house arrest for serious crimes. My question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister tell us how the proposed change to sentences for gun crimes will affect Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last fall the Attorneys General and Solicitors General met in Whitehorse and at that time, among other things, discussed the gun crimes that were occurring across the country, particularly at that time in the Toronto area. Here in Alberta we do not have the same extent of gun crimes, but it is a serious issue. There is a particular connection between guns and organized crime, particularly the drug trade, so I can tell you that the initiative of the federal government in bringing mandatory minimums with respect to certain gun crimes that are related, particularly, with other crimes is a very good move. It will ensure that conditional sentencing is not available in those particular crimes, and it means that people who today are not doing time in jail as a result of similar circumstances will in fact, once this law becomes a law of Canada, be doing time in jail.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. What effect will the proposed legislation on eliminating the option of conditional sentences for serious crimes have here in Alberta?

Mr. Stevens: Well, this is another matter that was discussed last fall at the federal/provincial/territorial meeting. In fact, Alberta has been leading the way for the last five years in asking the federal government to get serious with respect to serious crimes and ensuring that conditional sentencing is not available in those areas. Conditional sentencing is quite appropriate in minor crimes but not in serious crimes. I can tell you that as of last fall every provincial justice minister, every territorial justice minister was agreed that the federal government needed to do something. So, once again, this is a very good move. It will ensure that people who do serious crime will do some serious time now whereas today there is a very good chance that they go home and watch colour television, albeit under certain restrictions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Solicitor General. Given that our correctional institutions and remand centres are reportedly already over capacity, where will all these additional prisoners be housed?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. About 10 days ago I had the opportunity to meet with the Hon. Stockwell Day, Minister of Public Safety for Canada, and these were some of the issues that we discussed. There is a commitment – and there was a commitment in this last week's budget – from the federal government regarding providing resources as well as financial support for institutions in the capacity that they have right now. The offenders that the hon. member and the Minister of Justice spoke about are looking at serious crimes that have a mandatory minimum of possibly five years or more. Obviously, those are federal sentences. Those inmates would be placed in federal institutions, not provincial institutions, and there is a commitment from them for funding for additional space if required in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Home-care Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recruiting for caregivers in home-care programs has pitted individuals in the self-managed care programs against larger facilities and institutions which provide home care. There is a critical shortage of home-care workers, which is further exacerbated because these low-paid caregivers have to pay their own fuel costs to travel from location to location. Current funding models do not address these issues. My questions are to the minister of health. Given that people with progressive disabilities require 24-hour home care and the current funding model only provides for 10 hours, what does the government expect them to do for the other 14 hours?

2:20

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, relative to the very specific supports for people in transportation, there may not be in place in every

circumstance sufficient capacity in the regions. That's something that we'll have to check, and we'll see exactly how they intend to spend the money.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Assembly of something I mentioned during Committee of Supply last week. Since March 15 of last year this government has put \$83 million more into long-term and continuing care for the quality delivery of care. It has nothing to do with the amount of money that we have added through the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports' budget. It is purely to increase the amount of money for caregivers. It is to ensure that there are safe lifting policies in places. It's to ensure that regional health authorities have sufficient dollars to expand on the level of care and commitment to those with continuing care needs.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd be very happy to look into the very specific item about the mileage relative to the home-care delivery personnel and investigate it as the member sees fit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what is the government's plan to increase the total number of trained home-care workers and staff through school spaces and foreign qualifications? What arrangements has she made with her colleagues?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have an aggressive workforce plan that we will be delivering in the next few weeks with the opportunity to be fully conversant on all portions of it, but I should indicate that we have 8,800 aides in Alberta that will all be fully trained in skills as of March 31, 2008. We are working to make sure that they are enhanced in their skills and that the proper people that have the proper type of learning are in place to look after people in either home-care situations or in continuing care residences.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If the minister's investigations on the fuel cost issue are satisfactory, will the minister commit to new funding models which do include a fuel cost or mileage arrangement for home-care workers whether they're individuals working for self-managed care programs or working in institutions and travelling from institution to institution?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the responsibility for delivery has rested with the regional health authority. The very specific nature of this inquiry is such that I would feel much more comfortable getting the accurate information and tabling a response in the House not only to the accuracy of what is being provided for continuing care support but following up with a response that would assure the hon. member about our intentions relative to any expanded program if that's even within the feasibility.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Police and Peace Officer Training Centre

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in the fall the Alberta Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security issued a request for a proposal to build a centralized training centre for police and peace officers. Thirty communities submitted, I understand, some very excellent proposals to the department. In February they were asked to wait until May to find out who had the successful bid. My questions to the minister are: when will these communities find out who has the successful bid?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member mentioned, our department is looking at developing a single-site facility to improve the quality of training by setting a training centre which would have superior standards of training not just for police but, as well, for peace officers. We received 30 tremendous proposals with 42 land options from those communities. Our department has been reviewing them, and we'll continue to study them, and then we will be making the decision of a short list coming out in the near future. There is a lot of work to do. These are very large proposals, and there is a lot of work involved in looking at each of them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that there is no funding for the training centre provided in this year's budget, what are your plans to move forward with the development of this training centre?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, that's a very good question, Mr. Speaker, and it's a very important question. As we move forward in looking at the development of a site and/or of a centre of this nature, being one of the only two provinces left in Canada that do not have one, obviously the importance is there. How do we look at the future model for funding it? We want to work with not just government but look at opportunities regarding a private/public partnership in securing the facility but, as well, looking at the opportunity for the rural development strategy and building some of these opportunities for rural development, not just for major urban centres.

Mr. Marz: Given that the minister is looking for P3s, is he expecting the communities to resubmit proposals including P3s?

Mr. Cenaiko: No, Mr. Speaker. As we move through this process, site visits will occur with those centres. Obviously, the proposals that have come forward and have been examined and studied: there will be site visits that will be required by department staff to actually go to look at the site, look at the land. As well, it will provide an opportunity for better understanding of what may be required due to the geographic land situation. As I mentioned earlier, a P3 model would come from the private/public sector, not necessarily from a municipality although tied into the municipality because of the public nature of the facility as well as the opportunity for the public to partially utilize some of the facility itself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Sale of Surplus Crown Land in Edmonton

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Progressive Conservative government continues to sell surplus land around the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads for a wide range of prices. The prices start as low as pennies per acre, and taxpayers are not getting the maximum return on some of these deals. We must examine more closely some of these deals from the 2003 *Alberta Gazette*. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. In January 2003 why did the Walton International Group Inc. pay on average \$18,000 per acre for land in Edmonton when MacEwan West Developments and other developers paid close to \$50,000 per acre for surplus government land also sold in the city of Edmonton?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, since he didn't have the courtesy to give me any forewarning, I do not have the deal. If he's doing like he did on Thursday, he mixes up apples and oranges again, taking sales from a certain year in a hot area versus another year in an area that isn't a hot market. As a matter of fact, one of the parcels he talked about last Thursday wasn't even serviced, so how on earth could it have anywhere near the value of another parcel? And I don't imagine that he went to the Auditor General like I asked him to on Thursday. I don't imagine that he did that, because he knows very well that nothing wrong has happened.

However, let me correct a few of the things. He was correct that we did pay \$22,000, slightly more, per acre on a parcel of land in 1981. Remember: 1981 was the highest value, and we're probably now just starting to exceed it, so for anything that he says about sales in 2001 and those kinds of things, of course it's cheaper – of course – because the land values are. As far as selling for pennies, he's obviously referring to the Sheckter deal, and I would like him to stand up in this House and show the House where, in fact, we sold land for so-called pennies an acre. It's not true.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. infrastructure minister is in charge of the *Alberta Gazette*, so I would encourage him to read the *Alberta Gazette* for the year 2003. It's not my job to read his documents.

Speaker's Ruling Urgency of Questions

The Speaker: Okay. Stop now. I've just about had enough of this. We have motions for returns and written questions on the Order Paper. This is now 2006, and we're going back into history. There's been an election since the last time as well. There's not one precedent that says: why don't we ask questions about the great railway debate and scandal of 1911? That would be just as appropriate. Find a specific question that's current today, and we'll move on.

2:30 Sales of Surplus Crown Land in Edmonton (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. In March of 2003 why did Walton International Group Inc. pay on average \$15,000 per acre when South Terwillegar Developments Ltd. paid on average \$46,000 per acre for surplus government land that was sold by this government, by this department, in the city of Edmonton? We're talking about 2003.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, continuing on from Thursday. Of course, he hasn't given me any – I could have had all of the answers here today if he would have. We sell hundreds of parcels of land a year, hundreds of them, and for that member to think that he can ask me a question on any specific day on a specific site without giving me any previous notice that he's going to do it, I don't have the ability, nor does he, to even begin.

Now, once again I suspect that we're going to find that he's mixing apples and oranges. But going back to Thursday, the fact is that on the parcel that he referred to that we sold, we did have two appraisals done on it by licensed appraisers, people that know, and we even got more for the land than the appraisers said.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: who in this government signed the deals to sell these properties to Walton International Group Inc. for about 30 per cent of the sale price per acre that the

government got for other properties sold at the same time in the city of Edmonton? Who signed that deal?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that tomorrow, when I have all the answers for the questions that he asked today, the member will stand up and say that he's sorry that he is painting a picture that we, in fact, are selling land at a huge loss and that somebody in my department is allowing this to happen and signing it off. I hope that he will stand up and apologize for that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

School Class Sizes

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton public is one of a growing number of school boards across the province facing crippling budget deficits. In Edmonton public's case they are projecting a deficit of \$7 million at the end of the school year. Last week I tabled a memo from Edmonton public's superintendent. The memo informed trustees that a significant portion of the projected deficit is because Alberta Education reneged on a commitment to fully fund the kindergarten to grade 3 class size target by 2006-2007. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why did Alberta Education renege on a December 2004 commitment to provide \$4.2 million to Edmonton public in 2006-07 and instead provide only \$1.9 million to achieve K to 3 class size targets?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I indicated earlier this afternoon some statistical facts with respect to the Learning Commission's recommendation as it affects and impacts class sizes, and I indicated at the time, I believe, that at the two-year benchmark, which will be concluded here on or about June 30, we'll know that all school jurisdictions will have met or will have bettered the guideline, the benchmark, that was set for the two-year period in all grade levels other than kindergarten to grade 3. Clearly, what we're trying to do now is work with the school boards and address the kindergarten to grade 3 group level, which is where we need additional dollars for reducing class sizes by hiring more teachers, and we are going to be doing that.

I think that by the time this year ends, we will have provided in excess of \$200 million for the class size reduction initiative, and that's a considerable amount of money in a very short period of time. We reduced the window from five years to three years. We found that there were some problems with that, so we're extending it and giving the boards a little more flexibility and a little more time to meet that final age grouping in terms of class sizes.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister again. This was a commitment by the Department of Education in 2004. It's not only Edmonton; it has affected school boards right across the province. My question is: why did the minister and why did the government renege on this promise made back in 2004?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, education continues to be a very important and evolving feature of both our society and of our government's undertakings, obviously, but when you see that a problem has not been addressed, you want to rush in and help address the problem where it exists. The problem exists in the kindergarten to grade 3 level. I don't know how I can make that any more clear.

Secondly, let's remember that for all of the new teachers that have been hired in September of '04 and all of the new additional teachers that were hired in September of '05, those new teachers are provided

for in the budget. We are providing money for their salaries, for their pensions, and so on. On top of that, we're providing a significant amount of brand new monies to hire yet more teachers, probably up to 200 new teachers, in the coming September school year.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that school boards are facing deficits right across this province. For Edmonton it meant the \$2.3 million they were promised and didn't get. Other school boards are in the same situation. I ask the minister this: why did this happen when there were problems for these boards?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton public school board budget for basic education, not including infrastructure, should be going up from about \$560.5 million for the '05-06 fiscal government year to about \$577 million, and that is in spite of a flatline in terms of student enrolment growth. In fact, Edmonton public's student growth may be in the negative position. We'll know very soon. We should also remember that we are only going through now what we call the preliminary budgeting phase. Final budgets will be provided to us by the end of June, which is the standard requirement, and at that point we'll see where things stand.

Right now it is quite premature, I would offer, to be speculating on whether or not schools will be in deficit positions. I would be prepared to look at that again by the end of June and give further comment. When a school board is faced with a deficit position, all they have to do is write me a letter, explain why they're in that deficit position, explain how they plan to get out of that deficit position. I will sit down with my senior officials and review their case and make a decision on whether we will accept their deficit elimination plan if, unfortunately, they are in that position.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development wishes to supplement an answer given earlier in the question period.

Support for First Nations

(continued)

Ms Calahasen: I do, Mr. Speaker. I know that I answered a question which I wasn't really listening to when you asked, so what I want to do is be able to give you the correct information. The budget numbers cited are actually not specific to Alberta. We don't know what the amounts will be, as I indicated in my supplementary. I apologize for not giving that correct information.*

The Speaker: The interjection of the chair came about because the chair does not believe that the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has within her administrative requirements or competence knowledge of the federal budget, and that was the reason why.

Now, the rules also say that if a minister chooses to supplement, the person who raised the question gets to ask a supplementary. In this case the person was me, but I'm not going to do it.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a historical vignette today. Hon. members all know that Alberta's longest serving MLA is Gordon Edward Taylor, who was first elected to the Alberta Legislature on March 21, 1940, and he served to March 14, 1979. That was a total of 38 years, 11 months, and three weeks. But then there's the question of who Alberta's shortest serving member was, and there are actually three ways of defining this.

*See p. 1343, right col., para. 5

In one way Alberta's shortest serving member is William Morrison. He was elected as a Social Credit MLA in the constituency of Okotoks-High River in the general election held August 22, 1935. He resigned on October 7, 1935, to allow William Aberhart to run in a by-election held November 4, 1935. Aberhart was elected by acclamation. Morrison's length of service was 46 days.

2:40

On July 19, 1921, Percival Baker, a United Farmers of Alberta member for the constituency of Ponoka died. He had been elected in the general election held the previous day, July 18, 1921. Mr. Baker was a member who, unfortunately, was hit in the head by a tree when he was stumping trees several weeks before the election that was held on July 18. He was elected on July 18, was moved from the hospital in Ponoka to the Royal Alexandra hospital in Edmonton, and he died the following day. Mr. Baker's service was less than one day, but he was never sworn in as an MLA. In the by-election held December 9, 1921, J.E. Brownlee was elected by acclamation, and you have heard me make mention of Mr. Brownlee before.

The shortest term of office between election and defeat is another category, and that shortest term of office between election and defeat is held by Don MacDonald, a Liberal elected in a by-election in the constituency of Three Hills on October 26, 1992, following the resignation of Connie Osterman. MacDonald received 46.3 per cent of the vote. In the general election held on June 15, 1993, in the now named constituency Three Hills-Airdrie, the current Member for Airdrie-Chestermere won the seat with 51.2 per cent of the vote. MacDonald received 34.2 per cent of that vote, and his term was seven months, 20 days.

The second shortest term of office between election and defeat is held by Alberta's first elected separatist, Gordon Kesler. Kesler won a by-election held February 17, 1982, in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury caused by the resignation of incumbent Robert C. Clark. He represented the Western Canada Concept and received 42.2 per cent of the vote. In the general election held on November 2, 1982, Kesler ran in another riding, the riding of Highwood, and finished second with 17.9 per cent of the vote. Harry Alger, a Progressive Conservative, won that with 69.9 per cent of the vote. Kesler's term was less than nine months.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It brings me pleasure to introduce two groups of guests to you and through you to the Assembly. The first is a group of young Edmontonians. Mr. Tyler Harris is a young entrepreneur who has started a travel company here in Edmonton. Along with him is Meghan Humpkey, who is originally from Wetaskiwin but has moved here to work for the last six months before she begins her studies in Edmonton. Also we have Haley Kramer, who is taking some time between travels to Mexico and Europe but will be beginning her studies at Grant MacEwan College this fall. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, with us today is Mr. Chuck Temraz. Mr. Chuck Temraz originates from Lebanon but is a constituent of mine. Mr. Temraz is quite renowned in his community as he is the first

ever to translate the works of Plato and other philosophers from the English language into the Arabic language. His books have now been donated to libraries throughout Alberta and are used as text and reference materials throughout the Middle East. I'll ask Mr. Temraz to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ellen Parker and Reka Serfozo. Reka Serfozo worked in Canada World Youth for the past four years as a project supervisor and program officer supporting international youth exchanges in eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Ellen is a community activist, global educator, and former federal candidate for the New Democrats in Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I would ask them both to rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Liberation of the Netherlands

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to mark the anniversary of the end of the military occupation and oppression of a nation and the start of an international friendship which has lasted 60 years. On May 10, 1940, Nazi forces crossed the border in an invasion which began five years of occupation of the Netherlands and the oppression of the Dutch people.

Mr. Speaker, my parents had already immigrated to the province by the time war broke out in Europe for the second time. However, many members of my extended family were subjected to Nazi rule during the occupation of the Netherlands. While the Dutch resistance waged a continuous and mostly peaceful campaign to resist being assimilated by the occupiers, they were by themselves unable to convince the Nazis to leave Holland. They needed assistance. This assistance was provided in the form of the First Canadian Army. The strength of this army varied from anywhere between 200,000 to over 400,000 troops when adding the British, Polish, American, Belgian, and Dutch fighting men to the roughly 150,000 Canadian soldiers. While the size of the army varied, their resolve and determination never wavered and was never questioned.

May 5 marked the 61st anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by the Allied forces. This was the culmination of a nine-month campaign to free Holland from Nazi occupation. The battles to free the Netherlands were difficult in the extreme, complicated by the nature of the geography of the area. The Allied troops were forced to battle through wet and boggy conditions of the lowlands and the tenacity of their opponent. However, the First Canadian Army stayed the course, and after securing a truce in late April, which allowed food relief to be brought in to a starving populace, the Allied army accepted the unconditional surrender of the occupying force on May 5, 1945.

Friendship between our two countries was cemented that day, a friendship which has been forged in the fire of the battlefield and tempered with the jubilation of victory. This friendship is still strong today, evidenced by the gifts of tulips which are sent to our nation's capital from the Dutch people. I would ask all hon. members to join me in recognizing the sacrifices which were made and the bonds that were formed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Fire Tragedy Averted

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes you don't know when you will be called upon to act quickly and think on your feet. Monday of last week something truly incredible happened not too far away from our Legislature. I was walking to an event with my legislative assistant, who is also more affectionately known as my shadow, when a car pulled up, billowing steam and smoke. Now, we all assumed that the engine was overheating and that the lady in the car would call a tow truck and get the problem sorted out. Luckily for her my leg. assistant noticed the flames spitting out of the undercarriage of the vehicle. He quickly, without a moment of hesitation, ran over to the van and opened the door to ensure that the driver got out of the vehicle in a safe manner and distanced herself from the car. Moments later the van's engine burst into flames and began whipping up the windshield. Two of our colleagues, the hon. Member for Peace River and the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, secured a fire extinguisher and tried unsuccessfully to extinguish the fire. Meanwhile, my leg. assistant called the Edmonton fire department, and they arrived within a timely four-minute response to the emergency call and extinguished the flames that were now threatening the surrounding area.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes you must be prepared to react quickly to a situation. You never know when you will have to act. Thanks to the actions of these three people and the Edmonton fire department this situation was resolved without any injury to the lady or the bystanders in the vicinity. I suggest that all members of this House should commend those kinds of actions.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The saying goes, "A rising tide raises all boats." There's a reason why it remains a saying. Sayings, while they usually contain a grain of truth, often cannot be substantiated by the facts. The fact is that the rising tide in this province is raising some boats and swamping others.

In Calgary last Thursday I attended the groundbreaking for 13 affordable housing units to be built on part of the site of the old Highlander Hotel in an initiative put together by the Calgary Community Land Trust Society, Habitat for Humanity, the family of the late Leo and Goldie Sheftel, owners of the Highlander and for whom the complex, Sheftel court, will be named, and Home Depot, which occupies the rest of the old hotel site. The city of Calgary has played a lead role in bringing everyone together to make this affordable housing project possible, but it's like dropping a pebble into the ocean: the ripples are washed away by the rising tide.

A year ago the average resale house price in Calgary was about \$260,000; today it's \$340,000. That and the steady inflow of newcomers is quickly tightening up the supply of rental housing as well. After six years in which the vacancy rate was in the 5 to 6 per cent range, a range that holds the line on rents, in the last six months the vacancy rate has dropped to 1.6 per cent, and rents have climbed anywhere from 3 to 10 per cent.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, half the homeless people in Calgary have full-time jobs. Every night of the week homeless families bed down in a church basement somewhere in Calgary through the Inn from the Cold program. I know of no city in Canada with as many people as committed and as innovative in their many approaches to solving the homelessness crisis as Calgary has. But what Calgary doesn't have

and cannot do on its own, not with all the imagination and goodwill its people possess, is create enough affordable housing, and as rents go up, there's even less to go around.

Portable housing allowances and rent supplements would be a start, but the province needs to step up to the plate now with a land-use strategy, a budget to build affordable housing, and a program to focus on getting this shameful problem solved. It's unthinkable that a province this wealthy would not make affordable housing for all its residents an absolute priority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

God's Masterpiece School Play

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is the mark of a great performance when the actors on stage are so powerful that they help the audience to completely share in their joy and their sorrow. When the men and women in an audience are wiping away tears and when they are laughing together in joy, they are transcended from their daily life for one brief moment and are part of the greater drama being enacted on stage. You may have experienced this kind of elation in a great performance at the Jubilee Auditorium or the Shaw Festival in New York or even in Stratford-upon-Avon.

However, Mr. Speaker, the outstanding performance that I am speaking of is the work of the grade 4 and grade 5 students of St. Martin de Porres elementary school in Red Deer. St. Martin is a fine arts school that teaches skills that help each child to develop their full potential in the arts. Although you might think that I'm partial because this is a school in Red Deer and has my granddaughter in the kindergarten class, I can sincerely and unequivocally say that I was totally immersed in the performance entitled *God's Masterpiece*. These children performed so well that I had to continually remind myself that the young actors that I was watching were only nine and 10 years old and not even in junior high yet.

God's Masterpiece is a two-act play that tells the story of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. The teachers and staff of St. Martin worked very hard and many long hours to coach each child, to produce the great costumes and stage sets, and to hold a silent auction and reception to help pay for the costs of this excellent performance.

Mr. Speaker, my sincerest congratulations go out to the producers of *God's Masterpiece*, teacher Justin Flunder and principal Patricia MacRae-Pasula, to the staff that dedicated many hours to work with the children, to the parents that helped to organize the reception and silent auction, and to the entire cast of incredible students who played their roles so magnificently. The death and resurrection of the Lord may indeed be God's masterpiece, but as I watched these very young children rise to a level of performance that far exceeded the normal age and maturity levels of grades 4 and 5 students, I watched them perform with their hearts and souls, and I saw that each child was truly one of God's great masterpieces.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon in recognition of MS Awareness Month. Since the 1970s the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada has marked the month of May as MS Awareness Month. This campaign offers the opportunity for MS Society volunteers and staff to complete public awareness and fundraising activities nationally and locally.

The MS carnation campaign is one such event. The carnation campaign has traditionally been an important component of the MS Society's spring fundraising season. This campaign offers Canadians the opportunity to raise funds for MS research and services by purchasing carnations from volunteers in their local communities. Since its inception in 1975 the MS carnation campaign has been highly successful, providing more than \$30 million for multiple sclerosis research and services for Canadians with MS.

Mr. Speaker, MS is an unpredictable and often disabling disease of the central nervous system. MS can cause loss of balance, impaired speech, extreme fatigue, double vision, and paralysis. It's a disease that affects people of all ages. Canada has one of the highest MS rates in the world, and each day three more Canadians are diagnosed with MS. The cause of MS is not yet known, and there is no cure, but there is hope. Purchasing a carnation during the MS carnation campaign could help the MS Society come one step closer to finding the cure for multiple sclerosis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Sale of Surplus Crown Lands

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a historical vignette today even if some of the history on the purchase prices for the ring road lands around Edmonton and Calgary is yet to be written. Alberta taxpayers have lost millions of dollars due to this Progressive Conservative government's mismanagement of the purchase and subsequent sale of surplus ring road land in Edmonton and Calgary. By spinning the facts, making excuses, and pointing the finger at others, the government continues to try and suppress the truth.

Documents show that this Progressive Conservative government has given away and continues to give away prime residential land at fire-sale prices. Some parcels were sold at well below the market value, while other parcels were given away for pennies per acre. Just last week the minister failed to provide an explanation for a land sale in 2002 that cost taxpayers \$2.3 million in losses. In another case, several PC Party faithful were able to make a huge profit by flipping land to the government, which paid more than 15 times what their political supporters had paid for the land. A great deal for the Tories, a horrible deal for taxpayers. Still no answers are given.

The minister responsible for land sales tries to deflect the issue. However, it was not this government or this opposition that dragged the late Mr. Shekter's name through the mud. It was not the Official Opposition. It was this government's own bank, the Alberta Treasury Branches, that alleges in the statement of claim that the late Mr. Shekter was somehow involved in the payment of \$70,000 in secret commissions to arrange loans between the Treasury Branches and other parties. Now, it wasn't the opposition that said that. It was your own government bank.

There remain so many questions that this government must answer. I don't know if the Auditor General can do it, as the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation states, but perhaps we're going to give him the job. Maybe we should.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, you rose?

Ms DeLong: I was rising on a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, we'll deal with the point of order at the conclusion.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from 318 Albertans. They

1. urge the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement "the Third Way" health care reforms, which will undermine public Medicare;
2. defeat legislation allowing expansion of private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta and permitting doctors to work in both the private and public system, which will drain key resources from the public health care system . . .
4. vote against plans that would force Albertans to pay for private health care insurance for services that should be covered by medicare.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am presenting petitions on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. There are several sets here, but there's a total of 1,481 signatures on petitions to urge the government to abandon its plans on the third way, not allow for expansion of private, for-profit hospitals, oppose any action contravening the Canada Health Act, and not allow private payment for health care services.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition to the Assembly from citizens of Alberta who are requesting the Legislature to increase funding "in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels . . . be increased."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to file a petition from 23 staff and students from St. Joe's school in my riding. Essentially, they're asking for concerted government action to address the reported rise in teen smoking in Alberta. They have solutions. The first one is a tobacco tax increase; second, legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing legislation; thirdly, to make all workplaces completely smoke-free.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to table a petition from 42 Albertans from Edmonton, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and St. Albert dealing with the third way and urging us to abandon any plans to privatize health care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a petition against the third way from 28 residents in Edmonton.

head: 3:00

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I intend to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the immediate jeopardy of seniors and other continuing care residents due to the government's failure to fund and implement adequate care standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I'd like to give notice that I will be rising at the appropriate time to move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned to discuss an urgent matter; namely, the failure of the government to take the policy or budgetary steps required to identify the causes and reduce the extraordinary incidence of a variety of health problems, including cancers, among the residents of Fort Chipewyan and area.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Just so that all members are aware of this, we have two Standing Order 30 applications, we have notice from the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow to rise on a point of order, and the House wishes to advise that there is going to be another point of order that will come after the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow's point of order.

Hon. members, the chair received a letter from the Official Opposition House Leader on May 3 concerning early consideration of Bill 208 at the Committee of the Whole stage. The Opposition House Leader tabled the letter in the Assembly last Thursday, May 4, as per an invitation from the chair. The Opposition House Leader was also to convey a copy of that letter to other House leaders in the House, and there is nodding there saying that that was done. That letter is recorded as Sessional Paper 476/2006. The request from the Member for Foothills-Rocky View for the early consideration of Bill 208 at the Committee of the Whole stage was tabled by the chair in this Assembly last Wednesday, May 3, and it's recorded as Sessional Paper 469/2006.

Usually a letter from a member to the Speaker is responded to with a letter. However, in this case the chair finds the issue to be so important to members that the chair invites this to be treated as a point of order this afternoon. I repeat: sessional papers 476/2006 and 469/2006, all recorded and delivered last week.

So we will deal with that matter after we deal with the point of order from the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, then we will deal with the Standing Order 30 application of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and then the Standing Order 30 application of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Bill 40

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to request leave to introduce Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, for first reading.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 40 is simple enabling legislation. This amendment will allow us to implement a new tuition fee policy this fall as promised. The amendment does not contain the policy itself, so I wanted to be clear on that. The new tuition fee policy will flow out of the A Learning Alberta review, which is due and expected very,

very soon. The proposed amendment will allow for revisions to the current tuition fee regulation so that new guidelines can be implemented for tuition fee increases among all postsecondary institutions governed by the policy in time for the fall of 2007.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf.

Bill 41

Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon, on behalf of the Minister of Finance, to request leave to introduce Bill 41, the Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This bill will establish a primary repository and claims system for the unclaimed or abandoned personal property of Albertans consistent with recommendations by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. It will also establish a clear process for managing and resolving issues relating to property that vests in the Crown when a corporation is dissolved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often that I table letters, but I have quite an accumulation, so I'll dispose of them all in one shot. One is from Mr. Dennis Loughlin. He advises us that there is a proliferated use of foreign licences and that an increased number of Albertans are driving now under foreign licences.

Another one, Mr. Speaker, is from Larry Marcotte, and he's writing relevant to the standards of subsidized housing in our province.

Another one, Mr. Speaker, is from Mr. J.B. Struthers, and he indicates that the Alberta government's decision to have only one licence plate on a vehicle as opposed to two has resulted in a higher cost of law enforcement.

Another one, Mr. Speaker, is from Mr. Marlowe, who is providing us with a summary of minutes from the most recent annual general meeting of Seniors United Now.

Mr. Speaker, another one is written by Ms Deanne Friesen, who is raising some objections relevant to the most recent PDD budget.

The last one, Mr. Speaker, is written by Ms Maria Marrazzo, who is raising some concerns relevant to long-term care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister of Energy, do you have some something to table?

Mr. Melchin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table six copies of responses to questions asked by hon. members during the Committee of Supply debate of 2006-07 for the estimates of the Ministry of Energy.

The Speaker: I saw a great number of hands. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a series of tablings today, and I'll be quick. These documents are in regard to questions I asked last Thursday in the Assembly. The first one is the map of the Edmonton transportation and utility corridor.

The second one is a letter dated May 4 in regard to the Report of the Auditor General on Alberta Social Housing Corporation – Land Sale Systems. This is land sales in Fort McMurray. It's directed to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

The third document is the Alberta Government Services land titles office. This is the transfer of land agreement for the Royal Development Corporation's purchase of land in and around the ring road in Edmonton, and this is the land title certificate from that transfer of sale.

This is a document to support my private member's statement today, and it's dated December 10, 1979. It's an interoffice memo, and it's in regard to the purchase of land in the Edmonton greenbelt.

My next tabling is the *Alberta Gazette*, part 1, from March 31, 2003, indicating the land sold and the purchase price that we talked about in question period earlier.

My last tabling is from the January 31, 2003, *Alberta Gazette*, part 1. It's also about the sale or disposition of land by the department of infrastructure, and it is regarding my question today earlier.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate copies of five of the many letters I've received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens. These letters voice concerns surrounding continued funding by the province for child care under Alberta's five-point investment plan. The letters I'm tabling today are from David Hwang, Tracy Lee, Robin and Jennifer Clee, Ivonnie Joy Abes, and Wendy Patton and Rob Lutzer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. The first is an individual letter from Derek Jassman of Calgary, writing to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. He is a live-in caregiver for an individual. He's writing in response to the minister's request to keep sending her letters. The points he's raising are that the residential funding of the man who hires him has been cut by 1.9 per cent this year, and the new support home model coming into effect will likely further erode that funding. He makes the point that the supports that he provides on a daily basis are continually being devalued and undermined by decisions made by the government.

The second is similar letters written by individuals regarding funding of adults with developmental disabilities. The funding is not meeting the staff wage increases and making it difficult to hire and retain those staff. These similar letters are sent by Rhonda Fuhr, Robert Webb, Judith Da Silva, Jeff Shuman, Julie Sinner, Carol Rutherford, Tracy O'Reilly, Caroline Berezowski, Erin Buhr, and Anca Daroban.*

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of seven of the letters that I've

received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens pressing for continued funding by the province for child care under Alberta's five-point investment plan. They're from Maryn and Claudio Milazzo, Sharlene Claerhout and Ken Boyko, Sebastian and Ellen Maurice, Roberto and Michelle Benzan, Carole and Kevin Broger, Kathleen Fraser and Stacey Radley, and Tracey and John Woo.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of letters to table today. The first is a letter from Ruth Adria, who's with the Elder Advocates of Alberta Society. She's trying to find out definitive information in regard to the process of assessing the care needs of residents in long-term care. She wants to know what instrument is used by the resident care manager to determine residents' care classification levels and how much nursing care time is required for each level.

Next I have a letter from Dick and Susan Burgman, who are parents of a developmentally disabled daughter. They are concerned that despite a massive surplus in the province's budget, a segment of the population is being targeted by shortages in PDD funding.

I also have a letter from Alan Braithwaite. Mr. Braithwaite is a recipient of PDD funding who is concerned that funding shortages will leave him unable to perform his volunteer work at the Food Bank.

Next is a letter from Melody Slobozian, who is saddened that she has to write in support of people with developmental disabilities. She believes that adequate funding should be provided to help such individuals move forward in their lives.

I also have copies of a letter from Colleen Ross. She's worried that her PDD-funded worker will not be able to help her with banking, cooking, shopping, paperwork, and other important activities.

Next is a letter from Marilyn Ogilvie, who is also worried about shortages to PDD funding. She notes that this will cause serious suffering for many people and make it difficult for them to undertake daily activities.

Similarly, I have a letter from Penny Dana-Vogt. She says that any shortages in PDD funding would severely curtail the progress she has been making.

Sandra DeCecco is also concerned about shortages, and she has written a letter, which I am tabling, expressing those concerns.

Next I have a letter from Joyce Lanz, who is the mother of a disabled son whose programs and quality of life are in jeopardy from the shortages in PDD funding.

Two more, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from Stephanie Alexander. Her brother Scot receives PDD funding and will have a diminished quality of life due to shortages in PDD budgets.

Finally, I have a letter from Jeanne Stuart. She is an 84-year-old volunteer at the Food Bank. She notes that many of the disabled people who also volunteer there have a worker to assist. With PDD funding shortfalls the Food Bank may lose those important volunteers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four documents to table today. The first is a news release from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees dated May 4, 2006. In the release the AUPE president notes that the standards announced last week contain

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

“serious flaws.” The key to quality care is sufficient funding to hire appropriate levels of staff.

My second document is a letter from Paul Armstrong of Calgary. Mr. Armstrong is strongly opposed to Bill 208. He feels that the passage will nullify human rights and draw us back to the days of “gay bashing, wife bashing and keeping everyone uneducated and close-minded.”

My third document is an open letter from the Youth Coalition of Canada. They, too, are concerned about Bill 208. They argue that the bill would “allow for hate and prejudice to be protected under the guise of freedom of religion.”

Finally, my last letter is from Canadian Youth for Choice, who are also, not surprisingly, opposed to the passage of Bill 208. The CYC envisions a country with “a universalized standard for sexual and reproductive rights where young people have access to the services and information” that they need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four documents to table today. The first one is a letter that was received in my constituency office last week. It's by Ms Cinnamon Suyal of Edmonton. Ms Suyal expresses grave concerns about Bill 208. She says that it would “protect people's right to discriminate,” and she adds that “there is more than enough discrimination in Alberta at present.”

My second document is from a constituent of Edmonton-Strathcona, Dr. Garrett Epp. Dr. Epp is a professor and chair of the English and film studies department at the University of Alberta. He also expresses a great deal of disapproval of Bill 208. He says, “I am appalled by the very idea of Bill 208.” He says that it should be withdrawn immediately because it's “both misguided and offensive, and an embarrassment to the people of Alberta.”

The third document, Mr. Speaker, is an open letter from Connie Kaldor, James Keelaghan, Mike Robinson, John Russell, and Ian Tyson. These five individuals are urging the government to proceed with announcing the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp park as an integrated wildland and provincial park.

The last document, Mr. Speaker, that I have for tabling today is a news release from the Canadian Union of Public Employees dated May 1, 2006. The release is entitled Federal Budget Won't Help Parents. The CUPE Alberta president notes in the release that “parents need access to child care that is affordable and high quality,” that “the Harper program of handing out a few bucks [a day] won't create a single space anywhere in Canada.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first one is a handwritten letter dated March 30, 2006, with respect to Alberta's health care system from L. Schmode of Red Deer, who blames the Premier and the ruling Conservatives for what ails our system and declares that he no longer supports the Tories.

My second tabling is a copy of a letter sent to the Minister of Health and Wellness dated April 18, 2006, from Ms Rita Calhoun and copied to the Premier, myself, and my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark in which she draws attention to the situation with respect to hospital beds and emergency room overcrowding and the ridiculously long wait times to receive emergency attention or the rushed misdiagnosis in some cases.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings. This afternoon I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of correspondence that I received from Dana Stebner, Shaun O'Brien, Leisa Minter, and Lana Zips outlining their significant concerns regarding the lack of sustainable and adequate funding for PDD service providers and those in their care.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a series of 10 petition letters regarding funding for adults with developmental disabilities. The letters are from Carrie Lewis, Chad Webb, Nicole Moncrieff, Colleen Lisitza, Rolette Sudeyko, Brian Reid, Jeanine Schuller, Stephanie Lee, James Johnson, and Mary Binwag*.

3:20

My last set of tablings, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of seven of the many letters I have received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens. These letters voice concerns surrounding continued funding by the province for child care under Alberta's five-point investment plan. The letters I am tabling today come from Zhiwei Shen and Huafeng Li, Margaret Chan and Peter Boyce, Jennifer Speer and Corin Hopkin, Dawn Hoggett, Ralph Kroll and Suzy Moutinho, Saga H., and Jodie Hayden.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, do you have tablings?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a constituent by the name of Gordon Inglis, who writes to express his deep concerns about Bill 208, which is before the House today. He indicates that “a basic feature of a democracy is that minority groups are protected from tyranny by the majority,” and he warns that “history has its lessons.” He's worried that this may be a step toward tyranny.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday evening last myself and a number of members of this Assembly attended the annual general meeting of Edmonton Airports. I'm pleased today to table the appropriate number of copies of their annual report, in which they indicate a very successful year, with a number of new flights added and all passenger records having been broken.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, do you have tablings?

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings here today. I'm tabling a letter from a Lethbridge-East constituent, Eleanor Orser, in which she expresses her displeasure about promises broken to local school boards for third-year funding pertaining to class sizes and that assistants are being cut in kindergartens, where classes are sometimes 20 to 1.

Also, I am tabling 10 petition letters regarding funding for adults with developmental disabilities. Funding must at least meet inflation demands, and it's crucial for the continued progress of these individuals. These letters are signed by Tobias Jeserich, Donna Morneau, Karen Webb, Celena Veltkamp, T. Campeau, D. Allen, Marilyn Borchers, Kristina Mackenzie, Erin Wotherspoon, and Melanie Ellert.

I have 10 further letters regarding funding for adults with developmental disabilities. Proper funding is imperative for proper

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

staffing to ensure a continuity of service and that the care is provided. These letters are signed by Hailey Cramm, Jerilee Jorgensen, S. Hansen, Aref Yosef Abdelhai, Crystal Abbott, R. Robertson, Alice Lau-Kilo, Jynel Christ, Lyndsey Niddrie, and Chelsey Scott.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling nine letters regarding funding for adults with developmental disabilities. These letters are from Susan Swipney*, Valerie Proudfoot, Trueman Macdonald, Danielle van Loenen, Cecelia Johnston, Kim Johnson, G. Gabrielle, Lonnie Tanner, and Erin Stevens.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three separate tablings. The first one is from a constituent. It's tabling the Lake Wabamun Derailment: Fate and Persistence of the Spilled Oil, a summary on behalf of my constituent David Doull, who also has property along Wabamun.

The second tabling is from constituents George and Doreen Fedoruk, a letter that states that they wrote the health minister regarding the wonderful care and experience that they encountered while being treated in our current health care system and their strong opposition to the two-tiered health care system.

My third and final tabling is from constituent Sheila Hogan regarding the proposed third-way health care framework and her opposition to the two-tiered system as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, did I miss anyone?

That being the case, I'm also going to table with the House today a chart of private members' public bills requests for early consideration from 1997 to 2006. I'm also going to have the pages circulate a copy to all members as it may become pertinent in the discussion of a matter that we'll be dealing with a few minutes from now.

Okay. We now will proceed with, first of all, a point of order from the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Due to overriding scheduling concerns I'm going to withdraw my point of order today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Then we'll deal with a situation that the chair alluded to a little earlier. Just to repeat, the chair did receive a letter from the Official Opposition House Leader on May 3 concerning early consideration of Bill 208 at the Committee of the Whole stage. The Opposition House Leader, as per the request of the Speaker, tabled the letter in the Assembly last Thursday, May 4, and also provided copies to various House leaders. This document is recorded as sessional paper 476/2006. The letter arose out of a request from the Member for Foothills-Rocky View for early consideration of Bill 208 at Committee of the Whole stage, that was tabled by the chair on Wednesday, May 3, and is recorded as sessional paper 469/2006.

I repeat again that I indicated that usually letters to the chair are responded to by the chair directly to the letter writer. However, in this case, because it does deal with a matter of private members' business, the chair found the issue to be significant and would ask that it be treated as a point of order and so alerted the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

If she wishes to participate, please proceed. If not, the chair is prepared to give a ruling on this matter.

Point of Order Private Members' Public Bills

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to bring oral arguments on this particular issue. The Speaker has already outlined the sequence of events, and I won't repeat it. I do note that Standing Order 8(5)(c) sets out that private members' public bills which have passed second reading return to the Assembly for consideration within eight days. That's the rule as it stands. I note that the request letter for early consideration brought forward by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View did not give a reason for the request for early consideration, did not refer to the Standing Orders that it wished to waive, and directed the request directly to the Speaker.

Now, early consideration of Bill 208 in Committee of the Whole would preclude or delay debate on Bill 210, a bill on fixed election dates, sponsored by the Leader of the Official Opposition, which is next in line in the order. As the chair mentioned, this was challenged by me as the opposition House leader. I requested a ruling by the Speaker and asked that the issue of early consideration of private members' public bills be brought to the House by way of a request for unanimous consent to proceed.

I believe there are three issues at play here. One is timing. The second is equality of private members and their business. Finally, the Standing Orders and their position in this House.

On the argument of timing, Mr. Speaker, if we look at the Speaker's ruling from December 1, 2003, which appears in *Hansard* at page 1968, that dealt with a request to hear early consideration of a private member's public bill. The Speaker refers to this situation only happening in the "dying days of a session." To my determination this request for early consideration has happened exclusively in fall sessions as failure to pass a bill would determine that it died on the Order Paper as at December 31, which is what causes the urgency for the private member. So private members who have a bill which has passed second and they believe there's a level of support for it have tried to get their bills debated and passed before the end of the fall session, which has necessitated the waiving of 8(5)(c) and/or 8(5)(d).

Mr. Speaker, this is the spring session, not the fall session. December 31 is a long way off before anything dies on any Order Paper. There has been no formal indication to this House from the government that there would not be a fall sitting. In recent memory there has always been a fall sitting, including the one in December of 1997, which is regarded somewhat specially as the fall sitting focused exclusively on the debate on Canadian unity. But there was a Routine that was held every day. Question period was held. It was a full sitting. I note that the Government House Leader of the day sought unanimous consent from the members of the Assembly to set aside certain Standing Orders for the duration of that fall sitting.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of timing, we're in the spring sitting of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature; therefore, any argument that the Member for Foothills-Rocky View's Bill 208 would die on the Order Paper if not given early consideration, I argue, is unsubstantiated.

3:30

The issue of equality of private members and private members' business. Thus far all private members, and that's including all members of the opposition parties, the independent members, and members of government caucus not holding cabinet posts, have been subject equally to the same rules and processes. This has been noted

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

repeatedly by the Speaker; for example, March 22, 2004, page 617 of *Hansard*.

My request in the spring of 2005 when we were looking at new Standing Orders and OQP rotation on March 8, 2005, *Hansard* pages 90 to 91, to exclude government members from asking questions in QP as they had a different status and different access to ministers than did members of the opposition failed for exactly this argument. The Speaker upheld the equality of all private members. No one kind of private members' business trumps or is superior to any other kind of private members' business.

Arguments were made at one time when a large number of written questions and motions for returns were taking up most or all of private members' day. There was an argument that a limit should be placed on one kind of private members' business to allow for a different kind of private members' business to proceed. That argument failed. Only with unanimous consent of the Assembly was the contemplation of one kind of business adjourned to allow for debate on a different kind of private members' business, and that reference is March 22, 2004.

Finally, the Standing Orders. These are the rules by which we govern ourselves and how we understand the business to proceed. Although we often share certain similarities of processes with others, each Standing Order is unique to their particular jurisdiction and develops along those lines. Our Standing Orders set out the timing of when a private member's bill has passed second, when they then come forward to debate in Committee of the Whole, and further in third.

I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that there are consequences for allowing every request for early consideration. Not every request can be accommodated without some check in place. Otherwise, if every request gets approval to move ahead, we've created chaos, and I think that it makes a mockery of the process to establish the order in the first place.

There's a second argument that the current practice of writing to the Speaker to get early consideration flies in the face of the specific and thorough process of establishing the order of private members' public bills and, further to that, the detailed process which must be followed to switch the order of members in private members' public bills. I'm referring to Standing Order 68.1. Why would we bother laying out such a specific process on how to establish the order and then how to switch the order of members if all one needs to do is ask the Speaker to allow someone to queue-jump over another member, using early consideration of bills at a particular stage? It has the consequence of one member getting their bill past all stages while another member does not get their bill on the floor.

In this case Bill 208 would have received debate in both second and committee before Bill 210, the next bill in line and the bill sponsored by the Leader of the Official Opposition on fixed election dates, gets any debate. It makes Bill 208 more important than Bill 210.

We would like to see Bill 210 get some second reading debate today in part because there's a symposium for democratic renewal coming at the end of the week and a postponement would mean that the content of the bill and the debate could not be considered as any part of the discussion at the symposium.

I note *Marleau and Montpetit*, page 911, where members wish their business to move position. This is talking about an elaborate federal switching scheme. I note that where they wish their business to move position, a process is outlined for the Speaker to follow. Importantly, it requires that the Speaker may only do so with the permission of all members involved and all those who would be affected. I think that's a very important point.

In Alberta the precedent seems to be that simply by virtue of the request being made, the exception is granted. It's unclear who is

giving the permission. It appears to be the Speaker, but I argue that it should be the House. The formal process is set out in the Standing Orders, and therefore any waiving or exceptions or modifications of the Standing Orders should be permitted by members of this Assembly. They are our Standing Orders.

The current Speaker and former Speakers have noted the anomaly of this particular request for early consideration and have requested House leaders and others to propose changes to the process. One example appears in *Hansard*, December 1, 2003, on page 1968.

There are other examples that I can think of where exceptions to Standing Orders come to the House for unanimous consent to proceed. For example, a very common one almost every day is reverting to Introduction of Guests. That's waiving Standing Order 7(1), where the order of the business is set out. That activity takes place at a certain time. The consent allows it to happen at a different time. Second example: where the Speaker seeks the guidance and agreement of the House in allowing the leader of the third party to respond to ministerial statements. A third one: the House's agreement to allow a temporary change, for example, shortening the division bells in second or third, which is Standing Order 32(2). Even recently, on April 26, 2006, page 1087, a member of this House asked permission to extend his speaking time, waiving the Standing Order for speaking time.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that Bill 208 does not meet the test of timing in that we are still in spring session. The urgency to see the bill through all stages quickly does not apply as we still anticipate that there's time in the fall session. There is no valid reason for one private member's public bill to queue-jump over another private member's public bill, all private members being equal, a principle that has been underlined repeatedly by this Speaker. Waiving the Standing Orders does, in every other case I could find, require the matter to be brought before the Assembly and permission to proceed sought from the members through unanimous consent. I would ask that the request for early consideration of Bill 208, sponsored by the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, receive the same treatment and be brought to the floor for unanimous consent to proceed for early consideration of Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much for allowing me to present those oral arguments. I look forward to the Speaker's ruling.

The Speaker: Are there other participants? The hon. third party House leader.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not take a great deal of time. It seems to me that this is a very dangerous precedent. I believe that the only direction is found in Standing Order 9, I think, which states that private members' public bills shall be taken up in order of precedence in order to maintain some certainty. That can mean almost anything.

It seems to me, though, that as private members we're all supposed to be treated absolutely equally here. There's a random draw that goes in. Obviously, we were the big losers this year, but it's fair. It's a random draw. It doesn't matter who comes up for it, whether it's government or opposition to debate those bills. It seems now that this, to me, is a form of getting around this particular bill because, obviously, early consideration is only going to happen when the government members decide that it's going to happen because they have the numbers.

It's not going to happen – I think back to one from the Member for Lethbridge-East, a very important bill, that couldn't pass second reading. So it's very hard to pass second reading. In other words, I'm saying that there'll be two types of private members' bills: those

that are on the government's side, if the government wants them to proceed, and the rest of us will never have them proceed.

I suggest that early consideration like this is unfair because it's only going to be a government member that's going to be able to do this, Mr. Speaker. Here's an important bill coming up from the Leader of the Opposition that should be debated here today. By the fact that the government seems to think that they have the numbers and they can jump the queue, this one would not be debated. Whether there'll be a fall session or not, we're not sure.

I suggest that this whole early consideration could be a fairly serious loophole in terms of the purpose of private members' bills. Perhaps it wasn't meant to be that way, but I think it's becoming that way. So, Mr. Speaker, I really would suggest that you rule and take a look at this because it does have major implications. What's to say, then, that they couldn't get early consideration over almost every bill if there were some opposition bills coming along that they didn't want? I suggest that that would defeat the whole purpose of private members' days. Private members are private members; our bills should all be treated equally. I would suggest that by being able to jump the queue like this, they're not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Other participants? There's nobody from the government? Government House Leader? Deputy Government House Leader?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, the last speaker then.

3:40

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I promise to be very brief. The two speakers ahead of me actually mentioned most of those arguments. I just wanted to quote from *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, 371(3), that says:

The successive stages of bills are Orders of the Day since the House at each stage makes an Order and appoints a date for the consideration of the next stage, and without such Order, the bill cannot be further advanced.

The issue here today, as was mentioned, is not whether the bill appears on the Order Paper for continuance or consideration in the House on a subsequent date. The question is whether a favour is extended to advance a certain bill at the expense of others when no valid reasoning or strong arguments were made to allow it to be expedited or aggressively forwarded. Now, if this is a decision to be made on an exception to the operating rules of this Assembly, by which we all operate and to which we all adhere, I would argue and urge that this then would become a matter to be decided by the Assembly as a whole, and by that I advocate that unanimous consent be sought.

Also, in *Beauchesne* 18(1) it says:

Within the ambit of its own rules, the House itself may proceed as it chooses; it is a common practice for the House to ignore its own rules by unanimous consent. Thus, bills may be passed through all their stages in one day, or the House may decide to alter its normal order of business or its adjournment hour as it sees fit.

Then 18(2) says:

The House is perfectly able to give consent to set aside its Standing Orders and to give its unanimous consent to waive procedural requirements and precedents concerning notice and things of that sort.

So the members of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, can certainly come to a decision whether or not they are prepared to suspend, interrupt, or amend the regular and agreed upon order of business.

I humbly submit that should this matter receive any degree of attention from the Speaker, the question be put as a motion by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View requesting unanimous consent from everyone in this Assembly. I noted with interest the

list of private members' public bills requesting early consideration, that was circulated earlier, for the years 1997 to 2006. I couldn't help but notice that all of them were from private government members. So I couldn't help but think: what would the situation be if this request or this proposal was made by an opposition member? It was mentioned that we all enter into a random draw for private bills and private motions. I don't think that the hon. sponsor of Bill 208 presented such a formidable argument as to the urgency or weight of his request against others that are being discussed here.

With that, I'll take my chair, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is no precedent for this outside of this House. This process that we have here in the province of Alberta dealing with private members' bills is found nowhere else in any parliament that follows the British parliamentary system of government. When the Standing Orders of this House were revised in 1993, the most major significant revisions going back to 1905, there were 85-plus revisions.

One of the Standing Order changes had to do with private members' bills. The assumption made by the hon. members at that time, as I recall, was a unanimous decision of the House. I had the privilege of being the Government House Leader who dealt with the Opposition House Leader—his name was Grant Mitchell—and came up with a package, and everybody agreed to them. The purpose was to actually give some meat to private members' bills.

Let me go on. I want to be very clear that this subject of private members' business is treated very, very seriously, but I also want to make sure that all members know the rules as it is something that affects each and every private member. First, I'd like to start with a review of the rules.

Standing Order 8(5)(c) does not say, as the Opposition House Leader suggests in her letter, that a private member's public bill can come up for consideration no earlier than eight sitting days after it receives second reading.

In fact, it is quite the opposite. The section states that "a public Bill other than a Government Bill shall be called in Committee of the Whole within eight sitting days of the day the Bill receives second reading." Accordingly, the bill may be called in committee earlier than eight sitting days after it receives second reading. This distinction is important because the Opposition House Leader suggests in her May 3 letter that the Member for Foothills-Rocky View is asking to waive Standing Order 8(5)(c). He is doing no such thing, and there is no such request in his letter of May 3. His letter asks for early consideration of the bill at committee stage, which, as the chair will explain, is in accordance with the procedure that has been followed.

The Speaker's role in determining the order of business for private members' bills stems from Standing Order 9(1), which states that "all items standing on the Order Paper, except Government Bills and Orders, shall be taken up according to the precedence assigned to each on the Order Paper." The issue for the chair is to determine how to interpret "precedence assigned to each."

Members should know that this issue precedes this Speaker. In his February 11, 1997, ruling Speaker Schumacher outlined a procedure whereby members could request early consideration of their bills. The ruling is found at page 16 of the *Journals* for that date. As the chair believes this is such an important issue, he will repeat part of that ruling.

3. If a Member wants his or her Bill to be considered before the due date, then that Member must make a written request to the Speaker prior to the opening of the House the day before the Member wants the Bill to be considered. For example, if a Member wants a Bill to be considered on a Wednesday . . .

Remember that at the time the ruling was given, private members' business was considered on Tuesdays and Thursdays. That's the reason for: if a member wants a bill to be considered on a Wednesday.

... the letter must be received by the Speaker before the opening of the House on Tuesday on which day the Chair will table the letter;

4. When a Member requests that his or her Bill be considered before its due date, the Bill will be called after debate has concluded on the Private Members' Public Bill that is then before the House or Committee of the Whole assuming that no other Bills have reached their due dates.

Hon. members, this is the procedure by which this Assembly has operated for almost 10 years. There is nothing new here. It's been in existence for 10 years.

We've done some research, and I've had some research conducted on this subject, and we've found that since this 1997 ruling there have been 32 requests for early consideration, not including the one from the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, and I've provided a copy of all of those. Nor does the list contain the request by the Member for Red Deer-North on April 14, 2005, to have her Bill 202 considered at committee stage and third reading stage. The absence of Bill 202 from the list is because the hon. member was requesting that the Assembly consider Bill 202 on a Thursday rather than during the time allotted for private members' public bills on Mondays. To have it considered on a Thursday required unanimous consent, which was granted for both stages.

This chair has commented on this system for considering private members' public bills previously. For instance, on December 1, 2003, at page 1968 of *Hansard* for that day, this chair noted that there were requests for early consideration of bills that might work a hardship on the member who was sponsoring Bill 209 at second reading. The chair noted the procedure for early consideration but stated:

In an effort to ensure that the system is fair and equitable to all members, the chair would welcome suggestions by members and their House leaders over the winter on this issue of early consideration of private members' public bills so that a procedural policy could be put in place for the spring 2004 session, one that would be very clear at the initiation of the session.

It's May – what? – today. No recommendations have since been received, and no changes were suggested to the chair despite the chair's invitation. So the chair today would like to renew the invitation.

In keeping with the established practice, the order of business for private members' public bills today will be Bill 207 in committee as it has reached its due date, followed by Bill 208 in committee pursuant to the sponsor's May 3 request, followed by second reading debate on Bill 210. The chair hopes that this clarifies matters and will look forward to receiving unanimous recommendations from the House leaders with respect to this matter so that we might go forward.

head: 3:50 Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on a Standing Order 30 application.

Continuing Care

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising pursuant to Standing Order 30 to request an emergency debate. The motion I submitted to your office this morning reads as follows:

In accordance with Standing Order 30 be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the government's refusal to fully fund and implement the recommendations made by the Auditor General in his May 2005 report on long-term care and

the November 2005 report of the MLA task force puts seniors and other continuing care residents in jeopardy.

I'll be brief in my arguments regarding the motion. First, under Standing Order 30(7) debate "must relate to a genuine emergency." Mr. Speaker, I think that for the countless residents of continuing care centres there is no question that there is an emergency. I'm sure that all the members here have heard the story of 81-year-old Bill Mason this weekend. Mr. Mason's family was dismayed to find that his bandaged feet had apparently been rotting due to complications from diabetes. This is just the latest in a series of allegations of poor treatment in long-term care and continuing care facilities in Alberta. Of course, it is too soon to say who is at fault in this instance, but the point remains that many Albertans are suffering because appropriate standards have not been introduced.

I challenge members in this Assembly to stand and tell us that such suffering is not an emergency. Explain to us why we should sit idly by while these people's health deteriorates. I think their families would also be interested in hearing why this government would like to continue dragging its feet on this issue. In terms of urgency, Mr. Speaker, I would remind members that tomorrow is the one-year anniversary of the release of the Auditor General's special report on this matter – one year – and one year for many of these people in a very vulnerable situation is a lifetime.

At the time of the release there were many crocodile tears shed and many promises that the situation would be immediately remedied, that relief would be offered. The Minister of Health and Wellness even speculated at the time that \$250 million would be needed to implement the recommendations, and she would immediately begin to work at getting those funds and proper standards in place. Almost a year for standards that have already been condemned by seniors' advocates and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees is simply not good enough. We cannot wait another day to discuss this matter and hold both the Minister of Health and Wellness and the minister for seniors accountable. As an Assembly we need to debate steps that can be taken immediately.

I would like to point out that the other conditions for allowing a debate in this matter as they are laid out in Standing Order 30(7) have also been met. I have spoken to (a), that the matter must be "a genuine emergency," and I think we can agree that relieving ongoing suffering is an issue of immediate concern. In (b) it says that not more than one motion shall be dealt with on a particular day. I know that there have been a couple of other motions, at least one other today, but none of them have been dealt with yet. In (c) it notes that only one matter may be dealt with on the same motion. I think that this condition has clearly been met. We want to discuss standards for continuing care. It's very simple. In (d) it urges that the motion should not revive a previous discussion of such a motion. I don't believe such a motion has been brought before the House in this matter in this session, Mr. Speaker.

Further, we haven't had and are not likely to have any other opportunity to thoroughly discuss this matter. The proposed standards were quietly announced last week. There was an Auditor General's report last year, as I mentioned, and an MLA task force report earlier this year, but this is the first time we have been able to discuss specific proposals from the government. In fact, I would point out that debate on the two relevant ministries' budget estimates, which would have been an excellent time to discuss this, has already passed.

Now, the ministers knew that we would be debating estimates, and they knew that these standards are urgently important. The point is that we finally have concrete standards, insufficient though they are, but no piece of legislation and no budget to debate. I cannot see any other way to deal with this matter than for you to rule in favour of

the motion's urgency and put the question to the Assembly as to whether we ought to hold the debate. Mr. Speaker, a year from now is not good enough. A year for some of these people in very vulnerable situations is their lifetime, and I would suggest that for that reason this is an emergency.

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 30 provisions the chair can allow certain participants. Could I have some idea as to how many hon. members would like to participate under Standing Order 30? Well, I think we're going to have to perhaps limit it to two from each grouping, then, if that's the case.

Opposition House Leader, proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to support my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in his Standing Order 30 motion. He has laid out the arguments about urgent importance, which appears as *Beauchesne* 387 and, I would also add, *Marleau and Montpetit* 584, which is requiring urgent consideration. I think that in this instance it is an emergency because the health and safety of seniors continues to be in peril. Just Friday there was another allegation of neglect at another Edmonton continuing care facility. So this is not on hold by any means.

The standards that were released by the government on May 3 have no monitoring or compliance provisions in them that are enforceable at this point, so they offer no immediate solution to and are inadequate to protect the seniors that we have in care. According to what the government laid out at the time, there is no legislation coming forward on this particular issue that might give some weight to that monitoring and enforcement of compliance until a year from now, in 2007.

This session is coming to an end sometime in the next few weeks or a month or so. I do not see any bills on the Order Paper or any notice of bills that could address this issue. We do not appear to have any other opportunity for immediate resolution. The motions other than government motions deadline passed a couple of weeks before we started this spring session, so the ability of private members to bring a motion forward on this subject has passed.

This particular issue around the standards has come up since we came into session. The issue is indeed within the administrative competence of government. It is not currently before the courts in the form in which we are debating it at the moment. There is no other reasonable opportunity for debate. Questions in question period are not giving us the length of time and the depth of discussion to pursue it. We believe, following on *Beauchesne* 388, that it is pressing enough that the public interest will suffer if it is not addressed, and because of the recurring episodes the requirement under *Beauchesne* 389 of a genuine emergency – we believe that test has been met.

This, I would argue, is not a chronic condition. It is a resolvable one. So the cautions that are found in *Marleau and Montpetit* 585 I believe do not pertain specifically to this issue.

I appreciate the opportunity to add those arguments in support of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's Standing Order 30 application. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, we're dealing with arguments under Standing Order 30 dealing with urgency, not the subject.

4:00

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to that urgency, about this motion pursuant to Standing Order 30 that was brought forward this afternoon because I do believe, too, that it's an

important issue. We are making progress and I'd like you to know that. I don't believe that this is an urgent matter that requires the adjournment of our ordinary Assembly business.

As you know as well, Mr. Speaker, I've spoken in the Assembly before about the number of facilities that we have in long-term care. There are 200 continuing care facilities, around 400 supportive living facilities, including lodges and designated assisted living facilities, and when you consider the entire continuing care system, it provides care and support to around 100,000 Albertans.

It was just this past Wednesday that we took a significant step forward, I believe, by implementing new standards for health and accommodation services in continuing care. Given that announcement last week and the significant new funding that has been invested within the past three months, Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that this motion suggests that there's a crisis in the continuing care system that is not being addressed, and that clearly is not the case.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that we've mentioned before the dollars. That's very much what this motion is about: funding and the implementation of these standards that we just announced on Wednesday. Both ministries, Health and Wellness and my ministry, committed \$36 million originally, and that's significant funding. Also, in estimates we've brought forward an amount of funding which was another \$72 million added to that, funding which is in place to address this motion that's before you, and we have appropriations coming forward once again.

To talk about these standards, the implementation of the standards we have for the accommodation side in our area . . .

The Speaker: With all due respect, please. The debate this afternoon is about the urgency; it's not the subject. The subject could be anything. The question now is: why should we abrogate the Routine for the rest of the afternoon to discuss this matter? The subject could be anything. We're on Standing Order 30.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the subject could be anything, but I guess that it's just near and dear to my heart, and I know that we have met what this Standing Order 30 is about regarding the funding and the standards. We've met the funding, and we have implemented the standards. The standards that were implemented in my ministry will cover entirely the whole system of care.

The Speaker: I indicated that there would be three. Would there be additional members who would like to participate? Three. Is that enough then? I'm going to give fairness here.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on the Standing Order 30. This is not the subject of this. It's the urgency of the matter.

Mr. Prins: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to address this motion. I believe also that an emergency debate on continuing care is not necessary today.

The hon. member from Calgary and myself co-chaired the task force last year. We dealt with a number of these issues. Many issues came up, but one of them was staffing. There was always the concern that there was not enough staff in these facilities, and one of our recommendations was to immediately increase the level of staffing. This has been done. In February Health and Wellness dedicated over \$15 million to health authorities to reach 3.4 hours of personal care per day, so this is being dealt with. This year's budget saw much more money allocated to increase hours as well as to increase numbers of therapy and activity program staff. All in all, Mr. Speaker, care hours for continuing care residents have increased by 20 per cent since 2004, so there is much work being done.

Training was also an issue that was raised by Albertans as the task force did its work. Health care aides provide a large amount of the care to residents, and it is essential that they not only have the compassion but the technical training needed to help ensure a high quality of care for residents. So the hon. minister has informed me that her department . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. That's the speech you would give if, in fact, the House agreed to have the debate. We're still dealing with the question: should we have the debate? Anybody else want to deal with that matter?

Okay. Last speaker then.

Mr. Mason: Fair enough, Mr. Speaker. I wish to address the question of the urgency of this debate, and it's connected, I'm afraid, with what the government has done or, rather, what the government has not done. The government did promise a year ago to implement all of the standards recommended by the Auditor General, who took a very thorough and careful look at this question and came forward with what we thought were very, very adequate recommendations. The government's announcements, even the ones recently as they approach the one-year anniversary, have fallen short of what the Auditor General has called for.

The Speaker: Again, with all due respect, please. It's the same argument that I have addressed to the previous two speakers. We're dealing with the urgency, setting aside the time this afternoon. The issue, as I repeat, can be anything. Okay? So don't even mention the issue.

Mr. Mason: Okay. I promise.

Mr. Speaker, the urgency relates to the conditions under which people are living right now which may affect their health and their very life. That is why it is urgent. That is why the failure to implement, for example, the specific unannounced, outside, independent investigation by people qualified to do so of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities is extremely urgent. If it doesn't happen, we don't know whether or not the conditions have changed, and if we don't know that, people may die. In fact, there are cases where people have died because they have not been properly cared for in our institutions. Therefore, it is of the utmost urgency that we debate this question. Had the government fully implemented all of the recommendations of the Auditor General, I do not believe it would be urgent, but they didn't, so it is.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. It is not the subject that's the urgency. The urgency is whether or not there's another opportunity in the House to discuss the matter. That's what the urgency is, not the subject. The subject can be anything. Does this House have another opportunity to raise any matter associated with the subject at hand? If, in fact, there was agreement that there was no other opportunity, then a decision would be made, and the whole agenda would in essence be done away with.

I'm going to repeat again that the relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debates are *Beauchesne's*, paragraphs 387 to 398 – I'm sure all speakers who participated had *Beauchesne* in front of them – and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587, 589. The chair has reviewed these references closely in considering this request for leave and must emphasize to all members that to meet the requirements for urgency – again I repeat – there must not be another opportunity for the members of the Assembly to discuss the matter. To be very specific, again,

paragraph 390 in *Beauchesne's*, and page 589 in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

Just a few days ago in this Assembly the chair ruled a request for an emergency debate out of order and at the time noted for all members that although the estimates of the relevant department had already been voted upon, there appeared another opportunity for debate when the appropriation bill for the budgets for all ministries and departments would come before the House for consideration. That same principle applies today with respect to this application. The chair has no idea, no knowing how long this session is going to go on. The chair has no idea, no knowing many bills will be forthcoming or not forthcoming. The chair does know that no budget can be approved without appropriation bills. The chair has scheduled his schedule to mid-July in anticipation that there are going to be one or two more question periods and one or two more other things.

I don't want to detract at all from the importance of the issue. Please. That's not the question at stake here, and I repeat it again and again and again because 83 members all have their own important issues. The question about urgency has to do with opportunity for members to discuss the matter, not the subject. Sorry. The request for leave is not in order.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in making his statement quoted something from Standing Orders. He basically said that Standing Order 30(7)(b) says that "not more than one . . . motion may be proceeded with on the same day" in anticipation that no other subject could be discussed. The fact of the matter is that to this point in time no motion has been proceeded with as of yet.

head: 4:10 Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to proceed with her motion.

Health Issues in Fort Chipewyan

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Urgency. I have put forward a motion, which has been circulated, that under Standing Order 30 we adjourn the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly to discuss an important matter, which is the failure of the government to take the policy or budgetary steps required to identify the causes and reduce the extraordinary incidence of a variety of health problems, including cancers, among the residents of Fort Chipewyan and area.

There is certainly a question under the public interest provisions that appear in *Beauchesne* 388 in support of adjourning this business to talk about this. What we have here is a medical examiner in a community who is noting that residents are experiencing a very high disease rate, and there are a number of illnesses that have been diagnosed in this particular quite small community, 1,200 people. Now, there was a report released in 1999 recommending more monitoring, but there's been very little action taken on that. The minister today, in speaking in response to a question from the Leader of the Official Opposition on this issue, had noted that her actions since 1999 had been speaking to CBC in a radio interview on this particular subject.

We do have Dr. O'Connor, who is the medical officer in that community, requesting an investigation by Health Canada, and no response has been received, Mr. Speaker. None of the cancer funding that was announced this year was targeted toward that particular issue. These issues are why it's urgent and why it's of public interest. Nothing else has fallen into place to protect people.

We've had a cut in the aboriginal health strategies. The minister said that really this was federal funding, and we weren't going to

prop it up anymore. The point of the matter is that funding was withdrawn from a community that was suffering some severe health problems.

We have tried to get to the bottom of this question in question period, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it was our number one question today, which tells you the importance at which we place it. But a 45-second exchange is, frankly, not enough to delve into the issues that are before us.

I note that the debate on the Department of Health and Wellness and on Environment have both taken place, and the opportunity for us to bring this issue forward in another venue such as motions other than government motions or private members' public bills: those deadlines have both passed for us. We have tried through question period to get resolution, unsatisfactorily. Those options for us to pursue this matter have passed or were not able to be successful.

I agree with the Speaker that there is no end in sight for the session, and there may well be other opportunities but not through any of the forums that I have examined. The written questions and motions for returns deadlines at this point, if submitted, would not be coming forward to the floor for another three weeks, given the timing of that particular process. That puts us three weeks off, and we have people with cancer being diagnosed almost on a weekly basis.

I argue that according to *Beauchesne* 387 it does require urgent consideration given these substantial health issues. It is within the administrative competence of this government. They do provide funding. They're certainly responsible for water quality and other associated issues with this issue; therefore, it is within their administrative competence. The issue is not before the courts at the moment, Mr. Speaker. As I've argued, no other reasonable opportunity for a debate.

It, I think, could be argued under *Beauchesne* 389 as a genuine emergency, but also argued under *Marleau and Montpetit* 585 that it is "immediately relevant and of attention and concern throughout the nation." Further under M and M 585 I don't believe that this could be put in the same category as a chronic issue such as a constitutional matter, which is one of the definers that is given to us in M and M.

With that, I believe that we have met the test on urgency and opportunity to find other ways to debate this particular issue. We are seeing immense concern in the community around a lack of opportunity to take substantive steps to address this. I ask that the Speaker find in favour of our Standing Order 30 application.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak to the issue of urgency, as you have so often reminded us in this House, and not to the issue. I say that because to summon urgency that would otherwise require the House to adjourn all other business before it would suggest that there is no other opportunity in the foreseeable future to address this issue, and that's simply not the case. I can confirm to the House that we are not expecting the House to adjourn today, nor are we expecting the House to adjourn tomorrow, nor are we expecting the House to adjourn, for that matter, any time this week and, perhaps, not even next week. Who knows? We don't know. But it's not going to be in the next few days for sure. That having been said, there will be additional opportunities forthcoming very quickly on the two main points that this Standing Order 30 suggests: one dealing with policy and the other dealing with budgetary steps.

Now, on the issue of policy there will be presumably several question periods. Opposition and other members may wish to use

that opportunity to ask the appropriate minister what the policies are and what steps are in motion. For example, today the hon. minister of health did indicate in response to the question that many things are happening, including, Mr. Speaker, the fact that Alberta Health and Wellness in collaboration with representatives from Health Canada, the Alberta Cancer Board, First Nations, and other stakeholders is already investigating these claims that cancer and other disease rates may be higher in the Fort Chipewyan area as compared with other parts of the province. So it's not as if nothing is being done, and I'd like the House to have some comfort on that.

Secondly, with respect to urgency as it applies to the budgetary aspect, there will be, of course, an appropriation bill brought in as soon as the budget estimates are concluded later this week, and I would suggest that probably that appropriation bill will come in sometime next week, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, it will go through all three proper stages, including the Committee of the Whole stage, and there will be ample opportunity to address both the budgetary aspect as it relates to the Health and Wellness department or to any other department of government and also some of the policies that back that up. So there will be those opportunities. There's also private members' statement time at which point other points could be raised.

So I would submit that there are at least those additional opportunities during which time this issue can well be brought up and can be appropriately brought up and responded to and addressed by the government. On that basis, I would ask that the chair consider those points as it rules on whether or not this does constitute urgency or not.

The Speaker: The chair will hear one additional argument, though, from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I would be interested in speaking strictly to the urgency of this matter. I think that we have a situation where it's a combination of the circumstances weighing in with a factor of the timeliness of this. Considering how cancer and some of these very rare diseases develop and how they come from contact to fruition, combined somehow with the limited time that we have to specifically deal with this circumstance, compels me to suggest that my hon. colleague's motion that the failure of the government to take policy or budgetary steps to identify the causes to reduce the extraordinary incidence of a variety of health problems in the Fort Chip area would suggest that we do in fact have some reasonable grounds for urgent debate.

4:20

The two areas that I would like to cite and provide some illumination in regard to this specific matter first come from *Beauchesne's* 387. *Beauchesne's* 387 specifically deals with the lack of any other opportunity to deal with a specific circumstance. My research and understanding of what lies before us, even if we are in fact booking into July for this spring session, is the fact that the most relevant ministries' budgets have been debated and passed already, Health being one and Environment being the other. As well, the idea or the concept that the hon. House leader opposite brought forward that we could perhaps deal with this in question period – it seems to me that the question period format that we have is more for very specific issues and for later consideration, while urgent issues can otherwise pass by with great speed.

As I said, the other factor that we have here is the contact and the development of these various diseases, which is an ongoing issue. Certainly, I note that John O'Connor, the medical examiner for Fort Chipewyan, was suggesting that some of these diseases that he was identifying as relatively regular occurrences up there were things

that he would not expect to see as a physician more than once in his entire lifetime. So seeing four or five or six of these in a population of 1,200 or less, at least compels us, I think, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that there is an extraordinary circumstance going on there. If I use the case of asbestosis as an example, you don't see any visible effects of that particular carcinogenic contact until 30 years after the contact. So if we're starting to see a flowering or a blooming or a blossoming of these various fatal cancers, then I should expect that, you know, that in itself constitutes an emergency to some degree.

The other circumstances for opportunities that we have here in this House to deal with this include written questions, but my understanding of the written questions system, as we use it here, is that we have the deadline and then the time that expires between that time. I could see us not being able to really deal with this effectively for at least three weeks, perhaps a month, which again would put us into sometime where it would be less clear if we were still sitting here.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the other circumstance that I would bring up in no uncertain terms is *Beauchesne* 389, which does speak about a genuine emergency. Again, I would suggest that people dying in a concentrated form around cancer cases would in fact constitute a genuine emergency that we could deal with almost immediately. Considering that Bill 1 was our flagship bill that we brought forward here this spring, I think we have a circumstance here that is tragic but also provides a lot of scientific opportunity, and I think that we must act upon it immediately.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you very much.

Nobody mentioned – I have no idea why. When I look at the Order Paper, Votes and Proceedings – this is actually a pretty good document. We have this process on Thursdays where the Opposition House Leader stands up and is given the right to ask a question of the Government House Leader as to what the agenda will be for the next week. This whole subject is about urgency and opportunity or lack thereof to participate in something. I look on page 8 of Votes and Proceedings of Thursday, May 4; Wednesday, May 10, main estimates, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Now, as far as I understand, Fort Chipewyan is in northern Alberta, and most – not all – of the people who live there are aboriginal. It seems to me that if we were to approve today to deal with this special motion, we'd have one hour and five minutes. This estimate on Wednesday was designated by the Official Opposition. That's another privilege given to look ahead. You can spend two whole hours on this subject matter.

So once again we go back to the urgency and the opportunity, and that's only one of the opportunities. Other opportunities have been mentioned. Again, I am not minimizing the subject matter, and please don't anybody interpret that because that's not what the rules are. Sometimes when you're a referee, you have to, you know, take it from the big guys too. In this case the chair is not going to put the question because he does not believe the request for leave is in order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, proper notice having been given on Thursday, May 4, I am pleased to now move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24.

[Motion carried]

Alberta Sport Plan

Q16. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Agnihotri that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 what measures has the Ministry of Community Development taken to meet the funding challenges associated with supporting provincial sports and recreational programs as detailed by the Alberta Sport Plan Task Force in their report *A New Century for Amateur Sport: From Participation to Excellence*?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is very clearly a very important issue for the Alberta sport and recreation community. They're very concerned that to this point the government has not implemented – and they're worried may not implement at all – the Alberta sport plan recommendations. They've been waiting patiently now for a few years. They really do, it would be my submission, deserve an answer to this question.

We continue to hear from members opposite how health care costs are unmanageable in this province, and if that were true and they really wanted to put their money where their mouth is, what better way than to do even more? I'm not going to suggest that the Health and Wellness minister is doing nothing to promote health and wellness. In fact, she participated in a five-kilometre walk yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that supported the Kids Help Phone. So, certainly, I think we have an example of a minister who is walking the talk, but as a government I would submit that there's a lot more that they could be doing in terms of supporting health and wellness in the area of sport and recreation.

Now, the last thing, Mr. Speaker, is that the minister prior to the current minister had assured Albertans that the Alberta sport plan was in fact on its way. As I say, Albertans in general and particularly those involved in the sport and recreation community are still waiting for a more concrete answer. They are wondering, in fact, when they will see action on this issue.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the answer from the minister on Written Question 16.

The Speaker: Maybe we should hear what the government wants to do with the question first. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Community Development I'd like to speak to Written Question 16. It asks what measures the Ministry of Community Development has taken to meet the funding challenges associated with supporting provincial sports and recreation programs as detailed by the Alberta Sport Plan Task Force report. It asks for information for each of the years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005. I will say now that this government has worked hard to make sport and recreation funding a priority. We're aware of its social, health, and economic benefits and do as much as we can to support Albertans who want to be active and involved in sports as well as the associations that provide programs in all of our communities.

So why the sport plan? It's as a result of three factors. The federal government developed a Canadian sport policy. It was felt that a provincial policy should complement it. Alberta's last sport plan was developed in the 1980s. It was time to renew it, and the sport community was looking for a vision of where sport was going in the future and requested that a revised plan be developed. These factors led to the creation of the nine-member Alberta Sport Plan Task Force supported by an advisory committee in 2000. The task

force drafted a document that identified new strategies for sport development in the province. Their document, *A New Century for Amateur Sport: From Participation to Excellence*, is commonly referred to as the Alberta sport plan.

4:30

We're recognized in Alberta as world leaders in many different ways. The Minister of Community Development wants Alberta to be recognized as a world leader in sport and recreation. He wants Alberta to be the healthiest and most active population. The Alberta sport plan is one piece to the puzzle that will allow all of this to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to accept Written Question 16, which will detail what action the Ministry of Community Development has taken since 2001-2002 to address the needs of Alberta's sport and recreation community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was prepared to argue vigorously to have the government accept this, and I'm very pleased to hear that they have because we do seem to have a dilemma around our support and funding for amateur sports in this province. As the previous critic for Community Development and the current critic for Health and Wellness, in which I see these things all start to come together, I'm recognizing that the government needs to take a substantial role here.

When we look at the report – and it appears in the Legislature Library here; anyone can get a copy because I just did – it has a detailed sports plan which includes things like the benefits of sport, linking the current experience with identified areas of emphasis, and then goes through those areas of emphasis for things like participation, excellence, leadership and volunteer development, sport marketing and communications, business, facilities, funding, ethics in sport, safe environment, research and development, et cetera, and then again gives a number of actions that they are suggesting.

Part of our frustration here is that although the government keeps saying that it wants Albertans to be more active and there has been a mandated but, again, unsupported direction for educational institutions to be providing 30 hours of physical activity a month, we're not seeing that support permeate through the rest of our society, so anyone not a child, for example.

It's of continual frustration to me to hear the Minister of Health and Wellness talk about considering tax exemptions or tax receipts to individuals who might buy a membership from a commercial gym and that this would somehow be tax receiptable. There are actions that she could be taking that would be of benefit to the many, many organizations that operate at the grassroots, things like extending the same tax status for property tax exemptions from the educational property tax as is currently extended to multicultural groups and artistic groups, for example. That exemption has not been extended to sports groups, so there is an easy way to help them get more accessible to people and to help more people. If they were able to access that particular status, that reduces some of their costs, and they in turn will offer their services to the public for less money, making them more accessible.

A second way – and the Minister of Gaming could address this, probably. I believe there is still a prohibition on amateur adult sports and recreation groups from accessing casino income or the opportunity to get a casino licence and operate a casino and, I think, also for adult sports and recreation groups to access bingos. So, again, another way of them being able to offset their costs which is not currently available to them.

I know that the ministry is very interested, and I hope they're interested in what's being put forward here, but I am frustrated by the long-term lack of action in this area. I've been watching it since 1997. We're nine and a half years down the road now, and I have not seen a substantial difference.

I'm glad that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie brought this forward. I'm very pleased to see the government accept it, and I look forward to seeing what those concrete actions are that the government is taking.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to see that this was in fact accepted. I just wanted to make a brief comment in regard to how we might be able to look at the integration of the Ministry of Community Development pursuant to specific provincial sports and recreational programs that are encouraged by the provincial government through the Alberta Sport Plan Task Force and look for a means by which we can encourage healthy activity and realize the benefits of healthy activity through other ministries.

In fact, this should be and would be good news that would come from this question. If it's not, then I would suggest that that's exactly what we should be looking for in regard to the increase in physical activity of Albertans and then all Canadians and the savings, in fact, that we will achieve as a result through our health care system through reduced health concerns later in life and, as well, through proper socialization of our young people so that they might enjoy a healthier mental state and be less prone to psychological or psychiatric problems in the future as well. My understanding is, in fact, that a 10 per cent increase federally across the country was estimated to save at least \$5 billion in health costs back in, probably, about eight years ago. This just gives us a small indication of the benefits that could be derived from a serious commitment to community development, specifically to focus on provincial sports and recreational programs.

It's no mistake, Mr. Speaker, that in certain countries or jurisdictions that have made a serious commitment to their sports programs, not only do you see an increase in health overall of the population, but you also see a greater success rate in the competitive level of sports. When I look to, say, Australia, as an example, where the Australians have put in a very serious commitment to all levels of both competitive and noncompetitive sporting, you see the overall health of this country, perhaps save for skin cancer, increasing tremendously as well as their medal total in various Olympic Games increasing considerably. So you see an overall direct correspondence between the amount of money being invested in sports and the health of your population.

There are economic benefits to be had as well, certainly, by having an increased focus on sport. We have, perhaps, an extension of facilities, outdoor and indoor, that can be developed in this province, which attracts tourism. It attracts spending as well. The more we get people out and interacting with each other, I would suggest that we create a stronger social fabric as well, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the government has already accepted this question.

Mr. Mason: Yes, I appreciate that.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, good enthusiasm.

Mr. Mason: I'm well aware of that, and I want to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the government for doing this. They aren't all bad, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes they do do the right thing and surprise us, and I must say I'm surprised. But there are a number of things about this that I think are very important.

The written question had the effect of getting me to take a look at the report that's referenced in the question. The Ministry of Community Development has established an Alberta Sport Plan Task Force, and they produced the report *A New Century for Amateur Sport: From Participation to Excellence*. It's very interesting.

Mr. Speaker, when the government does respond to this, there are a number of areas that I would hope they would deal with. First of all is the strong relationship that exists between physical activity and individual health. This is from the report. The report cites the Mills report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, *Sport in Canada: Everybody's Business*, from 1998. It says that a 10 per cent increase in the physical activity level of Canadians would save an estimated \$5 billion in health care costs.

4:40

Now, I know that the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Premier have repeatedly talked about the sustainability of our health care arrangements in this province and the ability to continue to pay increasing costs, and here we have a report that says that a 10 per cent increase in physical activity would save \$5 billion in health care costs. Mr. Speaker, we can only speculate about what Alberta's share of that \$5 billion in savings would be, but we know that it would be very substantial, in the order of hundreds of millions of dollars. This would completely undercut the argument for an increasing the level of privatization in our health care system.

It talks a little bit about the importance of physical activity in deterring smoking. People who are physically active are less likely to engage in smoking. People benefit in many, many ways, so I would hope that the government would deal with some of these things.

The Mazankowski report, which we are very, very critical of, as members may realize, has also some good things in it, including the reform of staying healthy. The Mazankowski report proposes to contribute to the health of Albertans by providing a strong commitment to education, setting clear health objectives and targets, providing better information to Albertans, and taking steps to encourage Albertans to stay healthy.

One of the suggested actions of the Alberta Future Summit under the direction of Health and Wellness was to market and promote the benefits of recreation and wellness. I'd like to know in the government's answer specifically what they've chosen to do about that – the reports go back to 2001-2002 – to reintroduce the daily physical or recreational activities in the school curriculum. Maybe the hon. Minister of Education can assist in that.

Active living strategies. This is one that I'm very interested in, Mr. Speaker, and would very much like to hear back from the government on. It says, "maintain and upgrade aging recreational infrastructure." We know that the government has provided additional funding of a billion dollars in the capital region, in Calgary, and for the rest of the province, and I would like to know how much of that is going to be allocated by municipalities to maintaining and upgrading the aging recreational infrastructure.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that I have in my own constituency and in the ward that I represented at one time on Edmonton city council a

number of recreational facilities, some of which are rather outdated and old and are not being properly maintained. They desperately need additional resources, and I'd be very curious about how that is going to affect my constituents but also around the province.

I certainly want to encourage the government to deal with some of those issues. It's important as we begin to refund the infrastructure that has been left unattended for a number of years while the government pursued its financial goals of eliminating the debt and the deficit, thereby transferring some of the cost into our infrastructure. It's a bit like not changing the oil in your car because you're trying to pay off a loan, and you may in fact have higher costs down the road as a result. So how that has affected the issue is something that we need to take a look at.

Mr. Speaker, finally, there are significant economic benefits that are associated with hosting sporting events. Edmonton has traditionally been an excellent host system whether it's for the Universiade or for the Commonwealth Games. I was able to attend a number of events related to both of those. Those are certainly important and valuable things, and I hope that the government is willing and able to provide enough information on these areas, Mr. Speaker, when they do bring forward their report.

Once again, I'd like to commend the government for actually saying that they are going to answer this question. It's a delightful surprise as far as I'm concerned, and I hope that the government will continue in this vein for many years to come or until the next election, whichever comes first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: So I take it that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona wants to participate too.

Dr. Pannu: Very much so, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. Pannu: I do appreciate the opportunity. While I'm delighted that the government has certainly indicated its willingness to address this question seriously and, I hope, soon, I do want to however speak here as someone who is a senior. Often, to justify the introduction of the third way, to privatize, and to attain sustainability, the Premier or the minister of health and other members on the government side of the House have been trying to scare Albertans into believing that since the number of seniors in our population is going to grow dramatically, it will be impossible for us to support the seniors because they'll be the major users of our health care system. Now I've been . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. Before someone rises on a point of relevance, I would like to point out to the hon. member that we're dealing with Written Question 16, which has to do with sport and the Alberta sport plan, so if you can tie this in to seniors and everything else, this would be really helpful.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate your direction. Every time you advise me, I very seriously follow that. I was coming to the very point that you were making.

What I'm saying is that the availability of recreational facilities, encouragement to seniors to take part in sports, to remain healthy, to remain active: these things are very closely connected. The health care expenditures go up if we get sick more often, and as we become senior – and I've been in that position now, Mr. Speaker, for about eight years, I'm afraid, so I know that from year to year the challenges to remain healthy grow. I do take part in recreational sports,

from biking to walking to swimming occasionally, and take part in some other sports. The key to making sure that our health care expenditures remain sustainable is going to be increasingly the ability of seniors to remain healthy for the longest possible time in their senior years.

What better way to both limit expenditures on our health and to increase the quality of health for the very people who have built this province through their sweat and toil over the last century that we've been celebrating? We've been celebrating the achievements of this province thanks to the work the people who are now in their senior years do.

I take this opportunity to participate in this debate on this question because I know that the government needs to be reminded that there's a great opportunity in investing in recreational facilities and in supports, facilities that will be available to all Albertans but, in particular, focusing on both encouraging seniors, whose numbers are growing in our population, to engage in these activities and to provide communities the facilities and the infrastructure that will make available these facilities closer to where seniors live.

I want to close, Mr. Speaker, by saying that my wife and I had the opportunity to fly to Singapore a few years ago. In the morning we were on a bus going back to the airport, and on the way what was quite amazing to see was how many inhabitants of the city were out early in the morning, about 6 o'clock, in group sports activities, exercising, most of them seniors. No wonder.

There are ways within the public health care system to control costs as well as to guarantee to our seniors a far better quality of life than we presently do. So answers to this question, that I'm sure the minister will very kindly provide, do raise additional questions, in fact many questions, that we need to pay attention to and take every opportunity to find ways in which we can control costs for health care on one hand but at the same time also improve the quality of life of seniors, who will make up, I think, in the next 20 years about 25 per cent of our population. I also hear about the pension crises that are going to arise because fewer people are going to be working and paying taxes. How do you control all these things unless you in a very positive way, in a very active way, create facilities and opportunities for people to remain healthy so that unnecessary expenditures with respect to health and other problems that arise as we move into senior years are avoided and problems prevented?

4:50

So, Mr. Speaker, I again want to thank the government for its readiness to accept this written question, but there are many implications of raising this issue here, and I recommend to the government to look closely at how it can create these facilities for seniors so they remain healthy and don't in fact become a burden on our health care system and are not seen to be a burden on the health care system but, rather, remain active, productive citizens.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview hasn't participated yet on this?

Mr. Martin: No.

The Speaker: Well, please proceed.

Mr. Martin: Well, I'd feel out of it if I didn't contribute, Mr. Speaker. I'll look at the other end: being much younger. I'll talk about my experience as a school trustee dealing with a very important issue, and that is child obesity. If we want to talk about seniors providing a lot of problems to the health care system, if we

don't get kids active, we have a very serious problem. We know that. There have been many articles written about what's happening.

I know that the government tried to react. I guess that I'd like to see some more co-operation with the Ministry of Community Development and the Department of Education because if we're going to change things, I think it has got to be done at that level. It's important that we deal with the provincial sports and recreational programs, but it's also just as important to get kids participating at the elementary school level and even earlier and all the way through their school, Mr. Speaker. I think we see the rates going up for child obesity to 17 per cent in some cases.

When I was a trustee, I brought in a motion about this very thing, that we begin to take a look at it. It has to do with a lot of different problems, Mr. Speaker. It has to deal with the food that kids are eating. In some cases to have money for schools, we had vending machines that were pop and all the wrong food. I think we're finally moving in that direction. We have a problem, I suppose, with the modern technology of computers and video games and the rest of it. We have a lot of reasons why people are not participating.

What was scary to me is that they said that some of the kids in elementary school were developing middle-age diseases already at that level. Hypertension, high cholesterol: these things were occurring at that level with a lot of kids. Imagine the misery for them and their families if they die young, but imagine the cost to the health care system down the way if we don't begin to deal with these problems.

It's almost a new experience when they accept a question or a motion for a return, and we always celebrate when they do, Mr. Speaker. I guess that in doing this, they are putting money in and looking at funding challenges, supporting provincial sports and recreational programs. That's one of the things that I would wonder about with both ministers. The move towards more physical education in the schools has created some curriculum problems, but I think it's a necessity. We have to start early there. I'm wondering if some of that money from Community Development could also be worked together within the schools, Mr. Speaker, because one department does this, another department does that, another department does this. A lot of the programs that we saw – nutrition: we had nurses in the schools in the city centre project; that made sense. That was from the department of health. The Department of Children's Services had people working in the city centre project.

The more that we could work together in departments and begin at the very early levels in our schools, the better our population will be and the healthier our population will be. We have to recognize that some people are calling it a crisis. If we don't begin to deal with this, we're going to have some kids – as I say, the phys ed move is a good one, Mr. Speaker, but to think that it's enough just to have good sports teams: it's not. We have to do a much better job at that level.

I guess that, in retrospect, I'd be asking the Minister of Education if there is some co-operation with the Ministry of Community Development in terms of these sorts of programs so that they could be helpful in some of their budgets in dealing at the school level with what is a serious problem. I think the minister would agree.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's nice that the government has accepted this. We'll look forward to their answers. Again, I stress that we'd be looking for that co-operation at the lower level. We'll have the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona worry about the seniors, and I'll worry about the group that's closer to my age group.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close the debate.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been whispered around the House this afternoon that there may be a filibuster taking place. I have a confession to make. I, actually, had been asked to use my entire five minutes in closing so that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar might be able to collect his thoughts in preparation for written questions 17, 18, and 19; however, given the number of speakers on Written Question 16, I see that he is, in fact, ready. So I'm not going to take any time to close the debate. I will not participate in the filibuster. Rather, I would like to thank the government for agreeing in the affirmative to Written Question 16 and look forward to the following questions.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, the only matter now to be resolved is whether or not the House will give approval for the answer to be given under Written Question 16.

[Written Question 16 carried]

Royalty Review Consultations

Q17. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What groups or individuals did the Ministry of Energy consult with in its latest royalty review?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Written Question 17. Now, I would at this point remind all hon. members that this is a very important written question because without resource revenue or royalty revenue there would be very little money to provide any sort of financial support for Alberta sport – not only Alberta sport, but seniors, for health, for education, for various government initiatives. So when we talk about royalty reviews and the royalty rates, we have to give this matter a great deal of discussion.

I'm very pleased to learn that the Minister of Energy has conducted a royalty review. Now, this is only the latest royalty review. There hasn't been any significant change in the amount of the royalties or the percentage of royalties collected going back to 1992. I'm very pleased to see that the government has initiated this royalty review, but who, exactly, was consulted? We know the structure of the royalty formula. It certainly affects everybody in the oil patch. We've got different royalties for new gas, for old gas, for third-tier oil, for new oil, old oil. In fact, we also have many royalty holidays, Mr. Speaker, through royalty reduction programs.

5:00

I'm looking at the Minister of Energy's annual report. This is going back a couple of years, but at that time there were five oil and four gas royalty reduction programs. Now, I think it's even gone up since then, and there is an additional royalty program. "These programs reduce Crown royalties to encourage industry to produce from wells which otherwise would not be economically productive." Certainly with 70-plus dollar oil – we have also natural gas prices in excess of \$6 American per gigajoule – there are market prices that will encourage operators to keep each and every well in production. For those that are not in production, certainly those high market prices are a significant incentive to squeeze every barrel of oil out of the formation and recover every gigajoule or cubic metre of natural gas that we can.

Now, I was as surprised as anyone to recognize and learn – I was astonished to learn that the actual amount when we look at the total

royalty production as a percentage is going down. Our revenue share, the Crown's revenue share, was 23 per cent in 1996. It fluctuates. In 1999 it was 21 per cent. In 2001 it was 24 per cent. In 2003 it was also 24 per cent. This information is provided by Ross Smith Energy.

Mr. Speaker, was Ross Smith Energy included in this latest royalty review? Now we find out for the year that we are discussing in budget estimates that this government is collecting 19 per cent of the total revenue share. It's gone down. The market prices have gone up, but the actual percentage that this government is collecting is less, significantly less.

If Ross Smith Energy was not consulted in this royalty review, then who was? Certainly, the natural resources of this province belong to all Albertans. They have a right to know who is responsible for ensuring that Albertans are getting their fair share of the royalties. I know that the government receives advice from many, many different individuals or forecasters. We only have to look at the economic outlook from this year's fiscal plan and we see that the Alberta Department of Energy also surveys on a confidential basis, and I hope that if this written question is rejected, this is not why, Mr. Speaker, because this information is received on a confidential basis. The government through the Department of Energy receives surveys and private forecasts from the following forecasters: PIRA; another outfit called PEL; Petral; Purvin & Gertz; Groppe Long & Littel; CGES; and Wood MacKenzie. These are some of the groups.

I was surprised to learn now that the government has made a significant change in the forecasts of natural gas prices. It would be interesting to know if this was a result of this latest royalty review because I read – and this is again in the fiscal plan – in footnote (a):

The natural gas price is the US price of natural gas at Henry Hub Louisiana, as this is the benchmark for natural gas prices in the rest of North America. Since many consultants do not forecast the Alberta Reference Price, which is used in the Alberta Budget and is the basis for Alberta natural gas royalty calculations, the table has been changed this year to the US Henry Hub price of natural gas. The Alberta Government forecast in the table above is also the US Henry Hub price.

If we're going to have forecasts with the Henry hub price, was this as a result of the latest royalty review, the consultations that have gone on? There are some people who point out that the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' information is the basis of our royalties. What say did they have in this royalty review? What say did the smaller producers have in this? They would perhaps be the ones that would be affected the most by any changes that we would make.

We have to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that when we conduct a royalty review, we consult everyone. We also should consult the citizens that own 81 per cent of the resource. That's the Crown's share of land where we can get royalties from. We also get royalties from freehold. The citizens who own this resource should be consulted. They should be consulted to see if we want to put more money in the heritage savings trust fund, if we want to put more money into public education, into public health care, what exactly we want to do with this money. Many people are concerned about the royalties that the province is currently collecting and would be very interested in this review.

Now, I'm very disappointed to tell the House that this government is very secretive when the issue of royalties comes up. An accountable government, an open and transparent government would share the information with the owners of the resources. I thought during budget debates earlier that I was going to receive a great deal of information on the royalty structure from the Department of Energy. But every day, Mr. Speaker, I go to my Legislative Assembly mailbox. I'm waiting there. I get mail on a lot of issues, but

unfortunately I'm getting nothing to date from the minister on that royalty review.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Now, just to be sure. The chair has paid very close attention to the remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but did he actually move the question? The chair will assume that he did, but careful reading may be required.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'm not certain if there was a movement of the question either.

That said, the question. We had one similar to it in question 5. There's an assumption that there is a date of a start and stop of the latest royalty review. I mentioned it then, mentioned it's ongoing. Our department is continually looking at information from around the world. There isn't a "latest royalty review." I'm not certain even how to reference or what to provide given that it's not an event. We're continually looking at our programs, continually looking at information that comes at us, be it from people here or around the world. On that basis – I'm not certain how to confine it – we don't accept this written question.

We did say, though, that we do at times get reports, analyses done from around other places that comment on our royalty structures, and we will make copies. As I said in our debate on our estimates, we will make copies of some of those royalty assessment documents available to all members. We're going through some of that right now, and those documents will be provided in due course.

5:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wonder if I could clarify: did the minister actually accept the question?

The Speaker: It was rejected.

Mr. Mason: It was rejected. Okay. Well, that's better, Mr. Speaker. The universe is now sort of more the way I'm used to it.

The Speaker: Normal.

Mr. Mason: Yeah, normal. I feel better oriented now, Mr. Speaker, to my appropriate role, and I thank the minister for that.

But I'm very disappointed in the government, Mr. Speaker, very disappointed that this government would reject a question which I think is clear. It's clear that the minister has pulled out in this "latest . . . review" as a reason to reject the question when, in fact, whether that's in the question or not, it's a very relevant question. I would really like to know what groups the government does consult with when it sets these appallingly low royalty rates for the people of Alberta's own natural gas and our own petroleum resources.

The royalty rates in this province were set years ago for \$15 a barrel of oil. What's the price of oil today, Mr. Speaker? It's well over \$50. It goes up to almost \$70. I don't think we're going to see the other side of \$50 a barrel for quite some time. The people of Alberta are receiving a pittance of their resources.

Other jurisdictions in world that have oil – and I'm not talking about countries that are very, very different in many ways from Canada, but I'm talking about countries that are developed countries, that have a high standard of living, that have high levels of educa-

tion, investment in social structures, in social programs, health care systems, and so on. If you look at similar types of countries, not necessarily similar types of oil industries but similar types of countries – I'll give just two examples. One is Alaska, which is, as the Premier would say, not a country; it's a state. Also Norway. You compare the royalty rates that they receive on their oil and gas. It's much higher. It's much higher, and the result is that there is more money that has been set aside for the people of Alaska and the people of Norway that they can invest in their people. The fact that we have very high surpluses, Mr. Speaker, should not blind us to the fact that the increases in prices for oil and natural gas have flowed primarily to the companies that extract them and not to the people of this province.

So I think that it's high time that we reviewed the royalty structure for our nonrenewable natural resources. Mr. Speaker, I think we need to really reassess how we view these resources. They are not a source of extra revenue so that we can bring our taxes way down. They belong to not just this generation of Albertans, but they belong to every future generation as well, not just our grandchildren but beyond our grandchildren. So we must deal with them, in my view, in a way that the vast majority of the value of those resources is retained in this province and retained for the benefit of the generations to come in this province.

The government is not doing that. They're taking far less than they could or should from these nonrenewable resources as they are being extracted, and even of that they're spending perhaps far more than they need to or than they should or than would otherwise be seen as prudent. So I think that's a very important factor.

Royalties. I want to maybe talk a little bit about the scale. Royalties from synthetic crude have reached a record of \$1.2 billion, Mr. Speaker, and the total nonrenewable resource revenue is expected to hit over \$11 billion in the year 2006-07 according to our 2006 budget. Now, these are staggering, staggering amounts, but it really speaks to the fact that the majority of the value of these resources is slipping through our fingers. So when the government consults with, how they consult with them, when that occurs, and what the consultation is, in my view, is of tremendous public interest. It's of interest far beyond this Assembly. It's of interest to every citizen, and it will be of interest to future generations as they look back on the decisions we make today. So for the minister to reject the question because he quibbles with the line "latest royalty review" in here is just not good enough.

What groups or individuals is the Ministry of Energy consulting with on an ongoing basis? If this is an ongoing thing and not periodic reviews, that's fine, but the minister has neatly avoided answering the question, which is of fundamental importance. The government claims to be one of the most open governments in the world, in the universe if you listen to some ministers during question period, but the fact of the matter is that it is one of the most opaque. They're not transparent. They're not even translucent. They are opaque. You know, we've seen some legislation that's being considered by this House right now that will make them even more opaque. Trying to find out what's going on, how decisions are made which affect billions of dollars of revenue that belongs to the people of this province is of very, very fundamental importance, and for the minister to reject this question is just insulting the people of this province and their children and their grandchildren, who care about the future of this province. These issues are of fundamental importance.

I'd love to know who they're talking to, Mr. Speaker, and I'd love to be able to compare that list of companies that may be on that list with the people who benefit from low royalty rates in this province. I'd even like to compare it to the contribution list for the Conserva-

tive Party in the last couple of elections. There may be a correlation. I don't know, and we won't know unless the government is prepared to bring this forward and answer the questions.

So I hope that in some of the subsequent questions that come up today or next Monday the government will be more forthcoming and more transparent. It would be nice to see just a little bit of light coming through the government instead of just a solid, opaque lens, that the government prefers.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I will yield my place and see if there are other speakers. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to rise and respond to the minister's rejection of Written Question 17, which I thought was an excellent question. All they had to do was replace the word "latest" with "ongoing," according to his own words.

The point that I would like to bring up is the fact that this is something that's very much in discussion with Albertans across the province. They don't understand it, and although the minister might be very well versed and perhaps the government is very well versed in why our royalty rates are where they are, Albertans that talk to me aren't. There's very much discussion out there that we're being ripped off, and I go around and I explain to many of my constituents that a lot of our wells in Alberta are not like the ones in Norway. They're not like the ones in Alaska. They don't produce a hundred thousand barrels a day, and the cost of drilling those is being offset with a low royalty so that it is economical for them to go forward. But I think that there wouldn't be a better opportunity than to accept a question like this to explain to Albertans why our royalty rates are where they are and to have a good briefing from this government that the people of Alberta could understand and see those things.

5:20

The other point that the hon. members have brought up is the fact that oil is not \$15 a barrel. It's not \$50 a barrel. It's \$70 a barrel. Perhaps we need to look at a new way, with inflation and the way the world is going, to accommodate royalties when we see such an escalation.

I use the example of wind farms. Currently a wind farm might need to generate a hundred thousands dollars' worth of electricity a year at 7 cents a kilowatt, but if the price of electricity was to go to 14 cents in a few more years, then in fact that would be producing \$200,000 worth of royalties for the electric company. The land-owner might double from 3 per cent at \$3,000 to \$6,000 a year. The companies are earning, then, at that point \$180,000 or \$188,000 in a year, and they could easily be doubling the rates. It could very much be on a stepped or an escalating program as the prices rise.

So I'm disappointed that the minister didn't accept this question, and I hope that they'll reconsider it and just publish something for people to realize what the ongoing royalty reviews are, who they're talking with and explain what we do here in Alberta in a plain and simple brochure or on the Alberta Energy website so that all Albertans can see that it's crystal clear and understandable, so that we can compare apples to apples, not comparing a five barrel a day well to a 100,000 barrel a day well in Alaska and saying that we're being ripped off, because people don't understand those things.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise with some unhappiness as to why the minister is choosing to not answer this

question. I know for a fact that it's been mentioned before that the Ministry of Energy is in fact undergoing a review on royalty rates, and my understanding is that we were expecting to hear some information in that regard perhaps as early as July. So we know and he knows what we're talking about here in regard to this ongoing royalty review.

What we need at this juncture, Mr. Speaker, is some degree of transparency in regard to this review because it involves information that is very relevant to each and every Albertan in this province. We are talking about setting a rate for oil and gas. In fact, I would venture to say that we should be setting a rate for other sources of energy, even coal, which is otherwise owned by each of us. So the price that we're putting on these products is a direct correspondence to the amount that each Albertan would be getting under ideal circumstances.

By choosing to have this review process under some degree of secrecy or at least some lack of transparency makes it immediately suspicious to all of us as to what sort of deal is being cut behind our backs for something that we otherwise all own together. We know that our royalty rates are out of step with almost any other measure of royalty rates across North America, this hemisphere, and around the world. I would venture to say, Mr. Speaker, that at least part of the sort of mad rush that we have to exploit our energy resources is at least in part due to the fact that we're charging such a cheap price for our royalty rates that it's like some kind of fire sale. Energy companies know that the rates have to go up, so let's try to get as much as we can before they start charging a price that is actually in keeping with world rates. So we're creating a problem in regard to an uncontrolled economy just because we are being somehow stubborn in setting a rate that's more in keeping with the world price of oil and gas.

You know, we can use any yardstick that we might want to determine, to suggest, or to confirm that, in fact, the price is a fire-sale price at this juncture. By no means am I suggesting that we don't expect energy companies to make a fair profit for their endeavours. It's very central to our economy that energy companies are doing well, and we encourage them to do so. However, to suggest that we do not take adequate funds from those activities – and it's not a tax, but rather it is a price based on the portion of the product that we otherwise all own together as Albertans. So to not set a decent price does all of us a disservice. The process of setting that price has to be something that is in the public realm.

I know from a number of different sources that different energy companies are expecting that price to go up, but every day that we delay on setting a royalty price which is in keeping with world standards, we lose considerably, Mr. Speaker. That's why I've brought forward on a number of occasions a windfall royalty regime based on progressive measures looking at: as the price goes up, then so, too, in a very modest and reasonable way does the royalty rate go up, a windfall royalty rate increase. This is something that would be able to accommodate for the vagaries of prices in the world energy markets, which we know are very volatile, but also would be able to then account for these windfall rates where we can take a small portion of it and put it back into our economy.

We're increasingly, unfortunately, more and more reliant on those nonrenewable resource revenues to run this province. That's a different topic, and I will stay otherwise on topic, but the fact is that we are reducing our other taxation rates to the point where we really are dependent upon these nonrenewable resource rates. As that revenue passes out the window, Mr. Speaker – I would suggest that we let it fly out the window every day that we're not charging a proper royalty rate – that's money that we're not ever going to get back to run this province the way that it should be run in an equal

and reasonable way, ensuring social services for all people, ensuring that we maintain a certain level of infrastructure. It's an equation of diminishing returns, so that's why we want to see this information in the most prescient way possible. Who's setting those levels, and when and where are they going in terms of royalty rates? It's absolutely essential for all of us, and I would expect nothing less.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will not be long, but I do want to echo the comments of the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, who indicated that there is a great deal of confusion amongst the people of this province when it comes to royalty rates and how they're collected and the lack or at least the perceived lack of openness and accountability from the government. So very much so am I disappointed in the minister's response this afternoon.

Ms Blakeman: What about the lack of transparency?

Mr. R. Miller: My colleague from Edmonton-Centre suggests a lack of transparency, and I guess that's what I was really suggesting.

Mr. Speaker, everywhere I go in this province, I'm constantly met by people asking the question as to whether or not we are in fact getting a fair return on our natural resources. The question really is: how do we know? In what I would consider to be a fair and reasonable attempt by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to find out whether or not we are getting that fair and reasonable return on our resources, we have another effort by the government to withhold information or shield information from the public of this province and thereby not allow us to in fact find out whether or not the regime that we're currently operating under is returning the revenue to this province that we would deserve for it, and in the case of this latest review, which is really what this question is about, who did we talk to and how were the decisions reached in terms of the most recent review of those royalty rates?

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member and members, the House stands adjourned until 8 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 8, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/05/08

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Electricity Supply

510. Mr. Rogers moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to improve the delivery of stable and reliable electricity to meet the demands of advanced manufacturing throughout the province, specifically in areas such as the Nisku industrial business park and the Leduc Business Park, by increasing investment in transmission and associated infrastructure.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise this evening to open the debate on Motion 510. Since the foundation of this great province, our citizens have exhibited leadership, passion, and an entrepreneurial spirit. The ambitions of Albertans have always been unmatched, and our subsequent accomplishments have been undeniable.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has always been on the leading edge of governance, particularly in the realm of the economy. In Alberta the government has created a framework of policies that allows business to thrive throughout the province without interfering with those businesses or subsidizing them with taxpayers' dollars. Instead, Alberta has created an environment that is very conducive to economic prosperity. We have built up our education system to provide a skilled workforce. We have maintained a strong commitment to innovation, and we continue to govern with the lowest overall tax load of all our provincial brethren and without the aid of a retail sales tax, one of a handful of such jurisdictions in North America.

Where others focus on problems, Albertans envision solutions. When others see a challenge, Albertans consider it an opportunity. Our current economic climate, including our strong manufacturing sector, combined with our robust electricity-generation capacity, has given us the tools to capitalize on yet another one of these opportunities. Mr. Speaker, with the direction of Motion 510 we can use the strengths I've just described to facilitate the growth of advanced manufacturing centres across our province.

What we as legislators of this province need to do is simple. We need to create a regulatory framework that is conducive to providing these industries with the electricity transmission they require to be competitive and successful. The reliability of supply that these advanced manufacturers need is what I like to refer to as high-end power. This is not your regular, run-of-the-mill power supply and line that runs to your or my house or garage. We're talking about steps above that. The equipment these industries use is very vulnerable to any disruptions in service or even voltage spikes. When production is under way and this occurs, it is costly and puts manufacturers at risk, but the risk is avoidable with certain transmission facilities and associated infrastructure.

While this province has taken and continues to take the appropriate steps to ensure that all Albertans have a strong supply of reliable electricity, in the case of these companies we need to push the

envelope. We need to dare to dream. After all, isn't that what Alberta is all about? Advanced manufacturing centres have the potential to be the future of this province's economy. It is our duty to continue with the Alberta spirit and be brave and bold, making this a vision of reality. This province has experienced growth in the area of advanced manufacturing, and we can take it to a higher level.

This type of investment, Mr. Speaker, has benefits in itself, such as the creation of very high-paying jobs for our citizens. It also creates a classic ripple effect for other sectors of our economy. Due to the nature of advanced manufacturing and the goods that they produce, these companies act as a supply chain for other industries, providing various other economic sectors, including agriculture, construction, and the oil field, with needed equipment and parts. This makes these businesses extremely important players in the overall scheme of Alberta's success. They are vital to the future growth and diversification of the Alberta economy.

One specific example of the necessity of these advanced manufacturers is their role in specialty manufacturing for oil sands development and other energy sector operations using advanced computerized systems, lasers, and other cutting-edge technology. These manufacturers, Mr. Speaker, such as Vanoil Equipment, which has an operation in my constituency, turn unique materials such as special alloys into one-of-a-kind parts that are essential in many sectors of manufacturing and the oil field. These processes and these companies are a major part of the reason why the unconventional resource of the oil sands deposits are becoming more and more conventional every day. Extraction and refining techniques are constantly evolving, and industries in the advanced manufacturing sector make these concepts possible by providing the pieces that are necessary to build a successful operation.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that undertakings such as the oil sands are expanding and will continue to provide an economic spark for this province well into the future. We can take full advantage of this spark by ensuring that we produce the goods and services to support these operations right here in Alberta. It is possible to import all kinds of equipment from around the globe given our transportation capabilities and the global marketplace, but why would we not take advantage of our enviable position and make these products right here at home? We should encourage this type of business to set up in our province because companies like Fiberex Glass Corporation, located in Leduc, provide our economy with a phenomenal array of opportunities for spinoff manufacturing, high-paying jobs, and very significant local property taxes as well as purchasing many supplies from local businesses. How can we really determine the cycle of economic and social strength that is started by investment on such a grand scale?

Mr. Speaker, Fiberex is one of the largest independent glass fibre manufacturers in North America, and their state-of-the-art manufacturing facility represents a \$40 million investment. It employs an average of 150 people with wages starting at \$15 an hour and up. The spinoffs that this sort of company creates are extensive to the surrounding community and those they serve with their unique products.

It is important to recognize, however, that despite the numerous benefits of these advanced manufacturers, this motion is not urging this government to be in the business of being in business and is not intended to be a means of providing a subsidy to these companies. These companies are not seeking subsidies. What we need to do as legislators is to open the door to possibilities for our citizens and for the economy by creating a reputable regulatory framework and economic environment that allows these industries to continually take root and prosper.

As the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, Mr. Speaker, it is

clear to me that the electricity infrastructure for the Leduc and Nisku business parks is extremely important. But this motion is not just about Leduc and Nisku; it is about the province of Alberta. If we can create a template for establishing an advanced level of electricity transmission to support one centre like this, this framework can then be used for other areas and sectors of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is not about creating opportunity for my constituency; it is about enhancing the Alberta advantage. With enhanced electricity transmission centres across Alberta we can create advanced manufacturing hubs that will give us yet another reason to be proud that we reside here and continue to diversify the economy of this province to sustain our prosperity long beyond declining resource revenues.

When I look at this province, Mr. Speaker, I see a booming and diversifying economy with unbridled potential. With actions from this Assembly, including Motion 510, we can realize that potential and make Alberta stronger for years to come. It is my hope that successful passage of this motion will lead to a revamped regulatory framework that will allow the power industry to provide this level of reliability to meet the needs of advanced manufacturing and be able to recoup their investment through a rate structure that recognizes this valuable service.

Mr. Speaker, I would move this motion and invite all my colleagues of this House to join with me in supporting this motion. Thank you.

8:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I speak in support of Motion 510 by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon because it attempts to address one of the many failings of deregulated electricity. When we go back to about 1995, the idea of deregulation was being passed around, thought about. Unfortunately, neither former Minister Steve West nor Minister Murray Smith defined just what a deregulated market would look like. As a result, the hoped-for competition that would end up by driving down electricity prices never materialized. Instead, what happened was two failed electricity auction bids because there were very few bidders. The first one raised approximately a billion dollars, as did the second one.

What happened with that process is that we the Alberta taxpayers lost a regulated service, a dependable service, a very inexpensive service, in fact the least expensive service in western Canada and, for that matter, throughout most of Canada. What happened was that not only did we lose approximately \$5 billion of government-owned and -regulated assets, which were sold off for the paltry sum and failed bids of \$2 billion, but the government at that time in their so-called – and I put it in quotes – wisdom decided to dip into general revenue and take another \$2 billion to \$3 billion out and combine that.

That, basically, was used in the period leading up to the 2001 election to buy a lot of votes. Any Albertan over 18 received two sets of rebates – one on electricity and one on gas, and that did wonderful things for the Conservative members running in that particular election because it softened the blow of deregulated electricity and temporarily gave people faith that the government would come to their rescue on a regular basis because that was what was promised leading up to the 2001 election. The government realized that there would be a period of questionable electricity costs, which, of course, continue today, and they devised this rather convoluted rebate system.

What we find now is that that system has cost Albertans dearly: billions of dollars. I mentioned before, when we were talking about

intergovernmental relations, how on top, basically, of the \$5 billion we lost and then the bits of billions we got back in the form of one-time energy rebates, we were also stuck for a billion and a half in terms of transmission lines. Normally, up until that point the costs for the transmission lines were shared between industry and the public. Thanks to our former Energy minister, Murray Smith, we Albertans were stuck for the entire cost of the transmission lines.

However, in speaking in support of Motion 510, what it deals with is one very important portion, and that's the reliability of the system. The Alberta Electric System Operator, AESO, is responsible for the safe, reliable – that's the key word, and I'm pleased that the government admitted that this current system is not reliable and therefore needs repair – and economic operation and planning of Alberta's power system. The AESO also facilitates Alberta's hourly wholesale electricity market and is accountable for the overall co-ordination of provincial load settlement. Back in the blackout/brownout days of 2001 we were very dependent on electricity being imported from B.C. Of course, that electricity was considerably more expensive than the coal-fired generated electricity that we had in Alberta, but when it came online, that was the price for which electricity was sold. It gave organizations in Alberta – Enmax and EPCOR – a chance to regain some of their lost investments.

Under section 34 of the Electric Utilities Act the Independent System Operator, ISO, is mandated to determine the need for an expansion or enhancement of the capability of the transmission system to meet the needs of market participants. Once that need has been identified, the ISO must prepare and submit to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, EUB, a needs identification document for approval.

Going back to 2001, there are a number of companies, particularly in the steel business, who were in some cases forced to leave the province due to the escalating cost of electricity. For those who stayed behind and tried to adjust to the rampant rise in prices, they found themselves operating on midnight shifts because it was during midnight to 6 when residential use wasn't as high; therefore, there was more availability and, as a result, cheaper prices available. That shift work was basically a band-aid to try and solve the economic problems.

If the EUB approves the needs identification document, issues involving the economics, routing, and environmental concerns are dealt with through a subsequent transmission facility owner, TFO, application for a specific project to deal with the identified needs filed under the Hydro and Electric Energy Act.

The wording of the motion, as I indicated before, acknowledges that electricity reliability is lacking, affecting all Albertans and more specifically those within the advanced manufacturing sector. The industry is especially hurt by a lack of reliable electricity service due to the nature of their operations. In short, improving the reliability of electricity service in Alberta is a positive step that will benefit all consumers.

This motion targets a specific group of stakeholders who are especially harmed by unreliable service. The Official Opposition has recently acted as an advocate for the Leduc-Nisku industrial business community, where unreliable electricity service has threatened the financial viability of several businesses and continues to threaten further economic investment in advanced manufacturing facilities in this province. We desperately need diversification, and, as the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon mentioned, in order to have that kind of diversification, we have to be able to offer manufacturers a reliable source of energy.

Ideally, the Official Opposition would like to see the whole problem addressed, and we believe that can only be done by getting

rid of deregulation and buying back the assets that we so foolishly sold for minimum prices. However, this motion does address the reliability and, as such, that's important.

One of the most damaging effects of deregulation has been the lack of accountability that is inherent within a deregulated system. Instead of having one body or organization that is responsible for ensuring that Albertans receive affordable, reliable service, accountability has been fragmented among various bodies, organizations whose bottom line is profit. We all, obviously, are hoping to profit, but with the expense which Albertans have already paid in terms of setting up the system, we should be recouping some of that investment. Those responsible for serving Albertans are now less concerned about customer service and affordable prices and more interested with increasing their shareholders' profits. If you're one of the shareholders, great; if you're an average Albertan, you get the shaft end of the mine.

I will sit at this point. I know that my hon. associates will wish to discuss other areas, but in general the Liberal caucus supports this motion, and we thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for having brought it forward.

8:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join debate on Motion 510, sponsored by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing this motion forward because it gives this Assembly the opportunity to discuss electric supply and demand in this province. Looking around Alberta, it's difficult not to see the signs of economic boom. High oil and gas prices are driving a growing economy, and this sector is making ripples across the entire economy.

Alberta is well known for having a strong energy sector, but this province is also home to a nascent and specialized manufacturing industry. Much of the equipment used for energy exploration and development across the globe is not only developed using the expertise of Albertans, but it is also manufactured here in the province. This type of economic diversification is necessary for our province to grow and become less susceptible to volatile commodity prices.

It is exceptionally important that the infrastructure is in place to ensure that companies which are branching off from traditional Alberta industries are able to function in our province. This infrastructure covers a wide range of different areas, some of which come to mind easily and some which don't. The government needs to ensure that there are schools and technical institutes to be able to supply the skilled labour which is necessary to operate and manage advanced machining and production processes. Companies need roads to bring raw materials into the manufactured sites and then transport the goods to market. While we're on the subject of input materials, it's necessary for companies to be able to access the electrical energy which they need to drive the systems and the machines which make up the manufacturing process.

The policy of electrical deregulation which the government of Alberta adopted opened up the generation side of the electrical market. It's because of deregulation that Albertans enjoy a more than adequate amount of electricity to support their needs. Since 1998 Alberta's generation capacity has grown by 40 per cent – 40 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Why is it important? Alberta is growing not only in terms of industrial capacity but also in terms of people. By bringing additional generation online, Alberta has staved off the possibility of blackouts, brownouts, and rolling brownouts, which are happening more and more often in North America.

I'm fairly certain everyone in this Chamber remembers the blackout which struck eastern Canada and the United States. Generation is at maximum capacity in that part of North America. There's not enough electricity being generated to meet the demands being placed on the system. When this happens, shortages are bound to occur because there's simply not enough electricity to go around.

Mr. Speaker, multiple jurisdictions are encountering the same problem: there's not enough generation to meet demand. The troubling thing is that power generation plants don't show up overnight. They take time to plan and construct, so jurisdictions encountering generation shortages will not be able to solve this problem overnight. They will have to deal with it for quite some time until they can find a solution.

Luckily, we're not faced with that situation here in Alberta. We have a bit of a different obstacle to overcome, and that's transmission, Mr. Speaker. The government is examining the issue of transmission through the MLA Advisory Committee on Transmission. Their mandate is to ensure that the province's electrical transmission infrastructure expands at a rate which is commensurate with the economic and population boom which Alberta is experiencing. This committee is working with Alberta's Independent System Operator, communities, regulators, and the electrical industry to encourage investment into Alberta's transmission infrastructure. It is expected that this committee will return to the Minister of Energy with their recommendations by the end of this year, and this information will be invaluable in making decisions regarding electricity transmission in Alberta.

The wording of Motion 510 is such that it supports the goals of the MLA Advisory Committee on Transmission. I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing it forward because it gives us an opportunity to discuss this specific and important issue within the larger concern of infrastructure which supports electrical transmission.

I support Motion 510, and I urge all members of the House to do so as well. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 510 is reasonable as far as it goes. Clearly, the MLA from that area knows that there are problems, and he is bringing this forward to deal for his constituents, and I appreciate that. But I'd like to go back and suggest that we're trying to play catch-up here.

When we moved to a deregulated market, we were not supposed to have any of these problems. Consumers would be better off. The generation capacity would be there forever for Albertans. We would not have any problems at all. Well, Mr. Speaker, that was the triumph of ideology over common sense. We've had nothing but problems since we brought deregulation in. No matter what excuse the government wants to give, consumers are paying higher prices to the point that the government before the election, I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity mentioned, had to hand rebates out because it was becoming a political issue. Taxpayers' dollars. That was the first part of deregulation.

Now we have – and this is not new. It's perhaps new in the Leduc area, but I recall conversations with businesses in Lethbridge and around the province saying precisely the same thing, that some of them may have left. Because we have all our eggs even more in one basket with the energy industry, they seem to rule the roost. That's the reason that we're having, I believe, the generation problems that we have, Mr. Speaker. So now we have major companies in the Leduc-Nisku area saying that they're going to leave the province.

I take it that they are serious about it. The Official Opposition leader introduced them here in the House; they're obviously here for a reason, to tell us that they're pretty serious about it. I'm told that they put a \$45 million plant expansion on hold due to persistent power failures. I'm told that they've got offers in Winnipeg and eastern Canada, that they're serious if something doesn't happen next year. I'm told that the whole Leduc chamber of commerce is very upset about it.

It's probably not the corridor where we start looking at shipping power down to the United States. I hope that's not the answer. But it seems to me that there's a point, Mr. Speaker, where the government should say: look, we've made a major mistake here, and deregulation is not working. It's not working for anybody. Perhaps it's working for some of the power companies that are making money on it. It's certainly not working for the consumers, it's not working for the taxpayers because we have to pay rebates, and it's clearly not working for some of these, what I'd call, medium-sized industries that are complaining.

Probably people would say: well, it would be too much to turn the clock around and move toward a regulated market again. The other provinces that have either public power or regulated power aren't running into these same problems, Mr. Speaker. Now, I admit that we have an overheated economy here because all of our eggs are in the energy basket and we're pushing ahead and pushing ahead, and that certainly has a bearing on it.

How do we, I mean, as far as it goes, urge the government to increase a supply of "stable and reliable electricity"? Well, at one time we were told that the consumers were promised that when deregulation was brought in, transmission costs, new lines, et cetera would be paid for by industry. Well, we know that that's not going to happen, and I doubt that these types of businesses that are medium-sized could afford to do it. Only the energy industry is the one that, perhaps, could afford it, and they're not going to do it.

So it seems to me that I certainly have no objection to keeping these advanced manufacturing industries in the Leduc area. I think that's a necessity if we want to have any semblance of an economy that's not totally reliant on fossil fuels, Mr. Speaker.

8:30

It seems to me that the problem is that after years of proving that deregulation is not working – as I said, it was a triumph of ideology over common sense – why don't we back off and start to put that money back? We have money rolling in. We have surpluses. At least it would be some sort of investment to move back towards regulation. I don't think you'd see anybody crying, certainly not the consumers that you talk to. Certainly, businesses like this wouldn't be crying, Mr. Speaker. As I say, we seem to be driven more by ideology in terms of deregulation or the fact that perhaps we can't admit that a mistake was made. This is years later, after deregulation, and nobody is happy, so there should be a message here to the government.

Now, as I say, Mr. Speaker, in terms of how you do this, you take in Motion 510: to increase the supply of stable and reliable electricity to meet the demands of advanced manufacturing throughout the province. I think you have to get control of who's running the regulations again. As I said, when we had a regulated market, we could perhaps do something. I don't know how you do it if you don't have that regulated market. It becomes very difficult. I expect that that's part of the problem, why they've been so long in dealing with this particular problem and why we're having the energy shortages and the rest of it.

I mean, I'm certainly not going to vote against Motion 510. I think it's important that we look at what's happening there, but I

think, ultimately, the answer – and I think I'm echoing somewhat what the Member for Calgary-Varsity said – is that we have to turn this clock around and start to do what works. What worked for many, many years in this province was a regulated market. What are working well in other provinces in some cases are regulated markets and public power. I know that we're not going to go there, Mr. Speaker. We had a chance back in 1948, but it was not to be. But something should trigger in this government the reality that it's time to take a different look at this whole approach.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise this evening and join the debate on Motion 510, transmission and associated infrastructure. I think that the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon should be congratulated for bringing forward a very interesting proposal, that gives us a unique opportunity to add greatly to Alberta's economic potential.

We have the most favourable business climate in the country, Mr. Speaker. Alberta-based companies are on the cutting edge of technology and development, and our current prosperity is constantly driving further innovation. As our economy grows stronger, it attracts more and more businesses and spurs increased economic development, which in turn provides more opportunities for Albertans. Our province is home to a vibrant and ever-expanding manufacturing industry, an industry whose success is directly tied to the overall well-being of our economy as a whole. They produce the goods and products that are so vital to the operation of other industries. When they prosper, we all prosper.

These companies produce a wide variety of products, but they all have one thing in common: their operations are dependent on a reliable source of electricity. The energy needs of these companies are diverse. Some require large amounts of power. Some require a further enhancement of reliability in the supply of power. It is in the best interests of all Albertans to give these companies every opportunity to develop better transmission infrastructure to ensure that their needs are met, regardless of what these needs may be. With Motion 510, Mr. Speaker, we have the opportunity to do exactly that.

Alberta's electricity generation situation is unique. We've come from a situation of potential shortfall to one of sufficiency and even abundance. Our generation capacity has increased substantially over the last few years, and now we have the opportunity to encourage our manufacturing industry to benefit from this situation. As a result of our policies we have surplus power.

With our support of Motion 510 we can also improve the situation further by empowering Alberta's manufacturing industry to make the best use of this beneficial situation. We have the potential. We simply have to encourage the adaptation of this potential to the needs of manufacturing companies. This motion proposes that this be accomplished by establishing a regulatory framework that would recognize and make allowances for the unique electrical needs of manufacturing businesses throughout the province. This is an idea of great merit and one that fits with the practices that have made our province so successful. It is not encouraging subsidies. It is not providing handouts. It is encouraging Alberta's businesses by enabling them to do what they do best. It encourages giving our companies free rein to develop and bankroll their own unique electrical needs by providing a framework in which they can work.

I also see the potential to extend this idea to other businesses outside the manufacturing sector. In the constituency that I'm

honoured to represent, Dunvegan-Central Peace, we have a strong agricultural industry and an industry which often relies upon a reliable power supply to sustain its operations. One such example, Mr. Speaker, would be the operations of our forage-drying industry, something which is very vital to the success of their harvest. The people who operate such machinery emphasize the importance of an uninterrupted power supply. If the power goes out when their drums are very hot, it can cause not only a halt in operation but great damage to their equipment as well.

This isn't any different, Mr. Speaker, than a machine shop operating a delicate CNC machine or sensitive computer equipment. Even though a forage-drying operation is not manufacturing anything, it is vital to the ongoing success of our province's economy. It is equally as important as manufacturing, especially to rural and northern areas of this province. This is why I'm pleased to offer my support to Motion 510. Not only is it a good, solid idea with the potential to increase the capabilities in productivity of Alberta's manufacturing industry; it also has the potential to serve as a template with applications in a lot of other areas as well.

In short, I see this as a great first step. We need to fully encourage the development and utilization of the power generation capacity that our policies have made available. We need to carry on the tradition of enabling the economic momentum that has made Alberta the best place in the world to live and work. With our support of Motion 510 we have a great opportunity to do exactly that, and as such, I'm pleased to offer my support. I also encourage all my other colleagues to join me in doing so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Minister of Energy.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to speak to Motion 510, electrical reliability, whose goal is to achieve greater consistency and reliability of electricity production through increased government investment in transmission and associated infrastructure. Whenever I think about electricity, I think about our need to diversify and to move towards more renewables.

I know that this isn't specifically addressed here, but it's an opportunity to talk about our responsibility globally and nationally to reduce our impact on the environment and reduce our climate-change contributions. I think, obviously, the importance of reliable, sustainable electricity is on everyone's minds, and if we don't take care of the planet, if we don't take care of the very source of all of our energy, it's clearly not going to achieve the long-term result that we all want, which is reliable and affordable electricity production.

Ideally, the Official Opposition would like to see the problem of reliability fixed through removing this deregulation, which has been so problematic, so costly, and hasn't served the interests of the people of Alberta. I understand that this will not do that; however, it will address some important problems around consistency and reliability, and I think that is something that we want to support.

Lack of accountability has been a significant problem in the deregulated system because there are so many bodies now to be held accountable when there are problems in the electricity system, and these bodies all have their own profits to try to take. Those responsible for serving Albertans are now less concerned about customer service and affordable prices and more interested in their shareholders and their profits.

8:40

However, Mr. Speaker, this is a positive motion, and I think the Official Opposition supports this in general. It addresses a vital

issue for our future: our productivity, our consistency as a world competitor. We have vital resources internal to Alberta that absolutely rely on dependable, reliable electricity. Without it, I think we're going to see significant problems in our manufacturing sector. We need to ensure that the basic necessities for all Albertans are going to be there. This is a vital public interest that, again, like health care, like education, should be available to all regardless of their ability to pay. In my view and in our view, it should be a public utility, and it should be protected as the vital resource that it is.

Resolving the problem is a critical one, and I think this is going to take us a step closer to that. I would like to see more economic diversification associated with it and renewables associated with it. We have some innovative experiments. It's now time to level the playing field and allow them to be more competitive with the fossil-fuel-generated electricity in this province. The government clearly does need to take some responsibility for this and for, I hope, getting a handle on the whole accountability question in the province.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit and continue listening to the debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to stand and support this motion as put forward by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. Transmission is at the heart and core, really, of ensuring that we get reliable electricity delivered to our homes. It's fundamental, and I'd say that we have a great need in this province to get in front of the tremendous growth that's happening and build those highways to deliver that electricity from the generation plants to our homes and businesses.

There have been a number of lines already approved by the Alberta Electric System Operator. One is a 500 kV line between Edmonton and Calgary, the tremendous growth in that corridor. Another is in the southwest leg. There are two or three others in longer term planning that have to go ahead. We need to get support. No one likes some of these power lines and the substations right in their backyards. We appreciate that there are great impacts upon the public, especially those landowners that are directly impacted by them. Yet it is critical that those things be supported by the public if we want to count on reliable delivery and receipt of electricity in our homes.

One of the things that's confusing even in the discussion here is that there has been a lot of discussion about deregulation. Actually, this piece doesn't have anything to do with deregulation. Transmission always has been regulated and continues to be regulated. In fact, the motion specifically talks about: "to meet the demands . . . by increasing investment in transmission and associated infrastructure." Those pieces always have been directly regulated. The responsibility to ensure that the public good is served in that aspect hasn't changed in the past or even in today's structure. So discussions about deregulation, while interesting, don't relate to this motion at all.

With the particular needs – one I know that the hon. member is bringing forward, and rightly so, is a concern on behalf of his constituents. There are some very specific, unique requirements of at least one business, if not more, in the area. Fortunately, there has been quite a bit of progress made there, too, by approving a substation that needs to respond to that. That should be put in later this year. There's also, then, one of the companies in particular that has some very unique, specific electricity needs, not the requirement of the standard that most electricity users have. So those costs, the particular needs of one company, while regulated, wouldn't be fair to be paid by everyone, by all ratepayers.

That is the standard, that general requirements of transmission and building that system are paid by all ratepayers. When there's a peculiar need over and above the standard, those are paid by the individual companies. That is the challenge in this case, too. That company – yes, there are solutions for it, and, yes, they needed that substation in place, so those are some of the first steps. That will also provide this individual company the ability to address their unique requirements but at a cost to them since they are the ones that have these peculiar requirements over and above any standard need of delivery of the system. So that's what's happened in the case of our regulated model. All through the years there's a general requirement that's built in and paid for by all ratepayers, and then sometimes there are specific requirements by individual companies over and above those general requirements that are paid specifically by that company so that the average ratepayer doesn't have to pay for their unique needs.

But I fully support in this case this motion. We need to be in front working with these companies to ensure that there's long-term prosperity, that there's an avenue for them, that they can reliably predict getting electricity, that they can also anticipate their specific needs being addressed both by the general requirements put in by the system and by them also addressing it and upgrading their infrastructure for their particular needs. So I applaud the member for bringing this motion forward, and we will actively support that even from the Department of Energy's perspective.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that hits me about this – and I'm speaking in support of this motion – is the importance of having a reliable electrical supply. What concerns me in terms of this is the necessity, in my opinion, to have a plan. I'm specifically speaking about the St. Albert-Sturgeon-Westlock-Athabasca area, that whole area where we're going to have the new upgraders coming in. I think it behooves the government to take this good approach and look at a plan for other areas in the province that are going to be developed and need good, reliable electrical supply.

My position on this is that I support it, but I hope that when we're looking at things that are developing in again what we call the St. Albert-Morinville-Barrhead-Athabasca corridor, this whole aspect, this particular area of having reliable supply for commercial, industrial, residential is looked at and that we have this done ahead of time rather than have problems develop and after the fact have to look after it.

So those are just my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very, very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to join the debate on Motion 510. This is a very important motion. We've had some discussion tonight purportedly in support of the motion which was really talking about a deregulation and other aspects relative to energy. The fact of the matter is that we have had significant increases in the generation capacity for electrical energy in this province. There's been significant improvement in the supply, but where we do have a problem, the problem that needs to be addressed for industry in this province, is the stable and reliable delivery of that electricity.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon has indicated with respect to a particular industry, and that's one that's very close to home for me as a neighbouring constituency. In fact, the people that own that particular company live in my constituency.

So I just wanted to make some comments in support of the fact that we have done a number of really good things in this province, one of them is the policy which has allowed for the cogeneration of electricity, the biogeneration of electricity, the wind generation of electricity; in fact, many different methodologies of getting electrical generation on the market to the point now where we are the envy of North America in terms of electrical energy supply, but there are some issues that we need to deal with, and one of the fundamental issues that needs to be dealt with is to ensure that that electrical energy can get to industrial users and residential users in a stable and reliable way. That means that we need to have a regulatory framework which is flexible and which can adapt to changing circumstances, make sure that all of the regulatory processes and procedures we need to safeguard the consumer are there but also make sure that the people who wish to build reliable delivery mechanisms, transmission networks can do it, can recover their costs, can receive a return on investment for doing that, and can do it on a timely basis. That, Mr. Speaker, is what's missing in the process now.

I was very delighted to hear the Minister of Energy indicate that the Department of Energy is on that particular piece because as we move forward in this province with a very strong economy, with people who are willing to invest in this province to create new jobs for Albertans, to create new opportunities for Albertans, it's fundamental that we have a supply of energy, a supply of electrical energy. We've got that supply. Now we need to get it to the place where it's to be utilized, and that's what this motion addresses, and I am very strongly in support of it.

8:50

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Does the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon wish to close?

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a phenomenal economy today in this province, and I think it behooves us to do everything in our power to strengthen and diversify our economy so that future generations will continue to enjoy a standard of living comparable or even better than we enjoy today.

Mr. Speaker, the direction provided in this motion will continue to encourage visionary investors like the owners of Vanoil, Fiberex, and many others to think outside the box and continue to grow the Alberta economy, create quality jobs, and make a reasonable return on their investment.

Mr. Speaker, this is the Alberta advantage. I'd like to thank all members who spoke on this motion and encourage your support. Thank you very much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 carried]

head:

**Private Bills
Second Reading**

**Bill Pr. 1
Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very, very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to move Bill Pr. 1, the Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006.

Some of you may know that Senator Patrick Burns was a proud Albertan, and he is an incredible role model for us all. He was one of the Big Four who founded the Calgary Stampede. Mr. Burns was chairman of the Burns Company Ltd. and president of various Burns

businesses. These are just a few of the reasons why he was inducted into the Canadian Business Hall of Fame.

He became a Senator in 1931 and died in Calgary in 1937. Senator Patrick Burns school in Calgary was named in his honour in 1961, and just last month while on horseback just southwest of my riding of Calgary-Lougheed I was honoured to ride past the mountain that proudly bears his name. Truly, Senator Burns was an amazing individual.

But there's more, Mr. Speaker. Under his will Senator Burns established a charitable trust, later codified under the Burns Memorial Trust Act. The act was originally enacted in 1956 and was amended in 1981 and 2001. The trustee of the Burns memorial trust since inception is the Royal Trust Corporation of Canada. The investments held by the trust are currently valued at approximately \$45 million. The trustee distributes certain investment returns earned on the assets of the Burns memorial trust to five charities, which include the Governing Council of the Salvation Army in Canada, the Sisters of Charity of Providence of Calgary, the Burns memorial fund for children, the Burns memorial police fund, and the Burns memorial fire fund. The income from the trust property is distributed equally in quarterly instalments among the beneficiary organizations. Annual trust distributions have been approximately \$1,800,000.

In 2001 the act was amended to permit amongst other things the trustee to have the authority to invest the assets of the Burns memorial trust according to prudent investor standards and in accordance with a total return investment policy. The act was also amended to deal with the payments to the beneficiaries. Section 8 of the act provided that the trustee would distribute an annual amount "determined in accordance with the regulations dealing with the disbursement quotas for private foundations in the Income Tax Act (Canada), in equal portions to the Beneficiaries."

The disbursement quota is an amount calculated under the Income Tax Act of Canada in order to ensure that most of a registered charity's funds are used for charitable purposes; however, this disbursement quota amount is a minimum only, and charities are able to spend more of their income on their charitable activities as they desire. The disbursement quota for a private foundation is very generally the sum of 80 per cent of the receipted donations in the preceding year, a hundred per cent of the gifts received from other registered charities in the preceding year, plus 3.5 per cent of the aggregate value of the investment assets valued at certain times in the prior two years. The actual formula is much more complex.

In any case, as the Burns memorial trust has not receipted any donations nor received gifts from other registered charities, the disbursement quota under the Income Tax Act of Canada for the Burns memorial trust is calculated as 3.5 per cent of the aggregate value for its investment assets. At the time of the amendment to section 8 of the act the disbursement quota was calculated on the basis of 4.5 per cent of the aggregate value of investment assets. The rate was reduced in federal budget amendments to the Income Tax Act to 3.5 per cent, effective for taxation years commencing after March 22, 2004. So, as a result, the disbursement quota for 2005 was 4.5 per cent of the investment assets but was reduced in 2005 to 3.5 per cent of the value of investment assets.

The final financial impact of the reduction of the rate used in calculating the disbursement quota from 4.5 per cent to 3.5 per cent has been to reduce the annual payments to the beneficiaries from approximately \$1,820,000 per year to \$1,420,000. Each beneficiary who previously received \$364,000 per year for their charitable activities now receives \$284,000 per year.

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the trustee of the Burns memorial trust and the beneficiaries wish to amend the act to simply allow the

trustee the discretion to pay the beneficiaries an annual amount that may be in excess of the minimum disbursement quota rather than an inflexible fixed percentage of 3.5 per cent. The trustee and the beneficiaries would like the act to provide discretion to the trustee to pay out annual amounts in excess of the disbursement quota if, indeed, it is deemed appropriate.

The proposed amendment to section 8 of the act would require the trustee to determine annually the amount to be paid to the beneficiaries provided that that amount shall not be less than the disbursement quota amount. This will give the trustee the flexibility to meet the funding needs of the beneficiary charities while ensuring the preservation of the value of capital of the Burns memorial trust. Indeed, this is good-news legislation, Mr. Speaker, and it is with both humility and pride that I sponsor this initiative.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, the Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The Liberal caucus is in complete support of Bill Pr. 1. In Alberta we're extremely fortunate that we have so many philanthropists who, having made their fame and fortune in Alberta, have given back through their estates. Three names come to mind right off the bat for the University of Calgary, and those are Haskayne, Markin, and Rozsa. Recently, this past Thursday in Calgary, the Member for Calgary-Currie and myself were also made aware of the Sheftel legacy. Alberta philanthropists have big hearts and big wallets, and we very much appreciate their legacies.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Does the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed wish to close?

Mr. Rodney: I'm closed.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 2

Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act.

Mary Immaculate hospital of Mundare was incorporated under chapter 106 of the *Statutes of Alberta* in 1962. Bill Pr. 2 takes care of the modernization of the corporate structure for the governance of this hospital. I encourage all members to support second reading of Pr. 2.

9:00

Mr. Chase: I am pleased to again rise and provide our Liberal caucus support for Bill Pr. 2, the Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act. Well done.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Red Deer-North wish to close?

Mrs. Jablonski: Close, Mr. Speaker, and move second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 3
Edmonton Community Foundation
Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured tonight to rise on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, the Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006.

The aim of this bill is to allow the foundation to modernize its governance mechanisms, make changes to its method of appointing board members, seek clarification regarding the power of the foundation's board to indemnify its officials and to buy liability insurance. The committee has recommended that Bill Pr. 3 proceed with amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chase: As the representative of the Liberal caucus I am pleased to recognize the three home runs that the government has hit in consecutive fashion tonight: Bill Pr. 1, Bill Pr. 2, and now over the fence again with Bill Pr. 3, the Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to briefly comment on the Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006. This act, of course, helps to modernize the structure of the community foundation. But it would be remiss if I, as a member representing a constituency in Edmonton, didn't take the opportunity to put on the record what good work the Edmonton Community Foundation does in this city in terms of being a place where people can make donations to a foundation, a foundation which then manages those trust funds, those endowment funds, and turns those funds into good works in the community to support so many of the efforts which make this community a great place to live and to work.

So to Mr. Martin Garber-Conrad, who is the new executive director – I guess not new anymore: he's been in there for a year or so now – and the many people who work with the Edmonton Community Foundation I think we owe a debt of gratitude for the work that they're doing. This act will help them with their efforts by helping to modernize their organization.

I just wanted to put those comments on the record. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. mover wish to close?

Mr. Oberle: Call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 29
Environmental Protection and
Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: We are currently considering amendment A2. Does anyone wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: I have spoken once already, Mr. Chairman, but I could refresh on that issue if you wish.

The Chair: We're in committee, so you can speak again.

Dr. Swann: Well, amendment A2 on Bill 29 is really, in essence, an attempt to ensure that while this amendment would allow the government and specifically the director to delegate inspection of sites for reclamation purposes, it's a change from the past, in which internal employees of Alberta Environment would be taking that role. This would now allow the director to appoint outside people and organizations to do inspections and follow through on approvals and reclamation certificates. Our concern, again, is that this not be in any way construed as a conflict of interest and that there be no bias in the reclamation of sites and that, indeed, by making such appointments public, we could all live with it because we would be able to hold accountable those individuals and organizations that are carrying out the role under the director. So this amendment simply asks that the identification of outsiders be made public for the purposes of accountability.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat on amendment A2.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With regard to the need for a public registry, I'd like to thank the hon. member for suggesting this. I understand what the hon. member is intending with this proposed amendment; however, the ministry doesn't feel that a public registry is needed.

The minister is committed to a system of shared governance that includes publicly open and transparent processes as well as clearly identified roles and responsibilities for partners. Alberta Environment will continue to be transparent in selecting and working with partners. In fact, Mr. Chairman, the department sees an ever-increasing role of Albertans in all walks of life to help protect the environment, such as agrologists and environmental engineers. I can assure you that at the end of the day accounting for these systems of shared governance will remain with the minister.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, the ministry doesn't feel that it is necessary to have this amendment.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I think a recurring theme that we'll be hearing tonight is transparency and accountability. What has happened over the years is that the government has been so busy counting up the shekels that it has received from oil and gas wealth. They've only looked at the credit side of the account. They haven't looked at the debit side, and the debit side is in the hundreds of unreclaimed wells throughout this province.

What amendment A2 speaks to is the fact that there should be no suggestion or no hint of any conflict of interest, where companies that originally left the sites unreclaimed have gone through a series of transitions and company buyouts and amalgamations and so on, and we may get to the point where through political appointees some of the negligent individuals and companies that originally left the wells in their unreclaimed state now have the benefit of not only deriving the resources from those wells but assisting in the cleanup. The taxpayer gets stuck twice: once in that the job wasn't done properly the first time, and then through a political appointment process which is not transparent, the companies benefit for a second time.

If this government truly believes in transparency and accountability, a public registry is an absolute necessity to ensure public faith, government accountability, and transparency.

I speak in favour of amendment A2 and would urge the government to support A2. It puts into place true accountability. It takes the responsibility out of the government's hands and gives it back to the public, that, in truth, should be the ones running this province.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on amendment A2.

9:10

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bill 29, as I mentioned in second reading, has some good aspects to it, but there were some problematic areas as I recollect. This was one of them, that I alluded to in second reading, the fact that it may be reasonable to report and have this, but we need the public registry. Otherwise, Mr. Chairman, the oversight – in other words: who is the minister delegating authority to? In most cases perhaps it's somebody that it should be. We all use the name of Dr. Schindler or somebody like that. Nobody has any objections to that. That seems to make common sense. But there would be this feeling if there wasn't a public registry that: who else is the minister delegating authority to? Is it people within the industry?

I would almost see this as a friendly amendment if the government is interested in the transparency. I think others talked about it in terms of the law. I know that the Environmental Law Centre has contacted the Minister of Environment's office to discuss its own concerns, and this was a major concern that they had. They were suggesting, Mr. Chairman, that we at least have this public registry, that could be fairly clear in terms of who the minister has delegated authority to.

It seems to me that this simple amendment would go some way in doing that, and I would hope that the government, having had time to think about this – and it's not just coming from the opposition. As I say, it's coming from people that have some knowledge in this area, the Environmental Law Centre. With a public registry the minister could still do the same things, but it would be open and transparent and there would be some recognition about why they have delegated this authority to certain people.

Mr. Chairman, we had a similar amendment, but this one certainly would do the same as the amendment that we had, and I would support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The fifth amendment really allows Alberta Environment to partner with a wide range of organizations and individuals in order to deliver our environmental protection mandate. The amendment specifically broadens the list of candidates to which the minister may delegate work, and this supports place-based approaches to environmental management. As with all partnerships the ministry will ensure accountability frameworks are in place. I think perhaps it's a bit of a stretch to assume that the oil or gas industry would be one of those partners.

The current legislation restricts Environment's ability to let other government agencies, communities, and qualified Albertans manage their environment. With this amendment they can partner with local organizations, which are better positioned to understand the needs of their community and their environment. Alberta Environment will

develop agreements with partners so that they are clear on accountabilities, responsibilities, duties, and reporting requirements. Any system envisioned under this approach is one of shared governance that includes publicly open and transparent processes as well as clearly defined roles and responsibilities of those involved.

Mr. Chairman, the speaker does not believe that specific legislative provisions are required to assure the public. At the end of the day the accountability of these systems of shared governance will remain with the minister.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. That may well be the case. But, again, how would having a public registry detract from that? It seems to me that that would enhance the process, precisely what the member was talking about.

All we're saying is that the minister still would have that authority, Mr. Chairman, but there would be a public registry so that we'd know who he has designated that authority to. It would in no way stop the hon. minister from doing precisely what the member is talking about. It's just in a public registry.

I wonder: why the reluctance? I guess that I'd ask the member if he's had discussion with the minister's office about this in view of the fact that a very influential group such as the Environmental Law Centre has recommended that, and if there was some discussion, why that was rejected. I don't think it detracts from the minister being able to do exactly the things that the member is talking about. It just makes the process open and above board.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would just like to ask the hon. mover of the bill if he has within his information the exact number of orphaned well sites and if these orphaned well sites – the number of them and the location of them and a map accompanying as part of that location – are posted on a government site either under Energy or Environment so that Albertans could have a sense of the complexity and size of the number of orphaned well sites. I think that if Albertans were aware of just how many there were and their location, they might want to become more involved in the approval process. I think that anything we can do to involve and include the public in meaningful decision-making, the better we are.

If the hon. mover can enlighten the House as to those questions – how many orphaned well sites do we have, and are they posted on a government web site either through Energy or Environment and his opinion on whether this would improve public involvement in future approvals – I would be very pleased to hear his responses.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, quite frankly, even though the orphaned wells and orphaned well sites are very important, those are really upstream activities, and these amendments here deal with downstream activities. I do not have the information on that because that's not pertinent to the bill at this time.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a third amendment to recommend, and I'm thankful if you could circulate that. The essence of amendment A3, I suppose, is that we strike out the new section (a) under 112(1) and sustain the old section (a), which would not permit contaminated sites to simply be managed. They would be required to continue in the original commitment to "repair, remedy and confine the effects of the substance," and "remove or otherwise dispose of the substance." It is not in the interests of people and the environment, both health and environmental impact, to accept the notion that we would simply manage risk by covering over such contaminated sites and install test wells around the contaminated sites to monitor forever the potential for migration of an ongoing unremediated, unreclaimed site.

So the purpose of this amendment is to return to the original commitment to reclaim and remediate soil and return it to equivalent use. I am open to further discussion on that amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, we will call this amendment A3. While it's being distributed, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: 9:20 **Introduction of Guests**

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Katrina MacNeil and Kyle Langelaar in the Speaker's gallery. Katrina just finished her first year at UBC Okanagan where she is pursuing a bachelor of arts degree in political science. She's particularly interested in the political and humanitarian issues in South America. As well, today is the day that she turns 20 years old.

Kyle is visiting from our neighbour prairie province, Saskatchewan. He is a chicken farmer as well as an employee at a Saskatoon hotel. He hopes to attend university in January to study hospitality. They are both accomplished students and travelers, and most of all, Katrina is the sister and Kyle is the best friend of one of our LAO pages, Desirée MacNeil.

An Hon. Member: You didn't get them to stand.

Mr. Martin: Oh. I didn't get you to stand. Are you back there? Please stand.

Bill 29
Environmental Protection and
Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006
(continued)

The Chair: Does everyone have a copy of amendment A3?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A3.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm speaking in favour of A3. There is a tremendous difference between not only the definitions of manage versus reclaim but the realities. Manage can simply say that you've put a fence around the area, a bit of barbed wire with a sign: danger; unreclaimed site. That could be considered management versus what I believe is necessary, and that's total reclamation.

We have so many spots, environmental blights, and potential problems throughout this province because we haven't done the cleanup as we went along. Our desire to get there faster has meant

that we've left a number of sites behind, and what this A3 is suggesting is that we go back to the original wording, which was considerably stronger. It said that we've got to reclaim these sites.

We debated last spring about empowering companies to go back onto the sites and reclaim the sites that were left in an unsatisfactory condition to begin with. It seems to me that the original wording of this bill, particularly section 112(1), had that intent. It wasn't enough just to simply manage, which is a very loose term, but we had to remediate, reclaim the site as close to its original condition as it was possible without any environmental hazards associated with it. The amendment is very clear.

The government in its wisdom wrote a much tougher section originally, and to take away that requirement to reclaim or remediate is basically giving a licence to avoid proper management and proper drilling in the first place because if companies are only going to be charged with managing as opposed to cleanup, there is no motivation for them to do things right in the first place.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that the previous bill – this is the one with a much stronger section 112, and I think this is what the hon. member is driving at. He wants Section 112 amended "by renumbering it as section 112(1)" and adding the following. It seems to me that we're going backwards in this particular part of it.

As I said earlier on, there are some good parts to this bill, but where previously section 112 read "take all reasonable measures to . . . remove or otherwise dispose of the substance in such a manner as to effect maximum protection to human life, health and the environment," that seems to me a fairly strong statement. Now in the proposed amendment section 112 would read: "remediate, manage, remove or otherwise dispose of the substance in such a manner as to prevent an adverse effect or further adverse effect." It seems to me that that's a watering down. If we're remediating, we're managing, and we're removing. That's not nearly as strong as a statement as "to effect maximum protection to human life, health and the environment." What could be more important than to do that? An environment bill. Why are we reducing it?

An Hon. Member: To save money.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, I expect it is to save money, but "remediate, manage, remove or otherwise dispose of," in an environment bill. I'd say to the hon. member – it's again been that discussion with the minister – why would we take a strong statement and weaken it? Is it because it's money? Is it because we're not going to go after these companies or what? I like the statement that was there in 112.

We recognize, of course, that there's a wide variety of techniques and technologies. We could have perhaps put that in, but it seems to me that the ultimate goal of any environment bill, an act, should be the maximum protection of human life, health, and the environment.

I would ask the member why we are doing this. Why are we watering down this particular section? Without being cynical about it, is it because the companies have told us that they want to do this, and they can get away with more? If we have a stronger statement, is that a problem for them? I just don't understand why we'd water this down at this particular time, so I'd ask the member if he could perhaps tell us why we're doing that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate the hon. member's comments on the matter regarding their suggestion that there's a need for the department to require more remediation and less risk management.

I would like to clarify that cleanup is the preferred option that is promoted above all else under the EPEA. Cleanup applies to the majority of sites in Alberta that have contamination, but when the cost to clean up becomes prohibitively expensive, there are other more flexible options that will provide the same level of health protection and allow beneficial reuse of the site. I believe this is especially important for sites that have an active potential for redevelopment in urban and suburban areas, such as Hub Oil.

In many cases risk management alternatives bring revitalization to our communities more quickly and avoid lands being left as brownfields where further development is prevented by inflexible rules. If any monitoring notes any type of adverse effect or change, the company is obligated to report it and to clean it up. I believe, Mr. Chairman, that this amendment clarifies that even if the site has been closed, the company has a duty and an obligation to mitigate and to clean it up. Prohibitively expensive sites are exceptional cases, as the one I mentioned, and risk management will only be used if the site that is contaminated is well contained.

Mr. Chairman, an amendment as proposed wouldn't really serve the greater interests of appropriate environmental protection and future land use.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess what I'd like to know is what the definition of remediation is, then, and management because if it's a site like Hub Oil, for instance – I believe the hon. member referred to that – and it is prohibitively expensive to clean up, perhaps a worthwhile use of that land, that brownfield site, would be, quite literally then, to turn it into a green field; in other words, green space, a park, some place where people would not be prepared to stay there long enough that anything under the ground seeping through would cause them any hazard to their health. Perhaps. I don't know, and perhaps the member will explain it to me as he defines remediation or management. You know, remediation or management where the cost of cleanup is prohibitively expensive is not good enough if you plan to plunk a building down on top of it, you know, whether that's a building that people are going to be in for part of the day working or whether that's a building where people are going to live, a house.

9:30

Hub Oil was mentioned as an example, and of course Hub Oil was located in Calgary. We have another famous example from Calgary of precisely the way not to do environmental cleanups, and it's called Lynnwood Ridge. Years ago, decades ago, that was an active refinery site. The oil company decommissioned the refinery, certainly did some cleanup at the time, and then – correct me if I'm wrong, but I think we were in the midst of another boom at the time – because there was a shortage of housing in Calgary, there was pressure to develop that refinery site for residential housing. Of course, that's exactly what happened until – what would it be now: three or four years? – suddenly it turned out that noxious, toxic, poisonous fumes were leaching up from under the soil into people's basements. Heavy metals were leaching up. Although now well secured and the property reasonably well preserved and cared for by the oil company, which does still bear responsibility for the cleanup

after long and protracted negotiations with Alberta Environment, Lynnwood Ridge is, in fact, a virtual ghost town. The company had to buy out most of the residents, and now we have an abandoned neighbourhood.

Now, yes, maybe this time the cleanup will be done properly. I don't know. But it doesn't change the fact that an awful lot of houses were built on a site that wasn't properly cleaned up to begin with, and an awful lot of people's lives and financial situations and possibly their health were jeopardized. We'll find that part out in the years to come, I suppose. I think that was a textbook case of how not to remediate or manage a contaminated brownfield site.

So, yes, I would like a definition from the hon. member as to what "remediate" and "manage" would mean if we leave Bill 29 as it reads, if we don't pass the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Of course, the amendment by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is in effect an amendment to an amending bill, an amending piece of legislation. Amendments are supposed to improve legislation, not weaken it, not water it down. If we do not pass the amendment proposed by my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, then essentially we're leaving the cleanup of the most cost-prohibitive contaminated sites – and it follows logically that the most cost-prohibitive contaminated sites are, therefore, the most difficult to clean up in most cases – to our children, their children, their children's children, and we are washing our hands of it and saying: we really can't be bothered. That's not good enough for me, Mr. Chairman. I'll be voting in favour of this amendment.

Thank you.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the remarks made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Remediation is total cleanup. Management would be monitored – and I repeat, monitored – containment. I think that we're only assuming that buildings would be built there again knowing that the site is there, and I think greenfields are more preferred than brownfields.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The original section 112 is very much along the Liberal long-term view of things. What has happened with this bill speaks to immediate gratification versus long-term results.

The hon. mover of the bill suggested that risk management is the way to go because costs become prohibitively expensive. I would say to the mover of this bill: what could be more expensive than a series of environmental land mines spread throughout the province? What is the cost to future generations of leaving these sites unreclaimed? What is the cost to the environment, to animals wild and domesticated, and to people who live in the surrounding areas? So when we're talking cost and we're weighing the two sides, the profit and the debits, surely we have to take into account the long-term effects of leaving these sites simply managed but unreclaimed.

We spoke earlier in debate about having companies responsible for creating a reclamation pool, and the hon. Minister of Environment initially proposed this and then drew it back.

Dr. Swann: A cleanup fund.

Mr. Chase: A cleanup fund. It seems to me that what we're doing again is taking away the responsibilities of the companies to do it right the first time, knowing that management will be their only requirement, as opposed to total reclamation.

I would say that we have to start looking into the future and recognizing the costs of simply managing risk as opposed to dealing with it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you. Well, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, the intent of this amendment is to ensure that industry remains responsible for old sites where contamination causing an adverse effect is discovered and becomes apparent. Quite frankly, also, any closed sites that continue to have an adverse effect will be reported and managed appropriately, as I mentioned before.

This amendment supports the recommendations of the Contaminated Sites Stakeholder Advisory Committee and significant stakeholder input. The two-year consultation process with stakeholders included industry associations, nongovernment organizations, Alberta Environment, Municipal Affairs, the Farmers' Advocate, Finance, Energy, the Energy and Utilities Board, the Canadian Bankers Association, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, it's of some interest to me that the Minister of Environment has arrived in the House, and I think it would be an opportunity for him to comment on this amendment also. I hope that he will take the opportunity to speak to this amendment.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat talks about flexible options, risk management, allowing more prompt use of the site, and a company being responsible for cleanup. Well, what message does this send, Mr. Chairman, if we are allowing industry off the hook? If they don't actually have to remediate, if they don't actually have to clean up because it's too expensive, what message does that send to industry? The more you pollute, the less you pay: is that the message we want to send to industry? Is that the legacy we want to leave to our children? Surely not.

When the hon. member speaks for members of the contaminated sites advisory group saying that they support this, I beg to differ. I know a number of the members on that advisory group that reject this categorically.

This does not serve the future. This does not serve the environment. This does not serve public health. It is a travesty, allowing industry to get away with our future and our children's future. It's saying: we won't expect you to pay for the cleanup if it's too expensive for you, so the longer you leave it and the more you pollute, the less you'll have to pay. Does that make sense for our future? No, it doesn't.

We will not support this, and we will vigorously oppose this denial of our environment on the basis of industry interests.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thanks, Mr. Chair. In answer I just have to repeat that if any monitoring notes any type of adverse effect or change, the company is obligated to report it and to clean it up. This amendment also clarifies that even if the site has been closed, the company has a duty and obligation to mitigate and clean it up.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If the company has an obligation to reclaim it or to deal with migrating pollution, is that a hundred years from now? Is that 200 years from now? Is the company still going to be around to do the cleanup? Who is responsible for a site a hundred years from now? This doesn't make sense to postpone and fail to do the proper diligence in terms of identifying a spill and cleaning up the spill, which is what you have enacted under EPEA, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. You're again saying that you will postpone this forever. This is not stewardship.

The Chair: I was going to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, so perhaps I'll do that now, and the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat can address the answers after that.

Mr. Taylor: That's okay. I'll pass.

The Chair: Okay. Does the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat wish to respond now?

Mr. Mitzel: All I can say to that, really, is that there are very few sites that are prohibitively too expensive to clean up. In that case, as I mentioned before, those sites would be contained, managed, monitored. As I mentioned, the definition of managed was monitoring containment on that. If there was any change, then there would have to be cleanup for that change. That's all I was talking about.

The hon. member mentioned something about a hundred years or further. We can only speculate how long it's going to take to manage that. We're talking about cleaning up sites. For the majority of sites in Alberta we're talking about immediate cleanup. On management we're talking about very few. I think two sites were mentioned. Perhaps there are a couple more, but two sites were mentioned tonight when we were talking. Those are managed. Those are contained, managed, and monitored.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again: contained, managed, monitored. Give us a specific example, and tell us how they would be contained, how they would be managed, how they would be monitored, how they are being contained, managed, monitored. Is this ongoing now, or are we, you know, trying to create a scenario here that allows us to build a nuclear reactor in the oil sands and then dispose of the nuclear waste and not have to worry about its 10,000 year half-life? What's going on here?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the member – and I don't know where the Minister of Environment is now.

Mr. Boutilier: I'm right in front of you.

Mr. Martin: Oh. That's where we need you, over there, so we can get some answers.

The point that we're making here, why it is so worrisome to me, Mr. Chairman, is simply this: when we use words like "remediate, manage, remove," those are often what we call weasel words. They don't mean much. When we take away from section 112 what was very clear, that we want "to effect maximum protection to human life, health and the environment," and we move it in to what I call

sort of these weasel words that nobody understands particularly what they are in a major environment act, that's what's creating the problems, I think, over here.

It looks like, again, it's a watering down of what we had before in a particular bill. I for the life of me still don't understand what these words mean: remediate, manage, remove. I mean, you understand the dilemma that people are facing here when we take out, as I say, a very strong statement and we put in those sorts of words.

This is in an environment act, Mr. Chairman, that should mean something. If I'm a company and it says "to effect maximum protection to human life, health and the environment," that really gives a statement, and then we move to "manage, remove, or otherwise" – I think it's a watering down. I think that's what the problem is on this side. We don't see the need for it. The member says, probably correctly, that there are a few sites that he's aware of. But why are we doing this in this particular act? I think that's what we're trying to get to the bottom of, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to have a better explanation than we've had so far.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Chairman, at the cost of repeating myself, I think that the remediation is going to happen with nearly all the sites that are contaminated or found contaminated, and the industry has an obligation to report them and clean them up. As far as an example for the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, the Hub Oil site does have monitoring wells on it. These are monitored and checked, and if there's any change to any degree of the contamination or movement, then that will certainly be noted and will be rectified, will be adjusted to make sure that it remains contained.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Industry as a whole historically, with some notable exceptions like Nexon, has not been responsible to date nor has the Alberta government, or we wouldn't have had so many sites orphaned throughout the province. What is the incentive for industry in the future to be rigorous or do due diligence if they simply are required to monitor? Neither the Energy and Utilities Board nor Alberta Environment has the manpower now to properly monitor. Approvals are flying out the door, particularly with coal-bed methane, and we're just compounding a problem rather than resolving it. Part of the approval process should be that before you're allowed to proceed, any historical, unreclaimed sites must first be cleaned up. That would provide industry with the incentive to do it right at least the second time around if they didn't do it the first time around before they're allowed to drill further. Demonstrate your environmental responsibility before you pursue the economic advantage.

Mr. Mitzel: I think that I'm finding that any answers I would give now will just be repetitious. Mr. Chair, if it's all right with the House, I'd like to call the question on this.

Dr. Swann: By this logic, Mr. Chairman, the oil sands should be managed; it shouldn't be cleaned up. By this logic it is going to be so expensive to clean up those tailings ponds and the big gaps in the earth's surface that they should clearly not be properly reclaimed and remediated. By this logic we should leave those things with monitoring wells all around them and not expect the industry to pay the multibillion dollars of cleanup costs. This clearly flies in the face of rationality. This leaves a tremendous damaged legacy to our children. It means that the public will be paying for cleanup a hundred years from now when that business is no longer functioning, when it's gone bankrupt or gone into some other business.

Mr. Chairman, this is a travesty. This cannot be accepted by the House. The amendment is simply suggesting we go back to the original wording, which says that we will guarantee protection of health and safety of the environment, and we will return the land to equivalent use. It is requiring of industry what we said we would require of them. They must return the land to equivalent use. Why are you letting them off the hook? They know the risks they're taking. Why are you letting them off the hook? They know the risk they are taking. They have millions of dollars. If they don't want to take the risk of contaminating the land, then they shouldn't be in that business. Why are we letting them off the hook, Mr. Chairman?

I would appreciate the Environment minister speaking to this. He's going to have to deal with it in the future.

9:50

Mr. Martin: Mr. Chairman, of course we recognize that there's a wide variety of techniques and technologies resulting in both immediate and progressive reclamation of polluted sites. But, at the very minimum what you could have done if you wanted to talk about "remediate, manage, remove or otherwise dispose of," if that means something to anybody, why couldn't we have kept in there the most important part of it, require "maximum protection to human life, health and environment," and then you could have put in "remediate, manage, remove or otherwise dispose of the substance in such a manner as to prevent an adverse effect or further adverse effect."

Read this way, Mr. Chairman, the amendment would have actually strengthened the remediation responsibilities rather than water them down. The fact that we pulled out the most important part of the bill leads us to be very concerned about it. I know that the member is trying, but we still have not had an explanation why we would take out that part of it that's the most important part of the act and say: now we put in some other words that don't mean much in themselves. If they're going to manage, remove, or otherwise dispose of it, it should be to effect maximum protection to human life, health, and environment. Then we could probably live with it. If you take out the most important part of it, it makes no sense.

I know that the member is frustrated, but there has still not been given a logical answer why we took out the part of this bill that really carried the teeth to it. It's what an environment bill should be about. If an environment bill is not about effecting maximum protection to human life, health, and the environment, I don't know what an environment bill is all about. So this is the problem that we face, and again, Mr. Chairman, we have not had the explanation of why we want to do this.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask the Minister of Environment what he means when he says that he'll use every fibre of his being to protect the environment for our future, for our children's future. This is clearly a step back from that. We want to protect the environment. We want the polluter to pay. I think we want the polluter to pay. I think we know that the industries take on that risk when they assume the liabilities associated with their work. The industries say they are prepared to deal with their cleanup costs. They have said that. I am simply looking for some accountability. It's only going to come from one ministry and one minister, and it's going to demand from these industries that they do just what they committed to do, and that is to return the site to equivalent use, not let them off the hook.

This is an invitation to pollute because we are saying within this amendment that if it's too expensive for you, we won't make you clean it up. If it's too expensive, we'll just have you cover it and

monitor it into perpetuity. I would ask the minister to speak to that. What does it mean to use every fibre of your being to protect health, safety, and the future of the planet?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thanks very much. First of all, ladies and gentlemen, members, I want to say that the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has answered the questions. The member has in a very forthright way met with the members across the way to provide them with answers to their questions. He's been doing that day in and day out, and what I continue to hear on the other opposite side is a bunch of rhetoric that you know is toothless and absolutely bottomless in what you're saying.

You know that this hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has done very diligent work working with you. Furthermore, I have never heard so much balderdash tonight from the member across the way and what you were saying. You know it's not true. You know that the merits of what you're saying is a bunch of rhetoric. Ultimately, everyone on this side, and I assumed every member on that side, actually does care about the environment. But what I hear tonight is rhetoric. You know and I know that you're not interested in helping the environment. You're in here trying to make some political points. And you know what? I'm a public servant as Minister of Environment that is here to protect the environment, and I will protect the land, the air, and the water like we have been doing. It is the law, it will continue to be the law, and what we have in front of us tonight is even strengthening the law in terms of the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I cite Standing Order 23, sections (h), (i), and (j): "makes allegations against another member; imputes false or unavowed motives to another member; uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," which we have just seen.

Mr. Chairman, if there is one thing that my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View cannot be accused of it's of not caring about the environment. He has also been accused of telling an untruth here, and I don't think that that can be substantiated. I think that certainly imputes false or unavowed motives to another member, and is certainly abusive and insulting language in my book. I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Anyone else wish to speak on the point of order? The citation in 23(h), (i), and (j), I believe it was, making allegations – did you wish to speak on the point of order?

Mr. Boutilier: Did someone speak already?

The Chair: There was a point of order 23(h), (i), and (j), which is: "makes allegations against another member; imputes false or unavowed motives to another member; uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chairman, on the point of order I totally disagree. When I talk about political rhetoric, that I've heard it here, that's exactly what I heard, so I stand by what I said.

The Chair: The term "rhetoric" has been used in this House several times and never been considered as abusive or insulting, and I've heard it from all sides of the House. The false or unavowed motives: I'm not sure what specific comments you're relating to. If you could help me out with that, I would be appreciative.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Specifically, that the minister accused my colleague of saying things that were not true.

An Hon. Member: What's your point?

Mr. Taylor: You want another point of order?

Furthermore, although I concede your point about rhetoric, I don't know whether balderdash is on the list of unparliamentary language or not. In terms of explaining rhetoric, he went on to say that the member does not care about the environment or words to that effect, and I think the minister himself knows that that is not true.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chairman, on the point of order. The comments that were made from the other side were about "travesty." The implication and the intimation that was being made was as if the hon. member does not care about the environment, that this is a bad day, that it is ultimately something that is not true in terms of what we're trying to do. I am not aware that the word "balderdash" is unparliamentary. If it is, I will withdraw it, but I stand by the context of what I have said here tonight in terms of this side, in fact, supporting environmental principles.

The Chair: Obviously, the comments that were made, I will say, did create disorder because we have seen the results of that at this point. The minister has stated that he withdrew certain comments.

Mr. Boutilier: No, no, Mr. Chairman. I'm not withdrawing balderdash. If it's unparliamentary I will, but balderdash I will not withdraw.

The Chair: What did you withdraw?

Mr. Boutilier: I'm not withdrawing anything. I'm saying that if balderdash is considered unparliamentary, I'll withdraw it, but in my understanding of what I understand about balderdash when I heard it on Fred Flintstone and *The Flintstones*, it is a parliamentary word.

The Chair: Hon. members, obviously, under 23(j) if nothing else the comments that were made by the minister obviously did create disorder in the House, but if we could accept that and carry on from this point, would that be acceptable? There's a point of order on 23(j) for creating disorder. So let's proceed with the debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

10:00

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If current government members vote against this amendment, which is to basically restore the original government intention, then they show Albertans that they are willing to compromise the environment for the sake of immediate economic gratification rather than a sustainable smart growth, protected environment. To the Minister of Environment: how can the Environment minister, with only a half per cent of the budget, carry through with the heavy responsibility of environmental protection?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have one question, a relatively quick question, I think, for the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. He's indicated in debate on this particular amendment that there are perhaps only one or two sites in the province that we're discussing when it comes to managing as opposed to full reclamation.

I'm curious as to whether or not he's aware of a site in Edmonton on the corner of 105th Street and Whyte Avenue, which is the location of a former service station and is obviously prime real estate, sitting on Whyte Avenue, surrounded by commercial operations, one of the hot spots in the city, as it were, in terms of commercial activity, yet this site has now sat empty for in excess of 10 years waiting for somebody to reclaim it. In the meantime I believe it's being monitored, although I'm not sure. I'm not even entirely sure whether or not it falls under this piece of legislation. Perhaps it falls under the Municipal Government Act. But it certainly would be another example of a site that just seems to sit there, waiting for somebody to decide they're going to be responsible for it. Clearly, the government isn't willing to put the money forward to look after it. I understand that there are questions over who should be responsible because the land changed ownership several times over the years before the service station operation finally ceased operating.

I think it's at least, then, the third example of exactly what we're talking about here, on a much smaller scale than perhaps some of the other ones but a very visible example in that it is, as I suggested, located in a prime location in a major commercial district, which has literally thousands if not tens of thousands of people walking in the vicinity every day of the year. So it's very relevant to this particular amendment, and I'd be curious to know whether or not the member has any comments in relation to that specific location.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, in fact, I'm well aware of that particular site, and that was one of the reasons why this amendment is here. The Minister of Environment has spoken to the mayor about this, and this amendment will help that site. This site is privately owned. It's owned by Imperial Oil. It is being monitored and contained. As I said, this amendment will help with the remediation, being able to put this site back into commercial use. That's exactly why this amendment is here.

The Chair: Anyone else on amendment A3? Ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:05 p.m.]

Dr. Swann: We can use two minutes, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Too late.

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	Martin	Swann
Flaherty	Miller, R.	Taylor

Against the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	Mitzel
Amery	Hancock	Ouellette
Boutilier	Johnson	Prins
Brown	Knight	Renner
Calahasen	Liepert	Rogers
Cao	Lougheed	Stelmach
Cenaiko	Lund	Stevens
Coutts	Magnus	Webber
Doerksen	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Ducharme	Melchin	

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

Chair's Ruling
Divisions in Committees of the Whole House

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, Standing Order 32(2.1) states that "when a division is called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, a member may request unanimous consent to waive suborder (2) to shorten the 10 minute interval between division bells." It's been customary in the past to ask for the motion prior to because we've got members' offices that are farther away than 10 minutes. So although the Standing Orders can be interpreted to accept the request by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, that's the reason I didn't accept it at the time. But I would accept a motion, and I'll recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this particular point now.

Debate Continued

Mr. Stevens: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman. I would move that we do in fact reduce the time between division bells to two minutes for the balance of this evening.

The Chair: Would that be two minutes between the bells?

Mr. Stevens: That would be two minutes between the bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: From this point this evening in committee the time between the bells will be two minutes.

Okay. Are you ready for the question on Bill 29?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the clauses of Bill 29 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:20 p.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	Mitzel
Amery	Hancock	Ouellette
Boutilier	Johnson	Prins

Brown	Knight	Renner
Calahasen	Liepert	Rogers
Cao	Lougheed	Stelmach
Cenaiko	Lund	Stevens
Coutts	Magnus	Webber
Doerksen	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Ducharme	Melchin	

Against the motion:

Chase	Martin	Swann
Flaherty	Miller, R.	Taylor
Totals:	For – 29	Against – 6

[The clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 35 Fuel Tax Act

The Chair: The next bill for consideration is Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to speak again to Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act. I appreciate many of the comments that were made at second reading by hon. members, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

For the most part the debate revolved around the taxes that the province collects on the fuel, and I would have to say that this is not really one of the reasons why this legislation was introduced. In fact, it does not deal with that particular aspect of the fuel tax. The fact is that Alberta's gasoline tax is the lowest of all provinces at 9 cents per litre, and it hasn't increased over the last 14 years. So the rising fuel prices that were alluded to in debate on second reading are not affected in any way by this bill, and Alberta certainly doesn't receive any additional revenue when the pump prices go higher. The tax remains the same per litre.

As I mentioned in second reading, this bill would replace the existing Fuel Tax Act, which is outdated. It no longer reflects how the tax is actually collected. So the bill is technical in nature. It doesn't change the fuels that are taxed. It doesn't change the tax rates, nor does it change tax policy in any substantive way. So while the matter of the amount of the fuel tax was of some interest to members, obviously, it is not the subject of the act.

I would like to address a couple of particular issues that came up at second reading. One was relating to the difference in the collection process and the amounts that would result. It's important to remember that the process of collecting fuel tax in Alberta is the same as it has been for a number of years. This process has never been legislated, and currently the government of Alberta uses collector agreements to collect fuel taxes. There are over 30 of these for the gasoline and fuel tax. These are agreements with ultimate remitters who remit the tax to the government of Alberta. It's necessary to have a contract with each of those remitters. This is not

a very efficient process, obviously, because every time there's a reorganization of a corporation or any time there are changes to the collection process, these agreements have to be changed and renegotiated. So this bill will set out a collection framework clearly and make the process legislatively mandated.

At second reading I mentioned that the bill provides for a multistage direct tax. That is a tax where the highest person in the supply and distribution chain will collect the tax and remit it to the Crown, and then every person in the chain would pay the tax but recover the tax from the next person down the chain. So it is the end consumer of the fuel that ultimately pays the fuel tax. Having the highest person in the chain collect and remit the tax, obviously, is the most efficient way for industry and consumers to fulfill their tax obligations. It's also the most efficient way for the government to collect the tax.

The amount of tax collected will not change with this bill. The legislation will not see more tax dollars flow to the province, but it will see an improved method of administering and collecting the fuel taxes. The bill provides a taxation framework, including who pays the tax, the tax rates, how the tax is collected, when the tax is to be paid, and the assessment, collection, and enforcement provisions. However, the administrative details for eligibility for refunds, rebates, exemption, registration, reporting, record keeping, et cetera are provided through regulations. By providing the details in the regulations, it also allows for flexibility to deal with changing industry practices. The regulations are currently being developed, and they will work in harmony with the bill.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I hope these comments are helpful in clarifying the issues before the Assembly.

Thank you.

10:30

The Chair: Is there anyone else who wishes to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for his explanation this evening and clarification as we begin debate of Bill 35, Fuel Tax Act, in Committee of the Whole. The first question I would have for the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill as we go through this bill section by section is page 8 of the bill. It talks about the international fuel tax agreement. I'm wondering if we can have a little more detail on that agreement, in particular why Alberta is a member of the international fuel tax agreement. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of membership, and why isn't Alaska a member? As near as I can understand, Alaska is not a member of this particular consortium. Given that both Alberta and Alaska are energy-producing jurisdictions, is there something, perhaps, that we might be able to learn from Alaska; as an example, the fact that they manage to set aside 25 per cent of their natural resource revenues into a savings fund?

The next one, Mr. Chairman, on page 9, section 6, talks about the tax payable on liquefied petroleum gas. At this point I do have an amendment that I would like to introduce in relation to section 6. I have those ready for distribution now, so if it's all right, I'll just wait a minute for that amendment to be passed around to the members.

The Chair: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

You may proceed, hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The amendment that I'm introducing this evening would strike section 6 from the Fuel Tax Act. That is the section that, as I referenced earlier,

deals with the tax payable on liquid petroleum gas when it's used as a motor fuel. Currently that amount charged is 6.5 cents per litre.

I was attempting today, in preparation for tonight's debate, to get more accurate figures than what I have. Unfortunately, I was unable to get a response back from Alberta Finance in time for tonight's debate, but as near as I can understand, the fuel tax on propane at this point generates about \$6 million in tax revenue to the province on an annual basis. Approximately \$1.8 million of that amount is rebated annually to distributors for having made sales of liquefied petroleum gas that are for uses other than motor vehicle fuel and, thereby, would be exempt from the tax. Mr. Chairman, the first point of this amendment is that it's a relatively small amount of tax that is collected each year, not a significant amount, really, in terms of the overall income of the province. That's important to note when we look at the reasons why I'm moving this particular amendment.

The fact of the matter is this: propane, or liquid petroleum gas, is one of the cleanest burning fuels that we have available to us. I think it's imperative upon us in this day and age to look at clean-burning fuel alternatives whenever possible. I know that this government and, particularly, the Premier talked an awful lot about coal as a clean fuel alternative. Despite the assurances of the Premier as far as I'm aware, Mr. Chairman, the Premier has yet to find a way to operate motor vehicles on coal. As a result of that, I think it's appropriate that we look at other alternatives to gasoline, and certainly propane is one that has been used effectively over the years. It has a long history, actually, of being used in an efficient manner to operate motor vehicles.

I referenced in second reading that the Propane Gas Association of Canada had been in a couple of weeks previous to speak to both government members and opposition members on the merits of propane. Coming out of the information that they shared with us that day is the fact that if you go back to 1992, there were approximately 220,000 vehicles in Canada that were operated on LGP. Due to a number of factors, partially because the various government incentive programs to switch vehicles to propane have been moved away, partially because taxes have increased on propane, and partially because there, quite frankly, just wasn't an awful lot of take-up from the manufacturers of motor vehicles to present propane fuel as an option, since that time we're down to only approximately 60,000 vehicles using liquid gas propane across the country. The Propane Gas Association of Canada informs me that about 15 per cent of those, or approximately 9,000 vehicles, would be operating in Alberta.

Clearly, we've gone backwards instead of forwards in terms of promoting the use of propane as a viable alternate fuel for motor vehicles, and the fact that we collect 6.5 cents per litre on that fuel certainly doesn't help that situation any but, in fact, would indicate to me that it would be a deterrent to promoting that.

Now, the other thing that I noted with some interest, Mr. Chairman, is that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in one of their surveys of their membership recently asked the question: should fuel taxes be reduced to control rising energy prices? Not surprisingly, small businesses and medium-sized businesses in this country were overwhelmingly in support of taking such a move. In Canada country-wide the results showed that 74 per cent of small- and medium-sized enterprises would favour such a move, and certainly in Alberta the number was even higher at 80 per cent. Now, that particular survey was not propane specific, of course, but was looking at all motor vehicle fuels.

Here is an example, clearly, that it is a factor in terms of decision-making when it comes to small business. Again, most of the vehicle conversions that were done to propane were done by fleet services,

not necessarily individuals, but small, medium, and in some cases large corporations were moving their fleets over to propane.

So, again, if we can do anything to encourage them to consider doing so again in the future, I think that would be worthwhile. Clearly, 6.5 cents per litre is an example of one way we might encourage them to do so.

10:40

The other thing to point out, too, is that by removing the 6.5 cent per litre tax on propane as an auto fuel, it actually gives an even bigger benefit to the consumer at the propane pump because, of course, the federal GST is tacked on top of the price. The 7 per cent GST currently collected by the federal government is tacked on top of the 6.5 cents per litre that the provincial government collects. So if you remove that 6.5 cents per litre tax on auto propane, then you're removing the 7 per cent GST that is collected on that as well. Again, an even further incentive for business and individuals to consider converting their vehicles to propane.

So I think I've outlined, Mr. Chairman, some of the benefits of considering making this move. I'm not so sure that there is a lot of downside to making this move. As I suggested, the amount of tax collected by the province is not big in terms of the overall income of the province. In fact, if it's only 9,000 vehicles in Alberta currently that are using propane as an auto fuel, one has to wonder what the regulatory burden is to the province in terms of collecting that and whether or not the number of civil servants involved in collecting the tax and the amount of time and effort that goes into collecting that \$4 million are even justifiable. I don't know what that cost would be, but I suspect that it's a relatively high cost based on the relatively small amount of revenue that is generated from it.

Certainly, another point, Mr. Chairman, would be the regulatory burden on the distributors that have to collect this tax, and then, it would appear, according to the numbers that I've been able to get today, approximately a third of what's collected is rebated, which means there's an awful lot of time and effort spent on the part of small- and medium-sized businesses doing the paperwork to get that rebate. It was suggested to me today by the folks at the Propane Gas Association of Canada that they believe there is an even higher percentage of propane that is sold for uses other than as a motor fuel, but the tax is not rebated because many of the small distributors, in particular, find the task of completing the rebate application too onerous. Rather than taking the time and the effort to do the application for the rebate, they just let it go because it's more time and effort and, ultimately, more expense to their business than it's worth to collect it back.

So I think, again, that if reducing the regulatory burden to small businesses is, in fact, something that this government believes in, as they've certainly indicated it is – and in fact the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency has even struck a committee to look at that – I would hope that one of the issues that they'll be looking at is the cost to propane distributors to collect this tax and then fill out the various paperwork that would be required for them to collect a rebate on the amount of propane that they sell that is not, in fact, sold as a motor fuel.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will look forward to hearing others speak to this amendment, and I would certainly encourage the government to do the right thing and adopt this as a measure to encourage the use of a cleaner burning fuel, a more environmentally friendly fuel, and certainly something that will help small business along the way.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's commendable objectives in suggesting that the tax on liquefied petroleum gas would be eliminated. It is a very clean-burning fuel, and for that reason it does have some advantages environmentally. But to speak against the motion, I would say that there are certainly some limits to the utility of LPG with respect to a number of factors. Safety is certainly a factor. There are many parking structures and other building structures to which LPG vehicles are not allowed access. From an engineering standpoint there are certainly problems with respect to the fact that this pressurized gas has to be accommodated, usually in the trunks of passenger vehicles.

I would also say that there is probably some difficulty with respect to supply. There would not be, in my view and to my understanding, adequate supplies of LPG to fuel all of the vehicles that we have. So to the extent that there were some LPG vehicles that were driving around without paying tax while the other ones with liquid fuel were paying tax, I think that it would create an imbalance in terms of competitiveness of both the producers of the fuel and the ultimate consumers. If they were doing it on a commercial basis, certainly.

Lastly, I would say that if there was an elimination of the LPG fuel tax, there would certainly be a resulting loss of revenue to the government, and it would have to be made up, presumably, in some other way. So I would speak against the amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I speak in favour of the amendment. Both our provincial government and the former federal government, while they disagreed on the Kyoto protocol, did agree on the importance of cutting down on greenhouse gases and emissions. Both the federal government and the provincial government saw the value in providing incentives for furnace retrofitting, for example, which was good for fuel efficiency and environmental support. A neighbour of mine invented a device called the Furnace Buddy. He sought government approval for this. It demonstrated cost-efficiency and required very little installation.

I see this propane in the same light. That \$6 million collected would be an investment in clean air, and it's necessary for the government to provide some type of incentive in order for individuals to afford the cost of retrofitting their vehicle. Without some kind of a carrot or incentive individuals aren't likely to take this step, and \$6 million is a very small price to pay in terms of our environment's future.

The savings. We've been speaking a lot tonight in terms of long-term savings, and the money that would be saved in terms of our environment would well be worth that investment price.

Also, the hon. mover of the bill talked about the availability of fuel, and particularly in Alberta availability of propane is not a problem. A lot of agricultural vehicles going back into the '80s and so on used propane as an alternative because it was less expensive. In order to encourage that cheaper fuel and the availability of it, particularly for agricultural use, this is one way of achieving it. Farmers are having a hard enough time operating, and any incentive that we can have not only to regular vehicle users, fleet vehicles, and so on but also taking into account the agricultural benefits of reduced fuels, would go a long way to helping out.

That is why I speak in favour of using the money that we collect, turning it around, and investing in a clean-burning fuel that will have future ramifications and positive outcomes as of the present.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

10:50

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of points in response to comments made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. He asked about the safety of propane. In fact, according to the Propane Gas Association of Canada, propane is much safer than most people believe. Just a couple of examples: only 6 per cent of incidents involving the transport of propane result in a fire. I think there's a common misconception out there that if anything happens to a vehicle that's transporting propane, there's going to be some sort of a major catastrophe. Some of this, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, is born out of some very high-profile incidents that have taken place over the years, but they're very, very few in number and statistically virtually insignificant. The risk of getting killed by propane is the same as the risk of being hit by a crashing airplane as you walk down the street. There are many more facts provided by the Propane Gas Association, but I think it's safe to say that the elevated risk is a perception much more than it is the reality.

The other thing that I'd like to address is that the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill talked about the creation of an imbalance if we allow users of liquid propane as a motor fuel to be exempted from fuel tax. In fact, Mr. Chairman, all that I'm asking for with this amendment is to treat propane exactly the same way as we now currently treat both ethanol and natural gas. Both of those fuels are completely exempted from the collection of fuel tax, and all we're saying is: "Here's another example of another clean-burning fuel. Why not give the users of propane the same benefit that we currently give to the users of natural gas and ethanol as motor vehicle fuels?"

So in terms of creating an imbalance, certainly there would be an imbalance in comparison to gasoline. In fact, there already is, as the hon. member already knows, because we collect 6.5 cents per litre as opposed to 9 cents per litre on gasoline. So the imbalance exists now, and it exists to an even greater extent with natural gas and ethanol. All that we're asking with this amendment is to treat users of propane exactly the same as we currently treat the users of those other two alternate fuels.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the bill.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few comments and more questions than anything else. Maybe I misunderstood the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. In a quick perusal of the bill – I admit that I haven't gone through it top to bottom – my understanding was that the bill would move somewhat in the opposite direction. I wonder if I heard him right on where it's taking this legislation. I think we would all admit that it's outdated the way it's collected. Did he say that we would be putting this into regulation? In a quick look at it, I thought that we were actually doing something a little differently than we do usually, that we were putting much of this into legislation rather than cumbersome regulation and individual contracts. Maybe I misheard the member, and I'd like him just to comment on that if he could.

Mr. Chairman, there are just a few questions, though, that I'd like to follow up on. One is section 10. It deals with the duty of the vendor to pass on the benefits of tax exemption and the farm fuel distribution allowance to the consumer. Well, obviously, that makes sense, and we absolutely agree that this ought to be included in the

legislation. Any benefit to which a consumer is entitled ought, rightly, to be given to him or her.

However, section 10 specifies that if the vendor is found to not be passing on the savings, so to speak, the vendor must “pay to the Crown an amount equal to the benefit the vendor was required to pass on to the consumer.” I wonder how that works because there’s no mention made of the payment to the consumer. I would take it that the money should be going to the consumer rather than to the Crown. I wonder how that works. Realizing that it might be difficult to track down the consumer or consumers in question in order to repay them the benefits they are owed, this raises a question of how the Crown might track whether or not such savings are, in fact, being passed on. Would the member, if he could, explain how this might be tracked and if it is advisable and possible to reimburse the consumer the same amount payable to the Crown. This might also serve as more of a deterrent for those vendors who would otherwise simply pay their dues should they be caught. In other words, I’m wondering how foolproof it is.

This raises another question about deterrents as several sections – I think it’s sections 18, 19, 20; pages 15 to 18 – of the proposed bill specify that should the vendor sell tax-exempt fuel to a consumer who does not qualify or sell reduced-price fuel to someone who does not qualify, that the vendor and consumer are jointly and severally liable to pay the Crown two things: the tax on the true value of the fuel and the difference amounting to the true value of the fuel. Additionally, sections 56 to 61 provide for penalties over and above the repayment of proper tax and benefits.

I wonder, though. In most cases there’s an appeal procedure. As the member, being a lawyer, knows, there’s usually a provision for appeal. I guess the question I’m asking is: are there such provisions and regulations to allow for that leeway? Simply as a matter for clarification, we’re trying to find out how prevalent fuel tax fraud is in our province, the reason we’re doing it. Is this a big business? Is that why we’ve come to this in this bill? Is there any idea about how much of this is going on?

Mr. Chairman, I think most of Bill 35 makes sense, but if the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill could answer just a few of those questions, it would be appreciated.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’m not sure that I have a full answer to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview regarding the obligation of the vendor under section 10, but obviously the sanctions that are there are serious sanctions, and I think that’s the way that the provision is enforced.

Just with respect to the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford regarding the international fuel tax agreement, I might be able to very quickly explain my understanding of that fuel tax agreement. He mentioned the exemption of Hawaii and Alaska from that agreement. The international fuel tax agreement is a rather complicated agreement which is meant to distribute the revenue from fuel taxes to the provinces in which the fuel is consumed. So, for example, if a trucker is based in the province of Alberta, then that trucker would only file the fuel tax forms and remissions within the province of Alberta. They would remit only in Alberta, and then Alberta would distribute the tax pro rata according to where the fuel was expended. For example, if it was a carrier based in the city of Edmonton and they made a run down to California to the vegetable produce territory, each of the states in which they travelled would get a proportion of that fuel tax. If they had the fuel purchased in one province or one state, it would then be distributed pro rata.

So they do calculations based upon where the fuel is actually consumed by the trucker. It’s just an administrative way to do it. Why is Alaska not included in it? I can only infer that because of the huge distances involved most of the fuel that’s purchased in Alaska is also consumed in Alaska or perhaps in the Yukon or the adjacent territories. Hawaii, obviously there aren’t any trucks passing across the border there, so that explains it. In a nutshell that’s my understanding of it. It’s just a way to distribute the fuel tax pro rata according to where it’s burned.

11:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for further muddling my understanding of the international fuel tax agreement although I guess I understand a bit more about it. I am curious, though, whether or not there would be penalties for exiting that agreement, if you know that or not, and what restrictions or barriers there might be for withdrawing from that agreement if we were ever to choose to do so.

We discussed a little bit earlier tonight the fact that Alberta’s fuel tax is collected at a lower rate than anywhere else in the country and, particularly, lower than our neighbouring provinces. Based on the way you just outlined that agreement, I’m not so sure that the agreement is favourable for those provinces. It sounds to me like truckers might well choose to remit in Alberta and then have that tax at a lower rate redistributed as opposed to remitting in other provinces, and I’m not sure that I understood that fully. Perhaps you can clarify it for me because the way you described it, I’m not so sure that other provinces will be very happy with us.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, if I could just briefly. My understanding is that the way that the tax is remitted is according to the tax regime in each of the jurisdictions in which the fuel is actually expended. As to the consequences of withdrawal from the agreement, it would mean that Alberta truckers would be forced to file and remit in each of the states or provinces in which they were carrying. So there are certainly some great advantages to the administrative simplicity for any truckers in Alberta.

As to the issue of Alberta’s taxes being lower, that is quite correct. I would suppose that that’s part of the Alberta advantage, and if we could encourage truckers to be based here – and many large trucking firms are based here in Alberta, including Canadian Freightways, Mullen Trucking, Trimac, and some other large trucking firms – that would certainly be one of the advantages, that they can file the tax, as I said, only once here in Alberta and then remit only in Alberta as well. So I think there are great advantages, and there’s a huge disincentive for us to pull out of that international agreement.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’m wondering as well about section 13, which refers to a special account. It says:

The Minister may require a direct remitter to deposit the amount of tax to be remitted to the Minister into an account in the name of the Minister or an account in trust for the Minister at a financial institution specified by the Minister.

I’m wondering if the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill can enlighten me as to how many of these special accounts exist. Is it just one? Are we talking many? Tens or perhaps a hundred or more? Where

do they show up in Alberta Finance's fiscal plan? Because I've looked and I couldn't find any reference to those accounts in the fiscal plan.

The Chair: The hon. member? Anyone else? Are you ready for the question on Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act? Obviously not.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A couple more questions – and I sense some impatience on the other side, but I think these are important questions to ask. As you know, committee is the time to ask these questions section by section, line by line.

The Chair: Yes. I recognize that, hon. member, but when the opportunity arises, the chair expects you to rise quickly.

Mr. R. Miller: I had risen, Mr. Chairman. I had.

As I say, it's appropriate that we ask these questions now because once we get to third reading, of course, then we're talking the effects of the bill, and we don't have an opportunity to examine the bill piece by piece, as it were.

I'd like to clarify with the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill page 16 of this new Fuel Tax Act, where it talks about the prohibited sale. What it says exactly under 18(5) is that it talks about a consumer buying marked fuel. Now, you'll remember that we talked the other night about what we call purple gas. It's no longer purple gas. It's actually currently red gas. So we refer to it as marked fuel. It talks about: a consumer buying "marked fuel for farming operations in Alberta at the reduced price shall not sell that marked fuel to another consumer for a purpose or use other than farming operations in Alberta." So I'm taking from that that one farmer can sell to another farmer marked fuel and do so legally.

I'm not sure about the implications as far as pricing and whether or not he could sell it for a different price than what he purchased it for and whether or not there may be some tax implications there or whatever and why another farmer might wish to buy it at a different price. I suppose there would be situations where, given a fluctuation in price, maybe one farmer could sell it at a greater price than he purchased it for, yet that might still be less than the current price given the volatility in the market today. I don't know, but I'm curious about that.

Also, under the duty of vendor section on page 11, Mr. Chairman, I'm curious how many vendors there are in Alberta and whether or not the Auditor General has examined the processes that are described in this new Fuel Tax Act to ensure that vendors have appropriate tax systems in place. Again, I'm not sure that the member would have this information available at his fingertips tonight, but perhaps we might be able to get this in advance of third reading. That question would be: how many times in the year 2004-2005 had a vendor actually contravened the Fuel Tax Act? How many times was this an issue that caused concern to make sure that it's described in this new bill as we see it here tonight?

The Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 35 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 20
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: We are considering amendment A2. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I said before, I brought in this amendment that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, be amended by striking out section 4. Now, this is one of the really bad parts of this particular legislation. This section exempts ministers' briefing notes and backgrounders from FOIP.

You know, what's frustrating about this, Mr. Chairman, is that we stand in the House and we ask for information. There are two ways you can try to get information. One is that you can pay the money and go through FOIP and try to get that information. It's very hard to do it. It's time consuming. It takes a long time, as we noticed, asking to deal with some of the health FOIP. The deadlines come and go, and there seems to be no penalty for it. But that's one way to do it.

The second way to do it, Mr. Chairman, is to bring through written questions or motions for returns here in the Legislature. Well, almost inevitably, if it's any information other than something that the government wants to give out because it may make them look good, we're turned down. Usually they say that it's for third-party reasons or whatever reason. Now we're tightening up FOIP. It was difficult enough before. Now we're tightening it up more. One of the worst parts of it is that it exempts ministerial briefing notes and backgrounders.

11:10

This was so serious that Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Work, commented on this particular section, and he certainly was concerned. He didn't seem to be concerned by many of the others. His press release on March 8, 2006, says that the Commissioner, however, cannot support a proposal to exclude Briefing Books from application of the Act. "This has never been an issue for this Office in the past. This amendment could be a very significant exemption to disclosure. We already have a section of the Act which quite clearly establishes the ability to withhold advice given by officials and this particular amendment is not necessary." Now, Mr. Chairman, this is coming from Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner, and he's saying that this is unnecessary.

You know, briefing notes are precisely that, briefing notes. There are two sections. They have to do with new ministers and what they're going to say and the briefing notes that eventually come. Surely, when the ministers speak in the Assembly, they're saying some of those things that came from those briefing notes. Again, like Mr. Work I cannot understand why we need to go in this direction.

Being ever helpful, which we are on this side, we attempt to improve the legislation, Mr. Chairman, and that's why in this particular amendment we've asked that we just strike this out. If we struck out section 4, we'd be doing precisely what Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner has suggested. If we're not going to do that, I would certainly like somebody in government to explain why we're going so far with this particular amendment.

Mr. Chairman, the amendment was handed out I think a week ago, on Monday, so I know that all members have rushed out and looked

at it and are now convinced of the error of their ways. I'm sure that the government is doing the right thing and, being the transparent, open government that they are, will now see that they agree with the opposition and the Privacy Commissioner and will support this particular amendment by striking out section 4. So I'd at least like to hear from the government: if they're not going to do it, why not?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North on amendment A2.

Mrs. Jablonski: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Referring to the amendment and to section 4, this part of the amendment act will only limit the right of access to briefings provided to the minister when he or she assumes a portfolio and when he or she is preparing for a session of the Legislative Assembly. So those are the only two places that they'll limit access to their briefing notes.

The FOIP Act was never intended to cover records relating to the workings of the Legislature. Nevertheless, after five years these records become fully subject to the act. The five-year time period was chosen because it restricts records prepared for a legislative session only for the life of the Legislature. So, once again, it only refers to the briefing notes provided to the minister when he or she assumes a portfolio or when they're preparing for a session, and in five years they will be available.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would reject this amendment.

Mr. Chase: The purpose of the amendment was, as the mover pointed out, to create greater transparency and accountability. When we seek to bury information for an extended period of time, it works against the whole notion of transparency and accountability. If the information with regard to briefing notes and so on is perceived as dangerous to the government, then that information should never have been considered in the first place if it has that damaging potential. So in the interests of transparency and accountability I would suggest that any information be available within a reasonable amount of time so that it can be appropriately discussed and debated rather than buried. Therefore, I speak in favour of the amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief. I rise to speak in support of the amendment that stands in my name. Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act with its current features, the bill that's before the House, will make it much more difficult to have access to information that must be available to all members of this House and, indeed, to interested parties outside and through the media. What this bill will do will not only make it more difficult to have access to that information. That's in the public good. Remember that all these bills are supposed to serve public purpose and public good, and to put information out of reach by way of this section I think offends the very spirit of this legislation.

This legislation is about making sure that legitimate access to information is available to all in this province, not only the ministers. Ministers' briefing notes, in particular, I think are critical pieces of information, which, if available to members of this House, can help them understand the reasons behind why the departments are taking the position they are taking. Then they can be questioned on it. They can be held accountable on it. They can be challenged on those issues. But the very information on which the policy is based and on which the minister's rationale for his or her piece of legislation may be based will be denied to people who should have

legitimate access to it. It talks about members of this House. It talks about the media. It talks about other parties that may be affected by it.

What we are trying to do by way of introducing this amendment is to in fact strike at the worst part of this bill. I hope that the House will agree with this amendment. If we do that, in fact, strike out section 4, that will improve the bill, and if the bill is an improved piece of legislation, it certainly will be in the public interest to vote for this amendment. So I encourage all members of this House to support this amendment and vote for it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Briefly, Mr. Chairman, the information that the opposition or others may want can be asked for specifically, but the issue that I see in this particular matter is someone who says: I want the briefing book of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for the province for this particular session. I want the list of contents, and I want everything that's in the list of contents. It's not specific to issues; it's specific to a particular type of document.

From where I sit, what's important is that if you have a particular issue and you want information with respect to a particular issue, you ask for the information relative to the issue rather than just simply saying: I want the playbook for the Denver Broncos. You don't know what's in the playbook, but you want the playbook. Well, if you want to be specific, be specific. You can ask the specific question, and you are going to get the information that you're entitled to, but you don't get to cast a broad net that is not specific to the information by saying: we want the playbook. That is essentially what I see this particular matter in large measure addressing.

11:20

From my perspective if somebody has a legitimate interest in specific information relating to a specific issue, that is most appropriate. It's not appropriate to simply say: give me what happens to be in a particular binder that has been provided to a particular minister in preparation for that new minister taking over a ministry that they have not been responsible for before and dealing with issues that happen to come up at this particular point in time. If we have other information that's available, of course you're going to be entitled to it as a result of access under the act, but you're not going to be able to get access to it by a generic, nonspecific request.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the hon. Minister of Justice, that does not appear to be what the bill says, and if the bill is to be interpreted as the hon. minister indicates, then perhaps the bill should read that way. The bill as proposed says:

- (4) The right of access does not extend
 - (a) to a record created solely for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council in respect of assuming responsibility for a ministry, or
 - (b) to a record created solely for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council in preparation for a sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

It goes on through subsections (5), (6), and (7) as well, and subsection (8). It puts long timelines on the exceptions, the exemptions to those rights of access not extending five years or more in the case of a member of the Executive Council and 15 years or more in the case of a record relating to an audit by the chief internal auditor of Alberta. Perhaps I should read that.

(7) The right of access to a record does not extend to a record relating to an audit by the Chief Internal Auditor of Alberta that is in the custody of the Chief Internal Auditor of Alberta or any person under the administration [et cetera, et cetera]

Now, the hon. minister has the initials QC after his name as a lawyer of some repute. I am a mere journalist from my past life. He has a better understanding of the law than I do, perhaps. I have to say that that sounds very much to me as though it does cover specific requests for a particular record. It seems to say that the right of access to a particular record does not extend to a particular record relating to an audit by the chief internal auditor, et cetera, et cetera, or the right of access does not extend to a particular record created solely for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council in preparation for a sitting of the Legislative Assembly. Under subsection (4)(b) I would think that a particular record created solely for the purpose of briefing a minister in preparation for the sitting of the Legislative Assembly may in fact be germane to a topic or an issue that we are pursuing.

So I'll invite the minister to give me a crash course in the law here, but my interpretation of the words on the paper as they read now, unamended, certainly suggest to me that we very much need the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's amendment to pass.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The minister said that all we'd need to do is ask, that basically if there's a specific thing we request, just ask. Well, we've been asking, you know: motions for returns, written questions, blah blah blah, and very specific, but there's always an excuse not to give it to us if they don't want to. It's the third party this or the third party that or whatever reason at that particular time. So it's not quite as simple as the minister says. Again, the Member for Calgary-Currie is absolutely right. When the ministers stand up in the Legislature in question period or estimates or whatever, surely some of the briefing notes and some of the things that they're doing may have a bearing on that. The public has a right to know that. It's transparent. It's government.

The point that I would make is that it's not only us, that the top person in this area, the Privacy Commissioner, has made it very clear. He says that this amendment could be a very significant exception to disclosure. He's concerned about it, and that's somebody, I think, that the government and all of us should take into consideration. When he comes out that clearly on this particular section that I'm talking about, I think we should take a look at it. In a five-year period that could be a different government. That's ancient history by then, you know what I'm saying. Is that deliberate? It's another government, so they can't take the blame.

We have not been given, Mr. Chairman, a reason why this should be excluded. I think that even if you don't want to listen to the opposition, it seems to me that we should be listening to the commissioner that's in charge of this. He sees this as a severe problem. His news release of March 8, 2006: I would at least hope that the minister or the member have looked at that and taken that into consideration.

There's got to be a better reason than what's been given. If it was as simple as just asking, we wouldn't be paying money through FOIP to get this information, right? We'd just come here and ask the minister, and he'd tell us anything we wanted to know no matter what we wanted to know. But it's not that simple, and the minister knows that. So along with the Privacy Commissioner we think that this is a backward step. For a government saying that they want to

be transparent and open, we're certainly not finding that in Motions for Returns and Written Questions, and now we're seeing this sort of blocking back in terms of the FOIP. This particular one, Bill 20, section 4, is one of the most odious.

I think the government should take a look at this particular amendment. The member said that she would not support it. So you're saying that you would not support what the Privacy Commissioner is saying about it. That's basically what you're telling us in the Legislature, that you're not going to take the Privacy Commissioner's word that this is a serious exception to disclosure. That's sad if we can't take the legislative officer, the top person here at least in this amendment, and say: well, maybe he's got a point. He's the one that administers this. Why would he be saying this if he didn't think it was important?

So I'm sorry. Again, I'm not going to hold my breath here, but I think this is a very big step backwards, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. It's important for the minister to realize – and I believe he does – that the opposition does not make frivolous FOIP information requests, because we want both Albertans and the government to take us seriously. There's the second concern that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview pointed out, that generic, broad-based FOIP requests would be so cost prohibitive as to be not worth considering.

Back in the spring of last year I made a very specific request. I wanted to find out the maintenance report on the court elevators, the shafts of which Kyle Young found himself at the bottom. It was a very specific request. The government had the information, and in the interests of clarification and finding out whether it was simply a machinery fault or the fault of overexuberance on the part of the court security officers, that information would have been of benefit. Through the judicial process we learned that this elevator was short one of its pins, but the testimony of experts suggested that it would have taken a very strong push against this elevator door for it to come off its hinge and for the young gentleman to be killed as a result of the fall.

We're looking for information that the government has already collected. We're looking for very specific information, and we believe that it's in the public's best interest to have that information revealed. It's not a matter of frivolity; it's a matter of clarity and transparency.

Thank you.

11:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you. Very, very brief, Mr. Chairman. I know that it's getting late in the evening. I just want to make one point. Section 4 has lots of odious subsections to it. The most important one here that we are dealing with by way of this amendment is . . .

The Chair: We're speaking on amendment A2, not on the bill.

Dr. Pannu: Yes. To the amendment, yes.

Section 4 exempts ministerial briefing notes, and that's the point. I just wanted to draw the attention of the House to the fact that in Ottawa the sponsorship scandal would not have become a scandal perhaps as big as it did and have led to public inquiries and all of that had these kinds of materials been exempted according to federal law, if they had not been accessible to the opposition parties in the House of Commons. So what's in the briefing notes of the ministers

is of consequence with respect to public interest. It is of consequence with respect to the conduct of a government in power. It is of great consequence with respect to the decisions that the minister might make. There's something to be learned from the experience of the sponsorship scandal and how that scandal needed to be aired to make the information on it public. There had to be access to the kinds of materials that are being exempted now by Bill 20, particularly section 4 of Bill 20.

That's another reason why we are asking the government to seriously consider striking this section from the bill: so that the right of the public to the kind of critical information that I've just referred to with respect to what happened in Ottawa is available here. It will serve the interest of transparency. It will certainly keep the government honest regardless of which government is in power. If those two goals are to be served by making this information available and access to it available in legitimate ways, then that should be what should be a goal of any piece of legislation. But this section in Bill 20 seems to defeat that very purpose, and that's why we have introduced this amendment and are asking the House to vote for it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A2 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:34 p.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	R. Miller	Swann
Flaherty	Pannu	Taylor
Martin		

Against the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	Mitzel
Amery	Hancock	Ouellette
Boutilier	Jablonski	Prins
Brown	Johnson	Renner
Calahasen	Knight	Rogers
Cao	Liepert	Stelmach
Cenaiko	Lougheed	Stevens
Coutts	Lund	Webber

Doerksen	Magnus	Zwozdesky
Ducharme	Melchin	
Totals:	For – 7	Against – 29

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 20.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act, and Bill 29, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006, and progress on Bill 20.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

11:40

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 29, Bill 35. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 20. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has indeed been another excellent day of progress and a particularly interesting afternoon, to add to that. On that note, I would thank all members and move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 11:41 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 9, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports it is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a very special guest who has joined us today in the Assembly. Although originally from Manitoba, Mr. Mike Kaluzniak has spent his adult life in Alberta, but he has never had the opportunity to visit the Legislature until today. What makes this particular visit so special is that Mr. Kaluzniak is 100 years of age. Now, given that we are currently celebrating the 100th anniversary of our Assembly's first sitting, I think that his timing is outstanding.

He's still an active member of our community. He told the staff of the St. Michael's Millennium Pavilion, where he currently lives, that he wanted to visit us here at the Legislature so that he could finally see how things work in the provincial government, so he's watching us closely. I'm pleased that he's going to get that opportunity today, and I'd like to introduce him and his guests. Along with Mr. Kaluzniak are his sons Marvin and John Kaluzniak; Stan Fisher, president and CEO of the St. Michael's Health Group; Christine Peterenko, director of the St. Michael's Health Group; and Irene Miskiw, manager of the Millennium Pavilion. Mr. Speaker, they are all seated in your gallery, and I ask them to please rise so they can receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the hardworking members of the Northern Alberta Development Council who are meeting in Edmonton today. Joining us in the Speaker's gallery are Carmen Ewing, of Girouxville; Helen Henderson, of High Prairie; Mike Mihaly, of High Level; Michael Ouellette, of Grande Prairie; Williard Strebchuck, of Whitecourt; Maurice Rivard, of Bonnyville; and Harvey Yoder, of Lac La Biche. They are also accompanied by staff members from the Peace River office. Seated in the members' gallery are the executive director, Dan Dibbelt, Allen Geary, Kim Persaud, Jan Mazurik, Roxanne Heinen, and Jack Kramer. These individuals are to be commended for their dedication to the advancement of northern development through regional initiatives and partnerships with the private sector and community-based organizations. They are seated in both galleries this afternoon, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you 38 of

the very brightest young minds we have in Alberta, all of whom are attending Jackson Heights school in my constituency. They are accompanied today by teachers and group leaders Mrs. Celia Correlje, Mrs. Pam Schenk with parent helpers as well, Mrs. Marina Doyle and Mrs. Emily Sieusahai. I would ask that they now rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hate to argue with the hon. Minister of Education, but everyone knows that the brightest young minds come from Trochu Valley high school. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly today 18 very enthusiastic students from Trochu Valley high. They've already had their picture taken, and they've had the opportunity to meet the Minister of Education. They're accompanied today by Mr. Bill Cunningham, teacher, and Mrs. Brenda Hoppins and Mrs. Diane Doerksen. They're all seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We all here owe our success to any number of other people who have helped us out along the way. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two people who've helped me out. They happen to be two of my sisters, one of whom is visiting from Ottawa. They are seated in the public gallery, and their names are Sylvia Gazsi-Gill and Valerie Warke. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of all members.

Thank you.

The Speaker: They are obviously much younger sisters.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured and pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the wonderful volunteers that are here today from the Northgate Lions seniors' centre, which is really the best seniors' centre in all of Canada, I'm sure. It's centred in Edmonton-Manning, of course, and it has facilities ranging from a new seniors' fitness centre just special to seniors, lapidary, woodworking, art, weaving, and many, many other fine, fine facilities. It's the volunteers that make it work. They're here with their guide today, Mr. Ian Mathieson. I welcome them, and I ask you all to welcome them to the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly my father, Bob Mason, and my stepmom, Kay Guthrie. My dad is a retired electrical engineer and small business owner. He was a founding member of the Reform Party of Canada, and he likes Preston Manning. But he likes me better, and he's now a member of the Alberta NDP. My stepmom, Kay, is retired after a long career with CKUA. She is a writer and very active in the arts community. Both are very active. They attend the Fringe and the Folk Festival every year, and they've travelled in the last few years in Africa, South America, and India. This year both of them celebrated their 80th birthdays, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that my dad and Kay now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Roy Skoreyko. Roy recently won the Norm McLeod award from the Alberta Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board for his work with them. Roy is very concerned about the lack of funding for disabled people in Alberta and the cutbacks in services that PDD boards are now facing. I would ask that Roy now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to acknowledge three people from my constituency that are up in your gallery. They're with the Municipal District of Rocky View Council and are here to meet with a couple of ministers on some very important issues. As you know, Rocky View is one of the fastest growing areas in the whole province, and unfortunately the municipal district has to deal with all of the pressures from all the urban constituencies around it. I'd like to congratulate them on the work that they do and ask that they please rise. Lois is our deputy reeve, and she's accompanied by two other members of our council.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Courtney Luimes. Courtney will be working in the Calgary-Glenmore constituency office this summer as part of the STEP program. Courtney has just completed her fourth year of a five-year, two-degree program at the University of Calgary. She's working towards a bachelor of commerce and a bachelor of arts degree, majoring in marketing and political science. She's also, in her free time, the president of the University of Calgary Campus Conservative Association. Courtney is here in the members' gallery, and I'd ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of my greatest supporters, both in my professional life and in my personal life. I would like to introduce my mother-in-law, the best mother-in-law in the world, Clara Jonsson, and her husband, Bob Grant. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to stand and introduce two very capable new members of my staff to the Assembly. It's the first time that they've had a chance to be able to come to the Assembly and observe these proceedings. The first is Avery Trimble. She's been with us for a few months now and has joined us from our deputy minister's office. The second, Sheena McKinstry, joined us just last week. I'd ask them if they'd both stand. Please join us to offer them the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Rod Love Consulting Inc.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's former chief of staff Rod Love seems to make his living selling access to the Premier's office. FOIPed documents show that Love has moved freely from government contract to government contract, providing inside information through high-priced verbal advice. It's a money-making scheme at the taxpayers' expense. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that Rod Love is doing little more in these contracts than selling inside access to the Premier's office?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, first of all, to set the record straight – straight, absolutely straight – Rod Love hasn't had access to my office, and he doesn't use his consulting business to gain access to my office. He was my chief of staff, yes, absolutely. But his contracts with various government departments or health authorities are entirely up to the ministries or the health authority involved. It has absolutely nothing to do with my office. It has had nothing to do with my office.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: does the Premier recognize that Rod Love is peddling inside information obtained while serving as the Premier's chief of staff?

Mr. Klein: I have no idea what information he is providing to the various ministries or authorities, whether it's information he gained while in my office, which is very little, by the way – usually the opposition tells me what's going on – or whether he's providing other information. I have no idea, nor do I make it my business.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier assure this House that Rod Love is not sharing confidential government information with clients, such as PC leadership candidate Jim Dinning?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea. I didn't even know that he was working for Jim Dinning. [interjection] I didn't. They can moan and groan all they want. Relative to the leadership campaign my policy is hands off, and I don't give a tinker's hoot who he works for.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Lobbyist Registry

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. High-paid contracts to people like Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois are merely symptoms of a much deeper problem. This government's sense of entitlement is so pervasive that it's no longer capable of even identifying a conflict of interest: the Premier is fielding job offers while in office; a Tory Party VP sits on the government's Internal Audit Committee; chairs of government committees use their positions to sell PC Party memberships; ex-MLAs get plum appointments. It goes on and on. To the Premier: why does the Premier insist that Albertans don't

have a right to know who's lobbying this government by his refusal to create a lobbyist registry?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, to set the record straight: again, I have no problems – I have no problems – with a lobbyist registry. I have said that for every upside there is a downside, and I want to make sure that when the Legislature considers a lobbyist registry, they consider the downside and they clearly identify those who are lobbyists and those who are not lobbyists. Now, I've raised the question: if a person who represents a school board or a university or a municipality is asking the government for money, are they lobbyists? I want to make sure that I know that the rules are clear.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that the Premier's former chief of staff Rod Love signed on to a juicy contract with the Calgary health region very shortly after leaving his position with the Premier's office, will the Premier commit to extending the legislative Conflicts of Interest Act to senior public officials?

Mr. Klein: I don't know if I have the power to do that. I understand that a report on conflict of interest guidelines by the all-party committee that examined this issue will be coming to the Legislature, and I suspect that it will be fully debated in these Chambers.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that the federal Conservatives are proposing a five-year cooling-off period for ministers, will the Premier commit to extending the mandatory cooling-off period to a minimum of one year for Alberta's cabinet ministers?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have told the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that I don't give a tinker's hoot whether it's 10 or 15 or 20 or 30 years. I'm leaving. I've said that all I want is to have time to do what I want to do and time to golf and fish. Big deal.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

1:50

Tuition Fee Policy

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After more than a decade of policy failure, during which one failed tuition policy gives way to another, each one off-loading more and more costs onto students and their families, the new Minister of Advanced Education and this government are trying now a different approach: make the changes from now on behind closed doors, cloaked in cabinet secrecy, rather than on the floor of the House. To the Premier: if the Premier is so confident that he can clean up the mess and deliver the most affordable, entrepreneurial, and innovative tuition policy in the nation, why won't he do it in full public view right here, in this House?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education is responsible for bringing forward legislation. I understand that Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, will be before this legislative Chamber for debate, so I think it's premature for the hon. member to ask any questions. Plus, he can in an open, public, transparent fashion debate the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Advanced Education: is it true that his ministry has been telling student leaders that they either go along with this flawed Bill 40 or forget about getting a better tuition policy?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing I want to tell students is that the sky is not falling. I'm not aware of any such comments. I think that with your guidance I can speak to part of the act because it is on the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Well, hon. minister, please. We will have second reading of this particular bill coming up, so let's not debate the bill in question period. Deal with policy issues.

The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: will the minister commit to a joint meeting with me and student representatives before this flawed Bill 40 receives second reading? By the way, his predecessor says that he doesn't even need to bring in legislation in order to change tuition policy.

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, there was so much noise that I could not hear the question. Could you repeat it?

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Rod Love Consulting Inc.

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The culture of entitlement surrounding this government is deeply entrenched. The Premier's former chief of staff Mr. Love has got himself another juicy contract with another government agency. The Calgary health authority is now paying Mr. Love \$350 an hour for heaven knows what. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. It's very simple. What exactly did the Calgary health authority get for their contract with Mr. Love at \$350 an hour?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that's a question for the health authority. Today when I saw the report, it's very obvious that the health authority sets policy and has financial policies and implications and accountability examined by the Auditor General. So I would suggest that the hon. member approach the Calgary health authority and ask the question.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, is the minister suggesting that she does not have ministerial authority for what the Calgary health authority does? Is it not part of her responsibility as Minister of Health and Wellness? Yes or no?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the accountability of the government obviously is very clearly defined. Regional health authorities have the role and responsibility of engaging contracts as they see fit. They manage those contracts. They're accountable for those contracts both financially and from a substance perspective. We have very clearly delineated lines of authority in this regard.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the minister can duck and weave, but she can't avoid the fact that Mr. Love is getting money for nothing and his perks for free. Now, will the minister please tell this House what exactly Rod Love did for the money he got from her agency.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I am quite convinced that if the Calgary health authority has a contract with a provider of service, like I-3, Mr. Love's consulting contract, or any other contract, they are getting value for money. They are intelligent people. They make decisions. They will no doubt be able to answer that question. The first notice I have of it is the newspaper report today, that these things have been revealed, and no doubt the Calgary health authority will share what they wish or can to both the member opposite and, certainly, subsequently to the Auditor General and to the ministry if it's appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Royal Alberta Museum Acquisition

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the Royal Alberta Museum purchased a number of aboriginal items up for auction. The American Indian Movement has previously expressed concerns about the potential sale of these items and would like them reappropriated. My first question is to the Minister of Community Development. Could he please explain why the museum chose to purchase these items and what they will mean to Albertans and our aboriginal communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Royal Alberta Museum was able to acquire 29 of the 39 historic First Nations and Métis cultural artifacts that were put up for auction. These artifacts, collected by the ninth Earl of Southesk, have exceptional historical significance. These are items from the Canadian Plains from the mid-1800s, and more than a third of these objects are of Alberta origin. The collection was auctioned off piece by piece, which put it at risk of being sold to individual collectors, never to be seen again by the public.

I had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to sit in at the telephone auction, and I can assure you that the bidding was fast and furious. The purchase is an incredible opportunity to preserve some very important parts of our history for generations of Albertans to study, admire, and enjoy. Museum staff were very knowledgeable of each item's history, and visitors to our museums will now be able to see historic items that originated here over 145 years ago.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is also to the Minister of Community Development. How was the museum able to make this purchase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The museum worked with a number of partners to secure funding. The government of Alberta committed \$500,000 through the museum, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and the federal government generously dedicated \$600,000 toward the sale.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. How has the Alberta aboriginal community responded to the museum's purchase of these items?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, most of the aboriginal community are ecstatic about this purchase because securing these items is connecting them to their past.

I commend the museum staff for all the hard work that they did in making sure that they secured First Nations and Métis support. As a matter of fact, they received letters of support from people such as Charles Weaselhead, who is the chief of the Kainai nation, from retired Senator Thelma Chalifoux, the File Hills Qu'Appelle First Nations Tribal Council, Prince Albert Tribal Council, and of course Treaty 7 Management Corporation. A lot of people across Canada from the aboriginal community were very interested in this collection.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Contaminated Sites Cleanup

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta may have paid off its financial debt, but it is taking on a huge environmental debt in hundreds of contaminated sites. Albertans should be outraged. Instead of following the law requiring "maximum protection to human life, health and the environment," the minister wants to change the law to "manage" the risk posed by these contaminated sites. This means that we will now cover up contamination, and our children will be forced to deal with future problems. To the minister: can the minister explain how removing the responsibility of industry to properly clean and remediate a site is in the interests of the environment, health, and future generations?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, we spoke about this very topic last night till almost midnight in this Assembly under Bill 29, but it allows me the opportunity to say that the preamble is entirely vacuous when it comes to what was being allocated. Number one, did you know that we are the only province in Canada where we allocated almost \$60 million for contaminated sites? In fact, we did a risk assessment, and that risk assessment of managing those contaminated sites, I might add, in terms of working with Albertans, has worked extremely well.

So in terms of the words that it is – if I repeat the words – a tragedy what is happening, nothing could be further from the truth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:00

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister indicate how allowing industry to transfer contaminated land as a gift to municipalities is in the best interests of the environment and future generations?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that in this province it is the law, and the law says that the polluter will pay. We, representing the people of Alberta, will hold anyone involved with any type of contamination or pollution to that law. That's what we're doing today; that's what we're doing tomorrow and well into the future in protecting future generations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister indicate: when a company defaults on cleanup costs, how often has this department gone after company officers individually as is indicated in the legislation?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I can assure all of the members in this Assembly: the law says that the polluter pays. Let me say it simply: we will continue to go after anyone who is breaking the law to the full extent of the law both in spirit and in letter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Employment Opportunities for Foreign Students

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has become a global player in the economy. Relative to the U.S.A., Australia, and other provinces we are behind in promoting and recruiting foreign students to study in Alberta. Many successful jurisdictions see international students bringing to them economic benefits, fast-track human resource development, as well as good international relations, and they make it their beneficial public policy. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education. Given that foreign students in provinces such as Manitoba and British Columbia can find jobs off campus and work outside their study hours, when will foreign students in Alberta be allowed to do so, and what procedure do they have to follow?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much. The hon. member is right. Foreign students are important to us in this province. We jointly announced with the federal government late last month that international students in Alberta would now be allowed to work off campus. We are currently working with postsecondary institutions throughout the province to try and implement this as soon as possible, by June 1. I'm happy to report that presently we have a number of institutions that are up and running: the Alberta College of Art and Design, Lethbridge Community College, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, Portage College, Red Deer College, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, and the University of Lethbridge. So you can see that we're coming up to speed fairly quickly. In terms of the process, hon. member, international students interested in working off campus can apply to the federal government for a work permit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. My supplemental question is to the same hon. minister. Given that foreign students at our publicly funded institutions are allowed to work off campus, and it is unfair that foreign students at our private institutions are not allowed to do so, Minister, what are you going to do to rectify this unfairness?

The Speaker: The hon. minister if he heard the question.

Mr. Herard: Yes, I did hear it, Mr. Speaker. He's absolutely right. As it currently stands, none of our international students at Alberta's seven private institutions are able to participate in this program because, I guess, the former federal government did not understand how important those institutions are to the province of Alberta. In my opinion these seven institutions play an important role in the postsecondary system and provide good-quality education to Albertans. I'm going to cut to the chase and tell you that I plan to review this process and program and do whatever is necessary to ensure that international students studying at private institutions become eligible and participate the same way as everybody else.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, who is responsible for workforce matters in Alberta. Given that the lack of workers has become a crisis for many small Alberta businesses, particularly employers in the service sector, what is the procedure for them to recruit foreign students at our Alberta educational institutions to work for their businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Of course, one option for employers who would like to recruit foreign students is to contact offices at postsecondary institutions that provide services and support for international students. Employers may also want to place ads on job boards, et cetera. In addition to that, we have 59 labour market information centres across Alberta that provide all forms of services. We're spending close to \$300 million, in fact, to provide those supports. Keep in mind, again, that Alberta students would be given priority.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems to have lost the trust of Albertans concerned with education. With only 2 or 3 per cent increases, school districts, teachers, and parents are finding out that the education dollars are simply not flowing through to their local schools. This surplus budget will put students in bigger classes and send teachers looking for work. Can the Minister of Education tell this House how many teachers will lose their jobs next year in Edmonton, Rocky Mountain House, Lethbridge, just to name a few of the many boards facing tough decisions this year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't anticipate that any teachers would be losing their jobs. What I might anticipate is that there might be some teachers who are retiring, perhaps leaving some vacancies in their wake. Let's remember that within the envelope of \$5.3 billion we have provided additional funding in the amount of approximately 3 per cent for one category of educational needs and 2 per cent for another category. Every school board of the 62 should be receiving some sort of an increase in that respect. Specific to the class size reduction initiative, in our third year we anticipate hiring somewhere between 150 and 200 more teachers over and above the 33,000 or 34,000 or whatever it is that we have in the system right now. So that's pretty good news.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of Education tell us how many support staff, teacher aides, will lose their jobs next year in Edmonton, Rocky Mountain House, and Lethbridge, just to name a few of the many boards facing tough decisions to cut support staff?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I would hope and I would anticipate that there wouldn't be any of those kinds of job losses. It's interesting to have the questions coming forward now, when they are clearly at least six or seven weeks premature. We will get the final budgets submitted on or about June 30 of this year.

We'll take a serious look at what those budgetary needs are. We will know better what their enrolment projections were as the budget was being developed over the last few months in comparison with what the actual enrolments will be, where the trends and where the shifts and so on exist, and then we'll go from there in developing the final budget for September.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister did not keep his promises, can the minister tell us why he didn't provide adequate time to allow districts to plan ahead for these impending cuts?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm not sure that I should even dignify the question with an answer; it's so absurd. I don't know what sort of promises the member is referring to or what sort of cuts he seems to be referring to. We've explained very clearly for the last couple of days, at least for the last couple of days, that there is going to be a funding increase in education. I've also explained, I hope very clearly, that these are preliminary budget targets that are being talked about right now. The final budgets from the school boards will arrive in about six or seven weeks. We will carefully review those. That's the standard procedure. Then, based on how the shifts have occurred, we will make the appropriate adjustments with those school boards so that come September we are in a position of assurance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:10

Gasoline Prices

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I filled up my car with gasoline at \$1.06 a litre in Calgary. That same afternoon I was in Toronto, where I filled up my rental car with gasoline at 96 cents a litre. My wife asked me why Albertans pay more for gasoline, considering that we produce it right here in our backyard, and I promised to ask that question of the minister. So my first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is there so much volatility in the price of gasoline, and in particular, why do Albertans have to pay more than those in Ontario?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're glad for the comparison shopping that your family is doing around the country and for the information provided to the Legislature.

That said, you know, on average over the year Albertans do actually still pay the lowest prices in the country, including in those areas which you said. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Melchin: I suspect that it's the lowest prices in the universe. I stand corrected.

With that said, there are a lot of factors that go into why in any one day you'll have different prices, sometimes within the city, city to city within Alberta, and clearly province to province. There are a lot of factors such as inventory of supply, seasonal variations. In fact, they will purchase an inventory of their fuels at different times, bought at different terms and conditions. There are retail marketing practices that come into this. They sometimes are promoting an

area. There are cross kinds of promotions from the stores that also are selling some of their other merchandise.

The inference is that the only oil that comes is from Alberta. Clearly, Alberta is the largest producer of oil in Canada, but when you go to Ontario, for example, they also import a lot of oil from offshore and from other countries of the world. So we're not comparing even the same sources of oil and purchased at the same price, same times: those factors. They all contribute to why one area in Toronto could be more and/or less than an area in Alberta on any one day.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the Minister of Government Services. Given that a number of provinces in Canada regulate gasoline prices, is the minister considering regulating gasoline prices, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it was some time ago, a couple of years ago, when the province did have a look at the legislation that other provinces were using. In fact, it was proven then by comparison that Alberta had the lowest prices across this great nation. This ministry has no intent of bringing in price controls. The free market must prevail.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you even more. You know, yesterday in Onoway at the UFA the price was 99.5. My assistant in the office, Colleen, gassed up in St. Albert: \$1.04. Colleen from the office gassed up at Safeway: 96.5 using her discount. I think there's great market competition in this area. Maybe it's just in northern Alberta. I can't tell you that for sure, but we see lots of competition in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Department of Gaming Grant Program

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General recommended in his most recent report that the Gaming ministry develop clear guidelines for assessing the mysterious other initiatives program, an \$11 million pool of lottery money whose distribution is entirely at the discretion of the Gaming minister. During the Gaming department estimates the minister was asked on at least three occasions if he would comply with the Auditor General's recommendations, but each time he skirted the issue. My questions are for the Minister of Gaming. Will the minister act on the Auditor General's recommendations and produce clear, published guidelines for the other initiatives program?

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, actually, we have addressed the Auditor's comments. I'm before Committee of Supply tomorrow, and I would think that the Auditor at that point will express his satisfaction with the steps that we've taken concerning the other initiatives account.

Mr. Tougas: I guess that was an answer, but is that a yes or a no? Are you going to comply with what the Auditor General said? It's a yes or no question.

Mr. Graydon: I believe the answer was that we already have.

Mr. Tougas: Well, when you come up with your guidelines, are you going to allow the general public to enjoy the benefits of this

program, or is it going to be entirely an MLA-driven process as it is right now?

Mr. Graydon: Actually, I'm before Public Accounts tomorrow morning. I'm sorry. I said Committee of Supply. That was a couple weeks ago, when I answered this same question several times. But before Public Accounts tomorrow we'll find out the rules around other initiatives. I think it's a perfect title for that category of grant because it is other initiatives that don't fit into standard CFEP or CIP boxes, if you will. A good example is an arena that burned down in the community of Viking a while ago. The community did have insurance, but there wasn't enough insurance to cover the cost to rebuild that facility. It's an extremely important recreational facility in that community. What a perfect place to get a grant, from the other initiatives fund.

Tuition Fee Policy (continued)

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government wants to make future decisions on tuition behind the closed doors of the cabinet room, far removed from the public scrutiny of this Legislature. The very lame excuse, justification, so called, for this draconian move is because a certain Tory leadership contest makes a fall Legislature session inconvenient for this government. None of the stakeholders of the postsecondary system favour letting cabinet make tuition policy behind closed doors. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given that students fought long and hard to ensure that a tuition policy was entrenched in legislation, how can the minister justify removing this protection through a last-minute change introduced in the dying days of this spring session?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will try and answer the question without talking about the bill itself. The policy is not in the bill, so maybe I can talk about the policy. But to ensure accountability and transparency, I think that hon. members should know that government departments must always show, when amending regulations, that they have consulted with the affected stakeholders as part of the compliance process. So there's always a consultation that takes place when amendments to regulations are contemplated, and I plan to consult with our students with respect to this regulation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that students are saying that they've never been consulted by this minister up to this point on this issue, how can the minister justify the government sneaking this change through without consultation at a time of year when most students are working out there, trying to make money to pay for their next year's tuition fees?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, what's the date today? I think I've been the minister now for a month and three days and a few hours, but I do know that there's been a consultation process that's been ongoing for 16 months in which all of these students have been participating at all stages, and I can tell them that they're going to be very happy with the tuition policy.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, the last question to the same minister: why should this Legislative Assembly give the Tory government a blank cheque to impose whatever tuition fee formula it deems convenient behind the closed doors of the cabinet?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, by moving the tuition policy from the act into regulation, we are increasing the flexibility to adjust the tuition policy to meet the changes that students need. So instead of trying to show that the sky is falling, why don't you look at this as continuous improvement?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Anticrime Volunteer Groups

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Guardian Angels is a nonprofit group that uses unarmed volunteers to try to catch criminals in the act to deter street crime. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Since the Guardian Angels have visited our city and Calgary, has the minister consulted with them, and do we have any other local groups that do similar types of work in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Guardian Angels were established in 1979 in the United States, and they now have 60 chapters in six different countries around the world. They're a not-for-profit organization, and they do attempt to act as the eyes and ears in the community for the police. However, they do intervene in very dangerous situations, putting themselves and the public at risk, and this is highlighted by the fact that six Guardian Angels have been killed since 1981 in acts of their volunteerism within the Guardian Angels. As well, 36 individuals have been seriously injured within the Guardian Angels organization.

2:20

There's no requirement for such a group to have a relationship with a police service; however, we're concerned that whether, in fact, the Calgary or the Edmonton police service want those community groups to be involved in the community or they set up chapters here, the fact is that a relationship has to be built between the local police service and the Guardian Angels. This is all about crime prevention. It's about being vigilant, not a vigilante.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since those groups are arriving here as a result of public dissatisfaction with street crime, can the minister see any productive role for those groups to cooperate with police and, indeed, curb crime?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, as the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security it's ultimately my role to ensure the safety and security of all Albertans. That's a priority, the safety of Albertans. In this case we want to look at the issue related to what their goal and their business is. I have reservations about supporting an organization that places volunteers or citizens in harm's way. This is the concern that I have about community involvement with the police.

We have a number of programs that are available in the community right now through crime prevention units here in Edmonton and throughout Alberta that are related to working with the police, working with the communities. Some are Block Watch, Neighbourhood Watch, Rural Crime Watch. We have radio watch programs in both Edmonton and Calgary. These are volunteers that work with the police. They sit down and look at various targets, various areas

of concern that the police may have within an industrial area or a residential area. So it's well organized and well orchestrated between those community volunteers and the police. We want to maintain that partnership, maintain that relationship. Obviously, the Guardian Angels is something new that we're going to have to look at.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Secondary Suites

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the government released its final report from the MLA Review Committee on Secondary Suites. Although overdue, it's better late than never. The use of secondary suites is a primary tool for creating affordable housing solutions and helping some homeowners generate a little income on the side. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given the red-hot housing market throughout this province, be it rental or home ownership, and especially in cities like Calgary, Edmonton, and, more profoundly, Fort McMurray, how will this ministry work with municipalities to encourage the development and utilization of secondary suites?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple issues to keep in mind with respect to secondary suites. Municipal Affairs through building codes is responsible for the actual construction codes, and that's what this report deals with. The municipalities, on the other hand, are responsible for zoning and land classification. So it's really a two-step approach that will have to take place on this.

First of all, we'll have to make some final decisions on whether or not the recommendations from the committee should be implemented into our building code. Once that's done, the municipalities will have to decide how they're going to incorporate this new classification of building into their structure of land planning and R2 versus R1 or whether it becomes R1 and a half. So we'll work with municipalities on that issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this government provide assistance to individuals who want to develop secondary suites as a solution to offer affordable housing and to combat homelessness? Will there be any incentive for them to do that?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that's not within the purview of my ministry. We don't provide grants of any kind to individuals. I can say that the purpose of this report, though, was to remove some of the cost-prohibitive barriers from establishing secondary suites, and I think the report has done a very good job of doing just that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the new standards compel existing homeowners to update or upgrade their existing secondary suites, will there be any assistance from the government to recover some of that cost?

Mr. Renner: Same answer, Mr. Speaker. My department is not involved in granting to individuals, but I must say that the present

building code does not recognize basement suites, the traditional basement suites. The building code really talks about a duplex, and the requirements for a duplex are really very restrictive. What we are hoping to establish by the implementation of this report are somewhat reduced requirements on the part of the homeowner so that we can in fact legitimize a number of secondary suites that are on the market right now and hopefully encourage some new ones in some new developments in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Drivers' Licence Photos

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the Court of Queen's Bench ruled yesterday that members of Hutterite colonies in Alberta will not have to have photos on their drivers' licences. My question is for the Minister of Government Services. What are your department and yourself going to be doing about this decision?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, yes, that's right. In fact, the Court of Queen's Bench did put out a ruling yesterday, and I had discussions with our department on this. Photos are a very, very important part of our driver's licence here in Alberta, and we see that as an integral part of the security and of the identification of all Albertans. I understand that this issue may be still in the courts. There may be an opportunity sometime for appeal, but I can tell you that this is a serious matter. I'm going to have some discussions with other ministers on this, and I can tell you that we will ensure that the proper identifications are on our drivers' licences. I can tell you again that we will ensure that all Albertans have the ability to use their drivers' licences as a form of identification as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Justice. Has your department made any decisions regarding this matter?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe we found out late yesterday about this particular decision, so the decision itself is still being reviewed. I agree with the hon. Minister of Government Services that it's absolutely essential that we have photos on our drivers' licences and that we maintain that. So I'm sure that the Ministry of Justice will be working with the hon. minister's department to ensure that that continues and in the meantime reviewing the matter as it relates to a potential appeal.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplemental will be to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. As well, the same question: has your department been dealing with this, and what are they going to be doing about it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, we just learned about this at about 10 o'clock this morning, so I haven't had a chance to discuss it with the department. I would have to reiterate, as the other ministers have indicated, that this is very, very important to us, that there be that identification. As a matter of fact, there was a lot of discussion about whether, in fact, the Alberta driver's licence

may be a vehicle that could be used as far as the border crossing is concerned. There is that confidence with the facial identification on the driver's licence that it could be very, very secure. So we'll be discussing an appeal with the other ministers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Government Liabilities

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Finance. Could the minister please advise this House and all Albertans how much the total Alberta government's liabilities have risen in the last budget year?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry; I don't quite understand the question. I see the hon. member is looking at his writing to see if he does.

I would say this. I have estimates here tomorrow night at 8 o'clock. We'll have a full two hours, and I certainly look forward to discussing our very positive revenues in this province. I'll discuss any potential or maybe liabilities that the hon. member maybe alluded to, and, Mr. Speaker, I would just suggest that we take advantage of that time and have a real good, thorough discussion on this issue.

2:30

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, the answer is \$3 billion.* It's contained on page 43 of the fiscal plan, and I'm happy to table this later this afternoon.

The Speaker: Hon. member, why would you ask a question if you knew the answer?

What's your second question, with no preamble?

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, the question is: given that the government's liabilities have grown by nearly \$3 billion in the last year, can the minister please provide us with the nature of the increasing liabilities?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure he'll find that in the fiscal plan as well.

I come back to my earlier point. He did not in his first question talk about whether it was in unfunded pension liabilities. He didn't talk about where it might be, whether it was the perceived liabilities in capital. So, I mean, this is a rather broad question to come up with and to take the good time of this House in question period. So unless he has the answer on another page in this very thorough fiscal update we presented to the House some four weeks ago, I suggest that we have a real good discussion on this and any other matter in the purview of Finance tomorrow night beginning at 8 o'clock.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They present a very simple graph, so I ask a very simple question: why in this time of unprecedented revenue is this government allowing Alberta taxpayers to be exposed to such an increase in liabilities? It's up \$3 billion in a year. Why?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in this House, there isn't a government in North America that enjoys the fiscal position of this government. So if we want to have a

discussion on liabilities – funded, unfunded; perceived, not perceived – I suggest that we have that discussion. Maybe we can have a little economics 101, a little business administration whatever, and a little general accounting principles discussion tomorrow night, and he might understand it a lot better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Royalty Rates

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Petro-Canada announced a 75 per cent jump in their first-quarter earnings, with a net revenue of \$486 million in the first few months of this year. In those same months we've suffered price jumps for gasoline and all forms of home utilities. Meanwhile, this government has been satisfied with an outdated royalty regime and a lengthy royalty review process that does nothing to capture the profit padding of the already thick pockets of the energy industry. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. How much revenue will Albertans have to forgo before this government will institute a windfall royalty regime that best measures the royalty rates as captured around the world?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the question on developing royalty rates is more aptly put to the Minister of Energy, who, in fact, has that responsibility. Our responsibility is to take that rate information and transform it into our revenue picture, so I would invite the Minister of Energy to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, please.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Environment minister. Given that the price of gasoline is putting pressure on green transportation such as public transit, when will this minister develop a program to direct windfall oil revenues directly to green transportation initiatives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I attended the COP 10 conference down in Buenos Aires and then in Montreal just recently. I think it's very obvious in my discussions with the Minister of Innovation and Science, the Minister of Energy, and also the Minister of Finance that one of the many options we are contemplating is: what are we doing to incent and to encourage behaviour and helping in terms of environmental practices? I think that is not unreasonable. I think rewarding industry for technology investment and helping them in making a better environment is far better than a federal Liberal scheme of saying: go buy a carbon credit in another country, and let the money leave Canada. So we're taking those kinds of very proactive measures.

I might add that we're the only province in Canada with a climate change law. We are not just talking; we are taking action as has been reported in the front pages of newspapers by independent professors of universities that are not traditionally friendly to this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally to the Energy minister: if a small but spunky country like Equador has the guts to stand up to multinational oil companies on behalf of its citizens, why won't this minister fight for Albertans and institute a modest but practical windfall oil revenue initiative?

*See p. 1458, right col., para. 6

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I find it not surprising at all to hear once again from the opposition party that their formula is to make this an unattractive place to which to attract investment. Go to Ecuador. He just mentioned Ecuador. If that's the example, the model that he wished to use, I'm here to say that I was at the World Petroleum Congress back last fall, and if you look around the countries of the world that have a better opportunity than we have – and I'd like to know where – if you look around the countries of the world that actually are attracting as much investment as we can, that are driving as much opportunity for Albertans in jobs, in profits, in royalties, and in taxes, our province is doing better. But I guess they continually want to have a high, high, high percentage of a small, small piece of pie. That's their formula.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we had 92 questions and answers in a 50-minute question period, which is really quite significant.

I'll deal with members' statements in a moment or two, but first of all we have a little bit of history to deal with.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Ninety-seven by-elections have been held in Alberta since the first general election of 1905. In our first 50 years 66 by-elections were held, with the first on April 12, 1906. This by-election was necessitated by the resignation of Leverett G. DeVeber, a Liberal who had been elected in Lethbridge in the general election of 1905. DeVeber had been appointed to the Canadian Senate. W.C. Simmons, a Liberal, is Alberta's first MLA to have been elected in a by-election.

Until 1926 members were required to run for re-election before accepting appointment to cabinet. From 1909 to 1926 15 by-elections were held for this purpose, and in nine of these instances the member was returned by acclamation.

In Alberta's second 50 years we have had 31 by-elections, with the most recent by-election held on April 8, 2002. The incumbent MLA, Butch Fischer, had resigned, and the current Member for Battle River-Wainwright was elected in the then-named constituency of Wainwright as a Progressive Conservative. The current Legislative Assembly has seven members who were elected to this Assembly via by-elections.

While I indicated earlier that we have had 97 by-elections, the number of different MLAs elected is 95. Two different members were elected on two different occasions in by-elections. On June 29, 1910, C.R. Mitchell, a Liberal, was elected in Medicine Hat as a result of the resignation of incumbent W.T. Finlay. Mitchell lost his seat in the general election held April 17, 1913, to Nelson Spencer, a Conservative. George Lane, the Liberal incumbent in Bow Valley, then resigned his seat, and Mitchell ran in the by-election held June 12, 1913, and won by acclamation.

Don Getty returned to the Alberta Legislature via a by-election held on December 11, 1985, after being elected Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party and Premier in the fall of 1985. Getty had been elected originally in 1967 in the constituency of Strathcona West. He was re-elected in 1971 and 1975 in Edmonton-Whitemud. He did not contest the election of 1979. Premier Getty was re-elected in 1986 but then suffered personal loss in the general election of 1989 to Liberal Percy Wickman in Edmonton-Whitemud. Brian Downey, the Progressive Conservative incumbent, resigned his seat in Stettler, and Don Getty was re-elected in that seat by way of a by-election held on May 9, 1989.

By way of summation Alberta experienced 66 by-elections in its first 50 years and 31 in its second 50 years; 95 different members were elected in these 97 by-elections, with two members being

elected twice in by-elections. There are currently seven members in this Assembly elected in by-elections. The first member to provide me the correct order of the seven will receive a grand prize announced tomorrow.

head: 2:40

Members' Statements

Search and Rescue Volunteers

Mr. Snelgrove: Today I rise to recognize that May 6 was Alberta Search and Rescue Day and to talk to you about the importance of search and rescue volunteers in the province. Alberta's search and rescue membership is a hundred per cent volunteer driven, and it relies on the support of the community to make its service delivery possible. Across the province each year hundreds of volunteer Albertans put their lives at risk to help work with search and rescue teams. Last year about 1,200 volunteers gave their time to respond to more than 250 search and rescue incidents that occurred in Alberta.

The flooding last June emphasized the important roles all members of our emergency response teams play during crisis. Search and rescue volunteers from 15 search and rescue organizations assisted Alberta's municipalities during the flooding to coordinate a community response.

On August 14 it will be one year since when search and rescue teams were called to assist in the rescue of my constituent and friend Keith Martin, who fell into the waters of Muriel Lake, a rescue which ultimately turned into a search operation. Let me tell you: never in my life have I experienced first-hand the persistence and intensity of the volunteers and other search and rescue personnel, volunteers who for almost two weeks literally lined the shores of the lake to find this man.

Within my constituency since 1959 the town of Vermilion has been home to the Alberta fire training school, a training centre that has brought expertise and a global audience, a school which has set the standard for firefighting instruction, attracting students from across the continent and from around the world.

This past Saturday, May 6, was Alberta Search and Rescue Day. The day was established in 2000 to highlight search and rescue activities in the province and to recognize the contribution of volunteers. I am pleased to acknowledge those who are dedicated to this vital work.

Alberta communities provide search and rescue response of more than 100,000 hours of volunteers dedicated each year to emergency response, training, and education of delivery programs and program funding. Today I commend these exceptional personnel for their efforts, for their commitment to saving others, and for the risk to their own lives in doing so. To all of you across this great province, thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

National Nursing Week

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in recognition of Nursing Week, which is celebrated across Canada and around the world from May 8 to May 14. This year the theme is Nursing: Promoting Healthy Choices for Healthy Living. This theme reflects the essential role that nurses play as promoters of health and wellness. This role is so important in our health care system. Nurses are capable of treating patients in a time of need, and as the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Nurses know a lot about good health and as front-line workers are in the best position to pass this information on to citizens. One very

good example of this is the work that nurses do in the Alberta government's Health Link call centre, where Albertans are able to call in for extremely valuable health information 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many nurses are also very active in helping governments to develop information and awareness materials.

It is very important for us to take the time to appreciate all the hard work and dedication that nurses put in to all aspects of our society. For this reason, I ask all Albertans to go out of their way this week to thank a nurse for the job they do every day both in the areas of healing and prevention.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Compulsory Drug and Alcohol Treatment for Youth

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along with our hon. health minister and the co-chair of the Crystal Meth Task Force, Dr. Colleen Klein, I was honoured to open the Capital health Stronger Together conference last Thursday. AADAC was well represented that day, and staff members had been working hard every day to prepare for new addictions services for youth under the new Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, or PCHAD, coming into effect July 1.

This act provides an additional avenue of support together with the AADAC range of services currently offered to parents and guardians whose children are abusing alcohol or other drugs, including crystal meth, in a way that severely endangers them or others and who resist or are not seeking voluntary help for their severe addiction.

The considerable press coverage recently from AADAC's announcement of this new legislation was very positive. AADAC announced the locations of the protective safe houses, the program structure, and the number of beds being established in support of PCHAD. There will be 20 beds dedicated to the program in Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, and Picture Butte. To further support youth and families and to support the expansion of services, 24 additional staff members will be hired throughout the province. AADAC will also be adding another 24 voluntary detox and residential beds later this year in both northern and southern Alberta to ensure access to follow-up services.

In closing, I'd like to thank the hon. members for their support of AADAC and encourage them and their constituents to access further information on aadac.com.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Alberta Forest Week

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. May 7 to May 13 is Alberta Forest Week, a time for Albertans to recognize and celebrate the importance of forests and forestry to this province. We have a lot to be thankful for, including in my constituency of West Yellowhead, which looks to forests as the building block for our communities. In my constituency, as in many others in Alberta, forests are a significant contributor to the high standard of living we enjoy today. These forests provide us with recreational playgrounds, clean water, clean air, and habitat for a rich abundance of fish and wildlife, and they attract investment and employment in the forest products manufacturing industry, an industry that is the third largest in Alberta.

When Albertans first started to celebrate the values represented by our forests in the 1920s, this special time was known as Forest Fire

Prevention Week. Today this special week celebrates more than the fine work done by Sustainable Resource Development to protect our forests from fires. Today it's about recognizing how our trees and forests are an integral part of life in Alberta and how we have a responsibility to be good stewards of our forests in order to ensure that our forests are sustained and continue to benefit all Albertans. So it's especially appropriate that the theme of this year's Alberta Forest Week is Stewardship: It Starts with You.

Mr. Speaker, this week there are events throughout the province to celebrate our forests and the benefits all Albertans derive from them. I hope that everybody else contributes and understands that the forests are the future for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Proportion of First Nations Persons in Jails

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in the Solicitor General's budget debate the minister informed this House that despite making up only 7 per cent of Alberta's population, aboriginal people make up 30 per cent of adult in-house correctional centre counts and approximately 38 per cent of young offender in-house correctional centre counts. As legislators we are compelled to ask some very difficult questions about this very serious state of affairs. There is obviously some sort of discrimination at work here. Even if it is not the intention of government policy to create a gross overrepresentation of aboriginals as inmates in our provincial correctional facilities, the consequences are here for all to see.

In his presentation to Manitoba's 1999 Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, Chief Louis Stevenson, then of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, said, "It is these substandard living conditions, unfair and unequal opportunities, unequal education, chronic high unemployment, and inadequate housing which generates the frustration and anger that leads to offences and criminal activity." The recent talk federally and from members of this government about getting tough on crime and building more prisons illustrates a wrong-headed approach to this problem. As legislators we have to face a choice: focus our efforts on building a just society, or ignore the problems and continue to build a potential powder keg. Opening and filling more jails is hardly a way to deal with this problem.

The NDP is committed to fighting for justice for First Nations peoples in this province. This includes pushing to equitably settle unresolved land claims, such as those brought forward by the Lubicon Cree. We also want to work with aboriginal communities to create and implement economic development strategies, including targets for aboriginal employment in construction, resource development, and the public sector. The government approach has not worked. We need proper management to ensure that aboriginal people are not overrepresented in correctional facilities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

2:50

Excellence in Teaching Awards

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday evening I had the privilege of attending the 2006 excellence in teaching awards banquet, where 23 teachers were presented with awards. I was particularly pleased by the fact that 13 teachers from my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora were finalists, and three teachers from Edmonton-Glenora won this prestigious award.

I want to take a moment to congratulate all the winners and especially congratulate those from my constituency. First is Lorel Marie Trumier from St. Vincent elementary school, who has provided tremendous leadership in shaping a stimulating learning environment at St. Vincent.

I wish to also congratulate two winning teachers from Ross Sheppard high school. Deborah Stirrett is an outstanding chemistry teacher, making an incredible impact on student achievement in chemistry, supporting the curriculum in science 10 and also science 20 and 30 programs. Scott Bezubiak, the department head of athletics at Ross Sheppard, is a very creative and dedicated teacher, preparing innovative curriculum resources for teachers both at Shep and other high schools. I must also congratulate the principal at Ross Sheppard, Jennifer Lawley, for the fact that seven teachers from her school were finalists and two were winners of these excellence in teaching awards.

These great teachers have achieved a very high level of excellence and deserve our praise and our gratitude despite aging buildings, despite overcrowded classrooms, despite school board deficits, despite dwindling resources such as teachers aides, and despite the failure of this government to adequately fund education in this province.

My wife was an elementary school teacher, who was also highly valued by her students and colleagues, but she retired after 15 years of teaching in part because doing her job had become more difficult each year. There were simply not enough resources or support, and teachers were and still are required to take on a wide range of time-consuming and exhausting tasks not directly related to teaching, such as administration and fundraising.

I'm worried about our educational system. I'm especially worried that we may lose outstanding, creative teachers whose patience might just run out. What we need is a greater infusion of both money and vision from this government. If it does not happen soon, we will no longer be able to boast about Alberta's educational system. We will gradually slip behind, and it will be a great tragedy for this province and especially for our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul. Thirty seconds were left in the time frame, used up by everybody else, but that was good work today.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

**Bill 39
Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 39, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

The following nine acts will be amended: Oil and Gas Conservation Act, Oil Sands Conservation Act, Coal Conservation Act, Petroleum Marketing Act, Mines and Minerals Act, Gas Resources Preservation Act, Natural Gas Price Administration Act, National Gas Pricing Agreement Act, and the Gas Utilities Act. These amendments will ensure that Albertans' benefits from resources are optimized and will enable both industry and government to continue to operate efficiently and effectively.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 39, being the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, be moved onto our Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition was talking about the \$40,000 vehicle that the Minister of Education was driving. That fact is that that is a \$20,000 vehicle. The fact is that people who don't have a government vehicle have the ability to charge mileage. The fact is that for people that do have vehicles, it's not a freebie completely. The fact is that there is an annual charge for the vehicle for income tax purposes. When you calculate it all out, in Alberta the vehicles are not costing more than the mileage would cost. As a matter of fact, every province and the federal government provide cars, and in two provinces, Ontario and Quebec, they provide chauffeurs along with the cars.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings this afternoon. These tablings are in regard to questions that I have been asking for almost the entire session in regard to the ring road developments in Calgary and in Edmonton. The first one is a memorandum dated February 9, 1982, from Alberta Environment.

The second tabling I have is a presentation to the Metropolitan Affairs Cabinet Committee, and it's regarding the ring road.

The third document I have is a memorandum from Alberta Executive Council dated November 21, 1984, and it is also in regard to the ring road development area land purchases.

My last tabling this afternoon is also a memorandum from Alberta Environment, dated January 7, 1981, and it is concerning the Edmonton and Calgary restricted development area for the ring roads.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have only one tabling this afternoon. I'm pleased to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of a document produced by Mr. Maurice Fritze of Edmonton expressing his concerns about Bill 208, which is currently before this House. He reminds all Albertans that there is a parallel between Bill 208 and the Jim Crow laws. "Jim Crow laws were a number of laws enacted mostly in the Southern United States in the latter half of the 19th and early half of the 20th centuries that restricted most of the new privileges that had been granted to African-Americans after the Civil War."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Varsity – Calgary-Varsity. Sorry.

Mr. Chase: Thank you for that very important correction, Mr. Speaker.

I have four sets of tablings. The first tabling is the program celebrating the 40th anniversary of ACTRA, at which Harry Freedman, Bonnie LeMay, Sandra Redmond, Roland "Roli" Nincheri, Joyce Doolittle, and John Scott were recognized with life memberships.

The second tabling is the Calgary Community Land Trust's North Hill launch program, which was a beneficiary of the estate of Leo and Goldie Sheffel, providing the land upon which Habitat for Humanity will soon be building homes.

My third tabling is the Calgary program of the Mayor's Luncheon for Business & the Arts, at which both artists and patrons were recognized. A challenge was issued to Conservative leadership candidates to make funding for the arts a key commitment of their party.

My fourth and final tabling is the promotional postcard of the Cerebral Palsy Association, which is celebrating 30 years in Alberta and which held its 20th anniversary cerebral palsy bikeathon on April 30 in Red Deer; on May 7, last Sunday, in Calgary; and will hold its event this Sunday, May 13, in Edmonton. This is, incidentally, cerebral palsy week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a document. It's a media release by the president of the students' union of the University of Alberta. It's entitled Bill 40 Clouds Future on Tuition: Students Demand the Bill be Rescinded. It adds: "We were never consulted about this. If the Minister had bothered to ask, he would know that we are categorically opposed to the de-legislation of the tuition policy."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity of going to the kickoff for *Visit the Country*. It's an Edmonton countryside agricultural experience magazine that's encouraging people to go to the country, to discover the farms, ranches, and rural life. I've got the appropriate number of copies.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act, the Law Society of Alberta annual report 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Ducharme, Minister of Community Development, a copy of a petition signed by 11 Cold Lake residents urging the government to introduce measures to effectively curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta.

head: 3:00 **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Restructuring and Government Efficiency

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders the first hour will be allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to move the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency business plan for 2006-2009 and our budget estimates for 2006-2007.

By now I hope that all of you have a better idea of what Restructuring and Government Efficiency is about, and let me say that I've certainly appreciated all of your support over the last year, the first full year of operation for Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

This afternoon I would like to give you a brief overview of some of our accomplishments to date, my vision for the future of this ministry, and of course the budget numbers. Over the next few minutes I hope to answer most of your questions and tell you about my vision for this ministry, which includes government operating as one single entity for Albertans. I hope that you each have a copy of our business plan and budget, and I would like to take you through what I consider to be the highlights.

Before I get to that, however, I'd like to introduce some folks in the gallery. They have been working very hard developing our plans for the coming years. I'm pleased to mention that a number of Restructuring and Government Efficiency staff are here for an opportunity to learn about what goes on in Committee of Supply. They all work hard to keep the ministry running smoothly, and I'm glad they could join us today to watch the proceedings. I'd also like to point out some members from my executive. There's Paul Pellis, my deputy minister; Cheryl Arseneau, his executive assistant; Cathryn Landreth, assistant deputy minister of business services; Brian Fischer, assistant deputy minister of financial services – so if you don't like this business plan, he may be in trouble – David Bass, assistant deputy minister of technology services; Jeremy Fritsche, communications director; and Jason Ennis, my executive assistant, that most of you know. If you'd all stand, I'm sure that we'd show you a welcome here today.

At this time last year I talked about how we were just getting our feet wet, and truly we were. We have undergone significant change within our own operations since that time. We've tried to improve the services that we provide to our ministry partners, and we have initiated work important to Albertans. That, I believe, was the Premier's vision: to improve and simplify the operation of government and for all ministries to focus on the work that they are intended to do.

I've said it before: my department and its valuable work is not necessarily the sexiest ministry going. However, our work creates efficiency across ministries, and that means a better way of doing things across government. Over the last year I hope we've made it clear that the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency is cutting a clear path toward doing things better. To that end, we recognize the need for organizational change within our own ministry. That's why I have a new executive in place. They along with the 1,100-plus staff they represent are the backbone of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. This is a great team, and the combined expertise is already paying great dividends for government and, ultimately, for Albertans.

If I could throw a little title on Restructuring and Government Efficiency's budget and our plans as we go forward, it would simply be: a better way of doing things. What better place to start than with regulatory reform, a highlight for '06-07, one that I hope will reduce complexity and regulations and processes for Albertans and for those who conduct business in this province. I will say that the MLA Regulatory Review Steering Committee, led by the MLA for Foothills-Rocky View, has a big task ahead of it, but the group is enthusiastic, and I know that this government will give those members the support they need.

As far as funding regulatory reform, I want to stress that this is an important initiative to this government and, in particular, to my ministry. It's part of our business plan, and it is part of the mandate of our ministry. We have some good employees in our department who will be dedicating their talents and time to this initiative. Their task will not be easy, but at the end of the day my goal is quite simple: to lessen the impact of regulations on Albertans. I believe that the number of rules and regulations that a government has on its books isn't all that important. What's key here is that the rules, regardless of how many there are, don't unnecessarily burden a business or stand in the way of Albertans getting on with their priorities. It's about harmonization and making it easier for our citizens to interact with their government, and it's about keeping Albertans publicly informed.

Another key project for my ministry is our ICT service co-ordination initiative, which is well under way. This is a project that will create a private/public partnership between government and leading ICT service providers, resulting in cost efficiencies and improved services. We all know that the costs of maintaining and upgrading computer systems continue to go up in both the private and public sectors. In fact, the government's ICT costs are going up by more than 10 per cent a year. When we have more than 25,000 computers and servers and printers, that equates to big bucks. If we're spending millions of dollars on IT, let's make sure that it's money well spent. This is about controlling these costs and getting the biggest bang for the taxpayer's dollar.

It is important for members to know that we are not reinventing the wheel here. Research tells us that many organizations have in recent years revisited their service delivery models and have used consolidation and corporate alignment to improve the value of their ICT investments. For the government of Alberta that means that departments work with each other and not within their own silos. This initiative is about recognizing that each ministry has common ICT needs, and there are opportunities for us to leverage those needs while helping to facilitate specialized requirements.

To that end, I want to publicly acknowledge and thank the ministries that have joined Restructuring and Government Efficiency on this initiative and are providing important insight as we proceed. We know that there is potential for operational efficiency and savings if we adopt a strategic, more aggressive cross-government approach to standards and shared infrastructure. We've made considerable progress to date. We recently reached a significant milestone by completing the industry/ministry consultation process, and like with regulatory reform, I look forward to giving you updates as we progress.

Keeping with IT for a minute, privacy matters over the last couple of years have certainly heightened the importance of ensuring that information kept by government is secure. First and foremost, I want to stress that protecting Alberta's personal information is a priority for this government and, certainly, for Restructuring and Government Efficiency. My department is responsible for protecting people's privacy in two important ways: first, when it comes to accessing government services electronically; second, ensuring that necessary information stored on our equipment is secure from those who should not be accessing it. I'm pleased to say that Alberta is one of the few governments to have IT staff devoted to this cause.

In fact, there are several key projects under way that will help ensure the protection of personal information for Albertans. Protecting people's private information is a cross-ministry initiative led by Government Services and Restructuring and Government Efficiency. The purpose is to develop principles and policies to further protect personal information. The Alberta secure access service was created to enhance the protection of personal informa-

tion while online with government. It's designed to provide additional security for new online applications and the personal and confidential information that Albertans submit.

3:10

Educating our employees is important too. Restructuring and Government Efficiency has established a government-wide information security awareness program. It covers everything from selecting an effective password to protecting your computer from viruses. Since launching this program in November, our security awareness e-course has been accessed by government users over 11,000 times. Survey results show that this program is a highly effective tool, with satisfaction rates in the 90 per cent range. We continue to move forward to ensure privacy by designing software that protects personal information.

While my department concerns itself primarily with online or internal ICT security, Government Services also plays an important role, particularly as it relates to identity theft and authentication. I look forward to working with the hon. minister on those issues.

We've also seen a new addition to our ministry. As of April 1 Restructuring and Government Efficiency is proud to be the new home of the Queen's Printer, formerly part of the Public Affairs Bureau. Switching ministries is never easy, I'm sure, but for these dozen employees we're sure trying our best to make them feel right at home. The publishing, distribution, and information services provided by the Queen's Printer are a good fit because they are all well aligned with the shared services function we already offer, and we're happy to have them. Their \$1.9 million budget is reflected in your budget documents.

Mr. Chairman, whether it's Valleyview in the constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Mountain View in the constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner, or even Spruce View in my riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, these are just a few of the hundreds of Alberta communities that now have access to high-speed Internet thanks to SuperNet. I am proud to say that thanks to SuperNet remote parts of Alberta are now a keystroke away from the rest of the world. This is important because SuperNet and the first mile are critical to the future success of rural Alberta. With the SuperNet build completed, our goal now is to promote the power of this incredible infrastructure. Hardly a day goes by without an article of some sort about the advantages of SuperNet for our schools, our hospitals, our libraries, and our government offices, and now rural businesses and residences are jumping on board, tapping into the system and realizing the benefits of downloads and other services that are virtually immediate.

In addition to these major projects on the go, along with dozens if not hundreds of smaller projects, it might be fair to say that shared services are still the backbone of this ministry. The vast majority of our ministry's 1,100 employees help deliver shared services across government.

I have some numbers that I think you'll find quite amazing. We handle about 25,000 training registrations and deliver over 800 cross-government training courses annually to public servants, who improve the efficiency and quality of service to Albertans as a result. We manage over 26,000 telephone land lines and 7,000 cellular phones. Annually Restructuring and Government Efficiency ensures that over 22 million pieces of mail are delivered in a timely manner, and over 39 million documents are printed. We process over 375,000 invoices annually, ensuring that vendors receive payments in a timely manner.

Restructuring and Government Efficiency supports over 26,000 government computers. Since 2004 we have donated over 7,000 computers to the computers for schools program. In fact, last fiscal

year surplus sales either sold or donated over 106,000 items, with a value of almost \$5 million.

Despite this activity, you'll note that the budget for delivering shared services to other ministries has gone down slightly over the last year, from \$211 million to \$204 million. There are two main reasons for this. We are finding efficiencies where possible without affecting the quality of services, and we're simply providing these services in-house rather than billing back to the ministries.

I think the shared service model is working well along with the billing methods, but as is the case with everything that we do, I'm more than happy to explore, as I suggested off the top, a better way of doing things. Restructuring and Government Efficiency is geared to make government work more smoothly by providing these day-to-day shared services, and they will always be considered a priority for the entire organization.

As you might have guessed from all those shared services numbers, Restructuring and Government Efficiency continues to work closely with all government ministries to assist in streamlining new and existing programs and services. Since the formation of Restructuring and Government Efficiency a year and a half ago we've taken part in a number of cross-government efforts that produced many positive results. In fact, it's safe to say that Restructuring and Government Efficiency is actively engaged, working on a number of initiatives that are going to impact the government and Albertans.

For example, Restructuring and Government Efficiency is supporting the provincial plan for a possible pandemic by assisting in the planning efforts, everything from vaccine production and distribution to keeping Albertans up to date. We're working with the Solicitor General in a cross-ministry initiative to create an Alberta police and public safety radio communications system. This wireless network will improve communications for public safety responses and allow for a variety of organizations and enforcement agencies to communicate with each other on a regular and an emergency basis. We're developing and implementing new standardized ID cards for all government employees to enhance security.

With Alberta Justice and Infrastructure and Transportation, Restructuring and Government Efficiency is developing an abandoned vehicle disposal program. This program will work with police and towing and storage operators to deal with the 11,000 vehicles abandoned on our highways each year. Restructuring and Government Efficiency is partnering with Health and Wellness and Education to make sure that an effective cross-ministry video conferencing standard is in place that uses the SuperNet.

With that, let's take a look at the budget numbers. Starting on page 355 of the estimates, the 2006-2007 budget for this ministry is \$255 million, similar to, but even a little less than, last year. Allow me to break that down into our core budget programs. The cost of running the ministry is about \$7.3 million. This includes the corporate management budget for things like finance, internal IT costs, human resources and communications, and it also includes my office and the deputy minister's office. I'd like to point out that this cost is \$1.7 million less than it was in '04-05. This is because we've streamlined processes, re-engineered services, and become more efficient internally.

We've allocated \$6.7 million to business innovation. This is where we identify and deliver innovative change opportunities to improve delivery services to Albertans, pay for the operating costs of SuperNet, and conduct the regulatory review initiative.

Also, \$32 million is planned for cross-ministry initiatives such as the focus on privacy, as I mentioned earlier, and the development and implementation of IT standards. It also covers the continued

operation of the government's corporate, financial, human resource, and procurement systems.

The largest part of our budget is set aside for providing shared services in the areas of administration, finance, human resource employee services, and IT and network services. Of this \$204 million budget, \$31 million is for amortization of the ministry's capital assets, including SuperNet.

3:20

As a point of interest, over \$103 million of our budget is charged back to ministries for services we provide. If you're keeping track, that leaves about \$152 million of the \$255 million total budget which pays the portion of shared services that we provide in-house. We are really demonstrating leadership in delivering shared services by standardizing processes, meeting and exceeding service expectations, and looking at options where we don't have to charge ministries for all the services we deliver.

Those, in a nutshell, are the budget numbers. Overall we'll be operating on a voted budget of \$255 million, of which \$103 million is charged back to ministries for services that they require.

Thank you for your interest in Restructuring and Government Efficiency. You know, just to prove efficiencies here, I'm sure that we could just call the question now since I explained my ministry so well, and we would save all this time and effort. Really, I'm sure that it takes a little while to get through to across the House there, so we may as well let you have some time now to ask some questions, and I'll try to answer them for you.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, you had a good try, but we do have more than two hours allocated for this business.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed my extreme pleasure to rise and participate in this debate on this budget estimate, personally as a citizen and as an elected official but also on behalf of my hon. colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition, who is officially the critic for Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

I must start by thanking the hon. minister for his introduction and also to acknowledge and say hello and appreciate his most able staff. Whether or not we approve of this ministry's purpose or its reason for existence, we must also acknowledge that the staff make things happen, and they're the reason why things click the way they do. So I just wanted to get that out of the way in the beginning.

Capturing some of what the hon. minister spoke about, I must say that when it comes to Service Alberta, as a service we definitely rely upon it, and we use it increasingly every day. For most of the constituents who walk into the constituency office and ask questions or have concerns, I must confess that the first place I look is Service Alberta, and 80 per cent of the time I can find an answer fairly quickly. If not, it has the usefulness to actually direct me in the right direction to look for that answer elsewhere. So I find it very useful, and I think it's money well spent.

This ministry has acquired certain services or certain responsibilities from other departments that existed before it did, and in trying to put it together, it now appears that the ministry is busier than it used to be a year ago.

We mentioned SuperNet. We all know that in September or October of 2005 there was the announcement that bragged about the SuperNet having been completed. We know that the SuperNet is a very useful program and a very useful development. I have certain little questions with respect to the SuperNet. Did it really in fact arrive at or reach the 429 communities that were identified in the

announcement? We know now that 16 per cent of those, or 37 of those 429, were only connected via wireless links. That's not the fibre-optic connection that was basically agreed upon or that people were under the impression they were getting. So I need to ask the hon. minister if that is in fact allowed in the contract or whether this is an area where a suboptimal service was provided. We need to know if this was agreed upon in the contract and there's no breach, or whether this was agreed upon after and it was allowed to happen, or whether everything is where it's supposed to be and how it's supposed to be.

With that, I also ask: why wireless when everybody you talk to tells you that wireless is less secure and less reliable than an actual physical fibre-optic link? For example, here in the Legislature we do not use wireless Internet even in our own offices, whether on site at the Legislature or at the Legislature Annex. We don't allow wireless because of its vulnerability and the threats that it might be exposed to. If we don't allow it here, why are certain communities being asked to rely on a wireless link that is not reliable in performance and that might be susceptible to breaches and penetration?

Also, Axia in their agreement with the government promised guaranteed speeds and network performance, or committed access rates. They call them CARs. How is the ministry and how is the hon. minister's department monitoring that those committed access rates are in fact being delivered at those rates and consistently? We need to assure Albertans that they are getting what they are paying for.

Also, I must say that I was really extremely pleased when I wrote an e-mail to the hon. minister's staff asking for a list of the completed sites, the sites which were connected to the Internet, the 4,200 sites which were announced in September. Between themselves they took a day or so to ask him if it was all right to share it with an opposition member, and he replied that, yes, it was all right, that they have nothing to hide, so give it to the hon. member. I really appreciated this, and I felt very good that an hon. minister of that calibre is willing to share this information. Again, it's public information: 4,200 sites were connected; 4,200 sites appear on a list that is printed and shared with everybody who asks for it. However, I noted that in the agreement which we FOIPed earlier, under schedule G 6,304 locations were identified as potential targets for connectivity. So it went down from 6,304 to 4,200, and I need to know from the hon. minister where this discrepancy came from or, you know, why it exists.

On the issue of the SuperNet as well, I have two distinct concerns that were raised with the opposition. For example, we have spoken to some students in rural Alberta who say that the SuperNet has actually arrived at their campus, at their college or institution, but it is not shared with the student body. For example, you might not have SuperNet access in the student lounge or everywhere on campus, but you definitely have it for faculty and you have it for the support staff. These students said: you know, if it's right there, why not allow access even if it's restricted? They don't need to access all of the information that the dean of that school or the library staff have access to, but utilizing the high-speed connection there would at least be a cost saving for them, and it would allow them to conduct their research more efficiently. So that's one question.

The other question is with respect to costs. I can quote, for example, a library in one town in rural Alberta which declined the invitation to hook up onto the SuperNet. They said: "We don't need it. We're going to actually get our high-speed Internet from the municipality." They told us that they were actually paying \$1,000 per year for high-speed Internet versus a cost of about \$1,800 had they been on the SuperNet. How can we demonstrate that the SuperNet is actually cost-efficient for everybody who are asking to be on it? So that's that.

The minister also spoke about the plan to update or issue ID cards for all government employees. I'm thinking aloud here. Is this going to be something similar to the new Alberta driver's licence? Is it going to be as secure? If so, are we also going to use the Canadian Bank Note Company to provide us with those? Whether or not we're going to go that route, I need to get some indication of a cost estimate.

3:30

Security, of course, is on everybody's minds, and I totally agree that government employees' ID has to be secure. It has to be trusted. It has to be reliable. But what cost are we looking at? Is this cost going to be phased over a number of years, or is it going to be like a one-time lump sum? How is it going to be updated?

The minister also mentioned efficiency. He referred to it as operational efficiency, which means that the ministry is investigating ways to improve services: delivery of services for the public, efficiency in terms of partners that the government utilizes, and so on. What steps are being taken to actually assess and determine areas of potential efficiencies? I'm not just talking about the top-down approach, where people are told what to do and how to think. I'm also thinking about a bottom-up approach, encouraging staff and ministry employees and people in government to each look within their area of competency and within their responsibility to identify efficiencies that are not being realized fully and to potentially report back to the minister and staff, saying: this is an area we think needs attention. Then the ministry can actually compile all those local or microinvestigations into a bigger scheme.

What indicators or criteria does this minister use to test if government is, in fact, becoming more efficient? I am particularly referring to a conversation that happened in Public Accounts, where the minister hinted or admitted that the indicators were unrealistic and that they were sometimes subjective. So will there be indicators that are, in his opinion, realistic for this fiscal year or for the one coming after?

The minister also spoke about the regulatory reform angle, or the red tape review. We definitely support conducting a full and thorough red tape review. The burden of red tape is basically greatest on small business. If you're using the terminology or nomenclature of the business world, it's the SMEs, the small to medium enterprises, not the larger or more established firms. So the small businesses, independent most of the time, are the ones that actually bear the burden of the red tape and the difficulties it poses. What are we doing to try to focus our review on the small to medium businesses rather than going across the board, where, in fact, larger businesses, with their established status – and they have their armies of lawyers and accountants – are the ones that don't mind it?

In terms of efficiencies and studying whether this government is efficient or not, I mentioned the SuperNet. I need to also cover something that is personally interesting and troubling at the same time. By that I mean the ambulance service. Last year and to some extent earlier this year the question arose of who should be responsible for an ambulance service. Is it the municipality where it's hosted, or is it the government centrally? I would urge the minister to actually look at this from an efficiency standpoint and study it. Look at other models, look at other jurisdictions and determine whether, in fact, there should be one system that is implemented across the board or whether we would go with several models for several communities.

Another thing which I can't help but ask – and I asked it in Public Accounts, and the minister has promised to look into it – is about the newly created ministry of the Associate Minister of Infrastructure, and then we put capital planning in brackets. How efficient is this? How efficient will it be a year from now, especially after staff is

added, resources are included, equipment is bought, and all that stuff? We need a sort of before-and-after study to compare what things were and how they were conducted before that ministry was created and then after because, of course, the size of government and the size of cabinet is worrisome, and we need to ascertain that we're getting value for the taxpayers' dollars.

Some financial points, Mr. Chairman. Line 1.0.2, dealing with the deputy minister's office, that budget is increasing by \$80,000. What can we show for it basically? How is this money going to be utilized, and what are the deliverables, the end results which we can tell taxpayers are the result of this increased expenditure?

Line 4.0.3 on page 359 talks about inventory purchases of \$3.8 million for information technology and network services. I need more clarification as to what the \$3.8 million is going to cover and what things we are paying for.

On page 360 there is no capital investment in this year's budget. I know that the minister has talked about extending the SuperNet, making sure that everybody has access to it and can utilize it. In the business plan it talks about promoting the potential of government. There is no capital expense. I'm not necessarily arguing that there should be, but I'm just saying, you know: should people in businesses waiting for the Internet through the Alberta SuperNet assume that no capital investments this year means that no improvements are expected this fiscal year? Are we telling them to wait a year, basically? That is the question here.

The Auditor General highlighted the fact that the ministry did not have performance measures, or if they did, then they weren't satisfactory. The Auditor General recommended that the ministry "clearly define" its performance measures and targets and "develop systems" to monitor those performance measures and targets. We know that the government has accepted it, but what exactly has been put in place already, and what is going to be put in place within this year or within sort of the foreseeable future? If there are performance measures in place now, are they going to be funded through this budget, or where is the funding coming from?

Moving on – and I promise to be brief because I know that my hon. colleagues after me want to rise and participate – the link to the government of Alberta strategic business plan. One of them is goal 8, "Alberta will have financially stable, open and accountable government." It talks about "prioritization of opportunities to streamline, restructure and gain efficiencies for the business of government" and "sharing corporate information and communications technology and administrative systems and processes." This is all great, and there is no quarrel here, but where does that fit with the open and accountable government part of that goal? It doesn't talk about it, and I'm interested in finding out from the hon. minister how his ministry is going to promote openness and transparency.

The other goal which is listed, goal 14: "Alberta will have supportive and sustainable infrastructure that promotes growth and enhances quality of life." SuperNet is the one that is highlighted here, again with the 429 communities, but if people are not being able to access that or if, in fact, some of those Internet service providers are offering inferior service or they're experiencing delays, then is there a role for the government, for this ministry to intervene and to accelerate connection?

Also, the minister spoke about protecting people's private information, which is a noble and laudable goal, and I truly support him on that. Then he mentioned, you know, information that is either hosted or housed on government computers or information that is accessible from outside sources. I know that the government has many partnerships with software developers. I note the hon. minister's trip to the U.S., where he met with Microsoft, and we know that IBM is another partner and so on. How are we ascertain-

ing that the software that we buy is not itself infested with spyware, for example, or harvesting code that might maliciously access and transmit information to third parties without our knowledge?

3:40

The PATRIOT Act comes to mind, Mr. Chairman, where software developers at one point were told that if their firm is targeted, they would have to relinquish control over their code and allow the agency in charge, like the FBI or the CIA for example, to tamper with that code to allow it to harvest information. So however many staff that the minister mentioned that actually sit there and monitor, you know, threats and hack attacks and attempts, how much of that effort is dedicated towards making sure that the software that we buy is secure enough?

Also, the minister in his submission mentioned invoices being paid electronically. I'm looking at page 319 of the business plan for 2006-09, and it says that in last year's actual 960,000 invoices were paid online. This is amazing. This is very positive because now we're allowing people to be at home, for example, sitting at their keyboards and paying government bills, you know, taking care of their business from home.

Mr. Ouellette: I don't know whether to thank you for all those questions or what because you were so all over the map that I don't know if I can follow you. I'm not sure, from some of your last questions, that you haven't watched quite too many TV shows about hackers and whatever you were talking about there.

Mr. Lund: Well, commit that you will answer any questions, any that are relevant to the discussions.

Mr. Ouellette: Oh, no. I will answer his questions.

Anyway, I'll try to go back to the beginning, 20 minutes ago. One thing I will talk about a little bit is SuperNet. I mean, it's one of the very best rural economic development initiatives this government has ever come up with. I will say that for that contract that you're talking about, when you go back to schedule G and the 6,304 connections and all that stuff, you have to remember that the SuperNet contract – what we had planned on doing was connecting 429 communities, and in those 429 communities we were going to connect every government office, every school, every hospital, and every library. What was added after that were the municipal offices if they applied for a grant, and they could apply for grants with Municipal Affairs to get that covered.

It was a movement in progress, all while we were paying \$193 million to get connected what we wanted connected. We weren't going to pay any more or any less, and we haven't. That's what our contract was: \$193 million. It turned out that there were only 4,200 connections, but that went up and down as schools were built and some weren't built. All of those are connected today.

You were asking about different connections within a school. That really has nothing to do with us supplying the infrastructure of the SuperNet. That probably should've been asked of the Education minister on whether they control that. I'm guessing that it's the school boards that completely control that. We put the infrastructure there. The school board now pays us even though Education gives them a budget to do that.

I've got to beg to differ with you on the security of wireless. Yes, in our contracts wireless was allowed. There were areas we knew we would never get fibre connected to. It was just way, way too expensive to go do one spot out of the way. But with today's technology they tell me that they can secure wireless as good as they can secure whether a hacker can come into your computer that's

going down the SuperNet or not. I mean, as long as there are crooks, you're going to always find – you would almost think that crooks should be not quite as bright as the guys coming up. You'd think: if they were that bright, why wouldn't they go make their money legally instead of being crooked? But it seems to work out that the crooks are always finding a better mousetrap to be able to get you, so that's why we have to have so many people behind them working on that.

You were also asking about the budget going into SuperNet. There was never any more budget planned for SuperNet. We were to do that main infrastructure – and that was our policy – and let private enterprise develop the last mile. I've started calling it the first mile because of how important it is to small business and businesses and homes in rural Alberta. That is developing very, very quickly. We've got well over 50 Internet service providers right now. We've got over 135 communities connected; people can actually get onto the SuperNet.

There are new technologies out there working with satellite, and I've been talking to a couple of different companies on that. They won't necessarily connect to SuperNet immediately. They will go out and from satellite do the high-speed connections, and when they get enough people in an area signed up that it pays them to put in a wireless wired into the SuperNet – let's say 30 customers or whatever – then they'll transfer those customers onto their wireless connection, which will bring their speed up and bring their costs down.

You were also saying: how do we monitor it? I will have to actually get someone from my department to contact you on how they actually monitor it. I know that Axia SuperNet has a broader, wider band than anything else out there right now, and they can give you just about any speed you want. The nice thing about this is that the really high-speed stuff used to be only reasonably priced within the cities. Axia tells me that they will supply a full megabit, which is probably more than you would get on your coaxial at home unless you upgrade it, for, like, \$50 a month.

When you talk about libraries that say to you – and I have municipalities telling me the same thing. You've got to remember that their train of thought hasn't been geared yet to what the capabilities of that SuperNet connection are. They don't know yet what applications they want to run on it, but they could run all kinds of applications on that SuperNet access that they can't run on their Shaw Cable or whatever they're getting their old high-speed Internet on. Maybe all they've got now is high-speed Internet. Maybe they think that that's all they need, and maybe it is, but if they did a little broader thinking and thought of different applications they could use, they could build that small-town library into a lot bigger business for them to make their library actually survive. That's where they make up that difference in cost, going from \$1,000 to \$1,800. So a lot of it is that they just don't realize yet, because they haven't been educated, the application capabilities that they have by using the SuperNet connection rather than using the other connection.

3:50

You had mentioned a little bit about ambulances. I have to say that I think that we have just an excellent health minister in this province, who works very, very hard at making sure that all aspects of health care are looked after. She has an ambulance advisory task force out there right now reviewing what the ambulance situation is, so I think I'll let the questions about ambulances come to our wonderful health minister another day.

You talked about what we were doing with standardized ID cards. The cards will enhance security all across government with greater

control around the request tracking and retrieval of the ID cards. The card format will be consistent. Everyone's will be the same now, so they'll be a lot harder to forge. The new standardized ID card is expected to be launched in June of '06, with the rollout and distribution process to last several months. Ministries in phase 1 of the rollout include us, of course, PAO, IIR, Children's Services, Human Resources and Employment, Seniors and Community Supports, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Ministries in phase 2 of the rollout will be approximately a month later. That's when Education, Infrastructure, and I and S will come on board.

Initially, the card will be for identification purposes only. So that's all they'll be used for: identification. The next stages of the card are expected to include electronic authentication and secure building access, and that will all get rolled into that same card. Whatever the cost of that card it is all within the budget that we have. We don't have to go out and get any more financing or anything for that card.

You were asking about a little bit of an increase in the deputy minister's department. As you know, a while ago I think it was probably you guys that raised a lot of kerfuffle about the big raises that the deputies got. Well, we had to put extra money in those budgets to cover those deputies' salaries. Most of that \$80,000 was used up in increases in staff in the deputy minister's office.

You were saying – and I'm not very quick at going through my book – that there was no capital. I don't know where it is exactly in front of me, but we do have \$4.5 million in capital in there somewhere. Now, that isn't for SuperNet. A lot of that is to upgrade our data centres. As you know, we have a data centre in Edmonton and a data centre in Calgary, and all of our government stuff runs on those data centres. We've actually had test cases with them. If there's an emergency, if anything happens, if a pandemic happens or anything like that, we have to make sure that our data stays up and running and that Health can get at their files. Everybody's got to be able to operate. We've tested where we've shut down Edmonton and transferred everything to Calgary to make sure that it would work, and it does, but we need quite a bit of that money. Actually that's an increase in our budget. We only had \$3 million in there last year for capital, and we went to \$4.5 million. Most of that was for upgrades for the data centres.

I hope I got just about everything. I'm not sure if there was more that you had given me, but if there is more, if you'll send me a note on it, I'll try and get the answers to you.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will not go into as many questions mainly because I don't know much more about technology than he does. I could ask a bunch of questions, and neither one of us would know what the answers were. So I'll talk in broader terms about this particular ministry.

You know, nothing to do with the minister, but I've always found it a bit of an oxymoron that when this department was created, we added another bureaucracy to a government to become more efficient. I've never sort of understood the logic of that, Mr. Chairman. I mean, this department has been set up since 2004. I'm sure there's some good work. I know that the minister likes to talk about the SuperNet, but I want to talk broader about government.

I was sort of interested in the performance measures in the 2004-2005 annual report. The minister, if nothing else, is honest. By their own evaluation they are inefficiently pursuing efficiency. Well, that was an interesting way to put things, Mr. Chairman. I believe that

it was Benjamin Franklin who once said that “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” So I’m not sure what the difference is there.

Before I get into more general things, I want to talk about P3s. In their business plans they’re talking about exploring opportunities for private partnerships, better known as P3s. Now, it’s no secret in this Legislature how I feel about the record of P3s. They’ve been dismal, basically, where they’ve been tried. We’re touted to that Henday is going to be a great success. I still think that that’s not the case. I think that it has cost more than it should, but that’s another debate that the minister of infrastructure and I will hold time and time again. We’re not sure what the ring road will bring yet because it’s just in the preliminary stage.

I guess the major question that I have, then, is: what is the role of this minister and this department in this whole P3 debate? Is this the department that’s doing some work and looking into P3s? I mean, Nova Scotia is the obvious example, where a Conservative government got rid of them after a Liberal government brought it in. You know, it seems to be Infrastructure that’s pursuing this more, but there was some talk before about Education pursuing this and others. I guess I’d just like a general comment about the minister’s and his department’s role there.

I did look at, Mr. Chairman, the ministry’s website. The SuperNet is touted. We all think that it’s a great idea, albeit that it came in late and slightly over budget, but nobody would argue that it’s especially important for rural Alberta. One might argue that it was in a different department at one time, and it would have been done. But I notice on the website under its frequently asked questions that there are two categories: Alberta SuperNet questions – well, fair enough; we all want to hear about the SuperNet – and then there are general questions. This is what is sort of interesting. The former under general questions brings up another window with detailed information about the services provided or accessed through the province-wide SuperNet, while the latter, general questions, answers only two questions, one answering why surplus items for sale don’t have pictures with them more often and the other about how to register your company to purchase surplus items.

Now, I mean, those are probably interesting questions for some people, but for a restructuring department and going by the minister, the important work that the ministry is doing and what they’re about, you’d think that they would on the website have more than that. I suppose that’s important, but it’s not earth-shaking to most people. Most Albertans are not really going to know much about this particular department, so I guess that what the people would come to when they look at that website is that the sole purpose for this ministry was the SuperNet. I suppose the obvious next question would be: now that the SuperNet’s working and well, according to the minister, will this ministry be dissolved then? I’m sure that somebody else can do the surplus and the rest of it. I mean, either the website needs to be upgraded or we need to make some other more drastic measures. I will certainly be talking about the latter, Mr. Chairman.

4:00

This is where I want to come to sort of the philosophy of government, if I may. This is the major item that I want to discuss, Mr. Chairman. When this government came in under the leadership of Premier Klein, the deficit fighting, Premier Klein admittedly brought forward by the . . .

Some Hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Martin: Premier Klein: that’s his title, isn’t it?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, this is the third time now you’re repeating. You know the tradition of this House. We refer to colleagues by their constituencies.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I always greatly appreciate the help, especially from the Minister of Advanced Education.

But, Mr. Chairman, the point that I make is that at the time the previous government had something like 27 cabinet posts. We in opposition were saying that was too big and cumbersome. It was a big government, and at that time the new government under the new Premier agreed with that. You may recall that at that particular time – I believe that some members were here, not many, but some were here – the first cabinet actually had 19 members. Now I see us, even recently, up to 25.

The point that I make is that with a restructuring department surely the message should be that we start at the very top, the number of ministries, in terms of if we want efficiency and restructuring. The more ministries that you have, the more complicated government gets and, I would argue, the less services that get out to the people that need them.

I would say to the minister that maybe there are other ministries that he would be welcome to take over. But I guess I would ask the purpose of this ministry because the SuperNet is completed. It’s done. I expect that if we’re serious about government restructuring and efficiency, this is the type of ministry that would want to work themselves out of business. That would be the ultimate goal, it would seem to me, in this particular ministry.

Bureaucracies have a way, as we know, of creating work and finding reasons to justify why they’re there. I know that questions were raised, and I know that when we added cabinet ministers just recently, this particular minister has no control over that. But the reality is that government at the top level is getting bigger. If you’re trying to send a message that we want to be more efficient, that becomes very hard when you send it down to the level when it’s going bigger at the top.

So I look at the ministry’s three main functions on page 358 of the budget estimates, and I suggest that this ministry could easily be divided amongst other more appropriate ministries. Business innovation could be done by Economic Development. Government efficiency should be done by the Executive Council office. Service excellence, which includes a procurement faction, should be done by Infrastructure and Transportation, for which, I would point out, an associate minister was just appointed, and IT and network services could easily be done by Innovation and Science.

This is not directed to any particular minister. I’m talking about the bureaucracy here, Mr. Chairman. I would point out what it could mean if we could save \$255 million through dissolution of this department. Just to give you a few examples: \$255 million would allow schools to hire 1,700 new teachers or could allow full implementation of the MLA review committee’s recommendations for continuing care and still leave enough money to double Alberta’s Water for Life strategy funding; or \$255 million would replace the dropped federal funding for child care or pay for a quarter of the infrastructure that Fort McMurray desperately needs, including water treatment plants and housing developments; \$255 million would nearly double Alberta Environment’s pitifully small budget, which might just give that ministry a fighting chance at doing something more important.

The point is that that’s a lot of money. When we’re dealing with taxpayers’ money, it’s priorities. I guess that I question the priorities of adding more bureaucracies, especially at the top level, and more and more departments, how that is really serving Albertans.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I don’t want to suggest for a second that some useful work has not been done in this particular department.

I'm sure it has. But I stress that it seems to me that the purpose of a department with the name Restructuring and Government Efficiency should be to work themselves out of business. I'm suggesting that perhaps now is the most useful time to do that because, as I say, the longer a bureaucracy is there, the harder it is to maintain, the more it looks for busywork, the more it looks for opportunities to justify keeping itself there.

So being ever helpful that I am – and I know that the minister greatly appreciates my help – I would like to bring in an amendment, Mr. Chairman. I'll read it and then give you time to get around to it.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, do you have enough copies for distribution?

Mr. Martin: Yes. I'm going to hand them out.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead. Hon. member, please send the original copy to the desk.

Mr. Martin: It's coming, Mr. Chairman. Shall I proceed or wait?

The Deputy Chair: You may proceed.

Mr. Martin: What this particular amendment does – and we've checked through the Parliamentary Counsel and tried to find out how we can legally do it, Mr. Chairman. I'll just read it:

Move that the estimates for the minister's office under reference 1.0.1 of the 2006-07 main estimates of the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency be reduced by \$379,000 so that the expense and equipment/inventory purchases to be voted is \$254,760,000.

The purpose is simply to take a message, again I want to stress, not towards a particular minister but to the government. This is a way for us to say that we do not need this extra department in government, Mr. Chairman. If we're serious about government expenses and priorities and the rest of it, then this particular department should go ahead and work itself out of business.

We're asking the Conservatives to fall back to their old days when there were 19 cabinet ministers. This would be a start.

Ms Blakeman: Seventeen ministers.

Mr. Martin: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre says that it was 17. I was out by that time. She was here, so I'll take her word on it, Mr. Chairman. But we certainly should be moving in that direction, and this is an attempt to do it.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we have an amendment on the floor as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. We shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1. Would anyone like to participate in a debate on this amendment? Hon. minister, did you want to participate?

4:10

Mr. Ouellette: I would just like to have the question. Let's just vote it out of here and be done with it.

Mr. Hinman: That's what I love about this government. It's so efficient. I believe Churchill said that democracy was never meant to be efficient, so we'll continue if I have a few minutes.

I appreciate this amendment coming forward. He stole a lot of my thunder on what efficiency is, but I very much am in favour of this amendment. We need to look at reducing the size of this government, and I'll talk later on some of those things. But I'm in favour

of this amendment, in reducing it. Therefore, we will still have the budget for the expense and the equipment, but we could eliminate the ministry. That would be more efficient, and I'll give further reasons why later. I'd like to speak in favour of this and appreciate the NDP going against their normal idea of expanding – bigger government is better government – then going for a smaller, more efficient Conservative government.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, did you want to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Chase: I'm strictly seeking clarification from the mover of the amendment as to where the \$379,000 figure came from so that I can appreciate that reduction in the overall expenditure.

The Deputy Chair: Does anybody else wish to participate in the amendment?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Chairman, I kind of find it funny in a way. They're saying that 1.0.1 is the minister's office, and I don't really have a problem with that, that he wants to get rid of me. But I do really wonder. Actually, if you remember, in the speech from the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung just a little earlier he said how important a whole pile of the things were that this ministry was doing. I've also been questioned in the House a number of times on: we didn't get enough money to be able to do regulatory review properly. Now they're trying to say that we got too much money.

Do you want us to stop paying everyone's paycheques? Do you want us to stop paying the bills of the government? Do you want us to stop doing all the procurement, the buying we do? Should we stop delivering the mail? You can say, "Get rid of all these bureaucrats" all you want, but we need all those bureaucrats to do all of those jobs. Whether they're in my ministry or someone else's, they will be there.

We'll vote on that. There's no sense having a debate back and forth across the floor. I should be talking to the chairman, being that we are so polite on this side of the House.

An Hon. Member: Somebody who cares.

Mr. Ouellette: Someone who cares and actually knows the difference between good and bad and right and wrong.

Anyway, I honestly believe that it's a very poor amendment, and I think we should just vote it out of here.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the amendment? Are you ready for the vote on the amendment? Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do you want to participate in the debate on the amendment?

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. I appreciate the fact that I had an opportunity to talk to the hon. mover of the amendment. Basically, what he is pointing out is that this whole department is an unnecessary expenditure. I support that notion. He is doing it symbolically and figuratively by basically removing the beast's head. I would like to see the whole beast taken out.

Mr. VanderBurg: I would like to speak against the amendment, Mr. Chairman. Clearly, this department has done a lot of good things within their government ministry and within many others. I know that under this ministry there are about 25,000 training registrations that deliver over 800 cross-government training courses annually to public servants, who improve the efficiency and quality of services to all Albertans. To all Albertans. Let's remember that. They

manage over 26,000 telephone land lines and 7,000 cellphones. Someone has to do that work. I don't know who's going to do the work. This department also ensures that over 22 million pieces of mail are delivered in a timely manner and over 39 million documents are printed. Who's going to do the work? These people do great work, and we should recognize the work that they do for each and every one of us.

I'll tell you, this ministry also processes 375,000 invoices, allowing our vendors to receive payments in a timely manner. That's pretty amazing, that they can handle that. They support 26,000 government computers. My gosh. I don't know. I have trouble managing one. How about you, Mr. Chair? Twenty-six thousand government computers: that's a lot.

Not only that, but they've ensured that when it comes time that we have surplus computers, over 7,000 of those computers were donated to school programs. I thank the minister for doing that and his staff for ensuring that those computers weren't just thrown in a heap and gone to the recycle pile, that they're reused. In fact, the surplus sales that this department has taken care of or donated: I think there were over 100,000 items with a value of almost \$5 million. That's a lot of good work that this department does.

You'll note that the budget for delivering shared services to other ministries has gone down slightly over the last year, and I heard the minister talk about this. You know, it's gone down from \$211 million to \$204 million. That's pretty amazing, Mr. Chair, that in this day and age we can get that great service, and the price goes down. I betcha that doesn't happen across the way.

So I'm going to vote against this, Mr. Chairman. At this time I want to say to the minister and to the staff that as Government Services minister, as a new minister, we appreciate the work that you do each and every day, and we appreciate the dedication and commitment you have to your minister as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As we go through Committee of Supply year after year, we have amendments come forward. Normally, those amendments seem to be aimed at standing policy committees. This one is not, but the usual amendment that comes forward tries to eliminate a mechanism by which the people, through their elected representatives, can have input into the policy process of government. And the excuse for trying to do that is to say: well, not all members of the Legislature get to participate, and therefore it's not appropriate to have that committee. It usually says that the Legislature's funds should not be used in that way. Of course, the appropriate answer is that it's not Legislature funds; it's government funds, it's developing government policy, and it's involving private members of the Legislature, indeed, on the government side of the House in developing that policy.

This amendment is a slightly different tack on the same thing. It's trying to suggest that we should take away the elected participation, the elected oversight of important government and public policy functions by removing a minister, by removing the minister's office from the equation. The only way one could justify that type of an amendment would be to say that it's more important to have bureaucratic oversight of government and public policy functions than it is to have elected oversight, and that surely cannot be what the hon. member wants to accomplish.

Now, no insult intended, of course, to the bureaucratic oversight. You need to have a good bureaucracy to carry out public policy, and you need to have good senior civil servants to bring forward all the policy options for decision. But surely in this House the hon.

member would not suggest that we should take away the elected oversight, the representatives of the people, in the policy development process and the governance process. This amendment proposes to do exactly that and therefore, Mr. Chairman, cannot be supported.

4:20

Mr. Martin: I'm pleased that my amendment got so much action over on the other side, Mr. Chairman. The purpose is simply this: the Legislature controls the purse strings. [A cellphone rang] Tell them I'll call them later.

The Legislature controls the purse strings, and this is estimates, and if the Legislature voted here today – again, I'm not going to hold my breath – that this should happen, it would happen. It's not taking the rights away from anybody. This is the budgetary estimates, plain and simple, and the Legislature supposedly controls the purse strings. The budget has to be passed here. That's the reality of the Legislature. That's all we're asking. We're trying to send a message that government's got too big, too bureaucratic. We're asking the government to take a look at a department that should be working itself out of business. If all of a sudden the government here in the Legislature voted to do this, the Legislature has the power to do that. So I don't really understand the argument from the former House leader, but I'm sure he'll take the time to explain it to me at another time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, did you want to still speak on the amendment?

Mr. Ouellette: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I agree a hundred per cent with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I don't know how they can go about looking at a government estimate and just pull out 1.0.1, which is actually just the minister's office. So at one point he's saying that, you know, we can't have all this bureaucratic control – we've got to get rid of bureaucrats; we've got to get a smaller government – yet at the next moment he's saying: well, we're just getting rid of the minister's office, but the rest of the budget will pass.

So I guess that I should tell him again how much work our department has done and what we have done and what's important to this government. I'm just going to tell you some of the efficiencies that we do and what we have done. We've done huge volume purchases of computer equipment and have saved tons of dough for government through enterprise agreements across the government of Alberta for software licensing and technology. We've reduced the cost of maintenance of Microsoft products for the government by \$500,000 a year. Just by optimizing our cellphone plans across government, we've saved \$970,000 a year. We negotiated a new procurement card for over 4,500 government users, with an estimated savings of \$1.8 million a year. It goes on and on and on, yet you don't even recognize anything we do. So I don't know if it's really important to carry on debating with you or not.

The Deputy Chair: Does any other member wish to participate in the debate on the amendment before us? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Martin: I'll be very brief. Just on the point that the minister made: it's a wonder how they ever got all those things done that they talked about when they had 17 cabinet ministers. Mr. Chairman, the point of the figures: it's what we could do. If I had my way, I would say that the whole department goes, and it would be moved into

other departments. This is what we can do legally through Parliamentary Counsel. To the hon. minister, that was advice that we were given.

Mr. Chase: Just simply if we could call the question so we can continue with the debate and discussion.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, I'm listening to this debate, and I have to wade in if only briefly. I haven't heard the hon. member who moved this amendment come forward with a single coherent policy idea about how that ministry should be restructured or reduced other than frivolously pulling a number which includes the minister's office out of the air, really the legislative equivalent of the government suggesting that maybe we should reduce or eliminate the funding for opposition leaders. It makes no sense. It adds no useful weight to this debate that we're having. I, for one, wouldn't mind getting back to discussing the business plan, which is something of interest. We are wasting the precious time that we have this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Does anybody else wish to participate in the debate on the amendment before us?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We're ready for the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back to the estimates. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciated the opportunity in Public Accounts this past Wednesday to speak directly with the minister. That has allowed me to cut down on the series of questions I will be asking today.

The Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, or as we lovingly refer to it, RAGE for short, was formed from a combination of Government Services and Innovation and Science. Were these ministry staff reduced accordingly, or is this just another government make-work project? This is a question I had asked seriously this last Wednesday, but I was unable to get an answer. With more ministers here possibly they can indicate to what extent their two departments were reduced.

This ministry became ministry 24. When our current Premier became leader of the Conservative Party, he stated that he was opposed to big government, yet under his reign ministries have increased from 17 to 24. Of course, the obvious rhetorical question is: is this efficient?

The primary justification or cause célèbre of this ministry has been the SuperNet and creating economic efficiencies by bulk buying. I do not deny that these two things have occurred, but my question is: was it necessary to create a separate ministry to achieve these two goals?

If a new ministry was absolutely necessary, the ministry I would have preferred to have seen created would have been the ministry of arts and culture as this is an area that is currently undervalued in this province.

While the Auditor General noted satisfactory performance for most areas of this ministry, an area where Restructuring, or RAGE, fell sadly short was in the area of performance measures. On page

284 of the Auditor General's report he makes recommendation 37, and he notes that he's again making this recommendation.

We again recommend that the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency:

- clearly define its performance measures and targets, and
- develop systems to monitor and report results.

The Auditor General goes on to relate past history of the department in his recommendations. Then he suggests:

Criteria: the standards we used for our audit

The Ministry should:

1. clearly define its performance measures and targets and link them to the core businesses and goals of the Ministry.
2. have adequate control systems to ensure that performance information is reliable.
3. report performance results in relation to the business plan.

The Auditor General indicates:

The Ministry made unsatisfactory progress improving its performance measurement systems. The Ministry did not clearly define the performance measures and methodologies for six measures included in the draft Ministry's 2004-2005 Annual Report. The Ministry is also still developing the systems to monitor and report results for one of these measures.

Now, the Auditor General, without going into the whole business, has indicated that

as the methodology for the performance measures noted above was not clearly defined, this review process did not identify the problems with the data for these measures. As a result, these measures required restatement in the draft Annual Report and the results for three measures were zero.

My concern very briefly, without going further into the Auditor General's report, is that this ministry – what I find troubling is that if this ministry has experienced difficulty setting and evaluating its own performance measures, how can it then evaluate the efficiency of the 23 other ministries? This is very troubling. As a school-teacher I had my students set objectives, and part of the setting of objectives was evaluating how they would know that these objectives had been realized.

4:30

Another concern I have is that this government is notorious for contracting out work to external consultants/friends who frequently only provide lip service or oral advice. I would hope that this ministry would have the internal efficiency. What I'm suggesting is that instead of expensive outsourcing, should this ministry dedicated to improving efficiency not contain within its own staff the qualified individuals necessary to provide the information internally if the ministries, the other 23, for some unexplainable reason lack their own expertise? We have thousands and thousands of people employed by the government. It always causes me concern that we have to keep outsourcing. What are we paying the individuals within our system for if they don't have sufficient experience?

Another concern I have is interministry communication. I would like to think that this ministry was something that you sort of attached to the other ministries and that by that attachment the evaluations and improvements of efficiency would be readily noted, but to me the ministry itself is still trying to internally develop its own efficiencies.

[Mr. Lindsay in the chair]

My experience in the field while operating Cataract Creek on the southeast border of K Country was that there was a lack of communication between Sustainable Resources and the parks and protected areas. For example, conflicting information was supplied during the fire in the Crownsnest Pass in 2003 as to fire bans, backcountry

access, et cetera. The communication problem was further complicated by forestry during the process of fighting the fire using the same frequency as parks used to contact conservation officers. I'm wondering: is it within the expectation or role of your department to try to improve interdepartmental communications efficiency? I would hope that somehow you could get the departments talking to each other, thus improving their own internal efficiency and the output of their departments.

During Public Accounts last week I asked what role, if any, you had with parks and protected areas online registering, which has been an ongoing problem for campers. Does your department advise other ministries with regard to improving their electronic communications efficiency? I see your department as being responsible for the SuperNet, and the SuperNet is the king of electronic efficiencies, so I'm hoping that you can use your ability with the SuperNet to improve internal and external communications.

Is there a plan to improve the quality and security of Alberta health cards? You were talking about an identity card. Last year we noted that there were over 5 million cards in circulation for an Alberta population of approximately 3 million. I'm just wondering: instead of a separate ID card is it possible to potentially just do this as a health card, or at least could we improve the status of our current health card so that it is less likely to be abused and could be reliably produced as a qualified piece of identity?

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, just quickly on those cards. I don't think I need to go through the whole gamut on our employee cards, is what I'm talking here, again. On our health cards, actually, the hon. Minister of Government Services is working on that situation. I mean, we wouldn't want our identification cards for the Alberta government to be used as everybody's health card.

I think maybe I will talk a little bit and answer your question. I mean, I've answered this question for you in Public Accounts. I've got to come clean. You know, the Auditor General said that we did a very poor job on our performance measures. I agree that we have done a poor job on our performance measures, but over the past year Restructuring and Government Efficiency has done significant work on improving performance measures and associated performance measurement tracking and recording systems.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We could not have realized this great progress without the assistance and support of the office of the Auditor General. At the request of the ministry a preliminary evaluation of Restructuring and Government Efficiency's '06-09 performance measures was completed by the office of the Auditor General in November of '05. As a result of this review, we have ensured that the new measures are in compliance with the office of the Auditor General's policies and recommendations and that critical success factors were identified and translated into meaningful performance measures and targets. The new measures are directly aligned to core businesses and, at the same time, accurately reflect key targets or milestones that Restructuring and Government Efficiency will accomplish over the next three fiscal years.

As part of Restructuring and Government Efficiency's commitment to continue to strengthen its performance measurement work, an internal quarterly reporting system was established and implemented within the ministry in 2005. This system allows for

monitoring progress on performance measures and ensuring that quarterly results presented are consistent with the stated methodology.

Another thing that I want to mention. As much as we've talked about SuperNet here and everything else, I still mustn't be explaining it just right or something. Really, the SuperNet is just a highway. All it is is an infrastructure. It's a highway that information travels over, but you still need an Internet service provider. You still need all the other applications to put on that highway, but that's all we built. So to say, "Should we be doing the online registering for parks?" it's not in our purview.

I guess that comes back to saying that I didn't bring up the name of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. I think we have a good staff, I think our staff does great work, and I think we've accomplished a lot in the year and a half that we've been here. However many numbers of ministries there are, that's strictly what the Premier wants and what the Premier believes he needs to do a great job for this province of Alberta, and we have a Premier that's done an unbelievable job in this province for the last 13 years or however long it has been. Over those years you would've realized that if he wouldn't have been doing such a good job, we wouldn't have such an abundance of people on this side of the House making the decisions that have to be made to do a good job for Albertans in this province.

To answer your P3 question, I'm not looking at P3s anywhere, but if you want to look at a really successful P3 and look at a P3 that didn't go over budget, that stayed on budget of what the government expected to pay, just look at SuperNet. There was a very, very successful P3.

Anyway, I'll get back to telling you that I didn't pick the name for the ministry or exactly what the ministry does, but I will say that we did some very, very good work within this ministry. We have found efficiencies, and we'll still look for efficiencies.

4:40

You know, one of the biggest things this ministry has come a long way on is shared services. Shared services is a strong efficiency, a way of the future. Other provinces are looking at it. The federal government has looked at it. B.C. and Ontario have incorporated shared services. They're looking at our lead because we're so far ahead of them on the good job that we're doing getting rid of redundancy and getting rid of silos and getting everyone working together. Do you know that it goes a lot further than just within our government? It covers all of the governments of Alberta. Because of things we've done, municipal governments are falling in line and doing it.

As you know, there is only one taxpayer. So if we can save, if systems of our procurement and stuff are taken up by Edmonton and Calgary and Red Deer and other places and we save them millions of dollars, we're saving Albertans millions of dollars, and that's what we're here for. We're here and all of you people are here for the same thing: to make life better for all Albertans.

I'm sure that when you decided to run for politics, even though you picked – well, no, you didn't. Because of the way your mind works, you're in the right party. But when you decided to run for politics, I'm sure that you decided to run because you wanted to do the best you could for the constituents and the communities in the areas you represent. That's what every single one of us in this House is here to do, and that's what I think of every day when I have meetings with my officials, when we're looking at finding efficiencies and making life better for Albertans. That's what I think about every time we have meetings with them and say: "What can we do better? How can we make it easier for Albertans to access or

interact with government on things they need? How can we make businesses thrive better in Alberta?" And it just goes on and on and on. I'm sure, hon. members over there, that you understand that much of what we're doing.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I must compliment the minister. I do appreciate his passion and the enthusiasm that he displays for his new portfolio, but I have to question the whole purpose of it then. I have to ask the question after our amendment and the debate: are you telling me that all of these people that were performing these good services didn't exist before this ministry? They could go back to where they came from. I think it was more efficient. That amendment had nothing to do with eliminating those people; it was putting them back where they were.

Your comment that you just made about the SuperNet and the P3. Was that contract even signed for any late penalties? There are many, many communities that waited an extra year for those things. I don't think it was a booming success. Some communities actually went ahead and hooked up because the promise and the delivery never came through on time, and therefore they went to it. So I think you need to do a little checking on how great that contract was and the service that came forward.

There are many areas that I want to cover. You've got two portfolios, it seems like, restructuring and efficiency. Both of them I have to question. I hope that we can get some more answers on what we've really done to restructure because it seems like all we've really done is thrown another cook into the kitchen. Now the question is: well, who's the head cook? What is going to be efficient? What are we going to do? I don't see it as an advancement but more of a problematic system on who really has the authority to say: "Is this going to be restructured? This isn't efficient." It just seems like all we've done is added a new level of bureaucracy inside this government that doesn't serve the interest of the people or the best dollar being spent for our taxes collected, I guess.

One of the areas I wanted to touch on in hoping to look at being more efficient – there are two things that you've talked about. One is the identification cards. I'm just wondering how much this ministry has participated with Health, the federal government, and also possibly with the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on the fact that we're having to deal with our closest neighbour by having proper ID to cross the border. It just seems like it would be more efficient if we were to look at that. The passport is very expensive and short-lived. Could we not be efficient and bring all of this together into one, a new ID card here in Alberta, good quality ones, that would have your health care number on it, that would have identification on it, that would be something to meet and talk with the U.S. officials to get through, and that would work as a second part along with your driver's licence? We're looking at efficiencies. That's very much what we're after here, and we're suffering.

I wonder if the minister was involved at all in the \$10 million that was spent on trying to identify all the Albertans to get out our prosperity cheques. It just seemed like that was a lot of money that was spent to make up a single list that has come and gone.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity brought up the problem with the health card. I'm not sure if his numbers, 5 million health cards for 3 million Albertans, were accurate. That's even worse than what I remembered. This is an area that we have to get a handle on, and I hope that you would step in and help the minister of health in coming up with an efficient and workable health care card. As I say, let's put these all together into one.

You've talked about the procurement and the savings that have happened with cellphones, software, paper, and all those areas, and that's good to see. We want to do that, but I still have to question whether we need a whole ministry or whether that couldn't have gone back to Government Services, where it was in the first place. It just seems, like I say, that we're just throwing another cook in there, and we're spoiling the brew in getting things done.

Another question, I guess, if you're doing the evaluation and the restructuring of government. Obviously, it seems that the idea of this government is that you're being more efficient. Do you need 60 ministers before we reach top efficiency, where everybody over there is overlooking and seeing that everything is getting done correctly? I'd like to know where you see the efficiency and what number we're going for – 30, 36? – before we're going to be efficient and be able to serve Albertans. It just seems like this proliferation of government and government services is never-ending and will expand for every new dollar of revenue that we get in.

The SuperNet, going back to that. I'm sorry for jumping back and forth. I'm like you: I've been writing notes as the discussion has gone on and forward. The SuperNet – and I'm hoping that you can change this for the communities where they're still struggling – has been very much handled like it has with many of the water co-ops in the province. They've said, "Okay, we're going to put this co-op in," yet they put a list in there on who is going to get it. I'm speaking about the municipal buildings, the library, the hospital, and those areas. There isn't even a thought, it seems like, on how that hub is going to be hooked up to help all Albertans.

I very much agree with the minister that the SuperNet is a super highway, and it's a great thing that all Albertans should have access to. You talked about that first mile/last mile, and I agree with you, but it seems like we built the highway, and we've gone out of our way to do it only to find out that there's a river there and we don't have a bridge to get across to the people on the other side. What was efficient about that? We need to figure out that last mile, and there should be more thought into that.

I wonder also if part of the problem is that we're lacking, Mr. Chairman, is that we need a minister of common sense. It seems like we've got so many things happening that we're losing the common sense on what the purpose is and what we're trying to do to be efficient here in the province. As I mentioned earlier on the amendment that was brought forward, is the purpose and the goal of this government to look after the people from cradle to grave, or are we here to help people to help themselves? It seems like the continual growth in this government and in the number of ministers that we have is truly frustrating to the people of Alberta, and I have to question and ask: are we looking at eliminating any of these ministries as we get efficient and bring them together?

4:50

The biggest question of all, I guess, is: does this minister have it in his mandate to go in to the other ministers, whether that's Health, Innovation and Science, Environment, wherever, to look at and evaluate their offices and say, "This isn't being efficient; this isn't being done"? It seems like the name isn't being included in the mandate of what they really should be doing, and it's just wrong. We need to be able to be more efficient. We need to restructure to a stronger, more equitable structure for the people across Alberta. I would hope that the minister would be looking at these areas and figuring out ways that we can utilize the tax dollars much more efficiently for Albertans. We should be able to do it.

The \$250 million – and I believe it's \$380,000 for the minister's office. It would perhaps be much better if we were to reduce many

of these different government positions and just have a per capita dividend to the various levels of government. They would be efficient in seeing where those dollars needed to be allocated, whether it's their library, whether it's their golf course, whether it's their health facility in their town that the government doesn't want to fund – there are just many areas – or perhaps even build a larger gymnasium in their various towns and communities across the province. We've got \$250 million going to government in restructuring, a hundred million dollars going to a rural initiative. There are just many areas where I have to question the efficiency of these things, and I'm looking forward to the minister's response.

Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Chairman, I guess maybe there are people that just never ever, ever listen to anything because it doesn't matter how many times you tell them something; they ask the same question over, or they come back with a completely different – I mean, there was nothing relevant that he's talked about to do with this ministry.

He's heard a number of times in this House – a number of times in this House – that I don't have the purview to go into other ministries. We work along beside them. We work in collaboration with them. We have experts in the procurement field, some of the only ones across Canada that are certified procurement people, that will help all the other ministries. That's why I just tried to tell you a minute ago that restructuring may be in my name, and it was there maybe to restructure all the stuff that was put into my ministry. We did restructure that. I think we've done a great job at that. I have staff that are moving along. We've made our management team a lot smaller.

It amazes me that the hon. Member for Taber-Cardston-Warner tries to say that the Alliance Party is a right-wing side. You listen to him talk, and he's so far left that it's unbelievable. Then you listen to him say, "Oh, how efficient can it be to put a hundred million dollars into rural Alberta?" He represents rural Albertans? Is that what he wants? Would all his constituents say: make sure you don't get any money for rural Alberta, for Cardston-Taber-Warner, because that's inefficient.

Mr. Hinman: You're going on a rage.

Mr. Ouellette: I have to act like you guys call me. What the heck. I want to be a star now just like the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Anyway, I will say that there's really not anything else I can talk to you about because it was all irrelevant, what you talked about, because it was nothing to do with my ministry other than the SuperNet. Really, you don't understand the SuperNet either. I've answered a million questions on that, and now you're late for dinner. You don't want to stick around and listen to the answers anyway, so we'll talk to you later.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, that last reference about people's presence or absence is not called for.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the chance to discuss the business plan for the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, and I'll try to be respectful in the hopes that the minister won't yell at me in his answer.

I think we've seen some good progress from this ministry so far, Mr. Chairman, but I also see that there's a lot of work ahead. I'd like to focus some questions on the SuperNet. SuperNet is one of

those projects where we've seen some initial success. Before the SuperNet we had lots of Albertans who were out of the information loop, as it were, in terms of high-speed connectivity. They were living, in effect, like information outsiders in their own province. Now we're live on SuperNet, and I see that it is at least starting to make a difference. A number of ISPs came on board to make that happen. But I also know that there are a couple of hundred communities in Alberta where there is no ISP. I'm wondering what the ministry is doing to make sure that those Albertans get access as well. So one of my questions is: what is the ministry doing to get more ISPs signed up or to encourage existing ones to widen their net, so to speak?

I'm also interested in SuperNet's internal function as a government network. I don't think this aspect has been given very much attention.

I'm most interested in the schools. Having a connection is one thing, but is this a practical and useful network for them? I understand that video conferencing has actually been a bit of a problem with the schools. The schools have the connections, but I'd like to know whether they can actually use it to video conference, or do they get tripped up because they are on different systems that don't talk to each other? It's not just a question of access; it's about compatibility. I'm wondering what the ministry is doing to ensure that schools can video conference with each other, not just in small regional pockets but across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ouellette: Actually, the SuperNet with schools has probably worked better so far than anywhere. Long before it was completed, there were two different areas that actually used the SuperNet on a pilot project. One was up in Fort Vermilion, and I had never been up to see that one or what they were doing. They had a fairly closed system there working on that one. I went and saw the one that was going on in Red Deer. I was there one day, actually, in Rocky Mountain House when they were teaching a class from Red Deer. This was a class of 30 or 25 kids. The teacher was in Red Deer. They had their Smart board. It was unbelievable. There was great decorum in the classroom. They could see everything that was going on in the Red Deer classroom, and the teacher could see all of the people in the classroom in Rocky Mountain House.

I understand that today we've had calls from a number of people. I went and spoke at a conference in Calgary, and there were a number of different school boards that came up and told me how great it was and how some of their rural schools would probably be saved now because they could offer more subjects without having a teacher on staff for that smaller rural school. So as far as schools I think that they will be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the SuperNet.

You were asking about ISPs. As you know, there are 27 major cities classed as our base network, which Bell manages and operates, and there are 402 extended-area network communities that have been contracted to Axia to supply. But things were happening so fast once we got the connection up. There are only so many ISPs that can come on stream at a time that they have time to put on there. Right now they're getting more and more start-up companies, ma-and-pa operations. Some of the bigger companies are moving into Alberta, actually, to take advantage of the SuperNet because now they have something that they can go out and compete on and expand the size of their business.

5:00

We never, ever as a government had in our policy to actually do that last mile. Our policy is to build the SuperNet. It was a great

vision by Dr. Taylor, who was minister at the time, and our Innovation and Science minister carried it on. I mean, it was a great, great vision. The vision was that we would connect these 429 communities, get the connections out to the schools and the hospitals and the libraries, and the rest of it would go on its own. If we'd seen that it wasn't going to develop fast enough, that that last mile didn't work, our plan was to build in strategies. We will still do that. We will build in strategies. We'll do whatever we have to do, but I believe that that last mile is developing very, very quickly.

We also have, which I haven't talked about yet, a requirement in our contract that six months after the SuperNet was complete, Bell would become a supplier of last resort. Our six months was up in April. So now Bell is working on that supplier of last resort situation. I know that our department has been negotiating with them on what different types of connections they use.

Another thing. We don't want to use government involvement to compete with any of these new companies that started up, with any of the private companies that are out there. So if Bell does supply as a supplier of last resort, and let's say that they have five or six customers that they're supplying, if one of the other ISPs moves into the area, Bell will give those customers up to that person. We're not going to allow them to compete against the private ISPs.

So right now we believe that the ISPs are developing at a good rate. As I said earlier, with the wireless technology that we had a year ago and with the type of technology that we had with satellite a year or so ago, I'm not so sure that we could have even reached every portion of Alberta. We thought we'd reach 86 or 87 per cent. Now we're thinking that at some point in time 100 per cent of Alberta will probably be able to be achieved. No matter where you're from or where you're located, somebody will supply a connection to you. It may be satellite; it may be whatever. The objective was to get all of the people in Alberta connected. That was the initiative and why the government went out there.

Every conference I've been to and no matter where I've been – when I was at the Microsoft conference in Washington, there were some people from the Brazilian school board there that were talking about how connected they were, that they were having virtual schools in Brazil. When I talked to the Microsoft people, they said: "You have to remember one thing. They may have that, but the quality, compared to what we have on the SuperNet, isn't anywhere near what we have." I think they taught something like 280,000 students over virtual learning.

So our big challenge – and that's a global challenge; it's right across Canada and in the U.S.: rural communities are depopulating, and urban ones are populating. It's a big challenge. I mean, if you lose a school, you're not going to get people moving to that community. In fact, people will move out of the community because they need that school. It's things like the SuperNet and stuff that will keep that school.

Did I get all your questions covered?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the work to bring these estimates to us and the minister's words that the goal is to create efficiencies across ministries and that regulatory reform is a highlight for '06-07. I also appreciate that you have an MLA steering committee to examine regulations and reform and lessen the impact of regulations on Albertans. Rules, hopefully, then won't unnecessarily burden Albertans.

I do see that there has been progress, but I think that there's much that needs to be done. As the name of the ministry implies, core business 2 is government efficiency. What steps are taken to actually assess and determine areas of potential efficiency? What

criteria or indicators does this ministry use to test if the government is in fact being efficient? I don't know what you do to actually determine efficiency.

I also want to say – and I know that I'm running out of time. We've heard a lot about the SuperNet. I want to of course also echo concerns about the lack of total connection yet. You've explained how that's all going, and I appreciate that, but please remember that technology may be wonderful, but it doesn't work without outstanding teachers making the effort to create good learning opportunities. Technology is just a tool for that.

I also wanted to ask why there are no capital investments in this year's budget. When you're talking about expanding that Internet service provision in rural areas, won't this require further capital investment? Should people and businesses waiting for Internet service in their community assume that no capital investment means no improvement to their service? I understand that you just explained this thing about Bell now, but I still have a question about the fact that we're not doing as well as you had hoped.

The other thing I wanted to ask is in regard to interdepartmental communication efficiency. As Children's Services critic I'm often talking with families, foster parents who often tell me that the paperwork is burdensome. The accreditation process that the department is working on is improving, but I still think that there are ways it could be simplified. It is burdensome for many of our daycare owners. Also, many of my families have children that require help or support from Children's Services, Health, PDD, and Education, and often these families find it discouraging and frustrating. Even as an MLA I sometimes find it confusing and frustrating because we have to go to all of these different departments. What is your role in helping create efficiency in that regard? Do you have a role in that? Is it included in your ministry? I see the interdepartmental communication efficiency as a concern, as mentioned by my colleague from Calgary-Varsity.

I think that's all the questions I'll ask for now. I won't repeat other questions.

Mr. Ouellette: I guess one answer to the question of do I have a role in all those other ministries is really no. But with that I want to add that as our regulatory review gets going – and this was always our plan – part of that and how I always explain regulatory review is that we want to make things better, whether it's for an individual Albertan or whether it's for businesses, and we want to make things easier on how they access government when they need to. And that's what you're talking about. Sometimes it's tough for certain types of constituents to access. Whether it's Children's Services, whether it's an AISH problem, whether it's a seniors' problem, whether it's a mental health problem, lots of these things happen to be in three or four different ministries to fix the one problem the person has. What we're trying to say is that our regulatory review plans on working on that as we get more into it. If it takes three ministries to do something or to permit something or to okay something, let's get those three ministries to let one of them be a lead and give them the criteria they need so that they only need an approval from one person to make things easier for government and make it easier for the Albertans that need that help from government. That's what we're going to try to work on, those particular items.

5:10

You know, I didn't write your questions down, and we're pretty well out of time, I think, but I will get you an answer to those questions. My mind's kind of swimming around here from the amount I've had all day and everywhere we went, so rather than just talk out that last minute or half a minute we have, I will actually respond to you in writing on those questions if that's okay with you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are just a couple of items that I wanted to talk on. It's my understanding that Restructuring and Government Efficiency provides common businesses and shared services that help all other ministries deliver effective and efficient programs and services to all Albertans. Some of what I know to be true is that Restructuring and Government Efficiency provides many tools and services to the provincial ministries and their agencies; for example, processing of invoices, pay and benefits, procurement, purchasing of goods and services, developing contract standards, sorting and delivering mail, printing and copying documents, providing technical support for computers, telephones and faxes, managing records, surplus sales, and building and fleet management. Can the minister expound on any of these other shared services that his department does for the rest of the government of Alberta?

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$255,139,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's been an electrifying afternoon of outstanding debate and informational

exchanges, and we've all learned enormously from that experience today. On that note I would move that the committee now rise and report the estimates of the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Restructuring and Government Efficiency: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$255,139,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of an amendment considered by Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour and the successes achieved today, I would move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening, at which time we would beg leave to resume in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 9, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/05/09

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Economic Development

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Gaming on behalf of the Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to move the estimates for the Ministry of Economic Development.

I don't think there's a person in the Assembly this evening that wouldn't be happier if the Member for Lethbridge-West, the Minister of Economic Development, could be here presenting his own estimates, and that certainly includes me. But between the first Acting Minister of Economic Development, who is the minister of agriculture, and myself we're pleased to do this on behalf of our colleague and happy to report that he's doing well and moving along after some of his health issues during the last few weeks.

There are several staff members with us this evening, and I'm just going to introduce a couple of them as opposed to all of them. We're fortunate tonight to be joined by Shelby MacLeod, the executive assistant to the Minister of Economic Development. The deputy minister, Rory Campbell, is with us as well as some others.

I am pleased to present the business plan for Alberta Economic Development and ask for your support for the next year of departmental activity. The business plan spells it out in detail, but in a nutshell the staff of the department bring together the people and information to create opportunity. Staff of Alberta Economic Development include economists, who know every nuance of trade data; marketers, who help you see that Alberta is the best place to visit and do business; policy analysts, who can tell you about cost competitiveness across the continent; engineers looking for ways to help industry create a competitive advantage; and trade officers, who help businesses to access international markets. They have a variety of jobs. They work in 11 regional offices across the province, headquarter offices in Edmonton and Calgary, and nine international offices around the world. Travel Alberta also has staff in Calgary, Ottawa, the U.S., and beyond.

These people share a vision. That vision is that Alberta is the best place to live, work, and do business. Their clients range from a millionaire investor in Europe to a Montana housewife planning a family holiday to a Medicine Hat graduate starting a business to a Manchester welder thinking about coming to work in Canada. In every case: people, information, and opportunity. The department helps investors understand that Alberta is not just a safe place to work and to park their money but a thriving place to grow it.

When a German investor was looking for ways to produce a new product for Europe, we were ready. Staff matched the German investor with an Alberta company, and the result is a food processing facility that can meet the European Union's strict food standards.

Last year the department hosted a tourism investment symposium, the first of its kind in the country. Communities had a chance to present their opportunities, the parcel of land zoned and ready to be a five-star resort or the pristine lakefront just waiting for camp-

ground facilities. This coming October a web component and even more promotional activity will make the symposium even bigger.

There are lots of opportunities to build, but Alberta already has a lot to see and do. Travel Alberta's goal is to encourage Albertans to see more of their province, encourage our neighbours to head down the highway, and encourage people from around the world to come and explore. With the implementation of the new tourism levy, Travel Alberta has significant new resources for marketing initiatives. Some other longer term projects are starting to see results.

This year Travel Alberta worked with industry partners to bring two new charter flights from Japan to Edmonton; 640 people came to see the northern lights. They visited Edmonton, then travelled north for nature's outdoor light show. In all, Japanese visitors accounted for 100,000 overnight visits last year, up from the year before and expected to grow this year.

In the coming years negotiations for China to grant approved destination status to Canada will proceed. This will open up a large new market, and we would want to be ready. The work has already begun. Travel agents are doing their research, and information products are being developed, all with an eye to attracting visitors as soon as the borders open.

In Germany a successful promotional campaign targeting women will continue with radio and television programming and the cleverwoman.de website. Cowboys in New York helped attract media attention for the province. They also helped attract potential visitors because the cowboys were in town. They were in New York for a travel trade show.

Closer to home Alberta Economic Development is working with more than 60 communities in southeastern Alberta to develop and market the Canadian badlands as this province's next must-see destination. An expanding website, new self-guided touring routes, and printed material will attract people to the communities, parks, and historic sites throughout this region east of highway 2, stretching from Stettler to the Montana border. New visitor information centres and displays in Walsh and Canmore will encourage our visitors to explore the Canadian badlands and beyond.

A new partnership with the federal government will also support people looking to build new tourism products. Alberta Economic Development partnered with Western Economic Diversification to fund a DVD presentation on the proposed Pipestone dinosaur museum in Grande Prairie, in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency I might add. This computer-generated tour of a proposed facility will be presented at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington and later used for fundraising for this new tourist attraction.

In Alberta's labour market priority people are workers: people to work in hotels and restaurants, people in the trades, people to manage projects, just about everybody. Economists expect an additional 400,000 jobs in Alberta in the years ahead with almost 300,000 people to fill them. Government is working to close that gap with a three-pronged response. The first step is to train Albertans, ensure that people graduate from school with the skills they need to do and get a job.

The second step is to ensure that Albertans who are underrepresented in the labour force – people with disabilities, young people, aboriginal people – get the chance to work.

Finally, the third step is to recruit workers to the province from beyond our borders. The department is taking the lead with this third step. The department administers a pilot program called the provincial nominee program. Employers identify skilled workers from other countries, and the province helps expedite the immigration process. More than 970 workers have come to Alberta through this program since its inception in 2002: an instructor at Vermilion's

firefighting school, health care professionals in both urban and rural communities, sausage makers, specialist engineers, and more. The department is improving the program and plans to bring another 500 workers and their families to the province this year. Many of these workers start out as temporary foreign workers and want to become permanent residents of our province, but 500 is a long way from the number of people needed.

The department facilitated industry and government involvement in a series of job fairs in Europe. There are nearly 3,600 jobs available from Alberta employers who participated in job fairs in the U.K. last month. Employers attended 25 seminars about recruiting foreign workers last year, and at each one they identified openings. We need to communicate with people who are thinking about moving to Canada and encourage them to choose Alberta over Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver.

That said, we will work closely with other departments to ensure that Albertans have the first chance at employment opportunities. Alberta has a strong workforce, but we need even more people to ensure continued economic growth. In nearly every sector of the economy what business needs is people. We're helping find them. As I said, Alberta Economic Development brings together people and information to create opportunity.

That's where the second element, information, comes in. AED is working with Alberta Energy and 19 energy companies to develop a conceptual business case for an integrated upgrader, refinery, and petrochemical plant in the province. The purpose was not for government to build the complex; it was to demonstrate the potential benefits of an integrated complex to process bitumen. Government believes that it's the right thing to do: Albertans making the most of their natural resources. We can sell \$1.30 polyethylene rather than 58-cent ethylene or 30-cent ethane or a few cents' worth of natural gas. That value-added activity creates jobs and income for Albertans. Alberta Economic Development is helping to make the case. Refining in Alberta is not just the right thing to do; it's a profitable thing to do.

8:10

Information also takes the form of identifying contracting opportunities. By compiling and sharing information about large and extra-large construction projects on the go, we help companies identify opportunities for work. We track the progress of more than \$133 billion in projects, which means that real estate agents, architects, builders, bankers, and plumbers can better understand their competitive position. Training providers can access demand for their graduates.

We can also help identify exporting opportunities. The heavy oil Alberta project is a great example of government and industry working together and collaboratively for the benefit of Alberta companies. The Canadian Heavy Oil Association is working closely with Alberta Economic Development, Alberta Energy, and the Alberta Energy Research Institute to market Alberta's heavy oil and oil sands expertise to the rest of the world.

Alberta companies have figured out ways to minimize the environmental footprint of development, how to use steam to make frozen bitumen come up a tube, how to drill in a crooked line, how to move sludge along a pipeline, and more. Other parts of the world face these problems, and we have the solutions to sell.

The heavy oil Alberta project is creating the first comprehensive guidebook and directory to promote Alberta's heavy oil technologies in the global marketplace. At more than 200 pages it features profiles on Alberta's heavy oil experience and homegrown technologies. It also includes a directory of nearly 2,000 industry players, including explorers and producers, processors and distributors,

service and supply companies, industry associations, academic and research institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. The directory will be distributed internationally.

Because of the heavy oil Alberta project, the Canadian Heavy Oil Association will partner with Alberta Economic Development for the first time at the Global Petroleum Show in Calgary this June. The GPS, Global Petroleum Show, is the world's largest oil and gas event.

Members of the Canadian Heavy Oil Association will be working with Alberta Economic Development to provide technical support and advice, to matchmake Alberta and international companies, including a panel session focusing on Alberta's heavy oil innovations and related opportunities in select international markets.

In November of 2006 Alberta Economic Development and the China National Petroleum Company will cohost the first-ever world heavy oil conference in Beijing, China. Senior industry representatives from the major heavy oil producing regions in the world will participate in the event. This event will include a business conference and technical seminars, networking events, and an exhibition. Nearly 100 domestic and international industry exhibitors will showcase the latest in heavy oil-specific technologies, products, and services. This event will be a unique opportunity for Alberta companies to promote and demonstrate their expertise to the world.

In this day and age, of course, information includes the Internet. The Alberta-Canada.com website promotes Alberta to the world. In 1999, when the site was first launched, 47 per cent of the visits were international visits. Last fiscal year the Internet site set a milestone with nearly 1.2 million visits, and of this total 70.5 per cent were international visits.

Information is also the starting point for planning vacations. People can click, call, or come in to get information about all there is to see and do in our wonderful province of Alberta. At the 1-800-Alberta call centre counsellors help people go further, stay longer, and try new things. Over the year ahead they will answer more inquiries and be open longer hours. On the Internet, travelalberta.com and its family of websites received 3 and a half million visits in 2005. That's a 60 per cent increase over 2004. In the months ahead Travel Alberta is looking to expand the information it provides in languages other than English to further encourage international visitors.

The busiest information centre in the province, in Canmore, will be upgraded with kiosks, Internet stations, and interpretive displays. Information can make holidays better, and it helps make business better. For example, it can make operations more efficient. Farr Canada manufactures and distributes hydraulic power tongs used in drilling on land and on off-shore rigs. They were working full tilt in Edmonton. They knew that there were more opportunities, but they weren't able to meet them. Staff from Alberta Economic Development's lean manufacturing unit helped them take a look at their operation.

Some pieces were travelling too far from warehouse to assembly, taking too much time and too much space. Equipment was not set up to encourage flow from one stage to another. The result: better organization freed up 4,000 square feet from warehousing and 4,800 square feet from work in progress. Now, the painting and heat treating can be done on site. Company reps say that the facility is cleaner and better organized, and staff morale is higher. Their next step: higher production from the same amount of space. It's an exciting journey for an Alberta company, and it began with information about lean manufacturing techniques. Information can also help make for better decisions. As I said, Alberta Economic Development brings together people and information to create opportunity.

What about the third element, opportunity? I think the whole

world considers Fort McMurray a synonym for opportunity, but there's more, a lot more. Growth from the oil sands is creating growth in Calgary and Edmonton. The TD Bank estimates that 60 per cent of the economic activity from the oil patch is outside Alberta. Alberta is much more than energy. The challenge is to ensure that we can use our strength and energy to create opportunity in other sectors.

For government, opportunities begin with agreements to work together. In May Alberta Economic Development is signing an agreement with the Northwest Territories Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment. We will look at opportunities that benefit both areas and look for ways to enhance trade and regional development.

Sometimes opportunity is a chance for industries to work together to solve their problems. For New Brunswick metal fabricators opportunity is a chance to partner with Alberta companies who are already at full capacity. For east-central Alberta businesses opportunity is a chance to move from neighbour to business partner. Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake is part of the community. It could also be an economic driver for that community. Economic Development staff are working with base staff and the local business community to identify local procurement opportunities. Maybe it's sandwiches for training exercises. Maybe it's contracts to fix equipment. We don't know yet, but we do know that there's an opportunity, and we are looking at it.

In the film sector opportunity looks like the landscapes portrayed in the film *Brokeback Mountain* or the buzz about Alberta created when Brad Pitt visited the Royal Tyrrell Museum. With the profile generated by movies Alberta has an opportunity to market its locations for both production and tourism. Opportunity looks like Kananaskis Country or Fort Macleod, which see more visitors now because people want to go where the movies were made. Opportunity looks like the old blue pickup truck used as a movie prop, which an enterprising Pincher Creek youth recently sold on eBay for about \$70,000. Pitt's latest film, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, was filmed in a number of communities last summer. It will be released shortly, and we have a plan to improve tourism through the awareness of Alberta.

Opportunity looks like a fancy, high-definition television because the Alberta Film Commission partnered with NAIT and SAIT and the federal government to provide industry training in what will be an American standard next year. The production world is changing, and Alberta crews are ready. More funding to the Alberta film development program is helping to ensure an even stronger industry in the future. The program was transferred to Economic Development from Community Development on April 1, and that budget is to increase by 10 per cent to \$14.8 million.

8:20

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, unfortunately the 20 minutes allocated to you have now elapsed, but you will have an opportunity to go back to your text.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to say, first off, that on behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus, we do wish the Minister of Economic Development, the Member for Lethbridge-West, a healthy and speedy recovery, and we look forward to his presence back on the bench.

Having said that, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak to the Ministry of Economic Development. On page 118 of the business plan, under Link to the Government of Alberta Strategic Business Plan, the first goal states: "Alberta will have a diversified

and prosperous economy." I think that's great. However, the Official Opposition does have a concern with this particular approach to diversifying the economy: the lack of planning for diversification in Alberta's economy and spending the current resource revenue. Simply put, we're in a boom time, and this government is doing very little to protect us from bust.

First of all, this Conservative government lacks a plan and vision to diversify Alberta's economy, particularly investing in the high-tech sector. Indeed, Albertans only need to watch the news to see that Alberta's high-tech sector is struggling. Back in April the chief executive officer in Calgary-based software developer Urban Dispatch publicly commented: it's distressing. He talks about how we are falling behind the have-not provinces when it comes to venture capital investment in the technology sector, and he goes on to say that companies are out there with products complementary to the energy industry, and they can't even get funding. He goes on to conclude: I don't have any evidence that the province is adhering to a philosophy of diversification; there is a lot of lip service paid, but it's almost like the previous oil bust never happened. His comments are concerning.

However, relying on one source for analysis of a struggling high-technology sector would not be prudent. As a result, the Official Opposition looked at a report on Alberta's technology sector published in a prestigious account of Ernst & Young. This report says that it found that 38 per cent of technology CEOs said that rising oil prices would have a negative impact on their sector and the solution was to leave Alberta. Ernst & Young's technology practice executive director stated that oil and gas is just too good right now and that people would rather spend money on drilling a hole than investing in a technology company; it makes some sense; if you look at where oil and gas prices are right now, you've got a pretty good, safe return on that investment, but technology is a higher risk play. So the chances of people investing in it are less, obviously.

Clearly, challenges face the high-tech sector, and this government is not capable of meeting them. Take, for example, the Minister of Innovation and Science's recent remarks on this problem. He's quoted as saying: you know, you have to look at this problem over a period of time, and there isn't just a single initiative that's going to suddenly be the breakthrough; it has to be a consistent, long-term approach, and we want to make sure that there is a good policy in place that lets companies establish themselves; the impetus has to come from them, but yes, there has to be some advantage to being there. Clearly, this government is lost since the government cannot develop a plan that diversifies Alberta's economy beyond oil and gas.

Perhaps the minister has heard some of the Liberal ideas that we would have to diversify the economy, specifically a couple of pre-election points, like implementing a 10 per cent provincial tax credit for eligible expenditures in scientific research and experimental development; implementing a 30 per cent provincial tax credit for investing in qualified early-stage, Alberta-based technology companies; as well as creating a \$150 million Alberta technology venture fund, funded jointly by industry, universities, and government to generate a venture capital industry in Alberta – it would not invest in individual businesses; rather, it would invest in several venture capital firms, who would then invest in business opportunities – fourthly, creating a provincial technology program to harmonize technology commercialization programs across the province; and introduce a stronger film and television tax credit for Alberta-owned and -controlled production companies that are credited to Alberta expenditures.

Some of the specific questions that I'd have with regard to these high-tech companies – it appears to be getting worse, but if this

government is actually serious about unleashing innovation, why doesn't it provide tax incentives for companies to invest in research and development? Technology start-ups are leaving Alberta for other jurisdictions which have friendlier research and development tax regimes and more access to venture capital. Why is this government allowing Alberta to fall behind other jurisdictions? We talk about becoming competitive, but we're still, you know, lagging behind when we talk about research and development. What activity steps is the ministry taking to increase access to venture capital in Alberta, and what plans are in the works currently? Does the ministry keep statistics on how many start-up firms leave Alberta for other jurisdictions with better access to venture capital? Do we monitor? Do we track as to how many leave and how many we attract?

On page 120, I believe chart 2, it shows that Alberta's innovation performance is far below the average of its global competitors. This is even more reason for the government to adapt the Alberta Liberals' economic development policies to be able to maintain and ensure that we attract more world-renowned companies.

I'm going to switch and talk about resource revenue, then, if I might. The provincial government is also failing to diversify Alberta's economy with regard to its bungling of the resource revenue well. As mentioned earlier, the boom we're in – it is just about obvious, you know, that there's nothing from the government that's going to protect us. They're not doing anything to shield us, perhaps, from a bust that may eventually be down the road.

There's no better time to invest in tomorrow than today. Unfortunately, instead of using Alberta's energy resources to diversify our economy, the government is spending it. For instance, in this Legislative Assembly the Conservative government will increase the amount of resource revenue for the annual spending to about \$5.3 billion from \$3.5 billion in 2004.

In short, not only is Alberta's economy reliant on the energy sector, but Alberta's social services are becoming reliant on the oil and gas production as well. If the prices of oil and gas drop, so will Alberta's economy and social programs, and that's quite unacceptable. Consequently, the government is failing to provide a sustainable, long-term plan for Albertans.

Some specific questions that might come out of that would be: what is the government doing to ensure that failing to save the annual portion of the resource revenues for future generations – you can talk about the investment in the heritage fund where you put a billion dollars in, but we realize that there is still a billion dollars being removed as well, so the net gain is absolutely zero. What is the government's plan for the economy when, potentially, oil and gas prices return to normal levels? Coal and forestry: are those the only options that we've got?

Why hasn't the government adopted the Liberal strategy for the surplus policy to protect Alberta's economy from the ups and downs. The policy, to refresh the minister's mind, is known as the Alberta legacy act. It would create permanent wealth out of the fleeting resource revenues by investing future surpluses in postsecondary education, the heritage savings trust fund, the restoration of the crumbling infrastructure, and the arts, culture, and humanities. Our policy would also commit 35 per cent of the future budget surpluses to an endowment fund for advanced education, uncapped and no strings attached. This plan would set innovation free as opposed to trying to tie up postsecondary more firmly to the apron strings of the government of the day currently.

Thirty-five per cent of the future surpluses would be streamed into the heritage savings trust fund to grow it rather than to simply satisfy it with day-to-day interest. We're going to make sure that it's prevented from eroding, similar to that of Norway and Alaska,

whose funds far exceed Alberta's. Twenty-five per cent would be put into the capital account to address the backlog of infrastructure projects in this province. We talk about being debt free; we're certainly not debt free with the amount of infrastructure debt that we do have. Five per cent would be invested in an endowment fund to support the contribution to the arts, humanities, and make Alberta society. If the minister would ponder these points and perhaps implement them, I think we'd be much better off when we do that part of it.

Let's talk about the role of sports and recreation as economic drivers as well. We just saw the benefits when we had the Olympics in Calgary many, many years ago, and then we had the track and field events here as well, one issue that's clearly not adequately addressed in any business plan that pertains to the quality of life. On one hand, Alberta's future has a strong economy. There's no denying that. On the other hand, if Alberta doesn't strive to be a great place to live, we're not going to be able to attract those great people to this great place.

For example, when the Official Opposition travelled to McMurray not long ago, one of a number of problems was the quality of life that people have. There aren't enough hockey rinks or arenas up there or parks. As a consequence, a number of new Albertans are asking difficult questions. Do I live in Alberta, continue to struggle in McMurray and maintain a solid family life – I mean, the high cost of living, lack of recreational services – or do I pack up, give up this way of life here, and move to the south or maybe back to where I came from in eastern Canada? Who knows? But a lot of these people are certainly questioning that: make the money now and leave for a better way of life. These are some of the real challenges facing the Alberta economy: the workers and quality of life. Unfortunately, the Department of Economic Development I don't think understands that particular concept.

8:30

In Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary we have vibrant cities, so much so in particular that the young talent want to live in Alberta and call it home. Studies show that young, talented knowledge workers are driving today's high-tech economy. They want to work in jurisdictions that are rich and diverse with a quality of life and a quality of place. What is the ministry doing to improve some of Alberta's quality of place to attract and retain young, knowledgeable workers? How is the ministry working with other ministries to ensure that such a goal is maybe even successful with cross-ministry initiatives?

Young workers want and value a strong, diverse economy with an arts scene as well as ample opportunities for sports and recreation. How is the ministry working with Community Development in order to be able to support Alberta's arts and recreation sector? If the minister hasn't contemplated that, why not acknowledge the strong role that arts and culture do play? Let's support them as the economic drivers that they are. As in the example of Edmonton: very strong within the arts and cultural scene, very much reliant and looked upon as a leader in Alberta for doing that.

Let's go on to film here for a minute. The minister talked about trying to improve some of the film industries with some of the recent successes that we've had. On page 124 it says that Economic Development "markets Alberta as an attractive destination for . . . film production." Well, we've seen some successes in the area with the recently released film *Brokeback Mountain*, and previous to that would be something like *Unforgiven* with Clint Eastwood. I mean, Alberta is definitely an attractive destination: the scenery, the mountains. But the Economic Development spokesman admits that in terms of funding Alberta film, Alberta will remain in the middle of the pack, which is unfortunate.

Interestingly, as mentioned earlier in my comments regarding this government's failure to properly diversify the economy, well-known film industry representative and stunt co-ordinator John Scott recently stated: "We've got to get our [Alberta] government to wake up and realize [that the film] business is something great we have to offer. This province has more than just gas and oil." He goes on to say: "While there's 30 pictures shooting in Vancouver at a time, we have maybe one or two in Alberta" at best. Times have to change here.

What is the ministry doing to attract other high-cost movies and use some of the local talent and expertise that is here and waiting to be involved? What is the ministry doing specific to Alberta's film industry to move it from the middle of the pack to an international leader? Why doesn't the ministry introduce stronger film and TV tax incentives? Why are there no performance measures related to film and television production in Alberta in the ministry's business plan; for example, the number of film and TV productions or the total dollar investment in film and television in Alberta, the total economic spinoffs from TV and/or film?

I don't know if we've ever had an idea as to how much money or revenue is generated by having a film shot in Alberta such as the last one, you know, on Jesse James, the one that's going to be coming out in the fall, or *Brokeback Mountain*, *Unforgiven*. What is the economic spinoff? Do we have an actual idea as to what the benefit is to the local economy? Could the minister provide myself with a chart showing, perhaps, how much film production in Alberta has increased or decreased over the last 15 years compared to that of British Columbia and other provinces that are big into the movie scene as well?

We'll talk about, perhaps, some of the Auditor General's recommendations. He's made no specific ones for Economic Development. However, he did point out that "the Deputy Minister of Executive Council [should] update Alberta public sector governance principles and guidance so that they are consistent with current good practices for recruiting, evaluating and training directors." What specific steps is Alberta Economic Development taking to ensure that its directors are thoroughly recruited and trained? Obviously, there would be benefit there to ensure that they are thoroughly trained, but I'm just making that particular point.

We can talk about trips because we're always promoting Alberta and Albertans' ways to not only the local Canadian market but the market abroad and internationally. On pages 117 and 118 of the business plan the ministry markets Alberta as an attractive destination for investment in trade. How does the ministry measure how successful national or international trade missions are? What are the benchmarks? How do we gauge how much we've spent and how much we're returning with regard to that particular trip? Does the ministry measure the increase in trade after a mission? At what level of increased trade does the minister consider these trade missions a success? A 5 per cent increase? A 10 per cent increase? Does the minister perform a cost-benefit analysis on the trip and amount of people going? Just some specifics.

I will go on to tourism. I've already touched on it, so I'd like to touch on it again. On page 129 of the business plan performance measure 8.a indicates that the total tourism revenue in 2004 was around \$5 billion. Now, that's huge. That's one of the leading industries here within Alberta. I think that's magnificent. I believe that at one point they did actually have a tourism ministry, but it was combined, obviously, here. How does this compare to levels years before? Obviously, we've had some scares with some of the economy, but I believe some of the specifics have been addressed. We're starting to see a drive coming back.

Again, it would be interesting to know: exactly how does it

compare to years previous? Over 10 or 15 years how much has tourism grown in Alberta, and specifically what are the hot spots that we're continuing to market and profile? Could the minister provide ourselves with a comparison to other provinces, such as perhaps Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, as to how they're doing with regard to tourism? How are the dollars measured, and are they up or down in comparable years? How do we stand with regard to those regions, to other areas?

Let's talk about some government issues directly related to budget on Economic Development. On page 122, line 1.0.2., the deputy minister's office is increasing from approximately \$383,000 to \$469,000. I'm not sure what the reasoning is for the increase here, but I'd certainly like to see an answer to that. I'm sure that all Albertans would. Considering that the mission of the Alberta government is to remain transparent and accountable to all Albertans, this should be pretty easy to come across.

Page 122, line 2.0.3. Export development is seeing an increase of approximately 11.3 per cent from the previous year. Can the minister provide more specific details as to that significant line item? What is the reasoning behind it? Specifically, where will the money be going to and what will it be addressing? What tangible results can Albertans expect from the increase? How will the success of this increase be measured?

Page 122, investment and industry development, line 2.0.5. Last year the budget for investment and industry development increased by about 25 per cent from the 2004-2005. This year the line item is increasing another 23 per cent. How exactly is this increase in funding to be used? In terms of funding for industry development, what industry gets the most support from government? How do we budget for industry development, help Alberta's film and television industry or our high-tech industries?

I'll just do a sideline because I see a card here on my desk to remind me to mention a specific point. It was Visit the Country and its various services and entrepreneurs out there. One in particular, Pottery by Heather, has to in fact import her clay for her pottery from California. I mean, there's an abundance here in Alberta, and I mentioned that. She said: "Absolutely. But you know what? It's more expensive. Considering that we have to bring it in from California, the difference in the dollar, the shipping and handling, it's still cheaper than being able to buy it through Medicine Hat or down in Lethbridge or southern Alberta, where there's an abundance of clay." Now, I find that quite sad that we can't even supply local people here with our own product because we're not competitive. That should be interesting as well.

Getting back to regional development here, line 2.0.7. This line item is increasing from \$4.6 million in 2004-2005 to about \$8.2 million in 2006-2007. Now, that's nearly doubling in two years. The obvious question is: exactly how is the increase in funding going to be used? How will the money be distributed to the various constituencies?

Still on page 122, on travel . . . [Mr. Bonko's speaking time expired]

8:40

Mr. Graydon: I'll just finish with my notes before I move on to the comments that have just been made by the member across the floor there. I'll repeat the last paragraph that I was reading because it was a very important one, which says that more funding to the Alberta film development program is helping to ensure an even stronger industry in the future. The program transferred to Economic Development from Community Development on April 1 and had its budget increased by 10 per cent to \$14.8 million.

In other sectors the government helps create opportunities by

taking a strategic look at Alberta's competitive advantages and finds a way to build on those advantages. Securing tomorrow's prosperity is a policy, the economic pillar of the government's 20-year plan. Alberta has identified a number of strong sectors which have the capacity to expand even further. By focusing on those sectors, we can help ensure that the economy grows in ways that create jobs and wealth for Albertans. Our future prosperity and economic diversity depend on our ability to move up the value chain towards products and services that have greater value for customers around the globe.

The energy sector drives our prosperity. To make all Alberta prosperous, we need to grow other sectors in step: agrifood, building products, information and communications technology, biotechnology, environmental technologies, and tourism. There's a good example of this in Innisfail. Johns Manville is a leading manufacturer/marketer of building products, operating manufacturing plants in Europe, Asia, and North America, including a facility in Innisfail. The Innisfail fibreglass insulation plant recently expanded operations because of Alberta's infrastructure, tax regime, link to key markets, and strong economy.

We recognize that everyone sees the strength of Alberta's economy today. The challenge is to ensure that we keep the economy strong tomorrow. That takes good people, good information, and lots of opportunity. Voting the \$102 million to support Alberta Economic Development will help meet that challenge.

To get on to some of the comments that were just made, we will have the staff respond in writing to questions about the estimates of the Department of Alberta Economic Development. But in his speech there I heard questions that would more appropriately be addressed to the Minister of Innovation and Science, the Minister of Advanced Education, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the Minister of Community Development, the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and the Minister of Finance, so we won't be answering those questions. I'm a little disappointed that I didn't hear any questions directed to the Minister of Gaming, but we'll overlook that oversight that he has made, and maybe he'll . . .

Mr. Bonko: I'm trying to get to everybody.

Mr. Graydon: Can't get everybody, right?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I feel left out.

Mr. Graydon: You do too? I'm sorry, Mr. Education Minister.

Near the end of your comments there you did get specific about some questions on the estimates of Economic Development, and I assure you that you will get the answers to those questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise with a great deal of interest to make some comments on the budget for the Ministry of Economic Development here this evening. First, I would like to say that both on a personal level and on behalf of the New Democrat caucus we wish a very speedy and healthy recovery for the Minister of Economic Development. On a personal note, from the time that I came to this House, the Minister of Economic Development and Member for Lethbridge-West has always been the most courteous and interesting and vivacious member amongst the government. I look forward to having him back here in the House so that I can debate him and joke with him and otherwise carry on, so let's hope that he comes back soon and that he is successful in his treatments.

The ministry that we're dealing with here this evening is interesting. The hon. member standing in this evening points out a very good point that, in fact, Economic Development does cross many boundaries of other ministries that we have. When we're looking for the synergy that is possible through Economic Development, then certainly we can touch upon many other specific ministries and highlight them and perhaps use the Economic Development ministry as a way to speed up certain processes.

At the end of the day Economic Development is designed to help diversify our economy here in the province of Alberta, to help facilitate industry to make informed decisions about investment in our province, to increase growth and competitiveness, exports, increase development in regions.

Certainly, all ministries might be involved and, in fact, have a vested interest in what goes on in Economic Development, and my comments will indeed move across several of these ministries in terms of looking for constructive ways to diversify our economy here in the province of Alberta.

So I just want to make some brief comments, first of all in regard to the numbers. I was very pleased to see that there was an increase of over \$6 million, or 14.6 per cent, to the tourism funding part of this budget, which is great. I was certainly pushing hard for this last year. Tourism is one of those very pure sort of dollars that we can work toward bringing into the province. People bring it in, and you really do make the greatest return in profit if you have an established industry. Indeed, we do, but the potential for expansion is tremendous, tourism being the single greatest growth industry in the world today.

The funding for the Alberta film development program increased by 10 per cent last year, and again I applaud the ministry for choosing to focus on that sector of our economy. It seems as though we've had a number of successes in regard to the film industry, and certainly we do need to continue to move down that path.

The main issues that I want to just touch on this evening, Mr. Chairman, in regard to this budget are, number one, economic diversification; number two, balancing economic development with environmental protection; number three, the Alberta film and tourism industry; and, finally, an issue of fiscal responsibility.

I would like to begin, then, this evening speaking about diversification. Perhaps it's the result of a booming economy focused on a very few commodities, but in fact over the last dozen years or so our economy here in the province of Alberta has become less diverse and more focused on single sources or a very few, a handful of sources of economic activity. So while we're enjoying, perhaps, an unprecedented boom—I think that we're exceeding the numbers that we might have seen in the '70s or from even the postwar era by comparison—we find ourselves painted into a corner to some extent, Mr. Chairman, in regard to where our sources of income are coming from now and where they're coming from in the future.

I noticed with some interest that our Canadian dollar has been moving in very close step with our commodity windfall here in the province of Alberta. We've exceeded the 90-cent mark as a Canadian national currency, and commentators for a number of months now have been calling this a petrocurrency. I find this amusing in a way, but I also find it a bit a disconcerting because, of course, what happens when the currency rises very quickly is that many of the secondary, value-added, industrial parts of our economy, in fact, have a good deal greater difficulty exporting and attracting investment from outside of the province or even the country because the product becomes more expensive because of the rising Canadian dollar. So looking for economic diversification in the long-term, I'm a bit concerned that Economic Development has only chosen a few small areas to focus on. Certainly, we have

tremendous wealth and innovation and research capacity in regard to developing heavy oil projects and oil sands and the natural gas industry that we do have. We have a long history and a wealth of experience in those areas.

8:50

Of course, what I'm pushing towards and looking to is diversifying our economy in regards to nonhydrocarbon-based energy production. There is a tremendous opportunity, when different technologies become affordable, to bring them online and to bring them into production. This is where the private sector will be less likely to move at this juncture because, of course, there's so much money to be made on oil and gas. So my analogy of perhaps thinking of Dawson City during the gold rush two centuries ago in the 1890s in the Yukon, I think, would be a fair analogy to make because, of course, people travelled thousands of miles to the Yukon to the gold rush, and they weren't there to necessarily wash dishes or make soap or fry eggs or what have you. Everybody was there to make their fortune in gold. We have a similar situation here now, where the money goes where the greatest return is to be had, and that's in the oil and gas sector.

I guess I'm suggesting that it's incumbent upon the government, which is this House and the government across the way, at this point to make choices about diversification ahead of where the market is going because, of course, if we put all of our eggs in one basket, then the future is less stable for our economy into the far-reaching future. There are a number of alternative technologies that are financially viable at this time, but they need that investment to get them started.

For example, just a simple act of investing in people's homes to make them more energy efficient is a remarkably good idea and has the potential to carry us over the inevitable downturn in the economy that follows a boom because, of course, when you're making capital investment in people's homes and in industries and in physical plants to retrofit these facilities to make them more energy efficient, you're employing a wide range of trades and skills that otherwise might be lying fallow in the times of an economic downturn. If we can start to do this and set up this process now through the next five, 10, or even 20 years, we will establish an ongoing industry which will carry us through and provide stability for trades, provide actual capital increase in value in people's homes and in businesses, and most importantly we will be heading down the road of conservation, which is the number one way by which to achieve energy security and prosperity in the near- and long-term future, not just here in Alberta but around the world.

Sometimes we get caught up in the glamour, perhaps, of certain high technologies. I don't want to somehow minimize the value of high technology and research because it certainly does a lot for humankind, but the implementation of certain practical technologies can serve us well and economically, and generally I think that is what I'm trying to suggest that we do focus on. Look at the development of the efficiency and the affordability of photovoltaic cells, the solar panels that we've seen around. They've been around for many, many years, but now suddenly they've become very affordable, and they've also become much more efficient than ever before. So for us to perhaps focus Economic Development on solar energy in this province, of which there's no shortage, perhaps save for the last couple of days, would be very wise to be making an investment in that economic development for the future.

The same with wind energy. We have made some strides in regard to wind energy in this province, but we seem to have hit a bit of a ceiling. It seems to be a very artificial ceiling, and the ceiling is being sort of presented there as just a prime target for economic development initiatives to break through. I would suggest, Mr.

Chairman, that in regard to actually building the physical turbines that we use to develop a field of wind turbines, to actually build the structures here in the province would be a wonderful investment – most of them come from Europe otherwise now – and also encouraging a grid network that can move the wind energy in a more reasonable way throughout different parts of the province where it's windiest, I suppose, allowing us to increase our capacity to in fact rely on wind energy. Once we build those things, once we invest economically in those sorts of structures, then they're there for a long time, and we realize the profits for a very long time as well, similar to investments that different provinces made in the hydro parts of producing electricity in eastern Canada.

So there's a whole range of ways by which we could encourage economic development in a very reasonable way, I suppose. I would encourage that we do in fact do that in the near- and middle- and long-term future here in the province.

My next set of comments, I guess, in regard to both film and tourism is a concern that I have – and I know that it's just something that we're on the cusp of now, but I can see a greater problem in the immediate future – and that is the rapid environmental degradation of certain areas in our province. When we look at them, they're sort of irreversible and lead to the province, or certain areas, being less attractive to tourist development.

Let's use for the purposes of an example the eastern slopes of our Rockies. While it's certainly some of the most spectacular scenery in the world, Mr. Chairman, I think that there's so much activity in regards to the oil and gas industry and forestry and different types of economic development in these areas that we have to stop and think: what we would want the eastern slopes to look like in the next 20 or 30 years? We know that that's a prime place for tourist development, and it's a prime place for the film industry to sell the province. Whenever you see the promotional activity or certain films that are very successful – people are talking about these cowboy films, but I remember back a few years ago, 20 years ago or so, you know, there was a large Japanese film interest, again, in the eastern slopes of the Rockies. They were making these epic Japanese films there because of the unbelievable beauty that we see on the eastern slopes.

Are we planning to ensure that the future integrity of these places is going to remain so that we can sell it as a tourist attraction and as a film destination, or are we going to compromise that through the, sort of, degradation of these places through energy extraction and forestry? We have to just be careful about that. I'm certainly not saying that it has entirely happened already, but it's a balance that we have to be aware of.

Talking about diversity, I know that we've spent a fair bit of money and effort in regard to high technology, but what I'm seeing from a number of different high-tech sectors is that it seems to be an industry that is in jeopardy. There are some specific complaints coming from different sectors saying that while energy companies seem to have the ear of the government, the different start-up companies in terms of biotechnology and nanotechnology and electronics are having a hard time.

9:00

My concern, Mr. Chairman, is that these industries are very mobile. Cities or certain parts of the world that set up a critical mass of these sorts of things are usually more likely to be able to nurture and develop these industries along. So it's very important that we invest now in our capacity to produce not only research and tax support for high-tech companies but also to produce a culture of learning that will produce these scientists and entrepreneurs homegrown here in the province. Because, of course, if they are homegrown, they're much more likely to stay in the province of

Alberta rather than move to other world global centres of biotech or such things like that. It is incumbent upon us in the short term to give tax incentives and tax breaks to high-technology companies so that they can maintain what they have built over the last few years, but then in the long term to invest heavily in our postsecondary institutions and allow for pure research so that we are producing these talents homegrown, where they're more likely to stay. I think that's important.

Just on that same note of building sort of a critical mass for people to be attracted to stay in our urban centres, I think it's important in terms of economic development to encourage specifically development of our arts communities. I know you'll say that it's outside of your ministry, but we can use economic development to target something we want to grow very quickly – right? – sort of like fast-tracking a certain concept through the budget process. I think our arts community is just crying out across the province for proper investment and funding so that we create a world-class arts scene. That is part of creating that critical mass that makes a city into a great city, a world city, and makes other communities into places that are more likely to attract and keep immigrants in our province.

We have no shortage of people coming here to work, but it's so often this short-term, make a quick buck in Alberta's oil patch kind of phenomenon that we're seeing again. While, certainly, there's nothing wrong with that – we need to have lots of workers coming here – we also need immigrants that are going to stay. The shortage of workers that we have in the province is critical, and I would suggest that it's partly critical because Economic Development needs to focus more on people not just coming to work for a few months but people who are going to stay here for a long time, you know, perhaps the rest of their lives, and raise a family.

It is, I think, incumbent upon Economic Development to do this, working with immigration, working in liaison with the feds to create a circumstance by which people are not just being brought in here. I guess the most crass example of that is this temporary foreign worker thing, which seems to be the antithesis of any real economic development because you are bringing these people in for a very short period of time to build a certain structure, let's say. But, you know, in regard to building a larger social fabric that we can be proud of and otherwise populating the province, because we do need people in a raw sort of way, it seems to be going completely against that. So I do have a problem with that.

Thanks a lot for the opportunity to make some comments.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure to rise and participate in the estimates of Alberta Economic Development. Political democracy without economic democracy is a myth. This is all we are talking about if we don't have economic development. We talk about democracy in some other aspects. I mean, that's not as important as the development in Alberta first.

I have a few questions from the business plan. Page 122: Travel Alberta Secretariat, line 3.0.1, is increasing by 47 per cent. Can the minister provide some more details for this significant budgetary increase? What are the reasons behind it? Where specifically will the money go, and what tangible result can Albertans expect to see from this increase? How will the success of this increase be measured?

Page 122, the same page, line 3.0.4: the in-Alberta/regional marketing budget is up 99 per cent from two years ago. Can the minister comment on this increase? If the increase pertains to the hotel levy, is this increased spending from the 1 per cent hotel tax now being collected by the industry?

The next page, 123, line 4.0.5: the budget for emerging opportunities is down 23 per cent from last year. What is the cause for this decrease, and what kinds of industries or businesses will the decrease affect on this one? Shouldn't the Ministry of Economic Development be seeking emerging opportunities, not turning away from them? This decrease is disappointing and exhibits a lack of economic leadership in this government's plan.

Mr. Chairman, I met delegates from my constituency the other day. They asked me lots of questions, mainly about diversifying the economy. We all know that this government doesn't have a surplus policy and that they are spending money like drunken sailors. Without a policy, I mean, what can we tell our children and grandchildren about the royalties we've received in the last 14 years? This is a big question, and I haven't heard anything from the government so far. If they have a plan, I would love to see it and pass it on to my constituents. They are worried. They keep on asking this question, and I have seen many articles in the papers about this one.

Next I move to the film industry and tourism. Alberta is a beautiful place. I mean, we have the Rocky Mountains, beautiful scenery and lakes. How come other provinces like B.C. and Ontario get more business? I know that a couple of film industries, Bollywood or Hollywood – I think two years ago the Minister of Education and the Premier visited the film industry in India. Most of the producers there are interested in making movies in Alberta, but they don't get incentives.

Are you guys listening? [interjection] Okay. Thank you.

Lots of producers in India and China are interested in making movies here, but they are attracted to Toronto or Vancouver because their provincial governments give them incentives to make movies or documentaries. I just want to ask the minister responsible what strategies they are making to encourage more producers for film industries or more tourists, to attract them to Alberta. This is a big industry, and we should not be totally dependent on our resources. Resources will last, say, maybe for 25 years. First of all, we should, you know, have long-term, sustainable policies on how we can diversify the economy and how we can plan for the future film industry or future tourist attractions for generations to come.

9:10

The next one I want to ask about is skill shortages. I saw it in the business plan, the goals and strategies of this department. I've heard of the PNP program. Could the minister give us some details of what progress has so far been made on the provincial nominee program and what other training programs we have for the future to increase skilled labour in Alberta? We should not be totally dependent on bringing some people from foreign countries. We still have lots of skills maybe outside of Alberta, and we should approach them. If they are attracted to Alberta somehow, at least we could reduce the rate of unemployment in Canada as a whole. We should concentrate on a training program in Alberta. This is very important for our children because time is running out, and we still have skill shortages, and it's not good news. I mean, we can make development on the economic side.

Now I'll move to international policy development. I have heard that some ministers travel outside Alberta, and they try their best to increase exports from Alberta. I want to know how much progress so far has been made for exports from Alberta in goods and services. It's very important for Alberta development. This business plan has the goals but not specifically the details of what so far has been done in this sector.

Investment in Alberta is another issue. I would like to know how much effort and how much progress has been made to attract some

more investment to Alberta from other provinces in Canada as well as from other countries so far.

I know that some other speakers covered lots of other areas. On the small-business side of economic development, I think that this sector suffered a lot in the last 10 or 12 years. I had the opportunity to meet some people with small businesses, and they are still waiting for some initiative by this government so that they can recover the losses they had in the last 10 to 12 years during recession times, and they are suffering.

I want to mention two industries. The first one is the fibreglass industry. A couple of days ago the Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned this in the Chamber. He raised the question about that industry. They are losing millions of dollars because of a lack of supply of electricity. I mean, if we have the proper policy, if we have a task force looking after individual industries, I think, if we have efficient government, they should right away look into that matter and solve the problem so that they could recover their losses which they have suffered so far. This question has been raised and the media covered it all over Alberta. It's a very serious thing. If we have to develop the industries, we should look into it and help them as much as we can.

The next industry I want to talk about is the Alberta book publishing industry. I raised this question I think last session. I think that the former Minister of Community Development and now the Education minister knows that. This is the policy. I mean, I met with them last Friday. This industry has been struggling for the last eight years. "Alberta book publishers face an increasing economic disadvantage when competing with publishers in other provinces, due to higher levels of support received from other provincial governments, notably in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec" because they give them incentives. Alberta is the only province – you know, this industry is the pillar in the arts sector.

Mr. Backs: They're crying for a level playing field.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yeah.

They consist of artists. Now they have a plan: for three years a pilot program. They are only asking for \$15 million in three years' time if this formula works. After this three years they can right away increase output by 10 per cent. It's not bad. I mean, they are creating about 700 jobs, and very importantly it's the arts sector. The arts sector is already suffering for funds. They don't get enough funds, nor sufficient incentives. Lots of Alberta-based book publishing companies are forced to sell their business to the east, Ontario companies, due to the lack of provincial arts funding. This is very serious. We can afford that. They have the right plan.

I think a couple of days ago I discussed with the new Minister of Community Development. I will sit down with him and discuss this program. I think that if we help the industry like this, it will be beneficial not only for this reason, but it is beneficial for Alberta. When I asked this question of the Finance minister, she agreed that they have accomplished great things in Alberta. So if this industry has accomplished and they are creating revenue and they are creating some jobs, \$15 million for a three-year plan is not a bad idea. According to them, if they increased business 10 per cent the first year, after three years they will increase another 20 per cent. I mean, it's a good plan, and we should make some effort to help this industry. This is the plan. I'm going to show it to the Minister of Community Development.

9:20

The second reason, according to the book publisher, is that they didn't get a grant from the Alberta government for a long, long time.

They had to shut down the business. Then they moved because it always happens that the big fish eat the small fish. This is what happened with this industry. Some of them are definitely moving if the government doesn't support them. I want to see that industry stay in Alberta: the writers, authors. If we can afford it, we should keep everything Alberta makes. Not all books should come from Ontario or B.C. Why can't we keep them in this, our own province? They sacrificed during recession time, they struggled, and they are doing reasonably well.

Now, the fibreglass company, as I mentioned, is losing business because of the lack of supply of electricity. I mean, it's a small thing. Why doesn't the government consider their urgency and help them to progress in their business? What we need is an industry like this. There are a number of other industries who are struggling.

What we need is a long-term, sustainable policy for the future development of Alberta. Unfortunately, I haven't seen any surplus policy so far. The Liberals have their own surplus policy. Some of my colleagues have already mentioned many times that the government must have a surplus policy. They should have a savings policy. I'm glad that the government has been able to save \$1 billion for the heritage savings trust plan, which is good news, but . . .

Mr. R. Miller: But they took a billion out at the same time.

Mr. Agnihotri: A billion out, yeah.

Still, suppose that we received \$130 billion in royalties over the last 12 or 13 years. If we had a good plan, if we had a long-term plan, instead of giving \$400 cheques to the public, we could have given them a thousand dollars every year. But through the lack of government policies, it is not for us. I mean, it is the Alberta taxpayer losing it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the 20 minutes allocated has now run out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the budget estimates for Economic Development this evening. Certainly, I would like to echo comments that previous members of this House have made for the minister, and we can only wish him a speedy recovery in his illness and look forward to seeing him back in the Assembly and back active with his ministerial duties. We can only wish him the very best.

Now, I listened with interest to the hon. Minister of Gaming in his discussions and descriptions earlier in the debate. I can't help but bring this up, Mr. Chairman. The hon. minister was talking about Economic Development. Certainly, it caught my eye in this morning's paper, where there was an acquisition of property by Shell around, I think, the Seal area in the Peace River district. Shell plans to develop significant bitumen production facilities in that area of the province. In previous Economic Development debates we were talking about this and what the government was going to do.

I think the government should be commended for the twinning of the majority of the highway between Edmonton and Grande Prairie. I think that when you look at the Grande Prairie region, the Peace River district, and you compare it to the booming economy in Fort McMurray and the fact that now the road from Edmonton to Grande Prairie is twinned with the exception of a stretch around Mayerthorpe and also a stretch the other side of Valleyview that goes through the Sturgeon Lake First Nation, that has, in my view, been a significant economic contributor to the Peace River region.

What else is this government going to do to promote the economic development of the bitumen resources that are located around the Peace River district? I'm sure that there are plans. The previous Minister of Economic Development certainly nodded his head and thought it was a good idea to diversify some of our synthetic crude production, our bitumen production, from the Fort McMurray region further west. If the minister could give us an update on that, I would be grateful.

Also, you know, the previous Minister of Economic Development, Mr. Mark Norris, could use this road himself now if it was built to travel from the Peace River district across to Fort McMurray selling PC memberships for the leadership race. That road hopefully is in the planning stages, hon. minister, the road from Fort McMurray west across to the Peace River district. I don't know whether it would dip south to pick up the Wabasca community or whether it would go just straight across, but I think it's time that we looked at building an all-weather road from Fort McMurray straight west across to the Peace River district. I wonder if we could get an update on that proposal to see if it's in the planning stages.

Also, I think it would be to our economic advantage to consider constructing a road from the city of Edmonton across to Nordegg and maybe even go as far as the Saskatchewan River crossing. If the Minister of Economic Development or the department is considering any of this, I would be grateful to be updated at this time.

Now, certainly when we look at this budget and we go through the fiscal plan, there are some areas that we can improve. One only has to look at page 97 in the economic outlook, the Alberta farm product price index. We look at the percentage of changes that are going on there, Mr. Chairman. This is a chart that is titled Border Reopens to Cattle But Crops Struggle. That is certainly the truth. If we look at crops, there has been a significant decline of 22 per cent, and that's only in the year 2005.

9:30

Now, the U.S. border, Mr. Chairman, reopened to Canadian live cattle under the age of 30 months last July, allowing Alberta to export over 200,000 live cattle to the United States in the rest of the calendar year. Livestock prices have improved since the opening of the border but were down 10 per cent for 2005, the fourth consecutive annual decline. The previous year was 4 per cent, the year previous to that was 8 per cent, and in 2002 it was 5 per cent.

[Mr. Webber in the chair]

For the second year in a row poor harvesting weather affected the quality of crops in some parts of the province, raising inventory levels from two years of high crop production combined with reduced crop quality and a world oversupply of grain, causing prices to fall 22 per cent in 2005. So we certainly had some work to do to turn around our Alberta farm product price index. I would like to know what initiatives in co-operation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development the Minister of Economic Development is taking to reverse this rather dismal economic trend.

Also, Mr. Chairman, whenever we look at the economic outlook in the fiscal plan – if we look at page 99, we see Alberta – The Destination of Choice. Certainly, other hon. members have talked about this. It is worth noting one of the strategies that is discussed in the business plan for Economic Development – again, this is on page 119 – the significant opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Well, one of the challenges is providing skilled workers. Now, that's a significant challenge, and this narrow-focused, narrow-minded idea of importing temporary foreign workers is wrong. It is poorly thought out, and I think it is just pandering to

some special interest groups that are isolated even within the production of synthetic crude oil.

If we look at Alberta – The Destination of Choice, the net interprovincial migration to Alberta, we can go back 10 years if we wanted to, but when you look at the migration into this province and compare 1998 to what is occurring now, it is down significantly. In 1998 there were close to 45,000 people who came from other parts of Canada to Alberta. But we look even at last year. As reported in this chart, there were 16,615 Canadians moving to Alberta, so that's a significant reduction. I would like an explanation from the department as to why this has happened.

We are creating more and more jobs in this province, and you would think there would be more and more Canadians interested in settling down here to raise their families, but that doesn't look like it's occurring, certainly not like it was in 1998, 1999, even through to 2001. So what are we doing to increase migration from other parts of Canada to Alberta to meet our manpower needs, and why are we allowing the recruitment and the retention of temporary foreign workers? I use that word "retention" rather lightly.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I have a lot to cover here in the time that I have, and I want to spend some time on travel expenses because that's noteworthy. I may run out of time, so I think we'll get right to that.

I had a look, Mr. Chairman, through the *Alberta Gazette* at part of the last fiscal year for Economic Development. This is for amounts for hosting expenses over \$600. I would like to know what plans the department has for this budget year because as we look through this *Alberta Gazette*, Economic Development, certainly, was a very gracious host around the world and in this province. Now, we can travel through from Chicago, Illinois, to Tokyo to Seoul, South Korea. We can go back to Edmonton, Alberta, and it never seems to end with this department. I realize that we have to play the host on occasion and we have to meet with trade delegations and we have to meet with other foreign dignitaries and show them around the province and market our province and its people and its manufactured products – I'm not saying that – but what kind of control have we got on this?

Now, we look at the Korea/Alberta reception. Our "Premier spoke to Korean guests (government and business) on Alberta opportunities. To increase the awareness of Alberta to potential Korean investors." This dinner was over \$5,000.

We had another dinner here. This one was, I believe, in June 2004. The "Canadian Chamber of Commerce Annual Surf-and-Turf Gala Dinner (provided Alberta Beef for the dinner)." That's fine, I guess. At the height of the BSE crisis that was maybe a good thing to do.

We have another function here, this one in Mexico City. I must have missed something here because it looks like it's "Aboriginal Leaders' Roundtable on Tourism." That must be from the next line item.

Let's go on to China, and this is "Inbound European Union Organics Mission Luncheon and Dinner," \$1,500.

Here's one: a "British All Party Parliamentary Rail Group Reception." An all-party committee from Britain on railroads: well, that's novel. This was a \$3,300 hit to the taxpayers.

Here's another one in Economic Development, Mr. Chairman, for \$1,400, and it says: "Strategic Tourism Marketing Council (STMC) Meeting."

We have another one, a dinner to provide 40 delegates attending the Canadian Tourism Commission Research Committee meeting. That was for a round figure of \$1,600.

The "Canadian Chamber of Commerce Thanksgiving Gala

Dinner,” networking opportunities for Canadian and Mexican business leaders, \$1,100.

Here’s another one, “to provide an opportunity for Japanese businessmen and media to meet with the Alberta delegation to obtain further information on oil sands opportunities” – I wonder if they have ever heard of the Internet there – 2,700 bucks for this.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now, there are a lot here, and there are a lot of them in Mexico. Here’s another one: “Incoming Mexican Buyers Mission Dinner . . . to introduce Mexican buyers and guests to Alberta’s industry contacts with the purpose of facilitating trade and increasing awareness of the potential in the Mexican market,” \$941.

An Hon. Member: So you think that’s good or bad?

Mr. MacDonald: I would like details on this, hon. minister, before I could determine whether it was good or bad. Perhaps that’s a mission for the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

The “Opportunity for Undersecretary of Mexico, Juan Elivira Quesada, to meet with Alberta organizations” cost us \$800. Another lunch or a dinner with this gentleman around the same time cost \$700.

9:40

The “Alberta Catalogue Show”: we spent 1,500 bucks there.

The “Alberta Visitor Information Providers Conference” in Shanghai, China: I believe this cost us roughly 2,500 bucks.

Now, this is one that I would like an explanation on, and I would like to know in this budget year if we’re going to continue this practice: the “Alberta Korea Office Clients . . . Appreciation Night.” The purpose of this reception was

to thank Alberta’s key Korean clients and to provide an opportunity for Korean business organizations to meet with those who have established business relations with Alberta companies so as to encourage more South Korean investment in Alberta as well as increase Alberta trade into Korea.

This cost 6,500 bucks, and I bet the Koreans appreciated the taxpayers picking up this tab. I wonder if the minister could comment on whether appreciation nights like this are going to continue in this fiscal year.

The “Minister’s Mission to Germany.” Germany is a vital trading partner, there’s no doubt. This was a \$2,700 meeting.

Now, the “Minister’s Mission to the United Kingdom”: that was a \$9,000 tab.

I read about this in the *New York Times*: the “Hydrocarbon Upgrading Workshop” that happened in London, England. We spent 3,100 bucks there at a function, and then there was a follow-up meeting in Calgary. We’re a little closer to home. We spent \$1,000 less. We spent \$2,100.

The “Canadian Oil and Gas Business Development Mission to Mexico,” the annual 2005 trade show in Veracruz – is that by the ocean? – \$2,500 for that.

Another one, now, that I hope isn’t repeated, Mr. Chairman, in this fiscal year, but in February of 2005 at Veracruz, again in Mexico, the “Alberta Canada Maple Leaf Bakery Networking Reception.” The purpose of this \$4,000 bill was “to increase awareness of Alberta bakery capabilities, which would lead to increased sales in Japan.” Is that possible, that we would be having a function in Mexico to increase sales of baked goods to Japan? I’m finding that a little hard to believe, and I’m wondering if the computer didn’t mess it up somehow, printing off the *Alberta Gazette*. I don’t see the value of this. I really don’t. I’m sorry.

Now, the “Alberta Catalogue Show & Canola Seminar,” which occurred in one of China’s major cities, Guangzhou, \$3,300. Here’s another one in the same city for \$1,100.

It goes on and on and on. There are a couple of more pages of this, and my time is going to run out here.

But Travel Alberta, these outlook workshops, what kind of value are we getting for that? Are we seeing an increase in tourism here?

Mr. Graydon: Are they pork chops or workshops?

Mr. MacDonald: They’re workshops. But the ultimate objective of the workshop should be to enhance tourism opportunities because the whole thing started off in the city here, in the capital city, the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council meeting. If you add up all these catered functions or whatever, it’s a significant amount of money.

Then we took the show on the road, and we went to China. That cost us \$3,500 at a meeting of tourism industry operators. I would like to know who went on that, and did we send any representatives from the ski industry, the downhill ski industry in particular? Since the American dollar has increased in value, I understand that there are a lot less American skiing in the national parks. What are we doing to create another market?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I, too, would like to add my voice to those expressing their good wishes to the Minister of Economic Development. We hope he continues to do well in his recovery and look forward to seeing him back in the House as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman, on to the estimates as they are in front of us tonight. One of the frustrations that we in opposition often have is the difficulty in getting answers to our questions. Last week in this House when we had the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations speaking to his estimates, I asked him some questions on some information that came right out of that department’s fiscal plan. His answer was that those questions were really more relevant to the Ministry of Economic Development. I found that to be interesting given that they came out of his book, but nevertheless I did commit that I would ask those questions again tonight.

It has come to my attention that a lot of preliminary work has been done on the feasibility of establishing a trade office in the Middle East. As I mentioned, I was going through the annual report from the IIR ministry for the year ’04-05, and they have a result analysis in there on initiatives in the Asia/Pacific region, including China and Korea; initiatives in Europe, both in Germany and the Ukraine; and international governance offices in China, South Africa, Russia, and Mexico. But, Mr. Chairman, there was no reference to offices in the Middle East or North Africa.

That did cause me to wonder whether or not, in fact, we might not be missing some opportunities in the Middle East given the fact that Alberta is certainly recognized as a world leader in the oil and gas sector, in particular, but also in other areas. Given the amount of oil and gas activity that takes place in the Middle East and given the current world political climate in terms of the favourable manner in which Canada is looked upon as opposed to the United States by some of the countries in the Middle East, I thought that it was an appropriate question to ask.

So the specific questions that I asked last week and would like to

ask again today – and I understand that the Minister of Gaming is standing in tonight for the Minister of Economic Development and wouldn't necessarily have the answers to these questions at the ready, but I'm hoping that some of the staff that are up in the members' gallery tonight will be able to provide some written answers to some of these questions for me in the days ahead, preferably before the end of what would appear to be a soon-to-be-ending spring session, Mr. Chairman.

The particular questions, then, would be as follows. I would like to ask this minister or the ministry what exactly they are doing to actively pursue economic opportunities in the Middle East, particularly trade relations with Alberta's oil and gas sector. Also, when was the last time that the Alberta government ran an economic trade mission to the Middle East? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was just running through the list of visits to several countries. I'm not recollecting that he mentioned a trip to the Middle East.

Mr. MacDonald: No, I didn't. I didn't get that far.

Mr. R. Miller: I'm curious: when was the last time that we did that? Perhaps, if the member had not run out of time, we may have had the answer right there.

I'm also looking for an answer as to whether or not there is currently a plan in place to open a trade office in the Middle East. My understanding is that, in fact, the agriculture minister in the past has spoken out in favour of such an idea, not necessarily in favour for the Department of Economic Development. So I'm a little bit curious as to what might be happening there. So those are a few questions.

Then further to that, as I was doing some research on this, I noted that – well, I mentioned already the energy sector, but certainly agriculture I've just touched on. I do believe that there are other opportunities in terms of forestry, education and training, research and technology, communications, tourism – the minister talked about that – strategic alliances, and joint venture projects. Most of these countries in this area of the Middle East and North Africa import anywhere up to 90 per cent of their products and equipment, including labour, engineering, and other services. Several of those countries, in fact, are proceeding with privatization and market liberalization and diversification of their manufacturing sectors. Again, it's simply a question of whether or not we should perhaps be looking at spending some time, energy, and maybe even some dollars promoting further economic development and trade with that part of the world as opposed to concentrating on only some of the other countries that have been mentioned both in my comments tonight and by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

9:50

So I will leave that with the minister and the staff upstairs and would look forward very much, as I suggested, to receiving some response to that in the coming days so that we can have that in front of us before we deal with the appropriation bill in its entirety.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to build on some of the comments about questions from the *Alberta Gazette* from January 14, 2006, regarding some of the expenses noted by the Economic Development ministry. For the function of the "International Business Roundtable," which was a forum to provide information on Alberta Economic Development's strategies to the consular corps – now, they're a good bunch of fellows in Alberta –

and that looks to be the consular corps in Edmonton. That was \$2,191. I just wondered what sort of information was being provided to the consular corps and what sort of expenses were brought forward in that.

Another event was a function in Munich, Germany. It was "Tourism Services Spring . . . Training" for 2005 to provide some counsellor training, I guess. The amount of that was \$2,630.80. I just wondered: which were the people being trained, and what was the type of training that was provided? If we could get some detail on that.

Another is the "Tourism Services Regional . . . Training" for 2005, and that one went up for \$3,507.16 in Jasper. That looked like a nice one. I'd just like to see what that was all about: how many attendees, and what was the nature of the training that was provided? What was the purpose of this?

Another function was the monies given to the "Canadian Chamber of Commerce Annual Gala." The purpose of this was slated to be the opportunity to identify business and other things with Mexican decision-makers, and \$4,843.26 was supplied for that. I just wondered why so much money was given for that particular area.

Mexico seems to be a popular site sometimes. There's a function in Mexico City for the presentation "to market Alberta as a film location." \$8,211.94. That looks like a nice event, and I just wondered if we could have some details on what was brought forward in that particular meeting. What was the rationale behind having that?

Now, there is the "Travel Alberta Team Conference." The reason for this was to develop working relationships between various aspects of the government that deal with travel, and \$4,621.33 was spent on that. That's an interesting one. Why was this brought forward? It sounds like a good party. It lasted for two days in Red Deer.

Another was the reception in Alberta's Japan office that cost \$6,358.85 to the Alberta taxpayer. It was to "mark two significant milestones in Alberta-Japan relations." The 35th anniversary that it's been there, I guess. Spent some bucks on it. Good party.

Another dinner, for incoming buyers from Portland, Oregon, on September 22, 2005, where \$1,152.27 was spent to "capitalize on business opportunities." Well, that sounds like something pretty capital. I just wondered what that one was all about.

I'd like to mention a few things on some of the aspects of economic growth, which is really a core factor in the whole scope of economic development. One of the great things about economic growth, of course, is the access to capital. Many people in Alberta think that the access to capital is something that is really easy here, certainly in the oil and gas industry. We've had tremendous access to capital for the conventional oil and gas industry, as has been especially opened up in the oil sands in the last couple of years with \$60, \$70 oil and also with the original royalty structure that came in in the mid-90s in the federal/provincial agreement that encouraged the growth of the oil sands.

I remember that for a long time Syncrude Canada had a point looking at their North mine which was called Chrétien point. The federal and the provincial governments worked closely on establishing that, and I think that Anne McLellan was very instrumental in bringing that one forward. We've seen a lot of investment monies. Oil sands trusts have made the area of oil sands investment something of an investment salesman's dream. Capital has certainly been flowing into this important area of our economy. But we continue to be a difficult market for venture capital investment for areas other than oil and gas and related petrochemical ventures. We need to establish some way to encourage new venture capital.

One way that has seen some success in other provinces over many

years is the labour-sponsored venture capital funds. The beauty of these funds is that they provide capital for beginning ventures and also provide a tax break at the same time. I spoke some time ago with a nutraceutical entrepreneur who is set up in the mid-west U.S. because of the availability of venture capital in the mid-west states. If I look at chart 2 on page 120 of the business plan, venture capital as an innovation indicator is so far down that it is almost not on the chart. We also look at R and D intensity on that chart, which is also way below average, and certainly private-sector R and D intensity in Alberta is way below average and is something of a concern. If we were to factor out that R and D intensity on oil and gas, it would become – well, it is a matter of huge concern.

Talking about the nutraceutical entrepreneur, now, this guy is from Edmonton. He still remains a proud Albertan, lives in Alberta, and says that he would have located in Alberta if he would have had access to a fund, and he specifically named the labour-sponsored venture capital funds. It is sad that Alberta is one of the few areas that does not provide this tax break and does not move to grow a pool of venture capital in this way, that will grow business outside of the booming oil and gas areas.

We have to look to the future. This government has little or no interest in providing tax breaks for a lot of the workers and tradesmen building our province, building the major projects, working on the pipelines, working on the oil and gas, making some big bucks and paying the full tax rates, as they are right now. It would be nice to give them a tax break. They still are providing huge dollars in their taxes to the Alberta treasury. It would be nice to see if they could provide a little bit of venture capital for new businesses. They have moved to do so in a number of areas in the past in other provinces, and I think that it's incumbent upon this government to begin to look at that.

Another area, of course, is the development of our labour force. I see that the Economic Development department has looked to try and encourage . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(4), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration for a department's proposed estimates, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Economic Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$102,864,000

10:00

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report the estimates of the Ministry of Economic Development and beg leave to sit again at another time.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Economic Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$102,864,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head:

**Private Bills
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill Pr. 1

Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: I'd like to call the question, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill Pr. 2

Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw on behalf of the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the hon. Member for Red Deer-North I move that Bill Pr. 2 be amended. I think that has been circulated throughout the House.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member has moved an amendment, which we shall refer to as amendment A1. I believe the amendment has been circulated, and it is also being circulated as we speak. Does anybody wish to participate in the debate on the amendment that's before the floor?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

**Bill Pr. 3
Edmonton Community Foundation
Amendment Act, 2006**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege for me to rise tonight on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to initiate discussion on Private Bill Pr. 3, the Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act. To open the discussion, I would like to table an amendment that I believe has been circulated already.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, there is an amendment on the floor, which I believe has been circulated. Are there any comments, or does anybody wish to participate on the amendment that's before the floor? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you. Just very briefly, I'm wondering if the mover of the amendment might be able to share with us the reasons for the amendment rather than just presenting the amendment because, Mr. Chairman, you will be aware that not all members of this Assembly sit on the Private Bills Committee. In fact, some of us haven't had an opportunity to review the bills. I'm assuming that there's a logical reason for this, but I wouldn't mind a very brief explanation, if possible, as to the reason why this amendment has been brought forward.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, thank you, and thank you to the hon. member. I don't myself sit on the Private Bills Committee. My understanding of this amendment is that these are housekeeping items that arose as a result of the debates and the presentations in the Private Bills Committee. They were agreed to by the committee and by the Edmonton Community Foundation Act. I would remind the hon. member that this act only applies to that community foundation. It is not a public application.

Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Does anybody wish to participate in the debate on the bill as amended? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to make some very brief comments on the excellent presentation we had in regard to the Edmonton Community Foundation coming forward to present this private bill and the very good work that they do in our community. It's a remarkable foundation, and if there's any way by which we can ensure the smooth functioning and funding of this foundation through this Legislature, I would certainly be always in absolute favour.

The Edmonton Community Foundation administers a total of almost 400 separate charitable funds that extend not just through

Edmonton but throughout the province. They do innumerable good works for people in need and various philanthropic projects that make our city a better place. For example, I believe that just in the last year or so they've had the establishment of 30 new funds. So you can see that it's a very dynamic group, and I'm proud to have it as part of the city of Edmonton.

10:10

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: I just would like to thank the hon. member for his comments and then call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 3 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

**Bill 36
Securities Transfer Act**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 36, the Securities Transfer Act, 2006. There are a number of House amendments that I'll address shortly, but first I'd like to say that I appreciate the comments made last week by the hon. members for Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Judging from what they said, I believe that they've done some research on this and understand the significance of this legislation. I would like to respond to their concerns and perhaps clarify some of the matters that were raised.

I have to confess, though, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford did have me a bit puzzled by some of the comments because, of course, he does understand – and we agree – that it's taken an awful long time for this bill to come forward. But later there are suggestions that we wait for Ontario to adopt the Securities Transfer Act and observe their experience, and of course Ontario is in the throes of doing that. Our finding is that there are housekeeping items and amendments that they have to get along with in order to have the thing harmonized across the country.

I'm hoping that it'll help if I explain how this particular legislation came to be. It should be noted that the Securities Transfer Act project first originated in Alberta in 1993. The Alberta Law Reform Institute published a report on the transfers of investment securities, and the current version of the Securities Transfer Act is essentially a product recommended in a 1993 Alberta Law Reform Institute report. The Uniform Law Conference of Canada undertook this project in 1993 based on the report published by the Alberta Law Reform Institute. In 1998, Mr. Chairman, the Canadian Securities

Administrators Uniform Securities Transfer Act Task Force was struck. The transfer act was developed by the task force as a joint project with the Uniform Law Conference of Canada.

The Alberta government's Legislative Counsel worked closely with the task force, with some input from British Columbia and Ontario legislative counsels over the period from 1999 until 2002. During this period a number of consultative drafts were prepared and circulated to stakeholders, and in 2003-2004 the task force published successive drafts of the Uniform Securities Transfer Act together with extensive explanatory material as part of a major public consultation process.

During that process the USTA received strong and favourable support. Stakeholders, including securities and financial industry representatives and lawyers, urged prompt uniform implementation of the USTA. Mr. David Dodge, governor of the Bank of Canada, remarked that

provincial and territorial legislatures need to make the Uniform Securities Transfer Act a priority. Such an act would provide a sounder legal basis for the holding and transfer of rights in securities that are held in book-entry form, and would replace the current patchwork of legal rules in this area.

Raymond Protti, president and CEO of the Canadian Bankers Association, remarked that

we believe that the USTA initiative should be a priority of governments across Canada, and that the prompt passage of the legislation is important to the global competitiveness of Canada's capital markets.

In 2004 the Uniform Law Conference of Canada approved the English version of the USTA, and in June 2005 the USTA was reviewed by an interprovincial working group of government representatives with a mandate to review the drafting of the STA to maximize uniformity across the country. On December 1, 2005, the Securities Transfer Act was introduced in the Ontario Legislature, and other provinces, including British Columbia, plan to introduce a securities transfer act in 2006.

The hon. member is correct. It has taken a number of years to get to this point. However, the provisions of the Securities Transfer Act are complex. The Securities Transfer Act represents an important example of interprovincial co-operation in responding to the needs of Canada's capital markets. The process has been long because of the complexity of the subject and the fact that there is no precedent for uniform law of this type in Canada. As I indicated in first and second readings of the bill, stakeholders have expressed strong support for prompt, uniform implementation of securities transfer legislation in Canada, and the Securities Transfer Act provides for that.

During discussion at second reading the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford raised a concern about enforcement of securities regulation. I also note that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview suggested that Alberta should work instead on a national securities regulator. These are certainly issues worth discussing, Mr. Chairman, but they're actually not relevant to this particular bill. Maybe it would help if I attempted to make it clear that the Securities Transfer Act is not securities regulatory law but commercial law governing the transfer of securities and interest in investment property. The Securities Transfer Act merely adds a modern legal foundation to support existing commercial practices.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford also asked how much the Securities Transfer Act might save in administrative costs, and he noted that during second reading in the Ontario Legislature Minister Phillips remarked that the industry has estimated that implementation of the Ontario Securities Transfer Act, Bill 41, could save the securities industry approximately \$100 million to \$140

million. The figure cited by Minister Phillips is based on findings from a 2002 Cap Gemini Ernst & Young report commissioned by the Canadian Capital Markets Association. That study estimated the benefits associated with straight-through processing for securities transactions. The estimated benefits are for the entire Canadian securities industry.

Straight-through processing, Mr. Chairman, is the general term used to describe the elimination of manual or duplicative steps in the process of settling securities transactions. Basically, it's the efficient use of computer-based technology enabling the entire settlement process to be conducted electronically. Straight-through processing does not only reduce costs; it also reduces the number of risks inherent in the settlement process. The enactment of the Securities Transfer Act is a precondition to achieving straight-through processing. Many components of straight-through processing require a clear legal foundation for the indirect holding system, which is provided for in the Securities Transfer Act.

Mr. Chairman, I noted earlier that there are a number of House amendments being proposed for Bill 36. I wonder if I could have them circulated as I complete my remarks.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you're making reference to some amendments, but we do not have them at the table. Do you have them in your possession?

Mr. Knight: I have one copy.

The Deputy Chair: Is it an original copy?

Mr. Knight: It is not. It's a draft.

The Deputy Chair: Well, we need to have the original in order for us to proceed. Would you maybe like to adjourn and then come back to the subject?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, could I adjourn debate? We'll have this matter attended to.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall proceed with the next item before us, and when we resolve this issue of the amendment, we may be able to come back to it.

10:20

Bill 20
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise tonight to participate again in the debate on Bill 20, which seeks to amend Alberta's freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation. Some members might recall that I have mentioned in this House time and time again that this bill packages something that is really good with something that is really bad. It's almost a 50-50 split. Of note, both the Liberal opposition and the ND opposition amendments to try to make this bill an easier pill to swallow have so far not met with success.

However, tonight I wanted to start by talking about section 7 in

this bill, which amends section 55 of the original act by renumbering it as 55(1) and by adding the following as sub (2). It reads:

- (2) The processing of a request under section 7(1) or 36(1) ceases when the head of a public body has made a request under subsection (1) and
- (a) if the Commissioner authorizes the head of the public body to disregard the request, does not resume;
 - (b) if the Commissioner does not authorize the head of the public body to disregard the request, does not resume until the Commissioner advises the head of the public body of the Commissioner's decision.

Now, it is no secret that applications for freedom of information requests are already lengthy and drawn out, and they basically take longer than what is stipulated in the current provisions. Rarely have we received a request within the stated timeline, and many reasons are quoted or given and many excuses. Sometimes there's a request for clarification. Sometimes it's a negotiation over the extravagant fees. Sometimes it might be a procedural requirement. Delays, stalls, whatever. We remember the very famous debate that people were having with respect to the government aircraft flight logs and whether, in fact, it was artificially delayed till after the November '04 election or whether that was just an inadvertent procedural backlog that kept it from being released. It still remains to be seen.

In essence, FOIP requests are now being reviewed. The people administering them or looking after them are usually first thinking about how to deny the request or how to delay it rather than, really, looking for ways to grant the request and sharing the information or releasing it. So it is already drawn out, and we don't need to stop the clock or make it any longer.

What this amendment seeks to do is to basically stop that clock, and nothing progresses until after the commissioner deems it to be worthy of release, and then the clock resumes. So it's not really counting the number of days, weeks, or even months sometimes that a decision of this nature is required to take.

With these brief comments, Mr. Chairman, it would be my honour to introduce an amendment which is basically calling on the Assembly and the esteemed members in this House to strike out section 7. In so doing, what we are trying to accomplish is to make it more palatable and to basically tell people that we have amended bad legislation to allow the good part of it to go forward. So give us the amendment; we'll give you the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we have an amendment being proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. This is amendment A3.

Does anyone wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise this evening to voice my support for this amendment labelled A3 from the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. He's moving that Bill 20 is to be amended to strike out section 7 in its entirety, and I certainly do agree with this.

In my time here in the Legislature I've witnessed quite a variety of frustrations in being able to get information in a timely manner. This one particular section of Bill 20 really does interfere with that timeliness. It's curious because I guess what often happens with bills is that if there is some less than savoury section that wants to be passed through, then somehow they attach it to some other pieces that seem more savoury or more acceptable. So this bill is kind of a patchwork of things that needed to be done and then specific sections that really do put roadblocks in the way of not only the opposition doing its job but the media and individuals accessing information as well.

You know, when we pause to think of what we do put out the most in this Legislative Assembly, it's all about information. For us to debate in a transparent and open manner: that's what the design of this particular room is for. It's the information that we're trying to clarify and make serve best the public interest. So by putting roadblocks in the way of information, certainly we are protecting the privacy of individuals, but we have to balance that with the freedom of information that's necessary for people to make intelligent decisions about the governance of this province.

Specifically, this section 7 of Bill 20 is really causing a great deal of interference in the ability for us to access information in a reasonable way. For example, we've been looking through questions and through FOIP requests for information concerning how the government is making decisions on the Public Affairs Bureau, and this is perhaps one of the great black holes of information, Mr. Chairman, in terms of the choices that are being made. I can recall a question that we looked at specifically in terms of the Public Affairs Bureau review committee from last year, where we asked for submissions received by the Alberta Public Affairs Bureau review committee from last year to this year, and we were rejected on this straightaway. You know, the idea that this information would somehow lie fallow and out of the reach of the public, the opposition, the media, and even historians as well for such a long period of time I find to be, well, very troubling.

10:30

I was speaking to a colleague of mine who is an historian and is working on his doctorate and looking at the history of health care specifically. When I brought forward to him that this section of Bill 20 was going to perhaps exclude information from its full disclosure for a period of up to 15 years, he was absolutely flabbergasted. While I thought that perhaps this section of the bill was something that existed only under the dome, in fact his comments made me realize that there are a whole range of people and professions who analyze information that are also going to be affected, Mr. Chairman, by this same information.

The timely manner by which we are able to analyze history helps us to move forward in a general way to make intelligent decisions about the future too, so for us to seal away information for such a long period of time really flies in the face of our alleged commitment to higher education and to research and pure research.

That leads me to my next comment, which is that this section 7, in fact, impedes the fair progress of democracy because, of course, you can only make sound decisions and have participation of the public in a reasonable way if there is the information put forward for them to make their decisions on. So if we are narrowing the scope of those decisions, then the very composition of democracy, which is for people to make evaluations and then to have individual choice, is severely limited and can be manipulated.

Certainly, that doesn't preclude the idea that democracy should be in any way curtailed on the basis of knowledge or information, but we're not doing democracy any service by building this sort of a freezer of information by not allowing the free dissemination of information through FOIP requests in this part of Bill 20.

I do find it to be somewhat difficult, and certainly the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has done us a service to point out that this in particular is causing us some difficulty and requires revision – really extraction in this case, and it's a very specific surgical extraction. It does not interfere with the integrity of the larger bill, which has some merit. Rather, it's just a nice sharp incision that's going to help us to carry forward and give out information in a reasonable and timely sort of way.

It's interesting because if we look across the country, Mr.

Chairman, there is general agreement that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act that we have here in Alberta is among the most restrictive in the country to begin with, so for us to move past that rather dubious benchmark to a whole new league of secrecy is hardly the way to put up a good front. You know, when you look at things like section 7 and see how it curtails our access to freedom, eventually these sorts of things get out as a larger problem of governance that might cast a negative view of the province in terms of a place to do economic activity. If we are having some sort of favouritism, let's say, of a certain industry or of a certain company working in the province of Alberta and the government is somehow party or privy to that information but nobody gets to hear about it, then perhaps new businesses are less likely to consider investing in the province because they think: well, you know, there's this black hole that exists in terms of freedom of information.

It begs the question, Mr. Chairman: what are they hiding then? Maybe there is nothing, but maybe there is something. You know, this is part of a culture of openness that people expect in this day and age, in 2006, and international investors do certainly look at the viability of a government, the democratic functioning of a government as part of the criteria that they use to choose to make investments in the future. So as we look past our reliance on a hydrocarbon-based economy and our reliance on resource revenue and we're looking to diversify the economy, as we've been talking about earlier this evening, pieces like Bill 20 with section 7 in fact do send out the wrong signal.

I'm glad that the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung did give us this opportunity to strike out section 7. As we go through and comb through Bill 20, there are a couple of other pieces that did stand out for me that also need some fine-tuning or tweaking or, in this case, a surgical removal.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would defer to some other fine minds here to speak on the merits of this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder was referring to me in his last statement there, and I was listening to his comments with interest. I think it would be helpful to sort of go back and take a look at what section 7 is all about because I'm not sure that the hon. member's comments were wholly relevant to what is happening here. But, you know, that of course is a matter of debate, and I appreciate that.

In any event, amendment A3, that we have before us, is to strike out section 7 to Bill 20, which is amending the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. In this particular case, section 7, which purports by this amendment A3 to be struck, is a purely administrative amendment. It's one which would allow the 30-day processing timeline for a FOIP request to stop while the commissioner makes a decision on whether or not it is appropriate to disregard a FOIP request. Before a public body can disregard a FOIP request, it must seek permission from the commissioner. These requests are rare, but they do occur. In the 2004-2005 period there were six such requests, and there were 10 in total in all of the previous three years. The decision to take away an individual's right to make a request is a serious one, and as such the commissioner consults with the FOIP applicant. Since the commissioner's consultation takes time, typically a decision comes after the legislated 30-day response time has expired.

The problem that this particular amendment in section 7 is dealing with is to ensure that the problem of complying with one provision of the act doesn't cause the public body to breach another provision, hence the comment that it is purely administrative.

In any event, those points clarify what section 7 is all about, and I would urge the House to defeat amendment A3.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's with interest that I rise to participate in the debate this evening on amendment A3 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. Certainly, the entire bill, in my opinion, should be discarded by this Legislative Assembly. This is nothing more than the protection of the government from their own skeletons act. This is further increasing the government's ability to hide behind a wall of secrecy, not a veil of secrecy but in this case after 35 years a wall, and a thick wall at that.

The hon. Minister of Justice states, "Oh, no, this is purely administrative; there's nothing to worry about here," but I would like to hear, before we vote on this amendment, just exactly what the Privacy Commissioner thinks of this entire legislation. As the former FOIP critic from this side of the House I'm recalling that it was routine for the Privacy Commissioner to comment on legislation and certainly on issues surrounding privacy. I had not heard from the commissioner. I certainly would like to hear directly from the commissioner, perhaps in a letter from his office to all hon. members of this Assembly, exactly not only what he thinks of this bill but this section, the section that the hon. member would like to eliminate and eliminate with good reason.

10:40

Now, there are enough ways in the current legislation, unfortunately, for this government to get their way with a FOIP request. It has gotten so bad, Mr. Chairman, that sometimes I initiate FOIP requests and I just simply give up. I give up because I know that there are so many loopholes for the government to use to deny me access to information. Even when I'm willing to pay the high fees, the information doesn't come in a timely fashion. The government, I'm sad to say and very disappointed to say, has breached this act by not meeting time frames or deadlines.

When we look at A3 and we look at the role of the commissioner, the commissioner is really a ref. In this case with section 7 the referee came and occasionally does blow the whistle. But with this, play could possibly never resume, and I don't think that's right, and I don't think it's necessary.

I think that we should hear from the commissioner. I can't understand why on this legislation the commissioner is silent. I don't know what exactly that silence means. Perhaps the man agrees with this legislation. I certainly hope not. Whenever we look at this amendment, Mr. Chairman, and we look at FOIP laws in this province, we look at the principles and objectives of this act originally in 1994. It was supposed to be the flagship of an open and transparent government. It was the flagship act, but that is so far from the truth.

Now, freedom of information legislation is not new anymore to Alberta, but in the 12 years that we've had this legislation, there have been significant changes. I think that one of the benchmarks for access to information law in this province was the adjudicated matter that was heard by Justice T.F. McMahon going back to 2002. This was between the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Alberta Justice, and, of course, the *Globe and Mail* and Alberta Justice. The *Globe and Mail* had some very fine lawyers involved in this file, and there was significant discussion on what should and should not be released in the matter of Stockwell Day and his legal bills. Now, the taxpayers paid the legal bills, and Mr. Day has gone on to Ottawa. Mr. Justice McMahon writes, "Access to information legislation is a means by which people get that information from sometimes reluctant government hands."

This is what we have to consider with amendment A3. This is another means by an old, tired government that is now starting to display paranoia as well whenever you bring this before the Legislative Assembly. This bill should not even come before the Assembly because this entire bill is wrong. What the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is doing is a repair job. It's a repair job, but it's not adequate.

Now, we have to remember what this access to information legislation is for, and we have to pay heed to the comments from Justice McMahon. Now, Justice McMahon goes on to say – and, all hon. members, if you would listen to this and consider supporting A3, I would be very grateful – that the second principle that has been used by this government is that the user should pay. Justice McMahon questions whether this principle that the user should pay is in the spirit of the access to information law. He goes on to say: in any event, it begs the question who the real user is.

As well, this act expressly provides for several exceptions to that principle, and here we are with another loophole for this government to use by going to the commissioner and asking for a halt to the proceedings, and if not a halt to the proceedings, well, we'll stop the clock on this for a little while.

Now, I sat on the parliamentary committee that had a look at this legislation, and there didn't seem to be any problems at that time. Section 7 didn't seem to be necessary at that time, so why are we doing this at this time if for no other reason than to allow this government to hide its skeletons? The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is shaking his head, but this government has a lot of skeletons. There's no doubt about that. The former Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation talked about them.

An Hon. Member: Maybe he had them, but I don't have any.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, the hon. minister is saying that maybe the former minister had some skeletons, but he doesn't.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hope that the debate before us pertains to the amendment that's before us.

Mr. MacDonald: It certainly does, Mr. Chairman, because what this amendment is going to do is at least help not only the opposition but other interested parties find the skeletons that the former Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation was talking about just recently. It wasn't skeleton; it was skeletons. There were more than one. If we close all these loopholes in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, how are we to do our jobs? If the taxpayers have any interest in pursuing a file or a matter with this government and they apply to access to information, well, this is one more way for this government to stop the flow of information. If this government didn't have anything to hide – if they didn't have anything to hide – they would stand up and support the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung's amendment.

We can go on at length, but the first thing that should be of consideration in any FOIP law is the public interest, and the public interest is being disregarded. I was going to say something a lot stronger than that, but it's certainly disregarded. It's disregarded by a government that doesn't have the public interest in mind; they have their own interest in mind. Their own interest is keeping those skeletons that the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks talked about from the public. I can't believe that we would go to this extent to give the commissioner at this time this sort of extraordinary authority. I don't think we need to do that, and I think the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation secretly agrees with me. I really do, and I think he's going to support this amendment. I'm beginning to feel like he finally gets it.

10:50

Now, when we look at the public interest – and I think we're going to have to quote another leadership hopeful in this. This is going back to early January 2001, and this is from the former Minister of Justice and Attorney General, the former Minister of Advanced Education, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and he states this: "We are releasing this information in keeping with this government's policy of openness and accountability." The hon. member is talking about the release of some of the information, the select release of details of the Goddard versus Day settlement and the costs associated with that.

We've got to remember, Mr. Chairman, that the government's policy of openness and accountability will be completely ignored if we vote against amendment A3. It'll be completely ignored. It will be completely forgotten. I hope that the hon. member is not going to be ignored and forgotten in the leadership race. But this is what's going to happen if we don't support amendment A3 to sever this or surgically remove it, legislatively remove it as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder said. The public interest is not being met unless we vote in favour of amendment A3.

With that, I have a lot to say about this bill. Specifically to this amendment, would the commissioner have stopped my FOIP request on Enron? Would the commissioner have stopped my request? I never saw the light of day on anything on the power purchase arrangements. The information that we eventually did get in the Goddard versus Stockwell Day case we had to get through a judicial review. If this section was to remain, how would a judicial review affect it? I hope not. Perhaps the hon. Member for Red Deer-North could ask that and participate in the debate, and we could find out just what this would mean exactly with a judicial review. I'm certain that an applicant could go and receive or request a judicial review into this matter. If the commissioner authorizes the head of a public body to disregard the request and it does not resume, where does the applicant go? Hopefully to a judicial review.

Now, certainly if we look at the details that we got on Enron, if we look at the details we got on the power purchase arrangements – and these are only two – we see exactly the implications of this. We only have to read the newspaper today to see where one of the power purchase arrangements was sold for megabucks. EPCOR had purchased the one out in Battle River, and then they turned around and sold it for a significant profit. After using that electricity generation right for five years, they sold it for megabucks.

We find out also through a FOIP request that this government made a secret deal with AltaGas on Enron's power purchase arrangement out at Lake Wabamun, sold it at a fire-sale price. This was a secret deal – the minister is nodding his head – made in cabinet.

Mr. Stevens: You know about everything.

Mr. MacDonald: I know about it through freedom of information. That's how I know about it.

There was interest in the deal, but AltaGas got their hands on the generation rights for, at that time, 16 years for Sundance B power plant for \$220 million. I read in the paper today where this sale was concluded, and I thought: again, again. It's just like the ring road lands. This government is selling property and a public interest for well below market costs. Now, the AltaGas purchase of the generation rights was done completely in secret. If it had been an open process, how much more would another party have been willing to pay for that right to the electricity for the next 16 years at Sundance? How much more? We don't know. We'll never know.

Why was this deal facilitated so quickly? In October of 2001, when Enron was going down the tubes in the States, why was this deal done so quickly by this government? We'll never know.

We get some of the details through FOIP, and these are very embarrassing details. Unless, Mr. Chairman, we support this amendment A3 from the hon. member, those secret arrangements that this government makes will continue and there will be less and less information provided to the citizens – less and less information – and it's wrong. I think the hon. members across the way know it's wrong, but they're more interested in hiding the skeletons or making sure that the closet door doesn't open and the skeletons get out than they are of living up to the words from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who said, in conclusion – and I'm going to repeat this for all hon. members, and this is an esteemed member of the government caucus – “We are releasing this information in keeping with this government's policy of openness” and transparency. Those days are done unless we start improving this very bad bill by supporting amendment A3 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think it's really important that we set the record straight because after having listened to all that drivel, you'd almost think that somehow the government had control of the freedom of information commissioner. It's the commissioner that stops the clock, nobody else. It's the commissioner that does it. If that has any way of holding back information – I'm shocked to think that the member would think that, in fact, the government or the head of a public body could control the commissioner. It's the commissioner that stops the clock and starts the clock. That's what happens.

As far as hiding any information, not at all. What happens today, Mr. Chairman, is that when one of these comes before the commissioner and the commissioner is examining it, whether it's frivolous and vexatious and/or if it doesn't fit, the clock keeps on going. It could be maybe two weeks for the commissioner to make a decision. The clock is running. If the commissioner determines that it needs to proceed, then the time is getting very short. What usually happens in that case is that there's an extension requested of the commissioner. The extension is granted as a rule, in fact, depending on the amount of material that has to go through to answer the request. Maybe there doesn't need to be.

Mr. Chairman, there's another issue here. If the public body has to go through the whole exercise while the clock is running but not knowing whether at the end of the day the information that is being requested will be released under the order of the commissioner, the fact is that the staff are still doing this work. Since this act was implemented, it has cost the government over \$59 million to administer – \$59 million. We have collected about \$536,000 in fees. Of course, they constantly complain about the fees, and they want it done for free. Well, Mr. Chairman, is it fair that we take tax dollars, hard-earned dollars, so that they can go on a fishing trip? I think not, Mr. Chairman.

So I would urge the members of the Assembly to vote this amendment down because, in fact, we do not control the commissioner. All this does is allow the commissioner to stop the clock.

11:00

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise again

and speak in support of amendment A3, proposed by the Member for Edmonton-McClung, that “Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, be amended by striking out section 7.” The processing time for FOIP requests is already very lengthy and drawn out. Rarely have we received a request within the stated timeline due to various reasons; for example, requests for clarification, negotiation over the fees, procedural requirements, et cetera.

I'll give you an example. I had a chance to get some information from FOIP a couple of months ago. It cost about \$45. It was for wonderful people in my riding, the Allen Gray Continuing Care Centre. They asked me to find a copy of a contract made between the Capital health authority and the Allen Gray Continuing Care Centre. It took me a couple of months. We paid the money, and after two or three months what we received was five- or six-year-old statements. We asked them to give us the latest information about the contract, and after spending time and paying money, what we received were useless papers.

I know a couple of cases where the people tried to complain to the commissioner. Those cases have been there for years, and still they haven't any answer from the commissioner. I don't know. I really commend my colleague who proposed this amendment. If we carry on with something like whatever was in the data, this will be a bad bill. The people are already suffering from the FOIP system at the moment. There are so many people – I'll give you an example. They get the consultancy fee, like you mentioned, if it's less than \$100,000, just even \$5 less than \$100,000, and they don't even need the paperwork. In my view it's corruption. How can we fix that if we don't get the proper details? We need the full information from this government, and this government failed to provide us with the full information.

This is the only way. If we get the FOIP, if we get the full details, then we can at least fight for the people who are fighting in the commission for a long, long time. In short, this change will result in even greater wait times for FOIP requests. The Official Opposition requests that this particular clause, therefore, be struck from this bill, and I request other members to support this amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to speak to amendment A3 to Bill 20. I'm in favour of this amendment, and I just want to be short as well on this. One of the major problems and the dilemma here is the absence of information to the public. This is a public body, and if they're not accountable to the public and they can't have access to those things, it's very difficult to hold those people accountable and to know that they're really working in the best interests of whichever board they're on when, in fact, they can and will hide different things.

We have what we call in camera. They can participate in camera and then come out, and they have to give their decisions. It's very difficult, and we're having a problem in Alberta and in most democratic countries with the fact that the people are disengaged from government. They say that there's no point in being involved, that there's no difference that we can make. The reason why I feel they feel that way is because there is no power in the people to stop what is going on. They don't know what's happening. Many times the bills are passed or a decision is made, whether it's a seniors' home, a school board, or somewhere else, and because of this hidden information and the hidden agenda, they're not able to know what is going on.

It is critical. If we're going to remain a free society, we have to

be an open society. We can't have secret deals being made behind closed doors and information being hidden on why they're really doing something. It's very upsetting to the public, and it just isn't in their best interests.

I hope that everybody's had enough time to think about this amendment. Maybe we'll have some more good comments to realize that this is a good amendment and that it is in the public interest that we strike section 7 and allow freedom of information to be accessed and be provided to the public in general. We need to remove many barriers because we've lost sight of what we're really trying to protect here, and that is private individuals from harm. So I hope that this House will accept this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm speaking in favour of amendment A3, which would strike out section 7. I find it disturbing, in fact, that the government, as secret as it already is, would in fact want to become more secret. The Speech from the Throne, I'll remind everyone, talked about Alberta wanting to become more transparent and accountable to all Albertans so they can have the answers to the questions that they asked. Clearly, when you're looking at this FOIP, again another amendment to it, this is quite the opposite. In fact, it becomes more clouded, more secretive.

The Member for Rocky Mountain House talked about: why should the public pay for the opposition to go on fishing expeditions to search for information? Well, I think that part of the opposition's job is to in fact filter out some of the corruption or some of the skeletons that are being used, you know, to find fault with the government. That is the opposition's job. We're not going fishing on the taxpayers' dollars like the Premier up to his lodge. We're fishing on behalf of Albertans for real information.

11:10

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I'm talking about section 7, and I'll read it again just to familiarize everyone, including myself.

The processing of a request under section 7 . . . ceases when the head of a public body has made a request under subsection (1) and
(a) if the Commissioner authorizes the head of the public body to disregard the request, does not resume.

Now, the minister already spoke against this. He said that it's very unlikely that a commissioner would in fact tell the head of a public body to disregard a request. Well, you know, we've had several examples of perhaps delaying them. You don't have to address them quite in a timely fashion; you can get to them, but it's just a matter of when. Is it one year, one month, two years, two months, or even up to 15 years, as this bill proposes? I mean, 15 years to hide information from the public is, I think, a little bit ridiculous. At this point in time, basically, that could be four governments. At what point does the public have a right and deserve to know?

Again, these people who are elected are to represent the communities that they are elected in, and by not standing up to more secrecy in government, I don't think that you're doing your job for your community, that elected you to represent all Albertans, all opinions. However small a majority voted for you, it's in their best interest to ensure that, in fact, accountability and transparency continue to remain. With this section that we're trying to strike out, section 7, we would certainly not have that.

It's not housekeeping. The minister talked about it being administrative or housekeeping. Well, if that is in fact the case, if it's just administrative and housekeeping, then we wouldn't have a problem all unanimously agreeing to this particular piece, but I'm seeing that that is not going to be the case. They, in fact, do want

this particular piece because, again, it remains in the best interests of the government to keep the public at bay. Of course, we realize that knowledge is power, and with that power you'll realize what exactly is going on here in this government.

That's one of the reasons why they didn't want to offer free library cards to everybody. That, in fact, would empower more people to have knowledge, to realize what's going on in government. They didn't want regular people, the people who couldn't afford to have a library card, to be able to have access and freedom of information because that's exactly what this bill prohibits: freedom of information. It was a denial of information. It was a two-pronged approach. They said to the public when it was first introduced, "This is for the protection of your information," but on the other prong, "It's for our secrecy and our protection because, in fact, we don't need everyone knowing our business." Some have given it another acronym beside freedom of information and privacy protection. I won't go there, I guess.

It does raise the concern about how much the public will tolerate before the backlash happens. I think we found out with regard to the third way, the approach to meddle with our health care system. The public were not going to stand for that particular piece. They came out. There were petitions. Thousands, tens of thousands petitioned.

Ms Evans: They did not.

Mr. Bonko: I've tabled over a thousand petition signatures in this House, and I know that other members did as well, so I think that we can add them up. There have been over 10,000 signatures, so I beg to differ on that then.

Again, the public needs to in fact get more engaged as to what exactly is happening with the government. A lot of people said that perhaps less and less people are voting because, in fact, it doesn't make a difference: "My one vote won't make a difference. My one vote won't ensure that changes do take place." Democratic reforms need to take place if we're going to have an effective government for all Albertans. Again, if you continue to put in processes that make it more restrictive, such as this particular FOIP, then we're never all going to be on the same page.

We talk about fixed election dates. We talk about everything for democratic renewal, except when we talk about that, we don't find it when we talk about FOIP. The freedom that everyone talks about, the transparency, the accountability are certainly not here when you have prohibitive bills, secretive bills such as this particular one. If the commissioner is a referee, then the public is put in the penalty box for however long he decides, but the government continues to skate with the puck. I'm saying that just because it's hockey season right now.

Right now I will say that I humbly seek unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 32(2) whereby if a division is triggered tonight, it will only take two minutes rather than the usual 10.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member for Edmonton-Calder, did you want to speak on the amendment again?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Chairman, upon reflection of this amendment A3, one thing that I did want to bring forward is that when we're looking at what the fundamental principles are of the privacy act in the first place, I just wanted to point out that, in fact, section 7 does not support some of the five fundamental principles that we have to the whole idea of FOIP.

For example, the first principle of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is to “allow any person a right of access to the records in the custody or under the control of a public body subject [only] to limited and specific exceptions.” Section 7, which we’re seeking to strike out allows some disregard of this and, in fact, strengthens and widens the scope of these limited and specific exceptions, so I find it to somehow block that first fundamental principle. It’s a contravention of that first fundamental principle, so that’s why I’m urging each and every one of the members here tonight to accept amendment A3.

The second fundamental principle of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is “to control the manner in which a public body may collect personal information from individual” Albertans, to control the use by the public body of that information, and “to control the disclosure by a public body of [such] information.” This second fundamental principle, Mr. Chair, in fact, is not seriously contravened by section 7, although if the commissioner does not authorize the head of the public body to disregard the request, does not resume until the commissioner advises the head of the public body of the commissioner’s decision, I would suggest that, at least, this does muddy the waters in regard to the second fundamental principle, so I do have some small problem with that.

The third fundamental principle of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act allows individuals to have the right to access information about themselves held by a public body. Section 7, with the commissioner authorizing of head of a public body to disregard a request, I believe is in fact causing some limitation on this third fundamental principle, so I do find that to be somewhat troubling. There are other sections as well that certainly do affect the third fundamental principle even more, to a much larger extent than this one.

The fifth fundamental principle of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is to “provide for independent reviews of decisions made by public bodies under this [legislation] and the resolution of complaints.” This section 7, talking about the choice of a commissioner and how that takes place, could somehow, at least, weaken that fifth principle of the act.

Together, really, the best thing to do with section 7 is to simply eliminate it. I don’t think that it will in any way weaken the other elements of this bill that do have some merit, and in the spirit of compromise I would hope that everyone might support this amendment labelled A3.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on the amendment.

Mr. Hinman: I just wanted to make reference to the hon. minister who talked about the commissioner, that the clock is ticking. But the one thing that I think he’s failed to mention is that the commissioner is bound by the legislation that this House is passing, so by passing this instead of striking section 7, we’re actually giving the commissioner the authority to continue to hide information from the public. It’s just one other point. I think it’s critical to realize that, yes, the commissioner might be looking at these things, but it is the legislation that we’re passing here, and the commissioner would probably be acting to protect the public body rather than the public interest. It is a concern, so once more I’d say that I hope that people will think hard on this and that this will be accepted by this House.

11:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I would like to participate in the debate again on amendment A3. Now, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation informed the House that since this legislation was enacted in 1994, it has cost this government over \$59 million to administer and that there was so little collected back in fees. I feel that half of that collected probably came from the Official Opposition, but I can’t accept that administrative fee of \$59 million. I think there’s no way that it cost this government that much. It may have cost them that much in legal fees to hide and prevent the public from getting that information. Certainly, we know that they will go to any length and any expense to prevent citizens from getting access to their own information. We always have to look at the fees, and this government is using the fees as a barrier to citizens receiving the information. Now, certainly they will say, “Okay; we can have a waiver,” or “You can go to the commissioner and you can get a waiver.” That never happens for us.

Now, the whole issue of fees. There shouldn’t be any fees. We should take this bill and remember the word “freedom” that’s in it, freedom of information and protection of privacy.

Rev. Abbott: It has the root word of “free.”

Mr. MacDonald: And the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar is absolutely right. The root word in there is “free.” The information should be made available free to the citizens. There shouldn’t be any costs involved in this at all.

Again, I just have to point out to all hon. members that if there is a \$59 million cost to this legislation, to this government, show us. Show us. Provide documentation of that. I can’t accept that number. It is extraordinary. I just can’t accept that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I promise to be brief. I realize that it’s getting a little late.

Now, one comment, and it was briefly touched upon by my hon. colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner. The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation said that it’s really not us making the decision, that it’s basically the Privacy Commissioner making the decision, and that we’re not doing anything to change that. In that particular regard, I actually beg to differ. What we’re doing here is extending his or her ability to sit on their hands and not give a decision or not render a verdict, if you like, with respect to a particular FOIP request. As my colleague from Edmonton-Decore mentioned, it could take two months to two years or maybe even longer. The clock has totally stopped, and there is no recourse.

Whether, in fact, someone could do a judicial review to try to address this concern is a different story. I would have to say that requests for information that are examined to be disregarded or, you know, brought before the commissioner to say, “Can we please not honour that request” are not rare. As a matter of fact, it is becoming more the norm now that bodies that host information that members of the public or members of the opposition or members of the media, to that extent, ask for are going to the Privacy Commissioner saying, “Can we please disregard this? Is there a way we can not honour this?” and so on and so forth.

The overarching purpose of access to information legislation is to facilitate democracy. It’s basically to honour the requests because those who have nothing to hide hide nothing.

This particular amendment in section 7 is a stall tactic in my

opinion. You can probably expand and extrapolate to a situation like the hon. Minister of Education, for example, always saying that it's not his immediate responsibility; it's that of the school boards. We argue that the hon. minister and his department have to fully empower the school boards so that they, in turn, can make decisions and can make funding allocations that are adequate and that are reasonable. The school boards come back and say, "We don't have adequate funding, and we don't have the resources necessary," and they're faced with situations where they're forced to lay off staff or, you know, close schools or increase class sizes, or they might not be able to offer necessary programs like school lunches and so on. So is it the minister who's at fault or is it the school board or is it a mixture of both? That is the question. Similarly, is it the commissioner or is the public body trying to disregard the request or is it both? So between the two of them we need to definitely limit the ability of any one person or any agency or any organization to not honour a request and not to honour it in a timely fashion.

Citizens deserve access to information and more so in a timely fashion. They need to know whether their request is moving forward or whether it is going to be disregarded or denied, and they need to know as soon as possible. If we're talking an extension from a month to two months, like 30 days to 60, I can live with that, but if we're saying from 30 days to indefinite, to open ended, then I find it a hard pill to swallow. It's not only politicians and not only, you know, media where, in fact, those requests are looked upon by the government as a nuisance or as a waste of time. It is not a waste of time.

We talked about the fees, and we talked about how restrictive and exaggerated those fees are. I would hate to think that the government is looking at fees as a revenue stream. For example, when they charge for photocopying and they charge you something like 25 or 30 cents a page, in fact they could simply e-mail it, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore was saying. You know, do it for free and save a tree. You're not wasting time, and you're not wasting anybody's money or resources, and it's environmentally friendly. Do it for free. Or if the government absolutely has to print it on paper, let's take that CD or that disk and go to a place like Staples Business Depot, and they do it there for 4 to 5 cents. So why look at it as a revenue stream?

I am not optimistic – and that's really bad – because I know what the government is going to do. I'm hoping that when we trigger the division, some of the hon. members across the way are going to speak their minds and are going to tell the House what their conscience dictates.

An Hon. Member: And they should.

Mr. Elsalhy: And they should because this amendment is a useful amendment to try to fix something that is broken, and it's basically saving the patient without having to amputate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11:30

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:30 p.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	MacDonald
Bonko	Hinman	Miller, R.
Engen		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Horner	Ouellette
Ady	Knight	Prins
Amery	Lindsay	Rodney
Brown	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Calahasen	Lund	Stelmach
Coutts	Magnus	Stevens
Evans	Melchin	Webber
Graydon	Morton	Zwozdesky
Groeneveld	Oberle	

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 26
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 20.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 36 Securities Transfer Act (continued)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I really do appreciate the assistance of the chair with respect to an earlier difficulty I had on producing some documents, which were, in fact, the amendments that I would now like to move. I would like to move amendments to Bill 36, Securities Transfer Act, that are distributed in the House.

Mr. Chairman, I noted earlier that these amendments were coming forward. Stakeholders have clearly indicated that uniformity is one of the most important objectives of this type of legislation, and the amendments are necessary to maximize the uniformity. There are six House amendments required to Bill 36, the Securities Transfer Act, to ensure uniformity among the common law provinces. None of these amendments reflect any change in the objectives or purpose of Bill 36. The amendments reflect ongoing efforts by interprovincial working groups that developed the Securities Transfer Act to clarify the meaning and operation of the provisions.

It should be noted that the interprovincial working group continued to work to ensure such uniformity even after the introduction of the Securities Transfer Act in Ontario on December 1, 2005. It should also be noted that Ontario is expected to make a number of amendments to their bill to ensure that it will be uniform with Bill 36 and a similar bill anticipated shortly in British Columbia.

These amendments reflect revised wording developed in consultation with members of the interprovincial working group. The first two amendments, Mr. Chairman, amend section 44. Subsection (2) is amended by adding "other than the conflict of law rules" after "the law." The wording in subsection (5) is revised. The third amends section 57(2) by adding "against the issuer" after "enforceable."

The last three amendments deal with changes that are required to the Personal Property Security Act. As you would recall, Mr. Chairman, implementation of the Securities Transfer Act required consequential changes to other provincial acts, including the Personal Property Security Act. So the fourth amendment amends section 108(6) by revising the wording in proposed section 7.1(4)(a). This change improves clarity by making the provision accord with a parallel provision in the Securities Transfer Act, section 45(2)(a). The fifth amends section 108(7) by replacing “8(1) is” with “8(1) and (2) are.” The final amendment amends section 108(17) in the proposed section 24.1(2) by removing “A” and replacing it with “Subject to section 19, a.” These last two amendments are required to make the provisions uniform between the British Columbia and Alberta acts. The personal property security acts in British Columbia and Alberta are very similar; Ontario’s is somewhat different.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, this legislation recognizes and supports current business practices and codifies them in a uniform statute. It will then enable further improvements to the system and a further reduction of risk and cost, which benefits everyone.

I hope that these comments are helpful in clarifying the issues before the Assembly. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Listening to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky discuss the word “is” versus the word “are” reminded me of a certain politician in front of a grand jury explaining that his answer would depend on what the definition of the word “is” is.

In all seriousness, as it relates to these very important amendments to this very important piece of legislation, I would, first of all, like to thank the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for inviting me to his office this afternoon and taking the time to explain these amendments to me in person. I found that to be most helpful. It doesn’t preclude a couple of questions, however, and I would like to run through those if I could. The first one, as the Member from Grande Prairie-Smoky outlined, is to add the wording “other than the conflict of law rules” after the words “the law.” I’m wondering if there’s any possibility of having some clarification for what exactly “conflict of law rules” means. I’m not a securities lawyer – I’ve mentioned that a couple of times as we have gone through debate on this bill – but it’s interesting because I look at that, and I don’t fully understand the meaning of “conflict of law rules.” So that would be the first question on that particular one.

11:40

Now, the next part, where we talk about changing to the jurisdiction instead of “the law” – that’s section 44(5)(c), (d), and (e) – the question I have there, I suppose, is if the concern was to identify jurisdictions as opposed to the laws of those jurisdictions, is it the laws that are different in the various jurisdictions, or is it the enforcement of the laws that is different in the jurisdictions, and is that the reason for wanting that clarification? I’m not sure if the member will have that answer or not, but that was the question that came to my mind.

I think it speaks, actually, to a comment that the member made in his remarks earlier this evening, when he pointed out that in second reading I had discussed the fact that I was a little surprised that it had taken us this long to get to this point with these amendments. I’ve met with briefing staff from the ministry and with the lawyer who spent about eight years of his life working on this, so I understand the complications involved, and I understand the details. Frankly, I’m glad that I didn’t have to devote that much of my life to this bill;

nevertheless, I was a little surprised that it took us this long to get here.

The Member from Grande Prairie-Smoky commented on the fact that having said that, I also alluded to a reference that was made in the Ontario Legislature when they were debating their similar bill, and I wondered whether or not we should perhaps wait and see the results and the ramifications of how that bill works out before we proceeded with ours. I think the fact that we have already six amendments in front of this House before the bill has been passed, amendments that are coming from the government side, perhaps speaks exactly to my concern there; that is, that if there are loopholes in legislation that we’re mirroring in other provinces, it would almost appear to me as if we’re just going to go down the same path and mirror the loopholes or the mistakes that other provinces are making as well.

In fact, when I visited with the hon. member this afternoon, one of the things we discussed is that some of these amendments are coming from the Ontario policy writers as they were doing French translation. It turned out that some of the translation just doesn’t make sense in French, quite frankly, so these changes had to be made here in order that when the bill is translated into French, it will make sense in another language. I guess that that was really what I was speaking to the other night when I talked about whether or not we should be waiting and seeing the ramifications of that bill in Ontario because now we’re just simply making the same mistakes that Ontario presumably would have made as well.

Further to that point, then, on the one hand I suppose it’s good that we make these amendments here and now as opposed to not seeing them for perhaps another year in this House. That would mean we would have a piece of legislation on the books that would have some flaws. I’m going to guess that they’re not serious flaws but, nevertheless, flaws just the same, so it’s good that we catch them now. It does I suppose cause one to wonder how many other glitches like that might be in the legislation even if we pass these six amendments. That begs the question for me of: what steps would the government be planning to take to protect investors from the results of us not catching other mistakes like this that are in the legislation as it’s currently written? If there are six here that almost got past us and were caught either here in Alberta by the policy writers or in Ontario by their policy writers, what are the chances that there may be others in here that we’ve not picked up on yet, and what might the ramifications of that be to investors in Alberta and to the Alberta taxpayer, ultimately, if it’s found that somehow, perhaps, the ministry might be liable for not having caught those?

The one that refers to section C, 108(6)(a), is one of the three that is amending as a consequence the Personal Property Security Act. I guess my question there was simply – again, we’re talking about jurisdictions – whether or not we can have confidence that Albertans investing in other jurisdictions would be protected. I know that that is part of what we’re trying to achieve by all of this. I’m going to assume that by making this amendment, that will do that.

Now, another concern that I have – and I mentioned it to the hon. member this afternoon. It’s certainly not that I’m putting blame on him, but it does cause me concern. We’ve seen it a couple of times in this House recently. We saw it earlier this evening when we were dealing with the private bills. In the actual bill, Bill 36, the Securities Transfer Act, we have sections that are describing the policy that’s being made, and then on the opposite page it describes what’s being changed or what’s being amended. I think it’s always a good thing when the legislation that’s being amended is listed in the bill that’s published.

In the case of myself, I have access to the original bill. It’s much easier for me to source out that information. But for Albertans that are looking for this information, particularly today when we have a

situation where amendments are coming forward, and they're trying to reference what that might mean, it causes me some concern any time we're amending something that's not actually published along with the bill. If I were an investor out there, you know – and believe it or not, there are investors out there that follow quite carefully the words that we speak in this House – and I were looking at these amendments tonight, well, first of all I'm not even sure that the amendments would show up on the Internet if they were looking for them. But if they did, they wouldn't necessarily have ready access to the sections that are being amended. So that always causes me some concern.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on a point of order.

Point of Order Amendments to Bills

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your indulgence. I have been listening with interest to the hon. member and certainly to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky in regard to this government amendment to Bill 36. I cite 13(2) and also *Beauchesne* 697(3), "An amendment should relate to a specific clause in a bill and not to two or more clauses."

This amendment has been described in debate as mere housekeeping, and I have not heard from the hon. member guiding Bill 36 through the Legislative Assembly the reason why all these amendments from different sections of the proposed legislation are included in one amendment. An explanation to these changes should be incorporated into his justification for this being one amendment and not divided into six amendments.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the point of order? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To address the issues from our hon. members opposite, initially I do have to indicate the conflict of law rules, and that particular phrase is one of the phrases under question here in at least two of the amendments that are before us. In Bill 36 itself, with the conflict of law rules that are being discussed in this particular case, to get a proper legal definition of that phrase, I would have to resort to legal counsel. I would certainly do that and give the member the information at the first opportunity.

The question around: why would we not wait to see how well the Uniform Securities Transfer Act, that's been introduced in Ontario, works?

11:50

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we have a point of order on the floor. Are you speaking to the point of order?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, I was going to get to the point of order, but perhaps I'm straying here, and I should address it first. Thank you.

To deal with the point of order, the question has been asked: why is this one amendment and not initially five? In fact, there could be as many as six. Mr. Chairman, the amendments are brought together in this particular case because there is no intent in any of this to change either the subject of the amending bill or any of the content other than housekeeping wording, and that would be the support I would have for including these amendments in a single amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the point of order?

Hon. members, first, at the outset the citation was from a wrong perspective. Nonetheless, I think that the issue is valid.

Hon. members, you have been around in this Assembly for a very, very long time. This is not the first time that we've had amendments that encompass more than one section of the bill. We have done that. However, if there is any hesitation, there is no difficulty in having a separate vote on every section. So until such point in time we shall deal with this as amendment A1. When we come to the vote, if there is any hesitation and if there is a desire to break it down into five or six votes, the chair will have no problem doing so. As a general practice we have done this, and from both sides of the House amendments have come forward that include more than one section.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, you may proceed with your remarks.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I believe that I was finishing up on the amendment that deals with section 108(6). We were talking about the amendments that are being made consequentially to the Personal Property Security Act, and I mentioned the fact that hopefully Albertans will be protected if, in fact, they're investing in other jurisdictions.

Moving to the next one, section 8(1) and 8(2), where subsection (2) is not printed in the bill. I was commenting on the fact that it causes me concern any time that we don't have that information printed in the bill. My concern was for people outside of this Assembly who may not necessarily have access readily to information that we in this Assembly have.

Then moving to section 108(17), this is actually the last of the six amendments that are being discussed. The particular amendment here pertains to security interest in investment property, Mr. Chairman. What we're doing is referring to section 19, which isn't printed in the bill as it's before the House today either. So, again, the same comment in terms of not having all of the information readily visible for people outside of this Assembly, but because it refers particularly to security interest in investment property, I'd just like to point out that in the past we have had some questions and some concerns around undivided interests in land.

Both B.C. and Saskatchewan, actually, for some reason seem to take a harder line with companies that sell undivided interests in land, yet Alberta seems to have been somewhat more lax in that regard. It gets back to my concern that I've expressed previously about whether or not, in fact, we have adequate enforcement. So this is a section that I would be watching closely, assuming that these amendments are passed, as we have an opportunity to monitor the ramifications of this bill once it's passed.

Those were the comments that I had to make to the amendment specifically, and I'll cede the floor to anybody else who may wish to comment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else on the amendment?

Are you ready for the vote? Hon. members, is it okay, then, to have a vote on the entire amendment as amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Any further debate on the bill itself? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just briefly

I wanted to thank the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for the clarifications that he offered in his opening remarks this evening as we led off debate of this bill in committee, particularly the question around the regulatory savings, the clarification as to the potentially \$140 million being across the country as opposed to specific to Ontario. I've already addressed the reasons why I talked about perhaps waiting to see how things worked out in Ontario as opposed to proceeding with the bill right away.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'm prepared to support this bill as amended, and I thank the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for his co-operation today and as this bill has moved through the House. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 36 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 37
Miscellaneous (Provincial Treasurer)
Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 37, Miscellaneous (Provincial Treasurer) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I'd like to address a couple of the issues that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford raised.

Bill 37 is a housekeeping act that will allow changes in legislation with references to the "Provincial Treasurer" to be replaced with "Minister of Finance" or "Minister responsible." There's nothing out of the ordinary in that. It's updating legislation that needs to be updated to align approximately 80 acts with current titles and responsibilities of the Minister of Finance and program ministers.

12:00

In second reading the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford seemed to be of the understanding that finance and revenue became one ministry in 2001 and questioned the length of time it has taken to make these changes. I'd just like to clarify that they were reorganized in November of 2004, and the length of time that it has taken to make these amendments has not to my knowledge affected how any financial transactions were handled.

He also asked why we were making amendments to the existing Fuel Tax Act when a new one is currently before the Legislature and will likely be passed. While it's true that the new Fuel Tax Act will likely be passed, I think the hon. member would have also made a comment about the process if the government had made the assumption that any legislation would be passed without going through the proper process. All changes were grouped in Bill 37 for ease of review and implementation, and it simplified the legislative process.

There was also a reference to the legislation referring to AGT.

This will come forward as Bill 43, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, which now appears on the Order Paper.

Bill 37 is clearly housekeeping, Mr. Chairman. I hope these comments are helpful in clarifying the issues which have been raised to date.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the minister for his clarification this evening. I don't see any particular point, given the late hour, to reiterating the comments that I made in second reading. I'm quite happy with the explanation that was offered this evening and am prepared to support this bill. As the minister says, it is simply a housekeeping bill. Although some have encouraged me to ask for an individual vote on each of the 80 acts that are being amended, I'm certainly not going to do that tonight.

Mr. Chairman, with that, I support this bill and look forward to hopefully going home pretty soon. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I just want to make the short point that we seem to have a lot of housecleaning bills that go through, and it takes up a fair amount of time. I don't want to do that late in the evening.

Mr. Bonko: This is still early.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. We'll go then.

I don't believe I was around when they changed it from the Provincial Treasurer to the Minister of Finance, so the question has to be asked: why do we change ministers and the names of ministers so often? It just seems like an enormous amount of extra work that's being put into things. Provincial Treasurer served us for many years. I still have people calling and asking: why do we write the cheques now to the Minister of Finance when it was the Provincial Treasurer for, you know, I believe the last hundred years maybe? It just seems like too often we do things without good reason. I just want to get on the record that perhaps we don't need to be changing the ministers or portfolios and everything every time because we end up doing an enormous amount of so-called housecleaning when we had things in order.

Earlier today we were talking to the – boy, I'm going to have to get to remember this long handle because the short one is so much easier – Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. I don't see the efficiency in doing this, and I don't see the efficiency that we had by breaking up other ministries to form the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

With that, I'm disappointed that we have to pass such amendments but understand the necessity now because of what we've done in the past. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 37 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 38

Livestock Identification and Commerce Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to rise this evening in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 38, the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act. As stated previously in the House, this legislation is the consolidation and revision of three other acts. It's updating and modernizing legislation so that it can adequately regulate the day-to-day commercial transactions of the livestock industry. The intent of the proposed legislation is to facilitate fair commerce, protect personal property, and promote the integrity of marketing within the livestock industry.

I wish to take a minute to bring the House's attention to the extensive industry involvement in developing this bill. It's a product of many, many, many hours of deliberation, several discussion papers, numerous workshops with stakeholders, extensive feedback from the industry, and fine-tuning to achieve an agreement, Mr. Chairman. In fact, it took more than 30 months of consultation to ensure that the goals of all sectors of the livestock industry were fully considered and accommodated where possible.

Livestock industry participants are generally known for their independent spirit and strong will to succeed. I applaud them for their perseverance in assisting us to develop this bill, and I thank them for their compromises as they respected the goals of other associations also involved in livestock identification and commerce. I know that they are proud of this product because I've been receiving phone calls from the industry asking me if I need any help to make this bill move through the House.

I'd like to now address the comments and questions that a few hon. members raised during second reading of the bill. To begin, I would like to thank the hon. members for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Calgary-Varsity, and Cardston-Taber-Warner for their questions and support of Bill 38.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had a question about how this bill will impact the family farm. It is a complex set of provisions. As you can see from the part titles in the bill, the legislation addresses brands, livestock transactions, transportation, livestock inspection, dealing in livestock and livestock products, and an assurance fund system. All producers can draw upon these modernized provisions. Small-scale producers in particular will appreciate the effort to make the legislation easier to understand.

Going through the sections, we can see where small-scale producers or operators of these smaller operations will be impacted in a very positive way. Again, Mr. Chairman, I hesitate to use the term "family farm" because the majority of the farms in Alberta are family farms whether they are incorporated or not. Small and large operations will benefit from the changes that we're making and the consolidation of these acts. I could speak at length about the positive impacts, but briefly I can assure the member opposite that Bill 38 will have a positive impact on the small operations as well as the large operations.

The hon. member asked about the impact on producers of organic products. Bill 38 addresses sales transactions and does not differentiate between organic and nonorganic.

He also questioned if the proposed section 81, which relates to the time limit for prosecution, provides sufficient time. In response, the standard two-year period prescribed in Bill 38 aligns with the current

provision in the Brand Act and increases the one-year period in the current Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act. We're bringing them all up to the same standard, which is the standard of two years.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar also requested clarification on the Livestock Patrons Claims Review Tribunal. Of note, this is not a new tribunal that Bill 38 creates; it exists today. The members of the tribunal are appointed in accordance with section 25 of the Livestock Patrons Claims Review Tribunal regulation pursuant to the Livestock and Livestock Products Act. In accordance with the regulation, the tribunal is composed of the following members: one member appointed by the Alberta Auction Markets Association, one member appointed by the Alberta Beef Producers, one member appointed by the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association, one member appointed by the Feeder Associations of Alberta, one member appointed by the Alberta Livestock Dealers and Order Buyers Association, one member appointed by the Western Stock Growers' Association, and members appointed by other designated associations.

The member requested an example of a delegated authority under the act in respect to carrying out a power, duty, or function under the act. As explained in the news release for Bill 38, Alberta's livestock identification system is administered by Livestock Identification Services Ltd. It is a not-for-profit company established in 1998 as the delegated authority for livestock identification legislation. It is accountable to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and is governed by a board of directors comprising industry representatives from various Alberta cattle and horse associations. Of note to all members, section 90 of Bill 38 requires the annual report of a delegated authority to be a statutory tableting.

12:10

Finally, the member questioned the provisions related to poultry that are detailed at section 100 of Bill 38. These provisions relate to the current Livestock and Livestock Products Act, which is consequentially amended by Bill 38, where currently a regulation addressing poultry exists under the Livestock and Livestock Products Act. This regulation will continue as it does today. Bill 38 does not impact the current regulatory provisions relating to poultry.

I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar when he explained to all members that the act deals in industry and is not related to BSE, food safety, or the environment. This statement addresses the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's questions regarding BSE, chronic wasting disease, and bovine tuberculosis. Livestock diseases are addressed in the Livestock Diseases Act and not in Bill 38. Bill 38 deals with the inspection process as it relates to determining ownership, not health of the animal. Neither does Bill 38 deal with recommendations relating to the CAIS program.

To the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, I appreciated your recognition of the use of modern forms of identification beyond the historic method of branding. Bill 38 broadens the types of identifiers that can be used to identify livestock to include identification devices used under other industry programs such as the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency tags. The member opposite questioned the application of a number brand on the opposite side of the animal from the side to which they apply the registered brand. I believe that he is referring to an age brand as defined in section 3(2)(a). Bill 38 standardizes this practice for producers.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that I've responded to all of the relevant questions raised during second reading. I would like to thank all the hon. members for their support and questions related to this bill and urge all members of the Assembly to stand with the livestock industry, who have put so much effort into this bill, and give Bill 38 their full support.

Thank you, hon. members.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate those answers from the hon. minister, but certainly when we were discussing this bill in second reading, the hon. minister left the impression in this House that this side was unwilling to meet with him. That's not correct. I have enough to do without trying to keep up to the hon. minister's international travel schedule, and whenever meetings are set up and then they're postponed, there's absolutely nothing I can do about that. Those meetings are set up and postponed because of the department and the minister's travel arrangements, not mine.

Now, we have to recognize the importance of this bill. Again, Mr. Chairman, we have to look at the budget for this year and recognize that overall Alberta's farm cash receipts were down 1.7 per cent in 2005, a decline in crop receipts of 11 per cent and program payments of 22 per cent. However, this was outweighed by the improvement in livestock receipts of 12 per cent. When we look at the border reopening to cattle, we have to recognize – and we said this earlier in the Assembly this evening – that much has to be done. Certainly, Bill 38, when you look at it, at first glance you would think that this is an ideal piece of legislation when we think that the province is toughening cattle sale rules.

Now, we asked, and certainly the minister has informed the House that there was an extensive consultation process and a review of this legislation completed before the final draft was made. We have the bill introduced in the Assembly, and now, of course, we're at committee.

Mr. Chairman, when we look at Bill 38, we see many key changes. One of the key changes is that bills of sale have been standardized and now have mandatory content while still allowing sellers and dealers of cattle and horses to customize the forms to meet the needs of each market. When we look at the security interest in the lien declaration section of the new act, it makes it mandatory that sellers disclose any other owner or part owner of their animals. Now, as I understand it, multiple owners of an animal became quite an issue when Bonnett feeders of Ponoka, Alberta, was placed under bankruptcy protection. Again, as I understand it, Mr. Chairman, both banks and producers claimed to have ownership, title, or stakes, whatever you want to call it, in the feedlot animals while not knowing that the other parties also claimed ownership.

This gets me to this point in this debate on Bill 38, and that's the consultation process. I understand from correspondence, certainly, that the banks have been meeting with members of the department. In fact, late in February the Canadian Bankers Association met with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in regard to Bill 38. I don't know what stage the legislation was at. Perhaps the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar can also comment on this. Perhaps it's not in his constituency, but I have seen the sign in my travels through rural Alberta, which are quite extensive these days because a lot of people are getting more and more and more uncomfortable with the direction that this government is going in. I saw a handmade sign. I didn't get that close to it. It wasn't much more than three-eighths press-board, but it was a four by eight sheet, and it had CIBC written on it. The letters were vertical, and in smaller print was: can impound beef cattle. I'm sure that's not the sort of image that the Canadian Bankers Association have in mind when they deal with rural Albertans. We have to be cognizant and we also have to be respectful of their view.

I think that the Canadian Bankers Association makes some very good points here, which hopefully will be considered. The Canadian Bankers Association has expressed an objection to section 18, and this is the statutory bar to conversion. Section 18(3) extends

protection to agents of the seller. Section 18, which is new, the statutory bar to conversion, protects cattle buyers by limiting the ability of creditors to collect from the current owner. An example of that would be paying twice for the cattle. In a typical cattle sale, of course, cattle are trucked to a large packer, who purchases sometimes 40 truckloads of cattle per day. Payment is due within two days, so the buyer is typically unable to check the liens. I could be corrected on this. I think we're making a separate arrangement for the big packers. [interjection] They don't have seven days to square up? It is two days?

Mr. Horner: It's all the same.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. It's all the same. I appreciate that from the hon. minister.

If we were to compare this to the buying and selling of a used car, the buyer checks for liens before purchase. This can't be done with cattle as there is no mechanism to search cattle by serial number or VIN number. I think the minister is working on that very diligently, and there will be. There is in some cases but not in all cases.

The cattle industry, as we know, relies extensively on lending and borrowing. The Canadian Bankers Association's concerns: the lending institutions currently have the ability to collect monies owed by the seller from the future owner of the cattle. Lending institutions will lose this ability in Bill 38. This change may allow auction marts to not take the task of evaluating the risk as seriously as maybe they should. The agent for a seller or a buyer, such as an auction mart, is well positioned to evaluate title or security interests in cattle. For example, they can get to know their regular clients and in some cases only search or assess security risks from unknown clients.

12:20

Now, banks have not used their ability – and I can imagine that they would have a significant number of resources at their disposal – to sue future owners of cattle for lost funds. However, the banks, I think, are correct when they argue that the ability to sue provides a safety valve which keeps buyers and agents conducting due diligence in checking for security interests. These changes will have two effects, Mr. Chairman. First, these changes could effectively stop farmers from getting credit for livestock as banks will not be able to collect on their collateral. This will impact small producers significantly. Also, this will increase the cost of borrowing for farmers as it increases the risk associated with lending money to farmers and to ranchers.

The minister is shaking his head. He can get on the record and explain his position.

The bankers are proposing two solutions. The first is that the bankers propose repealing section 18(3) and substituting a section which requires auction marts to perform due diligence in checking for security interests. Two, when an auction mart is the financier of cattle, the auction mart and seller should be considered associated or not at arm's length. I would remind the hon. minister to have a look at section 1, the definitions. As such, the statutory bar to conversion would not apply.

Now, the statutory bar to conversion, Mr. Chairman, provides protection to buyers who purchase large numbers of cattle, mainly the big three meat-packing plants. They argue, as I understand it, that they need this protection because it is not feasible to check every animal. Again, we're making rules here and laws that may be in the interests of the big packers, but are they necessarily in the interests of the smaller producers?

I think that the minister should consider this from the Canadian Bankers Association for this reason and this reason alone: 90 per cent of the cattle traded in Alberta, as I understand it, are bought with some kind of a loan. I think we should consider the merit of the

argument from the Canadian Bankers Association. Again, how does the minister plan to resolve the legitimate concerns of the Canadian Bankers Association? Does the minister have any intentions at this time to amend the bill to include these concerns and these suggestions? Again, if the consultation process was so thorough, as we're led to believe, why weren't these concerns addressed prior to bringing Bill 38 to the Legislative Assembly?

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I certainly would like to announce that I expect an answer from the minister before we proceed any further with this legislation at this time, before it moves from committee to third reading. I think we need to toughen the cattle sale rules. But whose interests are being served here and why?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few more details that I guess I want to go over on Bill 38, the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act. I appreciate the minister and those people that have worked, as he says, for years to try and bring three bills into one and the efficiency of it. Yet we still seem to have some questions in areas: what we're going to bring together and the identification and the importance of that. Especially with the outbreak of BSE and the requirement around the world to identify livestock, I think that we've definitely made some major moves in the right direction. It will benefit the producers of Alberta in the long term as we're able to track the animals and to identify problems if they do arise in whatever area it comes under.

When you turn to page 56 in Bill 38, it's talking about the regulation of prescribed livestock and prescribed livestock products. It's going on there, referring to the poultry industry, but under regulation 1(1)(d) it says here that the minister may make regulations "respecting the production, grading, packing, shipping, transporting, advertising and sale of honey that is produced in Alberta for sale in Alberta." Talking about the commerce, one of the problems that seems to have arisen out of BSE and those areas – and I know, as he says, that we just have so many acts under the minister of agriculture that it's confusing and hard to keep track of all of them, yet we've thrown in, like I say, the production of honey there.

I guess my question is in regard to farm gate sales. It seems like it's still being a major problem in that for many agricultural products, even though the producer is the closest to the animal and knows what's going on – and I feel like the safest sale often is at a farm gate – that commerce act is being prohibited in many areas.

On page 55, section 99, just to read some of the different areas that still need to come together:

The Minister may, by giving notice in writing to the licensee, cancel a licence if the Minister is satisfied that the licensee has contravened or permitted the contravention of any provision of this Act, the Wildlife Act, the Meat Inspection Act, the Meat Inspection Act (Canada), the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act . . . which is what's being revised in here,

. . . the Livestock and Livestock Products Act, the Livestock Diseases Act, the Animal Protection Act or any regulations under any of those Acts.

So while we're going through the housecleaning and trying to put these things together, I guess I would continue to urge the government to try and simplify and bring more things under one act and to make it more understandable to producers. If we're to follow, I guess, the lead in Europe, we find that there are many small farms that are popping up with organic, natural production in those areas and wanting to get more into the commerce of those products. I would hope that we'll see further reduction and that the government will look at – well, I guess I've got to go back because I always want

to use that acronym, and it's been prohibited – Restructuring and Government Efficiency, that we need to be able to allow the production and the selling of farm products and allow these small producers to get their little glitch in the market and not go through so many rules and regulations at the farm gates.

But I appreciate the intent of this bill. It still seems like it's long and hard to handle, but hopefully we can continue to reduce it and the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency will be able to reduce the amount of red tape, which is one of its goals. We look forward to seeing more improvements on that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

Are you ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 38 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. Government House Leader, do I hear that we need to go to Bill 20?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm not aware of anyone's wishes to go to Bill 20 right now, in response to your question, hon. chair.

Nonetheless, I would like to propose that the Committee of the Whole now rise and report bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, Pr. 3, 36, 37, and 38 and progress on Bill 20 and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

12:30

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill Pr. 1, Bill 37, Bill 38. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill Pr. 2, Bill Pr. 3, Bill 36. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 20. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it has been a very, I'd say, engaging evening. There was the odd insouciant moment, but on the basis of the progress made, I would suggest and move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m. today.

[Motion carried; at 12:32 a.m. on Wednesday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 10, 2006** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 06/05/10
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce six individuals from my Calgary office. Now, these individuals help make my life at work a lot easier and safer. They are Rich Jones, Lea Roberts, Joyce Austin, Jack Davies, Cal Lawinger, and Jim Law. Rich runs the Calgary office. Joyce and Lea keep everything on track and me on time, which is no small feat, and they always seem to do it with a big smile. Jack and Cal provide me with the best level of security possible, and Jim tries to keep me from getting myself in trouble with the media, which would work better if I were better about taking his advice. I've been fortunate to have all these people with me for a number of years. I think some of them have been around longer, when my hair was a different colour. I want to thank them for everything they do. The dedication they bring to their jobs helps me do mine, and I'm so pleased they could be with us today. I would ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in giving them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to introduce through you to the Assembly various members of your staff who have been instrumental in the development of a project called Virtual Visit to the Alberta Legislature, which I was so thankful to have you join me at launching this morning in our Legislature rotunda. These individuals are Dr. David McNeil, our clerk of the Legislative Assembly; Rhonda Sorensen, communications co-ordinator and chair for LAO and the Virtual Visit committee – Rhonda will receive an extraspecial round of applause because it's also her birthday; Kerri Button, head of visitor services; Colleen Cameron, visitor services administrator; Tim Francis, our tour guide; Val Footz, manager of library operations; and Makoto Ohki, web and application analyst.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a moment to introduce certain members of my staff from Alberta Education who were deeply involved in the development of this important learning tool, which, as most members here would know, will allow people around the world to do a virtual visit of our Legislature building in all its beauty. My members of staff include Louise Bentley, director of online development; David Bryce, conceptual design co-ordinator and vital project lead, along with his wife, Charlene, and two daughters Chantelle and Brittany; Kaye Steward, our project co-ordinator; and Karl Muller, instructional design consultant.

Joining them today is another instrumental player in the project of the Virtual Visit, and that is Ryan Anderson, the public relations manager for Fuel Industries. All of these good folks are in your gallery or elsewhere. I would ask members of your staff who were involved and members of my staff to now please rise and receive our deepest thanks and our sincere gratitude for their work.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three of the 1,914 very professional Sustainable Resource Development staff that work in this province. First of all is Dave Ferrier. He is the provincial compliance adviser with our fish and wildlife division. He has been both with the fish and wildlife department of our department as well as a park ranger in the southern parts of our province.

Our second guest is Todd Letwin, and he is the head of the provincial compliance and enforcement programs in our lands division. I am proud to say that Todd has worked in the area of public land management for over 15 years, so he brings a lot of experience.

Our third and final guest is Kimberly Lougheed-Kain, a facilitator in field logistics in our fish and wildlife division. It's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that Kim is also the daughter of a very honourable and respected member of our caucus, of this government, the Member for Strathcona.

Our guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly members of my Aboriginal Youth Advisory Committee. This committee shares youth issues and perspectives with myself and, in fact, participated in planning initiatives with other ministries. This group advises me as the minister dealing with aboriginal youth issues, but they also provide a very unique perspective to make sure we address some of the concerns. They are the fastest growing population in Canada. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they stand as I name them: Myron Wolf Child, from the Blood First Nation; Danielle Cardinal, from Elizabeth Métis settlement; Amanda L'Hirondelle, of Métis Nation of Alberta; Terra Haugen, from the Métis Nation of Alberta; Fernando Didzena, from Dene Tha' of Assumption. Accompanying them today are from my staff Cynthia Dunningan, Nicole Hetu, and Gilman Cardinal. I'd ask that this Assembly give them a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that my group is in the gallery this afternoon, but with your indulgence I would like to introduce them into *Hansard* so that everyone knows that the 46 visitors from the Sturgeon Heights school in my constituency in St. Albert were in the Legislature today and touring through, accompanied by teachers and parent helpers Mrs. Cindy Hamilton, Mrs. Tracy Ayotte, Mrs. Trish Lema, Mrs. Elaine Schafers, and Mr. Perry Kozma. I did have the opportunity to speak with these students, and they are some of Alberta's bright lights for our future.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly students from a terrific school in my constituency, the school of Sherwood. There are 34 visitors, including three adults, Miss Mellick, Mr. Samchuck, and their teacher's assistant, Ms Connelly. I believe they're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm reception of all MLAs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 28 visitors from the Blackie school in my constituency.

An Hon. Member: Blackie.

Mr. Groeneveld: You bet: Blackie. I would like to say, as most do, that these are 18 of the best and brightest students. However, although they are an extremely bright bunch of students, they are also a rambunctious crew, which one would expect from grade 6 students. That's just what makes them great. Along with their teacher, Margaret Speelman, who has come here for four or five years now, I would like to introduce the parents: Lil Gillanders, Maggie Hooper, Shelley Randle, Vince Miller, Kari Eggi, Dave Kormos, Cheryl Brown, Ed Palmer, and a name I can pronounce, Glen Groeneveld, my nephew. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you to the Assembly the Member for Banff-Cochrane's rent-a-family. Her better half, Byron, son Josh, daughter Ashley are here to celebrate her special day, and at this time I would like them to stand in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of all of us.

The Speaker: If the hon. members did not get the subtle hint from the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, today is happy birthday for the hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members my son Mark Prins. He's graduating tomorrow from the University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine. He has been the recipient of many scholarships, including the rural physicians action plan scholarship for the last couple of years. He'll be moving from Calgary into a residency program, training for a family medicine practice, intending to practise somewhere in a small town, rural Alberta community. With him are my wife, Pauline, and my daughter Julia Vanderveen. I'd like him to stand in the public gallery and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My honour today to introduce eight leaders from Calgary working with the vital issues of persons with developmental disabilities. They are frustrated and discouraged

by the lack of support for dignified living and care for persons with disabilities, and they would like to see adequate funding they can count on. They are Bruce Howell, from outreach services, human resources, Calgary Scope Society; Ryan Geake, Calgary Scope Society; Judy Coe, with the Southern Alberta Community Living Association from Lethbridge; Shelley Murdoch, Calgary Scope Society; Tammy Winder, south region; Rhonda Phillips, Calgary Scope Society; and Sandy White, Calgary Scope Society; organized by Colleen Huston, from the Disability Action Hall in Calgary. Could they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise today and introduce through you to the other members of the Assembly, because I know you've met them already, 48 students and their teachers and parent helpers from Earl Grey school in my constituency of Calgary-Currie, which, I should also mention, is the alma mater of former Premier Peter Lougheed. They were here to assist you in unveiling and kicking off the Virtual Visit exhibit, and among them was student Jan Lisiecki, who, of course, we've had introduced to this House before as the winner of the What Democracy Means to Me essay contest. He spoke again today at the kick-off celebrations, the launch, of the Virtual Visit tour, and it is a spectacular essay.

With the students are teachers Donna Kovatch, Richard Bridges, and Jennifer Powell – these are grade 5 and grade 6 students and their teachers – assistant principal Tim Shoults, principal Judy Hehr, parent helpers Wendy Dick, Kathy Ogilvy, Elisa Iozzo, Jan Pugh, Sol Wright, and also Jan's mom, Anita Lisiecki. I'd have them rise – I think most of them are in the members' gallery; some may be in the public gallery as well – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure this afternoon to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of the very most important people in my life. They are tasked with the difficult job of making sure that I am on schedule, go where I'm supposed to go, say what I'm supposed to say when I get there, don't get in trouble with the media, and somewhere around all of that, they are also tasked with representing the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford through my constituency office. I would like to introduce Stacey Wickman. Yes, she is the daughter-in-law of my mentor and the former member of this Assembly, Percy Wickman, and she is my constituency manager. With her today is Caitlin Scruggs, who is my STEP student, my summer student, this year. I would ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three members of the Home-based Learning Society of Alberta, HLSA. It is a nonprofit society which provides information and support to families that have children learning at home and in the community. I met with these three representatives earlier today together with my colleague from St. Albert, and we appreciate their time and effort. The first person, who is an Edmonton-McClung constituent and the one who co-ordinated this gathering of home-

schoolers, is Louisa Lawson. She is joined by Joseph Mann, the president of HLSA, and Wendy Sauvé, who is their government relations officer. These three who are here now and about 50 more people who are going to join us in the public gallery in about 15 minutes are all opposed to the proposed standardized testing provisions in the latest draft of the Alberta home education regulation. This delegation comes from approximately 18 or 19 families from in and around Edmonton, and not all of them are members of the HLSA. I would now ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Contracting Policies

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A small look into government contracting policies reveals a big problem with the way this government hands out taxpayer dollars. Contracts are awarded without proper tendering, and little to no work seems to be required for consultants to cash their cheques. However, this government feels that this is normal conduct for everyday business. My questions are to the Premier. Given that this government shrugs off Rod Love's verbal advice contracts as the regular course of business, can the Premier provide the Assembly with other examples where contracts were given out for verbal advice and there was no documentation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, in the preamble the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition says "shrugs off." That is wrong. I don't shrug off anything. I don't pay particular attention to those contracts that are led by agencies of the government. Now, if it involves my office and there is a contract let, then I certainly wouldn't shrug anything off. I would pay very special attention to it.

In the case of Rod Love I understand that what the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition alludes to is a contract with the Calgary regional health authority. Now, that authority is appointed by the government, and it's a hands-off, self-governing body that is entirely independent. They hire, like the other eight health regions, who they want to hire and put on contract.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Premier: will the Premier commit to directing his ministers to find similar contracts for verbal advice and table them in the Legislature as soon as next week if possible?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to . . .

Dr. Taft: Don't shrug it off.

Mr. Klein: I'm not shrugging anything off.

My ministers are very talented and smart individuals, very talented and very smart individuals who are quite capable of hiring who they want or firing who they want, and I quite frankly don't involve myself unless something is so untoward and so wrong that it requires my attention. Otherwise, I will let these very smart and talented people decide for themselves, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, who wants control, control, control.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, let's try the Minister of Finance. Maybe we'll get different – given that the Minister of Finance has in fact recently changed the way her department hands out government contracts, will she recommend that other departments and regional health authorities take similar actions to avoid contracts like those given out to Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that all departments have reviewed their contracting policy and all of them have implemented a policy that would withstand scrutiny. Of course, a lot of those changes were made on the good advice of our Auditor General, whose advice we take seriously and follow very carefully.

At this point in time the RHAs, as the Premier has indicated, are an independent authority. They are funded by us. They present a business plan and a budget to the minister of health, which she approves. I would say that over 80 per cent of our RHAs – the minister of health could give you the exact number – in fact are audited by the Auditor General. I think that there are three exceptions, and they are audited by a recognized auditor. If there are any issues in those areas, I am sure that the Auditor General would bring them to our attention.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Automobile Insurance Rate Board Expenditures

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In May of last year members of the Automobile Insurance Rate Board and a few top Department of Finance officials dined at a posh Edmonton restaurant. An access to information request shows only a credit card receipt for \$914 and absolutely no breakdown of expenses. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. Given that the average price of an entrée at this restaurant was \$27, can the minister please tell all Albertans how it was possible for 12 people to spend over \$900?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Automobile Insurance Rate Board is a delegated authority of the province of Alberta. If there is a question on a meal expenditure, which I expect was a meeting and a meal, certainly I'll undertake to the hon. member to raise it with the chair of the Automobile Insurance Rate Board.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to guess that Albertans are going to find the bill for this meal hard to swallow.

Can the minister please tell us how much of the \$914 was spent on alcohol?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know. I wouldn't have any insight into that. I would undertake, as I did in my earlier answer to the hon. member, to raise this issue with the Automobile Insurance Rate Board chair. Perhaps he will provide some insight. There is certainly a hosting policy in all of these areas that I am responsible for. If there's a concern that they have not stayed within that hosting policy, I've indicated that I'll raise it with the chair.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is for the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Can the

minister please tell us anything at all about the efficiency of meetings conducted in restaurants while the participants are consuming alcohol?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea whatsoever what kind of meetings he's talking about, whether somebody's consuming alcohol or not consuming alcohol. I believe that if you were hosting a group from out of province or whatever and they wanted a glass of wine with their meal, I don't think that anybody would mind that whatsoever.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Hospital Bed Capacity

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal opposition has received charts from emergency room physicians in the Capital health region showing that at 8 a.m. on May 3 there were only two medical beds available in the entire health region of a million people and 71 people, having cleared emergency rooms, waiting for beds. A study released yesterday by the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health confirms that emergency room overcrowding is reaching critical levels. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that emergency rooms are operating at full capacity, what plans does the minister have in place to deal with an emergency like a bus crash or a flu outbreak or a catastrophe due to weather?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, first of all, since 2003 we have had in place a plan for catastrophes, like a pandemic plan, like plans that would help us initiate a protocol and backup supports. In fact, there are even interprovincial plans that have been supportive since the time of SARS, when on a daily basis communication was held with all of the ministers of health and their senior staff across the country. Fortunately, this week I will attend yet another federal/provincial/territorial meeting on pandemic planning. So in terms of major catastrophic events that impact the health system, I believe that we are more advanced simply because the Canadian government recognized that Alberta should be the one that would be presenting relative to cross-ministry approaches to planning. So while we review with significant concern limited bed capacity in regions, I can assure Albertans and the hon. member opposite that we've done a lot of work to make sure that in catastrophic situations we are indeed ready.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, back to the same minister: if there are only two beds available at a given time in the entire region, how does the minister expect to be dealing with some sort of catastrophic health emergency? There are only two beds available.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Gerry Predy has been the medical officer of health in the Capital region, and he has organized and orchestrated a number of meetings with other providers in the regions. Throughout Alberta there is a very strong and significant network. Obviously, other facilities outside the Capital health region are available.

I'd say one more thing. Mr. Speaker, \$1.4 billion: that was the expenditure assigned last year to make sure that we were building the bed capacity to make sure that in the future we would not have the same kind of opportunity that we face today. We're faced with that opportunity today because of a heated economy that is generating a lot of people in this province, that is gathering an intense

number of people in Edmonton and the Capital region. That rapid growth has necessitated an even more rapid expansion of some of our facilities.

Mr. Speaker, may I make the point that it's not like we're not trying here.

The Speaker: We have a time factor too.

The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the increasing acuity of people using emergency rooms means that the primary care centres are not an option, what choices do these patients have?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have identified, as the hon. member is aware, 19 additional primary care centres there. Acuity, as described, could mean anything from the flu season, the kinds of things that had more intense pressure this year, and also looking at other community-based facilities to offer other kinds of supports. There is certainly a plan to use the region for those regions that have additional pressure. That regional expansion has seen day surgeries done in Westlock, in Barrhead, in other outlying communities, in Lamont, in Fort Saskatchewan.

Ultimately, I'm confident that the peaks and valleys that we are experiencing today will level out and that there is, indeed, a good, managed system and that they are making the best of what sometimes is a very tight situation.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Anticrime Volunteer Groups

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, a U.S.-based group called the Guardian Angels wants to set up shop in Edmonton and Calgary. This group is widely known for its vigilante approach. Their confrontational approaches put citizens at risk, and many responsible municipal and police leaders have opposed the establishment of Guardian Angel chapters in their city. To the Solicitor General: why is this minister in his public statements seeming to endorse the attempts of the Guardian Angels to set up shop in Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not endorsing this group as a whole. I am endorsing the fact that every member of the public has a responsibility to be vigilant, not vigilante.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about crime prevention programs such as Block Watch and apartment watch and radio watch, these are all programs where the police service liaises with community organizations and volunteer groups. If the Guardian Angels enter into an agreement with the Calgary Police Service or the Edmonton Police Service, I would think that there could be a relationship there, and it may be a possibility for them to work in that community. But those, again, are discussions that have to take place at the community level.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Why hasn't this minister been vigilant in ensuring that there's adequate funding for

our police services, including up to 500 officers, which the NDP opposition has been proposing? Why hasn't this minister been vigilant in ensuring that we have enough police resources so that we don't need the Guardian Angels and their vigilante tactics?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, the budget for policing in the province, including the provincial funding that's provided, is about \$700 million a year for municipal policing and the RCMP throughout Alberta. We've provided 200 front-line officers to policing in the last two years alone.

Mr. Eggen: That's from attrition.

Mr. Cenaiko: That's in addition to attrition and not counting the positions we looked at in our organized crime strategies, in ICE, the integrated child exploitation positions. So we've added a number, and we're going to continue to look at those numbers. Again, we've added a component of sheriffs that are going to be working on our highways, which will be able to replace RCMP officer positions and allow them to do criminal investigations, respond to emergencies, and let sheriffs do traffic enforcement. So there are a number of initiatives. We want to look at new models of policing service delivery throughout Alberta so that we can effectively use our police officers to the best advantage possible.

Mr. Mason: To the same minister: given that the lack of provincial funding forced the closure of the duplex run by Crossroads street outreach housing for street-involved youth and given that there's a shortage of low-income housing, that there's a shortage of funding for drug rehabilitation, that there's a shortage for all kinds of things that could help prevent crime, what has this minister done to be vigilant in terms of making sure that municipalities have the tools and the financing that they need to prevent crime from starting in the first place?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, the hon. member mentions a number of issues that are related to policing. On the social issues we have a number of ministries within this government that are providing funds to agencies, to organizations to provide for those. As the Premier has mentioned over and over and over, we're there to provide them with a hand up and not a handout.

In policing, Mr. Speaker, crime prevention programs are in place. We do provide the city of Edmonton with over \$12 million, not counting the \$27 million they get to keep from their fine revenue, not counting the millions of dollars they get from our ministry of infrastructure regarding infrastructure funding for police buildings. So, obviously, we're talking not the \$11 million or \$12 million that goes in a grant cheque but, really, an opportunity for the municipality of Edmonton to look at somewhere around \$40 million. In Calgary it's around \$57 million, not the \$15 million cheque. When you add all of those components into it, these municipalities in Alberta get the highest award from any provincial government anywhere in this nation. So we have really outdone ourselves in Alberta, but we will continue to pursue new models of policing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Freedom of Choice

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning we were treated again to hear the winning essays on democracy. Master Lisiecki was grateful to wake each day with the freedom to choose who he wants to be. Mr. Warring was proud to have fought for our

democracy and our freedom to speak our mind and worship as we please. However, there are many religious leaders and churches and citizens who no longer feel that they have their freedoms of conscience, religion, and belief protected due to recent changes in federal legislation. My questions today are to the Premier. Will he restore the balance back to our democracy by passing legislation that protects religious organizations and leaders from prosecution or sanctions over their beliefs and being forced by law to go against their conscience?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I am not certain as to whether we have legislation in place, but certainly the principle has been long established, that there is freedom of speech and freedom of religious expression. I believe that legislation exists within the human rights legislation to protect all ministers of the cloth and others who wish to express their religious beliefs.

Mr. Hinman: I hope the Premier's beliefs are correct.

Again to the Premier, who has stated that he is not comfortable to perform certain legal marriages: will he sponsor legislation protecting religious leaders and marriage commissioners to choose to solemnize only those marriages which do not contradict their own religion and conscience?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that matter is up to the Legislature if they ever get around to it. There is a bill before the Legislature, a private member's bill, Bill 208, that speaks to this issue. If the hon. leader of the fourth party is interested in my personal opinion, I believe that there should be protection for marriage commissioners to not perform weddings if it violates their moral or their religious principles.

Mr. Hinman: That's why we're asking for a government bill instead of a private bill.

To the Premier again: will this government pass legislation that allows elected school boards, who represent their districts, the flexibility to choose which relationships are to be promoted or supported by the curriculum within their jurisdiction?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, this is a matter for school boards and the Minister of Education, so I'll have him respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in fact, the Alberta School Act does have provisions already in it. We do teach on a mandatory basis courses in human sexuality from grade 4 through grade 9. In grades 10, 11, and 12, of course, the popular CALM course is taught, which is career and life management skills. However, there's also a provision there which says very clearly that if parents have any reservations or concerns or whatever, they can ask for their child to be exempted from those classes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Climate Change

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is Canada's top greenhouse gas emitter, and its emissions aren't going to wait while the federal government decides if it will support or oppose the Kyoto protocol. My only question to the Minister of Environment: how is this delayed decision affecting Alberta's action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta – and I say to all of this Assembly, to all of us that actually represent our citizens, over 3 million – one thing about all of our citizens is that they don't just talk; they act. That's exactly what we are doing on climate change: we are acting. Not only that, I'm proud to say that Canada under not only the federal Liberal government but now the Conservative government is following the made-in-Alberta solution because we don't want to see money leave Canada to go to buy a hot air credit that says that you can pay to pollute. What we believe in and want to see is concrete action.

In fact, today the Minister of Energy and I were at the Shell plant at Scotford. Shell is a typical company for the actions they are taking in forward thinking relative to adapting to and managing climate change. Today it was very interesting, when they announced, of course, this new high-tech LSD, low sulphur diesel.

An Hon. Member: LSD?

Mr. Boutilier: This is LSD, and it's not the illegal drug. It is the actual technology that is being used to make a difference right here in Alberta. We continue to move forward. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans expect no less of their government. We'll continue not to talk but to act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Home Education

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems to have lost the trust of yet another group of Albertans concerned about education. This government offers home-schooling as an option for educating some of our students, but parents from the home-schooling community are concerned that the program may no longer be administered fairly. Some home-schoolers do not study the regular curriculum or do only parts of it. To the Minister of Education: given that standardized testing is designed to assess students who study a standardized curriculum and given that home-schooled children do in fact work with teachers in their homes who act as facilitators to monitor development and guide progress, why is the minister now asking these students to write a test on something that they do not study?

2:10

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member to get better researchers on his staff because I'm not doing anything of the sort. In fact, what we have done is that the home ed regulation as it exists today has been extended through to the end of July. In the meantime, very shortly I hope to present that very community that he's asking about with what the new regulation will look like. Until we finish that process and I've had a chance to discuss it with them yet again – I've already met with them probably half a dozen times or so – I won't be commenting any much further.

Specific to the issue of standardized testing, Mr. Speaker, it typically occurs at the grade 3, 6, 9 levels. In fact, according to the rights and privileges accorded to home educators and home-educating students, they have the option to write it or not write it, as they wish.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fifty of these people are in the gallery today. Will the minister commit to meeting with them in the near future then?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would be very pleased to meet with them. I attended their annual conference – I think it was last year – in Red Deer. We had a wonderful visit with them, and we did about a 40-minute question-and-answer period. I've met with their representatives. I've corresponded with them through e-mails and letters and phone calls and what have you dozens and dozens of times. We've had about four or five or six formal meetings with the home education community representatives. There are various groups there.

The essential thing to remember here is that home-educating parents do have the constitutional right to work with their children in their homes if they wish provided certain conditions and so on are met. We intend to continue to allow them, for the most part, as far as I'm aware anyway, to do the very same thing in the future.

Mr. Elsalhy: My last question, Mr. Speaker: can the minister explain the flip-flop between the previous Minister of Education's position and the current position that's held by the minister today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any flip-flop whatsoever. It's quite customary to review regulations approximately every five years or so, and that's what we're in the process of doing now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Legislative Assembly Virtual Visit Project

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, a very exciting event occurred today in the Legislature rotunda. I'm referring to the official launch of a new online project called the Virtual Visit, which uses the Internet to literally invite the world into our wonderful Alberta Legislature Building. I understand that this project is the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

Before I ask my questions, I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of Education for making this project possible. [interjections] I just read it, Mr. Speaker.

My questions are to the Minister of Education. How will this Virtual Visit online learning resource be utilized by our school system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the most valuable aspects of the Virtual Visit project is that it will allow students throughout the province, regardless of where they live, to pay a virtual visit to the Legislature without leaving their classroom. We know that this is a beautiful province, but it is also very, very distant in terms of the travel time required between places, and not every school group is allowed the opportunity to come to this beautiful building. Earlier today some school groups were introduced, and we were grateful to have them here, but not every child is afforded that particular opportunity. Therefore, the short answer is that the Virtual Visit project will allow all students that particular opportunity. It will also allow teachers to use the Virtual Visit project as a valuable learning and teaching tool in their classrooms and for students in their homes, too, if they wish.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder: could the minister enlighten us if this project will have an impact on the school curriculum, and how? [interjections]

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, there's a great amount of congruency between the Virtual Visit project and our Alberta school curriculum. I think members of the opposition who are moaning and groaning about this project should realize that this is a first for Alberta, and it's a first in the world. We should be proud of it. You shouldn't be heckling this one, opposition members.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the congruency is really manifested in the fact that this Legislature contains a lot of history, a lot of important history, be it the Famous Five individuals or be it former Premiers or Lieutenant Governors or MLAs in general or Speakers and so on. So there's a great congruency there with the curriculum, and there's also a fit even with the local history as well as with math and statistics and election results and so on. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally and apparently mercifully, my final question to the minister: could he inform us of any future plans for this project?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, well, that's a much better response. Thank you. One day you will realize how important this project is, which I realize that you're not realizing today, opposition members, because you may be part of that history. In the future we hope to have these doors opened up to the Virtual Visit, and the camera will actually take students in between our desks, and they will see where members such as some hon. members today sit.

Electricity Regulation

Mr. MacDonald: In April the Minister of Energy met with Kellan Fluckiger, the department's electricity business unit leader. It was a very important meeting for the minister. He wanted to be on his best behaviour when his real boss showed up in his office. This meeting was to discuss the government's latest blueprint on electricity deregulation, which is named role and mandate refinements for Alberta electric industry. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is the government recommending that the Independent System Operator have the authority to approve their own expenses without any further review from the EUB?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a wonderful day to be able to meet with the many, many, many capable, talented, energetic, loyal employees of the Department of Energy. Kellan Fluckiger is one of them. We have numerous meetings. This certainly wasn't the first time this topic was ever introduced. The department is always engaging in consultations with the public about how we can improve the systems that we have in place. In this case we were reviewing the roles and mandates of the Energy and Utilities Board, the Alberta Electric System Operator, and the Market Surveillance Administrator just to make sure that among the bodies there is appropriate governance. So in this case it was just to make sure that in looking at the Alberta Electric System Operator, we have got the appropriate structure and governance with respect to their budgets, their allocation of costs, the approvals, all of those good things.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why is this government allowing Mr. Kellan Fluckiger to continue to undermine the regulatory authority of the EUB?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, that wouldn't be the case at all. In fact, if you talk to the Energy and Utilities Board and the Alberta Electric System Operator, they've been very much jointly co-operating and working on these issues so that there's no overlap and duplication among the two boards. Really, the intent of this is so that we're not missing something between the boards and that we're also not duplicating the efforts amongst the two boards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Energy: why are electricity generators writing the rules for the Market Surveillance Administrator in this latest attempt to force more costs onto the power bills of Alberta consumers?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Market Surveillance Administrator has been very proactive in working to ensure, as their role is, that the public is protected and enforcement is there in case any irregularities or any problems do occur that would be unwarranted. So they do act as a great enforcement agency on behalf of all Albertans, to protect them. That said, we always are open to consulting with industry and the public at large, so we will always encourage that we get the best feedback on how to make sure that this is a very strong regulatory structure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Postsecondary Education in Public Health

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge signed a memorandum of agreement to align their efforts in advancing public health in Alberta. This collaborative agreement follows the announcement last month of the University of Alberta School of Public Health, Canada's first stand-alone facility dedicated to public health. My first question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister outline how her department plans to support this initiative, and would that include any financial support?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it was an exciting morning this morning with health care providers and educators packed into a room at the university, at the Telus building, with Calgary president Harvey Weingarten seated beside me, and in Lethbridge with president Bill Cade. The Lethbridge campus was linked in one virtual celebration of the first ever in Canada School of Public Health. The remarkable part about this is that instead of one place, three places across Alberta will be delivering better supports for public health.

What we will do as the Department of Health and Wellness through our officials in the public health division is look at practicum experiences, look at ways that we can support practical research. I spoke about two months ago to one of the organizers of this project, Dr. David Low in Calgary, and while there were no

identified dollars for this initiative at this time, it's understood that the collaboration between the campuses, between the government departments that could participate will ultimately see a number of dollars presented to us. There was an estimate that the University of Alberta may be in need of some \$20 million to support some of their programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is for the Minister of Advanced Education. Why is this important work being shared among three universities rather than having it concentrated at one university where it could become a public health care centre of excellence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, let me say that it's a great day for postsecondary education and wellness in the province of Alberta. In many cases it does make sense to have a university specialize and become a centre of excellence. We have many examples of that. For example, the University of Lethbridge and water. They specialize in that.

But public health is a very broad and complex issue that involves many disciplines, so it makes sense to share that vast field amongst our institutions. Plus, each university currently specializes in a particular area, and it's important to link those together. For example, the new Alberta School of Public Health at the University of Alberta offers highly specialized education and training to Albertans pursuing careers in this field and to those already working in this field, but the Markin institute at the University of Calgary designs, implements, and evaluates solutions at the population level to prevent health problems, and the University of Lethbridge, Mr. Speaker – this is very important – has Canada's only baccalaureate program in addictions counselling.

The Speaker: Everything's important. I have 18 members wanting to raise questions.

The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will this announcement help attract the much-needed new researchers that we need in Alberta?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I think I'll need more than 45 seconds for this one. I can get excited about this one. Not only is this the first in Canada, but in this province we know how to attract the brightest and the best people to come to this province to do research and bring with them the postgrads that follow them around in order to study from these masters. I'm going to be working with the minister of health and the Minister of Innovation and Science and see if we can't duplicate the success of iCORE that brought in 23 new chairs for the ICT industry. Let's see if we can do it for wellness.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Wind Power Generation

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bias of this government towards coal generation is well known. In fact, the return of Old King Coal was a major theme in this spring's throne speech. That's why I guess it should come as no surprise that the regulator agency

that controls generators to the provincial power grid has recently moved to cap wind power generation in this province. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Why are senior officials in the Department of Energy working hand in glove with the Alberta Electric System Operator to impose an artificially low cap of 900 megawatts on renewable, zero emission wind power generation in this province?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we're delighted that the hon. member is also supportive of wind generation and the alternative. Our department is clearly supportive of that. This province has more wind generation than any other province in the country. [interjections] I haven't yet polled the whole universe, but I certainly can say that I speak for the country when I say that it has the most wind power thus far. That said, for all the wind that he would like, we're prepared to let him take this power under one condition: if he only wants wind, then he only gets electricity when the wind is blowing.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that the AESO is not proposing to cap generation from power plants burning coal and natural gas, why is the minister standing idly by while the AESO uses its regulatory authority to impose an unnecessary cap on wind power generation? Lots of other jurisdictions have a much higher cap.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, like I said, we can have all the wind we want – we could go to a hundred per cent wind – and if the wind is not blowing, there would be no electricity in this building as we speak. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor. The chair is very attentive to his answer.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. With respect to this, some of the jurisdictions – and I might use Quebec in particular – are actually going out and actively trying to bring on a lot more wind, in fact a very substantial amount of wind power. But they have a very great quantity of hydro. If you've got a large quantity of hydro, it's easy to ramp up the need for new electricity coming on if you've got hydro against wind. Whereas Alberta is very more constrained in the quantity of hydro that we have. You've got to balance the kinds of sources of electricity so that it's reliable, predictably delivered when we want it. Every time we go to that light switch, we can count on the power.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that other jurisdictions like the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Quebec, as the hon. minister mentioned, are finding that 15 or more per cent of their electricity load can be met by wind power without affecting system reliability, why is this government allowing the AESO to restrict wind power generation to less than 10 per cent of Alberta's electricity load when certainly it could be approaching double that?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, AESO, first off, said that they wanted to manage above a certain amount. They didn't say that there was a cap they couldn't go beyond. They said that if you're going to add a great supply of wind, you have to appropriately manage. How does that factor into the other reliable sources of electricity so that it can come when wind isn't blowing? Now, if they want to blow a lot more, I guess we'll have more reliable wind power.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Highway Maintenance Contracts

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1995-96 the government of Alberta privatized Alberta's highway maintenance contracts. At that time the cost of Alberta highway maintenance was approximately \$72 million. This year the government is expecting to pay \$234 million in highway maintenance, a 224 per cent increase. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: given that four of seven highway maintenance contracts will expire in July 2006, what assurance can the minister provide this House that the bidding competition process will be transparently accountable rather than sole sourced?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there is a process for bidding of contracts, and I will certainly take that question under advisement for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I guess I'll have to go to the Deputy Premier again. Given that the Auditor General found that the government has failed to properly account for the real costs of highway maintenance, compounded by constant complaints regarding the deterioration of our highways, are Albertans getting value from these contracts?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again I'll be happy to get some detail for the hon. member from the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, but I remind all hon. members of the tremendous growth that has occurred in this province in the last very short years, and for anyone who travels outside of this city on our rural roads outside any of our centres, you know that the traffic has increased in a tremendous way. I was on highway 21 last evening, a very, very busy road. That's a good sign. That means that things are happening in this province.

Are we getting good value? The minister questions that through his contracts and through the process at the end of the contract of ensuring that the work has been done. As I say, you'll get a detailed answer from the minister.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the Deputy Premier researching that information and having it sent to me.

Given that former Treasurer Steve West indicated that highway maintenance privatization would save Alberta taxpayers millions but, instead, has dramatically increased costs with reduced quality, why is this government continuing down the privatization road?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again, you have to compare apples and apples, not apples and oranges, which we usually do. One, we have an increased number of highways. Every year the age of those highways changes, and so do the rehab requirements. The traffic patterns change. The size of equipment has changed. For many of our highways the base was built 25 years ago. So to expect that you could actually have a lower maintenance cost today in Alberta's economy is impossible. Are we getting good value? That is something that the minister ensures in the contracting process. There is an expectation of value, and at the end of that contract that is reviewed; I know that for a fact. The satisfaction must be there,

or the companies are called back to redo or complete the job. Again, more detail coming from the minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Orkney Water Co-operative

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Orkney water co-op consists of nine farmers who drilled two community or co-operative wells, which were piped to their farms as well as to an old school which has been used as a community centre since it closed as a school many years ago. This co-op was operated successfully for many years until recently when they were told by environmental officials that they had to have a qualified water technician on staff to test their water daily and will be treated the same as a hamlet. This will drive their costs up significantly. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister assure me that the Orkney water co-op is being treated exactly the same as the numerous communal farms that are located throughout the province?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, ensuring safe, secure drinking water to all Albertans: yes, I can assure the hon. member of that. In the particular example Alberta Environment, of course, is looking for some very practical solutions for keeping costs down, but as you can appreciate, any time there's a communal hall where not just necessarily the farmers from the area that you talk about but the general public come to an area where, in fact, they would go in expecting clean, safe drinking water, we have to ensure that. It's my understanding that that's happening as we speak. We want to minimize it. We're trying to take very practical, common-sense approaches to ensure safe drinking water. At the same time, when someone comes to visit someone, they will also be assured in that visit that they have safe drinking water as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that other communal farms also have a church or a school building that also doubles as a community centre for such occasions as weddings, funerals, and Christmas concerts that have invited guests from the public there, can you tell me what the difference is between these community centres and the Orkney community centre?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there is any difference. Ultimately, the fact is that we want to achieve safe drinking water. I can say that from my former ministry I am very familiar with the financial obstacles that smaller communities face. Safe drinking water is an expectation of all Albertans. From a big city like Calgary or Edmonton to a small rural community we want to ensure safe drinking water.

I also am not suggesting that the best solution for these farmers is just simply a whole additional expense. I think we can find creative ways of getting safe drinking water without the bureaucracy of instilling unnecessary costs, and I can assure the hon. member that we will not instill any unnecessary costs in ensuring that safe drinking water.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you. Again to the same minister: so when can the Orkney water co-op be advised that they will be treated the same as every other organization of similar circumstances such as these other communal farms?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, our Water for Life strategy is a fine example of ensuring safe drinking water. I also want to say: did you know that over 600,000 Albertans rely on water from private wells? Of course, as much as they have managed those private wells on their own, which are unregistered, we still have a responsibility to ensure their safe drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that we are working very closely with the hon. member. I appreciate also his advance notice of this important issue to try to alleviate in a creative but responsible way safe, secure drinking water for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wild Rose Foundation Granting Process

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While attending a fundraiser in my constituency to build a school for Sudan this past weekend, I was shocked to hear the Tory MLA for Calgary-East boldly declare that the Wild Rose Foundation would match all monies raised that evening. Despite the fact that the group had not yet applied for a Wild Rose grant, the member's promise implied that he had direct control over the granting process. This raises serious questions about the policy of this government and the impartiality of the Wild Rose Foundation granting process. To the Minister of Community Development: is it the policy of this government to allow Tory MLAs to use the Wild Rose Foundation as their own political fund for garnering support?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any improper action taking place by the board members of the Wild Rose Foundation, so I find that a very big discredit that we're accusing those people and the good work they do on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's about the MLA for Calgary-East.

To the minister again: given that the Member for Calgary-East has already made the monetary promise and the group believed him, will the minister be requiring the Wild Rose Foundation to honour his commitment?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any such request. All requests that go to the Wild Rose Foundation are vetted by good Albertans that sit on there as members, and they review all of these depending on their merit. I'm not aware of any MLA involvement from the time that I've served in this Chamber that they'd dictate to the board who shall receive any funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Community Development: what consequences, if any, will the Member for Calgary-East face as a result of this bypassing of the formal process for acquiring a Wild Rose grant? I'll provide the information to the minister.

Speaker's Ruling Allegations against a Member

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View almost seems, from the perception of the Speaker, to be making an accusation against another member of this House. There is a policy and

there is a procedure in the Standing Orders to deal with this. So we're going to leave this matter. The hon. Member for Calgary-East will be advised that these questions were raised in the House. The hon. Member for Calgary-East may choose to take certain actions under the Standing Orders with respect to this, and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View will also be given an opportunity, and we'll see where it all goes.

Before we deal with Members' Statements, I'm going to invite the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance to supplement a question from the question period yesterday. I believe the question that the hon. member was responding to was originated by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, so under our procedures the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford will have an opportunity to raise an additional question.

Government Liabilities

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, this is in regard to a question that was raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford yesterday. The quote from *Hansard* is: "The government's liabilities have grown by nearly \$3 billion in the last year." He cited information on page 43 of the fiscal plan. In fact, total government liabilities are forecast to have declined from March 31, '05-06, by \$760 million. That's a forecast. The final numbers will be available in June as part of our government's final business plan. There is a forecast increase – and again it's a forecast – to March 31, '07, which is about \$500 million.

As I said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, it was unclear from the member's three questions whether he was referring to pension liabilities or other things. In fact, this forecast that I'm speaking to is as a result of lending through Crown agencies, Agriculture Financial Services and Alberta corporate finance.

2:40

It appears that the hon. member has misread the fiscal financial assets line, which in fact shows an increase of nearly \$3 billion in assets rather than liabilities. So I thought it was important, Mr. Speaker, that we have it on the record. Certainly, the hon. member and I can have a further discussion on this, but I would suggest that he has misread the fiscal financial statements.*

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It would appear to me that there is some discrepancy between the minister's understanding of my questions and the way they were meant. Since I'm allowed a question, I guess my question for the minister would be this: how would the minister explain the discrepancy, then, between the graph that is in this year's fiscal plan versus the graph that is in last year's fiscal plan, which does in fact show an increase of \$3 billion in the province's total liability? That was the question yesterday.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that he's misreading the financial statements. I would be happy to sit down with the hon. member and review them. I've had the staff at the office of budget management, which I can assure you are pretty diligent and learned people, go over this thoroughly to ensure that, in fact, we did have an increase in assets of \$3 billion rather than an increase of liabilities. So we can have that conversation. As I indicated yesterday, we'll have two hours tonight to discuss it as well as generally accepted accounting principles, which is how our financial statements are presented.

*See p. 1401, left col., para. 7

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll call upon six hon. members today to participate in Members' Statements, but first of all the historical vignette for the day. Twice in the same week it deals with the making of history rather than dealing with history.

Citizens' access to the Legislature Building and citizens' understanding of the building and the institution of democracy that it houses has taken decades to develop. Alberta did not start producing its own *Hansard* until 1972, making Alberta one of the last provinces in Canada to do so. Alberta, however, was one of the first jurisdictions in the country to have permanent television broadcasts, with the first of its proceedings televised on March 15, 1972. In 1998 a searchable *Hansard* was provided daily on the Internet, and in 2003 gavel-to-gavel audio broadcasts were added to the Assembly website, followed in 2004 by streamed video of Oral Question Period.

On July 1, 1998, unique in Canada and for the first time in the history of Alberta opportunity was accorded to citizens to walk onto the floor of this Chamber. We now have numerous student parliaments, upwards of eight, a School at the Legislature five days a week, and some 176,000 visitors annually come to this building, where they're met by talented and professional tour guides who make them feel very comfortable.

While we are pleased with the many people who do visit and can visit this building, many were unable to visit the Legislature Building until now. Today, as you've already heard, we've unveiled the most innovative access visitor tool found anywhere in the world. The Virtual Visit: Step Inside the Alberta Legislature website is another major educational first for Alberta. To the knowledge of many, no other online tour provides the same immersive, 3-D experience that Alberta's tour does.

This project, Virtual Visit: Step Inside the Alberta Legislature, provides a realistic three-dimensional environment in cyberspace that replicates the layout, scale, lighting, and finishes of the Alberta Legislature. Students and citizens anywhere in the world can access the website and experience a virtual tour of this building that allows them to look around and move as if in the real world.

As Speaker I would very much like to extend deepest appreciation to Alberta Education, the previous minister, and the current minister for believing in a project that had humble beginnings several years ago. Virtual Visit: Step Inside the Alberta Legislature was fully funded as an Alberta Education centennial project, and gifted people in Alberta Education worked hand in hand with gifted people in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to erect a groundbreaking education visitors' tool that is the first of its kind. Deepest appreciation is also extended to the private sector firm Fuel Industries for outstanding work on this project.

Access is at www.virtualvisit.learnalberta.ca.

Today's tour is the first step. With the support of the members of this Assembly we hope to add more educational activities as well as enhanced interactive features with Members of this Legislative Assembly in the future. As of today anyone anywhere in the world can visit the Alberta Legislature Building right now as we speak.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Biodiesel Fuel

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the opportunity to take the lead in renewable fuels and be the green transportation and energy leader across Canada. By leveraging off the

agriculture and petroleum industries, we can revitalize rural Alberta and improve the environment for all Canadians.

Alberta farmers have much to gain from a strong canola-based biodiesel industry. A renewable fuel standard of 5 per cent would require roughly 2.87 million tonnes of oilseed. Last year Alberta farmers harvested approximately 3.6 million tonnes. Alberta farmers with high-quality soil, leading canola yields, and proximity to Canada's petroleum production and distribution sectors for downstream blending would be well positioned to provide the primary feedstock for a strong domestic biodiesel industry.

Stringent standards must be supported. Canola is considered to be the best biodiesel feedstock for cold weather use.

Mr. Speaker, biodiesel widespread use will benefit the health of all Albertans. It will lower air pollutants like sulphur, carbon monoxide, unburned hydrocarbon, and particulate matter. With a 5 per cent standard we will reduce CO₂ emissions by 3.3 megatonnes per year. Each litre of biodiesel reduces carbon dioxide by approximately 78 per cent compared with normal diesel.

Mr. Speaker, a renewable field industry will develop a more sustainable rural economy, deliver health care benefits from improved air quality, and lower harmful greenhouse gases.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Big Valley Jamboree

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over a decade the Big Valley Jamboree of Camrose has been one of the largest country music festivals in Canada. It's also been one of the most highly regarded. In two out of the past five years the Big Valley Jamboree has been recognized as the country music event of the year by the Canadian Country Music Association.

However, you don't need to see industry awards to know that this event is very highly regarded. The success of the Big Valley Jamboree is very apparent when you see the more than 85,000 people who attend this weekend each year that it's held. For four days in August a new village springs up around the Camrose Exhibition Grounds, covering a 400-acre area.

The jamboree has something for everyone, including a trade fair, cattle penning, and songwriting workshops. There are family-specific events and campsites as well as events and camping venues which are more geared towards adults.

The artists who perform at Big Valley have always been as diverse as the crowds which attend this festival, and this year is no different. This year the main stage will play host to headliners such as Gretchen Wilson, Montgomery Gentry, Mel Tillis, and Alberta's own Terri Clark among many other excellent performers.

As with so many other large events the success of the Big Valley Jamboree is largely dependent on the hundreds of volunteers who work so diligently to ensure that the festival goes and performers alike enjoy this great music weekend.

On behalf of the constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose I would like to invite all members of this Legislature and all Albertans to experience the Big Valley Jamboree this August 3 to 6 in Camrose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Salute to Second World War Veterans

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, last Monday marked the 61st anniversary of Victory in Europe, or VE, Day. It's an appropriate time to recognize the contributions of all of our veterans.

Approximately 1.1 million Canadians and Newfoundlanders served in the armed forces during the Second World War, including 600,000 in the Canadian army, 106,000 in the Royal Canadian Navy,

and over 200,000 in the Royal Canadian Air Force, of which my father, Pilot Officer Allan Brown, was one.

Often overlooked was the important involvement and contributions of Canadian women in the war effort. During World War II more than 45,000 Canadian women served in the military services. The women's division of the Royal Canadian Air Force was authorized in July 1941 and by 1945 had enlisted 17,000 women.

In August of 1941 the establishment of the Canadian Women's Army Corps was announced, and training bases were established in Ste.-Anne-de-Bellevue, Quebec; Kitchener, Ontario; and here in Vermilion, Alberta. More than 21,000 women served in the corps during the Second World War.

The Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, or Wrens, began recruiting in 1942 and announced 7,126 recruits by the end of the Second World War. One of those Wrens serving on the west coast of Canada was my mother, Irene Shaw, of Midnapore, Alberta, of whom I'm especially proud.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of women left the home to run farms or businesses or to take up tools or trades and work, which supported the Canadian war machine, freeing others to enlist on the front lines.

Mr. Speaker, I know that all hon. members join with me in saluting and giving thanks for all those Canadian men and women who served their country so well in time of war.

Lethbridge Centennial

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the great pleasure of attending the official centennial ceremonies for the incorporation of Lethbridge, a grand and wonderful city. A number of dignitaries celebrated with us. They represented our twin and friendship cities from Japan, China, Montana, and Quebec. Lethbridge's own Alberta Senator Joyce Fairbairn also attended. We were entertained by the St. Patrick's fine arts school choir, the Okinawa children's choir, and the internationally recognized aboriginal hoop dancer J.J. First Charger.

The range of people and the variety of languages showed off the diversity of our outstanding city. Lethbridge welcomes newcomers from almost every country in the world. The special relationships with the Chinese and Japanese communities was highlighted in the ceremony, as was the special relationship that Lethbridge has with the aboriginal people who live in and near our city.

Mr. Speaker, Mayor Tarleck made a special announcement that our city's tax-supported debt has been retired due to the vision of the mayors and councils from 1989 onward. Former Mayor David Carpenter was on hand for the special presentation of the cancelled debentures.

The centennial theme of Rediscover Lethbridge is a call to rediscover the history of Lethbridge and its citizens. Lethbridge's history is a strong one, built on coal mining, agriculture, and a knowledge-based economy.

Lethbridge also boasts the newly reopened Galt Museum, which promises to be a pre-eminent museum in Alberta. I would like to recognize Legacy Ridge housing development, a first in Canada, which celebrates Lethbridge's historical women by naming all of the streets in their honour.

I encourage all members of this House to follow highway 2 south to the magnificent coulees of Lethbridge, where people smile and say good morning and you can park downtown for a quarter. The Mayor of Lethbridge, Bob Tarleck, has graciously provided Lethbridge centennial pins for all of the members.

I was honoured to have been a part of the centennial events, and I am sure that Clint Dunford, the MLA from Lethbridge-West,

would echo my sentiments if he were able to be with us today. Lethbridge is a rare jewel in the Alberta crown.

The Speaker: Are you happy now?

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you.

The Speaker: You went beyond the time. You mentioned a member by name. But because it's a happy occasion, a 100th anniversary, and you gave everybody a pin, maybe forgiveness is in the air.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Northgate Lions Senior Citizens' Recreation Centre

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Edmonton Northgate Lions seniors' centre is truly the best seniors' centre in all of Canada. It is not only because of the wonderful facilities that have been built up through countless hours of fundraising and tireless volunteer work; it is not only the support from communities and all the citizens of northeast Edmonton; it is mainly because there are so many great people involved as volunteers, as staff, and as active participants in the programs created and provided.

The Northgate Lions Choralaires are justly famous for their wonderfully choreographed, performed, and sung choral music productions, and they're fun. The talented instructors and group leaders in programs that range from lapidary, weaving, fine woodworking, or all sorts of painting and art and many, many other areas challenge and involve the many participants. They're interesting and they're fun.

The food is scrumptious, and it is the camaraderie in the restaurant that is always great. Some of the best snooker and pool players in town ply their skills in the poolroom. It's good fun.

Begun as a project by the Edmonton Northgate Lions Club and first constructed in 1978, the Lions have continued with their generous volunteer support for the facility as it has grown. Thank you, Lions.

The community services department of the city of Edmonton maintains the operation of the centre in collaboration with the Northgate Senior Citizens Association. This incredible seniors' organization provided over 50,000 volunteer hours to the centre and the community in 2005. Over 400 volunteers give their time freely to help with the many projects and programs. These many volunteers have also raised millions of dollars to further expand and improve the centre.

The exceptional staff, the great volunteers from the Northgate Senior Citizens Association, and Edmonton Northgate Lions must all be congratulated for their contribution. Northgate Lions seniors' centre is a tremendous contributor to the communities of northeast Edmonton and, indeed, all of Alberta. This tremendous seniors' centre is a model for all of Canada to aspire to, and it's fun.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Evans Consoles

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about an Alberta company that plays an important role in the world-famous space program. We all know of the fantastic space shuttle launching flights and the amazing human achievements in the orbiting space station.

The space shuttle vehicle has over 2 and a half million parts, and each shuttle orbiter weighs approximately 78 tonnes. The three

space shuttle main engines generate about 37 million horsepower and release the equivalent of about 23 of the largest hydroelectric dams. The solid rocket booster produces an equivalent of more than 15 million horsepower, roughly about 64,000 Corvette cars. In seven seconds the 2,000-tonne shuttle goes from a standing start to a travelling speed of 150 kilometres an hour. To monitor and control such an operation requires unimaginable efforts of human minds and equipment.

Mr. Speaker, early this month a company called Evans Consoles in Calgary became the first ever Canadian company to win the much-coveted aerospace supplier award from NASA's United Space Alliance. I had the great pleasure to join in the celebration with the executives from the NASA space program presenting the award to Evans Consoles.

Evans Consoles company received the exclusive space flight awareness supplier award for its longstanding partnership and most recently for the turnkey design, manufacture, and installation of custom consoles for the new firing room No. 4 at the Kennedy Space Centre. From this very room NASA will be launching all remaining space shuttle missions.

I would like to ask all members to join me in congratulating Evans Consoles on this fantastic award.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition signed by the students and staff from the J.T. Foster school of Nanton, who petition the Legislative Assembly to "urge the Government of Alberta to introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the same kind of petition.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two petitions in the House today, one with 94 signatures and one with 95. Both petitions ask that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Alberta to "introduce legislation allowing parents the authority to place their children into mandatory drug treatment and to fund urgently required youth drug treatment centres."

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation I would like to table a petition from 15 Albertans from Lethbridge and Coaldale asking the government to "introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the . . . increase in teenage smoking."

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first tabling is copies of a letter that we

discussed in Committee of the Whole last night regarding Bill 38, the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act. This letter is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development from the Canadian Bankers Association.

My two other tablings are documents in reference to my questions earlier today in question period. The first is a letter. The original is signed by Mr. Kellan Fluckiger, and it's dated April 28, 2006. It's regarding the roles and mandates of implementing agencies, the Electric Utilities Act Advisory Committee members.

This last tabling is the roles and mandates refinements for Alberta electricity industry implementing agencies. I would ask all hon. members to have a look at this before we get on with the debate on Bill 39, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, which was introduced in this Assembly yesterday.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a campaign that was launched yesterday by Public Interest Alberta entitled Alberta's Seniors Deserve Better: It's time to take action! There's quite a thorough booklet of information and charts and facts here, and there's also a tear-off postcard on the back which people are expected to fill out and send back to our very own minister responsible for Seniors and Community Development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to table a copy of a letter that was shared with me by an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Kathie Landry, dated March 23 which she sent to the EMS department and the two ward 1 councillors detailing how long she had to wait for an ambulance and how the situation happens almost daily now that the emergency rooms are overbooked. She shared some pictures of her injuries with us, and although they might not be too clear, I promised to table them nevertheless.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to table the appropriate number of copies of the program from this afternoon's Salvation Army annual luncheon, which several members of this Assembly attended. The Minister of Municipal Affairs brought greetings on behalf of the province, and the guest speaker was Major Cedric Hills from London, England, who is the international emergency services co-ordinator. He shared with us some stories from some of the recent work that the emergency disaster services branch has completed, including working with Hurricane Katrina victims in 2005, the southern Alberta floods in 2005, the 2004 tsunami, of course, wildfires that ravaged Alberta and B.C. in 2002, and in 2001 following the terrorist attack in New York. I'm happy to have been there and happy to table these on behalf of the Salvation Army.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today 10 letters that I've received from concerned staff and citizens requesting that the government keep their promises and provide additional funding for long-term care and seniors facilities to improve living conditions

and staffing conditions. These letters are signed by Raminder Gill, Carlene Lewis, A.M. Rennie, Marilyn Slemko, Mary Pasula, S.M. and N.L. Tomlinson, E. Hope Pennock, Denise Ryan, Herta Duncan, and James New.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, it's my pleasure to move Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's business plan for '06-09 and our budget estimates for '06-07.

I can hardly believe that this is Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's sixth business plan, and I've worked on all of them. Imagine that. I'm really old.

Before I begin, however, Mr. Chairman, I would like to recognize departmental staff who were instrumental in assisting me to complete this budget and make every attempt to make sure that I walk the straight and narrow. I ask that they stand as I introduce them: my deputy minister, Shelley Ewart-Johnson; assistant deputy minister Neil Reddekopp; assistant deputy minister Donavon Young; executive directors John McDonough and Bill Werry; senior financial officer Lorne Harvey – I share him with IIR – directors Jason Gariepy and Gerry Kushlyk; and of course, our NADC executive director, Dan Dibbelt. I think he's there somewhere. As well, the chair of NADC has been a really fantastic individual to help us along as we develop this budget. He will be speaking on NADC's activities. I'll be asking him to do that.

I'm going to use a different approach this afternoon to provide as much time for members to ask questions if we can. Is that okay with you? Okay. If that's okay, I'll do that. I will do this by quickly highlighting achievements and reviewing the estimates and, of course, indicating why you should support the new funding in the two key areas. I will also list our strategic priorities and what we'd like to achieve.

While we are a small department, we consider ourselves to be a strategic and influential ministry with major responsibilities. We focus on policy development, not program delivery. We co-ordinate and facilitate cross-ministry policies within government, the strategies, initiatives on how to work more effectively with aboriginal governments and communities. The 2006-2007 estimates reflect our mandate to enhance aboriginal well-being and self-reliance. This population is one of the youngest and fastest growing in the province. It focuses our efforts to advance the economic and social development of Northern Alberta, the largest region in the province with over 150 communities and 60 per cent of the province's land mass yet only 10 per cent of the population. We do all this through partnerships with aboriginal people, communities, organizations, the private sector, and all levels of government.

I'd like to share our major achievements since the last estimates. Consultation received approximately \$5 million in funding last year. During that time we approved the government of Alberta's First Nations consultation policy on land management and resource development, a first across the country. We have 15 First Nations

communities and organizations that have established a one-window approach to manage resource development. Through the First Nations consultation capacity funding program we are enhancing their capacity to participate in consultation. This includes assistance in dealing with proposals and training people to manage consultation initiatives.

Traditional use studies. These are studies which are significant for First Nations, and of course what they do is map sites of cultural, spiritual, and historical significance by using a combination of documentary records and traditional knowledge of the elders of those communities. We've been very successful gathering and preserving traditional use information. As an example, 29 studies are under way involving 39 aboriginal communities. We also have 16 data-sharing agreements that have been signed with 24 aboriginal communities, and numerous traditional sites – grave sites, ceremonial areas – have been shared with government and placed under some form of protective designation. We've established positive relations with First Nations and demonstrated good faith on behalf of the Alberta Crown.

The other part is the First Nations economic participation initiative. It was designed to increase economic expertise in First Nations so they are job ready or prepared for industry partnerships. There are a growing number of First Nation leaders who recognize that economic development offers the best opportunity to enhance quality of life and self-sufficiency. They were part of the development consultation because we need to make sure that First Nations and industry are part of that.

3:10

Also, I want to say a special thank you to my Industry Advisory Committee – they have provided me with guidance as we move through this process – and, of course, the elders aboriginal advisory committee, who have also provided us with guidance as we move in this direction.

FNEPI was provided with \$2.75 million last year, including funds to our partnering ministries of Human Resources and Employment and Economic Development. As an example, 11 industry-driven partnerships have been established with First Nations in areas as diverse as oil and gas, pulp and paper, health, and environment with First Nations communities because these communities were prepared to take advantage of the economic activities surrounding their area.

On the northern development part of my portfolio, Mr. Chairman, relationships and partnerships with stakeholders in Alberta and beyond are another initiative that we take seriously. We have the responsibility of realizing the MOU, or the memorandum of understanding, with the Northwest Territories that focuses on training and employment, economic development, such as the Mackenzie pipeline, tourism, transportation, and land management. We've had a lot of results, and we look forward to moving more initiatives forward with the Territories.

We are also participants on the Alberta-Alaska Bilateral Council, which advances co-operation in energy, aboriginal issues, and, of course, labour and training. We recently travelled to Alaska to determine specific projects, how we can achieve the outcomes and determine structure.

The northern development ministers' forum is a vital part of our northern involvement. We undertake joint projects on social, economic, and fiscal issues that are important to the north. We currently lead two projects. One is developing a northern awareness strategy, and the second one is development of a communications plan.

Alberta is vice-chair for North America on the Northern Forum, which is an international organization comprised of eight northern

countries – the U.S., China, Iceland, Finland, Japan, Korea, Russia, and Canada – that are dedicated to improving the lives of northern peoples. We have also been involved with the Northern Forum for many, many years, and we're blessed to be able to make sure that we carry that specific initiative forward.

If you recall, last time I was talking about the northern development strategy. We are reassessing developing that strategy for a number of reasons. One, the rural development strategy has been now accepted by government. What we want to do is make sure that we don't duplicate our efforts but, rather, to be able to pull together all that information on how, then, northerners can take advantage of what's happening in the rural development strategy. We prefer to do that rather than build something new just for the sake of building something new. While opportunities are great, we are working on northern priorities such as improving transportation, increasing skills development, raising economic diversification, and improving access to health and education services.

Now, talking about our estimates – and I know that this is where you want to go – our 2006-2007 budget is \$44 million, up approximately \$5 million from the '05-06 forecast. We are proposing an increase of \$3.3 million, with three additional FTEs to expand and accelerate traditional use studies across the province over three years with all 47 First Nations. We need this increase because past funding was based on two assumptions. The first assumption was that the cost of TUS would be split between the government of Alberta and industry, but the courts have since established that TUS is the Crown's responsibility. Second, with current funding it would take 10 years or more to complete TUS for all Alberta First Nations. Gathering and preserving traditional use information, in our view, is at the very heart of meaningful consultation. TUS is a critical planning tool that assists industry and government in avoiding or at least reducing the impacts of development upon aboriginal and treaty rights.

Just as an example, Alexis Nakota First Nation and Millar Western Forest Products have an MOU to ensure that traditional information is considered in the forestry planning process along with the economic activities that are being explored.

We're proposing an increase of \$1.5 million, with an additional two FTEs, to support industry-based partnerships through the First Nations economic partnerships initiative. This initiative responds to a call by First Nations and industry, as I indicated in my earlier comment, to develop strategic economic partnerships and to make sure that the First Nations would be ready with their expertise within their own nations. It promotes greater collaboration and supports the development of First Nations economic development capacity at the regional and community level. Of course, this is another important tool when we're dealing with what we call self-reliance for aboriginal people.

As an example, being a small size, Kapawe'no First Nation must be innovative with its economic development approaches. A health centre has expressed interest in collaborating with the community to establish a holistic health centre that would provide services to High Prairie, Slave Lake, and the Peace River region. So those are examples of very small areas that are beginning to see what the possibilities are as long as they're able to develop their people so that they have the expertise to do that.

The total amount for Métis settlements legislative requirements and governance efforts is \$14.1 million: \$10 million is statutory funding provided to the Métis Settlements General Council as part of the Métis Settlements Accord Implementation Act, and \$4.1 million is provided to Métis settlements through the matching grants replacement agreement. This leaves approximately \$29.9 million for all departmental initiatives, including what we call aboriginal affairs,

if you look in the budget, of \$26.8 million, which includes operations of First Nations and Métis relations, land and resource issues, and of course strategic services. NADC, which my colleague will talk about: \$2.1 million. Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal: \$1 million.

In 2005-2006 the department had 90 full-time employees, of which 68 are in my department, 15 with NADC, and another seven assigned to the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. With the additional five full-time employees that we're requesting for this year, it would bring the total to 95.

Our strategic priorities in the 2006-2009 business plan continue to identify those priorities which we want to pursue. Of course, we want to make sure that consultation becomes a strong tenet of our budget, and it's self-explanatory from what I was able to explain. Building aboriginal self-sufficiency is something that we all think that we should do, but we don't quite know how to do it, so naturally we're working with the First Nations to see how we can do that. Of course, for the Métis, helping Métis settlements to prepare for the end of the statutory funding in 2007.

First Nations and Métis economic participation is something that we hear continuously, and we are making every attempt to ensure that we are involved with them.

Northern development, of course, is pretty self-explanatory. Through cross-ministry partnerships within government we want to make sure that we enhance the quality of life of aboriginal people in areas such as education, health, and employment issues.

Another core focus of the department is northern development. At this time, especially with the Northern Alberta Development Council's activities, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, the chair of the NADC, be able to give an outline of the council's activities.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It indeed gives me great pleasure to give you a presentation about the Northern Alberta Development Council. The need for the council, I would suggest, is probably greater now than it ever has been. While the opportunities are great in northern Alberta, the challenges that northern Albertans face have also increased and very much need to be addressed.

We have what I would consider inadequate transportation and infrastructure in comparison to the amount of activity that we're having and the increase in that activity that takes place particularly in the industrial areas.

3:20

We have a relatively small and sparse population. Doing business in a sparse population costs more. Doing business where the distances are so much further also provides its challenges.

We need to increase the skill levels of our population. We need to utilize the population and the contributions of all members of our population.

The challenges of being a resource-based economy are very much ones, I would say, of accessibility and the ability to access those resources. We need to work with our partners to support and further encourage value-added diversification in our regions. There is no question at this time that the oil and gas industry is the driving force of the northern economy. We need to do more to sustain our economy not only when the oil and gas prices are high but also keeping in mind when the prices fall or when they deplete. When those resources deplete, we need to be able to sustain not only the north but also all of Alberta.

NADC's role in helping to chart the course of the north will be increasingly vital as the region becomes more important economically to the province. Mr. Chairman, NADC is working to increase skill development. Together with Advanced Education we do provide bursaries to approximately 250 Alberta students in a wide range of programs. These students then return and live in northern communities.

The NADC strongly believes in developing northern transportation corridors, including air, road, and rail. Air is extremely important to us as for some of our isolated communities it's the only link to the outside world. It gives us an opportunity also in making sure that we have contact with our health authorities or our health services in the larger centres. When we look at roads, as I said before, the distance between our communities, the distance between our populated areas is so vast, and we need that connection. I want to also say that the rail is critical in order to enable us to deliver our product to market. The north east-west connector is required to link Alberta to Saskatchewan and British Columbia and, ultimately, coastal waters for the movement of northern products to markets.

With continued support for the NADC and its initiatives, NADC can help northern communities develop their economic base and increase their economic contribution to the Alberta advantage. Increasing the economic base of northern Alberta increases the economic base for all of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, I very much enjoyed working with the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and I look forward to continuing to work in supporting northern Alberta. Thank you so much.

Ms Calahasen: Just a comment. I just wanted to say that I look forward to . . .

The Chair: Hon. minister, your time has elapsed.

Ms Calahasen: Oh, is it up? Okay. I'll look forward to answering any questions. That's what I was going to say.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to begin debate on the aboriginal affairs budget. If I may, I'd like to divide my time into two or three smaller blocks if that's acceptable so that I can get some answers from the minister.

Once again I see a fairly substantial increase in the aboriginal affairs budget this year. In fact, back in I think it was '04-05, the aboriginal affairs budget was just about \$16 million. Now we're looking at a budget of \$24 million. That's gone up almost \$9 million. I'm not saying that this is an altogether bad thing. I think that we should be spending a substantial amount of money on our aboriginal people and Métis people. But, again, it's awfully difficult to tell from a budget report if we're actually getting value for our money.

Now, I'm having sort of a case of déjà vu here, Mr. Chairman. Last year when we were doing the budget debate, I had exactly the same problem. We had a line that said aboriginal affairs and one large amount of money: a single line, aboriginal affairs, \$22,292 million. That was the extent of the information. This year we have exactly the same situation: aboriginal affairs, \$24,624,000.

You know, Mr. Chairman, when I look through the rest of the budget document, I can't really find any other department that dismisses 70 per cent of its budget in one line. It makes it very difficult to accurately debate what's in the budget, and I think it's

important that we do bring up some of the items that are contained in it.

I would like to refer back to a letter that the minister wrote to me last year when I asked her to outline what was in the budget and to expand on a few of these things in her first set of answers to me. In last year's budget the aboriginal affairs total included aboriginal initiatives worth \$5.7 million; strategic services, \$1.7 million; aboriginal land and legal issues, \$2.5 million; aboriginal consultation, \$6.8 million; Métis settlements ombudsman, \$450,000; Métis settlements land registry, \$222,000. I would like the minister to take a little bit of time and tell us if these are roughly the same numbers for this year or if they're substantially different or if we're seeing the same things being funded.

I'm particularly interested in the aboriginal consultation, which the minister mentioned before. I believe last year we were looking at – I think she said that it was \$5 million. I was under the impression that it was predominantly for – sorry; what was the name of the document? – the aboriginal consultation policy, and I think most of the money went into that. That document is now almost a year old, a year old on May 16, I think, and I'd just like to know if the funding for that is finished or if we are going to see more of that. So if you can update us on the status of that document, particularly what the reaction was from the aboriginal community if you have any sort of surveys or research that has been done to see what they thought of it.

As I recall – and I have it right here in front of me – it was a rather thin document. It was all of six pages. In my discussions with aboriginal leaders it was sort of shrugged off and not considered to be really a particularly important document, and they had some serious concerns about it.

I'm glad to see so much money is going into traditional use studies. Again, these are things that we've heard are very important to the aboriginal community, and I hope that you're going to continue with this. I understand a large part, as you said, of the budget increase is because of the traditional use studies. Again, this would have been a lot easier if I had known about this ahead of time. So if I could ask if in future budget documents the minister would please break down the department the way she did in the letter that she sent to me last year, a more itemized listing so that we can have a little bit better debate and a better idea of where all the money is going. As I said, we had an awful lot of money wrapped up in one line. If I could get a commitment from the minister to next year include more information in the budget. I don't know if that was a yes or a no look on her face. It's kind of hard to tell. I don't know if she's trying to hide anything from me; I kind of doubt it. But it is very difficult to do this without enough information.

I'd just like to summarize a few of the things that I would like you to answer in your first set of answers, please. I'd just like to confirm if the aboriginal consultation is carrying on or whether that document is finished, if you would confirm that you will improve the documentation or the line items in the budget so that we have a little bit more to go on, and on the consultation process what the status is right now and the reaction from the aboriginal community to the consultation process.

I think that I gave you a fair amount to answer there. I would like to give you a few minutes to answer and then come back with some more questions if I may.

3:30

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I know that's always a question: where has the money gone? That's always

an issue. I'll just give you a breakdown as to what's happened. In 2006-07 budget summaries, of course, it's \$26.776 million. Minister's office is at \$380,000. Corporate Services is \$1.772 million, which includes budgets for the deputy minister, communications, information technology, and, of course, financial services. Strategic services receives \$3.695 million, which includes such things as federal/provincial relations, cross-ministry initiatives, and urban aboriginal initiatives.

The other part that we put money into, of \$9.924 million, is First Nations and Métis relations. First Nations economic partnerships initiative is included in there, and that's what I was explaining, getting First Nations ready for what they sometimes call job-ready or partnership-ready. Of course, First Nations relations, and that's dealing with issues such as described earlier in my speech, and Métis relations.

The next area is land and resource issues of \$11.005 million. That deals with consultation and traditional land-use studies, land negotiations, whatever negotiations we do have ongoing. Of course, that's to remove barriers to on-reserve economic development.

Mr. Chairman, the other part is on consultation. You wanted to know: what is the status of that? The consultation, as you know, was approved by cabinet on May 16, 2005. It's been a year and some months since we've put that into play. This actually brought together what we call a cross-ministry team comprised of six departments, and of course we're the lead in that respect. We have Environment, we have Energy, we have Sustainable Resource Development, we've got Justice, and we've got Community Development as the cross-ministry initiative because, no matter what happens, these different ministries are all impacted on any issue relative to First Nations. So we want to make sure that they're at the table. They've been excellent. Our ministers have been excellent. For our ministry it has just been incredible working with some of the areas.

Of course, one of the areas that we've been working on is on status with First Nations and industry in sort of advisory groups. We've developed what we call a framework document for the operational guidelines. We are actually in the process of doing that. That's with First Nations as well as with industry. We're not there yet, but we're getting close. We did develop an interim strategy for us to use for this year so that everybody knew what needed to be done and what could be done and how we should interact with each other. We did do that this year until we were finished the guidelines.

We hope that that framework will be done by spring 2006 and operational guidelines, of course, by August of 2006. We're pretty close, but we're not there yet. I was hoping that we'd be able to get that done, but we haven't yet.

We have what we call a tripartite approach as well. In this we embarked on a tripartite approach where representatives from First Nations, industry, and government have formally met together to discuss target dates, and of course the deliverables of that specific area. We have just begun, and it's clear to everyone who was at the table that consultation will be ongoing – it's not just once, but it's ongoing – and that we continue even after completion of the guidelines. So everybody knows that it's going to be ongoing and that we have to continue to do that.

We have a quarterly newsletter, and I think you've received that. I've sent that to you before. The cross-ministry working group has also published a quarterly newsletter. We call it, I think it was, fast facts, and it's intended to communicate progress and key dates to all parties. Of course, the department website houses updates and information on the framework as well as on the guidelines. So if you look on your www.gov.ab.ca and click on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Alberta, you will see my beautiful face there, but not

only that – I thought everybody was not awake here – you will also see that we've got a listing of activities and that is updated on a regular basis so that we can ensure that we have information updated for the people.

What have we accomplished to date? That's always a big question because everybody says: well, you spend so much money on aboriginal people, so what in the world have you accomplished? As a result, you know, we always look and say: what are our deliverables here? What is it that we need to do to make sure that we do this? I know that everybody says: well, we're supportive of aboriginal issues, but we want to see something happen. Right? It's never trying to make sure that the First Nations are going to be prepared to do a number of things on their own as well.

Let me just give you an idea. We participated in developing the guidelines, as I said. The First Nations used this funding program to engage with the government on the development of the consultation guidelines because we need to make sure that they have the capacity to do that. That's a very important thing. The government of Alberta's First Nations consultation policy that was approved certainly provides us with the ability to be able to move the money into that area. We have a project plan in place and a target date, as I indicated, for the guidelines. Of course, there's always a growing ability and willingness of First Nations to participate in this consultation process.

On that note, you indicate that you had spoken to a few aboriginal groups or First Nations leaders. I'm not exactly sure. I would say that the majority, if not all, Treaty 6, 7, and 8 have all participated in our consultation guideline development as well as in the policy. In the beginning they weren't sure whether or not they wanted to be involved in a policy, but as they began to see what it could produce and how they can become engaged and how they can engage industry so that they can begin to see the benefits, we saw that the First Nations were willing to come on board and work with us in good faith. As a result, we have made sure that we are working with them to ensure that what we are going to bring forward is going to be applicable to all that do anything on resource development.

The consultation offices. I'll just give you an example: the First Nations consultation offices. We have 15 First Nations, six tribal councils or regional organizations, one treaty organization, and three nonstatus communities that have established a one-window consultation office to deal with resource development. I remember at one point in time when you talked to me, you told me that one of the problems was: who is it that's in charge when you go to the community? Well, that has been the issue when we're dealing with First Nations as well. So what we have done with the consultation is to make sure that there is going to be a one-window approach so that when industry goes – and industry have often said: who is it that we get in touch with? – into that area, they'll be able to know who they can contact and how they can get that information to the people as to what they are intending to do and how they can be involved.

We also have the Woodland Cree First Nation community consultation office. That's also a one-window approach. We have the Loon River First Nation and, of course, Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council. As my colleague the NADC chair indicated, northern Alberta is where most of the activity is occurring, and as a result, the First Nations in those areas are also wanting to be part of the economic scene. So this is basically trying to pull it all together and make sure that they are. They are Albertans too.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you. I still didn't get an answer to the change in the way you're going to do your budgeting, which I would

appreciate. Just say yes or no. If you don't want to do it, I'd like to know why you wouldn't like to do it. As I said, I think the public needs to have some idea. I know that not too many people look through budget documents, but it would be a very valuable tool for myself or for anybody else who wants to look through these documents. If you could commit to changing that for next year so that it's more in line with other budget documents that we have here.

Secondly, regarding consultation. I did ask if you know whether you've done any surveys, a postconsultation document and see what the aboriginal community thinks of it and if you have anything that you can show us or tell us about.

On to a couple of other items. The Métis settlements legislation, I believe, expires in '07, I think that's correct, the \$10 million a year payment. I'd just like to quote something from the business plan. On page 62 it says: "While the Settlements have made significant progress towards greater self-reliance, consideration of strategies to continue that progress is required." Can you put that into some form of English that makes a little bit more sense? Does that mean that this is not working well; it's working well? Do you anticipate at the end of 2007 that we're going to have to renew the agreement? What can you tell us about that?

3:40

While still on the topic of the business plan there's a bit of an anomaly in the 2005 business plan to this year that I'd like you to address. The 2005 business plan on page 118 under core business 1, goal 2, line 2.a was: Métis settlements self-generated revenue from industrial taxation, user fees and levies. There was a target of \$4.09 million for '05-06 and further goals going up to '08. I can't find that line anywhere in the business document for this year. I'm wondering if it has been dropped, if it was inadvertently dropped, if it's placed somewhere else. It seems like it's an interesting piece of information. I don't know whether it means that they're working more towards generating their own revenue or exactly what it means. Can you tell us what it meant in the first place, and why it has disappeared from this year's document?

On to another slightly larger topic: the Kelowna accord. I know that the Kelowna accord is not in your budget, and it was a federal government responsibility. It was still a very substantial agreement, \$5.5 billion. It took several years to cobble this together. Then the new Conservative government came in, your Conservative cousins – I've been looking for a chance to say that for about a year now, and there it is – your Ottawa cousins pulled the plug on it. Apparently, they're going to substitute it with their own plan worth substantially less money than we have right now.

I wonder if the minister agreed with the cancellation of the Kelowna accord and if there's anything that the minister is looking at to sort of fill in the gaps which the cancellation of the accord has left. I mean, we had a major agreement here that was going to impact on aboriginal lives for some time. Is there anything that you see as the aboriginal affairs minister that you can move in to fill the void? Or if you actually agreed with the cancellation of the accord? I believe your exact wording was that it was sad. But, you know, is sad enough? I would like to hear a little bit of your opinion on the Kelowna accord and what you can do as an aboriginal affairs minister.

I have more questions than that, but I'd be happy to just hear your answers now and then get back to you a little bit later on. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, you asked quite a lot of questions there, so what I'll do is attempt to answer as

many as I can. What I'll do is, first of all, thank you. I will commit to making sure that we have a breakdown in the budget because I think it's very easy, you know. I mean, it's not a huge task. It's just very small, so I guess that's what we were doing. I will make sure that we do that next year. We'll continue to do whatever we can.

Yes, settlements. You gave me a whole series of questions. Métis settlements, those seven, are we going to renew the agreement, the self-generated targets? Okay. Is it dropped? Well, let me talk about the Métis settlements. What we've done is that we actually did a process called a transition assessment and planning process, it's called TAPP. What we wanted to do is to make sure that we reviewed the progress toward the goal of self-reliance and to develop recommendations which would contribute to ongoing progress towards self-reliance, which was something that the Métis also wanted to see happen. Because that agreement was over and the statutory funding will end in '07, we wanted to make sure that we engaged the settlements. In the last few years since I've been minister, I've been talking to the settlements to tell them that we have to start planning. We have to put together what it is that the requirement will be because we don't know what the requirement will be.

When you were asking about that information on the self-generated target dollars, that was one of the reasons why we had that in there: to be able to determine how far they had come. But because of the way that it was worded, it was something that we wanted to redo again and see where we're at. As a result, we removed that one, and then we'll be putting another one in to be able to identify what we need to do for that. That's working with the settlements; it's not something that we want to do unilaterally. We want to make sure that we have something that we can use as a target, a measurable outcome, so we will continue to work with the settlements on that.

What we wanted to do on the whole issue is develop that process so that we can see where they want to go, what it is that they're going to need. It's like municipalities. You know, they're always knowing that there's going to be a portion of dollars that will probably always come from government. We want to see where that gap is, and we want to be able to work with the settlements to see where it is that we need to go. We're still working on that, and we'll continue to work with the settlements on that issue.

As you know, establishing a governance structure as well as providing land for Métis people is a first across Canada, and it's the only one across Canada. The Métis settlements certainly want to make sure that they continue to salvage that and do whatever needs to be done. We've done a lot of data collection, of course, on many of these issues, and even though we've made significant progress towards that goal of the legislation, the fulfillment of the goals has not yet been achieved, so we want to be able to go towards that.

We made amendments to the Metis Settlements Act, if you recall. It was my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake who was involved in that, and those amendments were to make sure that we did changing in the decision-making process, the elections, and the ability of Métis settlements to enact new policies so that they could contribute toward the goal of self-reliance.

As I indicated, the Premier signed recently, actually just this last year – was it just last year? He signed that agreement on how we can explore ways of being able to see how we can work together to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency and work towards some sort of an agreement.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the hard work that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has

done to prepare this budget and the work of her ministry management and staff as well. Certainly, it's a very straightforward document. I appreciate having the role of a constructive critic to go through it. It's very easy to follow, and I appreciate the efforts that went into it.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is a very wide-ranging ministry, and like many of our other ministries in this government it really touches on other important ministries and areas of concern. As the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul pointed out, we often look north to the wealth that we are enjoying in this province, yet I think the reciprocal investment in northern Alberta for development of social services and infrastructure and all of the various human and natural needs that we administer here in this province is sometimes not even close to being commensurate with the wealth that we take out of that area.

I believe that this particular ministry has as its mandate, above all, to ensure that we are giving in equal amounts to what we take from the north. The people that live in northern Alberta and the wonderful resources that we have in northern Alberta deserve nothing less. It's a place where our future lies in many ways for the province, and we have to make sure that we manage that in the most judicious way possible.

The budget for this year for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is \$5 million more than last year. This is, of course, \$3.3 million to assist in the acceleration of the traditional use studies, which are meant to assist First Nations to map sites of historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. Completion of this TUS is a key component of the government's consultation initiative. This is very directly linked to resource development and land management because, of course, we have to recognize the cultural and spiritual significance of different places before we can develop different regions of the north in a responsible manner. This is an important initiative, and I certainly am fully supportive of it.

3:50

Other parts of the budget look to assist the ongoing development of accountable self-administering, self-regulating, and self-reliant Métis settlement organizations, again a very, very important component of the budget of this ministry. There certainly are areas of concern I have in regard to how this ministry assists this goal, although, at least in principle, on paper we do have laudable intentions in regard to the Métis settlements throughout northern Alberta, and for that I am grateful. This is a very vibrant and important part of our overall cultural fabric in this province, and in fact we can benefit, all of us, from the existence and the flourishing of these settlements, I believe, and we need to do everything we can to invest in their future.

Aboriginal Affairs' budget is also meant to be promoting social and economic development. It's meant to be collaborating with other ministries to work on specific problem areas. There are areas of concern, and certainly I will be speaking on a couple of those areas here this afternoon.

Finally, looking for the goal of self-reliance for aboriginal people throughout the province: I think that that again is certainly a laudable goal on paper, although sometimes I'm wondering what, in fact, we are doing in reality to forward that notion.

Perhaps I'll start with that last goal there, Mr. Chairman, to make my comments on specific areas of the budget: improving the quality of life for aboriginal people with the goal of self-reliance. Of course, most aboriginal people in this province are self-reliant. It's important to recognize that. Part of, I guess, the integrity of an individual is to know that they have the freedom and the latitude to make decisions about their future and about their own economic

future. Most aboriginal people are in that position. We need to defend and strengthen that position so that they can stay that way. Often there is this very broad misconception that there is money being poured into aboriginal initiatives without anything coming out the other end. We as a Legislature look for efficiencies in the public expenditure of monies, but certainly it's important to recognize that, in fact, aboriginal people are self-reliant and are independent and have the freedom to make those choices, economic choices especially, so we have to work based on that premise.

Anyway, that being said, on the improvement of quality of life for aboriginal people, I have a number of questions to direct to the minister. She can answer them at her freedom, whatever she wants to do, in writing or here this afternoon.

The first one is that I want to ask the minister what she is doing about this issue I brought up yesterday in my private member's statement, which is the very large overrepresentation of aboriginal people in corrections facilities. The minister during the budget for the Solicitor General said that our population of aboriginals in Alberta is about 7 per cent or so. Actually, I would say perhaps a little bit higher. However, he said that aboriginal people make up 30 per cent of the adult in-house correctional centre counts and approximately 38 per cent of the young offender in-house correctional centre counts. This is an issue that, as I spoke about yesterday briefly, reflects very poorly on what we have been doing here as a province and as a society to address poverty issues, to address sort of addiction issues, and to address the migration of aboriginal people from the rural areas into the city.

This is a very large social phenomenon that we will be seeing over the next many, many years, people moving from the rural areas to the cities, to Edmonton and Calgary and other centres. We must be sure that we are allowing a smooth transition for people to do so. We're not going to turn the clock back on this migration of people but, rather, to make sure that there are programs available, housing available, and schools that are appropriate to meet the needs of people moving in from the rural areas. So this is one concern that I have, and certainly there are many others in regard to why we have such a high prison population of aboriginal descent in this province.

I think that this is a good starting place for us to focus our energies in this ministry, and that's why I'm asking: what specific budget initiatives do we expect to see to tackle this problem? As I said yesterday in my member's statement, we have an opportunity now to build structures to defuse the situation. If we allow things to continue the same way, we're contributing to what I would say is a powder keg of social problems in this province that will spill over to affect all of us. Certainly, for such a high percentage of aboriginals to be in the correctional centres is a very debilitating thing for families and for the individuals themselves who find themselves in the cycle of a prison system, and we need to do something more.

Another question I would like to ask the minister, if possible, please, is: what new funding program support is being offered to native friendship centres? These centres have been doing yeoman's work, a very effective use of public monies to create cultural centres for aboriginal and Métis people in the cities and towns around the province. I have at least two of these facilities in my own constituency. They are wonderfully vibrant centres of pride and a place to teach culture and diversity and acceptance. I know that they're always riding on the edge in terms of financing, and I would like to encourage more support being directed towards native friendship centres, and I'm asking the minister what she has up her very fine sleeve in that regard.

The third question in regard to quality of life that I have to ask this afternoon is: how is the minister co-ordinating efforts with the Minister of Community Development to prepare education and other

sorts of campaigns to combat discrimination and prejudice against First Nations peoples? It's like talking about the elephant in the room, Mr. Chairman, when I speak of the high prison population of aboriginal people, and certainly it is in no small part due to a lingering racist sort of feeling in our community toward aboriginal people. It's a battle that is not easy to fight, but it's absolutely essential to fight, to break down these barriers through education and contact so that we're not perpetuating this disease of prejudice against a certain group of people here in the province. Investing in campaigns to combat this is absolutely essential, and I would ask what we might be able to do, not just with the Community Development minister but also with the Department of Education in this regard. I think it's important.

I am glad to see that certainly there is a focus on the Métis settlements in the budget, and I just wanted to comment on that briefly as well.

4:00

Another issue that I'd like to speak about just very briefly is the Métis interim harvesting agreement. I guess what I would be asking for, Mr. Chairman, is what the minister is proposing to do to attempt to build a lasting agreement that is going to work for all stakeholders – in this case, really, all Albertans – in regard to what sort of Métis harvesting agreement we can come up with on a more permanent basis.

We saw quite a reversal of the position of the interim agreement. I certainly do have sympathy with the minister in regard to how it was necessary to have some sort of thing in place. In the wake of the Powley agreements we had to act on something and sort of feel the issue out to some degree. I know that there is a huge frustration in regard to really knowing what sort of harvesting, what sort of hunting and fishing activity is going on in the rural areas, especially in the north, since this is such a vast place and is really impossible to monitor in any real way.

The best conservation system that we have, just like any law that we create in our society, is for people to buy into that law and to internalize it in their own behaviours. Right? When I drive my car or do things in the public realm, it's not the fear of the police that's monitoring my behaviour. Rather, it's an acceptance of a set of rules or regulations that you see are going to be for the safety, for the welfare of yourself and your family and everybody else. So the same thing with whatever agreement we do come up with in regard to hunting and fishing and harvesting of natural resources in general in the north: it has to be something that people will buy into and internalize and monitor themselves on.

If I do have one criticism of the interim harvesting agreement, it's that it gave this feeling amongst the other hunting and fishing population that perhaps someone was gaining an unfair advantage, so maybe it was easy for them to not comply with the law as well. When you create the situation where people perceive that something is unfair, then they will say: well, the laws aren't working anyway, so why should I follow them? So this is a very, very dangerous thing to play with. I'm actually glad that there was some push back and that we had the MLA task force on this to perhaps be a moderating influence on the whole discussion.

Now, here we are. We need to create something that's going to last. We need to create something that people will buy into, and ultimately it has to include the conservation of the resources that we're finding under dispute in the first place because, of course, Mr. Chair, if we have a situation where our wildlife populations and fish populations are being depleted not just through hunting but through the loss of habitat of these wildlife populations, then of course it's a moot point to discuss who gets to harvest what if there's nothing left to hunt or to fish. So that has to be a factor as well.

So I certainly welcome the discussion and would be happy to contribute to the discussion, to a solution and would like to see what specific elements of this budget the minister has to put in place a dialogue for interested parties to come to some long-term resolution in regard to the Métis harvesting controversy.

One more issue that I did want to bring up is the whole issue of labour, encouraging labour force initiatives amongst the aboriginal population in the north. Of course, the unemployment rate in different places is wildly out of step with the rest of the province, and it's absolutely essential that we continue to hammer away at this. Some people feel as though we're not seeing much improvement, so what's the point? You know, part of the reason that people are moving into the urban areas, this migration from the rural areas, is that people do want something better for themselves and for their families. So, obviously, if the will is there, we have to step up then and encourage that with some programs that are appropriate to the situation that we have at hand.

I do see some marginal increases in the employment rates for aboriginal people in the north, and that's great, but certainly there is a very large population there that is not being employed. We want to reverse that to meet the needs that we have, the labour shortage that we have here across the province but also to break the cycle of poverty, especially for the young people in the north.

So with that, I will leave off, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to comments from the minister. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to thank you for recognizing the fact that there was a lot of work that went into this budget. My departmental staff certainly play a major role and want to make sure that they address the issues that I think we are all interested in, which is to help improve the lives of aboriginal people, not the fact that we want to do it but that we want to be able to work with the First Nations and the Métis communities. I think that for too long there have been people who wanted to change things, but they wanted to change them for their own reasons rather than for the aboriginal people. So I thank you for that.

Also, I'm glad to see that you are supporting the traditional land-use studies. They are a very important part for aboriginal people. Any kind of historical, traditional sites that they have participated in, it is really important for them that they be mapped. I know that they've been working really hard to make sure that their elders will give them the direction. As well, in many instances there are children that are being asked to be involved. What it has done is that it has increased the knowledge within the community of not only the medicinal sites but also the cultural sites and all the other kind of historical sites that we do have. So I think that it has opened up a lot of education that needed to be done and the interaction between the elders and the youth. So I think that's a very, very important component, and I'm glad that you're supporting that. So I appreciate those comments.

Now, in terms of some of the other areas that you have requested information on, I'll start out with a number of other places here that I think I really need to deal with. You were talking about the overrepresentation in the correctional facilities. The overrepresentation of the aboriginal people in the corrections system is sometimes a result of what happened in early childhood and in many instances the education. People don't have enough education to be able to deal with the challenges in life.

What we as a government have been working on and working in co-operation with the Minister of Education is the First Nations,

Métis, and Inuit policy. That policy identifies different strategies for working with a community to see how we can improve the outcome of children who are going to school so that we don't see the high dropout rates that have occurred in the past. So we see that there are many liaison officers that have been hired. There are many other strategies that are being utilized by different school divisions and boards that want to see things happen. So we see that now really coming forward. I am a very strong proponent of making sure that we do implement those recommendations that have been made, as well, by the Commission on Learning. As you will recall, there were, I think, about 15 recommendations on aboriginal learning. On that you will see that they were trying to address the very concerns that you're talking about which lead in many instances to people being involved in the justice area.

So those are some of the places that we've been trying to work on; that is, prevention as well as child welfare. The Children's Services minister has really worked on some of the early intervention and many of those other areas. Certainly, we've been involved with Children's Services in cross-ministry initiatives as well as youth programs that would be able to address some of those concerns. We have also worked with communities to make sure that we look at job skills and training so that for the training and the job skills that they lack we can start to work with Advanced Education and Human Resources and Employment to ensure that we work together.

4:10

In my speech I spoke about cross-ministry initiatives. We are involved with various ministries on anything to do with aboriginal issues. I indicated that we're not a program-delivery ministry. We're very strategic. We try to make sure that we advise the Minister of Children's Services, advise the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, advise many of the other ministries to make sure that they understand what aboriginal issues are all about and in some cases northern issues as well. So what we do is make sure that we continue to work with the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice to see how we can have more understanding of aboriginal culture, make sure that they understand that maybe we need to look at ways of working together to ensure that we don't see that overrepresentation.

Hopefully, we can address what I call systemic issues of residential schools. That's another area that we have to deal with. I'm very pleased to see that the federal government is going to honour that agreement that had been made. I'm very proud of the fact that that will happen because there are people still stuck in that area, and we need to move them on. So I think it's important to be able to address that.

The second issue. You talked about the migration of aboriginal people into the cities. We have worked with a number of communities, and we have what we call the urban aboriginal strategy. The urban aboriginal strategy, basically, addresses urban needs so that we can look at a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach on the part of governments and the aboriginal community and other stakeholders who are interested. Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge are urban communities that belong to the urban aboriginal strategy, and the federal government provides significant financial resources to develop and implement community-based processes and strategies. In other communities, like Red Deer and Grande Prairie, my staff at the department is working with interested parties to develop strategies on issues and needs specific to aboriginal people in those communities.

We also work with the AUMA, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, as well as the AAMD and C, Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, to improve relationships between

aboriginal communities and these organizations. It is true that the people are migrating into the cities. What are we doing to see what we can do? I have to commend the AUMA and AAMD and C for pulling together what they call an urban aboriginal group committee to see what can be done to address the issues. They have made recommendations as well. The First Nations have also approached us to see what they can do to help us along as they're going through. They do have offices in the cities that try to deal with the people who have migrated to the urban centres.

When you're talking about the friendship centres, I always credit friendship centres for being able to be the transition point. I certainly used friendship centres when I first moved to the city. I am a very strong supporter of friendship centres because I think they do so much work, such as yeoman's work on dealing with the transitional concerns of the aboriginal community. It's almost the first place where people go to because there's nowhere else to go. So they have prepared some really fantastic work and done some really fantastic work.

I want to talk about the friendship centres because I really am a very strong believer that we have to provide them with more funds. I really do. We will do whatever we can. I gave them some advice as to how we can begin to work so that they can garner support from us as we go through with our budget. Certainly, we'll be requesting you guys as MLAs to help as well so that you can also support that information and so they can spread the word as to what they've been doing. Even though they've done some really great things, not everybody knows that they have. What I did with them was ask them to do business plans, so they can share those with the people, and then I provided dollars for somebody to go help them with their business plans. They've worked some really fantastic business plans, and I know that they'll continue to do so. We do give \$24,000 annually to 20 community friendship centres. The majority of their funds come from the federal government, as you know. But the way that they've been looking at funding, I didn't have enough money to be able to spread for them to get more money. I was able to glean about \$100,000 in additional funding, so what we did then was that we asked them to provide us with some ideas as to what they wanted to do in addition to what they've been doing.

What we found was that the funding that they requested – and I'll just give you a listing of those. The Red Deer Native Friendship Centre received \$20,000 to establish its community liaison function. High Prairie Native Friendship Centre asked for \$20,000 to provide youth programs. Alberta Native Friendship Centre Association asked for \$25,000 to assist in project management training to individual friendship centre personnel. The friendship centre in Peace River, Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, received \$9,994 to assist with a spiritual and health gathering. They deal with everything. It's not just a transition, but it's health; it's everything. Sik-Ooh-Kotoki Friendship Society in Lethbridge to assist with youth initiatives received \$25,000.

So whenever I was able to get more money or find money somewhere, we were able to provide it to the friendship centres so that they can continue the good work that they've been doing.

They had a great loss recently, the association itself. Their executive director passed away recently. He is going to be a great loss, and that's something that I know they're going to have to deal with.

You also wanted to know what we are doing with quality of life, community development to combat discrimination. Well, that's a big one when we're talking about discrimination. When I was first here, for many years I certainly know what it felt like to be treated differently. As a result, understanding those kinds of things, what we want to do is make sure that we deal with as many of the groups

as possible. Community Development, as you know, has the mandate to work on that specifically.

We have some people who have been dealing with that issue in different ways. I'll give you an example. If you recall, there have been some really negative articles, you know, about being an aboriginal person. The aboriginal community itself has taken control of that. They said: "We want to be able to do it. We don't need somebody to talk on our behalf." They've taken that on themselves and decided to address anything that's overt, to be able to deal with it head-on, and I have really appreciated their work in doing that. That tells me that we have gained a lot of respect for ourselves.

The Chair: Hon. members, the noise level is getting too loud in here. Would you please keep the conversations down?

Hon. minister, please proceed.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As a result, what I see is that they want to be able to take control of that, and they want to be able to address that, and they've been doing it. We'll be there to support them as they need us, but as you know, as a nation gets stronger, they begin to deal with those issues themselves. So I see that as really strong, and I want to commend them on that.

You also talked about the aboriginal labour issue. Aboriginal people actually participating in Alberta's economy have historically higher unemployment rates compared to all other Albertans, but it was really nice to see that the off-reserve aboriginal participation rate in March 2006 was 69.3 per cent, an increase of 3.7 per cent from March 2005. I was happy to see that we were starting to record that kind of information, mostly because when we know what's not going on, we know how we have to address it because then it gives us some ability to be able to know what we should do.

4:20

As a result of the higher than normal participation rate of aboriginal people in the labour force, what we started to look at was: how can we work with the aboriginal community? As a result, the Minister of Advanced Education started to work on apprenticeship possibilities. As you know, the number of aboriginal apprentices in Alberta recently reached 1,126, an increase of 888 apprentices in less than four years. That is something that needs to be spoken about, and we have to be able to talk about how good this is because what we see now is not the only fact. The aboriginal community is getting educated. They're also getting the training and the skills to be able to take advantage of what's happening here so that we can begin to see that high unemployment rate drop, just the way it has with other Albertans. So we want to continue to do that.

Off-reserve aboriginal-specific data for Alberta indicated, actually, a few changes, and I want to just talk about the unemployment rates over the past year if I can. The total Alberta in March '05 was 3.5 per cent. March '06 was 3.3 per cent. The change was minus .2 per cent. The total Alberta aboriginal was 12.4 per cent in March '05. In '06 it was 7.5 per cent. The change was minus 4.9 per cent. As an example, Métis was 9.4 per cent in '05. In March '06 it was 6.4 per cent. The change is minus 3 per cent. So when you look at all that, it tells you a lot of items which I think a lot of people don't even recognize.

Now, there was another area that you wanted to talk about. During the past year, actually, April '05 to April '06, aboriginal employment increased by 6,000 new jobs in Alberta. That's significant. That's significant. It's a lot of work, but I know that the aboriginal community is ready to take that on.

Let me now talk about the Métis harvesting. You wanted to know what we are doing with that. Actually, we've accepted the MLA committee. We knew we were breaking new ground when we did the first agreement. It was an interim agreement, and we wanted to make sure that we could deal with the issues so that it didn't create chaos on the land. What we did was that we requested the Métis community to come and work with us. If we hadn't, there were other areas that they could have continued to work on such as private land. They could have gone and hunted on private land without any kind of rules. So what we did was that we asked them to come and work with us, and they did. They took us at our word. We signed the interim agreement until we could find out what was going to be going on.

There were a lot of people who didn't quite understand the interim agreements. There were a lot of people who kind of read more into them than what was there. There was a lot of fearmongering that occurred. There were a lot of areas that, I think, people kind of wondered about, you know. Of course, as a government the suggestion the standing policy committee made was that we have an MLA committee, and we did. There were three MLAs that led that task force, and as a result they made recommendations. Those recommendations were then taken in, and we will be working towards some sort of a – we don't know what the agreement will look like. It's a changing landscape. Even as we're talking here, there are court cases that are coming forward. As a result, we want to make sure that whatever agreement we have will accommodate those kinds of things.

What else is there that you wanted to know? I think that was it for now. Whatever I missed, I will give you in writing.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to thank the minister and her department for their presentation. It's a very, very important department, that probably doesn't have the budget it should have when we look at the importance of aboriginal affairs in the next decade and beyond in Alberta. The linking of aboriginal affairs with northern development, I think, is apt, and there are many issues where aboriginal development is linked with northern development although there are issues in the south as well.

I will begin to talk about some general areas and give a lot of questions on both northern development and aboriginal affairs and some of the ways they do link. First, I'll look at the importance, I think, of positive role models and whether or not the department could do something to improve the highlighting of positive role models for our burgeoning and growing aboriginal population. Edmonton will be the biggest aboriginal city in the country very soon.

I salute the work of the government, individuals, industry, and such. There's a growing number of lawyers, nurses, teachers, tradesmen, entrepreneurs, business leaders, union leaders that are from the aboriginal population, people I've worked with. For example, Dave Tuccaro of Neegan Development, an excellent role model; Doug Golosky of Golosky Trucking and Clearwater Welding; and Mickey Demers: all aboriginal entrepreneurs that have worked to do well in many areas in the north and have developed our economy and trained many aboriginals themselves. Another would be Darrell LaBoucan, the head of the ironworkers' union. There are many. Of course, the minister herself and the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: great role models to many in northern Alberta and Alberta as a whole. The government has a clear role in encouraging prosperity and self-reliance, and ensuring that these positive role models are maybe put forward a bit more into our media, into our public viewpoint would be good.

There are a number of issues, and I'll get into particulars. One is actually going back to the Northern Alberta Development Council report of 2003-2004, page 17. I don't see it really addressed completely, and that's the issue in many communities of health and social services per-capita funding and the effect of transient workers. What is being done? This is clearly a cross-ministry initiative. It clearly affects the north and, actually, clearly affects many aboriginal communities as well, especially in the Fort McMurray area but also in Grande Prairie, High Level, and other areas.

Another important issue – it's been touched on – is the training. In the youth apprenticeship learning opportunities program the pilot communities for this program were Lac La Biche, Wabasca, and High Prairie. The increase in apprentices generally in our native population has been welcomed and good. I think a thousand is not bad, but I think realistically it could be 10,000. There are in Canada over 200,000 young unemployed aboriginals, yet we seem to be wanting to import temporary foreign workers. Some of the people that I have talked to that have been the most vociferous, the most angry about the temporary foreign worker agreement for the oil sands have been aboriginals from northern Alberta.

4:30

The MOU with the Northwest Territories on training, employment, and transportation. I'd like to hear how the development of that has been in terms of looking at developing young workers for the upcoming pipeline work. Actually, there's quite a shortage of pipeline workers developing right now, and for the people who know the area that the pipelines are projected to go through or are going through, there are some good on-the-job training projects possible there right now.

Northern development. Aboriginal development in the north is very much linked with the development of infrastructure and transportation. I'd just like to hear about the developments. Any possibilities for the road from Peavine to McLennan, which may affect the proposed upgrader in the McLennan area? The road from Wabasca to the heights of land near Suncor, commonly known as Supertest Hill. That would link up the Bigstone Cree – I know that there's one prominent member in this Assembly – and that would link up the many thousands of people in Wabasca-Desmarais and also through the Slave Lake area and the back lakes right to the oil sands where most of the work is being done. Also the road from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan. I've been up on that ice road I think three or four times to a historical community, the oldest community, arguably, in Alberta, Fort Chip.

A couple of related things on transportation which would affect commerce and links with the N.W.T. would be the Hythe-Dawson Creek rail link. What is happening? Also the enhancement of the Mackenzie Northern Railway to the N.W.T. Actually, the Hythe-Dawson one is to B.C.

Now, tourism is something of great potential, I think, for northern Alberta. I don't see too much comment here or too much monies actually being directed to specific aboriginal tourism. I know that there's been some success with the love tours from Japan. The love tours: the aurora borealis, the northern lights, were once shining quite often over Japan, and it seemed to be a good time to conceive a child. Now the aboriginal communities north of Fort McMurray and Fort McMurray itself are setting up tours to see the northern lights, and some people have called these love tours. There's great potential for the whole of northern Alberta for these love tours because of the great displays of aurora borealis, of northern lights, in the north. I think that's something to look at in terms of linking up our aboriginal communities with Japan and other areas.

Another area of tourism development I think is in the adventure tour area. There are tremendously interesting areas in the back lakes

and in the sand dunes blowing off Lake Athabasca, little-known sand dunes, fields of sand dunes that look like the Sahara and stretch on for 60, 70, 80 miles. Lake Athabasca, the reed beds of Wood Buffalo, the tremendous natural wonders that are little seen and little developed and hold great potential.

Another area is the traditional land-use studies. This is a question from page 28 of the annual report. I see that data management is somehow included in that, and I don't understand why data management. I wonder how much of the money being apportioned for traditional use studies – I couldn't see that exactly – is actually going to data management. That would be page 28 of the 2004 annual report.

There are many areas regarding the Fort McMurray area. But, first, I'll just touch on the federal urban aboriginal strategy, that the minister mentioned. It's now going on in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge and looking to be a good initiative for the urban centres. The minister did mention that the ministry itself is doing some work in Red Deer and Grande Prairie. Will there be work with the federal government to extend the urban aboriginal strategy into the other urban areas, especially into Fort McMurray and area, the municipality of Wood Buffalo, and other urban areas of Alberta?

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

I was particularly disappointed with the outcome of the Kelowna accord. I think that that should have been brought through. That agreement should not have been broken, that commitment to aboriginal people across Canada. I think that Alberta may have to step in in Alberta to fill the gap in some places that people were expecting to have come forward from that.

Another issue in northern development. This is the regional issues working group in Fort McMurray, especially the transportation portion of that particular group. That's very important for the Fort McMurray area. We've seen that regional issues working group come down here last year after the issue of the problems of infrastructure in the municipality of Wood Buffalo area, the Fort McMurray area, came to the forefront in the media. You know, they've spoken about the road north of Fort McMurray, that we haven't seen come forward in a meaningful way. I think Fort McMurray residents were first told that that was to be completed past Syncrude in 2004.

It's a matter of safety. There have been many deaths on that highway, and many people are concerned. It's the road to Fort MacKay. It's an area that I think has to somehow be looked at very quickly. I don't know if the regional issues working group is doing that or if perhaps they're actually funded in enough of a manner to look at the transportation needs as well as they should. Certainly, highway 63 became an issue that was a high priority, and it's very important, as the minister of human resources just banged a desk to accentuate. It's very important for both development and for the way that people get to Fort McMurray and the north when they go to work and when they travel to go to their home communities.

The other areas in the regional issues working group. Page 67 of the business plan, on the Northern Alberta Development Council, said that the bursary return rate was 78 per cent. I know that that bursary has been in place for many, many years. I know people that have taken advantage of that. It's been for good use to bring people back to the north. But 78 per cent seems to be a pretty low return rate in many ways. Why is that so low? Why are people not being encouraged to make good on their commitment? If they are not making good on the commitment, is the government getting those bursaries back, or to what percentage is the government getting those

bursaries back? Why is the return rate almost three-quarters? It's forecast to get even worse, to go from 78 per cent to 76 per cent.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Going back to the youth apprenticeship and the need for the training of aboriginals and the potential for it, I have seen many, many great tradesmen developed in the last 10 years. Indeed, there are many good mechanics, ironworkers. The Mohawks, for example, in eastern Canada are famous for their skyscraper work and lack of fear, almost, the ability to work – [interjection] There you go – in a way that is both productive and gets the job done. They've developed a reputation whereby they are an employee of first choice.

4:40

Certainly, a lot of mechanics and crane operators have developed their entrepreneurial skills by becoming tradesmen first. I mentioned Dave Tuccaro, the president of Neegan Development and other companies, winner of many awards for entrepreneurship. He started as a crane operator, a unionized crane operator as a matter of fact.

There are others. I mentioned as well Doug Golosky. I believe he was an ironworker. He employs many, many ironworkers now himself and pipefitters, equipment operators, and others and developed one of the bigger mining contracting operators or purveyors of heavy equipment operators in Fort McMurray and the oil sands area.

You know, these are tremendous role models, and I think that they should be looked to and also utilized sometimes in helping to train, getting self-reliance, getting entrepreneurs coming forward in the aboriginal community, getting people who are taking the lead in social services, in our unions, in our government and other areas. They're all so important to develop these populations and to ensure that they are seen to be the leaders in our society and to gain the full fruits of our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Sure. There were a lot of questions there, so if I don't answer them all, I'll commit to answering them in written form. Let me just sort of highlight some of the areas that you addressed, Edmonton-Manning. The linkage between aboriginal affairs and northern development is important. I agree. I think whatever happens in aboriginal affairs affects north, whatever happens north affects aboriginal people. The majority of people who live in northern Alberta – well, we don't know; maybe there's a little change now – are aboriginal people. So that's, I think, definitely a good link.

You talked about aboriginal role models. I think that's a really good idea. I mean, I'll just list some of the things we've been doing. Maybe if we haven't hit somewhere where you think there are some possibilities, I'd really like to hear what your suggestions would be because I really like that idea of positive role models and how we can make sure that we highlight them. Let me just give you an idea as to what we've been doing, you know, for role models. We do support the Esquao Awards. It's on Friday, and I think you're going to be there in your fine form. No? Oh, boy. That's not good. But, basically, we do that, and that's promoting role models, female role models. I think that's a really fantastic program, and the awards are really highly regarded by the aboriginal community.

We promote aboriginal partnerships, and of course no matter what happens, whether it's job shadowing or whatever it is, we have tried

to encourage that with industry so that people can see that they can do these kinds of things as well. We do National Aboriginal Day. We support the culture and the historical component so that we can sort of let people know and be aware of what the situation is on National Aboriginal Day. It extends to a week, actually.

My staff have been really good in making sure that they are part of whatever happens. They just give of themselves, and in most cases they volunteer. So they've been really excellent role models themselves because I have, in fact, qualified aboriginal employees in my department, and they are looked upon as people who can lead the way in many instances. So I'm really proud of the fact that they've been able to do those kinds of things. Those are examples of areas where we have been involved in the aboriginal role model type of scenario.

The other one, of course, is that we support government publication on aboriginal role models, and that's done through Community Development. We certainly support the minister and his ministry. Just as an example, the chamber of commerce does a really great thing on business awards. They do it for aboriginal organizations, and they do it for aboriginal youth awards that they have just to highlight the fact that aboriginal people are getting involved in the economic scene. There's also the Chamber of Resources. In their awards they recognize successful aboriginal partnerships. I think that Dave got the award in the last little while. My department certainly supports all these initiatives. As I said, they give a lot of their time. It's not part of their job, but they do. So I commend them on what they have been able to do.

Now, you have a number of other issues. On NADC I might want my colleague to get up and do a little speech on some of these areas that you have requested. I'll touch on some, but I think that he would be in a better position to talk about the bursary, you know, the rate. The return rate has actually increased from 74 per cent to 78 per cent. He might want to expand on the bursary and what's been happening. It's a fantastic bursary. As a northerner I have been involved with that bursary, and if it wasn't for that bursary, many northerners would not have been able to be as successful as we are today. I think that that bursary needs to also be provided with a lot of support, so whatever support you can give.

The other part I'll talk about, though, is the temporary work group that you were talking about. We work in a lot of areas on the labour force. I'll just give you an example. Not only is it that we work on making sure that the education – as I indicated earlier to our other colleague, we're trying to work with the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit policy and implement that to increase the high school rates or even up to grade 9 if we can. But if we can keep them to grade 9, then they'll go to grade 12. So we're doing everything that we can to make sure that that occurs.

The other part, of course, is what we call the youth apprenticeship projects, which are key to making sure that they know that there are different streams that they can go into. Of course, the Alberta aboriginal apprenticeship program, which is a very important component, as I indicated earlier: an increase of 888 apprentices in less than four years. That is an incredible amount. Advanced Education and Human Resources have been involved in that. They've really worked in a number of areas.

Let me just talk about that because I think it's important for you to know. In Alberta we have an aboriginal population of approximately 6.7 per cent out of 3 million people. Even if we were to train all the people that are of aboriginal descent, we couldn't keep up with the labour needs. But it's important to note that we need to make sure that we train our own first and we make those opportunities available to our own first. I strongly believe that that's what needs to happen, and the Minister of Human Resources and Employ-

ment has made sure that we continue to do that. We want to ensure that they have those opportunities available to them, but they have to be ready to take those opportunities, for that availability.

In order for us to be able to do that, as I indicated, the educational stream has to be done, but we also have to make sure that we look at how we can help them along. I know that the bursary system is one way. We have a lot of different programs that we could utilize to ensure that we have an ability to move those people who are ready to go into those areas and be primed to be able to do that. That's why when you look at my budget, you will see in there not only the capacity issue but the First Nations economic participation initiative. You will see that we're making sure that they're ready for it. We say pre-employment skills in many instances or preskilled areas. We want to make sure that they're ready for whatever comes their way and they can access that. So we want to make sure that we train our own first, that we're prepared for that.

4:50

There is a labour strategy that's going ahead through Human Resources and Employment, and we're involved in that to ensure that we have an aboriginal labour force strategy within that strategy so that we can see some activity there.

You also asked about the MOU in the Northwest Territories. I was tasked to bring that to life, and what we did was pick strategic areas. What we wanted to make sure of: what is it that's really coming down the pike that aboriginal people can take advantage of as well as northerners? So then we specifically picked training. We picked education. We picked transportation issues. Of course, we wanted to make sure that we would look at tourism and ensure that we are all together in terms of what we wanted to do. The Mackenzie pipeline was the huge issue on the economic side. We wanted to see how Alberta could be primed before that pipeline came down. Of course, Alberta Energy is responsible for anything to do with a pipeline, but what we do is try to make sure that all the areas that we need to cover are covered.

You were talking about northern roads. I know that my colleague will talk about this. The northern road strategy has been in place for a while. As a matter of fact, I think it was in 1995 at the northwestern Premier's meeting. The northwestern first ministers had what they called the northwestern road concept. If you look at that road concept, you will see that the road strategy definitely mirrors somewhat what was being recommended.

You spoke about the Wabasca-Fort McMurray connection. We call that the east-west connector. There have been a lot of people who have wanted to be involved in that. Many of the MDs have really pushed to see this happen, and we have thanked them because I think it's really important. It's actually in the MD of Opportunity, so the MD of Opportunity has now come forward and said: "Now we're ready to take this on because it's within our area. What can we do to get the partners together?" That's basically what we're doing with that. There have been no dollars identified. There have been studies done, and we're just trying to find out what is the best way for us to accomplish that road. We're still pursuing all avenues. The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is certainly outside to see what can be done.

You also discussed the Peavine-McLennan connection. As you know, the Bluesky upgrader, hopefully, is going to be going in there, and we're making sure that we try to make that connection happen. The community has been the driving force behind that, and we have supported it a hundred per cent. We'll continue to do that.

You also made mention that there are no dollars for aboriginal tourism. We are not a program deliverer. We don't do that. What we do is encourage the various ministries to deal with these issues.

I just want to talk about this because it's really key to tourism. The Minister of Economic Development, when we spoke, agreed to make sure that we would meet with First Nations and Métis leaders. We did that. We talked about tourism: what should we be doing, and how should we be advancing aboriginal tourism? The minister listened to all their comments. They made recommendations. One of the recommendations was to establish an aboriginal tourism council, which he has done, and we worked with him to be able to see that realized and make sure that the aboriginal product is going to be dealt with.

One of the biggest concerns always when we're dealing with aboriginal tourism or any products is that the aboriginal people have to be involved. So what we did as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is commit to make sure that we would have the connection to the aboriginal community. Of course, the aboriginal community says: we want to be involved with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. That's basically where we want to go. So when you look at those areas, we don't deliver services. What we do is talk about strategy; we talk about priorities.

You asked about the federal urban aboriginal strategy: will there be an ability to talk about other cities coming on board? Well, we're looking forward to adding more, but that will depend on the federal government as well. We have to work together. We were very blessed to be able to do that with Lethbridge, to add them on, and we'll continue to work on that. Fort McMurray is certainly one of the areas, and Grande Prairie, as you know, is another area that's really growing at a rapid rate. I think they're pretty well prime to be able to do that. We'll just continue to work on that.

You talked about the Kelowna accord. Let me just talk about that. Just as you indicated – and First Nations and the Métis community and the Inuit also indicated this – we were disappointed that it wasn't mentioned in the budget. We are always concerned about the fact when we're dealing with probably the most marginal group of people. So what the First Nations and the Métis and all the aboriginal community tell us is that they do not want the federal government to renege on their responsibility as well. They don't want us to take on responsibilities that they feel are the federal government's. Of course, we want to make sure that we address some of their concerns because they are Albertans too.

So, as a result, we have actually put a lot of money in lots of different areas. Housing is one, the remote housing. The Minister – I'm sure you saw her budget the other day – spoke about some of the affordable housing projects. So when we look at those, those are the kinds of areas that we have been making sure we're involved in, and of course on the consultation and a number of other areas, whether it's a human resource strategy, to make sure that there is an aboriginal strategy; you know, all those areas. So we've been involved as much as we can from the Alberta perspective, but we also want to honour what the First Nations have told us, that the federal government have a fiduciary responsibility.

Bursary. I know that my colleague may want to speak a few minutes on some of these areas. He's very knowledgeable.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: I just wanted to know if we could revert to Introduction of Guests, but he's stayed here long enough now that he's not a guest.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I've just got a couple of items I want to ask the hon. minister. If you refer to the aspect of your goal 3, what I'm wondering about is – when you go to your budget, I'm looking at line 3.0.1. As we're moving forward, you realize that we have lots of pressures in the north, and the big thing is transportation. We had a very great conference in High Level last month. I'm just wondering how we are going to keep this going from the point of view that we're looking only at \$785,000 to try and get things moving in the north. You know, that's our last frontier, and we have to make sure that we move forward on that, that we have the interconnectors. A lot of the roads need to be upgraded, and I'm just wondering what your department is doing on that so that we can work with the different communities.

The other thing I'm looking at is the Métis settlements governance, 4.0.1. I notice that we've moved down on that aspect too, and I'm just wondering where we're going on that. Is there a sunset clause on that?

Then if you could explain the aspect of 1.0.3 on the aboriginal affairs side. We're looking at \$4,879,000, and I just sort of want a bit more explanation on that. I'm sure that that's covered under goal 1: "Lead the management of significant Aboriginal issues requiring coordinated strategic response and partnerships."

5:00

The other thing is – I know your department doesn't look at this – remote housing. I want to thank the hon. minister and the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment for working on this with the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports because we're able to get some dollars and cents for the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation out of Grande Cache. As you realize, they were displaced from Jasper national park. They're working very well in the Grande Cache area with the different partnerships, but the housing is a big aspect. I'm just wondering how we're going to co-ordinate so that we can move forward on that aspect.

I guess that the other one is, as you realize, the nature in which we have the land deal with them. We have co-operatives and enterprises, and I'm just wondering how we can get some more autonomy there so that we can move ahead and do some more studying from the land issue so that we can have some outline plans, possibly using the hamlet status so that we can work with the MD of Greenview too.

If you could enlighten me on those, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to address a couple of the issues and the challenges that we do face in northern Alberta. As probably everybody knows, we have spent and paid a lot of attention to the need for professionals, especially in health care, whether it be doctors or whether it be nurses or physiotherapists. I suppose one of our greatest needs is the health care system, professionals in the health care system. But don't isolate it to that one category because we need individuals, we need professionals in all aspects, and the challenge is because of the isolation that is in northern Alberta.

That is why it is so necessary to have the bursaries that we do have in place right now. The bursary rate has improved from the 1974 level to 78 per cent. Of course, there's a lot of room for improvement, and we can't argue that. But we need to continue to

strive to develop a bursary system, one that is going to encourage people not only to come to northern Alberta but especially to come back to northern Alberta. If an individual was born in northern Alberta, they are more likely to come back and stay. We need to look at those individuals and encourage them to come back.

Mr. Chairman, I do want to talk about the roads as well, if I can. It is as important as communication when we talk about the roads. When we look at central Alberta and we look at the cities, I say that those roads are the lifelines for individuals not only to get around but to be able to communicate. In northern Alberta, as I mentioned before, the distance that we are challenged with makes it very difficult. We need to focus on major arteries. We need to focus on roads that will encompass energy or gas and oil to deal with the challenges we have of moving product.

Mr. Chairman, when we talk about Alberta and we talk about the northern Alberta development that takes place, we need to look more in depth at adding value. We need to add value to our products in Alberta but, I would say, especially in northern Alberta. We have our forest products. When we look at forest products and we look at adding value, we need to develop our pressboard plants and not only develop them to the stage where we have pressboard plants and ship them to other provinces or to other countries to further add value, but I think we need to do it here.

When we look at agriculture, there is no way that Alberta can survive on the sale of raw products. We need to develop and add value. We cannot compete against South America. We can't compete with Australia in a market where the cost of production is so much higher.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that in order to accomplish some of those goals, we definitely need to continue and enhance our bursary system. It is working very well. I believe that we need to try to add funds into that direction, look at different initiatives, and look at different incentives to bring youth back into northern Alberta. It is very important when we look at northern Alberta communities.

I want to use an example of some of the municipalities right now that are looking at trying to encourage administrators to come back into their communities. They are looking at ways of working with Children's Services and having the Youth Advisory Panel make presentations to municipal councils on how we can encourage youth to come back into rural Alberta. It is a key to our existence. We will never be able to survive if we continue to try to centralize our services and our delivery of services. We need the youth to come back not only for the energy and the gas employment opportunities but for all opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, again, I want to say that the bursary program has worked and is doing a tremendous job. As I said before, I would hope that we could enhance that part of our investment. I just want to thank you for the opportunity to stand up and, you know, explain a little bit about the bursaries and the importance of them.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'd just like to address a couple of comments to the minister, and they're observations that I've made in southern Alberta. One of the things that the hon. member with northern development spoke about were bursaries and also daycare. To me, I see that as a huge issue because I really believe that – particularly with what I see around my area in Lethbridge. I do see many of the young native women obviously having their children much earlier than the average. Their further education is very, very difficult because they don't have proper daycare. When I say proper

daycare, although you've said that you don't deliver programs, I think what I would like to see is some kind of a co-ordinated ability for the elder women in our community to be able to create a cultural daycare, so to speak, for some of these young children, to free up the younger teenage moms and even the young 20s moms to be able to go back to school because we are missing out on a huge potential with our native women.

I would just like to share those observations. You can make a comment or otherwise; I'd just like to share that observation.

5:10

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Chairman, I know that I've just got a few minutes. First of all, I'd like to say thank you to everyone who asked questions. If I didn't address your concerns, we'll certainly put it in writing so that you have the information before you. I've appreciated the recommendations that have come, but I also would like to see some other suggestions like the role model issue. I don't know if we've addressed all that. But if you have any ideas, please let me know.

The Member for West Yellowhead has huge concerns when it comes to his AWN and certainly pushed for housing.

So, Mr. Chairman, I want to say thank you again to everyone.

Mr. Backs: Just to mention some role models that were great leaders, I think, in this Assembly. Many members would agree. Peter Lougheed was a member of Métis extraction who was a great leader in this Assembly; Nick Taylor, the Leader of the Opposition, was also a Métis leader; and, you know, other good role models in our Assembly. There are many, actually, that have excelled in here.

There are a couple of items. I would just perhaps request a written answer on that bursary, you know, some of the specifics to my question. I won't go through them again.

The nontrades area is something I didn't touch on. That's something that was perhaps highlighted in a newspaper article today, I believe it was, in the *Edmonton Journal*, about the lack of equipment operators, buggy skimmers, Cat skimmers, and such.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates

for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$34,003,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee rise and report the estimates of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$34,003,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Acting Government House Leader.

Mrs. McClellan: That scares me when you say that.

Mr. Speaker, I think it was a good afternoon of work. I would move that we call it 5:30 and the House adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening, when it would commence in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, May 10, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 2006/05/10

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Finance

The Chair: I recognize the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to present the Ministry of Finance's estimates for 2006-07, and I'm sure it's a pleasure for everyone to know that this is actually the last department in estimates. It's been an interesting and I think productive and useful exercise.

I have some staff in the gallery. As always, we have a little trouble seeing up there with the light behind them, but I believe Brian Manning, my deputy minister, is there. Bonnie Lovelace is there. Bonnie is the senior financial officer. Nancy Cuelenaere is there. She's the person we phone late at night when we can't find something. She's our acting controller. Darwin Bozek from financial services is there. Marie Iwanow is our new communications director. Maureen Osadchuk from my office I think is no stranger to any of you.

Mr. Chairman, as Minister of Finance I was proud, on behalf of my colleagues in government, to present Alberta's 13th consecutive balanced budget. It is a budget, we believe, that addresses current needs while leveraging today's very strong fiscal standing to help prosperity for future Albertans. We have a lot to be proud of in this province. Our accumulated debt has been eliminated. We still maintain the highest credit rating of any province in Canada, and we have the lowest overall tax load in Canada.

This budget does build on Alberta's tax advantage. There are measures in this budget that will help us maintain our competitive position and enhance the fairness of the tax system. Albertans have already saved \$1.5 billion from cuts to personal income taxes between 1999 and 2001. That is a significant number. That includes, of course, implementing the introduction of the 10 per cent single rate.

These savings have been protected year after year by indexing our tax system to inflation. I think that's very important. Albertans will save an additional \$77 million in 2006 as a result of the continued indexation of the provincial income tax system, along with an extra \$100 increase to basic spousal and eligible dependants tax credits. As well, another very important program, the Alberta family employment tax credit, which benefits low- and middle-income working families, will be fully indexed to inflation beginning July 1, 2006.

Mr. Chairman, along with the enhancements to the personal income tax system, these changes mean a typical working family with two children can effectively earn up to \$37,000 before paying any provincial income taxes. Another 140,000 low-income Albertans are also benefiting from changes to health premium insurance subsidies that were introduced in April of this year. The income threshold to qualify for subsidies was raised by \$5,000, saving Albertans about another \$30 million this year.

We've heard some criticism about our reduction of the corporate tax rate. I'm not sure that anyone in this House at this point would

suggest that that was a wrong move, but it's important to put on the record why we feel it's important to continue our target of an 8 per cent corporate tax rate. We were able to move it to 10 per cent this year. What that does is recognize that Alberta and Alberta companies compete in a global economy. It's not just simply a domestic economy anymore. This will save our businesses about \$265 million this year – \$265 million, because there have been a lot of other numbers cast around – and it will help us in our world-wide competitive position. What may be more important, it sets a foundation for tomorrow's economic growth and job creation. Of course, just to finish the tax section, Alberta has no general sales tax, no capital tax, and no payroll tax.

Maintaining a competitive tax regime isn't the only way that we're helping Alberta's future prosperity. We're also making very significant contributions to savings. Budget 2006 allocates another \$1 billion from the estimated surplus into the heritage fund plus another \$242 million for inflation-proofing. That's on top of \$1 billion that was deposited as of third quarter and \$345 million of inflation-proofing last year. We've also been able to add \$750 million to the advanced education endowment fund in the 2005-06 fiscal year. We'll also be adding an additional \$150 million to the medical research endowment fund. I think that fund speaks for itself, and everyone would agree that that has been an amazing investment.

The Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund is being established this year with a \$500 million deposit. Proceeds from that fund will go to support the fight against cancer, and as I said in our budget speech, this will be in collaboration with other countries, with other provinces, and maybe, just maybe, we'll find a cure for some of the cancers that our citizens will face.

I want to just do a very quick overview of our ministry key roles, just to remind all of us. There are a number of key areas and functions. They include the office of budget and management; pensions, insurance, and financial institutions; treasury management; and ministry support services. The ministry also includes, of course, the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, the Alberta Pensions Administration Corporation, Alberta Treasury Branches Financial, Alberta Securities Commission, Alberta Insurance Council, the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation, and their subsidiaries.

Alberta Finance's vision is "financial leadership that strengthens Alberta." We believe this budget speaks to that. Our mission is to "provide corporate financial services and manage the province's financial affairs and policies in the interests of [all] Albertans."

Our business plan, I'll just touch on very briefly, has five high-level strategic priorities. These include Alberta's fiscal framework, Alberta's tax advantage, investment management, securities regulation, and pension plan governance. In addition to those priorities, of course, Finance will continue to do the day-to-day managing of the province's finances.

We have three core business goals that support our strategic priorities. The first is fiscal planning and financial management. Our goals are to have "a financially strong, sustainable and accountable government"; to have "a fair and competitive provincial tax system"; and to administer revenue programs "fairly, efficiently and effectively."

Our second core business is investment, treasury, and risk management. Our goals there are to soundly manage financial assets and liabilities for current and future generations of Albertans and, of course, to demonstrate effective leadership in risk management.

Our third core business is financial sector and pensions. Our goals there are to effectively regulate private-sector pensions, insurance, and financial products and services; to ensure that Albertans and local authorities have accessible financial services; to ensure that the

securities regulatory system is effective and efficient; and to ensure that public-sector pension plans in Alberta are sustainable.

8:10

Mr. Chairman, that's a quick overview of our priorities and goals for 2006-07, and now I would just touch on a very few highlights from our budget estimates. Our ministry revenue is estimated at \$12 billion, an increase from the forecast of \$11 billion for 2005-06. Investment income for 2006-07 is \$305 million lower than the '05-06 forecast. That is because public equity returns are expected to return to longer term averages which are lower than the projected returns for '05-06 and the effective rising interest rates on fixed income returns. Internal government transfers are \$68 million lower than the '05-06 forecast because of a reduction in the surplus available for transfer from the lottery fund. That is a result of increased funding to ministries in support of various public initiatives. Personal and corporate taxes are estimated to be \$1 billion more in '06-07. This is partially offset by the reduced corporate income taxes as a result of lowering the rate. In addition, revenue from premiums, fees, and licences is estimated to be \$4.2 million higher, and net income from our commercial operations is projected to be \$22 million higher.

The ministry's program expense is estimated to be \$690 million. This is an increase of about \$84 million from the '05-06 forecast, and I would like to take just a moment to explain those increases to you. This provides additional funding for the access to the future endowment, a \$23 million transfer. You would all understand that those transfers from that fund and others I'll mention come out of Finance's budget. Access to the future endowment, a \$23 million transfer. Transfer to Health from the cancer prevention legacy fund, about \$25 million. Research funded by the medical research and science and engineering research funds, \$15 million.

Now, the department's spending in Alberta investment management is another part of that, and that is to improve operation capacity, capabilities, and quality assurance, additional private investment capacity, and we are growing and we have to face relocation to address some space requirements.

I want to also just take a couple of minutes to highlight a few other areas in our estimates that I think you will find of interest. Our capital investment for '06-07 is estimated at \$6 million. Of that, \$3.9 million is for the department for the administration of revenue and rebate programs, management of investments, and network infrastructure. Alberta Pensions Administration Corporation accounts for \$1.3 million to undertake various strategic and operating initiatives and, maybe most importantly, to replace computer equipment.

The number of full-time equivalents is always of interest to members, and we do expect our ministry's full-time equivalents to increase by 48. Thirty-one of those are within the department, including 29 FTEs in Alberta investment management to sustain current investment operations, to meet private investing obligations, and to improve operation capacity, capability, and quality assurance. The remainder are increases for the Alberta Insurance Council, the Alberta Local Authorities Pension Plan Corporation, the Alberta Pensions Administration Corporation, and the Alberta Securities Commission.

Mr. Chairman, this is a really quick overview of Alberta Finance's business plan and budget estimates for 2006-07. I look forward to hearing comments and questions and answering as many of your questions tonight as possible. However, as in the past if we don't have the time to get all of the answers to you tonight or if I don't have the answer, I will commit to getting back to all members in writing before our budget is passed. They heard that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise this evening and participate in the estimates for the Department of Finance. I would like to thank the minister for her opening comments and particularly for her comment at the end of this evening's dissertation, where she asked her staff upstairs to have answers to us before the budget is passed. That's definitely a bit of a commitment on her part and on their part, and I appreciate that very much. The minister has always been good to her word in the past, and I appreciate that as well.

I would like to begin by acknowledging my staff who is present here tonight. Dave Kincade is in the public gallery, and I share him with four other opposition MLAs, so you can imagine how hard he works. He was here until well after midnight last night helping prepare me for this evening's debate.

So I'm going to start off, Mr. Chairman, and rather than editorializing a lot, which I am sometimes prone to do, I'm going to try to ask specific questions either to the fiscal plan as it relates directly to the Department of Finance and in some cases more broad questions as they relate to the government's fiscal plans in general, similar to the comments that the minister made a few minutes ago.

I have to start off talking about the overall government liabilities, which is a conversation that began yesterday during question period and continued a little bit today during question period. The minister accepted that we would discuss it tonight, and I think it's important that we get that out of the way. My questions yesterday were regarding the government's total liabilities as represented on page 43 of this year's fiscal plan tables. What I'm looking at there particularly is where it says: total liabilities, \$18.420 billion. In the same book last year on page 39, fiscal plan tables, the number was \$15.610 billion. Specifically, that is what I was speaking to in questions yesterday and today. It's an increase of nearly \$3 billion in total showing in this year's balance sheet summary as opposed to last year's balance sheet summary.

My questions yesterday were if the minister could explain why that number is nearly \$3 billion higher than it was a year before and why we're exposing Alberta taxpayers to nearly \$3 billion more in total liabilities given the current economic boom that we're experiencing. Whether it's accounting 101 that the minister was going to share with me or accounting 505, I don't really care, but I know what my eyes see. My eyes see a nearly \$3 billion increase in that line item year-to-year, so that was the question as it related to that in particular.

The other thing I want to point out is not a secret. The minister has acknowledged it in the past, but I'm not sure that most Albertans understand. The minister talks about the net assets of the government, and I will acknowledge that the number is a pretty healthy-looking number, but we must always bear in mind that even in their own subnotes they remind us that the net assets do not include – in fact, under the Fiscal Responsibility Act they explicitly exclude – pension obligations. In this case that amount is \$5.621 billion for this year, the majority of which is the unfunded teachers' pension liability. I've mentioned in this House before that that liability will cost us somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$30 billion to \$32 billion over the lifetime of the agreement if we don't address it now. So it's not quite as rosy a picture as the graph would represent.

8:20

Now, moving on to a specific question. On page 59 of the fiscal plan there's a reference under loan guarantees to Canadian Western Bank. That one in particular caught my eye, and believe me, I'm a big fan of Canadian Western Bank. I bank there. I've banked there

for years and years and years – in fact, long before they were Canadian Western Bank, when it was North West Trust – so this is no slight on Canadian Western Bank that I'm raising this issue. But I am curious. It shows \$2 million as a forecast for a loan guarantee for Canadian Western Bank, and then under the estimated liability a negative \$1 million, so I'm assuming that means a total loan guarantee for Canadian Western Bank of \$1 million, and I'm curious as to why that is there. What is the loan for? Why is the provincial government issuing a loan guarantee in the first place? I think it speaks once again to the question of whether or not the government is, in fact, out of the business of being in business, particularly since we all know that the Alberta government is the sole shareholder of Alberta Treasury Branches, so we have a major investment in banking to begin with. I would like some explanation as to that.

Also, while I'm talking about the business of being in business, I noted that Order in Council 163/2006 this year approved the incorporation of not more than 40 provincial corporations under the administration of the Minister of Finance. I'm wondering if I could have some explanation as to what those corporations would be and why we need them.

Now, on to the issue of resource revenue, and I won't spend much time here because I spoke to it earlier in the spring session. We see once again where the government is allowing themselves to use \$5.3 billion of nonrenewable resource revenue as opposed to \$4.75 billion. Year after year we see this amendment to the Fiscal Responsibility Act where they allow themselves to use ever more of that nonrenewable resource revenue, and it always causes me concern – in fact, a great deal of concern, perhaps more concern than almost anything else in the budget – because we all know that that revenue is not going to be there forever. Everybody in this House and, I'm going to guess, by now most Albertans have heard me rail on about that. I really do believe it's important. I believe not only should we have a solid surface plan, as the Alberta Liberals currently have, but it is time for a nonrenewable resource revenue savings plan as I have advocated and many others have over the last year and a half or so.

While we are looking at that, I do want to just touch on the rebate cheques, which have been mentioned in the past. Although it wasn't my first choice of a way to deal with surplus revenue, certainly there were some Albertans that desperately needed that money. I found it interesting, however. The other day we had School at the Leg., that I spoke to, and I asked all of the kids how they spent their money, and but for a very few they purchased video games. I was disappointed to hear that. I really was because I had hoped that a few might have invested the money a little more wisely. A few went on trips with the family, that sort of thing, and a couple actually had put it into investment savings, education savings plans, and so forth. But, unfortunately, as I was afraid, I'm thinking there will not be much of a legacy left from that particular program.

The minister acknowledged the other night when I was speaking to her in reference to some of the letters I've received as finance critic that, in fact, there were some cheques that went astray, particularly in Ontario where CRA, who had been hired to administer the program, had incorrectly entered some postal codes, so some Ontario residents were receiving cheques. I'm curious how many Ontario residents actually received that cheque and what the total cost to Alberta taxpayers was for that and whether or not there's any effort being made to recover some of that money.

The minister talked about taxes, and I'm just going to touch on this really briefly. I know that I'm going to run out of time this evening, and I'm disappointed about that, but there are certainly a couple of points I'd like to make about taxes, both personal and corporate. Once again, way too much paper. I'm going to move on, and I'll find that.

In reference to taxes, then: certainly, the health care premium tax, which I've talked about, again, many times in the past, wondering why we can't eliminate that. I'm well on the record for that, so I don't have to spend much time there. In particular, though, as far as personal income tax versus corporate income tax, she mentioned the \$265 million cut for corporate income tax this year. When I add up the basic spousal and eligible dependent tax credit of \$77 million and the \$30 million in health care premium subsidy threshold improvements, it's \$107 million, so I see a 40 per cent difference in terms of tax cuts to corporations versus tax cuts to individuals. I've talked before about being a small business person, and I appreciate tax cuts for business. My question really is: I'm curious as to why we're giving more of a break to businesses than we are to individuals.

Now, also in terms of the amount of revenue that's being raised by tax, there seems, again, to be a bit of an inequity in terms of not only the amount of revenue that's being raised but also the forecast for the future in terms of what's going to be raised in the future when it comes to personal income tax versus corporate income tax. Again, I think that should be causing some concern for Albertans given that, certainly, corporations are doing very well in this province right now, yet we're collecting about 2.5 times more in terms of percentage of income tax from personal income tax than we are from corporate income tax. I'm concerned about the inequity of that again, that perhaps individuals are bearing more of the brunt than they should be as opposed to corporations.

A couple of specific taxes I want to talk about. There was a notice on the Alberta Finance website recently about the fuel tax and the taxability of kerosene. Apparently it has been noted that tax collectors have been incorrectly selling kerosene without collecting the tax. I'm wondering how much tax is estimated to have slipped through our hands, whether or not the voluntary disclosure that is expected of those tax collectors is going to recover the amount that we think we've lost, and what steps are being taken to ensure that it's not happening with other hydrocarbon fuels?

We have a bill before us in the House right now which is the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act. In that there are two things that caught my eye. One is an amendment to the Elections Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act where related corporations apparently currently have a loophole that allows them to go beyond the \$1,000 total tax credit. So there are amendments being made here. Once again my question would be if the minister and her staff could identify for me how much tax has managed to slip through Alberta Finance's grasp by not having corrected that loophole sooner.

Then, likewise, there's an amendment being made to the Insurance Act. Apparently, some insurance companies were avoiding paying their insurance tax. This amendment is clarifying the way companies are defined by the Alberta Insurance Act to make sure that, in fact, that 3 per cent tax is collected. Again my question would be: how much tax has slipped through our hands over that period of time?

There's also a question about the special broker tax. I have to admit that I don't understand an awful lot about this special broker tax, but if I go to page 203 of the estimates, the numbers in terms of what we've collected in the past and expect to collect in the future on the special broker tax jump around a fair amount. Budgeted last year was \$750,000. The forecast is that we're actually going to collect \$1.75 million, and that's also the estimate for this year.

I'm curious about that because I've had some correspondence from a person who has done some work with Alberta Finance. I will table the correspondence either this evening or tomorrow. I'm going to guess, however, that the minister is probably aware of it. This

person is concerned that millions of dollars may be slipping through our hands because, again, of some loopholes in that special broker tax and the way it's collected and administered. So I'm curious about that. I'm wondering if maybe some steps may have been taken already to correct that, and maybe that's why the number jumped from \$750,000 to \$1.75 million. I don't know, but that is the question that I had in my mind.

8:30

Income trusts. I just want to go there quickly. Certainly, it's recognized by the Alberta government. In fact, in a document on their website called the Alberta Tax Advantage, they refer to the fact that Alberta may be losing an awful lot of money on income trusts. I think the number was about \$400 million per year. It indicates on the Finance department website that as part of the ongoing review of the tax system this issue is being examined. I'm curious to know where that's at now, whether or not there's going to be some action on income trusts.

While I'm mentioning it, I noted that the B.C. Securities Commission is warning their investors in British Columbia to do their due diligence, to be very careful with the homework when it comes to investing in income trusts. The alert cautions people to review carefully their current investments because in fact they may unknowingly or unwittingly be invested in income trusts right now. I didn't see a similar caution on the Alberta securities website. So I'm curious as to whether or not we should be at least cautioning people in Alberta about that, making sure that they're aware of the risk that they may be exposed to unknowingly.

We had an exchange in the House today about a particular restaurant bill that was submitted and paid last year as it related to the automobile insurance review board. But I think that those questions, although they were very specific to one meeting, did speak to a broader issue, and the minister referred to a hosting policy. I think that was in reference to my questions about the purchase of alcohol. I'm wondering if I might have access to that hosting policy so that when we're looking at these sorts of expenses in the future, we'll have a better understanding as to exactly what the hosting policy is.

I'm also curious to know whether or not the policy is or was that a credit card receipt only is good enough when an expense for hosting is claimed. That's all we got back from the access to information request that was sent in. There may have been more information although it wasn't indicated in the response from freedom of information that anything was excluded in relation to a breakdown of expenses. I'm curious whether or not it's department policy that a credit card slip is good enough. If that is still the case, then I would certainly suggest that we should be amending that policy so that all Albertans would have an opportunity to know exactly what they're spending money on when it comes to those sorts of hosting expenses.

I'd just like to mention that the Edmonton Oilers are apparently ahead 1-nothing. Both the minister and I are anxiously waiting to receive news, and I just had that passed to me.

Now, the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. The minister mentioned the billion dollars that's going in this year plus the billion dollars that was put in from last year's money. I could spend the rest of my time tonight talking about the heritage savings trust fund. But what I will say is that right now the Fiscal Responsibility Act mandates that the return on investment less the management fees and less the inflation proofing has to be put into general revenue. I would strongly suggest that we should change that piece of legislation so that the return on investment minus those costs can stay in the heritage savings trust fund, where it belongs.

I'd like to mention investing in tobacco. I've asked questions in this Legislature before. I actually have a motion on the Order Paper, Motion 608, that would mandate that we divest ourselves of investment in tobacco companies. We specifically excluded investment in tobacco companies in the government's Bill 1 this year, the cancer act that the minister was referring to. Unfortunately, with my motion being 608 and the session winding down – I think we're at Motion 510 right now – clearly this is not going to be dealt with in the House this year. But it's important, I think, in today's climate that we recognize that investing in tobacco companies, although it may return a profit, is certainly not ethical anymore. I think it would be prudent for us to divest ourselves of those investments.

Very quickly I'd like to touch on the payday loan companies. There has been some talk from the federal government that they may actually allow the provinces to regulate payday loan companies. Right now they're actually limited at 60 per cent interest, which I find incredibly high, but I've read some reports that at times on very short loans these companies are charging up to 50,000 per cent interest, which is incredible. So I'm curious whether or not there's been any action taken on this matter by the provincial government, whether or not we're preparing for that eventuality. It certainly looks like it's going to go ahead, and I'm wondering where we're at with that.

I look forward to some answers either this evening or later. Hopefully, I'll have another chance to get up and ask more questions. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Yeah. I'm going to really quickly try and whip through some of these. I really appreciate the hon. member and the manner that he's raised these issues tonight. Rather than long dissertations we've actually got some really good questions here, and I hope I can provide some really good answers back.

On the heritage savings trust fund. You're right: it was legislated that the dollars would go back to general revenue and, of course, also legislated that when we were debt free, we would begin to inflation-proof it. Until that legislation is changed – and it may be at some future point – of course, we are investing dollars into the fund, which are about equal to leaving the money in the fund. To me, that was incredibly important, and we've talked about that. I want to see that fund grow. I want to see it as a revenue stream for future years when it may be needed.

On tobacco companies. We did have this conversation, and we had the question at one point. I believe I checked on how much investment there was in tobacco companies, and I believe the numbers – and my staff will probably be shaking their heads violently either up and down or back and forth – are about one-quarter of 1 per cent of the investments, so not significant. I don't think it would be difficult to say that you wouldn't have a direct investment in a tobacco fund. But you know that there are funds that are – I've been searching for the right word; I've lost it out of my head – a conglomerate of businesses where you might have a small portion of that that might be a tobacco company. But the point made on direct investments into tobacco companies, I accept that recommendation, and we'll certainly raise it with our investment management group.

Hosting policy. You know, we talked about this in the House. I suppose that \$75 a person is not a high cost for an entire meal at a rather upscale restaurant. I don't eat those very often. Many of us in this House probably don't. At times you're compelled to. Most of my receipts are from Dairy Queen, Joey's Only, and the pizza

places. Actually, in many ways I prefer their food. But I have a personal policy in that if there is wine used at a meal that I'm hosting, I pay for that separately. I don't drink it myself, but I don't object to anyone else having a drink of wine with their meal. In fact, physicians will tell you that a glass of red wine is probably good for you; it's not good for me if I want to keep my driver's licence. I haven't learned the difference between a glass and a pail, so besides the headache not drinking it at all is a good thing for me.

I'll get you the information on the special brokers' tax. I suspect that your assumption is the correct one. I didn't have time while I was trying to make notes to look that particular page up.

Income trusts. I have nothing really new to report to you except to say that it is a part of our overall tax review. You're right on the estimate. It was our number that it could be as much as \$400 million there.

As to whether we put anything in on a caution, I don't think so. I think that perhaps my staff will help me there. That might be more in a consumer line than our role, but they'll tell me.

On the tax slippage I can tell you that there's not a lot. You know, it's not impossible, but as soon as this is found, it's rectified, and tax is collected as much as you can from companies that may have missed paying.

8:40

Kerosene. I don't have the answer; I'll get it for you. But I think we only collected about \$5 million in total on propane, so I would suggest that kerosene would be a much smaller part of the sales. So the slippage there would be less, but of course you don't want any. If you have a tax and it is to be collected, it should be collected in the manner in which it was put in place.

Health premium. We'll continue to discuss that. I think you agree that the move we made this year to take another 140,000 Albertans off of that roll was a good move. I will just take some exception to the comparison between the corporate tax and the personal tax because while our personal tax saved about \$107 million this year, we have saved Albertans \$1.5 billion over a period of from '99 to this year because we implemented those changes first. The same with small business: we reached our target on small business first. I have heard from some small business owners that they would like us to consider revisiting that again and look at either increasing the threshold, which we raised to \$400,000, or another part of the per cent or a percentage drop. Certainly, we said that we accepted their entreaties on that, and we would look at that as part of our overall tax review.

On the cheques astray: not many. I don't have the final figures. I'm sure one of my staff probably does. Canada Revenue Agency made every attempt to have those cheques returned, and I think they'll probably be quite successful. I do want to reiterate: it was a wise thing to use Canada Revenue Agency to deliver those cheques. We don't have a database that is as complete as theirs. I have said that that entire exercise will cost us under \$10 million. If anybody can administer a program of \$1.3 billion to \$1.4 billion for \$10 million, I think we'd be overjoyed if all of our administration costs were that low. We have found Canada Revenue Agency in this case very good agents to work with. They've been very accommodating with people who have been missed, have worked with them to get their '04 tax return filed if they happened to be a spouse or someone who didn't. If they were persons who had children and hadn't registered for the child benefit because they didn't qualify, they've been very accommodating with those folks.

I think we've been able to address most of the concerns people had. The toughest one in that one were the people who had lived in the province who left at the wrong time or, indeed, who came back

at the wrong time. You have to set a date. September 1 was our date. That was our centennial date, if you wish, and we had to set a date. You have to set a time. The hardest one was to correspond or talk with those folks on the phone who just missed that deadline or date, but as I pointed out to them: when you decide to do this, you have to choose some dates. You have to put some parameters around the program. The Auditor General will be watching very closely to make sure that we stuck to those parameters.

On the increase in revenue: we do have a surplus plan. I think that using some of those revenues in savings, in the heritage fund, in our various endowments is a good way to save. I'm in support of saving more, but I'm also conscious every day in this Legislature of asks from the House – sometimes all sides, most times one side – for more money for health, for more money for education, for more money for seniors, for more money for continuing care. What we really do is try to strike a balance to ensure that we continue to have the best health delivery system, the best education system, the best system for caring for our people who are vulnerable. I have some confidence in that because I happen to have had the responsibility of being the minister responsible for seniors, and I know that many of the programs that we have in this province are not available to people in other provinces at all. I speak of AISH for one, a program that's very good but not available. So it's a balance.

As our economy grows, as our population grows, we will attract more people. We certainly find seniors coming to this province in record numbers. Our net migration of all people is still positive. We still continue to attract a large number of seniors from other provinces. There's a reason for that. We're pleased and proud that they choose Alberta to be their home, some of them because they've followed their children that have come here to work, some of them because they just see the benefits of what's available for seniors in this province.

The other point I want to make is on the personal tax side. I would just remind all members that our personal exemption is double anywhere else in Canada, including the federal government, and I remind all members that on the tax side, if we taxed at the same level as the province next to us, which is British Columbia, we would collect an additional \$7.2 billion in taxes. That's \$7.2 billion that Albertans have that citizens in other provinces don't have. I think it's positive, and it's good for our people.

On the creation of corporations the simple explanation is that through our investment management division they set up those corporations for managing investments. So if you watch the OCs, which I'm sure that you do, you will see periodically where we remove a number of those companies. They're holding companies for investment, and when we're finished with that particular investment, we pass an OC to end that company. So that's really what that is.

Canadian Western Bank. Nobody really told me, but I'm going to make what might be an educated guess. Ag Financial Services: sometimes the syndication on loans for our small businesses will take last position. Maybe that's where it is. It's a small amount. But to our small businesses, particularly our value-added businesses, financing is sometimes difficult. We're very happy in the agricultural sector, which is one of our largest manufacturing sectors, to be able to work with our companies and syndicate or broker a loan utilizing other banks with it. I'm sure that somebody in my department will give you the absolute on that.

Overall government liabilities. We addressed that earlier today. I don't have the last year's figures, but if I look at the columns on page 43, I see a 2005 actual on liabilities of \$18.687 billion. I see a forecast for '06 of \$17.927 billion, and I see an estimate for '07 of \$18.420 billion. Those are the figures I'm looking at. I don't know

where – the \$15.610 billion might have been an estimate of something somewhere, or it might have been a calculation, but we will continue to have that discussion, and I'm sure we'll be able to sort that out.

That's as far as I'm going to go there. I appreciate all of the questions, and for anything I've missed I'll be sure to get the answer to you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: I guess there's a benefit to being here early.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the minister and the answers that she has given so far and for the details that we received in the financial statement. There is no question that Alberta is the place to be. When you look at page 63 of the fiscal plan, it's very encouraging to see our provincial tax rates there compared to the rest of Canada. That's very encouraging, but the question always is: are we doing the best that we can do?

8:50

I just want to turn to page 65, first, on the historical fiscal summary, and go over a few things there. On line 2, corporate income tax, it shows that it's levelling off. I believe that in 2005 it's about \$2.6 billion, and it goes down to approximately \$2.18 billion by 2008. This province, if my memory serves me right, promised a corporate tax reduced to 8 per cent. We haven't reached that yet, though we've attracted many corporate headquarters and things here to the province, and I'm wondering if that drop is because there are future plans to drop it another 1 per cent per year.

[Mr. Danyluk in the chair]

I guess I'm somewhat curious because, normally, when taxes are dropped, you see an increase. As we see in personal revenue tax, we've been lowering it, and you've raised the basic exemption, yet it's continuing to rise, which is encouraging, showing good economy and prosperity. But it's not showing up in the corporate income tax. That raises some curiosity for me there on why you feel it's going in that direction.

Another question. On line 7, other own-source revenue: I'm not quite sure I understand exactly what that is. Trying to link that with previous pages, it seems like they don't quite add up. If the minister could expound on that a little bit, I would appreciate what exactly is entailed on that line.

Turning to page 62, Alberta being the place to be and the benefits that are there and the surplus that we're having, I ask the questions on behalf of Albertans: why are our premiums, fees, and licensing charges all going up? It just seems like we should be able to hold it where we're at or even reduce it in some areas; for example, provincial camping and those areas where Albertans truly can go out and enjoy what the province has to offer and want to stay at home. Yet we're edging those up and looking at further increases next year. I'd encourage the government to reconsider that on behalf of Albertans so that we could enjoy our home province and not see an increase in fees, especially at this time of fiscal surpluses.

On page 61, full-time equivalents. This is a question that I've asked before, and the Premier continues to keep saying many times during question period that we have 22,000, but on page 61 it shows that we've got 26,800. We're looking at 27,000. I guess my question is on the accuracy, making sure that this is the accurate one, and perhaps understanding that a little bit better.

Page 60, the allocation of lottery fund revenue. Something that's been brought up many times and I think will continue to be debated

is that we see under Gaming that the biggest allocation goes to horse racing and the breeding renewal grant program. I believe I've asked once, and I didn't get the answers on the actual revenue generated from horse racing and what percentage is going back to horse racing. It just seems lopsided that horse racing, a fairly small industry, is getting such a huge percentage when many of our municipalities and charities and other things really rely on the community facility enhancement program and community initiative program, which together is just barely \$68 million, almost equalling the entire horse racing and breeding program. I just wonder, you know, in having to set priorities, you've mentioned it in here many times before, including this evening, that it's a tough balance. Everybody is wanting more money. I'm curious about what the actual gross revenue is from that because the Minister of Gaming always says: that's just a percentage going back. If you could enlighten us on that, I would appreciate it.

I also was curious about the Canadian Western Bank, and because it's been brought up, I won't worry about repeating that. That was something of a benefit for us to understand that.

The question that I have at this time is on the overall spending. I don't have the page number written down here. Of a \$32 billion budget, in a short period you've got the revenue going down to \$30 billion, if my memory serves me right.

Mrs. McClellan: What page?

Mr. Hinman: I can't find it. I don't have it written in my notes. I apologize. I've got to go from memory now.

I believe that we're looking at a \$1 billion to \$2 billion loss in revenue, that you forecasted two or three years down the road, yet our spending has already surpassed. Maybe that's going back to page 65, line 10, for a total revenue of \$30 billion, which is already less than our current spending. That raises a great deal of concern that we're already past a sustainable budget when by 2008 we're down to \$30 billion in revenue.

One of the questions that I guess I have – on page 64 you have an excellent chart showing the changes in prices and, you know, how it affects the dollar, the natural gas prices, or the exchange rates going up and down. But when I look at the production above that, it shows that production levels really aren't going off and that we're able to sustain those production levels. So I guess I'm concerned. What are we trying to show there? You know, is it: let's not show that we have too much money so that we can restrain the budget? Yet we're spending an enormous amount in the projections. So I worry a lot about that.

It brings up a question. When I look on page 64 at the bitumen production, we're going from 1.2 to 1.4 to 1.5. With that increase and the price holding there, I'm wondering if this government has a schedule or an estimate on when that royalty relief that those big corporations are receiving to pay for their infrastructure is coming due. When will that kick into the budget? Is it after 2008, 2010? We've heard a lot about that, and I'm just wondering if you have some estimates. Because of the increased price and the royalty that they're getting back, are we going to have a crossover there? Perhaps you could share that with us. That would be helpful.

Just an aside, I guess. With the dollar value and your chart on page 64, I'm wondering if you have any estimates – I've been told that in health care there's a huge cost in U.S. dollars for equipment and things that we're bringing in and drugs and whatnot. With the dollar rising, would that offset and show a significant reduction in our health care expenses? I've had many people from the Calgary health authority and other areas indicate to me that we should be seeing some balancing there between the two. If you could share something on that, that would also be helpful.

A question – and I can't remember where I picked it out, so I apologize; it's mentioned in a few places – about alternative financing. I'm wondering if that's just P3s or whether the government has some other programs that they're looking at. My question in regard to that is: when we look at these P3s, and I guess I kind of look at P3s going back to some of our history, whether that's the magnesium plant that the government got into or Swan Hills – it seems like there was another one, but I can't remember now; I didn't write it in here – we've learned that we get hooked for that anyways. I guess that Gainers is one that shows up in here, where we still have a debt that we're paying for, and it's been so many years. I was shocked to see that still coming forward. [interjection] Yes. He still smiles at us, thanking us.

With such a great rating, that you mentioned earlier, the triple-A rating, do we really do better? Do the studies show that rather than just going out and tendering it and having it done as opposed to a P3 where those people have to look at their expenses and overall, if they're borrowing money to put that in place – what's there? Are they at prime plus 2? Are they a double-A, a single-A rating? Are we really benefiting the province with the great triple-A rating that we have and the surplus that we have in entering into P3s? It's just, I guess, a question that many people have asked me. You know, if we have the money, why would we be going to second or third sources if in fact we can pay it and we're not having to pay any interest? It does cost them more. They're borrowing. They don't have the good rating. It's another area where curiosity definitely intrigues me.

9:00

I want to turn now to page 44, on the revenue again. One of the specific questions that I have is – we've had a tremendous sale on lands and, you know, a \$3.4 billion forecast for this year on land leases and those areas, and then our income goes down significantly, almost to a third in three years. I guess that I was wondering on those leases: how long term are those? Are we looking at a five-year lease? How do you estimate that and realize that it's dropping that much? Is there the potential like the crude oil and everything else that it's going to stay the same and that income could continue if the market stays where it is? Or are we definitely in a thing where this was the year where we put up a huge amount of our leases, and they were bid, and now we're not going to have any income for five years? If you could tell us a little bit on, you know, what percentage. Do we have 10 per cent a year coming up and they just rotate through smoothly? Or is this cyclical and coming and going and there is no chance of an increased, I guess, revenue coming in from land sales like we've had this current year?

On page 59 one of the things that caught my eye is the Agriculture Financial Services Act. We're going down from \$35 million to \$30 million. In such a tough time for agriculture it raises my curiosity on why loans would be going down so much, what the forecast is. The loan guarantees are being reduced there. I'm just kind of wondering if you could explain that bit of phenomena for us.

I guess just a few things that I'd like to ask and repeat once again. What are the plans for reducing corporate income tax? Are you planning on fulfilling the promise of reducing it to 8 per cent? What is the schedule? It just seems that in such a time we really need to look at and address legislation on what to do with the surplus.

It just seems wrong. When we have such a tremendous amount of money coming in – and both you and the Premier have mentioned that it's much harder to govern with so much money than it was without money – perhaps the best way to reduce that money and to not look like we're so flush with it is to have legislation rather than policy on what we're going to do with that surplus. Currently it just

seems like there's a policy, and policy is very easy to change; whereas, we grabbed the bull by the horns, we passed legislation, and we said that all surplus was going to go to pay off the debt, and it served us very well to do that. It just seems like the right thing to do to pass legislation now on what we're going to do with that surplus.

We can have good budgets. We can look at, you know, infrastructure, health, education, all of those things, and put in a good budget. Let's stick to that budget, and then when we do have a surplus – and I do once again want to thank the government for always being conservative. I see nothing wrong with pitching it in low and coming out smiling, especially if we have the discipline on what we're going to do with that surplus. To me that's very much up for debate. But it just seems like we should be putting 50 per cent of this surplus into savings and perhaps 50 per cent going back to the taxpayers. You know, like I say, I'm open for the debate wherever you want to go on that, but if, in fact, that was the law, then we wouldn't have all of this tussling over who's going to get it. We've got this extra money, and it just seems like it causes us a lot of grief, as it does with most families when all of a sudden they have a windfall. Everybody all of a sudden is your best friend, and everybody has these special needs, and we've got to have it. So I think legislation would be in the interest of Albertans.

The things that I want to point out and one that I brought up the other day: the propane tax of \$5 million that you referred to earlier tonight. Propane is one of the green powers. It's clean. Why don't we reduce that? We produce 10 billion litres of propane in the province, and we only use 2 billion, 20 per cent of our production. It just seems like that's an area where we could put the incentive in and remove that tax off propane, which I believe used to be back in the '80s or '70s. If we could utilize that, what it would do to benefit Alberta and the pollution that we have. So I would encourage the minister to look into propane and see if there's a way that we could increase the incentives.

Once again, the number one concern is to eliminate health care premiums. That would be a great benefit. You've taken a step. Everyone appreciates reductions, but we could reduce government size. You'd have full-time employees that you could utilize elsewhere by eliminating that whole area. We continue to encourage you to do that. Yes, we have the highest basic tax exemption, but we could continue to raise that and benefit those people, perhaps, to the low-income cutoff level of \$20,000. I'm not sure how much. If you could tell us what percentage of that \$5.8 billion we'd lose by raising it another \$5,000, I'd appreciate that.

To look at when we have the surplus to actually refund – you've mentioned that Canada Revenue did a great job of distributing that, but do we not have our Alberta tax? We're being charged at 10 per cent. It just seems like the logical thing: when there's a surplus, that means that we've overtaxed. We've got a windfall. To me it seems like the first place it should be going back is to those people who have paid tax if we're not going to put it into savings. We could do that on a refund on the personal tax. We collected \$5.8 billion. You have the numbers. You could've given \$1.4 billion back, you know, 25 per cent refund back on our personal tax or, on the same point, on our property tax.

Every town, municipal government is definitely struggling. We see the inflation there more than anywhere, trying to keep up with infrastructure, the roads in those areas. I'd encourage the government to look at refunding property taxes. I also would like to encourage the government to look at perhaps increasing the per capita payment to the different municipal governments so that they could look after more things on their own. These surplus revenues: if there was to be a per capita dividend of, for example, the \$400 that

was given out this last year, if that went to municipal governments. There are many of those that still have debts that they're having to address. It just would be great if, in fact, they could receive that money and that they could be out of debt and not have to look at increased property taxes.

To close, there's no question, I guess, that we've started many funds. I've forgotten what page those are on now, but we've got the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Act, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering, Farm Credit Stability Act, scholarship act, and the Financial Administration Act. We've got many of those that have been created and the one that has been mentioned twice here already, but we still have that liability for the teachers' pension fund plus two others. I've got my notes all messed up here now so I can't remember which other pension funds they were but, basically, amounting to \$4.8 billion, if my memory serves me right. Why do we not start a fund and at least put this surplus in there? If it takes us four years, one year, or 10 years to deal with the teachers, let's put it in there now and have a trust fund.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, again, another great series of questions, Mr. Chairman. In the interests of making sure that other members can get in and make their comments, I'm going to try and rattle off a few of them pretty quickly. On the whole issue of education property tax – I'm sure that's what you're talking about – I'm sure that the Minister of Municipal Affairs would want to speak to this, but I will just quickly remind you that there is an exercise occurring. The minister is leading with the AUMA, AAMD and C to establish roles, responsibilities, and relationships. Once that exercise is done, I think we'll all clearly understand whose role it is, whose responsibility it is to pay, and maybe the more important discussions around there are the building of relationships because it is the same taxpayer.

9:10

We did reduce our mill rate by 7 per cent. As you've read in the papers recently, this was much appreciated by cities, I'm sure by all municipalities. Some of them will use that room; some of them will allow savings to taxpayers.

On the Alberta tax, a 10 per cent flat rate, you have choices when you make tax changes. Raising the personal exemption is one way to do it. It's a way that we can do it that we can assure the sustainability of it. Remember that we index that, and remember that in Alberta it is double what it is for any province in Canada, including the federal government.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

So you have a personal tax advantage there. I'll be honest. I favour increasing that exemption. I think you're absolutely right: if we don't need the tax dollars, we shouldn't collect them. They should stay with people. But the one thing I want to make sure of is that when we make a tax reduction, it isn't at the expense of funding important programs like health, education, support to seniors and those who are vulnerable. We depend on those revenues on a sustainability basis.

While we're enjoying high revenues now, I have been here when those revenues weren't there, and I had to be a part of making some very painful decisions on reductions. It was not easy. Our entire civil service, our entire medical, teaching, universities: all of those people took rollbacks, which were not something that we would

want. In fact, the people in this House did too at that time. Better that you ensure that you could fund these things on a sustainable basis out into the future so that you do not have to face that.

So we're careful when we make our tax reductions, but you will not have to convince me to continue to do that as long as we can sustain it. It's proven that if you leave more money in people's pockets, Albertans will generate the economic growth here. That is well demonstrated.

Should we legislate surplus? Perhaps at some point that would be a good thing to do, but I would suggest that at this point, when we have just come off of debt elimination, it was important in this past year that we invest in infrastructure. So to tie your hands with those infrastructure pressures there might not be the wisest thing; however, as it turns out, when you look at saving, giving back, and investment in capital, we almost came to that point in the end of how much we saved through endowments, the heritage fund and how much we put into capital and then how much we gave back. It's not that off. So maybe there is a point we could do that.

Propane tax. Certainly, I'll look at that. As part of the tax review I know that my staff have done that. You make a good point on it being a green fuel.

Health care and the rising dollar. Most people know that in my other life I'm a farm person, and we happen to buy equipment that is manufactured in the U.S., and most of the parts that we buy are manufactured there. We can never understand how long it takes for that change in the dollar to show an advantage in the lowering of the cost of machinery and parts. I expect it's the same in medical equipment and drugs. It seems to go really fast one way and not quite so fast the other. I would expect that there should be some change there because certainly we're hearing that manufacturing businesses in this country are feeling it, so we would hope there would be some balancing. But we'll do some investigation on that.

P3s. We really have one P3, and it's a darn good deal. If you could enter into another one of a similar nature, I would expect that most people would recommend it. While it may seem that it costs you a little bit more at the outset, the fact that you can have a warranty and maintenance on a road for 30 years and get it in under the time frame, which is incredibly important in this city, where we're seeing such, such growth, and have those access and ring roads is important and the same with Calgary.

But remember that all of those are examined. There are no automatics there. We have an external committee that gives us advice on those, gives advice to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation as well as Treasury Board, and that is a method of alternative financing that we will continue to look at as an option but only if there's an advantage to us to do it. Although we have a triple-A credit rating – and, yes, if we were borrowing, which we're not in a position of needing, we would borrow at a favourable rate – it may make the better sense in the long run to do a P3 if you're getting things like maintenance, warranty, and coming in a year or two earlier certainly doesn't hurt.

The provincial tax rate. You asked about the corporate tax rate on page 65. Remember that we started at 15.5 and we're down to 10 per cent. Yes, we are going to 8 per cent, but that's not what those figures show. It's not an automatic. When you reduce the rate, you would expect that it would take two to three years for the economic advantage to start to show the benefit back. It may be sooner in this economy, but as always we're prudent and conservative in our estimates.

The premiums, licences, and fees going up. That's a difficult one in some ways, but we really consider that that is a cost of doing business. That's really what it's to cover. We've heard a lot about our campgrounds needing refurbishing, upgrading. Our campground

rates are pretty reasonable. In fact, for persons who don't have a lot of disposable income, there are a great number of absolutely free camping facilities in this province. So it's a balance. They need it to keep those campgrounds in good shape, to make sure that they're good places for people to visit. But our rule here is that your premiums, your licences, and your fees cover the cost of doing business.

FTEs. I spoke to hours. I'll check on what you asked on the numbers that are quoted to make sure that we're quoting from the same thing. I will give you that information at another point.

Horse racing. It's not going to help to explain this because this isn't a rational discussion. The rational discussion is simply this. The Minister of Gaming got up in this House one day and answered this question as best as I've ever heard anyone do it. If you don't put a quarter in a slot machine, if you don't lay one wager at a racetrack, they will generate nothing. So what Horse Racing Alberta gets is what they earn. I think you understand that.

However, you did ask a question on how much of that goes to the fund. I checked the figures with the good minister rather than having him get up and do it. He said I could, so we'll see how I do. Fifty-one per cent goes to Horse Racing Alberta, 15 per cent to the operator, and the balance to the lottery fund. So you can just do the math. You asked what the total was. I didn't have time to do it. I will after I sit down. But that is it.

I do want to mind everyone that 8,000 people are employed in that industry. I invite people to go over there, which isn't very far, to Northlands Park, and go to the backstretch. I especially invite the member who has this in his constituency. I do. I'd be honoured to go with you. I think that if you had the opportunity to go to that backstretch to talk to some of the people there who have gainful employment, who are so proud of the jobs that they have there – and these are people that wouldn't necessarily have a job anywhere else. The self-esteem, the pride, and the joy that these people have in working with a beautiful animal like a horse to me is worth it right there.

9:20

But beyond that, the financial contribution to this province is significant. It's a part of the proud history of this province. Alberta has the most horses per capita, if you wish, of any province in Canada. The horse industry has been a very proud part of the Alberta history, not just in racing but saddle. You need the complete industry. You really do.

Spruce Meadows. Who can measure the value of Spruce Meadows to Alberta and to Canada? The number one facility, above Aachen now. The number one facility in the world. Attracts people from everywhere who come for the beauty of show jumping and dressage to some point, but the international contacts that are made there and the emphasis on international is incredible.

The pleasure of horses. The stables that are just down the road here give so many people a lot of joy. I used to bring my grandkids to the zoo for a little while. You know, they live on a farm, and they'd come and go ride the horses at Valley Zoo. I said: what's wrong with this?

The horse industry in its entirety is so important to this province, and I think we all had a little thrill when Brother Derek was racing at Santa Anita and won and a little sadness when he raced in the derby last Saturday and came in fourth, but still some pride that an Alberta owner had a horse of that quality.

So if you have time some time, go over, especially on Alberta days, special races that are for Alberta-bred horses only, and just look at what this industry does do for the province. If everything that we were involved in had the type of return this one does, it would be quite great.

Royalty relief in the oil sands. I think the larger part of the return will start to come in in '08 and upward. We'll get that information absolute for you from the Minister of Energy because I'm going off of memory. Uh-oh, I'm getting a letter on the horse, I think. Maybe not. We're starting to get revenue of some significance now, but that, of course, changes when the capital investment is paid. It seems to me that it starts in a more major way in '08, and then maybe '11 is the next larger part when this comes off.

Production restraint land sales. Land sales are a function of the market, and we have a lot of land. We're not selling it all, even though those were very high sales. But I think it's a function of the marketplace today that encouraged people to make those investments. I will ask the Minister of Energy to give you the absolute, but when they buy a lease, they have to develop it in a certain time frame or it reverts. I don't remember exactly whether it's five years or what it is. That's just a little bit outside of my bailiwick.

I know that you had a few other things, but I know that there are others that want to get into the conversation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the minister leaving me some time to get in on this discussion. I'm going to, I think, just want to talk about some broad policy ideas, throw out maybe some of my ideas and ask the minister in sort of a broad sense what her thinking is with respect to some of these ideas.

I'd like to start with the question of the resource revenues that the province receives and the royalty rates that we receive. I'm wondering how the minister sees looking at royalty rates on our oil and gas, which are the declining revenues, on the coal-bed methane, and on the oil sands side. I note that the royalty regime that we've got in place now was done I think when oil was about \$15 a barrel. Is it suitable for today's market? I guess from our perspective royalty rates should return a maximum amount of the value of the resource, which does belong to the people of Alberta, without in any way significantly impacting the exploration and development of the resource. We want to see the resource continue to be developed and exploited for the benefit of the province, so we wouldn't want the royalty rates to really interfere with that, but we wonder if you couldn't sustain, actually, a significant increase in royalty revenue given the world-wide shortage that now exists.

It's apparent, Mr. Chairman, that we're either at or very near the world tipping point in oil, where the supply of oil will no longer be sufficient to meet the demand on a global basis. That's the case that I think most economists believe, that we're going to see sustained, almost permanent, upward pressure on oil prices. I see that the department is estimating in 2006-2007 a price of \$50 a barrel. Well, it was past \$50 a barrel some time ago, and I think most estimates are that it's going to continue to rise. We're at \$70 now, and some people are talking about the days of a hundred dollars a barrel of oil being not too far off.

I see that in the budget the government lists a number of firms that are engaged in forecasting oil and gas prices and so on, and I saw the graph about the high, the medium, the low, and the aggregation, and some of the information is not publicly available because it's proprietary and is purchased by the government on the understanding that they won't release it. I for the life of me can't understand how we're expecting the price of oil next year to be \$50 a barrel. I think being conservative in your estimation is a good thing, believe it or not. You'd rather be a little under than a little over, but you don't want to be way out either way. I think that we have often been way out. Looking back over the last 10 years or so, that's been fairly common.

I want to talk a little bit about tax policy. The government is continuing the policy which was announced by Steve West, when he was the minister, of taking the corporate tax rate from 15 per cent down to 8. I happened to be at the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce luncheon as a newly elected MLA when Dr. West made that proposal. He also talked about a long-term plan for education property taxes, which I want to come back to as well. I guess the question I have for the minister is: what purpose is served by continuing to reduce corporate taxes? What is the policy objective? In a hot economy, a very hot economy has the minister received any advice or suggestion that, in fact, cutting corporate taxes at this point may be very inflationary?

We know and I know that not only municipalities in the public sector but small- and medium-sized businesses are very hard-pressed to find labour, and the cost of labour is rising very dramatically. Even McDonald's is advertising for workers and has jumped up its hourly wage by at least a couple of dollars, as far as I understand. I've talked to several mayors in the province whose engineers are being enticed away with very, very lucrative offers and contracts. So they're losing their qualified people. I guess this is just my take on it, but if you cut the taxes of the biggest corporations in the province, then how does small business and how does the public sector compete with them in attracting the necessary labour and as well the materials and supplies that they need?

9:30

I'm very, very concerned that this corporate tax, quite apart from philosophical differences, is not a good economic policy at this particular point in Alberta's economy. I wonder if the minister has looked at that because we do have – and I could read from my notes. We looked up some economists and so on who have said that there's a real concern about the impact of this particular tax cut on the economic balance. It has the potential to create imbalances in the economy, and it could in fact wind up hurting small- and medium-sized businesses who can't compete.

The other thing that Dr. West talked about that time was a long-term plan for education property taxes. I know that the government has not followed through on that commitment. They're moving sort of in the direction. In other words, they're reducing the amount that they take in the mill rate, but because of growth and so on, they're actually taking more from the property taxes. I'm wondering if we're ever going to get to the position where the province returns to a policy of gradually getting out of collecting property taxes altogether.

I know that the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, when I met with their executive a few weeks ago, indicated to me that one of the things that they're continuing to be hopeful for is that the province will eventually vacate the property tax and give them the room that they need. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, although he didn't promise that it would happen at the last convention of the AUMA, did promise to work at it. So I am particularly interested in hearing about that and where we're going.

There was an increase in the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be spent on program spending to \$5.3 billion in this budget. I wonder if the minister is concerned that we are becoming too dependent for our ongoing program spending on nonrenewable resources. From our perspective, we believe that the nonrenewable resources of the province and the revenues that flow from them really don't just belong to us or our generation to be spent on the things that we want right now. These resources have to be seen as the property of all generations, including generations to come.

There are a couple of things. There's a philosophical point about

how much you are prepared to expend from your nonrenewable resource revenues to sustain programs today. The other question, of course, comes about from the narrowing of the tax base, and it ties in with the government's approach of cutting taxes generally and specifically cutting corporations' taxes. Has the minister looked or has she received reports from her staff saying that we're becoming too dependent on this and that when these resource revenues are no longer available, we might once again have to make some very, very tough decisions in this province? You know, that's certainly one of my big concerns.

There are some things in one of the government's documents. Here it is, Alberta's tax advantage, on page 134. It says that with no general sales tax, payroll taxes or capital taxes, Alberta's tax base is relatively narrow compared to other jurisdictions. While this is [beneficial] to Albertans, it also comes with some risks. A broader range of taxes means more stable revenues. With relatively fewer revenue sources, predictable funding for key public services is at more risk in the event of an economic slow-down. Consequently, it is inadvisable to eliminate or dedicate more taxes.

In fact, we are continuing with this reduction, and I'm really concerned about the twin problem of overusing our one-time resource revenues and narrowing our tax base from more stable and ongoing sources.

I'd like to ask the minister if she could just elaborate a bit on what the government's savings policy is with respect to revenues that have been received from nonrenewable sources and how she sees that playing out in the future, the role of the heritage savings trust fund and so on.

Another concern – and it has come up a number of times in the House – is the whole idea of off-budget spending, which has been growing and growing. I think we heard the Minister of Education talk about dealing with the problems with school renovations and new school construction in terms of coming from the unallocated surplus. That was within a few days, really, of the budget being brought forward.

Is there a policy to avoid doing that? If there isn't, what is the policy? What does the minister think it should be? Can we get to the point eventually where we are actually trying to accurately predict our resource revenues, budget them not for spending necessarily but budget them and try to budget as accurately as possible for the full coming year, so rather than constantly being surprised by these massive surpluses, actually budgeting for the surpluses and identifying needs ahead of time? So that's a concern.

I had an idea that I wanted to suggest to the minister, and that was based on something that happened a couple of years ago at the Alberta Urban Municipalities. There was a large surplus from the Municipal Financing Corporation. I'm not sure what its name is now. I know that it's been changed. There's a new name. It was appropriated by the Provincial Treasurer to be spent in terms of debt reduction, but the municipalities sort of rallied around it and got an agreement from the then Municipal Affairs minister, who is now the Minister of Environment. I was there, and I heard his speech, in which he said that this would be made available for municipalities to invest in energy reduction programs. It was called the ME First program.

I thought it was a good initiative. It represented a partial victory for the municipalities, but the problem with it was that it was sort of an incomplete plan because as they paid off their loans – they could borrow from the fund, invest in energy reduction programs, and then earn savings. They would earn savings, and they would repay the fund, but the money went back into general revenues rather than back into the fund. So it would've been preferable if the money was

repaid directly to the fund because then the fund would become permanent.

This is sort of our extrapolation of the ideas. We could take a billion dollars from the unallocated surplus and create a permanent green fund for municipalities and potentially also for universities and colleges and schools and hospitals, for the medical system, allowing those institutions to borrow money to invest in energy reduction, and then they take the savings from that and they repay the fund. When they've repaid their loan to the fund, then they continue to benefit from the reductions in their operating costs, but the fund is intact and is available for further investment for the whole public sector. This idea, Mr. Chairman, could also be extended sometime in the future and be made available to farms, to small businesses, and to individual homeowners. It's something that we've been proposing, and we think that it's something that has a great deal of merit.

When I was on Edmonton city council, the administration came forward with a proposal for about a \$350 million expansion of the E.L. Smith water treatment plant. Instead, we established a water conservation strategy for the city, and we were able to defer that expenditure for 10 years and save people a lot of money on their water bills because the capital cost would've been added, of course, to their water bills.

So it's just an example of the value of actually investing in these kinds of conservation programs. There's big money over time that can be saved.

9:40

I'd like to ask the minister about the Alberta Securities Commission, not about scandals or anything but really about whether or not she thinks that it's advisable that every province has its own securities commission and whether or not it might make more sense – and she's probably had some involvement with this – to negotiate with the other provinces. I'm not saying with the federal government when I say national. Rather than federal, have a national regulator. We think that it might be a good idea rather than having a patchwork of regulation across the country. It really makes more sense in today's financial world to have a single national regulator. We think it should be based in Calgary. We think that that would make a lot of sense. Calgary is a very important financial centre in this country, and I think it would make a lot of sense. So I wonder if the minister is pursuing that, what she thinks of it, what the progress might be.

I'd like to ask the minister also – and she doesn't have to respond to this tonight necessarily – just what the state of the regulation of the auto insurance industry is and whether or not the program there has met the objectives of the government and what the upcoming review is going to entail and what her objectives are in pursuing that.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask a little bit about the Alberta Treasury Branches and what the government's plan is for the long run in that. I know that it's not exactly the most small "c" conservative thing for the government to do, to have its own bank, but I advise them not to be embarrassed about it because we think it's a good thing. One of the things I know in my area is that the banks have abandoned some of the lower income communities, and the only financial institution that's available to many people is Alberta Treasury Branches, and it's a valuable contribution.

I think the same thing happens in many small towns and rural areas of this province. That's a really good objective from our point of view, the government continuing to own the Treasury Branches, because surely if they privatized it, then the shareholders would demand that the Treasury Branches do exactly what the banks have done, which is to leave the low-profit or negative – I don't know – areas without financial services. I'm assuming that that's why the

government has resisted what would seem to be its natural ideological bent on that. I just want to know from the minister if the government is going to continue to ensure that low-income areas in cities and rural areas and small towns continue to have financial services by maintaining the ownership of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my list of questions and comments, and I look forward to the minister's response. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you very much. Very good comments. Alberta Treasury Branches is business as usual. They do provide a valuable service. As long as they provide a valuable service and they're still needed, I and this caucus will certainly support maintaining them. You're absolutely right; they provide a valuable service in our rural communities but also in our urban communities.

There's one other that I just have to mention – I know you would agree – which is that credit unions have filled a very important role in many of our communities, urban and rural, and are an important part of the financial mix that's available to people in this province. I was asked by my boss one time about Ag Financial Services, ATB, credit unions. Credit unions, of course, are a little bit different. We don't own those, but we do regulate them. The other two, we have a stronger, maybe, role in. My response was that the need is still there. They still serve a very valuable purpose and still have a mandate in this province.

Auto insurance. There will be a review again this year. They'll be looking at rates, of course. They will be looking at about a year's experience under the new system, a little over a year actually, and looking at it and making sure that if there are any adjustments, they'll recommend them but make sure that it is meeting what we intended. I can tell you that the overall, general answer is yes. We see far fewer people driving uninsured, and that was a great concern to us. Very few people now are being picked up with no insurance, so that tells us that it is affordable for people to have insurance. Who wouldn't carry insurance voluntarily if they could afford it? So it has worked on that side. The rates are coming down. I won't know for some time whether they recommend another rate reduction, but that'll be coming in the next weeks, I guess. So far so good. I think it is meeting its mandate, but we'll have a better idea.

On the Alberta Securities Commission. I know that you don't want to talk about scandals. Neither do I, but I do want to put it on record that there have been three thorough investigations of the Alberta Securities Commission prompted by some different sources. In all cases the Alberta Securities Commission: there was no fault found. I said consistently from the beginning that I was confident on the enforcement side that there was not an issue. That has been proven by an RCMP investigation, by an Auditor General investigation, and by an internal investigation. I'm pleased to say that the human resource issues that did exist there are being dealt with and that the Securities Commission is implementing all of the Auditor General's report, as I understand it, meeting with the Auditor General on a regular basis to make sure that the implementation of those recommendations is proceeding properly.

You asked about the national regulator. I'm not hung up entirely on this, but I do believe that going with the passport system, where all provinces with the exception of Ontario have signed on to it, has been a great exercise. In September of last year we implemented the first stage, filing a prospectus, and I was quite amazed at our securities ministers' meeting to find the number of companies that were taking advantage of that. Whether or not it is deemed right in the end to go to a national regulator, I can assure you that all of the

work that we've done on pursuing harmonization will be beneficial to that exercise.

We had the opportunity to meet with Purdy Crawford, who did the report for the Ontario minister, Minister Phillips. All of the provinces had a chance to dialog with him, and I think, in fact, that he and a member of that panel as well – there were two there; one from eastern Canada and one from Ontario – were surprised at some of the questions and concerns that some of the provinces had and realized that especially for our juniors, small companies, of which we have a lot and many other provinces do, there are some issues that they have to look at when they talk about a national regulator. Ontario, although they aren't a signatory, have been at the table with us working on this. Some of the amendments that we were putting through this House last night on securities Ontario was doing at the same time. It's an exercise that's great.

I would agree with you entirely that if there was to be a head place, it should be in the most dynamic financial markets in Canada, which would be here. It would seem to me that what they are talking about in the Crawford report is a national regulator, not a federal regulator – nobody agrees with that – and looking at it regionally as well, how you'd function understanding the difference in markets in this country, understanding the diversity of that, and some of the issues that some of the smaller provinces in particular have with this issue. So a good exercise.

We're meeting again in June, actually, in Ontario, the home of the one that isn't a part of it, which I think speaks to how much cooperation there is among the provinces to see this done. That's a little update there, and we'll have more of an update after that meeting.

On savings and the heritage fund I don't think we have any arguments there at all. I agree that we need to save where we can, but we want to make sure that we're providing the right amount to our other programs as we do it. I want to see more savings and something that has a revenue stream for us down the road.

9:50

The one thing I can tell you about forecasting energy that I've learned over 19 years is that you will almost always be wrong, and I'm always hoping that it's on the right side of wrong, that we're under in our estimate, not over. I think that I'll add you to the list of eight that we have here and see where you fit.

Mr. Mason: We've got a better track record.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, we all have in hindsight. I have a better one, too, in some things.

It's hard to get energy analysts. I mean, we're having some saying, you know, that \$50 is the right place. Well, that is the middle of what the analysts said. Some are saying as much as \$120, and some are saying: no, we think it will settle at \$50. Some are saying: maybe \$45.

I think what we have to remember is that one of the reasons that Alberta has been so strong on not wanting revenue from resources in the equalization formula is how volatile it is. There is probably about a \$5 billion risk factor in there now. That's a lot higher than it was five years ago. We saw oil drop back to under \$60 not very many days ago, it seems. It's been above \$70, and it's been below \$70. You can have something happen in South America. You can have something happen in OPEC nations. You can have a Katrina. The only sort of stable way you have is on production and refining. Then we find that the refinery capacity has been estimated incorrectly in some of our bigger using nations as well. One month we hear that they have more than enough supply, and then all of a

sudden: oops, we're short. So it's a mug's game, I think, but we're going to do our best, and we're going to be on the conservative side of it.

A narrowing tax base: I couldn't agree more. I've said it publicly. One thing that came home to me in our tax review is that we have a very narrow tax base. We have to be extremely careful in making decisions as to reduction in taxes to ensure that we can sustain those reductions and still provide the dollars that are needed for our programs.

There's a section in here that I think is a very telling one. It was referred to earlier. It's page 65, and it gives you your income sort of blobbed together, your revenue and your expense for the departments. If you just look at that, it's a pretty interesting story. It speaks to the volatility of some of our revenue streams. Taxwise, pretty steady. We have growth, more people, more jobs, better jobs, higher taxes coming in. We're able to lower them, but we do have to be careful on that.

I don't use the words "nonrenewable resource" very much anymore if I can remember not to, because I'm more convinced than ever that this resource is going to be around for a long time. We know that we have at least a century in the oil sands, and we know that almost every year there's a new technology, a new methodology of recovering that that is more environmentally friendly, that is more economical. I don't think anyone would have predicted the change of technology that has transpired in that area. Of course, higher prices will dictate more aggression in getting better technology. Something that I think we can contribute to Kyoto is sharing some of this technology that we are implementing here that is more environmentally friendly, and I'm talking about using CO₂ and other methods for recovery.

Coal: a tremendous amount of coal, the lowest sulphur burning coal probably in the world. I believe that our efforts in clean-coal technology with our partners will bear some fruit that will be beneficial to us.

Coal-bed methane: a lot of deposits there, and again the technology is improving, and we see improvements in recovery there.

Should the royalty structure be reviewed? I think that the minister has already spoken to that and talked about looking at that. While we show some declining revenues, I think that we're going to have an income from that long into the future. While we should be conservative and recognize that we do have a lower revenue on bitumen and some of those other heavy oils, it's still an important resource that will be here. I believe that we need to value add more here and improve the technology for doing that and then sell that to the rest of the world, which is a good thing.

On the reduction of corporate tax in the hot economy, the real reason for reducing the corporate tax is to make our businesses more competitive in the global marketplace. Right around the city of Edmonton there are about 160 companies – small businesses, granted – that manufacture food and beverage, so agricultural products. That has grown from about 110 companies. Probably there are more than 160. The minister of agriculture might leap up and say: boy, are you behind. They ship to over 100 countries in the world, and they have to be competitive on that basis. So it's really more of a global issue.

One of the things that we learned when we did our tax review, the first thing that hit me, was how narrow our tax base was; secondly, how competitive we are in Alberta within Canada but how uncompetitive Canada is with the world. We have to look at that, remember that we compete in a global economy. We want to make sure that these small companies that are all around our city here – I've visited some of them. They're wonderful stories, whether it's the beautiful little cakes that are being shipped all over from here. A

young man who was a chef in British Columbia saw a wonderful opportunity, built a business, and ships these cheesecakes not only in Canada but to the U.S., expanding all of those markets, and had to do a huge expansion on his plant recently.

Mr. Mason: Does he qualify for the corporate tax rate, though?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, yes, he probably is above the small business now. He probably started in one range and went to the other. That's one of the reasons we did small business first, raised our threshold to \$400,000. I think there's some real merit in looking at either raising that threshold or reducing that rate again to make sure that they're competitive.

I have something I'd like to share. The Canadian Bankers Association – love or hate bankers, they are the financiers in this country. I have a letter from them – it's written to me – about our budget. I think it's important that we share it, and I'll just read a part of it. It says:

On behalf of the members of the Canadian Bankers Association (CBA), I am writing to congratulate you on Alberta's budget for 2006-07. Largely due to your government's sound fiscal policies, Alberta has one of the most robust economies in the country, no debt and is in the enviable position of having the fiscal flexibility to further strengthen "Alberta's tax advantage."

You can read it for yourself, but it does talk in that as well about the important priorities of health, education, and infrastructure, and it talks about it in relation to the importance of a competitive personal and corporate and business tax regime. They did encourage us to work towards our anticipated rate of 8 per cent. They say:

We believe that the current and anticipated reductions to the CIT rate will make the province's business tax advantage very compelling and set the foundation for future economic growth in the province.

That's the point I want to make.

10:00

The corporate tax reduction is not all about today. It is about the future and down the road encouraging people to invest here, to bring your investment to Alberta: a good stable tax regime, a good quality of life, wonderful opportunities for your families. I'll tell you, when people look at coming to Alberta to invest, they don't just look at taxes. They don't just look at good government. We'd like to think that. They look at quality of life issues too. They want to know if there are good recreational facilities for their families, good educational facilities certainly first of all, good cultural activities. They want the whole enchilada, if you wish, and we're proud to say that many companies large and small are saying: yes, this is the place to do business; yes, this is here for our family.

Thank you.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Finance, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(4), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration for a department's proposed estimates, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Finance for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,129,463,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$65,793,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee now rise and report the estimates of the Department of Finance.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,129,463,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$65,793,000.

I would like to table the document for the official record of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 40
Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must say that I'm very pleased to rise and move the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, for second reading.

In relation to this amendment I would like to highlight that our review of the advanced learning system has been completed, and the steering committee's report has now been finalized and is under consideration. One of the outcomes of the review will be an affordability framework, and this framework will identify a broad sweep of initiatives to improve the affordability of Alberta's advanced education system. A revised tuition fee policy is one of the initiatives within the framework.

This amendment to the Post-secondary Learning Act is necessary to prepare for the introduction of a new tuition fee policy. The amendment is proposing to repeal clauses in the Post-secondary Learning Act that set out the principles that guide tuition increases by public postsecondary institutions as reflected by the current tuition fee policy. Mr. Speaker, the repeal of these clauses will remove any legislative barrier to implementing the new policy by allowing the establishment of tuition fees in accordance with the regulation.

We need to make these amendments immediately so that government can make true on its promise of a new tuition fee policy in place and working for students by the fall of 2007. Failing to repeal and amend these sections would likely delay the implementation of a new tuition fee policy until September 2008 as public postsecondary institutions will have to follow existing sections when setting tuition fees. If we were to allow that to happen, under the current legislation average tuition in 2007-08 would increase 6.5 per cent at universities and 9.8 per cent at colleges. My commitment as

Minister of Advanced Education is to introduce a new tuition fee policy this fall so that we don't have to see increases of this magnitude ever again. A new tuition policy for implementation in the fall is strongly anticipated by key stakeholders. They expect to see it this year. This amendment is about being responsive to stakeholder concerns and, in particular, those raised by students around the existing tuition fee policy.

The new policy will be developed through further discussion and dialogue with stakeholders as we realign the existing regulation to support the new tuition fee policy. That's where I think most people who haven't been there and done that would not understand that making changes to regulations is an onerous number of steps. You have to be able to demonstrate that you've had consultation with stakeholders. It's not just a matter of preparing an OC for cabinet and, like magic, things change. You have to consult, and you have to prove that you've consulted with stakeholders. So I think that that's what maybe a lot of people don't understand because they've not been there and done that.

I strongly urge the Assembly to support this legislation as it paves the way for a new tuition fee policy for students, something which should not be delayed. With that, Mr. Speaker, knowing that we will be addressing Bill 40 in second reading on Monday, it's my pleasure to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 41

Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today and move second reading of Bill 41 on behalf of the Minister of Finance. Bill 41 is the Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act.

The first goal I'd like to accomplish with this legislation is to establish a primary repository and claim system for the unclaimed or abandoned property of Albertans. To accomplish this, Bill 41 would require all holders to pay or deliver assets that remain unclaimed after the end of a specified holding period together with all information on the apparent owners to a central repository. Owners will be able to research a single registry to determine if the administrator holds assets that belong to them or that they are entitled to. A single-stop repository makes the process of locating unclaimed assets easier for all owners.

To accomplish the second goal of establishing a clear process to manage and resolve issues relating to property that vests in the Crown after a corporation is dissolved, Bill 41 proposes several measures. First, Bill 41 proposes a five-year limitation period during which a corporation can be revived. Experience has shown that very few corporations are revived after five years. Once the deadline has passed, the corporation cannot be revived, and any remaining property vests permanently in the Alberta Crown.

10:10

It is anticipated that property that vests in the Crown would include land. The legislation proposes a process that will enable the Crown to take title to the land and remove existing encumbrances with sufficient warning. At the same time, creditors would retain the right to enforce any security interest they might have on the property. In both cases, Mr. Speaker, claims for the return of such property or proceeds will be allowed for 10 years from the date the property is transferred to or becomes vested in the Crown. From an

administrative perspective this legislation will empower the Crown to conduct searches to find vested property, administer and invest property, and minimize legal liability and risk.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, this legislation will establish clear rights, obligations, and procedures for managing vested property. With that, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 41.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 39

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Alberta has recently become an economic force in Canada that is far beyond its size. It is a Canadian leader in almost all economic indicators from growth to employment, from the education of the workforce to productivity, from average family income to standard of living. This is due in large part to the productive energy industry in Alberta. Alberta is increasingly being recognized as a global energy leader. Investors are clamouring to be a part of Alberta's energy future. Activity in Alberta's energy industry has grown to record levels across the province. Exploration, development, production, technological advances, improved environmental technologies, and protection: the list is long.

These amendments will ensure that Albertans' benefits from resources are optimized and enable both industry and government to continue to operate efficiently and effectively. As we are all aware, Alberta's competitive market is stimulating investments and growth in the energy industry. To ensure that the competitive natural gas retail market continues to operate with integrity, amendments need to be made that will enable comprehensive monitoring of the market participant behaviour.

The Gas Utilities Act will be amended in this bill to allow the retail natural gas industry to operate with similar regulations to the competitive electricity market. Amendments to this act include allowing Alberta's Market Surveillance Administrator to oversee the retail natural gas market to ensure fair and efficient competition, aligning regulatory-making powers to reduce the number of regulations in place for both the electricity and natural gas retail markets, putting a mechanism in place to ensure that the MSA is able to recover its costs for monitoring the natural gas market, improving alignment of the retail natural gas market with the retail electricity market to support convergence of the natural gas and electricity retail policy.

The energy industry in Alberta helps to ensure that Albertans enjoy prosperity and an extraordinarily high quality of life. Budget 2006 estimates that nonrenewable resource revenues will be \$11.4 billion for 2006-2007. In addition, the Crown owns 81 per cent of the province's mineral rights. Key amendments to the Mines and Minerals Act will allow the rules regulating taking and managing royalties in kind to be clarified. Although the act currently provides for the Crown to take its royalty in kind, which means that the Crown collects a percentage of the hydrocarbon product that is produced under the current regulations, the Crown only takes royalty in kind for conventional oil. If the Crown decides at some point to take and manage royalties in kind for other minerals, the regulations setting out the rules for doing so will need to be clarified. Before making such a decision and before any changes are made to these regulations, consultations with the industry and further government reviews will take place.

Corresponding amendments are also being made to the Mines and Minerals Act clarifying the technical rules with respect to the business of selling or swapping the products that the Crown receives as royalties in kind. For example, more revenue can sometimes be made from the royalties in kind by swapping one type of oil for another, which may attract a better price. By clarifying the technical rules within the act, the Crown will be able to optimize the value of our resources.

Other amendments to the Mines and Minerals Act will include increasing efficiencies such as allowing electronic transfers to take place and reducing red tape, such as eliminating the need for order in council approval for routine subsurface storage agreements, such as the storage of natural gas or petroleum liquids. It is important to note that in order to undertake the subsurface storage activity, all regulatory approvals and environmental requirements must be met.

There are nine acts that are being amended in this bill, in many cases to ensure that the industry continues to operate efficiently and effectively. Of these nine, there are two that are spent and being repealed, the Natural Gas Price Administration Act and the Natural Gas Pricing Agreement Act. These two acts are no longer relevant as they served to implement Alberta's role during the regulated gas price environment prior to deregulation of the gas pricing in the mid-1980s. It is important that this industry and the acts that guide it continue to evolve to ensure that it operates with the best interests of Albertans. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 39.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 31
Health Information Amendment Act, 2006**

The Chair: We are debating amendment A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm delighted to be able to join the debate on Bill 31, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2006, in Committee of the Whole. Actually, if the chairman doesn't mind, I'd like to make some general comments before I move amendment A1, but you're free to circulate it at this time.

The Chair: It's already been moved, hon. member, on May 3.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, is this the one that's on the floor?

The Chair: This is amendment A1. Adjourned debate on amendment A1.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So this is the one that's removing something. Hang on.

The Chair: The amendment reads as follows. The bill is amended in part A: section 2(b)(ii) is struck out.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you for the clarification.

This is an interesting one. In the health information review

committee that happened in 2004 the whole section around health service provider information and how much of that information was given out was one of the major points of discussion, and in the end the committee asked that a second committee be constituted. That question got passed on to that committee, which has yet to be formed, to deal with because there were some huge issues that we just couldn't deal with in the time that we had. There was somewhat of a guillotine hanging over us as the election was looming in the fall of 2004, and there was urgency felt by the chairperson of the committee to pass certain parts of what we had reviewed in the Health Information Act. Things we couldn't get to appropriately were just passed on to the next committee. As I said, one of the big issues there was around health service provider information, which at this point is very limited as to what information is released.

Now, a number of, in particular, pharmaceutical companies were very interested in getting access to more information about health service providers. Mostly what this is about is getting at prescribing information, so for marketing purposes they could see, you know, what kinds of drugs a doctor was prescribing, allowing them to analyze them and get at them to try and convince them to prescribe their particular version of an antidepressant drug, for example, as compared to the one they were currently using. There was great resistance to adding on any more information than could be allowed under the rules right now.

10:20

So the idea that's in this act of adding in the registration number after the licence number I found was very interesting, and for whatever reason – I don't know why, and I can't remember the member's explanation for this – that has again caused some controversy, it appears, and that has been pulled out. I have no objection to that happening at this time, so I'm satisfied to have the registration number removed and that clause deleted from the amending act, which means it would never go forward into the existing act. I'm sure we'll hear about this again in the future, but at this time I'm fine with it being pulled. I think we have to go back and examine the whole issue of health service provider information, and I don't think it should be done piecemeal, and this is somewhat approaching it from a piecemeal point of view. So removing the addition of the registration number is fine.

Thanks.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. [interjection]

Ms Blakeman: I so enjoy working evenings with the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar because he just gives me so much energy to speak longer and keep going. He's just my own little version of the Energizer Bunny, just gives me lots of grist for the mill. [interjection] Thank you so much. I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my working evenings.

What I would like to do. I have a series of amendments to progress through this evening, Mr. Chairman, but I would like to set the context for them because they are all more or less related to the same originating point.

Now, I had mentioned that I was one of two opposition members that sat over a period of about six months on the health information review committee. One of the issues that came up that I really

objected to is contained in recommendation 31 coming forward from the committee. What I'm seeing in this amending bill is I think what I disagreed with so much in recommendation 31 is getting mixed in with recommendation 32, which was basically about prescription fraud, and recommendation 34, which was about individuals perpetrating fraud in the health service sector. What I'm seeing in addition in Bill 31 is the government sort of anticipating health service provider fraud. So there are two different clauses there: one coming at it from the point of view that an individual is committing fraud, getting health services they shouldn't be getting, and then there's a second section that deals with health service provider fraud, taking advantage of the system. We did not particularly deal with those separately in the committee, but they're appearing separately in the bill.

The concepts that I was disagreeing with so much that are captured in recommendation 31 are sort of sprinkled and mixed in with recommendations 32 and 34. That was the prescription fraud and the individual perpetrating fraud in the health services in obtaining it or dispensing it. I'm just going to go through this for you. Recommendation 31 from the committee read that "the Act should be amended to mandate disclosure, without consent."

Now, let me put this in context for everyone. This is individually identifying health information, so from this information those involved can tell who it was, exactly what happened to them, where they live, all their health information, basically, and the individual is not able to give their consent and in many cases wouldn't even be aware that the information has now been disclosed to somebody else. So those situations need to be very, very carefully laid out.

Essentially, the Health Information Act is an act that sets out all the rules and says that you can't disclose people's personal health information, and then it goes through and says except. So it's exception-based legislation, except in the following circumstances, and they try and keep a really tight hold on that. There are a number of provisions where it talks about, you know, the least amount of information being given out with the highest level of anonymity and a number of other precautions, but that's how this is meant to work.

So let me go back again. Recommendation 31. "The Act should be amended to mandate disclosure," individually identifying health information, "without consent, to police services" of the patient's name, their address – that's their home address – their location in the facility, the date of admission, the name of the physician, the nature of the injury.

The reasons given at the time were "for purposes of obtaining a warrant or subpoena." So the police don't have the information. They're fishing for it. You can't get a warrant unless all the information is filled out. When you go on the Internet now and you try and purchase something or get involved with something, it actually will not process unless you fill in all the blanks. Essentially, that's what happens when you're trying to get a warrant. You have to fill in all the blanks or the police have to present the warrant with all the blanks filled in or they can't get it. If they're missing information, they can't get the warrant. So here they're trying to get the information they want to put in the warrant.

So the committee's recommendation that I was so exorcized about. Getting this information – that was the information – individually identifying, without consent

for purposes of obtaining a warrant or subpoena, and when the police have reasonable grounds to suspect that the person seeking health services has been involved in some form of criminal activity; and makes a request for that information; or (b) a custodian . . .

Now, a custodian is someone involved in the health system that is what we call inside the arena, so they're a custodian of health information.

. . . has reasonable grounds to suspect that the person seeking health services has been involved in some form of criminal activity.

So that was the original recommendation, and the reasoning behind it was fairly extensive.

But let's look at the situation that we have right now. Essentially, the police are able to get this identifying health information without consent if the situation is life threatening, if there is imminent danger, or if it is involving vulnerable people. So mental capacity – and they can do it under the Child Welfare Act, they can do it under the Protection for Persons in Care Act, and they can do it under the Fatality Inquiries Act. So there are already a lot of circumstances all covering urgency and imminent danger under which circumstances the police can receive this information.

So I say: why else do they need it? If they're seeking this information, it's not life threatening, it's not urgent, then it's sort of casual. Well, I've got nothing better to do right now, so I think I'll wander in and bug the nurses to get this information. It's not involving vulnerable people, so we're not in danger of somebody we should be protecting as a society, you know, being imperiled in any way. None of those circumstances apply when we're looking at changing this legislation because we've already covered it in the legislation.

So why are we doing this? Never made sense to me. This was to make it easier for police to get information on people. Well, we've got to be careful when we do that, and I think that in the interim, between when this committee met and now, we start to get a better understanding of why this becomes so important. Information once in a database in this day and age and with the electronic databases doesn't disappear. There's no time bomb that explodes or is programmed into a database that says: five years from now this information will be wiped out because we won't need it anymore. It stays in there forever, and every time somebody calls up that particular individual's information, bingo, it all pops up on the screen, including, my friends, your individually identifying health information that was obtained without your consent. In some cases you won't even know that they have it. Why would we be letting the police fish for that information?

10:30

Something else I want you to think about: is this really how we want our health professionals spending their time? Considering how backed up we are in the hospital system – every day there are questions about overcrowding and difficulty getting people through the system and stressed hospital staff and people working overtime and not enough staff to cover this, and we're now going to pass a law to change an act so that the police can go in, pull a nurse or a doctor or a hospital administrator aside, and: I'm looking for John Doe, and I think he's in this hospital, and I'd like you to give me all of this information on him.

Now, it's not life threatening. Nobody's in imminent danger. We have other ways of accessing this information if it's to protect a child or someone with a mental illness or an elderly person or a person in care. Why would we allow that? It's a shopping trip. Yet that's exactly what is being anticipated here.

Let's be clear. This is a recommendation the committee passed, and I was on that committee. I voted against it, but the committee overall voted for it. Now, it's not hard when in this configuration you always have an overwhelming number of government members on any of these committees, and they just vote it through. That's exactly what happened here, but I still disagree with it.

Okay. So let's look at some of the other reasonings about why this isn't a good idea. What you're trying to do is find the appropriate balance between privacy rights of an individual who is seeking

care and treatment and, basically, police requirements for personal information. I've already argued about why the police shouldn't be needing to get this personal information, because it's a fishing trip and they should find that information through the other sources and other processes that are available to them.

We had a number of people present to us, and each one of them was asked to sort of go through a survey of the issues that we had before us. A little less than half the people recommended no change in the existing law, but some, and in particular the police, wanted more discretionary authority, which covered any circumstance, to be able to draw this information out, and that's the situation that we're anticipating with the changes in Bill 31.

Now, one of the things we need to be careful about here is the co-operation of everyone in providing health information into the system. As people become more and more aware that their information is going to go into an electronic database that will be kept and shared, we all understand that that's probably a good thing. We want to know that if we're unconscious or arrive in an ambulance, the other treatments we've had and the fact that we've got allergies to things and that we've had various tests, all of that information is available to the health professionals that are going to treat us. But we have to trust that that information is only going to be used for the purpose of treating us for whatever ailment we might be arriving at the hospital with.

People get very reluctant to start giving additional information if they think that that information is going to be used for some other reason, which is why we have to be so cautious with health information. People start withholding information and only give a partial picture, which really makes our whole idea of electronic health records very difficult to manage if we believe now that we've only got partial information and partially correct information.

Now, I want to go back over the kind of information that would be requested and why that's important. Part of what we were looking at here is what's called registration information. That has a particular definition here. Under the act registration information includes elements such as name, their personal health number – now, what does that tell you? Well, the personal health number is going to give you some indication of whether they qualify for health services in this country. It's going to tell you, for example, what their immigration status is.

So you get additional information by getting some of these basic information categories. You get bonuses, in other words. The health number gives you the bonus of often finding out whether there are dependants that are listed under the same number, what their immigration status would be in Canada, and some other information. You get the gender. You get the date of their birth. You get their home address. Now, wouldn't that be handy if you were trying to get information for a warrant? You go in, you say, "I'm looking for John Doe, and I want this information on him," and gosh, you get his home address out of it. Well, that's the information you were looking at for your warrant. Bob's your uncle. Off you go. You got what you needed. Our health professionals had to spend time digging that out of the files to give it to the police officer.

This is not to say that police officers don't have other ways of getting this information. That's their job. They have all kinds of processes to draw upon to get this kind of information. There are certain tests there that the police need to meet in order to get that information. Protecting the public's privacy and making sure that our processes of law enforcement are being abided by is exactly why those tests are in place. So I see this as an end run around some of those tests.

Continuing on: health service eligibility information. Again, you pick up some of the things I was talking about with the personal

health number. Location information in the hospital: well, that gives you some bonus information too. Are they in the maternity ward, or are they in the orthopaedic ward, or are they in surgery? That would tell you a lot about why they were in the hospital.

Billing information. Well, you can get scads of information from billing information. You get some idea of their financial status. You may be able to pick up credit card information. That's likely to give you an itemization of what procedures or tests they've had so far. Remember, this is all going to end up in a database somewhere in the bowels of the police service, and every time – five years, 10 years, 25 years from now – they call up your name on that computer, bingo: up it all comes for anybody to read out.

Now, just think back to what happened around the Overtime affair. They were accessing that information for no reason that was justifiable under the circumstances. That could happen to any one of us in here. It goes on forever. That information is never deleted off that file.

Now, I think the other thing we need to keep in mind here is the Charter and whether what we're contemplating passing in Bill 31 is Charter proof. This government doesn't seem to care much if stuff is Charter proof. I've stood here many nights and talked about the fact that something they were about to do was not going to be Charter proof, and I've been proven right way more times than I ever wanted to be, Mr. Chairman. I have some sympathy for the Greek character of Cassandra, who kept making predictions that were absolutely true and everybody hated her for it. Well, I know how that feels.

I believe that this will not be Charter proof. When we look at what the Charter is about, what we want to be sure of – even though you may have legislation that limits a guaranteed right, it can sometimes be saved under section 1 of the Charter, which is saying that all rights are subject "to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." So is what we're doing in legislation justifiable in a free and democratic society? I would argue no because we just are not sure enough about enough things that we are contemplating here.

In order to survive a section 1 test, there's the two-part Oakes test. The first part is that the objective of the law must be of sufficient importance to justify limiting a Charter right. Second, the means chosen must be reasonable and demonstrably justified by showing that the law (a) is rationally connected to the objective and (b) uses the least drastic means to accomplish the objective – in other words, that if it impairs the right, no more than necessary to accomplish the objective – and (c) it's proportionate. It must not have a disproportionately severe effect upon the person to whom it applies.

10:40

I would argue that releasing individually identifiable health information without the individual's consent in circumstances that are not urgent – they are not life-threatening; there is no imminent danger; it does not affect vulnerable people, those with a limited mental capacity, children, elderly, or other vulnerable people – is not reasonable.

So I have a series of five amendments that are flowing from the argument that I've just laid out for you. The first amendment I would like to move at this time, and that is amendment A2.

If it's all right, I'll just keep talking about it while it's being distributed.

The Chair: We should distribute them so that the members can see what the amendment is. Then you can proceed after they're distributed, if you don't mind.

Ms Blakeman: Just wait?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: I think we're close to it. With your permission I'll continue.

The Chair: Yes, I think you can proceed.

Ms Blakeman: I'd like to move amendment A2, which is amending section 7 of Bill 31, which affects the proposed section 37.1(1) by striking out clause (a). This is part of where I see recommendation 31, which is the police stuff and giving the information to the police, being mixed in with the other recommendations. Specifically, I see it appearing as clause (a) under 37.1(1). I'll also note that all of the amendments that are added in under section 7 are in addition to what's already in the original bill. So this is all being tagged on to the end of a section that's about limiting fraud and abuse of health services.

Section 37.1(1) reads:

- (a) that the information relates to the possible commission of an offence under a statute or regulation of Alberta or Canada, and
- (b) that the disclosure will detect or prevent fraud or limit abuse in the use of health services.

Now, I'm fine with (b), and I'm fine with the way it flows to that. But I'm not fine with (a) because I think that's a back door way of the government being able to empower the police to collect that information based on whether an offence has been possibly committed under a statute or regulation of Alberta or Canada. Again, by whose definition? Who's making that decision? Is it the custodian that's supposed to know the Criminal Code here? Or are the police coming in and saying, "We believe there's been a gunshot, and it should be dealt with"?

I'll let the member respond. I think I've laid out the argument fairly clearly, and I look forward to an opportunity to respond again.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will address a few of the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I wish to emphasize, first of all, that it does provide in the bill that the "custodian may disclose individually identifying health information" in all of the various sections which she had referred to. The key word is "may." As the hon. member is aware from her participation in the Select Special Health Information Act Review Committee, the original recommendation which was brought forward by the committee was that it should mandate disclosure in those specific instances.

The hon. member is quite right to be cautious about these individual freedom issues and privacy issues because these are delicate matters and there has to be a balance struck between the privacy rights of the individuals and the overriding obligation and rights of society and of the public good as a whole. So what the department has tried to do in bringing forth these particular amendments is to strike the right balance. Whether or not that is exactly the correct balance I guess time will tell. The act, as the hon. member alluded to, has several provisions that already enable custodians to disclose individually identifying information in certain circumstances, but I think the overriding thing that I would like to emphasize is that this is permissive and not compulsory, and it is the subject of considerable discussion.

As the hon. member had pointed out, not only is the issue of privacy one which is paramount in this particular issue, but it also

affects the rights of the physician in the sense of the obligation of confidentiality and the protection of the confidence between the patient and the doctor, which is paramount. I think that that was one of the overriding provisions that mitigated against making it mandatory for the physician to disclose that information because we are dealing with some ancient protocols there, like the Hippocratic oath, with respect to disclosure of information.

What the legislation now does is attempt to strike a balance. So it's a two-part test that must be passed before that custodian releases information of an individually identifying nature. First of all, it must be shown that there's a reasonably founded belief that the information relates to an offence. Secondly, it has to get by another test, which is perhaps more appropriate, and that is that the custodian must in their own judgment, on balance, say whether in their judgment the release of the information is justified. They have to have a reasonably founded belief to start with, and they also must believe that in their judgment the release is justified, that on balance the public good dictates that they should release that information. So it is discretionary, as I said.

In section 7 of the bill, as far as I can see, the information does not give the person's address. It talks about the name, the date of birth, and the personal health number and so on. In the case of the health care provider it does provide the business address and so on. I would agree with the hon. member that there may be challenges under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms at some point. As to whether or not the right balance is struck in this present instance, I guess only time will tell, when the courts have some adjudication on it. But I think that what the legislation does as it presently exists is try to strike a reasonable balance in terms of discretion where the overriding concerns of the public good seem to outweigh the infringements on personal privacy.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you for that information. Yes, he is correct. The original recommendation from the committee – and I regret that I neglected to focus on that – was that it was mandatory. I appreciate the fine distinction that this is not mandatory, but I would argue that that matters not a hair's difference. When you're a nurse on duty at 4 o'clock in the morning and a police officer walks into your nursing station – and our police, when they're on duty, are in full garb with everything clanking off their belt, in uniform – and they come up and request information, I don't know how good a job we're going to be able to do to make it clear to that health service provider that they don't have to give that information. I haven't seen any indication that there is a massive education campaign going to be accompanying the proclamation of Bill 31.

10:50

It's something that we see happen. I've spoken to people that are health professionals that say, you know, that they're under immense pressure from their colleagues as a result of interactions with police and others that were requesting personally identifying health information, and they've said: "Sorry. I know the law, and I'm not giving you the information." They've come under immense pressure, and there have been complaints to their superiors and a number of other things. And they were right. They were absolutely right. They were doing everything that they should have done, but not everybody understands that, and they end up feeling huge pressure, to the point, I think, that one of them felt workplace harassment. They were doing what they were supposed to do, but it's very hard for people to understand that when we've got a police officer – we're a law-abiding society. We willingly give our police

power. So when they show up saying, "I want this information," most people tend to go: "Oh. Okay, officer. If you are asking for it, it must be legit. I'll hand it over." Not necessarily the case.

I guess what I'm arguing here is that if the sponsoring member believes that the word "may" in this amending legislation will be enough of a test to pass, that it would guarantee a balance and a protection, I would argue that that is a pretty slim protection here.

It's very useful, for those that are following along at home and on the Internet, to be examining Bill 31 with the original bill, the Health Information Act, in your other hand because you don't always get the full picture of what's happening here. So when we look at how 37.1 and the other sections that flow in – there's 37.1, 37.2, 37.3 – they all flow following the section 37 appearing on page 30 of the original act. Those numbers will change, obviously, if these amendments go through.

Section 37 is "Disclosure of health services provider information" and starts out by saying:

A custodian may disclose individually identifying health services provider information without the consent of the individual who is the subject of the information . . .

So we're talking about a health professional here.

- (a) to a health professional body that requests the information for the purpose of an investigation, a discipline proceeding, a practice review or an inspection relating to the health services provider, or
- (b) if the disclosure is authorized or required by an enactment of Alberta or Canada.

Then it goes on to section (2). They can "disclose health services provider information," and then there's a whole long list of what kind of information they can give. That's where the previous amendment would have fit, and this is

other than home address, telephone number and licence number, to any person for any purpose without the consent of the individual who is the subject of the information, unless the disclosure . . .

And here's where you get into the exceptions.

- (a) would reveal other information about the health services provider, or
- (b) could reasonably be expected to result in
 - (i) harm to the health services provider's mental or physical health or safety, or
 - (ii) undue financial harm to the health services provider.

Then this section in Bill 31 fits in because it follows after the existing section 37. So that's where you get into

37.1(1) A custodian may disclose individually identifying health information referred to in subsection (2),

which was that whole list,

. . . who is the subject of the information to a police service or the Minister of Justice and Attorney General where the custodian reasonably believes . . .

And then the rest of that flows from that.

So I think there's an argument here that there's some confusion about whose individually identifying health information is actually being discussed in this section because the first time I read it, my notes on the side say "patient," but in fact, I think we're actually talking about the health service provider. Makes it even more interesting.

I would still argue that to be on the safe side, we should be taking out section (a). I hear the argument – I actually got this from Parliamentary Counsel and from the sponsoring member – that this is a two-part test, what's set out here: "that the information relates to the possible commission of an offence" and "that the disclosure will detect or prevent fraud or limit abuse in the use of health services." I question whether, in fact, that is really the way it would play out. I see section (a) being used as a back door to gain that information that I talked about earlier.

So I would ask all members to support my amendment A2, which would delete section (a); that is "that the information relates to the possible commission of an offence under a statute or regulation of Alberta or Canada." I hope I can gain the support of everyone in the Assembly.

Thank you very much for allowing me to argue the case.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A2?

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

Ms Blakeman: Ah, well, one down.

We're continuing on with section 7 because my next amendment is continuing with this. But I just want to note that I skipped over section 37.2, which is noting in Bill 31 "Disclosure to prevent or limit fraud or abuse of health services by health services providers." Again, I think that there's a bit of a problem there about how this is all flowing because it looked like the first one was supposed to be about patients, but flowing as it does under the existing section 37, I think we're talking about health service providers there as well. I did not take the same clause, the corresponding clause, out of 37.2 because it was clearly about detecting fraud in the health services. Just in the way it's written, I did not see this as being used with the same sort of backdoor access.

But when I move on to 37.3, "Disclosure to protect public health and safety," this one I really see as a back door, as a way of empowering the police to request this information. I'm doing the same thing here in that I'm taking out section (a) because of what you have and the way it's worded under 37.3(1):

A custodian may . . .

And I note "may."

. . . disclose individually identifying health information referred to in subsection (2) without the consent of the individual who is the subject of the information to a police service or the Minister of Justice and Attorney General where the custodian reasonably believes

- (a) that the information relates to the possible commission of an offence under a statute or regulation of Alberta or Canada, and
- (b) that the disclosure will protect the health and safety of Albertans.

Now I think this is really the clause that reflects the intent of Bill 31.

At this point I would like to move amendment A3 and ask that it be distributed.

The Chair: Okay. We'll refer to this amendment as A3.

You may proceed, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. This amendment is asking that Bill 31 be amended in section 7 in the proposed section 37.3(1) by striking out clause (a). So it's exactly the same clause. It's the one that refers to the information relating to the possible commission of an offence under a statute or regulation of Alberta or Canada.

Again, how is the custodian supposed to know this stuff? The clause above it says, "where the custodian reasonably believes," and then "(a) that the information relates to the possible commission of an offence." Well, how are we expecting a doctor or a nurse or a radiologist or a licensed practical nurse to be up to speed on what would be an offence under a statute or a regulation of Alberta or Canada? You're asking a lot. They're health professionals. They're there to do a different task than to be knowledgeable about why the police might be searching for information on an individual.

I think that if you take that out, you can read this clause straight through, basically saying that they can disclose this if they believe

that the disclosure will protect the health and safety of Albertans. I still have problems with this concept, but I think that if we take out (a), we've made it less dangerous.

11:00

Essentially, what we have here is that it's far too vague. It is not defined, and that's one of the things that we test for when we look at the Charter. How defined is it? How narrowly defined is it? This is wide open. It could be anything according to what we're reading here. So I would argue that it's not allowing reasonable limits, and I think this one actually fishes the most.

Now, there could be an argument made here under public health and safety of Albertans that this is a terrorism clause, but I don't see anything else in there that is putting that concept in context. Therefore, I think that without a great deal of other information putting that in context, we can't accept that that's what it's for, that that's the good reason, that that's the reasonable limit, because it's not specifying it enough. It is simply just too vague.

I would look forward to the response from the member, and we will proceed with this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I am sympathetic to the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but take examples of things like gunshot wounds or stab wounds, someone coming into an emergency room who's intoxicated and has been injured in an accident and says that they've been involved in a hit-and-run accident, somebody who is mentally deranged and alluded to threats against their spouse, or something like that. I think we could all agree that in those circumstances there are overriding concerns of health and safety and that there may well be hard evidence in front of the health care service provider that very likely a criminal offence has occurred.

Again, what we have attempted to do is strike a balance here. Whereas in the original recommendations in such circumstances as gunshot wounds there would be a mandatory disclosure on the health care provider's part and some obligation to do so, this does provide discretion in instances where it was deemed in the best judgment of the health care provider that those types of things ought to be disclosed to the police or to the Attorney General. So I think that, again, one would have to assume that some judgment would apply on the part of those custodians of that information.

As I said, it is limited in its scope to the name of the individual, the date of birth, and the nature of the injury or illness. If it was a stab wound or a gunshot wound, I suppose that would be relevant. So I think, again, the key is the fact that this is discretionary on the part of the custodian and it's not mandatory.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. The member has now opened up a number of other areas that I wanted to talk about. We need to deal with the problem here. If the problem is that we have gang members, for example, going into hospitals with gunshot wounds, and they get to sit in there, get our public health care system helping them, and then sneak off, and we don't catch them, and we've helped to heal them, deal with the problem. There is legislation that exists in Ontario and in other locations in which there is mandatory reporting of gunshot wounds, and in that you could include knifings and severe beatings, which, as the member noted, are identifiable and there's a high likelihood that the person incurred those in some sort of illegal activity.

If that's your problem, deal with it. Bring forward the legislation that deals with that, but don't open up people's personally identifying information without their consent and disclose that to police service employees based on that. If that's your problem, deal with it. Bring in the legislation. But don't use that as a reason to open up the rest of this can of information for anybody else to get access to.

And you are already covered for that. If you've got a situation where someone's in imminent danger – you know, there was a car accident, and somebody else might be out there – you are already covered for getting that information under the clauses that already exist and the surrounding laws that already exist around that, which is the "imminent danger" and "life-threatening." If you've got somebody coming in and you think there's a spouse somewhere bleeding in the bathroom in the house, you're already covered to get that information.

So quit using those excuses as a way of justifying what's happening here because it does not describe the situation that it is intended to deal with. You're already covered for that stuff. Don't bring examples of someone with a mental health issue in here because those are already dealt with somewhere else. So you are unable to provide me with examples of exactly what situations you are anticipating that would be covered by this legislation because everything else you've described to me is already covered, under "imminent danger," under "life-threatening," under the provisions that are already available under the Mental Health Act, under the provisions that are already available under Fatality Inquiries, Child Welfare, and Protection for Persons in Care.

What is the situation you're anticipating here? You can't describe it. Every example that I've heard raised about why you need to be able to get at this information about people is already covered. So you're not giving me examples of why you need this. Therefore, I say: then, you don't need it, if you can already get the information in the other areas through the other provisions that are given to you through this legislation and other legislation. Those are the examples that keep being used to justify this. You can already get that information. What, exactly, is it that you want to use this information for? Nobody can give me those examples. I sat through days of public presentations, and all of the examples that were brought forward by the police services were already covered. None of them applied to what was being contemplated here.

Again, I say: what is it that you're trying to get at here? If you're trying to deal with suspicious activities that you want health professionals to report to the police, then specifically put together legislation and ask them to report that. As I said, you've got model legislation to work from in Ontario. That was mandatory reporting of gunshots, and I believe that knifings and severe beatings were included there, and if not, they could be, because those would be the obvious ones we'd be seeing. But this, you know, car accident stuff and the mental health person and the spousal beatings and imminent danger to a spouse at home: sorry; we're already covered for that. So don't use those examples as a justification for what's happening here.

Given that the member just gave me such an excellent argument, I would urge everyone to support amendment A3. I'll call the question, assuming nobody else wants to speak to this.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: I want to just suggest, Mr. Chairman, that given the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, that, in fact, this clause would provide the police services with additional access to people's personal health information with no particular good reason that is not already provided for, I am persuaded and will

throw the full weight of my caucus behind this amendment. I'm sure that will prove decisive.

Mr. Chairman, I think we need to be very, very careful in light of what's happened in the United States with the passage of the PATRIOT Act. You know, the stoking of fear always needs to be guarded against. In the United States with the PATRIOT Act it was clear that this was a pre-existing agenda – a pre-existing agenda of the FBI and other law enforcement agencies – that they had not been able to get through the democratic process because people stood against it and said: "We're not a police state. We have democratic values, we have things that we believe in, we have rights, and we have protections. The individual is protected from the state, and there have to be certain tests that need to be met before these can be overridden in the interest of the greater good." Of course, the PATRIOT Act swept that away.

11:10

Now, this is by no means the PATRIOT Act, and it's by no means as serious, but it represents the same thing in principle. There is an unnecessary and an unjustified intrusion into people's rights as individuals by the state without adequate justification and without appropriate tests.

I take the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre at her word because I have not heard the government side refute her arguments, and I think that until such clear evidence can be provided that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is wrong, we must support the amendment. If the government can provide that evidence and that justification at a later time, we can always come back to this and legislate it there. In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, I do not feel that it's appropriate to retain this clause in the bill.

Thank you.

Dr. Brown: I want to deal with what I think is an incorrect assumption on the part of the hon. member with respect to the issue of gunshot wounds and stab wounds. The present legislation talks about a disclosure if a custodian "believes, on reasonable grounds, that the disclosure will avert or minimize an imminent danger," imminent meaning immediate. Somebody that staggers into an emergency room with a gunshot wound or a stab wound, while they may well have signs that would indicate that they'd been involved in a criminal activity or been the victim of a criminal activity, would certainly not fall within the parameters of being in imminent danger or causing imminent danger to anyone else.

I take the hon. member's point regarding the fact that maybe there should be mandatory legislation to report such particular instances. We haven't gone that far because of the concerns. There was some considerable discussion on the issue, as I said, of the fact that we're dealing with doctor-patient confidentiality and so on, which is something that has to be safeguarded except in exceptional circumstances.

I think that one has to assume that the custodian of the information is going to use discretion on when it's in the public interest and when, in their judgment, they should disclose the information. As I said, things like gunshot and stab wounds are not covered right now under the existing legislation. Perhaps there should be some further strengthening of the bill which is there, to mandate those particular disclosures. But we haven't gone that far because we're trying to strike a balance, the balance between this relationship between the custodian – the health care provider, the pharmacist, or the doctor – and the patient, on one hand, and the public good or the public safety, on the other hand.

I think, as I said, it's a discretionary thing, and, yes, one could assume that there might be abuses, but one must also assume that we

need some discretion there in order to allow the disclosure in those circumstances which are exceptional like I described, like the gunshot wounds, like the knife wounds.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. One more point that I want to raise, just to put this in context. When we're talking about the custodian, that is our health professional: that is our nurse at the nursing station or our physician or our LPN or whoever. Given the circumstances that we keep hearing from this government about the situation that the health care services are in today, how busy everybody is and how pressed we all are to be providing these services, now we want to be taking our health care professionals, pulling them off of what they actually do to provide health care services so that they can be rooting through to give information out under circumstances that I still argue are unnecessary. They're already compelled to do it in the ones that I've listed. This is how we're using our health professionals? This is what we want them to spend time doing? More than that, we also want them to stand there and consider whether this is appropriate or not. They have very little certainty because they're now going to have to know the law and interpret it. I sure hope they get assistance to do that because it would be very unfair to place this burden upon them without some kind of training, and I hope the money comes to do that.

That's what we're creating here: an expectation that we're going to expect our health service providers to understand this, to be able to stand there and make the decision, no matter how busy they are, about whether this is appropriate or not, understanding all the context that's in it. I would still argue that this is not a good use of our health care professionals, in this day and age in particular, to be having to go through this process, especially when I argue that I've yet to hear a good argument about why we need to be disclosing this information under the circumstances outlined in this bill.

Those are my arguments. I hope I've convinced everyone here to support me, and I'll call the question.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A3?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I would like to move amendment A4, and I'll let that be distributed.

The Chair: We'll distribute those first.

Okay. You may proceed hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. This is amending section 37.2, striking out subsection (4). Bear with me while I walk through this one because this appears at the end. We're back to 37.2, which was the "Disclosure to prevent or limit fraud or abuse of health services by health services providers." They go through the usual thing about they may disclose the information, possible commission, detect or prevent fraud, or limit abuse in the provision of health services, the kind of information that they can release.

Then we get down to section (4), and that is: "Individually identifying health information may be disclosed under subsection (3) without the consent of the individual who is the subject of the

information.” Well, what does subsection (3) say? Let’s go back. Subsection (3):

If a custodian discloses information under subsection (1) . . .

That was the original section.

. . . about a health service, the custodian may also disclose individually identifying health information about the individual who received that health service if that information is related to the health service.

So we’re a little suspicious about Dr. X. We think Dr. X might be defrauding, so we have approached custodians of health information to release us information on Dr. X., and there’s a long list of the information that they can give. But Dr. X is also treating some patients, so we have patient A. Now what this would allow is that for patient A, who has been treated by Dr. X, their individually identifying health information would be released to the investigating authorities here, the police or the Attorney General, without patient A’s knowledge. Interesting, interesting, interesting.

11:20

I have to say: why? If you need me as a patient to be a witness against a doctor that you think is being fraudulent with health care services, then you can come and ask me, and I’ll probably be very glad to help. We’re all aware, you know, of having a good, strong health care system. I’ll probably be willing to help. But I think it is very wrong of you to put a clause in this bill that gives my individually identifying health information to the police service or to the Attorney General without my knowledge and without my consent. It’s wrong, wrong, wrong. I cannot come up with any circumstance under which that would be acceptable. This is, I don’t think, any of their information. If they need to be able to get at you to be a witness, they can come and ask your permission. I don’t see any reason why they can’t do that. As a matter of fact, I thought that at one point somewhere in here I read that you had to get written permission from somebody and that that was part of the tests that were met.

And this person isn’t even guilty of anything. You’ve got those other provisions in here that are about people where you think it’s an individual. That was section 37.1, where you thought it was an individual who was perpetrating fraud. You’ve got the sections in there to cover them. This is someone that isn’t even guilty of anything, and you’re taking their individually identifiable health information. All those tests, all your family’s genetic history, everything they have about you becomes part of this knowledge that gets passed on. You’re a victim here, and they want access to that information without your knowledge, without your consent. Wrong, wrong, wrong. I can see no acceptable reason for doing this.

That’s why I want to strike completely subsection (4) out of section 37.2. You can go after those doctors you think are committing fraud. Absolutely. Go for it. Remember, earlier I had mentioned that this was the section that I had left alone and left it there. But you absolutely should not be going after individuals’ health information without their knowledge, without their consent in order to try and get a health service provider.

So if I haven’t officially moved amendment A4, I’m happy to do so at this time. I would ask everyone’s support in deleting this particular subsection out of Bill 31.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to address some circumstances about that information relating to “the individual who is the subject of the information.” That is the way it’s phrased. It might be intrinsic to the investigation of the health care

service provider. I can think of a number of instances; for example, where numerous prescriptions are written, perhaps to the same individual, and where those prescription drugs are known to be illicitly trafficked and where many of those drugs can be abused by people for nonprescription uses. Also, where multiple procedures perhaps have been billed to the same persons, it would be necessary to verify whether or not those procedures had been carried out. If there was suspicion on the part of the authorities that there was fraud taking place with a health care service provider, they would need to check with the individuals who were allegedly the subject of those procedures to see whether or not they had been properly carried out and in order to verify whether or not there had been fraud.

So I think that the fact that the custodian would have to give that information is intrinsic to the fact of investigation. I don’t think that you could properly investigate those particular instances unless you did have that information.

The Chair: Are there others? Are you ready for the question on amendment A4?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move amendment A5.

The Chair: We will distribute those right away.

I believe you can proceed, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. This amendment is striking out the entire section 9 of Bill 31. Now, Bill 31 is amending section 42(2) of the original bill, so let’s look at section 42(2). Well, to do that, you’ve got to look at section 42(1). This is notification of purpose of and authority for disclosure. So 42(1) is:

A custodian that discloses individually identifying diagnostic, treatment and care information must inform the recipient in writing . . .

This was the clause I was thinking of.

. . . of the purpose of the disclosure and the authority under which the disclosure is made.

Now we get into the exceptions. Subsection (2) says:

Subsection (1) . . .

What I just read.

. . . does not apply where the disclosure is

- (a) to another custodian . . .
- (b) to the Minister or the Department under section 46, or
- (c) to another custodian under section 47.

And here we get into what’s included in section 9:

- (d) to a police service or the Minister of Justice and Attorney General under section 37.1, 37.2 or 37.3, or
- (e) to the individual who is the subject of the information.

So the same problem here. It’s supposed to be in writing to the individual that’s involved except in those various circumstances that are already laid out. The government is now looking to add two more circumstances and once again to a police service – uh-uh, don’t like that – and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General under the sections we just went through: 37.1, 37.2, and 37.3. This is essentially a consequential section that flows from the earlier section, and I can understand why it’s in here, but for all the same reasons I didn’t like what’s happening in the additions to 37, I don’t like this.

I want to be very clear here that in my original notes I think what we’re really considering here is that this is about people that are

outside of the arena. When we talk about health information – and forgive me for repeating this because I know it's really kind of boring to a lot of people – the way health information is set up is that you have what's called an arena, and it's difficult. There are a number of tests to get access to the arena, but once you're in that arena as someone who collects health information, you are pretty much free inside that arena to share that information around with everybody that's in there. In other words, everybody, once they get access to that arena, has passed all the tests, and they're legit. They are okay. They have the gold star of approval, and they can share that information back and forth under a lot of circumstances. The information is prohibited in most cases from being shared outside of that arena except for special circumstances.

My note is saying that part of the purpose of section 42 is to deal with those that are outside of the arena. That makes me even more cautious when I see section 42 being amended by what's under section 9 because I'm concerned that we have opened up a gate in the arena for this information to now pass out to custodians that are not particularly approved, and my examples here are things like the WCB. So I have a real concern about what's being considered here.

11:30

We also have no definition of why the information is being given to the police. I understand that it's consequential to the 37s, but I still think it's problematic. If I'm correct in my reading of 42, which is about dealing with people outside of the arena – I think we really have lost control of what we're doing if that's the case.

So I would urge everyone to support this amendment because I think we need to be very careful of when we exclude people from protection. It needs to be done for a very good reason, and I'm not seeing that reason forthcoming. But I will listen carefully to what the sponsor of the bill has to say.

Dr. Brown: Just very briefly, Mr. Chairman. Section 9 adds two particular clauses there. One is the one, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned, that's consequential to the changes of 37.1, 37.2, and 37.3. There certainly may be instances where an investigation may be prejudiced if the information was released by the prosecutor's office or the police. The Attorney General is what I mean by prosecutor. I can see where in those particular instances it may be prejudicial to an investigation to disclose it.

In the case of the second instance, to the individual who is the subject of the information, obviously where an individual, John Doe, seeks their information, it would be redundant to have to disclose to that individual that they themselves had obtained the information; for example, if they were seeking damages in a motor vehicle accident claim or something and they sought the information on their own behalf. This simply adds as another category, the person who is the subject of the information, and exempts them from the requirement of having to inform them. I think that is intuitively obvious why we wouldn't have to inform them. Presumably they would've had to have obtained the information, so they would've known about it.

Ms Blakeman: I disagree with that interpretation. When we go back and look in the original bill at what 42 says, it's talking about that a custodian disclosing individually identifying information has to inform the recipient in writing of the purpose of the disclosure and the authority under which the disclosure is made except – and these are the reasons that you would have to be excepting it, and you're adding in two additional categories for why you're excepting it. So the person is not getting the information.

Dr. Brown: Just very briefly. The requirement there is to notify the recipient in writing of the purpose of the disclosure and the authority

under which the disclosure is made. If we're talking about the individual subject to whom the disclosure was made, it seems – as I said, I think that that individual, obviously, has the information. There is no point to it.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A5?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. This is my final amendment. I would move it as amendment A6.

The Chair: We will distribute those immediately, and as soon as that's done, then we can proceed.

You may proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. This is amending section 10, and this is striking out subclause (ii) under section 46(1)(b). Essentially, this is saying that “the information is prescribed in the regulations as information the Minister or the Department may request under this section.” I really don't like this stuff being sent to regulations, and the regulations on implementing this bill are bindersful anyway.

I really don't like adding in clauses in which more decisions can be made by regulation for a couple of reasons: one, because this is intimate information. People should be able to access it pretty easily, which you can do about legislation, about statutes. You can access that online or through the Queen's Printer. It's much harder to get at regulations, much, much harder. It's almost impossible to tell that regulations are being changed because those are usually done by cabinet behind closed doors, and all you get is an order in council that comes out in the *Gazette* at some point, so way after the fact. You have no idea of why they made that change, what the discussion was that went on, who was in favour of it, who wasn't. There's very little, if any, public input on any changes that happen.

Whereas, if you leave it in legislation, it has to come back before the Assembly. You can have people in the public gallery watching the debate. The *Hansard* is available of who said what and why they felt strongly about something for or agin it. You can have a standing vote in which you can see, you know, who was in favour of it and who wasn't.

I really, really disagree, especially with health information, with empowering more decisions to be made by regulations, which is basically more decisions to be made behind closed doors, where the public gets no input on the decision-making or on any changes. And it's much harder to get this information. It's hard for me to get this information, and I supposedly have easier access to it. It's really hard for members of the public to get it, and we're talking about people's individually identifying health information here. So that's my reasoning for wishing to see this subsection taken out.

This is appearing in the original bill under division 2, Disclosure for Health System Purposes. Section 46 is dealing specifically with disclosure to the minister or the department. It starts out, “The Minister or the Department may request another custodian to disclose individually identifying health information for any of the purposes listed in section 27(2),” and then it goes on with a long list of why and how. But, essentially, this would be how the minister would deal with it, who they can disclose it to. All of that's laid out in the legislation.

This particularly would be falling under 46(1)(b), which is

if the information requested relates to a health service provided by the other custodian

- (i) that is fully or partially paid for by the Department, or
- (ii) that is provided using financial, physical or human resources provided, administered or paid for by the Department,

and then you get these additional services, anything that's prescribed in the regulations.

11:40

Part of my suspicion here is about how we will investigate possible fraud if we end up with more private provision of health services or health services that are paid for with private insurance. How do we ensure that we have protected everybody? The issue here is that if we see continued attempts at privatization – maybe not this year; maybe next year or the year after – I'm struggling to see if what we're encoding here is the ability to investigate the public system but not the private system except by using Criminal Code. I think that that can be more problematic because the tests are different. I don't think we want to see a system set up where we can't properly pursue private providers or private insurers of health services because we've set something up oddly here.

My initial concerns were around putting more decision-making into regulations, which I am never in favour of, but also my increasing concern is that what we may be setting up here is a difficulty in being able to use the same legislation to pursue potential cases of fraud or questionable provision of health services by a private provider or services that are paid for by private insurance providers.

If I haven't moved amendment A6, then I'm doing it now, and I urge everyone to support amendment A6. Thank you.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, just very quickly, Mr. Chairman, I would be remiss if I didn't echo the comments of my colleague for Edmonton-Centre when it comes to moving legislation into regulation or allowing ever more regulations to be put into place and taking away the ability of this Assembly to examine those rules before they're passed. It's been my pet peeve since I was first elected to this Chamber, and we continue to see it time and time again in any number of bills where that has taken place. So I have to take every opportunity to express my displeasure over that.

Often we hear arguments made that it's necessary because the Legislature doesn't sit often enough or it's too inconvenient to wait until the Leg. sits or that sort of thing. But that simply isn't good enough in an age where there is more and more being demanded of our governments in terms of openness and transparency. To be allowing such decisions as this to be made in the cabinet room by Executive Council without a guarantee of public debate is simply not good enough. I do understand that often there will be public consultation and stakeholder input and so forth, but it's not guaranteed to take place, as it is when it's legislation and when it's mandated that it be presented in front of all 83 members of the Legislature to have the opportunity to speak to it.

So I felt it necessary that I, as I suggested, echo the comments of my colleague for Edmonton-Centre in this case because it's just one more example of many where this is being done, and I think that ultimately the province suffers for it, and the people of this province suffer for it when we let this continue to happen.

Thank you for the opportunity to make those comments, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, if I may interrupt the proceedings under Standing Order 32(2.1) and request that if a division is called, the bells be shortened to a two-minute interval.

Mr. Mason: Just on this?

Ms Blakeman: On the bill.

The Chair: This is a motion for unanimous consent on division to shorten the time to two minutes between the bells. Is that correct?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, but I don't think it needs to be unanimous.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Just a point of clarification, Mr. Chairman. I believe that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is questioning, if this is approved by unanimous consent, whether or not it applies only to this particular bill or if it applies for the rest of this evening's sitting.

Ms Blakeman: My intention was that it's for the next vote, which I believe would be a vote on the Committee of the Whole proceedings on Bill 31.

The Chair: The motion is to reduce the time to two minutes between the bells on Bill 31. It requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: We have had the vote on the amendment, and that was defeated, so we're back on the bill.

Does anyone wish to participate in the debate on Bill 31? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to address a few of the points that were raised during second reading and the Committee of the Whole debate which preceded, on May 3.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora referred to section 5(vi)(r) and asked whether it was also involving disclosing health information without consent to insurers. The answer is yes, the amendment is intended to enable the disclosure of limited health information without consent to third-party insurers for payment purposes.

Another question was asked in relation to what protections are in place for health service providers who choose not to provide confidential health information. They may make this decision in response to a request from the police if they feel that they shouldn't disclose the information because of their relationship with the client, and that's what I alluded to earlier with respect to discretion. Currently, the health service providers are protected under the act. It states that no action can be brought against "any person acting for or under the direction of a custodian for damages resulting from anything done or not done by that person [acting] in good faith while carrying out duties or exercising powers under this Act." So that would include any failure to do something where the individual has discretion under the act.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder asked about section 5 and felt that it hinted at some possibility of private health insurance. The amendment is simply intended to enable the disclosure of limited health information without consent to third parties for payment

purposes. These third parties are primarily private health insurers. This would facilitate insurance that is already in place such as dental plans, drug plans, coverage for chiropractors, physiotherapists, and so on.

He asked what situation or circumstances this legislation might be anticipating, how disclosure to police services and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General or the minister of health would help the good, and what sort of situation would require disclosure for the sake of public safety. I think I've discussed that at some length already.

The Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act is a separate piece of legislation. It is not considered partner legislation to Bill 31. Assuming that the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act is passed and proclaimed, it is that legislation which would be relied upon to enable disclosure of health information for that purpose.

11:50

Regarding the issue of electronic disclosure, the proposed amendment would only remove the requirement to note the disclosure in a log because of the fact that the electronic system has automated audit capability as I alluded to earlier when I spoke to the bill. The automated audit capability, as I said, duplicates what a disclosure log would normally do.

The hon. member asked what information is available for disclosure and wanted more illumination on section 10. The intention at this time is to mandate the provision of community drug dispensing information from the health system. The information is currently being collected by community-based pharmacies. While some are already providing this information on a voluntary basis to the pharmacy information network within the electronic health record, the information is more useful for planning and evaluation purposes if a complete picture is available. Mandating the collection of this information would enable better monitoring of drug utilization and improve understanding of drug trends. The cost of pharmaceutical drugs, as we all know, is one of the major drivers behind the increasing health care costs. The department is required to complete a privacy impact assessment and to forward it to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for comment before they implement any such regulation.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung asked about health information privacy related to research studies. These proposed amendments do not impact on clinical trials. Patients enrolling in clinical trials consent to their participation. The consent form does specify what will happen to their health information. It's my understanding that the sponsor of the clinical trial receives information in a standard, preset, and nonidentifiable format.

Regarding residents in long-term care and prison inmates the Health Information Act requires custodians to take reasonable efforts to obtain administrative, technical, and physical safeguards. These safeguards are designed to protect the confidentiality of health information within their custody or control and to protect privacy. The proposed amendments do not directly impact on the protection of health information.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East raised a point about how informed people are regarding the rights about their personal health information. Health information is collected, used, and disclosed within the health system for treatment and care purposes. Patients receiving health services do have a right of access to their own health information, and they can express their wishes as to how their health information is disclosed by a custodian. The exchange of health information for the provision of treatment and care is certainly not a new practice. In determining how much information is disclosed for treatment and care purposes, custodians certainly must consider the wishes of the individual.

Within the electronic health record a custodian can honour an individual's expressed wish by masking the information in question. While the mask expresses the individual's wish to limit the disclosure of the information, that mask can be removed by health care providers with an individual's consent. They can also unmask that information without consent if there's a safety or quality of care issue. Unmasking activities are logged and monitored. The proposed amendments have no impact whatsoever on that particular issue.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had asked: what conditions are anticipated under which third parties would have access to this information for purposes of payment for services? As I previously mentioned, this amendment is intended to enable the disclosure of limited health information without consent to third parties for the purpose of processing payments. An example would be where third-party insurers adjudicate the payment of health services or products without requiring the individual's consent.

Regarding fraud and its potential the amendments in Bill 31 are intended to address fraudulent activities within the publicly funded health care system. Of course, we have an obligation as the government to ensure that the public funds are not abused. The amendments specifically address fraud perpetrated either by an individual in section 37(1) or in the case of the health care service provider in section 37(2). I have spoken quite extensively on those provisions earlier in the debate on the amendments by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Chairman, these are my comments, and I ask for the support of the House in committee.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 31 as amended agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:56 p.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Graydon	Mar
Ady	Groeneveld	McClellan
Amery	Haley	Mitzel
Boutilier	Herard	Morton
Brown	Horner	Pham
Cao	Jablonski	Renner
Cardinal	Knight	Stevens
Danyluk	Lindsay	Tarchuk
DeLong	Lougheed	

12:00

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Taft
Bonko	Miller, R.	Tougas
Elsalhy	Pastoor	

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

legal opinion as a municipality in order for you to fight that lawsuit in the courts, and you don't want the person suing you to have access to your legal advice any more than the city should have access to the plaintiff's legal advice. So that's exempt, and that's a very, very reasonable exemption.

You may have, for example, certain kinds of business advice if you're involved in a business. It might be a municipal initiative. Say you had a power company, and you're involved in a competitive business. You'd certainly be allowed to protect that information because it's competitive. If you own Edmonton Power, for example, or the city of Calgary electric system before it was made into a corporation – I'm going back a little bit because I don't want to talk about the new corporate entities that have been established but rather the old electrical departments that the major cities had or, for example, any other utility that might be owned by a municipality that might in some ways be in competition – you don't want your opponents, you don't want TransAlta to know what you're doing if you're Edmonton Power, so you need to be able to protect that sort of thing.

Similarly, related to that, a municipality or a government might engage in a competitive bid process. So you have different companies bidding on some kind of a job, some kind of a contract with the municipality or with the government in which they are trying to make the case that their company should be selected, and they provide you with information to back up their bid, which is of a competitive nature. They don't want their competitors to get that information just because they provided that bid information to a municipality and the principle is that the information should be made public wherever possible. You don't want to have that situation occurring. So there's a legitimate reason for competitive information. Now, having said that, Mr. Chairman, I think this government abuses that and hides behind that.

I guess, Mr. Chairman, that what I want to say is that there are fairly strict requirements around the ways in which municipalities can release public information or hide information from the public. They have to meet certain very specific tests. But this government doesn't abide by the same rules that it sets for municipal government in this province. In fact, this government is providing itself with an awful lot more in the way of reasons to hide information from the public, and there's no justification in doing so unless, of course, the government has something to hide.

The government doesn't want people to be looking over its shoulder, and it has a number of ways of doing that. One way is to make it expensive. Sometimes you get, you know, these massive bills that opposition parties can't afford or public interest groups can't afford or the general public could never afford.

Mr. Elsalhy: Maybe they look at it as a revenue stream.

Mr. Mason: My hon. colleague suggests that maybe the government looks at it as a revenue stream. Well, maybe they do, but I think there's another more profound reason why the government does that, and that is because they want to create an impediment to citizens asking for information. It makes it hard to ask for information broadly and forces the citizen to focus very specifically on documents. The problem with that, of course, is that the citizen or the interest group or the opposition party often doesn't know exactly which document it is that they want. So they can't ask for it unless they already know what it is. In many cases that's impossible for them, so it creates a real barrier.

The second way in which the government thwarts the access to information for its citizens is to engage in lengthy delays, bureaucratic processes, and, in fact, simply refusing to meet its obligations,

because there are, actually, no penalties for failing to meet its obligations under the act. In other words, the government can ignore the Information Commissioner or legal requests for information, and they often do so because there are no teeth in the act. There is no real compulsion on the part of government: there are no fines, ministers can't lose their jobs, there is really no sanction against the government if they fail to comply with the act in a timely fashion.

We have a recent example of that. That recent example was our request for information around the Aon report. We wanted to know who bid on the Aon report, what their bids were, what the reasons were for the selection of Aon as opposed to some of the other bidders on the contract. We wanted to know the terms of reference for the project that Aon was undertaking. We were stonewalled at every stage. The department requested extensions, which were granted. When their extensions ran out, the commissioner directed them to supply it by a certain date. That date came and went, Mr. Chairman, and the Department of Health and Wellness still did not provide us with the information.

We had to take it public. We had to raise it here. We wrote to the commissioner saying, "What are you going to do?" But, of course, there wasn't a sanction, so the government was able to take its own sweet time about releasing that information.

In the end, for all the time and trouble that we had taken and the lengthy period of time that had gone by, most of which was allowed for under the act and was quite legal and some of which wasn't legal at all, all we got was a handful of documents, a couple dozen pages that were sitting in the filing cabinet all along. It wasn't that the government had to do any fresh research or do any digging or undertake a massive search. They, in the end, gave us a handful of documents, only part of what we'd asked for, that were just sitting in the filing cabinet or were sitting on some administrator's desk or perhaps even sitting on the minister's desk. We don't know. But they made us go through all of that hoop.

12:20

So, Mr. Chairman, in the absence of any real teeth and penalties on the part of the government for failing to comply with the act, it is a toothless piece of legislation, and it does not protect the principle that the public is entitled to its own information that is held in trust by the government unless there's a good reason why not. So that's the second thing.

The third thing, which is really of a lot of concern, is that the government has all kinds of exemptions from the requirement, far too many. So ministers' notes, briefing notes, all kinds of things that are there that may be relevant, that are important, that are information that's been produced on the public's behalf and with the public's money: those things are kept completely outside the purview of those things that can be obtained under the act. This act, Mr. Chairman, extends those things. This act provides the government more fig leaves to hide the truth from the public.

These things, quite frankly, fly in the face of the general direction in this country. We've got the Harper government, which at least in some ways is actually doing what this government is not doing, and that's keeping things a little bit more open and accountable. Mr. Chairman, you cannot keep the government accountable if the public is in the dark.

Briefing notes, which are offering advice to cabinet ministers on their departments and pressing public issues, will be kept out of reach until 2011. Documents from a provincial internal auditor, which evaluates and improves on how the province spends taxpayers' dollars, will be sealed till 2021. This act, according to a recent *Edmonton Journal* editorial, "is already notorious for making it time-consuming, costly or nearly impossible for Albertans to attain

government information. Now the . . . Conservatives are making it even tougher, concerned more with protecting government documents than freeing up information for the public.”

So, Mr. Chairman, it’s not just, as far as we’re concerned, to pass this document. A recent letter to the editor said: This is just a continuation of a cleverly crafted program to stop the flow of information to Albertans. What do we really know about West Edmonton Mall, Alberta Treasury Branches, the Alberta Securities Commission, the Swan Hills toxic waste disposal plant, and electricity deregulation? The list goes on and on.

Mr. Chairman, this is really a bad bill, and it’s uncalled for. The government already has more protection from releasing the public’s information to the public than just about any other government in this country; in fact, I would say the universe. The government loves to say: we’re the best government in the universe. I would say that they are one of the most closed governments in the entire universe, based on my limited experience of the universe. I do think that we need to do something different.

Mr. Chairman, if I may, I would like to introduce an amendment, and I will provide copies to you for distribution.

The Chair: That would be amendment A4.

Chair’s Ruling Division

The Chair: While the amendment is being distributed, I will take the liberty to give a brief update on voting in division based on the point of order that was called. I would like to refer members to *Beauchesne’s* 818(2), which states that “the doors of the committee room are deemed to be locked while a division is being taken, and the vote of a member not in the room when the question is put will be disallowed.”

Also, *Beauchesne’s* 306 states:

- (1) A Member must be within the House and hear the question put in its entirety, in one of the official languages, or the Member’s vote cannot be recorded. It is not sufficient to hear it while in a gallery or behind the curtains.
- (2) Members must be in their own seats should they wish to vote and should remain in their seats until the division is complete and the result announced.

Based on 818(2), the member in question was indeed in the room. When the member was asked to vote, he was indeed in his seat, and when the chair noticed him respond to the vote, he was indeed in his seat. So, hopefully, that clarifies the matter.

Debate Continued

The Chair: I see that the amendments are distributed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, so you may proceed on amendment A4.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I’d like to speak just briefly to this amendment. The last time this bill was debated in committee, an amendment to entirely strike out section 4 was, as I understand it, defeated by the House. That section exempts ministerial briefing notes and backgrounders from FOIP. We’ve seen several examples of those being denied in the written questions and motions for returns. We think that it was a bad . . . [Mr. Mason’s speaking time expired]

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak on amendment A4?

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Chairman, can I just seek clarification, please, if I can stand on 29(2)(a) and ask a question to the hon. sponsor of the amendment.

The Chair: You don’t do that in committee.

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. So I’ll speak to the amendment then.

The Chair: You can ask a question during your comments, and the hon. member can respond when he rises again.

Mr. Elsalhy: Very good.

Okay. I’ll speak to the amendment briefly, Mr. Chairman. The hon. sponsor of this amendment is hoping to strike out subsection (4)(a) and subsection (5) under section 4. Now, what section 4 proposes to do is basically to conceal documents that are “for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council” – i.e., a cabinet minister – “in respect of assuming responsibility for a ministry.” Subsection (5) is talking about those records that are described in this clause not being open for review or open to be released till at least five years have elapsed since that member of the Executive Council was appointed with respect to that particular ministry.

Now, we have a bill here before us, Mr. Chairman, that proposes two things. On the one hand, it proposes to give ministers more power in terms of their ability to make decisions behind closed doors and to move things from legislation to regulation. It basically allows the minister to expand their role and their powers.

12:30

The other thing that this bill does and this amendment does is that it allows them to conceal for at least five years the information that is given to them when they join cabinet. So on the one hand you have them grow their powers, and on the other hand you make them less transparent and you make the information that is given to them less available.

We feel that this is a negative turn, and it has potentially a destructive impact on how things are run. If we are in fact trying to clean up government and to alleviate the concern that members of the public have with this government that it is secretive and that it is not open or transparent enough, definitely, if we allow this to go forward, we are not achieving that.

Now, I started thinking about the five-year period, and you can’t help but notice that this would be for the most part more than one electoral cycle, one election. So it was interesting to note that this basically has the effect of hiding information that might hurt that particular cabinet minister at least until they get re-elected. We feel that this is not the way to be conducting government affairs, and it is definitely something that we find grossly offensive.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was talking about fees and how fees are an impediment to access. I want to add that a FOIP application is almost like a maze now. It’s like an obstacle course. The applicant has to navigate through the obstacle course to reach the information having to contend with delays and stalls and, you know, sometimes applications to the Privacy Commissioner to disregard the application and all that. Once you get the information, if you can afford the fees and if you can be patient enough to tolerate the long wait, then three-quarters or 80 per cent of that information is blacked out. So, really, what value are we getting from that access to information, which in my view has turned now into something that is closer to restriction of information than it is to granting access?

Ministerial briefings. In a meeting with the former Minister of Government Services, he indicated that ministerial briefings are just advisory in nature and that this amendment dealing with section 4 would simply make preparing for session easier. We don’t view it as just advisory. We view it as an integral part of how any particular

portfolio functions and how a minister makes decisions. We think that the opposition, members of the public, and whoever else needs this information should be allowed or should be entitled to receive it.

I have to remind this House that on the federal stage what led to the Gomery inquiry federally was a ministerial briefing note. This government received a commendation from the federal Auditor General on just one aspect when it comes to transparency, and that is basically how we hire our deputy ministers. Other than that, they did not find anything positive with how this government functions. I bet you that when somebody, you know, either in cabinet or outside tells you that you can't get any more transparent and that this is the utmost example of openness and good governance, what they are referring to is basically: "Yes, we're okay because you can't find where all the errors are, and you can't look. Once you start looking, we will deny you the information."

We've heard the comments that were made about a month ago or five weeks ago with respect to the skeletons, and in a quick turnaround to try to do some damage control, it was referred to as gaps in policy. Well, let us look for those gaps in policy, then, to try to fill them and to try to satisfy not just members of this House but also members of the public at large that those gaps of policy are being looked at. And if, in fact, we unearth other skeletons that have a bigger impact, then, yes, we do have a right to look for them and to find them.

We live in a democracy, Mr. Chairman. I know my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore is trying to muzzle his laugh, but we do. People expect us to function as a democracy, not a tyrocracy, which is basically a tyrannical democracy or a corpocracy, which is a democracy run by corporations. This is a democracy that should be run by the people. We're here, opposition and government, to serve the people, and serving the people entitles everybody who seeks information to get that information, notwithstanding, of course, what the honourable sponsor of the amendment was referring to, when it's information that is not really necessary to be shared or that is detrimental if shared. Those are exceptions. Otherwise, the majority of applications should be granted, and the fees should be reviewed based on a true assessment of the actual cost, not used as an impediment or to generate revenue. This government is extremely secretive as it is, and they don't need to make it worse.

The government tells us that what's in Bill 20 is a mere house-keeping measure and a minor ineffectual administrative change, but again, Mr. Chairman, I beg to differ, and Albertans beg to differ. You know, I was thinking that if one would conduct a survey to gauge public support for this Bill 20, for this amendment to the FOIP Act, and if we actually, in fact, asked them what their views are of this government with respect to this particular area, what would people tell us? What would they say, and what would their answers be?

I came up with an imaginary or a hypothetical survey, which I asked a few people, and this is basically how it's structured. The question would be: do you trust what the Alberta government tells you? You would see that about 18 or 19 per cent of people would say: very rarely. They don't trust what the government tells them. The government, the way it's structured and the way the Public Affairs Bureau is structured, is to tell us how to think and tell us what to believe. They're not there to seek information from us or to gauge support. They're there to condition us and to tell us what to believe and how to think. Twenty-eight per cent would say: not usually. Thirty-six per cent would say: hardly ever. And seventeen per cent would say: are you kidding me?

An Hon. Member: Are you?

Mr. Elsalhy: I'm not kidding you, no.

You would get the usual stuff at the end of that survey, talking about the survey as being accurate within a margin of 3.5 per cent 19 times out of 20 and all that.

The next stage in that imaginary survey would ask people: do you think this Alberta government is open and transparent? Sixteen per cent would tell you: only selectively. They're selective with respect to which information they share readily and happily and which information they withhold and guard fiercely. Twenty-four per cent would tell you: no, definitely not. Forty per cent would tell you: you make me laugh. And twenty per cent would say: where do you come from?

The point is, Mr. Chairman, that this is a government that tells us how to think and what to believe. It promotes itself as a bastion of democracy and transparency where, in fact, it is a dungeon of secrets and skeletons. This is an administration that is solely interested in its own survival, and if that takes becoming more secretive and opaque, they're all for it, of course.

Their arrogance is another layer. You add arrogance to ignorance, and arrogance, Mr. Chairman, is what's going to lead to their demise. They believe that there will be no consequences to their actions. That's why they're pushing ahead with this Bill 20 although we told them that half of it is bad and half of it is offensive. They think that there is going to be no consequence and no result to their actions and that they're immune to public outcries and public outrage, and there is not going to be any loss. But I have to let them know that on this particular issue they stand to lose big time because the public will definitely reach the point, at one point in the future, you know, when they realize that this is not the way to run government and that if we expect a certain degree of transparency and it's not being offered, then maybe this government has to go.

At this hour, Mr. Chairman, I couldn't help but think about my children. My children are very little, but at some point in the future they would look back at the decisions we made in this Assembly, and they would ask me as their father how could I have agreed to something that maybe they would not understand in the future. I'm hoping that one day I'd say: "No. I didn't support 50 per cent of that bill. Fifty per cent was great, and I did in fact support it, but the other 50 per cent was offensive."

12:40

My kids' favourite movie character is Shrek, Mr. Chairman, and I'm not sure if you've watched his series of movies, but Shrek is an ogre. In one of his movies he was talking to his sidekick, Donkey, and he told him, "Ogres have layers." I don't think he was referring to layers like this government is proposing, layers of secrecy and opacity. He was referring to the complexity of his emotions. He was more human than humans. He was sensitive and caring.

Now, are these attributes that are shared by this government? I doubt it. The absolute opposite of openness and transparency is secrecy and opacity. Does this government view FOIP requests as a nuisance? Are members of the opposition and, indeed, citizens of this province wasting this government's valuable time when we ask for information, or does this government have an obligation to share this information? What do they have to hide? Again I say it, for the third time on the record: those who have nothing to hide, hide nothing.

Now, the sidekick found the explanation by Shrek to be a little confusing, so he asked for elaboration, and Shrek tried to give him an example by comparing himself to an onion. Mr. Chairman, an onion has layers, and the more you peel, the closer you get to that centre part of that onion. The more sheaths you remove layer by layer, the closer you get to the heart. The closer you get to the heart, the stinkier it gets. It gets more sour, and it's basically intolerable the closer you get to the heart of that onion. So I hope that one day,

after we unpeel all the layers of this government's onion, the heart would not be as poisonous as we think it is in this side of the House.

In short, I would definitely express my support for this amendment. What it tries to do is to basically salvage some of the good components of this bill, and it allows us to come back at a later date and say: "Well, you know what? We tried, and we basically made it less offensive by removing a section that is terrible." I commend the hon. sponsor of this amendment for bringing it forward, and I urge all the members of this House to vote in support of that amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Hon. members, I've just been informed that the Oilers won 3-2, for those that haven't heard.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. That's good news, indeed, and it inspires me because I now believe that my amendments also have a chance of winning, or at least four out of seven of them, perhaps.

Mr. Elsalhy: You mean against those sharks?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Well, we're quite used to taking on the sharks, Mr. Chairman.

I didn't really quite get a chance to explain the amendment. The section that would be amended is section 4, and 4(a) is struck out. It says that the right of access does not extend" – and that is that the right of access to the people to get the information that belongs to them does not extend – "to a record created solely for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council in respect of assuming responsibility for a ministry." In other words, the information that's provided to a new minister about his or her ministry and the issues that need to be dealt with and so on are going to be secret under this change.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Well, our amendment, which I move on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, will strike out the section that would exempt the notes and briefing materials prepared for new ministers. We think that this might well include some of the infamous skeletons that the former Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation was talking about while he was still the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and before he entered opposition Siberia because he was a little bit too frank and forthright just for the moment. So we think that those skeletons should be dug up and we should know what's there. Perhaps, by making this amendment, we'll in fact be able to do that.

The section that is being deleted by this amendment provides additional cover for the government, additional reasons to exclude requests for information, and we think it's unacceptable. So our amendment seeks to remove this fig leaf that the government is attempting to apply, and we hope that all hon. members in the interest of true freedom of information will support the amendment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get up this evening and once again speak to the amendment on Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act. I guess I just want to start by reading from the dictionary the word

"freedom." It's always been hard for me to understand how we can have the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, yet it seems like it's the protection of information. Freedom: the power or right to act, speak, or think freely. That's the first one. Two, the state of being free, unrestricted use of something; three, the exemption or immunity from; four, the power of self-determination attributed to the will, the quality of being independent of fate or necessity. It seems to me that perhaps we're looking at number three or four there, the self-determination and the protection from having that information.

It's bothersome to be in the opposition and wanting to ask a question or get information only to be shut down by the Speaker or to not have access to that information. [interjection] The Speakers always kind of tended – and these things are going back a few years, and I'll grant that some have been a long time.

The information isn't there. It isn't available. It just seems wrong, Mr. Chairman. The purpose of government is to serve the people, and the only way we can serve the people is if we're open. There definitely is not an openness in this government, and this amendment to strike (4)(a) and (5) is very much – you have to ask the question: what could possibly be the purpose of those two clauses other than the protection or the exemption of accountability to the people? It seems very much like this is a shell game. Everybody has been to the circus or been to the street where there's a nut under the cup and whether or not you can follow it as this guy moves it fast enough. The number of times that ministers are moved, that portfolios are changed, that names are changed, it's impossible to know where the nut is and under which cup. They won't even lift them to let anybody look, and they say that it's not there.

Mr. Knight: We know where the nut is; we don't know where the cup is.

Mr. Hinman: Good. Keep focused on it, then, because you're going to lose it one day.

It seems like the purpose of this bill without this amendment is that if you make it difficult enough and if you make it cost enough or if you make them wait long enough, we'll be exempt because there'll be no one left to watch when the cups are finally lifted and you see what's been going on.

So I'm very much in favour of this amendment. I once again urge the people of this Assembly to look at it and realize what is the purpose of this Legislature. It's to serve the people. It's to be open and honest with the people. The people should be able to come in here and have a virtual tour not only of this building but of what goes on in this building. They don't have a virtual tour; they have no tour. To be able to hide information for five years: there's only one reason that anybody who is on the outside can see for that, and that's because they want to retain power, and they want to take something, manipulate it, take advantage of it.

In order to show your openness to want to help the people, have the doors open, have the notes open, have the information open. That way, people will have trust and faith and will support a government that they know is working for them. I would hope that we'd all look at this and accept this amendment for the benefit of Albertans throughout the province.

Thank you.

12:50

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In fact, it's a new chairman. It's nice to see you there.

It's my pleasure to speak to this particular amendment. I just want to expand a little further on what my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner was saying a minute ago. Recently in this House during question period the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has been pursuing a line of questioning related to the ring road in Edmonton and very questionable land purchases, I would submit, and then subsequent sales of land by this government. He has been chastised both by the minister responsible and at times by the Speaker for asking questions that are 20 years old.

One of the big concerns that we have here is that with some of the changes that are being recommended by this amendment to the FOIP legislation, we will not even have access to material. In this particular case it's five years. In other places in the bill it's 15 years. I can clearly foresee the day when, if I'm still fortunate enough to be in this Assembly, the members of the day are going to be asking questions of the government, and they're going to have the Speaker chastising them for asking questions that are 20 years old, and their answer is going to be that they didn't even have access to the information until that time. That is a scary thought.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I mean, the reality right now is that this particular line of questioning that I referred to goes back to the point where it's before the current Premier. What is being suggested by the amendments to the FOIP legislation is that in almost every case the questions would be going back to former Premiers because the access to the information would be so restricted that you wouldn't even have an opportunity to see it and develop questions, to write questions until in this case five years and in some cases 15 years. So it really, really is a regressive piece of legislation. Certainly, this amendment, if it were to pass, addresses that, and I think it once again moves us towards a much more open and transparent government, and that's what people want.

I was hoping to have had the opportunity to reference this during my budget debates this evening, and I didn't have the opportunity. The Federal Accountability Act is currently before the federal Parliament. My colleague reminds me, and it is true, that it has been tabled in this Legislature, the entire act, and it's a sessional paper, so it's readily referable by all members.

Some of the 13 points that are mentioned in here: strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner, toughening the Lobbyists Registration Act, ensuring truth in budgeting – that's the one that I particularly wanted to speak to this evening, and I could expand on it, but as I say, it's a sessional paper, and it's available for all to see – making qualified government appointments, cleaning up the procurement of government contracts, providing real protection for whistle-blowers, strengthening access to information legislation. That's the one I was looking for.

Mr. Chairman, the reality is that access to information at the federal level is already so much easier and so much less expensive than it is here in this province. We have the federal Tory cousins of this government increasing access to information, making it more available, more transparent, more accessible to the citizens of this country while at the same time their provincial Tory cousins here in this province are going backwards. We're going the other way. We're making it more restrictive.

One of the things that I really like is the idea of separating the access to information from the protection of privacy because what we find so often with this FOIP legislation is that it tends to be much more about protecting the government's privacy than it does the freedom of information. The idea of having the Information Commissioner separate from the Privacy Commissioner I think

would make great sense. Separate those two; separate the legislation. That would go a long way towards addressing some of the problems and difficulties that we in opposition have accessing information. It would go a long way towards addressing some of the difficulties that the media have in accessing information. Clearly, it would go a long way in terms of addressing the difficulties that citizens of this province have in accessing information.

So I applaud the moves that the federal government is making. By and large they mirror recommendations that my colleagues, including the Member for Edmonton-McClung, made in a written submission to – remind me of the name of the committee.

Mr. Elsalhy: The conflicts of interest committee.

Mr. R. Miller: The Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee received a written submission from the Official Opposition caucus which was surprisingly similar, as it turns out, to the election platform of the federal Tory cousins of this government and, in fact, surprisingly similar to the Federal Accountability Act, which is currently before the federal Parliament.

So I would certainly like very much to see this particular amendment passed. It would be refreshing given that every other amendment that we have had before us to this point on this Bill 20 has failed.

Mr. Elsalhy: Doesn't it surprise you that they don't even stand up and debate it?

Mr. R. Miller: I am surprised, actually, that it is only the Official Opposition that even has comments to offer on these amendments. By and large, we seldom don't even hear any sort of a rebuttal from members of the government.

Mr. Elsalhy: Because they don't care.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, I'm not so sure that it means that they don't care. Perhaps they just suspect that legislation should pass through this House without any comment or observation by members of the opposition at all. I know that we have a Premier who is on the record many times as saying that he doesn't believe that we need an opposition in this province. I'll be honest, Mr. Chair. I've heard some people in this province echo his sentiments, and that is probably the scariest thing I've heard in my lifetime, actually. We all know what happens when you have a government that has no opposition. We've seen many examples of it through history, and I don't think any of us wants to go there.

Frankly, I don't believe that the Premier really means that when he says it either. I certainly hope he doesn't mean it. [interjections] Well, I have some members telling me they disagree. They believe that perhaps he does believe it. I'm not sure, but it causes me concern any time I hear anybody say that because, as I say, we all know what happens when you have governments that don't have any opposition, and it's not a pretty sight.

In particular, now, this amendment would strike out subsection (4)(a), which is the one that says:

The right of access does not extend

- (a) to a record created solely for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council in respect of assuming responsibility for a ministry.

Then it also would take out subsection (5). This is the one that refers to

- a record described in that clause if 5 years or more has elapsed since the member of the Executive Council was appointed as the member responsible for the ministry.

Personally, I would have preferred to have seen the previous amendment passed, which would have struck the entire section (4) out of this bill. But if that's not going to happen – and clearly it won't because it's already been dealt with by this Legislature and has failed, as I said – I think the very least is to allow us access to these records that were provided for briefing.

1:00

I asked questions in question period today on a meeting of the Automobile Insurance Rate Board that was attended by the Finance Minister, and perhaps there was a briefing that took place there. I would like to know what business was discussed at that meeting, and I know for sure that many Albertans would like to know as well. So just one example, I suppose, Mr. Chairman, of access to information that is becoming more and more difficult as opposed to making it easier, more transparent, more accessible. As I say, that goes against the wishes of the people of this province, I believe, and it certainly goes against the trend of both the federal Parliament and other provincial Legislatures across this country.

With that, I would strongly recommend that the members of the government join those of us in opposition and extend at least in this one case a little more access and openness to not only members of the opposition but, as I said, to the media and particularly to individual citizens of this province.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. There have been a number of speakers in the opposition supporting this amendment to strike out subsection (4)(a) and subsection (5), and I just wanted to speak briefly on the record in supporting this amendment.

FOIP is one of those great, frustrating, should have been a great idea – and, boy, did it get perverted somewhere along the way – situations that we see develop with the government. I think most new governments coming into power talk a lot about openness and transparency, and certainly if they're coming from an opposition view, they understand exactly what that means.

I'm coming up to my 10th year here, and I tell you that when I started, I couldn't get any information. I spent an extraordinary amount of time just trying to find out basic stuff of what was happening in the ministry that I was responsible as a critic for. We weren't sent media releases. We weren't told about media conferences that were being called. You know, if you could manage to get down to this building and go by the doorway where the notices were posted, then you'd know about it, but if you were operating from any constituency office, I mean, you just didn't get that information. It didn't get faxed to you; that's for sure. The government put more effort into making sure we didn't know what was going on. Now at least with the advent of the web and every ministry having a website and regularly posting their media releases and calendars of events and public hearings and things that they're holding, it does make it easier for us to get at information, but when you go to other levels of information that the government has collected, the net closes very quickly. It's interesting how this government likes to put out that they are so transparent and open, yet being able to get at real information gets more and more difficult.

We've just done the Committee of Supply debates on all of the budgets, and I can tell you that the amount of information that's released in those budgets has decreased every single year. Now you just look at a series of line items. You have no idea what programs are covered in there, how many FTEs were assigned to them, all kinds of really important information if you're to be judging whether

this government is producing good value for the taxpayer dollar. You can't get that information.

Here we have another example in Bill 20 where the government is cutting off the flow of even more information, and really, information is the currency of democracy. It needs to circulate freely and to be widely shared in order to be useful to the economy of democracy, if you want to put it that way, and we get exactly the opposite out of this government. I would argue that that impairs the government's ability to do a good job and for its bureaucrats to implement the policies that the legislators develop, and it makes it much more difficult for the citizens to hold the government accountable.

You know, what goes around comes around, and what ends up happening is you end up with an electorate that is totally disengaged from what we do in this room because they can't understand it, they can't get the information for it and why should they pay attention to it, and then we have trouble with voter turnout. So it does all go around.

In this particular case this amendment is trying to restore the right of access to be able to examine basically the briefing books that are provided to Executive Council when they move into a particular ministry. Putting in place that there is a five-year clause, that you can't see the information until five years has passed, is just another way of cutting off information to the opposition, to the media, to members of the public, and to stakeholder groups in the community. I disagree with it absolutely, and I would urge everyone to support the hon. member's amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been trying to get up a couple of times. I'm speaking on amendment A4 as well, just for clarification.

You know what? It does seem pretty simple. When you do have a FOIP Act that is secret, why would you in fact put more regulations in there to make it more secret? Obviously, the government does have something to hide. It's pretty obvious.

I spoke to a couple of kids – kids we're talking; we're talking junior high, even high school – just about general facts, about the ability to be able to get information and how the government is supposed to provide that information. They talked about them being transparent and accountable, and they understood what transparency and accountability were. To be able to deny information for five years in one instance and up to 15 in the other they thought was completely ridiculous, and the question that came to their mind was: "Why? Why would they want to do this?" The question is: why? If this was such a great piece of legislation the first time, why was this not included? This would never have passed to this stage already. When it came in about four years ago, citizens had their concerns about FOIP. Now, four years later, we're talking about even more prohibitive information being sought, and people are not going to be able to get it.

We had a couple of instances just a little while ago when people tried to in fact get airplane logs. Well, we were given the run around the terminal because it was a big deal. It was secret. That's just ridiculous. Then today in the session we asked about a \$900 food tab at a restaurant for approximately 12 people. It's not the cost of the tab. The point of it was that it came out as just a receipt with no explanation. When you're on the public purse, you need to have accountability. Citizens are paying the tab here. They go to the polls. They're expecting to have leadership, leadership in the form

of democracy, leadership in the form of transparency, leadership above and beyond what the average citizen, in fact, is accountable to.

Mr. Elsalhy: Honesty.

Mr. Bonko: Yeah. They're asking for honesty.

The basic principle that people want is to be able to trust their government. There was a poll and government came at the very bottom. Used car salespeople came ahead of politicians, and that's exactly the reason why. When you have bills like this that prohibit people from getting any information, why do you trust them?

Mr. Elsalhy: It wouldn't be acceptable.

Mr. Bonko: No. It wouldn't be acceptable anywhere else.

I do support amendment A4 that was brought forward by the member this evening, which would strike out two sections, (4)(a) as well as subsection (5), which would again lead to the outrageous amount of time that one would have to wait. Fifteen years. Like I said the other night, that's the entire government that this one has been operating for. That's like four elections. How many times can one go to the polls and hold their nose and vote and think that they are in fact getting good money for the whole piece of it?

The whole thing, Mr. Chairman, is that I ran, and one of my platforms was accountability. So far I feel that I have been accountable to my electorate. That's why I'm here at this hour, because I don't believe this is good government legislation that's going through. I think that people need to know that this is the type of stuff that does try and go through in the wee hours because most people are asleep. Most people aren't listening. They're asleep, and they're hoping that people are watching over them. We are watching over them and over their rights. In fact, when you wake up the next morning and find out that legislation has gone through that restricts information for five and up to 15 years, that's just ridiculous.

I think that those comments should in fact be on the record and encourage people to support it. We talked about the third way and how people could see an actual effect on their lives. They may not see the effect now, but later on the effect will be there when they need to have information or they start asking more questions. We have a younger and younger population that's coming up that's inquisitive, that, in fact, is more engaged in politics now than ever before. They're not old enough to vote, but if they were, I could see them saying that they would not vote for this particular piece here this evening.

1:10

An Hon. Member: Are you sure?

Mr. Bonko: Absolutely. I'm sure they would not.

An Hon. Member: Who would they vote for?

Mr. Bonko: Well, they wouldn't vote for the legislation if it was just the legislation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has the floor.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would, in fact, ask, because I'm going to speak just a little bit longer just to get this particular piece out. If the division bells are triggered, I would ask that we do shorten the debate from 10 minutes to two. That would

be the Standing Order 32(2.1) then, and that's for unanimous consent on this particular piece.

The Chair: You move that the bells be shortened from 10 minutes to two. Is that correct?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: Are you ready for the question? The hon Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Chair, I'm going to repeat what I've said every time they've stood up to comment on these sections. I hope this time that they hear me and that they understand. By the way they're talking, you would think that we're hiding everything in this government forever. What we're doing is: we're simply making the briefing books of the minister, who are new ministers for a new session, unavailable for five years. After that they are available. They're opened up to the public. The public can look at them and see whether or not we were hiding whatever they're talking about over there; I have no idea. I believe that because of that, because they are accessible in five years, that we should not accept their amendment. [interjections]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North has the floor.

Mrs. Jablonski: I listened to them, Mr. Chair, but I guess that they're having a hard time hearing what I'm trying to say. The records of the chief internal auditor are available to the Auditor General whenever he requests them and whenever he wants them. The Auditor General represents the interests of the people of Alberta, and nothing is hidden from him.

Mr. Chairman, for those reasons these amendments are not necessary.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I beg to differ with my hon. colleague from Red Deer-North. I'm looking at a release from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner dated March 8, 2006, and I'll quote just part of it. He says:

The Commissioner, however, cannot support a proposal to exclude Briefing Books from application of the Act. "This has never been an issue for this Office in the past. This amendment could be a very significant exception to disclosure. We already have a section of the Act which quite clearly establishes the ability to withhold advice given by officials and this particular amendment is not necessary."

That's from the commissioner.

Now, a noted political scientist in our province, Professor McCormick, from the University of Lethbridge, has some comments as well on what the government is trying to do. He said: this sounds like every secretive government's dream; this is a government that always likes to say it is in favour of freedom of information, but freedom of information is always a risk for a government; so what they want to do is look as transparent as they can while being as untransparent as they can, and that way they don't get burned.

Mr. Chairman, that sort of sums up my view. This amendment will remove from the act the specific aspects of the act that the commissioner does not support. He has said very clearly that it's unnecessary, that it's already dealt with, and it is not necessary.

So what does the Minister of Government Services say is the rationale for this? The Government Services minister has defended the proposed changes. This is the minister responsible. The minister

said that staff briefing notes and the internal auditor's records contain advice that a minister may reject and that that is why it should be kept secret: because it has an alternate view. It has something that the government has not done. It has received advice from its department, and it's chosen to do something else. Well, usually that's for some political motivation, Mr. Chairman. There's usually a political reason why a government rejects advice that it receives from its own administration.

So that's, as far as this government is concerned, the real reason why we have to exclude these things from freedom of information. The public might know what was suggested to the government might be the most appropriate course, and we can't have that, Mr. Chairman, because that might inform the public as to what the government is doing, what the government spin is, and so on.

I think, Mr. Chairman, the government is clearly trying to hide objective information that the public should know so that they can compare that information about what the government ought to do with what the government actually does, and that will help people divine the political motivations behind government decisions. That's what the government does not want to see. That is why they are making these changes in this act. That is why they're making this most secretive government even more secretive.

You know, it's interesting, Mr. Chairman. When I go out and go shopping at the grocery store or out in the community and so on, most people don't know about this bill, but when you tell them about it, they say: well, what does it mean? Well, basically you tell them that what it means is that the government is giving itself more reasons to keep information secret. They get angry. I'm very surprised at how much of an issue this is for Albertans. Even though many Albertans are not aware of this bill and what the government is doing – and no wonder; look at the time of day that we've been debating it for for the last week or so – when they find out about it, they're angry because the trend is against this. The trend we're seeing in Ottawa, the trend we're seeing across the country is not being reflected in this bill. The trend is to more openness and the public asserting its right to have access to its information and to disallow governments from hiding information from the public in order to serve their own political ends.

Mr. Chairman, FOIP has entered the lexicon of Alberta. When you say "to FOIP," it is a verb. It's an adjective. It's part of the language. But I've got a new definition for FOIP. F-O-I-P stands for: frequent opacity is prevalent. That pretty much sums up this bill.

So I urge hon. members to support this amendment and will remind them that this amendment is consistent with a recommendation of the freedom of information commissioner, who is against this clause of the bill. This amendment will take it out of the bill and make the bill consistent with the commissioner's view of what protections the public requires.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This will be my last time to speak on this particular amendment as well. I heard the Member for Red Deer-North trying to explain the reasons for this, but I haven't heard anything. It was a futile defence, in fact, of a weak bill. I think most people talk about crimes taking place in the evening. Well, the passing of this bill would certainly be a crime against Albertans who, in fact, put their whole trust in the government to do the right thing.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood talked about his interpretation of F-O-I-P, and it certainly isn't freedom of informa-

tion. It's more like: fork off; it's private. We all know what I'm talking about. It's basically: "Mind your own business. This is government business. You have no reason to need it." That's why you put cost-restrictive pieces on it, and that's why we're making it more and more secretive as this government goes along.

Mr. Elsalhy: It's a crime.

Mr. Bonko: It is a crime. Absolutely it is.

So I will thank you for that last comment then, Mr. Chairman.

1:20

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:21 a.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Hinman	Miller, R.
Bonko	Mason	Tougas
Elsalhy		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Graydon	McClellan
Ady	Groeneveld	McFarland
Amery	Haley	Mitzel
Boutilier	Horne	Morton
Brown	Jablonski	Pham
Cao	Knight	Renner
Cardinal	Lindsay	Stevens
Danyluk	Lougheed	Tarchuk
DeLong	Mar	

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 26
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[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Are there any other comments or amendments? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. I move that we adjourn debate with respect to Bill 20.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 31 and progress on Bill 20.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 31. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 20. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour and the significant progress made this evening, I move that we now adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 1:28 a.m. on Thursday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, May 11, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you 22 home-schoolers from Neerlandia in the constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. They are accompanied this afternoon by Joy Wierenga, Beatrice Tiemstra, Ina Hofstede, John Wierenga, and John Harink. They are seated in the gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Madeleine Jacobi, who is the Athabasca Rotary exchange student from Sweden. Her parents, Lars and Ann-Mari, are also here. They are accompanied by the host parents, Dan and Lorna Dennis. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to once again introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly probably one of the most faithful school groups that we have visiting the Legislature. Crestwood school has visited our Legislature every year of the 13 that I've been an MLA, and I know that they had a tradition long before I was elected. Although they may not have the most visits, I would venture to say that if a hardship factor was put in place for whoever drove the most kilometres, at a thousand kilometres per round trip, this group has put in well over 20,000 kilometres coming to visit us here at the Legislature. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. I would like to introduce to you two grade 6 classes from Crestwood elementary school accompanied by principal Mr. David George, vice-principal Al Tisnic, teachers Maria Thompson, Wade Lawson, Wendy Smid, Gary Ziel, and Kathy Western, also parent helpers Shawn Carry, Darren Pederson, and Sandy Noble. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have two introductions. First, I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the Alberta War Brides Association. This year, 2006, is the Year of the War Bride, marking the

60th anniversary of the war brides' arrival in Canada. In 1946 nearly 40,000 war brides and their children landed at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, from Britain and Europe on board special war bride ships. Organized and funded by the federal Department of National Defence, the war bride phenomenon is unique in immigration history. From Halifax they fanned out across Canada on many war bride trains. Perhaps just as compelling a story is the war brides' collective experience of meeting and falling in love with Canadian servicemen abroad. I have in my own family an example of that. My aunt met an Australian serviceman and actually was a war bride to Australia.

With us today are 12 war brides accompanied by their aides and loved ones, led by Mrs. Jeanne Pfannmuller, who is the social convenor for the Edmonton chapter of the Alberta War Brides Association. A number of the brides were unable to join us today due to illness and influenza. Those with us today are Jean Bruce, Josephine Campbell, June Dorn, Renda Grumetza accompanied by her daughter Rhonas Grumetza, Heather Heninger, Kit Kelly, Margery Paige accompanied by her daughter Arlene Kozuback, Edna Squarok, Sybil VanSickle, who is president of the Alberta War Brides Association Edmonton chapter, Olive Wadson, and Hetty Wear accompanied by her daughter Eileen Wear. I'd ask that our honoured visitors please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

I'm also pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly family members and friends of one of our pages, Jennifer Huygen. Seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is Susan Huygen, proud mother of Jennifer. Accompanying her are Nicole Huygen, Jennifer's younger sister; and Thomas L'Abbe and Lacey Suen, both friends of Jennifer's. Susan, Nicole, and Jennifer live in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. I think it's only appropriate to take a moment to say, when her mother and sister are here, how proud we are of Jennifer and of all our pages and the great work that they do for us in this Assembly. What fine young people they are. I thank the Assembly for the traditional warm welcome for our guests.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, on behalf of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, 35 people from the special town of Wainwright. They are here today with their teachers Mrs. Michelle Folk, Mr. Sheldon Gallagher, and Ms Janet Kaye and parent helpers Mrs. Jean Watson, Mrs. Cheryl Heier, Mr. Denis Mailloux, and Mrs. Dawn Worthington. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. First of all, it's a privilege to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Mel and Joan Teghtmeyer. Mel and Joan are two of Alberta's most committed and persistent activists. They're very interested in alternative ways of decision-making at the government level. They're calling for open and accountable government, ethical leadership, corporate responsibility. Believe me, they pursue those interests with passion and intelligence. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

My other introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Miss Jill Piebiak, my constituency office's summer STEP student. She'll be entering her

third year of political science at the U of A in the fall. Not surprisingly, she has a keen interest in Alberta and Canadian history and politics and hopes to continue studying these areas as a postgraduate student. She spends volunteer time with the United Church youth of Canada, leading many of their provincial events. I know that she is going to be a real asset to my office in Edmonton-Riverview. I welcome her on board and ask all members here to please give her a warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Meagan Hazlewood, our summer STEP student, back for a second year. She is taking interior design at NAIT and did a number of wonderful graphics last year for the Queen's visit. She is involved with the youth part of the party, attending our convention in June. Would she please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six wonderful people. They are Ajaib Singh Cheema from England, Mukhtiar Singh Dosanjh, Jaswinder Singh Dosanjh, Surjit Singh Dosanjh, Raghbir Khubar, Sharnjit Dosanjh. They are here this afternoon to tour the Legislature. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly some of the many wonderful mothers of our caucus and constituency staff. Today we celebrated Mother's Day at a luncheon as a way of thanking our mothers for their wisdom, their love, their generosity, and most of all their support. We all recognize that our mothers have helped build this great province through their hard work and commitment to our communities. I would therefore now ask that each of them rise as I call out their names: Louise Hicks-LaChapelle, mother of administration assistant Alison Crawford; Aruna Sharma, mother of outreach coordinator Anand Sharma; Leah Andruchow, mother-in-law of communications director Tina Faiz and mother of Rob Andruchow; Sharon Flanagan Dubé, mother of Marieke Dubé, sessional research assistant; Angela Andreychuk, mother of constituency assistant Kris Andreychuk; Herta Schymizek, mother of chief of staff Sherry McKibben; Sylvia Flood; Bettianne Hayward, grandmother of STEP assistant Beth Hayward; and Marion Eggen, mother of the Member for Edmonton-Calder. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly delighted and honoured to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very special guest today, John Kolkman. John has been caucus research director over the little more than nine years that I have

spent in this Assembly and as part of the NDP caucus. John also served, I understand, between 1989 and 1993, when my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was the Leader of the Official Opposition. Unfortunately for us, John will be leaving to pursue other opportunities and endeavours. I want to take this opportunity to offer my special thanks to John for the most valued advice, wise counsel, and sometimes firm reminders over the years about not doing this or doing that. I would now ask John to please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly gives me great privilege and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Gary Horan. Gary is a staunch and long-time Progressive Conservative Party member, who previously served as the president of the Alberta Alliance Party and gave up this position to return to the PC Party of Alberta and subsequently ran for Senator-in-waiting in Alberta. Gary is presently working with me. I would ask Gary to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Confidentiality of Ministerial Briefing Notes

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Conservative government has long, long been known for its secrecy. In 2004 it won the code of silence award from the Canadian Association of Journalists for being the most secretive government in Canada. Now government legislation threatens to even further restrict the freedom of information process by withholding ministerial briefings for five years, an amendment even the Privacy Commissioner is opposed to. It's the Premier's legacy of government: silence. My questions are in fact to the Premier. Given that a review conducted by an all-party legislative committee in 2002 made 62 recommendations, none of which included restricting ministerial briefings, will the Premier admit that this amendment is aimed at further protecting government ministers from public scrutiny?

Mr. Klein: No, Mr. Speaker, I won't admit that. It's to protect this book. There is no way in the world that you or you or you or anyone over there is going to get this book.

You know, there was an ND – he was a very good ND; he was a critic – John McInnis. He has since passed away, Mr. Speaker, so I can mention his name. One day down in the gym he said: would you just pass along to me your briefing book? And I said: sure. Then Vance MacNichol, who was my deputy at that time, said: did you really promise John McInnis that he could have your briefing book? He said: “Do you understand that in this briefing book there is very sensitive advice to the minister” – I was Minister of Environment at that time – “very sensitive advice that the opposition would love to get their hands on? They would love to get their hands on it.”

Mr. Speaker, this is sensitive and confidential advice to a minister or the Premier, and it will remain that way.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the taxpayers have paid for that book to be prepared, what secrets are in it that the public should not be informed of?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would remind all Albertans that they are getting paid to do nothing more than criticize the government.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: is the creation of a more restricted, secretive freedom of information process really the legacy that this Premier wants to leave the people of Alberta?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I want to leave a legacy of good government. That's the only legacy I want to leave. But I also want to make sure that ministers are protected relative to the advice they receive from senior government officials.

Now, when the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition worked for the government, he was very careful about providing advice to the minister. But then after he found out that the minister didn't accept his advice, he quit and wrote a book. And he's entitled to do that. [interjections] I'll tell you what, he can give it to the NDs.

This information, Mr. Speaker, is confidential now under the existing rules and will remain confidential.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Budget Process

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A report released yesterday by one of the Premier's favourite think tanks, the Parkland Institute, has confirmed what opposition parties and political observers have long known: that this Tory government treats public revenues like a partisan piggy bank; that the public, media, and opposition representatives are shut out of the budgeting process; and, most importantly, that the Tory government has no coherent plan to take advantage of Alberta's remarkable resources. It is time for a change. My question to the Premier: in the wake of this damning report, will the Premier at least go on record and recommend what the Alberta Liberals have long been committed to; namely, an end to the PC-only budget process, that shuts out the views of a majority of Albertans?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm always happy to receive the advice of a left-wing think tank. The report was entitled Fiscal Surplus, Democratic Deficit.

1:50

Mr. MacDonald: Does anyone work for a right-wing think tank?

Mr. Klein: The right-wing think tanks, in answer to his question, are at least more accurate in their predictions.

If the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition would turn to pages 100 and 101 of the government's fiscal plan – and this is a public document – you will see a list of private-sector forecasts for oil and gas. At the bottom of each of these pages you will also see how well these private organizations did at predicting oil and gas prices. Mr. Speaker, I would put my stock in the private-sector predictors instead of the Parkland Institute any day.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier commit, as I am prepared to commit, to creating an all-party committee of the Legislature to conduct public hearings on Alberta's budgetary process?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we have gone through a series of public hearings on all kinds of revenue/surplus situations: It's Your Future, Water for Life, the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, A Learning Alberta: Dialogue and Direction. The list of public consultations goes on and on.

I have to explain, Mr. Speaker. This is not a top-down government, unlike the Liberals, who want to control everything. They want to control the lives and the minds of all Albertans, but we give Albertans credit for being able to think for themselves, unlike the Liberals and the NDs.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: will the Premier join the Alberta Liberals in a commitment to increasing the mandate and authority of the Legislature's Public Accounts Committee, much like its federal counterpart, in order to increase legislative oversight of government spending?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee, which is chaired by an opposition member, can ask any questions they want of any minister. Believe me, I go through it. My ministers go through it. Nothing relates – nothing relates to the issue at hand, which is the expenditures of the last year. They go all over the place. In other words, they should bring their fishing rods because they're on a fishing trip.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Lottery-funded Grant Presentation Cheques

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Tory government continues to blur the line between nonpartisan government and partisan Conservatives. Lottery money is Albertans' money, not Conservatives' money. Yesterday in Public Accounts, in response to the Member for Calgary-Varsity the Gaming minister put an end to the Tory MLAs signing novelty cheques for photo ops in their constituencies.* I have only two questions, the first one to the Minister of Community Development. Now that the Gaming minister has banned partisan cheque presentations in his department, will the minister follow the lead with the cheque presentation for Wild Rose and other lottery foundations?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, on many occasions as the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake I've had the opportunity to meet with various groups that have applied for different grants in terms of being able to provide some good services and venues for Albertans to use into the future. It's symbolic when a cheque goes forward, in terms of a photo op, to show that the community has worked hard in terms of raising their funds. I think it's just part of the process in terms of acknowledging the hard work that volunteers in Alberta have done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Premier. In that backbench Tory MLAs have on at least two occasions given out novelty cheques with their signatures on them for expansion of seniors' centres, will the Premier put an end to this practice?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, no, I won't put an end to that practice. The CFEP grants are available to members of the opposi-

*See p. 1521, right col., para. 8

tion, as they are to government members. I'm sure that the hon. member benefits to a great extent in his own constituency from CFEP grants and all the community facilities that are built in his constituency by those grants.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Health Care Privatization

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans should heave another sigh of relief that the Conservative government has decided not to even bother introducing its third-way lite legislation this spring. The problem is that this government always wants to go down the failed road of delisting, user fees, and further privatization. The result of these dead-end approaches has been a complete paralysis on the part of the government when it comes to health care policy. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that the dead end of privatization has resulted in a paralysis of the government when it comes to health care policy? And will he admit and will he tell the House what we all know, and that is that no third-way legislation will be introduced in this session at all despite the minister's promise that that would happen?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the health care debate will never come to an end, not as long as health care costs continue to rise at the rate of over 9 per cent per year. The only solution that has been offered by the NDs, by the way, is to throw more money at it. They think that the money just falls from the sky. You know, we're already up to \$10 billion, and they say: oh, well, just throw more money at it.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of throwing money at things, I was listening yesterday to the radio, and I heard the hon. leader of the third party advertising: no way to the third way. Well, why would they be spending money on ads that are totally and absolutely redundant?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker, but as long as this Premier is still around, we're not going to rest.

Will the Premier admit that privatization of health care is a political and policy dead end, and will he commit himself to going down the direction of public health care?

Mr. Klein: No. No, I won't admit that, and I won't admit that Canada should be the same as only two or maybe three other jurisdictions. I don't know about Albania, but I do know about Cuba and North Korea. There has to be a better way. If the hon. member has a better way, send it over.

Mr. Mason: We're still waiting for the government's better way, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Premier commit as his legacy to improving public health care in this province through innovation and just good ideas within the public system?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's easy for the hon. member to say "good ideas." He had one idea, and we're working on that nationally. That's a national drug program. We're looking at reducing administrative costs, understanding that about 75 per cent of costs are wrapped up in salaries, many of them union salaries supported by the NDs.

Mr. Speaker, we're trying to find innovative ways to address this very serious problem. Obviously, through their misinformation and their campaign of misinformation we were forced to withdraw some contentious components of the third way, the result of their misinformation.

2:00

I'll give you an example of the misinformation that they're promoting, that people glom onto. A fellow wrote a letter to the editor of one of the Calgary papers. It was a Mr. Huck. He wrote about Granny breaking her hip. He implied in his letter to the editor that Granny would have to pay \$50,000 to have her hip repaired. Well, if she fell and broke her hip, she would be treated immediately. If she went to a doctor and the doctor said, "Well, it's not an emergency, so you might have to wait three or four years or a year and a half," but it was causing her pain, then she would have the option of waiting for that hip replacement in the public system or buying insurance or paying out of her pocket, Mr. Speaker.

But it was absolutely wrong and false to say that Granny would have to wait if she fell and broke her hip. That is the kind of misinformation that the NDs were spreading.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Municipal Financing

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given the urgent need for municipalities to fund critical infrastructure projects and in light of the fact that the provincial government has already taken an important first step in establishing the Alberta municipal infrastructure fund to address the infrastructure backlog, will the minister consider a longer term, sustainable solution to provide municipalities in Alberta with the financial resources to handle their responsibilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member brings to the attention of the House something that's very near and dear to the hearts of municipalities throughout the province. He points out that the \$3 billion commitment that this province made to municipalities to deal with infrastructure is a five-year commitment. Municipalities need a long-term, sustainable source of funding if they're going to continue to maintain their infrastructure and catch up on some of the backlog.

Ever since I became minister, I have been engaged in discussion with municipalities on how we're going to establish that long-term, sustainable source of funding. As I've mentioned before in the House, Mr. Speaker, at present I'm engaged with the minister's council, which is representatives of various municipal organizations in the province, to define what the roles and responsibilities of municipalities are, and then we will get into the long-term, sustainable source of funding to deal with those roles and responsibilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you Mr. Minister. Based on negotiating these defined sets of roles and responsibilities between the municipalities and the province, would the province consider vacating the \$1.45 billion of education property tax while at the same time balancing this by decreasing grants to the municipalities?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that's one of the options that the council is in fact considering. Is it feasible? Is it possible for the province to find an alternate way to fund education, leaving some tax room, in essence, for municipalities? Those are the issues that can be more fully discussed once we've got the agreement on what the roles and responsibilities are.

I think it's important that at the end of the day there needs to be a win-win-win. Simply transferring tax revenue from one pocket and one level of government to another level of the government isn't really seen by the taxpayer as being particularly beneficial. So we also have to figure out a way in this formula that the taxpayer can have some direct benefit as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and Mr. Minister. My last question is: will you consider and commit to bringing forward in the next year a strategic plan to coincide with budget planning to identify how and when the province will vacate the property taxes and allow municipal governments to plan for their infrastructure needs for the upcoming future?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I've asked the minister's council to be completed their work by this fall. The reason for that is that it then will allow their recommendations to be incorporated into our fiscal planning. I cannot commit that this particular option will be the one that we go forward with, but certainly what I will commit to is that once the minister's council has finalized and put their work together, we will make every effort to implement that plan as expeditiously as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Healthy Living Initiative

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier announced that the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge have initiated an innovative partnership to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent disease. The pan-Alberta public health coalition is designed to focus on healthy living programs to reduce obesity, manage chronic conditions, and train more public health officers. This project has the potential to greatly increase the health of Albertans but only if it receives the necessary support. My questions are to the Premier. Given that health promotion is exactly what we need to do to reduce costs and ensure sustainability in our health care system, what is the government's reasoning for not funding this initiative?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, this is an initiative of the three universities. I had the opportunity to attend yesterday at the University of Alberta. There was a video link to the U of C, and the president of the U of L was there in person. There was no mention whatsoever by Indira Samarasekera of the University of Alberta and no mention by Harvey Weingarten of the University of Calgary, nor was there mention by Bill Cade, the president of the University of Lethbridge, of any funding for this particular issue. Now, if they submit a business case to the Minister of Advanced Education, I'm sure it will be taken under advisement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: well, given that the former Deputy Minister of Health, currently the interim dean of

the U of A School of Public Health, one of the partners in this project, has stated that \$20 million is needed for Edmonton, why was his recommendation ignored?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, Roger Palmer was there as well, and indeed he acted as the master of ceremonies. That is the person to whom the hon. member alludes. He didn't mention to me any need for any cash at all. As I say, if they want to present us with a business case, we'll take it under consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that this government chose to reduce funding for the tobacco reduction strategy and has abdicated from funding hot lunch programs for schools, is the Premier adding this initiative to the growing list of examples of this government saying one thing and doing another?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we fulfill our commitment to a healthy lifestyle by actions. I don't see any members of the Liberal caucus in the gym. I'm there every day. But I see them at Martini's, you know, supping on steak sandwiches. Some people see them at Martini's, not me. I don't go there; I just hear that they're there and the NDs as well. Oh, I see one in the gym, that being the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. I see him from time to time, but I don't see any Liberals ever in the gym, and I work out every day. I do my five kilometres; I feel better for it.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there is a comment – the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations said once to a reporter, "Boy, I had my workout, and I feel really good." The reporter responded: "Yeah. I went to Martini's. I had a steak sandwich and a couple of beers, and I feel good too."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:10

Electricity Billing

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of mine are concerned with the practice of electricity retailers using estimated meter readings for billing purposes. They are concerned that when estimates are used, they are usually based on consumption that is higher than actual usage. One constituent compared this inaccuracy to a 30-day loan to the energy marketer. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Changes to the regulated rate option come into effect in July 2006 and could result in energy rates fluctuating monthly. How can consumers be assured that billing errors resulting from incorrect estimates will be corrected based on the appropriate energy rate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct that last year there were some policy changes in respect to how the regulated rate option was designed. Those continue to be implemented over the next number of years. July 1 of this year is the first stage of implementation.

One of the other things that's happened in companion to that is that the Energy and Utilities Board has put a tariff billing code in place that will also come into effect in July of this year. That will bring out some very precise practices that will be required for both estimated and actual billings. So that should address the particular question that he's raised.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Will these new invoices provide enough clarity that consumers will understand how these corrections are calculated?

Mr. Melchin: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, when it comes to electricity, as with all industries it is really quite complicated in detail, but to bring it down to a simpler understanding for the public, there are two primary elements on a bill. One is for energy usage. The other is for the delivery charges. There are obviously some more details related to each of those components. What will happen is that there will be a requirement that the rates that will be prevalent for that month for an estimation, those estimated amounts will be charged at the appropriate rate for consumption during that month, and then it will be adjusted when the actual reading is done on a bi-monthly basis.

Mr. Lindsay: My second supplemental to the same minister: for the purposes of clarity and accuracy will the minister make the necessary changes to ensure that bills for electricity are based on actual meter readings?

Mr. Melchin: Optimally, Mr. Speaker, it would be great if all billings could be based on actuals every month. The challenge for that is a cost question for everybody, too. So the practice is that every other month there's an actual reading. It is a tremendous cost to go out to read those meters and record that information on a monthly basis. It would actually add additional cost, that people would pay in the long run, than having it done on a bi-monthly basis. So it's in balancing that that it was decided that for the most practical and cost-efficient means every other month would be sufficient.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Kindergarten Programs

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Early childhood education has been abandoned in the '06-07 budget. We all know that early intervention gives children a greater chance of succeeding in school and life. The Education minister knows this by his past statements in the House. Will the Education minister answer his own questions from 1999 when he was sitting as a Liberal member? My question to the Minister of Education: given that the minister asked for sufficient support for a "fair and even head start in learning," why won't he fund these programs across the province today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to tell you that since I've been sent over to the government side by my constituents, we have put \$241 million toward this particular initiative.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, Mr. Speaker, is the minister prepared to undertake a review of the early childhood education program, which was a critical "priority" item for him in 1999?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it still is a priority, and it always has been a priority. The simple fact is that all we're saying is that we're not making it mandatory. We're not forcing it onto jurisdictions. We have locally elected school board trustees for a reason. We have them there to make local decisions. Not every part of this province wants a forced kindergarten program. Not every part of this

province wants a forced program for 4-year-olds in a pre-kindergarten either, but for those who wish to provide it, we help them with the funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the level of support that the current Education minister had for early childhood education, can he explain why full-day and junior kindergarten remain unfunded in the '06-07 budget? Can he explain to us why not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, you know, they've got to get better researchers. They just have to. They used to have them. I can attest to that. It's either that or the member doesn't understand how numbers work at all.

We do have program funding to help with both junior K and K in those jurisdictions who wish to provide those programs, and they provide them, some of them on a weekly basis, some of them on a part-time basis, every second day, or whatever. If he looks even with his own eyeglasses into the budget in '06-07, he'll see that the money is there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Workers' Compensation Board Dividends

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the WCB has realized an exceptional return on their investments over the most current reporting period. My question today is for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister share with the House exactly what the WCB plans to do with these windfall funds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. I believe that workers' compensation is very, very important to Alberta with a hot, booming economy under a good government. What Workers' Compensation does is very important. The policy of Workers' Compensation is to issue dividends to employers in certain circumstances. The reason employers received a dividend is because the funds invested came from monies paid by the employers. Of course, the guiding principle of the Workers' Compensation funding policy is to ensure that there is always sufficient money to continue operating the program from year to year because the economy could change, revenues could change. Although health and safety is not a legislated mandate for Workers' Compensation, they are also directed that portions of the money go towards safety programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: do all employers receive a share of this return on investment made by the WCB, and does the WCB place any restrictions on where employers can spend this money that they received from this dividend?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's another very good question. This process, I guess, is basically a reward for good practices and good safety programs. All employers receive a

share of the dividend unless they have a history of poor health and safety programs with the Workers' Compensation Board, they pay a premium of less than \$100, they did not complete their annual returns, or they are in arrears in their payments. The employers are free – and that's the main part of the question – to spend the dividend money wherever they want, but we encourage them to reinvest in other work safety programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: in light of this, how do Alberta's WCB rates compare with other jurisdictions?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, we are the best in the universe. We're definitely the best in North America and in Canada. The rates, of course, are the lowest anywhere in Canada. More good news on Friday, I believe. Stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Ethics in Government

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As executive director of the electricity unit at Alberta's Department of Energy, Kellan Fluckiger has undertaken a number of policy initiatives that have proven to be of financial benefit to AltaLink, the province's largest transmission company. Kellan Fluckiger's spouse is AltaLink's senior vice-president of regulatory and client services. Now, the province's code of conduct and ethics for public servants states that employees are in conflict of interest and in violation of this Code if they:

- (a) take part in a decision in the course of carrying out their duties, knowing that the decision might further a private interest of the employee, their spouse or minor child.

The Minister of Energy confirmed that the government is aware of Mr. Fluckiger's circumstances but has failed, in my opinion, to clear this matter with the Ethics Commissioner. My first question is to the minister. Given that the Department of Energy has suspended the bidding process for transmission projects, the majority of which will now be assigned to AltaLink, how is Kellan Fluckiger not in conflict of the province's code of conduct and ethics for public servants?

2:20

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first set the record straight with respect to Mr. Fluckiger, who continues to be mischaracterized in what has happened. From day one, before any contracts were put forward, the Ethics Commissioner – all of those things were reviewed as to his circumstance and certainly understood and approved. So this has all been vetted. It's made sure that it has been public and transparent. Therefore, in that case that first duty has been met.

Secondly, with respect to assigning of building of transmission lines, it's the Energy and Utilities Board and AESO, Alberta Electric System Operator, that go through the needs and application and assign it to the transmission facility operator in the area.

So it isn't anything to do with our department that makes that question and no conflict in particular to Mr. Fluckiger.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the Department of Energy has intervened in an Energy and Utilities Board, EUB, hearing to actively support a \$339

million expansion by AltaLink, how is Kellan Fluckiger not in conflict of the province's code of conduct and ethics for public servants?

Mr. Melchin: In this case, first off, the assignment was made by both the Alberta Electric System Operator and Alberta Energy and Utilities Board as to AltaLink being assigned to develop this line. It is in the department's interest and Albertans' interest, which we support, after it has been developed through these other boards to ensure that we have the transmission capacity in line to get electricity reliably, predictably, and on time to all of us when we need it. Therefore, it is incumbent upon our department to represent why it is the urgent need of the citizens of Alberta to see that transmission capacity is built not just in that one corridor but in a number of places where there is high growth in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the Department of Energy has exempted companies such as AltaLink from the generic rate of return that is imposed on other regulated utilities, how is Mr. Kellan Fluckiger not in conflict with the province's code of conduct and ethics for the public servants?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, first off, that decision as to rates of return or not on transmission is fully regulated, always has been regulated, and it goes through those appropriate bodies. The independent Alberta Energy and Utilities Board sets and approves and adjudicates those questions. It has nothing to do with the Department of Energy, not myself, not the deputy minister, not in this case Mr. Fluckiger in his capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The impact that coal-bed methane development is having on our land and water far outweighs the modest volumes of gas being produced. The jury is very much out as to whether the societal benefits of trying to mine natural gas from coal seams is worth the environmental and health trade-offs that it presents. The jury is also out whether the Conservative embrace of the recommendations will have an effect on anything besides PR spin. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Why does this minister think that the thousands of residents who are meeting in community halls throughout the province in central Alberta are wrong when they say that there's too much coal-bed methane activity on their land?

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. I think – and I'm sure the hon. member agrees – that it's incumbent upon all of us to deal with fact. As much as all of us can go to a Tim Hortons and determine opinions on certain things – and I'm very pleased to say that the multistakeholder group that was very forward-thinking said: we are going to base our decisions on fact, on science-based research. Now, that's what we're doing effective May 1. In other words, before anyone can determine if they can get an EUB licence, they have to satisfy Alberta Environment as a regulator. They have to do the baseline testing. That is a recommendation, and it is the law. What that baseline testing means is that it will take the opinion and we will formulate it into what the science says. I do think – and I'm sure

that the hon. member agrees: don't you think that it is very responsible for us to be using science and facts to make our decisions? That's exactly what the recommendations are, and that's why we acted on them well before they even have become public.

Mr. Eggen: Well, the hon. member has a lot of convincing to do to residents in central Alberta.

I would like to ask him: why is the protection of air, land, and water once again playing second fiddle to the bottom lines of energy companies wanting to profit from the exploitation of coal-bed methane?

Mr. Boutilier: Hon. member, there is some uncertainty out there by residents of what it is when someone goes around – I don't say this to, actually, the New Democrats, but I know that the Liberal Environment critic has been out there fearmongering relative to what is all wrong, and that is wrong. The reason why I say it's wrong: I thought the hon. member and all Albertans agree that we want to do what is right to in fact protect our water. We're taking that action, but to take a group of people with no knowledge at all and start fearmongering to them is irresponsible and wrong, and we will never do that. What we will do is deal with facts, science-based facts. In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing because it is our duty to Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. member, just so the House knows, there was a point of order raised in the last exchange, and we'll deal with it at the conclusion of the Routine debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that there are many legitimate complaints from central Alberta farmers and residents that do deserve something more than the empty rhetoric that is being presented here.

Why doesn't the government at least put a moratorium on drilling into the water-saturated Mannville formations until such time as the negative environmental and health impacts identified by the multistakeholder advisory committee are fully addressed? Instead, why are you giving them royalty rates to encourage them to drill there?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, we are not. Let me be very clear. That is not accurate or not true what the member just said. Let me even be further; let me be very further. If after our science, which we are doing and conducting now, when a licence is issued, six months is incumbent – by the way, industry are paying a hundred per cent of the science and the facts. In fact, if it is determined not by the fearmongering and all of the opinion that some others are promoting out there but based on fact – I want to assure this Assembly and all Albertans that if, based on science-based fact, there is someone's well that is being impacted negatively by coal-bed methane, I will shut down that well. That's my commitment to Albertans. But as of yet there is absolutely zero science-based fact to support such action at this time.

Mr. Melchin: I'd just like to comment on one thing with respect to royalties in particular. This multistakeholder advisory committee did actually have a recommendation about the Mannville zone to give royalty changes or structures. We did not accept that recommendation as a government. Today we put that out in public. That is not a recommendation that's been accepted by the government. In fact, it's been discarded.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Farm Safety

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is a very busy month in the farming community. It's also the month of the year that most accidents take place on the farm. Last year there were 1,353 farm-related injuries as well as 17 fatalities in Alberta. Of course, one is too many, but 17 is shocking. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What is the minister doing to address this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, agree with the hon. member that one fatality is too many and that 17 is indeed unacceptable. On average, 18 people are killed each year in farm-related incidents on Alberta farms. That's a terrible statistic and even more terrible is that it's wholly preventable. There are many practices that farmers and ranchers can follow to make sure that their farm is a safe place to work and also to recreate. For example, farmers are urged to take a little extra time to ensure that all their machinery is running properly, that all the guards are in the appropriate places, that all the safety mechanisms are working and in good working order.

Farms are unique in that they are work sites, they're homes, and they're places where families live, work, and play, so they can't be treated the same way as a construction site. The approach has to be a little bit different. We are working closely with rural communities and industry groups to increase the awareness of farm safety issues. We're providing information through resources like Ropin' the Web, the website, like some of the other education forums that we have. We're also working with workplace health and safety and the medical examiners' offices to gather information on these accidents and these hazards and then getting that information back out into our farming communities. So really, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is an education program. We're trying to make sure that farmers have the right information about what is safe practice and what are some of the issues that they should be aware of on-farm so that we don't have this number of fatalities.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: these programs are fine if they work. Could the minister tell me how effective these programs actually are? Are the rates going up, or are they going down?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We, of course, would like to see the rate go down to zero. It's very difficult to measure that kind of success because we don't really keep an accurate assessment of whether or not the education format is penetrating to the actual farmer on the ground. As well, there are so many other factors that come into each individual accident. Is it because of weather-related incidents, where the farmer might have been hurrying to get something done on-farm? Farm stress is another factor which we're seeing a lot of these days because of the crisis in our grains and oilseeds sector. We do believe that the message is getting through, Mr. Speaker. We believe that because of the calls that we're receiving in our call centres because of the information

that we're putting out there and the number of interactions that we have now on farm safety.

The other issue that I believe is very, very important, Mr. Speaker, is our education in the schools because if we educate the young farmers, they will have that knowledge as they go in and become professionals.

Mr. Marz: Given that many of the accidents involve livestock and your statistics show that 38 per cent of those involve horses, could the minister tell me how many of these horse-related accidents are actually on-farm accidents, or do they include competitive sports such as racing and rodeo events?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farm-related injuries and fatalities are reported on a voluntary basis by the health regions. Many times while we're aware of what happened, we're not always aware of what activity was taking place at the time the accident happened. We don't have any official way of tracking whether the incident occurred while the person was engaged in a competitive or a recreational aspect or whether it was a farm-productivity activity, in other words working on the farm, so we don't always know if the injury or accident occurred when the person might have been out horseback riding or actually involved in a rodeo. Nevertheless, no matter what activity they are participating in, individuals should be aware that they're dealing with animals who can be unpredictable. There are a number of potential dangers when dealing with livestock, and the best way to deal with that is to ensure that you have the knowledge that you need to have when you're dealing with livestock. We have a lot of resources available to producers: Ropin' the Web, our call centre, and a number of others.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Work Camp Standards

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our big work camps in the oil sands do not allow conjugal visits. Families are discouraged from visiting much less staying with their mothers, fathers, husbands, and wives. Family recreation is nonexistent. Twenty-four days on, four days off becomes standard for many workers: big bucks, no life. It is no wonder that the divorce rate is 80 per cent for some trades after a couple of years on a camp job. It is no wonder that some oil sands projects are having trouble attracting and retaining workers. My question is to the minister of human resources. Will the minister enact basic oil sands work camp employment standards to allow for conjugal visits and work to allow and encourage family contact for oil sands workers?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, you know, that's a very good question. It must be hard to be a Liberal opposition and wake up in Alberta and try to find something wrong with the province. In an issue like that, of course, there are a number of collective agreements between unions and employers, and you can be assured that our government does not interfere between the unions that negotiate with employers. We also do not interfere with private companies that take contracts with these companies or individuals that work with these companies. I believe that it's an individual issue that should be left that way, not get the government involved in the process.

Mr. Backs: It's camp design, actually.

To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: to retain more workers in Alberta and cut social costs, will the minister's department work to

encourage improved camp standards to have, for example, at least a toilet and a shower with each room?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, there again, if the Liberals were the government – thank God they're not, and they probably never will be. Issues like that: I have confidence in the union leaders; I have confidence in the private contractors. They do provide top-quality services, probably the best in the universe.

Mr. Backs: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will the minister encourage the big oil interests that it is in their interest to limit unsafe, overly long work schedules and encourage family-friendly hours of work?

Mr. Cardinal: There again, Mr. Speaker, this government will not get involved in the day-to-day administration of work projects in Fort McMurray or any other area.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have the hon. Minister of Gaming wishing to supplement an answer given earlier in the question period.

The hon. minister.

Lottery-funded Grant Presentation Cheques (continued)

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to supplement the answers given to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, who questioned the Premier and the Minister of Community Development regarding presentation cheques. What I stated at Public Accounts yesterday was that the practice of MLAs having their signatures – their signatures – on the lottery-funded grant presentation cheques was inappropriate, not the practice of having presentation cheques presented on the minister's behalf at community functions. The lottery-funded presentation cheques should only have the signatures of the Premier and the Minister of Gaming on them.*

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie may ask another question if he chooses.

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, my question was to stop this practice.

Another thing I want to ask, through you, is why the opposition members don't get the opportunity. [interjections] Just a minute. Let me finish. We are also elected representatives. People elect us too. This is Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member has raised his question. The question has been clearly identified.

Mr. Graydon: I would encourage the hon. member opposite to check the websites of the members of his caucus, and he might be surprised at one of the pictures that he sees on that website of this very offending policy that he claims.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, shortly we'll call upon the first of six hon. members, but today we'll continue with our historical vignettes. Today a number of random comments on a variety of election-related subjects from Alberta's first 100 years of democracy.

In the 1905 general election Albertans voted using coloured pencils. Voters selected the coloured pencil corresponding to the

*See p. 1515, right col., para. 8

candidate for whom they wished to vote, then marked a coloured X on the blank ballot paper. If current members in 2006 conclude from time to time that the House may get carried away with lawmaking and the writing of regulation, let me quote from page 299 of the North-West Territories ordinances of 1905.

The pencils used under the provisions of sections 26 to 53 inclusive of this Ordinance shall be of colour as follows in each electoral district: If there are two candidates the colours shall be blue and red; if three, yellow shall be added; if four, black shall be added; if five, brown shall be added; if six, green shall be added; and if there are more than six, such additional colours of pencils shall be provided as the Lieutenant Governor may direct. The handle of each pencil shall be of wood and shall be not less than six inches in length and of sufficient thickness to enable the name of any candidate to be placed upon one side in characters not less than three-eighths of an inch in depth. The wood of the pencil should be painted the same colour as that of the marking material it contains, which shall be inserted securely in the handle so that it cannot be removed.

The Alberta Election Act governed the election process for the first time in the 1909 election, less than a month after the Act was proclaimed, and it thus deemed the ordinances unnecessary.

2:40

I might then jump a long way forward in the history of Alberta. The office of the Chief Electoral Officer was created in 1977 under the Election Amendment Act, and this office oversaw its first provincial election in 1979.

Members may wish to know as well that in 1905 the deposit required to file nomination papers was \$100. In 1993, 88 years later, it was doubled to \$200, and in 2004 the deposit was increased to \$500.

For elections in Alberta March and June are the favourite months, with each hosting seven elections. August has held five, November has held three, May has seen two, and April and July have each experienced one. In Alberta a general election has never been held in January, February, September, October or December.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Tribute to Cicely Elizabeth Truman

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Even before our current version of Mother's Day, there were days honouring mothers. In ancient Greece, Rhea, the mother of gods, was paid tribute, and in the 1600s in England there was an annual observance called Mothering Sunday. In 1914 President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that Mother's Day become a national observance. Canada adopted the same day to celebrate mothers.

As Sunday is Mother's Day, I would like to tell you about my mom, one of four daughters born to Thomas and Cicely Lauder. My grandparents immigrated to Canada from Scotland and England, settling in a small farming community in Saskatchewan following the First World War. My mom was one of those rare children that did so well with her school work that she was recommended by her teachers to not write finals in high school.

My dad, like so many good Alberta boys, found a wife in Saskatchewan and promptly brought her back to Alberta, where they embarked on a life filled with adventure in the oil patch. By adventure I mean no power, no phones, no TV, no running water, no grocery store within 20 miles, and usually on a back bladed road. Sometimes the only way in or out was to be pulled in behind a D3 Cat.

As hard as it was, I do not remember thinking that life was hard. It was always just a challenge or an opportunity. I'd like to thank my mom for that attitude because, no matter where we were, she always made it our home. The best days were getting off the school bus and smelling fresh bread baking or seeing the sheets freshly washed and completely frozen on the clothesline, mom and the family black lab looking out the window to make sure both my brother and I were home safe. Summer was always fun. We picked blueberries, strawberries, and the inevitable bouquet of Alberta wild roses mixed with bluebells for my mom.

I'd like to thank my mom for teaching me about the little things in life that make it good and the wisdom that she passed down, including "If you can't say anything nice, Carol, don't say anything at all" or "Carol, if you make that face again, it will freeze like that forever" and my all-time favourite, "If everyone is going to jump off that cliff, are you going to jump off it, too, Carol?"

For all that and a million other things, to my mom and my friend, Cicely Elizabeth Truman, thank you, Mom, and happy Mother's Day.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Canadian Federation of Independent Business

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize an important 35th anniversary today. Nineteen seventy-one was a good year for the friends of free enterprise and prosperity. Nineteen seventy-one was the year of the formation of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, known to most of us as the CFIB. For 35 years the CFIB has been giving small firms a big voice in the public affairs of Canada.

Many of my constituents in Foothills-Rocky View are members of the CFIB. Many of the colleagues within this Legislature, past and present, are also members. Over 105,000 independent business members are with the CFIB and wholeheartedly support the federation's mandate of promoting and protecting Canada's free-enterprise system. Almost 10,000 members are from right here in Alberta. These 10,000 members in Alberta are pillars of their communities. They spearhead innovation, they create real opportunities, especially for our youth, and they're the drivers of our economy.

I know I speak for many of my colleagues today when I say that we appreciate the input from the CFIB on the issues of the day. CFIB keeps its fingers on the pulse of small business in Canada. It helps to relay to us where the members stand on the issues before us. We might not always agree on the best method of solving these issues, but we share the common goals of making Alberta the best place in the world to live, work, and raise our families.

Mr. Speaker, my own work in the Regulatory Review Secretariat has given me a new appreciation of the efforts of the CFIB. The federation recently did a report on burdensome government regulation and presented copies of this report to myself and the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. This report is tough but fair. We've discussed the report with the CFIB, and I look forward to continued co-operation with the CFIB as we move forward on this important initiative.

This is just one example of how we can work with the CFIB to ensure that Alberta has the most effective and efficient regulatory environment in Canada, and I certainly look forward to strong relations with the CFIB in the future. Congratulations on your anniversary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Lloydminster Super Cities Walk for MS

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon in recognition of the Super Cities Walk for MS, a walk which took place in the beautiful city of Lloydminster and included people from the surrounding area as well as my home town of Vermilion.

On April 29, Mr. Speaker, not only did I have the privilege of attending the eighth annual MS walk, I attempted the 10 K walk. I soon realized that five K was more my style, and after two blisters and a small rash, I realized that "K" meant "killer." But I digress. It was a wonderful morning to spend in the beautiful Bud Miller park with over 260 walkers.

For the year of 2006 the goal of the MS Society of Canada Lloydminster branch was to raise \$80,000. I have been informed that not only are the pledges still coming in but already the Lloydminster branch has surpassed both last year's funds of \$73,000 and their intended goal of \$80,000 for this year. To date the pledges officially turned in by the walkers are now over \$87,000. That's an increase of more than \$13,000 over last year. In fact, the staff at Wal-Mart raised \$5,000 themselves, which was matched by the Wal-Mart head office. So we're \$10,000 from Wal-Mart, Mr. Speaker.

For the sake of all people who have been so affected by this disease, the fundraising will continue, and one day soon we can only hope and pray that the ultimate cure for multiple sclerosis will be found. To all the Lloydminster walkers, to the volunteers, and to the sponsors: for a job well done congratulations on a truly special event.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Democratic Renewal

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am continuing my series on the need for democratic renewal in this province.

In the Speech from the Throne this Progressive Conservative government talks about wanting to be more open and transparent, but are words followed by action? Is this government serious about transparency and accountability? The answer is no, as is evident in one particular piece of legislation that is before us in this Assembly; namely, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, better known as Bill 20. The amendments contained in Bill 20, Mr. Speaker, are half good, half bad. The good part is the extra protection against foreign-based agencies or organizations obtaining access to Albertans' personal information, as what's in the USA PATRIOT Act to give an example. Also, there will be bigger fines for contravening the act, which is definitely positive, and I support.

Now, what don't I like about Bill 20? It attempts to add new layers of secrecy to a government that is already labelled as the most secretive and least open in the country. Ministerial briefing notes similar to the ones which led to the federal Gomery inquiry will be sealed from access for five years. Even the Privacy Commissioner himself opposes this change. Chief internal auditor investigations will become off limits for a whopping 15 years. That's like four elections or four governments, Mr. Speaker. The 30-day processing time limit on FOIP applications will now be removed, so a request can stay pending indefinitely while the Privacy Commissioner is considering whether it ought to be dismissed or not.

Even the federal government in Ottawa, regardless of which party is in power, is strides ahead in terms of openness and access to information. Our provincial Tories, however, do not respect the people's democratic right to ask questions or seek answers. They think they're above scrutiny. Access to information requests are

now processed from the angle of "How can we deny, restrict, or delay access?" not "How do we co-operate with the applicant?" It is also clear that government staff have been instructed to communicate verbally wherever possible or choose their words very carefully just in case they're FOIPed one day. Consultants are increasingly receiving compensation for verbal advice with nothing to show for it on paper.

I will repeat myself today, Mr. Speaker: those who have nothing to hide, hide nothing. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:50 Support for the Book Publishing Industry

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to speak about the importance of Alberta's book publishers. This industry has been starved by the government for years, forcing some businesses to relocate to other parts of this country. Just last year, Mr. Speaker, the Red Deer Press was forced to sell out to a larger Ontario-based company in order to stay afloat. This should not be happening.

Alberta book publishers help in attracting and keeping talented people in this province. Book publishers help to create literary work and foster talent that feeds other Alberta cultural industries, such as film, theatre, and magazines. They generate employment stability and provide a creative avenue for local writers to show off their talents. However, a lack of provincial support in Alberta has put our book publishers at a significant competitive disadvantage.

The Book Publishers Association of Alberta has developed a plan that would assist this province's publishers greatly. The Alberta publishers' fund, as suggested by the association, would ensure the stability and growth of an important cultural industry in this province, but it requires government support.

We discover who we are as individuals and as Albertans through our arts and culture. I urge this government to acknowledge the value of our book publishers and to work with the Book Publishers Association of Alberta to keep these important businesses in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

John Kolkman

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to recognize today John Kolkman for his contributions to the Alberta NDP opposition caucus in the nine years since April 1997 that he's been with us. John was invited to join the NDP caucus by then leader Pam Barrett. John came to the caucus with considerable experience in the nonprofit sector as an administrator, a researcher, and a community builder. He was an active citizen in his neighbourhood of McCauley, where, amongst other activities, he was part of the group that developed Edmonton's first community health centre to serve inner-city residents.

Prior to joining the caucus, he was assistant director at the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, where he worked tirelessly to assist the diverse immigrant community to establish themselves in the community. From this and other experiences John developed deep-rooted interests in human rights, good governance, and government policy.

During his tenure with the caucus his primary role was as caucus researcher, and as such he developed an encyclopedic knowledge of government policies, finances, and legislative matters. He has used this prodigious knowledge to benefit the New Democrat opposition

as we actively pursue quality of life issues for Albertans. John has also been the chief of staff on a number of occasions, fulfilling this vital caucus role when the position was otherwise vacant. In this capacity he worked to create a stable, productive work environment. I want to mention that John has a tremendous capacity for work and a very, very strong work ethic, Mr. Speaker.

He has a wonderful family as well. He's married to Kate Quinn, who's the executive director of the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton. He has two young-adult sons, David and Brendan. John Kolkman is a person of vision, dedication, and compassion, and he supports various nonprofit organizations and other causes promoting human rights, social justice, diversity, and peace.

On behalf of the caucus I wish John and his family the best of everything. We are indeed grateful for his outstanding contribution to our caucus, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Might I also point out to all members that today is the birthday of the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

head: **Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee I'd like to table the committee's report recommending the appointment of Mr. Lorne R. Gibson as the Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to give notice today that on Monday pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 17 through 28 and 30, 31, and 32.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday, May 15, I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 27 through 35.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to give oral notice today of two time allocation motions which will apply to Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, which, as we all know, comes under the primary jurisdiction of Government Services, sponsored by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. This is the first time we have found it necessary to use time allocation in this House since 2003. In fact, during the past five years our government has used time allocation only six times. I will table the exact figures for reference in this regard very shortly.

With that brief background, Mr. Speaker, I hereby give oral notice of the following two motions. Number one:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the second oral notice, I think it's valuable to just quickly remind the House that we've already had about six hours of debate on Bill 20 so far, and we have also debated at some considerable length 10 amendments proposed by the

opposition with respect to Bill 20, so this next motion and the one just given will bring us to a total of approximately 10 hours of solid debate on this particular bill. Therefore, I will give oral notice now of the second motion. Number two:

Be it resolved that when an adjourned debate on third reading of Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration at this stage of the bill, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Introduction of Bills**
Bill 42
Appropriation Act, 2006

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce and would beg leave to introduce Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2006. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having being informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, and I know that all of the members of the House know, the Appropriation Act provides voted spending authority to the ministries for operations of the Legislative Assembly and government for this fiscal year. Expense and inventory/equipment purchases are about \$27 billion, capital investment about \$1.2 billion, nonbudgetary disbursements \$172 million, and lottery fund initiatives \$1.3 billion, as well as the \$75 million for the expenses of the Leg. Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and table the appropriate number of copies of the 2003-04 and 2004-05 Child and Youth Advocate annual reports. We value the role the advocate plays making sure that the voices of children are heard.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table copies of two documents outlining the action Children's Services has already taken to address the issues in these reports. All of the issues have been addressed through various program ministries, services, or legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from a Paul Armstrong of Edmonton. He was quite upset by the response he received from the Minister of Advanced Education in regard to his concerns about Bill 40 and the undemocratic process the minister is establishing for tuition policy. Mr. Armstrong says the minister's response showed a "lack of consultation with the taxpayers."

Thanks.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. Both are exchanges between the Minister of Advanced Education and two concerned Albertans, Shannon Phillips of Lethbridge and Lou Arab of Edmonton. Both asked us to table what Ms Phillips called a dismissive response from the Minister of

Advanced Education to concerns that Bill 40 will reduce democracy and transparency in tuition policies. In both cases the minister tells the correspondents that “those who have not been there done that would not be expected to know” about the processes involved in passing orders in council and that Bill 40 “would avoid wasting energy on matters that are not a problem.” Both correspondents claim that they’ve been there and know what’s going on.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, pursuant to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists 2005 Annual Report.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(5) I would ask the Government House Leader to share with us the projected government business for next week, the week commencing May 15.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, hon. member and Mr. Speaker. On Monday, May 15, in the afternoon under Introduction of Bills we will deal with Bill 43, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, and then there will be private members’ business, Written Questions, Motions for Returns, as explained earlier, and other private members bills, should there be any. As part of that under Committee of the Whole and assuming that there will be time we will deal with Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006, and Bill 208, Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. On Monday evening from 8 to 9 we’ll deal with private members’ motions, presumably 511, and at 9 under government business we should be able to do second readings on bills 42, 40, at least, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday afternoon we should be able to deal with second reading of Bill 43 and Committee of the Whole for bills 42, 40, 43, and 20 and possibly some third readings as well as per the Order Paper. On Tuesday evening, May 16, we should be able to deal with Committee of the Whole for bills 42, 40, 43, and 20 and third readings for bills 10, 14, 28, and 32, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday afternoon we should be able to do third readings on bills 42, 40, 43, and 20, and otherwise as per the Order Paper. On Wednesday evening, May 17, we should be able to do third readings on bills 42, 40, 43, and 20, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday afternoon we anticipate dealing with, of course, question period and the spring sitting adjournment motion and also any other bills as per the Order Paper that may be necessary to be dealt with at that time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I actually rise with a heavy heart to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly persons who earlier today bravely shared heartbreaking stories about their families in continuing care. Anna Pavolich* is an RN who feels that the system bullies, is dishonest, and is run with unqualified staff. Marjorie Starr, Charlotte Helbak, and Merla Poulette,* who were here earlier but had to leave to get to the International Airport, have a mother who is helpless, aged, and had been sexually assaulted in a long-term care facility. Theresa Sawchuk* and Cheryl Doucette’s* father’s leg is being amputated as we speak. Their contention is that the care of his leg was neglected and therefore this amputation was necessary. Darryl T. Adams’* father choked to death. Beverly and Gary Heddington’s* mother died of dehydration despite having a feeding tube in place. Robert Warden’s mother died in care, and a public inquiry will take place. I would ask these brave people to rise and be recognized by this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a point of order.

Point of Order
Allegations against Members

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I give you the citations 23(h), making “allegations against another member”; 23(i), imputing “false or unavowed motives to another member”; and (j), using “abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.”

The situation was that during question period the Minister of Environment referred to actions of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who is also the opposition critic for the environment, as fearmongering, and he repeated this a number of times. I have checked the definition of fearmongering, and it says – well, a monger actually to be specific – a person promoting something considered contemptible. I would argue that the member was promoting public health, promoting community consultation, and promoting research on water. I would argue that those are not contemptible actions.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View draws on his background as a public health official, as a medical doctor, and, specific to this issue, from his direct dealings with Albertans. He’s brought the claims of Albertans to this minister and to the House. In that the primary source of Calgary-Mountain View’s concerns were those of Albertans, I’m disappointed that the minister would disparage the concerns of Albertans as fearmongering. I argue that the minister may not like what the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has to say along with the community activists that have worked with him, but that is no cause to impute motives or to make allegations that he is somehow involved in something contemptible.

I will also quote as a citation *Beauchesne* 484(3) in which it cautions that members “will not be permitted by the Speaker . . . to impute to any Member or Members unworthy motives for their actions in a particular case.” Clearly, under the provisions of 23(j) language like fearmongering is likely to create disorder and certainly promote additional debate, which is unwanted during the exchanges in question period. So I argue that there is a definitive point of order against the Minister of Environment for the use of those words, and I would ask that he would do the right thing and withdraw them in regard to the actions of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, we don't have the benefit of the Blues at hand, so there's no way of verifying or not what the accusations are that were just presented by the previous speaker from Edmonton-Centre; however, I will anxiously await the arrival of those Blues so that we can have a look at it.

3:10

I want to point out a couple of other things, though, with respect to the issue of the word or words "fearmongering". I've looked into *Beauchesne* to see what in the past has typically been ruled unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker. I would just remind the House that under *Beauchesne* 489, where it cites, "Since 1958, it has been ruled unparliamentary to use the following expressions" – and then it goes through and lists copious quantities of words and phrases – nowhere can I immediately see fearmongering, nor can I see the use of the word "mongering" either. Similarly, when I look at *Beauchesne* 490, which also deals with expressions that have been deemed parliamentary or not parliamentary – in this particular case it says "ruled parliamentary to use [them]" – I don't see any specific reference allowing the usage either. So I'm at a loss to comment on what may or may not be parliamentary from those two citations.

However, I did check a third citation. I noted under *Beauchesne* 492 that "the following expressions are a partial listing of expressions which have caused intervention on the part of the Chair" – in other words, one could assume that they would have been deemed unparliamentary – and nowhere do I see within citation 492 that "fearmongering" or the word "mongering" have caused the chair to intervene at any time.

I do recall, however, on several occasions in this House over the past number of years where, perhaps, government members have used the term "fearmongering." No points of order were raised then. I also remember, if memory serves correctly, that certain members of the opposition have used the term "fearmongering," and no intervention was applied then either.

So I would submit for your consideration, Mr. Speaker, that there are examples where this wordage has been used before and no interventions were created and that if, in fact, something did come from the hon. minister referenced that caused some anxieties, those issues can and will be reviewed. But I do know that the hon. minister in his comments felt that there was some fearmongering that had occurred and he was merely expressing his opinion in that regard. I think his feeling, as explained by the minister to me prior to this issue coming up, is that any comments that are made should be based more on scientific fact or on evidence or on direct, provable experience or whatever, and that's the context within which I think those comments were made.

So, Mr. Speaker, given the cut and thrust of debate, as we all know occurs in this House from time to time, perhaps there were some misunderstandings, and I will look forward to your ruling in that respect.

The Speaker: Any others?

Well, at the outset, the intervention in terms of what was said came on behalf of the Official Opposition House Leader on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. There's absolutely no doubt at all about what the hon. Minister of Environment said, and this is: "... but I know that the Liberal environmental critic has been out there fearmongering relative to what is all wrong, and that is wrong." This is a partial one. Then it goes on, "We're taking that action, but to take a group of people together with no knowledge at all and start fearmongering to them is irresponsible and wrong, and we will never do that." Then going on to a subsequent one, "In fact, if it is determined, not by the fearmongering and all of the opinion that some others are promoting out there but based on fact," and then

in the third response, "We're taking that action, but to take a group of people together with no knowledge at all and start fearmongering to them is irresponsible and wrong, and we will never do that." That's a repetition of what I just said a second ago.

The word was used. There's absolutely no doubt at all about that. But if one wants to go to *Marleau and Montpetit* on pages 525 and 526, so much of it is based on "the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking; the person to whom the words were directed; the degree of provocation; and, most importantly, whether or not the remarks created disorder in the Chamber." I'm not so sure in terms of what I've just quoted that it would apply today, but the bottom line is that the language in itself, while it may not be unparliamentary, has to be taken in the context of what it is.

It would have been very helpful if the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View had heard the remarks directly. Such is not the case. I do not believe that it's in the best interests of anyone in this House to use the word "fearmongering" in the way that it was used. It was almost intentional in terms of providing an allegation or a motive, and it certainly was intemperate language. I'm not happy with the utilization of the word or the words in this and will caution the hon. Minister of Environment to disassociate himself with the use of that kind of language in the future, as I would ask all hon. members to do the same thing.

Hon. members, I want to provide just a bit of advice. It is rumoured that perhaps we'll be here for, say, only another six weeks or eight weeks or something like this. It's my experience in the past that as we get towards the conclusion of a session, tempers start to flare a little more and patience becomes a little less. It's also my experience that at this time in a session we may have increasing numbers of points of order simply based on body language and words and utilization and a whole series of other things. I would ask everybody to just sit back, take a great big deep breath, and remember that you're all wonderful elected leaders of the province of Alberta, here to do the public good, and there is some give and take. Maybe this is the time when we actually do have a little more give and take. It's like the bodychecking in the third overtime period at about 1 o'clock this morning: there was a lot being given there that could have been called but was not necessary to call. So if we can deal with it that way. Let's move on.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Private Bills
Third Reading**

[The members indicated below moved that the following bills be read a third time, and the motions were carried]

Pr.1	Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006	Brown (for Rodney)
Pr.2	Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act	Jablonski
Pr.3	Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006	Lukaszuk

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

Bill 9

Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 9, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006.

I appreciated hearing many thoughtful comments and discussion on this bill. To recap, Bill 9 will provide more flexibility to take the individual circumstances of some grant-funded students into account

and clarify authority to establish forms pertaining to child support agreements.

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

3:20

Bill 26
Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 26, the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act.

I'd also like to thank a number of the stakeholders for their very good work over the summer last year: the police, the firefighters, the paramedic profession, the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the regional health authority, the medical officers of health, the Alberta Advisory Committee on AIDS, and the Alberta Community Council on HIV. I'd like to thank all members for their support of this bill.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Bill 11
Architects Amendment Act, 2006

Ms DeLong: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move third reading of Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006.

I would like to thank those who participated in the discussions on this bill. Everyone's comments were most helpful. Mr. Speaker, this act will help to clarify and strengthen the architect profession by allowing the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for mandatory continuing competence in their profession.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We support this bill, and to review, these changes allow the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for compulsory continuing competence in their profession. The bill clarifies that licensed interior designers and their employees can engage in the practice of interior design, allows them full voting rights to elect architects and interior designers to the association council, and also ensures that up-to-date regulations and bylaws can be developed for licensed interior designers that are registered in the same manner as architects.

If you visit the city of St. Albert, you will see how the core of the city is being enhanced, and the Arts and Heritage Foundation, I believe it is, is a perfect example of what the planning of these two professions would do together. Also, I believe that if you look at the city of Edmonton, the new mayor has talked about the significance of this.

We support the bill and are pleased to see it go through. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Bill 12
Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006.

Mortgage fraud is a complex and costly crime that impacts a variety of sectors. This bill will go a long way to combat mortgage fraud by empowering the land titles office to take a more active role in detecting and preventing mortgage fraud by requiring proof of identity of a person registering a transfer and in some cases refusing registration. In addition, this bill will assist the Privacy Commissioner with determining what uses of land titles information are acceptable under the Personal Information Protection Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak on third reading of Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006. I think it's a really good bill, and I'm willing to voice my support for this bill. It appears to be primarily aimed at cleaning up and updating the language. I'm happy with this bill.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

It's good to see that we are making the needed changes in response to the problems associated with mortgage fraud in Alberta, but I want to make sure that the government is still considering some points. For example, I have a few questions. What steps is the government going to take to stop the assumption of a mortgage? I know that it's related to real estate, but real estate and the land titles are very much connected.

I mentioned in second reading that we highlight sales by the government, any transfers of land. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked many questions. Some questions were related to 15 years ago, and it's very hard to answer those questions at this time. But if we had some amendment in the land title, if we highlighted in the land title all the properties sold by the government or transferred by the government that we still can trace out in the last, say, 50 years, it would be easy for the government to answer those questions. My suggestion is this: that from today onwards in the land titles all the government-related sales and purchases or transfers of land should be highlighted, and it should be publicized in the newspaper if something is going on with a sale and purchase.

Also, when somebody pulls a land title, they pay \$6, \$7 for every land title report. They don't get the full history, the full property archive report of the land title. This is not right. Suppose that you buy any product. You have every right to know the full history of the property. They are not buying vegetables. They're buying properties.

I mean, now we have a problem. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked so many questions about fraud – maybe fraud, maybe not – but still every time I'm listening here, the hon. minister is answering: this question is related to 15 years ago or 20 years ago. If we had a system in the land titles – just punch out all the properties sold or purchased or transferred in the last 50 years; click one button – you should be able to find out. It's not there. If we really want transparency – and in the land titles report it is a must – the government should consider it very seriously for the future misuse and, you know, mix-up like we have today.

RECA is responsible also. RECA is doing a marvellous job in the real estate association. At this moment the major problem that they

are facing is the assumption of the mortgage. Like, one person had the mortgage from the bank, and they transferred it to somebody else. What we normally see, those advertisements in the paper – many sitting here in this Chamber might have seen “zero down payment” or “you pay \$10,000; you move in” or something like that. Why can’t we see that in the land titles report? If we find all the details in the land titles report, it will make the job easy for the real estate. It will make the job easy for the banks because it’s a big problem for the banks as well. Assumption of the mortgage must be stopped. It’s only in Alberta, I think. In other provinces they don’t allow you to assume the mortgage. I think that assuming the mortgage is a major problem. RECA and the real estate board are trying to stop this practice. But still I want to know why they haven’t stopped assumption of the mortgage so far.

3:30

The detail of the full property archive report, including assumption of the mortgage, including the highlight of all the properties purchased, sold, and transferred by the government, must be highlighted in the land title. The system should be like this: you just click, 15 years of records from the government, and one person using just a PC, you know, sitting at home can pull out all the information. In 1981 how many lands, properties, or buildings were sold by the government of Alberta? The person, even an ordinary person in Alberta, should be able to trace out all the records. That’s transparency. The government must be accountable for that, and it’s not happening.

I tried to explain this in second reading, and I’m trying to explain it again. It’s for the benefit of all Albertans. Those frauds must be stopped.

Mr. Backs: Do you think they’re listening?

Mr. Agnihotri: I don’t think so.

Anyway, the government should create a task force, a task force who could stop the frauds. Frauds are happening, and the realtors admit – I have read many articles. It’s through transparency, through the clear archive report that the land title can help to stop fraud in the real estate business. Some people, they don’t work; they just make deals under the table. It shouldn’t happen. It’s our responsibility. We are the elected officials, and we have the responsibility so that frauds in Alberta should not happen. This is my suggestion.

Otherwise, this bill is mostly cleaning up and updating the language. It’s a good thing. But we should go a little bit further. An ordinary person should be able to get the full report in the land title, and it will help the real estate board to stop the fraud.

Mr. Speaker, that’s all I have to say. This is my suggestion. It’s totally up to the government because it’s in their hands.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s with interest, again, that I rise and participate in the debate on Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006, this afternoon. Overall, I would have to say that I would support these changes to the Land Titles Act. Certainly, when we consider that one of these changes was recommended by the mortgage fraud committee at the Law Society of Alberta and is supported by that committee, we have to take notice of that recommendation and support it. Also, this bill reflects recent commentary from the Privacy Commissioner. The hon. Minister of Government Services made reference to that earlier.

We have to be very careful with our land titles and the administration of our land titles. I’ve had in recent months first-hand experience with land titles. I’m the first to admit that I learned a lot about the entire process, and I’m still interested in learning more, but to have information accessible to potential purchasers of properties is very, very important. I certainly hope that at any time we’re not going to try to hide behind the privacy cloak in regard to this matter. If a party is considering purchasing a property, they should, either themselves or through their legal counsel, have the right to access that information in a timely fashion and for a modest price.

Certainly, whenever you look at any historical title of a property in Alberta, there’s a lot of information on there. Information can be related to past market value. Information can be related to parties that have had a caveat on the property for whatever reason. It could even be a caveat relating to remediation costs of an environmental spill. It could be any number of things, Mr. Speaker, that could be on there. When we look at property values in this city and in this province, we have to make sure that consumers – because for a lot of us the biggest purchase we’re ever going to make is a piece of property of one sort or another, we have to make sure that the land title system works.

In conclusion, I would urge the hon. minister and his department to make sure that the land titles system works in a timely fashion so that buyers and sellers and their agents are not hindered by delays in the whole process. I’m certainly not stating that this bill will slow down the process, but the Department of Government Services is spending a lot of money. I understand that there is more money needed to make sure that this process and this system work for buyers and sellers of real estate in this province in a secure and timely manner.

With that I will cede the floor to another hon. member of this House. Certainly, Bill 12 is of merit, and I hope everything works out. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 12, Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006, has the support of the NDP caucus. It’s a bill that really addresses a growing problem in the province related to land titles, mortgage fraud, and what have you. The two are obviously related. So legislation needs to be updated, changed, improved, amended to take stock of the growing problem and find effective solutions to the increasing incidence of fraud related to mortgage in this province.

It really is too bad that we are getting a reputation as being, sort of, the mortgage fraud capital of the country. Partly, I guess, it can be attributed to the number of transactions that are related to property: purchase, transfer, property changing hands in this province. Given the economic activity related to real estate transactions, one would expect problems along this line. I remain unconvinced that all of this problem can be attributed to the increase in economic activity. Clearly, the laws in place are wanting, are failing in what they’re supposed to do. So this bill is an attempt, I guess, to recognize that there is a problem and do something about it.

3:40

Giving powers now to the registrar to be able to refuse registry for certain transactions unless the registrar is fully satisfied with respect to the identity of the persons involved in the transactions I think is a good thing. But I think the whole issue of identity in itself is problematic, given that identity fraud itself has also become a problem in this province.

I am sure that while we are giving more discretionary powers to the registrar to make sure that identity documentation is there when

he or she considers it necessary to confirm identity, we need to work on the side of making sure that the documents needed for personal identity themselves are also dependable and sound.

That's where the problem of private registries has come up, and in this House during this spring session we have visited that issue as well in relation to another piece of legislation, which was debated in this House a month or more ago.

Clarifying and strengthening the powers of the registrar with respect to confirmation of identity is important. I don't think these by themselves will lead to a substantial reduction in crime related to the fraudulent mortgages.

I think identity is a problem and one hopes that there will be more specific legislative action forthcoming to deal with that. Unless we deal at both levels, on both fronts, I think the problem will remain. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, while I'm happy that the registrar will have the power to ask for documentation for identity, it's the power that's given: he "may" do that or she "may" do that. I think that given the high incidence of mortgage fraud in this province and given the fact that we know that it's been increasing over the years, perhaps it should be made mandatory that the registrar seek appropriate identification before proceeding to okay a registration.

Furthermore, if the registrar were to have that kind of power, then there is also, I think, a need for making room for an appeal by someone who may find that the action of the registrar in refusing registration based on his concerns is unwarranted. I think that to make sure that the laws are implemented properly but also respected by all who are affected by them, the room for appeal perhaps should also have been there. It's not there now, but I hope that there will be attention paid to improving this piece of statute later on with respect to that issue.

The last point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is the need to strengthen, perhaps, the consequences for those who engage in mortgage fraud. Certainly, they are open to criminal prosecution, but I think there need to be in addition some consequences in terms of monetary sentences or monetary requirements in what they have to pay if they are found to be guilty of mortgage fraud. In some cases this mortgage fraud leads to massive, massive amounts of exchange of money through illegitimate activity. That's the only other observation that I wanted to make on the bill in general.

We certainly are in support of the provisions of the bill, but I think in some ways this bill will need further improvement once it becomes law and we have had the opportunity to use it for a while and find some flaws, too few of which I have drawn attention to in my remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Minister of Government Services to close debate.

Mr. VanderBurg: I thank the members for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Ellerslie, and Edmonton-Strathcona for their comments, and I will take that advice seriously.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask for the question to be called.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

Bill 15
International Interests in
Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development on behalf of.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations I'm pleased to

move third reading of Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill creates the legislative authority for Alberta to participate in an international registry of financial interests in aircraft equipment. In plain language it is largely a registry of liens against airplanes. With such a registry banks can provide better secured loans to airlines with a corresponding drop in interest rates and costs.

Canada has already signed but not ratified the two international agreements that create the registry. The federal government will ratify when a critical mass of provinces indicates support. With Bill 15 Alberta shows that support. In passing this bill, Alberta becomes the third province to create a link to the international registry. We can expect ratification in 12 to 18 months.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 15 does not amend Alberta's Personal Property Security Act. It affects no other Alberta registries. The international registry will be self-financing, so there is no cost to this government, and we will work with other jurisdictions to ensure consistent implementation across the country.

I encourage all members to support the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very interested and pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 15, International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act, on behalf of the Liberal Official Opposition. If the intended effects of this act come forward, there will be a decrease expected in insurance costs for commercial airlines. There will be a decrease in interest costs for mobile aircraft equipment. If it's a decrease for commercial airlines, hopefully that will bring about some greater competition, and the competition in costs will result in lower airline ticket costs. If there are lower airline ticket costs, it will obviously reduce the need for the government to have its airline fleet and to use its private airline fleet. Perhaps then we could be looking to seek the sale of the government aircraft that we have, and I look forward to that, you know, as being a good effect of Bill 15 in coming forward on this.

I'll just touch on some background, though. Prior to 2001 the risk level for lending money to companies wishing to purchase aircraft equipment was high. Aircraft do not have a fixed location. Countries adhere to different sets of legal rules, making the process for debt collection difficult. In November 2001 the Cape Town convention was held in South Africa to attempt to mitigate this financial risk. At the convention no fewer than 20 states, followed subsequently by two others, signed the convention on international interests in mobile equipment and the protocol on matters specific to aircraft equipment.

In 2004 Canada signed the convention and protocol. Signing the convention means that Canada will adhere to an international registry when purchasing large mobile equipment similar to a vehicle registry. Given that the registry is a provincial responsibility, provincial implementing legislation is needed before Canada ratifies the agreement. That's why we have this legislation essentially coming into force. It has been moved through the first and reading reading, Committee of the Whole and such and is almost complete in its debate. The effect will be good. There has been support from the finance industry, support from the airline industry. Some of our companies that have done well here in Alberta in growing up look to support this bill, and I think it's a good thing.

3:50

You know, it might be good to look after this is ratified and if see some effects from it in reducing insurance in the long term, airline

costs, as I said, will be reduced for good companies like WestJet that would benefit from this. Then at this time of year we could be flying or having others fly here to enjoy our Edmonton Oilers winning the Stanley Cup two years from now, their third in a row. It'll be their third Stanley Cup in a row, you know. If necessary, we can send some players out for special dental work in those times.

The effect of the bill, I hope, will reduce those airline rates. I think it is going to have some good affects in the long term.

I hope that it does go through in terms of getting its full ratification soon. With that, I support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 15, International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act. It's a bill that I did speak to in its second reading and indicated the NDP caucus support for the bill. I am looking at the introductory remarks made with respect to this bill by the then minister of international and intergovernmental affairs. I totally agree with the reason that he gave as to why this legislation needs to be passed by this Assembly, in order for Canada to be able to ratify two international conventions and agreements that it put its signatures to. We will become, I guess, the third or the fourth province that will be passing this legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, we are in Assembly. We're not in committee. You need to be back at your seat.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's so quiet in the House sometimes, you begin to wonder, you know, what's going on here.

I think the purpose for this bill being brought forward and the reasons for us all to support it are quite clear and uncontroversial. One point that I want to draw attention to that was made by the then minister of international and intergovernmental affairs, who introduced the bill, has to do with these treaties that are ratified leading to a reduction in the lending rates that purchasers of airline equipment, mostly airline companies, will have to pay. It was suggested and a hope was expressed by the minister at the time that if these lending rates that banks charge come down for the purchase of this very expensive equipment – aircraft are very expensive, and the equipment that's used in them to modify or change or repair is also very expensive – given the fact that the overall cost to buy and maintain these machines will come down, that will mean, perhaps, that some of the savings resulting from this will be passed on to customers.

I think that's a tall order, certainly a very interesting hope expressed there, but will that happen is a question. I think that with the rising cost of travel, Albertans and Canadians in general would be very much interested in seeing some measures taken, in legislation if necessary, to ensure that some of these reductions in cost are indeed passed on to the users of the services provided by the airline industry.

Certainly, this bill is not the vehicle for undertaking such measures, but I hope that this will not fall off the agenda, that if indeed there are savings resulting from the passage of this bill and ultimately the treaties coming into place, then savings made by the airline industry will be shared with the users; that is, you and me, the travelling public of Alberta and Canada.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I want to express our support for this bill in third reading. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in regard to Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act, it's one that I can support, but I certainly cannot support this government's current practices surrounding their frequent international travels on other commercial aircraft.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Minister of Community Development on behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to close debate.

Mr. Ducharme: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

Bill 27

Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace on behalf of the minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to move third reading of Bill 27, the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act.

I believe that we've had extensive discussion on this bill in second and in committee, and I would ask for support again from the hon. members in third.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, on behalf of the Official Opposition at this time I would say that Bill 27, the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act, is one that we can support now that all vegetables produced in the province are graded with national standards in mind and the fact that this bill removes the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act plus two other enabling regulations from the statutes. I think that when we discuss this bill, we should be cognizant of the fact that so much legislation has been attempted in the past to be moved through this Assembly through Miscellaneous Statutes. This was one piece of legislation that at one time was considered under Miscellaneous Statutes.

4:00

I think, not only in this matter but in other matters, it's better for democracy, it's better for the government that people be given an opportunity to get on the public record if they have any issues whenever bills are drafted and introduced and debated in this Assembly so that people have a chance. One cannot forget – whether they're in power for six months or six years or in some cases 35 years, governments can't be afraid to put all their legislative ideas before the Legislative Assembly. This may seem like a rather boring matter. It may be a very boring matter for some members, but when you think of the fact that all government ideas and policies should come before this Assembly, it's a good idea that we have an opportunity to discuss the implications of ideas and policies before the Assembly. The notion that we can put everything through in Miscellaneous Statutes is misguided. It's wrong.

In conclusion, I would remind all hon. members of this Assembly, whether they were present or not in the year 2001, when Miscella-

neous Statutes was the best part of three-eighths or half-an-inch thick, and there were a lot of policy changes involved in that. So one has to be very, very careful about what we put and what we do not put in Miscellaneous Statutes.

I'm pleased to support this bill, and I'm pleased to see that it was stand-alone legislation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just really pleased to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three of my favourite people in the whole world: my son Jeff, who works for our Minister of Finance, his beautiful wife, Layna, and their wonderful son, probably Alberta's next best up-and-coming hockey player, Mr. Austin Mulligan. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our House.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 27
Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act
(*continued*)

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I don't want to miss this opportunity to speak on this bill. It's a bill about repealing a piece of legislation. In my little more than nine years in the Assembly I don't think I have had an opportunity to speak on a bill that repeals an existing piece of legislation, so it's very important. Secondly, it's spring-time, so spring cleanup time has come, I think, and this bill is in the spirit of doing that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I was looking at the news release that the minister of agriculture issued to explain what this bill is about. It's interesting to note that this legislation has been around for 50 years and hasn't been used and has been found of no use for the last 20 years at least. Very, very interesting. I didn't realize that there is, in fact, federal legislation that serves the purposes that at one time the existing law of the province called the Vegetable Sales Act was supposed to serve.

So the bill is now considered to be redundant. No one uses it, no one seems to pay attention to it, and no one sees the need to continue to have this piece of legislation on the books of this province. There are two regulations, I guess, that are associated with Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act that will also die a silent death as this bill is repealed. I think it's time for cleaning up our statute books, and this bill is a good candidate for it.

Mr. Speaker, I support the repeal of the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act, which Bill 27 intends to accomplish, hence my support for Bill 27. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so happy the House is going to "lettuce" have a final look at this bill before we "squash"

it. This has "bean" a very contentious bill, and as a matter of fact, the opposition was certainly able to "turnip" the heat on this bad boy. So I would suggest that you "peas" give us full consideration as this may improve the "celery" of our farmers.

Thank you.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise to support the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act. You know, it's not particularly a hot potato, this act. It really isn't too corny, and there really was no need for the government to move with a carrot-and-stick approach on this particular piece of legislation. We do not have to get really into depth on how to "repeel" this vegetable sales act.

I just rise in support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Shall I call on the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace to close the debate or call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

Bill 30
Persons with Developmental Disabilities
Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and move third reading of Bill 30, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006.

During the first two readings members on both sides of the Assembly supported Bill 30 and what it proposes. I appreciated their comments and questions during our discussion.

Mr. Speaker, as we've discussed many times during this session, the persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, program is extremely important. It provides assistance to approximately 9,300 Albertans with developmental disabilities so that they can live actively as part of our communities. Bill 30 will help strengthen this very important community focus of the PDD program. Dissolving the PDD Provincial Board and transferring its roles and responsibilities to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports will enable the ministry to enhance the overall accountability of the PDD program. This governance change will also enhance the role of the PDD community boards in delivering programs that support the inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities into community life.

In short, Bill 30 will enhance the way Alberta administers the PDD program, which will help our government better respond to the needs of Albertans who receive PDD-funded supports. I think that's something all the hon. members would celebrate.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank all of my colleagues on both sides of the Chamber for their support and for the questions that they raised during the debate. I ask that they once again support Bill 30 and pass it through third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:10

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Gover-

nance Amendment Act, 2006. As it has been going through the Assembly, we certainly have to support this bill.

I have cautious optimism that this bill will meet its objectives when we look at eliminating the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board that oversees the six regional community boards, when we see that we are transferring responsibility of the provincial board to the ministry. This, as I understand it, will enhance the role of the six regional community boards. These boards, as I understand it, will be reporting directly to the minister and will be responsible for the local governance, program delivery, and co-ordinating of other supports.

I certainly hope that with these changes no one in the PDD community will have to be as active as they've had to be this past spring to ensure that their budgets at least meet the inflation rate and meet other cost pressures that PDD boards have been faced with. I know that there was an increase. But, again, was it enough? We have to make sure that persons with developmental disabilities – and I've said it here before in this House, and I'm going to say it again – and everyone in this province can live in dignity and with respect. Certainly, people who work with individuals with developmental disabilities do their very, very best to ensure that people have the opportunity to live in decency and respect.

We can't dismiss or we can't ignore their pleas for financial assistance. They're necessary. They're needed. Some of these boards have in the past done remarkable things with the money that they have been allocated. Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, in the future this government will ensure that the practice of having to write letters and e-mails or visit respective members of this Assembly in their constituency offices or phone the minister's office or visit the minister's office before the budget is determined will no longer be necessary. Hopefully, these individuals will be able to count on a budget that reflects the cost pressures that we talked about earlier.

Now, whenever we talk about persons with developmental disabilities as we're doing in Bill 30, we cannot forget other individuals who have disabilities, but they're not developmental disabilities. We cannot forget about their needs as well. If it means that we have to have other measures so that they can participate in the workforce and maybe get some additional income in the time that they can work, I think that we should study this issue more. We should have a look at the entire issue of accessibility for people with disabilities.

I was astonished a couple of years ago that in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, we had chosen to lock a door for a period of time which provided access to people who get around in wheelchairs. We had them coming in the loading ramp down by the press gallery. That ramp was steep. I asked questions in the Assembly about it. I was glad to see that finally the other ramp, which had the proper building code slope to it so people in wheelchairs could have easier access to these premises, was finally opened up. But that's only one example of what we can do. Whether people have developmental disabilities or another disability, we cannot forget those citizens, and we must in this Assembly make sure that we do everything so that they can live again in dignity and respect. If they can work or do any sort of community volunteer work, it should be encouraged. We should make sure that they have every opportunity to participate.

With that, I would conclude my remarks on Bill 30. Let's not forget that everyone has the right, again, to live in dignity and respect. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak in third reading of Bill 30, Persons with Developmental

Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act. This bill eliminates the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board that oversees the six regional community boards, transfers responsibilities of the provincial board to the ministry, and enhances the role of the six regional community boards. The regional community boards will report directly to the minister and will be responsible for local governance, program delivery, and co-ordinating other supports. According to the government of Alberta news release from April 11, 2006, the goal of this reform is to "enhance the role of the community boards that administer services . . . while improving the province's ability to better co-ordinate all the programs that provide support to Albertans with disabilities."

Mr. Speaker, the changes in this bill to the system are absolutely necessary, and we have recently requested that the minister conduct a comprehensive review of the governance structure. However, we do not know how the minister arrived at the decision to eliminate the provincial board in order to improve efficiency or how the changes will impact the community boards. The community boards we contacted were unable to comment on how the elimination of the provincial board would impact their operation. The minister claims that the goal of this reform is to improve accountability and transparency, yet the community boards have been directed to not comment hardly on improvements.

The community boards are supposed to represent adults with disabilities, their families, service providers, and advocacy groups.

We hope that this role will be strengthened under the new structure rather than just being a voiceless arm of the government. A report conducted by former MLA Lorne Taylor on the PDD governance structure has not been made public. It may contain a recommendation on eliminating the provincial board, but we would like the report to be made public.

Mr. Speaker, I have a few questions that may be useful in the future. Building Better Bridges is a report on programs and services in support of Persons with Developmental Disabilities, PDD, released in March 2000. It contains 10 recommendations directed toward improving the governance and service delivery of the PDD programs as well as addressing the needs of other persons with disabilities who do not fit under current mandates. This review did not recommend eliminating the provincial board. How was the decision made? This is the question I want to ask. What review or reports were completed? Which groups were consulted?

4:20

Lorne Taylor prepared a report in the fall of 2005. When will this be made public? When will Albertans be able to see the recommendations made by Lorne Taylor about the PDD governance structure? Did the report recommend the elimination of the provincial board? Why were community boards given the direction to forward all questions to the department? How are we supposed to understand and evaluate the impacts of this change on community boards when they have been directed to not answer questions? How much money will be saved and where? How will that money be allocated? What arrangements have been made to prepare the department to take on these additional responsibilities? Given that 35 provincial board staff are being transferred to the ministry, what specific changes will be made to ensure that programs are being delivered in a more co-ordinated, effective, and efficient way?

This minister claims that this reform will improve accountability, administrative efficiency, transparency, and create a more equitable delivery of programs. How? What steps will the department take to ensure that services are delivered in a fair and effective way? What steps will the ministry take to improve transparency?

These are my few questions. Otherwise, we support this bill, and we still can consider these few questions in the future for the good. That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to make some brief comments on Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006. On the face of it, Mr. Speaker, the piece of legislation, in its third reading before us, is certainly about changing the way programs related to the services that are made available to Albertans with developmental disabilities are administered. The administrative changes being sought by way of this piece of legislation result from the fact that the programs that support adults with disabilities were placed under the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports in November 2004. So it's a response to structural and institutional changes that have taken place within the government's and the departmental structures. So far so good.

While we've been talking about changing administration in response to the changes in the ministerial responsibilities that impact particularly the adults with developmental disabilities and the services provided to them, the persons with developmental disabilities were seeking, in fact, answers to different kinds of questions. They were on the steps of the Legislature not long ago asking for action, which had more to do with the adequacy of resources and the services that are presently available to them. They were asking for enhanced resources for the purpose of improving the quality of the services that they are receiving, and they were also seeking a greater institutional responsiveness so that their needs are met in a timely and appropriate manner.

The question that comes to mind, of course, is will the administrative and governance changes that are proposed in this piece of legislation also address the issues of institutional responsiveness and resource adequacy seen from the side of the persons with developmental disabilities who need these services, who need these services on a regular basis, and need these services in a way that both protects their dignity and supports their daily needs that result from the disabilities from which they suffer. Whether or not these administrative changes and changes in governance will in fact enhance that institutional responsiveness remains to be seen. We'll have to wait, I guess, a couple of years to see how these changes being proposed impact in regard to the express desire on the part of persons with developmental disabilities for more responsive institutional arrangements.

There is in this bill, obviously, no room for addressing the need of adequacy and budgetary allocations. The rally on the steps of the Legislature two or three weeks ago by both the advocates for persons with developmental disabilities and by persons with developmental disabilities was also about the perceived cut of close to 3.5 per cent in the budgetary allocations to deal with the resource side of their concerns. Certainly, this bill doesn't address that. The fact that there has been a reduction in the budget for them is regrettable, certainly, but the administrative and governance changes proposed here I think will have to await the test of time for us to know whether they will increase either efficiency or accountability or increase responsiveness, which is in fact the concern expressed by adults suffering from developmental disabilities.

So there is only a limited impact that the changes here, even if they have a positive impact, will have on the daily living experiences of Albertans with developmental disabilities. The part that really concerns me and certainly concerns the recipients of these services has to do with the reduction in the budgetary allocations to them,

which necessarily, from their perspective and in my view, will lead to a reduction in the quality of services and the responsiveness of the institutions that provide those services.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks on Bill 30 in its third reading. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be very brief on Bill 30. It's a reorganization, and perhaps this is a good thing. I think my colleague was just talking about the other problems. The question that has been raised with me by some of the groups, certainly in a meeting I had in Calgary, is that there should be some savings involved here. I expect that's what the government's saying. We were told when the debates were occurring here and people were coming forward that the minister at the time said that this bill is important, that somehow by passing this bill, it would lead to better service for the people that required the service.

4:30

The question I sort of ask: is there a savings by doing this? The question that they had, Mr. Speaker: will that savings, then, go to the families and the clients? I'm not sure if this is true. I remember them saying that they felt that this board was being administered with something like \$11 million or in that range of money. The question they had: would that money be transferred? Is that how the minister was justifying that this would have some impact? Because with just the reorganization, that's fine, but it's not getting to the people that need it, and there are some very serious concerns about that. I'm raising this question because it was asked of me, and I don't have the answer, so I'm hoping that the hon. member will have that answer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, no need to close the debate. Then the question will be called.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a third time]

Bill 24

Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 24, Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, through the second reading and in committee there have been some excellent comments and thoughts provided on this bill, nothing in the way of questions other than through comments. So I think I've been able to respond to anything that was there.

I look forward to the comments in third reading and again, Mr. Speaker, will search *Hansard*, and if there are any unanswered questions, we'll be pleased to respond in writing to the members.

Mr. Martin: Just very briefly. I like the title Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act. Now, only a good Conservative spin doctor could take that title at the same time that we're jumping the limit up of what we can spend. I might call it the fiscal irresponsibility act, but I guess it's all in the matter of spin.

I know why we're doing it, and I can't recall if she indicated what it looks like down the way. I mean, this limit was raised to – I think it's \$5.3 billion. Is this something that we're going to have to look forward to in terms of next year's budget, the budget after that, or by this one jump does the hon. Finance minister feel that this will sort of solve the problems as we're going forward? This is a fair chunk of cash. It goes from \$4 billion in 2004, \$4.7 billion in 2005, and \$5.3 billion. So we can see trends there, and I think that must be somewhat disconcerting for the Minister of Finance. Just in conclusion, I would ask her if she could give us some indication of where she sees this going.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in previous bills that we've dealt with earlier this afternoon the chair has ascertained no movement from individuals with respect to Standing Order 29(2)(a), and I gather that there's no request for participation with the questions here either.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when we have a look at this bill and the title, Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006, we have to recognize that in Alberta thrifty Tories are a very scarce political commodity these days. When we look at the spending habits of this government, we recognize that "thrifty" and "Tory" are words that don't get along. When we look at the spending that goes on here, there's a significant increase in spending. So when we look at this bill, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, one again has to wonder.

I know that we talked earlier in debate about this, and we're certainly increasing the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be used for the budget purposes, from 4 and three-quarter billion dollars to \$5.3 billion, but we should be careful. The Minister of Finance I think means well, works very hard, but again "thrifty" and "Tory" don't get along these days.

Everyone in the province is stating that we should legislate to save, and this government is legislating to spend. Now, that is a contradiction. I noticed in the Appropriation Act that was introduced earlier that we're certainly going to set aside a billion dollars for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. That's a start. It's a modest start. I think the minister will do the right thing and make every effort immediately to ensure that the heritage savings trust fund is at least inflation-proofed, brought up to a pool of cash that should be larger than \$19 billion.

Now, the Alberta Liberals, the Official Opposition, have a plan for investing Alberta's surplus dollars that would create a lasting legacy for this province, but I don't see a solid plan, Mr. Speaker, from the current government. We have also long-term vision. We have a savings plan. We have a spending plan. When we look at some of the other sound fiscal ideas that this government has adopted from us, I wouldn't say too much – I would say very little – if they were to take our investment plan and use it. I think it would be wise. Imitation is a fine form of flattery. It doesn't matter whether we call it the sustainability fund or the stability fund, but that was one of our past economic planks, and this government has adopted that.

Now, instead of talking about where we'll invest the surplus during the next quarter century, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview said during budget debate, let's talk about the next quarter of a century, and instead of the next fiscal quarter, let's talk about the next quarter of a century. When we look at this legislation, we have to stop and think and ask this question: how do we want Alberta to look in 50 years?

4:40

Earlier today we had a discussion, and I listened with great interest to the comments from both the Minister of Energy and the

Minister of Environment in regard to the development of the coal-bed methane industry. If we're talking about fiscal responsibility, Mr. Speaker, we should also be talking about environmental responsibility. We all know that as conventional natural gas production declines, regardless of the price we're going to be faced in the near future with a reduction in the amount of money that we collect for the treasury.

So it is wise, it is prudent to facilitate environmentally sound coal-bed methane development policies. The development of coal-bed methane should proceed slowly, and it should proceed so that landowners and industry can both have confidence that the policies will protect the environment and also ensure that there is a return on the investment by the resource companies. I think there's a balance to be met there, and I think that that balance can be achieved. I'm not so certain that the direction that we're going with coal-bed methane development is necessary at this time. I think we should proceed but proceed with caution.

In regard to Bill 24 it would be responsible only if we were to bring on over time, in an environmentally safe way, significant amounts of coal-bed methane, which, hopefully, we will collect a significant amount of royalty on. So whenever the minister is talking about increasing the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be used for budget purposes, from \$4.75 billion to \$5.3 billion, well, that nonrenewable resource revenue will be coming in the future from coal-bed methane production.

Now, with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would caution all hon. members about this bill, and again we have to remind ourselves about the words "thrifty" and "Tory" and the fact that in the last five or six years the dramatic increase in government spending, the size of government, there hasn't been a dramatic reduction in the problems, whether the problems are in public health care, public education, or in improving our infrastructure. The budget has increased dramatically, but again the fundamental question that taxpayers ask is: where is the money going when we still seem to have crowded classrooms, when we still seem to have the prospect of teacher layoffs at the end of the school year, when we have emergency rooms that are overcrowded, people are waiting eight, 10, 12 hours sometimes, and when we have roads and bridges that certainly need a lot of work that has been overlooked in past decade? So we have to be cognizant of that.

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called. Should we proceed with calling?

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

Bill 16 Peace Officer Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and move third reading of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act.

We have had extensive discussion on this bill in second and in committee. I would ask for support again in third.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is one of those particular bills that could be good or bad, depending on how we use it. I know that the Solicitor General talked about this when

I was here – I believe it was in second reading. You know, we've had peace officers for many years, and he's absolutely right about that, but I think we're seeing differences here now.

Part of, if you like, the overheated economy, the best in the universe, or whatever the government says, is that we are facing some serious problems, perhaps in abundance, more than we have in the past. Crime rates are up, and this comes with an overheated economy. There's no doubt about that. It can also come from another direction: when you have poverty. We know that crime is fairly rampant. Whether we can hire enough police, I think we can still do more. We've advocated that, especially community policing.

I still can't get a handle on whether the hiring of these peace officers is complementary – and I suppose that would be good – or if we're looking for a cheaper fix here. They've raised this in second reading, that we are putting out people that perhaps aren't as well trained as they should be rather than paying a little more for the police that we actually need. Then I tie that to the most recent revelations about the Guardian Angels coming to Alberta to solve our problems and the minister not endorsing it but not rejecting it either. So I don't know where we're going with all this. As I say, I'm not exercised enough that I think that hiring these peace officers could be helpful, but I would suggest that the problems are probably more than this bill is going to solve. If it's a complementary piece of legislation and it's going to be used that way, fine. But if, as I said, we're looking at this as sort of being a cheaper version, trying to solve some serious problems by doing it cheaper, then that creates some very serious problems for me.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we have to relook at our whole policing situation, how this fits in. With the economy – and I'm speaking of Edmonton, but we hear of the problems in Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, wherever the economy is booming. Calgary, I know, is facing increased crime problems. The mayor has alluded to that, and I think he endorsed the Guardian Angels, which I was a little surprised about because that could create more problems. I think that it comes down to – and I think the minister and I would agree – the best way we can deal with it is to have enough well-trained police out there working with the community groups themselves as much as possible, participating.

I've said at community associations that the police can't solve all the problems. It takes the public working with the police. You see, my problem here is that I just don't know how this all fits into the whole policing structure. As I said, it's not enough for me to vote against it, but at some point I would like from the minister or the member or whatever some more clarification about where we are going, especially in view of the most recent discussion about the Guardian Angels. Even at their best that creates some other problems, and I don't think that's the way to go. Certainly, the police forces that I've talked to don't believe that it's the way to go.

Where does this fit in the whole policing structure? Where are the preventative programs that we've talked about to deal with the problems of crime in the overheated economy and prevention and what's happening? Again, I don't expect the member to have all the answers to these, but that's my basic concern about the bill. I'm not sure exactly how it fits into the total picture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak in third reading of Bill 16, Peace Officer Act. The main objective of this bill is to bring all peace officers, previously known as special constables, under one piece of legislation that will clarify their roles and responsibilities, increase accountability, and strengthen provincial standards for training, use of force, and qualifications.

My comment, Mr. Speaker, is that I think that there's a role for special constables to play in a complementary role to traditional police services, whether that is a foot patrol presence in communities responding to minor calls for investigating purposes – vehicle break-ins, accidents, whatever – or other such roles, but to put them into situations that are extremely dangerous without full training is dangerous.

Traffic stops are extremely dangerous, Mr. Speaker. The police spend hours in scenario training on just this one aspect of police duties. The question has to be: do these special constables going out onto highway 63 have the same training? Have they completed the same scenario training that regular police officers have? These are my comments. If they haven't, they are being put in harm's way, and that is unacceptable to me and unacceptable to many people in Alberta. Additional traffic enforcement on highway 63 is absolutely needed, but let's get real here. We need police officers with full training out there, not special constables who haven't received the same level of training. The minister should put more money into front-line policing services if he wants to get serious about traffic safety. This method is putting these special constables in harm's way, and that is unacceptable.

What level of authority will these special constables have? Can they just enforce provincial traffic laws, or are they going to have full Criminal Code powers? Have they been trained in all the policies and procedures dealing with the traffic laws? Do they fully understand the law and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as police officers are trained to do? Have they undergone the same level of firearms training that police officers do normally? Have they undergone the same level of training in the use of the baton and the pepper spray, and have they received the same hand-to-hand training that regular police officers have? Without the same level of training, the safety of the special constables and the public is at risk.

We are also very concerned that this bill leaves most of the details to the regulations. All of these details, Mr. Speaker, such as conditions of employment that must be met, qualifications, performance, standards of conduct, training, duties, and discipline, all of these crucial areas are left to the minister to make through regulation. In other words, we have no idea what training will be provided, how much it will cost, what standards an employer will use to hire a peace officer, and who may carry a sidearm. There is far too much ambiguity and not enough substance.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is a good bill. I mean, there still needs to be some clarification on it, but we are in third reading, and I don't know whether corrections have been made during the committee stage. That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Question has been called, so I'd call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays to close the debate or call the question.

Mr. Johnston: Call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

Bill 21

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and move Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, or the AISH Act, for third reading.

As discussed, this new act will continue our renewal of the AISH program and create a more flexible and responsive program that will

better meet the unique needs of Albertans with severe disabilities. I'd like to briefly highlight the proposed changes again for my colleagues and what those changes will mean for the clients.

Mr. Speaker, this act will make the reporting and appeals processes more adaptive to client needs. Reporting income based on individual situations will make the reporting process easier for AISH clients and will also reduce paperwork, administrative error, and the occurrence of overpayments and underpayments. The act will also help ensure that clients have the opportunity to appeal an overpayment before a debt is assessed and collection action is taken. If clients feel they haven't received due process, they will still be able to take the matter to court.

To answer a question raised in Committee of the Whole, clients will have the opportunity to appeal most decisions of a director. An example of a decision that may not be appealed will be the rates at which the personal income supports benefits are provided. In this case, the client can appeal the eligibility but not the rate of the benefit. Another example would be the provision of additional health benefits not normally provided under the various health plans.

This legislation will also allow the program to take into account special or exceptional circumstances and, if appropriate, exempt the client from repaying the amount they were overpaid. In passing Bill 21, the government can also update the language of the act and consolidate legislative provisions related to the AISH program under one ministry.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Bill 21 will allow us to provide health benefits on a limited basis to those people with disabilities who because of their income are not eligible to receive AISH. This legislation also increases flexibility by allowing AISH clients to request that the program pay third parties directly on their behalf for things like rent or continuing-care accommodation fees. That's another example of how the renewed program will be more responsive to the individual needs of the clients. Likewise, as was mentioned before, moving some of the provisions to regulation will help the program remain flexible and responsive to the needs of its clients now and into the future.

I'd like to take a moment to address one other issue raised in Committee of the Whole. A well-established process is in place under the AISH program to determine whether a person meets the definition of severe handicap of mental or physical functioning. Medical eligibility is not solely based on an applicant's medical condition. It's also based on the person's current and future ability to earn a living through working. AISH administrators use information obtained on AISH application forms and medical reports to determine eligibility. They also have medical consultants available to assist them in analyzing complex cases.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today to Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. This legislation truly will create a more flexible and responsive program that will be able to adapt and better meet the needs of clients. I'd encourage all members to support this legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a pleasure to get a chance to participate in the debate on Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, this afternoon at third reading. Now, there have been attempts in the past to amend this legislation. Certainly, when we listen to the hon. Member for Strathcona, I think all is meant well with this bill, but when we look at some of the past practices of this government and how they treat the citizens of Alberta in the AISH community, it's not a stellar record. The treatment of these citizens, a group of citizens who we

must treat with decency and respect, has been, unfortunately, very bad.

5:00

Before I go any further, Mr. Speaker, I think it's time that we acknowledge the contribution of the citizens of Alberta who are recipients of the AISH program. We have to recognize Edmonton lawyer Mr. Philip Tinkler, who filed the class action lawsuit in September 2004 on behalf of two recipients of the provincial assured income for the severely handicapped program. The two men argued that they were underpaid by the program or subject to an illegal and abusive debt collection process. For this government to pick on these citizens in this way is wrong. I can't believe that this government would do that.

This government went out of their way previously, seven years before this lawsuit was filed, and retired an entire loan for Millar Western when Mr. Stockwell Day was the Provincial Treasurer. Retired the loan just like that. There have been other loan guarantees that have been given and relaxed and in some cases retired entirely. But what do we do? Oh, no. We're going to squeeze every dime out of the disenfranchised and the unfortunate, the disabled. We should be ashamed of ourselves. We should be ashamed of ourselves, and we should be ashamed of ourselves that we're not indexing the monthly income for the assured income for the severely handicapped.

Now, hon. members of this House went on at length in committee whenever we tried to change that. We all have our salaries, each and every one of us, linked to one index or another. So if it's good enough for us, how come it's not good enough for the AISH community? Why should they have to go begging to this government? Maybe you like that. Maybe it makes you feel powerful. I don't know. But I don't think people should have to do that.

That's why in committee we had suggested that there's a better way of doing this, and that was to ensure that if there was a significant increase in the cost of living or if there were other factors – rental rates, energy costs, you name it – there would be an automatic increase in the monthly amounts that these individuals get under the program. But, no. It was seen fit by this Conservative government: oh, no, we can't do that. The thoroughbred horse racing renewal? Well, every budget year we can increase that amount by millions and millions and millions of dollars. But the AISH clients? Well, they have to go to court.

Fortunately, they won their legal case, and hopefully they'll never have to go to court again with this government. But I'm asking this government: when we consider the needs of the AISH community, we consider that every little bit that they get helps. They're very good managers of their monthly income. I've met with many different individuals in that community, and I'm amazed at how they get by. Maybe they should be giving the Minister of Finance budgeting advice because they know how to manage on very small amounts.

Maybe they do have some tips not only for the Minister of Finance but for the entire government caucus. There will be trips taken by this government. Economic Development itself would spend more money on some luncheons on some foreign city than these AISH clients would spend in a month. If we were to look, for instance, at the Economic Development hosting expenses for even a six-month period – and these would be amounts exceeding \$600 – and we were to show any member in the AISH community just exactly what this government was doing and where and in what restaurants or with whom, they would be very, very disappointed. They would be very, very disappointed that this is the same government that said, no, we can't have any sort of barometer that would link their benefit schedule to increases in cost of living.

We seem to have a set of rules here for ourselves, and we have a set of rules for the disabled. I think that's wrong, I think it is unfortunate, I think it is misguided, and it's reflective of a government that's out of touch, completely out of touch. I would urge the government to reconsider and, in your dealings with the AISH community, please recognize that they have every right to live in dignity and in respect. They shouldn't have to go beholden to this government with their caps in their hands. Programs should be well financed, and they and their families should know that the money will be there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Cardinal: Make it quick.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. He says "make it quick." Where are you going?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments. Maybe not quite as quick as the hon. minister would like, but I will make them anyhow. The bill, like so many bills, obviously has some good parts to it. Who is going to argue with, I think it's section (4)(a), that there'll be some discretion regarding allowing persons whose financial resources exceed AISH's allowed limit but who have high medical costs to benefit from eligibility for an AISH health benefit card? I mean, nobody is going to argue against that. It makes sense.

I would also argue and maybe throw out that I've been told that some people, even if they had help with such things that we used to have like bus passes, might be more employable if they could get around. I would hope the government might take a look at that as an area that could be added to something like this on the bill.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the government, I think, was embarrassed from the last election. I'm not saying that it was this member that did it, but certainly it became an election issue, and thankfully there are at least some improvements with the most recent raises in the wage and the fact that even this is a step in the right direction. There's some discretion with high medical costs.

But I would say to the member and say to the Legislature that these people are not in the lap of luxury. This is very, very difficult. I wonder how many people here could live on roughly a thousand dollars a month. That's the reality. It's better than it was, but if we look at the reality – and I've said this, and the member knows this – when you take inflation into account, these people are not as well off as they were back in 1991. That's the reality. I could have accepted this if they would have said: "Okay. This is the reality where we're going to be now, but we will put" – and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was talking about it – "the indexation on their benefits." What indexation level you use is debatable, but we could at least do it. We've advocated that and advocated that.

5:10

I know that the member and the minister have said, "Well, we'll review it," I believe in a couple of years. Correct me if I'm wrong. But, I mean, this member may not be there. It could be somebody else. It could drag on, Mr. Speaker, another seven years, and these people could fall further and further behind. As I say, they're not up to where they were in 1991. I do not honestly understand. I do not understand why we cannot bring in some sort of an indexation for the most vulnerable people in society. Nobody has given me an indication yet why we do not do that. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned that we do an indexation here, some sort of indexation so that we don't fall behind inflation. If it works here and it works in other areas, why for the life of us can't we do that?

Now, as I say, the bill doesn't refer to that immediately, but some of the realities are that they must recognize that there are some problems because they want some more discretion to be able to deal with people, and they talked about high medical costs. They have made some improvements to the benefits, admittedly. I'll give the government credit. That's at least a step in the right direction. But we've got a long ways to go yet, Mr. Speaker. A long ways to go.

You know, they say that the mark of a civilized society is how we treat the most vulnerable in that society, and I say to the members opposite that we have a long way to go to become a civilized society because we can do much better than we are with this particular bill.

Again, Mr. Speaker, there are some steps that make it a little better for some people. Hopefully, the minister would use that discretion in a generous way now that she has that discretion and that we might be bringing cases forward, as other MLAs might be too, when this occurs. I would suggest that with the indexation, we will keep haranguing the government until they do the right thing on that, but I also want to throw out the idea of some other things, like bus passes. That could be very valuable, because if you can't get to another job, how do you be productive and working? A simple thing like that. I'm told that we used to have that here in the Legislature at one time, but I haven't had time to research it, we're just getting letters about it. I think that even the hon. minister might be prepared to look at something like that. That's people helping themselves. That could be an immense help, just like we're dealing with in this bill in terms of medical benefits.

So I would hope the government would take that as constructive criticism and at least look at that. But let's not wait two years till we have another review, or seven or 10 or 12. Let's move in the next budget year at least and do something about the indexation and get these people up to some sort of level where they can live.

I just say to people: think about yourselves. Think about yourselves. It could be any one of us that could end up on AISH for whatever reason. How would you like to live on a thousand dollars a month? How would you like to do that?

Mr. Cardinal: It could be tomorrow.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Well, that could be anybody tomorrow. Exactly, hon. member. It could be any one of us. Then all of a sudden we're having to live on a thousand dollars, you know. It's just unbelievable that we can't afford to do better.

Anyhow, thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to speak to third reading on this bill.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Strathcona to close the debate?

Mr. Lougheed: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all members for their valuable contributions today. It has indeed been a very exhilarating and great Alberta day. On that note, I would move that we now call it 5:30, in view of what the hour actually is, and resume sitting on Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 5:15 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 15, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we begin our deliberations in this sitting of the Legislature, we ask for the insight we need to do our work for the benefit of our province and its people and to the benefit of our country. Amen.

Hon. members and to all in the galleries, I invite all to participate in the language of your choice in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Well, Mr. Lorieau, as we thank you for your service to the Legislature so far this spring, we want you now to go home and rest for the next couple of days to be at your absolute best Wednesday night.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Mar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sir, it is a privilege to rise in this Assembly and to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two honoured guests who are seated in your gallery. The ambassador of the Republic of Korea, His Excellency Sung-joon Yim, and his minister-counsellor, Soontaik Hwang, are both here this afternoon. Although the ambassador has visited Alberta before, this is his first official visit to our province.

Korea is Alberta's fifth-largest trading partner and a very important source of tourism, investment, and immigration. Alberta's office in Seoul, the capital, was created in 1998, and our very first twinning arrangement happened between the province of Alberta and Gangwon province in 1974. It is our oldest twinning arrangement.

Tomorrow His Excellency will visit Alberta's north, going to travel to see the oil sands, and also he is going to take part in the Alberta-Gangwon Technology Forum in Banff later this week. I ask this House to give Ambassador Yim and his minister-counsellor a warm Alberta welcome, and I ask that they rise and receive our warm welcome.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf

I would like to introduce to you and through you 22 grade 6 students from Legal school, which is located in the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Jason Paik and parent helpers Julie Keane, Tammy St. Jean, Robyn Witter, and Lorraine Zilinski. I would like to ask them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature 53 very special guests from Win Ferguson school. They are accompanied today by teachers Ms Faust and Mrs. Simpson, parent helpers Mr. and Mrs. Wheat, Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Middleton, Mr. Bowes, Mrs. Hagen, and Mrs. Noyen. They're all seated in the public gallery and I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through to members of this Assembly a group of 42 visitors from Glen Avon school in St. Paul. They are seated in the visitors' gallery and are accompanied by teachers and teacher helpers Miss Amy Charter, Mrs. Brandi Jean, Ms Janice Foster, Mrs. Sherri Piquette, and Mr. Dave Doonanco. If I could get them to stand, please, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 22 visitors from Thorsby high school. They're seated in the members' gallery, and they are led by teachers and group leaders Kim Van Steenis, Tracy Blood, Sam Kobeluck, and Mrs. Karen Marr. These are not only Alberta's brightest and best students; they're also Alberta's best Oiler fans. I would ask them to all rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a talented, young, and very bright fellow that we've hired in our office this summer as our STEP student. His name is Brendan Kane. He's a SAIT journalism student in his second year, and we obviously didn't hold that against him because we did hire him. He's accompanied by my assistant, the best in the building, Carmen Frebrowski. I'd ask both of them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Jessica Wagenvoort, who's my STEP student for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Jessica is currently entering the third year of the bachelor of arts in political science, history and economics, at The King's University. She plays soccer on their team, and her plans are to pursue law school and a career in international law. I'd ask Jessica to rise and please receive the warm and traditional welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you today a person well known to this Assembly, Mr. Oscar Lacombe, a former Sergeant-at-Arms, also a decorated veteran of the Korean War, and well known for his righteous challenge to the federal fire arms registry, which evidently is going to die a well-deserved death this week in Ottawa. Please stand and be recognized, Mr. Lacombe.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Wanda Dennelly and Karin Campbell from the Public Affairs office, assigned to Sustainable Resource Development, both working on public lands and the land-use framework policy for the province and helping our department with that. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased this afternoon to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special visitors from the Netherlands. We have a group of five that are here today on a Rotary International group-study exchange. They're in Alberta for a month to visit various government, industrial, and professional offices, and I'd like to take just a minute to introduce them all and then ask them to stand. They are in the members' gallery above me. First, we have team member Hanneke van Weert, who is an addictions counsellor with Novadic-Kentron. We have Jennifer Lebon, who represents Diesel. I mistakenly took that to mean engines, and it is in fact a brand of clothing. We have Mark Bankers representing ABN AMRO Bank, rather appropriate with that last name, and team member Martijn Lanenga representing NedTrain. He is an engineering and management science technologist. Joining them is a Rotarian team leader, Jeanne Pullens, who founded the Rotary Club of Houston, and that was some 15 years ago. As well, we have three members from the Rotary Club of Edmonton South: Ihor Kruk, Hank Hendricks, and Wayne Cameron. I would ask them all to stand as well and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you a young nephew of mine. It's his first time in the Legislature, and he's here this afternoon to observe what his uncle is doing in the House. So I would like Lionel Gauthier to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Freedom of Information Legislation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Noxious. That's the word used

by a top expert in government secrecy when asked to describe this government's Bill 20 proposal to further limit Albertans' access to government documents. This Conservative government seems hell-bent to ram through legislation this week to make Canada's most secretive government even more tight lipped. My first question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us who benefits besides himself and the front bench from restricting public access to ministerial briefings?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I explained last week that there is no way the opposition is going to get this briefing book. They will use it for purely political purposes. Purely political. I very seldom refer to it. As a matter of fact, I get my briefing notes here. But there are some sensitive pieces of information that were put together by the administration.

Relative to the FOIP legislation, you know, we've received over 3,000 FOIP requests. That's since 2004 and 2005. Ninety-four per cent were completed by government public bodies within 60 days or less. That is commendable. That's pretty impressive given the number of requests we get and the complexity of those requests and understanding that most of them come from the opposition. One criticism . . .

The Speaker: Hello? With due respect let's move on.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is then to the Minister of Government Services, who's responsible for the FOIP administration. Is this minister proud of the fact that his first major piece of legislation as a minister is being described as noxious by a top expert in the field of government secrecy?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that we all believe in the democratic process. You know, we've debated this bill in this House this session for six or seven hours. I think we have three more hours to go. I think that's enough.

Dr. Taft: That speaks for everything, doesn't it, Mr. Speaker?

Well, to the same minister: will the minister justify his decision to put the interests of 24 cabinet ministers ahead of those of 3 million Albertans?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we'll have three more hours of debate this week in the Legislature. We'll have lots of time to talk about those facts and other important parts of this bill.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last few months thousands of Albertans have gathered at town hall meetings across Alberta to voice concerns over coal-bed methane development. Some residents, such as Dale Zimmerman of Wetaskiwin, are struggling to get by after their once normal water wells are suddenly containing high levels of methane and have lost considerable volume. Last week after the release of the final report of the coal-bed methane advisory committee the Minister of Environment dismissed the real and valid concerns of these thousands of Albertans as fearmongering. To the Minister of Environment: given the importance of many of the coal-bed methane report recommendations to all Albertans, what are the timelines for implementing these important recommendations? Completion dates.

Mr. Boutilier: First of all, a couple of points that the hon. member has raised. One, in the Alberta Liberal opposition release they say – and I will table this at the appropriate time – “This report contains some excellent recommendations.” I thank him for that. Also in the report it says that perhaps if the minister didn’t dismiss, he would take the time to listen to Mr. Zimmerman’s concern.

I just want to remind this Assembly that about a month and a half ago, in fact, I met with Mr. Zimmerman, and I invited the hon. member to join me. We listened to his concerns. We have acted on his concerns. I might also say that we brought in leading experts to deal with some of the issues that he has raised, and I’m very proud to say that we’ll continue to listen to concerns and deal with the facts of the matter.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to establishing a public committee, including independent scientists, to investigate specific and cumulative impacts in the Horseshoe Canyon formation around coal-bed methane for the last five years?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to all members of this Assembly that that is exactly what we have been doing in the past in terms of looking at what the impact is, working with concerns of citizens, using independent experts from the university, such as I mentioned relative to Mr. Zimmerman, and we’re going to continue to do that because it’s that important to this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What will the minister do to ensure that residents with concerns about groundwater, including Dale Zimmerman, 10 months later still waiting for responses, meaningful responses, will be heard and that immediate action will be taken to ensure safe water for these people?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the fact that this member brought up in this House concerns – I met this gentleman with the hon. member. It is really not entirely complete when the member says, “waiting 10 months later,” when he knows very well that I met with the gentleman for over two hours with my experts and with him in attendance. I think it’s really important to us to forget about the politics. Something more important to me is the facts, the scientific, independent evidence. That’s exactly what this ministry does today, tomorrow, and well into the future in terms of securing the water for the people of Alberta, that we all value.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We’re told – and we spend a good deal of time in this Legislature talking about this – that we have a shortage of skilled labour in this province, and the numbers of people going into the apprenticeship program certainly indicate an attempt to deal with it, but are we succeeding? To the Minister of Advanced Education: I wonder if the minister can tell me how many apprentices were registered in Alberta last year in comparison with the number registered in 2002.

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I don’t know that I’ve got those numbers in front of me, so I will endeavour to provide him with a written

response, but I do know that in the last two weeks it went from 49,000 to 50,000.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

1:50

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since it takes three to four years to make journeyman from the start of one’s apprenticeship, out of the thousands of apprentices registered in 2002 – and I’ll give the minister the opportunity to get back to me again if need be – how many graduated, obtaining their apprenticeship? In other words, how many journeymen did we obtain last year?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, again I will respond in exactly the same way because I don’t have those figures in front of me. I want to be accurate for the hon. member, so I will give him a written response.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. I wonder if I can get one other response from the minister. How many apprenticeships were cancelled in 2002, 2003, and 2004?

Mr. Herard: I will endeavour to respond to that, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Just a second, hon. member. Is the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks free for a second? Would you mind just checking on that young lady who just about fell? I’d really appreciate it. Thank you.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Health Care Funding for Rural Areas

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Among the many health issues the government has ignored while it played around with dead-end privatization schemes is rural access to health care services. Many rural communities are experiencing a crisis as they are unable to obtain or to retain physician services. One Alberta town, being Bashaw, has gone so far as to levy a special tax in order to support their local physician. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister believe that it is appropriate and correct for the residential taxpayers of Bashaw to be paying to support and subsidize a physician in their town, or can she offer a solution which is more in keeping with her responsibilities?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, having been raised in a rural community, I can well appreciate the sentiments of residents who chose, in the face of an opportunity to either lose a physician or retain a physician, the choice that their council and perhaps some of the residents certainly supported, to provide some tax dollars in support of living expenses. The sheer fact remains that a doctor who has to be by himself pay for a receptionist and all the other clinical expenses under the currently negotiated trilateral agreement for funding doctors, is not likely to earn sufficient funds to support a family in a smaller community where there are not as many acute care services delivered. So we have been attempting with our rural physician action plan to help and to broaden that net of primary care delivery so that we can serve the residents in circumstances like this. But

where local councils have that discretion and make that choice, we have no rule against it, nor should we.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Then I'll ask the minister: why should local taxpayers have to subsidize doctors in order to retain those services in small communities? Why doesn't the government make sure that small communities do have physicians?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta our salaries for physicians, if you look at the Canadian Institute for Health Information, are in excess, on average, of \$340,000 per year. In Quebec, for example, they are about \$188,000 and, in fact, capped. So our dollars for doctors under our trilateral agreement are significant. Physicians who feel that that isn't sufficient – in this case a physician with a young family who wants to stay in Bashaw has identified to his community that it's not possible with the limited amount of exposure there. We are going to work on an aggressive workforce strategy to try and catch in the net the issues for smaller communities. But this government nor any other, I suggest, could promise to have a physician in every town. It's simply not practical, nor is it possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister admit that it is the responsibility of the provincial government and Alberta Health and Wellness to make sure that small towns and rural areas have appropriate medical care and not local ratepayers?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we're doing our level best and, in fact, are identified as a very strong provider of care on the Canadian scene with all of the work that we've done and the capacity we've had to deliver better quality care in a more expedient fashion. We are working on a rural physician action plan, this year adding 14 physicians in another unprecedented move by adding more funding in this year's budget for universities to take in more resident physicians. We're increasing that capacity. Once again, it is not our job to tell local communities how to spend their money, nor is it our job to interfere with that local decision-making.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Traffic Surveillance Cameras

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Police Commission has stated that since deploying 44 red-light cameras at sites with high collision rates in 2001, the number of right-angle injury collisions at those intersections has been reduced by 47 per cent. The police service also conducted a trial by enabling the existing speed-monitoring capability within the red-light cameras, and at one intersection alone the trial identified an average of 400 offenders a week travelling in excess of 100 kilometres per hour in a 70-kilometre zone. Studies show that the risk of involvement in casualty collisions doubles with each five-kilometre increase of speed over 60 K per hour. My question is to the Solicitor General. In view of these startling statistics, will the government commit to increasing funding support for more red-light cameras in Alberta's cities and towns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member's question is very good in the fact that technology has a critical role to play in a number of industries throughout Alberta but, as well, in policing. The red-light camera, the statistics that the member mentions, has really provided safer intersections in the testing period. In both Calgary and Edmonton they've been utilizing red-light cameras now for more than five to six years, and we've seen a reduction in serious collisions as well as fatalities at these intersections, a marked decrease. It's a proven fact that we can save lives as well as being able to provide those individuals that do go through red lights with a ticket and the opportunity to go to court. So the government has a strong record in supporting this, and we'll continue to support those decisions that are made by municipal police services.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: will the minister allocate more enforcement resources to photoradar enforcement?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, the main focus of photoradar is traffic safety. It's about ensuring that we can educate drivers but, as well, issuing summonses for those that fail or refuse to follow speed limits. We have seen a marked decrease in the number of photoradar tickets since its real inception in Alberta from 9 per cent of drivers in the province of Alberta to now about 2 per cent of drivers. So we've seen a marked decrease, and obviously the education program is working.

Dr. Brown: A further supplemental is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Will the minister commit to moving forward with the use of photoradar on provincial highways, including the Deerfoot Trail in Calgary?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the policy currently is that we do not allow photoradar on our highways. The public consultation that we have seen so far indicates that the public is not in favour of having them on the highway. Of course, part of the difficulty is that a person could be speeding on the highway, and with photoradar you probably don't know about it for at least two weeks. We're more interested in using radar where, in fact, an officer then stops the vehicle, gives the ticket, and they get demerit points, whereas if it's photoradar, they do not. As far as the Deerfoot is concerned, that is in the city of Calgary. The province does not have jurisdiction on that stretch on highway 2.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Federal Child Care Benefit

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite Alberta's immense wealth there are approximately 9,000 families with children in this province who receive income support. Many of these families require access to affordable child care services, but the recent cancellation of the federal/provincial child care agreement leaves very little help for parents struggling to keep up with high fees. To the Minister of Children's Services: has the minister consulted with the Minister of Human Resources and Employment to determine the effect that the new \$100 federal child care benefit will have on Alberta families receiving social assistance?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have. As I explained to the hon. member about two weeks ago when I sat down with her, Alberta won't be clawing back any of the benefits. My hon. colleague may want to supplement.

2:00

Mr. Cardinal: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a really important area, and it's a real high-needs area. Therefore, Alberta provides many, many supports on top of the basic rates we provide. Supports include money for babysitting, special diet allowances. These are supplementary benefits, among the best in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: what plan does the minister have for families on income support to ensure that they are able to receive the full benefit of the new \$100 allowance?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, again, that is one area that's really high needs, and we're really sensitive in that particular area. I've given directions to my staff already to assess the situation, assess all the new federal programs announced, assess what programs we have to offer here in Alberta, and determine where adjustments could be made. I'd like to thank the opposition member again for that question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister commit today to joining the governments of Saskatchewan and Ontario and agree to not claw back the new federal funding from families on income support?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've agreed to this already, that we will not be clawing back any of the benefits.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Monitoring for Health Program

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents have come to me with concerns about costs and provisions of diabetic treatment supplies. Now, I understand that more people are eligible to receive help managing their diabetes under the monitoring for health program. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister outline how this program can assist more people with diabetes while funding for the program has apparently not increased?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in September 2003 funding for the Alberta monitoring program was assigned to the Canadian Diabetes Association, and it was increased significantly. In fact, we increased that to a budget of about \$9 million annually. The program is intended to assist some 40,000 low-income people to access those supports so that they might be able to supplement their income sufficiently in order to look after the costly supplies that are needed for diabetics. The project was not intended, though, to fund all of the supplies. These supplies include blood glucose strips, injection supplies, lancets, and pump infusion sets. People who are insulin dependent receive about \$550 per year and with the oral medication about \$250 a year. So it is noteworthy that it is an expensive program, but to date there have been fewer people subscribe to the program than we originally thought would subscribe.

Mr. Johnson: My only supplemental is to the same minister. Could the minister indicate if there are plans to further increase funding for this program?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in light of the increase that has been identified for the number of people that will be receiving support for Alberta health care insurance premiums, raising those thresholds so that more can be a part of it, we are planning to announce some increase in those thresholds so that, in fact, instead of having a little less than 20,000 people in support and receiving support through the program, we can increase those support levels, increase those thresholds, and ultimately hit closer to that target of some 40,000 people that will receive support for their supplies. So it will be imminent that we will make those announcements, and I hope we'll be able to help considerably more people with the cost of diabetic supplies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Lottery-funded Grant Presentation Cheques

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Gaming minister put an end to Tory MLAs signing their names on lottery cheques. The minister stated that partisan cheque presentations using lottery funds will not be going on any further. The minister went on to say that the Official Opposition should check out its site and that we would be surprised at one of the pictures. We e-mailed the department for clarification, but it went unreturned. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister tell us which picture he was referring to and on which website he saw an opposition member presenting lottery money, not charity money? They are two different things, my dear hon. minister.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there is still some confusion even after my supplementary answer last week, obviously, when I said that MLAs shouldn't be signing the bottom of the cheque to make it appear as though the cheque was coming out of their account and not the government account. I've been trying to avoid embarrassing the member opposite whose website the photo is on, but unfortunately I guess I'm forced into telling the Assembly and the member opposite that if they would check the website of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, they would find a photo of a cheque being presented to the Afton School Parent Advisory Council. It's a \$125,000 community facility enhancement cheque. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, I'll be tabling an appropriate number of copies of that photo at the end of this session. Clearly on the photo is the Alberta lotteries logo.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: given that the only cheque presentation on our website involves charity or personal cheque presentation, will the minister take back the statement and apologize right now?

Mr. Graydon: Are you telling me, Mr. Speaker, that the \$125,000

to the Afton School Parent Advisory Council came from the hon. member's personal account? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister . . .

Some Hon. Members: Answer the question.

Mr. Agnihotri: I will find out about that.

Will the minister commit to getting better research from his staff because I confirmed from the present 16 MLAs that they didn't have any?

Mr. Elsalhy: This is false.

Mr. Agnihotri: This is totally false. I again request you to apologize because you don't have any evidence. If you have any evidence, please table it right now.

Mr. Graydon: As mentioned, I will table the appropriate number of copies of the photograph at the appropriate time in this afternoon's session.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Alberta/B.C. Economic Agreement

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta recently signed an historic agreement with the province of British Columbia to reduce barriers to trade, investment, and labour mobility between our two provinces. This partnership gives businesses and workers in both provinces greater access to a larger range of opportunities. In addition to this agreement a special memorandum of understanding was signed covering postsecondary education. My first question today is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Many students in the province today struggle to get accepted into a postsecondary program in Alberta because of the increasing demand for these spaces. Will the new agreement make it even harder for students to be accepted into a postsecondary program in Alberta's learning system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, this is good news all around because this agreement creates an economic region second only to Ontario, and the way that the economy is going in both British Columbia and Alberta, look out Ontario. This agreement will make it easier for students to be accepted into Alberta's postsecondary learning program and vice versa. One of the main purposes of this agreement is to improve the accessibility of each province's postsecondary programs to students in Alberta and British Columbia.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also directed to the Minister of Advanced Education. How will this partnership with B.C. support entrepreneurs wanting to start up companies in Alberta who can't find skilled labour?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, both Alberta and British Columbia

currently face low unemployment, shortages in the skilled trades, and lots of entrepreneurial opportunities in a booming economy. This agreement will allow an entrepreneur in British Columbia to start a company in Alberta knowing full well that the rules are going to be the same here as they are there, so the same requirements, for example the same credentials, will be accepted on both sides. As we know, small business is the engine of the economy. This will make it easier to grow even more.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:10 Physician Supply in Rural Alberta

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to fail rural communities with their health concerns and doctor retention issues. It's not about funding; it's about training doctors. The government's current approach to workforce planning is insufficient now and will be totally inadequate in the future. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. When will the minister release a detailed five-year plan on increasing the spaces allocated for educating and training doctors in Alberta's universities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question because, in fact, we have a meeting scheduled tomorrow morning with the minister of health to discuss exactly that.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, but when do we get the plan?

To the minister of health: given that the minister recognizes that there is a shortage of health professionals in rural Alberta, why was there no increase in funding for the rural physician action plan in this year's budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there were a number of ways that we increased funding that would benefit rural Alberta. For example, we had \$35 million in last year's budget for primary care networks. We have \$70 million in this year's budget. Our hope is that with another 14 – and we've expanded to 14 primary care networks now – raising the numbers to some 28 across the province, we'll have a wider net of health care professionals that will work in teams that will help support not only urban communities but rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, the other part of the equation, of course, is the work that we're doing to prepare health care professionals that are not physician related that deal with the supports for long-term care, the nursing supports, licensed practical nurses. If you talk to some of the regional health authorities, for example in Calgary, their anticipation is that we will be fine until the year 2010, but after that, for the broader net across Alberta it's clear that we have to do more as the boomers move towards retirement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: can the minister explain how health care in Alberta is equitable when the good people of Bashaw are paying income tax, health care premiums, and a share of natural resource revenue and now they have to pay a \$68 per year tax to retain their only physician?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as I explained earlier, there are two sides

to this issue. The one issue is where we have a trilateral agreement that compensates physicians on a fee-for-service basis, and without an acute-care hospital where there's long-term care in that community, the fact remains and the fact is that there are simply not sufficient procedures to compensate a doctor at the level at which he wishes to earn.

The second part and a very fundamental truth, however, is that if a local community chooses to undertake a service and supplement a service in order to retain that service in a community, we should not try to stop that discretion. It happens many times where local communities pay more to keep a school in function so that that school can continue to serve community capacity and needs. So although communities in many cases have been part of the recruitment process for health care professionals and have chosen to put their own tax dollars there, you cannot argue that this province funds insufficiently its physicians because, in fact, we're at the top of the scale.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Tuition Fee Policy

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Advanced Education has been tying himself in knots trying to justify removing tuition policy from legislation, where it's subject to the public scrutiny of this Legislature, to regulation, where future decisions would be made behind closed doors at the whim of the cabinet. The minister can go on arguing as long as he wants, but the fact remains that democratic oversight on tuition policy will be replaced with a secretive and undemocratic process. My question to the minister: if the tuition policy is good enough to be put in regulation, approved behind the closed doors of the cabinet room, why is the tuition policy not good enough to be included in the legislation that is openly debated on the floor of this Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be careful not to talk about the legislation itself because it is on the Order Paper, but I will acknowledge the concerns of students. That's why our government paid a tuition increase for students last fall and this fall, saving them \$87 million in preparation for this.

I'll make the hon. member the same offer I made to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. I offered him a spot at the consultation table, and I offer the same thing to you.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why is the minister refusing to listen to every student organization in the province which is calling on the government to keep tuition policy in legislation so that it can't be changed at the whim of the minister or his cabinet?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'm not refusing. In fact, I'm meeting with them this afternoon. You seem to have got there first.

With respect to the process, the hon. member knows that you can't pass an OC in cabinet without doing consultation. I'm offering him a seat at that consultation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is this government sandbagging the work of its own postsecondary

steering committee and the work of the subcommittee on transforming the postsecondary system, which nowhere recommends that tuition fee policy increases be made by cabinet decision rather than by this Legislature?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the consultation process that will in fact form the regulations is a very extensive process, and I invite the hon. member to be part of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Alberta/Montana Relations

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we know that relations between Canada and the United States have been strained over issues like BSE, softwood lumber, and emerging issues, like water. I understand that the federal government is responsible for resolving these kinds of international issues, but my first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What does Alberta as a province hope to accomplish through its relationship with Montana by working outside the federal diplomatic process?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has had a formal relationship with the state of Montana since 1986. This was long before issues of BSE and heightened border security arose. We've worked well with the state of Montana for the last 20 years co-ordinating things like agriculture and transportation, tourism, trade and investment, the environment, including water. In fact, there is an international joint commission that's been in place since 1909 to deal with transborder water issues between the two jurisdictions.

When issues arise between Canada and the United States, we think that our good relationship between the province and the state of Montana can influence federal negotiations and decisions. Last week Alberta and Montana both agreed to train together in support of each other's emergency response. As an example, we agreed to work on transportation issues to encourage the flow of people and trade across the border. Also, Mr. Speaker, the consul general for the United States, Mr. Naim Ahmed from Calgary, was in attendance as well as the Canadian consul general representing Canada based in Denver, the hon. Michael Fine. Both of those individuals will take the nature of the discussions held between Alberta and Montana back to their respective federal governments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: given that border security is one of those issues decided by the U.S. government, not the state of Montana, what kinds of actions can Alberta take through its relationship with Montana, if any, to influence that decision?

Mr. Mar: We do know, Mr. Speaker, that the legislation has already been passed by the U.S. Congress, so we recognize that a U.S. government decision has been cleared to require passports or some other form of identification to enter a U.S. jurisdiction. We're hoping that our two jurisdictions, Montana and Alberta, might be able to have some influence on the timeline for implementation. We believe, between the two of us, that more time is required to estimate the economic impact of this decision and perhaps lengthen it so that people will be ready.

2:20

As an example, Mr. Speaker, the U.S. consul general indicated that the number of people who use a passport to clear U.S. customs at the Calgary International Airport is about 70 per cent, but the number of people who have a passport to clear customs at Sweetgrass, Montana, is only about 30 per cent. With the introduction of the requirement to have a passport or secure document at land crossings of the U.S. border to be implemented by January 1, 2008, we believe that more time is required to ensure that the 70 per cent of people who don't have a passport will in fact be ready for it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My last question is to the Minister of Environment. Given that there is somewhat of a dispute between Montana and Alberta relating to the use of water in the Milk and St. Mary rivers, can the minister tell us how the province is working with Montana to determine a solution?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has mentioned, we are working very closely with our neighbours to the south. We have an incredible long history of almost 100 years. I want to say as Minister of Environment responsible for water that, clearly, Albertans are viewed in North America as excellent managers of water. I applaud Albertans for their work over the past 100 years. We continue to work with our neighbours to the south; in fact, right now the IJC, the International Joint Commission, that the minister previously had mentioned. We are asking for consultative feedback from residents in both Montana and Alberta. That's what's happening. We will continue in terms of conservation and collaboration because I think that at the end of the day this important resource we've been blessed with is far too valuable to do anything but work together.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Water Quality Monitoring

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta needs to learn from other governments' botched water strategies where the lack of government planning and monitoring led to dangerous results in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, and Walkerton, Ontario. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given that the money allocated in Budget 2006 for water and wastewater management doesn't even address the water infrastructure backlog, let alone address current needs, how can Albertans be confident in their water supply?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, since the Water for Life strategy has been adopted, the government of Alberta has taken that as a very serious issue. Of course, this year \$54 million was allocated to water/wastewater projects. As well, we know that in the agreement that we signed with the federal government – some \$88 million from us, \$88 million from the federal government, and \$88 million from the municipalities – some 55 per cent of that money has to be spent on projects that are green. Water and wastewater management are a part of those.

As far as the testing of the quality of drinking water to make sure that it's absolutely safe, Mr. Speaker, we are promoting the regional

type of projects. One of the big reasons for that is so that we can build water treatment plants that are efficient because you get some economies of scale, but also it's very critical that we have people operating those that are qualified. So to build a number of small stand alones, we believe that there's more danger of having some problems with the management of the plant.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Finance. Will the minister admit that Alberta's infrastructure deficit is in fact downloaded provincial debt?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me see. We have a 13 and a half billion dollar capital plan, triple any other province in Canada. We've added additional Water for Life funds in each of the last two years. We continue to support our municipalities. I would remind the hon. member of the \$3 billion commitment to municipalities that's being paid to them by their request over five years. There's a municipal sponsorship program. I lose track of exactly the amount of that one. Are we downloading? We're downloading a fair amount of money.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Three billion dollars with lack of planning isn't going far enough.

To the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, capital planning: has the minister considered adopting the Alberta Liberal plan that would see 25 per cent of all surpluses go into an endowed capital account that would responsibly deal with water treatment and other infrastructure shortcomings now and into the future?

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to be able to work with the Minister of Finance, who has outlined exactly the amounts of money and the programs that are currently in place. As we go forward beyond the three-year business plans, we've got billions more dollars to identify and how those programs will work and how we'll pass on the money and continue to work with our municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent reports indicate that there are a record number of mountain pine beetle-infested trees in our province this year, nearly 15,000. The mountain pine beetle has devastated the B.C. forest industry and a large number of communities that depend on this industry. Now the mountain pine beetle is threatening Alberta's forests more than it ever has. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is his department doing to get the mountain pine beetle out of our forests?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. We've said in this House many times that all along the mountains there are pine beetles and they are a serious threat to our forests. We've pursued a very aggressive strategy since they were first detected in Alberta in 2002.

We survey our forests both in the air and on the ground. We continue to cut and burn our infested trees, and we do prescribed burns in particular areas, strategic locations where we have a large infestation of pine beetles. The department, in addition to that strategy, has also asked the industry to review their harvesting sequences in their already approved plans and to focus on removing mature forests that might be threatened by the pine beetle. This aggressive, comprehensive strategy to fight the mountain pine beetle strives to meet the methods of our industry as well as the needs of our communities that depend on that industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Has his department learned anything from the B.C. government on how to effectively control this pest?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, we are indeed fortunate to have British Columbia as such a strong and experienced partner and an ally in battling this particular disease. At the recent Alberta/British Columbia joint cabinet meeting we renewed our commitment with British Columbia at that time to work together on our shared border. We're doing a very aggressive plan on both sides of the border to stop the beetle at that border. We target areas where the mountain pine beetle will most likely come across into Alberta. Again, we cut and we burn those infested trees in those areas. It's important that we continue to work with British Columbia to ensure that there is a ban on barked wood coming across the border into Alberta to reduce the beetles travelling into Alberta in that way as well. We're taking a very proactive approach in working with British Columbia, and we're going to be making sure that we do everything to limit the spread of the mountain pine beetle into our mature pine forests.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. How will the government deal with the potential impact of the mountain pine beetle on the softwood lumber framework?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. It is a question that the industry has brought to our attention, but it is too soon to say how the softwood framework might affect the challenges that we have with the mountain pine beetle. Our focus right now is on trying to prevent the beetle from spreading to the mature forests, as we said. We have met with the industry, and we all recognize that there are details to be ironed out in addressing and finalizing the framework as it's presented. We are concerned about the potential threat that will bring to Albertans as we bring forward the negotiations under the framework, and we will work closely with all our partners to make sure that the realities of our day-to-day forest industry like out-of-control beetles are considered in finalizing those details under that framework.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

2:30 Alberta/Montana Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Promoters of major new electricity generation projects in Alberta want greater access to U.S. electricity markets as a prerequisite before they invest here in

Alberta in the construction of more power plants. Export power lines benefit the generators at the expense of consumers here in Alberta. The first new export power line planned is now through a public process, and that line will be constructed between Lethbridge and Montana. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Is the Montana/Alberta tie-line licensed as a utility here in Alberta?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the Montana/Alberta tie-line is a merchant line. It's a private-sector application. To build, they have to go through all the regulatory processes to have that line approved just as any other utility company would have to. It'll be up to those making the contracts to see if it's viable.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is the Montana/Alberta tie-line a merchant line? Is it licensed as a merchant line, or is it licensed as a utility here in the province of Alberta? Yes or no?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the specific licence application in front of me. I'd be happy to get that and report back in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: given that electricity ratepayers will pay the cost now for additional transmission capacity that is to be constructed between Lake Wabamun and southern Alberta, will any electricity transmitted between these points after the new transmission capacity is developed be exported on the Alberta/Montana tie-line?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the application for this 500 kV line between Wabamun down to the Calgary area is to strengthen our grid for delivery of electricity to our residents, our businesses here in Alberta. It is in the primary needs application, that it was to strengthen our own grid, not anything to do with export.

That said, I do want to say, though, that we do already have a couple of interconnections, one through British Columbia and one through Saskatchewan. They're limited in scope. You can effectively already transport electricity through to British Columbia through to United States. That happens already. But it acts as greater stabilization to have access to more electricity, other plants in other jurisdictions that will help stabilize even our own market and would be to our benefit.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six to participate, but today just a little further information with respect to the democratic history of Alberta. While the length of time between Alberta's 26 elections varies, the overall average length of time is 3.95 years, almost right on the four-year mark.

The longest period between elections is five years, two months, and three days, the time between the election held June 19, 1930, and the election held August 22, 1935. The second longest time is four years, 11 months, and 10 days, the time between the elections held July 18, 1921, and June 28, 1926. The shortest time between elections is two years, 10 months, and 12 days, the time between the elections held May 8, 1986, and March 20, 1989. The second shortest time is two years, 10 months, and 24 days, the time between the elections of August 5, 1952, and June 29, 1955. Nine elections

were held after four years since the previous election and 12 have been held in the third year.

To repeat, the overall length of time between elections in our history is 3.95 years.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Marigold Library System

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and recognize the 25th anniversary of the Marigold library system. This system links libraries over a wide area, with member communities stretching throughout south central Alberta, including my constituency. Linked together, libraries can act as deposits of information for a much larger number of people than live in the immediate area around the library.

Since the creation of the Marigold library system there have been many changes in how they do business, and one of the main drivers of this change is technology. When this system was first implemented, microfiche was the tool most used in libraries. As new technology became available, libraries have become more connected, first through telephone or computers which linked to a system-wide reference and interlibrary loan system between the member libraries.

Not only the technology has changed the way the Marigold library system operates. New partnerships have also opened up broader horizons for rural libraries. Since 1999 Marigold has had a partnership with Northern Lights library system and Yellowhead library system, and this collaboration is referred to as the Regional Automation Consortium, or TRAC. Since that time, more regions have joined the partnership, and this level of interconnectedness allowed for the creation of the Alberta library card. With this a cardholder from Hinton could walk into a library in Edmonton and borrow materials.

In 2003 the Peace library system joined TRAC, which meant that the members were able to share books from over two-thirds of the province. Further improvements have led to other changes such as cardholders being able to access the system from home to check out books and have them delivered to their home library.

Over the past 25 years there have been a great many changes in technology, and this has greatly affected libraries in our province. The completion of the SuperNet means that rural libraries will be able to offer even more services to their members, and the possibilities are endless.

Mr. Speaker, when people communicate and co-operate, the sky is the limit. I would ask all members to join me in marking the 25th anniversary of the Marigold library system.

Native Prairie Grasslands

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's grasslands constitute a tremendously important part of Alberta's natural heritage. They're home to over 1,100 diverse species of fauna and flora, including characteristic species such as the prickly pear cactus, the western diamond-back rattlesnake, the pronghorn antelope, and the burrowing owl. Unfortunately, human development has led to the loss or degradation of much of our native mixed-grass and shortgrass prairie, causing many species to become threatened or even extinct.

Recently the energy company EnCana has proposed a project which could see as many as 1,275 new gas wells drilled in the national wildlife refuge portion of the Suffield military base in southeastern Alberta. While not completely free from human

impact, the refuge still contains much of its natural beauty and integrity as a native grasslands area.

The EnCana proposal has the potential to cause further degradation of the area. While the wells, once in place, may have a small footprint on the environment, a larger danger lies in the cumulative impact of drilling and servicing and associated pipelines, roads, and trails. This cumulative effect could be very damaging to the grasslands and threaten the tremendous biodiversity and the uniquely aesthetic nature of this area.

I want to commend Lieutenant Colonel Drew, the base commander of CFB Suffield, for recognizing the unique nature of the refuge and its fauna and flora and for his efforts in safeguarding the area. I believe that we as Albertans must take action to protect the last remnants of our native prairie grasslands, and I would encourage all concerned Albertans to make their views known to the panel established by the federal Environment minister to review this drilling project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Asian Heritage Month

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is Asian Heritage Month, and I rise with great pleasure today to recognize the rich culture and important contributions of the Asian community in our province. There are over 250,000 people from Asian backgrounds in Alberta, and the Asian community has been an important part of our province for its entire existence, over 100 years. From the business community to the academic world to the cultural sector there has always a vibrancy and dynamic feeling that the Asian community shares with the rest of the province.

2:40

The events celebrating Asian Heritage Month throughout Alberta demonstrate the diversity and energy of this community's contributions. In Calgary photo exhibits, a film festival, a writers' showcase, and concerts will highlight the amazing experiences of Asian artists. In Edmonton art exhibits, a book launch, an international martial arts championship, and a spring garden festival will showcase the diversity of Asian culture.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is proud of its multicultural heritage and the strength of its diversity. Albertans from all cultural backgrounds working together have made Alberta what it is today, a rich and unique province with opportunities for all. Asian Heritage Month provides communities with another opportunity to work together to make cross-cultural connections and recognize the value of our cultural diversity.

I encourage all MLAs and all Albertans to celebrate Asian Heritage Month. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Diversity in Alberta

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to focus on an Alberta that is coming of age socially, politically, and spiritually. It is becoming a cliché to speak of our diversity, yet it is this breadth of our people that is the strength of the new Alberta. Alberta is coming to reflect the pluralism that makes our country a microcosm of planet Earth.

Politically Alberta is coming of age. As a new Prime Minister from Alberta gets used to governing Canada as a whole, the rest of Canada is learning that Alberta does not march in lockstep. We have

many voices and viewpoints. Child care is an example. While Ottawa now wants to get out of the field, other Albertans are determined to have a voice in the choice the new government offers. We are becoming mature enough to recognize that to question and challenge is not disloyal for choices that grow out of debate and scrutiny will be more enduring.

Spiritually we are coming of age. In my riding I've been part of discussions where Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and Jews have shared our deepest concerns and admitted that it doesn't matter what we call God. That is truly a miracle. A century ago it was hard to get Christian denominations to talk. The Hebrew name for God, I am what I am, is one we cannot escape. Every time we make an I-am statement, we either affirm our source or take the name in vain. Let us make our I-ams not statements of individual ego but recognition of belonging to a larger whole. When we do that, we will reflect not only diversity but our divine splendour. Then we will truly have come of age.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans depend upon modern freeways for commerce, recreation, and commuting. That's why the new sections of Anthony Henday Drive are such a boon to the city of Edmonton. But my constituents have raised serious questions about the downside of this freeway.

Albertans in southeast Edmonton living next to the drive are angry and frustrated because the road runs less than a hundred feet away from some houses without true noise or safety barriers. They anticipate that their property values may fall because of increasing noise levels and air pollution from passing vehicles. More importantly, they are concerned for the safety of their children and pets. With vehicles zooming by at freeway speeds, children living near this road will be at risk every single day, yet the government has no plans despite requests from Edmonton city council to create earthen berms or barriers that could dramatically lower the risk to children while protecting property values and the quality of life of southeast Edmonton residents.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Ellerslie and, indeed, on behalf of all Edmontonians living near Anthony Henday Drive, I call upon this government to do the right thing and reconsider their position. The investment required to make the residential areas bordering Anthony Henday Drive safe and protected from noise and dust is well worth it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Bullying Prevention Campaign

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last June government launched a three-year province-wide bullying prevention program. This campaign encouraged children to learn how to handle bullying through the S-team heroes game at teamheroes.ca. I'm excited to say that this website recorded over 1 million visits in less than a year, a remarkable achievement. Parents can also learn more about the bullying prevention program through a web resource called bullyfreealberta.ca.

We are expanding on the S-team heroes work through a new campaign that encourages 12- to 18-year-olds to stand up and stop bullying. Bullying can stop in less than 10 seconds, Mr. Speaker, when someone intervenes on behalf of the victim. Youth can visit

b-free.ca for practical tips and advice on how to stand up and stop bullying in a positive way. We're also trying to encourage youth to talk to their parents or a trusted adult.

In conjunction with the new campaign, Mr. Speaker, government has launched a toll-free 24-hour provincial helpline for youth who are struggling with bullying. The number is 888-456-2323. Adults can also call this number for help and support with bullying. I'm confident that we're on the right track here, but we still have a long way to go.

Making bullying history requires the combined efforts of government, community, school boards, teachers, parents, and students. Schools can play an integral role in preventing bullying and are making a difference. This is one of many reasons Alberta is recognized internationally for its outstanding and caring education system. Alberta has also been recognized nationally by bullying prevention experts and is a leader on this issue, Mr. Speaker. Parent link centres have also played an important role in this work by ensuring that parents have the tools they need to help their children deal with bullying situations. I commend all those who have taken part in this very successful campaign and encourage all Albertans to do their part to end bullying in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice being given this time, it's my pleasure to introduce a petition signed by 23 students from St. Joe's school in Calgary. The petition calls for concerted government action to address the reported rise in teen smoking in Alberta, and not only do they offer their criticism; they also offer us some possible solutions: a tobacco tax increase, legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing, and legislation to make all workplaces completely smoke free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to give oral notice of three motions, the first of which is with respect to the Standing Orders of this Assembly and a package of edits and important updates, corrections, standardizations, and so on, put together by the Speaker's office and his staff, for which we are very grateful. It goes as follows. Be it resolved that

The Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, denoted as being effective April 11, 2005, be repealed in their entirety and the Standing Orders tabled in the Assembly on May 15, 2006, and distributed to members be substituted in their place.

The revised Standing Orders come into effect on the first day of the next sitting of the Assembly following the adjournment of the 2006 spring sitting.

The second motion will read as follows.

Be it resolved that:

- (1) A Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be appointed to review the Personal Information Protection Act as provided in section 63(1) of that act consisting of the following members, namely Mrs. Ady, chair; Mr. Goudreau, deputy chair; Mr. Backs; Mr. Johnston; Mr. Liepert; Mr. Lindsay; Mr. Loughheed; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Martin; Mr. Rodney; and Mr. Snelgrove.
- (2) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in

accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most recent Members' Services Committee allowances order.

- (3) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (4) In carrying out its duties, the committee may travel throughout Alberta and undertake a process of consultation with all interested Albertans.
- (5) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Assembly or the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.
- (6) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (7) The committee must submit its report, including any proposed amendments to the act, within 18 months after beginning its review.
- (8) When its work has been completed, the committee must report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

2:50

Finally, Mr. Speaker, my third motion is as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend that Mr. Lorne R. Gibson be appointed as Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 43

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two reports to table. First, I would like to table five copies of the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 2004 provincial enumeration and the November 22, 2004, provincial general election of the 26th Legislative Assembly.

Secondly, I would like to table five copies of the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Senate nominee election, Monday, November 22, 2004.

Copies of both were previously distributed to all MLAs.
Thank you.

Mr. Graydon: I'd like to table five copies of a photograph referred to in question period earlier today.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is raising a point of order on the Minister of Gaming's tabling of a picture?

Ms Blakeman: Yes.

The Speaker: We'll deal with it later. I just wanted to know that that's exactly what it is.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of four of the many letters I've received from concerned citizens of Alberta voicing serious concerns with the proposed third-way health care system. The first letter is signed by six individuals. They are R. Seamans, V. Brennen, E. Roy, M. Fichter, E. Morrissey, and J. Dunkle. The remaining letters are from Stan Nykiel, Jonathan Hyatt, and Tim Cambridge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the required number of copies of the Cuisine & Concours d'Elegance program from the Meals on Wheels fundraising gala that took place at the Roundup Centre in Calgary last Saturday evening. Calgary's Meals on Wheels delivers not only nutritious meals to over a thousand individuals each day but provides dignity, companionship, and security, allowing primarily fixed-income seniors to remain in their homes and therefore out of expensive institutional care. Hopefully, the Alberta government will recognize and financially support this now 41-year-old voluntary program that has outgrown its current facility.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table here today. The first is from Carl Ulrich from Edmonton. He says that Bill 20 is a step backwards and that one of the reasons the public has such little faith in elected officials is because of the lack of transparency.

I also have a letter from William Dascavich. He recently visited a senior in a health care facility in Edmonton. He was impressed by the high standard of accommodation but was very disturbed by the lack of staff and the resulting distress that this causes residents.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters to table today. They are all from people who are deeply disturbed by Bill 208 and who wish to voice their opposition. They're from Rheanna Sand of Edmonton, Rod McConnell, also of Edmonton, and Paul Sereda from Calgary. They each feel that Bill 208 would not protect human rights but would legislate and legalize discrimination.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have eight tablings today, and they're all regarding questions that we've asked over this past session in the direction of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation on the Calgary and Edmonton utility corridors or the ring roads. The first tabling is dated December 2, 1982, and again it is regarding the Calgary and Edmonton transportation and utility corridors.

The second tabling is also from Alberta Environment, and it's a memo dated February 25, 1983. The subject is again the Edmonton transportation and utility corridor.

The third tabling I have is dated September 18, 1981. It's a memorandum again from Alberta Environment to the hon. Premier of the day from the Minister of Environment, and it is on the Calgary and Edmonton corridor land purchases.

The next tabling I have is from September 18, 1981, and it's from the Minister of Environment again to the chairperson of the members' priorities committee. It is on the Calgary and Edmonton corridor land purchases. [interjection] Yes, hon. member, 1981.

The next tabling I have is from January 5, 1983, and it is from the Minister of Environment to the chairman, again, of the finance, priorities and coordination committee, and its subject is the northeast energy corridor land purchases.

The next tabling I have is dated October 9, 1980, and it is from the Minister of Environment to the president of the Executive Council, the hon. Premier of the time, and the subject again is the Edmonton and Calgary RDA purchases and special warrants.

The next to last tabling I have is also from the Minister of Environment, dated November 23, 1981. Again the subject is the Edmonton transportation and utility corridor.

The last tabling is from Alberta Executive Council, dated September 10, 1985, and the subject is the Edmonton-Calgary restricted development area land purchase, and this indicates that the finance, priorities and co-ordination committee authorized the minister of public works, supply, and services to "proceed to purchase a one acre parcel of land in the Edmonton Restricted Development Area from Northwestern Utilities Ltd. for approximately \$650,000." I don't know whether there was an oil well or a gas well on that property or not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two letters to table today, both on Bill 208. The first one is from Dr. Alan Rimer and Mrs. Shirley Rimer. They state that they are ashamed of what they call the close-minded approach to issues and people contained in Bill 208.

The second letter is from Mr. Peter Pratt, who also objects to Bill 208, and says that if a marriage commissioner feels that his or her job conflicts with their conscience, the right thing for them to do is to resign their position.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table five copies of a document signed by 69 persons in my riding of Edmonton-Glenora protesting the Alberta government's plan for third-way health care reforms.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings this afternoon, the first being the program from the second annual Stop and Smell the Flowers, a fundraiser held on Saturday evening for the Edmonton region of the Canadian Mental Health Association. They do work in partnership with other community agencies "to educate about mental health and illness, to advocate for better conditions in the community and to help . . . build strong supports for community life." Speaking that evening were the president of the board, Abigail Parrish-Craig; their executive

director, Bill Hofmeyer; and a mother of a son who suffers from a mental illness and has benefited from their programs, Cathy Ashton. Several thousand dollars were raised to benefit the charity.

As well, I have the appropriate number of copies of a rather heart-wrenching e-mail that was sent to members of the opposition from a Rodney Rea, a resident of Edmonton. Both he and his girlfriend, Beatrice, are clients of the AISH program, and he raises several concerns about the inadequacies of that program.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of e-mail correspondence that I referred to during the supply estimates for the Department of Finance last week. These are written by an insurance industry expert by the name of Susan Saksida in Ontario. She is raising concerns about the Alberta special broker and the fact that perhaps several million dollars, even tens of millions of dollars, may be slipping through the hands of Alberta Finance every year in uncollected insurance tax.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is the chair's pleasure today to table with the Assembly copies of the revised Standing Orders. As the hon. Government House Leader indicated when he gave oral notice of the motion, these Standing Orders will take effect at the next sitting of the Assembly following the adjournment of the spring sitting.

These revised Standing Orders have been discussed by government House leaders for nearly three years. They modernize the language used in the Standing Orders to bring them in line with the language used in the *Revised Statutes of Alberta*. They do not make any substantive changes, but members should be aware that the editing process means that certain Standing Orders have been renumbered.

After tabling this, I'm going to ask the pages to distribute copies of these revisions to all members in the House. If the Assembly should approve them, they will be put in the standard format in green binders in time for the next sitting of the Assembly following the adjournment of the spring sitting.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Minister Zwodzesky, Government House Leader, a report dated May 11, 2006, entitled Number of Times Closure/Time Allocation Used by the Alberta Government during the Past Five Years, prepared by the office of the Government House Leader.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Special Areas Act the special areas trust account financial statements, December 31, 2005.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the point of order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is referring to the tabling that I believe the Minister of Gaming made. If it's the same one that I took off the same website, we're talking about the same thing. I haven't been able to see exactly what the minister did table, but I'm assuming that it's the same picture. The citations that I'm using here are 23(h), (i), and (j).

In fact, the situation was such that the school asked if the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark would do a cheque presentation because they had been successful in receiving lottery money through the

grant program that falls under the minister's ministry. The school contacted the government for the cheque, the actual cheque to be presented, and was told that protocol dictates that it had to be a government member who came out with the cheque. They offered the Edmonton caucus chairperson, who is the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. The school wanted their local MLA, and they were dissatisfied with the government's lack of co-operation, so the students created an outsized cheque for them to use, with some help from the staff there. The school asked the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to present the students' cheque so that they could have the benefit of a ceremony that all of the school could participate in.

I note that the signature on the cheque is not the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's, so once again under 23(h), (i), and (j) there was a statement made that is false and a motive made that is incorrect. This is not a government cheque that appears in the photograph. It is a student project that had been done. I suppose that the minister could take pride that the logo was fairly well duplicated, but it was certainly not either the actual cheque nor the official photo of cheque that the government sends out as the school was so clearly told that only government members are allowed to do this. Opposition members are specifically excluded from this.

We have a situation where the minister alleged that the cheque was a government cheque. It is not, Mr. Speaker. That's under 23(h).

Under 23(i) he imputed a false motive, that the member was attempting to put himself forward as a government member, I suppose, and claim that he was putting forward this cheque and that he indeed had signed it. That is absolutely, 100 per cent, totally, flat-out wrong. Again, the language that was used in the question and follow-up and that culminated with the tabling has certainly created disorder, and I hope that this can be alleviated.

I believe that I have shown that the allegations from the minister are false, that the information given was inaccurate, and I'd ask that he please withdraw his statements and apologize to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who did exactly as his school asked him to do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just reviewing 23(h), (i), and (j), which are the three citations mentioned by the hon. member. Unfortunately, I don't have the benefit of the Blues to check verbatim what was said or what was not said in the spirit of the debate that occurred earlier today, nor have I yet seen the tabling, so I cannot comment on that. However, I would comment on whether or not there were allegations as such appropriated. I would simply say that the issue seems to be that a reasonable facsimile was provided which, according to what I've just heard, may or may not have borne the official logo used by one of our government-approved lottery programs. Whether it was the real cheque or a facsimile is sometimes not abundantly evident in a photo reproduction. So we would have to wait and see if, in fact, what has just been presented by the Opposition House Leader is the exact version of events as we understand them.

I wouldn't suggest that there were any allegations or unavowed motives either as I would indicate. I don't think that under (j) there was any "abusive or insulting language" used in the exchange, at least not from our side, nor do I think that there was any ensuing disorder, perhaps a bit of a disruption. I don't personally see that any of the standing orders were breached. However, I will yield my position to the hon. Speaker for his comments in this regard.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark going to get involved in this, or are we all going to have spokesmen on behalf of everybody? These are points of order respecting the member.

Mr. Tougas: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to confirm that everything from the Member for Edmonton-Centre is true. The cheque was . . . [interjections] Do you mind? Do you mind? Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, they asked that I present a cheque to them. They were denied because the government told them that only government members can give out these cheques, so they decided that since I helped them fill out the forms and I was their MLA, they'd ask me to come and make a presentation. This is nothing like the cheque presentations . . .

An Hon. Member: You could've said no.

Mr. Tougas: Do you mind?

This is nothing like the cheque presentations that the government does with the big cardboard cheque. This was done by the school. It's as simple as that, Mr. Speaker. I mean, there was . . . [interjections] Do you mind?

I presented a cheque that the school gave me because the government denied the opportunity to do the cheque presentation, which is exactly the point we've been making, Mr. Speaker. It was a gesture by the school. I'm certainly not going to tell them: oh, no, I can't do that sort of thing. They wanted me to do it. The government insisted on sending a government member to do it. The parents said: we don't want a government member; we want our MLA. That's why it happened. It's as simple as that.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, do you still want to get involved?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, very briefly, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(j) I actually beg to differ with the hon. Government House Leader because it did in fact create disorder in the House. The minister was responding to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, yet he chose to target the Edmonton-Meadowlark MLA and basically accuse him – you know, I don't have the Blues in front of me – of being a liar and of practising something that he doesn't preach. So it did in fact create disorder in this House. There was a lot of noise and a lot of interjections back and forth. We feel that this point of order actually is a valid one. The hon. minister should get his facts right.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The argument that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark just gave is the exact same thing that we face all the time. We have our constituents coming to us saying: "We would like you as our MLA to present this cheque. We're very glad that the Alberta government has decided to fund our playground or whatever through Alberta lotteries, and we would like our local MLA to present the cheque." Sometimes MLAs agree to do that. The very thing that he said he's facing is the very thing that they're accusing us of doing all the time. He could've just said no. If he didn't want to present the cheque, he should have said: "No, we don't believe in that. We don't want to do that. We don't want to

present the cheque.” Instead he went and he presented the cheque.

Mr. Speaker, I’ll say on the record what I said earlier: if it looks like a duck, if it walks like a duck, if it quacks like a duck, then it’s a duck. So he should just admit that he presented the cheque and did the very thing that they’re saying shouldn’t be done.

3:10

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency on this point of order.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we’re actually debating here on an object that was never ever said. I sit right beside this hon. member. I don’t have the Blues in front of me, but he actually didn’t accuse anybody of doing anything. He just mentioned that there was a cheque presented from both sides – there’s a picture of the logo on it – but he never at any time made any accusations to try to dispute that that hon. member did anything wrong whatsoever. All he was doing was saying that that hon. member as the MLA presented a cheque exactly the same as the hon. member – we should say a mock-up cheque. It wasn’t a real cheque that he presented, and it’s not real cheques that we present. He never ever once accused the hon. member of signing that cheque either. If you look in the Blues, I’m sure that it doesn’t state that he signed it.

Anyway, an MLA is an MLA, and I respect the hon. member for that, for wanting to look after his constituents and present whatever it is that the government can supply to his constituents. I respect him for wanting to look after his constituents.

The Speaker: Are there any others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you very much. I just want to do a little bit of a historical reference on what’s happening today.

The Speaker: But we’ll deal with citations today and everything?

Mr. Chase: Exactly.

The Speaker: Right. Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Chase: In Public Accounts, Mr. Speaker, I asked the question: is holding large, government prop cheques with government members’ signatures on the bottom ethical? The Minister of Gaming indicated that it wasn’t, and his reply was noted by the Auditor General.

There is an extremely large difference with a six-foot by two-foot government prop cheque with a member’s signature on it indicating that the money apparently came out of that government member’s bank account. There is quite a difference between a child’s poster with no member’s signature on it and what this government has been putting forward as their money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can’t resist.

The Speaker: We are on a point of order, please.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. I will speak to the point of order.

We have in this province a wonderful program called the community facility enhancement program. Under that program, which has a nominal division of funds so that it’s fair across the province so that every community can participate, communities get together and

raise money and then apply for matching grants under the CFEP program. Those matching grants more often than not, I would assume, although I haven’t done the research, are granted because people can comply with that program by doing good things in their community, creating community facilities.

Those monies come out of the lottery fund. The cheques come out of the lottery fund, and they come out of the lottery fund with the lottery fund logo on them. Sometimes there are cheque presentations, and that is a wonderful thing because what it does is provide an opportunity for an elected member to go to that community organization . . .

Mr. R. Miller: A government-elected member. Make the distinction.

Mr. Hancock: A member of the opposition just yelled, “a government-elected member.” I’m glad that he did because that was the point I was very much going to get to. I wasn’t here when that program was set up, but I understand that in the course of discussion when that program was set up, all members of the House were offered the opportunity to do that, and the Liberal opposition at the time said no, that they would not participate. They would not go to their local organizations and volunteers who do good work in their community and say thank you and deliver the cheque.

Now, if they’ve changed their minds, that would be a wonderful thing. Perhaps they’ve changed their minds. But that’s what happened when it was set up. That’s the practice now. I as a member of the government and I as an MLA, a representative of the people, like to go to community organizations whether they’re in my constituency or in my city or otherwise and say: thank you for the good work that you do. There is nothing amoral about taking a mock cheque.

Now, the minister indicated, I think, at Public Accounts, although I wasn’t there, but he certainly reiterated in the House that he didn’t think it was appropriate for the MLA’s signature to appear on that mock cheque, and I quite agree with him on that. But I didn’t hear him in this House accuse the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark of signing the cheque or having his name on it. What I heard him say, which was very clear from the document he tabled, was that the hon. member was standing there at a presentation of a mock cheque with the lottery fund logo on it saying thank you, presumably, to people in the community who are doing good work to build our community. That’s what he should be doing. That’s what we should be doing because we should be encouraging the community to get involved and build the community. That’s what the CFEP program is all about, and we shouldn’t be making a fuss about cheque presentations because it’s just a way of saying thank you to community volunteers, and that’s what should be done.

The Speaker: There was a citation there somewhere, was there not?

Mr. Hancock: The citation that the hon. member was referring to was 23(h), (i), and (j). How can you create disorder, Mr. Speaker, if what you’re doing is referring to an action which an hon. member did, which was quite an appropriate action, and just talking about tabling a picture to show that that was done?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on this point with a citation, please.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 23(h), (i), and (j). I would just like to inquire as to whether or not the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would be willing to table this agreement that he’s

referring to. Lord knows how long ago it may have been or if it even exists. Certainly, I believe he indicated that he wasn't even here then, so we know that it goes back many, many, many years.

Often government members accuse members on this side of the House of going back too far. I don't know how far back he's going, but clearly there's a willingness on the part of members of today's opposition to have the opportunity, the same opportunity that is extended to government members, to present those cheques. Really, the crux of this matter is that the opportunities – and, Mr. Speaker, you are one who always talks about the fact that MLAs are all equal in this House. What we're learning here very clearly by the reaction from the government members is that MLAs are not all equal in this House. Some MLAs, unfortunately, are more equal than others.

The Speaker: Okay. Anybody else?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: What question is there to be called?

Well, in this most useful exchange in the debate this afternoon with respect to this, I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for raising the point of order, and I do thank the Minister of Gaming for tabling the document, which is a picture. It's not very clear to me, but I think I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark in the picture. I see a great big cheque, at least a facsimile of something that says \$125,000 on it. There seem to be some logos on it, and there seem to be some names on it. It seems to be at least three feet by a couple of feet, and there are a bunch of happy-looking faces there.

All right. The thing had to deal with 23(h), (i), and (j). First of all, 23(h) says, "Makes allegations against another member," (i) says, "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member," and (j) says, "Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

So here is exactly what was said on the replay. Okay? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Gaming minister put an end to Tory MLAs signing their names on lottery cheques. The minister stated that partisan cheque presentations using lottery funds will not be going on any further. The minister went on to say that the Official Opposition should check out its site, and that we would be surprised at one of the pictures. We e-mailed the department for clarification, but it went unreturned. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister tell us which picture he was referring to and on which website he saw an opposition member presenting lottery money, not charity money? They are two different things, my dear hon. minister.

That sounds filled with a lot of nice salutations: "My dear hon. minister." That's polite.

The Speaker then said, "The hon. minister," everybody being polite, of Gaming.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there is still some confusion even after my supplementary answer of last week, obviously, when I said that MLAs shouldn't be signing the bottom of the cheque to make it appear as though the cheque was coming out of their account and not the government account. I've been trying to avoid embarrassing the member opposite whose website the photo is on but, unfortunately, I guess I'm forced into telling the Assembly and the member opposite that if they would check the website of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, they would find a photo of a cheque being presented to the Afton school parent advisory council.

Okay. So far everything seems to be as it is.

It's a \$125,000 community facility enhancement cheque . . . I'll be tabling an appropriate number of copies of that photo at the end of this session. Clearly on the photo is the Alberta Lottery logo.

Well, unless this photo has been doctored up, it seems to have the logo on it.

3:20

Then the Speaker said, "The hon. member." The hon. member said, "Thank you." Then there were interjections. The Speaker said, "The hon. member has the floor." The hon. member said to the same minister:

Given that the only cheque presentation on our website involves charity or personal cheque presentation, will the minister take back the statement and apologize right now?

"Involves charity or personal cheque presentation." So the hon. minister says, "Are you telling me, Mr. Speaker, that the \$125,000 to the Afton school parent advisory council came from the hon. member's personal account?" Then the hon. member said, "To the same minister: will the minister commit . . ." An hon. member then interjected, "Answer the question." The hon. member says:

I will find out about that, but will the minister commit to getting better research from his staff because I confirmed from the present 16 MLAs that they didn't have any?

Then an unidentified hon. member said, "This is false." Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said:

This is totally false. I again request you to apologize because you don't have any evidence. If you have any evidence, please table it right now.

The hon. Minister of Gaming says:

As mentioned, I will table the appropriate number of copies of the photograph at the appropriate time in this afternoon's session.

Then we got into a tabling, and then we got into a point of order.

So 23(h): "Makes allegations against another member." I'm struggling with that one. Under 23(i): "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." Again, I'm struggling with that one. Under 23(j): "Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." As a matter of fact, I think that the purpose of this whole debate the last 10 minutes actually was pretty positive and not negative at all. There's a feeling of love in the room.

Let me make a couple of comments. I'm going to quote from *Beauchesne 494*.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

Well, I'm not sure how many different accounts we've got here today, but we've certainly got a couple of interpretations.

Let's just clarify another thing. There was a lot of talk here about a member's signature on these cheques. I should, I guess, confess to the House that in a previous life I was the minister who created the community facility enhancement program, and the rules were determined as a result of conversations that I did have with everybody. This was a long time ago, quite frankly before anybody in this House was here.

Mr. Lund: No. I was there.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation was a member at the time. He doesn't have to stand up and attest to what I'm saying to be correct.

But the versions of various facts provided here this afternoon actually do hit the target. Offers were made, and rejections were provided to the then minister at that time, but that does go back in time. Never at any time, to the knowledge of this particular person, did any MLA ever have a signature on any cheque, certainly a

facsimile of a name but not their signature. Their name was on the cheque. That probably continues through to today. There was the name of the person but not his handwritten signature. That was never permitted, and that was never allowed.

Now, what the situation today is: one can only attest that that same thing applies. But there were definitely members' names on the cheques until, I guess, the hon. Minister of Gaming declared in the last few days that that would be discontinued other than the name of the Premier and the minister. However, that's a policy decision that members can work out for themselves. The question here today has to do with Standing Orders. The bottom line is that we've had an exchange. Members have provided their questions.

There's one other thing, too, that one could just probably mention at a certain point in time: one should always be careful of the question one asks. The response given may not be necessarily what the hon. member asking the question wants to get.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, May 11, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, and 32.

[Motion carried]

Royalty Review Consultations

Q17. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What groups or individuals did the Ministry of Energy consult with in its latest royalty review?

[Debate adjourned May 8: Mr. R. Miller speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I recall, when we adjourned debate on Written Question 17 last Monday, the government had declined to share with this Assembly and all Albertans which groups or individuals the Ministry of Energy had consulted with in its latest royalty review. I believe I was speaking to the fact that as I travel across this province, this is an issue that arises more and more often. In fact, at a charity casino that I worked for the Ermineskin Community League last night, it was the hot topic of discussion once the Oilers playoff hockey game was over. Many members of the community league that were there volunteering were asking me whether or not, in fact, the Alberta government is realizing its full share of royalty revenue through the royalty program. I would have been very pleased had I been able to share with those community volunteers which individuals the Ministry of Energy was consulting or had consulted in their most recent review, but unfortunately I had to tell them that the minister has chosen not to share that information with us. So I would like at this time to express my deep disappointment at that.

Thank you.

[Written Question 17 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Review Consultations

Q18. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What consultations, studies, research, or other information gathering exercises did the Ministry of Energy conduct in relation to its latest royalty review?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, we found out through the course of debate on the previous written question that the minister doesn't know what has been done and what has not been done. I'm very, very disappointed to learn from the minister that he thinks the royalty review is an ongoing process and that there isn't a latest royalty review. Well, I don't know what exactly the department has done with the information. It's obvious that there is some confusion on that side of the House. We only have to look at the recent budget, the business plans for this year, 2006, Strengthening Today, Securing Tomorrow, and we can see in the business plan for the three years 2006-09 for the Department of Energy that one of the challenges – it's listed as not an opportunity but a significant challenge – is "Fair Share, Changing Prices and Economics." It states in here:

The department will continue to review its royalty regimes, considering new price and economic conditions, to ensure they capture both a fair share of profits for Albertans while also attracting the investment needed to sustain future energy development and government revenues.

Now, that indicates to me that there certainly is a review of royalty regimes. I suppose we could say that we are looking at a continuous royalty review, but there are reports made. They are referred to in other government publications, yet for whatever reason the hon. minister is reluctant to release them. I don't know why, Mr. Speaker. It could be shame. It could be guilt. It could be a combination of both. I was as surprised as the members from the community league that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had been talking about because there is a lot of talk that there is not enough royalty being collected at this time by this government. Whether we look at the royalty holidays or the tax credits that are provided, that's the perception with the citizens who own the resource.

3:30

Now, certainly when we consider that as a percentage the amount of royalties that we're collecting is going down, the government isn't even meeting its own business targets. [interjection] Yes, that's true, hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. It's true. The target is that the range as a percentage would be between 23 and 24 per cent on an annual basis of the value of the total production should be collected in royalties, but this year – and I'm disappointed; I'm really disappointed in this minister because I think he can do a lot better – it's 19 per cent. Yes, it's 19 per cent.

Those extra millions of dollars we could find any number of uses for. Certainly, I think that if we were collecting those sorts of royalties, there wouldn't be any cuts in teaching positions, not only in Edmonton public but across the province. [interjection] Yes, there are, hon. minister, significant cuts across the province in education, through teachers. We can even have teachers or small class sizes, but we can't have both. So maybe the money could be used there. Maybe the money could be saved, and we could build up the heritage savings trust fund into a significant investment pool. That would be a good idea.

The consultations that have been done on these royalty reviews, the studies, the research, and other information-gathering exercises, would certainly help us with our research if the minister would provide that. The minister has promised. In fact, in this Assembly

last week the minister promised. This is, Mr. Speaker, what the minister said, “We’re going through some of that right now, and those documents will be provided in due course.” This is in *Alberta Hansard*, page 1366, May 8, 2006.

Well, in budget estimates the minister also promised me some information on royalties and royalty structures. I’m still waiting. The minister promised me last year and promised the research staff information. Still waiting. Meanwhile, we’re collecting less in royalties. The value of the resource goes up. Profits, certainly, for the energy companies are going up, way up, but the amount of royalties that we’re collecting as a percentage is going down.

Now, who are we consulting with? How often are we consulting with them? Whose numbers are we using? Which portions of the resource are we collecting royalties on and which are we not? For instance, if we were to receive the information with Written Question 18, we could ascertain how much royalty is being paid on pentane-plus, how much is on butane, how much is on ethane if anything. These by-products of the natural gas production, what royalty are we paying on those? Should we perhaps be changing the bitumen royalty? Should we be looking at perhaps changing the royalty regime to enhance heavy oil development in Peace River?

Maybe the answers lie in a response to Written Question 18. I would encourage the minister, if we’re going to be open and if we’re going to be transparent and if we have nothing to hide, to give us this information and also to provide to us the authors of this information and tell us exactly whose production figures we use when we calculate the royalty structure in this province and the amount of money that goes to the treasury. Is it CAPP’s production figures? Is it production figures from the EUB? I know that they do a production audit. I’ve yet to see it. I’m not holding my breath to see it because I don’t think that I’m going to be allowed to see it because, I’m sorry, we’re not open and we’re not transparent.

Why would we use other people’s production figures and not the Department of Energy’s? Does that indicate to me that this new electronic system is not working as well as had been anticipated? This idea that people are going to volunteer accurate production data and that we can calculate our resources from that, is that system not working? Am I to conclude, particularly with Written Question 17, with that response, that perhaps those systems are not working? Certainly, the Auditor General has had some questions in the past about the integrity of this system. But we are now into electronic reporting, and perhaps the reason why this government is so shy, so reluctant to provide this information is because they know that it would cause significant interest with the public, and the public would come to the conclusion that: oh, my, this government after 35 years is not managing our resources the way we thought they were.

They started off very well by starting the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, but now we see that we would have to put an immediate \$5 billion infusion of cash into it just to inflation-proof it, to bring it up to an amount over \$19 billion. If we had been collecting the royalties that we should have been collecting over the years, that fund would be worth significantly more than even \$19 billion. We don’t know unless the government through the Department of Energy will provide to us through Written Question 18 the information that we are asking. Who is advising this government on their royalty structure? Whose interests are being served here? Is it the citizens that own the resource or the energy companies?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Let’s find out what’s going to happen with this question. Okay? Let’s hear from the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Written Question 18. A

similar kind of wording, a different request, to Written Question 17. We are going to reject the question. The problem is that a lot of these questions that come forward are so generic. If you even wished to provide some information from the latest royalty review, whatever that is, I don’t know where that starts and stops.

I don’t know if it’s specific to one instance. For example, we are specifically looking at the Alberta royalty tax credit. So is that the latest royalty review? We’re also looking at the deep gas royalty program that we have. Is that the latest royalty review? Is it on an oil sands kind of a question? Is it on natural gas? Is it on conventional or unconventional? What date did it start? When he wrote the question, do we get into that date or is it today’s date?

I actually don’t even know how to answer the question if I wanted to give all the information that he asked. So, in that vein, we have said that what we will supply in due course – as we’ve gone through this, as we’ve had some third-party documents or otherwise that have come forward, we’re quite happy to see that he’s provided the information. I won’t know even if that would have supplied the answer to this question.

Therefore, it’s in that vein. It’s not having anything worried about trying to hide. We go through and publish our business plans. We have, as he’s mentioned, quite a bit of discussion on royalties, a three-year extrapolation of what royalties would be collected.

He’s also gone into a whole bunch more detail that gets outside the purview of his question, so as he’s gone into his own discussion, it gets broader and broader and broader. I’m not certain that he’d have enough time ever in his lifetime to go through every piece of paper or that we’d have the time to find every piece of paper that he ever might contemplate or dream of or think of. But we would be willing, quite frankly, if he’d be a little more precise, narrowing the discussion so that we’re not trying to interpret. It would be very helpful and constructive if he would narrow the phrasing of the question to be more precise so that we actually knew what he was trying to find out.

3:40

Saying “consultations, studies, research, or other information gathering exercises,” well, just the other day I suspect that we’ve had discussions with my colleagues on this, so that was a gathering exercise. I gathered some information on royalties, so is that the information? I didn’t know that we were supposed to keep minutes of everything that was going on. I might be at it just as he mentioned. He could be out talking with his constituents or stakeholders or otherwise, and they might give you some information on royalties. Is that the latest review they’re referring to? I didn’t – sorry; I apologize – take minutes of that dinner meeting or whatever that one was.

In all seriousness, though, we will provide if we’ve had some consultations. There have been a few in the past. I have undertaken and said that we’d supply those documents to the House. We’re going through those right now, and I’d be happy to see that in the not-too-distant future the members of this House will have that information.

But because of the vagueness of the question – really, I’d say impossible to actually interpret what is being asked as to what specific information is being requested other than please do a memory dump of everything you can ever, possibly find on the topic – in that vein, we’re going to reject Written Question 18.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some consternation as to why this particular question was rejected. I do understand that the hon. minister has some trouble with the language.

Certainly, considering what's been going on in these past few months in regard to discussions on royalty review, I think that we can at least come to an agreement as to what the parameters of this question are suggesting. The parameters are: where are we going with the royalty regime in this province, and how are we going to get there? I expect the hon. minister to be exercising due diligence in this regard, and I don't doubt that he has been, in fact, working very hard on this issue because it's one of the most pressing, important issues that we have before us, Mr. Speaker, in regard to the future financing of this fine province of ours.

We have the perhaps somewhat precarious position in that we are financing more and more of the functions of this Legislature and of the province through our energy resource revenues, and this is not necessarily the way we want it to be. Certainly, some greater degree of economic diversity would be in order, but considering that the boom is here and away we go, we have to grapple with this energy royalty issue in the most wide-ranging but the most honest way possible.

We know that we can project ahead into the next couple of years and realize that the price is not going to go down significantly, and if it does, in fact, we can build measures that can accommodate for that too. As I have mentioned previously in this House, and I will again, there is a way by which we can use a progressive system to increase royalty rates based on the windfall revenues that energy companies are enjoying. As the windfall revenues increase, then modestly and very carefully our royalty rates can increase somewhat as well. This is a way to capture literally billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, that we are in fact effectively losing in this province over these weeks and months and last few years certainly.

Average Albertans, of which I consider myself one, are starting to speak about this more and more often. It's an issue that has been on the back of a lot of people's minds for quite an extended period of time because we know that the resources are finite, and we know that the royalty level that we set, which is not a taxation level at all, is the piece of the pie, so to speak, that we are taking for what's ours.

The resource is ours, and it's not unreasonable to review it. I certainly know that the hon. minister is reviewing it as we speak. We'd like to be able to review those materials so the owners or the shareholders, otherwise known as the whole population of Alberta, get to make an intelligent decision about where their revenues are going to go. We're not suggesting some sort of regime that will kill the industry and send the rigs and heavy oil and tar sands machines packing off to somewhere else. We're just looking for what is a fair share for Albertans here in this province. I don't think that's unreasonable. Considering the billions and billions of dollars that are at stake, I don't think it's unreasonable that that discussion should take place in the public realm as much as possible.

So while my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar might have used some language that's too broad for the minister's liking, then certainly I would ask him to perhaps narrow the parameters and give us something to work with. Certainly, my own position as a critic for the Energy ministry is to be just that but in the most constructive way possible. I certainly don't want to be cavalier about the criticisms that I choose to make. Rather, I would choose to build a constructive argument that is going to work in everyone's favour. I think that's the sort of democracy that we should aspire to exercise here in this House. Certainly, as time goes on and majorities get slimmer and things change hands, this is the way that we have to do business. We see it being quite successfully done in other levels of government. Minority governments are becoming more common federally, and who knows what we have in store with our own provincial legislative system?

So working together in a collaborative way and hammering out

compromises with the information put before us in an honest and logical way is the way to do business, and I think that Albertans expect nothing less.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listening to the previous member speaking and talking about working in a collaborative way, I couldn't help but rise to speak to this particular written question because, precisely, this is a mechanism. Written questions are a mechanism under our Standing Orders and under the way that we do business here to allow for specific things which require more detail or more information than one might expect in Oral Question Period to be asked for and, perhaps, answered through the written question process.

But one does have to be precise about the question because if it's used as a fishing expedition, if the question is not phrased properly, there is no good way to answer it because, in effect, by voting the question, there is an order of the Legislature for a return. So it is not collaborative. It's not in the minister's determination as to what he or she is to bring to the House. By voting in favour of a written question, it's an order of the House to return certain information. If the question is not precise as to the information that's being asked for, if the parameters cannot be determined, then the question cannot be accepted. Over and over again in this House we've debated the acceptance of a question, and often ministers have come forward with amendments to try to clarify precisely what it is that they should be ordered to deliver to the House.

I would agree with the hon. member that we ought to have a collaborative process. A collaborative process would be an opposition or government member who wants information approaching a minister and saying, either in writing or through a meeting, "This is the type of information I need to have in order to do my job, in order to talk to my constituents, in order to go out and consult with stakeholders," to ask for that kind of information and perhaps work out the nature of the question that could be framed if, in fact, there's a disagreement as to what information could be provided, to work out the nature of the question so that it could be brought to the House and there could be, in fact, an order of the House returning that information.

When you have questions framed with such broad parameters that are not specific to the details, what it shows is two things: one, the member is using it for a political purpose rather than the purpose that is intended, which is an opportunity to get required information; two, they're not operating collaboratively. They're not working to narrow down the focus or to determine precisely what they're trying to do, so it's not a collaborative process.

3:50

I would agree with the hon. member opposite that there should be a collaborative process, that as legislators we should be working together in the interests of all Albertans. That means that every member of this Legislature should be able to get access to the information they need to do their job. They should be able to get access to the information they need so that they can critique a minister, so that they can critique a policy, but they can't do that by abusing the processes of the House, which is what happens when you write a question which is so broad in its parameters that it cannot actually be answered and, therefore, a minister has to stand and reject it and then be accused of not wanting to give up information, which in most cases is not the situation at all. In my experience most ministers would be happy to provide the information if it didn't

mean shutting down the whole order of that department for a period of time to find exactly, precisely the information that's being required. The Minister of Energy, I think, identified that quite clearly.

If the parameters are too broad, then the question is: are you talking about a conversation I had? Are you talking about casual consultations? Are you talking about things that happened in caucus? Are you talking about things that have happened? Written questions could be used a lot more effectively in this House if people paid attention to what their value was or what their purpose was and then worked the questions so that they asked for specific information which, in fact, could be responded to.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wasn't planning to speak on this, but some members have got me up. You know, I always get a kick out of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the former House leader and deputy House leader. I remember him saying: just ask, and we'll give you whatever you want. Well, I've been around this place for a long time, and the only things they give you are the things that they know are not going to embarrass the government. That's the reality.

When you ask a question like this, the minister can say: well, it's too vague. If you ask a specific one, they'd say, "Well, it's too specific; there are third-party people here we can't deal with," and the rest of it. This is a government that's going to tighten up the FOIP Act. You can't get the information this way. You can't get the information through FOIP. It's going to be harder and harder. They're just closing it off in all directions.

The hon. Minister of Energy knows precisely what this question is driving at. We have very low royalty rates – everybody knows it – compared to Alaska and compared to Norway, and that's costing money for the taxpayers, who own this. At the same time we're going to give to some of these same companies the lowest corporate tax rate. So we want to know why this is happening. Who are you talking to?

The minister could be very specific. I'm sure it's not a person in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview or constituents that are talking to the Minister of Energy; it's energy companies. The minister certainly should say: "Well, these are the people in industry that we're talking to. These are what we're coming to." At least then we'd have some idea why we have these low royalty rates. I'm sure there's not a balance of people here. They're not talking to people from labour. They're not talking to farmers. They're not talking to ordinary citizens. The Minister of Energy is well aware that this is political dynamite.

You can say to these questions: they're too vague. I've heard here earlier on that questions are too specific. I don't know how you'd ever word questions, to come back to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, that they would ever accept. Then if we try to do it through FOIP, we know that we run into difficulties there, and it's going to be even harder. So how do you ever get answers out of this government?

It's not as easy as working collaboratively and saying: gee, Mr. Minister, can you give me this information that might be embarrassing for the government? "I'd be glad to do it with you." I've been around here too long to know that little game, Mr. Speaker, but it's a nice thought. It's a nice thought.

I think, Mr. Speaker, the point that's trying to be made here is very clearly the old saying: he who pays the piper calls the tune. We know where the Conservative donations, the money is coming from. We want to know. Is that the reason? Is it the reason that these people sit down with the minister, the Premier, or whoever else, and they say: "This would be nice if we got another royalty tax break.

We're hardly making it here. We're poverty stricken. Can you do a little better job in terms of giving us more money because we're going to invest all this money in Alberta?" I know enough about the global economy, and that's not even the case. The minister knows that when we compare what's happening in Alaska, when we compare what's happening in Norway, the people who own the royalty, the people of Alberta, are being taken for a ride.

Sure, we have all sorts of money flowing in right now, but as pointed out by the previous speakers, there could be more. There should be more. Then we could be doing other things or at least putting it in the heritage trust fund for down the way.

So I think that the minister, you know, is very clever in saying that it's too vague, but I'd be interested in what sort of question you could ever get that they would answer because I've hardly ever seen it in this Legislature. It's not through FOIP. It's not through here. Maybe he can give us a course on what questions he will accept that will tell us which oil companies he's talked to in the last little while, why the royalty rates are so low. He knows exactly what we're driving at, what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is driving at with these questions, and he doesn't want to answer the questions. It's as simple as that. You can make all sorts of excuses, and that's what they are, Mr. Speaker. They're excuses.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, first off, again I have to express my disappointment in the minister and my astonishment that he would accuse us of being vague through the wording of this written question. We only have to look at the business plan of this department, the Department of Energy, if we want to talk about being vague. We're talking directly about the royalties here. This could mean anything. Strategy 1.1, "Continue to review the department's royalty regimes, mineral taxes, rentals and bonuses, and recommend changes needed to address changing economic circumstances and opportunities." Well, that's vague. That's vague. That could mean any number of things.

What we are asking for are the reports and not limited to – but, again, if the minister would read his own department's budget, he would clearly see that there are quite a number of outfits tracking the forecasts of natural gas prices. The majority of the royalties that we're collecting at the moment in this province are from natural gas. That royalty structure depends on the price of natural gas in the North American market.

So we're not asking for anything vague here. We're asking for the forecasters' reports, from Wood Mackenzie to Groppe, Long & Littell to Purvin & Gertz to PIRA and RSEG, and these forecasts are in the Henry hub prices. We were talking about this last week. How exactly do the Henry hub prices compare to the Alberta reference price? Are there reports done on this, or are these forecasters like Rod Love and those other hired consultants, where they're giving you verbal advice? Yeah. This may be why we're not getting any of this information. It's because it's provided on a verbal basis. There's no invoicing. It's just: here, talk to me sometime, even if it's long distance or by voice mail, and we're still going to pay you. Maybe that's the reluctance of this minister to answer Written Question 18. Clearly, there are companies that are providing information, and the minister for whatever reason is reluctant to share this with the citizens, who own the resource. Again, I must express my disappointment.

Now, the performance measures. We talked before about the fact that we're only going to get 19 per cent in total on a percentage of

the value of production in royalties. We know it should be considerably higher, and the minister knows it should be considerably higher. But, again, we're looking at the Crown revenue share. This is on page 148 of the business plan. Sharing the profits from resource development: the Crown revenue share, or the "portion of industry's annual net operating revenue that is paid to the Crown as royalty." Now, the source for this information is again from CAPP, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. Surely, that can be provided through this written question, and that is not vague.

This is not a fishing expedition. One day we're told: "Oh, that's too complicated for question period. We have to do it through Written Questions." Then when the written questions come up in the Assembly on Monday afternoons: "Oh, no, this is not suitable. It should be done through another forum." This has got nothing to do with political purposes, and if it did, one could argue from this side of the House that by being vague like this, like the descriptions that are provided in the Department of Energy's business plans, then it's certainly being done for political purposes, and that has been reflected by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in his remarks.

4:00

I take exception, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, that this question as it's worded is abusing the process of the House. I just find that incredible, that the hon. member would think that Written Question 18 is abusing the process of the House because again we were told: "Oh, no. If you're seeking details of that nature, do it through a written question." I don't know how many times we have been told that, and we're doing that. You can't have it both ways, hon. member.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about royalties in Alaska and Norway. Well, if we could receive the information that we're requesting through this, we could see how Alberta compares with the royalty structure in the lower 48 states. The hon. member was quite accurate about Alaska and about Norway, but what about the lower 48 states? Has anyone done a recent comparison in that department in regard to the royalty structure in Colorado, Oklahoma, Louisiana, or Texas? Now, perhaps if we haven't done it, we should, but I'm confident it has been done.

I'm confident that we're not collecting enough in royalties in this province with the prices as high as they are. The current royalty structure may have been very effective in 1992, '93, and '94, but with oil at \$70 American a barrel and natural gas at \$7 a gigajoule for the North American market, that's a whole new marketplace – a whole new marketplace – and the minister knows it. To reject this question is to reject the concerns and the complaints of thousands upon thousands of citizens of this province who own the resource and want a thorough public review of the royalty structure now that market prices for these resources are so high.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that I'm very, very disappointed in this government. I'm very disappointed in this minister. If our royalty structure at these prices is so sound and so fair, why use this lame excuse to prevent this information from being provided through this Assembly to the citizens who own the resource?

Thank you.

[Written Question 18 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Lund: Try again.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. I will try again, hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Natural Gas Well Applications

Q19. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 how many applications received by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to drill natural gas wells in Alberta were rejected?

Mr. MacDonald: Now, we know that drilling is going on in this province at a frantic pace. We know why. But there are concerns being raised by landowners about the process. Many landowners, regardless of whether they live on the edge of the city, for instance in southeast Calgary, or on acreages surrounding large metropolitan areas have concerns. If we were to receive the answer through this question, we would see exactly how many applications received by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to drill natural gas wells in Alberta were rejected and why they were rejected. Were they just too close to built-up areas? Was there a potential for sour gas leaks if the well was successfully drilled and went into production, either through the drilling process or the installation of the production facility or the operation of the production facility? Would there be the potential for a sour gas leak?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now, we need to restore confidence with the landowners in the regulatory process that is at the EUB. Certainly, when we look at Compton and the controversy around those well applications, the right thing was finally done, and those wells just southeast of the city of Calgary are no longer going to be drilled. How many other examples were there and why?

Whenever we look at the potential for sour gas, is the compliance record of the operator considered in the drilling application? If the application was to be rejected, would the compliance record of the operator be part of the decision?

Now, if we look at some of the directives that the EUB uses and the Department of Energy obviously considers and if we look at, say, directive 056, for instance, which is going to be used for the regulation of the drilling of coal-bed methane wells, and if we look at the violations of that directive by companies, there were a lot of violations. There was noncompliance. Some of it was major; some of it was minor. Not many people have followed that with the recent release of the MAC report, but certainly I read those compliance violations, and I have some concerns. Is it information like that that would be used to reject the drilling of a natural gas well?

I think this information would be very useful for any number of reasons, but I would remind the minister that it would go a long way to restoring public confidence in the regulatory process, and it would give landowners both on the edge of the city and in rural areas more confidence that this regulatory process is a balanced and fair way of dealing with applications.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Written Question 19. Certainly, with some degree of concern about what opposition members expressed about wording – wording is important. It's a good thing that in language we're better able to communicate so that we understand that which we're asked. In this case, I'm going to ask

for an amendment, actually quite willing and wanting to provide the information, though I'm going to ask for some co-operation from the members opposite on this one in the co-operative spirit to try and engage in providing information on a useful, timely basis, but here's the challenge. I don't know if the amendment has been passed out.

4:10

With respect to the amendment I'd like to move that Written Question 19 be amended as follows: by striking out "2001-2002, 2002-2003" and by striking out "2004-2005" and substituting "2004-2005, and 2005-2006." So the amended written question will read as follows: "For each of the fiscal years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 how many applications received by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to drill natural gas wells in Alberta were rejected?"

Now, the reason for that is that I'm told that the records for the information requested for the earlier years, 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, would need to be manually accessed and collated due to a change in the computer system that they've had put in place. It would take some considerable time for them to compile the information, just getting the numbers, giving the quantity of wells and applications they have, which they would not necessarily have available for the past years.

That said, we wanted to say, "Okay. Well, let's provide them with the more up-to-date figures and add another year on to the end of it," so that we still give you as much of the information that's available that could be reasonably and easily compiled. All that is asked for, though, even in this one, is how many applications. In the hon. member's comments, before he started getting into reasons why, that's not even in the written question, but we certainly can comply with that, and I think that's the reason we'd like to provide as stated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again the reasons for this amendment surprise and startle me. If the department is not as the minister indicated last week in *Hansard* – "There isn't a 'latest royalty review'" – I think there would be lots of staff in there that could dig up that information for those years, 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. We're going to get two years' worth of information here. Perhaps my suspicions in regard to these electronic records were more accurate than I thought, whenever we're talking about this issue here in the last 15 minutes. Perhaps that electronic system over there is not working as well as had been anticipated. But, you know, as the Rolling Stones say, you can't always get what you want. In this case, I will certainly look at two years' worth of information.

Mr. Melchin: Three.

Mr. MacDonald: Three? Oh, yes. Pardon me. Three. Absolutely. The amended written question will read for 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006. You bet that's three years. We will look forward to receiving this information. I would have to on behalf of the citizens at this time thank the hon. minister for at least providing part of the information that we requested.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Again on this one I will be very brief. On behalf of the public, the diligent Alberta Liberal research staff, and myself I would express my gratitude to the minister. I am disappointed, however, that he could not provide information even in amended form in written questions 17 and 18, but we will look forward to having a look at this information throughout the summer.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 19 as amended carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:15 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Lukaszuk	Pastoor
Amery	Lund	Prins
Blakeman	MacDonald	Rodney
Brown	Magnus	Rogers
Calahasen	Martin	Stelmach
Cenaiko	Marz	Stevens
Chase	Melchin	Strang
Doerksen	Miller, B.	Swann
Ducharme	Miller, R.	Tarchuk
Fritz	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Hancock	Oberle	Webber
Johnston	Ouellette	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Abbott	Goudreau	Haley
Cao	Griffiths	

Totals	For – 36	Against – 5
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[Written Question 19 as amended carried]

Community Initiatives Program

Q20. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Tougas that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 1998-99 through 2004-05 what is the total number of community initiatives program grants awarded without matching funds being provided by the grant recipient broken down by recipient and amount of unmatched grant?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The reason for requesting this information is that the CIP is set up so that below a certain amount groups can apply without providing matching grants. Above \$10,000 it's required that you provide matching grants. We're wondering how many have taken advantage of the threshold and applied for the grant that doesn't require the matching amount.

The second part of this is that in our experience in questioning the government on this particular issue, we've now been told that they can make exceptions. So we're wondering if perhaps there are additional people that we're not aware of that had their requirement for matching grants waived that would also be included in this amount. So that's why we're looking for the breakdown of recipient

and the amount of the unmatched grant to see which of those, in fact, were over \$10,000 that were granted by the exception that has been brought up.

I'm hoping that this will meet with approval, and I will give way to the government member to see whether we're going to get this accepted or not.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. With respect to Written Question 20 I'm pleased to comment on behalf of the hon. Minister of Gaming that we will accept this question.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close.

Ms Blakeman: Excellent. Great. I am looking forward to this information coming forward. We wish to probe this particular incident around the sorority house and the answers coming from the government, which we feel were somewhat incomplete. So we feel that the reasonable explanation has not been thoroughly evaluated.

In addition, in this particular instance the application that we FOIPed showed that the reasons used for justifying the nonmatching funds were that they weren't being provided because the fundraising the group was doing for the year had already been decided and they weren't going to do additional fundraising.

Ms Calahasen: It was accepted.

Ms Blakeman: Relax. This is the only chance. You tell us that we're supposed to be asking the questions here, so I'm asking the questions here, minister of aboriginal affairs. This is our opportunity to talk about it and ask the questions. You want me to spend more time justifying it to you? I'm happy to, but I'd really rather just get on with it.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, through the chair, please. Are you finished?

Ms Blakeman: No, I'm not finished.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead, but through the chair, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, and of course through the chairperson at all times.

The issue here is that there were a number of the provisions that are set out as criteria in this particular grant that appear to have been waived or not met; in particular, the reasonable explanation for why they weren't providing the matching grants, the fact that it was waived above the threshold level of \$10,000, and the particular justification of public good that was involved in this particular grant application. I think that a number of people are finding leather-covered bar stools and all a bit tough to justify somehow as works for the public good seeing as this is furniture that was inside of, basically, a private group that you couldn't... [interjection] Well, that's true. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is drawing a similarity to the leather-covered chairs we have in the House. But the public is invited in to watch what we're doing, and that is not necessarily true in the group that we were examining.

So I'm delighted to hear that we are going to be getting the information that I requested, and at this point I'd like to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 20 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:34 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Hancock	Oberle
Blakeman	Jablonski	Ouellette
Brown	Lukaszuk	Pastoor
Calahasen	Lund	Rodney
Cao	MacDonald	Rogers
Cenaiko	Magnus	Stevens
Doerksen	Martin	Strang
Ducharme	Melchin	VanderBurg
Eggen	Miller, B.	Webber
Fritz	Miller, R.	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Abbott	Griffiths	Johnston
Amery	Haley	Snelgrove
Goudreau		

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 7
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[Written Question 20 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Community Initiatives Program

Q21. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Tougas that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 1998-99 through 2004-05 what is the total number of community initiatives program grant applications that were rejected?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Part of our reasoning for this is trying to figure out the total number of applications that were received. We know how many actually received money. If we know how many were rejected, that tells us in the end how many applications were received. So we're just looking for some baseline information as we try and weed through how these two lottery programs administered by the Minister of Gaming are in fact administered and the choices that are made with that. It's pretty straightforward information. Just how many of the grant applications that they received were rejected?

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Gaming I'm pleased to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 21.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 21 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:50 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Ouellette
Blakeman	Hancock	Pastoor
Brown	Lukaszuk	Rodney
Calahasen	MacDonald	Stevens
Cenaiko	Martin	Strang
Doerksen	Melchin	VanderBurg
Ducharme	Miller, B.	Webber
Engen	Miller, R.	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Abbott	Haley	Magnus
Amery	Jablonski	Oberle
Cao	Johnston	Rogers
Goudreau	Lund	Snelgrove
Griffiths		

Totals: For – 24 Against – 13

[Written Question 21 carried]

Community Facility Enhancement Program

Q22. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Tougas that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 1998-99 through 2004-05 what is the total number of community facility enhancement program grant applications that were rejected?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I hope the government will co-operate and provide the information.
Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Gaming I will respond that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 22.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: The question, please.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 22 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:03 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Hancock	Pastoor
Blakeman	MacDonald	Rodney
Brown	Martin	Rogers
Calahasen	Melchin	Stevens
Cao	Miller, B.	Strang
Cenaiko	Miller, R.	Tarchuk
Doerksen	Oberle	VanderBurg
Ducharme	Ouellette	Zwozdesky
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Haley	Lund
Amery	Jablonski	Magnus
Goudreau	Johnston	Prins
Griffiths	Lukaszuk	Webber

Totals: For – 25 Against – 12

[Written Question 22 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf.

Community Facility Enhancement Program

Q23. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Tougas that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 1998-99 through 2004-05 what is the total number of community facility enhancement program grants awarded without matching funds being provided by the grant recipient broken down by recipient and amount of unmatched grant?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is following up on some earlier things where the minister made it clear that he has the discretion, if he wishes, to make different decisions on the CIP grant, which is the other grant administered by the same department. We note that the CFEP grants quite clearly state that you are to match those funds, but we wondered if, in fact, there was the same sort of discretion available to the minister with this grant, so we're asking to see which grants were provided without the matching funds and who were the recipients and what were the amounts of the unmatched granting amounts.

I hope that the government is able to provide this information, and my thanks for the opportunity to request it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Written Question 23, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Gaming I'm pleased to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 23.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Call the question.

[Written Question 23 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

A Learning Alberta Advanced Education Review

Q24. Dr. B. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

What is the total cost broken down by function – projected staff costs, consultant and legal fees, facility and hosting expenses, travel costs, et cetera – of the review of Alberta's advanced education system known as A Learning Alberta?

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that this review is coming to an end. There have been lots of other reviews of advanced education over the years and not much has come out of those reviews, so it's really important that we get this kind of background information about what kind of costs are involved in this particular kind of review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

5:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education it's my pleasure to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 24.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to hear that, and I'm wondering at this time if the hon. member could confirm to this House that when we're talking about the total cost breakdown for consultants in particular, it will be advice that has been received verbally as well as all written contracts.

Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is precisely the type of question that calls into question the purposes and motives of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, so I can't let that one go by. The hon. member knows or ought to know that there was a process engaged in last year called A Learning Alberta, and there was huge participation from Albertans, giving lots of verbal advice. To make what I assume was a quip intended to be humour just draws to the attention of the House, though, exactly the problem with the way some of the questions are phrased.

Now, this particular question isn't a problem. This question asks for certain cost information which the House would be entitled to have and the public would be entitled to have and would clearly point out not just the cost but, perhaps more importantly, the value of the process of A Learning Alberta and the number of people that engaged in it. For the hon. member to get up and say, "Would this include verbal advice?" shows his ignorance of the process that went on, which involved in excess of 350 Albertans participating in round-tables around the province and giving verbal advice, all of them consultants, all of them active participants in the process, all of them stakeholders, and all of them interested in Alberta being a learning society and in Albertans having the opportunity to advance their level of knowledge, skills, and ability so that they can fully participate in the Alberta economy and fully contribute back to building a stronger Alberta and stronger communities.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate.

Dr. B. Miller: I'd like to call the question.

[Written Question 24 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on behalf.

Student Loan Program

Q25. Dr. B. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2000-2001 through 2004-2005 inclusive what was the total dollar value of all Alberta student loan program disbursements, all Alberta student loan relief benefit payments, and all Alberta student loan relief completion payments?

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question, considering the fact that tuition has gone up so much, especially for the professions of medicine, law, dentistry. It's very important for us to know what kind of loan programs have been in place and what kind of benefits have been disbursed so that we can get an idea of what the burden is on students in Alberta. I'm looking forward to this kind of response to this kind of question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Advanced Education it is my pleasure to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 25.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate.

Dr. B. Miller: Yes. I'd like to put the question.

[Written Question 25 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf.

Problem Gambling and Workplace Performance

Q26. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.

What consultations, studies, research, or other information gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of problem gambling on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism are currently planned or under way under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This as well is a very important question given that we all I think recognize that problem gambling is becoming a greater issue in this province. Alberta Gaming is taking steps, thankfully, to address this problem, and I think it's a relevant question to ask whether or not the Department of Economic Development is also doing studies to see what the impact of this growing problem is on business in Alberta.

I look forward to the government response. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Economic Development I wish to respond to Written Question 26. The Ministry of Economic Development will be rejecting this request as the department is not currently planning nor has under way any consultations, studies, research, or other information

gathering exercises pertaining to problem gambling on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand the reasons for rejecting the question. If, in fact, there are no studies under way, then it wouldn't make sense to accept the question. I guess the only thing I would say is that perhaps Economic Development should be considering whether or not, in fact, they might wish to undertake such consultations and studies given the seriousness of the problem and the impact that it may well be having on business in Alberta.

Thank you.

[Written Question 26 lost]

Access to Prince Rupert Port

Q27. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.

What steps is the Ministry of Economic Development taking to work with the government of British Columbia and the federal government to allow all Alberta exports safer and faster access to Prince Rupert port in British Columbia?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Economic Development I wish to inform the hon. members that Written Question 27 will be accepted by the Department of Economic Development as they are presently working on an ongoing basis with the governments of B.C. and Canada.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to see that the government has accepted Written Question 27, and I would call the question.

[Written Question 27 carried]

Illegal Drugs, Alcoholism, and Workplace Performance

Q28. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.

What consultations, studies, research, or other information gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of illegal drugs and alcoholism on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism are currently planned or under way under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Economic Development I wish to inform the Assembly that the Department of Economic Development will be rejecting this written question. Economic Development is not currently planning nor has under way any consultations, studies, research.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, it's 5:30. The House stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 15, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/05/15

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Water Supply Inventory

511. Dr. Swann moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately commission and regularly update an inventory of all ground and surface, including glacial, water supplies in order to responsibly manage and sustain this resource in the public interest.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 511, ground and surface water mapping. The motion advocates a complete inventory of surface and groundwater resources in Alberta. An inventory of water resources should be the first step, in fact, in managing our water resources in the province.

Arguably, water is the most limiting natural resource in Alberta. It is intimately linked to social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Sustainable water management, Mr. Speaker, is an essential role for government. Alberta holds only 2 per cent of Canada's fresh water, so we are in a vulnerable position, particularly as we are having such exponential growth both in our industrial sector and in our population. Saskatchewan and Manitoba have a hundred times as many lakes as Alberta. I was surprised to learn that from the Water for Life literature that's available: a hundred times as many lakes as Alberta. I also learned this past while that a third of our groundwater is used for oil and gas development, and in conjunction with all industrial development 53 per cent of all of our groundwater is used for industrial purposes.

Climate change is obviously a key issue for us in the next few decades. With the prospect of a three-degree increase by 2050, with reduced precipitation at certain times of the year, with increased evapotranspiration, and with the loss of glaciers we're looking at some very serious potential problems over the next few decades in Alberta. I was very pleased to see that the government has committed \$33 million in this next three years to groundwater mapping. It's a tremendous statement and commitment to this important issue. Six hundred thousand people in Alberta depend on groundwater, and their livelihoods day to day as well as their health and their safety depend on our understanding groundwater and managing it better.

Motion 511 comes out of the well-documented need to have a solid understanding of our water resource if we're really going to manage it correctly and before making decisions about how we will allocate it and license it. A reliable, accurate, comprehensive, and current inventory is long overdue in this province as we try to examine what and how to sustain our quality of life into the future. I'm unclear at this time whether \$33 million is enough, not enough, or too much for this tremendous task of mapping the groundwater in the province. I'd be very interested to know how we established that as a figure for what we need for the coming few years as a priority to establish our groundwater reserves and our groundwater quality. We must address these water issues now. We know that we've already overallocated the Bow, the South Saskatchewan River basin.

We cannot go any further without knowing precisely what it is we're dealing with as an inventory.

There has been recent high-profile coverage of water issues in Alberta, including a report in the scientific journals by Dr. David Schindler and his colleague identifying that by mid-century we could have significant ecological change, increasing droughts, and very significant impacts on our productivity from an economic point of view and the capacity of our agricultural community to sustain itself.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all hon. members to reinforce the direction that the government is already taking, to applaud the government for the initiatives that it's already taken, and to ensure that we have the right investment in Water for Life, more generally, and specifically for groundwater mapping. I would just add that the current serious concerns in the Horseshoe Canyon formation of southern and eastern Alberta must be the priority for the groundwater mapping. As part of this motion I would hope that the communication is clear that a very timely assessment of groundwater is in order.

I hope all members will support this motion to move as quickly as possible and return to the issue with a report, I would argue, six-monthly to give us a sense of just how we're doing in terms of the mapping and what else we could be doing to ensure that we are managing our water sustainably.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased this evening to rise in this Assembly to join the debate on Motion 511, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. The natural resources of this province have always been of vital interest to Albertans. Hydrocarbons, forests, soil, and animals are all important commercial items, but they're also very necessary for our survival. Mr. Speaker, over the years Alberta's growing population and ever-expanding economy have placed a great deal of stress on these resources. The task of monitoring and managing these resources has become pivotal in sustaining our way of life now and for future generations of Albertans. As such, the government is committed to ensuring that Alberta's natural resources are responsibly maintained to benefit the citizens of our province for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, water is a resource of particular concern in that it extends far beyond serving to sustain our economy through agricultural and industrial needs. More than anything water is essential in sustaining humanity. Water is life. This notion is certainly not lost on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and I admire the member for directing his concern over the long-term sustainability of Alberta's provincial water supplies to the Assembly.

However, to alleviate this concern, one must look no further than the province's Water for Life strategy, which lies at the core of this government's mandate to effectively manage all aspects of Alberta's water resources. This strategy demonstrates how Alberta is among the nation's leaders in water management initiatives and represents the government's commitment to effectively manage the quality and quantity of our provincial water supplies to make certain that this resource is indeed protected for future generations.

As all members of this Assembly are aware, the intent of a motion is to raise an issue and urge the government to adopt a particular strategy in an attempt to solve it. Having said that, the very fact that this particular motion has been brought before this House implies that the government currently does not have a strategy to sustain our water resources in the future. As I alluded to earlier, this is defi-

ninitely not the case. In addition, I feel that through the wording of Motion 511 the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View is suggesting that the government has been irresponsible in the way it has managed and continues to manage our provincial water resources.

In response to that suggestion, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the hon. member has been misguided as the government's Water for Life strategy represents a framework with which all water quality and quantity issues, including inventory, are already being addressed. The government without a doubt recognizes the challenges at hand and fully understands what is at stake in terms of the long-term sustainability of our water resources. I for one am very pleased to debate this motion because it will provide my colleagues with the opportunity to highlight all that the government has done and will continue to do to ensure that our citizens enjoy healthy, reliable, and abundant water supplies well into the future. This evening we will hear categorical evidence to reinforce that the government does in fact manage Alberta's water supplies in a very responsible manner.

8:10

Mr. Speaker, motions are important in this House because they help to bring attention to issues affecting Albertans and recommend that the government take action, although in terms of our water this is already being done. As we will see, the claims of Motion 511 are unsubstantiated and lack substance to support the suggestion that the government's current water management strategy is ineffective.

I fully support any initiative that aims to effectively manage and protect our natural resources for all Albertans, Mr. Speaker. That is why I would like to wholeheartedly endorse the government's Water for Life strategy as the means to secure Alberta's water resources rather than what is intended by Motion 511.

I strongly urge all of my colleagues to join me in withholding their support for Motion 511 as I feel that such an initiative is very unnecessary in light of the water strategy the government currently has in place and all that the government has done to remain accountable to Albertans in this regard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening with great pleasure to speak in favour of Motion 511. I think that the timeliness of such a motion spreads across party lines and ideologies and different intentions and puts us all together in the same boat, so to speak, in regard to the impending water crisis that Alberta could be facing in the very near future.

Now, none of us can pretend to be able to see the future accurately, but we have to act on contingencies that are placed before us. We are facing clear signs that we are in the midst of a water shortage or a downturn in precipitation not just in Alberta but in the prairie provinces. Combined with climate change, a warming trend throughout this hemisphere and, indeed, around the world, again, makes a water shortage even worse. Now, when climate does change, it destabilizes, so we can't be certain as to what will happen, but certainly it is our responsibility to build systems into conservation of water in this province of Alberta and, first of all, to know better how much water we do in fact have flowing through the province and what it's being used for.

As my hon. colleague mentioned previously, we are in a country with a tremendous amount of the world's fresh water resources, but conversely here in this province we're amongst the very driest parts of the country. We only have maybe 1 or 2 per cent of the potable water that's available across the country. So water is a very

geographically based commodity, and certainly the closer that it is to its consumption, the more efficient the system is.

So this is why it's imperative, Mr. Speaker, that we do in fact invest and reinvest in the inventory of both ground and surface water supplies across this province. I know that this provincial government has undertaken to do something like this, but I guess what this motion might do is reinforce that initiative and perhaps increase in scope the Water for Life strategy. Indeed, the wording of this motion is to "regularly update an inventory of all ground and surface, including glacial, water supplies" and to invest properly in the ongoing maintenance of that inventory. I think this is absolutely essential because although, as I say, I do speak in favour of the Water for Life strategy in its conception, in reality I am starting to see some key problems, not the least of which is the fact that we don't have information from this initiative yet. So I would like for us to remind ourselves: what exactly is the Water for Life strategy doing, and are we going to see all of the information as it becomes available to this government?

There are a number of challenges that we have to face in regard to water here in this province over the next 30 years and questions, I guess, that I would like to bring up that we need to work through here in this Legislature as well as through the public on a more local level. I think water is a great unifying force for political change and action as it is for the public's participation. Of course, as we see with the CBM issue through central Alberta and irrigation in southern Alberta, water brings people together to the political process like no other topic that I know of. This is a motivating force. I consider that to be a positive force, in fact, and we can harness that to increase the level of participation and interaction that we have with the public and with government in general.

One of the issues that I would like to bring forward is talking about charges that we put on to water systems, and I think it's imperative that we look carefully at the regulatory role of this House. First of all, we are looking to make an inventory of where the water is, but then we need to make a weight of how we use water in our society and what value we place on it. I think that some economic incentives are absolutely important for us to help conserve water. Of course, as we know, we can have charges or we can have incentives for conservation, both of those things working in concert. So I think it is important for us to revisit the charging for water idea.

Of course, the first imperative is to value how we charge for domestic consumption, how we charge for agricultural consumption, and then how we charge for industrial consumption. Okay? The very first principle that is basic to all human beings, as we hear people so emphatically suggesting here, is that every single human being has the right to access to water for their own personal domestic use at a very reasonable price. We have to ensure that it is affordable for all people and that clean, sanitary fresh water is available to every Albertan at a very reasonable price.

The second priority is for agriculture because agriculture sustains us both economically and in terms of our nutritional requirements. Again, another pricing system has to be placed on the agricultural sector. We cannot have the agricultural sector competing directly with an industrial sector like the oil and gas sector because, of course, the oil and gas sector can afford to pay for water at a much higher rate just because of the nature of the industry that they're engaged in. But we have to recognize what's an essential part of water use, and that is agriculture. So, again, we need a specialized tier for that.

Then, finally, charging for industrial use. It's absolutely essential that we set a price structure for the industrial use of water in this province now. Lots and lots of the oil and gas systems that we have in place use a tremendous amount of water, but also these energy

systems do defer towards conservation and efficiency. When you go to a heavy oil facility or to the oil sands projects, certainly the engineers would love to use less water if that task has been placed upon them. Again, it's a regulatory body. It's imperative that we place those regulations into the industrial sector now so that everyone can play on a level playing field, know what to expect, and to realize the efficiencies that we set forth for them. We must challenge them in regard to water conservation, and we have to factor in the cost of using fresh water with these industrial processes.

8:20

When we take a look at the oil sands and we have billions of dollars of new expansion, many new plants on the horizon, which is great – it's great for the economy and whatnot – there has to be a more complete inventory of all of the inputs that go into making that barrel of oil. Cost factor that in so that the barrels of water that go into the production of that barrel of oil are also factored in and that we are in fact making sure that we're (a) regulating it and (b) charging an appropriate price for that because otherwise you don't know what you've got until it's gone, as they say. I should expect that suddenly when water becomes in short supply, it doesn't just sort of trickle down, so to speak, to use a bad metaphor, but rather, once you get past that certain point, you end up with catastrophic shortages of water.

Certainly, in my own experiences living in southeast Africa, it's not a question of suddenly everybody's a little bit short, but rather everybody has no water at all, and we don't want to be in that situation. We don't want to be draining our rivers like the Athabasca to that degree. We want to be regulating it and moderating it with long-term conservation in mind.

When we're talking about Motion 511, we have to be concerned about pollution back into the groundwater systems. As I said, up in the north with the tailing ponds, this has to be factored into an overall inventory of our water supplies because this is a net output of water that is not being recycled back into the system, and in fact it's not even being processed at all. I don't think that there has been any appreciable process by which these tailing ponds have been reclaimed, and it's becoming a disaster on a very large scale. The oil companies know that they have to do something, but they need a nudge from us, from this body, to ensure that that water is recycled, that it's not contaminating the groundwater, and that, in fact, we are being responsible stewards of the whole system.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to participate in debate on Motion 511. I'm definitely standing in support of this motion, ground and surface water mapping, as sponsored by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View. Obviously, it is abundantly clear that the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, both inside this House and outside, and to that effect our entire Liberal caucus care about the environment: our soil, vegetation and plantation, air, and, indeed, water. The hon. Minister of Environment also appears to have his heart in the right place, and by that I mean the correct place. I'm not talking about his affiliation with the political right.

I'm not going to repeat most of the arguments that were made by the members before me, although I must note my disagreement with the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who said that it was redundant. I would argue that if it is in fact redundant, it basically emphasizes something that we already know and it urges us to take some action. I argue that there is nothing to be lost if this House passes this motion or accepts this motion.

Now, it was mentioned that the province has just committed to promptly act on 32 of the 44 recommendations contained in the final report of the advisory committee on coal-bed methane developments. Of course, one would have hoped that they acted on all 44 of them, but at least it's a start. One-third of that entire report talks about water, and this is definitely important to note, and it's also worthy of appreciation because water is, in fact, the utmost resource, as I said before in this House. It is the ultimate commodity.

You remember when First Nations tribes a while back fought over horses or buffalo. They fought over grazing land, and in fact they did fight over control of their water resources. You probably agree, too, Mr. Speaker, that devastating wars are likely to be waged over what little water is left. The resource is dwindling, be it because of global warming and the effect it has on our habitat or be it waste by consumers or the increased demand or, equally, industrial or commercial use. Nations and, indeed, pacts of nations will go after other nations or alliances to raid or control their water streams. Water is that significant, even more so than oil or any other resource. The argument that was made that we have to charge more for a barrel of water than we do for a barrel of oil is a valid one.

Again, it is positive that this province has yielded to pressure from the many concerned citizens and from us in the opposition and that it is taking action. The question here is: how long before all the recommendations are implemented fully? Further to that, what will the continuous and ongoing monitoring process look like? We can pass recommendations all we want, but if you don't monitor their implementation and enforcement, nothing is gained and the exercise becomes useless.

Now, although I have a science background, I am not a scientist in the area of water or the environment, but I can tell you that I am worried about Alberta's future just like the majority of Albertans. We have to look at the big picture. We have to look at our lakes, rivers, groundwater, wetlands, et cetera. The discussion is not limited here to drinking water, for example, although it is a big, significant component of that picture. The government's own Water for Life document says that water supports people, prosperity, and preservation. This is a strong recognition of the importance of water. It then talks about how this resource is "renewable, but finite," and by finite I mean that the amount of water that we lose is lost forever, permanently. The water that is not recycled or that doesn't come back to the system is gone forever, and that's where we have to be very careful, Mr. Speaker.

This motion before us advocates for a complete and thorough inventory of both ground and surface water in Alberta. That is like taking a snapshot, or a picture, of where we are today so that we can plan for the immediate, intermediate, and distant future. This inventory or reading would then form the basis for a comprehensive water management plan for this province. This is exactly like what we have done as Alberta Liberals with our provincial land-use strategy. To sustain a resource, you have to quantify how much of it you have, how you're using it and for which purposes, and how you plan to manage it. This is definitely what we're trying to accomplish here today with this Motion 511.

Mr. Speaker, I must tell you that time and time again I find it a little frustrating that members of the government caucus sometimes agree with us in principle but choose not to vote for the ideas that we present, and they quote reasons and excuses, however weak, to reject opposition ideas or amendments. But today I'm a little optimistic that they will rise above their petty partisanship and will join me in supporting this important idea. What we're proposing here makes sense, and it is the right thing to do, and if the government has already adopted some of it, then why not go the extra mile to adopt something that is positive and that makes sense? Let's get to the

point and start doing this for our benefit and that of our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, if I expand a bit beyond this inventory idea – and, really, if it were up to me, I would look at the whole gamut of things like studying drinking water quality, for example. Many communities have commented or complained about the level of pesticides, herbicides, pharmaceuticals, industrial and commercial pollutants, and possibly also microbial and viral pathogens. E coli comes to mind, for example.

We also have to think outside the box, although this government finds it hard to do sometimes. Here's an example. We use chlorine to disinfect drinking water across the board. Right? Lloydminster, on the one hand, wants to use an ultraviolet light system to purify its water. Two problems. One, the UV system is expensive, more than \$100,000, and, two, reducing the amount of chlorine may mean that Lloydminster doesn't comply with the provincial standards. So they're in a catch-22 situation. They have a technology that's at their disposal that they can use to purify and clean their water without resorting to chlorine, which has its own problems, but then now they risk not being able to meet provincial standards.

Now, is this an idea that Alberta and Saskatchewan can co-operate on and run as a pilot study? I think so. In the summer of 2005, if I remember correctly, Lloydminster had an E coli scare, and many residents today are still wary of their water supply. They drink it, but that's the only source of water in Lloydminster, and ultraviolet could have actually helped with that.

Again, to think outside the box, take Edson for example, Mr. Speaker. It is growing fairly quickly, mainly as tourism grows. It's also outgrowing its water supply. They draw their water from a system of old wells, but the demand is fast surpassing what's available. New hotels and resorts are being built, more people are moving into the area to work at those hotels and resorts, and you have to also factor in the number of guests and visitors, which is climbing.

8:30

The town of Edson approached this Progressive Conservative government to drill a new well, but they were told instead to reopen old wells. Now, I think that's probably some bureaucrat in some office decreeing that they can't and telling them to go open old wells. I don't think that decision was based on any science or any research. Those old wells are not going to provide the amount of water that Edson needs. Nobody cares. They were told to open the old ones, and that was it. Further to that, there is also the fact that some of Edson's water shortage problems are caused by truckers taking water out of town to the oil rigs, water that should have stayed in their local system. Now it's being taken out.

We can probably extrapolate from these two examples, Mr. Speaker, to any number of locations and situations across Alberta, but today is not the day. We are here to discuss a motion that basically asks for an honest, comprehensive, and periodically updated water image, water inventory picture. We need to know where we have the water, how much of it, its state or quality. We need to also plan effectively.

Taking the picture today and then doing the periodic evaluations as we go would allow us to also determine the trends or the patterns that would help us forecast and plan. If we notice that our water is okay in a certain area but is suffering in another area, then we can study the reasons why this discrepancy exists. It really offers us that forecasting security that we can know what we're doing and what effect our actions have on our environment.

I'm going to repeat the title of that motion, Mr. Speaker: be it

resolved that the Legislative Assembly . . . [Mr. Elsalhy's speaking time expired]

Thank you. I appreciate the time.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to join the debate on Motion 511. Water is an important resource in this province and one that this government works hard to protect and conserve. I find the wording of this particular motion to be somewhat offensive. To say that we need an inventory of all ground and surface water "in order to responsibly manage and sustain" Alberta water resources neglects to take into account the fact that this government already manages this resource responsibly. It also neglects to note that the government is currently working towards an inventory of Alberta's water sources and supplies, that the government is already collecting data.

Mr. Speaker, to imply that the government is not responsibly managing water for Albertans is completely false. I have four words for the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View: Water for Life strategy. As the hon. Minister of Environment informed the member opposite during May 3rd's question period, Alberta's Water for Life strategy is the most progressive water strategy in North America. The strategy is in place to examine the issues surrounding water quality and water quantity while being conscious of the long-term challenges the province faces. It is, as the name states, a strategy to ensure that this province's water remains sustainable.

In developing the strategy itself, Albertans and stakeholders were consulted, resulting in three main goals for the strategy. These include a safe, secure drinking water supply, healthy aquatic ecosystems, and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. To ensure that the Water for Life strategy is successful, not only were Albertans given a voice in the creation of the strategy itself, but it's also being implemented by partners in communities, municipalities, industry, and agriculture as well as government.

There are three main types of partnerships involved in implementing Water for Life. The provincial water advisory council, the watershed planning and advisory council, and the watershed stewardship groups all work to manage Alberta's water. The provincial water advisory council is the main group responsible for implementing Water for Life. Ultimately, the council helps to ensure that the outcomes are achieved across the province and provides the government with policy advice. The purpose of the various watershed planning and advisory councils is to provide a system for public and stakeholder involvement in the overall management of Alberta's water within our individual watersheds. They work to help plan, create best practices, and report on the watershed which they manage.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the watershed stewardship groups allow Albertans the opportunity to act as stewards of their own local water sources. These volunteers most effectively take the initiative to protect their own water sources. This would lead one to believe that these everyday, hard-working Albertans are working in the best interests of all Albertans to responsibly manage these local water sources in the public interest despite what the mover of the motion may believe. Thus, the Water for Life strategy works to address the concerns of Albertans in terms of the use of Alberta's water and, of course, to manage Alberta's water supplies in the best possible manner.

Mr. Speaker, I myself sat on the South Saskatchewan basin advisory council for the Water for Life strategy. This was a great opportunity to take part in the building of the strategy. I experienced first-hand the consultation that was done with Albertans regarding

management of our water resources. From this experience I honestly believe that through the Water for Life strategy this government is responsibly managing Alberta's water and ensuring that this resource is being sustained in the public interest.

To imply that the province is mishandling water supplies is totally unjust and completely misleading to all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the Water for Life strategy is already addressing the sustainability of Alberta's water resources, and as the Environment minister noted for the member opposite during question period on May 3, mapping or data collection is already taking place as part of the Water for Life strategy.

It is for these reasons that I cannot support Motion 511. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening to join the debate on Motion 511. I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing this motion forward as it allows an excellent opportunity to highlight the many steps the government is already taking on this very matter.

No one disputes the fact that water is an extremely important resource to this province. In fact, the Alberta government has made water management a high-priority issue as evidenced by the comprehensive Water for Life strategy. Creating an inventory of the water supplies across the province is a huge task, however. This undertaking is extremely complex and will take a great deal of time and resources. Fortunately, Alberta Environment is already working diligently to ensure that this task will continue to proceed in a professional and thorough manner.

One important step in this process involves the creation of the Alberta Water Information Centre. The Alberta Water Information Centre, initiated in '03-04, is a multiyear project designed to provide Albertans with self-serve access to information about the status of Alberta's water resources, including quality, quantity, licence commitments, and actual use of surface water and groundwater.

The first phase of this project focused on building a data warehouse infrastructure and establishing a process to ensure surface water quality data from Alberta Environment's operational system. Work was also undertaken to develop a series of standard surface water quality information products, such as tables, graphs, et cetera, to meet the common request received from Albertans. The first rollout of the Alberta Water Information Centre was made available to the public in February of '05.

The next area of focus for the Alberta Water Information Centre will be to integrate information on water licences and licence use, the development of the ad hoc reporting capabilities, and taking steps to incorporate additional sources of data at the AWIC.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, one major goal of the Alberta Water Information Centre is to develop additional data and products on surface water quantity and quality. This will be one important source of information available to Albertans pertaining to the water quality in our province and its quantity. This initiative is but one aspect of the government's comprehensive Water for Life strategy, devoted to creating and maintaining an inventory of our province's water supplies.

This is a colossal undertaking, Mr. Speaker, both in terms of scope and logistics. First of all, there's a great amount of water in our province. In addition, water levels are constantly fluctuating. Thus, maintaining an accurate inventory becomes very difficult, yet it is attainable. It just needs a comprehensive strategy.

Alberta Environment has been reviewing the various provincial

ground and surface water monitoring networks, programs, and the databases. The department continues to compile information and data to help us better understand and record our water supplies. Keeping track, Mr. Speaker, of the water supplies in our province and ensuring future sustainability of this important resource remains a long-term goal of this government.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, Motion 511 is redundant. It is urging the government to do something it is already doing. Moreover, Alberta is considered to be a national leader in this regard. It may be a good idea, but the government is already acting on this initiative. To be honest, the next thing you know, the opposition will be calling for the government to eliminate the debt or to establish a taxation regime where Albertans pay the lowest taxes in Canada or to create the best climate for business in our economy. Maybe a motion will come forward this fall from the opposition calling on the government to prepare for this province's centennial. Fortunately for Albertans the government doesn't need to be urged to act on this matter; we're there. To support this, as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has asked, would imply that nothing is being done by the government, and that is not fair, it's not accurate, and it's not reasonable. For this reason, I will not be supporting this redundant motion, and I encourage all my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I stand and join the debate over Motion 511, and I'm very pleased to be able to do so and to add my thoughts and the things that I have come across in speaking and listening as we travel through Alberta.

I must start out by saying that I'm very disappointed that this current government seems to think that this is unnecessary. It seems to me that it goes back to the story of when you came across a person walking down the street and you were to ask them, "Where did you get those shoes?" and immediately he takes the defensive: "I didn't steal these. I bought these, and they're my own." It seems that they're very touchy on this subject, and therefore I deduce that they realize themselves that they can and should do more. In this perhaps we could just change the wording a little bit, if they find it offensive – and I don't think that it is; perhaps it's a little bit gruff – to say that we continue to speed up and do all we can to gather the inventory because we all know that that inventory is being taken, that we need to speed up, especially in areas where new development is being used, such as in the coal-bed methane, and to perhaps look at water supplies in order to more responsibly manage. We can always do better.

As an irrigator in southern Alberta we're always looking at innovation and how to move on. I very much get the feeling from the government members that they're on autopilot: "Everything has been achieved. We've got a plan. We have nothing left to do, and we don't need to talk about it." I find that disappointing because there are many innovative and great ideas out there that we can and should be discussing as we want to use our most valuable resource wisely and for the benefit of all current Albertans but, most importantly, future Albertans.

It's interesting to me to realize the numbers and the different numbers that we get from one side to the other side. What I would urge the government to do is to perhaps publish a simple report that has ordinary accounting, that says how much is being used in the north for the bitumen extraction, how much is being used in well

water and being put down. We have many numbers out there. Perhaps they could get those numbers and publish them in a way that works.

I think that we need to split the use of the water. There have been many good ideas talked about, you know, on the different uses of water, whether it's for human consumption, whether it's for industrial, whether it's for agriculture, but perhaps we need to split the consumption or the use of water into one that is returned to the system versus that which is taken and eliminated from the system, leaving us with no water now, and also an inventory of that water that is being contaminated and can't go back into the system. I think that would be of great benefit to Albertans.

We've talked about the inventory. Perhaps Albertans need to be updated and to realize: are there still some environmental assessments going on? Are we looking at off-river storage? Are we looking at more dams? We don't have the retention in the mountains anymore, and the glaciers are shrinking, and thereby when it rains and the water is running down at its full stream in June – and we experienced terrible flooding last year – we're losing an enormous amount. We need to look at storage. We need to look at ways to capture it because we've injured nature in many of those areas, and it no longer has the capacity to hold that water. So we need to be innovative and see where we can look at retaining that water, using it and letting it flow downstream throughout the year on a steady, slow basis.

As a long-time scouter I was always very concerned with the importance of wise use of our resource, and that's what we want to do. There has been mention, you know: is it worth six barrels of water to extract a single barrel of oil? Is that true? What's the data on that? Let's see the different plants and how they're doing that. I think every Albertan would say: "No, it isn't. We can live without our oil, but we can't live without our water. It would drastically change our lifestyle." But we'll lose our lifestyle if we don't have water, Mr. Speaker.

It's critical that we don't be partisan about our water and what we're looking at. We should have good ideas coming forward and everybody spending the time on it. What are the things that they've heard or learned or seen? We've had, I guess, somewhat of a lecture about this Water for Life strategy and talking about municipalities and being able to protect their water. There are many things, including agriculture, that aren't always friendly to that water: the problems with runoff that happens when we get these outbursts of weather, and the change of weather pattern. There's always, it seems, something new. I can't remember where I was at, but they were showing the 25-year flood line. What's important in the AOPA Act is, you know, to stay outside the 25-year flood line. Now we're having that twice in 10 years. Is that still relevant? We need to re-evaluate.

In 1912 the river bottom at Edmonton was flooded, and there was \$700,000 damage. That's when they decided to turn that into a park area. It's been the biggest and best in Canada. I love the river bottom here in Edmonton. The government has taken that action to protect it. Are we looking at those things and realizing that the climate isn't the same as 100 years ago or 25 years ago? We need to learn that if it happens now, let's act now and not say: "Oh, that was one in a hundred. Gosh, that's one in a hundred, twice in 10 years." Those aren't good enough answers. We don't want to be on autopilot. We don't want to cover our eyes. We don't want to plug our ears. We should have an open, honest discussion. Let's do all we can for current and future Albertans.

I'm very much appreciative of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View in bringing this motion forward. There's nothing more important to Albertans than our water. Our Environment minister

has referred to it as blue gold many times. It's exciting. The opportunity is there for us. Are we going to maximize it, or are we going to sit back and say: oh, we're doing the best that's being done anywhere? No, we have greater potential. Let's be innovative, and let's do it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, did you want to speak?

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and debate the motion before us tonight, Motion 511. I want to respond to some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright because I was struck by the bald-faced arrogance of his statements and struck again, not having worked all that many Monday nights this session, by how the members of the government seem to take the opportunity to debate an opposition motion as an opportunity to essentially abuse the opposition at will. I think it's shameful. I really do.

You know, the Water for Life strategy, Mr. Speaker, is a great policy, and I'm impressed with the work done by the previous Environment minister and those involved in crafting the Water for Life strategy. In my opinion it's one of the best policies this government has ever come up with. But, you know, right now it's barely worth the paper it's printed on because the Water for Life strategy is almost totally dependent on volunteers, on watershed groups, acting in isolation, making decisions in isolation. There is no communication to speak of, no co-ordination to speak of. There is inadequate funding: \$33 million over three years. To do what? I don't know.

For the last five years, while the oil and gas industry has been busily punching holes in the ground searching for coal-bed methane, there has been no baseline water testing. None in the last five years. Now the government is starting to talk. After unrelenting pressure this session from my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View and other members of the opposition now the government is starting to talk about doing baseline testing, five years late.

8:50

You know, we've got here a great policy that's underfunded, underenforced. Because it exists on a piece of paper somewhere, this government seems to think that it can arrogantly sally forth and talk about how wonderful it is and how behind the times the opposition supposedly is. The opposition is not behind the times, Mr. Speaker. The opposition is saying to the government: it's time to put your money and your management skills, if you have any, where your mouth is and where your policy is and start doing the work, the heavy lifting, that a government is supposed to do when a government brings in policy. But no: this government would rather sit back on its laurels, pat itself on the back, feel smug and arrogant and complacent and isolated from the people it's supposed to be serving. This government has been in power so long that it has utterly forgotten that it works for the people, not the other way around. It's about time they climbed down off their high horses, if they can find the route down anymore, and got to work and did the job Albertans elected them to do. I'll tell you, Albertans are getting increasingly fed up with this government not doing its job and are looking for an excuse to vote them out of office.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close debate.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the discussion and the comments from all members. Again, I would like to reinforce that this is a motion that supports in good measure what the government is already doing in terms of investing \$33 million over three years into the Water for Life strategy. This is long overdue, and I commend it for making this kind of commitment. I would like to see the same commitment to the Alberta Environment department overall so that it could do its job in this province. But this is a good first step, and I want to support it with this motion.

This motion does nothing if it doesn't concur with the priority that groundwater has. Along with other comments that have been made, it's not clear to Albertans that groundwater has been a priority for this government. It is not clear that this government has taken seriously the risks to groundwater for 600,000 rural Albertans. It is not clear that they have done due diligence and looked at the science that's needed to manage our groundwater, both the quality and the quantity, in a more sustainable fashion.

We have a long way to go to build public trust in the government's capacity and willingness to take care of our water resource, both groundwater and surface water. I would strongly encourage the members to move quickly on the groundwater inventory, to again look at the way the Water for Life strategy is working, based fundamentally on volunteers. We cannot expect volunteers to manage our surface water with any reasonable, sustainable, and good-quality assurance without adequate funding, technical support, and opportunities to plan for the whole watershed, not one piece of the river at a time.

The other issue that has been alluded to by the hon. members for both Medicine Hat and Battle River-Wainwright is the need to shift from supply management to demand management, especially in Medicine Hat. The greatest threat exists for drought and impacts there. We have to find ways to reduce demand. There is no way that we can increase supply. We need to look at demand-side management: conservation, water collection, storage. We have a tremendous lot to do there. I have no idea whether \$33 million will be anywhere near what is needed to seriously take on the commitments that are needed both in terms of the surface and the groundwater.

It's clear to me that there are hundreds of people in the Horseshoe Canyon formation of southeastern Alberta that are extremely anxious about their groundwater, whether they'll be able to use it and for how long and to what extent it's been damaged by coal-bed methane. It's extremely urgent that that be the priority for the groundwater mapping, to allay increasing anxiety that this more shallow coal-bed fracturing is or is not damaging their aquifers.

I would encourage all members to support the motion. It reinforces some of the good work that is being done, but it highlights the need for a high priority on planning and measurement, science-based management principles as opposed to ad hoc decision-making. It fosters, I think, a very strong ethic of water conservation and demand-side management that needs to be much more explicit than under the present jurisdictions of government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 511 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just before we get on with the moving at second of the appropriation bill, I wonder if I could seek unanimous consent of the House to reduce any division bells that might occur throughout this evening going forward from 10 minutes down to five minutes. I understand that some people

were in touch with my office, and that would be an appropriate request to make. I would ask for that unanimous consent first, and then I'll proceed with the rest.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 42
Appropriation Act, 2006

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move the Appropriation Act, 2006, Bill 42 as it is otherwise known, on behalf of our hon. Minister of Finance.

I'll just briefly comment that this bill recaps what we have been debating in this House for several weeks now, which in other words is termed the estimates of each ministry. We have gone department by department now for a long time, and at this stage we're simply seeking the consolidation, if you will, of all of that information into the Appropriation Act.

I would hope that with that brief intro and comment we could move through the Appropriation Act debate in the spirit with which it's intended. I'll move second reading now.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2006, if I could, I'd like to go through some issues with different aspects of different budgets and comment on it accordingly. One of the interesting comments of the Minister of Education when he gave his budget has made my phones ring recently. I've been busy. He called it – and a lot of the superintendents and teachers that have called the last 10 days are referring to the words – “preliminary budget.” That's really had some interesting connotation. Then, as one person who phoned today from Fort Saskatchewan said: “Your remarks, Mr. Flaherty, are inadequate. It's not a hold-the-line budget. It should be called a not-enough budget.” Because it's my area of interest, I'll just start off with the Education budget and try and get some clarification and put some notes on the record as to my feelings about some of the things.

First of all, let me just touch on the area of special education. You know, Mr. Speaker, I think we have to recognize the wonderful volunteer and support groups that we have in this area, in this province of Alberta. There's one operating in Edmonton which is a very profound group. In fact, I believe, if I'm not mistaken, it's called the parent advisory council out of the academy at King Edward. Now, this is a very good group of about I'd say 60 to 70 parents. They've been wonderful to us in the St. Albert constituency because we use a lot of them for workshops and to refer parents who are having difficulty with their kids. They've helped us immeasurably with some of the very difficult problems that parents face with children that have disabilities.

9:00

Now, let me just talk about a letter that the chairman of this group wrote to the Minister of Education. She said:

... I highlighted that the current funding formula does not address or does not provide additional funding for children with mild to moderate learning challenges. It has been pointed out to me that my statement on this matter might have been interpreted incorrectly. I

certainly apologize for any misinterpretation. I wish to take this opportunity to clarify our concern. Specifically, we are concerned that your Department . . .

That's the Minister of Education's department.

. . . does not provide additional funding beyond that which is provided within the base funding to address the increased cost of educating children with mild to moderate special needs.

Mrs. Burke goes on to say in this fine letter to the minister:

Our parent community is respectfully requesting that your department provide us with an explanation or rationale as to why districts are not provided with additional funding (beyond that which is provided through the base funding) for children with mild to moderate learning challenges. As you might appreciate, we find the lack of financial compensation to districts to be profoundly troubling and inconsistent with the fine Standards for Special Education . . .

which you came out with in June 2004. She's saying that was a wonderful document

created by your department to engender excellence in the provision of education for children with special needs. We need to understand with clarity the reason for this policy on the part of your department; our view is that it is a major and serious oversight in the manner in which funding is provided to districts.

So I think we're saying that in the particular budget of the Minister of Education, that seems to be very much lacking in the area of special education with the matter that I just referred to.

Now, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that just today, because of this idea of what he referred to as a preliminary budget rather than the one that we thought was the real budget, I received a very interesting call from the parents of the Catholic school district which is in Elk Island. It's called St. Luke elementary school. They're spending 2.5 hours a day on the bus for a trip that takes about 12 minutes if parents drive their children directly to school.

The concern of the parents' group in that school district is that there are no bathrooms on the bus, and children are not allowed to eat on the bus. This distance is about the same as kids going to Red Deer for school. There's a significant loss of children's time. So little value is placed on the children's time that it doesn't make sense economically to have more buses. Could you imagine an employer that asks workers to travel 2.5 hours a day on the bus without pay every workday?

Now, it's interesting to me that when we met with the Calgary public school board in Calgary, their board was telling us about the issues that they had in transportation. My point, Mr. Speaker, is that in this budget there doesn't seem to be anything that talks about evaluating the bus systems across Alberta and making reforms. I think that we need to look at the whole busing situation in this province and work some guidelines and make sure that children are not having these long periods of time and stressful times on bus transportation. I think that it's a serious problem. I can recall, when I was in the Lethbridge regional office, a Dr. Ed Bardock doing a provincial study evaluating what was happening in the province and making some major changes. Maybe we should be addressing that matter in this particular budget.

Now, let me also just talk quickly if I can about the whole question of infrastructure. We seem to have a lack of a plan that schools can review to see if their school's infrastructure needs are being addressed. I'm encouraged. I believe that the new associate minister of infrastructure, hopefully, is coming out with something on this, I suspect around the end of June, so maybe there's hope for us to make sure that schools get some feedback as to where they're going with the whole business of capital projects and infrastructure needs.

Again, just before we leave education, the question of the unfunded liability issue seems to be there. I'll be spending the weekend in Calgary at the ATA convention, and hopefully I'm going to get some information as to where they're going on that.

The class size initiative across the province seems to be causing some problems. The phone calls to me indicate that, for example, in Edmonton public they're suggesting to me that they are going to be \$4 million short in their budget to meet the class size initiative that they thought they were going to have right across the board, from K to 12. They're expecting that there will be cuts and that this will have implications for teachers in their system. There is a great deal of concern there. Stay tuned. I think we're going to hear more about that in the coming weeks.

Seniors. Let me just touch on the whole business of seniors. I commend the government on getting to the question of standards. I think that's a step in the right direction, and I compliment them. Where I have some concern is: why is it going to take so long to implement these across the province? That concerns me greatly. I have a 97-year-old father-in-law in Aspen House in Morinville, and I'm thankful, and I want to say that I'm very pleased at the care he's getting. It's wonderful. He's a wonderful fellow. He's even thinking of looking for a new bride on the weekend or very soon. That's encouraging. He said he'll have to buy a new car if that takes place. So he's being well looked after. But I see that as a pinnacle to aim for, and I'm hoping that these standards can do some wonderful things for seniors in this province, who I believe we owe a great deal to because of the amount of effort they've made in developing our heritage and the contribution they've made. The other thing that bothers me. I wish that we had some independent policing of that whole thing of the standards to report to this House as to what is happening.

Child care. Let me just touch on child care. It's interesting. I do a lot of following of B.C. politics. I think they're making a mistake by following this government in some of their new directions, but Campbell sometimes is not the wisest man in the world. I'm happy to see that the child's advocate in B.C. now will report to an all-party council of the Legislature, and that is to me a very enlightened move. I think that it has some wonderful implications for keeping their child welfare in B.C. up to snuff, and we should take a look at that in Alberta to see if it has any possibilities for us in the way we operate our child welfare services across Alberta.

The question again of AISH. That is to me a matter of concern because in the review I listened carefully – I just want to tell you a story, Mr. Speaker. When I happened to be with the minister of social services and health, Mr. Ray Speaker, I can recall a person with MS who had three kids that we helped. I was aware of this person from being involved in a church group. In fact, he married this beautiful lady that I had a crush on. This is a true story. Unfortunately, she got very ill and committed suicide. He had MS, and because of the AISH program and with his pension from Crane he was able to continue on with a housekeeper until he died at 57. One of his sons – I won't name him – is an outstanding lawyer in the Edmonton region and has a wonderful family.

I think what I'm saying to you is that the AISH program – and I commend the government – is wonderful, but I think that you have to build a good cost-of-living index into it and make sure that it's reviewed on an annual basis.

I think I'm allowed, Mr. Speaker – and I'll ask your guidance on this – to comment on Bill 40. Is that on the table today? Am I allowed to just say a few words about it?

9:10

The Acting Speaker: I think that we will be dealing with Bill 40 a little later on today.

Mr. Flaherty: Okay. So I'm not allowed to say anything. I had some wonderful remarks from a beautiful student that I met in St.

Albert the other night. She was a good friend of the president of the university.

Mr. Speaker, I'm searching to see if I've covered all the issues that I wanted to talk about. I think I have. Thank you for your patience, and thank you for allowing me to speak to Bill 42.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to participate in this debate on the appropriation bill. I promise to be brief. I'm building on some of the comments that were introduced on the record by my hon. colleague from St. Albert. Most of them also centre around education and learning. It is sort of an opportune moment for me to put them on the record, and I would appreciate any feedback or response from cabinet and from the hon. minister.

Last fall I started a petition on school fees, Mr. Speaker. What triggered my taking this action was that a constituent of mine from Edmonton-McClung actually called the office and later visited the office crying. She was complaining that she can no longer find affordable the fees that are charged by the school to which her children go. She was finding that expense to be unbearable. She was factoring in costs of, you know, instructional supplies, the fees that are charged for field trips, for example, locker rentals, and so on, and then you add bus fare. With three children she was definitely finding it very difficult.

So what we did was work with her, approach Parliamentary Counsel and approved the language of that particular petition. We tried to make sure that it was actually balanced in that it called on the government to fully and adequately fund the school boards so that they, in turn, can fully and adequately fund their individual schools so that they in turn do not have to resort to charging parents school fees. Now, it is noteworthy to mention that some of the discussions I had with parents indicated that they don't want to pay any fees. They actually want to still participate in the education process. They really quite enjoy being a part of that experience with their children, but they complained about the level of the fees charged, not the actual concept of charging fees for certain things.

So we had the petition. The petition went out to all the parent councils in the province. We received quite a few responses from all over the province, but we made the observation that most of those responses came from rural Alberta, not from the urban centres. That was an eye-opener for us because we thought that people in the cities tend to pay more, but that was not evident in the responses we received.

Further to our petition on school fees, the Edmonton public school board has just recently released their own survey on fundraising. I found it very interesting to read, Mr. Speaker, because they commented on, you know, the expectation now that parents have to fund raise. It is not the case where they actually fund raise for the options or the extras. They actually do in fact fund raise now for essentials or basics. The expectation that they have to participate in fundraising activities is growing, and the level of dissatisfaction with that is also growing. Parents are saying, you know: we're fund raised to death, basically; we have contributed time and time again. And that expectation is rising because they're paying for more and more every day.

Now, I hope that other surveys have been conducted or are going to be conducted in other parts of this province. This is one that I found myself, which was from the Edmonton public school board. I would be interested to see if maybe there's going to be a central survey commissioned by the hon. minister or, in fact, if he can instruct people at the Public Affairs Bureau to maybe commission a survey of that nature. Again, my argument is that the Public Affairs

Bureau should be there to ask people's opinion, to survey public opinion, not to tell people, you know, how to think and what to believe. We would find a survey of this nature very useful. It would offer guidance and direction to the hon. minister and to cabinet based on what people think is necessary and what people think is appropriate in terms of fundraising.

The other issue that I wanted to put on the record today, Mr. Speaker, actually has to deal with the issue of school boundaries. I have not spoken to the minister yet, but I was planning to, and today is a good opportunity to highlight this. There are concerns with the way school boundaries are set in terms of, you know, who can join which school and who cannot. I have three cases in Edmonton-McClung of students who live just a couple of hundred feet away from the particular junior high school that they want to join, but they didn't make the cut. The school has space. It is not an issue of space. They do have space in the regular program and also in the academic achievement program, but they didn't make the lottery because there's a random draw. They feel that it doesn't make sense for them to be asked to take a bus to another school where their friends are not going and that would waste at least 45 minutes in the morning and 45 minutes in the afternoon for them to come back when they could actually walk to the school that they picked and the school where all their friends are going. So the issue of school boundaries I think has to be visited.

Also, I was actually extremely disappointed to find out that there are no waiting lists anymore. We have situations where people actually misrepresent the truth. They give a false address to be able to make the lottery when, in fact, they don't live at that address. They use somebody else's address, a neighbour or a friend, and they don't live at that house and exclude people who are legitimately within the boundaries. Now, with a school that has space, there is no waiting list. I think that maybe in next year's budget it would be wise for the hon. minister to investigate this thing because if a school has space and people are asked to be bused to a different school to even out the attendance, to even out the enrolment, I think it's sort of a fake intervention. We're doing something to make it look better than it is when, in fact, the people who are affected by it are those students in junior high and high school.

That would be a valid expense in next year's budget, to study this school boundaries issue and also, again, to re-emphasize the issue of fundraising in schools because it is a big issue. I don't think it should go unnoticed, and some action has to be taken.

I sincerely appreciate this opportunity. I could go on and on about other things, you know, like health, for example, and seniors, which are dear and near to me, but I choose not to, to allow more members to speak tonight, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you again.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2006. This House has spent considerable time over the last six or seven weeks, as it should, on estimates for each department individually, and there have been fairly interesting observations made by hon. members on the department budgets from Community Development to Education to Health to Seniors, Children's Services, and so forth. It is true that this bill now is a final piece of legislation which is there to seek the approval of this House for the overall spending estimates and the budget for next year. This House, of course, takes this business of spending public dollars, taxpayers' dollars, on a variety of programs that this government offers very seriously. So any time spent on debates either on the estimates of individual departments or on the appropriation bill is time exceedingly well spent.

9:20

We know that this budget has proposed some overdue increases in spending in some areas, areas which have suffered over the years because of systematic cutbacks, restructuring, or whatever have you. There's a lot of catch-up being done. Infrastructure certainly is one such area.

In fact, I'll be seeing a representative from a large high school in my constituency the day after tomorrow who is seeking to meet with me to express their concern about the 50-year-old heating infrastructure that this big school has. There have been constant complaints. Experts and specialists have been brought in to assess the problems with the heating system. Particularly since we are a cold climate, it's seven, eight months of the year. The problems arise from uneven heating in this school, in various parts of the school. There are over 3,000 students going to this school, and the heating equipment for the school is from the 1950s. Repeated assessments of the performance of the heating plant have suggested that the aging of these structures is creating health hazards and problems for students, not only discomfort but, as a matter of fact, has put their health at risk. This is a high school.

This particular instance in my constituency is merely illustrative of the very large problem of an infrastructure crisis that has developed in this province over the years. Whether it's schools, whether it's hospitals, whether it's seniors' residences, whether it's roads and bridges and whatever have you, there are huge problems arising from the aging of structures and equipment that need to be fixed.

So while on the one hand there's some attention in this budget towards addressing problems related to this very, very profound problem of the infrastructure budget, at the same time there are tax cuts being offered to, it seems to me, the very business entities that perhaps do not need tax cuts at this stage.

An interesting figure, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the corporations and their profits in this country. Corporate profits are very high. There's a period of very high corporate profits in Canada as a whole, and for this last year that just passed, there's quite a startling figure: 70 per cent of all the corporate profits are made by corporations from Alberta. So the Alberta corporate sector is the beneficiary of 70 per cent of all the profits made by corporations in Canada – quite a figure to reflect on – and the very corporations who are beneficiaries of this huge share of national profits made by corporations, 70 per cent, are the corporations which will be receiving a big handout, a big tax cut in this budget, according to our estimates close to \$375 million a year in the next coming years, and I think this figure is going to increase as the size of these corporations and the size of their operations grow.

There's absolutely no justification to our seniors who wait before the quality of care that they receive can be improved. There is no justification at all for school boards to have to wait before they can get the infrastructure in their aging schools fixed or have their class sizes reduced while at the same time squandering the stable, predictable revenues, not just for one year, not once in a while but on an annual basis, on corporate tax cuts when, in fact, corporations don't need this kind of help given the economic situation in the country and particularly in this province.

When you take a longer term view, over the next 10-year period, by 2016, this province will have lost close to \$5 billion in these tax cuts. It's a cumulative revenue giveaway and loss, revenues that could be invested in our schools, in our hospitals, for our seniors, for our children, for improving the infrastructure, for protecting our environment, for doing just so many things that need to be done that are waiting to be addressed while this budget gives away huge amounts of money.

Ambulance funding is another one. Year after year after year the

AUMA, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, has drawn attention to the fact that there's a \$12 million funding imbalance, a deficit if you wish, in the budget for ambulances. Twelve million dollars. Yet this year's allocation for the purpose remains at the same level that it was two or three years ago, at \$55 million. Again, another area where we could have used the funds that were lost through tax cuts to corporations that didn't need the tax cut and addressed the deficits.

One other example comes to mind here. This year, Mr. Speaker, both in the throne speech and later on in the budget speech there was an emphasis on dedicating funds to cancer research and cancer prevention. At the same time as these commitments are being made by this government both to increase resources for cancer research and thereby for cancer prevention, AADAC's tobacco reduction strategy budget is reduced by \$300,000. We know that there are very direct connections between the use of tobacco and cancer, yet we find that AADAC's tobacco reduction strategy budget suffers a cut. So there are facts in this budget that are difficult to reconcile. On the one hand, a commitment is being made to prevent cancer. On the other hand, in fact, monetary or budgetary commitments are being rolled back where they will have the most effect; for example, our tobacco-reduction strategy.

Mr. Speaker, today I and my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood met with an arts and culture group from Edmonton. A delegation of five or six people came to see us drawing attention to the relative neglect and serious neglect over the years on the part of this government in budgeting for promoting arts and cultural activities in this province. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, we know what happened to its budget. You know, its budget went up by 10 per cent after years of staying at the same stagnant level while the horse-racing industry's budget went up by 40 per cent. Tens of millions of dollars are being thrown at the horse-racing industry while peanuts are being offered as increases for the arts and culture field.

The concern that the members of the delegation shared with our caucus this morning was: why is it that there is no appreciation in the government quarters with respect to the important role that art and cultural activities play in enriching our lives and our communities, both contributing enormously to the quality of the lives of our citizens in small communities, rural communities, or large urban centres and, at the same time, making a huge impact in terms of economic returns and economic activity, especially at the local level, yet they receive very poor attention in this budget from this government? So the question that they are asking is: what is it? What does the cultural and arts community need to do in order to send a clear message to this government when it's preparing its budget to pay attention to this extremely important set of activities, the economic and cultural and social sector – arts and culture, that is – where there's a huge potential for growth both in economic terms and in terms of the cultural vibrancy of our communities and the colour and the texture that they add to our daily lives? A very large number of Albertans, as a matter of fact, work in this field, yet it's an area that suffers from neglect in the budget year after year after year.

9:30

Mr. Speaker, I can go on to draw attention to many of these anomalies or contradictions of the budget. The budget decisions are made in such a way that the government seems to be speaking out of both sides of its mouth. It wants to prevent cancer, yet it withdraws money from programs that will in fact lead us to achieve that goal. So the question is: why is it that one finds these kinds of loopholes, problems with the budget?

Another area, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to take a moment to draw attention to is the area of climate change. We know climate change and its impact. It's now visible. We simply cannot deny that the climate is changing. The connection between the change and the agents of the change is also clear. It is human activity that has the highest impact on or is the greatest contributor to that change. Yet when you look at the budget, the climate change program budget has increased by a miserly 1 per cent. You know what the inflation rate is this year? At least 2.7 per cent to 3 per cent. So the actual dollars available and budgeted for climate change programs have gone down in value. Why is this? We are worrying about impending water shortages across the province, the threat of drought that might arise, our rivers going down, the volume of water that is flowing through them, and the impact of that.

I will close, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand and speak briefly to the appropriation bill, Bill 42. Clearly, the budgetary commitments of the government reflect its priorities and its values, and I would hope that all Albertans would have access to a sense of where the province is going and where the priorities are as reflected in our budgetary commitments through various ministries. Obviously, again, the people of Alberta expect that this resource that is given to Alberta in trust will be used for the purposes of improving health, safety, quality of life, and sustainability of our environment and our economy.

I mention economy last deliberately, Mr. Speaker, because it should serve the people and the environment, not the reverse. Unfortunately, this government has lost its balance in where the priorities should be, and all serves the economy in this province. We have failed to see the importance of the economy serving people and the environment.

There are two people in the Legislature tonight, the Musekamps, who have been here every day for the last few weeks trying to understand why this province fails to place its priority on farm workers and the value that they have to our province. Not only are they the breadbasket of this province, but farmers have been the very lifeblood and historic roots and tradition of this province. These folks are committed to persisting with the various departments in this government to see that farm workers get adequate protection for health and safety and basic human rights, that farm workers fall under the same protection of Alberta labour and the Workers' Compensation Board and other acts that protect workers' health and safety. Fundamentally, they are being denied these. Children and adults are working on farms. They're dying at a much higher rate than in other provinces that have included farm workers under health and safety and workers' compensation. So many of these injuries go unprotected and unfunded, and people are forced into bankruptcy in some cases and forced to take other jobs.

Part of our appropriation bill should really address what the priorities of government are. Why aren't we spending money to assist in a more meaningful way than simply education in the rural areas? Why are we not funding appropriate bodies to assist with the inclusion of farm workers in our labour code, in our workers' compensation? These people are absolutely marginalized and not getting the benefits and rights of all other Albertans. That's one area that I think we can highlight tonight in this general look at where we're spending our money in Alberta and how it's serving the people of Alberta, especially our farmers and the workers on farms. Over 20 deaths last year, Mr. Speaker, of which three were children,

and these are entirely preventable if we have the appropriate measures in place and certainly some of the financial support for people who do go through injuries.

I want to switch now to the environment, which I'm most closely associated with: \$130 million a year, Mr. Speaker, .5 per cent of the budget, one-third of what we used to spend in protecting our environment. Albertans have said repeatedly to this government that environment is the third most important element in their government services, after health and education. We are still giving a measly .5 per cent to Environment, which is fundamentally responsible for advocating for and protecting the environment and ensuring that it's in a position to support people and the economy. We are neglecting it woefully. It is not stewardship to give this critical ministry .5 per cent of the budget to establish standards, to monitor standards, to analyze the data, to enforce standards, and in fact to clean up some of the contaminated sites that industry walks away from.

Another element of our budget that is sorely lacking is a cleanup fund by industry. This Environment minister has suggested that we Albertans should pay for a cleanup fund, not industry, that we should set up a cleanup fund out of royalties, so essentially asking Albertans to pay twice, once when those responsible companies clean up and get the tax break for cleaning up and then calculate their royalties, and then a second time the public loses money on those companies that default. We are left then to clean up, as he would suggest, through public funds like the royalty, which is due Albertans as a result of the exploitation of our resource.

Again, in relation to our management of contaminated sites there's a serious gap in credibility here when the Environment minister calls for us to spend public funds in cleaning up industry's problems, at the same time calling on industry as the polluter, that they should pay. There's a mismatch between what is said and what is actually happening on the ground, especially with respect to downstream oil and gas and refineries and other industrial sites.

Indeed, we have not been cleaning up sites to equivalent land use, which the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act requires. We are now legitimizing the process of risk management on these sites, which means that we cover over the contamination, put in monitoring of groundwater wells, and if there is migration of contamination off the site into these wells, we say: oh, we've got a problem, and we'll clean it up now. This legacy will be left to our children. For several hundred years, then, we'll be managing these sites and monitoring the groundwater to see if these contaminated sites ever do spill into our groundwater.

This is not stewardship. We need to invest in full monitoring and enforcement of our standards. We have a very conscientious Environment staff, that are totally underfunded and unable to do the job they've been asked to do. It's time we addressed this, Mr. Speaker. I think Albertans know only a small amount about the negligence of our environment today.

9:40

On a more fundamental level in our finances, Mr. Speaker, if we're interested in the environment, we would do two fundamental things: we would stop giving incentives for industries that pollute, and we would start giving incentives for clean, renewable sources of energy. Those two fundamentals would go a tremendous amount to serving the interests of the environment and to serving sustainable development in this province. Stop giving financial incentives to activities that damage the environment and begin investing in those activities like renewable energy and energy conservation that will help to sustain the planet and reduce our impact in terms of climate change and greenhouse gases.

Clearly, we as citizens have a role, a serious role and responsibil-

ity in changing our ways, reducing our environmental footprint. We need to invest in making the healthy environmental choice the easier choice for people. The climate action fund, which has again received almost no increase this year, was a mechanism for getting people to buy energy-efficient appliances, energy-efficient furnaces, and to retrofit their homes and should be extending into vehicles and public transit. That would be progressive budgetary investment in our future. It would show young people that we have hope, that we have a vision, that we have plans to sustain our environment along with our economy and our communities.

I've talked at length in this Legislature about the concerns about coal-bed methane and the neglect that has happened over five years. We must restore confidence in this department. We must invest, then, in an independent public committee to examine some of the problems with wells and with groundwater, particularly in areas of the Horseshoe Canyon. That's an area that the Alberta Environment department and other departments need to share in. It's going to be expensive. We've done considerable damage there, from what I can assess, and we need to have objective scientific information to decide: where is there real damage from the oil and gas industry, and where is it natural causes that have contributed to groundwater problems? I do not want to impute fault without knowing the science, and we do not know the science today in terms of our groundwater. It's urgent both from the point of view of public trust in our government and in terms of public trust for our industries that we do proper assessment, and we need to invest there.

Industrial development has been massive in this province in the last few years, a fivefold increase in oil wells in the last decade yet no increase, substantially, in Alberta Environment. Alberta Environment, again, is one-third the size it was in the early '90s, and they are expected to do a huge amount of work in terms of the monitoring of these sites, follow-up of complaints in terms of water or in terms of air quality or in terms of soil contamination. We simply don't have the resources to do this.

Why is environment not a priority in this government? Why can we not commit the appropriate investment there? It's viewed too often as an expense rather than an investment. We have a legacy to leave to our children, and we have to invest more fully in the environment. All of us will benefit.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to raise these issues, farm safety and environment, all linked to human health and environmental sustainability and our ability to sustain our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 42.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 40 **Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006**

[Adjourned debate May 10: Mr. Herard]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you for taking your time. I was a little tardy in getting here.

Okay. I just wanted to add a few comments, having moved second reading the last time. I just wanted to make a few comments with respect to developments since moving second reading. I've

now had the opportunity to meet with CAUS and have spoken to ACTISEC and have written to both of my opposition critics. With respect to CAUS and ACTISEC I've made a commitment that if they give the regulation-making process an honest and fair shake and find that it just doesn't do the job for them, then they can come to SPC to make their suggestions for improvements. They wanted me to say that publicly, so I just did.

With respect to my esteemed critics I've now invited them in writing to participate in the regulation-making process so that they can shape the regulations through the consultation process. I don't know if that's going to make a whole lot of difference. I was hearing my hon. critic from Calgary-Currie. He was warming up a little earlier. I'm not sure that it's going to make a lot of difference, but I just wanted to put that on the record.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to continue second reading debate on Bill 40, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006. I want to start by very briefly referring back to *Hansard*, to a few exchanges that we have had over the course of this session in question period.

On February 27 I asked the then Advanced Education minister about whether there was a fair tuition policy coming for all postsecondary students in Alberta. He answered: "Mr. Speaker, legislation is not the only way to create a priority. In fact, if you don't need more laws, you ought not to make more laws." That was February 27.

On March 16 I asked the then Minister of Advanced Education: "With the minister's spring deadline for a new affordability policy fast approaching, why are stakeholders still waiting for a draft policy that contains some actual specific details?" His answer was quite simple: "Because it's not done yet, Mr. Speaker."

On April 4 the then Advanced Education minister said:

I've always found it prudent that when you ask knowledgeable people to form a committee and to examine all the possible options that might be available and to make recommendations about which ones are most appropriate for students in our province, to make sure that affordability is key, that every Albertan has the opportunity to access an education and can afford that education, one ought not to make presumptions about the conclusions until they've actually got the recommendations.

Those exchanges indicated that the process of A Learning Alberta was continuing, albeit sometimes it seemed at a glacial pace. The impression that the then minister gave this House was that the process was giving the whole question of affordability of postsecondary education a full and thorough consideration, and – to paraphrase the old wine commercial: we will sell no wine before its time – we would not rush this thing through. Now, it gets a bit difficult at this point, Mr. Speaker, because it has been 16 months. One might say, at least if one is making a Canadian wine, that that's long enough to let it age. Those are the bad wines, the bad Canadian wines. The great Canadian wines take somewhat longer.

On the other hand, though, we have gone through a process that . . . [interjection] No heckling there from the previous minister.

We have gone through a process that has taken its time and I gather from what the current minister has had to say is very, very close to delivering on a recommendation for a new tuition and affordability policy. Suddenly, with mere days left until this Legislature rises for the balance of the spring and the summer and, according to the Premier, the fall – there will be no fall session – and next winter and who knows what beyond that, we're rushing through a piece of enabling legislation supposedly to make this thing work.

9:50

If I can just quote the current Minister of Advanced Education, his indication was that this needs to be done. I quote from *Hansard* again, from last Wednesday. “We need to make these amendments immediately so that government can make true on its promise of a new tuition fee policy in place and working for students by the fall of 2007.” Well, that’s not entirely accurate, Mr. Speaker. There are better ways to go about it.

With that in mind, I would like to move an amendment to Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006. I have the requisite number of copies here. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that tuition fee policies for public postsecondary institutions must remain in the statute itself, rather than cabinet regulations, to ensure that any future changes are subject to full public debate in the Assembly.

I will now pass the amendment to the page for appropriate distribution. I look for your guidance, Mr. Speaker, as to whether I should pause until this has been distributed or whether I can continue my argument. Okay, I will continue then. Thank you very much for that.

Bill 40 is a very, very, very simple piece of legislation. I think my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona said today in our joint news conference with CAUS and ACTISEC that it’s barely 60 words long. But it’s amazing: if a picture is worth a thousand words, I guess 60 words are worth a lesson in how to subvert democracy, quite frankly. Look, there is only one purpose to this bill, and that is to take tuition policy, which is enshrined in legislation as we speak, and move it out of legislation and move it under regulations. Now, why would the government want to do that? I think that’s the fundamental question. Well, the minister says that this is what’s needed for flexibility, for continuous improvement, so that this thing can be tweaked as we go. You know, if you don’t get it right, well, you can easily make it better.

I can kind of understand the minister saying that, seeing as how this government has gotten tuition wrong so many times in the past 15 years. This government has had three tuition fee policies since the beginning of the 1990s, and while they all continued to off-load costs onto students, none of them has worked, none of them has lasted. In the ’80s until 1991 tuition was capped at 12 per cent of net operating expenditures. Then till 1995 it was capped at 20 per cent. Then till 2003 it was capped at 30 per cent of net operating expenses. Then in 2003 in the Post-secondary Learning Act the cap became more of a guideline, sort of like EPA ratings on gas mileage: your mileage may vary, kind of thing. Really, it set a couple of different classes. Those institutions that were below the 30 per cent had one set of rules applying to them, and those that were above had a different set of rules, and that is what’s enshrined in legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I’ll be the first to admit that section 61(2)(b) of the Post-secondary Learning Act is a complex and rather convoluted piece of legislation. But we don’t accomplish anything in the interests of the students of Alberta, their parents, their loved ones, anyone who may be helping them pay the freight for their education, or, in fact, the people of Alberta by taking this out of legislation and moving it under regulations. We do accomplish something if we look at a bad piece of legislation and say that we’re going to amend that bad piece of legislation, that we’re going to make it better, but it’s still going to be in legislation.

Now, the minister has dropped a number of hints, pretty broad hints, as to what this new tuition policy is going to look like. We

already know, if he stays true to the hints that he’s dropped, that he’s looking at a tuition policy once he sets the new baseline, whatever that will be, whether that’s 2004-2005 levels, 1999-2000 levels, or anything in between. Once he determines that baseline, then tuitions will increase on an annual basis by the cost of living, by the consumer price index.

A tuition fee policy like that is, you know, elegant in its simplicity, so simple, in fact, that I have to wonder why you wouldn’t want to enshrine it in legislation, unless, of course, your intention was not to leave that tuition fee policy in place for very long at all, unless your intention was perhaps to come back the year after next or perhaps the year after that and say: “Let’s move to full deregulation. Let’s let the institutions charge what the market will bear. Let’s move to a situation where the student pays the full cost of his or her postsecondary education.”

Now, models like that exist, except that where they exist and where they work, the high-cost model of postsecondary education is married to a high-aid model. Those two parts of the equation need to be in place. You can do it at a place like Princeton University, which has an endowment fund that produces an annual income of \$400 million a year for one university. You can create a lot of scholarships and a lot of bursaries out of that. You can pretty much ensure that if your son or daughter has the academic qualifications to go to Princeton, it isn’t going to cost your son or daughter a thing, quite apart from whether your son or daughter or whether you can afford to pay the tuition fees and the other fees at Princeton University, because the bursaries and the scholarships are in place.

You know, it takes a mighty big endowment fund to produce \$400 million worth of income. We have an endowment fund that has only \$750 million in it and may some day be topped up to \$3 billion, but that’s the cap, and \$3 billion is not going to produce \$400 million. We’re not in any way ready for a high-cost, high-aid model of tuition, not in any way at all.

The minister seems intent on having all the stakeholders trust him, and having been told loudly and clearly by just about all those stakeholders that, in fact, they don’t—and there’s plenty of historical precedents why stakeholders should not trust this government as far as it can throw this government when it comes to their ability to manage or look after postsecondary education and the colleges and universities of this province and properly fund them and properly manage a tuition policy—his response to that is: “Well, come on in to the stakeholder process. You know, we’ll consult. Oh, by the way,” he likes to point out, “we can’t do anything by order in council without first consulting with the stakeholders and proving that we have consulted with the stakeholders.”

All right, let’s examine that. On one hand, if you do consult with the stakeholders and you prove that you’ve consulted with the stakeholders, all you’ve proven is that you’ve actually talked to them. You certainly haven’t proven that you’ve taken their advice. You know, I could invite the minister out for a steak dinner and then renege on the steak dinner, and then six months later I could come to the minister or his colleague from Lesser Slave Lake—perhaps I could involve her in it—and I could say: “Now, I remember I promised you that steak dinner. Do you still want it?” If the minister said, “Yes, I do,” I’d say, “That’s great, but I have no intention of buying it for you.” I’ve consulted him, and if I document the conversation, I can prove it. It doesn’t mean I have to take his advice. So that’s a problem right there.

10:00

Further, though, this government claims that they always consult on regulatory changes, and just over one month ago, on April 5,

2006, they made substantial changes to the student financial assistance regulation, and neither of the major student stakeholders groups, CAUS or ACTISEC, was consulted at the time, nor were any of the stakeholders that we can find consulted about Bill 40 as it was coming down. Oh, there were some exchanges in question period that indicated that some legislation was coming sometime, eventually, but nothing to indicate that there was going to be a piece of legislation designed to take tuition out of legislation and move it under regulations.

You know, I don't trust this government. Well, I don't trust this government on very much, quite frankly, but I certainly don't trust this government given its rather dismal record on tuition or very much at all about how they've managed postsecondary education over the course of the last – what has it been now? – 13, 14 years. So it's not enough for the minister to ask for my trust or my colleagues' trust or the students' trust or college and university administrators' trust or faculties' trust or support staff trust or parents' trust or employers' trust, and it's certainly not enough to be invited into the consultation process as stakeholders when what we're giving up – and by we I mean we the people of Alberta – is the chance to have this debated on the floor of the Legislature if this bill passes. This is where it belongs, and this is where law should be made, and this is where policy should be made, and this is where policy that doesn't work should be amended or changed, right here on the floor of the Legislature, where every one of 3 million Albertans has access to their 83 MLAs who can contribute to the debate.

That is why we say that the tuition fee policies for public postsecondary institutions must remain in the statute itself rather than cabinet regulations, to ensure that any future changes are subject to full public debate in the Assembly. Mr. Speaker, that is the only way to guarantee – I'm not even sure it guarantees. That's the only way to offer any sort of protection against this government pulling the wool over the public's eyes and doing what they want. I can't imagine why they would want to move tuition policy out of legislation under regulation unless they're cooking up something, unless they have something that they want to do to tuition policy that they know students and parents and the public are not going to like, but they intend to do it anyway.

With that, I will wrap up my contribution to second reading debate and let others join the fray. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Herard: On the amendment. I don't think the member opposite will be surprised that I won't be supporting his motion and certainly ask all my colleagues to do the same. The member talks about: well, you just made changes to student loan regulations, or something like that, without consulting. Typically, I think, what would happen in a case like that is that, you know, people would be called and told: "We're going to do some housekeeping here and some housekeeping there. What do you think of it?" "Go ahead and do it. Big deal." But this is substantive, you know. This change is going to in fact make it so much easier and better for our Alberta students.

I don't know why the member would prefer to guarantee himself a role in the Legislature that essentially stands there and debates but makes no substantial difference to the outcome, because that's just the way the system works, rather than having an opportunity to make a difference in actually shaping policy through a consultation process that he would participate in, and by golly, if he didn't like it, you'd sure know about it. So I don't know why he won't give it an opportunity. He won't try it. I think all that matters is that people or opposition members be able to stand up and represent their special interests rather than try and balance things on a committee that's trying to do the right thing for all Albertans.

I would urge everyone to vote against the motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this amendment. As everybody here knows, we are strongly opposed to Bill 40 as it currently stands. I think, frankly, that this government and the representations from this minister are completely wrong. What we are seeing in Bill 40 is a continuation of a culture of secrecy and entitlement and control. [interjections]

I challenge the minister who is heckling me now. If he's so confident in what he's going to propose, bring it out now. Do what your predecessors did in the first years of the PC government. They would bring forth the regulations before a bill was passed, and they would consult people on the regulations and say: "These are the regulations that will follow our bill. What do you think?" I challenge the minister to do that. In fact, I challenge the minister, if he thinks his system is so great and is so wonderful, why not build it into legislation, which has been the practice for decades now, instead of pulling it out? One more thing being pulled out from under the purview of the Legislature, from under the purview of the elected representatives of the citizens of Alberta.

It is, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, part of a much broader trend that we were talking about earlier today in regard to FOIP. We're seeing cabinet documents pulled out from public purview. Time and time again, we are now seeing bills come forward which simply defer or refer everything to regulation. So this is an antidemocratic trend. It's a trend to avoid accountability. It's a trend that reinforces the secret, behind-closed-doors approach of this government.

I would like to see a tuition policy, Mr. Speaker – and it would be the kind of policy brought forward if this amendment was accepted – that was up front and that was in legislation and that was based, as this minister has said, on consultation but consultation that leads to legislation, a policy that would provide certainty to students and to their families and to funders paying the freight rather than a bill that will expose students and all their supporters to unknown changes year by year as ministers change and fashions change and experiments are tried at the expense of students. What I'd like to see is a tuition policy that supported merit, period. If you had the qualifications, if you had the merit, then you would get the education on the understanding that that education is an investment, and it will produce benefits not just for the individual but for all of society.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that this amendment as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Currie is well worth while. I know, even as I speak, that this government will vote it down because this is a government of secrecy. Sometimes I almost imagine, and I won't invite a point of order because the hour is late, but sometimes it almost seems to me that this government would like to do all of its business behind closed doors and perhaps reduce the Legislature to nothing more than a ceremonial centre, a ceremonial moment.

Dr. Swann: Four weeks.

10:10

Dr. Taft: Four weeks. Oh, I'm sure they wouldn't even like four weeks.

Anyways, Mr. Speaker, this bill is symptomatic of a tired, secretive government. It's bad legislation. It's unfortunate that it's being supported by a minister who could have brought a fresh start to this. It has no legitimacy from the stakeholders. We've seen that today. The students don't like it. The opposition doesn't like it. I can't imagine that the families of students like it. It's yet another sad day for democracy under a government that wants to reduce the Legislature to little more than a vacuum.

I oppose the bill as it stands. I support the amendment as it is proposed, and I would urge all proper-thinking members of this Assembly to stand with us. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 40, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, and the amendment that is before us that has been proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. The amendment proposes that the bill not be read a second time to allow more time for full, public debate on this bill outside this House and, hopefully, later on right here on the floor of this Assembly. I find the amendment most reasonable in light of what I have heard from the most important stakeholders in postsecondary education with respect to the tuition fee policy, the students themselves.

As the Member for Calgary-Currie mentioned, we met with the leaders of the three universities this morning – Lethbridge, the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta – the leadership of CAUS, or Council of Alberta University Students, and the ACTISEC, the Alberta colleges and technical institutes' executive leaders, among others. The TV room was packed with students from all over the province, and they were all of one mind with respect to this bill, that this bill at this point must not proceed forward. They want this bill pulled, and there are reasons for it.

They find – and I agree with them entirely – that the existing statute on postsecondary learning that this proposed bill proposes to amend entrenches one fundamental principle, and that is the role of this House, the role of the Legislature in determining the parameters of the policy with respect to tuition fees. That's what the existing law does. It recognizes, in fact entrenches, the role of the Legislature in the determination of tuition policy. That, to my mind, is one of the most fundamental, core principles of democratic decision-making: elected representatives through open, public debate which can be witnessed by citizens who elect us and send us here to make decisions and have the opportunity to watch and witness. It is that principle now entrenched in law which this bill attempts to reverse and kill.

That's the most unacceptable part of this bill to me, that it, in fact, asks the Legislature to sign off its authority to have a say in making that policy and give it to the minister and the council of ministers, Executive Council. It's a strange spectacle that we are seeing here. First, during the elections we all do our very best to get elected to be members of this House, and then some of us begin to proceed to neglect and ignore the role of this House. I'm not going to be an accomplice in supporting a piece of legislation which reduces the ability of this House to have a substantive say in one of the most substantive policies, important policies, that we have the opportunity to establish.

Consultations must happen before a piece of legislation of this sort is brought forward. What's the point of consultations after having already received the authority to exercise your will, which is what the minister seeks to do regardless of what he hears? If he chooses, he can ignore the consultations and move forward, and that's what I find so obnoxious about this bill. I don't think this is a bill that deserves the support.

I'm so very pleased that the students have expressed more than disappointment about this bill, in fact outrage about the fact that they see this bill violating the democratic norms of decision-making that fall within the purview of an elected Assembly such as this. Students are not only now calling for a different tuition fee policy; they also insist on an appropriate democratic process through which that policy should be arrived at. So there are two issues here, a new

policy and the process through which that policy ought to be established, and students are in total agreement among themselves and with us that that process must include the ability of the Assembly to debate that policy and vote on it.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment that's before the House now will allow the minister to have an opportunity to go back and engage all stakeholders in serious consultation and then come back to the Legislature with whatever legislation he proposes to bring forward to address the policy. As I think has been argued earlier by one of the speakers, we have legislation in place, the Post-secondary Learning Act, which allows the minister to introduce new tuition policy without asking for a vote on new legislation. The very fact that this legislation is brought before the House is in fact to annul the basic element that is there in the Post-secondary Learning Act which says that this Legislature must have its say. . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has the floor.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

. . . on the determination of the piece of legislation dealing with the policy. The minister has acted I think in a unilateral fashion, and unilateralism is sort of a fashion these days. I hope that he has not tried to seek guidance from a source not far from here. Unilateral legislative action doesn't deserve the support of this House. I think appropriate consultation prior to bringing legislation to this House is important. What the minister is trying to do is sort of get this piece of legislation through, annul the principle entrenched in law as is, and then have his *fait accompli*. You know, everything is done. Now you can come and talk to me. He's very courteous and nice about it. He says: you can come and give me some advice. Well, if he wants that advice – I'd like that suggestion – please ask me for that advice before you bring this piece of legislation here, not afterwards because then I lose my opportunity to speak in public to the issues that I'm concerned with.

10:20

Any decisions made behind closed doors in secret are not showing respect either for democratic decision-making or for this House. As I was trying to make the point earlier, we all try to get into this House, work very hard during the election, and then all of a sudden turn around and begin to be indifferent towards what the role of this House is. That shows to me disrespect, a lack of respect for what this House is about and what it's supposed to be doing.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the amendment before us gives all of us an opportunity to engage in serious, genuine consultation with each other. I'll be very happy to sit down with the minister, and I'll bring some other people to do the same, provided we have a real opportunity to make an input that will be translated by the ministry into a piece of legislation which he'll be, I'm sure, coming to persuade us is needed before he can proceed with this policy. Until then, I will support this motion and hope that other members will do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did want to rise and speak to the amendment. Members of the opposition would have us believe that the end of the world is near. It's not. This bill should be read precisely for what it is.

It may surprise you, Mr. Speaker. It may surprise members of the House. I don't particularly like this bill. I wish we didn't have this bill in the House. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie through the

course of the spring session has been asking: "When is the tuition policy coming? How are you going to make sure that a new tuition policy will be in place as promised for the fall? How are you going to make sure that it's effective?" Now, having been the author of his own misfortune by the minister bringing forward a bill to say that this is how we're going to make sure that the policy is effective in the fall, he says: "The sky is falling. You're taking it all away from the legislative process, and you're robbing us of our democratic right to discuss tuition policy." Well, you can't have it both ways.

The fact of the matter is that under the Post-secondary Learning Act there is a formula with respect to tuition policy. Now, I would have argued and would argue that that piece of legislation could remain in existence and that we could work with postsecondaries with respect to a new policy and perhaps amend the legislation in a year. Ideally, we would be coming forward in the fall with legislation to bring a tuition policy into play. But I can't fault the minister for bringing forward a mechanism this spring, not knowing whether he'll have a fall session to bring forward a tuition policy, not wanting to wait for a year or two to embed in legislation a new tuition policy, a mechanism which allows us to meet the commitment which the Premier and the government made to students in this province, that a new tuition policy would be in place by the fall of 2006, effective for the 2007 school year.

The Member for Calgary-Currie all year has been saying: "Bring forward a policy. You've got to hurry up. You've got to get the policy in place. You'll run out of time for the policy." Wiser heads said: "Let's do this properly. Let's take time to consult. Let's think about it. Let's consult with people. Let's bring forward an appropriate policy. Let's recognize that it's not all about tuition. It's about affordability. But, yes, we promised a new tuition policy, and a new tuition policy will be put in place." If advice suggests that in order to ensure that that happens, that there needs to be a way of embedding that in regulation and that wasn't afforded in the current Post-secondary Learning Act, then I would have to support the minister's efforts to allow proceeding with the new tuition policy by regulation at least as an interim step.

It's not the end of the world, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, tuition policy and the debate of tuition policy in this province is an important issue for students. It's an important issue for parents, and it's an important issue for all Albertans because all of us want to make sure that finances are not a barrier to students getting an education. All of us want to make sure that education is affordable and seen to be affordable. All of us want to make sure that all Albertans have the opportunity to get the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to participate in a knowledge economy. I think that's a given.

What we're talking about here is a very modest piece of legislation which allows the minister to proceed to bring the tuition policy in, to put it in place, as promised, by the fall of 2007, a promise which the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie and others on the opposition benches have been requesting, have been demanding, have been insisting, and have been arguing was necessary to do and necessary to do now. This minister has found a mechanism to do it now.

Perhaps it could have been done collaboratively, sitting down with institutions and saying, "We know what the law is, but you know that the policy is going to be different than the law, and the policy will be embedded next year." That might have been a way of doing it. This is legally the better way of doing it, as is being proposed by the minister. He has chosen to proceed in this manner.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the students of this province having been part of the consultation process over the last year, the academics of this province having been part of the consultation process over the

last year, the institutions in this province having been part of the consultation process over the last year, and even the opposition members having been part of the consultation process over the last year should recognize that coming to the conclusion of that process and bringing forward a tuition policy, as has been promised, is best done now, is best done in this manner. When the session comes again and more discussion has been had around the effectiveness of that tuition policy, we can then bring it back and put it back in the legislation if that's desired.

But this bill, this 60-word bill, as the opposition has referred to it, this Bill 40 is not the end of the world. You can't even see the end of the world from there. This is really just about putting in place a mechanism so that the tuition policy that's been promised, the tuition policy that's been demanded by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie can be put in place in time for the 2007 school year so that the institutions in this province, when they do their budgeting in the fall, as they start to do and plan for the next year, will know what the policy is and will know that it has the force of law, that students will know that they can rely on it because it has the force of law, and that parents can rely on it because it has the force of law.

Would it be better to have it in the act? Personally, yes, I agree. It should be in the act, but it's not going to be in the act this spring. There's a likelihood that it might not be able to be in the act in the fall, and therefore affording the minister the opportunity to give it the force of law and give some surety to students, some sense of security in knowing and understanding what the playing field is going to be like, is very important.

So I would encourage people to vote against the amendment and allow this modest amendment to go ahead. It's not going to do all the dastardly things that have been suggested. It's merely going to allow the fulfillment of a promise made by our Premier that Albertans will have the most affordable tuition policy and will go a long way towards ensuring that education is affordable to students and their families.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to get up and speak for a few moments on this amendment to Bill 40. I do appreciate it because I wasn't allowed to get up and speak on Bill 42 due to shortage of time.

First, I guess I'd like to address the hon. past minister talking about that he's been forced into this because they've made a promise to bring this forward. They've had two and a half years to come up with a bill and an act on what their tuition is. Now, because they said that they'd have it before we break for the summer, they have to bring this forward. It's almost laughable to use that as the excuse and say, "We have to do it because it's legal, and it's better to be legal."

Is this just? I say: no, it isn't just. It's not just for those students that are looking for concrete legislation, to know what's going to be there. This is purely getting thrown arbitrarily into the field at the whim of the minister. Yes, he says that he'll make the consultations, and I believe that he will absolutely do that, but the fact is that he can then make an arbitrary decision and say: well, due to fiscal problems this is the way it's going to come down.

We've heard this, Mr. Speaker, for 13 years in health care, that we've got this idea, we've got this plan, that we're going to bring forth this bill, the third-way bill, 13 years of a new way. They haven't. We've listened to this for two and a half years. One has to wonder which is going to have the longest tale by the time we're done. I just don't know.

They've brought in two bills to say that they would just pay the tuition increase. Why couldn't they do that again? They act like they're in this panic. I just for the life of me can't see the panic. They create the crisis, and then they expect Albertans, students to lap it up and say: well, there is nothing left that they can do. I called that poor planning where I conducted business before I came here. [interjection] Pardon me?

Mr. Elsalhy: Just trust me.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. It is very much going back to that saying: well, just trust me. That's fine to say: just trust me. It's always nice. History has shown that people always wanted to choose a benevolent king, but when a king passes, the chance that benevolence is passed on is very remote. It's usually a tyrant.

10:30

It's alarming to me that they want to put more power into the ministry's office. I am very in favour of this amendment to Bill 40. We know that it's going to get struck down, but I just want it on the record that this is the place to make legislation. This is the purpose of it. Democracy was never meant to be quick and efficient. They certainly can't say that they were quick and efficient on coming up with a policy in two and a half years and saying: "This is the best we have. Now we'll throw it to the minister because he's got the ability to do this, and he's a fair and kind person." As the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has said, "Trust me." That isn't what democracy is about, "Trust me." It's about the ability to bring a bill forward, to have the debate, and to vote on it.

I appreciate being able to debate this, and I very much would like to see this amendment passed. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:32 p.m.]

[Five minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Elsalhy	Pannu	Taft
Flaherty	Swann	Taylor
Hinman		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Griffiths	Pham
Ady	Hancock	Rogers
Brown	Herard	Snelgrove
Calahasen	Lukaszuk	Stelmach
Cao	Lund	Stevens
Cenaiko	Melchin	Strang
Doerksen	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Ducharme	Oberle	Webber
Fritz	Ouellette	Zwozdesky
Goudreau		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 28
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[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 40 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to participate in debate on Bill 40 that's before us, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006. I've listened with a lot of interest to all the arguments that were made on the bill and then on the amendment that was moved by my hon. colleague for Calgary-Currie, who is the Official Opposition critic for Advanced Education.

One question that came to mind, basically, is: if the argument from this side of the House is that the government is doing something that is antidemocratic, and the argument from the other side, from the government, talks about their needing to do something to offer some direction in terms of the postsecondary tuition policy, why did the hon. minister choose to introduce this legislation in the dying days of this sitting of the Legislature? Why wasn't this Bill 4 or Bill 10 or Bill 14 or Bill 24? Why did it have to be Bill 40, which was introduced just as this session was wrapping up? Could it be an ad hoc decision? Or maybe they decided that there might not be a fall sitting, and they wanted to appear to be taking some direction on a concern that many people have in this province.

10:40

Now, we've talked time and time again on this bill and on others that the direction now seems to be to put everything in regulations and remove the meat, if you will, from the legislation. So legislation is becoming a hollow creature, and everything is done behind closed doors and is left to the whim or the will of the minister at the time. There is no scrutiny. There is no debate. Again, as was mentioned – and I sort of agree – it basically amounts to a total disregard for the Legislature and for its role. Basically, it represents an unnecessary concentration of power in the hands of one person or in the hands of a small group of people, in this case the minister or his immediate and close circle of advisors.

Mr. Herard: It's called the government.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, I know.

The hon. minister is saying that this is the government, but I would challenge him to find me another government that does that by removing everything from the floor of the Legislature, where 83 of us were elected to debate ideas and policies, to an inner circle of people that, you know, tell him what they think should be the direction of his ministry, and then this direction is finalized, and it never sees any debate in this House. Where are those checks and balances? Where is the scrutiny? Where is the oversight? Where is the discipline, really?

In my view, this is yet another nail in democracy's coffin. We know that with FOIP and with this government's record of secrecy and now with this example of how things are moved into regulation, away from public scrutiny and public examination, again it offers no consistency because this minister might choose to do something today, and then the next minister might choose to do something totally different the next day. It allows for this flip-flopping, or the 180-degree change of opinion, that happens when ministers change. We all know that ministers come and go, and sometimes changes in cabinet are not forecasted. Sometimes they happen surprisingly quickly.

Now, the issue of consultation with the stakeholders. Any consultation has to be serious, has to be thorough, has to be inclusive. You know, when we're talking about postsecondary education, you definitely have to involve the students. You have to involve their parents. You have to involve the instructors of those postsecondary institutions, the faculty, the administrators. So it has to be widespread. It has to be all-encompassing, and it has to be done across the province.

I noted the minister saying in this House that the students are going to be happy with his plan. I view this as the carrot, basically. He's offering them a carrot to keep them quiet: "Wait. Trust me. I'm going to do something that you're going to like, but to get there, you have to allow me all this enormous power to do things without any scrutiny in this Assembly." Now, I would be interested to find out from the minister or from his staff what the student leaders told him. You know, the student leaders at the U of A, the ones at the U of C, the ones at the U of Lethbridge. What did they tell him? If he would be willing to table those communications here in this House.

Again, I also take issue with the words "enabling legislation." What is this legislation enabling, and who is it enabling? It is enabling the minister, basically, to fiddle with or tinker with the tuition policy at his discretion or behind closed cabinet doors without any chance for public debate. So it's enabling for him, but it is not enabling for the students, and it's not enabling for this Legislature certainly. He also said that the students are going . . .

Bill 42
Appropriation Act, 2006
(continued)

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. In accordance with Standing Order 61(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a second time]

Bill 40
Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006
(continued)

[Debate adjourned May 15: Mr. Elsalhy speaking]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I can go on and talk about the history of the tuition policy in this province. I can actually go back as far as the 1980s, when tuition was capped at 12 per cent. Then we moved on to the early part of the '90s, you know, with the infamous revolution. Tuition was capped at 20 per cent of net operating costs. Then you move into the latter part of the '90s and the earlier part of this new century, and you have tuition capped at 30 per cent. Although students were outraged at this hike, they took some solace, some relief in that at least this cap was legislated. They felt that although it was exaggerated and to some of them it was outrageous and not affordable, they felt that, okay, at least there is a legislative body that reviews it and that approves it. They took some relief and some solace in knowing that it was legislated by the house of representatives, the house of the people.

Now, in 2003 this cap was removed, and it was replaced by a tuition freeze. Again, it was an act of kindness or an act of benevolence from the minister because they chose to freeze the tuition rather than capping it. Now they're suggesting that they are going to remove this. I think and I argue that it actually basically opens the door to deregulation of postsecondary education. Advanced education will turn into a commodity, and market forces will now dictate who gets to go to college or university and who cannot afford to.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on about why we find this bill very offensive and why we are definitely not going to support it, but before I do this, I want to move an amendment. Seeing that the amendment introduced by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie

was defeated, I am moving an amendment that basically deletes all the words after "that" and substitutes the following: "Bill 40, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling
Amendments at Second Reading

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the amendment that has just been moved is a hoist amendment, which is different than the previous amendment that we dealt with, which was a reasoned amendment. So just be aware that this is a hoist amendment being brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

On the amendment, hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, you are wanting to finish your comments?

Debate Continued

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this amendment. It's not good for democracy to see a government that is comfortable in justifying taking the decision-making away from the elected representatives of the people and concentrating it, as I said, in the hands of one person, be it the minister in charge. It doesn't speak well for democracy, and it doesn't speak well for accountability and transparency.

In 2004 the Alberta Liberals campaigned for affordable postsecondary education. We came out on the side of students in a way that advocates sustainability and affordability. The PC government rapidly copied some of our policies and introduced their flagship bill in the first sitting of the 26th Legislature. They called it Bill 1, the Access to the Future Act. We voted in support of the Access to the Future Act. It created an endowment fund that allowed for money to be put aside to support postsecondary education. In other words, the government heard the plea of the students and either wanted to seriously look at ways to help them or at least wanted to give the impression or the appearance that they did. Now, a year later in this Second Session of the 26th Legislature and in this year's budget not a whole lot of money was added to this endowment fund. One would argue: how serious were you last year, and how serious are you this year?

10:50

Why is this discussion important? The discussion is important because it has tremendous impact on students and their families. When we change tuition policy, you have to consult the widest base in this province. You should not consult only with one or two people and then do things behind closed doors. How are we going to change the advanced education climate if this bill passes? I argue that it's going to change it for the worse, and I am talking from the angle of access and affordability.

Mr. Speaker, this government has had many attempts to target or to address tuition policy, as I mentioned, since the '80s, and every time the decision was changed, and it was changed quickly. So what proof does the minister have to convince us that his policy, that he's going to release later this year, is going to stick and is going to be here next year and the year after? We have no proof. You know, it's another sign of not taking this House seriously and not taking the electorate seriously. It's a sign of arrogance because they're introducing a tuition plan that will go up faster than any other place in the country. They should not ram through legislative changes that take away any future legislative oversight.

Remember that in the 2004 campaign, Mr. Speaker, there were many people who voted and had their lawn signs that said: I love

Alberta Education. I remind the hon. members from both sides of the House that in 2004 members from all three opposition parties received 15,000 more votes than the 62 government members. So that was basically people telling them that directions have to be revisited and that decisions have to be reconsidered. I think the wise thing to do for this government is to try to come back to the Legislature more often than not. Obviously, the trend that is evident is that they are trying to stay away from the Legislature and trying to take things away from this elected body, to do things as they please and without any scrutiny, as I mentioned.

I think the minister, when he told the students to be patient and that they were going to be happy with his plan – it actually basically amounts to blackmail, using the prospect of a new policy to convince students, families, and us . . .

Mr. Zwozdesky: Excuse me. Did you say “blackmail?”

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Then I’ll have to raise a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Zwozdesky: I think that it is highly inappropriate under 23(h), (i), and (j) to use the word “blackmail.” I think you’ll find it in *Beauchesne* also as being unparliamentary. I would just ask the hon. member, who normally presents some reasoned arguments, to just retract “blackmail,” to perhaps substitute a different word, and we can carry on.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to retract that word.

Debate Continued

Mr. Elsalhy: I’ll just continue by saying that I would disagree with the hon. minister, who promised the students something that they might find favourable by saying that they would be happy but asked them instead to wait to see what he proposes. Six or seven months after the fact they would have no recourse. They would have no way of affecting any decision that the minister arrived at, and by then it would be too late.

Now, this brings me to the point about user-pay policy. We’ve seen it with power deregulation, we’ve seen it with some attempts to privatize health care, and now we’re seeing it with some attempts to deregulate postsecondary education. Only those who are rich or can afford it will get it; the ones that don’t, then don’t.

I also have to mention student debt because student debt in this province is higher than in most other jurisdictions in Canada. The average student is graduating with a load of shackling debt to the lenders. We’ve received communication from people, particularly in professional programs, that say that it’s not acceptable the way they graduate now. Some of them are married, some of them have families, and the amount of debt that they accumulate is outrageous. It’s totally unjustified.

Mr. Speaker, I think this amendment basically offers the hon. minister and his cabinet an avenue to consult some more and take it upon themselves to ask all the stakeholders what they think about any proposed changes. If, in fact, it was deemed necessary six months from now to do things in regulation to address some of the

concerns from the former minister, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, then fine. Six months from now we will arrive at that decision. But till then, I think the students deserve and the parents deserve and this Legislature deserves more time to consult, more time to consider things before we jam things through. By then it will be too late, and we will have no recourse.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: I’ll be brief, mercifully brief. Of course, I won’t be supporting the amendment, but I think it has to be said for the record that this sort of an amendment is essentially just wasting the Legislature’s time. They stand there and tell us that we’re usurping their right, yet they use a particular mechanism in legislation that, in fact, you cannot bring back legislation six months from now. It’s only happened once in the history of Canada, in the House of Commons, and it was a mistake. So I just want to make sure that the record, at least, stated that what is happening here is just a delaying tactic.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let’s put another record on the turntable, then, shall we? We can have a whole symphony if you want. This is not a delaying tactic. I recognize that the government members opposite are anxious to go home for the night. It’s almost 11 o’clock. They’re getting hungry. They’re getting tired. They’re getting thirsty. They’re getting cranky. I realize that it’s been a beautiful spring. The golf courses are greening up beautifully, and they’re anxious to get out on the courses. They’d like to be gone from this House within the next few days. I recognize what the minister is saying about the impossibility of bringing back this precise piece of legislation six months hence. That is precisely our intention. This is a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation, and we don’t want it brought back.

What we want to offer this government is the opportunity to call a fall sitting of the Legislature. You could even start it earlier, you know. Most of the harvesting can be done in time to get us back in here before November. But come on back in, leadership convention or not, leadership campaign or not. I’m sure your whip will excuse those of your members who are running for the leadership of your party if they can’t be here every single day during the fall sitting of the Legislature. Still, I invite you to come on back, come on down, as Bob Barker would say, and let’s debate a real amendment to the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act six months hence. Let’s bring in a bill – what will it be up to? – 44 or 45 by that point, something like that. Let’s bring in a Bill 44 that does it right.

You see, the minister has made the case – and he’s been supported somewhat half-heartedly, somewhat feebly by his predecessor in that argument – that he has to bring forward this enabling legislation to satisfy my incessant demand and that of my colleague from the third party that they bring in a tuition policy. It’s all my fault. It’s all my fault for demanding this, and then when they comply with me because I have so much power – they hang on my every word, Mr. Speaker. They always have, you know. I mean, the responsibility that comes with being me is just so awesome, isn’t it? [interjections] Yeah. Yeah.

You know, now that they bring in this absolutely flawed piece of legislation and I get up in the House and say, “You know what? You’ve got it wrong,” I’m accused of the sky falling. Well, the sky is not falling although I suspect that your popularity ratings are over there on that side of the House. But here’s the deal. Here’s the deal.

An Hon. Member: Seventy-two per cent.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. Seventy-two per cent say: "Here's your hat. What's your hurry?" But we'll debate that another time. I see you've got your website up, hon. member, finally. So you're competitive now.

11:00

You know, it's not our fault on this side of the House that the so-called, quote, unquote, wiser minds took this long to craft a good tuition policy. So don't try to blame that on us. If it turns out that the work has been well done, perhaps it was worth the wait, and I would extend that argument to the amending formula for the Post-secondary Learning Act to deal with tuition policy. To do the work right, it's worth the wait. Okay?

The legislative schedule is not at our discretion, Mr. Speaker. It's at the government's, entirely at the government's. You know, we're quite prepared to continue sitting another week if it's that important that legislation enabling a tuition policy be brought forward, till the policy is ready, till you can bring forward an amendment that amends tuition policy within legislation. We'll come back after the May long weekend. We can do that. If the policy isn't ready then, then we'll come back in the fall. That's okay too. The government refuses to introduce the new policy in legislation this spring, so it can finalize the tuition policy and release it to the institutions to guide their planning process, allowing the old legislation to remain in place, until it can be changed in the spring of '07. The previous minister, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, admitted as much not half an hour ago.

You know, if the government wants to pretend or allege that it couldn't prevent institutions from ignoring the new informal policy because they're independent and they could use the existing legislation to impose greater increases or something like that, I'd refer them back to the former minister of learning, the current minister's predecessor's predecessor, who is known to have sent a letter to the institutions before the 2004 election telling them to keep their tuition increases below 4 per cent, and all institutions, Mr. Speaker, complied with that letter. The proposal to leave the legislation and direct the institutions to follow the new policy, notwithstanding the leftover legislation, is, in my view and in our view on this side of the House, more respectful of institutional autonomy and good legislative process than is this pre-election interference. You know, it also ensures that critical public policy issues remain subject to legislative debate and approval.

So, Mr. Speaker, in short, there's a right way and a wrong way to

go about this. This is absolutely the wrong way. That is why my colleague from Edmonton-McClung has proposed this hoist amendment, and that is why I'm delighted to support it. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:03 p.m.]

[Five minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Elsalhy	Pannu	Taylor
Flaherty	Swann	

Against the motion:

Abbott	Griffiths	Pham
Ady	Herard	Rodney
Brown	Johnston	Rogers
Calahasen	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Cao	Lund	Stelmach
Cenaiko	Melchin	Stevens
Doerksen	Mitzel	Strang
Ducharme	Oberle	Webber
Fritz	Ouellette	Zwozdesky
Goudreau		

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 28
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[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 40 lost]

11:10

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members who contributed to this exciting and electrifying debate today. On that note, I would move that we stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 11:11 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 16, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/16

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Let us pray. O source of all wisdom, care, and understanding, bless this province of ours and its people to be the guardians of the trust given unto them. Bring forth from this Assembly guidance to benefit all those who live within its borders and outside. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure and an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 10 outstanding individuals who work in the child development branch of Alberta Children's Services. This team was instrumental in conducting the public consultation that Alberta had with families to determine how best to invest in the future of Alberta's five-point child care plan. These individuals are here with us today, and I'll ask each of them to stand as I call out their name and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, starting with Lynn Jerchel, director of the child development branch; Judy Erickson; Ann Jordan-Mills; Murray Kleiter; Laurie Mosier; Diane MacLeod; Lorna Rogers; Bernie Trudell; Leann Wagner; and Linda Yurdiga.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of Assembly seven co-op students from my department who are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. They are accompanied by Human Resources and Employment staff. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is 13 staff members from the personnel administration office. They are located in the members' gallery, and I would like them also to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My final introduction, Mr. Speaker, is 25 seniors, pioneers of this beautiful country, from my constituency. They are with the Smoky Lake Legion. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would also like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six staff members from my Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. All of them work at the Alberta Records Centre, which I had the pleasure of touring last year. We have with us this afternoon Ruben Balanda, Sarah Kuster, Diane Lynas, Jennifer de Boer, Maurice Lafleche, and Tim Burgess. The work that they do is critical to the operations of government. As you

know, Mr. Speaker, it's important to keep records safe and secure, and for that I would like to thank them all for their hard work and dedication to my department. I would ask that my guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour and a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a very good friend and a very strong supporter of mine from the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills constituency, one who has operated my campaign office in Olds for the last three elections and has been my campaign manager for the last two and a very tireless worker, Linda Bell. She's seated in the Speaker's gallery today along with another person who's been a supporter of mine for over 40 years – and, yes, I still remember our anniversary date – my wife, Janis. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some faces that are quite familiar to most of us. They are the staff of government members' caucus. This group of capable and dedicated employees provides our caucus with quality legislative assistance and research work. I am delighted that our staff of 25, led by director of caucus Jason Zwarg, are able to join us in both the members' and public galleries today. I would ask our staff to rise when I'm done calling their names. The leg. assistants are Jan Aldous, Darlene Beckstrand, Jon Buck, Jordon Copping, Vera Fedor, Carmen Frebrowski, Nicole Guenette, Matt Hebert, Cheryl Lees, Barb Letendre, Theresa Lightfoot, Jeff Trynchy, Lanny Westersund, and Hannah Zacharias. Our research officers, led by senior researcher Mike Simpson, are Sean Day, Elizabeth Jeffray, Tyler Lawrason, Brock Mulligan, Brad Rabiey, and Eric Taylor. Our caucus is delighted to have Andrée Morier join our team for the summer months as a STEP student. Finally, I wish to introduce the staff members of my office: Stacey Leighton, Jeff Kasbrick, and the director of caucus, Jason Zwarg. If they would all stand, I would ask all hon. members to join with me in recognizing these hardworking individuals.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four outstanding Calgarians. Mr. Jim Arthurs is a retired Calgary businessman who also served his country for five years in the Royal Canadian Navy. Accompanying Jim today are three outstanding volunteers who serve on the Calgary-Nose Hill Progressive Conservative Association board. Mr. Ken McIvor is an administrator with a large law firm operating in Calgary. Mr. Earl Rose is a semiretired community volunteer and is known as the éminence grise of the Thorncliffe-Greenview Community Association. Mr. Doug Jeffery is a resident of the Beddington Heights community, and he is a retired bank manager and the president of our constituency association. All four guests are seated in the public gallery today, and I would ask these four gentlemen to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of 48 folks from the Sherwood Park and Strathcona constituencies. They are true pillars of our community. They're members of the Sherwood Park Alliance Church Pillars seniors' club. The tour was organized by Mrs. Hope Tupper and Pastor Leighton Gust. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four very special people: my younger brother, Sukhdev Agnihotri, former president of the Bhartiya Cultural Society; his wife, Vijay Agnihotri; his father-in-law, Gian chand Ghandha from B.C.; and his mother-in-law, Asha rani Ghandha from B.C. They are here this afternoon to tour the Legislature. I want to thank them for coming. They are seated in the members' gallery. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe my guest has arrived yet. I don't see him here, so I'll wait.

1:40

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the mother of one of our pages. The page is Stacy Schell, who is a first-year student at the University of Alberta. Her mother is Jody Schell, and she lives in my constituency. I would ask her to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Marieke Dubé. Marieke has been working for the NDP caucus since February as our sessional researcher. Her work has been invaluable to us, and we greatly appreciate the long hours and dedication Marieke has shown over these past few months. Marieke has a masters in political science from the University of Alberta specializing in political theory. Her thesis was very interestingly called *Manufacturing the Enemy: The Discourse of Fear in Democratic Societies*. I would now ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Acting Speaker: First Official Opposition question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Government Contracting Policies

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year Albertans were

disturbed to learn that Rod Love was receiving very generous contracts from various government ministries with no documentation to justify his paycheque. The 2004-2005 Auditor General's report states, "Treasury Board asked the Office of the Chief Internal Auditor . . . to conduct a detailed review of contracting practices at all departments." To the Minister of Finance: can the minister tell this Assembly when she anticipates this particular review to be completed?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I did indicate that we had done an intensive review of our contracting processes and indeed implemented that about a year ago. So we've done that.

On the other matter I will certainly get that information for the hon. member.

The Acting Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. To the same minister: does the minister support Albertans' right to be informed of these contracting practices given that these contracts are paid with taxpayer dollars?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear and open when we contract. Our contract policy is certainly available. I think every ministry's is. I tabled the contracting policy of Alberta Finance. That policy will be audited by the Auditor General on an annual basis as he does the audit to ensure that we are meeting our contract obligations. That is, indeed, part of the work that the Auditor General does. So I'm confident that the contracting policies that have been set out are being followed.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Government Services: given the public anger over these contracts and I think the minister's admission that the public has the right to know about this, why is this government proposing legislation to hide it from Albertans until 2021?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, I mean, clearly another way to get at Bill 20, that we're dealing with this afternoon in Committee of the Whole. You know, all kinds of questions can be raised on this at that time, and we'll give you an insight into what Committee of the Whole answers will be.

I think the Premier wants to supplement this.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm sort of curious why the hon. member hasn't picked up the telephone – I'll provide him with the number, or phone information – and talked to Jack Davis or Rod Love to get the information. He hasn't phoned.

The Acting Speaker: Second Official Opposition question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More budget woes for our local school boards under the vise of this Conservative government's hold-the-line budget. Talk amongst parents is: how much bigger will my child's class be next year? My question to the Minister of Education. Parents want to know, Mr. Minister: will their children be in larger classes next year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we've had a very successful class-size reduction initiative over the past two years, and we're going to phase in the third year of it. It might take two years, in fact, to accomplish it. What I want the hon. member and the parents that he alludes to to know is that as a result of this government's funding, which is around the \$200 million mark in total so far for the class-size reduction initiative, we have hired over 1,600 new, additional teachers, and because of that significant investment, we have seen class sizes lowered at all grade levels from 4 to 12 across the province on a jurisdiction-wide basis. That's why we are targeting this year's funding toward the kindergarten to grade 3, because that's where we haven't seen that kind of significant reduction in class sizes for all the school boards. It seems to me that 38 have accomplished it, but there are a few that have not yet, and that's where our monies are being targeted.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many teacher positions will be cut, resulting in larger classes, because the school districts will not be able to pay their salaries next year, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the school boards are all going through some preliminary budget discussions right now. By the end of May, as I've indicated in this House before, the school boards, who are comprised of locally elected, good, sound-thinking individuals, just like the MLAs are, will then look at which teachers are retiring, which teachers are continuing on, where their pressure points are, and so on. By June 30 they will submit to me as Minister of Education their requests for the coming September school year, and once we have all of that information, then we'll be dealing with more of the facts rather than just some preliminary projections, be they right or wrong at this stage.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: how many more districts will be in debt next year because you haven't provided them with expected class-size initiative funding in the '06-07 year, particularly for grades 4 to 12?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could be given about five or 10 minutes here to explain how this works because I've tried so hard to explain this honestly and straightforwardly for the hon. member to understand. We had a recommendation from the Learning Commission to meet certain targeted guidelines for average class sizes in the K to 12 system. In kindergarten to grade 3 it was supposed to be 17. In grades 4, 5, and 6 it was supposed to be 23. In grades 7, 8, and 9 it was supposed to be 25. In grades 10, 11, and 12 it was supposed to be 27.

Now, we have met those targets in terms of our two-year benchmark in all grade levels from grade 4 to grade 12, but we haven't yet seen the benchmarks met in kindergarten to grade 3. So we're working on that now, and we are taking the money and channelling it into that area to help out. As a result of that, we are still going to be hiring between 100 and 200 new teachers over and above the 1,680-some that were hired last September and the September before. So I'd be very surprised if the allegations that the hon. member is alleging are in fact going to be true come September.

The Acting Speaker: Third Official Opposition question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

School Fundraising

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a recent survey commissioned by the Edmonton public school board, 90 per cent of the 154 parent groups who responded said that they did participate in fundraising activities. When asked if the level of fundraising they had to do was appropriate, 29 per cent of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Some went on in their submissions to indicate that it is frustrating that a province this rich forces or expects parents to engage in fundraising activities. My questions are all to the Minister of Education. Given that parents now find themselves having to fund raise not only for extras or options but for basics, including computers and learning resources, what does the minister consider appropriate in terms of fundraising, and what are the basics that his government commits to providing?

1:50

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton public school board will be receiving about \$577 million this year, and that is an increase from \$560 million last year. Those are the anticipated numbers notwithstanding any changes or fluctuations in class sizes.

Now, what I want to clarify for the hon. member, however, is this. We have a policy in this province where we as a government and we as a Ministry of Education provide the funds necessary for the essentials in K to 12 education, for the basics. Anything over and above that which is determined to be nonessential or extra they are allowed to fund raise for. That would include things like yearbooks or band uniforms or athletic uniforms or perhaps other things that are outside the normal envelope, Mr. Speaker. In that respect, we have a lot of community organizations who want to contribute. We have a lot of parents who don't want to be disenfranchised from augmenting their child's educational opportunities. So we work together with a number of partners to provide the best education system anywhere in Canada.

Mr. Elsalhy: Given that there is growing concern, Mr. Speaker, that fundraising expectations will constantly increase as school buildings and equipment get older over time, is it this minister's position that school councils and parent groups should be prepared to fund raise even more come next year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we had quite a chat about this with the Alberta School Boards Association. They made it very clear that they have a policy that they would like us to adhere to, and that is to not prohibit parents and parent council groups from fund raising should they find it necessary in their community to do so. That formula has worked extremely well. You know what? In terms of the public education dollars that we put in, did you know that Alberta provides the most money per student in K to 12 education anywhere in Canada, and Alberta provides the most money per capita as well, per student and per capita, and \$5.3 billion will be going into K to 12 education this year. We're very proud of that, but we don't say no to those who want to augment some special nonessentials or extras for their children.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that 44 per cent of those who responded said that the funds they raise are predominantly spent on maintenance and upgrades of playground equipment, does the minister agree that this is an area of responsibility that is more appropriately picked up by his department rather than off-loading it onto the backs of parents who are (a) exhausted from too much

fundraising already and (b) may not have the expertise or knowledge necessary to properly look after school playgrounds?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are other programs that can be accessed through the government website other than Education. There are other websites such as the community facility enhancement program or the community initiatives program where playgrounds can in fact be jointly sponsored for funding through our lottery program. That program works extremely well, and we're very proud of it. It provides millions of dollars for community-use playgrounds. The playgrounds that are being referred to are shared by the municipality, by the community, by the neighbourhoods, and by Education. We all have a share in it, and we're very proud of those partnerships. That's why we have such successful students, and that's why our results, be they provincially, nationally, or internationally, are always right at the top because we do care.

The Acting Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Confidentiality of Ministerial Briefing Notes

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The secrecy of this Conservative government has given the province global notoriety. The NDP opposition has asked Toby Mendel, a leading international authority, to review the proposed changes to Alberta's FOIP law. Mr. Mendel is the law program director of Article 19, which is a London-based organization which defends and promotes freedom of expression and access to information all over the world. My questions are to the Premier. Given that an international expert on access to information states that blanket exemptions from disclosure violate international standards on public openness, how can the Premier justify using closure to ram through a blanket exemption for ministerial briefing notes in this Assembly?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Premier, you are aware that we will be dealing with this bill in debate.

Mr. Klein: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: You may proceed.

Mr. Klein: Thank you. I would reiterate, Mr. Speaker, that this bill is on the Order Paper, and indeed the New Democrats have promised to make Bill 20 the number one issue until the end of the session.

Relative to the preamble, this is a very narrow point. This isn't a widespread point. This is a very narrow point. Now, the NDP opposition and the Liberals want this briefing book. In the briefing book is advice to the minister; for instance, government appointments to boards and agencies. I've never referred to it, but you're giving me the opportunity now. The opposition says that it will raise the issue of patronage appointments to boards, agencies during the session, and they did. So I have some recommended responses here. I have some recommended responses, which were given to me by my deputy. My deputy.

Mr. Martin: It's not your deputy.

Mr. Klein: Yes, it's my deputy. It's not your deputy; it's my deputy. We are the government. You are not the government. You are the opposition. Your only justification, your only reason for living is to criticize and to seek information provided in this briefing book so they can use it. They are too lazy – too lazy – to do their own research. They want us to do it for them.

Mr. Mason: I'm actually going to miss this, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I want to ask the Premier: why is he ignoring the Legislative Assembly's own Privacy Commissioner, who says that we should not be exempting these briefing books, if not because it's the outgoing government's plan to securely padlock the Tory skeletons in the closet to ensure a trouble-free retirement?

Mr. Klein: There are no skeletons in the closet, Mr. Speaker. This is advice, and it is considered as advice when we develop policy or legislation, or we may ignore the advice altogether. But I'll tell you what these guys would do. [interjections] Are you listening? If they're listening, I'll tell you what they'd do. They would use this advice as a matter of fact. They would say: this is what the government is planning to do. In other words, I say that yes means yes, maybe means yes, and no means maybe. To them everything is yes: yes, this is what the government will do. So we would wind up defending advice that never may see the light of day, that never will become policy. We would end up defending this advice. That's what they want.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, if this government has no skeletons in the closet, then why does it classify more information than the CIA?

Mr. Klein: I have no idea what the CIA classifies.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Premier, the CIA is not within the purview of this Assembly, but if you'd like to respond, go ahead.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Forest Industry Sustainability

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development in regard to the competitiveness of the forest industry. The increased cost of production, the shortage of employable staff, the transportation to markets, and the rising cost of the Canadian dollar have caused some challenges for the forest industry in regard to competitiveness. Can the minister please tell us what his department is doing in this regard?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The forest industry competitiveness is becoming an increasing challenge for the industry. Certainly, because the industry is so predominant in Alberta, it's a problem for today's economy as well. To answer the hon. member's question directly, we are engaged with the Alberta forest industry to address the whole question of competitiveness in a global marketplace. A competitiveness review has been undertaken by my department and the Alberta Forest Products Association, and it will consider a full range of possibilities that have been outlined by the hon. member.

Certainly, the hon. member has mentioned some pressures that are very real today, and we want to do a thorough examination of those pressures and identify them so that we can have a go-forward plan. The softwood lumber framework will affect each of our producers in different ways, so we must do an entire analysis that takes in all parts of our industry. We are discussing that with the industry. We will continue to discuss the impact as it applies to each member of the industry and try to provide the solutions that they need to remain competitive.

2:00

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. In regard to adding value to product, our government and your department have been very cognizant of adding value, yet in the industry we have people that are closing down their businesses. Could you please tell me which way the government is looking at this?

Mr. Coutts: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, that's a part of our next steps. We'll do the competitive review. We'll look at costs. We'll look at revenue. We'll look at the costs for operations. Then we'll take a look at the marketplace to see how the products that we're producing today might fit that marketplace. As a reverse, we're working with the Department of Economic Development to look at potential for markets elsewhere. If we have the kind of product at our forest floor that can suit that marketplace and then we can adapt our processes here so that that product can be made to fit that market, that will certainly help our situation. This is a joint initiative between industry and the government to go forward so that the competitiveness can be minimized here in Alberta.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations: through our negotiations with the United States, could he please tell us how the forest industry is going to become more competitive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I wasn't listening to which minister he was asking.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, as we go forward, the information that we get from this competitiveness panel that has been set up and our association in working with the industry in terms of that pressure, the softwood lumber issue, and the framework that has been set out – the framework provides certainty. That's something that the industry has been looking forward to for a long time. We'll take all of that into consideration as we move forward, but our first premise has got to be to work very, very closely with the industry, which we have promised to do. We will also work with our rural MLAs as a go-forward program to make sure that they're in tune with what the industry wants and needs and what we can deliver together as a government for the future of a very important industry in Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Did the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations want to supplement?

Mr. Mar: No, sir.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Education Funding (continued)

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I met with teachers and parents from schools in my constituency that are in the midst of preparing their budgets for the next school year. Their major concern is that as they set aside a big chunk of the money in their budget for teaching, as they should, almost 90 per cent, that leaves only about 10 per cent for services, supplies, and equipment, squeezing that part of their budget. Of course, parents will have to get involved in fundraising to make up the shortfall. My questions

are to the Minister of Education. Can the minister explain what percentage of a school's budget should be raised through fees and fundraising?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the School Act certainly allows school boards to work with their local schools, presumably through their superintendents, to assess any sort of fees that they feel are necessary, and they want that flexibility at the local level. They want to be able to do that kind of fee levying if they so wish. Now, there's a wide range of application of that particular policy throughout the province of Alberta. I think you would probably see tens or twenties of millions of dollars being raised in that way.

Now, for example, let me just take the issue of fees for school textbooks. It used to be the case years ago where we might have provided those textbooks for free. You know, Mr. Speaker, they went missing. They went mutilated. They went underappreciated in many cases. As a result, a policy came in and said: "Why don't we try and rent those books to students and charge a deposit? Maybe the students and whoever else has them will take better care of them." That has been very successful. In fact, that issue of raising monies is secondary, in my opinion, to the appreciation of the value, if you will, that students are garnering for materials put into their charge. So there's a wide range of application of this policy throughout this province. The act allows it, and school boards appreciate the flexibility.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that schools in wealthier communities may have the resources to do what the minister is saying that they have the opportunity to do, what happens to schools in areas that are poorer, with fewer resources? What about the inequality within the system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. That's exactly why we moved to the system of education we have now, where every student is funded to the same basic level no matter where in the province they live, no matter how much money comes or doesn't come from the education property tax base for that particular area.

What I would like to do is just direct the member and all members to this wonderful pamphlet called the Renewed Funding Framework, which, by the way, is under review as we speak. In it you will find all of the different examples of equitable funding, whether it's additional funding for the daily physical activity program; for mild, moderate, special needs or gifted; for ESL; for enrolment declines; for enrolment growth; for First Nations, Métis, Inuit learners; for francophone equivalency; for francization; for Hutterite colonies; for interjurisdictional. It goes on and on, and it's equal across the board for all.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to ask the hon. minister, given his background as a teacher, whether he's ever been involved in a school's budget process and experienced the pain of having to cut back programs and personnel because of government underfunding.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, when you teach courses like languages – French and Ukrainian – which I taught, when you teach courses like English, when you teach courses like music and drama, you learn very quickly how to fight for dollars in the school system.

At the time that I taught, many of those courses were optional, absolutely optional, which meant that you had to not only struggle to get some of your budget dollars in those days; you also had to struggle to get student enrolments in some cases. We worked very hard at that. But look at where we are today, with the best education system anywhere in Canada and one of the best education systems in the world, with consistently improving results. Our high school completion rates are on the way up, and our teacher level of appreciation and our student and parent levels of appreciation are all on the way up. There is so much good news in education. I acknowledge that there are a few problem areas, and we are working on those.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Alternative Highway through the Rockies

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend a rock slide closed the Trans-Canada highway between the Alberta-B.C. border and Golden. This caused significant delays, long detours, and added a lot of costs for motorists using the Trans-Canada highway. It's the only highway through the mountains in this area. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Are alternate highway routes being looked at so that motorists don't have to be stranded during these rock slides and avalanches?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there is an alternate route that has been looked at for a number of years. As a matter of fact, if you go back and look at the history of the CPR, when they sent the people out from Ottawa to survey, to look at where the best place is to go through the mountains to the west coast, the Howse Pass was identified as the prime route because it's a shorter distance to the coast than going around the way they do through Golden. Also, it is the lowest pass in the mountains to get through. When you think about the grade and the cost of going up and over, it's quite substantial. Not only that, but it is a very easy route to build. Quite frankly, when the federal government announced some years back that they were going to twin highway 1, spending millions of dollars per kilometre because that is an extremely expensive road to build through, we talked to the federal government at that time about looking at the Howse Pass because the cost is considerably less. It would alleviate the problem with rock slides. There would be no rock slides if, in fact, this route was built. I've been through there about three times, and I can assure you that it's not a difficult route to build. So, yes, there are other routes being looked at, and we will continue to look at them.

2:10

Mr. Prins: My next question to the same minister: how is the latest set of discussions among these other levels of politicians going to be any different than the ones we've had for the last 50 years?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, the most recent study by municipalities in the central area plus the provincial government did do a fair assessment of the cost-benefit analysis. It was determined that for every dollar spent, there would be a return of about \$2.14. That is a very good return. I believe that this would be an excellent candidate for a toll road because when you look at the distances, that saves some 75 kilometres, a saving in distance rather than going around through Calgary and through the number 1. So you've got that distance.

Anybody that's really, really concerned about the environment would be supporting this because the fact is that the amount of fuel that is used to go this route is considerably less than going the other routes, where you have to elevate considerably no matter which way you're going. You've got to climb the hills, and that costs a lot of money if you're driving a truck. This route is one that would be good for the environment. When I've been through there, the amount of wildlife is minimal. Of course, there would have to be environmental assessments done before it could be done.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: do you really believe that the federal government and the B.C. government would be willing to spend money for a project that would benefit Albertans?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I shared the information, the study, with the B.C. government when we had the joint cabinet meeting. We've also shared it with the federal government. But I believe that neither government has to invest any money. I believe that this would be just an excellent toll road. We are prepared to assist. If some investor came along, we would be prepared to assist in getting the necessary permits. Of course, there has to be a lot of work done with the federal government because a portion of it goes through the park.

Like I said, if people are really interested in the environment and reducing the CO₂ emissions, they would support this, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Blood-borne and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the same time that this government complains about spiralling health care costs, they ignore many opportunities to drive costs down by improving and promoting public health. Part of this government's health strategy from last fall, for example, involved launching a strategy to tackle HIV, hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases, but community groups are still waiting for the strategy and a funding decision. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the major sexually transmitted diseases and HIV are on the rise – and in some cases the rates are doubling – why is the minister waiting so long to implement the blood-borne pathogen and sexually transmitted infection strategy?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member quite properly identifies the alarming escalation in not only STDs but in all the various things that have been associated. Sexually transmitted diseases are a critical concern. We have been examining not only how we tackle that issue from an administrative perspective with the regions but also looking at some of the other associated issues with mental health and with addictions. In all of these areas we're going to make sure that the programs that we target will have the broadest impact.

I'm going to give a comparator. When we passed Bill 1, the cancer legacy project, we identified that chronic disease management, wellness management between cancer, diabetes, heart and stroke should be packaged in a way that we could maximize the benefit of targeting wellness initiatives so that many of those who

would be benefactors of wellness initiatives would be collaborative in their approach. So here once again is an opportunity on STDs to be collaborative because of the target audience.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just make another observation. I think it's really important that we clarify that the kinds of ads, the kinds of initiatives that will target and improve, hopefully, the wellness of those people that might be engaged in risky practices, risky sexual behaviour have not only got the right opportunity to educate and make aware but that we make sure they are contiguous with the morals and values that Albertans hold; in other words, they must be appropriate types of advertisements. I was not satisfied that we were quite ready for that type of exposure yet.

Ms Blakeman: A lot of talk.

When is the government going to validate its commitment to HIV and increase funding for community-based HIV prevention and support? When?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think I've indicated that we will be able to come forward with a program. We've got a lot of work that has been done by our medical officers of health, but in terms of making further announcements, it's premature still at this point. I'd like to say, though, that although we haven't increased or made any overtures on the program in recent weeks, there's been a lot of work that's been done. It does not mean that they are less valid as issues. It means that we must be ready to make sure that the program in place is the one that maximizes the benefit of the dollars spent.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the minister: what assurance can the minister give that the Alberta community HIV fund will remain in place and be community driven rather than taken over by the RHAs?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the tone of the question somewhat puzzles me because regional health authorities have been not only legally obligated but, I think, charged with the responsibility of delivering health care in Alberta. To the greatest extent possible I think that they're doing an admirable job. Co-ordination of these activities is an important thing at the local level so that we focus on the priorities that are most important to the people within a region, and regional priority setting is one of the very best reasons to have regional health authorities. So I'm somewhat puzzled that the question infers that there should not be involvement of regional health authorities. I think, rather, it has to be complementary with Alberta Health and Wellness, those people that are advocacy groups, the regional health authorities, and we're looking to broaden the impact of how we provide these kinds of dollars and advance the policies with all of the partners in place.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The federal minister responsible for the softwood lumber industry gave the impression that the new deal with the U.S. is less than perfect. The Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations is on record as saying that he is cautiously optimistic. My first question is to the minister. Does the minister still feel that a deal can be moved forward by June in light of the federal minister's comments?

Mr. Mar: I remain cautiously optimistic on this file, Mr. Speaker. But the federal minister is correct. This is not an ideal framework

that we have for the settlement of the softwood lumber dispute. It is a compromise. It is not free trade, which would be an ideal framework for Alberta and the Canadian lumber industry, but it is managed trade. Under this framework Canada will get back 80 per cent of the duties that have been paid thus far, and the United States' commitment is that they will not bring forward any more trade actions for the seven- to nine-year period that this framework is set in place. But we still have the possibility of facing potential limits on our access to the U.S. market. We do need to have an end to this dispute. The framework agreement will give us one, and we're working through the details to ensure that our Alberta industry's concerns are expressed as best as we can make them to ensure that the industry continues to be strong in this province.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Is there a role for the Alberta industry as our provincial government and federal government work together to a final agreement?

2:20

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's forest industry has certainly been kept well apprised of our conduct of this file. Both the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and I have made a commitment to the industry to keep them informed. We are working closely with our industry representatives to develop Alberta's input to federal officials as they continue to work on finalizing the deal with the United States. The Alberta government will advocate to the best of its ability on behalf of the industry to ensure that the industry is not unduly disadvantaged. Certainly, the industry in this province has not been shy about sharing with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and myself what their concerns are. We will carry those forward on their behalf. There has been very close co-operation between government and industry on this file, and they can continue to expect that kind of co-operation from the government of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister explain how your department is working with the Alberta Forest Products Association re the softwood lumber deal?

Mr. Coumts: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Forest Products Association is representative of a \$12 billion industry in this province. The representatives that sit on the board of directors along with their executive director have worked very, very closely with the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and our own department to make sure that the vision that the industry has to expand on that \$12 billion industry will continue to thrive even through working out the details on the softwood lumber.

The industry itself has met with us on two occasions, and they will continue to meet with us as these details progress. I can guarantee the hon. member, as I have guaranteed the Alberta Forest Products Association, that we will continue that dialogue because it's so important because of the small operators, medium-sized operators, and the big operators that represent this viable industry in Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are about 50,000 apprentices in our apprenticeship system in Alberta right now. Only about 4,500 will graduate this year. The dropout rate is appalling, and the government would not release statistics on first-year leavers in Public Accounts a few weeks ago. In many workplaces apprentices are being hired to work without journeymen, are not getting proper training, and are let go after a few months even though the contractor is charging top rate for their work. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. What will the minister do to enforce journeyman-apprentice ratios, that are being ignored on so many construction job sites?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the sky is not falling. In fact, this morning there were people that were up pretty much as early as I was to line up to fill our institutions to take apprenticeships.

In relation to enforcing those particular regulations, what we're trying to do is work with industry to find ways of being able to have more apprentices in the system. As you well know, we have shortages of technical folks throughout the province, and we're working with industry to create more spots for these people.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplementary to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what measures will the minister put in place to end the abuses and ensure that apprentices get well-rounded, varied apprenticeship training on all job sites?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has information that there are jobs sites where people are not getting good, solid training, then I wish he would bring them forward instead of making allegations that are essentially unfounded. So please bring it forward because I think our apprenticeship system is the first and leading apprenticeship system in Canada.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what will the minister do to ensure that temporary foreign contractors that utilize tradespeople on oil sands jobs actually participate in our apprenticeship training system?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member wants to look at the way that these temporary workers are brought in. First of all, they have to all be qualified under the 20 trades that are compulsory trades in this province.

You know, it's interesting. When I found out about this particular issue several months ago, I decided to find out for myself what it was really all about, so I asked some trade union folks to come and meet with me, and I couldn't believe what they were telling me. They were telling me that in the case of one particular trade, they had over a thousand people on the spare board, and in the case of another trade there were 1,200 people on the spare board. I said: well what's wrong with this picture? Well, the problem is that they're only available for closed-shop environments.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Arts Funding

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's only sense

of culture is one of entitlement and secrecy. Under the previous Community Development minister the arts community was assured a province-wide arts and culture policy, and there was a legitimate expectation that it would be attached to a sustainable funding model. Instead, what the government has offered are one-off centennial infrastructure projects cast as arts funding. My questions are to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance. Given that Statistics Canada ranks Alberta last for per capita public funding for the arts and given that the entire budget for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is a third of what the horse-racing industry is getting, will the minister explain why a single industry or enterprise gets three times what an entire sector gets?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta arts and culture community is a recipient of lottery dollars. It comes in a direct grant and is distributed through that. I'm very proud of the arts community in this province. I represent personally a very rural community, all rural communities, and in fact we have cultural experience there that would not be available to us were it not for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. I'm talking about the travelling programs and performers that come to our very fine albeit small cultural facilities. I see every community that puts on a play, whether it's a musical or anything else, across the breadth of this province being supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make one thing very clear. The Minister of Gaming has said this, but obviously the member missed it: if you don't put a quarter in a slot machine, if you don't lay a wager on a horse in this province, the horse-racing industry will get nothing.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pride, yes, but where is the change?

To the same minister: given that the Department of Community Development's own business plan states that hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of full-time jobs are added to Alberta's economy through funding the arts and culture community, how can the minister justify the government's indifference to the arts with bare-bones, short-term funding?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I don't accept that there's any indifference to the arts and cultural community in this province by this government. As a previous minister responsible for that I could speak with some authority in that area. I can also speak to the fact that about every person in this province would attend about four cultural events, so over 13 million, 14 million in participation. That's phenomenal. But I'm also proud of the private sector and the corporate sector and the volunteer sector in this province, that also contribute to the arts in a big way in all of our communities.

2:30

Mr. Speaker, we have a thriving arts community. It will be seen by millions at the Smithsonian in Washington at the end of June and the first week in July. There's not another province in Canada that has had this opportunity. In fact, I don't believe the Canadian government has had this opportunity. That's a pure recognition of the arts community and the value that this government places on that community.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm afraid the minister's answers confirm the fears of the arts community here.

Last question to the same minister: given the skyrocketing utility and maintenance costs of theatres and art facilities, why is this government failing to protect smaller theatres and arts venues from possible bankruptcies or, worse still, having to close down and mothball these vital facilities?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, as I indicated, we have an Alberta Foundation for the Arts that has a long history of supporting the arts in this province. I don't know of another province in Canada that has a similar foundation that is operated by a volunteer board of directors, and they provide funding to a number in our arts community.

Again, I can't stand here and listen to members opposite criticize the arts and cultural community in this province. Go to Washington at the end of June, the first part of July. Try to understand why this province is being recognized at one of the largest festivals in North America for sure. It's because of a wonderful and vibrant arts community.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the first of six speakers for Members' Statements, today's vignette is on the Speakers of the province of Alberta. There have been only 11 Speakers of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta over our first 100 years.

Charles Wellington Fisher, a Liberal Member for Banff, was elected as the first Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on March 15, 1906. Fisher served for 13 years and is the second longest serving Speaker in Alberta history. He died in 1919, a victim of the Spanish flu epidemic.

Our second Speaker was Charles Steuart Pingle, a Liberal Member for Redcliff, first elected to the Assembly in 1913. He was elected Speaker in 1920 and served as the Speaker for only 499 days. He is the second shortest serving Speaker in the Legislative Assembly history.

Oran "Tony" McPherson, our third Speaker, was elected to the Assembly in 1921 as the Member for Little Bow and represented the United Farmers of Alberta. He was elected Speaker in 1922 and served in that capacity until 1926. He was the first Speaker to have attended university and the first to exercise the casting vote. To date, he is the youngest person, at age 35, to hold the position of Speaker in Alberta.

George Norman Johnston, the Member for Coronation, was first elected to the Assembly in 1921 and served as Speaker from 1927 to 1935. Our fourth Speaker was the last member of the United Farmers of Alberta to occupy the role. His rulings declaring certain language unparliamentary were the first to be reported in our parliamentary records.

Nathan Eldon Tanner, the Member for Cardston and representing the Social Credit Party, became the fifth Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in 1936. He presided over only 46 sitting days and 333 calendar days, the shortest tenure of any Speaker, before being appointed as minister of lands and mines. He is thought to be the first member of the Mormon faith to serve as Speaker in the British Commonwealth.

Peter Dawson, the Member for Little Bow representing the Social Credit Party, was elected speaker in 1937, becoming the sixth Speaker of the Assembly. He is the longest-serving Speaker of the Assembly, with a tenure of 26 years, or 9,523 calendar days. He died in office in 1963 while the House was in session and was the first Speaker to lie in state in the Legislature Building.

Arthur Johnson Dixon, first elected as the Member for Calgary in

1952, served in the role of Speaker from 1963 to 1972. He was the seventh Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the first to have previously held the position of Deputy Speaker. He was the last Social Credit member to hold the office. Mr. Dixon was appointed as a Member of the Order of Canada in 1979.

Gerard Joseph Amerongen, the Member for Edmonton-Meadow-lark, was first elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1971 representing the Progressive Conservative Party. He was elected the eighth Speaker of the Assembly in 1972 and served until 1986, the only member to have served his entire term of office as Speaker. In 1972 he presided over the introduction of both *Alberta Hansard* and the televising of Assembly proceedings.

David John Carter, the Member for Calgary-Egmont, was first elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1979, representing the Progressive Conservative Party. He became Alberta's ninth Speaker in 1986 and served in that capacity until 1993. He oversaw the Assembly taking responsibility for visitor and educational programs and the publication of the book *The Alberta Legislature: A Celebration* in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Legislature Building.

Alberta's 10th Speaker, Stanley Stanford Schumacher, was elected as the Member for Drumheller in 1986 and was the first Speaker elected by secret ballot in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in 1993. The first Alberta-born Speaker, he was also the first with previous experience as a Member of Parliament. He served in the role until 1997.

Our current Speaker was first elected as the Member for Barrhead in a by-election in 1979. He was the first Speaker in Alberta whose term was preceded by service as a cabinet minister. He also served as Deputy Premier from December 1992 to October 1994. He was elected Speaker on April 14, 1997, in the first contested secret ballot election for the role. He is the 11th Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and the longest serving member of all those serving in the 26th Legislature. As of today, hon. members, he has served 3,319 calendar days, making him the fourth longest serving Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Of current Speakers in Canada he is the longest serving Speaker, with over eight years of service, and has the longest continuous service as a member, approaching almost 27 years. He is the only Speaker in Alberta history during whose tenure the reigning monarch and the Governor General have spoken in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

head:

Members' Statements

Prevention of Domestic Violence

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise today in this Chamber to recognize the spirit, the dedication, and the tenacity of five individuals who live in my constituency. Domestic violence is a problem which knows no boundaries. People from all walks of life who live in large cities and small towns have been subject to domestic violence.

In order to do something about domestic violence in our province, five ladies from the constituency of Highwood decided to enter one of the most gruelling overland races in the world, the Canadian Death Race. During the August long weekend this five-person team called SLAP, Stop Letting Abuse Prevail, will each be running a leg of this very challenging race. To quote the race organizers themselves, the Canadian Death Race "consists of 125 kms, three mountain summits and over 17,000 ft of elevation change as well as

the crossing of a major river at our spectacular Hell's Gate canyon at the confluence of the Smoky and Sulphur Rivers."

2:40

Heather Boyd, Jessie Anderson, Kim Anderson, Lynne Mason, and Cathy Vickery will be running for two reasons. Firstly, they are hoping that having a team in the Death Race where only one member has had any prior experience in extreme racing will raise awareness of the problem of domestic violence. Secondly, SLAP is using their entrance into the race as a way to raise funds for the Eagle Women's Emergency Shelter, located in the foothills area. This shelter is a short-term facility designed to provide support and lodging to women and children who have been victims of violence.

I would ask that all members give their support to this team and recognize the importance of their goals. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Alberta Book Awards

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Alberta's amazing authors and publishers. Over the weekend I had the privilege to attend the 2006 Alberta book awards. The awards ceremony, which was attended by over 200 members of Alberta's literary community, honoured and celebrated the achievements of our writers and publishers throughout the year. Awards were given in 16 categories, including awards for writers, publishers, and designers.

The evening also featured the presentation of the Alberta government's Grant MacEwan literary awards, which gives \$25,000 to an Alberta author and four \$2,500 scholarships to Alberta students. The awards were created to honour the legacy of Dr. MacEwan and his legendary love for our province and for the written word. This year's winner of the \$25,000 Grant MacEwan author's award was Birk Sproxton of Red Deer. The young writers' scholarships were awarded to Rachelle Delaney of Edmonton, Carley Okamura of Edmonton, Lena Schuck of Calgary, and Jackie Tan of Calgary.

I would like to thank the Writers Guild of Alberta and the Book Publishers Association of Alberta for organizing such an enchanting evening. These two organizations both receive annual operating support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

The nominees and winners for this year's awards are just a sample of the incredible talent of our literary community, publishers and writers alike, and are deserving of our appreciation and support.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the members of the House to join me in congratulating the winners and nominees from this year's Alberta book awards. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

211 Telephone Help Line

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about an important service that is hidden from the limelight. This year, 2006, is the first anniversary of the 211 telephone line for information and referral services connecting callers to human services they need.

Just simply dial 211, and a caller gets connected to the complete network of care in Calgary, including more than 4,000 community, social, and government-related services. The line 211 is free, confidential, and multilingual, offering assistance in more than 150 languages 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In its first year it provided assistance for 30,000 callers.

Calgary is a fast daily growing community, reaching a million and beyond. Newcomers do not know where to turn for help before a

situation becomes a crisis. It can be very difficult even for long-time residents of Calgary to access the wide range of resources that exist. Sometimes it's hard to know where to start looking or even what's available. Talking to a trained specialist makes it easier to find information, discover options, and deal with problems.

The 211 operation handles an average of 580 callers per week of all ages, backgrounds, and needs. Everyone benefits from 211 from individuals, families, professionals to community agencies and people facing barriers due to lack of knowledge, language, poverty, and personal difficulty. The 211 operation has assisted callers in personal situations.

I would like to ask our hon. members to join me in congratulating those individuals who work in the 211 operation and the organization leaders who initiated it and contribute to the services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Inspirational Poem

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton Oilers of the past few weeks have been an expression of pure poetry on ice: the grit, the emotion, the pure fluid movement of released feelings in people that are often not expressed. Last Friday I passed on two periods of a great Oilers game, that I later watched, to witness the poetry, acting, light, dance, and a fine meal at John Bracco junior high school. It is a school with an outstanding and inspiring arts program in northeast Edmonton. Pure delight beamed from the broad and happy smiles on the faces of both the performers and the audience when they gave a standing ovation at the end of the performance of *Feeling Groovy*.

One of the young actors in *Feeling Groovy* is a talented young poet who gave me a poem to read. It is called *Change*, and this is how it goes:

I stared back at what I once was,
 focused on few
 now has grew
 from little to more
 spread out to a median
 nearly the same,
 good at all, best at none
 one away from allowed
 so close in all
 no longer alone
 the distinct feeling of my soul
 lay rest to endurance
 with time increased
 speed diminished
 and a push to retreat
 I continue forth
 training to the end
 Pushing,
 Fighting . . .
 Changing.

Alexander John Paul Pacan Pezzutto, grade 9, John Bracco junior high school.

Thank you, Mr. Pezzutto, for your poem, which will be published in *Hansard*, the official record of our Legislature. Poetry can be inspiring. I will send this statement to the Edmonton Oilers for their inspiring playoff run. I hope the Oilers this week will be pushing forward, fighting in the corners, and constantly changing their game as they work for victory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Alberta Dental Association and College Centennial

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would take this opportunity to acknowledge the Alberta Dental Association and College's centennial, which marks for this great organization 100 years of providing dentistry to the public of Alberta. On May 9, 1906, the Alberta Legislature voted its approval of the Alberta Dental Association, which later became the Alberta Dental Association and College in 2001.

However, the 1906 approval was not the beginning of dentistry in this great land, Mr. Speaker. The first dentist on record in the area that we now call Alberta was Dr. Frederick Shaw, who was born in Kentville, Nova Scotia, in 1856 and graduated from the New York Dental College in 1878. After joining the North West Mounted Police in 1879, Sergeant Shaw served at Fort Walsh in the Cypress Hills, located today on the border between southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. Likely the most notable patient he attended to was the famous Chief Sitting Bull, who required two teeth to be extracted to relieve pain. This was after the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn, which Chief Sitting Bull is often remembered for.

In part to commemorate their centennial, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Dental Association and College is donating \$3 million to finance the lifetime endowment for a chair in geriatric oral health and a chair in clinical dentistry research, both at the University of Alberta. The chair in geriatric oral health has been complemented by the recent approval by Alberta Seniors and Community Supports for a pilot program for mobile dental clinics to be used at senior centres. The association has stated that access to quality dentistry care for all Albertans is a prime motivator of this gift. As such, this generous donation of funds will be considered for matching through the Alberta access to the future endowment program.

Mr. Speaker, dentists play an important role in our society, and with representation through the Alberta Dental Association and College and measures such as the recent endowment, it is clear that they are making this province a much better place. I invite all members to join me in commending Alberta's dentists for 100 years of service to this great province.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

2:50 Oil Sands Development

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's lack of a coherent long-term plan for oil sands development is causing uncertainty about how important environmental, social, and economic questions will be resolved and how problems in each of those areas ought to be addressed.

The Alberta NDP is suggesting the establishment of a royal commission on oil sands development. The commission would be composed of distinguished Albertans from diverse backgrounds and would undertake broad, public consultation and educational efforts. The primary focus of the commission's work would be to ensure that the oil sands development serves the interests of Albertans, including future generations, ahead of any other considerations. As such, a review of the current royalty regime would be an important part of the commission's work.

Albertans are concerned that the current pace of development is socially, economically, and environmentally unsustainable. Skyrocketing housing prices in Fort McMurray, labour shortages across the province, and the re-emergence of inflation are but a few indications of an overheated economy.

We must also be conscious of the environmental cost of oil sands development and find ways to develop this resource without

jeopardizing the value of a clean and well-protected environment. Every barrel of oil taken from oil sands requires at least two barrels of water and a large volume of natural gas. The current gold-rush mentality must be replaced with clear answers for the significant environmental, social, and economic questions facing oil sands development.

A royal commission on the oil sands would be ideal for combining expert advice and popular input to develop a long-term development strategy for the oil sands, which would ensure long-term prosperity and environmental sustainability for future generations of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition sponsored by the Friends of Medicare. This one has 5,113 signatures. It was signed by people eager to see the end of the so-called third-way health care reforms and for the Assembly to defeat any legislation that would allow the expansion of private hospitals or insurance, to not allow doctors to work in both the private and public system, and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act. The NDP opposition has now tabled 14,751 signatures on this petition.

Thank you.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I table the appropriate number of copies of the Northern Alberta Development Council Annual Report for 2004-2005. The NADC is involved with numerous projects on transportation, value-added agriculture, tourism, educational initiatives, and interjurisdictional projects. The work of the council is extremely important as it advocates on behalf of northerners and works with other government ministries to develop and implement strategies to take advantage of economic, business, and social opportunities in the north.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month during Committee of Supply I made a commitment to respond more fully to the questions that were raised, and today I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of that response. Also, for your information, I have circulated this to the appropriate members as well.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a document on behalf of the leader of the NDP opposition. It's a statement, Nine Principles Underpinning Freedom of Information Legislation, prepared by Toby Mendel, the law program director of Article 19, a London-based NGO that defends and promotes freedom of expression and access to information all over the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a letter dated May 15, 2006, from myself to Mr. Dunn, the Auditor General. In this letter I am requesting that the Auditor General under section 20 of the Auditor General Act investigate the purchase and subsequent sale of surplus ring road lands in both Edmonton and Calgary.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a letter that was written to me dated May 14, 2006, from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Cheryl Torgalson, who draws our attention to the situation which arises when a student, like her daughter Dana, lives just outside the school intake zone cut-off and gets entered in a lottery even though the school does have space. She also comments that the waiting list mechanism has been cancelled. Her letter raises a few good points, one of which is when people use other people's addresses to cheat the system, and asks: what are we really teaching our kids here?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of Alberta's Provincial Parks and Protected Areas Economic Impact Report 2002. This FOIPed report clearly shows a significant economic return for a relatively small investment. I would urge the new Minister of Community Development for the sake of transparency, accountability, and efficiency to post future reports on his ministry's website.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Dental Disciplines Act the Alberta Dental Hygienists' Association 2005 Annual Report, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses 2004-05 annual report with attached financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2005, and the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta 2005 Annual Report.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed with Orders of the Day, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly today a young man, Ian Van Haren. He is working with me this summer as one of my constituency assistants in the Lacombe-Ponoka office in Lacombe. He was born and raised in Lacombe and currently attends university in New Brunswick. I have known this young man for most of my life and look forward to working with him this summer. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like to ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Joseph Pitt. He's a decorated veteran who served our country for 27 years, including some time at Normandy. Mr. Pitt is here today to bring attention to the broken promises he has experienced as a result of land expropriation and flooding. I would ask Mr. Joseph Pitt to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly an entrepreneur and a keen observer of all levels of government. My guest today, Mr. Merle Schnee, is from this fine hockey city of Edmonton. Mr. Schnee has served as the president of the firefighters, where he brought their concerns to the attention of the government of the day. I would ask my guest, Mr. Merle Schnee, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four government motions that I would like to deal with this afternoon. With your permission I'll do them one at a time, starting with Government Motion 21, oral notice having been given yesterday with respect to the revised Standing Orders from the Speaker's office.

Revised Standing Orders

21. Mr. Zwozdesky moved:

Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, denoted as being effective April 11, 2005, be repealed in their entirety and the Standing Orders tabled in the Assembly on May 15, 2006, and distributed to members be substituted in their place. The revised Standing Orders come into force on the first day of the next sitting of the Assembly following the adjournment of the 2006 spring sitting.

[The Speaker in the chair]

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak to Government Motion 21, which is to update the Standing Orders. We have been referring unofficially to these, with your permission, as the Speaker's revisions because a great deal of work was done by the table officers and I think the staff of the Speaker's office to go through and really clean up the Standing Orders, to capitalize things that should be capitalized, to watch for any typos or type case changes, to correct for name changes, et cetera.

We did get an opportunity to review these back last fall and I think again in the early winter. I did in fact go through every single change that was in here, and our caucus did agree to this. Our concern, of course, is always that what we looked at back then is exactly what we have before us at this time, but I'm comfortable if the Speaker is bringing these forward, well, not officially bringing them forward, that what we looked at is what is in front of us.

In context, Mr. Speaker, these Standing Orders are important to every member of this Assembly because they allow us to conduct our business in an orderly fashion. The parliamentary process rules are always slanted to the advantage of government, which allows the

business of the day to move forward, but that is always balanced with provisions that make sure of and protect and uphold the ability of the minority and minorities in this Assembly to have procedures that support their ability to have their voices heard.

We know that not all things are equal. As I mentioned, the procedural orders do favour the government. It does favour the majority vote. The majority vote wins, and that's the setup that we work with. Therefore, the government is always going to win on those kinds of motions. Obviously, government bills are treated with preference over the way, for example, private members' bills work, which have a much longer timeline. The private members in this Assembly have to have their bill ideas in back in September, which is a disadvantage if you're trying to deal with current affairs. You had to have submitted your idea a substantial number of months ago. You're not always current. But the Standing Orders, again, give you a way of bringing urgent, current issues before the Assembly; for example, the use of Standing Orders 30 and 40, which give you an occasion to ask the Assembly for consent to set aside the ordinary or scheduled order of business to discuss an urgent matter.

That's what's important in a democratic process, that we have rules that we all know and understand that allow us to move the business forward. At the same time, we protect the minorities that are here and give them provision to have a voice and to be able to bring their business before the House in a timely fashion. Sometimes that means in an urgent fashion. There are rules under our Standing Orders that allow us to insist that respect is shown in the House and to call members to order if they feel that has been violated. We all agree to abide by and work under these rules.

I haven't been directly involved in negotiations to change the Standing Orders. I know from my predecessor that that can be somewhat stressful because, again, we have a majority vote, and even if opposition is not keen on some of the provisions, a majority government can vote and pass the Standing Orders without our acquiescence on this. Sometimes that's a difficult situation, and it's hard to accept, especially if things have been put in place that make it more difficult for us to do our job. For example, Mr. Speaker, prior to when I started, there was unlimited speaking time for members when they were participating in debate. Then there was the 30-minute rule. Then when I first started, there was a 20-minute rule. Now we're down to a 15-minute rule plus a new innovation that was added in that allows for an extra five minutes for a sort of Q and A, a bit of a rebuttal session, at the end of a member's 15 minutes.

Speaking to private members' bills, that time has also been reduced from when I started. This is now my 10th spring sitting. We've gone from 15 minutes, I think, and now we're down to 10 minutes. That was not something that we agreed to, obviously, because that restricts our speaking time in the Assembly and our ability to bring forward the points of view of the people that we represent. So we obviously didn't agree to that, but the majority ruled in this case, and the Standing Orders reflected the changes that the government sought.

Overall, as a House leader I appreciate that the rules are there. I think that in most cases they are done for the best of intentions, although they may not appear to work that way. I am not happy with some of the changes that have come forward in the last couple of years that do restrict the members more, but that is not what is before us in the package contained and which we are asked to approve under Motion 21. Those are strictly what we would call typos and grammatical adjustments, and I appreciate the work that many people put into this. I think it does give us, if I may say so, a more professional looking set of Standing Orders. My compliments to those that worked long and hard on it. It can be I think quite a

t tedious business going back and forth. Nonetheless, I think it was worth it. My thanks to those that worked hard to present this.

I'm happy to support those changes in the package that has been set before us. As a House leader I have brought some issues before this House occasionally, most recently, I think, within the last week or so in which in the end result I was asking that changes be made to the Standing Orders in the way we work with certain things, in particular in this instance with private members' public bills. I was asking that rather than it being a decision of the Speaker for early consideration of private members' public bills in Committee of the Whole and third, that those in fact come to the floor for a decision of unanimous consent to proceed. When the House leaders meet again, that's something else that I would be looking at.

The other issues that I had started to explore with the previous House leader – I'm not talking out of school here because this is what I think we should be looking at. We know that we are struggling in attracting women members to run for political office. They don't always see this Assembly or a number of other political institutions as particularly family friendly. I don't think that family friendly should be a matter of men or women. I would look forward to the day when more men are equally involved in child rearing and those kinds of decisions. I would welcome that and look forward to it. But there are choices that we have made in the way we conduct our business that I think ultimately prevent people from considering this as an option.

I would like to be exploring, for example, some of the timing. Could we be looking at sitting for three weeks and taking a week out or recessing for a week out of the Assembly to allow those that travel here on a weekly basis and are away from their constituencies and their families to be back in their constituencies for a longer period of time? We are also one of the few jurisdictions that sits at night. That I think is often considered a hardship. It can also be a tool that is used by the opposition to try and get the government to be more willing to work with what's before us, but perhaps that's also preventing some people from considering running for political office.

I think there are some positive changes that we could work toward in Standing Orders. I look forward to that, but at this time I'm happy to accept the package of grammatical and administrative changes that have been proposed by the Speaker. I will support Government Motion 21. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to it.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to go on long because it's my understanding – we had these sent to us earlier on – that there's nothing significant here. They are administrative changes. It probably took a lot of work to go through and wordsmith it, I'm sure. We have no objections to that.

I expect at some point, like everything else, that the House leaders should get together and look and see if there are changes that we can make. I believe, Mr. Speaker, you were involved with this the last time. It was '93 that we reviewed, my recollection. I wasn't here then, of course, but that's the last time it changed. I know that the Speaker has suggested from time to time that we look at changes, but there are perhaps changes that we'd all like to make. The House leader of the Official Opposition has suggested some things. I might suggest some other things, but I think that for what we're dealing with right now, we certainly have no problems with Motion 21. Anything that can make it easier to understand and grammatically correct and administratively correct we would support.

There may be a time at some point down the way that the House leaders get together and look and see if there is any review that we can do to perhaps change things for the better in the future. That's time down the way. Certainly, we support Motion 21. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate on Motion 21 this afternoon. Certainly, I would like to remind all House leaders from each respective party of the new Standing Order 53, which is the public accounts referred. Fifty-three states: "Public accounts, when tabled, stand referred to the Public Accounts Committee."

My remarks are certainly not reflective, Mr. Speaker, of the committee. I'm speaking not as chair but as a member of this House. My views are not to be considered a reflection of the committee. However, after the last election in the middle of February I circulated a letter to the Government House Leader, the Official Opposition House Leader, and the House leader of the third party, and I was urging that there be some significant changes made. At that time it was Standing Order 50, but now it is, of course, Standing Order 53.

I think it is time. We may have missed it with this rewrite of the public accounts. We may have missed the opportunity of redrafting our Standing Orders, but I would urge the House leaders to sit down and consider the following. First, I think the Standing Committee on Public Accounts should be empowered to examine and inquire into the public accounts, all reports of the Auditor General of Alberta, and all such matters as may be referred to it by the House; to report from time to time and to print a brief appendix to any report after the signature of the chairperson containing such opinions or recommendations dissenting from the report or supplementary to it as may be proposed by committee members; and except when the House otherwise orders, to send for persons, papers, and records; to sit while the House is sitting; to sit during periods when the House stands adjourned; to sit jointly with other standing committees; to print from day to day such papers and evidence as may be ordered by them; and to delegate to subcommittees all or any of their powers except the power to report directly to the House. This suggestion could simply be Standing Order 53(2).

Now, if I could talk about another idea, we could call it 53(3). The Standing Committee on Public Accounts shall in addition to the powers granted to it pursuant to section 53(2) of the new Standing Order be empowered to study and report on all matters related to the mandate, management, and operation of all departments of government; the committee shall be empowered to review and report on it; also to report on the statute law relating to the departments in question; the program and policy objectives of the departments in question and its effectiveness in the implementation of the same; the immediate, medium, and long-term expenditure plans and effectiveness of implementation of the same by the departments in question; and any and all other matters relating to the mandate, management, organization, or operation of the departments as the committee deems fit. Now, certainly this has been discussed at the Public Accounts Committee meetings.

I think it would be advantageous for another addition to the Standing Orders on Public Accounts, and this one would be, Mr. Speaker, that within 150 days of the presentation of a report from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the government shall upon the request of the committee table a comprehensive response. Also, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts shall be empowered to retain the services of expert, professional, technical, and clerical staff as it may deem necessary.

The Special Standing Committee on Members' Services shall provide all the funds necessary for the effective exercise of the new Standing Order 53.

It is of the utmost importance, Mr. Speaker, that a review of government operations be conducted by a committee of the Legislative Assembly as opposed to a committee of the government caucus. This is because only committees of the Legislative Assembly, such as the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, can provide witnesses such as ministers of the Crown and senior government officials with the parliamentary privilege of immunity from civil action for defamation arising from blunt and controversial statements made by such witnesses. Only if witnesses enjoy the ability to give their full views to the committees of the Legislative Assembly can public policy be fully considered in this province. This is even more important with the changes we're making with Bill 20 and making the government even more secretive. So if we're going to limit the amount of information that can be provided through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, maybe it's time to give the Standing Committee on Public Accounts the power to look at past expenditures of this government and present policy.

Now, we all know that government SPCs don't have parliamentary privilege, and people who come before that committee don't have parliamentary privilege. Perhaps that's why so many of those meetings have to take place behind closed doors. I would urge hon. members of this Assembly to once again consider the Public Accounts Committee and the improvements that we can make to it, and we can start having a much more open and transparent system. We see the size of government increasing, the amount of money that we are spending increasing. We see over the course of time an average of between 10 and 12 ministries coming to the Public Accounts Committee. So these changes would certainly be better. They would be advantageous. I would urge that the next time we are going to examine and change our Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly to consider what we are now going to call the new Standing Order 53 and implement at least some, if not all, of the recommendations that we have talked about this afternoon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader to close the debate? The question then?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Question.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

3:20 Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee

22. Mr. Zwozdesky moved:

Be it resolved that:

- (1) A Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be appointed to review the Personal Information Protection Act as provided in section 63(1) of that act consisting of the following members, namely Mrs. Ady, chair; Mr. Goudreau, deputy chair; Mr. Backs; Mr. Johnston; Mr. Liepert; Mr. Lindsay; Mr. Lougheed; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Martin; Mr. Rodney; and Mr. Snelgrove.
- (2) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most recent Members' Services Committee allowances order.

- (3) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (4) In carrying out its duties, the committee may travel throughout Alberta and undertake a process of consultation with all interested Albertans.
- (5) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Assembly or the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.
- (6) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (7) The committee must submit its report, including any proposed amendments to the act, within 18 months after beginning its review.
- (8) When its work has been completed, the committee must report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I ask if you would like me to read the motion aloud in its entirety at this time as I did yesterday, or can the record simply show it as noted?

The Speaker: I think, hon. Government House Leader and hon. members, the motion was read in its entirety yesterday. We did check to make sure that the wording in Motion 22 as it is in Orders of the Day is identical, and it is. Unless there's an objection from anyone, we will proceed.

[Government Motion 22 carried]

Appointment of Chief Electoral Officer

23. Mr. Zwozdesky moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend that Lorne R. Gibson be appointed as Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to support this. I sit on the Legislative Offices Committee and participated in the special committee to recruit and interview and recommend an individual for this position. It was a fairly thorough process, so we did advertise in each electoral office across Canada and in the major newspapers and through the Internet, had quite a few interested parties respond. We did interview several of them, and I'm pleased with Mr. Gibson's track record on working with new technology and his openness to move into the future with the new challenges that we may well be looking at. So I'm pleased to support this government motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. I was also on that select committee that made a decision at the end of a very thorough process of inviting applicants, looking at their applications, and interviewing three candidates, I think. Was it? Yeah, that's

right. The committee came to a unanimous agreement and decision to recommend to the Assembly the appointment of Mr. Lorne Gibson as the most outstanding candidate for the position. I'm very pleased that the committee's deliberations were thorough, they were amicable, and we all were on the same page with respect to this recommendation before the House. So I certainly would ask the House to support this recommendation coming from the committee.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also sat on this committee, and I just want to say that we've picked a very good candidate. I also want to state that with the all-party committee we were very thorough doing the interviews, and I feel that we've got a very good person to be our Chief Electoral Officer.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others? Shall we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 23 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 20

19. Mr. Zwozdesky moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if I could exercise now my five minutes as allowed by Standing Order 21. Thank you. We know that this particular standing order allows the government side up to five minutes to explain the need for time allocation, and I would like to start by saying that we have not had to use time allocation in this House since 2003. In fact, during the past five years our government has used time allocation only six times in total.

Also, I think it is valuable to repeat what I said when oral notice of this motion was given Thursday last, at which time I reminded the House that we have already had about six hours of debate on Bill 20 thus far, and we have debated at some considerable length multiple amendments proposed by opposition members.

Bill 20 was in fact introduced on March 7, and since that time it has been debated on nine different occasions so far: on March 14, March 23, April 3, April 10, April 26, May 1, May 8, May 9, and May 10. Mr. Speaker, on these occasions the opposition spoke 30 times. All the New Democrats have spoken. All the Liberals have spoken, I think, with the exception of their leader perhaps, and one other member has spoken, and several of our members have also spoken. Everyone who wanted to speak up until now was afforded multiple opportunities to speak. In fact, according to the records I reviewed, three Liberal members have spoken twice, two Liberals have spoken three times each, and one Liberal has spoken four times, so I think that's pretty significant.

It's always a judgment call for a government of any House to use the time allocation or not. But all reasonable people I would hope would agree that there comes a point when a decision has to be made

after a considerable and reasonable amount of time and effort has been expended on debating any issue and in this case Bill 20.

After today's two additional hours of debate at the committee stage and I would anticipate a further one hour of debate sometime later with respect to third reading stage, anyone reading *Hansard* will know that about nine or 10 hours of so-called debate will have occurred on Bill 20. They will also note the repetitive and/or perhaps redundant nature of many of the comments now being offered.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that they, too, would then better understand the need to conclude this discussion on Bill 20 and to see it move forward. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under our Standing Orders 21(1) and 21(3) five minutes is provided to a member of Executive Council and a member of the opposition to participate. I take it the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is the member, right?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to respond to this Government Motion 19 for invoking closure or time allocation on Bill 20. Let me start by talking a little bit about this notice that was shared with us by the office of the Government House Leader, talking about the total number of times closure or time allocation was used over the past five years. The hon. minister indicated that it was only used a certain number of times, five or six times, if I remember correctly. I argue that it should never be used at all. So for the hon. Government House Leader to be proud of the fact that it was only used so few times is something I take issue with.

Now, further to this, I am also very proud that two of those six times or two of those five times are on a bill that I'm the critic for, so that tells me that I have done my work as an opposition member who was elected to represent a certain number of voters, and it also shows that the opposition in general, albeit from the Liberal opposition or from the third party, has mounted some formidable resistance to a piece of legislation that we find very offensive. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the government side of the House did not anticipate that it would be met with such fierce opposition. They've actually called it minor housekeeping and, you know, minor amendments to facilitate things when, in fact, it's basically there to restrict access to information.

Today the government is suggesting that we should only allow two more hours in committee, and there's another motion to allow one hour in third reading. I must confess, Mr. Speaker, I'm both extremely disappointed and disgusted that I am here witnessing this. I ask: is the government tired of hearing our arguments? The hon. House leader from the government says that some of the arguments were repetitive in nature. I would have to say then that, yes, they were because the government doesn't listen. We keep telling them that there are sections in this bill that are offensive and undemocratic and regressive, but they keep ignoring us. I note on the record that sometimes they vote down the amendments that we introduce without even participating in debate. So it's really something for them to just say no, and they don't even tell us why they're saying no.

3:30

Now, are they agitated that the opposition succeeded in bringing this to the forefront? I think they are. Are they concerned that the longer this takes and the more debate it receives, more people would

notice the regressive nature of this government and its dangerous turn to more secrecy and opacity? I think yes. Are they impatient to rise and adjourn? We all know they are. I think that part of my disappointment arises from the fact that when I joined this House, you know, I naively thought that some progressive elements of this government caucus would be reasonable and would listen to the voice of reason.

Plus the fact that this is not a government bill; Bill 20 is a private member's bill. Traditionally private members vote their conscience on private members' bills, but instead we see that all members from this government caucus, the ones I thought were progressive and the ones I know for sure are regressive, are all rowing in the same direction, and they're all toeing the same party line. That tells me that they're trained to say no to any idea that the opposition presents. They're trained to say no, and they have been restrained and restricted from speaking their minds. That is a bad day for democracy, Mr. Speaker.

We speak in this House. We tell our stories, and we tell the stories of the people who got us here. This government is not interested in listening. They think they're above the law, they think they're above scrutiny, and there is no explanation why they would cut debate and invoke closure. If they're proud that they only did it six times, I see it happening more often in the future because you will not get an easy ride from this side of the House. I apologize; this is not going to happen.

You know, Mr. Speaker, two more hours: we are going to use them to the fullest. One hour in third reading: we're going to use it to the fullest. Even when the House adjourns, this is far from over. The next battle in this province is going to be a battle fought over democratic renewal, and this is a battle that the Tories have already lost.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 19 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:33 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abbott	Horner	Ouellette
Coutts	Liepert	Rodney
Danyluk	Lindsay	Rogers
DeLong	Lund	Stelmach
Doerksen	Marz	Stevens
Evans	McFarland	Strang
Forsyth	Melchin	VanderBurg
Griffiths	Mitzel	Webber
Haley	Oberle	Zwozdesky
Herard		

Against the motion:

Backs	MacDonald	Pannu
Blakeman	Martin	Pastoor
Chase	Mason	Swann
Elsalhy	Mather	Tougas
Hinman	Miller, R.	

Totals:	For – 28	Against – 14
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[Government Motion 19 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 20
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any amendments, comments, or questions with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak more at length to Bill 20 than I've had the opportunity to do before. I think I'll note, first of all, that we are under a time allocation now according to Government Motion 19, which just passed. So at this point the members in this Assembly are restricted to 120 minutes, two hours, of further debate on the freedom of information bill, Bill 20, before the time allocation has elapsed and the vote will be called, which I think is an ironic statement. Here we have a freedom of information bill that is restricted in how much people can participate in the debate.

To me this casts into relief the larger issues that are at play overall from this government. We're all aware that the public does not view politicians with a great deal of credibility at this point in history. As a matter of fact, I think that a recent poll showed that politicians are ranked above used-car salesmen, with the belief that they are liars and cheats if I'm following on the correct analogy that was made. This was a national poll, I think, that was done and then reported. But I think that when we see activities like we're seeing from this government now, that's what plays into that perception that politicians are taking advantage of the public and doing things that the public doesn't approve of. A big part of that is the public being able to participate in the process and see the government participate in the process. When we talk about transparency, that's what we mean.

Accountability is the ability of the government to account for its actions. If it makes a decision, passes a regulation, implements a policy, starts a program, cancels a program, we should be able to ask the government what its reasons were for doing that and get a comprehensive answer on it. We're not able to do that in this day and age, and particularly in Alberta there's a great deal of difficulty with that.

It's also an irony to me that we set out to establish legislation that was about providing information. It's about freedom of information and protection of privacy, and the privacy to be protected, really, was of individual Albertans, not the government's intentions. That's not what was supposed to be protected here or hidden away. To me it's a perversion of our system and of the democratic process that we come to a point where this is about hiding everything that the government is doing or almost everything that the government is doing.

When we talk about the credibility that a Legislature or a government has with the public and they look at things like time allocation – I mean, I've been out talking to my constituents, and they laugh at the idea that six hours is considered too much discussion on a bill that will now, when passed, limit my ability, the media's ability, and their ability to get information from the government that holds them accountable, that shows why they made certain decisions or why certain information is available or not available. This is not the only example of this that we see from this government. What else challenges credibility with the public than the increasing habits of what we see before us?

3:50

We have the whole budget process, where every single year that I've been elected, Mr. Chairman, the government has been off by millions and millions and often billions of dollars in their budget planning. What does that tell me about their ability to actually have control of their finances? Either they're deliberately highballing their expenses and lowballing their revenues to be creating these immense surpluses at the end of it, or they have absolutely no control over how their financial accounting system is working. Neither one of those makes the government look particularly good because one is an incompetence, and the other is a perversion of a system that's in place.

Then we have things like off-budget spending, where, for example, last year we hadn't even completed the budget process and already we had ministers out there on the barbeque circuit talking about how they were going to spend the surplus. Well, there wasn't even a surplus at that point, and they were already talking about spending it. So that strains credibility with the public.

Certainly, the public is aware of the number of sitting days that we have in this province. I think that if you actually consider the number of days, we are one of the least sitting assemblies in the country. Again, people go, "Well, you're all on holidays," or come the end of this weekend we will all be on holidays. Well, I know that I'm still out there working, but for most people that see this as the work that we're to be doing, yeah, we're out of here. We've worked, whatever, 14 weeks out of 52, and that strains the credibility.

We have other systems that this government has become renowned for, like the consultation and the summits; you know, the growth summit and the future summit, the health round-tables, and a number of others. Remember those from back in the early '90s, where groups of sort of hand-picked people are brought together? They're fed a certain formula, and they come out with the expected and anticipated results that the government wanted to see in place to support whatever they'd already decided to do. Same thing with the mail-outs that the Provincial Treasurer who is now a sitting member in Ottawa made famous, all of these very restrictive and coercive questions about how we wanted our money spent. Of course, the answers all came back the way they wanted it, and Bob's your uncle, and they go off and do what they wanted to do anyway. But all of these things start to mount up and create a huge credibility gap with the public.

To me, what I see is that an honourable legacy, a legacy that should be respected from the early days of this administration, never mind the very early days of when this particular government took power, is being overshadowed by these increasingly antidemocratic measures or actions that this government is putting into place. You know, we have the refusal to put a lobbyist registry in place. We have the Wednesday night wine-and-dines in which it is so orchestrated now that you can phone up and find out who's the sponsor for Wednesday night that's going to be taking the government caucus out, feeding them dinner, and plying them with beverages to get their access to the lobbyists so that they can influence government policy. That's integrated now. That's part of what this government does and expects to happen. To them it's normal, but to people out there that's not normal at all, and they expected to see other things put in place to balance that and prevent what they see as something that's undemocratic.

Certainly, more recently the government's refusal to plan on how to save has been another issue. Rather, there's just been this rampant wild spending and sort of announcements off the cuff about: okay, let's give everybody \$400 and see how that works out. What we end up with is a public that feels increasingly distant from their

elected representatives and particularly from what government is doing, and at what point do the people refuse to co-operate, refuse to play their part in this democracy because we have no credibility with them anymore? I think that we are not approaching that; I think we're right at the cusp of that believability.

When you look at voter turnout, it's dropping every single time. When you look at a younger generation that has no interest in voting, is protesting it, and is not learning to vote as they establish themselves as more mature adults and get married and buy houses, they're still not voting. That's when you usually capture them, when they have something that they now value and want to see the representation about how that's being managed for them. So we have a government that has pushed, I think, the public to the point where they don't have credibility anymore, and those are the signals: when we look at that voter turnout, when we look at younger voters. I think that's going to cause us a real problem.

One of the other issues that occurs to me around this freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation is that if the government has nothing to hide, then why is it going to such extreme measures and working so hard to hide it? What on earth is in that briefing book that makes it so precious? You know, if this is all so above board and everybody is so innocent over there and everybody is so transparent and accountable, then what on earth do you have to hide? Yet there is so much effort and energy being put into making sure that things are hidden not for a little while but for a long while, for either five years or 15 years. That's an indication to me as well. We've entered a culture of entitlement from people that are elected on the government side, and they believe that they're entitled to carry on the business as they see fit, not subject to other rules or even subject to the scrutiny of the public that put them there. So there's one rule for them and a different rule for everybody else, and I think that's problematic as well.

There are a number of tests that I run when I look at legislation. Is there a problem? Do we need legislation to fix the problem? Is this the legislation that will fix the problem? Is what's being proposed the least intrusive amount of legislation required? I would argue that in most sections that are being proposed in this bill, this bill fails that test.

Mr. MacDonald: *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Do you think that's their favourite movie?

Ms Blakeman: Maybe *Pirates of the Caribbean* is their favourite movie, yes.

So those are the four test questions, and I argue that this legislation fails on all of them. Is there a problem that needs correction by being able to hide things like a briefing book or the work of the internal auditor for a period of five or 15 years? I would argue that there's no problem that needs that.

Does it need legislation to do it? No, because I don't think the problem exists in the first place, and legislation is not the way to be fixing it. This legislation, again, is punitive, and it goes far beyond what's actually needed. We've even got our own Privacy Commissioner saying that anything that the government wanted to protect right now, in the arguments it's putting forward – you know, internal briefing documents, for example – is already protected and available for the government to use. They don't need to put another dedicated law in place to help them do this.

This is also open to abuse in that I believe you take documents that you don't want out there and that wouldn't be covered under other FOIP provisions, slap them in the back of that briefing book or put a memo on top saying, "This is an internal briefing document to my minister," and that's it. They're covered under this new

legislation and unavailable for five years. Is that appropriate? Well, when have we seen reports, for example, that we were waiting for in this Assembly that the taxpayer paid for, and we don't see them? We wait and wait and wait, and we start to make inquiries, written questions, motions for returns, even FOIPs to try and get them. We can't get them.

Well, for most of the ones I can give you examples of, we did get them faster than five years, Mr. Chairman. The Police Act review: yeah, they hung onto it for two and a half, I think getting close to three years, but we did get it after three years. We got a first draft, and then a year later we got a second draft. But at least that was under five years. With the Corrections Act review it was also a couple of years that they managed to tuck that one away. The victims of crime study that was done under the Solicitor General was tucked away for quite a while, and I had to press very hard to get that study to see the light of day. But, again, it was faster than five years.

4:00

What they've done is gone through and looked at any report, any study, any material at all that they don't want out there for five years. They just tuck it into the back of that briefing book, and it's covered. That's a perversion of what we expected the FOIP legislation to be, and it is unnecessary legislation. So my fourth question: is this the least intrusive legislation that achieves the aims that they were trying to achieve? Absolutely not. This is going far beyond what was necessary to accomplish what they were looking at. They could already do what they were doing, but we've seen that before.

We ended up with the PCHIP bill. You could already do everything that they brought that bill in to do. And we've just done another one with PCHAD, which was the kids being locked up for crystal meth and detox for crystal meth. You could already do all of that. You didn't need the additional law to do it. In those cases I accused the government of grandstanding around it.

This is much more serious because if you're not doing anything wrong, what is it that you're worried about people seeing? I understand when you're inside your own caucus and want to kind of work stuff out and try some ideas before you have to get them out in the light of day and have everybody take their shot at it, but this is going far beyond that level of privacy to discuss things and to try out a few things. This is seriously restricting the ability of the opposition, of the media, and of the public to see what the government is doing.

Now, this government likes to talk about how nasty the federal Liberals were and how corrupt they were and how much they didn't like them. But you know what? Here in Alberta you would never have been able to dig out that federal Liberal scandal of the Gomery with the FOIP legislation that's in place here.

Mr. MacDonald: Even now?

Ms Blakeman: Even now. And worse. Worse.

That really piques my interest, and I start to think: "Isn't that interesting? What the heck are they hiding over there? It must be a lot, and it must be big." What's being created out there in the public's mind is: "Whoa. How bad is it? Where are the scandals?" We had a former member of that caucus who was asked to leave their caucus, and as he left, he said, "Well, I know where all the skeletons are." Aha. Well, I think that a lot of us felt that there were skeletons over there, but they were very hard to detect, and it was kind of nice to have that confirmed by somebody leaving that caucus, that there were skeletons. Now you start to think: "Okay. Where are they?"

I would argue that some of them, obviously, are probably around land use and the sale of public land. We're still waiting for a land-use policy. It's not coming. That's interesting. Why? What skeletons are rattling over there around that? Electricity deregulation: what skeletons are rattling around over there behind that? Really, just about any subject that this government covers is going to be in those briefing books, so in addition to the commonly used FOIP excuses that the government uses to get out of giving us any information, which was "third party" or "policy advice" or "advice to cabinet members," now we're going to have the briefing book policy on top of all of that. It's really quite unforgeable.

Just in closing, we have this government creating a situation that I think is only going to imperil itself. As we move into a leadership campaign on their side, I hope that people do question those leaders on what their particular viewpoint is around this more inclusive legislation which shields even more from the public view. I'm assuming that following that, we'll be into an election, and I hope that the people press hard. I would be very interested to see the voter turnout on that.

Mr. MacDonald: Do you think the people will ask about the closure motion today in the public debates during the election?

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I think the time allocation motions matter to people. They pay attention, and again it raises the same questions. What are they worried about that they have to use such draconian methods to keep everybody in line? What are they trying to hide that they have to bring that kind of thing into play? It signals exactly the opposite of what this government likes to have everybody believe of them.

You know, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, Mr. Chairman, and what we are eating here is rotten, and I hope it makes them all very sick. Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, it's rather interesting that in Harper's Ottawa the conversation is all about openness and transparency and ethics and all the things that people were upset about with the federal Liberals. Here in Alberta their cousins seem to be going the opposite way. I see the opposite over here, that people don't seem to care. I expect that if they were Conservative Members of Parliament in Ottawa, they'd be up on their hind feet saying that we've got to do this, that politics is an honourable business, and that we've got to bring back respect to the Parliament of Canada. Here we sit in this Legislature under a one-party rule going in exactly the opposite direction that they are in Ottawa and, I would suggest, the opposite direction that they're going in most other parts of Canada. I mean, this government is known as the most secretive government in Canada, maybe in the world or the universe, as they like to say. Certainly, I would probably agree with them in this particular case.

Now we even go further. I mean, the FOIP Act that we had was a difficult one to navigate to find what you wanted. Even when you got them to okay it, often the departments didn't get the information there quickly or on time. There are no penalties. So it's not that we're the most open. I mean, we've been voted the most secretive government, Mr. Chairman. Now we're going to take this FOIP Act – and it's interesting; they were going to say that it was to deal with the PATRIOT Act. Well, that was just a by-product to probably put a better spin on it, and we're making it even worse. I think it's part of what we face in this province of a one-party rule. You've been in power so long that you figure that you can do whatever you want

whenever you want and the people will just say, "Okay, that's the way it is," and it'll be business as usual.

I mean, why we would go to these levels, Mr. Chairman, when we see across the world international experts now saying that this is unbelievable, that this is Third World country material when we're dealing with the freedom of information acts. No other place anywhere is going in the direction that this government is going. Overkill, for example. You know, I quote here from a University of Lethbridge political scientist, Peter McCormick. I thought he put it very well: this sounds like every secretive government's dream. He's talking about Bill 20. He goes on to say: this is a government that always likes to say it is in favour of freedom of information, but freedom of information is always a risk for a government, so what they want to do is look as transparent as they can while being as untransparent as they can, and that way they don't get burned.

Well, it seems to me that that's what this is all about. We bring in Bill 20. It's to do with the PATRIOT Act. They hope that people fall asleep or the opposition falls asleep, and then they bring in all these other amendments that make it totally undemocratic.

Mr. Chairman, we've talked a bit about the briefing notes, but there are so many things wrong with this bill that it's hard to know where to start. You know, the Premier goes on, and I heard him say today: well, don't want our briefing book because there may be some information that we didn't accept in there. Well, you know, that would be fairly easy to see. If the government policy didn't follow those briefing books, we'd know that. It wouldn't take a genius to figure that out. The point is that theoretically the Premier indicates, as he's sitting here with the briefing book, that the answers that they're giving seem to be coming from those briefing books, and that's out in the public. So what is there to hide? What is there to hide?

4:10

In an interview Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner said, as we know, that he opposes this proposal to exclude briefing notes because he points out that they already fall under a section of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Section 24(1) allows the government to withhold any records that might contain "advice, proposals, recommendations, analyses or policy options developed by or for a public body or a member of the Executive Council." So they already have protection there. That's the point the Privacy Commissioner said. He said that they've had nine cases that he's had to deal with, and in seven of the nine cases that this issue has arisen, the Privacy Commissioner has ruled for the government. So why are we going through this particular proposal?

You know, the Premier often says – and I heard him – that if something happened in Alberta like what happened in Quebec, Adscam and the rest of it and the Gomery commission and the announcements after – well, I can't remember the exact words, but he sort of indicated that he'd be tarred and feathered or thrown out of town or whatever. Well, the question remains, Mr. Chairman: how would we ever know? And now it will be even harder to find out. It would be impossible – well, with my luck I suppose I shouldn't say impossible; anything's possible. But it would be extremely difficult to find any particular scandal here because we're covering it up. It was hard enough in FOIP; now it will be almost impossible. Briefing notes: five years. Other parts, internal auditor: 15 years. I mean, this is a total and absolute cover-up for this government.

How would we ever have a commission to find out? The last commission we had embarrassed the government. It was the Principal Group back when. We've never had a commission set up to do anything since then. My point is that with this most secretive government in Canada, in North America, the world, the universe,

wherever you want to stop, Mr. Chairman, it's very difficult. The government likes it this way, and they don't think that people care. But people are starting to care, they're starting to take notice, and they're going to demand better from this government. They're not there by divine right. Some of them believe that they are, that they don't have to be accountable to anybody. The reality is that they've had nothing but one-party rule in this province for so long that they forget that these things are important in a functioning democracy.

Now, I point out, Mr. Chairman, that five years is an interesting time for the briefing notes. We can't look at those briefing notes for five years, even though we're told that there's not that much in them. That's what we're told. Now, that's an interesting length of time, isn't it? That takes you into the next government. Anything that comes out then is ancient history. We hear that in this Legislature: well, that was then, and this is now; we're much better now.

Mr. Elsalhy: There might be a new minister.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, it's a new minister: we can't go back on that; if that happened, well, there's nothing we can do; it's ancient history.

Mr. Chairman, there are a lot of cabinet ministers that are going to be retiring. We know that the Premier is going to be retiring. But even the new ministers that come in in those five years or those that stay with the government will be in different portfolios and all the rest of it. So it's a deliberate – deliberate – attempt by this government to keep hidden anything that's there.

I don't know if there's anything in those briefing notes that would cause them to be embarrassed. But the Member for Edmonton-Centre was correct: because of this fight bringing in a bill like this, one certainly has to wonder what's in there. You know, if you didn't wonder before, you have to wonder now. Does the Premier not want to be embarrassed or the cabinet ministers? Some of them that will retire after or before the next election don't want to be embarrassed. The people that stay on don't want to be embarrassed. There has to be a reason for this, Mr. Chairman.

The government, I know, says: well, we'll listen to the opposition yak away, and we'll bring in closure, and everybody will go to sleep, and nobody will care. That's what they're counting on. I guess that's the record. They've been elected no matter what they do for so long that they think this will go away.

I suggest, Mr. Chairman, that people are starting to take notice of what's happening here. There was a culture of entitlement that they talked about with the federal Liberals. Now, as I said, when we see a new government, Harper and the new people coming in, their cousins, saying that accountability and openness are really what we have to shoot for and we see this government going opposite to the way their federal cousins are, then something doesn't ring right, whether we agree with everything they're doing or not.

When governments start to act this way, Mr. Chairman, even in Alberta they eventually get kicked around a little bit. The last time even the city of Edmonton told them that they were not happy with the way they were acting. I would suggest that with more bills like this and some of the things we're doing, other parts of the province are going to send them the same message. You can hide from these sorts of bills, you can bring in lack of freedom of information acts, you can tie it together with a little red ribbon called the PATRIOT Act, but people in Alberta know what this is all about.

You know, I think there are some good people opposite there, and I don't understand why they would put up with this. Hopefully, with a new leader coming out at some point in December, whenever the case may be, surely they're going to see that this is not good policy on their part. I think you are going to see changes here one way or the other.

Mr. Chairman, this is just too convenient for the government to hide information, and it's not democratic. There are all sorts of democratic deficits in this province, but this makes it even worse. The government will get away with this because they have the majority. It's the tyranny of the majority. They'll get away with it because they can, because they have the numbers now. Is it the right thing to do? No. Will they pay a price down the way? One can only hope. Hope springs eternal that some of them might see that this is wrong but obviously not by the vote that I've seen so far. We will certainly make sure on the opposition side that people do remember what this government is doing with this particular act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak today. However, before I begin my remarks, let me first thank the Member for Red Deer-North, who sponsored the introduction of this important piece of legislation, and also the previous minister for introducing this legislation to her. I really thank him for that. As the newly minted Minister of Government Services I have relied on her commitment and enthusiasm to steer this bill through the Assembly to this point and will no doubt benefit from her wise counsel as it proceeds.

This bill proposes a number of amendments to the FOIP Act. Perhaps the most important amendment sets higher penalties for disclosing the personal information of Albertans to a foreign court. But, Mr. Chairman, we don't hear about those comments, do we? If an individual or a corporation discloses personal information pursuant to a subpoena, a warrant, or a court order when a court does not have jurisdiction in Alberta or pursuant to a court order that's not binding in Alberta, that person would be guilty of an offence and would be subject to a fine. The proposed fine for corporations could be up to \$500,000 to deter such disclosures.

Let's not forget that the FOIP Act itself contains provisions for fines up to \$10,000 for anyone convicted of trying to thwart the intention of the legislation. Despite what the leader of the third party said in this Chamber the other day, this legislation is anything but toothless. I can assure you of that. Protecting people's private information is one of this government's top priorities.

We are also exploring other solutions to address the potential for American authorities to view the private information of Albertans without proper authorization. Our goal is to ensure that the personal information of Albertans is protected from unauthorized access. The USA PATRIOT Act – which many of you probably don't know, and I didn't know until I was advised, stands for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism – is of particular concern to this government, but the legislation will apply to any foreign government that seeks to obtain that personal information of Albertans without permission. This is a concern nation-wide, and we continue to work with other jurisdictions on a common approach to ensure that the issue is raised at the national level.

4:20

A related amendment would further enhance the security of Albertans' personal information. Currently, the act allows a public body to disclose personal information to comply with a subpoena, warrant, or order of a court. However, it's not clear which court this provision refers to. This amendment clarifies that a public body may disclose personal information only if ordered to do so by a court with jurisdiction in Alberta or in accordance with a rule of a court binding in Alberta. This will make Albertans' personal information less vulnerable to the collection of foreign agencies, Mr. Chair.

Another amendment clarifies the existing limits on access to ministerial briefing materials. The FOIP Act already allows ministers to refuse disclosure of advice to ministers, as was previously stated. This amendment will clarify that briefing books prepared for a new minister and session briefing books prepared for ministers will not be disclosed for five years. Mr. Chair, most of this information is confidential background material on issues that might be raised during the course of the Legislature sitting. You know, we're not going to do the opposition's job for them by sharing the information that might be of interest to them any more than they plan to share their confidential background briefings with this side of the House. The Premier has said: they didn't get this information before these amendments were introduced, and they're not going to get it now.

This is the only change to a time period of limitation, and it only applies to ministerial briefing books. This will ensure that ministers receive candid advice from senior officials. Applicants may request other briefings for a minister and any briefing materials in a briefing book not created solely for one of these purposes. The five-year period was chosen to coincide with the life of a Legislature, which is five years at most.

The third most important amendment limits access to working papers related to an audit by the newly created office of the chief internal auditor of Alberta for 15 years. This will encourage ministers to seek the chief internal auditor's advice on how to improve the quality of government programs. An individual can still make access requests for records about a program or service of a ministry but not for records about the audit. The Auditor General continues to have access to all records of the chief internal auditor.

Another proposal would suspend the processing of an access request while the Information and Privacy Commissioner consults on the application, on how a public body is handling the FOIP request. Mr. Chair, the amendment is purely administrative. Since the commissioner's consultation takes time, typically a decision comes after the legislated 30-day deadline for the response has expired. This amendment would allow the 30-day processing timeline for a FOIP request to stop while the commissioner makes a decision. These requests are rare, reflecting this government's commitment to the openness and transparency of access to information.

Of 3,168 FOIP requests received in '04-05, 94 per cent were completed by government public bodies within 60 days or less. You ask me to repeat that? Ninety-four per cent were completed by the government public bodies within 60 days or less. Mr. Chair, that confirms that Albertans have effective and timely access to information. This represents a significant achievement given that the complexity and number of requests received by the government continue to increase annually. The number of FOIP requests received in '04-05 increased by 27 per cent over the previous year. Preliminary figures suggest that the experience during '05-06 will be similar.

Of the 3,168 FOIP requests received in '04-05, 95 per cent were handled without complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. You ask me again: how many?

Some Hon. Members: How many?

Mr. VanderBurg: Ninety-five per cent were handled without complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This demonstrates the success of Alberta Government Services' efforts to support FOIP staff throughout government public bodies. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has said that he would take a dim view if the number of requests for extensions suddenly spiked.

The commissioner has the ability to order the public body to resume processing of the request immediately.

Mr. Chair, another amendment will allow newly created government boards and committees to be brought under the FOIP Act more quickly.

There are a couple of other amendments, but I think that I've touched upon the most significant proposals in the legislation. As I mentioned earlier, protecting Albertans' personal information entrusted to the government and public bodies under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is a key priority for us in government.

To address another comment made by the opposition last week, costs are not a barrier to access to government information. Since FOIP legislation was first introduced in 1995, we have collected \$535,000 in fees.

Some Hon. Members: How much?

Mr. VanderBurg: Since 1995 we've collected \$535,000 in fees. That's less than \$50,000 in fees in any given year.

An Hon. Member: How much did we spend?

Mr. VanderBurg: You ask: how much did we spend? Well, during the same time we spent \$59 million. That's more than \$5 million a year. Do the math.

An Hon. Member: Spend, spend, spend.

Mr. VanderBurg: Yes. You're right.

Administering the act, Mr. Chair, will continue to be an important function of the Ministry of Government Services. I'm proud to have this opportunity to speak to this important legislation.

With that, I close my remarks and specifically invite the previous Minister of Government Services and the Minister of Justice to make comments on this as well.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A very interesting afternoon indeed. Part of my response would be in response to the hon. Minister of Government Services, but before I start, I want to say that there is a real appetite out there for a stronger democracy. People want clear government and improved transparency and accountability, but unfortunately there is a group of government MLAs that do not want to satisfy this desire and are okay with further famishing the same people who voted them in and entrusted them to represent them fairly and openly.

The minister on a previous occasion, when challenged about a time allocation and invoking closure, said that the time spent already on Bill 20 was enough. I take issue with this. Today he was talking about the opposition not talking about the good things in the bill, and again I beg to differ because at the very beginning, at the outset, we actually stood in this House and commended them on the 50 per cent of this bill that we found very favourable. We said that we are truly in support of the good elements in this bill, but then I remind you, Mr. Chairman, and I remind my hon. colleagues that I also mentioned that packaging bad legislation with good legislation doesn't make the entire package good. I said that it was like sugar-coating rat poison, and I know that this comment was picked up.

I feel that this is intentional, to actually give us the carrot basically, if you will, Mr. Chairman, and tell us, "Here is some good stuff that you asked for and that you support," but then also to show

us the stick, where they actually put us in a situation where you either accept it all or reject it all. I think that we're inclined to reject it now because our amendments keep being defeated in this Assembly.

The minister mentioned that 94 per cent of applications were completed within 60 days. Now, that's a good figure. But he fails to mention: is it 94 per cent of all applications, or is it 94 per cent of the ones that were accepted? It is no secret, Mr. Chairman, that many of the applications are rejected right there at the source, and they don't progress. They don't go forward unless the person challenges the body and goes to the Privacy Commissioner, and indeed sometimes they go to court to seek the information they were after. So 94 per cent of what? Is it 94 per cent of the ones that were allowed, or is it 94 per cent of the total? Even so, of that 94 per cent how much information is blacked out or omitted or severed?

4:30

You know, since I became an MLA I started learning about the language that is used. Sometimes when they reject an application for access to information, they call it nonresponsive. So you're asking for a certain thing, and you get a package of 100 pages, 90 of which are blacked out. They're totally white. There's nothing on them because it is deemed nonresponsive.

Sometimes you're asking for information on a government contract or a grant. You get the information, and two-thirds of it is not there, and they say it's because it's information on a third party. Well, yeah, it is information on a third party. You're giving them money. I need to know why. They say: well, it's nonresponsive, it's third party, and we need to maintain that third party's confidentiality. I find that very objectionable.

I'm going to use a quote that I received, Mr. Chairman. It was a quote by a person by the name of Dag Hammarskjöld. Talking to the government, the quote reads:

You are the lens in the beam. You can only receive, give, and possess the light as the lens does. If you seek yourself, you rob the lens of its transparency. You will know life and be acknowledged by it according to your degree of transparency, your capacity, that is, to vanish as an end, and remain purely as a means.

This is the definition of government. Government is a means for the people. It's a tool for the people to use. It is not the end result, and it is not the target or the goal.

This government, however, has lost that definition and has deviated from it. Now they have turned from a lens that passes light through to a black hole that sucks light out of everything that gets close to it, and things enter to be lost forever or, more accurately, hidden forever. This information that the government is trying to withhold or seal forever is not theirs. It is information that is owned by the public that got them there in the first place.

Now, it was mentioned by members of the third party that this government is hypocritical. They don't borrow a page from their federal cousins. Stephen Harper came, and his flagship bill was the Federal Accountability Act. Some of the elements of that Federal Accountability Act would be very useful in this province, Mr. Chairman, some of which are to end the influence of money in politics, toughen the Lobbyists Registration Act, make qualified government appointments, ban secret donations to political candidates, clean up government polling and advertising, clean up the procurement of government contracts, provide real protection for whistle blowers, ensure truth in budgeting with a parliamentary budget office, strengthen the power of the Auditor General, strengthen the role of the Ethics Commissioner, and strengthen access to information legislation. Novel ideas. What wonderful ideas. But we don't see this government adopting any of them. In fact, they're moving in the opposite direction.

I have to tell you, Mr. Chairman, that democracy is ill in this province. By that, I mean that we have all these areas, and they're not separate or individual – they're all together – where we see a government that is totally disinterested. They're totally not interested in allowing the Legislature to do what it does. They're not interested in answering to the people or answering questions posed to them by the media, and this is only bound to get worse.

Today somebody e-mailed me, and they said: ask your colleagues on the government side what would happen to the statute of limitation if things are sealed away from public scrutiny for five or, indeed, 15 years? What will happen if somebody wants to take this government to court? The statute of limitation in most cases is two years. I don't have a law background, but I know some members of the government side have a law background. How would they answer this question? If this government commits a crime, and some citizen, some Albertan, wants to seek legal remedy, what recourse would they have then, after five or, indeed, 15 years have passed?

What's in those ministerial briefing notes, for example, that the Premier vows to keep secret and off limits to opposition members? He accuses opposition members of wanting to use the "sensitive information" contained in such briefing documents for political gains. Isn't that what he and his cabinet are doing? Isn't it political or partisan that they want to seal public documents and prevent legitimate access to information? Are they not interested in protecting their own seats, Mr. Chairman? That is the question.

Who does this government think it is? Who do the Tories think they are, Mr. Chairman? Are they above the law? Are they above scrutiny? Do they not answer to anyone? That is the question today. Being accountable to the House and to the people is something that we need right now, today, and right here, not many years from now, when governments have changed and ministers have either left or died or moved on or vanished somewhere. They have to give those answers right now and answer to the people.

As I mentioned earlier, the next battle in this province will be waged over democracy and the need to restore openness and transparency. People do remember, and again I emphasize that this is a battle that the Tories have lost.

Now, before I go on any further, Mr. Chairman, I beg leave to introduce yet another amendment to Bill 20. I will first ask the pages to distribute it, and then I'll talk some more.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll refer to this amendment as amendment A5. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung may proceed.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So basically this amendment that I'm moving, amendment A5, proposes that Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, be amended in section 9 as follows: one, in clause (a) in the proposed section 94(2) by striking out "or the Minister"; two, by striking out clause (b) in the same section.

Now, what am I trying to do here, Mr. Chairman? Basically, in light of all the arguments about how this government is becoming more secretive and less transparent – for example, they're restricting access to the ministerial briefing notes, they're restricting access to findings of the chief internal auditor, they are allowing an indefinite period of time for applications to be considered for dismissal, and all that stuff. Here, this section 9 proposes to give a lot of, to some extent, new powers to the minister in charge, and in this case it's the Minister of Government Services.

So the difference between this amendment that is before us, Bill 20, and the existing legislation is adding the words "or the Minister,"

basically allowing the minister and/or the Lieutenant Governor in Council to delete a body designated under the act only if the commissioner is satisfied. So now you have this new tool at the minister's disposal to remove bodies at his or her whim, basically. Yes, the commissioner has to be satisfied, but what are the chances that the commissioner will not be? That is the question here. I think that in light of all this regressive direction that this bill is taking us, the minister does not need nor, to be blunt, deserve to have this extra power at his disposal. This amendment basically offers that balance to take this extra and new power away from the minister.

4:40

Now, there is no justified reason to extend it, and the minister did not provide any adequate explanation why. As a matter of fact, this is a private member's bill, and the sponsor of the bill did not tell us why the minister needs all this extra power. It's really alarming, and we find it very objectionable. On the one hand you give him a lot more discretion, and on the other hand you deny outside groups like the opposition, like members of the public, like members of the media access to the information that he has control over now. It's basically contradictory and hypocritical.

I wanted to speak a little bit on this whole issue of skeletons. People want government to be transparent and open. People expect it. I think that contrary to what this government believes, it's almost like a pressure cooker. You know, Mr. Chairman, you've got one of those pressure cookers, and pressure inside it builds up, but all of them have a little hole or a safety valve or a pressure release vent that allows this pressure, when it reaches a critical point, to vent out and basically prevent it from exploding. I think that people are starting to pay attention, and they're approaching this boiling point if you will. What this government is proposing now is removing or sealing that little hole that vents that pressure out. We are actually approaching a critical moment in this province's history where people are going to revolt, and they will say: "Enough is enough. We don't like the direction this government is going."

In terms of the skeletons, knowing my pharmacy background, Mr. Chairman, I was thinking about bone density scans. I thought that if we were going to perform a bone density scan on this House, and notwithstanding the fact that we have 62 government members versus 21 opposition members – you can factor that into the formula – you would notice that the bone density measurement from the opposition is a lot lighter than the bone density scan from the government side. That doesn't mean that the opposition is prone to developing osteoporosis, but I think what it means is that those skeletons are buried really deep in those closets and in those graves, and it's not funny. It sounds funny, but it isn't really.

Again, I mention that it's also disheartening that even some of the progressive members of the government caucus do not seem to appreciate the seriousness of this issue and do not feel the urge to speak their conscience even though this is, again, technically a private member's bill.

So I don't think there is a lot to lose by removing this extra power from the minister's hands. If the government side found some of the arguments before repetitive or if they didn't want to just vote yes to an opposition amendment, at least this one here is the least contentious, and I would hope that most of them would find it easy to swallow. It's a challenge to them, and it's a challenge to the few of them who are seeking the Tory leadership because they keep bragging about wanting to be more transparent and accountable, and it's a new way of doing things, and "Vote us in because we will clean up the act," and so on and so forth. But it is hypocritical when we introduce amendments in this House that would actually take them that way, and they vote against it.

So this is a challenge not only to the backbenchers from the government but also to those of them that are seeking the Tory leadership and, actually, the couple or three of them that are on the outside now. I'm counting Mr. Preston Manning as well. That would be very interesting.

Back to the Federal Accountability Act. In terms of improving access to information, the federal Tories wanted to implement some reforms to the Access to Information Act. They wanted to "give the Information Commissioner the power to order the release of information." Not the power to sit on his hands indefinitely and not the power to agree to dismiss applications but the power to invoke the release, to force the release of information.

"Expand the coverage of the act to all Crown corporations, Officers of Parliament, foundations and organizations that spend taxpayers' money or perform public functions." Now this is a big net. They're trying to capture everything under this net. This government, however, is trying to eliminate things. One of the tools that they're going to use is for the minister to be able to delete public bodies from the register at his own discretion, and I totally disagree.

"Subject the exclusion of Cabinet confidences to review by the Information Commissioner." We're not talking about briefing notes here; we're talking about people. So people who are giving advice that the Premier finds too sensitive to share: two cabinet ministers will now be forced to co-operate and to release the information. What great ideas.

"Oblige public officials to create the records necessary to document their actions and decisions." Again, this government is doing things verbally now. They're paying people for verbal advice. We seek information from them, and they say: we don't have written records, and sometimes it's verbal communications. They pick up the phone and talk to each other. Employees have been instructed to try to do things verbally, or if they absolutely have to put it on paper, they're very careful about the language they choose. The federal government is trying to tell people to keep a paper trail, which is the right thing to do. This government, however, doesn't think it's interesting or important.

"Provide a general public interest override for all exemptions, so that the public interest is put before the secrecy of the government." This is great. I mean, I wish some of those MPs would pick up the phone and talk to some of those MLAs here and give them a piece of their mind.

"Ensure that disclosure requirements of the Access to Information Act cannot be circumvented by secrecy provisions in other federal acts." So access to information is paramount, not restriction of access as seems to be this government's direction.

Mr. Chairman, I can go on and on. Yes, they'll find some of the arguments repetitive. Well, that's the way it has to be because you don't seem to be listening to us, and you basically don't get it. I think we'll just keep going on and on until some of you see the light.

I'm going to end with a quote again, Mr. Chairman. This one is from Otto von Bismarck, and we all know who Bismarck was. He says: "Laws are like sausages. It's better not to see them being made." This is exactly what we're trying to do here. We're trying to ascertain what's inside that sausage that the government is trying to shove down our throats. This is the least that we can expect, and this is the bare minimum that the public expects from their government.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow on amendment A5.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will try to be brief because I know that the opposition members would like to

speaking further on these issues. I was on the last FOIP review. By the way, FOIP does get reviewed every five years, and there were opposition members on that latest FOIP review. I was very interested in that legislation because what we were trying to do with that legislation from the beginning and again – we’ve reviewed it twice – is to try to get that balance between privacy and access, and I know that that’s sort of generally what we’ve been doing. So when this legislation came through, that was one of the things that I looked at with it.

I do believe, Mr. Chairman, that it is obvious that we have been talking about this too long, or at least the opposition has been talking about it too long. They have stopped looking at the actual legislation and are just referring back to the rhetoric. So instead of actually dealing with what we have in front of us at any one time, they seem to have forgotten entirely what it is that we’re talking about.

I would like to say a little bit about this amendment. This, again, is very typical of what’s been happening here, and that is that they’ve looked at one clause here that says that “the Minister may delete a body designated under subsection,” et cetera, et cetera. Well, the et cetera, et cetera has all the controls in it. Okay? That’s the part that says that the body can only be deleted if it

(i) has been discontinued or no longer exists.

I mean, there are really strong controls put on this whole thing.

(ii) has been amalgamated with another body, and use of the name under which it was designated has been discontinued.

I mean, this stuff is really clear and simple. There is no need to remove the words “or the Minister” because “or the Minister” is controlled not only by all of these clauses but also by the commissioner.

4:50

I would also like to say a few words about the briefing books. There’s been all this concern, and it was actually stated flat out: oh, well, you could take another document and slip it into the briefing book, and because it would be put in the briefing book, we wouldn’t be able to see it. Yet if you actually read the legislation before us, which I encourage the opposition to please do, under (4) it says that these are the rights of access, and it does not extend

- (a) to a record created solely for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council in respect of assuming responsibility for a ministry, or
- (b) to a record created solely for the purpose of briefing a member of the Executive Council in preparation for a sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

So could you please try to remember what it is we are talking about and that we are in committee and that we are supposed to be dealing with the actual legislation rather than rhetoric that has been said before and spinned and spinned until you have pretty well forgotten what this bill is all about?

The Chair: Hon. member, could you keep your comments pertaining to the amendment? You were talking about the briefing book, and I don’t see that in here.

Ms DeLong: Oh, sorry. Yes, I was referring to the actual clauses that were suggested in the amendment, but I do also want to mention the circular arguments that I’ve heard today. When you say that the Privacy Commissioner has looked at this bill and said that it simply clarifies the situation that is already there – in other words, this doesn’t change it – then you can’t say at the same time that this legislation makes things more secretive. Sorry, it just does not follow. I really would appreciate in this House if people would try to be logical in their thoughts every now and again.

Those are my comments, but again I’ve got to say that in terms of

this possible amendment, you have to read the whole clause. You can’t just take one word out and think that that’s what they’re trying to express here. It isn’t: the minister decides this. The minister with the commissioner and guided by this, this, this, and this, four specific things – okay? – can remove a company from the list. So please read the whole legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton–Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Minister of Justice on amendment A5.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. It’s a pleasure to get an opportunity to speak on amendment A5. Listening to the comments from the hon. Member for Calgary–Bow, I too served on this committee. In the summer of 2004, when I introduced a solution to the problems surrounding the PATRIOT Act, the government members on that committee wanted no part of that. We’ve since had ample opportunity to deal with the issue of the PATRIOT Act and our Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This government at the time had their heads in the sand, and they did nothing and now throw the PATRIOT Act into this legislation when you are trying to make everyone comply to bad legislation.

Now, the Member for Edmonton–McClung with amendment A5 is trying to do some repair work to this very, very bad bill. This bill is all about the protection of an old, tired government. It has nothing to do with freedom of information. It is a bill to hide the many skeletons of this government.

What will A5 do? Again, it’s a modest attempt at a repair job, but when you look at this and you look at the briefing notes, how this would affect the briefing notes, the hon. Government Services minister is inaccurate, to say the least, when he states that briefing notes now are exempt. I received briefing notes in an access to information request in regard to Enron, and I did receive notes that the minister had access to. The hon. Minister of Government Services may be very interested to know that the Sundance B power purchase arrangements are among some of the lowest cost power purchase arrangements with all-in costs of less than 2.5 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity. Deregulation and the cost of electricity is a big issue in his constituency. Mr. Chairman, we would not receive this information now if this legislation was to pass without dealing with amendment A5. Amendment A5 will at least improve it, but it will not repair it to the extent that I could support it. No way.

We look at the entire history of Enron and their involvement with this provincial government, and the hon. government members put their heads down, and they work at their keyboards, or they themselves read their own briefing notes.

Chair’s Ruling Relevance

The Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

The Chair: We’re speaking on amendment A5, and there’s more to speaking on the amendment than just mentioning it by title every so often.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

The Chair: Comments should be about the amendment, not just mentioning it by title while you’re speaking about something else.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I can't hear you with the conversation in the background.

The Chair: Comments should be restricted to the amendment, not just talking about something else and then referring to the amendment by title occasionally. We're debating the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Okay. Certainly. Thank you for that guidance, Mr. Chairman. It's interesting to note that the Minister of Energy is the loudest one over there when we're talking about electricity prices and Enron's involvement with this government.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Now, in regard to A5 we look at what's being attempted here by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, and we look at the information that he's trying to administer and whether it would be subject to another act of Alberta or of Canada that provides for access to information or protection of privacy or, in this case, both.

Certainly, when we look at this and we look at the information that's provided in the briefing notes or the information that may or may not be provided in an internal audit, provided by our own version of the CIA, the chief internal auditor, what information may be excluded? What information may be included? What information may be hidden from public view? We all know the importance that this government is now putting on this office of the chief internal auditor.

Some Hon. Members: Lots.

Mr. MacDonald: A lot. You bet.

I would say that the office of the chief internal auditor should be eliminated and more resources and more scope, more authority be given to our Auditor General.

Now, it's not so long since we talked in this Assembly, Mr. Chairman, about the role of the chief internal auditor and some of the individuals that are on it and the fact that some time ago a group of individuals, including one Gary Campbell – I don't know if it's the same Gary Campbell that is involved in the Internal Audit Committee or not – speculated on land. They purchased a property for around \$400,000. Six or seven years later, even though all of it was not designated as land needed for the ring road, this government paid \$6.2 million for it, and then these individuals counted their money, their significant profit. What did the government do? Well, as time went by – almost 20 years went by – they sold that land at a significant loss to the taxpayers. Land that they paid \$6.2 million for they sold to Lehigh Inland Cement for \$1.8 million. Now, will the chief internal auditor look at that?

5:00

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. MacDonald: This is quite relevant. I'm sorry, hon. member, but this has a lot to do with amendment A5 because we will not see that information.

If the chief internal auditor was to audit this deal, the same party that was involved in the money, in the profit is now not only sitting on the Internal Audit Committee but sitting on the fundraising committee, as I understand it, for the Progressive Conservative Party. That's not a family compact; that's a Conservative compact. That's what that is. That's symptomatic of a government that has been in power too long, 35 going on 36 years. Now you need this

Bill 20 to work as a simple form of political protection because you don't want the public to know.

Chair's Ruling Relevance

The Chair: Hon. member, I've been reading amendment A5, that pertains to section 94 and to section 9 both by deleting the word "minister" and section (b), by deleting clause (b). I see nothing in there that refers to the auditor. If you want to restrict your comments to the amendment, that would be very, very helpful.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly, when we look at (2)(a)(iv), this information would be subject to another act. I would be referencing the government services act, which is used to give the chief internal audit office autonomy and authority through Executive Council. Now, we need to have a good look at this. I know that that's a sensitive topic for government members, but this is the reality. If we don't remove this section through this amendment, audits can be just swept under the carpet with this section.

Mr. Lund: You're so far off base.

Mr. MacDonald: Hon. member, I am not far off base. It is this government that is way, way off base with this entire legislation. No, I'm sorry. I cannot accept that.

Let's have a look at the Energy department and how this legislation and this amendment will affect the Energy department. It certainly will, and I know that government members are not going to want to hear about this. Let's say, Mr. Chairman, that we have a request this time on TransAlta Corporation and their involvement with electricity deregulation. Now, we know that we have a leadership race going on there, and one of the leading candidates was a former executive of TransAlta after he left this House. The minister says: oh, no, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has made an application for the same information on TransAlta that we received on Enron. But, again, TransAlta's role in all of this may be sensitive to the leadership aspirations of some politicians, some former members of this House, some current members of this House who may be supporting that candidate. I don't know. I don't know what kind of support that candidate has. I know it's a race between that candidate and Preston Manning, and I would have to put my money on Preston Manning.

Anyway, the minister wants to have a look at this FOIP request that is initiated by this member. Now, I can tell all members of this Assembly that I got about 1,400 pages on Enron. There were over 5,000 pages on Enron. I'm sure there would be boxes and boxes of documents on TransAlta's involvement with electricity deregulation because certainly they've come out of this deal with a very solid bottom line.

Mr. Chairman, that's an example of why we have to support the hon. member's amendment A5: because the minister has no right to even toy with any part of the application. I know that with the legislation now they certainly can. There are many, many different exemptions that can be used, and that should be good enough. Whether it's section 24 or whatever section they want to use, there are enough loopholes in the legislation already.

Now, in conclusion, I would like to urge all members to support amendment A5.

Mr. Chairman, I would also request to seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 32(2), whereby should a division be triggered this afternoon, we would shorten the duration of time from 10

minutes to just two minutes. There are many people on both sides of the House who have expressed an interest in not only debating this amendment but perhaps other amendments or perhaps the bill itself. It is quite odd that in a democracy we would put a time limit on free speech, but this is exactly what we've done with these closure motions. I must say, in conclusion, that I'm very, very disappointed in the government at this time.

Chair's Ruling Relevance

The Chair: Before I recognize the Minister of Justice to rise on A5, I'd like to remind everyone of Standing Order 23, which says:

- (b) speaks to matters other than
 - (i) the question under discussion, or . . .
- (c) persists in needless repetition.

If we could keep our comments on the subject of the amendment if you wish to speak to the amendment. Otherwise, maybe keep your comments until we get back to the bill.

Debate Continued

The Chair: I suppose the Minister of Justice wants to speak on the amendment. The Minister of Justice, followed by the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do appreciate the admonition with respect to relevance, but I am hoping that it's as a result of what has just transpired as opposed to what you anticipate to come in the next few minutes.

I want to start out by, of course, commenting on amendment A5 to Bill 20.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister. I apologize. On the motion by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for unanimous consent for shortening the division bells, is there anyone opposed to that?

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung was commenting on a lot of different things, and I think that the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow was absolutely correct when she said that it's important that when one looks at the amendment, they have to read the section being amended in order to make accurate and relevant comments with respect to the amendment. I know that the hon. Government House Leader, in making some comment regarding the necessity for time allocation earlier today, talked in terms of repetition and redundancy and was charitable in not mentioning irrelevance, which certainly could have been mentioned then and now.

5:10

What I want to do, Mr. Chairman, essentially is go through the purpose of the section of the amendment that is proposed because it is important to recognize that the hon. member who put forward amendment A5 ignored salient points in the section, and for the people who, I'm sure, will be reading the record at a later date, it would be unfair, in fact it would be unfortunate if they read the hon. member's speech and were left with the impression that he was accurate in his description of what this particular section does as amended.

As the Member for Calgary-Bow accurately indicated, this is a

situation where any deletion that is proposed either by the Lieutenant Governor in Council or the minister can occur only if the commissioner is satisfied that the deletion "is not contrary to the public interest." I believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung completely missed that particular point.

Deleting a body from the list does not necessarily mean that it is no longer under the FOIP Act. If the body operates as part of a ministry or as part of a local public body, that act still applies. A body can only be deleted from the list if all of the conditions outlined in this particular section apply. They are that the government of Alberta does not appoint a majority of members to the body, that the government of Alberta does not provide most of the funding, that the government of Alberta is not the controlling shareholder, or that one of these circumstances exist: (1) the body has been discontinued; (2) the body has been amalgamated; (3) the body is a local public body, not a government public body; and (4) there is a more appropriate act that should apply to the body, for example the Personal Information Protection Act or the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.

Also, Mr. Chairman, the minister will be able to delete public bodies from the list under the same conditions in between updates of the Lieutenant Governor in Council regulation.

Those are the circumstances of this particular provision of the bill. The comments of the proponent of amendment A5 I think need to be read in light of the reality of the provision.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on amendment A5.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, but I wanted to speak on Bill 20, not on the amendment.

The Chair: Okay.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation on the amendment.

Mr. Lund: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I don't have a lot more to add because the Member for Calgary-Bow and the Attorney General just made the comments that I wanted to have on the record: the fact that some members have been very selective in what they've read and how they interpret what is in the bill, what is the law, and what exactly the amendment is doing.

To suggest that there's going to be a wholesale exodus of public bodies and/or bodies that would fall under the act if we don't amend the section as was proposed in amendment A5 – the fact is that that is just not going to happen. There are all of these conditions that have to be met. The commissioner has to approve it. Mr. Chairman, the commissioner is not an employee of the government; it's of this Legislature. As far as having influence on the commissioner, that would be totally inappropriate, and that is not something that happens. In many cases when people have taken a decision to the commissioner, the commissioner has overruled the head of the public body. That's why the commissioner is totally independent, and that's the way it has to stay. It says that the commissioner has to agree. I don't know what all the fuss is about because the commissioner is the person who has to agree. Quite frankly, why would you want to have a body that has been discontinued? Why would you want to have them still listed? Why would you want to have a body that's covered more appropriately by some other section or some other identity?

For example, we had a corporate body that was in fact looking at gaming. It was really housed at the University of Alberta. Why would we have that identity as opposed to under the secondary

institution that it was housed at? So the information that anybody wanted to get from it, they go through that process. They don't go through this process.

I think there's been a whole bunch of to-do for nothing with this amendment, and I would highly recommend that we do not support it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: Yes and I will be brief. I'm not sure that the word "selective" is properly being used. What we're trying to do here is take the words "or the Minister" out because I'm not sure that on this side of the House we totally understand the rationale of why the minister was being put in in the first place. So, in fact, what we're trying to do is keep it at the status quo.

With that, I'll sit down.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be brief speaking to amendment A5. A5 deals with one of the nine different amendments this bill attempts to make in the existing piece of legislation. It's the last of the nine amendments proposed here.

Looking at the text on both sides dealing with that section, it's right, as the Member for Lethbridge-East has indicated, that the change from the language of the legislation as it presently exists to the one that's being proposed in the amendment is the addition of "the Minister" in the language. The Lieutenant Governor in Council already has that right. Now that right is being given to the minister as well.

That I think is an important point. No satisfactory explanation has been given here as to why this double check, another check where the ministry has, in fact, to justify to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that some organizations should be deleted and should now be dropped from the act. It is true in both cases. The commissioner's satisfaction that it is not contrary to the public interest, that condition remains the same in both pieces of the legislation, the existing legislation and the amendment proposed. So I don't think that should be used. That is not therefore a justifiable explanation for why the minister now is given the same authority as the Lieutenant Governor in Council already has. I think it should be obligatory for the minister to go to the Lieutenant Governor in Council to seek endorsement of whatever he or she proposes to delete.

The other change that the amendment proposes is adding in section 94(2)(a)(iii) and (iv). That changes the situation. The first two subs, (i) and (ii), are exactly the same as in the existing legislation. So there are some changes. Some additional entities have been added to the list which can be deleted while they exist. Now, they haven't become nonexistent. These entities do in fact exist and operate, and the minister is being given the authority to delete them from the obligations that the existing piece of legislation imposes on the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Given that, I think the proposed amendment, Mr. Chairman, is entirely appropriate. It deserves the support of the House. I certainly support it.

5:20

The last point I want to make, Mr. Chairman, has to do with the provision which is (2)(a)(iv), that "would more appropriately be subject to another Act of Alberta or Canada that provides for access to information and protection of privacy or both." It's a matter of which piece of legislation should take precedence. That's the real issue here.

I think that any law on freedom of information should require that other legislation be interpreted as far as possible in a manner consistent with the provisions of the freedom of information legislation. Only where that's not possible should other legislation dealing with publicly held information be subject to the principles underlying the freedom of information legislation. So the regime of exceptions to the freedom of information legislation should be comprehensive and other laws should not be permitted to extend it. That's the key here. In particular, secrecy laws should not make it illegal for officials to divulge information which they are required to disclose under the freedom of information laws.

Mr. Chairman, I think amendment A5 speaks to the very fundamental principles underlying any good, sound piece of legislation which deals with freedom of information. I fail to understand why there is a whole series of objections raised from the government side to this amendment by making reference to those elements that already exist in the other piece of legislation that's in existence. So unless some relevant new information is provided as to why the minister should now have the same powers as the Lieutenant Governor in Council heretofore has, this amendment should stand and should be supported by all members of this House. I certainly do.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe the Member for Edmonton-McClung may have had very good intentions in putting amendment A5 forward; however, I believe that he may not have fully comprehended the purpose of this section.

The FOIP Act applies to public bodies, and under this section a body can only be removed if the commissioner is satisfied that deleting it is not contrary to the public interest. Deleting this body from the list does not necessarily mean that it's no longer under the FOIP Act. If the body operates as part of a ministry or as part of a local public body, the FOIP Act will still then apply.

A body can be deleted from the list if all of the following apply – the government of Alberta does not appoint a majority of members to the body, the government of Alberta does not provide most of the funding, and the government of Alberta is not the controlling shareholder – or if one of these circumstances apply, and I think that these are important circumstances: the body has been discontinued.

I can't understand why anybody would argue about a minister or the Lieutenant Governor in Council deleting a body from the list if it has been discontinued or if the body has amalgamated – so in other words, instead of having it listed twice, it will only be listed once under the new amalgamation – or if the body is a local public body and not a government public body. So a local body. There is a more appropriate act that should apply to these bodies, and that's the PIPA act, the Personal Information Protection Act, or the PIPEDA act, which is the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act. So it could apply under both of those acts.

Also, the minister will be able to delete bodies from the list under the same conditions in between updates of the list of the Lieutenant Governor in Council regulation.

Because I think that's pretty straightforward and I think that those are very good reasons for deleting a body from the list, I don't think that amendment A5 is appropriate.

The Chair: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, promise to be brief to stand and conclude debate on amendment A5, but I have to note

two things. One, earlier this afternoon this government and this House passed a motion to invoke closure and bring a time limit on debate on Bill 20. If they had this much to say about Bill 20, why did they invoke closure? They could have actually extended the debate, allowed the debate to progress on its own and as per the usual and customary rules of this House. Now we see at least three or four members from the government side, two of which are cabinet ministers, standing up and speaking on this amendment, which is a good thing. It's actually a positive and welcome change from the typical routine where they just vote us down every time without debating, but if they had so much to say on Bill 20 and if they feel so strongly that it should progress the way it's proposed, then maybe they shouldn't have invoked time closure and time allocation.

I'm going to end, Mr. Chairman, with a quote again, so this will be my third quote for this afternoon. This one comes from George Washington. "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force; like fire, a troublesome servant and a fearful master. Never for a moment should it be left to irresponsible action." I think that giving more powers to a minister and to his close entourage of advisers is not the right way to go, and that is why I think amendment A5 should be accepted by this House.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: On the bill the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's quite a challenge to be able to be heard, and I guess that I, too, would like to start off my comments that I'm disappointed that time allocation has been moved on this with Motion 19. My question to the minister on that would be that perhaps this government has another solution for the democratic process because what I understand is that there are only

two ways that a government can and should be stopped. The one is by the opposition being able to filibuster and to speak on something that is not understood by the people and, according to this government, not understood by the opposition. Perhaps, then, the debate should go on.

This afternoon Calgary-Bow, the Minister of Justice, and the hon. Member for Red Deer-North all put forth some good points that we could listen to, which is to me what the debate should be about in this House, that we want to study it, the science of good government, and be able to come to a solution. But we haven't been able to do that, Mr. Chairman, so why would one want to invoke closure on such an important issue?

I'd also like to make mention that because the debate hasn't been centred around the protection of privacy information, the government should realize – and it's been stated many times, and I'll state it again – that we understand that part, and we're very much in favour of protecting the information of private people in this county. But we have to also realize that we're living in a time when the government is probing more and more into the private lives of individuals in the province and in the country, and that's very concerning because that information can and probably is being used against many citizens in the province. So we're very much in favour on that side of the FOIP legislation, and that isn't what this debate has been going on about. It's about the freedom of information for the people of Alberta.

I can't help but think – and I believe I mentioned this the other day – that we had a Prime Minister who said that Canadians weren't smart enough to understand the issues and to trust us and not worry about it, and that was the demise of the Progressive Conservative Party federally down to two seats. I think that what we have happening here is that we have higher walls being built. They become thicker walls . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) the committee stands recessed until 8 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 16, 2006** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 06/05/16
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 20 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: The committee has been discussing Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner still has 17 minutes.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Blues aren't back, so I don't know where I finished. Maybe I'll be a little bit repetitive here, and I apologize for being redundant.

We were talking, though, about a castle and about building the walls higher, the walls thicker, the moat deeper, and more water. I think the problem that they're looking at, Mr. Chairman, is that they don't realize that this castle that they're building doesn't include all Albertans though I believe they truly think that it is protecting all Albertans. So as they build their castle, there are more and more that feel outside, and they can't get through. They're being pushed away and are wondering: "What kind of government is this? They don't even let me inside the castle, and the walls are too high to see over." They definitely feel pushed to the outside.

The Chair: Hon. members, I know that the committee is a less formal part of the process, but we still need to keep our side conversations down so that we can hear what the speaker is saying. Right now the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has the floor.

Mr. Hinman: As I started out, what I was looking at, Mr. Chairman, was the fact that the House leader explained about democracy and the importance of it. I guess I have to wonder: if we can't filibuster in here and we don't have recall, how could the people ever possibly stop a government from doing something that they don't go along with? They seem to have a divine right to rule for four or five years and then can never be stopped. This isn't in the interest of the people.

But what I find really interesting and curious about this: though this government says that recall is wrong, I definitely remember that in November 2004 the people gave a mandate to the Premier, who was very much up front and open in saying: I'll be here for three-plus years before I step down. Yet he's been recalled by his own elite members of his party and turfed and told to leave. If you don't believe in recall, why do they allow their own leader to be attacked? So there are some questions that need to be answered there for the people of Alberta because they voted him in with a three-year mandate, yet he's not going to be able to complete what he promised to the people of Alberta because of his own members.

You have to ask the questions, you know, on private corporation versus a public corporation, and what openness should be there. We understand very well the difference in what's allowed. The House leader, I believe, was the one who spoke and said that we didn't understand and that they've got to be repetitive and go over and over it. I guess I just want to point out to the House leader – and I don't

know whether the hon. member was lazy or whether the reporter was lazy – that we have almost the identical, the same words talking about:

The subtler problem is that the legislation could give the government the power to append other important documents to the formal briefing notes – and by doing so, put them off limits, too. In other words, a ministerial assistant could potentially take an embarrassing internal memo or departmental report, put it into the same binder with the briefing notes as an appendix and suddenly make it a classified document.

So I think that not only do you need to say to the members of this opposition that we don't understand. I think it's more important that you get out and tell Albertans because I think a lot more Albertans read the *Edmonton Journal* than they do *Hansard*. It's not a secret that's inside this House and what's going on there. That's what's being reported in the papers, and they would do well to follow that.

Paula Simons comes forward with some more interesting points that I'd like to read into *Hansard*.

Internal financial problems the government doesn't want us to know about? They'll be top secret until it's far too late to raise the alarm or fix the problem.

So why should you care?

After all, you're probably not an investigative journalist . . .

An Hon. Member: Is this on the amendment?

Mr. Hinman: We're long past the amendment. You should keep up on things.

. . . just an ordinary citizen. The May sun is shining, the Oilers are leading the Sharks three games to two. Perhaps you'd prefer the government get on with doing its job efficiently, without nosy reporters poking into private matters that don't concern them.

Except that everything our government does is a public matter – and your direct personal concern.

We don't work for Ralph Klein and his crew. They work for us. Every cabinet minister is your . . .

I apologize. I'm sorry. I was reading the news clipping. I'll retract that.

We don't work for [the Premier] and his crew. They work for us. Every cabinet minister is your employee. So is every civil servant. We hire them with our votes . . .

The Chair: Hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I don't mind him making a speech per se, but *Beauchesne* is very clear in cautioning members from quoting extensively from public documents. So perhaps we could just be reminded of that and ask the member to stop and carry on with the rest of his comments.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader is absolutely right, and I was on the verge of bringing that to your attention. So if you would please carry on.

Mr. Hinman: I thank the hon. Government House Leader and the chair for reminding me of that. I didn't think it was long. I thought it was short. So I apologize. I wasn't trying to just use up time. I would highly encourage the government members to read the article. It puts out some very good points.

The secrecy that goes on isn't good. I talked earlier about a past Prime Minister who was saying that the electorate wasn't smart enough to understand. This is very much the same problem. We've tried to reform health care, and I think everybody in this House

agrees on that, that we need to reform it, but secrecy hasn't worked, and it's been brought forward three times. What are the briefing notes that go in there?

I would put forth to this government that they might be amazed if those briefing notes and those opinions were there and we were to educate the electorate rather than smothering them with smoke and trying to flash them with fancy mirrors so that they can't see it. That's what good government is: it's leading the people. I don't believe at all that it's an incompetent government that, after it puts out its ideas and listens to the people, retracts them and says: gee, we've got to rethink which pathway we're going down here. The Premier has been very good, when he's floated ideas in the past and then found them unpopular, at retracting them and going back on it.

We're very much in a position where it seems like we're in a small town and there's only one restaurant, and that restaurant says, "Everybody has got to come and eat what I'm going to feed them." They're not even allowed to know what's on the menu. They say, "Oh, we wouldn't feed you anything that isn't for your good health," not realizing that there might be allergies and things, and saying, "No, what we have is good."

The people will reject this. It is a bad thing if Bill 20 passes. They're not going to be pleased with it. As they push forward, it will be to their detriment after the detriment of Albertans, unfortunately. [interjection] Are you whining or someone else? I'm not sure.

Mr. Chairman, there are many aspects of Bill 20 that have been brought up that Albertans are upset with, that opposition members are upset with. I even had one person from this House talk to me that isn't in opposition, and he said: "Maybe what we need to do is amend the name. It should be perhaps the respect the dead and protect the skeletons bill. That would maybe be more appropriate."

Graham Thomson in his article recently said that the best thing to happen would be for the House to recess tonight. [interjections] I'm not reading anything. You guys, pay attention. It's unbelievable. Moaning and moaning. You'd think you were a Canadian Tire advertisement as soon as someone says something they don't agree with.

The Chair: Hon. member, could you please direct your comments through the chair?

Mr. Hinman: I'd appreciate that, Mr. Chair. I can't even hear myself think. There's so much moaning and nah, nah, nah that I thought it was a Canadian Tire advertisement. They're still continuing.

Anyway, Graham Thomson, who says that he's always complained how short the House has sat, is now saying that the best thing that could happen would be to shoot the old nag before she reaches the finish line on Thursday. I'd have to agree. It would be to the benefit of Albertans.

An Hon. Member: Is this on the amendment?

Mr. Hinman: Where has everybody been, Mr. Chairman? Maybe you need to tell them that we're on Bill 20 and that they've invoked time allotment. [interjections]

Chair's Ruling Decorum

The Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has the floor, and we are speaking on Bill 20. The amendment was dealt with before recessing at 5:27, so we are now on the

bill, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006. If the member would please continue and if the rest of the Assembly would please allow him to do so, we may make some progress.

Hon. member, please proceed.

8:10

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We only need to look at the voter turnout to see how it went down the last time. It's been brought up many times that actually the 21 opposition members have more votes than the government members, but we realize it's 21 to 62.

We only have to look at the latest report that ranks different professions and how they're trusted, and we realize that being a politician is ranked at the bottom of some 20, 29 things. There's a reason for that, Mr. Chairman. It's because of past behaviour, but we could change that with future behaviour and raise the standards. One has to wonder if that's going to change. It doesn't make one exactly excited to say that you're an elected representative when one reads and thinks of such thoughts when you talk about government.

The Chair: Hon member, we're speaking about Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, not electoral reform.

Mr. Hinman: I realize that, Mr. Chairman, and I thought that the two were directly related. When the secrecy is there so much, it's a problem. But I will try and get back more on track then.

The bill brings up many points that are good, and it does protect the privacy of individuals. No one in this House has been arguing or debating that. The debate has gone on and continues to go on about the things that can be buried for five or 15 years, and they seem to miss that point. That's what we've been trying to bring up. There were some excellent points brought up by the Member for Calgary-Bow and other members, and that's the type of debate that we need to be able to push through and to understand this thing. But to bring in the time allotment has not been helpful to this House, and it's certainly not helpful to the democratic process.

Basically, to wrap it up, Mr. Chairman, the public perception, the opposition perception is very much that this is about secrecy. This is not a bill that's in the interest of people. The people have no way of stopping this bill. The opposition now is left with no way of stopping this bill because of the time allocation that's been given to that. It's wrong.

But I will comment on the \$59 million that the hon. minister says has been spent on this and the \$550,000 collected. Yes, money is very much a major factor in this, but I don't know that it's a bad factor. We don't want to have to spend \$120 million, but on the other side, when something is reasonable – I spoke with one reporter who said that it cost him over \$3,000 to access the information, to get to it. It's very difficult to get to those things, but I don't know that that's totally bad.

Mr. Herard: What did he get for his 3,000 bucks?

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Chairman, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education wants to know what he got for the \$3,000. I'll refer to him later, maybe this evening, if he wants to talk on that subject. But, yeah, he got some interesting things, and there's lots more there.

As was mentioned earlier, maybe we need to amend it to respect

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 38
Livestock Identification and Commerce Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 38, the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act.

It's an important bill to the livestock industry, Mr. Speaker. It does consolidate and revise three existing acts. I'd just like to clarify a few things before we move forward. There seems to be some confusion regarding the regulation of livestock products. I'd like to clarify that the regulations addressing eggs, honey, and poultry that exist today under the Livestock and Livestock Products Act will continue under that act.

Returning to the subject of Bill 38, it will better address the regulatory requirements relating to commercial transactions of the livestock industry. This is an industry that has changed substantially over the past few decades, and we do need to ensure that the legislation reflects our modern realities. The bill clarifies that the purpose of a livestock inspection is to confirm that the person possessing the livestock is the owner or the owner's agent and that the sale proceeds are flowing to the correct party.

Bill 38 sets out a mandatory requirement that sellers disclose security interests in the livestock they are selling. This provision supports the statutory bar to conversion actions that protect buyers who follow the requirements of the act, pay in accordance with the manifest, and otherwise engage in bona fide transactions.

In the end what we've designed is legislation that will facilitate fair commerce, protect personal property, and promote the integrity of marketing within the livestock industry. These are important policy goals that Bill 38 certainly achieves. No single group, be it lenders or producers, has achieved their utopia under this, but Bill 38 is a compromise that respects the goals of a diverse industry. It's a balanced bill which I believe will be beneficial to everyone in the livestock industry.

Mr. Speaker, I know that many have stood in this House and spoken about their concerns on this bill but have also expressed their support to see it pass. I appreciate the support that has been received from many members in this House and anticipate their support at third reading. So I'm very pleased to move this bill at third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to speak on Bill 38, the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act. The Canadian Bankers Association has expressed an objection to section 18, statutory bar to conversion, and section 18(3), to extend protection to agents of the seller, of Bill 38.

The new section 18, statutory bar to conversion, protects cattle buyers by limiting the ability of creditors to collect from the current owner; that is, pay twice for the cattle. In a typical sale cattle are trucked to a large packer who purchases 40 truckloads of cattle a day. Payment is due within two days, so the buyer is typically unable to check for liens. A good analogy is buying and selling used cars. Following the car analogy, the buyer checks for liens before purchase. This cannot be done with cattle as there is no mechanism to search cattle by serial number, that is VIN. The cattle industry relies extensively on lending and borrowing.

The Canadian Bankers Association concerns are this. The lending institutions currently have the ability to collect monies owed by the seller from the future owner of the cattle. Lending institutions will lose this ability in Bill 38. This change may allow auction marts to not take the task of evaluating the risk as seriously. The agent for a seller or buyer, such as an auction mart, is well positioned to evaluate title or security interests in cattle.

Mr. Speaker, for example, they can get to know their regular clients and only search or assess security risks from unknown clients. The banks have not used their ability to sue future owners of the cattle for lost funds; however, they argue that the ability to sue provides a safety valve which keeps buyers and agents conducting due diligence in checking for security interests.

These changes will have two effects, Mr. Speaker. First, these changes could effectively stop farmers from getting credit for livestock as banks will not be able to collect on their collateral. Two, this will increase the cost of borrowing for farmers as it increases the risk associated with lending money to farmers or ranchers.

The bankers propose two solutions. First, the bankers propose repealing section 18(3) and substituting a section that would require auction marts to perform due diligence in checking for security interests. Two, when an auction mart is the financier of cattle, the auction mart and seller should be considered associated or not at arm's length. See section 1, definitions. As such, the statutory bar to conversion would not apply.

The statutory bar to conversion provides protection to buyers who purchase large numbers of cattle, mainly the big three meat-packing plants. They argue that they need this protection because it is not feasible to check every animal.

My questions are to the minister. How does the minister plan to resolve the legitimate concerns of the Canadian Bankers Association? Does he have any intention to amend the bill to include these concerns? Why were these concerns not addressed prior to bringing Bill 38 to the Assembly?

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, might I ask consideration of the hon. members for unanimous consent to doff our jackets for the long line of third readings that we have tonight due to the wonderful Alberta day that's sharing its warmth in here with us?

The Deputy Speaker: There has been a ruling on this on the past. I will accept the motion. Are there any opposed? That's apparently carried. So we will allow the jackets to be removed on this very hot evening.

Hon. members, does anyone else wish to participate in the debate?

The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to close debate.

8:30

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie basically repeated the same concerns and pretty much the same speech as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brought forward.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, this act will continue the major security that banks have under the Canadian Bank Act. Indeed, I'm a little surprised that the Liberals are supporting the interests of the bankers here and not the industry, which is who we're supporting. I am surprised that they've taken the side of the big banks.

To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, we do not do amendments in third reading. Amendments are done in Committee of the Whole, as I'm sure the hon. Speaker could probably let you know about. It's certainly something that by now we should all know in this House. So, no, I will not be introducing any amendments in third reading.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the industry, after three years of consultation, has been looking at compromises with not only the banking industry. As an ex-banker I understand the banking industry. I understand the security that they take in agriculture. I believe that this bill is a very good compromise and will serve our industry very well. I ask all hon. members to support it.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a third time]

Bill 34

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to move third reading of Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address a few specific concerns raised during the Committee of the Whole debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford asked for an elaboration on the reimbursement of the Crown charges and to provide an example of when this would apply.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, a private member cannot move a money bill on behalf of a minister. It has to be moved by a minister.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance to move third reading of Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Does the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon wish to speak on the motion?

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies for my lapse of memory.

Mr. Speaker, again referring to the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, section 12.1 provides that where one party reimburses another under the terms of a contract for Crown royalties paid, the reimbursing party is trusted as having incurred the royalties directly for income tax purposes. These arrangements are common in the oil and gas sector.

This member also questioned why Alberta is not paralleling the federal transition period for resource tax changes. The federal government, Mr. Speaker, is phasing out the resource allowance and returning to royalty deductibility over a four-year period from 2003 to 2006. Alberta reviewed its royalty tax policy in 2003 and decided not to parallel the federal phase-out to ensure that no Alberta taxpayers were adversely affected during the transition. As the federal government revises its Income Tax Act to implement the phase-out, Alberta has to ensure that the Alberta Corporate Tax Act does not parallel that transition. Effective January 1, 2007, the resource allowance is eliminated for both federal and Alberta purposes, and royalties are then fully deductible.

This member also queried the treatment of income versus mutual

fund trusts in section 7. Mr. Speaker, this provision parallels federal rules that describe how corporations must calculate their income when they receive a distribution from a mutual fund trust.

The member also asked if the minister or ministry has ever used the power to waive penalties or interest owing allowed under section 10, and if so, the member asked for a list to be made public. Since the time that the provision came into force, Mr. Speaker – and that was 1992 – interest and/or penalties have been waived for corporations which cannot comply with the Alberta Corporate Tax Act due to extraordinary circumstances. Tax and revenue administration, Alberta Corporate Tax Act, information circular CT-5R3 provides information on what are considered as extraordinary circumstances and how corporations apply for the waiver. The information circular has been made available to the public since 1992, when this provision came into force. In terms of providing a list, as the information requested is tax information specific to particular corporations, in accordance with section 77 of the Alberta Corporate Tax Act we must keep this information confidential.

Finally, the member questioned why section 106 is being substituted. This section provides the definition of the Alberta crown royalties paid by an individual that qualifies for the Alberta royalty credit, the parallel program to the Alberta royalty tax credit for corporations. In fact, you will notice that the same amendment is being made in section 26 of the act, which provides rules for the Alberta royalty tax credit program. These are technical amendments to the act itself, Mr. Speaker, to clarify its interpretation rather than a policy change.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that these responses clarify the concerns raised by the hon. member.

To review, Bill 34 will reduce the corporate income tax rate to 10 per cent from 11.5 per cent. This reduction will save Alberta businesses \$265 million in 2006-07. This reduction is necessary, Mr. Speaker, to maintain Alberta's competitive advantage as Alberta is not just competing within Canada with other provinces but in a much larger global marketplace. Enhancing the Alberta tax advantage for business helps attract investment and encourages entrepreneurship, meaning that Albertans will have more jobs and stronger communities and a better quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this Legislature to give their support to Bill 34. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006, should be better titled the Alberta corporate gift. We've said this before, and we'll say it again: in an overheated economy, when we already have the lowest corporate tax rate in the country . . .

Mr. Mason: In the universe.

Mr. Martin: In the universe maybe. Yes. I forgot about that.

. . . and you move it down to 10 per cent, and you're talking about 8 per cent down the way, what is the economic sense of that, Mr. Speaker? The money will be going. It's \$370 million lost revenue. The point is: how is that going to help the Alberta economy? These global corporations can take this money and say thank you very much and invest it anywhere they want in the world. Who's to say that it will even trickle down, the old trickle-down theory? Not many people have felt trickled down upon recently. It doesn't even make sense here because it can trickle down somewhere else. That's the point. Why would you do this, especially at this time? There

might be some logic to it if we had an economy that was staggering and we needed some investment. If we didn't have an overheated economy, I might be able to understand that, but I see this economy, when we theoretically can't get labour, we have jobs going wanting, we have the corporate sector with the lowest tax rate, and we're going to lower it more. One can only believe that this is an absolute gift to the people that support this Conservative government.

8:40

Mr. Eggen: It's a payback.

Mr. Martin: It's a payback. Exactly. It's a \$370 million gift to the wealthiest people at a time when we're going to be facing some difficulties in schools. We've talked about rising health care costs. We've talked about the problems. We don't have enough money to index AISH people. We don't have money for this, that, and everything else. But for the very wealthiest people in society here it is, \$370 million: "We don't care. You can have it. Do what you want with it." It's going again, most of it, to an energy industry that's already making more money than they've ever made before, Mr. Speaker, in an overheated economy.

We add that on in this budget. Even this government admits that we're losing \$400 million in income trusts, probably to the same group of people, Mr. Speaker. So there it is, a loss of some \$700 million. Eventually the problem with this is that when the Premier handed out the dividend funds, he said that it would be one time because we don't want to get obligated into a taxation rate for people, like taking medicare premiums off, which would have been \$800 million for everybody. We don't want to do that. We just want to do one-time things. Well, now we're taking the corporate tax rate, and we're going to live with that for how long? And you're talking about lowering it even more down the way. This makes absolutely no economic sense at all other than what I said, that it's a gift to their friends who pay the piper for this particular government. They're clinking champagne glasses in downtown Calgary, I'm sure, at the generosity of this government.

Meanwhile, what are we going to do down the way if the economy changes, Mr. Speaker? Now we've promised them 8 per cent, 6 per cent. Maybe eventually we'll have to just hand out the money to them without any taxation rate at all. It seems to me, when this government pleads poverty over so many other things and calls people irresponsible because they want money for certain programs, that this is the most irresponsible act that I've seen.

As I say, I could understand it – maybe not agree with it but understand it – if the economy was in recession to some degree and you wanted to stimulate investment. What does this stimulate? It stimulates money going outside the country. That's all it does, Mr. Speaker. As I say, it's not just a one-time gift like the dividend funds were to ordinary Albertans. This is a gift that keeps on giving year after year after year. Just to show you how generous we are, we're even talking about lowering it to 8 per cent. I find this particular bill the most offensive thing that they've done this time, and there have been a lot of offensive things that we talked about in Bill 20. This is costing the taxpayers a lot of money. Eventually it is going to have an impact on the programs and the things that we can offer Albertans down the way, and we will regret this particular Bill 34.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's any doubt about how I feel about this particular bill, but we always try to help this government out because Lord knows that they need the help.

Mr. Knight: Thanks, Ray.

Mr. Martin: You're welcome. You're very welcome.

I want to move an amendment here, Mr. Speaker. I'll send it up.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, an amendment is not in order.

An Hon. Member: A reasoned amendment, is it?

Mr. Martin: Yes.

An Hon. Member: Well reasoned?

Mr. Martin: Well reasoned.

The Deputy Speaker: Apparently it is in order because it's a reasoned amendment, so I will accept it.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, do you want me to go ahead or wait?

The Deputy Speaker: Just wait a moment until it's circulated to all the members. It's now fairly well distributed. You may proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion reads that Bill 34, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006, be amended by striking out the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 34, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006, be not now read a third time because the reduction in the corporate tax rate contained therein shifts the tax burden onto individual taxpayers and narrows the provincial tax base, thereby posing a threat to stable and predictable funding for core programs.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to us, as I said, folly to be moving ahead in this direction, especially when we don't know what the future holds. As I said, the Premier said that the reason he was doing the prosperity bonus is that he wanted this to be one-time funding. Now, here we go to the corporate sector, the wealthiest people, and say that we're going to permanently lower their taxes and even more so down the way in the future. We think it's time to put a stop to it, and this amendment would do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this amendment, just a couple of comments, if I might. The reason given for the amendment before us is that the reduction in corporate tax rate contained shifts the tax burden to individual taxpayers. Nothing could be further from correct. Individual taxpayers in the province of Alberta are also seeing a reduction in their tax rates. Again, it does not narrow the provincial tax base because, in fact, increased activity in our economic realm, that we have done very well with in the province of Alberta, will actually increase the tax base, not decrease it. So I would suggest that we're not posing any threat whatsoever to the stable and predictable funding for core programs in the province of Alberta, all of which have increased dramatically in the last number of years.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

8:50

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and support this amendment to Bill 34. This bill is nothing but to cut the corporate tax from 11.5 per cent to 10 per cent. Alberta Liberals always stand for the health care premiums being cut before any corporate tax, but this bill is totally helping the rich people. "The reduction in the corporation tax rate contained therein shifts the tax burden onto individual taxpayers." I absolutely agree with the

hon. member who proposed this amendment. Nobody is against the reduction in tax, but our first priority is to eliminate the health care premium tax. Alberta Liberals would prefer to cut the health care tax and some other user fees before we cut any corporate tax.

That's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this reasoned amendment. I would point out to the House that this reasoned amendment would have the effect of defeating a government money bill and therefore is a motion of confidence. It's our intention that the government should in fact be held accountable for its stand on corporate taxes.

This corporate tax cut is unnecessary. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, it's part of a program of the government to cut corporate income tax in this province from 15 per cent to 8 per cent, a promise that was made by Steve West a number of years ago, about six years ago, when he was the Provincial Treasurer. As far as I can tell, that comprises the entire and complete rationale for these corporate tax cuts.

As my hon. colleague has said, this shifts the balance towards the personal income tax, and the proportion of funding of government operations that is borne by individual taxpayers is increased in proportion to that of corporations. At this time Alberta corporations, like corporations across North America, are earning record profits. They are earning higher profits than they ever have before. So to cut their taxes at this time is completely unnecessary, yet it cuts into the ability of the province to finance on an ongoing basis its programs.

I will quote from the government's own documents. The government's own budget documents state that

with no general sales tax, payroll taxes or capital taxes, Alberta's tax base is relatively narrow compared to other jurisdictions.

Rev. Abbott: Right on.

Mr. Mason: We're getting applause over there for having a narrow tax base. I think the hon. member needs to talk to his Treasurer because she addressed this the other day during her estimates.

It goes on to say that

while this is a benefit to Albertans, it also comes with some risks.

A broader range of taxes means more stable revenues. With relatively fewer revenue sources, predictable funding for key public services is at more risk in the event of an economic slow-down. Consequently, it is inadvisable to eliminate or dedicate more taxes.

That comes from Alberta Tax Advantage, page 134.

That is exactly what the government is doing. They are narrowing the tax base, reducing their source of revenues which come from renewable sources as opposed to nonrenewable sources. The amount lost in this year alone is over \$265 million.

Cuts to corporate income taxes started in 2001, and will save Alberta corporations about \$435 million in taxes this year. These savings are on top of the savings from cuts to other corporate taxes, such as the elimination of the financial institutions capital tax and the drop in the railway fuel tax.

That was Budget 2004.

In two years alone, then, the cuts from 12.5 per cent to 10 per cent will have taken by a conservative estimate more than \$700 million out of government revenue. The \$700 million could have paid three times the amount urged to increase and improve on seniors in long-term care throughout the province. That \$700 million alone – remember, that's just what was saved in two years, not all five that have seen cuts in rates – would pay more than twice the amount of new schools being sought by the Calgary board of education.

How can the government constantly applaud itself as having one of the best education systems in the world and announce that its strategic plan is to prepare students for the workforce and citizenship when it denies both the building of new schools and the repairing of old ones? How can this government face its citizens with such pride when it is denying children their future in order to pay for tax cuts that aren't needed and are so damaging in other ways?

Mr. Speaker, it's not just a matter of shifting the balance toward personal income tax. It's not just revenue loss. It's economically ill advised. At this time small business and the public sector are having a hard time competing for labour, in particular, and materials as well. So in this kind of situation it will become even more difficult. With a large tax cut for big corporations, small business will have a more difficult time competing for scarce resources in this economy. So in a word this tax cut is inflationary.

The Auditor General has repeatedly asked the government to provide rationale for its tax cuts and particularly for its corporate tax cuts. In other words, it's seen as an expenditure item, a policy question that requires some sort of rationale in order to be justified. The government has not provided any justification other than an old promise made by Steve West.

Mr. Speaker, this is clearly nothing but a gift to corporations. I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie speak in favour of this because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the Finance critic, has spoken in favour of this tax cut and on a number of occasions. So I don't know where the Liberals stand on this, but I do know what the government is benefiting by this.

I have in front of me, Mr. Speaker, the 2005 corporate donations to the Conservative Party of Alberta. The Conservative Party in 2005 from the oil and gas sector received \$223,460.27. From financial management and insurance they received \$150,385. From the construction, development, and real estate sector they received \$232,408.94; from the engineering, consulting, and professional management firms, \$148,000; from utilities, \$65,000; from the health care sector, \$62,000; from the mining, forestry, and agribusiness sector, \$125,900; from professional corporations, \$29,000; and from all other corporations, \$333,828.19 for a grand total of \$1,370,433.12 last year from the corporate sector in donations to the Alberta PC Party. We see why they support this government. We see the symbiotic relationship between corporate donations to the Conservative Party and cuts to taxes for corporations. That really is the only economic explanation that I can see for this corporate tax cut.

Needless to say, we urge all hon. members to vote in favour of this motion of confidence in the government on this budget. This corporate tax cut is irresponsible, unnecessary, unjustified, and frankly completely unsupportable, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise and speak to this amendment on Bill 34. I'm opposed to this amendment, and I just want to go over a few points that the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky shared with us. There's this notion that there's a direct relationship between lower taxes and lower revenue, and quite the opposite has been shown time and time again. When you actually lower taxes, you often increase the government's revenue. We're grateful here in Alberta for the number of corporations that have relocated here, and as I've spoken before, I've urged this government to follow up on their commitment to go to 8 per

cent. They said that. Corporations have moved here, and we should be good to our word in Alberta.

9:00

The hon. third-party leader has talked many times about pharmaceuticals. Wouldn't it be a great blessing to Alberta if our corporate tax was a drawing card and we would actually get a pharmaceutical corporation to come into the province and want to produce those pharmaceuticals here in the province? We want to attract business. We want to be progressive and moving forward, be very diversified. We've gone to a flat tax of 10 per cent. That's helped professionals to come back to Alberta, doctors and researchers, because they know that they're not going to be penalized and treated unequally.

So I am very much opposed to Bill 34 and hope that we'll continue to lower taxes here and increase the revenue for the benefit of all Albertans. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Others?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:01 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Eggen	Mason	Pannu
Martin		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Herard	Mitzel
Backs	Hinman	Oberle
Coutts	Horner	Prins
Danyluk	Knight	Rodney
DeLong	Liepert	Rogers
Doerksen	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Evans	Lukaszuk	Taylor
Forsyth	Lund	VanderBurg
Fritz	Magnus	Webber
Hancock	Miller, B.	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 4	Against – 30
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[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 34 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to shorten any future division bells for the remainder of the evening from 10 minutes down to two, and I wonder if the rest of the members would consent to that unanimously.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Now, on Bill 34 does anyone else wish to participate in the debate?

Mr. Backs: I'm very pleased to rise to speak and say a few words in favour of this bill, Mr. Speaker. You know, there are some very positive things here. The initiative to share tax info with the Chief Electoral Officer I think brings about some certain degree of accountability on that financial information. It ensures that all insurance companies are paying tax. I think that's good.

I'm disappointed that it doesn't have removal of health care premiums in it. I think that there would be a greater efficiency for government in general in removing that bureaucracy and removing that payment. I don't think that that particular bureaucracy has any real value to Alberta and that it should be just rolled right into the tax. I think there is a need to reduce taxes not only in this area but in a number of areas. We will be having to prepare for what happens after the high oil price boom. If we can begin to attract and hold businesses in Alberta at least because of the taxes, if not because there are some problems in some other areas, it would do great good for the future of Alberta and Albertans.

I'm sometimes very disappointed in what the New Democrats seem to have in their view of taxes. They always seem to think that money grows on trees, that all business is bad, that any sort of profit-making mechanism, any small business is somehow a difficult thing for our economy. I don't know what would make the economy grow or go at all if the New Democrats had their way. Many people are saying that they've given up on labour in the last three or four years. They hate business. They hate profit. I don't know where they seem to be coming from or seem to be wanting their support. You know, they seem to love their ivory tower sort of ideas and all the rest of it. I don't know if they have any idea of where we would actually make an economy work with the ideas of the New Democrats.

With that I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There seems to be an awful lot of chatter. Please, if we could keep it down, the Speaker would be able to hear the hon. member that has the floor.

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

Bill 10 Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 10, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciated hearing the many thoughtful comments and discussion on this bill. Bill 10 will clarify and strengthen the engineering profession by allowing registered professional technologists to sit on the council of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, known as APEGGA, and vote on the association's new and amended regulations and bylaws.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure again to rise and speak to third reading in support of Bill 10, Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment

Act, 2006. This bill allows registered professional technologists in engineering to vote and be elected to the engineering council of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta. It's called APEGGA. RPT engineers will have an increased opportunity to participate in the governance of APEGGA.

ASET supports this change as registered professional technologists, RPT engineers, have been part of APEGGA since 2001. They feel voting privileges should have been in place since then. This bill allows them to have the right to vote in the governance of their professional association.

Mr. Speaker, in the year 2001 the act was amended to include registered professional technologists in engineering as Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, APEGGA, members. They were not, however, granted voting or council membership rights in the association at that time. There are currently about 150 RPT engineers in Alberta, but the number is growing from 135 in 2003.

9:20

Some members of APEGGA are not in favour of the change as they would prefer to keep the governance of APEGGA in the control of traditionally qualified professionals. The practice of engineering, geology, and geophysics in Alberta is governed by the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act. APEGGA is mandated to administer the act as a self-governing body on behalf of the Alberta government, all in the interest of public safety and well-being. It has about 43,000 members. APEGGA is governed by an elected council of 19 members, including three public representatives appointed by the government, and directs the association's affairs.

APEGGA's regular activities include registering and licensing qualified members, establishing practice standards, administering a complaint and discipline process, encouraging professional development, reviewing member and corporate practice, stopping those not qualified from practising and using the title.

Mr. Speaker, within a clearly defined scope of practice registered professional technologists are permitted to independently practise engineering, geology, or geophysics in Alberta within a narrowly defined scope of practice and to take responsibility for that work. This category recognizes that certain qualified individuals can be permitted to independently carry out certain specific functions, normally within the definition of professional engineering, professional geology, or professional geophysics, without the supervision of a professional engineer, professional geologist, or professional geophysicist. An RPT engineer is licensed to independently practise engineering in Alberta within a clearly defined scope of practice.

A registered professional technologist must be registered as an RET with ASET and be nominated for registering as an RPT engineer by ASET, have at least six years of experience in work of an engineering nature that is acceptable to the APEGGA board of examiners, be of good character and reputation, demonstrate knowledge of law, ethics, and professionalism by passing the national professional practice examination, and meet the English language competency requirements as well.

I support this bill. This is a good bill. That's all I have to say, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Backs: Just a very brief couple of comments to speak in support of Bill 10, Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, and reluctantly in support because I don't think it really accomplishes a whole bunch. The nature of giving a vote to a group of registered professional technicians, which will amount maybe to 150 in a membership of 40,000, is not giving a likelihood of a whole bunch of folks getting elected from that group.

In many ways I think what we've done with this is really struck something that the two groups have agreed on, and because of that I support it. But I don't really think that it accomplishes much of anything, and we'll be back in this Legislature down the road dealing with the nature of the conflict or the nature of the necessity of coming up with something that will better deal with the demarcation lines, the ways that the professional technicians and technologists deal with the actual engineers, geologists, and geophysicists.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to close debate.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I rise just to ask everyone to support this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

Bill 14

Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to third reading. Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, makes amendments to the Health Professions Act that respond directly to issues raised by professions being brought under the act. The Health Professions Act is nearing full completion. There will be 28 regulatory colleges established under the act and governed by regulation when it is fully implemented. Currently there are 16 colleges regulated under the act. The regulations for six more colleges are being finalized this spring. The amendments proposed in Bill 14 will strengthen the Health Professions Act and respond to issues raised by individual colleges and by the federation of regulated health professions.

Mr. Speaker, the key amendments to Bill 14 include clarification respecting receipt of complaints, the application of continuing competence programs, adding flexibility to the process for considering applications from professions to be governed under the act, enabling councils to regulate the title of specialist with respect to their profession, the addition of several protected titles, an amendment by the practice statement for opticians to allow the regulatory body to regulate its members who are performing refractions and conducting assessments.

During debate on the bill issues were raised with respect to two of the proposed amendments. One issue is related to opticians performing refractions and eye health assessments. The issue respecting eye health assessments was addressed through a House amendment agreed to by the regulatory bodies for optometrists and opticians to remove the reference eye health. The reference is now to conduct assessments.

I want to assure you that the amendment respecting the performance of refractions, which is not a restricted activity, only ensures that what opticians are currently doing as part of the practice of opticianry will be subject to the regulatory control of the opticians college. It doesn't change the scope of practice for opticians, nor does it permit them to perform the restricted activity of prescribing corrective lenses.

The second amendment that generated much discussion during debate on the bill relates to applications by professions who want to be regulated under the Health Professions Act. Instead of having to establish that there is support from the majority of practitioners, the minister will now be able to refer the application for investigation as

long as it is in the public interest. It's important to emphasize that the minister is not being given the authority to choose who is regulated or recognized. That decision rests ultimately with the Legislature. It requires an amendment to the Health Professions Act. Professional self-governance is not a right but a privilege which is delegated to professions only when the public interest is served by doing so and when the advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages.

In conducting an investigation, the Health Professions Advisory Board would be expected to ascertain such factors as what constitutes the practice of a profession, whether the profession is distinct and identifiable, what risks there are to the public of incompetent or unethical practice, and the qualifications and minimum standards of competence that are required for a person applying to the practice or profession.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill is an important part of the journey in having the Health Professions Act fully implemented, and I ask the hon. members for their support of third reading of Bill 14.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat wish to close?

Mr. Mitzel: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

Bill 25 Securities Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to move third reading of Bill 25, Securities Amendment Act, 2006.

We had excellent discussion on Bill 25 during Committee of the Whole two weeks ago, and I'd like to take an opportunity to respond to a couple of questions that were raised in committee. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked how the revenue from fees collected by Alberta Securities Commission is used. The Minister of Finance was correct when she responded that the revenue goes toward the commission's general operation.

9:30

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the Securities Act requires that revenue from administrative penalties be used for investor education and to enhance the knowledge of the securities market operation in Alberta.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning also asked a number of questions, and in response to his queries about the proposed new sections 33.1 and 76 of the Securities Act, these provisions reflect the streamlining initiatives with other jurisdictions for interim orders and registration process by the executive director. Section 33.1 amendment streamlines the process to make a permanent cease-trade order against issuers failing to file required disclosure. This is based on a similar provision in British Columbia. The section 76 amendment, Mr. Speaker, streamlines the conditions of registration.

The hon. member also asked about sections 184 and 192, which deal with the appointment of independent review committees for investment funds. Answering this question will require some context. Canadian Securities Administrators have developed a proposed rule, or a national instrument, as it's called, that sets out

the structure and functions of the committee. The proposed national instrument 81-107 requires that all publicly offered mutual funds have an independent review committee charged with reviewing any conflicts of interest that may arise out of the management of the fund.

The committee would also provide recommendations to the manager to fairly resolve these conflicts. Mr. Speaker, the proposed rule would also establish firm guidelines to determine who could be appointed to an independent review committee. I should note that the rule is still only proposed and following two public consultations has yet to be adopted.

Previously the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had asked whether we could provide an indication to the Assembly on how the passport system is working. The instrument that facilitates the passport system is a multilateral instrument, 11-101, principle regulator system. The instrument provides issuers with exemptions in nonprincipal jurisdictions from continuous disclosure and most prospective disclosure requirements and exemptions for registrants. In Alberta 12 per cent of applications from issuers regarding the continuous disclosure filings have been made under the passport system. I grant you that it is not a large number; however, keep in mind that the system has been in place less than one year. These early indications are promising since it takes time for market participants to become acquainted with the passport mechanism.

Finally, I note that some of the opposition members again repeated the argument for a single securities regulator. I've given the same response in the past, and even if provinces and territories were to change direction and pursue a common regulator, we would need to harmonize and simplify our securities laws. The changes to securities legislation set out in this bill are required regardless. It's important we ensure that our securities legislation remains modern, streamlined, and harmonized with other jurisdictions. This is essential not just for Alberta but for Canada to compete in the global marketplace.

In closing, I hope my comments have helped clarify any outstanding questions, and I urge members to support Bill 25. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

Bill 28 Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased tonight to move third reading of Bill 28, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006.

The Local Authorities Election Act describes the process for the election of municipal councils and school board trustees. It is an important piece of legislation that sets out how our leaders are elected at the local levels. Bill 28 will promote integrity and confidence in the election process by setting election standards that result in more secure and transparent election procedures.

The amendments will endeavour to acknowledge and encourage the public's role and participation in the election process. Bill 28 will also ensure that small and large jurisdictions can respond to their specific needs by permitting some discretionary procedural options within the legislation's framework.

As previously noted, these amendments were developed through consultations with municipalities, school boards, and the public. They deserve the support and approval of all members of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a third time]

Bill 29
Environmental Protection and
Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 29, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, 2006.

The six amendments in this act provide clarity to industry for emissions reduction, remediation of contaminated sites, and reclamation of coal and oil sands mines while upholding the principle of polluter pays. The bill also allows for expansion of the network of Alberta Environment's partners, supports the use of tools such as codes of practice, and makes access to environmental information easier for Albertans.

I urge support of this bill, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill has had extensive debate in second reading and in Committee of the Whole, led by our Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and we are against this bill. It's not going to have the effect that it intends, and I'm not going to go through all the points of debate again. Just to register our opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, there are some things to be said for some of the companies that do so well in reclaiming some of our oil sands areas and some of the ways that this bill will move towards helping them. I think that we have to have some justifiable pride in some of the companies that have been able to develop some of the practices that have brought forward some great strides, I think, in ensuring that the land is reclaimed. If anybody goes near some of the areas in the oil sands and sees some of the little parks that are being developed, some of the buffalo paddocks, some of the other areas, I think that they will agree that there are some great efforts being made in some of the ways that some of the mining reclamation companies have come forward in the way they deal with soils, in the way they stockpile their muskeg, in the way that they handle some of these things. I think they're laudable, and I hope that this legislation will help to provide for ensuring that their work goes forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to be very brief in voicing finally. We've gone through a lot of debate in regard to Bill 29. As often is the case, I'm finding that when a bill tries to bite off more than, perhaps, it can chew, you end up with some parts that are quite laudable, in fact, but others that require amendments. We were unfortunate in not being successful with those amendments. So I just wanted to stand in opposition to this bill this evening.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 31
Health Information Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West of behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill I'm pleased to move third reading today of Bill 31, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2006.

Amendments proposed in this bill will better address provincial electronic health record requirements, co-ordinate the retention periods for health records held by professional bodies, and clarify disclosure rules. The amendments are a culmination of stakeholder feedback, input from the all-party Select Special Health Information Act Review Committee, and analysis by Alberta Health and Wellness. Amendments promote patient safety, enable better tracking of drug trends, facilitate greater accountability in how funds are spent, allow for more accurate patient drug histories, and guard against health system fraud.

9:40

Regarding the additional disclosure provisions that generated much discussion during the bill's debate, the goal is to balance the privacy of individual's information with access to protect the public and manage the health system.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 31 and ask for support from members.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is an important bill because it deals with an important ethical issue; namely, the right of individuals to privacy and confidentiality about the information about their health. Of course, because of the public interest and the public need for safety and against fraud and so on, we've had a thorough debate about that, and I think that this bill really does manage to strike a balance with the protection of an individual's privacy and confidentiality on one hand and access to health information by various public bodies on the other. It's kind of an interesting Canadian compromise because, as a matter of fact, we don't prize individualism as much as we do the needs of the community as a whole, and I think this bill is directed to those needs of public security and public safety.

So I think that the stipulations in this bill, the protections that are in this bill are adequate, and I think we will vote in favour of this on third reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Bill 32
Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 32.

This act updates the tissue and organ legislation. It will become more inclusive and explicit about the process of donations. Clarity will assist the public and the medical professionals who deal with organ and tissue donation on a regular basis. This legislation and associated regulations will require tissues and organs being transplanted in Alberta to be from safe sources, thereby protecting the health of Albertans receiving transplants. This legislation also includes mandatory consideration and the subsequent required reporting of potential donors. This will further increase donation and benefit the people of Alberta and Canada who are in need of life-saving and life-altering transplants.

Mr. Speaker, we still need Albertans to sign the universal donor card on the back of their health care card and talk to their family about their wishes to donate. While this legislation will work to reduce the wait-list for transplantation, our next task will be to reduce the number of Albertans who need to transplant. Factors such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, burns, alcohol abuse, and tobacco use can all contribute to the need for transplants, so we need to do whatever we can to be healthy and prevent injuries. Being physically active, eating healthy foods, and living a healthy lifestyle can all make a difference. Combining this new legislation with people making their wishes known and good prevention will eventually lead to a reduced need for organ and tissue transplants.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act and ask for the support of all members. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's just tremendous – I'm giving out bouquets here – to see the progress beyond the private member's bill to this very solid bill, Bill 32. All the questions that I was really concerned about in discussing the private member's bill have been pretty well answered. This is a very important bill in terms of providing the organs for people who need them, and I support this bill wholeheartedly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a third time]

Bill 33
Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to rise tonight and move third reading of Bill 33, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance.

I think everyone is well acquainted with this bill and the advantages that it will provide on the taxation front for Albertans. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. members opposite for their support of this legislation throughout the process. I'd like to also address a few concerns raised during Committee of the Whole debate. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford questioned why the legislation used \$12,900 as the basic spousal and eligible dependent amount instead of \$14,523, that is used in the 2006-07 fiscal plan. The member suggested that this was due to the indexing that has come into effect since the last time this bill was amended. In fact, he is correct. The amount of \$12,900 was the basic spousal and eligible dependent amount for 2001, the year we switched to the single rate tax system. Due to inflation-proofing this amount had grown to \$14,523 by 2005.

There was no need to update the legislation each year to account for these inflation-related increases. However, since we are adjusting the amount by an additional \$100 this year, we need to update the legislation. The easiest way to update the original \$12,900 to \$14,899 is to start the inflation-proofing process again from scratch. The hon. member also wanted to know the effect of the starting date of July 1 on the fiscal plan. When indexation occurs partway through the fiscal year, as it does in this case, the part-year effect is in fact built into the fiscal plan. I hope that these responses clarify the member's concerns.

To quickly review, Bill 33 will increase the basic spousal and eligible dependent tax credit amounts by \$100 on top of inflation-proofing for a total increase of \$376. With this change, Mr. Speaker, more low-income earners will be added to those shielded from provincial income taxes. Our basic personal and spousal amounts will be \$14,899 in 2006, over \$6,000 higher than the province with the next highest amount. This means that you can earn more in this province than anywhere in Canada before paying any provincial income tax. This means that more than 1 million of Alberta's 2.36 million tax filers pay no provincial income tax.

Mr. Speaker, this strengthens the government's focus on building Alberta's tax advantage as Albertans continue to pay the lowest overall taxes in Canada. I urge all members of this House to support Bill 33.

Thank you.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this bill again, albeit reluctantly. It's much ado about nothing really. I think the average for an individual taxpayer that will come out of that cut there will be about 35 bucks. It's important; a tax cut is a tax cut.

What I think is more important is what it doesn't deal with. It doesn't deal with things like my private member's bill both last year and this year that call for a recreation tax credit to help with some of the things that were talked about in the previous bill, looking for greater physical fitness, greater ability for children to access all sorts of recreation. We've seen some advances in some special programs in northeast Edmonton and other areas. We've seen some volunteer programs that have been doing it in many, many areas for a long time, but that could be improved.

9:50

The income tax cuts certainly could be much greater if the health care premium wasn't there. I mean, it's just totally inefficient in terms of any essence of looking at economics or anything. It's

surely a political tax in its worst form, and if that was not there, it could actually give a much more substantial income tax cut if we had that in place.

There's no relief in the personal income tax area on things like credits for working in the oil sands, a travel area, things that could be put in place to attract people to Fort McMurray and other oil sands or northern remote areas to ensure that we're actually pulling workers from Alberta and from Canada.

I speak in favour of this bill, but I'm again reluctant because it is much ado about not too much. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the mover wish to close?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a third time]

Bill 35 Fuel Tax Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance, with kudos to the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 35 will replace the existing Fuel Tax Act, which is outdated and no longer reflects how the tax is charged and collected. This bill is largely mechanical and technical in nature and does not change the fuels that are taxed nor the tax rates.

There were some questions brought up during Committee of the Whole, so I'd like to take a few moments to provide responses to those questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford wanted some information about the international fuel tax agreement. This is essentially an agreement among 48 American states and 10 Canadian provinces that enables uniform collection and distribution of fuel taxes paid by motor carriers transporting among jurisdictions. The agreement not only saves the trucking industry from having to file a fuel tax return in each jurisdiction travelled through but also significantly reduces the paperwork and compliance burden for fuel tax reporting.

The hon. member also inquired about section 13 of the bill, and asked how many of the accounts referred to in that section actually exist. In fact, no special accounts have been required to date. Section 13 is fundamentally similar to section 6 of the current Fuel Tax Act and provides that such accounts might be required where the financial stability of a remitter may be in question.

There was also concern about the prohibited sale provisions in the bill. Section 18(5) prohibits farmers from selling marked fuel for farming operations in Alberta at the reduced price to anyone other than another farmer for use in farming operations. Mr. Speaker, this section is very similar to section 14(5) of the current act. It essentially allows two farmers who are both authorized to purchase fuel at the reduced price to sell fuel to each other. The act does not govern the sale price.

The hon. member's final questions were regarding the duty of vendor section and whether anyone had contravened section 13(1), which is the similar section in the existing act. We are not aware of anyone being charged for an offence for contravening that section in 2004-05.

Regarding questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. He asked about marked fuel and what happens if a vendor is not passing savings on to the consumer. Mr. Speaker,

section 10 provides that if the vendor does not pass on the benefit of the tax exempted on the marked fuel, the vendor is liable to pay to the Crown an amount equal to the benefit that has not been passed on. This is a penalty on the vendor. Whether the benefit under section 10 has been passed on will have to be determined based on a review of the facts of each case. Since marked fuel does not include tax and the consumer who purchases the marked fuel has not paid tax, there is nothing the consumer can recover from Alberta Finance. As previously discussed, section 13 of the existing act requires the tax and farm fuel benefit to be passed on to farmers. Section 10 expands that requirement to all tax exemptions.

I'll just reiterate, finally, that the principal goal of this bill is to provide the overall framework on how the fuel tax is applied and collected, and the bill provides for a multistage direct tax, meaning that the person who is highest in the supply and distribution chain will pay the tax to the Crown. Every person in the chain would pay the tax but would later recover the tax from the next person in the chain. In the end it is the end-user, or consumer, of the fuel that ultimately pays the tax.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I would just like to simply say that Bill 35, the Fuel Tax Act, will make the administration and collection of fuel taxes easier for everyone involved. On that basis, I would urge everyone to vote in support of it at third reading.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a third time]

Bill 36 Securities Transfer Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 36.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we've heard some excellent discussion on this bill both during second reading and in Committee of the Whole. I commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. He took the opportunity to learn about the legislation from government staff and clearly did a lot of research on his own. The concerns and questions he raised demonstrate his understanding of the Securities Transfer Act's significance, and I thank him for speaking in its support last week.

Mr. Speaker, stakeholders have urged prompt uniform implementation of securities transfer legislation in Canada. The Securities Transfer Act represents an important example of interprovincial co-operation in responding to the needs of Canada's capital markets. It will provide a single, uniform source of rules for transferring and holding securities and interests in investment properties traded in Canada and elsewhere.

Ontario has recently made amendments to its Securities Transfer Act, making its bill virtually identical to Bill 36 in Alberta. Other provinces plan to introduce a securities transfer act in 2006. Once implemented, Mr. Speaker, Canada's securities transfer laws will become more closely aligned with the Uniform Commercial Code in the United States, and this is essential to ensure that Canada remains competitive not only with the United States but also in the global marketplace.

I urge all members to support this important legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a third time]

Bill 37
Miscellaneous (Provincial Treasurer)
Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance it's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 37, the Miscellaneous (Provincial Treasurer) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

As previously noted, Bill 37 is basically a housekeeping act that fundamentally allows changes in legislation with references to "Provincial Treasurer" to be replaced with the phrase "Minister of Finance" or the minister responsible. It's simply updating legislation that aligns other legislation with the current title and responsibilities of the Minister of Finance and other program ministers.

I would urge everyone's support in that regard. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a third time]

head: 10:00 **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 43
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 43 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 42
Appropriation Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions or amendments pursuant to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to rise and speak to Bill 42, Appropriation Act, 2006, and to speak to the expense and equipment/inventory purchases that may apply to some

of the \$26,748,531,000. A lot of coin, a lot of money, a lot of budget there. Yet, you know, we get to see time and time again that there really isn't much of a budget in place when we vote for a budget and for the monies that run the government in this province. It seems that time and time again we will be seeing supplementary spending in the billions, and I'm sure that it will be coming forward. It doesn't seem to matter when it comes forward. The budget doesn't matter, and we will be looking out.

Nonetheless, there are a number of areas where obviously very quickly after this budget has come forward there may need to be something: in education, of course, where we're seeing layoffs and problems with class sizes. The amount that was put forward and originally budgeted is not looking to handle what is necessary as schools and boards look to the necessary monies that they have to run this so, so important area of our economy and of our culture and of our system. You know, if we could be looking toward some different ways of dealing with some of the monies that are spent there, if we could be looking at ways to ensure that families, children are not spending all their time raising extra money over and above what they have budgeted for the schools for things like textbooks and trips and just all sorts of small things, school lunches and things like that, we would have a much more efficient system and actually provide education and experience for our young people.

If we look at Advanced Education, you know, there are many areas of Advanced Education that seem to be very problematic right now. In the last report I had seen, there were 5,000 spots left wanting for apprentices to get into this year in northern Alberta, 5,000 apprentices in southern Alberta, people who are dying to work in the trades, who want to learn, to move ahead in their trade, to get into their trade, to try to find out how to make their way in a new career, yet they are not able to because those resources, those spots are not available.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

We look at, you know, Economic Development. My gosh, in Economic Development we don't seem to be doing much of anything. We seem to be going back in many sectors. In terms of real agricultural development in new areas, in nutraceuticals and things like that, we haven't seen a whole bunch. We haven't seen a lot of development in many, many sectors as the nature of our economy seems to be driven more and more by oil and gas and not expecting more and more in other areas.

I was actually pleased to see the bill passed earlier this evening to ensure something of a tax cut because I think that may help somewhat for economic development, but we're not, you know, looking to training. I mentioned earlier under Advanced Education that the spots aren't full. We're looking to bring in temporary foreign workers, temporary foreign contractors who will not train apprentices that will be needed in the economy as we approach the demographic time bomb of the retirement of the baby boomers, and that's just coming up in a few years. These things aren't at all addressed.

We look at, you know, the many areas in Finance where we haven't really looked at, I think, tax cuts that would help to ensure that our economy is working more efficiently, that we are training more people, that we are developing our oil sands in a meaningful way and not just in a pell-mell, confused way.

You know, I look at some of the ways in Gaming that our lottery fund payments are disbursed, and I really wonder how that makes a whole bunch of sense.

I look at some of the things in Health and Wellness, and I very much am distressed at what has been happening with our seniors and

the difficulty for them to have a decent retirement with just the few resources that so many of our seniors have to deal with.

I look at the nature of Infrastructure and Transportation, and I didn't really see, you know, some things that may help with aboriginal development and the provision to the aboriginal workforce of training for them and things like the east-west connector, things like some provision for the Peavine-McLennan road, more monies to ensure that highway 63 could go even faster. Some of it is very good, and I appreciate some of the spending that is there. I think that was necessary and should have been looked at over the long term.

In transportation we look at, in spending on road building and other similar types of infrastructure spending, a difficulty in the long term. I think it was not too many years back that the budget was cut very severely, and half of the people who work in that industry were lost. You know, it's very difficult to bring them back, very difficult to reinstate their training very quickly, and now the industry is having a huge problem bringing people up to speed. Their efficiency is not as good as it was, and I think that somehow that that has to be looked at as being an area where we have certain of these programs which are assured certain spending on a regular basis, that there be some type of a fund in place that ensures that this capital investment would continue in good times and bad, and that we would have that carry forward and not lose the contractors, not lose the people who work in that industry, not lose the ability and the capability to work on that and just throw money at it in a much, much bigger way in good times. That's what we're seeing. We're spending a whole bunch more because we didn't deal with it correctly in the past.

10:10

I look at the Solicitor General and the problems that we have in Edmonton in not taking care of the Remand Centre and ensuring that spending was put in place a long time ago to ensure that the proper facility is in place. I hear candidly and privately, to be truthful – they don't want to be public – from some of our police officers in north Edmonton that people are not being charged, that JPs, or justices of the peace, are not putting people in because they cannot honestly put some of the guys who should be put in the Remand Centre there because there is actually no space.

Under Seniors and Community Supports, the PDD. Gosh, I hope there's something that happens in that in the next few weeks. The people in Edmonton that I've talked to, the hundreds and hundreds of people that were at some of these meetings and demonstrations that looked to the real effect of what have in reality become cuts in a number of areas – the layoffs that have already happened in some areas are affecting people that are some of the least able to defend themselves in our society and are looking to so very little. Yet there was a cut in the Edmonton area of 3.5 per cent, I think, in some of these areas, in a system that does not make a lot of sense, quite often, in the number of providers and the way that some of these providers are controlled and administered, in some of the standards that are set for them. It's very, very questionable.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Sustainable Resource Development. When we look at the nature of ensuring that our forestry resources, our sustainable resources are coming forward in a much better way, I'm fearful of what may happen if we see the pine beetle coming through into Alberta in the same way I've seen in travelling through B.C. what has happened there. I'm not actually very, very encouraged by what I've seen.

The whole nature of the budget, though, I think leaves some room

open for some other spending. I hope that in some ways there could be some cuts in some areas, but that won't happen.

With that, I end my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure to rise again and speak to Bill 42, Appropriation Act, 2006. The government has spent a huge amount of money, no doubt, but the money, I think, was not spent wisely.

I start with the Department of Community Development. The overall ministry expense for Community Development for the year 2006-07 is \$242 million, a 14 per cent decrease from the 2005-06 forecast. The 2006-07 expense and equipment/inventory purchases estimate is about \$229.7 million, a 5 per cent increase.

I just want to make some comments. After spending a huge amount of money, why is this department so far behind compared to the other provinces in Canada? I was surprised when I was listening to question period. Somebody asked a question of the Deputy Premier, and she was quite happy with the way the government is handling community development. Still, I think of major concerns like the sports plan. I think the government was talking about the sports plan for a long, long time. I still have a copy of that, and they have not implemented the sports plan so far. A cultural policy is not there yet. A former Minister of Community Development promised to implement a cultural policy during this session, but I haven't seen any policy yet.

The minister of health talked about active lifestyles and giving some incentives to recreational facilities or maybe a tax rebate. She was going to implement that. Some good ideas which everybody appreciated, but it's not happening so far. After spending so much money, so much discussion, it's not in progress yet.

The human rights commission. Still I'm receiving lots of complaints from my constituents. Some people are waiting a long time, and the cases are still pending. I don't know where we're wrong, but if after spending a huge amount of money and the problems are still there, what's the use of injecting money into certain departments? Libraries, yes. The government gave a \$20 million lump sum of money, but if you compare the per capita funds to the '80s, still we are behind compared to any other province in North America.

We don't have any plan to prepare athletes for the Olympics. I talked to somebody who manages and looks after top athletes not only for Alberta but for the country, and according to him Alberta has some really good athletes that can shine in the next Olympic Games. This job is part of the federal government as well, but still the Alberta government is not doing anything to help the Olympic department to produce some more athletes for the next coming Olympic Games.

The Alberta sector, as I've said many times during question period and during the budget debates, creates about 3,500 jobs, and the revenues are coming approximately the same as – the government gives them grants. It's not fair with this sector. I know that today the Minister of Finance didn't agree with this, but I still think this sector needs some more funding. I mean, the money was spent like horse racing or some other departments' money. I'm not saying that the money was not spent. Even this government has broken all the records. This Tory party is, I think, the most spending party ever in the history of Alberta. They should take a lesson. I mean, they should spend money very wisely.

Another thing. I hear lots of complaints about the WCB. The people on low income, contentious files, long-term – they are struggling. Some people believe that the government is like a

private department. The government is totally trying to, you know, back off from this department, and they are not listening to individuals.

10:20

I'm glad that the government is giving some money to AISH after a long time, but still the people are complaining that every year there should be an evaluation, at least after one year, so that they can get a raise according to the inflation rate.

The PDD were protesting just a couple of weeks ago outside this Legislature, and they were given a 2 per cent raise. If you work it out, it's less than the inflation rate. They are people. Somebody said, you know, that the necessity of life is three things, Mr. Chairman: food, clothes, and shelter. I mean, a car, holidays, gambling, or if you do something else is a luxury. Those people with the low incomes are vulnerable people. They don't begrudge the big corporations if they are making profits in billions, but they do begrudge if they don't even get the basic necessities to live a reasonable life.

Every time we ask a question to the minister, they say that we are number one or number two. Nobody ever said that the art sector is number 10. I mean, how can we believe that? I suppose the health care system is number one. How can we believe it's number one when every time the minister compares it with Europe or somewhere else, with the other states. We will believe this health care system is number one or number two when we don't get any complaints. The people are suffering. There are long queues in the emergencies. I know that the department is working hard. Fifteen years ago we had a rally of about 15,000 people in Mill Woods, and at that time the waiting time was only four hours. Now it's nine hours' waiting time. We are not going forwards. We are going backwards.

I'm not talking about only health care. Every time you ask the Minister of Education, they spent that much money, in the classroom there's no problem, the classroom size problem is fixed, but when you talk to the students, the problem is still there.

I just want to know where we went wrong, and what we can do. I think the main reason is because we just throw money when we see a problem. When we see a problem, throw the money, and that problem is solved for a while. Then after some time the problem starts again.

Another thing, the long-term care centres. I know that in spite of the Auditor General's report – and they found out that in one-third of the facilities their standard of living is low, and every time we ask a question, the government is not listening. The government always answers very tactfully, but I don't call them answers. Yes, we ask them questions. We ask questions about the long-term care centres, but we don't get the proper answers that we actually asked for. But they always answer tactfully.

Drug abuse, crystal meth. In my riding crime is the major issue. Here's the report. We spent an 11.8 per cent increase on policing programs. If we spend that much money, why? Every time I read the newspaper, there is a stabbing, killing, kidnapping. In my riding recently two or three girls were just kidnapped, or nobody knows where they are. The bus incidents happen during the nighttime, and people are so afraid that they don't walk after 9 o'clock. I mean, I respect the people working in the police department. I know that they are working hard. They always take risks to save our lives. I'm not criticizing them, but my question is: where are we wrong? We can spend money – and the government is spending money – but the money is not well spent. It's not spent wisely.

My suggestions and my comments are that before we put some money in, we should have a proper policy. We should have proper discussions. Maybe we should have all-party discussions, case by

case if they want. I think the NDP, Liberal, Alliance, or any independent person would love to sit with them because we are here to serve the people, to serve Albertans. Okay? I mean, I'm sorry to say it, but if everybody thinks this way, I don't think we will have a problem. The problem is that, first of all, we don't admit that there's a problem.

We can't solve problems just by throwing money, giving grants to the different communities. We gave \$20,000 to Applewood community in Calgary, and the Auditor General's report found that the money was misused. We still can't find out why the government is not giving us the document through FOIP, which is 719 pages. That document contains the secrecy of that Applewood community, and we can't get it.

Mr. Lukaszuk: How do you know what's in it?

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, we want to find out. This is our job.

Mr. Lukaszuk: But you know what's in it.

Mr. Agnihotri: I'm saying that I want to know. Why is there secrecy? This is the point. You guys don't admit that. Through the chair. Sorry about that.

Deregulation. When it was regulated, the people were happy. They were paying less than \$5 a gigajoule, right? Now they are paying three times more. If we come back to regulation, anybody here can guess how much we lost, why we lost because of a lack of long-term sustainable policies. At this point everybody, all the scholars agree that we are receiving royalties in billions and billions of dollars. Where's the policy? Nothing. And nobody wants to hear.

Anyway, if we can give a 40 per cent, 60 per cent increase in grants to horse racing, what's wrong with the arts sector? What's wrong with them? I was in Fort McMurray two weeks ago, and there is only one theatre. I talked to the manager, and she said: if we had three theatres like this, they would be full for seven days, and it cost them \$1.8 million. Do you know how much the Alberta government paid them? Only \$50,000. One million dollars comes from next door, a college, and the college gets the money from three big companies, Suncor, Syncrude, and some other – I don't exactly know the name of the third company. It's a shame. I mean, we are not spending money where the money should go. That's my comment on that.

10:30

I met a group of people from the university, Mr. Chairman, and I'm sorry to say that they said that sometimes they don't even see the teachers. There are over 550 students sitting in the classroom during lectures. Can't we do something? Can't we make their lives a little bit better? Of course we can if we admit that there's a problem or if we spend money wisely, but we don't.

Everybody sitting here knows that we have a lack of doctors, we have a lack of nurses, nursing staff. Just talk. They all talk. But, I mean, there are 4,000 foreign doctors doing ordinary jobs. If they get a little bit of training, we can send them to rural areas, and we can solve the problem easily. But, no. If they cross the border, go to America, those doctors get a licence. They can work there, but they can't work in Canada. This is a problem.

Training centre. I mean, if we know we have shortages, there's a problem. I'm dealing with one person. I'm meeting tomorrow morning with the minister of human resources. I told that party, I said: why don't you talk to the minister directly? I appreciate that the minister agreed. He said: okay, you bring them here. He will listen to them.

There's one of the big companies here. Their workforce is 300 people, full-time workers, and they need 25 workers right away. He said: "I don't care where you guys, you know, import those. Bring them from any country."

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to say a few words about, first of all, the process in terms of the budget process. I hope that all hon. members will read the Parkland Institute's publication *Fiscal Surplus, Democratic Deficit: Budgeting and Government Finance in Alberta*. It's an excellent document. It raises issues about how the whole budgetary process takes place, especially in respect to the involvement of opposition members, that there are no open, public, prebudget consultation hearings across Alberta.

For example, the House of Commons has a budget committee that travels across the country and listens to public input. I think that that kind of process should happen provincially as well. I remember when the committee came to Edmonton from Ottawa. I had a chance to address the committee on behalf of Poverty in Action, which was a group trying to deal with poverty here in Edmonton. It was a very important moment for this group to be able to speak to and to be heard by politicians coming from Ottawa. I think that kind of involvement is certainly important in terms of the public having a sense that they have input into budgetary discussions.

I mean, actually, school budgets seem to have a better process in terms of involving the public than this government. I spent some time in a school recently. They are in the process of looking at budgets now, and they invite parents to come and be involved and to look at the whole budget and to provide input before it goes to the school board. I think that that's important to have that kind of input.

Well, Mr. Chairman, just looking at this whole budget, I only have one issue. I mean, like my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie I could raise lots of issues about different parts of this Appropriation Act, but in looking at the whole document and all the different increases that there are in all the departments, the one area that I'm really concerned about is Human Resources and Employment and the continuing low rates for people unable to work or expected to work and so on. The basic welfare rates haven't changed very much in about 12 years. Twelve years ago I helped to actually form a group called the Quality of Life Commission in order to deal with the cuts to social services that affected poor people in this province. It was our privilege, in forming that commission, to actually invite high-profile people to be on the commission such as the Hon. Lois Hole and the Hon. Doug Roche.

They went into the inner city and listened to people living in poverty. After hearing the stories, they were convinced that people living on SFI then – it was called SFI – didn't have enough money that could amount to a living wage. That's why we have so many people going to food banks. That's why we have churches opening their doors to provide meals for people in this city and throughout this province. The money that people get on welfare is just not adequate to live. It is just deplorable that in this rich province here, 12 years later, the rates are the same.

So in this budget under People Expected to Work – Income Support it shows a decrease of \$10 million from last year. Under People Expected to Work – Health Benefits, there's a decrease of almost \$3 million. Under People Not Expected to Work – Income Support there's a decrease of over \$5 million. Under the People Working – Earnings Supplement there is a decrease of over \$3 million, or 19 per cent, from last year, and health benefits has also

decreased by almost \$1 million. So I think that in a rich province when we have so many billions of dollars and a huge budget like this, it's deplorable that those rates still are so low.

Now, I'm not of the school that thinks that income is the only issue because I think that also there need to be social supports. There needs to be a social support system for people who are living in poverty. I deplore the approach that's so prevalent that treats people just as individuals, and then the individuals come with their needs, but they're not even told what they're entitled to get in terms of social services. What we need is to revamp, completely change the whole welfare system so that it appreciates people holistically and provides the adequate social support system in the community.

But income does mean a lot. People cannot get out of poverty, they cannot live day by day without having adequate income. So if these rates continue this way, we're just going to have a situation in this province where the rich get richer, because there's so much opportunity for people in this province to improve themselves, and the poor get poorer, so the gap between the rich and the poor increases more and more. That will lead to social decay, lack of social cohesion in the society, a lot of fragmentation, a lot of despair on the part of those who have very little. I don't think that's the kind of Alberta that we want in the future.

So I would hope that as we move into the future, we would be wiser and put our money into providing for the people who have the least. I think it's a measure of the morality of a government how we treat those who are the poorest in society. I think every budget is a moral document. It tells us what kind of priorities a government has. Budgets, even for families, are an indication of what priorities a family has. In this case because there's so little money supporting people who need it the most, at the very bottom of society, I don't find this a moral budget. I think it's deplorable that we can't have more compassion for those who are desperate and those who are in need. With that, I'll take my seat.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10:40

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 42 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that we as a committee now rise and report Bill 43, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, and Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2006, and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills:
Bill 43, Bill 42.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 40
Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I have some very brief comments in regard to Bill 40. Quite frankly, if I had my druthers, I wouldn't be less inclined to look for ways to somehow improve this bill through amendment, but my very honourable and thoughtful colleague has done so. My feeling, just before I do bring forward the amendment that I have here for my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Strathcona, is to mention that I find it deplorable that we are moving these sorts of decisions from this Legislature to regulation. I think that it goes against every sort of better judgment. I know that we've been studying this for the last two and a half years, and then to make this move I find a bit difficult to swallow. Nonetheless, I do have an amendment for Bill 40, and I'd like to distribute that now.

Thank you.

The Chair: We will call this amendment A1. We'll just wait another moment to have them distribute it.

Okay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you may proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. As I had previously stated, I'm finding it difficult to try to amend this bill, but if there is one place where it can be done, I would suggest that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona has hit on it. Basically what he's trying to do here is to place some reasonable control on how these regulations might be unfolding in the coming months and years.

The biggest concern that I think postsecondary students have is to be able to budget reasonably for tuition. I'm suggesting through this amendment that the tuition must not be increasing more than the Alberta consumer price index for the previous calendar year. That way people can make budgeting decisions that are reasonable, and in fact we can maintain a reasonable structure for public funding for postsecondary institutions as opposed to, let's say, allowing one or more or many or all of our postsecondary institution tuitions to run out of control and, thus, compromise the ability for all Albertans to access postsecondary education here in the province.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's an

interesting amendment. It's too bad they didn't bring it to me before now. One of the things that I've been able to do in the last few days was have a nice, long talk with students in the organization called CAUS. As you know, they're currently changing their leadership with new presidents and vice-presidents and so on taking over the helm of the organizations. One of the things that I did commit to them is that if they give the regulation-making process an honest shake, in other words an honest try, and if for some reason it doesn't work for them, then they can come to SPC and tell us what didn't work and how we should fix it or make the suggestion that it go back into legislation. They've asked me, you know, would I make that statement publicly, which I did last night and again tonight. I've also offered my two critics across the way to participate in that same process.

With respect to this amendment, as you can probably appreciate, there are three steps that we take in order to approve policy, and that's SPC, cabinet, and caucus. It would have been interesting had the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona approached us with that, and we might have had a discussion. As it is, I can't on behalf of government accept this amendment because it would be a policy that has not gone through the process.

Thank you.

10:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak in support of my colleague from Edmonton-Calder's amendment to Bill 40 and to perhaps poke one or two holes in my hon. colleague the minister's argument against it. Hole 1 would be this, if I'm quoting accurately, and *Hansard* will determine when the Blues are printed whether I got the quote exact or not: it's an interesting amendment; too bad it didn't come forward until now.

Mr. Chairman, the minister was I believe first elected to this House in 1993. That's a long, long time ago, certainly long enough ago to read the Standing Orders, learn the rules about how this process works. If you have respect for what is supposed to go on on the floor of this House, where duly elected representatives of the population of this entire province meet to debate legislation and policy, you'd realize that this is the way that it works, that bills are introduced, and at various stages, as appropriate, amendments are moved. Now, if the minister wants to say that he can't support this amendment and members of his caucus can take their direction from that comment or not as they see fit or as the whip allows them to do, that's fine, but to suggest that things would have been different if those of us on this side of the House had jumped through this minister's hoops is disingenuous at best.

You know, I too met with the outgoing and incoming leaders of CAUS this morning, so they were able to report to me on the meeting that they had with the minister yesterday. In fact, the offer was made, although they weren't 100 per cent clear on whether the offer was made as a sincere and binding commitment or whether it was more along the lines of: well, if you guys have some problems with this, come on back to my office and see if you can convince me to do it differently.

Yes, I assume that my counterpart in the third party, the Advanced Education critic, has probably received the same letter from the minister that I received today, and the minister will be getting a written answer, I would assume tomorrow, to his offer. I will say publicly right now that it is my intention to take the minister up on his offer, and if I have any influence whatsoever over the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I'll try to persuade him to do the same thing.

I will do this on my terms, and my terms are simply this. Number one, understand that in my role as the Official Opposition Advanced Education critic I will continue to exercise that role, and I will not be co-opted by being brought into the consultative process. [interjections] Laugh if you will, jackals, but if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen, and I'm giving the minister the opportunity to withdraw the offer now if he's not up to the challenge.

Secondly, my agreeing to take part in that consultative process, as specious as it is – because, of course, consulting with stakeholders is something that happens at the very beginning of the process, and there's absolutely no guarantee that having been consulted with, the stakeholders' opinions will actually be taken under consideration and acted upon if they happen to contradict what the government has already made up its mind that it wants to do. So understand as well that my agreeing to participate and take the minister up on his offer in no way construes any kind of approval for Bill 40 and its undemocratic attempt to take tuition policy out of legislation and put it under regulation, where cabinet can mess with it any time it so feels and stick the students of this province with any old tuition policy that it would like, and there's not a darn thing that they could do about it. Bill 40 is called the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006. It perhaps should have been more accurately titled the denial of democracy amendment act, 2006.

I'm going to support my colleague's amendment because it is, I suppose, in a way an attempt to take something, which is so fundamentally flawed as to leave us on this side of the House shaking our collective heads, and try to fix it. In fact, Mr. Chairman, I doubt that a bill of 60 or so words that seeks to do only one thing, which is to undemocratize the process further, can be fixed. Perhaps this bill should have just been drowned at birth, but I will vote in favour of the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think there are a couple of points that have to be made with respect to what we just heard. Number one, I think that the hon. member across the way probably doesn't realize that if you want to get an amendment approved at this stage, you have to have the approval of the process: standing policy, cabinet, and caucus. To stand there and say that you can have approvals of amendments made in this House without going through process, sir, is just an admission that you don't know how it works yet. Maybe you'll need to learn that.

To suggest, sir, that I did not make the offer that I said I did is absolutely wrong. One thing I do not do, sir, is come here and cast false witness. I made the offer, and the offer will stand.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, I only report what I'm told. I've always done that, and I will continue to do that. The fact remains that the minister can talk about the process all he wants, but the process that he's discussing is a process that happens within the government side of the House, within the government. The minister is very fond of saying – I've lost count of the number of times that he has said it during debate on this bill – that the government is the government as though the government is some high priesthood.

Mr. Herard: No. It's elected to govern.

Mr. Taylor: The cabinet was selected by the Premier to govern, but the cabinet, I would remind the hon. minister, his oath to do good work notwithstanding, is answerable to the Legislature, which in turn is answerable to the people.

This goes to the fundamental problem that we deal with not only in Bill 40, Mr. Chairman, but every day in trying to deal with this government – we the people of Alberta, not we the opposition – that it has been in power so long, it is so arrogant, so complacent, so corrupted by power that it has utterly lost touch with the people of Alberta and has no understanding whatsoever – and this, I think, is personified in some of the comments that the minister has made – of the relationship that is supposed to exist between a duly, democratically elected government and the people who put it in office. I will remind the minister yet again that the opposition parties in the last election got 15,000 more votes than the Conservatives did. The Conservatives would be well advised to listen to their stakeholders on matters like this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Just a reminder to everyone that we are discussing amendment A1.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be brief. I just wanted to comment. I appreciate that we're on the amendment, but the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has raised an issue with respect to the process of the amendment. Having had the benefit of spending some nine years as deputy House leader or House leader, working to make sure that this Legislature has an effective process for creating public legislation for Albertans, I can tell the hon. member, who doesn't perhaps have that same level of experience, that this Legislature works best when we work collaboratively on public laws. We have done that, and we have done that with members of the opposition.

11:00

There are two roles that an opposition has, and I appreciate those two roles. One is to improve public legislation by offering positive amendments, and the other is to point out a different perspective when they have no appreciation that the amendment will be passed. When they want to improve public legislation – and I will indicate that in the past when working with opposition members, there have been improvements to public legislation because an amendment had been brought forward which raised a concern or an issue that hadn't been understood or discussed before or brought to light a different way of doing something, and we had the opportunity to discuss that.

The offer has always been open to bring an amendment of that sort to our attention so that we could discuss it, raise it through the caucus process so that we could make sure that everybody was comfortable with it so that we could actually then improve public legislation. But if, in fact, it was an amendment that was being brought forward for, in essence, political purposes – and I don't use that in any derogatory way but just respecting the fact that one of the roles of the opposition is to point out a different philosophy or different perspective – then there was no need, of course, to bring it forward ahead of time because they had no intention for anybody to look at it seriously.

Now, for the hon. member to say that when an amendment is dropped on the floor of the House with nobody having had an opportunity to previously see it, it is better than what they complain about if you ever introduce a bill in the House and expect to debate it immediately, which they would raise up holy terror about, is ridiculous. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie shouldn't get on his high horse about the idea that the hon. minister might suggest that the practice that we've had in this House – and it's my understanding it still continues – is that we are always prepared to consider an amendment that would perhaps improve a bill, and if

there was an intention to bring forward such an amendment that would improve the bill, if it was brought forward on a timely basis for the members of the House to see and for caucuses to discuss and see whether it could be supported and see whether it could be fit into the policy objective of the bill, that would be considered in that manner. If it was a political amendment designed for them to put forward their point of view, then there was no need for that consultation.

I just wanted to take the opportunity on this particular amendment to point out that the process they followed was the latter and not the former. Therefore, they have no real reason to object to the hon. member's comments.

The Chair: Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The fact that a process has been going on for nine years or more and that it is a process behind closed doors and sometimes brings about changes still does not get away from the fact that it is undemocratic and fundamentally arrogant and is fundamentally not acting quite often in the best interests of the people.

I speak against the amendment to Bill 40, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006. With respect to the mover, I'm sure his reasons for moving it are laudable and correct, but I think that even having an amendment to this legislation implies some degree of acceptance of this odious legislation that shouldn't be passed in any way.

I think that in reality what we should be looking at is not even, you know, the sort of fake freeze that really was not a frozen tuition increase but just something that was covered by the government for a couple of years to look like a freeze. To be truthful, we should be looking to ensure that there is not just a cap in terms of percentage but that tuitions do not increase. By not increasing over time and by the fact that this would be seen as an investment – and I'll get into that later when I speak to the bill – and by looking at education as an investment in the future of Albertans and Alberta, we would be looking to ensure the prosperity of the province in the future.

I cannot support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment that's currently before us. I want to respond directly to some of the comments that the Minister of Advanced Education made. He indicated that he sees some benefit to the intention of this amendment and that had he had some more time to take it to his government caucus, he might well have been in favour of this amendment.

My question is: what the heck are we in such a hurry for? Everybody in this House knows that we can pass a bill through committee and third in the same day. That means that we've got all day tomorrow to do this. If there's benefit, if there's value in this particular amendment, let's adjourn tonight and allow the minister to take this amendment to his government caucus, share with them his views on the fact that it might actually have some merit, and bring it back to the House tomorrow afternoon. We can deal with the remaining issues tomorrow in committee, pass it through third, and at least we'll have something that is somewhat better than what we currently have in front of us.

Now, I'm not suggesting that I'm in favour of the bill, but I'm also a realist. I know that the government has a big majority, and they're going to get this piece of legislation, whether the opposition likes it or not. If the minister is suggesting that there's some merit to this

particular amendment, I say let's work together and make that happen instead of the partisan politics that are taking place right now. I really would like to see that happen.

If it's appropriate, Mr. Chairman, I would move adjournment of debate at this time and ask for it to come back to the House tomorrow.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you. I'm disappointed to see that the government has chosen not to support the motion to adjourn and give themselves a chance to look at this amendment a little more carefully. Given that that's the case, I would like to just touch on a couple of further points that the Minister of Advanced Education made in his comments earlier.

He talked about the offer that he made to the student association when he met with them. He said to give it a chance, and if it doesn't work, bring it back to the SPCs. Well, those on the other side of the House will know better than I do, but I have heard varying accounts as to how long it takes for a group to get in front of an SPC. It can be anywhere from a year to three years or longer is what I've been told. Now, I don't know if that's a fact, but I certainly heard it, and I know that there are a lot of groups that want to get in front of an SPC.

Perhaps the minister could elaborate on his comments and make a firm commitment that if they want to get in front of an SPC, it would happen within, say, two months or one month or three months. I don't know. But give us some assurance that if, in fact, the student associations do end up with the same concerns that we have – well, they already have the same concerns that we have – after a bit of experience with this bill having been passed, then I think that we should have a commitment from the government and the minister, in particular, that he will get them in front of an SPC forthwith so that they don't have to wait a period of time to raise their concerns.

The other comment that I would like to make is that there have been many comments in the House this afternoon and this evening as to the effectiveness of all-party committees working together. There was a comment earlier about the search for a new Chief Electoral Officer, and I heard a number of members tonight talking about success in other areas with all-party committees. If the minister is really serious about his offer to include the Advanced Education critic from the Official Opposition and the Advanced Ed critic from the third party, then let's get serious about it and open up the standing policy committees to all-party committees like they do in every other Legislature in this country. Then we'll be doing something. Then you'll have a process that would have some legitimacy to it. You know, the lip service or the hollow words that are often thrown out by this government aren't good enough. Let's put our words into action. If you're really serious about allowing input from other parties, let's legitimize that by establishing all-party committees. Then I would have some faith in the process. As it is right now, I really, really don't.

11:10

My final comment on this particular amendment, Mr. Chairman, is that the way we're going, I can see a day when we might just as well not have a Legislature. I've said this time and time again, but every single time I come in here, it seems that there's another bill in front of us that's taking legislation and turning it into regulation. Pretty soon we won't have any legislation at all any more. It will all

be empty frameworks that allow Executive Council to do whatever they want, when they want, consulting with whom they want, without ever being debated in public in this Legislature.

Frankly, all 83 of us, or at least the 58 of us that are not on the front benches of the government, our jobs will be redundant. We might just as well not be here if all we're going to do is debate an empty framework and not have any legislation with any teeth in it for us to debate for Albertans to follow and for Albertans to search on *Hansard*. What's the point? Ultimately, what's the point if everything is going to be moved into regulation and allow cabinet ministers to make the decisions behind closed doors?

That's just not good enough. It's not why I came here. I don't believe it's why any of you guys came here either. I really don't think that your intention when you ran for public office was to pass blanket legislation that would allow the cabinet to pass orders in council without input from legislators. That's not the reason why we ran for public office, and it certainly isn't what the people of Alberta expect. It's not what they deserve.

I do believe today is a sad day for Alberta, with this particular bill being pushed through the House, with Bill 20, the FOIP amendments, being pushed through the House. I think that we as a province will suffer for the decisions that are being made in this House today, and I don't doubt that a period of years down the road many of us, including many on the government side, will look back on today as a black day for Alberta. I'm actually very, very ashamed to have been a part of it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to stand up on amendment A1 on Bill 40. My basic comment is that I believe in the KISP principle, keep it simple, please. This is certainly a simple, understandable bill that the students would know is concrete. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford just took some of the comments I wanted to make. As we see Bill 20 and it is being put into the minister's hands and a special group to listen to the so-called desires of the students and Albertans to make the wise decision, I have to ask the question: well, should we not maybe just have a test put together and find the wisest person in the land, and he can become our benevolent ruler to decide all of the good things? It would be far more efficient than what we're doing, and it's much speedier as well, and it wouldn't cost us near the dollars.

I think it's disappointing that after two budgets we still don't have concrete legislation so that students can know what their tuition fees are going to be or the framework on how it would be decided. I think that the students and educators and people have to look at the budgets for the secondary schools to know what that is going to be, and they could plan on it instead of year to year wondering what the arbitrary decision of a minister might or might not be and have to adjust according to that.

I would be in favour of this, what I consider a not perfect amendment but one that is understandable. At least the people would know where it's coming from, and that's an important part, that we don't do well when we have arbitrary laws that are going to change or arbitrary decisions by a minister that could change mid-season because it's easy to do and efficient to do, which is the argument that I'm hearing.

I'm disappointed in how it has been going on Bill 40.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the

opportunity to speak on amendment A1, Bill 40, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006. I have a few comments, a few reasons to support this amendment. First of all, if this bill is so good, why does this government keep on rushing? Why don't they give the opposition enough time for discussion? If we discuss more and more, after some amendments we can make this bill better for a long, long time. We had experienced this, you see, in 2003. The last time, in 2003, the tuition fee, the cap, the annual increase – I mean, we have to change the legislation again and again, but the reason is because the government doesn't give enough time for discussion.

Another thing is that this bill is not democratic. I mean, if we give all the powers to the government and the government makes all the decisions through the back door, this is not democratically right. Giving more powers to the minister alone and not giving powers to the Legislature, this Chamber – the people sitting here are elected by the people. If we decide something, that means that the total population in Alberta is involved in that decision.

If the government really believes in transparency and accountability, they should make the decision here in the Legislature instead of giving powers to the ministers. But I still am surprised why this government is rushing and not giving enough time to the bill. This bill is a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation . . . [interjections] Excuse me? What's going on?

The Chair: We are speaking on the amendment.

Mr. Agnihotri: Oh, I see.

As happened with the FOIP bill, that bill, Bill 20, passed, but there was lots of criticism. This is another one, and I agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford that if we rush and pass this bill, this will be really, really a sad day for Alberta. I'm sure that the majority of people sitting here will listen to the voices of their own constituents and give sufficient time to the opposition for more discussion, and then it will be good for everybody.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

Mr. Backs: Mr. Chair, you know, I look at this bill, Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, and I look at it as being another nail in the coffin of democracy in Alberta. You know, if I look back to the 1930s and the governments that were in place in some parts of the world at that time, they would have been proud of this legislation, looking at taking another thing away from this Legislature. I remember that just not too many weeks ago the former Premier was speaking of the need for this government to look at what it has been doing, to look at how it's been taking things away more and more and more and more from this Legislature.

You know, this government doesn't trust Albertans. It doesn't trust democracy. What it has been doing and what it is doing, I think, is tantamount to what would have made the Nazis proud in the 1930s, would have made fascists proud . . .

Mr. Zwozdesky: A point of order.

Mr. Backs: . . . would have made any sort of the nature of these types of government very, very proud at that time, and this is the type of thing that is happening at this time.

11:20

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. I'm so grateful that the Member for Edmonton-Manning went rambling on and on because it proves my citation in Standing Orders of 23(h), (i), and (j). If he were to continue with those improper and absolutely incredibly silly remarks, he would indeed incite disorder through the avowing of false motives against hon. members of this House. I realize that that's not his characteristic nature, by and large, but making those kinds of allegations or imputing those kinds of false or unavowed motives or using insulting language such as references to Nazis is totally uncalled for in this Assembly. I'd simply ask the hon. member to retract that comment, and then we'll move on with the rest of his eloquent debate.

The Chair: Anyone want to speak on the point of order?

Mr. Backs: I will not retract those statements, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The term "fascist" has been ruled out of order by previous Acting Speaker Clegg on March 19, 1996, so I will take it that it was out of order and ask the hon. member if he would like to respond once again.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Chairman, the nature of what this law is about is odious. I think that that is what it means. I meant what I said.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to remind the hon. member that under *Beauchesne* 489, "since 1958, it has been ruled unparliamentary to use the following expressions." When you turn the page, on page 146 the letters N-a-z-i appear, which I read to be Nazi. So I would ask the hon. member to carefully reconsider his response to this point of order and simply withdraw the remark, and we will then be allowed to carry on.

The Chair: The term "Nazi" has also been ruled out of order on March 3, 1994, on March 26, 1990, and on August 14, 1989. I would give the member one more opportunity if he would like to respond to the point of order. It is out of order.

Mr. Backs: Upon advisement, I withdraw the word "Nazi," Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I accept that.

Debate Continued

The Chair: Now, does anyone want to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure once again to rise and speak to Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006. I want to add more comments on this bill. Given this government's clear policy failure on tuition, what makes them think that they have a mandate to take future decisions on tuition behind closed doors? I doubt that this is what all those voters in and around postsecondary institutions had in mind when they rejected Tory candidates and voted in Liberals. This bill is just

another sign of Tory arrogance. This government presided over, even caused tuition to go up faster than in any other place in this country. They should not ram through legislative changes that take away any future legislative oversight. The idea of trusting them to manage tuition policy without any opposition input is ridiculous, particularly when the public overwhelmingly rejects the Tory position on tuition. The government's claim that this change is a necessity is false. In the past they have requested that institutions temporarily ignore legislative provisions for setting tuition policy. They can easily do so here until the policy is ready to be legislated. The new tuition policy may very well be better than what we have, but this is not saying much.

Mr. Chairman, previous tuition fee policies haven't lasted very long. As I mentioned before, the last time was in 2003. In fact, the tuition policy established in 1991 was sold as the policy for the '90s. It only lasted until 1995. Are we prepared to hand all future decisions over to the Tory cabinet simply because this latest policy may be a small improvement? Who knows how long this one will last? That's why I'm asking for more time. The government should give sufficient time to the opposition for more discussion. Making small improvements to a record of abject failure is not enough to warrant handing over all this power to the Tories. This is akin to blackmail, using the prospect of a new policy to convince students' families and elected representatives to give up the right to be heard.

The Chair: Hon. member, please sit down.

The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Zwozdesky: Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j). We had a ruling on this just last night from the chair. The term "blackmail" doesn't belong in this discussion either, hon. member. If you could just withdraw it, and then carry on with your other remarks, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Agnihotri: Temporarily I withdraw the word "blackmail." I'm sorry.

The Chair: That makes my job easier. Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Agnihotri: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With this government's record with this ideological preference for user-pay policies, allowing this government to move future decisions on tuition policy behind closed doors, not subject to public debate, is a nonstarter. The best predictor of future action is past performance. This government's record on tuition is abysmal. There is no way that good, conscientious, responsible legislators can agree to hand over this kind of power on such a critical issue to this Tory government.

Mr. Chairman, the members of the opposition parties got more votes in the last election than this Tory government. This bill represents the Tories saying that they do not need to hear or heed the views of the opposition members who represent more Albertans than they do. It is profoundly antidemocratic. This government claims that regulations are the same as legislation. This is not true. If it were, why would they be so insistent that tuition policy be moved into regulation?

This is not about enabling a better tuition policy. It's about removing the barriers to future changes, including the barrier of

public debate. This government claims that they always consult on regulatory changes. This is false. Just over one month ago substantial changes were made to the student financial assistance regulation OC 139/2006, and neither of the major student stakeholder groups, CAUS or ACTISEC, was consulted. Not only does the government not consistently consult students on regulatory changes affecting them, but they did not even consult on this legislative change. Students had to hear about it through the grapevine and then immediately sent a letter objecting to the change to the minister.

11:30

Mr. Chairman, this change is not simply about enabling a better tuition policy. If this was true, we would be the first ones supporting it, but this government has wanted to take tuition controls out of legislation for a long, long time. They are doing it now because they think the new tuition policy provides them enough political cover, enough leverage with the students to do it. This is akin to – sorry; I can't use the word. Using the prospect of a new policy to convince students, families, and elected representatives to give up the right to be heard on this topic is yet another sign of Tory arrogance. As I said before, this bill is not democratic in giving powers to the minister. This is not fair. We should discuss this policy always in the Legislature, not behind the back doors, and I urge the government again to give more time to the opposition for more discussion. Maybe it takes one month, maybe two months, but more and more time, deeper and deeper discussions. As I said, this is a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation. This is not acceptable to me, this is not acceptable to my constituents, and this is not acceptable to Albertans. So I urge everyone to not support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 40, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 40 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the

Committee of the Whole now rise and report Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 40. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head:

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 20
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move third reading of Bill 20.

At this time I would adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another day of outstanding progress and something like 19 bills addressed this evening alone. In spite of a few rough spots along the way I think that says a lot for the ability of the House. On that note, I would move that we stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 11:35 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 17, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 105 visitors from Spruce Grove, from the Greystone Centennial middle school. I had the opportunity to visit with them a little bit in the rotunda at noon today, and this really is the future of our province. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Lonnie Granley, Mrs. Shireen Mohammed, Mrs. Lila Befus, Mrs. Tracy Lachman, Miss Robyn Currie, and parent helpers Mrs. Colleen Wallace, Mrs. Sandra Christiansen, Mrs. Susan Cherkas, Mrs. Pearl Young, and Mrs. Lauri MacKinnon. I believe they are in both galleries. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. the Premier, did you have an introduction?

Mr. Klein: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce Ryan Wells, who's here today with his two sons, Dylan and Eric Wells, and his uncle Wahab Ali. Ryan is an oil field supervisor, and his sons attend school in their hometown of Drayton Valley. Ryan's wife bid and won a lunch for four with me through the 10th annual Western Mardi Gras, an auction put on by the Chrysalis foundation.

Now, the foundation's auction raises funds in support of persons with disabilities and helps improve their lives in many ways. The Chrysalis foundation is a cause that's near and dear to Ryan, his sons, and especially his Uncle Wahab, whose daughter was born with a disability. I had the pleasure of enjoying lunch with the group of four this afternoon, which was once again a gourmet meal of sandwiches.

Some Hon. Members: Egg salad.

Mr. Klein: Egg salad, yes.

It was a special treat to talk with Ryan's sons, who at ages 11 and 12 are already like their father and uncle very community-minded Albertans. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask the Assembly to please join me in giving them the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce a very special group called the CCAF, who are sitting in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon. They are participants in a nine-month international fellowship program based in Ottawa and are visiting us

today as part of a western Canadian tour. The fellowship program is a collaboration between the office of the Auditor General of Canada, the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, and the Auditor General of Quebec. The program is sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency and is designed to expand knowledge and understanding of public-sector accounting and auditing as practised in Canada and help fellows address auditing issues in their home environment.

With us today is Mrs. Pauline Kane Fortune from Cameroon, Mr. José Alpizar Fallas from Costa Rica, Ms Grace Mugyabuso from Tanzania, Mr. James Ryoba from Tanzania, Mrs. Sirin Phankasem from Thailand, Mr. David Sohinto from Benin, Mr. Benoît Azodjilande from Benin. They are accompanied today by their hosts Ms Donna Bigelow, program co-ordinator of international affairs at the office of the Auditor General of Canada; Mrs. Antonine Campbell, principal of international relations at the office of the Auditor General of Canada; Mrs. Caroline Jorgensen, manager for international business at the CCAF in Ottawa; and Ms Lori Trudgeon, communications co-ordinator with the office of the Auditor General of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, they are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House the mother of one of our pages. Stacy Schell is the page. She's right over here. Apparently, she sprained her ankle, so we're happy to see her in the procession walking. It's rough work being a page. We're happy that Stacy's mother is here in the House, so it gives me great pleasure to introduce her, Jody Schell. She is in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I invite her to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First of all, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and members of the Assembly some 20 active seniors from Beacon Heights seniors' club, led by their leader Mrs. Vickie Drewoth. I've been over there a couple times, and they are active. They wanted me to play bingo with them, but I watched a couple games where they were covering eight or nine cards. I wouldn't have kept up with the one, so I wisely declined. They are in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction. I'm also very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Janet MacNeil. She is also the mother of one of our hard-working pages, Desirée MacNeil. Janet worked for the Multiple Sclerosis Society for eight years as a presenter for the MS readathon, educating and informing students about MS in schools around the city. In the process of changing careers, she continues to help with the MS Society. Janet is also a creative and dedicated mother to her four children. Janet is seated in the Speaker's gallery. I now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions this afternoon. The first is a duo of constituents from Edmonton-Rutherford, Scott Reith and his father, Bruce Reith. Scott is a 14-year-old who has a very keen interest in politics. He

has visited the Parliament buildings in Ottawa and wanted a chance to experience a question period in our Legislature. He tells me that someday he wants to be Prime Minister. We had an opportunity to have a brief visit outside before the proceedings today, and his father, Bruce, informed me that he was once a page in this Legislature, in 1979. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second set of introductions, Mr. Speaker, three staff members from the Alberta Liberal caucus. I would like to introduce Jill Roszell, who is our outreach co-ordinator. She comes to us from the arts community and has done a bang-up job, if I may say so, this spring. Christel Hyshka is a caucus STEP student for the summer and previously worked in the office of the Member for Edmonton-McClung as a STEP student. She just completed a degree in political science and I understand will be beginning her master's work this fall. The third would be Kelly FitzGibbon, who is an administrative assistant extraordinaire. I can attest to that because at the last minute I had her prepare tablings for me this afternoon with very short notice, and it was a lot of work. So I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Anna-May Choles. Anna-May is a proud Edmontonian and is planning to enter her third year of honours in political science at the University of Alberta and will be providing her valuable assistance to the constituency office of Edmonton-Manning this summer. Please rise, Anna-May, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have two. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three guests who have already travelled over six hours to be here today. My guests are concerned citizens from the Clear Hills area and are here today to hopefully get some direction on how they can protect their community and their quality of life. They feel that confined hog feeding operations could have a detrimental impact on the future development of the region. I would ask my guests Terrie Wayland, Becky Montpellier, and Lee Svederus to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also privileged to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three guests who are visiting here from the Eureka River area. They have also travelled over six hours to be here. My guests Linda Basnett, Dave Larsen, and Herb Bean have come to the Legislature to promote responsible animal husbandry and land stewardship as they relate to confined hog feeding operations. They feel that this could have a negative and divisive impact on their community. I'd ask my distinguished guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Ms

Glynis Dorey. Ms Dorey is a member of the Strathcona composite high school parent council. She's a graduate of the computing science program at the U of A and holds a master of political economy from the London School of Economics. Glynis is here today about her concerns regarding insufficient heating and infrastructure problems at Strathcona high school. I'm very pleased to have Ms Dorey join us here today, and I would please ask her to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sarah Crummy. Sarah has been volunteering in my constituency office of Edmonton-Centre all year and is now going to continue her work with us over the summer as our summer student. She has graduated with her degree in political science, and we're very honoured to have her join us and bring her perspective to our office. I would ask her to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Confidentiality of Ministerial Briefing Notes

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than a decade ago the Premier introduced a bill that was aimed at making the government more open and accountable to Albertans. The Premier intended to give the people of this province real power to see into the workings of government, stating, and I quote, that there is a public expectation that we must be more transparent; what you see is what you get, end quote. Now, upon his departure, the Premier is pushing legislation that effectively states to taxpayers: you can't see, and you can't get. To the Premier: given that in question period yesterday the Premier waved his briefing binder for the public to see, why now can they not get?

Mr. Klein: Well, I'll wave it again, and you aren't getting it. You are not getting it. It contains advice to the ministers. You can wait five years. Some of that advice the opposition will use for sure. This individual will use it for sure to interpret this as government policy when, in fact, it has not become policy. Some of it may become legislation; some of it may become policy. But this is fundamentally advice to the minister to answer questions, and we have no idea where they're coming from. No idea where they're coming from. But these are anticipated answers to questions. You know, they go to great lengths – that is, the members of the administration – to provide intelligent answers to what sometimes are very stupid questions.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, there are no stupid questions, just stupid answers.

Is it still the Premier's position that there exists a public expectation for greater government transparency in the province of Alberta?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's amazing when he talks about transparency. I had a conversation with a gentleman just a few days ago. He was a supporter, as many Albertans are, and he said that this is one of the most transparent governments he has ever encountered.

Transparency goes far beyond what's in briefing books. It involves attending media scrums almost on a daily basis. I know that the Leader of the Opposition is usually at those media scrums not to participate but to find out what I say so they can use it in question period the next day. Relative to transparency we use the website, we use communications as much as we possibly can. All of our ministers are accessible and open and accountable to the public through the media. So this is a very accessible and transparent government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the Leader of the Opposition usually takes the podium after the Premier leaves the room.

Given the Premier's apparent – to me, anyway – total flip-flop on transparency and accountability, what has happened under the Premier's watch that is so bad that it needs to be concealed?

Mr. Klein: Nothing needs to be concealed. This is totally consistent with the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation. The information contained in this briefing book is already privileged and is already protected. Bill 20 simply takes it out for an extended period of time. After five years they can have it. They can have it then, not now and not to use for purely political purposes.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Gasoline Taxes

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've already had it.

Mr. Speaker, it comes as no surprise to motorists that as this long weekend approaches, gas prices begin to soar at the pumps again. While this government collects millions of dollars in extra revenue, our drivers continue to get hit with high provincial fuel taxes. This doesn't just affect Albertans hitting the highways for the long weekend. This is thousands of Albertans running small businesses dependent on vehicle fleets. To the Premier: given that for every dollar increase in the price of a barrel of oil the Alberta government reaps more than a hundred million dollars in extra revenue, why won't this government consider reducing the gasoline tax so that ordinary Albertans can benefit from soaring resource revenues?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, our tax on gasoline is already the lowest in Canada. It is a flat tax; it doesn't rise and fall with the price of gasoline. Basically, the producers are responsible for setting the price of gasoline. We have a tax, which, as I say, is the lowest in Canada, plus we rebate 5 cents a litre off gasoline back to municipalities. So I think that our policies relative to gasoline and the sale of gasoline, notwithstanding the revenues we reap from the oil industry through royalties, are very reasonable indeed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a two and a half dollar a barrel increase in the price of oil would cover any revenue that this province would lose from cutting the gasoline tax, why won't this government consider reducing the tax to 5 cents a litre so that municipalities continue to benefit, and now so do drivers as well?

1:50

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we use the tax on gasoline to build roads and other needed infrastructure. If the hon. member is willing to forgo these very essential infrastructure projects, then I invite him to stand up and say so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then, to the Minister of Economic Development: what assessments, if any, has his department done to determine the effects of high gasoline prices on small Alberta businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. acting minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the department has done a lot of work on the feasibility of doing business across a number of different areas in North America. Quite recently there have been a number of reports that have come out that would indicate that Alberta is one of the best places to do business in all of North America. In fact, we rank very highly across a number of jurisdictions. So to look at only one piece of the whole puzzle really isn't responsible when you're talking about total business. We rank very well.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government stated yesterday that they are processing over 10,000 temporary foreign workers for our oil sands. They say that these applications are approved by this Alberta government and will work under the oil sands temporary foreign worker memorandum of understanding initiated by this Alberta government. Yesterday in this Legislature the Minister of Advanced Education admitted that there are thousands of union tradesmen unemployed in Alberta. The minister said that they are unemployed because they want to work closed shop, which means that they want to work with a real union. My question is to the minister of human resources. Will this government stick to its often-repeated statement of hiring Albertans first, Canadians second, and work to rescind, to cancel, these applications for thousands of temporary, indentured foreign workers?

Mr. Cardinal: Yes only to the first part of the question, Mr. Speaker. Yes, our top priority, of course, is to hire Albertans first, hire aboriginals, persons with developmental disabilities, and older workers that are displaced. That is our top priority.

I mentioned in this House earlier that we are working with some of the federal ministers already. I met with the federal minister of immigration already to talk about various issues that related to needs in Alberta. I'm meeting soon with the minister of Indian affairs to talk about the issue of aboriginal unemployment in Alberta. I've said before that there are over 200,000 aboriginal youth between the ages of 15 and 25. A lot of aboriginal youth still live in poverty. There's a lot of work to be done, but we are definitely working in that direction to ensure that they have the same opportunities as anybody else.

Mr. Backs: Let's get them working. They would make good workers.

A supplemental to the same minister: will the minister investigate

whether restrictive contract terms by oil sands owners on union contractors are resulting in Albertans and Canadians being unemployed and replaced by temporary, indentured foreign workers?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, I've said before in this House that with temporary foreign workers their immigration to Canada is completely under federal jurisdiction. This member knows that and still asks the same question over and over again. Call the federal immigration minister. You might get a different answer. In the meantime, our priority is to look after Albertans. Our job as a government is to create the environment for private industry to create the jobs and the wealth, and there are lots of job opportunities out there.

Mr. Backs: They're quoted publicly as saying that they're approved by the Alberta government.

A supplemental to the minister of human resources. Will the minister be working to ensure that temporary foreign workers are not displacing qualified Alberta tradesmen in oil sands work just because their employer will not employ union trades, which are the bulk of industrial tradesmen in Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, like I mentioned earlier, we do as a government try to create the environment for private industry to create the jobs and the wealth in Alberta. It's up to the unions, individuals, non-union members that are interested in work to negotiate with the companies themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Political Party Donations

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unite the Right became a slogan with new meaning last night as the Liberals and the Tories joined forces to vote down an NDP amendment that would have cancelled the fiscally reckless corporate tax cut in this year's budget. Since we know that 73 per cent of PC Party contributions and almost half of Liberal Party contributions came from the corporate sector, while 99 per cent of NDP donations are from individual Albertans, it's clear who is paying the piper. My question is for the Premier. Will this Premier commit, before he leaves office, to taking big money out of Alberta politics by restricting donations to individuals only, as Quebec, Manitoba, and the federal government have done?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure, but I think that that is a matter for the Legislature. We have no control over who gives to this party, the Conservative Party, or the Liberal Party, nor do we have any control over who gives to the ND Party. You know, the New Democrats are supported in large part by the unions. Now, I don't know to what extent they get donations from the unions either individually from union members or collectively through the union organizations, but I would bet that they get a significant amount from unions and union workers.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we're pleased to give up union donations if you'll give up corporate donations.

Mr. Speaker, given that the corporate sector gave \$1.5 million in 2005 to the Liberal and Conservative parties and received in exchange a \$250 million tax cut, will the Premier admit that it's corporate donations that are driving the tax cut agenda of his government?

Mr. Klein: No, Mr. Speaker. It's the economy that's driving everything really. You know, the income tax laws are there for everyone. They're there for the NDs as well. It doesn't matter. The 90 some-odd per cent of the individuals who donate to the ND Party get a very handsome tax receipt and tax break, as do corporations, as does everyone and all bodies, corporate or otherwise, who donate to political parties.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this is a serious question, and other governments have taken it up. Will the Premier commit, before he leaves office, to taking big money out of politics?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is entirely up to the donors, whether they donate to the NDs, the Liberals, or the Conservatives. We are not a top-down government, you know. We are not a top-down government, and we don't interfere like the NDs want to interfere. They want to control every aspect of everyone's life all the time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Confined Hog Feeding Operations

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many feel that it's the responsibility and duty of government to strike a balance between individual rights and a community's will. It is often stated in law that one's individual rights end when you encroach on other people's quality of life or property. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What can municipalities do if they do not want confined hog feeding operations in their jurisdiction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question. Municipalities do have the ability through their land-use planning to set aside areas they consider not appropriate for confined feeding operations. Certainly, under AOPA, the Agricultural Operation Practices Act, and the Natural Resources Conservation Board approval officers cannot approve applications if they're not consistent with the act or with the land-use provisions in the county's municipal development plan. I can assure this hon. member that this government is committed to ensuring that our legislation and the regulations are fair to the communities, to the operators, and to the environment.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: is there anything residents who are against the confined hog feeding operation can do if their municipal government is pursuing it?

Mr. Horner: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, they can make representation to their municipal governments. When the NRCB receives the completed application for these proposals, the public is notified by ads in the local paper and courtesy letters. They usually have 20 working days to submit their concerns. It's my understanding that the CFO this member is speaking about in northern Alberta has really only submitted part 1 of the application process. Part 1 of the process is essentially just informing the NRCB that there's something coming. Most confined feeding operations in this province are family operations, and our producers are good stewards of the land, and we're very proud of that.

I would also note, Mr. Speaker, that it's my understanding that the county council in this instance has actually put a hold on any permit issuances at this point in time to ensure that those residents' concerns are heard, that the environmental issues are heard, that the regulations are followed, and that they're doing what they need to do as a municipality and as duly elected officials.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question will be to the minister of health. Does the province have any studies – and if not, will they undertake to do one? – to determine the effect that confined hog feeding operations have on the health of the workers, the neighbours, and the surrounding environment?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's more appropriate for the minister of agriculture, and I will ask him to respond.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you. We do an ongoing scientific review of confined feeding operations. The NRCB consults the latest data that is out there. We have had extensive consultation with the industry, and the Department of Environment is also well informed of any of these things.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate when a development like a hog operation threatens to split a community, and that's exactly why we've developed these processes. That's exactly why we've developed the regulations. That's exactly why we base the decisions on science in consultation with Environment. The NRCB actually reports to Sustainable Resource Development, and that balances the interests of agriculture and the environmental concerns.

I do find it interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the member whose constituency actually contains more than 126 confined feeding operations would be quite interested in limiting that. Our policy is to build agriculture in Alberta, not dismantle it. Our policy is to build jobs in rural Alberta, not move them out of rural Alberta. Our policy is to develop the value chain of agriculture that the primary producers can earn their dollar from.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government recently announced that it is deferring collection of overpayments under the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, commonly referred to as CAIS. But that deferral applied only to the provinces where the federal government administers the CAIS program. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Because CAIS is handled here by the province, is that putting Alberta producers at a disadvantage?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to clarify this situation as there is a little bit of confusion out there. Yes, the federal government did defer collection of any CAIS overpayments until it has had a chance to work out details on an additional one-time funding arrangement which they've announced, which we're still waiting to hear the details on. The federal government did say that they were going to delay interest on those overpayments until January 1 of 2007.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the federal government is following our lead. We introduced a similar measure in February of this year, and in

consultation with producers last fall we informed every producer who has been in an overpayment situation under the CAIS program that no interest would be charged until the end of December. As well, we also added some much-needed flexibility to the producers in the sense that we informed them that they could convert any money owed to low-interest loans, to long-term repayment under CAIS program payments that were coming to them. This week we are actually calling or writing to every Alberta producer who has an overpayment under CAIS, and we are recommending that they hold off any business decision on the overpayment until we've had a chance to see what the federal changes will do to the overpayment situations in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then my only supplemental to the same minister is: what is he or his department doing to ensure that the changes the federal government is proposing are the right ones for our Alberta producers, that will help us?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we've talked about in this House a number of times, we are part and parcel of the National CAIS Committee. We are working through that committee to try and understand better what exactly it is that the federal government is going to do in terms of this retroactivity that they've announced, in terms of how they're going to calculate this payment. Until we know that, until we actually know what procedure they're going to follow and the calculation that they're going to use, it's a little difficult for us to understand how that's going to impact our producers in the province. We are lobbying a certain amount to have a set approach taken that we think will benefit, certainly, our grains and oilseeds producers who are the most dramatically hit.

It's interesting to note that of the 36,000 producers who are under our CAIS program, our overpayment situation is just a little bit over 10 per cent. In the total realm of things that's not to say that it's not a serious situation, Mr. Speaker. We believe it is, and we're hopeful that this one-time payment will help that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans have lost trust in the ability of this Environment minister to protect groundwater and their safety. Growing rural concerns about increasing gas migration into water have been dismissed as fearmongering by this minister. One week ago in Spirit River a private well exploded, burning and hospitalizing three men. Alberta Environment has been investigating and receiving complaints about this well for over three years. To the Minister of Environment: can the minister confirm that this private well which exploded in Spirit River was being investigated by Alberta Environment?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, this was, as the hon. member has mentioned, a very unfortunate occurrence. In fact, one of my own Environment staff is the son of the family who owns the well. Of course, I wish his father and the other two involved in the incident a speedy recovery as I'm sure all members of the Assembly do. My ministry was on-site very shortly after the incident occurred, and we will continue to be involved until this issue is resolved.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this hon. member has been in here talking about coal-bed methane drilling. There is no coal-bed

methane drilling going on anywhere near what is happening up there. I want to say that at this time we have no reason to believe this is related to industrial activity. There is simply no coal-bed methane in this area at all.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, after two years of complaints from people like the Zimmermans, Ernsts, Lauridsens, and others, how can we believe this department is protecting their health and doing a proper investigation of the complaints?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the inferences that he is making against me personally I find unacceptable. I accept them but as a public official because my passion and my interest is protecting the land, air, and water of this province to every citizen, all 3.2 million.

I guess I'd best describe it as almost as if I don't have a heart. All I can say to you is simply this. Albertans are very caring people, and I know that this government reflects that in how we protect the environment. I think, based on some of the inferences that you have made against me, based on some of the unsubstantiated facts that you have made, I can assure all Albertans that we will do what is right in protecting their interest.

Let me end by saying this. I think there's only one quality that is worse than the hardness of the heart, based on the kind of comments you're making, and that is softness of the head.

Dr. Swann: Three years this man waited for investigations. He still has no explanation of why his water exploded.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment has not met the mark in protecting our most vital resource.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I appreciate that there's a synergy that goes on in here, and I also appreciate that there's emotion, but it's question period. Let's get to the question, okay?

2:10

Dr. Swann: I ask the Minister of Environment to resign.

Mr. Boutilier: Not on your life, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I have had many constituents visiting my office to talk about the services their loved ones receive from the community-based programs funded by PDD boards. Even though they are satisfied with the quality of the programs they and their loved ones receive, they are concerned that the recent increase in funding will not enable these programs to maintain these services at current levels. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Is the minister committed to ensuring that funding levels are maintained at adequate levels to ensure that there are no cuts to community services of PDD programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the hon. member because I know, too, how important this program is, and I have been paying close attention to the concerns of the people in the community. There is substantial funding in the PDD program, and I am committed. The hon. member has asked that. I am committed

to ensuring that the substantial funding remains in place for the services, but I want to tell you how. This is a top priority for my ministry and there are two ways. One is the bill that we have here in this session, which I hope will pass soon and be proclaimed, and that legislation will change the governance, and it will also change the way that the program is administered. Along with that, I am currently reviewing the funding and the eight steps the funding goes through before it reaches the individual in the community. I believe there is a disconnect there. I will find that. I expect to have answers within the next two months, the next eight weeks, and I hope that satisfies this member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister: will the minister commit to monitoring the funding situation closely and make sure to address any shortfall in funding to these community groups which negatively impacts services provided to recipients? If she doesn't, will she resign?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, I can't even believe you said that.

Mr. Speaker, in all seriousness this is very important, about communication with the community. I can assure the member that I have met with the regional boards, the regional board chairs in the past two weeks. I've also met with the regional CEOs. We've discussed the monitoring, the accountability. I am meeting with the families, with caregivers out in the community, and even this Friday I'm meeting at the Disability Action Hall in Calgary, and we are discussing this very issue. This member is more than welcome to be there, and I will be there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Provincial Campgrounds

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the Minister of Community Development would agree that this weekend officially kicks off the 2006 camping season. Where we may disagree is on the ability of the park system to keep Albertans healthy, happy, and safe over the long weekend. My questions are all to the Minister of Community Development. How many conservation officers, permanent and seasonal, will be on duty this long weekend to ensure that Albertans have a safe visit to our approximately 500 parks and protected areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are 278 permanent park staff, and in the summer we nearly double that number, by another 300. Of those, there are 68 permanent conservation officers and 91 seasonal for a total of 159 conservation officers during the summer seasons. Two hundred and seventy of our parks have camping facilities; therefore, that gives us approximately one conservation officer for every two parks.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, the conservation officers are responsible for public safety, resource management, heritage appreciation, park administration, and enforcement of the various legislation that we have. Our interpretive staff manage heritage appreciation activities, including interpretive programming such as special events, guided walks, publications, environmental education, and public inquiries and complaints.

Mr. Speaker, our goal is to ensure that Alberta's provincial parks are safe and enjoyable for families.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the minister's response to the questions I sent to him previously.

Given that two popular campgrounds, Miquelon Lake and English Bay, will be closed this weekend, has the minister evaluated which nearby parks are expected to take displaced visitors, and if so, what steps were taken to plan for these extra displaced people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for asking this question. Just to reinforce again that at Miquelon Lake provincial park there will be approximately \$5 million of upgrading that will be taking place this summer to make our camping experiences that much more enjoyable for Albertans and visitors to this province. There will also be approximately \$700,000 in upgrades that will occur at English Bay this summer at Cold Lake. There was a public service announcement that was released on May 16 advising Albertans of this, and there are certainly opportunities in the surrounding areas where other camp facilities will be available for them to go out and camp this weekend.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My final question to the Minister of Community Development: now that Wal-Mart is officially sponsoring Alberta's park system, can the minister confirm whether there will be greeters in blue vests and yellow buttons welcoming campers to Alberta's parks this weekend?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, I think the situation in regard to Wal-Mart has been a little bit exaggerated. I can tell you that we do have a brochure that goes out advertising the campgrounds that we have available in our province, and that is done through various groups that take advertising space. Wal-Mart happens to be one of those. They also have links that have been established to our Gateway website that people have been able to go through. What we have done is we've informed Wal-Mart that there has been a little bit of negative reaction in regard to them linking themselves to our Gateway website, and we've asked that they redirect their page to describe the environmental initiatives that they do providing funding to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Postsecondary Education for Rural Students

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Alberta jointly launched a new bursary program with the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation to enable rural students to pursue postsecondary opportunities. Statistics show that fewer rural students complete postsecondary studies compared to their urban counterparts. My first question today is to the Minister of Advanced Education. What is the value of this new bursary, and will the bursary make it easier for students to complete a program in Alberta's postsecondary learning system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was greatly honoured this morning to be in Red Deer at Red Deer College along with Mr. Norman Riddell of the millennium foundation to announce the new rural incentive bursary. We know that postsecondary students from rural Alberta face unique challenges when furthering their education. In fact, 15 per cent fewer rural students enrol in postsecondary than urban students. So this bursary will help to assist with these challenges, in turn increasing the number of Albertans from rural communities pursuing and completing postsecondary education. We estimate that about 8,100 Albertans will be eligible to receive this \$1,000 bursary, and we hope that each and every one of these adults will make good use of it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you. My second question is also directed to the Minister of Advanced Education. Which students will qualify for this rural scholarship?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, this bursary is available to students studying in an approved Canadian institution who are enrolled in their first or second year of a postsecondary program of at least two years' duration. Students applying for the bursary must have attended high school in rural Alberta or lived in rural Alberta for 12 months prior to starting their studies. In addition, to qualify, the students also have to be eligible for at least \$1,000 in student loan assistance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:20 City Centre Early Education Project

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city centre early education project is an award-winning collaborative effort among seven inner-city Edmonton schools to overcome challenges related to poverty and lack of opportunity. One of their most important successes has been the junior kindergarten program in three of these schools. The program was funded on an interim basis by Children's Services, but the funding will be eliminated for September of this year. The success of this program is well documented, and its jeopardy is a serious reversal for high-needs students. My question is to the Minister of Education. What is the minister prepared to do to save junior kindergarten in the city centre project?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the hon. member is referring to the so-called AISI projects or not, but if he is, it was made very clear to the Edmonton public school board – and he would know this because he may have been there when it started three years ago – that the funding was provided on a one-time basis and that funds that were to be used out of that funding pool were not going to be repetitive in nature. They were not going to recur.

Now, if that's the fund he's referring to, then those particular programs will have to be adjusted for by the school board in its budget by the end of June. Alternatively, they'll have to look for other sources. The nature and extent of our AISI program is that we provide those monies, about \$71 million a year across the province, for specific innovative projects that typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not talking about the AISI programs. I'm talking about junior kindergarten, which was paid for

by Children's Services, and they're eliminating it. My question is again to the minister. What is the minister prepared to do to save junior kindergarten, specifically junior kindergarten that was financed by Children's Services before?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I apologize to the member. There were some kindergarten programs funded out of AISI as well. At least that's my understanding.

Now, I'm not aware of the particular junior K program specifically that is being referenced here, but I'd be happy to take a look at that and speak with Children's Services and see what it is that the public school board has in mind because this is, after all, a local decision by the local board.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not a local decision if they get the funding cut from the provincial government.

My question again is to the minister. Is the minister prepared to step up? This is well documented that this is doing good work for high-needs students. Is the minister prepared to continue with these programs in the three schools in the city centre project?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'm at a disadvantage because I don't know which specific schools are being referenced or which specific programs, but if the member would be so kind as to send me over the information, I'd be happy to take a look at it and see. Maybe something can be done, maybe not. I don't know on what basis Children's Services might have been funding which programs. Was it one-time funding, or was it some pilot funding, or something other than that? I'd be happy to take a look at it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Applewood Park Community Association

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An Alberta Auditor General's report has led to the Ministry of Community Development demanding that the Applewood Park Community Association repay its \$20,000 grant. The minister has asked the Crown's debt collection to collect the money. To the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency: why has the Alberta debt collection taken so long to collect any of the missing Wild Rose funds from the Applewood community?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's true that Restructuring and Government Efficiency does look after debt collections for the province of Alberta, and I can tell you that the overall success rate of Restructuring and Government Efficiency's Crown debt collection unit is very high. From 2003 to 2004 we went from \$4 million in collections to \$9 million today.

On this particular issue, Mr. Speaker, we have passed this over to Justice because we believe that this case may be going to court. Justice is determining the strength of the case and doing a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether to proceed with this collection or not. Once we hear the advice from Justice, we'll work with Community Development, who will determine whether or not we are going to proceed.

Mr. Agnihotri: I don't know when that time will come.

My next supplemental, to the Minister of Justice: why does the government take legal action against Albertans that do not pay their health care premiums yet takes this soft approach to Applewood?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, Alberta Justice provides legal services to each of the ministries, and if the ministries ask us for assistance in that regard, we provide it. The hon. minister indicated that he has asked for assistance from my department. That assistance is being provided. I don't know exactly what the current status of it is, but I'm sure that when he receives the advice from Justice, appropriate action will be taken.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next supplemental, to the Minister of Government Services: why is access to information refusing to disclose the Department of Justice's 719 pages of records pertaining to Applewood Park Community Association?

Mr. VanderBurg: I have no idea on the particulars of this, and I'll get back to him in writing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Alberta in Washington, DC

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Legislature rotunda is featuring many colourful banners depicting Alberta's participation in the Smithsonian's Folklife Festival in Washington, DC, this summer. A number of my constituents were interviewed to be a part of this festival. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. Can he tell us who was selected and how?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 21 I was pleased to announce along with the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations the names of approximately 150 Albertans that will be in Washington, DC, at the Smithsonian. These Albertans will showcase urban and cultural diversity. Our creativity, entrepreneurship, and can-do spirit will all be on display. This is a curated event. Participants were chosen by the Smithsonian Institute in consultation with staff from my department. The participants are listed on the April 21 news release or can also be found on our website at albertaindc.com.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What other activities does the government have planned, and was Alberta's business community given the opportunity to participate?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, we're going to help tell Alberta's story in a lot of different ways at a very, very important place. There are going to be economic forums featuring people speaking in the areas of energy and agriculture, innovation and science. Our postsecondary institutions are going to be featured with a concert at the prestigious Kennedy Center. There will be receptions held by the city of Edmonton, a Stampede breakfast hosted in Washington.

We're going to tell people in Washington about the integration of our ag sectors in both countries, we're going to educate Americans about the largest energy supplier to the United States, and we're going to promote Alberta as a tourism destination. We certainly have involved people from organizations and businesses throughout the province's municipalities. Many of them have come forward to

us, knocking on our door and asking how they can help, how they can participate. As an example, Alberta beef producers are donating Alberta beef. Caterpillar and Finning are donating a giant oil sands truck to be on display at the festival. Suncor is supporting the energy forum. So there's been a great deal of involvement from many different sectors. We've got a great story to tell. We're going to do a great job.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Regulation of the Legal Profession

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The legal profession in Alberta is extremely important, and it is imperative that lawyers remain independent and impartial. These same values must also apply to the Law Society of Alberta in dealing with public complaints in order to increase public confidence in the justice system. My questions are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Given that transparency and accountability are vital to increase public confidence in the system, how can a system for complaints against lawyers run by lawyers themselves achieve public confidence?

2:30

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, the Law Society of Alberta is a self-governing body. It is pursuant to an act of this Legislature. Indeed, from my observation in the few years I've been here, this is a trend we have, that there are more self-governing bodies. My recollection is that the benchers, who are the group that are elected by the lawyers, ultimately include among them lay benchers who are put there by appointment. These are people who are not lawyers but who participate as full benchers along with the other benchers. My memory is that they participate in the discipline hearings. The discipline hearings are also, to my understanding, very public if, in fact, they proceed to a discipline. The process itself is one where a complaint is made. If there is some substance to the complaint upon initial review, it goes to a hearing. If there is not, it ends at that time. If it goes to a hearing, it is a matter of public record. I know of nothing that is more transparent than something that is done in public.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just one supplemental question: given that reform of the legal profession from professional self-regulation to a more open and transparent system has been conducted in the United Kingdom – and I'll table the Sir David Clementi report later; good summer reading, by the way – will the minister commit to a similar review of the Legal Profession Act in Alberta to make the system more responsive to public concerns?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with the Clementi report, and I think the hon. member, if he was in fact holding up what he is going to file, is not going to be filing the entire report because when I got it, it was a full binder as opposed to just part of a binder.

Nonetheless, the fact is that the United Kingdom has in fact approached this in a different manner. There's absolutely no doubt about that. But I can tell you, on the basis of the information I have, that the circumstances we currently have in Alberta – indeed probably across Canada but certainly in Alberta – are different than the circumstances that were present in the U.K. when this particular

matter went forward with the Clementi report and the changes following.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that's fine?

Then the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Accessible Outdoor Recreation Facilities

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans have asked about the status of Blue Lake centre, located in William A. Switzer provincial park near Hinton. They believe that the Blue Lake centre would make an excellent location for a fully accessible facility similar to William Watson Lodge in Kananaskis Country. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Has the ministry assessed the demand for an accessible facility more easily reached by residents of northern or central Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Blue Lake centre offers significant opportunities for a wide variety of outdoor activities. The Alberta government has retained a consultant to investigate future options for the Blue Lake centre, including the possibility of a facility for persons with disabilities. We've also received indication from the disability association that converting the Blue Lake centre into a disability accessible facility would be encouraged. Once we've reviewed the consultant's report, we'll have a much clearer picture of what we have to do forward in order to meet all these needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you. It's complete.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, shortly I'll call upon the first of six to participate in Members' Statements today, but a historical vignette. [interjection] I want to put a disclaimer on what happened yesterday. I had nothing to do with that. Nothing to do with that.

Back to the business today. Four hundred and fifty candidates from nine different political parties contested the November 22, 2004, Alberta election. Prior to the implementation of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act of 1978 candidates could run under any banner that they chose. Starting January 1, 1978, political parties and independent candidates were required to provide appropriate registration information to Elections Alberta. This registration information has to be in place before a candidate's nomination papers are accepted and the candidate is allowed to participate in the election.

In Alberta's electoral history 62 different political affiliations or parties have had candidates run in our elections or by-elections. In our first election, held on November 9, 1905, the political affiliations or parties were Conservative, Liberal, and Independent with a capital I. In the election held November 22, 2004, the political affiliations or parties were – and there are currently nine registered political parties in Alberta – the Alberta Alliance Party, the Alberta Greens, the Alberta Liberal Party, the Alberta New Democrats, the Alberta Party, the Alberta Social Credit Party, the Communist Party of Alberta, the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta, and the Separation Party of Alberta.

During the Social Credit era coalitions between Liberals and Conservatives were created in an attempt to defeat the government. These coalitions failed, and failed miserably. In the 1955 provincial

election the Liberal Conservative political affiliation received only 1.1 per cent of the vote. In the 1963 provincial election the Conservative-Liberal affiliation received .3 per cent of the vote, and in the 1967 election the Liberal/Progressive Conservative Coalition received only .1 per cent of the vote. The support for candidates running under the Conservative banner or Liberal banner fared much better in these three elections.

In terms of political affiliation or party identification the name "Liberal" was not to be used by any candidate in the 1944 election whereas the name "Conservative" was not to be used by any candidate in the elections of 1940, 1944, and 1948. Liberal and Conservative candidates have run in all other Alberta elections.

The New Democratic Party name was used for the first time in the 1963 general election. The Alliance Party of Alberta name was used for the first time in the election of 1993. The Conservative and Liberal names were used for the first time in 1905.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great hope and great pleasure that the gentlemen I wish to introduce today are present in the Assembly. Mr. Peter Snyder from Allentown, Pennsylvania, is with us. He's with Air Products, and they have just completed a plant in Strathcona county and have received permission to construct a second facility. Accompanying him today is Mr. Ian Murray of Edmonton. The great enthusiasm they display for locating Air Products in Strathcona and in Alberta is indication that Air Products, as the world's largest supplier of third-party hydrogen, has recognized the advantage of locating in Alberta as the best place in North America to do business. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm applause of our members. At least one is still here.

Thank you.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Calgary Police and Community Interactive Fair

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a great pleasure for me last weekend to attend the police and community interactive fair. The purpose of the police and community interactive fair is to heighten the awareness for residents within district 4 about the various policing, community services, and available programs.

Mr. Speaker, the event was organized by Sergeant Gord Renke of the Calgary Police Service, and he put together an outstanding list of community organizations that are committed to serving the citizens of northeast Calgary. Some of the organizations that attended this weekend's event were the Parent Link Centre, Patch project, northeast Crime Stoppers, Block Parents, Greater Forest Lawn Seniors, Rainbow Lodge transitional housing society, youth alternative programs, Wal-Mart Walk for Miracles, the CHR, Sunrise community link, Wood's Homes, Families Matter, Calgary Family Services, and the city of Calgary. They all participated and on a daily basis work in my constituency and in many others to provide programs and services to people from all walks of life.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, while it's not possible to mention all of the great things each of these organizations do, I would like to recognize them and make the Assembly aware and all of my constituents aware that these programs are available for them to make use of. They can contact my office any time to get information on these valuable services provided to the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Tribute to Fathers

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today in recognition of Father's Day. While Father's Day will not be taking place until the third Sunday in June, June 18 this year, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the importance of our fathers a little bit early. We recognized Mother's Day in the Legislature last week, so I think our dads deserve the same recognition.

Father's Day offers us a wonderful opportunity to celebrate fatherhood and honour our fathers. It's a time to recognize the important roles that our fathers play in our lives and the lives of our families. Fathers are vital. The benefits of engaged fathers are obvious. Children are healthier, happier, and more productive when their fathers are active in their lives. Kids do better in school, are less likely to drink or use drugs, and are less likely to be involved with delinquent behaviour. The inverse, unfortunately, is also true. When a father is absent from a child's life, there's an increased likelihood of behavioural problems, depression, and health issues. Simply put, children are generally better off when both parents play an active role in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, children learn a great deal from their fathers. Dads play a vital role in the development, growth, and maturation of their children. Fathers teach their children how to play, how to learn, and how to work. They are there for wisdom, advice, and affection. Father's Day offers us a chance to let our dads know just how much we love them and how important they are to us and to remember our dads who have passed on.

I would like to acknowledge this important day a little early this year and wish dads across Alberta a happy Father's Day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Bow Habitat Station Aquatic Ecopark

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend plans were unveiled for Alberta's first aquatic ecopark, the Bow Habitat Station. Over 4,000 Albertans participated in the Wild Thing celebration organized by Alberta fish and wildlife and the Livingston Fish Hatchery.

The Bow Habitat Station, scheduled to open in the spring of 2007, will include displays and interactive exhibits that will help teach visitors and students how everything in our environment relates back to freshwater. The Bow Habitat Station will be a world-class visitor centre. It's located in the heart of the city of Calgary and is sort of an oasis surrounded by the city's major transportation thoroughfares. It includes the Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery and the Pearce Estate Interpretive Wetland. It is expected to attract 100,000 visitors and students each year.

This \$20 million project is made possible through a partnership between government, industry, and stakeholders. Together the government of Alberta and more than 100 businesses, corporations,

nonprofit organizations, and granting agencies from across Canada have contributed to this project. Major partners and exhibit sponsors include the city of Calgary, BP Canada Energy Company, Ducks Unlimited Canada, HSBC Bank Canada, and the Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery Volunteer Society.

The long-term vision of the Bow Habitat Station is to promote awareness of the connections between water and the rest of our environment and to encourage Albertans and visitors to discover what each of us can do to sustain the province's natural resources for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Go Oilers Go!

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about team spirit, spirit that is growing in numbers and in followers. This spirit has not only gripped the hearts of the young and old but that of a city, not just any city but the City of Champions, home to the Edmonton Oilers, five-time Stanley Cup champions.

Once again Edmonton has the opportunity to advance to the western conference final in front of the loudest crowd in the National Hockey League. You need only look around to see how much support is behind the Oilers. Flags fly on almost every vehicle, posters on windows and doors. This town is alive with passion about the team, the Oilers.

Tonight an entire city, province, and country will be watching as the Oilers are the last remaining Canadian team in their quest for the holy grail of hockey. Tonight the victory will be on the steps of the Oilers, one step closer to that particular piece, and shark bait will be on the tables in the restaurants.

Go, Oilers, go.

The Speaker: And some people still have their game beard on. It's my sincere hope that all Members of the Legislative Assembly will be able to watch all of the hockey game this evening.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Calgary Meals on Wheels

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 30, 1965, Calgary Church Women's Community Care was incorporated, and in 1976 the name was officially changed to Calgary Meals on Wheels. In addition to the United Church the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, and Presbyterian churches supported the movement while interested volunteers and service clubs answered the call for help and proved to be the backbone of the fledgling organization. The United Way and the city of Calgary have also played a vital role in the success of this social service. At this year's Cuisine et Concours d'Élégance fundraiser last Saturday night at the Roundup Centre the Ismaili community, a silver cloud sponsor, teamed up to announce a very special 2006 Stampede parade float project that will highlight for millions of viewers the significant community contributions of Calgary Meals on Wheels.

From January to December of 2005 Meals on Wheels delivered some 400,000 meals, 1,650 meals per day, to clients at their place of residence, enabling them to stay at home, to retain their autonomy and dignity, and to receive fresh, nutritious food. Meals to these seniors, convalescents, veterans, and persons with disabilities consist of one hot meal, one cold meal with a heat-up soup, and snack. Fifty-two per cent of the meals are special diets. In addition, Meals on Wheels delivers 215 bag lunches daily for the working homeless at the Drop-in Centre.

Through its duck soup program 960 servings of hot, hearty soup

lunches were delivered to seven high-risk elementary schools twice weekly to some 600 children, who, as noted by their teachers, would not have a meal due to living conditions, financial conditions, and/or social circumstances. Seventeen schools are currently on the waiting list for this donor-based service.

Meals on Wheels offers culturally appropriate meals through its chopsticks on wheels and reaches further out into the Calgary community with programs like food and fellowship, food and caring, as well as offering five-pack magic meals.

Unfortunately, the growing demand for services is far outstripping Meals on Wheels' kitchen capacity. Therefore, a new facility is desperately needed to carry on the 41-year tradition of outstanding outreach. Hopefully, the Alberta government will recognize Meals on Wheels' history of giving and provide sustainable financial support to help keep this program on the road.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Calgary-Fort Constituency Decennial

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about the great constituency of Calgary-Fort on the 10th anniversary of its creation. Due to the fast population growth in Calgary the constituency of Calgary-Fort was created in 1996. Its name was based on the historical landmark in the riding, Fort Calgary, which is the birthplace of the city of Calgary. The Calgary-Fort constituency now includes the hard-working residents in the communities of Inglewood, Dover, Forest Lawn, Erin Woods, Millican, and Ogden. It covers the largest manufacturing and industrial park in Calgary, from which products and services are exported to the world and other parts of Canada.

The residents and businesses of the Calgary-Fort constituency have been contributing a great deal to the robust economy of Alberta. The two main rivers of Calgary meander through the riding of Calgary-Fort, which is also the source of the irrigation system that brings abundant agricultural life to the district east of Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, in 1996 I had the honour of being nominated as the PC candidate for the riding of Calgary-Fort, and the following election I had the honour of becoming the first MLA for the riding. Hard work is just part of it. The electoral successes are thanks to the great team of the Calgary-Fort constituency. My constituents are very smart in their choice of support and decisions.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on with hundreds of names of people who are my respectful constituents and dear friends and strong supporters. For the last 10 years I can say with confidence that we have worked very well to establish a tradition of political integrity and honesty in the Calgary-Fort riding.

On the anniversary of this occasion, representing my constituents I want to express our sincere thanks to Premier Klein for his dedicated public service to bring outstanding success to the province, the city, and the constituency. Our constituents wish the Premier all the best in his next, deserving chapter of life.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: 2:50

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly a privilege to introduce to you and through you 47 concerned and dedicated

citizens from the Clear Hills area. They've travelled over six hours to share their concerns and are thankful for the guidance that they have received from the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and hope to be able to continue to protect their quality of life and their community camaraderie. I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, then Edmonton-Centre, then Calgary-Currie.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise this afternoon and present a petition on behalf of 197 Albertans from various communities: Grande Prairie, Sexsmith, Edmonton, Calgary, and many, many others. This petition urges the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms. I think it's been read into the record many times, so I don't have to read the entire thing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to submit a petition with 103 signatures of Calgarians urging the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present almost 4,000 more signatures, 3,921, which is bringing the total petitions against the third way that the Liberal opposition has presented to over 20,000 signatures.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition sponsored by the Alberta Social Credit Party. It has 1,058 signatures. The petition calls for the Assembly to urge the government to "introduce legislation to increase Alberta's share of oil and gas revenues to pay yearly dividends to Albertans."

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I talked about Liberal/Conservative coalitions, but never in the history of Alberta have I ever found anything that suggests a Social Credit/New Democratic Party coalition. This is another historic first.

Mr. Flaherty: I'd like to table a petition from 116 people from across Alberta regarding the third way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a petition from 40 residents of Grande Prairie, electors of the Peace River constituency, to the House of Commons, requesting that the federal government "provide the provinces/territories with annual funds of at least \$1.2 billion to build a high quality, accessible, affordable, community-based child care system."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and present the required number of copies of a letter from a constituent of mine, Barbara McNamara, a parent at the Western Canada high school, urging the provincial government to get on with the reconstruction or modernization of the Western Canada high school, which was built in 1928 and increasingly, as she says, consumes more time, energy, and school budget on behalf of the administrative and custodial staffs patching roofs that leak, asbestos ceilings that have been damaged, and so on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the report I referred to during question period, Review of the Regulatory Framework for Legal Services in England and Wales, the report of Sir David Clementi.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, two documents that resulted from a meeting and correspondence between the parent council representative from Strathcona composite high school in my constituency and my meeting this morning with that representative, Mrs. Glynis Dorey. I received a letter from her last week in which she drew my attention for the first time to a shocking problem at the composite high school with respect to health safety related to heating problems in the school. That problem was in fact identified by Alberta Infrastructure in '99 but has not received the attention that it needs. She's sitting in the public gallery and would like me to draw the attention of the House to this very serious problem.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of a letter that was sent to me by 17 land agents and interim land agents dated April 12, 2006, all of whom are stating their opposition to any consideration of the removal of section 1(c)(ii) of the Land Agents Licensing Act. They're questioning why our government would want to undermine the requirement currently in place that requires land agents to have certain qualifications before they're able to represent their clients. The names are Matt Martel, Leon McNamara, Darcy Harty, Phil Becker, Darrell Goruk, Elliott Friedrich, Jason Svenningsen, Tyson Zack, Diane Perrin, Harold Lema, Ron Bodnar, Bernie Tchir, Dennis Worobec, Joey Andries, Dennis Cochrane, Ken Curley, and Wade Pruett.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings here of photos that show the environmental impact of careless off-road driving and random camping in the Willow Creek forestry area. I'm submitting these on behalf of Sheena Reid of Nanton, Alberta, which further highlights the need for a land-use policy in these areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to table five copies of a response document to Written Question 14 as asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling responses to questions raised during Finance's estimates on May 10. The members to whom the responses are addressed received a copy in their offices this morning.

Additionally, I'm tabling the annual reports of the provincial judges and masters in chambers pension plan for the fiscal years ending March 31, 2004, and March 31, 2005, as required by legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of letters that I sent to the Leader of the Opposition as well as to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview answering questions that were left outstanding following Committee of Supply for Municipal Affairs held on April 11.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of responses that I made a commitment to during estimates, that I would make sure that we addressed the concerns if I didn't address them in my answers. I also sent copies to those members who I didn't answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table the required five copies of the 32nd annual report of the office of the Farmers' Advocate of Alberta. The report reflects the past 16 months as the agency has changed its reporting period to align with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Highlights include the details on 1,500-plus client inquiries, 19 water well hearings, eight wildfire hearings, two Farm Implement Board hearings, and the increase of 84,000 additional hits to their online obsolete parts directory. The increased energy activity and changing dynamics of rural Alberta have led the agency to pursue a renewal initiative, which is covered in the report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

3:00

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to file a petition from staff and students from Next Step outreach school in Sherwood Park. They're asking for concerted government action to address the reported rise in teen smoking in Alberta.

Also, I would like to table five copies of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities annual report 2004-2005.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Finance minister for her very rapid response to the questions that were asked in supply last week.

Mr. Speaker, I have several tablings this afternoon. The first is two separate reports that were prepared by Kathryn Burke on behalf of community workshop participants in relation to children who suffer with learning challenges. Both reports were prepared in response to an EPSB review of programming for children with learning disabilities. They were completed on a volunteer basis. The workshop report represents the collective voice of 48 stake-

holders, and the survey report represents the collective voice of 102 parents.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I have a letter from a constituent, Art Dyer, who is a retired Alberta civil servant and is very concerned about two aspects of Bill 20: that, in fact, they serve to erode the fundamental principles that the act was founded on, namely public business should be done in public, and his main concern specifically is the 15-year blanket thrown over internal audits.

Another concern is being expressed by a constituent, Butch Whiteman, regarding Bill 20, and this is actually a copy of a letter that he sent to the Premier of the province of Alberta. He indicates that he feels that "Bill 20 is something that should not even be given a second thought let alone be sanctioned as progressive legislation and passed in this legislature."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter which details 20 farm-related deaths in Alberta last year, marking an unacceptable upward trend for farm fatalities in the province in recent years.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Ducharme, Minister of Community Development, response to Written Question 16, asked for by Mr. Miller on behalf of Mr. Agnihotri on May 8, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Fritz, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, pursuant to the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Alberta Provincial Board annual report 2004-2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, responses to questions raised by Dr. Miller, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, on May 3, 2006, the Department of Justice and Attorney General main estimates, 2006-07, Committee of Supply debate.

Responses to questions raised by Dr. Pannu, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on May 3, 2006, Department of Justice and Attorney General main estimates, 2006-07, Committee of Supply debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Energy, response to Written Question 19, asked for by Mr. MacDonald on May 15, 2006.

**Speaker's Ruling
Member's Apology**

The Speaker: Hon. members, last evening, late in the evening in committee and during debate, an hon. member used certain words in the House. Today I would like to offer that hon. member, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, an opportunity to hopefully retract and apologize for the usage of those words.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In all humility, sincerity, and with a sense of contrition I rise to withdraw three words, namely Nazism, fascism, and Stalinism or any variance, which were mentioned in debates last night around 11 o'clock. These words are unparliamentary. I sincerely apologize if any member took these to mean practices which were committed by any enemy force or government in the Second World War.

My extended family was severely affected by that war. Some were lost in the defence of our country and great democracy. Some were lost fighting for our armed forces. Some were subjected to terrible times in the Netherlands and fought there or suffered there as well. I do understand those feelings, and I know that they do not subside over the decades. We do remember. That inference was not intended, and if any member felt that, I must say that this was not the intent, and I sincerely apologize.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. That concludes that matter.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Time Allocation on Bill 20

20. Mr. Zwozdesky moved:

Be it resolved that when an adjourned debate on third reading of Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration at this stage of the bill, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I could have permission to exercise my five minutes of explanation.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I believe I indicated yesterday, but I'd like to just reiterate today that time allocation motions are very rarely used by our government. In fact, they were not used at all last year, nor were they used at all in the year before. Over the last five years I think only four or five bills have had time allocations ever put on them for just and reasonable cause. Nonetheless, I want to reiterate, too, that Bill 20 has now come up 10 times for debate in this House since March 14.

Now, why does it sometimes become necessary for a government to bring in a time allocation or a closure-type motion? Typically, Mr. Speaker, as most members here would know, it happens because of the clock, so to speak, having moved on and a number of repetitive debates starting up, perhaps some redundancy starting up, perhaps in some cases even some irrelevancies coming up.

No one that I know really likes to use a time allocation motion to bring an end to a discussion. However, in the same vein that one of opposition's tools is the legislative power to speak virtually endlessly to a bill at committee, so, too, is it one of government's tools to use responsibly and to exercise good and sound judgment when sufficient time, in the opinion of the government, has taken place for the debate on any particular bill. Mr. Speaker, I would submit that with respect to Bill 20 that time has now come.

With about 10 hours or so of debate and/or question period time consumed on this one bill or on FOIP issues in general, it's important to note that rarely does any bill receive more than about an hour and a half to two hours of debate unless there's something really controversial, obviously. So 10 hours, or five times more than the two-hour general practice that I just mentioned, is certainly enough and ample time for members to have voiced their opinions. In addition to that, we've also, I think, received and debated approximately five amendments.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that we have met in this House on 41 afternoons. We have met in this House as well on 27 evenings during this spring session so far. That's 68 times. During those

times that we have convened in this House, at least 10 of those times we have referenced debate on this particular Bill 20, so it has come up a number of times.

With that, I would also just conclude by saying that I think every opposition member has now spoken to Bill 20 with the exception, I think, of the leader of the Liberal opposition, who still has an opportunity, obviously, this afternoon, and several government members have also spoken now to Bill 20 in debate or perhaps in response to questions in question period.

I will just conclude, then, by saying that the time has come to now resolve the final vote on Bill 20. With that in mind, I'm looking for the support of the House for the motion so that we can conclude this matter of business this afternoon with one final hour of exhilarating debate.

Thank you.

3:10

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 21(3) I'll now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education spoke about how many times, in fact, to his memory they have used the time allocation to put closure on the debate in this House. Well, from the years 1992 to 2005 that has been exercised 32 times to force closure – and I'll use that word “force” – on a democratic process in this House.

In the Speech from the Throne this government assured people that transparency and accountability first and foremost will be used to address Albertans' concerns. They wanted to be the government that was leading the way in this particular act. So far, when they put in something like this, this couldn't be any further from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, when we adjourn on Thursday afternoon and Friday and through the weekends to be able to touch base with our constituents, Bill 20 is becoming more and more relevant in the coffee shops or in the homes, in the newspapers because Albertans are just starting to wake up as to what is actually happening in this Legislature. Secrecy is now becoming more and more of a topic in the homes and on the doorsteps of Albertans. They're becoming concerned, and because they're becoming concerned, I think that this is unfortunate that we are only allowing another 60 minutes to take place.

You have immigrants coming to Alberta from other countries, wherever they may be, who in fact are trying to flee this sort of undemocratic way. I'll use my words carefully, noting debate . . .

An Hon. Member: Yeah, I hope so.

Mr. Bonko: Listen, that's enough of that already.

. . . noting the debate of last night. I know that people are tired, people are wanting to get out of this House, but unfortunately there's a lot of work that still needs to take place.

This is a legacy that needs to be talked about. It's the legacy of one person, perhaps the Premier. Only at this time has this ever come into effect. Other Premiers have had this open and transparent and accountable attitude. Now one Premier comes in, and suddenly we have FOIP. We have more and more secrecy because the individual says that they do not want anyone to have that type of record. They don't want speaking notes; they want briefing notes.

Well, it's not just for the opposition. It's for all Albertans to ensure that this government remains accountable and transparent and answerable, above all things, to those that elect them. It's the Albertans, the 3,500,000 Albertans that reside in Alberta. There are more and more that are coming all the time, and they, in fact, expect their government to act honourably. They expect their government

to act with integrity. When you put through a motion that adjourns debate, that ends the ability for opposition and Albertans to have an opportunity to speak to something that is near and dear to their hearts, which is basically democracy, then there is no democracy that remains.

Mr. Elsalhy: What signal are we sending?

Mr. Bonko: Yeah, exactly. What signal are we sending, Mr. Speaker? That we want to remain more and more secret.

It came out in a poll a little while ago that people do not trust politicians. They came behind used-car salesmen. I shudder to think, but the fact remains that that was the poll. This leads exactly to that particular point. If we're hiding something, then why are we hiding something? It's censorship right through and through. The fact remains that Albertans deserve answers regardless of who is asking. That is a democratic right. That is the ability that we all, in fact, have.

The Member for Edmonton-Manning talked about democracy and how only 60 years ago people fought for that right. This is exactly the right that we're debating here this afternoon. We debated evenings, 4 o'clock in the morning, 2 o'clock in the morning for the right to have that democratic process continue. When you're invoking closure due to time limits or people being tired, 10 hours, 20 hours: who's to say it was too long? If we're prepared to sit here and talk about it, then obviously we still want to have the ability and the time to discuss the concerns of the citizens that we represent. It limits freedom of speech. It limits democracy, which is all the more reason why we need more opposition in Alberta to continue to ensure that accountability remains. Now, I know there are only 16 elected Liberals, and there are four NDs and an Alliance, but that's certainly not enough, so the next election I think people will certainly be considering as to where they're going to mark their X along the ballots. Are they going to mark for democracy, or are they going to mark for a dictatorship, which is apparently what's happening here?

Mr. Speaker, I would seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 32(2) to shorten the division bells from 10 minutes to two minutes this afternoon should a standing vote be triggered.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, before that, we have some business we have to conduct. We have to deal with this particular motion, and I have to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 20 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:16 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Amery	Haley	Pham
Boutilier	Herard	Prins
Brown	Horner	Renner
Cao	Jablonski	Shariff
Cardinal	Liepert	Snelgrove
Evans	Lougheed	Stelmach
Forsyth	Mar	Strang
Goudreau	McClellan	VanderBurg
Graydon	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Groeneveld	Oberle	

Against the motion:

Backs	Flaherty	Miller, B.
Blakeman	Hinman	Miller, R.
Bonko	Martin	Pannu
Eggen	Mason	Taylor
Elsalhy	Mather	Tougas

Totals: For – 29 Against – 15

[Government Motion 20 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move to the next segment and ask the Clerk to identify the first speaker, we have two brief bits of information to deal with.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, as you were wrapping up your comments on your participation, you asked for consent of the House to reduce the division bells from 10 to two minutes should that be appropriate. I didn't allow the vote because we had a superseding motion. So if you want to proceed now, I'll let you do it, asking the Assembly.

Mr. Bonko: Do you just want me to go through the whole thing?

The Speaker: No. Just very briefly, unanimous consent.

Mr. Bonko: I'm just seeking unanimous consent, then, that if in fact opportunity does arise, we would revert from 10 minutes to two minutes.

The Speaker: Okay. All hon. members understand that? Should the opportunity arise for division bells to be rung, the normal time would be reduced from 10 minutes to two minutes.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Okay. That's done.

Now the hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would cite *Beauchesne* 489 again with respect to unparliamentary words and phrases. Dictatorship as referenced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore I'm sure was an unfortunate slip. I would just ask that he please retract that word from his final comments just before the division bells rang and apologize, and then we'll move on.

Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, I would retract the comment of dictatorship, then, if that would be pleasing to the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. We've heard that. The matter is closed.

head: 3:30 **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 20
Freedom of Information and
Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate May 16: Mrs. Jablonski]

The Speaker: Okay. I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. When she begins, 60 minutes begin.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, in third reading. It would be good to know and to remember that this bill proposes eight amendments to the FOIP Act.

Perhaps the most important amendment sets higher penalties for disclosing the personal information of Albertans to a foreign court, a very serious move to protect the privacy of Albertans. If an individual or a corporation discloses personal information pursuant to a subpoena, warrant, or court order when that court does not have jurisdiction in Alberta or pursuant to a court order that is not binding in Alberta, that person would be guilty of an offence and would be subject to a fine of up to \$500,000.

Anyone thinking that this legislation is toothless is not reading this carefully. The FOIP Act itself contains provisions for fines of up to \$10,000 for anyone convicted of trying to abuse the intention of this legislation. It is a top priority of this government to protect the private information of Albertans. Other solutions to address the potential for American authorities to view the private information of Albertans without proper authorization are being explored. Our goal is to ensure that the personal information of Albertans is protected from unauthorized access. The USA PATRIOT Act, which is a very clever acronym that stands for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism, is of particular concern to this government, Mr. Speaker, but the legislation will apply to any foreign government that seeks to obtain the personal information of Albertans without permission.

A second amendment further enhances the security of Albertans' personal information. Currently the act allows a public body to disclose personal information to comply with a subpoena, warrant, or court order; however, it's not clear which courts this refers to. This amendment makes it clear that a public body may disclose personal information only if ordered to do so by a court with jurisdiction in Alberta or in accordance with a rule of court binding in Alberta. This will make Albertans' information less vulnerable to collection by foreign agencies.

Mr. Speaker, another amendment clarifies the existing limits on access to ministerial briefing materials. This is the only change to a time period limitation and only applies to ministerial briefing binders. The FOIP Act already allows ministers to refuse to disclose advice to ministers without this amendment. This amendment will clarify that briefing books prepared for a new minister and session briefing books for ministers can be disclosed after five years. This information was not available at any time prior to this amendment act. The five-year period was chosen to coincide with the life of a Legislature, which is five years at most.

A third important amendment limits access to working papers relating to an audit by the newly created office of the chief internal auditor of Alberta for 15 years. Fifteen years is the same period of time for other financial records until now, and this hasn't been considered a problem previous to this because the Auditor General has free and timely access to these records. An individual can still make a request for records about a program or service of a ministry but not for records about the internal audit. I will state that again. This information is always available to the Auditor General of Alberta, who does an excellent job of representing the people of Alberta.

Another amendment suspends the processing of an access request while the Information and Privacy Commissioner consults with an applicant on how a public body is handling a FOIP request. This amendment is purely administrative. Since the Privacy Commissioner's consultation takes time, typically a decision comes after the legislated 30-day deadline for a response has expired. Now, the

opposition members have consistently expressed a deep respect for the opinions of the Privacy Commissioner. I would expect that if they respect his opinions in one area, they could respect his decisions in other areas. This amendment would allow the 30-day processing time for a FOIP request to stop while the Privacy Commissioner makes his decision. These requests are rare, reflecting this government's commitment to the openness and transparency of the access to information process.

I would like to repeat a fact that was stated by the hon. Minister of Government Services as I'm sure that some members did not hear this fact the first time it was stated. Of 3,168 FOIP requests received in 2004-05, 94 per cent were completed by government public bodies within 60 days or less, confirming that Albertans have effective and timely access to the information they seek. This represents a significant achievement given that the complexity and number of requests received by government continue to increase annually. Of the 3,168 FOIP requests received in 2004-05, 95 per cent were handled without complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This demonstrates the success of Alberta Government Services' efforts to support FOIP staff throughout government public bodies. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has said that he would take a dim view if the number of requests for extensions suddenly spiked, a statement that should be respected by all Albertans. The Privacy Commissioner has the ability to order the public body to resume processing the request immediately.

Another amendment in this amendment act will allow newly created government boards and committees to be brought under the FOIP Act more quickly. As I mentioned earlier, protecting the personal information that Albertans entrust to their government and the public bodies under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is a key priority for this government.

Mr. Speaker, costs are not a barrier to gaining access to government information. They are in line with other jurisdictions. Since FOIP legislation was first introduced in 1995, we have collected \$535,000 in fees. That's less than \$50,000 a year. During this same period we have spent \$59.3 million to collect and distribute the requested information. That's more than \$5 million a year in support of transparency and openness.

Administering the act is and will continue to be an important function of the Ministry of Government Services, and I'm proud to have this opportunity to speak to this important piece of legislation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Edmonton-McClung had the opportunity to quote three historical leaders in the last few days. So I, too, would like to quote a well-respected leader, my husband, who always says: happy wife, happy life. This is very good advice. Now I will be happy to take my seat and listen to the comments of others of integrity and honesty in third reading of Bill 20.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure how I follow that. Well, with respect to the Speaker, I'll try a vignette of my own. I used to work indirectly with a guy who was in management in radio at another radio station in our company who liked to say that he operated his department on a need-to-know basis: he told his staff everything and let them decide what they needed to know.

Mr. Speaker, we are but a mere province, one of 10 in this federation. We do not have the authority to commit the rest of this country to war or to go to war ourselves, and short of wartime, although I'll give you cold or hot, I can't really think of a reason why you need to keep anything secret for 15 years. I really can't. I mean, a year perhaps. A couple of years perhaps. Maybe there's some justification for that. But 15 years for documents created for

or by the chief internal auditor? Five years for briefing notes and papers? No disrespect, but I don't think that there's anything quite that valuable in that briefing binder that the Premier has been waving around the House in question period for the last few days.

3:40

I'm going to refer back to the opening questions that I asked this afternoon in question period, when I referenced something that the Premier said more than a decade ago, that he intended to make government more open and accountable to Albertans, that he intended to give Albertans real power to see into the workings of government, stating: "There is a public expectation there that we must be more transparent. What you see is what you get." He made that comment. Presumably he made it on December 23 because it showed up in a media account on December 24, 1994. Here we are 11 and a half years later, discussing a bill that does precisely the opposite of what the Premier, towards the beginning of his – I was going to say reign, but that's not the appropriate word – tenure, said he was going to do.

Now, I understand that one of the reasons why our trust level is 16 per cent among the general population in Canada, one of the reasons why people distrust us so much is because we make an awful lot of promises that we don't keep as a species, if we can be classified as a species. I understand as well that sometimes there are very legitimate reasons for not being able to keep those promises. You make a promise on the campaign trail that you fully intend to keep if you're elected to government. Once you are elected or re-elected to government, you discover that circumstances have changed or circumstances are different than you understood them to be, and in fact as much as you would like to go ahead and do what you said you were going to do, that just isn't possible. But I don't think that happens all that often. I don't think it happens nearly as often as the number of times that we as a species collectively break our promises.

We sometimes talk about looking for ways to re-engage a cynical, jaded, apathetic populous that likes to come out in droves of less than 50 per cent of eligible voters and cast their ballots on election day. I think the single best thing that we could do is actually deliver them a couple of terms of office consecutively where the government of the day actually keeps the vast majority of its promises.

Now, there are a number of ways that you can take that approach. One way, I think, is being attempted by the federal government right now, and that is to make very few promises. The fewer promises you make, perhaps, the fewer you have to keep track of and make sure that you're keeping. There is a certain sense in that. But I think, you know, within the context of no matter how many promises you have made, when you make a promise to the people of your political jurisdiction that you are going to make your government more open, more accountable, more transparent because you acknowledge that there's a real expectation on behalf of the people for that, and you go the other direction, I think that is more than breaking a promise. I think that's breaking a trust with the people.

There is, of course, under the U.S. style of government, I think, more ability to do certain things – and one of those things is to place term limits on how much time you can serve at any particular level – than we can do within the concept of the British parliamentary model. In fact, we may not ever be able to achieve term limits under this model, but there is a good reason, in theory at least, and I think as practised in the United States in some jurisdictions, in some areas, for supporting term limits, and that is because it tends to keep people from staying in the job past their best-before date.

I'd like to think that whatever we're doing in whatever field of endeavour, whether it's public life or private life that we're involved

in, we all kind of come to that job with a best-before date stamped on our foreheads. You know, that best-before date represents the point at which we are going to run out of anything meaningful that we as individuals can contribute to the process. If we've done our job up to that point, we will have made our contribution, and it is at that point time for us individually to move on and go do something else where we get a brand new best-before date. But there's no way of enforcing that best-before date, and, you know, when the milk of a career politician has gone over, there's no way of pouring it down the drain unless, of course, at the next election the voters throw the guy out.

Dr. Morton: Make cheese.

Mr. Taylor: I'm sorry. What was it that the Member for Foothills-Rocky View said? Make tea?

Dr. Morton: Cheese.

Mr. Taylor: Cheese. Well, he'd know about cheese.

Anyway, the point here is that we're seeing in Bill 20 ample evidence that this government has passed its best-before date because this government has forgotten, obviously, if it believes in this bill that it's bringing forward, the fundamental tenet of democracy, which is this. In a democratic country or a democratic province or a democratic jurisdiction of any sort those people who are elected to take a seat in a Legislature, whether they get appointed to cabinet or not, are the servants of the public, the employees of the public. We work for them, not the other way around.

A bill that supports this much secrecy purports to upset the apple cart, purports to have the inmates running the prison, purports to have the people of this great province, the 3,500,000 of them, working for the 83 of us. You can even carve off the 22 opposition members. Heck, you could even carve off the government backbenchers, who aren't actually part of cabinet. So all of us work for – how many people are in cabinet this week? It keeps changing – 25, 24, 26, that bunch. This is fundamentally wrong. Fundamentally wrong.

It is unfortunate that both opposition parties proposed at various stages along the way a number of amendments to this bill and found it impossible or virtually impossible to engage government members in debate about that. That, I think, speaks to the lack of interest in openness, accountability, transparency, and the democratic process that has developed from too many years in power. There's no possible way – there's no possible way – that I can support this bill in third because the effect of this is to deny information that should be readily available to the people of this province to those very people. The effect of this bill if passed, the effect of this law once it becomes law is to set the government apart from and above the people, and we must never do that.

We may get outvoted on this one, as we so often do, but we recognize on this side of the House that we are to be servants of the people. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when we are elected government, whatever happens today, if this bill is passed, we will throw it out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise at third reading of Bill 20 under the intolerable conditions of closure in this House. One of the most far-reaching bills in its impact on the government of this province, and we're allowed one

hour to debate this in third reading. I just want to indicate that despite our best efforts to process a number of amendments in committee stage, we still have four amendments that we have not had a chance to put forward in debate in this House. So people can see for themselves the impact of closure on the democratic process, or the lack thereof, in dealing with this issue.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is just the most recent example in a long trend towards secrecy for this government. No other government in Canada is so careful and so calculating in its management of information. The watchword of this government seems to be: what they don't know can't hurt us. The NDP opposition has attempted on a number of occasions to obtain information, as have other groups and individuals in our society, only to be misdirected and given selected information which has been filtered for political expediency, and this is under the act even before these amendments are included.

One example, Mr. Speaker, is that we recently FOIPed information relating to the study commissioned by the Minister of Health and Wellness and undertaken by Aon insurance company. We were interested in this information because there was a clear attempt on the part of the government to sell their third-way privatization schemes to Albertans. They knew the schemes were not workable, so they had to manage the information which was given to Albertans. Our request was plagued by unnecessary extensions and ultimately was not fulfilled until nine days after the final deadline that was set by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Not surprisingly, we received the information only after the minister had had time to put it through the government's messaging filter and it had been properly sanitized.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note that even though the government failed to meet the deadline set by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, there was no penalty for their noncompliance. This is intolerable, and if the government was really interested in improving our FOIP legislation, this would be one place to start.

Mr. Speaker, there's a clear pattern. The opposition party asked for information to be tabled in the Assembly and then were told to FOIP for it. When we do FOIP it, we are met with delays and exemptions. When the information is finally released, it has been nipped and tucked into government spin. But now we have a situation where the Premier is retiring. In all likelihood several senior ministers will retire with him. They will no longer have control over the Public Affairs Bureau, and they will have no way of ensuring that their successors don't open the doors and let the skeletons out of the closets.

We have a bill that does two things, Mr. Speaker. It provides for more exemptions, and it provides for more delays. It allows heads of public bodies to stop the clock while seeking permission to disregard a request entirely. But worse, it seals the vault on ministerial briefing notes and internal audits for five years and 15 years respectively. Now, the Premier has talked repeatedly about how we're not getting his briefing books, but the Information and Privacy Commissioner has indicated that in most cases requests for information relating to briefings from ministers have been disallowed by his office but that in certain cases they have been allowed and that adequate protection is already in existence.

Furthermore, the internal audit branch of the government is what is responsible for making sure that money is spent as it is supposed to be and that there is no fraud and there is no theft of public money. To seal their audits for 15 years is, in our view, inexplicable since they are in the forefront of protecting the taxpayers against fraud.

To keep their audit secret for 15 years represents, in our view, a really grave threat to public accountability.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a red flag for members of the opposition but also for Albertans generally. We need to ask why this information is so sensitive and what secrets are being kept. This government took great pleasure in watching the federal Liberal government flounder after Auditor General Sheila Fraser started revealing scandal after scandal about misspending and misuse of public dollars. The Premier boasted that such scandals could never happen in this province because Albertans would run him or any tainted minister out on a rail. But the reality is that if such scandals could never happen here, it is because Albertans might never find out about them in the first place. Members of this government flaunted the authority of our Auditor General by prematurely releasing damning reports. Again, this was a calculated political move designed to manage the release of information.

Ministers make deals with the likes of Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois for so-called strategic advice in which no documents are produced and for which there is no accountability. On this side we are left wondering just how politically partisan such strategic advice is or what advice was received at all. Are taxpayers footing the bill for strategic advice to ministers on how to best ensure re-election? How much time is being spent crafting workable public policy? How much time is spent crafting marketing strategies for bad policies based on ideological biases and rewards for well-connected donors?

You know, whenever this government seeks to restrict civil liberties – and it happens from time to time in this province – they tell us that if you're not doing anything wrong, you don't need to worry. Well, Mr. Speaker, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If ministers aren't receiving partisan strategic advice as part of their briefings, if they're not cooking up side deals and rewarding friends, fine. Show us the books. If you're not doing anything wrong, you don't need to worry.

The disregard for basic tenets of democracy shown by this government is astounding. We recently released an analysis of Alberta's information laws that shows that they are among the most secretive and regressive on the planet. Even worse, we are now facing closure on the bill. Why? Apparently because members opposite don't want to sit following the long weekend. Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to either, but it's not really a good reason to foreclose debate on this bill.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, the NDP opposition will not be supporting this bill, and we will continue to challenge the ever-increasing secrecy this government is pursuing. An Alberta NDP government will open the curtains on government secrecy and let the sun shine in on the closets of the most secretive government in Canada. An NDP government will ensure that the public information is available to those to whom it belongs, the public.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

There being none, the chair will then recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. If anybody else wants to participate, send me a signal, please.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a difference a decade makes. Alberta was a leader among Canadian jurisdictions when it first introduced its Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act on June 1, 1994. The act was the child of the new and now retiring Premier, who liked to point out that he personally had been FOIPed a number of times.

Access to information and privacy protection was and still is a significant next step in democratic empowerment. Democracy cannot work without informed citizens. Choices made in ignorance may be democratic, but they can also be prejudiced and persecuting. There's nothing quite as unanimous as a lynch mob. For democracy to work, there must be due process, a pause to reflect, and knowledge to reflect on. For citizens to function on a jury, they need instruction and clarification on the facts of a case before rendering a verdict. For the electorate to function as a jury on the government, the citizens must have a factual basis to assess the government's performance. Sometimes those facts come forward in the government's own announcements. Sometimes they come forward in response to questions by the opposition and media.

The FOIP Act can assist both media and opposition in gathering facts on government, but it can also be used by the ordinary citizen pursuing a matter of either public or private interest. This was the intention of the freedom of information part of the act.

Bill Gates' replacement of John Paul Getty as the world's richest man illustrates that knowledge has replaced earlier forms of capital, such as land, as a means of power. While all persons may not be equally endowed, all persons are entitled to equal access to law and equal access to information on their governments. By protecting citizens' privacy, including their private information, and simultaneously giving them access to information on what their governments are doing, it was hoped to restore a balance, to make the state the servant of the citizen rather than the reverse. This was the intent. Unfortunately, a growing culture of secrecy has offset these gains, and democracy has moved to the back burner.

4:00

With the current bill a backward step is being set in law, and two parts of FOIP legislation are being reversed. Freedom of information was intended to give citizens greater freedom in gathering information on their government. Privacy protection was intended to stop the flow of information on citizens to the state and to other interests. In our sister state to the south the war on terror has been used as an excuse to reverse the flow, for the state and corporate interests to gather information on citizens. This past week we have learned that American telecommunications companies have been passing information on their customers' calls to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. In Ottawa Canada's own Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, was recently shocked to discover that a list of her telephone calls could be bought on the Internet.

The U.S. State Department recently complained that Canada has not been doing enough to share information on our citizens with U.S. security officials since the Maher Arar case. The fact that this report was released the morning after the announcement of the settlement of the softwood lumber dispute suggests that there is a cost for the free movement of our commodities, and this cost may be information on Canadians. It was ostensibly for this reason that Alberta's FOIP Act is being amended: to strengthen the hand of Canadian companies in resisting the provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act. This is especially important when governments are outsourcing services to foreign subsidiaries and information on the health and private lives of our citizens is available to these enterprises and may be demanded under U.S. law. This was the stated intent of this bill.

There are other provisions that have more dubious effects: the protection of government from the prying eyes of citizens, the reverse of what the FOIP Act intended. It's a 400-year leap backwards in parliamentary tradition before Legislatures won control of the public purse. In the 1600s the word "privacy" in

government was more apt to refer to the Privy Council and the King's right to privacy of the information from his ministers. The divine right of kings has now become deference to Premiers. With the exception that a first minister or Executive Council can no longer send a citizen to the block, the government power now concentrated around a leader is as great as it ever was.

In Britain in the 17th century it was a king's ignoring and curtailing a government which he had called that led to his fall and a revolution. In Canada in the 21st century Legislatures have become so controlled by the government that when the leadership is in transition, everything comes to a halt. In Alberta's history when change has not come about from inside government, it has come about in an avalanche from outside. This has happened three times.

Freedom of information has become the government's freedom to control its message to the public, and privacy protection has become the preservation of government secrecy. I am sure that this is not what the hon. Premier intended when he first introduced the FOIP Act in 1994.

In conclusion, I cannot support this amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm still trying to grasp the relevance of the "happy wife, happy life" line. Maybe we'll get an explanation for that at some other time. It's one of the more interesting things I've heard in this debate over the last few weeks.

You know, Mr. Speaker, much has been said about Bill 20. In fact, of all the bills we've seen in here, large and small, that we've dealt with in this long and sometimes tedious session, no single piece of legislation has been more carefully scrutinized, analyzed, and criticized than Bill 20, and with good cause. As has been mentioned many, many times in this Legislature, Bill 20 is roughly 50 per cent progressive, intelligent, and worthwhile legislation and 50 per cent regressive, secretive, and uncalled for.

The government is to be commended for protecting the people of Alberta against the prying eyes of the United States government, or any foreign power for that matter. Raising maximum fines for individuals and for corporations for breaches of the act is to be applauded. The public must be assured that breaking this law in this province will be dealt with seriously. This is what a bill is supposed to do: provide a tangible benefit to its citizens.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the good news of Bill 20 ends there. Secrecy is a hallmark of this government. I guess that comes from a sense of entitlement that a political party feels after decades in power. The party in power begins to see itself not as a political party but as the natural governing party, much the same way the federal Liberals used to be called. This creates an us versus them mentality, a conviction that government documents are the property of the party in power and not intended for the prying eyes of the opposition, the media, or even the lowly taxpaying Albertan.

Under Bill 20 we'll see more documents than ever before – documents and research paid for and concerning the people of Alberta – put under lock and key for five or even 15 years. I ask: to what end? I've read and heard multiple explanations from the government, and none of them hold water. In defending the bill, the Premier has brandished a briefing book during his question period theatrics without giving any legitimate or reasoned defence of Bill 20 aside from saying that the opposition will play politics with the information or that the information may or may not become policy. Well, I think that the people of Alberta have enough good sense to know the difference between the two, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

This bill, in fact, Mr. Speaker, speaks volumes about how little respect this government has for the people of Alberta, the people it claims to represent. Public and expert opinion on Bill 20 has been virtually unanimous in opposition. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has called the bill a huge step backward. An expert on information law has called it unacceptable, while another has called it noxious. Now, why does the government stubbornly push forward with this bill in spite of unanimous public condemnation? Well, perhaps we'll only know in five or 15 years when these supposedly sensitive documents are finally unsealed.

The irony of the controversy surrounding Bill 20 is that it is an entirely self-inflicted wound. Government briefing documents and government internal audits were never a concern to the public before. Now, thanks to Bill 20, everybody wants to know what's in a briefing book or an internal audit, and more importantly, everybody wants to know what the government has to hide.

Mr. Speaker, any time a government moves to limit access to documents, access to information, the public has a right to be alarmed. The Official Opposition has proposed amendment after amendment to improve this noxious bill, and each one has been tossed aside with barely a moment's consideration by the government. This is a truly sad end to the career of a so-called populist Premier, who rode to power as a friend of the average Albertan but who ends his reign overseeing a secretive government that doesn't trust its own citizens.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 20 in its third reading. This is one of the bills that I'll remember. I think it's one of the most memorable bills in my last nine and a half years in this Assembly. It's a bill that really is an attempt to roll back the ability of Albertans to get information, to get the government to disclose information that they think is related directly to public interests and their interests. For the government to invoke closure on the debate on this bill is deeply deplored by me, by many members of this Assembly on this side of the House, and by a very, very large number of Albertans and the media in this province. Rightly so.

The existing legislation on freedom of information and protection of privacy is not very good as is. Alberta's government has been able to achieve the status of the most secret government in Canada and in the universe, perhaps, in spite of that legislation being in place. To speak against this bill, to speak against the amendments to the existing legislation that are proposed in this bill is not to support the existing legislation. It is weak legislation. It is flawed legislation. What these amendments do is to make it far worse. Far worse.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I'm opposed to this bill. I join with many of my colleagues in my own caucus and other members of the Assembly on the opposition side in opposing this bill.

4:10

This bill, any bill that deals with freedom of information, needs to meet certain tests. It needs to be based on certain principles. The leader of the NDP opposition made a document public yesterday, or the day before, which outlines the principles that must be the basis on which any such legislation should be drawn up. Those principles are outlined in a document by Article 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression. Article 19, Mr. Speaker, takes its name and purpose from article 19 of the universal declaration of human rights. The Article 19 organization is a nongovernmental organization based in

London. It works to engage people across the world in debate on how to make our governments more democratic, how to achieve good governance. What this Bill 20 does is to offend every one of the nine principles outlined in that document, principles on freedom of information legislation. If we haven't already tabled this document in the House, I will be certainly doing it tomorrow.

I think it's incumbent on the members of the Assembly and the people of Alberta to pay attention to what kinds of rules and principles are needed to be followed when either drafting legislation on freedom of information or amending existing pieces of legislation. It's an outrage that Bill 20, in fact, makes a bad piece of legislation – which has not worked in this province to make it easier for people to force the government to disclose information that they need – far worse.

That's why this bill has received such strong opposition from broad-based public opinion: in the editorials, in the letters to the editor, in the letters that we have received as MLAs. It's a bill that must be – must be – condemned for what it does. It offends democracy. It offends the obligation of governments to disclose the information that's in the public interest. What this bill does is simply put that information out of the reach of Albertans. That's why this bill should never have come before the House. It is there. It's sponsored and put forward by the government side. Certainly, we in the opposition will stand with Albertans to oppose this bill and will continue to voice our concerns about the secrecy, deepening secrecy, of this government when it seeks to amend legislation to protect, perhaps, its misdeeds.

People are beginning to ask questions. What is the government trying to hide? What is this Premier trying to leave as a legacy? The legacy is more secrecy, more ability on the part of the government to deny Albertans, who elect us to come here, to have access to information that they consider widely impinges on their rights and their interests.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I oppose this bill and will vote against it in the House.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see that we only have about 15 minutes to oppose this particular bill. That's the last opportunity for real freedom of information until this next thing comes about. It's unfortunate that this wasn't, in fact, an election promise or as highly regarded or as highly spoken about like the third way because when Albertans heard no particulars about the potential tampering with our health care, they were alarmed and they were armed. They were armed with petitions. They were armed on the steps. They were fearful of the change that they had no information about.

I think that if they had heard this particular piece, amendments to the FOIP Act, they would have been alarmed, they would have been armed, and they would have been on the steps as well. Unfortunately, it's come too little too late, the news, the media, that people's interests are suddenly being piqued. Like I said, it's unfortunate that it's this late in the session because I believe that they would have been giving more calls to their MLAs – to the rural MLAs, to the city MLAs, to all MLAs – expressing their outrage and concern. Particularly, if you would have asked Albertans or ask anybody, "Do you think any government should be more secretive?" – and it doesn't matter what government you're talking about – I'll tell you that the answer probably 100 per cent would be: absolutely not.

The people are elected to represent their constituents. You have to remember that we all come from communities that we represent. We all came to be accountable, to be transparent, to give to the best

of our ability, to represent all of the constituents who elected us. Now, when you put through something like this, it certainly doesn't allow us to be that much more representative, more accountable, because if we're asking information on behalf of a constituent, we now are blocked access just like the individual we were asking for, or if they wanted to have the notes, they are in fact blocked.

This again begs the question: how is this part of the democracy of this government when they talked about being leaders in transparency and accountability? How is this leading into the Speech from the Throne? It is a slap in the face to those who, in fact, trust government. People ask so little of their government. They ask them to be accountable and to be trustworthy. In turn, we ask the people to vote for those who they feel will be the most representative of them.

I think people will certainly think twice, as I said previously, as to who they are prepared to elect because when we have a standing vote, which I imagine we will, people can in fact ask: how did you vote? Did you vote for more secrecy, or did you ask for less secrecy? I think people have to realize that when they are going to be voting, this government and the members of the government asked for more secrecy.

It begs the question: what are you hiding? Not just for five years, 10 years, but up to 15 years. That is four governments, four elections is worth hiding something for. It really, really does have a hard time, you know, justifying it. We can come up with the fact about the PATRIOT Act, and we can come up with the other spins that we can put on it, that it's secrecy for the benefit of all Albertans and their information, and it's for their benefit. But, really, when you talk about 20 years, give me a break. I don't think anyone buys 20 years of secrecy that's worth, you know, that particular piece.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I reiterate the differences between a new Conservative government in Ottawa and an old Conservative government in Alberta, the different directions. The ethics and transparency and accountability is all the rave in Ottawa right now. Frankly, to some degree they get it. They get it because, I guess, going through with what happened with the federal Liberals, people are expecting a different way of dealing with government at the federal level. Here we are going the other direction. The differences right now must be obvious to people: a new Conservative government and what they believe in and an old Conservative government and what they seem to believe in.

The one-party rule seems to be that the longer we're here, the more paranoid we get, the more we have to cover up the information, the more we can't let the public in on what's going on. Contrast that with the new Conservative government. Well, obviously, we don't agree with them on everything, on a lot of things, but at least they have an idealism that they're there elected by the people to be accountable and opened up the books to some degree, Mr. Speaker. I think the contrast is a wonderful one that we can take a look at here.

You know, this whole FOIP thing doesn't make any sense to me, why we're doing it. I mean, we're told that the briefing notes aren't that important. Let's go on that. We've got to put them away for five years, but they're not really that important. They just tell us how they answer questions from the opposition. Well, we see the answers to the opposition. It's in the public; it's in *Hansard*. So what's the big deal? The more you try to cover up things and the more you try to hide things, the more the people are interested.

What's there to hide? What's it all about? I've been trying to figure out why they're going in this direction. Then we have the internal auditor. For 15 years we can't even look at the audits that they do with this government. Fifteen years. What's that all about? What's that all about, Mr. Speaker?

4:20

The big question is simply: why are they going to all this trouble to do this? People in the opposition, perhaps the media, and others knew that FOIP was not the easiest thing to deal with anyhow. It's costly, time consuming, and it didn't work that well. Imagine our surprise when they want to tighten it up even more. They've created an interest in it. Probably most people didn't give two hoots about FOIP and these things before, but now they're certainly interested, much more interested, Mr. Speaker, because they're saying the question that we're asking: why are they going to all this trouble to hide things like briefing notes that the Premier and others tell us are innocuous? Then they say: gee, people might get the wrong impression because we may not have accepted that advice. Well, I think it would be pretty clear if they didn't accept the advice. We can certainly see that.

Internal audit within the government for 15 years. Why? Why? I just don't understand. I mean, when I was first elected, the government hadn't been in power that long, the Lougheed days. I doubt that they would have done this. I'm sure that if Premier Lougheed had been there, he'd say: "No. We won't go this direction. This makes no sense at all." There was an idealism when they first came in just like there is some idealism with Harper and people like that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, here we are, a government – I don't know how long they've been here.

Mr. Mason: Thirty-four years.

Mr. Martin: Thirty-four years. It seems like forever.

Mr. Mason: Since I was in grade 11.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, since you were in grade 11.

Now, as I said, Mr. Speaker, the longer they're here, the more paranoid they are. You know, the little bit of information we got from FOIP, "Well, we better cover that up because knowledge is so important." Knowledge is power, Mr. Speaker. "We better cover this up and not let anybody know what's going on."

Well, I don't know. I know they believe that they can do whatever they want in this province. After all, they've been here 34 years. They believe that people accept them no matter what they do, but the point is that even last time they should have got a warning. Whether they like it or not – and it's been mentioned many times in this Assembly – more people voted for the people on this side of the House than voted for that side of the House. That should have told them something from the heady days of the past, but no.

It's interesting that when I notice leadership candidates being put on the spot about this, they're certainly not jumping out and supporting this legislation. Do you notice that? Do you notice that, Mr. Speaker? They're not jumping out. They don't want to be hung with this. I don't see them saying: oh, boy, this is the greatest legislation in the world. A number of them outside this House have actually spoken against it. Now, that should tell the members here something. The leadership candidates don't want to be tarred with what we're doing here.

How come they don't get it? How come they don't get it, Mr. Speaker? What does it take to get through to the sick, hidebound government that's been here too long?

Now, one can only hope that the candidates for leader, who automatically becomes Premier, whoever they are, would say that this is wrong and would come back and change this and become concerned about ethics and transparent government, Mr. Speaker. One can only hope.

Mr. Elsalhy: They talk about it only, but they don't understand it yet.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Exactly.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I say, I suppose there could be a deathbed repentance here in the waning minutes of the Legislature, but I've been around this place too long. I'm not going to hold my breath waiting for a miracle to happen, but time will tell.

The next government is going to have to deal with this. I'll tell you that ethical issues, transparency, democracy – these issues are not going to go away for this government because people in Alberta and across Canada are demanding more accountability from their politicians. They've started to realize that it's the people that elect the government, not the government that tells the people what to do, and it's happening now in Alberta too. There'll be a time at some point down the line where this government will pay a price.

Thirty-four years maybe just makes you this way. Maybe if you were a bunch of saints – I'd never accuse the government of being a bunch of saints. But even with a bunch of saints, if they'd been in power that long, this tends to happen. I don't know. I doubt that any other government will ever get 34 years of power to find it out. That's probably a good thing, Mr. Speaker. It's probably a very good thing.

I just say that it's interesting to see this particular bill, to see the government in action somehow justifying this when everybody in Alberta, even their leadership candidates, media people, everybody else, international experts are saying that this is wrong. But, oh, no. They know best. They know best, Mr. Speaker. "We'll ram this through. We will go back to our closed ways and think that the people of Alberta will say, 'Good job, boys. I'm glad that you're thwarting democracy. I'm glad that you're becoming more secretive. We really appreciate that. That makes us proud of our government.'"

What more can be said about this government, Mr. Speaker? They should be ashamed of themselves, but they're not. Hopefully, down the way they'll pay a political price for this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my first opportunity to stand and speak to Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006. I, too, in the short time left to me would like to express my deep concern about the lack of openness and accountability of this government. It's clear that Albertans are increasingly aware of this lack of openness and accountability and that the restriction of access and increased ministerial powers will come back to bite this government.

People are increasingly concerned about everything, how we're making decisions of land-use issues, how we're protecting our environment, how the water is being abused and industry is calling the shots, doing the investigations on its own right, how industry itself is monitoring our very groundwater, and we can't get access to any of that information even though this is of vital public interest, the very groundwater that we depend for life and livelihoods on.

So this particular bill is a step backward. It's classical George Orwell doublespeak and talks about information being accessible but, in fact, will step back years in terms of people's opportunity to know and to be empowered to speak to and effectively influence some of the key decisions in this province.

From a public trust point of view we are not helping things here, and when we reduce the level of trust in our public servants, we reduce the level of civil discourse in our society, we reduce the level of social stability, we reduce the level of community, and all of these lead down a dark path towards more division, anarchy, violence.

I dare say that some of the longer term impacts of this are being reflected in our health care system today, Mr. Speaker. Among the highest rates of depression, family violence, suicide, and alcoholism anywhere in Canada are found here in Alberta. I have to think that to some extent the attitude of closedness and mistrust is being fostered by these kinds of policies and practices by a government that says the opposite.

People out on the Legislature steps today came all the way from northwestern Alberta concerned that they've not had reasonable input into an intensive livestock operation, a big hog operation, that is already marching its way through the steps that seem clearly to be excluding people from decision-making that does not respect the regional plans of an area. Without an integrated land-use plan for the province, they indeed are left absolutely at the mercy of industry, who not only do the applications but do all of the environmental impact assessments in the absence of a department that will stand up for people, stand up for the environment, and take an opportunity to balance our development with the public interest and the social needs of people.

Information is power, and every time we make a move to restrict access to information, we are restricting people's sense of power and freedom. Indeed, that's what this bill ultimately will result in.

So, Mr. Speaker, I definitely will not be supporting this, and I know all Albertans are going to be dismayed as they learn more and more about how this government is trying to restrict opportunities and access to information and decision-making, subverting the democratic process.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, but pursuant to Government Motion 20, agreed to on May 17, 2006, I must now put the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Bill 20 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:31 p.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Haley	McFarland
Boutillier	Herard	Morton
Brown	Horner	Oberle
Cao	Jablonski	Pham
Cardinal	Knight	Prins
Evans	Liepert	Renner
Forsyth	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Goudreau	Lougheed	Stelmach
Graydon	Mar	VanderBurg
Greeneveld	McClellan	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Pastoor
Bonko	Mather	Swann
Elsalhy	Miller, R.	Taylor
Martin	Pannu	Tougas
Totals:	For – 30	Against – 12

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: Before we proceed with the next item of business, hon. Government House Leader, you wanted to rise on a motion?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with the indulgence of the chair and all hon. members to seek unanimous consent to present the following motion for resolution at this time. I would move that

pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) at today's hour of 5:30 p.m. or shortly beyond 5:30 p.m., should a decision at third reading of Bill 40 be reached at that time, the Assembly will stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

I say it that way, Mr. Speaker, because clearly we have bills 43, 42, and 40 still on the Order Paper to be dealt with today, and we anticipate getting to Bill 40 very soon.

Thank you for your anticipated unanimous consent.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, just for your information Standing Order 4(3) indicates that

if at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday or Wednesday, the business of the Assembly is not concluded, the Speaker leaves the Chair until 8 p.m. unless, on a motion of the Government House Leader made before 5:30 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned until the next sitting day.

The hon. Government House Leader is seeking unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 43

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Zwozdesky: I would simply move third reading of Bill 43, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

The Acting Speaker: Ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a third time]

4:40

Bill 42

Appropriation Act, 2006

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2006.

I urge all members to support this bill. There have been many comments made, some questions for clarification, and the commitment is that I will write to the individual member that may have had a question of clarification in any of those areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. Raising the bar or holding the bottom line? On opposite sides of the opinion pages in yesterday's *Edmonton Journal* were two contrasting views of the task of the next leader of the province. One by two researchers of the Canada West Foundation focused on studies that showed that two-thirds of Albertans want to see greater protection of the environment and elimination of poverty as provincial goals. The other, by management consultants, said that the next Premier must teach Albertans to live within their means by cutting spending and raising taxes in readiness for when the oil runs out. In essence, these two views are not utterly opposed.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Economy and ecology are not poles apart. They both come from "ecos," a word that means management of a household. Smart capitalists realize this. That's why Henry Ford supported welfare and higher wages in the 1930s as this meant that people could buy his cars. That's why Conrad Black wrote a biography of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, subtitled *Champion of Freedom*. At the height of the depression Roosevelt introduced the measures that later became the basis of the welfare state. Without these people supports capitalism would not have survived.

A society that ignores the environment and accepts poverty is not business smart. It is bad business, bad ecology, false economy, poor politics, and misguided governance. It makes about as much sense as a patient who puts off going to the doctor with a pain or cough because he doesn't want to be a sissy and because he can live with it. Such ills and unacknowledged and untreated problems can endanger the society and kill the body politic.

While the two opinion pieces in yesterday's paper both have messages we cannot ignore, they do offer different approaches to our future, different in tone if not in content. The one sets priorities that focus on our potential; the other, on our limitations. One calls us to raise the bar; the other, to remember the bottom line. It is no accident that the language of accounting is showing up in areas other than financial. We now talk of the social and democratic deficit and doing an environmental audit. This is a recognition that these factors that we used to overlook as intangible are every bit as important on a balance sheet of our state of being.

Seventy years ago William Aberhart's message on poverty in the midst of plenty led to a revolution in Alberta politics. There may have been some excuse for poverty in the depression of the 1930s. There is none today. Let us try to recapture what he was offering without being distracted by old party labels or monetary theories. He said that those who are in need and cannot support themselves for whatever reason must be extended the benefit of the doubt, what he called credit. He was saying that in a civilized country – he probably would have said a Christian society – their support needs to be underwritten by society as a whole; the social aspect. At that time some skeptics discarded his ideas as unrealistic. We are in a better position to achieve that dream now than we were in 1936.

Three times in Alberta's history as a province when the government inside this House has not listened, the people outside have heard, and it was their hearing and acting that changed the day. The message of William Aberhart comes to us again. We live in a very different world, but Albertans are still not prepared to accept poverty and injustice when we see an alternative. The only question that remains is whether that change will come from within the government or from outside it.

One of the concerns I have, obviously, is about poverty. I want to extend that to looking at the provincial government, indeed, having many policy levers that it can pull in an effort to reduce poverty,

from the tax system and social assistance to funding for nonprofit organizations and access to education. Many of our nonprofit organizations, which are designed to support a quality of life for the needy, work under a tyranny of uncertain funding. They do not have predictable and sustainable funding. They depend on volunteer help. They deserve recognition and certainty of financial support. This is one tool for helping to reduce poverty, a tool that is already in place, just needing support. Nothing prevents that support but attitude.

I've got a number of areas I'd like to talk about today. One of them, of course, is education. I've received some correspondence lately from people in the city who are dismayed about the Minister of Education's comments in the Legislature in response to questions regarding the class-size initiative and overall funding. He said that he would have the final budgets submitted to him by the end of June and that he would be looking at that then.

The reality in the school systems of this province is that by the end of June the budgets and staffing are set. We may have achieved some crude averaging target for grades 4 to 12, but because of the underfunding of education those numbers are going to change next year. Principals in some of the high schools are talking classes of 38 and 39 to even come close to balancing the budget. Some high schools in Edmonton will be losing seven or eight teachers for the coming school year. This is not because of a dramatic drop in enrolment. The enrolment is roughly the same. There simply is not enough money to retain the staff complements they have.

The excuse that those are site-based decisions doesn't cut it either. The reality is that there is simply not enough money in education. Education should not be funded on a business model, because it is not a business. It is a tool whereby a society assists as much as possible future citizens in becoming contributing, active, and moral members of society. We see it as an investment. Because human growth and development cannot be legislated, automated, or regulated, funding schools as though they were factories creates the groundwork for a dysfunctional system and produces not only poor results but a liability in the future.

The way schools are funded contributes enormously to the problem of providing appropriate education for all students. I talked about this before, especially the funding based on course completions in high school. Funding is only received for actual courses completed. That means 50 per cent attendance and a minimum mark of 25 per cent. Yet a great deal of staff time, smaller classes, aide time, calls to parents, conferences, tutoring, and planning for students at risk will be done to try to assist reluctant learners or students with difficulties learning. If the student is not successful, the school doesn't get any funding.

Schools need to be assured of an adequate block of funding each year. Stable and adequate funding allows schools to function whether they serve the academically elite population or a population comprised of less able students.

I want to again mention the unfunded liability. If not a debt to the province because we are debt free, what budget does the money come out of to pay the government's share, approximately two-thirds each year? Is the \$44 million stated in the newspaper that's going to the unfunded liability new money or simply what the government would have been paying anyway this year? The unfunded liability is placing a financial burden on all teachers regardless of whether we were part of that deal in the early '90s or not. Alberta teachers pay the highest percentage of salary into pension, higher than any public sector. What is equitable about that? I have to ask: what are the plans to address and resolve this contentious issue in a fair and equitable manner?

Again, I also have concerns about mandating second-language

learning. There's not enough staff to do it. There are not enough trained teachers to be implementing this. What is going to happen about that mandate?

4:50

We need to have more help with getting students with special needs the resources that they need to help them complete high school, but funding for special-needs students remains inadequate. An aide costs the school close to \$40,000, yet funding directly from the province is about \$20,000. So that remains a concern to me.

I'm also frustrated with the government's unwillingness despite record revenues to finance the new schools in my constituency area, the Meadows, and the modernization of older schools that are urgently needed. The upcoming budget will of course be very important for the operations of schools. They're headed into contract negotiations. Staff groups have seen salary increases elsewhere of over 3 per cent, so likely we'll expect the same. If grant increases are any less than that, that will result in staff reductions.

Again, I want to mention that fine arts do two important things, both of which are hard to measure: they feed the soul, which we desperately need in an increasingly secular world, and they make us more creative. Even with all our advances in technology we are still in need of creative minds. Unfortunately, with funding problems often the options – fine arts, any of them, counselling, and librarians – are at risk. I can't stress too much how much we need all of those.

I want to talk about AISH funding and PDD funding too. There's been a lot of discussion on these, but I want to add a request for indexation. If we can index MLAs' salaries, why don't we do the same for the most vulnerable in our society? Why do they have to wait for reviews? Indexation should be automatic in terms of people on AISH and people requiring PDD funding.

I also must mention the concern about individuals who have come from Children's Services care and must move to PDD when they are 18. There's a lot of uncertainty about the transition in terms of funding and what is available in programs. This creates unnecessary anxiety. This transition needs to be supported with communication and assistance to dispel these worries and simplify the process and make it client friendly.

Building Better Bridges is a report on programs and supports for persons with developmental disabilities, and it was released in March 2000. It contains 10 recommendations directed toward improving the governance and service delivery of the PDD programs. But this review did not recommend eliminating the provincial board, and I'm still wondering how that decision was made and what groups were consulted. Again, we need to work toward inclusion, equality, and quality of life for all types of disabilities.

Another area of concern for me is continuing care. The Auditor General's report of May 2005 was a wake-up call alerting us to the realities of long-term care facilities in this province, alerting us to the fact that many facilities were not complying with basic standards. Seniors are a vulnerable people. We need to take responsibility to put in a system with clear standards that are enforced and with a system that handles complaints effectively. Alberta could be a leader with increased accountability and transparency in regard to seniors' care. We should have the best care possible with adequate staffing and adequate hours of care per resident. There have to be standards and enforcement. Monitoring must be evident so that people of this province can be assured that we are doing what is in the best interest of each resident.

We are still waiting for the provincial standards that will give us

consistency throughout the province. Bill 205, sponsored by my colleague from Lethbridge-East, could have made a huge difference for us. We need an independent central enforcement body, a continuing care commissioner. Why aren't we legislating those standards now that we've been talking about? Why are we waiting till next spring? Seniors need the protection now.

It's also a crucial time for the environment. Global warming is no longer a possibility; it's a present reality. The earlier springs and later falls we experience each year are welcome, but they come at a cost. Desert areas are reaching northward and glaciers are receding. As a major producer of the world's energy Alberta has vowed to be a world leader in sustainability and conservation. This is a noble objective, and it needs to be more than that. Our government needs to send the signal clearly to the energy sector that economy and ecology must be balanced as joint responsibilities of a well-managed household. With only .05 per cent of the provincial government budget Alberta Environment does not have the manpower to monitor industry and our environment. The power of industry and the weakness of the Department of Environment have led to a lack of confidence that this government truly values the protection of the environment and truly understands the impact of failed action on the future of this province.

I've got concerns, of course, about coal-bed methane. We've heard a lot about that this session, and I still feel that we're not paying the attention that is due these people who are expressing concerns about the dangers of coal-bed methane.

I think I'll leave it at that.

The Speaker: Shall I call on the hon. Minister of Finance to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McClellan: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called then.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a third time]

Bill 40
Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to stand and move third reading of Bill 40, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006.

After all is said and done, I think that, essentially, what this will do is create an opportunity for continuous improvement with respect to tuition policy, and I urge all members to vote in favour.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise on third reading of Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, and acknowledge the Minister of Advanced Education for wanting to do the right thing by students; however, the fact remains that we on this side of the House believe that he's going about it in the wrong way.

Now, this is as was indicated in second reading and in Committee of the Whole, where this bill has gotten significant debate, full debate I think, as full a debate as a bill of about 60 words can get. It is a very short bill, and it seeks to do one thing and one thing only; that is, to remove tuition policy from legislation and move it under regulations. The minister very much thinks that is the direction that he wants to go. On the opposition benches we think very much that that is the wrong direction to go. I don't think that there can be any meeting of the minds on this. I don't think there's any room for negotiation on this one. It's just a black-and-white issue.

So, with that in mind, I would like to move an amendment that the motion for third Reading of Bill 40, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 40, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence." I have the requisite number of copies here for distribution.

I don't intend to spend a great deal of time speaking to this because, as I said, I think this bill has had a pretty full debate in second reading and committee stage. I think the merits or drawbacks of this bill now should be self-evident to anyone who has followed the debate. I think the positions are pretty well laid out on this debate, and of course it is our position that this is a bad bill, a bad piece of legislation, fundamentally flawed, should not go ahead. There are better ways to accomplish the same end, and we have been urging the minister to pursue some of those ways. He seems not interested in doing that. Thus, I move this amendment. I don't know how much appetite there is on either side of the House to debate this amendment, but I think it's fairly self-evident. I will take my seat now and allow the debate to go where it will.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do I take it that that was your participation on the amendment?

Mr. Taylor: On the amendment, yes.

The Speaker: Okay. So we have debate now on the amendment. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education on the amendment.

5:00

Mr. Herard: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess it won't come as a large surprise to my friend across the way that I don't support his motion.

Essentially, I'll just say this. We typically, I think, are into an area of whether or not democracy works the way democracy works. Now, it is what it is, as imperfect as it is, but at some point you have to come to the realization that you can only do what you can do.

So I would urge everyone to vote against the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on the motion before the House, which is to hoist the bill. I think there are very good reasons why this bill should not move beyond the stage it's at now and very good reasons why it shouldn't be approved by the House. We are trying to bend over backwards to give this minister the opportunity to do what he claims he wants to do. He throws up his hands in despair and disbelief that this side of the House is not willing to go along with his proposal to take the matter of establishing tuition fee policy off the floor of this House. Rather, it

should be done, he thinks, behind the closed doors of his office.

Last night the minister expressed interest in the motion that my colleague for Edmonton-Calder brought before the House on my behalf to amend the legislation. The minister said that it sounded like a good amendment, a good idea, but why didn't the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona bring it to me through my office? Well, there's an established procedure here. The minister brings the bill to the floor of the House. We debate it here. We draw attention to what we consider are seriously flawed portions of the bill. As I said, the bill is less than 60 words, and we still are trying to improve it so that the minister would have some room to manoeuvre yet respect the democratic traditions of this House.

He said that although he seems to like the idea that my amendment was proposing, he couldn't support the amendment. Very strange. I think that it's incumbent upon the minister, if he in fact found the ideas proposed in the amendment to be to his liking, to in fact implore, to try to appeal to his colleagues on the government side of the House to support the amendment. What he did, in fact, was quite surprising, quite strange. He stands to say that he cannot support the amendment.

What this hoist motion does, Mr. Speaker, is give this minister another chance to take the ideas that were proposed in that amendment last night back to his office, back to his colleagues in his caucus, back to the standing committee that deals with this matter, and seek their approval for it. The hoist motion comes, I think, at exactly the right time to rescue the minister from the difficulty that he finds himself in, that he didn't have enough time to consult.

This hoist motion does give the minister time to consult – to consult with us, consult with his own caucus, consult with the standing committee – to take the whole matter through the black hole that I talked about, but the minister doesn't seem to be serious about doing everything that he can to prevent this matter from slipping into the black hole. That's what's going to happen. That's what's happened with respect to the recommendations of the subcommittee on transforming the system, that I helped the minister to release to the press and the public. We don't know what's happening to those 37 recommendations. Now we won't know what will happen to the issue of tuition fee policy if this bill passes in the House. That's why I think it makes a great deal of sense from the point of view of the students, who have worked over the years long and hard, to put the matter of determining the parameters for the tuition fee policy back into the legislation.

Last night's amendment, that was proposed on my behalf to the House, was another attempt to help the minister to move the matter back to the floor of this House and put the issue of tuition fee policy and the framework which would guide it in the legislation that he proposes. He likes the amendment, yet he expressed his disapproval of it. I simply can't understand the logic of it. You can't be in favour of something and then say, "I'm opposed to it" in the same breath, within minutes. I read carefully what the minister had to say about that amendment in the *Hansard* last night, and I was quite puzzled how the minister can be on both sides of the issue. He's for the ideas in the amendment, yet he is against the amendment.

Mr. R. Miller: Then he wouldn't accept adjournment so that we could let him take it back to his caucus and discuss it.

Dr. Pannu: That's right.

Mr. Speaker, the hoist amendment that's before the House gives the minister yet another opportunity so that he can get things straight in his own mind first, and then he can get it right. That's what the

students would welcome. Students have been imploring this minister and this government to take another look at their concerns, and they've expressed these concerns in no uncertain terms. I hope the minister understands students' concerns. I hope the minister has been listening to what I have had to say about this matter. I hope the minister has been listening to what my hon. colleagues on the Official Opposition side responsible for this have been saying. Yet he seems to be turning a deaf ear to all of this.

Minister, you offered us an opportunity to be consulted. We are willing to be consulted, provided that you give us the opportunity. You vote for this amendment and ask your colleagues to vote for this amendment, which is a hoist motion. It really is not an amendment, Mr. Speaker; I'm sorry to confuse the two. This is a motion before the House to help the rookie Minister of Advanced Education to have time, to have the benefit of advice from this side of the House, from student organizations. I can see that rookies fumble the ball, and he has clearly done that. He has clearly done that. But we don't want to embarrass him. Mistakes are made, and then they can be fixed.

This motion gives the minister one last opportunity to say: "Mea culpa. I made a mistake." He can tell the House and his own colleagues on his side of the House, "I have been given this golden opportunity by way of this motion to take the matter back." Then he can consult with the opposition critics on this issue, to whom he wrote a letter two days ago, which was gratefully received, I want to tell the House. Yet I want to hold the minister to his word. If he's serious about consulting with us, then here is the chance. Here is the opportunity. In the dying hours of this spring session we are gracefully giving him the opportunity to fix his mistakes. Nothing is hard. If there's a will to do it, nothing is hard, Mr. Minister.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, I would therefore urge the minister to change his mind on what he had to say. I know that he sometimes acts rashly. He doesn't give himself enough time to consider the merits of arguments, of motions before the House. What I've done now is provide the minister with some chance, some opportunity, a few more minutes of reflection on the issue. I know that the minister wants continuous improvement, as he says, in setting tuition fee policy. I hope that he is also committed to making continuous improvement in his own performance in the House. It's a very, very important piece of legislation, and the minister is committed to the principle of continuous improvement, I presume, including his own performance and judgment.

Mr. Speaker, the minister has the opportunity to in fact admit that he made a mistake, that there are good ideas on this side of the House that he's willing to look at, and that in fact in his own mind for some reason – maybe his political reasons are different from his convictions, but for political reasons he's digging in his heels. He's saying no, that this hoist amendment is something he cannot vote for. But I appeal to his good judgment and say to the minister: you will win lots of friends, if not on this side of the House, at least among the students. And there are over 200,000 students in the postsecondary system. So here's an opportunity to stand up and ask for a special chance from the Speaker, to be able to have a second go and speak to the amendment and say to the House and to the Speaker that you have indeed changed your mind because the power of persuasion is there. Our job is to persuade, and I hope that I have persuaded the minister and the House that he should in fact stand up and say: "Yeah, I changed my mind. I'm going to vote for this amendment."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the amendment.

Mr. R. Miller: What he said.

The Speaker: Are there others who would like to participate in the debate on the amendment?

The question is being called then?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:13 p.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Speaker: Hon. members, what we have before us now is a division on the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Before I ask for the vote, I just want to remind you of the procedure that we use with respect to this kind of an amendment, known as a hoist amendment. If the amendment is carried, then this is the end of the matter, and the bill disappears from the Order Paper. If this hoist amendment is defeated, then I will immediately put the question on the motion for third reading.

For the motion:

Bonko	Miller, R.	Taylor
Mather	Pannu	Tougas

Against the motion:

Amery	Herard	McFarland
Brown	Horner	Morton
Cao	Jablonski	Oberle
Cardinal	Knight	Pham
Evans	Liepert	Prins
Forsyth	Lindsay	Renner
Goudreau	Lougheed	Stelmach
Graydon	Mar	VanderBurg
Groeneveld	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Haley		

Totals:	For – 6	Against - 28
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[Motion on the amendment to third reading of Bill 40 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm now going to call the question on third reading of Bill 40.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:19 p.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Amery	Herard	McFarland
Brown	Horner	Morton
Cao	Jablonski	Oberle
Cardinal	Knight	Pham
Evans	Liepert	Prins
Forsyth	Lindsay	Renner
Goudreau	Lougheed	Stelmach
Graydon	Mar	VanderBurg
Groeneveld	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Haley		

Against the motion:

Backs	Miller, R.	Taylor
Bonko	Pannu	Tougas
Mather		

Totals:	For – 28	Against – 7
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[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a third time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we now have a problem. A few minutes ago by resolution of this Assembly unanimous consent was given to rising at 5:30 or beyond. In this unanimous consent nothing was said about rising prior to 5:30, so now I must call on the hon. Government House Leader for a motion with respect to that.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is yet another vignette moment for us but a good one.

However, on a serious note, in view of the hour and in view of the progress made on the bills debated today and in view of the government's business being quite completed at this point, I would now move that we call it 5:30 and that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:26 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, May 18, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/18

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly my summer student, Kelsey Roos. She is attending Concordia University and working on a bachelor's degree in management. She's seated in I think the public gallery, and I'd ask that she stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several introductions today, and they're all seated in your gallery. Today marks the last time that hon. members in this House will see three Legislative Assembly security service staff in uniform for they are retiring at the end of May. Dedication, loyalty, and good humour are the qualities these men have so capably given to this House. We are most grateful to them for all that they have given in support of our provincial parliamentary process. In your gallery are Ben Walker, Nick Kutash, and Bob Baker. I ask them to rise and receive the much-deserved thanks of this House.

Also in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are spouses of some of our MLAs. They are Mrs. Shirley Johnston, the wife of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, and Mrs. Liz VanderBurg, the wife of the hon. Minister of Government Services. I'd ask them to rise at this time and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last but certainly not least, Mr. Speaker, is a young lady who on May 26 will be celebrating 20 years as the executive assistant of Mr. Speaker. She's also seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask Bev Alenius to rise and receive the very warm thanks of the Assembly.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have an angel among us today. Her name is Ellen McGregor. She's here with her mother and her grandmother Jean Fraser. Her mother is Mary McGregor, and when Mary found that she had MS, Ellen undertook to not only raise money for multiple sclerosis but as a 12-year-old sacrificed her birthday presents to make sure that fundraising was done for the MS Society. She is, indeed, a young lady that we could all model ourselves after. I'd ask that Ellen and her mother and grandmother, who are seated in our members' gallery, please rise so that we can applaud such generosity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 33 grade 6 students from Tempo school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Tempo school is a private school in Riverbend. I've had the privilege of visiting the school on a number

of occasions, and I can say without a doubt that this school is gifted with extraordinarily intelligent and inspiring students and staff. The Minister of Education and myself last attended the school last fall when we were honouring a young lady, Aysha Wills, who organized a tsunami relief effort. She was a student at that school.

The Tempo school students are seated in the members' gallery and the public gallery, and they're accompanied by parent helpers Mrs. Rosa Ziegler, Mrs. Shadia Fares, Mr. George Kuhse, Mrs. Lorraine Verbeke, Mrs. Kate Freeman, Mrs. Sandy Redmond, Mr. Ireneusz Mackowiak, and by their teacher, Ms Cathryn van Kessel. I believe this is the first visit of Tempo school to the Legislature. Just one more second, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to draw to your attention that Mrs. Kate Freeman and her daughter Emma Freeman, who is one of the students there, are direct descendants of the first Premier of this province, Mr. Alexander Rutherford, and are proudly wearing his campaign pins. I'd ask all members of Tempo school to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful, wonderful person who served 15 years in this House as the MLA representing the fine people of my fine constituency of Calgary-Foothills. Mrs. Patricia Nelson, or Pat as we call her, served under our beloved Premier, served in many portfolios, including Minister of Finance, up until her retirement in 2004. We love her in Calgary-Foothills, and we thank her for her many years of service to Albertans. Pat Nelson is seated somewhere in this House; I'm not too sure where. I ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. As the first one, it's my honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Pam Barrett. Pam served as the New Democratic MLA for Edmonton-Highlands from 1986 to 1993 and from 1997 to the year 2000. She won the leadership of the Alberta New Democrats in 1996 and was the party's dynamic and dedicated leader until 2000. Before her first term as an MLA and during her break from politics in the 1990s, Pam was an active public figure in Edmonton, with newspaper columns and regular political commentary and talk show slots on television and radio. Though retired, she continues to work as a freelance journalist. Throughout her career Pam has been dedicated to social justice issues, financial responsibility, and the maintenance of strong public health care and education. She is fiercely passionate in her beliefs and as a politician was consistently committed to standing up for the underdog. As a public figure Pam's charisma and dedication inspired the love and respect of the people of Alberta. We're very pleased to have Pam join us today. She's seated in your gallery, and I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

I'm delighted to also introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Julianna Charchun. She is the summer STEP student assistant for the Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood constituency. She is currently a master's student in family studies in the department of human ecology at the University of Alberta. She's been working on evaluations for Mother Earth's Children's Charter School in Wabamun and on Health Canada's Nobody's Perfect parenting program. Mr. Speaker, we're looking forward to having Julianna

work with us for the summer. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Lyndsey Henderson. Lyndsey is the summer STEP student assistant for my constituency. Lyndsey was originally born in Fort McMurray and came to Edmonton to pursue her bachelor of arts at the University of Alberta. She volunteers for the Centre for Equal Justice and has a keen interest in Canadian history. I'd ask Lyndsey to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you three people today. The first two have actually just arrived here from Perth, Australia, and they're my niece and her boyfriend. Evy Hoge and Ivan Denys have recently come from Perth, Australia, for a visit. Ivan has been very acclimatized in that he's already wearing an Oilers jersey today. The third person is my lovely wife, Evelyn, who is well known to the Members of the Legislative Assembly. I'd ask them to all rise to receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Barb McLean. Barb is the summer STEP assistant for the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview constituency. She will complete her combined honours degree in political science and women's studies next year at the University of Alberta. Barb is also one of the recipients of the Lois Hole humanities and social science scholarships awarded earlier this year. She plans to continue researching aboriginal women's issues. We are delighted to have Barb join us for the summer and would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my extreme pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mr. Barry Cavanaugh, who's the chief executive officer of the Alberta Pharmacists Association, which acts as an advocacy and representative organization for the thousands of hard-working pharmacists throughout this province. Barry's growing and ever-evolving role includes making presentations to government and liaising with both sides of this House, and he's here to observe democracy in action. I would now ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Dashiell Brasen. Dashiell is a summer STEP assistant for the Edmonton-Strathcona constituency. He is currently a student at Grant MacEwan College and will be attending the University of Alberta next year. Dashiell has lived in the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona his whole life.

His parents live in the same area. We are excited to have Dashiell work with us for the summer, and I would now ask Dashiell to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to echo the comments of the Minister of Health and Wellness. We do indeed have an angel among us today. We have with us a lady who literally glides through a room full of people with grace and dignity. She oozes caring and compassion. She's been known to make chocolate cake for hungry MLAs in the middle of the night when they're working a late session, and we found out this morning that she is in possession of one of the most amazing recipes for cinnamon buns. She is indeed the first lady of the Official Opposition, the partner of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I would ask Jeanette Boman to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we've arrived at a portion of the Routine where we have certain rules associated with ministerial statements, the length thereof and who can participate as well. Today I intend to exercise my authority as the Speaker to waive that, and I'm going to call on three individuals to participate. I mean waive by way of time. First of all, I'll call on the hon. Deputy Premier, then I'm going to call on the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, and I'll call on the hon. leader of the third party. At the conclusion of that, I'll invite the hon. the Premier to participate as well.

Tribute to the Hon. Ralph Klein Premier of Alberta

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's with enormous pride and, I must admit, some sense of sadness that I rise today to speak about a great leader, an outstanding Albertan, and I believe the most popular Premier in Canadian history. That, of course, is our very own hon. Premier of Alberta.

As this session of the Legislature moves to completion, my caucus colleagues and I are very much aware that the next time we gather in this Chamber, we will do so without the guidance and wisdom of this man to my right, a man who has held the Premier's chair in this Assembly since 1992. This is, of course, because of our Premier's announcement earlier this spring that he will be stepping down as our Premier later this fall. It was an announcement we all knew would come some day but always hoped would be some time in the very distant future. But the time has arrived, and we now prepare for the departure of a man who has dedicated 17 incredibly productive years to the service of his province, almost 14 of those as Premier.

Our Premier's list of accomplishments is very long, distinguished, and historic. It was our Premier's personal vision and leadership that led to the elimination of Alberta's deficit and then Alberta's debt. Mr. Speaker, today, with our fiscal house in order and a robust economy that leads the nation, it's easy to forget how difficult the early 1990s were for Alberta and for our Premier personally, but as a government and a province we were incredibly fortunate to have had at the helm a man of courage, a man of vision, and a man of conviction.

Albertans recognized a man of honesty and sincerity and believed our Premier when he spoke about the importance of getting rid of the deficit and debt, and Albertans trusted him to deliver on his promise that the tough decisions would lead to benefits in the future. As all Albertans know, our Premier lived up to his word. It was his

strength of vision and his natural leadership that helped create the prosperous and growing province that we enjoy today.

Even with the debt and the deficit gone, our Premier indicated that there was still work to be done. He always said that there was a greater purpose to achieving fiscal responsibility than simply showing balanced numbers on a budget spreadsheet. The tough fiscal work was just a prologue to bringing to life his vision of a strong Alberta for the future, a future with a world-class heart centre in Edmonton, a state-of-the-art bone and joint centre in Calgary, being at the forefront of medical research and, perhaps, Alberta being the home of a cure for cancer; a future where children would be protected from the violence of prostitution and the nightmare of crystal meth; a future where Alberta's economy would be strengthened by diversity and the entire province would be brought closer together by SuperNet; a future where postsecondary education would be accessible to any Albertan with a desire to improve themselves; a future where Albertans would pay far less overall taxes than all other Canadians; a future where the family farm would remain an enduring symbol of Alberta; a future where jobs would be plentiful, giving Albertans the opportunity to achieve their dreams. Mr. Speaker, thanks to the drive and determination, the persuasiveness and the dedication of our Premier that future envisioned by one man has already become Alberta's reality today.

It's been those kinds of accomplishments that led our Premier to being named Calgary's outstanding citizen of the century in 1995, a B'nai Brith citizen of the year in 1994, an honorary chief of the Blood tribe in 1996, an honorary degree recipient from Olds College and from Kangwon National University in Korea. Mr. Speaker, I've only scratched the surface of our Premier's many, many accomplishments.

1:50

One other I must mention, however. Our Premier has distinguished himself and our province for his wise counsel to fellow Premiers and championship of Alberta's interests at first ministers and Council of the Federation meetings. However, beyond the public awards and achievements beats the heart of a man whom I have admired and respected since the first day I met him. What an incredible honour it has been for me to be a part of his team.

Throughout his public life our Premier has embodied the very best characteristics of this province. He has shown integrity. He has been open, honest, and accessible, slow to anger, quick to forgive. His staff know him as a boss who treats them with kindness and friendship. I am so delighted, Mr. Speaker, to see so many of them here today and so many other familiar faces from around the Legislature Building and Annex to witness this occasion.

Mr. Speaker, his caucus colleagues know him as a leader who respects their views and their goals for their constituents, and of course Albertans know him as Ralph. Above all else it's been his incredible connection with ordinary Albertans that has defined this man and his career and made him the most unique political leader of his time. No matter where you go in this province, the Premier is known for being just Ralph. Our Premier has always been a man of the people in the truest sense. He is Ralph, a man whose words and vision reflected the dreams and aspirations of Albertans from all walks of life. This is not simply a skill he worked on developing or a technique that he learned from a book. It's who he is. He is a man with true interest in every person that he meets.

Today as all Alberta tries to imagine a province without Ralph as Premier, I know I speak for everyone in this House in expressing my deepest thanks to our Premier for all that he has done. Premier, thank you for bringing integrity and honour to this House and to the world of public service. Thank you for your countless unsung acts of kindness and humility, that touched the most cynical among us.

Thank you for the friendship that you have shown in the toughest of times and the dedication you've shown in the most trying of times. Thank you for always being Ralph.

As you prepare for retirement in a few short months, I hope you will always be inspired by the love and admiration that are in the hearts of all of us on your caucus team and in the hearts of millions of Albertans.

You've been so fortunate to have beside you a supportive wife, who has also brought honour and distinction to our province. Colleen Klein has been a caring mentor for thousands of Alberta children and a shining light for thousands of Alberta women. I hope that you and Colleen enjoy the peace and good fortune that you've both so richly earned. I hope that you achieve many new goals and dreams in the next chapter of your life, and of course I hope you have some time to golf and to fish. I hope that I may always have the honour and pleasure of calling you friend. Your voice, your spirit, and your laughter will be missed in this Chamber and across the province.

Mr. Speaker, when the Premier was asked on many occasions what he would wish for his legacy, he has always said, and I quote: to leave this province in better shape than I found it. Mr. Premier, you have accomplished this in spades. What you've achieved on behalf of all Albertans will never ever be forgotten.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Premier. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal and Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that today marks the last time that this Premier will sit in this Assembly as an elected member of the House, so I would like to offer a few words of acknowledgement and thanks to a man who will long be remembered, no doubt, as one of Canada's most dynamic public figures.

Life is full of irony. It folds and curves and loops on itself in the most unexpected ways. Nine years ago, after I had continuously challenged the policies and actions of his government as a member of the public, this Premier, I think in sheer exasperation, issued a challenge to me. He said: if you think anyone agrees with you, you'd better run for office. Well, I had never even considered the notion, but four years later I did run for office, and now here I stand today as Leader of the Official Opposition, with a great team around me, rising to wish the Premier well in his retirement.

One of the things about this Premier is that you never quite know what he's going to say next. The media loved that, of course, and so did many in the public who saw it as a refreshing contrast to the usual drone of politicians. I got my fair share of those unexpected moments, more numerous than we can talk about. I do still remember a Saturday morning in 1997, long before I ever considered running for office. It was a day after a book I wrote was published, and I'll admit that it was a book that was pretty critical of this government. I was having breakfast in our kitchen when I glanced at the morning newspaper and nearly choked on my coffee. There was the headline: Premier accuses Taft of spreading communism. [laughter] Well, I've never thanked you for that, Mr. Premier. Though it was completely untrue, it was the best publicity a book could ever have.

The Premier's career has been remarkable. There's no doubt about it. He served the public as an elected representative of one kind or another for nearly three decades, including almost 14 years as Premier. That sort of electoral success speaks to the connection the Premier has enjoyed with the people of Alberta. In fact, he is rare among Canadian politicians in that more people refer to him by

his first name than by his title. Most of us who have chosen careers in public life would love to have the same kind of rapport with the people that our Premier has.

It takes a lot of courage to pursue a career in politics, particularly a job as important as the Premier's, which places huge demands on the man and his family. The scrutiny is constant and intense, and the pressure is unrelenting, coming from all directions day and night. Anyone who can bear that kind of pressure for as long as this Premier has is clearly someone to be reckoned with.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, we should also acknowledge the strength and support of the Premier's wife, Colleen, and the rest of his family. Though they have lived on the verge of the spotlight cast upon the Premier, they have shared the burdens of his position, and in that sense they are as much servants of the public as the Premier himself. They are equally deserving of our gratitude.

I must also, if it's all right, make particular mention of the Premier's father, who is a constituent of mine. I'm pretty sure he's never voted for me, but we do often meet at events, and we chat and we joke. Many a time he has said to me, "You keep Ralph on his toes." Well, Mr. Klein Sr., I have tried. Believe me; I have tried.

In an age when many Canadians are cynical about politics, the Premier has shown that it's possible to maintain a real connection with the public while at the same time making the difficult decisions required by the office. The Premier has never been afraid to wear his humanity on his sleeve, and I think everyone sitting in this Legislature and in Legislatures across Canada should learn from the Premier's example. To serve the public good, you must risk your health, your reputation, your family life, and so much more. It's a risk taken on behalf of your fellow citizens with no guarantee of thanks, no guarantee of remembrance. The Premier took the risk because he wanted to help build a better Alberta.

So, if I may, to the Premier, on behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus you have our thanks, our best wishes, and our sincerest hopes that you will enjoy a fulfilling retirement and many, many happy years with your wife and children and grandchildren.

May the golf balls fly and the fish bite. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, what can you say about this Premier? It's almost hard to know where to start. I guess you might go to the front of any given parade – well, almost any parade – and you'll see the Premier happily out front. It's hard to think of any personality that has dominated Alberta politics as thoroughly as has the Premier.

For the Premier politics has always been deeply personal. He showed an almost unique ability to relate to the average Albertan, and they relate to him. It's an important quality because it makes politics more relevant to the average person in Alberta.

Getting out from under the dome has become part of the thinking of any successful politician in Alberta. Martha and Henry have been the symbols of this populist approach to politics. They have arguably become the most famous fictional couple in Alberta's political folklore. Looking at an issue the way Martha and Henry might look at it before opening your mouth has become standard operating procedure for us over here and I'm sure in other political parties in this province as well. The result, and a very positive one, is that everyday people are more engaged in politics and feel a greater sense of ownership of their government.

We all like to believe that a person of humble beginnings can rise to any office in the land. The Premier has inspired many people by demonstrating that this is possible. One such person, Mr. Speaker,

is me. When I first considered running for Edmonton city council, I wondered whether or not a bus driver could be elected. But when I heard the story of the TV reporter who took on the Calgary political establishment and won the mayor's chair, it really helped me to make up my own mind to throw my hat into the ring.

The one aspect of being an opposition leader that I've enjoyed perhaps the most is taking on the Premier each day in question period. He's a formidable adversary in these exchanges. I've looked forward to the daily matching of wits, and I can tell you that nothing feels better than to score a couple of good points, causing the Premier to launch into one his tirades about how bad things are in socialist Manitoba. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the converse is also true. Nothing is more discouraging than to have him blow a carefully crafted question out of the water and have to sit down to the hoots and thumping of the Tory caucus.

Ultimately, though, I think all members here can agree that the Premier's most significant accomplishment has been his single-minded determination to pay off the debt. I know that he will take pride in this accomplishment. While we may disagree on many things, I will say that this opens up many wonderful opportunities for our children and our grandchildren.

I hope the Premier gets all the fishing and golfing he wants, but I know he has lots more to contribute to this province. It's been an honour and a privilege to work with him. I wish him and Colleen all the best.

With the indulgence of the Speaker I want to say that it won't be the same around here without you, Ralph. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. members, those were three very wonderful statements.

We're now in the 100th year of democracy in the province of Alberta and the 101st year in the history of the province of Alberta. To the hon. the Premier and to all of you, hon. members, we have designed a very special new Mace pin. It's a Mace pin of the province of Alberta, and it has the number 100 on it. I am now going to ask my head page to take it and deliver it to the hon. Deputy Premier, who I will ask to pin it on the Premier as the first recipient of this Legislature.

Mr. Klein: Oh, isn't that beautiful.

Mrs. McClellan: It's gorgeous.

First they should have explained how to get it out of the box.

Mr. Klein: There are two pins.

Mrs. McClellan: See. I needed my boss, as always.

Mr. Klein: Isn't that nice.

Mrs. McClellan: It's beautiful.

The Speaker: Now, hon. members, may I call on Alberta's Premier in its 100th year, the hon. Premier for the province of Alberta.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To say that I'm overwhelmed would be an understatement. I really am, and I'm honoured that you would allow me this opportunity to respond to the very kind words of my Legislature colleagues, including members of the opposition. I really do appreciate them.

I would first like to thank my friend and colleague the Deputy Premier for her remarks. Her words mean a lot to me because they come from a loyal and trusted friend – and I mean that – a friend

who has stood by me through good times and bad. She's brought tremendous strength and integrity to the government and to this Legislature. She is, in short, a great Albertan, and it's been a pleasure to serve with her on the same team.

2:10

I would also like to thank the members of my caucus both past and present. You've been absolutely wonderful throughout the years. The things that have been achieved during my time in government were only achieved by their collective efforts. The will was theirs, the faith was theirs, the hard work was theirs, and the credit is theirs.

I would like to thank members of the opposition parties, both those who sit in the House today and their predecessors with whom I've crossed swords in the past. In fact, one of their predecessors, my friend Pam Barrett, was introduced earlier in the Speaker's gallery. I really enjoyed sparring with Pam. I really did.

Now, philosophically I haven't always agreed with the opposition points of view, as many of you have noticed, but I've never questioned their commitment and the commitment they bring to their jobs, the energy with which they serve their constituents, or their dedication to this province and its people. So I would especially like to thank the leaders of the Liberal and New Democratic caucuses. They are men and women of conscience and honour who bring a great deal of fire and passion to their work, and Alberta is a better place for it.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the team that has stood behind me all the way. My wife, Colleen, who has been mentioned by all three parties, has been a steady source of comfort, friendship, support, strength, and love. Without her I could and would have achieved absolutely nothing. I can tell you that for sure. To my staff in the Premier's office, who have handled more mail, phone calls, crazy schedules, and pressure always with grace, I know that every single detail of every single thing I do as Premier is always taken care of. I learned a lot from you, Mr. Speaker, about how to be organized. Before I met you and before coming into this office, I was totally and absolutely disorganized. Making this all happen, of course, is a huge undertaking that requires a very capable, dedicated team. In fact, my staff are more than staff. They've become like family.

Finally, I also want to thank all the Legislature staff who keep this place running. I know there are lots of things they do that I don't know about. They just seem to happen as if by magic, but I know it's not magic. It is hard work. I know that everything they do to support members of this House serves the people of this province.

Those of us who have enjoyed the privilege of working here know that the Legislature is a very special place. As much as I've often talked – and it was alluded to – about being out from under the dome, there hasn't been a single day that I've walked into this building when I haven't felt that I'm blessed to be here. Important work takes place in this building, extremely important work. Whether you're sitting in these Chambers or you're one of the dedicated people that take care of this magnificent building, you're all a part of it. You're part of a team that has been given the privilege of serving Albertans in a unique way. At least that's how I've always felt. I've felt blessed to be here, privileged to be part of this team, and honoured to serve the great people of this great province.

Thank you. [Extended standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier. I thank those who participated today, and I thank the response from all the members in the public galleries, the Speaker's gallery, and in the media gallery as well. That's a remarkable form of love.

Now I'll call on the Clerk to take us to the next point of the

Routine, called the Oral Question Period, so may I ask for 50 more minutes of love?

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Premier Klein's Advice for His Successor

Dr. Taft: I'm sure we all just feel the love, Mr. Speaker.

Well, last round. This Premier's legacy and the legacy of the 35 long years of Tory rule in this province will in fact be mixed. Great credit is taken by this Tory government for paying off the Tory debt, and indeed this was an important development. It was important enough to have been the central plank in the Alberta Liberal election platform of 1993. The real credit, however, belongs more to high oil and gas prices than to sound fiscal management or a real vision for Alberta's future. My questions are to the Premier. Given that Alberta's economy is more reliant on nonrenewable resource revenues now than it has ever been, what advice does this Premier have for his successor on how to build a genuinely sustainable economy?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mr. Klein: Actually, it is a very good question, and we have been going through this as a caucus. That's why we have developed a plan – and it may change at the next caucus planning session – to not get ourselves in the situation where we have to finance on an ongoing basis programs that might not be affordable in the future. That's why we adopted a program of spend some, but spend it on capital projects, needed infrastructure, that won't result in substantial operating expenses down the road; give some back, which we did in the form of rebate cheques or, as some people like to call them, Ralph bucks; and save, and we have done that through investments in the heritage savings trust fund, investments in various endowments. So, Mr. Speaker, that is the policy and that is the advice that I would have for whoever succeeds me: do not get yourself into a spending problem.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the democratic deficit in Alberta is bigger now than when the Premier first became leader, what advice does the Premier have for his successor on how to make Alberta truly open, accountable, and democratic?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, you know, I really do think that we are open, we are accessible, and we are transparent. I can't think of a Premier or ministers who make themselves more accessible anywhere in Canada. Now, relative to the FOIP legislation, Bill 20, which I know has been the topic of a lot of discussion both within the Liberal caucus and the ND caucus, I would like to remind the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that the very briefing books that are in question and the briefing books that they have been railing about have always been protected. As a matter of fact, they have been protected indefinitely, forever. Now we're saying that we want to amend the legislation so that at least they can have them in five years. I don't see what is wrong with that. They would never, never, never in their lives prior to this amendment get these briefing books. Now at least they can get them after five years. There is a reason for everything. One of the reasons might be – and now they'll really be scrambling – maybe the Minister of Gaming has the 6/49 numbers in his book. Ho, ho, ho. Who knows?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Premier: given that Albertans' reliance on food banks has soared across the province – there are now over 75 of them – what advice does the Premier have for his successor on how to make the Alberta advantage, as he calls it, apply to everyone?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, my advice to my successor, whoever he or she might be, would be to be compassionate and to remember that while there is a responsibility on the part of government, there also is a responsibility on the part of society to look after those who are less fortunate in society.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Education Funding

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, as the spring session comes to a close, educators and parents across the province are frustrated that this government has still not addressed their concerns. School administrators have notified us and the Liberal opposition that they simply won't have enough money in their budget next year to keep all their current teaching staff. My question is to the Minister of Education. Given that school administrators and the Edmonton public school board have indicated that they are expecting teacher layoffs next year, what will the minister do before school budgets are set to ensure that this doesn't happen?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful for the question because it will give me a chance to again emphasize that the school boards will submit their budgets to me on or before June 30, and at that time, as is customary in this tradition we have, I will spend a considerable amount of time with my staff reviewing those numbers and seeing where some of their pressure points stand and looking at things like shifting enrolments or declining enrolments or increasing enrolments, infrastructure needs, busing concerns, the numbers enrolled in ESL, the numbers of FNMI students. The list goes on and on to about 35 or 40 different categories. Once that review is completed and once the populations of students settle down, we will come up with a final budget with those school boards to be in effect as of September 30, which is the ultimate cut-off day. So with respect to the hon. leader's question, which is a good question, we will have to just wait until those budget numbers come in, and then they'll be reviewed.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is implying or, in fact, stating in his response that the budget may be adjusted through the summer, yet we just voted on the budget. Is this minister saying that the Education budget may be changing before the fiscal year is out?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker. We have a fixed amount of money, which is a provincial budget, but it gets apportioned to school boards on the basis of things like, for example, base funding on a per capita basis. Obviously, the more students you have, the more funding you would get. What I'm simply saying is that there are shifting dynamics that occur over the summer. July and August tend to be the largest migratory months for families who want to be in a fixed location so that when school starts up, they're ready to go, so you see some shifting demographic information such as popula-

tion counts and enrolment counts. Secondly, we also have a similar formula, albeit on a per-credit-taken-and-completed basis, and we'll know that count, at least the number of students enrolled in high school, very soon as well. All I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that when you take those two factors plus the factor of May 31 being the cut-off date for teachers to let others know whether they're retiring or not, those are some of the factors that determine final budgets on a per-jurisdiction basis.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that teacher layoffs will mean fewer teachers are paying into the teachers' pension fund, what effect will layoffs have on the unfunded liability of teachers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, if memory serves, we will be contributing for both the unfunded pension liability of teachers and the current pension of teachers an amount over \$300 million, and about \$153 million of that will go to the unfunded portion. So teachers who are active – and there will be approximately 33,000 to 36,000 of them come September, I expect – will be contributing on an active basis in accordance with the agreement struck in 1992-93 between the government and the Teachers' Association.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Alberta/Montana Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night in Lethbridge citizens from throughout the province gathered to discuss this government's electricity transmission policy. Both farmers and environmentalists want a public hearing at the National Energy Board before the export line for electricity is constructed between Lethbridge and Montana. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Will the minister on behalf of the government and the citizens of Alberta ask the National Energy Board for a full public hearing before construction of this line is to go ahead?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, this is a merchant line being proposed by the Montana/Alberta tie-line group, and it will primarily be in Alberta and then crossing into the United States, into Montana. Jurisdiction, really, initially will start with the Energy and Utilities Board, and I think that's appropriate, to start there and let the process take its due course.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: will this government act as an intervenor if there is a public hearing at the National Energy Board in regard to this export electricity line?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, at this stage that's far too hypothetical as to what we might do in the future if some things might happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the minister: given that under the Hydro and Electric Energy Act before a transmission line is even contemplated to be constructed, it must receive a permit under section 14 of this act, can the minister tell the citizens whether or not a permit has been granted to the Alberta/Montana tie-line from the EUB under this act?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the specific details with

respect to the permit. They have to go through all of the permitting and regulatory requirements. Transmission is a very important and key ingredient to ensuring that we have reliable power available to us as needed, but this will have to follow all the regulatory processes.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Education Funding (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta teachers and school boards are sounding the warning that once again funding for education is inadequate to sustain teachable classrooms and quality education. In fact, the ATA said today that “it has become clear that Budget 2006 does not provide adequate funding . . . resulting in larger class sizes or running deficits – all of which are completely unacceptable in a province having successive multi-billion dollar surpluses.” My question is to the Premier. Given the financial wealth of this government, what excuse is there for program cuts and teacher and staff layoffs in Alberta schools?

2:30

Mr. Klein: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I guess I have a difficult time understanding where these particular complaints come from because we have increased funding to school boards and to education generally, K to 12, by \$330 million. There are no cuts. There haven't been cuts since 1993-94. It's been more and more and more and more each and every year. So \$330 million is a lot of money. That's just for operating, and that's in addition to all the dollars we've poured in for capital construction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope the Premier will not be surprised when teacher layoffs and bigger class sizes occur, because he's been warned.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Education: given that school boards and the ATA are sounding the alarm acknowledging a looming education deficit, when will the minister also acknowledge the problem and do something to prevent these layoffs and increases in class sizes?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will be providing approximately \$126 million in the forthcoming budget for the class size reduction initiative. With those monies we will be able to help school boards retain all 1,688 teaching positions that were funded in September of '04 and September of '05, and we hope to see another 100 to 200 brand new teachers over and above that added in this coming September school year.

Mr. Mason: That's great, Mr. Speaker, but will the minister promise here and now in this Assembly on this last day of the spring sitting that when children return to school in September, they won't be once again sitting on windowsills and sitting in overcrowded classrooms?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be very surprised if we had students in that situation. But if the hon. member is aware of some of those circumstances, he can certainly let the local school board know that, or he can let my office know that, and I can assure him that we will follow up with it. We have \$5.3 billion with which to work. We portion out 98 or 99 per cent of that money to the school boards. They make the local decisions. For the most part things are

going extremely well in kindergarten to grade 12, and we wish them great success in their budgeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Statement of Appreciation

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My comments today are to the Premier. On behalf of the constituents of Strathmore-Brooks I simply want to say thank you to the Premier for 14 years of great government. And from me personally: thank you for giving me the impetus to run for political office.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Farm Safety

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All congratulations to the Premier, but the business of Alberta must go on, and this is a serious question. Over two-thirds of Alberta farm deaths last year were aged over 60 or under 20. Many would say that Alberta has the worst farm safety record in Canada. Economically stretched farmers cannot afford expensive new insurance programs, but their taxes provide little in terms of government support for safety. The cost in death and injury is large to farmers, their families, our health care system, and our Alberta economy. My question is to the minister of agriculture. What will the minister be targeting? What will the minister be doing to try and reduce that death rate, and hopefully to zero this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, that is an excellent question because it's an excellent opportunity for us to talk about an issue that is very, very important in agriculture, and that is deaths on farms, not only deaths of farm workers or the owners of those farms but also the tragic occurrence of children who meet a tragic end on farms. There are a number of educational components that we have in the schools today. There are a number of educational components that we have at all of the farm fairs. There are a number of educational components that we have with the 1-800 line about chemical mixtures, about utilization of equipment. In fact, in this House, I believe it was a couple of weeks ago, we also had a question on this where we were talking about ensuring that equipment guards were in place and that we need to make sure that we have a communications program to producers that teaches them that it is a dangerous place. The problem is that it's also a place of residence. It's also a place of recreation. We need to be cognizant of that when we're talking about putting in rules and regulations. Our goal is to ensure that the producers in the province are educated about safety around equipment, chemicals, and their operations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The next question is to the minister of human resources. Just to diverge a little bit, I had a short chat with the minister as we came in this afternoon, and the minister informed me that this could very well be the last question to him in this Legislature.

The Speaker: Is that the question? There are no preambles, hon. member. Come on. Let's go. We've got lots of members here.

Mr. Backs: I'd just like to congratulate the minister.

When will the minister's department move to have our Alberta safety legislation cover agricultural businesses with more than three nonfamily employees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question because agriculture continues to be very important in Alberta and has been for a long period of time. It's part of our overall economic diversification plan. In fact, I believe agriculture creates more jobs than the oil industry itself, so it is very important. Unfortunately, agriculture continues to face many challenges due to the fact that we have to export most of our agricultural products. Therefore, when it comes to agriculture, agriculture cannot afford at this time, because of the status there, to have too many standards imposed on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has been a great role model for many First Nations people in our province.

The second supplementary to the Minister of Finance: given the need for sound finance but understanding the potential for savings in health care and other areas, can the minister find money somewhere in the Alberta treasury to provide occupational insurance coverage and better safety for all Alberta farmers and their farmhands for the next three years?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not about finding money. It's about the producers' desire. I know that if the producers, in their wisdom not ours, were to come forward in a majority view to the minister of agriculture, he would bring that forward to this table. He represents them extraordinarily well. But I must inform the hon. member, being a part of the agricultural community myself, that they are very independent thinkers, and they like to make their decisions and ask us to carry out policy they believe is in their best interest.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Elimination of the Provincial Debt

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fourteen years ago a brave and courageous leader, our Premier, embarked upon one of the toughest challenges, to eliminate the provincial debt and to bring our financial house to order. I'm sure that he received a lot of advice on how to spend taxpayers' dollars, and some may even have questioned how he arrived at those decisions. At this juncture as we evaluate how far we have come, I wish to direct my questions to the hon. Premier. Mr. Premier, how do you justify the fast-track elimination of debt when there were other priorities that could have used some of those needed dollars?

Mr. Klein: You know, you have to hearken back to '92-93. The hon. leader of the Liberal Party at that time was also concentrating on eliminating the debt and fast-tracking it. It was: who could do it better? Mr. Speaker, one of the fundamental principles of economics is that you don't have unsupported debt and that you get rid of that unsupported debt as quickly as you possibly can. In the case that existed in 1993, we had \$23 billion in unsupported debt that had accumulated through deficit financing; in other words, using the credit card to pay the light bills and buy the groceries. So we had to get rid of that, and our first act was to eliminate the deficit, then the

net debt, then the gross debt. We achieved that 20 years ahead of schedule.

2:40

Mr. Shariff: On behalf of the people of Alberta who have benefited from your sound policies I wish to say that Alberta is a better place because of you, Ralph.

Confined Feeding Operations

Mr. Bonko: Confined feeding operations continue to concern rural Albertans. The ministers of Sustainable Resource Development and Agriculture, Food and Rural Development will claim that their policies and standards are excellent, but manure from sewage holding ponds has made water at Harnack Ranch near Airdrie undrinkable by people and livestock twice in the last three years. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given that flooding has caused manure to enter the surface water two times in the last three years, can the minister tell us whether regulations are too weak or if the NRCB is failing to enforce the regulations?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, when we have situations that are reported to the NRCB and to our enforcement people and our compliance people that are in place to operate under the AOPA legislation, those calls are taken seriously. We have compliance people that go out and check on the complaint. They try to offer suggestions. We have a process in place through AOPA, through the legislation, as well as through the NRCB to make sure that when there is a breach of the act, when there is a breach of any regulation, there is a process in place to make sure that that is looked after. The hon. member mentioned one specific instance, but I could cite many more specific instances across Alberta where we've had breaches, and our enforcement staff have gone in there and properly looked after the situation in view of the public interest. We will continue to work through that.

Mr. Bonko: To the same minister: given that there are 50 staff in the entire NRCB and no new staff in this year's budget, can the minister explain how he plans to enforce the regulations then?

Mr. Coutts: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker. We've just gone through a governance review with the NRCB. We have just put in place a very qualified, very knowledgeable individual who will be the chief operating officer that looks after the development of applications, the process that applications go through, the compliance and the enforcement as well. That particular individual will make sure that the proper staff is in place to look after the demands that are driven by a very hot economy and an industry that's thriving in Alberta.

Mr. Bonko: My last question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Will the minister review the one in 25 years flooding guideline in light of the increasing rates of flooding identified by the water researchers?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure of the exact circumstance that the hon. member is talking about. But as the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has advised, if he has some particulars that he could send over to me, I'd be pleased to give him a written response to that in view of the circumstances in flooding we had last year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Importance of Postsecondary Education

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to be able to rise and ask a question of what I think is the greatest Premier in the history of the province of Alberta today. Advanced education has been a top priority for this government. When our Premier did his television address last year, he did it in a brand new high school that, interestingly, was nestled in the heart of the Calgary-Shaw constituency. The name of that high school is Centennial high school after and in honour of the centennial year. In that televised address he was gathered with a group of grade 11 students. Now, in their minds he was such a great man that they were surprised that he was not taller. That was their first comment to me. He spent the day with them, and he was focusing on postsecondary education in that speech. One of the highlights of that was access to the future.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you should have a question.

Mrs. Ady: My questions are to the Premier. If those grade 11 students were in front of you today, what action would you tell them that government is taking today to ensure that they can pursue a postsecondary education?

Mr. Klein: Well, shortly after that taping, Mr. Speaker, at Centennial high school in Calgary-Shaw, we introduced, of course, in the spring session as Bill 1 the Access to the Future Act, which will allow for the creation of some 15,000 immediate new learning opportunities. In addition, 7,000 new apprenticeships were added to the system, bringing the total number of apprentices in Alberta to 47,000. Our overall objective under the Access to the Future Act is to create 60,000 spaces by the year 2020. This is all part of Alberta's efforts to give students the best access to postsecondary education in Canada.

The Speaker: I did recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but did the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford want to proceed? Proceed.

Constituency Association Offices

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After 35 years of Tory rule the line between partisan party politics and legitimate government business is becoming more and more fuzzy by the day. My questions are for the Premier. Is it this government's policy to allow government members to have their partisan constituency associations share addresses with their taxpayer-funded constituency offices?

Mr. Klein: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. To share what addresses? I really don't know. The hon. member is not quite clear.

The Speaker: The question should not be directed to the government. It has nothing to do with the government. If such a situation exists, it should be directed to the office of the Legislative Assembly, in this case the Speaker, but you can't do it in question period, so you'll have to do it later.

Do you have another question? Is there another question, sir?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Provincial Land-use Strategy

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's seemingly open prairies are rapidly becoming overcrowded. As oil development, intensive livestock operations, industrial development compete with

residential expansion, Alberta's health, water supplies, and quality of life are being jeopardized. We're rapidly losing agricultural land, and rural communities and towns and cities are in conflict. Despite this, the province has presented no land-use management strategy to ensure orderly and sustainable development. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Will the minister acknowledge that the lack of a land-use strategy is creating friction, pitting, if you like, cities and towns against rural municipalities and that this is not a healthy situation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, in 1995, when the Municipal Government Act was rewritten, it replaced what was in place at that time, regional planning commissions, with natural person powers in the hands of municipalities. It created an environment where municipalities for the very first time were able to negotiate win-win situations and allow for development of both urban and rural areas in a manner which served the interests of both.

Mr. Speaker, in the ensuing time – and the member is absolutely right – there have been some problems that have arisen. Those problems are precisely the target that is under discussion by the minister's council at this time. One of the working groups is dealing with relationship issues, and we expect to have a very thorough and full discussion on ways to deal with that in the ensuing few months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:50

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From what we're hearing, people are not seeing it as a win-win situation.

Given the strain placed on urban infrastructure, public transportation, water supplies, what is the minister doing now to promote smart growth for cities and to protect agricultural land in rural communities?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in the answer to the first question, I'm working with municipalities to put together a new strategy for long-term planning. One of the things that's under discussion is whether or not the intermunicipal development plan, that is now optional under the act, should at some point in time be made mandatory. That's one of the issues.

With respect to infrastructure and that kind of thing there are opportunities where municipalities could work together, and in fact we encourage partnerships. We encourage intermunicipal partnerships and have a limited amount of funding within our ministry to assist those partnerships in their developmental stage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister would be aware that the longer this problem grows and festers, the worse it's going to get.

To follow up, then, my question to the minister is: when can we expect a comprehensive land-use strategy to specifically address constraining urban sprawl, protecting agricultural land, and sustainable industrial development?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I have asked the members of the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability to have their final recommendations in place so that the government can deal with them in the government planning process by this fall. That's not to say that all of the answers will be there, but that's to say that we should be able to begin a very meaningful discussion with municipalities and other stakeholders as we address this very difficult situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Achievements in Health Care

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During my tenure in the Alberta Legislature certainly the biggest issue and probably the issue facing most Albertans and the one they care most deeply about is their health care. My mother is currently in continuing care. Both my parents are near 80. I have four children, and someday I hope to have grandchildren. We're a typical Alberta family with typical Alberta family concerns about their health care. Faced with the rapidly changing nature of health care delivery and health-related technology, sustainability and innovation are probably now more critical than ever. My question to the Premier: under his leadership what has the government of Alberta done to ensure that all Albertans continue to receive world-class care not just for today but, more importantly, for the future?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, indeed, we didn't address the question of long-term sustainability, but that will have to be dealt with down the road, believe me. But that's not to say that we haven't accomplished a lot relative to health care. The Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute will open very soon, and this institute will play a prominent role. It will be a centre of excellence for heart treatment and surgery. We have the Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. That fund is now worth well in excess of a billion dollars, has attracted top researchers from around the world. We have instituted the electronic health record. We have instituted through the AMA the bone and joint surgery initiative. Plus, there is the centre of expertise for bone and joint surgery in Calgary. The Edmonton protocol was developed to transplant healthy islet cells into people with type 1 diabetes. We were the first province to launch a wait-list registry so that Albertans could view waiting lists for surgical and medical procedures. We eliminated health care premiums for senior citizens in this province. Just this session, of course, we passed the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. The Stollery children's hospital has become a global leader in pediatric care, as will the new Children's hospital in Calgary.

So the list goes on, Mr. Speaker. It's not as if we've been standing by idly. We've been making some tremendous innovations and improvements in the health care system.

Mr. Snelgrove: My second is to simply wish the Premier and his family many, many wonderful years of health and happiness.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Tobacco Reduction Strategy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At the same time that this government identifies wellness as a priority, they invest almost \$34 million in tobacco-based companies through the heritage savings fund. Interestingly, Tory members have been presenting petitions throughout the spring session from Albertans urging the government to take action on teen smoking. It is clear that the priorities of Albertans and the priorities of this government are at odds. My first question is to the Premier. How does this government reconcile cancer prevention initiatives, like the cancer legacy fund, with continued investment in tobacco companies?

Mrs. McClellan: There is no tobacco investment allowed in that, Laurie, and you know it.

Mr. Klein: Well, I don't know. The hon. Minister of Finance is speaking to the hon. member, so I'll have her respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows full well that the cancer legacy fund does not permit investment in tobacco companies. Let's make that very clear in this House.

On the issue of the heritage fund I was requested for this information by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and I provided it to him by tabling it in the House yesterday. To refresh your memory, it's about a \$33 million investment in companies that are associated with or are tobacco companies. It's .25 per cent of 1 per cent of a \$49 billion investment: \$33 million.

Now, we talked about this and said that in some cases in investment, Mr. Speaker, there are conglomerates, investment structures so that it may not be a direct investment. This government does not interfere with investment. We charge an investment management group to provide the best return. However, I repeat: on the issue of the cancer legacy fund there was an amendment in this House that this government agreed to, and there is no investment in tobacco companies in that fund.

Ms Blakeman: Still \$34 million invested.

To the minister of health: has the minister conducted any studies on whether the profit made from investing in tobacco companies outweighs the health costs associated with treating smoking-related illness?

Ms Evans: No, Mr. Speaker, but on the last weekend at the discussion with other ministers from across the country while we looked at pandemic preparedness, we had a conversation between the western ministers of health about what we could do to look at some common elements of a tobacco tax so that we could do whatever possible to discourage smoking. We looked at the tax per carton. We looked at the research from the University of California on effectiveness of increasing tobacco taxation. Although we didn't examine profitability on investment, we did look at other ways to look at deterrents for smoking, particularly targeted at youth and those that might be most vulnerable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the minister of health: given that Tory backbenchers and I have both been urging the government to introduce legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing, will the minister join with other provinces and develop legislation to ban power walls?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be useful for a better understanding by this Legislature about power walls. I would just simply say this. We are making some progress. We are spending a considerable amount of time with the AADAC board, as well as the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, that is working in concert with the advisory committee chaired by Mrs. Colleen Klein and Dr. Bob Westbury. Stay tuned for more recommendations that will target addictions and will target the broader scope of how we manage those that are most vulnerable that have been affected.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

3:00

Alberta's Environment

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are truly fortunate to be living

in a province with the most robust economy in North America, but at the same time we're fortunate to have a government and a Premier who value Alberta's natural environment. It's an environment that provides Albertans with fresh air to breathe, clean water to drink, sparkling rivers and lakes for fishing and other recreation. My question is to the Premier. Can he tell us how Alberta came to be in such an enviable state of affairs?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, it started many, many years ago, indeed when the hon. Speaker was Minister of Environment. I can recall that when I was honoured to have that portfolio, the recycling program, deposit for return: one of the only programs of its kind in North America. That was expanded to the tire recycling program, now to computers and television sets and other electronics. The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act provides for some very strict enforcement measures against those who would pollute and violate our environment. More recently, of course, we've had the Water for Life strategy, Climate Change Central. The list goes on and on. So we have not been idle relative to issues facing the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Applewood Park Community Association

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we learned that the province's Crown debt collection was unable to collect a \$20,000 grant from the Applewood Park Community Association. As a result the file was transferred to the Department of Justice for possible legal action. My question is to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Why did your department fail to collect funds from the Applewood Park Community Association?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, we looked at it. It looked like it was going to be possibly a court situation, so we referred it to Justice for them to do an analysis and get back to us with advice on which way to go.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next supplemental is to the Minister of Justice. If the department's cost-benefit analysis fails to warrant taking Applewood to court, what is the department's plan?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, the matter is still under consideration.

Mr. Agnihotri: My next supplemental is a repeat of yesterday's question. To the Minister of Government Services: why is access to information refusing to disclose the Department of Justice's 719 pages of records pertaining to Applewood Park Community Association?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe I didn't make it clear yesterday. You know, Government Services is responsible for this legislation, but the Privacy Commissioner does not work with me every day on the 3,168 inquiries that they had last year. He works independently. He does not report that information to me directly. I'm sorry that I don't have the specifics that you'd like, but that's not how this legislation works. He works completely independent of the minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Alberta's Energy Resources

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's energy picture couldn't be brighter, but there are critics who say that our resources and the wealth that we derive from our resources come about more as a result of luck than by design. My question is to the Premier. In the past 14 years under his leadership what has this government done to ensure Alberta's place as a global energy leader today and in the future?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no question that our province is blessed with natural resources, and indeed energy revenues have helped to pay down Alberta's \$23 billion net debt.

Mr. Speaker, we are wise stewards of our natural resources through the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. Our energy sector is attracting attention from all over the world now that synthetic crude has been recognized as real oil. We've been featured on *60 Minutes*, *20/20*, *The West Wing*, and the French, Australian, and Chinese television networks. We're deemed to be the safest, most secure and viable place to invest, and the world is interested indeed. Energy investment in the next couple of years alone is in the neighbourhood of \$100 billion.

Mr. Speaker, it's where we are going tomorrow that concerns me the most because the oil and gas will run out. Therefore, we need to develop an integrated energy policy, which we are developing now, to look at how we generate electricity through clean burning coal to make sure that coal-bed methane is extracted safely, coal gasification, hydropower, wind power, biodiesel, biogasoline. That is the future: an integrated energy policy.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Premier for his answer. I wish to ask him: does he see a future, then, where Alberta is a leader not just in conventional energy but in alternative energy?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that's what I was talking about. That's really what tomorrow is all about. That is the next step in our energy policy. I would encourage all of the energy companies to join with institutions like the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, the Alberta Research Council, the Coal Research Centre, and all of the agencies involved in research to develop these integrated forms of energy to make sure that we remain the energy capital of Canada, certainly, of North America, and of the world.

3:10

Spring Session Statistics

The Speaker: Before calling on a number of hon. members to participate in Members' Statements, a bit of history today. Most of what we'll talk about today are statistics associated with the Second Session of the 26th Legislature; in essence, the session that began February 22, 2006, to the end of yesterday, Wednesday, May 17, 2006, except for the first item.

This session of the spring Legislature has sat for 42 days, including 28 evening sittings. That is the identical number to last year, 2005: 42 days, including 28 evening sittings. The number of minutes that you have sat to nearly 5:30 yesterday afternoon is 14,198 minutes. This compares to 13,394 minutes in the spring 2005 sitting. In terms of the number of hours that you've sat this year compared to last year, this year you sat 236 hours, 38 minutes. Last year you sat less time: 223 hours and 14 minutes.

Now, what is really significant – and you might want to know how we come up with these numbers. Well, we get up very, very early in the morning. The number of words spoken by members to adjournment yesterday afternoon was 1,827,493. That compares to last spring, which had 1,800,176 words. Now, we've had some longer speeches this spring, it seems, but we may also have had the shortest speech ever in the history of Alberta too, yesterday afternoon from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. We're checking that for verification.

In terms of Oral Question Period, for those days on which we had more than 14 sets of questions – that is, when the Speaker had the privilege of recognizing 14 or more members – this spring we had six occasions when there were 15 sets of questions asked and two occasions when there were 16 sets of questions asked. Now, compare it to last spring. Last spring hon. members spent less time asking their questions and less time answering their questions than they did this spring. Last year we had 14 occasions when there were 15 sets of questions, 10 occasions with 16 sets of questions, eight occasions with 17 sets of questions, and on one occasion we were able to get in 18 different members to participate in question period.

Government bills that received royal assent or third reading this year is 41, compared to 40 in 2005. Government bills left on the Order Paper this spring is two, compared to four in 2005. Private members' public bills that received royal assent is one in 2006, compared to two in 2005. Since 1993, when we started this policy associated with private members' public bills, there have been 40 such bills that have received royal assent.

This spring we had more tablings than we had last year. We had 633 in the spring session of 2006, compared to 516 in 2005. The total number of members' statements this session not including the ones later this afternoon is 231, and if we have six more today, that will be 237. Last year we had 168, but we changed the process and eliminated recognitions last year and then moved to the two-minute members' statements.

Hon. members, just to conclude the statement for today with respect to the historical side of it. Earlier this year we published one book, entitled *100 Years at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta: A Centennial Celebration*. I've indicated to hon. members that we've been working for nearly four years on a four-volume set of books that weighs a tonne. There are nearly 2,200 pages associated with those four books. They will be published, and we'll make them available to the public in the fall of this year. They will be called the Legislative Assembly of Alberta *Centennial Series*. Title 1 is *On Behalf of the Crown*. Title 2 is *The Mantle of Leadership*. Title 3 is *A Higher Duty*. Title 4 is *A Century of Democracy*. This has been four years in the making.

In addition to that, three additional books are being worked on, and we will have them done, hopefully, by the end of this calendar year. Because of a number of petitions from members with respect to this, one will deal with the historical vignette series. Two volumes will be associated. Then I intend on taking all members' statements made last year and this year and having them published in a book. It's called the historical vignette series: the statements of members, 2005-2006. Hopefully, by the end of the calendar year, at the latest the spring of next year, we will have concluded this.

I wanted to bring you up to date in case somebody wants to know what I'll be doing this summer.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Contributions to Alberta's Youth by the Kleins

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely

honoured and privileged to rise and make a statement on this very significant day to make special recognition of what our hon. Premier and Colleen Klein have done for Alberta's children and youth. Our Premier established the Ministry of Children's Services, which has led the way to the creation of similar ministries across this country, created the Great Kids awards program so that the contributions of our children and youth do not go unnoticed. Our Premier established both the Youth Secretariat and the Youth Advisory Panel to make sure that the voices of our children and youth are heard. The Premier does everything he can to give children and youth the attention and focus they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, he doesn't do it alone. With him, working just as hard every step of the way, is Colleen Klein. The Children's Forum, youth forums, Children's Cottage, the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, and most recently the Crystal Meth Task Force: behind each and every one of these initiatives is the dedication to and the genuine love of Alberta's youth. Colleen has made incredible strides bringing communities together to engage, listen to the voices of our children and youth, and take action on many issues that they face.

What sets the Premier and Colleen apart is the personal touch they bring to everything they do. They truly take their work to heart. I can say with confidence that there are no others who do so much. The Premier and Colleen want more for Alberta's children and youth, and when these two put their minds together, their dreams and visions become realities. They are tireless champions for their cause. We the Alberta government and Alberta's children and youth are very fortunate to have the Premier and Colleen on our side. Their legacy is one that will never be forgotten.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Larry Fleming

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak about an extraordinary coach and mentor, Larry Fleming. Larry has recently been inducted into the Canadian amateur Boxing Hall of Fame. Through his years of involvement Larry has coached such names as Scotty "Bulldog" Olson, Jason "the Troll" Adam, Jalena Mrdjnovich, and Amanda "Bone Rack" Bonko. The minute you meet Larry, you can tell that his heart and dedication are making a difference for all kids. Larry teaches life lessons and the power of positive thinking. He reminds kids that they can do anything they want if they put their mind to it. Larry is always in the corner cheering them on and encouraging them regardless of their ability or experience.

Larry has recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer and may not have many rounds left, but his devotion and dedication to the sport, to Cougar Boxing and the kids it trains, is amazing. Larry continues to make a difference. We all strive to lead our lives and hope that we make a difference, but Larry has touched the lives and enriched the world around him one fighter at a time. "You can make a difference," Larry says. "You just have to try." Larry's money often is used to continue to operate the Cougar Boxing Club and continues to provide youth with an experience, giving them confidence and a unique experience by a unique individual. A community at large is grateful for your dedication and commitment. Thank you, Larry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

1988 Calgary Winter Olympics

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to

reflect on a vision cited by our Premier which resonated with many of us nearly 20 years ago. I wish to share with you what then Mayor Ralph Klein told the world in his letter to the official report to the International Olympic Committee at the completion of the 1988 Winter Games.

They were the 15th Olympic Winter Games. They were the Calgary Games. But aside from the official titles, the 1988 Olympic Winter Games in Calgary will forever be remembered as “the people’s Games,” for it was the people of Calgary who gave so willingly of their time, and of their community, that made the Games a success.

Mayor Klein then shared what makes a success of an international sporting event such as the Olympics: the fair competition, the financial balance, the artistic and cultural celebrations, the technical and organizational precision. He reminded us: “Above all, they must be a success of, and by, and for the people who open their city to the world.” That, Mr. Speaker, was what really counted to this man, to our Premier.

3:20

I’d also like to share from this letter what Mayor Ralph Klein predicted that we would have today as a result of the 1988 Winter Olympics: “A legacy of spectacular winter sports facilities, roads and transportation systems, parks and pathways, and endowment funds for future Canadian athletes.” Nowhere more than in my own constituency of Banff-Cochrane, Mr. Speaker, is the truth of this vision more truly seen by the thousands who continue to use Kananaskis Country and enjoy the spectacular and challenging facilities of the Canmore Nordic Centre on the shoulder of the magnificent Rundle Ridge. The mayor of Calgary told the world in 1988 that the legacy of those games would live on “in this great city, in the foothills of Alberta, in a nation called Canada.”

Mr. Speaker, I submit that the legacy of this man, Premier Ralph Klein, will also live on in the great communities of Alberta, across our prairies, foothills, and mountains, and indeed throughout a nation called Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Alberta Society for Pension Reform

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Fair play is one of the values that Albertans hold dear. We believe in honesty, justice, and the value of deals that benefit all parties involved, but fair play is not always a matter of course when it comes to deals between Albertans and the government that serves them. That is why I rise today to recognize the hard work and dedication of the members of the Alberta Society for Pension Reform.

In April 2001 a small group of retired and working public servants sat down to address an issue that they felt was unfair. Essentially, they feel that they were promised a much better pension deal by the Alberta government than what they received. In true Alberta spirit they decided to tackle their issue head-on. Led by the founding president, Mr. Ken Smith, they’ve shown what a group of hard-working Albertans can do when they believe in a principle strongly enough to fight for it.

In just four short years they’ve managed to assemble a membership 8,000 strong. They have held annual general meetings to discuss the issue and earned significant donations from a concerned public to fight for this cause. Unfortunately, this group’s voice, like a growing number of others in Alberta, is being shut out by this Conservative government. Rather than having their issue dealt with properly by the province, the society has had to collect significant donations from its members in order to take the province to court. During the course of the last several months it has become more and

more evident that seniors are being ignored, neglected, and marginalized in this province. Where is the Alberta advantage for men and women who built this province? This government doesn’t seem to know, so seniors have to go after it themselves.

I can attest from attending this society’s annual convention last fall that this group will not back down. The members’ commitment and determination truly represent what this province was built on, and I give them my full respect for fighting for what they believe in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Contributions to Alberta’s Youth by the Kleins

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there is no greater legacy one can leave than to make a lasting commitment to the children of our great province. From the beginning the hon. Premier has made the future of our children and youth, the next leaders of our province, the government’s highest priority, and it’s no surprise that his wife, Colleen Klein, has been a visionary and driving force behind many initiatives undertaken by this government to improve the lives of the youngest Albertans.

Alberta’s Promise is just one example of the legacy they will leave for our province’s children. Our Premier made Alberta the first jurisdiction in Canada to enshrine the initiative in legislation, in 2003 through Bill 1, the Premier’s Council on Alberta’s Promise Act. This innovative initiative has created opportunities for children and youth by encouraging the corporate sector, communities, not-for-profit organizations, and governments to increase resources for programs benefiting the youngest Albertans. They committed to making every Albertan aware of Alberta’s Promise and that the little red wagon is pulling for our children.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta’s Promise has been an overwhelming success. Since it was introduced in 2003, more than 400 corporations, agencies, and communities have been inspired by the Premier’s and Colleen Klein’s vision. Through Alberta’s Promise they have made a marked and meaningful difference in the lives of our children. Their work has helped ensure that children and youth have the skills and support they need to reach their potential and lead healthy, happy lives. Their tireless advocacy has fostered an incredible commitment to our children and to the future of our province.

The hon. Premier and Colleen Klein have truly helped make Alberta the best place to raise our children, a place I call paradise and where my five grandchildren and all children have the chance to grow up to be the best that they can be and to have the real opportunity to make their dreams come true.

Thank you, Premier. Thank you, Colleen. Thanks to you our hope for the future and for our children is bright and exciting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Democratic Reform

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is long overdue, but democratic reform is finally starting to get the attention it deserves. Alberta has struggled with declining participation rates in elections and a general dissatisfaction with politics among many Albertans. I’m deeply troubled by this trend because there are important decisions to be made that will affect the future of our communities, and all voices need to be included in wide-ranging debates on this issue.

The NDP has put forward numerous proposals for improving our democratic institutions. My colleague from Edmonton-Calder has

been fighting for improvements to the Public Accounts Committee. My colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona has proposed legislation to examine the potential for proportional representation in this province. We continue to call for a citizens' assembly, similar to the one that reported in B.C. in 2004. Such an assembly should carefully examine the many ways which our electoral system can be improved.

There is one piece of electoral reform that we should address immediately. Last year the Liberals and PCs accepted a combined \$1.5 million in donations from corporations. This week the two parties joined together to defeat an NDP amendment that would have cancelled \$370 million in a corporate tax cut. The NDP believes that cutting corporate taxes shifts the tax burden onto individuals and jeopardizes stable funding for core provincial programs. We live in a world where he who pays the piper calls the tune. Last year the Conservative piper received 73 per cent of its payments from big corporations while the Liberal piper got half of his pay from big money. It's no wonder that they were playing the same corporate-friendly tax tune.

Reforming rules around election donations is not a radical proposal. Manitoba and Quebec already prohibit donations from corporations and unions, as do the federal election rules. The only thing stopping such reforms in Alberta is a lack of political will.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we go to the next item of the Routine, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise this afternoon and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three very hard working members of the society that I referred to in my member's statement a few minutes ago. Representing the executive of the Alberta Society for Pension Reform, we have with us today Mr. Ken Smith, a retired power engineer, who serves as the president of the society. We have with us Mr. Bill Robertson, who is the secretary, and he is also a retired power engineer. Also with us today is Mr. Barry Richardson, a retired teacher, who serves as the membership chairman of the society. I would ask all members to please give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Yes. I have a couple of introductions, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Rose and Edward Yanitski. Rose has colon cancer, and she and her husband have been fighting to get the cancer medication Oxaliplatin covered by Alberta Health. Although the drug is currently covered in jurisdictions such as British Columbia and Quebec, Albertans are left paying thousands to access this medication. The Yanitskis have been residents of Alberta all their lives. Edward is a retired mechanic, and Rose worked for CN Rail for 25 years. They currently reside in Beverly. We are honoured to have this courageous couple join us today. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure today to introduce to you and

to the members of the Assembly Michael Marlowe and Albert Opstad. Mr. Marlowe is a former president of the Alberta Retired Public Employees Society and the former vice-president of the Alberta Council on Aging. Mr. Opstad is the former president of Seniors United Now. Both are active advocates for seniors' issues in Alberta. Mr. Marlowe and Mr. Opstad are seated in the public gallery. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

3:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a young lady who is serving as an apprentice to the executive assistant to the Government House Leader, David Gillies. Michelle Zolner is a constituent of Edmonton-Whitemud, a very strong and active member of our political community down there, and has been learning well at the hands of the dome gnome, as he's affectionately called. I'd like Michelle to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

head: **Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's final report, which contains its recommendations regarding the Conflicts of Interest Act. This completes the committee's mandate. Copies are also being circulated to all members.

I want to take this opportunity to thank members of the committee from all three parties for their co-operation in completing the committee's work over the past year.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: These are petitions now. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, and then Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition from a number of concerned Edmontonians calling on the government to "prohibit two-tier medicare."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am presenting a petition signed by 68 concerned Albertans from throughout the province but mostly from St. Albert petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to

take measures that will require school boards and schools to eliminate all fees for instructional supplies and materials and general school services, including textbooks, musical instruments, physical education programs, locker rentals, lunch hour supervision and required field trips, and to ensure that schools are not deprived of the resources necessary to offer these programs and services without additional charges to parents or guardians.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate tablings on the same subject. They urge the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to oppose any action that would contravene the Canada Health Act, basically to oppose a two-tier health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a petition with the names of 44 people from the Edmonton area asking that the government "amend the Gaming and Liquor Act to provide for harsher penalties where liquor licensees allow activities that may be injurious to the health or safety of people," urge the government to "implement policies that will enhance the safety of staff and patrons at licensed premises," and urge the government and the city of Edmonton to "improve the enforcement of any regulations or by-laws governing occupancy limits in licensed premises."

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that should the House be sitting on Monday, May 29, I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 28, 30, 31, and 32.

I'm also giving notice that should the House be sitting on Monday, May 29, I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 27 through 35.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Would that be the list of them?

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Bill 215
Labour Relations Code (First Collective Agreement)
Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 215, Labour Relations Code (First Collective Agreement) Amendment Act, 2006.

The purpose of Bill 215 is to provide for first contract collective agreements to avoid labour relations situations such as arose in the Lakeside Packers UFCW strike of last year. This bill represents an idea supported by prominent members on both sides of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 215 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to have three tablings. The first is a letter from the Hon. Jean Charest, Premier of the province of Quebec, thanking Sustainable Resource Development, under the mutual aid and resource sharing agreement, for our assistance in the 1,250 forest fires and the 400,000 hectares of forests that were destroyed last year during the summer.

The next one I have is from the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association to our department thanking us for the leadership shown in standardizing and improving practices in Alberta's zoos.

The last one I have is the appropriate number of copies of the

annual report 2005 of the Surface Rights Board and Land Compensation Board.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table Breakfast for Learning, an assessment of provincial/territorial government support for school food programs as of May 2006.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table 1,117 health care petitions that did not pass parliamentary approval to recognize every effort of the individuals that took action to try and prevent this Legislature from passing anything that would expand private, for-profit health care in the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two letters from Michael Marlowe. Mr. Marlowe is with Seniors United Now and wants to ask the Premier why he "failed to keep his promise" made in 1993 to the effect that universal seniors' support programs reduced or eliminated at that time would be returned to seniors after the province was out of debt.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is actually a letter from Edmonton-McClung constituents Donna and Randy Kormos. They're basically talking about the arbitrary school boundaries issue, and they highlight some of the unfairness when only one lottery draw is conducted and the practice of a waiting list or a backup list has been stopped. They also talk about how people register invalid addresses for their kids to be able to make that draw.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is actually a copy of a mock invoice by the Windsor Park Fundraising Society from Windsor Park school issued to the attention of the Minister of Education in the amount of \$51,651 for items they fund raised for, including classroom computers and computer desks, library computers, music room computers, physical education equipment, and volunteer services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today, the first being a letter from a constituent, Terry Neraasen, writing about Bill 20, the FOIP legislation. He expresses that he would like to see "openness and transparency in government," and he's concerned that this particular piece of legislation that was "pushed through is completely unacceptable."

I also have some more photographs, Mr. Speaker, of government backbench MLAs presenting cheques. In this case they're all community facility enhancement program grants, CFEP grants. There are three separate ones, each with the name or signature of the MLA written on the signatory line as if to express that the money was actually coming from the MLA.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings here from John and Lori Harnack, who are concerned about protecting springs, streams, waterways, and groundwater around confined feedlot operations. The letters were to the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, their MLA, and the MD of Rocky View.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of my letter with some attachments to the Ethics Commissioner regarding Applewood Park Community Association and the Member for Calgary-Montrose.

head: 3:40 **Projected Government Business**

Ms Blakeman: Well, I invite the Government House Leader to rise and share with us any projected government business we might expect for next week.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, and thank you to the hon. Opposition House Leader for that especially good question. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond in this way: should the House be sitting, we would proceed with the only two remaining pieces of government business that I see. That would be Bill 39 and Bill 41.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, I would just like to acknowledge the presence of and acknowledge the departure of a number of our pages who are retiring as of today. There are actually a number of them. I'm going to read their names into the record, and then I'm going to read to you a very delightful letter that they sent to me as a message to all of us, to all of you. So to Janiesh Bali, Elaine Hoekstra, Daylan Hoffman, Desirée MacNeil, Chelsea Mitchell, Mikkel Paulson, Jenelle Pederson, and Stacy Schell, this is their last day. They're retiring. They will be retirees as of tomorrow. [applause]

You should all know, hon. members, and they should know as well, that in the fall of this year, in the month of November, I will be hosting a special dinner for all former pages in the history of the province of Alberta. So there's a great big test right now to try and locate these people. Somebody who may have been a page in 1921 may be just a little long, but, yes, we're advertising. Here's their letter, dated May 16, 2006.

Mr. Speaker,

As the days of this session come to a close, we have had a chance to reflect on the past couple years of paging. It goes without saying that an interest in politics, the parliamentary system of democracy and a desire to learn more drove us to seek out this job, but we leave with far more. We leave not only with a superb understanding of politics, parliamentary procedure, pomp and ceremony, but of the lesser known side of politicians and those who support them, the human side.

The ability to see through our own impressionable eyes, the parliamentary process at work, has changed our perspective dramatically. Being in this environment has expanded and deepened our awareness and appreciation for politicians, their hard work, and the true passion that drives them all.

We have worked with members and their staff, our fellow

Legislative Assembly Office employees and members of the public from all walks of life. Every person we encountered in our time here has taught us something and has enriched every moment of being a Page. We would especially like to thank the Legislative Assembly Security Staff, including Nick Kutash, Bob Baker, and Bennett Walker, who will be retiring this year.

The enriching experiences and the knowledge we have gained over the past years will forever be entrenched in our memories and will surely shape our lives and dreams for years to come. This has been memorable, inspirational, and a true privilege! For this, we thank you!

It was signed by the names that I mentioned. That's wonderful.

I'd now like to call on the Deputy Speaker to make a recognition for our pages.

Mr. Marz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Deputy Chair of Committees and myself, it has been a pleasure getting to know these wonderful young people. I recently was part of the group that judged the pages' speech competition, and although there were some absentees that haven't yet made their speeches, I can tell you that the competition was extremely close and very difficult to judge. I can say that if any of these young people decides to take us on in the next election, we will have our work cut out for us.

On behalf of all the members – page Janiesh Bali is here – I'd like to give each retiring page a gift with our best wishes to each and every one. We're honoured to have had you all work for us and with us this last year, and we'd like to thank you very much. [applause]

head:

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This spring session will truly be recorded as one of the most historic and most memorable sittings of the Alberta Legislature, and it's so fitting, in this 100th year of democracy, to be saying that. I say that not only because of the more than 40 bills debated and passed and the hundreds of questions asked and answered and so on but also because it may well be the last sitting for our hon. Premier, as we've heard. Therefore, on behalf of our deputy House leaders from Calgary-Glenmore and from Medicine Hat, and I am sure I would echo the sentiments of the opposition House leaders from the Liberals and from the NDs, we want to thank all the members for their co-operation during this particular session.

On a personal note I, too, would like to extend the very best to our Premier and his lovely wife, Colleen, for a very successful retirement.

On that note, and in thanking all the members yet again for the inspiring debates that occurred, I would now move that pursuant to Government Motion 14, agreed to on March 20, 2006, the House now stand adjourned.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the House is adjourned. The Government House Leader can't do that, by the way. The Speaker can do that. The House Leader can't.

So the House is adjourned pursuant to this particular motion. Have a very safe – underline safe – summer, and until we meet again, all the best.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 14 the Assembly adjourned at 3:47 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, August 24, 2006** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 06/08/24
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back. I would ask all hon. members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to our former colleagues who have passed away since we were last in this Assembly.

As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen.

Mr. Roy Alexander Farran
January 2, 1921, to June 2, 2006

The Speaker: On Friday, June 2, 2006, Roy Alexander Farran passed away. Mr. Farran was first elected on August 30, 1971, and served until March 22, 1979. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Calgary North Hill for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Mr. Farran served in cabinet as minister of telephones and utilities and Solicitor General. Mr. Farran served on the standing committees on Public Accounts; Private Bills; Standing Orders and Printing; Law, Law Amendments and Regulations; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education.

Mr. Randolph Hugh McKinnon
July 22, 1917, to June 10, 2006

The Speaker: On Saturday, June 10, 2006, Randolph Hugh McKinnon passed away. Mr. McKinnon was first elected on June 18, 1959, and served until May 23, 1967. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Strathcona West for the Social Credit Party. During his term of office Mr. McKinnon served in cabinet as the Minister of Education. Mr. McKinnon also served on the select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Private Bills; Standing Orders and Printing; Public Accounts; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education; and Railways, Telephones and Irrigation.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Family members of Mr. Farran and Mr. McKinnon are with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask all members to remember hon. members Roy Farran and Randy McKinnon as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Hon. members, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Mr. Lorieau, of course, comes off a very, very successful spring nine weeks, and I would ask all to participate today so that in the event that Mr. Lorieau does what he did this spring the place will not become stone deaf.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
 True patriot love in all thy sons command.
 With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
 The True North strong and free!
 From far and wide, O Canada,
 We stand on guard for thee.

God keep our land glorious and free!
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's an honour for me today to rise to introduce to you guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These guests are family members of our former colleagues, and I would ask them to rise as I introduce them. The family of Mr. Randolph McKinnon, former MLA for the constituency of Strathcona West, represented by Randolph's brothers Bert McKinnon and his spouse, Janice, and Dick McKinnon and his spouse, Lorraine McKinnon. The family of Mr. Roy Farran, former MLA for the constituency of Calgary North Hill, is represented by his daughter Sally Gregg and son-in-law Tim Gregg. If they would rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two distinguished members of Alberta's postsecondary education community who are seated in your gallery. Dr. Ron Bond is the new chair of the Campus Alberta Quality Council, appointed in July. During his 33-year career at the University of Calgary Ron was a professor of English, head of the department of English, dean of the Faculty of Humanities, and most recently provost and vice-president academic.

In addition to his work at the University of Calgary Ron has a long track record of serving the national postsecondary community. His positions include terms as vice-president of the Social Sciences and Humanities Federation of Canada, president of the Canadian Association of Chairs of English, and president of the Canadian Conference of Deans of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. He is a strong advocate for quality education programs, making him an ideal choice to lead Alberta's agency for the quality assurance of degrees. His impeccable academic credentials and reputation precede him in this very important work, which bodes well for the quality of postsecondary programs in this province.

Ron is joined today by Marilyn Patton. Marilyn is the director of the secretariat for the Campus Alberta Quality Council. She is a respected member of the advanced education team and I'm told does a terrific job.

I'd ask Ron and Marilyn to please stand now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an honour today to introduce two groups, one group from Strathcona county and their proud partners in an FCM and CIDA program from Vung Tau City, Vietnam. They are linked in a municipal partnership program. They hope to work in co-operation. This delegation here will stay for at least two weeks. They will be with the Strathcona officials and focus on areas of co-operation and look at new steps that they can take to advance that co-operation. The officials from Vung Tau are Mr. Long, who is vice-chairman of the People's Committee of Vung Tau City; Mr. Soan, vice-chief, administrative office of the People's Committee of Vung Tau City; Mr. Dieu, head of population,

Families and Children's Department of Vung Tau City; and Mr. Cong, deputy principal, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, who accompanies the delegation as an interpreter. The Strathcona county officials with us today: Kevin Glebe, who is the manager of corporate planning and intergovernmental affairs; Russ Pawlyk, manager of recreation, parks, and culture; Kristen Schindel, the strategic initiative assistant; and Alf Cunningham, the community liaison officer. I would ask them now to please rise and for the Assembly to give this special group a warm welcome.

1:40

My second group, Mr. Speaker, are representatives of a company that many of the hon. members of the Assembly are familiar with, Janssen-Ortho Inc. We are privileged today to receive Mark Fleming, who is the national director of government and community relations for Janssen-Ortho. He is based in Toronto. He has held a number of senior leadership positions in sales, marketing, and health economics. He is accompanied by a person who is very familiar to this Assembly, Mr. Michael Lohner, who is the regional director for western Canada – we congratulate him on his position – and a well-known favourite Brent Korte, who is the regional manager for Alberta. I'd ask those guests to please stand and for us to honour their presence here with a round of applause.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two of my dear friends who are here in the House today, Rick and Rose Lundy. Rick and Rose live in Calgary and have recently joined a patient experience committee to help improve patient care in the Calgary health region because of a recent personal tragedy that took place at the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary. Rick and Rose are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the St. Albert Lilydale White Sox slo-pitch ball team, who are joining us here today along with representatives from Lilydale. The White Sox competed in the over-60 age division of the 2006 national slo-pitch championship which was held August 3 to 7 in Moncton, New Brunswick. In a thrilling final the White Sox captured the championship by defeating a team from Brantford, Ontario, by a score of 4 to 3. In total the White Sox have now won six national championships and are on their way to the Worlds next year. The members of this team are truly positive role models for the community and have demonstrated what can be accomplished with a positive attitude, determination, and teamwork. The White Sox success would not have been possible without the generous support of Lilydale. I would like to thank this company for its strong community spirit and many contributions to worthwhile causes. They are seated in the public gallery. Once again, congratulations. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the Mandrusiak family, who are celebrating the 100th

anniversary of the arrival of their ancestors Ivan and Wasylyna Mandrusiak and their two sons, Dmytro and Mike. Ivan and Wasylyna emigrated from Galicia in 1906. They settled on a homestead near Musidora, where they raised 10 children: Dmytro, Mike, Bill, Annie, Nick, Pearl, Alex, Steven, Helen, and Walter. Bill and Pearl are in attendance today. I'd also like to introduce Rose Herard, the spouse of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, who is also a descendant of the Mandrusiak family. The members have travelled here from various locations in Alberta to be with us in the Legislature today. They celebrated their 100th anniversary on Saturday with 180 descendants, and it was reportedly a fantastic event. Located in the members' gallery and the public gallery, if I could ask the Mandrusiak family to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a couple of representatives of the Williams corporation out of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Williams corporation is currently here, like many businesses throughout the world, continuing to look at Alberta for further expansion. With us today we have Lina Taylor, who is the manager of government affairs for Williams and is from Tulsa, Oklahoma. With her is Ken Faulkner, who will be known to Members of this Legislative Assembly and who is with Global Public Affairs in Calgary. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the members of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jonathan Sharek. Jonathan is a musician, he's a music educator, he's a teacher, he's active with the ATA advocacy, and most importantly to me, he is a constituent. I would ask Jonathan to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Joe Fallwell and Tim Martin. Joe is 13 years old and is entering grade 8 at Wilma Hansen junior high in Calgary, and Tim is 15 years old, entering grade 10 at Father Lacombe high school also in Calgary. These two bright and intelligent individuals, surprisingly, are the grandchildren of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and are seated in the public gallery. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It indeed gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Maureen Hindman and Susan Evans. Maureen and Susan are constituents of mine and are here to watch the proceedings of the Legislature. Maureen has been an active volunteer with the Highlands United Church and is presently active with the Stollery children's hospital. Susan Evans has been working with ATCO Gas for the past 26 years and has two children and two grandchildren, with another grandchild on its way. They are seated in the public

gallery. I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Today I have the honour of introducing to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to members of this Assembly two very special and important people who have been an inspiration to me throughout my life. Both are registered nurses, and both are from St. Catharines, Ontario.

First, I would like to introduce my sister, Nicola Kalagian-Sider, who has been a very active community volunteer, a Sunday school teacher, a major fundraiser for her church, the United Way, the March of Dimes, and the Kidney Foundation. Nicki has also been a board member for Canadian Mental Health for eight years. Nicki suffered a stroke in the year 2000 and is now a motivational speaker for stroke survivor groups.

Donna Mallette has also been a very active volunteer in her community as a Sunday school teacher and fundraiser for the March of Dimes, the Kidney Foundation, and the Kinsmen fundraiser for the Special Olympics. Donna is a degree RN in Ontario, working for the past six years as a clinical research co-ordinator, specializing in cardiology, diabetes, and stroke prevention and studies. She was also my campaign manager for the nomination.

They are both seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that Nicki give us a wave and Donna stand to receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Brian Rozmahel and Len Legault. Brian is an active member in his community of Viking and helped to found a student organization called Augustana Against AIDS. Brian also organized a charity hockey game in Viking to raise funds for the Stephen Lewis Foundation. Len Legault is a community activist in Chauvin and has run for the New Democrats in Battle River-Wainwright. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they now rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure whether my guests have arrived yet, but with your permission I would like to proceed with the introduction. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my son Chris Miller, who, along with a number of his friends, is celebrating his 19th birthday today. If they're here, I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to have with us today my son Taylor Abbott visiting from Drayton Valley. He's in the public gallery. He's here this week playing with the NAIT Oaks conditioning camp for hockey, hoping to make a triple-A team this year. I'll ask Taylor to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House. Also, sitting with him is my Leg. assistant, Theresa Lightfoot, and I'd ask her to stand as well. If you could all welcome them, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a second honour today and the pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly employees from Advanced Education, strategic corporate services division, human resources. They're doing their public service orientation here today, and they are Lisa Urwin, Maegen Beattie, Salha Moloo, Kate Annis, and Connie Scott. Please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the Leader of the Official Opposition, just let me note again that I sent a note to all hon. members a couple of days ago that basically indicated that as a result of changes in one caucus membership, the rotation of the question period now will revert to where we were when the spring session began.

First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Services

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. An unexpected pleasure to be back for all of us, I'm sure.

While this government preoccupies itself with its own leadership issues, Alberta's health regions are facing a crisis. This summer the hospital in Grande Prairie, for example, was forced to repeatedly fly patients to Edmonton for emergency surgery, while intensive care beds, operating rooms, and emergency rooms in at least five health regions had to shut down due to acute staff shortages. The people of this province are being seriously and sometimes catastrophically affected. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the crisis at the Grande Prairie hospital has been boiling for years, why has this government completely failed to sort it out?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there have been many things done throughout Alberta to address the needs of the health regions. Earlier this summer I visited with the doctors in the health region and had an extensive period to meet with the board. I think it boils down to a couple of things. In North America there is a phenomenon of a lack of a qualified workforce to address the needs of a population that is booming, particularly in Alberta, with some 92,000 people here over and above what we had previously. The other thing, Mr. Speaker: we have had such an influx of people who, as our Premier often references, come without their schools, their hospitals, their families to support them. It adds an extra burden and strain to the region.

So I would contend that, for the most part, there have been excessively effective measures in managing the health of Albertans. In some cases, yes, we've had some strains.

Dr. Taft: Pure excuses, Mr. Speaker. Pure excuses.

Again to the same minister: given that the Grande Prairie region is now without a fully functioning hospital so often, including most of this month, what contingency plans are in place for something like a major bus crash or a major industrial accident?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member in the preamble for his first question noted, the Capital region predominantly has taken off some of the burden by airlifting patients here. Other contingency and disaster plans exist in every region for that hoped never-to-occur

tragedy. Disaster planning is part of what every hospital region does in order to get its circumstances in order, and I can confirm that that's happening because every single region is prepared with its own particular plan for the pandemic. It would not be unlike a plan for any disaster such as the bus accident or something that would be catastrophic that has been cited by the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given that Alberta needs more doctors, more nurses, more physios, OTs, lab techs, more health professionals of every kind so desperately, why are institutions under this minister's jurisdiction turning away fully qualified applicants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's very interesting to look at the numbers that have been published recently with respect to the turnaways in postsecondary. As I recall reading, 13,000 qualified entrants into postsecondary have been turned away, but when you really look at the numbers, you find out that one-third of those were not in fact qualified and therefore were rejected because of their lack of credentials and marks and so on. One-third of those were from outside of Alberta, and another third had applied to a number of different postsecondary institutions and were accepted by some and rejected by others. So it's impossible to tell. You're just a bit early to cry wolf with respect to this. It's too early to tell exactly how many students have actually been rejected.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Low-income Albertans

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the National Council of Welfare released a provincial comparison of welfare incomes, and the results were absolutely scathing for this government. The report ranks Alberta as the worst province in Canada for the level of support provided to low-income residents, particularly single parents with little kids. This is a dismal portrait of how this Tory government treats low-income people, particularly little children. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: given that Alberta ranks last in the entire country in welfare income for single parents with children, can the minister tell us how these people are supposed to enjoy the Alberta advantage receiving only \$12,000 a year? I'd like to see the minister survive on that.

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, I just received the report, actually, about an hour ago, and basically from what I understand, the report mainly concentrates on the income support rates rather than results. Here in Alberta we try to do the results because – and this is very, very important for everyone here – when you go back to '92-93, the welfare caseload was 97,000 cases, with 180,000 individuals on welfare, with 5,400 social workers working out there, and 80 per cent of the people on welfare were single people or couples without children that had no business being on welfare. When we changed the system, that 80 per cent has gone now into the workforce. Today's welfare caseload is down to 25,000, and only 13,000 of those are going through some challenge. The other 12,000 are people that are able to work and will get back into the workforce because there are a lot of jobs out there.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister can't explain away the treatment of little children here.

Again to the same minister: will the minister admit, given the clear evidence in this report, that the Alberta Works program doesn't work?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, according to the Liberals, Mr. Speaker, a welfare caseload over 200,000 is probably the thing they'd want to do. On this side of the House, we provide top-notch services. In fact, going back to the day of the welfare reforms – this is so important to the public out there and to the opposition – when I was minister of family and social services back in '92-93, the four departments that are here today were under one ministry: children's services, persons with developmental disabilities, aboriginal affairs, and of course family and social services. Part of the reforms were to have better services for those people in need. Today there are four ministries with big budgets that look after all those high-needs areas. Those are results that Albertans want.

2:00

Dr. Taft: It's disgraceful, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Premier. What explanation can the Premier give to the thousands of parents and especially to their children, Mr. Speaker, struggling to survive in the richest province in Canada for the treatment this government provides to them, forcing them into the lowest income levels of any welfare program in Canada? This happened on his watch. How does he explain it?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, unlike the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition I wasn't looking forward to being back here, and I'm even looking forward less after that question, but I will attempt to answer it.

The hon. minister pointed out – and you have to understand historically what happened. Every week the minister of social services was coming in with requests for special warrants to accommodate welfare recipients. We changed the tone, and we said to the minister, who was the same minister that we have right now, that the emphasis should be on finding work for the employable to instill within those people a sense of dignity and a sense of hope, and he did that. But he also said: for those who are employable and don't want to work, here's a bus ticket, and, you know, you can find welfare someplace else, but for those who really want to work and are employable, we will assist you in every way, shape, or form. In other words, rather than a handout, we gave a hand up, and that is the philosophy of this government.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Services (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's inability to plan for the future, manage our resources, and govern the health system has resulted in what physicians throughout the province consider a crisis. Five health regions experienced unexpected closures this summer, impacting patient safety and quality of care, including Rose and Rick Lundy's tragic experience in a Calgary emergency room. My questions today are to the minister of health. Given that physicians have always taken holidays during the summer and we haven't had the same problems with closures in the past, why has this government failed to anticipate and cope this year?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would contend that this government has coped very well with the emergencies and other things throughout Alberta this year. We have had a very solid track record throughout the province. To generalize based on a few particular circumstances would be an error.

Now, I must say that I felt it was tragic and very regrettable that the Lundys experienced what they did, and I mention that because the hon. member has referenced them. Let's just talk about what happens when something goes wrong in an emergency situation or in any other situation. The Calgary health region has undertaken not only to review that but to meet with the Lundys and discuss the issue and look at the issues that surrounded triage and all the other kinds of circumstances. They have finally this week announced the opportunity not only for Mr. Lundy to serve on the patient experience committee but for the Health Quality Council of Alberta to do a thorough assessment as an independent body of the emergencies and to see whether or not there is a crisis.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would contend that everything that we've done, including absorbing 1,200 more patients in the emergency departments in Calgary, has been on the track of supporting patient health and patient safety.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that physicians from throughout Alberta but particularly Grande Prairie and Capital have lobbied the minister specifically with their arguments that the system is on the verge of collapse, why has the minister failed to take action? [interjections]

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the echo and din of all that let me just say that we have taken action, and we are working with the staff in those areas. We are working not only on the plans that they have provided us but looking at complementary services in other regions to provide assistance. In the north the Capital region has involved particular staff members not only to liaise with Northern Lights but with the Peace Country. We have provided locum programs. We have increased the dollars, doubled in this year's budget, for primary care. We have increased the dollars for the ARPs to support the physicians. I should highlight that if you look at the number of doctors and nurses and other health care professionals that we have added this year, it's considerably more than many of the other jurisdictions. We're funding at the highest rate per capita in Canada, and I contend, despite the cries of anguish on the other side, that we have the best health care system in Canada.

Ms Blakeman: Don't diminish Albertans' experience.

Back to the same minister: why would the minister spend time visiting other countries to learn more about their private health systems when Albertans were experiencing closures in surgical, ICU, renal, and mental health units here in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's not one shred of evidence that I went exploring private care systems. Prove it, and then we'll talk about it.

But let's talk about what we've been doing here. We have been taking every effort with our health business plan, with our policy framework, with Getting on with Better Health Care, to look at practical ways to improve the system. To the largest extent we have been successful.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Education Funding

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's long history of guesstimate budgeting has finally come back to bite them, forcing them out of their country clubs and fishing lodges. At the end of the spring sitting the members across were watching the clock like grade schoolers before summer vacation, completely neglecting to adequately budget for things like education, health care, and infrastructure. So here we are in summer session, doing remedial lessons on budgeting. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. To the hon. minister: despite the fact that parents, school boards, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Alberta NDP repeatedly raised the alarm about crumbling schools, school board deficits, and growing class sizes during the spring budget debate when the Education estimates were being discussed, how is it that the government still failed to remember to adequately budget for Alberta's 600,000 grade school students?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, the hon. member might be interested to know that there was a hailstorm at my country club last night, and that's where I've been enjoying the country clubs.

There is going to be an opportunity over the next several days to debate the merits of all of the expenditures that have been brought forward before this House. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think that Albertans appreciate the fact that when there is necessary spending coming forward, we attend to it in a timely fashion. We are able to do that thanks to the prudent and conservative budgeting process that we use. Most governments in Canada would really appreciate being able to deal with some of those issues.

On the particular issue of the timeliness on the education funding, I think it would be appropriate to have the Minister of Education, who has been dealing with this issue, as he explained over and over again in the House, with all of the school boards that came up with this plan.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Minister of Finance: did the minister know that school board budgets were inadequate when she brought forward her spring budget, and if she didn't know, why wasn't she listening to us? Because we told her exactly that.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. leader of the third party researched a little bit, he would know that we don't even get that information from the school boards before the end of June. So, obviously, had I known, more importantly had the minister known, it would have been attended to in the budget that was presented in this House much earlier in the year.

Mr. Speaker, again I would like the Minister of Education just to very quickly explain to the hon. member how it works.

2:10

The Speaker: Sorry. The hon. leader, please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister must have a hearing problem because we all heard the school boards.

Why didn't the minister acknowledge that there was a severe shortage in the Education budget at the time, and will she table all of the correspondence she received from school boards, teachers, and parents before the development of her budget to show that she didn't know about it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I wish to undertake that question on behalf of the Minister of Finance because I think what has to be clarified here is exactly how much money is already going into this system, the best education system in Canada. That's undisputed. We also have the highest funded education system, the highest paid teachers.

Now, we want to even go further and make it the best education system in the world, and that's what we're planning to do. In order to help get that done, we're going to be spending close to \$5.6 billion this year, which comes out to about \$27.9 million each and every school day. Twenty-seven point nine million dollars each and every school day is what we're spending on the education system. We're working with the school boards, we're working with the superintendents, we're working with parent home and school councils, and we're working as hard as we can on behalf of the future of this province, our students, and we are getting the results we seek.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent reports indicated that the mountain pine beetle has spread as far north as Fairview and as far east as Fox Creek. Over the past few years we've seen the mountain pine beetle spread across British Columbia and devastate their forests. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is your department doing to address the spread of this destructive pest, and especially what are they doing to help our forest industry withstand the impact of this rapidly developing situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. We do have 6 and a half million hectares of mature pine forest that are at risk because of the mountain pine beetle. We have been extremely proactive in our efforts to get rid of the mountain pine beetle since it was first detected in 2002. We survey our forests, and we will continue to survey our forests and absolutely burn each and every single solitary tree that we know the mountain pine beetle has infested.

A couple of weeks ago, it is sad to say, with strong prevailing westerly winds the mountain pine beetle came over into the Peace Country. No one could have predicted that, Mr. Speaker. However, we are being very proactive in dealing with that as well. Our strategy has not changed. We will continue to survey, cut, and burn. We will make sure that our forest industry is engaged in that as well because what we're doing is looking at resequencing harvest plans so that we can harvest the most vulnerable trees possible. We're receiving plans as we speak to make sure that we deal with them promptly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What is being done to determine the extent of these new infestations?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, it's going to require all Albertans to help us with this. Our forest health officers will conduct examinations based on reports that we receive from staff in the field as well as industry players and the public at large to spot infestations of trees.

We're looking to make sure that we plan to retain and train our seasonal firefighters so that they can help us with these surveys and do the cutting and burning that is required.

We're also asking all users of the forest, Mr. Speaker, and particularly our oil and gas industry, recreationalists, and survey companies to make sure that if they find trees, they will identify them for us. All Albertans need to take part in identifying these trees, particularly where they show signs of sawdust around the base or if we have a crystallized honey that is on the surface. Anyone who spots trees with those signs is asked to mark that location and call us at 1-877-927-BUGS.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. Will the government's comprehensive strategy put an end to the mountain pine beetle in Alberta?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, scientists have told us that we're doing absolutely the right thing. As well, British Columbia, from their experience, has told us to be very proactive, and that's what this government is doing. By hitting the beetles hard, we think that we can try to prevent them from spreading any further. But the pine beetle is a natural phenomenon, and basically the best thing to get rid of them is about minus 40 degree weather. Nature is a formidable force, and under the right conditions the pine beetle infestation could travel across Canada into the boreal forest if we don't get that cold weather. There are 6 million hectares of pine forests in Alberta. Those 6 million hectares are roughly the size of New Brunswick, and to put it in perspective, the tremendous social and environmental and economic loss that would happen to this province is one reason why we cannot give up the fight.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Education Funding (continued)

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the year 2001 only 11 per cent of the school boards posted a deficit. In the year 2004-05 this figure skyrocketed to 43.5 per cent. This is an increase of 300 per cent – 300 per cent – and clearly indicates the failure of this government to adequately fund the education system at a time of great prosperity. Even with the announced increase in spending it's a drop in the bucket. To the Minister of Education: given the fact that Alberta's school boards requested over \$2.5 billion of capital funding in 2005, how many school boards will still be shortchanged despite this increase in funding that he proposes?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think any school boards are going to be shortchanged, and I don't think that the member has properly concluded his question in the way he might have wanted with that word. Let me just say with respect to the overall capital plan that we do have a significant injection of money being added to the K to 12 system, and since having inherited that particular budget from the infrastructure ministry, I should tell the House that we have increases of about \$177 million this year coming for the school capital funding initiatives. That will take funding from \$195 million previously up to \$372 million this year. That will, for example, this year see the completion and the opening of about 13 brand new schools right now and the commencement or continuation of another 51 over and above that, and that's even before we bring forward the plan for the next five years in the next few months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this minister finally stop blaming school boards for the government's failures and take responsibility today for the lack of schools in places across the province, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton, and do something about it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no one on this side is blaming anyone. I don't know where the member is getting that from, and if he wishes to blame the school boards, then he can do that because it seems like he's accusing them of a lot of wrongful things. We're not blaming or accusing anyone. I'm giving you some straightforward facts.

What I would encourage the member to do, which clearly he hasn't been able to do over the summer, is to take a look at school capital plans such as the ones put out here by the school boards just a few months ago, last spring, and he will learn in there exactly which schools are already being funded, which ones are opening, when they are opening, and where some of their additional needs are because of dramatically shifting and dramatically changing population numbers and school enrolment numbers. It's pretty flat province-wide, Mr. Speaker, but in certain spots they are experiencing enrolment increases. I should point out that Alberta is only one of two provinces in Canada that is experiencing that sort of sharp incline, an increase in student populations, and we're dealing with it.

Mr. Flaherty: Talking to school boards, they're not saying that.

Does the minister intend to provide ongoing funding for school maintenance, or is he content to just throw money at the problem each time a crisis like that in Calgary develops in some of the schools across the province? What's he going to do about it?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure why the hon. member is trying to be so inflammatory in his comments. He knows full well that we've increased operations and maintenance support to school boards by about \$28 million. That's about a 7.5 per cent increase. That's just in these last few months. It's going up to \$404 million. That's the largest amount they've ever had for operations and maintenance.

With respect to infrastructure and maintenance renewal programs, which maybe he's mixed up between the two, that is going up from \$48 million to \$200 million this year. From \$48 million up to \$200 million. The hon. member should have done some homework over the summer to know that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Programs

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday the Minister of Energy announced amendments to a number of royalty regulations in Alberta. As we know, the energy industry is Alberta's main economic engine, and Albertans want to be assured that when changes are made that affect the industry, they are not mere tinkering. My question to the Minister of Energy: is this a conclusion to the royalty review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said on numerous occasions, this is part of the ongoing review that the Department of

Energy does with respect to royalty programs. This isn't just an event. We're constantly monitoring changing circumstances, be it here or throughout the world, to make sure that we have the best structures to ensure that Albertans get their fair share of the ownership of that resource to which they are entitled.

I'd like to mention that even the tinkering kinds of questions – the royalty programs are going to bring back an additional \$186 million to Albertans. I don't know about in your books, but that's still a fairly substantial amount of dollars that come back into this province that will be there for the future. Those are made in adjustment to changing circumstances.

I'd also like to make one comment about a fair share question. It's true that the industry is making substantially greater profits today. In the past we made \$3 billion to \$4 billion off royalties from the province, this past year just under \$15 billion, well surpassing anything that we've ever had in that range. As Albertans we, too, are benefiting substantially from the increased profits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many producers, large and small, would be affected by these changes. My question to the same minister: can he provide the rationale for his decisions?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we will be bringing forward additional information to the public with regard to these programs and the royalty review in due course. But with respect to the four programs in particular the highlight of some of those is the fact that the price has been part of the question, the horizontal re-entry program. For example, technologies have vastly improved on horizontal well drilling versus the past. It used to be a very new, innovative technology. Now it's very commonplace. That was reflected in the change.

The deep gas royalty program. That's to reflect that today where it's in Alberta's interest is to help explore the vast resource, and it is a vast resource in the tight sands and shales, substantially or potentially more resource in gas in that than all of the other gas that we have, including the coal-bed methane. So it's in that respect that we continue to focus our efforts in getting the best value and the most recovery of that resource for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. He has suggested that the Alberta royalty tax credit might be terminated. Why has he not done so?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we have also mentioned that it has been the intent in our review to eliminate the Alberta royalty tax credit effective January of this coming year. We have undertaken with industry to give them through the end of this month to provide us with any solid economic reasons or business reasons for the people of Alberta why we should continue that. We are just waiting for the last of the process, which we continue through the end of this month, just another weekend. It still is our objective once we get that information, unless there's something substantively new, that we will work towards elimination of that program.

Electricity Generation

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the failures of electricity deregulation along with the total incompetence of this Progressive Conservative government were exposed a month ago today when the Alberta

electricity grid was in complete chaos and crisis. Electricity was in very short supply and prices were very high, and Albertans were forced by this government's flawed policy to endure an electricity blackout. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Where was all the extra electricity generation capacity this government continually brags about when during afternoon rush hour on July 24 we were at least 250 megawatts short in our electricity supply?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled that he chose to bring up this instance as how they continually mischaracterize and misrepresent and actually I would say falsely portray to the public that this was a result of market design, i.e. deregulation. This had nothing to do with generation. It had nothing to do with market design under any model. If this was under the old regulated model . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor. Carry on.

Mr. Melchin: If we went back to what they would propose, if we had a fully regulated model, I would be interested how it is that they think they could control three different strikes by lightning, different times, different places, that destroyed the network of transmission, and get the generation available for supply to the consumers. I'd be interested in how they're going to regulate lightning.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Under the regulated system whenever an operator pushed the button, a generating station would start, but it doesn't anymore. Given that the market surveillance administrator's report lists 265 megawatts as being unavailable on that afternoon for the following reasons – "unit failed to start," "unit is inoperable," and unit "not generally available to the system" – can the minister tell us this afternoon if this is the extra electricity capacity generation that the Premier and this Progressive Conservative government continues to brag about? If you push the button, it won't work?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, first off, I'm glad that he highlights that we do have excess capacity of generation. It's been a complete success of the market design that we have. A complete success. You know, sometimes equipment needs to be brought down for maintenance. Surprisingly, that happened with the old model too. Sometimes, as in this instance too, there's a mechanical failure. I'd be delighted to see how they'll regulate that in the future there'll never be a mechanical failure. Sometimes the wires, which are still regulated today, which are the highways to get that electricity from that plant to you and I as users, break down. In this case they did. So it doesn't matter how much electricity generation you have if it can't get there through the highways, which are regulated today and under the old model. It won't make any difference.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why are these generation stations counted in our overall Power Pool capacity if they will not start when they're needed to provide electricity during an emergency?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there was plenty of generation available to get to the market. The reason was that the tie-line between Alberta and B.C. was out because of a lightning strike. Sheerness 1 and 2 were off because of transmission wire facilities that were not

available to give that generation. They put off the generation. It takes time to bring those coal-fired plants back on to stream.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Labour Supply

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Alberta's hot economy has created a number of challenges, and when I travel around my constituency, the most proliferating sign is Help Wanted. The Alberta government has recently released its long-term labour force strategy. Mr. Minister, isn't this plan just a little late for the challenges that are already being faced by Alberta's businesses?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have a booming economy in Alberta thanks to this good government. Our diversification plan is working. In fact, within the next 10 years we are going to create over 400,000 new jobs, and with all the training programs in place and other programs we will only be able to supply 86,000 workers. So it's a challenge. It's a problem, but many jurisdictions in North America would love to have the problem we have. We are doing many things. In our recent release of our 10-year strategy our first priority, again, is to train and hire local people, Albertans, and then the ability of other Canadians to be able to move to Alberta and work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the hon. minister. It's been reported that the Alberta Federation of Labour was not consulted on this strategy. If this is true, can you explain why?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, in addressing the labour force challenges and opportunities we have in Alberta, the provincial government alone cannot resolve the challenges and the problems in that area. This is why, in fact, in order to develop the plan, we consulted with industry, education representatives, aboriginal groups, to get their input in this process. In fact, we met with the Alberta Federation of Labour on February 17 to address and get their input on the strategy that we developed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is for the Minister of Advanced Education. The report sets targets for meeting the number of apprentices. Mr. Minister, can you ensure that your department will see to it that the postsecondary sector can meet this need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The good news is that we currently have over 53,000 apprentices in this province, and I'm very pleased to say that we have more than 1,400 aboriginal apprentices, which is a growth of about 200 just in the last couple of months. I want to commend employers for really stepping up to the plate because in the last number of months we've been registering over a hundred new apprentices per day. That's because the

employers in this province recognize that they need to step up to the plate, and they need to be commended.

We're doing a number of other things also, Mr. Speaker. We continue to offer technical training through distance delivery, mobile delivery, SuperNet delivery, and other methods. We recognize apprentices from other parts of Canada at the same level that they are in their own territory. We promote the registered apprenticeship program, RAP. We recognize tradespeople from other jurisdictions through the red seal program. We're working very closely with our aboriginal community, because I think that's our biggest opportunity in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Budgetary Practices

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to failing, this government deserves an A. This government has failed to plan affordable housing in Edmonton. They failed to plan hospital sizes in Calgary. They failed to plan infrastructure in Fort McMurray. But worst of all, yesterday the Finance minister admitted that this government doesn't even have a plan to manage Alberta's massive surpluses, billions of dollars of surpluses. To the Minister of Finance: given that Albertans across this province are asking for a surplus plan, where the heck is it?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I guess the only person who has kind of missed this is maybe the hon. member and maybe some other members of his caucus. We've repeatedly discussed what the surplus plan would be and said very clearly that we had to change our plan for unbudgeted surplus because there was a very important event that occurred in this province that changed that. Previously, unbudgeted surpluses could be used for putting money into the sustainability fund, for debt repayment, and for capital. Well, of course, Alberta being the only jurisdiction in Canada and probably North America that is debt free, we no longer have to do that. So there is an adjustment to the plan that has been in place. The real people that fail in this room are those people over there that fail to listen.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister admitted that she has no plan for the budgeted surplus, and she admitted that there's a \$6 billion deficit, or debt, to the teachers' pension fund. Will the minister please tell us how much more of the surplus this government plans to blow before the year is out?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again a failure, and it has to be a hearing failure or else the member failed to be in the same scrum I was because, frankly, the only question on pension that came up at all was in reference to a document from Standard & Poor's, who happens to be one of our rating agencies, who I met with in Toronto in June. On August 22 Standard & Poor's – it's very timely – released their rating of the province of Alberta, where they said: triple-A ratings affirmed on extremely low debt. The question came in the scrum: "Well, then, do they consider pension debt in that?" which is off line for us in our budget because there's a long-term plan to address it. I should say, though, that the tax-supported debt as a share of GDP is 1.6 per cent, which is very low, which is expected to go to 1.3.

Mr. Speaker, I will table this document because I should table it. But there's one line, if I could have your permission to quote it:

The provincial government's conservative and prudent budgetary practices, which seek to protect Alberta's strong financial perfor-

mance against potential volatility in resource revenues, through the use of its fiscal sustainability fund and the capital account, which is where we deal with surplus dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance again: given this government's complete inability to manage the province's surpluses, why doesn't the department do the responsible thing and adopt the Alberta Liberal surplus plan? We have one. We've done the work for you. Why don't you adopt it?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, a very good question. [interjections]

The Speaker: Question period is about government policy. It's turning into a bit of a debate here in the last question and answer. If the minister wants to proceed.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, a very good question. Frankly, if we had adopted that plan from the opposition, we would not have put \$1.3 billion into health facilities last year. We would not be building the number of schools that we are. Their plan limited the amount of capital expenditure that you could have in one year. We did not do that because we recognized that there was a requirement for more capital, and while our savings are very close to what their plan wanted, our spending on schools, hospitals, and other government infrastructure is higher. I rest my case.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:40

Rental Increases

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a severe housing crisis in the province of Alberta. Working families and students find themselves in increasingly precarious housing situations, and the number of homeless people in the province has doubled. It doesn't matter whether we hear from Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, or other centres. This crisis, frankly, is a predictable result of this government's own reckless, growth at all costs, short-term thinking and lack of planning. As an example, I received an e-mail last week from a single mother living in Edmonton whose rent has increased 33 per cent, \$300 per month, in just the last few months. My question is to the Minister of Government Services, who's supposed to be looking after the renters. To the minister: what do we say to this woman and other hard-working Albertans who are spending over half their income on housing in this overheated economy and cannot even afford the basics?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, you know, the member opposite is absolutely right. We are facing unprecedented growth in this province. In areas like Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray we hear from people that are faced with rental issues. I'd ask this member to provide me with the name and the circumstance. We have landlord/tenant protection in this province. Give me the circumstance, and I'll take care of it directly. We'll do it tomorrow. We'll do it today for you.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's one person. I'd be glad to send it over to the minister, but the reality is that there are thousands of Albertans facing this situation. What's he going to do: look after all of them? I want to be specific to the minister. What is he prepared to do with these exorbitant rental increases that are occurring over the province, that are coming about not just for one person but for thousands?

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, Mr. Speaker, we do have legislation in place to protect renters, but if this member is asking if I am going to introduce rent controls, the answer is no.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that all the renters in the province will be glad to hear about that. I would ask the minister: why is he not prepared to look at caps, as is done in British Columbia, as is done in Ontario, where it's basically to the cost of living? Why is he not prepared to look at that? There are thousands of people being impacted in this province.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, we've been through this in this province before. You know, there were rent controls at one time throughout this country. It proved not to work. There were people who wanted to invest, and they said that they're pulling back that investment money and they're not building those rental accommodations. I don't want to go back to a situation where we prove that it did not work. We have to look at other options. I will assure this member and all Albertans that I will talk with my colleagues in cabinet. I'll talk with them seriously to find a way that we can find more housing, more land to develop. We'll do that quickly.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the first of six, a little historical vignette for the day.

A number of Alberta MLAs have had a town, village, or post office named after them.

Boyle is named after John Robert Boyle, a Liberal, who served in the Alberta Legislature from 1905 to 1924 representing the constituency of Sturgeon. Mr. Boyle was a leader in the revolt which ended Alexander Rutherford's service as Premier.

Holden became a village in 1905 and is named after James Bismark Holden, a Liberal, who represented Vermilion in Alberta's first two Legislatures, from 1905 to 1913. Mr. Holden also served as the mayor of Vegreville for various terms between 1914 and 1945.

Jean Côté was named after Jean Leon Côté, a Liberal, who represented the constituencies of Athabasca then Grouard between 1909 and 1921. He was appointed to the Senate in 1923 and died in 1924.

Douglas Corney Breton served in Alberta's sixth Legislature, from 1926 to 1930, as the United Farmers of Alberta MLA for Leduc and saw Breton named in his honour in 1927. He served in India and Afghanistan during World War I.

George Hoadley served as a Conservative MLA from 1909 to 1921 representing Okotoks, from 1921 to 1930 as the UFA MLA for Okotoks, and from 1930 to 1935 as the UFA MLA for Okotoks-High River. The post office in Haverigg was renamed Hoadley in 1924.

Vernor Winfield Smith served as a UFA MLA from 1921 to 1935, representing the constituency of Camrose. Smith was Alberta's Minister of Railways and Telephones when the Lacombe and Northwestern Railway named the siding of Winfield after him.

Henry Elbert DeBolt represented the constituency of Spirit River as a Social Credit MLA from 1940 to 1952. He had become the first postmaster in an area known as American Creek in 1923, and in that year the post office became known as DeBolt.

The first member of Ukrainian heritage elected to this Assembly was Andrew Shandro, who represented the constituency of Whitford from 1913 to 1926 as a Liberal. The locality of Shandro is named after him.

Some members might remember Henry Mancini's music about Peter Gunn. The hamlet of Gunn bears the name of Peter Gunn, the

Liberal MLA for Lac St. Anne from 1909 to 1917. Gunn was the sheriff for Athabasca and Peace River districts.

In the fall of 1947 residents gathered in the Notikewan River Valley to discuss a new name for their area. They endorsed the name of Manning for their post office after Ernest Charles Manning, Alberta's Premier. In 1951 Manning became a village, and in 1957 it became a town.

A number of Alberta recreation areas, streets, and roads also bear the names of former and current MLAs, as do a number of Alberta constituencies.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of six members.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Rick and Rose Lundy

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in the members' gallery we have two people whom I introduced earlier today. Like all people they have experienced many difficult challenges throughout their lives. Recently they have been caught in a media spotlight surrounding a deeply personal tragedy at the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary. Few of us here today can imagine the challenge faced when one faces a miscarriage. I know that the deepest sympathy of all hon. members goes out to Mr. and Mrs. Lundy on their loss and the difficulties surrounding that night at the hospital.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the Lundys face new challenges and old ones, the questions of why and how and what types of services and steps could have been taken to alleviate their discomfort and what were the appropriate procedures that could have been in place to assist them, the questions of a process-oriented nature. No process, no review, and certainly no remedial action by anyone will ever truly make up for the situation that they confronted that night. For the Lundys it cannot be a matter of simply the process and procedures of our health care system. It is to be, however, about a system that must become more responsive to the needs of individual Albertans in crisis.

We as Albertans expect things of our health care system, expectations that are not always easily met, and when they are not, we need to ask the question, "Why not?" not just with the interest to define right and wrong but to define the appropriate course of action in the future.

Mr. Speaker, during this terrible ordeal the Lundys have shown a lot of courage, and their strong character has been prevalent throughout this situation. I'm glad that they have accepted the appointment to the patient experience committee. I know that they will do their best in making an ongoing contribution to produce better patient care for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Alberta Summer Games

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many people said that they were the best Alberta Summer Games ever. From July 27 to the 30th 3,100 coaches, athletes, and officials gathered in Red Deer for the largest ever Alberta Summer Games.

At the games Alberta's youth were given the opportunity to compete in 17 different sporting events as well as cultural events, including a legacy sculpture and a downtown street gala. Congratulations to the city of Red Deer, the Red Deer county, and the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation for hosting the 2006 Alberta Summer Games.

The Summer Games were made possible by the hard work and dedication of 2,600 volunteers. These volunteers worked tirelessly to prepare meals, provide transportation, and deal with a massive array of logistics related to hosting an event of this magnitude. This hard-working group of volunteers was led by the tireless effort of the chair, Lauralyn Radford, and the board of directors: Cheryl Adams, Patti Anderson, Greg Atkinson, Debbie Bonnett, Darin Doel, Carol Dyck, Carrie Farnell, Bob Grainer, Hugh McPherson, Marg Phelan, Rinn Purnell, Jared Sayers, Ron Schuster, Greg Scott, Rick Tofani, Rob Willms, and Fred Zucker. The board also had a great supporting team and wished to express their huge thanks to games manager Barb McKee and her staff members.

2:50

The Summer Games allow the youth of Alberta to showcase their various talents, to form friendships that will last a lifetime, and to learn the value of sportsmanship, teamwork, and fair play. Those who exemplify these values are recognized with the spirit of sport award that was won by zone 4, Parkland. Congratulations to zone 6, Edmonton, on winning the minister's cup for the most points overall, and zone 4, Parkland, for winning the Alberta cup for most improved zone. Congratulations to all those who participated in Alberta Summer Games. Win or lose, everyone who participated should take pride in their accomplishments and cherish the many memories that they'll take home with them.

Alberta wishes Medicine Hat all the best in hosting the 2008 Summer Games.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Westbourne Place

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a unique senior citizens' institution in my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill. Westbourne Place is a senior citizens' apartment complex with a warm Christian atmosphere situated on the hill above 64 Avenue N.W. It's adjacent to the Westbourne Baptist church, with which it is connected by a walkway and a multipurpose room. The residents also enjoy amenities including a social room, a pool room, a gift store, a garden, and an outdoor barbecue. The residents receive home care and daily health care services.

I can truly say that Westbourne Place is a friendly and welcoming community. It's much enjoyed by the residents who live there and by those who come to visit. A unique feature of Westbourne Place is the individual style and artwork that many of the residents bring to their own apartments and their doorways, which adds to the cheery and homelike atmosphere.

Reverend David Ferguson is the administrator of Westbourne Place, and I want to take this opportunity to salute him and all of his staff as well as all of the residents of Westbourne Place for making this complex in my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill a great place to live and a great asset to our community.

Canadian Forces Mission in Afghanistan

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, today I address this House in order to recognize and celebrate the loyalty, the dedication, and the heroism of our men and women in uniform. To date over two dozen Canadians have lost their lives while serving in Afghanistan. These heroes died to protect Canadian freedoms; they died to extend those freedoms to the people of Afghanistan. They gave their lives as ambassadors of goodwill and Canadian values. Thousands of other Canadians continue to put themselves at risk on a daily basis to ensure that our mission in Afghanistan succeeds. Their loyalty and

their commitment to the ideals that made our nation great are cause for celebration.

We must continue to give all of the support that we can to our men and women in uniform. The yellow ribbon that many Canadians wear to show their support to our troops is a powerful symbol of our respect and gratitude to these exemplary human beings. With courage, compassion, determination, and hope they have ventured into the world's most dangerous places at great personal risk. They do so because they are willing to put their lives on the line for the highest ideals of humanity: peace, freedom, and our ultimate goal, universal understanding and brotherhood.

The families and friends of these brave and loyal soldiers are dealing with great loss and sorrow, and while no words of mine could possibly ease their suffering, I hope that this acknowledgement of the heroism of their loved ones will at least serve to let them know that the people of Alberta and Canada are profoundly grateful to the lost ones.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, I was advised by way of request from the hon. member's office several days ago that the hon. member was going to be making a member's statement today. He sought permission to provide all members of the Assembly with two cobs of corn from his area, which I presume is what the subject matter of his statement is, and I gave such permission. However, I did not give permission for him to circulate to all hon. members vanity fridge magnets with his name on them. So if you want to send these back to me, I will have them recycled with my name on them.

Taber Cornfest

Mr. Hinman: It was there for a good idea, so I hope you all do that.

Mr. Speaker, today is a special day as it marks the beginning of the annual Taber Cornfest. Cornfest is a celebration of more than just the corn harvest. It is a celebration of the hard work, dedication, and vision – which, by the way, is the variety of corn which you received today – of countless Alberta families.

Today's bounty would not be possible if not for the innovation of irrigation, transportation, and processing. In 1915 the area landowners voted to establish the Taber irrigation district. Soon after constructed dams, canals, and reservoirs became the backbone of the needed infrastructure. This is an example of how wise use of our resources is paramount to our present and future economy.

The railways were used to bring machinery and equipment into the area to attach southern Alberta to world markets for their harvest. It is a shame today to see these great assets of railway lines being demolished rather than remaining a vital link for our rural economy.

Current crop and forage production in the area consists of sugar beets, corn, potatoes, beans, wheat, canola, alfalfa, and timothy, just to list a few. Before oil and gas this province's economy was based on forestry and agriculture. Even today agriculture continues to contribute greatly to our economy. Many of the oil and gas workers are farm grown. It will be detrimental to the future of Alberta to have our economy based and focused only on one sector. Ours is the responsibility to ensure that our economy continues to be diversified.

Mr. Speaker, for the members of this House who have not had the opportunity to sample fresh Taber corn, I feel privileged to provide samples for all the members. It was picked fresh this morning at 4. I request that all members of the House eat their fresh Taber corn. It will add sweetness to their soul, and they'll have a tender heart for at least 10 minutes.

As the harvest continues throughout the province, I pray that we

can all remember to thank our farmers and ranchers. Corn does not grow in a can, a carton does not produce milk, and beef is not produced behind the beef cooler.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I don't know; I've got eight magnets now. If anybody has some corn they don't want to use, I'm going home later this afternoon, so send it up as well.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Montana First Nation Satellite RCMP Station

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently attended the opening of the Montana First Nation satellite RCMP station on the Hobbema First Nations reserve. Led by Chief Carl Rabbit, this event was met with much support from the community, as was demonstrated by both good attendance and celebration throughout the day.

By introducing an additional satellite RCMP station, the community will benefit from crime prevention associated with an additional nine RCMP officers in the community. This presence within the community will help ease the community's law enforcement challenges. The new satellite station marks the fulfillment of the signing of the community tripartite agreement this past March between the federal and provincial governments and the local reserve.

During the opening ceremonies of this event, I was impressed with the prominent and conspicuous role the Hobbema cadets played. One year ago the RCMP began a comprehensive crime prevention initiative aimed at disrupting gang activity. Following this, the RCMP formed a partnership with the Hobbema community to implement the First Nations Community Cadet Corps program. Today the cadet corps has more than 650 members from Hobbema's four bands. These cadets, aged eight to 18, have decided to proactively shape their community's future. Not only is this movement giving these young people a sense of strength and solidarity; it is engaging the community against crime. The Hobbema cadets reflect the inspirational direction of the community.

I am pleased to see Hobbema's youth actively seeking to secure both their future and the future of the following generations. I commend Hobbema First Nations reserve for their initiative in crime prevention through the new satellite police station and the cadet corps movement, which will enhance the quality of life and safety of this community.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 271 petitions today urging the government "to move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road south of the current proposal" to reduce noise, increase safety measures, as well as "minimize the environmental impact of the road."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I'd like to give notice that I will be rising at the appropriate time to move that ordinary business of the Assembly be

adjourned to discuss an urgent matter; namely, the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the failure of the government to provide the resources required for Alberta's health regions to operate essential health services.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I will be rising to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under Standing Order 42.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly [of Alberta] does not have confidence in the government because it has failed to adequately plan for the infrastructure, housing, education, health, and environmental needs of the province in a period of rapid growth.

The Speaker: A notice of motion, hon. Government House Leader?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Yes. One notice of motion. I just want to give oral notice regarding the following motion.

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the summer sitting of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Government in Council.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table five copies of the Campus Alberta Quality Council's second annual report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a letter from Arlene Stephen. Ms Stephen is a single mother whose rent has recently increased by \$300 per month. She's asking for a limit on how quickly rent can be increased and other strategies for affordable housing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon, and it's in regard to the questions I asked earlier in question period today. This is the Market Surveillance Administrator's report on the events of July 24, 2006. Further to my questioning, it certainly indicates here that a unit owned by ATCO in Rainbow Lake failed to start. It's an old unit. Another ATCO unit was unavailable as the unit is inoperable, and the Rosedale generation stations 8, 9, and 10, owned by EPCOR, were not generally available to the system slow-start units. Then there's another unit here that also failed to start as it is an old unit. I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to have a look at this document.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table an e-mail from my constituent Bev Burgess, whose daughter was bleeding for nine hours while she miscarried at the Grey Nuns hospital. It's a very similar story to Calgary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table a copy of a letter from a constituent, Daniel Langdon, to the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Mr. Langdon was employed over the past year by a PDD-funded organization and is expressing his concern that the government hasn't recognized the severity of the situation faced by such organizations. He's urging the government to increase funding and conduct a full review of PDD funding.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I'm tabling with the Assembly the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 2004. The report includes this office's financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2004.

Before we move on to the next segment, might we revert to Notices of Motions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Notices of Motions**
head: (reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, and my apologies. I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) to give notice that on Monday, August 28, I will move that written questions 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35 be dealt with that day.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday, August 28, I will move that motions for returns 27 through 36 be dealt with on that day.

There being no additional written questions or motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. McClellan, Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Government Accountability Act the government of Alberta 2005-06 annual report; pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act the Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2006; pursuant to the Securities Act the Alberta Securities Commission 2006 annual report, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research endowment fund financial statements dated March 31, 2006, the Alberta heritage science and engineering research endowment fund financial statements dated March 31, 2006, the Alberta heritage scholarship fund financial statements dated March 31, 2006, the ATB Financial annual report 2006, the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation 2005 annual report.

On behalf of Mr. Liepert, chair, Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, the Alberta heritage savings trust fund 2006 annual report for the year ended March 31, 2006.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I would ask the Government House Leader if he could rise and share with us the projected government business for the week beginning the 28th of August through the 31st of August.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday afternoon we'll deal with private members' business. On Monday evening from 8 to 9 we'll deal with Motions Other than Government Motions. There is one, Motion 512, scheduled. At 9 p.m. we will proceed to Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, in anticipation of that being day 2 of 2, and we will seek to revert to Introduction of Bills, assuming that everything goes okay, and hopefully ask for first reading of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2).

On Tuesday afternoon we will proceed, we hope, with second reading of that particular supplementary supply act. On Tuesday evening second reading again. Should it be necessary, we'll continue on the supplementary supply act and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday afternoon Committee of the Whole is anticipated on the supplementary supply act, and, if necessary, Wednesday evening we'll continue with Committee of the Whole on the supplementary supply act.

On Thursday, August 31, we should have third reading of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2).

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: Hon. members, before proceeding, we have to deal with the application re Standing Order 30.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move:

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the failure of the government to provide the resources required for Alberta's health regions to operate essential health services.

That motion has been distributed, I believe.

In my arguments on the urgency of this issue, Mr. Speaker, I reference *Marleau and Montpetit* 584, which is requesting that the issue be specific, that it be urgent and important, and that it be a "matter requiring urgent consideration." I would argue that when a citizen's access to health care is imperilled, it is urgent, and it requires the immediate attention of this House.

Since April the health system in Alberta has experienced a progression of crises with closures of beds, both in-patient and in surgical, renal, and mental health, plus a reduction in diagnostic services and in beds in one particular ICU. This has affected five health regions, Mr. Speaker: Capital health, Calgary region, Aspen, Peace Country, and Palliser.

I note that *Marleau and Montpetit* 585 also supports an urgency argument and asks that issues be "immediately relevant and of attention and concern throughout the nation." We know that the issues around access to health and wait-lists and provision of resources, planning, and policy is a matter of discussion that is arising in a number of places.

To the argument on urgency I refer to the parameters set out in

Beauchesne 387 to 398 on emergency debates. I note that this issue is not currently before the courts. If I look at a number of the other tests that have been either noted in those sections in *Beauchesne* or in precedents in this House, that would include the throne speech as an opportunity to explore a subject. Well, the throne speech was some time ago, and the timing of the next one is unknown but would not likely be before another six months have passed.

3:10

I have examined the Order Paper, and there is no bill that would address this issue on the Order Paper or, indeed, outlined in any press release or media release from the government regarding this fall session or generally. We are scheduled for a supplementary supply budget, but I note, Mr. Speaker, that we have a total of 210 minutes in which to debate some 15 ministries and almost \$1.4 billion. That's 14 minutes tops if we divide every ministry into equal time, and I would argue that at a rate of \$6.6 million a minute and 14 minutes a ministry, that is not a sufficient amount of time to debate a complex issue like this. Fourteen minutes is not conducive to a thoughtful debate on access and waiting lists and the closure of a number of different units in health regions across the province.

There is no other reasonable opportunity for debate, Mr. Speaker. Oral Question Period is not enough time to debate a complex issue, and the Speaker is often admonishing us not to create debate during question period. We did indeed ask our primary and our third-position questions today on exactly this issue but were not able to get satisfactory answers from the minister.

I've looked at the written questions and motions for returns that are on the Order Paper and were just noted by the Government House Leader, and these do not cover the subject that I am seeking debate on. There are no private members' bills on the Order Paper on this issue, and there are no motions available on this issue, either a government or a private member's motion. The Premier blew off this opposition's request for an independent inquiry, and we note that Calgary health has teamed with the Quality Health Council for a report which would possibly be released sometime after May next year, which is not immediate enough given the issues that have arisen in the last five months.

I would argue, using the arguments in *Beauchesne* 389, that this issue is "so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention." Indeed, we have people that have been brave enough to join us in the gallery and to travel some distance to bring their story to light and to try and work beyond that to improve the situation so that others do not have this same experience.

Under *Beauchesne* 390 "the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately," and I think a number of us or all of us can attest to a demand from our constituents that this issue be addressed. I argue that the government's failure to provide planning, policy, and resources required to operate Alberta's health regions is posing an imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans. I argue that our Standing Order 30 request meets the tests that are set out, and I urge the Speaker to rule in favour of our request.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the argument.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 30(1) and (2) the chair will allow for brief arguments from additional members. The chair will recognize the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness on this procedural point.

Anybody else? The hon. House leader for the third party, and then we'll just proceed.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would appreciate the opportunity to respond to the motion that has been raised, and while

it would be tempting to cite the number of accomplishments that would in fact show that we have been improving the system for the future, I will just focus on the need for the emergency debate.

Mr. Speaker, I would entreat you that while this is an important issue, an emergency debate would just serve to lengthen the time before we could table our supplementary estimates and get on with the debate relative to the funding and the important work that would be done in providing additional funding for the health system. I think this debate in the Committee of Supply will be an appropriate time for us to discuss the issues, and I would hope that the hon. member opposite would be patient with us and find the patience to help us go through the tabling of the supplementary estimates, indicating what sorts of plans we have in place to accommodate funding issues, workforce shortages, and the other kinds of things that have been identified in previous questions today.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I think this debate would only delay a session in which we could more expediently move forward with the supplementary funding that is needed by the regions and will enable them to get on with their job.

For all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I strongly contend that this matter, while important, does not constitute an emergency debate today.

The Speaker: Just for clarification and the elucidation of the chair, is the hon. minister saying that when an estimate is submitted to this House, there are dollars for health in it?

Ms Evans: Yes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief, but it seems to me that there's a lot of crisis developing in this province right now. Certainly, health care is a serious matter, and I'll speak to the urgency.

I mean, the reality is that we've seen the Sturgeon hospital in St. Albert close its surgery room August 5 to 6. That could be very serious. As already mentioned, this month the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Grande Prairie closed its intensive care unit for a week. The Foothills hospital has closed beds due to nursing shortages, and of course we're familiar with the sad experience of Rose Lundy, who miscarried while waiting for a bed in the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary. So this is very serious, and I would argue that we really don't have a good opportunity to debate this issue. The minister says: well, we can talk about it during supplementary estimates. Well, we have 15 departments to go through – 15 departments – and only two days to debate them. It seems to me hardly reasonable to grapple with an issue as complex as health care reform in such a short period of time.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that if nothing is done, these shortages in these hospitals are not going to get better; they're going to get worse. We've already seen some serious problems develop, and I would say that supplementary estimates in two days – I would argue that probably not even if we were doing it on the regular basis, but with 15 departments in two days it really does not give us the opportunity to fully debate these very serious matters.

So, in conclusion, I would urge you to rule the motion to be in order and hope that we can have an opportunity to thoroughly debate this health care crisis. Nothing bad could come from debating this, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the representation came from three different sections. I presume that that is what it is then.

The chair is prepared to rule on the request for leave for this motion to proceed as in order under Standing Order 30(2). First of all, I would like to confirm that the Member for Edmonton-Centre has given proper notice of her intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. Notice was received by the Speaker's office on Tuesday, August 22, at 1:43 p.m. The subject matter was provided at that time. Therefore, the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met.

Secondly, before the question as to whether the motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." The member's proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on "the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the failure of the government to provide the resources required for Alberta's health regions to operate essential health services." The relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debate are *Beauchesne*, paragraphs 387 to 398, and *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589.

Albeit that the debate with respect to this particular motion was rather short, the chair has listened attentively to the submissions from all of the members participating in the debate, and after hearing the arguments before it, the chair does not believe that this request meets the requirements under the standing order for emergency debate to proceed. One reason, the principal reason, is that the urgency stressed in the standing order is "urgency of debate." As pointed out and indicated by the Minister of Health and Wellness and in the question period today as well by the Minister of Finance, the main reason that the Assembly has been reconvened is to debate supplementary supply, which, according to the Minister of Health and Wellness, will contain a request for additional funds for the Department of Health and Wellness. These would be the additional resources that, presumably, the Opposition House Leader refers to in her request for leave. Furthermore, while the chair is aware of the importance of this issue, it is difficult to conclude that there is something so extraordinary as to constitute a genuine emergency as required under Standing Order 30(7).

To reiterate, while the member raises a serious matter – this is a serious matter – the chair does not consider it to be of such urgency to warrant postponing the business of the Assembly this afternoon as it appears that the business of the Assembly this afternoon will be exactly what the motion is all about.

So the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a Standing Order 42 application.

head: 3:20 Motions under Standing Order 42

Motion of Nonconfidence

Mr. Mason:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta does not have confidence in the government because it has failed to adequately plan for the infrastructure, housing, education, health, and environmental needs of the province in a period of rapid growth.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An SO 42 application allows a motion in case of urgent and pressing necessity to be made without notice under Standing Order 39. To proceed, the motion must receive unanimous consent of the House.

I believe that this is an urgent and pressing necessity. The government has failed to provide even a minimum level of governance to this province. Its competence is also extremely minimal.

The government seems genuinely surprised that there are pressures created by economic growth in this province and has not taken adequate steps to prepare the province and protect the people of this province from those pressures.

Many Albertans have been put into an extremely precarious position because on this government's watch Alberta has been burdened by a growing infrastructure deficit, economic distortions which threaten housing supports, and the government has played politics with our health care and our schools. From Fort McMurray to Medicine Hat working families and municipal leaders have been warning of impending crises in our environment, our school boards, and our hospitals.

In the area of infrastructure the lack of adequate planning is evident, particularly highway 63 and highway 19.

Earlier this week in the area of housing, mayors from seven communities made a plea for housing support. They identified a need for \$20 million to resolve the crisis. Mr. Speaker, just last year the count of homeless persons found 3,436 homeless people in Calgary. There have been rental increases as high as \$1,000 per month in Calgary, and the average rent in Fort McMurray is \$1,500 per month for a two-bedroom apartment.

The Alberta School Boards Association in the area of education estimates that base funding to accommodate salary increases for teachers has fallen short by \$48 million over the last three years and \$13 million in the last year. The ASBA estimates that \$1.2 billion...

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. With respect, the purpose now is to seek the approval of the members, not to give the debate. Once you get the approval of the members, then we'll recognize the hon. member to really give it the shot. So brevity right now is kind of important.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in the area of health, wellness, and environment I would argue that the situation that has developed in our province requires a debate on this issue. We need to see whether or not the people of Alberta support this government or whether this House supports this government. In my view we ought to have the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the house to agree to debate this motion because in this very short session there will be no opportunity to thoroughly consider the major public policy issues facing this province. Indeed, with the exception of some private members' business on Monday, the only matter the government is bringing forward to debate is a patchwork budget designed to cover over the lack of its vision. There is no real opportunity for debate on a wide range of issues facing the people of this province. The shortcomings of this government are increasingly evident to all people.

To conclude, I would argue on behalf of working people and their families that there is a very urgent need to find out what, if any, plans this government has to ensure orderly and reasonably paced long-term growth and that this remedial sitting of the Assembly will not permit any other opportunity to have such a debate. Mr. Speaker, it's my submission that we need to debate this motion. This government has lost the moral authority to govern. It has abjectly failed to provide for the needs of this province, and it ought to have done so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The chair would like to acknowledge to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that he provided adequate notice, which was very important. It's a courtesy and appreciated.

Hon. members, under Standing Order 42(1), unanimous consent of the Assembly is required in order for us to proceed.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving a number of motions relevant to the supplementary supply estimates, I wish to remind the House that I provided the government's 2006-07 quarterly budget report for the first quarter to all MLAs yesterday morning. I also made this report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act.

I now wish to table the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates. These will provide additional spending authority to 15 departments of the government. When passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$1.37 billion in voted expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$149 million in voted capital investment, and \$16 million in voted nonbudgetary disbursements.

Mr. Speaker, when a second or subsequent set of estimates is tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires an amended fiscal plan. The quarterly budget report serves as the amended fiscal plan.

I'm also tabling the first-quarter activity report describing the major achievements of our government during that period. Also being tabled is the first-quarter update for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

head: **Government Motions**

24. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 24 carried]

25. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund shall be two days.

The Speaker: This motion is a nondebatable motion.

[Government Motion 25 carried]

head: 3:30 **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Supplementary Supply Estimates 2006-07
General Revenue Fund**

Health and Wellness

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Today I'm here to request additional support for our health regions in providing essential services to Albertans. While we've made great improvements in providing a quality and effective health care system, there are many pressure points facing us, some that have been mentioned today.

Before I discuss the specifics of supplementary estimates, I would like to provide an overview of the state of our health system, including some of our challenges and innovations that we're employing to be proactive and forward thinking as we address them not only for today but for the future.

For the first time ever this past spring the Alberta Health and Wellness budget surpassed the \$10 billion mark. The approved health budget as it exists for 2006-07 is \$10.3 billion, an increase of \$735 million, or 7.7 per cent, over last year. Today's supplementary estimate will put us over the \$10.5 billion mark. We've the highest per capita spending of all the provinces. Today Health and Wellness spending accounts for 36 per cent of the government's total expense in 2006 and '07.

Nearly two-thirds of the Health and Wellness budget is being provided in operating grants to health authorities, and that is a good thing, Mr. Speaker, because it means that Albertans are benefiting directly from health service providers, technology, and treatments. Every hour we spend more than \$1.2 million to operate Alberta's health care system.

In our budget this year health authority funding was allocated to address population growth and annual inflation costs ranging from 4.9 per cent for Chinook regional health authority to 8.3 per cent for Northern Lights health region.

We're investing in the right places to meet our growing and changing population, and we're excited in the province about Calgary's new Children's hospital, which is the first built in Canada in over 20 years. We're proud of the Mazankowski Heart Institute, which holds great promise for improving health outcomes and is attracting interest from top health professionals.

Infrastructure is important to building a strong public health system. Seven hundred and forty-eight million will be spent on health capital this year, including \$672 million in capital grants to health authorities.

Spending on the 2006-2009 capital plan will increase by 74 per cent over the previous three-year plan, to \$2.9 billion. This includes \$2.5 billion for health facility projects, including the Alberta bone and joint institute in Calgary, the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute in Edmonton as well as health facilities in a number of communities. These projects will add an estimated 2,000 new beds, which by increasing capacity increases access. We recognize that the additional beds will mean additional operating costs. For 2006-07 the additional cost is over \$14 million, and this additional funding will help address that.

We have allocated \$1.88 billion to physician services. This allocation includes \$75 million for alternate payment plans to allow academic physicians to focus more time on research, education, and delivering speciality care to Albertans and \$70 million for primary care initiatives. Now, Mr. Speaker, the primary care initiatives as they grow are a very strong example of how we're stretching resources, improving scope of practice and the quality of care Albertans receive.

If you've read our recently updated health policy framework, you'll be surprised to see that there are now 26 primary care networks operating in Alberta communities, involving 550 physicians and providing services to more than 700,000 patients, over a quarter of Alberta's population. The primary care initiative has led to 24/7 access to primary health care services and will be a new model to lead the future of primary care in Alberta.

That health policy document also identifies that 800 physicians practise under the ARP agreement, allowing for flexibility and improved service. We're being innovative in this province to attract and retain health care professionals and are reaping the benefits. Over the past five years we've had the highest net increase in physicians, 800 in all, more than any province in Canada.

Of course, I must also mention the hip and knee replacement project, which decreased wait times for orthopedic surgery from 47 weeks to five weeks and will be a model to reduce wait times for other surgeries and procedures. We're doing a lot of things right.

However, we must continue to invest in other improvements. We've approved regulations to allow pharmacists to prescribe some drug treatments. Mr. Speaker, something they will be looking at modifying and accommodating as much as possible are the regulation requests, as they table those later this fall, by the addition of other health professionals to assist in the definition of the final standards. These regulations fall under the Health Professions Act, and overall it's a strategy to make the best use of health professionals.

We'll continue expanding our electronic health record so that patient information will be available to health professions by 2008 from all health authority regions. Regional health authorities will also be required to report how their mental health plans are addressing mental health services.

We've set priorities to address other demands. Managing growing costs in emerging technologies and pharmaceuticals, we're working with our partners to ensure that we have the right mix of providers to meet our system needs.

What are our system pressures? Well, we're blessed with a healthy economy, and that's attracting people from all over the world. Recent numbers suggest that 90,000 people have moved to our province in the past year, a huge increase from the mid-90s. Our prosperity, though, remains a challenge to the quality of our health system. With changing demographics, people bringing their aging population with them to accommodate the needs of grandparents and great-grandparents, currently 10 per cent of Alberta's population is 65 years of age and over, and this percentage is expected to increase to 13 per cent by 2016 and to 20 per cent by 2030. The province's population continues to shift from rural to urban centres, with one of the highest population growth rates in Canada at approximately 1.5 per cent per year.

Other challenges include the cost of emerging technologies and pharmaceuticals, workforce shortage expectations, increased health spending, broad public health risks, mental health issues and challenges, and addiction issues. I can't stress too much the fact that Albertans expect a high quality of health, and it is one of the reasons why, Mr. Speaker, we spend more on health than any other province in the country.

Over the next 10 years regional health authorities will be required to recruit 54,000 new workers. The Alberta Medical Association recently reported that the health system needs 1,100 more physicians right now, and this summer we've seen health regions struggling to maintain service in the face of staff shortage and increasing demands. The Northern Lights health region continues to cope with more than 150 staff vacancies caused by a highly competitive job market in the Fort McMurray area. Some regions have temporarily

closed emergency rooms, ICUs, and surgical units to deal with staff shortages. This week the Calgary health region announced that it'll be conducting an external review of its emergency care services, which are seeing huge volume increases year over year. We are concerned, and we need to take even more action.

There is no question that we face enormous challenges. We are fortunate here in Alberta to be in a position to address these challenges. Health and Wellness is requesting \$262 million in supplementary estimates for 2006-07. Additional operating funding totalling \$112 million will go to the nine regional health authorities and the Cancer Board to address cost pressures and the impact of the licensed practical nurses' mediated settlement. In addition, funds totalling \$150 million will be used by the RHAs and Alberta Cancer Board for diagnostic and medical equipment. The operating funding represents an additional 2 per cent budget increase, bringing the overall operating increase that the health authorities will receive from an average of over 6 per cent a year to just over 8 per cent, for a total of \$6 billion to the health authorities.

Approving this supplementary funding will help ensure that Albertans continue enjoying the best health system in the country and give confidence to health providers that we are indeed not in crisis.

The RHA deficits that have been projected. Well, Mr. Speaker, business plans for 2006-07 revealed that a \$210 million deficit was projected for 10 health authorities, the exception being the Cancer Board, which projected a balanced operating budget. Even with the additional funding of \$112 million, only Chinook, Aspen, and the Cancer Board are projected to be in a surplus position at the end of the year. I should point out, however, that even if the health authorities' operating budgets are increased to an average of 8 per cent, the allocation is still below what the health regions have requested for this year. The overall average increase requested by the health regions was 16.5 per cent.

Operational funds will be used for such things as recruitment and retention, utility expenditures, and other general operating expenses. Funds have been assigned to the regions on a population-based formula, so you'll note that the Northern Lights health region, which includes Fort McMurray, will receive the largest percentage, 10.5 per cent in 2006-07, with the rest receiving between 7.4 per cent and 8.8 per cent in total operating funds for 2006-07.

3:40

Questions about the shadow population in Fort McMurray are not relevant when we're talking operational dollars because as people receive health care services, whether they are in Fort McMurray or in Calgary or if they live in Red Deer, the money follows them. There are transfers between regions and indeed between jurisdictions beyond our provincial borders.

The additional operating funding will mean that the nine health regions receive an average increase of 8.1 per cent, which will go a considerable distance in helping them address their financial challenges.

Thirty-one million will be provided to RHAs and the Alberta Cancer Board to address the impact of the LPN mediated settlement. The new collective agreement is retroactive to April 1, 2004, and extends to March 31, 2008. The allocation is based on the number of LPN FTEs reported in each health authority for 2004-05. There are 2,900 LPNs registered in Alberta, and this is an important part of our health professional delivery system as the LPNs are recognized for their ability to make a valuable contribution to the changing needs of Albertans, particularly in long-term care.

The capital funding of \$150 million will be distributed to the nine health authorities for medical equipment. The health authorities will

use the money for the capital priorities. This money is earmarked to purchase a range of diagnostic and medical equipment which will include MRIs, CT scanners, nuclear medicine equipment as well as surgical, patient, and safety equipment. Each RHA prioritizes their region's equipment purchases. The funding will then help overall access to new or replacement state-of-the-art diagnostic imaging, laboratory, medical, and surgical equipment that can result in reduced wait times, earlier detection, and more effective treatment outcomes. The capital funding will ensure that health authorities continue replacing medical equipment that has reached the end of its useful life.

When we visited the Children's hospital, we noted how much efficiency can be gained by diagnostics that reach all parts of the hospital through new and updated medical technology. This will save time. This will save money. This will save patients. This will save emergency capacity. This equipment can also be purchased any time with this money in the fiscal year. Accounting for the funds that will be spent under the grant is part of the quarterly financial reporting.

Eligible equipment is in four categories: diagnostic imaging, diagnostic and therapeutic, medical/surgical, patient safety. Not only is equipment important in improving access and outcomes; it's a very visible outward sign of how we put patients' needs at the centre of our health system. This capital funding is also important because new technologies can enhance efficiencies in the health system. The regions will be able to use this money to both replace existing and purchase new technologies they don't previously have.

Mr. Chair, this government wants to strengthen our public health care system, and that takes investment. While we face many challenges and cost pressures, we are in a position, a delightful opportunity here, to fund solutions and to find solutions. The supplementary funding for the health authorities will help fulfill this goal and will help Albertans to be assured that they have the strongest health system possible.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity, the very brief opportunity, I'm going to get to speak to the issue of the supplementary supply health funding in the province of Alberta.

Let me start by saying that I appreciate what the minister is saying, that the government intends to do well and that they are looking at investment, but from where I'm sitting, that's not good enough. This is the same government that ramped up the economy, that fired everybody on go, that whipped everyone into a frenzy, that doesn't seem to be able to cope with any kind of a planning process on any level. As a result of that, we now have an overheated economy, that the government now admits is overheated, and I maintain that there is a mismanagement of the growth in this province. Yes, we've had an enormous number of people move into the province, and some of them have been health professionals. But let's remember where we started from. This is the very same government who spent most of the '90s cut, cut, cutting in health care, blowing up hospitals, selling hospitals, particularly in Calgary. Now what do we have in Calgary? A capacity problem. Now we're trying to build new beds and get new spaces in there.

I look at this and say: where's the planning? Where's the forethought? Where's the foresight in this? If the government, with all of the resources at their disposal, cannot figure out how to plan in advance on this, we are truly sunk, and that does seem to be exactly what the situation is. They lay off all the nurses. They tell

them rudely to leave and to go to the States and to get out, and then we're paying signing bonuses to get them all back because we can't get enough health professionals back into our system right now. So it's a situation of money, but more than that, it's a situation of planning. It's possible that in this resource-rich province we could get enough money back into the system. It's still not going to solve our problem because we haven't done the appropriate planning that goes with it. You need to plan for growth as well as planning for a reduction. I don't see that kind of consciousness coming from this government.

There are a number of issues that come up continually here, and I'm still not seeing them addressed by way of planning and policy from what the minister has just said. I took notes on a number of things, and I'll refer as I go along.

We have a huge problem with health workforce, and I remind everyone that that is not just about doctors and nurses. It's also about technicians. It's about physiotherapists. It's about speech therapists. It's about counsellors. It's all of our health professionals that make our system work. We particularly have enormous pressures in Medicine Hat, in Grande Prairie, in Peace River, in Westlock. All of those have cited very specifically health workforce problems, and that has led to closures of various units and various beds in the locations that I just mentioned.

I've talked about the huge infrastructure capacity problem in Calgary but also a workforce capacity problem. Over the summer what we had happening in Calgary was operating rooms were left vacant. There was no business going on there because of staff nursing shortages. Fifteen beds were closed at the Foothills hospital renal unit from June until mid-September, the entire summer. Also, we were cut back by diagnostic procedures. About a thousand exams were not proceeded with because of a reduction in hours due once again to staff. We had mental health beds that were closed for a month over the summer: all of this in the Calgary region. It's not just about pouring more money in there because, frankly, there aren't the health professionals to hire if we had all the money in the world right now.

Again we look to the government and say: where's your planning on this? How many spaces are you going to open up? Questions today for the Minister of Advanced Education saying: where is this plan of how we're going to get these people on stream? I want to also look beyond that and go: okay, if we get enough health professionals in here within, let's say, five or six years, which is what it's going to take, what is your planning for year 10, for four or five years beyond that? Do we need to keep increasing at that same rate, or should we be starting to draw back? Government is the only one that can do this kind of planning. Private health delivery services are not going to do this kind of planning and thinking. That's not their job. They're there to make money. It's for the government to do, and frankly the government hasn't done it.

The other big issue we hear is wait-lists, wait-lists in ERs, which I still refer to as the canary in the mine shafts. If we've got trouble in our ERs, we've got serious trouble because that for a lot of people is the entry point into the system.

We've got some advocates that are here with us today that have been generous enough to bring their own stories forward. I'm referring to the Lundys, who stayed with us through question period. They're still here in debate. That's darn hard to do, to put your personal life on display to make a point. And this is far beyond their personal situation. They're trying hard to make sure that this is going to improve the system and move beyond them, and my thanks to them for that work.

We've got wait-lists in the ERs. We've got wait-lists in things like surgery. I mean, when we're closing surgery units because we

don't have enough staff or enough beds to do it, that's going to back up everything else that's happening. That's why we end up with people in the hallways in ER. We can't actually get them into a surgery ward and fix whatever their problem is if we take them through ER.

3:50

Lastly, I want to talk about primary care and family doctors, which is still a huge area of concern. All these new people that are coming can't get primary care doctors, family physicians. That does put them into the ERs, and we've already discussed the problem of there not being enough capacity in our ERs to handle that.

You know, I've been health critic now for just about two years, and I'm still hearing the same problems today that I did almost 24 months ago, and I don't see great solutions in place. I'm hearing the same problems. I'm hearing that there's a crisis. I'm hearing that there's not enough health workforce people. Twenty-four months later I'm hearing exactly the same things. I'm not seeing solutions to the problems. I'm not seeing the action that's going to move us past that.

The minister mentioned electronic health records. I'm concerned that we're falling behind on that. I know that the Premier attempted to sort of artificially jump-start that and put a new deadline in mind, but I'm really wondering whether we're going to be able to achieve it.

I would ask the minister to please not blame the seniors anymore. I'm really tired of hearing about how our health care system is going to be brought crashing down by the fact that we've got a bunch of people turning 65. That's a really cheap way out. It's blaming the victim, and it's simply not true. As a matter of fact, if you look around this room, I would bet you money that there's a number of people approaching 65 or, in fact, over 65 who would argue very strongly that they're not going to cost the health care system any money at all. They try hard to look after themselves, to be fit. We should be in better shape: we've had the advantage of nutrition, we've had the advantage of housing and heat in our houses, and we've had the advantage of medications and medical treatment to get us past things that would have killed our parents' or our grandparents' generation. Please quit blaming the seniors for this.

I find that it's the choices of this government that have created and caused the shortages and the pressures, and I don't find it acceptable that the delegated administrative organizations that are in place here, which is the health regions, are supposed to shoulder the burden for this. You have a health region like Calgary that says: "This is what we need. It's a very good argument. We're dealing with all of the back-capacity that was taken away from us plus the influx of new people. We need an 11.2 per cent increase." I would like an explanation from the minister why the government gives them 6 per cent and something. Why? There was no explanation from the government as to what the missing money was supposed to do. I say to the government: tell me why. What are they supposed to do with that difference? You just say no, but you give them no explanation for that. At least it's not a public explanation, and I think it should be. I want to know why that's happening.

Specifically, I'd like a breakdown from the minister on how the money for medical equipment will be spent, and she of course can provide that in writing. I'm wondering what equipment is required and, specifically, if she can give me that breakdown by region. Also, an idea of when this new equipment would be in operation. If we're buying it now, will we see it in place within three months, or are we on some kind of a waiting list and it's two years from now? With that, of course, do we have the professionals that are required to run \$150 million worth of new equipment, or do we get that

equipment in place, and once again, like the unused operating rooms, there's nobody to run the equipment and it just sits there? What's the plan? Let me see how that's going to work hand in hand.

I'm also wondering why this money wasn't included in the spring 2006 budget. This can't be new news, and if it is, I've got to question where the government is getting their information. What were they hoping for, this kind of windfall money that they were then going to use to fund the system? It's that kind of stop and start that's creating the inconsistency in planning that we have here.

I would really like to see a very detailed plan about how the health workforce training is going to work out. I'd like to see how many new spaces are going to be created in dentistry and pharmacy and in training LPNs, PCAs. I want to see all of this laid out and exactly where those spaces are going to be created and when, at what facilities, and how they're going to be funded by the government. We just get this vague stuff but nothing specific. We must know how many people are needed. Health sciences can tell you. AMA can tell you how many docs. They want 1,100 docs. You know, those numbers are out there. How is the government going to meet that, and how long is it going to take to meet it? What are we looking at in terms of scope of practice? The Liberal opposition has been suggesting that you look at things like nurse anaesthetists to help out in the operating rooms to be able to move some of that surgery. What kind of training programs are available there? How fast could we move people through? Can we fast-track that?

I mean, this is what Albertans cannot understand. How can we be so wealthy – the money is just spurting out of the ground, you know, and the government is hiding it all over the place in all kinds of special funds, and they've still got a four point something billion dollar planned surplus that's coming – and Albertans can't get in to see a doctor in the ER for 10 hours? That simply does not make sense to them. What is it that we want for our people in Alberta? If we want that kind of excellent system, then let's do it. A big part of that is the training. It's possible to fast-track training. Why aren't we doing it? Why aren't we attracting people from across the country to come here and do a fast-track training program? I can't get numbers out of people. I can't get an indication of institutions. Why? If you're really thinking about it, you should have that stuff.

I would like to know how the \$31 million for auxiliary nursing salary adjustments is being allocated.

The minister talked a little bit about LPNs. I'm wondering if this could have been planned for earlier, or was it in the pipeline already, and now that you've got the money, you can do it? What if you didn't get the money? What was going to happen then?

I'm very much aware of the very short amount of time that's available. We basically have two hours today to debate, and there are some five or six ministries up. In consideration of my colleagues I will take my seat, most reluctantly as I would have liked to go through in detail a number of the health regions that are experiencing severe pressures. They've been in touch with me. They'd like questions asked. I'm going to have to look for another opportunity in order to give my ND colleague and, indeed, my Liberal colleagues an opportunity to debate other issues. I'm most angry about that, actually, because I don't think it's serving Albertans well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Just on one point. It's my understanding that the debate on Health is not just simply for this two hours. It will go on at the pleasure of this Assembly over this next week. I just want to make that observation and say that, in deference to the hon. member, many of the points that the hon. member has

raised will be things that we will provide commentary in writing as she has requested and in order to make sure that we properly follow through.

I'd just like to make one observation. When we account for changing demographics and note the increase in the band of population that is over 65, we do so prudently because we want to acknowledge that on an annualized spending, they spend more. We spend more as we get older. It's a simple fact of life. So acknowledging that is not blaming those individuals. It's celebrating the fact that we have them here but also recognizing the need to fund that. The Aon report in its content identified quite clearly that that is prudent to do because the aging population will begin to catch us as early as 2015. We have to be planned and prepared for that, and I know the hon. member would want us to do that.

In deference to the members opposite and others in the Assembly who may wish to raise questions or ask for clarification, I will sit down and allow them to come forward with their points of view.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's interesting that we're here in this session, and again I would like to talk about what I call bad budgeting. Think about it, to this minister and to others. We bring forward a budget in March. We pass it in June. Here we are in August, you know, passing another budget, a funding increase of \$262 million. Now, I'm not suggesting that the money isn't needed. It is needed. But for the life of me I cannot understand why we couldn't be doing these things when we brought our budgets in in March. Our budgets that we bring in the spring now, Mr. Chairman, basically mean nothing. It means nothing. You know, when we bring in – what? – \$1.3 billion in capital funds, this is more than some provinces' budgets, and here we are dealing with this in two days.

4:00

I would just say to this government and to this minister specifically about this \$262 million, putting \$150 million to medical equipment: couldn't we possibly have foreseen that back when we were passing the budget? Eighty-one million for health authority operations. It's like the schools. They were saying: we've got a problem. Why couldn't we have seen it back then? And \$31 million for auxiliary nursing salary adjustments. Why could we not have foreseen that these things were occurring, Mr. Chairman?

You know, the reality is and the government's excuse is that the economy is booming and all the rest of it. Well, that's true, but it's this government's economic strategies that are pushing that. They want to get in the tar sands as fast as they can, rip it out as fast as they can, and get into the American market. Well, it shouldn't surprise us under those circumstances that we have people moving here. They talk about 90,000, but surely that should have been part of the planning in health care – I'll talk about health care specifically – when you bring in an economic strategy. That's what you plan. You plan for the infrastructure: the social infrastructure, the health infrastructure. All these things should have been part of it, but this government seems to just sort of move ahead and say: "Well, good. We're planning. Go in and do what you can in the tar sands, and we'll see what happens after that."

We're starting to see what's happening in health care. We mentioned in the emergency debate that we've got serious problems. They're not going to get that much better, even with this money, unless we change some things around. That planning should have been done before, and I think the minister knows this. Now we're playing catch-up, and it's more expensive, and we're trying to play

catch-up in our capital costs. With an overheated economy we're paying a lot more. So when we're going to have an economic strategy, the economic strategy should include the social infrastructure and the physical infrastructure. It hasn't been done, and now we've got serious problems.

Frankly, to the minister: all the rose-coloured glasses in the world can't take away this particular problem. Yes, we're spending more money. Yes, we are, but the reality is that the province is growing that much faster. It's like we've talked about in housing or education, the rest of it. So it doesn't matter what numbers you give us and say that we spend the most in Canada. That's irrelevant. It's how we begin to adapt and whether we need more money or not and how we adjust it. I think the minister knows this.

As I say, Mr. Chairman, we have some very serious problems in health care. I noticed that the minister in her remarks alluded to all the doctors and how things were coming along and that we're getting more doctors moving into the province. Well, I just noticed the president's letter from the Alberta Medical Association – I'm sure the minister has looked at this – that just came out on August 16 from the president, Dr. Lee, and what he is saying is very scary in this particular documentation. They're saying that in the first report in 2000 they predicted "an immediate shortage of 333 physicians and predicted a shortage of 1,329 physicians by 2005." Now they're saying that "the current estimated shortage is 1,088 physicians with a predicted shortage of 1,541 by 2010."

The minister says that there are more doctors moving here. That's true, but we're falling behind, and more of these doctors are retiring. So we have serious problems here, and the president's letter has indicated that. They go on:

Alberta has an average net increase of just over 200 doctors annually for the past five years. Even with this level of growth continuing, and all other factors remaining the same, Alberta will still be 1,500 physicians short by 2010. If we hope to address the predicted shortages, Alberta will [have] to add 500 new physicians per year for the next five years.

That's the result of a boom economy, and that's why we had to plan this to go along with it. That's the AMA saying that; it's not me. So that's the reality of what we're facing.

I would just like to say very quickly, Mr. Chair – and I won't go on long – about the framework that was announced on the website. Now, most of it, good. Primary care, fine. We've talked about this before. But you can understand our skepticism when we see on page 21 an expanded role for privatized surgical facilities. How will that make the system cheaper, when we put the profit motive in, rather than the alternate?

The other things you talk about, great. Communities and different delivery systems, great. But we always worry, because we know where it's coming from, that this is another move in a stealth sort of way to move into private health care. Why would we even mention that? Get on without doing it. The public told us very clearly: "I'm glad that we backed off on the dual systems. I'm glad we backed off on the so-called private insurance." But I also notice that on page 23 that could include the delisting of future medical services that may be medically necessary. I know it's going through a process, but excuse me if we're skeptical because we know where this government has been coming from, that that could lead, again, to more private insurance.

I recollect the minister saying that she would bring this new framework to the Legislature in the spring and that there would be full public consultation. There wasn't even a press release. We happened to catch it because of somebody from the nurses' union telling us that we should be concerned about this. All of a sudden it was on the website. I think that we deserve better than that in terms of bringing this forward.

As I said, Mr. Chairman, there are a lot of good things in that framework. The minister talked about primary care. Excellent. I think we have to go further in primary care to more of the community clinics, health professionals working much closer together. There are all sorts of things we have to look at there.

Mr. Chair, there are some other things – I'll be very quick about this – that we have to do to bring more physicians on. We could eliminate differential fees at medical schools. Certainly, we need more educational institutions. Alberta lags behind the national average in postsecondary spaces. We have to target rural shortages by creating a provincial work experience and internship program in rural areas. We can encourage recent graduates to practise in rural Alberta with expanded student loan forgiveness. We have to do something about more foreign doctors, especially in rural areas. There are all sorts of things that we can do, but it has to be done within the public system.

The things that the minister brags about are correct. She's right to brag about the changes to knee/hip, but that was done through the public system, as the minister is well aware. We should be concentrating on doing some of the things that are being done, but concentrate on those and not get carried away again in this whole privatization. It doesn't work, it's more expensive, and the minister knows that.

I'll tell you, Mr. Chairman, just in conclusion, that we are going to be playing catch-up, like we are in so many areas, because of the economic strategy, the way it is right now. These problems that we've talked about, the hospital closures and the serious things that are occurring in the hospitals, are going to continue even with this amount of money going in because, as predicted in the thing, we have 90,000 more people. We'd better do some things fast. It may require more money, but it's not just money. I think that rather than worrying about privatization, getting into that whole debate, we should start to fix the problems in the public system and look at some innovative ways that are occurring in other parts of the world. I don't know where the bulk buying of prescription drugs is that we've talked about compared to New Zealand. I know that the minister said in the past that they were looking at that. Where is that and a number of things that we have to do?

Rose-coloured glasses aren't going to solve this problem, and talking about how much is being spent is not going to solve the problem. It may be that we need more. When you've got 90,000, as in I think the Minister of Finance's press release, when you've got the size of Red Deer moving into Alberta all the time, then it's not relevant to compare what's happening in Saskatchewan or Manitoba and the rest of it in terms of numbers.

I would just conclude, Mr. Chairman, by saying that I believe that there is a crisis not only in health care but in other areas, and this government is playing catch-up. The fact that we're having this session shows it. You know, as I said, bring in a budget in March, pass it in May, and here we are back asking for \$1.3 billion in August. That's some way to manage the farm.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:10

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, I am tempted to reference a very old movie where the hon. member opposite and myself were part of the same organization, and I remember the school board one day examined a budget. I was part of the board at the time, and they looked at an allocation that was provided by the superintendent of schools that everybody questioned. They said: what is this amount of money? He referenced a conversation I've never forgotten. He said: "Well, you know, it's like if you have a tractor that you hope will get you through the season, but it might not get you through the

season, so you put a little money away in case that tractor breaks down sometime during the year and you have to spend the money. So it's just there as a safeguard, so that if you need it, you can spend it."

What he was really referencing was an allocation that was provided for collective bargaining increases but wasn't necessarily identified for collective bargaining increases. It was some type of contingency. I have long rued the day that I moved away from places that had the capacity to put contingencies in. Health ministers across this country will tell you that the blood, sweat, and tears that go into getting a health budget allocation which they truly believe will fit that cloth that they have to provide for their constituents and their constituencies is just a battle. I look at the percentage increases all across this country. They range from 3.5 per cent, 5 per cent, 7 per cent. Somebody got 12 per cent, but the way they calculate their budgets is different than the way that we do, and you have to take a look at what base it's building on. I can assure the hon. member opposite that if we were able as health ministers to budget what we define as our list of wants, we may still not accommodate what we've had this year in the growing population and some of the particular challenges in some of the regions.

I also reference from my own constituency the boom/bust that happens in an economy, where all of a sudden when it's boiling, you need things now, and you may not have had the capacity to provide them in time to get those services there for when you see the whites of the eyes of the people. That is a very big difficulty that I think we have to wrestle with and hopefully overcome in the best way possible.

But your remarks on those points are both understood and empathized with, and as a health minister, if I was any other health minister in the country talking to you, I would probably say the same things. I would only rue the day, if I was in another jurisdiction, that I didn't have the ability to pump up the economy, if you will, for health care services like we are in Alberta. So we're truly advantaged.

I do want to make a couple of observations about the health policy framework, which has been referenced. Now, in April, when we made the announcement that we were not going to proceed with private health insurance, that we were not going to allow doctors to work in both systems, we emphasized that the workforce was one of the issues we wanted to both attract and retain. We took Getting on with Better Health Care, the existing health policy framework, and put it in one document, and we made this as an editorial release of something we had announced back in April. We announced this, Mr. Chairman, because we knew that Albertans wanted to find out what we were going to do. So this framework document is not a drastic departure from anything we've said. In fact, we listened to Albertans, explained our ideas, and released a document that was the response to theirs.

On delisting services, as mentioned by the hon. member opposite, there's not one mention of delisting services. What it does describe to Albertans is the decision-making process that's been in place for over a year and helps ensure responsible spending, particularly because of the use of the Alberta health technology decision process. That decision process is important to do the clinical and scientific review we need.

One of the hon. members opposite in the spring raised Enterra Therapy, for example, as one of the things to deal with gastroparesis, and I was overwhelmed by the petitions that I received and the letters: oh, please, relieve us with this electrical stimulator to look after persistent nausea and vomiting. In actual fact the health technology group with a group of experts was not able to validate that the scientific evidence was there to prove that this would be a

valid type of technology to deploy. In fact, nowhere else in Canada do they fund this particular device.

So I'm saying that this identification of a process for a proper review of drug evaluation and therapeutics was inserted into the health policy framework to give Albertans an assurance of how the process would work when they ask for new drugs, new technologies. There has to be a process so that it can't be something that could be whimsical or political in evaluation.

The second point on the use of private surgical facilities. Well, it's common knowledge that HRC has been providing services to Calgary for hip and knee procedures, and a number of procedures are performed in a private facility but publicly funded. Once again, on page 21, for the use of those facilities we wanted to make sure that we identified precisely that they must be accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, must have ministerial approval, and have a contract with a regional authority to be valid. We spent a lot of time working on that and felt that the insert of this was important because on an almost weekly basis people discuss this kind of procedure.

Now we'll be able to reference a document that points out what the lay of the land is. Hopefully it won't change that much, at least in my tenure, but I note that the new president of the CMA has already raised the spectre that there may be changes that will be contemplated by doctors across the country, so we'll see what debate follows through. But I intend to do nothing of the sort with the mandate we have in this government, and we certainly don't intend, as the member hinted at, that we might govern by stealth. I'm much preferring us to be open and declare our intentions, and hopefully we are doing that this afternoon.

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to participate in the discussion? The next issue for consideration is the Department of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chairman, I think we would proceed with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development instead at this time.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

The Chair: I recognize the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development I will just indicate the following. There is a need for an additional \$715,000 to defend Alberta in aboriginal litigation matters. Alberta has been named a defendant in aboriginal lawsuits containing claims of more than \$125 billion in damages. I'm not sure if that reads billion or million; I can't quite tell from the note here, but we'll clarify that quickly. It does say billion, quite clearly, from one standpoint.

In any event, this litigation is not reflective of the relationship between Alberta and First Nations, which is both positive and very much strengthening. However, three actions are being pursued actively by lawyers for the plaintiffs, and in these claims two attempts are there to set aside treaty land entitlement settlements and to challenge the validity of Treaty 8. Also, there's one attempt to challenge the validity of both Treaty 7 and the natural resources transfer agreement. Now, in addition to claims for monetary damages from Alberta of approximately \$35 billion, which, I guess, jibes with the \$125 billion I referenced earlier, these active cases claim aboriginal title to the entire province and challenge the validity of every resource disposition issued in Alberta's history.

Over the past seven years expenditures in defending litigation have been contained within the ministry's budget. The combined

cost of fees and disbursements for outside counsel and the cost of research, document collection and management have averaged about \$500,000 per year, but the increased pace of the three active cases has increased expenditures for 2006-07 quite substantially. These developments are either mandated by the courts or they are in response to initiatives by the plaintiffs, and the result is an increase in litigation costs from \$500,000 to more than \$1.2 million.

Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development as well as Finance, Energy, Sustainable Resource Development, and Justice are co-operating in the preparation of a longer range plan to resource aboriginal litigation issues. This proposal will be presented as part of our 2007-2008 business planning process, and accordingly the request is for one-time funding of \$715,000, which I would on behalf of the minister request favourable consideration thereto.

Thank you.

4:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In light of the fact that I have a number of questions which, it's unlikely, would get answered in this situation right now, I would like to submit some questions to the minister in writing at a later date and hope I will get a response to them. In light of the fact that we have many, many more millions of dollars to debate before 5:30, I will just submit my questions in writing later on.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am just again going to be somewhat brief as my colleagues have suggested that we have lots of things to do and a very short period of time in which to do them. However, I don't want to pass up the opportunity to just make some brief comments on this situation.

It's unfortunate that the scope of these lawsuits has embraced basically almost all of the land area and resource base of the province, but then I believe and I think that it's increasingly obvious that due to improper planning by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development over a long period of time, things have come to this crisis situation where people are seeking recourse in the courts to provide for basic services for aboriginal people across this province.

I've expressed the same sentiments in the past, and I will again, that we only have to look as far as the terrible overrepresentation of aboriginal people in our prisons in this province, look at the overrepresentation of aboriginal people on the rolls of our social service programs and health care, low success rates in education, and so on and so forth, to see that we are living still in the direct shadow of the mishandling and mismanagement of aboriginal affairs in this province and across western Canada for these past hundred years.

So living within that larger shadow of history, I think that it's appropriate that this ministry might use this opportunity in the supplementary estimates to in fact try to address more directly these glaring and embarrassing and tragic problems that we see in our aboriginal community in regard to overrepresentation in the prison population, the health issues, high unemployment, et cetera.

I just wanted to be on the public record, and I will have questions specifically for the minister, when she is available, in regard to this court case, but I do want to be on the record and say that, you know, this unfortunate court case is a direct result of mismanagement of aboriginal affairs in this province. Until we address these injustices in a comprehensive and honest and thorough way, then we can only see the problems getting worse and the solutions becoming more complex.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. minister of aboriginal affairs.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would just say on behalf of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development that answers will be provided either in writing or later during the debate during Committee of Supply or perhaps during the anticipated second reading, committee stage, and so on of the actual Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act once it is tabled.

Community Development

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe we do have one of our ministerial colleagues who will address the issue of supplementary estimates on behalf of the Minister of Community Development. I see that he is prepared to do that, so I would cede the floor to him for that purpose.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy on behalf of the hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Minister of Community Development I just thought I would comment a little bit on the supplementary estimates of his department, just a few comments. They're receiving 15 and a half million dollars "to fund site reclamation at various historic sites and provincial parks related to environmental liabilities and expense."

Some of this funding will be directed to historical sites. For example, it will help construct a new site protection and containment system at the Turner Valley gas plant. The health and safety of the people of Turner Valley continues to be a priority for the department. They are committed to funding this new system to prevent hydrocarbons and other contaminants from moving off site to allow for their removal. They received construction tender bids on August 11 and are currently evaluating them, and they'll have a better idea of the cost once they have finished reviewing the tender submissions. They continue to monitor and work with Health and Environment and other experts to make the site safe.

With regard to provincial parks I'd just add one comment. The additional funding for parks is required for reclamation of some abandoned wells, old sewer systems, abandoned mine shafts, and old garbage sites.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the supplementary supply estimates for 2006-07. On page 24 I can see that the government is asking for an additional amount of 15-plus million dollars. Some of the money is – there's a breakdown, but it's not all of it. I can't see a clear statement here of where they are spending this money, but I have a few questions about these supplementary supply estimates.

First of all, we don't know where this money is going exactly because we don't have anything in writing, a breakdown of which department this money is going to, and why this department has failed in finding out the cost for different departments. The Community Development department this time again has failed to give us proper plans. I want to know why this department has failed in finding out, you know, any specific amount of money at budget

time. No formal confirmation of purpose of monies. The first-quarter document suggests that some of the money is for acquisition of aboriginal artifacts.

This money, \$15,537,000, is a huge amount of money, and this is nonbudgetary disbursements. Will any of this money go towards better supporting the Alberta Foundation for the Arts? Book publishers in the province are being driven out of business due to this government's lack of support, so it would be nice to hear that some of this money is going to support the arts and cultural community in Alberta. It's missing again. I know that the previous ministers keep on promising that they will give us a proper policy on support of cultural facilities. I haven't seen that so far in any of this money.

4:30

I want to know if any of this money is going towards the recently announced Glenbow ranch provincial park. I don't have the breakdown. I know the money is going towards provincial parks, but which provincial park the money is going to I don't know. I want to know if the minister can give me the breakdown on this.

Will any of this money go towards sports and recreation?

I can see on page 23 that close to \$14 million is going to cultural facilities and historical resources but not in detail which cultural facilities, which town, whereabouts. It's not clear. I would like to know where the government is spending this huge amount of money. Also, I'm interested to know because last time we saw the Alberta sports plan was in 2003, and every year the minister keeps on changing. They keep on promising that we will give to the Alberta sports plan, and so far we haven't seen any.

Once again I request the government, through Mr. Chairman, that in the future if the government is spending a huge amount of money, the priority should be sports because sports in Alberta are very much concerned with the health department. If Albertans are healthy, we will spend less money in the hospitals, so it's very important. I'm sure the government will consider this very seriously.

This year the budget has zero dollars allotted for cultural facilities and the historical resources grants. I'm really glad to see that the intention of the government in this supplementary is really good, but how do they spend money? If they just throw the money at the problems, like they did in the past in a different department, that's not acceptable to me, and it's not acceptable to my constituents. I hope this government listens and that they do the needful and give this department of cultural facilities and historical resources, you know, the money they need so that they can help Albertans to get proper attention on this matter.

I hope they are not spending money on horse racing. Last time they spent quite a huge amount of money on horse racing. I'm glad this time the government's attention is cultural facilities, parks, and protected areas as well as various historical sites and provincial parks related to the environmental liabilities. This is a good thing.

I hope the priorities of this government are more funding for the arts and humanities, the Human Rights Commission. They should promote and support Alberta sports, Olympic athletes for the year 2010 for the winter games, the Alberta comprehensive sports plan, which is due for a long, long time.

Some of the members sitting here have been Minister of Community Development some time ago, and they should make a note and suggest that the present minister initiate this matter as soon as possible and make Alberta active and healthy. As I said before, if the money is going to recreational facilities, that will help to make Albertans active and healthy and reduce the load in the hospitals and save some dollars from Alberta health care. I hope the priorities of this government are also an Alberta sports plan in the coming year.

I want the government to begin to develop a strategy that will promote and support Alberta sports as well.

I just want to know why they can't have long-term economic priorities like long-term, sustainable funding, to spend money wisely. When they make a budget, they don't show us where the money is after the budget is done, and then they always ask for an additional amount of money. This is surprising to me. I don't know how the other members feel, but this is mismanagement, I would say, and it should not be happening.

Every time the members remind them that they should mention during the budget time. We discussed the budget three months ago, and now again we are discussing here additional billions of dollars. Okay, \$1.2 billion or whatever. This is a huge amount of taxpayers' money. We should at least listen to the people who elected us. This is mismanagement.

We should improve every year, but since I was elected, I see the same routine keep coming, the same thing this government is repeating again and again, and nobody listens. I hope that if I say something, somebody listens, and they act on this and make this money useful for Albertans. [interjection] I don't know. I am just requesting everybody to listen and act accordingly because it's a huge amount of money. You're not buying a suit or socks for yourself. You're talking about billions of dollars, and, no, I don't think a majority of the members sitting here take it seriously, and they should. I read one big booklet for the last, say, 20 years, the same routine budget after budget. They keep on asking for an additional amount of money.

Mr. R. Miller: What happens if you go over budget in your constituency office?

Mr. Agnihotri: The constituency budget. Yeah, the same thing.

My question is: when will that time come when the elected officials start listening to their constituents and act accordingly? At least save some dollars for the people who elected them, who put faith in them. It's not happening.

Another of my questions is the social priorities. All socio-economic groups get benefits from Community Development, and I hope nobody is left behind. If we have an Alberta advantage and Community Development is giving grants to different communities, it's a very good idea, but I want to make sure that that advantage is for everybody. Everybody. Not a few people. It should be for everybody. I want to see the balance, which has not happened in the past. All Albertans worked hard in the past, and they deserve to be treated as anybody else. So I request once again that there should be a balance. All communities should be served properly and . . .

Mr. Bonko: Fairly.

4:40

Mr. Agnihotri: Yes, fairly because the gap between rich and poor is increasing in Alberta. I was door-knocking last month, and the majority of people are asking – some people are not fortunate enough, and they are asking me: “Where is the money for this purpose? Where is the money for this purpose?” Some people are getting the major share, and some people are unfortunate and are not receiving enough funds. How this system works I don't know. I request the members sitting here that they should take it very seriously.

We have no problem. I mean, we will sanction this additional amount of money once again. But I warn and request the Assembly to please consider that if this is happening, say, in the last 20 years, let's pledge that it should not happen next year.

Thank you very much. God bless you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just very briefly want to augment the comments that have been made by my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie. Thank you to him for being an excellent advocate for the quality-of-life areas that we find under the Department of Community Development.

No surprise to you, Mr. Chair, my advocacy and strong ties to the arts and cultural sector. When I look around at some of the other ways that this government is choosing to spend money in this province, I continue to argue for an investment in the arts for job creation but also for job retention. We have a lot of people moving to this province. We want them to stay here and become part of a stable community, to put down roots, buy houses, participate in their communities. An integral part of that is the arts and cultural sector.

We, as you have heard me say many, many times over the last 10 years, are appallingly bad at supporting our arts and culture sector in this province. I mean, essentially we're giving it the same amount of money today that we did in 1988. It hasn't been adjusted for inflation. There's a little, tiny increase that happened in the budget this year of \$3 million, but, you know, we need to go big on this one, not to double the budget to the arts but triple the budget to the arts or maybe quadruple the budget to the arts, which still isn't going to bring it over \$100 million.

When I look at how much we're subsidizing the horse-racing industry, which is a for-profit industry – yes, it employs some people – and when I look at the cultural sector and the approximately \$20 million that it's getting right now, if we turned that into \$60 million or \$80 million, the number of people that would benefit, I would argue, would far exceed that that benefits from the subsidy of the horse-racing industry, which in an annual budget from this government is now running at about \$66 million a year. I notice as part of this supplementary budget that we're talking about an additional amount not to exceed \$8.3 million. So at \$66 million plus the \$8.3 million we're well over \$70 million a year this year for the horse-racing industry, which is a private-sector industry. It's a private corporation. This government is not out of the business of being in business at all.

In comparison to that, we've got a not-for-profit sector that actually retains people and particularly those people the government professes that it's interested in retaining with education and ties to the business community, et cetera, et cetera. A couple of the things that we're really starting to hurt from in this province because of the underfunding of the arts are things like our publishing industry, our recording industry, our film industry, and our fine crafts. All of those help us to get our artwork out to others. We also need to look at touring dollars if we're trying to get our stories out and bring other people's stories back to us. We need to invest in the touring of our arts and culture sector around, both in the province and outside of the province.

So, you know, I continue to hear mouthings from the other side about how important the arts and culture sector is with absolutely no real support for it. How about the report that was done by the HRE a couple of years ago on cultural industry workers? It went nowhere. A very strong report that had all kinds of great things to say, got no support, and it just died.

There's a lot this government could be doing. I appreciate my colleague's efforts in trying to encourage the government to do that, and I will answer that as well. This is our future. This is a knowledge sector. We want to invest in arts and culture. This is going to continue to pay back for us. It's renewable, it's people centred, and it makes Alberta a much better place to be. So not just \$20 million a year, but let's take that horse-racing money and put it in there. We

could have 90 million bucks a year into the arts and cultural sector. Now you'll see something very cool happen.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make some brief comments on the supplementary estimates for Community Development. This is one of the ministries where the original budget was I think grossly undervaluing this particular ministry at least by half. I know for a fact that the minister responsible for it at the time was very, very disappointed to see this important cultural ministry undervalued, essentially, in the spring estimates.

So when I saw that we were going back to Community Development, I did flip with some anticipation to see if our arts and culture and parks sector wasn't going to be finally belatedly rewarded. But I see that, in fact, where this money is being spent is in sort of peculiar areas: where the Community Development ministry has inherited some structural problems on sites they have rather than actually on investing in human cultural development in regard to the arts and provincial parks. So I confess that I was a bit disappointed to see where the money actually went.

Also, I just wanted to make a comment briefly. Specifically, having to spend millions of dollars on the Turner Valley site I think is part of a long legacy of how we ended up picking a real lemon here with this site. The owners of the site knew that the Turner Valley historical site was in fact terribly contaminated from long use as an energy plant, so I believe that when we picked this up for a dollar or whatever the deal was, the people were happy to unload it. Now with the contamination of the Sheep River from this area we're obliged to clean up probably a very long and complicated mess that someone else made. I mean, it seems, of course, as though we are left holding the bag with this. What a shame that Community Development is having to spend such significant funds on something that otherwise could be money put to better use.

Also, when I heard that provincial parks were part of this budget change, again I was anticipating with some hope that there would be some investment in the infrastructure in regard to actual campgrounds and redeeming some recreational areas that have been left in quite significant neglect over the last 10 or 15 years. I received a number of complaints in regard to people finding campgrounds that are in obvious states of disrepair and neglect. Again, we're not seeing that money going directly to those places that need that assistance. Some areas are being fixed up, but others are being left to go to seed.

At this juncture of rapid economic development, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that this is the chance we have to increase the amount of park space that we have in the province. I believe that, you know, at least 10 per cent of the province should be with some degree of protection for recreational and wilderness areas. Otherwise, we just can't do it. The time will pass very quickly, and with each month and year millions of acres of land are being redeveloped for industrial and mixed use. Now is the time for us to invest in our provincial parks system so that we have a legacy of wilderness and recreational areas that we can be proud of for the future. We need to put the money into this department, so here's the chance with our surprise summer session.

We're not meeting the needs of this ministry at all, I would say. This budget is grossly underfunded in regard to arts and culture, and considering the rapid urbanization and immigration to this province, I think it's a crying shame.

Thank you.

4:50

The Chair: Anyone else wishing to participate in this discussion? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize. I've got too many things going on. We have such a short session that it's hard to keep up, but I have a couple of questions. It says here that it's requested for site reclamation and related to environmental liabilities. I wasn't sure: are these overruns, or have we found more things that we need to update? Are these reclamations? Have we been aware of them? I don't understand why they weren't in the budget at the start of the year. All of a sudden we have \$15 million worth of expenses that have been added on. So I'm somewhat surprised at that amount.

As some of the other members have said, though, that the parks are very much enjoyed by Albertans and Canadians and visitors from around the world, that they are getting to the point where they're very costly. I just had two people comment to me in my own riding about Waterton national park and the cost of \$80 to get in now even for seniors for a year's pass. The prices are going up and up, and it just seems like we're passing on the bucks to the few users that get in there, and we're discouraging more people from going into our parks and recreation areas.

I hope that this money is well allocated and that it's not because of the rush to try and get the job done in one year that the expense has gone up so much because we're paying a premium in order to get the work done. I would appreciate seeing a more even-handed budget, where this would occur over four or five years rather than just one year, if that in fact is happening. But I'll wait to hear and find out more later.

Thank you.

Economic Development

The Chair: The Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to bring to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that we're asking for some additional funding, and this basically and primarily is to assist us in our provincial nominee program, to help us seek out and find and recruit immigrants to Alberta that will help us with the labour shortages we have, and that would be in the skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled categories.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, I'd like to say welcome back to the hon. member. It's a pleasure to see you here. I will continue on with some of my other comments then. First of all, I think we realize that there has been a labour force shortage for some time, not just six months. It has been coming for about a year. I mean, we can see the times, and we can recognize some of the obvious signs out there. This government is one that's pro importation of temporary foreign workers, so to request the monies that are being sought here, the \$2,235,000, is perhaps a little bit premature because the request for this could have been and should have been handled in the spring budget. I know that it's not a lot of money, but in the big picture it's a lot of money. It could fund schools or hot lunch programs or hospital beds. Instead, we're dealing with labour shortages that we knew about as well as the importation of foreign workers.

Some of the specifics. Given that the additional money requested is for funding, is this a policy change from the business plans that

were given in the springtime? That would be one of them. I also thought that immigration was a federal issue, unless we're trying to have the same sort of deal that Quebec has, which is to be able to directly manage and determine the amount of immigration into our province. I don't know if that's the case that we have here before us today.

Is any of that money being used for hosting in the future to try and attract solid business venture or skilled workers or immigrants? How much money is going to be required for travel to fill this request as well? Like I said, we have a labour shortage here, and we're going to go throughout other provinces in Canada trying to take their labour shortage woes and compound them just to fill our need. I'm not sure.

Is any of this money being used to cover any of the costs of the Smithsonian festival down there in Washington? I know that we had a number of people from Alberta to host and highlight some of the activities and the experiences that we in Alberta sometimes take for granted. We're trying to bring that much more travel there. Is any of this to cover the hosting expenses of the individuals as well as the MLAs that were down there taking in some of the activities? As well, has the department done any cost-benefit analysis in relation to the money that was spent down at the Smithsonian? I'd look forward to seeing a breakdown of that.

How can Albertans be confident that the money is going to be used wisely? Like I said, with a \$33 billion plus budget that we have, how can \$2 million adequately address the labour shortage? I'm not sure. Are we just putting up bigger billboards? I don't know. The big one is: how will the money address the labour shortage?

Those are just some of the specifics with regard to this particular request. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Dunford: Just a couple of things to make sure that we're on the record. This is not a Quebec-style type of immigration policy. The member needs to be aware that in agreements with the federal government each province was able to have a provincial nominee program, and certain parameters were set upon the particular agreement as it was developed and signed. We are planning to expand the provincial nominee agreement in two ways: one is to increase the numbers, and the second is to shift the focus from solely on skilled labour to, as mentioned, categories of labour that could also include semi-skilled and unskilled.

Also, this money will be used in the future rather than the past. So it will not be used in any way, shape, or form for any outstanding obligations that there might be from the Smithsonian.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I'd like to thank the minister for clarifying that a little bit. I guess my question, to go a step further, is that the federal immigration program isn't working as well in Alberta as we would like. So I would encourage the minister to continue looking at perhaps having our own plan that works for Alberta, as Quebec has for their interests.

I appreciate that we're going to unskilled labour because the small businesses are the ones that, as I'm sure everyone in this House is aware, are going around looking for workers. Last year we were debating about having to raise the minimum wage. Well, it's standard now. You go around, and they're advertising \$9, \$10, \$11, \$12, up to \$15 for unskilled work. So it's great to see the minimum wage issue being eliminated. But it's very frustrating for the small business owners that I've gone and talked with in that they struggle a great deal with trying to bring over people that want to come and

that they know from the countries they've immigrated from, yet they can't get them here.

So I would encourage the minister to look at making a made-in-Alberta policy and perhaps taking immigration into our jurisdiction, which we have the jurisdictional right to do, to benefit the workforce and the businesses here in the province. Like I say, I'd encourage him to continue to aid businesses in being able to get foreign workers into the province and not just as temporary but as full-time.

Thank you.

Human Resources and Employment

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment I would ask for favourable consideration of the supplementary estimates as indicated in the supplementary estimates table earlier and also undertake on his behalf that questions asked, should there be any at this time, will be answered in writing by the minister, or they will be answered verbally in debate later on during this discussion or once the actual estimates culminate in the presentation of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, which is anticipated next week.

Thank you.

5:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know that these amounts in the whole scheme of things are not a great deal, but I look at the whole scheme of things too, and I see, you know, a billion and a half dollars being spent in hardly any time. We're all kind of rushing through it in order to give everybody a bit of time to address these estimates. It's bizarre that we keep on doing this time and time again, that we can't have a budgetary process that will fully plan for many of these types of items.

I look at this item and I see that it's something that should have been, I think, in the budget in the spring, and I wonder why it's missed. We see this billion and a half, and it sort of reminds me of, say, looking at somebody playing the VLTs in our province, and they're running out of money and then running to the cash machine. You know, we've got a few hours to debate a billion and a half dollars. It's like myriad and many millions a minute. That's not democratic accountability, and that's not really responsible government.

A few questions just to be brief. Why was this amount not foreseen in our original budget? The second question is: why is this being funded from general revenues, and why is this particular disability income continuance plan for that bargaining unit not fully funded? A third question is: what is the estimated long-term liability for long-term disability in this unit, and is there a plan to pay down and fully fund this liability? A fourth question is: are there any other unfunded liabilities of this nature in the public service administered by the public administration office? Those are the four questions directed at this particular supplementary supply estimate, and I would appreciate those replies in writing when they do come.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again I'll be brief. I have certain questions that I guess we'd at least throw out. We've been told that there is an ongoing – it seems to be ongoing – labour standards review, and we're never sure where that's at. It was

supposed to be last spring, and now it got into the whole debate about child labour and the rest of it. I guess that with the minister not here the question I would ask is: where does that stand? Is the actual review coming, and when is it going to be made public so that we can take a look at it?

The other discussion I've had with the minister – and I won't go into the broad aspect of labour laws, but certainly the one that created the problem in the Brooks area with the Tyson strike was the idea of first contract bargaining. That was something the minister has said in the past in this Assembly that they were still looking at whether they were going to do it. There are only a couple of provinces that don't. We think it's self-evident that they should be doing that. Again, I'd like to know where the government stands with this very important issue.

Mr. Chairman, the other area that I've raised in the past has to do with the Appeals Commission with the WCB. We're talking about increasing persistent delays. We go back to the report, the earlier recommendations from when the government looked at this. They made it clear that appeals should take no more than 90 days, and this should be in regulation. Well, their own report that just came out shows that the wait time for WCB appeals now is at least 218 days and up to 280 days. Something has to be done. Now, maybe this is part of the same old problem with the booming economy: we're having more people getting injured or whatever the cause is. But we're not even close to what the government laid out back in the reports five years ago. As I said, justice delayed is justice denied. I'm sure all hon. members would say that in their constituency offices problems with the WCB and specifically the Appeals Commission take a great deal of our time. So I'd like to know what we're going to do about this delay. It's been raised before, and I'd like to raise it again.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the other part was brought up today by the Leader of the Opposition, and it has to do with Alberta Works. When we think about being a disadvantaged person in this society, we're talking about the housing crisis, we're talking about all the other things that are occurring. We talk about Alberta always being the greatest. We sort of laugh about it: it's the greatest in Canada, the greatest in the world, the greatest in the universe. The National Council of Welfare says that Alberta has the second-lowest for single employables, and there are a lot of people coming into this province thinking they're going to find jobs that they aren't. That's not something to be proud of. We have the lowest for persons with disabilities, and that's the lowest in the country in a very rich province, the lowest for single-parent households with one child, mid-range for a couple with two children. Now, this is in an overheated economy in the richest province. With the amount of money rolling in here, we're probably the richest place in North America.

There was a small increase, I think, back on May 1 but not nearly enough. Really, it should become clear to this government, and I guess this is the question that I would ask: why are we not moving towards a market-basket measure for social supports? This is particularly important in municipalities like Calgary, Fort McMurray, and Edmonton now, which are seeing increased housing costs and overall inflation.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would take the hon. House leader at his word, and we would expect a reply to these important questions in this department. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you again, Mr. Chair. You know, I was very interested a little earlier in the estimates that were brought forward

by the Minister of Economic Development. He mentioned some of the monies that are being spent by his department for the provincial nominee program and seeking out skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled individuals in other areas. It's an area that I think is of particular concern to many Albertans, especially those who run small businesses because those are the people that have been stressed the most in this labour market.

The labour market, of course – everybody can see it – is being incredibly affected by the conventional oil and gas industry and will be increasingly affected by the oil sands industry. The oil sands industry, of course, has been moderately booming for about seven or eight or nine years, and we'll see a huge increase in the number of employees that are required there. But the real increase has been spurred on by \$75 a barrel or more oil and the conventional oil and gas industry that is punching holes everywhere it can and trying to take advantage of a commodity price that is at its zenith.

How long will this last? How long will we see the American economy continue? Many people are forecasting that it will begin to see some serious downturn in the new year. We're into the 58th month of a commodity boom right now. The last longest commodity boom in many generations, to be truthful, was 28 months. This is fuelled, of course, by some of the foreign policy of the Bush administration in the United States and the transfer of the manufacturing capabilities, quite a bit of them, largely from North America to China and the needs of growth there.

A lot of the things that we see are not just shortages in labour. There are shortages in various things like concrete, cement, gravel, steel, and many, many other things that are components of construction.

5:10

Another question that would be going to the minister of human resources, and I would like a reply in writing: what are the projected increases that the provincial government and his department will be seeking in terms of numbers for the provincial nominee program, and can those numbers be directed to help small businesses with the great problems that they're having right now in maintaining their businesses? We may be seeing constriction. We may be seeing businesses closing. I've got a restaurant in my area that's not doing its lunch trade, for an example on a small basis. There are many restaurants having that problem. I had a bank manager just a couple of blocks from my constituency office quit his job here a couple of weeks ago to go work the rigs. You know, we're seeing odd things happening, and how long this boom will last, how long we'll see this keep going like this is a real question, but how it is affecting those small businesses is real. We sure would like to see them maintain themselves here in Alberta and maintain employment from people who could come under that provincial nominee program.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The next item we will go back to is Health and recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health and Wellness (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'm really glad that we've been able to get a bit more time on Health. I appreciate my colleagues' co-operation in that, at the same time recognizing that likely we did not discuss everything that had been brought to our attention as we tried to truncate everything and get it in.

I'd just like to go a bit more in depth in the notes that I have accumulated since the break and particularly talk about the health region deficits. I went back through the notes I took while the minister was speaking, and I apologize: I heard her say something

and I didn't write it down, so I will repeat a question. On the \$81 million that is set aside for the health region deficits, the way it's written up on page 38 of the supplementary supply estimates book is that there is "\$112,000,000 for additional operating funding to health authorities, including \$31,000,000 for the anticipated cost of auxiliary nursing salary adjustments," which in my calculations is leaving us about \$81 million beyond that. Will that be covering all of the deficits from all of the health authorities? I know the minister said something about that, and I'm sorry that I missed it, so I'm just asking about that again.

I've done some research about what's out there, and I know that with the Chinook health region, for example, they have a current-year operating deficit of \$2.4 million, but they have a \$9.6 million total deficit accumulated from the previous year. I don't know how much of that might be taken care of or, indeed, any of it. Certainly, the top three issues that they're concerned about are, number one, human resources and recruitment of health professionals, a huge issue for them, and with that comes providing access to all of the health services. They have an extra concern there that the funding formula is based on population with adjustments taking into consideration both age and gender. It's no secret to any of us in this House that pockets of southern Alberta have a higher percentage of seniors than other parts of Alberta. Although I have argued before that I don't feel that seniors are necessarily going to cost the health care system more, there can be a diversity of services that's required. Certainly, that's the feedback I'm getting from people in that health region. If we included long-term care costs in there, that may well be the case.

As a part of this supplementary supply and my continuing questioning of the government around their planning and policy development process, we have to bring up once again: where are we with long-term care? We had the first anniversary last May of the Auditor General's special report on long-term care, which certified what residents and their families and their friends and advocacy groups in the community and, indeed, the Official Opposition and this member had been saying for many years: that long term care was beyond in a crisis, that in some cases it was downright dangerous, and it was being appallingly managed.

So we've had the anniversary of that report. We've had the minister or ministry officials agree that it would be a certain amount of money to sort of come up to speed. I think the amount that was said at the time was \$250 million, and we've had a fraction of that that's actually been brought forward. So is any of this money that's being pledged here today to address specific concerns in long-term care, which I think is behind what's being brought forward by the Chinook health region?

There also seems to be a desire to move to expansion of the Lethbridge regional hospital, especially to include more space for outpatient programming, and I think that's including radiation therapy. That area also has some special considerations for First Nation and aboriginal peoples. With that is a focus on preventing and managing diabetes in particular but also obesity and the complications that that brings with it. So that's around a focus on education on the risk factors for diabetes and early testing and diagnosis but also, as we know, really good chronic management of diabetes. If you can manage those chronic diseases well, then they don't escalate into a need for the more intensive and therefore more expensive health services that become required in others ways, like use of an ICU, for example, if they end up with real foot problems or eye problems, kidneys, et cetera.

There is an identified need in Chinook region for new technology and operating room design and equipment. They believe that this would shorten the lengths of stays and increase the surgical capacity

and would also likely help them recruit and retrain specialists, obviously. They're looking for \$1.5 million there for two operating theatres, so I'm wondering what's going to happen with that request. Is any of that money going to be included in the \$112 million? Perhaps it's part of the \$150 million that's additional capital grants for the medical equipment that's being offered.

You know, I find this government that talks about accountability and transparency very frustrating when you're talking about \$262 million and there are basically two sentences that describe everything. We're constantly having to go through and say: "Well is it going to cover this? Is it going to cover that? What about this? What about that?" I don't understand why we can't just get a listing of what the money is supposed to cover. You know, if they know that they need \$150 million for additional capital grants to support medical equipment, what's the medical equipment? For whom? For what? Why can't it just be printed out instead of this constant sort of teasing out of information? The minister tries very hard to answer the questions on the spot, but again we're time limited. Then some months down the road there's something that comes in writing which doesn't completely answer the question. So it's a very frustrating process.

The other place where we're seeing pressure around long-term care and home care specifically is the David Thompson health region. I haven't been able to find out what the deficit is in that region, so I don't know how much money would be going there to deal with that, but our research has shown that they seem to feel that there's quite a bit of pressure on home care.

5:20

We do end up with a patchwork of services across the province with the health region structure. That's one of my concerns about having it all divvied up like that. Each health region is supposed to try and deliver services to their people. You do end up with checkerboarding. You don't get the same kind of health care resources, you know, in Edson as you do in Edmonton. You just don't. Are Albertans willing to accept that? I don't know. I would say that they would argue not, that they should be able to get the same thing that you can get in the city. But here we have home care. There are also increasing wait times for long-term care beds in the David Thompson region. So is any of that going to be addressed with the money that's coming here?

Now, we've had admissions to one of the continuing care centres, called CollegeSide, curtailed back in the spring because they didn't have enough staff. Has that situation been alleviated? Are they able to move on from that? Is there enough staff there now? Is this money going to help with that? Same issues around the shortage of physicians: both recruiting and retention, problems with people having to work through their holidays, not being able to get enough locums, all of those. We've heard all this before.

The other area that has specifically come before me was Peace Country health region. The staffing shortages there are really critical. This is one of the areas that had to close off access to some of the emergency departments in that area. They seem to be looking for a lot of money for capital upgrades as well, but on the closures, the Leader of the Official Opposition spoke in question period today about the number of people that had to be flown from that area into Edmonton to be looked after. I'm looking also at 10 psychiatric beds that were closed and some problems with surgery and ER and that they had a critical shortage of physicians so that patients had to be sent to Edmonton. So, you know, how are they finding some relief there?

There was a request to the infrastructure minister back in April that they needed new acute care facilities in High Prairie and Grande

Prairie. Has that been addressed by any of this money? There is a deficit there, and the argument is that the deficit would be even larger if they actually had the staff to be able to fully deliver all of the services. If they were able to deliver all of the service that they normally do, the deficit would be even larger: that is the argument that we've got coming from them. This is the location where the ICU was closed during the first week in August.

I've spoken to some of the doctors up there, and they are beyond frustration. You know, if they could have, they would have sent some people here during this short sitting to try and underline their concerns with what's happening there. Of course, they can't even take their holidays, never mind come here to lobby. You could just hear the stress in their voices. It's really critical.

One of the other areas that I've been watching really closely and that I've spoken a bit about is the Aspen health region as well. That's where we had the in-patient beds closed. All the other ones that I've talked about have been surgical beds, ICU for example, some renal-care beds, but this is in-patient beds for the whole month of August. This isn't just a week because you're trying to cover, you know, somebody that's out on holiday and there's nobody else to cover for them. This is a whole month. That's a fairly central region, so I suppose the idea is that they can just come in to Capital. But we had closures in the Sturgeon hospital, which is part of Capital region, so in putting all of the load on Edmonton – yes, they're able to carry it right now, but how long are they expected to carry all of that? Sure, they're paid for people that come from other health regions – they get reimbursed for that – but they still have to have all the doctors and nurses and bedsheets and gowns and all of that here to be able to accommodate those people. So this is no small thing.

I've talked about David Thompson. I've talked about the Peace Country. I've talked about Aspen and Palliser and Chinook. I mean, these are issues in almost every single health region in the province. This isn't small stuff that can be dealt with easily and will go away. You know, people are feeling that it's critical, and they can't seem to get the attention of the government long enough to get any sort of relief from them that there's going to be an end to it all, and I think that's what is causing a big part of why we're having such a hard time with physician retention in the rural areas. They just don't see where it's going to end. Why would you bother trying to tough it out another week, another month when, in fact, you could be toughing it out another two, three, four, five years?

An awful lot of this goes back to: where are we going to get the health professionals from? Where are the real concrete steps that are being taken to fast-track, to open those new spaces? You know, I'm now hearing in Calgary, just as we're about to try and get new spaces for health professionals, that people are being told to hold off because it's too expensive to build the new facilities that would create the new spaces, which would house the new students I guess is a better way to put it, because the inflationary costs are just too high. So there's a lack of overall planning and forethought from the government, and I don't see any improvement.

You know, I talked earlier about being 24 months, and I'm hearing the same things, only worse. I don't see the big steps that are being taken to solve this except keep going back to: well, we'll get the private sector to look after this. But the private sector really does not help us, especially around workforce problems, and it really doesn't help us around training because they in the past have been very reluctant to take residents into their operating rooms and let them do that period of their required training. Certainly, we saw that around the ophthalmology clinics and surgeries that were so much in the limelight back in the late '90s. You know, there was the comparison that the Consumers' Association did between the private, the contracted, and the completely public, and the best deal was in the public, and that was the shortest waiting list as well. My neighbour at the time was studying to specialize in that field, and he was immensely frustrated because there were only so many residency spots, and with all of these surgeries at that time going to a private provider, he couldn't get into the residency program.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but pursuant to Standing Order 61(1), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration of estimates, I would now invite the Government House Leader to move that the committee do now rise and report.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would at this time move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2006-07 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That being the case, I would move that we now call it 5:30 – I see we're almost a minute away from that anyway – and stand adjourned until Monday at 1:30.

[Motion carried; at 5:29 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, August 28, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/08/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, on this day I would ask that all Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly, all others present here, and those observing these proceedings in their homes join together in a minute of silence and personal prayer as we reflect upon the lives of Canadian police officers and military personnel lost in service to their countrymen. May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may a nation be eternally grateful. God bless.

Hon. members, today we'll be led in the singing of our national anthem by Colleen Vogel. I would ask all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to be able to introduce a guest to you and through you to the Assembly. This gentleman is known to many of us for his years of dedicated volunteerism for many organizations. He has served as a board member and president of the Edmonton downtown Rotary Club, the Christmas Bureau of Edmonton, and ABC Head Start. He was a board member of the Edmonton Boy Scouts and the Grant MacEwan foundation. As well, he was a founder of the Trying for Kids triathlon event and is a supporter of Junior Achievement. On top of that, he has been an active fundraiser for numerous community organizations. We know him better as the former Member for Edmonton-McClung and the previous Minister of Economic Development. I've always enjoyed his great enthusiasm and passion for life and am delighted that he is pursuing an ongoing interest in our Conservative Party. He is seated in the Speaker's gallery. I am proud to introduce my good friend Mark Norris. I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Julius Yankowsky, the former MLA who served the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview constituency for three terms, from 1993 through 2004. Julius is accompanied today by his wife, Katherine, and their grandson Brenden Steemson. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a very long list today, so a little patience, please. The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly staff from Children's Services governance services branch. Branch staff provide consultation, co-ordination, and facilitation services to assist child and family service authority boards, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee as well as the Children's Services appeal panel with their legislated responsibilities. They do a great job, and I'm extremely proud to be their minister. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome. They are Beverly Sawicki, Blair Addams, Laurie Anderson, Laurie Kehler, and Kris Loranger. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shad Valley is an organization that promotes interest in science, technology, and entrepreneurship to students in grades 11 and 12. Students who are accepted into this program attend a month-long program in July at one of the 12 universities across Canada. Many of the students then continue with a paid internship program. Two of these students are currently working with Alberta Innovation and Science. Jacinta Yeung and Brandon Evans are here today to be introduced to all of you. Jacinta has completed grade 12 and will be entering university this fall, while Brandon will be entering grade 12. They are accompanied by Lisa Bowes of the department. I'd ask them to rise and be greeted by all of you here today.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, capital planning.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a personal friend and young constituent, Mr. Adam Zaroni from Coaldale, Alberta. Adam is currently finishing his degree in accounting and financial management at the U of L. He has met today with our colleague the MLA for Battle River-Wainwright on some rural youth development issues. I think it's of some significance that Adam has recently been nominated for the CEO of the year award scholarship, a national award competition, by the University of Lethbridge. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. I hope he is up in the members' gallery. I can't quite spot him.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I usually rise to introduce guests who have travelled a fair distance to visit us, but I'm surpassing all my records today because my guest has travelled from Canberra, Australia, to visit with me. He is a branch on the family tree, I'm proud to say. He worked for the Attorney General's office in the government of Australia, and he is now visiting Canada and getting a real view of Alberta. He worked for a week at the Calgary Stampede and a week at the Edmonton Fringe, so he is really getting an experience in Alberta. I would ask that Matthew Granlund stand and receive our welcome, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seated in your gallery are five bright and talented high school students who will be joining us here

in the Assembly in the upcoming year in their new capacity as pages in the Alberta Legislature. These individuals were hired over the summer after a successful application process and will be joining their fellow pages for training this fall. They're already here to observe the proceedings of the Assembly today. If the following pages could please stand up when I call their name: Nancy Easton, Victoria Micek, Nicholas Mickelsen, Kaley Pederson, and Helena Zakrzewski. I'd invite all members to join in extending a very warm and traditional welcome to these new pages.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Duncan and Allie Wojtaszek, who are seated in the members' gallery. They're here to observe the discussion on Bill 208. Duncan, you may recall, has been introduced to this Assembly in the past as the executive director of CAUS, and I'm pleased to say that Allie is gainfully employed in important political work this summer and this fall. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this fine Assembly Mr. Michael Farris. Mr. Farris is the executive director of E4C, which is an Edmonton organization founded in the 1970s that runs 16 different programs for people of all ages who are in financial need. Among them are a couple that are well known to you: the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre and the Kids in the Hall Bistro at Edmonton city hall. This organization and Mr. Farris have made a long-standing commitment to our city and our needy. I would like to ask Mr. Farris to rise and accept the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and introduce to you a recent immigrant to Alberta, Canada, from Ukraine. He is a professor and a doctor in Ukraine who has established some roots here, and we welcome him sincerely. He is currently teaching part-time at the Minerva Senior Studies Institute, located at Grant MacEwan College. He has also taught for some time at NorQuest. He is a definite credit to our teaching profession. Accompanying him is well-known Edmonton lawyer Helen Tymoczko, who is no stranger to members of this Assembly. She is a good friend of the community, a good friend of mine, and she is also a very involved community activist and volunteer, particularly in the arts. I would ask Helen Tymoczko and Professor Walter Yahnishchak to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an education advocate from Calgary who is sitting in the front row of the public gallery. Her name is Tianna Melnyk, and she has travelled up today to see how the Legislature works. She is a tireless worker for public education and an outstanding teacher. I'd ask Tianna to rise and

receive the warm welcome of all members.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. In the first I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Zyp family. This is a very active family. Some of you in Edmonton will be familiar with their letters to the editor, and they certainly keep me informed of their opinion. I would ask them to please rise as I call their names: John Zyp, Bettie Zyp, their daughters Danielle Zyp and Cynthia Prefontaine, and her 12-year-old son, Jonas Coyes, who wants to be the Premier of the province. I would ask you to please join me in welcoming them.

For my second set of introductions I would like to introduce several members of the activist GLBT community. Please rise as I call your names: Julie Lloyd, who is a lawyer that argued on the Vriend case and several precedent-setting legal judgments to her credit; Kris Wells, who is an educator; Ken MacDonald, the president of the Edmonton Pride Centre; Ron Rowswell, Rob Wells, and Elisha Andrews, who are all constituents of Edmonton-Centre.

I also have a number of artists in attendance in support of action against Bill 208. Please join me in welcoming Annie Dugan, with Firefly Theatre; John Ulyyat, who is a pre-eminent actor in Edmonton and throughout Alberta; Roger Schultz, a theatre designer; and Ryan Sigurdson, who is an emerging and very talented young musician and composer.

Please join me in welcoming these individuals to our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of introductions today as well. The first of those is a special introduction for somebody who's been introduced in the Assembly before. Daniel Langdon has worked as a constituency manager in my office for the last year and a half. Unfortunately, we're losing him to McMaster University, and Friday was his last day in the employ of the Alberta government. He is also here to watch the proceedings today regarding Bill 208. I would ask Dan to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, several other constituents from Edmonton-Rutherford who are here today to watch the proceedings regarding Bill 208. I would ask them to please rise as their names are read into the record and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly as well. We have with us today Geraldine Young and a whole group from the Southminster-Steinhauer United Church: Patricia Seale, Dawn Waring, Sandra Lockhart, Thais McKee, and the Power family – Chris, Kathleen, and their children Aaron, Allandra, and Brayden.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the following guests who are here to show their objection to Bill 208: two from my constituency, Marc Trottier and Joseph Hachey, and also Jeffrey Coffman, Luc Drapeau, Jose Untalan, Jo Nicholas, Doug Dorward, Nick Green, and Barry Richardson. I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two people without whom I would not be

able to do my work as an MLA: Jan Millson, my constituency office manager, who's just done a tremendous job for me – and I'm proud to introduce her – and Peter Marriott, my summer STEP student. I would like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two wonderful people from my constituency, Mick and Bernice Rempel. Mr. Rempel spent 26 years in the Canadian air force. Mrs. Rempel is very well known to many members of this House, being a former mayor of Leduc. She spent 13 years as senior co-ordinator for family aid services, four years as director of parks, planning, recreation, and culture. Both are now enjoying their retirement. They are seated in the public gallery. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Allison Mullen. Allison is a constituent of mine. As well as a student entering grade 12, Allison has honours and is very involved in the student council at her school. Allison was a new addition to my office as a summer STEP student, and it has been great having Allison in the office. I wish her well in her final year at Archbishop O'Leary high school. I'd ask Allison to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise here today and to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an outstanding young woman who is a credit to her family, her school, and her community. Desirée Ho is on student council at Archbishop O'Leary high school. This coming year she's going into her final year, and she's been a great help as a summer employee in the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. Desirée, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly Sheryl Pearson. Sheryl Pearson is here with her husband, Vik Maraj. They live in the Kenilworth neighbourhood in the Edmonton-Mill Creek constituency. Sheryl and Vik recently had their first child, named Evan, in March of this past year, and they enjoy parenthood very much. Sheryl is a lawyer for the Alberta Law Reform Institute, although she is currently on maternity leave, and Vik is a human relations expert with his own consulting practice. This is their first visit to the Legislative Assembly as adults, although they both recall visiting during elementary school with their grade 5 class. They have just entered the Assembly, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the following guests who are here today to show their objection to Bill 208. Please stand to receive the traditional greeting of the Legislature when I call your name: Tony Sware, Larry Jewell, Jeff Bovee, Jason Bodnariuk, John Grindrod, Helen Lees, Michael Schaffer.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guest is not here.

The Speaker: Are there others? Did I miss anyone? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House today the following guests who are here to show their objection to Bill 208. If you would stand, please, as I call your name: Kayla Larson, Lana Phillips, Erika Lund, Cindy Walker-Watson, Craig Stumpf-Allen, Scott Graham, and Rheanna Sand. Please show them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of introductions today, and I'll ask people to stand at the conclusion of all of them. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mr. Neal Gray. Neal is here today to show his opposition to Bill 208. He was the federal candidate in Edmonton-Mill Woods-Beaumont for the NDP and is an active board member of the Woodvale Community League in Mill Woods.

My second introduction is Linda McLennan. Linda has been an Alberta resident for the past 30 years and has been a teacher since 1967, specializing in literacy and working with special-needs students. She is currently teaching at the Glenrose hospital school, and she is here to show her opposition to Bill 208.

My next introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Junaid Jahangir and Drury Straty, and I apologize for the pronunciations. Junaid and Drury are active members in the LGBT community and are here today to show their opposition to Bill 208.

My fourth introduction is Lois Evans. Lois was born and raised in Edmonton and has two wonderful children and six grandchildren. She is an active member in the Southminster-Steinhauer United Church and in many social justice groups as well here in Edmonton, and she is here to express her opposition to Bill 208.

I am delighted, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Robert Smith. Robert is a community development educator and a researcher with HIV Edmonton. Robert is here today to express his opposition to Bill 208.

It gives me great pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to introduce my next guest, Murray Billett. Murray is a well-known and prominent human rights advocate here in Alberta and is here today to express his concerns and opposition to Bill 208.

Christina Gray is a lead software development instructor at DevStudios. She also serves as chair of the Edmonton Transit system advisory board and volunteers with the Support Network's distress line. Christina was born and raised in Edmonton and currently resides in Mill Woods. She is here today, Mr. Speaker, to show her disagreement with the introduction of Bill 208.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to introduce my former colleague and good friend Michael Phair. Michael, as many of you

know, is a tireless advocate for the LGBT community and has been for many years. Michael was elected to city council in 1992 and is considered to be one of the most respected politicians in the province. He is here today to show his opposition to Bill 208.

I would ask that they all now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a number of guests to be introduced. All of them are here because of their concern about Bill 208. First of all, I'm delighted to introduce to you and to others in the Assembly Arron Kardolus-Wilson. Arron is a transgender activist and same-sex married man. I'd ask him to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to introduce to you and the Assembly Debra Morris. Debra is the president of the United Church Women of Edmonton presbytery. Debra is an activist in the community, particularly on issues related to women and social justice. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my third introduction today is Colin Simpson. Colin is a community activist and is here to express his opposition to Bill 208. He is currently compiling stories for a book on gay youth. I would ask him to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Glynis Thomas, Karen Smith, and Mike Haworth. Glynis is the executive director of the St. Albert Community Information and Volunteer Centre, Karen Smith is the executive director of the Sexual Assault Centre, and Mike Haworth is a student at Grant MacEwan College here in Edmonton. They are also here about Bill 208. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, my next guests are Scott Hlad, Maggie Lockwood, Jay Smith, and Gil Charest. Scott Hlad and Maggie Lockwood are the co-chairs of the NDP LGBT caucus while Jay Smith and Gil Charest have been ardent activists in the LGBT community for a number of years. They're also here, of course, about Bill 208. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask if they'd now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a number of guests today to introduce. I believe all of them are seated in the public gallery. They are here to observe the proceedings of the Assembly this afternoon and also to express opposition to Bill 208. I'll start with my first guest, who is Kyle Toles. Kyle is entering his first year at Grant MacEwan College and is working towards his office administration degree. He is here, of course, to express, as I said, his opposition to Bill 208. I'll ask Kyle to please rise.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Andrea Enes and Geneva Harwood. Andrea and Geneva are University of Alberta students, with Geneva working towards her bachelor's degree in human geography and Andrea working towards her BA in political science and economics.

My fourth guest, Mr. Speaker, is Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain. Jennifer is a professor in applied linguistics at the University of Alberta. She has recently received Canadian citizenship. She is originally from the U.S. She is also the president of the Edmonton-Strathcona federal NDP riding association.

Next, Mr. Speaker, is Erica Bullwinkle, Miriam Weinfeld, and Daniel Weinfeld. Erica, her daughter Miriam, and her son Daniel are here today to show their opposition to Bill 208. Erica is an education advocate and serves as a vice-president of the Alberta NDP. Miriam is entering her first year of university at the Faculté Saint-Jean here in Edmonton while Daniel is in grade 10 at Strathcona composite high school.

Next, Mr. Speaker, is Brendan Van Alstine. Brendan is an active community member and a registered social worker. He is here today to express his opposition to Bill 208.

I'm also pleased to introduce to you and to all of my colleagues in the Assembly Dr. Brian Staples. Dr. Staples is the chair of the Seniors' Action and Liaison Team, or SALT, and previously worked as a civil servant for the Alberta government in the department of learning.

2:00

My last introduction, Mr. Speaker, not the least but the last, is Reverend Charles Bidwell. Reverend Bidwell is an active member of Southminster-Steinhauer United Church in south Edmonton, which has been publicly declaring that it has welcomed gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people for the last seven years. Reverend Bidwell is licensed by the government of Alberta to conduct marriages, and he has performed several same-gender marriages. He received the Michael Phair man of the year award in 1994 for his ministry to AIDS victims in the 1980s and his ministry to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people during his 11 years as pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Edmonton.

I would ask all of my guests to please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Managed Growth in the Oil Sands

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer from Athabasca to Lac La Biche to Fort MacKay and especially to Fort McMurray I have visited with public officials, service providers, small-business owners, and citizens of all kinds who increasingly feel overwhelmed by the challenges of growth. They can't find workers, housing costs are beyond reach, public services are overloaded, and infrastructure is inadequate. Studies such as the government's own 1997 growth summit and the 1999 housing symposium predicted these problems, yet this PC government, openly boasting about being on autopilot, failed to anticipate the obvious. My first question is to the Premier. Given that the Premier has said that this Conservative government does not want to intervene to manage oil sands development, is it the Conservative government's position that managing growth is not their responsibility?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I was also in places like Eaglesham and through Falher and Donnelly and Girouxville and Forestburg and Slave Lake, of course, Foremost, High Level, and I heard the same concerns expressed. I'm so happy that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has characterized these as challenges because that's what I see them as, not problems. Problems are what other jurisdictions are facing in terms of deficit and debt and how to deal with the rising costs of health care and just operating on a day-to-day basis. We're faced with challenges, the challenges of growth. The Leader of the Opposition is absolutely right. They are challenges. There are challenges related to labour, there are challenges related

to infrastructure, there are challenges related to the rising costs of construction, and so on, but it remains true that the market must prevail. If we tamper, as the Liberals and the NDs like to do, with the marketplace, it's so hard, so difficult, to undo what has been put in place through legislation or policy or government.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Overwhelming challenges become problems, as the Premier well knows. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that this government's failure to manage growth has contributed significantly to the huge cost increases of the oil sands, which are then directly deducted from royalty payments, can the minister tell us what is the current hit to the Alberta treasury in cost overruns at oil sands plants?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that it's my responsibility to talk about cost overruns in oil sands projects.

There is no question that the buoyant economy here, the vibrant and growing economy, that's probably the envy of Canada and much of North America, has caused a lot of pressure in a number of areas. There are shortages in some areas of concrete, steel, rubber. That's what a demand situation does. It does affect our capital buildings on the public side, but that's about 10 per cent of the capital that's occurring in this province.

Certainly, we will have an opportunity to address the issue of capital overruns on public buildings, that we fund through the estimates, because we have recognized it and, in fact, have funded it to ensure that our school projects, our health facilities, and all other public projects will not be in jeopardy.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Environment, Mr. Speaker. Is it this minister's position that the proposed rate of expansion of oil sands plants is in the interests of the residents and the environment of the Wood Buffalo municipality?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, allow me to reflect for a moment, having had the honour of sitting as a mayor and on city council. Did the opposition member, through the chair, know that the government of Alberta built a bridge to nowhere? Actually, we had streets paved, with fire hydrants and street lamps, where everyone used to teach their kids how to drive, but we didn't have any homes on them. We had a water treatment plant built for 75,000 people, but – you know what? – there were only 30,000 of us paying for it.

In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, the over \$750 million of infrastructure projects that are going on demonstrate clearly that we are listening to the people in Fort McMurray, Wood Buffalo, or in Cold Lake or in Peace River or in southern Alberta or central Alberta because we care, and we are dealing with issues that are important to a growing economy in a growing province.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Infrastructure Needs in Fort McMurray

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Large-scale oil sands development in Alberta has rapidly increased, as we all know, causing the population of Fort McMurray to double in the last decade. The provincial government has allowed this development to occur without any sense of a long-term plan, as the minister just illustrated.

The situation has become so dire that both the municipal council and the regional health authority have been forced to intervene at the EUB with major oil sands projects because hospitals, roads, schools, and all kinds of other programs can't keep up. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. I drove highway 63 just a few weeks ago and was surprised to see no sign of twinning. Why not?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what he was looking for because, in fact, I was up there just a short time ago, and driving south from Fort McMurray for many miles the right-of-way is all cleared. They will be constructing there immediately. If the member had gone north of Fort McMurray towards Fort MacKay, he once again would have seen activity. Last winter – and this is some of the forward planning that we're doing – we had a contractor come in and move a huge quantity of dirt in order that we didn't have to do it in the summertime. He moved it over frost. It was sitting there. They were spreading that out. That's just a bit of it.

Now, had he gone up 881, he would have seen that, in fact, this year we're completing the paving on 881. There's surveying going on as we speak on the La Loche road. Mr. Speaker, if he goes up there this winter, he will see that, in fact, we're starting on the hundred million dollar bridge across the river. We put in a bypass. We're improving the intersections within Fort McMurray.

So I don't know where he went, but certainly he must have had his eyes closed.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given that an average of 30 people a night were turned away from a Salvation Army shelter in McMurray last winter, what steps is this minister taking to ensure that emergency housing will be adequate there this coming winter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, as well, was in Fort McMurray. It's a high-growth, high-cost area, and if you'd met with the mayor of Fort McMurray, you'd know that we're working together. We're determining how we can assist even further than what we are now with the funding that we're providing for emergency and transitional housing. One of the areas in the spectrum of housing is this in Fort McMurray: the rental subsidy program that we have for residents in Fort McMurray. As I said, it's high growth, high cost. We take an average of the rents of apartments in Fort McMurray. We then subsidize people at 30 per cent of their rent. In Fort McMurray that's a subsidy for a cost of housing at \$70,000 per resident. So we are doing some good work in Fort McMurray.

Thank you for the question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. Has the minister been vocal in cautioning the Minister of Energy and others that hospitals and health care services in Fort McMurray cannot – cannot – keep up with the growth that's occurring there? Has she been speaking out?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, for the last several months I have been part of a special group that has been discussing the issues of the north. It was chaired by the Minister of Energy; it is now chaired by the Minister of Justice. I think any of my colleagues would be able to

identify that I've been speaking up. More than that, I have met not only with the people in the region but with the industrial representatives, the CEOs of the region, talking to them about what kinds of services they're providing on plant sites. I've talked with the local elected officials in Fort McMurray.

I think that while a lot of people look at the challenges, they fail to look at the fact that Alberta has attracted more physicians than anywhere else in Canada. We have attracted 800 more physicians in the last five years, and many of them are choosing to locate in the north.

One more thing. We have put in aboriginal scholarships, and last fall with Health and Wellness and Advanced Ed we added 10 other scholarships to make it available for rural people who wish to take up health as a profession.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Reform Public Consultation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over and over we've listened to this government claim that health care spending is out of control. This weekend we learned that this government wasted another 1 million taxpayer dollars on their third-way propaganda campaign to convince Albertans that they are not entitled to public health care. It is the government that is out of control, not health care spending. My questions are to the minister of health. Why did the minister begin designing glossy brochures promoting the third way to be sent to every household when promised consultations with Albertans had not even been completed?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of ways that I should approach this. First of all, a million dollars was not spent on glossy brochures. A full \$220,000 was spent on paper, and that paper is currently being used by Health and Wellness and other government departments. So that was not in any way, shape, or form a consumable that wasn't used. We spent another \$200,000 on ads to Albertans, letting them know how to get involved in discussing the third way. When we first went out with consultations, focus groups and other work done by the consultants advised us that at least half of Albertans had no familiarity with the third way. So we believed that it was important as a government to provide them information.

Now, this particular spring if we had only advertised and done nothing else, people over on the other side might have a legitimate concern that we weren't listening, but we took over 6,000 submissions from Albertans. I listened personally to over 400 Albertans who gave me their views directly on the third way. We did a number of things to make sure that we not only took into account their concerns, but we actually had a way of addressing those concerns had we moved forward with the legislative amendments that were implicit in our discussions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: as she has pointed out, given that the million dollars was strictly the cost of the prep work, what was the final budget once the cost of purchasing radio and television time and printing and mailing all of these brochures is factored in? What was the total budget if a million was just the prep work?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a million dollars was the total. I believe it may have been \$1.12 million. The implicit and explicit detail I can

forward. It was a whole contract that dealt with production of television ads, and those two snapshots I gave on consultation focus groups and paper were a part of it. I mean, implicit in the criticisms of the opposition is that we just blew a million dollars on a campaign, and that is not correct. I have identified what we've done with the paper, and even with the adverts . . . [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, while we have done those advertisements, the mock-ups for the television advertisements – there were to have been five ads that dealt with the Alberta Hospitals Act, the Alberta health information and protection act, and the health insurance act. While we had those framed, it's obvious that they were not going to proceed because we chose not to table legislation. We believed it was prudent to be ready for legislation that could have been tabled this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My final question, again to the minister of health: given that the million dollars could have been used to pay the salary of 20 registered nurses for a year or up to 60 personal care attendants to help out in long-term care, does the minister still believe that Albertans got value for their money? All that help in long-term care.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, you'd be damned if you did, and you'd be damned if you didn't. If I had tabled on behalf of this government legislation with no explanation to Albertans, nothing to go into the householders' hands, no TV ad, which is almost all of the way that some people in remote areas believe they get information – they don't always see that householder that comes. If we had done that without advertising, we would have been criticized. Today we have in the archives of Health and Wellness some materials that would be available should we proceed with legislation. By the very fact that that legislation is outdated and needs refurbishment, I would suggest that we will.

And may I make one additional remark? The opposition compels me to do this. So much misinformation goes out on behalf of the opposition that it behooves us to tell the story.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Health Policy Framework

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine what we'd do if we had a million dollars to get our message out?

My questions are also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. On April 20, the Minister of Health and Wellness committed to ongoing consultations with Albertans about their plans for health care in this province, yet just two weeks ago a new health framework quietly appeared on the department's website, and that proposal continues down the road of two-tier, private health care. Now, they've spent a million dollars on a propaganda campaign that never appeared, but they still can't consult with Albertans. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that Albertans vocally rejected this government's third-way proposals in the spring, why did the minister then quietly present a framework that represents government policy which includes expanded roles for private surgical facilities and future opportunities for delisting of services?

2:20

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I truly wish that the hon. member from the third party had listened to a local radio announcer in Calgary talk about the fact that there were a whole lot of allegations made by the third party about delisting, about government by sleuth,

about the fact that the sky was falling. They read that report, and they saw that it was exactly what we announced in April. The report, *Getting On with Better Health Care*, contained eight of the 10 original policies, all public information, all posted on the web, all things that were retrievable. The only addition, the only punchline in this that hadn't been emphasized in previous documentation, was the work that we would do on workforce. In the area of delisting services, page 23, he cited, and I quote: the health policy framework does not even include any mention of delisting services.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what they're talking about, but that's old news. It was already out there. It's repackaged so that Albertans have both the *Getting On with Better Health Care* and the health policy framework in one document.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I don't know why the government spends a million dollars on propaganda when they've got Dave Rutherford to get their message out.

My question then is why the government, in fact, did pay a million dollars on a propaganda campaign which never saw the light of day and then surreptitiously posted the government policy, which includes two-tier private health care, on a website that most Albertans will never see.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think all of us do our best to get the message out in government. We did our best to anticipate that there was a need for new legislation in health care. We put together a package of materials that would inform Albertans about that. All of the work that we had done reflected on a couple of things: number one, that Albertans were not sufficiently familiar with the third-way initiatives, and, number two, many people after consultation said that they needed more information. They needed more detailed information. They needed to understand, for example, if doctors were working in two systems, how that would work. What would it mean in their community? So we did our best to get that ready. We chose not to table that legislation and to give it further study. We listened to Albertans, and that's not a bad-news story. We pulled back on submitting anything to Albertans until such time as government in the future may choose to table legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister gave \$1.5 million to one of the largest private insurance companies in North America to consult for a pointless private insurance study and a million dollars to ad firms, Tory-friendly ad firms, for the campaign that never was, when will this government stop wasting Albertans' time and money on selling them on unwanted privatization and start investing in the public system?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, if you were anyplace in Canada outside of Alberta, looking in, you would say: we wish that our province could afford and could do what Alberta is and spend more per capita than anywhere else in the country. We are now spending \$10.5 billion. We are spending almost \$1,000 a year on capital projects alone for every man, woman, and child in this province. There's nowhere that they're investing as much in public health as we are in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Agricultural Assistance

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The last few years have been extremely difficult for Alberta's grains and oilseeds

producers, who are facing increasing pressures on their livelihood. Producers taking off their crop this fall have to deal with lower than expected yields, depressed prices, and high input costs. This led the Alberta government to recently issue a disaster declaration in relation to this situation. My question is to the Deputy Premier. While this is a positive step towards supporting our producers, what constitutes a disaster declaration?

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, interpretation of statutes is not part of the purview of question period. There's a statute. We'll have a page provide the statute to the hon. member. He can study it.

Second question.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister, and it has to do with the CAIS program, which is selected using the 2004 basis for compensating producers when, in fact, the input costs are soaring dramatically for the past two years.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there's no question about it. The agricultural producers in the grains and oilseeds sector are facing a very, very serious situation. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you would be looking at what could be called a perfect storm: you've had a very good beginning to the year, you've had extreme heat in July, you've had low precipitation in 70 per cent of the province, you've got input costs of fertilizer and fuel skyrocketing, and you've got a dollar that is appreciating in a significant way, which affects exports.

So how do you respond to producers in a timely fashion? The decision was made to use the CAIS program because it is the safety net program. It was decided some time ago that that would be the safety net program for the province. Producers knew that. Many of them are enrolled in it. The decision on using 2004, Mr. Speaker, was that the information is in and complete. If you used 2005, there are a number of producers who have not filed 2005, and you would be going into a long period of waiting. The problems that we have out there, as shown by declaring a disaster, are imminent. Producers need help now. They need to know what they can expect.

The CAIS program was used with two adjustments. Quickly, those adjustments are a 15 per cent adjustment in the reference margin – the reference margin has changed by 15 per cent – and a 25 per cent change in the margin used on fertilizer and fuel.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. My supplemental is: will all producers affected by this disaster receive support?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I should just add one thing on the first one. Maybe not everyone understands what the reference margin is. A reference margin is the producer's income minus his eligible expenses, just to put that into context.

All producers that are enrolled in CAIS in 2004 will either receive assistance or not depending on their CAIS situation. If they were not enrolled in 2004, they would not. There are about 60 per cent of some 20,000 producers that are CAIS participants. They will all have their support levels increased on that 2004. They do not have to apply. These calculations will be automatic. There will be no additional costs in accounting for these producers, and it is expected, anticipated, and the people at the CAIS program are working hard to ensure that those payments are out this fall, when they're needed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Employment Strategies

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With high prices Alberta's oil industry is pulling workers from everywhere in Canada and from all occupations. The labour market is distorted and is hurting small business in particular. Some firms are delaying expansion, others may close, and some economic sectors look to shrink, and the boom will not last forever. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister ensure that the provincial nominee program, which fast-tracks new immigrant employees, be directed to small business, where this program is needed most urgently?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course we'll do everything we can as a government to meet those challenges head on and provide the employees that are drastically needed out there, but the particular program that the member is referring to is under another ministry.

Mr. Backs: The second question is to the Minister of Advanced Education, Mr. Speaker. With a small minority of employers training the vast majority of apprentices and less than 10 per cent graduating, will the minister ensure that more long-term apprenticeship spots are opened in the workplace so that young Albertans, women, aboriginals, and our shrinking farm population get a chance at the good jobs while they last?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Quite frankly, we have created over 4,000 new spots with respect to apprenticeship. The member will know that our employers are really bellying up to the table, if I can use that expression, to the rate of about a hundred a day. We are now registering over a hundred new apprentices every day. I have said many times that our aboriginal community is one area that I want to particularly work with because I think they're certainly one of our biggest opportunities.

2:30

Mr. Backs: To the minister of human resources again, Mr. Speaker: what contingency plans does this government have in place to deal with unemployed workers and professionals when this boom ends, as boom times always do?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, only the opposition Liberals would start thinking what may happen down the road which may never happen.

Managed Growth in the Oil Sands

(continued)

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, the pressures, challenges, and opportunities we face as a result of oil sands growth is one of the most important issues confronting this province not only in the future but right now. It is my understanding that the Minister of Justice will be chairing a committee that aims to look at addressing some of these short-term pressures; therefore, my first question is to the Minister of Justice. Could the minister please shed some more light on this new committee?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the premise behind the hon. member's question is quite correct, but I must say that this committee is not a new committee; it's simply a new chair of an old committee. It's the oil sands ministerial strategy

committee. The Premier had the wisdom and foresight some many months ago to establish this particular committee under the chair of the hon. Minister of Energy. I've been asked by the Premier to chair it to provide some neutral oversight and to continue the good work of the committee and the good work of the hon. Minister of Energy as chair.

Generally speaking, this particular committee has been identifying issues with respect to oil sands, and that particular general work will continue. But what we are doing is that we are adding additional resources to it in the form of a co-ordinator and additional resources for that co-ordinator. The co-ordinator has been hired. It's somebody familiar to government, somebody familiar to this particular Assembly, at least many of the people in this Assembly, someone who has 35 years of experience with this government, a former Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, a former Deputy Minister of Agriculture, a former Deputy Minister of Environment, Mr. Doug Radke. He will be starting at the end of this week, and his full-time job will be to provide co-ordination with respect to matters associated with oil sands growth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us how this committee will go about its work now?

Mr. Stevens: Well, the committee in large measure will continue to do what it has done, and that is that you look to the particular ministries to identify issues, and you look to the particular ministries who have the expertise to provide the potential solutions. So in that sense, matters will very much remain the same.

One of the issues, however, has always been to ensure that you get accurate information with respect to the growth associated with oil sands. We're talking about realistic, accurate information, and one of the things that our co-ordinator will be doing is developing a realistic growth forecast for the oil sands in the relatively short to intermediate term. Once that particular work has been done – and certainly that involves gathering all of the information and perhaps some additional information that's currently out there to develop that forecast – he will be working with the ministries to review the plan that we currently have in place, establish where there may be gaps, and provide some advice.

I can also tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it's our intention to continue what the committee has been doing, and that is taking a look at what I would call short-term wins. Those are issue and solution identification that can be done very, very quickly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. I realize that he has partially answered this question but just the same: how will this committee's work differ from the work of several other existing committees looking at the various challenges in northern development brought on by the oil sands growth?

Mr. Stevens: Well, that's an excellent question because there is a lot of good work that has been identified and will be ongoing by various committees. There's a land use committee under, I believe, the auspices of Sustainable Resource Development, there is an oil sands consultation committee under the auspices of Energy, Environment, and Sustainable Resource Development, I believe that there's an aboriginal consultation committee associated with much of this very issue, and so on. All of that work will continue to go on.

It is anticipated that Mr. Radke's involvement with this committee will be relatively short term, something in the order of five or six months. Much of the work that he is going to do will in fact be complete by year's end.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Softwood Lumber Trade Policy

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta lumber producers are under fire from the federal government to sign on to their softwood lumber deal. Many tell me that this deal is not in their company's interest, their workers' interests, or for the good people of Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. If the majority of Alberta's lumber producers withhold their support for this deal, will the minister support Alberta's interest and stop going along with that of his federal cousins?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the industry has already indicated what their position on this is. Minister Emerson indicated federally that they wanted the response by industry by the 21st of August. On that day individual companies within the softwood lumber industry in the province of Alberta and across Canada indicated their support for the deal. So we've worked hard in the negotiations, working with the federal negotiating committee, headed up by His Excellency Michael Wilson, the ambassador to the United States from Canada. Minister Emerson has worked very, very hard on this deal.

It is not an ideal circumstance, Mr. Speaker. This is not free trade. It is managed trade. But our focus from this point forward should be on how the industry should organize itself to take best advantage of the deal that will now go before the House of Parliament in Canada.

Mr. Bonko: To the same minister: if large amounts of lumber have to be cut because of the mountain pine beetle, will the minister bring in measures to ensure that producers are not penalized under the federal softwood lumber deal?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Coutts: We were thinking far ahead when we talked about mountain pine beetle well before they even knew that it was happening.

Mr. Speaker, this agreement has been a compromise solution that provides more predictable terms of access to the U.S. markets. You know, we continue to work with our industry within the confines of the agreements that are put forward and represent their interests both internationally and nationally. We have a very good relationship with our industry. They've talked to us about the impact of mountain pine beetle. They've also talked to us about the impact of what would happen in terms of the market price going down and how that would affect their industry. We talked to our industry at length about some of the competitiveness problems that they have. So I can tell you that the Alberta Forest Products Association and this government and particularly our ministry will continue to address those things in the future.

Mr. Bonko: To the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations: does the minister support the termination clause, where Canadian producers have to pay by giving up their lawsuits and the Americans can walk away after three years?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the agreement that's struck is much more complex than has been indicated by the hon. member. The purpose of the stand-still clause that he referred to is to say that when the agreement comes to an end, there's a 12-month period during which there cannot be any actions commenced by either side, by the United States or by Canada. The term of the deal is seven years. There is a renewal period that is permitted for an additional two years. The stand-still period will apply to the end of the agreement. So the seven-year agreement in pith and substance would become an eight-year deal, and if it's renewed, then the nine-year deal becomes a 10-year deal.

2:40

It is a very, very complex matter, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the overall package of commitments that were made by both sides, negotiated in a very, very difficult set of circumstances. I would only say this: if softwood lumber were an easy thing to have resolved, it would have been done 20 years ago, not today. But the deal is one that provides certainty. The side letter that has been provided by the United States trade representative should go a long way to demonstrating that the United States has real and demonstrable good faith in this and that they are not simply going to terminate the deal after a limited period of time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Standards for Secondary Suites

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is thriving. With more than 90,000 people moving to this province every year, our municipalities are now facing enormous pressures in finding places for people to live. One option is to rent basement suites, but there are no standards for these types of suites. My questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Could the minister please tell the House where his department is at in legalizing these basement suites?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely right that while all of us are familiar with basement suites in one form or another throughout, well, certainly my lifetime, the fact of the matter is that the building code under which we operate does not recognize something called a basement suite. We have single-family residential, and we have multiple family.

The building code itself requires significant standards if you have what's called a duplex. I think we're all familiar with a duplex. It requires separate furnace and ventilation systems. It requires the necessary windows that you would have in a building code in a home. It requires complete and total fire separation between each side of the duplex and, in fact, in many cases could be divided up and given title to each side.

So in recognition of this and in recognition of the need for accommodation like a basement suite, the government undertook a number of months ago to review the whole situation, consult with the public, consult with municipalities, with tenants and landlords, and come back with some recommendations on what we could do to develop a code specifically for secondary suites or basement suites.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Yes. Does the minister feel that these secondary suites will assist in alleviating the pressures on this affordable housing issue?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think that it will. The reason I say so is because in not requiring the standards that are there for a duplex and still maintaining safety as the primary overriding factor, there will be some opportunities for individuals who have perhaps in the past been hesitant to rent their basement, develop their basement as a basement suite, to do so. We also have the ability then for that to be a safe environment for the tenants when they move in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us when we can finally expect to see these standards in place?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the report of that committee that I referred to earlier has been circulating throughout the province over the past couple months. Overall, the overwhelming feedback that we're getting is positive. It's my intention to move forward with the necessary amendments to the building code either later on this year or as early as possible in 2007.

I need to put one cautionary note in place, Mr. Speaker, and that's to note that at present while we don't have building code that refers to basement suites, neither do we have zoning regulations that deal with basement suites. We have R1 and R2, and everybody knows that R1 is single-family residential; R2 is multiple family. We really are going to need something like a one and a half to completely legalize basement suites. So once the province is in a position to set the standards – the building code standards, the safety standards for basement suites – municipalities are going to have to determine in which neighbourhoods they're going to allow them to develop.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Spray Lake Sawmills

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water is the issue of the decade, particularly in southern Alberta, where, even this government has admitted, current water licences exceed the capacity of the Elbow, Bow, and Oldman systems. The Spray Lakes forest management plan, over 3,300 square kilometres of cherished public lands near West Bragg Creek, will adversely affect the drinking water of 400,000 Calgarians as well as disrupt animal habitat and a prime recreational area. To the Minister of Environment: will he be supporting Spray Lake Sawmills in clear-cutting or protect this critical watershed and water source for Calgarians?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, protecting the land, protecting the air, and protecting the water is my job. I am the Minister of Environment, and I will carry out that responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also say that very near to this area, in fact, the province of Alberta, the only province in Canada, will be hosting the first international water forum. Experts from 20 countries all over the world are coming to Banff. . . . [interjections] Well, I'm glad to see that the members opposite are very impressed by the fact that Alberta took the initiative to host such an important Water for Life strategy, that we will excel at, be proactive on, something the opposite side really has no clue about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister place water at the top of the priority list and press this government to buy back this critical watershed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. That's a very good question. Not only shall we say that we will put water at the top of the list of priorities; it is at the top of the priority list for this province and this ministry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: will this minister at least act to delay approval of this forest management plan until a land-use plan is available in this province?

Mr. Coufts: Mr. Speaker, Spray Lake Sawmills has been operating in Kananaskis Country in a multi-use area for the past 60 years. In order for them to get the forest management agreement on that particular multi-use area, they have to come up with a detailed forest management plan. It's a 20-year plan. It is not just a short-term plan.

The department is being responsible in asking the company to come forward and update their plan, which includes wildlife and water mitigation as well and the effects that resource extraction has on those two areas. It's part of the detailed forest management plan that we have asked Spray Lake Sawmills to come forward with. That detailed forest management plan will be reviewed by government and sometime within the next three months will be either accepted or rejected, depending on the regulations they have followed, which, by the way, are endorsed by Canadian regulations on forestry practices.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have a process to go through with Spray Lakes, and we will continue to do that in order to do as the Minister of Environment wants to make sure that watersheds are protected not only for the immediate people but for people downstream as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Energy Forecasting

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, since this remedial summer session is all about backpedaling to fix a myriad of budget problems, I think it's an opportune time to perhaps cast a critical eye on energy forecasting. Alberta's NDP opposition has determined that since 2002 this government has on average miscalculated crude oil revenues by 80 per cent and natural gas revenues by 65 per cent each year. Maybe the Minister of Finance could explain whether this state of affairs is a long-standing problem with her energy-forecasting department. Or is this government deliberately piling up unbudgeted surpluses year after year, keeping billions of dollars away from the democratic oversight of this Legislature?

2:50

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've explained through the budget process the process that's used for energy forecasts. The member opposite is suggesting that he has a better handle on this than eight private-sector energy consulting firms. I find that quite astounding, but then I have always found that people with hindsight have better insight when it comes down to the time.

Mr. Speaker, I do not apologize for having more money at the end of the year than less. That is considered prudent forecasting and budgeting. In fact, I referenced last week in a question Standard & Poor's. I'm sure that even the NDP opposition would recognize that Standard & Poor's is one of the top bond-rating agencies. Their comment, and I'm going to table it at the appropriate time today: "The provincial government's conservative and prudent budgetary

practices, which seek to protect Alberta's strong financial performance against potential volatility in resource revenues, through the use of its fiscal sustainability fund and the capital account," accounts for Alberta enjoying the highest rating in this country, the highest rating that we can achieve. No, I will not apologize.

The Speaker: And we will have the document tabled at the appropriate time.

Mr. Eggen: Those funds have nothing to do with forecasting. It's a question of budgeting.

Again to the Minister of Finance: given that in the 2002-2003 budget the government miscalculated crude oil revenue by 150 per cent, in 2004-2005 off by 127 per cent, how can Albertans trust a government that allows such wide miscalculations and misrepresentations of revenue?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, we use a very wide variety of forecasts by people who spend all of their time determining this. I find it interesting that the hon. member is being very specific to oil. Very specific to oil. In fact, when I did my first-quarter forecast, one of the first things that was said by a reporter was: well, Minister, I don't think anybody's going to talk to you today about lowballing gas prices. Isn't that interesting, how gas prices are lower? We're not talking about that. Oil prices are slightly higher.

The other thing the hon. member should understand is that that is why we do a quarterly update. We adjust those numbers, and we share them publicly. They are so transparent on a quarterly basis. Again, prudent fiscal management works, and we are the envy of this country for having dollars at the end of the year.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that this minister since 2002 miscalculated the natural gas revenues to the tune of \$10.4 billion, how is it possible, then, for ministries to make meaningful budget decisions when the amount of money available to this government goes up and down like a roller coaster within each financial year?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, I think that maybe I misunderstood the hon. member or he misspoke because it wasn't this minister that made that forecast in 2002. That's first. I like the results of 2002, but I can't take the credit for that.

Again, I've had the same opportunity that all members of this House have had since we left the Assembly earlier and now return. I do not find criticism from the public on prudent financial management. In fact, the public supports having a surplus. You know, an unbudgeted surplus is saying that in excess of the needs of servicing your services, you put that money aside, which we do in a capital account and in a sustainability account. Mr. Speaker, that's what every person strives for in their household. That's what every business strives for, to have more money than they need to spend at the end of the day. I don't think that Albertans are going to swallow what they hear over there, which is spend, spend, spend at any cost.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'm going to call upon the first of six to deal with Members' Statements today, but first of all a historical vignette.

Today's subject is the Mace. The first Sergeants-at-Arms were the bodyguards of King Richard I, and these soldiers were each armed with a spiked club called a mace. Over time the mace was no longer used as a weapon but, rather, became a symbol of the

authoritative power of the Crown as exercised by Parliament. Over time and by tradition the Assembly cannot sit without its presence.

The formal procession to bring in the Mace and announce the entrance of the Speaker was introduced in the 1970s by Alberta's eighth Speaker, the hon. Gerard Amerongen. The Mace is placed on the Assembly table with the head toward the government side of the House by the Sergeant-at-Arms, who is the official custodian of the Alberta Mace.

Alberta's first Mace was constructed for the First Session in 1906 out of plumbing parts, old shaving mug handles, butts of an old bedstead, and scraps of wood and covered by a coat of gold paint. For today and today only, it is displayed on the Assembly table in the centre of this Chamber. Normally it rests in the display case on the third floor of the Legislature Building. This makeshift Mace was used for 50 years before being replaced on February 9, 1956, when the Civil Service Association of Alberta presented the Legislative Assembly of Alberta with the new Mace.

The design for the new Mace, our present Mace, was done by Lawrence Bonheur Blain, an Edmonton watchmaker, patternmaker, and employee of Irving Kline Limited. The final design was done by the firm of Joseph Fray of Birmingham, England, and is the Mace, again, that allows this Assembly to sit today.

On top of the Mace is the figure of a beaver mounted on the traditional crown, representing the connection to Canada and the Crown. Both the royal coat of arms and the Canadian coat of arms are displayed on the ball of the Mace. Sheaves of wheat, representing Alberta's prairies, and wild roses, the floral emblem of Alberta, are engraved alternately on the crown. The headband of the crown is adorned with a ring of seven gems and semiprecious stones. They have been chosen in part because their initial letters spell out Alberta – amethyst with the A, lazurite with the L, bloodstone with the B, emerald with the E, ruby with the R, topaz with the T, and agate with the A. Two bison heads are positioned just below the bowl. The shaft of the Mace is decorated with wild roses and is capped with a sheaf of grain. The current Mace is three feet long, contains 5,669 grams of silver, and is overlaid with gold to weigh a total of approximately 11 kilograms. The total cost of the Mace in 1956 was \$3,000.

As part of our 100 years of the Alberta Legislative Assembly commemorations we have designed a special 100 years Mace pin, the first of which was presented to the hon. the Premier on the last day of the spring sitting. Today I'm pleased to provide all members and table officers with a 100 year Mace pin. One will also be provided to all former members, the Sergeant-at-Arms, and members of the Alberta Legislature press gallery. I hope that all will wear the pin with pride.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Protection of Individual Rights

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Democracy has flourished in Canada for nearly 140 years and in Alberta for over a century. Our democratic system has ensured peace, prosperity, and progress. The Canadian democratic system is built on a foundation of rights, including freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom of conscience. These rights, that are enshrined for every single Canadian regardless of their race, religion, colour, or sex, require constant vigilance and diligence on the part of all Canadians, particularly on the part of those who have the honour of serving as representatives in a Legislature body.

Specifically, I am talking about the issues that have arisen from the legalization of same-sex marriage. This is a practice that contradicts the faith beliefs of many, and while it is important to protect the rights and freedoms of same-sex couples, it is also important to protect the rights of others. It is a matter of balance. We must ensure that rights are protected for all Canadians and not simply those who are the most vocal or organized. By insisting that all Canadians are guaranteed the basic right to express themselves and act according to their own values, beliefs, and religion, we are sending a message to the world that Canada is serious about protecting human rights for everyone.

I wholeheartedly support the efforts of the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View to ensure that the basic rights of every Canadian that are enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are protected. By ensuring the basic rights of all, we are ensuring the democratic freedoms of Canada for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

3:00

CFB Suffield

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For more than 35 years British Armed Forces have been using Canadian Forces Base Suffield, located 50 kilometres northwest of Medicine Hat, as a military training ground. Two hundred and fifty thousand British soldiers have gained mechanized warfare training at the CFB Suffield site, and at 2,690 square kilometres the base is one of the largest military training grounds in the western world. CFB Suffield is larger than all five other British training grounds in the world put together.

This summer, on July 24, a signing ceremony between Great Britain and the Department of National Defence Canada was held to mark the British Armed Forces' training in Canada agreement. The signing recognizes the renewal of the exchange of notes allowing British Armed Forces' training to continue within Canada and, in particular, CFB Suffield. This agreement is unique in that it does not require periodic renewal and is therefore to remain in force indefinitely. The signing is beneficial not only in showing Canada's support for the NATO Alliance and its members but also in its economic applications.

The continuation of British training in Canada, including training done at CFB Suffield, ensures economic gain for the constituents of Cypress-Medicine Hat, Medicine Hat, Albertans, and all Canadians. Not only are jobs created within and around the Suffield base due to the military's use of these grounds, but infrastructure and general spending provide economic benefits both to Canada and Alberta generally. Approximately \$90 million is gained in economic benefits by Canada every year from allowing the British military to train their soldiers within this country.

Mr. Speaker, the continuation of British Armed Forces' training in Alberta has numerous economic benefits for the province and for the people of southeastern Alberta. The July 24 signing ceremony was a positive one for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Canadian Derby

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Northlands for its successful hosting of the 77th Canadian Derby this past Saturday. I had the pleasure of attending the derby, which is one of the richest and most prestigious

thoroughbred races in all of Canada, attracting many of the best three-year-old runners in the country. At \$300,000 in purse money for the second year in a row the purse was the highest it has ever been.

This year's Canadian Derby offered one of the strongest fields of horses, featuring such notable favourites as Edenwold, the Queen's Plate champion from Ontario; Shillelagh Slew, the Prince of Wales champion from Ontario; Halo Steven from California, who entered the derby on a winning streak; and Bear Character, who was a contender for running in the 2006 Kentucky Derby. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it was Shillelagh Slew who took home the winner's share of the \$300,000 purse, nearly \$190,000.

But the Canadian Derby is more than just a horse race, Mr. Speaker. It is also about celebrating a deep-rooted tradition. With over 12,000 people in attendance this past Saturday the racetrack was reminiscent of the Royal Ascot in England or the Kentucky Derby in Louisville. Women sported their most elegant derby hats, and the event was as much a social event as a sporting one.

I would encourage all members to join me in saluting Northlands for hosting another great Canadian Derby.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Progressive Conservative Leadership Campaign

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new vision for Alberta. In November 2004 over 200,000 Tory party faithful, disillusioned by this government's lack of vision and accountability, stayed home. While government MLAs were basically banished from Edmonton, four rookie Liberals running in constituencies with postsecondary connections were embraced in Calgary and Lethbridge. You'd think this wake-up call would have shaken this government out of autopilot, but this wholesale majority rejection of the status quo came close to repeating itself when Conservative insiders failed to wholeheartedly endorse their leader at this year's spring convention. As the Friends of Ralph Klein, the FORKs, and knives clashed, former and at that time current government ministers tripped over each others' ambitions in a race to distance themselves from their past policy failures and collective guilt by association.

In the most recent poll the front-runner in the Tories' desperate race to reinvent themselves was only three percentage points ahead of the second-place contender, who in turn was only eight percentage points ahead of the pack of other has-beens and wannabes who were tied with 5 per cent each.

The passage of years has not dulled the memories of Albertans who remember all too well how the race's current front-runner forced hospital and school closures or how this parade of wannabe Premiers helped create today's vast infrastructure deficits, falsely justified in the name of debt reduction. The so-called short-term pain has yet to materialize into the long-term gain the front-runner and other Tories promised. Devoid of policy visions themselves, Conservative contenders are attempting to co-opt long-standing provincial Liberal policies such as fixed elections, all-party policy committees, royalty and deregulation reviews, and land-use strategies.

Simply transplanting another old face onto a tired Tory body will not result in the substantive changes Albertans are demanding. Albertans want more than watered-down, warmed-up status quo leftovers. They are hungry for real change, ready to order from a full course, all-inclusive Alberta Liberal government menu.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: I hate to interrupt this interesting conversation here, but I believe there are some regulations relevant to members' attire in this Chamber, and my previous speaker seems to be missing several important components thereof.

The Speaker: So I take it you're raising a point of order.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Correct.

The Speaker: We'll deal with it at the conclusion. We'll also sanction the hon. member for using the name of an hon. member in the Assembly when he clearly knows that he's not supposed to do that. Right? He knows that? The member knows that he's not supposed to do that?

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you.

The Speaker: So you did it deliberately?

Mr. Chase: No. I referred to the Friends of Ralph Klein.

The Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Early Childhood Education

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate that many people still see publicly funded child care and early education as unfriendly to families, the state meddling in the nurseries of the nation. The history of early childhood education shows us something quite different. Italian pediatrician Maria Montessori founded schools for children whose families were challenged in providing the basics, and Friedrich Froebel, the founder of kindergarten, recognized that poverty could be emotional. His mother died when he was an infant, and his father was unable to provide the nurture Friedrich needed. Froebel developed the children's garden where education, care, and a constructive approach to life went hand in hand.

The city centre education project is an initiative of this kind. Funds from Children's Services supplemented Alberta Education in a three-year pilot for inner-city schools. These unique efforts have been very successful by all accounts. The city centre education project has become a national model for the power of education to positively transform children, families, and communities. It won the Premier's award for excellence in 2004 and was recognized in the magazine *Today's Parent* for providing effective and creative solutions to the complicated problems of inner-city children.

I know a man who taught in one of these schools. He told me of children who arrived with hands chapped and bleeding without mittens in subzero weather. He talked of the importance of a breakfast program for children who had none. It is essential that we do not see children's needs in isolation. Care and education are part of an inseparable whole, and I commend the ministries for working together here.

Now the funding from Children's Services has run its term but the program and need have not. There is no funding in place for the prekindergarten programs at Delton, Spruce Avenue, and Norwood schools. Now is the time to think beyond targets, deadlines, and deliverables to something larger. It is 180 years since Friedrich Froebel said that early childhood should be a garden. It is time to allow those seeds that he planted to grow and blossom.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was proud to join members of the Harvie family, my colleagues, and the Minister of Community Development to announce the preservation of a valuable part of Alberta's natural landscape. The new Glenbow Ranch provincial park west of Calgary will encompass over 3,200 acres and 14 kilometres of the beautiful Bow River shoreline. This area is a treasure of rolling grasslands which includes the Glenbow quarry, from which the sandstone for this very building was mined, as well as ranchlands that have been in use for over a century.

The park was made possible thanks to the Harvie family, who had the vision to conserve this property and who took the initiative to ensure that their father's dream became a reality. This incredible stretch of land is an important part of our natural and our cultural heritage, and the new park will ensure that future generations of Albertans will have the opportunity to experience and enjoy our history and our diverse landscape.

3:10

As Tim Harvie stated in his address, anyone who . . . ventured the length of the valley to witness the fragile biodiversity, the sharp coulees, the sandstone outcroppings, the fresh water springs, and the wildlife that inhabits this land, has seen the value in ensuring this natural beauty remains intact.

I am sure that all members of this House agree, and, Mr. Speaker, I ask that they now join me in thanking the Harvie family for sharing their dream and allowing the province to invest in a property that will well preserve and protect a part of our Alberta history.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 218 petitions today urging the government to move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road south of the current proposal to reduce noise, increase safety measures as well as minimize the environmental impact of the road.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to submit a petition signed by 196 concerned citizens from the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, which reads, "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to take measures to control unacceptable increases in rent."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a petition from a number of Albertans that reads, "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on a proposed Standing Order 30.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 30 I wish to give notice that at an appropriate time I intend to move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned in order that we may hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance; namely,

the mounting risk to pending and future investments in Alberta oil sands, the potential loss of public royalty revenues, and the diminishing ability of local authorities to cope due to the failure of the government to plan and provide funding for the necessary public infrastructure and community services in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

The Speaker: Okay. We will deal with it at the conclusion of Routine.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I want to bring in for this debate:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely that the failure of the government to develop an affordable housing strategy has exacerbated housing shortages, causing rapidly increasing rental rates, homelessness, and unsafe tenancies across Alberta and that the Assembly should urge the government to immediately create a ministry of housing to address this crisis.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. It will be dealt with at the conclusion of Routine.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I rise to table five copies of the Standard & Poor's document that she referenced during question period today while responding to questions from one or more hon. members opposite regarding budgetary practices.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling today is a handwritten letter dated August 21, 2006, from Edmonton-McClung constituent Ms Sherry Eastwood, recounting her experience with Alberta Blue Cross in transporting her father to Norwood extended care, which is across the street from and linked with a tunnel to the Royal Alexandra hospital, and having to pay for the ambulance drive because Norwood is not considered an active treatment facility. She asks how those rules are arrived at and urges as much attention to seniors as is afforded other sectors, especially in these boom times.

My second tabling is an e-mail dated August 17, 2006, from Dr. Chris Evans, who is an emergency room physician and another Edmonton-McClung constituent, talking about some of the homeless patients he sees who can definitely work but feel that potential employers get turned off when they find out they have no place to live. He also talks about social services and that we should be looking at ways to help these guys get roofs over their heads so they can focus on going out and looking for work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have on my list Lethbridge-East, Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Ellerslie. Are there more? Okay, we'll go up and down the line then.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre first.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. They are all in opposition to Bill 208. The first is from David Cournoyer, who voices his opposition and notes that nothing is acceptable to him in this bill.

The second is from Jason Rumer, a constituent deeply opposed to Bill 208, who would like to see the bill defeated.

Finally, from Gary Simpson, who is also very opposed to the bill and goes into some detail on the arguments against it.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter to myself from Kent Cameron expressing concerns about the funding of the city centre education program and explaining his views on the considerable value of early intervention programs like this. I have the five copies with it.

My other letter is from constituent Matthew Tang, asking that I table this letter, where he is expressing concerns about the possibility of Bill 208 passing. He is concerned that this bill does nothing more than protect discrimination.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the leader of the NDP I would like to table a document referred to in question period today. There's an article by Michelle Lang in which she writes, "The minister said the province would run the risk of criticism by introducing the complex act this late in the spring session of the legislature."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling 18 letters in the required five copies. They are from Burke Babki, Wayne Dudley, Rodney Barrows, Kara Koop, Boyd Sorrel Horse, Kent Pedersen, Billy Wolf Child, Shannon Kehler, Daniel Wright, Melody Scout, Leah Williams, F. Torrento, Joe Groeneweg, Meghan Mulloy, Colin Gray, Donna Tarnava, Danielle Petersen, and Kelly Shaver. They are or work with persons with developmental disabilities. They are asking this government to please raise their wages because they are losing their staff to the local doughnut shop. Their question is: which is more important, doughnuts or vulnerable people?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the residents of Alberta I would like to table a petition which has been disallowed by Parliamentary Counsel for some reason, urging the government of Alberta to "establish a system whereby the housing development in Edmonton includes one and two bedroom bungalows or apartment complexes with elevators so that seniors or war veterans can either buy or rent at affordable prices." Many low-income seniors and veterans "have some medical problems and want to maintain their independence."

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others, hon. members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today, and they're all in relation to the upcoming debate on

Bill 208. The first is from a constituent, Julie Chow, asking me to convey to this Assembly her support of Bill 208.

All of the others, Mr. Speaker, are asking that Bill 208 be defeated. They are from Nancy Steeves, Mrs. Mieke Wharton, Lesley Mitchell, Pat Seale, Thais McKee, Bob Hetherington, Chris and Kathy Power, Anne McCracken, Steve Cymbol, Dawn Waring, Gerri Young, Lois Evans, Daniel Langdon, Margaret Hetherington, and Claudette Esterine.

I'd just like to point out a couple of concerns from that last letter by Claudette Esterine. She indicates that she is also a person of colour and a person from an identifiable cultural group, where she has suffered discrimination for those two conditions, if I can call it that, and is concerned that if Bill 208 were to allow discrimination based on her sexual orientation, then where does it stop, and would it not also extend to those other conditions?

Thank you.

head: 3:20 **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, pursuant to the Agriculture Financial Services Act the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation annual report 2005-2006.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Committee of Supply Voting

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a point of order, we have two Standing Order 30s, and we have one procedural matter that I have to clarify with the House. On the assumption that, in fact, a Standing Order 30 might actually get approved today, that would negate, then, the opportunity to deal with the point of order or the little draft ruling. So I think we'll deal with the draft ruling, then we'll deal with the point of order, and then we'll go to the first Standing Order 30.

Government House leaders, in fact, I would specifically draw this matter to you. If you would take a look at Standing Orders 61(1) and 62(1) and (2), that would be helpful in terms of what I'm going to say because this is a situation that to our knowledge has never been the subject of a ruling by the chair before.

Under Standing Order 2 the Speaker is to decide upon the procedure in all unprovided for contingencies. The chair is making a statement at this time under this standing order so as to remove any uncertainty about the proceedings in committee this evening. Essentially, the chair must find a way so that there is not a conflict between two standing order provisions that come into play because we are considering estimates in Committee of Supply on a Monday night. Under Standing Order 61(1) for consideration of estimates to constitute a sitting day, the Committee of Supply must consider the estimates for a minimum of two hours any afternoon or any evening. Under Government Motion 25, that was approved by the Assembly last Thursday, the number of days that the Committee of Supply is being called to consider supplementary supply is two days.

Under Standing Order 62(2) the requirement is that on the last day of estimates consideration by the committee the chair is to interrupt 15 minutes before the normal adjournment hour and "put a single question proposing the approval of all matters not yet voted on." The normal adjournment hour tonight according to Standing Order 62(1) is 11 o'clock. So the chair should interrupt at 10:45. The problem is that this would mean there would not have been two hours spent on the estimates, so it wouldn't qualify as a sitting day.

This issue has never arisen before. In an attempt to interpret the

Standing Orders so that there is no contradiction, the chair has spent some considerable amount of time looking at this in the last several days and interprets them so that at the conclusion of two hours or if there is no member who wishes to speak before that time, the chair will put a single question on the supplementary supply estimates as required under Standing Order 62(2).

Now, all of this is premised on the fact that the Committee of Supply will start its consideration after 8:45 this evening. If Committee of Supply somehow were to start by 8:45, the two-hour thing that would come up by quarter to eleven would not be a consideration. But one is assuming that the full 60 minutes will be spent on the motion and that the Assembly in committee will not deal with this matter until at least 9 o'clock to 9:05 o'clock, which if you meant 120 minutes later, then in essence you have to deal with the vote between 11 and 11:05, and you could not apply Standing Order 62(2), which says it would come in by 10:45 to preclude the full two hours. Clear? Okay. Very good.

Point of Order
Dress Code in the Chamber

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. Point of order.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the drafters of *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* were kind to us and have provided for the situation where at times when we can't listen to each other, at least we can look at each other and have mandated all male members of this gallery to be wearing a jacket and a tie. I'm referencing section 330 of *Beauchesne's*. As I attempted to listen to the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I know that either his necktie appears to be absent or is covered by a shirt which may be wearing a slogan. I would like a speaker's ruling on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Yes, I would like to respond to the point of order that's been raised by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I note that section 329 of *Beauchesne* does set out what a member must wear, and that is a jacket, a tie, and a shirt.

That again is referred to in section 330. Now, it does specifically in section 330 indicate that a turtleneck is not an acceptable upper-body covering, that the shirt and tie are obviously required. But what *Beauchesne* does not lay out are additional garments that male members of this House may choose to wear. For example, it doesn't include a prohibition nor does it specifically ask that members be wearing a vest, which is quite a common garment that many gentlemen wear with a three-piece suit. It's also silent on, perhaps, a scarf. It gets a little chilly in here at nights, and I myself sometimes add a scarf or a shawl to what I'm wearing. So I don't believe this member has raised a valid point of order.

My hon. colleague for Calgary-Varsity has, in fact, a shirt, a tie, and a jacket on today. He has an additional piece of clothing on, but that is not prohibited by the Standing Orders and by the rules of *Beauchesne* under which we're operating. So I would argue that there is no point of order here.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, these are rather sexist Standing Orders and *Beauchesne* rulings that we operate under in that they are silent on the apparel of women. They are specific to the apparel of men. In this case we are talking about a man, and he has met the conditions that are set out.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Does anybody else want to participate on this point of order?

Hon. members, let me make this very, very clear. For 10 years now this is one subject that this Speaker has consistently avoided making any comment on, and there's a reason for that. If hon. members would look at the letter dated February 15, 2006, to all Members of the Legislative Assembly dealing with decorum in the House, there is one line that says, "suitable dress is always the order of the day and traditional practices will be continued." That pretty much clears the air on everything.

We may have *Beauchesne*, and we may have everything else in there, but traditional practice for gentlemen is generally a jacket and a tie. Listen, I've had notes from people telling me: you can't allow her – now, that's certainly sexist. "That skirt's way too short. She's not wearing a bra." I've had women send me notes saying: that member isn't wearing a bra.

Well, let me tell you that I'm not touching any of this stuff, okay? I refuse to touch any of this stuff. I'm not going to give a ruling on any of this stuff. I just want you to be neat, attentive, with proper decorum, that your mother would be proud if she saw you here and that she would expect. Talk to your mother about what you should wear, not to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

As far as I can see, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity does have a tie. It may only be an inch and a half. I have no idea what other insulation he has with respect to himself. If he finds it cool in the Assembly, so be it. Please, I'm not getting involved in this. If you want to have a committee of this Legislative Assembly to deal with the dress code, I'd be happy to secure names from all parties to deal with this.

You all look very, very nice. Thank you very much.

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Infrastructure Needs in Wood Buffalo RM

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your wisdom and those comments. Nice move.

I'm rising today to propose the following motion under Standing Order 30.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30, be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the mounting risk to pending and future investments in Alberta's oil sands, the potential loss of public royalty revenues, and the diminishing ability of local authorities to cope due to the failure of the government to plan and provide funding for the necessary public infrastructure and community services in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

3:30

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm well aware of how carefully you attend to these arguments, and you've pointed out many times that *Beauchesne* 387 and 389 indicate that the primary issue is the urgency of debate, specifically whether there is another opportunity for debate. But briefly establishing the importance of the underlying issue must certainly be part of the argument in favour of the request for leave as envisioned by Standing Order 30. So while the test for the motion is primarily procedural – namely, whether there are other reasonable opportunities for debate – the motion must also pass this basic test of importance, and I want to speak to that briefly. *Marleau and Montpetit* 584 also comment on this.

Basically, I want to demonstrate that this is a matter of urgent public importance. This is an emergency calling for immediate and urgent consideration. This is a specific issue within the administra-

tive competence of this government. This is not a chronic issue unless a failure of the government to address the issue is chronic. This is something specific, something that can be solved with an immediate commitment from this government.

I want to show that the public interest will suffer if it's not addressed. There is a risk to billions of dollars in investment and royalty revenues, and there is a risk to local authorities who are by their own admission in a crisis mode in relation to hospitals, mental health services, education services, water treatment, transportation, and infrastructure, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, this issue is immediately relevant and of concern throughout Alberta and even beyond, throughout the nation. The recent EUB hearings and associated media coverage, which was very extensive, demonstrate this.

So, first, perhaps most importantly, let me say that this issue is critically important to the citizens of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. The actions and inactions of this government have produced a crisis situation for that community. The municipality's intervention, unprecedented I believe, at the EUB hearings in Fort McMurray indicates that very clearly.

The local authorities, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, and the health authority, and the school boards simply cannot continue to provide the necessary public services, including health care, education, policing, and other human services as well as water, roads, housing, recreation, et cetera. They cannot support existing or new projects without immediate action by this government. Last-minute, politically driven rhetoric will simply not suffice. The municipality says that public facilities and infrastructure are under, and I quote, severe strain. There's a serious, profound infrastructure deficit, something that makes it impossible to support new expansions. Numerous new projects and expansions are planned over the next few years, possibly a hundred billion dollars or more over the next decade, and the strains as a result will only grow.

The rate of growth in Fort McMurray is so serious that, and I quote here, it puts the corporation at risk. Those are the words of the regional municipality. Now, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is already \$263 million in debt, I believe, per capita, the most deep debt of any municipality in Alberta and way beyond, and it needs at least \$2 billion to expand city services. The government's commitment to date is simply insufficient.

Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Government Act states:

- 3 The purposes of a municipality are
 - (a) to provide good government,
 - (b) to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality, and
 - (c) to develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

Those are the purposes of a municipality in law. The municipality feels that it may not be able to continue those. This is not the fault of the regional municipality. They are struggling to fulfill their legislative responsibilities by insisting on adequate support.

The negative impact of growth is something that Suncor acknowledges, and it further acknowledges that these problems may worsen without immediate action by the parties with direct responsibility. The municipality there further claims that there are, quote, insufficient mechanisms available to provide for the municipality's needs in a timely fashion. End quote. In other words, we need to take extraordinary measures now to solve this problem.

The municipality also notes that prior approvals granted on the basis of promises to mitigate negative socioeconomic impacts have not been followed through by adequate action by government. They have not lived up to their promises. Current funding formulas are obviously and painfully inadequate. In short, there is currently no

regular process or mechanism to solve this situation. We need, in other words, emergency action. The fact that the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo has openly challenged the new proposal before the EUB indicates that the funding and infrastructure crisis has tipped the scale away from the public interest. Other communities, from Cold Lake to Grande Prairie, may well follow suit. The stakes are, Mr. Speaker, very high.

Another urgent reason is the threat to both the loss of investment and the threat to the provincial royalty revenue stream. This government has charted a budgetary course that has increased Alberta's direct dependence on nonrenewable resource revenues and the investments that drive them. Essential programs across this province depend on a stable investment environment, including the assurance that the host community can support these long-term projects.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, I've worked hard here to establish that essential services across this province are dependent, indeed disturbingly dependent, on these revenues from the oil sands. Secondly, we've established that the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is in a crisis situation that requires immediate and urgent consideration if future oil sands developments are to go ahead. This government is pitting the health and well-being of the community members against the public interest to find more and more development and investment. The EUB hearings clearly show this conflict is unsustainable.

So, Mr. Speaker, we've established that this is a critical issue, an emergency requiring urgent consideration. It's a specific issue within the administrative competence of this government, and the public interest will suffer if the issue is not addressed. Finally, it's immediately relevant and of concern throughout the whole province. The Minister of Environment's unprecedented intervention at the hearings, though he apparently only appeared as a local MLA, is itself evidence of how crucial the issue is.

As *Beauchesne* 387 and 389 indicate, the most critical issue is whether we are to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly and debate this. The key tests are whether the rules of the House provide another opportunity. Well, Mr. Speaker, first, there are no government bills on the Order Paper that deal with energy issues. In fact, there are no government bills relevant to this at all. The only private members' bills do not address the issue. There are no private bills that touch on this, and the only motion being debated has nothing to do with energy or oil sands development. There are no written questions currently due for discussion that deal with this issue. There are no motions for returns requesting information that may help this issue move forward. We are receiving no committee or government reports that provide an opportunity to debate the issue, and any other tools, such as private members' statements or other debates, are not available.

As *Beauchesne* 387 says, the test is whether there is, quote, another opportunity for debate. End quote. Clearly, there isn't. *Beauchesne* 390 says that the test is not whether the issue can be raised but whether it can be discussed, and it clearly can't be unless we have an emergency debate, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period is also clearly not a proper forum for discussion. Finally and most critically, the supplementary estimates before this House do not specifically address the funding and infrastructure crisis facing Fort McMurray. Given the recent EUB hearings and the calls for action by local authorities, this is indeed troubling. Where is the government's action?

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this Assembly needs to send a clear signal to the citizens of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, to Albertans, and indeed to other Canadians and investors from around the world that the fears already being voiced by industry will

not necessarily be realized because this Assembly, this government is prepared to act. I would love to see this government act.

I've demonstrated, I believe, Mr. Speaker, both the significance of the issue itself and the urgency of debate. I would therefore ask you to find that a *prima facie* case for urgency has been made and that you put the question of whether to proceed with the debate to the Assembly as called for in Standing Order 30.

Thank you.

3:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 30 provisions allow for the chair to recognize participants, so could the chair get an idea – the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, and that's it then? [interjection] The hon. leader of the third party and the hon. Minister of Environment. Okay. Remember now that urgency is the only subject the chair is prepared to entertain. This is not a debate on the motion.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your words of wisdom with respect to the nature of the debate regarding the motion at this particular point. The hon. Leader of the Opposition did however spend some considerable time outlining his idea of the substance of the importance of the debate *per se* as opposed to the procedural situation. I would with your indulgence make a couple of comments with respect to that, but I would certainly agree that the fundamental issue with respect to this particular type of motion is whether or not there are other reasonable opportunities to address the debate. So what I will do is make a few comments on the former and then finish with the procedural side of the response.

First of all, I would agree, Mr. Speaker, that issues relative to oil sands, issues with respect to Fort McMurray and the growth associated with all of that are indeed very important. Indeed, they are a very large part of what Alberta is about today in terms of revenue, in terms of where dollars are expended, so there is no doubt about the importance of the matter. I would however disagree with respect to the critical and urgent need to have the matters set aside this afternoon for a discussion.

There is a great deal that is going on relative to this. There were questions today posed by the opposition which provided answers, to the extent there were questions, as to what is in fact being done by this government with respect to the points raised, but there's a great deal more than that. For example, in terms of infrastructure there is some \$680 million that has been budgeted for the work with respect to highway 63. There's an additional \$225 million, I believe, that has been budgeted with respect to highway construction in the Fort McMurray area other than highway 63 that is either being done or about to be done this year. So those are large sums of money, and I throw that forward as part of the matrix simply to indicate that here is a substantial amount of money in one particular ministry that is already committed from a budgeted perspective. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there is an additional \$260 million that is committed but not yet budgeted; in other words, to be done, say, next year in the next budget period.

We talked about the oil sands ministerial committee today in question period. We talked about the work that other committees are doing relative to consultation for land use, oil sands consultation, and so on and so forth. All of those things are being done, and they are going to be done in the fullness of time.

As it relates, however, to the procedural aspect, Mr. Speaker, this particular session is all about supplementary estimates. The debate on Thursday afternoon in large measure turned around that. Tonight

it will turn around that. Tomorrow afternoon, tomorrow evening, Wednesday afternoon, Wednesday evening, and Thursday afternoon we are going to be debating the supplementary estimates. There are 15 ministries that are associated with that, not all of them ministries, but the fact is that it embeds within that discussion the revenue assumptions of this government. It embeds where the money should be spent, where the money is not being spent. It embeds in that a certain portion of money that is being spent in Fort McMurray. Given the nature of relevancy in this Assembly – that is, that it is a flexible term, which the opposition fully understand and use at every opportunity – I would respectfully submit, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition have the opportunity and indeed will take the opportunity this evening, tomorrow afternoon, tomorrow evening, Wednesday afternoon, Wednesday evening, and Thursday afternoon to debate this issue should they wish.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party and the hon. Minister of Environment, briefly.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I note that an SO 30 application allows for a debate on a matter of urgent public importance, and the Speaker must rule that the debate is in order and put the question to the Assembly, so I ask that you do that.

The point, I think, that is made by this resolution is that the government does not have a strategy for the orderly growth of our province. It talks specifically about Fort McMurray, but in doing so, it talks about the orderly growth of the province as it relates to oil sands development. As a result, there are a number of interrelated crises which are emergent, which warrant urgent consideration by this Assembly and, in our view, are certainly a matter of urgent public importance.

The NDP opposition has called for a government commission to be established to look at all aspects of the tar sands. We've got no response from the government on that.

The MLA from Wood Buffalo himself appeared before the EUB in an unprecedented appearance to call for additional funding for infrastructure for his constituency, notwithstanding the fact that he'd been a part of this government for a number of years.

The procedure, Mr. Speaker, at *Beauchesne* 387 says that a debate under the standing order must deal with a specific question that requires urgent consideration. It must be "within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate."

The Minister of Justice and House leader has argued that the supplementary estimates provide that opportunity. It's our submission, Mr. Speaker, that they do not. They are fragmented, piecemeal program funding that do not address the fundamental question of the government's support for the growth in the oil sands and specifically the question of oil sands development. This is within the competence of the Minister of Energy broadly, but it also has important considerations in Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs, and Infrastructure and Transportation. Those supplementary estimates do not provide a reasonable opportunity to deal comprehensively with this issue and specifically on the focus of Fort McMurray.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to refer to *Beauchesne's* 391 and note that this question is not under adjudication in a court of law. *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 587 and *Beauchesne's* 391 tell us that the matter should not be elsewhere on the Order Paper. It is not. It is a recurrent theme that we are here to debate some very specific estimates, but there is very little time even to do that.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Fort McMurray has been very clear in her position that the current pace of development in the oil sands is completely unsustainable. If there is no strategy put into place, Alberta's fastest growing city could crack under the strain.

Further, the economic distortions being caused by the government's cowboy economics are causing significant ripples throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that the New Democrat opposition is in support of the call for a debate on this issue. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the issue of urgency and also under *Beauchesne* 387 and 389, which has been referenced by the third party as well as the Leader of the Opposition, I came to Alberta almost 30 years ago, and under this urgency I came and made Fort McMurray my home. In fact, I have the honour and privilege of saying that I was the first mayor of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, with the support and the privilege that the people of Wood Buffalo offered me.

Mr. Speaker, on this issue of urgency I just remind the hon. members that close to a billion dollars, which is not in supplementary estimates tonight – in actual fact . . . [interjections] I'd ask the hon. members to please listen through the chair because I'm trying to make important points representing my citizens, no different than what you do representing yours.

But the relevance to this is simply the urgency in terms of what we are doing. Under urgency, a citizen said to me the other day: Guy, there is not one piece of road in Fort McMurray that isn't being ripped up by the province of Alberta in its money in terms of the billion dollars that's being spent there.

Is this an urgent issue? No, it is not, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, I do not support under urgency what is being suggested here this afternoon.

3:50

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, it's Monday afternoon, generally allocated for private members' day, so I appreciate very much receiving a copy of this notice of Standing Order 30 a number of days ago. It certainly allowed us an opportunity to review where we were. So I am prepared to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion of receipt is in order under Standing Order 30(2).

First of all, again to repeat that the Leader of the Official Opposition certainly gave proper notice of intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. Notice was received by my office last Friday at 10:24 a.m., so it gave us plenty of time, and that certainly met the requirement.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion relates to "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." The member's proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on the following:

The mounting risk to pending and future investments in Alberta's oil sands, the potential loss of public royalty revenues, and the diminishing ability of local authorities to cope due to the failure of the government to plan and provide funding for the necessary public infrastructure and community services in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Again, very correctly the relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debate are *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 387, 398 and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* pages 587 to 589. The key principles are that the matter must pertain to a genuine emergency and there must not be another opportunity for members to discuss the matter.

The chair also listened closely and attentively to the submissions made, and there's no doubt at all in the chair's view that this is

considered by some to be a very serious matter. It's also true, though, that we will have a bill during this session called the Appropriation Act, that is scheduled for consideration, scheduled for discussion, and there will be opportunity – whenever there's a bill before the House, the bill provides for the greatest latitude with respect to debate and discussion. It even affords for amendments. So there is that one issue.

The chair is also just a little concerned about a couple of other things. The hon. leader of the third party is quite prepared to waive his Standing Order 30 by making an argument that this Standing Order 30 is much more important. So we'll await with considerable interest to see what the hon. member will be saying with respect to the next urgent matter, which is housing, when the arguments were made very, very enthusiastically for this one to be of greater concern.

Secondly, virtually all members of the Official Opposition today – and today was an abnormal day in terms of introduction of guests and visitors – said that they were introducing visitors who were present to hear debate on Bill 208. Well, the chair is perhaps a little confused, because under *Beauchesne* 387 it says, "In making his ruling, the Speaker may, on occasion, take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate." Well, if so many members were here today to introduce guests who apparently were invited to see or hear a debate on Bill 208 and then members would come in with an emergency motion for debate, that would preclude an opportunity for this emergency debate. The chair is sometimes a little unsure of what he really hears.

So the ruling is very clear. The request for leave, despite the fact this is an interesting subject, is not in order, and the chair will not put the question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton Beverly-Clareview.

Affordable Housing Strategy

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the point is that Bill 208 is to be opposed no matter how.

I would like to move the following:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely that the failure of the government to develop an affordable housing strategy has exacerbated housing shortages, causing rapidly increasing rental rates, homelessness, and unsafe tenancies across Alberta and that the Assembly should urge the government to immediately create a ministry of housing to address this crisis.

Mr. Speaker, you've already indicated that we distributed this order to your office about 10, well before the prescribed deadline of 11:30, as laid out in Standing Order 30(1).

Beauchesne 387 says that a debate under the Standing Order must deal with a specific question that requires urgent consideration. It must be "within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate." Mr. Speaker, we're calling for a very specific action in this motion; namely, the creation of a ministry of housing. This is clearly within the administrative competence of the government. In fact, it's entirely under the prerogative of the Premier and Executive Council. Because creating ministries is undertaken by the government and not the Assembly, we have very little opportunity other than a debate such as this to discuss why such a ministry is so important.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to refer to *Beauchesne* 391 and note that housing crisis is not under adjudication by a court of law, and I would stress that there is no other opportunity to debate this matter. *Marleau and Montpetit* suggest the same criteria on page 587. In particular, although we are here to spend over \$1 billion in the next

few days, not one red cent has been allocated to the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports or to Government Services, the two ministries best positioned to address housing issues.

Marleau and Montpetit 588 also set the following criteria: the motion cannot "raise a question of privilege." Clearly this motion does not. The motion should not be of regional or local interest or related to only one specific group or industry. This crisis is affecting Albertans across the province, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've met the procedural requirements on this motion, so the question, then, is whether it is a matter of urgent public importance.

Mr. Speaker, over the summer we have heard of people living in tents in places such as Canmore and Fort McMurray because housing costs are grossly disproportionate to their wages. Earlier this week mayors from seven communities made a plea for housing support. They identified a need to deal with the homeless, for \$20 million to resolve this crisis. The 2006 count of homeless persons found 3,436 homeless people in Calgary. There have been media reports of rental increases in Calgary as high as \$1,000 per month. Average rent in Fort McMurray is \$1,500 per month for a two-bedroom apartment.

In the city of Edmonton the Boyle Street community services centre began a program to reach out to the estimated 200 to 600 people living in the river valley, many of whom are working but cannot afford housing. I have received heart-wrenching letters from constituents who are in very precarious housing situations. We mentioned that one Edmonton woman, a single parent, has been given rent increases of \$300 in just a few months.

Just today we heard from Reverend Keith Loewen, who works with CUPS Community Health Centre in Calgary. He is seeking help for a 63-year-old man who is disabled and living on a fixed federal pension and provincial social services. His rent is increasing almost a hundred dollars in one month. That means almost 90 per cent of his income must go to paying rent.

Mr. Speaker, we have a crisis in this province, and I can't think of anything more relevant than to debate the lack of a housing plan in this province. I would remind that after this session we probably will not be back here until February, and things are going to get worse before they get better. There's absolutely no doubt about that. So I would suggest to you that I think that this is a prima facie case of something that is urgent in all aspects, because we can't afford to go the way we're going. Thousands of people are suffering.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Is there a government spokesman on this particular thing? The hon. minister, the Official Opposition, and then shall we bring it to a head? Okay. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports on the urgency.

4:00

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to respond to the motion pursuant to Standing Order 30 that has been raised by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. This is a very important issue, Mr. Speaker. As the minister responsible for housing programs for low-income Albertans – and that's this ministry; there is one: Seniors and Community Supports.

In responding to the issue of urgency, I know, as we said earlier, that there is unprecedented growth in Alberta. It's increased the demand for housing throughout the province. I'm hoping that you'll consider that the motion should have accurate information in it if it is going to be addressed on an urgent basis. I'd like to just let you know that it's inaccurate to suggest that the government is somehow

responsible for increasing rents and the demand for housing in Alberta, and it's also inaccurate to suggest that we do not have an affordable housing strategy. You're absolutely right, Mr. Speaker, from your previous ruling. The substance is inaccurate in this motion. I was a backbencher just recently, and I know how important private members' day is and how important it is that we're allowed as private members to put our information forward. This takes away from that for private members today, especially to base it on inaccuracy.

We do have a strategy in our business plan, Mr. Speaker. We have two goals, nine strategies, and five performance measures in our plan. It's available on the website. We continue to develop those strategies to meet housing. We have 113 staff members who work very hard, using their annual budget of \$171 million, to implement the strategies to address homelessness and affordable housing. Our efforts include what was mentioned as the whole continuum of housing, from homeless shelters to rent subsidies and affordable housing for low- to moderate-income people. We care deeply about looking after that area for Albertans.

So I'm going to submit that this debate, I think, should be dealt with, hopefully, in your ruling as was the previous motion 30 for the same reasons that you outlined in your ruling. I don't think that this motion really deserves to be holding up the time of the Assembly for what's been put forward today because it can be debated further this week as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the point of urgency.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking in support of the Standing Order 30 that has been brought forward on developing an affordable housing strategy, particularly around rental rates, homelessness, and unsafe tenancies. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has gone through some of the arguments. I think we're always looking at two things in these arguments. One is the importance of the issue, and the second is the urgency of debating it now, today, as compared to some point in the future, what makes it an urgent debate now.

There is no question that the issue of housing and homelessness is rising up both on the actual thermometer of dire circumstances but also in the public's perception, who are becoming more concerned about this, and the increasing calls from the public to do something about this even if they are not personally involved, and that's reflected in increasing newspaper articles and letters to the editor. The point I'm trying to make here is that there is a progression of the issue.

Is the issue important? Yes, of course, especially when we look at some of the numbers that are coming forward to us. Fort McMurray: we've already mentioned that the Sally Ann shelter there was turning away around 30 people a night last year in the fall, and that's up considerably now. So how many people could they be turning away this October or November? That becomes a very important issue, both for the individuals who are facing that particular situation themselves but also as a larger issue for the municipality there and, I think, for the province overall.

In Edmonton our homeless count went up from the one that I did in 2000, which was around 1,100 people. The last time it was done, in 2004, it was over 2,000. So it pretty much doubled in four years. Again, we're seeing a progression there. Lethbridge: in their Women's Emergency Shelter they were turning away as many women and their children as they were able to offer shelter to. In Red Deer the People's Place shelter experienced an increase in both length of stay and number of guests and, again, turning away people

at an unprecedented number. My colleague has already talked about Calgary numbers. In Grande Prairie the street outreach and support van assisted 20 to 25 individuals per night last year, and 20 to 25 camps are assisted each night this year. So that's going from an individual to a collection of individuals already. So I argue that the tests for importance have been met.

Are there other opportunities for debate? The minister in charge has indicated that there are, but again, Mr. Speaker, we are charged in this particular sitting – the only business in front of us is that of Committee of Supply and then an appropriation bill in which we are debating some 15 different ministries, each requesting varying amounts of money to a total of \$1.4 billion. The concentration and the focus there is on the expenditure of money for specific requests. It's not an open debate on housing and homelessness in Alberta, and neither would the Speaker be very pleased with us if we turned that debate into such a thing. There is a time and a place for everything, and we are not being offered the opportunity to debate this issue during this sitting, which is why you have a request for an emergency debate in front of you.

Certainly, there's no throne speech that we could look upon, no government bill, no private member's bill, no private member's public bill or private bill, no government motions, no motions other than government motions. So our opportunities for debate are nonexistent on this issue. Oral Question Period, as the Speaker has often pointed out, is not an opportunity for debate. The written questions and motions for returns that we are looking forward to being able to put forward later this afternoon: none of them at this point are anticipating the issue of homelessness and housing and shelter because, of course, those written questions and motions for returns were submitted somewhere back in the spring. Any motion for a return or written question submitted today would not come up for three weeks if we continued to sit. So our opportunity to debate this issue as compared to actually just raising it is severely limited, and that's why I'm supporting the request to follow through.

Now, taking into consideration the Speaker's careful consideration of the previous request for an emergency debate and his reasoning against it, you know, I do defend my colleagues because I did listen carefully to the introductions of people that were with us in the gallery. In fact, a number of my colleagues said that people were here in opposition to a particular bill that was named but did not specifically state that people had come here to watch a debate. They said that they were opposed to it. They said . . . [interjection] Well, check the *Hansard*. Be specific about this. Check the *Hansard* and see what people actually said. Don't assume these things.

So I think that for clarification purposes I'll add that in as a defence of what we're trying to achieve with this Standing Order 30. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Speaker: The chair has already made comments earlier with respect to the previous Standing Order 30. One is the recognition of the hon. member for providing the standing order application within the time frame that was required. It was very much appreciated.

The chair recognizes that this is without any doubt a considerable matter. The chair is not sure that he can distinguish in his mind if it's more important than the situation last Thursday or three months ago. However, there's one thing in the motion that is rather interesting. It's the last number of lines in the motion: "to immediately create a ministry of housing to address this crisis." Yet Standing Order 30(6) indicates that "an emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." There is a decision being requested. It's a serious matter. Standing Order 30 says a certain thing. The chair's conclusion, very briefly, is that the request for leave is not in order, and the chair will not put the question.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Private Members' Business

The Speaker: Now, hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, I would like to make a couple of comments. I have observed with a great deal of interest what is happening on private members' day. The chair has indicated on numerous occasions in the last number of years that the chair would do everything possible to protect the integrity of private members and private members' day from a tyranny that might come from the government. Such has not been the case. It may be a tyranny of the Assembly against private members. There is a very limited amount of time in this schedule that we have in this Parliament in the province of Alberta that is allocated for private members' business. It has been relegated now to one day per week, and it's Monday.

4:10

To me one of the outstanding positives about this Legislative Assembly which makes it so different from every other Legislative Assembly in the British parliamentary mode – when members go and meet with other parliamentarians from other countries and other jurisdictions, even in Canada, they can't believe the opportunity for private members to actually stand up and advance something and do something. When the reforms were made in 1993, they were governed to providing this opportunity for private members to basically advocate for something. In fact, if you were to go and ask the citizens of Alberta, if they elected an MLA, most of them would say: we encourage you to go to Edmonton and introduce a bill and try and get it through.

Now, in that short time frame that we have, there's only so much time allocated. There's no hope in hell this afternoon that any private member's bill is coming up. Right after I call Orders of the Day, we have 16, 17 written questions or motions for returns, and even at five minutes for each one, it'll be after 5:30. I know what has transpired in the last Monday allocated for private members' day. I know what's transpired today. I applaud all the parliamentarians in the room for knowing the rules, applying the rules, and using the rules. I applaud you all for that. But just remember what the future will be for private members because I think that the new system now is that no private member's bill will ever be dealt with on any Monday in the future, period, and that to me is unfortunate. I couldn't care less what the subject is. That's totally immaterial to me. It's the principle of what Parliament is.

So I'm now going to call Orders of the Day, which means we can now have a cup of coffee, and we'll be here at 5:30 still dealing with motions for returns or written questions.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would do well to heed your words.

Proper notice having been given on Thursday, August 24, it is my pleasure to move that written questions 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35 be dealt with today. There being no additional written questions appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places hereafter.

[Motion carried]

**Illegal Drugs, Alcoholism, and
Workplace Performance**

- Q28. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.
What consultations, studies, research, or other information-gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of illegal drugs and alcoholism on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism are currently planned or under way under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development?

[Debate adjourned May 15: Mr. Ducharme speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Community Development, do you wish to continue? You adjourned it last time.

Mr. Ducharme: I answered my questions.

The Speaker: Are there additional members? Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you wanted to participate?

Mr. Chase: Yes, I did, sir.

The Speaker: Please.

Mr. Chase: On behalf of Mr. Bonko.

The Speaker: No. You can conclude on your behalf.

Mr. Chase: Oh, thank you very much. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Decore, who proposed this written question, and closing the debate, as a member of Public Accounts and having had an extraordinary session in the summer, out of the usual legislative session, his concern is that a tremendous amount of money is being spent on the tail end dealing with the effects of alcoholism and drugs. Instead of the 10 per cent that's being spent on dealing with drug addiction, we'd like to see that money turned around and the majority of the money spent, and that is why we've asked this question. If the minister is prepared to respond, we would be very appreciative of his answer. If he prefers to do that in a written format, that's great. We can save further discussion.

Thank you, and I close debate.

[Written Question 28 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Divorce and Workplace Performance

- Q30. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.
What consultations, studies, research, or other information-gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of divorce on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism are currently planned or under way under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development?

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The reason for this question being asked has to do with our frequent trips up to Fort McMurray, where we learned that a variety of reasons – the isolation, the conditions of highway 63, the stress – has caused one particular trades group to have a divorce rate of over 82 per cent. The stress of life in Fort McMurray and in a number of distant regions is causing a great deal of upset and disunity in families, and that is the reason for our question. I would encourage the Minister of Economic Development

to either respond to the question orally or in writing. It's a major concern, especially in the boom town of Fort McMurray.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to indicate that we will be rejecting Written Question 30 on the basis that my department is not currently planning nor has under way any consultations, studies, research, or other information-gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of divorce on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make some brief comments. Certainly, if the ministry is in fact not conducting these research consultations and other information-gathering exercises, they're not capable of providing that information, but perhaps this is a reasonable opportunity for us to look at this very issue in the future in regard to productivity and effectiveness and the overall human quality of life for workers in this province. We're creating a situation in this province where so many workers are compelled to be working far from where their place of residence is and where their family is as well. This creates an unstable environment for not only where usually the gentlemen are working, in camps, but also back in our cities where, mostly again, fathers and it's certainly not uncommon for mothers to be away as well for extended periods of time, causing undue stress. It would be useful, I think, for our provincial government to look at this as a study but certainly also to look for solutions for this problem.

Thank you.

4:20

The Speaker: Others?

I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Beyond a doubt our most important resource is our people. When parents are basically exchanging goodbyes and hellos and are so busy working trying to keep a roof over their children's heads, which is very much the case in Fort McMurray where two parents are employed there as well as those who by separation are trying to eke out an economic existence, the calling for a study is hardly an expensive or intrusive request. For the sake of the people in Alberta who are forced to take on numerous jobs at the expense of both their marriage and their family's quality of life, I would urge the Minister of Economic Development to undertake such a study. Thank you.

With that, I close debate.

[Written Question 30 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Education System Improvement and Reporting Branch

Q31. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Flaherty that the following question be accepted.
What measurable impacts do the activities of the system improvement and reporting branch of Alberta Education have on enhancing teaching and educational outcomes for students?

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The reason for this request is multifold. With education dollars coming at such difficulty, especially when it affects infrastructure and classroom reduction, it's extremely important that every dollar spent on education is accounted for. What this question is calling for is that kind of accountability. What exactly does the system improvement and reporting branch of Alberta Education do, and is there any evidence that it is actually directly related to either enhancing the teaching or educational outcomes for students? Education is a major draw on the province's revenue, as is health care, and it's absolutely essential that the money that's being expended be accounted for.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Written Question 31 I want to advise the Assembly that I'm prepared to accept this question on behalf of the government, but I want to just point out a couple of things very briefly. Number one, the system improvement and reporting branch should properly be noted as being a division because there are three other branches within that particular division: the learner assessment branch, the performance measurement and reporting branch, and the system improvement group, which is also a branch. It's just a small editorial thing but just for the members present to know that. It's being reorganized, actually, to become the accounting and reporting division.

However, with respect to this question in particular and understanding that what the member is really seeking is something to do with our outcomes or our performance measures, Mr. Speaker, the measurable impacts are actually provided in our business plans and elsewhere. Whatever we can find in that regard, I'll be happy to provide to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Well, I appreciate the minister saying that this information is available elsewhere, but I would argue that it is not, in fact, completely available for us elsewhere. I appreciate that you're going to give us the information that you have.

The issue here is that we seem to have this section – now reorganized, you tell us, but nonetheless we've been operating under that system for some time – in which the system improvement and reporting branch seems to be there really to give information to the minister to make policy by or perhaps even budget decisions, but it really didn't enhance any kind of report back to either the parents or the staff in the school, which are the other two parties that need to have information about education and the impacts and the outcomes of how our system is working on students. It appeared to me that what was going on here was a bit of empire building because under the previous minister it did involve additional staff that were being assigned to the department, yet we weren't getting additional information that was coming out to the parents. This whole sort of accounting report-back system didn't really give the parents or, in fact, I would argue the schools information to make decisions on. It seemed to be information that was of most interest and usefulness to the minister.

I support my colleague from St. Albert on this motion, that was brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, in attempting to dig out exactly what it was that the department thought this reporting branch was doing. We would argue that it's not giving information to the parents or the students. What was it doing in giving information to the minister, and would he like to expand on

that and give us some good reason why all that money was going in there? It wasn't going to any of the other groups that are of interest. I'm looking forward to the information that's forthcoming.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're looking for accountability. We're looking for value. It was in that direction that that question has been asked. I look forward to whatever direction the minister can provide us that will answer the questions we have with regard to the relevance of this particular department and how its relevance translates directly to outcomes either by enhancing teaching or improving the educational learning possibilities for students. I appreciate the minister's willingness, as indicated, to provide some of that information. It will be received with great appreciation.

Thank you.

[Written Question 31 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you wanted to make a procedural proposal to the Assembly?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In deference to the issue of time and the possibility of division bells ringing today, I would ask under Standing Order 32(2) that when a division is called, the time interval between division bells be shortened from 10 minutes down to two minutes. The understanding typically is that the bells ring once for 30 seconds, then there's a two-minute interval, and then there's another full minute thereafter of the bells ringing.

Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Education System Improvement and Reporting Branch

Q32. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Flaherty that the following question be accepted.

For fiscal years 2000-2001 through 2004-2005 what are the total expenses broken down by project or function in the areas of system improvement and reporting within the system improvement and reporting branch of Alberta Education?

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, what we're seeking is basically the spreadsheet information, the amount of money that was spent in this particular branch of the Department of Education. We are asking for the figures so that we and the public have a sense of the organization's value, hence the request.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Written Question 32 I want to indicate to the hon. member, who I hope will indicate to the originator of the question, that I'm prepared to accept this question on behalf of the government. I just again will point out, as I said in the previous motion, that there are three branches

within the division of system improvement and reporting, and that should be noted.

However, with respect to the issue of the parents getting or not getting information, I think it should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that this information is publicly available, and I would have assumed that through the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, AHSCA, the information requested in the previous motion and perhaps in this one as well would be provided through that mechanism. Alternatively, it should also be available on the website. We'll just check into that to make sure that it is, just to help this along. Nonetheless, I will provide the information to the best of my ability, as requested.

4:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I appreciate that the minister is going to give the information that the Member for Edmonton-Decore was asking for, but I think it misses the point, the point in the system improvement reporting branch. I think it's a broader problem we're facing here in terms of what we're testing. Clearly, there are many people that are expressing concerns – I know the minister is aware of it – on the preoccupation with standardized testing for the sake of ranking schools, for the sake of whatever. I think even in the Department of Education's curriculum they admit that standardized testing only measures a narrow six out of 20 broad outcomes that students are expected to learn.

I'm sure that the minister has heard this, but there's some worry that we've become preoccupied with standardized testing. Not to use in a diagnostic way to help kids; that's where standardized testing is obviously beneficial and desirable. But the fact is that it's being used now for reasons that have little to do with a good education. The fact is that perhaps the department should be looking at how to broaden the outcomes. If standardized testing only measures a narrow six out of 20 broad outcomes, then I think we have to look at this a little differently. How do we begin to measure those sorts of things? I'm wondering if the department is going to spend some time with that.

I think that we all know the problems with standardized testing when we are, you know, ranking schools for that reason because standardized testing, it's clear, Mr. Speaker, is not adequate. They're not good for immigrants who don't understand the language. They're certainly not good for aboriginal students. We believe that some of the standardized testing allows us to brag about how well we're doing on standardized tests as compared to other provinces and other countries, but that's actually irrelevant. The important point for standardized tests is simply that they should be used for diagnostic reasons to help kids learn, not to rank schools, not to rank provinces and all the other things that we're doing.

I believe that interschool comparison and ranking promotes shaming and blaming while masking important problem areas and important economic and social realities. People say on standardized tests – I know the minister's aware of this – that the biggest indicator of how well you do compared to other provinces is what your socioeconomic status is. That will determine how well you do in standardized tests. So we can't always take the credit. I'm sure that the minister should take a look at this if he's not aware of it. But that's the reality.

What are we going to do about the other broad outcomes that the department talks about, when only six of them are being measured, and we're taking that as the Holy Grail, Mr. Speaker? So I suggest that in this department we begin to look at standardized tests

differently, more diagnostic rather than for ranking, and begin to work on the 14 other broad outcomes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, and thank you very much for the words of the preceding speaker. He outlined things very nicely, and I don't have to go over the same ground. So thank you for that.

My concern, aside from that that's already been outlined by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, is that we're seeking to see how the dollars that are assigned into this area are actually enhancing learning for kids. That's not the information that we've been able to get from any other source. Indeed, as the previous member pointed out, what's being measured here is fairly narrow and, again, doesn't really give the information in a usable form. So the minister said: "Oh, all this information is available in other places. Parents should be able to have this through the home and school association." Well, it may be out there in statistics or in a very technical form, but it's not out there in a way that is usable information to parents and, I would also add in, the staff at the school. So I think it's important.

We know that there have been six staff added into this division that report directly to the minister. So I think I'm looking forward to seeing the enhanced information that we're able to get through the provision of information in response to this written question coming from the minister.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I want to thank the minister for his willingness to at least provide the figures and his suggestion of putting it on the website, where it is available for all to see and to examine. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, sort of beyond the raw data, explanations as to how that money translates directly to outcomes would be much appreciated.

As a teacher of 34 years and as a member of both school councils and as a council of schools representative this kind of information is extremely important because schools and parents are always penny-pinching, forced into fundraising, and they want to know that their government is putting the money where it's going to have the greatest impact at the classroom level.

Thank you.

[Written Question 32 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on behalf.

Alberta Health Care Insurance Act

Q33. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

For the fiscal years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 what was the total cost of administering the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act broken down by costs associated with provision of customer services, registration, and benefit processing?

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The point about this is that we are one of the few provinces that charges premiums, and fairly significant premiums. In doing that, there is a cost. Of course, it's well documented that we believe this is an unfair, regressive tax and

shouldn't be there, but the government says that they need the income. I think there are other ways they could get the money. Even on this there are administrative costs, and we're trying to figure out how much it's costing us to administer this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept Written Question 33.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will look forward to this co-operation. Maybe we can have co-operation in the future when they get rid of medicare premiums. We can all sit there and bring this forward, and the minister will stand up and say that she supports it, and it will happen.

Thank you.

[Written Question 33 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Health Insurance Premiums Act

Q34. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

For the fiscal years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 what was the total cost of administering the Health Insurance Premiums Act, and of that total what percentage was attributable to administering premium subsidies and what percentage to collecting overdue accounts, including payments to collection agencies?

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are attempting to get more specific information about the cost that it takes to administer the premiums. It's not all profit, as we know. This government that calls itself conservative would surely want to cut down on these sorts of, you know, extra money that we don't have to spend.

Mr. Speaker, the minister was very co-operative in Written Question 33, so I'm looking for the same response to Written Question 34. Thank you.

4:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept Written Question 34.

Ms Blakeman: That's excellent news. Thank you, Madam Minister. I'm looking forward to that information because it's always struck me as a great irony that we do tax our people through this health care premium, and then we have to also figure into all of that a certain amount of money to chase down the people that don't pay that tax which is administered as a premium. Certainly, I think all of us who answer the phone in our constituency offices have had people phoning up, and they're baffled because they're now getting calls from a collection agency.

Part of what I'm looking to understand is: when a person falls into default with their Alberta health care premium bill, it does get sent to a collection agency. Usually when that happens, it's a matter of the originating group selling the debt for whatever: 10 cents on the

dollar, 20 cents on the dollar. So if the debt was \$800, they might sell to the collection agency, and the collection agency would pay them, whatever, a hundred dollars. Then the collection agency would attempt to collect the whole \$800, and whatever they can get out of that is how they make their money. I'm wondering if that's the process that's used by this government, that they in effect sell the debt to the collection agency, who then attempts to recoup more than what they paid for it.

I'm interested in the wording of this particular written question, which seems to indicate that somehow there's a percentage to collecting overdue accounts and that they're paying a collection agency to just chase down the money for them, which is a different scheme than the one that I believed was in play here. So I'm looking forward to how this is administered. I think that in the end we are supposed to be providing health care to people regardless of their ability to pay or their economic status, so the fact that we, in fact, have to get involved in all of this chasing people down to get this money owed is because this government refuses to give over this archaic and, I think, ideologically driven idea of a health care premium, which is a tax. It's not a premium. It's a tax.

An Hon. Member: A head tax.

Ms Blakeman: It's a head tax, yeah. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for accepting the question. The information that is being sought by way of this question that the minister has agreed to provide is, I think, of critical importance, this matter of health care premiums as a tax and not only a tax but a very regressive tax regardless of income levels. Some of those who pay this tax can afford it, others cannot.

Ultimately, I think once the minister provides this information – and I hope this is provided with some dispatch – it will first of all give the minister and her staff, I hope, good, compelling reasons to simply get rid of this unfair and regressive tax. It really does lead to great hardship for lots of Alberta families to find money to pay this regressive tax but also leads to considerable wastage in addition. In terms of the money that is spent on collecting the overdue premiums, I have received in my office information from some of my constituents, who have continued to receive letters for overdue payments and have come and asked us to plead on their behalf so that they can buy some more time to find a little bit of money to pay at least part of what's overdue. Looking at those letters that they receive, I wonder how much time is spent just on getting that correspondence out, how much time the staff spends on getting those letters ready, putting them in the mail and all of that stuff. So there's quite a bit of wastage right there.

Then the worst part, of course, of having this tax is the use of collecting agencies to collect the overdues that people are never able to pay in addition to harassment, intimidation that Albertans are subjected to as part of this process. Just the amount of public money that is lost in the process I think needs to be brought to the light of day so that we and the minister in a sober way can assess why it is really important. In addition to reasons of fairness toward all, there is no need for extra revenue for this government to generate through this unfair tax. It intimidates people, takes their dignity away when collection agencies are after them. All this information is available. I hope that the minister will come forward with a decision that leads very quickly to just getting rid of this unfair tax, which is also very, very wasteful.

I thank the minister for accepting this question, but I hope that she will take a close look at the information in addition to maybe providing it to us and come to the decision that some of us in this part of the House have been urging this government to do for at least as long as I've been in this Assembly, which is nearly 10 years now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. The irony of this particular tax is that it causes sickness instead of eliminating it. The people who are least capable of paying, who live from paycheque to paycheque, are stressed not only by the tax but then the follow-up collection agencies who come knocking on their door when they're unable to pay the tax.

I do credit the minister for having recognized the hardship of this nonprogressive, wealth-based tax on seniors. I'm very pleased that the minister saw fit to eliminate the tax for seniors, and I am aware that people at the lowest level of what this government determines poverty are also exempted. But the day-to-day pain that it causes people who are trying to get ahead is unjustifiable, and I look forward to the elimination of the tax.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm in almost total shock. That's two questions in a row that have been accepted. I'm almost tempted to write one out quickly and get rid of medicare premiums right here, but I thank the minister for agreeing to that question.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The vote hasn't come yet, hon. member.

[Written Question 34 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Choice Matters Campaign

Q35. Mr. Martin moved that the following question be accepted. What is the total dollar amount spent by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on the Choice Matters and related campaigns promoting marketing choice for each of the fiscal years 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06, what is the estimated amount to be spent in 2006-07, and for each of these years what portion was spent or will be spent on paid advertising?

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe now that it's in my name, it might have a little more trouble. I'm not sure.

Mr. Speaker, this goes back to the spring sitting of the Legislature. On April 12, 2006, the agriculture minister told the House that he would get the NDP opposition all the figures related to the Choice Matters campaign. He said: "Our Choice Matters campaign is in our business plan, and it is located in our budget estimates. I don't have the number right in front of me, but we'll get that for the hon. member."

4:50

Mr. Speaker, I'm afraid that the hon. minister was mistaken. The total dollar value of the Choice Matters campaign is not in the business plan or the budget estimates. We had the Legislature

Library look into the minister's statement, and they couldn't find the information in the business plan or budget estimates. The best the Legislature librarians could find was the purpose of the campaign as outlined in the first issue of the campaign's newsletter, issued in April 2004. In that newsletter the previous minister of agriculture stated:

The Alberta government sees the great potential of this industry, but we also see what stands in the way. For the agriculture industry to grow into the future, the Canadian Wheat Board should be one option for marketing wheat and barley – not the only option.

The first issue of Choice Matters is about the Alberta government's vision for the future of the grain industry, a vision shared by many Albertans. We see a marketing system where innovation, entrepreneurship, and risk [management] are rewarded . . . where individual producers decide what is best for their individual operations.

Mr. Speaker, when the NDP opposition staff members contacted the minister's office, his staff seemed unaware of the minister's pledge to get these numbers on the Choice Matters campaign. The NDP opposition is concerned that the Choice Matters campaign is a tax-funded – and I stress: Alberta taxpayer-funded – initiative to undermine and eventually destroy the Canadian Wheat Board.

It is well known that the single-desk marketing of grains results in higher prices for farmers. There are faults with the Wheat Board, and the board has shown some willingness to be flexible and to work with farmers to iron out the wrinkles and assist them. In fact, the Wheat Board has announced intent to seek some changes from the federal government recently, and they've sought new powers that would include the ability to invest in grain-handling facilities and other enterprises now forbidden under federal legislation. The board needs these powers to return more money to the farmers, who, as we all know, have been struggling to be profitable in the wake of skyrocketing costs and relatively low commodity prices.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board spans three western provinces and is within the federal jurisdiction. The province of Alberta should not be spending Alberta taxpayers' money in trying to undermine something that has generally been proven effective and, I stress, is not within the provincial government's jurisdiction. The minister of agriculture stated that the Alberta government did not want to abolish the Wheat Board, but the fact that they're spending this money and some of it in advertising in, clearly, a jurisdiction that they shouldn't be in indicates that they aren't serious about protecting the Wheat Board even if they make changes.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be very interested to find out where it now stands and whether we're going to get this information. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development we will respond and indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 35.

The Speaker: Three for three, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm very much pleased that the minister has accepted providing the answer in terms of the amounts of money being spent on this particular program.

The federal government has also been making rumblings about the Canadian Wheat Board and, I'm sure, expending taxpayers' money in a similar fashion to undermine it or weaken it despite the service

it has provided for farmers and continues to provide for farmers throughout the prairie provinces.

I know that there have been various end runs made by this province in terms of trying to load trucks down and head across the border and sell it privately, and people have ended up in jail as a result of breaking the federal laws. My hope is that neither the federal laws nor the provincial laws will allow individuals to try and end run the value that the collective policies of the Wheat Board provide in terms of ensuring income to farmers through a large representative base.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Now you may have to carry me out, Mr. Speaker. I think that I'll quit while I'm ahead and thank the minister for agreeing to at least take a look at this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I may have made a mistake here. Did the hon. Member for Highwood want to participate?

Mr. Groeneveld: You bet.

The Speaker: Well, okay. Please, go ahead. That was an error. My telephone here, which only rings once every 12 years, was just ringing at the same time, so I wanted to put it away. Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do realize that you were standing on your head on the throne there, so you couldn't see me.

I guess I would just like to take issue with some of the things that were said. Certainly, I don't want to get into a big debate here. [interjection] We might as well perhaps. I don't know.

The Canadian Wheat Board certainly is not serving all the farmers of Alberta, and I'm one of them. If you think that we're using taxpayers' money to knock down the Wheat Board, I don't think that's exactly the issue. I've discussed this with the minister, and we've heard it said before. It's not the Wheat Board that we object to; it's the monopoly and the single-desk selling. The last time that I checked, this was still a free country. Alberta maybe stands alone – I don't know – but perhaps we should look at this situation. I don't care whether it's a majority, a minority, or one person that doesn't want to deliver to the Wheat Board. That one person has his rights, and I don't think he should be forced into that situation. So perhaps with a little bit of luck we can maybe deal with this in the coming year.

I certainly am not in favour of this motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to now close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I like that argument that the member just said: if one farmer wants to do whatever he can, he doesn't have to go along with the board elected throughout the province, that they can decide to do whatever they want. That's interesting because less than half of the people voted for this government, but the people in the province still have to go along with what they decide. I wish they'd be a little more consistent in terms of what they see as democracy. A little more consistent.

Mr. Speaker, the point still remains that they do not have the jurisdiction over the Canadian Wheat Board. It's okay if the

Conservative Party wants to spend that money, but it should not be up to the taxpayers of Alberta to spend money organizing a propaganda campaign on something that's not in their jurisdiction. That's wrong, and it's wrong no matter how you cut it. For people that are supposed to be concerned about the taxpayers' money, I would think that the member would not be very happy about that. Would he be crying if the government was spending money on things that he didn't agree with? No, it's only when it works for him. So their idea of democracy is very interesting. Very interesting indeed.

Thank you.

[Written Question 35 carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, August 24, it's my pleasure to now move that motions for returns 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36 be dealt with today. There being no additional motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of Edmonton-Decore.

General Revenue Fund Grant Details

M27. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents related to the \$150,800 grant provided to Maskalyk Miles as described in the 2004-2005 general revenue fund details of grants, supplies, services, tangible capital assets, and other payments.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To give the House somewhat of a break, I'm going to put forward the arguments, which I will not then repeat for 28 and 29. I'll give you the gist of the argument. It's an argument on accountability.

5:00

We're presented in this House with budgets that have very few lines. It's next to impossible for us as members representing our constituencies to try to get any idea where the majority of the money is spent. The government has indicated that any expenditure over \$100,000 must go through a bidding process, but the government can avoid this by simply cutting down the amounts and doing, basically, one for \$50,000, one for \$70,000 and another one for \$35,000 awarded to the same company in a piecemeal fashion, therefore avoiding the transparency of a bidding process.

Each of these motions for returns is for a large grant provided by the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development. All grants are listed in the general revenue fund details of grants, supplies, services, tangible assets, and other payments 2004-2005. This grant as indicated is for \$150,800, a sizable sum of money provided to a single contractor, Mr. Maskalyk. It's a large sum of public money with no supporting documentation. This is one of the largest grants paid to individuals in this ministry this year. In the name of transparency and accountability we're hoping that the answers and the fine print details will be provided.

The public does not know what services this individual provided. The public does not know what common good or what public value was obtained for this expense. What was the justification for providing grants to these people? The public has no idea why these individuals received public money. The public is unable to evaluate whether these individuals followed proper channels in applying for these grants. There could be perfectly good explanations. These people could be doing great work and helping many Albertans, helping the environment, protecting endangered species, helping with a solution for the mountain pine beetle problem, but we don't know. This government obviously has a justification for the hiring of these individuals. We would please ask them for an explanation so that we can see that this was money well spent and that outcomes were achieved.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are prepared to accept Motion for a Return 27.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank my colleagues for bringing forward the question and the minister for agreeing to supply the information because I think there's an underlying issue here around accountability and transparency of what the government does. It's extremely frustrating operating from the opposition side, trying to get information from the government. You know, there's often a reference: "Oh, it's in our business plans. It's in the budget documents." No, actually, it isn't. It's not broken down. We get a one-line rollup.

It's the same thing when we're looking at the end of the fiscal year. The annual reports from the various ministries contain a great deal more information about what they believe they achieved, but for breakdown of actual information of each program they had and how much money was spent and how many people were assigned to it, that's for the most part a mystery. That's when we have to start digging to tease apart what's actually going on in the government.

If you go back and look at what the budget document and the reporting documents looked like 15 years ago, you get a much more detailed picture of what the government was doing. Rather than becoming more open and accountable and transparent, this government has become less open and accountable and transparent. We've had to go through a number of layers to get to this point today where the minister has said: yes, I'll provide the information to you. That takes place over a very long period of time, while we try to dig out a very simple thing. This could be perfectly acceptable and done annually or whatever. There's probably a very good reason for this, but we have to go to extraordinary effort to try to get that information out, right down to being here on private members' day, using our private members' privilege to ask this question of the government.

The second part of this is that while we cherish the role of the Auditor General in this Assembly and the work that the Auditor General and his staff do, I think that sometimes we come to believe they are all powerful and that in fact they're auditing every single receipt of every business transaction that the government makes. That's not possible. We really would be giving the Auditor General and his staff superhuman powers if that were the case. They have a general look, and some departments they concentrate on in a given year, but in other departments they have a general look at what's

going on to see if the recommendations that have been made in previous years have been adhered to, check a couple of things by way of sample, and then they move on. In fact, it's quite easy to overlook something that may well have been improper. The idea that the Auditor General is out there checking every single thing is not true.

It's well within our duty as an opposition to be asking questions such as: what is this \$150,800 for? There is no supporting documentation to it. We've pulled this out of what's commonly called the blue book, which just lists the department, the individual, and the amount of money, but there's no supporting information. I'm very glad that we're going to see the information coming from the minister. I think we have a couple of other questions that are very similar, so in all likelihood I don't need to repeat my argument, but it's part of a context.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just want to thank the minister for his openness and his willingness to provide details.

I want to extend another bouquet to the minister because I was extremely impressed having had my first opportunity to attend PNWER, the Pacific Northwest-Economic Region's conference. I was privileged, I would say, to be a part of a presentation that the minister provided on a variety of topics, including information that was provided, basically co-chaired with Dr. Brad Stelfox, at the University of Calgary. I also want to credit the minister for seeking information from a number of very informed individuals. The beauty of Dr. Brad Stelfox's presentation, as the minister recognized, is that he doesn't draw conclusions. He presents information. He presents projections, and with those projections we are able to form our own advice.

I also want to give the minister a bouquet for his explanation of how the province is undertaking the attack on pine beetles. What I'm very pleased about in this specific part of the attack is that at this point in the presentation the minister acknowledged with government biologists that the pine beetle is being attacked tree by tree. The minister pointed this out in question period last week, and the fact that clear-cutting is not the justifiable response for infestation gives me great hope. By singling out those trees, dealing with it tree by tree instead of clear-cutting massive areas of forest and threatening the watershed, I think the minister is dead-on in his one tree, one solution process.

Thank you very much. I close debate, and I appreciate the minister's actions and openness in providing answers to this request.

[Motion for a Return 27 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

5:10 General Revenue Fund Grant Details

M28. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents related to the \$188,000 grant provided to Jean Henry Paul as described in the 2004-2005 general revenue fund details of grants, supplies, services, tangible capital assets and other payments.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I promised that I wouldn't go into lengthy argument. What we're looking for is transparency and accountabil-

ity. Any information that any ministry can provide directly to this House or by posting it on a website saves a FOIP request. We all know how expensive and how frustrating those FOIP requests are. So if the minister and all ministers, following his example, would provide that information rather than forcing us to seek it through other methods, it would be a great change in transparency and accountability that all Albertans would appreciate.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I'd like to thank him for his comments about a very successful PNWER meeting. Certainly, the working group that he participated in produced some very good information, and that's what PNWER is all about. So thank you for those very nice comments.

With regard to MR 28 we are also prepared to accept this one on behalf of the government.

The Speaker: Shall I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate?

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the clarity. I appreciate the transparency. I appreciate the collaborative work that this House is demonstrating this afternoon.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 28 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

General Revenue Fund Grant Details

M29. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents related to the \$103,000 grant provided to Lefebvre Edmond as described in the 2004-2005 general revenue fund details of grants, supplies, services, tangible capital assets, and other payments.

Mr. Chase: Thank you again. Without going into detail, the work of Public Accounts and the debate in the Assembly – so many of these other avenues for achieving accountability could be speeded up if the information was clearly expressed and pointed to. Again I would encourage ministries to post information and explanation rather than strictly dollar figures on their websites so that the public has the ability to judge the value for money that was received. I am hoping that we're in a 3 for 3 circumstance, and I look forward to the minister's reply.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion for a Return 29 will also be accepted as presented. We'll provide that information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate, or should I call the question?

Mr. Chase: I would like to call the vote, sir.

[Motion for a Return 29 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Proposed Police and Peace Officer College

M30. Mr. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including but not limited to studies, reports, submissions, and correspondence, regarding the design, cost, location competition, and curriculum for the proposed Alberta police and peace officer college.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This 3 for 3 act times two will be a tough act to follow no doubt.

Now, I recognize that this has been an issue largely under the purview of the Solicitor General as opposed to the Minister of Advanced Education, but it does involve, obviously, Advanced Education. Therefore, on behalf of my colleagues and on behalf of the people of Alberta I have an interest in this. So I move Motion for a Return 30.

One of the key things that we're looking for here, of course, is the location competition because we really are in a vacuum, as the opposition finds itself so frequently in with this government, in terms of understanding the nature of that competition. You know, I can't comment on whether decisions that were made were based on merit or not – I don't know – or whether it was all based on politics, but the competition seems to have pitted one small community against another against another against another against another.

What this motion for a return really does, among other things, is seek the reason why for that, the reason why that kind of a competition was necessary. We need to know whether the competition, the curriculum, the design, the cost of this proposed Alberta police and peace officer college is going to deliver what this province so obviously requires on a going forward basis, and that is the issue of consistent training for police and peace officers. I would look specifically at the increasing use of special constables, sheriffs with – what? – one month's training, I believe . . .

Ms Blakeman: Four weeks.

Mr. Taylor: Four weeks of training.

. . . going on duty here very shortly to enforce traffic regulations. While I suppose it doesn't take a degree in advanced mathematics to learn how to operate a radar gun and determine whether someone was in fact doing 120 in a 100 kilometre an hour zone or something like that, there's a need to know that the training has been consistent and will continue to be consistent.

So with that, I'll take my seat now and look for a response from the government benches, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We'll be rejecting Motion for a Return 30. This motion requests copies of documents relating to the proposed Alberta police and peace officer training centre. As the member opposite knows, we are currently in the process of a request for proposal for the training centre, and the rules governing RFPs prevent the public release of any information that would undermine the process. This includes not releasing any of the information requested in the motion, so therefore we must reject Motion for a Return 30.

Mr. Chase: I just have to rise to suggest that that's the weakest excuse I've heard in some time, and the reason I say that is that nowhere within Motion for a Return 30 is there a time or date; you know, Mr. Minister, we want it by 5:25 on the 28th or there'll be

trouble. There is no time requirement. What has happened is that this competition for the college has become almost like an international competition for the Olympics, where what has happened is that a number of communities who have restricted cash flows are hoping to make it big by having a college in their area.

I know that when I travelled last spring – that's the spring of 2005 – to Drayton Valley and I talked to the mayor and councillors there, they were looking for economic opportunities. They were thinking, possibly: "Could we have a satellite college like Athabasca University? Could we have aboriginal apprenticeship training offered in Drayton Valley?" I'm sure that Drayton Valley was probably one of the towns that was asking for this kind of a possibility because it would bring individuals into the community. They would be shopping at the local stores. It would add infrastructure, obviously, in the way of either dorms or off-campus housing. So it's a large concern and would be a large benefit to whichever lucky municipality received it.

However, what has happened is that trying to put forward the best bid possible involves money, and that's money that a number of these municipalities don't have. So they have to decide: "Do we go all out, and do we spend several thousand dollars? Do we create a PowerPoint program? Do we elicit support from MLAs in other jurisdictions? Would they give it up in order for us to have this jewel in our own location?"

5:20

If this process isn't an open and transparent circumstance, then a variety of municipalities have possibly been led down a very expensive government garden path in terms of trying to put forward a successful bid. Nowhere – and I repeat as I began – is there any call for a certain time period for this information. I would look forward to the minister saying: well, possibly I can't give you such and such a study or report submission at this particular time, but when the decision has been made to award the college to whatever municipality, I will be glad to provide you with the specific details that you've requested, realizing, of course, that because the competition is still on, I can't provide you this information at this particular time. We would understand that time limit. We would embrace it. But we're looking for transparency and accountability that previous ministries have demonstrated and we will hopefully find soon within this ministry.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have from the beginning, when this initial proposal for an Alberta police and peace officer college was presented, been supportive because I think there's a real need in Alberta to have the training for our police officers under one roof so that municipal police departments would not be all training their own recruits with standards different from other municipal police departments. So I think we've been supportive of the idea.

What this particular motion for a return asks for, simply, is more information about that. It's difficult even on this side to begin to provide our support if we don't know all of the studies, the studies that were engaged in to come to the conclusion that this was a good idea. So asking for such studies and reports and submissions seems to be just the sensible thing to do to have transparency, to have all the information necessary.

My hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity has raised the issue about the cost to municipalities. From the very beginning that has been a real concern. Having talked to people in different municipali

ties who submitted a proposal, I think that it's cost a lot of money for municipalities to put in their bid. I don't know to what extent municipalities have been helped in that process. I hope they have. But we don't have any information about that. We also don't have any information about the current process of determining the location. So it's all about transparency and getting the right kind of information so that we can even begin to support a government position that we might want to support.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to just make some observations on the minister's decision to reject MR 30 and the information requested therein. I find the minister's decision both disappointing and baffling. I know that he has spent his life in very important positions where he has learned to handle information in confidence, and perhaps the reasons for secrecy were obvious. He is now in a different arena. He's in a public arena, where he's expected to live by different norms, norms of openness, transparency, and providing the information to this House. It's very important for all of us to make judgments about whether or not decisions being made by the government and by ministers such as the Solicitor General here are worthy of our support.

For the minister to reject this request out of hand without saying: "Well, look, there's lots of information here. It seems to me as the minister that these pieces of information can be released now. There are others which are so sensitive, of a contractual nature, that I can't do that now, but once the time is right, I'll be very happy to share that information with this House" – that's why I use the words "disappointing" and "baffling." It's disappointing that the minister didn't find some obligation to share information asked in good faith with the House and baffling because I thought he was very much committed to principles of openness and transparency and accountability.

I still think that there's an opportunity for him to rise in the House and say that he does subscribe to these fundamental principles of openness, transparency, and accountability, that he has had time to have second thoughts about the decision, to perhaps change his mind and say: here are the following pieces of information that I willingly will share with you on such and such a date, and there are other issues on which the information will be made available once I've come to the conclusion that there's no longer a need to keep them secret and inaccessible to Albertans and this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, there is only one taxpayer, and numerous communities spent what we can only assume were considerable amounts of taxpayer dollars preparing their submissions. We can only assume it because the information won't be shared with us. Whether or not that involved expenditure

by this particular level of government or those particular levels of government – at the town level, at the municipal level – the taxpayer is still out of pocket for the money that was being spent, so the taxpayer has every right to ask for an accounting of the spending of that money. Since this was the level of government that required the competition, this is where the accountability should happen.

We need greater details as to why the government chose to put the location for a public institution out to a bidding war between communities. We need to know how much it was going to cost the communities. We need to know why the provincial government did it that way. We need to know whether there could have been a better way, whether there could have been a better process, or whether there was just kind of a desire on the part of government MLAs to use up some of their travel per diems and go on a government road show.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, no. Extra. This is above and beyond. This is more money.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. I suppose it is. You're right.

You know, it may also cause some problems. I don't know. It may not. But it may cause some problems for institutions and communities where colleges and institutions were already offering some version or portion of this curriculum. I'm thinking about, for instance, Lethbridge Community College. Does the weakening or the loss of this program from LCC have a significant impact on that institution? We need to know. Therefore, it's critical to know who the MLAs consulted with while they were on their road show, where they drew their ideas from.

It's critical to know whether high-ranking friends of the government, such as the Premier's former chief of staff, Rod Love, might have been acting as a paid lobbyist for any of these communities. I mean, we don't know. We know that he has acted as a paid lobbyist in the past. We don't know whether he was involved or not. We don't know whether there was any connection between who lobbied whom for which community and which community was or was not in the running for this police college.

We need to know, in short, Mr. Speaker, that this was a fair and open competition, that it was not about who you know, that it was not about who you could afford to hire, that it was about who was going to do the best job. Given that it was put out to competition, who was going to do the best job of educating the future police officers and peace officers of the province of Alberta?

The citizens of Alberta are entitled to nothing less. The citizens of Alberta are entitled to demand that. The citizens of Alberta are entitled to demand accountability from their police officers, from the government that sets in motion the process of training their police officers.

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. The House stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, August 28, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 20060828

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, the Government House Leader moved a motion earlier on this afternoon, and I believe there was unanimous consent given that should there be any division, the bells be reduced to two minutes. We just want to make sure that that motion applies for the evening as well.

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. So the motion as passed earlier this afternoon applies for the evening too.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Cattle Health and Slaughter Protocols

512. Mr. Groeneveld moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to work with provincial governments and the federal government to standardize health and slaughter protocols for cattle across the country, thereby increasing interprovincial beef trade.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all members in advance for their participation in this evening's debate. I look forward to hearing your comments shortly. Before we begin debating this motion in earnest, I would like to begin by discussing some of the reasons for bringing forward Motion 512.

Mr. Speaker, it was three years ago, on May 20, 2003, that a case of BSE was discovered in an eight-year old cow within the province. The ramifications of this discovery were far reaching, and the toll of the closure of the international borders, and particularly the United States border, to live cattle and beef products was devastating to cattle ranchers.

As most of you are aware, the agriculture industry is a major contributor to Alberta's economy, and when our cattle producers were hit by the cut-off of trade from the United States, all Albertans felt the impact. The United States is our largest trading partner in terms of beef exports, with somewhere around 80 per cent of the province's beef exports destined for that country. No longer being able to export beef and beef products to the U.S. had a huge effect on the beef industry, as we are all aware.

As an MLA with constituents who suffered during this time period and also as a beef producer myself, I witnessed first-hand the effects that the border closure had on beef producers. In 2002 Alberta's revenue from beef and veal exports was more than \$1.6 billion. By 2003 this figure was closer to \$1 billion. Such a significant decrease in the revenue generated by beef goods cut into beef producers' bottom lines considerably.

Improving the ease with which Alberta beef is traded within the country will ensure that our beef trade remains strong, which is a benefit to all Albertans. Currently meat being traded interprovincially must be processed in a federally inspected meat facility. Beef cuts that are being shipped solely within the province can be processed within the province at a provincially inspected meat processing establishment. At both levels meat is inspected to make

certain that it is safe for consumption. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible for enforcing the food safety standards created by Health Canada, and our own provincial legislation, such as the Meat Inspection Act, ensures that our Alberta beef is safe for consumption by Albertans and individuals worldwide.

Although Alberta has high standards for provincial meat facilities, meat inspected at these establishments still is not eligible for shipping interprovincially. Mr. Speaker, the requirement that meat shipped to other provinces be processed in federal meat establishments impedes many Alberta beef producers and small companies who sell meat products from shipping their goods between provinces with ease and efficiency. For example, in my constituency in the village of Longview there is a beef jerky producer who is hindered by this current system. Many of you may recognize the name of Longview Beef Jerky. This is a company with great product who has enjoyed a good deal of success within the province. The company uses a provincially inspected plant in creating their product. Were the system more flexible and this company able to ship the meat inspected at the provincially inspected meat processing facility interprovincially, the possibility for them to expand their business would be much greater.

Another incident where the lack of unified standards across the provinces has hurt Alberta companies was the incident of Blue Mountain Packers. This was a group of Alberta ranch investors who refurbished a mothballed packing plant at Salmon Arm, B.C. They did not set up in Alberta because of the fact that they could not export out of the province. Ironically, you can send live cattle province to province quite easily, but you cannot send meat or meat products unless they have been through a federal meat establishment. The cost of shipping live cattle and the unanticipated fact that all waste products had to be shipped back to Alberta proved to be too great a financial burden, and the plant went into receivership after just 16 months of operation.

Were we able to trade beef products between provinces using our provincially inspected meat facilities by standardizing our health and slaughter protocols across the country, Alberta would be able to further increase our interprovincial beef trade. Companies such as the ones I have just described would be free to ship their beef products across the country using a more common-sense method. Standardizing would be an efficient manner of increasing such trade and also benefit the country as a whole, not just our own province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has high standards for its meat processors as well as provincial cattle producers, but standardizing health and slaughter protocols across the provinces and territories would demonstrate to other countries how vigorous our standards truly are when shipping beef and beef products within the country and abroad. It also presents a great opportunity for Alberta to assist producers in diversifying their markets. If producers can easily and efficiently export their beef between provinces while still maintaining animal health and food safety, they are more likely to take advantage of this fact.

Mr. Speaker, this government has done a great deal to support the beef industry after the occurrence of BSE caused markets to close to live cattle and beef products. With Alberta's six-point BSE recovery strategy the industry has been able to recover most of the trade and to look forward to the future, when we can increase our exporting to even greater levels. Motion 512, standardizing health and slaughter protocols, will help to further this goal and build on the BSE recovery strategy.

Easing the trade between provinces, thereby increasing Alberta's interprovincial beef trade, will benefit Alberta's beef producers, the beef industry, and, indeed, all Albertans. Therefore, I hope that all

Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly will support Motion 512 this evening.

Again, I look forward to the rest of tonight's debate and thank all members in advance for their comments regarding Motion 512. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise in this Assembly in the month of August and discuss Motion 512. I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing this forward. It certainly is a very good motion, and I think that all hon. members of the Official Opposition would be interested in supporting the member's motion.

Now, this motion certainly reflects one of the Alberta Beef Producers' carried resolutions. This was decided upon late in 2005. If you have a look at the resolutions of the annual general meeting that were published in the Alberta Beef Producers' newsletter, you will see where there is a similarity.

This motion encourages the provincial government to work with other provinces and the federal government to standardize cattle health and slaughter protocols nationally. It aims, of course, at increasing interprovincial beef trade. I would like to know from the hon. member – and perhaps in the time that we have someone else can inform everyone in the House – just exactly what sort of consultation process has gone on not only with other provinces and the federal government but with the Americans, if any. The hon. member pointed out quite accurately the significant export trade that we have in beef and beef products with the Americans, but it is certainly in that market that we need to restore one hundred per cent confidence. Whenever the American consumers buy our beef and our beef products, they should know that they can have all the confidence in the world in that product.

8:10

According to the Alberta Beef Producers, producers are able to trade beef within their own province, which inspects beef according to their provincial standards. When beef, of course, is traded interprovincially, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible for inspecting the beef, and again it's according to federal standards. In Alberta the meat inspection regulation sets provincial guidelines in the area of animal slaughter and handling.

I would like to know at this time – and if I could get an explanation, I would be very grateful. We have HACCP in Alberta, which is the hazard analysis critical control point. When I look at this in the Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development annual report from 2004-05, I'm looking at some of the performance measures. The hon. member talked about our vigorous standards, and I would like an explanation from the hon. member in regard to this performance measure from the annual report, which indicates that as a "per cent of Alberta-licensed food processing plants that have implemented appropriate food safety process control systems" for meat, the target is 6 per cent, and then it's going to increase in leaps and bounds to 20 per cent in the next year.

Now, there have been no draft annual reports of any respective departments released by the government. I don't why. Usually in other years, Mr. Speaker, there is a complete list of draft annual reports presented to the standing policy committees and through the standing policy committees to the Official Opposition and to the public, the taxpayers. But this year – I don't know whether it's because of this session or because the government is lacking focus and direction because of the leadership race – there have been to date no annual reports, the draft form, presented through the SPC

process. Perhaps I could have my question answered, but in light of the fact that I don't have the annual report in draft form for 2005-06, the hon. member could let me know for meat products just how we're doing so we can make sure that we are restoring confidence in our meat processing industry.

Federally, Mr. Speaker, there is the Meat Inspection Act,

an Act respecting the import and export of and interprovincial trade in meat products, the registration of the establishments, the inspection of animals and meat products in registered establishments and the standards for those establishments and for animals slaughtered and meat products prepared in those establishments.

Well, I would also like to ask if in the research leading up to this motion the hon. member had contemplated the manufacturer of the beef jerky in the constituency perhaps being interested in making a presentation to the committee that I understand is meeting regarding red tape or, as I call it, blue tape – there was supposed to be a reduction in blue tape by this government; in all regulations and all rules and laws there was a supposed to be a streamlining, a look at that – and if this is perhaps a place that individual or that enterprise could go and have their opinion heard.

Now, when we look at this, Mr. Speaker, we already know the importance of Alberta's cattle trade. The interprovincial cattle exports certainly fluctuate, but they've been as high as 350,000 head in 2002. Since BSE that has dropped significantly, but hopefully it's going to recover, and we are going to once again have a very important and healthy and prosperous industry.

I'm certainly willing to support this motion. The purpose is to increase interprovincial trade, and we on this side of the House certainly support the hon. member's initiatives. The beef industry, as we've said before, is very important to Alberta, and we are happy to support any measure that will facilitate increased interprovincial beef trade. I think this is a good idea, and I know that it's something that would and should get a lot of support here in this province.

In conclusion, in due time can we hear from the hon. member: has the member spoken with any groups either in Alberta or elsewhere who are opposed to this idea? If anyone is opposed to it, if he could elaborate why, I would be very grateful.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Motion 512 is a good first step in terms of going to work on this issue. I'll come to some problems, but I think it's certainly reasonable that we in the Assembly support this.

I think there are some danger signs, and I don't know if this has turned around yet. I notice from the daily livestock estimates that the national cattle herd has declined for the first time in three years since BSE. They had an estimated 14.8 million head on the farms as of January 1, a drop of 233,000 head. Now, I'm hopeful that if we move on this motion, that will solve some of the problems, that it would get the herd back up. Clearly, the member talked about the reasons, BSE, and certainly, Mr. Speaker, there have been attempts in Alberta – I don't agree with all the attempts; I think some more could have been done – to increase packer capacity within Alberta. We have, I believe, nothing to lose, nothing to lose at all from a comprehensive nationwide strategy.

I'm sure the minister is aware of this. Last year in May 2005 – I'm not often a great Senate person that advocates a Senate, but every once in a while they stumble in and do some reasonably good work, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about the interim report of the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. There are

a number of recommendations, but I think it's important that they make recommendation 6.

The Committee recommends that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency immediately undertake a legislative review, in consultation with the industry and the provinces, and with due consideration of all trade implications, to propose changes to the relevant acts and regulations in order to implement a domestic standard allowing establishments that comply with this standard to trade with other provinces without being fully registered to trade on the international market.

It seems that what they're recommending in 6 is certainly in the same spirit as the motion that the member is bringing forward. Though it is important, it's not quite as simple – I'm sure the member knows this – as just saying that we're all just going to get together and agree to do this. It's important to note that this is a matter requiring thorough negotiations and quite likely legislative changes at both the federal and provincial levels.

8:20

The Senate report does note that there is currently an agreed-upon meat code which reflects basic minimum food safety standards for a meat processing plant. It also cautions, however, that if this code is enshrined in legislation, it might have unintended consequences in terms of the standards Canada would request of foreign countries shipping meat to Canada. So they're saying that there could be some problems here. To quote the Premier – I can use his quotes every once in a while – for every action there is a reaction. They're saying that could create some problems there.

I think that on the whole this motion is a good one in that national standards would be an initial step toward improving interprovincial trade barriers, particularly as it relates to beef. Clearly, though, there is more work to do. The point I want to make is that this is probably much more complicated than we can just put in a motion, but I think this motion is worth supporting as an initial first step.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise this evening to join the debate on Motion 512. Motion 512 proposes that the government work with other provinces and the federal government to standardize health and slaughter protocols across the country with the objective of increasing interprovincial beef trade. I'm confident that this idea has the potential to achieve not only its intended objective but to have positive effects on Alberta's international standing as well.

To understand the positive effects this proposal will have on the future of our beef industry, it is vital that we consider it in light of the past. Three years ago our beef industry was brought to its knees by BSE, bringing with it a multitude of other trades and occupations that depend on its well-being. Borders were closed, profits fell drastically, and the future of the beef industry in Alberta looked very grim indeed. Thankfully, it seems as though we've managed to weather the worst of the crisis.

Because we survived, however, doesn't mean we can rest easy. We need to take steps to protect ourselves from another such crisis. How will Motion 512 accomplish this? I think the encouragement of standardized slaughter protocols will inspire two very different yet equally significant and positive effects.

First and most obvious is the economic benefit that will be realized from easier interprovincial trade. Adopting a universal standard would make provincially licensed facilities able to export their products to other provinces, something currently prohibited under federal law. In this day and age I think it's totally ridiculous

that trade of not only beef products but also most agricultural products and commodities is still prohibited unless federally regulated and licensed. As the lion's share of Canada's cattle are in Alberta, I think that expanding market share within the country would provide a good deal of opportunity for our beef producers, slaughterhouses, truckers, and all those whose financial security depends on the beef industry. Opportunity aside, it would also provide protection in the event that foreign borders were once again closed due to BSE or any other form of crisis. Having an easily accessible market right next door would make things easier should that ever – and let's hope it doesn't – happen again.

Which brings me to the second benefit that I believe could come about from this proposal: increasing confidence from our international trading partners. Our handling of the BSE crisis was absolutely beyond reproach, as have been the measures we've taken here in Alberta to prevent another outbreak. While other provinces may be equally vigilant, they do things slightly differently. If their procedures are perceived poorly by a foreign trading partner, the consequences for Alberta could be disastrous. Even though exported beef is governed by existing federal standards, this still doesn't change the perceptions surrounding provincial protocol. A nationwide standard would show a unified front to the world, benefiting Albertans and Canadians by increasing international confidence in the safety of our beef.

The ideas proposed in Motion 512 have been a subject of discussion for quite some time now. In fact, the new federal government has indicated that it may be enacting legislative changes in the very near future. Does this make support of this motion redundant or unnecessary? Not at all. I've spoken this evening of the importance of presenting a unified front, Mr. Speaker, something our support of Motion 512 would be instrumental in doing. Additional encouragement never hurts and serves to illustrate Alberta's commitment to the ongoing health and well-being of one of our oldest and most valuable industries.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Highwood for bringing forward a very useful, thoughtful, and constructive proposal. I'm pleased to offer Motion 512 my support, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to join me in doing so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also appreciate the opportunity tonight to stand before the Assembly and share my views with regard to Motion 512. The issue of health and slaughter protocols for cattle is certainly something that is important to the producers of livestock in Alberta as well as the industries that buy and sell the products that come from these livestock.

However, as seen in the BSE crisis, this industry involves a much larger circle of people than just farmers. The cattle industry includes farmers, auctioneers, truckers, slaughterhouses, food processors, feed producers, and a variety of businesses that support these ventures such as local hardware stores, veterinarians, and machinery dealers, et cetera. The list goes on and on. This web of economic interdependence proves that we as legislators of this province must do everything we can to ensure that the entire sector is healthy and strong. Creating a governing framework that solidifies the cattle and livestock industry has been important to this government, especially over the last few years. It is great to see that just because we survived what was possibly and hopefully the darkest years of the BSE crisis, we are not happy with just keeping the status quo. Motion 512 is another example of this.

At a time when we are looking to expand and secure trade as well

as improve the margins of our livestock and agricultural operations, investigating the costs and eliminating the inefficiencies and barriers involved with multiple jurisdictional standards seems like a logical step. Producers and consumers both deserve our support in the realm of slaughter protocols. If we consider the number of Albertans that are involved in the cattle, hogs, poultry, or any other livestock industries, including elk, deer, or bison, and combine that with all of the citizens that consume our Alberta meat products, that figure translates to a huge majority of our constituents.

The effectiveness of slaughter protocols is a concept that makes sense on a political, social, and even personal level, as I'm sure most of us also enjoy a good steak from time to time. After all, if you eat, you're involved in agriculture, and that pretty well takes in all of us.

The tricky part for us is deciding what the best approach is for supporting the industry and protecting Alberta consumers. As most of us know, there's always a positive side to creating localized procedures and regulations. The standardization outlined in Motion 512 would likely save the province money, time, and red tape by creating a made-in-Alberta solution to health and slaughter protocols for cattle.

There appears to be great potential in standardizing health and slaughter protocols for cattle mainly because it would allow for easier interprovincial trade, opening up a greater market share for Alberta producers and the sector as a whole. If you consider that in 2004 Alberta beef exports made up 79.8 per cent of the Canadian total, which is about 80 per cent of all the cattle in Canada, it would make sense that we make the process as smooth as possible to ship beef to our interprovincial customers.

Mr. Speaker, currently if an animal is slaughtered in Alberta in a plant that is only provincially inspected, that animal or its products can only be sold in Alberta. If that same animal had been slaughtered in a federally inspected plant, it could be sold interprovincially or even exported outside of Canada. Yet if a farmer wants to, he can take a live animal from Alberta to Saskatchewan or B.C. or anywhere else and have it slaughtered there. Similarly, if a consumer from Alberta or Saskatchewan or B.C. or any other province comes to Alberta, they may buy products here, carry them back, and consume them in their home province, but they can't resell them.

Other provinces have standards, and we have standards, and we all seem to believe that our standards are adequate to protect our own consumers in our own provinces. It is clearly time to harmonize these standards across the country, to remove barriers to trade and prosperity. If we had the same standards at all slaughter plants in all the provinces, then products could cross any border without these barriers.

Earlier I mentioned the other species, Mr. Speaker: elk, deer, and bison. Currently there's only one plant in Alberta that slaughters elk and bison for export. This is not good because that plant can just set their own prices for the live animals, and they can ruin the market for the producers of these products. There is another plant being built right in Lacombe. This is good for the economy in these industries, in the elk and bison industries. This plant will not be operational for a few months, but I'm hoping that when it comes on stream, we'll improve markets. As well, that plant in Lacombe will be federally inspected and EU inspected, so it will be able to ship product from Alberta to any other province and any other country.

8:30

It is my understanding that work is being done already to standardize these protocols, but pushing the envelope with these discussions or giving someone a nudge from time to time in order to get things moving can be a positive step in the right direction. Considering all the issues and intricacies that have been brought

forward here tonight, I feel that at the very least this motion has yielded constructive discussion to work from. As such, I would like to commend the efforts of the Member for Highwood in bringing forward this proposal on standardizing health and slaughter protocols for cattle. Once more I say that this is not just for cattle, but it would be for the elk and bison as well.

I support Motion 512 and encourage other members to do so as well. I'll cede the floor and listen eagerly to what other members might say or to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak in support of Motion 512, cattle health and slaughter protocols. I was noticing a billboard on the drive up to Edmonton last night – I think it's for a credit union or a small regional bank or something like that in and around Bowden – that says: common sense should be more common. I think there's a lot of common sense in this motion.

You know, I viewed the mad cow crisis, the BSE crisis, at its height perhaps a little differently than a lot of my colleagues in this House. At that time I was still in the media and talking on a regular daily basis to a number of people both directly and indirectly involved in agriculture and beef production who were badly harmed by the crisis. One of the things that became clear to me over the course of the first few really critical months in that crisis was that we need to a greater extent to be masters of our own destiny, I guess is the best way to put it.

One of the problems, of course, that we ran into was the fact that we not only could not get our beef products across the line to the United States or other countries in the world; we couldn't get our live cattle across the line either. If I understood correctly what I was being told over the course of really the first year, I guess, of that crisis, it became fairly clear to me that one of the ways that we can be masters of our own destiny is to take every opportunity. This not only applies to beef production or the raising of elk or bison. It applies to the oil industry. It applies to the petrochemical industry. It applies to virtually every endeavour that we undertake in this province. One of the best ways to be masters of our own destiny is to add value at every step along the way that we possibly can.

I don't want to get myself in too deeply here, because I profess to be a city boy through and through to the core. But, again, if I understood what farm people and rural people were telling me, it certainly does make sense from time to time to export live cattle and import live cattle because you're improving the gene pool, but to ship live cattle across the border holus-bolus to have the cattle slaughtered somewhere in the United States and the beef shipped back to us dressed and finished doesn't make nearly as much sense as doing it ourselves and selling the finished product across the border for a good deal higher profit margin.

I think that as a relatively small player on the global scene one of the ways for Canadians, whether that's Albertans or people of any other province, to do a better job at being masters of their own destiny is to break down the walls between the provinces, the interprovincial trade barriers, the regulatory barriers that exist and to build the strongest possible domestic markets at home, realizing, of course, that a nation of 32 million, 33 million people is a small player compared to nations of 300 million or 400 million, but it's a bit of a cushion when unforeseen circumstances and tough times are visited upon us from external sources. If for no other reason, I would support Motion 512 and what it proposes and what it urges this government to try and work on so that we break down barriers,

break down walls, allow for the freer movement of beef interprovincially, across provincial borders, so that we are stronger right here at home at our base.

As has been alluded to by at least a couple of members before me, if our protocols for health and slaughter are standardized across the country, across Canada, then that improves our position when we do go to export, whether it's a live animal or whether it's finished product, whether it's to the United States, Mexico, Japan, Korea, whoever our customer is on that particular day. If we pass this motion and our government acts on it and works with other provinces and with the federal government to standardize cattle health and slaughter protocols nationally, I think that as well as increasing interprovincial beef trade, as well as making it easier to set a made-in-Canada standard for our exports to the world, a standard that speaks to the highest quality in health and safety, it will allow us the opportunity to tap into markets both domestically and around the world that perhaps we're not really making much of an effort to tap into at this point. Usually when you break down barriers like this, it opens up new opportunities, some of which we can anticipate, many of which we can't. Perhaps it gives us an opportunity here in Alberta to lead in the field of kosher and halal meats and the new markets we can tap if we recognize this as a growth opportunity.

We have a long heritage and a long history in this province of being entrepreneurial, taking advantage of opportunities as we recognize them. Let's take that to the next level. This is an opportunity to do that, but let's try to do it as a matter of course every time. Look at what we do now in the way of doing business with other countries around the world and say: should we continue doing business that way, or is there a way to add value, to take it a step up the production chain and sell a more finished product, a less raw product, for greater profits?

You know, we're often criticized as a nation for being hewers of wood and drawers of water, a nation that for its entire history going back to colonial days has been about providing the rest of the world with raw material that they can then develop into something and sell at great profit around the world and sometimes sell right back to us, the providers of the source material. Obviously, there are times when you want to sell raw materials, but there are times that we do sell raw materials where we could be refining those materials and making more money. In those instances, why sell the Americans a barrel of crude if we can sell them petrochemicals instead? Why sell the Americans or the Japanese or anybody else a live animal when we can sell them dressed meats?

I think this motion helps us in that endeavour, and I'd be happy to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your time tonight.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can very sincerely say that I agree with everything the hon. member has said. It is truly a very small first step in representing Vermilion-Lloydminster in this province. It certainly gives me an insight into the hundreds of rules that we have put up interprovincially to stop trade. You know, it's the hypocrisy we have when we go to deal internationally, how we demand other countries remove their barriers, how they need to have access and we need to have access. Then we turn right around, and we have exactly the same internal barriers in Canada. It is much the same. I've been very privileged to represent Alberta at several international functions on agriculture. The Mexicans have much the same problems. They find it easier to deal with us than with each other. The Americans have more trade restrictions interstate than

they do with us. It is protectionism, pure and simple. They do it often under the pretense of safety, and it is not.

8:40

Diamond 7 Meats in Lloydminster is a hundred feet on the Saskatchewan side. I doubt that there's a more reputable firm anywhere here. I can take my animals to them. I can slaughter them and take them home. They can slaughter for everyone in Saskatchewan. They can sell it to all the restaurants and stores in the Saskatchewan side of Lloydminster. Albertans can flock across there and eat that meat. But they cannot move it 10 feet across the street and sell it to an Alberta café. It's just bizarre.

I mean, it opens a few more. In Lloydminster, for example, we will happily pay for me to go across the street and see a doctor in a hospital that we pay for on the Saskatchewan side, but that doctor cannot walk back across the street and see me. We will not pay for someone to go across the street and have their eye examined under a Saskatchewan eye doctor because they're not in Alberta anymore. We do this so many times, and it costs nothing but bureaucracy. If we're doing it under safety, then it makes it really difficult to talk about it.

We are so frustrated in Alberta with R-CALF because of all the things they do to keep our beef out, and it's always about safety. Everyone here and everyone in that organization knows that it's got nothing to do with safety. It's protectionism, blatant, pure and simple. When they don't win in a court of law, they'll move to another court or another jurisdiction. They're now lobbying to get beef put on what they call a J list, which is an import protection list that hasn't been adjusted since 1939. These boys are serious about what they think is protecting their beef industry, probably very shortsighted. We sit and look at them with ridicule, yet we do it to ourselves.

It would be a challenge to have the different departments in the other provinces come back to us with an instance where someone has been given back meat from a slaughter facility that's been contaminated. I think we hold standards that are very close or certainly close enough that Albertans are comfortable with our slaughter facilities, and my good friends in Saskatchewan are comfortable with theirs too. It's not them that stop us; it's us. It's the political will to put everything on the table and say: it's about trade.

I have to applaud the Premier in his initiative to sit down with the B.C. cabinet and talk about issues where we can work with B.C. and try and make it easier for business and commerce to happen. And I hope – I really hope – that our friends in Saskatchewan look at that and say: that's an opportunity for us to get inside. It's not about politics, although that's what we make it. If I can use the same term, it's about common sense, and we have so little of it when it comes to business and trade. It's not common here anymore.

I will say this about HACCP, that the hon. member mentioned. It's an internationally accepted standard, and it is a very good start to be able to connect the dots bigger than just here. If New Mexico is HACCP and we're HACCP and Saskatchewan is, maybe we can start to send a message to our federal management at CFIA. Quite candidly, most of the CFIA people that work at our level in the plants are very good, competent, caring people. When you move to the upper level in Ottawa, it becomes one of the most unaccountable bureaucracies we've ever seen.

We are going to be faced in agriculture with a huge growth in organic foods, organic meats. It doesn't matter. It is going everywhere else around the world, in the States, and we will regulate ourselves out of the market if we don't understand it. I don't want to get back into the Wheat Board fight, but you can't have the Wheat

Board dealing with organic foods. They don't separate them. They can't handle them. They don't acknowledge it. It's ridiculous to think that a system built 60 years ago is still relevant in organic foods. If we're going to have an organic food industry – and we will have it – we might have to import it all because we might regulate it out. If we're going to have it, we need to facilitate what the realities of today are. Everywhere else in the world recognizes that self-imposed trade barriers are just simply wrong.

So to the hon. Member for Highwood: I couldn't agree more. It's a very timely topic and timely discussion. I really do appreciate some of the statements from the opposition and our fellow members. I hope that everyone supports this motion, and I then hope that we do something about it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood to close debate.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you also to everyone who participated in this evening's debate. It has been very interesting to hear the thoughts of the legislative members regarding the important issue of interprovincial beef trading, and I'm pleased to be given the opportunity to address some of the concerns and comments that the members across brought up.

Specifically to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I'd like to thank you for the support, to begin with. When we talk about CFIA, as we know it today, I think that it was established in 1997, and one of their first mandates was to move forward on these type of issues with the meat and some of the other issues with livestock of various kinds. They're just the ones that we have to prod into action. I think it was brought up across the floor; they talked about this, about getting to work on some of this stuff. I think that they're the ones that we have to motivate somehow or other. I think that the provinces would come onside fairly quickly.

As far as Edmonton-Gold Bar's talk about whether he longs to call it blue tape or red tape, I think that the tape all belongs at CFIA at this particular time.

The other issue that he brought up was getting a hundred per cent support back for the American market, which would be a wonderful thing. I hope that that happens someday, but I think that for animals over 30 months of age this is going to be a pretty difficult situation. The member over here just mentioned about R-CALF; they've got the scare on there. So probably it's more important for us to concentrate on the Asian market: Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, those ones.

He questioned some of the plants. I think that there are only two federally inspected plants in Alberta besides the two big, international companies that we have here right now.

I think that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, although he and I don't agree on the Wheat Board, we seem to agree on this, which is quite refreshing. I guess the drop in the herd right now is partially because we had such a tremendous buildup of those cattle over 30 months of age that were retained on the farm, that are slowly now disappearing. Thus you see the numbers dropping. Also, in the meantime, because of the BSE crisis so many of what we may call the old boy ranchers have just plain got out of the business, and this further dropped the herd. Yes, it is going to be a bit of a challenge to bring this herd back up, but I hope that this type of motion, if we could get this moving, would start the process.

I did want to comment to you as well about the legislative changes at the CFIA. We have to perhaps initiate this, and I hope that we can move forward on this motion and do that.

I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for his

support. Indeed, we want to keep our value-added stuff here, and it just makes – I guess we're overusing today the words common sense, but that's what we have to do.

I thank all of you people for participating.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 512 is an issue of great importance for Alberta's agriculture industry, and I'm pleased that there were so many insightful comments given regarding Alberta's current situation. The BSE crisis that occurred in 2003 was very hard on Alberta producers. We know that. As was discussed, the closure of United States and other international markets was very damaging to producers and the industry as a whole. By urging the government to work with other provincial governments as well as the federal government to standardize health and slaughter protocols, Alberta could further support beef producers in expanding their markets for Alberta beef. One standard between the provinces would assist the beef industry in shipping their products more efficiently and with greater simplicity. Alberta is Canada's number one beef producer, and the trade of beef products contributes a great deal to this province's economy. Encouraging interprovincial trade by creating one standard countrywide would be beneficial to all Albertans.

Again, I'd like to thank all members for their participation in this evening's debate, and I would ask them to please vote in favour of the motion. Let's kick-start this thing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 512 carried]

head: 8:50

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before we proceed with the Committee of Supply, I'd just like to remind every member of the comments that were made by the Speaker earlier this afternoon. We are beginning Committee of Supply at 8:51, so the earliest vote that we could have, unless there are no other speakers, would be at 10:51. Okay?

An Hon. Member: Unless there is no one who gets up to speak.

The Deputy Chair: Unless there are no further speakers, yes.

head: **Supplementary Supply Estimates 2006-07
General Revenue Fund**

The Deputy Chair: So, hon. members, I believe we have an order in which we're going. Okay. We'll begin with the hon. Government House Leader.

Education

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you. Mr. Chair, as you know and as all members here know, our students definitely benefit from one of the best education systems in the entire world. Thank you for that applause, hon. members. Alberta Education also enjoys one of the highest levels of investment in its students and teachers as compared with all other counterparts right across the dominion. As further proof of this tonight I'm pleased to comment on the supplementary estimates for Alberta Education, totalling an additional \$293.3 million for our school-related needs, bringing our total voted expense for the '06-07 fiscal budget to about \$5.6 billion. [some applause] Yes, thank you for that as well. It shows you how deeply we do value our K to 12 education system. In fact, this amount includes funds received through the Alberta school foundation fund,

or what we commonly refer to as education property taxes, that help support our K to 12 education system in Alberta.

The specific increases I'm asking for tonight include \$52 million more for operating grant support to public and separate schools and \$241.3 million more for school facilities-related expenses. Mr. Chair, the \$52 million in operating support can be broken down into supporting four very important initiatives. Specifically, \$16.5 million more will provide school boards with a 1 per cent increase in their base instruction rates. This increases the base instruction grant from \$5,087 per student in '05-06 to \$5,291 per student in '06-07.

As well, \$5 million more will be provided to school boards to accommodate the increasing number of students with severe special needs. This translates into a total 6 per cent increase in funding for all school boards this September for students with severe disabilities.

As well, \$2.5 million more will allow us to extend the funding eligibility for students requiring English as a Second Language programs beyond five years. We've seen a very exponential growth in the need for ESL services in various parts of the province but particularly so in the Calgary and surrounding area.

Another \$28 million will support the small class size initiative to help school boards retain the 1,685 teachers already hired under this initiative, and it also allows school boards to hire yet another 800-plus new teachers this September. The expectation, of course, is that school jurisdictions will reduce their average class sizes to those recommended by Alberta's Commission on Learning, and I do mean reduce to that number within the three-year time frame set by our government on a jurisdiction-wide basis.

Now, to comment on the \$241.3 million of this supplementary estimate, let me say this. This amount will address the cost pressures related to school buildings, and here is how this amount can be broken down: \$9 million more will be added to provide school boards with increased plant operations and maintenance funding for the '06-07 school year, bringing our total investment in plant operations and maintenance funding, or what we usually refer to as PO and M, up to \$404 million for the '06-07 fiscal year. As well, \$119 million in additional funding will be used to increase infrastructure maintenance and renewal funding for school boards. This money can be used to replace floors, ceilings, roofs, boilers, mechanical systems, and so on, as well as for improvements to school energy efficiency. This, in turn, can of course reduce cost pressures associated with operating older school buildings.

Mr. Chair, our IMR, or infrastructure maintenance renewal, funding will increase from \$48 million last year to a whopping \$200 million this fiscal year, a significant investment to ensure that health and safety concerns are addressed where our students are concerned. As well, \$72.3 million will be provided for new schools and new school preservation and modernization projects as so-called kick-start funding and in order to address urgent school facility needs in our province. This will help provide an additional 130 new steel-frame modular classrooms as well, and we can also help with the relocation of 45 existing portables to communities in need around the province. In addition to that, \$41 million will address cost escalations for previously approved school capital projects. The competitive construction market has resulted in rising costs over the life of all of these previously announced projects, and we want to ensure that the rising costs of construction are addressed with these additional escalation dollars.

I'll just wrap up by saying that new school construction and major modernization of existing schools are both of critical importance to our school jurisdictions right across the province. I will be announcing some specific allocations very shortly in that regard which will be based on emergent needs that address the health, safety, and other concerns that our jurisdictions are facing.

I want to briefly comment also on the schools for tomorrow plan that will serve as a guide for decision-making over the next five years for new school constructions, modernizations, modulars, and other school construction-related projects. I will have the schools for tomorrow plan completed later this fall, as has been indicated by our Provincial Treasurer, and it will be a very detailed long-term plan outlining where schools are needed, in what amounts, what sizes, and address which grade levels.

Now, I'll end just by saying a couple of brief things. The funding that's contained in tonight's supplementary estimates is a very, very good start. They are in addition to the \$207 million that I announced in September of last year for new school construction projects, modulars, and so on. That all combined will bring the total to almost half a billion dollars in new funding committed for school infrastructure over the past year alone. I think this is a good demonstration of the commitment we have to this particular issue.

School boards told me that they are facing challenges in preparing their '06-07 school year budgets, and with an unanticipated surplus in government's revenues for the first quarter, these additional dollars will be provided to help them address those challenges. We've worked very hard over the summer, Mr. Chair, with school jurisdictions, with their chief financial officers, with school trustees, and the like. Our final school board funding levels will be of course determined after the final counts are taken at the end of September, but these dollars that we're announcing over the summer and confirming, I hope, and approving tonight will help alleviate those problems that they had flagged for my attention.

I'm proud to say that when our students return to their classrooms over the next several days, they will on average experience smaller classes. There will be additional base instructional dollars to support the classrooms. There will be more funding to support special-needs students. There will be more programming for ESL students. There will be additional planning initiated for new school constructions. There will be more monies and more planning possible for major modernizations of other schools, and additional classroom spaces will be available as a result of new steel-framed modulars.

Thank you for this opportunity to briefly comment. I'll now look forward to others commenting as well. Thank you.

9:00

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to start by just looking at the minister's figures here for a moment. I assume that the \$28 million for the class size initiative so that school boards can hire more teachers – it's a total of \$154.3 million. Maybe you could clarify that for me.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yeah. It's over and above what was in the budget originally.

Mr. Flaherty: Yeah.

Let's see. The infrastructure and maintenance renewal program was 119 million plus dollars. I have \$351 million now for the total amount.

Mr. Zwozdesky: A hundred and nineteen million plus \$81 million.

Mr. Flaherty: Oh, \$81 million. Okay. I think that's what it adds up to.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yeah. It adds up to \$200 million.

Mr. Flaherty: Yeah. Thank you very much.

Mr. Zwozdesky: That's IMR.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you very much for that. I appreciate it.

You know, you look at the direction that Alberta Education sets for the school systems. One of the key things it says: "Allocate funds to school boards." I think what we've gone through here is an exercise of three different budgets, if you will: the one in the spring, the one early in the summer, and now the present one. It suggests a kind of difficulty in dealing with the question of dollars and helping school systems get on with the tasks that they are faced with.

The minister was suggesting that he met with a number of school districts. I had the honour of doing that this summer, and I particularly speak of my own riding in St. Albert, where we find that one of the things that they are very much faced with, especially our high schools in St. Albert, is the credit enrolment unit. The minister's department set out to do an audit of this particular system on how it operated, and the timing and the planning and the way that audit went has really had impact on our high schools. In fact, both high schools in St. Albert will have close to a million dollar loss of dollars this next year, which is going to impact how they deal with their student populations.

The other aspect that's been significant there that's been brought to my attention is the class size initiative of 27, and they feel that this is a very difficult thing to hit and that it will be difficult to operate or make work well in their particular school situations.

The other thing that we're facing in our school systems in St. Albert is that one of our high schools has a difficult plant situation, and it does affect the program offerings that it's limited in offering.

So we have our high school systems in St. Albert facing some very difficult times in terms of funding this next year, to the point of being in deficit positions.

The other aspect is in the elementary and junior high schools. In one system we have 39 aides being let go. In fact, I visited one of the schools and met a mother with a child. Unfortunately, next year she'll have an aide only halftime whereas this last year she made wonderful progress and had a full-time aide. So this is having an impact on us.

The other thing I was kind of hoping for in this statement was some plan or some initiative on the unfunded liability for teachers across the province.

With that, Mr. Minister, maybe you could comment a little later, if you would. If you don't want to, that's fine too.

Now I'd just turn again to maintenance. Any additional funding that the minister has talked about is very welcome. However, it is doubtful that an extra approximately \$232 million plus \$119 million, whatever that adds up to, will address the infrastructure and maintenance needs of schools in the province of Alberta. Delaying routine maintenance and major repairs increases the cost to Albertans in the long run. Following the completion of the school evaluation project in 2001 there's a one-year jump in capital spending on schools followed by a return to the status quo. This suggests to me that the government recognizes the severity of this problem but is unwilling to commit a long-term solution to it. The Alberta School Boards Association, ASBA, noted in their report *Missing the Mark: Alberta's School Building Deficit* that while \$2.62 billion of capital spending was requested by school boards in 2005, only \$0.2 billion was awarded by the government. In 2005 the Calgary board of education calculated its total cost of deferred maintenance using data from Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation at \$426 million, up from a calculated \$322 million in 1999 and 2000, and this was adjusted for inflation and aging. Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation's business plan for 2006-2009 notes that 45 schools require major repairs and upgrading to comply

with the minimum standards and that 530 schools have aged to the point of needing major refurbishing to remain functional.

Can the Minister of Education suggest a timeline for completion of major repairs needed to bring Alberta schools up to minimum standards? What is the Alberta government's long-term strategy for paying down the deferred maintenance in Alberta's schools, and is the government taking steps to ensure that schools that were rated as being in good condition in the school facility evaluation project in '99-2000 are not requiring greater maintenance presently, presently meaning now? Will the government create a specific fund for emergency maintenance projects to ensure that something like the closure of Marlborough school in Calgary-East, which closed because of fears that its roof would collapse and injure students, does not happen again? Will the government commit to immediately funding upgrades to schools that present a threat to students' health and safety due to mould and faulty roofs, et cetera, across the province?

Now, let me just comment if I can on capital spending on construction. Because of Alberta's hot economy many people are immigrating to the province each year, creating immediate and also long-term demands because of the concurrent baby boom. This reality necessitates the construction of new schools to address population growth and to stimulate emerging communities. Alberta has not adequately budgeted to meet these new demands. Calgary has 40 new communities. The Calgary board of education requested funding to build 24 new schools in its most recent three-year plan at a cost of \$282 million but was awarded only \$12 million, enough to build only one new school. In 2005 school boards requested \$2.5 billion in funding in their three-year capital plan, but the provincial government allocated only \$833 million for capital spending on schools over the next three years. That is \$1.7 billion less than school boards required. The government has now allocated \$1.3 billion and \$1.2 billion less than what is required.

Capital requests by school boards have doubled within the past few years: \$1.37 billion in 2002, \$2.5 billion in 2005. This suggests that failure to provide adequate funding does not cut costs but, rather, defers expenditures to later years. The question is: will the Alberta government recognize that quickly growing centres require new schools to ensure that emerging communities are successful? Is the government prepared to assist parents and school boards with the increased costs of busing for as long as it takes to build neighbourhood schools in various communities, such as Calgary? It really begs the question: does this government recognize the importance of neighbourhood schools? I don't really know, and I don't see any really solid plan that suggests that they do.

Special needs. Let me just touch on special needs for a moment. The Alberta Learning Commission pointed out that in 2003 the number of students with severe, moderate, and mild special needs had gone up quickly in the past 10 years. They estimated that between '95-96 and 2000-01 the number of children with severe special needs went up 64 per cent and that the number of children with mild to moderate special needs went up 140 per cent. This suggests that additional support and funding are needed to ensure that the needs of all children are met.

9:10

So what is the status, I'd like to know, of the pilot project going on in 27 school districts that explores a flexible funding model for project unit funding, and what is the government doing to ensure that the needs of students with mild to moderate special needs are met? The example, again, is the one I gave in St. Albert. Will the government consider funding students with mild to moderate special needs in grade 1 individually rather than through block funding, as

recommended by the Alberta Learning Commission? Will the government look at expanding PUF to grades 1 and up, particularly for those children who need assistance and have not taken any assessments because they haven't experienced kindergarten or an early childhood experience? That's a question. I think assessment is very, very important for kids starting off well in school.

The class size initiative is a good one, and we'll hope that it does relieve some of the problems across the province. I think it also will hopefully help schools better adjust to better teaching and learning.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair, and hopefully I can get some answers. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. I'll provide a couple of quick answers right now, and then I'll do the rest in writing so that other members can have a chance to speak.

The \$154 million total for the class size initiative is correct when you include the additional \$28 million that I'm asking for tonight. The additional \$119 million for IMR, infrastructure and maintenance renewal, coupled with the \$81 million that was approved in the May budget will take us to a total of \$200 million.

Just in general, hon. member, there are three envelopes involved with the infrastructure piece. Let's say that the first one is PO and M, plant operations and maintenance. That will experience a \$28 million increase, to a total of \$404 million. IMR, infrastructure and maintenance renewal, will increase by \$152 million from last year, up to a total of \$200 million this year, and the school construction budget envelope, the third one, will increase by about \$195 million this year, to a total of about \$372 million. I'll just confirm some of that back in writing because I'm going by memory a little bit here.

Quickly, on the CEUs the rules are very clear, hon. member, and all school principals know them as do school superintendents and school board trustees and so on. Basically, we're asking that students enrolled in the high school courses have the prerequisites that are required, that they attend at least 50 per cent of the classes, that they achieve a mark of at least 25 per cent, that a certified, accredited teacher is present, and so on. If some of those criteria aren't being met, then that is something that every school principal and every school superintendent and the school boards must review. And that's all that we do. We do about 23 on-site audits and about 200 paper audits, so we're trying to get the system to abide by all of those rules.

I'll comment in writing later, Mr. Chair, with respect to the maintenance issues, the three-year capital requirements of the boards. I understand the figures you've given, but those aren't all requested in one year. They're requested over a period of three and sometimes four and five years. The schools for tomorrow plan that I alluded to earlier will address exactly what you're talking about, and I think you'll quite enjoy reading that.

Issues to do with quick growth communities will be addressed.

Busing costs. We just added several millions of dollars to that, but I think the major problem that school boards are facing is the fact that you can't get as many people to drive buses today as they could, say, a year ago, and that's not just in the school system, hon. member. That's also in many other industries that rely on busing.

Special needs I've already addressed.

The unfunded pension liability we will chat more about.

With respect to the specific point you mentioned about aides being let go in one school jurisdiction, I'd like to see which school that is, because I think that with the additional monies they should be able to retain most of those. At least, let's hope that's the case.

Mr. Chair, I'll take my seat so that other members can get their

comments and questions forward, and the questions I didn't address for the hon. Member for St. Albert I will undertake to address in writing at a later date.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try to be relatively brief. [some applause] I appreciate that. Whenever I can get applause, I'll take it for whatever reason in this House, right?

I want to make some of the same comments I made about Health, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, this \$232 million is needed. I don't think there's any doubt about that. The \$61 million that is going into the schools is needed. Now, whether it's enough or not, that's a debate that we can have. But I think the important part about it is – think about this, Mr. Minister – that we brought in a budget in March, we passed it in June, and now we're coming back for another budget in August. It's nice that this money is coming, but it was surely predictable that we needed this money back in March.

This is what is so frustrating. The budget that we passed in March really doesn't mean much anymore. [interjection] Well, in May or whenever, but we brought it forward in March. I remember asking questions in the Legislature, and I know that the Official Opposition did. We were hearing from school boards, the rest of it. The problems were there. I guess I'm just saying: why couldn't we have dealt with them then, when we knew that it was going to occur, rather than have to do it now in supplementary estimates?

Don't get me wrong; I'm glad for some of the money because I was one pushing for it, as the minister knows. We take it this way if we have to get it this way, but it makes it very difficult for the boards to budget because they took these teachers, I know in most jurisdictions, and already they had laid them off because they had to do that with the money that they were accruing. Then all of a sudden there's money there later on. Now they're going to have to hire them back, and some of those young teachers will not be there. So it just doesn't make much sense to budget in this way.

The budget should be there in March. It makes sense to know what's occurring. We know that we have a huge infrastructure deficit. We know in Edmonton public that half our schools are 50 years of age or over, and I think Calgary is the same way. We know these things, so we should be budgeting for them in the proper way rather than hit and miss.

Again, Mr. Chairman, don't get me wrong. The money is needed. The money is needed, and we certainly support it, but there's got to be a better way to do this. The school boards have to have more ability to plan their budgets. I know that some of them are scurrying around now trying to bring back some of those teachers and teacher aides and the rest of it that they've lost. They may not be there. Wouldn't it have been much simpler to keep these people and not lay them off, because they knew the money was coming at that particular time? So I just say that we've got to learn from this that sort of crisis budgeting is not the best way to do it.

We look at the maintenance. I'm glad that there's more money coming in, but the numbers – you know, we can talk about big numbers, but it always comes down to what's happening at the local level. The Alberta School Boards Association identified a need for more than \$2.5 billion in capital investments in their three-year capital plans, and for the same three-year period the government allocated \$833 million, which is 32 per cent of what the school boards need. Now, even the new funding announced in the supplements here, an extra \$463 million of capital investments for school maintenance, is still only 50 per cent of what school boards need. I mean, it's a start.

All I'm saying is: why can't we work this out in the budget over a three-year period of time to match what's actually going on? We don't save money. I know that the minister knows this. We don't save money by waiting, because the costs just get worse. The roofs are in worse shape. The gyms are in worse shape. I know that in Calgary Western and Ernest Manning, in which I used to be a counsellor and coach, you know, they can't even have their gym classes when it rains. So that ends up costing us more. Of course, I know that the construction costs are greater because of the overheated economy. But we just have to, I think, budget differently, make our annual budgets mean something and look at a three-year plan to cover the deficit.

9:20

Mr. Chairman, there are just a couple of other things I want to talk about. I want to say to the minister that I am very disappointed that we did not deal, as the Learning Commission suggested, with full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten in high-needs schools. We have examples across the province, but again I'll talk about where I know of the most and the member's statement from Edmonton-Mill Woods about the city centre project. I was the trustee in that area, and I know the good work that was going on there and in some other schools also.

Nobody said that it had to be across the board to all schools at all times right away – maybe that wasn't even feasible – but it's absolutely so crucial in those high-needs schools. If we don't get those kids at an early level, we will lose them, and we'll pay the price down the way. We talk about our high school dropout rates; there's a good reason right there. One of the quickest ways that we can do it over 10 years is do the job at the early levels. The city centre project was set up through AISI and was a pilot project, but it seems to me that when something works and is documented as well as this is, junior kindergarten and full-day kindergarten, we should make it part of the system rather than saying: well, the school boards can do this if they want. They take it out of other instructional dollars.

I would honestly suggest that over the long haul that would save the government money. I really say to the minister: I wish that they would relook at this whole area of junior kindergarten and kindergarten. I think it's absolutely crucial in certain schools in Alberta, and if we don't get it, we'll pay the price. You know, it's the old advertisement: you can pay me now or pay me later.

We'll see what the school fees are like. One question, and he doesn't have to answer it here but maybe, as he said, in writing. The Learning Commission also talked about the fees, and I know that the minister has talked about that and I believe that there's some commission looking at this. The minister is reviewing the fees. I guess I'm wondering when. The latest I have would be sometime in the fall, but if he can give us an idea when we might look at that because fees are becoming a major obstacle for people with modest incomes. There are a lot of things that I would consider essential that are being charged in fees. So that's a very important issue, I think, for the minister to look at.

School dropout rates. Alberta is not doing well there, and the minister knows that. There has been a slight improvement but not nearly enough. I guess I would come back and say about that that one of the quickest ways 10 years down the way will be, as I said, to deal with kids in the high-needs areas. The other point I would make is that there are figures that I've pointed out before about high school counsellors. Now, maybe I'm biased, having formerly been one when I had a real job, but librarians and those sorts of people: there has been a tremendous drop at least in Edmonton public, and I expect that it's true throughout Alberta. It seems to me that if

we're looking at one of the reasons for our high dropout rate in this province, it might be for that reason because that's what counsellors and certainly librarians did.

We know, for instance, that if a kid is going into high school and they're one year behind in their reading level, the chances are they're going to be a dropout. The odds are pretty good. We know. Those are the facts. I think that's what we may begin to look at, that whole area, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to come back – and the minister did reply – and talk about school utilization. This is again going to be a major problem. In a letter that he wrote to me – I guess I got it on June 29, and I appreciate the letter back. I was asking about the utilization and how other provinces handle it. The minister says: this is done using different approaches, including leasing space for other community services, rightsizing of facilities by relocating attached portable classrooms, and as a last resort the closure of schools. Well, I want to stress – and I was there in Edmonton public – that the closure of schools seemed to be the first resort, and it was encouraged by the government, not so much this minister. The impression was: look, if you want to get a new school out in the suburban areas, you'd better close down the schools in the inner city. They played off one part of the city against the other, and it's unacceptable, Mr. Chairman. The use of portable classrooms and many other things are good ideas, but I think there are some things that we have to look at.

I pointed out about Ontario: they've changed it around. They've taken the position that the education program needs of students must take priority over decisions concerning school buildings. I honestly suggest that it's the other way here still unless we're going to change this. One of the things that they do is that they make it very clear that you cannot close a school down to get another new school. There may be a reason eventually for closing a school down, but the two shouldn't be related. We have done that in Alberta. The previous minister made that very clear to the boards. That's why he had a rush of inner-city school closures. It's wrong. It's the wrong way to go about it.

We have to look at other uses for the community, too. If there's something useful going on in the schools that's beneficial to the community, why can't that be part of the utilization rate? We've talked about the old schools and how unfair that is. I know the minister is aware that we count halls and washrooms and everything else as space. We don't give enough coverage or enough utilization for special needs and the rest of it.

Now, I believe the minister said that they were going to relook at this whole process on utilization. Again, I'm wondering when we might look forward to hopefully a more enlightened policy coming on the whole utilization. We see all the schools up in Edmonton public again on a watch list, you know, all in the inner city. As I say, the process is ugly. I've been through it as a trustee, and I've been through it as an MLA. The parents feel violated, as you know, and it just doesn't work the way we're going. So I think we really have to take another look at the whole utilization. I think this would be true of rural Alberta as well as urban Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, there are a number of issues – we could go on forever – but I'll just reiterate what the Member for St. Albert said. Finally there's acknowledgement by the Finance minister that a nonfunded liability is a debt. At least, that's what I heard the other day. That's a new approach, I think, from the government. This debt will grow and grow and grow. I know that the minister is aware of this: \$6 billion now will be \$46 billion down the way if we don't do something about it. So I would hope that the government would be taking a look at that and working with the Alberta Teachers' Association to begin to deal with this unfunded liability. I'd rather try to deal with \$6 billion than \$46 billion down the way.

There are a lot of other issues that we could go on in education, Mr. Chairman, but time is short. We've got a lot of estimates. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, there were a lot of comments and questions there and far too many for me to address in the time today if we're going to allow other members to speak, but I will just comment very quickly. Just for clarity's sake, one important issue is the date on which the budget actually was construed for '06-07, and the date it was passed, as you know, was in May. That's a critical date, hon. member. As you know, school boards don't send in their budgets to us until the last week of June. So we have a little bit of underlapping/overlapping in the wrong way here, and it's a challenge for us as well.

We go on the best projection estimates available from the school boards and based on our own tracking and so on, but there are other factors that impact that decision, Mr. Chairman. One of them, as I've referenced before, is the fact that teachers who are planning to retire aren't required to let the school board know until May 30 or 31 or something. Even if we could accelerate that frame by about a month or even two, that would help school boards with their planning, which, in turn, would help us a lot. I don't want this to come down to a money issue, because I'm a former teacher and I respect the profession deeply, but the fact is that most school teachers who are retiring are in the upper echelon earning capacity. They're in that \$70,000 to \$80,000 range typically, whereas new teachers coming into the system are typically in around the \$40,000 a year mark. So it makes a difference. I think we can all do the math and understand that. Budgeting is difficult both ways.

9:30

The bottom line to it all, hon. member, is that the school boards' final budgets are set, and we agree to them around about the end of September. There's always a little bit of movement and overlap because that's when their school year is only one month old whereas we, at that point, are seven-twelfths of the way through our budget already, but we have to do the best we can with the information we have.

With respect to the cost escalations I'll make this comment, Mr. Chair: it's important to realize that cost escalations were already built into the '06-07 budget passed in May, but they were predicated on information we had going into the January, February, March period of allocations. Had we known that costs were going to jump again during the months of May, June, and July by another 15 to 20 per cent, obviously we would have addressed it earlier. That's one reason why we need your support for supplementary estimates tonight. Previously approved projects alone require \$41 million in cost escalations just over the past couple months. It's happened so quickly. We don't want to abandon those projects already announced; we want them to continue on, so I need your support tonight for \$41 million to continue those projects.

With respect to the high needs for schools. You know, hon. member, funding is available for students enrolled in recognized ECS programs. When you talk about the capital city centre projects, those three schools and so on which we've talked about before, all that has to happen in that case is that they just simply have to apply to the school board and have those students registered as mild- or moderate-delay students in the special-needs category, and they will receive the funding. We provide funding for recognized programs. Okay.

Now the junior K program is a separate issue, and I understand

that. It ties in somewhat with what you're saying. But if there are high-needs students, if they are so-called at-risk students, and they're in that mild/moderate delay category, they can and should be receiving funding. If those folks who are running that project wish to approach the school board, they can do that.

School fees. That report should be coming forward in the next few months. I'll comment more in writing. I'll just remind everybody about the high school completion symposium, which will address the dropout rates. That will occur on September 24 and 25.

Other stuff to do with utilization, unfunded liability, and so on, Mr. Chair, I will address in writing so that we can have other members take the floor and offer their comments and questions.

Thank you, hon. members.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to participate in the discussion here on the supplementary estimates for Education this evening.

Certainly, one welcomes this money. One only has to visit a public school anywhere in the province to see that it is needed. It is mind-boggling, to say the least, that in June teachers and support staff were being laid off. Everyone was very concerned – parents, trustees, and members on this side of the House – but the government at that time failed to recognize the funding shortfalls. This is welcome at this time, but hopefully we will have better planning, and we will have a better budgeting process in the future.

I don't know what sort of contingency the hon. minister is building into his budget. Certainly, everyone seems aware of the cost overruns that are happening in the province. We only have to look at the bridge construction on the ring road in the south end of the city. I mean, last year there were significant cost overruns that were acknowledged by the former Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation in this House, whether it was fuel, whether it was cement, whether it was labour costs. This is not new, and I'm astonished that this is not built into the budget.

Specifically, we look at school maintenance projects, and let's just pick our own neighbourhood in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. The minister's a very busy man, and I was pleased to hear that in June he, along with trustee Hansen, toured the Holyrood elementary school, which was a receiving school after this government, a former minister, forced the school board to close other public schools. After those schools were forced to be closed, Holyrood, of course, was one of the so-called receiving schools.

So the schools were closed. It was an exodus. The parents that had any confidence left in the public system enrolled their children in schools like Holyrood. It got so crowded, Mr. Chairman, that there had to be two assemblies because the student body was too large to have one assembly in the gymnasium. They had to go at separate times. There were issues of mould. There were issues of inadequate plumbing. There was a long list of repairs needed to be done to that school. Now, the hon. minister has toured that school. Hopefully that school – and it needs close to \$5 million to bring it up to today's standard – is going to be included in this \$232 million budget for upgrades and renovations. While we're at it, there's Capilano elementary. There's Gold Bar elementary. They were bumped down the list here. They both need over a million dollars in upgrades. What's the status on those two schools? Is there going to be any change in how they may be viewed?

Certainly, this government cannot force the closure of anymore neighbourhood schools. It has gone on long enough; it has gone far enough, and it is about time that we reinvest in neighbourhood

schools, whether it's Capilano, or Forest Heights. We look at McNally senior high which is jammed to the rafters. I don't know how many more symposiums and more studies we need to do on our high school drop out rate, but just tour the school. Grade 10 students – if they're feeling in any way alienated, if they're feeling in any way that they don't fit into the school, they're lost in there with that large, crowded school. They can get frustrated, and of course they may not last through grade 12. I would like the hon. minister to let me know, please, what's going to happen with the upgrades that are needed at McNally senior high.

We look at the separate system. Austin O'Brien needs repairs. St. Brendan. There's probably not a school in a mature neighbourhood of the city that does not need upgrades and renovations. If we can find millions of dollars for other school boards, we can find adequate money to upgrade all the neighbourhood schools in both the public and separate systems in this city. Certainly there is a long list here. There's Ottewell junior high. There's Fulton Place elementary, which certainly needs work. Clara Tyner needs some work. The Gold Bar community would be no different than any other neighbourhood. I would really appreciate it if the minister could update the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. Whether it's at a later date by a letter, that is adequate, but I would appreciate a detailed explanation of which of these additional dollars is going to the schools in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you very much.

9:40

Mr. Zwozdesky: Again, Mr. Chairman, I won't take much time. I'll respond in writing so that others can get their questions onto the table. Let me just say, first of all, that I appreciate the comments about one welcoming these monies or whatever. I think the other previous speakers mentioned that too. I thank you for at least acknowledging that these dollars that we're injecting tonight are needed dollars and that they will be appreciated. I know that some additional dollars are still needed in other areas, but this is what we're working with. I'm pretty proud of the fact that we've got it, frankly, so thank you for acknowledging that.

The budgeting process is difficult; it is complicated. Let me just remind members here, Mr. Chair, that Alberta Education is essentially a flow-through agency, if you will. I'm not sure if that's the best way to describe it, but let me put it this way: we put out to school boards 98 per cent of all the monies that we get. We retain a very small percentage ourselves for curriculum development and the Learning Resources Centre and our own staff and travel costs and so on, but 98 per cent of our total budgets flow out to the locally elected school boards. As you know, we're dealing with about \$5.6 billion in total, so that's a huge amount of money that is going out there.

I will again reiterate that cost escalations were not all known at the time that, you know, the budget was brought in, and the reason for that in part – and I should have mentioned it in response to Beverly-Clareview and his questions – is that projects get tendered at different times by the local school boards. So they don't all get tendered at the ideal time for all budgeting purposes.

You asked the question about Holyrood being one of the receiving schools. I think the hon. member would agree that Holyrood is one of the absolute best schools in all of Alberta in terms of its output. There are many schools who do an incredible job, but Holyrood happens to be one that I'm intimately familiar with, having visited it, oh, probably 100-plus times over the last few years. I know that it's a receiving school, and I know that it has some issues, as does Balwin, as do others.

Your specific request, however, with regard to McNally, Austin

O'Brien, Ottewell, Fulton Place, Clara Tyner, and others. The first thing we'd have to do, hon. member, is take a look at the boards' three-year capital plans and see where those projects are in their plans. But let me say this. IMR dollars, infrastructure maintenance renewal dollars, that have just been increased, I hope tonight with your approval, by another \$119 million will go a very, very long way to helping some of those difficulties that schools such as those you mentioned might be having. Again, I'm not sure.

For example, in the case of Edmonton Catholic schools their IMR dollars will go from \$231.5 million last year up to \$253.8 million this year, and that's just for that one envelope, infrastructure maintenance renewal funding. Edmonton public will go from a grand total – sorry; hang on here. That's grand total funding. My apologies. IMR funding: I have to restate this; I'm sorry. The grand total for that school board, all of its funding – my apologies – will go from \$231.5 million up to \$253.8 million. The IMR goes from \$2.7 million up to \$12 million just in IMR for that envelope. Similarly, with Edmonton public they were receiving \$6.9 million in IMR funding in '05-06, and they will now be receiving \$30.8 million. I mean, it's a huge jump. So, you know, we can't address them all in one fell swoop, but that's a huge jump. Their total budget will go from \$567 million up to \$625 million, so they've got a lot more money to work with and a lot of flexibility.

I beg to differ. I don't think we're forcing any closures, hon. member. I think what we're trying to do is take a long-term view of this situation, see where it is that steel-framed modulars, which are mould resistant and have a much longer life span, can be moved around. They're wonderful. I just toured the facility here a couple of weeks ago down in Crossfield, Alberta, and they're amazing – absolutely amazing – units with steel-framed floors, steel-framed walls, steel-framed roofs, the whole nine yards. They're just real works of art. That factor along with the IMR dollars will help bode us very well, and hopefully more schools will be able to be preserved or added to or modernized or whatever. The schools for tomorrow plan that I referenced earlier, which I will have completed later this fall, will address that as well. Mr. Chair, we don't want to wind up in the end with a whole bunch of new schools that are only going to be 40 or 50 per cent full, and in the meantime the older schools are also only going to be 40 or 50 per cent full. We want to find a better solution than that.

I'll take my seat now and let other members get comments and questions on the record, should they wish, and I'll undertake to provide Edmonton-Gold Bar with additional written answers to the other questions he asked.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm really pleased with this additional money, and I'm very pleased with the comments that you're making tonight in terms of long-term vision and planning. I am concerned that in 2005-2006 \$81 million was budgeted for infrastructure and maintenance renewal, and the supplementary budget funding right now is almost three times the entire original budgeted amount. You're right; that's a huge jump. To me it suggests poor planning. We've got to get a handle on things.

I know that schools have been through years and years, since about 1992, of government releasing money too late and in bits and pieces. The figures used to be released in January-February, and now it's as late as April-May. In the last several years there have been summer announcements of money just like this year. This creates staffing decisions being made in late August, often after our

young teachers have left the province because we couldn't tell them that they really did have a job.

I know that in Edmonton public there were hundreds of teachers who were on probationary contracts last year and were recommended by their principals for continuing contracts because they are good teachers, but these teachers had to go through this summer not knowing if they would get their contract, and I suspect that some of them have left. Some of them are returning to work, but they still don't know if they have a contract. This anxiety is huge because it's about livelihood. It affects lives, and it affects families.

I know schools that let teacher aides go in June, and it may be very difficult now, even though we've got the extra money, to find replacements. People need stability in their lives. With the hot economy these teacher aides can go across the street and get a job with more pay and less responsibility. The reality is that they have to have that stability, so that concerns me.

Based on the budget schools have in April, they make plans for the following year. By the beginning of May, with students having generally concluded their registration plans, they put together master timetables. By the end of May schools declare some teachers surplus, and a process begins to plan for and place teachers for the next year. So teachers move, they change schools, and get placed as much as possible by the end of June. But that doesn't always happen.

To get money in August means that even if principals now open another position, they will not likely get back the teacher they had already lost and who has been placed somewhere else. The angst of waiting for placement for the teacher declared and moved to a new school has already occurred, and now principals have to take time to interview and go through that whole process to replace perhaps an excellent teacher that they would have preferred to keep with a possible new teacher now with limited experience. It disrupts teachers' lives, the schools spend time and money they shouldn't have to, and children and parents get upset because they were expecting so-and-so teacher, and that teacher is not coming back.

In high schools it may mean many hours of admin work modifying the master timetable. This will mean that many students will find that their timetable has changed from what they believed it was in July, and this can cause great difficulties, perhaps, in that they'll lose a course that they need for their postsecondary requirements.

I am concerned about that anxiety. I think it's unnecessary. If planning could be based on facts instead of guesswork, just like you say you have to do with your department, layoffs would be minimized and additional programs might even be planned properly. So why can't we do something about changing the timelines to accommodate schools? I don't know. Why is it like this?

9:50

The other thing I'd like to talk about: the recent addition of the 1 per cent of operating grants is really welcome. If school boards had known this would happen, it would have probably eliminated a lot of anxiety. But, you know, with the considerable increase in transportation budgets due to fuel costs and the rising costs of utilities, I'm told that it's likely the additional 1 per cent will allow schools to just break even. However, this is assuming, of course, that the three nonteaching contracts in Edmonton public school board, for example, will be settled at 3 per cent, like the ATA has already done.

Now, when I look at Mill Woods, as the hon. minister knows, the schools there are relatively new. They started in the 1970s. However, a number of them need modernization. But schools in older areas have greater needs.

The second major problem is that while the extra cash is welcome,

the funding isn't nearly enough to deal with the overwhelming maintenance backlog in this province. The injection is good news, but the extensive backlog at local schools is just going to be shaved; it's not going to be eliminated. We know that. What concerns me is that the longer we wait, it seems that the cost is increased. So things have been put on the wayside because of lack of funding over the last several years, and we're going to pay a greater price.

What we need is sustained funding over the long term, predictable sustained funding. Man, it just sounds so simple, I know. But it would make a tremendous difference. Costs are increasing for many reasons. The longer things are on hold, the more they will cost. Soaring construction costs and inflation-eroded dollars mean ballooning price tags.

When I look at Edmonton public school board's plans for major maintenance, I really appreciate the effort that's gone into identifying for consideration what needs to be done by receiving input from schools, from facilities staff, and from regulatory agencies. The needs and requests for school improvement projects continue to exceed available funding. The plan, therefore, has to reflect the district's highest need. This is where I go back.

Now, I'd just like to talk a little bit more about Edmonton-Mill Woods, which I know the minister is quite familiar with. I've got a number of schools, Lee Ridge, Tipaskan elementary, and W.P. Wagner high school, who are getting new roofing through infrastructure maintenance and renewal. J. Percy Page is getting flooring, upgraded sidewalks, and upgraded washrooms. Wagner is also getting asbestos abatement and replacement of some corridor walls. Edith Rogers is getting lockers replaced. I wonder what's happening with Holy Trinity. It's the same age as J. Percy Page high school. They must have enormous needs too. Frère Antoine elementary school is not wheelchair accessible. I know that from personal experience, but I've also had calls from parents who need to use walkers that can't get into that school. That concerns me. I mean, that's an obvious need.

In years 1 and 3 Hillview and Weinlos are going to be looked at, and that's good news, but several schools have to wait for years 4 and 6 for facility alterations or a review of program fit, you know, looking at program viability. These are good things. But that involves Grace Martin, Greenview, Kate Chegwin, Lee Ridge, and Malcolm Tweddle. These are some of our older schools in Mill Woods. It concerns me that this is all based on needs at this time. There's no crystal ball to tell us what might be needed down the road due to extraordinary circumstances.

I think the cost of defeating the debt for the deadline of 2005 has been enormous. We should have been maintaining schools all through the last decade. Surely this would have been more responsible and competent fiscal management, management that would better serve Albertans. Again, I say that we have to provide sustainable funding to allow schools to plan with confidence to meet existing needs and to maintain their schools and their programs.

I've got more that I'd like to talk to, but I'll wait for another time. I think I've said enough for now. I don't want to repeat a lot of what's been said.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Sure. I'll be brief as well. Thanks very much for the positive comments. I have great respect for this member because I visited her school often, and we talked about education a great deal.

I'll just briefly say this: why did IMR, or infrastructure and maintenance renewal, dollars jump from \$48 million a year to \$200 million a year? The reason for that is because I happen to know some people who are in this business of property management, and

I talked with them over the past year, and some of my officials did as well. I can tell you, hon. member, that in many cases private industry tend to budget about 2 per cent per year for maintenance of their inventories.

Now, in the case of schools we have approximately \$10 billion worth of school infrastructure out there. So if you take 2 per cent of that, you'll get about \$200 million a year. If you take \$81 million that we had in May and add \$119 million, voila: you have \$200 million. So that's the formula I used to get to the \$200 million, and our caucus fortunately understood that, agreed with it, and we're asking for you to concur in it tonight. I mean, we take each year at a time, but that will do a tremendous amount of, as you called it, catch-up.

The issue of teacher stability and the budgeting process: I just want to comment this way. I know about the timetablings. I used to do them myself, and student enrollments and teacher retirements I've already commented on. But I want to correct one comment with respect to getting the money in August, as you said. No. In fact, I announced those dollars for the classroom on July 10, which is 10 days after the school year ended. It was as fast as I could get it out there and as fast as our caucus would approve it. We really did work hard to fast-track that, hon. member, so if it's some small consolation at least, you know that we got it out as quickly as we possibly could.

The 1 per cent increase in the base grant will help a great deal. That means a total increase of 4 per cent for the base grant rate alone right now, and that's a huge amount of dollars there. We are working very hard for this predictable, sustainable approach.

I think we've made some good progress toward that. Hopefully, we'll make more at tonight's vote, but it should set a good pattern for us. Let's not forget the fact, Mr. Chairman, that in terms of the new dollars that have been allocated for K to 12 education, the Learning Commission responses alone have necessitated a spending increase of approximately \$600 million and climbing so far, just for responses to the Learning Commission. You know yourself that when you're dealing with up to 90, 95 recommendations, you can't throw every single one of them into the mix all at once, or the system will reverberate on you, perhaps negatively, and we don't want that. We're trying to deal with this huge influx of dollars in a very sustainable and efficient way because we want the system to be built on as solid a foundation going forward as possible so that we don't face any of those backlogs later. Hence, I appreciated your comment about the long-term planning that we're doing.

The specific schools you talked about: Lee Ridge, Wagner, the asbestos abatement there; J. Percy Page, the flooring, the sidewalks; Edith Rogers, Holy Trinity. Let me look into those along with Weinlos. The one, however, that I'm going to ask my staff to get on immediately in the morning ahead of all those is the Frère Antoine school that you mentioned, which I think you said is not wheelchair accessible. I'll have my staff follow up with the public school board. Is that the public school board there? That's the Catholic one. Sorry. I haven't been there for a long time. But that Frère Antoine one, if it's not wheelchair accessible, as you say, then perhaps some of the IMR dollars will help get that done or perhaps the PO and M dollars, both of which envelopes have been significantly increased. I wouldn't be surprised if they have it on their list already, but we'll check on that very quickly and try and get you an answer soon.

With that I will cede the floor to others. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by St. Albert.

10:00

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make some very

brief comments on the Education budget. Certainly, I would like to acknowledge from the outset that these dollars are very much appreciated by K to 12 schools all across this province. We were really in a dire circumstance in terms of school-based budgeting and school board budgeting across this province. I think this money came in the nick of time, and I do want to acknowledge that.

That being said, however, I would also like to I guess have some reassurance that perhaps we could get the budgeting process through in a more timely manner or at least so that something like this doesn't happen again. As previous speakers have pointed out, there was a very disruptive process taking place right across the province, where school boards were compelled to serve notice to hundreds and hundreds of young probationary teachers. This creates a destabilizing effect on not just the schools individually but also on the entire profession. It sends a message that these very qualified people are somehow less valued or not as capable, perhaps, of maintaining a full-time job. Teachers, especially these probationary people who have otherwise exhibited tremendous skill and ability to get to that position, are somehow being devalued and made to question the very profession for which they've chosen to study.

I would like to get some assurance somehow – I know you're explaining the timing, Mr. Minister, and I appreciate that – to look for ways by which we can have the timing in place so that someone can leave their position in June and have a sense that they will continue back in the fall or not. This was the way that it had been over the last 18 years or so when I was teaching, and obviously something has changed and not for the better.

Another point that I wanted to bring forward here this evening is just information suggesting that there's a wider problem with parents meeting the school fees. This is something that I'm getting in my constituency office more and more. I can compare from last year and know that it's increasing. You know, it's this whole thing of charging extra fees for textbooks and for different programs, for options, but these are not really options because, of course, everyone does need a textbook, and everyone does need to fill up their timetable. Students going to elementary and to junior high and high school are seeing fees that can range from \$100 to \$400 or \$500.

I have a survey of different schools here at different levels in Edmonton and Grande Prairie, and these fees, especially if you have more than one child in school, can be quite onerous given the other expenses that you will incur at the beginning of the school year. Again, I think this is something that I have seen increase quite dramatically over the time that I was a teacher and from the time that I, in fact, was a student. Obviously, we're downloading the cost of education onto the parents basically. This is not a way, at the very least, to encourage people to have children, and it is also discouraging and creating financial constraints and going against the spirit of public education in the broadest sense. Speaking out for my constituents, I would like to see some very specific attention addressed to increasing school fees over time, and I would also demand that we do in fact address that for the sake of public education in the most equal and accessible perspective that we can bring forward here from this Legislature.

Another comment that I wanted to make is that the Learning Commission's recommendation to establish junior kindergarten and full-day kindergarten has again not been met. I know that the evidence is overwhelming that this indeed would improve the quality of education and the success rate for students throughout the rest of their public education up to grade 12. We know that other countries, in fact, do this. These are also countries that we often cite as being, you know, perhaps our intellectual competitors, who are in fact educating their students to a higher level or creating more students into the postsecondary level, and certainly full-day kindergarten has a lot to do with that.

The program that my colleague had pointed out, the inner-city school program that Edmonton public was funding and having difficulty funding, is a good reflection of that. Certainly, if we have something that works, then why don't we extend it to the wider population and increase their success rate as well? It's important when you're talking about that inner-city program – I think that the hon. minister is somewhat mistaken in that these are not people for special funding, that we're not putting them as special-needs students. These are students that require extra attention because of other circumstances, not the least of which being lower incomes. Certainly, a lower income is not a qualification for special needs. It's a wider issue that we are compelled to address here from this Legislature.

The whole issue of class sizes I think needs to be monitored in a more specific way. I know that certainly with higher grades and the class size situation, there's been little relief in that regard. In fact, quite the opposite. The 10, 11, and 12 classes are getting larger. I guess that it's a frustration I hear from high schools. I think it's a reflection again of perhaps the need for a more particular accounting mechanism for us in regard to measuring class size across the province. Certainly, I think that we have the imperative to look at that here through this Legislature as well.

Finally, last but not least – well, sorry; second last but not least there is the issue of the unfunded liability. I know that crosses over to the Finance department as well. I think it's a good thing that we are seeing this entering the public debate. In the leadership as well I'm happy to see it. It's a simple accounting issue, whether you're willing to come forward with \$6 billion now or pay \$46 billion later. I think the answer is obvious to all taxpayers, not just people whose pensions are being affected by this.

The very last issue I think that we need to stress – and I know that you will be having a commission in regard to this – is that our completion rates in this province are not acceptable. This problem is being exacerbated by the lure of jobs before students complete high school. I know that from being the product of a former generation that was in a boom and then a bust, you create a whole generation of people who have difficulty going back to education and completing their education or postsecondary education because they were lured into what seemed to be high-paying jobs in the oil patch. Now we're repeating that same scenario here 25 years later. I just loath to see the results of it, where you have undereducated people looking for other forms of work perhaps 10 years later, and it becomes a difficult problem, especially if the economy doesn't stay buoyant.

These are my concerns in regard to the Education budget. I'm delighted to see that there are some monies coming forward, but I think long-term planning and movement in some of these key areas that I pointed out would only help to make it even better.

Thank you.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chairman, I'll respond to the member in writing regarding his comments.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

I guess we can move to the next department. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Advanced Education

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will try and adhere to our House leader's suggestion that we try and keep it down to about five minutes.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to present the supplementary estimates request for Advanced Education. Advanced Education has one request, and it relates to cost escalation on approved capital projects that are currently under construction. There's not a lot of complexity with respect to what we're asking for. We're experiencing strong economic growth, and everything is going up in price. That's the reason we have to come back and ask for more money to finish projects that are already into the ground. The labour market with all of its benefits is having cost implications for our capital construction projects. This includes projects at our postsecondary institutions as well as education and health care facilities.

10:10

The supplementary estimate of \$49.2 million that is requested for Advanced Education is to provide additional funding for five approved postsecondary capital projects that are currently under construction: \$16 million for the Health Research Innovation Facility at the University of Alberta; \$14 million for the Health and Research Innovation Centre at the University of Calgary; \$10 million for the Sport and Wellness Centre at Keyano College in Fort McMurray, which will see improvements and expansion to the college recreational facilities as well; \$6.5 million for the Robbins health learning centre at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton, which will provide much-needed classroom and laboratory space for MacEwan's nursing and health sciences programs that have just recently been approved; and \$2.7 million for expansion of the Cold Lake campus Portage College.

I'd also like to note that it's expected that costs for capital projects will continue to escalate throughout this booming economic period, but my officials are working closely with counterparts in Infrastructure and Transportation to monitor capital cost increases and will be paying close attention to this.

This concludes my remarks, and I would be pleased to address questions on the supplementary estimates. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and debate the estimates for supplementary supply for the Advanced Education department. The minister was brief. I will try and be brief as well because, of course, we have a great deal of ground to cover and a very short time in which to cover it if we're to get through all the departments asking for extra money tonight. Well, who am I kidding? We're not going to get through all the departments. We didn't set aside enough time. There's no possible way. I would have loved to have gotten involved in the discussion of the estimates for the Department of Education, but I leave it to my colleagues to ask as many of those questions as possible because we do have to move on.

You know, over the course of the summer the Taylor family has been building a new garage, a garage that we've been putting off building since we moved into the house 20 years ago, a garage that was supposed to be the first project after we moved in except the first project turned out to be the birth of our first-born and you know what that does to the construction budget when the budget for Pampers and things like that comes in.

I noted this summer, though, that had I gone ahead with that plan to build that garage 20 years ago, I could have built the whole garage for what it cost me to pour the concrete this summer, so I do understand what this minister is saying and what other ministers will say over the course of the debate for supplementary supply over the next few days about cost escalation. Both in terms of labour and in terms of materials it is fairly astounding. The Minister of Advanced

Education really is looking for about 18 per cent more money than he budgeted for, and that's not far off the mark of what we're told is the cost escalation in the construction business in the province of Alberta these days. So in broad, general terms, no complaints here.

I thank the minister for his breakout of how this \$49.2 million is proposed to be spent. I have no particular questions in that area. But I do have some questions, and I don't expect any answers from the minister tonight on this because I know that he shares my view that we need to move this process along, and he's very good about replying in writing, so I'll anticipate his answers in future to as many of these questions as possible.

Let me, though, run through this quickly. I guess question one is: given the way the numbers have bounced around for postsecondary education infrastructure budgets over the course of the last couple of years both in terms of budgeting and projections three years down the road – and I ask this uncritically; I ask this for information – can the minister provide any kind of assurances to what we can anticipate in the next two budget years? I mean, the budget has gone up by nearly \$50 million over the course of this budget year. Does the minister anticipate that the same thing is going to happen next year and the year after? I'm getting a little bit to what the plan will be and how you plan in this kind of escalating cost environment, that we're all dealing with in one form or another.

I have a few other areas of interest as well that do not specifically relate to the dollars that we're talking about here but which will relate to dollars that we will need to talk about in fairly short order, I would hope, but in the months and years to come. So I'll hit the minister with a few questions if I could. Given that in just one year the budget for SAIT's new apprenticeship centre went up by something like \$55 million, or 18 per cent, should the Legislature get used to this kind of budget? Whether they be supplementary dollars or budgeted dollars, when will we be seeing some hard funding beyond the sort of million dollars to cover the very basic start-up costs, I guess, for SAIT's new apprenticeship centre? I ask this question, obviously, because – and I know that the minister shares my view – it is vital that we turn out more apprentices in this province. SAIT is on record as saying that they expect the government to fund 81 per cent of the project. Will the minister commit to funding at least this amount? Can he?

ACAD, the Alberta College of Art and Design, is in need of a new downtown facility to meet enrolment demand and to support a dynamic, culturally diverse downtown core in the city of Calgary. I'm curious as to whether the minister is supportive of this project. I'm curious as to where he stands on support for the new NAIT/Northern Lakes College apprenticeship facility in Grande Prairie. I'm curious as to when we might expect to see some financial support to the new community learning campus at Olds College, the expansion of Bow Valley College in Calgary, the new digital library, the veterinary school at the U of C, the whole Campus Calgary concept, which I think is still alive, although I'm not sure that it's not on some degree of life support these days.

The University of Calgary as part of that wants to create 7,000 new spaces by 2010. Given what the minister is seeing happening to cost escalation, given what the minister is seeing happening to the infrastructure budgets bouncing around somewhat, can the minister offer any assurance that the U of C, the University of Calgary, will be able to meet that goal of 7,000 new spaces by 2010?

The U of A has an ambitious expansion plan to help the government fulfill its access promises. I know, again, that this is not part of this particular supplementary supply, but I'm wondering if the minister could provide an update to the Assembly on whether he's supportive of the University of Alberta's effort to increase enrolment to 50,000 by the year 2020. Has he committed to providing funding for any particular parts of this initiative?

What specific other projects on Alberta campuses is the minister committed to getting done over the next three years? This, I think, does potentially get back to some of the dollars we're talking about tonight. Can he provide specific estimates on how many additional spaces each of these projects will support and some timelines, too, specific timelines for increasing capacity in medical schools, in nursing programs, and other health-related fields over the next few years because as we all know – and I'll use once again the city of Calgary as an example – the city of Calgary is short hospital beds.

The Calgary health region has in place a plan to alleviate that shortage through the construction of new hospital facilities, but it won't be completed until the year 2010. The city of Calgary is fated to be short of hospital beds until 2010-2011. But even in this context of today's labour shortages and escalating costs, even if you could speed up the construction of those hospital facilities, you probably couldn't do much about filling the buildings with patients because you have doctors and nurses and other health care professionals to hire to staff those facilities.

We are short of doctors. We are short of nurses and other health care professionals. We need to churn out more, and I'm taking this opportunity to put this question to the minister although, again, it's not directly related. I wonder if the minister can offer us some timelines for increasing capacities so that we can graduate more doctors, more nurses, more health care professionals wherever they're needed over the course of the next few years.

As I said, Mr. Chairman, I offer the minister the opportunity to reply to any or all of those questions in writing if we want to move this process along, and I thank the House for this opportunity tonight.

10:20

Mr. Herard: Just very briefly, and I will take the opportunity to provide as much information as I can in writing. As a general principle what I have looked at is that all of our institutions and boards have a number one priority project. Essentially, what I try and do is make sure that all of the number one priority projects are prioritized in such a way that depending on how many capital dollars, how far down the list I can go, I will effect as many number one priority projects around the entire province as I can. So that's sort of the basic principle in how I look at this because, quite frankly, every single one of our institutions has priority projects that they want to try and achieve for very good reason.

There are a number of projects that you mentioned that are really good ideas, but I don't have anything solid yet to analyze. You know, for example, that there isn't a good business plan in place; maybe some of the partners have moved away from the proposals. Anyway, we don't have something solid to evaluate yet. Everything that we've got in the hopper today has been analyzed and prioritized primarily to make sure that we distribute this throughout the province.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will also try and be brief and thank the minister for his introductory comments and then a few observations in response to those he just finished making. The \$49.2 million in supplementary estimates that he is requesting the House to approve is related to the five projects that he mentioned. He's given us a breakdown, and I want to thank him for this: the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, Keyano College, Grant MacEwan College, and Portage College in Cold Lake, five of these projects. The increase that the \$49 million represents over the \$273,143,000 that was approved in the 2006-2007 budget barely

three months ago, in May, is 18 per cent, yes, but are these monies being requested for the high-priority projects for just these five institutions? Are there some other institutions which had also asked for money and didn't get it?

The second question that I have is that it's only taken about three months for the minister to come back and ask for an 18 per cent increase over the funds provided in the initial budget. We have yet, I think, seven months remaining for the 2006-2007 budget going forward. Does he expect to have to come back, whenever the time permits, for more money in the face of the cost escalation that everyone recognizes is a problem for these five projects? That's what I'm asking.

A related question is: when are these five particular projects likely to be completed? Are they likely to be completed in the next few months, or are they going to be completed in the next two years? If the latter is the case, then can he say with confidence that it's the last time he'll be coming back to the Legislature for additional funds for the completion of these five projects?

I am concerned, in the context of rapidly increasing costs, with the way we are doing the budgeting. Either we have to abandon the old way in which the budgeting was done and concede that that is inappropriate and bring forward an open-ended budget and tell the Legislature that we may have to come back every three months or five months given the context of cost escalation or if you're going to be taken seriously on the annual budget just passed in the spring session, then you say that we'll find better ways of estimating the cost-escalation factor and build into the budget numbers that are presented to the House in March or April, at that time.

So there is some sort of difficulty here that I sense, and I sympathize with the minister and other ministers too. If it is, in fact, the case that there is a cost-escalation factor that is almost running not out of control but certainly somewhat wildly, then how does this House approach the request that it may receive, as it's receiving now, and hope that this is the last time that the minister or the ministry or the department is going to come back within this current budget year for more money? It is a cause for concern. I think that it does raise questions about budgeting procedures and budgeting practices. The circumstances have changed. Is some consideration being given to how to budget for this? Those are some of the questions for the minister.

I'm curious that these five projects with five different institutions are the only ones for which additional money is being asked. I wonder if this initial budgeted amount, \$273,143,000, was dedicated for only these five projects. Are there other projects that are also covered by that initial 273 million plus dollars? If there are more projects that were covered by the \$273,143,000 than just these five projects, then how is it that there is obviously no need for the minister to ask for additional funds for the completion of other projects, which are, I would say, outside the list of these five. In other words, are there 10 projects, in fact, that are going on now, which are funded by this \$243 million? If so, why is it only these five which require additional funds and not others?

The minister may have answers to all of these questions. I hope I made my questions more or less clear. Otherwise, he'll come back to me and ask for clarification. With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down and see if the minister would want to respond.

Mr. Herard: I will deal with those questions in writing. Thank you very much for your questions.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development on behalf.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here this evening on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on the supplementary estimates request for that department. I think it's important to acknowledge the earlier debate that we had this evening when the hon. Member for Highwood brought forward some of the challenges that the agricultural industry has. This Assembly certainly well knows those challenges because many of those challenges were talked about during that earlier debate. They talked of everything from disease to border closures, drought, having to deal with low commodity prices, and certainly the ever-increasing input costs. Alberta agricultural producers and processors have faced a great many of those challenges that we have mentioned.

As a government we continue to stand by this industry. It is an important industry to the province of Alberta. So, therefore, Mr. Chairman, the 2006-2007 supplementary estimate for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is \$270.8 million.

10:30

I'd just like to take a moment and outline the main components of these estimates. The supplementary estimate provides \$261 million in disaster funding relief to agricultural producers through the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program. Given the challenges our farmers are facing, this disaster declaration and resulting funds represent government's commitment to support farmers who face escalating input costs at a crucial time of year with the upcoming harvest season.

In addition to the disaster relief funding \$4.8 million was put towards infrastructure assistance for municipal waste water to support a project in the municipal district of Rocky View. The funding will support the municipal waste water cost for the agricultural portion of the construction of a horse-racing track and equine centre. That's for the agricultural portion of that centre. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's total commitment of \$8.3 million is particularly offset by other savings in the municipal waste water program.

Another \$5 million was dedicated to bioenergy development in Alberta, including support for the bioenergy commercialization and market development program, and the delivery of the bioenergy infrastructure assistance program. Both of these will help place Alberta at the forefront of the emerging bioenergy sector and could contribute to long-term sustainable growth in this province.

That concludes my explanation on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and their request on the supplementary estimates. I'm sure that the hon. members opposite will have some questions, and I will advise the hon. members that the minister or his staff will respond to those questions in writing following review of tonight's *Hansard* and make the answers available to the hon. members.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I just wanted to make a couple of brief comments in regard to the agriculture estimates. The first issue that I think needs to be addressed is the way that the farm-aid deal is assessed because, in fact, the way that it's being referenced – right? – is using the 2004 margins in order to establish peoples' rebates. However, we know that 2005 and 2006, this year, is when we've seen a serious increase in farm costs, especially in regard to fuel and petroleum-related inputs, fertilizer and whatnot, and I'm putting this forward, of course, for the minister to catch later. Changing those parameters

by which the farm aid is assessed for individuals for the different year I think would make a big difference to being more realistic to just how fast the prices have been going up here in the last 18 months or so.

As well, I'm curious to ask about the Choice Matters campaign, how much of the budget and supplements are going into the funding of this program from the agriculture ministry, and I'm just wondering about the appropriateness of that choice of funding for this advertising campaign. You know, I have difficulty seeing the relevance of the province of Alberta being in this debate in the way that they are because, of course, it is a federal issue. It's a very controversial issue as well because when you do take a piece out of a monopolistic board, as the Wheat Board is, then you are risking the deflation of prices across the whole board. So I hope that this is being considered when the agriculture minister, in fact, weighs in on this issue.

Those are my two points that I wanted to bring forward, and I know that my first point particularly, in regard to the base lines for farm aids, is reflected by other groups. The Wild Rose Agricultural Producers association, among others, has expressed this as a pressing need from farmers across the province.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate this evening on Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Before this session started, it was interesting to follow the department. I don't know how much public relations were devised by the Public Affairs Bureau, but certainly it was with interest when the news came out that \$261 million was being set aside for farmers. I read with interest the previous day where the order in council had been initiated. I believe it was the 17th of August, Mr. Chairman, that this provincial government declared that a natural disaster exists in the nature of an agricultural economic hardship with respect to the 2006-07 fiscal year.

Now, there are a number of reasons, of course, for that. A lot of this was articulated in question period today. I listened earlier to the hon. Minister of Finance, and on first blush I'd have to say, Mr. Chairman, that I don't think the hon. minister has really given up the portfolio of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. I would have to say that she seems very capable of handling that department. She's certainly familiar with all the programs in there. But we see the increasing production costs and the falling crop prices. We talk to farmers almost daily on this side of the House. They talk about fuel prices. They talk about fertilizer costs. Farm gate incomes we know are falling. There are significant problems. The only fortunate thing we have right now is the fact that so many people can work off-farm in the robust energy sector.

We asked questions during the budget estimates this past spring. This side of the House asked if we could have an increase in the farm fuel benefit allowance. That hadn't been adjusted for a number of years. It needed an adjustment to reflect this significant fuel increase. Nothing was done. We asked about fertilizer costs. There was a nod from the minister, but again nothing was done.

Now we find ourselves in this situation where funding will be provided through the CAIS program based on the 2004 claim year. The hon. Minister of Finance gave a detailed answer in question period, which I referred to earlier, but I'm not so sure that we should be using the 2004 claim year. Producers who participated in CAIS in 2004 will automatically have their claims processed, as I understand it, but now in other adjustments that have been made to the

CAIS program, we have found that there have been significant overpayments.

Mr. Lund: How did that happen?

Mr. MacDonald: How did that happen? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation asks: how did those overpayments in the CAIS program happen? Well, in the November 2004 election this government was so anxious to shore up its deteriorating support in rural Alberta that it quickly went through all these claims, hastily cut the cheques, and got themselves re-elected. But now, 18 months later, they're asking from some of those farmers up to \$80 million back. The farmers that have contacted this side of the House see through that. That's exactly what happened.

10:40

My point with this is: can we be assured that this won't happen again with the CAIS program? There are some files that I have seen where there is in excess of \$45,000. There's a beef producer north of town here. I think he's got over \$70,000 in overpayment. It's not a laughing matter. It is certainly not a laughing matter. You know, the hon. minister can chuckle and grin, but it is certainly for many farmers not a laughing matter.

We'll have to be very careful. We'll have to watch this. The hon. Minister of Finance spoke earlier about the 2004 claim year, that reference margins will be increased by 25 per cent for fuel and fertilizer costs, and there will be a general reference margin increase of 15 per cent. Now, by targeting the producers with the most need, about 60 per cent of the 2004 CAIS participants will receive the funding. Funds are expected to reach farmers this fall regardless of whether there's an election or not. There's a leadership race over there but no provincial election. I suspect that that's going to come during breakup next year, next spring.

Funds are expected to reach farmers this fall and are intended to provide support from now until when the disaster component of CAIS is developed. I wonder if the government has ever considered having a separate disaster relief fund. Let's set aside some money for a separate disaster relief fund. That was one of the past ways of dealing with these disasters but not currently. If the government has considered that, I would be interested to hear about it.

Now, the \$4.8 million infrastructure assistance for municipal wastewater. Can the minister provide us with some details on this particular need? Why was the need not anticipated? Are there specific jurisdictions that this money will be targeted for? What led to this problem, and why wasn't it prevented? Certainly, there is interest in this.

The \$5 million bioindustrial technologies: will the minister provide us with some details on this particular need? How exactly will this additional money be used? Are there specific initiatives that this money will be dedicated to? Why did the minister not recognize the need for this money when the budget was drawn up? Now, hopefully this will be dealt with.

I also have some other questions regarding the CAIS program. We talked about this a little earlier, specifically: why didn't the minister anticipate the need for the disaster program when we were doing the budget just this past spring? Conditions haven't changed that much. Why, again, has this government allowed the situation with farm incomes to reach a crisis? There seems to be a concern amongst farmers that the process that is being used for distributing this money is flawed. We talked about this earlier. I'm sure the government is hearing the same questions because of the question that the Minister of Finance directed today. Is the minister con-

cerned that by using 2004 as the claim year, the increase of costs in 2005 and 2006 will not be adequately addressed? How does the minister plan on ensuring that farmers who were not significantly impacted in 2004 but who suffered greatly in 2005 and again this year, 2006 – how will they receive any additional funds?

The order in council that I spoke about earlier – and this is in conclusion, Mr. Chairman – states that this disaster is a result of many things, including “limited market access.” Will the minister elaborate on this point briefly, please? Is it the minister’s position that the further opening up of the market would prevent such disasters in the future?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Environment

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’m very pleased here tonight to talk very briefly about what Alberta Environment is doing. Alberta Environment is requesting a supplementary amount for Water for Life, for grant payments under the waste management assistance program of \$3.7 million; \$2.7 million for the grant payment under Alberta water management and erosion control. As well, I want to say today that that’s why my ministry is requesting \$11.4 million, because of the most progressive strategy pertaining to Water for Life in this province. So, Mr. Chairman, I move the \$11.4 million as priorities for Water for Life and important environmental initiatives.

I also want to say that \$2.4 million of the funding is allocated to the energy innovation fund to detail groundwater inventory mapping and management models, which are very important. As has been mentioned in the past, groundwater mapping will support planning for coal-bed methane development. Industry, municipalities, and communities all have a role to play. Understanding our groundwater is how we can best protect its integral part in the livelihood and longevity of this province, and of course this is a key principle of our Water for Life.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Minister, for sharing some of the thinking behind the new allocations requested. I guess that in general terms this is an important investment given the grossly underfunded budget of this ministry, so one cannot but applaud added investment into some of these vital issues for Albertans. Unfortunately, our environment has been a major casualty in the uncontrolled growth in this province, and it will continue to be a great concern to Albertans and certainly to us on this side of the House as we try to get a handle on just what sustainable smart growth is as opposed to uncontrolled growth at the whim of business.

As indicated, a good part of the \$11.4 million has to do with water infrastructure, and that, I’m sure, is vital and just less than half of the money going into water mapping. I would very much appreciate knowing from the minister what water mapping has been done, where we are in terms of mapping in the province, and how we are monitoring the groundwater mapping to date. I think something that all of us need to be able to have a stronger handle on is: “Where are we? What needs to be done? When will this be complete?”

The Horseshoe Canyon is obviously the big play for coal-bed methane and a great concern for people around the province. It’s not

clear to me to what extent the Horseshoe Canyon has been mapped and to what extent we understand why changes that have occurred there are occurring as a result of resource activity or other factors. So I think we need to know something about where this is taking us and how much more is going to be needed because this is clearly a priority for Albertans. A better handle on groundwater mapping is absolutely vital.

“Will these data be publicly accessible?” is another important issue. Many landowners have asked questions that I think are reasonable, and many of us could reduce some of the demands on the department if we had more information about the known elements of the groundwater inventory.

10:50

What about the observation wells and the groundwater monitoring wells? There are over 200 monitoring wells in the province, and on the basis of the amount of activity in the province, clearly not enough, and no gas monitoring in these monitoring wells. This doesn’t make sense, and I hope this can be addressed at some level so we can get some sense of the extent to which gas is migrating into groundwater. We still don’t know despite some testing in the hamlet of Rosebud, and the indications are very much that the gas is migrating from cumulative impacts across this province in resource activity. We need an objective comment. We need objective science and a public process to restore confidence that we understand the extent to which our groundwater has been damaged and how much of it is natural.

Finally, it’s applaudable that we’re going to do some more oil sands assessment. Clearly, that’s an important role that we have to give more science to. I think and I hope industry is spending a lot on this as well.

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2006-07 General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, but pursuant to Standing Order 61(1), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration of estimates, and pursuant to Government Motion 25, agreed to on August 24, 2006, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon related to the 2006-2007 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that the committee now rise and report the estimates.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows.

All resolutions relating to the 2006-2007 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund have been approved.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$715,000.

Advanced Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$49,200,000.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$270,800,000.

Community Development: nonbudgetary disbursements, \$15,537,000.

Economic Development: expense, \$2,235,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$293,300,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$11,400,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$262,000,000.

Human Resources and Employment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,300,000.

Infrastructure and Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$171,644,000; capital investment, \$139,420,000.

Innovation and Science: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$20,000,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,600,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$20,356,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,000,000; capital investment \$9,600,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$251,503,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now that the supplementary supply has been voted on and based on previous discussion with all opposition party House leaders or such representatives regarding the need to revert to the introduction of bills, I will seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to in fact revert to Introduction of Bills so that we can do first reading of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Bills

Bill 44 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I would request leave to introduce Bill 44, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a first time]

head:

Government Motions

Adjournment of Session

26. Mr. Zwozdesky moved:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the summer sitting of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, oral notice having been given last week by myself, I now move the above motion, which, as I understand it, is not debatable. All members have been apprised through their House leaders or such representatives regarding this matter as well.

[Government Motion 26 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members for participating in tonight's debate and for their comments and questions, which will be responded to. That being the case and in view of the hour, I would move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:59 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, August 29, 2006** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 06/08/29
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce two sets of guests. I'll ask them to stand as I mention their name: Lorna Chandler from Black Diamond and her children Josh Chandler, who is 8, and Jada Chandler, 4, the widow and children of a farm worker killed in June of this year; Patricia Williams, her sister, and her daughter Raylean Williams and grandma Rita Williams. With them are Darlene Dunlop and Eric Musekamp from the farm workers union of Alberta. Let's give them the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Secondly, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly Kathryn Andrusky, president of the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta, and Sarah Thomas of the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta. They're concerned about attracting more doctors to Alberta through the promised Alberta Learning approval of debt deferral and interest-free status till the end of residency. Let's give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this esteemed Assembly two sets of introductions. The first one is Jacquie Lycka, an 18-year-old friend who is my STEP student at the Edmonton-McClung constituency office. Jacquie is attending Grant MacEwan in the fall, majoring in political science for her BA, and we're hoping that she's being groomed to be the next Liberal MLA for Edmonton-McClung. She has absolutely loved working in the constituency office, and today she is here watching me put on my other hat as a legislator. I hope she learns, and I hope she enjoys her stay. I would invite her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is my sister Amina Elsalhy, who is just back from her honeymoon, and she is accompanied by her husband, Moamen Nomeir. Again, they're watching me do my work as an honoured member of this esteemed Assembly. Today, incidentally, is Moamen's birthday, so I wish him a happy birthday. I would invite all our colleagues here to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As is so often the case at this time of year, late summer brings a number of comings and goings in the caucus office of the Official Opposition. I would like to make some introductions today, if I could, the first

being Jodie Gauthier, who is a research analyst with the Alberta Liberal caucus and the newest member of our team. Jodie was born and raised in High Prairie, Alberta, and recently completed a combined honours degree in political science and women's studies at the University of Alberta. Jodie would like to add that she supports same-sex marriage and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in general.

John Hanley has been a tremendous addition to our administrative team this summer as a correspondence assistant. John is a fourth-year political student at the U of A and will be completing his bachelor of arts degree this fall. He has worked previously as a radio broadcaster, a computer programmer, and a writer. John is excited about making his contribution to Alberta's democratic system by working in the Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, he's leaving us on Friday to go back to school, so we would like to thank him and wish him continued success in the future.

Sarah FitzGibbon joined us this summer as part of our administrative team. She has done a phenomenal job and has been instrumental in cataloguing and reorganizing our library. Sarah will be starting her first semester at the University of Alberta in September in the sciences and hopes to continue on to medicine in the future. She is a bright young woman, Mr. Speaker, and we're sure that she will achieve great things.

Finally, Christel Hyshka has been with us as a STEP student, and she's done fabulous work supporting our outreach program. Christel completed her undergraduate degree at the U of A and is now off to Carleton University in Ottawa to begin her master's degree in Canadian politics. Christel plans to return to Alberta to work in the public sector and is particularly interested in issues surrounding democracy and civic engagement. She will be leaving us tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, and we would like to thank her as well and wish her every success.

I would ask all four of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Del Marlow. Del is the program manager with Elizabeth House in the Alberta Avenue neighbourhood of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Del has worked in Edmonton's nonprofit sector for 14 years and has been with E4C's Elizabeth House facility for women in transition from homelessness for two and a half years. Elizabeth House provides a warm and safe home environment for women making the next step from emergency housing to independent living. Elizabeth House and E4C recently held a turn up the light on homelessness community event to break down some of the myths about homelessness and to foster relationships with the general community. Del Marlow is seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to this Assembly two guests today: Samantha Power and Andrea Enes. Samantha was elected president of the University of Alberta Students' Union for this year. She has been a tireless advocate for students over a number of years and is here today to encourage the government to make postsecondary education a real priority.

Andrea Enes was recently hired by the students' union as the external officer for the advocacy department. Andrea has also been

involved in the community on a number of fronts, including a number of social justice causes.

I would now ask both of them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce three students from the University of Alberta who are here to observe the goings-on in the House this afternoon and also to advocate for reduced debt loads for students in postsecondary education. They are – and if you would rise as I call your name, please – David Cournoyer, VP external for the University of Alberta Students' Union and chair this year of the Council of Alberta University Students, CAUS; Jessica King, U of A political science student and campus campaigns co-ordinator for the U of A Students' Union advocacy department; and Dane Bullerwell, a first-year U of A law student. If you could all please give them the warm traditional welcome of the House.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Planning for Growth Pressures

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta cities and towns are facing massive growth pressures. You know, quite frankly, without a plan to deal with the challenges to infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and community services, our communities will be left wondering where the Alberta advantage went. Yesterday in this House the Minister of Human Resources and Employment stated that only Liberals "would start thinking what may happen down the road." Precisely. To the Premier: does the Premier have any vision whatsoever or, indeed, even any interest in what kind of Alberta our children will inherit, or in his world is it just about he who dies with the most toys wins?

1:40

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the allegation that this government has no plan to meet massive growth pressures is blarney. It is hocus-pocus. It is Liberal hocus-pocus. The challenge, as always, is finding a balance. We are well aware of the pressures in the Wood Buffalo region and other regions of this province where phenomenal growth is taking place. At the same time, we don't want to negatively impact the livelihood of thousands of people, literally thousands upon thousands who are directly or indirectly employed by the oil industry, that would be affected by the Liberals interfering in the market.

Now, we will consult with Albertans and stakeholders about oil sands development this fall. As a matter of fact, there is a process and a stakeholders committee set up to do precisely that. In addition, we have formed an oil sands ministerial committee to examine everything from infrastructure requirements to socioeconomic pressures in the areas involved, and that committee will report back to government before the end of the year. The chair of the committee is the hon. Justice minister, and he may want to supplement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All that consulting doesn't sound like there's a plan yet.

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that previous governments in Alberta had legislation in place to deal with extraordinary urban growth pressures in boom times, will the minister commit to bringing back that legislation, that was repealed in 1994 when the existing Municipal Government Act was brought in?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, when the existing Municipal Government Act was brought in, it replaced a number of pieces of legislation, and the legislation the member refers to was one of them. That being said, it doesn't mean that because the act is no longer there, the municipalities do not have the ability to deal with issues under the existing legislation. So the answer to the question is no.

Mr. Taylor: Well, having the ability to deal with it is something that we can't readily see any evidence of these days.

Again to the minister: given that counties and MDs often have the tax base, the money, and cities and towns have the population and the infrastructure pressures, the expenses, how does the minister propose to resolve this fiscal imbalance? Or should, for instance, Cold Lake just annex half the MD of Bonnyville in an effort to solve its problems?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's very timely that the member would ask that question because tomorrow afternoon I will again be welcoming to the Legislature members of the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability as we continue our ongoing dialogue to deal with just exactly what the member refers to.

Municipalities largely are dependent upon an inelastic form of taxation: property tax. That's very good in slow times; it seems not to be as effective in boom times. On the other hand, the province has a very elastic form of tax revenue, that provides good sources of revenue in times like we are in now, but frankly, Mr. Speaker, when the economic boom takes a downturn, our revenue can literally go to zero from a significant number. So the minister's council is exploring ways that we can look at what the responsibilities of municipalities are and what the opportunities are for them to garner revenue. Then we'll determine how we should distribute those various revenue alternatives.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lots of talk. We're still waiting for the action.

Despite this government's unshakable faith in the ability of the market to solve every problem known to humankind, the market has clearly failed to resolve the affordable housing crisis in Alberta. In fact, the government's hands-off approach has exacerbated the problem, with skyrocketing rents and a near zero inventory of reasonably priced housing. My first question is to the Premier. What is this government going to do, in real terms for real people, to build affordable housing or cause it to be built? The market isn't doing it on its own, and it's hard to be patient when you're living in a trailer.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as with all matters affecting growth, we see this as a challenge, and striking the right balance is the key. The hon. member is right; we don't want to interfere in the marketplace. But we do understand the severity of the problem.

Perhaps the minister responsible for housing might want to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, we have been planning through this ministry for about four years now along with the federal government. Working with our counterparts, we have the Canada affordable housing program, which I've mentioned to you before. Over the past four years we have put \$100 million from Alberta, \$100 million from the federal government – \$200 million, \$50 million per year – developed 3100 units, houses, in the past four years. We are continuing it this year with another \$44 million. And that's just the housing component.

An Hon. Member: It's not working.

Mrs. Fritz: It is so working, and well.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, we're not keeping up with the demand. To the Minister of Government Services: does the minister consider that any increase in rent is fair and reasonable regardless of whether it's 3 per cent, 30 per cent, 300 per cent? At what point do market-driven rent increases become rent gouging?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Fair Trading Act we do watch this very, very carefully to make sure that the rents can only be increased twice a year.

Further to the question that the hon. member had previously, saying that private enterprise is not stepping up, that's absolutely wrong: 49,000 units are being built this year by the private sector here in Alberta.

Mr. Taylor: How many of them are priced over \$400,000?

To the Minister of Advanced Education: has the minister begun to calculate how much the high cost of off-campus housing is going to add to students' debt loads when they return to school next week?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much. As you know, we are looking at the entire affordability framework with respect to postsecondary, not just tuition, which happens to be sort of the iceberg. It's what lies below the water that seems to cost an awful lot. Housing and transportation, particularly for those who, in fact, have to move away from rural Alberta to find housing in our urban centres, is a big problem. We are looking for new solutions, and within the next few weeks I'm sure that the hon. member will be pleased with what we come up with.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Siting of Calgary Halfway House

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Halfway houses are a necessary part of the justice system. They facilitate the release of paroled prisoners back into the community. Without halfway houses prisoners would simply be released into communities with no controls or treatments after parole. This is obviously not in the interests of public safety. Our Solicitor General, our top cop, seems to believe: "Fine. Build your halfway house, just not in my backyard. This is someone else's problem." My question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Given that the minister has made public statements threatening to withhold funding

from an agency if they proceed to put a halfway house in his riding, is it the minister's policy, is it the government's policy to negotiate through intimidation?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is wrong. The issue that we have here is a halfway house. The John Howard Society does provide a very good service to offenders that are released. The issue that we have – and it just happens to be in my riding – is the fact that we're going to have pedophiles that are two blocks from junior high schools and elementary schools. The issue isn't NIMBY, not in my back yard. The issue is: what should be the proximity of a school, an elementary school, where we have kids that have English as their second language, kids that are most vulnerable in our society that are going to have to walk right by and right in front of this facility on their way to school, knowing that there are pedophiles inside that would be very happy to sexually assault those kids? We're here and this government is here to protect the children in this province. We'll do what we have to, and it doesn't matter what riding it's in, if it's my riding or Edmonton-Glenora.

1:50

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, the pedophile issue is not the issue here.

Has the minister consulted the research? Across Canada such halfway houses do not contribute to an increase in crime and do not contribute to a decrease in property values.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, there have been studies that have been done on halfway houses. There has been, in fact, a study on one halfway house that was in the Glamorgan area, in the southwest portion of Calgary, where the crime rate was noticeably higher than in other sectors of the city of Calgary. So I'm not sure where the member is getting some of his information. But I can assure you of this: it doesn't matter in which riding this would happen, if it was in Edmonton-Glenora or in Edmonton-Castle Downs. It's the issue of where we're going to be placing these and the issue of ensuring the safety of residents. I can tell you this: the safety of our kids is uppermost in this government's mind, and we're going to pursue that. We'll assist the John Howard Society in looking for a new location that isn't two blocks from an elementary school.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary question is this: is the minister willing to work with the John Howard Society and help them out? Where is the evidence that he is willing to help them find a suitable location? If not in his riding, what riding?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have been in touch with both the provincial association and the association in Calgary in looking at other options for them. I have also worked with the two communities that are very affected by this issue, the community of Scarboro and the community of Sunalta, and will continue to work with them. The John Howard Society has gone forward in their development application. It's before city council right now. There has been an appeal by the community, and there will be further appeals as well. The communities have hired a lawyer because they don't want this facility in their community. There are four other agencies in this community that are providing services of that similar type. The communities are saying: "We don't need one more in our community. We have four already. Is there not another location in the city of Calgary or outside the city of Calgary or in another community where the John Howard Society can provide this same service?"

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta lags behind other jurisdictions which require public disclosure of all donations in a leadership contest for a registered political party. Tory leadership hopefuls are raising and spending millions of dollars, much of it coming, no doubt, from big business. Given that the winner of this race will automatically be the Premier of Alberta at least until the next election, it is unacceptable that the public is being kept in the dark about who is paying the piper. To the Deputy Premier: will the government take action to ensure that all donations to the Tory leadership candidates are publicly disclosed, and if not, why not?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. members, our rules clearly – clearly – prohibit questions dealing with political party matters being raised in the Assembly, and the question in particular asks the government to deal with the activities of a political party. That question is not in order, hon. member, under our rules.

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

(continued)

Mr. Mason: This is a matter of government policy and very important public policy. It's been legislated in other jurisdictions in this country. So I will ask the Deputy Premier if this government is prepared to table legislation in this House to regulate the financing of leadership campaigns, including but not limited to the current race for the Progressive Conservative Party.

The Speaker: The question is a bit broader in the sense that it includes everything, and it has nothing to do with one particular party. If the hon. Deputy Premier wants to, proceed, please.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer, of course, in this province is an officer of the Legislature, but frankly I think that the question in this area would be more appropriately directed to our Minister of Justice.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My memory is that we do in fact have a legislative committee which addresses issues surrounding, in general terms, elections and election financing and whatnot. It's an all-party committee. I know that there are members of the Liberal opposition on that committee, and indeed my memory is that one of the members from the ND third party is on that committee.

The Chief Electoral Officer after the last election and, indeed, after all of the elections since our Premier became Premier of this province has prepared reports that have gone to that particular committee, including recommendations with respect to amendments to the Election Act and to the election financing act. There has been a discussion with respect to those matters after each of those three elections, and indeed the material has gone before that committee in this particular session.

Now, I know as a matter of fact that there have been recommendations made, and I know that there has been no discussion put forward by the ND or by the Official Opposition with respect to this particular matter. From my perspective, that is the appropriate place to raise that. There is a legislative committee, and to date there has

been absolutely no interest expressed by this member, his party, or any other party with respect to this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will this government take responsibility to introduce legislation in this House, where it should be discussed, that places limits on the enormous campaign contributions that the Conservative candidates are receiving? When will this government deal with the issue?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. member, the second question dealt with everything. The third question now goes back to dealing with one particular political party. I ruled the first question out of order. I'm going to rule the third question out of order.

We're now going to go to the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish the opposition had been as interested in discussion yesterday. [interjections]

The Speaker: I recognized the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View. Please proceed.

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is one of the few provinces in Canada that does not include farm workers under provincial labour law. In June in Foothills-Rocky View we lost an important member of the community in Black Diamond, Mr. Kevan Chandler, in a farm accident. Many of my constituents and the friends and family of Kevan Chandler are wondering why Alberta does not include farm workers under our labour law. Also, I know that my friend and colleague from Wetaskiwin-Camrose has had this issue raised with him. My first question is to the minister of human resources. Why are farm workers not covered in Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question because, no doubt, any time there is a fatality in any industry in Alberta, we are concerned. Our target is not to have any fatalities at all. I understand from Alberta Agriculture that the majority of farms in Alberta continue to be family farms, and with families living and working together, they require unique operational needs. Of course, you know that that whole industry is faced with so many challenges.

Farm workers do have some coverage under the Employment Standards Code. They are covered for payment of wages, termination notices, and parental leave. Farmers are among the over 200 industry groups which may voluntarily purchase workers' compensation coverage, Mr. Speaker. That is, of course, available. We do have the cheapest workers' compensation rates in the country. Workers in all sectors are encouraged to find out what injury insurance coverage is provided through their employers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. My next question is for the Acting Minister of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What steps is the government taking to make farm workers safer?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody can be complacent when it comes to human life, and there's no question that we take

farm safety very seriously. Many of us, including this member, live with our families on farms and face this issue every day. Our ultimate goal is to prevent all accidents and fatalities on farms in Alberta. We are doing a lot of work through adopting best practices, identifying hazards, managing risk, those things.

There's an exceptional CD called *Farm Safety: It's No Accident!* that is available. It's a free training tool. It includes checklists and the dos and don'ts of farm safety. We have farm workers that participate in trade shows where there are examples.

2:00

One of the best examples that I've personally seen work, Mr. Speaker, was the program that worked with schoolchildren. If any of you that live on a farm have been involved with this, when your child has been through that program, they come home and have been instructed to very clearly and very respectfully inform parents where there are risks, whether it's around power lines or moving machinery, and so on.

It is a tragedy in any industry when there is an accident, especially one that takes a life.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. My last question is for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Are there any plans in your ministry to change the legislation to include farm workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, that's a very important and a very good question. Of course, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Alberta Human Resources and Employment will continue to work together in this area and monitor the situation very closely and, of course, make the necessary changes to improve the system as required.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Electricity Pricing

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier's legacy now to Albertans is electricity prices that soar to 99 cents per kilowatt and the constant threat of rolling blackouts. The market as designed by this government is not driving down the price of electricity in Alberta, as this Premier promised. It's another broken promise. My first question is to the Premier. Given that yesterday in this House the Premier stated that he would not tamper with the free market, why is this government continuing to subsidize electricity generation in the oil sands to the tune of at least \$162 million in the year 2005 alone?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I fail to see where we are subsidizing production in the oil sands at any level. Now, there is a case where a company or perhaps one or two companies or maybe three are using their own gas to create steam to stimulate wells or operations to extract the oil from the sands, but it is their gas.

An Hon. Member: No. It's our gas.

Mr. Klein: No. It's their gas. It's gas over bitumen. Now, they either sell that gas, or they use that gas. Either way it's not free.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the Premier: where is all the extra generation capacity for electricity that the Premier constantly brags about when yesterday the wholesale electricity price was 99 cents per kilowatt, and generators were forced to produce at their maximum continuous rating to prevent another blackout?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as the opposition has pointed out time and time again, it is a tremendously fast-growing population, and thank God we had energy deregulation in the generation business only, only in the generation, notwithstanding the falsehoods being spread by the Liberals relative to deregulation on the retail side. [interjection] Right. It is on the generation of electricity only.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that through deregulation the capacity of the generation plants has been increased substantially to the point where we have, notwithstanding some breakdowns and some unforeseen problems, 3,000 additional megawatts of power on stream.

Mr. MacDonald: And they weren't there yesterday whenever they were needed.

Again to the Premier: why does this government force consumers to pay the full shot for all transmission upgrades and expansions while the province subsidizes the price of fuel gas for generators of electricity in the oil sands before they sell it to the open market, as designed by this government in this province?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is not true.

Mr. MacDonald: It is true.

Mr. Klein: It is not true.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Land Title Wait Times

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unprecedented growth of Alberta's hot economy continues to lead the nation. One area that has been significantly affected by this growth is the long wait times at land titles offices. My questions today are for the Minister of Government Services. Can the minister tell us what actions are being taken to address registration volumes and resulting turnaround times at land titles?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is quite right. You know, we are experiencing longer delays than we would like. There has been such a huge increase in the volume at registry offices. I think our 109 officers are doing about 5,000 land transactions a day – a day. That's unbelievable. So last year we added new staff. This year we're adding new staff. It takes about six months to take a paralegal out of a postsecondary institution, get them trained, and get them into our workforce to produce. Our staff are working Monday nights, Tuesday nights, Wednesday nights, Thursday nights, and Saturdays. We have quite a commitment from the Government Services staff to address the backlog.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister then: can he tell this Assembly what the average Albertan can maybe do

on our side of the ledger to reduce the long wait times for land titles registration?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, expectations are high here in Alberta. When you make the largest investment of your life that a couple can – I know that when my wife and I bought our first home, that was our largest investment, but we gave ourselves time to make sure that we had a mortgage lined up ahead of time, we made sure that we had, you know, the paperwork done properly, and we made sure that it was our responsibility to give ourselves the proper time and have the lawyers that represented us hand in the proper paperwork to the land titles office so that we had this done as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question for the same minister: is it true that long delays such as we are currently experiencing mean that people aren't able to get into their homes when they planned and are faced with paying fines or excessive interest payments due to government delays?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate the comments that I made earlier. You know, to go and spend \$200,000, \$250,000 on a home and expect that in two weeks you're going to be in it is unrealistic. You have to take some personal responsibility and make sure that you allow yourself sufficient time to buy a home with the right paperwork done.

To the member across: there is a no-cost service administered by the Law Society of Alberta that allows folks that are dealing with buying a home to have a lender release their mortgage money before the title is registered. So there is that service. They have to explain that to their lawyer acting on behalf of them. But I tell the public out there: please give yourself three weeks' time to buy a home. That's your largest purchase of your whole life that you'll make. Consider that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

2:10 Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On June 18, 2006, Kevan Chandler was killed in a farm accident that was entirely predictable and preventable. Agriculture is a hazardous industry, with 20 deaths and 1,353 reported injuries in 2005. Still this government insists that farm workers just need more CDs and pamphlets. They've deliberately excluded these employees from occupational health and safety legislation in this province. To the minister of human resources: in front of the widow can you tell us what this government is prepared to do to change this situation?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, a similar question was just asked earlier this afternoon. It is, of course, very unfortunate that any accident would happen, not only on a farm but in the whole sector out there in Alberta. Of course, our target in Alberta is to ensure that there are no fatalities, and you can be assured and I can assure the individual listening that we will do everything we can. I made a commitment earlier this afternoon that I will be working very closely with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to review the situation, to monitor the situation, and make the necessary changes that are required to improve the system, keeping in mind that

agriculture today is challenged with many difficulties because it's a difficult industry.

Dr. Swann: It's five years of monitoring, Mr. Speaker.

Is this minister saying that occupational health and safety regulations and legislation help every other occupation except farm workers? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Cardinal: No, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there are a number of industries in agriculture now that are covered under occupational health and safety. That includes the food processing plants, mushroom farms, greenhouses, nurseries, sod farms, and landscaping areas. Those are already covered under occupational health and safety. All I'm saying is that we'll review that between the two ministries and, of course, possibly involving the agriculture industry out there because they will be impacted by any change that is made. Hopefully, whatever we do will eliminate any fatality in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of human resources: with the proliferation of large-scale factory farms, will you at least institute basic minimum standards for workers?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, we will review all sectors in this area, as I said before, and make the necessary changes that are required, keeping in mind that agriculture is one of the backbones of rural Alberta. Many communities in rural Alberta depend on agriculture for their survival. Therefore, whatever change we make has to be the right change, keeping the balance, keeping in mind again our target of zero fatalities in Alberta.

Degree Granting Approval

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, next month students will be enrolling in new bachelor degree programs at Grant MacEwan College, while Mount Royal College is also applying for further degree-granting programs. There have been concerns raised that these new degrees will not be recognized as being of the same quality as university degrees. My questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education. What is the minister doing to ensure that any new degree programs granted at MacEwan and Mount Royal College will maintain the high standards of the other university degrees being granted in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much. It's a very important question, and I'm sure that the students in the gallery will be listening for the answer. Our government is committed to ensuring that quality education is provided to all students at our post-secondary institutions. That's why in 2004 we established an assurance mechanism to ensure that the new degree programs are of the highest quality, and that's what the Alberta Quality Council in fact does.

The issue that you may be referring to here with respect to Grant MacEwan is really not an issue of quality but an issue of whether or not Grant MacEwan is part of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, which is the AUCC. Now, Queen's University had said that they would not recognize degrees from institutions that were not part of the AUCC. So we are taking steps in terms of regulation to make sure that our institutions can in fact qualify for the AUCC.

I have confidence in the rigours and the processes that the Quality Council has undertaken to ensure that every student will have their degrees recognized by other institutions.

Dr. Brown: A supplemental question for the same minister: can the minister assure Albertans that graduates in these programs will have their degrees recognized and that they won't be penalized when they go to apply for graduate school as other Alberta graduates do?

Mr. Herard: I think that the member has hit the nail on the head. That's really the million dollar question. Now, I don't know that I can stand here and guarantee what others will do in other jurisdictions, but certainly here in Alberta our public universities are on board with the council's decisions and will accept new degrees from MacEwan and other public colleges. The council is committed to ensuring the national and international recognition of Alberta degrees and works closely with other provinces in quality initiatives. It has established an outstanding reputation nationally for the work it does.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise whether he can assure the House that the Campus Alberta Quality Council has the academic and public credibility to judge the quality of these new degree programs?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, many of the factors that the Quality Council looks at are things such as academic policy standards, faculty qualifications, physical resources, and things like libraries and laboratories. The most important thing, though, is that it is all a peer-reviewed process. The members of the council use their extensive knowledge of postsecondary education as well as the advice of external experts to make a thorough assessment of degree proposals.

Now, you may remember that just a couple of days ago I introduced here in this House Dr. Ron Bond, who is the chair of the committee. These people have impeccable qualifications. When I looked at his qualifications, I couldn't believe everything that he has published in his 33-year career. His reputation is on the line and so are the other members' on that Quality Council. I would invite you to look at their credentials, and you'll see that we use nothing but the highest credentials.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Tuition Fee Policy

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last 16 months we have heard all kinds of grandiose statements from this government on tuition policy, none of which have materialized. In 2005 the Premier promised that Albertans would have the most affordable tuition policy in the country, but the reality is that we have the country's second-highest tuition fees. With the odious Bill 40 becoming law, we've moved tuition fee policy into regulation, out of public scrutiny, and behind the closed doors of the secret deliberations of cabinet room. We are now left with not only broken promises but also secrecy. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education. Will he bring tuition fee policy back into the Legislature as the Council of Alberta University Students and the Alberta NDP opposition have asked, allow this Assembly to debate it, and give Albertans democratic oversight over this, one of the most important public policies?

Mr. Herard: Well, I think the hon. member answered his own question. He did say that Bill 40 passed, which essentially set out tuition policy for regulation. He was also invited to participate throughout the summer along with members of ACTISEC and CAUS to ensure that we get it right with respect to tuition policy. I don't know for sure if I've heard from him. I was hoping to get some pearls of wisdom from him with respect to that.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that when you have tuition policy in regulation, you have the opportunity to have continuous improvement instead of enshrining something in legislation that doesn't change for 10 or 12 years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have clear messages for the minister right here.

My next question to him: given that this September students face yet another tuition increase masked by a band-aid rebate, why won't this minister reveal his secret tuition fee policy to this Assembly now, during this sitting?

2:20

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is just simply a couple of weeks too early. We are currently reviewing all of the input. As I said, I'm not sure that he did respond, nor am I sure that my critic from the Liberal opposition responded, but we are looking at all of the responses to bring forward a tuition policy. As a matter of fact, tomorrow I'll be meeting with the council of presidents and chairs to make sure that everybody is on board with respect to tuition policy. But I'll do more than that. I will challenge them to become more efficient and create more spaces with the physical infrastructure that they have now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary to the minister. It's a piece of good advice for him. Given that the summer students on average earned less than \$1,400 a month while tuition fees alone in this province now are close to \$5,200, will this minister adopt the policy advocated by all kinds of student groups and supported by the Alberta NDP opposition to roll back tuition fees to the 1999-2000 level and then link any annual increases to no more than CPI?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We went partway on that. We decided to keep the tuition level as it currently is. We paid \$87 million to ensure that there was no tuition fee increase for last year and this year. Next year it will be based on that tuition fee plus a CPI indicator. So we've gone partway there.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think we live in a new world. Employers who sit on the sidelines and wait for institutions to produce well-educated and motivated employees are going to be competing for the bottom of the barrel, but those who participate in the journey of postsecondary from the very first year will get the cream of the crop.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Hospital Bed Capacity in Calgary

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians suffer daily from former Finance minister Jim Dinning's disastrous decision, sup-

ported by Calgary Conservative MLAs, to close half of Calgary's hospitals. The folly continues as the new, state-of-the-art Calgary Children's hospital has only 21 more beds and will not meet the needs of Calgary's growing population. Compounding the ongoing distress is the continuing series of delays in constructing the southeast hospital. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the predictable population increases, the increasing number of births, and the need to correct Dinning's shortsighted decisions, why weren't more beds added?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, clearly I have a number of points that I'd like to raise. First of all, when Chairman David Tuer of the Calgary health region speaks about beds, he speaks about effective beds. The beds in the currently used Children's hospital are not always effective. Children come in with communicable diseases, so frequently two or three beds are actually sterilized, unable to be used because only one bed can be used because the child has to be isolated. This new hospital, contrary to the number of 80, has 133 beds, 135 when fully operational, and has 60 per cent more in its emergency capacity.

Mr. Speaker, the Children's hospital was built for 25,000 emergency department visits. It usually got about 41,000 visits. This new facility will accommodate 60,000 visits, and it will enable us to do more of the kinds of supports for families who need that support in their homes and in other facilities.

One other point, Mr. Speaker. If you drive around Calgary, which I have done, to look at what Calgary is doing, you see construction on almost every site. There is a criticism that we haven't advanced on the southeast side, but take a look at the Sheldon Chumir, take a look at the work being done on the Rockyview, take a look at the work being done on the Peter Lougheed, and look at the state-of-the-art Children's hospital, which everybody is proud of.

Mr. Chase: Yes, Calgarians are spending a lot of time looking at hospitals instead of being served by them.

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. Was that the question? We don't have preambles, remember.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What plans does the minister have to add the additional capacity that Calgary families require?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, by the year 2011 we will have 700 more beds in Calgary available, up and running, to add to the bed capacity. We approved last August \$1.4 billion. Today across Alberta there is about \$3.5 billion being spent or on the books, planning and work being done, to add beds and other community-centred health capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary alone had an injection of an additional \$670 million last year, and they are actively not only planning for an expanded population but building on their primary care centres. I think the doubling up of dollars for the ARP plans, for academic plans for physicians, will help us build our medical capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: how many more code burgundy delayed, anxiety-filled trips to understaffed, stressed emergency facilities will Calgarians be forced to endure before the southeast hospital is finally operational?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, from experience I can tell you that one facility in one part of the community won't necessarily alleviate

all of the problems in another part of the community. We have got a situation where we're trying always to make sure that we're serving just in time for emergencies. That's part of why I mention the primary care centres. I think that rather than a complaint about this city, that's had 1,200 more visits this year over last year – it will have a quarter of a million visits in total based on last year's statistics in emergency departments in Calgary – I think this Legislative Assembly would do well to congratulate the good men and women that are working hard to handle this excess capacity in this city.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Home Inspections

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing of more and more instances of Albertans buying homes, arranging for a home inspection, and then moving in only to find that the inspector overlooked serious problems they must then deal with. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. What is your ministry doing to protect buyers against unscrupulous and unqualified home inspectors?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that there is currently no regulation of home inspection businesses here in Alberta. However, the Alberta Fair Trading Act would apply if a home inspector were to misrepresent their services or qualifications. We are working with the Alberta chapter of the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors to find an effective and economical way of regulating the needs of the home-buying public. My ministry established just last month an advisory committee to advise me on educational and operational standards as well as licensing requirements. This committee includes representatives from the home inspection and real estate industries, nonprofit organizations, consumers, and government people. Once a potential model is identified, I make a commitment that we will consult Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister. In Alberta's heated economy to save time and expense many Albertans are purchasing homes without first arranging for a home inspection by a home inspector. Is there any recourse available to someone who purchased a home without a prior inspection and is now faced with costly repairs or possibly replacement?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's like I talked about in an earlier question: it's buyer beware. The public out there making this largest purchase of their lives needs to take time to get the facts, to make sure that they hire a proper inspector, one that's recommended by the Real Estate Association, by the municipality. Obviously, you know, the prospective homebuyer needs to discuss this with their real estate agent and their lawyer. So I'm asking the public out there to take the time to do this properly.

head: 2:30

Statement by the Speaker

Alberta Association of Former MLAs

The Speaker: Hon. members, shortly I'll call upon the first of six to participate, but a little historical vignette for today.

On June 1, 2006, proclamation was given to the Alberta Association of Former MLAs Act. The act became another first for the Alberta Legislative Assembly. The act deems that the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is the honorary president of the association and mandates that his first responsibility is to appoint seven former members who shall constitute the first board of directors. Today I have done such.

After a three-month consultation with former MLAs and several separate requests for former members to advise me of their interest, I am pleased to advise that the following former members will serve as the first board. Fred Bradley represented the constituency of Pincher Creek-Crowsnest and served in the Assembly from 1975 to 1993 as a Progressive Conservative member. Walter Alexander Buck served as the MLA for Clover Bar from 1967 to 1989 as a Social Credit member. Ed Gibbons served from 1997 to 2001 as the Liberal member for Edmonton-Manning. Karen Leibovici served from 1993 to 2001 as the Liberal member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Ian McClelland represented Edmonton-Rutherford as a Progressive Conservative member from 2001 to 2004. Don Tannas served from 1989 to 2004 as the Progressive Conservative member for Highwood. Julius Yankowsky served from 1993 to 2004 and represented Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont first as a Liberal, then a Progressive Conservative and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview as a Progressive Conservative.

This board will be invited to its first meeting shortly and will be asked to determine its first list of officers and determine the date of the association's first annual meeting. The Alberta Association of Former MLAs must not by law pursue its objects for any partisan political purpose and was established as a nonprofit body corporate. Thank you.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Baseball Canada Cup

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. August 17 through 20 saw the Baseball Canada Cup held in the city of Medicine Hat. This is a tournament for youth aged 17 and under, and the quality of baseball played during this event is of the highest calibre. I was pleased to have an opportunity to attend this year's competition and was very impressed by the proficiency with which these youth play the game. The fact that there were approximately 20 scouts from various major league teams watching these young players indicates just how good the quality of baseball being played was.

Mr. Speaker, sports teach Alberta's youth a great deal about working as a team, healthy competition, and sportsmanship. Being involved in sports also teaches young Albertans the value of working hard, of dedicating oneself to an endeavour in order to be successful. Finally, participating in sports impresses upon our youth the importance of an active lifestyle in order to remain healthy now and in the future. The individuals who participated in the Baseball Canada Cup certainly demonstrated these attributes throughout the tournament. Each one of them worked hard the entire season to support their team and to assist them in playing the best ball they could during this important tournament.

Mr. Speaker, every province was represented at this tournament by a team, and I would like to congratulate them all on a job well done. Although our own Alberta team did not win the championship and Ontario took home the honours of being the number one team, the quality of ball played was excellent and it was a very entertaining competition for the spectators who were there to take it in. I would like to congratulate all the teams on their efforts, and I would

like to thank all of the volunteers in Medicine Hat who helped make this tournament possible.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mountain Pine Beetle

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has been very aggressive in its action to limit the spread of mountain pine beetle ever since they were discovered in our province outside the national parks in 2002. We implemented an aggressive cut-and-burn program. In the past three to four weeks a massive flight of beetles has resulted in infecting trees in and around Grande Prairie, Fairview, Peace River, and Fox Creek.

Mr. Speaker, this government remains committed to taking the most aggressive action it can to limit the spread of this tiny and deadly bug that has caused so much damage in British Columbia. We will survey all around the area where infected trees are reported. We are in the process of hiring more than 100 seasonal firefighters to do this work. They will be trained to identify the infested trees, and they will then cut and burn them. We will cut and burn every infested tree we find. We are working closely with industry to mitigate the situation as well. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has asked forest companies to make changes to their harvest plans. That way, companies will be able to harvest the stands that are most likely to be infected.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very confident that everything that can be done is being done to limit the spread of mountain pine beetles in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Alberta Labour Market

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is time to end the war. I'm not talking about some conflict in some faraway land. I'm not talking about some war on drugs or crime. I am talking about the war that's been waged against occupation groups in our Alberta for the last generation. Limit doctors, hammer teachers, squeeze academics, control the nurses, destroy the traditional trades organizations; the list goes on.

Look at the trades. Labour brokers have been given union status by the government's not-so-arm's-length Labour Relations Board. These wise-guy brokers brag to big investors about how they can limit wages and benefits and conditions. They do not rally their worker clients and try to improve their state in life. If few want to work through them, they say: no problem. They'll get their friends in government to bring in temporary foreign workers.

Lists of workers are bought and sold like some slave markets of old. Fake unions have been bought and sold. Big lie words are used with impunity. Words like "open shop" and "merit" and "Christian" and "progressive" are used loosely where the syndicate organizations using these titles bear no resemblance to the words' true meanings. They trumpet and advertise their integrity as if it somehow makes what they do right. Think about it. Any group that has to advertise their integrity obviously knows that they have a problem with it. The big lie.

But Albertans, especially young Albertans, are not stupid for long. They look elsewhere for their future. The effect of all of this has been to create a labour market in chaos that is dragging a huge anchor, limiting its ability to adapt. Why else do we have concession bargaining by the trades in a time when they should be making real gains? Why do we have two strains of apprenticeship forming,

limited skilling cheap labour versus full-mobility skills? Why do so many kids leave their trade when they see the hypocrisies? Why do so few graduate from apprenticeship?

No. It's time to end the war. End the special treatment for the labour brokers. Let them operate as what they are and forget the facade. Let people actually choose. Let Albertans have true freedom to be represented and to learn. It will solve our labour market woes quicker than you think. End the war now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Vermilion Centennial

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In honour of Vermilion's 100th birthday some historical vignettes if I may.

In 1897 the first rancher settled in the Vermilion area, and in 1905 the railway arrived, a station was built, the post office was relocated, and by the end of 1905 the town could boast three hotels. In 1906 it was incorporated as a village, and in the same year incorporated as a town. The first grain elevator was built in 1909. The ag society incorporated in 1906, and the *Vermilion Standard* started to publish and still publishes to this day. In 1911 the provincial government established a demonstration farm west of Vermilion. It later became the Vermilion School of Agriculture and is known today as Lakeland College.

2:40

Oil was discovered near Vermilion in the late '30s, and in fact for the first eight months of 1941 it was the second highest producing oil field in Canada and made a valuable contribution to the war effort.

The first gas turbine used to generate electricity was located in Vermilion in 1954.

In 1959 the Alberta Fire Training School was established in Vermilion and obviously continues very successfully today as Fire Etc., a part of Lakeland College.

We have very successful people out of Vermilion. I'm sure you all know of Beckie Scott, our gold medallist and silver medallist. Susan Massitti set Canadian records in speed skating and represented us in the Nagano Olympics. We've hockey players by the dozen: Art Wiebe from the Stanley Cup champion Blackhawks – some may remember that – Jeff Woywitka, Grant McNeill, just to mention a few. Charlie Mead played baseball for the New York Giants back in the '40s. We have Mr. Bert Mead, test pilot, who worked with developing the first automatic takeoff and landing to allow us to land and take off from aircraft carriers. We all know Jean Paré, the country's most successful cookbook author, selling over 24 million cookbooks.

Over the hundred years some businesses have been there the whole time: Long's, Craig's, Webb's of Vermilion.

Solid Roots – Strong Future, Mr. Speaker. That's Vermilion's logo on its pin. I wish to join all Albertans and congratulate Mayor Judy Woyewitka and the wonderful people of Vermilion on a hundred years.

Frank Janett

Ms DeLong: When I first started out fundraising for charity in Bowness, I came to a door with a sign on it: patrolled by Smith and Wesson, with a picture of a handgun beneath it. So, naturally, I just had to knock. A very gruff old man came to the door. "What do you want?" "Donations for cancer." "I don't give out money." So entered Frank Janett, another father figure, into my life.

Over the years Frank would regale us with stories of Bowness characters from the past, stories of the great flood of '48, stories about the bird man but never stories about Frank himself. It was from others, such as Richard McDonnell, that I heard about Frank "Leadfoot" Janett: his racing of Model Ts, stock cars, and sprint cars; how once he was escorted out of the town of Olds by the RCMP for street racing his sprint car at midnight; Frank, who once broke his hand against a guardrail trying to land a punch on a rival in a finish-line skirmish; Frank, who never met a racer he wouldn't lend a hand to and who overcame alcoholism and injury to race high-powered supermodifieds until the age of 50; how he became a mechanic and a crewman, built racers, and then officiated in the fastest class of car races at the fastest racetrack in western Canada.

Frank epitomized to me my Bowness, made up of colourful, heroic characters living unassuming lives.

Frank "Leadfoot" Janett passed away last Father's Day, and, yes, despite his gruff exterior he always gave generously.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Development in the Peace Country

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Let's not make the same mistake twice. The municipality of Wood Buffalo has been crying out these past months. Its infrastructure can't handle the pressure of rapid growth. In fact, a member of this very government has spoken out to the same effect and even intervened at a recent Energy and Utilities Board hearing.

The municipalities in the Peace Country do not want the same thing to happen there. They want managed, integrated growth of oil sands to promote both development but also to limit the detrimental impact on the environment and the residents in this more densely populated region.

An integrated, planned approach has many supporters. Municipal leaders, local residents, and even especially industry believe that an overall plan for the region will make for a better and more sustainable future on a level playing field. Local leaders and residents are wondering: how much more drilling will be allowed at Seal Lake and at Carmon Creek? They worry that in the absence of an overall plan drilling projects will continue to be approved piecemeal and without any consideration for the cumulative impact.

The provincial government has a very clear role to play. The departments of Municipal Affairs, Sustainable Resource Development, Energy, Infrastructure and Transportation, and especially Environment need to work together with stakeholders to craft an integrated plan for the staggered development of the oil sands in the Peace Country. It is, after all, the province that gives the go-ahead for the drilling of new wells. The province has a responsibility to think about the impact of these decisions and not download it onto the municipality.

The oil wells in the Peace Country are not like Fort McMurray. Wells are being drilled next to farms, villages, rivers, and lakes. This region has been settled for many centuries. People are worried about the environmental and social impacts on their lands. If we want to avoid the problems of the overheated economy like in Fort McMurray and to preserve the diversified economy in the Peace Country, then an integrated plan is absolutely essential.

Thank you.

The Speaker: To the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster: there's a clarification here required. I want to make sure that *Hansard* gets this right. Did the hon. member say that *Company's Coming* cookbooks by Mme Paré had done 24 million copies or \$24 million in business?

Mr. Snelgrove: Twenty-four million copies, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Twenty-four million? Perhaps only two books in the world have ever had 24 million, one the Bible, the other the Koran. I don't know who could have ever done 24 million.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, that's what they told me in the paper.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 1,427 petitions, for a grand total of 1,916 to today, urging the government to move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road south of the current proposal to reduce noise and increase safety measures as well as minimize the environmental impact of the road.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table, with permission, a petition with 135 signatures from concerned Edmonton-McClung residents. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to work with the City of Edmonton to ensure that the traffic noise from the Edmonton Ring Road near our neighbourhood of Wedgewood Ravine is evaluated immediately and again in six months, and that if the noise levels measured are found to exceed acceptable provincial or municipal thresholds, that noise attenuation and reduction measures be implemented as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly. This petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to immediately abandon plans to increase the role of private insurance in the health care system, and instead, commit to strengthening the single-payer, public system.

This petition has been signed by over 100 Albertans.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to the rules of the Assembly I rise to give a notice of motion that I will move a motion under Standing Order 30 resolving that

the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the Assembly urge the government to introduce election financing legislation requiring full disclosure of all campaign contributions and their sources for all leadership contests of registered political parties and that they do so prior to the selection of the new leader of the Progressive Conservative Association [of Alberta].

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, all regarding the question I directed to the Premier earlier in question period. The first is a letter dated August 2, 2006, from the Minister of Energy to myself, and this indicates that "the Crown royalty quantities and estimated royalty exempted under section 15(1)(c) of the Natural Gas Royalty Regulation, 2002, for the 2003-2005 period are shown below." This is the "Crown royalty share of gigajoules (GJs) burned as fuel royalty exempt" and the "estimated royalty exemption value."

Also, I have the current supply demand report from the Power Pool yesterday, indicating that many units had to operate at overcapacity to meet the demand.

The last tabling I have is also from yesterday. It's the actual posted pool price for electricity, and even yesterday during question period it was at its maximum at \$999.99 a megawatt, or 99 cents a kilowatt, per hour.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table in the Assembly the requisite number of five copies of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta annual report for the previous year, 2005-2006.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta Research Council's 2005-2006 annual report. This annual report demonstrates how ARC operates as a premiere agent of the government of Alberta and the impact it creates on the economy of Alberta and on the lives of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from David Cournoyer, the chairman of the Council of Alberta University Students, to the Minister of Advanced Education. In the letter Mr. Cournoyer expresses disappointment that despite the opportunity presented by the sitting of the Assembly, the minister has not put tuition fees back into the legislation. Mr. Cournoyer also feels that the minister could have at least tied tuition increases to increases to the consumer price index.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Boutilier, Minister of Environment, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Government Accountability Act the Ministry of Environment 2004-2005 annual report and pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act the Environmental Protection Security Fund annual report April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2005, the Alberta Elevating Devices & Amusement Rides Safety Association annual report April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006, the Petroleum Tank Management

Association of Alberta annual report 2005 and pursuant to the Safety Codes Act the 2005 annual report of the Safety Codes Council and the authorized accredited agencies activities summary 2004-2005.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Optometrists annual report to government 2005, the College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2005, the College of Alberta Denturists 2005 annual report, the Alberta College of Medical Laboratory Technologists 2005 annual report; pursuant to the Mental Health Act the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate Office 2005 annual report; pursuant to the Opticians Act the Alberta Opticians Association annual report 2005; pursuant to the Pharmaceutical Profession Act the Alberta College of Pharmacists annual report 2005-2006; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Palliser health region annual report 2005-2006, the Chinook health region annual report 2005-06, the East Central health region annual report 2005-2006, the David Thompson health region annual report 2005-2006, the Calgary health region 2005-2006 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, a response to Written Question 1, asked for by Mr. Martin on behalf of Mr. Mason on March 20, 2006, and the responses to Written Question 8, Written Question 9, and Motion for Return 16, asked for by Ms Blakeman on March 20, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Herard, Minister of Advanced Education, the responses to Written Question 6, Written Question 7, and Motion for Return 14, asked for by Mr. Taylor on March 20, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Energy, return to order of the Assembly, Motion for Return 6, asked for by Mr. Eggen on March 20, 2006.

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll now deal with a Standing Order 30 application. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the Assembly urge the government to introduce election financing legislation requiring full disclosure of all campaign contributions and their sources for all leadership contests of registered political parties and that they do so prior to the selection of the new leader of the Progressive Conservative Association [of Alberta].

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I sent a letter, which has been distributed to all House leaders, to your office before the deadline of 11:30, as laid out in Standing Order 30(1). *Beauchesne's* 387 and *Marleau and Montpetit* at 588 say that a debate under this standing order must deal with a specific question that requires urgent consideration, it must be within the administrative competence of the government, and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

Mr. Speaker, we are calling for a debate on a very specific action that the government should take, in our view; namely, that the Assembly discuss the lack of rules for disclosure of financing in leadership campaigns, although Albertans would be well served by a broader discussion of electoral reform as well. The more immediate concern that I want to raise is that there are no disclosure or transparency requirements of leadership contests for registered political parties in this province. Indeed, as all members of this House are aware, such a contest is under way right now.

Mr. Speaker, I note, too, that the changes I'm proposing to discuss are well within the administrative competence of the government. One needs to look no further than section 2 of the Election Finances

and Contributions Disclosure Act, which specifically exempts leadership contests from the requirements laid out in the act. The government has clearly legislated in this area already, so it is within the competence of the House and the government.

This motion, in our view, meets the requirements in *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 588 and *Beauchesne's* 391 to 392 that the matter is not under adjudication by a court of law, does not raise a question of privilege, and has not been previously addressed in this session.

That brings us to the question of whether the matter is better dealt with as part of a substantive motion elsewhere. Looking at the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker, I only see a single piece of government business, which is the Appropriation Act. As I'm sure you can appreciate, this is clearly not a question of appropriations or government spending. We cannot ask the Finance minister or any of the ministers who have brought supplementary estimates to this House to debate election finance reform. There are only, after today, two days of business scheduled, and there are no more days of private members' business, and there is apparently no other legislation to be debated.

With respect to the urgent public importance, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this Legislature has seen fit to legislate both donation limits and public disclosure requirements with respect to most operations of political parties in this province. The single major omission is leadership campaign financing. Leadership is, of course, a keystone of the activities of all political parties within our current system. Other jurisdictions, including the federal government and the province of Manitoba, have recognized this in legislation. Why have we recognized it in legislation with respect to political parties? Why have we adopted the principle that there should be disclosure and campaign limits? It's because we have accepted that the public has a right to know who is paying for the operations of political parties so that that might serve as a check against the activities of a government or of a political party. If they are acting not in the public interest but in the interests of those financing their activities, the public can then discern that and can draw appropriate political conclusions.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I respect your comments earlier in question period about singling out a political party, but this speaks very much to the urgency of the issue. In my view this is an unfortunate situation, but the winner of the current leadership race of the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta will automatically become the Premier of the province at least until the next election. So this is, in my view, not just a matter of public importance but of supreme public importance. This is perhaps the most important political decision that is currently under consideration. It is extremely important to all Albertans and is therefore, I think, something that needs to be brought within the purview of this motion.

3:00

This motion is clearly intended to encourage the government to bring forward legislation that affects all political parties and deals with them equally, but we cannot forget that the leadership race now under way will determine, at least for a short time, the Premier of this province, and therefore it is of extreme importance. As elected officials we all have a stake in bringing integrity and transparency to Alberta's political process. Active engagement by voters based on information is key to democracy.

So to conclude, I would observe that this is probably the last opportunity for this Assembly to debate this matter, making it truly urgent, and I would reiterate that although such reforms have already taken place in other jurisdictions, it is not too late for Alberta to catch up.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll recognize two additional participants on this very, very briefly. We'll go with the hon. Deputy Government House Leader and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I had an opportunity, in answer to one of the questions in question period, to address part of this particular matter. I don't intend to repeat what I said at that time, although I would like to incorporate it into my argument against the motion.

I find that it's somewhat ironic that at this time the leader of the ND opposition brings forward this motion. I've been in this House since 1997, and by my count there have been three leaders of the NDs in that time period. There have been four leaders of the Liberal opposition. There have been since 1992, when our Premier became Premier, four elections. After each election presumably there was a report similar to the one that was prepared this year by the Chief Electoral Officer regarding the elections and recommendations for discussion points put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer. There have been opportunities by the opposition to bring forward private members' bills and so on and so forth. So I don't think that the particular rule that's being put forward can possibly be that because there is no opportunity under the Order Paper to have a discussion with respect to this matter, it must be urgent. Therefore, one takes a look at the facts behind this.

This matter clearly has been the subject of discussion within the ND Party and within the Liberal Party on a number of occasions over the last 10 years that we've been here. They have never felt the need to bring forward this matter to govern their parties' affairs, and the legislation at this point in time clearly provides that it is a party matter. They found it completely satisfactory for their purposes until now, and because we happen to be having a leadership within the party that this government is part of, they would like to have a debate on it. I don't think it's urgent in any sense, Mr. Speaker. I think the facts surrounding it indicate that that is the case.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly on this application for Standing Order 30 sponsored by the NDP opposition. I'm not going to repeat some of the citations and quotations from *Beauchesne* and all the other references, but I can probably understand where the NDP opposition is coming from. Further to the comment by the hon. Government House Leader about private members' bills, private members' bills are submitted way in advance to the extent that currently, in August of 2006, we have a September 18 deadline to submit our private members' bills to Parliamentary Counsel for next spring. So there was no way we could have anticipated the events that have transpired and the leadership race that is currently under way.

Second, further to assessing all the tests that one has before we allow a Standing Order 30, we mentioned no bills, no motions on the Order Paper. We mentioned also that no written questions and no motions for returns are on the Order Paper, and arguably, like was demonstrated today in question period, Oral Question Period is not the best avenue to seek information from this government, given their customary and usual way of dismissing the opposition and dodging questions and deflecting criticism.

In terms of the urgency, Mr. Speaker. Again, we know that this is an internal party matter within the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta, but the outcome has a profound effect on everybody living in this province. Whoever wins the PC leadership race does in fact basically become the Premier for a certain period of time. The motivation behind Standing Order 30 is to ensure the

greatest degree of transparency in that race and, if anything, to try to alleviate some of the concerns people have with politicians in general but possibly with Tories in particular, especially after 35 years of uninterrupted power.

I may also be inclined to support this motion because of our own Alberta Liberal position with respect to democratic renewal in this province. Many citizens do not trust politicians anymore, and they feel distanced from and disenfranchised by the state of affairs in this province. The Alberta Liberals would certainly hope that faith is restored in the democratic process in the abstract sense but then also in practical terms would reflect in things such as higher voter turnouts, youth participation, more female representation, and more collaborative politics. This is something we've campaigned on.

We've introduced ideas in this House to strengthen democracy as such, things like a lobbyist registry, whistle-blower protection, fixed election dates, and campaign finance reform, which is to some extent the issue being dealt with here. Some of these ideas, Mr. Speaker, have been embraced by a number of those PC leadership hopefuls, and I'm glad to say that they're increasingly sounding like us Liberals. This is something that makes us happy because our ideas are proven sound.

Under *Beauchesne* 390 the distinction is made between urgency and the urgency of debate. The Government House Leader – no surprise – indicated that he doesn't think it's urgent. As such, I would urge you, Mr. Speaker, to put this matter to a vote by all hon. colleagues from both sides of the House under Standing Order 30(3) to gauge the appetite of the hon. members in this Assembly, to see where they stand on the issue, and to proceed from there.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 30(2) the Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave . . . which was done,

. . . and the Speaker may allow such debate as he . . . considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

The chair is prepared to rule on the fourth Standing Order 30 application since this sitting started last Thursday. The previous decisions can be reviewed at pages 1694 and 1695 and 1728, 1729, and 1730 of *Alberta Hansard*, so the chair will not repeat all of the authorities.

The chair confirms that the ND leader, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, provided proper notice to the Speaker's office. The request was received at 11:10 this morning, so the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met. The subject matter of the request was also provided to the Speaker's office.

As members heard last Thursday and yesterday, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion "relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

Similar to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's request yesterday, this request seems to be inconsistent with the requirements of Standing Order 30(6), which indicates that "an emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." This request reads like a private member's motion as it urges the government to bring forward legislation. While there may not be a matter to discuss or debate this issue in the current sitting, the subject of financing fiduciary campaigns does not in the chair's view constitute an emergency in any way, shape, or form.

We'll repeat the historic analysis of the last 13 years with respect to this. There have been at least three Official Opposition leadership

campaigns. This matter has never been raised by anyone in those three. There have been at least three third-party leadership campaigns, and to the chair's knowledge this matter has never been a pressing matter before. Why in the case of one leadership campaign in 13 years this becomes an emergency today is very difficult for the chair to understand in trying to determine this an emergency in any way, shape, or form. It may be an issue of concern and debate, but whether or not it is an emergency is quite the other thing, and the chair wants to reiterate Standing Order 30(6). So the chair will not put the question. The emergency debate will not proceed.

3:10

There's one additional thing the chair would like to say. While the chair respects the rights of every member to utilize the rules and to bring forward matters for debate, the chair is concerned that matters clearly not emergencies are being brought forward under the guise of emergency debates. The chair treats these applications under Standing Order 30 very seriously and would only ask that members respect the rule and, in turn, the institution. If individual members have difficulty understanding Standing Order 30 and would like private consultation with the chair, the chair's office is always open for this pedagogical exercise as we advance and improve our understanding of the Standing Orders.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 44
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Minister of Finance in order to move second reading of Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2).

I would only note that these supplementary supply estimates have already been debated in the Legislative Assembly in Committee of Supply over the past couple of days and that they are required in order to help cover extraordinary pressures facing many different parts of government operations. We are grateful to have these dollars available for those important needs. With that, I will cede the floor to others who may wish to present their comments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has moved the bill on behalf of the Minister of Finance.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have before us the appropriation bill for this very brief summer sitting of this Assembly. It is my understanding that this is the second shortest sitting in Alberta's history, at least lately. I'm sure someone in Public Affairs is going to scramble to research this to try to prove me wrong. It is ridiculously short regardless of whether this House sat fewer days before or not. This bill, Bill 44, called the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2) is the second in one year. It should be called the extra-spending bill or the in-hindsight bill.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Alberta's budgets under the current Tory administration are never final or credible documents. They're a work in progress, constantly

in flux. You pass a budget, and then you pass three more quarterly minibudgets until the next throne speech, and so on. When you add interim supply, Mr. Speaker, it gets more complicated. As a layman I had never heard of supplementary supply till I joined this esteemed House. I can understand it when we're talking about a genuine emergency or something that is being used very infrequently and very far between under special circumstances, but instead it has become the preferred method, the way we do business in this province. It's the normal way the government prefers.

Yesterday in speaking with some of my caucus colleagues who've been here longer than I, it was made clear to me that back then all they did was approve additional funding for an emergency, like I mentioned, something like extra money for the firefighters. Possibly they added one other department for something very minor, maybe two at the most, not the practice we have here today, where 15 ministries or departments each get a piece of the pie, and the pie itself has grown so excessively large.

Mr. Speaker, we today are basically asked or, to be more accurate, we are being forced to rubber-stamp 15 minibudgets for 15 government departments worth \$1.37 billion in three hours and 45 minutes in Committee of Supply. That's more than \$6 million per minute. Last night, for example, we only had enough time for four departments out of the 10 scheduled for debate. Again, that is totally unacceptable.

As I mentioned, supplementary supply is okay when it's a natural disaster or an unforeseen circumstance. Otherwise, everything should be in the main budget. But this government cannot or will not budget. The talk about fiscal conservatism and how this government manages the affairs of this province has long been strayed from. The hon. Minister of Finance and some of her colleagues sometimes express their frustration at how much it pains them to spend, but the money they waste on things like the Aon report back in the spring or the \$1 million that was slated for the third-way propaganda campaign that never saw the light of day doesn't bother them one bit. That doesn't bother them. Waste doesn't bother them.

The fact that they do not budget is something that I find very troublesome. The short legislative sessions and the mockery that we call a budget are this government's plan to minimize the amount of scrutiny and close examination that they may be subjected to. That's as much planning as this government is willing to do. In terms of fiscal planning, the actual governance and management of this province's affairs, there is clearly no plan. The various arms of this government – and there are many to this beast – do not talk to each other, and it's time that we evaluate this situation and try to rectify it. It's time to disengage the autopilot and take charge of this vessel, which is totally adrift. Status quo just does not cut it anymore.

One can also translate the need for supplementary supply into the equivalent of a deficit, needing more money to pay for something for which funds were allocated previously. This government is cool asking for more and more money, and it doesn't bother them. But in my constituency office I have to be very careful with my budget, and if I'm one penny over, it comes out of next year's budget. That's how careful I have to be. No free rides. School boards, health authorities, and many other government agencies and departments are also treated with this philosophy or this approach. They do not enjoy the luxury that this government enjoys. On the contrary, they are usually the victims of poor management and poor planning and are frequently audited, penalized, or even, in fact, fired. Why doesn't this government apply the same standards to its own operations?

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, today I wanted to focus briefly on Innovation and Science since I am the Official Opposition critic for that department. It's a department that is asking for money this time

around, and it didn't have time to be looked at yesterday because of the rushed evening sitting. So we have a department that is asking for \$20 million, which is not really a terrible sum of money. I have to agree that this ministry is a good-news ministry, and I support them getting this money. I mentioned this back in the spring under the regular budget.

We can only criticize this ministry, if we're going to, based on their granting process; for example, if their granting process is skewed or if the guidelines are not being adhered to. In essence, what I'm saying here is that this government is wise to invest more money in Innovation and Science, and my reasons are to follow. Fifteen million dollars is for energy-related research, and \$5 million is for the Water for Life strategy research. Right away I would indicate that while I support the initial \$15 million for energy research, the question always is: why mostly energy? Why can't we move on or expand to other sectors which can be equally or more lucrative? However great our resource reserves, they're still finite and are bound to run out. We have a responsibility to the future generations of this province to leave them with something. The money we make today belongs to us, yes, but equally to our children and grandchildren. So as important as energy research might be, other fields of research are also worthy of attention and support.

Why isn't any money being put toward encouraging the development of the tech sector, for example? Why can't we turn Alberta into the Japan of North America or the Korea of North America, for example? Why not invest in pharmaceutical research, nutraceutical research, agriculture, or veterinary medicine? The list goes on, of course. Are we doing enough? Is the government telling us that everything else should wait or could wait?

Also, if we're talking energy, what timelines does the Ministry of Innovation and Science have in place for the development of renewable energy resources? I'm interested in this twofold. One, because I said that our reliance on fossil fuel should not and cannot continue indefinitely, and other sources of energy have to be identified and commercialized. Two, I'm also approaching this as an investment, as something we can make money on or from, something we can generate some decent revenue from, something we can benefit from right here in Alberta and can sell to the world and be leaders.

3:20

Water, which is the second part of this money being requested, is also of paramount importance, and water research is money well spent. We need to know how much water we still have or how much is left, and how much is being used by oil and gas. We need to forecast and plan our water future as the population grows and the resource dwindles and so on. Water for Life is indeed an operative phrase as water is life, and we have to address both the internal and external pressures on this valuable asset.

Furthermore, I would like to see this commitment for further funding in 2007-08, which has been alluded to as being \$25 million and even beyond. I would like to see it materialize into a long-term plan, not ad hoc, not one-time announcements. I would like it to be a constant plan that is again being adhered to. Can I tell people that this minister or his colleague in Environment have a long-term vision or plan for our water? Can I tell people that should this vision or plan be ready, the Tory caucus will endorse it and fully fund it?

Moving on, Mr. Speaker. Now that we have a new minister looking after this department, why not conduct a thorough review or inventory of all research initiatives in this province to see what's missing or lacking and to look for areas of potential growth? What percentage is our research drive compared to the entire provincial budget or whatever other measure we choose, like the GDP? How do we compare against other North American jurisdictions?

I have some reservations as to the budgets passed in this province, you know, the size of them and the uncontrolled growth that they have experienced. Instead, I want to focus on other departments if I may. I want to briefly mention some of the areas I would advocate as a member of the Liberal caucus, which is something that we advocated during the campaign and after, so inside the House and outside: something like establishing a provincial policy to direct the research and commercialization of cleaner energy and renewable energy initiatives in this province; implementing a 10 per cent provincial tax credit for eligible expenditures in scientific research and experimental development; implementing a 30 per cent provincial tax credit for investment in qualified early-stage Alberta-based technology companies; creating something like a \$150 million Alberta technology venture fund, which is a request we've asked in this House time and time again, funded jointly by industry, university, and government to generate a venture capital industry in this province; and, lastly, creating a provincial technology program to harmonize technology commercialization programs across the province so that instead of a sporadic or separated, piecemeal approach we would have a harmonized, concise approach.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I am supportive of Innovation and Science getting this money. I just think it should have been budgeted in the first place.

Lastly, I have a very brief question with respect to the granting process because, really, Innovation and Science is a granting ministry. They just give money out. I am concerned that giving money in-year, basically outside of the budget in supplementary supply, might actually lead to some waste or to an inefficient expenditure of these funds. So I am concerned that the minister should really assure us that they have adequate safeguards in place to guard against any of that wrongdoing.

Now, moving on if I may, the second area of interest for me is education, of course. A large chunk of this supplementary supply bill is for K to 12 education. I'm also proud and grateful to have been chosen by the Alberta Teachers' Association as a friend of public education for 2006. As such, I feel an obligation to enter into this discussion here today and to focus some of my energy and my time on education.

Let's have a look at the July 13, 2006, press release from the Ministry of Education. They're committing an additional \$180 million to be infused into the veins and arteries of this department, bringing the total government support for education in '06-07 to almost \$5.5 billion. Amazing. That's a great story. Of this \$180 million \$61 million is for operational support in classrooms, and \$119 million goes toward school upgrades and renovations. The press release references and links to the renewed funding framework, which has been brought up in this House time and time again, but the link is broken, or the report is mysteriously missing for some reason. I'm not sure if maybe some of the people in the department are working on it, and that's why they removed it.

I know that some work is being done to implement the class-size initiative in 2006-07, but let's hope that significant improvements are achieved. Mr. Speaker, I'll be one of the first people to commend the hon. minister when those targets are reached. Class sizes went down for a brief period after the Learning Commission report, but they have crept back up since. This deserves attention and requires decisive action, which requires leadership.

The Alberta government expenditure per student in 2000-01 was about \$6,800, when back then the budget for K to 12 education was something like \$3.65 billion. So when you take \$5.5 billion in 2006 after this new infusion of money, after this supplementary supply lifeline, and you subtract the \$3.65 billion back in the year 2000, the government spin doctors will come out saying that in six years

spending has increased by about \$1.85 billion. The student population, however, has grown, and so did government spending, realizing, of course, that education is an investment in our future and not merely an entry on the expense side of our budget. It's an investment.

The government conveniently fails to go back, of course, to the trimming days of '92-93 and elects to only highlight the better half of the picture. The hon. minister will boast in this House about how much money is being spent every day on education as per his answers on August 24, 2006, when he indicated "\$27.9 million each and every school day." He does not, however, tell us how much it represents today per student. How much money are we investing per student?

The same press release I mentioned just a minute ago tells us that the base instruction grant rate in the 2006-07 school year would rise after this infusion to \$5,291 per student. I would certainly conclude, Mr. Speaker, that this represents a drop from \$6,800 back in the year 2000, dollar for dollar in the simplest form, and we're not even looking at inflation or the rising cost of living in this boom time. So this is the bigger snapshot.

To take a smaller snapshot, Budget 2006 sees the government blow its own horn, talking about a 3.2 per cent average increase in funding for school boards, a 3.2 per cent average across the province. However, this is less than the inflation rate. Take the consumer price index for the month of July 2006: 140.8. If you want to understand it, Mr. Speaker, that's compared to a base score of 100 for the year 1992. So now we're 40 per cent higher than what we were at in '92, the highest in the country. The percentage change for the period July 2005 to July 2006 in Alberta was positive, or plus 4.3 per cent, again the highest increase in inflation in the country.

This supplemental infusion is a welcome gesture. I'm not arguing against it. I think it's a little late, but it's positive nevertheless. I know that the hon. minister, especially with his teaching background, recognizes the pressures that are faced by the system, but I also know that it is not easy for him when he does his sales pitch to his caucus colleagues, and for that I totally and truly sympathize. The government spin doctors will understandably showcase this extra spending but will ignore the fact that this money did not make it into the budget we just approved a few months ago. Is this government yielding or reacting to pressure? If yes, good. It's a sign of life, however faint. Government being responsive, that is, even if only motivated by political survival.

We as opposition members are often accused in this House of being big spenders or asking for more money for programs and services. I would seize this opportunity today, Mr. Speaker, to clarify that we as Alberta Liberals demand and offer better management whether or not more money is invested in certain key and critical areas. Management is the word to be underlined here, responsible management with a clear plan and a concise vision, not an ad hoc one of supplements crammed through in an extremely short, rubber-stamping Legislative sitting.

You know, here's another example. Again the same press release, telling us that the infrastructure and maintenance renewal funding will increase by \$119 million on top of this initial \$81 million to ensure that students' learning environments remain safe and healthy. This is definitely a victory for this minister to secure this kind of extra funding and is a good first step. But think about this, Mr. Speaker: the supplement is greater than the initial amount budgeted. The supplement, the lifeline, is greater than what they budgeted back in April and May. If so, why were our requests ignored last spring? Why was this government as dismissive of and resistant to our ideas in opposition when we were debating the budget back in the spring? You cannot help but wonder when the supplement is 47 per cent

higher than the principal amount, and we're still a ways to go on the huge infrastructure deficit and school maintenance backlog. If they lack a plan, they should perhaps consider listening to some of the other ideas presented in this House in good faith.

Moving on again, Mr. Speaker, I have many points about education. This particular one was raised by some speakers in this esteemed Assembly before, English as a Second Language, which is an area that needs more attention, and more needs to be done. It was not included in this added support under supplementary supply.

3:30

Similarly, the area which I personally care about, the issue of school fees and the issue of the need for parents and guardians to fund raise more and more, not only for the extras but, increasingly, for the basics as well, which I find alarming and objectionable: no sign of relief on this issue.

Furthermore, transportation costs. Remember back in June of this year when the hon. minister came out with a token \$8 million announcement to try to help alleviate some of the concerns with respect to transportation costs. Everyone told him back then that that was not enough. Again, I'm urging him to reconsider today, to continually monitor the situation, especially with fuel prices as high as they are. They're not expected to go down any time soon.

Special needs is another huge area. My staff and I at the constituency office in Edmonton-McClung have assisted a few constituents already with placement requests. What seems to be the predominant issue, of course, is funding. The magnitude is one aspect, the magnitude of funding, the size. But, also, the portability of this funding is equally important, how we can move the students from one place to the next and how we can make the money that is allocated towards looking after them move with them. More attention should be focused on this issue as more special-needs students join our schools and as the education environment evolves to try to make it fair to them and also to their classmates as well, plus their teachers and their teacher aides.

One more issue with respect to education, Mr. Speaker, which I talked about previously, was school boundaries and the catchment areas and how some students who live less than a block or two blocks away from a school are forced to go to another school in an attempt to even out the enrolment figures across the province. So instead of a kid walking for less than five minutes to his or her preferred school, he or she now takes a bus for 35 or more minutes to try to go to a different school because of that enrolment and catchment issue with the school boundaries. Again, it doesn't make sense, especially when some parents lie about or misrepresent their address in an effort to try to get their kid in their preferred school.

I will continue later, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a start. If I remember word for word what Calgary public school trustee Pat Cochrane had to say after the Education minister announced the \$180 million in additional funding that we are talking about in supplementary supply estimates debate, among other things, that was her comment to reporters: well, it's a start. But that's about all that it is: a start.

Yes, you know, it's a good idea to see an increase in the base per-pupil instructional grant. It's a good idea to see extra money in the budget for students with severe disabilities. It's a good idea – it's a superb idea in the case of school boards like the big metro school boards – to increase and extend the funding eligibility cap beyond five years for English as a Second Language students. Not every

student from another country can master this language of ours in five years. Yes, it's good that money has been put into the class size initiative so that school boards can hire more teachers.

I'm not going to take time today to discuss whether the estimates under each one of those categories are what they should be, whether there should be more in there, whether there should be less in there or not. I'm going to focus primarily on what is, I think, the single biggest issue for schools and teachers and students and parents in my constituency because school starts again on Tuesday next. While there may be many parts of rural Alberta where people may be praying for rain – I don't know; it's been a dry summer in much of the province – in Calgary-Currie they'll be praying that it doesn't rain so that the roofs don't leak on the students on the first day of school.

You know, I've got two kids – one grown to adulthood, one very nearly so – so I have experience as a parent of kids in the public school system, and I have experience as once upon a time having been a child myself in the public school system at a time when my father, as a matter of fact, was a school trustee in Ontario. So I've been associated with public education long enough to see a fair number of fads come and go. There was the back-to-basics movement. There was year-round education. I even remember that when I first started out in talk radio, it seemed like every fifth commercial that we played on that radio station was for the Hooked on Phonics game. I wonder if anybody still has that game.

But, you know, through all of that, from the time I started kindergarten more years ago than I care to admit until very recently, there has been one thing that never has been a fad, there's been one thing that's been a consistent, and that has been this: the physical surroundings in which our children are educated. As parents we've trusted that when our children went off to school, they would be spending the day safe, warm, and dry in a well-maintained learning environment. Well, I guess that's a pretty naive assumption these days.

I take a little bit of pride – and my colleague from Calgary-Varsity should too because he joined me on this darn-fooled idealistic crusade of mine, which was at the behest of the school administration at Western Canada high school, one of the finest, most storied secondary schools in not only this province, not only in my city, in my constituency, but right across the west of Canada. My colleague and I late last June toured Western Canada high school along with the public school trustee Miss Cochrane, a couple of parent council members, and two student council representatives at the behest of school administrators who wanted me to see for myself the general state of disrepair of Western Canada high school. They wanted me to understand what they've been up against in trying to deal with this government for the last – I guess it's been eight years now since the facilities audit was done. They wanted me to see for myself just what the rains of June had done to their school.

Through that tour and the media coverage and the public attention that it got in Calgary and Calgary-Currie, the Education minister, after having put off and rescheduled four previous appointments, magically appeared just a few days later to himself tour the facility and a couple of other public schools and a couple of other Catholic schools. And a couple of weeks after that – I believe it was during Stampede week, if I remember correctly, because I seem to recall that I was decked out in a cowboy hat and cowboy boots – he actually emerged from a cabinet meeting in Calgary at the McDougall Centre and announced the \$180 million, \$119 million of which was for the infrastructure and maintenance renewal program, and that's when Miss Cochrane said: well, it's a start.

But that's all it is. It's a start. It's 10 per cent of the accumulated infrastructure maintenance deficit of the public school system in the

province of Alberta, the public and Catholic school systems. Calgary board of education by itself has a \$425 million deferred infrastructure deficit, the biggest of any school district in this province. Calgary Catholic has its own deferred infrastructure deficit. So does Edmonton Catholic. So does Edmonton public. So do many smaller school districts. Visit your child's school and you'll see for yourself just how rundown it has become after 12 years of provincial government neglect.

You know, we don't even need to go back that far. I'm just going to run through a little bit of information here about the schools in my constituency, those ones which remain open, of course, because a number of schools in my constituency have been closed because of the way in which this government has applied its utilization formula. In the case of Western Canada high school, for instance, which is actually sort of a collection of individual buildings that grew together and where in order to get from the second floor of one wing of the building to the second floor of another wing of the building, you've got to go down half a staircase, then up a staircase – and there's a fair-sized landing in between those staircases, and under the utilization formula that counts as classroom space, which is just bizarre beyond belief. But I digress.

The general state of affairs is that when the school facility evaluation project was undertaken in 1999, in which audits of Alberta's schools were conducted by the government to determine overall maintenance needs, the schools were given scores. Anything between zero and 399 points ranked as good and from 400 to 799 ranked as fair, and anything 800 or over ranked as poor. At that time Western Canada high school came in as one of the schools in the worst physical condition – that's to be understood; I mean, it goes back to 1928 in the oldest parts, right? – with a score of 960, which is pretty bleeping bad no matter how you cut it.

3:40

An Hon. Member: Pretty bleeping?

Mr. Taylor: Pretty bleeping bad, because they won't let me say the word that I really have on my mind.

Well, you know, here we are seven years later. Over a million tax dollars have been spent on band-aid repairs to Western Canada high school while the province has dithered over a decision to modernize or rebuild the school. In that time the likely cost of the Western Canada high school project has ballooned from \$9 million to \$32 million or more.

As my tour with my colleague from Calgary-Varsity and the school trustee and the school administrators and the parent council members and the student council representatives back at the end of June showed, the tour where they showed me where the water gushed through the roof of the fitness centre and came down one wall like a waterfall during the rain, where it ran in around the windows of the electronics lab and where they had plastic garbage bags all hastily taped up to divert the water away from the computers and the electronics equipment, where the water damage leaked through and caused damage in a science lab and all the other places that the rain poured in, dribbled in, dripped in, ran in – they showed me the classrooms where a couple of windows had blown in during one storm and old wooden window frames that literally were so rotten you could fit your thumb between the edge of the pane of glass and what remained of the edge of the frame.

What all this proves is that with every passing day – you know, every problem proves that the costliest option is to do nothing, which, of course, is the modus operandi of this government. Do nothing. Consult, monitor, and watch the cost balloon. So, typically, the province has given Calgary public \$14 million to maintain

and repair every school in its system. Calgary public, Calgary board of education, is the second largest school district in the entire nation. It's got a lot of schools. It's got a hundred thousand students. You can't do much with \$14 million when it would take \$32 million to modernize or rebuild or fix appropriately, renovate extensively one high school.

And that's not the only story. Let's look, for instance, at Richmond elementary in my constituency, which received a score of 590 in 1999 in the provincial school facilities audit, 590 being just about in the middle of the fair category. That was in 1999. Using the Calgary board of education's own rating system, rating the mechanical, electrical, and structural conditions on a scale from 10, which is very, very good, to 140, which is pretty bleeping awful, Richmond elementary today has a total condition index of 120. That's the evidence of degradation there.

There's evidence of degradation in all kinds of schools in our constituency. You know, I've been to, I think, just about every single one of them: Alternative high school, which is a really cool place for kids who learn differently, kids who joyously proclaim every day that they are square pegs that are not going to be hammered into a round hole, and they go to school in an old elementary school that is very rundown. In 1999 it had a score of 630. It's gotten worse. Its total condition index now is 90 out of 140.

I've been to St. Mary's senior high school in the Catholic system. The Catholic schools in my constituency as a rule have seen some improvement over the course of time, the seven years since the school facilities audit was done. The public schools in my constituency, I'm afraid, have run down even further.

Now, this government, I guess, has tried a number of times in the past to blame all the problems with public education in the city of Calgary on the public school board in the city of Calgary. It's a convenient scapegoat, an effective whipping boy. It has all the responsibility and none of the authority. You know, when you set your governance model up like that, you make the decisions and create an institution, an organization, a board at a level below yours, at a level closer to the irate stakeholders, the irate stakeholders are going to call their school trustee and blast away at them for problems which were of this government's making because of lack of funding.

There are a lot of fine schools in my constituency – elementary, junior high, high school, alternative, even charter schools – each doing in their own unique way the best job they can and often a job that not only meets but exceeds everybody's expectations of educating the children of my constituency and in many cases children bused in from many other constituencies. They're doing the best they can in really inferior conditions.

It seems that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity and I, by touring Western Canada high school late in June, shamed the Education minister and the government of Alberta into actually doing something. But what they did and what they've done in this budget is 10 per cent of what they should have done, and it's not followed by any sustainable, predictable funding plan, so we haven't really made any progress here, Mr. Speaker. What we've done, really, is classic Conservative: throw money at it and hope the critics sit down and shut up. Well, you know, you can't fix many roofs when you got a billion dollars' worth of roofs that leak and \$100 million to fix them. While this may be a start, it's not nearly good enough.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available and available after each subsequent speaker, which is a five-minute period for brief questions and comments. Are there any wishing to rise under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

An Hon. Member: What was it he really said?

Mr. Elsalhy: Exactly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie was interrupted midway when he was called on the 15-minute time maximum, so I would like to ask him kindly to finish what he was stating.

Speaker's Ruling Question and Comment Period

The Deputy Speaker: I'm going to read Standing Order 29(2)(a) to everyone here so that you're familiar with it. It says:

Subject to clause (b), which allows for the 20 minutes for the first speaker and the following speaker,

following each speech on the items in debate referred to in suborder (1), a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments.

Upon reading that, I'm not too sure that it's available for the reason the Member for Edmonton-McClung requested, but I will recognize that it has been allowed in the past to do so. So until that gets changed, I'd just like to refer you to the actual standing order. I think it was intended for brief questions and comments, not to continue speeches. But since it was done before, I will allow it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your ruling on that, and I appreciate your advice on that as well. I hope that it's taken and adhered to by all members of this House. We could use a little focus here from time to time, don't you think?

3:50

Debate Continued

Mr. Taylor: The point is simply this. I could run through a list of every school in my constituency, and I could probably get it done in five minutes. You know, you have some schools, like Earl Grey elementary and Mount Royal junior high, that are in fair to good condition. You have some schools, like Western Canada high school, that are in pretty pathetic condition. You have some schools, like St. Mary's Catholic high school, that are in improved condition relative to where they were in 1999 when the school facilities audit was undertaken. But we have maintenance needs that have gone up significantly in a number of schools in the constituency in the past five years.

I guess, really, my point is this. It may be illustrated more vividly in Calgary-Currie, because Calgary-Currie is an inner-city residential constituency, than it is in some other constituencies where the school buildings on average may not be quite as old. But when you drive around the city of Calgary, the city of Edmonton, the province of Alberta, you see schools as a symbol for this province's great paradox: unparalleled private-sector wealth alongside the public school infrastructure of a have-not country.

Mr. Speaker, when this House was in session last spring and we broke for March break, my wife and I went down to Costa Rica for a week. Now, I'll grant you that I saw some schools down there that were in worse condition than schools in my constituency, but I also saw some that were in better physical shape in Costa Rica than in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Relative to the rest of Central and Latin America Costa Rica is a relatively prosperous country, but it ain't got nothing on good old Alberta.

This is the paradox of the province of Alberta expressed in schools, expressed in colleges and universities, expressed in

hospitals and public health clinics, expressed in our road and rapid transit systems, expressed in our infrastructure generally: unparalleled private-sector wealth expressed in total in Fort McMurray in the region of Wood Buffalo, unparalleled private-sector wealth along with the public infrastructure of a have-not country because this government can't seem to see beyond next Tuesday. That, my friends, my colleagues, is pathetic. It's unacceptable, it's inexcusable, it's lazy, it's blinkered, and it's considerably less than the citizens of this province have a right to expect. It's about time – not that I expect them to rise to the occasion – that the government of Alberta started doing its job. I've yet to see any evidence that that's happening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to the second reading of the appropriation bill, Bill 44. I think the same question that's crossed my mind has crossed many of our minds here over the last few days, and that is: why are we here? Why are we sitting in this extraordinary session in the summer? It's like we've been sent back to summer school because the government can't add. We know that the government and the Premier have had trouble with math in the past.

I just want to say that I think it's a real disappointment that we are in fact having to have this session at all. The fact that this session is taking place at all is really a testament to the incompetence of this Progressive Conservative government. If this government could do the rudimentary things that a government should do, if it could perform the basic functions of a government such as budgeting and planning, we would not be here today. I think the primary reason that we're here is because the government apparently forgot to fund the schools when they passed their budget in the spring session.

Mr. Elsalhy: Forgot or ignored?

Mr. Mason: They forgot; they ignored. I don't know whether it's absent-mindedness, whether it's wilful deafness, or, you know, a simple lack of attention to its functions.

I'm looking at some quotes from *Hansard*. In fact, I asked our staff to put together all of the questions to the Minister of Education from the spring session and to include those questions to the Provincial Treasurer that had to do with the school budgets. At that time, of course, we in the Alberta NDP opposition were telling the government that they had not funded schools adequately. And it wasn't just our opinion, Mr. Speaker. On the 2nd of May the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview addressed the Provincial Treasurer. He said:

School boards across the province are facing a financial squeeze. Edmonton public is the latest school board to be looking at a deficit. In their proposed planning base document presented to the April 18 board meeting, they have projected a \$7 million deficit in this year's budget.

He asked the Minister of Finance:

At a time of multibillion dollar surpluses why are school boards facing a financial squeeze so severe that they are forced to run deficits?

Well, the hon. provincial Minister of Finance talked about "school boards that are elected to carry out the business of providing an education . . . for our students" and that they have been given "a 5 per cent increase in this year's budget." She says that she thinks

"the Minister of Education expects that that should suffice to operate those schools."

Then on the 8th of May the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview again addressed this issue to the Minister of Education. He said, "Edmonton public is one of a growing number of school boards across the province facing crippling budget deficits." Well, the minister again responded with a lot of verbiage and stuff about the Learning Commission, and he accused the NDP opposition of wanting to rush in and so on, but he said that it was "premature . . . to be speculating on whether or not schools will be in deficit positions."

It goes on. On the 18th of May I asked a question of the hon. Premier. I talked about the Alberta Teachers' Association, which said that day that

it has become clear that Budget 2006 does not provide adequate funding . . . resulting in larger class sizes or running deficits – all of which are completely unacceptable in a province having successive multibillion dollar surpluses.

The Premier said:

Well, you know, Mr. Speaker . . . I have a difficult time understanding where these particular complaints come from . . . There are no cuts. There haven't been cuts since 1993-94. It's been more and more and more [money] . . . every year. So \$330 million is a lot of money. That's just for operating, and that's in addition to all the dollars we've poured in for capital construction.

Mr. Speaker, the government cannot say that the opposition or school boards or teachers or parents did not bring to their attention the deficiency of the budget which they presented to this Legislature in the spring session because it's here and it's clear. It's a matter of public record. So why didn't they do it? Why didn't they fund it adequately?

4:00

You know, I heard the Minister of Education say: well, we haven't got the final numbers yet. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? They don't get the final numbers when they pass the spring budget in any year. For 30 years before that this government alone was able to provide a budget to this Legislature that minimally met the needs of school boards and children in this province without the final numbers, but somehow this government now is no longer able to do so. This minister is unable to do so, and this provincial Finance minister is unable to bring forward a budget that actually funds schools adequately.

So, Mr. Speaker, instead of listening to the ATA and to parents and to school boards across the province and instead of listening to the NDP opposition, the government passed the budget, and here we are in an emergency session – because that's what this is – to pass a sufficient budget so that there won't be layoffs in schools, so that we won't be turning children away from classrooms. Yet even so there's a real question as to whether or not it's enough. That is not competent governance. That is clearly a government that is unable to perform minimal functions that the people that elected it expect from it. It's a government, in my view, that is in crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal a little bit with health care services as well. Health authorities across the province have also been communicating to the government about the stresses and strains that they're experiencing. In Grande Prairie, for example, patients were repeatedly flown to Edmonton for emergency surgery. Emergency rooms, intensive care beds, even operating rooms in at least five health regions had to shut down because of acute staff shortages.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about growth and the pressures of growth. This government has been talking about growth for years. The whole function of the Alberta advantage, which was introduced in the mid-90s, over 10 years ago, was

designed to facilitate economic growth. That was the government's claim. Yet when the growth occurs – and, I might add, not because of the Alberta advantage and the various cuts and changes that the government made at that time but because of sky-high world oil prices – it's amazing to see that this government is actually surprised by it and unprepared for it.

You know, if you look back to the other major goal of the government – and that was the elimination of the debt – you found the same thing. They worked so hard to pay down the debt. They poured billions of dollars into it, sacrificing people's jobs, sacrificing quality of care in hospitals, in seniors' lodges, and in our schools, but they paid down that debt with single-minded determination. When it was finally paid off, Mr. Speaker, they had no plan for the massive surpluses that replaced it. So even though they worked very hard and diligently, I might say, to pay down the debt, once they'd accomplished that goal, they seemed surprised to have gotten there. So we see a parallel situation. We see the paydown of the debt with no plan for the postdebt world, and we see the effort to build economic growth in the province with no plan to deal with the growth.

Now, some little changes in committees that the Premier has made, appointing the Minister of Justice as chairman of the committee and so on, is a bit like closing the barn door after the horse is out. So the hon. Minister of Justice may be there to close the door, but I'm here to tell him that the horse is gone from the barn. The growth is out there. It's impacting and affecting people around this province. Municipalities are unable to deal with it. Hospital and health authorities aren't able to deal with it. School boards are struggling to deal with it. Farmers are struggling to deal with it. The government has not prepared the groundwork for the growth that is taking place, and they refuse to look at managing the growth in any way.

They believe deeply in their hearts, I'm sure, in the religion of the free market. They don't believe in it as a tool or as an economic policy. They believe in it as a religion that's true always and forever, and they refuse to acknowledge that there may be exceptions from time to time when the free market does not meet the needs of the economy or of the people or even of business. So you have small businesses who are now hurting badly because they can't find labour.

You know, I heard recently about a restaurant in one of the towns that I visited that had to go out of business because they can't hire staff. You've got big corporations like McDonald's and Tim Hortons that are advertising for staff, offering scholarships. Well, those are big, multinational corporations, Mr. Speaker, and they're able to advertise for staff. But the mom-and-pop businesses, the small farmers, the small-business people around this province are really, really squeezed. Why? Because of this government's single-minded determination to dig up all of the tar sands as fast as they can, refine it regardless of the consequences, and pump it down to the United States to feed the United States' addiction with oil.

A former Premier of this province, Peter Lougheed, had suggested that we should moderate the pace of development because he, unlike the current Conservative crop, is not a religious believer in the free market system. I'm sure that he does believe in the free market system, but he can see that there is a need from time to time to manage the growth.

Why should we be in such a hurry to dig up all the tar sands just as fast as we can, refine it, and pump it down to the United States? This resource, Mr. Speaker, belongs not just to this generation, I would remind the government. It belongs to all future generations and needs to be managed in their interests as well. It's no good if we can buy lakefront property in B.C. and have giant Hummer vehicles and great big homes and so on in our generation if our grandchildren

have nothing left. But the government doesn't seem to have thought of that. They seem to think that this will go on and on forever. Well, I assure them that it will not go on and on forever.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk a little bit about housing as well because this is a clear example of where a religious belief in the free market does not serve people well. When the economy grows, rents rise and there's a shortage of housing. There's a great lag time before new housing is brought on, and in the meantime people suffer because there isn't housing for them, or they can't afford the housing that does exist. So we have the shame of tent cities popping up in Fort McMurray, in parks. We have people who, even though they're working, are homeless.

So, Mr. Speaker, this government should be ashamed of itself, and this budget ought not to have been necessary. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wish to rise under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. member because he brings up the fact that they were telling us months and months ago that school boards were entering into a deficit and that the first one was Edmonton public. I wonder if the hon. member has looked at, as a percentage of the funding envelope for instruction, what the cost of salaries and benefits has done over the last number of years. I can tell the hon. member that 13 years ago it was somewhere around 80 per cent. Today I've got school boards who write to me and show me that their average cost for salaries and benefits is around 92 per cent of the funding envelope.

Here's an hon. member who wonders why boards are having some difficulty, when the very board that he talks about is the first one that went to 23.8 hours of instructional time per week, thereby necessitating the additional hiring of, I think, about 1,400 teachers throughout Alberta to cover the time for the spares of the other teachers who were, in fact, in the classroom. So he should probably look at what the efficiency has been over the years rather than what the funding has been.

4:10

Mr. Mason: Well, to respond to that, this government is responsible for the operation of education and has legislation in place regarding school boards and labour legislation and all of those other things. If it was just one school board, it might be an excuse. But it's a lot of school boards, Mr. Speaker, and it's a lot of health authorities, and it's a lot of municipalities, and it's a lot of housing. So his excuse is flimsy at best and is clearly just an attempt by his government to escape responsibility for the crisis that they have created.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a great opportunity to speak because we're already talking on education. The Minister of Advanced Education alluded to perhaps school boards overextending themselves. I happened to be on the board at that time with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and at that point the majority of the schools' money did go into supplies, equipment, services, as well as salaries. About 85 to 90 per cent is eaten up by salaries. Some schools were in fact budgeting as high as 91, 92 per cent. Recognizing that fact, we ensured that they capped the clawback; whether they released some people from their contracts, the bottom line was that you could not go over 90 per cent because it was just going to end up in an obvious deficit. There was less than 8 per cent, then, to dedicate to supplies, equipment, and services.

Basically, the whole budget was dedicated to salaries. It didn't make much sense. So they made sure – and it still is a policy, if I am correct – that they cannot budget beyond 90 per cent. Between 85 and 90 per cent would be an ideal operating budget within elementary, junior high, and high schools.

Mr. Elsalhy: If they run a deficit, would they get supplementary supply?

Mr. Bonko: No, they do not get supplementary supply if they run a deficit. They have to pay off that deficit, whether they cut back in custodial hours, whether they cut back in the basics, such as librarians, custodians, some of the support staff.

Mr. Elsalhy: They do fundraising.

Mr. Bonko: No, they cannot fund raise either, and that's another misconception perhaps.

I'd like to talk about my ministry that I didn't get a chance to talk about last night, which is Sustainable Resource Development. Sustainable Resource Development is asking for an additional increase of \$251,503,000: \$231 million is for forest fire costs, and \$20 million is to survey, which they do plenty of, and apparently for control of the mountain pine beetle.

Well, back in the spring when this ministry was asking for their first allotment of money, we on this side with a vision, which we were accused of having, said that, in fact, with supplementary supply they continue to ask for money after they shortchange themselves during the budget. They always underestimate, and this has been going on for years.

I'll give some case in point. In 2002-2003 the budget was \$227 million. In 2003-2004 they were under by about \$128 million, and in the next year \$124 million. They continue to come back to the cup because they know that it's going to be full because of the fact that our economy is doing so well. They realize that they don't have to budget efficiently. Other households have to budget because they don't have extra money. They just can't go to the bank, open the vault and say: "You know what? I need a loan to get me to the next banking day." Unlike this government here. They know that they can always go to the bank; they can go to the trough, whatever you want to call it. The supply continues to flow in. We're in a very fortunate position that we do have that supply. Times are good.

But we should be managing our resources. We should be managing our budgets far, far better, showing some leadership to all Albertans. I'm sure that this isn't a new thing when I talk about the fact that debt not just in Alberta communities or Canadian communities but worldwide is astronomical. So we ought to be showing some leadership, being able to stay within our budgeted amounts.

Like I said, the budget here, the base budget, has continued to be very low; they've not accurately predicted or forecasted for many years. You ask the question, and you don't get an answer. That's just the way it is. We can't predict whether we're going to have a large rainfall or whether we're going to have severe fires, but we can tell pretty much by looking at the almanac. Perhaps some of us have read that before. It gives us an indication. We can tell by our spring what it's going to be like. This year has been no different than any other year except that perhaps we've had far more forest fires. That's why we're asking for \$231 million more in firefighting costs.

Just this spring we asked for equipment for firefighting, and I thought it was going to be for perhaps planes or something, but we ended up leasing some bombers and that. Some of these bombers had some fatalities. I believe that was the case there just this spring.

Mr. Elsalhy: We're buying planes for business.

Mr. Bonko: We're buying planes for business. That's right.

So the biggest question is: why does the ministry not budget for wildfire operations a little bit more realistically so that budget figures are more appropriate to the actual amount spent at the end of the year, so we have an idea of exactly how it's being spent? What steps do they take to ensure that the efficiencies at the wildfires or the forest fires are kept in line? I'm not sure.

Talk about the mountain pine beetle. We're asking for another \$20 million. Well, back in the spring the ministry was saying that, you know, they're doing everything they can to ensure and allocate money to fight this dreaded disease aside from hoping for cold weather. They're monitoring on the ground. They're working closely with B.C.

Mr. Elsalhy: Now they're pointing fingers.

Mr. Bonko: Yeah. Now they're pointing fingers.

It appears that the government finally may be taking this a little bit more seriously, and they're trying to put some more money into it. Finally they're committing more than just a token amount, which they did in the spring and the year before that with a million dollars coupled with the federal investment because they were only giving a million dollars at that point. Now we're up to \$20 million. But I think this could be a little bit too late.

Can the minister explain what actions exactly are going to be taken with the money? What other plans are being considered with regard to that additional \$20 million that wasn't earlier budgeted? The mountain pine beetle, as he said many, many times, is a natural infestation. Warm winters, fire suppression, and migration from B.C. have allowed this phenomenon to continue to grow. It's unfortunate. But, you know, burning of trees, harvesting infested wood, or prescribed burns are about the only ideas or initiatives that we've got so far.

The money is going to be all right, but is it going to go far enough? I think we've been calling on this action, as I've said in the past, and we'll continue to call on the government to protect this forest and this valuable commodity which employs more than 49,000 people in its billions of dollar industry.

When we had an opportunity to go up to some of the pulp mill plants, we realized that SRD works closely with the ministries and some of the businesses out there. In fact, if this fire isn't raging out of control near any township, causing no concern to life, buildings, why not let it burn, then, instead of fighting it? As I said, this is an ethical question. They said: "This is wrong. We can talk about this for a long, long time. You know what? This is valuable money that we're just going to let sit here and go up in flames." So they said: "You know what? We can't agree with that particular one." They said, "We've got a concern with that one." We said: "It's an ethical question. Do you let it burn, or do you not let it burn?" I believe under the ministry you have a bid that you can have allowable burns in the area. You do have allowable burns in the area, that you can in fact allow to burn instead of fighting every little bit.

Now, the minister is indicating that that perhaps is not the case, but I believe that is the case. You can't fight every single solitary fire out there.

Mr. Elsalhy: It has to be contained.

Mr. Bonko: Yeah. It's got to be contained.

The fact is, you know, if some of this fire is taking place near where the pine beetle is coming in, would it be prudent to let it burn, or would you fight it? So you fight it, you save the forest, you save the resource, only to have in the spring or at some time over the course of the year the beetles being able to come through and

destroy the forest. So now you've got a double-edged sword here. You've pinned yourself against fighting the fire, saving the resource, saving the commodity, saving the jobs, the livelihood of the industry. Or do you allow the bugs to take it down?

4:20

This is the question I put to some of the foresters out there. What do you do? Do you let the fire burn along the eastern slopes, where the beetle is coming in, or do you fight it? This is part of the problem that B.C. is facing. They've done such a good job in suppressing the forest fires in B.C. Over the course of the 100 years prior to this forest fires, you know, took a natural course. They didn't have people to fight them. Long before forest firefighting was set up, it took a natural course. Because we've begun to be so good at fighting them, we've allowed this infestation to get a better handle on it and take control instead of us having control over it.

Communities that perhaps we can talk about that are ravaged right now in B.C., a larger area than New Brunswick – and they're going to continue to remove the entire timber supply in those areas – would be Quesnel or Prince George. These areas are a good example of what happens if we're not in fact being prudent with our forest firefighting measures or, better yet, with fighting the pine beetle.

We talk about, you know: let's watch and see what the weather does. I don't think that's enough. I think now we have to be a little bit more aggressive, and we have to put more money into it. This ministry has to employ more people on the ground to do more monitoring, as they say, or to do more cutting and prescribed burns or maybe change the agreements. Even though they're not part of the plans right now, have those companies go over and harvest those infected or potentially affected areas right now, during the course of the year, or before it becomes infected. They can go back later on and take care of the other areas. I know we've got an ability to allow some flexibility within agreements, or at least we should have. So that would be one specific piece I would talk to the minister about.

Other priorities. Perhaps we could talk about SRD improving the enforcement roll of the Natural Resources Conservation Board by hiring more field officers and training more as well. I know we have not been successful in that area. We continue to need more and more in that area as well. Perhaps they're being drawn into the oil and gas industry like a lot of the other communities and large cities and, in fact, in half the country. You know: come to Alberta because we've got a lot here to offer you. We don't have affordable housing. We don't have affordable prices on homes or rents, but we've got a lot to offer you. This is a problem. We've asked for these people to come to Alberta with the signs of money and streets paved of gold like at McMurray. There's the perfect example. Yet when they get there, I think they're a little bit shocked. They're a little bit horrified at some of the conditions. We talked to some Americans that have gone up there, and they can't believe that this is what the prices are, that this is what they're led to believe is affordable.

You know, the Premier asks: come to Alberta. Other ministries have always asked for the economic opportunities. Come to Alberta. We continue to ask these people to come, but when they've come, we've got no opportunities for them to be able to live. Affordable housing in some cases is two years on the waiting list, and then the people aren't able to have their homes inspected. We don't have the ability to be able to even have the people registering. We've got such a backlog. This is something we've asked for, though. So did we create our own problem here? You've got to wonder about it.

Other priorities for SRD: more forestry officers, opening more offices, hiring more scientists to enforce the Forests Act regulations and the conservation initiatives, and redeveloping recovery plans to

designated areas for special habitats. We could in fact ensure that some of the species that are supposedly in danger or at risk – it actually does take enforcement or at least putting into play. So I've talked a little bit about my area, Sustainable Resource Development, which I wouldn't have had an opportunity to talk about last night.

We could talk about another hot topic which seemed to be one of the reasons why we did come back into this session, which is because we didn't in fact properly plan for the looming crisis, we'll call it, before the budget time of September 30, when school boards have the projected enrolments and they submit the monies that they need to be able to operate for the entire year. They don't get to come back to the government and say: look, we're short here. They have to make their submissions based on enrolments by September 30. So before September 30 comes, and we have the candidates all seeking the leadership and then having an embarrassing question, we're here redeveloping a strategy again to talk about the priorities.

We'll talk about some of the schools within my constituency. Some that have placed high on the raw scores need the investments, need to ensure that they have the ability to track the students so they're not closing schools. You know, Dickinsfield junior high, the one that my daughter went to, didn't do too bad, but it can always use some money. Apparently, it could use about \$350,000. With the escalating costs of construction and the overall supplies, equipment, and demand, it's going to be more than that, so what some of the schools, in fact, have had allocated to them for original estimates is going to be thrown out the window. Look at the costs of just completing the Anthony Henday or some of the stuff down there in Calgary I'm not specific with. The overrun costs are just outrageous. Are we going to be able to allow some contingency plans for already preapproved projects for schools to ensure that they're able to meet that same scope of work required but not adversely affect the board directly? They can't. They don't have and they won't have the ability to pull this out of their own budget. So they've got to rely on a government that's originally given them the grant money to be able to fulfill this particular piece.

Killarney junior high school in my constituency has received a poorer rating. It's mid-500s, and it needs over a million dollars, \$1.4 million at last estimate a few years ago. Now, I mean, I went to Killarney junior high a number of years ago, and it's a school that's continuing to grow. It's got alternative programs and continues to attract new students through these measures, but we've got to realize that \$1.4 million is just not going to cut it. Again, like I said, the spiralling costs and construction costs if you're able to find the trade workers are going to bump that number probably up to \$2 million. Another concern right there.

Mee-Yah-Noh, just south of that, is one of the feeder schools. Now, this school is definitely older. It's about the 1960s. You know, if you or I have had a place since 1960, we're going to put a little bit of money into it because there's no way you could . . . [Mr. Bonko's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone.

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coumts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to address the Assembly this afternoon and talk about the need for the \$252 million of supplementary estimates that we need for the rest of this fiscal year and that Sustainable Resource Development is under control of.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you rising under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Coumts: No, I was not.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Was there anybody else?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, I heard you say, "Seeing none." You were going to acknowledge somebody else.

The Deputy Speaker: I saw none. I was questioned on it, so I thought someone wanted to rise. Please proceed.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just put it this way for the hon. member and for all Albertans and for members of this House. This government and this minister take a prudent approach to budgeting for wildfires. We take a prudent approach. The base budget that we use for wildfires this year is similar to previous years. It comes in at close to \$77 million. That gets us set up with contracts for helicopters. That gets us set up with contracts for all of our firefighters that we feel that we might need for the year.

Common sense will tell anyone here and common sense will tell any Albertan that it's very, very difficult to predict forest fires. Yes, you can come up with some ideas that you could have a wet year or you could have a dry year. Last year, for example, it was fairly wet, and therefore we didn't need as much money in supplementary estimates because we didn't have as many forest fires. But, Mr. Speaker, that will tell you that the dollars will vary depending on the amount of forest fires that you have. Also, it's not just the number of forest fires but the severity of a forest fire.

This particular year has been a very, very busy year for forest fires. Our near-record levels for our driest winter and spring and extremely warm temperatures have resulted in more than 1,600 wildfires burning over 116,000 hectares of land. That's an area that would be the size of Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Oh, my.

Mr. Coutts: Yeah. You know how large that is.

Ms Calahasen: Yes, I do.

Mr. Coutts: Wildfires burned near the communities of Caroline, Whitecourt, Hinton, Evansburg, and Gift Lake, and on July 4 the community of Nordegg was evacuated for a total of four days when the wildfire burned within almost 1.5 kilometres close to the hamlet. During that same week low relative humidity, warm temperatures, and extreme lightning – and that's something else that we can't predict: lightning strikes – resulted in the province seeing 169 active wildfires burning on a single day. We had to have the resources in place, and we had to have resources at our disposal to look after those 169 wildfires.

4:30

The wildfire season this particular year is not officially over until October 1, meaning that we still have over one month of wildfire season left. The total amount that the department currently expects to spend on wildfires in this fiscal year is about \$308.9 million, and that will almost be a record. The \$231.5 million in additional funds is what we actually need to complete this year.

The hon. member made some comments about pine beetle, and the comments are a little confusing, but I want to say that this ministry has been very proactive and had a very busy year in dealing with mountain pine beetle. We have kept on contract through the winter a number of our firefighters to do and assist us with extensive air and ground surveys, and we will continue to do that through this year so that we can catch the infestations that happen during this summer's fly of the pine beetle. We need to do that as early as possible so that

we can cut and burn individual trees, so that we can look at large areas that would do prescribed burns.

We've had close to 14,000 infested mountain pine beetle trees that have been identified and selectively cut and burned by our forestry staff, the majority of these trees being in the Willmore wilderness park area. That's a real credit to the Department of Community Development, who has helped us establish a protocol to go in there and make sure that we don't abrogate our responsibility to the people of Alberta by letting the parks go to a brilliant red colour from pine beetle kill.

It's true, Mr. Speaker, that a new infestation has been recently identified in the north of the eastern slopes, the farthest north the mountain pine beetle has ever been in Alberta. The pine beetles that have infested not only have been identified by landowners but certainly confirmed by our forestry staff in Grande Prairie, Fox Creek, and Fairview. We're working with municipalities as well as private landowners to find the extent of the recent infestations, and we're working with the industry, which is so important in this, as well as provincial parks and protected areas and the federal government to survey and control as much as possible all of the beetle infestations. As soon as they're identified, we'll make sure that we go in there and cut and burn.

We will be training seasonal firefighters in surveying and keeping them on staff over the winter for the mountain pine beetle control. Ground surveys are being conducted this fall and will determine the number of trees infested for cut and burn treatments. Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely necessary that we remain vigilant in our efforts at limiting mountain pine beetles in our forests as Alberta's entire pine forest, which is 10 per cent of the entire area of the province of Alberta, is now at risk.

The department needs an estimated \$22.6 million in total this fiscal year to continue this battle. Mr. Speaker, our original budget for the mountain pine beetle was \$2.6 million, and that's all we needed at that particular time for the amount of trees that we had, but seeing that we have more trees infected with mountain pine beetle, this government has taken a very proactive approach and put the resources towards eradicating and stopping this pine beetle at the border of Alberta and British Columbia. These two requests make up \$251.5 million in supplementary funding.

It's done to make sure that we preserve and protect this natural resource that we have that Albertans not only enjoy seeing but that they also work in. It provides to our economy about \$12 billion worth of revenue a year, Mr. Speaker, so it's very, very important that we do the prudent thing and budget responsibly, and when we have emergencies, we can call on supplementary estimates to assist. Actually, in my opinion, you end up budgeting better when you know that the supplementary estimates are there to cover the costs of the action that's already been taken both on wildfires and on pine beetle.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Am I allowed to make a comment and question, Mr. Speaker, to the minister? I've been exposed to the beetle problem in B.C., and I would say to you, sir, that you are certainly on the right path with your burning and what you're doing. But one of the things I would emphasize to you, with all due respect, is that I think that the work of science has to go on. I would urge you, sir, with your compatriots in B.C. forestry to continue on that vein as well.

You're right. Everything you've said today I agree with. It's a very serious problem. For example, the property that I'm aware of in British Columbia: we took 200 trees off this year because we

didn't handle it properly. We should have done the slash and burn and done it in the winter, which we didn't do. We're paying the price now.

I would emphasize that the government has done so much good work in health in terms of the heart and the kind of work you've done with children and the children's hospital. I would also suggest: don't give up on the science part of this. I think that's a very important one.

The other comment I'd just like to give you is on your fish hatchery in Cold Lake. We were up there visiting, my colleague and I, and it just is a very positive experience that we had. The staff treated us so well. I hate to say this, but I never knew it existed. Let me tell you that the tour was wonderful. It's a facility everyone should see, and when you see the condition of Cold Lake, the lake itself, and how it's nurturing the well-being of the fish that are in it – I understand it's not been restocked in the last year number of years. It's held its own is what I'm trying to say, and the water is really something to behold for Alberta. So I think there's a feather you can wear in your cap, and I hope that continues to be developed.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. minister wish to respond?

Mr. Coutts: Just a quick response. Thank you very much. Our staff at the Cold Lake hatchery are very qualified staff. They work very, very hard to make sure that the hatchery provides the fish that can go into lakes. We do the science around that to make sure that Albertans can go out there and have a pleasant experience not only on the sports fishing side but also on the domestic side.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake certainly brought the fact that we need to make some improvements to the hatchery. We took the trip up there as well. I was, like you, very surprised and, actually, a little astounded that we had such a high-quality hatchery. This summer when I was in Korea, I thought I was going to learn something from the hatchery in Korea. Well, we don't have to take a back seat to anyone. We have a very, very good hatchery: quality water and good people with good science behind them to make sure that our fishing experience is a good one here. We'll continue to put the resources to that.

Your comment about not forgetting the science for mountain pine beetle is well taken. We continue to make sure that the scientists that we have on staff will continue to help us. As a matter of fact, we thought at one time that the Jack pine in northern Alberta in our boreal forest was exempt from mountain pine beetle. The scientists have said that that's not true. If the mountain pine beetle get into that Jack pine and go across the boreal forest, within the next 15 to 18 years that pine beetle could go all the way across Canada, all across the boreal forest, well into Labrador. We've advised the federal government of that. As well, B.C. has advised the federal government of that. The federal government has been participating not only, again, in some of the science but also in helping to facilitate some of the dollars to help stop the beetle. We think that this is the best stand that can be made at the high altitude between Alberta and British Columbia. So it's ongoing.

We also have to thank the ongoing presence of the science and the protocol that was put into place by British Columbia and Alberta back in early 2005 where they are participating and helping us with information and giving us support in whatever way they can. They're also supporting our industry to identify areas where mountain pine beetle could come across and the next area that we should be looking at.

So thank you for your comments.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As many others have commented, it has been very difficult to have time to raise the kind of issues that we wish to raise given the fact that in supplementary supply there were only three and a half hours to discuss \$1.3 billion and the procedure was to go through the departments in alphabetical order. That left out the one that I want to comment on; namely, Solicitor General and Public Security. I don't think we got very far last night. It's probably still with the As in terms of the departments.

I find it lamentable that we don't have an opportunity to have a give-and-take with the minister. I'm going to comment on the appropriations bill, Bill 44, and especially the amounts of money under Solicitor General and Public Security, but I would have preferred to hear some sort of introduction or explanation from the minister about these amounts before I make my remarks. Anyway, I will proceed.

There are two parts to the monies that are being requested for Solicitor General. The capital investment of \$9,600,000 is requested for the development of an integrated province-wide strategic information technology system for police, corrections, and other public safety partners. I think this is something that's really needed. I applaud the movement towards a kind of rationalization of policing in Alberta, not to go so far as to suggest that Alberta have its own police force – many people are suspicious that that's where we're heading – but certainly to have a rationalization in terms of education, so the direction towards a police academy is something that is in the right direction.

This kind of proposal to develop an integrated strategic information technology system is quite laudable. My only two questions are: how much have municipal police forces already invested in their own information technology system, and how much are they going to actually be losing when this integrated system is put into place? I need to have more information about that. The second question about this integrated system is about the whole issue of abuse. What kind of monitoring, what kind of oversight of this integrated system will be put into place? It's easy to think about the Overtime scandal. I happened to be in the Overtime bar not too long ago, and I was reminded by the owner about that event when Edmonton police ran through their system the names of people that they were planning to catch in a sting operation. We all know about the aftermath of that. So what kind of oversight, what kind of prevention of abuse of using these computer systems will be put into place? That's all the comment I have about that portion of the money, capital investment in this technology system.

Now I want to turn to the other matter. There is \$4 million being requested to provide an interim solution to the overcrowding at the Edmonton Remand Centre until a new one is built. According to press releases, I guess there's going to be a new remand centre to the tune of \$308 million, although I'm not sure how that budgeting process unfolds. There's nothing in Infrastructure this year to cover that. I expect that there will be amounts from Infrastructure in the years to come, but a new Edmonton remand centre wouldn't be built until 2012, which raises all kinds of issues in terms of what is to be done in the meantime. So the \$4 million asked for in the appropriation bill is for some interim solution to deal with overcrowding. Some of the inmates will be transferred to the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre, and sentenced inmates from Fort Saskatchewan will then be transferred to the federal Grande Cache Institution and so on.

I am not disputing the need for a new remand centre. I've raised numerous questions in the past, both in question period and before the Public Accounts Committee, about the terrible conditions in the remand centre in Edmonton. The problem is obvious. We have an institution, the Edmonton Remand Centre, which was built in 1979 to hold 332 inmates and now has more than 700.

It's not just the Edmonton Remand Centre. We forget easily that the Calgary Remand Centre, which was built in 1993 to hold 361 prisoners, now holds more than 500. That is a tremendous problem too, and I don't read anywhere about suggestions about what to do with the Calgary Remand Centre. I understand that there are 14 different units in the Calgary Remand Centre, including a number of medium security units for the general population, maximum security, female unit, disciplinary segregation, a suicide-watch unit, et cetera. Again, double-bunking occurs in the remand centre in Calgary just as much as in the Edmonton Remand Centre.

I am quite disturbed by this particular statistic. The average stay in the remand centre in Calgary is 14 days, but it is estimated that 15 to 20 per cent of inmates stay for one year, and 5 per cent stay for two years. That, to me, raises all kinds of questions about what we are actually doing to people through the remand centre. I mean, if most people in the remand centre are waiting for trial, and they have to wait a whole year or even longer, then in effect we are punishing them before they have a trial, and I think that's quite unacceptable.

The conditions are obviously lamentable in the Calgary Remand Centre and the Edmonton Remand Centre and the Red Deer Remand Centre and other institutions throughout the province. So my question is: what kind of consultation is taking place, especially with all the players in the justice system, to examine the whole picture, not just the need for one new remand centre but the needs overall?

I just want to say a few things about that because I think that if we don't do that, then a new remand centre is just a stopgap measure and doesn't deal with the real problem. I don't want to see a situation in which we're rushing to a solution before we have looked at all the different possibilities.

Given the trend of Conservative governments, especially federal and provincial, demanding that there be changes to the Criminal Code – for example, mandatory minimum sentences, less use of conditional sentencing, limiting conditional release, all of which eliminates judicial discretion, taking a lot of power and wisdom away from judges – that whole approach of Conservative policy guarantees that there will even be more offenders going to jail.

Now, it's interesting. There was an MLA review of the correctional system in Alberta, submitted in November 2002. That review was responding to a completely different situation, I assume. It seemed in reading the review that that was a response to complaints that actually we were too soft on prisoners, that they had "club-fed" situations in the correctional system, so most of the recommendations tried to make things tougher. The report also states that because of the use of conditional sentencing, the demands are not so great because there are other alternatives, so some youth detention centres were actually closed.

4:50

Of course, the situation now has shifted again as Conservative policies are recommending against conditional sentencing, so the demands on the system have changed and are much greater than before and will be greater. In fact, the MLA report which I referred to says that

adult offender custody populations, especially offenders on remand, have been rising during the past year. In 2001-02, the remand population increased by 23 per cent and the sentenced population in Alberta facilities grew by 9 per cent over the previous year.

Mr. Speaker, that is going to continue to increase because of the policies of the federal government and the provincial government in Alberta, and more and more people are going to be incarcerated. Really, if it's the trend that the prison population will increase exponentially, then a new remand centre is not what we need. Right now we need an urgent review of the whole system.

Again, it's a question of planning. If this is the direction that the governments are going in, then we need to have greater planning for

the future. What about the other facilities? Are we going to have to have other prisons being built, more prisons and larger prisons? It's a huge, huge issue, and I would like to see more study, more reports, more analysis of the whole situation than I'm seeing right now.

I'm asking that the whole issue be seen in a wider perspective, not just focusing on the one issue of a new remand centre. I mean, it leaves the question: who are the inmates in the remand centre? How many inmates in remand are there because there actually is no room in some of the other prisons like the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre?

Now, I have a personal experience along that line because I visited someone in the remand centre here who was actually sentenced for a white-collar crime of defrauding his employer. The judge wanted to make an example of him, so he was sentenced, but he stayed for a number of months in the remand centre because there were no cells open in the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre. I mean, he was put in with violent offenders. Here was a person that committed a white-collar crime and mercifully he wasn't double-bunked with somebody who was accused of a more serious crime. What are the solutions here if not moving in the direction of building more prisons?

Who is in the remand centre? Now, my assumption has been that the remand population consists of those who are waiting for trial and not, as the hon. minister said to this House, that if they are in remand, they must have done something wrong. We have no right to say that about someone who is waiting for his trial. Eventually they may be found guilty, but they also may be found innocent. What we should not be doing is punishing them before they have their trial. That's why the terrible conditions in the remand centre are so important. I mean, we have people there waiting for trial living in terrible conditions. That goes against the fundamental principle of justice that people should be considered innocent until proven guilty.

Who is in the remand centre? Well, the evidence seems to indicate that there are a disproportionate number of aboriginal men in the remand centre. In fact, the aboriginal population in Alberta is about 40 per cent in terms of inmates in provincial jails, and that raises all kinds of issues, which I'm not going to go into now. It leads one to think about a greater need for making ourselves aware of cultural differences, of the need for appointment of aboriginal Crown prosecutors and aboriginal judges and dealing with the whole aboriginal population in a different way. It seems to me that if there is a disproportionate number of aboriginal people in the remand centre, maybe it's the whole issue of: well, they may not appear for trial so keep them in prison, have the bail high so that they can't afford to pay it, and keep them there. Now, I find that quite unacceptable. We need to have different kinds of approaches understanding the aboriginal population.

Well, Mr. Speaker, my time is up, and I have much, much more to say. Again, this is not adequate, so someone ask me a question.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wishing to rise under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member appears to be talking with some degree of expertise on the population in prisons. But having very recently, about a year or a year and a half ago, done a thorough review of all correctional facilities in Alberta, I know for a fact – the first question: has he read the report? Because as a critic he should have. If he has read the report, he would have known that Alberta's correctional facilities are about 50 or 60 per cent vacant right now.

My supplemental to that question will be: how does he arrive at the conclusion that we may have to or are in a position to have to

build more prisons? The reason why we have 50 or 60 per cent vacancy is not because we have fewer offences but because of some of the sentencing trends toward alternative sentences. So how does he arrive at this conclusion when the facts clearly don't support it?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to respond?

Dr. B. Miller: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have any statistics, but the money that's being requested for . . . [interjections] I read your report. The money that's being requested is to transfer inmates from Fort Saskatchewan to Grande Cache. Now, Grande Cache is a federal institution. Why are we moving people from Fort Saskatchewan to Grande Cache? Why don't we send them to Lethbridge or other provincial correctional centres? I think the issue of space in provincial prisons, correctional centres, is a serious issue.

Also, I think the situation is changing because, as I've said, of alternatives. Is the hon. member saying that this government is going to continue to emphasize alternative sentencing, restorative justice approaches? Because that is the issue. It seems to me that the issue of dealing with our burgeoning prison population is to reduce the incarcerated population by turning to other measures. I mean, building our way out of the correctional crisis – and I think there is a correctional crisis; it's here and it's going to get worse in the future – is not the answer.

Actually, I'm glad the hon. member raised the issue with me because I think we need to actually go back and look at the MLA review. It was looking at other possibilities of alternative sentencing. That's what we need. We need to find ways of keeping people out of prison. We need to find ways of providing other ways; for example, supervision within the community. If it's a property crime against an employer, surely the issue of restitution comes into it. Why throw someone into prison? Have that person restore what they stole to their employer and serve in the community and do some community service. There are all sorts of ways in which we can deal with people, especially first-time offenders, to make sure that the population in prison doesn't get bigger and bigger and bigger.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to participate under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity to enter the debate this afternoon. Our ministry's vision is to ensure that Albertans have safe and secure communities in which to live, work, and raise their families, and we require funding for two very important initiatives that further support that vision. In conjunction with Infrastructure and Transportation we recently announced plans to replace the Edmonton Remand Centre. Construction of the new facility is expected to take four to five years, and until the centre is complete, overcrowding at the Edmonton Remand Centre will continue to put the safety of staff and inmates at risk. So we need the \$4 million to help alleviate that situation.

5:00

These funds will allow us to transfer provincially sentenced offenders currently housed in the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre to the federal Grande Cache Institution. Moving these offenders will free up space at Fort Saskatchewan to house more inmates from the Edmonton Remand Centre, therefore relieving some of the pressure and overcrowding at the Remand Centre. This requires \$1.6 million for additional staff in Fort Saskatchewan to address security issues associated with housing remanded inmates,

\$500,000 to transport inmates from Fort Saskatchewan to Grande Cache as well as the additional cost to transport remand inmates from Fort Saskatchewan to Edmonton for court appearances, and finally, Mr. Speaker, \$1.9 million in per diem payments to Correctional Service Canada, which operates the Grande Cache facility.

Mr. Speaker, we are also developing a new central crime database for our law enforcement agencies. The five-year, \$100 million commitment by the Alberta government will enhance the safety and security of Albertans. In fiscal year '06-07 \$9.6 million will begin the initial groundwork to start moving the project forward. This project will develop a comprehensive computer system that will improve the ability of law enforcement agencies, including police, sheriffs, and corrections, to share important criminal intelligence information. The systems will allow easier input and access to that information from anywhere in the province and should provide real-time information to front-line officers. So these two initiatives are vital to ensure that Albertans continue to live in safe and secure communities.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora mentioned the fact of who was actually studying the issue regarding this IT system. I can let him know that there has been an executive team in place from the police services as well as from our ministry and from RGE working together to look at the future as to what type of model would be in place. As well, I want to remind the hon. member and this Assembly that the population of Alberta is smaller than the size of Toronto, where they have one system for their police service. The issue that we have is eight major police services in Alberta that have eight different systems. So the issue is: how do we connect them all together? How do we provide that information and that sharing of information and resources to all of our police services throughout Alberta? Even though we have geographic issues and boundaries to deal with, the size of the police service in Toronto is, in fact, larger than the size of our 5,300 or 5,400 police officers in Alberta. So we want to obviously take that next step, and this government has provided that leadership in moving in that direction to ensure the safety and security of our communities.

I do want to touch on a few of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora's comments regarding the capital for other remand centres. Of course, there are issues that he mentioned. We are looking at the capital planning process for 2007-2008. Actually, we're meeting with the hon. minister for capital infrastructure planning regarding those requests and those needs that we have in other centres; for example, in the Calgary Remand Centre and the Calgary Correctional Centre as well. Those are going to be developed over the next year, and of course we have to go through the government process for capital plans. So we are aware of those needs. We are looking at those projects as we move forward in the coming years.

I had some concern with the hon. member blaming the Conservative government for filling facilities, and on the other hand my Liberal counterpart's comments were that he wants less individuals in the jails and to put them back on the street. The issue is that these individuals have been remanded either by a judge or by a justice of the peace to ensure the safety and security of the public, and that's why they're being held in custody. There are murderers. There are pedophiles. There are sexual assaults. There are rapists. There are assaults causing bodily harm, shootings, and stabbings that occur every weekend and almost on a daily basis throughout Alberta. These people are a risk to the general public, and that's why they're being held in remand. No, they haven't been convicted. Yes, they may sit in remand for two years, but it's better having a murderer sit in remand than having that murderer, who could commit another offence similar to that, exposed to the public. Our goal as the Conservative government is to ensure that we can provide the leadership and the facilities and the storage of remanded individuals

and/or those individuals who are sentenced into correctional facilities.

I applaud the federal government. This Conservative federal government is looking at new initiatives, ensuring that there are deterrents in place for future potential offenders to look at, saying, "Do I want to spend five years in jail for this offence?" whereas right now they may spend 18 months and they're kicked out, or they used to. So I applaud this federal Conservative government for the initiatives they're taking and hope to see a lot more this fall when Parliament opens up again.

Mr. Speaker, I think that those are some of the comments that I have other than, obviously, the dollars that we're asking for in Solicitor General and Public Security are smaller dollars but will have a huge impact on the service level we provide within the ministry and, as well, to ensure the protection and safety of Albertans as well as the staff that we have in our ministry and the inmates and/or the remanded individuals themselves.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is general support in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning for the remand centre. Certainly, there's been a long number of comments over the last year or two about the fact that some justices of the peace and such are not putting people that maybe should be put into some incarceration because of the fact that the remand centre has been too packed.

However, when the issue of the remand centre was brought into public light as to where it would be sited, this became something of an issue in my riding. The mayor of Edmonton mentioned a site near the Alberta Hospital, which is in Edmonton-Manning, which is my riding, and this has created a great deal of consternation among the residents of my riding, many who have seen the Edmonton maximum institution, Alberta Hospital, Henwood, and other institutions brought there. They're important institutions, but I think the feeling is that we've got our fair share.

There is opposition, which is very clear, to the fact of placing it at that particular site. I must make that clear. Ninety-nine per cent of many communications which I've received are against the siting near Alberta Hospital or, indeed, in having some suggestions, you know, from members of the Edmonton Police Service that it really only makes sense to have it downtown because there is one there already. They would be building on. There is land that could be made available from the city. My question to the minister is: will you ensure that it doesn't go near Alberta Hospital and that we could maybe see it downtown? Take the interests of the police service members and others who think that, as you say, murderers, pedophiles, rapists, thieves being transported on a regular basis to the courthouse, to the main police headquarters in Edmonton might be a mistake, that we don't want them travelling daily on our roads.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I have the hon. minister respond, I'd like to remind the hon. Member for St. Albert that we're not in committee.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for those questions. I take his concerns to heart. I, too, have received a number of e-mails from residents in Edmonton, in the northeast area, in and around the Edmonton hospital. Obviously that is one of the locations due to the amount of government land that is available to us, but we are

looking at other sites. Our department has recently met with the mayor and I believe council in Fort Saskatchewan to look at existing land within the Fort Saskatchewan complex as well as just across the street from it as well as looking at other opportunities and other government-owned land in and around the Edmonton area, around EYOC and other land in the downtown area as well.

5:10

There are a number of options that we are looking at and, again, looking at what the facility should look like, how it should be provided, how it should be housed, and obviously looking at the long term, the number of inmates that a remand centre can hold, to ensure that we have that space available for 25 to 30 years down the road so that we have a clear vision of ensuring that when we've reached 2030 or 2035, in fact, that facility will still be in use and the ability to provide a sufficient and safe service not only to the inmates but to the staff and corrections officers as well that work in those facilities. So we are looking at those.

I take the member's questions to heart and will let our department know, and obviously we'll keep the hon. member in the loop as we move through the process.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods wish to participate in the debate?

Mrs. Mather: No.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: In debate on the bill?

The Deputy Speaker: In debate on the bill.

Mr. Renner: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be very pleased to discuss the request that's included in this bill as it applies to Municipal Affairs. As you know, \$20.4 million of these estimates apply to Municipal Affairs. The lion's share of that is \$13.4 million, which is the first increment of a \$50 million commitment that the government has made to reinstate the underground storage tank program.

This was a very successful program that assisted many small-business operators and municipalities throughout the province to deal with the contamination that they found themselves with as a result of leaking gas tanks from old technology. That program had a limitation both in total dollars, which was met, as well as individual claims that owners could make. There was a \$10,000 grant available to do the initial investigation to determine the extent of any contamination and then up to a \$100,000 grant that's available to actually deal with the contamination itself. Most of the sites in the province fall within that \$100,000 range.

However, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of sites that have been identified through the first program that the contamination actually exceeded the \$100,000, and additional funds were or will be needed to deal with the decontamination of those sites. The program that we'll be putting in place as a result of these new dollars that become available increases the amount from \$100,000 to \$150,000. The original \$10,000 stays in place. So an individual may be able to now have up to \$160,000 to deal with the decontamination of leaks that have been created by leaking underground tanks.

That necessitates two things, Mr. Speaker. It requires us to go back through our files and determine if there were sites that were not remediated because the landowner did not have the personal resources to go beyond the hundred thousand, didn't want to start on

the hundred thousand knowing full well that it wasn't going to be enough. There are some other sites where the owner of the contaminated site did in fact pay personal finances or small-business finances to go beyond the hundred thousand. The bulk of the \$13.4 million that we have before us today will go to deal with those two situations: to go back and have a look at sites that were not dealt with because there wasn't sufficient funds and also to retroactively compensate some of the individuals who, had the program been available to them, obviously would have been compensated up to \$150,000.

The rest of the \$50 million will come in the next two construction years. We anticipate that there will be as many as another 600 sites throughout the province that will be identified. Applications will come forward, and we'll deal with those on a first-come, first-served basis based on the applications that come in.

The \$50 million, if you do the math, may or may not be sufficient, depending upon the severity of the contamination. I have made a commitment as minister responsible for this program that if at the end of the three years the \$50 million still has not dealt with all of the contaminated sites in the province, I will again request an extension and additional funding, so that we can continue to deal with things.

The reason we're not doing it all at once, Mr. Speaker, is that this is a fairly sophisticated industry. There are constraints within the industry, and you can only do so much in a construction season. So we anticipate about \$15 million a year over three years, and that's how you come up to the \$50 million.

We also have included, Mr. Speaker, \$3.5 million so that we can institute disaster recovery programs as a result of severe weather conditions that have occurred in Alberta in 2006. One occurred in southern Alberta that resulted in about \$2.5 million in damages resulting from overland flooding. Part of that will be paid to municipalities to compensate them for the costs that they have incurred in dealing with the situation.

I know I can use as an example – the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat will be very familiar because it's in his constituency – the town of Bow Island. It had significant damages. This huge cloud just opened up over top of them and dumped a substantial amount of rain. It overwhelmed their storm sewer system. They had to bring vacuum trucks from all over the country to try and deal with the situation. Those are the kinds of things that a municipality can be compensated for. There also may well have been some incidental damage to the storm sewer system. As well as that, because the storm sewer system backs up, you end up having actual overland flooding, where water enters into homes over the top of the foundation, not through the bottom, which is a sewer backup. That sewer backup is a damage that can be recovered through a normal homeowner's insurance policy. Overland flooding, on the other hand, is not something that insurance companies are responsible for, and that's why we step in with a disaster recovery program.

There was also an incident in the city of Edmonton on June 15 that had similar results, and there's \$1 million included to assist the city of Edmonton and the residents of Edmonton that incurred damages as a result of that incident as well.

Finally, there's \$3.4 million in this request to deal with the ongoing administrative costs for the previous 2005 disaster recovery program. This is a cost-shared program. We actually lay out the money, and then we will in turn eventually recover it from the federal government. So we're essentially creating an accounts receivable in this \$3.4 million either next year as this file is closed or perhaps even a subsequent year because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, some of the damages that resulted from last year's storms are going to take as many as two construction seasons to repair. We won't be able to close that file off until all of the damages have been

calculated and repaired. Once we do, we will submit an accounting to the federal government. They'll reimburse us, and this \$3.4 million will be returned.

That, Mr. Speaker, is an explanation of how Municipal Affairs came to request \$20.4 million.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wishing to rise on 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that there are so many of these – what are they called? – brownfield sites all throughout the province needing the tank sites remediation program and that if I heard you right, you're going to have to request more money after the \$50 million is used up, I don't understand the relationship between asking for this extra money and the ongoing budgeting process. How is it included? Shouldn't it be included in the long-term budgeting process for the department?

5:20

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, in the year 2000 the program was introduced that I referred to earlier, that had a total budget of \$60 million. That \$60 million has been expended in totality, so without introducing a new program, creating a new budget, we're unable to deal with anything that hasn't already been dealt with under the old program. This is a new program that will increase the grants to \$150,000. Part of this initial budget will compensate individuals under the old program who paid more than the \$100,000, up to the \$150,000. Part of it will deal with sites that have already been identified. Much of the research has already been conducted, but it was obvious that the \$100,000 under the old program was not going to do the job, so that's part of it. The balance will be used for other sites that either had not applied under the old program or applied after all of the available funds had already been allocated.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, anyone wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Stevens: Briefly, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Justice is seeking approval for an additional \$3.6 million to pay justices of the peace in anticipation that the 2003 to 2008 Justice of the Peace Compensation Commission will submit its recommendations to the government in this fiscal year, 2006-2007. The next JPCC was due in 2003, but what happened was that there was a delay because the justices of the peace challenged the provision of the government's response to the 1998 to 2003 JPCC, which, of course, is short for the Justice of the Peace Compensation Commission.

The Supreme Court of Canada ultimately rendered a decision in favour of the government, and we believe that we're now in a position to proceed with the 2003 compensation commission for the justices of the peace. The amount of \$3.6 million is our best estimate as to what the outcome of that particular mandatory process will be, which we will be required to pay in this particular fiscal year. So it's a bit of housekeeping which we can now do as a result of a successful court case in favour of the government.

Those are the comments I have with respect to the matter. I put them on the record at this point in time because I had not had an opportunity, and I don't think it's a matter that the critics on the opposition bench will spend much time on.

In any event, at this time, Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence I'd like to call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, August 29, 2006**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/08/29

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 44
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)**

[Adjourned debate August 29: Mr. Stevens]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General still has 13 minutes if you wish.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I look forward to this opportunity to discuss the supplementary estimates. The over a billion dollars that we're talking about is such a large sum that for some people it's hard to get a grasp on it, so what I'd like to do is kind of personalize it, put some faces behind it, and ask questions as to whether these faces and these situations that I bring up with regard to my constituency and contacts ring true with other constituency representatives, MLAs, throughout the province.

First off, a bouquet. As you're very well aware, I don't throw too many bouquets, but here's one for the health ministry. I am very pleased that the health ministry finally recognized the importance of funding Herceptin. This is something that other provinces have recognized for some time. The federal government has recognized the value. It's gone through all sorts of drug tests and series of approvals. Thank you, ministry of health, for finally helping people with that \$40,000 a year expense.

Another bouquet. This is a mixed floral bouquet that I would like to hand to the health department: the fact that lymphedema treatment will very soon be offered in Calgary. Prior to just basically last week's announcement women suffering from the after-effects, the swelling that occurs with chemotherapy, were forced to leave Calgary and basically anywhere else in the southern part of the province and come up to Edmonton to receive this treatment. Very shortly through the Calgary hospital connections it will be offered.

The reason I say a mixed bouquet is that the place where it will be offered is leasing space out of the Holy Cross hospital, and of course that is one of the hospitals that was unfortunately prematurely closed. The owners of that hospital are doing extremely well because, first off, as we're all aware, over \$32 million went into upgrading that facility, and then it was sold for under \$7 million. And over the years since that sale, I believe in 1996, we have been, through the Calgary health region, spending millions of dollars in leasing space that we once owned. So, as I say, a mixed bouquet.

As I continue with the cancer theme, I receive contact from constituents frequently who are suffering from various forms of cancer, and I want to relate the story of one constituent, whose name is Marlene. Marlene suffers from breast cancer, and adding to the suffering of the breast cancer is the fact that the chemo cocktail treatment that, again, has been approved in other provinces and is available in B.C. has not yet been approved for use in Calgary. The circumstance is that the exact combination of drugs that have been approved for the treatment of pancreatic cancer and are available at the Baker cancer clinic in Calgary are not available for breast cancer.

So Marlene has to make her way to B.C., leave behind her two children and her husband, who is a professor at the University of Calgary, and travel to B.C. to get this cocktail that's available in Calgary. But Alberta, again, won't recognize what other provinces and the federal government have recognized, that the combination of the two chemicals not only treats pancreatic cancer but has shown effective results on breast cancer as well.

Last year I talked extensively about the family of Jeanne Keith-Ferris. The two children, a teenage boy and girl, suffered the devastating effects of gastroparesis, which is a disease that causes a person to always feel on the edge of vomiting, if not actually vomiting. As I pointed out – and I will not go into great detail about last year – this family had to lay out \$60,000 to go down to receive treatment from a Dr. Abell, who actually performs this surgery in Mississippi three times a week.

The federal government has recognized that gastroparesis can be managed – not cured but managed – through the Enterra Therapy device implantation. The province of Quebec publicly funds the operation but does not have a whole lot of spaces in its delivery system, setting aside operating space specifically to deal with gastroparesis.

Since I recounted the story of Jeanne Keith-Ferris and her two children, an individual doctor from the University of Calgary has gone down to Mississippi. He has received training on monitoring the Enterra Therapy device. He's come back to Calgary, and basically he is, along with a number of individuals, appealing to the government to run a clinical trial. At this point the government has said that they recognize that Enterra Therapy works, but they have yet to figure out how it works. They're calling it experimental despite, as I've pointed out, a number of cases through Mississippi and through the States in general.

Tonight I want to introduce you to a young lady who sent out 83 letters to all our constituencies. I would like to thank the few individuals who responded to her. That is a young lady who is by training a nurse, a registered nurse. Her name is Krysta Livingstone. This is what I'm talking about by trying to put faces in front of the dollars. Krysta is in her early 20s. As I said, she's a nurse. Her gastroparesis circumstance is worsening on a daily basis. She doesn't want to end up like other individuals, in the Calgary Foothills hospital or in her Medicine Hat facility with a feeding tube. She would like to realize the quality of life.

She travelled this past spring down to Mississippi, where Dr. Abell installed a temporary device. She immediately received the benefits of that device, and it was like a change in her life. The problem is that it's a \$41,000 ticket to have the surgery done, the recovery, the cost of the device, and so on. But because the Alberta government at this point still refers to this treatment as experimental, this young lady and her parents are having to go through the hardship, as the Ferrises did, of putting a second mortgage on their house.

Now, Tenille Tellman, who is a reporter with the Medicine Hat News, has covered this young lady's story. I've been in contact with Tenille a number of times. Most recently I said that based on all the information I had received from the ministry of health, the best we can hope for in the near future is the clinical trial. There does not appear at this time to be any money, and we're talking, with these two individuals combined, approximately \$100,000, contrasted with the billions that are being discussed tonight.

8:10

What I'm getting at is that I wish we could deal with the major crises in people's lives and have some sort of funding, a compassionate fund, and a speedier process in bringing into Alberta what other

provinces and the federal government have taken into account. We have a committee that works with all of the other provinces in terms of drug approvals, we then have a secondary subcommittee here in the province of Alberta, and then we have a committee that reviews the findings of the subcommittee. What's happening is that people are getting lost in the bureaucracy.

Another individual who comes into my constituency, who I see fairly frequently because he shops at the Co-op and the Safeway just around from my house, is a senior. His name is Maurice. Maurice has to go to dialysis three times a week. He hasn't asked for much. All he's asked through Aids to Daily Living is for the government to cover the cost of under \$100 for a cushion that would give him a degree of comfort as he sits for hours in dialysis three times a week. Now, under our Aids to Daily Living a small expenditure like this would improve the quality of life of those people who have to go in for dialysis. These are not major expenditures. We should have funding for it. It should be approved. It shouldn't be a matter of great debate and discussion.

Another bouquet. It's nice to intersperse the concerns with the bouquets. I have an individual who comes into my constituency office approximately once a week. He's a firefighter who's suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder. It's been diagnosed and supported and finally accepted by Workers' Compensation. After years and years and years of getting very little recognition of his difficulties, he talked with the ministry of health. He pointed out that if you are a veteran suffering from posttraumatic stress or if you're an RCMP individual suffering from posttraumatic stress, there is a federally funded program that basically offers counselling, and it's based in Calgary. He had a great discussion; he got right through to the deputy minister, and for that, again, I give the government credit. The ministry is considering providing some provincial funding to support the already existing federal program. They've got the infrastructure. They've got the building. They've got the psychologists. It's just a matter of having some provincial money to support one more group.

As I say, I know that there are a number of firefighters who have been putting their lives on the line. My colleague from Calgary-North Hill has been a champion of firefighters' causes, cancer most recently. He talked about the heart coverage within 24 hours if a person goes down. He proposed legislation. So I'm hoping this is something that the government will embrace, the idea of dealing with people who have put their lives on the line for us yet somehow have gotten lost and shuffled in the system.

I'll change channels now and go to education. We're very aware that the problem is not just limited to Calgary, but the Calgary infrastructure problem, the bill between the Calgary public and Calgary separate school for delayed, defrayed infrastructure maintenance is now over a half a billion dollars. Unfortunately, in the latest supplementary estimates and in the Minister of Education's announcements we're still getting money that does partial repairs. While both the Catholic and the public schools in Calgary are grateful for whatever funding they receive, they don't know from year to year how much money they're going to get. It's very difficult for them to plan. They submit every year their three- to five- year plan to the government, and basically it's a wing and a prayer and a whim as to whether that money is going to come forward. What I've witnessed first-hand with my colleagues when we've toured various schools, for example Western Canada, is piecemeal patching, and I wouldn't want to say that nothing would be better than the something, but what happens is when you have a large roof . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Ms Blakeman: I was interested in the topic that the member was talking on when his time ran out, and I'm wondering if he could just complete that section for me. Finish the statement, in other words. Statements are allowed under 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: If the hon. member would accommodate the request very briefly.

Ms Blakeman: The question is: what is it that he's particularly interested in around the educational deficiencies that he's noticed?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to continue. When we went into Western Canada, we found that the roof had leaked in several places. Patch jobs had been done here, there, and in various places. It's almost like a mini-Katrina in the sense that the dike didn't break in just one spot; it broke in a series of spots. So what happened was that you if repair the spot in the northwest corner, there becomes a problem in the southeast corner. With every leak you end up redoing the work you've done. The gymnasium in Ernest Manning, a similar circumstance.

I went through Brentwood elementary school. The roof over the library leaked. They temporarily fixed it. In the next heavy rainstorm it was the whole west wing that went. What is happening is that every time it rains in Calgary, whether it's a devastating circumstance like the Marlborough elementary school, the partial fixes just become part of a more expensive repair. If you don't do it completely and right the first time, this happens. We know in terms of the infrastructure repairs that that's the half billion dollars. That doesn't even begin to address the \$3 billion that the public schools have put out for the construction of 19 schools. Calgary isn't alone. Edmonton has indicated their difficulties with maintenance, their need for building schools.

When we talk about other areas, roads and infrastructure, we all know, those of us who drive the province to come up to Edmonton for our various meetings, how much in need of repair the highways are. With highway 63, for example, just whacking down a few trees towards the end of Fort McMurray is barely scratching the tip of the iceberg. What needs to be done, at least on a temporary basis, is to have pull-offs. So instead of just concentrating at the Fort McMurray end, throughout that whole highway 63 at least take out some trees, at least put in some temporary compacted gravel pullouts so that people can get off that road.

Schools, infrastructure. The government can find \$11 million for new planes. They can find millions of dollars for waste treatments of a race track out in Balzac that neither the cities of Airdrie nor Calgary wants. There is money. It seems to be available for a whole wide variety of projects but not the ones that are the most necessary. I would suggest that the most necessary projects are the hospitals – the expansion, the staffed beds, the places in the university for the trained individuals to staff those beds – and education. After that, obviously, the third one is the infrastructure, the support the municipalities have been calling for.

I thank the Speaker and my colleague from Edmonton-Centre for allowing me the leeway of expressing my concerns. Thank you.

8:20

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 44, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). We are debating, actually, more than \$1 billion, and this government has given \$6.6 million per minute for debate, which is not enough. Okay? This government has totally failed to manage the budget plan. They keep on repeating the same mistakes again and again. They should have done it during the budget time, but this time again they are asking an additional amount of more than a billion dollars. I think this is not a good thing. They don't want to learn something from the mistakes they have done in the past.

This government, Mr. Speaker, is really a big spender. I think they are number two in Canada. They used to blame the federal Liberals all the time. You know, the federal Liberals are big spenders. But this time this House, this particular additional amount of money, and the budget in the past clearly show that this PC government is a big spender. If we compare it to the other province which is number one, compare it to their total population, this government is the number one spender in the country. They don't spend money according to the plan. They don't spend money wisely. They throw money at the problems. They don't have any long-term sustainable policies, and they don't want to even think. If the opposition members give good ideas, they think the opposition is inflaming the situation. Everything is fine. If you talk about health care, well, we're number one or number two. If you talk about long-term care centres, we are number one. They find out when the Auditor General finds lots and lots of, you know, deficiencies in that department, and they are still not learning.

Let me start with the education side. This government is asking for an additional \$293 million. Any funding for education is welcome. But, still, it's a long way to go because by the time they locate some amount of money for education or health care, by the time the department receives the money, because of inflation and because of price increases, you know, by the time of completion, the prices go up.

I just want to ask the minister concerned to tell me if this additional amount of money is going towards new schools, playgrounds, recreational facilities, school libraries. The reason I'm asking is because my riding, Edmonton-Ellerslie, is growing very fast with lots of new development areas like Summerside and Ellerslie Crossing. There are thousands and thousands of new houses being built there. I mean, when you make a project, I think it is very important that they should have schools, playgrounds, libraries, everything planned before they submit the plan and show it to the public, but it's not happening.

Let me go through this list of my area alone. The funding pressure and priorities are eventually on the MLAs. I was door-knocking in the last, say, two, three weeks, and lots of people are asking me about the school and recreational facilities and libraries in that area, especially in the new development areas, but I don't have the answer.

I talked to the school board trustees, and they have an evaluation project for the year '99-2000. Catholic schools especially have higher maintenance needs. For example, Crawford Plains school is in my riding. The projection for '99-2000 is \$303,000; Daly Grove, \$115,000; Dan Knott, \$741,350; Ekota, \$766,000; Ellerslie school, \$602,000; J. Percy Page, \$285,000; Menisa elementary, \$488,000; Meyokumin elementary, \$354,500; Meyonohk elementary, \$656,000; Pollard Meadows elementary, \$610,000; Sakaw elementary, \$620,800; Satoo, \$381,850; T.D. Baker, \$406,000; Holy Family school, which is a Catholic school, \$818,950; Holy Trinity – that's a Catholic school as well, and they need \$1,096,800. That is the evaluation project for 1999-2000.

What will happen in 2005, 2007? Some projects are due in 2009. I think the price will be more than double. I won't be surprised if the price is three times higher than the projection. The maintenance has increased since 1999 to 2000. Schools in good condition will deteriorate. Those schools might need some money as well.

This is not a good plan. I think this government doesn't believe in plans, but without a plan, if they run this province, we will be back in a deficit one more time. We are lucky that the money is coming from the royalties, but these royalties are not forever.

My next area is Health and Wellness. The additional amount of money that this government is asking for is \$262 million. In this particular area the government didn't give us the breakdown once again. They give us only a few lines, no breakdown. They say: okay; we are going to buy medical equipment. Which medical equipment? Nobody knows, not in full details.

I just want to know because the Grey Nuns hospital is between the Edmonton-Mill Woods riding and the Edmonton-Ellerslie riding. We are the closest ridings in this area. The waiting time in that hospital is more than nine hours, especially on the weekends. When we had a protest in the 1990s, 50,000 people protested against the cuts, and even at that time the waiting time was four hours. Now it's nine hours. We had a complaint from a couple from Calgary. She had a miscarriage. I received a letter actually yesterday or the day before. I tabled that letter I think yesterday, and she had a very similar story. She was waiting in the Grey Nuns hospital for nine hours, and she had the same experience. I mean, if we don't look into these problems and we sit here and just keep on giving speeches and not taking any action, I think we are wasting our time. We should take it very seriously, especially health care and education. They are the top, major issues not only in my riding but all over Alberta.

8:30

Also, it's not clear in this \$262 million. I just want to know whether they are hiring new doctors, nurses, staff in the hospitals, new beds. Well, it's not clear enough. How are you going to distribute among different regions all that amount of \$262 million? It's not clear there which region will get how much, and nothing is mentioned in that report. This is all guess work. You know, guess work doesn't work, especially when we have an institute like this one. My suggestion is that money should go where the money is mostly needed. Okay?

Infrastructure-wise some hospitals need some money for the infrastructure, and it's not clear if the money is going for the infrastructure or not.

Human resources. With this money are they going to give some more wages to doctors, nurses, or any medical professionals? No. Nothing is clear.

Efforts to reduce visits to physicians is a good idea. I would suggest to them, I mean, that they should look at it.

Waiting time to visit the doctor. Some people are saying that there is abuse. I agree with that. If there is abuse, we should review the system very carefully and find out if some people are abusing. We should make sure. We should manage it properly and stop this mismanagement and stop this misuse of money. Especially, you know, we should make some efforts to reduce visits to physicians because when you go to the physician, there are long, long lines. You have to wait there sometimes two, three hours. This is very important.

I think that the main problem for waiting times in the surgeries in the hospital is three things: gambling, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, et cetera. We are making money out of these people. Nobody tries to stop this. Suppose I'm smoking. I have a bad lung. I have to go to

the hospital again and again. The same thing with the other bad habits. I think we should teach Albertans, you know, educate them not to use these things, and we can save lots of money. We can save lots of time as well. All these addictions are the main cause of rush in the hospital, as well as in the doctor's clinic. If some people believe that in the medical system there is fraud or abuse, it must be stopped.

My next issue is the Solicitor General and Public Security. This government is asking for \$4 million in addition to the budget. The budget was only three months ago, and now they want another \$4 million. First, I just want to know where this money is going and where it should go.

Alberta is supposed to be one of the best provinces in the best country. What we see in the newspaper, television, every time we see family violence. I recently heard that family violence is 14 per cent higher. And gang-related crimes, terrorism policy programs, aboriginal crime, organized crimes . . . [Mr. Agnihotri's speaking time expired] Could you give me a little bit more time, sir?

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I recognize her first.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'm wondering if the member can expand on his concerns around what the budgeted amount for Solicitor General is being used for. He seemed to have a number of suggestions on where he could go with that money. If he could expand.

The Deputy Speaker: I saw one other member wishing to participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a), so if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie could briefly answer Edmonton-Centre's question, I'm sure other members would appreciate it.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back on the same – crime, aboriginal crime has also increased. Organized crimes used to be in Edmonton, then some people say they moved to Calgary. Now I heard the news just a couple of days ago, and it's extending to the rural areas. I mean, some people came to this country to enjoy their safety, their real democracy, and welfare of their family, but they don't see that anymore. Of course, we can do that if we are serious on this.

In my particular riding I have seen three or four dead bodies outside their houses. They were shot dead. When we talk to the police, they show us the numbers: "Oh, the graph is going down. Okay? The crime is going down." But if you ask the mothers who lost a son, the wearer knows where the shoe pinches. Still, the police couldn't find the person who shot the young 19-year-old, 20-year-old son. One young guy was shot down at the Mac's store. He was working there.

I want to know how long we will wait and what steps this government is going to take. How can we stop the crime in this province? If we don't stop this crime – I mean, all the members sitting here, they might say: it's not happening to me. Maybe it's not happening to you and me today, but who knows? I go outside and somebody shoots me or somebody shoots somebody else. Then we will realize how serious this problem is. So crime should be the top priority.

Also, when I was door-knocking, the people were complaining about, you know, lots of people stealing their cars, the gang violence, throwing petrol bombs on their houses, shootings taking place, break-ins, thefts. Just two months ago in my own riding one of the young ladies suddenly disappeared. She parked her car outside the bank, and we still can't her. The police say that it's a

homicide. There are many other people like this. So many other people like this. That's not the answer.

When we have a meeting in my riding, the people ask me these questions: "Can you answer this question? Why don't you guys do anything?" So I'm requesting everybody to take crime, this issue, very seriously, and do something about it.

Thank you very much. Thanks again.

8:40

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, on Standing Order 29(2)(a) you've got 13 seconds to make your point.

Dr. Swann: This is supplementary supply, so clearly the question is budgets. How does the hon. member feel this budget in Solicitor General should be spent?

The Deputy Speaker: The time period for Standing Order 29(2)(a) has elapsed. Back onto the debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm always pleased to get a little bit of time to talk about budgets. I had done the calculations that we were talking about, \$6.6 million a minute in Committee of Supply. I'm delighted that as we debate our way through Bill 44, the appropriation bill, and with some estimates of time, I'm hoping that we can bring that down to just debating \$2 million a minute. I've got 15 minutes, and that's going to get me through about \$30 million.

I'd like to focus on my own constituency first, and that's the constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I'd like to talk a little bit about the schools that are in my constituency and then maybe a little bit about some of the particular health issues of the capital. Then, if I get time, I'd like to talk about the situation in Grande Prairie.

When I look at the schools in my constituency, I've got a sort of interesting mix. Because I have what are considered inner city schools, we've already gone through a crisis, if I may call it that, in our infrastructure in the schools. This actually goes back to before I got elected. We were in pretty dire straights, and the community has worked very, very hard to rebuild itself and to develop structures to support a revitalization of the inner city. Coming along with that has been a revitalization of our schools.

We really value our schools as integral parts of our community. They are in many ways community schools. Even if they're not open extended hours, they do tend to be a focus for us. For example, St. Catherine, which is a very diverse elementary/junior high school in my riding, hosts several family fun days throughout the year in conjunction with the local community league and the community action coalition, which is a loose association of individuals and organizations working in the community. I note that along with the Boyle Street Co-op and the Edmonton Viets Association they also support a series of awards, and they co-sponsor the July 1 barbecue that happens, in fact, on the grounds of the school.

So our schools are really integrated, and therefore we need those buildings to keep standing. Now, what happened was that we went through a consolidation of schools and for much heartache – it was a real tragedy – one of our schools, Queen Mary Park, was in fact closed and the junior high school portion of John A. McDougall school was closed, so we lost those out of our community. The idea was that we were to sort of share resources more, and that's how the central inner-city schools were going to start to share things like art teachers and choral practice and bands and that kind of thing and actually move the kids around.

But on infrastructure we have Oliver elementary/junior high, and the junior high, of course, is the Nellie McClung program. That school has had an enormous investment in the building itself: new windows, better weatherproofing, some structural changes, a boiler and that kind of thing, so it's actually in pretty good shape. St. Catherine was also due for an upgrade, and of course once they started to get the walls open, they realized how much trouble they were in. I think what was supposed to be a six-month renovation program turned into almost a year and a half while they dealt with asbestos and a new boiler and then some problems with the flooring, and it just went on and on. That has now been totally revamped, and we're very grateful for it.

Of course, we had a major reno of St. Joseph's high school, which is one of the oldest high schools in the city and at one time was the major high school for Catholic boys in the city and has a very, very proud heritage. So those three schools have all had a fair amount of injection of funds, and as a result they can continue to serve the community very well.

What was supposed to be the showpiece and, in fact, was a major plank in the 2001 Conservative platform was the Victoria school for the performing arts, which continues to be more than a disappointment, Mr. Speaker. It is now becoming an eyesore. With a huge injection of I think it was \$64 million that was talked about at one point, this was going to be the Juilliard of the north, and a number of highfalutin promises got one of the Tory backbenchers elected and then defeated. That school continues to not have anything. It just sits there. I mean, I don't know what the government plans on doing with it now. You know, when I look at any indicator that is offered to us that we've been able to glean, if we look at the raw scores from the '99-2000 evaluation, it ranks as very poor, with a score of 1,240 points. Well, the "poor" index starts at 800 points, so you're well into this category with how bad the situation was with this school in '99-2000. We're now six years on from that one.

When we look at the maintenance reaudit that was done as an upgrade in 2000, we were looking at \$17,125,000 of necessary maintenance events that were required to happen in the next five years, so pretty expensive stuff. This school is in tough, tough shape. All they've managed to do is knock down one part of it now. That's the big improvement there: so much for the Juilliard of the north. This school is offering excellent programming and, frankly, unique programming. Some of the pre-eminent families in Edmonton have got their kids going to a school where you can't stand too close to the windows because they've been known to fall right out of the building and into the parking lot below, which is a pretty sad state for a school in our capital city in a province with as much money as we've got.

I don't know what the problem is over there or what happened to the great plans and all of the great promises. This is an absolute tragedy and a huge failure on the part of the government, and still we have no concrete plans and no real idea in the community of what is supposed to be forthcoming, when we will actually see improvements to the school or a new school entirely. I don't think there are enough words that we could come up with to describe what a complete miscalculation and boondoggle this has been for this government.

I note that one of my other schools, Grandin, is on a list to have some kind of improvements come up for it I think in '08-09 or '09-10. So it's coming, but again it's an old school. I mean, these are all these red brick schools with the lovely cornice pieces on them, but they're old. The boilers are old. The air exchange systems are old. The windows are old. They need major upgrades or they have to be redone, and at this point it's a better investment to upgrade them.

For Grandin, when I look at the difference between what was the estimated maintenance in '99-2000 and what was the new estimated maintenance in 2005, again for a five-year plan, it's almost doubled, more than doubled. It was \$353,123 in '99-2000. In the 2005 reaudit, if you want to call it that, we're up to \$736,695. It's ranking at 10.29 on the FCI scale, which is into the poor category. You've basically got under 5 per cent, 5 to 10 per cent, and over 10 per cent. This is in the very poor category. It's costing us more and more money to maintain it. It's considered in very poor condition. Something needs to happen there.

You know, these are very good schools. They've served us very well. They've certainly waited and bided their time on the list for a very long period of time. Some of them have been addressed, but there is one glaring, glaring problem and total lack of planning and follow-through from the government and another one that certainly needs to be on that list and get some attention to it quickly. I don't see any of that forthcoming in the budget that's been put forward to us although there's so little detail in the budget that perhaps I've missed something. I'd be happy to be corrected – and I'm sure that my schools would be delighted to hear me be corrected – that in fact there was actually going to be some action on either of those two schools in there.

8:50

I want to note that I have some schools that really don't have buildings that qualify on this Richter scale, and that is things like the Boyle Street charter school, which has been in the news recently for celebrating its 10th anniversary. That's a school that really came out of the community. It came out of a defined need. It's unique. It provides a really important service to the community that it is in. They have been wise enough to define success in a way that works for them, and more power to them. I'm very proud of the work they did, and my hat is off to Hope Hunter and her wisdom in launching this school out of the Boyle Street Co-op. It now operates in a different site entirely and I think is actually managed by a different board, so it's actually taken flight and is off on its own. That was a great community vision.

When I look at the health region needs for Capital health, there we're looking at a deficit of \$65 million, so that's certainly not going to be covered by the money that's been offered up in this budget. My question, as always, is: what is it that the government was expecting that Capital health would not do? You know, the government has devolved and created these delegated administrative organizations of the health regions, like the children's regions and God knows what other regions. It was meant to devolve responsibility for things, but ultimately they can't get it done if they don't have the funding to do it.

I'm always curious when, you know, they ask the regions to come up with a budget of how much money they need and why and defend all of this, and the regions do. The region asks for – I'm sorry; I can't remember off the top of my head what Capital asked for. Let's say 10 per cent, and the government says: "Hmm. No. Six." Well, what are they supposed to do with the 4 per cent that they didn't get? What is it that the government envisioned that they wouldn't offer or they would cut back, or how many beds or services were they not supposed to do and in what area? It's a very bizarre way of budgeting, with very little communication going back and forth. So we've got a \$65 million deficit with Capital, and obviously this budget is not going to cover anywhere near all of it. What does the government think the Capital region is supposed to do with the rest of that money or with the lack of the rest of that money?

We're certainly seeing pressure points. Edmonton is serving most of the north. We've already had some problems. I've asked

questions in the House about the number of code burgundies, which have increased, the issues around the ambulance authorities, about the wait times in the emergency rooms. The Sturgeon hospital in St. Albert had to close its surgical unit over one of the August long weekends. We've got a growing and an aging population here. We serve a very high aboriginal population in this city. We've got issues with emergency room wait times, bed shortages, health professional workforce planning. Our health professionals' vacancy rate is 4.5 per cent.

Alberta Health did allocate in October of last year, basically 11 months ago, an additional \$647 million. Now, that was out of last year's budget, and the goal was to add a number of new beds to help us reach a 1.9 per 1,000 acute-care bed ratio. I don't know how close we're going to get to that. There are a number of construction projects, but the earliest they'll be available – the earliest they'll be available, and this isn't all of them – is 2007, including an elective surgical centre at the Royal Alex, more beds and increased ICU at the Royal Alexandra, the Misericordia, the Grey Nuns, and the U of A hospitals. That's all of them. We need some work at the Eastwood primary care centre. We need the 38-bed replacement hospital still working its way through the system in Fort Saskatchewan and the one in Sherwood Park. All of this just from Capital, and I'm not even talking about the other health regions in the province.

Everybody flaps their hands and says, "Well, we're working on it" and "Give us some time" and "Gee, only the Liberals plan; we'll have to scramble to catch up." Well, get on it. This is not acceptable for a government that's been in power for as long as this government has to be this far behind the eight ball in planning and implementation.

What I would like to do is actually just go back and talk about my schools again and some of the unique strengths and programs. I started to talk about Boyle Street. One of the things that we found – and it's a small funding thing, but it matters when you don't have any money and you can't do it – with a number of the kids that we serve, for example, that a lot of them come with very high needs. We have . . . [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'd be interested in knowing if Edmonton is experiencing a similar problem to Calgary. For example, our Tom Baker cancer centre at the Calgary Foothills hospital can no longer cope either with infrastructure or with individuals working within the centre. Is there any equivalent shortage for cancer treatment? Also, does the member know of any place in this budget or any other place where the Premier's promise to invest a half a billion dollars in cancer treatment has shown up? I haven't seen it show up in Calgary. I'm wondering if you've seen any evidence of that money or cancer program extensions in Edmonton?

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks for the questions. I'll try and answer them. In Edmonton the Cancer Board is ahead of Calgary in its implementation of a new centre. We know where it's going to be located. The land is secured; the drawings have been done; the plans have been done. For that kind of a facility it's a long planning horizon because those are complex structures to build, and the idea was that there would be research space incorporated into that. So that work is well on its way. They've now got the sign up, actually, that's sort of announcing what's going to go in the space. So we are progressing on that, and I have to say that I think that the Cancer Board is actually managing to look after itself better than some of

the health regions have been able to. Their support is a bit more secured. The capital infrastructure money for the Cross was secured sometime back, and I know that it's a little less secure and that they're in a different part of the planning process for Tom Baker. So for those of you in Calgary it's harder to see because it's not as much in front of you.

The second part of the question was: where is the money? Yeah. Again, I think that we're early enough in the implementation of the various plans that the Cancer Board has for that endowment that you can't really see any of it now, but we do know that the two facilities are progressing. Edmonton is ahead of Calgary on that one.

So I hope that's actually answered your questions.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Dr. Swann: A quick question. I know that the hon. member is from the arts community. I'm wondering what her sense of investments in the arts is in relation to this budget.

Ms Blakeman: I can't possibly answer that question in the few seconds we have left. This government has consistently failed to invest in the arts considering the enormous return that's been proven in so many other locations across the world that you get for an investment in the arts. The arts funding has essentially been stagnant in this province. There was a \$3 million increase in the budget that we saw in the spring onto a budget that had essentially been stagnant since the late '80s. I mean, there hasn't even been inflation-proofing in that money. It's really a shell game following that because there have been things added into that budget, different sections or branches added into it and then taken out like the film division, for example. So money appears to be added into it, but then it disappears when the program is taken out and moved somewhere else.

9:00

We must at least double the funding to the arts without fail. I would at this point argue that the funding to the arts should be tripled considering what kind of a payback we can get from that investment. It's definitely worth it. If we're really proud of our heritage in Alberta, we should be investing in our artists to tell our stories to ourselves, to create those stories and to tell them to us. So that's the creation of it and the development of it, the touring inside of the province but also the touring outside of the province.

If we really want to see our cultural industries flourish, we need to be supporting the conduits that get that out as well, and I'm talking about the publishing industry, the recording industry, the film industry, and fine crafts. Those are our cultural industries, and we've absolutely failed them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the debate.

Ms Pastoor: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm going to talk about the debt that remains after the attempt to eliminate this provincial government's debt. There remains a large infrastructure debt, school buildings being only one of many neglected areas.

When I was on the Lethbridge city council, the operations staff created and used a sort of template for the ongoing monitoring of every public building, a 25-year window based on the known data of how buildings and materials will deteriorate. There was proper planning and management. The most important component was that the money was budgeted forward, and there were no surprises, like a roof caving in on kids trying to learn.

In Lethbridge school boards 51 and Holy Spirit have made some progress in relation to this issue, but maintenance planning and managing remains unresolved because it is impossible without the proper funding. Dollars are needed to catch up, and a stable budgeting process for sustainable dollars to take Lethbridge schools into the future is imperative.

My riding is home to 18 schools. A reaudit from the year 2000 used the facility condition index, which is a tool that determines exactly how much maintenance is needed. It's calculated by dividing the dollar amount of total required maintenance by the replacement value of the building, and there is a sort of an evaluation based on: under 5 per cent is good, over 5 per cent is fair, and 10 per cent is poor. So with that information, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to discuss some of the schools in my riding of Lethbridge-East.

The Ecole Agnes Davidson school has an FCI of 11.14 per cent. Fleetwood Bawden is good; it's only 0.38 per cent. Galbraith elementary is 5.27. Lakeview elementary is 10.38. Some of these schools have not had their reaudits. Lethbridge Christian school has not had that reaudit. Senator Buchanan elementary is at 8.8.

Westminster elementary is at 10.31. Westminster elementary is an amazing small school. When you go into assembly – they are so fortunate there – it almost looks like the United Nations. It is a very multi-ethnic school, and they have some wonderful things going on there. So the fact that they need maintenance at 10.31, which is very, very poor, is sad when you realize how much they're giving the children that come from the lower socioeconomic area of our city.

Park Meadows elementary has not been reaudited. Gilbert Paterson middle school, 6.59; Wilson middle school, 6.71; Allan Watson, 5.97; Lethbridge Collegiate Institute, 1.80.

Winston Churchill and Catholic Central high schools have not been reaudited, and I would suspect the reason is that, yes, we are fortunate in Lethbridge, and we are getting two new high schools on the west side, a Catholic high school and a public high school which will be joined in the middle by a library. However, the school isn't built yet. It will be another two or three years. Already it's probably full to the rafters, and we haven't even got the ground turned over yet.

Ecole St. Mary school is at 10.63, very, very poor. Our Lady of Assumption, 16.8. St. Francis junior high and St. Paul schools were not done.

So out of a number of 12 we've got five at poor, five at fair, and only two at good, and then of course the other ones haven't been done. I don't think that's a very good record to be proud of when we've got kids trying to learn. They are our future.

In Medicine Hat is a different story for some reason. Out of 12 schools they have three poor, three fair, and six good. Interesting. I don't know the ages of these schools, so I hope that they are much older than the ones that I have in Lethbridge-East.

The McCoy high school is 2.9 per cent. That's good. Mother Teresa and St. Francis Xavier have not been done. St. Louis school is .03 per cent; to me it sort of sounds like it's brand new. St. Mary's junior high school, 3.61; St. Michael's, 7.76. St. Patrick's school is .60 per cent. St. Thomas Aquinas has not been done.

In the public schools the Alexandra junior high school is at 8.2 per cent. Central Park school was not done. Connaught school is 19.38 per cent; that is even higher than poor. Crestwood school is 14.42 per cent. Again, that is exceedingly high. Earl Kitchener school has not been done. Elm Street school is 0.93 per cent. Again, I'm just guessing, because it needs so little maintenance, that it's a brand new school. George Davison elementary has not been done. Georges Vanier has not been done. Herald school, 15.16 per cent. Medicine Hat high school, 7.9 per cent. River Heights elementary has not been done. Riverside school, 4.13 per cent. The ones that have not

been reaudited are Ross Glen school, Southview community school, Vincent Massey school, and Webster Niblock school.

Now, these reaudits have been performed since 2001. I would suspect that that's not a very good record to have them all done when they've had over five years to get them done.

There is \$232 million in this supplemental funding for school upgrades and renovations, and \$232 million is something I can't even comprehend. It is so huge. However, I think that putting those dollar figures out is only a distraction. What I want to know is: for that \$232 million what were the outcomes? I don't want to just know the amounts because you can throw out huge amounts of dollars and huge percentages. What did those dollars really deliver? Obviously, not fixing up many of the schools that I've just referred to. Who got the dollars, and which school was considered of the highest need in this province, and if it was evaluated throughout the province and not within regions, did it really get the dollars that it needed?

What are these dollars for? At this point it would appear that they're only for catch-up maintenance. But what's required? How many dollars are required to go forward in some sort of a planned fashion? When is this work going to be done? Is there any time frame that this work could be done in? Is there any time frame that would include the dollars that they need to actually have it done? Of course, in this labour market I understand, as everyone else does, that there are huge costs to try to actually get these jobs done, and the longer you let it go, the more expensive it will be because labour is diminishing, and obviously salaries are rising.

Where is the plan? Why do we really need these plans? I think it's because we need the information to be able to budget forward. It has to be in a sustainable fashion. It cannot just be for maintenance. There has to be dollars that will recognize that there is growth in these schools. I don't think there's a school in this province that isn't growing, and the fact that we close small community schools and make young children bus is a disgrace, a total disgrace.

9:10

Another thing that I believe is that our kids deserve much, much better than portables. Please. Portables. These are windowless ATCO trailers, so let's call them what they really are. Trailers are expensive to heat, and the air exchange at any time is certainly questionable at best. It's very hard to learn when you're sleepy because the air is not fresh.

The point is that there is no long-term plan. In fact, there isn't even a short-term plan, and I'm not even sure that there is any plan at all. So far the dollars are only for catch-up, and that is not good enough. So don't quote me dollars.

Tell me what your outcomes are. Are our schools really good enough for our students to learn in? Are our schools good enough, and are they really safe for all of our students that are going to be our future? After all, we need the labour force. We need these kids to be graduating. We need them to accept apprenticeships. We need these kids well educated. They have to be educated in an atmosphere that is conducive to learning.

Mr. Speaker, I'll leave these questions out there. Maybe this government will consider these as crucial issues and actually come up with a plan that includes outcomes, which would reflect that all the maintenance is finally caught up and that there actually is forward thinking.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29.

Mr. Chase: If I could under Standing Order 29 ask the hon. Member

for Lethbridge-East if she has a sense from her constituents of being left out of the boom? When I was speaking to residents of Crownsnest Pass, they expressed great concerns about the lack of twinning of highway 3. There was a definite envy of the power corridor between Calgary and Edmonton. I'm just wondering, in talking with your constituents and talking in your outreach with people from Medicine Hat, if they're feeling that the southern part of the province is left out when it comes to highway infrastructure.

Ms Pastoor: When I was on city council, I sat on the twinning committee for that highway 3. I'm trying to think. It was probably eight, nine years ago when we first sat on that. Then it was a huge issue. Now it is a huge issue, and they're still sitting at the table talking about highway 3 being twinned. It isn't just a question of: gosh, it would be nice to get through. It's a question that it isn't safe anymore, but then highway 2 is not safe either. I have to drive here every now and again, and the last time I came up on a Sunday, I clocked in at 140, and I was with the traffic. I was not leading it; I was in the pack. I was bumper to bumper, and I had guys beside me. I could barely move in and out, and I was clocked at 140. [interjections] That's not the point. The point is that that highway has to be enlarged the same as highway 3. I'm following trailers with three pups, and I'm telling you that they're going 140. It's not safe. It's the same as highway 3. The highway is obsolete. There's too much traffic on it to accommodate the traffic. It's obsolete.

However, highway 3 has exactly the same problems. The trucks that are coming through from B.C. will obviously increase if and when we ever get the Canamex up and the highway running, which of course is another whole issue that I'd love to discuss at some point. I want everybody in this House to go to Germany and go on the autobahn. That's what a highway looks like. Highway 3 must be twinned. They're still talking about it. Where's the money? Show me the money for highway 3, and I'll be happy, and so will everybody else along that corridor. We'll feel, finally, that southern Alberta is a part of this province because we're outside of the magic corridor.

The Deputy Speaker: On 29(2)(a).

Dr. Swann: To the hon. member. Water is a key issue in southern Alberta. What would you like to have seen in the supplementary budgets in relation to water and water protection?

Ms Pastoor: Where do you go with water in southern Alberta? We hope that we can go to our reservoirs. We hope that these dams that we've put up are going to be enough. It isn't. It's oversubscribed. The water is oversubscribed.

One of the things that I found interesting with the international committee was that the Americans actually came to us and asked us if we would help them with their water storage because they are wasting it. They know that we are lucky – and I give credit fully to the government for this. Actually, I think it was under the Lougheed government. Anyway, we are lucky that we have had enough dollars to put in to create storage and pipes that will save our water. The Americans are still using wooden storage if, in fact, it's not out in the open. Some of our irrigation ditches and all of those are now enclosed. So we are very fortunate. But the fact that the Americans realize that they're wasting the water which is part of our water basin I think is a very, very serious issue.

Water, as we all know, is the oil of tomorrow, and if we're not smart now, we are going to be in deep, deep trouble. The majority of people are not going to be able to buy bottled water, so what are they going to do? It's a huge, huge issue.

I'm proud to say that at the Lethbridge water treatment plant as

much water as we take out of the river we can put back in, and it has been treated. However, all along that river we have many, many feedlots that are not contributing to clean water.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Lethbridge-East, I'm not sure if *Hansard* is a document that the local RCMP regularly review for confessions, but perhaps you can take that up with the Solicitor General.

Ms Pastoor: I'm not afraid of the RCMP. It's those new sheriffs that scare the hell out of me.

The Deputy Speaker: On the debate, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to speak to Bill 44, supplementary supply. It's about sharing the Alberta advantage, and I guess that the questions we have to address today have to do with the role of government in ensuring that we all share in a well-planned, well-invested future. I want to talk about several areas. One is my constituents. The second has to do with their social concerns, some aspects of the schools, how this supplementary budget fails to deal with some of those issues, and finally some closing comments on the environment, which is also very close to the hearts of many of my constituents.

How are we managing? How are we managing our capital, our financial, human, and natural capital? If we're not balancing those three – financial, human, and natural capital – we are not really managing for the future. How are we sustaining in our planning these vital resources for the future, and why are we continuing to focus on gross domestic product as the measure of our success? When a forest fire increases our gross domestic product and more ambulance services and more casualties increase our gross domestic product, this is a very false measure of how we're doing. If we're planning and spending on the basis of gross domestic product, we are planning to fail. In fact, as we've said repeatedly in the House, what we're doing here in supplementary supply is recognizing the failure of planning and continuing to overspend based on nonrenewable resources. This is a serious issue for all of us in Alberta, and more and more people are asking for leadership in this province on planned, sustained funding.

We need to look at a future without oil. Clearly, that's coming within the next few decades. More and more people are saying that we need to see people and the environment and the educational processes as investments, not as expenses in this province. In that context, then, we need to look at policies and investments that reduce demand, increase efficiency, and increase investment in renewables. So it's in that context that I want to raise questions from people in my constituency in relation to their school systems and the health care system and the environment.

9:20

In the context, then, of our ideological commitment in this province to business over public interest, what has resulted is a counterproductive cycle in which there is increased competition and focus on money. There's a lack of trust now and an erosion of community. There is uncontrolled growth as a result of what we've seen in the oil sands primarily, but it's a reflection of the overall philosophy of this government to grow at all costs. Well, in medicine growth at all costs is called cancer, and as I've mentioned, it causes an erosion of community, a decrease in the health status of people, and an increase in health care demands, which is exactly what we're seeing. This needs to be cut off through a serious commitment to larger thinking about what our future holds and what

our budgeting has to do with where we invest our dollars and how we increase the capacity of communities to care for themselves and care for the future. Compounding these factors is the struggle of our disadvantaged in this province: growing frustration and despair in those who cannot cope with the existing status quo; persons with developmental disability and their caregivers, abominably paid in this province; AISH recipients stuck at a thousand dollars a month, half of the poverty line. How are they expected to live in quality and health? Those on social assistance and unemployable and homeless youth are increasing. How is this reflective of our commitment to Albertans and to the future? This is a social deficit that we have to begin to address. We have paid off some of our financial debt. We have only begun to address social and infrastructure and health deficits as well as environmental deficits in this province.

The national report on welfare was a scandalous, scathing indictment of the way we are managing our most disadvantaged in this society. Where is the supplemental supply for the most critical and disadvantaged in our society? We have essentially decided that they're only worth 50 per cent of the support we gave them in 1986. Well, we gave ourselves 5.5 per cent this year. What does this say about a government and their morality?

Students are also coming increasingly to say that the stresses they're under have to be alleviated in some way. We have to minimize and assist them in getting through to be more productive citizens without an obsession with money after they graduate, which is what we're creating with high debt loads. Medical students and residents have indicated this week that they graduate with over \$100,000 debt in most cases. Like other postgraduate students they are not given the opportunity of waiting till after they graduate to start paying down their debt. This is adding a tremendous toll in terms of their mental stress, and it has to be addressed as well.

Infrastructure clearly has been an important part of what has to be addressed in the supplemental supply, and we have to acknowledge that many good investments have been made to patch up the neglected infrastructure over the past decade. Schools, for example, have identified some of the key challenges. Most dominant in my mind in my constituency is the Marlborough school, which had to be closed down because of significant risks from the roof. It was leaking and potentially going to fall in.

The Calgary board of education released statistics on many others in my area. Nine were generally fixed this past year, and I commend the government for making the appropriate investments there. However, six are still in serious disrepair.

Ms Blakeman: Which six?

Dr. Swann: The Chris Akkerman elementary school, a raw score of 470, with \$700 million needed to be fixed; Albert Park elementary, at a score of 830, with over a million dollars in needed repairs; David Oughton elementary, also in Calgary-East, 570 the score, with over one and a half million dollars needed in repairs; Belfast elementary, Calgary-East, 560 the raw score, with \$1.1 million in repairs needed; Sir John Franklin in Calgary-East, 440 score, with \$1.2 million deficit spending; and Holy Redeemer in Calgary-East, at 740 raw score, with \$1.4 million deficit.

In my own region of Calgary-Mountain View are another seven schools that clearly have been neglected: the Briar Hill elementary, with a raw score of 490, nearly a million dollars deficit maintenance budget; Queen Elizabeth elementary and Queen Elizabeth high, both in the 700s as a raw score with, respectively, \$1.3 million and \$3.2 million in maintenance deficits; the Hillhurst community school, a raw score of 480, with \$900,000 in deficit maintenance; Rosedale school, one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in the city, with

serious neglect in their school at over \$677,000 in deficit; Crescent Heights high school, a very well-recognized school in Calgary, significant underspending with a \$3.08 million deficit; finally, the most needy school, Christine Meikle for the handicapped, in my constituency, with a raw score of 920, amounting to a \$1.29 million deficit in spending. This reflects some of what still needs to be caught up in both my constituency of Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-East.

In relation, then, to Environment, which is, I think, woefully underfunded and on which our very future depends, I'm very disappointed to see the minimal supplementary investments. This whole ministry needs to be reviewed and a significant expansion of their scope in monitoring, in inspection strategies, and enforcement of our environmental legislation.

Most critically, our water inventory, is still very much behind. We still have no idea what's going on in our groundwater around this province. We continue to make allocations and give out licences. We continue to fail to measure how much water is being used in our province in spite of knowing that with climate change and predictions both in terms of glacial loss and changes in precipitation we're going to be facing a serious water crisis in the next couple of decades. We need to get a serious handle on water, both surface and groundwater, in order to manage it in a sustainable way.

Watersheds need to be critically examined for their protection and for sustainable practices that will ensure that our major communities continue to get water into the future. A recent foothills study that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and I attended in Chain Lakes raised very stark predictions about continued development in the southern foothills of Alberta and the need to seriously look at legislation that protects these from both foresting and other resource activity if we're going to have water quality and water quantity in the future.

The Rosebud community continues to be troubled by ongoing gaseous and deficient water in spite of the reassurance of the Department of Environment. They have not been able to do the adequate testing. They have still not been able to conclusively say whether or not the water has been damaged by resource activity. This is unacceptable. The people in Rosebud continue to wonder about their water, and there's increasing evidence that government is not being up front about what they're finding in people's water.

I was today meeting with scientists at the University of Alberta who see significant evidence that gas migration continues to occur in our groundwater. There is a resistance to talking about this in the public. The government is continuing to be challenged on the basis that it is siding with industry in silence and not recognizing that this represents a serious threat to long-term water independence in this province.

We again need an independent committee to look at this. The level of trust, especially in the rural areas among landowners, is at its all-time low in terms of the investigation of these water bodies that appear to have been damaged, some by resource activity, some by age and decline in well quality, but these need to be sorted out by all means and quickly if we're going to get restored confidence in rural areas and get back in a constructive way to look at a balanced development in rural areas. So I would again acknowledge that the Environment department is working hard, but it is failing because it lacks the resources and the political will, I would argue, to actually call it what it is. We've had some resource damage to water in our province, and there's an unwillingness to identify and state that and move towards constructive solutions.

A number of rural communities around Calgary have raised concerns about water and other developments in the area. When it's acknowledged by the government that we have overallocated the South Saskatchewan River, there is obvious concern about how we

are going to manage continued demands for business and development, confined feeding operations. Any industry is going to need is going to need some water, and we have no idea at this time how we are going to make these difficult decisions about who gets to develop a business and who doesn't.

So those represent my significant comments on supplemental supply, and I thank you for the opportunity to raise this.

9:30

Ms Blakeman: Interbasin water transfers.

Dr. Swann: Interbasin transfers of water have been raised as I've just been reminded. Obviously, taking water to people is not a long-term sustainable solution. It is never going to be supported on this side of the House. We must begin to live within the means that we've been given. We cannot at a huge expense transfer water and disrupt ecosystems and create the conditions that are not sustainable, where people continue to grow and develop businesses because new water has come and then the endless cycle of expecting water to come to people instead of asking people and their businesses to move to where the water is.

So that is not a solution. It's obviously being discussed because we are increasingly stretched in southern Alberta even as it is, not even considering the considerable losses we've had over the century and will continue to experience with climate change in this next 10 to 20 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned landowners' concerns in Calgary. My constituency has a big issue of low-income homes and affordable houses especially, and I would really appreciate it if he could draw some attention in this House, please.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Very much a concern in Calgary, obviously. I have many people who are living in handicapped conditions in my constituency, many who are being squeezed out of their accommodation as a result of the massive increases in rent. It's a very serious issue for the municipal, provincial, and federal governments to get a handle on as quickly as possible. People are suffering. People are living with extreme anxiety. One family, a young couple, both working and three children, is going to be forced to be out on the street if they cannot – even though they have jobs, they are low-paying jobs. They simply can't afford \$1,850 a month, which now the rental accommodations in central Calgary are demanding.

So we need to find creative solutions. We need to assist some of the granny flats to get established. I know that the government has been making some strides in that. I think that's important. I guess I would argue that we need to collaborate as much as possible with all three levels of government to try and get our own investments as governments and ensure that the development community steps up and makes their contribution of 5 to 10 per cent affordable housing in any new housing developments.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View commented on our trip last Friday to Chain Lakes, where we talked to environmentalists, local ranchers about their concerns with regard to water and also maintenance of the natural

grassland. My question to the hon. member is: when we travel together to places like Ponoka and Turner Valley, Nanton, Trochu, Drayton Valley, can you comment on the unanimous concern of the extent and the potential for pollution of underground aquifers that we are hearing at those meetings attended by hundreds of individuals?

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you for the question. I guess the overriding concern that we experienced in the rural areas is a lack of confidence that what they're hearing from government is the truth, a sense of being reassured, that we know what we're doing, that groundwater is understood, that casing of wells is going along properly, that there's not been any identified well contamination from resource activity. So the overriding concern is a real cynicism.

Again, that comes down to addressing it head-on instead of pretending it doesn't exist and that these farmers are really imagining things and setting up an independent committee to look at these issues, some independent science, and reporting back in a timely way to actually, explicitly say: "These wells have been damaged by resource activity. These have not. Back off. These are the lessons we've learned from those wells that have been damaged, and this is the way that we're going to legislate protection and monitoring and enforcement in the future." Learn from what we've done, and move ahead.

I think that everyone believes that our resources are wonderful and that they should be developed. The question is: at what rate and under what supervision, under what standards and conditions to minimize threats to our lifeblood? These rural people know where their lifeblood is, and it's not in oil and gas. They feel violated in many respects by this unwillingness to accept genuine concerns and in fact genuine science that's saying: "We have some damage done. What are we going to do about it?" When are we going to face up to it and address the oil and gas industry and the public in an honest way and say: "This is what we're doing about it. We're going to confront it. We're going to deal with it, and we're going to solve it"? It's going to be a win-win for industry, for the public, and for the government.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I hope I've still got enough time. I notice that there is an additional subsidy of the horse-racing industry contemplated in this budget, with \$4.8 million for infrastructure assistance for municipal waste water to support a project in the MD of Rocky View that includes a horse-racing track and equine centre. Could I get our water guy to comment on the anticipated effect of this?

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. The time for Standing Order 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

Are there others who wish to participate in the debate?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 9:39 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, August 30, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/08/30

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special family that's visiting from Calgary today. It's my absolute pleasure to introduce my friends Al, Noelle, Kathleen, and Nicholas Mah. They've made a special trip to our Legislature so that they can tour the Legislature. I think we'll even be going to your office this afternoon, seeing where you are as well. The children are very interested in that. I'm very glad that you're all here today, and I ask that you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two aboriginal leaders who have been involved in aboriginal issues, working for the government. Tom Ghostkeeper and Clifford Supernault are both working towards retirement and will be leaving the government. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In response to the Turner Valley Gas Plant's environmental contamination of the Sheep River and its surrounding area a group of residents from Black Diamond and Turner Valley have come together to address their concerns over site cleanup, drinking water supply, and environmental integrity. Two of them are joining us today, and I would ask them to please rise as I call their names. Linda Abrams is the leader of the Sheep River foundation, which is a group of area residents that formed specifically to address the contamination of the Sheep River and the surrounding area by the gas plant, and Roxanne Walsh is a member of the Turner Valley Gas Plant Committee for a Safe Historic Site. This committee is attempting to get stakeholders and community members together to come up with a solution that not only contains the problems but reclaims the Turner Valley Gas Plant as a historic site that is safe for visitors and also for those who swim or recreate in the Sheep River. I am pleased to introduce them to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, and I ask that you join in welcoming them to this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly today guests from the Good Samaritan care centre in Mill Woods. The guests today are Dwayne Danforth, Rowena Emmons, Harold Ferguson, Earline Kwasnycia, and Linda McClinton. I'd ask these guests to stand or wave as they receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Dr. Gene Kalita, a well-known psychologist in the Edmonton region. Would you please rise, doctor, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, over the past few months I've been meeting with a number of municipal leaders who comprise the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability. Again this afternoon, immediately following question period, that minister's council will be getting together to deal with important issues related to municipalities. It's my pleasure to introduce one of the members who has joined us today, who I will ask to rise very shortly. I would like to point out that the president of AUMA, Mr. Bob Hawkesworth, was planning to be with us and will be participating in the meeting, but I understand that he has the pleasure of changing a tire on QE II at the present time, so he'll be a little bit late. We do have Mr. Don Johnson, who is the president of the AAMDC, with us in the gallery.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's interesting to note that in preparation for this afternoon's meeting this morning I read a speech that was given by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in 1962, reporting on the work of his advisory council, that was structured very similarly to the one that we have ongoing now, so history does have a sense of repeating itself from time to time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Diane Martin. Diane is the current president of the Alberta Lymphedema Association. The Alberta Lymphedema Association is a not-for-profit charitable organization founded in 2003 by a team of people who recognized the need to help people living with or at risk of lymphedema. The ALA works to make a difference and to empower affected individuals and their families to help manage this condition and is committed to ongoing education of its stakeholders. Diane has been affected by lymphedema for the past four years and has worked tirelessly since her diagnosis to effect change in the community. She's also the co-founder, along with Kirsten Hausmann, of the lymphedema therapists association. She's in the public gallery. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Services in Grande Prairie

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The conditions in Alberta's health regions due to acute staffing shortages continue to deteriorate. Physicians in Grande Prairie feel that they have no support from

local MLAs, no input into medical affairs, and they fear someone will die before the provincial government addresses the crisis. In a letter from the president of the Peace Country region medical organization, which I will table, the president states that “the growing deficit of family physicians has reached a crisis where whole communities may soon be without any physician.” My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that these physicians express concern that “many existing services are only one physician or one nurse short of complete collapse,” will the minister finally admit that this government has failed the people of the Grande Prairie region?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the contrary. I would acknowledge that there are pressures in Grande Prairie. There are pressures in Fort McMurray. There are pressures in Calgary, quite frankly. You don't add 92,000 people to a province within one year and not have pressures on workforce. We are not unique. We are part of a North American phenomenon where workforce issues are a problem. We are taking action.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that Peace Country health was unable to retain its only child psychiatrist for the entire region, will the minister admit that this government has failed children needing mental health services in the Grande Prairie region?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. A very interesting comment from Senator Kirby in the time that he worked on the mental health commission was that in fact Alberta is doing more for mental health services than anywhere else in the country. Clearly, there have been issues in Grande Prairie retaining a child psychiatrist. I spoke to the psychiatrist that remains there. We have been networking with Capital health region to put a bridge over troubled waters, if you will, for the kinds of needs that are either for the acute system or the mental health care system, and we have been working as best we can to provide that support measure when urgent cases come to the attention.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the intensive care unit and the surgical departments in Grande Prairie were both forced to close for a week earlier this month and face the same situation again, will the minister admit that this government has failed the Grande Prairie region's most critically ill residents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Over the last several weeks we have done a considerable amount of work with the Grande Prairie region. My deputy was there yesterday listening to the doctors, getting some of their ideas about attracting more physicians. It's not unusual in the summertime to find that the pressures in health regions are increasing because of absenteeism of some of the physicians and nurses and other health care professionals who choose to take holidays. But I'd have to acknowledge that the most important thing we . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, thank you so much.

The thing that I find most impressive is that the Capital health region has been assisting that region where needs can be met, providing locum support, and our rural physician action plan continues to build on the amount of dollars and amount of resources that we're providing.

Mr. Speaker, the last point: we doubled the amount of money this year in the academic relationship plan for physicians, putting more physicians in place, and I would remind the Assembly that we had a greater per capita increase in physicians, with 800 physicians more over the last few years, than any other part of Canada.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Calgary Health Region CEO

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The crisis in Grande Prairie, which has been building for years, is just one example from across Alberta of how this government has failed to deliver the health care services Albertans deserve and need. Yet documents just released show that CEOs of regional health authorities are paid top dollars, especially if they're connected to top Tories. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the serious and chronic problems of the Calgary health region, how does the minister justify the head of the region, Jack Davis, getting a \$57,000 raise this year alone for a grand total salary of \$593,000 plus a car allowance? Justify that.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. member opposite has not looked closely at the delegation of authority from the province to the regional health authorities to manage their affairs, their staffing, their management issues as they see fit. That management authority looked at the marketplace, looked at what was happening in Canada for payments to people that provide CEO services, looked at the risk and liability of the position. I can share with you that in one of the larger Toronto hospitals they recently advertised and got a CEO for the cool price of \$1 million plus benefits. The reality is that top health officials to run a top system are paid at a market price higher than what many other professionals are paid.

Mr. Speaker, they are addressing the questions to the wrong person. They should address those questions to the chair of that board. I can assure you that the chair of that board, speaking to me, is well satisfied that they are receiving value for money with the challenges and the planning that goes in place to run and operate a situation like Calgary's health region.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that Mr. Davis is widely known to be a good Tory with close connections to the Premier and to the former Provincial Treasurer and only one year of experience in health care management when he was hired, is this minister actually confident that there is no one else in Canada who could do the job better for less?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite misses the point. First of all, this minister does not appoint that individual. That individual is accountable to the board. It is not up to this Legislative Assembly to get involved in the health care recruitment for CEOs and evaluate whether they're doing a good job. But may I say this: I am very confident that not only in the Calgary health region but throughout the health regions of Alberta we are getting yeoman

service from excellent professionals that don't deserve the strikes and accusations and malignment that they are getting from the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. She speaks of accountability. What action has the minister taken to hold Jack Davis accountable for the outrageous contracts that he had the Calgary health region channel to his friends Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order to come.

The hon. minister. [interjections] The hon. minister has the floor.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think it's regrettable that in this House we are maligning people and making references to contracts without giving quite specific examples about what is outrageous, what is unwarranted, and the references to this party, to this government are totally without call.

Mr. Speaker, on my way into the Assembly today it was referenced to me that an hon. member of the third party called us monkeys. Quite frankly, I don't think the reference points and this kind of name-calling are necessarily appropriate either in this Assembly or out, and words like "outrageous" and the kinds of deleterious comments are not fitting to respond to.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker: Another point of order. Okay. [interjections] The hon. member has the floor.

Electricity Generation from Gas over Bitumen

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Yesterday in this House the Premier said that the millions of dollars' worth of gas that was used to subsidize electricity production in the oil sands belongs to the generators, not Albertans. My first question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain, please, why this government believes that the gas used to subsidize electricity generation in the oil sands belongs to the generators and not the fine citizens of this province, who own the natural resources?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Energy supplement, but the hon. member is alluding to gas over bitumen – gas over bitumen – and whether they use that gas to generate electricity or sell it on the open market is entirely up to them. They lose money one way or another. First of all, gas on the open market is very expensive, and gas to burn to generate electricity is very expensive. Either way, it's six of one and half a dozen of the other, and I would hope that the hon. member will understand that.

The Speaker: The hon. minister briefly.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, once again, there's a response to the hon. member across the side to a letter back in July, which I understand he tabled also, about this question in particular and fails to recall that I also mentioned in the same letter

that gas that's used to help produce an additional product out of the oil sands, be it in their processes to get bitumen to a product that can be sold on the market, much of which is upgraded and refined, has actually created \$75 million more than anything else that he would have called a waiver or otherwise. He doesn't talk about that, that we do charge a royalty on a final product produced and sold. It's in that sense that we've created the extra value, the tremendous value that Albertans are receiving in this case in specific.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how long will this government continue to subsidize generators of electricity at the oil sands while forcing Alberta consumers to pay record prices for the electricity?

1:50

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, first of all, Albertans are not paying record prices for electricity. Secondly, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, these are not subsidies. These are products in the oil sands. It's a net profit. It's a net profit regime, 25 per cent of net profits. Their costs are deducted from them to sell a product, which is either bitumen or synthetic crude, that's upgraded from oil sands. From that we charge a royalty on the final products that are sold. There is no subsidy in this kind of a question that he asserts or otherwise.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the Minister of Energy admitted in a letter dated August 2, 2006, that \$162 million worth of gas for electricity generation was exempted from royalties in 2005 alone, will the Premier now admit that he was wrong yesterday and apologize to the true owners of the resource, Albertans?

Mr. Klein: No, I'm not going to apologize for anything, and I wasn't privy to the letter.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, once again, in processes that the oil sands go through, in bitumen, in their upgrading to get it to synthetic crude, they create off-gases, a product that is then used for them to help create this bitumen and synthetic crude to be sold. It's in that that all the costs are deducted. There's no forgoing. If we had charged a royalty on that one, then they would have deducted it as a cost wherein in the end all we're trying to do is a simple system so that they would charge the royalty on the final product that's sold to the market, of which we receive substantially more in royalties than if we were focused specifically on that question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Hospital Bed Capacity

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning the NDP opposition released figures from Alberta Health and Wellness which showed that Edmonton and Calgary each have fewer acute-care beds than they did in 1992. In fact, despite Edmonton's population growth of nearly 100,000 people, we have 15 per cent fewer beds than just over a decade ago. The region has clearly not

recovered from the reckless cuts of the 1990s, and we are facing longer waiting times in our hospitals as a result. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister admit that the government has created a bed shortage crisis by allowing a persistent gap between population growth and investment in new acute-care beds?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, no, I will not admit that. I am disappointed, to say the least, that the NDP opposition release that I have in my hands quotes these figures, that we lost beds from 1992 to 2004, and fails to account for the beds that have been added up to March 2006. In that period we added 470 acute beds in the Capital region and we added 165 acute beds in the Calgary region, and many other health care providers, both for continuing care, assisted living, and other forms of care beds, provide additional support to the health system.

Mr. Speaker, one final point. Many years ago when I was a nurse, gall bladder surgery might take two weeks in the hospital. Today it may take two or three days. Many outpatient services that are provided in day surgery and by new technology have changed the complexion of health care. The delivery through primary care and community health centres, in fact, very much supports a health care model where recovery is best facilitated in the home. So to look at the beds as an indicator that Albertans maybe are being failed in their health care system is not only erroneous, but it is misleading.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister just told the House that new beds have been added since the period covered by this document and given that I have a release from her department, October 14, 2005, announcing those beds – and clearly those beds have not been built – will she stand up and apologize for misleading the House? Those beds do not yet exist.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the release from October 2005 is for yet more beds that will be built, \$1.4 billion worth that will be added still. The statistics that were quoted in their release were up to the end of 2004. Since that period the figures that I've just quoted to the House are the beds that were added and were opened from 2004 to March 31, 2006. Calgary, by the opening of the new southeast hospital in 2011, will have at least 700 more beds. There are many more beds that are scheduled for opening in the Capital region.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's unfortunate that the acknowledgement is not current, is not up to date, and I have just sharpened that point by pointing out in the last two years the additions that have been made.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that Calgary has grown by nearly 240,000 people and given that the minister's document does not include bed cuts as a result of the blowing up of the Calgary General hospital and the privatization of other hospitals, how can the minister justify the fact that Calgary has fewer beds now than it had in 1992 even though it's grown by 240,000 people in the meantime?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me use the simple example and the recent example of the children's beds and the opening that I spoke about yesterday. We had 80 beds in the Children's hospital, but they weren't all effective. Sometimes the rooms accommodated three children. When a child came in with a communicable disease, two beds were sterilized because one child was being looked after in the third bed, so nobody else could go into that bed. We're looking at effective beds now, and effective being a term which says that we can use all of these beds, that we are not ever without a bed that can

be used. So in the Children's hospital, for example, we expanded to 135 beds. Once again, we have made several changes in Alberta to improve the health care of Albertans.

I would point out that over 85 per cent satisfaction in the delivery of health care service is exactly where we were sitting at the time that the last report was released, with the acknowledgement that in some areas services could be improved, but to the largest extent Albertans are satisfied with the health care they're receiving. As I've said, beds are but one indicator, and we have been doing our best to rebuild and add beds. Going back to the '90s and trying to prove that those were poor decisions to remove beds is a total fallacy. The removal of those particular hospitals was done to protect the people from being exposed to asbestos, and other construction was necessary and has taken place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Energy Innovation Fund

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Energy unveiled the government's integrated energy vision, and earlier today he announced the program details for the \$200 million energy innovation fund. As my constituents in West Yellowhead have a vested interest in the future of our province's energy industry, especially as it relates to coal development and conventional oil and gas, my first question today is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister explain how the energy innovation fund will help the coal and conventional oil and gas industries that are so important to the citizens of West Yellowhead as well as Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I will table a document called Integrated Energy Vision, one part of the rollout of the things which we can do to help accomplish the tremendous opportunity that's before Alberta. We leave about 73 per cent of the oil in the ground. We leave half of the natural gas in the ground. Only 10 per cent of our oil sands are in a proven category. You add to that the huge and enormous potential of renewables, the coexistence of energy development and environmental practices: all of those things to which we can apply the science and innovation that ought to be at the forefront. That's what this energy innovation fund is to help do, so that when we think about coal and clean coal environment, there are tremendous potentials given. There's more resource and energy in coal than all the oil and gas combined.

It's in that thrust that we've put together a \$200 million energy innovation fund, announced in the first-quarter budget and more detail announced today. There are five sponsoring ministries: Department of Energy; Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Environment; Innovation and Science; and Sustainable Resource Development. Through those development priorities we have enormous opportunity to create this value, an opportunity for all Albertans for centuries to come.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the Minister of Environment. How will this new fund assure my constituents, who rely on water and aquifer water for drinking, washing, growing crops, and feeding livestock, that their groundwater will be protected, especially during coal-bed methane development?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that this will create a permanent monitoring network in the Athabasca oil sands. What it will be able to do is keep a constant eye on ground-water quality and quantity. Even more importantly, what it's going to be able to do, the money in the West Yellowhead area, is safeguard, of course, the important groundwater supplies, that we have recognized as blue gold. Everyone in this Legislature, all parties, do agree that it's such an important resource. But criticism has come in the fact that there hasn't been money. This is living proof of that money and another example of the long-term vision of our Premier and this government, of our work and the money that's going towards this important work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Acting Minister of Innovation and Science. What research is being done to develop the province's vast reserve of coal?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Energy Research Institute, otherwise known as AERI, co-chaired by the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky – and I thank him for the hard work that he and his crew do with AERI – is working with the departments of Energy and Environment, as we earlier heard, as well as industry and the research institutions in Alberta and all across Canada to advance cleaner coal production. You know, in the next few weeks we will be announcing specific projects that will result in more innovation and power generation with fewer emissions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Continuing Care Costs

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in my constituency are becoming vocal about the lack of support and commitment from this government to continuing care facilities. We owe our seniors a friendly environment where care is based on their needs, comfort, and independence and provides security, but residents are expressing anxiety and fear with the pressure to take on increasing costs. My first question to the minister of health: given that quality of life can be significantly improved when residents of continuing care facilities have an opportunity to participate in activities and have access to recreational therapy, what is the minister doing to ensure that these services are readily available?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, may I convey a compliment to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who has done yeoman's service in working with her residents in a particular facility, the Good Samaritan Society, and worked on the conversion from assisted living to long-term care. She deserves to be applauded.

It's a delight to see residents from that particular care centre today and acknowledge that there has been a lot of work that has to be done and is being done. I believe it was on August 18 when the last meeting took place between Capital Care, the Good Samaritan Society, and I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was in that company. Residents were concerned about the recre-

ational therapy services, the response time for call bells, and were concerned about the change from assisted living to long-term care because they believed that not sufficient kinds of opportunities were being made available to them. So we have undertaken to work with Capital Health to ensure and monitor that the continuing care standards that this government released will be, in fact, fully in place by early next year. We will work quite specifically in support of this facility to make sure that these kinds of opportunities exist.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the hon. member has other questions, so I'll sit down and let her go forth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. My next question: given that retaining staff is a critical factor in enhancing quality, when will the minister implement competitive wages, permanent positions, and increase staffing levels?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, we hope to have all of our standards in place which address staffing needs as well as wages by early next year. There have been a number of strides made in that direction. Obviously, we have to work with the regional health authorities to make sure that this is accommodated. In some of the regions it has been more quickly accommodated than others, but we are working with a target of full implementation of the standards by early next year. At that time we'll be able to more fully respond to each of the issues surrounding each particular facility.

I should note that some of the facilities, because of their staffing mix, are up to the standards, are being paid wages at the standard that would be appropriate, but there's still more work to do on others, and we acknowledge that.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: how is the minister prepared to address the issue of the increasing cost burden on residents?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports to respond on accommodation challenges. We have a recognition that in some of our facilities and in this particular facility converting from assisted to long-term care has created a hardship, and work is being done with individual patients. But if I could ask the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports to respond on accommodation challenges.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. The accommodation fees for both facilities, whether it's a designated assisted-living facility or a long-term care facility, are for room and board services. They are regulated in long-term care. Those rates have not increased in long-term care for three years. The rate for private accommodation, for a private room, is \$48.30 per day, and the rate for a semiprivate room is \$42 a day. As you know, when the budget came in in February, we did place further funding into the budget, as I indicated to you, to ensure that as the increases for fees take place, which will be coming soon because they haven't increased for three years, we assist our low-income and our moderate-income seniors with that. Having said that, we also like to ensure that our seniors still have \$265 at the end of the month, and that is taken into context when they pay their fee. I'd be willing to look into that further with you, hon. member, as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Water Supply in Southern Alberta

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans, particularly in southern Alberta, are becoming increasingly alarmed about the shortage of water available to sustain their quality of life. To the Minister of Environment. I know that you call water Alberta's blue gold and that everyone places a high value on this resource. My question is: what action is being undertaken to assure the people of southern Alberta that they'll have a reliable water supply for the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I said in this Legislature to all members a while back that if you were in a desert and had a choice between a barrel of oil and a barrel of water, what would one choose? I think it's obvious to us all. That's why our government in cabinet just approved a comprehensive water management plan for the South Saskatchewan River basin, referred to as the SSRB, which includes residents from Red Deer all the way to the member's constituency down in Cypress-Medicine Hat. This is a monumental and significant decision that clearly demonstrates this government's commitment to protecting our watersheds.

The SSRB water management plan provides a long-term vision for water management in southern Alberta. We have wonderful examples during drought where Albertans help their neighbours side by side, on how we work together as neighbours, helping each other with this valuable resource.

This is really the first plan of its kind in North America under Alberta's Water Act, and it's a key deliverable under our Water for Life strategy. I thank the members from all parties who are joining us at this international forum where 20 countries are coming to this province because of our government's forward thinking in terms of the actions we're taking, such as this monumental announcement we made today relative to the South Saskatchewan River basin.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that a key action of this plan is to stop accepting applications for new allocations on the Bow, Old Man, and South Saskatchewan River subbasins, how will municipalities, industries, and other water users in these subbasins be assured that they'll be able to continue to get the water that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first of all thank all Albertans and the multitude of stakeholders who have sat on the watershed councils that we have met with because this is a very important and valid point. In fact, at the appropriate time I will provide highlights. In fact, in this document, to summarize, this plan reflects a balance between protecting the aquatic environment and the amount of river water required for economic development in the SSRB.

I want to assure my colleagues in this House today, Mr. Speaker, that the plan for managing this basin ensures a sufficient and sustained water supply for southern Alberta's economic growth and, at the same time, protects the basin's aquatic environment. Ultimately, this is a goal of our Water for Life plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that this plan will have serious implications for the people of southern Alberta, can the minister tell this House what role Albertans have played in the process to develop this plan?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I want to thank the multitude of Albertans, the watershed council members, the consultations that took place in the early part of January. We are currently also in discussion with the First Nations residing in the river basin. Input from Albertans on this critical issue will continue because it is ultimately so important to us all and, I know, to the members across the way.

So Albertans have made their voices very clear and loud, and the government has taken action based on the input, the very good input, that they have given to us. We're acting on it because we have a vision.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Water Quality in Turner Valley

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The chief medical officer of health for the Calgary health region and the Turner Valley gas plant committee are concerned about contamination from the site that is entering the Sheep River, a source of drinking water for nearby communities. The health impacts of this contamination have not been explored, and concerns from citizens are bounced between Community Development, Environment, and Health and Wellness. No ministry is taking responsibility for co-ordination and leadership of testing and measures to protect the health and safety of area residents. My first question is to the minister of health. Why hasn't the minister advised either Alberta Environment or the Calgary health region to sample the water wells that are across and downstream from the Turner Valley gas plant historic site?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm very confident that the Calgary health region has undertaken the necessary tests and has undertaken the necessary due diligence for the health of the region. In fact, earlier in the spring I had an extensive conversation with the chairman of the Calgary health region. They were not only pleased to undertake that; they were very forceful in their acknowledgement that there were issues that they wanted to explore.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, for more information on either environmental testing or on sustainable resource development that may go on in the area, one of my colleagues would like to add to the response about testing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The chief medical officer disagrees.

My second question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister commit to conducting a comprehensive health assessment of residents in the area? Comprehensive. Of everybody.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environment is continuing to monitor the Sheep River and looking after the local residents, and I'm going to ask the Minister of Environment to respond so that we don't get any incomplete or misinformation about what is going on based on the questions.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, quite contrary to the preamble, this government and this ministry are working closely with its residents.

We want to do the right thing. We are doing the right thing. We are doing the appropriate testing and will continue to do so.

I also want to say that I thank the hon. member from the Bragg Creek area and also the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, who have been working really closely with us and working on solutions. That's what we're harnessing our energy to do rather than what we are not doing or accused of not doing. Quite the contrary could be true in terms of what you are suggesting.

Ms Blakeman: That's why there's a problem. Health assessments get referred to Environment.

The Speaker: Okay. Let's get on with the question.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister explain why, when Alberta Environment was digging at the site 10 days ago, the site was not secured, nor were there any signs posted to warn parents with children playing at the campsite downstream about the contaminants leaching into that very same water. Why?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, what the preamble of this question was is simply not accurate. Number one, why are we testing? We are testing because residents want us to test, and we are doing what citizens in the area have asked us to do. What the hon. member is really saying is, "Don't listen to the citizens of Alberta," which could be so far from what we do. So it is clear to us that our testing and our proper order of what we do is getting to the right decisions so that we can protect Albertans, contrary to what the hon. member is suggesting.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development to supplement.

Mr. Ducharme: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to advise the House that the House is very much aware that earlier this year there was an advisory committee that was formed specifically to deal with the issues of the Turner Valley gas plant, where there has been \$5 million spent to date as far as containment. I'd like to advise that we're presently debating in this House, what we have been doing over the past number of days, supplementary estimates. In terms of being able to set up a containment and diversion system for that plant, I can advise the House that tenders have been received, and hopefully a contract will be awarded very shortly in terms of being able to address the issues.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Skilled Worker Immigration Program

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of Economic Development. In August the Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported that the biggest concern facing Alberta business owners is employee shortages. I understand that your department runs the provincial nominee program. What is your department doing to bring more workers into Alberta today?

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, the provincial nominee program is a response from the province of Alberta and, as a matter of fact, other provinces to work with the federal government in terms of bringing foreign workers into the province. Normally, the involvement with

an employer that has a shortage of workers and wants to use immigration as the response to that deals with the federal government, but under this particular program we are able to respond, then, to those particular needs.

Members of the House will know from their review of the estimates that we have currently in front of the House a request for additional funding for the provincial nominee program. Under that particular program we bring about 400 to 600 people into the province depending on the year, but clearly, Mr. Speaker, we're finding that that's not enough. So we hope that the members will respond in supporting our ask. Under the estimates we want to increase the resources to this program and perhaps move those numbers up to something like 1,200 per year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: would the minister consider changing Alberta's PNP program to be more like Manitoba's or Quebec's? They nominate hundreds more employees every year.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dunford: Yes. That actually is one of the reasons for the estimate request. We have heretofore been focused almost entirely on the professional and higher skilled ranks, but clearly there's more of a demand, there's more of a need in Alberta than what this program has been able to respond to to this point. As I mentioned in the estimates when it was my turn to speak, we are looking at this program, going to open up the categories now into not only the skilled areas but into semiskilled and unskilled and, hopefully, then be in a better position to respond to what is clearly seen as an urgency amongst employers in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: No further questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:20

Affordable Housing

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Human Resources and Employment has so clearly pointed out, the Alberta Liberals are well known for their ability to think and plan for the future. To ensure sustainable growth and build a prosperous, compassionate society, this government must take action because homelessness is skyrocketing and affordable housing is so difficult to find. My first question would be to the minister of seniors. What steps has the minister taken to secure the \$20 million that was requested by the seven-city delegation for the national housing initiative to provide prevention and support services for the homeless and towards the affordable housing crisis in Alberta?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. I can tell you that I'm fully supportive of the request that was put forward just recently to our standing policy committee by seven municipalities as well as community agencies that serve the homeless, and I want to tell you why. It's because it's innovative. It's unique. The initiatives that they've brought forward are different solutions than have been brought forward in the past. It's not for building more shelter spaces as much as it is for three pilot projects that they know

have worked, the outcomes which were that they have outreach teams that assist our homeless as they move through the transition of housing, from emergency shelter to transitional housing to rent supplement. These outreach teams will assist people staying in that shelter by accessing the services that are available. So I'm fully supportive. I am moving that forward through the proper process, which, of course, is including my colleagues that will be very much a part of the decision-making.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Thank you to the minister for that answer. That's certainly what I was looking for.

But I'm still looking for \$20 million, so I'd like to address my next question to the Finance minister. Is the minister aware that funding for prevention and support programs require fewer resources than dealing with at-risk citizens in the justice or health system? When do you think you could make that funding available?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a very competent minister who brings these programs forward as they're ready to be developed. I will totally agree with the member opposite that prevention should be our first priority in all cases. In all cases. More emphasis on prevention in health, on early childhood problems, on drugs, any of those areas, alternatives for children: this government believes in that firmly. But, again, I'll repeat that we have a most competent minister who has been a stalwart minister in bringing forward those issues and having action taken on them.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. My next question would be to the Minister of RAGE. Can the minister attempt . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. I have no idea who the member is talking about. If the member would enlighten the House, that would really be helpful.

Ms Pastoor: Restructuring and Government Efficiency. I'm sorry. I do apologize.

Can the minister attempt to identify any inefficiencies or areas that could be restructured to find the \$20 million requested for the long-term and affordable housing plan?

Mr. Ouellette: You know, Mr. Speaker, I do have to agree with the hon. Treasurer that this government has its priorities set on prevention, early prevention, of all the different categories that the Treasurer said. Actually, we're always looking for efficiencies. We're always looking for different cases where we can save some money, but when we save that money, it still goes through Treasury and the business planning to come up with money for the different necessities that this government needs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmr.

Early Education for At-risk Children

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely shameful that this government has failed to implement an important Learning Commission recommendation to provide funding for full-day and junior kindergarten for high-needs children. The Edmonton city centre project's junior kindergarten program is an award-winning success story of inner-city Edmonton schools helping vulnerable children and families overcome challenges of poverty and lack of

opportunity. To add insult to injury, it is now clear that this important program will no longer be funded by this government. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why has the minister forgotten to budget for at-risk inner-city children when this program is such a success?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Education ministry has not forgotten its obligations. In fact this particular program that the hon. member is referring to, I think he knows full well was a program funded by Children's Services. It was funded I believe for a period of three consecutive years or thereabouts, and it was in fact in a couple of cases extended for yet another year because it was a Children's Services program. The program being offered was not one of the recognized ECS programs, which would have enabled Education to fund it.

The member should know that if that particular batch of schools – I think there are three there – want some of these students funded, they have to come under the qualifications and criteria of an ECS-recognized program, and those options have been outlined to those schools. All they would need to do is identify the students who come into the particular criteria, and then they would be considered for funding by the local school board, which in this case I think is the Edmonton public school board, where the hon. member sat and would know that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, frankly, it's gobbledygook. Yes, it was provided by Children's Services, but the reality is that this program is no longer going to be there as of the 15th of September. I remember that the minister told me in a letter dated June 14 that he would work with the inner-city school project co-ordinator and, I quote, maximize available educational funding for the program. That was the promise. Why is this program not going to be funded?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that particular statement and that particular promise remain in place. We have worked with them, and the co-ordinators have indicated to us, the best I can recall anyway, that they do not wish to approach the school board to whom they would otherwise report for possible qualification under a recognized ECS program.

Now, if they were to do that, they would simply have to turn to the renewed funding framework manual, and they would see where additional funding is available. In fact, it's been increased significantly this year, and we do fund ECS children who, for example, are under mild, moderate, or special needs or gifted or talented to the tune of about \$2,241 through the locally elected school board. So there are remedies in place to see programs like that continued.

But in this particular case, Mr. Speaker, that project was told in a letter written in September of '05 that funding would be curtailed – although it had been extended, it would be curtailed – in June of '06. So there was ample time for that case to have been brought forward.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is not anything to do with special needs. The reality is that this program is done and out.

How can the minister justify saying that he cares about these sorts of programs that work and then not fund them?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we do not have a mandatory junior K program in this province, and that is an entirely separate issue. Here if you have children who you know need help, be they mild or moderately delayed or perhaps they might need other assistance such as is provided through our parent link centres, there are remedies available. I'm sure the hon. Minister of Children's Services would augment if time were to allow on what the benefits are of some of

these – is it 30 or 40? – parent link centres that have been established. Some of them are not too far from that area.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, would you like to supplement?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Education has indicated that his department has been working with the Edmonton city centre education program and the Edmonton public school board. We have established over the time of the ministry 45 parent link centres. Parent link centres look at early intervention and try and deal with these particular individuals. So they can utilize the parent link centres. There are four in the city of Edmonton.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 37 years ago, in 1969, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity took a bride. Thirty-seven years later we congratulate him.

2:30 Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Now let me take you all back, let us all go back 35 years ago, to August 30, 1971, and let me quote exclusively the words of Calgary writer George Koch as found in the book *The Sixties Revolution and the Fall of Social Credit*, pages 298-299. My sole change to the text is the inclusion of the full names of the individuals mentioned.

Yet even on August 30, election day, most Socreds remained hopeful. The Calgary *Albertan* had endorsed the incumbents, calling their overall record “the convincing argument for their party’s re-election on Monday.” Even the blatantly pro-Lougheed *Edmonton Journal* still thought the Socreds would win. [Peter] Lougheed himself compared the election to a Grey Cup kickoff; once the ball was in play, anything could happen – but had booked a vacation to start immediately after the election. For most of the day, Lougheed and his top aides were convinced they had lost. “I don’t think we made it,” he said glumly around 4 p.m. But as final returns trickled in, they began showing the PCs picking off even strong Socred candidates like [Don] Hamilton, who was running in a very conservative Edmonton riding. [David] Wood had keyed on Stettler as a bellwether, a constituency with a mix of ranching, farming and petroleum, where the population lived on farms or in small towns and were reasonably prosperous but not rich. It too went Conservative.

One after another the Social Credit bastions fell and at 9:13 p.m. CBC television predicted a Tory majority. The party was elected or leading in 49 ridings, to the Socreds’ 25. It was a vastly better result than any PC had dared hope for; the boldest prediction by the wildest optimists had been for a bare majority of 39 seats. By now, Lougheed’s spirits had revived, and he changed into a clean shirt and tie. A “nearly hysterical” crowd began to gather outside PC campaign headquarters at Calgary’s Westgate Hotel, wrote [Alan] Hustak, and a carnival atmosphere prevailed as Lougheed arrived to deliver an acceptance speech. Thanking both his supporters, and Social Credit for its “remarkable contribution,” he ended up with “This is the best darn province in the world.”

The Socred gathering at the Jubilee Auditorium in Edmonton was a funeral scene, as first Edmonton fell to the PCs, then much of Calgary. The party was shut out of the North. Central Alberta split. Only the rural south held, and not overwhelmingly. Eight cabinet members were defeated, and only eight of the 38 newcomers elected. “White-faced men bravely tried to look optimistic and women sat crying as they surveyed the wreckage on a large chalkboard,” noted [John] Barr.

[Harry] Strom, who stayed in his Cypress riding long enough to be sure he had won his own seat, arrived at the Jubilee about 10 p.m. He mounted the stage, conceded defeat, congratulated Lougheed on his victory, thanked his party for their work, accepted responsibility for the outcome, and hinted he would soon resign. President Orvis Kennedy presented Strom with a statue of a horse. A planned victory party in Edmonton’s west end turned into a brief, sparsely attended wake which

soon ended with the host roaming his house putting away unopened bottles.

There are two footnotes. Footnote 1, the results showed Conservatives with 49 seats and 46.4 per cent of the vote, Social Credit with 25 seats and 41.1 per cent of the vote, the NDP with 1 seat and 11.42 per cent of the vote, and the Liberals with zero seats and 1.01 per cent of the vote.

Footnote 2, Alberta nearly lost Peter Lougheed the night he became Premier. After celebrating his stunning upset in Calgary, Lougheed boarded a corporate jet and flew with his wife Jeanne and a few aides to Edmonton to greet supporters there. The plane was met on the tarmac by a boisterous crowd of 300 that had to be parted by a flying wedge of Lougheed aides. On the return flight the weather turned foul. The pilot had to try twice to land, the second time successfully, then noticed he had passed the control tower on the wrong side and nearly plowed into the ground.

Members' Statements

Beddington Heights Community Association

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a fine community located in my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill. Beddington Heights is one of Calgary’s largest communities, with a population of over 12 and a half thousand people.

Beddington Heights has a large and active community centre, which contains a large preschool, a banquet hall, a gym, and an after school centre. Outdoors the centre is adjacent to a large field and contains an ice rink which becomes a skateboard park in the summer.

The community centre offers a large number of courses and programs, including soccer, volleyball, martial arts, dance, darts, yoga, fencing programs, and the community Block Watch Association. To help finance these programs, the community centre hosts over 40 bingos a year.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to salute Danielle Leger, the president of the Beddington Heights Community Association, and all of the other members of the executive and board of directors, who give freely of their time to make the community centre run and to make Beddington Heights such a great part of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wetaskiwin Centennial

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Have you ever wondered what’s in a name? A name can reveal history, meaning, and direction. Never has this been more evident than in the recent Wetaskiwin centennial celebrations under the chairmanship of Alderman Bill Elliott.

The festivities commenced with the rededication of the city’s peace cairn. This monument marks a significant facet of Wetaskiwin’s extensive heritage. The history of the cairn goes back to a legend that tells of an 1867 battle between the Blackfoot and the Cree. As legend has it, the Blackfoot tribes sent Buffalo Child to scout out the enemy’s position as did the Cree tribe when they sent Little Bear.

When the two men ended up on opposite sides of a hill, each man maneuvered his way through a bush to a crest of a hill, where they came face to face. They fought without weapons. Because they were so evenly matched, neither could gain the advantage, and finally, exhausted, they rested. Buffalo Child pulled out his pipe and tobacco. Little Bear did likewise but found that his pipe had been broken in several places. The two men shared one pipe, and from

that act of amity, peace was made. Since that day the hills have been known as Weteskewin Spatinow, meaning the place where peace was made.

We see this legacy continue today. Since the honorary chair of the celebrations committee, Dr. Leavert Johnson, was present at the first dedication of the peace cairn in 1927, he can tell us that the cairn was erected at that time to commemorate 60 years of peace between Blackfoot and Cree.

Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong was a special guest at the rededication of the peace cairn along with many young Hobbema cadets. He and Chief Gerry Ermineskin of Hobbema had the honour of unveiling the plaque for the cairn signifying peace. Representing harmony and growth, the peace cairn is both physically and metaphorically the focal point in the heart of the city.

I would like to thank the 250 volunteers and Mayor Don Montgomery of Wetaskiwin for continuing Wetaskiwin's tradition of peace and friendship into the 21st century in the hills where the peace was made and where peace is embedded in the name Wetaskiwin.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Disadvantaged Albertans

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want today to talk about the Alberta disadvantage. The Bible quotes Jesus as saying: inasmuch as you have failed to do this to the least of my brothers, you have failed to do it to me. All religions, in fact, call on their members for genuine support of the poor.

The recent Welfare Incomes 2005 report in Canada singled out Alberta not for its pre-eminent economic status but for its profound failure to meet the basic needs of its most vulnerable citizens: the unemployed, persons with developmental disabilities, the impoverished, including single parents and homeless youth, a burgeoning part of our urban populations in Alberta.

In Alberta today a lone parent with one child receives \$12,300 a year. In real dollars this is roughly 50 per cent of what they received in 1986. This is unconscionable and hypocrisy at its height given this government's decision this year to increase MLA salaries by 5.5 per cent. Is it, therefore, any wonder that politicians have the lowest level of trust in this society?

2:40

The blind adherence of this government to an ideology of competition and markets is a profound insult to our humanity as it deprives people of their basic human rights. Far from enabling dignity and opportunity, this punishes people, including children, undermining their humanity and ability to contribute meaningfully.

This government has created a class of worthy and unworthy citizens, shaming all Albertans. Having eliminated the unworthy over the last decade, the Tories extended their same blame and rigid thinking to those that cannot work. Growing food banks attest to the failure of planning and commitment to our most vulnerable by this government. The irony of this blaming of our victims in Alberta is that from an early age Albertans feel that life is about winners and losers and increasingly focus on their own success at the expense of others, weakening the sense of community. The health of people, both mental and physical, declines. The health system is witness to growing numbers of people who are unable to cope with this unhealthy climate: higher depression, anxiety, domestic violence, and suicide.

Most Albertans do not support abandoning our poor. They share a sense of shame at how this government treats our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you.

Special Olympics Softball Tournament

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, last weekend I had the privilege of attending the 20th annual Special Olympics Softball Tournament in St. Paul. The goal of this year's tournament was to have 20 teams for the 20th year of the tournament, the largest such event in the province. I am pleased to say that the organizers reached this goal and were even able to host a team from as far away as Parsons, Kansas.

Thus the tournament was an opportunity for participants from all over North America to play the game of softball, and what was truly a great event was that while the winning teams in each skill division won a trophy, winning was not the focus of the tournament. Camaraderie and sportsmanship were the real highlights of the weekend.

Mr. Speaker, this event would not have been possible without the support from the St. Paul community and the many, many volunteers who helped to address the challenge of hosting and co-ordinating such a large group.

At this year's tournament a very special individual was honoured for his continuing support and extensive work in organizing the Special Olympics Softball Tournament. For 25 years this individual has been part of the Abilities Network. Over the years he has enhanced the lives of many players, helped to ensure that all participants had an enjoyable time, and worked hard to make sure that this year's tournament went off without a hitch. Because of his dedication to this tournament, spanning a great many years, in his honour this year's tournament was renamed the Conrad Jean Softball Tournament. There is no other individual who deserves such recognition more than Mr. Jean. His support for the tournament and the players is truly inspirational.

I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the players and coaches on a successful and fun weekend and thank all the volunteers who helped make certain that the tournament went forward. Without them this wonderful event would not be possible.

Finally, I'd like to give a special thanks to Conrad Jean for his continued good work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

GlobalFest 2006

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. GlobalFest burst onto the scene in 2003 with 10 cultural pavilions and three countries competing in Alberta's very own international fireworks competition. The festival had attendance of close to a hundred thousand in the first year, making GlobalFest one of Calgary's top draws for local citizens and tourists alike.

GlobalFest's mandate as a not-for-profit society is to produce an inclusive, world-class multicultural festival and international fireworks competition that will offer the viewing public an affordable and accessible, multifaceted cultural experience. This year South Africa, Germany, Canada, and Hong Kong vied for the trophy from August 18 to the 26th.

Although some of the fireworks launched from Elliston park can be seen from other parts of the city, there is no experience like that from within the park. The reflection of the fireworks off the water and aquatic fireworks that bounce off the water are components that cannot be experienced unless you actually come to the park. But most of all it's the synchronization with the music that makes this such an exquisite experience. The fireworks are not just timed to the music, but they actually become an expression of the music itself, an exciting and unique new art form. The audiences were awed. Hong Kong won the GlobalFest 2006 trophy.

Thank you to the many volunteers that made GlobalFest such a success. I along with hundreds of thousands of others look forward with anticipation to next year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are confused over the resource royalty system used in this province. Yesterday the Premier added to this confusion by stating that gas used in electricity production in the oil sands belongs to the generator, not the citizens of this province. That is wrong. No wonder we are collecting less in royalties than we should be.

Albertans are demanding a full public review of our royalty structure, not a secret, internal review conducted by the minister with industry insiders. The owners of the resource, the citizens, demand a say. Progressive Conservative leadership hopefuls also question the process and rightly so. Albertans have witnessed their fair share of the royalty pie decrease over the last three years from 24 per cent in 2002 all the way down to 19 per cent in 2004. This decline in resource royalties has cost Albertans potentially billions of dollars in lost revenue.

The government only needs to look at a report published recently by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to realize that the royalty structure may need to be adjusted to reflect the new realities in the energy market. This report shows that marketable natural gas and natural gas liquids produced from Alberta in 2005 had a market value of \$50 billion. Why is it that we are only getting 13 per cent on the take of the natural gas and its byproducts produced in our province when the government's own performance measure sets a target of 20 to 25 per cent?

The government must be up front with Albertans as to what their fair share of the resource revenues is. These resources belong to Albertans, who overwhelmingly support the Official Opposition's call for a full public review of the royalty structure in this province at this time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 26 years ago on this day I had the distinct pleasure of attending the wedding of the very beautiful Rose and the then handsome Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Development. So congratulations to both of you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with 335 signatures calling on the government to include coverage for complex decongestive therapy. This therapy is absolutely essential for people with lymphedema, an incurable condition which many women develop when receiving radiation therapy for breast cancer.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Bill 214

Public Service Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 214, the Public Service Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act.

This bill would offer whistle-blower protection to public service employees to enable them to bring matters that they consider to be instances of serious government wrongdoing to the direct attention of the provincial Ombudsman.

[Motion carried; Bill 214 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Acting Minister of Innovation and Science.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, the first dealing with the Vital Statistics annual review. This review summarizes all births, marriages, deaths, and stillborns that occurred in Alberta during 2005. Any member wishing to receive a copy of this can obtain one from my office.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table in the Assembly today five copies of the '05-06 annual report of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research, otherwise known as the Alberta ingenuity fund. A copy of this report has been forwarded to all MLAs directly from Alberta Ingenuity.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the government's copies of Alberta's Integrated Energy Vision, that we released last week. This is a look towards where we could potentially go not just with hydrocarbon integration but the value-added opportunities, the renewable platforms, the perpetual energy opportunity, and furthermore an approach to integration of planning for those opportunities among various government departments.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter to table that I sent to the hon. Minister of Energy on July 12, 2006, and this letter is asking questions regarding the natural gas royalty regulation, 2002, specifically section 12 and section 15.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Miloslav Bozdech, who is the president of the Peace Country health regional medical organization, directed to the hon. Minister of Gaming, the minister of aboriginal affairs, the MLA for Dunvegan-Central Peace, the MLA for Grande Prairie-Smoky, and the MLA for Peace River. I believe it's also CCed to a number of other individuals, including the minister of health.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. The first is a chart produced by the Canadian Institute for Health Information. It shows that between 1994-95 and 2004-05 there has been a 19 per cent increase in the length of in-patient hospital stays in this province.

The second is an open letter sent from the Alberta Association for Community Living to all MLAs. The AACL would like to remind us that funding for persons with developmental disabilities has not

been sufficient to sustain existing supports and services and that support is needed to ensure that all Albertans are able to participate in community life.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon, both copies of e-mails from constituents. The first is from constituent Maureen Slater, who is writing expressing her concern about out-of-control rent increases in Edmonton and, indeed, across Alberta, and particularly that landlords can increase those rents by whatever amount they choose once every six months, and obviously that is creating an awful lot of hardship for many residents in this province.

The second correspondence, Mr. Speaker, is from a constituent, Stephanie Ibach, who is writing requesting that the province change the provincial and federal tax laws – well, clearly, the provincial tax laws – “to allow a university student to transfer ALL of his [or her] tuition credit to [their] parents or other eligible persons.” Currently, legislation allows only a \$5,000 transfer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Environment copies of the approved water management plan for the South Saskatchewan River basin. This plan itself provides long-term vision for the water management in southern Alberta, and it’s another tangible success under Alberta’s Water for Life strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Referring to Nonmembers

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with respect to *Beauchesne* 493(4), essentially, which reads on page 150-51 as follows under Protected Persons: “The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply.” I have other citations I will refer to momentarily.

I think it was pretty clear this afternoon as the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition started his second round of questions – I believe it was his second round of questions – that he did make some imputations that I felt were improper and violated this particular tradition of the House, where we do not cite names of individuals who are not here and able to speak for themselves and defend themselves. I don’t have the benefit of the Blues yet, Mr. Speaker, because they’re not available to me to quote you chapter and verse of what was said, but I’m hoping that members who were present did understand that that was what the hon. opposition leader was in fact doing.

In fact, he began this approach yesterday. Or maybe it wasn’t him; maybe it was another one of the members in the opposition. They were maligning another private individual. Today they tried to malign two additional private members during question period, and I find that that violates the traditions of the House.

In *Erskine May* on page 348 it clearly states the following: “Questions to Ministers must relate to matters for which those Ministers are officially responsible.” It goes on under sub (3) to say:

It is not in order in a question to ask for action to deal with matters under the control of local or other statutory authorities, or of bodies or persons not responsible to the government . . .

And it gives examples.

. . . (except where there is a government shareholding in such companies).

Clearly, the issue that was asked about today by the hon. Opposition House Leader dealt with a health authority, and questions about health authorities would likely be acceptable. At least, they have been in the past. But to name individuals who are employees of that health authority and not directly employees of the government, which the minister, therefore, is not responsible for, is clearly in violation there.

I would also mention that the tone and nature of the hon. opposition leader’s questions seemed to be of almost a threatening nature, and we would note under *Beauchesne* 487(1) and (2), where threatening language is referred to, it says the following:

- (1) Threatening language is unparliamentary.
- (2) Words may not be used hypothetically or conditionally, if they are plainly intended to convey a direct imputation.

I think that did happen, unfortunately.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would look at the citation under *Beauchesne* 409(1) and (7), wherein we again have the tradition of question period explained in part under (1). It says, with reference to question period: “It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate.” Clearly, the hon. opposition leader was expressing an opinion, which went far beyond normal opinions that are allowed in this House, perhaps.

Under (7) it says: “A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it.” In this case we have a person who is referred to that is not able to be in the House and is not an elected member.

So I would find it appropriate to bring this matter to the attention of the House, particularly with respect to the first citation I mentioned, *Beauchesne* 493(4), about the Speaker cautioning the members, and I look forward to your ruling in that regard.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to answer the points that have been brought forward by the Government House Leader and, in fact, to rebut them all, for they’re well intentioned, I’m sure, but inaccurate.

Now, there seem to be two or three matters that the Government House Leader was most concerned about, and the first was naming the individuals. Well, what the Leader of the Official Opposition was doing was actually naming the contracts, and since the contracts were actually held by the individuals, the only way to refer to the contracts was by naming the individuals that had them. That’s the only way to make clear what the topic is that we’re talking about. Otherwise, it is so vague as to be meaningless and not very helpful to the minister. Had the contracts been held with Alberta numbered company 123456, I’m sure we would have been happy to refer to the contract so. But that is not the case. They were with two individuals, who were in fact named.

3:00

That is public knowledge. It has been discussed in the media a number of times. As a matter of fact, the two individuals that have been named were named repeatedly in an exchange on April 11, 2005, in *Alberta Hansard*, appearing on page 643. Certainly, there was no point of order called at that time and no caution coming from the Speaker about that, again around the same actions or contracts. So the naming of the individuals is connected to the contracts, and that’s how they’re identified.

There was also a reference to I think it was 493(4), in which the Government House Leader has acknowledged that referring by name

to Mr. Davis, who holds a position that is directly accountable to the health region and to the Minister of Health and Wellness and, further, to this Assembly, is in order. So that was not the problem. There was no maligning of the individuals. It is definitely connected. The sentence is, “for the outrageous contracts he had with the Calgary health region channel to his friends Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois.” So it’s definitely referring to the contracts there. There was no maligning. “Outrageous” refers to the contracts, and I think that \$8,000 for one speech is pretty outrageous. Certainly, I have media reports which comment on that as well as the contract that Mr. Love had for verbal advice at \$42,000.

Finally, the Government House Leader seemed to be saying that the Leader of the Official Opposition was voicing an opinion. In rereading the question that I have in front of me – and I was sitting here and listening carefully, and I do not believe that the Leader of the Official Opposition extemporized at all, but we can certainly check *Hansard* – there is no opinion that is ventured here. It is factual on comments with the connections between the Premier and the former Treasurer and the CEO of the health region. That’s all well documented. His resumé is documented. None of that is an opinion or an invention. It all exists in fact. The Government House Leader did not give any detail on what opinion he thought was being voiced here, but what I’m looking at is all connected to fact, which I’ve been able to assemble.

Finally, the “threatening language” is a really interesting one because, again, as I look at this, I mean, nowhere in here did the Leader of the Official Opposition say, “Do this or else” or “I’m going to get you” or “Step outside” or any of those other sort of phrases that we traditionally associate with some sort of a threat of either physical harm or harm to a career choice or losing your vocation or something like that. There just is no threat here. The language is strong, but there’s a lot of strong language in this House. There’s absolutely no threat in here. There’s a question. There are some facts that are stated, and it’s directed specifically to: what action has the minister taken to hold this person accountable? I don’t see how that’s threatening, certainly not either to the individual or to the minister. So without the Government House Leader giving some indication or a quote of what he felt was the threatening language, I don’t see it in here, and I would maintain that there was no threatening language.

Again, no imputation against a member. Any actions that were quoted in here are verifiable actions. It was accepted that the given name of the CEO of the health region is appropriate to be used. The other two individuals named have been named in this House on a number of occasions, and I gave you an example of one time. Their names were used in direct connection with the contracts that were the focus of the question. There is no threatening language that has been used, and neither was there an opinion voiced on anything, unless it’s about being a friend, and I know that there’s a Speaker’s ruling in 1997 in which he admitted that it’s okay for Tories, even top Tories, to have friends. So that would be the only thing I could see being an opinion there.

So thank you very much for the opportunity to refute and to rebut what the Government House Leader has brought forward as a point of order. I maintain that there is no point of order available under any of the citations that he listed.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Would any other hon. member like to participate?

That having been the case, then we will now deal with this matter. All of the citations quoted today, by the way, were the appropriate citations, and hon. members can review those citations again at their own opportunity.

Just for a quick referral here *Beauchesne* 493 in particular says: (3) The Speaker has traditionally protected from attack a group of individuals commonly referred to as “those of high official station”. The extent of this group has never been defined. Over the years it has covered senior public servants, ranking officers of the armed services, diplomatic representatives in Canada, a Minister who was not a Member of either House, and the Prime Minister before he won a seat . . .

(4) The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply.

There are other citations as well.

The chair listened very attentively to the text of the question and really has great difficulty finding this an appropriate point of order, and let me explain why. Number one, the name of the key individual cited in the particular question, who is a member from outside of the House, is public information as a result of legislation passed by this Assembly. It was this Assembly that passed legislation which caused full disclosure of the CEOs of all health regions and other senior officials to have their name, their benefit package, their salary, and everything else listed in an annual report. This annual report then is not made public by the health authority. It is tabled in the House by a minister of Executive Council. It is this House which approves the full 100 per cent expenditure of health budgets in the province of Alberta. There is a direct flow and a direct connection with respect to that. So we’re not seeing inappropriate-ness at all with respect to the naming of such individuals.

In terms of opinions all members have opinions on everything. If they want to say that somebody making \$599,000 a year with a bonus of whatever it was – \$54,000 a year – is outrageous, that is their right to make that statement. There’s nothing that prevents a member from saying that, the same way that for every one of us, when we go home on the weekend, our constituents look at us and ask us, “Well, how much money do you make as an MLA?” We tell them, “Sixty-seven thousand dollars a year.” They say, “That’s outrageous.” So opinions vary. We’ve heard already today in the Assembly another hon. member saying that the salary of an MLA was outrageous.

In terms of temperament, yes, there’s absolutely no doubt that when we get towards the dying days of a session, the temperature always seems to go up a bit, and people tend to be a little more aggressive in the questions. But that’s the give and take of a parliamentary democracy.

The chair would just like once again to ask for temperance with respect to everything, temperance in the question and temperance in response, but we’re going to move on from this particular matter.

Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you have a point of order?

Point of Order Clarification

Mr. Martin: I’ll be very brief, Mr. Speaker. It’s more a point of clarification. The Minister of Health and Wellness said that I called the government monkeys or something like that. I want to clarify what I said so that the Assembly is well aware. I did not call government members monkeys or even compare them to monkeys. What I did say is that 82 monkeys could run this province better than this government. That’s my point of clarification.

3:10

Ms Evans: So, Mr. Speaker, if I can understand that clarification – and the comments were made by the media gallery to me outside about that reference, and I declined to get into the cesspool of name-

calling – what I understand that the hon. member has just said is that our planning, our capacity as MLAs is less than that of monkeys.

The Speaker: Well, I think we should bring this whole matter to an end. First of all, this purported reflection was not made in the Assembly. The hon. minister said that she got it second-hand, if I recall it correctly. So we're dealing with a matter that wasn't made in this Assembly; it was made third-hand. Then we had a confession from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who was not named by the Minister of Health and Wellness. So I think transparency has come about in a way that this is totally clear for everybody now. We're all honourable members with a great deal of love and synergy.

head: **Orders of the Day**
head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 44
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I think we'll just proceed with the discussion of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2) during this time in committee.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to lead off debate in the Committee of the Whole on Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). I think it's important to recognize the "No. 2" that's printed on the front page of this bill because what it tells Albertans is that this is the second time this year that the government has come back to this Assembly, asking for more money than they had budgeted. I think that's an important distinction.

Before I get into my comments, Mr. Chairman, I would like to acknowledge once again the Minister of Finance and the respect I have for her and the respect I have for the assistance that her staff provides myself and my researcher. As I've pointed out before, I actually have one-fifth of a researcher because the Official Opposition does not actually receive a whole lot in the way of financial support, so we don't have the same benefits that members on the other side have in terms of support. So myself and my 20 per cent of a researcher certainly do appreciate the help that we get from the minister. We do get a lot, and they're always very respectful of the job that we have to do. As I've pointed out before, I do believe that this results in better debate and, ultimately, better legislation.

I'd also just like to acknowledge that the Finance minister and myself, I think it would be fair to say, probably think more alike when it comes to matters of finance for this province than either one of us would ever admit publicly. Having said that, I have some serious problems with this bill and particularly with the process that leads us to debating this bill today.

I said before that I'm not going to necessarily complain about a lot of the money that's being asked for by the government in this bill, although there are some instances where I do question the money, but for the most part this is money that I think it would be fair to say could have been recognized three or four months ago that would have to be spent.

The real question is the validity of the budgeting process that the government undertakes, how much worth there is in it when we come here every spring to debate the budget, whether or not there is adequate planning and adequate recognition on the part of various departments as to how much money they will be needing for the coming year, and quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, whether or not there is adequate discipline on the part of the government in terms of sticking to a budget that this Assembly passes. I would certainly argue that, in fact, there is not adequate discipline, that there doesn't seem to be much willingness, if any at all, on the part of the government to pass a meaningful budget and then show the discipline to stay within the bounds of that budget.

It may have been mentioned previously but I think it's worth noting what happens to other entities if they, in fact, exceed their budget. A graphic example, for sure, is individual MLAs. When their constituencies go over budget, they're actually required to deduct the amount of overrun from their next year's budget. Now, I'm not suggesting that we would want to see that happen in the case of the Alberta government because the people of the province would then suffer for the mismanagement of the government, which it could probably be successfully argued they do anyhow.

You can look at school boards, for example. When they go over budget, they're subject to audit by this government. When health authorities go over budget, they have to come begging cap in hand to the government for more money. Sometimes they get it; sometimes they don't. In the case of the Calgary health region, which has been discussed a number of times in the Assembly today, they're getting a little more money but not enough to cover their budget overruns. So whether it be MLAs or party caucuses or school boards or health authorities, there are some relatively tight reins on their budgeting and, certainly, not just a matter of giving themselves more money if, in fact, they do go over budget.

This government, however, not only makes it a practice but, in fact, it's almost without saying, it's just an automatic, a given that we will find ourselves debating in this House at least once a year and quite often twice a year supplementary spending. They just come back and get more money. It's that simple. It really, as I said, leads to a lack of discipline in terms of sticking within a budget.

One of the biggest concerns that I have, Mr. Chairman – I mentioned this in the press conference last week when the minister gave her first-quarter update – is that this document, this Bill 44 that we're debating this afternoon, is asking for about \$1.5 billion in extra spending, which not coincidentally, I would argue, is almost identical to the amount of extra money that the government took in in the first quarter of this year. At that press conference the minister announced an unbudgeted surplus, an even bigger surplus than what had been forecast in the budget and what we had approved in this Assembly, of \$1.5 billion, and here we are today debating the expenditure of \$1.5 billion. So quite clearly we are, as I've argued before, spending the money as fast as it comes in. We're spending the money as quickly as it can come out of the ground. There is no real effort whatsoever to save this legacy for our children or their children; rather, we just spend it as quickly as we make it.

Mr. Chairman, I've argued in the past that we should perhaps be looking at an idea where we would save up front some of that natural, nonrenewable revenue so that there would be something left over when this is all over. I've referenced the bumper sticker in the

past, and I won't read it verbatim because I got into trouble with this House the last time I used the exact language. Certainly, the bumper sticker – and many of us had them on our bumpers in the mid-80s – talked about making sure that there was something left over the next time, and here we are spending the money as fast as it comes in.

3:20

I have a real problem with the fact that we continue to have on the books in this province legislation that demands that every single penny of net income from the heritage savings trust fund go into general revenue. I can't imagine that we have that legislation on the books at a time of unprecedented wealth and unprecedented revenue from nonrenewable resources, that we're still making ourselves, mandating ourselves, legislating ourselves to put every single penny of income from that fund into general revenue and thereby raping that fund. I've talked before about how that fund is worth only approximately half of what it would be worth had we at least inflation-proofed it since 1987, which we failed to do until only a year and a half ago. So the very minimum that I would ask of this government is a commitment to at least save the revenue that that fund generates. And it's not just me saying that. Everywhere across this province when people learn of the fact that that money gets dumped into general revenue and isn't saved in the fund, they can't believe it either.

Now, we talked about unbudgeted surpluses, and I mentioned that in the first quarter alone this year the unbudgeted surplus is \$1.5 billion. In fact, Mr. Chairman, over the last 12 years the total amount of unbudgeted surpluses – now, this is money that is over and above what we said we would make extra. What we said we would earn beyond what we spent, over and above that. We're now in – I can't remember the exact number – something in the order of \$35 billion in the last 12 years. The Finance minister said many times – and I agree with her – that it's better to have more money at the end of the year than you thought you were going to have. I don't disagree with that, and I don't think anybody does. Clearly, this happens year after year, 12 years in a row.

Last year it was \$10 billion more than we had budgeted that we would have left over at the end of the year, and there's every indication that it could very well be that much again this year. We passed a budget only three months ago that showed a surplus of \$4.3 billion. Already that number is up to \$5.9 billion, nearly \$6 billion, and that's after only the first quarter. So there is a very realistic expectation that if oil prices continue to hover around \$70 and \$6.50 or \$7 for gas, we could once again be looking at a \$10 billion surplus.

The Finance minister at that press conference last week stood and answered a question about unbudgeted surpluses and admitted to the people of this province that the government does not have a plan for how to use those unbudgeted surpluses. She said: we're sitting on it; we're watching it collect interest. That's the only plan, to sit on it and watch it collect interest.

We as the Official Opposition have been arguing since early 2004 that at the very least we should have a plan for unbudgeted surpluses, and we've outlined it: 35 per cent for the heritage savings trust fund, 35 per cent for a postsecondary endowment fund, 25 per cent to address the critical infrastructure debt, and 5 per cent to go to an endowment fund for arts and humanities. I've said before, Mr. Chairman, that you can argue the percentages, you can argue the allocations, you can argue the uses of those funds, but you can't argue that it is a plan that would deal with surplus dollars, which this government and the minister the other day flat out acknowledged that they don't have a plan for. It's just a terrible disservice to the people of this province and to future generations that will follow us to admit that.

Mr. Chairman, we were called back into this Assembly for this very rare, very short summer sitting ostensibly to approve added dollars for education. It's been argued by speakers before me both in second reading and during Committee of Supply that this was entirely predictable, and I'm certainly not going to stand here and suggest that we shouldn't approve extra money for education. In fact, I support it wholly. The truth is that there's probably not enough money here for education. In fact, I think the minister has acknowledged that there will be more money coming, that there's a need for more money.

The question is: why couldn't they have seen this coming? The Minister of Education has trotted out excuses like, "Well, you know, they don't do their budgeting until late in the year, and it doesn't mesh with our budgeting" and so forth. The reality is that there were indications from school boards long before the budget was ever introduced in this Assembly back in March that there would be needs above and beyond what the government was willing to give. I've got letters in my office from teachers, I've got letters in my office from various members of school boards indicating that they had asked the government for more money. The capital plans of these various boards across the province show that they need more money. So for the minister to suggest that they weren't aware of the need or that the exact dollars weren't there in advance I have trouble accepting because, clearly, it had been communicated time and again to the government, to the Finance minister, and to the Education minister that these needs were going to be there.

To come back now, quite frankly, at the end of August and finally approve that money almost does a disservice to the various boards because now they're left scrambling, trying to do what they should have been able to do back in May and June. It's questionable whether or not they're going to be able to get things in place in time for the start of the school year. In fact, Mr. Chairman, you're probably aware that some of the schools are already back in, so we've got kids in schools, and we don't have teachers. They might be there next month if we can find them. If those teachers that we laid off back in June haven't found other employment, if they're still available by some chance, perhaps we might get them back. We may be able to move towards reaching the goals of the Learning Commission in terms of class size, but there's absolutely no guarantee whatsoever that that's going to happen.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about school fees. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung has talked an awful lot about school fees in this House. He's presented petitions in this House from constituents of Edmonton-McClung regarding school fees. I just want to outline some of what's going on out there. I'm not going to name the high school. I don't necessarily think it would be fair to point them out in particular because, quite frankly, I don't think that they're all that different from anybody else. If I were to suggest that this one school is doing this in terms of fees and somehow leave the impression that they're different from others or that others aren't doing this, I think that would be unfair.

Here's an example from a registration handbook, some of the fees that this particular high school is charging this year's registrants. I think you'll agree with me that some of them are unusual, and many of them I'm sure that most people would have thought would be covered and certainly should be covered by the Education budget and wouldn't necessarily be expected from parents.

The first one that caught my eye, Mr. Chairman, is parking. This particular high school in Edmonton is charging students to park. Now, there aren't very many students that actually have the opportunity to drive to school. Most, I'm sure, take transit. But can you imagine? There's a \$44 per year parking charge if a student is fortunate enough to have a vehicle to drive to school. I've never

heard of that before. It took me by complete surprise. I don't know if they charge the teachers for parking as well or not. I'd be curious to know that.

Optional fees: bus passes. Thirty-eight dollars now for a bus pass for a student to attend school. We've talked about this before. We know that the minister has actually given a little more money to the schools for transportation, yet this same school charged \$30 last year, and it's \$38 this year. Now, we talked a little bit earlier today about MLA compensation. I don't think there's an MLA that can't afford to pay \$38 for their child to buy a bus pass, but I can guarantee you, Mr. Chairman, that there are a lot of parents in this city who will find that increase very problematic. It concerns me a lot that some kids might end up now walking to school in a situation when they wouldn't normally have to, and perhaps it may cause safety concerns. I'm not sure. But I really do think that's quite telling, that we're now charging \$38 for a bus pass.

3:30

Printing. Ten dollars each student has to pay for access to printers to print off homework that is assigned by the school. Now, I understand that when this was questioned at this school, they were told: "Well, you can print your work off at home. There's nothing that says you have to print it off at school." I'm not sure that all children have access to a printer at home. Most families, I'm sure, probably do have computers and, perhaps, printers at home, but not all do, and certainly the families that would least likely have printers and computers in their home would probably be the same families that could least likely afford to pay \$10 to the school to have their homework printed off. I really question that.

A wellness fee. Now, we've talked an awful lot – and, in fact, the Minister of Finance acknowledged earlier today that prevention is the best medicine. Again, I don't think too many members would disagree with that. This particular high school – and it's not unusual; I know from experience with other high schools – is charging \$40 in terms of a wellness fee to allow students access to their health and wellness centre. So for these kids to go and work out in the gym, use the treadmill or use the free weights, they have to pay \$40. I think that absolutely flies in the face of government initiatives to get children more active. We've mandated physical activity in the schools now, yet we're turning around and charging them 40 bucks if they want to go work out in the gym.

Phys ed 10. Thirty-five dollars for transportation to the aquatics and arena units. Now, again, we've mandated that kids be physically active. We're encouraging them to do things like swim and play hockey or floor hockey or indoor soccer, yet we're charging \$30 for them to have that opportunity. A \$75 fee for phys ed 20 and an \$85 fee for phys ed 30, and no indication as to what those fees are for.

Science. There's a \$30 charge for introduction to engineering and a \$15 charge for marine biology. I'm assuming those are for workbooks. I'm not sure, Mr. Chairman. But it causes me concern once again that parents of kids taking science are being hit by these extra charges.

Here's one that blows my mind. Math 14, 24, and math 10 applied: a \$15 charge to cover the cost of student workbooks. To cover the cost of student workbooks. My colleague from Lethbridge-East is shaking her head, and you should all be shaking your heads. Student workbooks. Would it not be fair to assume that a student workbook in a math class should be covered by Alberta Education? We're asking parents to ante up separate for that?

I look forward to the opportunity to carry on, Mr. Chairman. I have a lot more.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on Bill 44, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). I want to start by making some observations on the peculiar nature of this session. I have spent nine years in this House and started on my 10th, a few months into it. First time in those years that a special session such as this one is being held. Supplementary estimates have been a yearly exercise, but usually this House has dealt with them a couple of times a year during the fall session and then again during the spring session, when monies have been spent as part of the appropriation and supplementary supply estimates.

This session I said is unique certainly in the last nine and a half years that I've been around. I would not be surprised if this kind of session is unique in the entire 100-year history of this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, who certainly has a flair for historical vignettes, probably can dig up this information and inform us one day if, in fact, this session stands out as the lone and only example of the kind of session that has been called, especially less than four months after the primary budget for 2006-07 has been passed, to deal with additional monies needed for that budget.

Why is this? Why do I make this point, Mr. Chairman? I think it is important to begin to grasp the significance of this happening. It seems to me that it certainly looks like a lack of any idea in terms of planning, in terms of forecasting costs, and in terms of ensuring that for the areas in which public services are to be provided by this government, there is adequate funding committed at the appropriate time in the year; that is, at the beginning of the fiscal year during the debate on the budget.

This is poor governance, Mr. Chairman, extremely poor governance. If one needed any evidence of this, it's right here. People have called it a band-aid budget, a remedial session. Others call it an emergency session. Why the emergency? No one has made it clear. But it certainly feels like sitting in an emergency room in a hospital, trying to have the problems arising from a stroke that may have occurred three months ago being addressed in the hospital emergency room. Just as going to an emergency room three months after a stroke is not very helpful, will not likely lead to much remediation in terms of returning to good health, similarly I think this kind of exercise in an emergency session, or a remedial session, as the leader of my caucus has called it, is no guarantee that the government is about to learn to return to appropriate budgeting practice and forecasting. It has all the tools. It has all the resources, all the experience, but it looks like there is an evident inability to learn from experience.

The two arguments that are given are, one, rapid population growth. Well, that's been happening in this province not for the last three months but for the last three to five years. So nothing new about that. The second is, of course, the cost escalation when it comes to capital costs, that those costs are rising very fast, and therefore there was no way possible to have estimated effectively, appropriately the budgetary requirements for the capital projects which were being funded under the budget.

I think both of these arguments are fallacious. They don't hold water because the cost escalation issue is something that has not happened just all of sudden over the last three months. We heard this reference to it during the debate on the budget in April and May. We have heard that argument for several years now. We have got the same news from various public institutions in the area of health, education, seniors, and others, who have been telling us that costs have been growing.

3:40

We on this side of the House have drawn attention to the pressures and the sources of cost escalation for years, including deregulation policies and the inability and failure of the government to bring in

cost controls by way of establishing a pharmaceutical policy in place which would help reduce the ever-growing costs on the health care side. So it's not that there have not been ideas put forth as to how to deal with the cost escalation. It's not that this news has not been around for some time. It's just that this government has either not been listening or is unable to use the information available to factor into its estimates that it brings forward in the form of a budget. It's bad news for Albertans to have a government that's unable to really effectively deliver on one of the most key and core responsibilities that it has; that is, the budget and the public monies that it requests in order to meet its obligations by way of budget estimates.

The second argument that's given is in terms of increasing population due to rapid economic growth. Well, again, this government has been of course boasting about the rapidity of the economic growth, the high level of economic growth year after year in this province. So it's not something new. It's not news that the government didn't know anything about. In fact, it has been trying to stake its whole reputation on the fact that it has achieved this rapid level of growth regardless of warnings that it has been receiving from municipalities, particularly in the Fort McMurray area, regardless of advice they have been receiving from the likes of former Premier Peter Lougheed that there's a need, perhaps, to slow down, to take a look where we want to go, how fast we want to get there, and why it is that we want to go to that point rather than some other.

This government has been absolutely, totally not so much oblivious but determined not to listen to advice, regardless of where it comes from, whether it comes from the opposition benches here or whether it comes from people who in principle are philosophically in agreement with the government but say that something has gone awry.

We need to slow down. The government needs to take some action to make sure that they slow down so that they have a chance to look carefully and plan the activities for the next few years and bring onside the major economic players, including the corporations, the oil and gas industry, and others, who are the wheelers and dealers and the main actors on the economic side.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

The economy and the economic growth are not the only thing that governments need to pay attention to. They need to pay attention to the society at large and know the consequences of this rapid escalation of costs and growth in population. The rapid rate of economic growth, primarily due to the headlong rush to expand oil sands projects as quickly as possible, is disastrous for many segments of our society. Housing is one issue that has come up here in the last three to four days in question period again and again, yet the Premier says, and his cabinet colleagues seem to agree: we will not intervene; let the market take care of the chaos that's before us.

Mr. Chairman, that's not good enough. The market must always be a tool, not a sacred cow not to be touched. The market must submit to the needs of society rather than society being dragged along by the market. What is a market after all? You know, this abstract notion of the market doesn't really help us debate the issues, whether government intervention, government's ability to take autonomous action in spite of the market are desirable things, unless we know what the market is. Those who talk about free markets and free trade and all of that stuff need to, I think, take cognizance of the fact how markets fail and how market actor, some that act so badly, make not only decisions that are technically disastrous but make decisions that are deliberately planned to rob some others in the market of their assets, of their investments, and engage in acts of

what can only be called piracy or plunder. The collapse of Enron, the case of dot-com, the litigation and civil and criminal investigations that Lord Black, the great hero of the free market in Canada, is implicated in: all of these are clear pieces of evidence which suggest that if we want to rely on markets, we better be careful what we mean by markets.

Especially in this House, Mr. Chairman, to continue to harp that markets will take care of everything is to ignore the historical experience of Albertans during the Great Depression and the following years. Albertans learned not to allow markets. At that time, of course, the question was the speculators from the east and the banks and how their decisions and policies and interests came into direct conflict with the interests of ordinary, hard-working folks living on the prairies, including this province, where we learned to in fact deal with markets with a grain of caution. Often Albertans urged their own elected governments year after year, election after election to in fact develop alternative strategies to reduce this reliance on the so-called markets or market players, which at that time, of course, seemed to be situated, you know, thousands of miles away in eastern Canada. Ottawa and Toronto became the targets because that's where this powerful concentration of wealth and corporate headquarters was, so Albertans became, I think, appropriately critical and suspicious of these big market players. So the market wasn't something so sacred, an icon that you never looked at with some degree of suspicion and tried to develop some ways of controlling the decisions that markets will make, nevertheless decisions which will negatively impact Albertans.

I've been hearing here and during the question period references to the market again as if markets are supreme, markets are sacred, markets can never do wrong, and therefore this government uses this terribly indefensible reason to fail to act, to justify its failure to take action, whether it has to do with housing, whether it has to do with infrastructure, whether it has to do with the lack of spaces in a postsecondary institution, or whatever have you.

So, Mr. Chairman, this supplementary budget is in a way I think the result of poor governance, poor governance which fundamentally is rooted in these flawed conceptions of the market, conceptions of the market which are out of date, conceptions of the market which Albertans have learned not to trust, not to rely on. I regret the fact and deplore the fact that this government is not willing to learn from the bitter experience of Albertans themselves over the years in how markets have failed them and, therefore, for this government to hitch its wagons to the market without question.

3:50

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I'll use the few remaining minutes that I have to draw attention to the fact that the other evening when I was talking on the supplementary request for Advanced Education for \$49.1 million or something, I asked some specific questions of the minister on where this money is going, whether the minister has asked the appropriate questions. What I didn't get were any answers from the minister. He said that he will reply in writing. I'm surprised when a special session is to be called for a minister not to be ready with the answers that are obvious and that will come up in the debate. We didn't debate all 15 departments. We had no time to do that. We debated only perhaps five or six departments altogether, and even those for which we had some time to ask questions, the House got no answers when the questions were asked. The questions are seen as legitimate but no answers.

We can't really sort of support the request that's before us simply because the questions that we asked, asked in all seriousness, have no answers given to them. This leaves the House in limbo, and the expectation that the House will simply rubber-stamp \$1.39 billion or

something in additional funds without addressing those questions is unfair. I think it's inappropriate. I think we need to take the House's input into budget making and budget approval seriously. If we are to do that, then I think we need to allow sufficient time for budgetary estimates, whether they are primary or supplementary, to be debated appropriately and given enough time for members of this House and the ministers responsible to engage each other in serious debate and address some of those questions.

So, Mr. Chairman, these are some of the questions that I asked the other day about this \$49 million. The minister said that . . . [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired] I think that I will have to take my seat.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My honoured colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford brought up the concern over school fees and questioned why students were having to pay for a whole variety of circumstance. In Calgary the school board has taken a different tack, and it's having a very direct effect on programs. The Calgary public school board for a large part has done away with school fees, and for a high school in my area, Sir Winston Churchill high school, that means a loss of \$98,000. School fees should not be required when parents and taxpayers in general already pay income tax. They pay property tax; they pay health care tax. They should not have to be paying school fees for essentials. But now Calgary parents more so than ever before are going to have to be forced into heading out to the casinos, and of course that's an unfair circumstance because when you're working three jobs, you don't have time to give extra support for casinos. So, again, the parents who have the most time, the greatest degree of wealth will be able to go out to the casinos and raise funds for basic education that this province doesn't cover. Education obviously isn't a priority.

Last night in my comments with regard to the infrastructure deficit for Calgary schools I talked about the half billion dollar infrastructure defrayed costs that Calgary schools are facing. For whatever reason the constituency I represent of Calgary-Varsity was hit hardest in the entire city of all the constituencies when it came to either school or program closures. The school that I began my teaching career in 35 years ago, Jerry Potts elementary school, a relatively new school, only 35 years old, was unfortunately forced by this government's infrastructure and school size regulations and restrictions to close.

Another school very close by, Varsity Acres school, was required, because of burgeoning enrolment, to go French only and shut down its English program. Unfortunately, the board, I'm believing with pressure of lack of funding from the province, decided that instead of taking the hundred-plus kids from Varsity Acres school, that was approximately three or four blocks away from Jerry Potts, and the 35 regular kids living in the community – instead of putting those 135 kids into Jerry Potts school, which is a very small facility to begin with, the board, unfortunately, made the decision to require kids to hop on a bus to go to another neighbouring school across a 70-kilometre stretch of traffic. So what's happening is that these kids who went formerly to their local schools, Jerry Potts and Varsity Acres, are now joining the over 40,000 kids, when you combine the Catholic and public schools, that will spend over a hundred thousand kilometres each day on the bus. Of course, with the bus driver shortage in Calgary and the scrapping of routes in the Calgary board, that hundred thousand kilometre bus ride per day will increase.

At this moment I just want to give credit to Janet Ross. Janet Ross years ago was a former student of mine at Jerry Potts. She is now the very hard-working chair of the school council at Calgary Varsity. Janet along with her colleagues, both from Calgary Varsity and Jerry Potts, tried desperately to appeal to the province and appeal to the school board to keep Jerry Potts school open. Both schools were in agreement that the best solution for their kids, if the English program had to be closed at Varsity, was that they be moved over to Jerry Potts. Unfortunately, that decision got nowhere.

One of the ways of judging how badly a school is in need of repairs is called the facility condition index. The way that is calculated is by determining the amount of cost it would be to repair the school by the cost of replacement. Under 5 per cent is considered good, 5 per cent and over is considered fair, and anything over 10 per cent is considered poor. In the neighbouring community of Mountview, Terrace Road elementary is at a 10.24. Montgomery junior high is at 12.82.

Now, my wife taught at Montgomery junior high school for a number of years with electrical transformers dripping onto students' desks, with tiles missing on the floor and tiles missing in the ceiling. The fact that this school is rated at only a 12.82 amazes me. Branton junior high in my area is listed at a 6.03, slightly above satisfactory. St. Jean Brebeuf junior high is listed at an 8.99, so it's well into the poor category.

4:00

What I find most interesting is that the constituency that has the greatest collection of schools in the saddest condition just happens to be Calgary-Elbow. For those of you who aren't familiar with who represents Calgary-Elbow, it's our Premier. I would suggest that when the Premier takes his rubber boots off, finishing his fishing trip, and when they clean the think tank down in the States, he trade in his rubber boots for workboots. Maybe he could go over to Elbow Park elementary, which is FCI percentage of 19.15, or maybe he'd like to lend a hand at Elboya elementary/junior high school, 40.34. Rideau Park, at 13.3, would love to see him in work pants and with his hammer. Sir James Lougheed elementary could sure use his help: 43.39. Glamorgan elementary, 20.09; Chinook Park elementary, 10.95; St. James, 9.53. Those are just the worst ones.

In Calgary-Buffalo our Solicitor General might want to in his spare time lend his assistance to Sunalta elementary. This is the school he wanted to protect from the halfway house. It's got an FCI of 23.46. Alexander Ferguson elementary, 10.01; Connaught elementary, 25.94. If he's got some extra time he could go over to Sacred Heart and help out. They're at a 15.25.

Over to Calgary-Bow. This area is represented by one of our leadership contenders. She might want to provide some assistance at Westgate elementary, where the FCI is 21.33. She might want to help out at Vincent Massey, 21.07. I'm sure Bowcroft elementary, where a very good friend of mine, Ted Woynilowicz, recently retired, could use her help because it's at a 12.61. Keep in mind, above 5 per cent is considered poor.

Our Lady of the Assumption. That's a good name for a school. They're still assuming that this government is going to come to their rescue: 13.44.

In the Calgary-Glenmore constituency: Haysboro, 9.51; Bishop Kidd, 7.42.

I don't want to bore the House with details, but the point is that that's why Calgary is at a half billion dollar infrastructure deficit.

I would like to see the kids off the buses, and I would like to see them in the new schools. Forty communities without schools. The answer is not: put them on the yellow bus, short of bus drivers, fill up the tank with Alberta's nonrenewable resources, and send the kid off to school.

An Hon. Member: That's only for the rural kids.

Mr. Chase: No, it's not. For the rural communities there is a large, spread out area. There is a need for schools and so on, but the rural areas don't have the concentrated population and need to the same extent for large composite schools. The rural schools that I've travelled to – and I should have the statistics to share with you – are suffering as well. It's not an either/or. It's not urban schools versus country schools. All schools are suffering.

Among the 40 districts without new schools and where parents are looking for help is the Royal Oak school. Tuscany recently received a K to 3 school. They're grateful for anything, but the older children, the grades 4 through 6, still have to hop on the bus.

Last spring my colleagues from Calgary-Currie and Calgary-Mountain View and I participated in the homeless count. When the figures came through, it turned out that homelessness in Calgary had risen by 30 per cent. We have a problem, and unfortunately this government is not addressing it.

I recently toured the food bank in Calgary. They have the good fortune of receiving, thanks to the kindness of a company, an extended lease for a fantastic facility. It's a large warehouse with many bays and a large walk-in freezer. There is no problem in terms of the generosity of Calgarians contributing food to this facility. One of the greatest expenses that this facility has is having the goods transported to the facility and the waste products transported from. The Calgary Interfaith Food Bank would very much appreciate support from the government in taking over its lease, providing it with sustainable funding as a recognition of the job they do.

The lack of support for other outreach programs such as Meals on Wheels. Lou Winthers of Meals on Wheels together with the Ismaili community, who put forward a wonderful parade float, recognized the importance of Meals on Wheels. The facility that Meals on Wheels is currently in is completely inadequate given the demand. We think of Meals on Wheels as traditionally just dealing with shut-ins, helping people that cannot get out of the house. They do that, but they do much more. They provide school lunches for three schools; they've got 17 schools on a waiting list. Not only do they provide lunches for schools, but they provide bag lunches for working men and women at the Calgary Drop-in Centre. These people are without a home, but they do have jobs, and Meals on Wheels recognizes the fact that to do their daily work they need their daily bread, something the government has failed to recognize.

In terms of infrastructure shortcomings Mayor Bronconnier has said that up until last year the city of Calgary was holding its own. That's no longer the case when it comes to infrastructure. The mayor has called upon the province to give back the property tax portion that they currently collect in the name of education although it never makes it into education; it disappears into general revenue. He said: give us some flexibility. Municipalities have called for a \$20 million relief fund over the next five years. Hopefully the government will consider this. The problem with the property tax is: if you give it back to the cities, will you then recognize the underfunded situation that the school boards face, or are you going to put the schools and the municipalities into warfare, tugging at those lost property tax dollars that should never have been taken away from the boards originally in 1994? What are you going to do? How are you going to fund it?

4:10

Other delays and 41st anniversaries: 41 years ago the city of Calgary, a much smaller city, began negotiating with the Tsuu T'ina for a ring road. Forty-one years later we are still waiting for those negotiations to come through. We have heard that an appraiser has

been agreed to by the Tsuu T'ina, the province, and the federal government. I look forward to an answer as to when we can expect an environmentally sound and structurally appropriate six-lane bridge across the Elbow river. I know that the DFO, the federal government, is responsible for approving the structure. I hope they use a similar structure like the Stoney Trail bridge. It's high, it's got six lanes, it's effective, it doesn't interfere with either animals or humans, and it serves a great purpose. If we're looking for a style of bridge to go for, let's go for that one.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

In terms of infrastructure concerns I brought out the fact that in my community of University Heights the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation in its infinite wisdom built a sound barrier in a ditch. As a result, while you walk by the sound barrier and look up, way above the sound barrier you see the wheels of passing trucks. Then you look, as the Friendly Giant would say, "way, way up." You see the smokestacks, the exhaust pipes from which the noise comes, and, oh yes, all above the sound barrier; well thought out. Unbelievable.

When it comes to parks and protected areas, I would like to hand off a great big bouquet to the Harvie family, a family that has got a history of philanthropy. They come from ranching stock, the true Albertans, the first Albertans, a pioneer spirit. They had the fortitude, the wisdom to provide land, very valuable land, which they gave to the government considerably below the price so that we could have our Bow watershed protected, we could have some pristine land to recreate in, hopefully of the walking variety, and we could have our watershed protected. This is a major concern because the Bow River provides Calgary with half its water.

It is my hope that this similar type of protection will be afforded to the Bragg Creek area, the area through which the Elbow River flows and which is responsible for the other 50 per cent of the water that Calgary receives. The government has in its power the ability to thumb up or thumb down the forestry management plan, which, basically, if I were to summarize, means: in order to save the trees for future generations, we will cut them down now. I guess they'll save them in log piles.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to address the health issues that are in my region. I'll be talking about the debt that's been created by trying to eliminate the debt in this province. There are actually common themes that really run through the province in terms of the problems within health care, and the main thing, of course, as we all know, is the shortage of health care professionals. It is a huge, huge issue. It is something that came to the fore – it was the most prominent thing that was a problem – when we were talking about the MLA task force. It was staff, staff, staff. I think it's very, very important that we put an emphasis on the staff for health care because we are losing them to doughnut shops, and I think that's wrong.

Each region has the responsibility for coming up with plans and carrying out the projects designed to overcome their challenges. In my region the deficit is \$2.4 million this year; however, it's \$9.6 million total, including the accumulated deficit from the previous year. From the knowledge that I have, I believe that this is probably an honest deficit. They have done everything that they can to cut. I think part of it is that people are working overtime again because labour is such a huge, huge issue.

Three of the other top issues in my region are human resources recruitment of health professionals, that I've referred to, but we not

only have to recruit them; we actually have to be able to increase the seats at the Lethbridge Community College and the U of L so that we can turn out RNs with baccalaureates. Certainly, in the year 2007 the Lethbridge Community College is anticipating having the enhanced licensed practical nurse program, the LPN program. That will help, but we must open up more seats.

We need to provide access to all health services, and that has to be increased in our region. We have to ensure that the funding formula continues to be based on population with adjustments for age and gender. Southern Alberta has a higher percentage of seniors, which increases the overall burden due to the increased need for chronic disease care management and long-term care diagnostic exams.

When I refer to long-term care, it is an entity unto itself. In the Chinook health region they have definitely made a concerted effort, one that I think I would debate. It is a concerted effort to decrease the number of actual long-term care beds, taking some people who don't belong in long-term care and creating other designations: designated assisted living, assisted living, lodges, enhanced lodges, et cetera.

Regardless of where these people are housed, they simply must have properly trained people to care for them that are trained to be able to assess when these people are in trouble or if things have changed. Good staff can recognize changes in the people that they care for almost instantly if they've been trained and if they are consistent. They can't work in three and four and five different places and be consistently aware and have the full knowledge of the people that they care for.

Another priority is the expansion of the Lethbridge regional hospital to include more space for outpatient programming, but one of the things that it has to include – and certainly the conversations have been held – is to include radiation therapy. There was an article in the December '05 journal of *Current Oncology* called *Access to Radiation Therapy: Modelling the Geographic Distribution of Demand*, by Michael Taylor, P.S. Craighead, and P.B. Dunscombe. It concluded that a move away from a centralized service delivery model would “be beneficial in some form for the 28% . . . of rural Albertans who currently live more than 100 km from existing radiation therapy services.” They estimate that about 400 Lethbridge area patients travel to Calgary for treatment every year, and this number is expected to increase as people age.

The Cancer Society in Lethbridge funds between 50 and 60 people a year that are low income and must travel. They pay only 10 cents a kilometre, but I must admit that this is under review. I hope that they will see their way clear to increase this, especially with the price of gas, that has gone through the roof following this 10-cent-a-kilometre designation. So it by no means covers all the costs, and it is limited to low-income people to a maximum of \$500 a year per person. This really doesn't adequately cover some of the costs that they do incur.

Every Monday my fellow southern Albertans drive north on highway 2 to the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary in order to receive the radiation treatment. These cancer patients spend most of the week in Calgary getting treatment, and then they drive back to their homes on Friday afternoon. Those patients who are unable to make the gruelling trip back and forth must remain in Calgary, and it's often for weeks at a time. So many families have had to make this trip that the demand for radiation treatment in Lethbridge is overwhelming. In fact, last year 15,000 people signed a petition asking for radiation treatment in Lethbridge.

4:20

Given the devastating impact of cancer and radiation treatment, I would hope that the Minister of Health and Wellness would take a

very serious look at this for southern Albertans and move forward on the Lethbridge project to be able to provide radiation treatment outside of the two urban centres. Alberta's growing population and the increase in the cancer rate is contributing to the mushrooming demand for radiation, and the Tom Baker cancer centre is feeling the upswing on that one. As a result, again, there is a demand for the satellite centre.

Residents in Lethbridge – and it isn't just the residents in Lethbridge; it truly is everyone probably south of Calgary – are demanding that we have this radiation treatment centre and have it established at the Lethbridge regional hospital. There has been knowledge that the Lethbridge satellite cancer centre is further advanced than the Calgary planning, and Calgary's planning is, I understand, five years off, with a possible \$600 million price tag. However, as we all know, with this labour market and materials these costs I'm sure will go up over the next five years. Lethbridge's planning and Lethbridge's need is now, so what I would like to ask the minister is to take a very careful look at the Lethbridge centre and to please put it ahead, actually, of the Calgary one. I realize that Calgary has to be increased, but if a lot of the people from southern Alberta weren't going to Calgary, it would take some of that pressure off.

The region has an exceedingly high population of aboriginals. We have two of the largest reserves in the country. We have the Bloods and the Peigan very close to Lethbridge. Many, many, many of our aboriginal, First Nation people are moving into Lethbridge. We must be working with them to teach and prevent and manage obesity and diabetes, which is running rampant, unfortunately, through their populations. Not only do we have to help them prevent it, but when it does occur, there are huge complications that happen if these are not managed in a very professional manner and on a very regular basis. We have to focus on the risk factors for diabetes, and certainly there has to be early testing and diagnosis. To be able to actually have our aboriginal citizens recognize what's going on, we need to be able to go back to the reserves. It would have to be done in conjunction with the federal government because they are on the reserves, but we have to teach them at a very early age how to recognize the symptoms of early-onset diabetes and how to have the testing done because it can be done very simply.

We need to identify a need for the latest technology in operating room design and equipment to improve patient safety, shorten the length of stay. I believe that the Minister of Health and Wellness actually referred to the difference from when she was nursing, how long it took for a gallbladder operation. Because I nursed later than she did, I know that it can be done very simply: probably a day and a half, and you're out. So we need to shorten those lengths of stays.

We need to increase the surgical capacity certainly within the regional hospital and retain and recruit surgical specialists. It looks good on paper, but it is exceedingly difficult to be able to do. Again I would say – this would probably go to the Minister of Advanced Education – that we simply must open up more seats for health care professionals in this province. The cost of an i-Suite operating theatre is approximately \$1.5 million.

The Chinook health region realizes that with the deficit they have, even if they got the money from the province, it's not helping them go forward. We have a very good hospital foundation, and I know that they're working very hard toward raising this money for our operating theatres; however, I don't believe that that should let the government off the hook because they can get other people to raise the money that truly they should be providing for the people in Lethbridge for our health region.

I would like to leave those thoughts with the Minister of Health and Wellness. Please really consider giving us the radiation centre that we need so badly.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my privilege to stand and speak to the appropriations. As I've indicated in the House before, my key issues have to do with water and environmental investments, natural capital as well as human capital and financial capital. I guess I'm concerned, in the light of the tremendous surpluses and wealth of the province, that we do our diligence in relation to longer term planning. Specifically, how can we make some of the development decisions we're making without the benefit of a land-use plan?

We're continuing to make decisions on the basis of the assumptions we've made relatively safely until this last decade that we will have unlimited resources to draw from. But as things are unfolding, particularly in southern Alberta, as evidence mounts that climate change is going to have a significant impact on the various aspects of our natural capital and our ability to sustain some of our communities – and, certainly, the business climate will be affected – it's imperative that some of these investments be used in a smart and intelligent way that recognizes the need for long-term planning and a strategy based on land use over the next 50 years. We continue to wait for that, Mr. Chairman, and I think all of us on this side of the House and, I'm sure, on the other side are eagerly anticipating the investment that's needed and the invaluable assistance that our residents and our municipalities can contribute to a plan that will be both science based and value based in the communities around Alberta.

It's clear that water will be the issue limiting development in southern Alberta. We've already recognized overallocations in the Bow River, Elbow River, and South Saskatchewan basin, yet proposals continue to come forward and be approved, most recently in the area of Balzac for a racecourse, a huge mall infrastructure that has the potential for serious compromise to water supplies and water treatment programs if it's not adequately planned for and if the research isn't there to ensure that we will have water and land-use opportunities to do the development and to protect the people and the businesses that intend to locate there. Recent evidence has indicated that groundwater in the area has been dropping steadily for the last decade. We don't know why, and we need to know why. The kind of decisions that are being forced upon this government without the benefit of a land-use plan, without a real understanding of our water inventory, without science-based cumulative impact assessment, and without meaningful public consultation places us in a very untenable situation.

My strong sense, coming from the perspective of sustainable development, is that we need a clear plan and that we need to have indicators of when we're moving in a sustainable way and when we're not, when we're exceeding the carrying capacity of a particular bioregion. We simply don't have the research to make those decisions, and we haven't done the planning. So I would press the government very seriously to move forward as quickly as possible on those fronts so that we can have confidence that the kind of boom we're experiencing now will not compromise future generations, will not compromise specific bioregions and render them unsustainable, in fact permanently damaged in some cases. That means looking at all of the ways that we manage our water. It means looking at the ways in which we have continued to focus on supply as opposed to demand management in this province, and we continue to allow water to be used without measurement and without full-cost accounting. This leaves us, again, in a totally untenable situation, comparable to someone drawing on their bank account without ever having any feedback about what's left in the bank account. Albertans expect better, they deserve better, and we on the

Liberal side commit to providing better when we form the next government.

4:30

The options that are open to us if we fail to do that are rather ominous. I think that across the province, across the country, across the globe people are saying that water is going to increasingly be a contentious issue. Already we're seeing conflicts between Calgary, for example, and the developers and communities around Calgary, where 19 communities will be involved in a public hearing next month in dispute, basically, with the city of Calgary, who refuses to give its share of allocated water to these communities to sustain their own growth. As a result, we are paying through the nose to the tune of \$80 million for water supplies coming from far afield from these communities, from the Kneehill water system, when for a fraction of the cost the city of Calgary, if the planning were in place, could supply adequate water to the areas around Balzac, Irricana, and Acme. So that is a pressing issue that I'm hearing concerns expressed about in the immediate rural areas.

Within the city of Calgary and my own constituents there are concerns being raised about water quality changes, about the decline in our glaciers, and the diminishing flows in the Bow. We've already lost 85 per cent of the flow in the Bow River over this last century with the loss of our glaciers, and the prospects for the next 30 years are very significant. So water management is critical for some of the issues that I have to deal with on a daily basis.

The questions continue to be raised in the area of the Horseshoe Canyon formation in southeastern Alberta where coal-bed methane is being developed at a record-breaking rate despite the fact that we still do not have the information related to some of these damaged aquifers and damaged wells. There remain serious questions that scientists at the University of Alberta are saying are not being adequately presented to the public. The Alberta Environment department continues to block access to some of the isotope testing and continues to reassure people in the Rosebud area that all is well and that these water wells are the fault of poor maintenance by farmers. That gets to be a tired tune when science shows us that there is, indeed, significant gas migration.

In fact, in the Lloydminster area about 50 per cent of water wells have been shown to be contaminated to varying degrees by some of the SAGD developments up there. There's growing evidence in the Horseshoe Canyon formation, based on the science of some of these U of A researchers, that we are not acknowledging some of the changes in our groundwater, both volumes and quality, that relate to some of the activity that's been going on for a hundred years in this province. It may not all be related to coal-bed methane. It may be a cumulative impact from shot holes, from boreholes, from the seismic lines and clear-cutting that is occurring in some areas, from the conventional and the unconventional oil and gas activity.

So making plans, making decisions on developments in the areas of south and eastern Alberta in the absence of real understanding of what's happening to our groundwater is a shame. A very strong message that I'm getting from landowners and from environmentalists and scientists is that we need to do better in terms of our water use planning. It is the issue of the decade. It is the issue that must be addressed before some of these major decisions are made about land use. I would strongly encourage the government to get the best of science advice, move forward quickly on getting the results of some of these putatively damaged wells, establish which have been damaged by resource activity, which are a natural phenomenon or poor maintenance in some cases, and be very clear about what our resources are going to be over the next decade.

In the area of my constituency there's also a strong message that in the centre of the city housing is a critical issue. It is not only

creating hardship, physical hardship, for people in my communities among those who are least able to deal with it: the handicapped, people impoverished, single mothers. It is also creating a tremendous mental stress and adding to the tremendous burden on our health care system as a result of not being able to provide the basic necessities of life in the context of safe, secure housing and the basic needs of adequate, balanced food and shelter and educational opportunities that we need to be able to do as a caring community. I note with interest that the government has made some important headway on the housing issue. I'm glad it's being a strong focus. I acknowledge that it needs to be and that this budget will go some distance in trying to alleviate some of the pressures. Clearly, it's the issue pressing most on our most disadvantaged in the communities, and I'm getting a lot of pressure on it.

In relation to the health care system, too, there is a need, again, to step back from the crisis that we're in and begin to look at the whole question of management of our health care and management of our resources and examine just the extent to which we're identifying outcomes from the burgeoning expenses and the growing stresses and strains on the health care system. My sense is that after regionalization we haven't necessarily looked carefully enough at what the impacts of regionalization are, on the bureaucracy. What kinds of decisions have had what kinds of outcomes? Are we, in fact, creating bottlenecks and inefficiencies and a failure to shift responsibility from various professional groups to where they can more sustainably be managed?

I spoke with a pharmacist today who feels that pharmacists could be doing a lot more than they're given at this time. Physicians need to be looking at the bigger picture and relinquishing some of their authority to both pharmacists and nurses, and nurses need to play a bigger role in the system. They clearly have a tremendous knowledge and experience with people and are underutilized to the detriment of the whole health care system and to the detriment of the long-term well-being of our residents because in some cases, indeed, nurses can address individuals' concerns more effectively than physicians.

So with that I would leave a few comments on the health care system: a need to review outcomes; review top-heavy administrative loads, which have not necessarily translated into better and more efficient delivery of health services in this province; a failure of delegation across the board in terms of our health professionals; and a profound failure nationally in bringing foreign medical graduates, foreign dental graduates, foreign professionals into the Canadian milieu and allowing them to practise and serve the community, reducing their own dependence on our support systems, improving their own mental health. It's a win-win situation to recognize that we have wasted, squandered, the resources of many of these foreign graduates by what I would call petty politics in our professions, putting up unnecessary barriers to some of these foreign-trained workers who are eminently qualified, eminently capable to step into some of these important positions of great need.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I think I'll take my seat. I appreciate the opportunity to address the Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:40

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get this opportunity again to discuss supplementary supply, this time through the bill. I had the opportunity previously to ask questions regarding the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and I'll certainly read with interest the responses that, hopefully, I will receive from the minister in regard to

questions. There's a significant amount of money here. There is certainly a need, and everyone recognizes the need for income support for farmers, particularly those in grain production at this time. As I said earlier, we discussed this whole issue in the Assembly last winter. Again, hopefully this money will reach the farmers that need it.

When we look at this entire budget or this entire request, and we see where it is certainly in excess of \$1 billion . . . [A bell rang] That may be the answer to my questions right there. When one looks at this and one considers that we've just gone through the budget process and you look at the \$1.366 billion estimates, you couldn't blame the taxpayers of this province if they were concerned about this government's inability to plan. I was so pleased to hear the Minister of Human Resources and Employment yesterday state that he admires how the Alberta Liberals have an ability to plan. I'm glad that is recognized by someone on that side of the House. Certainly our ideas are adopted by the government on occasion, many occasions. But when one looks at the plan of this government, there is cause for concern.

Now, we look at each department and we look at the size of government and we see the growth in government. One of the checks and balances that we used to have on this government as opposition members and as taxpayers was the fact that we could have a look at the annual reports of each and every ministry in a timely fashion. The government was always very proud of the fact that they would present a draft copy of the annual report. Each minister would go before the standing policy committees, and these are committees where opposition members are not allowed to participate. These are Progressive Conservative government-members-only committees. Each and every minister in the month of August – the occasional time it would be into September – would appear before that respective committee and present the draft annual report from their department for the fiscal year that ended the previous March.

This year – this year – all the ministries have to date not even approached the standing policy committees with their draft annual reports. It hasn't been done yet. No. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development looks up, and I know that he is thinking: was I there? No, he wasn't there yet. He was certainly there last year. I believe he was there on this date precisely last year. There were seven if not eight ministries that appeared a year ago today, August 30, before a respective standing policy committee.

So there are two questions here. Has this government completely lost direction, or have they scheduled the release of these draft annual reports after this mini summer session ends so that the bad news that's in there will not be used by the opposition members during question period? Is it mismanagement, or does the government have something to hide? Is there a waste of tax dollars in there that not only would the opposition parties discuss but that taxpayers would be outraged about? There are two things possibly here. It's never happened in my time in this Assembly that we haven't had these draft annual reports presented at this time of the year through the standing policy committees. But this year here we go. It hasn't happened. Hopefully, it'll happen here right after Labour Day, Mr. Chairman, but I don't know. I haven't seen any press releases to let me know when the minister of agriculture is going to make his presentation or when the Minister of Energy is going to make his presentation.

I used to enjoy so much going to the former Minister of Energy's presentation. Even the Conservative members on those standing policy committees would grill the Minister of Energy on the failures of electricity deregulation. In the summer a lot of them would go to their constituencies, talk to their constituents, and realize the folly of

electricity deregulation. It was interesting, to say the least, to sit there and watch that minister try to dance around that particular flawed policy. It got so bad that some of the performance measures that used to be in that department's annual report, comparing electricity prices in various places, were removed because it was a total embarrassment to this government.

Now, that's only one example. But we've got to have a look at this, and we've got to consider: is it mismanagement, or is this government hiding something, hiding the misspending of funds? If we had sort of an open, transparent system with this government, if we had a public accounts system that was more open and more transparent – and I must say that I did some historical research this summer on the previous Progressive Conservative government. The Speaker today, Mr. Chairman, talked about the Peter Lougheed victory in 1971. If one looks at how the government at that time reported to the citizens on how they spent the tax dollars, it's totally different than what it is now. It's totally different. It was much better. It was much more open. It was much more transparent.

I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly, including the hon. Member for Drayton Valley–Calmar, to go to the library downstairs and have a look at some of the public accounts documents going back to the first years when the Progressive Conservative Party formed the government. I admire their open, transparent method of reporting to the citizens. I'm sorry; I can't admire the current Progressive Conservative Party's method because it is certainly not open and it's not transparent.

For instance, contracts, all contracts from each department, would be listed. There was no end to the valuable information for taxpayers in those public accounts documents. You don't see that now. You're just given this blue book. Each contract is in there, and each amount in a grant is listed in there alphabetically, not by department. You have to wonder why. When you go through the blue book and you see some of the amounts, some of them are quite extravagant. You wonder if perhaps we couldn't have spent a little less there so that we would have money to spend on education and on health care now. If we were spending all this money wisely, would the Minister of Education have had to go back and rightfully ask for more money for the schools of this province? I don't know the answer to that. The Conservative government certainly should be able to help out and answer that.

I don't know how much time I have left, Mr. Chairman, but I have some specific questions in regard to this that I would like to get on the record and, hopefully, get an answer. Now, with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development could I please have some details on this \$715,000 that's requested here? What exactly is the government's position on these legal actions initiated by aboriginal groups? Who are these First Nations groups? Is this \$715,000 to pay for legal fees or lawyers' advice? What is the nature of these disputes? I would appreciate a little bit more information on that if I could.

4:50

Certainly, with Infrastructure and Transportation I was interested to read in a recent edition of one of our newspapers – it may have been the *Edmonton Journal*; I'm not sure – that there has been an \$11.2 million allocation here for the purchase of two new aircraft to replace the aging King Air 200s. Well, if something has been used in this province in the last few years, it's certainly been those King Airs, and if they're worn out, I can see why. This government has certainly been fond of using them.

Now, I would like to know what sort of cost-benefit analysis has been done on these new planes. I used to hear former members of this House on the government side complain about these King Airs. They were quite noisy, and whenever they were going across North

America, they had to land in Duluth for fuel because the tanks weren't big enough to go from, I assume, Toronto to Edmonton. But what are the details on the purchase of these new planes? I'm certain that one of the features besides probably leather seats is long-range fuel tanks so that they don't have to land in Duluth anymore.

I would like the details on this because it perplexes me why a government that is so vigorous sometimes in promoting the private sector – and it's nothing that I think they should be worried about or ashamed of. I think a good private sector is excellent. A good, strong private sector that develops jobs and creates prosperity is excellent. But why, when you're so anxious to get involved in all these P3 projects with the private sector, would you buy your own airplanes? Why don't you let the private sector do this?

If you're not so confident that the private sector can do it in a cost-effective manner, why don't you just retire these King Airs and try the private sector? Give them a chance for maybe two years, maybe three years to see if they could provide flights in a timely, economical fashion and save the taxpayers a few dollars. Why don't we try this? If we have so much confidence and so much faith in the free-enterprise system, why don't we see if some of these charter outfits in the province can do just as good a job or maybe even a better job than our own fleet? See what happens over a two-year period and then explain to the taxpayers: well, this hasn't worked out, so we're going to go on the market and maybe buy an airplane or two somewhere else.

I heard that Enron had a couple of jets for sale. I don't know if this government is interested in second-hand airplanes, but certainly there are a couple of those jets. I can give them the tail numbers of those planes if they wish, if they want to check it out. But I don't know why the private sector wasn't given a chance in this case, why we're spending this kind of money on two airplanes.

That amount would build two complete new elementary schools. Whether they would be located in fast-growing communities in Calgary or Grande Prairie, it really wouldn't matter. I was up in Grande Prairie this spring, and the parents up there were really frustrated.

An Hon. Member: How much money, Hugh?

Mr. MacDonald: How much money? Eleven point two million dollars would build two good cinder-block construction elementary schools. It certainly would. I know that whenever I was in Grande Prairie, the parents that I met up there were quite frustrated, and they were concerned not only about class sizes but the condition of the schools.

So, you know, if we don't have any money for Grande Prairie for a new school, perhaps we could look at this as an alternative. I'm sure there's a opt-out clause on the purchase of these two new airplanes; I'm sure there would be.

But there's certainly not an opt-out clause for consumers whenever they get rooked into these high-priced energy contracts, whether they're electricity or natural gas. There should be. There should be an opt-out clause for consumers. I keep asking and hoping that the government would give consumers a chance, but, no, they will not. With all this deregulation, this market system that's been set up, the consumer has been forgotten about. The consumer has to dig deeper and deeper every month into their pocket to pay for heat and for lights, and that's not right either.

There are a lot of different line items in this request. Certainly, in conclusion, I would like to urge the hon. Minister of Finance to be very cautious in spending. I know that the majority of them at least are needed items, certainly in education and certainly in health, and I'm sure that there's a justification somewhere for each and every

dollar that's being spent. But we're spending a lot of money here, and I don't think we're being open and transparent.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and cede the floor to another hon. colleague and hope that at some point in the future I can get some more time to express my concern about this government's expenditures. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for giving me an opportunity to rise again to deal with some issues that I haven't dealt with before, and that is some concerns around central Alberta.

Certainly, as Environment critic I've received some questions about and admonitions to press for better water protection in the area of Pigeon Lake, Big Island Lake, that has been under threat for a number of years. Actually, it's been proposed over the last 15 years that the Big Island Lake be reclaimed after being illegally drained and used for domesticated animals. So I've been passing that pressure along to Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Great concerns again about water, and I neglected to mention them in relation to human activity, animal activity, and confined feeding operations, which are increasing pressures in the centre of the province.

I notice in the budget that a lot of the increases have to do with waste management assistance, erosion control. I think that's appropriate, but it's, of course, inadequate given the tremendous strains attendant with the vast growth that's going on in the province.

So I think we need to look seriously at a longer term investment in infrastructure, which, by the way, should not be included under Environment. We have a false sense of investment in our environment when we continue to put budgetary items that are truly infrastructure – water supply, water treatment, water transport do not strictly belong under Alberta Environment. Again, it obscures the fact that this department is grossly underfunded and completely incapable of doing the jobs it's been tasked to do in terms of monitoring, enforcement, education, and research.

5:00

I note the \$2.6 million within the supplementary estimates for the oil sands research on reclamation and groundwater assessment: again, vitally important but long overdue. Oil sands development is going ahead apace without any understanding yet about how well we're going to be able to reclaim the sites, how well we're going to be able to remediate the soil and return the land to equivalent land use, which is under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, the ultimate goal of all reclamation and remediation. We do desperately need more research, and \$2.6 million is important, but where is the long-term plan for establishing the criteria ensuring that we have the best possible protection for the environment before we allow the unfettered development, especially in the oil sands and, increasingly, I've mentioned, in southeastern Alberta in the Horseshoe Canyon formation, where there's evidence of negative impacts on some of the groundwater?

In relation to central Alberta a number of schools have raised concerns in the Red Deer area, in both Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South. I will simply here, Mr. Chairman, highlight the major liabilities that some of these school boards have, both the Red Deer Catholic regional division No. 39 and the Red Deer public school district No. 104. École Camille J. Lerouge school, a raw score of 980; over \$1.5 million in maintenance expenses has been brought down to \$207,000 in 2005. That deserves a credit to the Alberta

government for investment in that important school, a big school in Red Deer. St. Patrick community school, however, is creeping up and has not been substantially addressed in the last five years, standing at a score of 420, with roughly \$450,000 in deficit maintenance awaiting attention.

The Annie Gaetz school, with a score of 310, has \$285,000 in maintenance deficits. Aspen Heights elementary school, with a score of 360 and a maintenance deficit of \$1,052,000, clearly a very high priority in need for reconditioning. Fairview school, a score of 660 and a maintenance deficit of \$1.15 million. George Wilbert Smith school in Red Deer, \$769,000 in deficit maintenance and a raw score of 510. The Hunting Hills high school in Red Deer, a raw score of 330 and a deficit maintenance need of \$843,000. Lindsay Thurber composite high school, the highest raw score on the page, 1,320, with \$5 million in deficit maintenance expenditures. Finally, West Park middle school with a raw score of 510 and a deficit maintenance budget of \$938,000, Mr. Chairman.

Well, just to return briefly to some of the Environment budget expenditures and needs, I was disappointed not to see some investment in climate change initiatives. There's no mention of any new money. There is, again, a tacit commitment to a fossil fuel addiction that continues in this province, and we continue to look for leadership on energy efficiency and managed growth in the area of fossil fuel development. From a budget of 2006 estimates briefing the government states that it will "initiate actions that make Alberta a leader in energy efficiency improvements, carbon management strategies and adapting to climate change." But what specific programs? We see nothing new despite the growing awareness that we have to reduce in Alberta.

We are the prime producer of greenhouse gases in this country. People are looking to us for leadership not only within this province but around the world. The scientific consensus around man-made activities, fossil fuels being the prime contributors to climate change, is staggering now. It's unavoidable. We have to make the changes. We have to move towards energy efficiency. We have to move towards renewables. To do that, government has to show leadership in providing incentives and setting the standards for building codes and level the playing field for some of the newer technologies in renewable energy development that will actually move us into the leadership role that we deserve and must aspire to and away from our unhealthy dependence on fossil fuels.

Given recent statements by Dr. David Schindler, the water expert out of the University of Alberta, he indicated that climate change as a major factor will threaten our long-term water sustainability. I've indicated earlier that without a better inventory of our water in relation to climate change and our serious commitment to reducing fossil fuel use in this province, we are not going to be credible, and we are not going to be showing the leadership for our children and our grandchildren that we all want to do.

I'd like to know from the Minister of Environment what he's doing to reduce CO₂ emissions in Alberta, especially from the large emitters. Will he commit to a real plan to decrease emissions and not simply focus on this intensity target that is relatively meaningless and simply talks about more and better technology as opposed to new ways of doing business in this province? What is the commitment to CO₂ injection and, again, to renewable fuel development?

The Water for Life strategy again continues to suffer under the lack of investment for some of these public advisory committees that are having huge expectations placed on them about water management in their areas and no resources to deal with a meaningful plan and sustainable management. This puts tremendous pressure on

these people, very caring individuals in our communities that have stepped up to volunteer on these public advisory committees on the watersheds and find their hands tied by lack of resources and lack of technical support to make some of the decisions that they are.

Clearly, also, we're getting the message that full-cost accounting must be instituted in this province if we're actually going to be serious about conserving water, focusing on demand management as opposed to supply management. I would again strongly encourage the Minister of Environment to look at ways to more sensibly conserve through demand management, and full-cost accounting is one of the most effective ways worldwide that has been used to help people value appropriately the monies that we are needing to pay to discover the water, to develop the water, to transport the water, and to treat the water.

So I'll close with those remarks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. When I last had the opportunity to speak in this Assembly, I was talking about school fees and some of the surprising fees that showed up at a local Edmonton area high school on their 2006-07 registration forms. I'd just like to touch on one more that I didn't quite get to speak about earlier, and that was music. There is a hundred dollar fee for the rental of band instruments and guitars to take a music class in that high school. Again, this is not to pick on one particular high school because my understanding and recollection from other schools I've dealt with is that it's actually quite normal to have such fees. So that concludes the concerns I had about those particular school fees at that particular high school, but it's indicative of what's happening across the province, and I think that it's a sad comment on the budgeting that we provide to the school boards when we see schools having to charge for parking, as I indicated earlier, or the use of gym facilities or workbooks for math classes.

5:10

Now I'd like to talk about some of the schools in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, in particular some of the maintenance concerns that have been raised by those schools in their capital planning and where it leaves them. Louis St. Laurent is a combination junior high/senior high school in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. It's a wonderful school with great teachers and an excellent reputation within the Edmonton Catholic system. In 1999-2000 the forecast for repairs at that school was \$5.1 million. Some work has been done there, Mr. Chairman. The forecast now for the next five years in terms of maintenance at that school is \$1.25 million.

Interestingly enough, several speakers have referred earlier to what is known as the FCI, or facility condition index. This is a rating that's calculated at a school indicating the amount of work that's required in terms of maintenance relative to the overall value of that building. In the case of Louis St. Laurent the score there is 5.75 on the facility condition index, which means 5.75 per cent of the value of the building is what's required in the next five years just to maintain it. That's not a particularly bad score, but indications are that anything over 5 per cent is high, so certainly that causes some concern.

Another Edmonton Catholic school, St. Stanislaus, which is again a wonderful school, very close to my constituency office, has great programming. Their score back in 1999-2000 was 450. Again, Mr. Chairman, anything over 400 points shows that the school was in fair condition, so this school was not in particularly bad shape. But the

most recent estimate for maintenance over the next five years is \$613,000, and it actually gives it an FCI, or facility condition index, of 14.45, which is quite alarming. Again, 14 per cent of the value of the building is what's required for the next five years just to maintain it at its current condition. So this is certainly a concern for the parents of the students that attend St. Stan's and something that we have to watch carefully.

Perhaps, the most alarming in terms of the Catholic schools in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford is St. Augustine, which is currently showing more than \$1 million in required maintenance over the next five years. That gives it a facility condition index of 25.14, Mr. Chairman, which means that more than a quarter of the value of this school is what's required in maintenance over the next five years. This is the highest score of any school in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford and certainly, again, a concern.

We're hoping that some of the dollars that have been provided in this supplementary supply bill will find their way into those three schools. Clearly, they need them.

Another school that I would like to highlight in terms of need is Duggan elementary. Mr. Chairman, Duggan is, again, a wonderful school with a very diverse mix of children, in fact one of the schools that was on the hit list, if I can put it that way, of Edmonton public in terms of its low utilization numbers. Duggan is now bringing in students from south of Ellerslie Road. Those kids in the newer parts of the riding of Edmonton-Whitemud don't have a school, so they're actually being bused all the way up to Duggan to enhance the enrolment of that school. This school is one that, unfortunately, is showing its age.

One of the fears that I have is that it hasn't been kept up as well as we would expect it to be, perhaps due in part to the fact that it is on the hit list, and its future is certainly in doubt. Yet the parents I've spoken to who have children there think that the educators in this school do a wonderful job and would certainly like to see it continue. We've talked a lot in this Assembly about the need for maintaining community schools, how valuable they are to a community, how they are, in fact, often the lifeblood of a community.

Certainly, you know, we're not talking about inner-city schools, where nobody lives anymore. We're talking about schools in very mainstream communities that have been rejuvenated. That particular community is at this point about 40 years old. There are still a few families living there who purchased there 40 years ago. I met a lot of those when I was door-knocking through the constituency. But there are also an awful lot of young families moving into that community, several of them with children that are perhaps not of school age yet but will be soon. The thought of closing their local community school and then perhaps at some point having to bus their kids down south of Ellerslie Road into a new school when they have a perfectly fine facility there if only we maintain it and keep it alive for a few more years until these kids reach school-going age and we can get that enrolment back up: it would be a real shame if they were to lose their community school.

Now, I want to just talk a little bit about Cold Lake and Bonnyville because, Mr. Chairman, I recently had the pleasure of visiting Cold Lake and Bonnyville. Myself and the hon. Member for St. Albert toured that area not more than three weeks ago. We were fortunate enough to go up and be a part of the local Seniors Mini Summer Games for the northeast Alberta region and just had a wonderful experience meeting not only people from that area of the province but throughout the northeast region of the province. Particularly fun were a group of seniors from Fort McMurray, who I became quite enamoured with and who I'd like to think enjoyed my company as well.

We spent two days in Cold Lake discussing various local issues with the residents and managed to learn quite a bit about the community. I have to say that I hadn't personally visited Cold Lake since I was a teenager. What a wonderful community it is, and what a wonderful resource that lake is. I had quite frankly forgotten just what a treasure we have there.

One of the interesting things, Mr. Chairman, is that we spent an absolutely engaging hour speaking to a local schoolteacher about some of her experiences, and I was quite surprised and taken aback at how fearful she was that somebody might actually see her speaking to the Education critic from the Official Opposition. Without a word of a lie, she literally looked over her shoulder several times as she was speaking to the Member for St. Albert and said: I can't let anybody see you talking to me. It speaks to a culture of fear that I have noticed across this province, where people are outright afraid to share their concerns with members of the Official Opposition for fear of retribution from either this government or agencies that depend directly on this government for funding. I think it's a sad comment that we live in a society where people are afraid to express their concerns about their government, but this was very clearly the case in Cold Lake. So, unlike some of the questions that were asked earlier today in question period, I'm not going to be mentioning her name, not because she can't be here to defend herself but because she was so fearful of the retribution she might face if it were known that she was actually sharing some of her concerns with us.

5:20

I'll just go through some of the schools in that particular constituency that are definitely in need of looking at. L'école Notre Dame, a high school in Bonnyville, over the next five years needs \$406,000 in routine maintenance and has a facility condition index of 5.83, which again is not particularly bad, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, most schools in that constituency have somewhat less need than that, but again anything over 5 is a red flag or an alarm bell that we have to be watching carefully and making sure that these concerns are addressed.

We have H.E. Bourgoin middle school in Bonnyville, where \$324,700 is required over the next five years. Now, that's not a particularly high number although it's about the same as what was identified five years ago. The concern is that we really haven't done anything to catch that school up to where it needs to be in terms of maintenance.

A couple of the Cold Lake schools appear to be in a little more need. Cold Lake elementary school is facing \$459,726 in maintenance over the next five years, which gives it a facility condition index of 9.42 per cent. Nearly 10 per cent of the value of that particular building is going to be required in the next five years just in terms of routine maintenance to keep it at where it's at today. So these are certainly concerns for the residents of Cold Lake.

I see the R.A. Reynolds school, a school that's located on the base at Cold Lake and has a tremendous reputation for providing education to the students of our military families, has a requirement of nearly half a million dollars. Actually it's much more than that. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. It's \$741,000, almost three-quarters of a million dollars in terms of upkeep. Now, they've received some money over the last five years, so it's not that we haven't paid attention to this school, but clearly it hasn't been adequate in terms of getting them back up to where they need to be. They still need nearly three-quarters of a million dollars over the next five years to bring them back up to snuff.

Now, I happened to look at another constituency here, and I hope I can find this information because I thought this was quite interest-

ing. In the constituency, Mr. Chairman, of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, which happens to be the constituency in which our Speaker resides and represents, surprisingly it appears as if most of the schools are doing quite well. The only reason I reference that is because earlier this afternoon my colleague from Calgary-Varsity was highlighting some of the needs of the schools in the Premier's riding of Calgary-Elbow. There appears to be an awful lot of need in Calgary-Elbow, yet Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock seems to have done fairly well.

The Fort Assiniboine school, a community which I know quite well – I spent a fair amount of time in Fort Assiniboine as I was growing up – has a need of \$448,330 in maintenance and upkeep over the next five years, which gives it a facility condition index rating of 10.05 per cent. That is the highest, as near as I can tell, of any schools in the Speaker's riding. It's a lot of money, but, as I've said, surprisingly Calgary-Elbow seems to have somewhat more need than Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Now, you can draw whatever conclusion out of that you wish, but I found it to be an interesting little tidbit.

I'm just going to look at some of the other departments, Mr. Chairman, in terms of this supplementary supply bill. The first one that attracted my attention – and I know the people in the horse-racing industry are going to be phoning tomorrow morning because the Official Opposition talks an awful lot about \$66 million for horse racing this year and how that's gone up dramatically over the years.

Members opposite will argue that it's not really taxpayers' dollars, that this is only money that comes out of the slot machines that are in the horse-racing facilities. I understand that, but the bottom line is that if it's money that comes into the province, it is taxpayers' money. It belongs to all Albertans, so it's relevant in terms of the conversation. It really becomes a question of priorities as opposed to just picking on the horse-racing industry. However, they happen to be an obvious one. People do have a problem at times when you put this on the scale and you compare horse racing against education or horse racing against health care. Always it raises alarm bells. Again, perhaps the horse-racing industry is an easy mark, but it is one that jumps out at you.

I'm going to pick on them again, as it were, I guess. I note in the supplementary estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development that there's \$4.8 million for infrastructure assistance for municipal waste water to support a project in the municipal district of Rockyview that includes a horse-racing track and an equine centre. Now, anybody who's driven along highway 2 just north of Calgary recently will have seen this development taking place, a huge development which is now under way between Calgary and Airdrie just on the east side of the highway. And here we are: not only giving \$66 million to the horse-racing industry but now a total, actually, of \$8.3 million more to facilitate waste-water management for this particular project. There's \$4.8 million that the minister is asking for today in supplementary supply and another \$3.5 million which apparently will be paid from the approved program budget or reallocated from lapses in other programs, so a total of another \$8.3 million for waste-water management for the horse-racing industry.

Again, that might not be a problem until you start balancing it off against other things. We know from reports that were made to the government's standing policy committee by the municipality of Wood Buffalo that they have huge problems up there. We hear daily about the concerns coming from Wood Buffalo, and Fort McMurray in particular. One of their problems, not surprisingly, is finding the money to either upgrade or replace their waste-water treatment plant. They're having trouble funding this project.

Now, I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, but I'm sure that the average taxpayer of this province, when they look at \$8.3 million going to

look after waste-water management for this complex that's being built between Calgary and Airdrie to accommodate the racing horses and then they look at Fort McMurray, who can't get the funding they need to either upgrade or build a new waste-water treatment plant, when you put those two on the scale, there's something wrong with the picture. Clearly, there's something wrong with the picture.

Another question I have when it comes to that particular request for money is why it appears in Agriculture in the first place because when I flip through the bill and I come to the Department of Environment, the Minister of Environment is asking for \$3.7 million for the Alberta waste management assistance grant program to support waste management contracts and commitments. The obvious question is: why? Why are we asking for money here for waste water, money there for waste water? Why is it not together? I think it's an obvious question.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate again this afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's comments in regard to this amount of money that is being used to subsidize . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 8 p.m., at which time we will reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, August 30, 2006** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 06/08/30
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order. The committee had adjourned earlier on at 5:30 in Committee of the Whole, so we are reconvening.

Bill 44 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The other evening when I had a chance to speak about the education spending, I talked about the difficulty with the process and the timelines. I've given it some more thought, and I'd like to express some of those this evening.

When I look at the regular parade of this government begging for basics in education while living high on the hog in so many other ways, I'm reminded of *Oliver!*, the movie that was made from the musical that was made from the book by Dickens. Remember the scene in the workhouse where the boys had been fed their rations and *Oliver Twist* comes up to his boss, bowl in hand, and asks in a plaintive voice: please, sir, may I have some more? His boss retorts, "What?" and flies into a rage at his audacity.

Though the bleakness of the surroundings might suggest otherwise, Britain was at her summit then. She had an empire with suppliers in every part of the globe, a lucrative balance of payments, and bank vaults overflowing with gold. This was possible because of a workforce stretched to the limit, which included nursing mothers and small children. Yet with this huge surplus, wealth, and power she couldn't find it in her priorities to pay her workers adequately, and when they asked for more, they were intimidated.

Mr. Chairman, we may not have workhouses, but we are impoverishing our children with our current priorities. This province leads the continent in economic growth, and our assets are the envy of the world. This is not only a result of our natural resources but of a resourceful workforce, and that depends on our public education system. Yet too often this third vital ingredient is seen not as the contributor to our well-being that it is but as a drain on the public purse. We talk about our children as the leaders of the future, then we sell short their needs today. How long will our educators, parents, and children have to beg for the basics before we have a level of infrastructure that adds up to the Alberta advantage we advertise? How long will the government routinely underbudget the cost of education and force its representatives to show up, cup in hand, in this House with the sad and unnecessary refrain: please, sir, may I have some more?

We need predictable and stable funding. This will enable school jurisdiction planning that is consistent with the province's goals for the basic education system. This would also provide stability for school jurisdictions in dealing with changing circumstances and in periods of stability and growth as well as decline. I believe we need to provide school jurisdictions with the flexibility to allocate funds to programs as they choose in order to meet the educational needs of their students and address local priorities. Our province was

established on the principle of local autonomy because those closest to the constituency and grassroots can better understand and meet and represent the constituents. School boards deserve the opportunity to make decisions based on the needs of their jurisdiction.

Education is important. For more than 30 years economists have been virtually unanimous in recognizing that it is not resources or technology that create wealth but people. If there is any one area that deserves our attention and support, it is the drawing out of our people into their fullness, which is what the word "education" means.

I have some concerns that I'd like to go over in particular with senior high schools. High schools have to set up completion target rates every year. The funds are then allocated based on projected credits as of September 30. If at the end of the school year the targets are not met due to dropouts, the school is hit with huge funds being taken out in August. As such, it is almost impossible for high schools to plan budget spending, and many high schools end up in deficit.

This practice is leaving the most needy high schools with the least funds. High schools in poor neighbourhoods or with significant immigrant population are the ones most affected. In irony, they are the ones that need the funds the most to provide these students with extra help, these students who are needy or are often coming from difficult home situations, and they get the least amount of money. In other words, poor schools are getting poorer, and rich are getting richer. I'm disappointed that the recent figures that were shown have no indication of any plans to change the allocations for high school funding.

Another concern is that the maintenance of physical plants to create safe and clean environments for students has been neglected for years. Schools, especially the aging ones, are not getting enough funds to meet the school maintenance needs. The maintenance allocations are based on the size of the building and enrolment and not on the school age or individual needs. I saw that there is some money, a great deal more, that's been added lately; it's a huge jump. But because of the fact that we were so determined to get rid of the debt, we have neglected these buildings for years, and the huge jump still isn't enough.

Another concern is school technology, keeping up with upgrades. There's nothing specific that indicates that we're going to put something in to help in this area. It's a constant challenge for schools to keep up with technology upgrades. To update one computer lab, which needs to be done every four to five years, is costing schools about \$60,000. Most high schools have more than one computer lab, not to mention the technical support that's needed to maintain the program. The allocation that we get per student covers about 25 per cent of what is needed.

Another area that I've talked about in the past that still is not being addressed adequately is the programming for special-needs students. Amounts now allocated do not cover the cost of full-time aides that some need. They do not meet the school's cost to provide the programming ratios necessary to ensure that those with learning deficits can be brought up to speed. They do not allow for the collaboration time and the prep time necessary to ensure teachers' ability to provide the highest level of assessment practices or to prepare material that will challenge students on higher order thinking skills.

The special-needs area includes the most disadvantaged, and it is not adequately funded. Programs like Head Start and early childhood programs should be strongly encouraged for families who need support to ensure that the next generation has an equal starting place when they hit kindergarten. A six-year-old in grade 1 can be two or more years behind his peers before he even starts on his grade 1

year. This could be prevented through participation in quality programs that ultimately will result in saving enormous amounts of dollars that are required later on for remediation.

Another area of concern continues to be school counsellors, librarians, and speech therapists. There's no funding allowed to recognize this need. We lost many of these people because their jobs were cut in the last decade. University students chose other careers so they would have a greater chance of employment in the future, and now if we did have the funding, it would be difficult to find the people to fill these positions.

Ellul, who was a French communications expert, points out that technology means we are moving towards fewer workers in the area of manual labour. What we need for the information age is well-trained people. We have a drastic shortage of skilled blue-collar workers: mechanics who work with computer chips in vehicles these days, electricians, plumbers, chefs, beauty culture workers. The list goes on and on. We've been catering to the top 10 per cent of the population in our schools, and as a result we have taken out the repair shops and the building shops and the other labs that once were there for the vocational part of the programs.

The best legacy, I think, that we can leave behind is the best-trained workforce in the world, and that only happens with education. We need all kinds of education, and it costs money to tool up for the 21st century. We need to use the public school system to ensure that every student is fully employable and therefore a useful and participating member of society.

8:10

I talked earlier this week about kindergarten, especially the junior kindergarten program under the city centre education project. The positive effects of providing optimal junior and full-day kindergarten, for example getting children on the right path to success, far outweigh the costs. Many districts I know are already offering full-day kindergarten. These optional programs are at or near capacity, which indicates that there is a strong demand for these programs. The problem of drawing resources from other areas to pay for kindergarten still remains and is a concern. The junior kindergarten program I spoke of earlier has received enormous awards throughout its three years, indicating all kinds of success from many perspectives.

Another area I'd like to talk about is the joint use agreement. Specifically, it's a legal agreement between the city of Edmonton, Edmonton public schools, and Edmonton Catholic schools that describes how the partners work together to plan, develop, and share schools and park facilities. The agreement outlines how school gymnasiums and other parts of school buildings are made available to community groups during after-school hours and how swimming pools, arenas, tennis courts, and picnic sites are available to school children during school hours. Why isn't there a specific fund from the government to support joint use? This would take the burden of cost away from the schools and from the community groups – that is, custodial help, security, and so on – and assist our schools in really being part of the community and being the heart of the community.

Another thing that I feel I need to take a look at is the idea of capital projects and school boards listing their priorities. The province decided to provide the Edmonton public school board with \$17.3 million for their top priority project, the construction of a new high school in the Riverbend/Terwillegar community in southwest Edmonton. The school is going to be built to accommodate 1,000 high school students. But when I looked at the priority listing from Edmonton public schools, this particular school that's going to be built is number 21 on the list, so I have to ask how it became number

one in the minds of our government over 20 other projects that the district listed as more of a priority.

Another thing is that the \$17.3 million given at that time was out of \$207 million for the province. That's a percentage of 8.3 per cent, but Edmonton public schools, in getting the 8.3 per cent, must educate and accommodate 15 per cent of the province's students.

Another thing that I'll bring up again – and it's been brought up many times – is the unfunded liability of the Alberta teachers' retirement fund as a growing, inter-generational, unproductive debt. What plan does the ministry have to deal with the rising costs of its unfunded teachers' pension obligation? There's nothing indicated yet that this is even going to be addressed.

As I looked at the constituency of Leduc-Beaumont-Devon – that's the Black Gold regional division No. 18 and the St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic separate school division No. 38 – I was looking at the ranking of concerns, and École J.E. Lapointe school is listed at 29.61 per cent under the facility condition index. We note that 10 per cent is considered poor, so I have to ask what plans there are for this high school. That ranking would indicate that perhaps renovation or additional space might be more costly than replacing the school. I'm wondering what the minister has considered there.

The other question I have is Leduc composite high school. Again, a rating that's very high, and I'm not sure if there are any specific plans for that school that would involve looking at, of course, sustainability or addressing some specific needs to help it be at par and to sustain its programming.

I also looked at the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. Donnan school, which is a junior high, has a sustainability review in the next one to three years and also Avonmore in that area, but it's not till four to six years. I'm wondering what the communication process has been with the residents in these areas because I understand a sustainability review would mean that perhaps they would be looking at school closures. What is the actual process for determining sustainability? I notice that Kenilworth is ranked also, but it looks like it's at a 4.44 in terms of the facility condition index, which means that it's considered to be only average needs. I guess I'd like to have more explanation of how that sustainability factor is calculated and what is the process of letting people in these constituencies know what is being looked at for the years coming ahead.

I think at this point I'll leave it. I'd like to talk about Health, but I'll do that later on.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The traditional opening for anyone speaking on second reading or committee is to say something like: I'm pleased to rise today to address bill whatever. I wish I could say that was true today, but it isn't. We've been called into session here in the dying days of what had been up until today a beautiful end of August to rubber-stamp, basically, \$1.3 billion worth of supplementary spending. Now, this government's attitude towards spending is best described as cavalier. I was reminded when I was working on my notes for this today of a famous, or actually infamous, quote from C.D. Howe, who was called the Minister of Everything in the government of Louis St. Laurent. During a notorious debate in the House of Commons in 1945 Howe famously said: what's a million? You can up the ante on that quote to a billion dollars, and you've got this government's attitude today: what's a billion? So here we are, called into session in the summer to approve – and that's all it is because in reality there's no debate here – \$1.3 billion in expenses.

Now, to be honest, the vast majority of this spending is actually

essential. Dozens of schools in Alberta are in dire need of repair. The cost of building materials in Alberta is going through the roof, resulting in vastly increased costs for a variety of projects. Our health care system is experiencing severe strains as the population booms.

As much as this money is needed, and in some cases desperately needed, very little of it could be classed as unforeseen. Schools don't crumble overnight. There was no epidemic that caused health authorities to ring up deficits. The vast majority of the \$1.3 billion that is being spent here today is due to this government's chronic aversion to long-term planning and its single-minded obsession with defeating the debt. But, Mr. Chairman, if you don't change the oil in your car so that you can put more money into paying it off, eventually it will cost you a whole heck of a lot more to repair the car than you saved by paying it off faster. It's like that old commercial – I think it was for FRAM air filters – where the mechanic says: you can pay me now, or you can pay me later. Well, welcome to later.

While most of the appropriation that we are debating tonight and over this past week is needed and long overdue, some of the supplementary spending looks to me like items that could and probably should have waited for a full hearing in the Legislature during a proper budget debate. For instance, we have Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, which has asked for \$270,800,000. Now, \$261 million of it is to respond to an economic disaster in the agriculture industry, but the rest of it appears to be for matters that could or should have waited for a full budget hearing, ideally with the minister present.

8:20

Most interesting is "\$4,800,000 for Infrastructure Assistance for Municipal Wastewater to support a project in the Municipal District of Rockyview that includes a horseracing track and an equine centre." Now, with the very limited amount of time we have to debate over a billion dollars in spending, a relatively puny amount like \$4.8 million practically goes unnoticed, but there are plenty of questions regarding this expenditure, most notably if it is yet another sweetheart deal for the horse-racing industry. It's a legitimate question that deserves to be addressed properly in this forum, but it doesn't look like that's going to happen.

We could also ask the same questions about the Economic Development ministry's expense of \$2.2 million for the ministry's contribution to the strategies for something called "Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce" and "Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta." Now, it's an important topic, certainly, but an expense of \$2.2 million deserves a full airing in the Legislature, and it certainly doesn't appear to be something that we have to be called into session for to pass.

How about the additional \$20 million for Innovation and Science? Now, my friend, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, is supportive of this expenditure, so I will accept his opinion that this is a worthwhile use of public funds. He's nodding his head, so I guess that I got that one right. But it does not answer the questions. Is this expenditure so vital that it should be included in supplementary estimates so soon after the last budget was passed? The ink has hardly dried on the last budget we passed here, and here we are, at it again. These are questions that we're not going to get answers to.

I would like to switch gears briefly and talk about some places where the money should be spent, most notably education, and I'm going to make what amounts to a flagrant pitch that some of it be spent in the constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark. Now, Edmonton-Meadowlark constituency is a predominantly middle-class area with a large number of homes in the 25- to 40-year range.

The schools are roughly the same age, so they are at the stage where upkeep is vitally important.

Now, some good things have happened in the schools in Edmonton-Meadowlark. I am particularly impressed with the work done on Winterburn elementary, which has seen substantial improvements over the past few years, and it's now a very attractive and very well-attended school.

Unfortunately, due to a chronic lack of funding five schools in Edmonton-Meadowlark have what are called facility condition index ratings of over 10 per cent, which is considered poor. For instance, Hillcrest junior high has an FC index of 16.96. Now, in the 1999-2000 audit Hillcrest needed \$264,000 worth of repairs and upgrades. Today Hillcrest needs about one and a half million dollars. So virtually nothing has been done at Hillcrest at all.

Also of concern in Edmonton-Meadowlark is H.E. Beriault school, which has a 19.69 FCI and needs \$1.7 million in upgrades over the next few years.

St. Thomas More is in even worse shape. A few years ago, back in 1999-2000, it needed \$749,000 to address its maintenance needs, but now it needs more than \$3 million over the next five years.

No school in Edmonton-Meadowlark and perhaps no school in Edmonton needs an infusion of government cash more than St. Francis Xavier high school. St. Francis Xavier is the largest Catholic school in west Edmonton, with more than 1,100 students. St. FX is home to an advanced placement program, a modified French immersion program, a complete career and technology program, French, Spanish, Italian, and French immersion, and Spanish 105. It also has a hugely successful sports academy program, which includes the sports of hockey, soccer, lacrosse, baseball, and golf. St. FX is a thriving school in every aspect, but much of the building is in very poor condition.

The original school was built in 1958 and has had only one minor modernization done in roughly 1985 or 1986. The school is quite literally sinking. The roof needs replacing. There were at one time plants growing out of the joints in many locations of the roof. The mechanical systems are original to the year that the area was constructed, which means that some of the mechanicals are approaching 50 years of age. Imagine, Mr. Chairman, having a 50-year-old furnace in your home.

You know, Mr. Chairman, I spoke to a former St. FX student who told me that while she was attending school there, it was considered wise not to sit too close to some of the windows in case the pressure from the shifting building caused one of the windows to pop out. Now, maybe that's an apocryphal story or maybe it's just school talk, but that's the kind of concerns that students had about being in that school. A teacher told me that the evaluator told him that the best thing to do with much of St. Francis Xavier was to tear it down, but then, of course, where do you put 1,100 students? The best course of action for the 1958 section of the school is to tear it down and to build a new addition. This isn't the opinion of the Catholic school system only but also of the 2004 facility evaluation report. At that time, the cost was estimated at \$4 million. Now we're looking at \$6 million and counting.

Mr. Chairman, the longer we wait before we start doing necessary repairs to schools, the worse it gets. We are adding to the costs with each passing day that we neglect these schools, and we are just not serving the best interests of the students or the teachers or the city of Edmonton or the province of Alberta by not passing the proper legislation to get this job done. Now, I've made a pitch for my school and I admit it, for St. Francis Xavier.

An Hon. Member: Apply for lottery funds.

Mr. Tougas: Apply for lottery funds. Well, if we could only do that, we'd have things cleared up. We've got hundreds of millions of dollars in lottery funds. We've got lots of it all over the place.

An Hon. Member: Put up a little track.

Mr. Tougas: No more horse racing, please.

I've made my pitch for my school. I know that the money is there. I can't remember the exact total. Hundreds of millions of dollars are available for schools now. A number of schools in Edmonton-Meadowlark are in dire need of this money. I trust that the Education minister will read over *Hansard* in his spare time and make the appropriate decision.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate having the opportunity to speak on a number of I think crucial issues in regard to the supplementary budget. I have had the opportunity to speak on specifically Education and a couple of other departments. What I would like to perhaps lead off with here this evening is a more general commentary as to what sort of message we're being sent here with this budget and previous budgets that I have been able to review in the last couple of years.

It's clear from all indications here in the province, across the country, and indeed around the world that we're in the midst of an unprecedented economic boom in the province of Alberta. Certainly, the growth that we are enjoying and the prosperity that comes with that boom is welcomed by most people. However, I always look at the actions of people and of governments as much as I listen to what they say. It's curious at best, I think, to see the reaction to this economic boom from this Legislative Assembly, not from what is said because we have been inundated with platitudes about prosperity and the best this and the best that. Rather, let's take a look at the actions that are taking place because quite often they speak much more loudly than words.

What I see from a lack of commitment to long-term investments in certain key areas of infrastructure, of public institutions, of the things that this Legislative Assembly is responsible to provide for the people of Alberta is that I'm getting this feeling that we're here for a good time, not a long time. We're going to ride this boom out. We're going to ride the crest of it and slide on down again into the depths of whatever comes next, just like the last time. That's the sort of action that I'm seeing from this government and from this Legislative Assembly, and quite frankly I am not only disappointed, but I feel compelled to intervene in some way, whatever way possible.

Of course, for most of us of a certain age we have gone through the boom and bust cycle previously here in the province of Alberta, and we all know in our heart of hearts that without planning and without intervention, in fact, this boom and bust cycle is more destructive than it is constructive.

8:30

Let's just take it back to the last time we found our economy doing so well and then bottoming out, in the early 1980s, and what did we see? We saw unprecedented inflation, where people were buying very expensive homes and businesses were making very expensive investments, and suddenly the bottom fell out of the economy. What happened? People lost their homes. We had double-digit inflation and interest rates, and it was, certainly,

relatively speaking, quite devastating for many thousands of families across the province.

Here we are in 2006, and we're seeing very similar economic indicators. People are buying and borrowing at a much higher rate than we've seen in the last 25 years, real estate prices are unrealistically high and continuing to move that way, and people are being stretched to the limit as a result of these and other inflationary pressures that affect the pocketbook, the bottom line of regular working people in this province.

What we saw back in the late '70s and early '80s that was different, though, at least, is that the government was making infrastructure and investments in public institutions to meet somehow the growth and the increase in population in the province. Now, 20-some years later, a similar situation, and we are simply not making that investment. So as I said before, what we're seeing here is actions speaking much louder than words.

How are we going to manage this boom? Well, come on by for a while, ride it out, and then perhaps you just have to go home or go back to where you came from afterwards because we're not going to build the infrastructure, the public institutions, the housing, the things that people need to survive the long term here in the province of Alberta, and I think that's very, very disappointing.

I think we have to look no further than in regard to housing. I've heard some very interesting arguments here in the last 48 hours or so in regard to building housing. I always like that right-wing sop that comes back and says: "Oh, well, these people aren't planning. They come to Alberta, and look at them. They're irresponsible. They're not planning to pay for that \$1,500 rent a month or whatever. They're looking for a cheap deal. It's every person for themselves, thank you very much." Well, you know, that sort of attitude – right? – coupled with the severe labour shortage that we have here is just incomprehensible. It's like two ideas striking illogically against each other.

We're trying to bring people into the province presumably to not just work and build a house or drill a hole and then go back to wherever they came from but to build the population and to build the culture and to build the foundation of the new future for Alberta and have them stay here. So housing I would expect to be the very first place that we would send a welcoming signal and, in fact, at the very least help to alleviate our labour situation because people would feel welcome and willing to stay. When you solve a housing problem by building labour camps – right? – or you try to solve a labour problem by using temporary foreign workers, you're sending, again, the same very clear message that we're here for a good time, not a long time. We'll build your thing. Come here and we'll give you a few bucks, and then hit the road, thank you very much.

I have a constituent that had a complaint for me last week. A person with a temporary work permit had come to the province of Alberta to work and got injured, went to the Workers' Compensation Board, and lo and behold, before his hearing came forward, his work visa ran out. "So sorry. Too bad. So sad. You were here to work. You can't work. Hit the road. We'll see you later." You know, there is a myriad of new problems that we're creating by failing to deal with the economic boom that we're experiencing here in a logical and systematic sort of fashion, using the capacity that we have here in this legislative House to deal with it.

Perhaps I would like to start, then, just in terms of the various departments, by looking at what we can do to somehow moderate and to use intelligently the economic riches, particularly the energy resources, with which we are blessed and on which the foundation of this boom is based. Even the most conservative voices that we hear from outside of this government are saying very clearly that we have to moderate and control the rate of major projects that are being

approved – the drilling projects, the heavy oil projects, the tar sands, the oil sands projects – moderate them in some basic way so that you're not approving everything all at once. It creates shortages of labour and materials. It distorts the economy. In fact, it is distorting to some extent the entire national economy of the country by simply having this rubber stamp that approves every single major oil project that passes over the desk at any given time.

You can see a perfect microcosm of that, of course, and perhaps the epicentre of that in Fort McMurray, where there are 22 large projects either approved or on the way all happening at the same time, and you have this meltdown situation, Mr. Chairman. You have a situation where the municipal district of Wood Buffalo, perhaps out of desperation, said: "Well, hey, maybe enough is enough. Maybe even we will stand up and say to Suncor" – one of the long-standing and certainly more responsible corporations up in Fort McMurray – "that we can't handle your Voyageur expansion. Enough is enough. Our roads, our water system, our hospital are all on the teetering edge of collapse."

I had an opportunity to be at that EUB hearing a couple of weeks ago, and it was just absolutely illuminating to see the social tension and, I dare say, the political tension that is being wrought on that area as a result of poor planning or, I should say, almost entirely the absence of planning in regard to tar sand expansion throughout the Wood Buffalo region. You know, this act of desperation was for attention, I would say. The good burghers of the MD of Wood Buffalo certainly are not opposed to tar sand development, and certainly the New Democrats aren't either. It provides tremendous job opportunities and revenue opportunities which all Albertans should share in, but it just brings to a head, I hope, in the minds of the members opposite that a little bit of planning probably isn't such a bad idea at this juncture in the history of this province.

Looking at the next group of energy projects that are coming up for review, let's try to use, perhaps, a little bit more of a clear-headed approach to it. Looking in a tempered way, do we have the capacity for another half a dozen upgraders, do we have the capacity for another major tar sand project or oil sand project, and have we done the planning to see what the implications of those projects are? I would suggest neither, in regard to both long-term planning and the economic implications, have been looked at properly. Really, that constitutes not just irresponsibility on the part of this Legislature, but I would say that it borders on gross negligence as well.

Looking at individual projects, I suppose, what is lacking in my mind in terms of planning is an integrated method by which different ministries can look at and contribute to the viability of any given project. I was in the Peace Country recently, and it struck me perhaps as a bit of an epiphany that, you know, the oil sand potential that they have in the eastern Peace area is certainly comparable or at least as significant in some way as the tar sands in the eastern part of Alberta. What a great opportunity for us to learn from our mistakes, from Fort McMurray, and not visit them on the good people of Peace River in the east, not just for the residents of the Peace River country but for the benefit of the whole province as well.

Part of the problem, Mr. Chairman, is that when we're developing all of these projects all at once, we're not collecting the revenues from royalties that all Albertans deserve. Part of the reason, I would hasten to suggest as well, is that all of these projects are being developed in sort of this headlong rush, all at once, in a bonanza sort of manner because the energy companies know that they're getting such a tremendous bargain on the royalty rates. They know it can't last, so everybody is trying to get in there before reality sets in and, in fact, the province of Alberta does charge a decent royalty rate for the energy that is being exported out of this province.

8:40

As I say, it's not just a question of the people who are affected in the immediate area around a major project, the workers that are going there, but really it's an issue for all Albertans to seriously consider at this juncture. What sort of infrastructure we build in regard to energy, in regard to all of our public institutions right now is the structure that we're going to be left with for the next 20 to 30 years. What sort of energy choices we make are systems that we're going to build now at tremendous expense that we're going to be either stuck with or happy that we had the foresight to put into place for, as I say, not just the short term but the long-term future as well.

As we have advocated for quite a while now, what we must do is use our hydrocarbon resources that we have available to us and use that wealth as a bridge to build a new sort of energy future for the province. Certainly, we're not going to simply walk away from hydrocarbons and neither is the world, but what we must do is learn to sip those resources more judiciously instead of gulping them down and to make sure that we're maximizing the money that we have from that to invest in green energy alternatives.

So the critical portfolio of the areas that I have been responsible for I would like to see working more in concert to create that dream energy future so that Economic Development, Sustainable Resource Development, Energy, Environment are all working together to create a mechanism by which we can make a serious commitment to solar energy, to geothermal energy, to wind power, to conservation, to cogeneration so that with any decision we're making and investment we're making, we are looking at a nonhydrocarbon alternative first and foremost. I will be introducing a private member's bill tomorrow that hopefully will I guess help to move this notion forward in some small way in regard to the capacity of people to net meter their electricity. I know, amongst many, many other good ideas, that this is a notion whose time has come for this province.

As I said, energy, certainly, is the key to the province. I guess there's no mystery there, but how we manage it is up for question and for debate. What we need to do is have an honest debate in this province over the next weeks and months and years to ensure that, in fact, we are investing in something that ultimately will be sustainable environmentally, economically, and socially as well.

I have quite a number of other issues that I want to speak on. Perhaps I'll just stick with the energy development concept.

One of the things that struck me in the Peace Country when I was there last week was, of course, the oil sand development there, which is slightly different from Fort McMurray – they're having to drill further down to reach the oil sand deposits in the Peace Country – is that once again the development is taking place in a very piecemeal and sort of fractured sort of way. Specifically, I visited the Seal Lake, Cadotte Lake, and Carmon Creek area just southeast of Peace River, and what I saw there I found very concerning because you have a much more populated and more sensitive situation than perhaps you have in Fort McMurray. In this area you have farming. In this area you have areas that already have been designated as green zones by SRD. You have forestry and a much higher population that has been there for a long time. Rather than having an integrated overall plan for this area, this green space, as I say, around the Seal Lake, Cadotte Lake area, instead of having an overall plan that involves both Environment and SRD, what's happening is that the municipal district is simply going ahead and piecemeal servicing the energy companies that wish to drill in this green area.

So you have roads being sort of built in a slightly haphazard or, you know, piecemeal fashion. You have green space being cut up

into smaller and smaller pieces. You have an absence of planning around the green area so that people that live on the periphery of the drilling area are uncertain as to what sort of future they can expect for their farms and for their acreages, and you have a complete absence of an environmental impact assessment that works in concert with the SRD to ensure that the green zone that has been established there remains and keeps its integrity as a wild area.

So it certainly sparked my imagination to think that this is a small microcosm of a lack of planning that causes problems all across this province, where we say: "Okay. Industry first; business knows best. Away we go, and let's drill that new area." Well, certainly that is useful, and I won't stand in the way of that sort of economic progress. But it is, again, the responsibility of this Legislature to provide the regulation and the level playing field for all different industry players and for residents and for farmers to know what exactly to expect. I will say with some authority that energy companies like this same sort of clear-cut regulation and planning so that they can conduct their business in a reasonable and equitable way rather than this piecemeal approach, which might favour one or another operation.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At this stage of debate on this Bill 44, the appropriation bill number 2, I wanted to talk some more about this extra money that we're asked to approve, with focus, of course, on both education and health not only because they represent the larger portions of this supplementary supply from a purely monetary or financial standpoint but also in appreciation for their importance and the emphasis that we Alberta Liberals place on these two files or departments. I have already spoken with respect to education in second reading and have put some of my general thoughts on the record, but today I wanted to cover some specifics.

Looking at my own schools in Edmonton-McClung, Mr. Chairman, we tend to be in relatively better shape than other areas because these schools are either younger in comparison or have been well kept. You know, I would think that it's probably a mix of both. The age is one thing, and the maintenance is another. The newest addition in my area is Archbishop Oscar Romero, which is a Catholic high school which came on board in 2004. Now, in terms of a needs assessment or the maintenance audits, which took place back in 1999-2000, it would seem that St. Martha and Rio Terrace were the two needing the most attention, in the amount of about \$559,000 each, followed by Our Lady of the Prairies at \$508,000, and Callingwood elementary at \$452,000. Then you would include Centennial school at \$395,000 and Patricia Heights at around \$353,000.

Now, those were the six schools identified back then as needing the most attention and assistance in terms of the money needed to address all maintenance needs for each of those particular schools. This is not saying that the other schools did not need or deserve attention as well, but based on that audit back in '99-2000 these six schools sort of stood out. They were in need of a bit more attention. It was more critical or more urgent.

I'm also under the impression that a whole bunch of reaudits were started in 2005, but unfortunately there is no data yet for the schools in Edmonton-McClung, which means that we don't have a more current picture evaluating the situation today. Again, I might assume that this is because most of them were relatively new, so maybe the ministry did not feel the need to re-evaluate or reassess, or maybe their turn did not come yet.

I would also like to receive the up-to-date facility condition index,

or FCI, figures for my schools, which is another useful tool to determine how much work is needed compared to the replacement value for those buildings. So if the hon. minister has access to this information or if it's in fact being looked at or in the process, I would like to receive it as soon as I can.

8:50

Now, if the FCI assessments were not done because my schools are in better shape than most, I would also need to be informed of this situation. Also, I would argue that the minister keeps telling us about how he continually monitors the situation with respect to infrastructure and so on, so if they're scheduled at some point in the future or planned, I should also be made aware of this. Actually, parents, to some extent, deserve to be told as well. The buildings age, and new problems manifest all the time, you know, regardless of how much work or how much maintenance is done on an annual basis. So every school year we fix some, but then new problems would manifest.

Another layer we can add is basically to rely on the principals and the custodians in those schools to submit, you know, progress reports or to submit concerns or issues that they're having to the attention of the minister. So if they're scheduled for a review, let's say, in six months, but something is happening today, they don't have to wait, and they're not told to wait. These guys are the front line and they're right there. You know, I have tremendous respect for custodial staff and for principals. They look at things everywhere, from a light bulb that needs replacing to actually ensuring the structural integrity of a school's roof, for example, and everything in between. They're the ones entrusted to make ends meet, and they're the ones that actually make those operational decisions right there. So, again, I would seize this opportunity to commend them on the work that they do and to also recognize the principals and the custodians for their resilience and creativity. Amazing men and women, Mr. Chairman.

Now, in terms of the raw score, which evaluates the amount of maintenance needed under that school facility evaluation project, back in 1999-2000 we were told that a score of zero to 399 lands you a "good." A score of 400 to 799 means a fair status, and then anything over 800 means poor. Luckily, none of my schools ranks as poor, and only two are in the fair category. Centennial was at 490, and Callingwood was at 410. St. Martha was at 380, and the other schools were less. So again I would highlight the need for more current estimates. I don't want to be led to believe that my schools are doing better than they are actually or in reality, and I think that continuous monitoring and reassessment is advised.

Mr. Chairman, almost all of us in this House enjoy a good working relationship with the people running the schools in our constituencies. I, for one, certainly do. One of those principals took me to the back of his school to show me a door which gets repeatedly vandalized. A simple stone is thrown and the glass window on that door is shattered; it happens every two or three months. What I saw was not a sheet of glass. I saw an ugly piece of dirty wood, or something that looked like wood and, of course, no light coming through. I asked the principal: why not install that sort of protective mesh wiring that goes on top of the glass to permanently address this problem and to prevent it from reoccurring even if it costs a little more?

The answer is that based on the pool of money for repairs, short-term fixes, even if they end up costing more in the long run, are fine and allowed, but longer term solutions, which make more sense – they might cost more today, but they would save a whole bunch of money later – are not allowed, or they have to be funded from a separate allocation of funds. It takes longer for the paperwork, and

sometimes they're even denied altogether. I think that this is stupid, and it has to be addressed. I would urge the Minister of Education in one of his numerous meetings around the province to discuss with the school boards ways to transfer this minute piece of decision-making and management flexibility to the individual principals on site. I agree that most of our institutions and organizations should be managed or run like businesses. I don't think it's happening now, and I think it's a model to be further investigated.

I disagree, however, that we enforce the accountability pillar, as it is referred to in the yet-to-be-released 2006-07 funding manual for school authorities – I have a copy of it, and it's due to be released next week – while not affording full support and enough flexibility for them to perform and excel. That would be the flexibility pillar. That document, which is going to be released next week, Mr. Chairman, talks about the accountability pillar, and it also talks about the flexibility pillar. Speaking of this funding manual, the flexibility statement was one paragraph long, while the limitations listed to qualify it appeared in five paragraphs.

It's good to have limits and boundaries, dos and don'ts, to have structure, but I would argue equally for local decision-making with the right checks and balances in place. Furthermore, I would advocate fuller and stronger involvement by parent groups as stakeholders and partners, as equals. Our schools need regular maintenance and care, some more than others, and there should be a clear plan with clear timelines and frequent reassessments, as I mentioned, along the way.

I can digress here a bit and editorialize, Mr. Chairman, how I think it was poor planning, an example of government shortsightedness, to pay off the financial, or on paper, debt at the expense of school boards and local health authorities. That's also assuming that we believe or share this government's view that the unfunded teachers' liability in the neighbourhood of \$4 billion for the government portion alone – and then the teachers are on the hook for about \$2 billion on their own in today's dollars – is not a debt. So the question is: are we truly debt free? I don't think so.

What this government has done was eliminate the debt on paper while postponing or ignoring required and timely maintenance and upkeep projects and allowing the infrastructure in our schools, hospitals, and roads to deteriorate plus the fact that what we could have fixed up or kept up six or seven or, indeed, 14 years ago, when the so-called revolution began, at those years' dollars would have saved us enormously at today's dollars. But, again, these are symptoms of a government adrift on autopilot, only looking under its feet, with no worries about tomorrow. Mr. Chairman, that tomorrow is here now, today, and we cannot and will not wait any longer or forgive any more of this government's sins.

Applying the deep cuts back in 1992-93, which amounted in some instances to sabotage by this government and its former finance minister, who's now hoping to come back, was one thing. But this government abandoning its responsibility and mixing up its priorities, with no vision or sense of direction whatsoever, is another and more important thing. Penalizing school boards if they run deficits while denying them the adequate support that they need is wrong. As I said yesterday, boasting about giving them an average 3.2 per cent increase over last year compared to the inflation in Alberta, which is the highest in Canada at 4.3 per cent, is hardly something to be proud of. When the base instruction grant per student is \$5,200 in 2006-07 compared to \$6,800 back in 2000-01, something in this picture is not right. Not offering the required flexibility or even minimal autonomy to principals to manage their own school affairs and run their organizations is also wrong. But, as I said, Mr. Chairman, I digress.

Back to Edmonton-McClung. I'm not sure if you're aware, Mr.

Chairman, that my constituency is experiencing the highest rate of growth in Edmonton, tremendous growth west of the Anthony Henday Drive. There is a housing building frenzy, and the population is rapidly and constantly growing. I would bet you that at least 2,000 to 3,000 new people now make McClung their home compared to 2004 figures. Most of these newcomers to the west end. More importantly, south of the Whitemud in my constituency are young people with children or young couples who moved to Alberta to settle and start families. So in a year or two or three these families are also going to have children. We urgently need at least one elementary school in that area to serve the residents of the Grange, Glastonbury, and the Hamptons. That's the start.

9:00

We may also need to potentially look at a junior high school as well, perhaps, as time goes on, in three to five years' time. So I hope the hon. Minister of Education would take this into account. The people of Edmonton-McClung, especially, as I mentioned, west of the Anthony Henday, have a lot of difficulty actually busing their kids to other schools. I think that at least an elementary school to start plus potentially a junior high is advised. I know that the land and the infrastructure are there. All we have missing or lacking or maybe not yet is the will and the resources allocated by the hon. Minister of Education.

Moving on, another constituency which I particularly care about is Sherwood Park. Sherwood Park has about 20 to 22 schools, and some of them are in better shape than others. Now, looking at their facility index, some of them were at, you know, 24, 25. One was at 37 per cent, which means that it would cost 37 per cent to fix it or it would cost 100 per cent to replace it. So it's really in bad shape. This particular one is Madonna Catholic school, and they had a raw score of about 410 back in '99. In 2005, Mr. Chairman, this particular school, for example, needs about 2 and a quarter million dollars for all the upgrades and all the maintenance.

Take another one: Brentwood school. Brentwood school has an FCI of 25 per cent. Surprisingly, in 1999-2000 their estimated requirements were valued at about \$626,000. In 2005, which is about five years later, it actually skyrocketed to \$1.5 million, so that's like a big 150 per cent jump, a raw score of about 300.

Take another one: Campbelltown school, raw score of 510, and in '99 they needed \$652,000. In 2005 they needed \$1.16 million. Take Fultonvale elementary school at a raw score of 490: in '99 they needed \$737,000. It rose by about a hundred thousand to \$876,000 in 2005. Take Pine Street school: they needed \$499,000 back in '99; in 2005, \$744,000.

The list goes on. Take Wes Hosford school, raw score 450: in '99 they needed \$475,000. Nothing got done or not enough, and in 2005 they needed \$970,000. Madonna I mentioned needing \$2.25 million.

Other ones for which we don't have the 2005 figures include Bev Facey composite. In '99 they needed \$1.6 million. I'm not sure where they stand today, if in fact a reassessment has been done. Salisbury composite: back then \$977,000. Again, we're not sure where they're at today.

Mr. Eggen: That's my high school.

Mr. Elsalhy: Oh, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder went to that school. Was it bad back then?

Mr. Eggen: Salisbury? Yeah, it was falling apart.

Mr. Elsalhy: It was falling apart back then, and we need to be made aware of improvements at least.

Sherwood Heights junior high: back then 1 and a quarter million, and again we're not sure what's happening today. Woodbridge Farms: \$701,000; we're not sure what's happening today. Father Kenneth Kearns went down minimally. It required \$1.1 million back in '99. It requires \$1 million in 2005, so some progress, but their FCI is 24 per cent. Jean Vanier at a raw score of 520, again, slightly went down from \$1.5 million to about \$800,000. Our Lady of Perpetual Help, \$837,000. St. Luke Catholic, \$818,000 back in '99.

So tons of money needed for schools in Sherwood Park. I would hope that the ministry shares with us the updated estimates for the year 2005, also the FCI figures, to give us a better understanding of the maintenance picture in those schools in Sherwood Park.

Now, why would we worry? We worry, Mr. Chairman, because what we don't fix today would cost more tomorrow. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark mentioned the analogy with the car and changing the oil frequently. It would definitely cost less to keep your engine running at optimal performance than wait until it dies, and then you have to replace it altogether.

Schools should not be viewed as an expense on the debit side of the budget. They should be looked at as assets. They're jewels in the community. They should be preserved, maintained, looked after, and looked to to give us the skilled workforce that we're hoping for in the future, to give us the tax base that we're looking for in the future, and overall this is something that cannot be overlooked.

Now, in view of the time – I know that I'm approaching my 20-minute limit, and I also wanted to speak about health care – perhaps maybe after other speakers have had a chance, I would come back and talk some more about health care.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my honour to speak for a few minutes about education in the context of my riding of Edmonton-Glenora. I want to talk about the impact of the budget supplementary supply on teaching, also on class size, and also on infrastructure.

Now, education is extremely important for my riding. There are two outstanding high schools, Ross Sheppard high school and also Archbishop MacDonald high school. The headquarters of the Alberta Teachers' Association is located in my riding. There are many faculty people from the University of Alberta, many teachers residing in my riding, and I know that they would want me to speak strongly about the need for adequate funding for education by the provincial government.

I want to move back before the supplementary supply estimates came out and before the appropriations bill, which is suggesting some additional increases, came before us to a few months ago, when school boards and also local schools had to deal with their budget issues. The government had promised a 2.8 per cent increase over the previous year, so most schools had to go with that offer in terms of their budgeting. A 2.8 increase was just not very much at all, so it put a lot of schools under a tremendous pressure.

I approve of school-based budgeting. When principals have to develop their budgets to provide the information to the school board, they're faced with a tremendous challenge: 2.8 per cent increase. Now, that doesn't really cover very much if we take into consideration the rising teacher costs, because all teachers gain experience through the years and move up the grid; therefore, their salaries increase, so that has an impact on the local school and the school board. Of course, there's inflation to consider. So 2.8 per cent really doesn't cover the rising teacher costs or inflation.

So right away boards of education, including the Edmonton school board, were faced with difficult decisions, and the schools themselves: tremendous difficulty in making decisions about what they should do. Faced with this minimal increase, principals are faced with either teachers must be cut, as in the case of Archbishop MacDonald high school, where they had to reduce their staff by five teachers, and their class sizes are still quite high. Of course, reducing teachers leads to an increase in class sizes. That's what principals have to decide. If they're going to present a balanced budget, they might have to cut teachers. So it's either cut teachers or keep teachers and reduce spending on services, supplies, and equipment.

9:10

Now, I sat down with the principal at Glenora elementary school and went through some of the budgeting agonies that they go through every spring. One of the real problems is that given the high value on education that people have, most schools want to keep as many teachers as possible and have the full allotment of teachers. That sometimes forces them into a quite unacceptable situation, where the proportion of money directed to teaching goes up all the time. The optimum might be around 80 per cent or 85 per cent of their total budget, but it keeps going up under the pressures of the lack of funding from the province and the board of education. In Glenora school it went up from the low 80s to 86 per cent and then this year 89 per cent. Eighty-nine per cent of their budget is going to cover teachers and the cost of teaching.

Eleven per cent of their budget is then for services, supplies, and equipment, to cover the plant operations, maintenance, custodial work, utilities, supplies. There just isn't enough money, out of that 11 per cent, to cover all of those things, so that leads to putting pressure on parents. The parents are forced, then, to worry about the school not having enough supplies, enough textbooks for their children, so they begin to get into fundraising schemes, casinos, whatever, to raise money to cover the costs that are not covered by this 11 per cent.

That's what happens every year. The principal and the parents and the teachers go through this whole process of budgeting. Then the Minister of Education suggests that it's all speculative anyway because even though these budgets are presented, you have to wait for enrolments to come in in September to figure out exactly what the school is going to get. I resent that term "speculative" being used because if this process is to have real meaning, then it's got to have greater recognition by the provincial government and the Department of Education.

So all of these requests, these budgets, go in, and we wait for the enrolments. Well, through the summer I guess the Minister of Education got the message that the amount of money, the 2.8 per cent increase over the previous year, was just not going to do it, so there is additional money in the supplementary supply.

Now, when I look at the amount of money here, there is the \$52 million for operating support to public and separate schools, and then there's the \$240 million for infrastructure. Out of the operating money quite a bit of it is dedicated to specialized applications like students with severe disabilities – and I have no problems with that – or funding in the area of English as a Second Language and the class size initiative, which I'll comment on in a few minutes. But, really, the only addition to the general operating expenses of schools is the \$16,500,000, for a 1 per cent base instruction grant increase.

Mr. Chairman, this is really a drop in the bucket. I mean, when you consider the huge, huge budget of education in this province, a 1 per cent increase in base instruction doesn't really amount to very

much. In fact, there are some high schools in this province that have as large a budget as that amount. So, really, I think that the 2.8 per cent increase that was suggested by the Department of Education over last year – it was supposed to be a 2.8 per cent increase – with this 1 per cent increase in the base instruction grant brings it up to a 3.8 per cent, or almost 4 per cent, increase over last year. But given all of the expenses when we factor in transportation costs, fuel costs, utility costs, and the rising inflation and so on, I don't think that this amount really will make much difference in terms of the decisions that have had to be made by schools already in terms of letting teachers go. So I'm really quite dissatisfied with what the government has done. There's not very much help here at all.

Now, I just want to make a few comments about class size. I applaud the government for putting \$28 million into the class-size initiative. I think this is a really important issue. The Learning Commission suggested that the average class sizes across the province should go down. They suggested guidelines such as junior kindergarten to grade 3, 17 students; grades 4 to 6, 23 students; grades 7 to 9, 25 students; and grades 10 to 12, 27 students. By and large, I think most of the schools in my riding are a little bit below those numbers although not by much, so I am really concerned about the effect that the money that's coming to the school board and then to the schools is going to have on class sizes. If the school is forced to let one teacher go, then the class sizes will go up.

I think there's a problem with the accounting for class size because the government always announces average class sizes across the whole province rather than looking at specific schools where there are special factors. Where you have a lot of schools with very small classes, that's averaged in with schools which have quite large classes. So the average looks good, but when you take a closer look at individual schools, then there are a lot of problems in terms of class size.

I notice that the Edmonton school board in a recent report was indicating that if the money coming in from the province was just the 2.8 per cent increase over last year, that would really affect class sizes. If there was no new money coming in, they expected that class sizes would really go up. I hope that this is enough money. This \$28 million that's going to school boards throughout the province: I hope that's enough to make a real difference in class sizes. So we'll watch that one. We'll see reports and monitor how that's going to develop for schools this year, especially when we have a report on the enrolments in September.

Now, turning to the infrastructure issue. This is a serious problem in my riding of Edmonton-Glenora because it's an older district with older schools, and there are a number of schools in my riding that have been earmarked for examination, for auditing in the future. There's the so-called sustainability list that the Edmonton school board provides, and there are at least six schools in my riding that are on the one- to three-year list and one school on the four- to six-year list. On the one- to three-year list I have in my riding the elementary schools Britannia, High Park, Grovenor, Coronation, Woodcroft, and Westglen, and on the four- to six-year list I have Inglewood.

Now, when schools appear on these lists, there's tremendous consternation on the part of parents because they're very worried that their school might be closed even though the school board indicates that being on the list doesn't mean that the school is going to be closed. It means that there's going to be a process of examination of the needs of the school and the trends and so on. But it is a serious issue, and I just hope that the school boards don't rush too fast, that they take their time because there are lots of changes to the demographics, especially in a riding like Glenora.

9:20

Many members of this Assembly whose ridings are in areas where there is tremendous housing development see the need for many new schools to be built, but there's still obviously a trend of young families moving back into older neighbourhoods. I see that when I knock on doors. I was knocking on doors near Westglen school in the community of Westmount, and I came across many, many young families. Of course, they started talking to me immediately about their school. When I asked them what their concerns were and what they would like to tell me about the issues facing provincial politics, they invariably mentioned education.

Many of the young families moved into the neighbourhood because of the older homes that are there. There are homes that were built just after the First World War. Westglen school itself was I think built in the 1940s. Let's see. I had a date here. I think it was 1944. It's a wonderful old school. It was originally built for a high school, so it has a huge gymnasium, big wide halls, and large classrooms with high ceilings. There's a lot of concern that it's difficult to maintain an elementary school with about 200 students in a building which was built for some 400 students, so there's some pressure on the local community in terms of what's going to happen to this particular school. There's the infrastructure need in terms of repair and of changes to the school, but I am really encouraged by the fact that the parents have organized themselves to try to do something about the present situation of that school. One of the things that they have come up with is a proposal to have Westglen elementary school changed into a community school.

Now, this is a very interesting initiative. There was a community school program in this province, a program that was started in 1980 and ran until the mid-90s, until this government cut that program, which was quite premature and misguided. I know from experience that a number of these schools in Edmonton really have thrived as community schools; for example, Norwood community school, Steinhauer community school, and Thorncliffe community school.

It was shortsighted of the government to cut that program. It didn't cost them much more to maintain that program because the idea of a community school is to involve agencies, social agencies in the community, groups in the community who might utilize the school in off-hours and contribute to rent and so on. It's been proven that community schools can increase the utilization of their building almost to 100 per cent, yet the cost in terms of additional money to school budgets is quite minuscule because most of the money they can get through the renting of the building by organizations in the community.

Now, I'm very impressed by the prospectus, the suggestions that this parents' group has come up with to make Westglen school into a community school. I think it's a concept that we have to revisit. We have to rethink the role of a school in the community. Now, it used to be the case that the school was the hub of activity in a given community, and that's what parents want to see again. They want to see the school utilized all the time, not just 20 per cent of the year but throughout the year, that even on the weekends the school would be available for sports groups, for adult education. The local school used to be the centre of adult education. I've been committed, as a former teacher, to lifelong learning for adults. The local school in our communities can be a real focus of adult learning. So I'm really intrigued by this concept of community schools. That might be something that we can bring back in the future.

Mr. Chairman, one of the problems of many of our older schools and one of the problems of this particular school, because it's so large and was built as a high school, is that the current ways in which the utilization is determined in terms of so much space per

student doesn't fit the older schools. It fits newer schools, but if you use that same formula for older schools, it doesn't fit. It puts the parents in a difficult situation when their kids are going to these older schools. So I'm looking for initiatives, new approaches to try to encourage people in the community to focus on their school so that they can continue to see the schools survive. [Dr. Miller's speaking time expired]

Well, I have much more, and I'll have to come back in a few minutes.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am pleased, actually, to be able to speak here today because we have a democracy in this country, but we don't have very many days and very much time to speak of these budgets. I am angry, actually, that we had to . . . [interjection] Oh, I hear a groan there from my colleague from Drayton Valley-Calmar that I should be angry at having to come back early to accommodate a fishing trip for our Premier and some fundraising buddies he has. I had to shorten a trip to west Africa. I was in Sierra Leone, and even though it was short, I had a tremendous trip.

I do convey the greetings from the Speaker of their Assembly. Actually, they invited me to tour their Parliament and speak in their Parliament, and I met with a number of their ministers on their invitation, which I was very surprised when I got there. One really sees, in contrast, some problems that some countries have, that being, according to the UN index, the poorest nation on this planet and the difficulties they had. I was there at the invitation of some now fairly large immigrant communities in our province from that area. I convey the thanks from their foreign minister for taking some of their people during times of difficult and brutal civil war.

[Mr. Johnson in the chair]

To the bill at hand here, to the estimates, this government can take no credit for the booming economy that we have right now. It can take no credit for the oil price and the present massive thrust to exploit our natural resources that the oil companies are doing, to try and exploit them and get as much as they can from our resources in the shortest possible time. But this government must take the blame for not looking beyond its nose to try and at least have some contingency plans in place to ensure a decent quality of life and protection for our environment as this massive thrust does take place. There is a responsibility for elected leaders to provide some leadership, and this group of elected leaders on the government side has been asleep at the switch. This government has abrogated, even forgotten, its responsibility to provide that leadership.

The real effect of much of what we've seen is just short-term solutions. Ad hoc solutions have become the norm. We see time and again the fact that we're back again to vote supplementary money: "Oops, didn't think about it. Oops, missed that. Oops, I guess we better put some dough into that." I think it's a crime that our Alberta children have to go through some disruption again this fall because the government couldn't get it right in its spring budget again. But it never gets it right in its spring budget because this government does not take that budget seriously. Time and again we're debating supplemental estimates. I've been here less than two years, and, gosh, it seems like every few months we're back for supplemental estimates. It just shows that this government doesn't really know what it's doing and generally gets it wrong. Short-term solutions are the norm. To use a farm term, this is a government that relies on haywire fixes and, indeed, is a haywire government. Where is the leadership?

9:30

You know, another haywire fix is clear in the push, in the proposals for temporary foreign workers, which really gets me how this will be of any tremendous benefit to Alberta or Albertans, especially in the sense that temporary foreign workers will not be able to bring their families, in the sense that they will not be able to live in a home other than some temporary camp environment, in the sense that they will not be able to stay in this country and will be sent home. I mean, we're hearing now about the problems in some of the packing plants who are having their temporary foreign workers sent home abruptly for reasons that sometimes they don't even know.

The Minister of Economic Development said today that they might be able to expand the provincial nominee program to 1,300 or so individuals from I think it's 800 or 900 now. I mean, it doesn't even come close to the needs of many of our small businesses, many of our restaurants, our packing plants, our industries that are hurting right now and that may be shrinking because of the nature of the short-term, ad hoc leadership that's been going on that doesn't take into account the needs of many of our economic sectors. Even the government identified that retention is somehow important. I don't know how a temporary foreign worker deals with retention in any way.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

You know, what we seem to get from this government so often, so much is that there's no leadership to try and ensure the quality of life for Albertans. The housing market is out of reach for many individuals. Homelessness is getting out of hand. I'm getting calls. Last week I had one. A woman on AISH, a small apartment, somehow couldn't take her daughter in – she has been sleeping in a tent in the ravine – trying to get somebody to put some space in her backyard so she can at least put the tent up in their backyard in the summer while it's still nice.

The numbers of people I see, you know, living near the bottle depots, the number of people sleeping on the mattresses outside. I've got a Goodwill store not too far from my constituency office, and continually they're trying to put themselves up in the back alley behind the area there. I didn't even see that in Sierra Leone, the poorest nation on Earth.

The problems that we see in this particular budget – I mean, it's good to see some monies being put forward to our schools. Again, though, it's ad hoc. It's late. You know, we're seeing some tremendous pressures. I have a lot of new construction in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning, a lot of whole new subdivisions going up. We're seeing the temporary classrooms go up. I remember going just before the end of the school year, and you could hardly breathe in the one of them because it was so hot. I wonder why we put our children into that sort of thing. We are seeing that the new Christian high school is not able to put forward a full slate of classes, and kids are being forced to go right across the city in order to take advantage of their facilities. The slowness of getting some of the new schools in place, the problems with upkeep, and the problems with the fundraising are clear all across the board.

This morning I met with a number of community leaders during the social function after the opening of the new Northgate Lions seniors' expansion, addition. I thank the government for the monies that they've put into that. That's a wonderful project and a wonderful thing for seniors and a wonderful thing for the communities of northeast Edmonton, but the problem that we're seeing is a shortage of volunteers. The hours of work for so many people in the

northeast part of our city and, indeed, much of Edmonton are becoming so long that they cannot be involved in coaching, in community activities, in a lot of the things, and much of it's falling on our seniors now, oddly enough. We have so, so many people – we're hearing stories of 24 and fours. That's the legal limit, if that's followed, 24 shifts on and four shifts off, as the minimum, for somebody to go to work.

People are going to Fort McMurray and to Lloydminster and to the diamond mines in the Territories and to largely the conventional oil industry, and it is really causing a great deal of distortion in our labour market. I mean, even the bank manager at one of the local banks, two blocks from my constituency office, quit two weeks ago to go work the rigs because he figured that if he works the rigs for a couple of weeks he could, you know, do better than working as a bank manager. We've obviously got a distorted labour market when we have things like that happening.

We have small businesses that can't get dishwashers. They can't get sous-chefs. I had two sous-chefs with one local restaurateur, who has a very nice restaurant – he's shut down his lunch trade because he wants to keep his quality. He wants to ensure that he can keep his business going in the way that he deems is best and that is a good quality product and doing things right as many Alberta businesses surely like to do. But he can't do that because he says his wife is going to leave him if he continues working the hours that he's been working. He shut down for a whole month in August, and he shut down much of his lunch trade.

You know, we're hurting our economic development. We're hurting our business development. We're hurting our business growth. Like the two chefs I talked to the one day, one told me he was going to go work in a rig camp, and one told me he was going to work on the rigs. That's what's been happening here for the last 18 months as we've had this high oil price and the need and the rush for exploitation.

It does affect the volunteers. It does affect minor hockey. It does affect the coaching. It does affect the soccer. It does affect all the other things that help to ensure that our communities and our children grow well, even outside of the schools. The schools are being forced to take up more of the baton, so to speak, more of the responsibility, as so often the parents are away and busy and working. The time that they have to spend in ensuring that the kids have some proper recreation and all of the rest of it and some of the teachers' times they give is more than what we would see in I think more normal times.

In some of the schools that have a lot of recent immigrant population, especially those of lower income, talking to the principals, talking to the teachers, the kids hardly see their parents. They're working two jobs with low incomes. The minimum wage is not enough to have a living wage even with two income earners in a family in this province, especially with the cost of housing, the rising cost of rental accommodation, and it has been rising very, very quickly. You know, people are afraid that they're going to be forced out of their rental accommodation if they don't continue with their jobs, and the people that are left behind are the kids. The people that are left behind are the children. I have teachers and principals telling me that some of these kids have been in this country for three and four and five years and have not even been to a park. The first time that they actually had an outing was just the school outings, coming to the Legislature. There's one grade 6 class that I spoke to just last spring. For some of the kids it was the first time they'd actually been anywhere in the city and done anything, and the teacher said that this is a common problem.

9:40

We don't have volunteers. People are out working huge, incredible hours. So many people out of town. The *Edmonton Journal* was surprised some months ago when they said: what's going on with 16,000 less jobs in Edmonton even though everybody's working and the place is booming? They're all working out of town. They're not here. That will change. There will be some huge, necessary, new requirements if we don't look at them fairly soon. I don't think we are really.

In the northeast portion of the city and actually in Sturgeon county and the areas where the new upgrader facilities and the other plants are going to be coming in, if we don't have the new bridge come in fairly quickly – and it will probably, I think, take three years to build the Anthony Henday east side – we're going to have some problems in trying to transport some of the modules, trying to transport a lot of the workers, trying to have a decent transportation system in place when we deal with that \$30 billion worth of investment. If we don't deal with the railroad bridge at Gibbons to ensure that there's enough ability for the larger loads to be transported on that route, we're going to run into some major difficulties. If we don't deal with some of these issues fairly quickly, we're going to run into some greater logjams than what we saw a few years ago when the upgrader was being built for Shell, and that was only 12,000 workers.

The necessity to deal with some of those things, the necessity to look ahead, the necessity to plan, the necessity to have some forward-looking leadership is something that I think we have to have continual emphasis on, and I don't see that at all from this government. It's just all ad hoc. It's all laissez-faire. It doesn't matter what happens; we'll see what happens.

The nature of the quality of life concerns are something that I'm hearing so often from many, many Albertans. Many are saying: "What is this boom? Where am I seeing this boom? Why am I not getting something extra, and why am I actually paying more, a lot more? Why is it that this boom is leaving me behind?" You hear from the people on AISH. You hear from the people on fixed incomes, the seniors and such. They are afraid of the rising costs for their accommodation, the rising costs for services, the rising costs for so many things. They just want to say to me: "Well, gosh, can we get some relief? Can we get some ability to get some benefit from this boom?" They don't see that they are getting any benefit.

The schools in Edmonton-Manning do have some needs for some particular types of better maintenance. There are a number of needs in some of the areas. There are some very good schools and some tremendous teachers. I have had a number of schools like one that was cutting their numbers of teachers. When I talked to them before the closure in June, they were going to decrease their number of grade 6 classes and lose one teacher even though they were going to have about a 20 per cent increase in students. That would have brought them to something like 37 students per grade 6 class, which I think is far, far too many.

Smaller schools sometimes run into these conundrums, and they have to make these choices, and it's very difficult. Many of them run into the problems of having to lose part of their special needs and all the rest of it. There's some money here that will be able to be moved around a little bit by some of the schools, and that's a good thing, but special needs continues to be a tremendous problem for many parents and many schools. Trying to deal with that and trying to fund partial positions and trying to fund the . . . [Mr. Backs' speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I much appreciate the opportunity to speak here, as always, and appreciate the comments of everyone so far.

Mr. Mar: We're on the edges of our seats.

Dr. Taft: I'm sure. Yes. One members says that he's on the edge of his seat. Well, listen. For those quieter moments in the Legislature a few years ago I bought a little book called *The Languid Goat is Always Thin: The World's Strangest Proverbs*. See, everybody's already listening. It's full of very strange proverbs. I thought a couple of them since the Treasurer is here. There is no economy in going to bed early to save candles if the result be twins. A little lesson in false economy. Here's another one from the Chinese: govern a great nation as you would cook a small fish, which means, I think, take great care. Maybe it means don't overcook it. Anyway, we could go on and have some fun with that.

I'm actually rising tonight to address issues of economy and issues of careful governance, Mr. Chairman, and I am going to propose an amendment to the bill before us, an amendment that is intended to save a little bit of money for the taxpayer. I've got the appropriate number of copies here, including the original, and I shall wait a moment while it is distributed.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the amendment that's being proposed is being circulated, and for the record we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

9:50

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The notice of amendment reads as follows: that Bill 44, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2), be amended as follows. Under part A section 1 is amended by striking out "\$1,366,053,000" and substituting "\$1,361,253,000". Under part B the schedule is amended (a) on page 3 following "Agriculture, Food and Rural Development Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases" by striking out "\$270,800,000" and substituting "\$266,000,000"; (b) on page 4 following "Amount of Expense or Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases to be voted under section 1" by striking out "\$1,366,053,000" and substituting "\$1,361,253,000."

Now, I'm sure that every member is wondering why I am proposing this amendment. The intent of the amendment here, Mr. Chairman, is to trim \$4.8 million from the proposed expenditures by the government. That \$4.8 million is the amount equivalent to the proposed amount going to be used for a municipal waste-water project to support a project in Rocky View MD that includes a horse-racing track and an equine centre. This is on page 18 of the supplementary supply estimates, the complete document.

Given the number of ministers here today who may well be informed on this issue, maybe we can clarify some explanations here. The reasons for my concern are several. First of all, from what I know of this project, it is an immense project. There is the large racetrack that will replace the one that has been held at the Stampede grounds for so many, many years. There will be an equine centre with a training facility for people learning about equine care through Olds College. There will be an industrial park, and in addition there will be a mall to rival West Edmonton Mall, a large hotel, and goodness knows what else. This facility, if people aren't aware, is proposed on basically the north edge of Calgary between Calgary and Airdrie on the east side of highway 2. Indeed, the ground is already being prepared for this project.

Now the project itself involves, as I understand it – and I'm prepared to be corrected – a huge, in fact I think Canada's largest, shopping centre developer, a company that has billions of dollars in assets. Undoubtedly, within that shopping centre there are proposed to be a large number of huge retailers, some of the largest in the United States who have been moving into Alberta with this mall. In addition a major hotel and, as I mentioned, a large racetrack. There are all kinds of backers, enormous backers, to this project. So I have to ask myself why the taxpayers of Alberta are contributing millions of dollars in infrastructure funding to handle waste water from this project.

But my concerns go beyond that, Mr. Chairman. The water issue that Alberta faces is coming to a head with this particular project, and I think this is going to be the beginning of a whole wave of projects in which water becomes a constraint and an innate issue of debate. The city of Calgary has actually refused to provide water to this project, as I understand it. Again, with the people here today on the government side, I may well be corrected, but my understanding is that the city of Calgary has refused to provide water to this project because they disagree with the nature of the project. They aren't able to work out an agreement with the MD of Rocky View, and of course the water supply for the project is immense.

The Bow River is already heavily drawn on, so the water for this project as it is planned, I understand, is going to be taken from the Red Deer River and piped quite a long distance to the north edge of Calgary. I think we all need to consider and question the wisdom of that. The Red Deer River is not a large river, nor is the Bow River. To be draining further water from the Red Deer River to support a megaproject driven by largely retail and horse racing I think is of some dubious wisdom.

Now, I understand from people who live in the central Alberta region that this summer there were times when there was a regional water shortage, and people drawing on water in central Alberta were actually asked to curtail consumption. This was not a terribly dry summer. I have to ask myself, Mr. Chairman, what will happen in a dry summer or a series of dry summers, when the Red Deer River is not simply the source of drinking water and industrial water for now a major portion of central Alberta from north of Ponoka to – gosh, I don't know how far south – way south of Bowden, I think, and then on top of that has to provide water for this megaproject on the edge of Calgary. I think we may find some backlash from the residents of central Alberta who aren't able to consume the water they want while a vast amount is being shipped to a big development on the edge of Calgary. So I have questions, and I'd love to see some debate in this Assembly on the water allocations for this project.

Beyond that, I have to question the public's appetite for yet more subsidies or more allocation of public funds to horse racing. I know that the horse-racing industry employs lots of people. They've spent time with me and with other members of our caucus lobbying, and we listened carefully. We're not anti horse racing, but we do expect at some point the special deal that was cut for the horse-racing industry to be phased out, and we expect the horse-racing industry to ultimately stand on its own four legs, as it were, Mr. Chairman.

So \$63 million, if memory serves me right, will be provided from lottery funds to the horse-racing industry this year. Do they really need – do they really need – another \$4.8 million subsidy? I question that.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I have to question the wisdom of the uncontrolled development that this project represents and that is, I think, the reason the city of Calgary is not providing water to it, one of the key reasons. [interjection] I've spoken to them. The Treasurer is questioning me. That's my information from the city of

Calgary. They are not supporting this kind of development. They are not particularly keen on contributing to the massive urban sprawl that I freely acknowledge the city of Calgary is already guilty of, but they seem not to want to exacerbate it further and are not keen on having a giant mall that rivals West Edmonton Mall and a giant horse-racing track and a huge resort on their northern edge, with all the traffic and water and power and all the other implications that provides. [interjections]

So, Mr. Chairman, those are the reasons why I move that we amend this bill by pulling the \$4.8 million intended for the wastewater treatment project at this horse-racing track. With those comments – I’m getting some heckling from members on the other side – I would love to have a debate, a good-natured debate.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It’s a pleasure for me to rise to respond to this amendment and to encourage my colleagues to vote against this amendment. The premise upon which the argument has been made that we are supporting a particular project with \$4.8 million is absolutely false. In fact, as it says in the supplementary estimates book, it suggests that this is going to the municipal district of Rocky View under a program which has been in existence for some time. This is augmenting that program because, quite frankly, we’ve had a great deal of success with our rural counties with populations less than 40,000.

10:00

That’s what this program was intended to do: to help these communities develop industries that are agricultural based, that provide employment for agriculture workers, that provide opportunities to grow our livestock sector, that provide opportunities for feed and supplements and veterinary care and, indeed, Mr. Chairman, probably even research and development and training, all related to the agricultural sector. Throw into that the aspect of rural development and ag tourism, and this becomes something of a very positive story.

When we talk about the municipal district of Rocky View’s approval process, not ours, for us to say to a municipal district, “Thou shalt not approve a particular project that has to go through all of the environmental approvals and all of those other things that are going to have to happen,” is somewhat, I would say, precious of us. I would think that the reeve of the municipal district of Rocky View might be somewhat concerned at the hon. member’s reasoning behind his amendment.

I would certainly suggest to you, Mr. Chairman, that because of the success of this program that we have had in the beef slaughter industry, that we have had in ag tourism, that we have had in the agricultural industrial sector, including this project, that that’s why we have this supplementary estimate here, because these dollars need to move before our year end.

So, Mr. Chairman, with those comments I will cede the floor to some of my colleagues, who also, I believe, have some comments to make on this. I would encourage the hon. members to vote this amendment down because it was based on the wrong premise.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. You know, I find it a bit rich that the hon. member previous is suggesting that the municipal district is calling the shots on these and other issues. It’s always a

convenient excuse that we find from the other side here when they’re trying to slip something behind the back of this Legislature, saying: “Oh, well, it’s the MD who really wants it, it’s the MD who has come up with it, and who are we to stand in the way of democracy? Blah, blah, blah.” In fact, we see on a regular basis these MDs being manipulated by this provincial government to do those sorts of thing, as we see happening here with this particular circumstance.

Now, I was not aware of this water treatment thing, but certainly it is in keeping with a problem that I’ve seen with MDs being pushed into building water treatment plants in small, piecemeal fashions around the province when a regional strategy could satisfy the water needs and, in fact, satisfy being able to build a regional strategy for water conservation in a much more efficient way financially and ecologically as well. I know for a fact that there are a number of smaller communities that were building water treatment plants that ended up having to walk away from them or otherwise not be able to maintain them in the first place. I think that Claresholm is an example of that and also the northern municipal district adjacent to the town of Peace River, where the provincial government is encouraging them to build small water treatment plants when a regional system is much more efficient and much more prudent as well.

I did know, however, about this large project and the city of Calgary’s opposition to it. I applaud them for trying to make some larger city plan for the area in defiance of this tendency to allow growth around the periphery of a city or growth just on the other side of even city limits in the areas around our province. You get this sort of doughnut effect where for taxation purposes or land purposes people are building just on the other side of the border of different jurisdictions to try to either get a better tax regime or what have you.

You end up with this suburbanization of our municipal areas, which is creating very serious land problems that we’re going to have to face up to in the very near future. You end up with this sort of Orange county urban planning thing, which is actually an absence of urban planning, where eventually, you know, the city is spread out in an unreasonable way. You have these industrial areas next to residential and big malls sucking the vitality out of the centre. Calgary has a very fine sort of traditional urban centre with shops and whatnot around the middle, which is the sort of city that we should be looking towards rather than with large malls on the edge.

I applaud the spirit of the whole thing in this amendment in that it is saying: let’s look and allow the city of Calgary to have their input, encouraging these very large projects in defiance of what they would like to have otherwise. This is new to me, but I would like to at least look more carefully before we approve something like this in terms of moving water from one area to another because it seems to me that if you are moving water from the Red Deer River over the hump to north of Calgary, then in fact you are moving water between basins as well unless you’re planning to pump the effluent back up to the Red Deer River afterwards.

So I find this a very interesting bit of an amendment, certainly on the side of prudence and good management, and I do support it forthwith. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just want to give the hon. members in the House a little bit of a history lesson from a municipalities perspective and why we find ourselves in this discussion tonight, some of the background that led up to this. The municipal district of Rocky View and most other municipal districts and counties throughout the province as of 1995, when the Municipal Government Act was changed, finally were recognized as equal to

every other municipality in this province. Every municipality, be it cities, towns, villages, or rural municipalities, now has the natural person powers, has the ability to make their own decisions and is not dependent upon some kind of an oversight regional planning commission that views rural municipalities as nothing more than land banks for the orderly development of urban municipalities. That travesty that we had in this province is now long behind us.

That's not to say that there is not some friction from time to time between urban and rural municipalities. We're dealing with that. We deal with that on an ongoing basis, and we're making some significant progress in that area. In fact, I remind hon. members that today before question period I introduced Mr. Don Johnson, who was part of the meeting that I participated in for the entire afternoon, that included Bob Hawkesworth, the president of AUMA, who represents all of the cities, towns, and villages in the province; Mr. Johnson representing all of the rural municipalities; as well as Mr. Mandel, the mayor of Edmonton; and Mr. Bronconnier, the mayor of Calgary. Among many things the minister's council is dealing with is this issue of intermunicipal relationships, and we are making some significant progress.

I want to talk specifically about Calgary because I think Calgary is starting to set some examples that the rest of the province and perhaps even the rest of North America is going to watch very closely. The Calgary Regional Partnership is finally beginning to put some frames around its own existence, beginning to talk about a regional plan, not a plan that's imposed upon the region from upon high but a plan that's negotiated and planned by all of the partners within the region, some 22 different municipalities that lie within the Calgary Regional Partnership. So that is the context in which we talk about industrial expansion and expansion in a planned way, not an oversight kind of planning but a co-operative plan. From time to time, like any family, there are going to be disputes, there are going to be issues that need to be resolved, and we are dealing with those on an as-needed basis.

10:10

Now, that being said, the MD of Rocky View has for some time been putting into place the ability for them to accommodate development throughout that section of the MD so that they will be able to provide water and waste-water services not just for this one development but for a number of developments that they have planned, both industrial and residential. Frankly, I think the last thing that we want is to see piecemeal development without having the preplanning of having water and waste-water services because as density begins to grow and we begin to depend upon septic systems and wells and everything else that goes along with it, we find that that is not good, strong development.

This is, as the minister of agriculture mentioned, part of an ongoing program that the government has in place to assist rural municipalities to begin to develop water and waste-water systems. In some cases they go towards regional systems, and this could at some point in time be incorporated into a larger regional system. The MD of Rocky View also has long-term plans to extend a water and waste-water system in the west part of the MD to deal with some much-needed water and waste-water issues in the Bragg Creek and the Springbank areas as well. So all of this at some point in time has the ability to be tied together.

On behalf of the MD of Rocky View, who have spent many, many hours talking with me, talking with other members of our caucus to explain what their long-term plans are, how this will assist them in advancing what they already had in place to allow for their economic development, the well-being of their citizens, I urge all members of

the House to vote against this poorly thought out and ill-conceived amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak strongly in favour of this amendment. I think it's wise. I think the minister of agriculture speaks with a forked tongue. And that's not unparliamentary; I checked it. [interjections] It's not on the list. The nature of saying that there are rural development issues involved with placing a huge development on the edge of the city of Calgary is facetious at best.

This particular project, \$4.8 million, is not chump change when you really look at it. It may be in terms of how the government looks at it quite often and looks at many of these particular things, but it's not chump change. It's a lot of money. It could go to a lot of things in classrooms. It could go to a lot of things in many, many areas. It certainly could help some things that should be a higher priority than this to the government.

The Municipal Affairs minister said that, you know, regional planning for the cities should just be co-operative and should just be something that's not – it's almost a bad thing. I wonder about that. You know, the Member for Edmonton-Calder mentioned the Orange county problems, and many people who have been down in that particular part of the United States really see the problems of no planning. Some people term that the Lakeland model. What we see in some of those areas in terms of planning is that whole municipalities have been brought up and developed just for particular purposes. There are municipalities called "Dairy." There are municipalities called "Industry." There are municipalities that are single-purpose and single-taxation . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, there is a point of order being raised by the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, I'm raising a point of order under sections 23(h), (i), and (j). "Speaking with a forked tongue" is a common English phrase that would imply that I have lied in some way, shape, or form; in other words, he is making the allegation that I am lying to this House. I take that extremely seriously, and I believe that it is also unparliamentary to be accusing a member, even if he believes it to be in jest. He is in this House, and he should understand the seriousness of such a charge.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the point of order.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't see that particular term being listed as unparliamentary language or being termed to be lying. Speaking with forked tongue could be seen to be speaking not necessarily as a lie but with some sense of ensuring that the statement is not exactly as it seems. If the minister did think it was something particularly derogatory to him and all the rest of it, I do withdraw that, Mr. Chair.

If I can continue then?

The Deputy Chair: No.

Hon. members, this is an Assembly of honourable people, honourable members, and when we play around with words, we hurt people's integrity in this Assembly. If there is a withdrawal to be done, then the withdrawal has to be done unconditionally. I'll give

the Member for Edmonton-Manning an opportunity to withdraw unconditionally those words that he attributed to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. I withdraw without condition the words “forked tongue.”

The Deputy Chair: That’s accepted. Thank you. You may now proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Backs: Thank you. The nature of the particular development here is one that is not, I think, anything that should be determined or seen to be rural development. It is on the edge of the city. It is something that is huge. It is not just an agricultural development; it is meant to be a megamall. It will be of a size that will equal the West Edmonton Mall, and that’s a pretty large development – this one here actually took many phases and many years to develop – and the water resources are a huge issue. Are we going to carve out some new sort of municipality and call it “Water” now even though the water is not there?

I strongly urge this Assembly to vote for this amendment, Mr. Chair. I think it’s a wise move.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Chairman, I’d like to speak just briefly, as we are debating the supplementary supply estimates, the appropriation bill that I moved in this Assembly. Mr. Chairman, I have been puzzled for some time and have tried hard to understand why both opposition benches are so opposed to an industry that actually contributes in not only a traditional and a historic way to this province but currently very strongly economically: a \$385 million contribution estimated this year; 8,100 persons employed, particularly in this city, where we just on Saturday had 12,000 people attend the Canadian Derby, 12,000 people – men, women, children – people that came to this city for that race, that enjoyed the amenities of this city and contributed to it.

On Sunday the Nat Christie in Calgary: a similar experience. The hundreds and hundreds of people in this province, many of them right around this city, that make their living in this industry, whether it’s in raising horses or whether it’s in feed, training: I would invite the hon. members to go and visit the backstretch here and see the number of people that are happily and proudly employed, many of those who might not enjoy employment and a sense of pride as they do in their job.

10:20

I don’t understand this other than that it’s a good way to needle things in the \$48 million, which the Minister of Gaming has explained more than once only occurs if they earn it. I mean, if you don’t produce, you don’t get the money.

To look at this project and say that because it has a racetrack attached to it, it shouldn’t go – and the specious arguments of the amount of water that it’s going to take. The Edmonton MLAs are sitting in this room saying: you can’t have a megamall on the perimeters of Calgary. We have West Edmonton Mall, which is a huge tourist attraction for this city, I believe a huge asset to this city. It probably uses a little bit of water here and there. I don’t see the members on this side of the House saying that that mall shouldn’t exist, although I’ve heard a few negatives over there on that one, too.

But the other part of it, Mr. Chairman, is the equine centre. It speaks to a lack of understanding of those caucuses of agriculture in this province and the importance of it. Alberta has the largest

number of horses per capita per region of anywhere in Canada, whether it’s Spruce Meadows, which is the number one venue in the world today. It used to be on par with Aachen; now it’s considered number one. A huge number of people come there. There will be an event there this week that will attract thousands and thousands of people. That is a major part of our industry.

The western heritage, the films that are made here, that outfitters here provide all of the horses for, the tourist side of it, the working horse that still works in this province: if you were out in the grasslands, you would see where people ride horses because they will not put vehicles on grass.

The number of people that are involved in this industry is huge. Why it seems to be the target at almost every discussion – and to suggest that they’re not saying that they don’t like horse racing. Well, I can tell you that the racing industry doesn’t believe that one because of the many derogatory and negative comments that have been attributed to an industry that has a proud history and is making a very good contribution to us.

The equine centre: what an opportunity for us. With the horse population overall in this province, to have that equine centre attached with Olds College, with the new veterinary college that is in Calgary, we have an opportunity to be the horse-health centre of western Canada, if not all. Research: all of those opportunities are here.

What I don’t understand is why we can’t look at the larger picture in this Assembly. It isn’t all about one thing. Alberta is many things. The horse industry and racing – I was at Millarville, at their anniversary. What an amazing event. My hon. colleague who’s the MLA for there was there as well. Thousands of people visit Millarville, one of the oldest traditions in this province: 6,000 this year at that. Amazing. Amazing. These are people. These are the grassroots people of this province, and it’s really what built this province.

Hon. members, you might want to look around at your caucus benches and not find it surprising that you do not have one rural member, and until you understand rural Alberta – understand rural Alberta – understand the contribution that agriculture makes to this province, I don’t think those stats are going to change.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I’d like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for bringing forward this amendment because it leads into exactly what I was speaking to this afternoon when I ran out of time, and that is a number of questions about this particular request for money. The question I was actually asking when I ran out of time earlier this afternoon was why this particular \$4.8 million appears under the Agriculture, Food and Rural Development department.

When you flip through the book to Environment – I believe it was Environment.

Mr. Renner: Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: that’s the name of the department.

Mr. R. Miller: The Minister of Municipal Affairs is suggesting Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, but my point this afternoon was that when you flip to the supplementary estimates for Environment, there’s \$3.7 million there “for the Alberta Waste Management Assistance grant program to support waste management contracts and commitments.” My question quite simply was: why do we find a similar expense in a different place? It doesn’t strike me as being terribly efficient in terms of governance. We

have a RAGE department, the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, which is supposed to look after these sorts of things, and here we have two departments asking for supplemental spending for what, would appear to me at least, basically the same thing. I have yet to hear an explanation from anybody who's spoken on the other side as to why that occurs.

Now the other thing I was mentioning this afternoon – I'm not sure whether or not members opposite were listening; I'm going to guess probably not – was that despite the minister's protestations a minute ago, we're not necessarily against the horse-racing industry. Yes, they are an easy target, and, yes, we do isolate that particular instance and refer to it a lot. My explanation this afternoon – and I'm happy to make it again – was that when the people of this province look at priorities and when you look at, in this case, \$8.3 million additional funding for the horse-racing industry on top of the \$66 million . . .

Mrs. McClellan: It isn't.

Mr. R. Miller: Now the Minister of Finance is protesting that that's not what it's for, and the minister of agriculture stood up a few minutes ago and said: that's not what it's for; it's not for one particular project. Their very own document, Mr. Chairman, says: "to support a project in the Municipal District of Rockyview that includes a horseracing track and an equine centre." So it's very clearly for one particular project. It's right there in black and white from their own Public Affairs Bureau. For them to protest now that that's not what it's about, well, I'm sorry; I just don't believe it. It's very clearly in front of us. That's what it's about.

To make my point, we have Fort McMurray and the municipal district of Wood Buffalo crying for proper funding so that they can address their waste-water management needs. This is where we pick on the horse-racing industry, because when you put these two on a scale and you say: waste-water management for the municipality of Wood Buffalo, an area that has doubled in size in the last 10 years, an area where you have the local council appearing before the EUB, a minister of this government supposedly shutting off half of his brain so that he can appear in front of the EUB using the other half of his brain as the MLA for that constituency – these are his own words, Madam Minister. There's so much concern about what's happening up there.

The people of this province, quite frankly, look at a document like this and they say: \$8.3 million for the horse-racing industry when we can't fund waste-water management in the municipality of Wood Buffalo. That's why we pick on the horse-racing industry. It's not because we don't like them; it's because they are an easy target when you look at those two situations. It's a question of priorities.

10:30

You know, I really get upset – and I've made this comment publicly before – when people talk about the tax-and-spend Liberals. We have been the voice of reason. We've been the voice of discipline. We've been the voice of fiscal conservatism in this House since the day that I and my colleagues were elected. If it wasn't for the members of the Official Opposition, there would be nobody in this House talking about fiscal conservatism because the people opposite – and I made this argument this afternoon – spend money as quickly as it comes in. Madam Minister, you know that that's a fact because you announced last week downstairs in the media room \$1.5 billion in extra spending at the same time that you announced \$1.5 billion in unbudgeted surplus. We're spending the money as fast as it comes in, and that is a problem as well.

Now, the other thing. And I'm glad that my colleague from

Edmonton-Calder raised this because it's another really good question. If, in fact, the argument that the Minister of Finance and the minister of agriculture are making is that this isn't just one project but that this is part of a bigger picture, then my question is: why are we not talking about the bigger picture?

In this morning's media clippings there's a very interesting story published in the *Carstairs Courier*.

An Hon. Member: Table it.

Mr. R. Miller: I'm happy to table it, and I would really hope that all members opposite would take the time to read it after I table it.

This story talks about the need for a regional strategy for waste-water management – guess where? – in communities throughout central Alberta, from Crossfield to Lacombe. Now, they're talking about \$200 million. There's actually a quote in here from somebody who works for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation saying that this makes sense. But nowhere in here, nowhere in this story, nowhere does it reference anybody from Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation talking about tying in this project at the racetrack in the county of Rocky View to a central strategy for waste water in central Alberta. Why not? If, in fact, as the ministers are trying to tell us, this is part of a bigger picture, then why aren't we talking about it? It doesn't reference it in here. It doesn't reference it in the newspaper today, and it certainly doesn't reference it in your documents asking for the money. In fact, all you talk about here is to support a project in the municipal district of Rocky View that includes a horse-racing track and an equine centre.

So you know what? Here we are once again talking about the lack of a vision and the lack of a plan. I'm sorry, but I have yet to hear any explanation from the other side that would tell me that there really is a vision or a plan. Once again, as my colleague from Edmonton-Manning suggested, it's ad hoc spending, ad hoc thinking. It drives me crazy, quite frankly, and I know that it drives the people of this province crazy.

You know, I had a breakfast meeting this morning where I had the pleasure of . . .

Dr. Taft: Did they serve water at the meeting?

Mr. R. Miller: We had water. It was very fine water.

I was at a breakfast meeting this morning where I also had the pleasure of spending some time with the mayor of the city of Edmonton. The Minister of Municipal Affairs was talking about his afternoon meeting with Mayor Mandel and several other municipal leaders. Well, you know what the mayor's message was to my Rotary Club this morning? He talked about the need for planned growth. He talked about the need for a vision. He talked about the need to manage the incredible opportunity that we have right now, the same sorts of things that people on this side of the House have been talking about for two years, the same sorts of things that somebody, a minister, on the other side of the House yesterday said that only the opposition Liberals would think about. The Minister of Human Resources and Employment – you can check *Hansard* – said that only the opposition Liberals would think about what might happen in the future. You know what? Unfortunately, I'm starting to think that he was right.

You know, I started off speaking to this amendment. I think I probably wandered, but nobody called me on relevance, so I probably got away with it. So I'm going to take my place now and encourage all members of this House to vote in favour of this particular amendment. I would hope that if, in fact, it were to be fortunate enough to pass, we could look at that \$4.8 million that

we're talking about, and maybe we could apply it to something on the scale that really matters to Albertans, something that really matters to Albertans. I'm thinking more along the lines of, perhaps, affordable housing, which is becoming a bigger issue by the day.

As we debate \$4.8 million for the horse-racing industry, we have people that are dying in the river valley because they're living in tents and are not protected properly. We have people in Fort McMurray that are living on the streets. In Fort McMurray of all places. So, you know, if we're going to talk about \$4.8 million dollars in supplemental spending for something that we really, really need now, something that we couldn't have thought of three months ago, when we were in this House passing a \$30 billion budget, let's talk about the emerging problems, not a horse-racing complex that has been in the planning stages for years and years and years. Let's talk about an emergent problem like the homelessness and the escalating rents.

We've got a leadership candidate who yesterday suggested that companies should provide housing for people coming in from out of province. I can only imagine the situation when multinational oil companies start buying up entire blocks of apartments or condominiums, forcing the residents out so that they can bring people in from out of province.

So we have problems, yes. We have emergent issues in this province, yes. We have all sorts of things that require supplemental spending on an emergency basis. A racetrack outside of Calgary that's been in the planning stages for years and years and years: I'm sorry; it's not one of them right now.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, the opposition and, notably, several members have been trying to take what is a program that has been in Alberta Agriculture for some number of years now that is related to smaller municipalities with a smaller population base, who are not eligible for a lot of the grants that large municipalities get, that want to develop industrial areas or agricultural industries within their counties – we help them in Alberta Agriculture with waste-water and water planning strategies. We help them with capital cost. We don't pay the whole cost; the county has to pick up a good chunk of that as well. The county also gets developments within that industrial complex to also pay for that.

This is a long-standing program. If the opposition members, who have been so eloquent about their opposition to racetracks, who have been so eloquent about their opposition to smaller counties doing their own planning and approvals, who have been so eloquent about all the things that they're against had taken the time to educate themselves about the program when I brought my budget forward this spring, then this would probably not be so much a question of "Gee, why are you doing this, Doug?" as "Geez, the program has been so successful."

In order to complete the applications that are on the books right now, we need this supplementary estimate to ensure that these developments move forward on behalf of the counties, Mr. Chairman. We are not paying these dollars to the developments. We're paying them to the counties to help these smaller counties.

I see the Leader of the Official Opposition is laughing because, I guess, he believes in what his other member had to retract. What I'm saying is the truth.

The other thing that I might bring up, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that we don't go out and solicit these applications from the counties. They make the application to us because the AAMDC and all of these counties who are eligible are quite aware of these programs. Again, I would encourage the hon. members, much as my colleague the Minister of Finance did, to perhaps go out and talk to these rural municipalities before they lambaste them in this House for being

inept. I think that the municipal district of Rocky View is going to be rather interested in some of these comments.

I would also say that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has made me a little bit concerned because I represent two of the smaller cities. In fact, one of your members represents in partnership with me the city of St. Albert, which is part of the ring around the city of Edmonton. Based on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder's comments, I would have to surmise that he is advocating for central planning of the larger city over the smaller cities. I have to tell the hon. member that the residents of Spruce Grove and of St. Albert would be opposed to that at this point in time. I think that perhaps before making those types of comments, you might want to talk to the mayor of Spruce Grove, and you might want to talk to the mayor of St. Albert. For that matter, you might want to talk to the mayor of Fort Saskatchewan. I think you might find a little bit of a different view.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talked about two different departments of supplementary estimates. I can tell the hon. member: they are for two different things. As I said, this is a program which has been in Alberta Agriculture for some time. I would encourage the hon. member, if he has concerns about that program, to perhaps come over and chat with me about it. I've yet to have that discussion with the hon. member, and I think it might be worth his while.

Because of that, Mr. Chairman, and because of all of the erroneous comments that have been made about this amendment and why it should be here, I do again ask all members to vote against this amendment.

10:40

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the vote?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few brief comments. I think this amendment in many ways speaks to a bigger issue overall, and the issue is the lack of information we have to deal with as opposition MLAs. Now, we have a job to do here just as you have a job to do. We have been forced repeatedly to deal with one-line mentions in supplementary estimates, \$4.8 million. Vote for it. Well, we don't know what it's all about, and we don't have time to debate what it's all about.

It's very interesting to me that the only real debate we've had here tonight is when we brought up this amendment, and that got the minister of agriculture involved, which is great. We got the Minister of Municipal Affairs involved. This is great. We got the Minister of Finance involved, which is always interesting. So we got things happening here. But if it weren't for the fact that we had this amendment, none of this would have happened, and none of this information would have come out. That's a problem that we have. There's just not enough to go on as legislators to make proper decisions about expenses of almost \$5 million. It's still a lot of money, and it's a good thing for us to know, and it's easier for us to do our jobs as MLAs.

If I could address the Finance minister's comments about horse racing, she would probably be interested to know that we had a meeting with Dr. David Reid of Horse Racing Alberta. We had an excellent conversation with him. We had a very good conversation with him, and he invited us to come back to go around Northlands, and we're making arrangements for that. I believe a number of us are quite interested in doing that. So your assertions that we're all anti horse racing is entirely wrong. Nobody is anti horse racing. We're just concerned about the amount of money that's going into this industry, and it's got to learn to stand on its own two feet. He has admitted that to us, that this is a problem with them. So he's

going to address it, and I hope the whole industry addresses it too. But this business of being, "Oh, you're anti horse racing; you hate the rural people," all that kind of stuff, is entirely untrue.

That's all I have to say.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we have just another two or three minutes to deal with this amendment.

Did you want to speak, hon. member?

Dr. Taft: Sure. I'll just quickly wrap up, Mr. Chairman. I do appreciate the debate, actually, and I continue to have profound concerns about this expenditure. It seems pretty clearly itemized, although briefly so, on page 18 of the supplementary supply estimates, which clearly relates to an equine centre and a racetrack, a racetrack and a centre that I understand is going to draw water from the Red Deer River down to the northern edge of Calgary. That draw will be facilitated by having this waste-water infrastructure in place. It's a threat, I believe, to the water supplies of central Alberta, from Ponoka down maybe as far as Crossfield. I think there is a question here for farmers in that region, and I think farmers will be concerned that the water is going for what is by any stretch of the imagination a huge commercial industrial project.

I'd like to know: what is the water draw going to be? What is the impact of this development going to be on the Red Deer River? I will tell the members opposite that we're not opposed to horse racing; we're opposed to special deals. The horse-racing industry is getting a special deal. You could make exactly the same arguments for all kinds of industries. The only one that gets a special deal is horse racing.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will urge everybody to vote for this amendment, anybody with an interest in the future of water of Alberta.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, it is 10:45 now, and I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 64(4) I must put the question proposing the approval of the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for consideration by the Committee of the Whole. Does the committee approve the following appropriation bill: Bill 44, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)?

[Motion carried]

The Deputy Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall immediately rise and report.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 44. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that in view of the hour I would like to move that the Assembly stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:47 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, August 31, 2006** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 06/08/31
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very special guests seated in the members' gallery. The first guest is Mr. Dan MacLennan, the very popular president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. With him today is the vice-president, Krista Koroluk, a dedicated health worker who has her roots in Lamont. You can see why she moved up the ladder very quickly with her nice, warm smile and, actually, as my second cousin. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Legislature two exceedingly bright and hard-working young women who are very important to me and, certainly, important to my constituents. I refer to my office staff, who are visiting from Lethbridge. Bridget Mearns, who coincidentally is my daughter, is the constituency manager and MLA assistant. She has experience in political administration at the federal and provincial levels, having served our MP in Ottawa. Bridget is bilingual and this fall will be studying to hone her mediation skills in order to better serve the constituents of Lethbridge-East. My office is very busy and very efficient thanks to her work, and she has lots of experience in keeping track of her mother.

Lisa Lambert was my STEP student this summer. I was very lucky to have Lisa because of her very great research skills. She did a great job for me. She is finishing her master's in political science, and she is the founder of an online newsletter, *Martha's Monthly*, an issue-based site with a focus for women. It encourages the public to express their views to their elected officials. I trust that the experience in my office will help Lisa to proceed towards her PhD.

I would ask them both now to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and honour to rise in this Assembly today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two fine women from the city of Edmonton, Catherine Obacz and her daughter Jessica. Catherine is the constituency manager for Edmonton-Manning. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Derrick Harrison from Akinsdale, Bernard Riley from Akinsdale, Ed and Joanne Kells from Akinsdale, Fran Preston from Akinsdale, Louise Perreux from Akinsdale, Helen Dempsey-Simmons from the Grandin area in St. Albert, and my trusted colleague and friend Pauline McCormick from St. Albert. Would they please rise – they're a real potent crew – and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Samara Jones. Samara recently joined our caucus as our research director. Samara is a native of Edmonton although she has been working in Brussels with international nonprofit organizations on social justice, housing, and homelessness issues in the European Union. She worked on immigration issues and was an active volunteer with new immigrants in Belgium. Samara received her master of arts from the University of Leuven and a BA degree in history from the University of Alberta. She is fluent in both French and Dutch. We are delighted to have her as part of our team. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly John Schneider. John is a retired truck driver and has lived in Edmonton for 40 years. He is very concerned with the Alberta government's treatment of seniors. He was injured in a train accident at work 10 years ago and therefore lives on a fixed income of only \$853 a month. He hopes that the government will improve access to affordable housing for seniors as well as improve accessibility issues for seniors, particularly for access to properly maintained mechanized scooters. I would ask that John now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and honour to introduce through you to the members of this Assembly four guests. Kazimierz and Barbara Toryfter as well as their daughter and son-in-law Anna and Mark Chandra are here in the gallery. Anna and Mark were married earlier this month, and her parents travelled here all the way from Poland for that occasion. As a side note, Mr. Toryfter used to work at the port of Gdansk as a crane operator. He was a member of the Solidarity movement in the 1980s during the now-historic strikes that eventually helped topple communism in that country and throughout Europe. They are seated over here in the members' gallery, and I would like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this

Assembly two ladies who do a tremendous job in my constituency office out in Stony Plain. They're here today to witness democracy in action. I'd like to introduce my constituency manager, Lorna Wolodko, and her STEP student, Paula Cornell. Paula's last day in the office is tomorrow. She is going to go finish high school, and tomorrow, she tells me, she is going to go challenge the Alberta road test so that she can get her driver's licence. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask these two ladies to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

[Premier Klein entered the Chamber to a standing ovation]

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It feels like déjà vu all over again, doesn't it?

Mr. Speaker, a huge project involving a mall to rival West Edmonton Mall, a giant horse-racing track, a resort hotel, and a large industrial park is currently under construction just outside the north edge of Calgary. The water demands for this project are absolutely immense, and the developers are planning to draw that water from the Red Deer River, many, many miles away. Very few people in Red Deer or elsewhere in central Alberta, including Drumheller, are actually aware of this. So my question is to the Minister of Environment. Given that the Red Deer River will come under increasing pressure in the next few years, does this minister support using water for a megamall and entertainment project on the edge of Calgary instead of for irrigation and communities in central Alberta?

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the opportunity to table for all members a plan which reflected our Water for Life strategy regarding the recommendations that our government has acted on. It is very important in this way, our blue gold, and to summarize, it says that our plan that the vision of our Premier and our government has implemented reflects a balance between protecting the environment and sustaining it and our aquatic aquifers and also allowing economic development in terms of growing in the future. What we are doing, though, which is an important point of the question, is that we in this 21st century want to manage water better. We are doing groundwater mapping. We are actually taking the water and ensuring that in the future in the South Saskatchewan River basin, in the Oldman River, in the South Saskatchewan River, and in the Bow River there will be no further applications for water.

In the Red Deer River based on the information . . . [interjections] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on the information that we have received from, of course, our multistakeholder groups and our watershed councils, what they have said is simply this: there is capacity within the Red Deer River. We want to learn from that to ensure that what has happened over the last hundred years in the Bow, in the Oldman, and in the South Saskatchewan – we want to ensure for the future that our rivers and our aquatic systems and our aquifers and our basins are protected. That is exactly what we are doing and the action of this government is doing in terms of the recommendations this cabinet and government have adopted.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given his fabulous planning, apparently multistakeholder consultations and so on, can the minister explain why city councils in Red Deer, Innisfail, for example, many people in Drumheller have no idea – no idea – of this proposed use of the Red Deer River when those communities' very futures depend on allocations of that water?

Mr. Boutilier: Just as a way of geography of where the water is and where it's coming from and where it's going to, it's important to recognize that this water that we have been blessed with – and I might say that we've been blessed and are very fortunate in our province – as we go forward, we want the best use of water. Our goal under . . . [interjections] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is very important stuff. [interjections] You know what? When your mouth is open, your ears don't hear. So I would like to answer the hon. Leader of the Opposition's question. Maybe the leader can ask some of his members to close their mouths so that they can hear what I'm saying.

The Speaker: We'll move on to the third question, please.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will this minister guarantee . . . [interjections] Thank you. Will the minister guarantee that any proposed allocations for this project from the Red Deer River subbasin will be the subject of full public consultation in all the communities affected?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, this province and the Ministry of Environment have an absolutely outstanding record when it comes to the process that we use for water allocation and the permits that we grant. I also want to thank the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition when he suggested that our plan is fabulous because I agree with him: it is fabulous, and it really is the state-of-the-art public policy that we're doing for the 21st century.

I'll also ask, though, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who is dealing directly with municipalities on this issue because we consult with our stakeholders now, in the past, and well into the future.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Labour Market

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta growth summit recommendations, signed off nine years ago by this government, had many solid, strong ideas to deal with growth, but this government failed to act, failed to take leadership, and failed to implement the solid recommendations that would have helped immeasurably with our Alberta labour market today. In doing so, the government has failed in properly training and preparing opportunities for our young people, our young women, our aboriginals, our new immigrants, and our shrinking farm population. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. With dozens of recommendations for workforce training signed off by the Premier, co-chair of the growth summit, what happened, and where did they all go?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we do have in place as a government a 20-year plan that deals with a lot of these issues. We have one of the best diversified economic action plans in North America, that involves the oil and gas industry, agriculture, forestry, tourism, and science and technology. We are value-adding now in all those areas. That's the job creation side. We're spending

hundreds of millions of dollars in training people to make sure that they fill as many of those jobs as possible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the opposition members, not only the Liberals but also the NDs, that if they have any quick answers, please send them to us.

Mr. Backs: Look at the growth summit, that's been sitting for nine years gathering dust, the recommendations there.

The Speaker: The next question is to look at that?

Mr. Backs: No.

The Speaker: Well, I'm sorry. There's no preamble.

Mr. Backs: Sorry.

The Speaker: So how are we going to get around this?

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Advanced Education: why did this government fail to act on the huge problem of the apprentice dropout rate identified nine years ago in the growth summit report?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I recall the growth summit. I was caucus liaison, so I remember it very well. But in about the same time frame, I would remind the member, we've gone from 23,000 apprentices to 53,000 apprentices. At that time we had about 200 aboriginal apprentices, and today we've got 1,400.

Mr. Backs: A supplemental to the minister of human resources, Mr. Speaker: given that action recommendation 50 states, "create a formula and process for the annual review of the minimum wage in Alberta," what happened, where did it go, and why is there not a formula today?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, the minimum wage was changed not too long ago in Alberta, raised up to \$7. I've indicated in the House that I will review it again, and if it is necessary to increase it, then we'll definitely have a look at it. But one thing: because this government does so well in creating and developing jobs and developing a strong, diversified economy, there's only 1 per cent of the people who work close to the minimum wage. In fact, most of the people work at over \$10 an hour.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Northwest Anthony Henday Ring Road

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. St. Albert residents in the neighbourhoods of Heritage Lakes, Grandin, and Akinsdale are up in arms over the proposed northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive, which runs far too close to their homes. They're worried about the road being a dangerous goods route, noise and safety measures, clear-cutting, and most of all they feel that their government isn't listening to them. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: will the minister listen to the residents of St. Albert and move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive south of the current proposal?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the right-of-way for the ring road has been in place for a number of years, but what has happened is that the interchange that now has been engineered and designed makes it

very difficult to centre the highway in the right-of-way. As a consequence, there has been a proposal that it would move farther north. I can tell you that with the lobbying that has been done by the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development from that area in conjunction with the council from St. Albert, we have done some modelling, and we have determined that, yes, if the road were to be built where the proposal was, then there could be a problem with noise. The commitment is that we would be putting in noise abatement if, in fact, the road is built there. But I've got to stress that there has been no decision made at this point.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: has the department approached Newman Theological College about the possibility of purchasing its property?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, yes, we have. As a matter of fact, we have advanced some money to the college to assist them in assessing any other location that they might feel is suitable for them.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Minister. To the same minister: given the close proximity of the current proposal to homes in St. Albert, how can the department be confident that the dangerous goods route won't put families in harm's way in St. Albert?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, those kinds of issues, along with noise abatement, are issues that we are currently dealing with. We've had a lot of consultation with the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and that will continue along with the input from the residents through the department. But I can assure you – and it's extremely important to recognize – that there has been no decision made. There are just proposals.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday the Minister of Human Resources and Employment stood in this House in the presence of the widow of Kevan Chandler, a farm worker who was killed on June 18, and told this House that he would "monitor the situation" and "make the necessary changes" that are required "to improve the system." What he did not tell us, however, was that a review had already been completed by his own joint industry, labour, and government committee on workplace safety to the farm worker exemption from the occupational health and safety code. Worse than that, he did not tell us that he had rewritten the committee's report, dropping a recommendation that would have ended the exemption of farm workers from protection under the occupational health and safety code. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How does this minister justify standing in this House and promising to take all necessary steps to protect farm workers knowing full well that he had already rejected a recommendation of his own committee to do just that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a good and very important question, and it needs clarification. Of course, as you are aware, you know, we have a very strong economy, a lot of activity out there, and a lot of challenges in relation to safety. In our government safety in the workplace continues to be important.

I wish I could say that there are not going to be any fatalities and in the past have had no fatalities, but I can't say that.

One of the challenges we're faced with in relation to that particular issue is that the committee that was in place – it's a committee that's been around for quite a long time – did not have agriculture represented. What I indicated to the committee was that if there were any changes proposed in relation to agriculture, in relation to any impact it may have on farm families, which is very, very important, I would have to work in consultation with the minister of agriculture – and the minister of agriculture may want to supplement – that we would work together. Also, if it's going to impact the farm family in particular, we would have to consult the farm families out there and the farm industry to ensure that whatever is put in place does not impact the farm family negatively because the farm families right now, as you know, are challenged. There are a lot of bankruptcies out there. A lot of farm families are close to bankruptcy right now.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about protection for farm workers in agribusiness not on the family farm.

To the minister through the chair: given that this minister has now held this portfolio for nearly two years and given also that in the year 2005, 20 farm workers were killed on the job and 1,353 reported injuries took place on the farm, why has the minister not acted before now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Of course, like I said earlier, safety in the workplace, not only in agriculture but generally across the province, continues to be a top priority for our government. Again, I made a commitment. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and I have already sat down. I wanted to start talking about what steps may be taken next in relation to that specific issue.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister has not dealt with major issues brought before him and constantly talks about monitoring and taking action in the future and given that he almost never does, can he now give us a clear and firm answer about when this issue is going to be addressed by his department, and can he give that answer so that the farm workers and the families who have lost loved ones know that the government actually is going to do something for a change?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, agriculture continues to be a very, very important industry in Alberta. It is the backbone of rural Alberta, and many small towns across Alberta depend on the agriculture industry, the farm families. To make sure that we continue to have a strong, strong rural Alberta economy, you can be assured that any changes that are made by this government to deal with those specific issues will be done jointly with the ministry that's responsible for that area. It will involve the farm families. It will involve other farm leaders. It's an area that's so sensitive that any changes that are made have to be the right changes, and what this government will do is make the right changes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

School Construction in Airdrie-Chestermere

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As everybody knows, Alberta is experiencing unprecedented growth, no less in my

constituency than in many others, for example Fort McMurray. Airdrie right now is growing at an annual rate of 10 per cent. Chestermere and Langdon are growing at a rate of 20 per cent annually. In the spring I had the opportunity to ask the Minister of Education what he was going to do about getting schools for constituencies like mine and dealing with the infrastructure problems throughout the province when it comes to K to 12. I would like to know where he's at with his plan.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to report that we've made some tremendous progress in respect to the response to that question. In fact, today I have announced another \$303.3 million for new school projects across the province, for new modernization projects, and for modulars. This will help deliver on what the school boards have identified as their top priority projects, that address specifically health and safety concerns and crowding capacity concerns in many areas of the province. About \$44 million is heading into the Calgary boundary area, about \$41 million is heading into Grande Prairie and area, about \$40 million is heading into Airdrie-Chestermere and area, about \$30 million is heading into Edmonton, and the list goes on. So we've taken some major steps toward advancing those causes today.

Ms Haley: On behalf of my constituents I'm delighted, Mr. Speaker.

However, my question to the minister is this: in the spring I identified the fact that we required five schools. His announcement will give us three of those five. Could he please tell us when the other two can be expected?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I should also have indicated that today I announced that I will have the schools for tomorrow plan completed later this fall, and that particular plan will be the most comprehensive plan for new schools and modernization projects in about seven years. It will include information about demographics and trends and patterns and so on across Alberta. It will also specify on a year-by-year basis where new schools are needed, including Airdrie, Chestermere, Langdon, and those other areas around Calgary and elsewhere around the province, and why they are needed. It'll do the same in year 2, year 3, year 4, right up to year 5. Where possible I will also allocate what our estimates are for the dollars required to deliver on that.

So that plan is forthcoming. It will be extremely comprehensive, and it will certainly include what the hon. member is asking for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

2:00 Racing Entertainment Centre Project (continued)

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's obvious that straight answers aren't forthcoming from this government. Residents of central Alberta are being kept in the dark about a proposed megamall/racetrack project that could negatively affect their future and livelihoods. We'll try for answers one more time. To the Minister of Environment: will the minister delay the approval of the water diversion from the Red Deer River until after this government finally comes up with this integrated land-use plan or until full public consultations are complete?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I will ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs to supplement. It's important to understand one principle in terms of aquatic protection and also the first in time, first in right.

Under our application process right now the city of Red Deer and all of the citizens in that area and in the county have the first in right. So the decision of any shopping mall or in a farm area will be based on: is there capacity? We have found from our multistakeholders that there is capacity. The application process will quite simply be: the first right will be to the citizens of the Red Deer area. Be it a shopping mall or farm or any other industry, we have a very strict consultation process that we use.

I'd ask the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to supplement, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Very briefly.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. Sometimes it's important to get a few facts on the line. The facts are in this case that the water in question is coming through the Kneehill water co-op, who in turn have a long-standing agreement in place with the city of Drumheller. So the city of Drumheller has a water treatment facility with excess capacity. They have been treating water for the Kneehill water co-op, which has a waterline that goes for miles. This will simply be an extension of that. The people of Drumheller know very well what's going on because they benefit by reducing their cost of water treatment.

Mr. Tougas: To the Deputy Premier: given that this PC government has refused to implement a lobbyist registry, will the Deputy Premier reveal how many times she or the cabinet have been lobbied by the developers of this project for their approval?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it is a large project – there's no question about it – probably one of the largest projects outside of the oil sands in this province, about a billion dollars in total. I would not call it lobbying. I would call it good interaction between a variety of ministries in this government.

Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of work done on this project. It is a positive project. Contrary to what the hon. members allude to out there, it is actually at Balzac, which is not exactly on the edge of the city of Calgary. You might say closer to the edge of Airdrie. It is a large development that includes far more than a mall and a racetrack.

Mr. Tougas: To the Minister of Environment again: can the minister guarantee to the citizens of central Alberta that the Red Deer River can support both their growth needs and things like the proposed megamall/racetrack north of Calgary?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues have just indicated, let me repeat one more time but in a more eloquent way. It was said by Mark Twain that "Whiskey is for drinking; water is for fighting over." The comments are suggesting that we should fight over something. We use our energy in a more positive way. We are conserving water. We are ensuring that we can protect the aquatic environment in the basin and at the same time allow this province to grow with what we've been blessed with.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Bioenergy Industry

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bioenergy is a topic of growing interest given the rise in fuel costs and the world demand for renewable energy. Recently the government announced the energy innovation fund, and one of the areas eligible for funding is

bioenergy. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. I appreciate yesterday's announcement, but why isn't your ministry doing more to further the bioenergy sector here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very true that the biofuel sector – and I will say bioenergy sector – which includes not only things like biodiesel and bioethanol but also biogas from municipal waste or from manure or other waste that might be in the ag sector, is indeed a huge opportunity for us. We want to ensure that we get our programs correct, that we get it so that there'll be a sustainable industry for the future. We believe that there's tremendous potential in Alberta, certainly, with our large canola crop and other fibre sources, that the biodiesel sector is going to be an extremely great opportunity not only for the producers who sell canola but even, perhaps, for ownership in those particular operations.

So we're looking at ways and means that we can help develop that industry in the process and in conjunction with our alternative energy strategies as well as utilizing the environmental aspects of our water management plans, which the minister so eloquently has outlined already, which I won't go into. I believe that in the very near future we are going to be in a position to announce that strategy, and I think producers and the industry will be pleased.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess my only supplemental, then, is to the same minister. You're talking about possible further announcements. How will the agricultural industry be able to capitalize on this emerging sector?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the opportunity in bioenergy exists on a number of fronts for Alberta's agricultural sector. In the first instance it creates an alternative market for a lot of our products, whether that's in canola, whether that's in alternative fibres for ethanol production, as an example, but it also creates an opportunity for us to create an even more environmentally friendly livestock sector, that will help us deal with things like odour management, issues around water recycling, and even regional electricity generation, that will make it perhaps someday an area where municipalities will want to have these types of facilities and livestock feeding operations located nearer to them than they do now.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, there's also the opportunity for producers to diversify their income through ownership in these particular operations. By that, we give a more sustainable agricultural industry for now and far into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Policing Resources

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government has failed to protect our sons and daughters from crime. People are afraid for their safety and the safety of their children. This government throws big dollars into sheriffs and expensive computer programs but ignores the best solution: more police officers. My questions are all to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Given that the mayors of major cities and the AUMA want an increase in the funding formula, why is this minister ignoring them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're not ignoring anyone. In fact, we've built a stronger relationship with our policing communities and our policing stakeholders over the last few years, where we have regular meetings with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police. We really seriously take our direction from the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police in looking at the resource issues that we have and looking at the extremely difficult investigations that have to take place here in Alberta and those intense resources that are required for long-term investigations.

We've assisted stakeholders and policing agencies throughout the province by developing ALERT, the Alberta Law Enforcement Response Teams, which includes Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta. It includes IROC, the integrated response to organized crime. It includes our organized crime strategy as well as ICE, the integrated child exploitation team. These are provincially funded positions, Mr. Speaker, over 160 of them, to assist investigators in an integrated fashion from the RCMP in Calgary, Edmonton, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge. All work together in an integrated fashion, sharing information, sharing resources. We'll continue to do that in the future.

Mr. Agnihotri: But you ain't seen what's happening on the south side, Minister.

Given one of the lowest ratios of police officers per person in Canada, can the minister explain why and what he's doing about it?

2:10

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, all of our units, our police agencies, the RCMP in Calgary and Edmonton, have culturally diverse relations officers that work in the community. They work with ethnic organizations throughout their municipalities. They work with seniors, the disabled community, the gay and lesbian and transgendered communities. They have officers that are dedicated solely for the purpose of working with those communities. As well, they provide training to young recruits regarding those areas so that young recruits that are joining the police services have that understanding, that knowledge, and the ability to understand so that when they go into a situation where it may be an ethnic minority and the issues that deal with their community, he has a better understanding of that individual's ethnicity and background.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need more police officers. The minister knows this very well. Why is he being soft on crime?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, I think I'm the opposite. I think I'm one of the hardest individuals on crime. It's the hon. members across the way that want to release individuals back into the community with the lightest offences and the lightest punishments that are out there. We support the federal Conservative government in these tougher rules and regulations and legislation that's going to be coming before Parliament this fall.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing everything that we can. We are looking at the ratio of police officers in this province, but as this member does know because it passed in the Assembly, we have increased our front-line officers by 200, which is the most significant increase in the last 20 years, and for those officers that work in that investigative area we've added another 160 over the last two years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Tuition Fee Policy

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, next week classes will be starting again at universities, colleges, and technical institutes across the province, yet students still haven't seen the details of the government's new tuition fee policy. There have been lots of meetings, lots of discussions, and lots of ideas. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education. When will students know what the new tuition policy is?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the hon. member, I think the students do know what the new tuition policy is. They know that they haven't had an increase since 2004, and in June we did announce that the tuition rates for next year will be maintained at the 2004 levels and that any future increase will be limited to inflation. What we've been doing is dealing with the nuts and bolts of the details of this over the summer. We've consulted with student groups, institutions, and even asked our esteemed critics to take part, to calculate exactly how that would be done.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I met with representatives from every postsecondary institution, all the major student organizations, industry, aboriginal organizations, and community groups to outline what we've heard and what we're planning with respect to overall affordability. I'm very pleased to tell you that the feedback was very positive and that we're on track to seeking approval for the new affordability framework. I'm confident that this packet of changes will result in Alberta having the most affordable postsecondary education system, as our Premier said we would.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: given that affordable education will still have a price tag that students and parents will pay, what is the minister doing to help future students pay for their postsecondary education?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, we started, actually, a couple of years ago with the 2005 Alberta centennial education savings plan. This program provides a total of \$800 towards a registered education savings plan for any child born in Alberta starting in 2005. Any parent, grandparent, or relative can apply for this program.

It's been quite interesting to see how popular the \$400 rebate was but how little take-up there has been on twice as much money, \$800, to be invested in our children's future. We're looking at the reasons why. We will promote this program again this fall, and we will make sure, Mr. Speaker, that if a new mother can leave the hospital with her bundle of joy along with samples of diapers and baby food, maybe they can take a package with them to apply for the grant.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Fuel Pricing

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drivers in my constituency and throughout the province are concerned about the price of gasoline in Alberta, especially when compared to other jurisdictions in Canada. While Alberta boasts some of the most abundant supplies in the world, consumers in this province are not feeling the benefits at the pump. To the Minister of Energy: notwithstanding the latest and, most likely, temporary decline in retail gasoline

prices, can the minister explain why our prices in this province are often above the Canadian average and significantly higher than the average price in a province like Ontario, for example? Why do we have to pay more here in this province?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that he said: notwithstanding that the prices are coming down even in Alberta. It's a response to what has happened to oil prices world-wide. It's a commodity. But on average Albertans have the lowest price. [interjections] We do. Across the country, on average. Once in a while, periodically, some markets are lower than any other market. Ontario actually doesn't get all of its oil from Alberta. They import a lot of their oil from other places in the world. It's not all from Alberta that goes to Ontario. There are supply issues. There are refining issues with their own refineries in Ontario versus here. There are retail price wars that happen here in Edmonton, in Calgary, and throughout Alberta from time to time as well. We all experience that volatility sometimes.

The one thing that can be said is that the marketplace responds extremely well to getting that product to the consumer when they want it, when they need it, all the time. You can almost always rely on being able to get to that pump and get the fuel you need in a very competitively priced market.

Mr. Elsalhy: To the Minister of Energy again, Mr. Speaker: given that Alberta motorists feel that the gasoline prices in this province are usually unjustly high, why has this government failed to investigate potential price gouging at the pump and take measures to ensure fairness and restore confidence in the retail marketplace he's talking about?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, first off, you know, a lot of those assumptions and assertions are just that: they're assertions. These things have been studied and studied by all kinds of agencies. If he has the evidence of any wrongdoing, if he has anything to back up anything other than wild assertion, of course, there are agencies that can review any specific details.

The fact is that this marketplace responds to the commodity price of oil. It's a world price for a high demand because you and, I suspect, they are using a lot of the gasoline at the pump. It's because you're using it as a consumer substantially for your everyday needs that's driving up the demand for this around the world. This is what has driven to the higher prices. We are fortunate in Alberta that we continue to have some of the lowest priced gas and electricity, other than potentially hydro, of anywhere in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This one is to the Minister of Finance. In light of the increased fuel costs here in Alberta, will this government increase the Alberta farm fuel benefit with respect to diesel and gasoline to better support struggling Alberta farmers?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that the question on farm fuel should be more appropriately directed to the minister of agriculture. I would ask that he respond, and I'm sure that in that response he will reflect on the fact that we have the most generous subsidization to all producers.

2:20

Mr. Horner: It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. You know, we have the most generous . . . [laughter]

Mr. Speaker, we are one of the few jurisdictions in Canada that do rebate the farm fuel tax to our producers. We have been after our federal counterparts to do their part on the farm fuel tax exemption. Part of the reason why we recently announced our farm aid package of some \$261 million to producers was also based on the fertilizer and fuel prices. We believe that that has been a sector of our industry that's been hit very hard. They can't pass that on to their marketplace as readily as others can. But we are going to continue to be there to help our farm families and our producers with whatever it takes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Provincial Sheriffs

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the ill-conceived firewall proposal is a theme that has not yet died among some members of this Tory caucus. One of the assertions of the firewall concept is that Alberta should form an independent provincial police force. These days currents of change are running from the office of the Solicitor General, so I think it's about time that the minister exercised the democratic practice of full disclosure in regard to this matter. My questions are to the Solicitor General. Can the minister reassure the public that his arming and deployment of large numbers of sheriffs throughout the province is not laying the groundwork to establish an independent provincial police force here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely not. We have a firm commitment and a contract with the RCMP that they will be providing our provincial police service until the year 2012. Actually, we're in negotiations right now and working towards those negotiations with the government of Canada regarding the next contract. As well, our provinces neighbouring us across the country will be negotiating that same contract.

I can tell you that the number of sheriffs in the province of Alberta has only increased slightly in the fact that we rebranded the provincial protection officers and a number of names that they had before that to sheriffs to give them the identity that they requested and the identity that they could have in a professional career with the government of Alberta. It also provided them with opportunities like the traffic safety program, which will have 42 officers when training is completed, to work on Alberta's most dangerous highways regarding traffic enforcement and traffic education to make Albertans safer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Well, considering that the force of sheriffs has been expanding and the minister is deploying and training these people throughout the province, could the minister perhaps reassure Albertans that he's not compromising the authority and the integrity of the RCMP throughout the province with this?

Mr. Cenaiko: No, Mr. Speaker, not at all. In fact, we're working in a complementary service with the RCMP. I'm meeting with Deputy Commissioner Sweeney tomorrow in Calgary. We're going to be announcing the southern aspect of the traffic safety program in southern Alberta tomorrow at McDougall Centre. If the hon. member would like to attend, it starts at 9:30.

Mr. Speaker, we're doing this to work with the RCMP, not against the RCMP. This is really a complementary service. This will provide the RCMP with the additional time and the additional focus on front-line policing, investigating criminal activity in their communities. This provides a complementary service where sheriffs that have almost three months' training will be out on the street, will be out investigating traffic collisions, enforcing the Traffic Safety Act, but as well ensuring that motorists have a safer roadway system in Alberta to drive on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. Considering what the minister is asserting here, certainly he wouldn't be averse, then, please, to tabling documentation as to what his ministry's long-term plan is for the police college and his sheriffs program so that the public can know with certainty that the role of the RCMP in Alberta will be strengthened and not weakened.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be more than happy to provide a copy of our business plan to the hon. member, which has everything in there that we did this past year. Of course, the business plans are just coming out, so I'd be more than happy as soon as that's done. It has a full explanation of what we did this past year and where we want to move in the future. I'd be more than happy to give him an autographed copy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Spray Lake Sawmills

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is not about policing, but I congratulate the minister for his initiative on our new police college.

Mr. Speaker, my concern is about the Spray Lake Sawmills forestry management plan in Kananaskis Country. Many of my constituents and many people in the Calgary area are concerned that this forestry management plan does threaten Kananaskis Country. Could the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development please tell us how he responds to those concerns?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the direct question is that residents of Bragg Creek and further down into your constituency are not threatened by the logging that is going on or that is planned or proposed by Spray Lake. Spray Lake have been logging in the area for over 60 years, and that shows the company's commitment to sustainability of the natural resource. Kananaskis Country has had logging in it for the past 60 years, and it's on basically less than 1 per cent of the land base. It is important to note that there is absolutely no logging going on in parks or protected areas of Kananaskis Country, and it's absolutely necessary to let you and your constituents know that a detailed forest plan must be put together by Spray Lake Sawmills. It is absolutely important for you to also know that managing the forest – it's a mature forest. As a matter of fact, it's an overmature forest, and it's at great risk from mountain pine beetle and from fire as well. So the risks that are being put forward in the detailed management plan, which had public consultation, are there to address the public's concern.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Again, my constituents and people that live downstream on the Bow River and the Elbow River are concerned that this harvesting will have an adverse effect on water quality. Could you please respond to that concern?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, in 1986 the integrated resource plan that was put out for Kananaskis Country states that watershed protection, recreation development, and wildlife management are the properties that are valuable to that area while at the same time allowing for the extraction of our natural resources. There are zones set up to make sure that those particular areas and those uses are determined. So the government of Alberta is committed to watershed protection in Kananaskis Country. But more important than that, we are concerned about all the values in the forest in all of those areas right from wildlife aesthetics to soil retention, and it's really, really important for the sustainability of the forest industry to have soil retention.

Spray Lake and its contractors also work under a series of strict regulations to make sure that the ground rules are designated to prevent any negative impact.

Mr. Speaker, one more . . .

The Speaker: Almost sounds like a ministerial statement.

Dr. Morton: My final question is to the same minister. I know there are plans for a FireSmart program in the Bragg Creek area. Will the minister let the residents of Bragg Creek know when they can be expected to have some sort of public consultation or public meeting to discuss the FireSmart program?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, Spray Lake Sawmills in addition to FireSmart has also commissioned a scientific assessment on water quality and water quantity from the University of Alberta, so let your constituents know about that as well. In terms of FireSmarting, it is absolutely central and critical to FireSmart that the residential views are taken into consideration. The municipal district of Rocky View is the lead agency responsible for the FireSmart plan for that community. The municipal district sets up local advisory committees that have a plan that is put into place. They have technical advisors on them. From the point of view of FireSmart the fish and wildlife considerations – and the mountain pine beetle is certainly part of that as well. The local advisory committee must have on it councils, industry. [interjections] This is important to this hon. member.

The federal government and stakeholders of the municipal district have to be invited. The advisory committee in this case, in Bragg Creek, is in the process of being organized. The councillor, Bob Everett, and the fire chief, Trent West, are responsible for that, and your community can get a hold of them to organize a meeting post-haste because FireSmart is important.

2:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will be calling on the first of six members to participate in Members' Statements shortly, but prior to that our vignette of the day.

Now, I'm going to chastise myself after I conclude this vignette for violating two rules of the House. One is that I am going to mention the name of a sitting member of this Assembly, and secondly, I am going to direct the pages to move and deliver something to all members while I'm speaking. But I will draw both of these standing orders to my attention when this is all over.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

**Tribute to the Hon. Ralph Klein
Premier of Alberta**

The Speaker: Hon. members, 12 different men have had the great honour in serving as the Premier of the province of Alberta. Alberta's Premier, the Hon. Ralph Klein, has had the unique privilege of serving as Premier since 1992. On May 18, 2006, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta paid special tribute to this remarkable man who formed four governments and presided over the most dynamic growth period in the history of Alberta. He has received countless provincial, national, and international awards, is recognized throughout Canada and many parts of the world, and is the dean of Canadian governance and political leaders.

For 26 years the Premier has been a servant of the public: as mayor of the city of Calgary from 1980 to 1989, as an MLA since 1989, as a minister from 1989 to 1992, and as the leader of Alberta since December 14, 1992. Twenty-six years of unselfish public service is worthy of praise.

The chair listened attentively to the tributes given to the Premier on May 18 by the hon. Deputy Premier, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, and the leader of the third party. The words spoken were eloquent, sincere, and noteworthy. All members of the Assembly were moved. The day was worthy of commemoration, and to remember it, we have created a special *Hansard* titled Special Edition: Tribute to the Hon. Ralph Klein. The pages will now provide a copy, first to the Premier and then to all members. I hope that all members will retain this special *Hansard* as a keepsake for many years to come. The *Hansard* is a fitting tribute for a most deserving leader.

Mr. Premier, you will leave this Assembly shortly, and when you do, you will leave a legacy of accomplishment. As the cowboys of old traversed the west with their horses, the leaders of today function daily with their loyal chair. The chair that you are currently occupying, the chair of the Premier of Alberta, will go with you, with the appreciation of the men and women of your caucus, who have personally and generously purchased it at full cost from the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. As you sit in it in the future, may you only remember the best of times.

Thank you for your service to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and to the people of Alberta. May you and Dr. Klein experience only smooth times ahead, and may good health be with you both always. Thank you and God bless. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, if I could be allowed to respond briefly. You are so kind. That's what I said in my note to you.

To all of you, thank you for the honour and the privilege of serving this great province.

Thank you.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of six members to participate.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

35th Anniversary of PC Government Election

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the year 1971 was a very good year. On this weekend 35 years ago I married my knight in shining armour. On this day 35 years ago a new administration began for the government of Alberta. Yesterday our Speaker quoted George Koch, a Calgary writer who described those tense moments

on election day as the Progressive Conservatives won 49 seats to become a new government.

Thirty-five years ago today Premier Peter Lougheed, who declared that Alberta "is the best darn province in the world," proceeded to implement his policies without resorting to negative attacks on the previous government. With wisdom and grace Premier Lougheed began to implement the changes that placed this province on the path of economic prosperity and success. The government led by Premier Lougheed will long be remembered for introducing a new royalty regime in 1974 and for the creation of the heritage savings trust fund. It was during the PC government of Peter Lougheed that Albertans first received the Human Rights Act and the assured income for the severely handicapped, known as AISH. The Progressive Conservatives were re-elected in '75, '79, and '82 under Premier Lougheed's leadership.

In '85 Don Getty was elected leader, and the introduction of Family Day on the third Monday in February, the accord establishing the Métis settlements council, and providing land for eight Métis self-governing settlements are hallmarks of his years as Premier. The Progressive Conservatives were re-elected in 1986 and 1989. It was during this time that the north was opened up for forestry development.

December 1992 marked another incredible milestone for the Progressive Conservative government. Our current, great Premier was elected leader and seven months later was returned by Albertans to govern in the first of four election victories. This Premier will go down in history as the man who slayed the deficit and retired the debt. He will also be remembered for establishing a Ministry of Children's Services, for Alberta's Promise, for making advanced education and cancer research a priority, for promoting partnerships with other provinces, and for being a Premier who gave back to the people.

Today is truly a time to reflect on the many opportunities that exist in this province because of 35 years of good, caring Progressive Conservative government. Mr. Speaker, no matter how loud and preposterous the rants of the opposition may be, Albertans on the street will declare, just as Premier Lougheed declared 35 years ago, that this is the best darn province in the world.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

2:40 Role of Religion in Building World Peace

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Asked where he came from, the ancient Greek Cynic philosopher Diogenes replied, "I am a citizen of the world." He meant by this that although we are defined by our local identity – as legislators we represent local communities, and we are Albertans – yet with respect to the most basic moral values such as justice, we should regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and neighbours. The Stoics went further and declared that we should give our allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up of the humanity of all human beings; indeed, we are citizens of the world.

I want to bring to your attention a very special event that will be happening here in Edmonton on October 20 to 22. I'm referring to a conference at the Shaw centre with the title Building World Peace: The Role of Religions and Human Rights, sponsored by the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights. This is a timely and urgent topic for discussion, focusing on the role of religions in building world peace.

The 20th century was unquestionably the most violent century ever given the staggering statistics of the loss of lives during the

many wars of that century. Now at the beginning of the 21st century the world is experiencing mass murders, suicide bombings, invasive wars, and the continuing buildup of nuclear weapons, with countries like Iran and North Korea trying to join the nuclear club. It is a great tragedy that so many acts of violence in our world are committed in the name of religion. Academic students of religion know from their study of sacred texts like the Quran and the Bible that all the major religions teach the way of nonviolence and peace.

Now it is time for religious people and faith communities to join together with educators and politicians to take the initiative and proclaim to the world that our various religious traditions are the key to the development of a culture of peace. This timely and important conference will remind us that the major world religions have helped to shape the movement of human rights in our world. We must be reminded that it was a Canadian, John Humphrey, who was the principal drafter of the universal declaration of human rights. So I invite all members of this House to check the website of the John Humphrey centre and register for this conference, which will help us as world citizens move toward a safer and more peaceful world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Centennial of Alberta Building Trades Council

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and recognize the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Building Trades Council, which will be celebrated here in Edmonton September 1.

This organization first originated in 1906 as the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council, then grew to become the Northern Alberta Building Trades Council until its present form. This organization currently has more than 40,000 members and is still growing. This group has a lot of history with the city of Edmonton as its members constructed the High Level Bridge. Also, while members of this Assembly may not know, we are all very familiar with the works of members of this organization, as they built this beautiful Legislature Building, of course where we have the honour of serving our constituents.

The Alberta Building Trades Council is not known only for the craftsmanship of its members but also for their support of charitable organizations in the province. Donating more than \$2.4 million, they support a wide range of worthy groups, including STARS air ambulance, the Bissell Centre, Big Brothers Big Sisters, to just name a few.

I would ask that all members of this Assembly join me in congratulating the Alberta Building Trades Council on their 100th anniversary and wishing them well in their second century.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Opposition to Northwest Anthony Henday Ring Road

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the most dedicated and hardest working constituents in Alberta, the residents of St. Albert. As you know, the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation is proposing to run the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road dangerously close to St. Albert homes. The neighbourhoods of Heritage Lakes, Grandin, and Akinsdale are most at risk. Residents justifiably don't want a dangerous goods route so close to their homes, nor do they want the noise pollution, nor do they want their children to be in harm's way,

nor do they want to see beautiful trees cut down, nor do they want their property values to decrease.

Instead of lying down and being defeated, the residents mobilized. They packed a government town hall meeting and strongly opposed the proposed alignment. They're writing letters to the editor and to a number of government officials, opposing the route and at the same time keeping their cool. In just four days residents organized and managed to collect nearly 2,000 signatures urging the government to move the proposed highway further south. They're wisely using this short session to bring their concerns to the Legislature. Mr. Speaker, these residents are remarkable.

As their MLA, along with St. Albert city council, I am joining their call and urging the government to please reconsider the proposed route. There are other alternatives. We're speaking in one voice to the government. We hope and pray that the government is listening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

U of A Partnership with Northern Colleges

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The opportunity for all Albertans to access higher learning through postsecondary schooling, should they seek it, is a priority for this government of Alberta, and it continues to take it very seriously. Enhancing postsecondary opportunities for individuals in northeastern Alberta, particularly those in rural and aboriginal communities, was a goal of two memorandums of understanding signed earlier this year.

The first MOU agreement was signed by Portage College in Lac La Biche and the University of Alberta. The signing allows for students to access the first two years of university studies before transferring to year 3 at the University of Alberta.

The U of A also signed a memorandum of understanding with Blue Quills First Nations College in St. Paul. Mr. Speaker, this particular signing serves to enhance the two institutions' current partnerships and increase the number of graduates of aboriginal heritage. For example, the Blue Quills aboriginal teacher education program offered as part of the Faculty of Education has been very successful. Over 30 students have received their bachelor of education degrees from the university college. Many more will follow in the future as well. This memorandum of understanding between the two schools will continue to build on this success in the future.

Mr. Speaker, the collaboration between these two colleges and the University of Alberta not only enhances the accessibility of postsecondary services in northern Alberta but also helps to maintain the traditions of quality education and ensure that Albertans continue to be among the best-educated people in the world.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta should take the lead in keeping big money out of politics. A leadership race is no different from other election activities. There's still a great deal at stake, and politicians have a responsibility to provide full transparency of funding resource sources. This is certainly true of the PC leadership race because the winner will automatically become our next Premier.

Alberta lacks a policy of full disclosure in leadership contests and legislation to limit donations to individuals. Clearly, the PCs and the

Liberals prefer to keep their close connections with big business behind closed doors. In 2005 73 per cent of donations to the PCs came from the corporations. In the same year the Liberals took in 45 per cent of their donations from the corporations. In contrast, 99 per cent of Alberta NDP donations came from individuals.

While the PCs might talk about transparent and open government, Albertans know that corporations who donate to political parties expect that their issues and concerns will be taken more seriously. It's not difficult to trace a line between Tory policies and big-business interests. Let's take oil and gas royalties as an example. When the oil and gas companies provide 16 per cent of Tory party funding, it's no surprise that the PC government has refused to meaningfully review oil and gas royalties.

But the PCs are not the only ones. The Liberals also have friends in big business. A fine example is a fundraiser on September 27, 2005, in Toronto, when the Alberta Liberals charged \$3,000 a plate from well-connected Bay Street CEOs. The Liberal support for corporate tax cuts is a clear indication of the value they put on these big corporate friends.

Albertans deserve better than this. Albertans deserve political parties and a government that are willing to set high standards of transparency. Albertans deserve political parties whose policies are based on the support of individual Albertans. The Alberta NDP is the only party working for full disclosure of political fundraising during elections and party leadership campaigns and is dedicated to getting big money out of politics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: 2:50

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five petitions today for a grand total of 1,921 this week urging the government to move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road south of the current proposal to reduce noise, increase safety measures, as well as minimize the environmental impact of the road.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a letter.

The Speaker: We're just doing petitions now.

Mr. Flaherty: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm out of order?

The Speaker: No. You had a petition; you did that one first. We'll get you later.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, as everyone in the Chamber would know, normally at this time on Thursday I'd be giving notices of motions pertaining to written questions and those that would stand and retain their places or be dealt with or whatever, but since there are none on the Order Paper, I won't be making that statement.

Secondly, I should also normally be presenting notice for motions for returns on the Order Paper. However, given that Monday is a statutory holiday and given that the House may or may not rise later today – we'll have to wait and see – my best effort at giving notice today is that when and if the House should resume in the next several days, then at that time I would move to provide proper notice for the remaining motions for returns that are on the Order Paper.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Bill 219 Electric Utilities (Net Metering) Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 219, Electric Utilities (Net Metering) Amendment Act, 2006.

This act would amend the Electric Utilities Act to lay the framework for net metering in Alberta.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 219 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a letter from Mr. Bernard T. Reilly to the minister of infrastructure and highways.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate amount of copies of the results of two postcard campaigns that were sent to my constituency office. The first is directed to the chair of the Standing Policy Committee on Education and Employment from Vibrant Communities in Calgary. They're calling for affordable transportation for all low-income Albertans as proposed by Fair Fares' action team.

The second is a campaign undertaken by Public Interest Alberta. They are calling for better treatment of Alberta seniors, including establishing an independent seniors' advocate as an officer of the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Mar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During debate on the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations budget estimates I committed to provide some answers in writing, responses to specific questions that I could not fully answer at that time. It's my pleasure, sir, to table the requisite number of copies of those responses, the originals of which have sent to my respective critics.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity I rise this afternoon to table five copies of a letter sent to him by his constituent Steve Hooker. Mr. Hooker spent several hours in the hall outside Calgary Foothills emergency trying to comfort his father as he awaited treatment, and he's calling for more money to be put into the medical system.

Also on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity I would like to table five copies of a petition signed by 92 Albertans from across the province urging this government to consider increasing funding in order that "all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

Then from constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Speaker, the first being a letter from Celeste Ibach, writing to give us a perspec-

tive of what it is like to work in the field of rehabilitation, and she's asking the government to consider giving out higher wages to front-line staff.

Secondly, a letter from a constituent, Baldwin Reichwein, writing with concerns about housing for people with disabilities. In particular, Mr. Speaker, he's writing about the Bader Tower, which was in the news recently, and a resident, Dorothy Heppler, who was, incidentally, one of the founding members, with a former member of this Assembly, Percy Wickman, of the Handicapped Housing Society of Alberta. Unfortunately, Ms Heppler passed away recently, and there is concern that it may have been as a result of some of the stress that was caused by the moves that were being made in that facility.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a news release from the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board announcing that yesterday they won the Institute of Public Administration of Canada's prestigious award for innovative management. This institute recognizes the Energy and Utilities Board for its role in developing Synergy Alberta. This Synergy group allows members of the public, landowners, industry, and the regulator to come together in a co-operative manner to discuss energy development issues and to create local solutions, another very tremendous example of the great work that the Energy and Utilities Board is doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a package of documents. The package includes the March 2006 draft of the Work Safe Alberta three-year strategic plan. The draft includes a recommendation to remove the exemption of farm workers from the occupational health and safety code. I'm also including the July 28, 2006, version of the strategy and a letter endorsing it from the Minister of Human Resources and Employment dated August 23, 2006. The July draft does not include the recommendation to remove the farm worker exemption.

The next document I'd like to table is a backgrounder from the Alberta Federation of Labour, and it clearly sets out the statutory and regulatory changes needed to protect farm workers.

Finally, I have a letter from Gordon Christie and the Calgary and District Labour Council dated August 24, 2006. The letter is written to the Premier and calls on him to end 80 years of discrimination against farm workers that results from their exemption from the occupational health and safety code and sections of the employment standards act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Then, hon. members, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 19th annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 2005. This report represents the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2005, and the ninth annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon.

Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act the Workers' Compensation Board 2005 annual report, the Workers' Compensation Board 2005 Accountability Framework Report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Alberta Law Foundation annual report 2006 with attached audited financial statements and other financial information for the year ended March 31, 2006.

head: **Projected Government Business**

Ms Blakeman: Due to the slightly renumbered Standing Orders I think I'm under Standing Order 7(6) now asking if the Government House Leader could share with us whether there is any expected business for next week.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member. I have scoured the pages, and I don't see any projected government business for the upcoming week.

Thank you.

head: **Statements by the Speaker**

Standing Order Revision

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, just two items for housekeeping. House leaders, will you take out your Standing Orders, please, and look at 62(1). We've discovered a minor error – I underline the words "minor error" – in the revised Standing Orders, and these standing orders took effect last Thursday, August 24, 2006. In Standing Order 62(1) the reference to Standing Order 61 should not be 61; it should be Standing Order 64. That I should be a 4, not a 1.

Members will note that this standing order concerns the consideration of appropriation bills, and of course that's what we'll be doing in the Assembly this afternoon. If members go back and examine the Standing Orders as they read prior to the revision, they will note that what is now Standing Order 64 was then Standing Order 61. While the number of that standing order changed, the cross-reference did not. So the intention was very clear. At the conclusion of this sitting we'll be making the required typing corrections and providing a corrected page to members and all users of Standing Orders for inclusion in their binders.

3:00 **Chamber Chairs As Parting Gifts**

The Speaker: Just one last housekeeping item so that I'm not inundated with lots of memos from members. The cost of the chair in this Assembly is \$1,835. Number two, a cheque was provided to the Clerk yesterday for the full amount of \$1,835. The cheque is made out to the provincial Minister of Finance to deal with this particular matter. Thirdly, the fund, as I was informed by the government caucus whip, came from personal contributions from members of the government caucus. That's how it was paid for.

Number four, the policy that I've instructed to the Clerk in the future and for myself in the future – not for me but to remind myself as the Speaker – is that should a member, a leader of any other party or caucus in the Assembly choose to leave and if the members of that particular caucus wish to buy such a chair for their leader, we will make it available to them for \$1,835. I'm not aware that this is

happening at the moment, but just so that there is absolute, total transparency with respect to this matter.

I do not need notes from members suggesting that there's an expectation that when I leave, this chair comes with me. No way, thank you very much.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 44

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 44, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2).

There has been very good debate and some, I think, constructive debate over the past several days on the supplementary estimates. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that we are recognizing \$293 million to increase operating support to our schools, to school maintenance, renewal, new schools, and preservation projects, and cost escalations – unfortunate but a fact of life – of approved projects. I'm equally proud of \$262 million for medical equipment, auxiliary nursing salary adjustments, and health authority operations, and \$102 million for natural gas rebates to protect Albertans from high natural gas prices. I am especially pleased that this province is in the fiscal position to do these things.

Mr. Speaker, another area, of course, as a rural member of caucus, is to recognize that an industry that is such a part of this province, such an integral part of the growth of this province, that contributes so much to the value added in the small business part of this province is receiving some, I think, very important disaster funding through this.

I commend the minister of agriculture for bringing this forward. I commend him for his consultation with industry. I understand the difficulties in how to process these dollars, but I commend him on his decision to use the most current and expedient methods of getting these dollars to the industry at a very critical time. Most of us who do represent rural ridings know that these costs are weighing heavily on producers, and they affect the very viability of our people who supply fuel and who have outstanding fertilizer accounts. They affect, actually, every coffee shop, every dress shop, every machine agency, every farm supply and include the offshoot into the urban supply chain, to which agriculture is a huge contributor. We're all looking forward to November, when the Canadian Finals Rodeo comes to this town. We know what a huge contribution the agricultural people bring to this city, and that's just one example.

Mr. Speaker, these supplementary estimates were deliberated by our members with great scrutiny. I can say that every member of the government caucus spent an enormous amount of time looking at these estimates, ensuring that they are dollars that are needed, most importantly, that it was important that they come forward now, that in the areas of environment the most pressing needs are met. These are comprehensive. They have been well thought out, well deliberated.

As I said earlier, I thank all hon. members in this House for their comments on the estimates, many of them constructive, many of them useful. I know that every member comes to this House every day with the best intentions of representing their constituents, and I hope that every member comes to this House with the best interests of the entire province on their mind although each of us is elected to look after a number of people that we proudly call our constituents.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage all members to support the passing of this bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Well, it's sounding like a good afternoon.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in third reading to Bill 44, the second appropriation bill of this year. The hon. Minister of Finance made a really nice comment about how we're here to represent the people who elected us but that we also have to keep in mind the people in the rest of the province and serve them as well.

There are two areas that have really come up on my radar screen that I want to talk about in conjunction with the appropriation bill that is before us today. Of course, in that appropriation bill we have two ministries that are featured fairly prominently for funding. One is health, and the second is Education. I'd like to focus my comments on that.

One of the areas that's very near and dear to my heart is the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. I have a number of friends there. Part of my family came from nearby, the Turner Valley-Black Diamond area, and I visit southern Alberta and those areas in particular at least once a year. So I was interested in what the school situation looked like in Fort Macleod in particular, and I'm going to focus on that and the other areas that are nearby; you know, schools like Granum and other schools like that. I wasn't able to get the statistics on all of them, but I did notice that there are a couple that are in really tough shape, and I'm hoping that this money that's being injected into the infrastructure is going to benefit them.

In particular, I'm noticing that the raw scores from the 1999 audit were quite high – in other words, indicating a very poor infrastructure situation – for A.J. Nowicki elementary and A.J. Nowicki high school. In the '99-2000 estimate, reaudit as they called it, of the maintenance that would be needed, they were as well quite high: the elementary at \$617,000 and change and the high school at \$837,700. So that's actually quite high. Canyon elementary at that time had a raw score of 540, which puts it just into the fair category, but their expected maintenance was \$1,225,000 – I'm rounding up a bit there – which is also very high. So I'm hoping that those have already been looked after in the last six years.

3:10

One that is still coming up to my concern is F.P. Walshe, which is in Fort Macleod. Its maintenance amounts forecasted between 2000 and then the second one done in 2005: there is an increase there. It's not an astronomical increase, but it is an increase. So that's indicating that there's more difficulty, and it's more expensive to maintain those schools. But when I look at the facility condition index, the F.P. Walshe school was very high, at 14.75. Now, considering that that grid really goes under 5 per cent, 5 to 10 per cent, and above 10, this is almost five full points above that marker, so that's indicating a pretty grim condition. I'm sure hoping that this money is going to result in some improvement in their situation.

The other one that comes up as being in particularly dire straits is W.A. Day elementary. Again, it's had a significant increase, almost double, in the maintenance estimate, going from \$284,000 to \$593,000 and change, which is really indicating a bad decline in the situation there. Its facility condition index is coming out at 10.38 per cent, which is, again, putting it into that poor category. So on behalf of those schools in particular – I mean, there are some others

that have either very high raw scores from six years ago or very high maintenance from five years ago. For example, Willow Creek comp had a maintenance of over \$2 million, which, again, is very high, but there are no other scores that are given, so that either means that they're off the Richter scale or they've already been dealt with. I'm certainly hoping that we're going to see something positive there.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

When I look at the second thing that's affecting Livingstone-Macleod, that's around the health regions and what's happening there. Livingstone-Macleod turns up in two different health regions. The northern part of the constituency is attached to the Chinook health region. No. I have that the other way around; it's the Calgary health region. The southern part is attached to the Chinook health region, which in and of itself is a bit of a strain because it does make for some administrative headaches, but that's what we're dealing with there. So the challenges that we're seeing in the Chinook health region that affect this constituency: it's showing an operating deficit of \$2.4 million this year, with a total of \$9.6 million, including the deficit accumulated from the previous year.

The top issues for the region are shared with a number of others, human resources and their recruitment of health professionals. They are struggling with providing access to all health services. They're concerned with ensuring that the funding formula continues to be based on population with adjustments for age and gender. Southern Alberta has a higher percentage of seniors, which increases the overall need for chronic disease management and care: long-term care, diagnostic exams, et cetera.

There is an additional priority of the expansion of the Lethbridge regional hospital to include more space for outpatient programming, and that's including radiation therapy. Of course, since Fort Macleod actually had its hospital closed by this particular administration, they now all have to drive to Lethbridge, so the condition of the Lethbridge wait-lists and infrastructure are of intense concern to those living in Fort Macleod, Pincher Creek, and others.

There is a concern on behalf of the high proportion of aboriginals in that area around preventing and managing diabetes and obesity and all of their complications. It's a major challenge for anybody to try and deal with that, but they are particularly concerned about it. They'd also like to focus on education on the risk factors for diabetes and early testing and diagnosis.

They have identified a need for the latest technology in operating room design and equipment to improve patient safety, shorten the length of stay, and increase surgical capacity, and that helps them to retain and recruit surgical specialists. Thus far the Lethbridge Regional Hospital Foundation has been encouraged to raise its own money, so we'll see what happens to the condition of that hospital and their wait-lists there and for those that are affected in the Livingstone-Macleod constituency with having to work through the Chinook health region.

For those in the northern part of that constituency, which would be places like Claresholm, for example, they're working through the Calgary health region, which, as we know, has a deficit of \$70 million. We've had a number of closures and crises there over the summer. That Calgary region is serving not only its own million but also people coming from over an hour's drive away and pouring in to use their facilities as well.

We had things like the Peter Lougheed Centre that had to leave operating rooms vacant due to a surgical nursing staff shortage. The Calgary health region closed 15 beds at the Foothills hospital renal unit from June until mid-September, the entire late spring and summer. They also cut back on diagnostic procedures. About a

thousand exams were expected to not be able to be done because of the reduction in hours at the Peter Lougheed Centre, the Rockyview, and the South Calgary Health Centre.

At the Rockyview hospital five mental health spaces were closed from July 15 to August 13, and I remember that when the current minister of health took the portfolio, she said that she wanted to place a priority on improving mental health. Certainly, this is again pointing out that this continues to be a deficiency, especially when we're having to close mental health beds in hospitals, which is where the most urgent cases end up. So that's pretty dire.

Emergency room wait times increased the pressure on the whole health system. We've heard a number of stories of people being unable to get from emergency and get into surgical beds or get into the hospital because they just aren't there. So there's pressure everywhere.

The Calgary health region has been pretty clear. They need funding in order to increase capacity. In 1990 there were 2,600 hospital beds to serve a population of 700,000. There are now fewer than 2,000 beds for 1 million people. So on behalf of that particular region I sure hope that they're going to see some improvement. I'm happy to champion on their behalf, and I hope that their needs will be considered and looked after by this government.

The other area that's been of real intense concern for me – and I will be visiting this region shortly – is Grande Prairie. That's covering the constituencies of both Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky. Again, when I look at their school situation, they have one school in the sort of poor ranking, two in the very poor ranking, and one school in the very, very, very poor school ranking. So I'm willing to stand up here and advocate on their behalf, and I'd like to see whether the government's plans for infrastructure in schools are going to address the concerns here.

The school with the poor ranking is Grande Prairie comp. It had a raw score back six or seven years ago that put it in the sort of fair ranking, but then the school maintenance money required was over \$4 million, which is indicating some pretty dire circumstances there. The facility condition index at this point is over 11 per cent. Remember, I said before that you've got under 5 per cent, 5 to 9, and then 10 and over. So that's putting it in the poor ranking.

Then we've got Parkside elementary. Now, this is interesting. You see, when you can see the projected maintenance costs going up between the '99-2000 reaudit and the 2005, you know that there's a problem here. So here we're seeing that maintenance cost estimate going from \$803,000, actually almost \$804,000, to over a million dollars within five years. Again, that increasing cost is an indication of a serious problem. Their facility condition index: 19 per cent. Now, remember, the last marker they gave you was over 10 per cent. This is almost double the category of bad shape, so that's in very poor shape there.

3:20

The other one turning up in very poor shape is Alexander Forbes, and again we're seeing the maintenance costs increase substantially. From '99-2000 to 2005 it goes from – I'm rolling up here – \$922,000 to well over \$2 million, almost \$3 million worth of estimated maintenance costs needed for that facility. Wait for it: the facility condition index is 29.51 per cent. That is triple the cut-off for being considered in bad shape. Triple. Remember, it's 10 per cent and over. This is almost 30 points on that scale.

Then we have St. Thomas More school in Fairview. It has a maintenance cost of over \$3 million, again a very bad sign, and its facility condition index: 38.44, which of all the schools I've looked at has been the highest we've seen. That's almost four times the sort of cut-off mark to get into the poor category. It's four times as bad in the poor category.

So there's a lot of attention that needs to be paid to schools in the Grande Prairie constituencies of Wapiti and Smoky. I'm willing to stand up here and talk about it, and I hope that we're going to see some action as a result of this on that infrastructure.

I've also been working a lot on health concerns in the Grande Prairie region. Yesterday the Leader of the Official Opposition thought it was important enough that I think his first question in the House was on the situation in health care in Grande Prairie. On his behalf I also tabled a letter that was from the president of the Peace Country health regional medical organization, Dr. Bozdech. He had addressed this to all of the surrounding MLAs that have any affiliation at all with the Peace Country health region. The letter is available as a sessional paper. It is an extremely damning and very pointed letter. People there are very, very frustrated. They just feel that they're not being listened to. They feel that they can't get any action, and they really feel that there's a crisis there. I've heard some of them actually say that they think somebody's going to die because their situation has reached such dire circumstances.

When I look at where we're at with Peace Country health region, we've got a deficit of somewhere in the \$8 million to \$10 million range. Well, that's pretty significant. They've got incredible staffing shortage pressures, and these are no question impacting service levels. They require 70 physicians and 250 nurses and other health profession staff there, which is really a very difficult number for them to be trying to recruit and retain. They are working on a recruitment and retention strategy, but recruitment efforts have been hampered by a lack of provincial capacity to assess and credential internationally trained physicians. They have requested new acute-care facilities in High Prairie and Grande Prairie, and that was requested officially from the infrastructure minister in April. We'd sure like to know where that is in the lineup.

The expansion of the QE II hospital emergency department is an immediate priority. The maintenance and facility-upgrading needs include replacing roofs, heating and cooling systems, and other building upgrades at facilities throughout the region. So needs for infrastructure maintenance program funding are close to \$16 million. What they're telling me is that August was a very tough month for them. They had to close their ICU during the first week of August. Eleven patients were flown to Edmonton for treatment, and that increases the burden on the Edmonton region, of course. They're feeling that September is going to be even more problematic.

I hear an argument back from the minister that, well, this is just normal summertime problems with doctors going on holidays and leaving it short. But, you know, doctors go on holidays every summer, and we do not see Grande Prairie and other health regions in the province closing ICUs, closing mental health beds, closing surgery units, reducing diagnostics. That has just not happened as a regular item in our calendar year. So there is definitely a serious problem here.

I had wanted to particularly focus on Livingstone-Macleod and on Grande Prairie. I think my time is close to up, and I'm glad that I got the opportunity to raise those issues. The effect we're anticipating from this budget I think is not what these two areas were looking for. I certainly hope that they are going to benefit from the numbers that we see in this budget, but I am very much afraid that they are not going to and that those schools will continue to have very high maintenance costs. We will have children working in situations that are not optimal to learning, and I think that's the biggest tragedy of all. Health care: we want it to be there when we need it, and certainly we want it to look after our loved ones. But our future is in our children, and if we have them working in schools that are in shoddy repair, that really is a tragedy to me.

So thank you for that opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and I will let one of my colleagues have an opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've been listening carefully to and reading through comments made earlier during this particularly interesting debate, which in a general sense refers to the estimates that were approved on Thursday and Monday earlier and also to the bill itself, obviously, that we're debating today at third reading. I need to make a few comments. Some of them I hope will be explanatory and helpful in nature, and others might just present greater clarity on what this bill really contains and is all about.

For example, when it comes to the Department of Education serving kindergarten to grade 12 needs in the province of Alberta, we are clearly asking for \$293.3 million through this appropriation supply bill. In listening to some of the speakers – and I'm not going to cite anyone in particular – you would think that perhaps they either didn't read the document thoroughly enough, or they have missed or misunderstood what the points were that were enunciated. So I'd like to just cover that territory briefly if I could.

First of all, we're asking for \$52 million, additional dollars, that are going to go out to our 62 school boards to help them face some additional costs with respect to certain aspects of their budgets. I want to again put on the record that their budgets came to us the very last couple of days of June. However, the final, final budgets from our end, in other words our response to that, won't and can't occur until after September 30 enrolments are known, final enrolments. So we have to pick a cut-off date somewhere.

Specifically, today's bill, once it's approved, I hope, will help provide that \$52 million of additional monies in the following way: \$16.5 million will provide a 1 per cent base instruction grant increase. Now, that is over and above the \$3 billion or \$4 billion that's already being provided to them. I heard some members trivializing this \$16.5 million addition, this 1 per cent base instruction increase, as if it didn't matter. I can tell you from the phone calls and letters and e-mails and so on that I've received directly from some board chairs or trustees, privately or otherwise, that they are very grateful for that because that one alone allows them maximum flexibility on how to utilize it.

I should remind members that we have a renewed funding framework, which is an extremely flexible funding framework that was brought in by my predecessor from Strathmore-Brooks. We worked very hard on allowing maximum flexibility for all of our school boards, and this is one demonstration of that.

Secondly, there's \$5 million more for grants provided to students with severe disabilities, and, Mr. Speaker, this is over and above the tens of millions of dollars already provided there. This is an augmentation of that money. We all know that it's very much needed and very much appreciated by the school boards, and we're happy to provide it.

3:30

The third category is with respect to English as a Second Language. Here we are providing \$2.5 million over and above the tens of millions already going into that area so that those students who are deemed to require or could benefit from an additional year or two years of ESL-type instruction will have it provided to them. To put it slightly differently, we are extending the current five-year cap up to seven years to specifically address those students. That's \$2.5 million over and above what's already there to help in that regard.

Then there's \$28 million more for the class size initiative. Mr. Speaker, you will know that these estimates contain and this bill in particular contains those augmentations so that with the class size initiative we will help school boards, who are the employers, to hire an additional approximately 800 – 800 – more brand new teachers and put them into the system to help educate our children. That's a tremendous injection of instructional expertise to keep our education system the best in Canada. This bill will help facilitate that.

The other part of this supplementary supply estimates and now the culminating bill that reflects the estimates is with respect to school facilities and operations. This bill, when approved, will help provide an additional \$9 million for plant operations and maintenance, or what we call PO and M. That will bring our total PO and M budget up to over \$404 million to ensure that the day-to-day operating costs are there for janitorial purposes, for custodian purposes, for routine maintenance, to pay for those types of staffing costs, materials and supplies. I know that the school boards are very pleased with that.

It will also provide \$119 million more for the infrastructure and maintenance renewal program. I want to clarify again for the record what IMR stands for. Infrastructure maintenance renewal refers specifically to the replacement of major, big-ticket items such as boilers and mechanical systems, roofs and ceilings, windows, doors, walls, and so on. Floors are included in there as well. So that's the type of thing that IMR funding will look after as differentiated from school capital or school capital major construction projects. That is not to infer that IMR doesn't have some construction associated with it because clearly it does, as we all know.

But to differentiate, it takes us to the next part of our estimates and/or supplementary supply bill which is being debated today: \$72.3 million has been allocated "for new schools and preservation projects, modular classrooms and the relocation of portables." I'll just comment briefly on this, Mr. Speaker, because out of that \$72.3 million, as I announced today, we will immediately provide the seed funding, or what we call year 1 funding, for 21 additional new school projects across the province, including modernization and preservation projects. We will also help purchase 130 more new, steel-frame, modular classrooms, the state-of-the-art ones that are being built in Crossfield as we speak. Those modulars will be distributed to communities that are showing rapid changes in their student population numbers.

Finally, the \$41 million written here will help us cope with capital cost escalations on previously announced projects so that we're not abandoning some of those projects. That's extremely important, and it's important for members here to understand that as well.

With these estimates, once they are approved, Mr. Speaker, we will be able to provide brand new schools, and I'm happy to have this moment to just indicate this to members here because it's directly tied to this supplementary supply appropriation act, this bill. There will be a brand new K to 6 elementary school going into Airdrie through the Roman Catholic separate school division in Calgary. There will be a brand new 5 to 12 school going into Anzac. There will be three new schools going into Calgary: K to 6 in Taradale, K to 4 in McKenzie Towne, and K to 4 in Panorama Hills through the Calgary public board. Those three, by the way, total \$44.2 million.

There will be a new K to 6 school going into Chestermere. It'll be called Chestermere Lake elementary core school, and that's through the Roman Catholic school division in Calgary, as well as a new K to 6 school into Chestermere, courtesy of the Rocky View school division. The total monies going into Airdrie/Chestermere, those three projects, will be \$41 million.

In Edmonton the Edmonton public school division will have two major – and I stress the word "major" – preservation and moderniza-

tion projects: one for Balwin school, \$11.4 million; one for Holyrood, which will be \$8 million. Those are the two receiver schools. They were ranked as the number one priority for that school board in terms of this category. There's a third one for Edmonton Catholic. That's \$10.9 million for St. Francis Xavier, a major modernization project.

In Fort McMurray we will provide \$9.2 million for the major preservation/modernization project called Westwood community high school through the Fort McMurray public school, and we will provide Fort McMurray public with an additional, separate \$1 million in funding to initiate a major study on planning and design of a new junior high school there. Once we have that, we'll know what the total costs will be, and then we'll address that. Similarly, \$1 million additional funding is being provided to the Fort McMurray Roman Catholic division to do a similar study and design for a new high school that they require.

As well, this particular bill, once provided for, will help us kick-start several francophone school projects, also an important part of the Alberta advantage. We're very proud of our francophone school system here, and we'll be providing about \$7.3 million for a number of their projects.

Very quickly, in Grande Prairie we'll be providing money for three projects that were identified as their number one request. Alexander Forbes through the public system will receive \$9 million for major preservation and modernization purposes. There will be a new K to 9 school built in Grande Prairie, I suspect either in southeast or in northwest or whatever. We'll wait and see. That will be through the Grande Prairie Roman Catholic board. That will be \$17.5 million. There will be a third one for the Grande Prairie public school board in this case. It will be \$14.7 million to build a new K to 6 school in Crystal Lake. So Grande Prairie will benefit with about \$41.2 million in total new monies.

Of course, we have one going into Chinook's Edge that will be of particular importance, I'm sure, to Mr. Speaker because I know how passionately and how hard this one was advocated for. This is going in as a new K to 4 school in Carstairs. That will be about \$9.1 million.

In Olds we will provide \$4 million to the Red Deer Catholic school board so that they can build a new starter school, and it will be up to that board to determine if it suits their purposes to be a K to 4 or a K to 6. They will determine that, working it out with my officials.

In Slave Lake Living Waters Roman Catholic school division with these monies provided for in this particular bill this afternoon will have the seed money to proceed with the new grade 7 to 12 school, St. Mary of the Lake, \$13.7 million there.

The East Central francophone education region will receive \$6.3 million for a major preservation/modernization project at Racette junior high school in St. Paul.

Stony Plain will receive funding for a new replacement high school, specifically Memorial composite high school, via the Parkland school division, and that one alone, Mr. Speaker, will cost approximately \$42.7 million.

3:40

Finally, over and above that, with the passage of today's bill we will have about 130 brand new steel-frame modulars constructed. As you know, we must pay for all of those up front and get them out to the school systems and to the areas where replacements are needed urgently because of health and safety concerns or because of crowding or capacity concerns or aging infrastructure concerns or whatever it may be. We'll be doing all this as quickly as possible.

So those are just some of the highlights contained in this bill. We're very proud of that. I realize, Mr. Speaker, that there are other

projects that need attention as well. That's why in today's press release, which all members I think have now seen, I included a very clear indication of what the next step is going to be. All of what I've just read concludes phase 2 funding: \$303.3 million new dollars that we are announcing today to facilitate the construction starts on all of those projects or the go-ahead for design, as the case may be. That's over and above the \$207 million new dollars that I announced last September. So over one-half a billion dollars has now been announced within the last 12 months. I think it's a phenomenal commitment to the importance we place on new schools. The schools for tomorrow plan will take it to the next step and go further.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for the next five minutes for questions or comments. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister talked about the schools for tomorrow plan. I'm just wondering if he could elaborate on that somewhat.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. minister wish to respond?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you. I would elaborate on that very briefly to allow others to get their questions in if they wish. The schools for tomorrow plan, Mr. Speaker, will be the most comprehensive plan we've had in this province in seven years. It will reflect everything that we can possibly put into the plan and to the largest extent possible the issues that I've heard from all 62 school boards in the three, four, five different meetings I've had with some of them – at least two or three with every one of them, but some I've had five, six, seven, meetings with. This will reflect growth and development pressures. This will reflect growth management pressures, enrolment increases, enrolment decreases, urbanization issues, population changes, demographic changes, immigrant population growth areas, new subdivisions that are being planned. I know, in talking last night with the chair and superintendent from Chinook's Edge, for example, that some of the areas they are responsible for now are looking at where municipalities are allowing new subdivisions, and they're trying to tailor-make their needs there. So we have to get in front of that, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, and let these school boards know and see in the plan where we're going to reflect their needs.

So in a nutshell those are some of the things that will be coming forward. As I have indicated, the schools for tomorrow plan will be completed later this fall, and it will show on a year-by-year basis in all five years what types of new schools are needed, where they are needed, and why. It will show on a year-by-year basis what types of major modernization, preservation, expansion, rightsizing, and upgrade projects for schools are needed, where and why, and similarly with modulars.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, wherever possible we will do our best to provide the cost estimates to facilitate that so that government can carefully consider, with the school boards' plans, where and how best to apply the monies entrusted to us.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the minister a question, but first off I would like to express my gratitude on behalf of the Holyrood community to the minister for making much-needed funding, \$8 million in total, to the

school. It'll virtually be rebuilt. It was one of the receiving schools when there were four school closures in the neighbourhood. I appreciate that. It shouldn't have come to that, but I would like to publicly thank the minister for that because we brought up here in this House on Monday night the fact that that school was in dire need of repair. The hon. minister had toured that school I believe in June. I can only say on behalf of the community thank you.

I would at this time like to ask a question regarding the spending announcement and commitment that was made by this same government in 2001 in regard to the Victoria school of the performing arts. It was supposed to have been the Juilliard school of the north. There was \$60 million set aside to reconstruct that school. Where does that fit into the future plans of this government?

Thank you.

Mr. Zwodzesky: It's an excellent question, and I'm happy to comment on it because the Premier and I were chatting about it casually this afternoon here. I want the member to know that there is an official committee that's been struck with stakeholders from the groups necessary, and I think they have just about finished whatever their final recommendation is going to be. There is already about \$36 million that has been earmarked and is sitting, waiting to be deployed. It's just a question right now, hon. member, of where and how the public school board, which has jurisdictional rule over this decision with us, sees the needs being met and in the best fashion that they want them to be met. Should it be a new school on one corner of the lot with improvements to the existing facility, or should more of it go into the existing facility and some to an add-on? That's the kind of discussions that are going on. Now, the latest I have, Mr. Speaker, is that I'm supposed to be receiving this plan. I'll then review it with the hon. minister of infrastructure and with our associate minister of infrastructure, and then we'll see exactly what the best course of moving forward will be.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you've got four seconds.

Mr. Martin: Four seconds?

The Deputy Speaker: Now you don't have any.

Mr. Martin: Best speech I've ever made.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize on the debate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to perhaps have a few moments to sum up some issues that are concerning my constituents in Edmonton-Calder but probably, on reflection, most Albertans as well because, of course, we still do have the benefit of some degree of equality amongst working people in the province, from Lethbridge right up to the top in Fort Chipewyan. For regular working people there is quite a lot to be had in terms of change with the recent economic boom that has passed over the province but then some serious concerns as well. If we are to try to serve the most people in the best and most equal way possible, then I think that this is a list of concerns that really do concern us all here in the Legislature.

The boom that we are currently enjoying for many people has the effect of creating inflationary pressures on people's budgets. While there might be more job opportunities, certainly people have to work hard or harder than ever to retain the standard of living which they were used to and, indeed, a standard of living that we would expect at least minimally for all of our citizens.

Looking specifically at what those inflationary pressures are and what we can do to alleviate them with the wealth that we have available to us, I would like to draw attention first to utility costs because, of course, our monthly utility bills – electricity, natural gas, water, telephone, and what have you – often together will exceed or be close to the mortgage payments or the rental payments that an individual or family has on their residence. So we've seen a dramatic increase in utility bills specific to electricity, for example, in the past decade or so in the province of Alberta. My main concern here is to try to provide some relief for people.

Of course, we are producing electricity using our own native energy sources: mostly coal, natural gas, hydro to a small extent, and other sources. So it is possible for us to in fact influence that electricity cost if we do put our minds to it, still using the principles of a market system to some degree but also recognizing that electricity is a necessary part of our modern society and modern life. We can't treat it as anything less than an absolute necessity and make sure that people have an accessible and a secure source of electricity that they can rely on that's not going to break their monthly bank account.

3:50

So looking specifically at electricity charges, one area that we need to regulate and look much more closely at besides the price is these line charges. People are bringing me their electricity bills – I'm sure other people have the same thing going on in their constituencies – and showing me that even if their electricity is not on – like, perhaps they've been away or at the cabin or they are using solar panels – they're still being charged quite a significant monthly bill for line charges.

I've been investigating this to some degree. Line charges do not fall under much purview or scrutiny. So energy companies are giving these bills, saying that we have these line charges, and it's going by pretty much unscrutinized. So, you know, this is a big problem because, of course, we're building these new line systems all across the province. To some degree we do need to upgrade our lines across the province, but at the same time are we getting the value for our money, and who's paying for those lines?

We had a promise, and I think a reasonable promise, from the previous Energy minister here in this House that, in fact, the utility companies would pay for new line systems being built, especially if those lines might involve sales of electricity outside of the province or even outside of the country. Yet to this date we end up having to foot those bills on our consumer bills every month, and this is creating an unreasonable extra amount of cost on people's monthly electric bills. So I would ask very seriously that during the interim – I know that we are closing down the House here today – we do continue to pursue this and make sure that people are having a fair price bill, that line charges are being examined much more scrupulously, and in fact that people have an affordable and secure access to electricity at all times.

Also, this whole deregulation thing is forcing people somehow into considering contracts. I had, myself, the contract people coming to my door on several occasions. You know, I feel sorry for them that they did. I wasn't mean, by any means, but I certainly was giving them a hard time with it. You know, a lot of my constituents are feeling as though they are compelled to sign these things because of the stories that are being told at the door. I know that everybody likes to say "Buyer beware," but it's the circumstances we created here in this Assembly with deregulation and high prices that are forcing people into considering these contracts when otherwise they wouldn't do so.

I have had to deal with a number of people who felt as though they were coerced into buying a contract and then, you know, going

back and having the company come back and rescind that deal. I really feel as though Albertans are being held under the gun to sign long-term contracts when, in fact, that is not necessarily the best way to deliver electricity to individual customers.

There are other concerns in regard to utilities. I think, just briefly, we want to make sure that we have the capacity to maintain electricity and power and gas to people's homes even when they are under difficult financial circumstances. You know, I think that our own power company here servicing Edmonton has improved considerably, but I think that we have to have an independent advocacy group that allows people to submit their problems of being cut off from electricity and from gas. You know, it causes a great deal of hardship. You end up with these bills that are back-billed, and people end up with this debt in the high hundreds or even thousands of dollars owed to the power company. For a person on limited income that's just another hole which they have difficulty getting out of.

Another issue that I think concerns all Albertans in a significant way is education. I've spoken at length about education already, but I want to reiterate the importance for us to make sure that extra fees for students from K to 12 are kept at the absolute minimum. We've been looking at these fees increasing quite significantly, especially in the higher grades, and it's combined with other costs for people on limited incomes that just makes these fees overwhelming. Again, textbooks and things that were otherwise not charged for in years past are now nickelled and dimed onto the parents. If you have more than one child, this can be an onerous, difficult situation come September, this next week. So school fees I think are something that we need to look at closely here to make sure that we're only charging the minimum amount, certainly not charging for textbooks and necessities that people require in order to go to a public school.

The class-size issue I think is something that needs to be looked at. Again, I've spoken on this briefly, but I can see the same thing unfolding, at least anecdotally, at the schools that I had previously taught and at the schools that my children are going to as well. We say that we want to set the limit at 25, let's say, for junior high, but I saw in the junior high where my youngest daughter is going that every single class is over 30: 31, 32 students.

I know that this is not the best circumstance for educating students, and in fact if you can make one single adjustment to a classroom to improve learning for each individual, it's to reduce that class size in an actual level, not in a relative level by averaging out everything across the whole school board but each and every classroom. Certainly, it's not an easy thing to do, but it's the very best thing that you can do for public education and improving students' learning.

Another issue, just very briefly, that I did not speak on is this whole idea of expanding the role and the purview of a community school in any given area. We're talking at length about new schools and new building, and I appreciate the new monies for that, but what we see in more established areas is that the utilization rate makes it difficult for more established schools to maintain themselves on a year-to-year basis. You know, once a school closes in a neighbourhood, it has a ripple effect, which includes real estate values. It includes the capacity for that area to attract new families. It has sort of a hollowing-out effect on an established community.

So I really believe that the value in keeping those schools alive over perhaps some difficult years where there are less students far outweighs the financial gain that you might get on a balance sheet of saving a few dollars by closing the school down. Once you close a school down, dollars to doughnuts, it's never coming back.

So this idea of community schools and somehow accounting for all of the uses that a school is being used for in a community and not

just students in seats from 9 o'clock in the morning till 3 o'clock in the afternoon I think is an idea whose time has come. To be able to use schools, the structures, for community events, for night classes, for perhaps a community police station, a health nurse station – there's just a wide range of things that we could use and be creative about and actually count that as utilization of that facility. The communities would appreciate it. We would be able to retain the family atmosphere of neighbourhoods that were built and have gone through one or two or three generations of children and attract families back to those places later on.

You know, at the very root of all of the public institutions and services that we provide here through the provincial government, that I think perhaps we need to look most closely at and with a greater deal of objectivity, is the whole larger issue of how poverty affects education, health care, neighbourhoods, and security through the Solicitor General and Justice, just the widest possible range of endeavours that we seek to influence here through the Legislature.

What I'm seeing through inflation from the boom is that more people are actually being left behind: people on fixed incomes, people working in service industries. The economic boom is not trickling down, as that famously confused theory sort of purports to allow, but rather people are just hitting and falling out of the bottom at a greater rate. So you have the most embarrassing situation of people working full-time and living well below the poverty line, according to a market-basket measurement of what's acceptable to live in any given place, say the city of Edmonton, working full-time with full-time jobs, unable to meet the basic human needs of housing, good food, and all sorts of basic expenses.

4:00

Certainly, I think this is where objectivity has to prevail. We can't just rely on the ideology of how people should behave, how people should be responsible for themselves, and how the state must pull back from providing these services, but instead look at it in a basic human way and in a way in which we buoy up and bring up the most members of our society in the most equal way possible because that indeed will pay dividends to all of us in ways that are sometimes unexpected.

Looking specifically at poverty, I think the number one issue has to be housing. If you don't have an adequate place to live, a clean sort of a warm place to live and to hang your hat every night, then all other things fall apart. That's the beginning, the foundation, of a decent civilized life. Here we are attracting and trying to entice thousands of new people to come here and work in the province, yet our housing situation is falling short of meeting the needs of these new residents arriving. You know, this is a big problem that we're only seeing the cusp of right now. It's just starting to become apparent.

I think it's absolutely necessary for us to invest in housing that's available at a reasonable price, for rent or for sale. It will pay dividends in every single other department, as I say, that we are responsible for here in the Legislature because once people are established in a reasonable place that is safe and is good to live in, then they can start to make plans for the future. All other things follow from reasonable housing for every single resident in the province of Alberta. It's not just an economic issue; it's a moral issue, and I hasten to see more coming in the future.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

Mr. Zwodzesky: I just wanted to quickly ask the hon. member if he was aware of the comments I made in the House the other day

regarding the school fees issue and the fact that that is being looked at thoroughly by the Alberta School Boards Association. They are expected to provide me with a report very soon. I can't remember the date, but I just wanted the hon. member to answer whether or not he's aware of that.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. I appreciate what is being done. It's like when you're teaching something, you do it seven times and then it happens. Right? It's like teaching my children to eat new food. I appreciate and I did hear the minister's plan for that.

I guess that school fees are due in the next week or so, and that's what I'm looking at. It certainly is part of the annual family thing that you have going on. Nothing bothered me more than to be working in a high school and having the responsibility of adding everybody's school fees together and telling them the news. With some people you could just see their faces turn ashen in colour, and that really, really bothers me. I just want to see it rectified as soon as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on the debate.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to third reading of Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2) and to consider the effects of the health proposals. When we hear of such incidents as the mother who miscarried in a Calgary waiting room, some will deny that there is a crisis in health care. They will say that the evidence is anecdotal, that this is a necessary cost of living in a high-growth economy rather than one with a surplus of spaces in places that have a shrinking population. While we may not have the full-blown crisis of an epidemic or disaster, we do face a major challenge.

I am reminded that our word crisis comes from the Greek word for decision. We do have a decision on our hands, and we do have choices to make. We have to decide whether the future of our health care system will be based on the needs of people or on the need to make a profit by those who invest in it. We have to decide whether the investment capital we seek for new facilities will be allowed to determine the clientele who get to use the facilities.

When we faced the mad cow crisis, the greatest part of our province's investment went not to the farmers who were hurting but to the multinational processing plants. In health care we must decide whether to focus on the pharmaceutical and insurance companies or on the citizens. We have to choose whether to focus on illness, where the research dollars are, or on wellness, where the gains are less dramatic and more widely spread around. Are we going to continue to be mesmerized by MRIs and other high-tech equipment and research facilities, or are we prepared to invest more in home care, chiropractic, and other therapies that enhance the quality of life? Will our focus be on spectacular surgeries, transplants, ways of prolonging life and averting death temporarily in the name of science, or will we give equal attention to hospices, where those who are facing their end can do so with calm and dignity? We need to decide whether to continue charging our citizens health care insurance fees while advertising that we are tax-free and giving away energy royalties in cash. Fundamentally, we have to decide whether good health is a right all deserve, part of the Alberta advantage, like education, or a privilege to which some by their success and affluence are entitled.

So we have choices on our hands, decisions to make. If we do not face up to this crisis in the Greek sense of thinking and choosing, we

will most certainly face a crisis of mass proportions arising out of our lack of thought in the next few years.

Health care is a unique service that does not respond the same as other goods and services bought and sold on the open market. We have grown up with the notion that all goods and services respond positively to being on the open market and assume that health care is the same. But health care is very complex and vastly more important than many other services because it is one that all of us will use at some time in our lives, and it can mean life and death if we don't get it at the right time. In today's world we have come to expect service immediately, and nobody likes to stand in line for anything, especially if we are willing and able to pay for better service. But one would hope that governments would want to care for all citizens according to their health needs: those that need it the most followed shortly by those who are nonemergent, because health care is everybody's business.

As I look at the supplementary supply funding proposals, I find it necessary to mention the effects of the budgeting process and the uncertainty that it creates. Health care spending was stable before 1993. Since then, it's been very confusing and uncertain. Massive layoffs in the mid-90s created today's staff shortages. Cutbacks led to a shortage of beds and equipment and to the deterioration of facilities and uncertainty for all medical staff and for our population. Health care professionals are demanding a well-planned, well-managed public health care system with stable, predictable long-term funding. We need predictable funding levels adjusted annually for population growth, inflation and, of course, the aging population.

I want to stress the real need to change the fiscal year of regional health authorities so that business plans are approved before the provincial health budget is set. Alberta's RHAs, particularly in the rural areas, face an annual financial conundrum. They must reconcile rapidly rising costs with the meagre increases in their budgets, and often those plans are not approved until several months after the fiscal year. The Auditor General has recommended repeatedly that RHA business plans be approved at the start of the fiscal year. The government's response was to replace business plans with three-year performance agreements, but the problem still remains. They never know what they're going to get until the year begins. Without this information RHAs have no way of coming up with a fiscal plan for the current fiscal year. So RHAs, like school boards, should follow a different fiscal year to eliminate the guesswork and to help create stability and certainty and confidence.

As I look at the supplementary funding that is proposed now and the present process that we do have, I ask: why wasn't this money included in the spring 2006 budget? The needs have been apparent. They have been discussed many times and at great length. Given that health region deficits are well over \$165 million, how did the ministry decide to allocate only \$81 million? What criteria or guidelines were used to determine how much each health region would receive?

4:10

I'd like to draw attention to the Palliser health region, with a deficit of \$3 million to \$4 million. The top three issues for the region are human resources, recruitment of health professionals; infrastructure, space capacity, expansion of diagnostic services, physio services, outpatient services; and improving access. Specifically, I'd like to consider Medicine Hat. Many of the concerns in Medicine Hat would be the same as we are hearing across the province in rural areas. The issues include recruitment of doctors, waiting times and, of course, lack of bed space. The one unique issue that Medicine Hat has is that the pain management clinic is closing in September. I don't know why, and I don't know the

circumstances for the closure, but it's a serious decision that has been made.

In addition, there was an issue where a doctor left his practice suddenly, and patients had difficulty accessing records. Certainly, finding another physician was a problem. These particular patients appeared to be high-needs because they required triplicate prescriptions for pain management. Their records were apparently lost, and they had difficulty finding a doctor. That's a sad story, indeed.

Another issue there is the shortage of pharmacists at the regional hospital. I'm wondering how we are going to address that issue. Is it being considered at this time?

Now, as I look again at my own region, the Capital health region, with a deficit of \$65 million, the challenges there are similar: the growing and aging population, the emergency room wait times, bed shortages, health professional recruitment and retention. I look at the fact that there are going to be some construction projects which will result in the earliest beds being available by mid-2007, and that is wonderful news. It is great. I'm looking specifically at more beds and the increased ICU capacity at the Grey Nuns. I'm also, though, aware of a shortage of mental health beds, and I don't see anything addressing this great need. But this is a good-news item for my community that fought to keep this hospital, the Grey Nuns, open, and I'm grateful for that.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mrs. McClellan: I just have a question for the hon. member, and I hope that I heard her correctly in her comments. It doesn't really totally relate to these estimates, but it was used as an example of hoping that the money went to the right places. I thought I heard her say that the majority of the assistance in BSE went to the multinational packers or something to that point. If I heard her correctly, I'd just like to ask her where she got her information. There was a list comprising every cheque that was written under the BSE programs tabled in this Legislature. Even when you take the feeder cattle that were owned by those packers or by a subsidiary of the same name, that comment would not be accurate.

The reason I raise it is because the industry themselves designed these programs. With the exception of the first program, which the federal government refused to take their advice on, on the extension of the 30 days to allow time for adjustment, we accepted their recommendations in all cases. I feel strongly that that industry did yeoman service. There may be a small group of people that think that too much money or that none of it should have gone, which none of it did in the last program. That was by agreement of the industry. I think the majority of people in this province today would tell you that without the support of this government and the quality of the programs that were put in place, we would not have a beef industry, let alone a packing industry, in this province.

So I wanted to make sure that I understood her correctly. I wanted to understand where she got her information. If I could be of any help to you in clarifying that information, I would be pleased to do that.

Mrs. Mather: I appreciate your clarification. I think that probably I was reacting to what I am hearing.

Mrs. McClellan: I'll get you the answers.

Mrs. Mather: I would like that because I will share it with the people that talk to me.

Mrs. McClellan: I'd be pleased to do that.

Mrs. Mather: It's farmers that have been talking to me.

Mrs. McClellan: I mean, I talk to these people myself. I actually live with one.

The Deputy Speaker: This conversation is very nice, but it would be nice if the comments were directed through the chair.

Mrs. McClellan: I'm sorry. I said that I would be pleased to get that information and through the assistance of the hon. minister of agriculture so that she does have this. She said that she was talking to farmers. I said: "Well, I do that too. I actually live with one, even though he doesn't have any cattle."

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I appreciate that. The chair was feeling a little left out.

Mrs. McClellan: We apologize.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any others on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, on the debate the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to third reading of Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). I have been fairly quiet up until this point, although I have said a few comments off the record, I guess, about some of the things that have been going on during the debate of this bill. But I would like to get a few things on the record. It's a great opportunity for us to talk about what we think as government backbenchers about this spending and about what's happening here with Bill 44. So I'll take a few minutes to do that.

First of all, I'd like to say that it's great that we even have this opportunity to come back into session in the summer and have the, quote, unquote, problem of having a large surplus that we have to find some places for and some areas to spend it on. It's a, quote, unquote, problem that many provinces would love to have. We're very blessed and very thankful that we have this opportunity, which is what it really is, here in Alberta to be able to have such a large, unexpected surplus so that we can go back and reinvest in some of the things that are important to Albertans. That is why we're here, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

A few months back or several months back now we talked to Albertans, and we asked them what they wanted us to do with unexpected surpluses. They basically said three things. They said that they wanted us to save some, they wanted us to spend some on needed infrastructure and emergent programs, and then they wanted us to give some back. So, of course, we've done that. We've given some back through the form of the \$400 resource rebate cheques. We've certainly put a lot of money away into the different endowments and the heritage savings trust fund. Now we're also spending some.

Let's just talk about that spending because that's the main issue of the bill that we're debating here this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Well, where are we spending? We're spending on education. We're spending on health care. We're spending on agriculture. We're spending on infrastructure. We're spending on the environment and many other important areas. I think it's almost a neat coincidence. If you look into Bill 44 and you look at the dollar figures, you see where we're spending the most money in this supplementary supply

bill. We're spending the most on education. I really believe that's appropriate. I really believe that that is reflective of this government. We have made education our number one priority.

I know, Mr. Speaker, from my first three or so years sitting in the Legislature, that it was always health care, health care, health care. Certainly, health care is very important. But to be honest, I think that to build a good health care system, to build a better Alberta, to build the province that we want to build, education has to be number one. It really is reflective of the spending of this government. We spend more on education than any other province, as has been said.

One of the things that thrust me into politics was the need to see education get more funding and to be more emphasized by the government. I started out, as many people did, in municipal politics as a trustee. I was a school trustee for the Wild Rose school division. We would go do our annual, or actually biannual, pilgrimage to our MLAs and ask for more money for education. We would do that a couple of times a year.

I'm sure that the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House – I see him smiling there – remembers me coming to his office several times and asking for some dollars. We always put together a good plan to say exactly how we needed the money and why we needed the money and where we were going to spend the money. Thankfully, pretty much every year that we went to him, we did see some form of an increase in the education budget.

Then I remember that when my predecessor, Tom Thurber, was retiring, I thought: if I really want to help education, I've got to go where the money is. You know, show me the money; follow the money. So I stepped up and let my name stand for the nomination and got into politics, and here I am.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, it's an honour for me to be able to support this spending on education. It's an honour for me to be able to stand here and say: "We're investing more in our children. We're investing more in our future. We're investing more in schools, infrastructure, and programs. It's going to make an even greater Alberta." So that's exciting. I believe that if we spend on education, we're going to see less needed spending on health care. We're going to see less needed spending on some of the other social programs that we spend on. We're going to see less of a need for putting money into some of these other departments because it's no secret that a well-educated province is a province that is healthier and is more productive, harder working, and the list goes on and on. So I'm really happy to support that, and I think it's excellent.

We're going to see some new and renovated schools. We're going to see some modulars go into these rapid growth areas. Hearing the minister talk about the schools for tomorrow plan is even more exciting. I know that the school in Thorsby will one day be announced with that schools for tomorrow plan. We desperately need a new school in Thorsby. I've heard some of the other members talk about where they need new schools. I know that in every province in Canada, in every state, I'm sure, in the United States of America you could go around and say: this school needs to be improved, and this one needs to be replaced. Well, that's why we exist as a government, that's why we as taxpayers pay taxes: so those things can be done, so they get done in a systematic and an orderly fashion.

I'm glad to know that I do have a couple of schools coming. I'm very thankful for that. We have a new junior high school coming in Drayton Valley, and we're probably going to have to build it bigger than we originally planned because our community is growing so fast. We're also getting a new Catholic high school, which is much needed. I really love the choice that we have in education. It's so

important that we fund all the different levels and all the different aspects of education. It really does make our education system the best in Canada. So that's education.

Health care. Of course, our RHAs are coming to us as MLAs, and they're constantly asking for more money. Why? Because they want to provide better care. They want to be able to do better for their patients, for their constituents, for their clients. Again, as an MLA I'm proud to support that. I know that our RHAs are very well managed. They do a really good job. I believe they're very fiscally responsible. Again, when they come to us with requests for money, they don't just say, you know, that they want to throw money into a black hole. They always have very, very specific places where they're going to put that money, where they're going to invest that money to see a healthier Alberta and a better Alberta.

So that's exciting, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very happy to support the investment in health and education.

If I look at the other priorities in this Bill 44, I see that sort of tied for third and fourth are agriculture and infrastructure. Again, I believe that's really reflective of Albertans. That is reflective of where Albertans want to see money spent by this government. They would like to see our agriculture industry supported because it is, as has been said many times in this Legislature, the backbone of Alberta, and it truly is. The very food we eat comes from our agriculture sector. So you know how important it is to make sure that our agriculture people are supported, that the department has enough money to function properly and to be able to do some of the support programs that they do to keep the agriculture industry not only alive but thriving and growing and adding jobs and doing value-added in our province.

Infrastructure and Transportation. Well, it goes without saying that this is a necessary area to be investing our dollars, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, there are a lot of people moving to Alberta. There are a lot of roads that are getting to that sort of 20-year-plus stage, where they need to be rehabilitated. There are a lot of new bridges that need to be built.

In Drayton Valley we need a bridge really badly. We have a nice bridge there that served us well for about 50 years or so, but it's time for that bridge to be replaced and, hopefully, twinned. We need a bridge. We have about 10,000 cars a day that go over that bridge. Certainly, when that bridge was first built, it wasn't 10,000 cars, I can assure you of that. It might have been 1,000 or 2,000. We've just done some recent traffic counts, and today we're between 8,000 and 10,000 vehicles a day crossing over that bridge into the busy little community of Drayton Valley in Brazeau county. So we do need a new bridge.

I know that we're not going to get it out of this \$171 million or this \$139 million that's mentioned here in Bill 44, but I'm hoping that as we tick off some of the smaller projects and as we complete some of the smaller and larger and even medium-sized projects in Alberta, my bridge will work its way up the list and will eventually get done. And I can be patient. I can wait for that, Mr. Speaker. I know that we can't do everything overnight. Rome wasn't built in a day. I can make sure that we're meeting priorities. I can make sure that we are doing the most needed areas first, and certainly I do believe that we're doing that. So I think the spending plan that has been outlined here is an excellent one.

I could mention several of the other departments. I think we're doing some great work in the SRD department. We're doing some great work in Solicitor General. We always need more officers. Again, probably the one word that we've maybe heard more than any other throughout this sitting of the Legislature, this summer session, is "more." I think it's pretty obvious that you can always spend more. You know, pretty much everybody can say: "Here's an

area that's a need. Here's an area where we can spend more." I think we do try to do that in a fiscally responsible way as the government. We do try to invest more, and when I say more: as much as is possible in every single area.

The thing that is probably pretty obvious, though, is that there really is no right amount. There's no amount that you could say: "Well, this is the right amount. If we could just spend this much, it would be enough." I think of the education system again, and I know that however much money we can give them, they can find ways to better educate and better spend that money for maybe technology or maybe other things. They can make it a better system than it is. So there really is no magic number, but I think that, certainly, as a government we're working towards making sure that we can do the best possible based on our economy and our GDP and the amount that our taxpayers can support and the amount of dollars that we have. So it's good to be sitting here. It's good to be having these opportunities to reinvest some of this money.

Advanced Education. I should have talked about that. Almost \$50 million going into there is very good.

You know, Mr. Speaker, what I see here as I look through this Bill 44 is solutions. I know that the Liberal and the ND opposition often point out problems. They often point out shortfalls. They point out some gaps. But they very, very, very rarely offer any solutions. I think that what we have here in Bill 44 is a bill of solutions. It's a bill that is paving the way and planning the way for a brighter future, a better Alberta, a better place for all our citizens, new and old alike, to live and to enjoy.

I'm excited, Mr. Speaker. I know that it's the 35th anniversary today of our party having the privilege of governing, and I believe it's only maybe the halfway point. I think we have many, many more years of governing. I know that today we have given accolades to our Premier. I believe he probably has been one of the best Premiers, if not the best, so far. I have to say so far because there are a lot more great things that we can do in the future. We have nine excellent leadership candidates that are going to work to make this province even better. I really do believe that the best is yet to come, and it's exciting to be in the Legislature, to be a part of it. I'm excited about some of the new visions and plans that will unfold and just really looking forward to being a part of that and helping to build the future of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. To the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. Last night I had a look at the website of one of the Progressive Conservative leadership hopefuls, Mr. Jim Dinning. There is a list of 27 Members of the Legislative Assembly, of Alberta Progressive Conservative government members, who have publicly pledged their support to Mr. Dinning. I don't see the hon. member's name on that list. Also on this website was a story from the *Edmonton Sun*. It headlines, "I don't believe in oops budgeting." This is Mr. Dinning. Mr. Dinning appeared before the editorial board of the *Edmonton Sun* and said this: "I don't follow the adage that has occurred where . . . come November we said: 'Oops, we're off track.' We start by saying what is realistic budgeting." Mr. Dinning goes on to say: "In my view, you don't need a leadership race to fix leaky roofs or to prevent the laying off of teachers. That's governing." He has some concerns – Mr. Dinning – about this habit of this current Progressive Conservative government of what he calls oops budgeting. Does the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar think that Bill 44 is oops

budgeting as described by Mr. Dinning in his comments to the *Edmonton Sun* editorial board earlier this summer? Does he consider Bill 44 oops budgeting?

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to respond?

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would respond to that question with a question back, and that is: does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar own a mirror? Because if you do own a mirror, my guess is that you look in that mirror from time to time, and when you look in that mirror, you're going to see certain things on your person that may need correcting. You're going to see certain things on your person that may need a little bit of fixing up or a little bit of sprucing up. Maybe you need to comb the hair every now and then or trim the mustache. In that mirror you will see things that you need to fix about yourself. That's called a self-criticism. That's called a self-evaluation.

I think one of the excellent things that's going to happen throughout this next few months in our leadership race is that we will have people from within our own party who will be taking a look at the mirror and saying: "Where can we improve? Where can we make ourselves look a little bit better? What can we do to fill in some of the gaps, comb the hair, trim the mustache so that we can go out there and face the public and be ready for the next four years?"

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar again, I would like to remind the members that under Standing Order 29(2)(a) you still have to direct your comments through the chair. The purpose is not for personal conversations between one another.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I have another question for the hon. member, and this is certainly also in regard to the visit by Mr. Dinning to the *Sun* editorial board when he stated that – and Mr. Dinning, we have to remember, served as the Provincial Treasurer during the 1993-1997 term – public health and education ministers have a responsibility to sit down with their respective officials and determine the true costs. Do you think there was a meeting and the true costs were determined when the last budget was discussed in this Assembly in the spring, three months ago?

The Deputy Speaker: Would the hon. member wish to respond?

Rev. Abbott: Sure. I guess how I would respond to that, Mr. Speaker, is that I would say that, certainly, all of us had opportunity to sit down in the spring and to talk about the monies available at that time, to invest the most that we could into education, into health, et cetera, et cetera. As I mentioned in the beginning of my speech, we've had some extra monies come available, and we now have an opportunity to reinvest some of those, so we're trying to do that in a careful and in a balanced way.

I believe that all of us as MLAs hear from our constituents on a daily basis – certainly on a regular basis through phone calls, through letters, through meetings, when we go out to the public gatherings, et cetera, et cetera, when we talk to constituents one-on-one – and we hear constant feedback. That's why it's not unusual, the moment that you pass a budget, to start tweaking it and to start saying: "How could we make it better? If there are some additional dollars that come in, where should we invest?"

I believe that Bill 44 is a response to that. It's a response to the last several months of hearing our constituents asking us in a very

thoughtful and a very educated way, saying: "Here's where we feel that we need to put more money. If you guys get that opportunity, we'd like you to do that." That's why we're here. We're here to represent our constituents. We're here to be responsive to their needs. You cannot predict the future and say that we think they're going to want all the money here, so you have to be doing this on a balanced and on a monthly and yearly basis.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the debate.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tempted to say that there aren't enough mirrors around to fix the problem that we have here.

To begin, I want to just talk generally about the budgeting and the budgeting process, Mr. Speaker. I guess Mr. Dinning called it an oops budget, but I would say that part of the problem goes back to Mr. Dinning's time as the Treasurer. I, unfortunately, was here during that time when it became a battle between the massive and brutal cuts. What we forgot at that time, Mr. Speaker, is that clearly we were running deficits in the early 90s that you couldn't sustain over a period of time, but there should have been a balance between the revenues and the cuts because the cuts were severe. They were popular at the time. No doubt about it. The result was that we forgot, frankly, about our social infrastructure, and we forgot about our physical infrastructure, if you like, and we concentrated only on the economic deficit.

Well, for a while that seemed to work okay, Mr. Speaker, because the reality was that we were in a bit of a recession at the time, and people didn't notice it as much. But we were going to come out of the recession. That's why I'm saying it was shortsighted at that time not to find a balance because we're still playing catch-up. The reality is that for our physical infrastructure we need billions, it's been acknowledged, not only in schools – and the previous speaker talked about the infrastructure – but it's happened all over the province. We have a social infrastructure problem that we're still playing catch-up with in terms of health care, education, help for vulnerable people. What is now making it worse is that because of the economic policy of this government we are now in an overheated economy. We hadn't caught up with the physical and social infrastructure from the past, and now the pressures are immense, and this government, frankly, has no idea about what to do about it. That's why we're having this budget.

Now, the reason I haven't spoken before is that we need this money, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to vote against this budget because most of it makes some sense. It has to be there. That's absolutely the case. But I'm saying to you that this is the wrong way to budget. I'm sure I speak back in the past in terms of the way the Lougheed government and even the Getty government budgeted. The budgets meant something. So think about this: we brought in a budget in March, we passed it in May, and now we're coming back and asking for over a billion dollars in August. Now, if this was any other government, you would think – I can see these people screaming about that if it was an NDP or Liberal government, if it was the other way around. "Oh, what bad budgeting."

We can't continue to do this. The budgets we bring in in March don't mean anything. They don't mean anything at all. When I look at this budget that we're bringing through, the supplementary estimates now, in some of the smaller provinces this is probably more than their total yearly budget, Mr. Speaker. So what's the point of the debate in March about the budget, going through all this process, going through all the estimates, when we know that there's

going to be another budget coming down in the summer? Maybe there will be another one in the fall.

What I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the government is out of control. I know that the Treasurer disagrees. She says she's being proactive and being conservative in the estimates. Well, look, if this was any other household budget – I say that either the people who are advising her are incompetent or they're deliberately underbudgeting. How can you be underestimating the price of crude oil by 42 per cent – and we're talking about the five years – and 80 per cent off the mark in terms of your revenues? Now, I recognize that it can't be an exact science, and I recognize that it's difficult to always predict the price of oil and gas, but you can't be 80 per cent off the mark and have realistic budgeting in this province. I look at natural gas prices, almost the same: 39 per cent off the average. This translates into being 65 per cent off the mark for natural gas revenues.

Now, I can understand if maybe one year something happened, but this is over a five-year basis. So I say to the Finance minister: is it deliberate? She says: "Well, we're being, you know, conservative in our estimates. It's better to be that way." I even accept that. But 80 per cent off and 65 per cent off? If that's the best that you can get from the officials, they should be sacked. Or is this a deliberate process that we underbudget, then come back to these and make all these fancy announcements as the Minister of Education did today. Is this a deliberate political policy, Mr. Speaker, to do this? That's the reality of what we're facing at this particular time.

4:40

I want to say again about Bill 44 that the money is needed. I've said that already, Mr. Speaker. But part of the problem is that this government does not know how to manage growth. Their economic policies are creating an overheated economy. That's the reality of it. If you're going to move – and now we know it's happening in the Peace River – and your whole economic policy is to get in the tar sands, rip it out as quickly as possible, and move ahead to get into the American market, an economy like that, that is going to overheat the economy dramatically. That's what's happening.

So now we're not providing the backup service. Now we're playing catch-up. Mr. Speaker, that's what's happening. Now we have problems in housing, problems in rents, problems in health care, problems in education, trying to keep up. We're not managing growth, because we're moving too fast. As I say, we cut too drastically in the early '90s, and we're still playing catch-up there. Now we've got an overheated economy.

Then we turn around in a budget, Mr. Speaker, in an overheated economy and say to the corporate elite, mainly in the oil industry: gee, we've got to give you more of a tax break. Tax break? For what? They're doing the best they've ever done. They can't do any better. So we lacked \$360 million in revenues that could have gone to some of the same problems that we're talking about in our last budget.

I mean, the whole process is just out of whack. It's out of whack, Mr. Speaker. Again, we'll be having this budget. I guess we're not coming back for the fall because we're preoccupied with the leadership, so we're going to I suppose not deal with this again. Then we'll come back and theoretically bring in a budget in March or pass one, and it probably won't mean anything then either unless the new leader starts to change this around.

It's just a terrible, awful way to budget.

Dr. Morton: I agree with you.

Mr. Martin: You agree with me. The hon. member agrees with me. Well, I'm glad, Mr. Speaker. We might vote for you yet, you know.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that this is what's happening. You know, the problem is when we look at housing, this is the impact it's having in housing. We've talked about this. Twenty million dollars the mayor has come and asked for, and the minister of seniors says: yeah, it sounds like a good idea. Well, it was a good idea a while ago. It shouldn't have taken the mayor. It should have been self-evident that we've got these problems. The 2000 count of homeless persons found 3,436 people that they can identify as homeless in Calgary, a 30 per cent increase. There have been media reports of rental increases in Calgary as high as a thousand dollars per month. The average rent in Fort McMurray is \$1,500 per month for a two-bedroom apartment.

In the city of Edmonton Boyle Street community service has begun a program. I see it because I live down in that direction. Two hundred to 600 people estimated to be living in the river valley. What's going to happen to them in the winter?

I've received heart-wrenching letters from constituents. I mentioned one before, and I've mentioned Reverend Keith Loewen, who works with the community health centre. We know the welfare rates. We've just had that discussion. It's a double whammy. People on the marginal incomes are getting hit, Mr. Speaker, by a higher cost of living because of the boom, yet we have the lowest rates. What are we doing about it?

The Minister of Education: yes, glad to see some money coming forward today, Mr. Minister, for the schools. But this is over a four-year period. It's desperately needed. Again, Balwin is in my area, and I know that it's definitely needed, but this is still not going to play catch-up.

I know from being a trustee in Edmonton – I'm only going to speak here for Edmonton – that half of our schools are 50 years of age or over. Many of them are crumbling apart. You used Vic comp as an example. Well, they had a plan for the \$36 million. I was there. Remember, they were promised \$62 million at one time. [interjection] Thank you, \$63 million. Okay. We got that right. Now it was down to \$36 million that the board had to make because there was \$60 million altogether, and now that \$36 million won't allow that plan to go ahead. So the \$36 million – I know you're waiting for something – but it keeps shrinking, that amount of dollars, because of the overheated economy again. That's the point that we're making. I'm glad that the minister is taking a look. That's what we're talking about: planning over a longer period of time down the way. This should have been self-evident.

That's what my frustration is, Mr. Speaker. It's that we were raising these questions about needing more education money in the spring session, and we were told that we didn't need to do it. Now, the minister says that he didn't know all of the results until he got what was coming in from the school boards. Well, I understand that to some degree, but they were all telling all of us that it wasn't enough. The minister has now acknowledged that it wasn't enough. That's why we have this money here.

The same in health care. I mean, we could have a battle of figures like we did yesterday, but even though the Calgary health region says that there have been some increases in beds, there have been a few but not nearly enough to deal with their population growth. So we're going to keep playing catch-up here, Mr. Speaker – catch-up, catch-up, catch-up – because of what happened before and the fact that we haven't planned for growth.

I would just sort of conclude near the end with this: the problem with this government is their ideology. They now recognize that they have a problem. They're on the Holy Grail of the marketplace, Mr. Speaker. I watch across the way that when you say private, they almost salivate with excitement; when you say public, somehow that's bad.

The reality is that you have to provide for your social – the marketplace works well where it's supposed to work, and I've worked in the private sector much more than you did, my friend. I worked in the financial business. It works well where there's economic competition. It doesn't work well where there are monopoly situations, and it doesn't work well when you're dealing with human needs. That's the reality. But if you're going to push ahead with an economic strategy, Mr. Speaker, that's going to overheat the economy, the very minimum you can do is provide the proper public and social infrastructure. That's where this government has failed, absolutely failed.

Mr. Speaker, it's going to be difficult. I mean, even if we start doing the things that we need to right now in health care and housing to catch up, we can do some things quickly and have to do them quickly, but even if we do start now to change what we're doing to catch up, it's not going to be easy because of the growth that we're having. I see no evidence that the government is going to change their economic strategy, as some people have asked them to do. Even former Premier Lougheed said that you have to control the rate that you're moving ahead. It doesn't make sense. But even if we start to do that, we're still going to have these problems.

Mr. Speaker, I would just urge the government to take a more serious look at this. Let's make our budgeting realistic, and let's recognize that we have an overheated economy. What are we are going to do about it?

I have my timing here, and I realize that I have about 12 seconds left, so I've probably said enough. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions, Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and comment briefly on the issues raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in his remarks on third reading of Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). The hon. member seemed to agree that the spending is required, and his criticism was mainly directed at the process of the budgeting. The Minister of Finance and the government in my view are to be commended for responding so expeditiously to a number of dynamic factors which have given rise to the necessity of further spending.

4:50

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. Is the hon. member participating under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the question-and-answer segment?

Dr. Brown: Yes.

The Speaker: So we will get to a question?

Dr. Brown: It's a comment.

The Speaker: You're supposed to sit down.

Dr. Brown: It's a comment.

The Speaker: You're supposed to sit down.
It's basically question and answer.

Dr. Brown: I'm commenting on his speech.

The Speaker: Yeah, but not for five minutes.
Proceed. Let's find a question in this, okay?

Dr. Brown: The factors, as I was saying, that arise and necessitate the fact that we need additional appropriation are the incredible influx of over 90,000 people into the province of Alberta creating new demands and the rising costs of some of the public projects which are under way. There are a number of emerging issues with respect to school capacity and maintenance, with the needs of the regional health authorities, and there's a critical need for the agricultural community, so I agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that additional spending is needed.

The fact that we do have these additional, surplus monies now to meet some of these emerging issues with revenue of \$1.2 billion higher than estimated in the spring budget means that this is an appropriate time to bring this bill before the House. I would say in particular that the bill is good news for the children of Alberta, with an additional \$293 million being spent on important school improvements. It's good news for Albertans who rely on health care facilities, with an additional \$262 million, and it's really good news for Albertans, especially the agricultural community, which is suffering in hard-pressed times.

I strongly support the additional appropriation, and I would encourage all members, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, to support this appropriation bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Martin: Is there a question?

The Speaker: Well, I guess it was under the comments side.

So the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford under 29(2)(a).

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I promise you I have a question. I'm wondering whether or not the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview shares with me the concern that I have about escalating costs. Wholly \$170.8 million of this supplementary supply bill is for escalating costs. At that rate I can imagine us coming back here in March, six months hence, and they're going to be asking for another nearly \$400 million due to escalating costs. Can't we budget properly? I think that was your point in your speech, hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member to respond.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's precisely the point. I agree with the member from Calgary that there is an influx of people. That's the point I was making. It's the economic strategy of this government to move ahead that fast. They're not providing the backup services, and because we're not, we're going to be playing this role again and again and again. All I'm saying is that we have to look at this realistically in the budget. We probably should be looking at the pace of development, but this is just going to keep going over and over and over again. We're out of control here, Mr. Speaker. That's the point I'm trying to make.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the hon. member, as I did a number of years ago when he was, I believe, the leader of the third party, and he waxed on eloquent at that time as well about the budgeting process and how terrible it was to run a deficit and how the budgeting was then when we were overestimating the revenue, so of course we want to correct that situation. He mentioned about the Lougheed government and the Getty government and how they seemed to be able to budget more accurately even though I remember huge deficits, but the way that things were covered off was with special warrants. I was wondering if the hon. member really prefers the special warrants to what we're doing

today. We're coming back before the Legislature. We do not use special warrants like they did back in those days, so the whole Assembly has an opportunity to vote on the expenditure of the money, not just the cabinet.

Mr. Martin: That's a good question, actually, Mr. Speaker. The point I was trying to make . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but I must now call on the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to be given the opportunity to rise and join the debate on Bill 44. There have been a great deal of new situations requiring further expenditures since the last time this Legislature was sitting. I feel that this bill will help to deal with these new developments effectively and most appropriately. These new cash infusions will ensure that Albertans continue to enjoy the same quality of life as they had and help minimize the effects of the disasters and emergencies.

One area where this new cash infusion will be of great service is the agriculture industry. Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support the injection of the \$261 million to the Canadian agricultural income stabilization, or CAIS, program. This has been a difficult summer for grain and oilseed producers, with the challenges of hot weather and low levels of moisture or moisture at the wrong time making up the growing environment for the majority of the province. This has resulted in the prospect of lower-than-expected crop yields for producers, a situation which is further challenged by high input costs and low commodity prices. The \$261 million will be used to index the 2004 fuel and fertilizer costs by 25 per cent and, of course, to increase the 2004 CAIS reference margins by 15 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, this addition to the CAIS program recognizes the difficulty that the agriculture industry faces and helps them deal with these hard times. While harvesting is already taking place in many parts of the province, the timing of this support for farmers could not have been better. Not only does this enhancement to the program help these grain producers, which have had less than a perfect growing season, but it serves to help all of those in the agriculture industry. It will also therefore be a benefit to all Albertans.

As we discussed during Monday night's debate on Motion 512, the effects of BSE and the closure of international borders to beef and beef products are still being felt by cattle ranchers and the entire industry. The cash influence into the CAIS program will help to assist producers who are still working to make the industry stronger than ever.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has their finger square on the pulse of the agriculture industry and its needs. It is committed to continuing to monitor and review its programs. I applaud the department for all its good work. I also commend the government for the \$261 million increase to assist the Alberta agriculture industry, a much-needed enhancement in reflection of this summer's difficulties.

The increase in spending on Alberta's infrastructure is yet another good example on how this bill will affect Albertans. With \$303 million being allocated to increasing the operating support to schools for maintenance and renewal of new schools and to address the cost escalation of projects already approved, Alberta schools will be well prepared for starting the school year.

Mr. Griffiths: It's about the children.

Mr. Danyluk: It is about the children.

Bill 44 also allocates funding that will be used for our provincial highways. Thirty six million dollars has been allocated for provincial highway rehabilitation, \$12 million for highway systems and safety, as well as \$12 million for strategic economic corridor investment initiatives to deal with increases for highway construction projects.

5:00

As well, \$308 million will be used to create a new Edmonton remand facility, replacing the old facility which is nearly 30 years old and much too small to house all the inmates that are held there now. With Alberta's growing population this new remand centre is greatly needed. It has been estimated that by the year 2010-11 there will be approximately 1,200 inmates to be housed. This new remand centre will have a capacity to hold 2,000 inmates. Money well spent, Mr. Speaker.

These are just some examples of how Albertans' money would be put to good use through the adoption of Bill 44.

Recently Statistics Canada reported that last year Alberta's population grew by more than 90,000 people – 90,000 people. This unprecedented growth presents a great deal of challenges for us as legislators. While the opposition feels that members on this side of the House have not predicted Alberta's needs, well, I have to disagree. How one predicts the future, as members across the way seem to think the government should be able to do, I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, this government does not have a crystal ball, yet it has done a commendable job of getting funding to areas that need it based on recent developments. Our mandate as elected officials, all of us on both sides of the House, is to sit and debate these new situations and respond to our constituents' issues as they arise. While we could not have predicted some of the situations that have arisen over the summer, it is our responsibility as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to deal with them. That is what this government and our Premier have done by calling this summer session.

I stand today in support of Bill 44, the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, and urge all of the members of this Legislature to do the same. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I then recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in third reading to Bill 44, the appropriation supply act, and I believe it's called number 2, if I remember right, because it's the second time this year that the government has come back to us asking for more money. There are actually some good things in here. Certainly, I talked yesterday and many members talked about education and how important it is that we are giving more money to education.

I lamented on and on about the lack of foresight and why three months ago we should have been able to predict this. In a question a minute ago to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview I mentioned again that some \$180 million, I think, of this supplementary supply bill is actually for cost escalations. You know, the cost escalations are not a surprise to anybody. We've all seen this for the last couple of years. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation knows about this. Some of the other departments that are facing cost escalations are all aware of this, yet for some reason we weren't able to predict this three months ago and include it in the main budget estimates. I have trouble with that. I am completely convinced that three or six months from now we're going to be back

here again, and you're going to be asking for \$400 million or \$500 million further for cost escalations that for some reason you weren't able to predict today when we dealt with this bill. I find that very frustrating, and I know that most Albertans find that very frustrating. Most Albertans don't have the opportunity to just simply write themselves a cheque if they spend too much money, yet that's in effect what this government is able to do.

Now, I mentioned that there are some good things, and I do want to point out, aside from the money for education, a couple that I have no problem with, despite the fact that I have a problem with the process. In the area of Community Development I see that we're spending \$15.537 million to fund site reclamation at various historic sites and provincial parks. I'm on the record many times, Mr. Speaker, as being in support of provincial parks. In fact, I don't think we do enough for provincial parks, and I believe that at both the federal and the provincial levels there is a distinct methodology at work that's actually trying to deter people from using the parks and keep them away from the parks. That bothers me. I think we should be doing everything within our power as a government to encourage people to get into the parks and use them more as opposed to trying to discourage use of the parks. So in this case we're spending some money on cleaning up parks and improving parks, and I am all for that.

Certainly, one of the ones that I wanted to applaud, and I recall doing this last year, is Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Mr. Speaker, \$2.5 million dollars for the southern Alberta disaster recovery program relating to flooding June 14 to 16 of this year and a million dollars to the city of Edmonton relating to flooding on the 15th of June this year: now, this is what supplementary supply is for. This is unpredictable. You people across the way were telling us the other day, when we were talking to the Energy minister about the blackouts on July 24, that you can't predict lightening strikes. You can't predict lightening strikes, and certainly we know that you can't predict floods. So this is where I have complete understanding when you come to us and say: we need \$3.5 million to look after some flooding that took place in June because of storms that, clearly, nobody could predict. That's what supplementary supply is for. Nobody in this House could reasonably expect that you would know that those storms would take place.

There are other examples in here. There's disaster assistance for farmers. Now, depending on how you define disaster, I suppose, certainly I know many small-business people that would argue that they're facing some of the same hardships caused by some of the same factors that were cited when the government declared a disaster for farmers. Specifically, I'm thinking of a higher Canadian dollar. There was another factor that was cited in the press release too, and I can't recall what it was. There are factors that contribute to the disaster in agriculture, in farming, that certainly are relevant and contribute to great hardship in other areas of the economy, particularly small business, home-operated business, and so forth. So others might want to question how a disaster is defined. Again, something like that constitutes a legitimate reason for the government to come back to this Assembly and ask for more money only three months after a budget has been passed.

I do want to follow up a little bit on some of the comments that my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar was making a few minutes ago when he was referencing Jim Dinning, the former Treasurer of the province of Alberta, and the number of members of this Assembly who have publicly declared their support for him. In reference to the oops budgeting that was discussed in an Edmonton newspaper article back on the 29th of June, I find it interesting, Mr. Speaker, because when I go through this list of government members, some

backbenchers and some who are currently sitting as ministers in this government, not one of them got up in the past five days to speak against this oops budgeting that we're dealing with here this week. Not one of them.

I see that the Member for Calgary-Shaw is one of those who has publicly declared her support for Mr. Dinning, and she certainly hasn't spoken out against the oops budgeting that the current government has saddled this province with. The Member for Calgary-East is another one. The Member for Calgary-Nose Hill: well, he did get up and speak a few minutes ago, but certainly he didn't speak out against the oops budgeting. In fact, he actually spoke in favour of the oops budgeting. Yet the gentleman who this member is supporting to be the next Premier of this province doesn't like oops budgeting, and he says he will not oops budget. So, Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, you might want to have a discussion with your preferred candidate and just find out whether we're going to oops budget next year or not if he happens to be the successful candidate.

5:10

The Minister for Human Resources and Employment is one who has publicly declared his support for Mr. Dinning, yet oops: guess who's asking for more money in Bill 44? The same minister who has publicly declared support for a fella who is portraying himself as being fiscally disciplined and doesn't believe in oops budgeting. Oh, would you look at this, Mr. Speaker? I'm not terribly surprised, but we also have the Solicitor General publicly declaring his support for the candidate who is considered to be the front-runner to be the next Premier of this province and who doesn't believe in oops budgeting. That same Solicitor General has asked in Bill 44 for a total of \$13.6 million. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development happens to be on the list as well of those who have publicly declared their support for Mr. Dinning, who doesn't believe in oops budgeting, yet for some reason, oops, \$251 million required for SRD.

Moving down the list I see, oh, Advanced Education, another minister of this government, another minister who has asked for some money because there was an oops, an oops to the tune of \$49.2 million, yet he is publicly supporting the man who wants to be the Premier of this province and doesn't believe in oops budgeting. It's going to be a very interesting year in here next year, I'm going to suggest, given this . . .

Dr. Brown: Point of order.

The Speaker: We have a point of order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, please.

Point of Order

Third Reading Debate

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has digressed on a tangent to the contents of this bill, and I wish to point out page 533 of *Marleau* with respect to debate on third reading. It says as follows: "Debate on third reading is designed to review the legislative measure in its final form and is strictly confined to the contents of the bill." It is a stretch to say that the contents of this bill relate to who some members of the government side might be supporting in a potential leadership campaign that may be coming up. So in my view it's irrelevant.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on this point of order, please.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that in probably every second sentence I'm referencing the bill and the amount of money that is being asked for in this bill. In several instances, in fact, I've cited what the money that's being asked for in supplementary supply is to be directed towards. So I think that I'm well within the confines of third reading in my comments.

The Speaker: So I take it, then, hon. member, just so I can be assured, that when I come up with my ruling with respect to this matter, we're not going to have just a listing of 25 members' names with comment, but we're going to just tie it all together in a final point that you're going to be making?

Mr. R. Miller: I'm working towards pulling it all together.

The Speaker: Sure. Absolutely. Well, you go right ahead with your debate on third reading here now.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to work through the remaining names on the list a little more expeditiously so that I can tie it all together and then, hopefully, allow somebody else to speak.

There are two more ministers that I wanted to reference: the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, whose department is asking for \$171 million in oops budgeting, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Well, actually, I'm not going to mention him because a good chunk of what he's asking for is, in fact, as I suggested, for legitimate disasters. However, several other members of this government have yet to speak against the oops budgeting that has taken place here today.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but with sincere regret I must now interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. In accordance with Standing Order 64(5) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a lead-up to the motion that I will present very shortly, I want to briefly offer a sincere thank you to all members of the House for their participation in this important summer session, and a special thank you to you, Mr. Speaker, and to your Deputy Speaker and our table officers for the enormously great work that you all do.

Today, as it turns out, will be noted as an even more historic day than was May 18 since it will be recorded as our Premier's last sitting day inside this Chamber as our leader and our Premier. When the Assembly next convenes, Mr. Speaker, it will be with a new Premier, perhaps even a new cabinet and a new administration and so on. Therefore, on behalf of myself as Government House Leader and our Deputy Government House Leaders from Calgary-Glenmore and Medicine Hat and our entire caucus, we thank our current Premier once again for his enormous work on behalf of all Albertans. It's been a pleasure and an honour, Mr. Premier. Let me just end that by saying, "Thank you, Ralph."

Now, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Government Motion 26, agreed to on Monday, August 28, I move that the Assembly stand adjourned.

[Motion carried; pursuant to Government Motion 26 the Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]

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